

FORUM LETTER

Volume 41 Number 1

January 2012

Inside this issue:

- Portico pettiness** 4
The one true God 5
Ex libris forum 6
Omnium gatherum 7

The American
Lutheran Publicity
Bureau is on the web
www.alpb.org

FORUM LETTER is published monthly by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau (www.alpb.org) with LUTHERAN FORUM, a quarterly journal, in a combined subscription for \$27.45 (U.S.) a year, \$49.95 (U.S.) for two years, in the United States and Canada. Retirees and students, \$22.00 a year. Add \$8.00 per year for Canadian, \$12.00 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. Postage paid at
Delhi, NY and additional mailing offices.

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

Copyright © 2011 by the American
Lutheran Publicity Bureau.
ISSN 0046-4732

The world's shipwreck is at an end



In the mystery of our Lord's incarnation there were clear indications of his eternal Godhead. Yet the great events we celebrate today [at Epiphany] disclose and reveal in different ways the fact that God himself took a human body. Mortal man, enshrouded always in darkness, must not be left in ignorance, and so be deprived of what he can understand and retain only by grace. In choosing to be born for us, God chose to be known by us. He therefore reveals himself in this way, in order that this great sacrament of his love may not be an occasion for us of great misunderstanding. Today the Magi find, crying in a manger, the one they have followed as he shone in the sky. Today the Magi see clearly, in swaddling clothes, the one they have long awaited as he lay hidden among the stars. Today the Magi gaze in deep wonder at what they see: heaven on earth, earth in heaven, man in God, God in man, one whom the whole universe cannot contain now enclosed in a tiny body. As they look, they believe and do not question, as their symbolic gifts bear witness: incense for God, gold for a king, myrrh for one who is to die. So the Gentiles, who were the last, become the first: the faith of the Magi is the first fruits of the belief of the Gentiles. Today Christ enters the Jordan to wash away the sin of the world. John himself testifies that this is why he has come: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world." Today a servant lays his hand on the Lord, a man lays his hand on God, John lays his hand on Christ, not to forgive but to receive forgiveness. Today, as the psalmist prophesied: "The voice of the Lord is heard above the waters." What does the voice say? "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." Today the Holy Spirit hovers over the waters in the likeness of a dove. A dove announced to Noah that the flood had disappeared from the earth; so now a dove is to reveal that the world's shipwreck is at an end for ever.—Peter Chrysologus, 5th century Bishop of Ravenna, Sermon 160, *Patrologia Latina*, 52, 620-622. Cited in J. Robert Wright, *Readings for the Daily Office from the Early Church* (Church Hymnal Corp., 1991, 48-49).

Sabbatical musings



Last fall I had the gift of a four-month sabbatical from my parish responsibilities. We have a policy that allows for a sabbatical every five years, but last time I was "due" we were in the midst of some staff changes and the time didn't seem right. So it's been ten years since my last sabbatical. Since I'm now 62, it's pretty likely this will be my last one until the permanent sabbatical of retirement. I hope you will indulge me if I take some

space here to reflect on what I did and what I learned.

Pastors who've never taken a sabbatical are really short-changing themselves; or perhaps I should say that their congregations are short-changing themselves. A planned "time away" is a good thing for everyone involved. My two previous sabbatical leaves were both academically oriented; on the first I began a Ph.D. program by going to school full time for a semester, and on the second I wrote most of my dissertation. I will always treasure the remark of one of my parishioners: "This is so good for us," he said, "because you bring back so much from your studies."

Contemplating retirement

This time my plans were more amorphous. I half-facetiously called it my "contemplating retirement" project. Part of it was some work with an Alban Institute consultant to learn how I can best prepare the congregation of which I've been pastor for nearly 30 years for the coming transition (whenever it may come). I admit that part of it was also "trying on" what retirement might feel like for me personally. I rather quickly began to understand what I've heard so many retirees say: "I don't know how I ever had time to work."

Some of my time was spent doing church-related things I normally do that are "extra-parochial." Of course I continued to edit *Forum Letter*, and that included a week at the 2011 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. The last few years I've had the enriching opportunity to teach some church history courses for Fuller Theological Seminary, and I was already on the docket for a class during the fall. (It was Early Church History—a course I love to teach these Fuller students, many of whom are non-denominational evangelicals who often think nothing important happened between the last chapter of Acts and, oh, last week.)

