

# FORUM LETTER

Volume 37 Number 6

June 2008

## Inside this issue:

- The death of William Lazareth** 4
- That they may all be one** 5
- Omnium gatherum** 7

The American  
Lutheran Publicity  
Bureau is on the web  
[www.alpb.org](http://www.alpb.org)

FORUM LETTER is published monthly by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau ([www.alpb.org](http://www.alpb.org)) with LUTHERAN FORUM, a quarterly journal, in a combined subscription for \$26.95 (U.S.) a year, \$48.95 (U.S.) for two years, in the United States and Canada. Retirees and students, \$21.50 a year. Add \$7.50 per year for overseas delivery. Write to the Subscription Office for special rates for groups. Single copy, \$2.50.

**Editor:** Pr. Richard O. Johnson  
<roj@nccn.net>

**Associate Editor:** Pr. Peter Speckhard  
<pspeckhard@hotmail.com>

**Member:** Associated Church Press.

**EDITORIAL OFFICE:** P. O. Box 1394,  
Grass Valley, CA 95945. <roj@nccn.net>

**SUBSCRIPTION OFFICE:** American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, P. O. Box 327, Delhi, NY 13753-0327 <dkralpb@aol.com>  
Telephone 607-746-7511. Periodicals postage paid at Delhi, NY and additional mailing offices.

**POSTMASTER:** Send changes of address to PO Box 327, Delhi, NY 13753-0327.

Copyright © 2008 by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau.  
ISSN 0046-4732

## No unity which evades the truth



“The prayer-desk has disappeared from our offices. Luther, however, had one. . . . Pastors must pray more than the congregation. They have more to pray for. They need the strengthening of their faith and the illumination of their understanding. Prayerful consideration of the Scripture gives us a firm footing. It makes us certain of what we should pray for. We need this prayerful refuge when we do not see how we can go on anymore and Satan tries to tear faith out of our hearts. We need it before every hour of decision-making. We need the study of the Scriptures when we feel inadequate and unable to pray. It drives us to the cross that Christ bore and brings that which bothers us and from which we suffer into proper perspective.

“Every day should begin with meditation on the Scriptures. Before we meet others, we should meet Christ. Before we decide something, his decision should have confronted us. . . . We are neither obliged nor entitled to have something unusual happen in our prayerful reading of the Bible. We do not await special happenings or experiences. We have the commission only to do this work. God intends that the Word of God should be read and prayed over. We leave it up to God what will come of it. In this work the pastor must only be faithful and obedient.” —Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching: Lectures on Homiletics* (Crossroad, 1991)

## The sexuality draft: two responses



*In the April issue, we invited our readers to share their responses to the published draft of the proposed ELCA statement on human sexuality. Some have done so, and we share two of them with you this month.*

### Some good, some not by Kenneth Sauer and Paull Spring

Our first word is a word of thanks to the members of the task force and the staff who prepared this draft. They have worked hard, under pressure, and have earned the thanks of the ELCA for their work. As the process moves toward the preparation of a final draft, Lutheran CORE participants will continue to pray for the task force and for the leadership of our church.

There is much to be commended in this draft statement. It is, for the most part, well-written and understandable. It contains numerous biblical references (although we wish that more passages were quoted in the body of the statement, rather than simply cited).

The draft touches on many theological themes that characterize specifi-

cally Lutheran perspectives. Notable in the draft are, among others, presentations on the Word of God as Law and Gospel, the uses of the Law, the centrality of justification, and the understanding of believers as simultaneously sinners and redeemed. The task force is to be commended for providing these obviously Lutheran perspectives within the draft.

Moreover, we note with appreciation the way the draft addresses many current issues on sexuality. We lift up especially the role of the family, the abuses of sexuality in our society, and the dominating influence of advertising and the media in our culture. We commend the task force for addressing these issues forthrightly. We also appreciate the way the draft recognizes the role Christians have sometimes played in the dehumanization and discrimination against gay and lesbian persons.

### **Worrisome elements**

In short, there is much in the draft that we can commend and applaud. Unfortunately, there are also elements in the draft statement that are troubling, even worrisome, to us.

(1) The first is the definition of marriage. True, marriage is affirmed as a covenant of fidelity between one man and one woman. But this definition is not consistently maintained throughout the draft. In fact, references to other forms of the family and to other relationships as valid weaken the definition of marriage as initially presented. There are few references to procreation as one of the chief purposes of marriage.

