

FORUM LETTER

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Archsinger of the praise of God's mercy

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How might contemporary Protestants begin to recover an appropriate awareness of Mary's presence in the mystery of the church? In the spirit of walking before one tries to run, I have only three simple-minded suggestions. First, celebrate those feasts of Christ in which Mary appears as a significant personage in the story of salvation: in addition to Christmas, the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Presentation of our Lord in the temple. . . . Celebrate them even when they occur on weekdays and "not enough people will come" (that terrible phrase that perhaps more than anything else discloses our practical godlessness). Pastors, when you preach on these texts do not be afraid to take Mary as seriously as Scripture takes her. . . . Second, sing the Magnificat. Sing it at home, and sing it at Evening Prayer in the congregation. Of course, this advice requires that Evening Prayer actually be *observed* in the congregation. It would not be a bad way to rediscover the Magnificat for the pastor simply to turn up at the church every evening at a stated time to pray and sing Mary's song with anyone who comes, or alone if necessary. On the other hand, the presence of a pastor is not *required* for Evening Prayer; if the pastor is not interested, no one can rightly stop the people of God from praying and singing together. . . . Third, when you sing the Magnificat, do not de-gender it as contemporary liturgical versions often do. To translate *doulē* with "servant" [instead of, e.g., "handmaid"] suggests that the Magnificat cannot become the church's song without ceasing to be the song of the particular woman Mary. . . . This suggestion should be vigorously resisted. The Magnificat is the church's song because it is the song of the specific Jewish woman Mary, whom God's election and promise have set in the midst of the church as the prototype of the church's faith and prophecy – and therefore as the archsinger of the praise of God's mercy in Christ. When we sing the Magnificat, all of us, male and female together, take our stand with Daughter Zion, the Lord's slave-woman, identifying with her, and joining in *her* song, the primal, and in this life unsurpassable, articulation of the joy of the Kingdom. —David S. Yeago, "The Presence of Mary in the Mystery of the Church," in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Mary, Mother of God* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 78-79.

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Sinking spirits



"As the last straw breaks the laden camel's back," wrote Charles Dickens, "this piece of underground information crushed the sinking spirits of Mr. Dombey." [*Dombey and Son*, 1848]. I would have thought the familiar proverb came from Aesop's fables, but apparently not. And

while Dickens' quote is one of the earliest formulations in English literature, it seems to be derived from an Arab saying.

But I like the Dickens reference, with its context of "sinking spirits." Those of us in various Lutheran church bodies (and others too, I'd wager) have often had sinking spirits when we read news of one thing or another going on in our own churches, and sometimes it feels like we're about to be crushed.

The last straw

That was the reaction I heard from a couple of different colleagues in the ELCA over the election of R. Guy Erwin as our church's first openly gay and partnered bishop. My friends had struggled with the decisions of 2009, struggled mightily, and yet found a way to maintain some shred of loyalty to the ELCA. Now, for them, this was the last straw – or at least they were contemplating whether, in fact, this was the last straw.

I have to admit that I sympathize with them. I think there are many reasons that Dr. Erwin's election was a very unfortunate thing, despite the insistence of some other bishops that this was truly due to the leading of the Holy Spirit. (For some of those reasons, see our comment in last month's *Forum Letter*.) When I heard of it, I found it discouraging – though it didn't really crush my sinking spirits. I've been trying to figure out why this was so bothersome to some colleagues (and I'm sure it was troubling to far more than just the two who've talked to me about it), and why it didn't strike me in quite the same way.

Who cares?

When the ELCA agreed to ordain persons in same-sex relationships, it was certainly clear that such persons might also be elected as bishops. In that sense, this is really no step further down the road to the new sexual order. We Lutherans, after all, do not see bishops as a different "order" from pastors; they are essentially middle managers, administrators. That some of us wish it were not so does not change the reality. So who cares? Once we've learned to live with partnered gay pastors, however unhappily, what difference does it really make if one (or more) is serving as a synodical bureaucrat?

And yet, on the other hand, it does "feel" different. We were assured that no congregation would be forced to call a gay pastor. That perhaps allowed those who opposed the 2009 decisions a bit of a fig leaf: sure, that tiny urban congregation someplace else has a gay pastor and his/her same-sex spouse living in the parsonage, but that doesn't really affect me.

