

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

## Trip to Tallahassee



## LIFELINES

by Rev. Dr. Gerhard Michael Jr.  
President, Florida-Georgia District

April 4-8 was Children's Week at the Florida State Capitol. Numerous events were scheduled by organizers to raise consciousness of and support for legislation that would impact positively the welfare of children and their families. I was privileged to be there for a portion of the week and play a small role in one of the rallies on the Capitol steps.

Since what takes place in our state capitol influences the lives of the citizens of our state, and since we are called to live both as citizens of heaven and citizens of the earth, I would like to use my trip to Tallahassee as a framework to share some ideas to encourage you for your life as God's people in the world.

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As a sign of the Florida-Georgia District's commitment to be concerned about our life in both realms (the civic as well as the churchly), we are members of Florida Impact. Florida Impact is an organization composed of many churches and other nonprofit organizations dedicated to work for the well-being of the poor and hungry. Under the effective leadership of Dr. Debra Susie, it seeks to influence legislation that is sensitive to the needs of the poor and assists communities in responding to those needs.

This year much of their effort has been directed to promoting the Summer Children's Nutrition Bill. This legislation develops policy to utilize already existing federal tax dollars to provide meals in the summer for those children entitled to free and reduced priced lunches during the school year. For instance, in 2004, Florida communities left unused more than \$106,000,000 federal tax dollars in Washington set aside for this purpose.

I recognize that when it comes to enacting legislation, differences of opinion often exist as to what is in the best interest of all concerned. I do not believe that these differences, however, should deter us from participating and seeking to do what will reflect our Christian values and concerns.

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As part of the Children's Week's festivities, 40-some students from our Christian Day School in Tallahassee, Epiphany Lutheran School, were present with us for the Tuesday rally. We began with a trip to the top of the capitol building, where we all got a tremendous view of the surrounding area. Even though these students live in the Tallahassee area, a number of them had not been to the capitol building before.

Under the excellent leadership of their principal, Lawson Smith, and teachers, the children were very well-mannered, were attentive to directions and tuned in to the devotional time we had with them there on the top floor of the Capitol.

In my words to them, I drew on their name, Epiphany Lutheran, to recall the story of the wise men who were led by the star to worship the infant Christchild. I suggested that their name reminds them that because they were followers of Jesus, the light of the world, they were now his lights in the world. In fact, Jesus encourages them and us, "Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

I suggested to them that they should let their light shine in the way they do their school work, the way they treat one another, the way they take

care of their chores at home, the way they talk with other people. The same certainly goes for us adults as well. As Christ's agents in the world, what we

When meeting with each of them, I thanked them for their service on behalf of the rest of us, lifting up governmental service as an important way

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Following our devotional time with the children on the top floor, Dr. Susie and her aids took us all down to the main floor where the children were privileged to meet for a few minutes with two of our Lutheran legislators. David Murzin and Marsha Bowen graciously came out of the session to encourage the children, pose for some pictures with them, and sign a few autographs. Afterwards, the children had the chance to sit in the gallery for a few minutes to get a glimpse of how our legislature operates. Who knows, but perhaps one or the other of them will be led to become involved in local, state, or national government. Having legislators and others working in the area of government who are informed by Christian convictions and values is a blessing for the entire commonwealth.

At the rally on the Capitol steps, children sang, a delightful recitation was given, speeches were made, including a very articulate one by a young man who battles autism, as well as one by me. While the legislators were not present since they were in session, the rally still had its role to play in encouraging citizens to be engaged in promoting those initiatives which would serve the needs of our children and their families.

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For me, perhaps the most meaningful aspect of my trip to Tallahassee was the privilege to make our way to the offices of each of our Lutheran legislators. In addition to Representatives Murzin and Bowen mentioned above, Fred Brummer from Apopka serves in the House. Interestingly, all three have ties to our Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Representative Murzin spoke of how he was involved in his congregation in Pensacola in planning for some Youth Servant Events to help people recover from Hurricane Ivan which devastated his church and large portions of Pensacola from which he comes.

Representative Brummer was excited about his pastor and family, Rev. and Mrs. Donald Moore, who had just welcomed their second child by adoption. Representative Bowen reflected how she had gone to kindergarten at Grace-Winter Haven, and had sent her three children to their school.

for people to live out their Christian calling, encouraging them to consider supporting the Children's Summer Nutrition bill, and then offered a prayer for each of them as they sought to carry out their responsibilities in a way that would bring glory to God and serve to improve life in the Sunshine State.

Among you, our readers, I am sure that there are differing political persuasions, and differing perspectives on what will be best for us in a variety of areas: education, taxation, transportation and the like. My point is not to push one perspective or another, but to suggest that all of us do well to exercise our citizenship, "seeking the welfare of the city," as Jeremiah wrote to his people approximately 600 years before Christ. I am encouraging us to be involved in one way or another, not escaping because we are convinced the world is evil!

In a democracy we have the privilege of not just being taxpayers and law-abiding citizens, but also participants in the process to influence and advocate, sharing our thoughts on what we believe is best for all. While no one of us can be knowledgeable about all the legislation before our elected leaders on the local, county, state or national levels, it seems to me that we do well to seek at least some understanding in some areas, that we might contribute our two cents worth, in the confidence that collectively we will be able to serve the greater good.

Further, let my trip to Tallahassee lift up an important Lutheran emphasis: the Christian's vocation. According to this teaching, we have the privilege and responsibility to live out the meaning of our baptism in four spheres: our family, the workplace, the community, and congregation. In baptism, Christ has called us to be His own. In the various spheres where God has placed us, He now wants us to demonstrate our Christian identity by our attitudes and actions, by our words and relationships. This is what gives our lives purpose and enables us to contribute to the well-being of our world.

I am grateful to our legislators whose Christian convictions have led to their involvement in the realm of politics. My hope is their participation may encourage each of us to take our vocation in the world seriously. By our own involvement, may we each serve our neighbors and so contribute to the common good.

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# LUTHERAN LIFE

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