

For the

# LIFE of the WORLD

July 2006. Volume Ten, Number Three



**Because Christ Is for All,  
the Church Has a Corporate Life of Mercy - p.4**

**Complete in One Body - p.7**

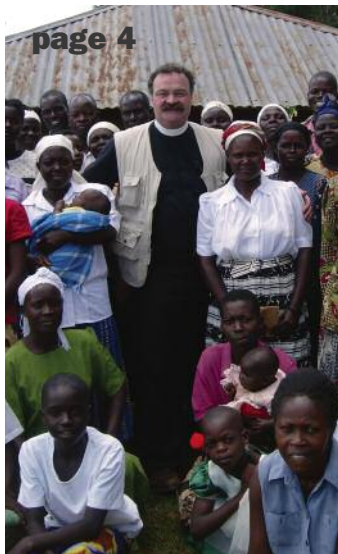
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## For the **LIFE** of the **WORLD**

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## FEATURES

### 4 Because Christ Is for All, the Church Has a Corporate Life of Mercy

By the Rev. Matthew C. Harrison, Executive Director of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s Board for Human Care Ministries and World Relief, St. Louis, Missouri

I have met the President of the United States. I’ve been all over the world and met dignitaries of all sorts. But I’ve never been so humbled and honored to be doing the work of LCMS World Relief and Human Care in behalf of the church.

### 7 Complete in One Body

By Mrs. Patricia S. Nuffer, a Concordia Theological Seminary deaconess intern with the LCMS Board for Human Care Ministries and World Relief, Fort Wayne, Indiana

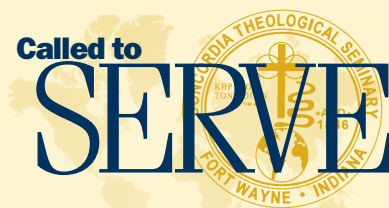
One body, different members, it is an exciting challenge for the church to be one body, an exciting challenge for CTS to equip pastors and deaconesses to welcome the vulnerable, to celebrate each one’s gifts in their differences, and to be complete in one body.

### 9 Christ in the Parish

By the Rev. Everette E. Greene, Pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Cincinnati, Ohio

For me, being a confessing Lutheran has nothing at all to do with race or color but everything to do with the Gospel that makes us one in Christ!

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# Christ in the Parish



By the Rev. Everette E. Greene

Most people assume that being an African-American pastor in the Lutheran Church gives me a unique perspective—especially when they discover that as an African-American I am thoroughly Lutheran, heritage and all. I am quick to remind them of two things. First, I am not so unique, of which I'm constantly reminded as I fulfill my call in a parish made up of mostly African-Americans. They, like me, are also Lutheran in theology and heritage and do not want any other Gospel.

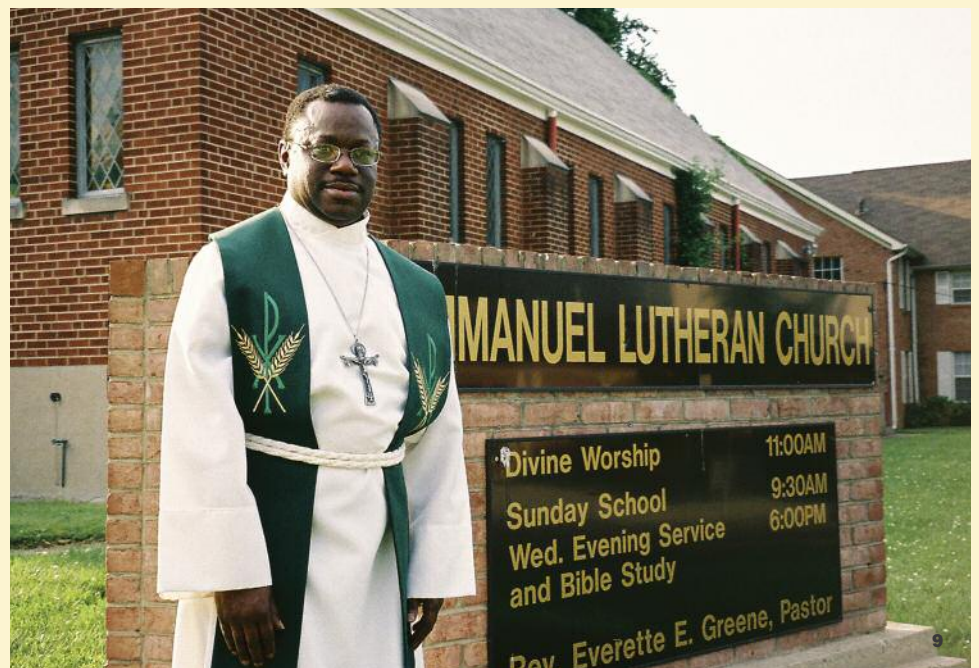
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**The Gospel is the same whether it is preached in a rural or urban setting, whether it is preached to the financially affluent or to people who struggle to make ends meet. The challenge is to apply this same Gospel to the unique setting, urban or rural, to which pastors are called by the Lord to serve. The fact is, what we all have in common is that we all live in a fallen world; we all have our joys and sorrows; we are all sinners in need of our Savior Jesus Christ.**

