From undercover government plots to clandestine murder schemes and secret spy technology, people love conspiracy theories. It should come as no surprise, then, that some maintain that the story of Christ's resurrection from the dead was an apostolic conspiracy. It's tempting to brush conspiracy claims aside as baseless, but to fail to answer not only gives fuel to conspiracy proponents, but it also misses the opportunity to highlight the evidential nature of the Christian faith.

Former cold case homicide investigator J. Warner Wallace tackles the conspiracy theory in his must-read book *Cold Case Christianity*.[1] As a homicide investigator who has broken numerous conspiracy cases, Mr. Wallace understands what it takes to execute a conspiracy successfully. He lists at least five criteria that are needed to pull off a conspiracy:

1. A very small number of conspirators,
2. A short time to maintain the conspiracy,
3. Excellent and immediate communication between conspirators,
4. Strong 'familial' relationships, and
5. Little or no pressure to confess.

A very small number of conspirators

This is fairly obvious. Lies are hard to keep and they get increasingly harder to keep as the number of people who have to keep the lie straight increases. Mr. Wallace writes, "The ideal conspiracy would involve only two conspirators, and one of the conspirators would kill the other right after the crime."

A short time to maintain the conspiracy

Mr. Wallace writes, "Lies are hard enough to tell once; they are even more difficult to repeat consistently over a long period of time."

Excellent and immediate communication between conspirators

This is an absolute must for any successful conspiracy. Conspirators need to be able to know what their co-conspirators are saying, whether they're giving them up or maintaining the lie. "Without adequate and immediate communication," writes Mr. Wallace, "coconspirators simply cannot separate lies from the truth; they are easily deceived by investigators who can pit one conspirator against another."

Strong 'familial' relationships

Family bonds strengthen the chances of a conspiracy's success because coconspirators are far less likely to give up a relative than they are a non-family member.

Little or no pressure to confess

Conspirators who face no pressure feel no need to confess to their lie. When the consequences for maintain the lie escalate, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain it. Mr. Wallace writes, "When suspects fear incarceration or condemnation from their peers, they often respond in an effort to save face or save their own skin."

Evaluating the "Resurrection Conspiracy"

With these realities in mind, let's examine the evidence. What do we know about the alleged conspirators? First, there were at least 12 of them (counting the 11 plus Matthias and excluding the 120

[1] Available in the church library.

at Pentecost and the 500 that Paul lists in 1 Corinthians 15). This is a huge number that greatly reduces the likelihood of a successful conspiracy. Further, the apostles would have had to maintain this conspiracy for decades! Tradition tells us that they took the gospel of Jesus' resurrection to Greece, Rome, Ethiopia, Turkey, and even to India. And they didn't live in an age of instant communication. Maintaining a conspiracy among so many over such a great distance over so many decades approaches impossible.

It's true that some of the apostles were related. Judas Thaddeus (Jude) and James the Younger were brothers, as were Peter and Andrew, and John and James. But many of them hailed from different communities came from diverse backgrounds. Their short time spent in one another's company was nothing compared to the years they spent apart proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. At some point their loyalty to the group would have been tested.

And tradition tells us that's exactly what happened. According to tradition, al, except John faced gruesome interrogations and martyrdoms (crucifixion, hanging, stoning, beheading, and more) that would have tested their loyalty and their willingness to maintain a conspiracy. Preserving a conspiracy under such circumstances simply isn't credible.

Mr. Wallace reflects, "I can't imagine a less favorable set of circumstances for a successful conspiracy than those that the twelve apostles faced." He then adds,

> Multiply the problem by ten to account for the 120 disciples in the upper room (Acts 1:15), or by forty to account for the five hundred eyewitnesses described by Paul (1 Cor. 15:6), and the odds seem more prohibitive. None of these eyewitnesses ever recanted, none was ever trotted out by the enemies of Christianity in an effort to expose the Christian 'lie.'

Yes, the improbable possibility that the resurrection of Jesus was a finely concocted conspiracy remains, but as Mr. Wallace points out, the disciples

> either were involved in the greatest conspiracy of all time or were simply eyewitnesses who were telling the truth. The more I learn about conspiracies, the more the latter seemed to be the most reasonable conclusion.

The conspiracy theory simply doesn't hold up under scrutiny. Now, having disproved the conspiracy theory doesn't equal proof of Jesus' resurrection. Presenting a positive, evidential case for the historicity of Jesus' resurrection will take another article,[2] but for now we can rule out conspiracy as a plausible explanation for His resurrection. The evidence leaves no doubt: the disciples of Jesus went to their deaths fully believing that Jesus rose from the dead. – Pastor Conner

Timothy standing with Mr. Wallace and his signed copy of Cold Case Christianity at a recent conference. And notice the real police badge!

[2] To read more evidence to support the historicity of Christ's resurrection, check out *Cold Case Christianity*, and *Resurrection iWitness.* Both are available in our library. For another excellent evidential case for the resurrection of Jesus, check out Gary Habermas and Mike Licona's *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*. Or log onto www.coldcasechristianity.com.

