

# THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

## NEWSLETTER MARCH 2008

### DANIEL PREUS TO REPEAT VISIT

The world wide renowned Director of the Luther Academy, St. Louis, Missouri, Pastor Daniel Preus, will tour Australia in May and June.

This visit follows the very successful speaking tour of last year.

Pastor Preus is a very different proposition to the conventional bombastic ear bashing American TV evangelist.

He is renowned as a speaker who gets his message across with a quiet and convincing authority. His message is a return to the issues of Christian teaching and life that are of interest to all confessional Lutherans and in fact, is vital to the health and existence of all Christians.

Pastor Preus was the First Vice President of the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, and is holder of two Masters Degrees in Historical Theology. He has lectured at seminars in the Ukraine, Panama, South Africa, Australia and the Baltic countries.

Pastor Preus will be the guest speaker at the Marburg congregations Lutheran Identity and Worship Seminar on Saturday May 31 and Sunday June 1 at the Marburg Show Hall. Pastor Preus will also be speaking at Hamilton and Horsham in Victoria, and Loxton, Adelaide, Maitland and Hahndorf in South Australia.

Further programme details will be published in May Newsletter, but readers are asked to put these dates aside now. As this is an important event for all Christians you may consider asking friends and neighbours. This is not just for the benefit of AELC members, but should be considered as one of our important mission events.

### A NEW COLUMN

This issue Newsletter commences with a new column that has been lacking and, with hindsight, should have always been a regular feature. The role of Chairman automatically carries important responsibilities involving the mission expansion and welfare of the AELC and its congregations.

The changeover of chairman of the Co-Ordinating Committee prompted a welcome to new Chairman Paul Hoopert and we wish him well in his endeavours. He has been asked to be a regular contributor to Newsletter, in addition to the Chairman's role as a member of the Editorial Committee. Paul Hoopert has assumed office on taking over from retiring Chairman Errol Noble, who has to be thanked for his tact and

leadership during his period in office.

### CHAIRMAN'S JOTTINGS

There are issues facing each one of us as we travel through life that can be handled in different ways. In a debate there are two sides opposing each other, there are different styles of debating but the centre of the debate should always be the issue being debated. Once the debate has started, any facts, figures or information tendered are open to being refuted by the opposing side, to clarify their position or defend any unwarranted information entering the debate. This procedure should also be evident in any debates we have as a church body. Attack the issue or the sin with all your might to win the debate. However we should all remember that the aim is to discredit the opposing team's position, not the opposing team. Everyone has feelings and like it or not once you feel that you have been wronged your efforts to win the debate are diverted to either defending yourself instead of your position or you attack the opposition in the same vein. The debate soon generates into an argument and there are no winners because the debate has been lost and antagonism takes over and everyone loses. We need to examine our position and calculate what we can say to best win the debate and win over the opposing side or discredit their position. Let the church be an example to the community how disputes should be resolved.

Paul Hoopert. Chairman

### EDITORIAL

#### LAW and ORDER and FAMILIES

The phrase Law and Order is much used by politicians who use this term in attacks on the opposing party, particularly at election times. The breakdown of law and order is constantly before us on radio, TV news, and the print media. Whilst there is some debate over the crime figures and statistics, the observant citizen can only conclude that there is an increased level of violence in the community. In addition to criminal violence we hear of complaints, particularly in suburban shopping centres, of sheer bad, often aggressive manners, and the bad behaviour of young children out of control.

A prominent area of this violence is the riotous behaviour of young people at late night parties, which require the presence of police to restore order and prevent damage to life and property. A recent case in Melbourne incited much public concern when in the absence of his parents a youth staged a party that required police to stop the violence, an operation which cost the public purse \$20,000. TV interviews with parents and the youth revealed a sad picture of a

rebellious youth, parents with little control or influence, and a lot of reconciliation ahead. Questions were asked about the causes and how to prevent future occurrences of this blight on the community. Although this was reported as a very bad case, in fact similar occurrences are common in many cities in Australia.

We have no hesitation in saying that at the root of the trouble is a nation-wide breakdown of the family and a rejection of the Fourth Commandment.

Luther in his explanation in his Large Catechism<sup>1</sup>, makes a case that could well be used as a guide today. At the outset he states that the Commandments are given to us in order of importance and the Fourth, which relates to people, is given priority over all other Commandments that relate to people. It is interesting to note that Luther devotes 17 pages of explanation to the Fourth Commandment and only 36 to the remaining 6.

Another point of interest is that Luther places the position of parents on a higher priority than the government by the State. If we believe that the family is the most important building block of any nation, then we arrive at the position that a nation that is made up of well disciplined, orderly, loving, and peaceful families will be a successful and law abiding society.

We have seen for some decades the promulgation of the rights of the youth of the nation. There is very little about parental discipline, lessons about duties, discipline, and responsibilities. We have been inundated with the propaganda that it is immoral, barbaric, and brutal for a parent to discipline a wayward child by a healthy and loving smack.

