

The Lutheran **WITNESS**

NOVEMBER 2003

VOL. 122 NO. 10

'Stand with Africa'



***Also:
The Perils of Prosperity
How Long, O God?***



The Lutheran WITNESS

A MAGAZINE FOR THE LAYPEOPLE OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH — MISSOURI SYNOD

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Official periodical of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod through the Board for Communication Services, Dr. Martin G. Schramm, chairman; Rev. J. Thomas Lapacka, executive director.

Staff: Rev. David L. Mahsman, executive editor; Don Folkemer, managing editor; Joe Isenhower Jr., news editor; Paula Schlueter Ross, contributing editor; John Krus, senior designer; Corinne Latimer, marketing manager; Pam Burgdorf, coordinator; Marcy Hanewinkel, advertising sales; Carla Dubbelde, editorial manager, district editions; Karen Higgins, editorial assistant; editorial office: 1333 S. Kirkwood Rd., St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; (314) 965-9917, Ext. 1228.

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Published 11 times per year by Concordia Publishing House, 3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968. Individual subscription \$18.48 per year. Organized congregation subscriptions and district editions offered at reduced rate if submitted through local churches. Standard A postage paid at St. Louis, MO.

For subscription information or address changes, e-mail: cphorder@cph.org

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
1-888-THE LCMS (843-5267) www.lcms.org
e-mail: LUTHERAN.WITNESS@lcms.org

Member: Associated Church Press
Evangelical Press Association

November 2003 (ISSN: 0024-757X) Vol. 122, No. 10

Cover Photo: Corbis

To subscribe, renew or to give a gift subscription, call Concordia Publishing House at: 800-325-3381

God and homosexuality

I submit that the increased acceptance of the gay and lesbian lifestyle ... results basically from a breakdown in acceptance of the inerrancy of Scripture.

*Dave Dietrich
Crofton, Md.*

I COMMEND REV. DAVID L. MAHSMAN for his article, "God and the Gay Lifestyle" (Oct. '03). I submit that the increased acceptance of the gay and lesbian lifestyle within popular culture and within some Christian denominations results basically from a breakdown in acceptance of the inerrancy of Scripture.

Ever since the so-called Age of Enlightenment (late 18th century), influential theologians have promoted a theology that denies inerrancy. In many denominations, Scripture has been reduced to Gal. 3:28, a passage used to justify a variety of ecclesiastical pathologies, including the ordination of women, gays and lesbians.

*Dave Dietrich
Crofton, Md.*

YOUR PHOTO SELECTION FOR THE October issue, showing two "brides" in a same-sex "wedding" was especially ironic. One "bride" was dressed femininely, with a white dress, shoulder-length hair and makeup. The other was very masculinely dressed, with black pants, black shirt, short hair and little makeup. Even in homosexual rebellion from God, His divine plan of male and female roles are written on our hearts.

*Jane Muhlenbruch-Yee
Loveland, Colo.*

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ARTICLES ON homosexuality ("God and the Gay Lifestyle" and "The Christian's Struggle with Sexual Temptation"). I've been struggling many years in

secrecy, except in the care of a loving pastor.

Lutherans struggling with the issue need to hear of baptism's power to regenerate, that reconciliation with God is possible in confession and absolution, and that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper offers communion with our Lord. We don't need affirmation of sin. We need Law and Gospel as do all Christians.

Most groups helping people struggling are based in an Evangelical Christian mind-set, which, for the most part, is not sacramental nor practiced in liturgical worship. These groups break down the isolation but rely on contemporary psychology and religious worship and avoid a Law-and-Gospel approach.

I thank God for Evangelicals who attempt to help strugglers know the truth. I thank God the LCMS has published these and other articles. I only wonder what could happen if more Lutherans who struggle could access the power through Word and Sacrament in our rich heritage.

Name withheld

PLEASE ACCEPT A HEARTY THANK-YOU for the October cover story. The lead story on the gay lifestyle and same-sex marriages is much needed in our day, extremely well written and, above all, faithful to the Word of God!

You may receive some criticism for the "shocking" cover photo, but do not count me among your crit-

ics. It accomplished exactly what a cover photo is intended to do—stimulate the prospective reader to turn to the article and there hear a clear declaration of God's Law and Gospel. I would have changed only one thing in the photo: the clock at the rear of the church. I would have had the hands set for one minute to 12 midnight!

*Dr. Phil Lochhaas
Ballwin, Mo.*

Yes, we did receive some criticism for the cover photo. See the next section of letters.—Ed.

The cover photo

I WAS SHOCKED TO SEE YOUR October 2003 cover, which appeared to flaunt two homosexual women getting "married." The articles on the inside contained what God's Word says about the sin of homosexuality, but unfortunately, many people will never read the magazine. From the cover alone, they will come away with the opinion that the Lutheran church now supports homosexuality. Wouldn't it have been better to have a picture of what marriage should be—a man and a woman?