MINISTRY APPS—Zion Lutheran – February 2015

Applying the Gospel in Hearts and Homes

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus." Acts 4:13

For much of the church year the first lesson in the Sunday readings is from the Old Testament. That pattern changes in the weeks of the Easter season. The first lesson is from the New Testament book of Acts. The lessons share the reality of Easter in the hearts of homes of the early church.

Easter People—Then and Now

What was the impact of Jesus' resurrection on Peter, Paul, Phillip, Barnabas, Dorcas and others whose story is noted in the Book of Acts? An Easter season Bible study will be held each Tuesday morning (with an occasional exception) beginning on Tuesday, April 7. The class will begin at 9:45 and conclude at 11 a.m. Join us for the Easter study. Bring a friend or neighbor.

Easter Proclamations

A highlight for youth, family, and the church is the Easter proclamation of the confirmation class. On Wednesday evening, April 22, the confirmands will give witness of their understanding of Luther's Small Catechism as well as Christ's presence in their hearts. The congregation is invited. The Rite of Confirmation will be part of the worship on Sunday, April 26. We pray the confirmands will be faithful to the resurrected Lord and His church for the rest of their lives. Midweek classes for the year will conclude with confirmation and resume in the fall.

The resurrection of Jesus is shared EVERY Sunday in worship and Sunday school. The consistent attendance of all children is encouraged.

Easter Generosity.

Easter people are generous! (2 Corinthians 8 and 9) We invite the community to be generous in financial support and "hands on" participation in the "Wolf Pack for Hunger" event on Wednesday, April 8 at the IKM-Manning high school gym. Individuals and families can sign up to package food anytime from 3:30 to 7:30 p.m. If the community raises $12,500, we will be able to provide supplies to package $50,000 meals to feed the hungry around the world. As we focus on world hunger, we also thank congregation members for their generous support of the local food pantry.

The C-3 organization will be sponsoring another community concert at the Manning Heritage Park on Sunday evening, June 7. Watch for more details.

Easter Places—VBS 2015

Zion Lutheran will be an Easter place for more than 100 children during VBS week. Children ages 4 through 6th grade will gather at "Camp Discovery," June 1-5. Put the dates on your family calendar. Share the opportunity with grandchildren and neighborhood children. Many volunteers will be needed at the "camp grounds." Share your interest area and availability with VBS coordinators, Pastor Bob and Diane Riggert

Last month we began our discussion on the problem of evil and we pointed out that evil is a problem for every worldview. Every worldview must offer an answer to the problem of evil. If it cannot bear up under the weight of the question, it's not a worldview worth having or keeping. This month we continue our discussion as we start to place the full weight of the question upon Christianity's back. Is this faith strong enough to bear up under it?

The [In]Famous Trilemma

The problem of evil has typically been formulated something like this:

Premise 1: If God is all-good (omni-benevolent), He'd want to stop evil and suffering.

Premise 2: If God is all-powerful (omnipotent), He'd be able to stop evil and suffering.

Premise 3: Evil and suffering persist.

Conclusion: Therefore, God is either not all-good or all-powerful, or He doesn't exist.

Atheists and skeptics have trumpeted this argument *ad nauseam* for generations. What's surprising is that they have never considered that their premises might be incomplete. It hasn't occurred to them that they might have omitted some critical premises that would completely defeat the conclusion. Further, if the argument's conclusion is accepted (specifically, that God doesn't exist), then the argument commits suicide.

To understand how the argument commits suicide and what premises have been excluded, let's start by accepting only the premises that are listed. We accept that an all-good God would want to stop evil and suffering and we accept that an all-powerful God would be able to stop evil and suffering. We also accept that evil and suffering remain a part of our reality. If this proves God doesn't exist, it also proves evil doesn't exist.

Huh?

Let's make sure we understand this. If this infamous trilemma proves God's non-existence, it proves that evil doesn't exist. But let's be clear: it doesn't prove that pain and suffering don't exist. A world without God may be a world where people suffer terribly.[3] In a world without God, however, no one would be able to call something truly evil. They could say, "I don't like this." Or "This is painful to me." But in a world without God no one could call something objectively evil because when God is eliminated, the objective category of evil is eliminated, too. It's like eliminating the objective category of a straight line. If there is no line against which to measure all other lines, then no other lines can be deemed crooked. A Godless world is one in which evil is undefinable in any objective sense. Honest atheists will admit this.

TO OBJECTIVELY DEFINE EVIL, GOD MUST EXIST.

To objectively define evil, God must exist. Christian author and apologist Ravi Zacharias famously puts it this way:

[3] All one needs to do is see what life was like under the atheistic regimes of Stalin and Hitler!

> When you assert that there is such a thing as evil, you must assume there is such a thing as good. When you say there is such a thing as good, you must assume there is a moral law by which to distinguish between good and evil… When you assume a moral law, you must posit a moral lawgiver because the questioner assumes the intrinsic worth of humanity in raising the question of evil, an assumption that is not warranted by naturalism. But this moral lawgiver is precisely who atheists are trying to disprove.

So if the argument eliminates the objective category of evil, then it eliminates itself as an argument against God's existence. By proving itself, it defeats itself. It effectively cuts off the branch on which it was standing to make its argument.

