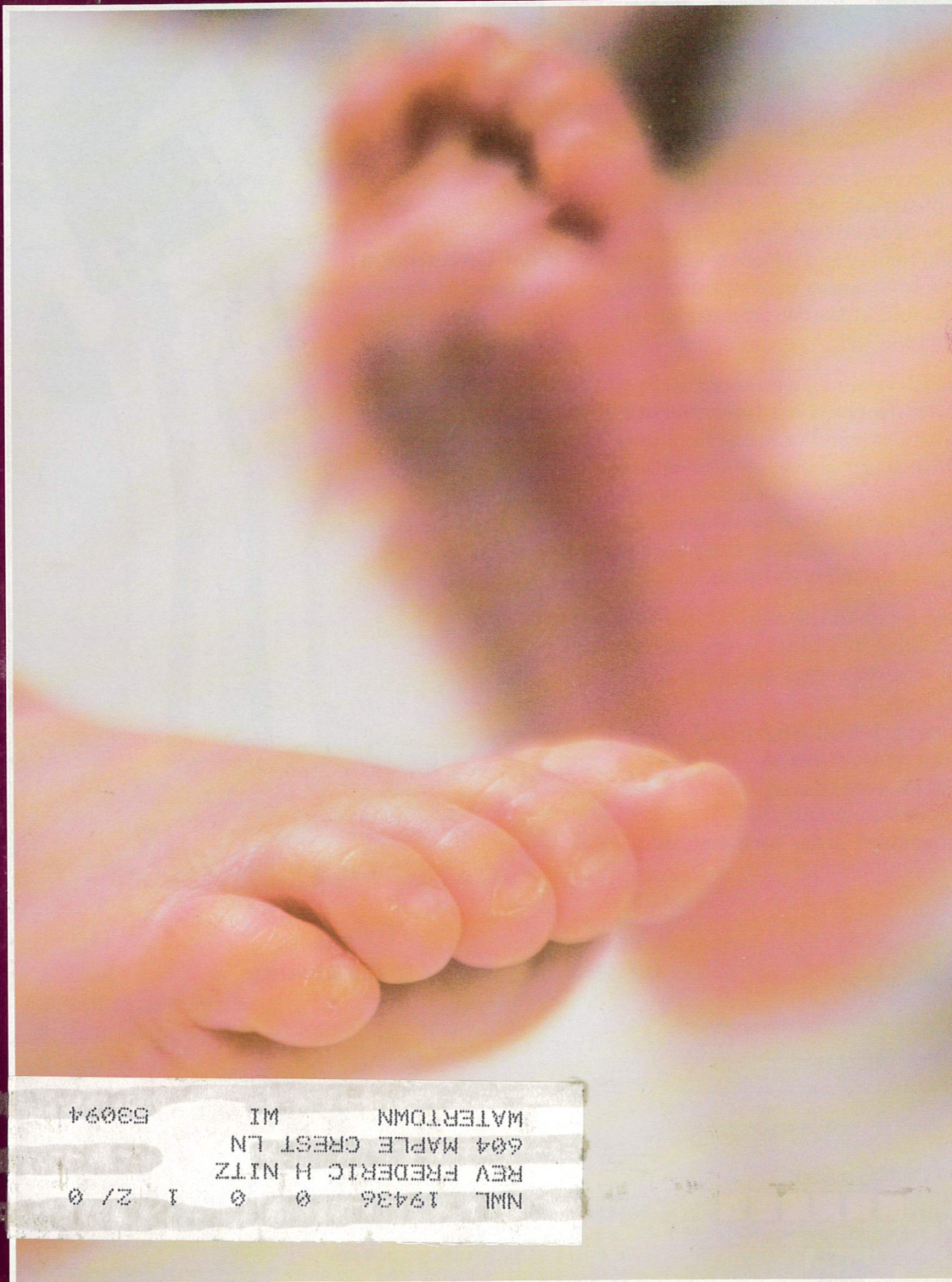


NORTHWESTERN

July 1998

LUTHERAN

THE WORD FROM THE WELS



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Christian Citizen! Yes, God means YOU!

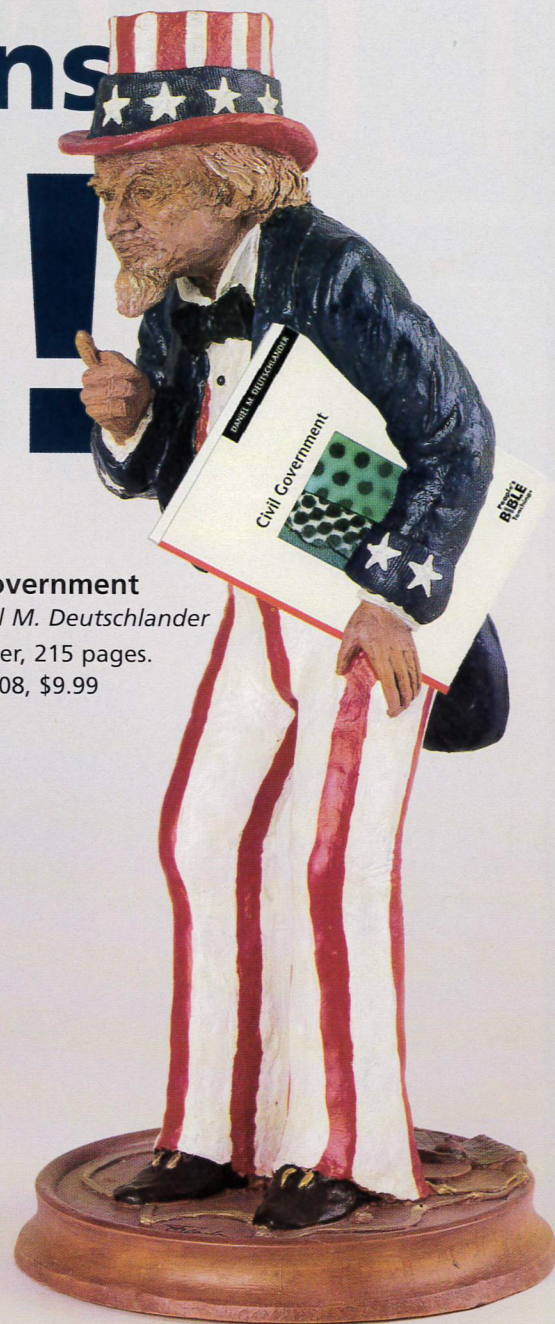
Our United States has become the land of the *free-to-do-as-I-please* and only the *brave* hold public office. Government can be *unspiritual*, riddled with compromise, and subject to corruption, tempting some Christians to want nothing to do with it. Have we forgotten that citizenship is a God-given responsibility?

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Follow him all the way

*As they were walking along the road, a man said to him,
"I will follow you wherever you go." Luke 9:57*

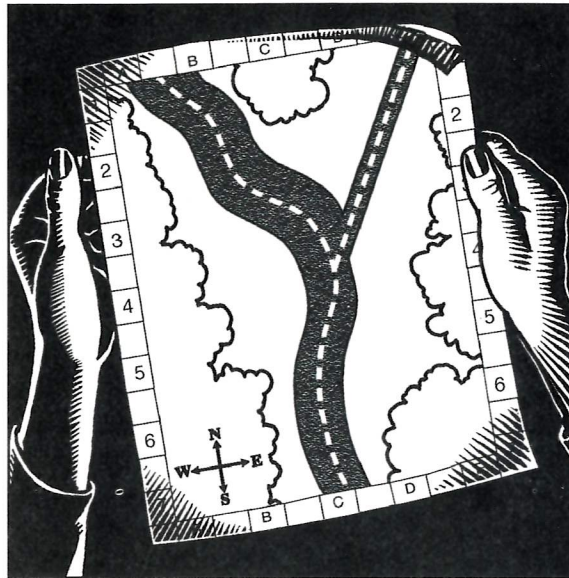
Richard D. Balge

The man was a Bible scholar and teacher. But he knew that Jesus was a better teacher, and he wanted to go wherever Jesus went—at least he thought he did. Jesus, who knows our hearts, tempered the man's enthusiasm. He tested the man's commitment.

