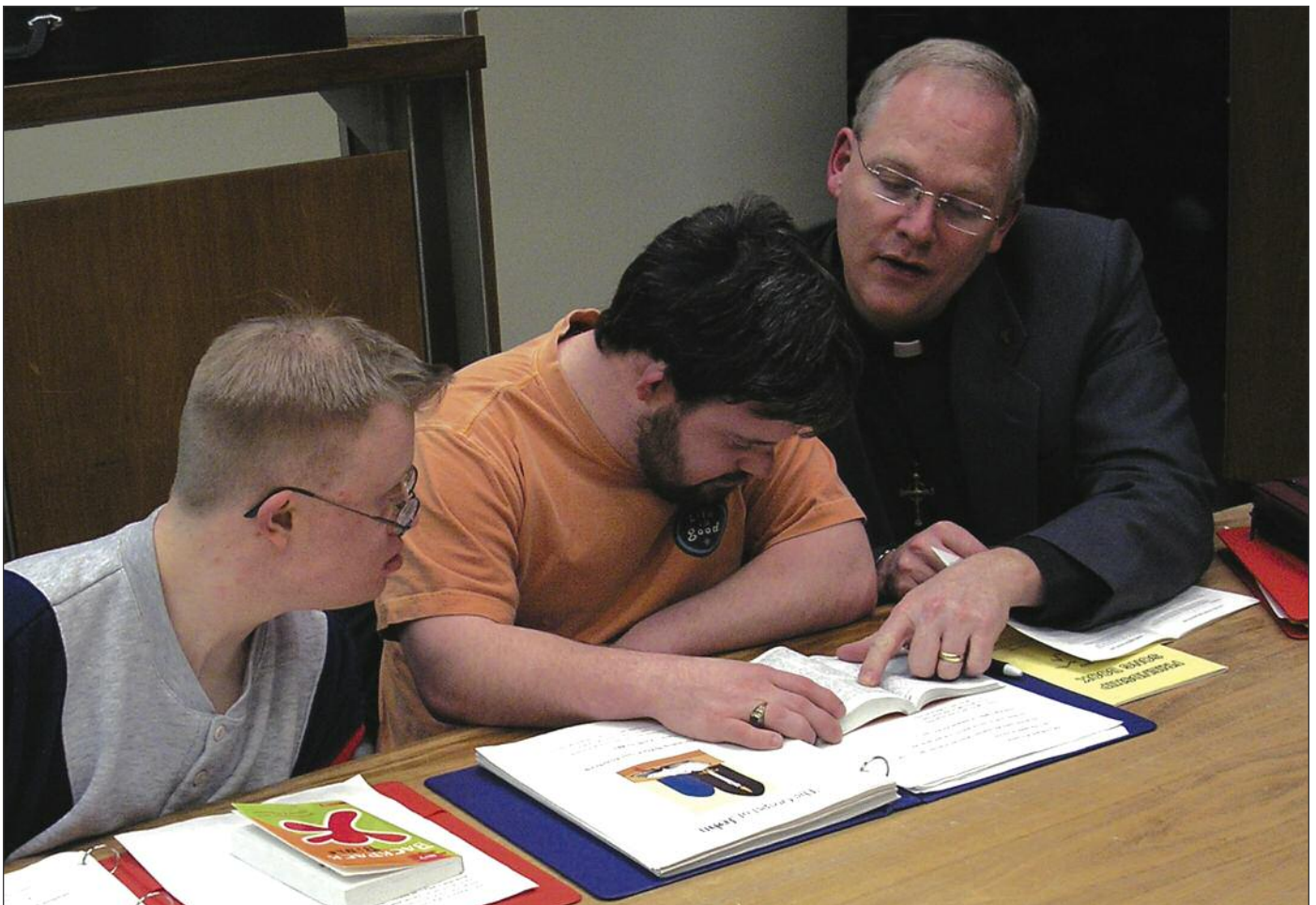


For the

LIFE of the WORLD

July 2006. Volume Ten, Number Three



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By the Rev. Matthew C. Harrison, Executive Director of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s Board for Human Care Ministries and World Relief, St. Louis, Missouri

I have met the President of the United States. I’ve been all over the world and met dignitaries of all sorts. But I’ve never been so humbled and honored to be doing the work of LCMS World Relief and Human Care in behalf of the church.

