



THE LUTHERAN WITNESS™

VOL. 129 NO. 11 NOVEMBER 2010

Living a Life of Significance in a Post-Christian Culture

Supporting Our Soldiers <
of the Cross

Handing on the Word of Truth <

How to Escape the Christmas Madness <

A Different Kind of Hope <

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The Light of the World

Lights. That's what I think of when Advent rolls around. My childhood is rife with memories of the Sunday School classes decorating the church sanctuary in light. Red felt ribbons secured seven-foot-high torches to the aisle-side of

the cherry wood pews. Strings of white lights spiraled around the live Christmas tree in a corner. The smell of fresh hay called attention to the life-sized wooden Nativity scene, where a tiny desk lamp is strategically placed in the manger to signify the Christ Child. All of that, and the only thing I and every other child focused on was the Advent wreath placed center stage in front of the altar. Four purple candles, each one representing one of the four weeks in the season, and the fat pink one in the middle that, when lit, meant it was finally Christmas morning.

But that's where my love affair with light ends. I remember the trauma of my first birthday party, learning that the dancing flame crowning the waxy cylinder was not a toy. Scarred for life by that event, those Advent candles served their purpose far up front in the sanctuary, away from me.

My family gathered with the faithful every Christmas morning to celebrate the birth of the promised Messiah. For the better part of the hour, though, the tempo of my pounding heart drowned out the singing and the sermon. My only concern was our tradition of closing the service with everyone

forming a ring around the sanctuary, each person holding a flaming candle in their hands. The pastor would stand in front of the blazing Advent wreath and light his candle. He would touch his taper to the person's standing next to him.

One by one, the sanctuary glowed as a wave of lights flickered in front of my eyes. I loved watching the trail of flames, but I dreaded when my candle was lit. I would study my flame, imagining it catching hold of my braid and shooting up my scalp. I prayed that the hot wax oozing down the white stick didn't sneak past the cardboard barrier and burn my hand. Yet it always did, and I relived my lesson on fire.

This particular year, though, the service closed with the usual parade of candlelight around the sanctuary. But instead of a hymn, we sang from *The Lutheran Hymnal* the words Simeon used when he recognized the Christ Child in the temple:

"Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word: For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou has prepared before the face of all people: a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel"
(Luke 2:29–32 KJV).

Was that what this candle was for, my adolescent mind quizzed? This whole time I had been focusing on the wrong light. All of the waiting and anticipation of Christmas culminated into a childish fear of fire.

But isn't this typical of a lot of us? As children, we are anxious for Christmas to get here, spending our Advent traveling neighborhoods to see whose house was adorned with the most light. Rarely do our thoughts ever go to the man who recognized the Light for what it was. Simeon knew immediately that the child before him was the Messiah. Just like my fear, our focus is on everything but the reason for the season, the impending arrival of Christ Jesus. This time, I was not afraid to accept the flame.

I still think of lights when Advent comes around. I count down to Christmas by lighting my own Advent wreath. My childhood fear of fire and candles is now replaced with an understanding and appreciation of the significance of this time of year. But I no longer need the sting of hot wax on my hand to remind me for whom my candle burns.

Michelle Vargas (a_s_k_delta8@sbcglobal.net) is a member of Redeemer Lutheran Church, Highland, Ind.



**A light to lighten the
Gentiles and the glory
of Thy people Israel.**

(Luke 2:32)

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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It's happened. Already stores are playing Christmas carols and plying you with promises of perfect presents. What happened to Thanksgiving? What happened to Advent? What happened to waiting?

Not to worry. The Church does not operate like the world. The Church, in fact, thrives on waiting. It is unhurried, deliberate, thoughtful.

So it seemed only natural that this November, as we await the start of Advent, we take a deep breath and a step back. In "Living a Life of Significance," Dr. Kurt Senske discusses something worth slowing down for: living the life God planned in advance uniquely for you. He'll even help you rediscover the peace and mercy Christ gives you each day.

Read also Rev. Hans Fiene's "How to Escape the Christmas Madness." In the rush to get to Christmas Day, it's easy to skip over Advent only to suffer a letdown when it's all over too quickly. Instead, Rev. Fiene encourages you to listen to God's Word tell you about Immanuel, God with us, who will soon be here, ready to work all things for your good.

Take time for "Supporting Our Soldiers of the Cross in Crisis Battles," a meaningful look at the emotional and financial struggles in the lives of church workers. Kim Plummer Krull explores LCMS Lutheran World Relief and Human Care's outreach to pastors, deaconesses, and other church workers, giving you the opportunity to help support our church's own servants.

Read also the story of 24-year-old Megan Eckardt in "A Different Kind of Hope," told by her husband Peter. Though Megan passed away on Easter Sunday 2010, her life was also one of significance, filled with hope in Christ and His promise of the resurrection on the Last Day.

Furthermore, during Advent, consider taking time to explore the richness of God's Word each day. In Rev. John Sias's "Handing on the Word of Truth," you'll get a crash course in different versions of the Bible and which translations can be trusted more than others.

Finally, join us at *The Lutheran Witness* in waiting for one last thing: a new look and design of the magazine. In January 2011, we'll be unveiling new formatting and design changes based on ideas that we've received from you, our readers. You can expect the look of the magazine to be a little less busy and a little less hurried.

Be still this Advent. Allow this penitential season to add to the approach of Christmas. Wait with us in eager anticipation of the fulfillment of God's promise to send a Savior. Hear about the Baby who will save you from your sin.

Take comfort. Your life has significance, because you belong to Him.

Adriane Dorr, Managing Editor
The Lutheran Witness
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- For timely Synod news, visit *Reporter Online* at lcms.org/reporter. Included this month are stories about record-high fall enrollment at the 10 Concordia University System schools and LCMS World Mission identifying 22 cities in which to launch urban ministry strategies.
- Also, go to lcms.org/witness to check out "Jesus—the Example to Follow," a thoughtful look at what it means to be a servant of Jesus Christ by LCMS North Wisconsin District president Joel Hoelter.

Life worth living

In all the years I have been privileged to read *The Lutheran Witness*, rarely have I had the honor to read a finer essay than Dr. Gene Edward Veith's "In Praise of Work" (September).

The beauty of Veith's little essay is what he says so simply and elegantly: That there is equal dignity and worth in every vocation, the root of which is service to God and our fellow man. This is a simple truth so easily obscured.

God made Luther brilliant, no more so in evidence than when he was writing on the sublimity and sanctity of our work. The rising generation

The most desirable way

Dr. Jerald C. Joersz is right that the Sacred Scriptures do not specifically tell us whether pastors should commune themselves or not (Q & A September).

Our official doctrine and practice, however, come from the Book of Concord of 1580: "The mass should be a communion, at which the priest and others receive the sacrament for themselves."

The custom of having the celebrant receive the body and blood of Christ from another clergyman is of relatively recent origin. Even more recent is the practice of having him receive from a layperson.

Thus, for a Lutheran pastor to administer Christ's body and blood to himself at a parish celebration of the

pastor. The *Altar Book* allows the things that it leaves unstated, which belong to Christian freedom.

This is what the *Altar Book* expects, recommends, and prefers: "The pastor and those who assist him receive the body and the blood of Christ first, the presiding minister communing himself and his assistants. Then they distribute the body and blood to those who come to receive."

No, the *Altar Book* does not require this, because we are Lutherans. We don't require anything in this regard. But where able, we do prefer stronger practice to weaker.

Rev. David Petersen
For the Editors of *Gottesdienst: The Journal of Lutheran Liturgy*
Fort Wayne, Ind.



There is equal dignity and worth in every vocation, the root of which is service to God and our fellow man.

Tim Goeglein
Vice President for External Relations
Focus on the Family
Colorado Springs, Colo.

In support of pastors

Dr. Joersz had an opportunity to offer support to a pastor who was just doing what the *LSB Altar Book* directed him to do. He was being faithful. Instead, the Q & A gave the members of his congregation support for criticizing their pastor.

Thomas M. Winger, Acting President
Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary
St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada

The pastor as Christ's representative

I thought Dr. Joersz gave a very helpful reply in a recent answer to the question of a pastor communing himself in a worship service. The practice is an adiaphoron, i.e., it's neither forbidden nor commanded in Scripture. An example by itself does not establish doctrine or church practice, but still it bears some weight as to the wisdom of certain practices in the church. It appears obvious when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper He did not self-commune.

The called pastor is Christ's representative to the congregation and their representative to Christ in intercessory prayer. This prophetic and priestly function of the pastoral office is symbolized by the pulpit and altar. When the pastor faces the people he acts as Christ's representative to the people. When he faces the altar he is their representative to God.

Rev. Harlan C. Wendler
Springfield, Ill.

of young Lutherans would do well to read this wonderful essay, both in our Lutheran schools and in our synodical colleges and universities, because it is a beautiful reminder of what makes life worth living.

May Dr. Veith's book *God at Work* be widely read and happily absorbed.

Tim Goeglein
Vice President for External Relations
Focus on the Family
Colorado Springs, Colo.

From sniper to shepherd

The September article on Pastor Chehab was truly inspirational. It had special meaning for me, whose primary call for my ministry in India (1954-78) was to share the Gospel with Muslims.

Luther T. Engelbrecht
Seattle, Wash.

Holy Communion is, from the standpoint of Christian and Lutheran history and the Book of Concord, the most desirable way for him to receive the Sacrament of the Altar with his people.

Rev. Dr. Philip J. Secker, Director
The Arthur Carl Piepkorn Center for
Evangelical Catholicity
Mansfield, Conn.

Allowing the opposite

Dr. Joersz's response to the question about the pastor's self-communion is slightly misleading. He claims that "The *Altar Book* . . . allows a pastor's self-communion." That is not completely false, but it is terribly inaccurate.

The *Altar Book* allows the opposite thing. It allows a layman to distribute the body and blood of Christ to the

The Church's future

This past July, I had the distinct pleasure and honor to help chaperone 39 young adults to our LCMS National Youth Gathering (NYG) in New Orleans. The theme was "We Believe," yet if there is one thing I believe it is this: With the loving guidance of our Lord (Prov. 3:6), our Church's future is in very capable hands. I was continually amazed by the 25,000 plus young adults that attended NYG.

*Steve Trapp
Phoenix, Ariz.*

We believe

After reading the August issue, which was dedicated to the Synod's convention, I was looking forward to seeing similar treatment for the National Youth Gathering in the September issue. Imagine my disappointment when I opened the magazine to see a two-page article instead. The article didn't come close to capturing what the NYG is about. In this article, you've done a disservice to the Synod by downplaying one of the biggest and best things the Synod does for its members. Furthermore, you've made a clear statement that church politics is worth a full issue, while youth ministry is worth two pages. And we wonder why the Church is losing its young people?

