



President
Paul
Sieveking

Listen to Him

Have you ever been with a group of friends when one of them tells a joke and everyone laughs except you because you didn't get it? It's an awkward moment. Some people have a similar problem with life. They don't get it. Life doesn't make sense.

Jesus said things that are hard for us to understand. He wasn't joking when He said things like "Whoever would be great among you must be a servant, even slave of all" (Matt. 20:26 NIV) or "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). We may understand the words but still not get what they mean for us. This isn't just awkward. This could have eternal consequences.

The disciples traveled with Jesus for three years, but they still didn't get it. Like everyone else, they had been impressed by the authority with which He taught and the power of His miracles. But they still didn't understand who He was or why He had come.

At a critical moment, Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do people say I am?" (Mark 8:27). Popular opinions included: Elijah, John the Baptizer, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Then He asked them the real question, "What about you? Who do you say I am?" Peter confessed, "You are the

Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Mark 8:29).

Then there was a turning point. For the first time, He explained that He "must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things ... be killed and on the third day raised to life" (Matt. 16:21). Peter wouldn't hear it. He rebuked Jesus and offered an alternative plan, "God will be merciful to you ... this will never happen." He didn't get the implications of what he had just said. He had taken a stand against God's will! Jesus turned and said, "Get behind me, Satan. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (Mark 8:33).

Then Jesus said to all His disciples, "If anyone wants to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Here is the heart of discipleship and a Christian life. Those who belong to Jesus follow Him on the path He must travel in the same sequence ... first the cross then the glory. You must deny yourself, not simply deny yourself things, but say "no" to yourself.

Like Peter, it's our nature to think that God's way of doing things ought to conform to our way. In each of us is the dark conviction that God ought to put me in charge and give me power and I will get things done my way. Ambition often gives birth to criticism, competition and one-upsmanship. It demeans a brother or sister. It exalts oneself. It grabs the glory. It destroys harmony in the Church and damages the mission of Christ. The Lord says to you and me, "Get behind me, Satan."

Jesus calls us to follow Him in the way of humble obedience and submission to God's will. He calls us to deny our desire for power and glory and to take up His cross. It is a daily struggle with sin and self-denial. Following Him entails hardship,

humiliation, suffering, loss, persecution, even death. He never promised it would be easy.

A week later, Jesus took Peter, and James and John up a mountain. There He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun. His clothes became as white as the light. Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus in glory and spoke with Him about His cross.

The disciples were awestruck. They had never seen Jesus like this or suspected His glory. Peter had to interrupt! "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish I will put up three shelters ... one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (Matt. 17:4). He didn't know what he was saying. Yes, it was good to be there! He wanted to build some shrines, stay there and enjoy the glory. It was a much better plan than going to Jerusalem.

His words weren't just foolish, they were sinful. He was still arguing with Jesus and with Moses and Elijah. Peter wanted to avoid the cross, avoid the suffering, avoid the sinful world and avoid God's plan of salvation! Peter deserved to be reprimanded again. He still didn't have in mind the things of God.

While he was still interrupting, a glorious cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud silenced Peter, "This is my Son whom I love ... listen to Him!" (Matt. 17:5). Listen to the voice from the cloud! Listen to Moses and Elijah and the sure prophetic Word. Listen to Jesus, the Word made flesh, and to the revelation of the cross. Unless he listened, Peter would never really get who Jesus is. Listen to Him, for He alone has the words of eternal life.

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MISSIONS



The Rev.
Mark
Gerken
Executive
Assistant

Building bridges to the community

The 250-plus participants at the Outreach Resource and Training Event held last November heard California-Nevada-Hawaii District President Robert Newton share that we live in a post-church culture. Because of the decreasing influence and perceived importance of the Church in our society it is important for God's people to look for ways to go out into the community with the love and truth of Jesus Christ. This is supported by research conducted by the Transforming Churches Network of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod which discovered that one of the key factors in a growing and healthy congregation is intentional outreach to the community by both the congregation and pastor.

I asked three pastors in our district to briefly share how they are personally building bridges to the community. Because of space limitations, I'll be sharing one story each of the next three months.

The Rev. Dr. Keith Schweitzer, Immanuel, Greenfield:

"My congregation, not without struggle and discussion, has given me permission to substitute teach in our local middle and high schools. I remember that, first and foremost, I am there as a substitute teacher. I have the responsibility to fulfill the classroom requirements that the regular teacher has for me

and to write a report at the end of the day. However, the opportunities to witness my faith to youth in the classroom are endless. I do not 'preach' in the public school classrooms. I don't have to. Kids are naturally curious about everything. Typical questions from students include, 'You're a doctor?' 'What kind of doctor are you?' 'What's a pastor?' Questions can then move to become more in-depth. 'Why does God allow bad things to happen?' 'Why do my parents fight all the time?' 'Why am I unhappy?'