Consider the cost

Jesus answered: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). The Son of Man is the Son of God, who came in the flesh, submitted to God's law, died on a cross. He came to destroy the devil's power and rescue us from eternal death. Soon, he would finish that work. But the Maker of heaven and earth had no place to lay his head. Did this would-be follower realize he would be giving up security and everyday comforts by following Jesus?

Jesus didn't turn him away, but he didn't say, "Come along right now," either. What did the man do? More important, what will you do? To follow Jesus is to trust in his righteousness and not your own, to rely on his remedy for sin, to obey him and not your own sinful will, to look out for others' well-being as well as your own. To follow him means being a stranger on this earth whose real home is in heaven.



Consider the cost. But also consider the cost of *not* following him.

Set your priorities

"He said to another man, 'Follow me.' But the man replied, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father'" (Luke 9:59). The man would not have been there if his father were already dead. He would have been burying his father that day, as the law required. No, his plan was to stay home indefinitely, then follow Jesus after his father died.

"Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God'" (Luke 9:60). That might seem heartless, but the Lord is not telling us to neglect our parents. He is saying, "Get your priorities straight." The most important thing is to follow Jesus right now.

We don't know what the man did. We do know what Jesus did. He went to Jerusalem to die for the sins of the world. He did not delay. He willingly did what the Father had sent him to do—for you. Set your priorities and follow him all the way.

Don't be distracted

"Still another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family'" (Luke 9:61). A natural request! Jesus didn't tell him he couldn't do that. He warned him, however, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

A farmer who set his plow in one direction and kept looking in the opposite direction would botch the job. Jesus' point is that if human relationships distract us, our discipleship won't be consistent. We might even get lost. If we say, "I will take care of unfinished business, look to my personal interests, and then follow him," it might be too late.

Jesus was not distracted from saving us. Who or what can be more important than following him? Where will someone or something else lead you? Don't be distracted. Follow him all the way.

NL

Richard Balge is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon.



- ❑ On our cover, you see a tiny baby's feet. Do genetics determine that child's sexual orientation? Is the child "born that way"? Author Tom Trapp addresses those who use genetics to excuse sin. (p. 6)
- ❑ On the first Easter Sunday, Peter ran to Jesus tomb and saw the strips of linen and wondered what happened. Today, people run to the Shroud of Turin and wonder if this is the same cloth Peter saw. Two articles address our human desire for tangible proof of Jesus' resurrection. (pp. 12 and 34)
- ❑ Toy stores sell Ouija boards on the same shelves as Ants in the Pants, Monopoly, Scrabble, and Legos. But Ouija boards are anything but child's play. (p. 8)
- ❑ This issue ends Mark Braun's Bible study. We thank him for sharing with us the wisdom from the book of James. (p. 30)
- ❑ Last month, Randy Hunter concluded his six-month Bible study. Now Mark Lenz takes over. Join us in studying God's Word. (p. 29)
- ❑ With this issue, Richard Balge ends his stint as a contributing editor of NL. He started writing our "Thought for Today" in 1989. But his work is not over. He continues to serve on the Communication Services Commission (CSC). This commission ensures that NL stays true to its duty to bring you "The Word from the WELS." We thank Balge for his years of insight into God's Word.

—LRB

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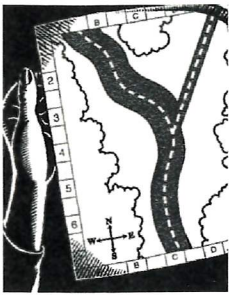
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Homosexuality: sin or orientation?

Our lifestyle is not judged on the basis of some genetic connection, but we are judged on the basis of God's commandments.

Thomas H. Trapp

In "Letters to the Editor" of a large university student newspaper, a man wrote, "Just this Sunday I was accepted as a member of [name of Christian church] as an openly gay person."

Some clergy today are publicly challenging other clergy to join ranks and fully embrace openly practicing gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people into their congregation as brothers and sisters in Christ.

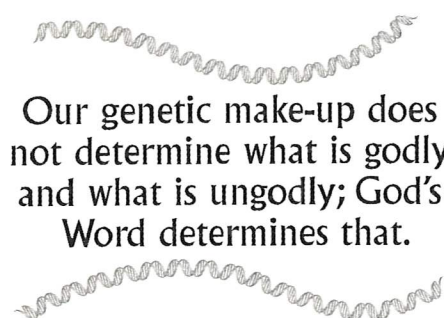
"For too long," claim more than 60 Midwestern church leaders (mostly Christian clergy), "homosexual persons have been condemned and mistreated by the followers of Jesus Christ."

"Sadly," they say, "the Bible has been misused in support of this condemnation. This abuse of Scripture must end." Their statement admonishes Christian clergy who call homosexuality a Christless, immoral activity and labels such clergy as people of "hatred, prejudice, ignorance, fear, arrogance, self-righteousness, and intolerance."

How can such words of judgment be defended? Two reasons are often given. Those who affirm that homosexuality is neither sickness nor sin often claim Scripture never condemns a "caring, committed homosexual relationship." They also state that just as the church accepts left-handed people as brothers and sisters in Christ, so also the church should accept practicing homosexuals, since they too are

"born" or "oriented" that way and cannot change anything about it.

Last month's article addressed the position from Scripture, but what about "birth" and "orientation"?



Our genetic make-up does not determine what is godly and what is ungodly; God's Word determines that.

Genetic connection

Are people "born" homosexual? In 1973 homosexuality was removed from the Manual of Psychiatric Disorders. Since then some scientific studies suggest that homosexuality is the result of genetics, an inborn trait.

How conclusive are these studies? In their 1993 article, "Human Sexual Orientation: The Biologic Theories Reappraised," Drs. William Byne and Bruce Parsons, research psychiatrists at Columbia University, conducted an in-depth review of scientific literature on this subject and reported: "Recent studies postulate biologic factors as the primary basis for sexual orientation. However, there is no evidence at present to substantiate a biologic theory, just as there is no compelling evidence to support any singular psychosocial explanation" (*Archives of General Psychiatry*, Vol. 50).

Future research may discover that homosexuality is rooted in a complex

of biological, psychological, and environmental factors. But even if scientific studies eventually conclude that there is a clear genetic connection that makes some people oriented towards homosexuality, will that justify a homosexual lifestyle? Can we justify a lifestyle on the grounds that one was "born that way"?