I learned it all in kindergarten

But those were not the things that were most important to me during my time away. Perhaps my greatest joy was volunteering one day a week in my wife's kindergarten classroom. Public schools in California are in dismal financial shape, and in our local district this has meant increased class sizes and the elimination of classroom aides—a perfect storm of troubles in a kindergarten classroom. For the past

several years, primary class sizes have been more or less capped at twenty; this year my wife has 25. No aide means trying to teach a lesson to all 25 four and five year olds at once—not something most people would find particularly edifying.

So I had a blast going in every Monday and doing everything from teaching a math lesson to doing an art project to sitting in a corner and cutting out things. It's been a while since I've had the chance to look at the world through the eyes of a five-year-old. It was a wondrous experience indeed.

To give just one example: A boy in the class, let's call him Mike, has some serious problems. A very difficult birth has left him with serious cognitive handicaps, and he really can't focus well. He's large for his age, and often kind of like a bull in a china shop. In the beginning of the year it was tough for the other kids to like him very much.

Then there's a girl, I'll call her Abby. She's the youngest in the class, very sweet but kind of in la-la land much of the time. She can't help it; she's four years old. One morning we're sitting down on the floor for the opening circle time, and Mike is sitting off by himself. Here comes Abby, who timidly asks, "Would you like me to sit by you, Mike?" "Yeah," he says, "Will you be my friend?" "OK," she replies, and down she sits.

There's a world of life lessons in a kindergarten classroom. I probably can't keep up the every Monday routine now that I'm back at work, but I'm going to try to be there at least a couple of days a month.

Moving on out

Then there were the family dynamics. The big event of the late summer was my daughter's ordination, which happened here in our California congregation though her first call is to Upstate New York. I was so very honored to be the preacher at the service. You can't imagine what that was like—or maybe you can. To have your child hear the call of God into the ministry is an awesome and humbling thing for any pastor; to stand beside her as her assisting minister as she presides at the Eucharist for the first time—well, it was quite a day for us all.

But with this first call came the stark reality of a child moving away from home for good. While she hadn't really lived in our house except for some summers and holidays for almost ten years, there was still a "Johanna's room." Now it was being

emptied of furniture, books, pictures on the wall—everything being packed up to ship to New York.

To make matters worse, her older brother has now married and landed in a stable situation in the United States (after some years in Asia), so he chose this summer to move all his stuff—most of it in boxes, but still stored at our house—to Texas. So the garage was filled up with Johanna's boxes until the mover came, and then it was promptly filled again with Luke's boxes for the mover coming the next week.

As part of this process, we went through the house and bequeathed various pieces of furniture and other items to them as they each begin to set up housekeeping in their new homes. That was harder than I expected. We had an antique sideboard that I loved. It had been in storage for a while, but I still wanted to find a way to use it some day. I had a bookcase made for me by my grandfather when I was a boy. (I guess it qualifies as an antique, too.) Both of these we gave to my son, and then, when they were gone, Lois and I had a serious case of giver's remorse. Should we really have let those things go? I mean, sure, it's our son and all, but will he appreciate these things as much as we do? Will he treasure their history?

The gifts we give

All that regret went out the window when we visited him in October. We walked into his house, and these pieces looked beautiful. It was as if they had been given new life, in a new context, by a new generation. We were thrilled to see it.

There's a metaphor there, of course. Maybe several. We give what we can to the succeeding generation—our own children, yes, but also perhaps our congregation, or our community. Many things we give gladly, some reluctantly. Some things we give without even realizing it. But the gifts are given, and they are received. They may be used differently from our expectations. They may look a bit different in a new context. But how can we not be moved and satisfied to think that what we have given will go on? Well, as I said, my sabbatical theme was "contemplating retirement."

Tough sledding

Another fascinating part of sabbatical: worshipping in different churches. This had a retirement

angle, too; we don't expect to move from our community when I retire, at least not immediately, and so we'll have to find a place to worship. The closest ELCA congregations are 30 minutes or so away. So we attended some different churches, always with the question: "Could we worship here regularly and be satisfied?"

It was tough sledding, I have to admit. We mostly worshiped in Lutheran or Episcopal congregations. My wife, of course, is not nearly as critical as I am. One Sunday early in the sabbatical I proposed worshipping at a particular church and she said she didn't want to go because I would just complain about the pastor. But I promised to be good, and I didn't say a word. I didn't have to; the minute we were in our car, she started in with "What in the world was that sermon about, and what the heck were they doing to the liturgy?" I just smiled; sometimes you have to just smile.

