

FORUM LETTER

Volume 41 Number 10

October 2012

Inside this issue:

Book review: *Turning Controversy into Church Ministry*

Omnium gatherum

In expectation contained



The fact is that the ethic of [the Sermon on the Mount], taken by itself, will not work at all. . . . The new law of the Sermon on the Mount, in itself, can only produce despair. Strange indeed is the complacency with which modern men can say that the Golden Rule and the high ethical principles of Jesus are all that they need. In reality, if the requirements for entrance into the Kingdom of God are what Jesus declares them to be, we are all undone; we have not even attained to the external righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, and how shall we attain to the righteousness of the heart which Jesus demands? The Sermon on the Mount, rightly interpreted, then, makes man a seeker after some divine means of salvation by which entrance into the Kingdom can be obtained. Even Moses was too high for us; but before this higher law of Jesus who shall stand without being condemned? The Sermon on the Mount, like all the rest of the New Testament, really leads a [person] straight to the foot of the Cross. Even the disciples, to whom the teaching of Jesus was first addressed, knew well that they needed more than guidance in the way that they should go. It is only a superficial reading of the Gospels that can find in the relation which the disciples sustained to Jesus a mere relation of pupil to Master. When Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," he was speaking not as a philosopher calling pupils to his school; but as One who was in possession of rich stores of divine grace. And this much at least the disciples knew. They knew well in their heart of hearts that they had no right to stand in the Kingdom; they knew that only Jesus could win them entrance there. They did not yet know fully how Jesus could make them children of God; but they did know that He could do it and He alone. And in that trust all the theology of the great Christian creeds was in expectation contained. —J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972; originally published in 1923), 38-39.

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

Looking to the future: NALC Convocation

by Brad Everett



"It's important for us to lose the rearview mirror and look forward to the future God has for us," said Bp. John Brodosky in his report to some 411 voting delegates and another 300 visitors and observers at the North American Lutheran Church (NALC) Convocation in Golden Valley, MN, August 16-17.

Easier said than done, given that for many in attendance the wounds and hurts suffered as a result of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's 2009

sexuality decisions are still fresh. For some it seemed they were physically present at the NALC Convocation, but their hearts and minds were still on guard for a fight that was over when they left the ELCA.

But to the credit of the NALC leadership and other delegates, the overall tone of the gathering was positive, intent on moving ahead into the opportunities and challenges on the horizon as the NALC enters its third year.

LWF Controversy

Nowhere was this more evident than when the resolution to apply for full membership in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) just barely passed by the required 2/3 margin after being strongly debated. The close vote required a division of the house to determine the final tally: 241 in favor, 118 against. Of course there was a natural sense of *déjà vu* among those who recalled the 2/3 vote on the sexuality statement at the 2009 ELCA Church-wide Assembly. Rather than being a problem that dredged up past pain, however, this proved to be an opportunity for the leadership and membership of NALC to remind themselves that this was a new day, a new church structure, and that the battles of the past need not be reenacted.

Bishop Bradosky seized the moment with his comments following worship the next morning. Rather than skirt around the obvious elephant in the room, or try to downplay the strong difference of opinion among the delegates, he addressed the situation head-on.

Bishop as pastor

"I was troubled by our vote last evening," the bishop told the convocation. "There is little joy when something this significant in our life together passes by the narrowest of margins. There is no joy in the knowledge that nearly a third of our delegates opposed the resolution."

He noted that "no joy" is military code for "I've been unsuccessful." He speculated that perhaps as bishop he had been unsuccessful in providing the necessary information for the decision, that the process used to discuss issues around the resolution wasn't what it could have been, or that perhaps he was unsuccessful in determining if the members were ready to make such a decision.

"As I mentioned in my report, I am certain to

make many mistakes. For my failures I can only ask your forgiveness and work with you to find the best way forward," he said.

He then went on to speak to various concerns raised in the previous night's discussion by speakers both for and against the motion.

Telling the truth

The resolution had come to the floor as a result of a motion approved at the 2011 convocation to pursue membership in the LWF, and while an initial application has been submitted, it will not receive LWF action until it has been approved by the convocation and then ratified by 2/3 of the NALC congregations. If and when it receives ratification, LWF will move the application through the membership process.

