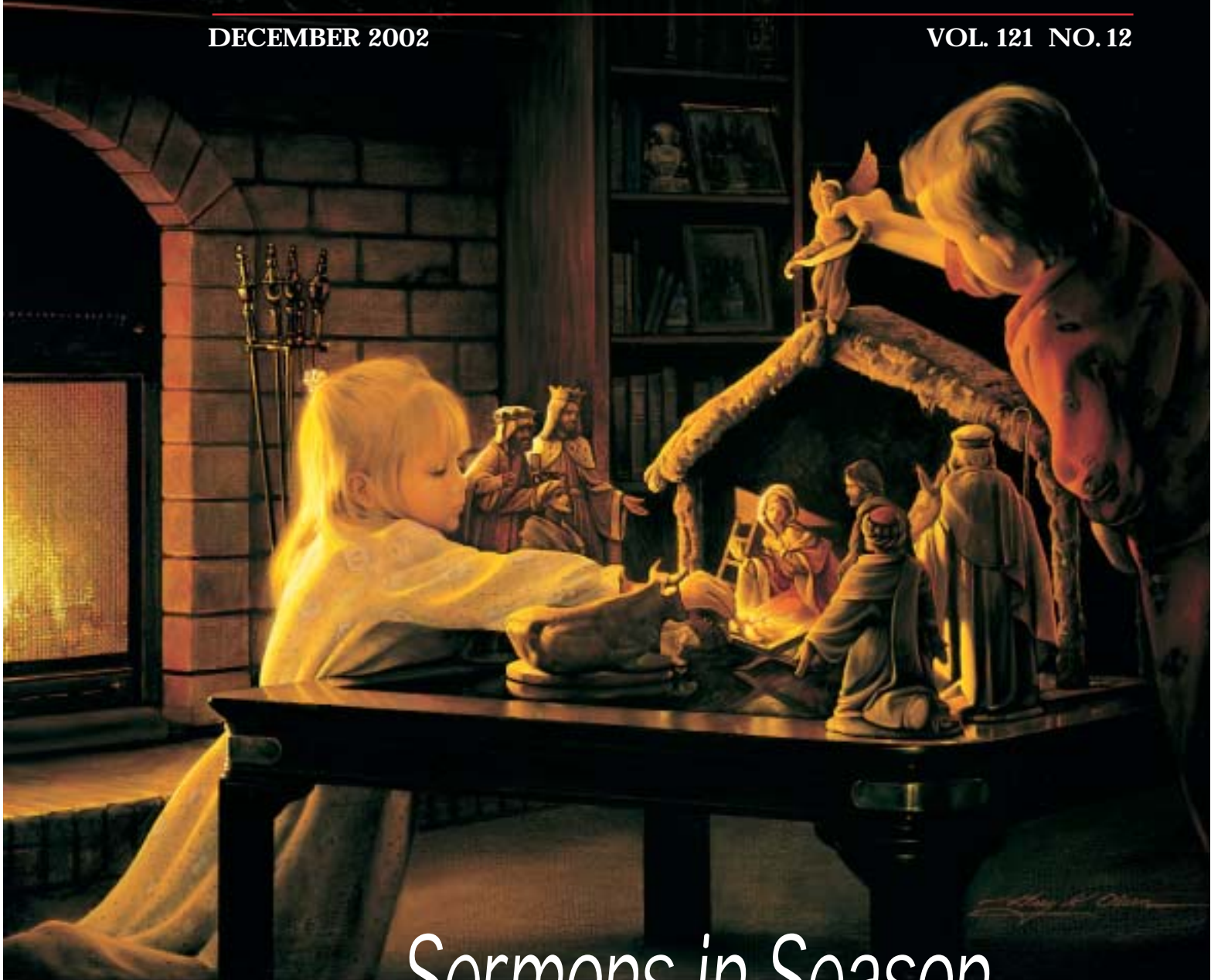


The Lutheran WITNESS

DECEMBER 2002

VOL. 121 NO. 12



Sermons in Season



Also:

Jesus' Little Lamb

The CAN-DO Spirit



The LUTHERAN WITNESS

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

Features

DECEMBER 2002

6 SERMONS IN SEASON by Gene Edward Veith



Martin Luther brought Christmas down to earth.

Gustav Koenig

12 JESUS' LITTLE LAMB by Carol Albrecht

Woolly fell ingloriously, only to be rescued for a higher purpose. Sound familiar?



Picturequest

16 CHRISTMAS MOURNING by James Sudbrock

Here is some advice on coping with the grief of the loss of a loved one, particularly as the holidays approach.

8 THE CAN-DO SPIRIT IN TEXAS by Robin Mueller

Teens who are challenged and trained, rather than entertained, catch a vision for mission.