The discussion on marriage and homosexuality is itself unbalanced — one sentence for heterosexual marriage and several sentences on homosexual unions. A more detailed attention to Genesis 1 and 2 and Matthew 19:4ff would strengthen the draft considerably. We suspect, frankly, that a new definition of marriage is being suggested — not a lifelong covenant of fidelity between one man and one woman, but a relationship of trust and love between two persons. The task force has been charged with preparing recommendations on the blessing and rostering of gay and lesbian persons. There are strong hints in the draft that open the door for recommending such blessings and ordinations — a prospect that distresses and alarms us.

(2) Secondly, there are numerous references in the draft to "pastoral" and "pastoral care." Unfor-

tunately these terms are nowhere defined in the draft. The Lutheran heritage understands pastoral care to be a personal address that is based on God's Word of both Law and Gospel. By contrast, pastoral care in the draft appears to be largely a matter of affirmation and support.

(3) Thirdly, there is — to us — the confusing use of the category of trust in social relationships and institutions. The observations in this section of the draft are buttressed by references to unnamed social scientists. Trust is an appropriate category to use in the God/human relationship and in relationships among humans. But, in view of the two kingdoms doctrine, the Christian's life in society — family, state, education, commerce, the arts — is more characterized by justice, reliability, and order, rather than trust. Or have we misunderstood the draft?

### **Redraft the draft**

(4) Fourthly, the draft needs to be significantly re-framed and re-structured. This is especially the case with the first half of the document. The draft begins a statement on sexuality with a reference to the Great Commandment, followed by an extensive discussion of the incarnation that leads in turn to a fulsome paean in honor of the resurrection and the new creation. In so doing, the draft places the whole matter of sexuality within the saving work of Christ, the Gospel.

The Lutheran tradition, by contrast, places sexuality within the doctrines of creation and the Law. Human sexuality is part of God's created order for the world. Sexuality is not salvific, and sexual intercourse is not a sacrament. On this point we feel that the draft needs serious revision. It would be clearer if the draft were to begin with creation — rather than the incarnation — and then move to a discussion of the Word of God as both Law and Gospel. It is our hope that subsequent revisions of the draft will reflect these observations.

(5) There is, moreover, the overall flow of the draft — or rather the lack of it. Themes appear and disappear, to the point where the draft itself seems confused and disjointed. It is not always easy to discern how one theme leads to another. A much better way of dealing with the issues of marriage, family, and sexuality would be to move clearly from Biblical interpretation to practical application. We also wish

that the draft had incorporated the more direct affirmations on sexuality from the American Lutheran Church and Lutheran Church in America statements on sexuality and from the ELCA Church Council's 1996 message, "Some Common Convictions."

There are other concerns we have about the draft statement – too many to mention here. We hope and pray that the churchwide discussion that is now underway will lead to a much improved statement. We also hope and pray that the implementing resolutions will clearly re-affirm the rostering provisions that are in place in *Vision and Expectations* and in the relevant sections in *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline*.

In the meantime we urge everyone in the church to take advantage of the review process for this statement. May God through his Spirit strengthen the church in faithfulness to his Word.

*From a statement drafted by Kenneth H. Sauer and Paull E. Spring for the Lutheran CORE steering committee. Prs. Sauer and Spring are both retired ELCA bishops.*

### **The lack of lust**

by John S. McKenzie

Since the 1970's, liberal theologians have tried to re-ground the church's understanding of sexuality. They have argued that, far from being a dangerous force which is difficult to channel into positive modes, sexuality as it happens is part of God's intention. The basic thrust of this movement – tied to the sexual libertine movement – is that if a behavior is natural or of the body, it is probably God-pleasing. Traditional Christians have subsequently rejected this as a distortion of the concept of natural law. Natural law derives from nature as God intends it, not nature as it is found. The ELCA task force on sexuality, in its draft statement, has picked up the *found in nature* ball and run forward with it.

I have read through the statement twice. I noticed on both readings that lust was not dealt with significantly. As I embarked on the third reading, I discovered why in an endnote referenced on page five (line 123). The sentence in the draft seems innocuous enough: "Neither 'bodiliness' (including bodily desire) nor materiality (all of creation) rightly can be equated with evil or sin." The endnote con-

tinues (page 47, note 7) with what appears to be a discussion of the first parenthesis: "It is true, of course, that the church has given way to this error many times throughout Christian history. For instance, certain early church theologians argued that Christians should not have sexual desires, even toward a spouse. Such ideas supported the medieval church teaching that celibacy was a high and pure religious good."