In an overwhelming number of situations, I am able to be with teenage boys and girls who come from broken homes and who know nothing of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Christian faith. I am thankful for any opportunity the Lord may provide to share my faith by answering a simple question and demonstrating the love of Christ and Christian values. The congregation sees the value of this outreach, and the elders recently gave me permission to expand my substitute teaching."

"Allowing and encouraging your pastor to be involved in your community is not without challenges. Members may feel neglected. They'll need to pick up some of the other responsibilities the pastor has been handling. You'll need to make sure he doesn't neglect time with his wife and family. But in the end, your pastor and congregation will be building bridges to the community and the Church's mission will be advanced!"

Let me encourage you to sit down with your pastor and congregational leadership. Pray, discuss, and determine where the opportunities are in your congregation and start building bridges—both individually and as a congregation! If I



can help with the discussion, I'd be more than happy to sit down and facilitate them. Get in touch with me today!



Mission grant deadline March 1

The deadline for submitting an application for a mission grant from Iowa District West for 2012 is March 1. The application, along with a synopsis of previous grants, can be found on the district website at www.idwlcms.org.

The purpose of the grant, as explained in the application, is "to assist congregations in sharing the Good News of Jesus with the unreached or uncommitted of their communities." The grant enables the people of Iowa District West, through their financial gifts to the district, to enter into an intentional partnership with congregations all across the district.

Last year, 19 grants were awarded totaling more than \$29,000.

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Gary
Thies

Christmas gathering

One of the joys of Christmas is the gathering of God's people to rejoice in the greatest gift that was ever given to mankind ... the Christ-child.

At Mission Central each December, a group of pastors and their wives gather to celebrate the wonderful festival that the world knows as Christmas. What a blessing and joy to know that we can gather and say "Merry Christmas" and we don't have to say "Happy Holidays." The world is filled with "political correctness" today. It's a time when we need to marshal our forces and Christians need to stand up and boldly proclaim the very message that dwells in our hearts, especially at this time of the year and all year through.

The group enjoyed our time together with much laughter and good things to eat and refreshments. It was a time for the pastors and their wives to just relax and "let their hair down a bit" and be with special friends in Christ.

The entire group enjoyed a special DVD that displayed the dancing ability and musical ability of the Rev. Larry Lemke of Aurelia, Iowa. It was amazing to see his "quick moves" and "amazing gracefulness."

All enjoyed the special program by violinist Rev. Dr. Klaus Raab, who provided the music so that all could sing those wonderful Christmas carols that reflect the birth of Christ our Savior.

One of the most delightful events was to hear the voices of Pastors Merrill, Mahnken, Kaiser and Lemke join in singing in German one of the most famous of all Christmas carols, while accompanied by Dr. Raab.

It was one of those special nights that many will long remember. What a joy to share this time together to sing and praise God for sending us the greatest gift in the entire world ... the gift of our Savior Jesus.

Here you see pictured the entire group and Dr. Raab in full action and finally the German singing group that brought the house down.



work done in such an amazing way!

Longtime volunteer and special helper Kathryn Sprecher from Des Moines, Iowa, was called to be our "annual mailing director" for Mission Central. Each year, Mission Central sends just one mailing per year. The letter thanks the people that God has sent to help us with His work. This mailing goes out at no expense, as we have special volunteers who provide the printing, mailing, stamps and photos. We don't have to take one penny out for overhead for Mission Central of any gifts that come in for our annual mailing! Why? Because God sends us wonderful volunteers to do the work.

This year, for the first time, all of our mailing sheets were printed in color. This was possible because Don Gettner from Remsen, Iowa (our volunteer printer), purchased from his own funding a new color copy machine! God bless you, Don.

Richard Thies, our volunteer data entry director in Omaha printed and addressed all of the envelopes for 4,000 letters that were sent out! Our volunteer staff took charge and we had volunteers from all over drive these items to Trinity Lutheran Church in Des Moines, where Kathryn Sprecher called together 34 volunteers from seven congregations! Each of the three sheets that went in the annual mailing

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God uses volunteers

The corporate world today would like one to believe that it would be absolutely impossible to carry out a huge volume of work using volunteers! However, that is *not* the case when it comes to the Lord's work, as He calls His special people to get His

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Ellie
Menz

Prepared for a disaster

Disasters come “like a thief in the night” when we least expect them. They destroy a person’s property and life very quickly.