But then we say (however inaccurately) that the bishop is the synod's pastor, and therefore the pastor of all the congregations, and the pastor of all the pastors. And so now, pastors and congregations in the Southwest California synod (and likely others in the future) have, in fact, been forced to have a pastor whom they feel shouldn't have been ordained in the first place. It's the "in your face" aspect of it that rubs against the grain.

No going back

And then perhaps what causes the sinking spirits is that a gay and partnered bishop makes it pretty clear that the ELCA is not going back. There will be no revisiting this decision, no making adjustments or changes except in the direction of our new god "Inclusivity." As long as the official position of the denomination was one of "we agree to disagree," traditionalists could find a way to accept some unpalatable things. But the election of a partnered gay bishop makes it clear that traditionalists will be increasingly marginalized. There will be no more traditionalist bishops, no more orthodox seminary professors. *The Lutheran*, assuming it continues to publish, will keep pushing and celebrating the new ecclesiastical order, month after month.

But again, that's been the direction things have been going for quite some time now. Those of a more traditionalist bent who haven't seen it or admitted it have been kidding themselves.

Many have already jumped ship, heading for the North American Lutheran Church, Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ, the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. Some – and especially some with very high profiles – have taken more decisive steps into the Roman Catholic Church or Eastern Orthodoxy. That steady stream has also contributed to the "sinking spirits" of those who are left. There's a growing tendency to feel like Elijah: "I, only I, am left, and they seek to take my life."

Just because you're paranoid . . .

That feeling is not without good reason. I've heard folks express the fear that with same-sex marriage on the fast track to be legal and accepted everywhere, soon the government will force the churches to acquiesce, perhaps by threatening an end to tax exemptions for those who refuse to perform such marriages. That fear is mostly paranoia, and yet, as they say, just because you're paranoid doesn't mean there's not someone out to get you.

I frankly worry more about coercion from the church than from the government. It seems to me that those of us who decline to hop on the bandwagon on all these issues will in fact be increasingly marginalized in the ELCA, almost to the point of non-existence. Some days I'd go so far as to say we're already there.

And yet I don't feel compelled to leave the ELCA. Part of it, maybe, is that now that I'm retired, I can allow myself to be more detached from it all. That's not such great churchmanship, I know, but it is the reality. I don't really have to read *The Lutheran* (though I keep reading it, in part because it provides such good fodder for *Forum Letter*). I don't have to go to synod events. I don't feel any obligation to serve on any committees, even if I were to be asked (which hasn't happened for quite a while now; see what I mean?).

Longing for the church

But there's more to it than that, something deeper. As part of my program for cleaning out the clutter, I was reading a very old issue of a long-gone Lutheran journal *Una Sancta*, which sort of merged, if I have the story right, with our sister publication *Lutheran Forum* a lot of years ago. This 1966 article

was by Carl Braaten, and it was entitled, "Rome, Reformation and Reunion." Near the end he quoted the late 19th century Roman Catholic theologian George Tyrrell: "God will not ask us, 'what sort of church have you lived in?' but, 'What sort of church have you longed for?'"

Tyrrell is an odd person to quote, in a way; a "modernist," he went afoul of the Vatican, was expelled from the Jesuits, suffered excommunication, and while he was given the sacrament of extreme unction, he was denied burial in a Catholic cemetery. I suppose he experienced "sinking spirits" of a sort rather different than those we face in the ELCA, and yet he hung in there, always longing for a church that would be more faithful than the reality in which he actually lived. For him, his longing for that church was, in itself, faithfulness.

A nobler gift than laughter

Curious about the context of Tyrrell's comment, I went looking for the quote. Turns out it comes from a letter, which also contains these poignant words: "There are treasures of truth in the dust-heap of every tradition. . . . Even could we do nothing to mend matters, yet the internal struggle, with its doctrinal and institutional difficulties, sets our spirit to work and elicits, at the cost of wholesome suffering, its best ideals and aspirations. 'Mine eyes gush out with water because men keep not thy law' — such tears 'are a nobler gift than laughter.'"

And so I try, in the midst of discouragement, to remember that tears and sinking spirits are nothing new for the people of God, and that from the internal struggle can come something faithful and true, in God's time and by God's grace.