### **More than untrustworthy behavior**

Until our task force came along, lust was sin. The church has believed this for a couple of millennia. When Paul talks of worshiping and serving the creature rather than the creator, he is not far from what drives visitors to strip clubs, frequenters of prostitutes, and the occasional high school teacher enjoying her boy toy. Lust keeps human beings distracted, watching, fighting, maneuvering, manipulating, and purchasing goods and services. Lust is real. Lust destroys lives. Lust cannot be reduced to untrustworthy behavior. Lust cannot be explained away by corporate greed.

Certainly some definitions of lust are so excessive as to include any physical attraction for the opposite sex. Augustine might well be accused of this. He does have the benefit of taking Jesus' words in Matthew 5.28 quite literally. Others, Chrysostom and Luther, for instance, tend to be more moderate in their definition. Sexual attraction may be natural, but our distorted nature is precisely why the redemption of human beings and of creation cannot be accomplished by behavioral programs.

The study seems to suggest that lack of trustworthiness and corporate greed explain everything that lust used to describe. The congregation where I did internship twenty-some years ago had been rattled prior to my arrival by a pastor who had been caught as a peeping tom in the backyard of one of the parishioners. He was not guilty of corporate greed as the authors of the study might suggest. Nor was he the victim of corporate greed. He was guilty of lust. He was not trustworthy, to be sure. But in terms of causality, he did not use lust in order to be untrustworthy; he violated the trust that was given him in order to act on his lust.

### **The traditional list**

I use a traditional list of the seven deadly

sins quite a bit in my preaching. It is pride, envy, anger, covetousness, sloth, gluttony, and lust. Shall I change the last sin to “not being socially trustworthy” as the authors of the study seem to suggest? Shall I change the last sin to “corporate greed” as the new whipping boy of the new left church?

It appears to me that the committee had trouble distinguishing between healthy sexual attraction and lust. The easy way out was the way that was chosen. Certainly there are voices in the church which have said the former category – healthy sexual attraction – does not exist. The proper way to demonstrate that they are in “error” is not through tautological endnotes, but through making proper distinctions. Throwing out the concept of lust because one is not pleased with prior distinctions is irresponsible and ultimately unfaithful to Scripture and the great tradition.

#### More to come?

So why would the committee be irresponsible and unfaithful in this seemingly small matter? My speculation is that preparations needed to be

made for a later argument – not yet made – that what is *wholesome and natural* (e.g., longterm homosexual partnering) is God-pleasing. The only thing that would make what is *wholesome and natural* less than God-pleasing is, in the minds of the authors, social untrustworthiness and corporate greed. Barring those, if it happens in nature, God approves. The notion that an individual’s sexual focus and drive could be completely infected by the sin of lust and the obsessive thought that accompanies it from the get-go, does not further this preparation. It in fact derails this preparation.

The church has taught that individuals created in the image of God can through lust become sick puppies. Experience – not always to be trusted – would seem to bear this out. The task force would do well to revisit their draft with the mind of the church.

*Pr. John S. McKenzie serves Advent Lutheran Church, Elmont, NY, and St. James Lutheran Church, Stewart Manor, NY. This is his first contribution to Forum Letter.*

## The death of William Lazareth

by Richard Koenig



Dr. William Lazareth, longtime professor of theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and the first bishop of the ELCA's Metropolitan New York Synod, was memorialized in a splendid mass of thanksgiving for his life and ministry on Saturday, April 26, 2008. Bill, as friends and colleagues always called him, died on February 23, 2008, following a long illness. A private memorial service was held in Bar Harbor, ME, after which his ashes were interred in the cemetery of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Red Hook, NY, one of the series of congregations he selected annually as his home church while synod bishop.

The thanksgiving mass was celebrated in St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, White Plains, NY, the congregation in which he retained membership after moving to Maine in retirement. Celebrant was the pastor of St. Matthew's, the Rev. Eric A Mathsen, a subscriber to the rule of the Society of the Holy Trinity (S.T.S.), as was Bill early in the history of that in-

ter-Lutheran ministerium. The printed order of service carried a dramatic icon of the Resurrection of Our Lord in full color on the front and a fine portrait of Bill on the inside back cover.

#### Themes of a life and ministry

In his sermon, the Rev. Rodney L. Eberhardt, S.T.S., pastor of St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Farmingdale, NY, sounded themes that were echoed at the end of the mass by six honored guests, including a representative of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod and former Lutheran (and former *Forum Letter* editor) Fr. Richard John Neuhaus. Those themes were Bill's pastoral ministry, his brilliance and forcefully-articulated conviction as a confessional Lutheran theologian, his concern for the poor and social justice, and his contribution to Christian ecumenism (particularly his role in *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, the landmark document produced while he was on the staff of the World Council of Churches). Pr. Eberhardt lamented the inability of

Bill's own church to respond in any effective way to the challenge *BEM* presented to the ecumenical Christian community.

