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From the President

# THE CHANGING FACE OF GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

SINCE THE BIRTH OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AT PENTECOST, the Spirit of God has moved the Gospel from place to place. The Holy Spirit works when and where it pleases God, as Article V of the Augsburg Confession says. World history is really a subset of the Church's history in this world. World events ultimately are in service to the Gospel even as the Church remains under the cross and at the same time can suffer from them. The Roman persecutions pushed the Church out of Jerusalem into the broader world. The fall of the Roman Empire brought Christianity to the barbarians. European colonialism brought the Gospel to the farthest ends of the earth. At each of these events and many more like them, the face of Christianity changed as different people groups came into the Church. Today, another historic shift is occurring. Christianity is shifting away from the Global North (primarily Europe and North America) to the Global South (Africa, Asia and Latin America).

Ethiopia now claims more Lutherans than Sweden, the former largest population of "Lutherans" in the world. For the past century, even where the "numbers" of Christians have not significantly declined in the North, the participation of these "Christians," who might have been baptized, married and buried in a church, has decreased dramatically. In contrast, many African

churches do not count members per se, but rather those who attend church on Sunday. The Church in the North and the Church in the South need each other. Both have gifts to offer the other. One blessing of our current age is the relative ease with which these gifts can be shared. On the domestic side, the challenge of the decline of Christianity in the public square also is an opportunity to reach out to peoples who have not heard the Gospel.

This issue of the *Journal of Lutheran Mission* reflecting on the themes above contains the papers presented at the 2014 Mission Summit sponsored by the LCMS in Orange County, Calif., this past November. The first day of the conference focused on the changing face of Christianity in North America, while the second day of the conference focused on the change internationally. We hope that you will find the papers both thought-provoking and edifying. We have the sure and certain promise from our Lord that He works all

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things for good and that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church. The changing face of global Christianity is not to be feared, but to be embraced in the confident hope that our Lord will work a blessing from it both for the church and the world, as people hear the Gospel of Jesus.

*Sub cruce,*  
President Matthew C. Harrison