

The Lutheran WITNESS

MARCH 2004

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Gospel Partners in Asia

***Also: Man's War, God's Peace
Surfing the Synod***





The Lutheran WITNESS

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

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The end times

Read Revelation. Then, by all means, read *More Than a Skeleton* and the “Left Behind” books, but hold in your heart our Lord’s words, “Surely, I am coming quickly” (Rev. 22:20).

Darlo Harms
Bertha, Minn.

WHAT IS MY TAKE ON THE “LEFT BEHIND” series (“The Bible and the End Times,” Jan. ’04)? I hope I have the courage to stand up to those who put down my God. I hope I take the opportunity to bear witness. And most of all, on the last day, I will go to heaven and not be left behind.

Lena Jo McCoy
Scottsdale, Ariz.

I ENJOYED THE LATEST ISSUE OF *THE Lutheran Witness*, and especially “The Bible and End Times” by Paul L. Maier. I was especially struck by this line from the text, “I guess they figure the church had had it all wrong during its first 18 centuries!” This is exactly the point I made in a recent article I wrote for our congregation’s monthly newsletter.

Rev. Ed Blonski
Mayville, Wis.

DR. PAUL L. MAIER’S STATEMENT through his fictional protagonist, Jonathan Weber, carefully worded as it may be, that errant end-times theology “is only a recent novelty” is a fiction of a different sort. One Lutheran end-times theologian has, for example, called a literal millennial reign “the prevailing orthodoxy” early in church history. Another, Dr. Louis A. Brighton, traced it out in his commentary on Revelation published by Concordia Publishing House.

Professors do not serve their students well—or magazine publishers their readers—by glossing over details of history with which their opponents will confront them. We

are all served better by intellectual honesty with a valid response.

Rev. Jayson S. Galler
Austin, Texas

Dr. Brighton in his commentary does indeed note, “Throughout the history of the church, interpretations of the millennium have varied. ... In the early church a pre-millennial interpretation was seemingly prevalent, partly due to the church father Papias. ...” Dr. Maier’s reference, however, is specifically to the theological system known as “dispensational premillennialism,” which is the theological basis for the “Left Behind” books. As the *Commission on Theology and Church Relations’* 1989 report, “The End Times,” notes, “Dispensational premillennialism, or simply dispensationalism, is a theological system having its origin among the Plymouth Brethren in Ireland and England in the early 19th century. ...”—Ed.

Hymns we can sing

I DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHY WE NEED another new hymnal (“Something Old, Something New,” Jan. ’04). Every time a new hymnal comes out, many of the songs that congregations can sing with gusto are taken out.

Rosemarie Armstrong
Flushing, N.Y.

THE HYMNODY COMMITTEE FOR THE Lutheran Hymnal Project is described as a “group of pastors, musicians and professors.” Where

are the laymen, those of us who sit in the pews every Sunday and attempt to sing the hymns the professionals have selected for us? Please give the worshiper an equal say in the selection of hymns and melodies.

G.T. Daehnke
Wright City, Mo.

Information on the hymn texts and tunes under consideration were available for comment on the Web for more than a year. According to Dr. Paul Grime, executive director of the Synod’s Commission on Worship, “Thousands of comments were received and taken into account. The [hymn-selection] committee and the commission are very cognizant of the concerns” of congregation members. He added that many familiar tunes in The Lutheran Hymnal that were not included in Lutheran Worship will be restored in the new hymnal.—Ed.

How to reach her

I WANT TO THANK *THE LUTHERAN WITNESS* for telling about my journey of grace since I left the Amish. My pastor and others have had numerous requests from churches and individuals trying to reach me. Could you kindly note my Web site, which has all my contact information? It is <http://ruthirenegarrett.com>. Thank you for your help.

Ruth Irene Garrett
Glasgow, Ky.

Not to be misunderstood

IN A RECENT NEWS ITEM, “THIRD ‘IGNITING’ Event looks at worship attendance” (“National News,” Jan. ’04), I was quoted as saying, “I have never conducted my ministry in terms of counting heads . . . but solely in terms of [properly using Word and Sacrament].” While undoubtedly unintentional, the article may have given the impression that I agreed with everything that happened at

this conference and that I approve the first sentence in the article, which says, "There is no single formula for increasing worship attendance . . . but lots of approaches to share."