7 Complete in One Body

By Mrs. Patricia S. Nuffer, a Concordia Theological Seminary deaconess intern with the LCMS Board for Human Care Ministries and World Relief, Fort Wayne, Indiana

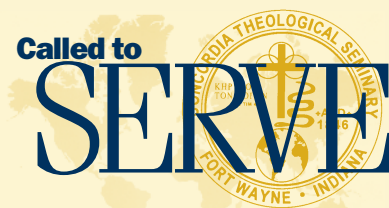
One body, different members, it is an exciting challenge for the church to be one body, an exciting challenge for CTS to equip pastors and deaconesses to welcome the vulnerable, to celebrate each one’s gifts in their differences, and to be complete in one body.

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By the Rev. Everette E. Greene, Pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Cincinnati, Ohio

For me, being a confessing Lutheran has nothing at all to do with race or color but everything to do with the Gospel that makes us one in Christ!

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Because Christ Is for All, the a Corporate



I have met the President of the United States. I've been all over the world and met dignitaries of all sorts. But I've never been so humbled and honored to be doing the work of LCMS World Relief and Human Care in behalf of the church. I asked one boy, "What do you think, Eric?" He replied, "I thank God and Jesus Christ that someone has regarded us as human beings."

I thank God and Jesus Christ that someone has regarded us as human beings." I had visited Eric and the AIDS orphans a year earlier at Othoro in Western Kenya. Every congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya (ELCK) is caring for orphans. Othoro Lutheran had charge of a dozen boys. The small, mud, one room hut was stark even by African standards. The children packed onto the floor each night with only an elephant grass mat to spread on the hardened mud; some had lived like this for nine years. A few worn plastic bowls were the sum total of their worldly possessions. The boys were visibly distressed; a burden of sadness lay heavy upon them out of all proportion to their tender age. On that first visit we had resolved to assist the ELCK in building a small orphanage. The orphanage was built and March 2006 brought a return visit.

Church Has Life of Mercy

By the Rev. Matthew C. Harrison

Lake Victoria had long faded out of sight as the highway took us into the lush and tea-rich highlands of Kisiland. Along the way we saw cows provided by LCMS World Relief to Kenyan pastors. It's amazing how something so simple can so profoundly affect a pastor and his family. Cows mean milk, calves, income, food, and increasing wealth. The Othoro Rescue Center came into sight. The boys! Could they be the same children? They came forward beaming with pride. Like my own children of similar age, they had grown tremendously over a year's time! "Show me your home," I shouted!

They took me to the new kitchen and storeroom and showed me every inch. They showed me their dining hall and the wonderful chairs and tables made by the ELCK's trade school in Kisumu. By the time we got to their dormitory we had all become overwhelmed by the moment. Twelve bunks, all made and spotless, for a total capacity of 24 children lined the hall. Each boy stood by his bed, all of us silent for joy, yet tears flowing. I told them, "Your new home is a gift from our Christians and this Othoro community. It has been done because our Christians know Jesus loves them, and they want to share that love with you."

Over time that little orphanage will serve hundreds of children who will go to Othoro Lutheran Church (not 100 feet away) every Sunday. They will be cared for and looked after body and soul by the pastor and the housemother. They will learn Luther's catechism and Bible stories. They will be loved and the effect upon their lives will be profound. "What do you want to be when you grow up?" one boy was asked. "I want to be a doctor and help orphans . . ." A Lutheran law student from the University of Nairobi—himself an AIDS orphan—spoke and showed that dreams may become realities, even here. I was given the honor to express with prayer and proclamation that here the Gospel and Luther's catechism would always reign and children always be loved.

I have met the President of the United States. I've been all over the world and met dignitaries of all sorts. But I've never been so humbled and honored to be doing the work of LCMS World Relief and Human Care in behalf of the church. I asked one boy, "What do you think, Eric?" He replied, "I thank God and Jesus Christ that someone has regarded us as human beings."

The proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments are the *sine qua non* of the church's life. Yet they are not the limit of the church's task in this world. The church has a corporate life of mercy according to the New Testament. We all well know the great "stewardship" passages, or so we think:

"God loves a cheerful giver."

"He who sows sparingly will reap sparingly."

"See that you excel in all things . . . See that you excel also in this grace of giving."

"Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich."

"The gift is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what a person does not have."

"Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."

