



THE LUTHERAN WITNESS™

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In Everything Give Thanks!

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TO THE HUNGRY

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SAINTS: MORE THAN
A 'SHORT LIST'

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ADVENT
ANTICIPATION



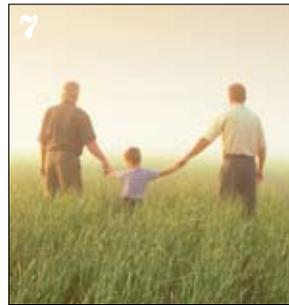
Providing Missouri Synod laypeople with stories and information that complement congregational life, foster personal growth in faith, and help interpret the contemporary world from a Lutheran Christian perspective.

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TO THE READER

For many of us, 2008 has provided a roller-coaster ride: the cost of gas has been up—way up! Our stock portfolios (and job prospects), down—way down.

Yet, our November authors remind us that as Christians we have much to be thankful for, not only for our "daily bread," but more important, for the spiritual benefits with which we have been blessed. In these pages, we are reminded also that sometimes our brothers and sisters need our help—with food, encouragement, and other needs. May our cover theme, taken from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, be our guide this month: "In everything give thanks!"

J.H.H.

Life Lessons from a Cat

By observing a family pet, a pastor uncovers some lessons in Christian living.

One of my favorite authors is F. W. Boreham (1871–1959). Boreham was a Baptist pastor of churches in New Zealand, Tasmania, and Australia. He wrote thousands of articles and scores of books. During his lifetime, his writing was popular in many Christian circles. Today, he is almost unknown. Fortunately, some of his books are currently being reprinted.

Boreham had the gift of observing everyday things and using them to teach Christian life lessons. I am not Boreham, but I would like to share some circumstances that have had an impact on me.

About a year ago, my wife, Holly, and I acquired a short-haired, mostly black cat from the local humane society. The cat's name is Sherman, the name which the humane society had given him. He quickly became an important member of the Genzen household. Sherman is extremely friendly and affectionate. Like all cats, he reserves the right to be alone at times. Generally, however, wherever people are in our house, there you will find him. He brings us much joy on a daily basis. He asks for little in return.

Sherman is a cat, not a human. However, as I have watched him during this past year, he has taught me much. It has been said that, in the wild, for every time you see a cat, such as a lion or a tiger, the cat observes you 200 times. Sherman has taught me that this may be true. Even when he appears uninvolved with his surroundings, his eyes, and indeed all his senses, seem exceedingly attentive. He seems aware of everything that is going on around him. He is vigilant. At the same time, Sherman is also relaxed. He will respond to a perceived threat, but he appears generally untroubled by the events of everyday life.

This is a reminder for us. As Christians, we have a responsibility to be aware of events in the world around us. We need to stay vigilant to the threats of the world, Satan, and our sinful flesh. We also need to be vigilant concerning threats to our physical and spiritual well-being. At the same time, God does not call us to a perpetual state



We can emulate Sherman by having the same kind of trust in our triune God and in our Savior, Jesus Christ. God provides us with the blessings of all that we need, and far beyond. We respond with praise and thanks and by trusting and loving God in return.

of anxiety. Rather, His will is that we be rested and relaxed in Him.

Sherman also demonstrates complete trust in Holly, me, and virtually anyone else who comes through the door. He knows that we will care for his

needs. He responds by providing companionship, playfulness, and affection. We can emulate Sherman by having the same kind of trust in our triune God and in our Savior, Jesus Christ. God provides us with the blessings of all that we need, and far beyond. We respond with praise and thanks and by trusting and loving God in return.

Like other pets, Sherman shows his owners playfulness, affection, and attention, even when we do not deserve it. Here his behavior reminds me of our heavenly Father, who also constantly shows us His love in Christ, even when we definitely do not deserve it. As you can probably tell, I could go on about my friend, my dear cat, Sherman.

I will close with this observation. Sherman wakes up each morning at about 5:15. Holly and I think he must have a built-in alarm clock. He also believes that everyone else in the house should wake up when he does. In any event, he awakens with what appears to be a real sense of enthusiasm for the day ahead. When night comes, Sherman sleeps, either at the foot of our bed or on a sofa in our study. He greets the day with a sense of energy. He sleeps at peace at night, apparently not worried a bit about tomorrow. His waking and sleeping remind me of the concluding statements in Luther's Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. Beginning the day, Luther says "go joyfully to your work." Ending each day, Luther says "go to sleep at once and in good cheer." Sherman the cat appears to do both.

It's amazing what a cat can teach you. Indeed, by drawing some parallels, we can even learn something about the Christian life.

Rev. Gary C. Genzen is pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church, Leesburg, Fla.



LETTERS

Our best-kept secret

I had to let you know the Mission Central article on Gary Thies (September) arrived just as our church was planning a bus trip to Mission Central in Mapleton, Iowa.

I didn't know what to expect, since I had never heard Gary Thies or toured Mission Central. So the story gave me some insight into one of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's best-kept secrets. What an outstanding day we had learning and being inspired to action for missions.

Any church within traveling distance should schedule a bus trip and time with Gary Thies at Mission Central. Those folks just out traveling our country, according to Gary, are also welcome to stop by and see what's happening out on the farm!

Those who went from Our Redeemer were inspired and glad they made the trip, and those who

people who are willing to share money, prayers, and time. God's command of serving one another is being done by many people who have mission work as a common goal. Come and visit and join in spreading the Word to a world eager to learn of Jesus. Our CEO goes to small and large congregations, planting seeds so the Bank of Christian Love will never go broke. Let's be Christians serving and working together on spreading the Word.

*Missionaries with Gary,
Art and Darlene Rehm
Bethlehem Lutheran Church
Crete, Neb.*

We enjoyed and appreciated so much the article on Mission Central in the September issue of *The Lutheran Witness*. The story should inspire all Christians to pray more fervently and support more generously the mission work of our church. We have so little time to carry out the Great

in Iowa—northwest Iowa. When we go back to visit, we'd like to see this Mission Central. Every little town in Iowa has a name, and every road in Iowa—paved, gravel, or dirt—has a name. Why can't you tell us where it is?

We finally went to the Web site, and near as we can tell, Mission Central is near Mapleton, but why does the article say that Gary Thies flies 300 miles from Mapleton every Sunday? Very confusing!

It seems like this is a great mission effort, and we applaud its enthusiasm and focus. Just wish we could know where it is for sure.

*Mrs. Duane Schramm
N. Highlands, Calif.*

*The address for Mission Central is
40718 Highway E 16, Mapleton, Iowa
51034; telephone: 712-882-1029. —Ed.*

The Three R's

Praise God for Dr. James Lamb and his dedication to life! ("Life Issues: Renewing the Three R's," September). His simple three R's formula to renew our church's commitment to life issues is one that can be implemented by every one of us.

I agree wholeheartedly with Dr. Lamb that our churches are responsible for raising awareness of all life-related matters, and that the message we hear from the pulpit is paramount. Silence must not reign in this arena. His comment, "The value the Gospel gives to life from the moment of conception needs to connect with us all again and again," resonates especially with me as a Christian mom. Life matters are vital, relevant, and foundational. Fortunately for our busy pastors, there are a myriad of resources currently available for their congregations from Lutherans For Life. Bulletin inserts can be a starting point. I pray each of us can share in a new "revival" for life, within our own families of faith and beyond—today.

*Pamela Clare
Bedford, Mass.*

In his September "Life Issues" article, Dr. Lamb makes the point that,



Any church within traveling distance should schedule a bus trip and time with Gary Thies at Mission Central.

*Susan Kiger and Marian Noordsy
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Sioux Falls, S.D.*

stayed behind are hoping for a second chance to go. Please don't keep these important areas of church mission and activities out of future issues.

*Susan Kiger and Marian Noordsy
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Sioux Falls, S.D.*

We are proud to know Gary Thies and have helped in his mission for several years. He never asks for money, but does ask for prayers. He sells mission projects with his enthusiasm. We have signed contracts to help mission projects in Kenya and Ethiopia. On visiting Mission Central, we were pleased to see the way a meaningful message of God is being spread worldwide from humble buildings by humble

Commission of bringing the Good News of salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.

We have had the privilege of hearing Gary Thies speak many times and also have visited Mission Central, which has made it possible to send missionaries to places we are unable to go.

Thank you for this very inspiring and informative article.

*Ernest and Marilyn Schauland
New Ulm, Minn.*

The September *Lutheran Witness* story about Mission Central—I have read the article many times, searching for the location of this barn in "western Iowa . . . 100 miles from Sioux City."

My husband and I were raised

although beginning and end-of-life issues are political and controversial, they are spiritual at their core. He is right about that, and he is right to state that the Church has the responsibility to address these life issues from the pulpit.

But limiting “life issues” to abortion and euthanasia, as Dr. Lamb does in his article, leaves out other important life concerns. These include issues of poverty, homelessness, lack of health care, need for adoption support, etc. In addition to beginning and end-of-life issues, the Church should also address these issues from the pulpit and suggest how church members might become advocates on these issues in the public square.

As Dr. Lamb states, “The Gospel is the most powerful and positive pro-life message in the universe, and it is tailor-made for issues of life and death.” But let’s be completely pro-life and proclaim that message to defend human life wherever it is threatened throughout the lifespan.

