

SPEAKING WORDS OF FAITH

by Anita Reith Stohs

As I turned into my driveway, I noticed two older women coming back down the front steps of my house. No one was home, so the two waited by the driveway to talk with me.

Campaigners, sales reps, fundraisers, and missionaries of assorted faiths often canvass my neighborhood. Which type of visitor, I wondered, had come this day? It did not take long to find out. As soon as I stopped the van and got out, the women came over to explain that they would like to talk to me about God's answer to the problems facing our world today.

I explained that I already knew God's answer to our world's problems — Jesus — then went on to tell the women of my faith in Jesus Christ.

The women assured me that they also believed in Jesus and were Christians. I asked what church they came from and was given the name of a religious group that I understood to have a concept of Jesus far different from that of Christianity. I was surprised at the women's description of themselves as Christian, and did not know what to say.

Because my daughter was still in the van, I ended the conversation, and the two women went on their way. Since that day, however, I have thought about my attempt to witness to these women, their reply, and the challenge of describing my faith in Christ to someone for whom my words of faith have an entirely different meaning.

"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" Jesus once asked His disciples. Peter's answer, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," puts the emphasis upon Jesus as Christ — the Promised One or Messiah who came to save his people, as the name Jesus [God saves] also indicates. (Matthew 16:13–16)

Perhaps Peter was remembering this question when he later wrote: *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have* (1 Peter 3:15). And, Peter, whose tendency toward impetuous responses is well recorded in the Gospels, notes how this should be done: *with gentleness and respect*. In verses 18–22, Peter goes on to describe his own faith in a mini-creed that summarizes Jesus' death for our sins, His resurrection, and His place in heaven at God's right hand.

Jesus once reminded His followers to trust the Spirit when asked to give an account of their faith. (Luke 12:12). According to His promises, the Holy Spirit gives us the words to say, with *gentleness and respect*, when we are given the opportunity to share our faith with others.

Lord Jesus, help us to always be ready to give the reason for our faith in You. Send Your Holy Spirit to give us words that touch the heart of the hearer, so that they too may come to know Your saving love. Amen.

Anita Reith Stohs, member of Hope Lutheran Church, Shawnee, Kansas, has written religious children's and craft books, and educational materials.



GETTING THE CONVERSATION GOING:

- ▶ Think about what you can do to be better prepared to give an account of your faith to someone else.
- ▶ Write down the words you might use to do this.
- ▶ What does it mean to witness to your faith with gentleness and respect?
- ▶ Role-play a situation in which you might give a reason for your faith to someone else.