We use these texts to inform all manner of giving in the church except the very type of giving for which they were written by Paul. Every one of these texts is from 2 Corinthians 8-9 and was written to urge and motivate the Corinthians to give generously for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. As much as the Book of Acts is missiological, a predominate theme in Acts is most often overlooked: mercy. "They continued steadfast in the apostles teaching . . . the fellowship (*koinonia*), the breaking of bread, and the prayer" (Acts 2:42). Luther rightly noted that this *koinonia* is created by the Gospel and Sacraments, involves doctrinal unity, but then brings concern and care for the needy within the fellowship. Commenting on Acts 6, Luther noted that the church would be best ordered with

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bishops doling out the spiritual goods and a deacon with the bishop caring for the physical needs, thus "body and soul" would be cared for. While the communal sharing of possessions of the Acts church was limited in time, the church continued an ordered diakonic existence. Men "full of the Spirit" were chosen by the multitude and put in office by the apostles, all to care for the physical needs of the widows being overlooked in the daily *diakonia* or distribution of bread. The church's care for the needy is always spiritual or it isn't the church's.

In Acts 11:27-30 we see the Gentile church in Syrian Antioch swing into action by sending funds to the suffering Jerusalem church via the hands of Paul and Barnabas. Aside from the Gospel and Sacraments, the most tangible demonstration of church unity is money for material assistance. Paul would soon expand on this "proto-collection." In Acts 15 the great apostolic council solved the problem of fellowship with the

Gentile converts sans Mosaic Law. Paul commented in Galatians 2 that in Jerusalem “those reported to be pillars, James, Cephas and John, gave to me and to Barnabas the right hand of *koinonias* (fellowship); thus we would go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” The rest of the verse is often ignored, though it gives us deep insight as to just what this “fellowship” entails. “They asked only this, that we remember the poor.” For Paul, for Acts, for Luther, *koinonia* is unity in teaching and a unity which looks to the physical needs of those in the community who suffer (see Smalcald Art. II.IV.9).

“Be ye shepherds of the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” This great passage from Acts 20 is very familiar, yet we overlook the fact that the several Greeks named at the beginning of the chapter, all traveling companions of Paul, are heading to Jerusalem carrying their respective regional church’s offerings for the poor. In fact, the collection is the basis for Paul’s entire third missionary journey. Caring for the poor as an act of fellowship is so vital for Paul that he even dies for the cause. Paul went to Jerusalem the final time to deliver the gifts of love from the Diaspora, and he ended up jailed and heading to Rome to face death.

“Stewardship” had long lost my “interest” UNTIL I discovered Paul’s collection for Jerusalem. It was often presented to me as a mere churchless, individualistic matter of following Old Testament regulations as New Testament suggestions. For Paul the matter is deeply theological and deeply corporate, churchly and even sacramental. Consider this, in 2 Corinthians 8-9 Paul uses the greatest, theologically freighted words in the New Testament to describe the collection for the poor. He calls it a *diakonia* (a service or ministry); he calls it a *leitourgia* (a liturgy or public service); he calls it a *eucharistia* (a eucharist or thanksgiving); he calls it a *koinonia* (a fellowship), the very word he also uses for the Lord’s Supper in 1 Cor. 10:16-17!). Finally, Paul even calls the collection a *charis*, a “grace,” a gift of God.

We often hear, and rightly so, that the church needs much greater

“outward” focus—true. However, I suggest that the mission strength of the church of the New Testament was in some measure connected with its internal life of *koinonia* and love. Is it happenstance that just after the very ordered system of care is established in Acts 6 the section ends, “And the word of God increased and the number of the disciples grew tremendously in Jerusalem . . .” (6:7)? Mind you, we should not merely find some diakonic work in order to “grow the church.” The church’s life of mercy is an expression of who we are in Christ. Mercy in word and deed is who Christ is. His body, the church, is in this world. If we fail to have mercy, to care for the needy among us, we render our confession a clanging cymbal (1 Cor. 13). But a zealous orthodoxy, a zealous proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments, together with a rigorous concern for the needy reflect the New Testament church, even Jesus Himself. And precisely that internal life of love and concern for those in need spills—laden with the Gospel—into the community around the congregation. “Do good to all, especially to those of the household of the faith” (Gal. 6:10). I see it all the time. Churches concerned with caring for the needy in their midst are also most concerned with those outside.

There are Lutheran churches all over the world reaching their communities in love, or poised to do so, bringing Christ to all people. It is the sacred task of the church’s mercy arm to assist them in this act of love for the sake of Christ and His Gospel. And what joy is ours to hear along the way, “I thank God and Jesus Christ that someone has regarded us as human beings.” For that boy will be a vital member of Christ’s body there, “regarding others as human beings,” bringing both the Gospel and love to others.

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