*Robert C. Droege
Rockville, Md.*

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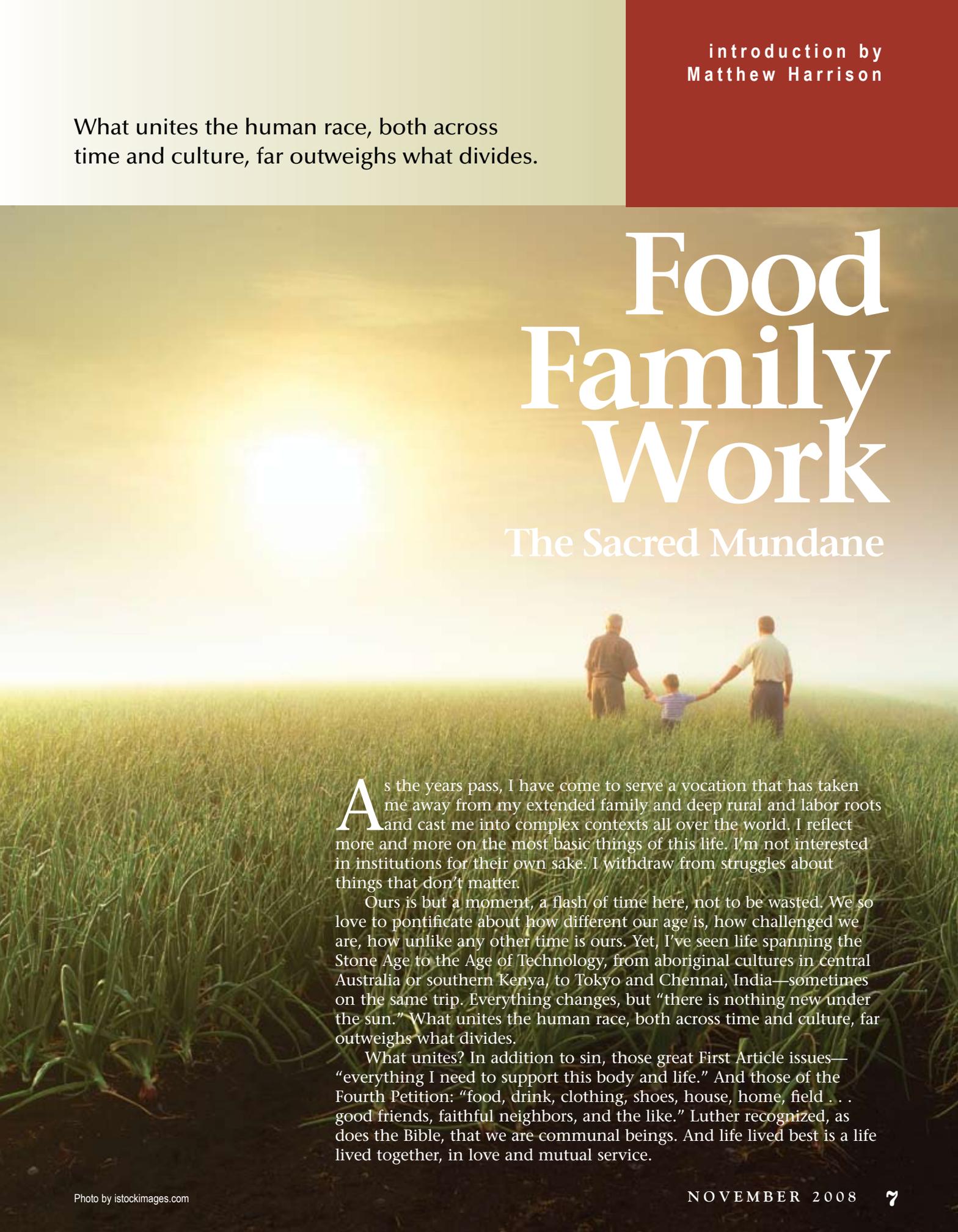
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Cover image by Veer.com

What unites the human race, both across time and culture, far outweighs what divides.

Food Family Work

The Sacred Mundane



As the years pass, I have come to serve a vocation that has taken me away from my extended family and deep rural and labor roots and cast me into complex contexts all over the world. I reflect more and more on the most basic things of this life. I'm not interested in institutions for their own sake. I withdraw from struggles about things that don't matter.

Ours is but a moment, a flash of time here, not to be wasted. We so love to pontificate about how different our age is, how challenged we are, how unlike any other time is ours. Yet, I've seen life spanning the Stone Age to the Age of Technology, from aboriginal cultures in central Australia or southern Kenya, to Tokyo and Chennai, India—sometimes on the same trip. Everything changes, but “there is nothing new under the sun.” What unites the human race, both across time and culture, far outweighs what divides.

What unites? In addition to sin, those great First Article issues—“everything I need to support this body and life.” And those of the Fourth Petition: “food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, field . . . good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.” Luther recognized, as does the Bible, that we are communal beings. And life lived best is a life lived together, in love and mutual service.

I learned these lessons early. Every Sunday, we drove to little Lawton, Iowa, for church with the extended family. We received the Lord's gifts together. Then we went to Bernie and Loraine's for coffee. Then it was to Grandma and Grampa's place for lunch—wonderful lunches! Ah, to be a boy again at that great oak table, filled with potato salad, coleslaw, corn on the cob, radishes right out of the garden. What a sacred blessing is food!

Food brought us together. It helped keep us a family—and still does. After lunch, the uncles would play cribbage and talk about the horrible politicians and how the world was falling apart. And we would laugh. We'd wrap up the evening watching Lawrence Welk and Disney, and head home in the dark. How a thousand such nights drifted so quickly into the past, I shall never comprehend.

Early on, we learned to work. Dad and Mom could do anything—and did it. That's the way all farmers were. We watched and helped them do it all, and learned the value of work.

"Why do you do it that way, Dad?"

"It's the right thing to do, Matt."

From cement to plumbing to carpentry, roofing, painting, auto mechanics, freezing corn, and canning—and dealing with some of life's great challenges—we learned something of it all. It wasn't all roses, and still isn't. We are sinners, but we know our Savior. In all and through all is Christ. I've always known I am baptized, and that Jesus loves all people and me.

It's so easy to think that people who look different, talk different, or come from different places and cultures are fundamentally different from us. Believe me, the basics are the same: food, family, work—"good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like." And because "no one is righteous, no, not one," Christ is universal.

Very simply, the work of LCMS World Relief and Human Care addresses "food, family, and work," and does so while speaking Christ's Gospel and seeking wherever possible to include folks in the fellowship of the Church. People struggle in this world, often having no access to food or family or work—or to Christ. Our "sacred mundane" vocation is right in front of us.

Rev. Matthew Harrison is the executive director of LCMS World Relief and Human Care.

Reaching Out to the Hungry: from Appalachia to Africa

Even with today's high food prices, "hunger," for most of us, means working through lunch or eating less to trim our waistline.

But at the Our Savior Lutheran Church food pantry in Chillicothe, Ohio, needy families emptied the shelves of every canned good—even the lima beans, says Deaconess Deanna Cheadle.

In Chicago, a record line of people wound from the soup kitchen at St. Matthew Lutheran Church nearly out to the street. "That had never happened before," Rev. Julio Loza says.

And in West Africa, longtime agricultural missionary Delano Meyer sees more people clearing land to farm and, he hopes, more potential participants for his biblically based agriculture training—one unexpected positive result of rising food costs.

Each of these ministries—and the people they serve—is affected by today's economic challenges. And each ministry, over the years, has received critical support from LCMS World Relief and Human Care (LCMS WR-HC) and the ministry's generous donors. Since 2005, development grants from the Synod's mercy arm have helped feed more than 206,000 people and trained nearly 1,000 others to improve food production.

As Thanksgiving approaches, here's a look at how blessings shared with LCMS WR-HC are a blessing to people in need, from Appalachia to Africa—and beyond.

Chicago Soup Kitchen Serves More Than Meals

In August, a line of about 80 people wound from the soup kitchen at St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Chicago, Ill., nearly out to West 21st street.

"That had never happened before," says Rev. Julio Loza, who started the meal ministry in 1990 to serve the poor, ethnically diverse Pilsen neighborhood on the city's Lower West Side. "As soon as one person finished eating and left, another person sat down."

The summer's high food and gasoline prices sparked record demand at *El Comedor Popular* ("the popular eating place," in Spanish)—and, likewise, challenged this 138-year-old church with a fluctuating, generally low-income membership to feed about 300 people weekly.

"We're the poor feeding the poor," Loza says.



From left to right, Rev. Julio Loza, pastor of St. Matthew's, Chicago; Maria Luisa Leal, director of community services; and Clara Garcia and Juanita Leal, congregation members and El Comedor Popular volunteers. Each month, St. Matthew's twice-weekly soup kitchen serves about 1,200 hot meals. In its 19-year history, it has served nearly 275,000 meals. The congregation's work has been made possible with the help, not only of its faithful members, but also of the LCMS Northern Illinois District, LCMS World Relief and Human Care, the Lutheran Women's Missionary League, and many Christian friends.

Below: Deanna Cheadle

The congregation raises money through rummage sales, Mexican food catering, and constant appeals. But this summer, donations slowed to the point that St. Matthew closed two congregation-sponsored food ministries in Mexico. "It was a hard decision," Loza says. "But we could no longer financially support them and respond to increased needs in Chicago." After a brief hiatus, the church reopened the ministries with a donor's emergency help.

In the ministry's early years, St. Matthew turned to LCMS World Relief and Human Care for grants. "We approached them because we didn't want to take government funding that would prevent us from being a witness for Christ," Loza says.

Today, *El Comedor Popular* serves hot noon meals twice weekly, garnished with prayer and Scripture readings in English and Spanish. Former regular Tom Lopez says he is thankful the soup kitchen gave him more than meals.

Six years ago, the then unemployed bricklayer teetered on the edge of homelessness. Soup-kitchen volunteers made Lopez feel "warm and welcome." Over time, he attended worship and even moved to the other side of the soup line to work as a volunteer.

Lopez took part in an alcohol-addiction program for veterans and now, at 52, is studying to become a counselor. St. Matthew, he says, provided "something that I needed in my life.

"It's a blessing, a miracle," adds Lopez, who now serves as St. Matthew's congregation president.

Loza is determined such blessings continue, despite the

church's financial challenges. "The economy is affecting everyone," he says. "But there are still people who have good jobs. And there are still people who send us donations every month, even though they are having a hard time, too."

To learn more, visit stmatthewchicago.org.

At Ohio Food Pantry: Even Lima Beans Disappear

Every week for the past year, families in the western Appalachian community around Chillicothe, Ohio, have visited Our Savior Lutheran Church for groceries when their own shelves grow bare.

But in August, for the first time, "a family came in, and we had nothing to give," says Deaconess Deanna Cheadle, who helped organize the food pantry as part of her work with nine LCMS congregations that comprise Diaconal OutReach and Care Services (DORCAS). "Usually, there's



'We're the poor feeding the poor.'

—Rev. Julio A. Loza



‘There are many fine Christians like Lawrence who have been very helpful to us and set a great example by their lives.’