Bradosky stressed that in conversations with LWF "we have been bold in telling them the truth regarding our relationship with the ELCA and would not say we were in altar and pulpit fellowship with them." He further noted that the same could probably be said regarding a number of other members of LWF.

According to the LWF representative, NALC's impaired relationship with the ELCA would not impede the application for membership as altar and pulpit fellowship among LWF members is a goal but not a reality.

"At no point did we ever try to hide the truth regarding our identity, our values or the consequences resulting from the formation of the North American Lutheran Church, nor would we compromise our integrity for the sake of being perceived as politically correct," said Bradosky.

Making distinctions

He then went on to emphasize that the resolution to join LWF was not an issue NALC leadership was trying to force, noting again this was the result of a motion passed at the 2011 convocation.

A necessary distinction was made between the good work LWF does in its initiatives and ministries in the world, in which NALC would like to join, and some of the broader LWF agendas, which NALC simply cannot support.

"Our participation in LWF would be for the purpose of supporting the good they *are* doing and aligning ourselves with other member churches who are trying to move LWF in a direction that is more

consistent with the witness of Scripture and our confessional heritage," said Bradosky. This was in reference to churches such as the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) who had specifically asked NALC to apply for LWF membership.

It's up to the congregations

Bradosky acknowledged that there were important questions for congregations to consider in their deliberations before ratifying the convocation's decision. He raised seven questions, which simply ask if membership in the LWF is the best, most effective and most faithful way for the NALC to be part of Lutheranism internationally.

Ultimately it is up to the NALC's 311 congregations to decide whether to ratify the resolution. "If you do not approve this resolution in the ratification process," said Bradosky, "I will certainly understand, support you in that decision and help our partners to understand the concerns and issues that prevent us from partnering with them in LWF."

But "on the other hand, if you decide to approve this resolution, you have my commitment that no one representing NALC will compromise our integrity, witness or understanding of the authority of the Word of God as the norm for all matters of life and faith, our understanding of the Lutheran Confessions or the values that shape our life together."

He concluded by expressing his hope that as congregations meet to study, discuss, and prayerfully seek the direction of the Holy Spirit in this matter, a more definitive response would emerge allowing NALC to move forward with greater unanimity than the 2/3 vote of the night before. A motion was then brought forward and passed that the Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine prepare a document for information and guidance to help congregations in this process.

Lingering suspicion of leadership

Obviously a great deal of suspicion of the ELCA remains among a segment of NALC, and there is a very real danger that such tendencies could affect how the NALC leadership is viewed. But the comments by Bp. Bradosky, and similar ones by Bp. Paull Spring, seemed to go a long way

in assuring and reminding delegates they were now part of a new reality in the NALC.

Even if the congregations ratify the resolution, there is no guarantee that the NALC will be received into the LWF. There was speculation in the hallways that the ELCA and its sister denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), would block the NALC from joining. Further hallway conjecture then suggested that such a move would pave the way for a new international Lutheran organization that could include the NALC and Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

When I asked NALC General Secretary Mark Chavez about these rumblings, he said the bottom line is that "The NALC has a desire to be involved in international Lutheranism and since [the Ethiopian and Tanzanian churches] formally asked the NALC to apply for membership in the LWF, that is the direction we took."

"If for whatever reason the NALC doesn't become a member of the LWF," he continued, "we still want to be involved internationally, but it may need to take a new form. There has been some talk of 'what if...,' but nothing specific."

Ecumenical joking

It's not just internationally that things seem to be taking a new form and heading in a new direction. Convention greetings from ecumenical guests typically have a degree of formality and even stiffness. There was a very different atmosphere at this convocation.

Earlier on Thursday, during a presentation concerning the Canadian Rockies Theological Conference, Pr. Karl Johnson reported how Rev. Dr. Jim Nestingen (one of the conference's presenters) told Lutheran Church—Canada (the Canadian sister of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod) district president Pr. Don Schiemann that Missouri should be thanking NALC, since "the North American Lutheran Church has replaced the Missouri Synod as the most hated Lutheran denomination." To which Pr. Schiemann replied, "Well, it only makes us want to try harder."

