



President  
Paul  
Sieveking

### **Light in the darkness**

On a very cold and dark Christmas Eve, a little boy and his father walked down a path through the woods on their way home. The boy held tightly to his father's hand. He was afraid. He looked at the lantern in father's other hand and whimpered, "Daddy, I'm scared ... and the light only reaches out a little ways." The father squeezed his son's hand a little tighter and said, "I know, Son, but if we just keep walking, you'll see, the light will keep shining before us all the way home."

This is the darkest time of year. We will soon see the shortest day of the year, or the longest night. But that's not what I mean. For many people, Christmas is a dark time. There are people who are living in darkness—the darkness of loneliness as they find themselves alone this season, the darkness of sorrow as they remember loved ones who have died this year, the darkness of gloom as so many people are disappointed because Christmas may not live up to their expectations, or worry, or fear.

It seems that the works of darkness—shoplifting, burglaries and other crimes—also increase at this time of year.

There is darkness over the world this Advent and Christmas season, and the darkness can crowd out all the joy of Christmas. Like that little boy, people are afraid of the path that lies before them, and the light

seems to reach out only a little ways.

But Christmas is the season of light. There are lights everywhere—on stores and businesses, in our homes and on our Christmas trees, in the church, and on the Advent wreath. There are lights everywhere, but do you know why? Do you understand the symbolism?

Light has always been associated with our God. Into the darkness and chaos God's first words were, "Let there be light ... and there was light!"

When the Israelites were on their way to the Promised Land, the Lord guided them with a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. When they saw the glorious pillar, they knew the Lord was with them. King David believed, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?" The prophet Micah confessed, "When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me."

So it was most fitting that when Jesus, the Son of God, came into this dark and troubled world, He claimed, "I am the Light of the World!" Just as God was present among His people in that pillar of fire, so Jesus claimed "I Am" God in person ... God incarnate ... God with His people. That's the message of Christmas.

There was darkness on the Judean hillside the night Jesus was born. Those were the days before electric lights. There were no yard lights, or street lights, or headlights, or lighted signs. Maybe the shepherds there had a little fire to keep themselves warm. But it was dark until that darkness was broken by an angel—by an army of angels—and the glory of the Lord shone all around. It's no wonder the shepherds were terrified. They had never seen anything so bright or glorious. But the angel told them, "Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy. Unto you is born this day in the city of

David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord." All the darkness in the world that night could not extinguish the light or silence the message. The Light of the world had come!

Thirty years later, another hillside was covered with darkness ... a strange darkness in the middle of the day. The armies of angels stood ready again to split the darkness and come again to rescue the Lord of Light and to carry out God's judgment against sinful mankind. But out of the darkness from the cross came the cry, "Father, forgive them. ..."

Three days later, in the darkness just before dawn, light exploded out of an open grave. That light scattered the darkness of sin. That light dispelled the darkness of evil and Satan's power. That light filled the grave as an angel proclaimed more good news, "He is not here, He is risen!" That terrible, frightening darkness was gone, forever.

This Christmas hear the words of Jesus: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." He comes into your world—into your life, into your heart—God with you. He comes to bring light into your darkness, to bring hope into your sorrow, to give comfort in your gloom, to restore calm in the midst of the storm. He comes to establish God's peace on earth. He comes with a Christmas gift—the gift of life—abundant life, eternal life.

And He says to you, "Follow me." Either you follow Jesus and walk with Him in the light or you stumble and grope through the darkness of this world alone.

St. John wrote, "This is the verdict; Light has come into the world, but men loved the darkness instead of the light, because their deeds were evil."

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# EDUCATION



Rev. Bob Riggert  
Executive Assistant

## Changing hearts with change

Iowa Lutheran school teachers (East and West districts) gathered Oct. 22-23, 2009, at Gloria Dei, Urbandale. The theme of the conference was “Changing Hearts Through a Changeless Christ.”