I find this statement very disturbing since it reflects the principles of the so-called Church-Growth Movement, which far too many LCMS pastors and congregations are adopting and which are, in fact, destructive of sound Lutheran doctrine and practice, as is made clear in the report submitted by the late President A.L. Barry's Church Growth Study Committee to the 2001 Synod convention. Our goal as Lutheran pastors and congregations should not be merely to increase worship attendance, but to proclaim purely the precious Gospel of our Lord Jesus and to administer His holy sacraments properly and let "the Holy Spirit work faith where and when it pleases him in those who hear the Gospel," as the Augsburg Confession correctly reminds us (Article V).

*Rev. Steven C. Briel
Maple Grove, Minn.*

Correction

The photograph on Page 9 of the February issue, in "A Christian Influence, On Campus and Off," is incorrectly identified as being of Christopher Leslie, an alumnus of Concordia University, Austin, Texas. The photo is of a current student, Chris Brynestad.

Also, although the enrollments listed for each campus of the Concordia University System in a table on Page 7 are correct, the total number of church-work students is incorrect. That number should be 2,805.

We apologize for the errors.

***Send letters to "Letters," c/o
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length and clarity.***

*The Missouri Synod's
“partner churches”
in Asia, and around the
world, are bringing Christ
to their countrymen
and beyond.*

‘THANKFUL FOR THE PARTNERSHIP’

by David L. Mahsman

This may be the largest single concentration of men and women anywhere on earth, and it was spread out before us.

From the glass-enclosed observation deck on the 52nd floor of Tokyo's new Mori Tower office building, we could see city in every direction. But for the sea to the east and the mountains in the grey-blue haze of the distant west, the cityscape would have stretched to the horizon all around.

Some 30 million people live in the Tokyo-Yokohama metropolitan area, making it the largest in the world. And hardly any of them have saving faith in Jesus Christ.

“Perhaps the biggest issue for us in the religious milieu of Japan is, how do we carry out effective missions?” Rev. Yoshiaki Kashiki, speaking through an interpreter, had told his American visitors earlier that day.

Kashiki is president of the Japan Lutheran Church and one of the Lutheran church-body leaders Missouri Synod President Jerry Kieschnick had traveled to east Asia to visit. The others were in Hong Kong and South Korea.

In every case, missions and evangelistic outreach—sharing the life-giving Gospel of Jesus Christ with their countrymen and others in Asia, of whom there are so many—was on the front burner.

On their turf

The east-Asia trip, in late September and early October, was one of several Kieschnick has been making to the Synod's partner churches—church bodies with whom the Missouri Synod works and is in church fellowship—



LCMS President Gerald Kieschnick (left, hands on table) and others in the Missouri Synod delegation talk with leaders of the Japan Lutheran Church in Tokyo. Among them is JLC President Yoshiaki Kashiki (middle right, with books).

around the world. This month, in fact, he is scheduled to be in Africa to meet with Lutheran leaders there.

“Asia is part of a larger program of trying to visit all of our partner churches, something that I strongly encouraged,” said Dr. Samuel Nafzger, executive director of the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations. Nafzger has accompanied Kieschnick on all his partner-church visits.

“It's important to visit them on their own turf,” Nafzger continued. “It speaks to the importance we give to them, and it lets them know that we have a feel for their successes and challenges.”

Also with Kieschnick on the east-Asia trip was Rev. David Birner. He was in the middle of moving back to the United States from Hong Kong, where he and his wife, Lois, lived for three years while he was area director for Asia with LCMS World Mission. He now is the associate executive director of LCMS World Missions responsible for international work.

“This was the first Asia tour by an LCMS president in many years,” Birner said, adding that having Kieschnick’s wife, Terry, along on this trip “opened and built bridges.”

“The visit built a sense of family and common identity that moved our relationships beyond where they had been for years,” Birner said. “It put in place connections and relationships for igniting a Lutheran mission movement in Asia.”

Challenges and opportunities

“We have very few members—you may be the only one in your family who is a Christian,” Kashiki told Kieschnick and the others as they sat at a large conference table in the church body’s offices, their street shoes outside the door in the Japanese way. “So you have to worship with no one else there from your family.”

Christianity has not gained much of a foothold in Japan, a country known for its staid and traditional ways. Depending on who’s counting, Christians make up anywhere from about three percent of the population to less than one percent.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod began mission work in Japan shortly after World War II. The Japan Lutheran Church grew out of that work. And though it has just under 3,000 members in its 35 congregations, it is not without resources or strategies for continuing its efforts on behalf of God’s kingdom.