The next day, when Rev. Larry Vogel, Associate Executive Director for the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the LCMS, came to bring greetings, he began his remarks by saying the

convocation “had been a uniform joy... up to the Canadians’ presentation, and now I’m crushed. I don’t know how I’ll take the news back to St. Louis that we’re no longer the most hated. We didn’t even know the title was in jeopardy.” It’s one thing when jokes are made internally about “being the most hated,” but it’s a clear sign that something has changed when they can be shared between church bodies.

Mutual admiration

When the laughter died down, Vogel went on to comment how the LCMS has been watching the NALC and has appreciated its commitment to biblical and confessional truth, and how this has been an encouragement to the LCMS.

The appreciation is taking on a tangible form with a draft agreement between the LCMS and the NALC on Inter-Lutheran Consultation, the purpose of which will be to “consider ways by which our churches may work together to make Christ known and to strengthen the Lutheran witness by word and deed in the church and community.” The draft also proposes to include Lutheran Church – Canada as a full participant. Plans have been made for a series of five dialogues over the next few years that will allow the two to work on the basis of a relationship as it develops, rather than assumptions.

The potential of this relationship was stated explicitly in words not said or received lightly when Vogel told the assembly, “If you hear nothing else from me, know that you have earned the respect of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.”

Other guests

Other ecumenical guests bringing greetings included the Most Rev. Robert Duncan, Archbishop of the Anglican Church in North America; Father James Rutten, representing the U.S. Roman Catholic Conference of Bishops; the Rev. Kip Tyler, Chair of the Board of Trustees, Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ; the Rev. Dr. Robert Bugbee, President of the Lutheran Church – Canada; the Rev. Timothy Swenson, of the Augsburg Lutheran Churches. Each one expressed a desire and willingness to work with the NALC as they could and were able – not glossing over differences but choosing instead to focus on what is held in common.

ELCA officials were also present although not officially bringing greetings. Rev. Marcus Kunz,

Assistant to the Presiding Bishop and Executive for Theological Discernment, was present for the CORE Convocation and the theological conference as well as the NALC Convocation, while Rev. Donald McCoid, Assistant to the Presiding Bishop and Executive for Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations was there for the NALC meeting.

Regular business

Then there was the regular sort of business that’s part of any church assembly. Elections were held for two positions on the Executive Council that resulted in the re-election of Dr. James Hansen and Pr. Victor Langford, while Richard Currey was elected by acclamation to the Court of Adjudication.

An update was also given from the Canadian Commission of NALC. As of the end of June, nine Canadian congregations had joined with several others considering membership. At this point the obstacle holding back many congregations is that the legal work of incorporation that would make the NALC truly North American is still in process, although it is expected to be concluded in a matter of months. (One must always remember that while the U.S. likes to talk about “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” the documents establishing Canada as a nation prefer “peace, order and good government.”)

Oops!

As the convocation wound down there was one final, albeit unintentional, example of NALC looking forward and not in the rearview mirror: it was discovered that the NALC Convocation, theological conference, and CORE Convocation had been slated for Pittsburgh, PA, August 13-16, 2013, which just happens to be the same city and week the ELCA Churchwide Assembly. NALC General Secretary Mark Chavez joked that “maybe we need to look in the mirror once in a while.”

To avoid any conflict, the three events have been moved one week earlier to August 6-9, 2013, at a location in Pittsburgh to be determined. That will at least make it easier for *Forum Letter* to cover both.

The largest theological conference

The theological conference, sponsored by Lutheran CORE and the NALC, attracted over 600 attendees, making it the largest Lutheran theologi-

cal conference in North America. The theme was "Preaching and Teaching the Law and Gospel of God." Prior to the conference, the organizers, Rev. Dr. Carl Braaten and Dr. Robert Benne, arranged for a meeting of a "Young Theologians Group." (When someone asked about the use of the adjective "young" considering that two participants were over 50, it was explained that "young" meant anyone younger than Braaten.)

The 16 theologians who were invited to attend represented the ELCA, LCMC, NALC and LCMS, thus emphasizing the pan-Lutheran nature of the theological conference. They presented and responded to papers reflecting on the greatest challenges to doing theology today. "Over half the theologians involved in this group are parish pastors, which might be indicative of a new way theology is being done," observed Benne.