It was only fitting and proper that William Lazareth be remembered by the church he served with such distinction throughout his ministry. Listening to all that was said in honor of and about Bill prompted me to reflect on the virtual disappearance in contemporary Lutheranism of the role he once played in the counsels of his church. However they might have disagreed with one another, American Lutherans used to listen closely to the voices of their premier theologians—not exclusively, of course, but

with care and respect, for guidance in making theological and ethical decisions. Perhaps the passing of Dr. Lazareth will induce us all to give renewed attention to the great themes of our Lutheran theology in confronting the perplexities of our pluralistic present, as we determine what course to follow, when to say “no” and when to say “yes.” I am sure this would cause Bill to rejoice.

*Richard Koenig is a retired ELCA pastor. He was founding editor of Forum Letter, serving from 1972 to 1974; he also served as editor of Partners and its successor, Lutheran Partners. He now lives in Cromwell, CT.*

## That they may all be one



The Seventh Sunday of Easter gave us Jesus' prayer “that they may be one” — ironically, just after the United Methodist

Church approved the proposal for full communion with the ELCA (still to be acted upon by the ELCA's 2009 churchwide assembly). So it was a good week to think about Christian unity — not that any other time isn't equally good for such an important reflection.

What might it mean for Christians to be one with each other? It seems to me there are at least three wrong answers — or maybe I should say, three answers more wrong than right. We need to get them out of the way first, before we can think clearly about what it actually means to pray for the unity of Christ's church.

### Chairs in the nursery

First of all, Christian unity does not mean absolute unity of thought. There has often been a tendency in the church to demand that everyone agree about everything — whether the topic at hand is the two natures of Christ or what color to paint the chairs in the nursery. Most of us, of course, are convinced our own opinions are correct, and if everyone would just see things our way, the world would be a better place. But that just isn't the way things are.

Luther recognized this; he insisted there are some doctrines in Christianity so critical that one can only say “Here I stand”; but there are also other aspects of Christian life and thought about which

there can be differences of opinion — *adiaphora*, he called them, things not essential to unity. I've always appreciated the places in the Bible showing faithful, well-meaning people disagreeing with one another — Peter and Paul, Paul and Barnabas, there were conflicts. Sometimes they were differences of opinion, sometimes differences of personality, but always difficult and troublesome. Human beings just don't always see eye to eye, and I suspect when Jesus prayed “that they may be one,” lockstep agreement isn't what he had in mind.

### Singing “Kumbayah”

Secondly, Christian unity does not mean a feel-good, emotional state where everybody holds hands, sways, and sings “Kumbayah.” It's a big temptation in the church to say, “Can't we all just get along?” In truth, though, unity based entirely on our feelings is bound to fail, because as soon as something happens to upset the good feelings, there's nothing left.

This is one of the major challenges every married couple faces, so much so that we have a phrase we draw from marriage: “the honeymoon is over.” What we mean is that human relations are often like a couple on a honeymoon: everything is sweet and lovely and wonderfully nice, until reality sets in. Reality in this case is that we're all sinners. We're constructed in such a way that my sins really irritate you, and yours really irritate me, and so we get our feelings hurt and we get upset with one another. Sometimes we respond by walking away in

anger or frustration. Perhaps more often we just try to paper over our differences, ignore our hurt feelings, and put on a happy face. It doesn't work. When Jesus prayed that we might be one, he did not have in mind, "Can't we all just get along?" He knew us too well.

### Common cause

In the third place, Christian unity does not mean simply ignoring our differences and working together on some common cause. That's an approach taken sometimes by people of all political stripes. They think if we could just all join together in one cause, whether it be opposing abortion or supporting environmental action – again, there are examples all across the spectrum – then we would find that elusive unity. The trouble is, of course, when you define your unity according to a particular platform or cause, you automatically condemn everyone who disagrees with you; and so the unity quickly becomes division.

That's one reason I get aggravated when religious leaders make public political pronouncements – even if I agree with them, it seems to me they are more often than not damaging the unity of the church for no very good reason. Not to say there aren't exceptions, times when leaders of the church really must speak out. But those times are relatively rare. I don't think in Jesus' prayer for unity, he had in mind a unanimous platform for political or social action.