One of those resources stands in the very shadow of the Mori Tower, which is the centerpiece of a brand-new international business-entertainment-housing complex known as Roppongi Hills. In addition to the office tower, the 28-acre site includes a broadcasting center, a luxury hotel, cinemas, more than 200 retail shops and restaurants, and apartments for more than 840 families.

It also has a Buddhist temple—and one Christian church, a Lutheran church.

“This may be some of the most expensive land in the



Land purchased by an LCMS missionary 50 years ago is now surrounded by an expensive new international-business development in Tokyo. Partner-church leaders took LCMS officials to the site in Tokyo’s Roppongi Hills area, where a new church building is being built by the developer in exchange for use of some of the land.



world,” Birner commented. That’s reflected in the rents. The least expensive studio apartment goes for about \$3,000 a month. For just over \$40,000 a month, a family can have five bedrooms and a study.

The Japan Lutheran Church does not have the kind of money it would take to buy land in Roppongi Hills today. It already had a church there—on land purchased some 50 years ago by LCMS pioneer missionary William Danker—when the Mori Building Co. began to develop the site. The developer wanted to buy the church property, but the Lutherans would not sell. So, in exchange for use of some of the land, the company tore down the old church building and put up a larger, multi-story church structure in its place.

“Can you imagine the opportunity for reaching the international business community that will be living and working here, around the clock, every day of the year?” Birner asked.

A tradition for education

But one of the main entry points into their own societies for the Asian partner churches is education, a tra-



President Allan Yung, left, of The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod discusses with Rev. David Birner the agenda for a visit from President Gerald Kieschnick and others from the Missouri Synod. Birner is the associate executive director of LCMS World Mission responsible for international work.

ditional strong suit for Lutherans.

Many Japan Lutheran Church congregations operate a kindergarten, for example. The national church also operates two junior-senior high schools. (When the baseball team at one of them, Seibo—"Holy Hope"—made it to the championships last year, the students in the stands stood and sang "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus" with every run. "It was perhaps the first time hymns were sung openly on national television," the school's headmaster, Takashi Yuguchi, said with a smile.)

It is in Hong Kong, though, where the use of schools is especially impressive. The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod, which has 8,500 baptized members, operates 44 schools with 1,100 teachers and 22,000 students.

This is made possible by the Hong Kong government, which is a partner with the church in a way that Americans might find surprising. The government builds the school building and pays 100 percent of the costs of operating it, including teachers' salaries. The church furnishes and equips the building, hires staff—and runs the school.

"We can teach religion freely in the schools, even though the government pays for it," said Hong Kong Synod President Allan Yung. He added that the schools have provided the foundation for starting new mission stations.

Kieschnick and the Missouri Synod delegation visited two of the schools.

At St. Matthew's Lutheran School, a primary school, Bible passages are posted prominently throughout the modern building. Rev. Daniel Lee, the pastor of the congregation there, outlined for the visitors a wide variety of Christian education, activities and worship opportunities available through both school and congregation.

The group also visited a secondary school with a

Young children in day care are among those served by Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service, which Executive Director Paul Chan says touches some 30,000 people of all ages each year.



rather long name: MKMCF Ma Chan Duen Hey Memorial College. The staff at the school includes a "spiritual development coordinator," Michelle Lok, who is an evangelist with the Hong Kong Synod.

"Our mission is to spread the Gospel faithfully to our next generation," said Hung Kei Poon, principal of the school.

The good reputation of Hong Kong Synod schools resulted in a request from the education department of one of the provinces in mainland China: Can you help train our English teachers? As a result, 120 teachers a year from mainland China will attend eight-week sessions at the Missouri Synod's Concordia University in



Pupils at St. Matthew's Lutheran School in Hong Kong greet visitors from The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.



Irvine, Calif., over the next five years—paid for by the People's Republic of China.

"Because we have this partnership, Allan could say, yes, we can meet your higher-education needs, even though they don't have a university," LCMS World Mission's David Birner said, referring to the Hong Kong Synod's president.

"These top-tier English teachers in Chinese public schools will be learning American culture through Irvine and Lutheran schools, by meeting Christians, visiting in Lutheran homes," Birner continued. "This is an opportunity for us to speak one on one with them and shape their impressions, not only of the United States, but also of Christians.

