

FORUM LETTER

Volume 41 Number 5

May 2012

Inside this issue:

Shepherds and hirelings 4

Church buildings talk 5

Omnium gatherum 7



The intellectual difficulties [of Christian faith] have to be met, however, and you will be meeting them for the rest of your life. When you get a reasonable hold on one, another will come to take its place. At one time, the clash of the different world religions was a difficulty for me. Where you have absolute solutions, however, you have no need of faith. Faith is what you have in the absence of knowledge. The reason this clash doesn't bother me any longer is because I have got, over the years, a sense of the immense sweep of creation, of the evolutionary process in everything, of how incomprehensible God must necessarily be to be the God of heaven and earth. You can't fit the Almighty into your intellectual categories . . . If you want your faith, you have to work for it. It is a gift, but for very few is it a gift given without any demand for equal time devoted to its cultivation. For every book you read that is anti-Christian, make it your business to read one that presents the other side of the picture; if one isn't satisfactory read others. Don't think that you have to abandon reason to be a Christian. . . . To find out about faith you have to go to the people who have it and you have to go to the most intelligent ones if you are going to stand up intellectually to agnostics and the general run of pagans that you are going to find in the majority of people around you. . . . Even in the life of a Christian, faith rises and falls like the tides of an invisible sea. It's there, even when he can't see it or feel it, if he wants it to be there. You realize, I think, that it is more valuable, more mysterious, altogether more immense than anything you can learn or decide upon in college. Learn what you can, but cultivate Christian skepticism. It will keep you free – not free to do anything you please, but free to be formed by something larger than your own intellect or the intellects of those around you. – Flannery O'Connor, writing to a college student who had heard her lecture; published in *The Habit of Being*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979), 387.

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 © 2012 by the American
Lutheran Publicity Bureau.
ISSN 0046-4732

Communing where Jesus walked



Nothing provokes serious thought about Christian unity like a trip to the Holy Land. With pilgrims gathering from the four corners of the earth to visit the places where Jesus walked, it seems a bit churlish to insist on one's confessional peculiarities. If there is any place where Jesus' prayer "that they might all be one" should be taken to heart, it is at those sacred sites.

Of course Christians have shown an astonishing inability to fulfill that prayer. Last year's fisticuffs-turned-brawl right in the Church of the Nativity in

Bethlehem between monks of differing communions arguing about who was sweeping which part of the floor was a safely comic episode in the ongoing, serious story that in the past often featured actual casualties. The history of internecine Christian conflict, the razor-wire-draped context of political unrest between Israel and the Palestinians, the checkpoints, and the horrible ghost of the Holocaust hovering over the place all seem to call out to all sensible people, "Can't we all just get along?" Christians joining to celebrate the Eucharist together in such a place might constitute an act of defiance and an act of healing at the same time. Or at the very least, insisting on "closed communion" in such a place seems like shrinking from an opportunity to witness to the unity of the body of Christ.

A deeper truth

Or then again, such insistence might just be a witness to some deeper truth; at least that was my recent experience. After first going to the Holy Land as part of an all-Missouri Synod "familiarization tour," I decided to return the next year with a group from my congregation. We were not nearly numerous enough to fill a large tour bus, so the company grouped us with a bunch of other little groups of various denominations. Which was fine; we're in bus fellowship with practically everyone.

Then I was asked to be the "bus captain," a pretty nice gig that required (in exchange for perks like free lunches) doing constant head counts and coordinating things like schedules and devotions with the leaders of all the other little church groups on our bus. I knew the tour was slated to include frequent devotions with the whole busload of people, as well as at least one communion service. The latter obviously presented a problem

Kosher

So several weeks before departure I contacted the leaders of the other groups who would be sharing the bus with us. After covering a list of topics and logistical arrangements, I explained to the other leaders that our group would be doing our own thing at the communion service, that we hoped it wouldn't be awkward but that our church body has a different teaching on this issue and we needed to respect it. We certainly weren't intending to offend and we looked forward to being all together on the tour, and so forth.

One person responded with great disappointment, but the others accepted it as some sort of quirky sectarian thing, as though we'd asked for kosher meals or something.

