The Concord

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Hein-Fry, Aus Lectures:

Seminary Community will Benefit from Sample, Willimon

By Robert O. Smith
Managing Editor, The Concord

Ah, 'tis the season for lectures at Luther Seminary.

But don't think it's going to be boring. If you had the privilege of attending the Hein-Fry lectures presented by Tex Sample, you've already had a taste of what's to come.

On Feb. 17, Sample, an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church, offered a three part lecture, "Class Matters: Mission Across Unseen Divides," that discussed what it means to be a church in mission within a society and world divided along class lines. With his characteristic straight-talking style, Sample urged church leaders to find those dividing lines and be sure they're on the right side.

The next lecture series, to be held March 14-15, will be offered by Dr. William Willimon, professor of Christian ministry at Duke Divinity School and Dean of the Duke University Chapel. Presenting the 21st Annual Aus Memorial Lectures on Evangelism, Willimon, under the theme "The Irresistibility of Jesus," will discuss topics such as "Why Lutherans Find it so Difficult to Evangelize."

Attendees can expect Willimon to offer more of the direct approach taken by Sample. Recognized as one of the twelve most preachers in the world, Willimon has authored forty-five books, including Worship as Pastoral Care, and, with Duke ethicist Stanley Hauerwas, Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony.

Community Forum Addresses Hospitality Issues

By Scott A. Johnson
Associate Editor, The Concord

"Hospitality is not optional: it is constituent of Christian life," said Professor Steven Ramp at a Community Forum addressing hospitality at Luther Seminary. The forum, second of a two-stage meeting, was held Tuesday, February 15th in the technology classroom in Northwestern Hall.

Approximately 35 students, faculty, and staff gathered to address practical ways to put into practice a statement from "Vision and Expectations," Luther Seminary's statement on community: "We welcome all who come as Christ among us."

Four community members spoke briefly to begin the meeting. Peter Bartimawus, Jean Justice, Ramp, and Heba William Mussad shared their thoughts on hospitality and what it means to be hospitable on campus. After the initial presentations, attendees were invited to share their comments and reflections. During the group discussion, several faculty, staff, and students admitted both their own insecurities and personal shortcomings regarding hospitality.

Alienation and separation were feelings expressed by several people. Justice, the assistant director of admissions, commented that "there are times when I definitely feel like a stranger, because I'm not Lutheran."

"My learning involves interaction with a culture that is quite different from mine," said Bartimawus, a student from Nigeria in the Islamic Studies program. He illustrated his dilemma by describing a missionary who had separated himself from the very villagers he was supposed to be converting. Once the missionary's daughter died, and the villagers were allowed to see the missionary's human emotions, Bartimawus said, they were able to bridge the culture gap and find common humanity.

"Getting involved in God's ministry makes us so busy we forget God himself," noted Mussad. "Being a pastor is not a job."

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Notes on the Restoration of a ‘Christian’ America

By Robert O. Smith
Managing Editor, The Concord

As this cycle’s political rhetoric is ratcheted up notch by notch, the nation’s Christians are again being tempted by arguments that purport to be in our self-interest, that claim to protect us from the onslaught of our enemies. The current arguments are most often framed in terms of protecting status of the “Judeo-Christian ethic” on which, it is often assumed, the United States was founded.

This “Judeo-Christian ethic,” however, popular phrase may be in the contemporary discussion, is rarely defined. Most people employing the phrase assert that it can be clarified by the “Ten Commandments” (however variously those may be defined).

Such a definition was attempted by Indiana state Rep. Jerry Denbo as he read these ten statements to his colleagues before they voted 92-7 Feb. 7 to pass a bill allowing the commandments to be posted in government buildings, including schools. “If any of you think these are bad principles,” he said after reading, “vote no on the bill.”

In these times of generally recognized moral deficiency, it is not surprising to find appeal to “principles” such as those contained in the Ten Commandments. In the face of Columbine, who would argue with the assertion that killing is just a really great thing to do?

Apart from the obvious American concerns regarding the separation of Church and State, the problems come when these attempts at regaining some “moral compass” are applied to readings of history that tend to change our conception of the “foundations” we are attempting to protect.

Efforts such as these result in a new twist on “sacralization,” what New Testament scholar Cain Hope Felder calls the transposition of an ideological concept into a tenet of religious faith that serves the vested interest of a particular ethnic or racial group.