*Steve Meyer
St. Louis, Mo.*

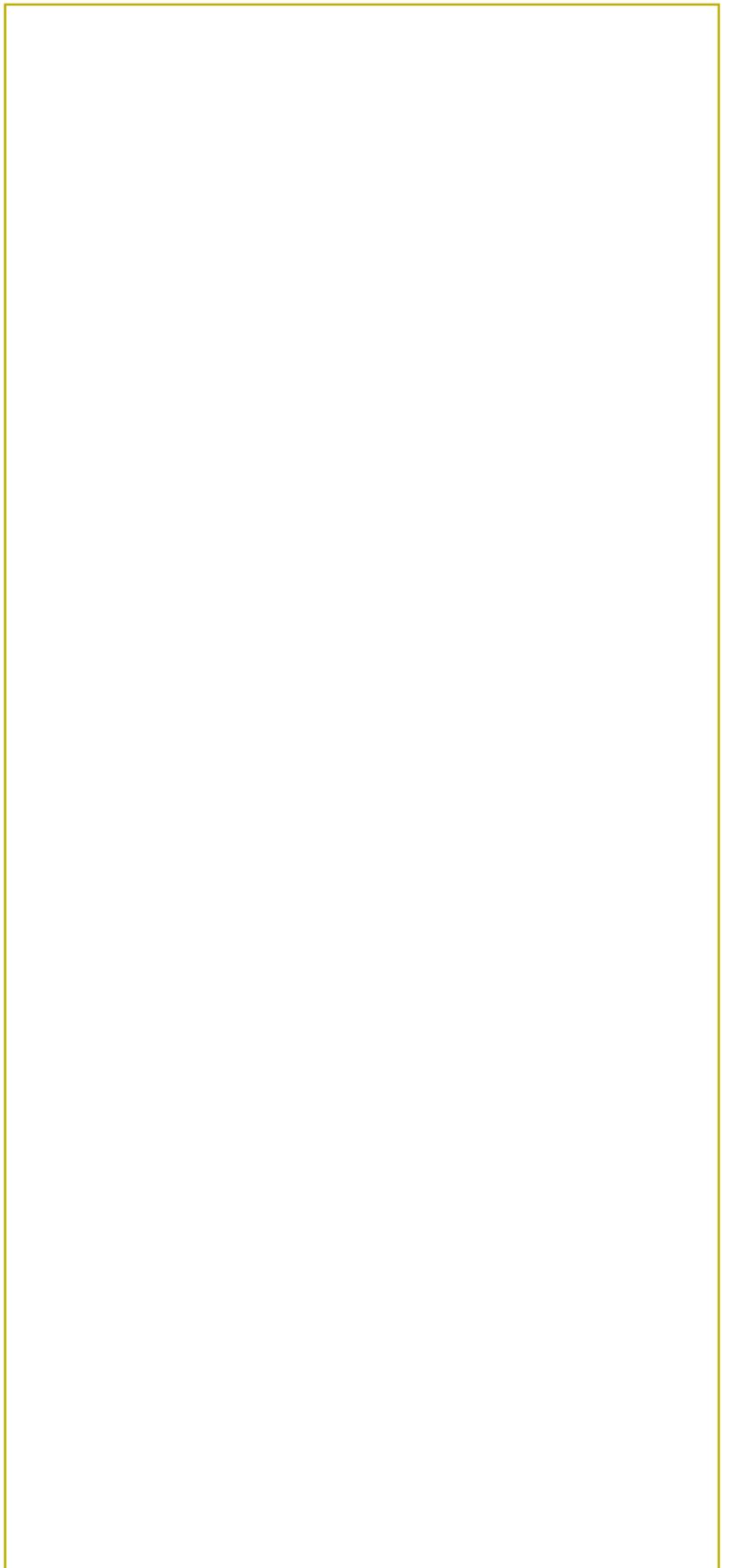
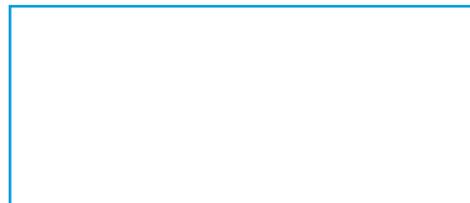
Faith like a child

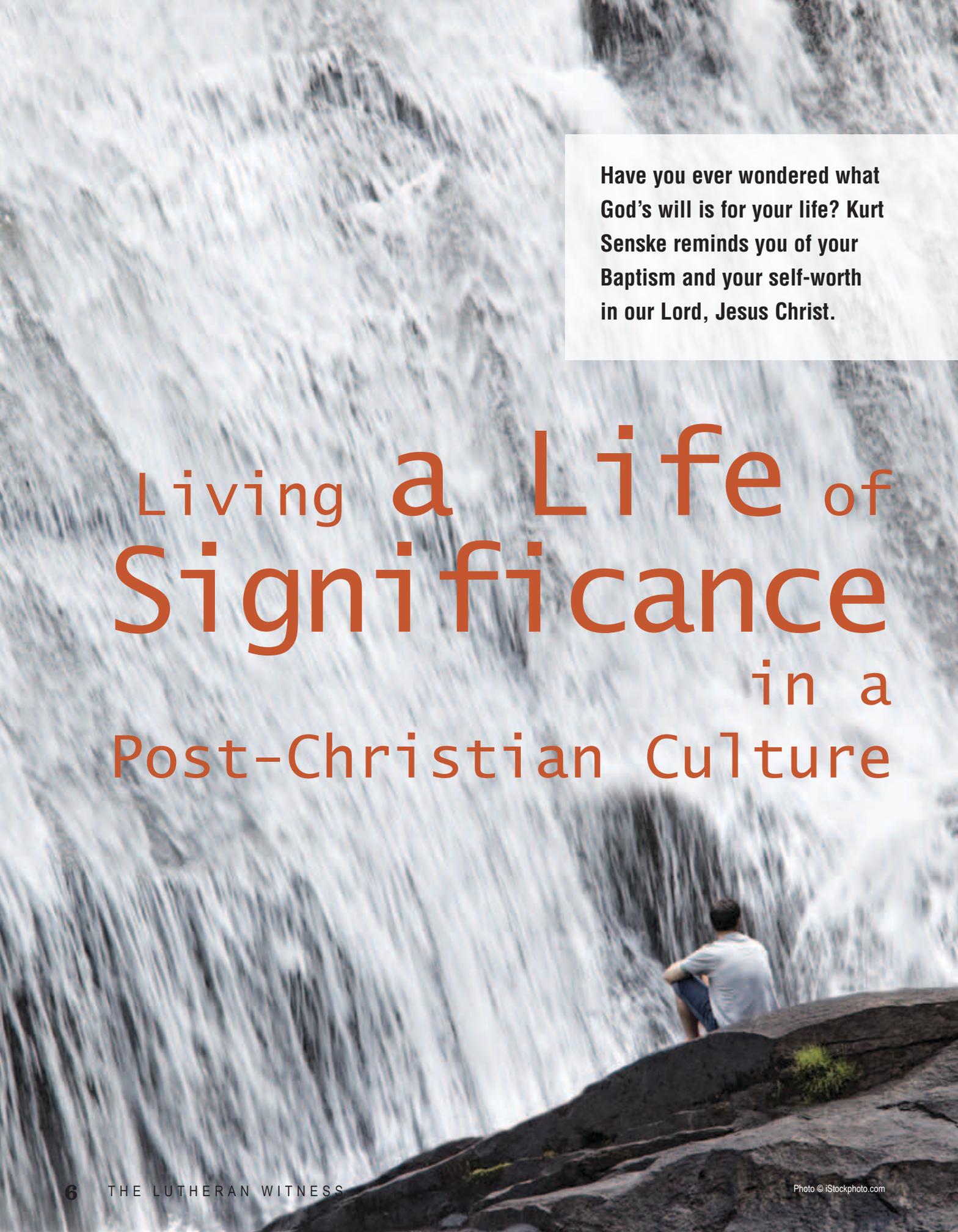
I really like *Portals of Prayer*. It comforts me when I'm sad or mad.

Keep up the good work.

Sincerely,
*Morgan Irvine, age 9
Sheridan, Wyo.*

(Although this letter compliments Concordia Publishing House's Portals of Prayer, The Lutheran Witness's close partnership with CPH, as well as the age and sentiment of the writer, made printing this seem appropriate—Ed.)





Have you ever wondered what God's will is for your life? Kurt Senske reminds you of your Baptism and your self-worth in our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Living a Life of Significance in a Post-Christian Culture

How many times have we found ourselves asking, “Is this all there is out of life?” “Am I really living the life God has created uniquely for me?”

Sometimes the questions become less esoteric: “How do I pay the bills?” “What should I major in at college?” “How do I find a job that motivates and inspires?” “Why is my family life in such shambles?”

What makes living the Christ-filled life even more difficult is that we live in a society where, in many places, openly practicing our Christian faith is less and less considered normal. Daily it seems that we as Christians engage in battle against the overwhelming societal message that power, wealth, beauty, and sexual pleasure are the keys to happiness. The idea that we can discover a road map for living from the words of an ancient leather-bound Bible is greeted with derision by our non-believing peers. In this seemingly post-Christian world, we sometimes feel we are all alone when we wrestle with and discern “What is God calling me to do?” and “How do I live with integrity as I pick up my own cross and daily follow Jesus?”

Proverbs instructs, “The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps” (16:9 ESV). It leads us to ask, “How have I been called to participate in God’s life through my family, work, community, and church roles?”

The questions continue: “How do I distinguish between God’s will and my own self-interest, and are they ever the same?” “If I perceive His will correctly, will I have the courage to pursue it wholeheartedly?”

Jesus reminds us, “Not everyone who says to Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). Simply put, it is impossible for us to live out our calling *and* continue in our old ways. To paraphrase Dietrich

Bonhoeffer, when we respond to God’s call, we intentionally separate ourselves from our previous existence in order to create a new life.

True Security

The good news is that because God gave us our self-worth in Baptism, we can approach our quest secure in the knowledge that God’s action for us through Jesus Christ has infused our life with meaning, no matter our station in life. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to stand in this world with confidence, like David in the presence of the mighty Goliath, and come out victorious. Armed with the security of eternal life, we are free to meet the needs of those we encounter today—family, neighbors, colleagues, and clients. We are free as both sinners and redeemed to serve the sick, abused, imprisoned, “the least of these.”

What I have learned through my research and own personal journey is that to live a life of significance is, above all, a spiritual undertaking. In the process, however, we can also employ certain strategies of our 21st-century world, integrating biblical wisdom with secular research to optimize our unique gifts from God. Such strategies include making God the center of our life, connecting our dots, honestly telling our own personal story, leading a life of simplicity, incorporating rituals, and caring for ourselves so that we may more effectively care for others.

‘In this seemingly post-Christian world, we sometimes feel we are all alone when we wrestle with and discern “What is God calling me to do?” and “How do I live with integrity as I pick up my own cross and daily follow Jesus?”’

