



THE LUTHERAN WITNESS™



THE SHEPHERD OF YOUR SOUL

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TO THE READER

In May, the Easter season ends and new images of Jesus enter our minds. Perhaps chief among them—springing from a scriptural text used almost invariably in May—is the image of the Good Shepherd. Few other verses rival “The Lord is my shepherd” in the emotional tug it exerts on our hearts. For that reason, with this May issue of *The Lutheran Witness*, we focus on “The Shepherd of Your Soul” in the cover story. That is fol-

lowed by a piece on how Christ’s future shepherds in the LCMS—our forthcoming pastors—are being prepared for the ministry challenges of the 21st century. May these and other stories in this issue remind us that the Good Shepherd, who lays down His life for His sheep, is the One by whom and in whom we live.

David L. Strand — Interim Executive Editor

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Days in the desert

The brooding portrait of Jesus Christ in the desert (cover, March '06) captures the desert days of many of our daily passages.

The dismal clouds and bleak isolation of rocks and sand portray the sojourning, suffering Savior in His accepted state of humiliation better than any portrait I have seen. The poignancy of His lonely battle with temptation penetrates deep down to the private and public precincts of our lives.



'No wilderness, however wild, and no desert, however dark, can quench the light that is coming in the resurrected Christ.'

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

Juxtapose that brooding picture with the constant horrors of Darfur, the countless numbers caught in international slave and sex trafficking, and the post-traumatic stress of being a prison guard at Abu Ghraib. No wilderness, however wild, and no desert, however dark, can quench the light that is coming in the resurrected Christ—the light in which sin, death, and demons finally are destroyed.

If anyone is dragged into or trapped in a figurative desert, it is good to reflect that Jesus really did go into that bleakness and emerge victorious. *The Lutheran Witness*, in this portrait, gives timely and timeless water for the scorching thirst of any desert day.

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

Who may consecrate?

Dr. Herbert Mueller's letter in the March *Witness* concerning the February "Q&A" question, "Who

may consecrate [the elements]?", struck a chord with me. What indeed are the boundaries of service of certified and commissioned deacons?

Dr. Mueller pointed out that in Titus 1:5, Paul spoke to Titus on the ordination of elders, advising Titus to set in order things that were "wanting." If the LCMS is expecting that, in time, seminary instruction might well be bypassed, at least to a degree, then our church body will indeed be found "wanting."

Today we have deacons doing sermons, speaking the liturgy, reading the lessons, distributing the bread and wine, announcing the forgiveness of sins, and saying the benediction. Does the LCMS believe that this is in keeping with our confession (Augsburg XIV)?

I think it is all quite contrary to Holy Scripture. It is an affront to God and to all the ordained ministers, living and deceased, who dedicated or are still dedicating their lives to the Holy Ministry—men who have had the benefit of years of teaching and wise counsel from their seminary professors.

The Synod's membership is being shortchanged, and I am not satisfied with this state of affairs.

*Mildred L. Plueger
Banning, Calif.*

The 1989 Wichita Convention wisely recognized that there are congregations so small and isolat-

ed that they will never be able to be served by an ordained minister. We are talking about cases of one or two dozen parishioners hundreds of miles from the nearest "full service" LCMS congregation.

As an elected head elder, I have conducted services, including preaching the Word and distributing Holy Communion, during times when our pastor was unavailable owing to cancer therapy. I think our Confessions make allowance for situations such as this: "Both the sacraments and the Word are effective because of Christ's institution and command, even if they are administered by evil men" (Augsburg VIII).

Would those who disagree with me deny all preaching, teaching, and the sacraments to all congregations that, through no fault of their own, have no ordained pastor present? What kind of church leadership is that?

*Ron Koenig
Estacada, Ore.*

He died for the sins against us, too

Allow me to comment on two points in Diane Stelling's fine article, "Loving the Abused" (March '06).

First, she said she bristled at well-meaning Christians who "told me... that Jesus had wiped away my sins..." assuming that "these were sins (as an abuse victim) for which I needed to be forgiven, for which I had some culpability."

When we say that Jesus died for our sins, the truth is that He died for more than just the wrongs we have personally done. Jesus died also for the evils that sin brings to us. Isaiah 53:4 teaches this well: "Surely he took up our infirmities (sicknesses) and carried our sorrows..." Jesus carried the sorrow and the injury of the abused—along with their personal wrongdoings—when He died on

the cross. Although saying to the abused something like, “Jesus wipes away your sins,” certainly is true, we, the church, need to understand and clearly convey that we mean, “Jesus cleanses you and saves you from the evil someone else did to you.”

Second, Ms. Stelling asked, “Should the victim forgive the abuser?” I highly recommend to all your readers the excellent *Lutheran Witness* article, “Can You Forgive the Oklahoma City Bomber?,” by Rev. Philip T.R. Spomer (Aug. '95). Pastor Spomer writes: “You may be in that shadow between the time when you forgive with your mouth and the time your heart is at rest. Sometimes that is more than a lifetime. But forgiveness is not of the mouth. Nor is it of feeling and emotion. It is of the soul, of the will.” Perhaps the *Witness* can ask Pastor Spomer to rewrite his paper in the context of the abuse victim.

*Rev. Leonard Poppe
Lincoln, Mo.*



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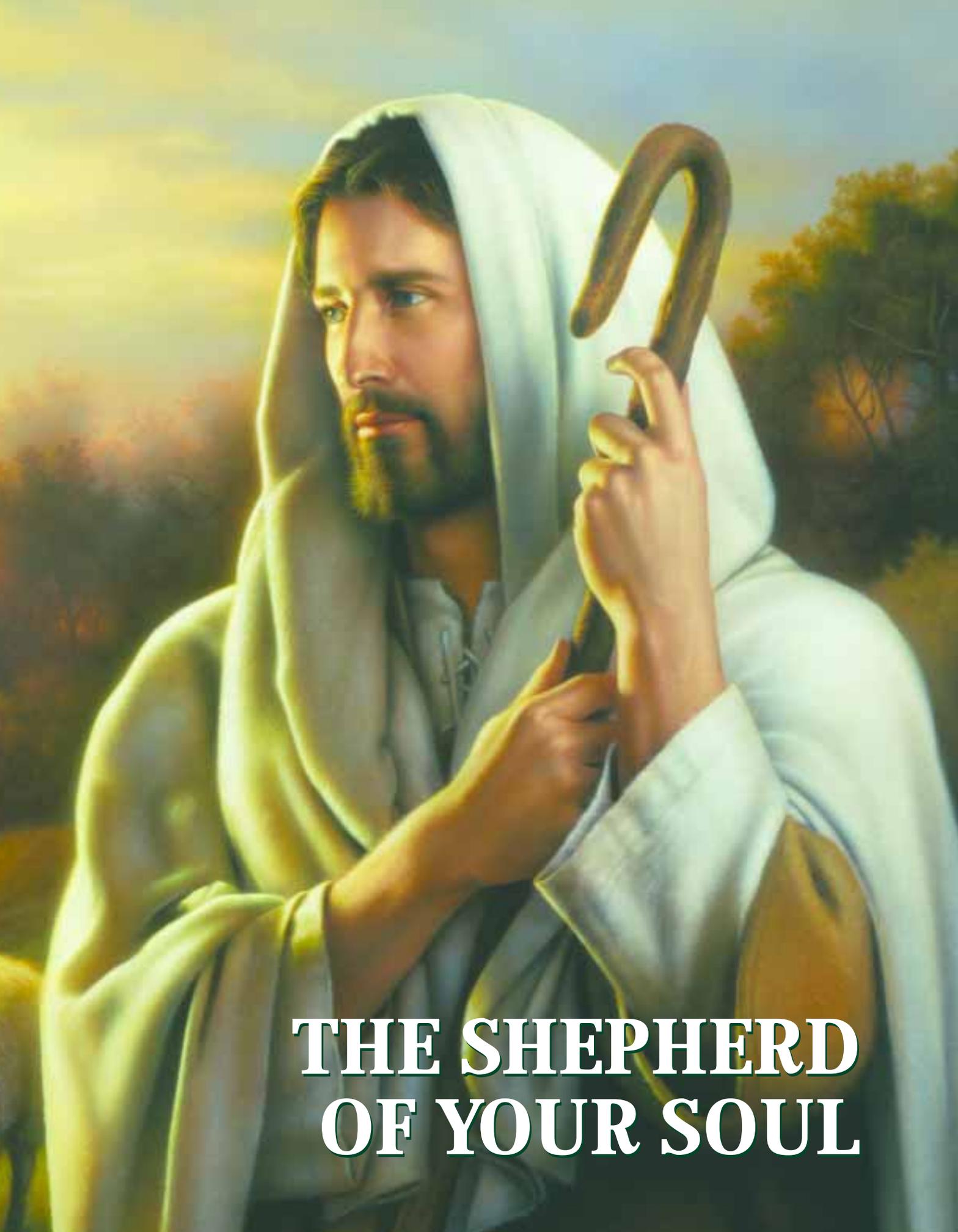
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**THE SHEPHERD
OF YOUR SOUL**

by John W. Oberdeck

“The Lord is my stock broker; He buys low and sells high.” No, that doesn’t do it.