— by Richard O. Johnson, editor

Affirming marriage



Editor's note: In the evolving world of American Christianity, new and interesting ecumenical alliances are being formed. A recent "Marriage Summit" brought together representatives of the North American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, the Lutheran Church — Canada, and the Anglican Church in North America. They developed a statement entitled "An Affirmation of Marriage," which was then "approved" by the ecclesiasti-

cal leaders of each of the four church bodies. That doesn't seem to be quite the same as saying this is an official statement of those bodies, but it probably comes close. These four groups plan to meet together at least annually to discuss mutual concerns.

An Affirmation of Marriage

The Sacred Scriptures teach that in the beginning the blessed Trinity instituted marriage to be

the life-long union of one man and one woman (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4-6), to be held in honor by all and kept pure (Heb 13:4; 1 Thess 4:2-5). God's Word assures us that each time one man and one woman join themselves together in the union of the marriage commitment and relationship, God himself has joined them as one. It is important to see that marriage is not only a grace-filled institution of the church, but part of the very fabric of God's creation which extends to every time and place on earth and includes every man and woman who are joined together in this "one flesh" commitment and bond. Marriage is created by God and is not simply a social contract or convenience.

Flowing from the gift of marriage is another precious gift of God, the gift of children. "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28) is as much a word of divine blessing as it is a command. Children are the most obvious, distinctive, and natural gift of marriage, for the child is in every sense the "one flesh" of the mother and father. Marriage lived out according to God's purpose is therefore also, just as naturally, the optimal setting for the child. Within the gift of marriage children receive the blessing of a father and mother who nurture and care for them, modeling a life in which the distinctive uniqueness and created differences of male and female serve to complement one another.

The tragedy of contemporary culture

Part of the tragedy of contemporary cultural perspectives in Europe and North America is a growing bifurcation of marriage and child-bearing. Growing numbers of men avoid or abdicate fatherly responsibility. Growing numbers of women choose to have and/or raise children apart from marriage. Just as frequently encountered is the pervasive assumption of married couples that postponing or purposefully rejecting children is compatible with the marriage bond. In these different ways, children appear to have value only to the extent they fulfill parental desires.

While the gift of procreation is a profound and beautiful testimony of the blessedness of marriage and reveals one of marriage's most fundamental purposes, marital goodness is not limited by procreation. Where procreation is not possible, many couples choose to adopt a child into their family and, regardless of intention, also reflect the divine

love which leads God to adopt us as His own (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:5).

So also, a childless couple exhibits, richly and beautifully, the blessings and goodness of man and woman living in complementarity. Although as an individual male and an individual female they are different, even to the point of often seeming to be alien to the other, their sexual and emotional bond enacts a life of self-giving openness to each other, protected by the bond of faithfulness. The committed love of marriage always reveals God's intention that individuals are called into community, since marriage takes us beyond our individual identities so that we give ourselves to another who is distinctively different from us.

The bride of Christ

The beauty and significance of marriage go beyond its earthly effects—as rich and wonderful as they are. God gave marriage as a picture of the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church. In sustained and exalted language, Ephesians 5:21-33 connects godly marriage with the glorious relationship of Christ and His church. As a man and woman relate to one another with rich love and profound respect, their one flesh union hints of and is intended to signify the union of Christ and His bride, the church. But Christ and His bride also indicate the fullness of divine intention for marriage. Speaking of Christ as bridegroom and church as bride, the apostle notes that husbands are called to sacrificial love toward their wives and wives to a willing respect for their husbands.

In responding to the bitter reality of divorce, the Word made flesh, our Lord Jesus, reaffirms the gift of marriage and then reminds us of an obvious implication: "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (see Matt 19:3b-6). His warning is necessary because the beautiful gift of marriage—like all of God's created goodness—can be and is marred by sin, which Jesus describes as "hardness of heart" (Matt 19:8). Yet, sin does not have ultimate power. Christians recognize that marriage is lived under the cross. Husbands and wives are not exempt from the suffering that comes with faithfulness in marriage. Rather, trusting in the promises of Christ Jesus and clinging to each other in love, marriage is the arena for husband and wife to live together in repentance and faith.

What God intends

God's intention for marriage is also skewed when it is spurned as unimportant for human well-being, or repudiated as a godly gift, or twisted into forms that no longer correspond to the gift God has intended. Rather, God gives marriage to humanity for its wellbeing. He commends Biblical marriage for couples to make a deep commitment to one another before God for a life time of giving to each other.

