

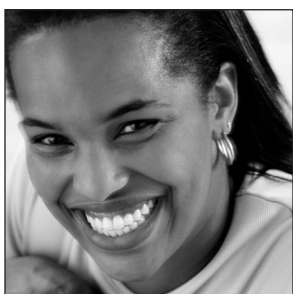
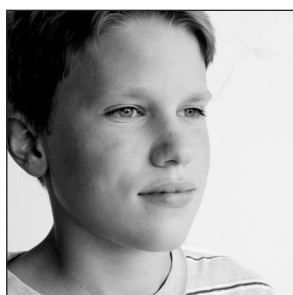
ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

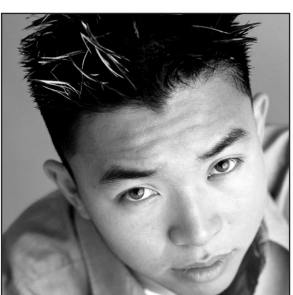
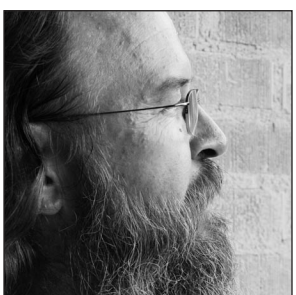
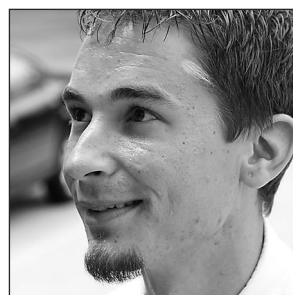
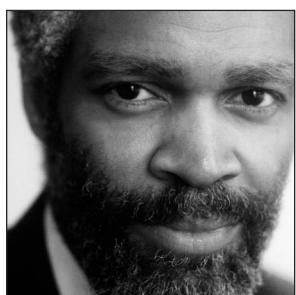
Fall 2005

Vol. 39, No. 2

Ablaze!: Origins, Theology, Structure, Impact



Ablaze!
Igniting the World with Christ's Love



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reflections

LAST MARCH the Concordia University A Cappella Choir performed in Des Moines, Iowa. The Rev. Paul Sieveking, President, and The Rev. Earl Pierce, Executive Assistant for Missions and Stewardship of the Iowa District West of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, were two of the persons in attendance. President Sieveking was wearing an *Ablaze!* necktie. Rev. Pierce had on an *Ablaze!* lapel pin. Some good-natured teasing ensued about the new apparel line they were promoting.

Paul and Earl told me that Iowa District West is marketing a wide array of shirts, ties, pins, pocket crosses, and other items to encourage each congregation of the district to get involved in identifying ways to tell the Good News about Jesus Christ. What a creative idea! As we talked, President Sieveking reached into his pocket, pulled out an *Ablaze!* pocket cross, and handed it to me. He gave the cross and the message of the cross *away!* What a powerful action! Today the *Ablaze!* pocket cross remains in my pocket as a constant reminder of the One who loved and gave his life so that all people might have the free gift of eternal salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

But this dare not be the end of the story! If the cross only remains in my pocket, it is a blessing to me. But what if I share it with another and that person shares it with another and that person with yet another! The goal of *Ablaze!* is to reach 100 million people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ by 2017! It is a marvelous vision and a daunting task—yet it is the call and commission of every baptized child of God.

The late president of our Synod, The Rev. Dr. A. L. Barry, often talked about his daily “goal” of sharing the Gospel with one other person. He had a goal and he fulfilled it—in airports and restaurants and the highways and byways of our church and world. This edition of *Issues* highlights the LCMS World Mission’s *Ablaze!* as a major thrust of the Synod during the coming decades. The edition presents some of the challenges and opportunities, areas of possible controversy, areas for ministry within and between congregations, and occasions for greater outreach and evangelism for clergy and laity alike. In 2017, when we look back to the beginning of *Ablaze!*, I hope and pray that then, as now, we will repeat with the early disciples: “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us on the road, and while he opened the Scriptures to us?” And as our hearts burn, so may the Holy Spirit empower us in every way and in every place to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

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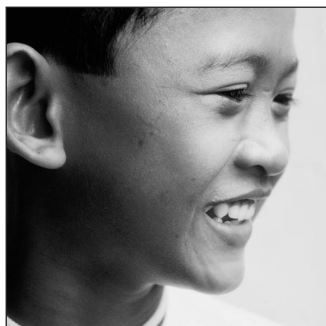
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Brian L. Friedrich, President



Waking a "Sleeping Giant"

I was first introduced to *Ablaze!* in the fall of 2003 while serving as a missionary to Japan. The team of missionaries committed to the initiative because we felt that in a country where less than one percent of the population is Christian, hearts needed to be ignited for the Gospel. Our overall goal did not change as a result of this undertaking, but we were inspired by the renewed drive to respond to the Great Commission.

At the time, we were a group of fourteen lay missionaries who had received several crash courses in ministry training. Some of us were two- or three-year veterans in the mission field in Japan while others had just recently arrived. Despite our differing experiences, we were all able to relate as a unified body by responding to the Great Commission. The rationale behind *Ablaze!* enabled us to establish more concrete goals for our work and our group as a whole. Our small group suddenly had a bolder vision that was backed by the greater LCMS church body.

After hearing about *Ablaze!* and having gone through the process of establishing goals based on the proposal's vision and mission, I took a closer look at just what this program would mean for the church as a whole when everyone responds. The thing that stood out for me the most was that the ministry lies in the hands of every single member of the Church. There is absolutely no distinction between called and lay ministers in sharing the Gospel, and there should never have to be such a delineation of authority or ability when it comes to fulfilling God's command to "go and make disciples."

While I was in Japan, there were countless barriers to spreading the Gospel to the unreached and the uncommitted, but God

showed me a variety of ways to get around them. Part of my determination to do so was my mindset—that I was a missionary. That mindset was easy to achieve because I was in a foreign country for the specific purpose of teaching the Gospel of Christ.

Unfortunately, there are many people in the Lutheran church who feel like a foreign country is the only place to be a missionary. We seem to put foreign missions on a pedestal and stand back in admiration and amazement as seemingly "elevated" lay people travel to various other countries with the sole intention of spreading the Gospel. The problem with this mindset is that our own mission field in the United States is severely neglected by those who have not been called abroad, but are equally empowered by the Holy Spirit to seek out the unreached and uncommitted here at home.

God has called each of us to share in this mission, whether it is in a foreign country or in our back yards. This is not news to anyone, but based on the response of our church as a whole, it is difficult to see that we really believe and apply God's command to our lives. *Ablaze!* proposes that each of us deliberately and intentionally act on this call and quite simply guides us in our responses. Every person is capable of responding in at least one of the seven proposed ways, so my question then is, "Why aren't more people in our church body doing so?"

Billy Graham once commented that the Lutheran church is a "sleeping giant." I find this statement to be simultaneously complimentary and insulting. We should rejoice that our church body is strong in number and capable of achieving the status of a "giant." We should also rejoice that we have been blessed through the Holy Spirit who empowers us to act. But we should be concerned that the numbers are dwindling due to our inactivity, lack of moti-

vation, and internal divisions. *Ablaze!* unites the Church with one common vision and establishes a very bold and attainable goal. I cannot imagine what our world would be like were everyone to dedicate one's self to only one of the seven mission responses outlined in the proposal. This "sleeping giant" might actually wake up, get the attention of the unreached and uncommitted, and grow the kingdom of heaven.

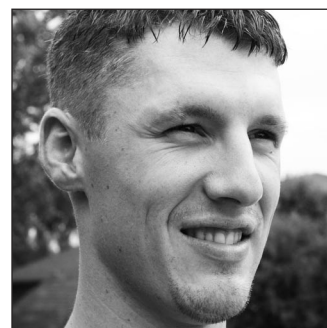
The vision of *Ablaze!* is a bold one which challenges us to focus more of our attention on the mission and ministry of the Church. By calling on the priesthood of believers to go out instead of keeping what we know to ourselves and waiting for the unreached and uncommitted to come to us, *Ablaze!* encourages each member of the Church to answer God's call. This invitation is definitely a mission opportunity that each of us is capable of undertaking.

Cheryl Dart

Graduate of Concordia University
Nebraska, 2000, Missionary to Japan
2000–2004

Ablaze! Being Held Accountable for Doctrine and Practice

In discussions about *Ablaze!*, the opinion sometimes surfaces that this movement, with its numerical targets (as adopted by the 2004 Convention), is somehow new or alien to the Lutheran identity of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Both advocates and critics of *Ablaze!* seem to share this assumption of its novelty: The one group sees it as a desirable revolution to introduce something which has been lacking among us, while the other group regards it with suspicion exactly because they



see it as alien to the tradition and theology of the Synod. I can take some pleasure in disagreeing with both camps, because I consider the roots and approach of the *Ablaze!* initiative neither as revolutionary as its fans claim, nor as alien to true Lutheranism as its detractors argue. Viewed in the context of the Synod's theological history, *Ablaze!* is an example of the Synod's deep-rooted desire for accountability in evangelical doctrine and practice.

The collective challenge expressed in the *Ablaze!* initiative is rooted in the very existence of our church body. What holds the Missouri Synod together? Why do congregations and individuals join the Synod? When I pose these questions to seminary students studying LCMS history, their initial answers usually point to joint ventures such as a publishing house, world mission programs, and educational institutions for training pastors and teachers. But such pragmatic tasks could just as well have been accomplished by *ad hoc* alliances of interested congregations and individuals, without inventing the whole organizational superstructure of a permanent synodical body. Indeed, in our day the tasks of publishing, missions, and education are increasingly being organized in more decentralized ways that bypass the synodical structures. So the question of why one might want to be part of a Synod turns out to be a very contemporary question, and one that is not satisfactorily answered by pointing to the Concordia University System or appealing to the pension plan.

The seminary students in my classes are often surprised to learn that the Synod's founders also were motivated by a desire to "defend against schism and sectarianism" and to promote and protect the unity of the church. Why should it be a surprise that the LCMS exists to prevent schism and sectarianism? Perhaps my students have grown up accepting the caricature

of the Synod which simply assumes that passionate concern for true doctrine necessarily divides the church into sectarian factions. Such a stereotype of orthodoxy sees doctrine as a kind of centrifugal force in the church, tending always to drive things apart as differences are recognized and emphasized.

The Synod was founded on a very different view of true doctrine as the *centripetal* rather than *centrifugal* force at work in the church, as unifying rather than dividing. The founders of the Synod created an organization based on the daring idea that the church is healthier, more unified, and more vibrant if we are held accountable by others for our preaching, teaching, and practice. It is, of course, important to realize the enormous difference between the desire *to be held accountable*, and the hunger *to be the one holding others accountable*, which is just the Old Adam's lust for power over the other guy. The desire to be held accountable, on the contrary, springs from the knowledge that what divides the church is human sin, including my own sin, which likes to masquerade as my uniquely profound insight and my superior virtue. Knowing this, I desire to be a member of Synod because I know that without my brothers and sisters I am more than likely to twist and pervert God's truth and go my own way.