### The will of Jesus

What, then, did Jesus mean in this prayer – if not unity of opinion, feeling, or action, then what? It seems to me what he's talking about here is unity of will. Christians are those who will one thing. But the catch, of course, is that our will is not to be our own, but God's. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "*thy* will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Jesus prayed this prayer for unity in John 17 on the same night when, the other gospels tell us, he would be in the Garden of Gethsemane praying, "Not my will but thine be done."

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, there was a heresy, little remembered today, called monothelitism. The question was, did Jesus have one will or two wills. The monothelites taught that Jesus didn't have a human will; he was human, but it was the divine will that

motivated him. (They had no internet or professional sports in those days, so there was a lot of time to think about obscure theological questions.) But the orthodox response to this heresy was really very important. The orthodox Christians said if Jesus was indeed truly human, he must have had a human will, because our will is such a vital part of what actually makes us human. The difference between him and us is that he always freely willed in accordance with the Father's will. He and the Father, in other words, were one in what they willed.

So when he prayed to the Father that his disciples may be one "as we are one," perhaps that's what he meant – that we might be of the same will as the Father. His prayer was that we, too, might freely will the will of God – that God's will "may be done also among us," as Luther put it. Insofar as we manage that, of course, we become one with each other, as well as one with God.

### Embodying Christ's will

Willing the will of God is tough. It often demands we not follow the crowd, that we not just go along. It sometimes requires us to work through hurt feelings and differences of opinion, and do so with the humility that prays "thy will, not my will." It always entails "constantly devoting themselves to prayer," as the book of Acts puts it. It always involves casting our anxiety on God, disciplining ourselves, staying alert, and recognizing our adversary the devil is on the prowl. One of the adversary's prime tactics is to try to make us cling to our own will, and not to God's. Seeking God's will is always a struggle. Always.

But when we seek God's will, then we begin to embody the prayer of Jesus, "that they may be one, as we are one." "Embody" – that's a good word, because it is at the table, where we receive Christ's Body and Blood, that we are drawn again to him, invited again to give up ourselves, to humble ourselves, to discipline ourselves. There we are reminded we are one body; there indeed we are made one body. There we are welcomed as sinners who want so desperately to cling to our own wills, and there we are bidden to give them up to God, thus finding unity with him and with each other. There it is we indeed become one body in this one Lord.

—by *Richard O. Johnson*, editor

## Omnium gatherum



**An interesting read** • You probably already have more subscriptions than you can handle, but here's one that might be of interest. Richard Cimino edits a newsletter entitled *Religion Watch*, published by the Religioscope Institute <[www.religioscope.org](http://www.religioscope.org)>. Its purview is trends in contemporary religion — not just Christianity, and not just in the U.S. Cimino is often a perceptive observer of these things, and his work here is no exception.

**Ecumenism down under** • North Americans often have, shall we say, a somewhat parochial view of ecumenism. In case you have missed it, the Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogue in Australia has recently produced a very significant document called *The Ministry of Oversight: The Office of Bishop and President in the Church*. Looking at the episcopal office Biblically, historically and theologically, the dialogue has produced a statement that is a model of careful ecumenical convergence. It doesn't seem to be available on-line yet, but you can order a printed copy from Australian Church Resources at [www.acresources.com.au/](http://www.acresources.com.au/).

**Speaking of down under** • Another Australian resource worth knowing about — this one not from the church but from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. They produce a wonderful radio program entitled "For the God Who Sings" — two hours each week of beautiful church music, keyed to the liturgical calendar. You can listen to the podcast by going to [www.abc.net.au/classic/ftgws/#listen](http://www.abc.net.au/classic/ftgws/#listen).

**The Joy of Bach** • And speaking of beautiful church music, any Lutheran worth his or her salt must be a fan of J. S. Bach. One of my best recent purchases was a set of his complete works, 155 CD's, for a very reasonable price (around a hundred bucks). Go to Amazon.com and search for "Bach Edition." I haven't gotten through all 155 yet, but what I've heard is very satisfactory.

**Lutheran trials** • I'm glad I'm only the editor of *Forum Letter*, not *The Lutheran*. (I'm probably not alone in that.) I mean, what a challenging job it must be. Editor Daniel Lehmann tells us in the May issue

that the house organ for the ELCA is going to be shrinking by four pages. While this obviously is in part due to financial considerations, it will also "force" the magazine to "better focus our editorial content." Seems a little like putting a lock on the refrigerator door to force oneself to eat a little less — it might help, but it's no guarantee, and a better approach might be improved self-discipline.