In faithfulness to Christ and in recognition of God's desire to continue to bless men and women in the gift of holy marriage, the church through the ages has sought to encourage godly, joyful, faithful preparation for marriage according to God's plan and work. This is in obedience to the Scriptures, which call men and women to an appropriate discipline of desire. Our human inclination is one of self satisfaction, but God's Word calls us to a higher purpose—serving God and others (see Rom 6:12-14; 1 John 4:20). To serve the other requires the discipline of our bodies, which obviously includes sexual desires (see Rom 13:13). Therefore both biblical and wider human traditions of most cultures have emphasized the importance of chaste relationships which reserve sexual intimacy for marriage.

A vision of human life

In such ways Scripture holds forth a vision of human life as male and female—one which invites us to see that as embodied creatures, our Creator intends great joy for us. Joyful, fulfilled life as men and women requires a paradox, however, for it

demands the discipline of our bodies so that our desires do not rule us. This is so because the source of deepest human joy comes as our lives reflect their highest purpose in serving God and our neighbor (Matt 22:38-39).

May 2013

Approved by:

The Reverend John F. Bradosky, Bishop, The North American Lutheran Church; The Reverend Robert Bugbee, President, Lutheran Church-Canada; The Most Reverend Robert Duncan, Archbishop, The Anglican Church in North America; The Reverend Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Official participants in the ACNA-LCMS-LCC-NALC "Marriage Summit" (May 3-5, 2013, Dallas, Texas):

The Anglican Church in North America (The Very Reverend Dr. Jonathan S. Riches and The Rt. Reverend Dr. Ray R. Sutton)

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (The Reverend Dr. Frederic W. Baue, The Reverend Dr. Joel D. Lehenbauer, The Reverend John T. Pless, and The Reverend Larry M. Vogel)

Lutheran Church-Canada (The Reverend Dr. John R. Stephenson)

The North American Lutheran Church (The Reverend Mark C. Chavez and The Reverend Dr. David Wendel)

Omnium gatherum



The significance of hymnals • In an interesting article in the June 2013 issue of *Reformed Worship*, John Witvliet of Calvin College offers "Ten Reasons Why Hymnals Have a Future." Responding to the increasing tendency of congregations to scrap hymnals in favor of electronic resources, he writes: "One stunning result of the [Christian Reformed Church's] 1987 *Psalter Hymnal* was the number of Anglo congregations that fell in love with the black gospel hymn 'Lead Me, Guide Me,' and the number of history-resisting congregations that found 'If You But Trust in God to Guide

You' to be a source of blessing in times of tragedy. Now, it is very possible to experience crossover songs on the internet, or through other sources. But, in general, the internet tends to feed us more of what we like. It pulls toward homogenization. Today's hymnals, with their musical diversity, are designed to help us meet, discover, and come to love a wide variety of music." Read the full article at <http://tinyurl.com/ks9a2vc>.

Trying new things • There's a Facebook group for ELCA clergy, and I look at it on occasion. There was

a recent query posed by a pastor who wanted to find some way “for everyone to be more involved in worship,” and her idea was to “have the people commune one another.” The other participants in the discussion seemed to think this was a pretty nifty idea, though a few raised various kinds of cautions. One suggested the pastor might be underestimating the way people are already involved in worship by “earnest hearing of the Word, fervent prayer, and faithful reception of the Blessed Sacrament.” The pastor initiating the discussion allowed as how that opinion was “valid. However, if we never try anything new, how will we know if there are other ways of worship, and even celebrating, that are meaningful to people too? . . . Just because it might be uncomfortable, I don’t think that necessarily means we should not consider it. If we aren’t open to God working in new and different ways through us inside the church, will we ever be able to practice it outside the sanctuary walls?” Aside from the convoluted writing, the theological and liturgical viewpoint here is, shall we say, shallow. But it seems that among contemporary Lutherans, the liturgy is the playground for “trying new things,” all in pursuit of the “meaningful.” Nice of her, though, to acknowledge that more traditional views are “valid.”