Given the success of this initial meeting, another is planned for next year, with the Rev. Dr. Sarah Hinlicky-Wilson and the Rev. Dr. Piotr Malysz, two of this year's participants, taking the responsibility for organizing it (with Benne and Braaten serving as liaisons). The success of the theological conference shows there is a hunger for rigorous and uncompromising theology in Lutheran circles, and the young theologians group hopes to raise up and encourage the next generation of theologians to do theology in the church and for the church, whether in the classroom or the parish.

A permanent state of transition

The Lutheran CORE Convocation began its week of meetings with 350 in attendance. Both CORE Moderator Pr. Paul Uring and Director Pr. Steve Shipman acknowledged that the one constant for the group is that it is in a permanent state of transition as the needs of its members change.

"Last year 40% of the attendance for the convocation was from the ELCA," said Uring, which would indicate that continued ministry to and support of traditional Lutherans there remains an important focus of CORE. But it also means that 60% were from other Lutheran groups. It is indeed a time of realignment and change within North American Lutheranism.

As a pan-Lutheran organization that involves 19 different renewal groups, CORE continues to focus on assisting congregations and individuals

make connections that will help them to be faithful where they are, as well as on fostering relationships between the different groups.

As NALC enters its third year and LCMC its tenth, there are many who started out with CORE as members of the ELCA but have since moved on to one of these bodies, or even some other Lutheran group. "Even if you think you don't need CORE because you have moved on," said Shipman, "many still need CORE and need you." So as the face of North American Lutheranism continues to change, CORE continues to adapt itself to meet the ever changing needs.

Some personal observations

I have been ordained 14 years and have only missed one Synod Convention and one National Convention of the ELCIC in that time. I have listened attentively as my elders told how "back in the day" it was an honor and a blessing to attend the national church gatherings; how it was an event with the best preachers, outstanding theologians and glorious worship, where one could renew old acquaintances and be blessed to make new ones with fellow workers in the Lord's vineyard.

The four days I spent at Calvary Lutheran for the CORE/NALC Convocations and theological conference was the first time I can say I've experienced a church convention "the way it used to be." Was it perfect? Of course not. The diversity of Lutherans and piety meant there was something there for everyone to critique. I still don't understand liturgical dance, and having grown up in the Pentecostal church, I've sung more than enough praise choruses, thank you very much. But there was also a magnificent pipe organ, reverent liturgy and robust singing of hymns. Through it all there was a mutual respect of the various pieties and, most importantly, a unity of faith and confession that I haven't experienced previously in a Lutheran church convention. God grant that this can be maintained as NALC and CORE move into the future. Perhaps for all the talk of not looking in the rear-view mirror, repeating some of the past might not be such a bad thing.

Pastor Brad Everett is pastor of Nazareth Lutheran Church (ELCIC) in Standard, Alberta.

Book review: *Turning Controversy into Church Ministry*



Turning Controversy into Church Ministry: A Christlike Response to Homosexuality by

W. P. Campbell (Zondervan, 2010; ISBN 978-031032123). Reviewed by Peter Speckhard, associate editor.

Several years ago, before the ELCA's sexuality decisions but with the issue looming on the horizon, I decided to offer an opportunity for my congregation to discuss homosexuality and Christianity at a practical level. I intended it to be a combination discussion forum and support group for Christians who were struggling with the issue of homosexuality, be it their own temptations or the lifestyle of a close relative or friend. We made it clear up front that we weren't there to discuss whether homosexual behavior was sinful or not; our Biblical, traditional teaching on the subject was not up for debate. Rather, the goal was to work through how best to love people who would or could only interpret our teaching as unloving toward them—how to reach and minister to the homosexuals in our lives without compromising our witness, and how to witness to people we love but whose behavior we believe is wrong, without shredding our relationship.

We didn't want to have to pick a side as the churches seem to continue dividing into two camps: one where homosexuals participate because the doctrine has been changed to declare homosexual behavior no longer sinful, and the other where homosexuals do not participate at all because the baby of their humanity had been thrown out with the bath water of their sin. Rather, we wanted to be a place where the traditional Christian doctrine on marriage and sexuality remained firm, but where there was actual ministry to homosexuals and their families.