—Delano Meyer
LCMS Missionary
to West Africa



something left—a canned good like lima beans. But this time, everything was gone.”

A record 14 families visited the food giveaway that week—around the same time that church members also were feeling the challenge of stretching dollars to stock the ministry and still feed their own families.

Throughout the year, 31 families turned to the church for food. In this sparsely populated rural area that’s a significant number, Cheadle says, adding that more than half the food-pantry visitors are 70 or older. Many are unemployed because of disabilities.

One such couple is Herb and Meredith Mitchell, who told Cheadle they must limit their food-pantry treks because they could no longer afford the gas. This worries the deaconess, because the couple also confided that “they didn’t know what they would do” if not for Our Savior’s food distribution.

In 2006, grants from LCMS World Relief and Human Care supplemented funds from the congregations and the Ohio District to hire Cheadle. Since then, Cheadle has helped members organize human-care programs, including the food ministry.

Congregation members staff the pantry. They tell visitors about church activities and ask for prayer requests. “We try and build relationships so we can share the Gospel as we care for

them,” Cheadle says.

To help prepare for future needs, the DORCAS congregations are planning their first fund-raiser—a community fast they will promote like a walkathon. “We’ll ask people to fast for 30 hours and collect pledges for each hour,” Cheadle says of the event, set for May 2–3, 2009. The goal is to raise money for the food pantry and awareness about Our Savior. The church will host a fast-breaking community meal after Sunday worship.

“We also want people to notice hunger,” Cheadle says. “We want them to think about how they can choose to fast, but some cannot choose to be hungry.”

To learn more, visit lutheranDORCAS.org.

Higher Food Prices, Higher Regard for Farming in West Africa

While today’s global economic challenges spotlight serious problems, longtime agricultural missionary Delano Meyer says high food prices have at least one positive impact on West Africans.

“Now that the food situation is getting serious, we have many who are taking our training more seriously,” says Meyer, who, with his wife, Linda, helps farmers in Liberia, Sierra Leone,



Last year, Vietnam's National Institute of Nutrition recognized LCMS World Relief and Human Care and LCMS World Mission for the Cow Bank and other projects—including those that have educated mothers about prenatal nutrition and taught farmers crop diversification.

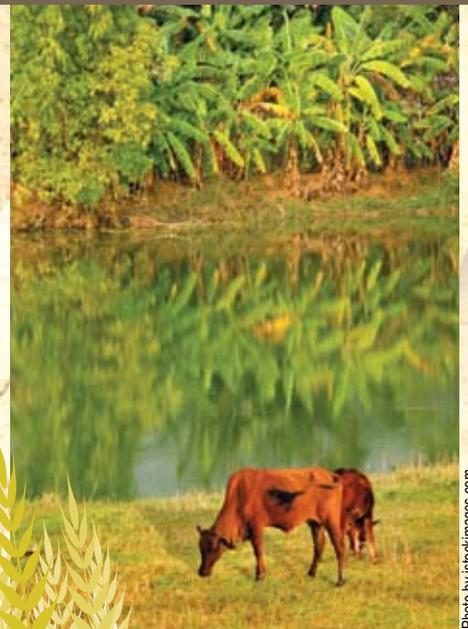


Photo by istockimages.com

and Guinea improve agricultural practices and become better stewards of resources.

Africans can and must produce more food, says Meyer, who has led agricultural training in West Africa since 1994, supported by LCMS World Relief and Human Care and LCMS World Mission. Programs such as "Management of the Harvest" show farmers the causes for food shortages and help them find solutions. The Meyers follow up with biblical guidance, teaching how agriculture is a gift from God to use wisely.

"West Africa is abundantly blessed with agricultural potential not yet tapped," says Meyer, who farmed in Minnesota for 22 years before becoming a missionary. He hopes today's increasing food prices will help erase a generally negative African view of the farmer as lower class and prompt more young people to pursue agriculture.

One such West African is Lawrence, who has enthusiastically embraced the LCMS-sponsored training. In the past, Lawrence followed traditional "slash and burn" farming, cutting trees and torching land to prepare for planting. Today, the African follows the practice he learned in the "Harvest" program, mixing crop residue into the earth to better maintain long-term fertility.

Lawrence also assists the Meyers by teaching fellow farmers. "There are many fine Christians like Lawrence who have been

very helpful to us and set a great example by their lives," says Meyer, who also works with local West African Lutheran churches to address community needs.

Before the Meyers returned to Minnesota in May on furlough, they noticed more West Africans clearing farmlands, motivated by high food prices to plant more acres.

As the couple prepared to go back overseas in late summer, Meyer says he hoped to also see more West Africans in class—at this fall's new agriculture training that will "teach people to know the Lord and show them how to wisely use this wonderful creation He gave us."

To learn more, visit lcmsworldmission.org. Click on "International" and then "Africa."

'Cow Bank's' Four-Legged Loans Benefit Vietnamese Families

Phi and his wife warmly greeted J.P. Cima when he visited the Vietnamese couple this spring. But the missionary knew the family was more excited about another arrival—their four-legged loan due any day from the "Cow Bank."

"This cow will be a huge blessing for the family," Cima says of the farmers, who live in a dirt-floor, thatched-roof home. The couple spoke enthusiastically about how the cow will transport tools and crops the three miles between their house and field. They look forward to future calves—and potential income.

From left to right: Meredith and Herb Mitchell are one of the families in the community around Chillicothe, Ohio, who depend on Our Savior Lutheran Church food pantry for groceries when their own shelves grow bare. (Photo provided by Deanna Cheadle)

In West Africa, Lawrence, right, helps teach the LCMS biblically based agriculture training program that shows farmers the causes for food shortages and helps them find solutions. With Lawrence is one of his training colleagues. (LCMS World Mission photo)

Missionary J.P. Cima, right, visits with Phi, center, after his family received their four-legged investment from the Cow Bank. The bank—sponsored by LCMS World Relief and Human Care and LCMS World Mission in partnership with Vietnam's National Institute of Nutrition—provides families in the Phu Tho province with income-generating livestock. (LCMS World Mission photo)



Phi's family is among those who have benefited from the Cow Bank, one of the most successful projects sponsored by LCMS World Relief and Human Care and LCMS World Mission, in partnership with Vietnam's National Institute of Nutrition (NIN).

Although the Southeast Asian country has made great strides since these nutrition and development programs began in 1995, inflation has hit many people hard. "The high costs of food and now building materials, too, has affected most families and has also meant that some families can no longer send their children to school," says Rev. Ted Engelbrecht, LCMS World Mission's Southeast Asia area facilitator.

Food costs are up at least 25 percent, with some provisions jumping 300 percent. Like most poor farmers, Phi's family

makes about \$300 a year—approximately the cost of their new cow, which they received as a loan through the Cow Bank.

But instead of repaying their loan with money, the couple will give their first calf to another needy family. To date, the Cow Bank has provided cows to about 150 families in Phu Tho Province, northwest of Hanoi. In turn, those cows have produced calves for about another 150 families.

Last year, the NIN recognized LCMS World Relief and Human Care and LCMS World Mission for the Cow Bank and other projects—including those that have educated mothers about prenatal nutrition and taught farmers crop diversification. Much of today's work targets poor families "left behind" during the country's general economic improvement.

Although the government forbids evangelism, LCMS missionaries demonstrate God's Word as they build relationships with the Vietnamese. The Cow Bank, Cima says, shares a stewardship message—for farmers such as Phi and his wife and for donors who make the project possible.

The Cow Bank, he adds, teaches financial responsibility, the importance of caring for precious resources, and that "even a little money can make a big difference in someone's life."

To learn more, visit lcmsworldmission.org. Click on "International" and then "Vietnam."

Kim Plummer Krull is an editor-at-large for *The Lutheran Witness*. She is a member of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Des Peres, Mo.



'Where Needed Most' Helps the Most!

The Sunday before Thanksgiving is when many congregations and individuals across the country traditionally observe LCMS World Relief and Human Care Sunday as an opportunity to share blessings with people in need.

With today's high food and fuel costs, your help is needed more than ever—and here's the most efficient, effective way you can lend a hand through the Synod's mercy arm: designate your gift "where needed most."

LCMS World Relief and Human Care receives no funds from the Synod's unrestricted operating budget. This ministry depends completely on your generous gifts to reach out to people in need, motivated by Christ and His Gospel, according to the Lutheran confession of the faith.

LCMS WR-HC's "self-help" projects feed the hungry—and help other hurting people in the United States and 50 countries around the world. Your "where needed most" gift enables the Synod's mercy arm to reach out when and where needs are most urgent—responding to the latest natural disaster, assisting an LCMS partner when a door opens to share the Gospel, and more.

Please know that WR-HC keeps fund-raising and overhead costs to a minimum. Over the past five years, about 80 cents of each dollar has gone to programs and grants that help people in need. (The remaining 20 cents helped cover fund development and other ministry costs.)

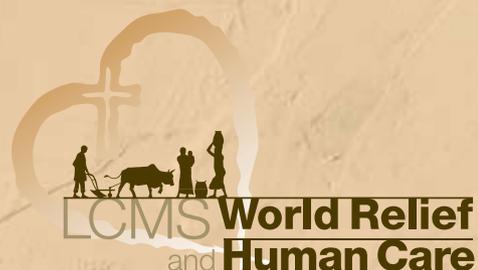
To learn more about this "body and soul" ministry, visit lcms.org/worldrelief or call (800) 248-1930, ext. 1380.

To make a gift, use the envelope included in this *Lutheran Witness*. Designate "where needed most."

You may also:

- **give by phone. Call toll-free (888) 930-4438.**
- **give online at <http://givenowlcms.org>.**

Thank you for sharing your blessings with people in need! —K.P.K.



Mercy forever.

SAINTS: MORE THAN A 'SHORT LIST'



Is the Lutheran Church short on saints? By some standards, it appears that it might be. There are other Christian denominations that seem to have at least one saint (or more) assigned to every day of the year. The Lutheran listing, as represented by the saints included in the table of “Feasts and Festivals” and the list of “Commemorations” in *Lutheran Service Book*, is not that extensive. “Feasts and Festivals” presents us with about two dozen names, and “Commemorations” adds fewer than a hundred more. Are these people the only genuine saints in the history of the Christian Church?

