

For the Life of the World

Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne

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Life Together—Gift

By Rev. J. Bart Day

Experiencing Life Together in Christ

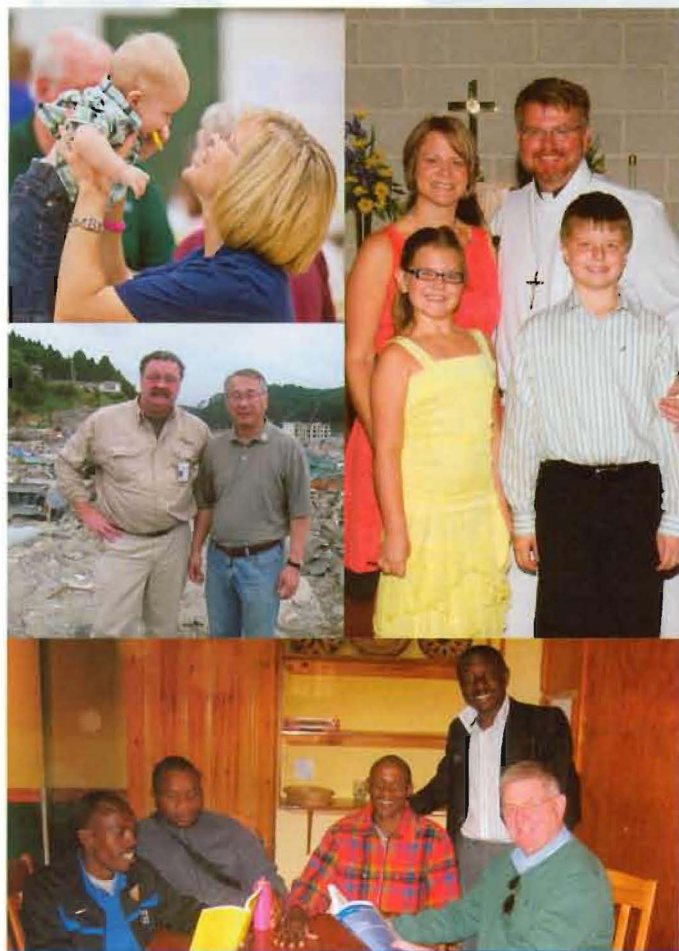
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Philadelphia Lutheran Ministries: Witness, Mercy and Life Together in the City

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The Office of National Mission is doing the work of “Home Mission.” The world is at our door. The challenges facing the church in our post-Christian culture can appear overwhelming. In the face of such challenges, the church must stand ready to proclaim the Gospel boldly. Being a faithful Lutheran has never been more critical.

6 Experiencing Life Together in Christ

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God’s people are uniquely empowered to model life together in Christ. Not only is the church where we abide in community with Christ (Matthew 18:20), but we also abide in community with one another (Ephesians 2:19). And then, we take that power of life together in Christ into a world around us (Matthew 22:39)—a world parched for meaningful relationships (Isaiah 32:2).

9 Philadelphia Lutheran Ministries: Witness, Mercy and Life Together in the City

By Rev. Joshua R. Gale

Philadelphia Lutheran Ministries (PLM), the organization that has recently called me as their mission developer, is a Recognized Service Organization (RSO) of the LCMS, daring to pursue Witness, Mercy and Life Together in the name of Christ into the Philadelphia metropolitan area. The project at my direction, known as the “Northeast Philly Project,” seeks to realize this purpose through reaching out to the homeless in and around the city of Philadelphia.

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What Does This MEAN?

Life Together in South Africa and Throughout the World



As I work on this article, I am sitting in the guest house of Lutheran Theological Seminary in Pretoria, South Africa. What a blessing it is to come to this seminary twice a year as a visiting professor to teach students from several African countries so strategic for confessional Lutheran witness in all of Africa.


Being on this campus brings to mind the words of the Bavarian pastor, Wilhelm Löhe (1808-1872): “The church of the New Testament is no longer a territorial church but a church of all people, a church which has its children in all lands and gathers them from every nation. It is the one flock of the one shepherd, called out of many folds (John 10:16), the universal—the truly catholic—church which flows through all time and into which all people pour” (*Three Books About the Church*, p. 59).

We share a life together which is thicker and deeper than nationality, ethnicity or language. Bound together in Christ by a common redemption mediated by the one Baptism instituted by our Lord we have life together. We hear and confess the same apostolic Gospel and we eat and drink of the same body and blood in the sacrament of our Lord’s new and eternal testament.

Along with Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Life Together*, Löhe’s *Three Books About the Church* is a lucid exposition of what it means for Christians to live together in that holy community, the church of Jesus Christ. Pastor Löhe published this classic volume in 1845, the year after his wife’s early death. Certainly his writing is reflective of a heavenly homesickness, no doubt intensified by his young wife’s death which left him in an abiding grief. Yet Löhe knew that this life together we have in Christ Jesus is not broken by geography or even by death. There is one church

that spans heaven and earth: “There is therefore one eternal church, part to be found here and part to be found in eternity. Here it becomes smaller and smaller; but there it becomes ever larger, for the yearning, struggling band is always being gathered to its people....From it death shall not separate me, but death will for the first time bring me to complete enjoyment of love and fellowship. To it all things draw me and nothing hinders me, whatever it may be. Praise be to God!” (*Three Books About the Church*, p. 54).

By God’s grace we are part of this church that Löhe paints with numerous images. One of his images for the church is a long river that constantly moves from its headwaters to the ocean: “Springing up on Pentecost and Calvary, the church flows through the ages like a river, and that same river and no other will flow unchangingly on through the ages until that great day when it will empty completely into the famed sea of eternal blessedness” (*Three Books About the Church*, p. 55). Our life together is not based on human preferences or attractions of particular personalities but in Christ Jesus who has redeemed us by His blood, called us by His Spirit working through the Gospel and incorporated us into His body with the washing of the water with the Word. Jesus Christ is both the source and end of our life together.

Hidden under the cross, we live trusting in the forgiveness of sins purchased and won at Calvary and distributed in preaching and the Sacrament. It is this absolution that binds us to Christ, the friend of sinners, and glues us sinners to one another in that holy community which is the church. We cannot create or engineer our life together—it is a gift, unmerited and undeserved—of God’s merciful donation so that sinners are not left utterly alone in their sin. Life together is jeopardized when it is grounded in anything other than the forgiveness of sins given by Christ Jesus. This is why we confess in the Catechism that the Holy Spirit in this Christian Church “daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.” Whether in Pretoria or in Fort Wayne, it is this singular Gospel that makes us coheirs with Christ of all the riches of the Father and so brothers and sisters of one another. This is our life together. 

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