*Carole Durbin
Richardson, Texas*

I WAS OFFENDED BY THE COVER OF the October issue. It gives the appearance that the Missouri Synod is condoning gay marriage. I certainly can't put the issue out on my coffee table for my kids and guests to see. In addition, I'm embarrassed that my letter carrier may think I'm in favor of gay marriage in the church!

*Elizabeth Wendorff
Shawnee, Kans.*

IT IS BAD ENOUGH WHEN I HAVE TO tear questionable covers off secular magazines such as

Newsweek, which I often do, to avoid scandalizing my young children. But it is very disappointing when I am compelled to do the same with a magazine that should be lifting up Christ rather than “gay marriage.” Although I am sure it was not intended by the editors, the cover photo by its very nature glorifies “gay marriage” as just another, normal option. Also, those outside our Synod who would see this magazine cover in our church, my home, or those of my members would assume that we are just one more in the long list of Protestant denominations that have given up Scripture for the homosexual agenda.

*Rev. Kevin Vogts
Dakota Dunes, S.D.*

THE PICTURE OF A GAY “MARRIAGE” WAS not only offensive, but it meant that we could not keep the issue of the magazine out in our home, for concern that our children or visitors would see it. Would we choose to represent such an offense to our Lord as using a third-term abortion picture complete with smiling mother and dying infant, or of a happy-go-lucky murderer standing over his slain victim?

*Pat Nuffer
Fort Wayne, Ind.*

I REALIZE THAT IT MIGHT BE GOOD journalism to lead the reader to an article from the cover, but I believe that the cover of *The Lutheran Witness* must also bear witness to the truth.

I understand that you cannot put the whole article on the cover. I know that you want not only to let people know that homosexuality is outside God’s Word, but that there is forgiveness in Christ. I know that you struggled with what to put on the cover. I am writing to you as a pastor that I believe an error in judgement was made. I’m trying to find a nice way to say this, but that picture is totally inappropriate.

*Rev. Robert Barth
New Berlin, Ill.*

THE OLD SAYING, “ONE PICTURE IS worth a thousand words,” never rang more true. Many people are visual learners, and visual stimuli imprint much more quickly on their brains.

Granted, an adult of average intelligence should be curious enough to read the article. But what about our teenagers who get all of their news from the television and spend little or no time reading—and, to boot, are visual learners? When they discuss it with other teenagers, the probability is that they will say the church sanctions a homosexual lifestyle. After all, they saw the cover on *The Lutheran Witness*.

Even more impressionable is the smaller child who sees the picture and simply files it away in the unconscious mind. Later, when they are older and see a wedding, it may trigger that picture to return and create the false impression that same-sex marriages are OK—particularly in light of the ongoing debate in our society.

I’m not suggesting that all visual learners or every small child who saw the cover will believe that same-sex marriages are OK, but the visual suggestion has been implanted and could well grow in that direction.

*Thomas G. Ivey
Pekin, Ill.*

FIRST IMPRESSIONS TEND TO STICK, AND if someone doesn’t read carefully the accompanying articles, they may come away with the impression that the LCMS is sliding down the slippery slope toward approving homosexuality. With all the other misperceptions the public has of our Synod, we can ill afford to give false impressions of where we stand regarding homosexuality.

*Rev. Kenneth D. Lueke
Bad Axe, Mich.*

When we selected the cover photo for the October issue, our intention—as always—was to call attention to the lead story, to indicate the topic addressed by it and to encourage people to read it. It is never our intention to sensationalize, scandalize or offend. Nor, in this case specifically, was it our intent to imply in any way that the editors, the magazine or The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod condone homosexual behavior. We do not condone what God in His Word identifies as sinful behavior and contrary to His will. We sincerely apologize for the offense given to some of our readers by our use of a news photo showing a lesbian “wedding” on the October cover.—Ed.

Be bold

THE AUGUST ISSUE OF *THE LUTHERAN Witness* was great! I appreciated the challenges given to us by our synodical president and by Pastor Roegner from the mission department.

Let’s encourage our Synod, districts and pastors to present the mission needs and opportunities and then be bold and ask for sacrificial support. Let’s overcome our timidity to ask the church for support. There are numerous precedents in Scripture for asking. Our Synod has responded in the past to such appeals.

*Rev. Carl E. Lueders
Marshalltown, Iowa*

We welcome letters that comment on articles in The Lutheran Witness. Letters may be edited for length and clarity. Send letters to “Letters,” c/o The Lutheran Witness, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; or send them via e-mail to Lutheran.Witness@LCMS.org.

'STAND WITH AFRICA'

U.S. Lutherans are providing hope to people in Africa through efforts to combat HIV/AIDS, to banish hunger and to build peace.

by David L. Mahsman

Why should these people live such an awful life?" asked Sister Agreda Mosha. "People can't believe how one can be so poor that he cannot even have clothes, or a breakfast."

Sister Agreda, a Roman Catholic nun, wore a visage reminiscent of Yoda, the ancient and wise Jedi Master of the "Star Wars" movies. She was telling her Lutheran visitors about poor people in her corner of the world, which has more than its share of poverty and other problems.

