



President  
Paul  
Sieveking

### Good news of great joy

A Sunday school teacher told about a little boy in her second-grade class, who after a couple of weeks of rehearsals for the Christmas Eve service, was getting a little tired of it all. In his boyish way he asked her, "Why do we have to do this?"

There are times, as we make all our preparations for Christmas, when we could empathize with the boy. Why do we have to do all "this" at Christmas? His question deserves an answer.

Every Christmas, we hear again the familiar story from Luke's Gospel. We've heard it so many times that it tends to underwhelm us. It begins in a small and gentle way with the birth of a baby in such lowly conditions, wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. Mary the mother, looking at her baby, ponders it all in her heart. Shepherds, resting on the hillside, keep watch over their flocks.

Suddenly the countryside explodes as the night sky is flooded with the light of glory. First one angel with Good News of great joy for all people, "To you is born this day in the City of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord." Then the sky is filled with the heavenly host putting on a display of glory so spectacular the shepherds are terrified. It must have been awesome! Can you picture it?

Unfortunately, the way we try to

recreate it in our Christmas pageants seems so pitifully small. A bunch of boys, who last week got into trouble for throwing snowballs after Sunday school, are dressed in terrycloth bathrobes that aren't quite long enough to hide their new basketball shoes. They keep watch over a flock, little ones dressed in black-and-white spotted pajamas and acting too much like little animals. Other children, dressed in white robes with flopping cardboard and garland wings and halos, flutter into the chancel. Another group kneels before the manger wearing tinfoil crowns and carrying gifts—a jewelry box and a glass vase. A young boy and girl, who really don't like one another, gaze down into a plywood manger, holding an ugly baby doll that's missing one leg.

Is it any wonder the boy would ask, "Why do we have to do this?" These bathrobe Christmas programs—as sweet and as well performed as they are—and even our highest attempts to convey the power, the glory, the beauty of what really happened that first Christmas, our cantatas, or even the extravaganza at the Crystal Cathedral, seem so trivial and so small in comparison!

Maybe so. But before we put the costumes and the manger back into the closet for another year, we should look again carefully at the way Luke described the events. The important thing to notice is that Luke didn't try to dazzle us with an eloquent description. How bright was the glory of the Lord? What did the angels look like? Luke didn't tell us. How many shepherds were there? What colors were Mary's clothes? What did the baby Jesus really look like? Luke said nothing about those things.

Instead, he pulled our attention away from the details and focused

our attention on the baby, first and foremost, and then on the responses of those who were there. The shepherds were "terrified ... and hurried off to see the baby ... and when they had seen him they spread the word ... then returned glorifying and praising God." The people who heard their reports "were amazed at what the shepherds said" about the baby. And Mary "treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." Luke wants to tell us what happened in those folks' hearts and lives because of the Baby.

Luke wants us to see ourselves in the story.

He wants us to hear for ourselves the message the angels proclaimed: "Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you ... to you." Throughout the Advent season, we focus our attention on the gifts of God: faith, peace, joy, life, and God's love. All these are God's gifts—to you—in Jesus your Savior. He wants us to be filled with wonder, to treasure these things and to ponder them in our hearts, to understand who God is and what He is doing for us. He wants us to hold the baby Jesus. He wants us to praise and glorify God this Christmas for all that we have experienced because of the life of the Christ Child who was born that night. Luke wants us to "spread the word" concerning what has been told to us about this child.

From one generation to the next, we tell the story year after year. Think back to the first Christmas pageant that you were in. Isn't that when you remember first hearing the story and how it came to life for you? You were a participant. You were part of that story. Do you see how important it is that we continue to do this? That's why the little boy has to do it!

*(Continued on Page H.)*

# EDUCATION



Rev. Bob Riggert  
Executive Assistant

## Who is Sue?

For 30 years, pastors and partners from across Iowa District West have called the Iowa District West office and have been greeted “Good morning, Iowa District West, this is Sue.” Many registering for district events or seeking district resources have been advised to e-mail *sue.light@idwlcms.org*. Who is Sue?