Maybe you or your friends have experienced such a loss. If so, were you prepared? Are you prepared for a future disaster? We all hope that a disaster will never happen, but we know we should be prepared. It is like having car and health insurance but hoping you will never need it.

Stop for a minute and consider the following questions:

Your pastor is in the pulpit and the tornado siren is sounded. What do you do? What is your plan of action to ensure the safety of your church members? Do you have a plan? Are your personal and church records safe if a tornado or flood destroys your house or church?

As I write this, my mind goes back to a Lutheran church in Louisiana after the Katrina hurricane. It was surreal. The pastor’s office was in shambles. His desk and file cabinets were tipped over. The computer was on the floor and soggy Bibles and hymnals were strewn on the floor. The water mark on the wall indicating the height of the water was just under the clock, which was still running. My thought was that time continues as we pick up the pieces,



clean up and move on with God’s help. As I left the church, I noticed that the crunching sound under my feet was from the sea shells that had remained after the water receded.

Much closer to home are the destroyed houses along the Missouri River in the Sioux City and Omaha areas. Lives dramatically changed by the water.

You may be thinking that you do need to have a plan. Maybe you are a church elder and are thinking that we need to have a plan for the church. What do I do to plan?

One way to plan is to attend the LERT training provided by Iowa District West. LERT is “Lutheran Emergency Response Training.”

LCMS is in the forefront in offering help and hope to hurting people. They are working to have the best system of support available for people throughout the world to help one another when disaster strikes. Pastor Glenn Merritt, director of Disaster Response, Office of International Missions, and the LCMS team are dedicated in their response to the many disasters in the world.

Iowa District West is taking the lead in LERT training. We want to be proactive and not just reactive when disasters happen. We want people to be prepared now so they can jump into action when a disaster strikes.

Mark your calendar! LERT training: Saturday, March 10, 9 a.m. – noon, lunch following meeting, Emmanuel Lutheran Church, 115 2nd St., Lake View, IA 51450

Additional training can be arranged in different areas of the district. If you’d like to have LERT

training in your community, please contact me at the address below.

After attending the training, you will be eligible to receive a FEMA-approved certification from LCMS World Relief and Human Care, which allows you to be a volunteer in an area affected by a disaster.

Note: Iowa District West conducted two LERT trainings in the past. They were at Gloria Dei, Urbandale, and St. Paul, Carroll. If you attended one of those trainings and have not received your certification from LCMS, please contact me at the address below.

Volunteer opportunities in Louisiana and Missouri

To volunteer as an individual or a group to help in New Orleans and the surrounding area, check out www.camprestore.org.

To learn about the tornado relief outreach at Joplin, Mo., check out www.immanueljoplin.com. This is an organized outreach through Immanuel Lutheran Church in Joplin, Mo. On the left, click on “Immanuel is responding to tornado relief.” Then click on “volunteer FAQs” for answers to many questions. Following that, click on the blue box (Register to help us—Lutheran Church Charities). The volunteering is managed by Lutheran Church Charities.

Please contact me with questions and to let me know if you or your group plan to volunteer. I’d be happy to help you organize your outreach. Also, if you are willing to add a person or two to your group, please let me know.

Ellie Menz
IOWAY Director
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Carole
White

Reunion on Dedication Day



Dedication was held for Holy Cross, Carlisle, located just outside Des Moines on Sunday, Sept. 11, 2011. Laborers For Christ built a two-story, 4,400-square-foot addition. The new space includes a larger narthex, new



classrooms, more accessible restrooms and an elevator.

Dedication Day was much like a reunion, as the Laborers returned to celebrate and to reminisce with the people of Holy Cross. Stories were told, encouragement was given and the love of God was shared as people reconnected and celebrated all that God had done.

“Almost all of the laborers made it back to see the fruition of their hard

work. That is what I call dedication! We were so blessed to have them with us. They made the day special. Their love of laboring for the Lord and their obvious desire to do everything for His glory was a real example to our congregation. They made a lasting impression that will be remembered for a long time. There is really no way to thank them properly for all of their ‘labor!’ Without them, we would not have completed the project the way we did,” said Pastor Kevin Johnson.

Laborers For Christ combines church-related construction with spiritual

renewal. As Laborers build structures together with volunteers, they know that it is God who is truly building the church.

Since Laborers For Christ was founded in 1980, the ministry has helped congregations and organizations complete more than 800 projects! Contact Lutheran Church Extension Fund (800-843-5233) for information on how Laborers For Christ can help with your building project or help implement energy efficient projects. Lutheran Church Extension Fund was pleased to be a partner in this project!

In addition to using Laborers For Christ, Holy Cross was able to utilize the loan services available through Lutheran Church Extension Fund.