At its core, living a life of significance requires no special skill, only self-discipline. First and foremost, we must be intentional about placing our relationship with God at the center of our life. When we take time to pray, study the Word, attend worship, and partake of Jesus’ body and blood, we naturally move to the second discipline as we become aware of ways in which we can humbly serve others. Through the Holy Spirit, we become less so that we can become more. It is through the daily routine of our lives that God gives shape to our calling and thus transforms ordinary life into extraordinary existence.

How, Not What

We live out our calling when we focus less on obtaining a distant goal and focus instead on the here and now. Who have I been called to serve today or at this particular instant? Such focus will, paradoxically, clear the way to discern more clearly how to prepare for the future. For example, in order to serve my family well tomorrow, I must enhance my skill sets and adopt healthy rituals today. Such focus allows us to diminish our own ego so that we become more attuned to be of service to others.

In fulfilling our vocational calling, it is also helpful to focus on the *how* as opposed to the *what*. When we focus on what we want to accomplish, we make the thing we desire the end goal, an often self-serving perspective. For example, “I want

‘As both sinners and saints, our journey will not always be smooth.’

that promotion.” Rather, living a life of significance is measured not by *what* we obtain but by the quality of *how* we live in the present. “How well have I served my spouse today?” “How well have I focused on caring for my neighbor?” “How well have I used my God-given talents at work?” When we focus on the *what*, we turn inward, making it more difficult to hear God’s voice. When we focus on the *how*, we look outward, diminishing our own selves so that the lives of others may be enhanced.

Sinners and Saints

As both sinners and saints, our journey will not always be smooth. We will occasionally relapse, falling into our self-absorbed ways, having to take a step back in order to take two forward. We may make a wrong turn or bump into a closed door. We may allow stress, doubt, and anxiety to block out God’s still, small voice. When this happens—and it will—first, take a deep breath. Second, say a quick prayer, perhaps something like, “God, please help me discern how, in this moment, to live the life You intend.” Third, focus on what is happening at that very moment. *I am in the office. I am in the hospital. I am sitting in class. My spouse and I are having a disagreement.* In my own unique, God-given here-and-now circumstance, how might I serve?

Living this countercultural life may also require us to speak the truth that could result in personal sacrifice. Others may ridicule our decisions because they seem out of touch with societal values. It may require us to take a path that our friends or parents do not completely understand. It will, on occasion, bring us to our knees in exhaustion. It will also provide us with the peace that transcends all understanding.

The good news is that you and I are not alone in our quest to live a life of significance. We are reminded that “for where two or three or more are gathered in My name, there am I among them” (Matt. 18:20). We have the opportunity to come together and become empowered by the Holy Spirit as we support each other’s journey in our congregation, home, and work, through our family and friends and even through all of the various forms of technology that God has provided. Together we can serve God by making the most of our gifts in service to others.

Dr. Kurt Senske (kurt.senske@lss.org) is the author of *The Calling: Live a Life of Significance* (CPH, 2010). He also serves as CEO of Lutheran Social Services of the South, Chairman of Thrivent Financial, and is a member of the LCMS Board of Directors.



Wondering if this is as good as life gets? Go to CPH.org to order Dr. Kurt Senske’s new book *The Calling: Live a Life of Significance*. In it, you’ll learn more about vocation, what it means to live the Christian life, and how the Holy Spirit enables you to find meaning and purpose in what you do.

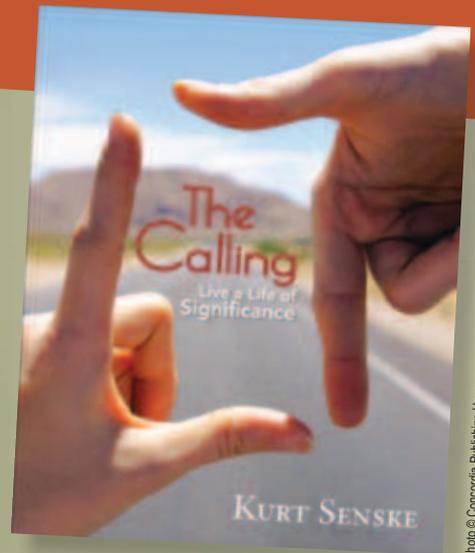
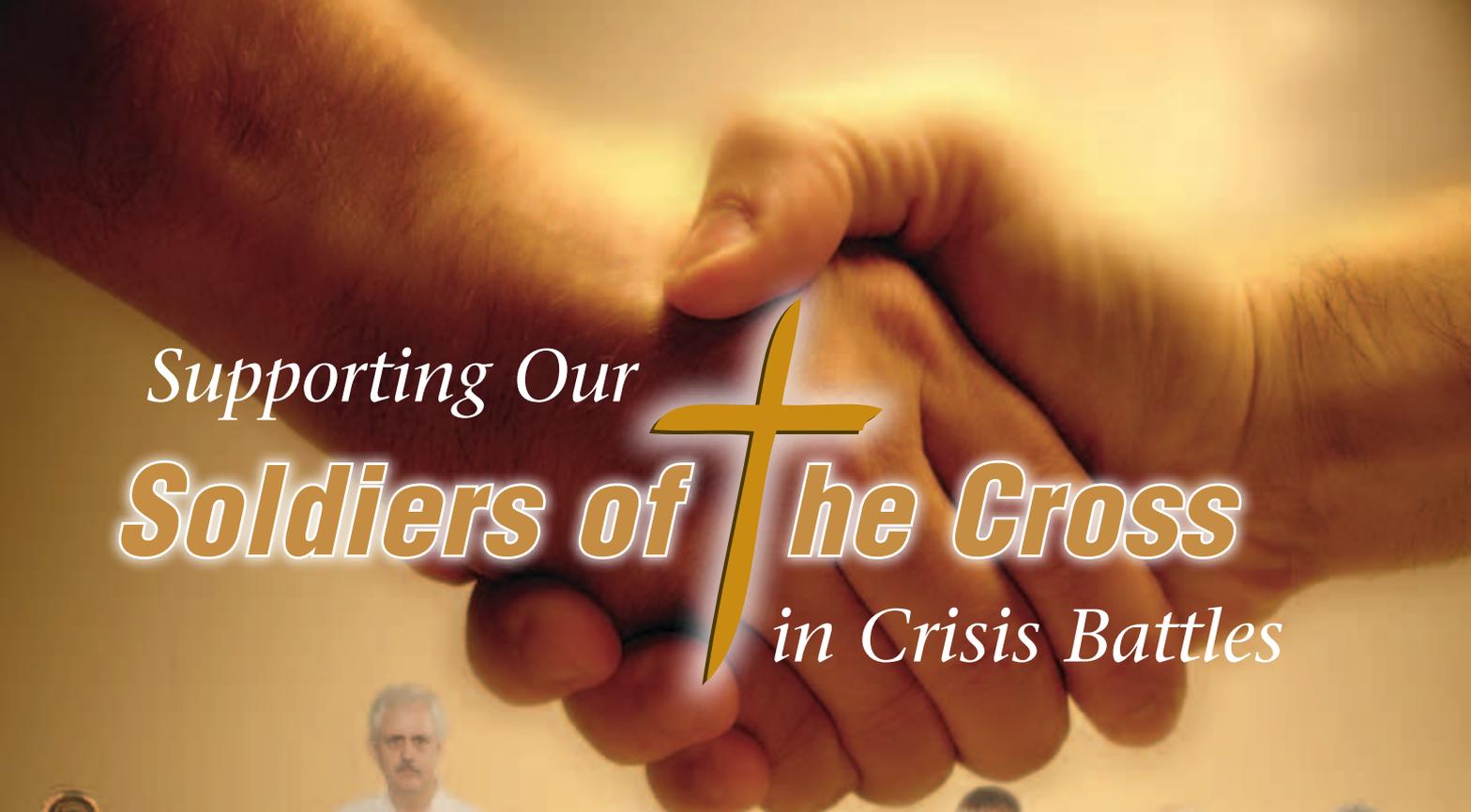


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∨ CONTINUE THIS DISCUSSION

Watch President Matthew Harrison’s video perspective of what it means to live a Christ-filled life of significance, and participate in the virtual conversation at www.kurtsenske.com.



Supporting Our *Soldiers of the Cross* in Crisis Battles



America's struggling economy is affecting the Church as well. See how the Soldiers of the Cross emergency assistance fund, a program of LCMS World Relief and Human Care, is reaching out to LCMS church workers struggling with financial crises.

When LCMS World Relief and Human Care's Soldiers of the Cross emergency assistance program offered Phil Stilke a helping hand, the director of Christian education felt guilty. "As a church worker, I'm supposed to be the one helping people, not the other way around," said the 44-year-old Clarksville, Tenn., father of three.

But life changed last year for the Concordia University Chicago alum and his wife, Judy. During a five-month stretch:

The Stilke family grew when two children the couple was in the process of adopting moved into their home.

At 47, Judy suffered a heart attack followed by complications resulting in multiple hospitalizations.

Phil lost his job when the congregation he had served since 2002 eliminated his position.

"We had a lot of bills at one time. Our situation was so bad, it almost resulted in us not being able to adopt the children," Stilke said. "Soldiers of the Cross really helped us out when we needed it."

Stilke received one of 30 grants issued in 2009 from Soldiers of the Cross, a program spearheaded by LCMS World

Relief and Human Care (WR-HC) to provide emergency support for LCMS church workers based on financial need. By September of this year, the program has already issued 47 grants, a 55 percent increase to date over last year, according to WR-HC.

That steady stream of emergency requests shows no sign of slowing. "On any day, I'm working with at least a half-dozen cases, and they keep coming," said Rev. Carlos Hernandez, WR-HC's director of districts and congregations, who serves as the Soldiers of the Cross case manager. "Even before the economy went south, many of our church workers were toward the bottom on the economic scale. Now in this economy, they are really struggling."

To make matters worse, the Soldiers of the Cross program also struggles. The fund depends solely on contributions. Donors are making fewer gifts at a time when more church workers need help. Program funds are depleted, says Hans Springer, associate executive director, Fund Development, with WR-HC.

"We are receiving increasing requests from districts for assistance because of illness and also unemployment, especially for Lutheran teachers who have lost their positions because of school closings or cutbacks in staff," Springer said.

These days, Hernandez spends many hours fielding Soldiers of the Cross referrals from concerned district leaders and following up with worried church workers. "So many of our workers have needs, but we're to the point that we have to ask whose needs are most critical," Hernandez said.

Life or Death Needs

Helping pastors, teachers, and other church workers keep their health insurance tops the Soldiers of the Cross priority list. It's no exaggeration to describe some situations as life and death, such as the plight of Jocelyn Moore, the wife of Rev. Donald Moore, pastor at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Apopka, Fla.

After being diagnosed with leukemia in 2006, Jocelyn fell while carrying her son. She damaged her neck and spinal chord, injuries that now severely restrict the use of her arms and legs. In July, Jocelyn, 50, needed a bone-marrow transplant.