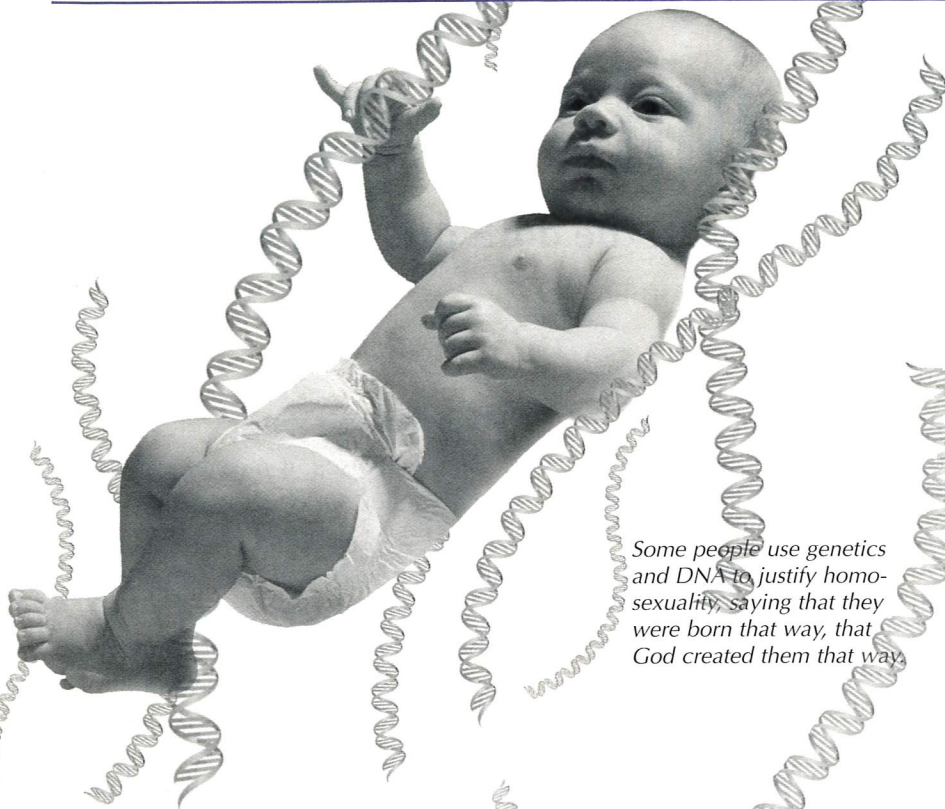
For example, current scientific studies suggest there is a possible genetic connection or link that makes some people inclined towards alcoholism. But does that justify drunkenness? Of course not.

God's commandments

Our lifestyle is not judged on the basis of genetic connection, but we are judged on the basis of God's commandments. And that is bad news for us since we are children of Adam and thus "sinful at birth" (Psalm 51:5), by nature "God's enemies" (Romans 5:10) with "every inclination" of our heart evil from childhood (Genesis 8:21).

Our genetic make-up does not determine what is godly and what is ungodly; God's Word determines that. The Bible, for example, does not say it is ungodly to be left-handed. But God's Word does say it is ungodly to be greedy and a drunkard. The Bible also says it is ungodly to live a homosexual lifestyle. It does not specify whether the lifestyle is "caring or uncaring."

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived:



Some people use genetics and DNA to justify homosexuality, saying that they were born that way, that God created them that way.

Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9,10).

As humans beings, we are all born with the orientation of all of the above. As someone has said, "There's no sin so great we're not capable of committing it." If a study of the brain of serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer ever reveals why he murdered so many people, it will still not justify his activity. His actions were evil, against God's will. Whether one is called a "born killer" or a "born drunkard" or a "born doubter" or a "born homosexual" does not justify one's "way." Sin is sin.

Born again by grace

So is change possible? Is it possible to turn from greed to generosity, from drunkenness to sobriety, from anxiety to certainty, from homosexu-

ality to morality? Millions of sinners have emphatically said, "Yes!" Some of those sinners include former gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people. Today there are ex-homosexual ministries that point to 1 Corinthians 9:11 as one of their favorite passages: "And that is what some of you *were* [emphasis added]. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." The author of this passage, the apostle Paul, knew change was possible. He experienced it. He was a killer of Christians before he was changed.

The cleansing blood of Jesus is the key to changing one's sinful ways. And such change comes by pure grace. An ex-gay that I know loves to quote Romans 6:14 for comfort and strength: "For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace."

That is where we born-sinners all need to end up—under grace—born again "of water and the Spirit" by

God's undeserved love in baptism. Read closely the following Spirit-given words:

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone (Titus 3:4-8).

To defend a godless lifestyle on the basis of "birth" is neither excellent nor profitable. To turn in repentance to Jesus Christ is not only excellent and profitable, it is life-changing and eternal.

NL

Thomas H. Trapp is the full-time campus pastor for Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel & Student Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Resources

- "Hope & Healing: Coming Out of Homosexuality," 30 minute video, discussion guidebook by Family Research Council. 1-800-225-4008 (not available from NPH)
- "Understanding Homosexuality & the Reality of Change," 60 minute video, discussion guide by Impact Resources, Inc. 1-800-333-6475 (not available from NPH)
- *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth* by Jeffrey Satinover. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. (Available from NPH, LU15-3694)

Ouija board—only a game?

Even those who make a living dabbling in the dark arts send a warning about this “child’s game.”

John M. Parlow

“Hi! I have heard that all spirits you contact are evil, but if you say your prayers out loud, they will go away. I am 13, and I love the Ouija board too. I sure hope I’m not talking to Satan,” said one young man on the World Wide Web.

“Well, let’s just put it this way. When your parents tell you ‘Don’t do this’ or ‘Don’t do that’ you pretend to listen, right? Well, it’s the same with spirits. You have no control over spirits you contact with Ouija boards,” said another player on a Ouija board Web page.

If that doesn’t send chills down your spine, you better check your pulse!

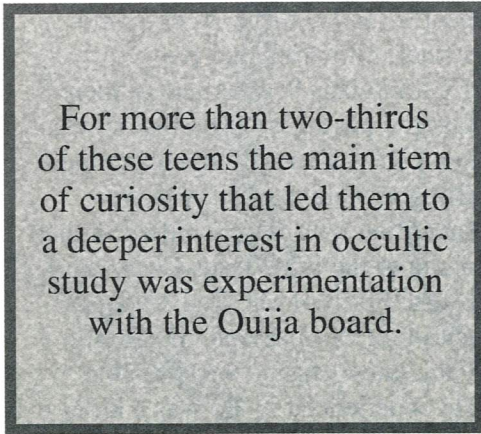
The history of the Ouija board

Divination devices, such as Ouija boards, are instruments used for communicating with the spirits of the dead, or the “other world.” Made in various shapes and designs, some can even be traced back to 551 BC. They were used by the Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, and through the Middle Ages.

The invention of the planchette in 1853 led to the advent of the Ouija board. The planchette was a small heart-shaped table with three legs, one of which was a pointed lead pencil. The other two legs had casters attached and could easily be moved in any direction. A French

spiritualist invented this device to aid in “automatic writing.”

The Ouija board was born when the planchette’s pencil was replaced with two additional legs and a smooth board, about 12 by 19 inches, with the printed alphabet, numbers, and the words, Yes, No, and Good-bye. It can be used individually or in groups of two. Fingers lightly touch the planchette, which sits on the board, and the individual asks questions of the board. The planchette moves, spelling out messages.



For more than two-thirds of these teens the main item of curiosity that led them to a deeper interest in occultic study was experimentation with the Ouija board.

The board takes its name from the word “yes” in French (*oui*) and in German (*ja*). It was patented in 1891 by Elijah Bond and eventually taken over by William Fuld. The patent was bought by Parker Brothers in 1966. The Ouija board is one of the best-selling board games, presently outselling the popular game Monopoly.

What makes it work

In most cases, it may be true that the planchette moves because one or both of the operators are pushing it subconsciously and that some of the remarkable answers can be explained by telepathy. A dimension beyond this, however, shows the intrusion of outside forces—such as evil spirits or demons. The content of some of the messages bears this out. In some cases, information is given that is unknown by the individual working the board, and such information has been checked and verified. The board has been tested by using blindfolded individuals and rearranging the letters on the board. Consider the following account:

One competent observer states that in one experiment with a Ouija board the answers were spelled out at high speed when the operators of the board had their eyes blindfolded. A board was used in which the letters could be moved. When the letters were shifted around, the planchette moved more slowly but continued to spell out messages correctly and gradually regained its speed. (*Christianity and the Occult*, p. 71)

Physical manifestations have been recorded, such as a sudden drop of temperature or a wind passing through the room during use of

the Ouija board. Some have testified that the planchette moved without hands, and foreign languages were used to communicate. If the movement is simply a result of the subconscious, these things become difficult to explain. John Stafford Wright says that "even if that which emerges is the product of their own minds, . . . experience shows that what emerges soon becomes a conglomeration of evil, even if it starts apparently harmlessly" (*Christianity and the Occult*, p. 151).

