

December 1991

the Northwestern heran

"Precious is the Child"
A nationwide
Christmas outreach
PAGES 417 and 420



CHRISTMAS:

Christmas worth preserving PAGE 406

An Exmas letter PAGE 408

Christmas still relevant PAGE 424

Christmas worth preserving

by Robert H. Hochmuth

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod (Matthew 2:1).

If you're working on a nativity pageant, one as authentic as you can make it, today's newcomer to kindergarten may puzzle, "What's Christmas about this? No tree, no lights, no presents." His quandary nudges us into thinking about the role holiday customs play.

In plain terms of a factual record with an elemental, historical setting, the evangelists record the stupendous events by which our God poured out his favor on our race.

Looking to the past

Long before the traditions reflected in Christmas card sentiments, the early Christians rejoiced just as heartily as we. Paul's words in Titus 2 and 3, for example, break the first century darkness with a string of lights connected to the Bethlehem event: grace of God, salvation, blessed hope, mercy, kindness, and love of God our Savior.

The end of 1 Timothy 3 beckons us to recapture an early majestic carol on the theme: How marvelous is our God.

Those are elements the Holy Spirit has passed down to us. No question, these are indispensable for the Christmas we want to preserve and pass on.

What about the embellishments that have evolved in the telling and retelling through the years? Some have so rooted themselves in emotions that nostalgia makes it difficult to sift endeared traditions from the precious historical event. It can be perturbing to have someone point out the Bible does not indicate a December date, leaves indefinite the number of wise men, and says nothing about angels singing, but only about the message they conveyed.

Similarly it can be upsetting to think about the possibility of altering or relinquishing time-hallowed customs. Who hasn't on occasion heard dismay and disappointment give voice to something like: "It won't be Christmas, if we switch the children's service from Christmas Eve." There are deep feelings even over matters of little consequence: A plastic tree or a real one. There is a strong allegiance to the accustomed.

But Christmas can be so much more than a vehicle for carrying on past traditions and personally cherished memories.

Looking ahead

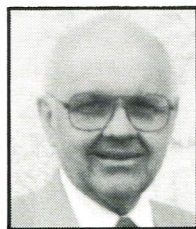
It goes without saying that the record of Jesus' incarnation as an historical event, together with its assurance for us mortals, is basic to what we want our children to treasure. That's vital. Beyond that, grateful hearts and innovative spirits can continue to generate limitless ways of expressing gratitude for the event.

Newlyweds facing their first Christmas often discover some surprising Christmas traditions in the spouse's family. Total accommodation to both sides is unlikely, and they may find themselves recasting old traditions in a new way in the best interest of their own new family unit. It's a matter of being willing to concentrate on the best from the past with an eye to present purpose.

One consideration for us is the people around us for whom Christmas this year is not Christmas because they are familiar only with a secular holiday. Will the customs we observe and the traditions we maintain help to demonstrate something more precious for them? Will they hear us talking only about exchanging wares, or will they be made aware of God's kind of sacrificial giving?

Are there perhaps some beneficial traditions awaiting birth in our time? A decision to do something as a family for people who have nothing to give in return. Some new tactic to initiate soul-winning conversation — maybe 2 Corinthians 8:9 as a Christmas season motto on my desk. Specific prayer that the Holy Spirit, working in a cheerless heart through the word, will make this Christmas a first Christmas in that life.

Preserving Christmas is not a sequence of displaying and then packing away an antique, but of treasuring and sharing the ever new assurance: Today a Savior!



Robert Hochmuth is pastor of St. Andrew, Sacramento, California.

May the Lord our God be with us
as he was with our fathers;
may he never leave
or forsake us. 1 Kings 8:57

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FORWARD

- Christmas in the year 2426 is the setting for Mark Braun's "Exmas letter." His thought-provoking article on Christmas of the future begins on the next page.
- This issue brings the final article in Paul Kelm's seven-part series on spiritual renewal (p. 410). Don't miss it — and you might want to read any previous articles you missed.
- On the cover is a scene from "Precious is the Child." The video-taped message, produced by the WELS Mass Media Ministry, is scheduled to be broadcast nationwide during the Christmas season. More information about the program can be found on page 417. Check with your church office for broadcast times in your area.
- And from the staff of the Northwestern Lutheran — Christmas blessings to you and yours.

DJS

Will this be Christmas in the 25th century?
“A man told me there was something behind Exmas,
beyond getting presents and throwing parties. . . . He said
there was a Someone who came to live with us, so that someday
we can go to live with him. . . . It sounds too good to be true.”

An Exmas letter

by Mark E. Braun

17 December 2426 AD

Dear Philip,
Greetings and salutations in this, our most exciting, exhausting season — Exmas! I see, as I trust you do too, the rush and bustle as people prepare for the holidays. The malls are jammed. Traffic is a disaster. Old-fashioned, charming, Exmas music fills the air, spilling from electronic speakers. I can hum most of the tunes, but I never pay attention to the words.

Isn't it a nuisance to locate exactly the right Exmas card and the proper present for all the folks one scarcely pays attention to the rest of the year? When I come home and find Exmas cards from the same people to whom I sent cards, I'm relieved, put them away in a corner, and almost never get to look at them. But when I find I've gotten cards from people I didn't send cards to, I must quickly return the favor. If I've run out of Exmas cards, I have to trudge off through the snow and slippery streets to buy more.

But Exmas is good for business.

I must tell you about a man who came to my store last week. He was an ordinary looking man, but he told me some things I've never heard before. He said there was something behind Exmas. I'd never given

that much thought. Why must there be anything behind Exmas? Isn't getting presents, and throwing parties, and making profits reason enough to celebrate?

My visitor even told me (and I thought I heard a trace of arrogance in his voice, but maybe it was my imagination) that he could explain the real meaning of the season.

He said there was a Someone out there (and, he said, there still is). I remember reading in our history books at Level Two school that our ancestors centuries ago believed there was something out there, a Power or a Cause or a Force. They assigned numerous names to it and they believed various things about it. Some people thought there were lots of Someones out there. The most common name they gave it, or them, as I remember, was “god.”

But this is the 25th century. I didn't think anybody believed that stuff anymore — or, if they did, they kept it to themselves.

But here's the best part. He said the Someone out there came *here*, and this Someone (can you imagine?) looked and sounded like one of us. He *was* one of us, only he was stronger than we are, and better than we are.

“Sounds scary,” I said.

“Yeah, it could be,” he answered. “It could have



been. But the Someone didn't come here to frighten us. The Someone has a Father, and the Father sent him here as a gift. That's what this season is about — his gift to us — not about people hurrying from store to store to buy gifts for each other."

"So you don't have to buy Exmas presents?" I asked him.

"Sure," he replied. "That's why I came to your store. But I don't feel I have to buy presents. I enjoy it — usually. But what's behind all the gift-giving (there he was again, telling me what's behind things!) is that the real gift is from God to us."

The Someone out there came here to live with us, he said, so that someday we can go there to live with him.

He made it sound as though a king had come to our world — a genuine king — only he'd come in disguise.

My visitor even repeated the words of a song he said explains what the season means:

He undertakes a great exchange,
Puts on our human frame,
And in return gives us his realm,
His glory, and his name.

There's a Someone out there who has feelings,
who gives gifts, who visits earth, who wants us to live

with him, who gives us "his realm, his glory, and his name"? The only realm I know is this one, and there doesn't seem to be much glory about it. It sounds too strange to be true.

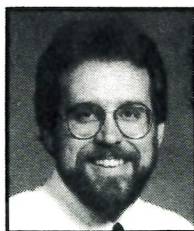
But if what the visitor said is right, it sounds too good to be true.

The stranger asked me to go with him to meet some of his friends who believe the same things he does. It sounded as if they get together quite often. I don't know what they do, or what they're going to want me to do. I think they sing verses and hear more stories about their Someone. Philip, can you see me doing that?

I told him I was awfully busy during Exmas.