Today, Pastor Moore's ministry is limited because he cares for his wife and two young sons. The small church where he has served for 11 years struggles to pay the pastor's salary and the family's health-insurance premiums. "Losing her health-care benefits would mean the end of [Jocelyn's] life," said Florida-Georgia District's Rev. Douglas Kallesen, executive director, division of outreach, who contacted Soldiers of the Cross about the family's crisis.

In March, a Soldiers of the Cross grant covered the family's health-insurance premiums. People throughout the district have pitched in with other support.

"We didn't ask for help, but people like Carlos and so many others knew we needed it," said Pastor Moore, who this fall was staying with his wife at the home of fellow Lutherans near Gainesville so Jocelyn could remain close to the hospital after the transplant. "People have been so caring and concerned. My spiritual breath has been taken away more than once."

Partners and donors are essential for the Soldiers of the Cross program to meet growing needs. When WR-HC created the program in 2004, the goal was to provide short-term help, typically a single payment to see a church worker through a temporary emergency. Today, dwindling church budgets and numerous school closings mean more church workers need financial assistance for longer periods.

In April, Rev. Rob Sandley was released from his call because his small Texas congregation could no longer afford a full-time pastor. Four months later, the father of three is still job hunting. "I've applied everywhere from Wal-Mart to [the U.S. Department of] Health and Human Services. Lowe's [retail store] told me I was overqualified," said Sandley, 45.

Ideally, the Concordia Seminary alum wants to stay in church work. He never declines an invitation to serve as a fill-in pastor on Sunday. "I take every single chance I get to proclaim the Gospel," he said.

Sandley is grateful a Soldiers of the Cross grant helped his family keep their health-insurance coverage. He appreciates financial assistance from the LCMS Texas District. "But we're not out of the woods, by any means," said Sandley, who was looking forward to an upcoming interview for a prison-ministry position. "As of next week, we'll be dirt poor again."

A Compassionate, Listening Ear

Along with providing financial aid, Soldiers of the Cross offers what Hernandez calls "a compassionate, listening ear." "When people are suffering, it's a very lonely experience," Hernandez said.

'Helping pastors, teachers, and other church workers keep their health insurance tops the Soldiers of the Cross priority list.'



Rev. Carlos Hernandez (left) of WR-HC explains Soldiers of the Cross to members at an on-site congregational visit.

‘We’re just hurting ourselves if we don’t step up to the plate and help our Church’s most vital voice.’ – Rev. Carlos Hernandez

“They are hungry for someone to talk to. The two [financial help and pastoral care] go hand in hand.”

In June, Sandy Kocab suffered a mother’s worst nightmare. The former Lutheran school-teacher had moved to Florida to be near her police-officer son. She was working with the LCMS Florida-Georgia District to find a teaching position when her son, Jeffrey Kocab, 31, was killed while on duty. Two weeks later, Jeffrey’s first child—and Sandy’s first grandchild—was delivered stillborn.

“It’s been overwhelming,” said Sandy Kocab, 57. “I had bills that needed to be paid. I didn’t know how I was going to manage.”

The district contacted Soldiers of the Cross. “Pastor Carlos called me soon after we buried Jeff. I got very emotional, but it meant a lot to know that the Lutheran Church had a fund that could help provide for us. He was very consoling,” said Kocab, who received a grant to help with living and medical expenses.

Both LCMS seminaries also have requested Soldiers of the Cross assistance for graduates without calls. On Call Day in April 2010, 21 Concordia Theological Seminary (CTS) candidates for placement remained unplaced. The CTS faculty and congregations made donations to help the students. WR-HC issued grants for nine future pastors, including those with spouses, children, and mounting bills.

Rev. Mark Sheafer, CTS director of financial aid, knows this economy is tough for all graduates, not just seminary students. But unlike graduates in other fields who can actively pursue multiple

job possibilities, seminary grads “have to wait for that first call to come in,” Sheafer said. “They seek a very specialized job, and the placement process is very specialized. They have been trained, and we want them to be available when that call does come in.”

By September, all but one of the CTS graduates assisted by Soldiers of the Cross had received a call. But the waiting and searching continues for many other LCMS church workers. Hernandez recently worked with one district to provide financial help for 10 teachers after their school closed.

Of course, church workers’ families are not alone in their financial battles. In August, 9.6 percent of Americans were unemployed, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. Why help church workers when many others also face economic challenges?

“These are people who aren’t making a lot of money to begin with. Many have not been able to generate large savings to fall back on,” said LCMS Texas District president Rev. Kenneth Hennings. “They have been moved by the Holy Spirit to dedicate their lives to sharing the Gospel and supporting people on their own spiritual journey. They have educated themselves and dedicated themselves.”

Through Soldiers of the Cross, fellow Lutherans assist “proclaimers of the Gospel,” Hernandez said. “We’re just hurting ourselves if we don’t step up to the plate and help our Church’s most vital voice.”

Indeed, Phil Stilke hopes to resume using his “voice” as a director of Christian education. In the meantime, he says Soldiers of the Cross support helped his family in a way that goes beyond finances. “In church work, it takes a lot of hours and a lot of commitment to do the job well. Your family doesn’t always come first,” he said. “This has been good for my wife and my children to see that this is how Christ’s Kingdom works.”

“With so much chaos in my family life and career,” Stilke added, “it’s refreshing to know that people are stirred by the Holy Spirit to provide love and care.”

Kim Plummer Krull (kimkrull@sbcglobal.net) is an editor-at-large for *The Lutheran Witness* and a member of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Des Peres, Mo.



✓ SHARE CHRIST'S MERCY



Help Church Workers in Need.

LCMS World Relief and Human Care (WR-HC) shares Christ's mercy with people in need around the world, including those who are hungry, ill, and homeless. But this year, the Synod's mercy arm is designating all gifts for LCMS World Relief and Human Care Sunday on Nov. 21 to help LCMS church workers with financial crises through the Soldiers of the Cross emergency assistance fund.

"One of our Synod's top priorities must be helping our church workers in their time of need," said Rev. Matthew C. Harrison, president of Synod and former WR-HC executive director. "These are the men and women who teach our children and preach God's Word. Many have given a large portion of their lives to serve, very often in modest circumstances. While these are challenging times for many families, we must make every attempt to help our servants of the Church."

WR-HC is working to raise a minimum of \$300,000 by June 2011 to assist the growing number of struggling church workers and their families. The need is urgent. At a time when more pastors and teachers need emergency assistance, the Soldiers of the Cross fund—which depends solely on donor contributions—is depleted. — *K.P.K.*

Soldiers of the Cross

• To make a gift for WR-HC's Soldiers of the Cross:

Mail a check to LCMS World Relief and Human Care, P.O. Box 66861, St. Louis, MO, 63166-6861. (Make checks payable to LCMS World Relief and Human Care; designate "Soldiers of the Cross" in the memo line.)

Call toll-free, 888-930-4438 to make a gift by credit card.

Give online at <http://givenowlcms.org>.

• To make a Soldiers of the Cross referral on behalf of a church worker, contact your LCMS district office or WR-HC's Rev. Carlos Hernandez at 314-956-2005 or carlos.hernandez@lcms.org. (Hernandez also serves as case manager for Veterans of the Cross, a companion program also funded by WR-HC to assist impoverished church-work retirees and their families.)

• For free, downloadable WR-HC Sunday resources, visit www.lcms.org/wrhcsunday.

• To order offering envelopes, call 800-248-1930, ext. 1639 or 1672. Please note that the Sunday before Thanksgiving is the traditional WR-HC Sunday, although congregations also celebrate the emphasis at other times during the church year.

Handing on the Word of Truth

With so many Bible translations to pick from, it can be hard to know which one to choose. Which version best drives home what God means to say?

‘Being in God’s Word, where the

We Lutherans are *sola scriptura* people. Scripture alone! When it strikes home in us, this powerful Word of God, inspired by the Spirit, written by the prophets and apostles, does what it says—proclaims forgiveness of sins through Christ and gives peace with God and eternal life (John 8:31–32; 14:23–24; 16:13; 20:30–31; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:21). Luther knew this as his own story. When Rom. 1:17 finally grasped him—that “the righteousness of God” is not a standard for us to achieve (or not), but the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation God gives us solely by grace, through faith, for the sake of Christ crucified—heaven was opened to him.

And so were the Scriptures. From 1522 until his death in 1546, Luther worked on translating and revising a Bible in which the Spirit spoke clear Law and Gospel in clear German. The *Lutherbibel*’s faithful theology left its mark on the Reformation; its forceful clarity, memorable constructions, and vivid, accessible vocabulary spoke so well that it shaped the German language for centuries.

Where precision was important, Luther was deliberately literal rather than freely German. At the same time, he knew well how he and others had so long mistaken the Bible as God’s to-do list for man. He knew this sort of “self-help advice” is what the self-righteous human heart wants to find, rather than the Word of God that kills and makes alive in the cross of Christ. Luther’s translation, therefore, carefully underscored the chief doctrine of the Bible: justification by faith in Christ. He translated Rom. 3:28, “We hold that a man is justified by faith alone apart from works of the law,” adding *alone* (*sola fide!*). This, he argued, was how a German St. Paul would make his point and how German hearers would get it. To make sure they got it, Luther added marginal notes to difficult passages and prefaces that prepared readers to receive each book

as preaching of Law and Gospel, of Christ crucified and resurrected for us.

Not many of us can read the *Lutherbibel* but, as we choose from the dizzying array of English Bible translations, its example is instructive. Which version will best drive home what God means to say? Since Luther’s day, more has changed than simply the language. In the rest of this article, we’ll consider some pros and cons of modern English translations in three areas: textual basis, theory of equivalence, and language issues.

Textual Basis

Translations have as their basis original-language manuscripts, copies of copies of the originals, long since returned to dust. All is not lost though—far from it! We have over 5,000 Greek manuscripts containing all or part of the New Testament, copied in the second to 15th centuries. These include essentially complete books (codices) from the fourth and fifth centuries and sections copied out in the second. While we shouldn’t exaggerate their differences (they render no point of doctrine uncertain), these hand-written copies do not all agree in every place. There were occasional omissions or misspellings or “corrections.” Sometimes extra words from marginal notes or other contexts also crept in.

Different English translations start from different sets of manuscripts. Both the “Old” and New King James Version (KJV, NKJV) use the manuscripts available in 1611. Other translations, such as the New International Version (NIV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), and English Standard Version (ESV), take into account many older manuscripts differing from those used in KJV and NKJV (Matt. 6:13b; Mark 16:9–20; Luke 11:2–4; John 7:53–8:11; Acts 8:37; 1 John 5:7b–8a). The closer we can get to what the prophets and apostles wrote, the better!

Spirit works, is full of promise.’

THE LUTHERAN STUDY BIBLE



The Old Testament in English generally relies on the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT), as copied by Jewish scribes in the seventh through 11th centuries A.D. They also wrote their suggested vowels into the previously vowel-less Hebrew, standardizing pronunciation and dictating a particular meaning. Occasionally our translations indicate a “revocalization,” where modern editors suggest different Hebrew vowels.

