

JESUS Welcomes SINNERS

BY REV. DR. MATTHEW C. HARRISON



A recent television documentary covered the famous “Woodstock” concert, which occurred 44 years ago this past August in New York State. I grew up with the music and did and do enjoy much of it. I was seven years old in 1969 and, aside from seeing the Vietnam casualty reports on the evening news, I was blissfully unaware of the unraveling of American culture.

The documentary, all filmed at the three-day concert, struck me profoundly. The normality of the young people interviewed, the pervasiveness of drugs, the undertone of sexual experimentation, the understandable disillusionment with war and the rejection of standard political solutions were all tremendous portents of the cultural tsunami we are now experiencing. And based on the size of the crowd, make no mistake, there were thousands of LCMS youth there too.

Much of the counter-cultural agenda articulated in 1969 has been achieved in the 44 years since. Artists who performed in that muddy field in upstate New York are passing from this world, while those living singers, now in their 70s (like Joan Baez) and older, have become radical champions of our cultural implosion today. Their goal was peace and love. Seeing the likes of a young Jerry Garcia of “The Grateful Dead” joke about marijuana stunned me as I contemplated his life, marked by struggling with a drug addiction that finally killed him. Watching Jimi Hendrix, who would be dead of an overdose just 13 months later, filled me with even more melancholy. Man seeks freedom by his own devices, only to become enslaved.

We live today with a “Purple Haze” of confusion over many issues, and no issue more so than sexuality. Our job as the church is not to Christianize our society. Not at all. We do our best as pastors and teachers and church to teach what the Bible says about church and state, about natural law, morality and marriage, and we encourage you to be active in your communities, politically and otherwise. It is our task to teach to those in the Church what the Bible says about marriage and sex. We have done this, and much of it has been done very well. But it is past time for us to up our game in this regard. We have the herculean task of teaching our people what God in Christ expects of us in the realm of marriage, family and sexuality. The pressures of our culture toward the acceptance of the gay agenda,

“It’s time to recognize, increase and share our resources to **reach out to individuals and families** who are struggling with these issues so we can **share their burdens.**”

and the secular sexual agenda *in toto*, are pressures upon us. And they are ever increasing.

Some time ago we resolved to begin working more intentionally in the area of caring for those who struggle with same-sex attraction. We assembled a group of individuals (who, by the way, are the primary authors of this issue of *The Lutheran Witness*), each with significant experience in this area, and we asked them: “Where do we go?” “What do we do as the Church?” The weekly preaching that our pastors do—condemning us sinners and delivering the forgiveness of sins—is pure gold. It’s the *sine qua non* of dealing with the Sixth Commandment sins of thought, word and deed with which we all struggle. But we also assembled the “God’s Gift of Sexuality” task force on same-sex attraction, believing that it was time for the Synod to begin to identify existing LCMS capacity and knowledge on this issue.

Several years ago, we took this approach in the area of disaster ministry. The result was an overwhelming strengthening and networking and use of unending capacity within our own church body to care for people in times of disaster. We can do the same with same-sex attraction. It’s time to recognize, increase and share our resources to reach out to individuals and families who are struggling with these issues so we can share their burdens. Even though the Bible prevents us from affirming same-sex marriage and same-sex attraction, we must nevertheless be welcoming to those who struggle. We are all sinners. Jesus welcomes sinners. Jesus came to have mercy upon us sinners, and He does.