Sacralization, of course, has long been a central feature of western, but especially North American, Christianity. In this current climate, however, a reverse form of this phenomenon often occurs, with religious values being codified for the psychological benefit of Christians who understand themselves as threatened.

The possible results of these efforts have not escaped the attention of those not benefited by such changes. Take, for instance, the vehement protest of the American Jewish Congress (AJC) against recent efforts by Kentucky State Senator Albert Robinson to restrict the teaching of religion in the colonial era only to Christianity. Calling Robinson’s efforts “an offense against history,” the AJC called on all Kentucky citizens “of good will” to reject “the illusion that [it] is possible to restore a ‘Christian America’.”

While legislation of this sort is likely to be defeated, it is unlikely that most American citizens would flatly reject its underlying historical and moral assumptions. Since followers of Jesus might generally be expected to be willing to listen to the minority in any given situation, the charge that such assumptions are “an offense against history” must be taken seriously.

In the current rhetoric, “Judeo-Christian values” have been flattened to include only the ethical prescriptions of the Ten Commandments and, at times, a limited selection from the Sermon on the Mount. However, this sweeping category is rather more open than selected textual references may imply.

Indeed, “Judeo-Christian values” may be understood as encompassing the various historical manifestations of these two religions. One can reasonably infer from historical realities the core values of any given community (Matt. 7:17-20).

Before one can confidently claim that the United States was founded on “Judeo-Christian values,” one must critically compare its founding documents and ideals to those of the historical communities it is said to emulate.

Perhaps the most enduring value of the United States—as it is stated in the Declaration of Independence—is that all men are created equal. In sharp contrast, the basic Jewish concept of “chosenness” has informed Judeo-Christian thought throughout its history.

Many Christians would be quick to point out that this sort of thinking was, shall we say, modified with the advent of Christianity. Perhaps the most enduring statement of this correction comes from Paul, when he states that, in Christ, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female” (Gal. 3:28).

The problem comes, though, when it is pointed out that universal equality as it was idealized by the “founding fathers” of the United States has never been practiced by the Christian community. While Paul’s state—continued on page 3

The Concord

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The Concord reserves the right to publish, edit, or disregard all submissions. “Letters to the Editor” submissions should be limited to 200 words or less while “Guest Columnist” submissions should not exceed 850 words.
ment may have been put into practice at various points within the ekklesia, it has almost never applied to individuals outside its bounds. Thus, the Judeo-Christian concept of equality doesn't quite seem to match what Thomas Jefferson had in mind.

Many of the same people who would argue that "Judeo-Christian values" provide the foundation for our society would also extol the virtues of free market capitalism. But, while the assertion makes Michael Novak cringe, there is no biblical support for capitalism as a Judeo-Christian economic reality.

While capitalism blesses competition and, at points, necessarily deteriorates into a form of social Darwinism, God specifically commands the Jewish community to not take advantage of its lower classes (Deut 24:21-2). In fact, the early Christian community gives us an example diametrically opposed to the capitalism encouraged by North American economic philosophies and realities (Acts 4:32).

Another of the basic concerns of the new Republic—as embodied in the first ten amendments to its Constitution—was that government should make "no law respecting an establishment of religion" (Amendment 1, 1791). Again, this concern does not square with the historical realities of the Jewish and Christian communities.

While it started out as a scraggly band of desert nomads, the Hebrew community quickly set itself to the goal of establishing a theocracy, or at least a religiously informed monarchy. Naturally, this idea quickly proved itself not worth keeping, but, it seems, some Zionists still haven't quite figured that out.

Again, it would seem that Christianity could improve on the Jewish record. Instead, the Christian community has time and again also ignored God's warning the oppressed should never allow themselves to be the oppressor (Deut. 24:22).

And so we have Constantinian Christianity, that horrible dream from which western Christianity is still attempting to awake. Oh how quickly the dis-establishment became the establishment!

And Luther—whom we on this campus tend to champion as a revolutionary more than a reformer—didn't help matters any. Instead of destroying Christendom, he validated a plethora of princely mini-Christendoms. It was those that brought about the Thirty Years War and the subsequent Treaty of Westphalia—the inauguration of Enlightenment Europe.