More to the Story

Some may respond, "Okay, the argument doesn't prove God's non-existence, but it does prove that God is either weak or evil." If the three premises listed were the only premises possible, they may have a point. If, however, the argument has left out key premises, the conclusion of a weak and/or evil God doesn't follow.

Ravi Zacharias again proves helpful here. He points out that the argument lacks two key premises:

- God is all-wise.
- God is eternal.

These two premises change everything. Think about how:

God is all-wise

First, if God is all-wise, it means that God might have a morally sufficient reason for letting evil and suffering remain. Scripture mentions precisely such a scenario. St. Paul writes in Romans 8, "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son…" (8:28-29).[4] God may use the evil and suffering we endure to conform us to the image of Christ.

Paul adds in 2 Corinthians 1,

> For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. *But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead* (1:8-9).

Notice the italics: God used suffering and evil to teach Paul and his companions to rely on God who raises the dead. So God may use suffering to teach us to place our very life into the hands of the God who has authority over life and death, the God who will raise us from the dead, the God who can restore all that has been broken and make right all that has been wrong.

And again Paul adds in 2 Corinthians 4, "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison… (4:17). The evil and suffering we endure prepare us to enter the glory of the resurrection and the New Earth. We could add numerous more examples to make our simple point: God is all-wise and may have a good reason for letting evil and suffering remain.

GOD IS ALL-WISE AND MAY HAVE A GOOD REASON FOR LETTING EVIL AND SUFFERING REMAIN.

God is eternal

Second, if God is eternal, it means, for one thing, that our perspective is exceedingly limited. The psalmist observed, "Man is like a breath; his days are like a

[4] It's important to point out that Paul doesn't say that God will work everything out for our temporal good; He says the good that God will work is being conformed to the image of Christ.

passing shadow" (Ps. 144:4). It may be just a tad presumptuous for breath and shadows to box God in to their limited perspective. Further, if God is eternal, God may yet have a plan to deal with evil and suffering.

And that, in fact, is the case. According to the Bible, God has a plan for evil: the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. In the cross God judges evil and in the resurrection God promises that suffering will cease. Now, up to this point we haven't mentioned the reality that evil resides in our heart and that the cosmic brokenness that pervades all hearts and lives is ultimately because of human rebellion against God.[5] We will address this more directly in months to come. For now we simply need to acknowledge that persons brought evil and suffering into the world and that the resolution to evil and suffering is found in a person. This, in fact, is one of the things that distinguishes Christianity from other world religions. The solution to evil and suffering isn't found through philosophy or the extinguishing of persons (as in pantheistic religions); it is found in the God-person Jesus.

St. Paul writes about this personal solution in Romans 3, "[Christ's cross] was to show [God's] righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (3:26). In other words, in the cross of Christ God acts righteously toward evil; justice for evil is done and the believer in Christ is justified before God.

And in Romans 6, Paul indicates that everyone who has been baptized into Christ, being joined to a death like His, will be joined to a resurrection like His (6:3-5). Being "joined to a resurrection like [Christ's]" means living in our resurrected bodies eternally free from suffering. This is how he can write in Romans 8, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (8:18).

Those who reject God's personal solution to evil and suffering, however, will personally experience the justice of God against their evil and the suffering they have brought into the world. The Bible calls this eternal justice hell. We'll address the reality of hell in coming months because it remains a major stumbling block for many people today. For now we can simply acknowledge that the age-old trilemma erected against God is insufficient. To be biblically sound it should read as follows:

Premise 1: God is all-good and desires to rid the world of evil and suffering.

Premise 2: God is all-powerful and can rid the world of evil and suffering.

Premise 3: God is all-wise and has morally sufficient reasons for letting evil and suffering remain for a time.

Premise 4: God is eternal and, as such, has a better perspective on the problem of evil and suffering than we do and may yet have a plan to deal with it.

Conclusion: Although evil and suffering persist for now, the all-good, all-powerful, all-wise, eternal God desires to deal with evil and suffering, has the power to deal with it, has morally sufficient reasons for letting it persist for now and will yet rid the world of it forever.

In the coming months we will address the question of evil's origin and then progress into some of the thornier questions of personal suffering and evil. For now we can acknowledge that Christianity has not buckled under the weight of evil and suffering. We'll see if it remains standing in the coming months. – Pastor Conner

[5] This doesn't answer why individuals suffer the evil they do. The question of why a specific individual suffers is typically beyond human understanding. The Scriptures, instead, point not to an answer for individual suffering, but to a person who suffered for us and issued a promise that our individual suffering will cease in the resurrection.

We Need to Talk about It

In his must-read book on Biblical Stewardship, *Money, Possession, and Eternity*,[6] Randy Alcorn relates the following apocryphal tale:

> A man jumped off a twenty-story building. Onlookers were terrified, but the man seemed perfectly calm. As he plummeted by the window of a fifth-story apartment, he looked at the wide-eyed occupant and said, 'Everything's all right so far.'

This, Alcorn writes, is "the attitude many people take toward debt in its early stages: 'Everything's all right so far.'" As you might surmise, things didn't end well for the man in the story and things aren't ending well for people who are doing the same with debt. Debt is destroying marriages, wrecking families, and weakening the church's ability to do ministry.

We need to talk about it.