Certainly not!

REMEMBERING THE FAITHFUL

From the very first Christian centuries there has been a continuing concern that not every saint who should be would be remembered properly. Somehow his or her life and death in the faith would go unnoted. To address that concern, the Festival of All Saints was instituted. Church historians report that the Church of Antioch, one of the earliest centers of the Christian faith, held a remembrance of all holy martyrs on the first Sunday after Pentecost each year. By the time of St. John Chrysostom, in the fifth century, the day was observed as a holiday throughout the Christian world. By the ninth century, the festival day, which originally was observed in the spring, was moved to Nov. 1, so that Christian pilgrims who traveled to Rome to celebrate together could be fed more easily at the time of the autumn harvest. Giving thanks to God for the saints of the past and thoughtfully remembering them has been part of the piety of Christian people in every century.

Remembering the “unnamed saints of the past” became even more popular during the Middle Ages. It was not by calendar accident that Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, on Oct. 31, 1517. He knew that one of the largest gatherings of the faithful in the entire year would be passing by that door the following day, as it had become a “holy day of obligation,” requiring church attendance by all Christians by decree of the Pope in 1484, the year after Martin was born. Luther’s choice of the eve of All Saints’ Day for the sharing of his ideas and concerns about the faith and the Church is now remembered as the beginning of the Reformation.

Luther himself was a “fan” of the saints. During his early years, he had been taught, not only the names of countless saints, but their life stories as well. Reading through hagiographies (stories of the lives of the saints) became a significant part of his personal devotional life. In a revealing comment, Luther stated that “next to the Holy Scripture there certainly is no more useful book for Christendom than that of the lives of the saints.” Luther made certain that each of the children born to him and his wife, Katherine, were named for one of the great saints of the past. His own name, *Martin*, had come to him directly from the saint’s day on which he had been baptized, Nov. 11, when St. Martin of Tours, a fourth-century French bishop, was remembered by the Church. His affection for the saints is reflected in a sermon he delivered in 1537, when he said: “Thus I praise and laud the true saints, people graced and gifted with an understanding of Holy Scripture and with many fine, splendid endowments of the Holy Spirit, gifts which they also use for the improvement and encouragement of Christendom.”

The Lutheran Church is certainly not ‘short on saints,’ for in the wider sense, we are all saints together by God’s grace through the working of the Holy Spirit.



Saints: the process of 'holy discovery' can be inspiring in itself!

WHAT ABOUT SAINTS TODAY?

Luther was well versed in the lives of the saints. But have the Lutherans who follow in his churchly footsteps kept that same interest in, and devotion to, the saints? Certainly the names of the saints are remembered in the names of countless Lutheran congregations across the country. There are many churches named for St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. John. There are even Lutheran parishes that commemorate the names of St. Laurence, St. Ambrose, and St. Athanasius. Yet, extensive celebrations of the lives and deeds of the saints in Lutheran congregations, with such activities as processions or chancel dramas, are not very common in 21st-century America. Are we in some way “shorting” ourselves by not remembering the saints as fully as we might?

Going back to the basics in learning about the saints may help us recover some of the faith-uplifting power that the stories of these devoted people supplied to previous generations. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession clearly states the following: “Our Confession approves honoring the saints in three ways. The first is thanksgiving. . . . The second service is the strengthening of our faith. . . . The third honor is the imitation, first of faith, then of the other virtues.”

Although the feasts, festivals, and commemorations included in *Lutheran Service Book* are not exhaustive, they do provide a solid start for the remembering of the saints, not only those from the centuries after Christ, but also men and women of faith included in the books of the Bible as well. The month of November invites us to recall and thank God for St. Andrew on the 30th and to commemorate a notable variety of people of faith throughout the month, including Johannes von Staupitz (11/8), Martin Chemnitz (11/9), Martin of Tours (11/11), the Roman emperor Justinian (11/14), Elizabeth of Hungary (11/19), Clement of Rome (11/23), and, from the Old Testament, Noah (11/29). Information about these inspiring people of God can be found on the Web site of the LCMS Commission of Worship and in numerous books.

Some years ago Concordia Publishing House released the book *Saints and Angels All Around*, which included devotional reflections on the lives of memorable saints. In October, CPH published the *Treasury of Daily Prayer*, which presents daily meditations for each day of the calendar year, some of which feature readings about the saints included on the Church calendar. The book also incorporates quotations from outstanding Christian writers, many of whom are noted in the list of commemorations.

Another way to find devotional materials related to the saints is to use a Bible or hymnal concordance, such as the forthcoming volume designed to complement *Lutheran Service Book*.

There is no shortage of literature available today related to saints for anyone who makes the effort to find this special information in print or online. The process of “holy discovery” can be inspiring in itself!

SAINTS ALL AROUND US

The Lutheran Church is certainly not “short on saints” for, in the wider sense, we are all saints together by God’s grace through the working of the Holy Spirit. In the *Apostles’ Creed* we confess to our belief in “the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.” In the classic hymn, “I Sing a Song of the Saints of God,” British lyricist Lesbia Scott says this about the saints:

*They lived not only in ages past
There are hundreds of thousands still;
The world is bright with the joyous saints
Who love to do Jesus’ will.*

Each generation supplies its own share of saints. Some we are privileged to know by name; others can only be remembered in a less specific way. Yet they too are important. In a recently written hymn introduced to Lutheran congregations through *Lutheran Service Book*, Carl P. Daw Jr. reminds us of that wider sense of commemoration through these words:

*We sing for all the unsung saints,
That countless, nameless throng,
Who kept the faith and passed it on
With hope steadfast and strong. (LSB 678)*

The Church has perpetuated the celebration of All Saints, not just to look backward in time, as important as that is for the edifying of God’s people, but to look to our own times as well. The All Saint’s Day section of in the *Treasury of Daily Prayer* features this quote from 20th-century Lutheran writer Hermann Sasse:

All the saints from the beginning of the world who have died believing in the Redeemer, whether He was yet to come or had come in the flesh, all members of the people of God of all times to the present day—in this sense, all are fathers of the church.

There are fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers in the faith right in your own family and right in your own congregation. The month of November, the “thankful” month, gives a great opportunity for expressing thanks to God for all of the saints who daily touch our lives—and to thank these individuals for the blessings they bring to us all year long. Taking the time to learn about the special saints with the same name as someone you know and then sharing that information with that individual can be a faith-enriching experience. For example, sharing with a friend named Elizabeth something about the life story of Elizabeth of Hungary, a selfless, charitable queen who ruled in Germany in the 13th century, could be a blessing to both of you. Saints are people like us—or, better yet—they are us!

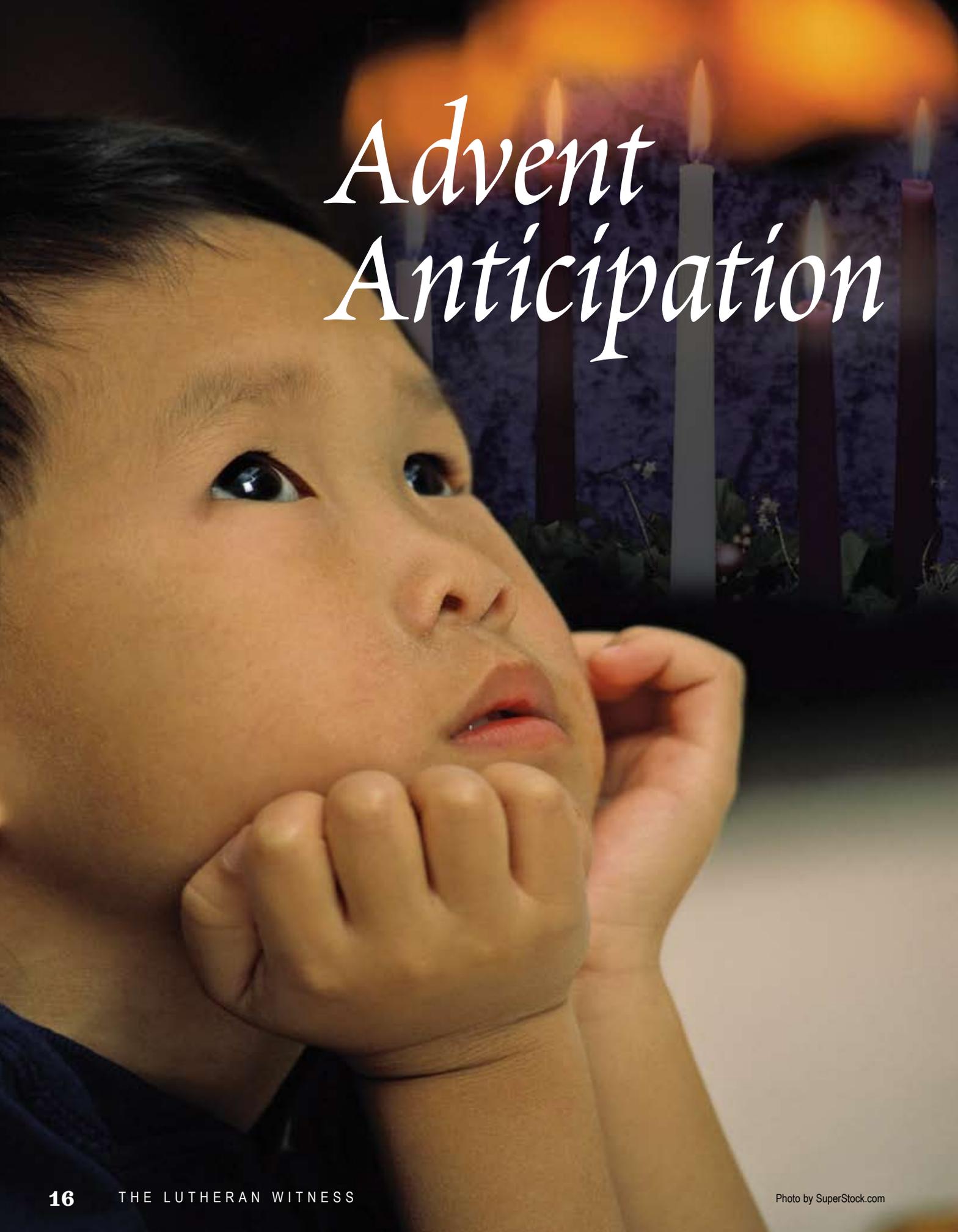
All Saints’ Day and the month of November that it begins invite us to celebrate the saints of times past, to share in faith with those of times present, and to rejoice in anticipation of the generations of saints yet unborn who will keep and will pass along the faith until the end of earthly time.