As the conference committee explored and expanded the “change” theme, the suggestion was made that Iowa Lutheran school students should adopt a special mission



project and bring change—coins—to their school in the weeks preceding the conference.

In consultation with Mission Development Counselor Gary Thies, a project to provide tuition and supplies for elementary students in southern China was selected. The Lutheran Church of All Nations and Hong Kong International School are reaching out to remote villages where Lutheran schools are being established to share the love of Jesus. A \$70 gift provides the basics of this education for a student for a year.

The students and teachers of eight Iowa District West schools and 10 Iowa District East schools were more than generous. Nearly \$4,500 was donated by students and teachers. More than 60 students will learn about Jesus through Lutheran school missions in southern China.

St. Paul complimented the mission donation of the Macedonian Christians. “They gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints” (2 Cor. 8:3-4).

The stewardship example of the children is to be celebrated and followed.

Lutheran school students share their offerings each week as they gather in chapel services. Typically a new mission project is adopted for each month or quarter. Excited about their own faith, the children



look for opportunities to share the Good News with their words and with their change.

Iowa District West Lutheran schools as well as Sunday schools, youth groups, and vacation Bible schools have the opportunity to support a district mission project “Amigos en Cristo.” The project provides financial support for Hispanic children to attend district Lutheran schools and preschools.

Chris Schindler, teacher at Clarinda Lutheran School, summarized the conference theme by writing special lyrics to the hymn “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee.” With their hearts and with their “change,” Lutheran school students proclaim:

*Changeless, changeless  
gracious Master;  
Giver of eternal Hope  
Loving, giving, caring, blessing;  
All our lives in every way.  
Strengthen us to be your  
witness;  
thanks and praise and  
adoration  
From our hearts we honor You.  
Amen.*

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Rev. Mark Gerken  
Executive Assistant

### The mission field of your community

Have you ever heard the saying, “When life hands you lemons, make lemonade?” It’s a reminder to make the best of every situation. The apostle Paul echoes a similar thought when he says, “Be very careful how you live—making the most of every opportunity” (Eph. 5:15-16).

I thought of this as congregations shared with me different efforts they were undertaking to reach those around them with the love and truth of Jesus Christ. Two examples follow. May they encourage you and give you ideas as to how to look beyond the walls of your church into the mission field of your local community!

You’d have to be living under a rock not to be aware of the financial challenges facing the world, including our own communities. While Christians are not immune from worry and fear, we do have the opportunity to be reminded of God’s certain promises to provide. Imagine living without that certainty! Yet, that’s exactly the situation of the majority of people around us.

Why not see the financial uncertainty as an opportunity to make contact with those outside the Church? **Christ Our Savior, Norwalk**, decided to do exactly that. Using the curriculum of Financial Peace University, by Dave Ramsey, the congregation publicized the beginning of a class last April. Thanks

to an *Ablaze!* grant from the district, scholarships were made available, so no one was prevented from enrolling in the class due to financial concerns. When it came time to begin, nine individuals showed up, nearly all of them from outside the congregation!

By the end of the 13 weeks, eight of the nine completed the course and experienced some very practical and helpful results—completed monthly budgets, established \$1,000 emergency funds, and drove their overall debt load down by \$10,000. While this was encouraging, what was even more important were the relationships established with individuals outside the congregation and the message the community received that Christ Our Savior cares about their community.

By the time you read this, Christ Our Savior will have completed



Seven of the eight graduates of Financial Peace University offered by Christ Our Savior, Norwalk.

its second class, resulting in more individuals not only receiving godly guidance on handling their financial blessings but coming into contact with the loving people of God!

Imagine being told that over 10,000 bicyclists would be going by your church. Some might see it as a problem and potential cause of vandalism, while others might see people needing the love of Christ. The latter approach was the one taken by Pastor Steve Hayden and

the members of **Mount Calvary, Indianola**, when they learned that RAGBRAI would be going by their church.