Later in the fall she made an astute observation: "The Episcopal churches we've attended seem to be more predictable and respectful in terms of liturgy than the Lutheran churches." She was definitely on to something there. Very seldom did the Episcopal liturgy disappoint us, though the preaching wasn't always the best. In Lutheran churches, it seems, one can't count on either one any more.

Of course this did not surprise me intellectually, but experientially it saddened me. I'm not entirely opposed to creativity in liturgical forms, when taken in small doses and according to directions. But my experience of the liturgy in ELCA congregations was pretty discouraging. Things added or left out, choices made for no apparent reason or purpose, and all with an air of "Well, it's all *adiaphora* anyway, so we can do whatever we please."

We don't need no stinkin' policy

It isn't just the form of the liturgy where this attitude shows up, but it is manifested in deeper ways. I was astonished how many of the congregations we visited—both Lutheran and Episcopal—made it clear that everyone, just everyone, is welcome to receive the Eucharist. Baptism is not required, let alone any particular confessional agreement.

This is contrary to the ELCA policy, insofar as there is an ELCA policy, and it is even more clearly contrary to the canons of the Episcopal

Church. It raises pretty serious theological and ecclesiological issues when a congregation decides they can just abandon the teaching that the Eucharist is for the baptized. I'm no "closed communion" Lutheran confessionalist type of guy, but I'm just sayin'—I'd almost rather go that direction than "y'all come." There's more integrity to it.

So I'm back at work now, thinking about the things I've learned on my sabbatical—the formal

things, the "official project," but also the personal things. Thinking about them, praying about them, not coming to any conclusions but then I didn't expect to come to any conclusions. But I will close where I began: If you are a pastor who has never had a sabbatical, you should work with your congregation to find a way to do it. You, and they, will be the richer for it.

—by *Richard O. Johnson, editor*

Portico pettiness



The letter from ELCA Board of Pensions CEO Jeffrey Thiemann announced what had already been in the news: the Board of Pensions has become Portico Benefit Services. This change, said the newly elected head of the agency, "follows recommendations we've heard over several years from plan members like you."

He makes it sound like a popular movement, doesn't he? I'm having trouble buying it. Truth is, I just can't picture any pastor I know sitting down and writing a letter, or even dashing off an e-mail, to say, "Hey, you guys really ought to find some snazzier name than Board of Pensions. I'd really like it better if you could come up with something that's not so, you know, institutional." Who would even think to do that? He or she surely could find a better use of time than complaining about the name of a pension program.

Marketing panache

I didn't much care for the fraternal benefit companies becoming "Thrivent" either, but at least one could argue a marketing strategy there. Neither "Lutheran Brotherhood" nor "Aid Association for Lutherans" expressed the kind of pizzazz necessary when you're out hustling for new policies and accounts. (Not sure "Thrivent" does either, but that's another story.) But as far as I can tell, the new Portico Benefit Services isn't looking to expand their clients beyond the ELCA, so what need have they for marketing panache?

Indeed, the BOP (I can't quite bring myself to start calling them PBS) has decided to reduce their numbers by expelling a bunch of pastors who have left the ELCA. It has been BOP policy for quite some

time now that pastors and congregations withdrawing from the ELCA could continue to participate in the ELCA pension and benefit plans indefinitely. When the North American Lutheran Church was formed in 2009, the BOP reiterated this policy, and also agreed that newly ordained NALC pastors and newly formed congregations could come on board as long as the BOP was the sole comprehensive benefits provider. This seemed a win/win situation for everyone; NALC pastors had coverage available, and a larger pool arguably lowered costs for all members.

That's all, folks

It appears to have been understood by all that the NALC would move toward an alternative plan eventually, in part because many in the NALC have conscientious scruples about the BOP's coverage of elective abortions. This past fall the NALC negotiated a health benefits plan with the Hahn insurance group, a respected provider of insurance of various kinds to churches. The BOP promptly announced it was kicking all NALC pastors off the portico, effective almost immediately. That's *all* NALC pastors—not just the newly ordained ones for whom, by the agreement, the BOP would be sole provider, but also all the former ELCA pastors who for years have been part of the plan under the previous policy permitting former ELCA pastors to participate.