What the experts say

One of the most interesting quotes about the Ouija board comes from a Parker Brothers brochure entitled "The Weird and Wonderful Ouija Talking Board Set." In answer to the question of how to view the Ouija board, the brochure states, "Frankly, Parker Brothers does not know." They are a leading manufacturer of games, but they doubt

whether the Ouija board should really be regarded as a game. They do know that many people have a lot of fun with it, and that those who enjoy using it are often interested in the occult.

Randy Emon, a California police sergeant, interviewed some 1,500 teens involved in some aspect of the occult. He says that for more than two-thirds of these teens the main item of curiosity that led them to a deeper interest in occultic study was experimentation with the Ouija board. Ed and Lorraine Warren, who have over 40 years' experience with demon possession research, have said the Ouija board is as dangerous as drugs and is not to be played with.

Even those who make a living dabbling in the dark arts send a warning about this "child's game." In a newspaper called *Psychic News*, a front-page article stated that mental disturbances can result from playing with the Ouija board and reported:

"Manufacturers say that fears about the game are groundless; they speak with the voice of inexperience."

What Scripture says

From Genesis to Revelation there are a number of references to divination. The Bible universally condemns such practices and reminds us that we are to turn to God for guidance. Acts 19:18,19, tells us of people who came to faith and then burned their scrolls that were used in sorcery. This is a good example of what individuals who are involved in this kind of activity should do. Anyone who intentionally opens up his life to demonic activity will likely get more than he bargained for.

NL

John Parlow is pastor at St. Mark, Green Bay, Wisconsin.



"I'm your child"

Two stories about adoption show how God works through the adoptive parents and the adopted child to spread the good news about Jesus.

Krista Preston

The government of China wanted my baby dead. Was it because she was the second born or because she was a girl? Because a political directive in China allows only one child per family, she could have been aborted or received a saline injection into her skull after birth to end life just seconds after she took her first breath. If the saline didn't work she might be left for dead in a hole beneath the ground, or left in the dark with hopes she would be found in time.

In time for what? To be thrust into an under-equipped, understaffed, unsanitary orphanage in hopes of finding a family before getting too sick or too old to be wanted? That was the fate of the infant who would soon become a part of my life.

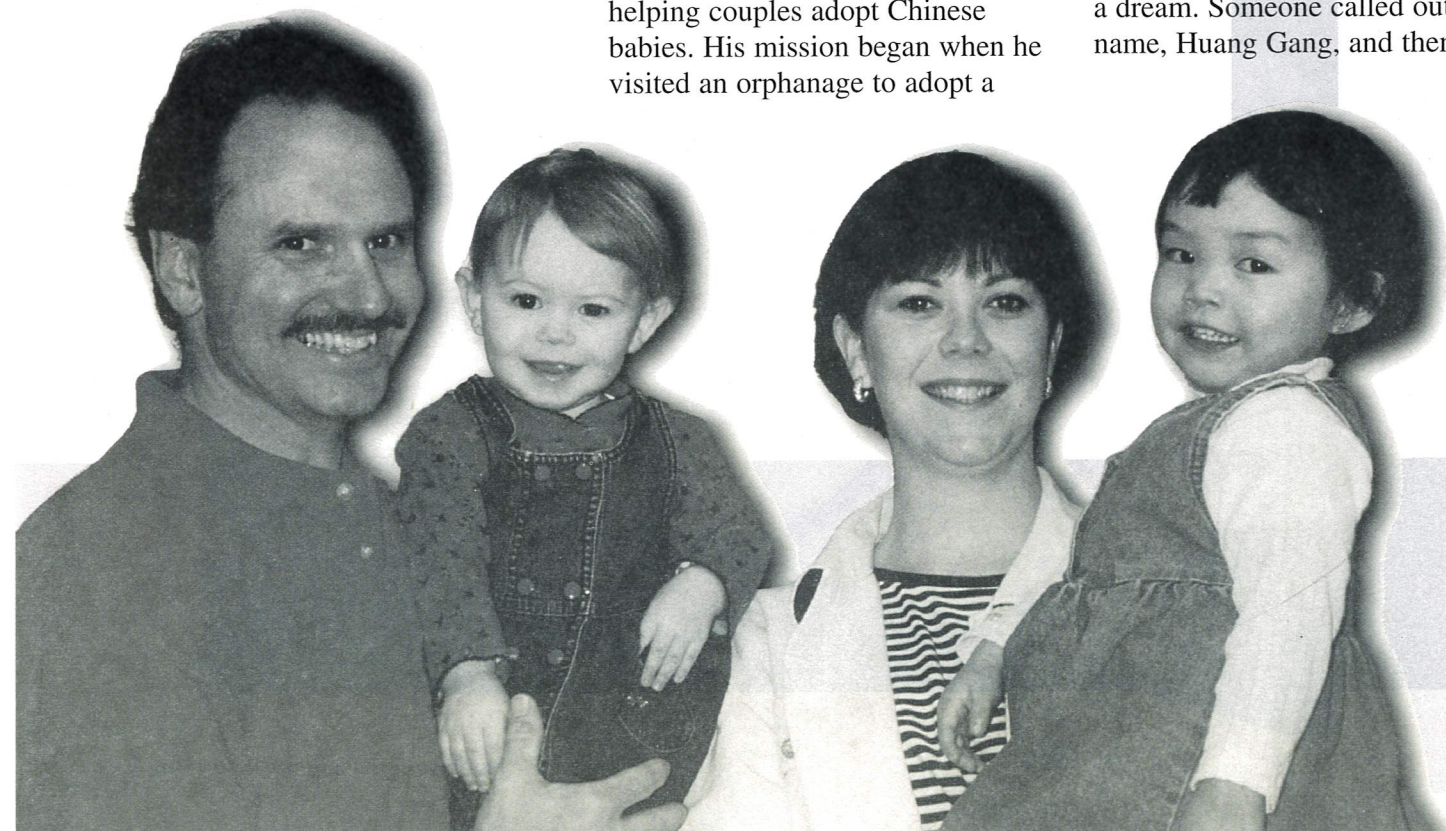
That God chose us as part of one of his miracles still astonishes me. He led us 12,000 miles from home and gave us the most precious gift, a child. He guided us from the beginning through an article about a woman who adopted a baby girl from China, an article that filled our hearts with longing. Together my husband and I prayed for help and guidance.

We hit many bumps in the road along the way, but that just made us pray harder and exercise our faith more. I called adoption agencies, but they told me we couldn't adopt in China because age restrictions required both parents to be at least 35. A misdialed call led me to an agency that connected us with a Chinese man in Illinois who was helping couples adopt Chinese babies. His mission began when he visited an orphanage to adopt a

child and saw over 200 infants in one unheated room. He said he knew then that God's wish for him was to help these children.

When we met the four other couples going with us to China to adopt a child, we were virtual strangers. Ten days later we were a close-knit family. We saw each other through emotional highs and tear-wrenching lows. Watching someone you have come to know and respect being handed their child for the first time is beautiful.

Then it was our turn . . . they stepped out of the elevator, and I saw her. She was beautiful. All I could do was stare through my tears. I was afraid to blink or take a breath in case the moment was only a dream. Someone called out her name, Huang Gang, and then it



became reality. My daughter was nine and a half months old and being placed in my arms for the first time. Could she feel my heart pounding and my pulse racing? Could she tell that she would never be left cold and hungry again? Did she know that her tears would be kissed away and all her fears calmed? Did she know how much she was loved?