And that's another thing. He told me we haven't even been calling this season by its right name. The real name, he said, isn't Exmas at all. The season is really named after the Someone, and for the people who believe in him, it still is. He called it — what did he call it — Krissmas?

Season's greetings,
Newton

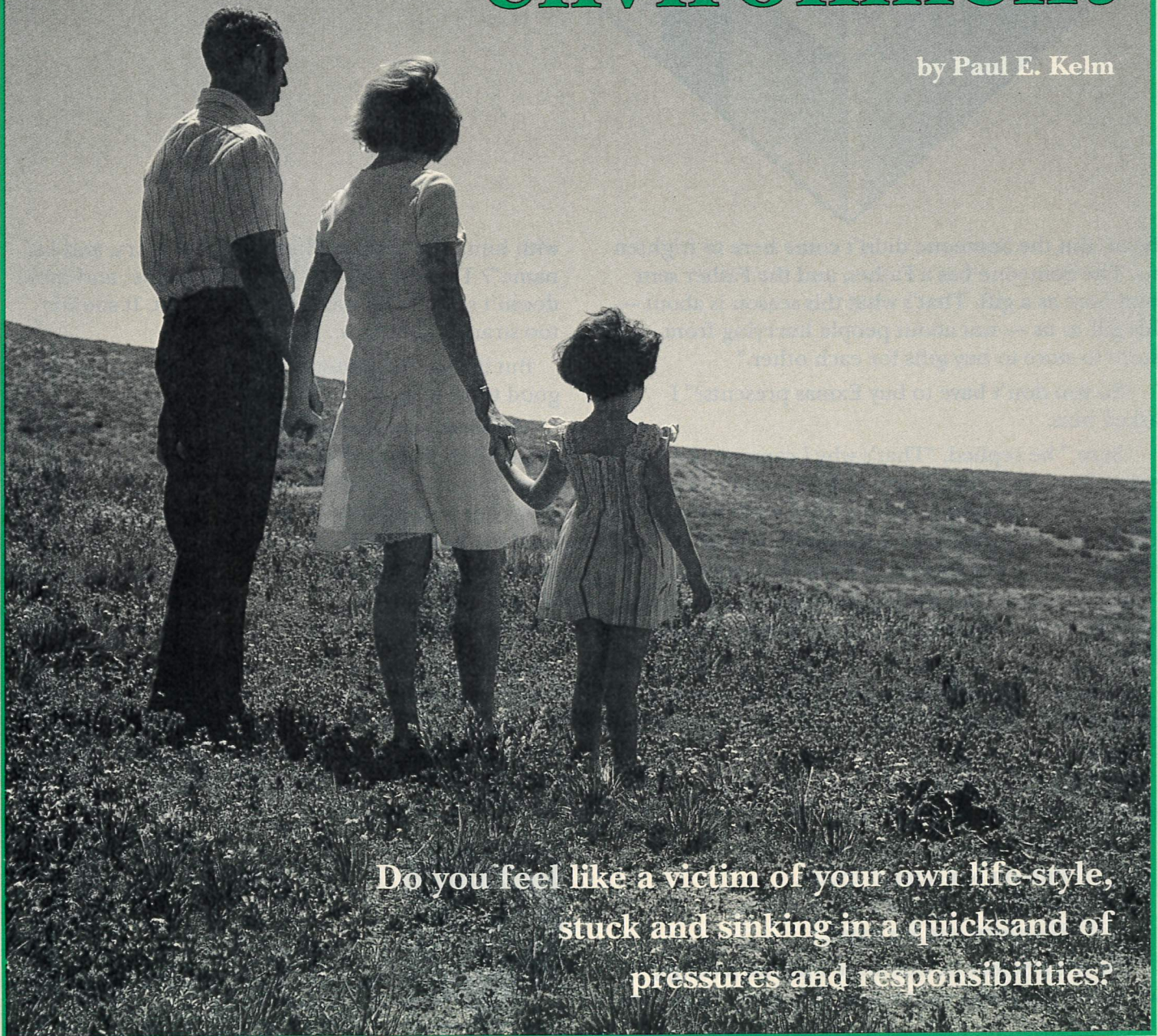


Mark Braun is director of spiritual programming and instructor of theology at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee.

MRS. KEVIN SCHEIBEL

Reorganizing our spiritual environment

by Paul E. Kelm



Do you feel like a victim of your own life-style,
stuck and sinking in a quicksand of
pressures and responsibilities?

“We’ve lost control of our lives!” Andrea muttered it under her breath, almost as if to hear how it sounded before trying it on her husband. There was quiet desperation in her words.

Andrea and her husband were both experiencing pressure at work. Critical projects meant longer hours; and the efficiency experts were trying to meet competition by trimming the payroll. Job security coupled with a big mortgage is a formula for stress.

Stress didn’t end at the conclusion of the work day either. Juggling the children’s schedule of soccer practice, piano lessons, the orthodontist, and 35 other “necessities” of child-raising in the ’90s was mentally exhausting and physically impossible. “Something has to give,” Andrea whispered as she gathered up dirty laundry. Family conversations had been reduced to scheduling and problem solving.

Speaking of problem-solving, the to-do list was expanding with mechanical repairs. One of the cars always seemed to need something. The more labor-saving machines they bought, the more there were to fix. Why couldn’t the manufacturers build things right? And where did the box of sales receipts and warranties go? “We’ve become slaves to our possessions,” Andrea thought, and she knew she didn’t coin that phrase.

Then there were all the “shoulds” that added to a baby boomer’s *angst*. Health warnings only produced guilt as Andrea recalled all the frozen pizzas and failed intentions. Of course, they’d bought bikes and weights. Most nights, however, ended with glazed-eyed and mind-numbing television. “Who has the energy to stay fit?” Andrea wondered. Even recreation had become more social obligation than enjoyment. Some days Andrea didn’t even know what she would like to do if she could.

Like Andrea, you can probably describe the life that’s too full of things and too void of happiness. On a good day you’re writing the script of a sit-com. A bad day is one more psycho-drama — television’s contribution to national depression.

Maybe you feel like a victim of your own life-style, stuck and sinking in a quicksand of pressures and responsibilities. Maybe you can resonate with the notion of reorganizing your spiritual environment.

Don’t look for some quick-fix formula to rearrange your life and guarantee happiness. Fact is, we are victims of some of the disorder that the fall into

sin inflicted on life. Happiness with life in this world is not humanly possible. God has left us with enough reminders of what’s wrong with life to teach us appreciation for his forgiving grace and to heighten our longing for the life to come with him. God has invited us to unburden ourselves to him in prayer and trust him for what is beyond our ken and control. God has promised to strengthen us through trial and protect us from ultimate evil. Unhappiness is often the result of expecting what God never promised and life can’t deliver.

Understand, however, that our life-style is a spiritual issue. The way we’ve structured our life is an expression of our values, consciously or unconsciously. The schedule and style of our life either promote spiritual growth and sharing, or inhibit God’s will for us. I can’t judge your heart by reading your life-style. You can.

And you can, within limits, reorganize the environment in which your spirit lives. We are, as the apostle reminds us, “more than conquerors through him who loved us.” God is, the apostle affirms, “able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.”

Reorganizing our personal life

In business, a distinction is made between “efficient” — doing things right, and “effective” — doing the right things. The so-called “tyranny of the urgent” describes the countless little issues and crises that keep us from what’s important.

Long ago Jesus taught and applied those principles to personal life. To frazzled Martha, he said: “You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed.” To people searching for better answers to life, Jesus taught, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. . . . You cannot serve both God and Money. . . . Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. . . . Seek first [your heavenly Father’s] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

The issue is priorities. You can decide to invest your emotions where they matter: in people rather than things; in prayer, not worry; in praise instead of complaint. Think about where your emotional energy is spent. Your God will help you reinvest.

You can decide to replace a half-hour of television

with Bible study, just because you want to get closer to your Father, get your head straight, sort out your life. You can schedule the evening meal, at least a few times a week, to conclude with a family devotion and conversation on stuff that matters.