The reaction in the NALC has been one of surprise—not that such a decision would be made, but that it would be made so abruptly, giving NALC congregations a very small window for arranging new coverage for their pastors; and that it would be

made so absolutely, affecting even pastors who have been assured for years that they were most welcome to continue their coverage with the BOP.

“It makes us in the ELCA look petty and vindictive,” lamented one ELCA pastor. “I want an explanation of how this move benefits me. How does this decision follow the ‘prudent man’ rule?” I guess

I’d have to say that if the BOP can’t give a persuasive explanation as to why they need to change their name to Portico Benefit Services, this more complicated question is not very likely to be answered to anyone’s satisfaction.

—by Richard O. Johnson, editor

The one true God?



Yale University’s Miroslav Volf is one of the most interesting voices in the theological world today, and he has waded into any number of touchy topics over the years. His most recent book is *Allah: A Christian Response* (HarperOne, 2011), in which he argues, to put it simply, that the Muslims’ Allah and the Christian God are in fact the same God. Understand, Volf is no ordinary liberal pluralist; he formerly taught at Fuller Theological Seminary, and has solid evangelical credentials.

That gave him a hearing, at least, at another conservative seminary, Gordon-Conwell in Massachusetts. In a keynote address there in November (reported on at some length in the November 29 *Christian Century*), Volf made his argument that Christians and Muslims worship the same God, though in different ways. This got mixed reviews at Gordon-Conwell, as one might expect. Certainly Volf’s argument, agree with it or not, is one that needs to be taken with utmost seriousness.

Ignorance at the mailbox

Reading about Volf’s proposal, my mind went back to the time after the September 11 attacks. A couple of days after that terrible event, my wife and I were out walking the dog when we encountered our neighbor at the mailbox. He was performing his usual ritual of reading another neighbor’s morning paper; this time he was so upset by the news that he neglected his usual explanation that he was just taking the paper over to put it on its owner’s doorstep. “Those Muslims,” he muttered, “their god must be Satan.” The immediate meditation of my heart was something to the effect that if he would just subscribe to his own newspaper, he might not be so damn ignorant, but the words of my wife’s mouth beat me to the punch and offered a

more gentle response, no doubt one more acceptable in the Lord’s sight.

My neighbor, an ardent Southern Baptist, was likely reflecting what he had been taught. A number of leading evangelicals have, over the past years, offered a much less irenic evaluation of Islam than Volf’s (Franklin Graham once described it as an “evil religion”). Among Lutherans, such vitriol has been less common. We are perhaps especially sensitive to interfaith harmony, given the later Luther’s difficult pronouncements on the Jews. Lutheran reflection on Islam post-9/11 quickly became enmeshed with controversy over the LCMS’s Atlantic District President David Benke’s participation in an interfaith Yankee Stadium event (whether it was “worship” or not, we’ll leave to the language parsers). In a way it was safer and easier to dispute over the Lutheran view of ecumenical and interfaith fellowship than to tackle the difficult theological question of whether the God who was incarnate in Jesus Christ is the same God in whom Muslims (and, for that matter, Jews) believe.

The same God?

In the midst of that brouhaha, President Benke was quoted as saying that the God of Islam is the “one true God.” This comment apparently came in a private e-mail from Benke to a correspondent, which then was made very public and began making the LCMS rounds. Benke perhaps would have chosen different words had he intended them for public consumption; one of the curses of e-mail is that it allows us to say things to the world before we think them through. But assuming he was quoted accurately, Benke was only reflecting what many Christians say rather unreflectively: we all worship the same God.

The Benke incident is all water under the

bridge now, or it should be, but a serious theological question remains as to the nature and identity of God. Most Christians would say—it would be hard not to say—that the God of our Lord Jesus is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But is that God also Allah—that is to say, is “Allah” just another name for the one true God whom we Christians worship and serve?

Generally Muslims believe so. Their view, as I understand it, is that Islam is the final and fullest in a progression of understandings of the one true God. Jews and Christians, they say, were on the right track, and their prophets and teachers were pointing in the right direction. It remained for Mohammed finally to get it right. Parts of the Qur’an can be read to view Christians and Jews with some charity, since we all worship the same God. (OK, so Christians have no corner on the market of failing to live up to their Scriptures.) Other parts of the Qur’an class Christians as “unbelievers.”