What does all this talk of history and accountability have to do with our contemporary debate about the *Ablaze!* initiative? Just this: the goals and targets adopted by the last convention are our most recent expression of that old and noble desire to be held accountable within Synod for our doctrine and practice. We said together at the 2004 Convention that we want our brothers and sisters to help us keep an eye not only on the *content* of our preaching, teaching, and confessing in the world, but also on whether we are actually *communicating* that

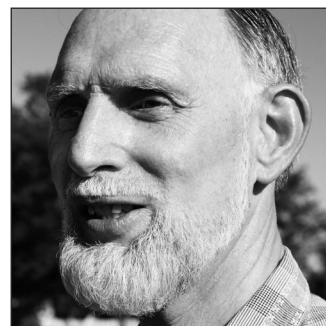
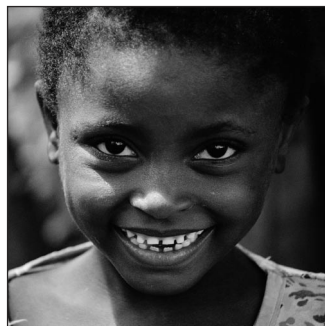
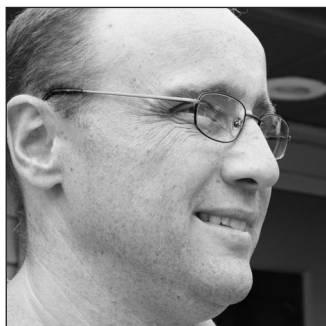
content to the billions in the world who still lack the saving faith which comes from hearing the word of Christ. I support and welcome the *Ablaze!* targets not because I suppose that I am responsible for converting people, for the Holy Spirit still creates faith when and where he pleases. Rather, I want my life and ministry to be characterized by a ready, clear, insistent sharing of that message because the Spirit works faith "in those who hear the Gospel." And I want and need the rest of the body of Christ to help hold me to that. That kind of desire for genuinely evangelical accountability is not new, but it does run counter to our radically individualized culture, which may explain some of the screams coming from the Old Adam (in me and others) who likes it better when he answers to no one.

Dr. William W. Schumacher
Mission Assistant Professor
of Historical Theology
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis
schumacherw@csl.edu

Ablaze! In Foreign Fields

We have seen our share of church-wide programs come and go with questionable results. Yet some programs do make a difference. The vision of igniting a worldwide Lutheran mission movement to share the Gospel with 100 million people is being expressed by the word *Ablaze!* And with it comes an initiative that offers a significant change of focus for us. *Ablaze!* uses the strategies of the first century church which I believe have been lost to much of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) today but can be recovered.

In Acts 13:3, the church at Antioch fasted and prayed, placed their hands on Paul and Barnabas, and sent them off. They went to



Asia Minor to serve, share the Gospel, and build eternal relationships. "From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. Upon arriving in Antioch, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles" (Acts 14:26-27).

In several journeys, Paul and his partners had successes and failures, but they did the mission. Then as now, the purpose of the church's preaching and teaching is that Christians love God and care for the spiritual and physical needs of our neighbor. Paul's words to the Corinthian church remind us that "through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing" (2 Corinthians 2:14b-15). Those who know Jesus is risen "are now his witnesses to our people" (Acts 13:31b).

The *Ablaze!* goal is to kindle the spirit of Paul and Barnabas and the first century church to share the Good News with 100 million people by the year 2017. For decades the LCMS has sent missionaries into communities at home and abroad. But in the recent past, support and fervor has waned for sending missionaries by and through LCMS World Mission. *Ablaze!* is a renewed and long overdue call to return to the world mission of the church. And as an educational missionary to Asia, I can report that *Ablaze!* has already demonstrated some very positive features.

First, *Ablaze!* has ignited a fire on the foreign mission fields. Missionaries are energized by the 2004 Synodical Convention commitment to the *Ablaze!* focus on sharing the Gospel and saving souls. I for one feel the power of more prayer from more of our members and congre-

gations. Missionaries can now see the growing interest of lay and professional people seeking short-term and long-term opportunities for witness through education, ESL, medical, and humanitarian work. LCMS World Mission (LCMS WM) is restructuring its outreach to be more focused and confident, receiving increased support from Synod's board of directors, district presidents, pastors, teachers, schools, individuals, and congregations. This translates into willingness to take a risk and plan more boldly for further expansion.

I now see a new spirit of financial support for foreign missions at the Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) and the LCMS Foundation. Other financial organizations are also getting on board as they see the potential in the *Ablaze!* concept. Many joined with World Mission and LCMS World Relief to minister compassionately when the tsunami hit Asia. With the challenging goal of reaching tens of millions for Christ, more organizations are sure to be moved to help.

Second, the foreign fields see the LCMS as recognizing the value of partners in mission. Even in this early stage, *Ablaze!* has fostered enhanced partnering with Lutheran and Christian bodies with whom we agree doctrinally. Asia has over three billion people, and the vast majority does not know Jesus. We need to work side by side with our partners. LCMS missionaries, now greatly reduced in numbers, understand this is a critical approach for multiplying the ministry to world areas.

Over the past fifty years, LCMS missionaries have fostered nine new Lutheran church bodies in Asia. Through *Ablaze!* these church bodies are partnering with LCMS in significant ways to share the Good News with millions of people. They have committed their own missionaries to Asian countries, forging new links with LCMS missions, the Concordia universities and

seminaries, districts, and local congregations. This can include forming strategic teams of laypersons and professionals in short- and mid-term projects. For example, the Lutheran Church Hong Kong Synod (LCHKS) is teaching, training, and doing humanitarian work in Hong Kong and China. They have also partnered with Concordia University Irvine to prepare Chinese English teachers and support LCMS World Mission tsunami relief in Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

The Church of All Nations, an LCMS congregation in Hong Kong, is a congregational model for *Ablaze!* These Christians are expanding their already significant mission outreach to China and Vietnam by partnering with Hong Kong International School and LCMS teachers and missionaries. Similar collaborations are emerging in South Korea, Japan, Thailand, Papua New Guinea, Macau, India, Sri Lanka, and other countries of Asia.

A third exciting feature for *Ablaze!* is Christian education. Lutheran schools are springing up across Asia and becoming a potent force for partnerships, faith communities, outreach strategies, and humanitarian needs. More than 150 Lutheran schools have over 100,000 students and teachers. The nine Asia churches want their schools, universities and seminaries (initiated by our missionaries and partner churches) to collaborate to enhance their educational ministries. They asked LCMS WM to be their partner in making it happen, and the Asia Lutheran Education Association (ALEA) was organized in 2002. ALEA gathered 81 schools in Hong Kong in 2004 where they adopted a six-point plan to energize their ministry of sharing the Gospel. The Christian education partnering concept of *Ablaze!* adds a potent force for sharing the Good News by equipping tens of thousands of students with the message of who Jesus is and the desire to be his witnesses.



The energy of the church comes from evangelism, service, and sharing Christ's peace with those who do not have it. Were they among us, Paul and Barnabas would be the first to step forward into Asia. *Ablaze!* is rallying the church back to our roots as a "missionary" church, and at least one of its major efforts is becoming reality: The foreign fields are *Ablaze!*

Dr. Allan H. Schmidt

Director, Asia Lutheran Education Association (www.AsiaLea.org)
LCMS World Mission
allschm@aol.com

The Most Challenging Mission of All

"... I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Matthew 25:40.

I remember standing in the bus station as if it were yesterday. I asked three people for help. They all looked at me. "Nie Anglicky." [No English.] I was tired. I hadn't slept or eaten since leaving Berlin nearly a day before. I was carrying 50 pounds of books to donate to a school to which I'd never been and all my supplies for a several-month-long stay at a third year mission school. Someone was supposed to meet me. No one was there. Another person passed and looked at me as if I were the devil herself. Exhaustion turned to fear. Fear turned to despair. "My God," I thought, "why am I here?" I cried.

I remember the feeling I had hours later when a Slovak man arrived, looked at me, and called me by name ... took me to his family ... fed me soup ... laughed with me ... and gave me his daughter's bed. As if my dad were there to tell me it was okay. As if God were physically

there. In a few short hours, my entire concept of missions changed. I was the served, and my mission was to learn.

Through my Slovak mission experiences, God allowed me a small window into the lives of the thousands of international persons who dwell among us every day. God taught me to question the notion that mission happens "over there." It can. Yet for most Christians, mission needs to happen right here to the people God brings to us now. And in that, Christ comes both to them and to us.

The lessons I learned those first months in Slovakia seem obvious now. It is hard to live in a foreign place without friends or access to resources. It is lonely when you don't have language skills and most of the people in the country wish you would leave, or worse, don't care that you are there as long as you don't bother them. It is painful to exist where one doesn't understand the routine, the ritual, the food, the language, the music, anything.

It is alienating to go weeks without ever feeling really safe, really normal, really like yourself. I cried more heartfelt, truly painful prayers in the first weeks that I was in Slovakia than I thought I could physically produce. I thought I could do anything and that I had a good background to minister and that I was ready to do what I was doing. I had no idea. Yet internationals around me understand completely what I experienced.

They know how frightening it can be to step on a bus with no idea where the bus will go and no ability to ask for directions. They know how frustrating it is when a friendly wave sends someone walking the other way. The internationals living around us have stood in a supermarket and felt tears because nothing looks familiar. Or in a hospital while people talked over their dying child and they understood nothing. These international persons

understand what it means to have to ask for help with everything from government papers to transportation to shopping and housing. They understand what it is like to feel like a child desperate for a Father to show mercy. To make them feel at home. To laugh with them. To remind them it will be okay.

Living here in our mission field are internationals, refugees, and students. Some of these people are Christian, here seeking sanctuary in their faith. Others know little if anything of Christianity. They are here for safety, security, and education denied to them in their countries of origin. Yet, their experiences are remarkably similar. They may have been here a week or a year, yet don't feel they belong. Many are lonely or extremely limited in their support system. Often they are without family, friends, or spiritual support. Resources may be limited. Surroundings are unfamiliar. Nothing is normal. Food. Clothing. Smells. Music. They are strangers in a strange land.

They seek the comfort of home, friendship, and acceptance. They long for people to listen to their stories or share a joke, to break bread or rice balls or soup dumplings with them. And they need people to help them with the most basic skills to make life bearable. Through tears, they see the cold stares, hear the foreign tongue, and feel isolated from all that they used to know. God sees their sadness, hears their cries, and weeps for them. But to most of us, the international persons remain invisible.

They don't have to be. We have a calling. To see the people among us. To call them by name. To invite them into our homes. To know them. To do for them ... the least of these. The most challenging mission of all.

Dr. Renea Gernant

Associate Professor of Communication
Concordia University, Nebraska
Renea.Gernant@cune.edu



DR. ROBERT SCUDIERI

Ablaze!—A Theology of Mission in Action

IN MAY 1518, MARTIN LUTHER wrote a letter to Pope Leo X to explain his concerns regarding indulgences. The 95 Theses had already been posted and created more of a stir than the author anticipated or intended.

Luther wrote to Pope Leo, "Indulgences began to be preached among us recently. They dared to proclaim the worst, wicked, heretical teachings leading to a most serious scandal. Finally, when I could do nothing else, I decided to give at least some little evidence against them, that is to call their teachings into question and debate. So I published a disputation list and invited only the more learned men to see if perhaps some might wish to debate with me. Behold, this is the fire with which they complain the whole world is *ablaze* (italics mine). It is a mystery to me that fate spread only these my theses beyond the others, so that they spread almost to the whole world."¹

DR. ROBERT SCUDIERI IS ASSOCIATE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL MISSIONS, LCMS WORLD MISSION, ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI.
(bob.scudieri@lcms.org)

It is not my contention that Luther originated the *Ablaze!* movement in the LCMS. However, when Luther talks about "the fire" that "spread almost to the whole world," he comes close to the mark intended by initiators of the modern day *Ablaze!*. *Ablaze!* is an effort to begin a global mission movement among confessional Lutherans, resulting in the sharing of the Gospel with 100 million people by the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. For Luther and for *Ablaze!* the main concern was and is to spread the Gospel of God's free grace, acquired through faith alone, to the whole world.