As member Daniel Wilson says, “We started the process by forming a committee (the Lutheran way of doing things) and doing a lot of praying.”

Mount Calvary offered the church grounds so groups and individuals



RAGBRAI riders enjoying breakfast on the grounds of Mount Calvary, Indianola.

could camp. The congregation also provided wireless network access, members to mingle with those on the grounds, and took prayer requests. And, of course, there were dozens of homemade pies and cinnamon rolls, not to mention a warm breakfast served by Chris Cakes!

But what made their breakfast and food donations different was that all proceeds were given to causes outside the congregation which serve the local community! Following expenses, approximately \$1,250 profit was realized. Half went to Warren County Habitat for

*(Continued on Page H.)*

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# GIFT PLANNING



Jim  
Schroeder  
Christian  
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Planning  
Counselor

## Grow the mission team!

It has already been one year since Pastor Mark Gerken officially joined the Iowa District West mission team. On Oct. 12, 2008, Gerken became the executive assistant for missions, but he has been a part of a faith mission team for much longer than that.

Gerken describes himself as a product of the LCMS educational system, having attended Lutheran schools from kindergarten through seminary. Both Pastor Gerken and his wife, Ruth, whose fathers were pastors, grew up in homes that focused on faith.

Mark and Ruth first met when they attended our Synod's residential high school—Saint Paul's—in Concordia, Mo. They both graduated from the high school and junior college there, then went on to graduate from different colleges. Mark graduated from Concordia, Ann Arbor, and Ruth from Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa. Wedding bells rang out in 1980, just prior to the beginning of Mark's vicarage year.

In 1982, Pastor Gerken completed his studies at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and received a call to Faith Lutheran Church in Humboldt, Neb. He served there until moving to Adel, Iowa, in 1987, where he began to serve another Faith Lutheran Church.

"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord

Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57-58).

This favorite Bible verse of Pastor Gerken's (and many others) helped form his own personal mission statement:

***"Celebrating the victory to grow the team!"***

Not only were these two congregations a part of his mission team, but also the Gerkens' growing family. Son, David, and daughter, Sarah, now both married, along with their brother, Jonathan, were taught firsthand about missions, stewardship, and firstfruits giving.

"First of all, we wanted our financial stewardship following our death to be a continuation of what we've practiced while we were living on earth—firstfruits giving to the Lord," explains Gerken. "This also provided an opportunity, through a Christian preamble, to share one last time with our children that which was most important—the faith God has given us in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

Mark and Ruth are grateful that gift planning counselor Jim Schroeder provided his assistance and expertise with their Christian estate planning. Jim even accompanied them on their visit to see the lawyer.

Pastor Gerken recalls when he first was introduced to Jim Schroeder. "I believe Faith, Adel, was one of the first congregations Jim visited when he started working for Iowa District West back in about 1989. We established a friendship and then invited Jim to help us update our Christian estate plan this past year since it had been over 20 years (and our children were now grown)," says Gerken.

With Jim's help, the Gerkens established an estate plan that gave them the opportunity to provide a gift to their children and to various

ministries. After their deaths, a tenth of their estate will be given as a tithe offering to the Lord and another portion divided among their children. The remainder of their estate will go into their "Give It Twice" trust. Mark and Ruth's children will receive an annual gift from the trust for 20 years and then the trust principal will be directed to other ministries chosen by the Gerkens.

Gerken knows his children will be touched by their decision. "What we shared in the preamble—both about our faith and Christian stewardship—was not anything they haven't heard before. Yet, we would imagine that hearing it again in our own words following our deaths will have a powerful impact."

Gerken adds, "A side blessing was an opportunity to witness to our lawyer who commented about the Christian preamble, 'I've never seen anything like that before.'"

The Gerkens encourage others to contact Jim Schroeder. "Jim has a gift with people—putting them at ease and allowing his faith to shine through," says Pastor Gerken. "He was extremely helpful, patient, and thorough in explaining how it all worked."