Masoretic manuscripts are not the only witness to the Old Testament text. A third-century B.C. Greek translation, the Septuagint (often abbreviated LXX), survives in fourth century A.D. copies and often matches New Testament quotations more nearly than the MT. The Dead Sea Scrolls—found in the mid-20th century and dating from 150 BC–70 A.D.—also generally confirm, but sometimes differ from, the MT. As with the New Testament, the translator has to decide which is the best text to translate. The more evidence considered and the more useful information shared clearly with the reader, the better.

‘Formal’ vs. ‘Functional’ Equivalence

After a starting text is established, the translator faces a choice between making a more literal, word-for-word translation, or making a less literal but perhaps more easily understood one. The (N)KJV and ESV fall more on the formal, literal end of the spectrum. The NIV, familiar to us from its use in *Lutheran Worship*, falls more on the functional end. Paraphrases like *The Living Bible* or *The Message* go even farther.

A functional translation, like the NIV, often seems easier to understand at first. Its user, however, relies heavily on the translator to have understood the precise sense of the text and to have produced a new, yet fully faithful, expression of it. Sometimes the interconnection of different passages of Scripture can be very intricate, and it is hard to come up with new forms that respect all the intended connections.

A formal translation, like the ESV, conveys the structure of the original language in a more word-for-word fashion and leaves it to the reader to interpret the text from context. Since translators cannot always be relied on to interpret the text for you without their own biases (that is, to let the Spirit do the talking), a more formal translation can be a wise choice for worship and for study. Time spent pondering the context to see what God means to say is, after all, time well spent!

Language Issues

Beyond issues of which manuscripts to follow and the style of translation, translators have to decide which words will speak most faithfully and clearly to hearers. Beyond the manageable

thees and *thous*, the beautiful but outdated vocabulary of the KJV can get in the way of understanding. More contemporary (but still not faddish) language (as in NIV, ESV, NKJV, etc.) can make for more time spent contemplating God’s Word rather than puzzling over words.

Words are tricky though! On the one hand, it helps us to see connections in the Scripture if each Greek or Hebrew word is translated as consistently as possible (KJV). On the other hand, a single Hebrew or Greek word can have different senses that no single English word shares. The Hebrew word *torah*, for example, is commonly translated “law” but also refers to the books of Moses as a whole, which certainly contain Gospel (e.g., Gen. 3:15) as well as Law.

Translators have to avoid the old error of making the Bible sound like a book of “God’s rules for good living” rather than keeping it the book that points sinners to Christ, but this is hard. Remember: it’s what our Old Man wants to hear, so let the reader beware, and listen to good Dr. Luther. A faithful study Bible’s notes can also be a great help!

The Bible, the whole Bible, is about Law and Gospel, about Christ. But some scholars impose on the Old Testament their view that the Old Testament should be understood as a Jewish text, not an Israelite or Christian one. The New Revised Standard Edition (NRSV) writes the Holy Spirit out of Gen. 1:1, saying a mere “wind from God” hovered over the waters. It writes the Virgin and her son Jesus out of Is. 7:14 when it ignores the clear evidence of the Septuagint and of Matthew’s Gospel, and has Isaiah’s prophecy merely as “a young woman is with child and will bear a son.” Such choices are unhelpful in finding Christ in all the Scriptures, which He Himself says is their point (John 5:39–47; Luke 24:27, 44–49).

Christ can also be obscured by political correctness. In Hebrew and Greek, as historically in English, the word *man* and the male pronoun (he/him/his) have been understood as meaning either a male person or, in the sense of *mankind*, any person, male or female. “God created *man* in His own image, in the image of God He created *him*; *male* and *female* He created them” (Gen. 1:27).

‘The Bible is not simply words on pages for us to use to feed ourselves but is the living Word of God, meant for proclamation, for public reading, and for preaching.’

Handing on the Word of Truth

Modern, gender-neutral English tries to eliminate this usage, often substituting *people* and *they* for *man* and *he*. Some modern Bible translations (NRSV/Today's New International Version) follow suit, translating, for example, Ps. 8:4 as "What are mere mortals/human beings that You are mindful of them, human beings/mortals that You care for them?" instead of a more literal rendering like that of the ESV: "What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You care for him?"

Here, as Heb. 2:5–9 makes clear, *man* and the phrase "the son of man" point to mankind but especially to the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, our Lord. We might add that the people of God are considered (all together) the body of Christ and so can be found "in him" in a lot of those masculine pronouns—and "in him" is not a bad place to be.

How Do I Choose?

With all these concerns, choosing a translation seems fraught with danger. On the other hand, being in God's Word, where the Spirit works, is full of promise. Here are a couple of thoughts on where to go for help:

"Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked an Ethiopian traveler who was reading from Isaiah 53. "How can I, unless someone guides me?" he said (Acts 8:30–31). In reading the Scriptures for understanding, context is everything. A study Bible can serve as such a guide for us, but choose carefully. *The Lutheran Study Bible* (TLSB by CPH, 2009) is a good option, based on the "essentially literal" ESV text. TLSB provides a thorough system of cross-references (including the *Lutherbible*'s) to help the reader understand a passage in the context of the whole of Scripture. Possible points of confusion or alternate translations from the original languages are well-noted. TLSB also follows in Luther's tradition, providing book introductions (including Luther's), helpful notes, and devotional prayers. All focus on delivering Christ as the point of the Scriptures and prepare us to hear God speaking Law and Gospel to us, to kill our Old Man and to bring our New Man of faith to life. Although the LCMS has not officially adopted a Bible translation, since the ESV is used in *Lutheran Service Book* resources, TLSB provides an especially helpful companion in preparing for, or following up on, our time together as a congregation in God's Word.

Finally, the Bible is not simply words on pages for us to use to feed ourselves but is the living Word of God, meant for proclamation, for public reading (1 Tim. 4:13), and for preaching (2 Tim. 4:1–4). We in the LCMS are blessed to have pastors well-prepared for these tasks. Having studied the biblical languages, they can evaluate translations and feed you from with the "full, original strength" Word of God as written. Trained to be faithful stewards of God's Word, they are also equipped to rightly divide Law and Gospel and to give each one the right word at the right time (2 Tim. 2:15; Matt. 24:45). Like Philip, like Luther, they'll gladly help you hear God's Word in a way that strikes home, so that to you also, heaven will be opened and also the Scriptures.

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For a more detailed analysis of several common Bible translations, see the LCMS Worship Office's *Comparative Study of Bible Translations* at <http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/Worship/BibleComp.pdf>.

FOR FURTHER READING

- > Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521–1532* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 46–56.
- > Martin Franzmann, *The Word of the Lord Grows: An Introduction to the Origin, Purpose, and Meaning of the New Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961).
- > Horace Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh: An Introduction to the Origin, Purpose, and Meaning of the Old Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979).
- > Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration, Third Enlarged Edition* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
- > Uuras Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel: New Light upon Luther's Way from Medieval Catholicism to Evangelical Faith* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005).
- > Jeffrey Gibbs, "All Those Translations!" *Classic Witness*, lcms.org/witness.



Why celebrate Advent when you're already surrounded by Christmas trees, Christmas carols, and Christmas presents? Rev. Hans Fiene reminds you of what Advent means, waiting for Christmas, and how the Church anticipates the arrival of Jesus Christ, your Savior, in the flesh.

How to Escape the Christmas Madness

Advent is not pre-Christmas, you have been told. Advent is not a series of mini-celebrations of Christ's birth. It is a season where we focus on repenting of our sins and on waiting for the arrival of Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory and the Babe of Bethlehem.

That is, of course, all true. But let's face it: sometimes it's really hard to celebrate Advent the way you ought to when the demands of celebrating Christmas, both the true version and the secular version, are weighing you down. With parties and presents, candles and credit breathing down your neck from the moment Thanksgiving ends, it's not always easy to have the proper Advent frame of mind.

But Christ wasn't born of Mary to burden you with more stress than you already have. He was born of the Virgin so that He might carry all your burdens to the cross. The Word of God didn't become flesh to add more guilt to an already guilt-ridden season. He became flesh to take away your guilt by forgiving your sins through the shedding of His blood. And because the Jesus Christ at the heart of Christmas is also at the heart of the Advent season, His mercy and forgiveness always can and always will give comfort to those who hear His Word during the time of the Church year when we prepare for His arrival.

So if you find yourself overwhelmed on the First Sunday of Advent, unable to focus because you only managed to check off 50 percent of your door-buster Black Friday gift list, pause for a moment. Take a deep breath. Listen to the Gospel reading about Christ's triumphal entry. Listen to God's Word tell you about His Son arriving in Jerusalem as your king, as the One who now rules you in mercy and love through His Word and Sacraments.

This is the Jesus who did more than stand in a crowded line at four in the morning to give you His gifts. This is the Jesus who won the gifts of eternal life and salvation for you through His death on the cross and who now pours them out upon you in the waters of Baptism, in His body and His blood, and in the preached Word. So, on the first Sunday of Advent, when you need to step outside of the Christmas madness, take a moment to hear of Jesus Christ, who is with you now.

If you find yourself stressed out beyond belief on the Second Sunday of Advent, incapable of paying attention because you haven't finished your daughter's snowflake costume for her school's Christmas concert, or rather "Winter Extravaganza," relax. Listen to the Gospel reading about John the Baptist preparing the way of the Lord.

Listen to God's Word tell you about the One holding the winnowing fork. This is the Jesus who has done more for your daughter than completing her concert costume. This is the Jesus who will come again in glory to gather your daughter, you, John the Baptist, and all believers to His side on the Last Day. So, on the Second Sunday of Advent, when you need a break from the Yuletide overload, take a moment to hear of Jesus Christ, the One who will call you worthy of eternal life on the Day of Judgment.

If you look down at your fingers on the Third Sunday of Advent and find you've bitten your nails down to the quick because the Christmas bonus that you have depended on for the last five years to buy your wife's present is going to be one-fifth its normal size, be calm. Listen to the Gospel reading about John in prison. Listen to God's Word tell you about the One who will give sight to the blind, life to the dead, and good news to the poor.

This is the Jesus whom God promised would be your Savior, regardless of your paycheck's size. This is the Jesus whom John the Baptist identified as the Redeemer of both rich and poor alike. So, on the Third Sunday of Advent, when you need to wake up from your Nativity nightmare, take a moment to hear of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who is coming soon.

And if you find that, on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, your head won't stop spinning about how you are going to pick up your parents from the airport, finish wrapping everyone's presents, walk the dog, and get everyone dressed before 7 p.m. on December 24, inhale. Exhale.

Listen to the Gospel reading about the angel's proclamation of the Christ Child inside the womb of Mary. Listen to God's Word tell you about Immanuel, God with us, who will soon be here to carry your burdens and those of all mankind.

So, on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, when you want to find relief from a season that has buried you in an endless pile of guilt and worry, take a moment to hear of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, born to take your guilt and worry from you.