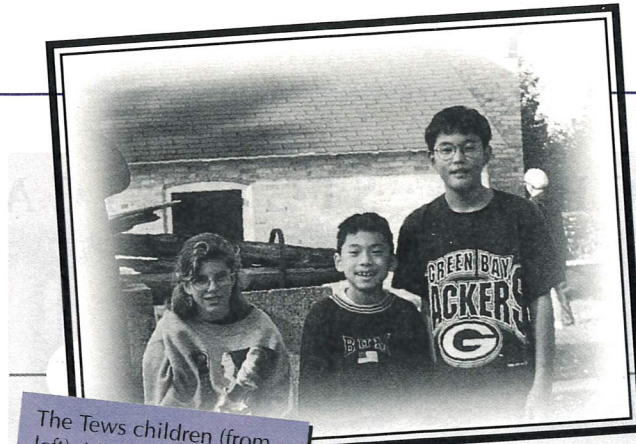
When we got home, people told me how fortunate our daughter, Miya Catherine, was to be in the United States and in our family. That sunk in the first time we took Miya to church. It was communion Sunday, and we took her up to the front with us. As we stood there, holding our baby, it occurred to us that she probably would never have learned about Jesus in China. Knowing that this little soul would be saved makes us want to go back, adopt another baby, and bring another soul to Jesus.

God has enriched our lives in ways I only dreamed possible. Not only did he allow us to adopt, but five and a half months later blessed us with the birth of a girl. Only a year before, we were two people talking about kids. Today we have a refrigerator filled with bottles, a living room heaped with toys, and hearts filled with love. Is there no end to his love and blessings? Fortunately for us all, there isn't.

NL

Krista Preston is a member at St. John, Newburg, Wisconsin.

The Preston family (from left): Barry, Chloe, Krista, and Miya. Barry and Krista Preston, who was pregnant with Chloe at the time, went to China to adopt Miya when she was nine and a half months old.



The Tews children (from left); Michelle, Mike, and Justin. Michelle was adopted when she was 11 days old; Mike, like Justin, was born in Korea.

The Preston's story tells how God helped a family through the adoption process. This letter, written from an adopted son to his birth parents in 1996, shows the blessings—especially

life-giving faith to a child who might not have heard about Jesus—that God gives through adoption.

To my birth Mom and Dad,

I hope you remember me. I'm your child.

The reason I'm writing is because I want you to know about my life, and I want to know what's happening with you. First I'll ask how you are doing. I'm doing great. I really miss you. I always wonder what you look like and what you are like. I can't hide my feelings that I miss you. But I don't think you could have given me a better life. I now have the best parents. I always say, "Boy, am I ever lucky." I have two moms and two dads. . . .

The main reason I am writing is because I want to tell you about the true God. At my school we are taught and believe idols can't do anything for you. Like when Elijah told all the idol worshipers that your god can't talk to you or answer prayers. And he proved it and said, "Make an altar and ask your god to start a fire." It didn't work. Then Elijah asked his God to start a fire without him even touching it and even poured water on it. And it burned. Even though you don't see it, it doesn't mean it never happened.

I care for you, and I want you to stop worshiping idols. Learn about Jesus, that he died for you, rose from the dead, and took away your sins and everyone else's sins and also that God created everything. Then I hope you will get baptized. Thank him and praise him. Go to church and listen. I hope you get away from all the spirits because they are rubbish. I want you to go to heaven where everything is perfect and not to hell where it's tough. Stop worshiping idols. Don't worship anything but God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. I pray you will come to know and believe in the true God like I do.

Sincerely from your birth son,

Justin Tews (Hwang Kyung-Hoon)

Justin, born in 1986 in Korea, was adopted by Roger and Lynne Tews of Cedarburg, Wis., when he was seven months old. He now is in the seventh grade at David's Star, Jackson, Wis.

IN SEARCH OF SIGNIFICANCE

SHROUD OR



People are searching the Shroud of Turin, looking for proof of God's presence. Actually, true proof of his presence comes from the sacraments.

Wayne A. Laitinen

Remember all the fuss over the Shroud of Turin? It all but disappeared when scientific tests determined that the cloth, which allegedly bore the image of our Lord's crucified body, could not be older than the 13th century.

A decade later, the shroud is back, making the cover of the April 1998 issue of *Time*. Radiocarbon dating notwithstanding, "shroudies" insist that this is the cloth in which Christ was buried.

Moreover, many of them are trusting the shroud to impart great spiritual blessings. The *Time* article reported that Marella Trabattoni of Milan plans to make the 90-mile drive to see the image on the shroud. Why would she tow two infants into the crowd of curious pilgrims? "Age doesn't make any difference," she explains, "for receiving grace."

This desire for something physical with deep spiritual significance is natural to us. We are, after all, earth and spirit. In fact, we are dust that bore the perfect image of the Spirit. Unlike animals, which live by instinct, we could share our Creator's thoughts, rejoice in his works, and make moral choices that pleased him. We lived in a garden that had physical trees with physical fruit, all of which had a profoundly spiritual significance: "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:16,17). In a real sense, the tree of life was a sacrament. It was a tree, established by God, that yielded physical fruit with the promise of everlasting life.

Satan murdered our race by offering us his own, cruel parody of the tree of life. He attached a bogus promise to the fruit that God had forbidden. Then he promoted it as a more appealing fruit that offered a loftier wisdom. What was bitter tasted sweet to our perverted senses. It yielded the venomous aftertaste of fear, shame, and everlasting alienation from our loving Father.

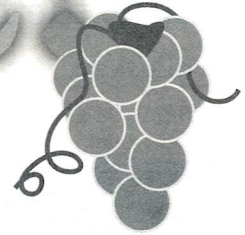
After the fall into sin, God rescued us through Jesus, who would

crush the serpent's head. Jesus, our Savior, is spirit and body, like his brothers. But here is where Jesus defies science and reason: He is true God and true man. God's plan of salvation in Jesus wed the physical to the spiritual for our salvation.

Is it any wonder that the Holy Spirit has chosen to communicate to sinners all of the spiritual blessings of Jesus in a physical way? He makes disciples of all nations with a handful of water. He gives us the redeeming body and blood of Jesus with a morsel of bread and a sip of wine. How he does this defies science and logic. Nevertheless, it works because we have the promise of God who created us and knows best how to communicate his saving love to us.

That is why we treasure Baptism and Communion more than anything else in all the world. When we examine our hearts, we cry, "Woe is me, I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and I come from a people of unclean lips . . ." (cf. Isaiah 6:5,6). The sacraments are the live coal from heaven's altar that touches our mouth. Here our guilt is taken away. Here our sin is atoned for. At the font and at the altar we are set free to serve God with pure hearts and worthy lips.

CHALICE?



Because of these biblical promises, the Lutheran church is not just a Bible church. It is a church of Word and sacrament. Through Word and sacrament, God uses physical elements to communicate with us. When we hear the Bible being read, God uses sound waves to touch our eardrums with the message of the gospel. In baptism, we see and feel the water through which we become participants in Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6:3,4). In the Lord's Supper, God embraces all our senses with the promise of our Redeemer's victory. We smell, taste, touch, and see the wine and bread, which are, we hear, Jesus' body and blood "given and poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:27,28). God could communicate his love to us in many other ways, but he chose water, bread, and wine. That's why Lutherans have called the sacraments a visible gospel. The sacraments are the new tree of life.

But Satan is still at work undermining the tree of life. He still offers us pious parodies of God's sacraments. Part of us, as fallen children of our first parents, prefers to substitute the imitation for the real thing. This summer, an estimated three million people will make the long pilgrimage to see a piece

of woven flax with blood stains in all the right places. Some imagine they will receive God's "grace," when all along God's grace was in the chalice down the street.

Many others run from church to church in a lifelong search for "something more." When you ask them what they mean by "something more," they may say they want to "experience" God's love in a more "real" way than our churches can offer. The only real experiences of grace, however, are the ones God has given us: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." "This is my body . . . my blood . . . given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins."

The sacraments are the jewels that Christ's bride wears on the third finger of her left hand. She boasts of them before the merchant, the butcher, and every passerby in the market place. While the groom is away, she examines every facet in the brightness of the noonday sun—almost incredulous that he should love her so.

NL

Wayne A. Laitinen is pastor at Gethsemane, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

For more insights on the Shroud of Turin, see "The shroud is a shroud" on page 34.

