

### *C-R is for Conference Review*

*We are pleased to provide you with this Conference Review from the Third International Crossings Conference late last January. The author of this review, Steve Kuhl, is the Crossings President. He and others involved in the planning of this event did an absolutely outstanding job making all the arrangements for our provocative and enriching gathering on "God's Promise, Our Mission: Making the Crucial Link." The use of the word "crucial" in this title puns on both the urgency of the matter, but also the cross – the "crux" – that makes mission possible. We're glad to be linked with Kuhl, as with all of you, through that Crucial Link.*

On January 25-27, 2010, 101 members of the Crossings Community gathered for the Third International Crossings Conference at Our Lady of the Snows Conference Center and Shrine in Belleville, Illinois, just a few miles east across the Mississippi River from St. Louis. If you were there you know both how full and how rewarding it was. If you weren't there, you can still reap some of the fruit, since soon we will have many of the major presentations and homilies posted on the Crossings website. Even so, there was no substitute for the face-to-face exchanges and the mutual conversations and consolation of Christian siblings that filled the three-day event.

The first thing to note is how international and diverse the Crossings Community is. We know from



*Jerry Burce answering questions after his keynote address at the Crossings conference.*

our website "hit" statistics that we have Crossings Partners in 120 countries, most of them unknown by name and face, yet united in Word, faith and Spirit. These brothers and sisters participate in the Crossings Community and benefit from the Crossings Mission through some 47,000 distinct computers. From that "hit" parade representatives came from six different countries, including Germany, India, Singapore, South Korea, Liberia, and Nigeria. Stateside participants hailed from Alaska to Florida and from California to New York.

Half of the attendees were long time Crossings members and half were relatively new to Crossings, being introduced to Crossings through web-surfing or word-of-mouth invitation. While the majority of those in attendance were clergy and graying, nevertheless nearly a quarter were laity, and we were overjoyed to have 10 seminarians and a generous sprinkling of younger lay participants.

The theme was at once perennial and timely: **God's Promise, Our Mission: Making the Crucial Link.** Three keynote speakers unfolded the theme, each complementing and building on the previous speaker. Jukka Kaariainen (former missionary kid, doctoral student at Fordham University, pastor and campus

minister at the Lutheran Church of the Messiah in Princeton, NJ) set the stage for the whole conference by giving us a systematic account of a Lutheran Theology of Missions. Drawing on the work of Robert Bertram (that “*promissio* is the secret to *missio*”) and Ed Schroeder’s recent work on a Lutheran theology of mission, he pulled together into one place a comprehensive vision of a “duplex” theology of mission that is soundly seated on the three-legged stool of (leg-one) “the law-promise” (duplex) hermeneutic, (leg-two) the theology of the cross, and (leg-three) the hiddenness of God. This paper is a summary of the thought he is pouring into his nearly finished dissertation which goes by the title of “*MISSIO Shaped by PROMISSIO: Lutheran Missiology Confronts the Challenge of Religious Pluralism.*” It is a must read.

The second keynote was presented by Jerry Burce, formerly a missionary kid and later missionary in Papua New Guinea and presently a pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Fairview Park, Ohio. Jerry sang the kind of theology that was presented by Jukka, but “changed the key,” so to speak, by putting it into language that might better resonate with contemporary ears. Jerry said we use too many “walnut words,” words that are too hard for people to crack and too difficult for people to dig out the meat of the gospel.

He began with Luther’s distinction between “God’s alien work” (*opus alienum dei*) and “God’s proper work” (*opus proprium dei*) and designated them God’s two (distinct and different) “missions” in the world. One is God’s “alien” mission (alien = not God’s preferred option) and the other God’s “proper” mission (God’s preferred mission). Turning these two terms back into Latin, Jerry offered us “*missio aliena dei*” [MAD] and “*missio propria dei*” [MPD, with vowels added to make it pronounceable becomes My-

PaD]. MAD is that work of God’s law that ultimately drives us to madness. MyPaD is that work whereby Christ prepares a place (“a pad”) for us to dwell in God [cf. John 14:2-3]. Jerry gave an example of how congregations might find language from their contemporary world that can be used to express the promise of God (MyPaD) in a fresh way in our MAD world. I

