



The Lutheran **WITNESS**

SEPTEMBER 2004

VOL. 123 NO. 8

'BEYOND IMAGINATION'

LCMS Youth Gather in Orlando

*Also: God's Grace and
the Green River Killer*



The Lutheran WITNESS

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

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Getty Images



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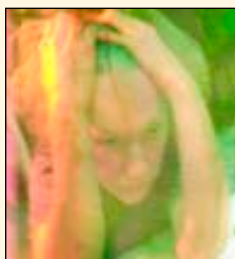
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Alcoholism and hope

I write this letter to let others know that families who are struggling with the disease of alcoholism need to hear these kinds of stories. ...

Name withheld

I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR THE "FAMILY Counselor" about alcoholism (April '04). Because I have lived for more than 25 years with someone (my husband) who suffers from this disease, the article hit home about so many things.

The description in the article put it so well, that a person is "in recovery—there is no 'cure' for alcoholism. ..." By God's grace in Jesus, my family and I were led to understand that and to find help in Alcoholics Anonymous and in Al-Anon. We learned that alcoholism is a disease that affects the whole family and that most alcoholics do not start out to be alcoholics. We also learned what it means when the alcoholic "crosses the invisible line" and loses the perspective of their relationship with family and God.

It's not that they don't love their family, they do. It's just that that drink of alcohol comes first.

It was difficult to know what to pray for. We may feel at times that God has forsaken us. At first, we would pray "about him"—that is, we would ask God to make him quit drinking. Later we learned that it was better to pray "for him" and put him into God's caring hands.

Al-Anon taught me how to "let go" and to work on myself. It was hard for me, as the wife, to deal with my obsession—that it was my job to make sure that he quit drinking. That's all I could think about! I couldn't sleep nights. I kept asking Him, "What am I supposed to do?" I had my faith in God, but He wasn't doing what I thought He should be doing.

I reread the story of Job and

learned patience. I found strength in Rom. 8:38: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose." I found hope in Phil. 4:6: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

Through these passages and by God's grace, I realized that God made the night for sleeping and that He would take care of the rest. In the mornings when I woke, I always had to deal with my anger about this situation, but God in His grace helped me to understand that I could be thankful for another day and to rejoice in that day.

Obviously, my faith in God was the anchor I needed during these trying times.

I write this letter to let others know that families who are struggling with the disease of alcoholism need to hear these kinds of stories and that sharing them with others offers the hope and strength that there is another way to live, relying on a faith that teaches us that God forgives the alcoholic. I hope that in some way by sharing this letter, I can help others find peace and serenity—but most of all to say, "There is hope."

Name withheld

We are publishing this letter at the suggestion of Dr. Leslie Fyans, who wrote the "Family Counselor" for April. As we noted in the May issue, Dr. William Knippa was identified in error as the author for April.—Ed.

THE INDIVIDUAL WHO ASKED THE question for the April "Family Counselor" indicates that he or she is a recovering alcoholic, still struggling with periods of intense craving for a drink, asking for help. While I do not disagree with the answer, it is my opinion that it has overlooked a very significant support available to the questioner, namely, the Alcoholics Anonymous fellowship.

The preamble to Alcoholics Anonymous' "big book" states: "Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other that they may solve their common problems and help others to recover from alcoholism. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety."

AA also strongly encourages the new member of AA to select a "sponsor," someone who volunteers to be available to his "pigeon" (the person being sponsored) at any hour of the day. If the alcoholic can taste the next drink, if the anxiety is so great he goes into the sweats, he calls the sponsor, who talks that person through that craving at that time. There is an empathy there known only to the recovering alcoholic.

Recovery is a process. After the alcoholic experiences not only a physical but also a spiritual recovery, he/she will again be open to the Gospel and will again be able to acknowledge Jesus Christ as his/her "Power greater than him/herself." AA is a great resource for the alcoholic. Let's not overlook it!

*Rev. Ed Eggert
Pewaukee, Wis.*

Pastor Eggert, now retired, formerly served as a chaplain in drug treatment centers. He also was a member of a synodical committee that dealt with alcohol and drug-abuse issues.—Ed.

How much per cow?

