

**A Pastoral Letter to  
Pastors of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod  
From President Jerry Kieschnick  
March 25, 2009**

Dear Brothers in Christ,

Although quite a few years have gone by, I can remember as a boy anticipating the special worship services at church during the holy season of Lent. My parents "suggested"—in a loving way, of course—that we attend every midweek service, plus Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. That "suggestion" was more nearly a mandate, meaning that we simply missed none of those special services. As an adult, I have only grown in appreciation for these opportunities to reflect on our Lord Jesus Christ and His presence in our lives.

At my home church in Houston, Palm Sunday was Confirmation Sunday, and our first communion was on Maundy Thursday. I vividly recall the first time I received the Lord's Supper, with the other members of my confirmation class at my side. To this day, this special oneness with Christ in the Sacrament draws me back to His presence in, with, and under bread and wine.

In this time of the church year, which I know is quite full for each of you as you prepare for and lead so many additional services of worship, my prayer is that Lent and Holy Week will provide also for you and your family especially meaningful times to worship our most gracious God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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### **Reaching the neighborhood**

The percentage of American adults who consider themselves to be Christian dropped from 86 percent in 1990 to 76 percent last year. Meanwhile, the percentage of Americans who say they have no religion at all climbed from 8 to 15 percent over the same period.

These results from the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), while not good news to hear, come as little surprise to those of us engaged in various aspects of ministry in the LCMS. But, what does this mean for our life and ministry together in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod? For me, it is yet another reminder that one of the biggest challenges facing our Synod today is how to remain an orthodox, confessional, evangelical, Christian, Lutheran church body that is proactively proclaiming the Gospel in a culture that at best is indifferent and at worst downright hostile to the Christian faith.

A general answer to this challenge is to be aware of, alert to, and sensitive about discerning the needs of people in the communities in which we live and serve and intentionally to develop strategic plans for communicating the Gospel in ways that reach beyond our sanctuaries and classrooms. Unquestionably, we need to reach people where they work, in their homes, at the local café—wherever people gather, articulate their deepest needs, and can be met with the soothing ointment of the Gospel.

In the next issue of *President's Leadership News*, which will come with your *May Reporter*, I will share a specific example of a pastor and congregation who are meeting people where they live—in what probably is an even less Christian culture than our own. For now, I encourage you to do

what many LCMS pastors and congregations are already doing. Feel the pulse of your community and the neighborhood around your church. Ask questions of people and about people. What is the greatest need you face these days? What causes you to lie awake at night? What can our church do in a positive, constructive, helpful way to address these needs? How can our people and leaders be involved in a way that uses their God-given gifts and resources for the welfare of the church and community?

I am reminded of Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet, when the royal host sends his servants out into the community. He told them, "Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests ..." (Luke 22:9-10). Many, if not most, people in our communities won't automatically come to our churches these days. They are waiting to be invited.

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### ***Fan into Flame* moves forward**

Despite the current economy, *Fan into Flame* continues to move forward, providing above-budget funds for new and much-needed mission projects worldwide. January and February 2009 were the best two months of the campaign so far, with more gifts and pledges (\$4.4 million) than in the first seven months of 2008. The total in cash and pledges raised so far has surpassed \$45 million.

*Fan into Flame* funds already are helping our worldwide partners and us to reach more people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Here are two examples:

- More than \$1.1 million has been received to distribute 60,000-plus digital audio Bibles to young people and their families through the *Ablaze!* Bible Listening Project. Audio Bibles on MP3 players were given to some 25,000 participants at the 2007 National LCMS Youth Gathering and are being distributed this school year and next to students in participating LCMS elementary schools. Through related school projects, funds also are being raised to send audio Bibles in six languages to Bible-listening centers operated in India by our partner church there, the India Evangelical Lutheran Church.
- In St. Petersburg, Russia, St. Michael Lutheran Church is reaching people with the Gospel through classical-music concerts that are drawing large crowds that often overflow the available space. In less than five months, from October 2008 to mid February 2009, some 14,500 people attended the concerts and heard a clear witness to the Christian faith. Renovation and expansion of the church's facilities are under way, funded by more than \$1 million from *Fan into Flame*.

