

THE CRUX OF THE MATTER

NOVEMBER – DECEMBER 2006

“Faith Active In Love”

Mission Trip to Bluefields, Nicaragua

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Crosscurrent Church in Virginia Beach, VA, sent their first team to the small coastal town of Bluefields, Nicaragua in August 2006, which begin their ministry to orphaned and abandoned children through ORPHANetwork. Enclosed is an excerpt from Crosscurrent member Laura Thacker's account of their trip.



Bluefields, Nicaragua, is located on the Caribbean coast line of Nicaragua and is accessible only by boat or plain. The Crosscurrent trip to Bluefields was ORPHANetwork's pioneering effort in this city. Our team was given the task of bringing the message of the mission of ORPHANetwork to the Verbo Church and the people they minister to in their community.

For over twenty years various missionary groups have visited Bluefields. Our predecessors have come to Bluefields with their own agenda and idea of what the Verbo ministries need to improve their situation. They left the Verbo Church feeling disappointed by their lack of concern for their specific needs and failure to fulfill promises of continued support and long-term relationships.

The task before us was to change the hearts and minds of the inhabitants of Bluefields that white North Americans

are not all the same and that we were there to learn from them and help them in ways they saw fit.

Coco, a local shop owner and member of Verbo Church, has been ministering to street children in Bluefields for 30 years. Coco's ministry is the primary reason ORPHANetwork wanted to come to Bluefields. She has suffered a great deal over the years, sacrificing her own time and money, and has done courageous work in teaching and feeding the street kids. It was a pleasure to finally meet the women in person that we had heard so much about over the year. For our work projects some of us went to Coco's "house" to play with the street kids, many of which are orphans and currently live on the streets because there is no orphanage in place yet. There are other children come to Coco's during the day to be fed because their own family does not have food for them.



I Love to Tell the Story

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- **I Declare Unto You...**
- **I Believe! The 2007 ALC Youth Leadership Retreat**
- **“I Love to Tell the Story” February 2007 Gathering**
- **The Eighth Commandment – Michael Mueller**
- **God's Truth Abideth Still – Dick Smith**

The mission of the Augsburg Lutheran Churches is to bear witness to the good news that sinners are put right with God by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. We resist any corruption of this Gospel. Looking to the cross of Christ, we proclaim God's Word as Law and Gospel for the redemption of his people today. May God help us to the glory of his holy name. Amen.

“Faith Active In Love” — Bluefields, Nicaragua

One evening Pastor Ed took us to the rock quarry where the poor sit and chip away at large stones all day to turn them into small enough pieces to be sold for mixing with concrete. They spend their entire day chipping rocks to get, if they lucky, at most \$20 for all their effort. We also packed up 60 bags of food donations that included 5 pounds of beans, 5 pounds of sugar, oil for cooking, and a large bar of soap that we distributed to the community adjacent to one of Pastor Ed's mission plants, and at the city dump (called “Places of Hope”) later during the week.

One evening we took Coco's kids and the children from the deaf school to Chez Marcel, which is modest by our standards but “the classiest” and most expensive restaurant in all of Bluefields.

We caused such a scene with our outing at the restaurant that people on the street were asking why these North American “gringos” would treat these outcast children to such a lavish night?

As we left the restaurant the teacher of the deaf school caught up with Travis, our trip leader, and told him that a radio announcer in town who had heard what we were

doing and wanted to know what we were up to. The news spread fast and furiously back to Managua by radio broadcast that ORPHANetwork was in Bluefields ministering to the children!

During our trip we also went with Pastor Ed to visit Tasbapauni, a mission plant approximately 75km north of Bluefields up the Caribbean coast. Elder Henry gathered together the members of his congregation and we personally handed each member a bag of food. We made sure to convey the message to the people of Tasbapauni that the food was not from North American missionaries, but in fact it was a gift from God.