"For many—perhaps most—of them, this will be their first encounter with Christians and the Christian faith," he added.

China's second-largest university, Fudan University in Shanghai, also asked the Hong Kong Synod for help, Birner said. In this case, with teaching human care, another area in which the Hong Kong church has built a reputation.

Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service has 800 employees and 42 human-care centers that serve children, youth, the elderly, and those who are blind, deaf, or developmentally disabled. It operates foster-care, family-edu-

BEING 'WHERE THE ACTION IS'

Ten years ago, there wasn't much in Pudong, across the river from downtown Shanghai, China, but rice paddies. Today, it's sprouting skyscrapers and attracting international businesses.

It's there that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod planted its second international school in east Asia. Concordia International School, Shanghai (CISS) is modeled after the Synod's first such institution, Hong Kong International School.

"We have got to be where the action is," says CISS Head of School David Rittmann.

The two LCMS schools focus on the international community (though they increasingly are serving national clientele as well). Both provide an American-style, college-prep education, and are supported largely by tuition.

"We are the only school here with a Christian character," Rittmann, a former headmaster of the Hong Kong school, told the LCMS delegation that visited in October. He said four more international schools have opened in the area within the last year. "There will probably be 40 within 15 years."

Growth has been rapid for CISS. It

opened in 1998 with 22 students. Now it has about 400 students (whose parents work for some 200 different companies) and a brand-new building that opened in the fall, thanks to a \$5 million loan from the Synod's Lutheran Church Extension Fund. The loan, which also will help fund future expansion, is the largest yet from LCEF's Arthur C. Haake World Ministry Fund.

The Hong Kong school has been around a lot longer. Founded in 1966, it has more than 2,600 students (representing some 40 countries) and 480 faculty and staff on four campuses.

"Amazing" and "impressive" are two adjectives Synod President Gerald Kieschnick used after visiting the two schools.

"The challenge, as with all our schools in foreign countries, is to do an excellent job of secular education in the arts and sciences while also inculcating a Christian perspective, clearly proclaiming the Christian message and values," Kieschnick said. "That becomes somewhat difficult in an environment largely supported by the

tuition dollars of large companies and by governments, and it's a continuing challenge to keep solid, Christian teachers."

The president said that he's "encouraged" by how the schools have managed to meet those challenges. And the effort is worth it, he added. "What's the value of a soul?" he asked. "Of many souls?"

— D.L.M.



President Kieschnick, himself a former teacher, leads a devotion for primary students at Hong Kong International School, one of two international schools in east Asia owned by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

ABLAZE! INTERNATIONAL

If Lutherans are going to reach 100 million previously unreached people with the Gospel by 2017—the 500th anniversary of the Reformation—it will take a worldwide effort, say the Missouri Synod's mission leaders. And that worldwide effort is starting to take shape.

Ablaze!, the name given to the initiative to reach that 100 million people, began with LCMS World Mission, but it's catching on with the Synod's partner churches, too.

"We will do this in genuine partnership," President Allan Yung of The Lutheran Church—Hong Kong Synod told LCMS President Gerald Kieschnick when they met in Yung's office last fall. Yung said that his church body's schools would be a big part of that effort.

Yung has since been to St. Louis, along with three other church body leaders—from Europe, Africa and South America—as part of the steering committee for the *Ablaze!* International Conference being planned for July 6–9 in St. Louis, just before this year's Synod convention.

"This is the first time our partner churches have come together around a mission theme," said Rev. David Birner, associ-

ate executive director of LCMS World Mission for international work. "Their role [in *Ablaze!*] will be a critical factor in reaching 100 million people around the world."

Kieschnick agreed, saying, "The national church bodies have so many built-in advantages and opportunities" for reaching their own people with the Gospel. He cited their connections with their government and other leaders, for example, and the absence of language and cultural barriers.

The Synod's partner churches "loom large" in plans for reaching people with the Gospel and are "important" to the endeavor, Kieschnick said.

The leaders of most of the Synod's 29 partner churches worldwide will be in St. Louis for the *Ablaze!* conference and also will take part in the opening of the Synod convention.

"Many of our partner churches are coming to a defining moment in their history," Birner said, referring especially to those that are about 50 years old, the age at which the Missouri Synod began its overseas mission work. He added, "I think we have the capacity as the LCMS to strengthen, encourage, empower and equip them for outreach around the world."

