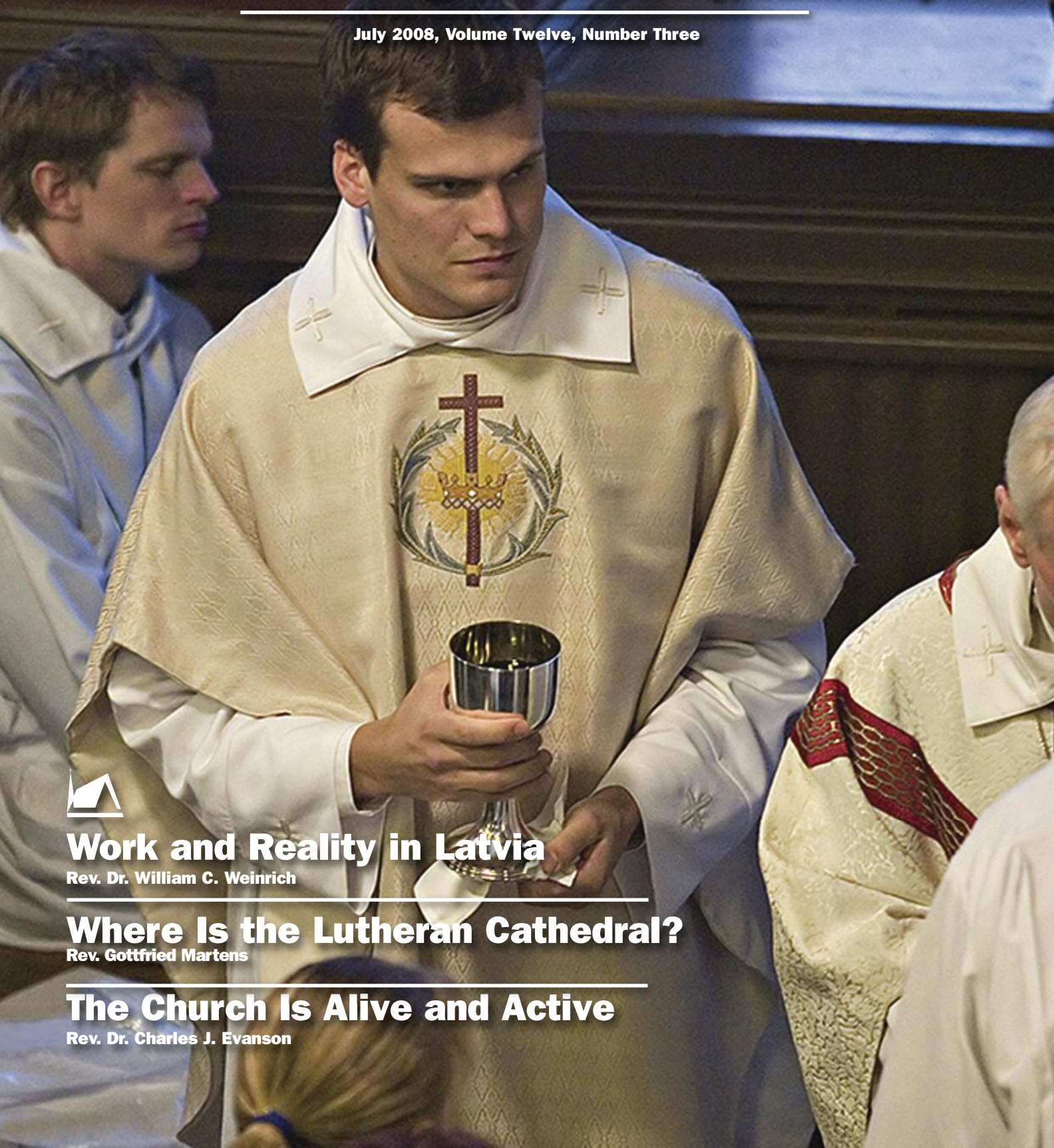


For the Life of the World

Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne

July 2008, Volume Twelve, Number Three



Work and Reality in Latvia

Rev. Dr. William C. Weinrich

Where Is the Lutheran Cathedral?

Rev. Gottfried Martens

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A Modern Day

The mission house in Härnäs was packed full when Rev. Jakob Appell arrived. Some had traveled as much as fifty kilometers to attend. This is one of three mission groups this recent S.T.M. graduate of Concordia Theological Seminary regularly visits in southeastern Sweden.