Recently Sue observed her 30th anniversary as a district office employee. As a 19-year-old, Sue was completing the Iowa Central Community College clerical office occupations program when she noticed a posting at the college advertising the position at the district office. Sue was interviewed by then executive assistant Rollin Cattau. She interviewed on Friday and began work the next Monday. She’s been showing up every Monday since.

During her three decades at the office, she has worked under Iowa West District Presidents Nieting, Kapfer, and Sieveking. She has been the assistant to executives Cattau, Reinhardt, and presently Pastor Riggert. Other major changes include the shift to computer programs. Sue began with an electric typewriter



Sue Light



At a staff luncheon, members of the district staff observe Sue's 30th anniversary as a district employee.

and carbon paper.

Duties also have changed. Over the years, Sue did some office accounting and assisted Gary Thies’ office with “thank you’s” to donors. She also initially attended all district youth events (and was among the group confined in the gathering hotel during the Thanksgiving weekend blizzard of 1985). Sue notes that, over the years, “we do more of everything.”

What hasn’t changed is Sue’s pleasant greeting on the phone and her servant heart in the office. When asked, “What’s the best part of your job?” she quickly responds with “the people.” In more than 30

years, she most likely has connected with over a thousand different district professional workers. Executive Assistant Riggert notes, “Sue is a blessing to me, to the staff, and to the district.”

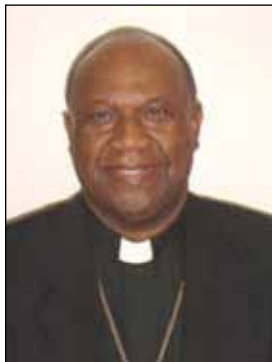
Sue has been married to husband Bruce for 24 years. They live in Gowrie and were very

involved with their children’s activities at the Prairie Valley schools. Daughter Megan is a sophomore at the University of Northern Iowa and son Kevin is a freshman at Iowa Central Community College. The Light family also is active in their local church.



The mission of the district is to connect, resource, and partner with district congregations. Sue provides the voice connection to many; she capably and professionally produces resources; she is a key staff partner. She lives out the district mission with you and for you.

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Dr. Arthur  
Porter

*Dr. Arthur Porter, director of The Los Angeles Nehemiah Project, has announced his intention to retire at the end of 2009. He shares his final message in this month's Witness.*

### **Christ is the bridge to salvation**

The Los Angeles Nehemiah Project was founded on the principles of restoring and revitalizing its member churches to regain the vibrancy that made the inner-city Lutheran churches an effective and important pillar and lighthouse for Christ in the city.

Our namesake, Nehemiah, came to rebuild the temple walls to bridge the past and the future of the Jewish religious life. Like Nehemiah, The Los Angeles Nehemiah Project is rebuilding inner-city churches, but unlike Nehemiah, not with bricks and mortar, but with souls: devoted disciples doing the work of God connecting the lost to Jesus Christ.

We are committed to building bridges, not walls. The city is rife with walls, barriers, and gated areas requiring passwords and keys. Building walls and barriers is not Christian. Walls are a barrier to a sense of unity that is required for being the church. In order to reach the lost, which includes an ever-increasing number of cultures and

languages, we have to remove barriers and build bridges.

Man has made many marvelous constructs in human history: skyscrapers and the Panama Canal. But one of the most fascinating constructs is the bridge, like the Golden Gate Bridge. Bridges are fascinating because they not only are built across water, they are built in water. But, more importantly, bridges are the connectors of the world.

Because we have bridges, we can access all of God's physical creation. Without bridges, we would be under universal house arrest—unable to freely traverse and explore our world. We need a spiritual bridge to the lost.

The Golden Gate suspension bridge is a wonder of the world. But the greatest bridge of all is not made of bricks, steel, and cement. The greatest suspension bridge is the one suspended across the biggest abyss of mankind—that is the alienation between God and man. Moses could free us from slavery in Egypt, but only Jesus Christ can free man from bondage to sin. The only bridge to salvation is Jesus Christ alone.