This might come as a surprise to many Christians, but the Bible, while not forbidding debt, warns against it. Proverbs 22 observes, "The borrower is the slave of the lender" (22:7). In other words, debt is bondage. Debt enslaves the borrower to the lender and, as Alcorn asks, "How can we be fully free to serve God when we're indentured to human creditors?"

Unfortunately, many of us are not conditioned to ask discerning questions regarding debt. We reason, "Debt is the way things work today." This debt mentality, as Alcorn points out, involves at least six assumptions:

1. We need more than God has given us.
2. God doesn't know best what our needs are.
3. God has failed to provide for our needs, forcing us to take matters into our own hands.
4. If God doesn't come through the way we think he should, we can find another way.
5. Just because today's income is sufficient to make our debt payments, tomorrow's will be too.
6. Our circumstances won't change – our health will be good, we'll keep our present job, our salary will keep up with inflation, and God won't direct us to another job with a lower salary or lead us to increase our giving.

And then Alcorn adds this zinger: "It's one thing to trust God to provide for our present needs (Matthew 6:33). It's another to presume upon him by dictating (via a decision to incur debt) the terms of his future provision." We would do well to consider Alcorn's words and to reflect thoughtfully on the assumptions of the debt mentality. Have we unthinkingly adopted them?

It's one thing to trust God to provide for our present needs (Matthew 6:33). It's another to presume upon him by dictating (via a decision to incur debt) the terms of his future provision.

It may be hard to admit, but debt means spending money we don't have. That doesn't mean that debt can never be taken on, but it does mean that we should seriously consider the reasons we're giving for spending money we don't have. Are they good reasons or not?

Alcorn details 11 questions that we should ask ourselves before we incur debt. Put your defensiveness down, drop your hackles, and open-mindedly consider each question:

1. Is debt our way of getting around depending on God? (Why trust God to provide when we can get a loan?")

[6] Available in our church library.

2. Is debt our means of short-circuiting the God-created means of acquisition – including work, saving, planning, self-discipline, patience, and waiting for divine provision?

3. What message are we sending to God when we go into debt rather than live on what he has provided? What are we really saying when we take out a loan? How does it reflect on our view of God? What are we saying about his sovereignty, goodness, wisdom, or timing?

4. What effect will going into debt today have on our ability or willingness to tithe and give voluntary offerings tomorrow?

5. What effect will today's decision to go into debt have on tomorrow's freedom to follow God wherever he wants us to go?

6. By taking out a loan that commits us to make payments over a number of years, are we presuming upon God?

7. Although our income today might be enough to make debt payments over the next twenty years, is it right to assume that we'll continue to generate the same level of income?

8. Are we mortgaging the future to pay for the whims of the present? Are we mortgaging God by supposing to commit him to pay off something he may disapprove of?

9. Is debt our way of getting around depending on God? of circumventing prayer, patience, and waiting on God to provide?

10. If we 'must' go into debt to provide for our 'needs,' is it because our 'needs' are really wants in disguise? Have we spent so much money on our wants that there's not enough left for our needs? Have we robbed God and forfeited his financial blessing by failing to give him the firstfruits?

11. Have we really exhausted all other avenues to avoid going into debt? Have we given up expensive activities, hobbies, and memberships, and liquidated valuable possessions?

Alcorn then concludes,

> We can be certain that God will provide for our basic material needs if we seek first his kingdom (Matthew 6:25-34), but where does the Bible promise that God will provide for all the debts we incur through our own greed, impatience, or presumption? If we are seeking first his kingdom, will we put ourselves in bondage to debt?

These are important questions to ask, questions that require honest reflection, which is why we so often avoid them! We know it to be true, but debt is often our means of getting what we want when we don't have the funds on hand to acquire it, whether it be a new car, camper, TV, college degree, or house. And that's the rub. We want what we don't have. Maturity requires us to ask, "Are we content with what God has provided or is our heart infected with greed?"

Debt is often our means of getting what we want when we don't have the funds on hand to acquire it.

This doesn't mean that we can NEVER take on debt, and it doesn't mean that all debt is because of greed, but it does mean that we should NEVER take on debt without honestly examining our motives for doing so. In the coming months we'll take a closer look at when debt might be *temporarily* acceptable, the hidden dangers of debt, the illusions of debt, and how you can get out of it. In the meantime, if you want to better understand a Christian approach to debt, check out *Money, Possessions, and Eternity* from our church library. Also in our library is Dave Ramsey's practical guide to getting out of debt and living on a reasonable budget, *The Total Money Makeover*. Or you can check out their websites: www.epm.org and www.daveramsey.com. Or come and visit with me. – Pastor Conner

Is Same-sex Marriage the Civil Rights Movement of Our Time?

