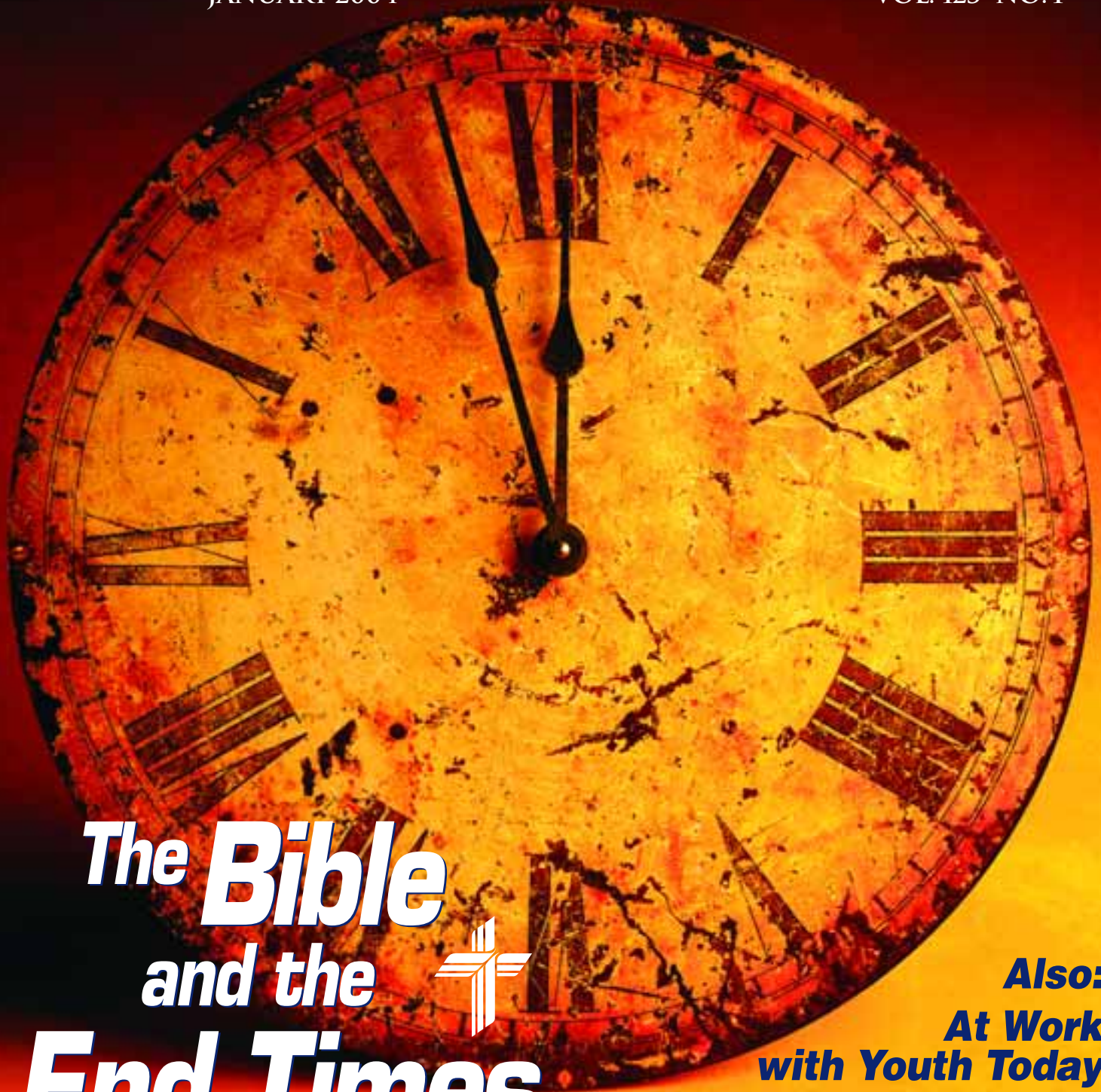


The Lutheran **WITNESS**

JANUARY 2004

VOL. 123 NO. 1



The Bible
and the 
End Times

Also:
At Work
with Youth Today
Welcoming the Blind



The LUTHERAN WITNESS

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

Features

JANUARY 2004

6 THE BIBLE AND THE END TIMES

by Paul L. Maier

Jonathan Weber may be a fictional character, but when it comes to what the Bible teaches about the end times, he gives us the facts.



Arthur Kirchhoff

16 SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

by Jon D. Vieker

How does one decide which hymns should be in our new hymnal?

20 WELCOMING THOSE WHO ARE BLIND

by Paula Schlueter Ross

More than 95 percent of the 10 million blind and visually impaired people in this country have no church home.



Photo courtesy of Lutheran Blind Mission

10 AT WORK WITH YOUTH TODAY

by Robin R. Mueller

As youth attitudes change from one generation to the next, so does youth ministry.



Photo courtesy Leon Jameson

10

Departments

3 Lifeline

Ruth Irene Garrett

4 Letters

14 National News

19 Searching Scripture

James Lamb

23 In My Opinion

Dennis Di Mauro

24 Notices

26 Family Counselor

27 Q&A/

Shedding Some Light

28 From the President

Gerald B. Kieschnick



Photo courtesy Ruth Irene Garrett

Now I Know Christ
Page 3



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Handling prosperity

Never before have I experienced such a convicting, challenging and, at the same time, inspiring commentary on stewardship as that of Art Simon's "The Peril of Prosperity."

*Rev. Joel Christiansen
Webster Groves, Mo.*

"THE PERIL OF PROSPERITY" (NOV. '03) was a real blessing to me. It not only gave me much to learn, but it also gave me a great deal of motivation to give to the poor. The article was filled with Jesus quotes and Gospel. The topic itself was given an honest, fresh and powerful approach to all who feel "snookered" by the culture of consumerism. It was great to be freed from that feeling.

While it presented the radical nature of Jesus' life and teaching, the article brought dignity and purpose to the high calling of Jesus: "Love one another as I have loved you."