MY HUSBAND AND I GOT ALL EXCITED AFTER reading your article titled “Cows and Effect” (June/July '04) and planned to ask our Bible class to participate and to donate immediately. I phoned for more particulars. Then I was informed of an error in the article. One cow costs more than \$100, but no one could answer my questions. We still think it is a wonderful idea, but how is it managed?

*Marilou Guelker
Delano, Calif.*

According to LCMS World Relief and Human Care, the cost to purchase one cow for a Lutheran pastor in Kenya—the topic of the article—is \$300. We apologize for the error. To contribute, make your check payable to LCMS World Relief/Human Care, write “Cows for Kenya” on the memo line, and mail the check to LCMS World Relief, Human Care, P.O. Box 66861, St. Louis, MO 63166-9810. For more information, contact Rev. Jerry Rux at (800) 248-1930, Ext. 1387; Jerry.Rux@lcms.org.

Church and state

I FEEL COMPELLED TO OPPOSE THE IDEA that the separation of church and state is “nonsense,” as Dr. Richard C. Heckmann indicates in his letter (“Letters,” May '04). That seems to me to be a venturesome notion at best. It is one that goes against our experience in this country. The church has thrived under this wise arrangement.

The separation of church and state, embedded in the First Article of the Bill of Rights, is the very protection Dr. Heckmann would want in case he is asked to do something against his conscience. I have always felt that keeping the church and state separate as much as possible is one of our most important freedoms, to be zealously guarded by the church.

*Rev. Earl C. Kettler
Chaplain, USA Ret.
Dayton, Ohio*



Gary Ridgway

GOD'S GRACE AND THE GREEN RIVER KILLER

Dave Reichert pursued the country's most notorious serial killer for two decades. Then, he did something few law-enforcement officers would care to do: He shared with the murderer a message of forgiveness.

by Paula Schlueter Ross

King County Sheriff Dave Reichert sat across the table from a man he has called “pure evil”—a man who killed just for the pleasure it gave him.

It was just the two of them—Reichert and Gary Ridgway, the most prolific serial killer in U.S. history. Over a 20-year span, Ridgway, the so-called “Green River killer,” murdered dozens of women, many of them teenagers as young as 15.

His method was usually the same: cruise the Seattle streets for a teenage prostitute, or maybe a run-away looking to make a few bucks—the younger, the better—get her in the car, take her to his house, pay her, have sex with her, strangle her, take back the money, dump the body.

Some victims begged for their lives, he said, but it made no difference. They—daughters, sisters, mothers—were all “just garbage,” he told investigators, and his goal was to kill as many as he could.

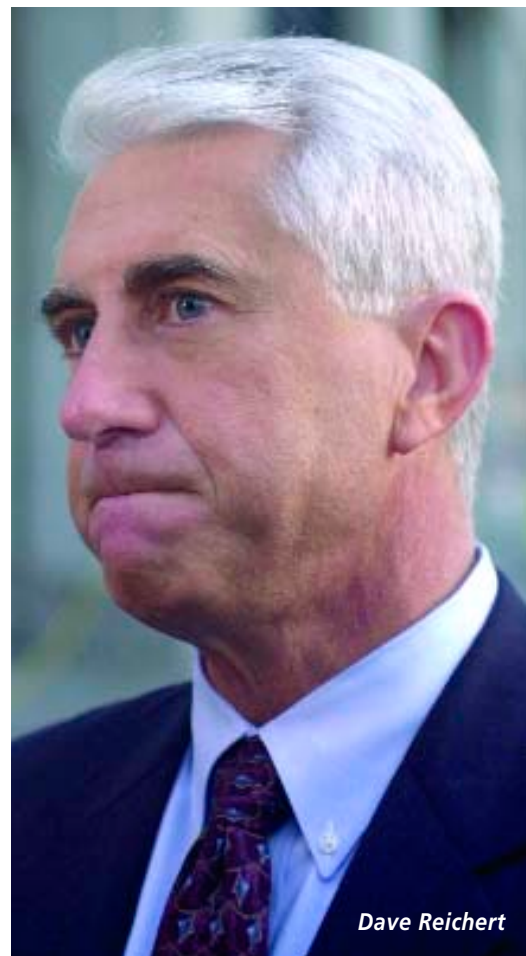
Now Reichert, sheriff of King County where Seattle is located, sat

face to face with this monster.

