

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

# Is the World Winning?



**LIFE  
LINES**

Gerhard C. Michael, Jr.  
District President

During the last few months, I have had two disappointments as your District President that have led me to ask, "Is the world winning?"

Before I share the disappointments that triggered the question, let us be clear on what I understand "the world" to be.

It is not the definition that underlies a most familiar Bible passage, "God so loved the world, . . ." where "world" refers to all the people God loves—the whole of humanity. Another passage uses the word in a similar way: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29)

Rather, in my question, "the world" stands for that which opposes the way of the Lord, the collective self-centeredness of us people. By nature, each of us is turned in on himself. We are all sinners. The "world" represents that which is alienated from God, that which is living apart from him and in opposition to his way.

A passage which was recently read in our lessons illustrates

this: "Do not love the world or the things of the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world. And the world and its desires are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever." (I John 2:15-17)

By God's grace, we come to new life in Jesus Christ, so that we are set free from bondage to the desires of the flesh, corporately expressed as the "world." God's grace transfers us from the opposing side to his team.

The reality remains, however, that we are still in the

report for fiscal year 2008, which is printed elsewhere in this issue. As I reviewed the record of our congregations, and particularly the per communicant giving, I rejoiced in quite a number of the congregations' performances. There was evidence of sacrificial, first-fruits giving, reflecting a missionary spirit which puts others first, a wonderful example for all of us!

Unfortunately, there were any number of congregations which gave little or nothing to our common efforts. Our District work program is designed to build us up to share the good news with others and to actually underwrite programs that share the good news with others. The

and peace Jesus' triumph gives. Let us not let the world win!



*My second disappointment was felt when I saw the small*

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number of congregations that participated in the nominations process for selecting a new District president and vice presidents. When I realized that only 29 congregations out of 190 had submitted nominations, which translates into less than one-sixth, I wondered, "Is the world winning?"

Unquestionably we live in an "anti-institutional age." The research of Robert Putnam, ably presented in his book, *Bowling Alone*, documents the reality. We are highly individualistic and find it very inviting to detach ourselves from others, relax our commitment to and involvement in the corporate structures of society. It seems that an "anti-institutional climate" pervades our current culture.

partnership in ministry and teamwork in sharing the Gospel.

Paul spells it out clearly in Phil. 2:2-4, "Make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being of full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others."

Personally, I know what a struggle it is to be other-directed, to reflect the mind of Christ, but I ask and encourage you not to give up the battle, not to give in to the enemy's enticements, not to let the world win in our lives, but to join me in seeking to live on the basis of what Christ has done and won. "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Cor. 15:57)

John encourages us to live on the basis of God's word as he reminds us, "For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes Jesus is the Son of God?" (I John 5:3-5)

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world, and so the world's ways can influence us. The magnified desires of the flesh expressed as "the world" can tempt us powerfully. (Think of the power of greed in recent years with the real estate boom and the banking industry.) Our old sinful nature can be awakened by those temptations and be led to give in to them. Our souls become a battlefield, and we are led to ask, "Is the world winning?"



The two disappointments I have recently felt lead me to ask that question with reference to our district. Let me share those disappointments with you and why they have triggered my question.

*One of the disappointments was aroused by the financial*

key Biblical text which underlies our District's values statement is John 3:16, "God so loved the world. . . ." We are seeking to be a mission district.

I do not know what the budget of each of our congregations is and therefore do not know what percentage their gifts to the District's mission budget amount to. If the con-

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gregations of the District are "tithing first fruits" (10%) of their gifts to the District/Synod, some of our congregations are living on next to nothing! (For your information, we pass 20% of unrestricted congregational gifts on to the Synod for its work.)

My purpose in sharing this disappointment is not to judge our congregations but rather to awaken them to live victoriously, to demonstrate in their personal and congregational stewardship the fact that Jesus has defeated the world's self-centered ways by his total and perfect self-giving. He shares that victory with us and asks us to pass it on through our personal witness, our service, and our sacrificial, generous giving.

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Let us help one another base our lives on Jesus' perfect love and his ultimate decisive victory. Let us so order our congregations that they reflect the love and confidence, the hope

What is disappointing to me is the reality that our marching orders are not to be determined by what prevails in the culture. The culture indeed provides the context where we are called to carry out our assignments, but it is not to dictate what we do.

**Instead of being self-centered, we are to be directed to the other, "Love one another as I have loved you." Life in our Florida-Georgia District provides a wonderful opportunity to practice such mutual care, partnership in ministry and teamwork in sharing the Gospel.**

What we are called to do is to take our orders from the Lord Jesus. His first call to the fishermen by the sea was a simple "Follow me," (Matthew 4:16), but he reiterated that call again and again.

By calling us to himself—and uniting us with himself in Holy Baptism (Rom. 6:3-14; I Cor. 12:12f; Gal. 3:26-28; Col. 2:8-3:17) and fortifying that union through the gift of Holy Communion (I Cor. 10:16f)—Jesus is empowering us to think and live corporately: "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (I Cor. 12:27)

My friends, Christ has risen! May his victory so inspire us that we live confidently on the basis of it. May it inspire us to overcome our personal and congregational self-centeredness and thus defeat the world. May it inspire us to work together in our District, that many more might know his victory. With a risen Lord, there is no need for "the world" to win! We can go forward with hope and determination united with our brothers and sisters, for in Christ the victory is ours!

*-gcm*



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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