“The Lord is my air traffic controller, we do not sit on the tarmac nor have mid-air collisions.” No, that doesn’t do it either.

“The Lord is my accountant; He lowers my taxes and raises my refund.” That’s even worse!

Do you see the problem? We live in a technological age surrounded by images and gadgets that eclipse the age-old boundaries of space and time in ways unimaginable only decades ago. Yet the images we use to describe our relationship to God, inspired by the Holy Spirit as they are, come from a time we barely comprehend.

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” (Ps. 23:1, KJV) was first written on animal skins soaked in lime and stretch-dried. I wrote those same words into a digital document read on a liquid crystal display (LCD) screen.

The distance from parchment to laptop

aptly demonstrates the distance from God that we may feel in our high-tech, fast-paced society. Does anyone really care for us? Does God?

Bridging the gap

How can we bridge the gap? In an impersonal world, how do we comprehend our very personal relationship with God? The danger is to fall into sentimentality.

“The Lord is my shepherd” triggers images and feelings in our minds and hearts. We think of bright skies, pastoral hill-sides, and cuddly sheep surrounding a well-robed shepherd standing with staff in hand and lamb on arm.

Now there is nothing wrong with this view of our Good Shepherd. But what do we really know about shepherds and sheep? For the majority of us, the shepherd’s staff is a good symbol for care, but we wouldn’t know how to care using a shepherd’s staff if the lamb’s life depended on it. It’s all too far removed from our daily experience. Our sentimental picture runs the risk of missing too much of the story. Warm and fuzzy may fail us when life turns hard and cold.

Recognizing the comparison

Let’s be clear. Jesus isn’t a shepherd, and we are not sheep. But Jesus is *like* a shepherd, and we are *like* sheep. There is much more to this comparison than the sentimental.

How are we like sheep? Sheep were an extremely valuable commodity in the pasturing economy of Bible times. Sheep, and goats for that matter, provided food to eat, wool to wear, cloth for shelter, and goods for bartering. In the world of animal husbandry, one accumulated wealth by accumulating sheep. Nothing better illustrates the value of sheep than the sacrifices of the Old Testament. Old Testament sacrifices involved giving

Throughout Scripture, God reveals Himself as our Shepherd. He cares for His people, the flock of His pasture.

up the best one had in order to demonstrate repentance and submission to the will of God. Sheep were used for every type of sacrifice and offering; burnt, sin, guilt, and peace.

While sheep were valuable for the economy and central to religious observance, they were relatively helpless. Luther describes it this way. “A sheep must

Psalm 22 is the testimony of Jesus dying on the cross. The dying man wanted to hear about his Shepherd who was watching over him and caring for him because his Shepherd knew his pain. He wanted the assurance that Jesus was looking at him from the cross.

live entirely by its shepherd’s help, protection and care. As soon as it loses him, it is surrounded by all kinds of dangers and must perish, for it is quite unable to help itself, nor find the right way, nor protect itself against any kind of danger or misfortune” (Luther’s Works, vol. 12).

Both the value and the needs of sheep made the shepherd’s job extremely difficult. The shepherd had to find grass and water in a land where both were scarce. He was required to protect the flock against bad weather. He needed constantly to be on guard against wild ani-

mals looking for dinner. If he was a good shepherd, he would find safety for the good sheep while he went in search of strays. And if a lamb was lost, the shepherd was held responsible.

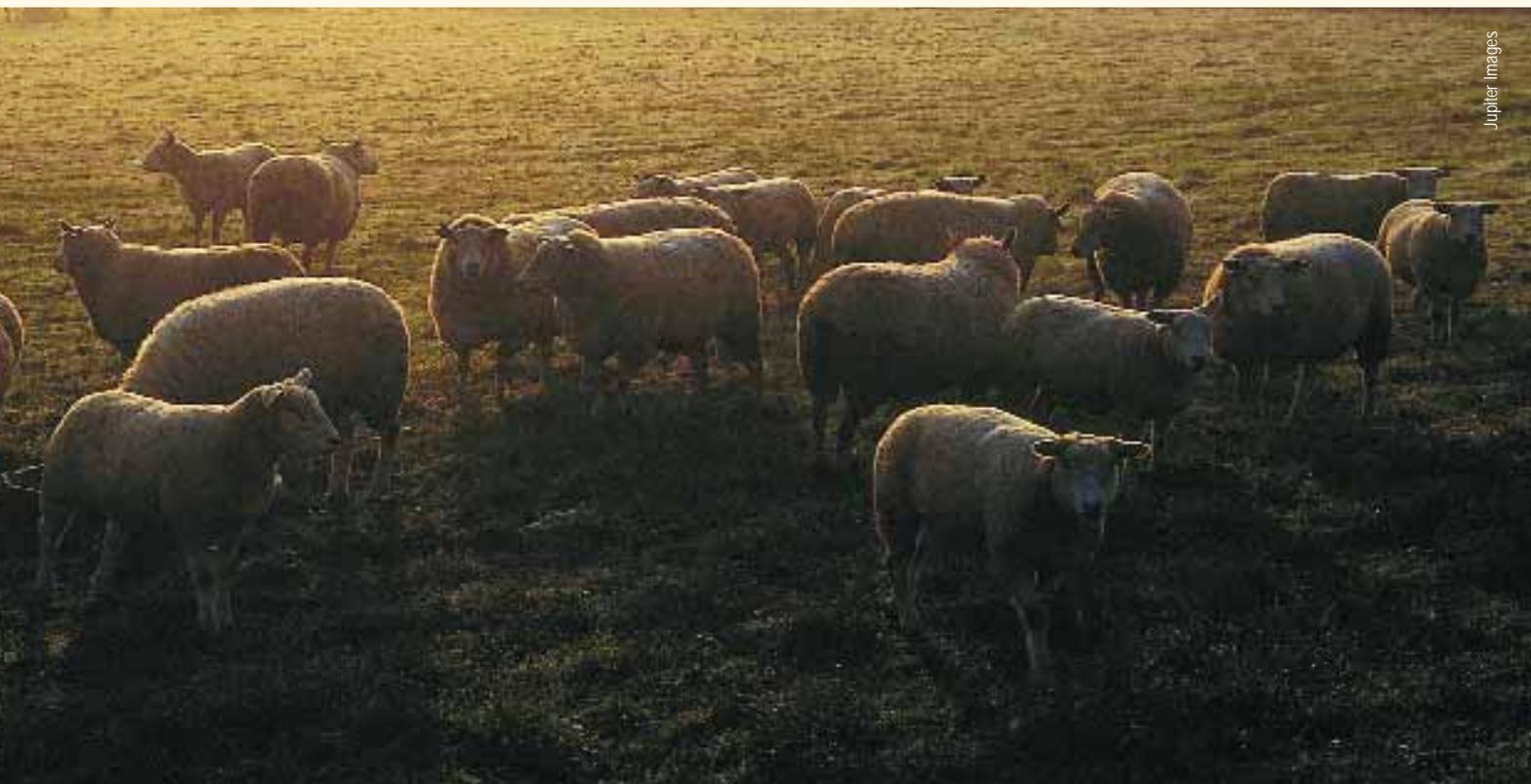
We are like sheep. First, God’s love has made us extremely valuable to Him. Second, left to ourselves we are spiritually helpless. We are surrounded by all kinds of dangers, and to make matters worse, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (Is. 53:6a).

Jesus is like a shepherd. First, because people were “like sheep without a shepherd,” Jesus “had compassion on them ... teaching them many things” (Mark 6: 24), and thereby meeting their most important needs. Second, like a shepherd He was held responsible. “And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Is. 53:6b). Johann Herrmann described it better than anyone when he wrote:

“How strange this great paradox to ponder;
The shepherd dies for sheep who love to wander;
The master pays the debt his servants owe him,
Who would not know him.”

Lutheran Worship 119

How do we bridge the gap between our impersonal world and the love of Jesus Christ as He cares for us and loves us in His most personal way? We can’t. But He does—over and over again. Through the Word and in the sacraments, the Holy Spirit feeds the flock of Jesus. In the means of grace we see Jesus caring for us,



Jupiter Images

watching over His flock, from two vantage points, the cross and the empty tomb.

From the Cross

Once, when I was a parish pastor, a member asked me to visit her dying father, a member of a neighboring congregation. I met her in the outer room of the hospice suite, chatted for a while, and then entered the room where her father laid suffering from bone cancer.

Such visits must, by their very nature, be kept short. After visiting a few minutes, I asked, "Is there anything you would like me to read from Scripture?"

"Yes," he replied, "I'd like you to read Psalm 22."

Thinking I had misheard or that he had misspoke, I responded, "Don't you mean Psalm 23?" With a great deal of pain, he raised himself on one elbow and said in a loud voice, "No! I *mean* Psalm 22!"