October 2017 will mark the 500th anniversary of the posting of the 95 Theses, the traditional date for the start of the Reformation. For past anniversaries we have written a new history, or commissioned a new translation. The challenges faced by Lutherans today demand more, and the resources of an international church body like the LCMS provide opportunity for significantly more to happen in response to this important anniversary.

This author was asked by the staff of *Issues* to address the questions, "What are the origins of *Ablaze!*? What is the rationale for its development? What are the biblical and theological

foundations of *Ablaze!*?" Some unkind assumptions have been made, frequently out of ignorance of what *Ablaze!* is about. As one who has been involved with the movement from the beginning, I am eager to provide answers to the questions posed by *Issues*.

Origins

IN 1998 AS THE 21st CENTURY approached, the staff of the Board for Mission Services began asking the question, "What will our mission work look like as we approach a new millennium?" We were near the end of an effort called "Blueprint for the 90s." Adopted at the 1992 Synod convention, "Blueprint" meant to address the opportunities given to churches in North America and overseas by the large movement of immigrants. What we were asking was "What is next; what is after Blueprint for the 90s?"

In "Blueprint" we had taken up the challenge and opportunity in the 1990s to reach new immigrants to the United States with the Gospel. We set a goal of beginning 1000 new LCMS ministries among immigrants. The final number of new cross-cultural ministries begun was 1011, but we had seen something else happen. The culture of the Synod was changing. LCMS churches were now more eager to reach out to ethnic groups other than their own.

At the end of the nineties we knew that as a church body we had declined from 2.9 million to 2.5 million members. Our financial support for missions did not reflect the resources God has given to members of the Synod. In the new millennium we hoped for an increase in passion and sacrifice by LCMS churches for reaching the lost, those who had never known Jesus as Savior, or who had fallen away from the faith. Could a new initiative help focus LCMS churches on reaching those outside the faith? Could a culture shift occur that would turn LCMS churches outward, to become more passionate about bringing the Gospel to those without faith in Jesus? And we had another concern.

Up until the 1990s LCMS World Mission saw itself as the only entity authorized to carry on mission work overseas. A bylaw gives us the exclusive right to call missionaries outside the United States. But we were becoming "the mission police." As travel and communication

technologies improved, individual LCMS members and congregations were coming more into contact with mission needs beyond our borders. In the early nineties, I had a conversation with a former classmate from the 1971 graduating class of Concordia Seminary. He began to tell me how his congregation was helping to build congregations in Kenya. Without thinking, I said to him, "I didn't realize the Board for Missions had work in Kenya." We did not. He replied, "Maybe I shouldn't be telling you this."

The Spirit of Christ was moving in the hearts of LCMS members. When they saw a mission need, they wanted to respond, no matter whether it was in or outside the United States. But LCMS World Mission had few ways to help them respond. So, they just found other opportunities to share the Gospel outside the United States. In one sense we were becoming irrelevant to those we had been called to serve, congregations passionate about mission work.

I had become familiar with this kind of reaction when I served as a district mission executive. Districts and Synod had done a great job of convincing congregations that we, the district, did mission work. We even asked them to send us their "mission money." There was good reason for this—we could do more together than apart. We wanted to act "on behalf of" congregations in their mission efforts; however, too many times we were acting "instead of" congregations. Some LCMS churches came to believe that they were not allowed to be involved in mission work, that they were not supposed to start new churches, and that it was against Synod's policy for them to begin work overseas. As leaders of LCMS World Mission we saw that we had aided and abetted a depletion of mission initiatives in our congregations.

Laity on the Board for Missions understood the challenge. They also believed that a movement in the LCMS to bring missions to a new height would have to be spurred on by laity. To address these issues, the executive director of the Board for Mission Services at the time, Dr. Glenn O'Shoney, was encouraged by missional lay leaders like our board chairman, Butch Almstedt, to pull together a group of mission leaders, lay and clergy, from around the world. With the aid of an outside consultant we began to look at our structure, policies,

and opportunities in the United States and around the world. What we found out was very encouraging. There were open doors in many places. We were eager to begin, but not sure we were ready. There was one looming reality we had to address.

We thought our first need was to begin gathering a monetary offering. The firm Skystone Ryan was engaged to help us think through this project, which at the time we were calling "The Quantum Leap." The question for Skystone Ryan was "Can we raise \$100 million in the LCMS?" The company conducted a survey of LCMS leaders and came back with their answer: Yes, \$100 million would be a drop in the bucket for a denomination as wealthy as the LCMS, but first we would have to make clear how the funds would be used. To do that we would have to make clear to our constituents what our mission goals were.

Glenn O'Shoney brought another group together with a second consultant and asked where were the most strategic areas for work to begin. At a strategic planning session on June 30, 2001, we set our first goal—sharing the Gospel with ten million people in five years. By September 17, 2001, we were talking about sharing the Gospel with 100 million people, and at first called this initiative "Shaking the Earth."

President Al Barry at this time was calling the Synod in its North American mission work to undergo three years of preparation for a new evangelistic initiative, an initiative that would last for at least ten years. An outside consultant was engaged to help us think through issues and conduct studies to help us make informed decisions.

The Rationale

WE WANTED TO LOOK AHEAD; with Dr. Barry's encouragement, we did not want this to be just a one- or two-year program, but an intensive effort over the next generation to encourage congregations of the LCMS to see themselves as centers of Gospel ministry. We defined a "generation" as 17 years—and by the fall of 2001 we had set the goal of reaching 100 million people with the Gospel, and beginning 4,000 new missions worldwide by 2017. In fact, in the beginning the reality that 2017 was the 500th anniversary of the Reformation did not occur to us, but when we realized the importance of the date, this only made the initiative more compelling.

How did we arrive at these numbers? Our outside consultant worked with the team put together by Dr. O'Shoney to research current trends in national and international fields. We asked for input from the leaders on these fields; we looked at current numbers and asked for best estimates of how many might be reached with the Gospel if God willed this to happen. One hundred million seemed a stretch, but not unreasonable. To share the Gospel in the United States with 50 million people by 2017, each congregation of the LCMS would have to share the Gospel with just two people per week, not an impossible challenge.

We received similar input for the number of new mission starts. Overseas missionaries sent in their estimates. In the United States we knew that 20 percent of our congregations should be less than 25 years old. Each year we had to begin three percent of the number of current congregations in order to replace those churches that were dying and going out of existence. With approximately 6,000 congregations, that meant each year we should be starting 180 new missions. This was something the LCMS was doing in the 1950s. Between 1950 and 1970 we added 1,350 new congregations. To do this we probably began close to 3,000 new missions. But between 1970 and 1990 we added only 700 new churches.

In fact, the average number of new starts in the LCMS in the 1990s was not 180, but 82. As a result, in 1995 only 15 percent of our churches were less than 25 years old. (Up to this point we have continued the decline. Today only 10 percent of the LCMS churches are less than 25 years old.)

We knew the goals were large. We believed that such large goals could be attained only if God were involved. This would not happen by human effort. We began the *Ablaze!* initiative with an encouragement for LCMS congregations to spend one million hours in prayer. If the Lord wills, then we will share the Gospel with 100 million people by the 500th anniversary.

One of the criticisms we have heard is that no goals were set for baptisms or confirmations or worship attendance. However, as Lutherans we understood this to be something only the Holy Spirit could determine—"The Spirit

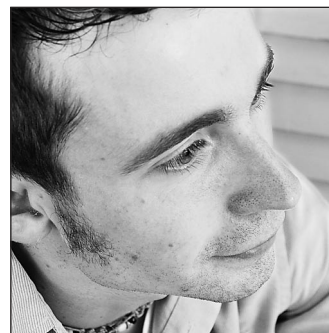
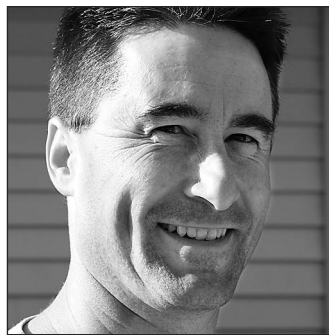
blows where it will.” We trust the Word to do its work. If we had set goals for numbers of baptisms and confirmations, we would have been criticized for trying to manipulate the Spirit. Sometimes you just cannot win.

A Movement

IN ANY EVENT, the concept for the *Ablaze!* movement and the goals were brought to the 2004 Synod convention. President Kieschnick gave his passionate support. The delegates enthusiastically adopted *Ablaze!*, and declared that 50 million of the 100 million people with whom the Gospel would be shared should live in the United States, and that 2,000 of the 4,000 new missions we were praying for would be in the U. S.

The new Executive Director of the Board for Mission Services, Dr. Bob Roegner, embraced the *Ablaze!* goals. The current president of the LCMS, Dr. Gerald Kieschnick, has given this BFMS initiative his unqualified support. We see the same support from an overwhelming number of districts of the LCMS. The enthusiasm of the districts has spawned creativity and courageous plans for district and congregation efforts to address the goals of *Ablaze!*. Recognized Service Organizations and auxiliaries of the LCMS, universities and seminaries, mission societies, and elementary schools of the LCMS have shown equal initiative and support.

Shortly after last summer’s Synod convention, President Kieschnick and Bob Roegner invited district presidents of the LCMS along with the district mission executives to meet with them and with me in a series of seven clusters around the United States. Thirty-three of the 35 district presidents attended. As a result of those daylong meetings, initial goals were set by 15 districts to share the Gospel with 20.5 million people in the United States and to begin 1,250 new churches. But was *Ablaze!* just about numerical goals? No. This was a faith effort; we knew that only by the Lord’s blessing could we see the goals achieved. It is like a budget being set; the dollars are not in place, but we pray that the Lord will provide what he knows is needed. One of my seminary professors used to say, “Ore et labore,” work and pray. Work as if everything depended on you, and pray as if everything depended on God.



Two significant policy changes were also involved. First, we believed that LCMS World Mission acting alone was not going to reach 100 million people with the Gospel. We wanted to emphasize the creation of partnerships. We want to find more ways to involve and support LCMS congregations in national and international mission work. Instead of discouraging participation we want to invite greater involvement of churches, mission societies, and individuals. Acting together we can do more for missions than each congregation or each district or the national church body working alone. But this was true not only for work in the United States.

Partnerships in international missions would be just as important to *Ablaze!*. Why would LCMS World Mission send a North American missionary to Uganda when the Lutheran Church of Nigeria could do this more effectively and efficiently? They could send ten missionaries for what it would cost us to send one. We would rather give our support to the Lutheran Church of Nigeria.

The second major shift is to become more strategic. We have to focus our funding on the areas with the most potential. We do not want to be a mile wide and an inch deep. This means that not every mission field overseas is an equal priority. When we brought overseas missionaries back a few years ago, we were making strategic decisions, not just financial decisions. The same is true for the United States. God has given us greater openings for new mission work in some areas than in others. If we are to use our resources wisely, we have to make difficult choices. Where are the areas that are most receptive and most easily supported?

Theological Issues

WHAT ABOUT THE THEOLOGY of *Ablaze!*? In my opinion, *Ablaze!* provides us with the opportunity to discuss topics that have been in disagreement, at least in "confusion," in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. This is a great moment to take time and talk to each other, in love, about issues where there has been disagreement. What issues?

The first issue is the reason why we carry out mission work.