“I really believed that I was talking to the devil himself,” said Reichert, who, as the lead investigator in the case, had seen the decomposing bodies of Ridgway’s victims—48 in all (although Ridgway claims more than 70 victims and Reichert believes the real total could be closer to 100).

The cop looked into the killer’s eyes, eyes he described as barren and almost sub-human—“two dark holes that go into a deep, dark pit”—and steeled himself for the message he had come to deliver: *Jesus Christ died for your sins, Gary Ridgway, and He will forgive you if you are truly sorry for what you have done.*

That meeting with Ridgway, on Dec. 31, 2003, had not been an easy step for Reichert to take. But the sheriff saw it as a necessary one, he said. One that provided more “closure” to the case than the satisfaction of seeing Ridgway in prison for life. (Ridgway’s life was spared in exchange for months of interviews in which he provided details on the murders and led investigators to bodies.)



Dave Reichert



Sheriff Dave Reichert talks to the media in March 2002. In the background are photos of Gary Ridgway's victims.

Always a 'peacemaker'

Ever since he was a kid, growing up in a tough neighborhood as the oldest of seven children, Reichert's mottos have been "there's always a solution" and "never give up."

He is, he says, "the kind of person who takes it like a challenge if somebody tells me, 'you can't fix that' or 'there's no solution.'" He was the kid on the block who wasn't afraid to stand up for the underdog—or to intervene when the situation looked hopeless.

Once, when his mother had a disagreement with a friend in the neighborhood, Reichert, then about 12, knocked on the neighbor's door and asked her to make up with his mom. Even though the tactic didn't work—both women chastised him for meddling—he says he always saw himself "as kind of a peacemaker."

With matinee-idol good looks and a strapping, six-foot frame, the silver-haired Reichert cuts an imposing figure, especially in uniform. Now 53, he's been interviewed by numerous reporters about the Green River case, including Dan Rather on television's "60 Minutes II." He's currently running for a seat in the U.S. House of

Representatives, in Washington's 8th Congressional District.

He's at once gentle and stern, a no-nonsense type of guy whose easy smile shows off trademark dimples. He's an elder for his congregation, Lutheran Church of the Cross in Kent, mentors a teenage member, and attends Sunday-morning Bible class.

"He's certainly sincere and committed to caring for people," said his pastor, Rev. Dino Pacilli.

The forgiveness question

On Aug. 12, 1982, a 20-year odyssey began for Reichert when he was called to the Green River in Kent, Wash., where the body of 23-year-old Debra Lynn Bonner was pulled from the murky water.

As years of investigation ticked by, more bodies were found and the Green River killer remained at large. But Reichert remained "100 percent certain" that the case would be solved.

Although Gary Ridgway had been questioned as a suspect as early as 1983—a year after the first bodies were discovered—hard evidence eluded investigators



Detectives Fae Brooks, Rick Gies and Dave Reichert search for evidence at the site north of Sea-Tac Airport where the remains of 17-year-old Shawnda Leea Summers were found in August 1983.

until 2001, when improved DNA testing methods linked Ridgway to the murders and he was arrested.

The arrest, and Ridgway's confession a year later, were what Reichert had been praying for his "whole career," he said.

At that time, it never occurred to the sheriff that someone like Gary Ridgway would have any chance of seeing heaven. If anyone deserved the eternal fires of hell, he thought, it had to be this calculating killer who showed no remorse for his crimes.

But then Reichert's pastor decided to use the murderer as an example in a Bible study. The focus was on Psalm 32, which starts out, "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered," and the class was discussing "for whom did Christ die?"

"I said, 'Is there forgiveness for Gary Ridgway?,'" recalled Pacilli, "and there were lots of surprising answers."

As humans, Pacilli said, we want people like Ridgway to pay for their crimes. After all, the horror of what he did is much worse than anything we would ever do, we say.

"But the minute we point our finger, we realize we

should pay, too," Pacilli said. "Because *all* sin separates us from God, and we are *all* guilty."