While in Tasbapauni, Pastor Ed announced that several local people, including a few children, had decided to give their lives to Jesus that day. He then asked four of the men from our team to assist him in baptizing the people who had come forward in the ocean.

It was a beautiful sight, the waves crashing all around us as the people were baptized, and it was an honor and a blessing to have participated in what many will remember as a miraculous day.



“Faith Active In Love” — Bluefields, Nicaragua

Friday we traveled to "The Place of Hopes" - the city dump. The people who live in The Place of Hopes live off of the trash, digging through the trash and crawling into the dump trucks as they are being emptied. While we were there we passed out the bags of food we had prepared. Each family we gave a bag to was asked if we could pray for their needs specifically. They shared with us the desires of the heart. Many of us were moved to tears.

Yet there was not enough for everyone one women asked if she could have a bag but because there were none left a few team members bought a bag of rocks from her so she could purchase food for her family.

As we wrapped up our trip we talked about why our faith makes so much sense in Bluefields. Why was it so incredibly easy to live and breathe the gospel for eight days straight? We believe we are saved by faith alone. Yet we must not forget the fruit of faith is love. And because love is a verb it can only be paired with something to which it acts upon. To paraphrase, "the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (*“For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but **faith which worketh by love**” Galatians 5:6*).

Why did so many of us comment over and over how we felt our spirits and hearts being changed every day? Because we were given a glimpse at the kingdom of heaven in the hearts of the children and the families we served. Our hearts were revealed to us, and our eyes were opened to God's calling to serve and love one another with certainty and constancy of heart.

Laura Thacker

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Create a Stir by Loving the Unlovely!

Join us for ‘07 ALC Mission Trip

“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” James 1:27

Please complete the enclosed form if your chapter or your church is interested in being part of an ALC mission trip to Nicaragua in 2007.

- Enclosed is a donation for the ‘07 ALC mission trip
- Please send information about ORPHANetwork
- I would like to be part of the ‘07 ALC mission trip

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: ____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Please mail this form to:

Ms. Laura Thacker
 165 Sawgrass Bend
 Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Or Email it to:

Thacker_laura@yahoo.com



SPREAD THE WORD

Augsburg Lutheran Churches

A Caring Community

1 Peter 1.3-6: “³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, ⁵who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”

We are here to help our brothers and sisters who are experiencing difficulties in their present situation. Please feel free to contact one of us at:

641-745-7060
Rev. John Emerson
salvage1@cashette.com

641-347-5398
Mrs. Dorothy McNaught
dot@mddc.com

432-362-2549
Rev. Michael Mueller
pastormmueller@sbcglobal.net

910-916-9130
Chaplain John Rasmussen
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910-245-7099
Rev. Lenae Rasmussen
lcarasmussen@earthlink.net

FROM THE AUGSBURG PASTOR

JOHN EMERSON

I hope your thanksgiving was as great as mine. It was quite unusual because the kids all went their separate ways and I spent a quiet day by myself. For some that might seem lonely but for me it was just what I needed.

In a busy world most of us seldom get time to reflect and spend time reprogramming. From one event to another, children and grand children, work and play, we can’t escape the daily intrusions. Everywhere we go life intrudes on us, I needed that day to unwind and it was great. I napped, read, watched some TV but when I wanted silence I had it.

I had time to reflect, give thanks, and just think. Nothing intruded, no visits, no calls and very little conversation, it was great! Now I wouldn’t want a steady diet of that time of aloneness but it sure was great for the day. I came away with a greater appreciation of friends and family, it gave me time to reflect on the many undeserved gifts of love people regularly share with me. It allowed me to look at the blessings I have found in the ALC, and it allowed me to dream and envision our future. When a person gets so busy, and when life so intrudes in life, little time is available for reflection.

We live in an age that glorifies busyness, idle time is seen as bad, we are told to keep busy, we make sure that the kids are never idle, little time is left between school, extra curricular activities, and work. We fall into bed exhausted; sometimes enough is enough!