Photo courtesy CAN-DO

Departments



Thanks, Aunt Lorene
Page 3

3 Lifeline Jon Vieker

4 Letters

14 National News

19 In My Opinion Paul Marschke

21 Notices

25 People & Places Family Counselor

26 Searching Scripture Karl Weber

27 Q&A/ Shedding Some Light

28 From the President Gerald B. Kieschnick



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

Staff: Rev. David L. Mahsman, executive editor; Don Folkemer, managing editor; Joe Isenhower Jr., news editor; Paula Schlueter Ross, contributing editor; John Krus, senior designer; Darla Broste, marketing manager; Richard Sanders, coordinator; Steve Masterson, advertising sales; Carla Dubbelde, editorial manager, district editions; Charlesta R. Zekert, editorial assistant; editorial office: 1333 S. Kirkwood Rd., St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; (314) 965-9917, Ext. 1228.

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Published monthly by Concordia Publishing House, 3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968. Individual subscription \$18.00 per year. Organized congregation subscriptions and district editions offered at reduced rate if submitted through local churches. Standard A postage paid at St. Louis, MO.

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

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

Member: Associated Church Press
Evangelical Press Association

December 2002 (ISSN: 0024-757X) Vol. 121, No. 12

Cover: *Angels of Christmas* © Greg K. Olsen from the "Visions of Faith" Collection by art print publisher Mill Pond Press, Inc., Venice, FL 34292 (800)535-0331—www.millpond.com

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



Caring for His creation

God gave us a wonderful world ... but look at it today—full of terrorism, hatred and murders!

*Stewart E. Kropp
Milwaukie, Ore.*

I AGREE WITH BILL GRIFFITH WHEN HE says, “Our Lord has called us to be caretakers of His creation” (“Letters,” Oct. ’02). But what a lousy job we are doing! God gave us a wonderful world, with everything we need, but look at it today—it’s full of terrorism, hatreds and murders!

Can you even begin to imagine the effect if all believing Christians witnessed to the one thing that counts? The one thing that counts is, “I believe in the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and that Jesus Christ is my Savior who gave us forgiveness of sin and life everlasting when He gave His life on the cross.” All true Christians believe this. Let’s witness to it every day. What a world we would have!

*Stewart E. Kropp
Milwaukie, Ore.*

CONTRARY TO WHAT PEOPLE WHO ARE prone to oversimplification think, the environmentalist “movement” is not monolithic and is not a religion. As such, it cannot be truthfully said that the environmentalist “movement” is based on evolution, as one of your letter-writers maintained. People from all walks of life and faiths (and lack of faiths) believe in protecting the environment. We are united only by the idea that we should protect and improve the air, water and other natural resources necessary for life, for ourselves, our children and their children.

I am a lifelong member of the LCMS and a committed environmentalist. You can be a good Christian and an environmentalist. Bill Griffith nicely expresses the rest of my sentiments on this subject.

*Richard Zelade
Austin, Texas*

Worth waiting for

AS I READ THE LETTERS IN THE AUGUST issue, I was prompted to respond to the divorcee of nine years who wrote to you.

My parents divorced when I was 3 or 4. My mother didn’t date again until I was 13. In the meantime we moved and became active in a Lutheran church. My mom’s faith was rekindled, and she met a wonderful Christian man. They were married when I was 14. Their marriage ended when my stepfather died at age 70. They had 23 blessed years of marriage and two additional children (there were three from my mother’s first marriage).

Waiting a long time between marriages may actually be a blessing. And church is a good place to find the right kind of spouse. As my wife says, “You don’t find a Cadillac at Wal-Mart.” May God bless you with a husband like my stepfather.

*Rev. Alvin L. Newton
Dundalk, Md.*

A stewardship issue

I WAS DISAPPOINTED IN THE OCTOBER “Q&A.” Someone wrote to ask “What does this mean?” after they had sung, “Take my silver and my gold/ Not a mite would I withhold.” “Q&A” went into a long dissertation about what a mite was. I don’t think that was the question at all.

I believe the questioner was asking a question all of us should ask: What does it mean in my life that I sing the words, “Take my silver and my gold/ Not a mite would I withhold”—and then withhold a great deal?

This is a stewardship issue that

every Christian needs to consider prayerfully and thoughtfully.

All that we are and all that we have needs to be available to the Lord. I do not think that means there can never be other than the bare necessities in our lives, but I have to admit that even as one who is extremely faithful in tithing, I have struggled over the years with just how much material comfort I should allow myself.

*Rev. John Krueger
Tempe, Ariz.*

Fertile soil

SOME SEPTEMBER LETTERS COMMENTED on this statement from “In My Opinion” for July: “I believe it’s time to move away from the good old funeral ‘chestnuts’ like Psalm 23” I thought you might like to hear a “Psalm 23 success story.”

Last year, my daughter, then 7 and a half, interrupted me one morning. “Mommy, listen! I can say this whole psalm!” She passed me her Bible and proceeded to recite Psalm 23, nearly word perfect! This was *not* an assigned task; it was the first verse she chose to learn motivated by her own heart (and I’m sure some Holy Spirit, too!).

It gets better! During our “Summer Family Sunday School,” discussions included questions like “What Bible verse helps you to remember that through Jesus your sins are forgiven?” Each time, Kayla, now 9, at her turn, joyfully recited Psalm 23. When questioned about her choice, she explained something like this: “Jesus is my shepherd. He will take care of me and guide me in righteousness. And He is with me always and helps me overcome sin and death and will take me to His house in heaven.” For Kayla, Psalm 23 has become a faith anchor.