To date, *Fan into Flame* also has disbursed \$3.65 million to participating districts and \$815,000 to participating congregations.

For those of you who have participated or are currently participating in *Fan into Flame*, thank you! If you have not yet been involved in the campaign, please, we need your congregation's participation to help advance proclamation of the Gospel around the world. For information on taking part, contact your district office or phone the *Fan into Flame* office at (800) 977-2017.

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## **A matter of serious concern**

My dear brothers in Christ, I come to you now with a matter that has been weighing on my heart. From time to time, district presidents call me for counsel on how to deal pastorally with rostered church workers who have "stepped over the line" regarding morals or ethics in their personal behavior. There is no greater burden for a district president than seeking to deal pastorally, evangelically, faithfully, and responsibly with an ordained or commissioned minister of the Gospel in such a circumstance.

My heart aches and breaks when I hear of a church worker, especially of a brother pastor, who has fallen prey to Satan's temptation and violated through infidelity the covenants of love made with his spouse. Occasionally, I will hear also from members of the pastor's family, who are devastated by the horrific consequences that result from the pastor's resignation from his congregational ministry and his resignation or removal from the LCMS clergy roster. I also often hear from members of his congregation. Their story is always the same—they are stunned and saddened by the revelations of unfaithfulness; their hearts ache for the pastor and his wife as they try to put the pieces of their marriage back together, sometimes successfully, sometimes unsuccessfully; they express concern for their children as they try to deal with such a disastrous development; and they grieve for themselves and other congregational members whom the pastor has been serving. One of their primary concerns is for those with the most fragile faith who are put at the greatest spiritual risk by the betrayal of trust they feel at their pastor's infidelity to his spouse, which is also accompanied by feelings of their own personal betrayal of trust in the pastor's integrity.

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

This rather heavy note is not intended to be discouraging. I simply share my encouragement with each of you—as I do also with myself—to pay careful attention to such matters as integrity, honesty, truthfulness, and godly behavior. None of us is without sin, and all of us thank God for His forgiving love in Christ our Lord. The pastoral office carries with it special requirements and expectations (1 Tim, 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9). The office also carries great responsibility and privilege that we dare never take lightly. I pray that your administration of the office to which you have been called by God and the church gives you great joy and will continue to be a blessing to many!

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## **Security plans for churches**

Perhaps you read or heard about the tragic shooting March 8 at First Baptist Church in Maryville, Ill., which is close to St. Louis. The pastor, Rev. Fred Winters, was shot while delivering his sermon that Sunday morning in front of 150 parishioners. He died moments later.

This wasn't an isolated incident. Last July, two people were killed and several more were wounded after a gunman opened fire during a children's performance at a Knoxville, Tenn., church. Since the first of this year, churches in 39 states have reported 141 incidents, including burglaries and bomb threats.

News stories about the Maryville shooting included comments from experts saying that churches should have security plans in place to include evacuation, long-term shelter, medical

emergencies, lost or missing children, and violent confrontations. I raise this issue because you may want to explore this matter with your congregation's leaders and local police, fire, and emergency officials. While it grieves me even to have to mention matters such as this, we are called upon to be prudent and prepared, addressing matters such as these with responsibility, care, and concern for the ministries and people we serve.

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## **Concordia Sunday**

The 10 colleges and universities of the Concordia University System (CUS) continue our Synod's long history of educating and developing Christian leaders for service to the church and world. Please encourage your congregation to join with our CUS schools in celebration of this ongoing ministry by dedicating one Sunday as "Concordia Sunday." Choose any Sunday you like—April 26 is suggested, but any Sunday that is convenient for the congregation is appropriate.

This celebration highlights the importance of Christian higher education in a Lutheran context. It also is an opportunity to encourage youth and adults in your congregation to consider serving in positions that benefit the Synod and society through preparation at one of our Concordias. Make this an occasion of joy and thanksgiving! To order materials to help in celebration of Concordia Sunday, go online to [www.lcms.org?4174](http://www.lcms.org?4174), or call Linda Lehr at (800) 248-1930, Ext. 1252.