That certainly is no “short list”!

Dr. Gregory J. Wismar is pastor of Christ the King Lutheran Church, Newtown, Conn., and serves as chairman of the LCMS Commission on Worship.



For more information about the illustration that accompanies this story, visit lcms.org/witness and click on the link for this story.

A close-up photograph of a young child's face, looking upwards with a hopeful and expectant expression. The child's hands are resting under their chin. In the background, several lit candles are visible, creating a warm, glowing atmosphere. The text "Advent Anticipation" is overlaid in a white, elegant script font.

Advent Anticipation

For Christians, Advent heralds more than the beginning of the Christmas season.

Anticipation.

It fills the air the week before our annual vacation. Time to get out the camping gear. Where did we store the tent? Air it out. Find the fishing poles. Are they in working order?

As our departure approaches, our excitement reaches a fever pitch!

Anticipating our vacation is almost as much fun as the trip itself.

Anticipation. Couples about to be married know the feeling as the special day approaches. The nine months of a pregnancy are filled with anticipation.

The Church of Jesus knows even greater excitement. In fact, we devote a whole season to anticipation. Advent, it's called, after the Latin *adventus*, a word the Romans used to describe the "coming," or "arrival," of the emperor in a city. During the four weeks before Christmas, the Church anticipates our Lord's "arrival." *Adventus* translates the Greek *parousia*, the New Testament word for our Lord's second coming (1 Thess. 5:23).

Anticipation, Preparation

Quite obviously, Advent anticipates Christmas. Various traditions prepare for the joys of the holiday—the "hanging of the greens," Advent wreaths, Christmas caroling, children's programs. Parents love to watch the anticipation in their children's faces while they decorate the Christmas tree.

Anticipation filled the heart of Mary, mother of our Lord, when she went to her cousin, Elizabeth, and sang: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name" (Luke 1:46–49 ESV). Think of old Zechariah waiting for the birth of John, struck speechless because he did not believe the word of Gabriel, God's messenger, and then, when the day came, the Holy Spirit prompted him to say, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people" (Luke 1:67ff.). Picture Simeon, to whom the Spirit had revealed that he would not die until "he had seen the Lord's Christ," now finally holding the Child for whom he had been waiting, "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation" (Luke 2:26, 29–30).

Taking her cue from these saints, the Church in Advent anticipates and prepares for our Lord's coming. Advent Gospels bring us Zechariah's son, John, preaching "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4), just as Isaiah, the prophet, had anticipated, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord'" (Mark 1:3).



*The Spirit lifts up
our eyes from
everyday worries
to see Jesus coming.*



There is much to be done preparing for a trip, just as we have much to do to prepare for Christmas. But the most important preparation for the “arrival” of the Lord is not accomplished by our efforts. The Holy Spirit, by God’s Word, works in our hearts the preparation called repentance.

The Spirit lifts up our eyes from everyday worries to see Jesus coming. “The Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mark 1:15) was

One day our own eyes will see Him coming in glory on the clouds of heaven. But today, right here and now, with the ears of faith we do ‘hear His coming,’ hear His call to ‘repent and believe in the Gospel.’



Christ’s first message. To repent is to turn, to turn away from pursuing your selfish ways and turn to the Lord, your God, “for He comes to judge . . . the world in righteousness and the peoples in His faithfulness” (Ps. 96:13). By the power of the Holy Spirit, hear this Word of God’s prophet: “Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other” (Is. 45:22).

Advent repentance opens our hearts for the celebration of our Lord’s coming into the flesh. “I bring you Good News of a great joy that will be for all the people” (Luke 2:10) the angels will say. And we will sing, “Joy! Joy! For Christ is born, the Babe, the son of Mary” (LSB 370).

He Will Come Again

What happens, though, when the much-anticipated vacation is over? The tent is packed away, the fishing poles stowed. How long before we begin to anticipate next year? It’s the same with our observance of Christmas. Even as we put up the tree, anticipating the celebration, we know the day is coming, sooner than we might like, when we will take it down again. Is that all there is?

“No, not at all!” is the continuing message of Advent. The anticipation of Christmas is a picture of the Church’s faithful waiting for our Lord’s coming again. “This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven,” angels tell the disciples on the Mount of Ascension, “will come in the same way you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11), namely, openly, for all to see. Ever since, God’s people have been “on the lookout.” We “look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come,” all of which will take place when “He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead” (*Nicene Creed*).

Oh, the astonishing anticipation that comes with Advent! A new heaven and a new earth “in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13), where “they shall not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord” (Is. 11:9). Our world may be in convulsion and turmoil, but that is only a sign, Jesus says, “that your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:28). The world will not end in a terrorist attack, nor in a political debacle (even if your party loses the election; it’s not the “end of the world”). High gas prices notwithstanding, the Church finds its comfort, its hope in the promises of God: “Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).

The Church sings her Advent hope in Christ who is coming again:

The King shall come when morning dawns,

And light and beauty brings.

*Hail! Christ the Lord! Your people pray:
Come quickly, King of kings!” (LSB 348)*



With a wonderful combination of fear and joy we look ahead to watch for our Lord's coming again. We know what it means for all who believe: "For the trumpet will sound [at the Lord's 'arrival'], and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality." Jesus' coming, His *advent*, is our final victory: "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:52-53, 57).

What about those who do not yet believe? Does not our Lord send us with His Word to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing . . . and teaching"? And where is He when we go? "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20). Our Lord sends us, but is always with us.

He Is with Us Now

That is why we also remember in Advent how our Lord comes *now*,

comes in His Word, comes with His body and blood in the Supper, comes by His Spirit in the water with the Word in Baptism. One day our own eyes will see Him coming in glory on the clouds of heaven. But today, right here and now, with the ears of faith we do "hear His coming," hear His call to "repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mark 1:15), hear His promise for ourselves, that though we were "strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world," now "in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:12-13).

The Lord Himself comes in His Word to say into our ears, "For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but My steadfast love shall not depart from you, and My covenant of peace shall not be removed" (Is. 54:10). And the same Lord now comes through us to tell others, "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near; let the wicked forsake

his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that He may have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Is. 55:6-7).

Celebrate, Trust, Desire

Do you see how Advent anticipates our Lord's coming in all three ways? First, we celebrate His arrival because Jesus is God in our flesh come to die and rise for us. Second, trusting that our Lord is coming again in glory to take us home, we look ahead with hearts full of hope. But even now, our Lord comes to us in His Word and Sacrament, to comfort and strengthen us for the journey. In faith, we respond with the Church of all ages, *Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!* (Rev. 22:20).

Rev. Herbert C. Mueller Jr. is president of the LCMS Southern Illinois District.



Giving





Thanks in Every Circumstance

Norman Rockwell probably would have loved to paint the Thanksgiving of my childhood. He would have needed more than one canvas to do so, however. When our substantial extended family gathered in our Texas farmhouse to thank God for the harvest and ask God's blessing on the feast, we filled two rooms. Children ate during the first three-table shift. When their bellies were filled, they poured out of the house to play hide-and-seek in the yard, build hay forts in the barn, or have "China berry" wars in the trees by the chicken house. The adults then ate in leisure, telling stories and swapping jokes. Frequent gales of laughter echoed off the walls and wafted through the windows.

Thanksgiving was always celebrated at our house. We had room for everyone, but we also raised the turkey—and a hundred or so others. A stuffed 30-pound bird entered the oven on Wednesday night and roasted into the morning. Mom prepared other dishes from our vegetable and fruit bounty, and everyone who came brought their specialty to add. Scrumptious dishes packed the refrigerator, countertops, and side tables. Milk flowed freely from the dairy-barn cooler, as children gulped away their thirst.

The "extended family" seated at our Thanksgiving tables often included people not related to us—a neighboring family, foster children living with relatives, or college friends of my older siblings. An assortment of foreign students got their first experience of an American Thanksgiving with us. In almost every way, the Thanksgiving Days of my youth were days of joy and plenty. It didn't matter that I wore hand-me-down clothing, worked hard even as a child, and didn't have a lot of "things." It was easy to give thanks.

I never imagined how much my Thanksgiving celebrations would change in the years to come. Varying circumstances would alter the form, family connection, foundation for thanksgiving, and faith responses involved in my Thanksgiving Day activities. I would gain new perspectives on 1 Thess. 5:18, which urges us to "give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

My first Thanksgiving away from the bountiful table of my youth came during my year of service with Prince of Peace Volunteers. POPV was an outreach program of our Synod's youth-ministry arm known then as the Walther League. Everything about my life in Indianapolis' inner city stood in stark contrast to the life I had known: environment, culture, demographics—and the hopelessness of poverty. I missed being with my family, but I had new appreciation for God's grace and provision in my life.

In subsequent years of isolation from family, I became aware that for many individuals, couples, and intimate family units, Thanksgiving is a most difficult holiday to spend separated from kin. As a newlywed, it seemed only natural to expand our table to include others. My husband, Lee, was a vicar, so we welcomed other single and married vicars as our "family" for the day.

In almost every way, the Thanksgiving Days of my youth were days of joy and plenty. It didn't matter that I wore hand-me-down clothing, worked hard even as a child, and didn't have a lot of 'things.' It was easy to give thanks.

Separation from the larger family often strengthens the bond between those sharing the ritual meal. It was true for my sister and me when we ate at a table for two in St. Louis. It was true when our young family of five was the guest of a family in our congregation. It was true when my young adult daughter and I helped friends with cognitive disabilities prepare a Thanksgiving meal in their group home. Each celebration had its own form and a different "family" dynamic, but every situation gave me new reason to give thanks for the people God put in my life.

Marriage changed the shape of my family, connecting me with a new family with strong faith and family traditions of their own. Our children benefit from the heritage of both families. I was filled with gratitude when my son's children became the fourth generation eating at the Thanksgiving table of his paternal grandparents, Cecil and Juanita Sodowsky.