*David Schlie
Fort Wayne, Ind.*

WE KNOW A LOT OF WEALTHY CHRISTIANS (though we are not among them). They are some of the most generous persons I know. These are people who own businesses and offer employment so that many people can support their families. I resent the implication that all wealth and being wealthy are sinful.

I was raised in a family where there was not much extra. A couple of family members worshipped money much more—because we didn't have it—than any of our friends who do have it. The root of all evil is not money but the love of it. My family members loved money; they always wanted it.

I am thankful for the wealth of our nation. It has given my family an income, a place to live and, yes, the ability to share it with others.

*Bev Kerns
Littleton, Colo.*

MY THANKS TO REV. ARTHUR SIMON. His clear and well-cited presentation of financial stewardship was absolutely wonderful.

*J. Ward Pallotta
Fairview Park, Ohio*

Hope in Africa

THANK YOU FOR THE FOCUS ON "STAND with Africa" (Nov. '03). It was especially meaningful for us—we are a father and son team—because we have visited Kenya and have been guests in the home of Bishop Walter Obare of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK).

In Kenya, we saw children with distended stomachs from starvation. We saw elderly men and women languishing from neglect because there were no family members left to care for them. We saw death all around us from HIV/AIDS.

In the midst of this suffering, we visited many Lutheran churches. One, Kondegwa Lutheran Church, had so many children at worship that there was no place for them to sit (the adults took up all the pews). So the kids came and sat in the chancel and center aisle during the sermon, but even so they could not all get in and were hanging in the windows so they could take part. Worship was vibrant and strong, and the people were gathered around Word and Sacrament.

We saw hope. Through projects like "Stand for Africa," people are receiving food, health care and education. ELCK congregations

can begin to turn the tide against the HIV/AIDS epidemic that is so ravaging the African people—but only with your help. Please support these efforts. So little for us can go so very far in Africa.

*Jim and Sean McCoy
West Palm Beach, Fla.*

THE NUMBERS ARE STAGGERING: Millions have HIV/AIDS, and 42 million are at risk. If you do not have hope, you cannot cope.

When Rev. Paul Bupe, a pastor from Zambia, came to my class at Allen University and related how he had ministered to hundreds of parishioners at burials, my students were numbed into silence. The story is heartbreaking, but this pastor brings home the pleas of those who are suffering in Africa, and they might be added to the AIDS deaths and patients right here in South Carolina.

We cannot be overwhelmed; we must organize and do what we can. Your excellent article compels us to hope in Christ in order to cope. God's Word must be part of the African stance.

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

'Abstract' facts

IT IS ONLY AN ILLUSION THAT NON-Christians have a better and richer life than Christians ("How Long?," Nov. '03). Here are a few facts:

- In 1993, families that attended church each week averaged \$37,021 in annual income. The unchurched averaged \$24,361. So much for the wealth myth.

- The article suggested that non-Christians are healthy. Not so. Men born out of wedlock live an average of about 50 years; men legitimately born and who don't smoke and have good Christian habits live about 80 years.

My main source of data is the *Statistical Abstract of the*

United States, published by the U.S. Department of Commerce. The *Abstract* is in the reference section of the library and my closet.

*Anthony Rust
Brownstown, Ind.*

Admonished

“SEXUAL TEMPTATION” (OCT. ’03) STATES, “When Christ meets the woman caught in adultery, He does not admonish her but her accusers.” While I agree that He did not admonish her before the accusers, He certainly did so when He said, “Go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:11). There is a difference between condemning and admonishing.

*Ronald Migliore
D'Iberville, Miss.*

A witness tool

TO THOSE WHO WERE SO CONCERNED about the October cover portraying two homosexuals getting “married,” yes, it is an offensive photo (“Letters,” Nov. ’03). All sin is offensive. However, what a witness tool this picture can be. When adults see it on our coffee tables, we have the opportunity to share God’s truth with a world of Christians and non-Christians who believe that the lifestyle is acceptable. When our children see the photo, we have a wonderful opportunity to instruct them in God’s Word and strengthen them in their beliefs to stand firm in a world and educational system that is teaching them otherwise. Believe me, your children have seen this before (or soon will), and it is already imprinted on their minds.

*Gary and Jean Peters
Frankenmuth, Mich.*

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

THE BIBLE AND THE END TIMES

by Paul L. Maier

In the 1970s, Hal Lindsey's The Late Great Planet Earth popularized a view of Biblical prophecy about the end times known generally as "millennialism." Popular fascination with this take on the end times continues yet today, fueled in large part by the "Left Behind" series of bestselling novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins.

One might be led to think that the views espoused by these books reflect what most Christians believe about the end times. In fact, the vast majority of Christians do not hold to the theology upon which the "Left Behind" books are based.

Now comes Dr. Paul L. Maier, professor of ancient history and Missouri Synod Lutheran, with a new novel of his own that addresses some of the same end-times issues. In Chapter 1 of More Than a Skeleton, Maier's hero, Jonathan Weber, is interviewed about the prophecy mania. Because the "interview" provides a handy summary of the issues, we offer here an adaptation and abridgement of that first chapter. — Ed.

It was May Day in Massachusetts—though hardly a distress call, Jonathan Weber mused, in one of his less successful attempts at humor. He was piloting a blue BMW Z4 convertible through balmy air along the Charles River, the car being the one big luxury he had allowed himself since his book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, became an international bestseller. But should a man holding the distinguished Reginald R. Dillon Professorship of Near Eastern Studies at Harvard University be sporting about in a transportation toy that better suited a pampered college undergrad?, his Lutheran conscience inquired.

Crossing the Charles River en route to his office, he carefully maneuvered through the trademark traffic radiating out of Harvard Square. His "Beamer" was doubly safe, he knew, both because of its superb German engineering as well as his own



meticulous care while driving. At Mt. Auburn Street, for example, he gave no thought to outrunning the light that had just flashed yellow, but braked defensively to a stop. And that may have been his undoing.

Brakes shrieked and a shattering crash from behind hurled Jon into his cream leather seat. Fortunately, he was not injured. The same could not be said of his Z4.