That corner, and her tiny office, is in Arusha, Tanzania, East Africa. The city, a jumping-off point for tourists going on safari, stands nearly in the shadow of Africa's famed Mount Kilimanjaro.

It is to Africa that U.S. Lutherans have given special emphasis for the past several years. The emphasis has been through "Stand with Africa," a three-year campaign sponsored by the Missouri Synod's LCMS World Relief, the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) World Hunger Program and their joint partner, Lutheran World Relief (LWR), headquartered in Baltimore.

I was invited to travel with Becky Thernes, LWR's campaign educator for "Stand with Africa," and staff from LWR's East Africa Regional Office through parts of Tanzania and Kenya in late May and



Sister Agreda Mosha shows her visitors pictures of families she has known who have been wiped out by AIDS-related complications. "We attend them out of Christian love," she said of those she and other Christians seek to help in Arusha, Tanzania.

early June. There, we would visit projects that exemplify the campaign's three-point support for African churches and communities as they:

- combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic;
- seek to banish hunger; and
- build peace.

"Stand with Africa" is called a "campaign of hope."

HIV/AIDS

Sister Agreda, who is coordinator of the HIV/AIDS prevention and training program operated by the Archdiocese of Arusha, showed us photos of some of those for whom she has cared.

One snapshot was of a mother, her daughter, who was in primary school, and her little boy. All have since died AIDS-related deaths. Most of those in another photo—a boy, his father, mother and siblings—also have died. All except for the boy, she said, but he also is infected with HIV.

"We find households of children left completely on their own," Sister Agreda told us. "Mother is dead. Father is dead. No Granny."

According to the United Nations HIV/AIDS program, sub-Saharan Africa has more than 3.5 million orphans who have lost



both parents to the disease. More than 13 million have lost at least one.

While Africa has only 12 percent of the world's population, reports UNICEF, it accounts for 70 percent of those living with HIV/AIDS. And 90 percent of all children worldwide who have been orphaned by AIDS are in Africa, the agency says.

Dr. Mganga Kipuyo, medical secretary in Arusha for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, operates a clinic that offers HIV testing and counseling for young people. Of the 1,640 youth who visited the center between February and May this year, some 7 percent tested HIV positive, he told us.

Those with whom we spoke said that cultural and economic factors contribute to the spread of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Cultural practices, for example, include men being obliged to marry their brothers' widows.

The lower status of women in many African societies contributes to higher infection rates among women than men. They cannot control their husbands' sexual activities, including adultery. And widows often lose all property rights and turn to prostitution or providing sexual favors as their only means of survival.

Lutheran World Relief is working with the Medical Assistance Program (MAP) International, a non-profit Christian relief and development organization, to help Christian churches in northern Tanzania respond to the HIV/AIDS crisis there. LWR's financial contribution to MAP's project is \$206,000 over two years.

One MAP initiative is to train pastors and other congregation leaders in HIV/AIDS counseling and to help them speak openly about the disease.

"The pastor meets more people than a politician," says Dennis Mashiku, director of MAP's office for Arusha and Mwanza, a larger city farther west, on Lake Victoria.

The counseling and educational approaches are intended to help people understand HIV/AIDS and to change behaviors that contribute to the spread of the disease.

"People think it's a curse, that it's a disease of those who are immoral," Mashiku told us. "People who are trained walked away knowing HIV is not a curse and that it is not because the people were necessarily immoral."

"Some people were not immoral—they are victims," he said, referring, for example, to wives who get the disease from unfaithful husbands and infants born with the virus passed on by infected mothers.

But immoral behavior does spread the disease, of course. MAP-trained counselors teach abstinence outside of marriage and faithfulness in marriage.

What's more, Mashiku noted that Jesus "met prostitutes. They needed to be forgiven. People need to be forgiven." But they needed to change their behavior. "We teach them Biblically that certain behavior is bad," he said of those who come for counseling.

"You may have to find a way to replace immoral behavior with good behavior," he added, explaining that counselors look for ways to help those who believe that their only chance at survival—perhaps even at finding their next meal—is by earning money or getting gifts in exchange for sex.

"Our approach is with compassion, positively," he said.



David Mjuni Elias (center, behind pole) stands in front of his small "drug store" in Arusha, Tanzania. Elias, a volunteer HIV/AIDS counselor trained through a Lutheran World Relief-supported project, says he spends five hours a day in his volunteer work. He promotes sexual abstinence for those who are not married and marital faithfulness for those who are.





Students at the Mukuru Promotion Center in Nairobi, Kenya, learn skills that will help them grow their own food in the slums where they live. The school's gardens also help feed the children who live in the children's home associated with the school.

Hunger

"I used to live in the slums with my mother," Caroline Mbithe, age 15, told us. "She often got sick and we had no food to eat. Finally, she died of sickness."