In a sermon preached at Trinity, St. Louis, on the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity, 1842, C.F.W. Walther said, "The holy desire to bring souls to Christ begins immediately, as soon as the light of true faith comes into a person's soul bringing with it the fire of true love for others. This holy desire is inseparable from a true faith. Whoever has no desire to bring someone else to the knowledge of the saving Gospel has certainly not yet come to know the heavenly power himself."² The motive, the reason we do mission work, is love, love for a world that is dying without Christ.

A second issue is urgency. There is no salvation outside of Christ. In the same sermon Walther reminds us of Martin Luther's concern: "Luther has rightly said, 'When a Christian begins to know Christ as his Lord and Savior, through whom he has been rescued from death, his heart becomes thoroughly godly, so that he is willing to help anyone. He knows no higher joy than knowing Christ. Therefore, he goes out to teach and warn the others; he gives praise and declares his praise before anyone; he prays and tells others that they also must come to this grace. This disquieted spirit lives in the most peaceful place of all, that is, in God's grace and peace. Nevertheless, this spirit cannot yet be still, but continuously struggles and strives as if it lived for this alone—to bring God's praise and glory to other people'."

Another issue is the nature of the church itself. Some years back I wrote a small book called *Apostolic Church: One, Holy, Catholic and Missionary*. The point was that the Greek word "apostolic" connotes both "orthodox" and "missionary." In the third article of the Creed of Nicea we confess, "We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church." For the framers of the creed, "apostolic" certainly meant preservation of the true faith. This has been the primary connotation of the word in our day. But there is more.

The apostles in their day were first of all missionaries. There were Jewish apostles; Jesus did not invent the concept "apostle." And, there were Jewish missionaries. The rabbi Gamaliel (the teacher of St. Paul) was a leader in the Jewish missionary endeavor. However, no Jewish missionary was ever called an "apostle,"

but this is exactly what was new about Jesus' apostles. They were sent around the world with his commission, sharing the Gospel, raising up indigenous leaders and planting churches. Somewhere along the way we lost the "missionary" meaning of "apostolic." What a difference it would make if in our confession of the creed we would say, "We believe in one, holy, catholic and *missionary* church."

Another issue that *Ablaze!* hoped to address was that every Christian is, by baptism, a missionary, a "sent one." One of the major themes of *Ablaze!* is taken from 1 Peter 2:9, "But you are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, *that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*" This was not spoken only to pastors. Every Christian is not only authorized but also required, as a result of whom they are, to share the Good News of God's love with friends, co-workers and neighbors. Pastors are authorized for public ministry of the Word; this cannot preclude the community of all the baptized telling the story of God's love to those around them in non-public settings.

There is also the issue of what it means to be faithful. Fourteen years ago I shared my first update with NAME, the North American Mission Executives of the LCMS. I had just become the North America Director for LCMS World Mission, and wanted to set an initiating, law/gospel, scriptural-confessional tone for the work ahead. The title of my presentation was "Aspirations of a Fourth Steward." Basically, I wanted to speak about Jesus' understanding of faithfulness as he put it on the line to the disciples in Matthew 25:14 and following. You remember the parable—a man goes on a journey and leaves his three servants in charge. To one he gave five "talents," to one two talents, and to the last one talent. When he returned, he asked them for an accounting. The first came forward and gave back the original talents, plus five more. He had doubled his Lord's property. The second did the same. To each of these the man says, "Well done, good and 'faithful' servant." The last servant came forward and returned only what he had been given, with no increase. The Lord's response is, "You wicked and lazy servant." The third steward is then sent into "outer darkness."

Notice, in the text the man does not say, "Well done, good and *successful* servant." He says "*faithful*." The fourth steward is the one to whom the Lord gives a talent—he takes the talent and buys good seed, and puts the good seed in good ground. But then the rains do not come—and the crop is lost. What would the Lord say to this fourth steward? I believe he would say, "Well done, good and *faithful* servant." The faithful servant is committed to doing the Lord's work and to living in the Lord's forgiveness.

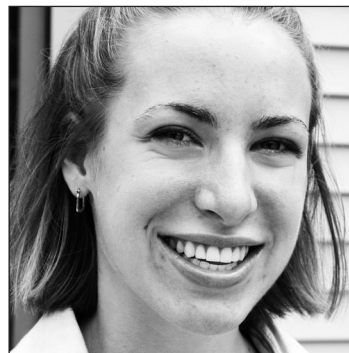
President Kieschnick in his first inaugural address told us:

"In 1970 the LCMS had 2.8 million members. Today it is under 2.6 million. In the same period attendance has dropped from 1.14 million to 960,000. Annually, 35 percent of LCMS churches do not baptize or confirm a single adult."

In that light it might be fair to ask if this is the work of a first, second, or third steward. Is The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod being faithful? Of course, in the end what matters is that the Lord Jesus was faithful, far more faithful than we could ever be. God counts Jesus' faithfulness in place of our unfaithfulness. But repentance means a change of heart and actions. Out of love we want to bring more people to Christ.

Something else we need to talk about is the nature of the mission. For some among us it is basically to preach the Gospel and celebrate the sacraments. That is it. However, the mission statement of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod says, "In grateful response to the grace of God, empowered by the Spirit through Word and sacrament, it is the mission of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to vigorously make known the love of Christ, in word and deed, in our churches, our communities and our world." Word and sacrament are not ends in themselves—they are means. The end is the making of disciples, more disciples, and more mature disciples. Again, we need to discuss this.

We need to talk about what it means to be Lutheran. What are a Lutheran church, a Lutheran pastor, and a Lutheran worship service, aside from externals? Lutheran worship at



its core must have everything to do with God's service to human beings through Word and sacraments, and our response to God's great love. It must correctly divide law and Gospel. It must see the power inherent in Word and sacraments to do what they intend to do—forgive sin and strengthen faith. And it has to do all of this in ways that communicate on all levels.

A young professor at one of our universities asked me to teach a class for him. I brought up the issue of worship and how it needs to be meaningful to the particular group that is worshipping. He interrupted me and told the class when he put together a worship service he did so in a way that a grandmother could easily worship. My question was, "Whose grandmother?"

A Long-Term Commitment

Ablaze! IS NOT PERFECT. We are at the beginning of a twelve-year effort, which I believe is ushering in the golden age of mission work in the LCMS. At no point in our history have we made such a commitment to share the Good News of Christ's love with so many. But we will learn many things along the way. I pray that ten years from now we are not working in the same way that we are today. *Ablaze!* is helping us learn how to be more faithful in sharing the Gospel.

There is a parable I came across some time ago in a book on strategy, about a young lieutenant of a small Hungarian detachment in the Alps sent on a reconnaissance unit into the icy

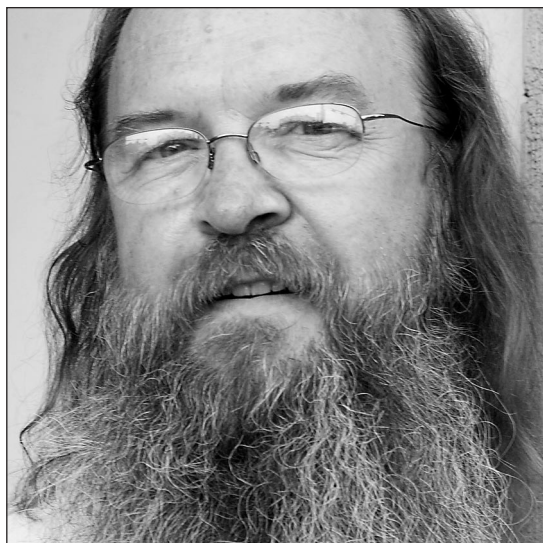
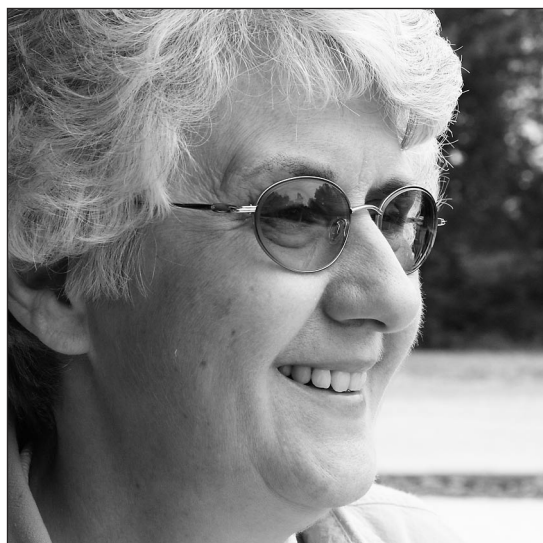
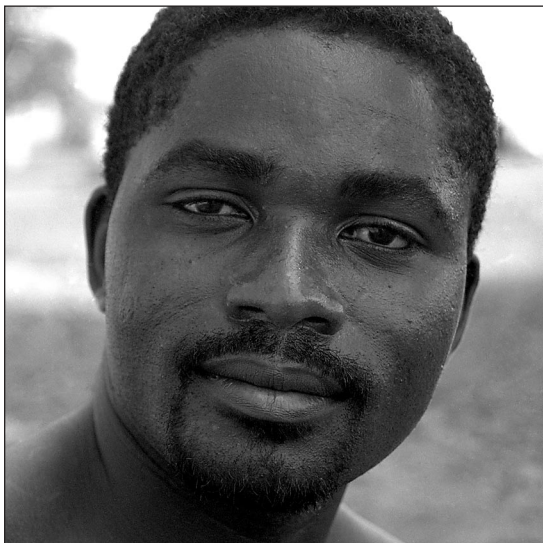
wilderness. It began to snow. The snow continued for two days, and the unit was lost. "But then," the lieutenant said, "one of us found a map in his pocket. That calmed us down. We pitched camp, lasted out the snowstorm, and then with the map we discovered our bearings." It was not until they returned to the camp that they discovered the map was a map of the Pyrenees.

The point of the author of the strategy book was that the map moved the men to do something, to not just sit and wait to die, but to try some things. It gave them an image of where they were and where they needed to go. As they went they learned more, noticed clues, and built on their learnings, until they were able to arrive at their destination.

If *Ablaze!* can help The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to "get going," to "discover some things" about sharing the Good News of God's love, maybe with our Lord's grace and guidance we will "set the world *Ablaze!*." At least we might begin to talk to each other. At best we *will* talk the Gospel to 100 million people who have never heard it before.

Notes

- 1 Kurt Alan, *Martin Luther's 95 Theses*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967, pp. 73–74.
- 2 Published in *Festklänge* (CPH, 1892). Translated by Bruce Cameron, July, 1993.





DR. DANIEL L. MATTSON

Ablaze!: Strategy and Structure

NO LUTHERAN CONGREGATION is opposed to evangelism. It is commonly heard, "Our doors are open. Visitors are always welcome. When people come, we always try to make them feel at home, and we invite them to become a part of the life of the congregation." The problem is that this strategy does not work very well in the 21st century.

There was a time when church membership was important—politicians even put their church membership in their resumes and on their posters—but those days are largely over. You do not need to be a church member in the modern world; in fact it might be more advantageous not to be—in order to be regarded as a good citizen in the community. If we wait for people to come, we need to recognize that they are not coming.

No, today mission work, sharing the Good News of Jesus, must be a good deal more intentional. That is what the *Ablaze!* movement

is all about. Jesus says to us as he said to his first disciples, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). It is not enough for us to sit in our spiritual houses waiting for the fish to jump into the boat, but we must follow Jesus into the unbelieving world and be about the task of sharing the Good News he has given us.