I thought he would want to hear about the Shepherd who would usher him through the valley of the shadow of death. Turning to Psalm 22 and beginning to read, I realized why he didn't want green pastures, still waters, or plump sheep carried by a tender shepherd. On his deathbed, he didn't want sentimentality; he wanted a raw Savior.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?" (Ps. 22:1).

What this meant for the man became clearer as I read on. "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death" (vv. 14–15).

Psalm 22 is the testimony of Jesus dying on the cross. The dying man wanted to hear about his Shepherd who was watching over him and caring for him because his Shepherd knew his pain. He wanted the assurance that Jesus was looking at him from the cross. And his heavenly Shepherd gave it to him, in spite of the error of the earthly shepherd.

From the empty tomb

Any good Bible dictionary will explain how important the shepherd's voice is in leading the flock. To this day, the mark of a competent shepherd is the ability of the sheep to respond to his voice, and only his voice. Jesus was not idealizing our relationship with Him when He said, "My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). Our relationship really is that personal.

If our Good Shepherd personally took care of our greatest need, the forgiveness of sins, by reconciling us to God by means of the cross, then how much more has He removed from us our greatest fear—death? Listening to His voice removes all fear. Our Baptism first opened our ears to the voice of our Shepherd. That same baptism links us not only to Jesus' death but also to His resurrection (Rom. 6:4).

Over an 18-month period, beginning in March 2003, three of my family members died. At three services we heard the words, "Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?" (1Cor. 15:55). Hearing those words didn't remove our grief. It did, however, empower us to grieve with hope. We know the voice of the Shepherd. He's defeated death by going through death for us. Through the power that is His from His own empty tomb, we, along with our loved ones, will someday hear His voice just as He promised. "A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out" (John 5:28). When we do, we will have life through our Good Shepherd in eternity.

Watching the flock

"The Lord is my webmaster; my hard-drive will not crash." No! Regardless how valiant the attempt to up-date the imagery, it doesn't work. The result always seems silly. Instead, we continue to use the imagery used by the Holy Spirit. We need someone like a shepherd watching over us, guiding us, caring for us, and leading us to the fulfillment of our salvation, because we really are like sheep.

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THE SHEPHERD IMAGE

From the walls of the catacombs to the stained glass of modern churches, the picture of Christ as our Good Shepherd is one of the most popular and well-loved images of the Savior. He is often depicted with a lamb draping His shoulders and sheep standing at His feet. We look at those pictures and instinctively know: That's our Jesus and that's us!

The popularity of the image is not surprising. After all, our Lord identified Himself that way: "I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

We confess that Jesus is the Shepherd who wrangled with the wolf—death—and came out the victor!

For centuries in the early Church, it was customary for catechumens (adults preparing for Baptism) to learn and to recite not only the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, but also Psalm 23. They all knew that when they said "The Lord is my Shepherd" they were talking about the Lord Jesus.

When the Lutheran Confessions identify the Church, they often use Shepherd shorthand, for example, "The holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd" (Smalcald Articles, Part III:XII:2).

And it is no wonder, given St. Peter's words (1 Peter 5:1–4) about Christ being the Chief Shepherd. The Church often calls those who are called to preach His Gospel and administer His sacraments in His stead "pastors"—which is Latin for shepherds. In some Christian traditions, certain pastors even carry a crosier—a shepherd's staff.

The image of the Shepherd is particularly loved at the time of death. We confess that Jesus is the Shepherd who wrangled with the wolf—death—and came out the victor! He knows how to guide His people safely through that dark valley and bring them out to the high pasturelands of heaven. Under His guiding hand, His people "fear no ill"—they know that their Good Shepherd is with them with His rod to ward off the evil spirits and His staff to snatch us back if we start to wander.

So even in urban settings where folks have not seen a sheep in years, the image of our Lord as the great Good Shepherd continues to speak to the hearts of Christ's people.

Rev. William Weedon is pastor at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Hamel, Ill. His e-mail is weedon@mac.com

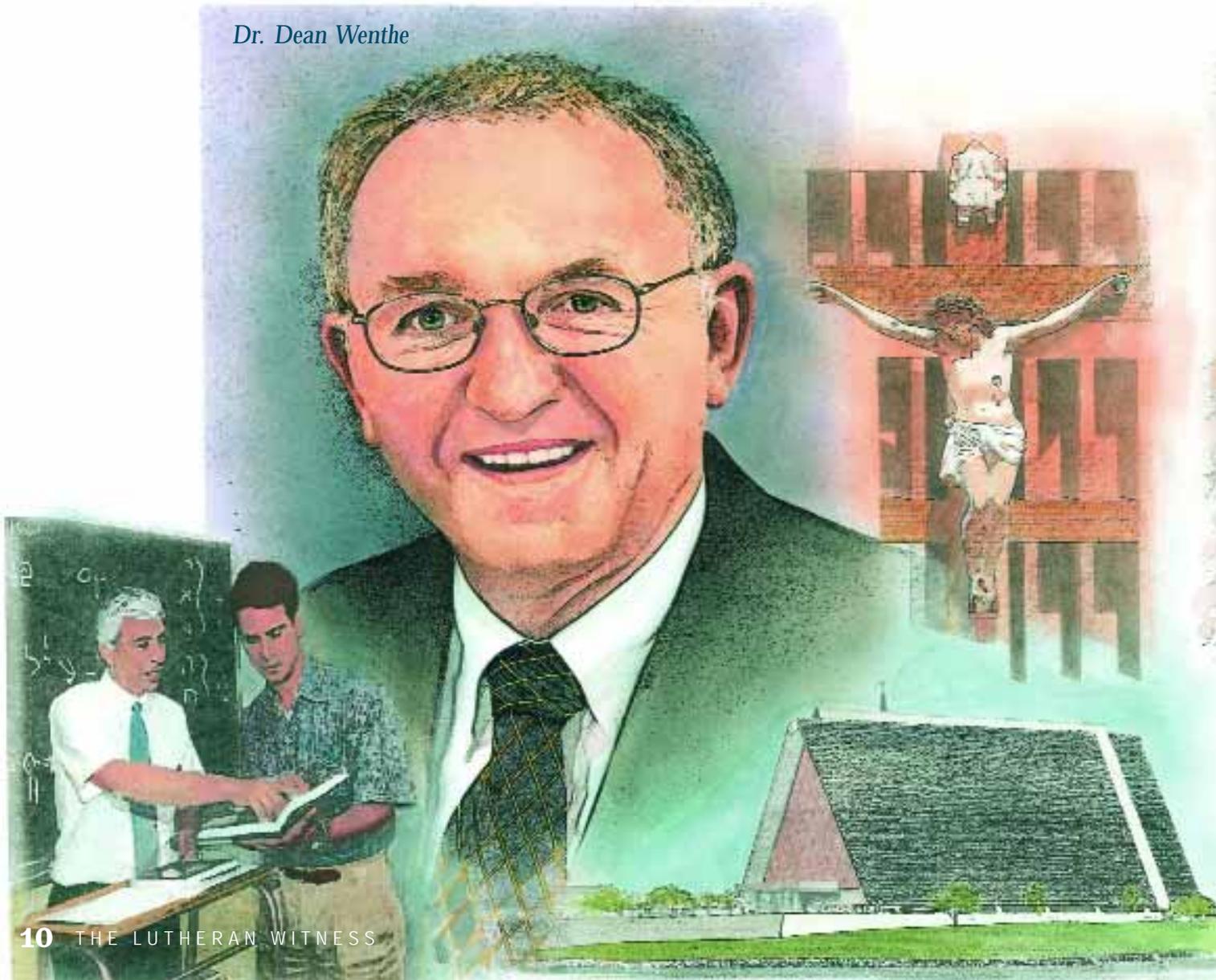
*To educate pastors for the 21st century,
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Making Shepherds

“We’re trying to help the people of God by giving them a pastor who has the same level of excellence in caring for their souls that they would wish from the physician taking care of their bodies.”

by James Heine

Dr. Dean Wenthe



Ask Dr. Dean Wenthe and Dr. Dale Meyer how much the world has changed since they first joined the clergy ranks of the LCMS, and their shorthand answer is “a lot.”

As the presidents of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, respectively, they recognize that they and their faculties must prepare our future pastors—our church’s 21st-century “shepherds”—to share the Gospel with a world that is increasingly diverse in its makeup and perspective.