We lose much in order to be productive. We try hard to never be idle, yet we lose

ourselves when we live like that. Jesus took time to be by himself, and invest his time in prayer and solitude. The Church has traditionally encouraged times of reflection and called the believer to times of silence so God could speak in that still small voice. Often we get kingdom things messed up because we act without thought, reflection and open hearts when we find no time for holy silence.

If you find your life so crammed with busyness, stop and find a place where you can hole up with God and take time to just listen. Maybe one of the reasons you haven’t heard that still small voice is that you have spent too much time in the whirlwind, earth quake, and fire. Stop! Find a place to be still and listen to Him speak*.

Blessings,

John Emerson
salvage1@cashette.com
(641) 745-2415



*1 Kings 19:11-13

"Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the Lord told him. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. ^[12] And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. ^[13] When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

And a voice said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Many thanks to the Rev. Dick Smith and Dr. Dennis Bielfeldt for arranging another great fall theological conference for our clergy and interested guests at the Old Sanctuary, 410 Fourth Street, Brookings, SD. Many thanks also to everyone who participated in the conference. The event will be held next year on **October 8-9, 2007.**

A Proposed Order for Confession and Forgiveness, papers on Luther’s treatise on “The New Testament,” grammar for proclamation, ethics and resistance to tyranny are available for downloading from the Augsburg website: www.augsburgchurches.org

FROM THE AUGSBURG EXECUTIVE CHAIR

LENAE RASMUSSEN

Jesus said to him, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me”** (John 14:6).

I love to tell “the old, old story” of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem . I never get tired of it. It is the most precious story I know, and the most encouraging news I can share. God revealed his love for you and me in his Son. Jesus’ birth means you *can* come to the Father because you’re reconciled to Him for all eternity in Christ. The Babe leads you away from your fears and fantasies about God and draws you into a concrete relationship with Him by your own death and new Life in Christ. His loving gifts of faith, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life are the best Christmas presents of all.

So, in a world where people are looking for something that is “new and improved” I’m still clinging to the Babe born in a stable! For the little One lying in the manger is the Christ who died on the Cross for you, which makes the joyful news of Christmas sound just as sweet today as it did to the Shepherds some 2000 years ago: “I have come that you may have life in me. Your sins are forgiven. Peace on earth; good will to men.”

I Love to Tell the Story

Plans have been made to hold the ALC Vision and Planning Task Force meeting with the Augsburg Council on February 19, 2007, at Advent Lutheran Church in Roseville, MN.

This special convention was called to address ALC business and build consensus among our members on key issues. We’d like each church and chapter to send at least one delegate to this important meeting.

Dr. Dennis Bielfeldt will speak on alternatives to the traditional 4-year seminary tract, and

other types of cooperative work the ALC can engage in with other established seminaries.

We will also hear from seminarians and call committees members as we build consensus on the colloquy and screening process. Our goal is to improve how we assist churches and pastors in the call process.

Foreign churches have applied to join the ALC. We plan to build consensus on how to screen international applicants and pastors, and develop a process for handling this sort of thing “routinely” in the future.

New worship and education resources, plans for outreach (membership), mission church plants, and the 2007 convention will also be discussed in workshops and the business sessions.

Finally, we will review what it means to be a theologian of the cross vs. a theologian of glory, and the ALC “Heidelberg Disputation Lutheran ethos” based on:

- † **Justification by Faith alone**
- † **Bondage of the Will**
- † **God’s Word as Law and Gospel**
- † **Simultaneously sinners and saints**
- † **Preaching — for you — the Self-authenticating Living Word**
- † **Faith alone, Grace alone, Scripture alone, Christ alone, Cross alone**

This lays the groundwork for our vision of being **Christ centered, Gospel driven, and Bible teaching** Lutherans who proclaim God’s Word for the redemption of His people here and now. Come for the discussion and fellowship. Come to hear the Gospel. Come to be part of building a cadre of people to proclaim the Living Word to God’s people today.