We are in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, Tanzania's next-door neighbor to the north. Here, poverty and slums are a fact of life. Of the city's 3 million people, some 60 percent live in the city's slums, packed into only 5 percent of Nairobi's land area.

One of Nairobi's slums is called Mukuru. It is home to an estimated 400,000 people, 60 percent of them below 16 years of age. At the edge of this slum, on a former dump site, is Mukuru Promotion Center, a primary school and home for children operated by the Sisters of Mercy.

This is where Caroline Mbithe now lives, brought here by an uncle

after her mother died.

"Life is good here," Caroline told us, a slight smile on her lips. "I have clothing, somewhere to sleep, water, everything. So life is good." Her favorite food, she told us, is *ugali*, a cornmeal porridge.

"I want to work very hard so I can go to secondary school," Caroline continued. "When I grow up, I would like to be a social worker, so that I can help children."

Lutheran World Relief works in Nairobi with the Sisters of Mercy, an order of nuns founded in Ireland. At Mukuru, they work together on an agricultural project at the home and school.

Walking around the grounds, one feels miles away from the overcrowded slum that is so close. Children are hoeing in gardens and feeding animals, including goats and rabbits. Others play as they take a recess break from their classes. It feels like we're out in

the country.

Sam Guamba, the accountant/bookkeeper for the Mukuru Promotion Center, told us that 115 children, 80 percent of them orphans with nowhere else to go, currently live here. "Most of their parents died of AIDS," he said.

Far more still live in the slums but come to the center during the day for school.

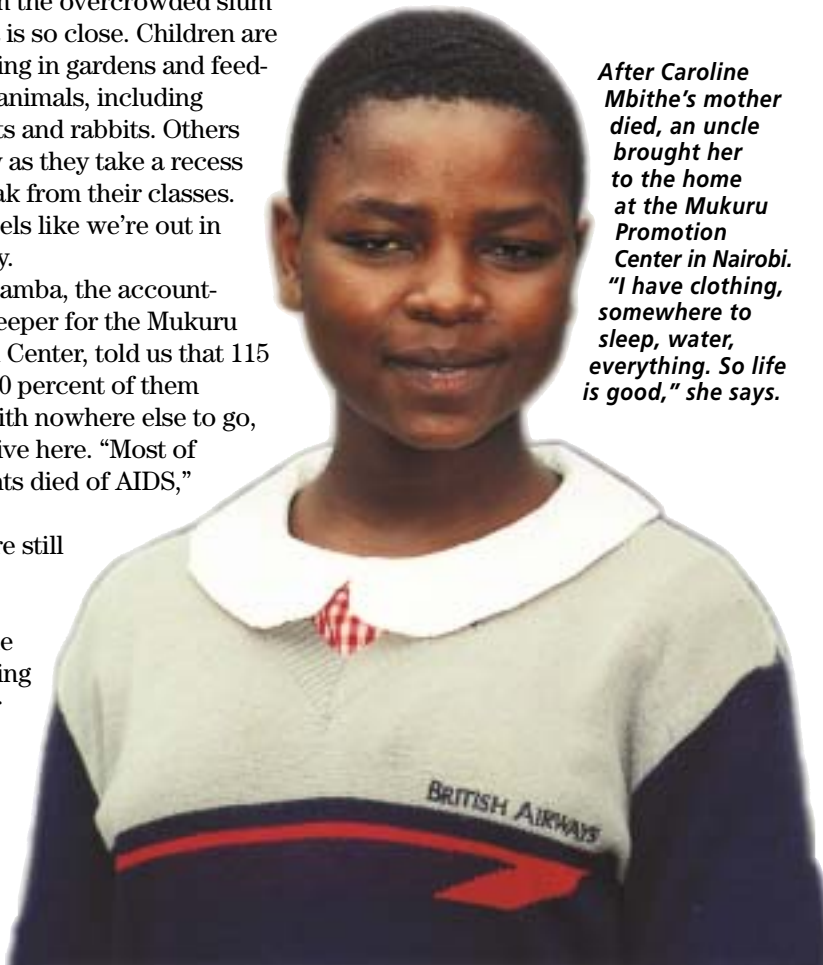
The Mukuru

Agricultural Project, funded largely by a \$25,000 LWR grant, helps feed the children who live here as it provides practical training in urban agriculture for those in the school.

"We try to motivate the children from the slum—to help them have a career and help them to sustain themselves when they return to the urban areas," says Sunstar Njiriri, head of the center's agriculture department.

"I will work very hard and grow my own crops, because I have learned how to dig since I came here," Caroline Mbithe said, referring to the education and experience she has gotten in cultivating the garden.

"I have learned how to do many works I did not know how to do them," Caroline said. Later, she added of the center, "It's a happy place for me."



After Caroline Mbithe's mother died, an uncle brought her to the home at the Mukuru Promotion Center in Nairobi. "I have clothing, somewhere to sleep, water, everything. So life is good," she says.