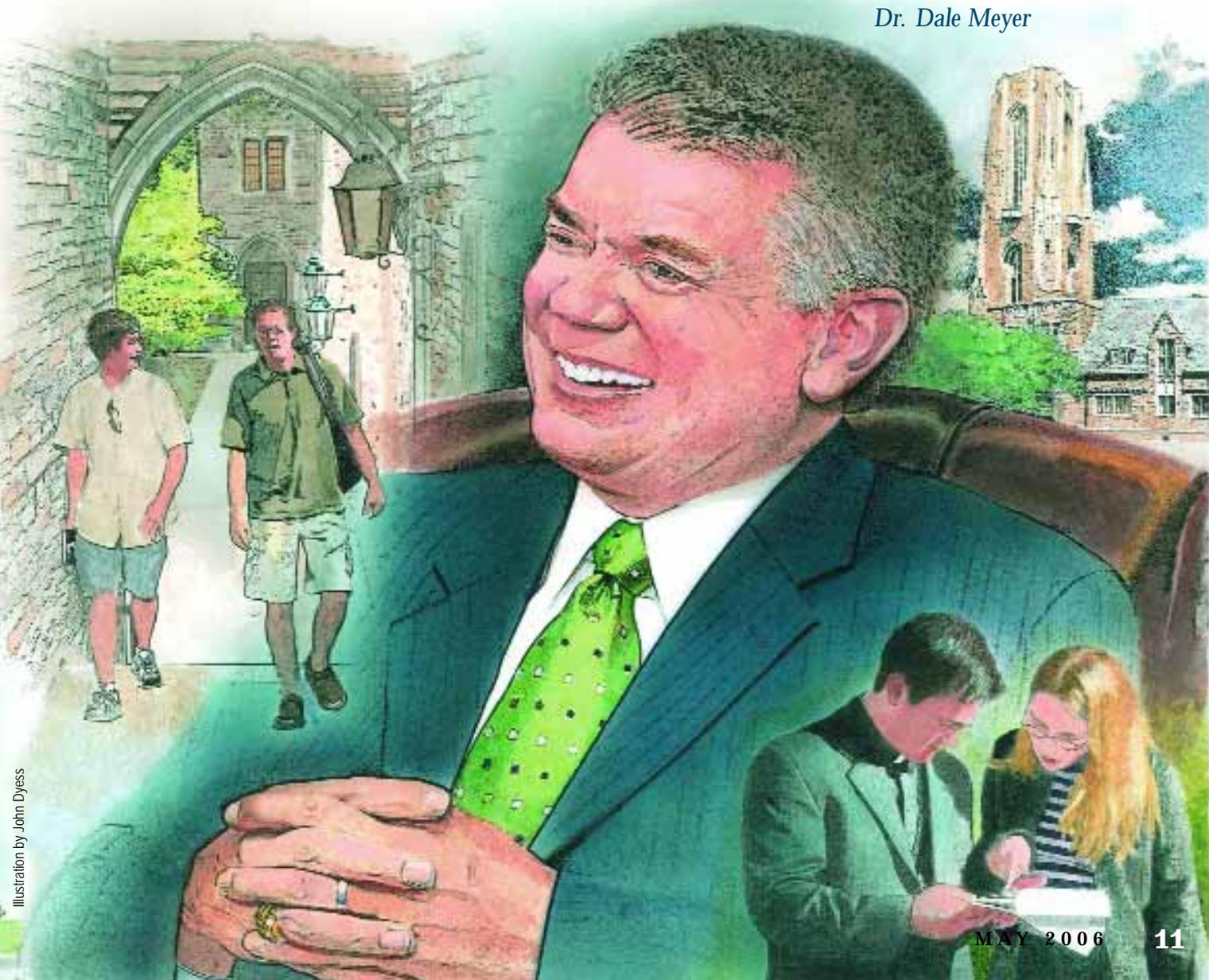
“The world they encounter will be profoundly different from the world in which many of them grew up,” Meyer observes. “Many of our students come from traditional, white, middle-western, churched homes. They’re not going into a world that’s like that. They’re going to be plunged into different kinds of ministry contexts. It’s going to be a stiff challenge.”

Wenthe concurs: “I graduated in ’71 from the St. Louis seminary, and the Church looked very different in terms of the commonality of practice, in terms of the culture around it.”

That culture was generally favorable to the Church, Wenthe recalls. “When I was a parish pastor in the ’70s in Iowa, the school system designated Wednesday night as

“We cannot turn out pastors who only pontificate on Sunday mornings but do not give evidence that they are true human beings who have a heart for people who are hurting.”

Dr. Dale Meyer



church night, and they didn't schedule anything."

Today, parish pastors—and laity—are often confronted by a culture that no longer sets aside the Church as noble and helpful, Wenthe observes.

"There is a sense that our people are in a culture, in America and elsewhere, that's catechizing youth, that's shaping the habits of Christians in ways that sometimes aren't even recognized, so that people know more about the Xbox than about God," Wenthe says. "That, I think, is true across the Christian family, whether you're Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, or Lutheran. You're trying to pass on a vision of God and the world and life that is not supported by the mainline culture in the way it was 20 or 30 years ago."

To prepare young men for the parishes and communities they will serve, the seminaries ensure students are aware of what is "going on out there sociologically and psychologically," Meyer says. "But the bottom line is the basics of what God has already taught us, His words of Law and Gospel."

Students need to understand Law and Gospel deeply, Meyer continues. That is an unchanging essential and a lifelong quest. "Upon graduation they've only begun to understand Law and Gospel somewhat," he says. "They need to understand and spend their lives studying Law and Gospel, because we know that God gave those two great teachings for the salvation of people, and that's critical for the ministry in the future. The shepherd has to be into Law and Gospel."

To help students address the new dimensions of society and culture, Concordia Seminary is increasingly offering "contextual" real-world experiences for its students, Meyer says. These experiences range from mission outreach in Central America to field-education activities and the insights offered by the seminary's institutes and mission and evangelism modules.

Seminary instruction cannot prepare a pastor for every situation he will encounter in his ministry, Meyer notes. The key is to help them "think theologically."

Wenthe sums it up this way: "We're trying to produce for the Church a faithful shepherd who, whether his sheep are in San Diego or New York City or rural Iowa, is able to enter that world and name

Into the Harvest



For most fourth-year seminary students, a high point of their academic career is Call Day. The Synod's Council of Presidents, acting as the Board of Assignments, extends calls to students who have completed their academic work and been certified for service in the Church by their faculties.

This year, more than 170 pastoral candidates from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, received calls April 25–26. That is good news for the Church.

What is not such good news is the amount of debt many new pastors take with them to their first assignments, says Rev. Glen Thomas, vice-president of seminary relations for Concordia Seminary. He notes that many students begin their sem-

inary education with \$30,000 or \$40,000 in undergraduate debt and add to that amount while completing their studies.

"Virtually all of our students qualify for financial aid," Thomas says, "and we try hard not to add to the debt they're already carrying."

Still, he explains, many graduates enter their first assignments shouldering a considerable financial burden, to be repaid on a typically modest pastor's salary. "When they graduate, and the loans come due, it's tough," Thomas says.

"This is one reason the LCMS Joint Seminary Fund is so important," says Jeff Craig-Meyer, development director for the fund, "It gives us the opportunity to support our seminaries and encourage our young men to enter the ministry."

In the first eight months of the current fiscal year that ends June 30, the fund has raised more than \$1 million and enlisted the aid of more than 1,000 new donors, Craig-Meyer says, "but there is still so much we need to do."

Rev. Ralph Schmidt, vice-president for institutional development at Concordia Theological Seminary, agrees: "The Joint Seminary Fund provides opportunities for God's people who wish to support both

the things that are good and wonderful gifts from God and to also name the things that would disrupt and endanger God's people."

A new curriculum

Concordia Theological Seminary instituted a new curriculum at the beginning of the 2005–2006 school year. Wenthe believes the curriculum will better prepare students for the challenges and opportunities they will face.

"We have spent about six years as a faculty addressing these very questions," Wenthe says. "I have to compliment the faculty, because this is a hard task. There were lots of debates and lots of discussions."

The new curriculum is integrated, highly interactive, cross-disciplinary, and "much more ori-

ented to the Church's practical life," Wenthe explains. "What we're aiming for, and working on, is a holistic kind of formation of the person. It's really designed to prepare the seminarian for a post-Christian or a post-modern world. It emphasizes much more the understanding of who they are as baptized Christians. It stresses an active spirituality and prayer life before God and in service to the neighbor."

In the center of that focus on the practical life "is love for the people of God and compassion for the lost," Wenthe says.

Reaching out

At both seminaries there is an increased emphasis on missions and human care, Meyer and Wenthe say.

"We had several busloads of seminarians go down and help Katrina victims," Wenthe says. "We have a group in Madagascar now, with a faculty member, building shelters and helping people there. We're making missions and human care part of the seminary experience."

Today, perhaps more than in recent decades, churches and pastors are judged, not only by their proclamation of the Gospel, but also by their personal and corporate acts of compassion, Meyer explains. "That fits into the whole plan for the Church. We cannot turn out pastors who only pontificate on Sunday mornings from their pulpits but do not give evidence that they are true human beings who have a heart for people who are hurting within and without the Church."

To prepare pastors for our new century, both semi-

naries are collaborating more fully than ever, Wenthe notes. "We're trying to help the people of God by giving them a spiritual pastor who has the same level of excellence in caring for their souls and for eternity that they would wish from the physician taking care of their bodies."