Their table was not complete, however, because my husband was not there. His parents still grieved his loss, our son missed his guidance, and our grandchildren regretted knowing their grandfather only through pictures and stories. Yet, they expressed gratitude for God's faithfulness to Lee and to them.

Loss shakes the foundations of our thanksgiving—not just loss from death, but also loss due to illness or disability, unemployment, or other adverse circumstances. Loss challenges our faith response.

My last seven Thanksgiving Day celebrations have been radically different from those before. Multiple-impact head trauma in 2001 left my daughter, Jennifer, with constant dizziness, frequent migraines, and hypersensitivity to many things, including smells.

Celebrating a traditional Thanksgiving is no longer an option. Dinner is scaled down to what can be prepared in a turkey roaster and crock pot on the patio—and only if it doesn't rain. Ordering in isn't a choice, because many common foods are now migraine triggers. Group activity increases her symptoms, as does even short-distance travel.

Last year, I flew to Kansas to celebrate Thanksgiving with my sons Joel and Wayne and their families prior to Wayne's deployment to Iraq. We ate together Wednesday evening, keenly aware that Jennifer could not be with us. I spent much of Thanksgiving Day in the air, flying back so that Jennifer would not have to spend the entire day alone. It was a migraine day, and she was too ill to even think about turkey dinner. Still, I didn't regret hurrying home. And I gave thanks.

I gave thanks for safe travel, for the ability to be in both places on the same day, and for my family's willingness to accommodate my need to do so. I gave thanks for my children and grandchildren who all enrich my life and who share faith in Christ. I gave thanks that Wayne was an excellent leader who would be a witness to his troops and to the Iraqi people he'd meet.

I sometimes joke that I am glad God only calls us to give thanks *in* all circumstances, not for them. I might be hard pressed to thank God for hard financial times, for unemployment, for my daughter's lack of recovery, or for my son's being in harm's way. But I can give thanks for God's provision—often through other Christians—in every circumstance.

Edith M. "Edie" Sodowsky is a member of Peace in Christ Lutheran Church, Walkersville, Md.



Circumstantial Evidence of a Thankful Heart

When challenged to come up with ways to demonstrate our gratitude to God by reaching out to others at Thanksgiving, we typically think of collecting money or items for food baskets for families in need or helping serve a meal at a homeless shelter. These are, indeed, excellent means of outreach, but we can add other ways with just a little effort—and make a difference in another person's life. Here are some possibilities:

- **Add a personal touch** to food baskets. With other families in your congregation, "adopt" a family in need to whom each church family will deliver the basket or box. Tell the recipients that your family wants to support them in prayer, and ask if they are willing to share prayer needs. If a need is a tangible one that you may be able to supply, consider doing so.
- **Don't leave as soon as food is served** at the homeless shelter or soup kitchen, but sit down and talk with people who have come for the food. Ask the facility director if it would be appropriate to bring a bag with a variety of low-cost games, New Testaments, paper, pens, and envelopes for use after the tables are cleared, or for individuals to take with them.
- **Write a personal note** modeled after Phil. 1:3ff. Tell someone why you thank God for him/her. Be specific about the gift(s) you see in them and the ways they are a blessing to you. Remember not only your elders and peers, but also the children in your life.
- **Share your table** with others, especially those who may be far from family. Ask single adults of all ages—at work, church, or in your community—if they have a place to go for Thanksgiving; remember those who are widowed or divorced. Invite couples or families with no relatives in the area. Check with a local college to see how you might include several students who cannot go home.
- **Spend part of your day with shut-ins**, individuals in supported-living situations, or people who are incarcerated. They may be isolated, not only from their families, but also from the outside world.—E.S.



Through the Ages . . .

One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God and Father of All—in Howard, S.D.



When the telephone rang, I wasn't really ready to make a hospital visit. Today had been a long day after a long night. I was tired. But I needed to go.

You see, she is 100 years old. She fell. "She may have broken something," my caller said.

As I prepared to go, I was put out by not being able to spend time with my family—

again. I put the Communion set in the car, checked carefully to make sure everything was in order, and fumed a bit over having to travel alone again. But as I said, I had to go.

The drive was quiet. I wasn't in the mood for the radio. I wasn't in the mood for noise. Silence fit my mood. I arrived at the hospital, found the room, and woke the 100-year-old.

She looked good. She said it hurt, but she was getting along just fine.

The conversation began slowly, but soon she warmed up. She talked about her long life, as she always did. And that's when she said it. It wasn't complicated. It wasn't even that profound. It was just words I know I've said.

But she didn't say that *I* said them. Instead she said, "I remember when Pastor Jehn said that you should say 'the holy Christian church, the communion of saints' together, because they are the same thing."

Suddenly Pastor Jehn's face popped into my head. Oh, I've never met him. In fact he died in 1951, 10 years before I was born. I know who he is, because he was the pastor here at Howard 100 years ago. He spoke to me.

No, I didn't have a vision. Pastor Jehn's words just crossed the pages of time through the lips of the centenarian lying in front of me. What he taught her stuck in her brain to be released to my ears over the distance of time.

Now, to really understand the impact those old (and familiar) words had on me, I have to back up a bit. As I said, it had been a long day. It had been a long week. You know, one of those weeks when you wonder if you really should be a pastor. I'd been mulling over, brooding over, things that just didn't seem to go the way I thought they should.

Doubt is like a plague. But then she said it, or Pastor Jehn said it, "the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, are the same thing."

"That's what I teach," I thought: The Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the life-giving blessings of Baptism and Holy Communion—our duties as Christian men or women. Pastor Jehn, that sainted man, 10 pastors removed, taught his confirmation class what I teach my confirmation class, and not just about the communion of saints.

St. Paul's words came to me: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your

call—one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Eph. 4:1–6 ESV).

I saw, and understood, the communion of saints in a different way than I had ever seen it before. I had a connection to Pastor Jehn. We taught the same things. I am teaching the same things.

A few moments later my centenarian and I shared the body and blood of our Lord. Christ came to us there in the hospital room and brought us the gift of eternal life, just as He has for more than 100 years in Howard, S.D., just as He has for thousands of years for Christians everywhere and in every time. And the words sang out, "with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising you and saying . . . Holy, holy, holy Lord, God Almighty."

At that moment we were united in one faith—in what we believe, teach, and confess . . . the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, Pastor Jehn, his 100-year-old pupil—and me.

'That's what I teach,' I thought: The Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the life-giving blessings of Baptism and Holy Communion—our duties as Christian men or women. Pastor Jehn, that sainted man, 10 pastors removed, taught his confirmation class what I teach my confirmation class, and not just about the communion of saints.



Rev. Jonathan C. Watt is pastor of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Creston, Iowa. He also served as pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church, Howard, S.D. Rev. Ernst G. Jehn (1882–1951) — seen above—served St. John's from 1903 to 1921. He was president of the South Dakota District from 1918–1921.



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

Official Notices— From the Districts

REV. DANIEL M. HACKNEY resigned from the roster of ordained ministers of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. ST. PETER’S LUTHERAN CHURCH, St. Louis, Mo., officially dissolved as of Aug. 31, 2008, and is no longer a member congregation of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.—Dr. Ray G. Mirly, president, LCMS Missouri District.

REV. DUANE MIESNER, Kingsley, Iowa, was appointed circuit counselor of the LeMars Circuit as of Aug. 26, replacing LARRY FETT, who was called to glory.—Rev. Paul Sieveking, president, LCMS Iowa District West.

REV. DAVID L. PEARCY was appointed circuit counselor of Circuit 6, replacing DR. PATRICK CARLSON.—Dr. Jon T. Diefenthaler, president, LCMS Southeastern District.

Official Notices— Colloquies

BRENDA RICHARDSON, Harbor Beach, Mich.; WHITNEY VANDERCAR, Seymour, Ind.; HEATHER CHRISTENSEN, Sylvania, Ohio; KATHRYN LANG, Edinburg, Texas; and LARK MAYESKI, San Diego,

Calif., 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.

DON SEYBOLD, Virginia Beach, Va., and ROBIN MADSON, Amherst, Wis., have completed the Director of Christian Education Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and are, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Dr. Stephen C. Stohlmann, Director of Colloquy, Concordia University, 275 Syndicate St. North, St. Paul, MN 55104.

CAROLYN KIRCHNER, Decatur, Ind.; ELLEN PETT, Saginaw, Mich.; JANIS MCGRATH, Shelby Township, Mich.; and CAROLINE PINTNER, North Royalton, Ohio, have completed the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and are, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Mr. Kevin Brandon, Dean, School of Education, Concordia University, 4090 Geddes Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48105-2797.

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

ANNEMARIE OWENS, Carrollton, Texas, has completed the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and is, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Dr. Jim McConnell, Assistant Colloquy Program Director, Concordia University Texas, 11400 Concordia University Drive, Austin, TX 78726.

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

Official Notices— Requests for Reinstatement

GLENN S. BRAUER, Grayslake, Ill., has applied for reinstatement to the Minister of Religion—Ordained roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. SUSAN BAILEY, Oak Creek, Wis.; RONALD S. DREWS, New York, N.Y.; SANDRA SCHMIDT, Springdale, Ark.; RHONDA J. SWANSON, Lakefield, Minn.; and STEPHANIE M. WILABY, Mayer, Minn., have applied for reinstatement to the Minister of Religion—Commissioned roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Correspondence regarding these applications should be directed to the undersigned for receipt no later than Dec. 5.—Dr. Raymond L. Hartwig, Secretary, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295.

Positions

The Lutheran Witness *welcomes notices for positions available at affiliated entities and Recognized Service Organizations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The deadline for receipt of such notices is the 20th of the month two months prior to the publication month (e.g., Nov. 20 for the January 2009 issue). Send notices to karen.higgins@lcms.org.—Ed.*

The following institutions of the Concordia University System (CUS) are seeking candidates for

Dealing with Change

Our pastor recently accepted another call, and it's been a blow to all of us in the congregation. He's the most incredible pastor our church has known. We all thought he and his family were happy here. I'm especially worried about how this will affect my 14-year-old son, who greatly respects the pastor. I know this is God's divine call, but I just can't believe this is happening.