To bring this back to the topic

of your article, here's a little background: During Kayla's very early years and before our family really knew our Lord, the opportunity to hear the Word at funeral services was presented to our family with frightening regularity. But, as a result, our children have heard the 23rd Psalm innumerable times. Wherever the Word is shared, seeds are sown.

Funeral and memorial services are worship services. They present a unique and delicate opportunity to plant the seeds of God's grace and Jesus' great gift. Perhaps, by sheer repetition, the Spirit, like a strong wind, can impress tiny seeds deeply enough to find fertile soil. I know one little girl who believes in Psalm 23's success story—that we shall “dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

*Debbie Marchini
Livermore, Calif.*

A recycling tip

DURING MY DAD'S RECENT SURGERY, I noticed (quite quickly) the uninteresting and unending array of mindless magazines in the waiting room at our local hospital. Yes, there was an occasional *Time* and *Sports Illustrated*, but those are hardly exciting to me. I decided to make my shelves lighter at home and donate some *Lutheran Witness* magazines. At least they could provide some hope, strength and peace to others who are waiting for some good news about their loved ones. I thought it was worth passing on.

*Brenda Hantsche
Arlington, Texas*

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.

SERMONS IN SEASON



Martin Luther brought Christmas down to earth.

by Gene Edward Veith

Contrary to legend, Martin Luther did not invent the Christmas tree, though the custom of decorating evergreens for the holidays did come into England and America from the Lutherans. Nor did Luther write “Away in a Manger,” though he did write five other carols about the Christ child just as lovely.

Luther gained his reputation as a Christmas trailblazer because he really did help shape the way Western culture thought about the holiday. It was not so much trees and songs but Luther’s Nativity sermons that contributed to the imagery and emotions now associated with Christmas.

Luther’s portraits of the Holy Family have a way of reminding us, especially at Christmas, that in a sense, every family is holy.

Luther preached up to 200 sermons a year at the parish church in Wittenberg over his 30-year career. Some 2,300 have been collected. He would preach on a Christmas text from Advent through Epiphany, more than a month each year.

His most famous Nativity sermons, though, are those he himself published in his *Christmas Postils* (1522). Designed to serve as preaching models for other parish pastors, they found their way to pulpits throughout northern Europe and were excerpted in countless devotional manuals.

The sermons were essentially meditations on the Biblical Christmas story. As arguably the major the-

ologian with the greatest literary gifts, Luther presented the Holy Family with vivid imagery and poignant characterization.

Ironically, for someone accused of dismantling medieval piety, Luther writes some of the most affectionate accounts of the Virgin Mary. He writes about her, though, not as the Queen of Heaven but as a poor, socially despised peasant girl, “no more esteemed than a maid among us who does her appointed chores.” When it came time to have her baby, Mary, with no room available at the inn, had to go to the stables.

“Who showed the poor girl what to do? She had never had a baby before. I am amazed that the little one did not freeze. Do not make of Mary a stone. It must have gone straight to her heart that she was so abandoned. She was flesh and blood, and must have felt miserable—and Joseph too—that she was left in this way, all alone, with no one to help, in a strange land in the middle of winter. Her eyes were moist even though she was happy and aware that the Baby was God’s Son and the Savior of the world.

“She was not stone. For the higher people are in the favor of God, the more tender are they.”

Luther stressed the humanness, even the ordinariness, of the Holy Family to impress upon his congregation of ordinary human beings the magnitude of the Incarnation, that God became one of them. “What can be sweeter than the Babe, what more lovely than the mother! Look at the Child, knowing nothing. Yet all that is belongs to him, that your conscience should not fear but take comfort in him. ... Watch him springing in the lap of the maiden. Laugh with him. Look upon this Lord of Peace and your spirit will be at peace.”

Are you afraid of God? he asks. “He places before you a Babe with whom you may take refuge. You cannot fear him, for nothing is more appealing to man than a babe. ... To me there is no greater consolation given to mankind than this, that Christ became man, a child, a babe, playing in the lap and at the breasts of his most gracious mother.”

In his Christmas sermons, Luther spiritualized the ordinary. He turned the season into a pretext for benevolence. (Would you have helped the Baby Jesus at Bethlehem? he asks. “Why don’t you do it now? You

have Christ in your neighbor.”)

By highlighting the shepherds, the Baby’s swaddling clothes, the hardships and the transfigurations that suddenly break into ordinary life, Luther brings theology down to earth in a way that is, to this day, associated with Christmastime.



When artist Gustav Koenig created “The Life of Luther in Forty-eight Historical Engravings,” he depicted the family at Christmas. It was on just such a Christmas Eve family gathering in 1535 that Luther wrote the Christmas hymn “From Heaven Above to Earth I Come.”