Storming out of his car, Jon saw a lanky, red-faced lad climbing out of the gray PT Cruiser that had assaulted him. A woeful look of anguish twisted the young man's features—and, of course, his grille. Before any confrontation, Jon walked to the rear of the Cruiser to record its license number. It was then that he noticed a

Jonathan Weber may be a fictional character, but when it comes to what the Bible teaches about the end times, he gives us the facts.



large white sticker with red lettering on the back end of the car just above its plastic bumper:

WARNING
IN CASE OF RAPTURE,
THIS CAR WILL BE LEFT DRIVERLESS!

"So," Jon snapped at the driver, "apparently your car is driverless! Have you just been raptured? And if so, what in blazes are you doing back here on earth?"

"I'm ... *awfully* sorry about this," the youth drawled. "I was looking over at the river—it's such a beautiful day—and I just ... couldn't stop in time."

After exchanging the usual insurance information, Jon tried a few pleasantries to calm the shaken fellow,

obviously a university undergrad. "That bumper sticker of yours," he said. "Do you *really* believe that bit about being raptured out of your driver's seat?"

"I sure do!" The lad brightened, adding, "I've read all the books in the 'Left Behind' series, and I think that ..."

"But they're *fiction*!"

"Yes, but they're based on fact ... on what Christians believe will happen during these end times."

"Not *this* Christian!" Jon objected. "Here's my card. Why not come to my office sometime and let's talk about it?"

"Love to," he replied, finally managing a sheepish smile. "Again, I'm ... awfully, awfully sorry about this!"

By the time he reached his office, not far from Harvard's immortal Yard, Jon was angry—less about his wounded BMW and more about how end-times mania had beset the minds even of university undergrads—or at least one poor driver among them. He was scheduled to have an interview with a journalist from *Newsweek* magazine later that morning, during which he had every intention of being cool, dispassionate and tolerant. Now he wondered if he could actually manage that.

At exactly 10:30 a.m., there was a knock on his office door. There stood the tall, distinguished figure of Kenneth L. Woodward, *Newsweek's* veteran religion editor, who had come to Cambridge to interview Jon for a cover story on the end-times mania sweeping the nation. The two were well acquainted from previous interviews.

"You know the drill, Jon," said Woodward, while opening his attaché case, pulling out a tape recorder, and placing it on a small table between their chairs. "I'll let you see my copy before we publish. We hardly ever do that, but I make special exceptions in the case of persnickety professors!"

Jon chuckled and said, "Just be sure you translate my comments into English, Ken!"

"Always difficult in your case!"

"I'm sure!—But, once again, why me? How do you think I can help your story?"

Woodward cleared his throat and began, "Well, you can guess where we're going with our end-times feature, and I'm sure you know the stats: many millions of copies sold in the 'Left Behind' series, and end-times fanaticism abounds. Now, what we want from you, Jon, is a critique of the whole end-times thinking—fact and fiction."

"Okay, I'll have at it, but you may have to tone down what I say. You know I have an overactive tongue in an overopinionated mouth."

"Worry not; we'll run your comments by our lawyers."

Jon proceeded to summarize the claims of the prophecy enthusiasts as fairly as he could. At the start of their end-times scenario, so they taught, true believers

would be physically taken up to heaven in a “rapture” that would leave their non-Christian relatives and friends behind for a second chance at genuine faith. A seven-year period of tribulation would follow, during which terrible things would afflict the new believers and unbelievers alike, many of them caused by an Antichrist figure at the summit of a one-world government with a single currency, who would lord it over subjects branded with “the mark.” Next, a final, horrendous battle at Armageddon would follow, and only then would Jesus return in His second coming, bringing on the millennium—a 1,000-year period of His reign—ending with the final judgment. The whole scenario would also be peopled with mysterious witnesses, beasts, demons and apocalyptic figures mentioned in such Biblical books as Ezekiel, Daniel and Revelation.

“Christians agree on the second coming itself,” Jon continued, “but they disagree on the rest of these claims. They’re really based on overliteral interpretations of what’s clearly symbolic material in the Bible. Much of that material is also mistranslated, misunderstood or misapplied by projection from the first century into the 21st. Just a second, Ken ... see if this helps.”

Jon walked back to his desk, pulled out a large plastic card from the center drawer, and handed it to Woodward. “You really can’t keep the prophecy views straight without a scorecard.”

“The version on top—what’s called ‘dispensational premillennial’

ism,’” Jon continued, “is the current rage, with most of the prophecy specialists teaching that chain of events. Those farther down, in my estimation, can get more and more Biblical until we come to ‘amillennialism’—non-millennialism. This is the traditional view of the church

world believe in the pure, uncluttered version at the bottom: amillennialism.”

“Really?” Woodward’s face registered surprise.

“Roman Catholicism will have no part of millennialism, and that’s a billion Christians for openers, half of

Christendom. Nor will Eastern Orthodoxy, another 350 million. Nor will Lutherans. Nor will Episcopalians or Reformed or Presbyterians. Nor will ...”

“Okay, point taken. Has Christianity always had these alternative views about the end times?”

“Oh, anything but! Rapture theology is only a recent novelty when it comes to church history. A little Scottish girl named Margaret MacDonald claimed a revelation in 1830, and a traveling evangelist named J. N. Darby took it as his own and marketed it successfully to the 19th-century American church—to our detriment ever since, in my opinion. An American preacher, Cyrus Scofield, edited a Bible that amplified Darby’s views, and millions of Evangelicals use it now. I guess they figure the church has had it all wrong