The other leaders were clergy or other religious leaders of various mainline denominations. One was a Sister of Mercy with a Ph.D. in theology. One was from a tiny denomination I'd never heard of that broke away from the Nazarenes about some issue. All of them had been on these tours before, so I had secretly entertained the hope that one of them would have a problem with all of us communing together and suggest some other arrangement. That way I wouldn't have to be the bad guy. But no such luck. They all had simply assumed that we would all commune together.

Not nearly as narrow

Even the Catholic sister was described by her close friend as "not nearly as narrow as the Catholic Church on this issue," and very comfortable communing with anyone and everyone. But she, at least, understood where I was coming from — didn't agree, but understood. To the others, the LCMS and its policy was something entirely foreign.

Our groups finally met at the airport, got acquainted, and (as far as I could tell) got along famously throughout the tour. I didn't have to resort to any lame ice-breakers to get the groups mingling. The communion service wasn't until the last day; as of yet only the five or six leaders even knew there would eventually be a communion service, and we'd agreed to take turns leading the devotions until then, so all was well.

Nerve-grating

Our devotions, however, sometimes truly grated on my nerves. Alas, my position as bus captain fell short of genuine ecclesial authority, so even though I was to coordinate the devotions I didn't think it was fair to insist on doing them all myself; nor, I imagine, were the other pastors inclined to submit their talks to doctrinal review. And I had told my own parishioners before we left home that the tour would include all kinds of different denominations, and advised them just to let the differences be part of the education of the tour rather than letting them bother us.

The only time my inner reservations might have showed through my façade of outward agreea-

bility was when I declined to take part in the pan-denominational liturgy of rebaptism at the Jordan River. (This wasn't a remembrance; it was very explicitly a rebaptism.) I decided to watch from the back rather than join in and get all holdy-handly about the service. We were all friends by then, our multi-denominational busload of pilgrims, and the service was an emotional experience for those involved so it was probably conspicuous that some of us were merely observing rather than participating whole-heartedly, but no one said anything.

A few moments of silence

The two or three women (Catholic nun and two Protestant pastors) who were most eager to keep volunteering to lead devotions had a translation of the Bible that avoided masculine pronouns by avoiding pronouns altogether. It barely passed as a paraphrase. They always asked for a few moments of initial silence before they began to tell us, softly and somewhat sing-songily, what to think and feel in this holy place, like a hypnotist getting us to relax. They wanted us to experience the presence of God. The cross never once came up in any of their devotions, nor did forgiveness or salvation. It was just the presence of the Creator-God bringing togetherness, oneness with creation, and spiritual healing. And they were clear that Christianity, like Judaism and Islam, was simply one of the many ways that people could conceive of and experience God's presence and holiness.

One of the devotional handouts featured a drawing of a person holding a globe. It might have been a chubby Chinese man with his hair pulled back or it might have been a matronly woman. That you couldn't tell was the point. The God who holds the world in God's hands, we were told, was beyond gender. Okay, I thought to myself, but then wouldn't such a God be beyond any anthropomorphism at all? What's with the face and hands? Why draw a picture of God as a person to make the point that God is beyond being pictured as a person?

Why are we here?

Several times we were told in devotions that the historical nature of the Bible didn't matter at all (which begged the question of why take a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, but I was being good and not raising my hand with objections to other people's

devotions) but only the presence of God (never the presence of Christ, just God) mattered. And that presence was always in the silence, beauty and togetherness, never the Sacraments.

When I led devotions I could tell that some of the others were tolerating me with the same self-control with which I tolerated them. I did the Lutheran thing about the mission of the cross, sin and forgiveness and all that. Some seemed genuinely appreciative and said so; others listened in vain for some comforting word about gender or ecology. But so be it. We were united in the joys and struggles of travel, the odd meals, the adventures of shopping, but not in what we found most important.

Spiritually out of place

One of the great joys of going to the Holy Land is mingling with the pilgrims from all over the planet. You hear the guides explaining the same places and the same Bible stories in Finnish, Korean, Arabic, Spanish, and every other language under the sun. I had a clear impression (hard to say what exactly caused it) that I had more in common and would be more likely to commune with these pilgrims whose language I did not know but whose piety (to the degree I could figure it out) seemed familiar than with many people from my own country, speaking the same American English.