Great opportunities

While it's tempting to bemoan our cultural state of affairs, we should not forget that our age offers great opportunities for the Church's shepherds and their flocks, Meyer and Wenthe say.

Yes, the culture is increasingly estranged from the Christian faith, but that same culture yearns deeply for spiritual nourishment—a yearning the Church and the Gospel can fill. We are more than flesh and blood, Wenthe notes. We are created in the image of God, and each of us counts eternally in His eyes. That there is joy in heaven when one sinner repents stands in radical contrast to the view that we are simply political and economic entities and nothing more.

"We're eager to give, and to form in our students, a heart that beats with that type of mission, to show their neighbors who are unchurched the beauty of being a Christian—and the truthfulness of it," Wenthe says.

In many ways, this is a delightful time to enter the ministry, to serve as a shepherd of the Church, Meyer adds. Yes, it's tough, but it's delightfully tough—and rewarding—and the opportunities are great. "They're terrible only if we convince ourselves they're terrible," he says. "Too often, we forget that God's in this deal, too."

James Heine is a freelance writer and a member of Trinity Lutheran Church, St. Louis, Mo.

seminaries to assist students preparing to serve our Lord and His Church. We have many second-career students who leave homes and jobs behind and bring families along as they return to school."

The fund provides critically needed aid, Schmidt adds. "It helps students enter the ministry with full energy devoted to serving the Church without undo concern about how to repay large student loans."

For more information about the Joint Seminary Fund, contact the following:

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A Soldier's View

IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

by Eric J. Erkkinen

David the shepherd keenly understood the dangers lurking in the shadows. It is in dark corners and shadows that the enemy hides and waits to attack the sheep. Yet, as the psalmist writes, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

Journal Entry: March 8, 2006

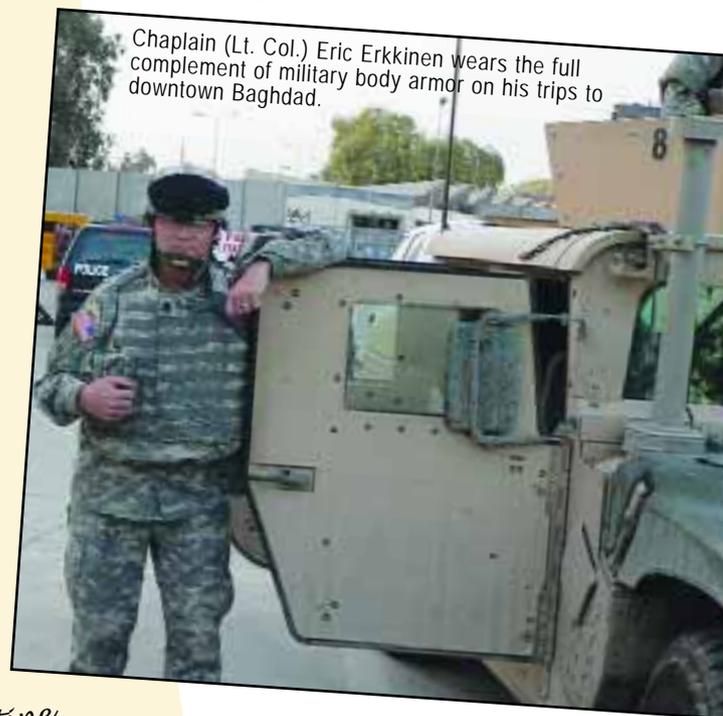
A four-vehicle convoy of "up-armored Humvees" departs Victory Base, Baghdad on a routine 14-kilometer trip to the international zone (IZ). Every soldier in the security detachment is wired [for communications], covered in body armor, and is hyper-vigilant as soon as we pass the last exit gate. A bold red sign reminds everyone that we have entered the valley of the shadow.

Here in the "valley," every strewn object, every out-of-place dirt mound, every civilian vehicle is a potential danger. A momentary delay in traffic ahead brings an immediate order, "Cut over left!" All four vehicles now cross the median and, in a matter of seconds, we are calmly cruising in a lane of oncoming traffic. All the oncoming civilian traffic automatically clears our path as they recognize the convoy.

As soon as the highway traffic jam is passed, we cross back into our proper lane.

In another few minutes, we arrive safely at our destination. This was a routine, uneventful trip, and there were no incidents. Every day, these soldiers and many others like them travel the roads, highways, and paths through the valley of the shadow of death.

*For Christ and Country,
Chaplain (LTC) Eric J. Erkkinen
MNC-I, Baghdad, Iraq*



Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Eric Erkkinen wears the full complement of military body armor on his trips to downtown Baghdad.

Throughout our nation's history, those serving in the military are frequently called to walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Nowhere is this truer than in operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

David's words in Psalm 23 are words of faith in God's divine protection and offer tremendous comfort to the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines serving in two theaters, Iraq and Afghanistan.

OF DEATH

As a chaplain in Iraq, I am privileged to serve as Christ's "undershepherd." In a land of bloodshed and violence, I have the privilege of sharing the very body and blood of Christ with soldiers who are trying to bring peace. In a land torn by war and competing factions, I also enable our fine chaplains to assist with humanitarian outreach to many Iraqis who have experienced loss of home, security, and loved ones. Our chaplains demonstrate, in a very real way, God's care and Christ's healing love.

Among my own troops, I have special opportunities to share the life-changing Word of God as we apply that powerful Word to our lives in this alien environment. Our midweek study group now averages more than a dozen—that's a good number in this setting.

What greater mission can any Christian have than to proclaim to these courageous men and women God's nearness, His power, His comfort, His goodness and mercy in sending the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ, to rescue us from death and hell?

Chaplain (LTC) Eric J. Erkkinen is currently stationed in Baghdad, Iraq.

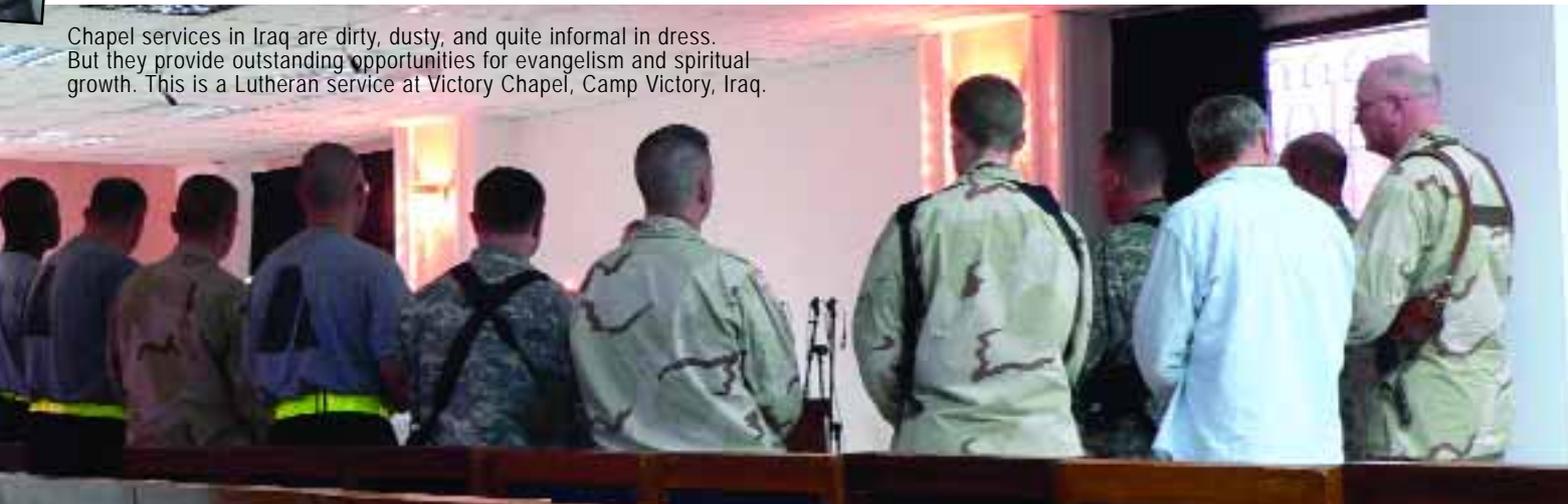


Religious Support Teams (RST) add support for military civil affairs operations and humanitarian efforts in local towns. Here a chaplain assistant hands out gifts to Iraqi children.