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Second, the Gospel is the same whether it is preached in a rural or urban setting, whether it is preached to the financially affluent or to people who struggle to make ends meet. The challenge is to apply this same Gospel to the unique setting, urban or rural, to which pastors are called by the Lord to serve. The fact is, what we all have in common is that we all live in a fallen world; we all have our joys and sorrows; we are all sinners in need of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Of course, the unique setting in which African-American Lutheranism finds itself does have its unique challenges. Most often—and this is just how the *opinio legis* that plagues us all happens to get its fingernails into black Lutheranism—our challenge has to do with maintaining the distinctive biblical and Lutheran teaching of salvation *sola fide* and *sola gratia* in the face of the largely synergistic sects that have long appealed to African-Americans. And the history of the



parish I presently serve offers an optimistic assessment of Lutheranism's prospects in this ongoing challenge.

I have been called to serve a wonderful congregation in Cincinnati, Ohio. Immanuel finds herself located in a rough area that has definitely seen better days. This year the congregation is celebrating God's blessings of 80 years of ministry, and it has been in its present location for 50 of those years. The buildings around us have fallen into disrepair or have been torn down altogether; but our little church remains a pristine little A-frame beacon of light in an area struggling to recapture some of its former dignity and stature in the city.

This primarily African-American congregation of saints is a thoroughly Lutheran congregation whose members have roots that go all the way back to Rosebud, Selma, and Kings Landing, Alabama. These towns are among the first places where the LCMS dedicated itself to work among former slaves. Drawing on the faith received in Alabama, by God's grace, Immanuel Lutheran Church has remained faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the *Book of Concord* for decades in its challenging urban setting. The congregation started out in a bathhouse in 1924, moved into a church building in 1936, and then moved to her present location in 1956.

To be edified in the faith they have received, for years now, members of Immanuel have gathered together on Wednesday evenings for Vespers and Bible study. Recently during one of those Bible studies, as we were studying Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, my heart was warmed when a beautiful elderly lady responded to Luther's commentary concerning our "passive righteousness" by quoting the meaning of the third article of the Apostles' Creed:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the last day He will raise me and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.

A major challenge for our congregation, which is not unique in the urban setting, is that we have seven churches of differing denominations in our immediate neighborhood and simply being Lutheran does not draw anyone to our door. Therefore, we must reach out to our community and meet specific needs while remaining who we are. This beautiful elderly lady stood out as a bloom of the Gospel in this arid synergistic setting and in those few words captured what Immanuel Lutheran is all about. By God's grace we remain faithful to the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions that our redemption is a completely gratuitous act of God, which we simply receive in the means of grace. Our setting makes giving this up a pressure we cannot but constantly feel. Yet, "called by the Gospel . . . and preserved in the one true faith" in Jesus Christ, black or white, urban or rural, we know no other Gospel; and here, where Christ promises that the gates of hell will not prevail, not even an angel from heaven can turn us from Christ who has called us in His grace (Gal. 1:6), not even for the sake of increasing our membership and so-called unity and fellowship.

So, like Paul among the Jewish and Gentile Galatians, I have a great privilege and duty: to Lutherans, who are quick to be ashamed of their theological and liturgical heritage, and to people of my own race, for whom Lutheranism does not always strike a resounding chord; a duty to show that there is one Gospel, for white and black alike. I am a born and raised Missouri Synod Lutheran, and I have fully appropriated our Lutheran heritage—doctrinal and practical alike. For me, being a confessing Lutheran has nothing at all to do with race or color but everything to do with the Gospel that makes us one in Christ! As St. Paul says in Galatians 3:27-28, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." I think the members of Immanuel in Cincinnati would wholeheartedly concur.

*The Rev. Everette E. Greene serves as Pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Cincinnati, Ohio.*



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