If your congregation is remodeling, building a sanctuary, upgrading systems for efficiency or expanding its child care center, we have loan funds available to assist you in sharing the Gospel. We offer personal, caring, Christian services that assist to help bear witness to Jesus Christ and to those that do not know Him.

Contact Carole White for more information on loans and services.



Contact Carole White
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STEWARDSHIP/MISSIONS NEWS



The Rev.
Phill
Andreassen
Executive
Assistant

Martin Luther astutely observed, “There are three conversions necessary: the conversion of the heart, the mind and the purse.” Of these three, it may well be that we find the conversion of the purse the most difficult.

One human response is to hoard material possessions and money, to be greedy. Simply stated, people can become very possessive about “things.” Jesus said, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” Through the work of the Holy Spirit, our Christian response is one of selflessness. Christ’s love flows from our hearts, and we are moved to per-

form acts of generosity and kindness for the benefit of our fellow man.

God uses money and material possessions for a variety of purposes in our lives. He provides for our daily needs. He gives us the strength and ability to work and earn. But there is more. God has given money and possessions as a temporal tool for furthering the preaching of the Gospel and for benefiting our fellow man, especially the believers.

Luke complimented the members of the Christian congregation at Jerusalem. He wrote, “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions were his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.”

Great grace was upon them, for they had been brought to faith in the risen Lord and Savior. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, they had approval with God and were aware of His mercy. As they gave evidence of their faith by showing love, respect and charity, they received the approval of their fellow men.

God, by His grace, has given us the power and knowledge of the Gospel. God has also given all of us the temporal tools to assist in the further preaching and teaching of the Gospel message. May God grant the Holy Spirit, in Christ’s love, to guide and direct each of us in the proper use of our money and possessions for the glory of God and for the benefit of the members of this fellowship.

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An opportunity among the Sudanese

When the African country of Sudan declared independence from the colonial British and Egyptian rule, it was deeply divided, both geographically and religiously, into the Islamic north and the mostly animist and Christian south. Civil war was pervasive for more than 20 years, and was based on ethnic, religious and regional grounds. From 1989 to 1994, the civilians of southern Sudan suffered extreme cruelty from the invading northern armies. An estimated four million people were displaced, and an estimated two million people were killed.

Christians often were the target. After escaping to neighboring countries, many Christian Sudanese sought and received refuge in the United States.

This crisis presented an opportunity for God’s people to respond with Christ’s love. In August 1993, 23 Southern Sudanese refugees, most of whom were sponsored by Trinity Lutheran Church in Des Moines, joined Trinity. By December of that year, Trinity’s attendance swelled by approximately 250 Southern Sudanese. Since that time, Trinity, as the epicenter of ministry to the Sudanese in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, has seen the number of Sudanese drop as a

result of their movement to other parts of the country. However, congregations have been established in 20 locations in nine different states!

Iowa District West came to the aid, both financially and spiritually, of Trinity Lutheran in Des Moines. Iowa District West continued to assist our Sudanese members after they formed their own, independent congregation in January of 2006. Pastor Simon Yiech is their called pastor. Worship, still held in Trinity’s facilities but in the Nuer language, is regularly attended by 60-70 people, mostly women and children. Since they are first generation Americans, their income and contributions are

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very limited. It appears they are not capable of sustaining the cost of a congregation without help.

Another opportunity presents itself! Iowa District West is redirecting its mission dollars from supporting only a few ministries on a long-term basis to a greater number of congregations all across the district, while at the same time encouraging more local ownership and direct partnerships. As a result, the district financial support for the Sudanese congregation, which has been a significant portion of its income, is gradually being phased out over

a four-year period.

Individuals and congregations all across the district are urged to prayerfully consider including the Sudanese ministry in their mission budget. One-time contributions are certainly welcome, but a sustaining income is what is needed the most to support these wonderful, caring Christians who desperately need our help. Even more important are your prayers and hands-on involvement. Pastor Yiech is available to come and share their story.



For more information, please contact Pastor Yiech (syiech@yahoo.com; 515-988-6467) or District Missions Executive Mark Gerken.

Parish Nurse

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

February is National Senior Independence Month. People 65-plus represented 12.4 percent of the population in 2000 but are expected to grow to be 19 percent of the population by 2030. While an increasing number of seniors are remaining in their homes (half of older women age 75-plus live alone), they are often targets of dishonest activity. Compounding the problem, 37 percent of older persons report they have some type of disability such as difficulty in hearing, vision, cognition, ambulation, or self-care.