From time to time there are disparaging comments about planning to do evangelism as though this were a human attempt to take over God's work. Lutherans do not accept this faith worldview. Lutherans are not Pentecostals, believing that it is God's work only when he bypasses all human means in order to perform some miracle. It is not that God could not act in such a way, but Lutherans believe that God uses means to accomplish his will. He has given his church the Means of Grace: the Word and the sacraments to get his work done in the world. Through water and the Word given in human language, through bread and wine and the Word, through the divinely inspired words of the Scriptures, God gets his work done in the world. Just as God uses the plans and words and works of farmers to feed the people of the world, so, Lutherans believe, he will use the plans and words and works of his people to share the Good News of Jesus.

In nearly every respect, the *Ablaze!* initiative is not new, not something that the LCMS never thought of before. Already in November

DR. DANIEL L. MATTSON IS ASSOCIATE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, LCMS WORLD MISSION, ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI. (dan.mattson@lcms.org)

of 1991, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) placed before the congregations of the Synod, "A Theological Statement of Mission." That statement was written in response to a 1986 convention resolution, a resolution that is now nearly 20 years old, that asked the CTCR to "initiate, facilitate, and develop a theological Statement of Mission" which will "reflect the urgency, vitality, and joy of our historic confession of Christ's forgiveness by grace alone through faith alone as taught in Scripture alone." The time has come, said the Synod, "to support more fervently the biblical mandate to proclaim the scriptural Gospel of Jesus Christ for the life and salvation of people everywhere" (1986 Resolution 3-02; cf. Ephesians 5:16).¹ The recognition that the LCMS needs to be more active in sharing the Good News of Jesus is not something new.

At the same time, the "Statement" gently urged congregations and other entities of the Synod to formulate and make use of mission statements, recognizing the value of such statements for keeping organizations focused on their task. It did this in a context that recognized that the "Synod's request for a 'Theological Statement of Mission' manifests its desire to move forward resolutely and fervently in proclaiming the Gospel so that the lost may be found and God's people may be empowered for their witness and service."²

Mindful of the value of mission statements and at the same time aware of the self-aggrandizing dangers of such statements, LCMS World Mission attempted to carefully craft a mission statement to guide and direct its own activities until 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. This statement said,

Praying to the Lord of the harvest, LCMS World Mission, in collaboration with its North American and worldwide partners will share the Good News of Jesus with 100 million unreached and uncommitted people by 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

Needless to say, an organization's purpose statement focuses on what the organization does and needs to do. It does not say everything that could be said, and it is certainly not a one-

sentence-long theological treatise. Such statements are written in a context of theology and practice and should be read within and as supportive of that theology and practice.

As a shorthand way of talking about this immense task which the leadership of LCMS World Mission believed that God had led them to, staff members began to look for a term that could wrap up these ideas, and at the same time, encourage the congregations and their members to grow in their commitment to the evangelistic task. After much discussion and prayer, LCMS World Mission chose the term "ablaze," and further deliberations and prayer led to the graphic design for *Ablaze!*, so well received in LCMS circles.

These ideas grew in popularity and were presented to the Missouri Synod's convention in 2004 and were overwhelmingly embraced. If one looks at the memorials submitted to the convention, the memorial which appears to have influenced the convention floor committee most was that submitted by historic Trinity Lutheran Church in St. Louis, Dr. C.F.W. Walther's congregation (1994 Convention Overture 1-04). That is entirely fitting, for Dr. Walther, the first president of the LCMS and himself an immigrant from Germany, loved the United States and rejoiced in the unprecedented opportunities that were available in this country to share the Good News of Jesus in all its truth and purity. At the same time, he recognized the enormous spiritual needs in this country, especially among new immigrants, and he constantly urged all Lutherans, laypeople and pastors, to be about the missionary task. In important ways, the *Ablaze!* initiative is merely an attempt to regain the missionary zeal of that first LCMS generation.

Not only did the 2004 convention accept the goal of attempting to touch the lives of 100 million people with the Good News of Jesus, but it took upon itself additional goals of establishing 2,000 new LCMS congregations by 2017 (2004 Resolution 1-05A), to expand cross-cultural work at home and abroad (2004 Resolution 1-01A), and to raise \$100 million to enable the LCMS to carry out the mission work it needed to do (2004 Resolution 1-04). Perhaps the most significant goal of all was the convention's resolution that every LCMS

congregation and institution should grow in its understanding of itself as a mission outpost, as a community of believers in the midst of a wilderness of unbelief, prepared to go out into that wilderness to share the life-giving Good News of Jesus. (2004 Resolution 1-02).

With these resolutions, the *Ablaze!* initiative changed from a vision held by LCMS World Mission into an idea that belongs to the entire LCMS. While the convention resolutions made it clear that the Synod holds LCMS World Mission accountable for assisting the Synod to reach some of the Synod's *Ablaze!* goals, the same resolutions made it clear that LCMS World Mission is but one of the players in the *Ablaze!* movement with the congregations and their members playing the major roles.

What is perhaps most significantly different about the *Ablaze!* initiative is the recognition that the passing of fine, well-meaning, theologically correct statements about mission is not enough. Attention must be paid to the implementation of those statements. The Synod convention asked LCMS World Mission to serve as the custodian of the *Ablaze!* vision, providing direction in some cases and always keeping the Synod focused on the task.

What is LCMS World Mission's role in bringing about this change?

SINCE I AM WRITING this article close to the celebration of D-Day, June 6, please allow me to use a military analogy.

If General Eisenhower had planned the Normandy invasion and sent his forces into battle with only the insight that Germany was northeast of France, it is unlikely that Allied forces would have prevailed, no matter how great their numbers, and there is no doubt that the waste of soldiers' lives would have been horrific.

Eisenhower was a military genius, and his genius lay in his ability to keep a huge organization focused on a single objective, the defeat of Nazi Germany, and in his ability to keep a very diverse organization—separate branches of service, various nationalities and radically diverse ideologies—glued together, talking to one another and making plans for the benefit of the entire effort. General Eisenhower, certainly, and even the members of his staff did not take part in all of the planning conversations nor

did they even know all of the conversations and their outcomes. Battles would be fought in a whole range of settings using an enormous array of weaponry, and tactical decisions beyond counting would need to be made by people in the field. Nevertheless, because of clearly articulated and widely accepted goals, countless people, whose names no one knows, made the right decisions that led to victory in Europe.

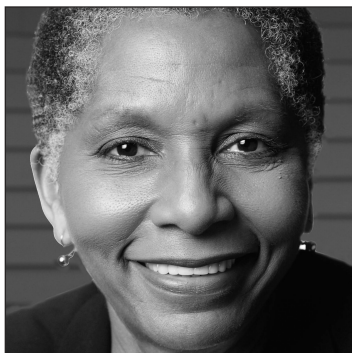
LCMS World Mission faces a similar leadership challenge. In some ways, its challenges are more daunting than those that faced Eisenhower. Eisenhower had the legal authority that went with his appointment as supreme commander, and he had complete access to the resources of the America war machine. Since the LCMS is not a hierarchically organized church body, and since most of the resources contributed by the members of the church are expended at the congregational and district levels, LCMS World Mission does not have levers of power to constrain pastors or congregations and their members to do anything that they do not want to do. The *Ablaze!* effort in the LCMS will be accomplished by a coalition of the willing.

LCMS World Mission would have it no other way. It would be entirely inappropriate to use secular power with its fear of punishment or hope of reward to accomplish what is a spiritual task. As the LCMS goes about its work, we can be confident that the Holy Spirit will be at work shaping people's hearts and minds so that they are prepared to take part in the missionary task.

When the *Ablaze!* initiative reaches its goals, what will the LCMS world look like?

IF WE THINK ABOUT THE GOALS set by the 2004 Synod convention in a systematic way, they might look like the following.

The overarching goal: Lutheran Christians both in the United States and around the world, as a result of the Spirit working in their hearts and minds, have attached such importance to the treasure they have in the Good News of Jesus, and are so dedicated in the use of the resources that God has given them to address the needs of the world, that the result is they are actively involved in sharing the Good News of Jesus with 100 million people by 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.



In order to accomplish a goal of this size, the Synod anticipated that the following steps would need to be taken.

Expand cross-cultural work at home and abroad

- By raising the consciousness of congregations to their mission responsibilities through prayer and the study of the Scriptures
- By involving congregations and other entities in encouraging individuals to learn the languages and cultures of the immigrant people around them

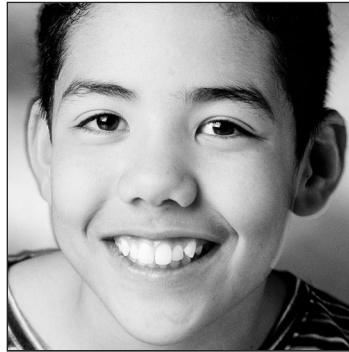
When this resolution is fully implemented, what might the LCMS look like in 2017?

Recognizing that lack of concern for the lost is essentially a spiritual problem, the church recognizes that change will be brought about through spiritual means. Through Word and sacraments the people of God grow in their understanding of their relationship with God and their responsibilities toward their neighbor. People in LCMS congregations become involved in prayer and Bible study leading to the conclusion that they need to do something about the lost people around them and throughout the world. A significant number of people reach the conclusion that we Christians cannot wait until immigrants become like us. Instead, as people charged to share the Good

News of Jesus, we must learn how to address immigrant communities on their own terms. The Synod's institutions, as well as the pastors and congregations who make up the Synod, work together to find ways to involve everyone in sharing the Good News of Jesus and to equip people to carry out these tasks.

The most important insight of this resolution is recognizing that LCMS laypeople play a role that is key to the success of the *Ablaze!* movement. To the extent that the people of God recognize the need of the world and are passionately and creatively involved in sharing the Good News of Jesus, the *Ablaze!* initiative will make its contribution to the life of the Church.

In the same way, it is immediately apparent that the *Ablaze!* movement provides opportunity for involvement from a broad range of people and institutions. Congregations that are blessed with schools and teachers will be seeking ways to involve students and their parents in sharing the Good News of Jesus. Those who are involved in Lutheran higher education will intentionally prepare teachers who will be involved in the task of sharing the Good News of Jesus with those who do not know him and taking part in congregational efforts to accomplish that task. Just as significantly, Lutheran university professors will be heavily involved



in supplying the guidance that the church needs to address intelligently the needs of the modern world.

Encourage every LCMS congregation and institution to see itself as a mission outpost, understanding itself as a community of believers who have the task of entering the wilderness of unbelief and sharing the Good News of Jesus.

- By encouraging pastors, teachers, and other professional workers to encourage and equip the laity to see themselves as missionaries sent out by that mission outpost
- By preparing resources to help congregations carry out their equipping tasks
- By encouraging every congregation to adopt at least one new mission goal concentrating on the unreached of its own community

By 2017, LCMS congregations are to be served by professional church workers who feel completely comfortable leading the congregation's involvement in evangelism. Through personal involvement, they are involved in the evangelistic work of the church, modeling intentional interaction with the unbelieving world for the purpose of sharing the Good News of Jesus. At the same time, their purpose is not to do the work of sharing the Good News of Jesus for the congregation but to *model* the behavior

that the Lord of the Church expects of every member of the congregation and to multiply the number of people involved in the missionary task. In response, the congregation and its leadership, guided by the Spirit, have thought about how to be involved in sharing the Good News of Jesus in its local setting (what are the needs of the local unbelieving community and what resources does the congregation have to meet those needs?) and has developed a targeted and innovative plan of its own to get involved in that task. The congregation feels such strong ownership of that task that it has set evangelism goals and is working toward accomplishing those goals.