The finality of Christ

So how can that be reconciled with our un-

derstanding of the finality of Jesus Christ? How can the radical unitarianism of Islam be reconciled with the trinitarian convictions of Christians? If the “true God,” in our confession, became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, while for Islam that concept is blasphemous and scandalous, how can we be said to be worshipping the same God? If God’s “name,” as some Lutheran theologians have suggested, is “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” how can that be reconciled with the insistence that there is only one God, Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet?

I have many more questions than answers about this, and I’m certainly no scholar of Islam. I’ve known very few Muslims personally, and those I’ve known have been wonderful people whose faith I find to be worthy of respect. But do we truly worship the same God? And if not, do we do anybody any favors by claiming that we do? I think one of my New Year resolutions will be to work my way through Volf’s volume. There are, I would think, few interfaith issues that are more pressing in our contemporary world.

—by Richard O. Johnson, editor

Ex libris forum



Time for another installment in our occasional notes about some books you might like to read. Too late for Christmas presents, I know, but there’s a lot of winter left, and what better way to cope than with a good read?

■ Steve Luxenberg, *Annie’s Ghosts: A Journey into a Family Secret* (Hyperion, 2010, ISBN 978-1401310196). This is a remarkable book—not “religious” in the normal sense, but a fascinating read. Luxenberg grew up thinking his mother was an only child—she had said so plenty of times. Turns out she had a sister who had been committed to a mental institution in her young adulthood, and had lived there for several decades until her death. This only came to light after Luxenberg’s mother’s death, and he set out on a quest to find out the story of his Aunt Annie. The journey touches on changing attitudes toward mental illness, the Holocaust, the culture of immigrant communities, and much more. Part memoir, part family history, part detective

story, this is one you’ll have trouble putting down.

■ J. Robert Wright, *Readings for the Daily Office from the Early Church* (Church Hymnal Corporation, 1991, ISBN 978-0898692013). I have to admit I’m one of those people who thinks in theory it would be good to read more from the patristic writers, but I never get around to it. I’ve tried some “daily excerpt” books without much success. Then I found this one. The passages selected are a good length (not too long, not too short, but just right), and well-chosen. So far I’ve stayed on track with it, and I’m enjoying it. Unfortunately out of print, but readily available on the second-hand market.

■ Günther Gassmann, *Historical Dictionary of Lutheranism* [second edition] (Scarecrow Press, 2011, ISBN 978-0810872325). There have been a number of dictionaries and encyclopedias of Lutheranism published over the years, from Henry Eyster Jacobs’ *The Lutheran Cyclopedia* (1899) to Julius Bodensieck’s

massive 3-volume *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church* (1965) to Erwin Leuker's *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (most recent revision in 1975). Each has its uses, but obviously each is now out of date. This new edition of Gassmann's 2001 work (compiled collaboratively with Duane Larson and Mark Oldenburg) fills in some gaps. The entries are in many respects somewhat quirky. You'll find, for instance, an article on "Nonmember Churches of the Lutheran World Federation"—an interesting enough article, but who would think to look that up? Or what might move one to go searching in a historical dictionary for an article ungrammatically titled "Art, Lutheran Attitude to"? More predictable, and therefore useful, are some entries for contemporary Lutheran leaders and theologians—though the choices are again somewhat baffling. Here you'll find George Lindbeck, but not Carl Braaten or Paul Holmer or Arthur Carl Piepkorn. There's a lengthy article on the ELCA, but no separate entries on its predecessor bodies. The entry on "Homosexuality" is the same length as the article on "Grace." All of this makes for interesting browsing, but I don't see this becoming a standard

reference work. One nice feature is a lengthy series of bibliographies, arranged topically. Even here, the entries tend toward more recent books, and as a historian I found myself mystified at some of the significant omissions.

■ Lowell G. Almen & Richard Sklba, eds. *The Hope of Eternal Life: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue XI* (Lutheran University Press, 2011). Yes, Virginia, there is still a U. S. Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue. It's been six years since the last report was issued. Most of the dialogues have been published by Augsburg, but apparently real ecumenical work isn't so marketable anymore, and Lutheran University Press is to be commended for taking on the project. This dialogue tackled the difficult topics of heaven, hell and purgatory, prayer for the dead, the possibility of universal salvation. Unlike some of the earlier dialogues, in this one the statement itself is most of the book, while only a small handful of the background papers have been included. Still, this is a great resource which should be (along with the previous volumes) in every pastor's library. —roj

Omnium gatherum



Hard to know • The following appeared in the *New York Times* on October 16, 2011: "The Rev. Charles Thomas Dupree and Matthew Bodine Cole were married Wednesday at the Lake Hill, NY, weekend home of James Conrad, a friend of the couple. Janet W. Baus, another friend of the couple who became a Universal Life minister for the event, officiated. Later this month, the couple are to have their marriage blessed at Trinity Episcopal Church in Bloomington, Ind., of which Father Dupree is the rector. That ceremony is to be led by the Right Rev. Catherine Maples Waynick, the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Indiana. . . ." It's hard to know, isn't it, just what is the most outlandish part of this notice.