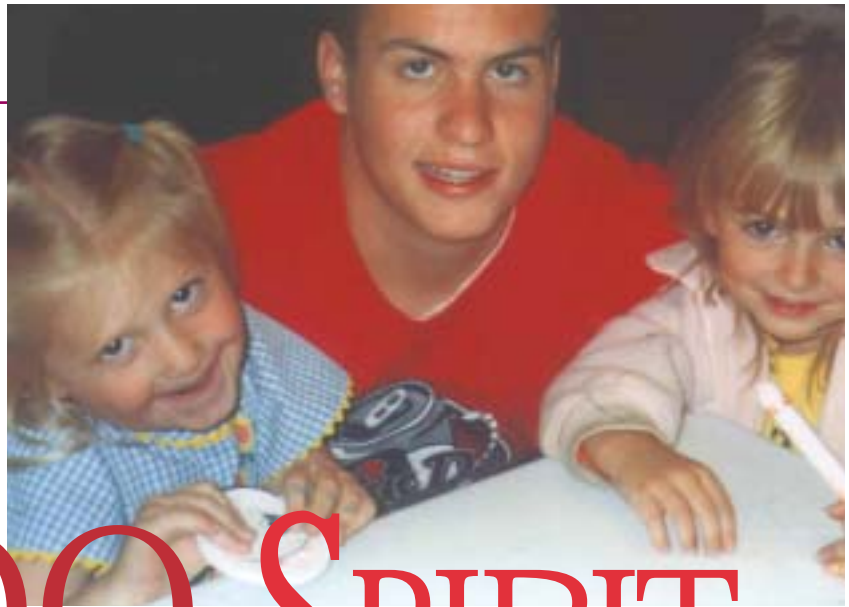
Social historians credit Luther with idealizing what is condescendingly referred to as “the bourgeois family.” Reacting against the medieval notion that Christian perfection requires celibacy, Luther taught that God Himself is hidden in marriage, taking care of children and ordinary family life.

Luther’s portraits of the Holy Family have a way of reminding us, especially at Christmas, that in this sense, every family is holy.



Dr. Gene Edward Veith is professor of English at Concordia University-Wisconsin, Mequon.

A CAN-DO volunteer from Faith, Georgetown, Texas, shares a smile with two Talkeetna, Alaska, VBS students.



THE CAN-DO SPIRIT IN TEXAS

Teens who are challenged and trained, rather than entertained, catch a vision for mission.



Jessica Beale (center), Bethel Lutheran Church, Dallas, hugs two VBS participants at a 1999 CAN-DO project in Talkeetna, Alaska.

by Robin R. Mueller

J. B. Stephenson, 22, a future doctor, intends to do medical missionary work. Phil Cook, 24, will become a pastor. Heather Bostick, 26, is a director of Christian education. All trace their mission-mindedness to their CAN-DO experiences.

CAN-DO (Christ Among Nations — Discipleship Outreach), a Texas District ministry that sponsors planned youth mission trips throughout the world, takes Phil. 4:13 as its motto: "I *can do* everything through Him who gives me strength."



Each year, more than 150 CAN-DO volunteers help the Alaska Mission Committee conduct VBS programs throughout the state.

"I'm a different person and a different Christian because of CAN-DO," says Stephenson, a member of Memorial Lutheran Church, Katy, Texas. He participated in five trips during high school and college to different Mexican towns. In summer 2002, he led five CAN-DO groups to San Luis Rio, Monterey and Rio Bravo, Mexico. "It's all about Gospel outreach," he says. "It's taught me about loving people and caring for their needs, physical and spiritual."

Phil Cook, studying at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., says, "CAN-DO was a shaping force in my life! The joy I saw when people heard the Gospel for the first time! That's why I'm here—to present God's grace and Gospel to those who don't know it."



Earlier this year CAN-DO volunteers from Immanuel, Giddings, Texas, helped to expand the sanctuary of El Calvario, Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Mexico. The first part of the project involved demolishing an existing building (above and left) to make way for the new addition to the sanctuary.



CAN-DO volunteers (left to right) Phil Cook, Mike White and J. B. Stephenson perform during a CAN-DO mission trip to Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico, earlier this year. "I'm a different person and a different Christian because of CAN-DO," Stephenson says.

Since ninth grade, Cook has gone on nine CAN-DO trips, three in a Texas border town and six in Mexico—the last with fellow seminarians. Cook intended to become a civil engineer "in order to improve life in Third World countries." But when he worked in Haiti with Engineering Ministries International in 2000, he learned, "I wanted to become directly involved in mission work."

Stephenson adds, "Adapting to a different culture gets you out of your comfort zone and really makes you put your trust in Christ. A mission trip is dangerous, not because of politics or terrorism or deprivation, but because you will be changed!"

CAN-DO's growth has been explosive. In 1994, about 40 senior-high youth traveled to Slovakia and Russia. In 2002, almost 1,000 junior-high, high-school and college-age youth (on spring breaks) participated in 15 locations. Groups number from a dozen to 20 youth, with two or more adult counselors.

Nearly 7,000 participants have done construction, taught VBS and Sunday school, and participated in witness/evangelism week-long projects in Russia, Slovakia, Brazil, Guatemala, Panama, Mexico, Alaska and Texas. In 2003, new work in Cuba is planned.





For nearly 10 years, CAN-DO volunteers have lent a hand with mission projects in Central America, South America and Europe. Pictured here are members of a 1999 CAN-DO team in Slovakia.

