

FROM THE PRESIDENT

A Test for Our Congregations



LIFE LINES
Gerhard C. Michael, Jr.
District President

every member a missionary, with all of us working together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, empowered by His Gospel to share His love." Are we making progress in fulfilling this vision?

How might we test whether our congregations are seen as "missions?" How might we assess that our vision is not just a slogan but a goal we are actually beginning to implement?

One way, it seems to me, is to ask whether the members of our congregations see themselves as missionaries, people who speak of Jesus with others. How well do they witness to who Jesus is and what he has done?

Another way to test whether our congregations are missionary in intention is to ask how well we welcome strangers and newcomers to our worship, educational and other activities. Do we help them sense that we are glad they have come and have something to share with them?

Perhaps another way is to look at our budgets. Is the money we want to go beyond ourselves — for missions — a significant, first-fruits portion,

the focus of our congregational life, whether it was focused inward or outward. It asked whether our activities — worship, fellowship, educational programs, board and committee meetings — were designed to keep the organization running or whether they were intent on helping the members genuinely live their faith throughout the week.

With the *Ablaze* emphasis in our church body seeking

they are seeking to live out their vocations?

Imagine with me for a while what our congregations might look like, if we saw them as true missionary outposts with a major purpose being to equip their members for the Monday through Saturday routine. Worship would feature the faithful preaching and celebrating the saving work of God, so that the members could go forth from worship with a renewed sense

sent in the congregation and beyond, it would foster an awareness that we want to live out our entire lives as Christian people. The encouragement that comes from intercessory prayer would strengthen members' resolve to put their faith into action.

□□□□□

It is my conviction that Christians who seek to live as the people of God throughout the week — if faith is just a Sunday thing, what good is it? — will be surprised by the many opportunities to witness which naturally arise because their faithful service elicits them.

So, one test that I would like to ask our congregations to take to assess whether they are genuinely a missional congregation is to audit whether their current activities are designed to help their members live out their faith on a daily basis. The key concern is not whether we worship or not, whether we do Bible study or not or whether we have fellowship groups or not, but whether what happens in our worship, our study sessions and our fellowship activities serves to instruct and empower our people for their witness and service in the world.

In talking with a few people about this type of focus, I get the feeling that many times our congregations get preoccupied with budgets, taking care of buildings and maintaining our institutions. All these things need to be done, but my hope is that we take care of our buildings so that they are pleasant places for equipping us for our work in the world, our budgets fund

While we normally think of tests as something for students to take, I think it is probably good for us to expand the circle to include our congregations.

If I look at tests from the perspective of a teacher, their purpose is not to fail anybody, but rather to assess whether one has learned the material that has been taught, to identify areas where the teaching or learning has been inadequate

Is our congregational life focused inward or outward? Are our activities — worship, fellowship, educational programs, board and committee meetings — designed to keep the organization running or are they intent on helping members genuinely live their faith throughout the week?

and to provide a basis for moving forward in the educational process. It is meant to be an aid to education!

In our Florida-Georgia District, we have been emphasizing for some years now that "every congregation is a mission and

or is our budget lopsided with the focus on taking care of ourselves?

□□□□□

Recently I read an article which raised the question about

to inspire and empower our members to witness to Jesus Christ, the author's question, in my opinion, is most pertinent. It is true, I believe, that we Missouri Synod Lutherans do not lack the opportunities to witness to 50,000,000 people in this country over the next 11 years. We are strategically placed next to all kinds of people to whom we can witness.

To illustrate this, think of how many people live and work in your neighborhood. Those in our cities have countless people who are next to them. They work alongside of them; they attend school alongside of them; they golf beside them; they live beside them. We are placed where the witnessing opportunities are.

The truth of the above paragraph is re-enforced by the fact that the church is not just the professional church workers but the whole people of God, both clergy and laity. By virtue of our presence in our several callings at home, in the workplace, the community, and our congregations, and by virtue of the fact that we are Christians 24 hours a day, seven days a week, we do not lack for the opportunity to communicate God's love innumerable times over.

□□□□□

As a consequence of the ubiquitous nature of the Christian church, the test for the Christian congregation, it seems to me, is this: how well are we equipping our members to witness to our Lord Jesus Christ? How well are we preparing them to carry out their vocations as Christians? How well are we encouraging and supporting them in this endeavor, or is life within the congregation so focused on sustaining the institution that we fail to equip our members for the witness opportunities which naturally come to them because

of their identity as children of God and a renewed commitment to living out this identity throughout the coming week.

There would be training for witnessing, because witnessing has specific content, or it would not be able to communicate "grace to those who hear." The training would teach our people the content of our faith and the skills needed so that the sharing could be done graciously.

Educational programs would seek to equip people for their lives in the various spheres of responsibility in which they find themselves. Classes for parents to gain skills to carry out their responsibilities toward their children more effectively would be one example. Another focus might be Christian citizenship and how one might

be involved beyond voting in elections. Business ethics would be another topic.

Support groups could offer people the opportunity to wrestle with issues unique to their occupations. Medical professionals could meet together to help them deal with advancing technology in the medical field even as they seek to grow in their skills in caring for patients as Christian professionals. If a congregation had a significant number of teachers or engineers, opportunities for them to collaborate in addressing their challenges as Christians might be helpful.

Additionally, it seems to me that as a congregation includes in its prayers, petitions for the various occupations repre-

programs that strengthen us for our service as God's people and our institutional life (our Boards and committees) reflects our desire to help us live in the world as people of God who witness to his grace in Jesus Christ.

No matter where your congregation may be at this time in its institutional lifestyle, can we all work together to direct our activities in such a way that we are swept up into God's gracious action for our salvation and then be sent into the world as agents of his grace? Doing that would be to pass the test of being a missionary congregation.

-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.

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.

District President Rev. Dr. Gerhard Michael Jr.	Publisher, Executive Editor and District Public Relations Director John List
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	Editor-in-Chief Eileen Bishop
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	Art Director & Layout Coordinator Chris Utech
	<i>Serving, Assisting, Encouraging Congregations in Ministry</i>