SAINTS IN NEED OF HELP

We are a weak church. ... Our people are starving. ... Can you help us?" Bishop Walter Obare of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya is asking for our help.



Rev. Walter Obare is presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya.

The devastation in Africa, due to draught, HIV/AIDS, political vice and incessant war has produced human tragedy of epic proportions. And this while the world's attention is riveted elsewhere—upon Iraq.

Meanwhile, post 9/11, our collective consciousness regarding suffering has been altered. Ironically, the surreal shock of that fateful day in 2001 seems to have raised the bar in our ability to tolerate news of human tragedy—and lowered our charitable response to devastating events. What's the point of Christian charity in such a world?

"God loves a cheerful giver." "Whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly" These well-known verses and many others on Christian giving are found in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. But we don't often note their context.

Obare's letter—"We are a weak church"—made me think immediately of the first-century church of Jerusalem. Enduring famine and persecution, the mother church was suffering. St. Paul's great "stewardship" texts come from his third missionary journey, at the heart of which was his appeal to the churches of the Diaspora for help.

The collection had enormous significance. There had been great tension between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. Should the Gentile converts be subject to the laws of the Old Covenant? Paul's answer: "No." Salvation is all gift. Regulations on food and dress may be observed freely, but not imposed as a requirement.

Peace

"The Sudan government is fundamentalist Islamic. Their only attitude toward others is, 'You should be dead,'" said Dr. Pauline Riak, chairperson of the Sudanese Women Association in Nairobi, or SWAN.

"The government has been burning the villages," she continued. "If you're caught, you're dead."

To the northwest of Kenya lies Sudan, a country that has been racked by civil war for the last 20 years. The conflict has been made even worse by fighting among rival factions in southern Sudan, even though they all oppose the government.

More than 2 million Sudanese have been killed in the conflict, and another 6 million-plus, mostly in

the largely Christian South, have been displaced from their homes.

The membership of SWAN represents 23 ethnic groups, 11 warring factions and 13 different primary languages, Riak told us. But 97 percent of the members are Christian. "That helped," she said of getting the organization started, "because we don't have one common culture."

SWAN was organized in 1988 by women who had been displaced by the fighting. "We knew we had to work together even though we didn't like each other and our husbands were fighting," Riak said. Many of their husbands have been killed. But whether dead or fighting, most husbands are not around.



Betty Poni used a small loan to open her own business, a little fabric and clothing shop in Nairobi's Kenyatta Market. A micro-credit program is part of a Lutheran World Relief-supported project that helps Sudanese refugees like Poni.

Paul saw the collection as an opportunity for the Gentile mission churches to express their love and fellowship in a concrete way with the saints of Jerusalem. These far-flung churches were one body of Christ, partaking of one body and blood in Holy Communion (1 Cor. 10:15ff.). How should this “one body” reality now be lived? By charity and love. Paul even uses the same word for both the Lord’s Supper and the collection for the poor: *“koinonia”* (Romans 15).

“In the supper Christ gives himself completely for you, that you might give yourselves completely for your neighbor” (Luther).

LCMS World Relief/Human Care will do its best to assist in Kenya and beyond.

Paul’s words to the Corinthians teach us more. The Corinthians would be “enriched” in every way as they gave, and not impoverished. And their generosity would have a profound affect upon the recipient, but in a wonderful way. For such gifts would

cause those in need to “glorify God because of your gifts flowing from the confession of the gospel of Christ” (9:8). Such gifts, says Paul, would cause the recipients “to long for you and pray for you.”

I suspect that when the veil between time and eternity is lifted, we shall find that what sustained the LCMS all these years shall not be our wisdom, our efforts or our programs (important as all these may be), but the humble prayers of the humblest saints in the most far-flung and impoverished lands—people who have come to know Jesus through your gifts, helped body and soul.

The saints are still in need of help. But this time, Nairobi is Jerusalem.

Kyrie Eleison.

*Rev. Matthew Harrison
Executive Director
LCMS World Relief/Human Care*

Sudanese Women Association in Nairobi (SWAN) brings together Sudanese women who have been displaced by war and violence and have fled to Kenya. They are working for peace in their home country. Lutheran World Relief helps them find ways to earn a living and improve their lives in Kenya.



“We were economically poor because we ran away from home,” she continued. “But we were extremely gifted in the things we could do. We decided we would not beg—we would use our skills and earn income to pay the rent and send our children to school.”

Riak said it’s “not easy to become a member” of SWAN. “You must agree not to quarrel, not to speak evil of one another, not to teach your children to hate, not to beg.”

She said, “You seldom hear the

word ‘peace,’ but everything we do is to build peace and unity among ourselves.”

Lutheran World Relief is providing SWAN with nearly \$250,000 over three years to help them “build peace” and make a better life for

themselves and their children.

The LWR-funded program provides SWAN members with a variety of training and other opportunities. Included are literacy and business training, a “micro-credit program” that provides small business-loans to the women, training in mediation and conflict resolution for a “peace committee,” and strategic planning to help the organization attain greater self-sufficiency.

