

## Spanish-Language Devotions Available

*Portales de Oración*, the Spanish-language version of the *Portals of Prayer* daily devotional magazine from Concordia Publishing House, is now available for individual purchase or annual subscription. Each daily devotion includes Bible reading, brief meditations, and a prayer.

*Portales de Oración* is written in Spanish, not translated

from the English version of the magazine. Complete product details can be found at [www.cph.org/magazines](http://www.cph.org/magazines).

CPH offers special rates for bulk purchases of the Spanish-language devotions.

At the time of this release, bulk pricing was set at \$1.25 per copy for orders of 25-74; \$1.00 per copy for order of 75 or more;

and full cases (160 copies per case) for \$120. Shipping is additional, and CPH will ship directly to mission locations.

For more details, contact Customer Service at 800-325-3040. The offer is not available online.

Concordia Publishing House is the publisher of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. □

## LCMS President Responds to Findings of Religious Affiliations Study

In response to the recently issued American Religious Identification Survey, Dr. Gerald B. Kieschnick, president of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, issued this statement:

According to a study released March 9 by the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), the number of Americans who call themselves Christians has dropped more than 11 percent since ARIS conducted its first survey in 1990. In just 18 years, despite an increase of nearly 50 million adults to the U.S. population, almost all religious denominations have lost members. Equally, if not more alarming, is the reported increase in the percentage of people who claim to have no religion, now reported to be 15 percent, up from 8 percent in 1990.

For the LCMS, this study is a reminder of the importance of our mission, succinctly articulated in the LCMS mission statement adopted in 1998, which, stated in part, is "vigorously to make known the love of Christ by word and deed within our churches, communities, and the world." We understand our mission is important, not for the sake of reversing church membership trends in our nation, but for the sake of Christ, who came to reverse the destiny of people's lives from despair to hope, from sorrow to joy, from hell to heaven.

The LCMS remains committed to proclaiming the good news of hope, life, and salvation through Jesus Christ. For declining trends of church

membership do not indicate any decline in the love of Jesus Christ for the people of this world, a message that the people of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod want their neighbors to know "His Love is Here for You."

Accordingly, the LCMS in 2004 officially adopted Ablaze!, a faith-sharing movement begun in 2002 which includes a goal of sharing the Gospel with 100 million unreached or uncommitted people in the United States and around the world by 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Since that time, more than 9 million people have heard the Good News of Jesus Christ from someone in our country or in other parts of the world connected with Ablaze! — a family member, friend, co-worker, or even a stranger to the hearer. Furthermore, millions more worldwide have learned of God's message of salvation throughout the 162-year history of the LCMS. Without the working of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel in these faith-sharing efforts, the percentages cited above of people who claim to have no religion would undoubtedly be even higher.

The number of those who call themselves Christians in our country may continue to decrease in the future. But the mission of the LCMS remains steadfast in the true and certain knowledge that Jesus Christ is the rock on which God's church is built. And even the gates of hell shall not prevail against it! (Matthew 16:18). □

## Five CUS Schools Will Offer Free Tuition to Veterans

Beginning this fall, eligible veterans of the U.S. armed forces receiving full Chapter 33 benefits can earn a graduate or undergraduate degree tuition-free from at least five of the Synod's 10 Concordia University System (CUS) schools nationwide. Housing and other fees still apply, however.

Under the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, veterans and other qualified military personnel are eligible to receive a subsidy for tuition that is equivalent to the highest tuition of any public institution in the state. Under the national program, half of the difference between a CUS school's tuition and the veteran's subsidy is covered by the university, and the other half will come from the federal government through the Yellow Ribbon Program.

The benefit applies only to those qualified veterans who

are accepted to and enroll as full-time graduate or undergraduate students.

"Concordia University is proud to partner with the federal government to provide the maximum benefit to our veterans so that they may fulfill their dream of obtaining a bachelor's or a master's degree," said Dr. Mark Wahlers, provost of Concordia University-Portland, OR.

"Through our numerous faculty members who have served our forces, we have a history of supporting the ambitions of the individuals who serve our country. Helping veterans achieve a degree, particularly in these challenging economic times, is the least that Concordia can do to thank our veterans for their service.