Advent is not pre-Christmas. It is not a series of mini-celebrations of Christ's birth. But Advent is a season of hope, a season rooted in waiting for the arrival of Christ's mercy. And so, whenever the demands of preparing for Christmas weigh you down and wear you out, Advent is always there to build you up by showing you the love of the Savior for whom you wait. Whenever the stress of celebrating our Lord's birth fills you with sin and shame, Advent will never fail to give you the forgiveness of Christ, whose birth we joyfully prepare to celebrate.

Rev. Hans Fiene (pastorfiene@gmail.com) is pastor of Mount Calvary Lutheran Church, Denver, Colo.



A Different Kind of *Hope*



*I have fought
the good fight,
I have finished
the race, I have
kept the faith.*

— 2 Tim. 4:7

Megan and I were newlyweds, and we loved it. We loved the excitement of being married and the adventure of living on our own. We loved our cute little apartment. We loved grocery-shopping and making dinners together. We loved playing Cribbage and watching the Food Network. Megan loved me, and I loved her. It was only three months into our loving marriage that Megan became ill and was diagnosed with advanced cholangiocarcinoma (bile duct cancer).

The 17 months that followed were simultaneously some of the best and worst of my life. Some of the best because I was with my sweet Megan, and our love for each other grew stronger than we could have imagined. Some of the worst because the cancer could not be beaten. Despite aggressive chemotherapies, numerous surgeries and procedures, and top-notch doctors and nurses, Megan got sicker and thinner, weaker and quieter until she finally passed away.

Trial and tribulation visited Megan on a daily basis, but she always hoped for the best. We both did. When we were told that the odds of beating this cancer were against her, we hoped that she would beat those odds. When her ovaries had to be removed, we hoped to adopt. When doctors gave her only months to live, we hoped for years. It is often said that being optimistic is essential to one's physical well-being, but Megan knew that all her dearest hopes and dreams of being cured, having a family, and growing old together were *not* ultimately what mattered. What really mattered was a different kind of hope altogether. It was the hope of eternal life.

Just one week after Megan was diagnosed, she wrote this on her Caringbridge blog:

"Because God has promised it, I will be blessed with a miracle, whether it be the healing of my body or Christ's perfect healing."

Megan knew that Jesus Christ is the Great Physician of both body and soul and that whether He made her well or not, she would attain eternal paradise and, on the Last Day, the resurrection of her body.

But it is not easy to have this kind of hope, though St. Paul urges us saying, "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2). It's much more natural for us to be occupied with our earthly lives than it is to dwell on heavenly things. Indeed, on our own it is *impossible* to have this kind of hope. Rather, it is a product of faith, which comes only as a gift from God.

This hope sustained Megan through innumerable hardships as the cancer spread throughout her body. In the final weeks of Megan's life, her kidneys started to fail, keeping her in the hospital for the better part

of a month. She was finally able to come home, but Megan's parents and I had to learn to administer IV fluids to her on a daily basis.

She was so weak, and she took so many pain and nausea medications, that she slept through much of the day. She was also progressively less able to use stairs or walk. One day her legs gave out altogether, and she couldn't even stand.

Clearly, Megan had come to the point at which there was nothing left on earth that she could reasonably hope for. Death was staring her right in the face.

But she didn't flinch or shudder; in fact, she was peaceful and content, a testimony, I think, of the

endeavor. "Never lose hope!" is only a proper mantra if the hope of eternal life is meant. God does not ask us to run the race of survival; He asks us to run the race of faith.

Megan knew she was dying, but that does not mean that she gave up hope. On the contrary, her hope was in the Lord. These are the sentiments of Psalm 39:

*"LORD, make me to know my end,
And what is the measure of my days,
That I may know how frail I am.
Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths,
And my age is as nothing before You;
Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor.*



'Because God has promised it, I will be blessed with a miracle, whether it be the healing of my body or Christ's perfect healing.' Megan Eckardt

grace of God that was in her. Pure grace had taken the place of what, by our standards, should have been despair, anger, fear, or sadness.

In her last days, Megan no longer had any fight left in her, but by that same grace of God she was also at her bravest then. I believe it was the night before Megan died that I gave in to the emotions that had been welling up inside me without release, and I wept to Megan, telling her how scared I was to lose her. She lay beside me unafraid, her hand in mine, and her thoughts—I suspect—on things above. I was a mess, heartbroken and distressed. She was serene and lovely, full of the grace that God had given her.

I sometimes felt pangs of guilt when I looked at Megan and knew that she wasn't going to be with me much longer. I believed that God could still cure her if He wanted to, but I had stopped thinking that He would. As I have since reflected on Megan's passing, it has become clear to me that unshaken optimism is not necessarily something worthy of our

*Surely every man walks about like a shadow;
Surely they busy themselves in vain;
He heaps up riches,
And does not know who will gather them.
And now, Lord, what do I wait for?
My hope is in You" (vs. 4-7).*

It is foolish to put our hope in the things of this earthly life. Likewise, if my hope had been only that Megan would beat cancer, how sorely it would have been in vain! The Lord must always be our hope.

Being still on this side of glory, I mourn the loss of my beautiful wife, but I do not sorrow "as others who have no hope." I thank God that I have *true* hope, that Megan also had, the hope of everlasting life. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus" (1 Thess. 4:13-14).

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Reason or the Holy Spirit?

Many Christian people I know say they have made a decision in their life to follow Christ. Why do Lutherans hesitate to say that people can decide to accept or receive Christ?

You are correct in suggesting that Lutherans are uncomfortable with this type of language to describe a person's conversion to Christianity. The problem lies not so much in the words themselves but in the spiritual baggage loaded into them.

The apostle John writes, "But to all who receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12–13). John does use the term *receive*, but there are several things to note.

First, becoming a Christian is not the result of our own initiative or achievement; it is completely God's doing. Second, the term *receive* is synonymous with faith in Christ.

The New Testament everywhere declares that our salvation and the faith by which we receive it are God's gifts. Name one thing, St. Paul asks, that you did not receive as a gift from God: "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7).

The answer, of course, is nothing! "By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8–9). Yet, some still think that human beings themselves play a part in meeting God halfway.

People commonly believe that though we are sinners at birth, we still have the ability spiritually to cooperate in some way with God in making conversion happen in our lives. That is, unbelievers have an inherent power to "receive Christ" or "ask Him into our heart." This clearly contradicts what Paul teaches about our natural condition in Eph. 2:1: "And you were [that is, in your unbelieving

condition] dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked [that is, as fallen creatures prior to saving faith]." And again he says, "The natural person [unspiritual] does not accept the things of the Spirit of God . . . he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

Thus, an unconverted person does not have the inner ability to desire Christ, seek Him, or open the door to Him. Only the Holy Spirit, through the means of grace (the Gospel and Sacraments), can kindle a spark of faith in a sinner's heart and awaken a desire for God's grace in Christ (1 Cor. 12:3; Rom. 10:17).

To receive Christ is nothing else than to believe or trust in Him, as John says in the passage first noted above. Faith cannot be defined in its essence as a commitment to obey and serve the Lord. Rather, God creates faith as the instrument by which we receive His saving and renewing grace. Indeed, the Christian life of obedience is a result of this faith uniting us to Jesus. We are God's workmanship, "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Eph. 2:10).

Luther's words in the Small Catechism summarize this belief: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

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



Send your questions to Q & A, *The Lutheran Witness*, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; or send them via e-mail to lutheran.witness@lcms.org. Please include your name and address. While we look for questions that have broad interest among our readers, no question is unimportant. Unfortunately, the volume of questions we receive makes it impossible to answer every question individually.

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— Communicating the Financial Position of the LCMS

In response to Res. 4-03 of the 2010 LCMS convention, “that each November, the Vice-President—Finance—Treasurer of the Synod use widely available

means (i.e., *The Lutheran Witness, Reporter*, the LCMS website) to state the financial position of the Synod in a form easily understood by persons unfamiliar with financial terminology,” a statement of the Synod’s financial position will be available online at *lcms.org* and *lcms.org/reporter* after the Nov. 18–19 meeting of the LCMS Board of Directors. The report will be printed also in the January issues of *Reporter* and *The Lutheran Witness*.

Thomas W. Kuchta
Interim Chief Financial Officer
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Official Notices— Call for Nominations

The President of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod herewith calls for nominations for the position

of Chief Mission Officer (CMO) of Synod. The CMO is a new position mandated by the 2010 Convention, to be appointed by the President in concurrence with the Synod Board of Directors, as per Bylaw 3.2.1.1. of the Handbook, Constitution Bylaws Articles of Incorporation of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2010.

Bylaws 3.4.3 through 3.4.3.8, provide a description of the responsibilities of this position, which contain the duties that an ordained minister of religion, mission officer will be responsible for, inclusive of all programmatic and coordinative functions and of the ministries of the Synod, as it provides vision and leadership to the Boards for National and International Mission.

Names should be submitted in writing to the undersigned no later than Thursday, Dec. 30, 2010.

Val Rhoden-Kimbrough, Executive Director,
Human Resources
Val.Rhoden.Kimbrough@lcms.org
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
1333 S. Kirkwood Road
St. Louis, MO 63122-7295

Official Notices— From the Districts

REV. RICHARD C. MUELLER was appointed circuit counselor of the Pine Ridge Circuit, replacing REV. MARVIN TEMME, effective Aug. 17.—Rev. Richard O. Boche, President, LCMS Wyoming District.

REV. RICHARD MERRILL, St. John, Charter Oak, Iowa, was appointed circuit counselor of the Mapleton Circuit, effective Aug. 18, replacing REV. SCOTT FIEGE, who has taken a call out of the district. REV. PAUL JOHNSON, St. John, Ocheyedan, Iowa, was appointed circuit counselor of the Northwest Circuit, effective Aug. 18, replacing REV. DAVID ERICKSEN, who resigned from the position.—Rev. Paul G. Sievekink, President, LCMS Iowa District West.

REV. JOHN A. ELLINGTON, Oklahoma City, Okla., has resigned from the Ministers of Religion—Ordained roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and is, therefore, no longer eligible to receive a call.—Rev. Barrie E. Henke, President, LCMS Oklahoma District.

REV. MARK WENZEL, Peace, Beaver Dam, Wis., was appointed circuit counselor for the Watertown Circuit 23, replacing REV. RICKY SCHROEDER, formerly of Divine Savior, Hartford, Wis.—Rev. John C. Wille, President, LCMS South Wisconsin District.

REV. DANIEL C. HAYES has resigned from the Ministers of Religion—Ordained roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and is, therefore, no longer eligible to receive a call. ST. JACOBI, Jennings, Mo.; and NEW HOPE, Festus, Mo., have disbanded. They are no longer congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.—Dr. Ray G. Mirly, President, LCMS Missouri District.

REV. ROBERT POHL has resigned from the Ministers of Religion—Ordained roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, effective Aug. 24. He is, therefore, no longer eligible to receive a call.—Rev. Gregory S. Walton, President, LCMS Florida-Georgia District.