And that brings me to my final point—America is the crowning achievement of Enlightenment values, not of any group of religious values. Indeed, it was the failure of religiously informed government—as championed by Luther—that brought about the Enlightenment.

The governmental sanctifying of any one religious belief over another is precisely the problem the Enlightenment intended to overcome. While it may be true that this conviction itself has at times been transformed into a religious value, there can be no ignoring the contribution theocratic notions of government to its foundational claims.

These latest attempts to prove that the United States was founded on "Judeo-Christian values" should rightly fall on deaf ears. Chances are, however, that they won't. It is our responsibility—both as historically informed citizens and as Christians concerned for the well-being of our non-Christian brothers and sisters—to set the record straight and reject not only "the illusion that [it] is possible to restore a 'Christian America'" but the notion that such an America has ever existed.

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Wartburg Seminary To Host "Called To Common Mission" Conference

Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, will host "Mission in Eumenical View," a March 23 conference to explore possibilities created by "Called to Common Mission" (CCM). CCM is a Lutheran proposal for full communion with the Episcopal Church.

Wartburg Seminary is one of eight seminaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). CCM was adopted by the 1999 ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Denver. It will be considered in July by the 2000 General Convention of the Episcopal Church in Denver.

The conference opens at 9:30 a.m., with a Holy Eucharist service at Loche Chapel on the seminary campus. The Rev. Steven L. Ullstad, bishop of the ELCA Northeastern Iowa Synod, Waverly, will preside. The Rev. Christopher Epping, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Iowa, Des Moines, is scheduled to preach.

Following a reception, the program begins with "History: Past and Promise," a presentation by the Rev. Donald S. Armentrout, professor of church history and historical theology, School of Theology, University of the South, Sewanee, Tenn. Armentrout, an ELCA pastor, also serves as associate dean for academic affairs at the university, which is affiliated with the Episcopal Church.

Another presentation, "Congregations: Promises and Possibilities" will follow lunch. The scheduled presenter is the Rev. Cynthia Raush Banks, an Episcopal priest who has served as pastor of a joint Lutheran-Episcopal congregation in Washington, D.C. She is also a member of a local Episcopal Church ecumenical coordinating committee.

A dialogue with all presenters will conclude the conference.

Participants are asked to call 1-800-225-5987 to register in advance. There is no cost to attend.

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Hospitality

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Being a Christian is not either. It's a commitment.

While no concrete resolutions were offered, most members of the group felt that they had engaged in very profitable reflection on the topic and were encouraged to act with that awareness. Most were satisfied with the progress made in the discussion.

Dr. James Boyce, Professor of New Testament, made one final suggestion, referring to a Gospel verse where the word 'encourage' comes from a Greek word for 'oxgoad': "Let's goad one another in this practice of hospitality."
Theses for a New Millenium

By Donavon L. Riley
MDiv Midddle

Editor’s note: This column continues Mr. Riley’s offering of 99 theses for the contemporary Christian community.

There is nothing so contempitible, nothing so vile, as to attempt to stifle the Gospel of Christ. Therefore, we must ask ourselves whether western culture and its ideology of prosperity has so infected the church that the communion of saints has been run through and through with the cancerous cysts of status, success, and pursuit of filthy lucre. For it is precisely when this cancer nestles deep in our bones that we begin doubting the power of the one true life and begin asking, “When the Gospel message is not proclaimed in its truth and purity must we (the church) not look elsewhere for our relevance and meaning?” And this distinction between death and life can be viewed paradoxically precisely when the Gospel is given prominence. At such times that the primacy of the Gospel is held forth as a witness to the world church offices are loosely held and the power of the Word spreads like a prairie fire, but when the Word is compromised and hidden under a basket the church offices strut about like game cocks flexing and swaggering, seeking to establish their primary authority. The church must not sit idle while local congregations, seminars, and church offices are taken captive by this malignancy which suffuses and germinates daily in the body of Christ. We confess our commitment to a tradition and faith which is constantly reforming yet we are bound by a disease of self which eats away at us minute by minute with no regard for life.

If the church is to be controlled through economic pressures perhaps it is time to ask once again the question, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?”

If we are dead with Christ why do we continue to burden our consciences as though we were alive?

37.) Building congregations about a full-time clergyman has of necessity promoted large congregations to pay them and has made necessary a large expensive building to house such a number for worship.