Your conflicting emotions are understandable, given the high regard, respect, and affection you have for your outgoing pastor. You are experiencing the grief that comes with the loss of a significant relationship. Grief has many faces, some of which you might recognize: Anger at the person for leaving (as contradictory as that seems, it is not uncommon), fear about what changes the new pastor will bring, or confusion about how to respond to this transition. I affirm you for reaching out for help, and I encourage you to stay on this courageous path by talking with a trusted friend or counselor—and taking it to the Lord in prayer.

I offer a word of caution about thinking your pastor's leaving had to do with his being unhappy with the congregation. You might be asking, "Would he still be with us if we had done some things differently?" The fact is that he received the call and he accepted the call. He may have been unhappy. On the other hand, he may have been very

happy with his ministry. There are, no doubt, many pastors who, while content in their place of ministry, felt moved to accept the Holy Spirit's call elsewhere.

It's obvious that you are concerned about your son during this significant transition. I recommend that you give him every opportunity to talk about his feelings. While you cannot protect him from his own grief, you can support him in the process. Perhaps there is a way he can stay in touch with this man he respects. This is also a good time to seek out other adults who can serve as a positive role model for him.

You and your fellow saints have played a vital role in creating what appears to be a wonderful spirit in your congregation. You can be assured that the Holy Spirit will continue to work through you as you take part in the exciting process of calling a new pastor.

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. Please include your name and address.

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positions described below:

Concordia College—New York, Bronxville, N.Y., seeks to fill the following faculty positions: **business, English, psychology.**

Concordia University, Irvine, Calif., seeks to fill the following position: **executive vice president for Advancement.**

Concordia University, Portland, Ore., seeks to fill the following faculty position: **global business.**

Concordia University Wisconsin, Mequon, Wis., seeks to fill the following faculty position: **music.**

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

Anniversaries

The Lutheran Witness welcomes notices 50 words or less 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., Nov. 20 for the January 2009 issue). Send notices to karen.higgins@lcms.org.—Ed.

Hope, Bradenton, Fla., will celebrate its 50th anniversary Nov. 2. First pastor, Rev. Robert Strickert,

emeritus, will conduct the service at the same location as the first service held. A buffet will be held following the service. Visit www.hopelutheranfl.com for more information.

Trinity, Hammond, Ind., will celebrate its 90th anniversary Nov. 2. For more information, contact the church office at 219-932-4940.

St. Jakobi, Shawano, Wis., will celebrate its 125th anniversary with a special 9 a.m. service Nov. 2. Former pastor Rev. Timothy H. Lamkin Sr. will be guest preacher. Fellowship and a noon meal will follow.

Benediction, Milwaukee, Wis., will celebrate its 50th anniversary at an 8 a.m. breakfast and 9 a.m. worship service Nov. 9, with Rev. James Klug leading the service. For more information, contact the church office at 414-463-9158 or visit www.benediction-lcms.org.

Bethlehem, Columbus, Ga., will celebrate its 45th anniversary at the 11 a.m. worship service Nov. 9, with a luncheon and fellowship to follow. For more information, contact the church office at 706-327-8756.

St. John's, West Bend, Wis., will celebrate its 150th anniversary with a dinner Nov. 15 and community worship service Nov. 16 at the Washington County Fair Park Pavilion. Dr. Paul Maier will be guest preacher. Contact the church office at 262-334-4901 or www.stjohnswestbend.org.

Bethlehem, Aloha, Ore., will celebrate its 50th anniversary at the 8, 9:30, and 11 a.m. worship services Nov. 30. Dr. Warren Schumacher, president of the Northwest District, will be guest preacher. The celebration will continue at 3 p.m. with a special

program, featuring messages from former pastors and staff members.

Epiphany, Houston, Texas, will celebrate its 25th anniversary with an evening banquet Saturday, Jan. 10, 2009, and at the Sunday worship service, Jan. 11, under the theme, "Joy in His Presence." Dr. Gerald Kieschnick, president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, will deliver the anniversary message. For more information, contact the church office at 713-896-1773 or visit www.epiphany-lcms.org.

In Memoriam

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

ORDAINED

BRINK, KURT WILLIAM; Sept. 23, 1917, St. Charles, Mo., to June 8, 2008, Bryan, Texas; son of Fred and Lydia (Sachtleben) Brink; graduated Springfield, 1941. Served 1942–1982. Ministries/parishes: Peoria, Ill.; Redlands, San Diego, Barstow, Calif.; Albuquerque, N.M.; retired 1982. Preceded in death by his wife, Martha (Schaal) Brink, and son, David. Survivors: son: Rev. Paul; daughters: Lois Braatz, Ruth Roth. Funeral and interment: June 13, 2008, Albuquerque, N.M.

BURRACK, RICHARD ELMER; Oct. 18, 1920, Danzig, N.D., to Aug. 17, 2008, Carroll, Iowa; son of Rev. William and Anna (Ricklefs) Burrack; graduated

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‘Much Ado about Nothing’ (September) is an inspiring example of how Prof. Paul Maier plows through the mire and muck of much of the spiritual junk food of our day.

*Dr. Albert E. Jabs
Lexington, S.C.*

Plowing through the muck

“Much Ado about Nothing” (September) is an inspiring example of how Prof. Paul Maier plows through the mire and muck of much of the spiritual junk food of our day. We are on the same team.

In fact, his story reminds me of how his father, the world-renowned Lutheran Hour speaker, Dr. Walter Maier, hit at the hype and hypocrisy of his day. I have been privileged to feed on the Maier models for almost 65 years, and their inimitable words can still stir the soul.

We should also challenge the mass

media that desensitizes children and adults alike to video violence, pornography, and structural injustices such as modern slavery—that is, international human trafficking.

Paul Maier, like his father, offers a good model for shining a searchlight on the dark nooks and crannies of our overblown, informational society that so often feeds on false hype, false faith, and feckless fears.

*Dr. Albert E. Jabs
Lexington, S.C.*

What joy!

Susan Senechal’s September Lifeline story, “Dancing with Joy,” is a wonderful commentary on cheerful giving. It

should be sent to all Lutheran congregations in the U.S. as a stewardship flyer.

I would love to see the author’s description of joyful dancing in my church.

*Janice Sievert
Wilson, N.Y.*

Addressing divorce

The stories about “God’s Design for Marriage” in your August issue were of interest, but as a divorced Christian, I am concerned that the issue of divorce was not addressed. Almost 50 percent of all marriages, including Christian ones, end in divorce. There is so little constructive information about how to survive a divorce and move forward. This would have been a great vehicle for reaching all divorced Christians looking for advice.

*Karen Maggart
Trinity Lutheran Church
Bowie, Md.*

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

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Dubuque, 1951. Served 1977–1986. Ministry/parish: Pomeroy, Iowa; retired 1987. Preceded in death by his wife, Lois (Kehren) Burrack, and son, Mark. Survivors: sons: Frederick, David; daughters: Ruth Carter, Clara Smith. Funeral: Aug. 21, 2008, Carroll, Iowa; interment: Aug. 22, 2008, Plainfield, Iowa.

CAMERON, IVORY CARL; Nov. 24, 1918, Eutaw, Ala., to Aug. 3, 2008, Birmingham, Ala.; son of Lovell and Evie (Cross) Cameron; colloquy 1963. Served 1964–1980. Ministries/parishes: Meridian, Jackson, Miss.; New Orleans, La.; Saint Albans, N.Y.; Vredenburgh, Oak Hill, Ala.; retired 1980. Preceded in death by his wife, Marie (Harris) Cameron. Survivors: son: Paul; daughters: Bertha Bryant, Lucinda Mosley, Marietta. Funeral and interment: Aug. 9, 2008, Birmingham, Ala.

CLOETER, OTTMAR H.; July 9, 1920, Pomeroy, Iowa, to Aug. 30, 2008, Minneapolis, Minn.; son of Rev. Richard and Martha (George) Cloeter; graduated St. Louis, 1945. Served 1945–1991. Ministries/parishes: Bristol, Conn.; Northrop, Faribault, Minn.; Minnesota South District president 1978–1991; retired 1991. Survivors: Elsie (Lorenz) Cloeter; sons: Richard, Rev. Paul, Rev. Carl, Robert; daughters: Renata Brand, Roberta Wiesehan, Anita. Funeral and interment: Sept. 3, 2008, Faribault, Minn.

DANIEL, THEODORE A.; Feb. 10, 1920, Detroit, Mich., to Aug. 30, 2008, Sterling Heights, Mich.; son of Rev. Andrew and Anula (Pelikan) Daniel; graduated St. Louis, 1944. Served 1955–1985. Ministries/parishes: Detroit, Mich., retired 1985. Survivors: Olga (Marcis) Daniel; son: Theodore Jr. Funeral: Sept. 7, 2008, Detroit, Mich.; interment: Sept. 7, 2008, Livonia, Mich.

FELTEN, VICTOR CARL; April 24, 1909, Inlet, Quebec, Canada, to July 6, 2008, Newhall, Calif.; son of Edward and Aline (Raafaub) Felten; graduated St. Louis, 1935. Served 1935–1955, 1956–1974. Ministries/parishes: Petoskey, Boyne City, Brutus, East Jordan, Grand Haven, Mich.; Pueblo, Colo.; Baltimore, Md.; Aurora, Berwyn, Ill.; Colorado District circuit counselor: 1950–1954; 1954–1955; retired 1974. Preceded in death by his wife, Rena (Schoenbohm) Felten. Survivors: son: David; daughters: Mary Duitsman, Catherine Startt, Victoria Scharen. Funeral and interment: July 17, 2008, Denver, Iowa.

JOSUPAIT, JOHN W.; Feb. 13, 1929, Kilpinnen, Lithuania, to Aug. 26, 2008, Orlando Park, Ill.; son of Mike and Elsie (Dumashus) Josupait; graduated Springfield, 1961. Served 1961–2002. Ministries/parishes: Waterbury, Conn.; Chicago, Oak Lawn, Ill.; Northern Illinois District circuit counselor: 1991–1997;

retired 2002. Survivors: Erna (Cesna) Josupait; son: John; daughter: Heidi Ozinga. Funeral: Aug. 28, 2008, Tinley Park, Ill.; interment: Aug. 28, 2008, Justice, Ill.