— D.L.M

Ablaze!



LCMS President Gerald Kieschnick waits for his interpreter during his Sunday-morning sermon at Jungang ("Central") Lutheran Church in Seoul, South Korea.

cation, and school social-work programs.

Paul Chan, the executive director of HKLSS, says his organization touches about 30,000 people of all ages each year, sharing "love and concern."

"We also tell them about the love Jesus Christ has given to us," Chan added.

A 'debt of gratitude'

"It is a fact that throughout the world every day—every second of every day—people are dying without saving faith in Jesus Christ. ... The Bible says those who die without that faith in their hearts will spend eternity in hell. ... This is an urgent mission for your church and our church."

It's Sunday-morning worship at Jungang ("Central")



The choir at Jungang Lutheran Church in Seoul, contributes to Sunday-morning worship.

Lutheran Church in Seoul, South Korea. The congregation is listening, through an interpreter, to the president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, who is preaching that day.

President Kieschnick tells them, “I am truly thankful for the partnership in the Gospel that we share.”

Rev. Hong-Yeol Lee, president of the Lutheran Church in Korea (LCK), offered thanks of his own.

“Some 45 years ago, after the Korean Conflict, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod sent three American missionaries to this poor and impoverished land, in order to give birth to the Lutheran Church in Korea,” Lee said in his formal greetings to the LCMS contingent, also at Central Lutheran that Sunday. “The LCMS has sent more than 20 missionaries and sent a huge amount of mission support to assist the mission work of the LCK.

“We who are part of the LCK can never forget that debt of gratitude,” Lee said.

The LCK is roughly the same size as the Japan Lutheran Church, with about 3,000 members in 34 congregations. Yet it’s had an impact on the much larger Christian population—more than 40 percent of the Korean people are identified as Christian—than its size would suggest. For example, some 400,000 people, including 8,000 pastors, have studied the Bible in “Bethel Series” courses offered by the LCK. And some 750,000 people have signed up for the LCK’s “Christian Correspondence Course” through the “Korea Lutheran Hour.”

The Korean church also operates the first accredited Lutheran university in Asia. Luther University’s most recent president has been an LCMS missionary, Dr. Hilbert “George” Riemer. With his wife, Joan, who also taught at the university, Riemer devoted most of his life to this country. They arrived in Korea nearly 43 years ago; in retirement, they returned to the United States just last month.

The same missionary spirit that brought the Missouri Synod—and the Riemers—to Korea is evident also in the Korean Lutherans today.

“Now we, the LCK, as the debtors of mission, have a new mission calling before us,” LCK President Lee said. “If the LCMS in the USA 45 years ago looked to the west and did mission work in Korea, now we, the LCK, look to the north for the mission task we must undertake for the sake of Russia, China and North Korea.

“As the LCMS without any condition began proclaiming the Gospel for the sake of Korea,” Lee continued, “now we, following that example of the LCMS, will go forward and take on the mission for the sake of the north.”

LCMS World Mission’s David Birmer notes that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was about 50 years old when it sent out its first overseas missionary—to India, in 1898. “We’re seeing churches we visited in Asia just at the 50-year mark and at the point of sending their first missionaries and engaging in the mission of the church,” he said.

As he recounted some of his impressions from the visits in Asia and elsewhere, President Kieschnick



Students at the Lutheran Church in Korea's Luther University study the Bible. The university, near Seoul, is the first accredited Lutheran university in Asia.

included “the appreciation shown by the people of these partner churches, particularly those begun by the mission efforts of our Synod.

“The thanks I received as president really was for those who dedicated their lives to bringing the Gospel to these countries, and for the Synod that sent them,” Kieschnick said. “It was a very humbling experience.”

Nafzger, of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, said it is good to see the fruit of LCMS mission work around the world. He said, “People are going to be in heaven because The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod cared enough to share the good news of the Gospel.”



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

*Through the brutal events
of “that night” in Iraq,
God’s promises offered
comfort and peace.*

MAN’S WAR, GOD’S PEACE

by Joseph Bruhl

Last spring, as the nation held its breath and the last measures of diplomacy were brought to bear on Saddam Hussein, I deployed with my unit, 1st Operational Longbow Attack Helicopter Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, to Udairi, Kuwait, less than 15 miles south of the Iraqi border.