According to many LGBTQ advocates, same-sex marriage is the last great struggle of the civil rights movement. As many are putting it, "Gay is the new black." Whether we agree with the claim or not, there's no denying the effectiveness of the strategy. After all, who wants to be labeled as opposed to civil rights? It's becoming increasing common to hear the question phrased this way: "Do you want your grandkids to learn that you were on the wrong side of history like segregationists in the 1950s and 60s?" The question equates opposition to same-sex marriage with racism. Through this powerful strong-arm technique, LGBTQ advocates have intimidated and coerced an increasing number of people into supporting their cause (or at least keeping their opposition silent). Those who haven't affirmed same-sex marriage as a civil right have been fired, fined, and more. Consider but a few of the victims:

- Kelvin Cochran: Atlanta Fire Chief fired for writing a book on Biblical morality.
- Wes Modder: Navy chaplain fired for sharing Biblical teachings on sexual ethics upon request in private counseling sessions.
- Eric Moutsos: Salt Lake City police officer fired for requesting not to be forced to ride with the police squad in a gay pride parade.
- Aaron and Melissa Klein: Oregon bakers found guilty of breaking the law for declining to bake a cake for a same-sex wedding.
- Barronelle Stutzman: Washington state florist fined for declining to provide flowers for a same-sex ceremony.
- Elaine Huguenin: New Mexico photographer found guilty by the New Mexico Supreme Court for declining to photograph a same-sex marriage and instructed that she was forced to compromise her beliefs as "the price of citizenship."
- Daniel Murphy: Player for the New York Mets under a gag order from his team's administration for expressing his disagreement with same-sex behavior.
- Brendan Eich: CEO of Firefox fired for donating to a pro-traditional marriage ballot measure in California.

Ironically, this has all been done in the name of tolerance!

If the same-sex movement is the same as the civil rights movement of the 50s and 60s it would be reasonable to ask a few insightful questions.

Is skin color equal to behavior?

At the center of same-sex unions is a chosen sexual behavior. Yes, same-sex unions involve more than sexual behavior, but they certainly don't involve less. LGBTQ advocates aren't lobbying for same-sex roommates or same-sex friends, after all; they're lobbying for the right to fulfill their romantic and sexual desires with the gender of their choosing in a federally recognized and culturally affirmed institution. Is this chosen behavior equal to skin color? Skin color is innate; is sexual orientation? No reputable study has ever demonstrated a causal link between genes and homosexual behavior. Jeffery Satinover speaks of potential inborn inclinations toward certain behaviors (whether that be basketball, alcoholism, or homosexual acts) in his landmark book *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth*. BUT! inclination does not equal causation. We remain in control of our behavioral choices.

And the debate over whether a person can "stop being homosexual" is beside the point. Whether someone can lose homosexual attractions, the fact remains that there are former homosexuals. There are no former blacks. Even more, someone with homosexual attractions can choose (just like an

unmarried person with heterosexual attractions) not to act on those attractions. Yes this may be an incredibly difficult choice, but it is still a choice that one can make and one that many have made. A black person, however, cannot chose not to be black. It might not be politically correct, but skin color cannot be equated to behavior.

Is love the only criteria for a legitimate marriage?

Same-sex marriage advocates claim "love is love" and that a vote against same-sex marriage is a vote against love. And who wants to be labeled as against love? But if love is the only criteria for a legitimate marriage, why are we not endorsing polygamy or polyamory? Can they not love each other? Throuples (a "couple" of three) are beginning to be recognized in other countries; why aren't we recognizing them here? Can they not love each other?

Or what if a 30 year old man and a 14 year old boy or girl are in love? Why should they be forbidden from marrying? Or what if a step-father and step-daughter love each other? Why should they be kept from marrying?

If love is the only criteria for legitimate marriage what valid limit can be put on marriage?

If love is the only criteria for legitimate marriage, what valid limit can be put on marriage? And if love isn't the only criteria for defining marriage, what other criteria is there? Shouldn't the rearing of children be a part of the conversation? And if that's the case, is it right to institutionalize a form of marriage that forces a child to forfeit at least one of his biological parents?[7]

Further, if it's not unloving to exclude polygamy, polyamory, the thruple, minors, or incestuous relationships from marriage, why is it unloving to exclude same-sex couples from marriage? And if children fare better with their dad and mom, as studies are beginning definitively to show,[8] is it unloving to protect the arrangement of marriage that has been shown to be the most advantageous for them?

Christian author and apologist Ravi Zacharias summed up the Christian response to same-sex marriage to a reporter subtly accusing him of racial-like discrimination against people practicing homosexuality. The reporter asked, "Why are Christians openly against racial discrimination but at the same time discriminate against certain types of sexual behavior?" Ravi replied,

> We are against racial discrimination because one's ethnicity is sacred. You cannot violate the sacredness of one's race. For the same reason, we are against the altering of God's pattern and purpose for sexuality. Sex is sacred in the eyes of God and ought not to be violated. What you have to explain is why you treat race as sacred and desacralize sexuality. The question is really yours, not mine. In other words, our reasoning in both cases stems from the same foundational basis. You in effect switch the basis of reasoning, and that is why you are living in contradiction.

We would do well to think likewise. Both ethnicity and sex are sacred and God has spoken clearly on both. As Christ's church we are called to love people with same-sex attraction, to bear their burden with them, and to invite them to battle the passions of the flesh and the sinful desires of the mind with us. We are also called to think clearly and reason clearly on this matter. Gay is not the new black. Same-sex marriage is not a civil right. We are right to be color blind towards people's skin color, but we cannot be blind toward behavior. Both are sacred and must be honored as such. – Pastor Conner

[7] See article "The Overlooked" in the March 2015 newsletter for more on this.