Today, the city is filled with thousands separated from the church of Christ and has no faith past to return to or assess the extent of their depravity. We need a bridge to reach the lost and connect them to God. Until there is a connection to God, there is no worship of the true God. Jesus came to connect us to Himself and to God the Father and the Nehemiah Project is a servant of Jesus.

God has always gotten His work done through a human agency and today is no exception. The Los Angeles Nehemiah Project has been called and placed in position to serve as the bridge between the



organized Lutheran Church and the many who are lost.

Nehemiah churches are the strongest Lutheran voice in the inner city. The Lutheran presence is critical because it remains the truest exposition of the Christian faith. That voice needs to be heard and not silenced. We must constantly talk to God and constantly reach to connect others to Him.

We pray for strength and guidance as we dedicate ourselves to become a bridge to Jesus Christ for as many as we can reach. Jesus has died for all men and desires that all be saved; but there are some who do not know what He has done for them. We pray that as we reach the lost and tell them about the completed work of Christ, that Nehemiah may become their bridge to salvation.

As I prepare to leave my position at Nehemiah, I pray that Nehemiah will stay true to its mission and continue to seek out the lost and connect them to Jesus Christ, the bridge to salvation.

*Dr. Arthur L. Porter  
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# MISSION SNAPSHOT



Rev.  
Henry  
Witte

## Hispanic outreach in Siouxland

In the past 20 years, the population of Hispanic immigrants has grown greatly in the Siouxland area with many working in the meat packing plants or other companies related to the food industry. Many have come to find better incomes and living conditions for their families. Some have lived in other parts of the United States before arriving and others have come directly from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and other Latin American countries.

As they search for a better material life, we hope to show them the better true life in Jesus Christ. Most come with some identification with Christianity, but sadly many do not know Jesus Christ and what He has done for them. They obscure His work of redemption with many man-made traditions and beliefs.

We could compare them in part to the Ethiopian who needed help to understand what the Scriptures really said about Christ, the Savior. We need to be like Phillip and be prepared to explain and teach the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. We may only have a short time to share before they move on to other cities, so we need to make the most of the opportunities God

places before us to shine the light of His Gospel to these neighbors from the south.

We are using English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes as a way to meet Hispanics in Sioux City and South Sioux City. We have classes two nights a week in each city, teaching from 6 to 7:30 p.m. on Monday and Thursday. We also offer classes at 1 p.m. two days a week for a group of Hispanic senior citizens. During the evening classes, we offer child care for the students and use this as an opportunity to teach Bible stories and songs to the children. For the adults, we teach Bible verses, stories, and songs in a bilingual manner as part of the English course. Also we offer bilingual Bible reading two nights a week for students who can stay after class. During the past year, we have been able to serve more than 150 adults and more than 80 children.



We likewise look for opportunities to share the Word outside of class. We visit or call all the families to get to know them better and to apply the Word to their particular situations. We offer special activities on certain weekends, which include Bible study, crafts, games, and songs. We hold a weekly service in Sioux City on Sunday afternoons, and we hope to do the same in South Sioux City.

Other ideas we have for the future include cooking, sewing, and citizenship classes as a way to reach even more families. We also invite the families to participate in



the activities of the local congregation. Some have come to the Valentine's dinner, Ash Wednesday service, Easter egg hunt, rummage sale, and vacation Bible school. Any activity is an opportunity to let them see the love of Christ in action and to hear His Word.

The volunteers who help teach English and provide child care also share their faith and love in Christ. They become friends with the families and give a living testimony by their words and actions.

More than 30 members from various local congregations have helped in different ways with this ministry! We thank God for their service and pray that many more will be able to share in different ways so more and more Hispanics will come to the knowledge of the truth in Jesus Christ.

Please pray that God will guide us to faithfully proclaim His Word and not be discouraged if we see little fruit or rejection of the Word. Pray also that He would open our eyes to see all the opportunities that surround us in our area. May He help us to see the many in need of the Gospel and the many ways in which we can reach them.