We found several SWAN members running small businesses as we walked through the narrow concrete alleyways of the Kenyatta Market, narrow canyons lined with tiny stalls offering various goods and services. This is not a tourist market; this is where local people, including those from nearby slums, to do their shopping.

One of the SWAN members we met there is Betty Poni, who left Sudan in 1992 because of the war. She was talking on a cell phone as we walked up to her shop.

Through SWAN, she learned English, as well as tailoring and how to tie and dye cloth. With a small business loan, also through SWAN, she started her business two years ago, selling cloth and making clothes (as well as baskets and peanut butter). Now she has opened a second stall, staffed with people she has trained.

Does she ever think of going back to Sudan?

“I would go back tomorrow—even tonight!” she said. And she let out a little whoop of excitement at the thought.

But she also has found a life where she is.

“I’m happy because SWAN helped me. I can help my husband and children,” she said. Her children are 16, 14, 12 and 7 years old, she told us.

“We have been blessed by the Lutheran community,” says chairperson Riak. The grants are helpful and important, of course. But she said she values the regular contact LWR staff in Nairobi has with SWAN.

“We’re not just a number,” she said. “There are personal relationships.”

‘Stand with Africa’

Since the “Stand with Africa” campaign began in early 2001, Lutheran World Relief has committed more than \$2.6 million to combat HIV/AIDS, attack hunger and build peace on that continent.

LWR is funding 38 “Stand with Africa” projects this fiscal year in nine countries.

“Africa is a huge continent; extraordinary efforts are needed to withstand AIDS, banish hunger, and build peace,” says LWR’s president, Kathryn Wolford. “Where there are challenges, however, God provides people with courage, vision and tenacity to confront and overcome them. By God’s grace, LWR provides funding to and works with these people and their grass-roots organizations to implement long-term solutions.”



How to Help

Keep African people in your prayers.

To contribute to LCMS World Relief, send your check payable to LCMS World Relief, P.O. Box 66861, St. Louis, MO 63166-9810. To designate your gift specifically for the “Stand with Africa” campaign or for Lutheran World Relief, Baltimore, write on the memo line of the check “Stand with Africa” or “LWR,” as appropriate.

Or, you can give through the toll-free credit-card gift line, (888) 930-4438.



Rev. David L. Mahsman is executive editor of The Lutheran Witness.

FEASTS—ON EARTH AND IN HEAVEN

by Thomas E. Engel

The turkey is sitting in the freezer downstairs. Although it has lost its last chance to fly away, I check on it from time to time to be sure it's still there. On Thanksgiving morning, it will migrate from the basement to the kitchen and land in a hot oven. I can hardly wait. As the old gobbler bakes, the house will turn warm and every room will be filled with its aroma.

Sitting here at my desk, I can already taste the rich gravy, see the mountains of mashed potatoes, hear the crunch of the green bean casserole and feel the warm buns that don't need any butter to taste good—but I will put slabs on them anyway.

And then, after I have stuffed myself more than the turkey was stuffed, I will go to the living room and have a big piece of chocolate cream pie, piled high with whipped cream.

I will remember the food for a long time—not only because of the delicious taste but because of the pound or two added to my waistline. But that's OK. I want to remember the feast. This great meal can actually serve to point me toward heaven.

Scripture tells us of many feasts. Read about Abraham and the "great feast" he held in Gen. 21:1–8. Why was Abraham in such a festive mood?

Now read about Passover in Exodus 12:1–20. Why did God tell Moses and the Israelites to "celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread"?



What is the significance of this feast for us?

Prov. 15:14–15 tells us that life can be as joyful and as satisfying as the days of a festival. How can we have a "continual feast"?

I am reminded of the many times Jesus sat down with His disciples and ate. The fellowship that they had with their Lord must have helped their faith to grow. I especially think of the Passover meal before Jesus' death, when He Himself instituted the Lord's Supper. Read Matt. 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–25 and Luke 22:7–30 for the full account of when "Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table."

Earlier this year in worship we had a reading from Isaiah. We talked of the end times and heard of the feast that we will share in heaven. Explain the meaning of the mountain and the "feast of rich foods for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best meats and the finest of wines" in Is. 25:6–9.

Eating is one of my favorite activities. I often wonder if we will eat in heaven. It looks like from Isaiah that there will be plenty of food and drink and it will be better than what the finest restaurants serve. This feast in heaven will be for those who have been redeemed and who have had their robes washed in the blood of Christ.

Thanksgiving reminds me to give thanks to God for all of His bountiful goodness, including the feast for that day. But I am reminded also that another feast is waiting for me. A feast that I will share with Christ and with all the saints in heaven.

So this Thanksgiving, as you taste all the courses before you, think about the feast being prepared for you by our Lord in heaven. With every forkful of delicious food on earth, He is pointing us to the glorious feast in eternity.



Rev. Thomas E. Engel is pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church, Louisville, Ky.