You can decide to shorten lunch and take a walk, to encourage a co-worker rather than vent at a vendor, to cheer your daughter's volleyball team and let that project wait for tomorrow. The decisions won't be the same each day because relative importance is a judgment call you have to make repeatedly.

But underlying each day's decisions is a priority ranking that starts with your Lord — his will, his work, your relationship with him. You can decide that what he thinks is more important than what others think.

Ask yourself each day what matters before you plunge into what's happening.

Simplifying life is a parallel discipline. You can't add something to your schedule without subtracting something else. Contemporary life has become adding things to do and things to have, without a purpose or a plan. Consumerism has become our life-style; indiscriminate doing and having. It's time for simple subtraction.

A well-to-do young man whose life was socially correct wanted to add God, good, and eternal life. Jesus told him he'd have to subtract. "Go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then, come, follow me." To another, who wanted Jesus to do something about economic injustice, the Savior said: "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

If you're trying to fit God in, something has to go. If you have no time for family and friends, you need to make time. If it's been too long since you've marveled at God's creation, you'd better lose some of man's toys. Consider such principles as:

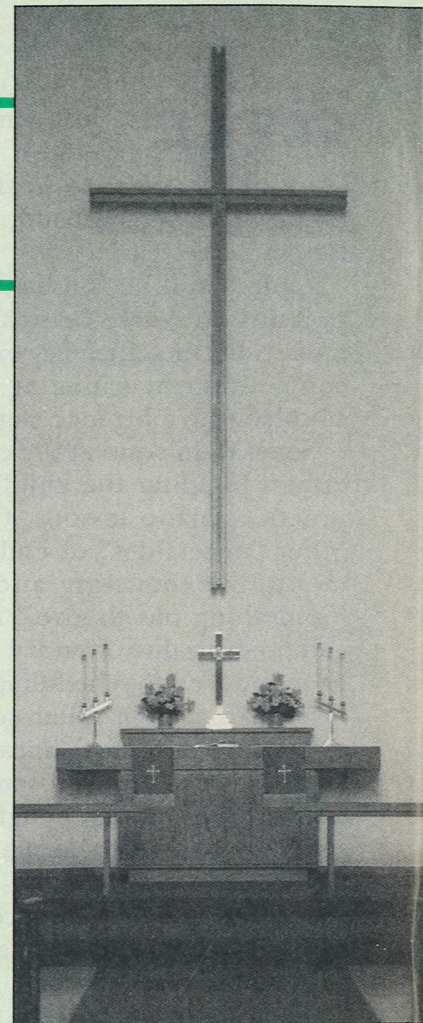
- Get rid of whatever owns or drives you. It's an addiction becoming a god.
- Don't do or buy anything whose value is chiefly status, impressing others.
- Give. It not only balances your inventory of things; charity balances your life.

*Understand that our life-style
is a spiritual issue.*

- Question your own wants and others' demands: Is this important? Does this serve God, people, purpose, and priorities? Am I the best person to do this now? What are the ramifications?
- Evaluate your schedule and commitments for things to drop that won't really matter, for things you can do less often or in less time, for things you can do with family and others to add a relational dimension to tasks.

Simplifying is an issue of stewardship. We are all managers, accountable to God for the gifts, time, resources, and opportunities that he has invested with us. Therefore, his mission and values guide our schedule and life-style. The "glory of God" test and the "good of many" criterion of 1 Corinthians 10:31-33 are a steward's quality control.

If subtraction is essential to meaningful addition in life, then there is one form of addition that is critical to spiritual subtraction. Peter describes that "addition" of Christian character at the outset of his second epistle. After reminding us that God's gracious gospel is "everything we need for life and godliness," the power to overcome sin and grow spiritually, the apostle urges: "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance . . . godliness . . . brotherly kindness . . . love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep



you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Before any of us will rebuild our lives, God must build our spirits. Christian character is built on Bible study, meditation, and application. Directed and empowered by God's word, we can add the traits which allow us to prioritize and simplify our lives. Make room in your life for what will make a difference in your life.

Reorganizing our church's life

Our congregations are a reflection of members' schedules and life-styles. In fact, the church contributes to its members' schedule and life-style. Teaching biblical values and stewardship out of God's grace in Christ is the positive contribution. The structure and schedule of the church may be a negative contribution.

If meetings at church aren't essential, purposeful, and efficiently organized, members won't continue coming. If the church's calendar separates the family two or three evenings in a week, structure and schedule are interfering with purpose.

Churches need to ask how and where the time of pastors, leaders, and members will be best spent. A church's priorities, you see, are expressed by what occupies the discussion and dollars of members in meeting, by what occupies the pastor's time and attention.

Churches need to ask which meetings aren't necessary to the mission, how meetings can be streamlined, if small mission teams or individuals could replace meetings productively.

Can the church combine its purposes of spiritual growth and fellowship with the church's business to make an evening spent at church more worthwhile? Can a family night involve the entire family in meaningful time together before its members disperse to simultaneous groups and meetings?

Too many churches have a "layered" bureaucracy which assures that an issue will be discussed repeatedly before a decision is reached. Committee, board, council, and voters all must pass a proposal, often with the same people involved at two or more levels of the process. Especially in mid-size to large churches today, time is too valuable for so redundant a structure.

Efficiency means printed proposals, tight agendas, and, wherever possible, decisions made at the point

of action rather than up in the organization. Effectiveness means that voters' assemblies discuss and decide the critical issues of ministry direction, then call or elect leaders; church councils establish planning and policy; boards develop strategies; committees see to it that work gets done. Trust, in the people we call and elect is vital to the efficient and effective use of God's people's time. Simplifying is as important to the church's spiritual environment as the individual's.

If the church's agenda is to move off finance, property, and survival thinking, spiritual planning is important. Spiritual planning begins and ends at the church's mission — who we are in Christ and what he's given us to do.

In the light of that mission and the mission field God has given us here and now, evaluation of what the church is doing can occur. Evaluation uncovers blessings for which to thank God and strengths on which to build the future. It also exposes specific weaknesses to work on, needs to meet, and opportunities to address. A positive process of evaluation minimizes negative criticism. And it may suggest where the church, too, needs to practice sanctified subtraction from an accumulated list of programs and traditions.

Long-range planning should allow members to provide input into the kind of ministry their church will offer. From specific descriptions of essential ministry programs, planners can project staffing, facilities, and fiscal needs. Strategic planning assures that priorities are established and focused, that needs, problems, and opportunities are anticipated, that steps from where we are to where we want to be are scheduled and coordinated. Action planning, then, breaks essential tasks into components that are clearly assigned, calendarized, supported, and supervised.

Mission focus and people orientation, under the direction of God's own word, will help the church reorganize the spiritual environment in which faithful ministry renews God's people. And so strengthened, God's people can reorganize their lives around God's purpose for life.



Paul E. Kelm is director of the synod's spiritual renewal program.

The tree of Calvary

by Curtis A. Peterson

The tree of temptation brought death into the world. The tree of the cross is the means by which Christ restores us to life.

For God's plan of salvation, the tree of the cross is the most important tree of all. Without this tree, the first tree would spell our doom. "Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

The second tree is God's gracious answer to the tree with which the devil tempted man, providing redemption for those of us who are nailed to the tree of sin and temptation every day of our lives. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree'" (Galatians 3:13).

The Old Testament background to Galatians 3 is Deuteronomy 21:22-23, where Moses speaks of the curse of the death penalty: "If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the Lord your God is giving to you as an inheritance."

Because of the greatness of his sin, a person hung from a tree was considered to be under God's curse.

In the Roman world, crucifixion was the most shameful and humiliating death possible. Thus Christ became a curse for us.

The curse of that tree was the curse of our sins. Jesus was punished as our substitute. He carried our guilt for us on that dark Friday. Jesus became sin and a curse for us, that we may never experience the curse of hell itself.