[8] www.frc.org/issuebrief/new-study-on-homosexual-parents-tops-all-previous-research

Phase 1 Almost Complete!

On Sunday, March 22, we celebrated the arrival of most of our new chancel furniture and on Palm Sunday (March 28) we welcomed the rest. Some of the pieces are pictured here.

Come celebrate with the Generations of Zion!

Generations

Thanak You Mrs. Fink

Appreciation and Benefit

ZION Lutheran Preschool Manning, Iowa
Christ Centered... Child Focused... Family Connecting

ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH MANNING, IOWA
Celebrating and Sharing Christ's Redeeming Love

Sunday, April 12th, 4:00- 7:00 p.m.
Zion Lutheran Church, Manning, IA

Recognizing and appreciating the faithful service of Deb Fink

All funds raised will be given to help the Fink family with Mrs. Fink's medical expenses.

You can send notes of appreciation, memories from your child's preschool, or words of encouragement to zmanning@mmctsu.com.

March Highlights

President Cheral Buhr led the Guild in the LWML Pledge to open the meeting. Pastor Conner followed with a devotion based on the 3rd chapter of John, Nicodemus and Jesus' conversation. Christian Life Chairman, Margaret Backhaus, then read a piece entitled "Tears of Sorrow". The mite box prayer was recited and the mite box passed.

President Buhr then called the business meeting to order. Roll call was answered with 13 members present. The secretary read the minutes of the previous meeting which were approved as read. Correspondence included thank you notes from the family of Phyllis Callender and also from Pastor Vogel who noted that the newest church in Iowa District West is called Amigos en Cristo Lutheran and is located in Denison, Iowa. Treasurer Barb Anderson and Kitchen Treasurer, Darlene Vollstedt, gave their reports.

President Buhr announced that Diane Witt from Arcadia will be the new Carroll Zone Mission Chairman. To date, the ink cartridge collection has netted $25,600.00 to help pay expenses for the 2015 International LWML meeting to be held on June 25th-28th in Des Moines. We will keep collecting cartridges even after the convention. September 12th will be a fall retreat at Mission Central. Those planning to attend should register early. Joni Kienast will continue to be in charge of the cookie walk for Kinderfest. Margaret Backhaus said that confirmation of 6 students will be held on April 26th. Darlene Vollstedt will buy corsages and bill the guild. The board of education will buy the juice and Diane Vetter will use her Thrivent dollars to provide the cakes as well as provide food for the April 29th after church coffee.

Committee reports: Human Care Chairman, Audrey Roe, said 31 quilts had been tied in February. Audrey will deliver the quilts to the site in Sac City for shipping in early May. Sunshine Chairman, Bev Grundmeier, sent 4 cards last month. Mary Grimm, auditing committee, announced that the treasurer's and kitchen treasurer's books were in order. Circle #3 served at Phyllis Callender's funeral luncheon. Circle #1 will have the next funeral. Circle #2 will have the April fellowship coffees.

There was no old business. New business included a reminder that registrations for the International Convention in Des Moines are due. A letter was read from Camp Okoboji that asked for a basket or a donation for a raffle to be held to raise money to furnish the kitchen at the Ginny DeWall dining room at the camp. Mary Grimm moved that we send $100.00 as a donation. The motion was seconded and carried. President Buhr will need a count of Manning ladies that will attend the Spring Rally at Glidden on April 18th. She will ask for that number at our next meeting on April 8th.

Guild collection items will be: Box tops, All postage stamps, Campbell's soup labels, bars of soap, and computer ink cartridges. We will no longer be collecting greeting card fronts. Plaza bingo will be on March 27th with Susie Schilling as chairman, and members Sue Puck, Bev Grundmeier and Charlene Hickman as helpers.

The meeting was adjourned with the Lord's Prayer and the table prayer. Hostesses for the day were Bev Grundmeier and Barb Anderson. Audrey Roe and Sue Puck will be hostesses for the April meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Sue Puck, secretary

Charles, Cheryl, Caleb, Caitlin, Carissa, and Cassie Ferry
Missionaries to Indonesia

February 2015

Tahun Baru lagi? (Indonesian for "New Year Again?")

February may be the shortest month of the year, but it still seems to have gone extremely fast. In Jakarta, the rainy season kicked into high gear. This meant that rain poured down nearly every day. Sometimes, it rained all day long. But as the rain brings cooler temperatures, this is ironically the busiest season for weddings in Indonesia.

On the front fence one day, we found a colorful flyer which turned out to be an invitation. One of our neighbors was getting married, and had thought to invite us to her wedding, which was going to be right outside our house.

Weddings in Indonesia are much like "block parties" in the US. They're held outside, include music and food, and are events for the whole neighborhood. So we put on our best batik shirts, and went out to learn and to give our best well-wishes. The kids enjoyed seeing the colorful outfits (the bride changes clothing three times!) and hearing the music, and we loved trying some new traditional foods. We could hear the party continue on into the late night hours.

Away from home, I traveled to Medan to meet with the GKLI bishop. And I visited Singapore twice, meeting our small congregation to deliver the Lord's gifts in Word and Sacrament. We've settled on a more consistent location, which is centrally located. This makes it easier for people to attend Service and to plan on getting together. People also have been getting to know and trust me more, and so are much quicker to allow me to serve them and provide for their pastoral needs. Those trips to Singapore are an absolute joy, and I've gotten used to packing in as much as possible during those quick weekends.