Official Notices—Colloquies

JULIE A. FAULKNER, Wausau, Wis.; and DANIELLE C. WHITE, Fort Wayne, Ind., have submitted their applications for the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod through *CUEnet*. Correspondence regarding these applications should be directed within four weeks after

publication of this notice to Rev. Herbert C. Mueller Jr., Chairman, Colloquy Committee, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295.

MARK S. BOERGER, Austin, Texas, has submitted an application for the Family Life Ministry Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod through Concordia University, Seward, Neb. Correspondence regarding this application should be directed within four weeks after publication of this notice to Rev. Herbert C. Mueller Jr., Chairman, Colloquy Committee, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295.

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

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

RACHAEL JOHNSON, New Haven, Ind.; JULIE SMITH, Fort Wayne, Ind.; and MATTHEW DICKINSON, Traverse City, Mich., have completed all requirements of the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and are, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Dennis Genig, Dean, School of Education, Concordia University, Ann Arbor, 4090 Geddes Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48105-2797.

SHERRYL MULL, St. Augustine, Fla., has completed all requirements of the Teacher Colloquy Program of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and is, therefore, eligible to receive a call.—Prof. Norman Metzler, Director, Colloquy Program, Concordia University, Portland, 2811 N.E. Holman St., Portland, OR 97211-6099.

Official Notices—Requests for Reinstatement

LEROY W. MASON, Browns Valley, Calif., has applied for reinstatement to the Ministers of Religion—Ordained roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. CORINNE M. BIELENBERG, Willmar, Minn.; KYLE BRYAN CHUHRAN, Shelby Twp., Mich.; and LINDA N. ERKKINEN, St. Louis, Mo., have applied for reinstatement to the Ministers of Religion—Commissioned roster of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Correspondence regarding these applications should be directed to the undersigned for receipt no later than 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 2011 issue). Send notices to karen.higgins@lcms.org.—Ed.*

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

Concordia College-New York, Bronxville, NY, seeks to fill the following positions: **Nursing (adjunct); Geography (adjunct); Senior Manager of Student Enrollment and Support Services; Director of Student life.**

Concordia University, Irvine, seeks to fill the following positions: **Assistant/Associate Professor of Education and Director of Off-campus Master of Arts in Education Programs for Orange County**

Concordia University Wisconsin, Mequon, WI, seeks to fill the following faculty positions:

Pharmaceutical and Administrative Sciences; Molecular Pharmacology; Pharmaceutics; Pharmacy Administration; Toxicology/Poison Control; Psychiatric Pharmacotherapy; Drug information; General Pharmacy; Infectious Disease Pharmacotherapy; and Oncology Pharmacotherapy; Physical Chemistry; Physical Therapy

Concordia University, Portland, OR, seeks to fill the following faculty positions: **Chemistry; Biology; and Director of the Art and Carol Wahlers Center for Applied Lutheran Leadership/Dean of Christi Crux College**

(continued on page 26)

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(continued from page 25)

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 2011 issue). Send notices to karen.higgins@lcms.org.—Ed.

Grace, Warminster, Pa., will celebrate its 50th anniversary Nov. 14 with special music and a guest speaker, followed by a luncheon at a local restaurant.

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint Michael, Chicago, Ill., will celebrate its 80th anniversary with a 3 p.m. service Nov. 14, with a catered

reception to follow. Rev. Steven Frentz, son of the congregation, will be guest preacher. RSVP Rev. Mark Post at 630-832-2685 or revmarkdpost@yahoo.com.

Messiah Lutheran Church and Classical Academy, Keller, Texas, will celebrate its 30th anniversary with special worship services and events November 2010 through October 2011. Former members and students are encouraged to contact the church office to be added to the mailing list and for details of ongoing events at 817-431-2345 or churchoffice@messiahkeller.org.

Emmanuel, Van Wert, Ohio, will celebrate "140 Years Receiving God's Grace" on Nov. 7. The congregation will mark the anniversary with Divine Service at 10:00 a.m. and a lunch afterwards. Rev. Wallace Schulz, Evangelist for the Lutheran Heritage Foundation, will serve as guest preacher for the service.

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

BERG, DARIN PAUL; June 11, 1974, Champaign, Ill., to Aug. 25, 2010; son of Dan and Joyce (Slottje) Berg; graduated St. Louis, 2001. Served 2001–2003, 2006–2010. Ministries/parishes: Stockton, Minn.; Niles, Ill. Survivors: Nicola (Ardrey) Berg; daughters: Ella, Lena. Memorial service: Aug. 30, 2010, Niles, Ill.; cremation.

FRIEDRICHSMEYER, EUGENE O.; May 8, 1930, Browns, Ill., to Aug. 20, 2010, Belleville, Ill.; son of Rev. Owen and Esther (Gentsch) Friedrichsmeyer; colloquy 1994. Served 1994–1998. Ministry/parish: Staunton, Ill.; retired 1998. Preceded in death by his wife, Bernice (Vogel) Friedrichsmeyer. Survivors: Ella (Meckfessel) Friedrichsmeyer; sons: James, John; daughter: Janet Dinkelman; stepsons: James Meckfessel, Charles Meckfessel, Michael Meckfessel. Funeral: Aug. 25, 2010, Nashville, Ill.; interment: Aug. 25, 2010, Hoffman, Ill.

FRTZ, MARVIN R.; Dec. 5, 1924, South Bend, Ind., to Aug. 24, 2010, South Bend, Ind.; son of Adolph and Hilda (Grabowski) Fritz; graduated St. Louis, 1948. Served 1948–1990. Ministries/parishes: Austin, Logansport, Ind.; Rockford, Ill.; retired 1990. Preceded in death by his wife, Madelyne (Roesener) Fritz. Survivors: son: Timothy; daughter: Natalie Austrian. Funeral: Aug. 27, 2010, Rockford, Ill.; interment: Aug. 28, 2010, Fort Wayne, Ind.

MEHL, CARL ERICH; Oct. 17, 1916, Farmersville, Ill., to Aug. 13, 2010, Dearborn, Mich.; son of Rev. Theodore and Lydia (Eichmann) Mehl; graduated St. Louis, 1940. Served 1941–1983. Ministries/parishes: Oconto, Preble, Wis.; Denver, Colo.; Macon, Ga.; Farmington Hills, Detroit, Mich.; retired 1983. Preceded in death by his son, Theodore. Survivors: Lois (Hischke) Mehl; son: William; daughters: Catherine Sherlock, Mary Cassidy. Funeral: Aug. 17, 2010, Birmingham, Mich.; interment: Aug. 17, 2010, Livonia, Mich.

MYERS, JOSEPH LYNN; Nov. 10, 1948, Estherville, Iowa, to July 26, 2010, Wagoner, Okla.; son of Jack and Lillian (Wellnitz) Myers; graduated Fort Wayne, 1995. Served 1995–2010. Ministry/parish: Garber, Okla. Survivors: Mary

(Cunningham) Myers. Funeral: July 31, 2010, Garber, Okla.; interment: Aug. 2, 2010, Fort Gibson, Okla.

REINISCH, RICHARD OTTO; Dec. 4, 1924, Chicago, Ill., to Aug. 13, 2010, Portland, Ore.; son of Carl and Clara (Raddy) Reinisch; graduated St. Louis, 1948. Served 1950–1998. Ministries/parishes: Harbine, Neb.; Portland, Ore.; retired 1998. Survivors: Irene (Viehweg) Reinisch; sons: Steven, Christopher, Richard; daughters: Vicki, Elizabeth. Memorial service: Aug. 28, 2010, Portland, Ore.; cremation.

RUHLIG, EDWARD MARTIN JR.; March 1, 1913, Detroit, Mich., to Aug. 1, 2010, Zeeland, Mich.; son of Edward Sr. and Martha (Sell) Ruhlig; graduated St. Louis, 1937. Served 1938–1975. Ministries/parishes: Blendon, Robinson, Agnew, Onekama, Holland, Mich.; retired 1975. Preceded in death by his wife, Elvira (Hintz) Ruhlig. Survivors: Swannie (Katt) Ruhlig; sons: Edwin III, Richard; daughters: Elvira Aubel, Carolyn Funckes; stepsons: John Vander Meiden, Jim Vander Meiden, Dave Vander Meiden; stepdaughters: Carol Vander Wall, Dorothy Meyers. Funeral and interment: Aug. 4, 2010, Holland, Mich.

THIEM, ALFRED E.; June 23, 1925, Kendallville, Ind., to Aug. 26, 2010, Fargo, N.D.; son of Emil and Anna (Pietz) Thiem; graduated St. Louis, 1949. Served 1949–1991. Ministries/parishes: Inkster, Grafton, Anamoose, Drake, Fargo, N.D.; retired 1991. Preceded in death by his son, Mark. Survivors: Betty (Lepper) Thiem; son: Joel; daughters: Rebecca, Deborah Bickler, Karen Stirling, Kristine Meyer, Lisa Kleingartner, Sara Nelson. Funeral and interment: Aug. 30, 2010, Fargo, N.D.

WILTENBURG, WILLIAM JOHN JR.; Nov. 21, 1917, Alberta, Canada, to Aug. 18, 2010, Whitinsville, Mass.; son of William Sr. and Johanna (Wind) Wiltenburg; graduated St. Louis, 1942. Served 1945–1979. Ministries/parishes: Groton, Conn.; Boston, Framingham, Mass.; retired 1979. Preceded in death by his wife, Anne (Taft) Wiltenburg. Survivors: daughters: Joanne Beets, Elaine Kraiger, Faith Augat, Linnea Grealish. Funeral: Aug. 23, 2010, Holliston, Mass.; interment: Aug. 23, 2010, Attleboro, Mass.

COMMISSIONED

GAEDE, RICHARD HERBERT; Jan. 8, 1937, Hoxie, Kan., to Aug. 20, 2010, Pasadena, Texas; son of Christian and Amanda (Brandhorst) Gaede; graduated Seward, 1959. Served 1959–1999. School/parish: Pasadena, Texas; retired 1999. Survivors: Joann (Ricke) Gaede; son: Neil; daughters: Rebecca Ramage, Ericka Rolf, Susan. Funeral and interment: Aug. 24, 2010, Pasadena, Texas.

GRIMM, WILLIAM IRA; July 13, 1940, Bancroft, Neb., to July 30, 2010, Wausau, Wis.; son of Rev. A. Ira and Elsie (Priem) Grimm; graduated Seward, 1985. Served 1986–1992. Schools/parishes: Appleton, Antigo, Wis.; Richmond, Va.; retired 2003. Survivors: Ruth (Hillman) Grimm; daughter: Brenda Harrison. Memorial service: Aug. 4, 2010, Pickrel, Wis.; interment: Aug. 4, 2010, Summit Lake, Wis.