38.) Since congregations and missions are built around the full-time paid professional, and since the poor cannot afford such, the poor, by and large, do not have the Gospel preached to them as much as do the rich.

39.) Because of the imagined necessity of having a full-time professional and a church building needed to house large numbers of people, the church has been closely tied to the moneyed classes and has lost credibility among the very poor.

40.) Because of the economic pressures of paying for personnel and buildings, Christians in different denominations, and within the same denomination, compete for members to the sorrow of Christ and the destruction of Christian community.

41.) Also because of these pressures, churches must resort to fund raising efforts which are often manipulative, legalistic, and go against the clear teachings of our Lord not to let one hand know what the other one gives. (Matt.6:3)

42.) Because of the imagined necessity of buildings and professional clergy, churches are not able to contribute as much proportionally for the poor as were the New Testament churches.

43.) Where the ministry of Paul was filled with great joy because it operated with church leaders selected on the spot, the ministry of many contemporary pastors and missionaries is depressing, and burdensome because of the need to keep the organizations running with limited resources.

44.) The ecumenical movement has failed to bring unity to Christians on local levels largely because of the economic bases of professional clergy, congregations and denominations.

45.) By insisting upon the paid professional, we impose intolerable financial burdens on the church of the third world. By subsidizing their education and support, we make them open to the charge that they are captive to the churches of the West.

46.) The economic basis of the Church, together with the desire to control the organization of the church, has led to the introduction of sassy politics into the house of God, with men and women vying for positions of high remuneration, status, and power. All this is contrary to our Lord’s teaching that the greatest among us is a child or a slave. (Matt.18:4; Matt. 20:26)

Cling to Christ and to the relationship he established with us through his death and resurrection, not to the doctrines of this world. Hold fast to the head, which is Christ, from whom the whole body is nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, growing with a growth that is from God. Amen.
I argue that our true priorities manifest themselves in the way we spend our money. If we don’t set money aside for church or missions—when it is explicated commanded by the Lord—what are we saying about our response to the Gospel?

But responding to the Gospel financially isn’t as simple as saying, “Ok, family, this month we’re going to cut back and give 10% to the church.” Spending habits are hard to break, and some financial commitments, such as loan and car payments have to be met. Students are notoriously “poor.” But typically graduation from student status doesn’t solve any problems.

John and Sylvia Ronsvalle of empty tomb ministries spent much of the early-90s talking to pastors and regional church leaders about money dynamics in the church. Their results have been published in the incredibly insightful and well-written book, Behind the Stained Glass Windows (Baker, 1996).

According to the Ronsvalles, the financial problems students face in seminary intensify once seminarians leave and receive a low-paying job with multiple loans to repay. New pastors are often in such debt that they often feel they have to make compromises when it comes to giving. “Given this combination of factors,” the Ronsvalles found, “a pastor finds it difficult to lead parishioners into responsible use of personal money when his or her checkbook cannot balance.”

Enabling You to See Money as Manna

To break the cycle we need to take control of our finances and start developing better stewardship mindsets. First, given that how we spend money is a reflection of our priorities, we should start budgeting and spending our money to reflect our desire to put God first.

This is no easy task, but there are several options available. Your first and easiest option is to get a hold of a financial software program like Quicken or Microsoft Money. Both are relatively inexpensive (with the available rebates you never spend more than $20) as long as you buy the “basic” or “standard” editions, which is all 90% of us need. I have used both Quicken and Money and personally like Microsoft Money better.

Money, for example, has two great features. First, it has a budget feature that helps you set up a budget that is realistic and works. This feature allows you to track your spending and modify your budget and spending as you see fit. It may take a couple months to come up with a budget that works and a couple more months to modify it to a budget you feel accurately reflects your spiritual response to the Gospel, but I assure you this process is worth it.

Second, Money has a debt reduction planner. As part of its budgeting feature it can take you through all your outstanding debt, whether it is a school loan or credit card debt, and help you realistically determine the
Semper Eritas: Dating Advice

By Emily Jensen and Mike Matzek
MA and MDiv Seniors, respectively

Good Morning and welcome to the first Semper Eritas column of the new year. Yes, we know that we haven’t been around in while. We were busy with destabilizing several central American governments and campaigning for Steve Forbes. But now that Forbes has left the race and the our pictures our too well known in San Salvador, we are back to our day job.

