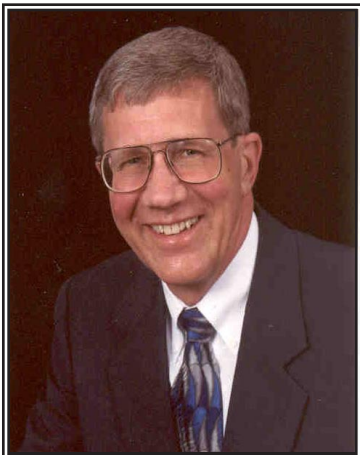


FROM THE PRESIDENT

Looking Back to Go Ahead!



**LIFE
LINES**

Gerhard C. Michael, Jr.
District President

The changing of the years invariably has people looking back to review what has happened in the past 12 months and looking ahead, trying to predict what might happen in the year now beginning. For us, 2008 is a special year as we celebrate our District's 60th anniversary!

Anniversaries offer us the gift of seeing what God has done in the past, so that we might look forward with hope and confidence.

Anniversaries are times when we naturally look back, but hopefully look ahead as well. Last summer, three of us from our District — Dick Schneider, a laymen from Lake Oconee - Eatonton, GA, Bob Jacobs, a retired pastor from Ormond Beach, FL, and I, all classmates of the Concordia Academy-St. Paul, MN, class of 1957 — attended our 50th high school class reunion.

There was a lot of catching up to do, since a number of us had not seen one another since

graduation! It was a time for the three of us and our other classmates to reminisce about classes, good times we had, relationships established, playing sports together, other extra curricular activities and living in the same dormitory.

It was an enjoyable trip down memory lane.

As we looked back, we also listened to what one another was doing now and what plans we had for the future. It seemed that all of us had reason for living, for looking forward, for anticipating the future.

Anniversaries offer us the gift of seeing what God has done in the past, so that we might look forward with hope and confidence.

Our District's first convention was held February 4-6, 1948, and so now we stand on the threshold of its 60th anniversary. God has been kind to us.

We have grown from 22 original congregations to 190 now. We've got plans to help us

look back to see how this happened, but our purpose is not merely to remember "the good ole days!"

Our intent is to celebrate what God has done that we might embrace the future cheerfully and with hope!

When we see the lack of growth we are experiencing today, we may be tempted to glamorize our early years as the District's "Golden Age," then to bemoan our current situation and wonder what we're doing wrong. Indeed the early years

were golden: churches were being planted right and left, pastors and laity yoked themselves together in the same mission team, the numbers grew and buildings were erected.

At the 1973 LCMS convention, a brochure promoted Florida-Georgia as the fastest growing District in the Synod, and invited people to come and join us. What has happened to us today?

Our history includes God himself becoming a human being, living as a servant, dying as a sacrificial lamb, and rising from the dead—to provide deliverance from our bondage to fear and our slavery to sin.

The purpose of an anniversary celebration, obviously, is not to send our congregations and workers into a "funk," because we are not experiencing the same success that our forebears did. Such a gloomy result would do no one any good!

Rather, it is to give thanks for God's blessings on those early efforts, explore what powered our ancestors to work as they did and discover what we can learn from them for our responsibilities today.

Here's what we have planned. **January 27 will be "Church Worker Recruitment Sunday,"** when we affirm our workers, pray for them and for new ones to take up the challenge, identify church work candidates, and begin to gather the funds to make their education possible. The Gospel for that day guides the way as we hear Jesus say, "Follow me," to the fishermen by the seashore.

"Anniversary Sunday" will be February 17. We are urging and inviting all congregations to use a similar worship service to express our oneness in Christ, give thanks for God's blessings in the past, and to go into the future drawing on the theme of the first devotion at the first convention: "Following in Faith!"

The third celebration component will be the **"Circuit Convocations" on the week-ends in the Easter season.** We invite laity and professional church workers to turn out for these gatherings

Worship and Bible study will inspire us; vignettes of past missionary heroes will encourage us; and circuit leaders will share their blueprints for mission to mobilize us for outreach.

Looking back can indeed help us look ahead! When Israel was in exile in Babylon because of their unfaithfulness, God told

them to look back in order that they might go ahead!

"Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham, your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many." (Isaiah 51:2,3).

Israel's past communicated a valuable lesson — if God could multiply one lonely couple to be a multitude, surely He can help them in exile. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14)

In an earlier chapter, He used history to make another point. He uses the exodus from Egypt, that miraculous saving event that got them out of the

We will discover that what enabled our ancestors in the faith was the same God in whom we are called to put our trust.

Amazingly, we have something more to look back on than a 90-year-old woman having a baby and a nation walking through a sea opened up by a lifted rod.

Our history includes God himself becoming a human being, living as a servant, dying as a sacrificial lamb, and rising from the dead — to provide deliverance from our bondage to fear and our slavery to sin.

Nothing could be more surprising and liberating than this, but the God who did this in Jesus Christ is the object of our faith.

That's the really "new thing" from our history that makes the future an invitation to enter!

Our context may be different today than in the 50s and 60s, but since our God is the same and he remains faithful, we can engage the culture.

The culture may not encourage us to go to church and pursue the path of faith, but God's faithfulness and our need for forgiveness, hope, and power do.

What our changeless God offers to each of us is just what meets our needs perfectly.

Indeed the cultural context today becomes our opportunity to stir one another up to faith and good works, encourage one

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land of slavery, to provide the imagery for a new deliverance He is going to effect for them from Babylon.

However, He adds, that this new rescue will be so superior, so spectacular compared to the old one, that they should even forget the old one!

"Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: 'Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.'" (Isaiah 43: 16-19)

As I reflect on the challenges before us in the District, I am convinced that a look back at our history can be instructive and empowering.

another not to grow faint in our faith or weary in our resolve to do what's right, but to keep the faith, to live on its basis and to share it with whomever we can in as winsome and persuasive ways as we can.

In that hopeful spirit, we have established **Servants for the Future**, an Endowment Fund, to provide necessary support to prepare future leaders for the church's mission. Your prayers and gifts are coveted as we seek to gather \$1,000,000 in gifts to establish this fund. This will help us move into the future God is opening before us.

May our planned anniversary activities help us to look back so that we can go forward. May we see that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever," (Hebrews 13:8) and, "the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever." (Psalm 106:1) How can we go wrong when our faith is riveted on such a God as this?

Anniversary Event Highlights

**January 27:
Church Worker
Recruitment Sunday**

**February 17:
Anniversary Sunday**

**Easter season weekends:
Circuit Convocations**

*Serving,
Assisting,
Encouraging
Congregations in Ministry*



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.

Lutheran LIFE is the official newspaper of the Florida-Georgia District/Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Lutheran LIFE is designed to inform LCMS church and school members of the activities, the personalities and resources offered by the Synod and the District. Lutheran LIFE may also provide a forum for Lutherans to express their views and ideas on a wide range of topics. We welcome and encourage editorials, emphasizing that the views and opinions expressed are not necessarily shared by the editors or District or Synod personnel. Lutheran LIFE is published monthly, with occasional combined bimonthly issues. Editorials, press releases and photos are encouraged and must be received at Lutheran LIFE publication offices no later than the 10th of the month prior to the publication date. While we make every attempt to use submitted information in the next issue of LIFE, space considerations prevent us from guaranteeing that stories will be used immediately. Advertising is welcome; information is available from our production office. Changes of address or new subscriber information should be directed to our production office as well.

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