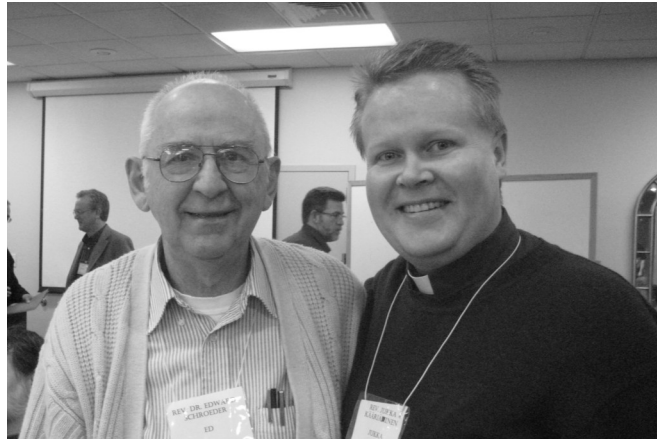
cannot begin to do justice to the imaginative word-smithing Jerry does. Read it for yourself.

Third keynote presentation was given by Bill Burrows. Bill has quite a resume. He is a former Roman Catholic priest who is now married and who has been a missionary, the managing editor of Orbis Books, and president of the American Society of Missiology. His commitment to the idea of the “gospel as the promise of the forgive-

ness of sins” is both deep and wide, and he credits Ed Schroeder (and the friendship they established through the ASM) as nurturing that insight.

Bill’s presentation came to us over internet connection because weather prevented him from being with us in person. What was impressive was how well Bill used that medium to both present his paper and answer questions in the Q&A. Indeed, this last minute “fix” (thanks to Nathan Schroeder, one of Crossings’ technical geniuses) to what we thought was a condition that would derail the whole conference, actually inspired our participants from Singapore to ask this question: Might we not broadcast elements of future conferences to those gathered in churches in Singapore or other places around the globe? Amazing how the Spirit might use adversity to seed new mission opportunities.

Bill’s fundamental contribution to our discussion was to remember that the promise is a **living Word** and that participation in it is fundamentally rooted in Word and Sacrament. Too often the modern mission-



Two keynoters, Jukka Kaariainen (above, right) and Jerry Burce (below) urged “promise” as essential to “mission.” Ed Schroeder (top left) added spark and insight to all conversations, especially the Monday pre-conference on Elert.





ary focus is on “social transformation” **at the expense of** its proper focus as the “promise of the forgiveness of sins” extended concretely and unambiguously in liturgical gathering. Bill’s paper, too, is a must read.

## *O-S is for Other Speakers*

As if that weren’t enough, the conference attendees also feasted on a wide range of topical discussions offered through 12 breakout sessions, a panel discussion with the keynote

presenters, and three round table discussions, all aimed at helping us “make the crucial link” between God’s promise and our own unique mission placement. Such notables as Robert Kolb (Professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis and co-translator of the Book of Concord), Fred Niedner (Professor at Valparaiso University, author and master teacher), and Art Simon (founder of Bread for the World) filled out those sessions along with other talented theological members of the Crossings Community.

A special interview with New Testament scholar Frederick Danker on “Not Missing the Mission in Luke” and three Monday pre-conference seminars (one on exploring the Crossings method in text study with Steve Albertin and Marcus Felde, one on “Dusting off Elert,” featuring Matt Becker, Ed Schroeder and Bob Schultz, and one on Art Simon’s journey with Bread for the World, all generated great discussion and sparked new enthusiasm for keeping mission and promise properly linked.



*Carol Braun (Crossings board member, physicist) shared thoughts on how to connect with her generation. Special presenters Fred Danker (below left) and Robert Kolb (below right), chat during a break.*



Finally, in fulfillment of the call Bill Burrows issued in his presentation, the conference was punctuated with liturgical opportunities for prayer, preaching and praise. Indeed, so edifying was the preaching in those liturgical gatherings (done by Steve Albertin, Marcus Felde, David Schreiber, and Michael Hoy) that the conference participants urged us to also place them on the website along with the conference papers. So, by popular request, you will find them too on our website. Of course, the pinnacle of our liturgical celebration was the Eucharist on Tuesday evening organized and presided over by Ron Neustadt. There Marcus Lohrmann (bishop of Northwestern Ohio Synod, ELCA) treated us to a model sermon that weaved the promise of God into the fabric of our lives equipping us to go out and enfold God’s dear worldlings with that very same promise.