Lutherans call Baptism and the Lord's Supper sacraments. Why these two rites and not others? Only they fit the three characteristics of a sacrament as defined in Luther's Catechism:

1.
Christ established it.

2.
Christ tells us to use earthly elements together with God's Word.

3.
Christ offers, gives, and seals to us the forgiveness of sins.

We live together as a family—to the glory of God

As a family, the first thing we do is love one another.

David J. Valleskey



We were not a family. We have become a family—by the grace of God. Now we live together as a family—to the glory of God. One aspect of our lives as children of God is the love we display to one another.

The New Testament frequently uses “one another” or “each other” with reference to those who have been reborn into the family of God—especially in connection with the word love (Greek *agape*, a-gah'-pay). “A new command I give you: Love one another,” says Jesus. “As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34).

Reciprocal love

The apostle John repeated these same words 60 years later: “This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.” Again: “This is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.” (1 John 3:11; 3:23)

The apostle Paul also emphasizes love among those reborn into God’s family. He writes: “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law” (Romans 13:8).

The general epistles also encourage us to love one another. Hebrews says, “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (10:24). Peter encourages his readers: “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart” (1 Peter 1:22).

Missing love

Love one another. We couldn’t do that before we were reborn into the family of God. A distinctive mark of those who live without Christ is hatred—of God and one another. A distinguishing mark of those who have been reborn into the family of God is that they are able and willing to love—God and one another. Jesus says, “By this all

men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

The word love is bandied about so much, however, that it has lost its luster. It has become a soft, wishy-washy word that excuses all behavioral or doctrinal aberrations. Still, we have no reason to ignore it, in view of the emphasis our Savior and his apostles put on it. Rather, we need to seek to understand correctly the scriptural meaning of love and then apply it to our lives.

Patterned love

The scriptures reveal a pattern for love and also provide power for love. The pattern for our love is clear: “Love each other as [literally, “in the same way as”] I have loved you” (John 15:12). So says our Lord.

Well, how did our Lord love us?

- “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10).
- “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).
- “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his

own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:6-8).

- “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Five adjectives describe that love of God.
- *Unilateral*: “Not that we loved God”—so that God had something to respond to, “but that he loved us.” It did not depend on who we were or what we had done.
- *Active*: “He sent his Son.” It was more than a feeling.
- *Giving*: “God so loved the world that he gave . . .”
- *Unselfish*: “For a good man someone might possibly dare to die”—as might a parent who dies while trying to rescue his child from a burning building. “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
- *Sacrificial*: “He laid down his life for his friends.” One can give no more than that.

That’s the pattern. That’s the *agape* of God in action—unilateral, active, giving, unselfish, sacrificial.

If you are like me, then you are thankful that God not only gives us the pattern for practicing *agape*, but also forgives our frequent failure to do so. “If we confess our sins,” his Word promises, “[God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Living love

With pardon also comes power, power to walk in closer conformity to the biblical pattern of love. Through the Holy Spirit, God pours his love into our hearts. He continues to do that every time the absolu-



tion is spoken. So, let us be of good cheer. Our sins are forgiven. Believe and rejoice. And then, in our joy and by his power, let us love one another even more intensely.

We have said much about reciprocal love in living together as a family—for two reasons: One, to ponder the mercy of our God. He has brought us formerly loveless, hateful creatures into his family where we—loved by our God in Christ—are now able to love our brothers and sisters, all to the glory of our God. That’s worth marveling over.

Two, to remind all of us that we dare not selectively use God’s Word. We need to protect one another within the family of God—to practice church discipline and to warn against false teachings and teachers. We must at times be blunt and forthright. We must take stands that won’t win popularity contests. But that does not mean we can forget

about love, about being patient, kind, considerate, and humble in our dealings with one another.

Speak the truth, yes, but we want to be, as Scripture says, “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). Failure to do either—either to speak the truth or to do so in love—places us in danger of having Jesus’ reprimand of the Pharisees come down on us also: “You should have practiced the latter without neglecting the former” (Matthew 23:23).

NL

David Valleskey is president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon. This series is taken from a paper he presented to the 1997 synod convention.



When good things be

Innocent activities that initially bring pleasure can spiral into compulsions that are difficult to control and have devastating effects.

Tina Raines

Addictions consume energy. Problems exist when addicted persons abandon people and things in their lives that were important at one time.

Exercising

“Evan” and his wife, “Kim,” have been married for seven years and have two small children. He has always been an overachiever and has a successful business in his community. Evan began running to lose weight and manage his stress, and quickly found success in achieving his goals. Motivated by positive results, he continued to invest in his new hobby, purchased running gear, and began entering competitive races.

Initially, Kim supported Evan’s interest in running and encouraged him. His friends and co-workers reinforced his hard work and efforts by saying how good he looked or how they envied his energy and drive.

This spurred Evan to work out more often and for longer periods of time. He ran before he left for work and immediately after work. The

two nights he spent lifting weights at the gym gradually turned into three plus a quick workout on Saturday afternoons.

The routine began to interfere with the time he spent with Kim and the children, and she began to complain. Evan chose not to attend his daughter’s dance recital because it would have interfered with his weightlifting routine and he was not willing to give that up. Kim began to worry when she saw Evan experience various sports injuries, and yet he would not slowdown his workouts and often ran on sprained and injured muscles. Evan was hooked on physical exercise to the point of jeopardizing his health and family.

Good things can turn bad

Even good things can become habit forming and lead to destructive addictions in our lives. Innocent activities that initially bring pleasure can spiral into compulsions that are difficult to control and have devastating effects.

When we think about addictions, we commonly picture a person who abuses alcohol, is dependent on drugs, or gambles his money away and finds himself destitute and on the street. We are not as likely to think about people who exercise too much, overindulge in food, shop for items they don’t need, or engage in thrill-seeking activities. Yet these usually good things can create unhealthy balances and end up being as powerful and damaging as an addiction to a harmful substance.

Several key elements to addictions are necessary to understand how good things can become problems. Addictions numb pain and help the addicted person avoid feelings that are uncomfortable. The addicted person feels in control of the feelings that he or she is trying to avoid, yet soon finds the addiction taking over. As the addiction progresses, it demands more energy and resources. The pleasurable feelings of the moment are often followed by devastating and defeating consequences.

Through Christ's work of redemption, we no longer have to be slaves to sin.

Busyness

An addiction also produces mood changes. The change in a person’s mood gives the addict the illusion of being in control. “Alissa,” a 35-year-old woman who lost her husband to cancer a year ago, found that keeping herself busy helped her alleviate the pain of the loss and avoid feeling lonely. She maintained her full-time position as a teacher and added a part-time job at a gift shop to her schedule.

Although she often found herself fatigued and exhausted, she pushed herself to further limits like volunteering at a food pantry and helping raise money for needy families.

Soon she found that her personal life was suffering. She had little time

come addictions

left for the family and friends who were once an important part of her life. When she inventoried her life she found that she hadn't balanced her checkbook in several months, the laundry had piled up, and there was no food in the refrigerator. Alissa was keeping herself so active that she was too exhausted to get out of bed on Sunday mornings to attend church.

The activity that initially gave her pleasure and a sense of well-being had become a negative force in her life and was leading to stress-related illness—headaches and other body pain. She began realizing how much she missed the people who had been an important part of her life. And she felt a spiritual void in her life as she realized that in all of her busyness she had pushed God out too.

God makes all things good

As Christians, however, we know that God has provided a way for us to be free from compulsions and addictions in our lives. Through Christ's work of redemption, we are no longer slaves to sin. The first step in recovering from an addictive behavior is to recognize the problems that the addiction causes in our lives and admit that personal, social, and spiritual losses have taken place because of it. It's to see the sin at the source, repent of it, and trust in Christ.