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Gary Thies

**Annual meeting**

Toward the end of each year, we begin to think about celebrating our Savior’s birth. It also brings a time



for “annual gatherings.” At Mission Central, it’s the same thing!

We have our annual “Volunteer Presenters Training” about that time of the year, and this year was no exception. What a joy to welcome 18 people to Mission Central to spend two days in intensive training to encourage, educate, equip, and enable them to share the story of the Lord’s mission!

This two-day training session was provided at no cost, and all the presenters came at their own expense. We were able to provide housing for them in local homes, and eight of them stayed at Mission Central. Volunteers provided meals for those in attendance. These dear friends came from Wisconsin, Minnesota, Wyoming, Missouri, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Iowa!

New pictures and stories were provided to these presenters, and they were able to return to their areas to present the story of the Lord’s mission to Bible study groups and churches in their areas.

What a blessing to see how the Holy Spirit has called these people to have the privilege of serving the Lord Jesus in this wonderful way to help “raise the level of mission awareness”!

**LWML retreat**

Each year for the last two years the LWML of Iowa District West has held a special “retreat” for its members at Mission Central.

This year, President Marilyn Schroeder did an excellent job of planning for this event, which was held in the barn at Mission Central. Missionaries from Thailand and Indonesia spoke of their work in these countries, and a panel of guests spoke of mission challenges that confront our country.

It was truly a day of mission



education, and the group of about 175 women seemed to enjoy the beautiful day.

After the day’s activities, a special group picture was taken in front of the barn.

**Natasha’s first Christmas gift**

Finally, in the spirit of Christmas, we need to once again realize how the Lord has blessed us in this great and wonderful country we call the United States of America! We are the most blessed country in the world. We really don’t know anything about real suffering. God has blessed us in many ways, and

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sometimes we forget that!

There is a country in southeastern Russia that was under the control of Communism for 70 years. In those years, the government owned everything and controlled everything. The people were not allowed to have Bibles in their homes. Then came the fall of the Russian Empire when the wall “came down.” This country of Kyrgyzstan then claimed its total independence and opened its doors to the world.

Missionaries started our first Lutheran church there in 2000 in the capital of Bishkek. At Christmas time, our missionaries went to Kyrgyzstan orphanages filled with children who were not wanted by their parents. Natasha was in one those orphanages. One of our missionaries gave her the very first Christmas gift she ever received—a pair of mittens. She was so pleased!

Natasha also received the greatest gift of all, her new home in heaven! On Christmas, she was baptized into the kingdom of God through the washing of the Holy Spirit. Here is a picture of little

Natasha, smiling with joy, knowing she received the greatest of all gifts at Christmas!





Ellie  
Menz

## Mission trip to 'KZ'

Where is "KZ," you ask? Jennifer Anderson, senior at Concordia University, Seward, Neb., is one of the few who will have the right answer. Jenn, daughter of Pastor Russell and Harriet Anderson from Ocheyedan, Iowa, shares some of her amazing experiences as a missionary to "KZ" this past summer. Sit back, relax, and enjoy Kazakhstan through Jenn's eyes:

I cannot believe that my trip to Kazakhstan (KZ) has come and gone. God has taught me so much through this short experience. A few things I've learned are to never take anything for granted such as hot running water, the ability to speak and understand another language, and the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Many people do not know much about Kazakhstan, so here are a few facts about KZ:

- Located in Central Asia
- 47 percent of population is Muslim
- 44 percent is Russian Orthodox
- 60 percent want to

learn English

- Foods: horse meat, soup, flat bread, Shashlik
- Drinks: tea, fruit compote, and fermented horse milk.

The first week that I was in KZ, I stayed in Taldy Korgan with David and Rachel Baker, who are LCMS missionaries. The first day, David and I visited a village where some of his friends live. I do not remember much about it since I was still feeling the effects of jet lag. I do remember they wanted to kill a sheep for me because it was my first time in Kazakhstan. I felt honored, but because of lack of time, they served me delicious Kazakh tea instead.