CAN-DO's director since 1996, DCE Ron Scherch, thought the 9/11 terrorist attacks would end the program. "Instead, we broke our record in 2002," he says. "I stand in awe of that! I don't direct this — God directs this program through me. CAN-DO has opened doors, changed lives and experienced the grace of Christ."

"CAN-DO mission endeavors are

not for spectators. What these kids accomplish is absolutely marvelous," says Rev. Ray Schkade, who initiated CAN-DO and serves on its board of directors. "They prepare sites for churches, dig trenches, demolish walls and remove concrete slabs. They walk the dirt streets of shantytowns and invite children to vacation Bible schools. They sleep on concrete floors and work long hours in 100-degree heat to serve people they don't know."

The former district executive director of parish services, Schkade was "inspired" at a 1991 mission festival in Warda, Texas. He thanked the congregation for their faithful, annual gifts to missions, but then suggested they could double their support if each confirmed member would "give up one Warda soda water [a beer] each week" and contribute the savings to mission work.

Driving home, he thought about asking youth and adults in Texas congregations to donate the cost of one can of soda weekly (50 cents), \$26 annually, or more than \$1 million combined, to mission work. (Another "can" reference in CAN-DO's name!)

In 1992, Schkade heard Marlene Wilson, a volunteerism expert, speak. "She said too many congregations spent time serving and entertaining youth, but little time challenging and training them for ministry," he recounts. Many young adults leave the church because they have not caught a vision of its mission, Wilson asserted. (Cook confirms that he "remained involved with the church during college, instead of falling away, because of my CAN-DO experiences.")

Schkade received "overwhelming support" from District leaders and worked with the LCMS Board for Mission Services to investigate sites with a survey team in Russia and Slovakia in 1993. CAN-DO "decided from the start to work alongside and advance the work of LCMS church bodies and missionaries," says Scherch.

The district provided \$100,000 and Wheat Ridge Ministries contributed a \$90,000 three-year grant. DCE Randy Potts became CAN-DO's first director. The first groups in Russia did surveys and reconverted an historic St. Petersburg church, which housed a gym and pool during the Cold War, to its original purpose. Texas teams in Slovakia worked with local Lutheran youth to witness on the streets. Later, some Russian and Slovakian youth who had served as hosts visited Texas congregations.

Heather Bostick, a DCE at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Temple, Texas, went to Kosice, Slovakia, in summer 1994.

She had taken previous mission trips with other mission agencies. After graduating from Concordia College, St. Paul, Minn., she served in Jamaica as a Christian education administrator. In summer 2002, she led CAN-DO groups to Alaska and Saltillo, Mexico. "God definitely called me into full-time ministry through those teenage experiences," she says. "And I felt God working through me to touch the lives of kids last summer."



CAN-DO volunteer Stephanie Mapes helps two students with a pipe-cleaner activity during a 1999 VBS program in Talkeetna, Alaska.



CAN-DO volunteers present an impromptu concert in the town square of Propad, Slovakia, during a 1999 mission trip to help build a youth center.

In 1994, CAN-DO piloted its work among three congregations—a large one, Salem Lutheran Church, Tomball, Texas; a medium-sized, Our Savior, Austin; and a small, Lord of Life, Plano. Smaller churches can form one mission group, or an individual in one congregation can join another church's team.

A thick CAN-DO manual prepares teams spiritually and mentally. The content includes a covenant, mission/vision, team-building exercises, fund-raising ideas (youth play a major role in funding trips), Bible studies, skits, "Temple Talks," Sunday-school projects and publicity materials. Congregational groups attend a pre-trip, daylong orientation seminar. "You build a wonderful Christian community with your group that lasts long after the trip ends," Phil Cook says.

"CAN-DO has earned a great reputation for being extremely well-organized and intentional about mission, from start to finish," says Schkade. "All the money from congregations goes to support their team and the mission. When a group arrives, the permissions, materials, schedule and local congregation are ready."



One of CAN-DO's earliest mission efforts was a cooperative project with local volunteers to build a youth center in Slovakia. Pictured here are Slovak volunteers led by Lutheran Hour staff member Jan Kerekrety (far right) of Bratislava, Slovakia, and his wife, Aurelia (far left), a university professor.

The good word spread, and district executives and congregations across the country asked CAN-DO leaders to help them organize mission trips, or have "piggy-backed" their youth groups with CAN-DO groups.

CAN-DO has forged ongoing relationships with Mexican congregations since 1994. Duane and Sherlyn Carter of Our Savior Lutheran Church, Austin, went with their son, Graham, 15, to serve San Mateo and its three satellite churches in San Luis Rio last summer. Another group from Katy joined them to build churches and conduct VBS, under the leadership of Rev. Filiberto Jimenz, the local pastor.

"I became the Mom, nurse and cook," says Sherlyn Carter. "We worked from sunup to sundown, but I felt like it just wasn't enough. The poverty and need greatly affected all of us."

Graham Carter says, "It was easy to make friends, in spite of the language barrier. We played soccer with the kids and got involved in VBS."

"We were sweaty, grungy and dirty," recounts Duane Carter. "I was wheel-barrowing a load of sand and Sherlyn was painting a door. I just looked at her and said, 'Retirement!' When we got back, I reminded our kids it's not just mission out, but mission in. Now, they're asking, 'What will we do next summer?'"

