

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Our Financial Challenge



**LIFE
LINES**

Gerhard C. Michael, Jr.
District President

With the new fiscal year beginning February 1, I thought I would use this month's column to alert you to the financial challenge we are facing as a District and encourage you to draw on the resources of good stewardship practice to help us meet the challenge.

Our challenge arises very naturally for us. By nature we turn in on ourselves and manage our money from a self-centered perspective. God, however, has acted to liberate us from such slavery and enabled us to live in harmony with him through the forgiveness of our sins.

Indeed, God has entrusted this Gospel to us, the good news of salvation in his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Having just celebrated his birth, we remember in this Epiphany season how he devoted himself to fulfilling the mission God gave him — as the anointed Messiah, he would establish his reign through his humble, faithful service. His service would climax in his self-sacrifice on the cross, the full payment for the world's sin.

Knowing this good news, we must share it!

I trust that in our hearts is the same burning desire that marked the disciples on the way to Emmaus when the Lord revealed himself to them. They had to run back to Jerusalem to tell the good news that Jesus was alive, that the Messianic mission was accomplished through suffering, for that's how God would conquer.

John and Peter had the same inner compulsion. "We cannot but speak of the things which we have seen and heard," (Acts 4:20) they said to the authorities who had executed their Master. They had a message that could not be silenced. It was a fire burning in their being that could not be extinguished.

The Apostle Paul had the same conviction. "Woe is me if I don't preach the Gospel," he wrote to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9:16). He knew the reason. In his second letter to them he said, "The love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that

serve the growing population of our region and to support our national church body as it seeks to expand its mission.

This forward movement in missions is expressed by the word "Ablaze!" As a District we

from congregations are being received in these days. These will give us a better indication of our true situation. The District Stewardship Advisory Council (DSAC) has been doing a good job in encouraging our

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are seeking to plant 200 new congregations and witness to at least two million people by the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

We have been doing well. Our Executive Director of Outreach, Rev. Doug Kallesen, informs me that we have started 40 new ministries since we began counting in 2000. Our

congregations to respond. At their meeting January 26 and 27 the Board of Directors will set our ministry spending plan for FY 2007.

I share this information with you, that you may be advocates for good stewardship practice in your congregation. Through your advocacy in your congregation, you can help your fellow members respond generously, so that the mission is not set back.

The DSAC, under the leadership of its chairman, President Emeritus Edgar Trinklein, is making strenuous efforts to provide resources to our congregation to promote first-fruits giving. At our convention last summer, they distributed to each congregation sample copies of a program entitled, "The Blessing of Tithing." Reasonably priced, it is a great resource to assist congregational leaders help their members grow in the grace of giving.

My personal conviction is that God has given us sufficient resources for us to do the work that he wants us to do. The challenge, in my opinion, is to help people sense the urgency and excitement of God's mission, and the joy and privilege of practicing Christian stewardship.

one has died for all; therefore all have died." (5:14f)

Moved by that same love, the Florida-Georgia District is committed to strengthen congregations for their mission, to raise up leaders to help our congregations tell the story, to plant new congregations to

capital campaign, *Forward Together-Servants in His Mission*, has provided an infusion of cash to help fund these new ministries, as well as train more workers through the Concordia House of Studies. Unrestricted receipts were on an upward path through the middle of Fiscal Year 2006, but since July, we have fallen short of our expectations.

At the end of this fiscal year, we plan to be in touch with certain congregations to ascertain what the reasons might be behind the drop-off in support, and then seek to determine how best to go forward, that we might help one another as we strive to fulfill the mission Christ has entrusted to us.

As I write this article, final results for FY 2006 are not yet in. We are hopeful that we will be close to having balanced our accounts through reduced spending. As you know, though, reducing spending often means delaying new mission starts or not funding projects as fully as would be ideal.

Initial projections for FY 2007 are that income will fall short of needs by perhaps \$200,000 to \$500,000. Pledges

My prayer is that we will indeed discover or rediscover the joy of stewardship, putting the Lord first in our money management; experience anew the excitement of God's mission as we tell the story of Jesus; and that we will tell that story with passion and effectiveness.

This past summer and fall, five pastors were trained to serve as Guest Leaders in congregations which wish to use the Consecrated Stewards program. This is an enriched, Lutheran version of Herb Miller's Consecration Sunday materials, and has had good results as it solidly anchors our stewardship response in Biblical teaching. For more information, please contact Kathy Keene at the District office (kkeene@flga-lcms.org) or 877-457-5556, extension 4) and she will connect you with the appropriate people.

members. Through the power of the Gospel, we can be revitalized to take our place in his mission of extending his grace to others.

My prayer is that we will indeed discover or rediscover the joy of stewardship, putting the Lord first in our money management; experience anew the excitement of God's mission as we tell the story of Jesus; and that we will tell that story with passion and effectiveness. In this way, our financial challenge will just be an opportunity for further growth as Jesus' disciples.

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Every congregation is a church in mission, and every member is a missionary; with all of us working together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, empowered by His Gospel to share His love.

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District President
Rev. Dr. Gerhard Michael Jr.

Florida-Georgia District Office:
Lutheran Ministries Center
7207 Monetary Drive
Orlando, Florida 32809-5724
Telephone: (407) 857-5556
FAX: (407) 857-5665
www.flga-lcms.org

Lutheran Life
Editorial & Publishing Office:
75 SE Third Street
Boca Raton, Florida 33432
Telephone: (561) 417-5605
FAX: (561) 417-5606
e-mail: LutheranLife@aol.com

Publisher, Executive Editor and
District Public Relations Director
John List

Editor-in-Chief
Eileen Bishop

Art Director & Layout Coordinator
Chris Utech

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