Among a general smattering of American Christians I felt perfectly at ease travelling around, chatting, laughing, or standing in silent awe, but I also felt spiritually out of place, as if I had to keep explaining apologetically our denomination's arcane beliefs and practices. Where I was most at home culturally I was most alone spiritually.

But among jabbering foreigners in weird clothing I felt spiritually at home. Had we spoken the same language, I do not doubt that the ancient monks keeping the holy places and the pilgrims from around the world—Catholic, Orthodox, Coptic, African Anglican—would understand the categories in which I think. They wouldn't always agree on the answers, but they would agree on the questions.

Not a foreign concept

Whether they approved of it or not, closed communion would at least not be a foreign concept, nor would rebaptism be merely a matter of breezy tourism. They weren't there to talk about gender

and ecology. At this place of intersection where the many centuries of the past are still alive and where global Christianity comes together, the LCMS and all its works and all its ways is perhaps not so odd after all; rather it is mainline Protestantism that seems like something altogether arcane and different.

In the garden

In the end we had our own communion service. I explained to the whole group that their Green Bay friends would head to another section of the (somewhat cheesy) Garden Tomb, and then when both services were over we'd meet up and head back to the bus. It seemed to be fine with everyone. The communion service was a highlight of the trip for our group as we focused on the real presence of Christ and the miracle that we had traveled around the globe and back many centuries to find remnants of Jesus' life in history, yet here he was. I don't

know what they focused on in the other service.

In the tragedy-soaked history of the people of God, it remains an offense that we couldn't commune together that day. But it wasn't the greatest potential offense. True, it would have been easy just to go along and get along — nobody would have put me up on charges or anything — but I think more blessing came from the opportunity to explain our practice and actually practice it than would have come from ignoring it and just communing together for the sake of the friendships we had formed with the other groups by touring together. Somehow closed communion, though awkward, keeps the focus where it needs to be, preserves what genuine spiritual unity there is to be had and prevents doctrinal scattering and dissolution. In the Holy Land, I was glad to be a part of a denomination that takes such things seriously.

— by Peter Speckhard, associate editor

Shepherds and hirelings



One of my favorite Sundays of the liturgical year is Good Shepherd Sunday. Oh, I know you don't find it by that name on the liturgical calendar, but every pastor who follows the common lectionary knows what I mean. On the Fourth Sunday of Easter, the gospel lesson in each year of the lectionary cycle comes from John 10, where Jesus identifies himself as the good shepherd. Phillip Pfatteicher has noted that this observance "distills the essence of Easter in a memorable and beloved image. The Lamb who was slain is one with the Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep."

I've always been particularly intrigued by the contrast Jesus draws in this year's pericope between the good shepherd and the hireling. (I like that so much better than the NRSV's "hired hand.") I've never known a real shepherd, but I've known a lot of hirelings — people who do their job just to get a paycheck, but who have no investment or pride in what they do and couldn't care less whether they do it effectively or not. A lot of these people, it seems, have jobs in customer service.

My all-time favorite job

When I was a student at Yale Divinity School

back in the last millennium, I supported myself by working in the library — still probably my all-time favorite job. It was an opportunity to get paid for being in the place that I loved the most. But during my final year in seminary, my immediate supervisor, the circulation desk administrator, resigned and a new woman was hired. Everything went downhill from there.

This woman, let's call her "Kathy," had been transferred from another part of the university library system. She was not a professional librarian, for the job did not demand that. She knew nothing about religion, as far as I could tell. The job at the divinity school paid better, and so she took it. As far as she was concerned, she was paid to oversee students and check out books. She didn't know the difference between the Old Testament and the New, and she didn't really care to learn. She just checked out books and bossed.

We'll get back to you

One day Professor Roland Bainton, the great Luther biographer, came in to look for a book. He was well into his 80s and long retired, but he and his bicycle were regular fixtures on campus. He was

just ready to send a recently completed manuscript off to his publisher, but he needed to double check one particular reference. He went down into the stacks to try to find the book he needed, but he came back empty-handed; the book was not on the shelf. He took the name and call number over to Kathy to get some help. Without even looking up, she handed him a search slip and said he'd get a postcard in three to five days if the book could be located.