By His life and death, "Jesus paid for every one of the murders Ridgway committed," as well as all of our sins, explained Pacilli. "Christ died for all. He died for Hitler. He died for Genghis Khan. He died for me. And all have fallen short. We're *all* in desperate need of His forgiveness."

God's law says the sinner must be punished; His Gospel says the punishment already has been paid. "Ultimately, all you can do is leave [Ridgway] in God's hands. ... It's between him and God," Pacilli said.

Even though the pastor had talked to the sheriff about his Bible-study topic beforehand, Reichert admitted it was, at first, hard for him to conceive of forgiveness for Ridgway.

"It was hard because we're human, and I saw what he did," he said. He'll never erase the vision, he said, of informing victims' families, and watching as heartbroken parents buckled to their knees in horror.

But Pacilli's Bible class got the sheriff to thinking that he hadn't done enough, as a Christian, in his conversations with Ridgway. All the interviews had been one-

‘Chasing the Devil’

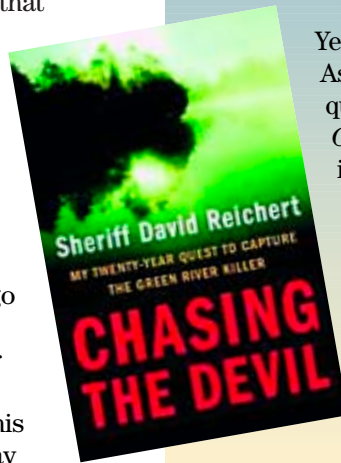
sided: extracting information from the killer that might prove useful to investigators. No one had bothered to relay information to Ridgway that might provide him with eternal salvation.

An answer to prayer

It was now clear to Reichert that, even though the killer had been convicted and sentenced to life in prison, someone had to go back and share God’s Word with him. So he contacted Ridgway’s attorneys and asked for one more interview with the prisoner.

Dressed casually in blue jeans instead of his uniform, Reichert went to make sure Ridgway understood forgiveness in Jesus Christ. It was just the two of them, face to face, and he told the killer, “I’m here because I want to make sure you understand what it means to be Christian. And I want to make sure you understand, when you say you’ve been forgiven, what that really means.”

The sheriff had brought a Lutheran handout on Law and Gospel, and proceeded to explain the concept to Ridgway. At one point, Reichert told him, “You really have to be sorry for what you’ve done. ... You really have to feel remorse. You took the lives of 48 people.”



Dave Reichert, honored as “Sheriff of the Year” in June by the National Sheriffs Association, has written about his 20-year quest to capture the Green River killer in *Chasing the Devil*, a book that was released in late July by Little, Brown and Co.

Profits from sales of the book will go to the Pediatric Interim Care Center, a Kent, Wash.-based charity that provides care for drug-exposed infants.

Reichert and his staff also have spoken with producers of an ABC miniseries about the Green River killer.

And he reminded Ridgway, who was known to read the Bible from time to time, of God’s commandment, “Thou shall not kill.”

“I wanted to make sure that I did what I needed to do as a Christian,” said Reichert, a lifelong Lutheran. “I told him, ‘Look, I don’t like what you did, but my faith tells me that I don’t want anybody to go to hell.’ And then I leaned across the table and I said, ‘I don’t even want *you* to go to hell. And neither does Jesus.’”

Divers recover Debra Lynn Bonner’s body from the Green River on Aug. 12, 1982. Dave Reichert, then a King County police detective, watches from shore, on right, in light-colored pants.





Green River killer Gary Ridgway is led into the courtroom April 15, 2002, when prosecutors announced they would seek the death penalty in his trial. In exchange for months of interviews with investigators, Ridgway's life was spared.

Some of Dave Reichert's interviews with Green River killer Gary Ridgway were videotaped. To spare his life, Ridgway spent months talking to investigators about his crimes, and leading them to several victims' bodies.



Dave Reichert talks with his pastor, Rev. Dino Pacilli, in the sheriff's office in Seattle. Pacilli is pastor of Lutheran Church of the Cross in Kent, Wash.



The sheriff was shocked, he said, when the cold-hearted killer responded by crying. Tears were “just pouring down his cheek” and he could not speak, Reichert recalled.