Grace and peace,
 Lenae Rasmussen
 lcarasmussen@earthlink.net
 (910) 245-7099



“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”
 John 14:6

EACH ONE REACH ONE



ALC NEWS, REPORTS AND EVENTS

Worship & Education

I Declare Unto You ...

Preachers can't be wimps! When it comes to proclamation, we can't really be worrying about our hearers' feelings or about whether or not the gospel is successful among them. In the desire to protect feelings, proclamation is exchanged for the abstract notion of universalism which eventually leaves the hearers under wrath once again as they encounter the scriptural word. Worry over the gospel's success returns the issue to human responsibility: persuasion, explanation, and exhortation as motivations for the hearers' supposedly free will replace the definite deed of proclamation.

Preachers must be bold! We stand in the concrete moment of declaring and delivering the mighty acts of God to our hearers' in the living present. Such present tense speech maintains the proper application of the pronoun. It delivers judgment as in Nathan's word to David, "YOU are the man!" It has all the particularity of the bread and wine placed in the hand, "Body and blood of Christ given and shed FOR YOU!" It delivers salvation as effectively as Jesus' words to Bartimaeus, "YOUR sins are forgiven!"

When preachers proclaim the absolution, we must declare it unconditionally: "I declare unto you the entire forgiveness of all your sins! In the name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit; Amen!" In such present tense proclamation of Christ's work, "faith

comes from what is heard."

Here are more bold examples unconditional present tense proclamation:

"Your sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake; Amen!"

"Upon this your confession and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I declare your sins forgiven; Amen!"

And here's one by Dick Smith--

"Take heart my friends, your sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. And, where there is forgiveness, there is the real presence of Christ in you as a redeeming reality. We are always 200 percent which mathematically makes no sense whatsoever. We are always 100 percent sinner and will be to the day we die. At the same time we are always 100 percent holy, righteous, and perfect in the eyes of God—saints, because of Jesus Christ. When Christ died on the cross, He pulled you up on the cross with Him. ALL this happened in your baptism: As He was crucified, you were crucified with him; as he died, you also died with him; as he was buried, you were buried with him; and as he was raised from the dead, you also have been given a new life—Christ's life in you! As Paul said of himself so also it is said of you, "You have died to the Law. You don't live any longer. Its CHRIST who lives in you now and forever! AMEN."

Augsburg Worship & Education Committee

Mrs. Dorothy McNaught, Chair

Rev. Tim Swenson

Rev. Jack Torgersen

Rev. Ron Rasmussen

The 4th Annual **ALC Youth Leadership Retreat** will be held **June 13-17, 2007**, at the Heart Ranch in West Texas, and **June 20-23, 2007**, a 2nd session will be held at Mount Carmel in NW Minnesota.

The First Article of the Creed will be the focus:

*I believe in God the Father almighty,
Maker of Heaven and Earth.*



ALC NEWS, REPORTS AND EVENTS



I Love to Tell the Story

ALC Vision & Planning Conference & Convention

Heidelberg Disputation Lutherans are invited to gather for discussion and fellowship

February 19, 2007

Advent Lutheran Church
3000 Hamline Avenue N
Roseville, MN 55113
(651) 633-3232

- 9:00 a.m. Opening Worship
- 10:00 a.m. Seminary Alternatives & ALTS
Dr. Dennis Bielfeldt
- 11:00 a.m. Business Session
- Noon Lunch
- 1:00 p.m. Break-out Session #1
- 2:00 p.m. Break-out Session #2
- 3:00 p.m. Business Session
- 4:00 p.m. Theological Foundations of the ALC
Lou Hesse & Lenae Rasmussen
- 6:00 p.m. Dinner
- 7:00 p.m. Closing Worship
- 8:30 p.m. Fellowship

Heidelberg Disputation Lutherans are invited to join the Augsburg Fellowship of the Cross and FODM-WLIC Chapter for dinner & fellowship

