

April 1, 2010

Greetings friends in Christ,

I wanted to start this article out by sharing the good news about a 10 million dollar endowment set up for the Florida-Georgia District, and then say "APRIL FOOLS!" But that seemed kind of mean! Can you recall a memorable April Fools' joke? The origins of this day are disputed, and largely unknown, but among the pranks pulled on April Fools' Day through the centuries there have been some real doozies! Let me share two of my favorite April Fools' pranks from the recent past.

In 1998, Burger King ran an ad in USA Today, saying that people could get a Whopper for left-handed people. It was designed so that the condiments would drip out of the right side. They later reported that not only did customers order the new "left-handed" burgers, but some specifically requested the "old," right-handed burger.

Perhaps even funnier was this one, from 1996, when Taco Bell took out a full-page advertisement in The New York Times announcing that they had purchased the Liberty Bell to "reduce the country's debt" and renamed it the "Taco Liberty Bell." When asked about the sale, then White House press secretary Mike McCurry replied tongue-in-cheek that the Lincoln Memorial had also been sold and would henceforth be known as the Lincoln Mercury Memorial.

I had a friend in my former parish who was quite the prankster. One April Fools' Day he sent out an alternate newsletter, formatted to look like the regular one, but with all bogus stories. Another year, as we were preparing to build a new facility, he sent out a letter to select people announcing that the building committee had been approached by a local Baptist Church, which was relocating, and offered us their location. A few years back, he sent a letter, again to select folks, on official looking letterhead from a local ELCA congregation, stating a desire to merge congregations for "economic reasons" and, of course, we would have to relinquish our facility. That's only three out of many years of pranks! You can only

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imagine the phone calls I received over the years from irate parishioners who fell hook, line, and sinker, for these pranks! In fact, in the early years of my ministry, there were a few times he even got me!

But perhaps the greatest and best April Fools' joke is one we celebrate each year around this time. The devil thought he had won, that he had stopped God's plan, that he had killed the Christ! Just when he thought he had won, God pulled the greatest April Fools' joke, and on the biggest fool! The fact is, Jesus didn't stay dead, but defeated the power of death as He rose victoriously to new life. That very life He continues to offer each of us! That's the message that we not only celebrate, but share with the world! That makes each of us fools for Jesus!

In fact, the Apostle Paul reminds us, *"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.' Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."* 1 Corinthians 1: 18-25 What a privilege is ours to be tied to this foolishness that is wiser than any of man's wisdom!

This Easter we will have glorious celebrations in our churches, and it will be a joyful, exciting day with all kinds of activities. Yet within the communities where these churches are located are many people who may celebrate the Easter Bunny or stuff themselves on peeps, but really have no clue what the true celebration is all about. Maybe you heard the story about the atheist who lamented the fact that while

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Christians have Christmas and Easter, and Jews have Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and other religions have their holy days, but atheists don't have any. His friend pointed out, "Why, of course you have a holy day!" He said, "We do?" The friend said, "Why, certainly. It's April 1st!" The Psalmist writes, *"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Psalm 14: 1*

May the good news of our Lord's resurrection cause us to go into our communities with wild abandon—in good taste, of course—and be those fools for Jesus that proclaim His good news to those who haven't heard, or maybe have heard and rejected it for some reason. May the celebration we experience in the confines of a church building overflow in our lives to the neighborhoods in which we live. Jesus is alive. He has risen, just as He said. What a joyful opportunity to share our faith, and there's no better way to do that than to let it show in our lives—in word and in deed!

So, Happy Easter, brothers and sisters in Christ. Let me be among the first to triumphantly declare: "He is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia!"

Let me also thank you for your partnership and response to the events in Haiti. The outpouring of love and contributions has been a beautiful demonstration of the body of Christ in action. God will not only multiply these gifts, but He will also make them a legacy for years to come as they impact many hearts and lives with the message of the love of Jesus to people in such desperate need!

The District is moving into spring with a joyful spirit. We have such an awesome staff of servant leaders at the District office—all you need to do is call in to recognize that, and that is not only a blessing to me, but also to each of you in the work you do. We are in need of your help in locating someone to assist us with book keeping duties. This is a short-term need that may develop into a full-time position. We are looking for an individual with the following skills or characteristics:

- Bookkeeper / Accountant / Business Manager
- Solid accounting background
- Degrees/Certifications preferred, but not

- required
- Peachtree experience
 - Payroll background
 - Clerical work included
 - Wants to be part of a Team and make a difference
 - Embraces change as part of a continuous improvement process
 - Non-Profit background, especially in a church organization
 - Christian belief system welcomed & encouraged (especially an LCMS member)

Due to the non-profit nature of the enterprise, compensation will be modest, but the benefits, work environment, & other soft-side aspects of the job are excellent. If interested, please e-mail your interest, resume, & salary requirements to Daniel J. Reichard, Director of Administration and Finance, VP LCEF at dreichard@flga-lcms.org. Applications will be accepted through the end of April.

Pastors please remember to participate in your Spring Regional Conferences. This is a great opportunity for fellowship, personal growth, and strengthening of our faith. Who knows, God may bring you there simply to bless another brother going through a difficult time. I am planning to be at each of these gatherings, and hope to see many of you there.

Later this month I will travel, again, to St. Louis with the Council of Presidents for Placement of Vicars and Candidates. This is an exciting time in the life of the Church as new men enter deeper into service for Christ and His Church. We are anticipating the placements of seven vicars in our District and five candidates, including two who have gone through Hispanic Institute and TEE (The Hispanic Theological Education by Extension). Please keep this process in prayer!

Concordia Seminary will begin another SMP (Specific Ministry Pastor) Cohort in September 2010. This is for men interested in pursuing ministry opportunities by an alternative route. For additional information or to begin the application process, which must be completed no later than June 30, go to their web site, <http://www.csl.edu> where materials can be

downloaded.

A little closer to home, Lutheran Church of the Cross, Port Charlotte, Florida, will again this year be the site of a very interesting and timely continuing education opportunity sponsored by Concordia Theological Seminary (CTS), Fort Wayne, Indiana. On August 2-4, 2010, Dr. Adam Francisco, Assistant Professor of Historical Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary, will present a discussion entitled, "Contending for the Faith in the 21st Century". For more information contact Pastor Ken Redmann.

Messiah Lutheran Church, Tampa, Florida will also offer a summer workshop entitled, "Christ, Redeemer of Marriage: Tools for Pre-marital and Marital Counseling," to be taught by Benito Pérez-López, June 25-26. This workshop is offered in SPANISH ONLY! For more information contact Pastor Jim Guelzow at Messiah.

Again, many blessings to you all in this blessed upcoming season of Easter!

Your fellow fool for Jesus,

Greg

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