The first week I taught a five-day English camp at an organization for the disabled. Each day we had 15 to 20 students on various English levels. All of these young people had smiles on their faces no matter their disability, and they were eager to learn.

No one knows what will actually happen in life. This is especially true in KZ. The culture is very relaxed. The plan was to go to the orphanage a few hours a day and teach, but the orphanage decided to do some remodeling and keep the children at camp. I was very disappointed, but we were able to meet with the director and discuss possible

future plans for teaching English to the orphans.

After seven days of the Bakers' hospitality, I went to Almaty to a camp where I did not know anyone, if I would have a translator, or what I was supposed to do. I was fully relying on God. Proverbs 3:5-6 states "Trust in the Lord with all your heart." The camp was once again a great experience that made me step out of my comfort zone. God did provide two great translators for me.

There are many stories I could share, but one that is strong in my mind is about a 14-year-old girl, Damira (pictured below). She knew fairly good English. On the second day of this camp, we went



on a hike. While we were talking, she asked me if I was a Christian. I said yes and asked her if she is a Christian. She said she is Muslim. I was not expecting that answer.

Later, while I was preparing camp devotions, she sat next to me and asked to read my Bible. Several different times, she asked to read my English Bible. I sat with her and explained several things. She did not ask many questions, but the whole time she was intrigued with it. Every time she would read the Bible, I would pray so hard that God would work in her heart and show her the truth.

I thank God like Paul did in 1 Tim. 1:12, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that He considered me faithful, appointing me to His service."

I ask that you continue to pray for the people of KZ, the Bakers, and for me as I graduate from Concordia and prayerfully consider serving in KZ for a year.

—Jenn

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### When dust settles

Pastor David Loeschen's dedication Sunday sermon, "When Dust Settles," reminded LCEF Vice President Carole White once again that a building is but a tool to help proclaim the



Rev. Loeschen

Gospel, administer the Sacraments and announce forgiveness to a world waiting to be touched. Members worshipping that day also were reminded that they themselves were being equipped to touch the world for Jesus.

And these members are out touching the world. Our Savior supports eight missionaries serving areas including Los Angeles, Nigeria, Kyrgyzstan, Taiwan, and Korea. Not only does the congregation host a number of visiting missionaries, members also actively serve on short-term mission trips themselves at home and around the world.



Our Savior Lutheran Church, Denison, touches the world for Jesus.

LCEF assisted with Our Savior's new facilities initially by providing a small construction loan, and, now, a bridge loan and permanent financing.

The congregation expanded, added a narthex, chapel, coffee space, new offices, and work space. The fellowship hall also was expanded, and additional classrooms will be finished in the future.

Baptized membership grew from 513 in 1999 to

Carole White



850 today, but worship attendance, while it increased, did not keep the same pace. Some potential growth in attendance may have been

*(Continued on Page H.)*

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## PARISH NURSE

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

December is Safe Toys and Celebrations Month. Fires injure 2,600 people in the United States each year and cause \$930 million in damages. As people decorate homes with trees, wreaths, electric lights, and candles, there are some important steps to remember to ensure a safe and happy holiday.

If you decorate a natural tree in your home, select a tree with needles that are fresh and green. Don't put the tree near sources of heat. Keep the tree stand filled with water. Check electric lights for frayed wires or broken sockets. Don't leave electric lights unattended. Don't overload electrical outlets. Decorations should be non-flammable or flame retardant. Keep breakable glass ornaments out of children's reach in the home.

Fire safety includes more than the Christmas tree and lights. Never leave burning candles unattended. Don't put wrapping paper in the fireplace because chemicals can build up and cause a fire. Keep ribbon away from small children; a child can be strangled by a 7-inch piece of ribbon or string.

In the kitchen, use the back burners for cooking. Turn pot handles away from the front of the stove. Keep hot foods and liquids away from the edge of counters and tables. Be especially careful with tablecloths. Children can pull hot food and heavy dishes down on themselves.



Holidays brings families together to celebrate the blessings they have received from God. May God continue to protect us and our homes as we gather with family and friends.