Allow us to re-introduce ourselves. Emily Jensen is a MA senior who at the current is considering various options including college and young adult ministry. Mike Matzek is a senior M.Div who is planning on running for pope or maybe just working in a church.

Contrary to unpopular belief, we are not dating/engaged/married. Emily is married to the tall, blonde, and handsome Kurt Jensen. M.Div, B.A., B.M.O.C, P.T.I.P, A.R.P., W.B.L.S.D.C. Mike is currently involved with the lovely and charming Loriann Licke who currently on internship at Trinity in Owatonna. We are going to ruffle off a Scofield Bible to whoever correctly guesses date of his proposal to Loriann. Please submit any guesses to Emily PO box, 265.

Apparently, February marks the month of love and romance, and the official end of the couples’ season (which begins at Thanksgiving with visits to the relatives, through Christmas and New Years’ for the sake of parties, and ends the day the flowers given on Valentine’s Day and wither). The staff here at Semper Eritas just happen to be experts in this process and experience, so we’d like to share a few words about relationships, gleaned from personal trial and tribulation.

We know that many of you are looking at the way the senior is dropping like flies, excuse us, getting engaged and are wondering when is my turn? So, we want to help.

First, there is the challenge of meeting someone. Fortunately, here at seminary we have a number of places for meeting those of the opposite sex. In addition to the obvious social mixers (Campus Bar or the cafeteria), there is Communion on Wednesdays. So the next time you’re standing in line with cup in hand, just lean over to that attractive person and say, “Come here often?” [If he/she is honest, they will say, “Why, no—and neither does anyone else….”] For further note, check out the lounge space in third floor Bockman; it seems to be a testing ground for embryonic relationships and deep, theological discussions.

Secondly comes the trials of dating. Some good first dates: 1) a Pentecostal tent revival—they’ll get slain in the Spirit and become so ecstatic that they’ll think they are in love with you; 2) the monthly power outage party on third floor Bockman—you need not be concerned with your looks in the romantic candlelight. Some bad first dates: 1) Movies: “Basic Instinct”, “Fatal Attraction”, “Eyes Wide Shut” and “The Horse Whisperer”; 2) Working on synodical paper work in the stacks of the library—it may be quiet and secluded, but it is drifty and unromantic.

Next, one may be concerned with how to propose marriage. In the high pressure environment of Luther Seminary, you will eventually entertain the question of “So, when are the two of you getting married?”, this usually happens about two weeks after you begin dating. Fortunately, Emily had a Luther Seminary proposal experience—her husband Kurt proposed in a way that had to do with Columbia, Ohio; the Bockman chapel; and the question, “Are you serious?” [If interested, inquire of her about this wonderful and unique story.] Tip: Don’t take your girlfriend to the nice, romantic restaurant, hand her the ring and say “OK, you win.” (a la “The Bachelor”—good film, catch it in the cheap theatre).

Now, if proposing is right out, we need cover the other eventuality of breaking up. First, there is the classic guy method, just stop calling. After a couple of weeks of avoiding her and not answering phone calls, she probably will get the hint. Or, if you don’t want to take the coward’s way out, we would be happy to break the news in one of our columns.

We would be happy to make it as nice (“you’re a really nice guy but can’t we just be friends”) or as harsh (“Die! Die! Die! you bi-turical tone-deaf cantor”) as you like.

Well folks, that about does it for us. We have our own relationships to tend to and we must be on our way. We can not be held responsible for the actions of reactions that happen as a result of this column. But keep us posted and we will be available for counseling, or at least a beer. If you have and announcements, questions, comments or otherwise would just like to tell us how it turned out with that person who you met in line at communion, drop us a line. (saint-mike@juno.com or PO box 265)

1. Master of Divinity, Bachelor of Arts, Big Man on Campus, Part Time Interim Pastor, Awaiting Regional Placement, White Bear Lake Saturn Delivery Coordinator. (And you thought you would never see a foot note in this column.)

Notes from the Parish Nurse

March is recognized as National Nutrition Month and also the season of Lent. It is a good time to practice discipline and discipleship in all aspects of our daily life. I would like to focus your attention on Healthy Eating.

Physicians and dietitians still recommend that a diet low in fat and full of grains, fruits and vegetables is the healthiest. Such a diet is rich in the anti-oxidant vitamins (C,E and betacarotene) and protects against heart disease, cancers of the colon, prostate and breast, diabetes and high blood pressure. The following Healthy Eating Quiz was adapted from the Iowa Health Awareness Team.