Experiences such as the Carters' inspired adults to found KIMA (Koinonea Independent Mission Agency) in 1998. Comprised of individuals and congregations in Texas and other states and associated with CAN-DO, KIMA supports Lutheran Synod of Mexico congregations, helping them develop evangelism and discipleship programs and prepare future pastors and church leaders.

Almost half of Texas congregations have sponsored CAN-DO groups and nearly 80 percent repeat the experience. "About 20 congregations send multiple groups each year," adds Scherch.

In 1999, CAN-DO's defining theme became "partners in the Gospel, guests in the house and witnesses back home." CAN-DO congregations typically become involved in local missions. A Dallas congregation is



Volunteers from St. Paul, Plainview, Texas, assist with a VBS program in Wasilla, Alaska, earlier this year.

working with a coalition of inner-city churches, and San Antonio congregations have initiated Hispanic work.

With the Texas District's blessing and continuing support, CAN-DO will become an independent agency in 2003 in order to seek other funding sources and grow nationally.

Scherch describes "a 1997 video clip I treasure. Nathan Gettel, then 17, was asked to describe how CAN-DO had changed his life. He said, 'Before I went on my CAN-DO mission trip, I never told people about Jesus.' Then he smiles and says, 'Now I can't stop talking about Jesus.'"

"Multiply that effect among CAN-DOers who are now young adults, DCEs, teachers, and pastors in Texas and throughout the U.S.—and watch out. Mission-mindedness is infectious!"



Robin R. Mueller, a former features editor for The Lutheran Witness, is a freelance writer in House Springs, Mo.

Fall Concordia enrollments reach all-time high

The total enrollment this fall at the Synod's 10 Concordia University System (CUS) colleges and universities is at an all-time high. The number of Synod students at CUS schools also continues to rise, and seminary enrollment climbed for the third year straight.

Including the two seminaries, the total enrollment is 17,042 (738 more than reported last year); the number of Missouri Synod students at the CUS schools is

4,920 (157 more); and the number of seminarians is 1,010 (up eight).

The Synod's Board for Higher Education (BHE)/Concordia University System compiled the enrollment figures and other data and released a statistical report containing the data.

Totals that are down include the number of CUS students studying for church-work vocations—2,854, or 189 less than a year ago. Preseminary students at the CUS

schools number 420 (down 26).

"Please note that a one-year comparison is not the entire story," said Dr. William F. Meyer, executive director of the BHE/CUS. Meyer said that in the past five years, total enrollment on the 12 campuses has increased by 15.8 percent and the number of students preparing for ministry has declined by only 1 percent.

He said that the 2001 Synod convention cut several categories former-

ly counted as church-work students, which is "one factor that accounts for a drop in the number of church-work students over the five-year period."

He said that some schools "have small endowments, so they are not able to provide the discounts to tuition that future workers of the church expect."

Eight Synod schools reported enrollment increases this year and four indicated that their enrollments declined.

Committee OKs DELTO changes

A committee revising the Synod's Distance Education Leading to Ordination (DELTO) program has approved revisions to the program.

Dr. L. Dean Hempelmann, the committee's chairman and director of pastoral education with the LCMS Board for Higher Education, said that the committee's work is "virtually complete" and that qualified DELTO candidates "may now apply to the program."

He described DELTO as "a program of theological education leading to ordination for men who provide pastoral services to congregations that cannot support a full-time pastor or who serve in situations of extraordinary circumstances."

Revisions now allow

DELTO participants to take a third of the required 30 courses at the district level, complete courses on a pass/fail basis, and study the Bible in their own languages rather than via original languages.

Hempelmann said that men serving in "extraordinary circumstances" may contact their district presidents and the DELTO coordinator at one of the seminaries to apply to the program.

Group to study boosting teacher certification

Falling percentages of Synod-certified teachers in schools of LCMS congregations over the years have created "a problem of great magnitude," said Dr. Ray Halm, chairman of the New Generation Task Force, which is studying how to reverse

those percentages.

The most recent statistics available from LCMS District and Congregational Services—School Ministry show that the percentages of Synod-certified teachers between 1991 and 2001 fell from 18 percent to only 9 percent for those in early-childhood programs, 70 percent to 54 percent for elementary-school teachers, and 66 to 60 percent for high-school teachers.

Halm said that members of the task force "expressed strong concern over these alarming statistics" when they met for the first time Nov. 2–3.

"The faith development of our children, and therefore the long-term health of our Synod, is in large measure dependent upon the ability of our teachers to articulate Lutheran doctrine accurately every day," Halm said, "whether on the playground, in

science class or in religion class. Let us ensure that they are fully prepared."

Halm said that the task force "will look at measures and strategies to increase the number of certified teachers," such as urging principals and other school administrators to offer uncertified teachers scholarships for teacher-colloquy programs.

The task force will report to the 2004 LCMS convention.

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.

Parishes share church-planting insights, ideas

Representatives of six LCMS congregations that have done “an exemplary job” in starting “daughter congregations” shared their expertise with national mission leaders Sept. 5–7 in St. Louis.