Then Ridgway reached into his jail coveralls pocket and pulled out a piece of paper. “This is a prayer that I’ve been saying every day,” he said, and he handed it to the lawman. In the prayer, Ridgway admitted he was a sinner and asked God to forgive his sins and save him from eternal damnation, praying in Jesus’ name.

“I looked at that prayer and I said, ‘You know what? That’s the right prayer to be praying,’” said Reichert, and he encouraged Ridgway to call him if he ever needed to talk. That was eight months ago, at this writing, and the sheriff hasn’t heard from Ridgway since.

But he knows he made an impact. One of Ridgway’s lawyers, who visited the prisoner a few hours after Reichert, said she could not believe the change in Ridgway. He was amazed, she said, “that the sheriff himself took the time to come down here—not to interrogate me, not to interview me, but to make sure that I was going to heaven,” said Reichert, recalling the incident.

“I feel like he got the Law and the Gospel, and now it’s up to the Holy Spirit,” he said.

Said Pacilli: “We don’t deserve God’s grace. Neither does Gary Ridgway. But God’s grace is for all. Christ paid for the sins of all. And if that forgiveness doesn’t include Gary Ridgway, it doesn’t include us.”

Will Ridgway be forgiven? “Forgiveness is only received through faith in Christ, and only God knows Ridgway’s heart,” Pacilli said. Fortunately, God isn’t as unforgiving as we humans can be, he said: “God wants everyone to come to a knowledge of the truth, and be saved.”



King County Sheriff Dave Reichert, left, speaks to former sheriff Vern Thomas, Nov. 6, 2003, in Seattle after Gary Ridgway pleaded guilty to being the notorious Green River serial killer, admitting to killing 48 women. Thomas was the sheriff heading the department when the murders first surfaced in the early 1980s; Reichert was then the lead detective.

I told him, ‘Look, I don’t like what you did, but my faith tells me that I don’t want anybody to go to hell.’ And then I leaned across the table and I said, ‘I don’t even want you to go to hell. And neither does Jesus.’”



Sheriff Dave Reichert talks with his pastor, Rev. Dino Pacilli, near a Seattle park where homeless people often sleep (some are shown in background). Reichert is trying to launch a program that would pair homeless people with area churches to get them the help they need.

“God’s love is great enough, even for this serial murderer,” Pacilli said. But the killer “needed to hear the [Gospel] message.”

The pastor recalled leading his congregation in prayer for Ridgway months earlier, asking God to “send someone who will get through to this man and turn his eyes to You before it’s too late.”

Dave Reichert, Pacilli says now, was “the answer to that prayer.”