CTCR commends Kieschnick on homosexuality concerns

The Missouri Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations has commended LCMS President Gerald Kieschnick for addressing issues related to homosexuality and the church at the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

Kieschnick in early

August issued a statement of concern over the confirmation by the Episcopal Church, USA, of its first openly gay bishop. Later, he addressed the issue during greetings to the ELCA assembly.

In a resolution adopted at its Sept. 15–17 meeting, the CTCR commended Kieschnick and added that

it supports him “in his resolve to continue to address this issue, and as he appeals to the ELCA to resist the trend toward acceptance and approval of homosexual behavior.”

The ELCA is in “full communion” with the Episcopal church and is conducting a major study of issues of human sexual-

ity, including homosexuality.

The 2005 ELCA assembly will be asked to decide if people in committed homosexual relationships may be ordained into the ministry and if the ELCA should have an official policy on blessing same-sex unions.

Fort Wayne sem gets accreditation

Concordia Theological Seminary (CTS), Fort Wayne, this year received its longest renewal of accreditation.

The accreditation results from the report of a team of representatives from the Association of Theological Schools and

the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. That team visited the seminary last winter, and the two associations announced the seminary's seven-year renewal of accreditation this summer.

“The dedication and quality of the Board of

Regents, faculty, staff, and students achieved this milestone,” said Dr. Dean O. Wenthe, president of the seminary.

The visiting team credited Wenthe as “the principal agent of the renaissance CTS has undergone since 1996.”

11 finish DELTO at St. Louis sem

Eleven men—the first to complete the Synod's Distance Education Leading to Ordination (DELTO) program through Concordia Seminary, St. Louis—received their diplomas in September.

DELTO is the Synod's theological-education program that leads to ordination for men who provide ministry to congregations that are not able to support a full-time pastor or who serve in extraordinary circumstances.

Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, graduated its first DELTO class of 10 men last year and six other men from there graduated this year.

Hewitt accepts Thrivent post

Brad Hewitt, chief administrative officer of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod since 1998, has accepted a position with Thrivent Financial for Lutherans.

Starting Oct. 13, he assumed executive leadership of the Fraternal Operations division of Thrivent.

In that position, Hewitt runs day-to-day fraternal operations,

serves as executive liaison to the Fraternal Committee of Thrivent's Board of Directors, and is president of the Thrivent Financial for Lutherans Foundation.

Hewitt, 43, succeeds Fred Ohlde, senior vice president of Fraternal Operations, who relinquished the position to be chairman of the National Fraternal Congress of America Board of Directors.



Hewitt

Board gets opinion on legal authority, then issues report

Challenges to actions taken by the LCMS Board of Directors regarding Synod finances led the Board to seek an outside legal opinion on its authority under Missouri law, says Board Chairman Robert T. Kuhn.

A report from the Board on the legal opinion, which was prepared by attorney Edwin Fryer of the Bryan Cave law firm in St. Louis, is online at www.lcms.org/bod. Click on “Report for Responding to Financial and Legal Matters, September, 2003.”

The report says, in part, that the “ultimate authority” of the Synod convention “is the only exception in the [Synod's] Articles of Incorporation to the authority given under Missouri law to the Board of Directors.”

The Board voted in a Sept. 18 conference-call meeting to seek a second opinion. Kuhn said that another opinion will be sought “for the good of the Synod,” since exploring the Board's authority under civil law “is an area in which we have not been involved before.”

Leaders share outreach ideas

Personal one-on-one contact is still the best way to reach another adult for Christ, and sharing stories of faith often makes a big impact, said participants at the first "One Mission Ablaze: Igniting Congregations" event in mid-September at St. John Lutheran Church, Ellisville, Mo.

Pastors and lay leaders from 10 area congregations were invited to participate in the conference—a pilot for seven to follow—because of their record in confirming adults.

The conferences after the pilot are bringing together leaders from the

top 30 LCMS congregations in each of seven categories. They are part of Synod President Gerald Kieschnick's initiative to "move [the Synod] forward as a dynamic church body that will reach many people for Christ."

River Forest has tier-one rank in 'best' listing

Concordia University, River Forest, Ill. (CURF), is the only Synod college or university in a top tier of *U.S. News and World Report's* lists of "America's Best Colleges" for 2004.

For the third year in a row, the magazine ranked all 10 schools in the Synod's Concordia

University System in best-college tiers for their region. In addition to CURF's tier-one ranking, five of the schools are in tier two, three in tier three and one in tier four.

The best-colleges rankings are in a special September issue of *U.S. News and World Report* and are on its Web site, www.usnews.com.

Churches report 2,512,714 members

The total number of baptized members reported by Synod congregations for 2002 is down by almost twice the decline reported for 2001. Total giving in 2002 dropped by about the same as for the year before.

The total baptized mem-

bership for 2002 is 2,512,714, or 27,331 fewer than for 2001. The 2002 reports put confirmed membership at 1,907,923, down by 13,026 from 2001.