The New Testament uses the word "tree" as a synonym for the cross. 1 Peter 2:24, for example, says of Jesus, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

Here the great exchange which brings about our salvation is described, with our sins being placed on Jesus so that we might live for him, free of the condemnation our own guilt deserves.

Likewise, in Acts 5:30, Peter says that God raised Jesus from the dead — the very one "you had killed by hanging him on a tree." Ordinarily, of course, the Scripture speaks of the cross as the instrument of his crucifixion, but the word "tree" is used to carry through the theme of the trees of Genesis 2 — the tree of life, the symbol of spiritual health and eternal life; and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the symbol and, in fact, the instrument of the loss of spiritual harmony with God and of eternal life.

In the *Sampler* liturgy, a phrase in the Lenten preface to the communion service picks up this theme: "... who brought the gift of salvation to all people by his death on the tree of the cross, so that the devil, who overcame us by a tree would in turn by a tree be overcome."

The tree of the cross is the means by which Christ overcame Satan, who, by means of the tree of temptation, brought death into the world. The symmetry of salvation is again perfect. One man brought sin into the world, so one man brings salvation. A woman was guilty of the first sin. So through one woman, Mary, God became incarnate into the world. And now a second tree is used by God to restore us to the tree of life and eternal salvation.

The wood of the cross thus becomes for us Christians the very tree from whence life arises for us. It provides access for all believers to the tree of life once seen in Eden.

Next: The tree of life



Curtis Peterson is pastor of Resurrection, Milwaukee.

People caught in the trap of chemical dependency need our love and support. We need to make an effort to reach out to them and pray for them.



Helping addicts

My job and yours

by Jody R. Schmidt

I am an alcohol and drug abuse counselor. I've seen many men and women who have "hit bottom"—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—and are looking for help in rebuilding their lives.

Physically, chemical dependency destroys people's health far beyond the hangover and shakes of the "morning after." Emotionally, it leaves them with no alternative but the mental health wards of hospitals for recuperation. As a Christian I can also see that these people are caught in a trap of the devil that afflicts their souls and jeopardizes their eternal life unless the cycle is broken through God's power.

For the people I counsel, the first step toward recovery is admitting the problem. By the time a person enters a treatment program, the effects of chemical dependence have become so overwhelming that recovery is a matter of life and death. Yet the nature of chemical dependence leads the dependent person to deny the problem and believe in his or her own ability to function normally.

As a counselor my first job is to help addicts and alcoholics see they are powerless to control their addictions, admit the serious consequences on their lives, and realize the need to change.

Unfortunately, people don't realize how quickly drug and alcohol abuse will get out of control. They often assume that once they "dry out" in a treatment center, they're as good as new and can start drinking or using drugs in moderation, as if they'd never abused them in the first place.

What they don't understand is that chemical dependency is progressive. Even after years of abstinence an addict who relapses is immediately as deeply into substance abuse as when he stopped. It's as if the period of abstinence had never happened. The person who returns to treatment after a relapse is generally in much worse shape than he was the first time.

Some people don't make it back. One man I'll call Jerry had been a chronic alcoholic for many years.

He'd lost his home and his family because of his alcoholism. I had seen him a number of times when he would come into detox to "dry out" between binges.

We were able to get Jerry into a long-term treatment program and he stopped drinking. He stayed sober for several months. He would stop by every few weeks to say how well he was doing and how much happier he was.

After a while, though, Jerry seemed less convinced that his life was really changing for the better. I could sense Satan was putting doubt into his mind. I

tried to talk to him about the need to trust Christ and experience the power of the Holy Spirit in his life, but Jerry was already headed in another direction. He stopped coming by to visit and we heard he was drinking again. Jerry died one night. He fell off a bridge while walking home drunk.

I have also known people who have died from liver damage and other physical complications of chronic alcoholism because they didn't stop drinking. I will never see these people again on earth, and my fear is that they died in unbelief and I will not see them in God's kingdom either.

Many people's lives have changed, however. One client whom I'll call Paul knew if he went back to drinking he would die. Months after he finished treatment, I saw him again. Paul had stayed sober.

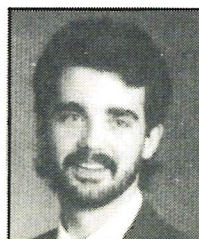
We talked a long time about how much his life had changed. He said it was still a daily struggle, but he was finally able to break the grip of addiction once he started to trust in God's power to control his life.

Why some people are changed when others are not is as difficult to fathom as the nature of sin itself. But more important is that Jesus died to save all people. We cannot stop trying to help people accept his love and change for their lives just because some never do.

As a professional, I help addicts and alcoholics by counseling, educating, and giving them support in their recovery. People who aren't trained in this kind of help can still do a lot. There are many Christians recovering from chemical dependency who need our love and support.

Make an effort to reach out to them. Don't make their burdens more difficult by being ignorant or insensitive. Encourage your pastor and congregation to be aware of their responsibility to chemically dependent members, those who are recovering and those who are still using.

And pray. For me, that is the most important way to show love and to work at carrying out the task God gives all of us.



Jody Schmidt is a member of Fairview, Milwaukee, and a counselor at Milwaukee County Mental Health Complex.

What are the signs of chemical dependency?

1. Do you occasionally get high after a disappointment, a quarrel, or when the boss gives you a hard time?
2. Does your use of alcohol or other drugs increase along with increased stress in your life?
3. Have you noticed that you are able to handle more alcohol or other drugs than you were in the past?
4. Have you ever awakened "the morning after" and found you could not remember part of the past evening (even if friends tell you that you didn't "pass out")?
5. Do you attempt to have a few extra drinks when you're with others, without their noticing it?
6. Are you uncomfortable in certain circumstances if you are unable to drink or use drugs?
7. Have you noticed that you're in more of a hurry to begin drinking or using drugs than you used to be?
8. Do you sometimes feel guilty about your alcohol or drug use?
9. Do you become irritated when someone mentions your use of alcohol or other drugs?

A "yes" answer to any of the above questions may indicate a developing addiction, and may mean you should seek help.

Adapted from the National Council on Alcoholism's brochure on the signs of alcoholism.

WELS set to inaugurate national Christmas outreach

"Share with us the glory of God in the coming of his Son Jesus this Christmas." These words and a 1-800-234-WELS phone number signal an invitation to a potential audience of 65 million viewers.

The outreach project, Precious is the Child, was introduced at the 1990 District Conventions by the WELS Evangelism/Mass Media Ministry, and has set out to accomplish three objectives:

- 1) Present a clear witness for Christ to a national audience.
- 2) Provide assistance to all WELS congregations to expand their outreach opportunities.
- 3) Generate and create a positive image for the WELS.

The first two objectives are being reached, as measured by the response from some 600 participating congregations. The third objective is expected to be realized with the broadcasts of the Precious Child message on four major national cable networks and 25 pre-

selected regional network affiliates (NBC, CBS, ABC).

The Family Channel, USA Network, WTBS-TNT, and Arts & Entertainment (A&E) will cover the entire USA. Regional network affiliates will add viewer impact in Green Bay, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Milwaukee, LaCrosse-Eau Claire, Madison, Sioux Falls-Mitchell, Wausau-Rhineland, Flint-Saginaw-Bay City, Detroit, Phoenix, Chicago, Lincoln-Hastings, Grand Rapids-Kalamazoo, Minot-Bismarck, Tucson, Toledo, Rapid City, Seattle-Tacoma, Tampa-St. Petersburg, Omaha, Rochester, Mason City, Austin, Orlando, Lansing, South Bend-Elkhart, and Mankato.

Broadcast schedules with days, times, and programs, were mailed to all WELS congregations.

As many as 50,000 responses to the 1-800-234-WELS number can be expected.

WELS members are asked not to



These networks will televise the WELS Christmas message.

call the 1-800 number, but to call the stations which broadcast in their respective areas to thank them for televising the "Precious is the Child" message.