He knoweth his sheep

I overheard the conversation, and asked Mr. Bainton what book he needed. (At Yale, at least back then, it was always "Mr. so-and-so," not "Dr." or "Prof.," sort of a reverse snobbery.) He showed me the name and number, and I recognized it as a book from a section of the library where some stacks were being shifted and things were in a bit of chaos. But I knew I had seen that book within the last day or two in a reshelving area in the course of my work. I asked Mr. Bainton to wait there for a moment, while I went down to the stacks. In short order I located the book and brought it back to him.

His face lit up in that cherubic way that anyone who knew him would recognize. "Ah," he said, "He knoweth his sheep by name!" I smiled and replied, "Well, at least he knoweth his books by call number."

In the library, Kathy was a hireling. She was working for money. She had her job, her procedures. But for those of us students working in the library, things were different. We were familiar with

the books that passed through our hands, and we knew the needs of the teachers and students who used those books. Procedures were not as important as helping people find what they needed.

Loving the flock

We've all known hirelings, people whose job meant nothing more than a way to earn money. And we've known people whose job was truly a vocation, a calling; people who knew that what they were doing was important, and who wanted to do it well. The hireling does what is required; the good shepherd loves the flock.

Years ago I saw a cartoon that showed a big desk with a box marked "in" and a box marked "out," and each box was full of little people. One little person turned to another and said, "You know, I never thought the last judgment would be like this." Maybe sometimes we wonder if God deals with us the same way we get dealt with here on earth—like a number, quickly, efficiently, by the book.

But of course God is not like that. A hireling cares nothing for the sheep, but God is no hireling. In Jesus Christ, we have a Good Shepherd who stays with the sheep every minute, cares for them, defends them, protects them—even to the point of laying down his life.

And that's why I love the Fourth Sunday of Easter.

— by Richard O. Johnson, editor

Church buildings talk

by Paul Gregory Alms



Buildings talk. Old farm houses covered with vines, supermarkets and church buildings all tell stories. Especially churches. They whisper to us of those who built them, of the faith confessed within their walls. If we had ears to hear, those walls would sing of weddings and funerals and hymns and baptisms. Sanctuaries speak of the God who is worshiped within them.

Recently I had two church building experiences. The first was driving by a new church off of an interstate highway. I drive one stretch of this

road every couple of months, and one day I noticed a new structure rising in the suburbs. It looked much like a typical warehouse or some commercial complex. I was quite surprised when I saw a sign go up which announced that the building was in fact a church. Well, actually the sign said it was a "worship center." The complex had no identifiable design or markings or appearance that would mark it as a church. What is more, I am sure that the anonymous business character of the site was intentional. Retail Christianity, you could call it.

Otherworldliness

My second experience was walking into an old inner city cathedral-type Lutheran church. A huge statue of Jesus towered over a stone altar inlaid with a bright colorful painting of the last supper. Elaborate carved statues of Peter and Paul flanked him. A huge pulpit topped with spires seemed to reach to heaven and soared over the tiny pews. The font and altar environs were decorated and marked out with a holy reverence. Every detail of the sanctuary conveyed awe and otherworldliness and transcendence.

What did they say?

If buildings talk, what did each church say? What story did they tell? Of what God did each speak? The first spoke of what one might call a Walmart God, a God of the corporate mindset, a God who drives an SUV, a God of the suburbs. Those who designed that building no doubt built it specifically to be comfortable to outsiders, to appeal to those who are not at home with traditional Christianity. Still, that warehouse sanctuary tells a story about God; it is the story of a God who fits in, a God who talks and behaves much like middle class Americans in the twenty-first century.

The God that old inner city Lutheran church communicated could not be more different. That structure offered a vision of a God of inexpressible power, of distance and glory and yet recognizable in the human faces that looked down from the walls. Every detail in the church added up to a pointed contrast with the street and culture around it. I had gone from commerce to cathedral, from sales to saints.