Historically Sweden was a strongly Lutheran country, but today most churches are empty. Although the Church of Sweden claims to be the largest Lutheran Church in the world, only one member in seventy-five attends worship in an average week, and that figure includes Christmas and Easter.

The goal is to develop *koinonias*, or worshiping communities, that will grow into confessional Lutheran congregations. Rev. Appell's work is much like that of the American circuit riders who traveled among frontier settlements in the mid-1800s, gathering and ministering to the scattered flock of Lutheran immigrants.

Historically, Sweden was a strongly Lutheran country, but today most churches are empty. Although the Church of Sweden claims to be the largest Lutheran Church in the world, only one member in seventy-five attends worship in an average week, and that figure includes Christmas and Easter.

After four hundred years of state control of the church, a socialist government came to power in the 1920s. Two recent doctoral dissertations have documented its systematic—and effective—campaign to undermine the authority of Scripture and transform the church into an agency of social engineering. As the Church of Sweden abandoned the Gospel, its pews emptied.

“The Church of Sweden is collapsing.”

Rev. Appell explains. “In place after place, God’s faithful people are left without reliable shepherds. They are lost, afraid, abandoned, confused—but with an admirable faith in God’s Word. In my work as a circuit rider, I travel around to places where people have been forced out of their old congregations.

“They gather in homes and borrowed chapels and ask for a pastor to bring them what they need, God’s Word and the Holy Sacrament. If we don’t bring them a pure and clear Gospel, who will? It is hard to travel so much, but it brings great joy to see these faithful people who will settle for nothing less than the preaching of Christ crucified.”

Although Rev. Appell first sensed God’s call at an early age, he had put aside thoughts of ordained ministry. Since 1992 the Church of Sweden has refused to ordain men with a confessional view of Scripture. Sweden’s theological faculties have abandoned their Lutheran heritage, but a small confessional alternative, the Lutheran School of Theology in Gothenburg (LSTG), was founded in 1993. Rev. Appell decided to study at LSTG for one year.

“I was struck by the joy of studying the Holy Scriptures,” Rev. Appell recalls. “The Gospel was purely proclaimed in many of the lectures, and the light of Christ reached into my heart. This was what I wanted to

Circuit Rider

By Dr. Chris Barnekov

spend all my time on, even though I hardly dared to think about becoming a pastor.”

The one year of study became three. Meanwhile, after years of discussions and preparations, a group of faithful Lutherans organized to provide a path to ordination. In January 2006, Jakob and his brother David were among the first to be ordained in the newly formed mission province.

David has also been serving as a circuit rider. After two years of this work in northern Sweden, he was installed on the Second Sunday of Easter as pastor of a newly organized congregation in Umeå, the largest city in the area.

Rev. Appell served a newly formed congregation in Gothenburg but felt the need for further studies. “It is a great challenge to minister in Sweden’s secularized society,” he reflects, “especially given the hostility from the liberal church and competition from other denominations. I was eager for more study in preparation.


“At CTS I found the same faithful approach to the Scriptures I had experienced at LST in Gothenburg. In addition to the good, solid

Lutheran teaching, the tremendously rich worship life and fellowship greatly strengthened me for the mission in Scandinavia.

“I have never been so clear as to my identity as a pastor as now, after the time in Fort Wayne. I think back with gratitude to Dr. Nagel’s deep teaching on the pastoral office. I find this tremendously helpful in facing the challenges in Sweden.”

This year Rev. Appell divides his time between serving as a circuit rider and as admissions counselor for LSTG. “We have a great need for more pastors and a deeper evangelical Lutheran foundation,” he notes. “My role is to help recruit students for LSTG. I am also hopeful that many of our students will be able to continue their studies in Fort Wayne.”

Concordia Theological Seminary has worked closely with LSTG for many years, with CTS faculty visiting for lectures and mini-courses. Many of the LSTG faculty have also benefited from intensives and other short stays in Fort Wayne. Currently, CTS and LSTG are exploring additional cooperation that would enable more Scandinavian students to pursue, especially, the S.T.M. program.

“By equipping me, and hopefully many other fellow Scandinavian pastors,” Rev. Appell observes, “CTS is doing missions to the far north.” 



Dr. Chris Barnekov hosts Scandinavian students studying at Concordia Theological Seminary, one of which was Rev. Jakob Appell, featured on the cover.