MEYER, MERLE JANET (KELLER); Jan. 7, 1948, Cleveland, Ohio, to Feb. 2, 2010, Gretna, La.; daughter of Elmer and Dorothy Keller; graduated Seward, 1969. Served 1973–2010. Schools/parishes: Harahan, Gretna, Marrero, La. Survivors: David Meyer; sons: Kurt, Brian; stepdaughters: Claire Adams, Joan Schaff. Memorial service: Feb. 13, 2010, Harvey, La.

Thinking through Options

One of my sisters is planning a family reunion for Thanksgiving, and it's turning out to be a real problem. She has chosen to invite our brother's ex-wife but not our brother! My sister is a faithful Christian woman, but her decision is making it difficult for all of us, and we feel we're being forced to choose sides. How can we deal with this in a constructive way?

I affirm you for wanting to respond constructively to a difficult situation. As you clearly know, divorce affects not only the former husband and wife, but the children, extended family, and community as well. While I don't know the particulars in your situation (Are there children? Are there legal considerations such as a restraining order?), I want to share a few basics that I hope will provide a godly response to a potentially contentious situation.

First, ask your sister how she came to her decision to invite your brother's former wife and not your brother. You want to understand her thoughts and feelings without accusing her of wrongdoing. Her reasons may be sound. She may also be hurt and bitter. Once you understand her motives more clearly, tell her your concerns, and let her know you want to find a solution that will foster health and healing for your family, not further division and hurt.

Invite her to think through options to this complex situation with you. Perhaps both your brother and his former wife—with each other's knowledge—can be invited to the

reunion. Children who see their divorced parents relating respectfully can lay the foundation for the success of future events where they will want both parents present.

There are ways to foster a relationship with a former in-law that won't make family members feel like they have to choose sides. It may be that your former sister-in-law feels uncomfortable that she, and not your brother, was invited, especially if it comes with the price tag of further conflict.

If you think your sister is trying to punish your brother in some way by excluding him, address this with her. They might consider meeting with a pastor or counselor if their relationship is fractured.

Above all, continue to pray for God's guidance and peace. Our responsibility as Christians is to seek unity, as far as that is possible, in every situation, trusting God's promise to heal what is broken.

Theresa Shaltanis practices family and marriage counseling in Fairfax, Va.



Send your questions to Family Counselor, *The Lutheran Witness*, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; or send them via e-mail to lutheran.witness@lcms.org. Please include your name and address. While we look for questions that have broad interest among our readers, no question is unimportant. Unfortunately, the volume of questions we receive makes it impossible to answer every question individually.

SHEDDING SOME LIGHT

Splish Splash

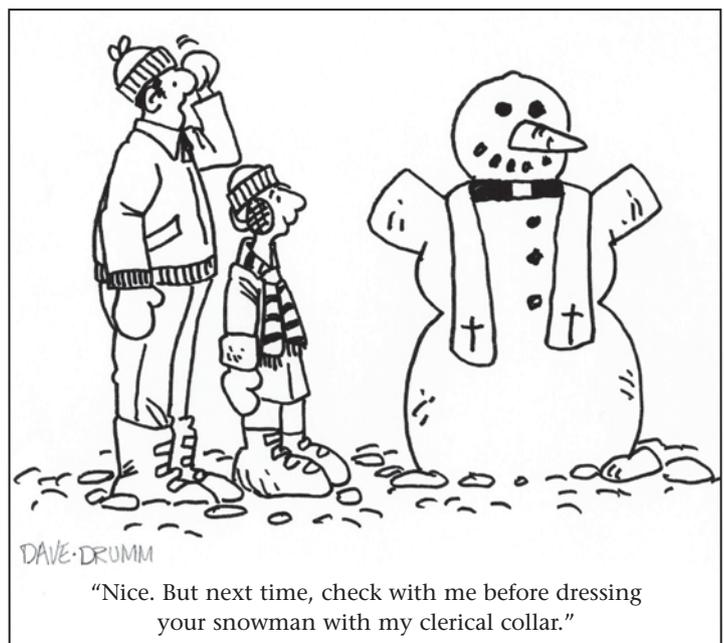
A six-year-old girl was baptized in our Sunday service, and our pastor seemed to use an especially adequate amount of water. As he patted her forehead and bangs dry with the cross-embroidered hanky, she proclaimed petulantly, "I already *had* my bath."

Lorna Beall
Lebanon, Mo.

Say What?

Our five-year-old grandson has taken an interest in God's creation. His main interest is the human body. In order to foster his interest, his parents have bought a DVD about the body. After watching it a few times, he was talking with his mom about what he had learned. He told her he had learned Christians have blue blood. His mom thought this wasn't quite right, so she watched the DVD with him. During the course of the review, they learned that it was not *Christians* who had blue blood but rather *crustaceans*.

Rev. Allan Scharlach
Waterloo, Ont.





Our Advent Prayer: Thy Kingdom Come

Advent is possibly the most misunderstood season in the church year. Let's face it: we tend to take our cues on how to prepare for Christmas more from Macy's than from the manger. Could it be that the Church has largely forgotten the purpose of Advent? Most of us don't know why we use purple, blue, and even pink for Advent instead of red and green.

Surprisingly, Advent for the early church was a season to anticipate Epiphany, not Christmas. Wise men came to make tribute to King Jesus, and thus the color of royalty (purple) was used for this season. Purple also had a second significant meaning: it is the color of repentance and fasting. It is a reminder that He who came as an infant is coming again in an instant to judge both the living and the dead. Advent, therefore, is a time to both deck the halls *and* inspect our hearts.

The word *advent* means "coming," and it is our coming King who teaches us to pray, "Thy kingdom come." This year, take your cue from Christ on how to observe this blessed Adventide. As you light each candle on your Advent wreath, take time to study and pray.

Week 1: King Jesus, Come to Me

Verse: "O Lord, how shall I meet You, How welcome You aright?
Your people long to greet You,
My hope, my heart's delight!
O kindle, Lord most holy, Your lamp within my breast,
To do in spirit lowly, All that may please You best." (LSB 334:1)

Text: Romans 13:8-14

1. Why are we told to "wake up"?

2. How does verse 10 summarize the commandments?

3. No one has kept the commands listed here. What solution is given in verse 14?

Light: As you light this week's candle, consider how Christ brings light to your darkness.

Week 2: King Jesus, Come to Many

Verse: "The One whom angels tended Comes near, a child, to serve;
Thus God, the judge offended,
Bears all our sins deserve.

The guilty need not cower, For God has reconciled
Through His redemptive power, All those who trust this child." (LSB 337:2)

Text: Romans 15:4-13

1. What does verse 8 tell us about Jesus' life? What Old Testament connection is made?

2. In what ways do verses 9-12 include Gentiles in God's kingdom?

Light: As you light this week's candle, describe one way that your family can share Jesus during Advent with someone outside the Church.

Week 3: King Jesus, Come Quickly

Verse: "Lo! He comes with clouds descending, Once for every sinner slain;
Thousand, thousand saints attending Swell the triumph of His train:

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! Christ the Lord returns to reign." (LSB 336:1)

Text: James 5:7-11

1. What is the message of verses 7-8? What does it mean to "establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord"?

2. The early church spoke a one-word prayer: "Maranatha!" which means, "Come quickly!" As we suffer and wait for our redemption, what encouragements do verses 10-11 give?

Light: This week's candle is pink. It is a reminder to us that our fasting will soon be over and that an eternal feast of victory will soon begin!

Week 4: King Jesus Came to Save

Verse: "The everlasting Son Incarnate deigns to be,
Himself a servant's form puts on To set His servants free." (LSB 331:2)

Text: Matthew 1:18-25

1. Joseph is not the child's birth father, and, therefore, the little one will not bear his name. Why is the name *Jesus* given instead?

2. In verse 23, the child is also given a nickname. How do Joseph's actions take that nickname to heart? How will this guide your own actions?

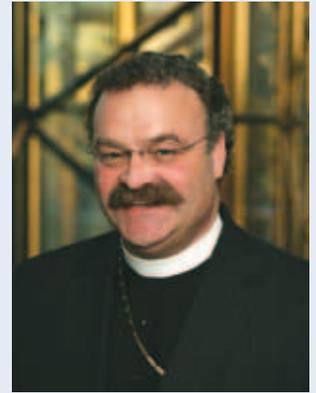
Light: Take a moment for silent confession. Then, as you light the last candle, speak these words aloud: Christ Jesus has saved me from my sin!

Rev. Steven B. Borst (ilcspastor@yahoo.com) is senior pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church and School, Riverside, Calif.





from the President



MERCY: Regarded by God . . . and Others

In this month's letter, President Harrison continues his series of three articles on the "Witness, Mercy, Life Together" emphasis for the Church and the world. To find out more about these themes, check out: www.lcms.org/emphasis.

I thank God and Jesus Christ that someone has regarded us as human beings." I've never heard anything so profound, and this from the lips of a young boy in Kenya. LCMS World Relief and Human Care had built an orphanage where he and his fellow AIDS orphans were now to be cared for. Amidst the tears, his word *regarded* caught my attention.

Regarded is at the heart of the Lutheran confession of the faith, as confessed in the Augsburg Confession, Article IV on justification. It is the door to eternity. And it is also the most powerful, freeing, compelling force for a joyous life in God's mercy, driving us to act mercifully to our neighbor in need. In Christ, God "regards us as human beings."

Our churches also teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works but are freely justified for Christ's sake through faith when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes [i.e. regards, reckons] for righteousness in his sight (Rom. 3-4).

Note that little word *impute*. In the Gospel, God *imputes, reckons, regards, credits, accounts* faith in Jesus as righteousness. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your doing; it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8). Thus I am *reckoned*, justified, sinless, not guilty on account of Jesus. Faith merely grabs hold of Jesus. The good boasting in the Bible is about Jesus! (Gal. 6:14). In Jesus, God recognizes me as somebody. In fact, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Cor. 5:19). There is not a living soul in this world who is not worth the very blood of Jesus. God accounts each individual as just that precious.

Is this justification stuff all ethereal mumbo-jumbo, having nothing to do with real life? Not so. Oswald Bayer points out that justification is fundamental to all human existence.

There is no such thing as an autocratic individual, totally independent of the surrounding world and its recognition. . . . Striving to find approval in the eyes of others, being noticed and not being dismissed as nothing by others, demonstrates that I cannot relate to myself without relating to the world. It applies to our social birth as well as our physical birth. I constantly vacillate even to the very end of life, between the judgment others make about me and my own judgment of myself. . . . I arrive at some point of calm, and then become unsure of myself again (*Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification*, Eerdmans, 2003, p. 3).

God's solution for our sin, and for our deepest need in time and eternity, has been to *regard* us as valuable as "His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death." And this frees us to *regard* those around us in the same way—to acknowledge, to recognize, to value, to listen, to forgive, to have compassion, to speak up for, to act in mercy. Then we shall soon find them saying, "I thank God and Jesus Christ that you have regarded me as a human being."

Pastor Matthew Harrison

"Let's go!" Mark 1:38
e-mail: president@lcms.org
Web page: www.lcms.org/president