

Faith Sharing Stories Change our Congregational Outreach Culture

The Florida-Georgia District adopted four Ablaze goals:

- Sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with 2 million or more people by the year 2017,
- Starting 200 or more new missions,
- Strengthening 75 or more existing congregations
- Sending 10,000 or more of our members into the mission field either locally or internationally.

Each of these goals is powerfully finding its way into the ministry of our local congregations. The purpose of this month's article is to underscore the importance of intentionally sharing our faith.



This is a true story that occurred in one of our congregations. I have changed the name of the young boy.

Mark was a ten-year-old boy who was enrolled in one of our Christian Day Schools. His pastor told the class about how each of them were to be a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. The pastor took a multi-colored witnessing bracelet and explained how each of these colors told the story of Christ's unconditional love for people. The pastor gave each of the students a witnessing bracelet and told them to share the story of Jesus with someone and then give them the bracelet.

Time went on, all things were normal and Mark had worn his bracelet again the morning he and his mom went to the mall. Upon returning to their car, Mark noticed a truck speeding across the parking lot towards their car. Mark's mom opened the car, got in and had not noticed the truck barreling her way. Mark saw the truck speeding up with no change in direction. Inside the truck was a young man who had a medical problem. Instead of stepping on

the brake his foot had hit the gas pedal.

Instead of stopping he was speeding up and ended up plowing into Mark's car. Mark, still standing outside his mother's car, witnessed a head-on collision. He quickly glanced and saw that his mother was breathing, alive, but somewhat dazed.

He instinctively ran to the truck and on the passenger side saw a teenage girl. He asked if she was alright. She repeatedly said, "I'm sorry, I am so sorry, my boy friend didn't mean it ... it's our fault ... I'm sorry."

Mark looked down and saw the bracelet. He said to the young girl, "Can I tell you a story? Sometimes things happen that we didn't mean ... it's like this marbled color on my bracelet, it's spoiled, it's not as it was intended to be. God calls that sin; but the good news is God forgives us for things like this.

"The red color on my bracelet reminds me that Jesus died, that's the color of His blood that was shed for you and me to forgive us. God paid for this sin you don't have to.

"Blue is for belief in this promise of God that Jesus has paid the price.

"Golden yellow is the color of Heaven and reminds me of all of God's promises to us."

Mark continued, "Here, take my bracelet. These are God's promises to you, and I think you need this now."

The girl, through a flood of tears, gladly received Mark's story and his bracelet and asked if he would share it with her boy friend. When the boy returned to his truck, Mark again shared the story of God forgiveness and love and again tears flowed as Mark simply shared what his pastor had taught him one day in a classroom.

On Monday Mark went back to school, looked up his pastor and asked, "Pastor can I have another one of those bracelets?"

The pastor asked, "What did you do loose it?"

Mark replied, "Yes — to two people who ran their truck into my mother's car."

Needless to say, this pastor gave Mark a few witnessing bracelets and encouraged him to come back when he needed more.



After reading through this article I ask you to consider the following:

1. How is your school or congregation training your students and members to share naturally

who Jesus Christ is? What outreach training will you provide in 2009?

2. How can we record and receive such stories as a congregation or school so as to encourage other members to share their faith? How can these stories be shared (in bible class, worship, classroom, newsletter, sermons, testimonial, etc.)?

I hope you will consider becoming an Ablaze Partner Congregation or School that will offer intentional outreach training to your school students and congregational members. I also hope that you will provide

multiple ways to receive and record such faith sharing stories.

It is my belief that such stories will encourage many others to share their faith, offer a prayer, and be a genuine Christian witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that by sharing such stories our culture of mission and outreach will become more intentional and natural.

If you would like to become an Ablaze Partner Congregation or School please contact me at dkallesen@flga-lcms.org or call 407.857.5556 ext 2. If you would like to place an order for a witnessing bracelet, contact me. □

Ablaze! Ambassadors Program Expands

Two years ago, Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod President Gerald Kieschnick invited dozens of church members to "ambassadors" for *Ablaze!*, the worldwide initiative to share the Gospel with 100 million non-Christians by 2017.

In accepting the invitation, they agreed to give presentations about the effort in congregations, schools and other venues to encourage fellow Lutherans to share their faith with family, friends, co-workers — even strangers.

One of those who accepted the invitation is former Lutheran Women's Missiary League President Ida Mall. She took that step because of her "passion for outreach" and because it fit

well with her personal mission statement: "To actively seek opportunities to share my faith in Jesus Christ with others."

Since joining the inaugural ambassadors program two years ago, Mall and 35 other former district and national Synod

LCMS and Lutheran Hour Ministries executives. He described them as "people of influence" who have "national vision and national reach."

The original Ambassadors are being asked to stay with the program as it grows; 27 more



leaders have touted *Ablaze!* in countless LCMS churches and classrooms, sharing the initiative's vision "slowly but surely," according to Dr. Richard Bimler, past president of Wheat Ridge Ministries and a member of the *Ablaze!* Ambassadors Planning Team. As team members, Bimler and several others provide leadership and direction to ambassadors, encouraging their ongoing participation.

"One great thing about it is that it enables us 'veterans' in the LCMS to continue to be pumped up to help focus our church body on Jesus Christ and what He has done for us, and celebrate what He is doing through us and so many others," Bimler said.

Rev. Scott Snow, director of national outreach with LCMS World Mission who has been involved with the Ambassadors program from the beginning, said those currently serving are proven LCMS leaders and include former district presidents and LWML presidents as well as

Lutheran leaders have been invited to join the effort beginning next year.

Among new developments, each Ambassador will be asked to make an annual presentation to his or her own congregation, as well as to two or three other groups, with an average of 100 people attending each time. That means the program could conceivably reach 20,000 people a year, according to Snow — 20,000 more Lutherans who might be encouraged to share their faith as part of *Ablaze!*

Past LWML President Linda Reiser, who also serves on the Ambassadors Planning Team, noted that the program's volunteers have great potential to meet, and perhaps even surpass, that goal.

"I think the Ambassadors are a wonderful group of individuals, highly visible and very significant leaders who bring integrity, leadership, and encouragement to others about faith-sharing opportunities we all encounter daily." □

LHM Advent Devotions Now Available

The 2008 Advent devotions from Lutheran Hour Ministries are now available at www.adventdevotions.net.

LHM produced two versions of devotions: one targeted to long-time Christians and the other to seekers or new believers. *Come to the Manger* helps Christians slow down in the rush of the Christmas season and reflect daily on Christ. *Christmas Conversations* takes the skeptical reader

on a journey through spiritual questions, Christ's birth and the Lord's plan of salvation.

Churches and schools can download and print as many copies as needed and include their service schedule, contact information and dates and times for special Christmas events.

The church version, *Come to the Manger*, is available in English and Spanish as a customizable PDF, to listen online or via podcast and to read online. *Come to the Manger* will

be available to read online in Chinese.

Christmas Conversations, for seekers, is available in English and Spanish as a customizable PDF.

Churches and schools can also use the theme and visuals of either devotion to enhance their Advent celebrations. For both versions of devotions, LHM provides downloadable bulletin shells, PowerPoint templates, Web banner ads and images of the cover art. □