

# Shepherds Tend and Feed the Lambs and Sheep

by Pastor David Tuff, retired, Valley of Peace Lutheran Church, Golden Valley

Christ-alive asked Peter three times, “Do you love me?” Three times, mind you! Peter felt a bit put upon; wouldn’t you? So the ensuing dialogue that follows gets a little testy when Peter saw the “beloved disciple” tagging along. What about him? “What’s that to you?” Jesus shot back. “YOU follow me, and feed my lambs, shepherd my sheep and feed them. You’re done with your child-ways. You said you loved me—which means you won’t be in charge any longer, OK? Follow me!” I, too, get a bit irritated at times when a distraction comes along and I lose my train of thought or when my agenda is challenged.

When I was young my Uncle Oscar and nine cousins lived a mile over the hills from our farm. Uncle Oscar raised sheep. That’s how I learned how sheep needed constant care in order to survive, especially in the most vulnerable times, like springtime, when the little lambs were born. Even on a sunny day sheltered from the wind they were in danger. We rushed to help the mother ewes birth their babies; often there were twins. We wiped their faces so they could get their first breath. We rubbed their bodies with old gunny sacks until their little insulating tufts of wool were dry. We stood them up so they could get their first gulps of mother’s milk. Then we rushed off to another ewe in labor.

When it was cold and wet, we took turns running to the house to sit by the pot-bellied stove for a few minutes to warm up. The flock couldn’t be left alone for even a few minutes. The big hawks circled the flock in the daytime. In the dark there were coyotes and feral dogs running loose that could wreak havoc with both lambs and sheep.

The media is full of information on how predators circle our children day and night to see how and when they can attack. The \$7 billion system of commercial sexual exploitation is training pimps, seducing businesses and individual adults as well as children to do their vicious work, and supporting the newest technology that will help them to prey upon our kids and youth 24/7/365. Studies indicate that as many as 30% of those who attend church are spending time at home and on the job viewing internet porn.

At Valley of Peace, as a part of this synod’s Cherish Our Children ministry, we are thankful to have the gift of daily prayer for all our children and youth, ages birth to 22, to protect and equip both lambs and sheep. Congregations and individuals committed to Cherish Our Children look to organizations such as Adults Saving Kids for training and educational materials.

Who will protect and equip Jesus’ sheep and lambs? There are many ways for you to say, “I will.” In this season of Advent, as we prepare for the shepherds gathering around the Christ child in Bethlehem, pray, ponder in your heart, and act to protect, equip, and cherish all God’s children.

For more information about Cherish Our Children, contact Amy Hartman, [ahartman001@luthersem.edu](mailto:ahartman001@luthersem.edu). To contact Adults Saving Kids, call 612.872.0684 or email [info@adultssavingkids.org](mailto:info@adultssavingkids.org).



## Holiday Times Can Cause Extra Tension in Military Families

The hubbub and social pressures of the Christmas season can accentuate transition problems for soldiers returning home from combat and their families. At a recent public presentation on re-adjustment problems, a National Guard sergeant explained how Christmas time issues became the final breaking point for his marriage.

It was his first Christmas back from Iraq. His wife was eager to involve him in the bustle of the season—buying presents and going to parties. Yet, all the activities grated on him. Many soldiers returning from combat feel overwhelmed by the plethora of decisions required of civilian life after being told what to do 24/7 during their time in the army. Many feel uncomfortable in crowds due to the hostile and unsafe conditions they’ve experienced. Others prefer not to be with people because they anger easily or because their mood clashes with the happiness around them.

While his wife wanted him to participate in the Christmas activities, this sergeant wistfully remembered how he had celebrated the previous Christmas, how special it was while stationed in Iraq. He recalled that he had managed to secure some precious time all by himself to enjoy a can of beef stew. He yelled at his wife, “I wish I was back in Iraq!”

We can imagine how this was the last straw for his wife. Typically a spouse suffers through the hardship, loneliness, and anxiety of the many months of training and war. Chances are she had put great effort into accommodating his transition home issues. Perhaps she took his statement as a signal to her that he wasn’t going to change. This family became yet another statistic in the high divorce rate of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Sadly, the figure is expected to increase with time. Some estimates of the divorce rate for Vietnam veterans are as high as the ninetieth percentile.

How can the church respond to the needs of returning veterans and their families? What happens to the person hardened to war when they come home? Join with other church leaders on Thursday, January 18, 2007, at Calvary Lutheran Church, Golden Valley, for a Joint Synod Ministerium, “Healing the Wounds of War: Re-Integration Issues of Returning Veterans and their Families.” Chaplain John Morris, Minnesota National Guard, and Gary Schoener, executive director of Walk-In Counseling Center in Minneapolis, will speak.