Options for shoes or salvation

The two church buildings were aimed at opposite effects: one to fit God into our lives, the other to fit us into God's life. But the incredible thing is not what is different about these churches, but what they hold in common: Christianity. Both claimed to be Christian, to follow the God of the Bible, to worship Jesus Christ, the Messiah. And yet they could not be more different in their expression of that faith.

So which one is better? The Walmart church or the cathedral church? Of course many today would say neither, or both. We like options in our

shopping, whether for shoes or salvation. The numbers might suggest the Walmart church by a mile. Certainly today people seem to flock to such retail outlets of faith. Meeting needs, marketing services, pleasing visitors can add up to a potent recipe for growth.

But beyond that there lies a deeper question: what story do we tell with the building that we build? What kind of God does our sanctuary talk about? Is God really like a checkout line? Can the reality of the God who descended on Mount Sinai in smoke and thunder and lightning be adequately expressed in a building that could just as easily be a Walmart as a church? Are the magnificent truths of the incarnation and crucifixion and resurrection of God-made-flesh easily expressed in the things of commerce and sales and marketing?

Church building as confession

Of course not all church buildings need be magnificent cathedrals. The humble country church and the modest struggling mission are as much the church as any dazzling Gothic structure. It is the gospel of grace, the preaching of Christ crucified and the giving of his holy sacraments, that is the true beauty of the church.

But Christians have always understood a connection between the structures of our faith and the structures we build. A tattered banner thrown across the wall of a rundown gym or a tarnished candlestick on a plain wooden table are evidences, however modest, that how we surround the Gospel we proclaim, how we decorate our sacramental worship, is a confession of what we believe about Christ. That country church building has much more in common with the Gothic cathedral than with the big box church structure.

In other words, our church buildings talk. They tell stories about God, and we should listen to what they say. How we build and furnish and decorate the places where we worship God and receive his saving gifts says something. It confesses the faith. Buildings tell stories. We should listen to them. Maybe we could learn something.

Paul Gregory Alms is pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church (LCMS), Catawba, NC. An earlier version of this article appeared in the Charlotte Observer in 2005.

Omnium gatherum



Sacrilege • OK, so after all that talk about the Dr. Suess Eucharist, I will admit that it might be considered more or less dignified – if, that is, you are comparing it to other things. Take, for instance, the website entitled “TheBody.com” in which ELCA pastor Andrena Ingram relates the words of institution to the use of condoms. “It may sound sacrilegious to equate condoms with those words,” she admits. “But think about it, when you are about to engage in a sexual union with another person these days, aren’t you giving up your body?” I did think about it, and it does sound sacrilegious. But of course the pastor is slated to be one of the speakers at the 2012 ELCA National Youth Gathering. While she appears to have an inspiring story, and will no doubt be a charismatic speaker, she does not appear to have very good judgment.

Criminal language • We’ve come to expect that we will receive proposed ELCA social statements right around Holy Week, and this year was no exception. Pastors in late March or early April found in their mailboxes the *Draft Social Statement on Criminal Justice*. We’ll no doubt have some extensive analysis down the road, but for now let’s just say that a quick glance makes it apparent that the social statement factory still hasn’t hired anybody with decent writing skills. I just opened a page at random to find this example: *As this church yearns for the justice of Christ’s coming kingdom, we listen to the cries for justice that ring out right now – the cries of offenders and victims, of families and communities, of those who work within the criminal justice system. Those cries cannot wait for our hope in Christ to come in completeness. For the sake of the same world that Christ was willing to die for we must be willing to employ power to preserve life. That power must never be used for self-promotion, self-satisfaction or the advancement of the interests of only some but for the good of all, especially for those who are most vulnerable.* It’s hard to know whether the worst thing about this is the theological oddity, the unrelenting liberalchurchspeak, the grammatical problems, or just the general clunkiness. I personally wish the ELCA would listen to the cries of those who think that social statements, if we are to have

them, should be written in plain English and with considerably more felicity than is generally the case. But I suppose for that we’ll have to wait for Christ to come in completeness.