A system in which a congregation calls a pastor so that he can do the congregation's work for them, calls a Director of Christian Education (DCE) so that the educational work of the church can be done for them, or calls a Director of Christian Outreach (DCO) so that a professional can share the Good News of Jesus cannot work. Training of professional church workers at all levels—pastors, DCEs, DCOs, deaconesses, family life ministry leaders, music ministry leaders, and lay ministers—will emphasize the tremendous reservoir of talent that exists in the people of every Lutheran congregation and the importance of mobilizing that talent in support of the congregation's

missionary task. Particularly important will be training that prepares church professionals to assist in analyzing the need for change and identifying and working through the changes that need to be made.

Very likely, some congregations will find that their present structures do not serve them well as they respond to present and future challenges. They may have been able to function perfectly well when they were a part of Judea, serving people of a culture similar to their own, but now they find themselves living in Samaria where the people are a bit different or among people from the ends of the earth. All kinds of changes in the church's life will need to take place—some of them painful—as traditional ways of life are modified or discarded in order that the unchanging Good News of Jesus might be proclaimed in all of its truth and purity in a changed setting.

In such contexts, sharing the Good News of Jesus, very likely, will not be limited to words about Jesus but will include deeds of loving service performed in Jesus' name. Creative responses will be required, such as immigration assistance programs and English-as-Second-Language classes. The people of God are amazingly creative once they recognize the extent of human need.

Share the Good News of Jesus with 50 million unreached and uncommitted people in the United States (and by implication with 50 million people around the world) and establish 2,000 new congregations in the United States by 2017.

- LCMS partner churches around the world and LCMS World Mission establish and work toward a goal of an additional 3,000 congregations worldwide.

It is the work of Lutheran Christians (and all Christians, for that matter) to share the Good News of Jesus. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to use the Word that is shared to create faith in the hearts and minds of people. If the Good News of Jesus is shared, there will be new converts to faith in Jesus. New converts, called and gathered by the Spirit, will seek fellowship with other believers; they will want to grow through Word and sacrament. As a result, existing congregations will grow, and new

congregations—lots of them—will be formed. When longtime Lutherans are exposed to new believers, when they hear the stories that illustrate that faith in Jesus makes a difference in people's lives and gives hope in a hopeless world, their joyful and confident participation in the mission task will increase.

If the entire \$100 million the Synod has committed itself to raise were spent on beginning 2,000 new congregations in the United States, the money (about \$50,000 per congregation) would not be sufficient using traditional methods. However, since LCMS members annually contribute more than \$1 billion to their congregations, the congregations and their members will find a way to get the job done. The Lutheran Church Extension Fund will play a critical role in helping the church with the resources it needs to grow.

The adoption of this goal implies, however, that the Synod at all levels is prepared to reconsider its spending priorities and particularly the way it does mission work at home and abroad. It is not only a matter of money, but serious attention will need to be given to the question of how pastoral leadership is trained and provided to so many congregations arising in a relatively short time. When one considers that the major growth in population in the United States is taking place outside of the Midwestern Lutheran heartland, serious soul-searching will need to take place as the church decides where the need to share the Good News of Jesus is greatest and where new congregations need to be planted and grow.

Worldwide, no one knows precisely what the future will bring, but if present trends continue, LCMS World Mission's efforts will be concentrated in Africa and Asia. These are the areas of the world where there are enormous numbers of people who have never heard the Good News of Jesus, but are willing—even anxious—to hear that Good News. Because of growing anti-Western sentiment around the world, it is unlikely that a missionary family will be able to spend a lifetime of service planting the church among a particular people group. LCMS World Mission's evangelistic efforts will be concentrated among those people who will have no opportunity to hear the Good News of Jesus unless someone comes from the outside

to share that message. The church that grows up will depend on local leadership from the beginning, and the role of LCMS missionaries will concentrate on providing training for that local leadership. LCMS mission work for the most part will be done in cooperation with the partner churches around the world who identify the areas where mission work needs to be done and are also able to deploy their resources in support of the work.

At the same time, opportunities for congregations to be involved in international mission work will surely increase. American congregations will be involved in sending short- and long-term volunteers to provide the expertise needed on foreign fields and to grow in their own understanding of the cross-cultural missionary task.

Raise \$100 million beyond the Synod's current level of giving to finance new mission work around the world.

- About 50 percent of the funds available will be used to support work in North America and 50 percent to support work in the rest of the world.

By 2017, through the power of the Spirit, the congregations and their members have grown in their joy in sharing the Good News of Jesus. As a result, they are heavily involved, directly and indirectly, in the efforts of their own congregation to share the Good News of Jesus. They have recognized the importance of the work their church is doing in other parts of the United States and around the world and are supportive of that work. They work as volunteers where needed, and they support those who are working in their place.

The congregations and their members recognize that although \$100 million sounds like a great deal of money, when stretched over a period of at least a decade, and when directed at the needs of the whole world, it will not be enough to make much of a dent in everything that must be done. It is not a simple matter that the Synod and its members will be able to do everything that they are doing now and the \$100 million will enable the church to do a whole lot more. The needs of our world are infinite; the people and financial resources available to the church at any given time are

always finite. Choices will need to be made. Priorities will need to be set.

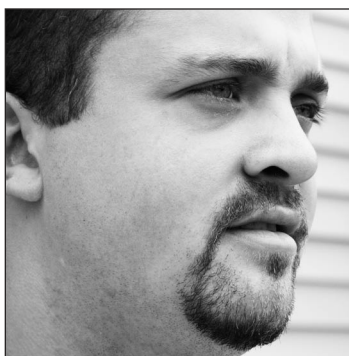
What, then, is LCMS World Mission's role in the Ablaze! initiative?

IN MATTERS AS IMPORTANT as addressing the unbelieving world with the Good News of Jesus, the support of the leadership of the church is critically important. If President Roosevelt had announced one agenda while General Eisenhower had announced another, victory in Europe would have been an impossibility.

Especially significant here is President Gerald Kieschnick's involvement in the *Ablaze!* movement. In his inaugural address, before he (or anyone else) was even aware that LCMS World Mission was beginning to consider the challenge of reaching 100 million uncommitted and unbelieving people, he urged the LCMS to make the evangelization of the world its first priority. Since that time he has been a tireless, unwavering proponent of the *Ablaze!* initiative, speaking with passion to district conventions and in countless other settings of the need for Lutheran Christians to be intentionally involved in what he describes as the "Critical Event": the sharing of the Good News of Jesus with an unreached or uncommitted person to the extent that it provokes a response from the person addressed.

Particularly significant was his recognition that some congregations and their members were already involved in meeting *Ablaze!* goals before the *Ablaze!* movement came along to give a name to their efforts. They had already analyzed the problems and made their plans for sharing the Good News of Jesus. The President's Office called together congregations that were willing to teach and congregations that were willing to learn in what were called "Igniting Congregations," events designed to help congregations and their members get started on sharing the Good News of Jesus.

Subsequently, LCMS World Mission and the President's Office—sometimes together and sometimes separately—have held meetings with district officials, with Lutheran Hour Ministries and the Lutheran Women's Missionary League, with Recognized Service Organizations, with mission societies, and with countless others interested in missions and in the future of the LCMS, to discuss involvement in the *Ablaze!*



movement. As one might expect at this stage of the introduction of a new idea, there are lots of questions, and many are asking, "How can we be appropriately involved?" Answers are being found, and the coalition of the willing is growing.

As can be seen from the above descriptions of the future, this is only the beginning. LCMS World Mission does not have the answer to all of the challenges recognized above—let alone to the countless others that are certain to arise—but we can be confident there are people in the LCMS whom God has guided to the needed answers. People will come together as individuals and as representatives of entities to foster the vision of an LCMS active at all levels in sharing the Good News of Jesus. It is LCMS World Mission's privilege to serve as the glue that holds people together and helps them to focus on the task that needs to be done.

Above all, those involved in the *Ablaze!* initiative need to remember that the church is dealing with a spiritual problem. On the one hand, there is a loss of confidence in many places that the Good News of Jesus is something worth sharing. The pervasive anti-Christian propaganda that says that Christians are divisive and that their sharing of the Good News infringes the rights of others has had its effect on Lutheran Christians. On the other hand, all too many Lutherans are convinced that they cannot accurately explain what they believe, and so they are mentally and emotionally prepared to say nothing.

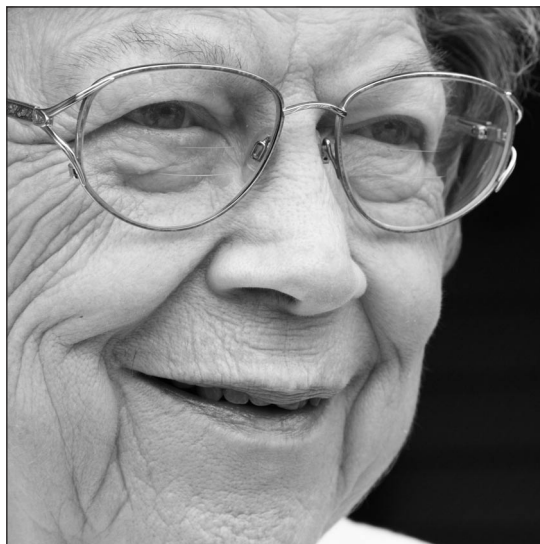
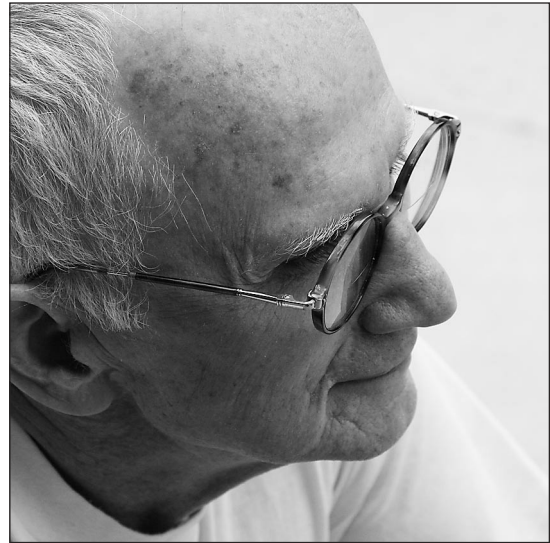
This is not a problem that can be addressed through political means or through changes in structure (although structures can promote or hinder the sharing of the Good News of Jesus). Form always follows function. We need to be clear what the Church is about, and the *Ablaze!* initiative can help us to gain the clarity. Spiritual problems must be addressed through spiritual means.

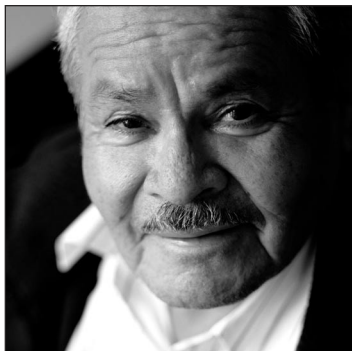
Challenging times are ahead for the LCMS, but these will be exciting times as well. What makes this a time of special joy is that no one can question that this is the work that Jesus wants his people to be about. At the same time, this is the work that he specifically promised that he would accompany. "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age'" (Matthew 28:18-20). We may be confident that our Lord will bless us on the journey.

Notes

- 1 Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *A Theological Statement of Mission*. St. Louis: Commission on Theology and Church Relations, 1991, p. 3.
- 2 *A Theological Statement of Mission*, p. 4.