*In His Service,  
Darlene Rueter, RN  
IDW Parish Nurse Representative  
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# CELEBRATIONS

## WHEN DUST SETTLES

(Continued from Page G.)

stified by a lack of adequate sanctuary space. This expansion should help address the crowding issues.

"This place is alive in Christ!" said one frequent Our Savior visitor.



## We congratulate

### Birthdays

- Dec. 5—Mabel Brinkley, 90, St. John, Clarinda.
- Dec. 12—DeLoris Sonnichsen, 90, Zion, Denison.
- Dec. 28—Mabel Hustedt, 95, St. Paul, Alta.

### Anniversaries

- Dec. 5—Gene and Phyllis Lass, 50, Zion, Ogden.
- Dec. 5—Marty and Fran Gebauer, 50, St. Paul, Ireton.
- Dec. 10—Gene and Hazel Jurgensen Beam, 50, Zion, Denison.
- Dec. 11—Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Frank, 60, Emmanuel, Lake View.
- Dec. 14—Norman and Betty Warnke, 65, St. Paul, Carroll.
- Dec. 18—Kenny and Lillie Longhenry, 55, Zion, Ogden.
- Dec. 19—Lowell and Vanetta Heggen, 55, Zion, Humboldt.
- Dec. 26—Julene and Karen Peterson, 50 Zion, Ogden.
- Dec. 30—Marvin and Wanda Schmidt, 65, St. Paul, Ireton.

## February 2010 issue:

**Dec. 15**

Please send photos  
and stories to:

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## GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY

(Continued from Page A.)

That's why congregations have to keep on doing it, too! Those simple children's services capture the Christmas story best. They are like the Gospel itself—pictures of what happens to ordinary people like us, living in a dark world, when suddenly in ways we don't understand, the glory of the Lord shines on us and we hear again the Good News of great joy: "A Savior has been born to you."

Then like the magi wearing their tinfoil

crowns carrying their gifts, we come to worship our newborn King. There we are, just like the little ones, stumbling over each other to get near the baby. There we are, our voices cracking as we seek to hit the high notes, singing "Away in a manger ... bless all the dear children in Thy tender care, and take us to heaven to live with Thee there."

That's why we've just got to do it.

## Roster changes

### Change in Status:

Rev. Matthew Warnke, U.S. Navy Chaplain, changed to emeritus status effective Oct. 1, currently living near Sanborn, Iowa.

### Candidates Ordained and Installed:

Rev. John Rutz—ordained Aug. 2; installed as pastor of St. John, Hastings, and St. Paul, Oakland, Aug. 16.

Rev. Eugene Krueger—ordained and installed Aug. 30 as assistant pastor of Shepherd of the Valley, West Des Moines.

Rev. Glenn Hansen—ordained and installed July 26 as pastor of Trinity, Odebolt.

Rev. Edward Durand—ordained July 19; installed as pastor of Prince of Peace, Fort Dodge, July 26.

Rev. James Fernandez—ordained June 7; installed as associate pastor of St. Paul, Ankeny, Aug. 2.

Rev. Nicholas Thackery—ordained and installed Aug. 9 as pastor of St. Paul, Emmetsburg, and Peace, West Bend.

### Installations:

Rev. John Burger—installed July 26 as pastor of Faith, Adel.

Rev. Mark Baldwin—installed Aug. 2 as senior pastor of St. Paul, Ankeny.

Rev. Timothy Geitz—installed Aug. 2 as pastor of Grace, LeMars.

### Transfer Out of IDW:

Rev. Thomas Ogilvie, from Shepherd of the Valley, West Des Moines, to St. John, Austin, Minn. (Minnesota South District), Aug. 4.

### Change within IDW:

Rev. Timothy Braun, is now senior pastor at Hope, Des Moines, effective June 28.

### Change in Status and Transfer Out of IDW:

Rev. Dennis Angland—to emeritus status and transferred to the Minnesota North District, effective Sept. 1.

Rev. Leo Kostizen—to emeritus status and transferred to the Indiana District, effective Sept. 7.