After training and waiting for six weeks, President Bush made his “48 hour” speech, and we made final preparations for combat. With nerves at a heightened pitch, pilots and soldiers were mentally sharp, plans had been reviewed and rehearsed, and every trooper was ready.

My experiences during Operation Iraqi Freedom can be divided into two distinct portions: “that night,” and everything else.

“Everything else” was what I imagined it would be, if not better. My brother Jake was a company commander for 46th Engineer Battalion, assigned to build the runway and ramp areas at Camp Udairi. For almost a week, we ate every breakfast and dinner together, meeting at 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. to catch up and check up on each other. Even then, we were fully aware of what a precious gift those few, short days together really were. We would talk about our family, his wife expecting their second child, our units and anything that popped up during the small talk that accompanied each meal.

The author, right, and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Doug Sanders, flew their Apache Longbow helicopter in combat around sunset last March 23, the first night of the war in Iraq, near Najaf, where they came under heavy ground fire.

After our last dinner together, we walked back to my tent and stood in the darkness of the cool March evening, pondering out loud what would transpire before we saw each other again. Jake gave me some final words of advice, and I offered my support and assured him that I “wouldn’t do anything stupid.” Lighting cigars, we talked one last time about our family, shared a couple of funny stories and that was it. We were both uncertain what the impending war would hold, but as we fumbled around in the darkness with our words, neither of us came close to guessing what would happen “that night.”

As the Army pushed north, our battalion attacked the Medina Division of the Republican Guard in order to soften them for 3rd Infantry Division’s attack through the Karbala Gap. On 23 March 2003, 1-227th received the mission to attack Iraq’s Medina Division. My company, B Company “Reapers,” was to lead the fight.



Serving as the scout platoon leader, it was my job to lead the first team in, find the enemy, fix his location and begin the fight. As we flew north, I scanned the long columns of American vehicles that passed underneath us churning up billowing clouds of dust, hoping that in one of the nondescript trucks beneath me was Jake and that he was safe.

After landing at our prearranged location near A Najaf, about 160 kilometers southwest of Baghdad, the pilots relaxed on their aircraft and gathered in small groups as the sun sank behind the horizon. We had landed in knee-high wheat fields, the first patch of green we had seen since leaving Fort Hood, Texas. It was a refreshing sight and seemed to calm our nerves as we made our final preparations for the mission. As night fell, we completed our rehearsals and cranked the aircraft before receiving word the mission was delayed for two hours.

The two hours passed like an eternity. Then, we huddled in darkness for the final update. The battalion commander passed out refinements to the plan as the intelligence officer updated the information on the enemy. We prayed, shook hands and climbed back into our cockpits, this time knowing there was no turning back.

Along the route to the objective, things were quiet. We slowed back our airspeed and moved into position for the attack. I identified a self-propelled artillery piece at a range of 5,700 meters, and destroyed it with a Hellfire missile. It was the first shot of the battle and it did not take long for the Iraqis to respond.

Less than 30 seconds later, my wingman reported taking fire. The radios erupted. I looked to the west, and I could see waves of orange and red tracer fire dancing toward us. It looked like a summer thunderstorm racing across a field, coming so fast you can only wince and wait for it to reach you. Rounds were being fired



A U.S. Army Apache attack helicopter, similar to the one flown by the author, patrols a road in southern Iraq.

from rooftops and in the streets; anti-aircraft artillery was positioned next to homes, making it impossible to return fire without inflicting collateral damage. The fire was thick. As we broke left away from fire, we flew directly into more streams of tracers. Bullets ripped up the bot-

We continued to return fire and maneuver. As we turned south, I looked across the city. The fire was so thick that it looked like a blanket of red and orange had been woven across the sky. I sighed. A fourth round of bullets tore up the left side of the aircraft, rattling around only

As we flew north, I scanned the long columns of American vehicles ... hoping that in one of the trucks beneath me was Jake and that he was safe.

tom of our aircraft, not once, not twice, but three times.

By now, the attack team, a group of four Apache helicopters coming 15 minutes behind us, rolled in ready for the battle handover. I reported my current location and recommended they remain approximately four kilometers south, unaware that I had just ordered them to wait in the area of thickest fire. It was there as they waited that U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officers Dave Williams and Ron Young were shot down, eventually being taken as prisoners of war and held for 19 days before their rescue by the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force.

inches from my cockpit. I could hear them tear through the skin of the aircraft and through the computers that sat just to the left of my knee.