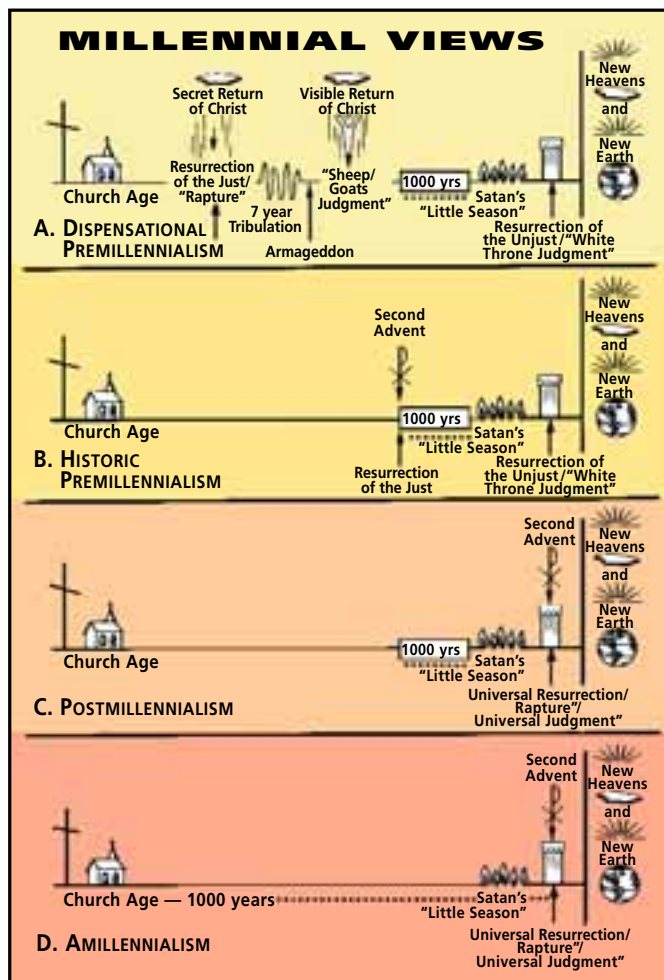
during its first 18 centuries!”

Then a grin crossed Woodward’s face as he asked, “What about that southern evangelist with the big following, Dr. Mel Merton? You haven’t mentioned him.”

“Melvin Morris Merton!” Jon groaned. “He’s the one who called *me* the Antichrist several years ago in Jerusalem!”

“In Merton’s latest book, he claims that you deny the second coming of Christ.”

“No, just Merton’s timetable for



ever since its founding: the belief that ‘the 1,000 years’ is merely symbolic for the Christian era. But take it literally? Why? A thousand years is just a drop in the bucket against the background of eternity!”

“Can you attach numbers to those views, Jon?” Woodward wondered. “How many Christians believe which scenario?”

Jon thought for a moment, then shook his head and said, “I can’t give you exact figures, but the great majority of Christians across the

same. That's a standard response from the prophecy crowd whenever you question their scenarios. Most of them begin with the dire things Jesus predicted on the Mount of Olives while overlooking Jerusalem and claim they will soon take place, probably in our generation. Wrong! They already took place when the Romans conquered Jerusalem. 'This generation will not pass away until all these things are accomplished,' said Jesus around A.D. 33. Jerusalem was indeed destroyed 37 years later in the year 70. Perfect fulfillment! But the prophecy pack transfers most of this from the first to the 21st century!"

"All right," Woodward probed, "if the bad things Jesus prophesied took place when Jerusalem was destroyed, what about the good things He predicted for believers—eternal salvation and heaven?"

"All of them, including the rapture, are part of the general resurrection of the dead at the end of time when Jesus returns. The church has always had it right in the Creed: 'I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.' There it is—pure, sublime and simple. No additional clutter necessary."

"What about Merton's prediction that the rapture will take place on New Year's Day three years from now, and that Jesus will return exactly seven years after that?"

"Not worthy of comment. They had false prophets in Biblical times, and we have false prophets today. Remember, it was Jesus who said, 'Of that day and of that hour no one knows: not the Son—not modern doomsday prophets—but the Father.'"

"One of those phrases I don't recall from the Gospels," said Woodward, with a wink. "So, would 'false prophet' be a good label for Merton?"

"Of course! But if you quote me, better make that my *opinion*, not my 'statement of fact.' Otherwise

Merton may sue my pants off."

"Worry not. As I said, we'll run it by our lawyers. Well, Jon, I certainly have enough material here. Any final thoughts?"

"Just this: ordinarily, I'm very tolerant of differing Biblical interpretations among genuine scholars, but not in the case of a pseudo-prophet like Merton. His kind hurt Christianity in several ways. First, people get so hung up on apocalyptic predictions that they panic and prepare for 'the end' when there is no end. Remember the lunacy that took place about the 'great Y2K menace,' advising everyone to store up survival supplies?"

"Which played into the general doomsday outlook," Woodward commented, while scribbling on his note pad. "Other reasons?"

"Secondly, what happens when prophecy believers see such 'prophecies' fail? Some become disillusioned and abandon their faith entirely, all for the wrong reasons. Thirdly, the heart of Christianity—the Gospel of Jesus Christ—gets displaced in favor of amateurish forecasting of the future. And finally, most of these wrong-headed prophecies are insults to intelligence. What thinking person can believe in a god who gleefully watches airliners crash because he has raptured Christian pilots out of their cockpits? Or credit a scenario in which Russia attacks Israel, yet its bombs explode harmlessly? Or believe that the United Nations headquarters will be transferred from New York City to Babylon, the archaeological ruin in Iraq? Or find millions destroyed by demonic ..."

"All right, all right!" Woodward held up his hands. "Remember, I didn't write that stuff. ...!"

"Sorry, Ken! I got carried away," Jon chuckled. "OK, I'll stop preaching to the choir!"

Woodward smiled,

put down his notepad, and said, "Well, I think that's a wrap, Jon."

"Good.—Oh, by the way, this time you don't have to send me a copy first."

"Thanks for that note of confidence! And for the interview, of course."

Three weeks later, the *Newsweek* story appeared. "NEAR THE END?" was featured in bold lettering across the top of the magazine's cover, with artistic reproductions of beasts, monsters, the Antichrist, exploding volcanoes, falling stars, assorted demons, and the faithful in tribulation.

Woodward had done a masterful job in writing up the story, Jon thought, citing authorities both for and against the current prophecy claims.

Over the next days, phone calls, voice-mails, e-mails, faxes and letters streamed into Jon's office, nine-to-one in favor of his critique. But a few discordant notes appeared.

Several weeks later, a squat, swarthy individual with an augmented waistline appeared at Jon's office door. With a forced smile, he asked if he was addressing Dr. Jonathan P. Weber.

"I'm Weber," Jon replied.