In the area of those placed in authority in society, whether they are teachers, law enforcers or government, past attitudes and methods are ridiculed as being old fashioned and out of date, and at first glance Luther's ideas on family, and servant/master relationships would bring down the wrath and ridicule of today's child psychologist or any Union official.

However, we should note that we are examining a Commandment of God, not opinions of men, and a closer look at Luther's explanations of the Commandment provide a wise balance for human relationships for all societies and for all time. Not only must children be obedient to those in authority over them, but those in authority, whether they are parents, teachers, or government, must also be sincere and faithful in carrying out their duties to those for whom they are responsible.

If all levels of society followed the Fourth Commandment diligently, what a wonderful world we would live in! However, our politicians, while raising the subject of Law and Order as a political weapon, have over the years introduced the very legislation that has destroyed many of the values of the family. If they were really sincere about the state of society and the moral condition of the nation, they would be making a

careful study of the Fourth Commandment and by extension, the wise counsel Luther contributed to a practical understanding of it.

Perhaps for our Legislators Luther had the last word when he wrote, "*We all complain about the state of things, but we don't see that it's our own fault. We have bad and disobedient subjects because that's the way we bring them up.*"

(1) Luther's Large Catechism, Anniversary Translation, Dr. F. Hebart.

We continue our search into lives of the great hymn writers who have done so much to teach Christians the message of the Gospel through music and song.

### ISAAC WATTS 1674 – 1748

During the Lenten and Easter season there would be millions of Christians around the world who sang one of the great hymns of all time, "*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*," a hymn which has made a lasting contribution to the faith of Christians for centuries. Hymn books denote that it was written by Isaac Watts 1674 – 1748.

Watts was born in Southampton when the Nonconformist issue was at its stormiest. The period following the Restoration and the accession of Charles the Second brought into sharp focus issues that arose between Christians following the Civil War.

Two years after the return of Charles the *Second* an Act of Uniformity and an Act titled the *Test and Corporation Act* was passed. These Acts excluded Nonconformists, that is, those who opposed certain practices of the established Church from holding civilian and military office, and prevented them from being awarded degrees at Cambridge or Oxford. 2000 clergy left the Church of England. Many of the issues concerning doctrine and church practice eventually were adopted by denominations such as the Wesleyan Methodists, Congregationalists, Baptists and Church of Christ. The issues included controversies over the Sacraments, the use of the surplice, the sign of the Cross at Baptisms, kneeling for the reception of the Sacrament, and the wearing of rings in marriages. These issues are not the purpose of this article, but set the background and atmosphere in which Watts lived. People with strong and stubbornly held views were prepared to divide and separate rather than conform. As the centuries unfolded, historians divided about the ensuing results and whether the results of those disputes were the best way of promoting God's Kingdom here on earth.

Watt's father, a Dissenter, the name by which protesters were called, was hounded for his independent stand and conflicting Christian views, and spent time in prison because of them.

When quite a young child, Watts already showed

much skill in writing rhymes. On completing his education at about 22 he was invited by Sir John Hartopp, a prominent Puritan, of Stoke Newington, north London, to be the tutor of Hartopp's family. In a short time he was appointed as assistant to Dr. Chauncey of the Independent Church in Mark Lane, London. Here he preached his first sermons.

He succeeded Dr Chauncey and became well regarded for his theological papers and his hymns. He wrote over 600 hymns and this gained him the title of the father of English hymnody.

Strangely enough, despite great achievements such as *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, he explored and promoted many views quite contrary to Scripture, which were hotly debated at the time. Many of his views would not be acceptable to Confessional Lutherans. This is a lengthy subject, which again could not be adequately covered here, but it prompts the thought that brilliant, highly educated thinkers can err in matters of profound theological importance, causing much controversy in the church, and yet they can produce a priceless gem that strengthens and sustains the faith of countless Christians such as the hymn *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*.

Throughout his latter years Watts suffered from insomnia, which kept him awake for days on end, undermining his health.

Despite this affliction he lived to a good age for that period. Watts died trusting alone in the merits, righteousness, and blood of Christ, of which he had so often written. One recorded sentence from his deathbed was, "I remember an aged minister say that the most learned and knowing of Christians, when they come to die, have only the same plain promises of the Gospel for their support as the common and unlearned of the people of God; and so I find it."

Isaac Watts is buried in Bunhill Fields Cemetery, London, but his impressive statue was erected at the Abbey Park Cemetery.

It is worth repeating his most famous work, which we should read or sing, in season or out, as a constant reminder of the source of our salvation.

When I survey the wondrous cross,  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it Lord that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ my God,  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down,  
Did ever such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small,  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

### IS THIS A WORLD RECORD?

The Guinness Book of Records is famous for its record of unique events and achievements, which are classified as records in sports and all forms of human endeavour. They do not have a category for people who travel long distances to baptise a child. If they did, the record must surely go to some members of Hivesville who live in Darwin.