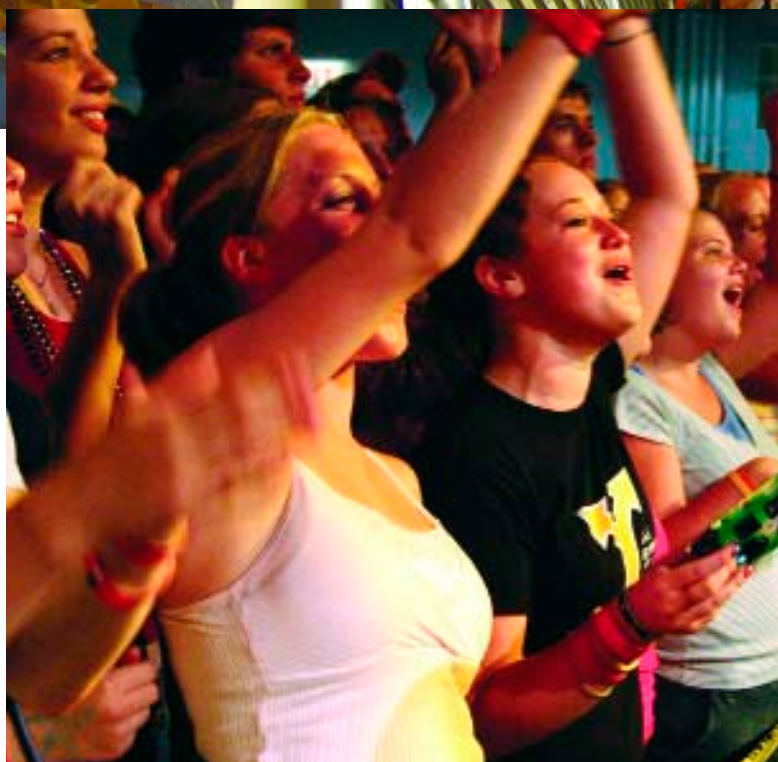


Gary Ridgway cries in King County Superior Courtroom Dec., 18, 2003, as he listens to testimonies from relatives of his victims. Ridgway also cried when Dave Reichert stepped out of his role as detective and sheriff and told Ridgway that he did not want him to go to hell, “and neither does Jesus.”



Paula Schlueter Ross is a contributing editor for The Lutheran Witness.

'BEYOND IMAGINATION'



More than 33,000 Lutherans came together in July for the country's largest single denominational youth event ever. And they did it to grow in their faith, to praise God and to serve others.

by David L. Mahsman

The gathering's contemporary Christian music included a hip-hop performance by "NOVA for Jehovah," right. Dancing in the background are some of the gathering's volunteer "section leaders," young adults who acted as "cheerleaders" to keep the audience engaged at various points before and during mass events.



“Teenagers find fun, faith in a crowd 35,000 strong.”

In fewer than 10 words, that headline in the July 26 edition of the *Orlando Sentinel* gives the gist of it. But even an entire article couldn't begin to report everything that was going on in the Orange County Convention Center from July 24–28.

“Beyond Imagination” was the theme—the reference is to Eph. 3:20–21—as 33,651 youth and adults made the triennial pilgrimage to the National LCMS Youth Gathering. This one was the first in Orlando, Fla., but the ninth synodical youth gathering, and the largest. In fact, it is believed to have been the largest single denominational youth event ever in the United States.

“When we come together for an event like this, we do so first because the Gathering is about God,” writes Rev. Terry Dittmer, director of youth ministry with LCMS District and Congregational Services, in the 128-page Gathering book given to each participant. “We gather in His name to hear His Word, to worship and learn and grow in our knowledge of God and His grace given to us through His Son, Jesus Christ!”

Each morning, all 33,000-plus gathered for Bible study in one cavernous room of the country's second-largest convention center. They poured in again each evening for a “mass event,” a sort of faith-based variety show, on one of the daily themes—Power, Truth, Love, Praise and Live.



Gathering participants study the 128-page gathering book that they received with their backpacks. The book detailed the many gathering activities and services and included such vital information as emergency phone numbers and the location of “lost and found.”

Photo by Lisette Metz Grulke



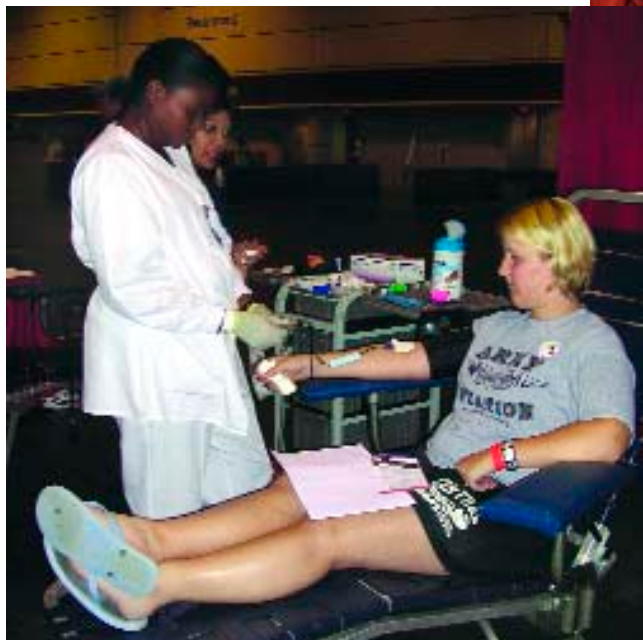
Artist Mike Lewis, known as the “Jesus Painter,” was a regular in the evening mass events. Lewis, who paints large portraits of Jesus in under 20 minutes, has been painting at Christian events since 1998.