The man plopped two documents into his hand and said, "You have just been served with this summons from the First Judicial Department of the State of New York, as well as the attending complaint. Good day, Sir!" The process server quickly turned about and left.

Jon opened the documents: Melvin Morris Merton was suing him and *Newsweek* for libel, slander and defamation of character in the amount of \$38 million!



Dr. Paul L. Maier is fourth vice president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and is a professor of ancient history at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo.

*As youth attitudes
change from one
generation to the
next, so does
youth ministry.*

by Robin R. Mueller

Jacob Youmans, director of Christian education at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Orange, Calif., describes this generation of youth as "over-committed and over-connected." He says they live in a *blur*.

"They're over-committed in school, sports, music and homework. They're connected to the good, bad and ugly on the Internet. Cell phones and computers hook them up 24/7."

Youmans finds that "kids long for significant relationships. Of course, we hope their most significant relationship will be with Jesus Christ. They're bombarded with negative messages. At least 50 percent come from divorced families. If you can create a place where youth feel safe and loved, they'll come."

On Sunday nights, youth meet for a Bible study, which leads into their contemporary worship service called "The Rock." On Wednesday nights, the junior-high Crossfire group and the senior-high Organized Chaos group enjoy fellowship and fun activities like laser tag and arcade outings.

Youth also face schedule overload and family pressures in the heartland, says Leon Jameson, director of Christian education at Immanuel Lutheran Church, St. Charles, Mo. In a church surpassing 4,000 members, Jameson is building junior and senior high programs

around "fellowship, ministry, service, evangelism and celebration [worship]," he says. "The big picture is to help our youth see Christ in all things and to see Him in their lives as they travel their journey of faith."

Many junior-high schoolers "gain a wonderful foundation of faith" in Immanuel's elementary school, he says. They enjoy a junior-high program called "breakfast clubs" on Saturday mornings in various homes, making breakfast for each other, studying the Bible and playing games. "It's a great way to build trust and community and to encourage parents to take part," Jameson explains.

"I'm involved in teaching Confirmation, and I want to relate to them and help them grasp Biblical truths. By eighth grade, many students are able to think more abstractly and begin to have a clearer understanding of grace. In senior high, we concentrate on

Bible studies that help them live out their faith."

Senior-high youth meet on alternate Sunday nights for "Overtime," (inspired by Eccl. 3:1-8), which combines fellowship, Bible study, worship and service. "Guys and

"Youth group has shown me how to relate my faith to everyday occurrences. It's definitely influenced my decisions about how to choose friends and interact, how to balance all the pressures and distractions in my life and keep me close to God. It will influence my decisions in college and in the way I raise my kids."

*Anna Bremer, 16
Immanuel, Valparaiso, Ind.*

Girls" meets on alternate Thursday nights for an intensive two-hour Bible study.

"Girls are more expressive and vocal about their faith," explains Jameson. "My wife leads the girls, while I help the guys discuss what society presses on them versus how they should live as godly young men."

This month, Immanuel will launch its own youth-driven praise and celebration service called Powerhouse. About 45 youth took part in planning

AT WORK WITH YOUTH TODAY



The youth group from Immanuel Lutheran Church, St. Charles, Mo., pose after white-water rafting in Montana. They were en route to Camp Lutherhaven in Idaho where they worked with physically challenged children.



it. “We gave them a vision and then let them loose,” says Jameson. “After Confirmation, many kids drop out and we lose them. We pray that our ministries help keep them integrated and give them a purpose.”

At smaller churches

That’s also the goal at Trinity Lutheran Church in rural Hoffman, Ill. (population 500). “I think the basic needs of teenagers are the same—they need to be included, feel welcomed at their church and stay active,” says Kathie Knuf, Trinity’s 10-year volunteer youth leader.

Life-long resident Knuf says Hoffman hasn’t changed much, although proliferating meth labs bring new dangers. “We continue to be a close-knit, Christian community,” she says. “The youth attend our parochial grade school. Most come from solid families, who all know each other. Our congregation is very caring and supportive of them.”

The 25 youth sit together during Sunday worship and take Communion together “to make their presence felt.” At nearby Carlyle High School, they are known as the “Hoffman kids.”

They serve Trinity as readers, perform the opening skit for vacation Bible school and decorate the church at Christmas. At the Men’s Club annual mission dinner, the youth serve dinner.

“The older people really see them as young servants and appreciate them,” says Knuf. “We have no budget for youth ministry; we’re entirely self-supporting. But older people say to me, ‘If any kid needs help to attend the Youth Gathering, you call me.’”

“National Youth Gatherings are great for our kids,” says Knuf. “They enjoy connecting with thousands of other young Christians who are living out their faith, too.”

Though Peace Lutheran Church of Decatur, Ga., has just 100 worshippers, “the shadow we cast is humongous,”

says Rev. Victor Belton. Peace’s youth ministry and its liturgical dance ministry appear on local TV. That “makes people think we’re a big mega-church,” Belton laughs.

This African-American congregation is known for “our open, accepting and non-judgmental attitude. But, doctrinally, we are very conservative and make no apologies for that,” adds Belton.



“I think youth ministry is setting in stone the morals and values I’ll need as I get older. Even when we play games, we incorporate something about God and the Bible into what we do.”

*Dan Speckhard, 14
Immanuel, Valparaiso, Ind.*

“This is a difficult time for youth. What the Bible and church say and what they see on the Internet, on TV and even in their parents’ lives are conflicting choices. We encourage them to live God’s way and we set strong, clear expectations. We make a point of knowing and caring about each one of them.”

Audrey Johnson leads Peace’s adult Youth Ministry Team. She researches and creates the most challenging Bible studies she can for Peace’s dozen core youth and visitors. “We want our youth to enter into a deeper life with Christ and learn how to apply Biblical teaching to their lives,” she says.

Last year, Peace’s youth studied “Voices and Choices,” contrasting current media and music against Biblical principles. This year, they are learning a dozen “Spiritual Disciplines” and keeping prayer journals.

“We help draw them into a personal relationship with the Lord,” says Johnson.