—John Barber

Also in the news

Former Michigan District mission counselor **John Chworowsky** is on a one-year assignment to Laos as a lay teacher to instruct children of Laos government people in the English language. The project has been funded by private gifts. The project, privately undertaken, is under study by the world board which has made no decision as to its future. . . . **David Sternhagen** of New Orleans, La., has been appointed to the world board to replace Kirby Spevacek who has accepted a call to begin a radio ministry in the Soviet Union. . . . Reports on **enrollments in the synod's six schools** include an increase of about 70 students at Dr. Martin Luther College, a drop of two students at Northwestern College, a decrease of 11 at Martin Luther Preparatory School, the same number as last year at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, a decrease of three at Northwestern Prep, and an estimated decrease of ten at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. DMLC reported that its more intense follow-up during the summer may have helped bring about the

increase in enrollment. . . . **Builders for Christ**, the home mission board volunteer building corps, has finished its second project in a two-year pilot period. The new chapel at Abiding Savior, Elk River, Minn., was dedicated in November. . . . As approved by the convention, the **Division of Parish Services** has been restructured, trimming the division from eight to six commissions: Evangelism, Worship, Youth Discipleship, Parish Schools, Adult Discipleship, and Special Ministries. Units are now guided by appointed commissions rather than elected boards. . . . Under the leadership of the Board for Parish Services a **Parish Enhancement Seminar** is being organized for first-year pastors. The seminar is scheduled for the summer of 1992 at the seminary. . . . An all-school reunion is planned for the former **Northwestern Lutheran Academy, Mobridge, S. Dak.**, for June 27 and 28, 1992, at Mobridge. Contact the NLA Reunion Committee, PO Box 814, Mobridge SD 57601.

Unexpected gifts for missions

Budgets were tight. The synod convention in August had determined that more study of our worker training system is needed before implementing any changes designed to reduce operating expenses. A prudent course of action, but where would the money come from in the meantime? Dollars for missions were already extremely short, so much so that there were no funds in the operating budget for any home mission openings this year.

God provided two totally unexpected gifts. One was a donation of one million dollars from a WELS family. It is designated to be used for missions.

The second gift was two bequests. Ten years ago, unknown to us, a Christian couple in Iowa included the Lord's work in their estate plans. Late last year both of them passed away within eight days of one another, and recently the synod received \$905,000 from their estates, designated for home and world missions.

We thank God for the generosity of these two Christian families, recognizing that current gifts and deferred gifts of WELS members are becoming increasingly important for carrying on the work of our synod.

— Ronald D. Roth

WELS Lutherans for Life holds national convention

126 people attended the WELS Lutherans for Life national convention on October 18-20 at St. Mark in Citrus Heights, Cal. Those who attended participated in a variety of workshops addressing a wide spectrum of life issues. Topics included abortion, fetal tissue use, assisted suicide, and counseling techniques.

A highlight of the convention was the keynote presentation given by Dr. Christopher DeGiorgio, Assistant Professor of Neurology at the USC School of Medicine. Dr. DeGiorgio explained the functions of the brain and efforts made to bring so-called persistent vegetative state patients to consciousness.

Guest speaker for the evening banquet was Pastor Wayne Mueller, administrator for the Board for Parish Services and chairman of the national board of WELS Lutherans for Life. He reminded those in attendance of the importance of establishing a Christian pro-life legacy in the family so that



Paul Snamiska, principal at Calvary, Sheboygan, Wis., led a workshop on "Educating others on pro-life."

the children may continue the fight for life in Christ.

The 1992 national convention is planned for October 16-17 in Manitowoc, Wis.

—Robert R. Fleischmann

Obituaries

Paul August Carl Behn 1900 — 1991

Paul August Carl Behn was born June 22, 1900, in Brillion, Wisconsin. He died Oct. 27, 1991, in Watertown, Wis.

He served as missionary to the Apache Indians at Whiteriver, Bylas, East Fork, and Cibecue, Arizona; as pastor of Fairview in Milwaukee; as counselor and instructor in the Chinese Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong; and as pastor of Cross of Christ, Kingman, Arizona.

Pastor Behn is survived by four daughters, Laurel (Donald) Schuster, Lois (Peter) Thomas, Miriam (Robert) Behnke, and Ruth (Russell) Kobs; 20 grandchildren; and 15 great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Esther, his second wife, Dorothea, and by a son, Paul.

Services were held at Fairview in Milwaukee.

Rhoda Yerges Zeitler 1948 — 1991

Rhoda J. Zeitler, nee Yerges, was born November 17, 1948, in Columbus, Wis. She died October 8, 1991, in New Prague, Minn.

Following graduation from Dr. Martin Luther College she taught at St. Peter Lutheran School, Plymouth, Mich.

She is survived by her husband, John; sons, Jeffrey, Nathan, and Mark; daughters, Shari and Amy; and two sisters.

Funeral services were held at Trinity, Belle Plaine, Minn.

Christ Jesus: Our all-sufficient faith giver

Colossians 1:1-14

by Fredric E. Piepenbrink

“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” These were the words of the father who brought his boy with an evil spirit to Jesus for healing.

His dilemma was one with which we are all too familiar. We know we believe. We think we believe. We hope we believe. But sometimes we have doubts. The doubts come when we find ourselves tempted or actually sinning in ways we never imagined; when Christ’s word and sacraments no longer hold a special place in our heart; when our prayer life is waning; or, when, like this father, a severe trial has entered our life and the Lord asks us to trust in him implicitly.

The struggle with faith is a troublesome one because we know how important faith is for this life and especially the life to come. And even if we can say confidently, “Yes, I believe,” we may still worry about the faith of our children, our spouse, our friends.

Faith’s source

In Paul’s opening words he bursts forth with an oration of thanks and praise to God for the faith and love of the Christians at Colossae. This may seem strange, if not presumptuous, when we realize that this Colossian congregation was only recently established, and the members were new converts to the faith.

In addition, these opening verses are lofty words from a man who probably never met these Christians personally. Paul, as far as we know, never did mission work in Colossae.

Finally, the congregation was surrounded by heresy, always a danger to faith and the ultimate purpose of Paul’s letter.

Yet Paul does not hold back in his jubilation for the Colossian’s faith, because Paul recognized the true source of that faith and love — “God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Faith does not come from within us. How could it when in our unregenerate state we were dead in trespasses and

sin? Faith is entirely the work of the triune God. When God does his work of faith, we know he uses his incomparably great power for us who believe.

Faith’s disclosure

Paul’s confidence was further justified, as he mentions, by two outward manifestations: the gospel and its fruits. The gospel is the instrument that the triune God uses to work faith. Wherever the true gospel is proclaimed, there faith is possible. In this connection Paul reminds the Colossians never to underestimate the pastor’s role in their faith-life as a servant of God promoting that gospel among them.

The fruits of the gospel are the good the Colossians did, especially acts of love. That is why Paul not only thanks God for their faith, but prays that they be “filled with the knowledge of his will, through all spiritual wisdom and understanding . . . that they may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way.”

Without fruits of faith, not only do we rob ourselves of the joy of pleasing our Lord, but also the confidence that faith is even present.

Faith’s focus

Yes, the One who has qualified us to share in heaven, the One who rescued us from the devil, the One who redeemed us and forgave us our sin is the same One who supplies our faith and that of our loved ones through the gospel.

The story is told of a Christian on his death bed lamenting to his pastor that he couldn’t really say with confidence that he had faith. The wise pastor replied, “I don’t want to hear about your faith, just tell me about Jesus,” to which the man gave a beautiful witness.

Good advice! It is best not to focus on faith itself but on Christ Jesus, the all-sufficient faith giver.



Fredric Piepenbrink is pastor of Atonement, Milwaukee.

Precious is the Child

When I was a boy, the arrival of the Sears Christmas catalog at our home made for great excitement. Page after page of colored illustrations pictured a rich variety of toys and games. So that none of us children would get more than our fair share of time with the catalog, mother set up a rotation schedule with equal viewing rights for each of us.