Lutherans up north • *Forum Letter* didn’t manage to have a correspondent at this year’s national convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, which was something of an ecumenical first: a joint assembly of the ELCIC and the Anglican Church of Canada. The meeting took place in Ottawa in early July. There were individual sessions so that each church could tend to its own business, but also joint sessions to talk about mission, and lots of joint worship services. This would ordinarily be kind of an exciting opportunity, but the news coming out of the Lutheran side has been rather depressing. National Bishop Susan Johnson reported that ELCIC membership has dropped from some 262,000 at its establishment in 1986 to about 139,000 today. For those of you mathematically challenged, that’s a decline of about 47%. The bishop noted that some 54 congregations have closed since 1986, and it is anticipated that another 64 will close by 2020. (The total number of congregations at present is just under 600; it was unclear whether the past and pro-

jected congregational closures includes congregations that have left or will leave the ELCIC.) The bishop also apparently acknowledged that some of this loss of membership is a result of the 2011 decisions on rostering persons in same-sex relationships and allowing for same-sex marriage; those decisions, she said, “have had consequences, some good and some bad.” Presumably the membership loss, and its concomitant financial crisis, is in the latter category. Nonetheless, the bishop kept a stiff upper lip about the whole situation. The crisis, she said, presents an opportunity for Canadian Lutherans to “define what our core mission is and how we can best accomplish it.” In my experience, when a religious leader starts talking about how membership decline and financial crisis is an opportunity to “define our core mission,” things are not going to get better any time soon.

Lutherans down under • In other news of the Lutheran world outside the United States, Dr. Mike Semmler is retiring as President of the Lutheran Church of Australia, but will soon take up new responsibilities as the president of the National Council of Churches of Australia. He has been succeeded in the LCA post by John Henderson – but with a new twist. Since the church’s founding in 1966, the LCA has had a president. Beginning with Henderson, they will use the title “bishop.” The change was approved by the General Convention of Synod in April, when Henderson was elected. Heading the LCA presents unique challenges. The church’s history is almost as complicated (though on a smaller scale) as the history of Lutheranism in the U. S., but one could summarize it by saying that the 1966 merger brought together Lutherans that were sympathetic to the Missouri Synod version of Lutheranism and Lutherans who were sympathetic to the ELCA strain of Lutheranism. As result, the LCA is something of an ecumenically odd duck. It is an “associate member” of the Lutheran World Federation, but also of the International Lutheran Council (the more conservative international Lutheran group), making it the only church body to have relationships with both international fellowships. It thus on some issues leans toward the conservative side (the church doesn’t ordain women, though there is considerable agitation toward change), and on others toward a more liberal view (the LCA has

been very active in ecumenical relationships in Australia – in fact Henderson is a former general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Australia). The new bishop seems to have a good grip on the challenges facing the church: “We need to be sincere in practising the love we preach,” he says. “For instance, some might think whether we ordain women or not is the big ticket issue, but many people have already moved on. What we do, rather than what we say, is how we will be judged, especially as we engage with the issues faced by our society, such as our response to refugees, the vulnerable, marriage, the family, and the prevailing culture of pleasure, greed and loneliness. How does our faith speak to these things?” (*LCA News*) Excellent questions, and we offer our prayers and best wishes for Bishop Henderson in his new calling.

Not just a bishop • Openly gay and partnered R. Guy Erwin got lots of press coverage when he was elected bishop of the Southwestern California synod at their assembly earlier this year. The same assembly elected as synod secretary the Rev. James Boline, another openly gay and partnered pastor who caused a sensation when he “came out” at the 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. Boline is pastor of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Santa Monica, CA.

NCC bloviating • The verdict in the Zimmerman trial in Florida has gotten a sharp response from Kathryn Lohre, president of the National Council of Churches (remember them?). “In the wake of George Zimmerman’s acquittal of the murder of Trayvon Martin, the National Council of Churches joins other people of faith and conscience in a renewed call for racial justice. This summer as we commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation and the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington, we are reminded that racism is alive and well. We have seen this in the Supreme Court’s recent invalidation of parts of the Voting Rights Act and now in the shocking impunity granted by a Florida jury to a man who stalked and killed a black child.” One can disagree with the verdict, or be puzzled by it; one can even be angry about it, as Ms. Lohre obviously is. On the other hand, Ms. Lohre didn’t sit in the courtroom, hear the evidence presented, and struggle to reach a verdict based on that evidence and on the law rather than on emotion

or opinion. Her fulminating looks rather injudicious next to, for instance, President Obama’s first remark that “We are a nation of laws and a jury has spoken. I now ask every American to respect the call for calm reflection from two parents who lost their son.” Even more wise and poignant were his extended remarks to the press a few days later. But then it’s been a while since the National Council of Churches was known for its judiciousness.