A place to call home

Some churches, like Immanuel Lutheran Church, Valparaiso, Ind., enjoy the bonus of dedicated youth centers. Immanuel’s Youth Room includes an operating kitchen, multi-media area with big-screen TV, stereo, six couches and foosball, ping-pong and pool tables. A wall exhibits poster-size photographs of past and present youth, enjoying fellowship, servant events or youth gatherings.

“A lot here connects the kids to people who have gone before them,” explains Chris Prahlow, Immanuel’s youth director. “It gives the younger kids something to look forward to and, for graduates, it’s like coming home.” Immanuel’s youth stay connected to former members at universities by sending them “exam care packages” of letters, prayers and gifts.

“We talk about the challenges of living as Christian young men and women. We want our youth to be lights where there is darkness,” says Prahlow. Junior high



Youth group members at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Valparaiso, Ind., enjoy regular fellowship. But they are serious about helping one another face the challenges of being Christian in today’s society.



The "Name Wall" in the youth room at Immanuel, Valparaiso, holds more than 600 signatures of youth, alumni and visitors. A "Logo Wall" displays painted logos from youth gatherings, sports teams, sponsoring organizations. They help connect the current youth with those who have moved on in their lives.

Bible studies concentrate on the internal, growing relationships and exploring identity issues. Senior high youth studies stress the external, expressing faith and discovering spiritual gifts and life callings.

The Fire Escape Coffee House in Chanute, Kan., welcomes youth of all denominations and hosts Christian singers and bands on its large and small stages. What began as a small gathering place grew into a large volunteer-run establishment in a former furniture store downtown. Youth from St. Peter Lutheran Church in Humboldt, Kan., and Zion Lutheran Church in Chanute say they enjoy the Christian fellowship.

Whitney Chapman (left), and Heidi Flandemeyer from Immanuel, St. Charles, Mo., play and work with one of the special-needs children they met last summer at Camp Lutherhaven near Coeur d'Alene Lake, Idaho.



Mercy and service

All these youth ministries feature service as a key component. St. Paul's, Orange, Calif., groups do maintenance work, lead vacation Bible school, and have canvassed low-income neighborhoods at Messiah Lutheran Church in Ewa Beach, Hawaii. At the White Mountain Apache Indian Reservation in Arizona, they combined community service and cultural education.

Last summer, the youth group from Immanuel, St. Charles, Mo., went to Camp Lutherhaven in Idaho. "I was thrilled to see how the high-school kids totally focused on a group of mentally and physically challenged children from Couer d'Alene," recounts Jameson. "One girl with extreme cerebral palsy needed a strong, caring guy who would carry her in his arms to different events. Joel Haak never left her side, even while the other kids played in the lake. He tried to talk



"If you take youth ministry seriously, it can bring you closer to God and help you in your walk of faith. I've decided to be a Lutheran teacher."

*Lindsey Knolhoff, 18
Trinity, Hoffman, Ill.*

to her and make her smile. It was really beautiful!"

The youth at Peace, Decatur, Ga., volunteer at the Atlanta Food Bank and make holiday gift baskets for the homeless. At Immanuel, Valparaiso, Ind., the youth serve in community events like a cancer relay walk and painting a local clinic. They have even reached around the world, sponsoring a child in Indonesia.

Gifted for youth ministry

"Our youth have so many abilities; we don't give them the credit they deserve," says Jameson. "They want to express their faith, but they don't know how. They just need focus, and then we need to get out of the way."

Knuf adds, "I'm very enthusiastic about youth ministry! The Lord has given me the gift of energy, and I must do this!" She hopes to intensify her group's evangelistic outreach.

"The best way to reach kids is to love them unconditionally," Youmans believes. "I simply recruit youth volunteers who love kids. I don't want them focusing on programs; I want them focusing on people."

"When you think about it, youth ministry has always been counter-culture. Mass gatherings, servant events and contemporary worship were all pioneered by youth ministry. That's a great history. Youth have always given the church new things!"

Push 'reset'

"In youth ministry, you need to push the reset button every five years," says Rev. Terry Dittmer, director, LCMS District and Congregational Services—Youth Ministry. "We Baby Boomers [born 1946–1960] will fight to the death for our drums and guitars. But today's

This generation doesn't expect the church to give to them; they want to give to their church. They don't want to be handheld; they want to be released to do significant things.

Millennials [born 1985–present] enjoy the 'old-fashioned' stuff of organ music, the liturgy and Christian art in stained glass, banners and statuary. In a changing world, today's kids find security in consistent quality, order and beauty. That's very good news for churches that emphasize those traditions.

"Today's youth also are extremely conservative, very receptive to pro-life messages and law-and-order thinking. They are much more like their grandparents."

Mark Blanke, associate professor and director of the DCE program at Concordia University, Seward, Neb., agrees. "The Baby Boomers were touchy-feely. Ministry was directed *at* them. So they became perpetrators of church shopping and 'What's in it for me?' thinking.

"The Baby Busters and Generation Xers [1961–1985] tended to react against their parents by withdrawing and becoming somewhat directionless. But this generation doesn't expect the church to give to them; they want to give to their church. They don't want to be handheld; they want to be released to do significant things. It's

natural that the explosion of servant events ... has grown to become a major piece of youth ministry."

Blanke says successful youth-ministry programs have 1) continuity of purpose, which may take up to five years to develop; 2) strong relationships—with adults equipping, not controlling, youth; and 3) active involvement. He encourages congregations to filter plans through this question: "How does this activity build their relationship with God, fellow man or church?"

Dr. John Oberdeck, assistant director for the Lay Ministry program at Concordia University, Mequon, Wis., says servant events "are positive because they reinforce community. It's important that adults serve



"Just today a kid in my class asked me if I was a Christian. When I said, 'yes,' he said, 'I can tell.' That's great! I love talking to anybody and everybody about my faith—youth ministry made me comfortable in doing that."

Michael Biczko, 19
St. Paul's, Orange, Calif.

with them, so youth don't assume that servant events are something you grow out of."