**Award winning** • All that aside, you should know that Lutherans fared well in the recent awards for excellence given by the Associated Church Press. *The Lutheran* got top honors both for its churchwide assembly coverage and for a "shorter theological reflection" ("The Annunciation Reconsidered" by Debra Farrington). *Lutheran Witness* won in the "feature article" category for "New Life in Greensburg" by Paula Schleuter Ross. *Lutheran Women Today* was recognized for this year's Bible study of the Beatitudes by Martha Stortz. All three of these publications, as well as the ELCA News Service, took second place and honorable mention awards in several other categories. Kudos to all.

**No award for advertising** • Having said nice things about *The Lutheran*, now I must go on to say it was a bit disappointing to see a full-page color ad in the May issue for the Biennial Assembly of Lutherans Concerned/North America. Billed as "a conference of the movement to welcome persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities into the life of the Lutheran communion," the ad was at least colorful. But I expect it will lead to more congregations deciding just to drop the "every member" plan. What pastor needs the hassle of dealing with parishioners who find LCNA's platform objectionable, and don't really want an advertisement for it sitting on their coffee table? Yes, I know LCNA is an officially recognized "Independent Lutheran Organization." I also know their advertising dollar is as good as anyone else's. But *The Lutheran* knew darn well this would stir the pot of controversy; why else would they have emblazoned "ADVERTISEMENT" across the top of the page, a designation not provided for other full-page ads by, for instance, Thrivent or even the company selling columbaria. If I had to pick the four pages that could best have been eliminated in

this issue, that advertisement would have been at the top of the list.

**The editor's mailbox** • My predecessor did not adequately warn me about the volume and the nature of the letters that were going to start filling my mailbox. *Forum Letter* readers, many of them, seem only too glad to tell me what they think about what we've published. We don't generally publish "letters to the editor"; if we did, we'd have to pick up those four pages *The Lutheran* is going to drop and the cost of your subscription would go way up. But perhaps you would be interested in looking over my shoulder at some of what comes addressed to the editor, just this once.

Some of it is angry. An Episcopal clergyman who described his parish as "Anglo-Catholic" had somehow happened upon my comments in the March issue about "The looming Episcopal train wreck." He suggested that I might want to know what I'm talking about before writing such a thing, and went on for two pages of single-spaced size 5 or so type to make sure I understood how completely wrong I was, using colorful phrases like "tabloid journalism," "disgusting and demeaning," "cheap shot," and "the height of hubris." You get the idea. It was when he insisted that "you Lutherans are just as divided as we are, you are just better at hiding it" that I knew I didn't need to take him seriously. Lutherans, better at hiding their divisions? I don't think so.

Some of it is thoughtful. Another reader, apparently responding to my invitation for commen-

tary on the sexuality draft, said simply, "The *Small Catechism* makes more sense to me on the subject of human sexuality than the study recently released." He kindly supplied me with extensive quotations from the Catechism, perhaps knowing how much trouble I have finding things on my desk. As to the substance of his comment, though, I'd have to agree.

Sometimes the letters are uplifting and encouraging. Hope Wittrock, an ALPB board member, loved Paul Sauer's article "Daddy, I want a white face" (April issue). Ms. Wittrock claims that her LCMS congregation, Redeemer Lutheran Church in the Bronx, is "the most diverse Lutheran congregation in the USA" with more than twenty-five different ethnic backgrounds represented. "I am the only member," she wrote, "who can trace blood to the Saxon immigration of the mid-1800's that became the LCMS. Thirty-five years ago the times and the neighborhoods were a-changing in the Bronx. The leadership of Redeemer made a conscious decision that our parish was going to embrace the neighborhood. We did not care where people had been born or what shade their skin was. We were going to grow Lutherans. Due to this decision we have a thriving church that models the community." Certainly sounds like a lively place. Looks like it, too, if you visit [www.redeemerlutheranbronx.org](http://www.redeemerlutheranbronx.org).

**If you hurry** • Sorry we didn't tell you sooner, but it may not be too late to register for the June 9-11 Baltimore conference on "Christian Theology & Islam," sponsored by the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology <[www.e-ccet.org](http://www.e-ccet.org)>.

Address Service Requested

Periodicals  
Postage Paid

AMERICAN LUTHERAN PUBLICITY BUREAU  
LUTHERAN FORUM / FORUM LETTER  
POST OFFICE BOX 327  
DELHI, NY 13753-0327