February 18, 2007



Jensen's Supper Club
3840 Cedarvale Blvd.
Eagan, MN 55122

- 5:30 p.m. Fellowship of the Cross
- 6:30 p.m. ALC Vision: *Proclaiming the Radical Gospel In A Fallen World*
- 7:15 p.m. Dinner
- 8:30 p.m. Compline
- Cost \$30.00
Seminarians—no charge
- Questions: Contact Lenae Rasmussen
Phone: (910) 245-7099
Email: icarasmussen@earthlink.net
- Seminarians: Contact Natalie Gessert
Phone: (703) 963-2789
Email: ngessert001@luthersem.edu

Christ was born for you



ALC NEWS, REPORTS AND EVENTS

The Eighth Commandment

Rumors, Slander, Lies and Deceit

Sir Winston Churchill was quoted as saying, “A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on.” False rumors have such swift legs because most people prefer them to the truth. John deals with a similar situation where he must correct a rumor started because of what Jesus said to Peter, “So a rumor that [John] wouldn’t die spread among Jesus’ followers. But Jesus didn’t say that he wouldn’t die. What Jesus said was, “If I want him to live until I come again, how does that concern you?”“

What John dealt with did not seem malicious, but in Revelations, he puts malicious rumormongers in the company of “dogs, sorcerers, sexual sinners, murderers, idolaters, and all who lie in what they say and what they do.” Spreading rumors was also the weapon of choice for Christ’s enemies after His resurrection (Matthew 28:11-15).

As children of the light we are to refrain from starting, repeating or even listening to rumors—true or not. Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 4:29, “get rid of lies. Speak the truth to each other, because we are all members of the same body.” Continuing on in verse 29, he exhorts, “Don’t say anything that would hurt another person. Instead, speak only what is good so that you can give help wherever it is needed. That way, what you say will help those who hear you.”

Christ always confronted those with whom He disagreed and took His complaints directly to them. Christ is Truth—we live in that truth and are set free to be truthful.

Suppose you’ve just heard some news about someone you know, news that you knew you should, or were asked to, keep to yourself. But, deep inside yourself you feel a burning desire to tell someone. Or maybe someone leaves your church and people start filling in the information gap with all sorts of lurid assumptions as to the reason for leaving. This is not just keeping up with the news, it is malicious gossip.

One dictionary defines gossip as “rumor or report of an intimate or sensational nature.” As sinful beings, we take pleasure in sharing rumors, especially if it is sensational, in order to build ourselves up and appear to be “in the know,” or to be valued for sharing the news. However, anyone who has been the subject of such gossip knows the hurt and damage it can cause. To put a twist on an old saying, ‘sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can kill me.’ You see words do cause emotional pain and spiritual suffering, especially when said about us behind our backs where truth cannot counter the lie (Psalm 69:20–21).

As Lutherans, we study in Catechism class the eight commandment, but often forget Luther’s explanation, “We are to fear and love God so that we do not betray, slander, or lie about our neighbor, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain his actions in the kindest way.” Betrayal is repeating a harmful truth, slander is to tear down a reputation and lying is to say an untruth. Jesus gave us a similar command, “love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 19:19).”

If we truly love our neighbor as ourselves, then, we build our neighbor up to others and always interpret their actions with words that are kind and affirming. We reach out in care and concern, recognizing that our duty of love and support, even as we need such from them. Let’s remember that the old English root word for gossip was *godsibb*, meaning being tied to another spiritually, i.e. a sponsor in Baptism. So when we hear gossip about someone, it should remind us instead to care for their soul and speak well of them in the kindest way (Hebrews 10:24-25).

The Old Adam (our sinful nature) revels in passing on a juicy rumor, insulting witty remarks, defamatory allegations, disparaging stories and humorous mockery. Luther colorfully described it as “relishing and delighting like pigs that roll in the mud and root around in it with their snouts.” At its heart it is self-idolatry—

*“Thou shalt
not bear false
witness
against thy
neighbor”*

Small Catechism

ALC NEWS, REPORTS AND EVENTS

The Eighth Commandment

the lifting up of oneself by putting down someone else. Repeating rumors—even when they are true—violates the eighth commandment against bearing false witness, Luther said, adding that the commandment charges us to protect others' reputations against "poisonous tongues."