Programs offered to congregations by organizations like the LCMS Teens Encounter Christ (TEC "Weekends") and LCMS-based Ongoing Ambassadors for Christ (O AFC) also grow community, says Oberdeck. In its 33-year history, "O AFC has helped thousands of youth to express their faith and learn how to share a very strong Christian witness."

Youth are undergoing "tremendous social, cognitive, moral and faith development. What could be more comforting during all that change than the Gospel?" Oberdeck asks. "The message of the church is 'God loves you for who you are.' You don't need the right kind of grades and clothing and parents. In church, you can just chill."



Robin Mueller is a
freelance writer from
House Springs, Mo.



A solid youth ministry helps young Christians "see Christ in all things and see Him in their lives" as they mature, says Leon Jameson. Above are some of the members of the youth group he works with at Immanuel, St. Charles, Mo.

LCMS, ELCA reps renew formal doctrinal discussions

Representatives of the Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) met Nov. 11 for their first formal theological talks since both church bodies elected new leaders in 2001.

"We sat down and talked about the hard questions that divide us," said Dr. Samuel H. Nafzger, executive director of the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations.

Meeting in Baltimore, six representatives from each body focused on:

- a 2001 LCMS convention resolution initiating a

review of cooperative pastoral working arrangements between the two church bodies; and

- the ELCA's theological and confessional rationale for its full-communion relationships with three Reformed

church bodies, The Episcopal Church and the Moravian Church.

"The conversation was characterized by frank discussion of the doctrinal issues that divide the two church bodies as well as the recognition that areas

of consensus exist between them," said a joint statement released after the meeting. "Participants described the meeting as an honest, forthright and helpful discussion of the positions of the church bodies."

Missions cuts director posts from 12 to four

To further streamline its administrative structure—matching staff needs to a new strategic plan—LCMS World Mission eliminated a dozen area-director positions Nov. 30 and is replacing them with "regional directors" for

four world areas.

Posts eliminated were six full-time and three part-time area directors, plus three vacant positions.

The area directors were among those being considered for the four regional-director positions as this *Lutheran Witness* went

to press.

"I have no doubt that [they] will continue to distinguish themselves in service to the church," said Rev. David Birner, associate executive director with the international mission team for LCMS World Mission.

Third 'Igniting' event looks at worship attendance

There is no single formula for increasing worship attendance in Missouri Synod congregations, but lots of approaches to share.

That is one way to sum up the Nov. 14–15 "One Mission Ablaze: Igniting Congregations" event Nov. 14–15 at King of Kings Lutheran Church, Omaha, Neb. The event gathered representatives of 23 LCMS congregations among those reporting the highest gains in average worship attendance from 1997 to 2001.

"Whatever is working for you, I pray that your experience will encourage and energize other congregations," said LCMS President Gerald Kieschnick, who called for eight such events "to

move [the church] forward as a dynamic church body that will reach many people for Christ."

Participants identified factors influencing worship attendance, including prayer, worship leader-

ship, outreach, a sense of community, service times and styles, spiritual growth, and networking with growing churches.

"I do not think that growth comes from a specific action or program, but

rather from an attitude of the leader and the people," said Rev. Paul Hoyer, pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Lake Mary, Fla.

"I have never conducted my ministry in terms of counting heads at worship services," said Rev. Steven Briel, pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church, Maple Grove, Minn., "but solely in terms of preaching the Gospel of our Lord's forgiveness and salvation as faithfully and clearly as possible and properly administering His holy Sacraments."

The Omaha participants adopted a project that calls for similar events on a regional basis, to be funded with a \$50,000 grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans.



Participants in the Nov. 14–15 "Igniting Congregations" event in Omaha vote for a project to be funded by a \$50,000 grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. The project they selected calls for similar regional events.

LCEF president: Get behind Kieschnick's 'one' vision

Merle Freitag, president of the Lutheran Church Extension Fund, urged participants at the 2003 LCEF Fall Leadership Conference in Miami, Fla., to get behind the "one mission, one message, one people" vision laid out by Synod President Gerald Kieschnick.

"Let us proceed to make that vision our reality through our actions,"

Freitag said in his "LCEF State of the Mission" address Nov. 22.

"Building the Church ... One Mission, One Message, One People" was the theme of the Nov. 21–23 conference. A variety of groups—the Synod's Board of Directors, Council of Presidents, district business managers and others—held meetings in Miami, too, before the

conference began.

LCEF describes itself as a "ministry-through investment organization that offers [LCMS] members the opportunity to invest their money, earn interest, and help build churches and schools at the same time."

Freitag brought participants up to date on LCEF. He reported the following:

- Total assets continue to grow, standing at \$1.359 billion as of June 30, compared with \$78 million when LCEF began 25 years ago.

- The loan portfolio grew to just over \$1 billion.

- Loan rates to congre-

gations have been as low as 5.125 percent.

- Loan approvals in 2003 continued at a record rate.

In his address to the conference, Kieschnick drew an analogy from the spark it takes to start a wildfire to the importance of mission outreach.

"Well," he said, "I am here to tell you that the spark has been ignited and we are ready for a wildfire of the Gospel to consume the lost and dying souls of our land. I can see it happening across our church in so many ways and so many places."

Board's proposal increases district funding for Synod

At its Nov. 19–22 meeting in Miami, Fla., the LCMS Board of Directors adopted in principle a policy meant to increase the amount of contributions forwarded to the Synod's national budget by its 35 districts.

The Board plans to ask the Synod convention in July to endorse the policy, which would set an amount or percentage of contributions to districts that would go to the Synod.

Currently, districts receive funds from congregations and decide

how much to forward to the Synod. The new policy is needed "so that the Synod may accomplish its objectives in funding adequately higher education and missions," says a resolution the Board adopted.

Contributions from congregations to the districts have increased 140 percent over the last 30 years, but the amount forwarded by the districts to the national budget has increased by only 1 percent, according to the Board.

"As a result, when taking the 30 years inflation rate into consideration, the amount of congregational contributions that the districts have forwarded on to the Synod has resulted in a shortfall of nearly \$57 million [annually]," the Board says.