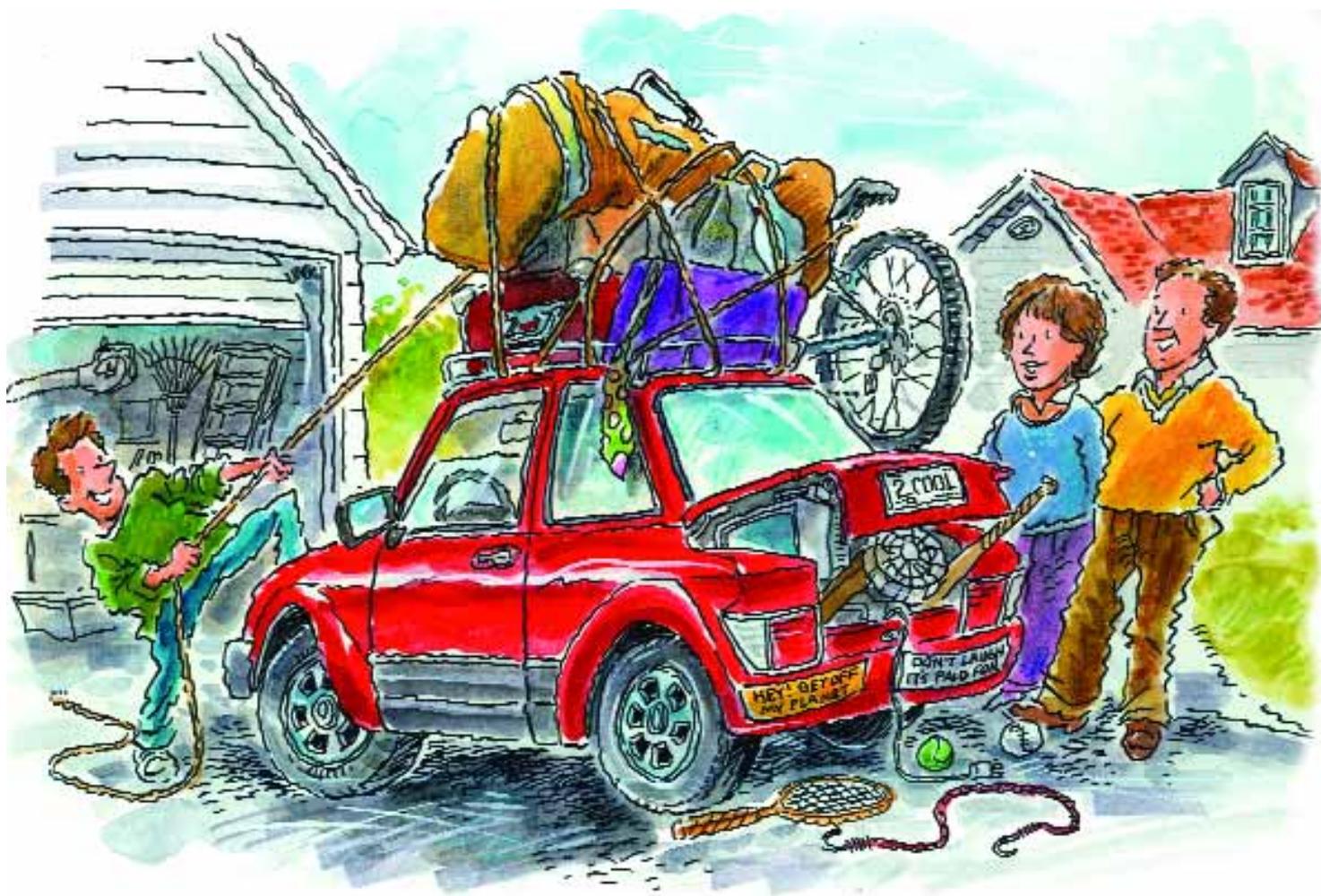
Chaplain Eric Erkkinen and Chaplain Darren Jaensch, a Lutheran chaplain in the Australian Army, prepare for a worship service at the Victory Base Main Chapel.

Chapel services in Iraq are dirty, dusty, and quite informal in dress. But they provide outstanding opportunities for evangelism and spiritual growth. This is a Lutheran service at Victory Chapel, Camp Victory, Iraq.



When children leave home for college, careers, and marriage, anxiety often accompanies joy. But you and your child still belong to God and to one another.

The Last Graduation



by Rodney Rathmann

In a poignant scene from the 1941 Oscar-winning movie “How Green Was My Valley,” the father of a Welsh mining family bends his head over the family Bible. His wife sits nearby, her eyes closed as she listens to him read. The couple’s grown sons, unable to find work in their economically struggling community, are preparing to leave home for the new world—perhaps forever. As they walk quietly from the house, the boys hear the calm voice of their father reading Psalm 23, “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. . . .”

Illustrations by R.J. Shay



Spring finds many young people preparing to leave home in their own version of venturing from the old world into the new. High-school graduates are preparing to go off to college, find full-time jobs, or join the military. Grown children are starting careers, getting married, or both.

My wife and I recently watched our two sons leave home for college and careers. Both married shortly after college. Allow me to offer some thoughts and reflections from our parenting experiences during these times of transition.

Modern Blessings

Nowhere is beyond the reach of God's loving hand, as Psalm 33 reminds us: "From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place He watches all who live on earth—he who forms the hearts of all who considers everything they do" (vv. 13–15).

When our children leave home, the adjustment can be difficult. But the distances that separate us are insignificant to God. His blessings of modern communication technology help to lessen the difficulties of the distance for us as well.

Preparation For Separation

Parents and child may worry that his or her leaving home will be traumatic. Talking about it and anticipating happy future events and outcomes will help lessen the anxiety of change.

When I took our oldest son to the football camp that would begin his freshmen year at college, I wanted to stay for a while after helping him move into his dorm room and meet some of the other students and their parents. But my son said, "Dad, I think it's about time you get on the road."

I took the hint and left for home. He was making things easy for me, and I was grateful for such an ordinary, comfortable parting. I drove away already anticipating his first visit home, confident that God, who gave him to us 17 years before, would keep him under His watchful eye.

Connected in Prayer

My wife's aunt Irene recalls that after she moved hundreds of miles away from her family, she would sometimes look up at the night sky thinking about those at home who could well be, at that very moment, looking up at the same heavenly lights. As God's people joined together through faith in Christ Jesus, we already enjoy a connection unbreakable by time and space.

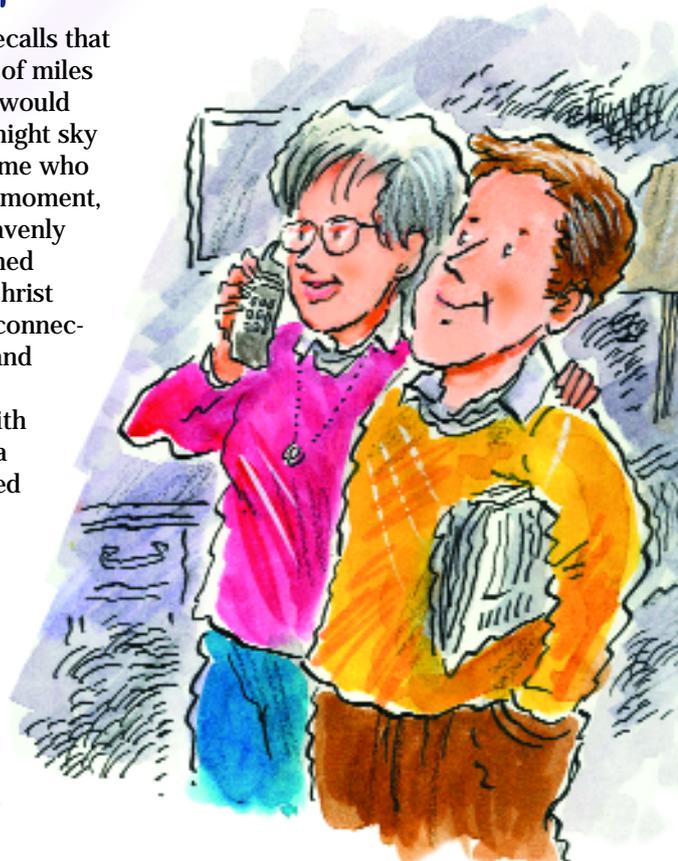
Prayer connects us with God. But it also provides a way for us to stay connected with our children's day-to-day activities through Him. When we ask our children, "What do you have for me to pray about?" we let them know they are in our thoughts and prayers. We remind them that we are regularly sending peti-

tions heavenward on their behalf, confident that God hears and answers us for Jesus' sake.

Change Offers Opportunity

Although parents and children share common experiences, each is on a journey of his own. When children leave home, parents realize greater freedom as well as their children. They can find their own new adventures with more time for involvement in church, community, and personal growth opportunities, like that couples' Bible class they had thought about joining, or that college course they had always wanted to take.

Talking about these new experiences with children who have left home can give them a sense of pride in their parents. Knowing their parents are doing new things may also help ease concerns they have about abandoning their parents by moving away from home.



Continuing Traditions

All families have traditions that bind them together. Some parents have found ways to adapt family traditions to accommodate adult children that celebrate and reinforce the family identity. One family's adult children look forward to returning to their parents' home every Easter to take part in a childhood tradition. After

worshipping together to celebrate our Savior's resurrection victory and sharing a meal together, they take part in an Easter egg hunt. They hide and find the same plastic eggs they hunted for as children.