"Everyone enjoys hearing and telling the worst about his neighbor and it tickles him to see a fault in someone else," Luther writes. "People have many virtues which the devil can't destroy, yet he hides or disfigures them to make them invisible." Luther is right that this practice is demonic and the opposite—lifting up our neighbor—helps tame the tongue and redirects our actions toward seeing our neighbor as the image of God.

What do we do when gossip and rumors come our way? Ask yourself if you would repeat it to the person's mother who is being spoken about. Does this lift that person up or tear them down? I try to deal with it by asking the person to wait while I get in contact with the subject of the rumor so that they can hear it and defend themselves. If the rumor monger leaves and the gossip is hurtful, I still disclose all to the victim.

Gossiping is another form of bullying in that it is perpetrated by cowards who cannot face the victim and take that chance that the gossip will turn back on them. Repeating it or not objecting to it is to become a bully yourself. Put into practice Matthew 18 with those who bring gossip to you so that the gossipier has the opportunity for confession, forgiveness, restitution and reconciliation.

The Office of the Keys comes in here now. So, let's say one is caught spreading rumors about someone else. We can say, "God declares in the eighth commandment that spreading rumors is a sin." This is not being judgmental. It is a statement of fact, a statement of what God says to us in His Word.

If they continue to spread rumors, then we can declare, "According to God's Word, because you are unrepentant you are not forgiven. I urge you to repent, quit sinning and confess, or you'll face God's judgment." This is retaining sins. It is to declare what God

says about being unrepentant. If they want nothing of God's forgiveness for their sin, they do not have it. We are merely messengers, not the Judge of heaven and earth.

On the other hand, if on being confronted with God's Law, they say, "You're right. I am being sinful. I repent and will stop spreading rumors and will confess to all to whom I have said them." We can respond, "Then joyfully I tell you that in the stead and by the command of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven!" This is what it means to loose (forgive) sins. You announce to them the forgiveness that God has for them, for the sake of Christ.

You see, if I were to mow your lawn while you're away, drive you on your errands when your car is in the shop and do other acts of kindness for you—and I become ill and you bring me soup, that would be neighborly love. But if I throw rocks at your house, dump dog waste on your doorstep, and spread malicious rumors so you lose your friends—and then I become ill and you bring me soup, that's grace!

If mercy is to not get the punishment we deserve, then grace is to get the reward we don't deserve. By nature we throw rocks at God and spread malicious rumors about our neighbor. But by grace He decided in advance to show us mercy. By grace He gave us much more than soup—He gave us His Son to ransom us and make us His own. Shown mercy in not counting my sin against me and grace in receiving the inheritance of His Son as His adopted child, I can do no other but to act likewise towards my neighbor.



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ALC NEWS, REPORTS AND EVENTS

Thought for the Day

Rev. Dick Smith

24 Pentecost B, November 19, 2006

Gospel: Mark 13:1-8

“And as he (Jesus) came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down” (RSV: Verse 1-2).

This was not only a prediction of the destruction of the temple; it was a statement about the place of institutionalism in the New Age ushered in by Christ’s death and resurrection.

The temple had been the location of the presence of God. In Isaiah 6, it was in the temple that the prophet had his vision of the Lord. Christ announced that his body was the temple (Gospel of John). St. Paul asserted that because Christ now lives in us as our new life, since we have died with him in the waters of baptism, our bodies are now the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians). Oh yes, and the Samaritan Woman at the well said, “Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Woman believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (Gospel of John 4:20-24 RSV).