LFL meets as Bush signs partial-birth abortion ban

Two days after President George W. Bush signed into law the partial-birth abortion ban Nov. 5, a White House official addressed those gathering for the 21st annual national Lutherans For Life (LFL) convention, Nov. 7–9 in Omaha, Neb.

Tim Goeglein, deputy director of the White House Office of Public Liaison and a Missouri Synod Lutheran, quoted Bush as saying partial-birth abortion is an "abhorrent procedure that affronts basic human dignity" and that "no lawyer's brief can make it seem otherwise."

Passed by both houses of Congress, the bill

imposing the ban defines partial-birth abortion as delivery of a pre-born baby "for the purpose of performing an overt act that the person knows will kill the partially delivered living fetus."

LFL issued a Nov. 5 news release saying that it "joins the vast majority of Americans in applauding the passage and signing of the ban."

For more information about LFL, contact Lutherans For Life, 1220 South G Ave., Nevada, IA 50201-2774; (888) 364-5433; info@lutheransforlife.org. Or, see the Web site www.lutheransforlife.org.

For more news...

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

Hope in God's Plan

by James Lamb

What do you do when things just aren't going the way you planned? Many of us imagine the worst. So it was for God's people captive in Babylon. Read the account in Jer. 29:1-14.

Just imagine

Just imagine how God's people felt. Had God abandoned them? How were they to live in a foreign land? Imagine what they were going through and then listen as God speaks about *His* plan!

Who is receiving Jeremiah's letter in Jer. 29:1-2?

What was the cause of their exile according to Jer. 25:7-11?

How did God's people feel? Read Jer. 30:15.

Who was in control, however, according to Jer. 29:4, 7 and 20?

Just imagine what they must have thought when they read what they were supposed to do while in captivity (Jer. 29:4-7), or when they read how long they would be staying in Babylon (Jer. 29:10). What would your first reaction be to such news?

Just imagine what they did for 70 years in Babylon. Look again at verses 4-7. How do these relate to Rom. 13:1-7 and Matt. 5:13-16?

Sin and rebellion have caused us to live in a world that is not what God intended. Although not *of* the world, we are *in* the world. Read Jesus' words to His followers in John 15:19 and 17:11.

God uses the governing authorities today according to His plan just as He used Babylon. We are to honor them. But God calls for more than a peaceful co-existence with the world.

Christians are to influence the world. We are to be "salt" preserving God's truth that is constantly being attacked. We are to be "light," revealing the truth of salvation in Jesus Christ. This can seem as overwhelming as what God's people in Babylon were supposed to do! We find our hope and strength in God's plan.

Listen to God's plan

List the promises of God's plan in each of the following verses in Jeremiah 29:

v. 10 _____

v. 11 _____

v. 12 _____

v. 13 _____

v. 14 _____

Now relate these to Eph. 2:11-13 and Phil. 3:20-21.



Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem

We don't have to *imagine* God's plan. He has revealed it! God brought us back from our separation through the blood of His Son. He has promised us a glorious future with Him forever. This future is the hope in which we live in the present. It is this hope in which we are able to bring change to the present. It is this hope in which we endure the present when things are not going according to plan. "There is not a single item of evil in His plans for His people. ... All is good, all is blessing" (Theodore Laetsch, *Bible Commentary: Jeremiah*, Concordia Publishing House, 1952).



Dr. James I. Lamb is executive director of Lutherans For Life, based in Nevada, Iowa.

FROM GREENLAND'S ICY MOUNTAINS ...

Many of you will recognize the words above as the title of a great mission hymn. Not many of us have actually seen with our own eyes such far away places as those mentioned in the hymn. But a few among us have not only seen, but also have spent significant portions of their lives in such places, many of which are thousands of miles away from family and friends, home and hearth.

Although they would be the first to shy away from any attempts to praise them as having done anything above and beyond the call of duty, they are, in my humble but strong opinion, some of the unsung heroes of the church. I'm talking about the faithful, dedicated, self-sacrificing people who bear the designation of "missionary."

To the missionaries of the past, present and future, on behalf of the entire Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, I express humble and hearty appreciation for your faithful service

For more than a century, the collective call of congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has sent people from ordinary backgrounds to many and varied mission fields. These missionaries have faced non-ordinary circumstances and have accomplished extraordinary tasks of Gospel proclamation to many types and groups of people around the world.

In many cases, LCMS missionaries and their families have experienced living conditions quite different from yours and mine. They have

been challenged with realities of life in a different culture, from relatively minor inconveniences to life-threatening illness and danger. They have faced incredible communication barriers, often living and working among people whose languages had never before been reduced to writing. And, especially in bygone years, they have spent years of separation from their young children, who were educated in boarding schools often hundreds of miles away, staffed by other loving, caring missionaries who essentially served as surrogate parents to the children entrusted to their care.

During the past two years, on trips to Europe, South America and Asia, I have had the opportunity to visit LCMS mission fields, which in numerous places around the world have developed into national church bodies with whom the LCMS is in church-body fellowship. In almost every case, it all started with the quiet, committed, selfless work of LCMS missionaries.

In most of these visits, other representatives of the Synod and I have been the recipients of sincere thanks from leaders of our partner churches. On behalf of the congregations and members of the Synod, we have received their gracious expressions of appreciation. Actually, to be quite frank, I have experienced a certain degree of uneasiness in so doing, simply but significantly because it is our missionaries who deserve the thanks of these brothers and sisters in Christ around the world.

In order to help that happen, a plan is in process for next summer's Synod convention delegates to give special thanks to God for the faithful service of our mission-



aries—past, present and future. I look forward to that opportunity with great anticipation!

In the meantime, I know you join me in giving thanks to God for His special calling in the lives of some very special people, the missionaries of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Many have been theologically trained at one of our seminaries. Others are professionally trained educators. Still others serve as lay leaders in any of many support capacities on the mission field—as business managers, agricultural missionaries and in other similarly significant roles in support of the mission of Christ.

In addition to giving thanks to God, I respectfully encourage you also to express your thanks to a missionary. If you don't know one personally, visit www.lcms.org or ask your pastor for assistance.

To the missionaries of the past, present and future, on behalf of the entire Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, I express humble and hearty appreciation for your faithful service, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. 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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