RUSSELL L. SOMMERFELD

How Ablaze! Impacts Culture

Ablaze! in Action

SHE APPEARED SAD as she walked into the airport gate area. Her eyes were glued to the floor. Upon sitting down, she stared out the window at the incoming planes. The crowd swirled around her, but she didn't notice them. I detected a tear on her cheek. The public address system interrupted my budding compassion for this sad young person with the command to board the outgoing plane. She disappeared into the line of travelers. When arriving at my seat, there she was seated behind me with an older gentleman and a younger man. I settled into my seat, attempted to engage the couple next to me in conversation, but they declined. Soon I was overhearing a conversation behind me. The older man asked the young lady, "Are you okay? You look so sad."

With surprising vulnerability she responded, "I have just left an argument with my mom. She is divorced from my dad and living with a man. That's wrong. And I don't like him."

"Are you a Christian? You have strong morals," the man boldly remarked. By now, I was straining to catch every word.

"Yes, but not much of one. I don't go to church much. I don't know the Bible too well. I sometimes go to a church since I have been on my own. But I just haven't become a part of it."

The older man's response was slow and measured, "I pray that you can find fellow Christians with whom you can learn, talk, and pray. It's hard when parents whom God gives us sin. We can't accept their sin as okay. But we still love them. God loves us even though we have sinned. You know how he gave Christ Jesus to die and rise to forgive us. He did that for your mom, too. She needs to see her sin and know that it can be confessed to Jesus and that he can move her to change."

By now the young woman's words were punctuated with deep emotion, and she said, "I am just so upset. I don't want her with that man. I want to still love her. I want to tell her God loves her."

THE REV. RUSSELL L. SOMMERFELD IS THE PRESIDENT OF THE NEBRASKA DISTRICT, THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD.
(russs@ndlcms.org)

"You can, and you can pray for God to show her the sin she is in and the forgiveness he can give and the change of life she can have. God can provide. Don't give up."

The younger man now spoke up addressing the older man, "What church are you with? Are you a pastor? Who are you?"

The quiet response was, "I am a member of a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod congregation. I am not a pastor."

I had just heard The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod movement *Ablaze!* in action. *Ablaze!* is sharing the Gospel with individuals—seeds planted in faith—trusting that God will bring about his desired fruit in each of those lives. This movement of Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Christians sharing one by one their hope in Jesus depends on the Holy Spirit to work the miracle of faith. The challenge is to share the Lord Jesus with 100 million people by the year 2017. One hundred million is a huge number, but compared to the four billion in this world who do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ, it's just a first step.

Ablaze! in the Culture of the LCMS

WHAT IMPACT will this *Ablaze!* movement have upon the culture of congregations, schools, and missions of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod? In 1965, Concordia Publishing House of St. Louis, Missouri, published a paperback titled *The Church of the 21st Century* in which the author asked, "What will the church of the 21st century be like? Will the church die out in America?" He then suggested that there will be a reawakening of a sense of the church. This would involve recognizing that although the church is represented among us as a social institution, it is first and foremost that unique, eternal institution brought into being by the sacrifice of Christ. The church will not worry about keeping its children and youth separate from the social world but will be concerned about rearing them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. When there is reasonable evidence that they are spiritually able to walk, they will be sent out to infiltrate and to influence. The individual member, young and old, will think of himself as an ambassador of Christ whose responsibility is to find, reach, and win others.¹

Will this prediction in 1965 for the 21st century Christian church become reality for the congregations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod via the *Ablaze!* movement? Indeed, the church goes through phases. In January 1862 the first president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the sainted Dr. C.F.W. Walther, wrote:

...we share the belief of our fathers that the church, like the moon, has its phases, its waning and waxing, and even its eclipses; now in full bloom, now lying in the dust, buried beneath the debris of human teachings and abuses. The age of Moses, when all the nations were moved to exclaim with regard to the church, "Surely this nation is a wise and understanding people" (Deuteronomy 4:6), is always succeeded by the age of Eli, when "the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was not frequent vision" (1 Samuel 3:1). The blessed times of David, when the Lord builds the walls of Jerusalem, are always followed by Elijah days, when the church's great desolation moves the few remaining faithful servants to lament, "The people of Israel have forsaken the covenant, thrown down Thy altars, and slain the prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left," so that God must console them by calling attention to his hidden church: "I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:14,18). Periods in which the Word of God grows and the churches are strengthened in the faith (Acts 6:7; 16:5) alternate with periods of apostasy, when people turn their ears away from the truth and wander into myths (2 Thessalonians 2:3; 2 Timothy 4:4).²

Walther's observation reminds us that the church experiences ebbs and flows of trial and triumph. The current Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod *Ablaze!* movement can be a time blessed by God for one-to-one witnessing of the forgiveness, hope, and eternal salvation provided by Christ Jesus. And then the Lord can lead his people into and through another

era, be it one of God's Word abounding in the nations or being rejected by the nations.

We live now in a day of great change in institutions and world views. There is a shift from sameness to differences confronting congregations which, once priding themselves on sameness, are now looking at their unique opportunities to speak of Jesus to those God has brought to their community.³ While congregations sprout up day by day on the African continent and rural churches are quickly planted in South America, as well as a renewed openness to the Gospel being seen in Asia, a civil spirituality consisting of contradictions has emerged in North America. But the one thread in all circumstances is opportunity for individual Christians to speak to individual human beings about the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and triumphant return of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Interjected into divisive social issues, moral dilemmas, ethical struggles, and political polarization are intimate moments between a Christian and a person who desperately needs to hear the Gospel.

Churches as organizations tend to lose their focus on mission and become stagnant over time. The dilemma confronting many congregations today is significant change or slow death. The needed change is at the personal level: Personal transformation is key.⁴ The *Ablaze!* movement of the LCMS is directed at personal transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit at work through Word and sacraments to move individual Christians to engage those God is placing around them. The *Ablaze!* movement offers individual Christians of LCMS congregations the opportunity to connect the timeless, never-changing truth of Jesus who is the singular Way, Truth, and Life to the context into which God has placed them. This is, at the same time, an old and new challenge for pastors and professional church workers. For they must continue being faithful to the preaching and teaching of the One True Gospel and at the same time guide and prepare individuals to live their lives in witness for the Christ with a sensitivity to their changing neighbors who need the unchanging Jesus.

The *Ablaze!* movement raises awareness for pastors, church workers, and people to define their community, identify people, find the

overlooked, and listen for openings to speak of the Christ so that the Holy Spirit can lead people to confess their sin and receive freeing forgiveness while also confronting death with his resurrected eternal life. This may mean urban Christians speaking of Christ to new immigrants or the poor, small town Christians speaking of Christ to people passing through their communities, and rural people speaking of Jesus to those who have been long-time neighbors but rarely engaged in a relationship or new neighbors escaping the nearby town or city.

Alice Mann in her book, *Can Our Church Live: Redeveloping Congregations in Decline*, encourages entire congregations to ask three questions: 1) Who are we (especially at a faith level)? 2) What are we here for? and 3) Who is our neighbor?⁵ The LCMS *Ablaze!* movement calls for the pastor and church worker to help individual Christians ask similar questions of themselves. This is a time for individual growth in sound learning from the Scriptures via the systematic expression of the Lutheran Confessions for a clear Lutheran Christian identity. Lutheran Christians can offer a clear Law message leading to despair over sin and a Gospel-transforming life focus to a spiritually interested but often confused world of people. This is a time for individuals also to see how the vocation into which God has led them is a great way to demonstrate their dependence upon him as well as to seek opportunities God provides for them to witness their faith in Christ. Finally, it is a time to individually ask, "Who is my neighbor?"

Partnering with Lutheran Christians from Various Corners of the Globe

THE *Ablaze!* MOVEMENT also portends to offer further intersections for individual Lutheran Christians from various corners of the globe to not only cross paths but learn from each other what it means to speak of Christ in various contexts. Partner churches have not only committed themselves to the goal of *Ablaze!*, but are very active in embracing the movement. When The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was adopting the goals of *Ablaze!* in its 2004 Convention, reports of amazing partnerships were already being made. LCMS World Mission has signed



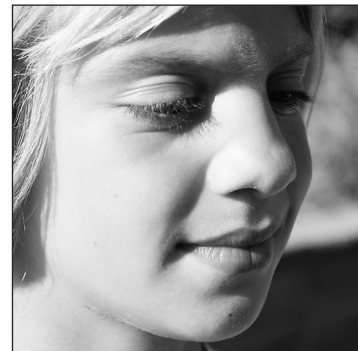
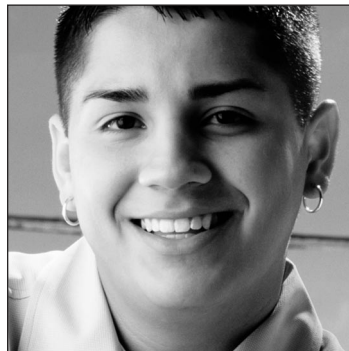
more than 30 formal partnership agreements. Many LCMS districts are partnering. In 2003 the Mid-South District of the LCMS formed a partnership with the East of Lake Victoria Diocese in Tanzania to plant more churches through the establishment of mission training centers. With partnerships in Nigeria, Spain, Russia, Asia, and the Far East come opportunities for individual Christians to partner with fellow Christians from various cultures to touch the lives of individual people around the globe with the saving message of Jesus.

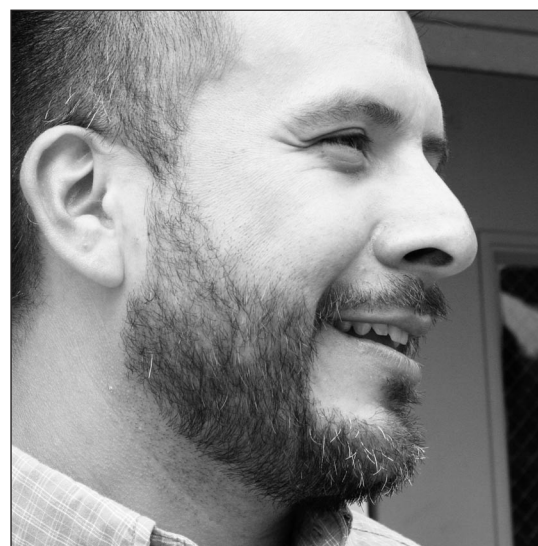
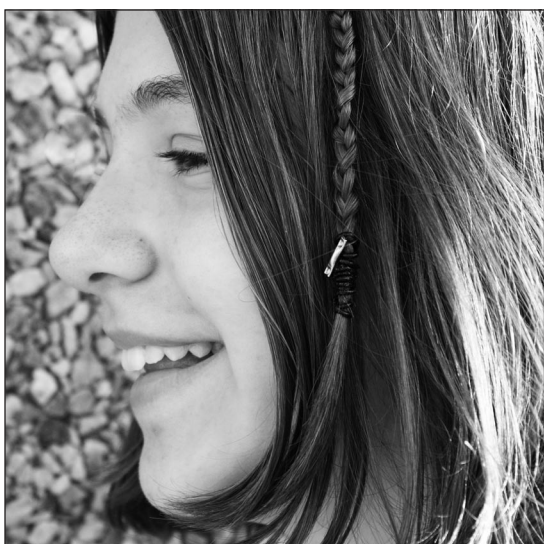
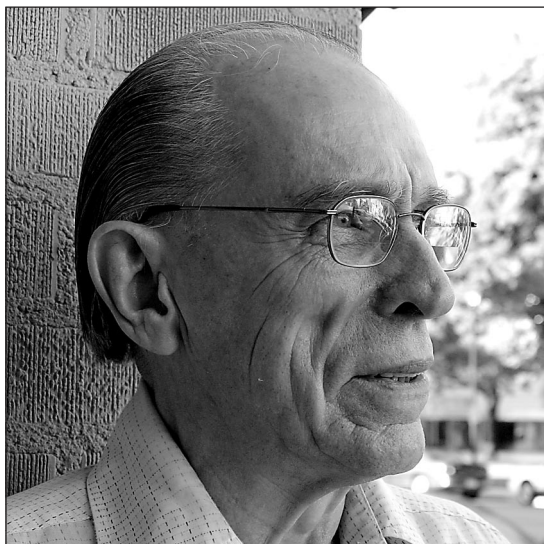
In 1965, the author of *The Church of the 21st Century* concluded his book by observing: "What the church of the 21st century becomes will indeed depend on the Lord of the church and on the Holy Spirit. God has never let his people down though they often have slipped miserably because of themselves. God, who neither slumbers nor sleeps, is more ready to do his part. The big question mark is you and I. We can wiggle and twist and rationalize all we want, but ultimately we cannot avoid our responsibility and accountability to the Lord of the church."⁶

How the *Ablaze!* movement within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and her partner churches will impact their cultures is in God's hands as his Spirit works through his Word and sacraments in and through his people, one by one.