It is also necessary to understand what function the addiction serves. The func-

tion of Alissa's activity addiction was to avoid the pain of losing her husband. If she could keep busy, she had little time to feel sad. If she was helping other people and working hard, then her family and friends would think she was doing well. The activity also prevented her from feeling lonely and empty. For Evan, the exercise altered his mood, fought off self-doubt, and helped him feel in control of one aspect of his life. In both cases, the addictive behavior replaced the confidence and comfort that Jesus gives to those who come to him.

People do recover from addictions. The recovery process requires great amounts of effort and patience, but we don't struggle

alone. Jesus calls us to come to him for rest. He is our hope and comfort. We find the peace that we are searching for with the Savior. Romans 12:12 tells us to "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." As sinners, we rejoice in the hope of heaven and pray faithfully that Jesus will help us cope with difficulties that challenge us in this life. The apostle Paul reminds us that we are not powerless over addiction when he says: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

NL

Tina Raines is a marriage and family therapist at Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service, Milwaukee.



Wisconsin Lutheran

1998 Graduates



Jonathan E. Arndt
Menasha, Wis.



Paul D. Brug
Mequon, Wis.



Heath D. Butler
Bancroft, Mich.



Reed M. Degener
Hager City, Wis.



Timothy C. Diener
Waupaca, Wis.



John P. Ehlers
Clinton Township, Mich.



William A. Finn
Fond du Lac, Wis.



Andre T. Frandle
Marshall, Wis.



Aaron C. Frey
Mt. Pleasant, Mich.



Michael L. Gehl
Hubertus, Wis.



Timothy R. Gerbing
Fond du Lac, Wis.



Timothy P. Glende
Columbus, Ohio



Matthew C. Grunewald
Elkhorn, Wis.



Matthew M. Guse
Marietta, Ga.



Mark L. Hayes
Watertown, S.D.



Daniel F. Heiderich
Manitowoc, Wis.



Kent D. Holz
Belle Plaine, Minn.



Kevin D. Hundley
Milton, Wis.



Jason D. Jobs
Saukville, Wis.



Joseph B. Johnson
Yakima, Wash.



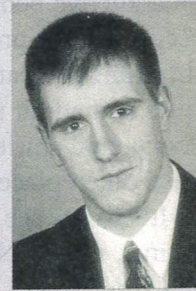
Randall S. Johnson
Menominee, Mich.



Mark A. Kaesmeyer
Saginaw, Mich.



Daniel F. Kramer
New Ulm, Minn.



Ryan J. Landwehr
Appleton, Wis.

Lutheran Seminary

Mequon, Wis.



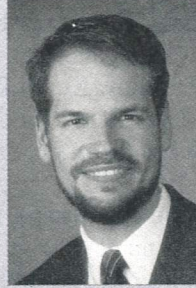
Matthew J. Martin
Oshkosh, Wis.



Jonathan A. Micheel
Milwaukee, Wis.



Adam R. Mueller
Oconomowoc, Wis.



Stephen T. Mueller
Greenfield, Wis.



Scott C. Mund
Madison, Wis.



Steven W. Neyhart
Eldorado, Wis.



Peter M. Prange
Janesville, Wis.



Eric S. Roecker
Slinger, Wis.



Stephen P. Schroeder
Saginaw, Mich.



Paul T. Schuler
Vienna, Va.



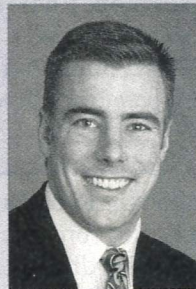
Marcus L. Schulz
Milwaukee, Wis.



James R. Skorzewski
Clare, Mich.



Douglas C. Tomhave
Brookfield, Wis.



**Charles D.
Vannieuwenhoven**
Appleton, Wis.



Paul L. Wegner
Clear Lake, Iowa



Robert E. Wendland
Washington, DC



Jonathan Zietlow
Soldotna, Alaska

**At the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary graduation service on May 20,
41 graduates received their Masters of Divinity degrees.**

Quick facts about the assignments (see p. 20):

- 46 calls were issued (includes five graduates from previous years)
- 14 calls are in home mission settings
- 3 calls are in world mission settings
- Graduates will serve congregations in 23 states

ASSIGNMENTS

Arndt, Jonathan E., Beautiful Savior, Petoskey, Mich.

Bode, Gary D., Grace, Sioux City, Iowa

Brug, Paul D., St. Matthew, Niles, Ill.

Butler, Heath D., Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

Degener, Reed M., Christ, Cochrane/Dr. Martin Luther, Buffalo City, Wis.

Diener, Timothy C., Faith, Russell/exploratory outreach, Hays, Kan.

Ehlers, John P., St. Paul, Crandon/Christ, Hiles, Wis.

Finn, William A., Peace, Janesville, Wis.

Frandle, Andre T., St. Andrew, Toledo, Ohio/Apostles, Temperance, Mich.

Frey, Aaron C., Peace, Otsego, Mich.

Gehl, Michael L., exploratory outreach, Katy, Tex.

Gerbing, Timothy R., missionary to Ndola, Zambia, Africa

Glende, Timothy P., exploratory outreach, Urbana, Ill.

Grunewald, Matthew C., Mt. Olive, Detroit, Mich.

Guse, Matthew M., exploratory outreach, Henderson, Nev.

Hayes, Mark L., exploratory outreach, Pueblo West, Colo.

Heiderich, Daniel F., Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

Holz, Kent D., Abiding Peace, Greenville, S.C.

Hundley, Kevin D., Ascension, Harrisburg, Pa.

Jobs, Jason D., St. John, Markesan, Wis.

Johnson, Joseph B., St. John, St. Paul, Minn.

Johnson, Randall S., St. Matthew, Appleton, Wis.

Kaesmeyer, Mark A., exploratory outreach, Smyrna, Tenn.

Kom, Mark C., King of Kings, Little Rock, Ark.

Kramer, Daniel F., Vietnamese exploratory, Boise, Idaho

Landwehr, Ryan J., St. Mark/Our Savior, Lena, Wis.

Lange, Steven L., Hope, Louisville, Ky.

Martin, Matthew J., Zion, Mt. Pleasant, Mich.

Micheel, Jonathan A., assistant to Arizona-California District president

Mueller, Adam R., Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

Mueller, Stephen T., missionary to Bogota, Colombia, South America

Mund, Scott C., assistant to Michigan District president, Midland, Mich.

Neumann, Michael D., Zion's, Mission/St. John, Witten, S.D.

Neyhart, Steven W., St. Paul, North Platte, Neb.

Prange, Peter M., Good Shepherd, Jacksonville, Fla.

Roecker, Eric S., Resurrection, Virginia Beach, Va.

Schmidt, Stephen J., Ascension, Jacksonville, N.C.

Schroeder, Stephen P., Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

Schuler, Paul T., Mountain View, Great Falls, Mont.

Schulz, Marcus L., Christ the Redeemer, Barre, Vt.

Skorzewski, James R., Cutler Ridge, Miami, Fla.

Tomhave, Douglas C., exploratory outreach, Verona, Wis.

Vannieuwenhoven, Charles D., St. Paul, North Mankato, Minn.

Wegner, Paul L., missionary to Lilongwe, Malawi, Africa

Wendland, Robert E., Redemption, Milwaukee, Wis.

Zietlow, Jonathan P., Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

Let your
light shine

Wonderful examples of people who live their faith often cross our desks. But, because they don't qualify as "news," we don't run them. We decided to change that. So in the spirit of Matthew 5:16, we'll share some of these stories—and maybe they'll give you some new ideas on letting your light shine.

Jim Langebartels, pastor at Christ, Imlay City, Mich., sent us this letter. His son John, a student at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., received the letter in February.

Hello John,

Let me introduce myself. My name is Josephine Kocjan or "Jo." Pastor Ken Fisher of Risen Savior, Milwaukee, has suggested that members write letters of encouragement to students at Martin Luther College.