Go ahead. Put him on your mission team and start growing today.

If you would like more information on developing your Christian gift plan, contact Jim Schroeder toll-free at 877-913-2221 or e-mail [Jim.Schroeder@idwlcms.org](mailto:Jim.Schroeder@idwlcms.org).

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Gary Thies  
Mission Development Counselor

### From the Czech Republic to Mission Central

People from all over the world come to visit Mission Central. Several weeks ago, Rev. Jim and Mabelle Bloker from Prague in the Czech Republic came to report on their work in this former Soviet Union country. Rev. Bloker told



how God is using him to touch the lives of people in this area that we not allowed to have a Bible in their homes for nearly 70 years during the rule of the Communist Party. Pastor Bloker and Mabelle did an excellent job of sharing their pictures, PowerPoint, with Mabelle reciting John 3:16 in the Czech language!

A large number of people came from amazing locations to hear this report, and guests came from Ghana, West Africa; Carroll, Storm Lake, Schaller, Denison, Harlan, Des Moines, Sioux City, and Ute in Iowa; South Dakota; Idaho; and Hubbard, Seward, and Lincoln, Neb. It's amazing to see how far people will drive when they really "get it" and

understand the importance of the mission of the Lord's church. These "not normal" people all came to hear firsthand what God is doing in this area of the world.

Pictured here in the barn is the diverse group that prayed for the Bloker family as they are sent back to the Czech Republic.

### Missionary training

What a blessing to have young people come to Mission Central for special missionary training. Pastor Roger Carlisle from Wall Lake, Iowa, Rev. Don Peterson from Lake View, Iowa, and Rev. Andrew Ratcliffe from Sac City, Iowa, all brought their youth and confirmation students to Mission Central for special missionary information.

In a study completed by LCMS World Mission, it was revealed that when missionaries were polled on what age they decided to become "foreign missionaries" the average age was 10 years of age. That's why we MUST bring the message of mission to young people at an early age.

These three congregations brought their youth and spent the entire afternoon with mission stories and mission education. The young people enjoyed the Mission Museum and the tour of the office and also a special PowerPoint mission story on "Children Around the World." The Lord Jesus still calls young people, and what a blessing to share that message of



God's goodness and grace. The entire group traveled to Vietnam, Africa, New Guinea, and Kyrgyzstan via the special mission education presentation.

### Confirmation students come to Mission Central

Rev. Glen Hansen just this past year was installed as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church at Odebolt, Iowa. Rev. Hansen and his wife had



never been to Mission Central, and they wanted the confirmation students to come and receive some "Mission Education."

They were told of the customs of the Muslim people, and also told that the Islamic religion is the fastest-growing religion in the United States.

What a joy to welcome these young missionaries and to provide them with a special youth mission program that day, and give them a tour of the Mission Museum and offices! It was a day that the youth will long, long remember.

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Ellie Menz  
IOWAY  
Director

## What is a string thing?

*The String Thing* is a book written by David Burrier of Hope Ministries in Des Moines, Iowa. It also is a concept that he believes and teaches to the many homeless and others with whom he works each day.



The 430 participants at the October Junior High Youth Gathering in Des Moines learned this concept. We were reminded of the blessing we are to others when we all work together to help each other. Each of us receives a ball of string (talents) when we were born. When we put all our strings together, we are stronger and can reach out to help others.

Youth and leaders bringing items to donate to Hope Ministries in Des Moines and the Nehemiah Project in Los Angeles made a big impact as a group. Cash gifts, 231

toys, 53 backpacks, 998 school supplies, 95 pieces of underwear, and 2,055 health items (totaling 3,732 donated items) made a huge “string thing”!