Photo by Nathan B. Harrmann

Up to 5,000 participants could attend each of five gathering interest-center “Mega Sites” (there were also smaller “Mini Sites” and even more intimate “Chat Rooms”). Here, “Craig and Jake Live” use stage performance, comedy, video and teaching to explore the presence of God and His intentions for us.

Photo by Nathan B. Harrmann





Top left: Volunteers from the Orlando area sit atop some of the 37,000 orange backpacks that they stuffed with a special-edition gathering Bible and other items for participants in advance of opening day for the event. The packs, provided by Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, were ubiquitous throughout the week in Orlando. Photo by Nathan B. Harrmann

Bottom left: Yellow-shirted CLBs—Community Life Builders—staffed the command center for gathering communications 24 hours a day. The center served both as the event base and the HelpLine. On each participant's wrist band, which served as the entry ticket to all gathering activities, was the HelpLine phone number. Photo by Nathan B. Harrmann

Top right: Youth-gathering participants help the horticulture staff at the Central Florida Zoological Park through one of the servant events offered by the gathering. About 9,000 youth and adults worked at 80 servant-event sites around the Orlando area. Photo by Nathan B. Harrmann

Center right: Youth take turns hammering nails to make window and door headers that will be used in houses built by Habitat for Humanity. Photo by Louise Gebel

Bottom right: Hundreds of pints of blood were collected at the youth gathering's blood drive. Photo by Kelly Warneke

Right: U.S. Army Capt. Matthew Bacon of St. Louis, just back after 15 months in Iraq, gets a standing ovation during the Sunday-morning Bible study. Bacon and Bible-study leader John Nunes talked about "the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6), comparing visible combat and spiritual warfare. Of his thoughts about combat, Bacon said, "If this were your last day, you know the Lord's there with you."

Below: Rev. John Nunes of Chicago, the gathering's Bible-study leader, rehearses before one of the morning sessions with Nikie, a cartoon character who thinks she is real. Nunes and Nikie, who provided a foil for each day's lesson, carried on animated conversations during the Bible studies.



school kits for needy students were assembled by participants, who also donated Bibles, blood and food for the sake of others.

Nearly \$200,000 was donated during and after the worship service for LCMS World Mission's *Ablaze!* initiative to bring the Gospel to 100 million unreached people by 2017, for youth-leadership projects and for work being carried out by the Synod's Florida-Georgia District, the host district for the event.

Plenty of other activities kept participants busy as well. There were mega-sites and mini-sites with featured speakers on topics of interest to youth; "chat rooms," smaller settings to allow for more intimate interaction between youth and church professionals; "Outer Limits," more than half a million square feet of interactive exhibits and activities; recreational opportunities in the "LCMS Zone"; and a variety of concerts and dances.

Asked what message he would send to parents and grandparents of

the youth participants, Dittmer said, "You can be proud of your kids. They're living out their faith."

Dittmer credited the quality of parenting and support for families in LCMS congregations that send youth to the gatherings. This year 2,126 congregations—about a third of all LCMS congregations—were represented.

"And as kids see other kids do positive Christian acts, it spreads," added Gretchen Jameson, associate director for youth ministry—communications. "They had five days of Christian community."

The 2007 youth gathering will be in New Orleans, site of two previous gatherings. Asked when planning would begin, Jameson replied, "Last year."



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

On Tuesday, the night before the event closed, they gathered for worship and Holy Communion.

"The fact that Jesus died for you and me and all the people of the world is beyond imagination," LCMS President Gerald Kieschnick told the young people in his Tuesday-night sermon.

The gathering was about service, too. Some 9,000 of the participants took part in Servant Events at more than 80 sites in the Orlando area. Others made enough window and door frames for 50 Habitat for Humanity houses. More than 8,500

The Small, Weak and Powerless

by Robert E. Smith

Many breakthroughs from medical science are great blessings from God. Most of the ancient plagues have been eliminated. Relatively few children in our country die in infancy and fewer mothers die in childbirth. In recent years, we've made progress even against cancer, strokes and heart disease.

But with these blessings have come temptations—to use our knowledge to abort or to use live human embryos for medical experiments, for example, or to end the lives of those who live in severe pain. The Bible speaks to such temptations, however.