## *S-I is for Supportive Individuals*

In closing, I want to thank all who attended the conference and all who support Crossings’ “duplex” mission of helping Christians make the crucial link between

God’s Promise and our mission. Special thanks go to the Crossings Board of Directors, whom I introduced at the conference and who give generously of themselves to the Crossings Community.

On the Conference Planning Committee were Steve Albertin, Marcus Felde, Cathy Lessmann, Jerry Burce, and Don Tanner. Lori Cornell ed-

its the Sabbath Theology text studies, Mike Hoy edits the Crossings Newsletter, Carol Braun is working with Bob Schultz on a fresh translation of Elert’s “The Christian Faith,” and Ed Schroeder advises and edits Thursday Theology. One more behind-the-scenes person is Tom Law. He posts everything on the web. Because of him, the “must-read” materials from the conference become “get-to-read” materials for everyone.

*Steven Kuhl*

Steve's list is almost complete. We also offer special thanks to him for his own leadership and enthusiasm. Applause is welcome!

## N-G-S is for New Growing Season

That's what Lent is – a new growing season, a “spring” of new life. By the time this newsletter gets to all of you, you will be well into Lent, hopefully headed toward Easter. Hopefully not so late, however, as to miss an opportunity to reflect on one of our Lenten texts for this year, the only one from John's gospel (all the rest are from Luke): John 12:1-8. Enjoy the Crucial Link of how our Lord overcomes critique for us all!

<sup>1</sup>Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup>There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. <sup>3</sup>Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. <sup>4</sup>But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, <sup>5</sup>'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?' <sup>6</sup>(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) <sup>7</sup>Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup>You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'



Many commented that the camaraderie and opportunity to meet new people with the same passion, was a highlight of the conference. Opportunities for socialization included meals and special wine-and-cheese receptions. Above, Bishop Lohrmann chats with Seminarian Nelson over breakfast. Below, enjoying social hour.



In the midst of a dinner party, Mary, in a demonstration of total praise and devotion, anoints the feet of Jesus with a very expensive perfume. Cost: about \$20,000 by our standards, certainly enough to raise a few eyebrows in this tight economy. And not just a few drops of the perfume, mind you, but the whole bottle! And then she lets down her hair, literally, wiping Jesus' feet - a provocative act to be sure, one to get noticed and not forgotten!

“The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.” But tension also filled the room; tension given voice by an exacerbadated Judas, sounding off his criticism about fiscal policies on the alternative uses of costly items. The tension of that criticism is deafening, if not deadly. Dear Martha, if you can't stand the heat, stay in the kitchen! Dear Mary, accused as a

wasteful, profligate person, not to mention with little self-respect letting her hair down like this, is this enough to make you want to go crawl into Lazarus' tomb and die?

That's what criticism does to us - lead us to retreat, to doubt, to die. And it's not just for Mary, but for all of us. There is plenty of shame and disgrace to go around. Many may go to their graves with the ridicule of having only been failures or losers in the eyes of others.

From Mary's perspective, I'm sure she didn't want to upset the celebration for her dear brother Lazarus. She

wanted to give thanks for his life that has been restored. I'm sure she didn't want to upset her sister Martha's dinner plans. She wanted to add to the festivities. And I'm sure she didn't want to anger the disciples of Jesus, Judas in particular. She wanted to honor the One they called Lord.





(Above) Art Simon linking "Bread for the World and the Promise of God."



(Right) Ed Schroeder interviewing international participants on how they "cross" the Gospel into their cultures and societies.

And yet all she can be greeted with for this tremendous risk - in faith? - is the stinging rebuke that second-guesses her action. "Why didn't you give the money to the poor?" And it has to be incredibly infuriating given that the one who makes the criticism is himself not willing to really lift up so much as a finger in assistance for such as these. Furthermore, Judas really didn't care about Jesus - he was already prepared to betray him; and this incident couldn't have helped to persuade him any differently.