MOHN, TRUMAN PALMER; Feb. 9, 1916, Hayfield, Minn., to Aug. 20, 2008, Minneapolis, Minn.; son of Torggrim and Hannah (Bergom) Mohn; graduated St. Paul, 1944. Served 1979–1984. Ministry/parish: New Haven, Conn.; retired 1984. Preceded in death by his son, Jonathan. Survivors: Shirley (Wick) Mohn; son: Stephen; daughters: Elsa Stazesky, Katharine Kragh, Monica. Funeral and interment: Aug. 27, 2008, Hayfield, Minn.

WILKE, DONALD CHRISTIAN; April 28, 1928, Sheboygan, Wis., to July 28, 2008, Delavan, Wis.; son of Marvin and Loretta (Rumney) Wilke; graduated Springfield, 1954. Served 1954–1987. Ministries/parishes: James, Stratford, West Hanson, S.D.; Bridgeport, Bayard, Neb.; Delavan, Watertown, Wis.; South Wisconsin circuit counselor: 1970–1982; retired 1987. Preceded in death by his wife, Shirley (Koeppler) Wilke. Survivors: sons: Michael, Paul; daughters: Susan Boutelle, Cindy Boss, Elizabeth Maurer, Mary Wegner. Funeral and interment: Aug. 1, 2008, Delavan, Wis.

Natural disasters such as the recent Gulf Coast hurricanes cause terrible damage and create much stress on communities and families affected by them. Yet even in such difficult circumstances, God's people sometimes find rays of humor—such as the following anonymous (and popular) Internet/e-mail collection—in their day-to-day efforts to cope. Our sense of humor: It's another blessing for which we can be thankful. —Ed.

Things Hurricane Ike Taught Us

- A new opening phrase when seeing someone: "Got lights yet?"
- Coffee is possible without Starbucks.
- Frozen pizzas can be made on a barbecue grill, and Hot Pockets taste pretty good deep-fried on an outdoor cooker.
- Peanut butter and jelly is a perfectly acceptable meal for breakfast, lunch, and dinner in the same day.
- There are a lot more stars in the sky than most people think.
- There are a lot of dang trees around here.
- Tree-service companies are underappreciated.
- Cell phones work when land lines are down, but only as long as the battery remains charged.
- The neighbor who knows how to use a chainsaw is your new best friend.
- If you fill the bathtub with water, as advised, the city water system will not fail or be turned off.
- Floodplain drawings on some mortgage documents are seriously wrong.
- People will get into a line that has already formed without having any idea what the line is for.
- Our car gets 23.21675 miles per gallon, *exactly*. You can ask the people in line who helped us push it.
- We can walk a lot farther than we thought.
- TV is an addiction and the withdrawal symptoms are painful.
- A 7-pound bag of ice will chill 6, 12-ounce Budweisers to a drinkable temperature in 11 minutes, and still keep a 14-pound turkey frozen for eight hours.
- Math 101: 30 days in month minus 12 days without power equals a 30 percent higher electric bill?
- Drywall is a compound word; take away the "dry" part and it's worthless.
- Ice is a form of currency.
- Two-year-old canned beets taste better than you think.
- A skateboard and a sheet make a great "sailboat" before the rain starts.
- Five gallons of sweetened iced tea a day is not enough for nine teenagers.
- Neighbors are much more sociable when they are sharing a generator.



- Seven dogs that do not normally live together will not get along during a hurricane. They have no comprehension of sharing.
- A new method of non-lethal torture—showers without hot water.
- What appears acceptable by candlelight in your bathroom will scare you when you look at yourself in the mirror at the office.
- Hair can dry without a blow-dryer, but it may not look the way you planned.
- The storm treasures your kids are finding really belong to your neighbors.
- It's easy to ignore a dirty floor when you can't see it.
- You can't train yourself not to flip on light switches when entering a room.
- Baseball caps go with any post-hurricane ensemble.
- Coming home from work with a pizza and a charged-up laptop so the kids can watch a DVD makes you a hero.
- Never make fun of another state's blackouts.
- You have neighbors.

Submitted via e-mail
 Courtesy of Dan and Anna Braden
 Lamb of God Lutheran Church
 Humble, Texas
 (And their Houston friends and neighbors)



Thanksgiving Cornucopia

by Terence Groth

Many of our homes feature a cornucopia as part of our traditional Thanksgiving decorations. The curved goat's horn overflowing with fruit and ears of grain serves as both a celebration of our abundance and an encouragement to thank God for it. Likewise, as the Scriptures speak of thanksgiving they overflow with both celebration of God's gifts and encouragement to thank Him for them. The cornucopia invites: "Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good" (Ps. 136:1 ESV).

One accent that flows out of the horn of God's plentiful words about thanksgiving is just how important it is. It is so crucial that in Israel's calendar for worship God prescribed *two* festivals connected explicitly with harvest for His people to give thanks annually. What were they? How were they to be celebrated?
Ex. 23:16; Deut. 16:9-17

Not only the times for these thanksgiving celebrations were specified by God, so were the gifts God's grateful people were to offer to Him as expressions of their gratitude. What tangible thanksgiving gifts are specified for the Feast of Weeks (Harvest/Pentecost) and Feast of Tabernacles (Booths/Ingathering)?
Lev. 23:16-18; Num. 29:12-16

Similarly, what *tangible* offerings of thanks does God direct *New Testament* believers to give?
Rom. 6:13; 12:1; 1 Cor. 16:1-2

Phil. 2:17; 4:16-18; Heb. 13:16

Of course, Scripture also overflows with encouragement for utterances of thanksgiving from believers' hearts and lips. How is that expressed in these passages?
1 Chron. 16:8-10; Col. 2:6-7; 3:16-17; 4:2

Ps. 95:1-2; 100:1-4; 147:7; 1 Thess. 5:18

Eph. 5:19-20; 1 Tim. 2:1; Phil. 4:6

Nor do the Scriptures lack in models of believers giving thanks. Who gives thanks, for what, and how in these texts?
1 Chron. 16:4-6; 23:28-31; Matt. 15:36; 26:26-27

2 Chron. 29:31; Luke 2:36-38; 17:11-19

Dan. 2:19-23; 6:10; Rom. 1:8

The overwhelming majority of scriptural thanksgiving references are all those that proclaim the greatness of who God is and what He has done as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier for His people. Such revelation of God always leads His grateful people to give thanks. What acts, or characteristics, of God result in thanksgiving in these passages?
1 Chron. 16:34; 2 Cor. 2:14; 9:12-15

Ps. 75:1; 100:4-5; 136; Rom. 1:8; 6:17-18

Col. 1:3-6, 12-15; 1 Cor. 1:4-9; 15:54-57

2 Thess. 1:3; 2:13-14

What an abundance of reasons for thanksgiving—and these are only a sample of the Bible's witness of God's gifts! Obviously, the Scriptures are overflowing from front to back, not only with encouragement, but especially with reasons for thanksgiving! They give a cornucopia of directions, examples, and good news in Christ for giving thanks. Sounds like a great centerpiece for Thanksgiving!

Rev. Terence Groth is an assistant professor of theology at Concordia University Nebraska.



Blessed to Be a Blessing

As I prepare this column, the campaigns leading up to the Nov. 4 general election still are raging. (By the time you read this, we probably will know who our next presi-

dent will be—though with the possibility of “hanging chads,” I can’t be too certain!)

Throughout the campaign, our country has seemed divided. It’s been Republicans versus Democrats versus independents, and conservatives versus liberals versus the fence-sitters. Newscasters and reporters have emphasized and highlighted the differences and disagreements among Americans.

Notwithstanding all that, I remain thankful to God that I am an American citizen, with freedoms and blessings unequalled in most, if not all, of the world. And finally, it is commitment to the Constitution and love of our country that unites us as Americans.

In our Synod, too, people don’t always see various matters of importance from the same perspective.

For example, congregations may have to decide whether to build a new sanctuary or a new fellowship hall—or nothing at all. They may debate what musical instruments should be used in worship; the gender of acolytes and lectors; or whether to support a school with offerings, tuition, or neither. Should the congregation leave its historic location for the suburbs, or figure out how to engage the new neighbors that now surround their stately but nearly empty church building?

Decisions on which good and faithful people may disagree are not restricted to congregations. Our national Synod also sees its share of discussions and even disagreements about matters of faith and life. It is our privilege, duty, and responsibility as a synod prayerfully and carefully to discern what God’s Word says about such matters as close(d) Communion, non-traditional worship, the service of women in the church, the role and authority of the pastoral office, and the priesthood of all believers.

At times, differing perspectives on these and other topics among us result in disharmony and disagreement. At such times it behooves us to search Holy Scripture as we endeavor to achieve agreement in those areas of faith and life where disagreement currently exists.

Yet, the fact is that our church body is blessed with significant, if not unparalleled, agreement in what we believe, teach, and confess. There’s not enough room on this page to list everything on which we agree, but here’s a sample (for a longer list, go online to www.lcms.org?13380):

- That there is only one true God, who has revealed Himself in Holy Scripture as the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- That this God created the world and everything in it, including the first man, Adam, and the first woman, Eve, in six days.
- That since the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, all people are born with original sin and are altogether incapable of pleasing God by their own merits.
- That God promised a Savior to Adam and Eve and, through them, to all people.
- That this Savior is Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, through whom alone we receive forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation.
- That Christians are called to proclaim to a lost and dying world the Good News that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.
- That the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament are the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice.
- That the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church are a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God.

As we approach the Thanksgiving holiday, I thank God for the blessing of being an American citizen and a member of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Some church bodies debate the deity of Christ, His virgin birth, and His bodily resurrection. I am not aware of anyone in our Synod who questions these doctrines. Other church bodies debate the ordination of homosexual pastors who are living in “committed relationships.” That question isn’t even on our radar screen, because we have agreed that homosexual behavior is intrinsically sinful. I thank God for our unity in Christ!

As we approach the Thanksgiving season, I also thank God for the blessing of being an American citizen and a member of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Indeed, we have been blessed to be a blessing!

Jerry Kieschnick
John 3:16–17

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