CUS schools participating in the program are:

- Concordia College-Bronxville; 800-937-2655; [admission@concordia-ny.edu](mailto:admission@concordia-ny.edu).

- Concordia University-Portland; 800-321-9371; [admissions@cu-portland.edu](mailto:admissions@cu-portland.edu).

- Concordia University-Chicago; 800-285-2668; [crfadmiscuchicago.edu](mailto:crfadmiscuchicago.edu).

- Concordia University Nebraska; 800-535-5494; [admiss@cune.edu](mailto:admiss@cune.edu).

- Concordia University Wisconsin; 888-628-9472; [admissions@cuw.edu](mailto:admissions@cuw.edu).

Three other CUS schools are considering taking part in the program:

- Concordia College-Selma; 334-874-5700; [webmaster@concordiaselma.edu](mailto:webmaster@concordiaselma.edu);

- Concordia University-St. Paul; 800-333-4705; [admissions@csp.edu](mailto:admissions@csp.edu); and

- Concordia University Texas; 800-865-4282; [admissions@concordia.edu](mailto:admissions@concordia.edu).

For more information about the Synod's 10 Concordia colleges and universities nationwide, visit [www.lcms.org/universities](http://www.lcms.org/universities) or call (800) 248-1930, Ext. 1252. □

## LCMS Directors Confront 'Financial Realities'

The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod Board of Directors adopted a number of resolutions at its February to advance the work of the national church body, as well as LCMS congregations, districts and schools.

In a move to lay the groundwork for the Synod's 2009-10 budget that starts July 1, the Board acted to freeze salaries at the current fiscal year's level for the 525-some national-Synod employees worldwide. The Board also resolved to eliminate the bonus budget for the year and adjusted salary range mid-points upward by 2.54%, an adjustment that does not affect current employees' rates of pay.

According to Ronald P. Schultz, the Synod's chief administrative officer, the LCMS accounting staff projects an approximate \$1.2 million

reduction in revenue for fiscal year 2010. That represents a combination of anticipated reductions in the following areas:

- \$600,000 in district pledges to the national Synod;
- \$250,000 in endowment and split-interest income;
- \$100,000 in unrestricted support; and
- \$200,000 in support from synodwide corporate entities.

He explained that the projection will reduce the Synod's unrestricted revenues from \$21.48 million in the current fiscal year, to \$20.259 million for the coming year.

Schultz added that as Synod executives develop a budget for the Board's consideration at its May meeting, "Our focus will be on funding program and ministry initiatives that support congregations and districts to the highest degree possible." □

## Reconcilers Complete Training

A group of 18 laypersons and professional church workers from throughout The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod participated in a January 12-16 dispute-resolution process training session in St. Louis.

Since 1993, reconcilers — four per district — have been integral to the dispute-resolution process in the Synod. Their roles are to resolve differences between congregations and between congregations and their workers, questions of procedures in excommunication cases, and issues related to removal of workers by a congregation or district. The reconcilers also comprise a pool for selecting panels in cases of appeal.

"There will always be disputes in the church," said Dr. Raymond Hartwig, secretary of the Synod and overseer of the resolution process. "The issue is

how the church handles them. Our reconcilers are trained to approach the issue spiritually, which enables us to bring people together under the cross."

Differences were resolved informally in the early years of the Synod, without a defined process, according to Hartwig. Over time, a system developed to adjudicate disputes through courtroom-style procedures and the parties often engaged legal counsel. Hartwig says the current dispute resolution relies on reconcilers who work with the disputing parties in the spirit of Matthew 18.

Hartwig emphasized that the reconciliation process is strictly confidential. Neither the reconciler nor the parties are allowed to publicize any cases or details. When a dispute process is completed, the reconciler must submit a report to the district or Synod secretary

— and that information remains confidential.

If the parties are unable to achieve reconciliation with the help of a reconciler, a complainant can appeal to the secretary of the Synod. The Synod's bylaws outline procedures for, first, a dispute-resolution panel of three reconcilers drawn at random from throughout the Synod. If necessary, a decision can be appealed to an appeal panel of three district presidents who determine if the hearing was fair and the decision was reasonable. If successfully appealed, the case is reheard by a review panel of three reconcilers, beyond which there is no appeal.

"The intent is to resolve an issue early versus later," Hartwig commented. "We may see, at most, a dozen panels in a year." □