Moving Onward

OK, so your family isn't perfect. No family is. Even the "holy family" could claim only one member without sin. When adult children get together and relive their childhood experiences, their parents are reminded also of failings—their own and their children's. But through Christ Jesus we have the opportunity to leave the past behind and begin anew as we give and receive forgiveness. Forgiveness can be powerful in helping parents as well as adult children relate to one another as both move into new stages of life and reinvent themselves as a family.

Finding Their Own Way

When my wife and I sat with one of our sons and his fiancée to plan their wedding, we were bursting with happiness and enthusiasm over the new life they would soon share. I was anxious to give all manner of advice, both practical and theoretical. But I soon realized that the experiences my wife and I had weren't going to be theirs. They were going to have to find their own way and make sense of the world, just as we did and still do.

As one generation retreats and another advances, the realities of human sin and God's grace remain the same. But the dynamics of the world in which each new generation builds a life are unique. Our children can learn from our perspective, but we also have much to learn from theirs.

Finding Comfort

Through Baptism, our Good Shepherd welcomes children into His family. "He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart" (Is. 40:11). In Baptism, God placed a powerful claim on us and on our children. His promises to forgive, save, and never leave are especially comforting and reassuring during times of change.

Trusting our Savior's promises, we can send our children out into the world, confident that His love and concern for them exceeds our own. He remains the Good Shepherd who gave His life for us. He will go with us through both the green pasture and valleys of family life.

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Islam keeping the facts straight

American Christians ought to be more informed about the real nature of Islam and the Koran.

by Alvin Schmidt

Since September 11, 2001, the mass media have presented many views of Islam and its adherents. But they have failed to report some well-established facts that the American public needs to know in order to gain a better, more accurate understanding of Islam. Often the media's failure has been the result of reporters not doing their homework. Sometimes it is because they do not want to say anything that could be deemed "politically incorrect."

Lets look at a couple of important facts about Islam that most Americans, including us Christians, have not been told. Not knowing these facts often results in not being able to discern fabricated propaganda regarding Islam. This makes it easier for its zealous promoters to deceive us.

Doctrine of abrogation

When two or more passages in the Koran are in conflict or contradict each other, the more recent passage(s) Muhammad reportedly received from Allah via the angel Gabriel usually abrogates (repeals) the earlier passage(s) in question. The Koran states, "Whatever communications We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring one better than it or like it. Do you not know that Allah has power over all things?" (Sura 2:106).

When given passages were abrogated, they continued to be part of the Koran. Because abrogated verses are never deleted and because the public does not know about the doctrine of abrogation, or which verses have been abrogated, Muslim propagandists can (and do) easily deceive the non-Muslim public by citing certain abrogated verses as though they were still valid, thus falsely presenting Islam in a positive light.

For instance, since 9/11, some Muslims have placed ads in American newspapers saying that Islam is tolerant of all religions by citing the following passage from the Koran: "There is no compulsion in religion" (Sura 2:256). But this verse, spoken by Muhammad before he left Mecca for Medina in 622, has been abrogated by more recent passages.

Although there are numerous verses that abrogate the "no compulsion in religion" passage, I'll cite only two: "Fight those who do not believe in Allah, nor in the latter day, nor do they prohibit what Allah and His apostle have prohibited, nor follow the religion of truth" (Sura 9:29). "I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve, therefore strike off their heads and strike off every fingertip of them" (Sura 8:12).

These verses and others like them, called the "sword verses," abrogate those that speak of peace or

tolerance. The tolerance passages were uttered by Muhammad in Mecca when his followers were few in number, and he was still trying to gain converts by peaceful means of persuasion. But after his flight to Medina, he changed his tactics.; he employed the sword to gain converts. He once said, "I, therefore, the last of the prophets am sent with the sword!"

Thus, when promoters of Islam cite passages from the Koran to show Islam as a religion of peace, we must not let ourselves be deceived by verses that have been abrogated. In fact, when Muslims cite certain passages in newspaper ads or on television, we would be wise to ask, "Have these verses been abrogated?"

As already noted, the doctrine of abrogation is an orthodox teaching of the Koran and is not an anti-Islamic concept. Most encyclopedias on Islam, usually written by Muslim scholars, contain reliable information on this doctrine.

Out of context

Another practice often employed by defenders and promoters of Islam in their efforts to put a positive spin on their religion is to quote a passage out of context. In trying to convince the public that Islam is a religion of peace, they often cite the following verse: "Whoever killed a person it is as if he killed all mankind, and whoever saved a life it is as if he saved all mankind" (Sura 5:32). This verse appeared as part of an almost full-page ad in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* on July 20, 2005, under the title "Not In The Name Of Islam."

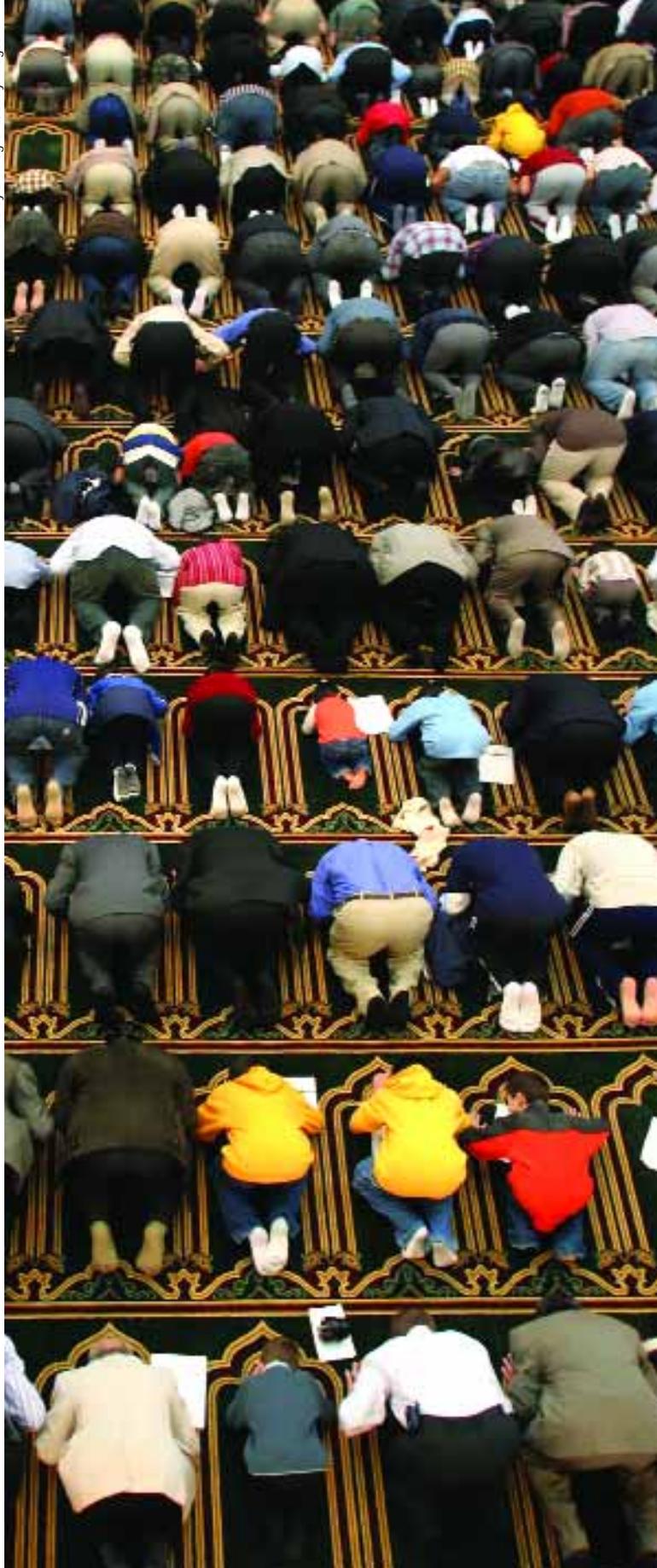
Quoting Sura 5:32 was an attempt to get people to conclude that its words apply to Muslims who engage in violent acts. But that would be a false conclusion, for the ad's quotation hides two deceptions. One, it was taken from the middle of the verse; thus it should have been printed with ellipses, both at the beginning and at the end of the quotation to indicate that there was more to the passage than what was quoted. Two, it ignored the context of the immediately preceding verses, together with the first part of Sura 5:32, which talk about Cain having murdered his brother Abel.

The complete passage reads, "On this account [Cain's crime], we decreed to the Children of Israel that if anyone kills a person—*unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land*—it is as if he kills all mankind, while if any saves a life it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind" (emphasis added).

Regarding this verse, Ibn Warraq, a former Muslim, correctly noted, "The supposedly noble sentiments are in fact a warning to Jews. 'Behave or else' is the message. Far from abjuring violence, these verses aggressively point out that anyone opposing the prophet will be killed, crucified, mutilated, and banished!"

So, when this verse is cited out of context, Christians and other non-Muslims must not let them-

Photo by Bill Pugliano/Getty Images



Muslims pray at the Islamic Center of America in Dearborn, Mich. The Dearborn area is the most populous Muslim center in the United States.

selves be deceived into thinking that its words prohibit Muslims from committing violence.