I don't know if Sears still sends out a Christmas book. But our mailman does bring other catalogs advertising a wide selection of gifts. This year we received a catalog from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Its pages are chock-full of offerings. It's possible to order a reproduction of the head of Thalia, Muse of Comedy, for \$295. Or for those with richer tastes, the replica of a 16th-century Spanish gold necklace for a mere \$1,995.

The variety and cost of gifts advertised for sale at Christmas suggest that we are not a poor people. Local department stores and world-famous museums don't stock items which they know will not sell. Individuals do spend money — especially at Christmas — to purchase expensive gifts for family members and friends.

But consider the public good, and the ghost of Scrooge emerges. One writer comments: "We are not poor as a people, yet somehow we have become bankrupt as a society. Our wealth may no longer be unlimited, but we surely remain a society of plenty. There is still plenty on our tables and on our roads. Yet we have come to accept that, in our public lives, violence, impoverishment, squalor, and cruelty will rule. We seem to have accepted two separate economies: one of abundance, ruling the way that many of us eat and sleep and entertain ourselves, and one of absolute hand-to-mouth impoverishment, ruling our civic life."

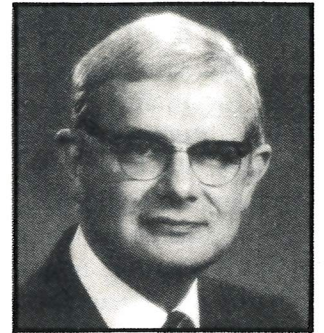
A similar attitude is sometimes evident when it comes to funding the mission of the church. There seems to be an extra \$20 (or more) around when it's an item the individual craves, or for another Christmas gift. But announce that the congregation or synod is embarking on a costly effort to reach those who don't know the Savior, and one may hear pleas of poverty.

God was very much concerned about the public good when he gave his gift at Christmas. "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son." What God gave to the world is the most precious gift of all.

The television presentation, "Precious is the Child," is being offered to the American people as a Christmas gift from the WELS. It's one way of saying that we do care about the public good, the ultimate public good. Our concern is that many more people receive this precious Child into their hearts and lives.

No gift selected from the pages of a catalog is as precious as this Child. To give another person this precious Child makes for a truly merry Christmas.

Victor H. Prange



Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

“Violence in Wichita”

In an issue (Oct. 1) in which Prof. Toppe so beautifully draws the distinctions between evangelical and Lutheran theology, we are also presented with another critique of these same evangelicals for their protests in Wichita. Robert Fleischmann has written a well-reasoned argument for non-involvement in civil disobedience.

However, his major premise is that our government is not forcing Christians to participate in the sin of abortion. But have not our tax dollars been funding abortion? Have we not all participated in some sense at least?

Those Christians in Wichita who chose to protest are convinced they are obeying God rather than men. Those of us who chose not to participate have in good Christian judg-

ment reached a different conclusion. Neither of the two groups should be criticized by the other for the manner in which it has reacted to the murder of babies in America.

*David Luetke
Onalaska, Wisconsin*

I have participated in a number of pro-life protests including many where civil disobedience resulted in arrests. I have yet to see an act of violence by any pro-lifer. In fact, rescuers are the most passive of pro-lifers; they must remain calm while being verbally and physically abused.

The goal of Operation Rescue is not just to prevent sin, but to rescue an innocent victim from certain death. For years rescuers have been writing letters, visiting legislators, picketing, and volunteering. They are fed up with the lack of results. This is why they follow God's command to “rescue those being led away to death.”

Not coincidentally, I have found rescuing to be a most opportune way to share the message of salvation. I have witnessed the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit working through rescuers who witness to a “captive” audience in a jail cell.

There is much more to civil disobedience than meets the eye or can be read in a newspaper.

*Timothy P. Begalka
Clear Lake, South Dakota*

“Violence in Wichita” (Oct. 1) brought a thought to mind. As much as we are in the world, we are not of it. When we try to change the minds of those who do not share our beliefs, we must target the heart, not the head. If there is no change of heart we cannot expect any change from a sin-sick world. As Jesus said, “Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”

*Jeff Scheibe
Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

Operation Rescue is not breaking the no-trespassing law to keep a per-

son from sinning, but to keep a person from being murdered. Wouldn't you ignore a no-trespassing sign on a swimming pool to rescue a drowning child?

I don't believe that pro-abortion advocates will lie down in front of the doors of pro-life centers. That takes sacrifice, and they are in it for the bucks.

Writing letters to legislators and volunteering in local pregnancy counseling centers is for us less courageous pro-lifers. Thank God for the people out there who are willing to make sacrifices in this civil war.

Maybe the Lord has not called you to put your job or your life on the line at the murder mills, but please don't criticize those that have been called to do so.

*Herb Kluth
Prior Lake, Minnesota*

Spiritual growth

I found Paul Kelm's article “Renewing our spiritual growth” (Oct. 1) interesting and challenging. I could relate to “Stephanie” as I too had seen my spiritual growth nose-dive after confirmation. Confirmation should not be looked on as graduation from Bible learning, but as an expression of faith and commitment to the Lord for life-long service to him.

I believe the spiritual renewal program, emphasizing individual and/or group Bible study, is vital for the well-being of each individual, each congregation, and the synod.

*Michael Winter
Madison, Wisconsin*

Scriptural vs. secular

In the Oct. 15 issue I count six secular articles, including Teentalk, From This Corner, and the Editorial Comment. I count two articles with Scripture text and comment.

The Northwestern Lutheran is a mission arm, reaching Christian as well as non-Christian people.

We are a religious publication, not Readers Digest.

*Doris Greig
St. Clair Shores, Michigan*

Corrections

The following closing paragraph was accidentally omitted from the Oct. 1 editorial by Carleton Toppe:

“Or have even the conservative Lutherans in that synod [LCMS] gone too far down the road of unionism and ecumenicalism, or have they adapted themselves too much to the culture of our day, so that they cannot return to a confessional position they once shared with us 60 years ago? Then not even beautiful presentations of Christ-centered theology can reunite us.”

We offer our regrets for the letter “Decisions of synod convention” in the Oct. 15 issue. Because it was in conflict with the synod's theological position, it should not have appeared.

In the future, letters on the subject of man and woman roles will not appear in the letters column, but will be forwarded to the Conference of Presidents whom the 1991 convention asked to prepare materials for congregational study of the theses adopted by the convention.

NOTICES

Notices are printed in the first issue each month.
The deadline for submitting items is five weeks before the date of issue.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS DR. MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE

Because of vacancies, the board of control of Dr. Martin Luther College requests the voting constituency of the WELS to nominate candidates for the following positions.

Education

Nominees should be qualified to teach professional education courses and supervise off-campus student teaching.

English

Nominees should be qualified to teach composition, language, and literature.

Education

Nominees should be qualified to serve in the college classroom at St. Paul school as a student teacher supervisor of middle or upper grades and should have an interest in exceptional education.

Names of nominees with as much pertinent data as possible should be in the hands of the board's secretary by Dec. 30. Those who desire to receive the list of nominees may obtain the same by contacting the secretary, Pastor Robert A. Bitter, 173 E Waupun St Box 277, Oakfield WI 53065.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS FAMILY DEVOTIONAL MAGAZINE EDITOR

Northwestern Publishing House plans to produce a family devotional magazine with a focus on home devotions. In order to bring this magazine to reality, the NPH Board of Directors plans to call an editor to develop, edit, and direct to completion a family devotional magazine. The person called must be theologically trained as a teacher or pastor. He should be sensitive to family issues, have good organizational skills, be capable of motivating and directing authors, and adept at devotional writing. He should have or be capable of developing basic editorial skills. Nominations for this position should be sent by January 15 to Elwood H. Lutze, Secretary, NPH Board of Directors, 1250 North 113th Street, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284.