These members of Hivesville flew to Queensland and then travelled overland to Hivesville for the baptism of their new son on Sunday 24 February. There was an added significance to this Baptism Service for it was part of a double baptism, which created much joy in the congregation.

### EASTER AT HIVESVILLE

Pastor Phil Mueller reports good attendances at Easter Services and on Easter Day estimates that over 60 parishioners gathered to celebrate the joyful Resurrection of our Saviour. Pastor Mueller's sermon was based on Isaiah 2:6-9.

The congregation included a family that had journeyed from Goondiwindi.

### MELBOURNE VISIT

Pastor Mueller travels to Melbourne to hold Divine Service with his small but faithful flock on Sunday 4 May. This will be a joyful occasion as the Service will include a confirmation.

### MOVING MOMENT AT MARBURG

At the Maundy Thursday service Pastor Mark Hampel re-introduced the practice of individual absolution. This time-honoured practice is well known to older generations but has not been in vogue for many years. For younger generations who are not familiar with this practice, the people proceed to the altar, where the Pastor pronounces absolution, touching each person in turn. It is a very moving and personal occasion, giving great comfort to the penitent sinner, emphasising that where there is forgiveness there is also salvation.

Members expressed their appreciation for the return of a practice that is bound to strengthen the faith of individuals and the life of the congregation.

Easter Services were well attended. Good Friday was another impressive day when Pastor Hampel used seven brief meditations based on Jesus' words on the cross. After each meditation there was a moment of silence and the church bell tolled. At the first silence the bell tolled once, then twice after the second meditation, and repeated until the bell tolled the seven

times.

Pastor Hampel emphasises that these practices are far from being entertainment. They are mighty symbols that both teach us about our faith and re-enforce it by impressing on our minds the great events that are the foundation of that faith.

### **DARLING DOWNS NEWS**

The Darling Downs Parish celebrated the Lenten Season with weekly Vespers services. The 6 services were shared through the 4 congregations, and were very well attended throughout.

We held our parish Maundy Thursday service at Trinity Oakey, and it was pleasing to see the church full for the night. Pastor Ziebell preached on the Gospel text, John 13:1-17, 31b-35, where the Lord washed the disciples' feet. The point made in the sermon was that genuine love gives and serves, and what greater service is there than when the Lord gives His body and blood for us in the Sacrament for the forgiveness of sins?

Good Friday and Easter Sunday services were held throughout the parish, and again we were pleased with the attendance as our members rallied around to commemorate the death of our Saviour and then celebrated the triumph of His resurrection on Easter Day.

### **ANNUAL PICNIC**

The Downs Parish celebrated the joy of the resurrection by holding the annual parish picnic on Easter Monday at Aubigny. Appropriately the picnic began with a Gospel reading, prayers and hymns in the church, and then all went outside to watch the children competing in races and playing some games. Ice blocks and cold soft drinks are always welcomed by all, and it was no different this year, even though the weather was a bit kinder in not being so hot.

It was good to see a large gathering of children, parents and grandparents all enjoying themselves. We then enjoyed lunch together, after which more games were held for the bigger people, while the young enjoyed a ride in some little carriages pulled behind a four-wheeled motorbike. Overall this was a great time for fellowship and fun, and was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

### **MUSIC FOR INSPIRATION**

Handel's Messiah still attracts huge audiences wherever it is performed. For the Christian its musical magnificence is equalled if not surpassed, by its portrayal of the birth, crucifixion, and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The Messiah is now available in a 3 CD pack from some music shops, or can be bought in by them.

The title on the pack reads, "An Introduction to Handel's Messiah. A listener's guide in words and music presented by Graham Abbott."

Graham Abbott has conducted The Messiah in 60 performances and his knowledge of Handel's music as scholar and musician is justly acclaimed. His brief introductions to each aria or chorus, quoting the Scriptural texts which apply, are informative and accurate.

The CD pack bears the code ABC Classic, 476 289-0. This number should assist any music shop to order it in if they do not hold it in stock.

Highly recommended both for its Gospel story as well as musical enjoyment.

### **WHERE ARE WE HEADING?**

Christians should always be optimistic, energetically planning ahead for growth in God's Kingdom here on earth. But we should also be practical and realistic as we assess the future and have a sound appreciation of the world around us.

Here is an entirely possible scenario for the future written over 200 years ago by English Professor Alexander Tyler.

"A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until its voters discover that they can vote themselves money from the public treasure. From that moment on, the majority always vote for the candidates promising the most money from public treasury, with the result that democracy always collapses over loose fiscal policy, followed by a dictatorship. The average age of civilisations is 200 years and has progressed through the following sequences.

"From bondage to spiritual faith,  
From spiritual faith to great courage,  
From courage to liberty,  
From liberty to abundance,  
From abundance to selfishness,  
From selfishness to complacency,  
From complacency to apathy,  
From apathy to dependency,  
From dependency back to bondage."

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