Iowa law states that exploitation is “the act or process of taking unfair advantage of an individual or taking assets or resources for your own profit or gain. This includes the use of undue influence, harassment, duress, deception or false representation.” Financial exploitation involves unauthorized use of an elderly person’s funds or property, either by a caregiver or an outside scam artist. This could involve misuse of an elder’s checks, credit cards or accounts, stealing cash, income checks, household goods, forging the elder’s signature or engaging in identity theft. Typical rackets that target elders include announcement of a “prize” that the elderly person has won but must pay money to claim, phony charities or investment fraud.

Signs of financial exploitation include:

- Significant withdrawal from the elder’s accounts
- Sudden changes in the elder’s financial condition
- Items or cash missing from the senior’s household
- Suspicious changes in wills, power of attorney, titles and policies
- Additions of names to the senior’s signature card
- Unpaid bills or lack of medical care although the senior has enough money to pay for them
- Unnecessary services, goods or subscriptions
- Financial activity the senior couldn’t have done such as an ATM withdrawal when the account holder is home bound

*In His Service,
Darlene Rueter, RN,
IDW Parish Nurse Rep
rrueter2642@msn.com*

If you are an elder who is being abused, neglected, or exploited, tell at least one person. Tell your doctor, a friend, or a family member whom you trust. In Iowa, contact the Iowa Department of Human Services at 800-363-2178 AND your local law enforcement. For abuse in a facility, contact the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals at 877-686-0027 AND your local law enforcement.

(Information taken from Iowa Department of Aging, Department of Health and Human Services, and Administration on Aging websites.)

CELEBRATIONS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

(Continued from Page A.)

Peter had zeal. He loved his Lord. He had made the good confession. But he would not listen to Jesus as He spoke about His passion and death. So, the Father's voice thundered within the cloud. Now he and the other disciples were terrified and fell face down on the ground. They knew they were sinners in the presence of God! They hadn't listened to Jesus.

What a tender, gracious moment. Jesus came and touched them. He told them to get up and not be afraid. When they looked up, they saw no one but Jesus.

It wasn't until sometime later that they really "got" what happened that day on the mountain. It wasn't until God's plan had been completely carried out ... after the rejection, the suffering, the cross ... after Jesus had risen from the dead. It wasn't until Pentecost when God poured out His Holy Spirit on them. Then they took up their crosses and fol-

lowed Jesus. They began to do the things that Jesus had done. They humbly served. They boldly preached the cross. When others saw the works they were doing and heard the words they were proclaiming, they knew these men had been with Jesus.

Some years later, Peter wrote, "We were eyewitnesses of His majesty ... we ourselves heard this voice when we were with Him on the sacred mountain. We have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it" (2 Peter 1:16). Peter finally got it.

Do you get it? Every year we go to the Mount of Transfiguration to prepare for what lies before us. Lent then Easter ... humiliation then exaltation ... darkness then glory ... the cross then the empty tomb ... death then life. Before us is Jesus who gives meaning and hope to our lives. Listen to Him!

Deadline for the April issue: Feb. 15

Please send information to:

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MISSION CENTRAL

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had to be folded individually by the volunteers because the folding machine didn't work right. It took a total of 130 hours to get this all put together with the stamps being put on and the 4,000 envelopes being sealed and mailed.

This is another *miracle* example of what God can do when HE calls his people together to do HIS work. We thank each of the

volunteers. You can see just a few of the volunteers working on the project and God can even use young missionaries like Kristen Berstler from Des Moines, Iowa, to help with his work.

We thank and praise God for the help of our volunteer staff out at Mission Central, where



the Lord has sent us ten volunteer typists that work in their homes, and a total of 60 people that are willing to help!

We congratulate

(February 2012)

Birthdays

- Feb. 10—Clarence Krager, 100, St. Paul, Ida Grove.
- Feb. 11—John H. Hansen, 95, Zion, Denison.
- Feb. 19—Gen Baker, 90, Zion, Denison.
- Feb. 27—Robert Lovett, 90, St. Paul, Ida Grove.
- Feb. 28—Melburn Schmidt, 95, Trinity, Cherokee.

Anniversaries

- Feb. 9—Jerry and Bonnie Vlotho, 50, St. Paul's, Ireton.
- Feb. 10—Harold and Carol Tooker, 60, Grace, Le Mars.
- Feb. 12—Cliff and Ruth Jensen, 50, Trinity, Coon Rapids.
- Feb. 17—Donald and Darlene Radke, 55, Trinity, Cherokee.
- Feb. 24—Marland and Jeanie Mork, 60, Zion, Denison.
- Feb. 23—Paul and Marie Schwanz, 65, Zion, Denison.
- Feb. 25—Kenneth and Rosemary Beckman, 50, St. Paul, Carroll.