That shook me. For the first time, my mind began to wander. I knew that I would have to fly back through that blanket of fire and I had just received a rude reminder of how dangerous it would be.

Even still, I suddenly felt peace. Looking over my shoulder, I knew that if the Lord planned for me to land that night, I would land safely and if this were my appointed time, then I was taking in some of my last sights. In a way so similar to what

God had shown me countless times before, and yet in a manner so powerful I had never imagined, the Lord told me, as he had the prophet Jeremiah, “I know the plans I have for you ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jer. 29:11).

And then tracers streamed past the cockpit, close enough to light it as bright as the noonday sun. My mind was back in the fight, the peaceful moment over. As I led my team back out, we banked hard left and then right again, turning towards the tracers of AK-47 rifles being fired from the banks of the Euphrates River. We punched off our final six rockets and turned away as they exploded, stopping the tracers.

The next few moments passed like hours—or in the blink of an eye—it is hard to tell which. But, we were through the fire and it was quiet again. I had one wingman whose gunner was wounded when shrapnel burst into his cockpit. My other wingman was limping home on one engine, the other taken out by a rocket-propelled grenade. Still, we had made it through what would later be referred to as the fiercest helicopter fire fight since Vietnam, and, at least for that night, God had chosen to prosper us with life.

Once our aircraft began to land, the damage became apparent in a way that was blurred in the heat of combat. Blades had holes in them, cockpits too. We had come within six inches of losing three different pilots and as the crews gathered together, it became clear that we had lost two. Dave Williams and Ron Young were still out there. Reports of their location varied as aircraft had attempted a rescue. But the volume of fire was too heavy. Radios had been blaring all night,



Then-Lt. Joe Bruhl and his older brother, Capt. Jake Bruhl, commander of A Company, 46th Engineer Battalion, were both stationed at Camp Udairi in northern Kuwait, just 25 miles from Iraq, during the week immediately preceding the war. They met each day for breakfast and dinner, thankful of those few days together.

and only now, in the quiet of the groups gathered around tail booms, did most crews realize we weren't coming home with the same number of men we had left with.

Conversations continued, centering on the bullet holes in fuselages and the shared awe and frustration of fire from rooftops. Crews took turns embracing and then inspecting each other's airframes. It was clear that the unit had been through something each man had anticipated but no one could have ever imagined.

Slowly, the adrenaline relented its control of bodies that gave into the exhaustion of a 20-hour day. As the eastern horizon began to show the first light of a rising sun, crews sprawled over their aircraft, and under them, closing their eyes to scenes of tracers racing up from the night sky. They would open them to the full spectrum of what those tracers had done to their battalion.



Capt. Joseph Bruhl is a helicopter pilot in the United States Army, serving with the 1-227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. This month, he is returning to Iraq for a second tour of duty. Joe and his parents, Win and Rita Bruhl, are members at Christ Lutheran Church, Little Rock, Ark.

The next several days were as difficult an exercise in perseverance as the night of March 23. We each had to cope with a failed mission, near fatal encounters and the fact that two of our close friends were now prisoners of war.

Again, God's quiet voice was ever present: “For I know the plans I have for you... Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

“Be still, and know that I am God.”

“They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.”

And wait we must. Whether we are in the middle of combat, or in the middle of our daily routine, the Lord certainly

will renew our strength, and we will mount up with wings as eagles. But first we must wait. And as we wait, the Lord promises that if we delight ourselves in Him, He will make straight our paths.

Our Lord is a good God, and I do not say that because I lived. I can testify to that because I knew He was good when I stared through the thick of fire, and though I did not know His plans, I knew they were good. What happened to me does not determine the Lord's goodness, but rather what happened to me is a result of His goodness. I am undeserving and unable to earn God's favor, and whether He chose to prosper me with safety or peace, each is a precious gift. So God does keep His promises.

And He promises to prosper us.

VICTORY OVER THE MONSTER

by Thomas E. Engel

Do you remember when, as a child on dark and stormy nights as lightning bolted across the sky and thunder shook the window panes, you thought you saw shadows across from your bed—shadows of a monster?

On such nights, I would stand at the door, flip the light switch off and run and dive into my bed to hide beneath the covers. I didn't want the monster that I thought was under my bed to reach out and grab my ankles and pull me under the bed, where I would be lost forever in monster land!