The term “church” is used and abused in many different ways. It is commonly used to refer to a building where a congregation gathers. It is commonly used to refer to what is supposed to be happening when a group gathers: “going to church.” Old Testament language about the temple is often applied to buildings. How often I have entered congregational buildings where the words are emblazoned above the doors, “the temple of the Lord.” In our town there is a congregation that even calls themselves, “—temple.”

In all these instances “church” is being interpreted as “institution.” “Temple,” “church,” are pulled out of the person and presented as an institution of the Left Hand Kingdom (which is LAW). But the church is of the Right Hand Kingdom (which is GRACE). Scripture stands over against this and the Augsburg Confession of June 25, 1530, expresses Scripture eloquently when it reads in Article VII: “The church is the assembly of all believers where the Gospel is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered according to a right understanding of the gospel.” Again, Philip Melancthon wrote

***“God’s truth
abideth still,
the kingdom is
ours forever.”
Martin Luther***

in the *Apology (Defense of) to the Augsburg Confession*, “The ‘church’ is mainly an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit in men’s hearts? ((Articles VII and VIII) The Church: paragraph 5). (“Faith” is Christ in us for it is His faith that is in us because we are dead and live no longer.)

As Regin Prenter wrote in his book on Luther’s Understanding of the Holy Spirit, “Faith in Christ IS THE REAL PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN US as a redeeming reality which as an invisible and incomprehensible but divine reality tears away from and places us in contrast to all other reality” (*Spiritus Creator*, tr. John M. Jensen, [Philadelphia, Muhlenberg Press, 1953], page 50).

So Jesus words, “God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24) DO NOT refer to our doing ANYTHING but to the HOLY SPIRIT (“in spirit”) and CHRIST HIMSELF for he IS THE TRUTH (John 14:6) (“and truth”).

In the Mark 13 passage, Jesus does not answer the question about when the destruction of the temple will take place but rather warns about being led astray by those who would claim to be him. When you think about it where ever “church” is pulled out of the person and made an institution one is being manipulated, “led astray,” by “hawkers of God’s Word” (II Cor. 2:17 in the original Greek).

Yes, buildings can be helpful, constitutions, church councils, budgets, carpeting, musical instruments, can be. BUT THEY ARE NOT THE CHURCH. They will crumble just like the temple. They are in the Left Hand Kingdom and they are only tools to serve the Gospel which is the Right Hand Kingdom.

“The church is (the) association of faith and the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men” (Ap.AC). “It is the assembly of all believers where the gospel is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered in accordance with the gospel” (AC VII).

What we see is not where it is at. Christ is delivered in the proclamation of the Gospel that Christ died for the UNGODLY. You are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. The Law (10 commandments) with its commands has revealed how impossible your life is and so has killed you. Now CHRIST IS YOUR LIFE. Baptism and Holy Communion are outward signs of the gift of Christ himself to you and in you. You are 100 percent sinner and 100 percent saint (holy and perfect and righteous in the eyes of God) all at the same time.

As Colossians reads, “For you are DEAD and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, appears, you also will appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:3-4)!

As Luther wrote, “Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also. The body they may kill, God’s truth abideth still, the Kingdom is OURS FOREVER!”

ALC NEWS, REPORTS AND EVENTS

ALC Churches Looking For Pastors

St. Paul Lutheran Church Gaffney, SC

St. Paul Lutheran Church in Gaffney, SC, is seeking to call a full-time pastor. Gaffney is located in the Piedmont area of South Carolina, about one hour from Asheville and Charlotte, NC, and Greenville, SC. This is a vibrant congregation, small children abound!

Paid staff includes a part-time youth director, organist, secretary and volunteer choir director. St. Paul Lutheran is a member of the ALC and LCMC.

Pastoral candidates interested in interviewing for this call are invited to send their colloquy packet (resume, autobiographical faith statement, paper on Our Declaration, and written answers to the ALC colloquy questions) to:

Barry Brown, Congregation President
864-487-4638
St Paul's Lutheran Church
1600 W Floyd Baker Blvd
Gaffney SC 29341

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Welcome to *River of Life Lutheran Church* in Lincoln, Nebraska. Rev. Dan Cloeter and his wife, Marji, are planting this new church. Your prayers and support are appreciated.