Times change • Way back in July, last year's "From the archives" feature reprinted a piece by Russ Saltzman lampooning the "language guidelines for worship at Holden Village." In November we received a letter from Holden's current "village

pastor," Scott Kershner, responding. (I know that's a long response time, but Holden Village, you may know, is pretty remote.) Pr. Kershner says that the quotations (from *circa* 1992—remember, this was "from the archives") "are in no way representative of the worship life at Holden Village." Worship at Holden "[follows] the historic ordo of the western church" in its "praise of the Triune God, confessed in the ecumenical creeds and attested to in the Lutheran Confessions." In a follow-up e-mail, Pr. Kershner assured me that no one presently at Holden had any recollection of these "guidelines," and that our reprint caused the Holden staff to dig them out of a file, which became "the occasion of lots of laughter." He also insisted that the quoted guidelines "have no relationship to our present worship life at Holden, nor are they representative of Holden's worship and ministry through the years." Good news, all around, and I'm glad we could provide some amusement for the Holden staff. For what it's worth, I confess that in my own visits to Holden

Village—and I’ve been there a couple of times over the years—the worship, while generally not my cup of tea, has not been as flakey as the document quoted in *FL* might suggest. I’ve experienced more problematic worship in some ELCA congregations and synod assemblies. Anyway, when you go to Holden Village, you set aside certain expectations and take it as it is. You know, sort of like Bible camp.

A powerful film • One thing I wanted to do on my sabbatical was to watch a lot of movies. I didn’t actually accomplish it, sorry to say. One Netflix rental had been sitting gathering dust for several weeks—mostly because it was a French film and it seems harder and harder to read subtitles on the television. I finally watched it, and I was really glad. The 2010 film is called *Of Gods and Men*, and it is based on the true story of a community of Trappist monks in Algeria who are being encouraged to leave their monastery because of the threat of Islamic thugs who are preying on the village and who seem a particular danger to European Christians. The monks wrestle with their vocation, their faith, their commitment both to the people they serve and to one another. It is a fascinating and moving film, and I recommend it strongly.

And another • Speaking of films, something interesting came up the other day. A fellow contacted the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau office wondering where he could get a copy of the film *Question 7*, which, he claimed, ALPB had produced. Donna, our knowledgeable office manager, was pretty sure he was wrong about that, but wondered if I knew any-

thing about the film and where the guy might get a copy. Turns out I did, because my father-in-law was a consultant on the film, produced in 1961 not by ALPB but by Lutheran Film Associates and judged “best picture” that year by the National Board of Review. Like *Of Gods and Men*, it is a remarkable story of conscience in the face of adversity and danger. It is available, turns out, from amazon.com, or even more inexpensively from visionvideo.com. Over the years Lutheran Film Associates has produced several very important films—most famously, perhaps, *Martin Luther* in 1953. Nearly as well-known, at least in some circles, was *A Time for Burning*, the 1966 documentary about a Nebraska pastor and congregation facing the struggle for civil rights. I’ve used that film in courses on American church history, and it never fails to spark the most intense conversation of the quarter. The significance of the film is seen in the fact that it appears on the Library of Congress’s National Film Registry. And let us not forget the wonderful *Joy of Bach*, produced in 1988. Yes, Lutheran Film Associates has done some great work over the years—an impressive result of the inter-Lutheran cooperation that now seems to be pretty much kaput.

Digital age • As the problems of the U. S. Postal Service spiral further and further out of control, this might be a propitious time to remind you that it is possible to receive your copy of *Forum Letter* digitally. If you’d like to switch from print to PDF (and this is for *FL* only, not *Lutheran Forum*), contact Donna at the ALPB subscription office; e-mail dkralpb@aol.com.
—roj

Address Service Requested

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

NON-PROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
MASON CITY, IA 50402
ALPB