The congregations represented were Carmel Lutheran Church, Carmel, Ind.; Ascension, Wichita, Kan.; Christ Assembly, Staten Island, N.Y.; San Pablo, Aurora, Ill.; El Redentor,

Rockford, Ill.; and Rivercliff, Atlanta.

The pastors of those congregations participated in a panel discussion with North America mission leaders.

Dr. Ken Behnken, a participant and director of the Center for U.S. Missions, Irvine, Calif., said Synod mission leaders are trying to shift church-planting from districts to congregations.

Videos of the discussions will be made available next year to other congregations interested in planting churches.

Program focuses on immigrants

A distance-education seminary program for immigrants to the United States is expected to be “up and running” in mid-February.

The Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology, based at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, is a specialized, interdisciplinary program that blends distance education, local mentoring and on-campus training.

Students will include Africans, Asians and

Middle-Easterners who work with Muslims, said Rev. Yohannes Mengsteab, facilitator for new African-immigrant and urban missions with LCMS world Mission and director of the new Ethnic Immigrant Institute.

While the Synod has more than 70 African-immigrant ministries, the majority of them are led by laymen, Mengsteab said.

For more information, contact Mengsteab at (800) 433-3954, Ext. 1336.

Declining revenue may force deep cuts for missions

With revenue falling for the current fiscal year, LCMS World Mission expects to make “substantial reductions” in programs and in the size of its staff—in St. Louis and in mission fields worldwide—by year’s end.

Mission leaders are faced with cutting between \$2 and \$3 million from the mission board’s budget because of a shortfall of some \$1.5 million in income during the first quarter of the fiscal year that started July 1.

The entire national LCMS budget saw a shortfall of some \$3.1 million in the same period.

“There is no way we can have reductions like this without substantial reductions in personnel,” said Dr. Daniel Mattson, associate executive director of LCMS World Mission.

According to Mattson, world-mission leaders are contemplating “the possibility of closing mission work ahead of schedule in some fields,” but expect that local leaders will continue worship and outreach activities.

As this *Lutheran Witness* went to press, LCMS World Mission supported work in 68 countries, with a mission force

of 400, including 177 career missionaries.

Mission leaders say that the drop in mission funding is due to two factors: With the current U.S. economy, donors just don’t have as much to contribute; and controversy in the Synod has distracted people from the Synod’s mission focus.

Other Synod departments also have been

affected by the drop in income.

Those include the Synod’s radio station KFUE, which faced a \$120,000 shortage in funds raised for the station. The Board for Communication Services made a number of cuts, including the elimination of one communications-staff position and several part-time posts at KFUE, and accepted two early retirements.

Other Synod departments are not filling vacant positions from early retirements and other natural attrition, said Brad Hewitt, the Synod’s chief administrative officer.

Hewitt indicated that a group of Synod leaders would propose a “systematic approach” to funding to the LCMS Board of Directors, and possibly to the 2004 Synod convention.



Lutheran leaders in Africa distribute Holy Communion during an outdoor worship service. Because of falling revenues, LCMS World Mission is considering closing mission work ahead of schedule in some fields.

A LESSON IN THE CHRISTMAS SHEPHERDS

by Karl Weber

A part from the holy family, the first humans to hear the Good News of the birth of the Good Shepherd were shepherds. They were tending the flocks on the Judean hillside that night.

The Scriptures are filled with references to shepherds and sheep. Many Old Testament metaphors are to prepare you and me for the coming of the Shepherd, the one who will shepherd Israel like a flock.

In what ways do you see these passages referring to the work of the Triune God as our shepherd?

