

Likens offers dramatization of centurion

Rev. James Likens, an LCMS actor, musician, and owner of JDL Video Productions in St. Louis, buys a lot of nails these days. But he's not in the construction business -- the 6-inch nails are object lessons that he uses in his half-hour presentation of "Julius," a dramatic account of a Roman soldier who nailed Jesus to the cross and later came to faith.



Frank Kohn

Rev. James Likens, in character as "Julius," a Roman centurion, talks about how he nailed Jesus to the cross during a Sept. 7 performance at the Synod's International Center in St. Louis.

Everyone who sees the presentation receives a nail to take home, to remind them of their "debt that was nailed to the cross" through the crucifixion of Jesus (Col. 2:13-14).

Julius is mentioned in Acts 27:1, when Paul and other prisoners were handed over to a centurion with that name. Likens' portrayal of the soldier has him deserting his post after spending years guarding -- and learning from -- St. Paul. Led by the Holy Spirit, Julius comes to realize that Jesus was indeed the Son of God and that even the soldier's own sins have been forgiven.

"When an audience hears Julius' story -- that he was the one who nailed Jesus to the cross and he was brought to faith by the Holy Spirit through the words of St. Paul, and when he realized that even he was forgiven for what he did," said Likens, "my hope is that there's just one person who's listening, who's carried a burden for life, that they're set free."

Likens also hopes audience members will hang on to the nail he gives them at the end of the performance, and "will keep it in a place where they can see it every day" and know, every day, that "they're forgiven," he said.

The "Julius" performance is part of "Operation Outreach: Canceled," a ministry of Likens and St. Louis-based Partners in Urban Ministry, that also will include a men's component, "The Order of the Centurion," that's designed to "recruit, train, equip, and send" Christian men out into the world to share their faith with others. The men's ministry includes Bible study, a "Canceled" business card that explains the significance of the crucifixion, and a stainless-steel sword, engraved with the words *Spiritus Gladius* ("sword of the spirit") and mounted on an oak frame.

The card and sword are intended as "outreach tools," to give Christian men opportunities to talk about their faith. Likens also is looking for donors to provide the mounted swords to seminary students, "to remind them that we're in a battle not against flesh and blood, but against satan," he said, and that they can "put on God's armor and take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."

For more information about "Operation Outreach: Canceled," or to schedule a performance of "Julius," call (314) 308-5203 (314) 308-5203 or visit the Web site www.canceledcode.org. Also available is a free eight-minute sample DVD.