Contributions that members gave congregations in 2002 totaled \$1,203,333,537, or \$13.8 million less than the year before.

For more news...

For more news—and more timely news—visit <http://reporter.lcms.org> on the Web. That's the Web site for *Reporter*, the official newspaper of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

LCMS congregations feel effect of Hurricane Isabel

Synod congregations and members felt the effect of Hurricane Isabel as it moved through the Mid-Atlantic states in mid-September.

More than 30 people—none of them LCMS—died in the category-two hurricane that was 700 miles wide when it made landfall at North Carolina and caused destruction as far north as Pennsylvania.

Sally Hiller, mission and ministry executive with the LCMS Southeastern District, said that three member families lost homes on the Maryland shore, and other member homes in Virginia, Maryland and North Carolina were damaged.

But Hiller said that congregations reported no deaths or serious injuries. Officials of other districts said that they

were not aware of any major damage or injuries in their congregations.

"We are grateful that there was not more loss,"

Hiller said. "God is good—He quieted the winds and what we experienced was not what it might have been."

Lutheran Disaster Response, a joint program of the Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, said in a news release that it was "present and active with fellow voluntary agencies and emergency management throughout the area."

To help those affected by the storm, send donations earmarked "Hurricane Isabel" to LCMS World Relief, P.O. Box 66861, St. Louis, MO 63166-9810; or call the credit-card gift line at (888) 930-4438.



Oak trees uprooted by Hurricane Isabel Sept. 18 flank Trinity Lutheran Church, Norfolk, Va. Members of the congregation wrote prayers, Bible verses and other messages on index cards and placed them on the trees' branches, as a witness to passersby. Trinity's buildings were not damaged, but were without electricity for several days.

OUR PARTNERS AROUND THE WORLD

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod enjoys official church body “altar and pulpit” fellowship with 28 other national Lutheran church bodies. These formal relationships are established only by our Synod in Convention.

Our partner churches, also called “sister” churches, are located in the following countries: Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Denmark, England, France (and Belgium), Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Haiti, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Philippines, Russia, South Africa (two church bodies), Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Venezuela.

In addition, fraternal conversations and theological discussions are under way with a number of other Lutheran church bodies in countries that include Bolivia, Kenya, Sudan and the United States.

Recently—along with Dr. Samuel Nafzger, executive director of the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations; Rev. David Mahsman, executive editor of *The Lutheran Witness* and *Reporter*; and Rev. David Birner of LCMS World Mission—Terry and I visited Hong Kong, China, Japan and Korea. We developed and fostered relationships, communicated, worshiped, communed, preached and prayed in congregations of our partner churches. We encouraged their members, leaders, presidents and spouses, along with our volunteer and career LCMS missionaries on the field and in the classroom.

One purpose of this 14-day trip was to visit the Hong Kong International School and Concordia International School in Shanghai, both owned and operated by the LCMS. I'll share more about these two exciting schools in a future column.

In recent years, I have visited all

but eight of our partner churches, with plans to visit four of them in Africa in March 2004. Haiti, Papua New Guinea, Philippines and Sri Lanka will remain to be visited.

These visits are significant for strengthening relationships with confessional Lutheran churches around the world. From Europe to Africa, South America to South Korea and many places in between, the pure and precious Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is preached from pulpits, taught in classrooms and expressed in worship services in ways remarkably similar to LCMS congregations across our land, with great devotion, energy and excitement!

Many of our partner churches consist of congregations initiated and developed by faithful, dedicated and self-sacrificing LCMS missionaries. It is important to affirm, assist and encourage the mission and ministry endeavors of these churches. Their development and maturation from “daughter” churches to healthy, vibrant, autonomous church bodies is vital for the expansion of God's kingdom here on earth.

Our partner churches play a key role in this expansion. Many of them are already excited about ABLAZE!—initiated by LCMS World Mission to reach 100 million unchurched people with the Gospel of Christ by 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. I pray that we will work together, by the power of God's Holy Spirit, as congregations, districts, agencies, institutions, auxiliaries and partner churches of the Synod to reach this challenging but attainable goal!

Partner churches are also very important for other reasons:

- They are established in their respective countries, with economic, cultural and political ties that may take decades for missionaries from the LCMS to establish.



- They can operate efficiently and economically by utilizing national pastors, leaders and other mission workers who already live and work in the countries and communities in which their national church is located.
- Their mission efforts are not hampered by the natural barriers of language, culture and acceptance with which our own LCMS missionary personnel can be challenged for many years following their arrival in foreign countries.

Still, our encouragement and support are critical to our partner churches, many of which are relatively young, small in size and sorely in need of professional church workers trained in sound, evangelical, Biblical and Confessional Lutheran theology.

In addition to providing support for our partner churches, we must respond to this urgent need for missionaries in many countries around the world, as mission fields are ripe for the harvest. I'll share more about the work of our wonderful, dedicated, committed missionaries in next month's column.

In the meantime, God's grace, mercy and peace be with you all!

Jerry Kieschnick

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

John 3:16–17

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