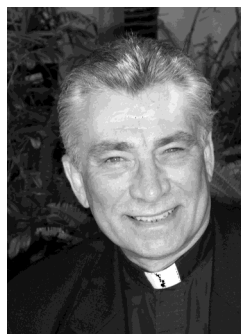
Nonetheless, Judas has a point. And it is a very sharp point. And there is no point in hiding from the criticism of it all. The criticism will not go away

simply because we dismiss it on the basis of the hypocrisy of the critic; or excuse it because we have done what we could and still are; or ignore it and hope that it will eventually get dropped in time. No, the criticism is more damning, more haunting, more real than that. It is true that these poor, whom we have with us always, **are** still clamoring for us; and even with all the aid to Haiti, the poor, as Jesus said, "are still with you" -and their being with us continues to critique us for all that we have failed to do. The solution is not taking them away through earthquakes or tsunamis. That only makes the criticism worse. And it also makes it clearer who the Critic really is.

But this is the point where Jesus also breaks up the criticism, not by ignoring it, but taking it on head first. Over against the damning critique, he charges, "Leave her alone!" He stands in the defensive breach between the Criticism that haunts Mary (and us); and he stands in our defense when the Criticism gets to be too much, as in fact it does.

"You always have the poor with you, but you do not always **have me**." What does it mean to "have Jesus?" It means to have him **by faith**. It means that his mercy is greater than all the justice of this world. It means precisely because we cannot stand the heat of criticism that he is there for us, in the breach for us, making the Crucial Link on the cross.

"Leave her alone!" is his answer. The heat of all this tension and criticism, he claims, is mine. But because it is his, this gathering is now a party about life. There's life even when this anointing would have some bearing on Jesus' own death and burial, because that's what all that was about for him, and because of him for you and for me.



## In Grateful Memory

**Stephen C. Krueger**

**Sept 9, 1949 - Jan 5, 2010**

The Crossings Community, along with the whole church of God, give grateful thanks for the life and ministry of Stephen C. Krueger. On January 5, 2010 Steve made his final crossing of his baptism from death into life. Steve is remembered for his life and ministry of being a faithful proclaimer of the Promise, a gifted writer, and an endearing partner in the Gospel who blessed the lives of all he encountered. We will miss him dearly. Steve's "last sermon" was our feature article in the Michaelmas 2009 newsletter.

A longer eulogy can be found on our website, at <http://www.crossings.org/thursday/2010/thur011410.shtml>.

Life wins out over death. Joy wins out over sorrow. Promise wins out over judgment.

It's really Jesus' willingness, in fact, to risk all for us that finally brings the kind of universal solace not only for Mary but for all who stand condemned under the judgments of others. It's not only Jesus' feet that smell great, but you and me who come out smelling great. We have the hope and the promise of an Advocate who cheers us on. Nothing can harm us. Nothing! No damning critique will hold sway over our lives or over our freedom or over our desire to risk in love.



It's not that we are unaccountable. We are responsible and accountable, to be sure; and there will be plenty of those who accuse to remind us so. But our final response and accounting of all the cost comes in the one who bears it for us. He is our final reward.



The freedom we have in Jesus, in fact, leads us to risk in ways we could not before. Over the smell of tension and death - wherever it may be found - might we bring Jesus' great smelling feet to stomp that down in a fragrance of new hope and new life?

In fact, Jesus turns the law into its proper use by turning it back on the critics. What are you doing for the poor? They're there for you to tend to, to care for. Are you?

The critics can be silenced by the heat of that judgment; but for all, there is the solace of new life in the One with the great smelling feet - those feet that have stomped over death and the grave in all their criticism, for us all.

Maybe now we **can** help the poor! We get to risk that kind of outreach! We get to bring Jesus' perfume to bear on this stench!

We get to spread it around on the stench of oppression!

We get to spread it around on the stench of suffering and illness!

We get to spread it around on the stench of hunger and homelessness!

We get to spread it around on the stench of abuse and neglect!

We get to spread it around on the stench of grief, loss and depression!

And then even Lazarus sees life again! Martha comes out of the kitchen, cheerful! And Mary is raised from her weak knees to stand up laughing! It's time to feast! The Lamb is ready, and my, oh my, doesn't this room, this house, this world smell wonderful! So full of life and hope!

*Michael Hoy*

*Printing and mailing this quarterly is paid for by your gifts, thank you. If you are a reader but not yet a giver, we can wait. When you are ready to be both, we won't object.*