Gen. 49:23–25 _____

Ps. 23:1–2 _____

Ps. 28:8–10 _____

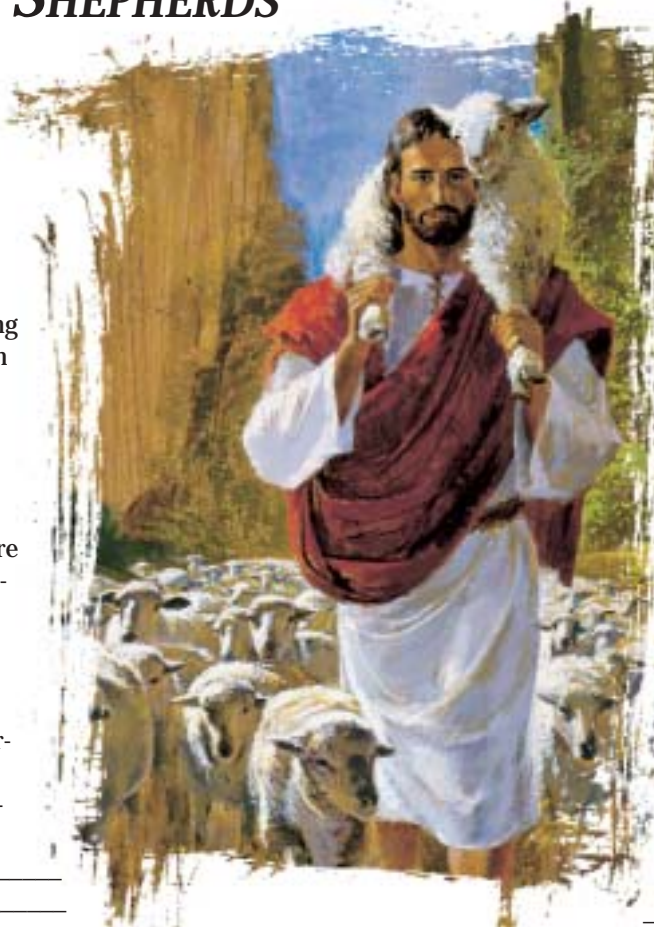
Ps. 80:1–2 _____

Is. 40:11 _____

Ezek. 34:11–16 _____

Micah 5:2–5a _____

Sheep, though they might look cute, are not very intelligent. They are prone to disease, have the annoying ability to wander off, and are one of the most defenseless of God's creatures. Often, Jesus compares His saints, His dearly beloved—you and me—to sheep. Could there be good reasons for



this comparison? Look up these verses and note in what ways we humans, even Christians, are like sheep.

Num. 27:16–17 _____

Is. 53:6 _____

Ps. 100:3 _____

John 10:27–29 _____

In the early days of the Old Testament, shepherds were glorified much like Americans glorify cowboys. They were out in the wilderness defying the odds of nature, watching over the weak and helpless.

But, by the time of Christ's birth, their status had suffered.

Urban sprawl had relegated the shepherd to the Judean highlands where the cultured Jews and the Romans would not have to smell the shepherd or his sheep. They were looked down upon and shunned.

They developed a deep bond with their sheep, calling them by name and loving them. When the terrain was rugged or the sheep wandered, the shepherd would search for them. When they were too weak and frightened, he would hoist them upon his shoulders.

So it is with our shepherd. He protects and defends us with His own blood. He guides us with that Word of pardon and truth. Read God's ultimate plan for us—the sheep He loves.

Matt. 9:36 _____

John 10:11; 14–16 _____

Mark 6:34 _____

Matt. 25:31–33 _____

Amazingly, our Shepherd's greatest victory for us is in His death. For His death is the death of death itself.

When we hear of the shepherds in the Christmas story, remember that they are one more sign pointing us to the true Shepherd—the One who shepherds our souls.



Rev. Karl Weber is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Decatur, Ill.

LIVES TRANSFORMED THROUGH CHRIST, IN TIME ... FOR ETERNITY!

The words of the title to this column take on even more special meaning at this time of the year, during which we celebrate the birth of the Christ child, the baby Jesus of Nazareth.

Reading through the New Testament, particularly in the Gospel of Luke, one cannot help being amazed at the wonder of His birth. For example, when questioned by Mary concerning how she could possibly conceive and bear a son, given her virginity, the announcing angel answered: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

For indeed, the wonder of Christmas is in the miracle of divine love ... reaching out to every person ... bringing peace to every heart!

And an angel of the Lord said to terrified shepherds concerning the birth of the baby Jesus, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

Interesting, isn't it, that both of these announcements concerning the Savior's birth came from the non-human mouth of an angel. Our Christmas greetings, prayers and wishes for family and friends are articulated in quite human words and ways. But the true meaning contained therein comes from above.

Recently, in the process of selecting Christmas greeting cards, I was struck by the messages contained therein. Here are several examples:

- "... that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" John 3:16 / May Your Home Be Filled With His Extravagant Love This Christmas And Throughout The New Year.

- *His destiny was the cross ... His purpose was love ... His reason was you* / May Your Christmas Be A Celebration Of The Savior.

- *"Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent"* John 17:3 / When you get right down to it ... the only thing that really matters is Jesus.

- *If our greatest need had been information,* God would have sent us an educator.

- *If our greatest need had been technology,* God would have sent us a scientist.

- *If our greatest need had been money,* God would have sent us an economist.

- *If our greatest need had been pleasure,* God would have sent us an entertainer.

- *But our greatest need was forgiveness,* so God sent us a Savior.

- *This Christmas may you see and know anew how great His love is toward you* / "For unto you is born this day ... a Savior, which is Christ the Lord" Luke 2:11.

- *It was out of His great love for us that He came not only as a humble babe but delivered us as a risen king* / May your home be filled with the unending love of our



Savior this Christmas and throughout the coming new year. Luke 2:11

- *The peace that passes all understanding is the peace that only He can give* / Praying your home is filled with His abiding peace, His incessant joy, and His glorious presence this Christmas and throughout the coming new year. Isaiah 9:6

- *Jesus left heaven and came to earth so that when we leave earth we can go to heaven* / May the Lord bless you with the gift of His perfect peace this Christmas, and a sense of His presence in your heart every day. James 1:17

Along with all the members of our family, Terry and I extend to each of you, in the words of all the greetings shared above, our most heartfelt expressions of Christian love, appreciation and thanksgiving for our partnership in the Gospel. *For indeed, the wonder of Christmas is in the miracle of divine love ... reaching out to every person ... bringing peace to every heart!*

A Blessed Christmas and a Joyous New Year to you all!

Jerry Kieschnick

John 3:16-17

e-mail: president@lcms.org

Web page: www.lcms.org/president