Success — at first

At first it seemed it would be a resounding success. At the initial meeting, twelve people showed up. Some said nothing, but others shared the pain and difficulty they had in trying to love people without giving approval to sin. Some were hurting from the rejection they felt, not as homosexuals being rejected by their families but as loving family members being written off as hateful by ho-

mosexual loved ones.

The discussion was mostly practical. What do you do when a relative wants to bring his or her same-sex partner home for Thanksgiving but there are children in the house? Where do you have them sleep? How do you introduce them? How do you make sure the partner knows he or she is welcome without "caving" on the matter of sin? After all, some said, I would never let my daughter sleep with her boyfriend under my roof; why should I let her sleep with her female lover? The times move faster every year; today every commercial for every sitcom deals with these issues, and the idea of even considering morality in such cases is deemed at best old-fashioned ignorance and at worst religious bigotry or even hatred. There is no question we conservatives have been left behind by the *Zeitgeist*.

Conservative conundrum

And in fact our group did not last. We had a total of four monthly meetings, and by the last one only three people came. The problem? It was the same discussion every time. It didn't go anywhere. It acknowledged the conundrum conservative Christians faced in their personal lives, but that was about it. We used an LCMS publication called "A Plan for Ministering to Homosexuals and their Families," but a lot of that resource discussed the science of the issue (as it was back in the 1990s) and the difference between orientation and behavior, which wasn't really to the point. It remains a helpful document and it is still available online, but it isn't enough.

What perhaps might have made the difference back then is something like W. P. Campbell's *Turning Controversy into Church Ministry: A Christlike Response to Homosexuality*. Here is a book that takes a more comprehensive and organized approach to what we were trying to accomplish with our group. With 16 chapters divided into three main parts, the book, addressed to pastors and congregational leaders, offers a roadmap as to how churches can maintain their commitment to Biblically sound doctrine while also becoming congregations that actually minister to homosexuals.

Dr. Campbell is a Presbyterian pastor with a

D.Min. from Fuller Theological Seminary; what he offers is not profound theological reflection but more of a practical how-to guide for church leaders. The book includes diagrams, step-by-step approaches to things, guiding metaphors, sidebar stories and examples, and all the marks of a book geared for organizational leaders. It covers in broad, basic strokes all the necessary territory – the theology, history, and science of the discussion, all in a way that acknowledges how the church has generally failed people in the past on this issue. It seeks to understand the revisionist position fairly and sympathetically rather than simply disagreeing with it, and to show how to identify the steps needed in a given congregation to become a center of genuine Christian ministry to the homosexual community.

Sloppy for Lutherans

This book would be good for LCMS, WELS, ELS and traditionalist ELCA congregations that don't wish simply to cede the argument to the revisionists or forgo ministering to homosexuals. But it is clearly not a Lutheran source, and it uses terminology in different ways that call for clarification. For example, Campbell often seems to use "Law" in ways we Lutherans would consider imprecise, sloppy or downright false.

In his Ten Ministry Essentials for getting started on this process, Campbell lists various theses. Most are fairly innocuous (#3, "Ministry begins when we connect brokenness in our hearts with brokenness in others," or #9, "Where sin abounds, God's grace is greater still"). But #7 in particular grates on Lutheran ears: "The Law leads us to Christ, who enables us to fulfill it." It is possible to understand that in an orthodox way, and for the most part Campbell seems to do so, sticking with themes and assumptions that would be uncontroversial within the Great Tradition of Christendom. But certainly no Lutheran would ever phrase it that way for fear of being entirely misunderstood. Some

of the book would fly better within a holiness tradition than among Lutherans. Some of Campbell's organizational prescriptions might not be received well everywhere either, especially his absolute insistence on the necessity of small group ministry in a congregation.

All in all, however, it is a good book, and will probably be helpful to some congregations. I might even adapt some of it for use in my own parish. But my sense is that it is way too little too late. Had it been published in 1980, it might have offered a genuine alternative way forward for American denominations, something other than the divide we now have. Had it been published in 2000, it might at least have become the focus of a national parachurch ministry assisting many congregations and denominations.

