

Clippings

Newsletter of Good Shepherd
Lutheran Church
February 2012



I've been thinking about the *Costa Concordia*, that Carnival Corp cruise liner that came too close to the Italian coast the night of January 13th and was hulled by submerged rocks, taking 16 lives for sure, and most likely the lives of at least 22 others missing. My attention was drawn to the story because of the ship's name: the word "Concordia" (peace, unity, agreement) is in the names of all our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod universities and seminaries, and the guiding documents that help keep us Lutheran as we preach, teach, and interpret the Bible are combined in something called *The Book of Concord*.

What sank the *Costa Concordia* was not rocks, but human error. It is the captain's responsibility to avoid the rocks, and for whatever reason, captain Francesco Schettino failed to do that. The investigation is still going on. "Operator error" covers a lot of things.

If Good Shepherd Lutheran Church were a ship, I might be sounding a klaxon. Our church is classified as "at risk." Some might even say we are "in decline." Did you know that? If you've been part of the faithful few that has continued to attend, you've seen it, the low attendance, the empty pews. We could have a useful discussion on the question of whether I am "the captain" of the good ship Good Shep. But I have a better question for you: **who are you on this ship?**

If you see yourself as a **passenger**, that means that you come to church to be served. You sit in your deck chairs and wait for the view to change. You bask in the sunshine of God's love, and you come up to the bar at Happy Hour twice a month. I'm sorry if this sounds flippant and even blasphemous, but I am afraid that some of our members act like they think they're on a cruise. They seem to be consumers, here to receive a product.

The other members attend also to be served, but it's like a staff meeting before the beginning of the work day --because they see themselves as **crew**. They go forth and serve in the strength and inspiration they received in the staff meeting. They recognize that the good ship Good Shep is a fishing vessel, not a Carnival cruise liner. They come to Holy Communion like workers in the galley, taking a break from the spray and the smell and the roughneck work of being fishers of men. They enjoy the view and the sun too, but they don't wear suntan lotion and Bermuda shorts; they wear aprons and coveralls, ready to serve in the home, at F.R.O.M., in their daily vocations, in their neighborhoods.

And they get a little annoyed, sometimes, when one of their fellow members--*who are supposed to be crew!*--not only are lounging around not working, but even have the nerve to hold out an empty glass and say, "Waiter, would you get me another mojito?"

**ATTENTION ALL HANDS: This is a FISHING VESSEL, not a CRUISE SHIP.
Fish, or cut bait. Or go belowdecks and see if there's a propeller shaft that needs oiling,
or a net that needs mending!**

Pastor Joe