Monsters. If they were real, they would be terrible. So our parents would comfort us by assuring us, "There are no such things as monsters. You don't need to be afraid."

I have to admit that I've never seen the creepy monsters that go bump in the night. But I have run into a monster or two that have tried to pull me into a world of fear.

Our monsters can be the loss of financial security after getting laid off from a job, sickness that brings pain and uncertainty when waiting for the results of medical tests, or the loss of a loved one and the fear of loneliness and of heartache. And there's the one monster that will get us all one day—death. Death will swallow us and try to take us to the depths of its belly forever.

What imagery do these verses give of death?

Ps. 49:14 _____

Ps. 69:15 _____

Prov. 1:12 _____



*Go ahead and look beneath your bed ...
Christ has taken care of all your monsters.*

Is. 5:14 _____

According to Hab. 2:5, who will death swallow?

Why do you think Scripture uses such strong imagery when it talks about death?

Death may be able to swallow us, but Christ has swallowed up death. By His death and resurrection He defeated the monster death, and now nothing can hurt us. We belong to Christ now and forever.

What does Is. 25:7–8 say to you about Christ and death?

In 1 Cor. 15:26 and 15:54–55, how does St. Paul confirm what Isaiah said about how Christ saved us from the monster death?

What does Rev. 21:4 tell you about the power that Christ has over death?

There is nothing to fear. Go ahead and look beneath your bed; look all your troubles in their eyes. See death and do not fear. Christ has taken care of all your monsters—even the monster death. We can live fearlessly because we live victoriously in Christ.



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

A CALL TO PRAYER, REPENTANCE AND SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

By the time this article appears, the Lenten season will be under way. Lent is a time for personal and corporate reflection, prayer, repentance and meditation on the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is also a time to give thanks to God for the wonderful blessings of the forgiveness of sin, life and salvation that are ours as a result of God's grace, demonstrated in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

In separate letters to the pastors and congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, I recently shared with the church “A call to prayer, repentance and spiritual renewal.” This call is extremely important, both during the season of Lent and also in the months prior to the 62nd Regular Convention of our Synod this summer in St. Louis.

I believe it is time for a widespread call to prayer, repentance and spiritual renewal among us. I say this with deep sincerity and conviction. ...

Mindful that many individuals in the LCMS do not have access to letters addressed specifically to pastors and congregations, I am sharing with you, the readers of this article, pertinent portions of those letters:

“A matter of importance among us is our recognition of the depth of sin in the world, in the church and in our own personal lives. Sin manifests itself in many ways. Sin is a

necessary ingredient in separation, sectarianism and schism, as well as in a widespread lack of faithfulness to God's Word as revealed in Holy Scripture.

“To say the least, we are a church body experiencing significant tensions regarding numerous doctrinal issues, and regarding ways of carrying out the mission and ministry of the church. Left unresolved, these differences will continue to provide a foothold for Satan. His influence and subtle manipulations catalyze our individual and corporate sinful thoughts, words and deeds. Divisiveness and a spirit of contention are the result.

“Accordingly, I believe it is time for a widespread call to prayer, repentance and spiritual renewal among us. I say this with deep sincerity and conviction ... mindful of Paul's words in Galatians 5:

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. ... Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. ... The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (Gal. 5:13–26, selected verses).

“Critical aspects of spiritual renewal include humility, self-examination, confession, repentance and absolution, results of which cannot exclude a deepening personal relationship with Jesus Christ, along with fervent prayer



and humble commitment to our part in Christ's mission on earth.

“Prayer is an integral part of spiritual renewal ... especially if we are serious about setting hearts on fire—a work that only the presence and power of the Holy Spirit can accomplish in our midst. As Luther teaches us, ‘We must, after all, achieve everything through prayer.’

“Therefore, my dear friends in Christ, in a spirit of genuine humility, regularly and painfully aware of my own sinful nature, failures and imperfections, I respectfully and fervently encourage you to continue to commit yourself to:

- ... regular and fervent prayer for our church and its courageous, uncompromising, unapologetic witness to the world;
- ... private and public repentance for sins of omission, commission and no mission;
- ... spiritual renewal through personal and group Bible study, devotion, Christian witness and service.”

God bless your Lenten reflections, dear friends in Christ!

Jerry Kieschnick

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

John 3:16–17

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