Check how healthy your food choices are by answering true or false:
1. I eat high-fiber cereal; at least 4 times a week. T F
2. I eat 100% whole wheat bread rather than white bread. T F

3. I eat raw fruits and vegetables at least twice a day. T F
4. I drink fewer than 2 pre-sweetened soft drinks per week. T F
5. I use little sugar, syrup, jelly or honey on my food. T F
6. I never eat pre-sweetened breakfast cereals TF
7. I avoid desserts, other than fruit TF
8. On an average day I do not add salt to my food. T F

February 28, 2000
A Timely Message from a Student of History

By Nancy Hamm
MDiv Junior

At a time when the rigors of our studies are compounded by the rigors of winter, and with midterm looming just 'round the bend, all of us, students and professors alike, are cringing under the press of time. The easy smiles of summer are often replaced by furrowed brows and looks of grim determination. It is very important for us not to lose sight of how much we love what we're doing here.

Therefore, whenever you're feeling particularly burdened, it's helpful to remember that this time is relative and you really have all the time you need.

I'm not just speaking metaphorically. In fact, I'll prove to you that time is as elastic as the waist band on your long johns. To illustrate this truth, I want to show you how you can compress all of the important events of an entire century into less than thirty lines of verse.

It's best to read or sing them aloud and at a fair enough clip. Thus, if you're inclined to set the words to music (and I hope you are), most LBW hymns would not be suitable—"Ein Feste Burg" in particular. However, the Major General's romping monologue from Gilbert and Sullivan's "Pirates of Penzance" should work quite well.

It's a quick, albeit complete, summary of the rather late early middle ages. Those of you familiar with the Gonzales and Placher texts will hear some deeper resonances as you read below. But even if you've never heard of the Middle Ages, you'll feel better after your brisk recitation ... so plunge forth!

It is the very model of the papacy of Rome
That Leo crowned Charlemagne because of his portfolio.
The Saxons broke and holy smoke! he won against the Frisians
And all were forced to be baptized and turn to God as Christians.
Charlie died and Louis rose to be the pope, the Pious one.
The empire sank and Louis crooked and then there came the Norsemen.
Jack Sprat Charles the Fat just ate and sat and ate and sat;
When Norsemen raids became the risk, he changed his diet to lutefisk.
The kings and lords became the hordes and land was granted feudally,
And vassals under various lords did claim the land so crudely.
Then came the conflict of the time, the one the Carolingian,
That had to do with Jesus' blood and presence in Communion.
For Charles the Bald, as we recalled, the matter made him sadden,
Ratramnus came to clarify the matter of the matter.
But time had told this time of old of this exaggeration:
The change of change of bread and wine in transubstantiation.
So many came and were baptized as Christians in conversion.
And those who conquered too were led and others by coercion.
The model of the papacy descended in decay,
And John and John and John and John were popes without delay.
Then Clement II crowned Henry king and died shortly thereafter,
And Bruno left to go to Rome which brings us now to Placher.
The piece is o'er as you've surmised and all that can's been summarized.
So say a prayer and study well and you'll do great as time will tell:
Farewell, for now, oh students dear. Fear not, behold, be of good cheer!
For humor too is God's great gift, and frozen Lutherans need a lift!

The Fortnightly Devotional

By Scott A. Johnson
Associate Editor, The Concord

As I read the Gospel, I think to myself: "Stupid scribes. They're always missing the point." Then I sit down at my computer and start to write yet another of these little forays into the great wonder of God. Oh, the irony of it all...

Where should we start with Mark 2:1-12? The fact that all these people had come to listen to a carpenter talk about God in filthy Galilee, for crying out loud! That four friends were so convinced this carpenter could heal their friend that they let him in through the roof? Imagine these poor scribes sitting there, hearing the thatch being ripped out of the roof and all of a sudden this man descending on a pallet, in the middle of this dirty, unwashed mass of people crowding in to listen to this young carpenter who appeared out of nowhere!

And yet, we never seem to talk about one important matter: before Jesus heals, Jesus forgives. I certainly never noticed it before, but this young man descending on a pallet is forgiven well in advance of being told to walk, and no one wonders why Jesus forgives first and foremost. In all my years of loving this story, I never stopped to consider the eternal implications of the order in which Jesus treats this paralytic: first the soul, then the body.