Notes

- ¹ Sommerfeld, Richard. (1965) *The Church of the 21st Century*. St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House.
- ² Walther, C.F.W. (1981) *Editorials from Lehre und Wehre*, VIII, January, 1862. St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House.
- ³ Rendle, Gilbert. (1998) *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*. Bethesda, Maryland: Alban Institute.
- ⁴ Herrington, J., Bonem, M., Furr, J. (2000) *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey*. Jossey-Bass.
- ⁵ Mann, Alice. (1999) *Can Our Church Live: Redeveloping Congregations in Decline*. Bethesda, Maryland: Alban Institute.
- ⁶ Sommerfeld, Richard. (1965) *The Church of the 21st Century*. St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House.





book reviews

Great Commission Companies: The Emerging Role of Business in Mission

Steve Rundle and Tom Steffen

Downers Grove, Illinois
InterVarsity Press, 2003

Rundle and Steffen provide an important study that opens up exciting possibilities for entrepreneurial Christian business people who want to be involved in mission beyond making donations. This does not require that individuals exchange a career in business for one as a full-time professional church worker (e.g., a missionary) supported by the donations of the rest of us in the church. Instead, the model of mission work that the authors have researched and now urge us to consider is the "Great Commission Company (GCC)."

A central thesis of the authors is that globalization is part of God's plan to spread the Gospel to the whole world. Many governments that are hostile to Christianity and would not allow missionaries in the country nevertheless are very receptive to foreign investment. Therefore, Christian business professionals have opportunities to become directly involved in mission to populations of the world who have been the last exposed to the Gospel by founding, managing, or otherwise supporting GCCs.

The name "Great Commission Company" is an obvious reference to Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus' directive to "make disciples of all nations ... teaching them everything that I have commanded." Although not explicit in the name, Jesus' Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40) that His followers should "love God with all their heart, soul and mind, and their neighbors as themselves" is also integral to the GCC model. This was understood throughout the history of the church until early in the 20th century when liberals began to emphasize social justice rather than making disciples, and evangelicals did the opposite. By the end of the century it had become obvious that both extremes were flawed, and more holistic approaches to missions began to emerge (pp. 34-35).

One manifestation of a more holistic approach is the GCC. A GCC is a company that is very intentional about bringing the Good News to the least developed and the least evangelized

parts of the world. Although a GCC can take on a wide variety of forms, the authors identify several common characteristics that surfaced in their five-year study of these enterprises: A GCC is socially responsible, is an authentic business that creates wealth, is managed by professionals committed to serving Christ in the market place, deals ethically with all its stakeholders, and promotes the growth and multiplication of local churches (pp. 41-42). The profits are often used to support other local mission and ministry programs.

In addition to the access that GCCs afford to the least-evangelized peoples of the world, the authors believe there are other advantages to this model that make it more effective than traditional mission efforts. These advantages include lowering the cultural barriers that often exist between foreigners and those with whom they are trying to connect and the opportunity that Christian managers have to model ethical business practices that are very often not the norm of the society.

Although this book is directed toward Christian business people, the mission of the church would be well served if its leaders were to consider the GCC model as they engage in the process of adopting and refining strategies to more effectively touch the lives of people throughout the world with the transforming message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Stan Obermueller, Ph.D.

Chair, Business Administration Department
Concordia University, Nebraska
stan.obermueller@cune.edu

Bethlehem Besieged

Mitri Raheb

Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2004

Though its setting is an impoverished land under cruel domination and occupation, *Bethlehem Besieged* is a testimony to the ironic hope that flows from the Gospel.

Mitri Raheb is an unlikely prophet. He is tall and slender, a bespectacled pastor and a lifelong citizen of Jesus' birthplace. He earned his theological doctorate from Marburg University in Germany, is fluent in four languages, and is intensely dedicated to proclaiming the Gospel within the context of the on-going struggle between Jews and Palestinians. Moreover, Mitri Raheb is absolutely strategic in wringing hope from despair.

In this, his second book (*I Am a Palestinian Christian* was published in 1995), Raheb reflects on the siege of the "Little Town of Bethlehem" in the occupied territories of the State of Israel in April of 2002. Israeli troops stormed the vulnerable city, killing innocent civilians and inflicting senseless damage on its buildings, including the campus of the historic "Christmas Church" of which Raheb is the pastor. Raheb uses stories to take the reader beyond the news headlines into the hearts of fellow Christians who, by virtue of their Palestinian Arab identity, are literal targets for the cruelty of an oppressive government. As he describes holding his young daughter Tala tightly in his arms in her darkened bedroom while an American-built F-16 strafed his neighborhood in October of 2000, political arguments seem irrelevant. Raheb's poignant narrative brings the conflict between Jew and Palestinian into the heart of the reader.

He is blunt both in his telling of the story and in his reflections on the current conditions in Bethlehem and the Occupied Territories. His most openly political chapter, "Building Walls or Planting Olive Trees?" is incisive in its indictments. "The current crisis in Israel/Palestine arises from a leadership lacking vision," he says. He is critical of both Ariel Sharon with his vision of Palestinian apartheid and the PLO for its inability to free themselves from a "liberation organization" into a more constructive "creative state."

But ultimately, *Bethlehem Besieged* becomes a case study in Christian hope. As he rests in bed after thirteen hours of Israeli firepower devastating Bethlehem, Pastor Raheb reflects on Jesus' words from Matthew 10: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." His fear dissipates: "I stopped worrying about what had been destroyed and started to think of ways to rebuild ... I felt as if I had been given a new dream in the midst of a nightmare ..." (p. 13).

Over the years since that first siege of Bethlehem, Mitri Raheb's "new dream" gave birth to Dar Al Kalima Lutheran School, the International Center of Bethlehem, a Health and Wellness Center, and "Bright Stars," an arts program for Palestinian children that seeks to replace their nightmares with visions of beauty and peace as they use their God-given talents.

It is hard for these two reviewers to be completely objective regarding this fine book. Pastor

Raheb is a dear friend, and our congregation, Our Father in Centennial, Colorado, raised \$60,000 for a classroom at Dar Al Kalima. "Christian hope holds firm that it's never too late for faith in action and for acts of compassion," Mitri reminds us toward the close of his book (p. 156).

Bethlehem Besieged is an engaging chronicle of the power of Christian hope in action. It is never too late.

Donald and Margaret Hinchey

Donald and Margaret Hinchey serve Our Father Lutheran Church in Centennial, Colorado, where Donald is Senior Pastor and Margaret is Minister of Music. They have traveled to Bethlehem numerous times.
dfhinchey@aol.com

The New Global Mission: the Gospel from everywhere to everyone

Samuel Escobar

Downers Grove
Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003

Samuel Escobar's book is a valuable perspective on God's mission of bringing the Gospel to the world. The author states: "In this book I shall explore how the church propagates the Christian faith. The heart of 'mission' is the drive to share the good news with all, to cross every border with the gospel," and "This book is intended to be a missiological reflection. I define *missiology* as an interdisciplinary approach to understanding missionary action" (p. 21). He more than succeeds in accomplishing these two stated goals. The ten chapters include the titles, *Brave New World Order* (globalization and contextualization), *Post-Christian and Postmodern*, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Mission*, and *Text and Context—the Word through New Eyes* (Bible and culture).

Escobar is eminently qualified to write on the topic of mission theory. Currently professor of missiology at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wyncroft, Pennsylvania, he served in the International Congress on World Evangelization held in 1974 in Lausanne, Switzerland, is president of United Bible Societies, and is past president of International Fellowship of Evangelical Students.

As a native of Peru, he embodies one of the characteristics of the world mission movement. Today, more Christians live in Africa, Asia,

and Latin America than in Europe and North America, and the number of missionaries from these regions is growing. Non-Western cultures continue to be more receptive to the Gospel in contrast to those in the West, and the relocation of Christian migrants and refugees provides increased opportunities for their witness. Some of the book's strengths are: It is an example of a non-Westerner writing for both Western and non-Western audiences; the broad global, historical, and scriptural approach Escobar provides; and the way he integrates samples of other mission writings.

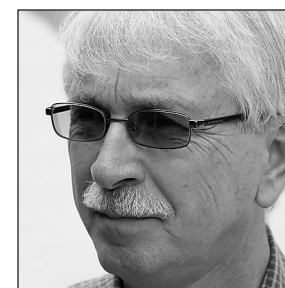
The author creates awareness of the certainty of God's mission when he writes, "... we lose perspective and a sense of direction when we forget the divine dimension of mission. A sound grasp of the history of missions helps us to avoid becoming idealistic or paralyzed by cynicism." He quotes K. Latourette, "No fact of history is more amazing than the spread of the influence of Jesus."

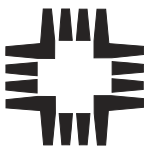
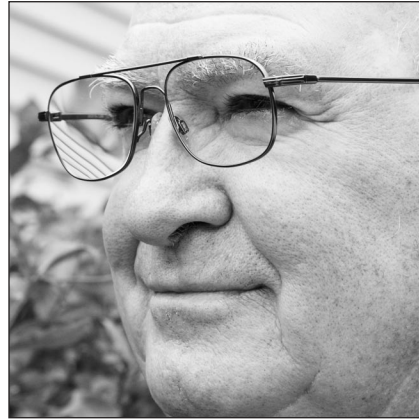
By making numerous Scripture references (a one-page Scripture index is included; there is no general index) and comparing the church described in Acts and the church today, Escobar challenges readers to examine their own beliefs. He cautions all Christians against substituting man's plans for God's when he says, "If Christian mission is first and foremost God's mission, Christians must always conduct mission in an attitude of humility and dependence upon God." He calls all believers to consider their vital part in God's mission when he writes, "... the church exists for mission and ... a church that is only inward looking is not truly the church," and "Global partnerships of churches will be indispensable for mission in the twenty-first century." An appendix "For Further Study" describes additional book resources to help further inform and challenge the reader.

The New Global Mission is highly recommended for laypersons, all church workers and church leaders, mission personnel, and theology or mission book collections.

Thomas A. Krenzke

Information Services Librarian
Concordia University, Nebraska
Thomas and his wife Bernita served as Bible translation missionaries in Liberia, West Africa, for 22 years.
tom.krenzke@cune.edu





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