It’s official • Nobody was much surprised when the announcement was made that Matthew Harrison was reelected as president of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. The new electoral system (see “Missouri goes electronic,” June 2013 *FL*) came off smoothly, as far as can be seen. The ears were visible before the magician pulled the rabbit out of the hat, for it was announced that there had been an election and no need to go to the “second round,” and almost nobody could conceive that anyone other than the incumbent could have been elected on the first ballot. So despite some discontent from both the right and the left, President Harrison will be at the helm for the next three years.

ELCA election • It isn’t very likely that the ELCA’s presiding bishop Mark Hanson will be defeated when the churchwide assembly meets beginning August 12 in Pittsburgh, but around the edges there appears to be some grumbling. Some are saying that 12 years is long enough for a presiding bishop; others just think that Bishop Hanson, who is 66, ought to take a clue from former Pope Benedict and retire. There doesn’t seem to be an active campaign afoot, at least not one coalescing around any particular person. One willing candidate seems to be Stephen Bouman, Executive Director of the Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission Unit of the ELCA, and formerly the bishop of the Metropolitan New York Synod. The way these things go, of course, is that at least a respectable number of votes on the first ballot often presages a serious candidacy next time, assuming the incumbent is re-elected this summer. But Bouman is only a few months younger than Hanson, so this would probably be his last shot, and unless the eagerness to retire the current presiding bishop grows exponentially in the next couple of weeks, Bouman will probably conclude his career as a unit executive. Of course there’s al-

ways the position of Secretary being vacated by David Swartling. (We'll be offering real time coverage of the churchwide assembly over at Forum Online beginning August 12.)

Living confusion • The ELCA has an online publication called LivingLutheran.com (and you can probably figure out from the name where to find it on the web). I think it's supposed to suggest that there is a particular way of life that is Lutheran, though every time I see the name I sort of want to add the word "last" to the front of it. But never mind. They have a feature they call "Ask a Pastor" where people can send in their questions. These are things they presumably can't ask their own pastor, so they instead get to ask what appears to be a stable of on-call pastors who each offer their best advice. Rebecca from Houston recently asked, "In our congregation, 'everyone' is invited to participate in Holy Communion during the service, but our bulletin specifically states that 'Holy Communion is open to all baptized Christians.' By making this stipulation, aren't we limiting God's grace? What is the Lutheran teaching about Holy Communion in this regard?" Four pastors responded, and not very well. The best answer referred to the ELCA's official statement *The Use of the Means of Grace*, which says rather clearly that the Eucharist is for the baptized. Pastor David explained that this "is less of a proscription ('thou shalt not') and more of a description. The sacrament of Holy Communion is the meal that people of the Christian faith share together — and people of the Christian faith are baptized." The other respondents all admitted that they willingly

offer the Eucharist to the unbaptized, and then went on, each of them, to avoid discussing the theological implications of this action and instead to throw up the "hard cases" or the "straw men." One suddenly was talking about how sometimes divorced Christians feel they aren't welcome at the Table. Another told a long story about a 15-year-old whose family had previously been Baptists, and so he had never been baptized but was already receiving communion. Another launched into a discussion of infant communion, with which "the church needs to grapple" (along with welcoming the unbaptized to the Eucharist). There used to be a column in *The Lutheran* where somebody answered questions from readers — often well, sometimes not so well. But here, in this new format, we get to hear a diversity of answers. That's always a swell thing; if you don't like the one that actually explains the church's teaching, then you can pick a different answer. But I kind of like this feature of LivingLutheran.com; it offers the promise of lots and lots of snarky comments in the pages of *Forum Letter*.

Homiletical helps • There are a number of places out there in cyberspace to find homiletical helps or complete sermons based on the lectionary texts. An ecumenical selection is hosted by the good folks at the Christian Leadership Center at the University of Mary, a Benedictine school in Bismarck, ND. You can sample their sermons at www.clcumary.com/category/homiletics. (Full disclosure: both your editor and previous *FL* editor Russ Saltzman are among the Lutheran contributors.) — *roj*

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