It is also important to note that the above ad's omitted words—"unless in retribution for ... spreading corruption in the land"—permit Muslims to engage in violence against non-Muslims, as in recent violent responses to cartoons of Muhammad.

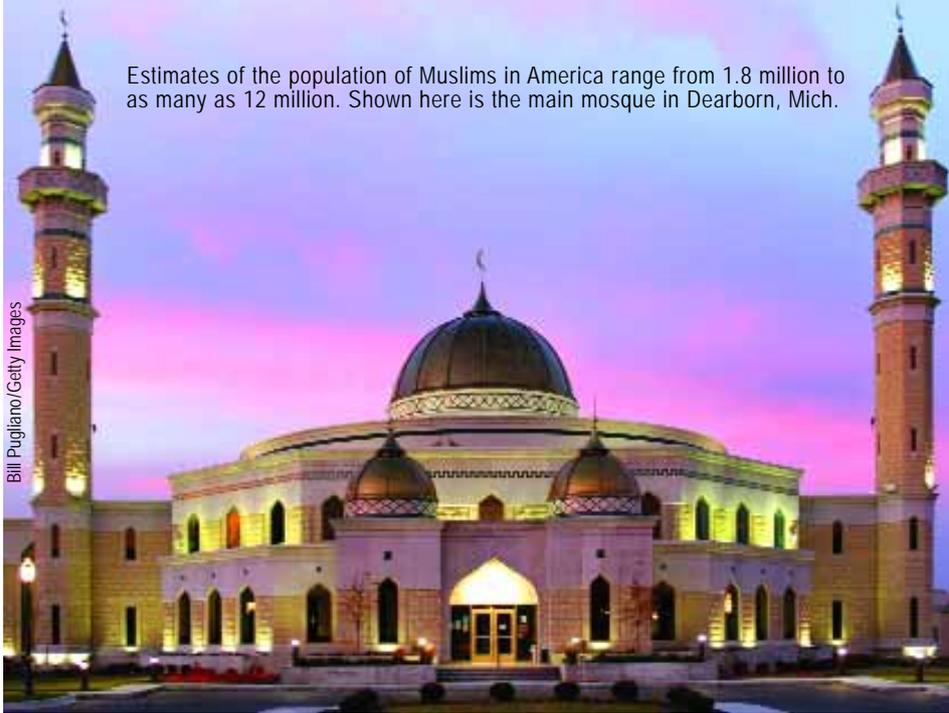
American Muslim population

In recent years, many news media have reported inflated population figures for American Muslims, ranging from 7 to 12 million. The census data of the United States do not include questions about religious affiliation, but independent research groups study the population size of American religious denominations. In 2001, the American Religious Identification Survey of City University of New York reported 1.8 million Muslims in the United States. Also in 2001, the National Opinion Research Center (University of Chicago) reported 1.9 million Muslims, and the American Jewish Committee reported 2.8 million American Muslims—about 1 percent of the country's population.

These Muslim population figures are sometimes decried by pro-Muslim groups for political reasons; they argue that the Muslim population is much higher. But the three scientific surveys just cited, as well as others, do not support the argument that there are 7 million or more Muslims in America.

Pollster James Zogby, an Arab-American, thinks the U.S. census of 1.25 million Arab-Americans in 2000 is too low because many Arab-American have language

Estimates of the population of Muslims in America range from 1.8 million to as many as 12 million. Shown here is the main mosque in Dearborn, Mich.



Bill Pugliano/Getty Images

difficulties, distrust the government, or are confused regarding racial or ethnic questions when filling out census forms. His research gives the estimate of 3.5 million Arab-Americans.

You might assume most Arab-Americans are Muslim. Interestingly though, according to Zogby 77 percent are Christians, and only 23 percent are Muslims. Of the Christian 77 percent, 42 percent are Roman Catholics, 23 percent are Eastern Orthodox, and 12 percent are Protestants.

The American media have largely ignored this fact. As a result, Americans tend to believe that all or most American Arabs are Muslims. But they are not.

It's also interesting to note that the University of Michigan Dearborn Center for Arab-American Studies recently found that even in Dearborn, Mich., 58 percent of the Arabian descendants are Christians and 42 percent are Muslims.

Most Muslims in the United States are not of Arabic background. Some studies estimate that the American Muslim population is 30 to 42 percent black, and about 30 percent are from South-Asian and Southeast-Asian countries such as Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Indochina, Philippines, and Indonesia. Still others are of Iranian and Turkish origin.

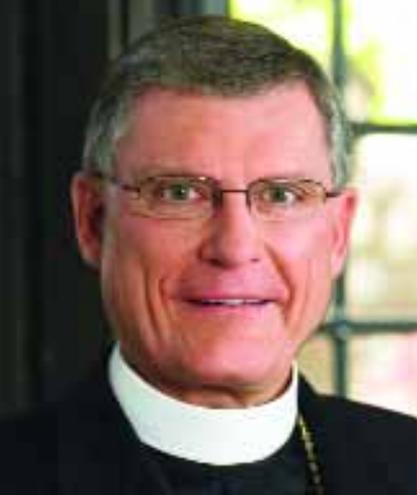
Americans—and especially we Christians—ought to be aware of such demographics as these. But we must be even more informed about the real nature of Islam and its holy book, the Koran, that confronts many of Christianity's noble contributions to the West.

Dr. Alvin J. Schmidt is the author of *The Great Divide: The Failure of Islam and the Triumph of the West*. His e-mail is schmidt@ic.edu

A young girl watches the start of the annual Muslim Foundation of America Parade in New York City. Most Muslims in the United States are not of Arabic background.



Spencer Platt/Getty Images



Our New Shepherds

Convention delegates

The Synod's 35 districts are meeting in convention this year. Some already have met, but most will meet next month. The district convention often is where voting delegates for the 2007 Synod convention will be chosen. Permit me, then, to offer this counsel to those involved in the delegate-selection process:

It is very important that delegates—one pastor and one layman or laywoman from each electoral circuit—be proven leaders, recognized within their own congregations and circuits as faithful, fair-minded, objective, and not characterized by a “party spirit.” They should be dedicated and committed to the Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Constitution, Bylaws, and resolutions of the Synod. They should also be firmly and energetically committed to the mission of our Synod.

May our Lord richly bless your district convention as it considers the needs of congregations, the district's opportunities and challenges, and matters of importance in the national Synod!

— G.B.K.

The spring 1970 call service at Concordia Theological Seminary, then in Springfield, Ill., is vivid in my memory. My parents and my dear wife, Terry, who was holding our newborn baby, anxiously waited with me to learn where my first assignment as a pastor would take us.

When it was my turn, the announcement came: Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Biloxi, Mississippi. Terry said later that Mom leaned over and whispered, “Isn't that where all the hurricanes hit?”

It's hard to explain how exciting the annual spring call services at our Synod's two seminaries are for those about to receive their first calls into the ministry and for their sometimes-anxious wives and families as they prepare to pull up stakes and go wherever they are sent.

This year's seminary call services took place last month. Between academic year-end seminary activities and Good Shepherd Sunday (May 7), it's a good time for the emphasis *The Lutheran Witness* is giving this month to shepherds and the Shepherd.

Much prayer and preparation preceded these services. Most candidates and their families have invested four post-baccalaureate years in seminary education. Faculties have worked to educate and form these students to be pastors. Congregations have prayed for God's blessing as they entrusted to the Synod, through the Council of Presidents (COP), responsibility for assigning a new graduate to a call on their behalf. Acting as the Board of Assignments, the COP carefully and prayerfully made the assignments.

In 1990, the COP adopted a statement, “Commitments of the Shepherd.” In the introduction, it said: “If there is anything that is clear about the office of the ministry, it is that the pastor is called to be a shepherd under the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ (1 Peter 5:2–4). The very fact that Holy Scripture singles out the pastor for special treatment with regard to the conduct of his ministry ... apart from what is normally expected of any Christian underscores this special relationship with and unique responsibility toward the Good Shepherd.”

The responsibility and expectations of the shepherd indeed are great, as is the blessing that a good pastor is to his flock. In a sermon for the installation of a pastor in 1878, Dr. C.F.W. Walther, the Synod's first president, encouraged the congregation:

“The flesh, the world, and the devil will trouble our pastor daily. Oh, therefore, let us all, as many as can pray, daily remember him in heartfelt prayer! If his courage fails, let us speak to him so that he will take heart! If he becomes weak in faith or in any necessary work, let us encourage him! If sorrow overtakes him, let us comfort him! If he stumbles, let us with a gentle spirit help him up! If we see him faithful in the work in God's house, let us hold him all the more dear for his work's sake and consider him worthy of double honor! If at last he goes joyfully ahead of us on the narrow, rough, and steep way to the heavenly Zion, let us joyfully follow him!”

And to that I say, “Amen!”

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

Jerry Kieschnick
John 3:16–17