

DESPITE REMARKABLE ADVANCES in transportation and communication more than 30 percent of the people alive today have never heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Two years ago, when the world's population recorded an increase of 47 million, the number of professing Christians showed a gain of some five million. The non-Christian population increased by more than 42 million.

Many of these people live in our community. They work with us. They are our neighbors.

Some of them are being drawn to Christ and His church through our "Lutheran witness." As a result we are a growing church. In most Lutheran church bodies there has been a continuing year-by-year decline in new growth since 1956. The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod has been a notable exception, though its growth rate showed a slight drop from 1961 to 1962.

By the grace and power of the Spirit — all glory be to God alone — the witness of our Christians has indeed been fruitful. Throughout North America the Lord has "added to the church daily such as should be saved."

RESEARCH INDICATES, however, that it takes 27 years for the average member of our church body to help bring another person to Christ and membership in His church.

During 1962, according to official statistics, 1,741 of the 5,500 parishes affiliated with The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod did not gain a single adult by confirmation or confession of faith.

Statistics tell a sad story about these 1,741 congregations. We cannot doubt the Spirit's presence and work in the hearts of His people; but do those people sometimes quench the Spirit who seeks to reach the hearts of others through them? Is neglect indicated here when we look at the total picture?

To gain and regain perspective on what they are and can be by the

The Fruit of Our "Lutheran Witness"

power of God, Christians need to ponder again and again the words of Jesus. "Ye have not chosen Me," the Savior says, "but I have chosen you and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit and that your fruit should remain."

What the Lord Jesus promises He fulfills. If Christians lack fruit, it is their fault, not His. One such fruit is the testimony of a godly life; another is the power of the Spirit working through the believer's spoken witness.

This power of the Spirit was so evident in the witness of the very first followers of Christ that they were said to have "turned the world upside down." No such charge is being hurled against church members today. But it is being said that the church has had its day because it has lost its effectiveness and power to influence.

CHURCHES OF CHRIST can lose their effectiveness and experience power failure only when they do not live and move and have their being in the Spirit of God.

We may have our buildings and budgets, our programs and policies, our societies and socials — but do we have the Spirit and His power as we should? The Lord does not build His church through human devices and financial schemes. He builds through His Spirit.

The Spirit is seeking to use us. Unless we put ourselves at His disposal, our so-called church work will represent little more than expended energy. The Spirit of God can do little with our plans and programs if He can do little with us.

God be praised for those congregations throughout Synod that are bearing fruitful witness and serving effectively as redemption centers of the Spirit. In these congregations the people recognize that they be-

long to the fellowship of the redeemed, the concerned, and the sent ones.

Conditions are spiritually healthy in a parish when the voters' assembly shows more interest in saving men than money, when members of the women's organization are encouraged to bring their Bibles rather than their baked goods for the bazaar, when the men's group has more enthusiasm for soul-winning than game-winning.

SOME of our congregations are really moving forward in faith. A St. Louis pastor reports that as a result of observing the Jan. 26 Evangelism Festival 300 names were added to the congregation's soul responsibility list.

Members of an Iowa congregation after committing themselves to evangelism brought 27 people to the pastor's adult class and have set a 1964 "Goal for Souls" of 172 new members.

A Portland, Oreg., pastor enthusiastically reports that his Sunday school is participating in the synodical goal of 200,000 more in 1964 by striving for "every teacher and every class — one more pupil this year."

On Evangelism Festival Sunday members of an Arkansas congregation not only responded to the call of commitment but went out calling that afternoon — 77 strong — and results indicate from 20 to 25 prospects for the next adult class.

In these and other instances the church is being the church. God's people, members of the body of the living Christ, are being empowered by the Spirit to witness to their Lord and are bringing forth fruit unto life eternal. — *Adapted from a report by the synodical Department of Evangelism, Rev. Theo. R. Raedeke, Associate Secretary.*