Is it any wonder the scribes, with their education based on Law and halakah are amazed? Jesus has no consideration for the earthly implications of His forgiveness: it is only when the scribes call attention to forgiveness that He heals the body, and that as a teaching point.

If you were taken to a healer, beyond all hope of recovery, and he said to you "Your sins are forgiven", would you become confused? Would you maybe wonder at this healer who is more concerned for your state of grace than their state of health? Or, years later, would you look back, realize what had happened, and thank God for wisdom that comes to you in the truly paralyzing: in the healing of the sinner?
CFC's Spending Guidelines

Larry Burkett suggests that you begin budgeting with these spending guidelines. Remember, they are not all "hard and fast" but they try to balance a proper mentality of stewardship with what is realistic given the costs in American society.

Housing: 36%
Food: 12%
Auto: 12%
Insurance: 5%
Debt: 5%
Entertainment: 6%
Clothing: 5%
Savings: 5%
Med/Dental: 4%
Misc: 5%
School/Children: 6%
Investments: 5%

The School/Childcare category is added as a guide only. If you have this expense, the percentage shown must be deducted from other budget categories. Remember, all percentages must add up to 100 percent.

Money

ternal. His Web page has links for budgeting, mortgage calculators, as well as other financial tidbits.

As Christians we need to be deliberate as to how we spend our money. Going willfully and basing our offering on what we have left at the end of the month that wouldn't be uncomfortable to give back to the church isn't what we are called as disciples to do. Good stewardship habits do not come overnight, nor are they ever definitively refined during our lives, but they should be attempted. Making a step in a positive direction towards Christian giving habits is never easy, but as I have heard it said, "I challenge you to find someone who attributes their financial rain to giving too much to God."

Spiritual Side

Church offerings 101

How do churchgoers determine the amount of their church offerings? According to the survey, one-fourth (26 percent) of Christians claim to tithe, that is, share 10 percent of income with the church. However, According to Empty Tomb, Inc., a Christian service and research organization, on average, Americans give 2.6 percent of per capita income to their churches.

Support where it counts

While two-thirds of Americans (67 percent) agree that religion has declining influence on society, only 12 percent are so concerned that they have increased their financial support or volunteer time to religious organizations.

Americans underestimate the value of a church's community services. Research indicates that the average American church contributes $150,000 per year worth of community services, such as food shelves, community meeting space, health care, and youth programs. However, according to the survey, Americans believe a church's community services are worth only $53,700 per year. Only eight percent of people believe a church contributes an average of $150,000 or more of local outreach.

Nurse

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9. I eat bologna, hot dogs, ham or bacon less than once a week T F
10. I rarely eat pre-packaged meals T F
11. I eat salty snacks no more than once every two weeks T F
12. I eat meat at only one meal a day & in moderate amounts T F
13. I eat 3 or fewer eggs a week T F
14. I eat 4 or fewer slices of cheese a week T F
15. I eat white or low-fat cheese rather than yellow cheese T F
16. I use 2 tsp. or less of margarine or butter per day T F
17. I use 2 Tbsp. or less of salad dressing on a salad T F
18. I eat foods cooked by methods other than frying T F
19. I eat foods prepared without oil whenever possible T F
20. I eat breakfast everyday T F
21. I avoid snacking T F
22. I eat regular meals T F
23. I don't eat at fast-food restaurants more than once/2 weeks. T F
24. I drink fewer than 5 alcoholic drinks a week T F
25. I drink 8 glasses of water a day T F
Score 5 points for every item answered true.
115-125 - Are you telling the truth? 90-115 - You have good knowledge about healthy eating 73-90 - You make good choices, but could learn about better methods 60-73 - You are the average U.S. food consumer. You may eat foods associated with chronic health problems. It would be good to make some diet changes. Below 60-Your diet provides half the nutrition you need. You need to make some diet changes.

If I can be of any help to you, please contact me. You are also invited to have lunch every Wednesday at 12 noon with the Sharing Group for Healthy Living. Eating nourishes our bodies, mind and spirit. As Christians, we are encouraged to place our eating and drinking within the context of our faith (Romans 14:23). May the Lord richly bless all of your health choices.