According to the following passages, why is human life special?

Gen. 1:26–28, 31 _____

Gen. 2:7 _____

Gen. 2:22–25 _____

Psalm 8 _____

1 Cor. 6:19–20 _____

Now, in your own words, summarize what makes human beings different from the rest of creation.

According to the following passages, how does God regard a fetus?

Ps. 22:6–10 _____

Ps. 51:5 _____

Ps. 71:5–8 _____

Ps. 139:11–17 _____

Is. 46:3–4 _____

Is. 49:1–6 _____

Jer. 1:5 _____

Matt. 1:18–25 _____

Luke 1:39–45 _____

Rom. 9:10–13 _____

Gal. 1:15 _____

In these passages, what does God say about those who are outcast or helpless?

Ex. 22:22–24 _____

Deut. 10:17–22 _____

Deut. 27:19 _____

Ps. 10:12–18 _____

Ps. 27:9–10 _____

Ps. 68:4–6 _____

Is. 49:15–16 _____



Matt. 8:1–8 _____

Luke 4:18–21 _____

1 Cor. 1:27–29 _____

God is the creator of all life. He cherishes every person, even the powerless. He sees, knows and loves each of us from the very start—even in our mother's womb. He cares for those for whom society has no regard.

God cares even for the weakest and smallest person, so we also love them, defend them and care for them—speaking out in their defense in a culture that so often is more intent on using them than caring for them.



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A Christian Education

Training up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

Those are words I remember hearing often as a child at St. Matthew Lutheran School in Houston, after I first learned them at home from my godly parents, Martin and Elda Kieschnick. They have been etched in my memory since those days of years gone by.

Often, I think of the tens of thousands of children and young people who receive the Christian training offered by 2,500 school ministries operated by LCMS congregations, along with 100 high schools, 10 colleges and universities and two seminaries of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. What a blessing these ministries of Christian education are to our entire church body and to the people in the communities served by the 6,150 congregations of our Synod!

*Learning of God's eternal
love and discovering how
His will is to be applied in the
rapidly changing world in which we
live are formidable challenges.*

In the life of every human being of any age, Christian education is very important. Learning of God's eternal love and discovering how His will is to be applied in the rapidly changing world in which we live are formidable challenges. Christian parents face those challenges at home. Christian leaders face them in the church. Christian education in both the home and the church does not occur automatically. It requires intentionality, commitment and faithfulness.

All LCMS congregations, both those that sponsor Christian day schools and those that do not enjoy that privilege, are involved in the Christian-education endeavor. Adult Bible studies, junior and adult confirmation classes, vacation Bible schools, midweek schools, Sunday schools and Bible classes are some such ministries that come to mind.

Your Synod, its members and its leaders desire to provide valuable assistance in this regard. In fact, significant expenditures of time and money are devoted to the educational enterprise in the LCMS. Your congregation is privileged to have available to it the services of numerous professional church workers, educated in many institutions of higher learning, including the educational institutions of the LCMS. Such preparation requires considerable personal sacrifice and synodical support and is blessed by family encouragement and congregational affirmation.

The individuals who serve as your pastor, teachers, director of Christian education, director of Christian outreach, director of parish music, deaconess, parish assistant and/or certified lay minister have made many personal sacrifices and have expended precious personal resources preparing for service and leadership in your congregation. In most cases, they also have received scholarship assistance from the educational institutions they attended and other financial aid from our Synod's budget.

These workers and those who provide such assistance are blessings from the generous hand of our gracious heavenly Father. Many



more workers are needed! Much more assistance is required!

I know you join me in prayer that the Lord will provide laborers for His harvest (Matt. 9:38). I trust you will also join me in supporting the synodical educational institution of your choice with your generous and cheerfully given gifts (2 Cor. 9:7). Contact the Concordia University System office at (800) 248-1930, Ext. 1250, for additional information on how such gifts might be given.

God's Word, revealed to us in Holy Scripture, is a precious gift that God has given to His Church. I encourage each person and every congregation in our Synod to a renewed resolve and to a rededication of resources to the privilege and challenge of sharing that Word within our churches and the communities they serve.

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

Jerry Kieschnick

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

John 3:16–17

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