SELAMAT

People in both Singapore and Indonesia celebrated a treasured holiday this month: Chinese Lunar New Year. Because there are large populations of people who are ethnically Chinese, this was a big deal in both countries. Stores and businesses were closed, people took vacations, and government services were shut down. In fact, I couldn't walk through the Singapore streets without seeing and hearing the lion dances with their drums banging and cymbals clanging, while the men in colorful costumes danced.

The Ferry Family has gotten word this month of many incredible and generous people who have chosen to continue or renew or even increase their contributions for our work here in Southeast Asia. We are so humbled and thankful to you for your trust and your help so we might continue serving people here. It's common at Chinese New Year to wish people prosperity and luck, but we know we don't need those things… Christ has given us all that we need: the forgiveness of our sins by His blood, and therefore life and salvation. Thank you for your friendship and prayers!

Prayers, Praises, and Thanksgiving

- Thanksgiving for all our partners who shower us with generous support so we can continue working in this land!
- Thanksgiving for a wondrous first year of life for Cassie, and the blessings of health and safety
- For our children, that they might continue to be at peace with where we've been called to serve, and find joy in the simple things of life
- For ongoing pledged support, that we might continue serving overseas according to our Lord's will
- That our gracious Lord Jesus would grant His wisdom and grace, so any would be blessed by the work we're doing in Indonesia and in Singapore.

!Amigos En Cristo!
News from IDW Hispanic Ministry
Missionary/Pastor Daniel Vogel

Iowa District West, LCMS
Year 11, Issue 4, April 2015

Elbert the Birthday Boy: Last month Elbert Perez celebrated his 10th birthday. Here he is pictured with his mother, Mayra and his godfather, Antonio. Elbert was the first baby baptized in our Hispanic mission. He is now in 4th grade at Zion Lutheran School and an eager acolyte in our Amigos en Cristo Lutheran Church. I often encourage him to consider becoming a pastor in the future. Thankfully Elbert has a very supportive extended family that cares for him. So with church, school and family we pray to be able to serve many other children like Elbert in the Denison community.

Lent has Begun: The kids our congregation attended our Ash Wednesday service and with crosses of ashes on their foreheads they helped us enter into Lent. We commemorate this sacred season with a special weekly worship service to prepare for Holy Week and Easter. For Hispanics the Lent season is a rather controversial time. Those from a family tradition in the Roman Catholic church look forward to it. But those who come from an "Evangelical" background most likely reject this season as too "Catholic". In our small new church we have 28 communicant members and 50 baptized members. We are the Hispanic ministry in the middle striving to be the historic church of the Apostles and bringing the open Bible to the community. We focus on Christ crucified and His mission of the free gift of salvation for all. Like many Hispanic communities in the U.S. there is a very competitive variety of protestant/evangelical churches and the cults who aggressively strive to evangelize. So our outreach is one of friendship, doctrine, and mercy. We seek to make friends in the community who have many false ideas about a church with the name 'Lutheran'. We seek to be a teaching church by inviting the community to read and study the Bible for themselves. In addition we partner with Zion Lutheran School to help teach our children. Finally in mercy we offer classes in English, citizenship preparation and food distribution for needy families in partnership with Our Savior Lutheran and other churches.

My Tyson Chaplaincy at the Plant in Denison: Last month Tyson celebrated their annual banquet with awards for long term workers. The highlight was Ron Fink being honored for 53 years of service. We learned that no other Tyson worker in all the national beef or pork plants has worked as long. In the picture above left he is congratulated by the Plant manager and Management staff. At right he is with his wife, Deb. Ron is a quiet faithful worker and a great role model to our workers. Ron and wife Deb are members of Zion in Denison and Deb is the Director of Pre-School at Zion, Manning. Good job Ron, literally! God bless and keep all of our hardworking workers. They are the life blood of this work to provide food for the world. +

Please Pray: + For the blessings of the Open House at Zion Lutheran School in which a number of new Hispanic families were enrolled. + For growth in faith during Lent and Holy Week. + For our Spring Evangelistic Campaign to reach the Denison Hispanic community. + For new families that are attending our church that they may continue to grow and serve the Lord with us. + For my work as a Chaplain at Tyson and for opportunities to share the Gospel in the workplace. + ***In thanksgiving for the mission hearts of the many individuals and congregations of the Iowa District West who monthly support the Lord's work among Hispanic immigrants in Denison and in our other 3 Hispanic missions. +++***

Please Continue to Support our new church: For our mission friends financial support checks should now be sent to: Amigos en Cristo Lutheran Church: 1004 S. 1 Ave., Denison, Iowa, 51442

NEW E-MAIL: E-mail me at: daniel.vogel@ ziondenison.org

TO CONTACT ME:
Rev. Daniel Vogel
32678 Aspen Ave. Manning, Iowa, 51455
1-712-653-2354 or Cell: 712-309-1292 or
E-mail me at: Dan.Vogel@idwlcms.org