Grandstanding • Of course the ELCA is all about justice, in case you hadn’t noticed. “In the wake of Trayvon Martin’s tragic death” (to quote the presiding bishop), the Presiding Bishop felt he needed to make a statement, or send a message, or whatever it is they call it. Don’t get me wrong; Mr. Martin’s death was tragic and it raises all kinds of issues that should be discussed – issues of racial profiling, issues of how the justice system works or doesn’t work. (Bishop Hanson refers to him throughout as “Trayvon,” which seems to me a tad paternalistic unless he knew Mr. Martin personally.) But I have to wonder whether a “message” from the Presiding Bishop of the ELCA advances that conversation one whit. Here is part of what he said: *Let us together courageously engage in God’s work of restoring and reconciling communities. Let us together pursue justice and work for peace no matter how long the journey or wide the chasm. Let us tear down the walls we erect to divide us and turn those walls into tables of conversation and reconciliation.* It leaves me wondering once again why he thinks he needs to make public statements about nearly everything. It leaves me wondering as well whether he’s the one who actually drafts our infelicitous social statements.

Heresy • In March, I pointed out some confused (to use a gentler word than “heretical”) Trinitarian theology in Augsburg Fortress’s confirmation curriculum. One of our eagle-eyed readers has sent another example of Augsburg Fortress’s apparent dearth of writers and editors with theological knowledge, this one something in the March-April-May issue of the *Augsburg Adult Bible Studies*. There we read, in a study focused on John 1, that “Jesus is simply ‘the Word’ who existed with God and who is God. This Word is created before the creation of everything else that exists.” The writer and editor might do well to take a refresher course in the Nicene Creed – you know, that part about “begotten, not made.” Or perhaps they could review the Athanasian Creed while

they're at it: "Uncreated is the Father, uncreated is the Son, uncreated is the Spirit." Of course it is very difficult to use precisely correct terminology when discussing the Trinity. Wouldn't you think they'd try harder, though, in materials published by our independent publishing ministry? To speak of the Word as "created" was judged to be heresy in the fourth century, and Lutherans haven't changed that judgment, at least not yet. Maybe Concordia Publishing House could teach Augsburg Fortress something about doctrinal review.

Kudos • Congratulations are in order, by the way, to Concordia Publishing House, which was recently named as one of the 2011 recipients of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, the nation's highest Presidential honor for performance excellence through innovation, improvement and visionary leadership. The award was announced by Secretary of Commerce John Bryson, who said that CPH and the four other organizations so recognized are role models for "any organization that strives for a higher standard of performance and never settles for second-best." Not that the government cares or even understands, but CPH doesn't settle for sloppily heretical sentences, either.

Drink beer first • Over on Forum Online we have the cyber-equivalent of a whole bunch of Lutherans (and others) in a beer hall arguing loudly, laughing, shouting each other down, throwing darts, and occasionally making points that invite sustained reflection. The recent flap about religious freedom and the Roman Catholic teaching on birth control brought to mind that our associate editor has often wondered

aloud why the Lutheran position on contraception changed so suddenly. When the conversation recently turned to "overpopulation" and the morality of dealing with poverty and environmental destruction via contraception, Pastor Speckhard shared a parody written by his brother: *Now when it was evening the disciples came to Him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." But Jesus said, "They do need to go away, but sending them into the villages won't help because the villagers need their own food." They said to Him, "We do have five loaves here, and two fish." And Jesus said, "Bring them to me." Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and two fish He looked up to heaven and cursed the lack of access to birth control in that overcrowded, desolate place. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, who looked around joyfully, for the crowd was no more, and only the disciples remained. But each disciple preferred a full loaf, and a dispute arose, so Jesus reduced the number of disciples to five, and they ate their fill, a full loaf for each man. So it was that the food was plenty, and they ate it nervously. And those who were uncreated that day were about five thousand men, besides women and children and the seven superfluous disciples. (Speckhard family get-togethers must be quite remarkable.)*

Reminder • Just a reminder that our office manager Donna will be having some surgery in late April; she is indispensable, so the office will be closed from April 27 to May 21. During that time you can continue to place orders on line or by mail, but please understand that they will not be filled until after Donna returns.
 – roj

NON-PROFIT
 U.S. POSTAGE PAID
 MASON CITY, IA 50401
 ALPB

Address Service Requested

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