A stitch too late

But in the second decade of the new century, it strikes me as a stitch at a time when the rip requires nine – like introducing a plan in 1864 for the gradual phasing out of slavery. Perhaps I am overly pessimistic and not sufficiently in tune with Ministry Essential #10, "With God, everything is possible and no one is unreachable." But at least on a large scale, institutional basis, my sense is that the divide is permanent. Homosexuals will never come *en masse* to conservative churches for God's grace, and revisionist churches will never steer significantly back toward orthodox teaching on sexuality. Now it is a matter of one by one, case by case, as it always is, I guess. But the divide between traditionalists and revisionists becomes more of a chasm every day, and the leap from one side to the other gets more and more difficult. Perhaps some of the newer, centrist Lutheran bodies would benefit most from a book like Campbell's. Perhaps they can invent a third way on this issue for all Christians and reshape the whole discussion. Perhaps.

Omnium gatherum



Et tu, CPH? • I suggested (somewhat flippantly) back in May that perhaps Concordia Publishing Company could teach AugsburgFortress a thing or two about doctrinal

review. This was after an AF resource referred to the Word as having been "created before the creation of everything else that exists" – a rather blatant example of the Arian heresy. But now one of our

sharp-eyed readers tells us that CPH's *Portals of Prayer* contained a theologically suspect notion some time back (she didn't have the specific date). It was a prayer which began, "Heavenly Father, who promised to return, another day has ended without your second coming" and concluded, "It is with this confidence that I rest in You tonight and will greet the new day with renewed hope of Your return." Our reader noted that it is *Jesus* who will return in glory, not the Father. It's not quite as bad, perhaps, as saying (as did a video clip in AF's *re:form* curriculum) that "Jesus of Nazareth was also the third person of the Trinity," but the formulation is at the very least theologically imprecise. Maybe worse.

Are you a heretic? • Of course I will admit once again that getting the Trinity right is always a little tricky. When I teach early church history, I like to refer students to a wonderful Quizfarm quiz entitled "Are You a Heretic" [tinyurl.com/5wf8kt]. It makes a series of assertions, you agree or disagree, and then it reveals just which heresies are your own. It's great fun, and a good theological review. My students general flunk it quite badly – that's at the beginning of the quarter, of course; they do better after I've taught them a thing or two. Maybe it should be a required hiring exam for church publishing ministries. Try it yourself, and see if you turn out to be "Chalcedon compliant."

Uncovering the Apocrypha • For a lot of years now I've contemplated teaching an adult class on the Apocrypha, and I finally decided to do it as a summer diversion. I was astonished, actually, at

how many of my parishioners were quite interested in this – they came to class each week, or borrowed the recordings, at a remarkable rate. I have to admit that I'd never read the Apocrypha all the way through, and I found it fascinating. It was fun, too, to read Luther's comments, and a real challenge to try to keep straight all the various numberings of the books of Ezra/Esdra. If you're a pastor who has never delved into these books, give it a shot.

By the numbers • A reader who likes to track Lutheran membership statistics (well, we all have our quirks) writes to wonder why it is quite a few months into 2012 and the ELCA has yet to post their 2011 membership statistics. Since there was a precipitous drop between 2010 and 2011, he suspects they're trying not to draw attention to what may be another drop. He's inquired of the Secretary's office, and has been told "We're still working on it." (Doesn't seem like it would be that hard, what with computers and all.) The ELCA News Service page, it seems, has had a direct link to these statistics for the past several years, but now that's a little harder to find. There is a place to "Submit a News Tip"; perhaps someone should tip them off that people are asking about the 2011 membership figures.

Christmas shopping • The stores around here are already displaying Christmas stuff, and it isn't even St. Michael and All Angels. So you'd best hurry: a gift subscription to *Forum Letter/Lutheran Forum* is the perfect solution for several of the people on your gift list. Order online at alpb.org – or check out other great gift possibilities there.

– roj

Address Service Requested

DELHI, NY 13753-0327
POST OFFICE BOX 327

LUTHERAN FORUM / FORUM LETTER
AMERICAN LUTHERAN PUBLICITY BUREAU

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