NORTHWESTERN LUTHERAN ACADEMY REUNION

A reunion is planned June 27-28 for all persons associated with the former Northwestern Lutheran Academy in Moberidge, S. Dak. Everyone is welcome. All alumni, parents, friends, pastors, former students, instructors, secretaries, cooks, and custodians are especially invited. For more information, contact NLA Reunion Committee, PO Box 814, Moberidge SD 57601.

CONGREGATION TREASURERS

The cutoff date for synod mission offering receipts in the synod's post office lock box is the last business day of each month. December 1991 lock box offerings will be credited as 1991 receipts through January 9, 1992, as long as they are received in the lock box on or before that date and are clearly labeled as 'December' offerings on Form 220. Please note that offerings must be mailed to the lock box rather than delivered to the synod offices.

Randy E. Matter, Accounting Manager

NAMES WANTED

Survey work preliminary to conducting exploratory services. People interested in WELS services, contact person noted.

TRI-CITIES, GREENVILLE, MORRISTOWN, JEFFERSON CITY, TENNESSEE — Pastor K. Engdahl, 10212 Kennard Lane, Knoxville TN 37932; 615/966-3112.

OGDEN AND LAYTON, UTAH — Pastor Peter Unnasch, 3134 Eccles Ave, Ogden UT 84403; 801/392-2265.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN COMMUNITIES IN COLORADO, UTAH, AND WYOMING — Pastor Mark Birkholz, 12051 Northaven Circle, Thornton CO 80241; 303/252-8546.

EXPLORATORY SERVICES

to determine the potential for establishing a WELS mission in the area. Services are held on Sundays.

GREENSBORO, HIGH POINT, WINSTON SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA — Services second and fourth Sundays of the month at the Christian Center, 105 Wade St., Jamestown. Service at 4:30 p.m. Sunday school, 3:30. Contact Tom Parshley, 917 Monticello St, Greensboro NC 27410; 919/855-0688.

CHURCH LIBRARIANS

The first meeting of church librarians was held Sept. 21. A second meeting is planned for March. Exact date and location will be announced later. A newsletter is available. For further information, contact Joanne Weber, S90 W13322 Boxhorn Dr, Muskego WI 53150 or Barb Koch, 152 Hoyt St, Fond du Lac WI 54935.

WINTER TEXANS

Winter visitors to south Texas are invited to worship at Gethsemane, 3434 Holly Rd., Corpus Christi. Sunday service 9:30 a.m., Bible class 11 a.m. Pastor James Krause; 512/855-5275; 854-8481.

Visitors to the Rio Grande Valley are invited to worship at Abiding Savior, 599 S Westgate (Mile 6 west), Weslaco. Worship, 10 a.m.; Dec.-March, also 8 a.m.

GERMAN DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET

Gott ist fuer uns is a daily devotional booklet for 1992 published quarterly by the Ev. Lutherische Freikirche, our WELS sister church in Germany. The cost, including airmail postage from Germany, is DM 22.20 per year, or DM 5.55 per quarter. Please write to the Concordia Buchhandlung for reduced rate for bundled orders to one address.

Also available from Concordia Buchhandlung for DM 6.40, including postage, is the 1992 *Evangelisch-Lutherischer Volkskalender* in book form (80 pages). Both may be ordered from Concordia Buchhandlung, Postfach 58, Bahnhofstrasse 8, 0-9541 Zwickau, Germany.

SERMON TAPES AVAILABLE

Sermon tapes are available for those who have no access to regular church services. Please send names and addresses to Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Attn. LWMS, 3910 First Ave S, Minneapolis MN 55409.

Special note: We ask that the person from Arizona who responded to our former notice please write again. We apologize for misplacing your address, and we certainly want to share God's word with you.

ITEMS NEEDED

Lutheran Liturgy, Lectionary, and Agenda for new congregation. Contact Pastor Norman Berg, 206 King Nicholas Rd, Scroggins TX 75480; 903/860-3749.

Hymnals for mission congregation. We'll pay for shipping. Prince of Peace, 1405 W Tamarack Rd, Salt Lake City UT 84123; 801/261-3808.

Samplers for use at Wisconsin Lutheran College. Contact Mark Braun, 8830 W Bluemound Rd, Milwaukee WI 53226; 414/774-8620.

ITEMS AVAILABLE

The following are available for the cost of shipping

Individual communion set — Includes cover, bread tray, two cup trays, base. Pastor Roger Rockhoff; 808/422-4693.

Luther's Works in German — St. Louis edition, complete, with *Hauptsachregister*. Gary Haag, PO Box 2034, Cottonwood AZ 86326; 602/634-0630.

AUDIOVISUAL LENDING LIBRARY

UNDER HIS CARE (VHS - 109 - UHC)
1991 16 min. 1/2" VHS color PJSCA

Life on the reservation has changed over the years, but East Fork Lutheran Nursery continues to provide Apache children with warmth, love, and shelter. This video tells the nursery's story in a fresh and interesting way.

THE SEED IS THE WORD (VHS - 112 - TSW)
1991 18 min. 1/2" VHS color PJSCA

This video gives a lively look into the purpose and life of Michigan Lutheran Seminary, our synod's preparatory school in Saginaw.

EXPERIENCE THE WISCONSIN LUTHERAN DIFFERENCE

(VHS - 110 WLD) for parents
1991 7 min. 1/2" VHS color CA

DISCIPLING FOR TIME AND ETERNITY

(VHS - 111 - DTE) for students
1991 10 min. 1/2" VHS color PJSCA

Wisconsin Lutheran High School has produced two videos to encourage enrollment in the school. The first is intended for adults, particularly parents. The second is intended for prospective students.

With annual subscription or rental, order from AUDIOVISUAL LENDING LIBRARY, Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 North 113th Street, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284. Phone 414/475-6600, extension 127.

OUR FAVORITE HYMNS

These audio-cassettes are again available. The three sets contain 58 hymns sung by mixed and male choirs. Cost for each cassette is \$6.00 postpaid. Send orders to Martin Albrecht, 315 Highland Dr, Grafton WI 53024.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

PASTORS:

Bourman, James C., to Emanuel, St. Paul, Minn.
Busse, Carl J., to St. Andrew, Medford, St. Peter, Rib Lake, Wis.
DeRuiter, Richard A., from Zion, St. Louis, Mich., to St. Paul, Saginaw, Mich.
Rodewald, Duane A., from Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich., to St. Paul, Tomah, Wis.
Ruppel, James A., from Grace, Casa Grande, Ariz., to Our Savior (ELS), Grants Pass, Ore.
Schmidt, Thomas R., from Mt. Olive, Tulsa, Okla., to St. Paul, Norfolk, Neb.
Schmugge, Karl M., from St. Matthew, Spring Valley, Wis., to Redeemer, Pembroke, Ontario.
Schultz, Anthony E., from Trinity, Campbellsport, Wis., to Emmanuel, Zephyrhills, Fla.
Schwartz, David C., from Mt. Olive, Appleton, Wis., to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.
Wagner, Werner E., from Emmanuel, Owatonna, Minn., to retirement.
Zietlow, David D., from Faith, Anchorage, Alaska, to retirement.