April Birthdays and Anniversaries @ Zion

2. Connie Ahrendsen
Larry Hansen
3. Aaron Ahrendsen
Lillie Ceminksky
Emma Lacy
4. Dorothy Knudson
Duane Otto
5. Bob Henkelman
6. Darla Neumann
Viola Ostebee
Dennis Tibben
7. Jeff Bradley
Jesse Page
Hadley Wiig
8. Judy Bald
Mikasia Jacobsen
10. Stephen Grimm
Dorothy Larsen
11. Vicki Tibben
12. Cory Otto
Vila Ranniger
Kael Renze
Thomas Ulrickson
Nathan Vetter
13. Drew Greving
Vernon Larsen
Deborah Ranniger
14. Katelyn Dreher
15. Jerry Backhaus
Natalie Bauer
Nancy Muhlbauer
Dan Peters
Karen Reinke

16. Duane Wegner
17. Tim Kienast
Sue Puck
18. Curt Janssen
Cheryl Kerkhoff
Susan Lamb
19. Saylor McManigal
Colton Otto
Diane Riggert
20. Tanner Bald
Franklin Mohr
21. Joene Bohlmann
22. Conrad Kurth
23. Shauna Borkowski
Ashley Johnson
Roger Sinow
Daniel Vogel
Judith Wegner
24. Collin Borkowski
Ericka Irlbeck
25. Jackie Hagedorn
Virginia Johnson
Becky Karsten
26. Myrtle Otto
Ron Schilling
Geri Spies
27. David Gore
Georgia Lohrmann
28. Glen Ahrendsen
Eric Lage
29. Craig Wegner
30. Andy Booth
Emily Brus
Nancy Opperman
Sara Puck

8. Todd & Tammy Winter
12. Ron & Susan Schilling
20. Merlin & Jean Borkowski
25. Brian & Diane Vetter
28. Greg & Sandra Sextro

If we missed or misspelled your name, please inform the church office.

Congregational Servants

Council:
Curt Struve, President
Sam Musfeldt, Vice President
Jean Ferneding, Record. Sec.
Amber Neumann, Fin. Sec.
Karen Kienast, Treasurer
Jeff Hargens, CFO

Board of Elders:
Stan Baack, head elder
Stan Musfeldt, Lynn Kruse
Dave Grundmeier (Gary Witt)
Tim Kienast, Gary Witt
Floyd Forman

Board of Deacons:
Larry Mahnke, Bruce Grimm,
Ryan Crawford, Eric Ramsey
Paul Christiansen, Rich Zinke
Don Lamb

Board of Trustees:
Bob Genzen, Dan Behrens,
Kent Vollstedt,

Rodney Backhaus

Board of Missions:
Arlene Mohr, Chair
Dave Grundmeier, Lynn Kruse,
Frank Mohr, Bev Grundmeier
Gary Schroeder, Warren Puck

Board of Education:
Shelly Gruhn, Chair
Dan Dawson, Margaret Backhaus
Joni Kienast,
Kari Ranniger, Kathy Vollstedt

Preschool Board:
Dianne Riggert Chair
Jean Ferneding,
Sandra Sextro, Heather Kusel,
Jen Morris, Janet Smith

Altar Guild:
Monica Christensen, Director

Ladies Guild:
Cheral Buhr, President

Choir:
Dr. Tom Ulrickson, director

Children's Choir:
Susie Ulrickson, Jill Arp

In Our Prayers

Prayers Needed:
Athena Bess, Lyle Borkowski, Franklin Mohr, Walt Noelck, Andrea Payne, Mandi Sandage, Dave Grundmeier, Judy Musfeldt, Mitch Robinson, Heather Kusel, Jeff Jones, Glen Eickman, Jeanie Petersen, Robert Hansen, Ruth Hansen, Sherri Steffes, Susan Lamb, Pearl Kurth (Conrad Kurth's mom), Myra Wittrock, Duane Karstens, Steve Rutz (Karl Rutz's Brother), Deb Fink

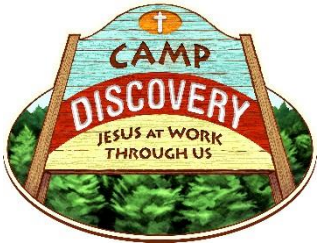
Zion's Missionaries:
Rev. Stephen Oliver in Taiwan; Rev. Daniel Vogel, Hispanic missionary in Iowa District West. Pat Monroe, Council Bluffs, Deaf ministry; Rev. Charles Ferry in Indonesia

Cross Cultural Worker:
Molly Ulrickson serving in India

"Generations" Campaign

Military men and women:

Manning Food Pantry: Isn't it wonderful that Manning now has a food pantry available for individuals and families? Did you know you can help keep the pantry thriving? The five churches in town take turns providing volunteers to clean/stock the shelves and to "shop" for clients. Cleaners/stockers serve on Wednesday evenings and "shoppers" serve on Saturday mornings (8:00 – 10:30). Training is provided. If you're interested, please visit with or call Rhonda Grimm (653-2008).



VBS is coming! June 1-5

Get ready for Camp Discovery at Zion this summer as we see Jesus at work through us.

In order to offer an excellent VBS program, we need YOU to help. Please consider volunteering your time, creativity, and/or refreshments to make our VBS a great success!