Some of these items were assembled into “We Care Kits” at the gathering. Burrier shared that the 150 kits will be given to homeless people who come to the shelters in the next week. Yes, in the next week! We often think of homeless in big cities like Los Angeles or Chicago, but there are many homeless in Des

Moines. The “We Care Kits” each contained nine health care items, such as soap, wash cloth, toothpaste, toothbrush, etc. The last, and maybe the most-needed item, was then included in the bag. It was a note of encouragement, hope, and a reminder of God’s love written by the junior high youth.

Twelve Iowa District West college students were a huge part of the

“string thing” as they volunteered at the gathering. They happily served in many ways as “happy helpers” and “the blue shirts,” including counting, packing, and lugging the donated items.

## What is Hope Ministries?

Hope Ministries is a Christ-centered faith-based ministry that provides programs and services for homeless, hungry, and hurting people in Des Moines and central Iowa. One of the largest non-denominational efforts in Iowa, they are focused on homelessness and hunger issues.

Each year, more than 100 individual churches participate in their ministry by providing financial support, volunteers, clothing, or food donations. Nearly 1,000 volunteers donate their time and talents each year. Be one of those volunteers! Iowa District West pastors’ wives were part of those happy volunteers as they spent an October

afternoon at the Hope Bargain Center.

For information on how you, your family, or church group can become involved, check out [www.hopeiowa.org](http://www.hopeiowa.org).

Their facilities include:

- Bethel Mission—rescue shelter with 108 beds for homeless men;
- Door of Faith—long-term men’s recovery center with 102-bed facility;
- Hope Family Center—three eight-bedroom houses for long-term recovery for homeless women and children; and
- Hope Bargain and Community Outreach—a place for low-cost clothing, furniture, and numerous other items.

If interested in purchasing *The String Thing* book by David Burrier, go to [www.playbooks.com](http://www.playbooks.com).

To organize a donation drive, one-day service project, or a short-term mission trip, contact:

Mary Kohlsdorf  
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515-265-7272, ext.109  
or

Ellie Menz

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Carole  
White  
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### Fun ways to teach stewardship concepts to kids

LCEF is committed to providing financial resources and services that you can count on. A new stewardship education resource recently released is called K.I.D.S. Count. It's a complete stewardship curriculum for children in kindergarten through eighth grade that includes more than 250 Bible-based activities and lessons to help kids understand what it means

to be disciples and stewards for Jesus.

Life-changing lessons about sharing God's blessings aren't easy for children to grasp, so LCEF turned to the curriculum experts at Concordia Publishing House (CPH) to write this new resource.

The lessons are flexible and fit a variety of educational settings and are easy to use for both professional and volunteer teachers. Most important, kids love all the fun, hands-on activities that bring stewardship and discipleship to life. This resource is available for every LCMS school and Sunday school; it can even be used in the home since it is so affordably priced.

One easy and fun way to implement the lessons learned through the

K.I.D.S. Count curriculum is with LCEF's K.I.D.S. Stamp program. Kids Into Discipleship and Stewardship learn to be good stewards of the financial blessings that God gives them, while allowing them to help build God's kingdom here on earth through the ministry of Lutheran Church Extension Fund.

They save money for their future needs (one quarter or one dollar at a time) and those investments are used to finance new mission starts, church and school building expansion, and upgrading ministry facilities right here in Iowa District West.

Volunteer to be the stamp coordina-



tor for your Sunday school or preschool, and LCEF provides all the resources you need to help children begin—even the first \$100 in stamps for FREE! For more information on the K.I.D.S. Stamp Program or the K.I.D.S. Count curriculum, contact Ruth Gerken at [ruth.gerken@ialcef.org](mailto:ruth.gerken@ialcef.org) or call her toll-free at 877-439-5233.

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## PARISH NURSE

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

January is **National Radon Action Month**. Radon can't be seen, smelled, or tasted but can be dangerous. Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer deaths among non-smokers and claims the lives of 20,000 Americans each year.