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## **China Evangelical Lutheran Church**

When Mao Zedong won the civil war in China against Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist army in 1949, China became a communist country. This forced many Christians, including some of our missionaries and Chinese Lutherans, to retreat with Chiang to Taiwan. The Missouri Synod continued to send missionaries to Taiwan, small plots of land were acquired, churches were built, a seminary and middle school were built, and the church in Taiwan grew. Chinese men were trained for the ministry so that in 1966, the church in Taiwan became an independent partner church body, the China Evangelical Lutheran Church (CELC). Today, the church has about 2,000 members in 20 congregations.

Our missionaries have continued to work hand in hand with the pastors and churches of the CELC, establishing new missions and reaching out to Chinese people with the Gospel. Many volunteer missionaries have been stationed at individual CELC congregations, Concordia Middle School, and China Lutheran Seminary in Taiwan to spread God's Word through the medium of English teaching. At present, our mission involvement continues among CELC congregations but has evolved toward two focal points: the middle school and seminary. Each has a career missionary from the LCMS, and each has a robust mission program. In addition, one of the most exciting recent *Ablaze!* ventures has been working with the CELC to send Pastor Michael Wu from Taiwan to Macau to reach out to Chinese people in and beyond Macau.

China Lutheran Seminary currently has 400 students, about 300 of which are lay people studying in 25 branch locations around Taiwan to increase their service and evangelistic outreach. The other approximately 100 students study on campus—training primarily to be full-time workers in the Chinese churches—in a new eight-story building that was funded in part by *Fan into Flame*.

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Concordia Middle School has been doing educational mission work in Myanmar for more than 15 years. This has included the founding in 2008 of "The Bob Zimmer Foundation," named after LCMS missionary Robert Zimmer, who started the school more than 40 years ago. Last summer, the school sent a team of teachers and students to Myanmar on a short-term mission trip and sent former CMS Principal Kenneth Chen to do teacher training in Myanmar for one month last fall. These are all in areas where we cannot go as westerners.

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## **Concordia University Portland**

Concordia University Portland, founded in 1905, currently serves 1,700 students through its College of Education; College of Health and Human Services; College of Theology, Arts, and Sciences; and School of Management.

Today, the campus is undergoing transformation. In August, the university will dedicate the George R. White Library and Learning Center, which will allow the library to expand its collection from 80,000 volumes to 200,000 volumes. It also will include classrooms, a community room, faculty offices, technology for the campus and community, group and individual study spaces, a coffee shop, and program space. A component of the new facility is a partnership with the Northwest District to establish the Art and Carol Wahlers Center for Applied Lutheran Leadership (CALL), which is intended to enhance leadership that will help congregations strengthen and create vibrant, healthy, relevant, and effective ministries focused on their mission.

Last summer, Concordia dedicated a state-of-the-art Throw Center for student athletes, Olympic hopefuls, and community youth to participate and train in the four throwing events (shot, discus, hammer, and javelin). Inspired by Concordia's throws coach, Olympic gold medalist Mac Wilkins, the facility will be made available to youth from around the region as a part of Concordia's ongoing commitment to the community. The university anticipates breaking ground soon on a new athletic complex for baseball and soccer.

A key part of Concordia Portland's mission is its focus on community engagement. The school recently was named to the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll for service to America's communities. On average, Concordia faculty, staff, and students contribute more than 223,000 hours of practicum, internship, and service-learning hours per year, serving more than 10,000 community members. In 2006, the university established the Concordia Teacher Corps, select students who volunteer to mentor and tutor elementary, middle school, and high school students in nearby neighborhoods.

For more information about Concordia University Portland, visit [www.cu-portland.edu](http://www.cu-portland.edu).

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## **A parting word of encouragement**

As we prepare to follow our Lord to Jerusalem and the cross, we also know that on Easter we will rejoice in His resurrection. St. Paul reminds us, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, *who was raised to life*—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Rom. 8:31-34).

May our Lord bless you richly as you lead your people in worship through the remainder of Lent, Holy Week, and on to the joyous celebration of the Festival of the Resurrection!

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"Transforming lives through Christ's love ... in time ... for eternity ..." John 3:16-17