Designated gifts for *River of Life* may be sent to the ALC at P.O. Box 332, Greenwood, IA 50849.



Congratulations to Rev. Melinda Russell who will attend the Army chaplain basic course at Fort Jackson, SC, from January 7 to April 5, 2007. She was commissioned as a First Lieutenant in the United States Army on July 7, 2006. Russell has orders to report to Fort Riley on April 11, 2007.

CH (1LT) Melinda Russell is endorsed for the military chaplaincy by the ALC and the NAE-CC.

UPCOMING EVENTS

February 18, 2007 — Fellowship of the Cross meets at 5:30 p.m. at Jensen's Supper Club in Eagan, MN .

February 19, 2007 — ALC Vision & Planning Conference & Convention at Advent Lutheran—Roseville, MN.

February 20, 2007 — Augsburg Council Meeting at Advent Lutheran—Roseville, MN.

June 13 - 17, 2007 — **I BELIEVE!** — the ALC Youth Leadership Retreat in the Davis Mountains of West Texas.

June 19—20, 2007 — *Mount Carmel Theological Conference*: **Speaker: Dr. Steven Paulson**

June 20 - 23, 2007 — **I BELIEVE!** — the ALC Youth Leadership Retreat (2nd session) at Mount Carmel, Minnesota.

September 98, 2007 — The First ALCW² Gathering: **"At Peace With God Through Christ"** in Fontanelle, Iowa.

September 9 - 11, 2007 — **REJOICE! Christ died for the ungodly—He died for you!** The 7th Annual Augsburg Gathering at Emmanuel Lutheran Church - Fontanelle, IA. **Keynote Speaker: Dr. Roy A. Harrisville, Jr.**
(40 miles west on I-80 from Des Moines, IA, south on Hwy 25 to Greenfield, west on Hwy 92 to Fontanelle).

THE CRUX OF THE MATTER

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AUGSBURG LUTHERAN CHURCHES

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**T H E C R O S S A L O N E
I S O U R T H E O L O G Y**

THE CRUX OF THE MATTER

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“He Is In the Manger”

by Regin Prenter

It is natural to start with the Trinitarian ideas of Luther under which he embodies the Logos Christology of the ancient church. In his doctrine of the Trinity Luther takes the prologue of John and the whole tradition of the church and identifies God's eternal inward Word with the incarnated Christ. The Word of God which brings a message from his heart cannot come from him and to us in this world except in a body of flesh. The incarnated Christ himself is the outward Word of God. Yes, he is literally *Words* when in the sermon he falls as rain upon the dry meadows, either to be accepted by faith or to be rejected by unbelief. In the *Church Postils* Luther takes strong opposition to the scholastics who want to make the Logos Christology of the prologue of John into the work of man and into Platonic and philosophical ideas which lead us away from Christ into ourselves, while the gospel writer intends to lead us from our-

selves to Christ. The gospel writer does not treat the almighty, eternal Word of God in any other way than by pointing us to the Word clothed in flesh and blood walking here upon the earth. He does not scatter our thoughts over the whole creation of God that we should try to run after him out there and seek him there and speculate our way to him just as the Platonic thinkers do. He wants to take us away from all these protracted and scattered thoughts and lead us to Christ just as if he would say: Why do you seek so far away? Behold, in the man, Christ, you have it all. Christ is the ladder to heaven by which we alone have entrance to the Father. He is not found in the heaven where the commentators seek him in flighty speculations. *He is in the manger and in the bosom of the woman.* We must start from below and not from above. *Christ—or rather the humanity of Christ—is the sign by which God will draw us to himself.* Therefore the eyes must be directed toward this sign and not toward speculations (*Spiritus Creator*, 108-9).