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas released in rock, soil, and water from the decay of uranium. It can accumulate to dangerous levels inside buildings. Radon gas enters homes through cracks and plumbing fixtures on lower levels. Nearly one of every 15 homes in the United States is estimated to have elevated levels.

An easy-to-use test kit can be purchased from a local home improvement or hardware store. Many kits are priced under \$25. Radon is measured in picrouries per liter of air (pCi/L), a measurement of radioactivity. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that homes with radon levels at 4pCi/L or higher should have the problem fixed through home repair of the radon entry sites. The EPA recommends home repair if radon levels are between 2 pCi/L and 4 pCi/L.

Questions regarding radon testing can be answered by calling 800-SOS-RADON or going to the Web site [www.epa.gov/radon](http://www.epa.gov/radon).

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

## LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

*(Continued from Page A.)*

This Light of the World enlightens us and reveals to us the love of our God. John also wrote, "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin."

Jesus promised, "You will have the light of life." He invites you to put your hand into His and to walk with Him through the darkness of this world, through the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death, all the way home to the glory, the joy of our heavenly Father's house. He has promised you the Light of everlasting life.

That is what all of the lights are about this season. They are all about Jesus, the Light of the world, about the Light of life, about the glory of heaven. The lights of

Christmas push back the darkness with their special glow, don't they?

Have you noticed that it doesn't take bright spotlights or floodlights to make this season bright? A lot of little lights accomplish the same purpose. Each one adding its own special luster to the total brightness.

Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men. ..." Your light might be small. Your influence in this dark world might seem insignificant, but each of us glows with the brightness of our Lord's love. As He fills your heart and life, your world will become brighter; and the darkness, whatever it might be, will be driven back, farther and farther. And you'll see, the Light will keep shining before us all the way home.

## MISSION FIELD IN YOUR COMMUNITY

*(Continued from Page C)*

Humanity (with matching funds from Thrivent), one-quarter to a non-profit job training program in Indianola, and the remaining one-quarter to a yet undesignated non-congregational, local mission project.

What opportunities is God presenting to you to share His love, hopefully to open the door

for sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ? I'd love to hear what you are doing that I might share it with the other congregations in Iowa District West as together we connect, resource, and partner for the extension of the Gospel within our communities, throughout the district and into all the world (IDW Mission Statement).

## Outreach workshops

When you hear about "missions," you probably think of pastors who go to distant lands and learn a new language and culture for the purpose of telling new people about Jesus. Did you know that your own friends, family, and neighbors are estimated to constitute the third-largest mission field in the world? And who better to bring the news of Jesus to them than someone who already speaks their language and lives their culture—you!

To encourage you in this task and provide you with the necessary resources to carry it out, the district is offering these upcoming workshops:

Saturday, Feb. 6, 8-11:30 a.m.—Faith, Council Bluffs  
Saturday, Feb. 13, 8-11:30 a.m.—Gloria Dei, Urbandale  
Saturday, Feb. 20, 8-11:30 a.m.—Prince of Peace, Fort Dodge  
Sunday, Feb. 21, 3-6:30 p.m.—First English, Spencer



## Roster change

### TRANSFER OUT OF IDW:

Rev. Arthur Porter, missionary, Los Angeles, Calif., to St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. (Southern District), on Nov. 13, 2009.

## We congratulate

### Birthdays

*None to report*

### Anniversaries

Jan. 1—Bud and June Dilocker, 60, Trinity, Cherokee.  
Jan. 1—Fred and Arlene Hollenbeck, 50, Trinity, Cherokee.  
Jan. 11—Don and Louise Schemmel, 60, Zion, Dexter.  
Jan. 21—Rev. Helmut and Arleda Schauland, 65, St. John, Ireton.  
Jan. 29—LeRoy and Shirley Larson, 55, Trinity, Cherokee.  
Jan. 30—Harold and UnaBell Frehse, 55, Zion, Denison.

### March issue: Jan. 15

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