ADDRESSES

PASTORS:

Baumgart, John J., 429 S Main St, Juneau WI 53039
Helwig, Daniel J., 100 N Evergreen, Plymouth MI 48170
Hennig, Richard, 3340 Deerfield Pointe Dr, Jacksonville FL 32244
Kiecker, Peter E., 136 S Concord Ave, Watertown WI 53094
Mayhew, William, 3044 W Genessee St, Saginaw MI 48602
Meier, Donald W., 10 Bahia Pass Radial, Ocala FL 32672
Petermann, Joel, 1907 13 Ave NE, Rochester MN 55906
Qualman, John D., 1300 Western Ave, Watertown WI 53094
Sorum, E. Allen, 5671 N 34 St, Milwaukee WI 53209
Sprain, John, 931 Hermosa, Tempe AZ 85282
Wagner, Werner, 1828 N Hawthorne Park Dr, Janesville WI 53545

TEACHERS:

Bode, Glenn, 625 S Twelfth St, Watertown WI 53094
Boehm, James, 3449 LaSalle St, Racine WI 53402
Brown, Eric R., 2090C Woodtrail, Fairfield OH 45014
Cahoon, Wade, 2414 N 55 St, Milwaukee WI 53210
DeNoyer, Kirk, 610 N Moreland, Waukesha WI 53188
Draeger, Alan A., 1497 N Macomb St, Monroe MI 48161
Earl, Johnathan O., 415 Hitchcock St, Baraboo WI 53913
Gartner, Daniel R., 2707 25 St W, Bradenton FL 34205
George, David, 305 S Third, Medford WI 54451
Gosch, Andrew, 5226 W Greenfield Ave, West Milwaukee WI 53214
Gray, Gary D., 1610 Ash Meadow, Houston TX 77090
Gregorius, Justin T., 617 S Twelfth St, Watertown WI 53094
Groening, Steven, 3255 N 50 St, Milwaukee WI 53216
Grukke, Joel, 13605 Lima Rd, Ft Wayne IN 46818
Hunter, Thomas, 224 Summit Ave, New Ulm MN 56073
Jacobs, Paul, 2529 N 67 St, Milwaukee WI 53213
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I'm back at my desk just in time to wish our cherished readers a merry Christmas and a happy, blessed new year. In spite of the Scrooges, of which there are so many, God's gift of his Son to the world is an awesome event in the history of the world. There is hardly a heart in the western world — believing or unbelieving — that is not somehow touched with the event.

St. Augustine said that we are Easter people and our refrain is "Hallelujah!" He could also have said that we are Christmas people and our refrain is "Glory to God in the highest!" May the hours you spend in church these days warm your hearts with the love of God, strengthen your bond of faith with the Lord, and freshen your generous spirits.

I have been out of circulation for about five weeks after an operation to remove a lesion on my lung — it turned out to be non-malignant. After a number of years with hardly a sick day, the episode reminded me of a word from Luther. "Even in the best of health," Luther counsels us, "we should have death always before our eyes so that we will not expect to remain on this earth forever." And he adds one of his crisp recommendations, "But we will have one foot in the air." One foot in the air, gentle readers, always, one foot in the air.

My unexpected absence from the office prevented me from writing my usual fall column promoting subscriptions to the Northwestern Lutheran. (It's our one sales pitch in the year.) I may well be too late to urge expanding the congregation's subscription list by trying a blanket or bundle subscription. But I'll try.

The magazine continues to be the most important component — excluding the pastor, of course — in keeping synod members in touch with each other. In the Milwaukee area with 72 congregations and 47,000 baptized members, congregation members freely mix with each other. But in other areas of the synod congregations — with a few annual exceptions — are isolated from each other. In many areas of the synod the average member sees more non-WELS Lutherans than WELS Lutherans.

It is the Northwestern Lutheran which shares with the synod the gifts which God has given his church. Not all of us are the same. We have various tastes and temperaments. We have, however, one thing in common: God's word is final, in faith and life. So we try to feature writers, whom God has gifted, to bring you insights into God's word, to encourage you to hold fast, to witness, and to rejoice as God's love impels others to action. We try to encourage you to lift your eyes beyond the corner of Third and Oak Streets and celebrate God's victories on our home and world mission fields. Through the year we will visit most of our world mission fields and many of our home fields. We will read of God at work in WELS Christians wherever they are. Every issue, we hope, is a feast for those who long for a glimpse of the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints — at least in the corner the WELS occupies.

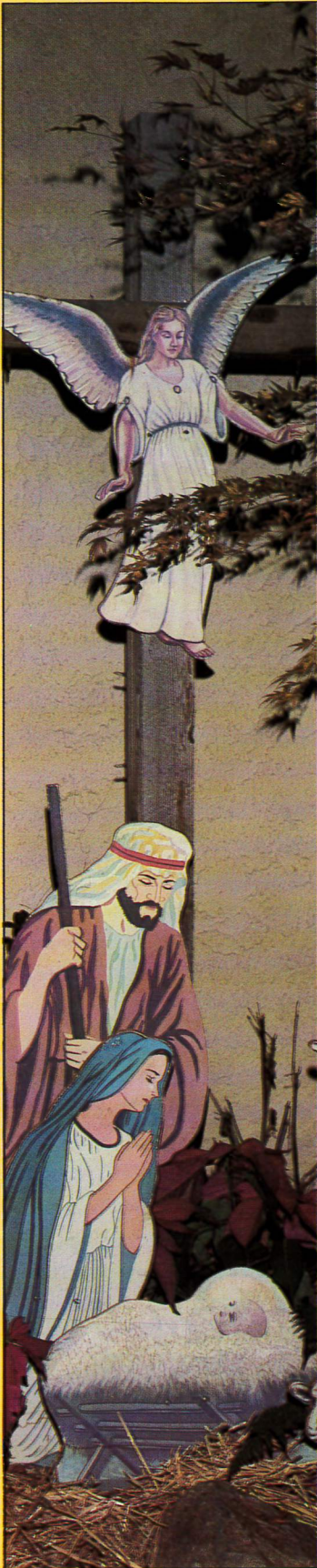
And that's it for a year!

James P. Schaefer

*St. Augustine said
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Easter people
and our refrain is
"Hallelujah!"*

*He could also
have said that we are
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"Glory to God
in the highest!"*

MRS. KEVIN SCHEIBEL



Christmas still relevant

It was a day in early December. I walked into the hospital to call on an elderly lady who had undergone exploratory surgery the day before. In the lobby I met a man whom I had learned to know well, the president of a neighboring congregation. I was aware that his congregation was in considerable turmoil because of a proposed building program. Some of the members wanted to relocate; others wanted to expand on the present site; a sizable segment wanted to do nothing. The congregation was sharply divided. I asked him how things were going. "We decided not to have any more meetings until January," he said. "We don't want it to spoil our Christmas."

I then went upstairs to make my hospital call. On my way to the room I was intercepted by the daughter and son-in-law of my patient. "The news is not good," the daughter said. "Mother's tumor is malignant. Her illness is terminal." Before I could respond her husband added, "Just so it doesn't happen during the holidays!"

These two incidents, occurring only moments apart, highlight a flaw that is often a part of our thinking. Christmas is a time for fun and merriment, a time of peace and good cheer. But it isn't really relevant. It doesn't really address the nitty-gritty issues of life. We have to put those on hold so they don't put a damper on our celebration.

Christmas not relevant? Christmas not addressing life on the level where we have to live it on a day to day basis? Let's not forget the origin of Christmas. It wasn't a very pretty scene. It was a humanity that had separated itself from God because of sin. Nothing could be more depressing than that. But Christmas — followed by Good Friday and Easter — is God's answer to the problem of sin. And the God who has dealt decisively and effectively with our foremost need can be trusted to handle the lesser things of life as well so that in these too "he works for the good of those who love him."

In our little family that we affectionately call the WELS we do well to remember that. There's a kind of uneasiness among us today about a number of things. There are concerns about diminishing resources to carry out God's mission, about synodical school structure, about applying God's unchanging word in a changed environment on such issues as the role of man and woman in God's world, marriage, divorce and remarriage, ministry forms, orders of worship, and others.

But we don't have to put these matters on the back burner until after Christmas. And we certainly dare not let them rob us of the real meaning of Christmas, "Unto you is born a Savior." Christmas is still relevant. It still speaks to our foremost need, a Savior from sin. Having done the greater, God will not fail to do the lesser. He will also provide the answers to the other issues we face. The more we appreciate the grace he revealed to us at Christmas, the more we will rely on him to provide answers for the lesser things of life, the more ready we will be to walk hand in hand with our brothers and sisters in WELS to tell the world that our Savior from sin is their Savior too.

Pastor Carl Mischke is president of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Carl H. Mischke