I've lived in Milwaukee most of my life, and have a husband, children and grandchildren. My "churchly" activity consists of volunteering at Risen Savior's pre-school, which keeps me in touch with young children, as my grandchildren are grown up.

In view of the current shortage of pastors—Risen Savior being an example, we have been without a permanent pastor since August—it is

important to encourage you young men. I'm sure this time of year can be especially difficult. Spring seems so far away. But, it is apparent you have been especially blessed with the will and intelligence to succeed in your called mission.

So hang in there—you will be richly blessed in service to your calling to the Lord. I'm enclosing a small gift—I was going to bake some cookies, but I suspect money is better.

Best wishes for your future,

Jo Kocjan

Send your examples to 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; <nl@sab.wels.net>.

There still is work to do

Indonesia. A land of 200 million people—10 percent of whom are Christian.

There is much work to do.

But for now that work will have to wait—at least for the Reid family.

In May, Pieter and Marlys Reid and their four children, the only WELS expatriate missionary family in Indonesia, left because of political and economic unrest.

“The mission will go on whether we’re there or not,” said Pieter. “But I pray that we’re able to return and work with the national pastors and the church in Indonesia as they prepare to stand on their own.”



The WELS members evacuated from Indonesia. Back row (l to r): Jennifer, Jonathan, Pieter, Matthew, and Michelle Reid. Front row (l to r): Marlys Reid, Kathy Uhlhorn, Stephanie Hopf, Cherie Wehausen.

Getting out

Indonesia suffered unrest since late 1997, but on May 12 it escalated. An increase in fuel and electricity costs and the shooting of six students at a demonstration caused riots among the Indonesians. Stores were looted and burned. People were killed.

“Everything happened so fast. The demonstrations were on Tuesday. Then the rioting started. The message from the embassies was to stay home. That was for Tuesday through Thursday. Then on Friday they were saying ‘Get out,’” said Pieter.

And so the Reids got out. They tried leaving Friday night on an embassy flight, but there wasn’t room. After getting to bed at 3 AM, they got a call two and a half hours later saying they could leave that morning. They left within the hour.

“We told the children, ‘You can have one bag and one carry-on. If there’s anything that’s going to break your heart to leave behind, take it.’” said Marlys.

Three other WELS members, Stephanie Hopf, Kathy Uhlhorn, and Cherie Wehausen, were also evacuated. They taught at a private Christian school outside of Jakarta.

“We called off school Wednesday afternoon. We left the kids saying,

‘We’ll see you tomorrow,’ and that never happened,” said Hopf.

They left that Saturday—after a bus ride with military escort through Jakarta, five hours at the embassy, eight hours at the airport, and two hours on the plane before takeoff.

“It just stopped raining as we were being evacuated,” said Hopf. “Then we saw a rainbow. It was a wonderful reminder of God’s promise.”

Going back

Seeing riots. Escaping in the middle of the night. Leaving personal belongings, your home, your friends and co-workers. And wanting to go back. What kind of people are these?

“It’s not that we’re some kind of heroes,” said Pieter. “The real heroes are the Indonesian Christians who are still there. They’re the ones carrying on the Lord’s work in that country.”

Gereja Lutheran Indonesia numbers over 300 members in 12 congregations. Six national pastors, two evangelists, and four vicars minister to the people.

“It’s a great group of people,” said Pieter. “In a country where it’s illegal to initiate a conversation about your faith, they live a life of faith.”

And they’re more than a great group of people to the Reids and the teachers. That’s why they hope to go

back by August. But that’s not soon enough.

“I’d go back tomorrow because that is home and the people are our family,” said Marlys.

And there still is much work to do.

For more information about our mission in Indonesia, watch the September WELS Connection.

“It was a riot”

That’s how many feel about their high school years. For the seniors of the International School of Indonesia, however, it took on a different meaning. Their graduation service was canceled because of the riots. Jonathan Reid, son of Pieter and Marlys Reid, was one of those seniors.

But he didn’t miss his graduation. Because more than half of the seniors and their families were first evacuated to Singapore, the parents held a graduation ceremony there. They borrowed gowns and printed diplomas (with a picture of the school mascot—a dragon—riding a scooter and carrying a suitcase in “evacuation mode”) and T-shirts. The front had “Jakarta International School—Graduation 1998,” with a line through it. The back had the following in large letters: “It was a riot.”

Witnessing through the Web

The World Wide Web is giving Christians more opportunities to reach out with the gospel.

Linda R. Baacke

All around the world, people are logging on to the World Wide Web to find something, anything, that interests them—instantly. And with this instant technology, comes an audience of thousands—maybe millions—who haven't heard of Jesus or don't believe in him.

This gives WELS members yet another way to share the gospel. To see how WELS is using technology to God's glory, log on to <www.wels.net>.

Connecting to Christ

The WELS Web site has two goals. The first, and most important, is to connect all people—believers and unbelievers—to Christ. Bible studies, devotions, daily prayers, and explanations on Christian beliefs help do that.

Here's how it has worked.

Youssef Boshra, an Egyptian man, has been living in Canada for 17 years. Formerly of the Coptic church, he wanted a church whose teachings and practice were based on God's Word, not mixed with tradition.

As he searched for a church that held to the truth, he visited a dozen churches in the Ottawa area. No church had what he was looking for. Then he searched the Internet. He came across the WELS Web site and found "This We Believe."

He liked what he read and then looked for a church affiliated with WELS. That's when he visited St. Paul, Ottawa.

Pastor Roger Knepprath met with Boshra. They covered the Adult Information Class, which is 20 sessions long, in three meetings. "He was committed to the truth. Then he committed to our church because we held to the truth," says Knepprath.

Boshra has been a member for one year now. "He's extremely active. He's been quite a thrill, a shot in the arm for his enthusiasm for outreach," says Knepprath.

But Boshra has not only shared his faith with those around him. He has also served WELS by translating materials into Arabic. And now his membership has come full circle. From visiting the church because of a Web site, Boshra has offered to design a Web site for the church.

Gina Kern, now a member at Holy Scripture, Fort Wayne, Ind., was also introduced to WELS through the Web site.

"From the time I began a comparison between my former denomination and Lutheranism I found the site especially informative," says Kern. "The more I read, the more questions I had and was able to get answers from Pastor Golm."

On Christmas 1997, she joined Holy Scripture. "This wonderful morning came about because of discoveries I made on this WELS site and through the willingness of my



pastor to answer an unending string of questions.

"The site is a valuable tool for study both of WELS and of the truths given to us in Scripture. It has been such a wonderful resource for me, and I have shared it with many people."

Keeping in touch

The site's second goal is to keep synod members in touch. Areas of ministry offer information and resources to WELS members. Call reports, news, mission stories, and links to WELS-related sites help members stay informed.

The site also offers opportunities to share your faith. After all, the site may touch people's lives, but it doesn't replace the need for personal contact. Once people exit the WELS home page, we need to invite them to enter the church—our home. Though the WELS site has led people to our churches, it's the congregation that shares the Word of God that keep visitors coming back.

NL

Linda Baacke is the senior communications assistant for Communication Services and Northwestern Lutheran.



The current WELS Web site premiered one year ago. Look how we've grown since then.

	May 97	May 98
Average hits per day	11,843	32,441
Call reports	5,554	14,433
Q & A	452	2,475
Bible studies	481	965
Devotions	418	530

Here's what people are saying:

"I am most impressed with your use of Internet technology. My compliments to everyone involved. It looks attractive and eye-catching. WELS is in the 21st century! Congratulations!"

"I particularly like the interactive nature of the Web site—Bible studies, viewers questions, lessons, etc. Keep up the good work."

"Thank you for sharing this Web site with us. It is very helpful, and I'm glad that there is someone out there who wants to tell the love of Jesus, even on the Internet."

"A BEAUTIFUL site!!! . . . and I never thought that a computer could bring ANY amount of joy!"

"Super Web page! I'm trying to use it daily. An outstanding mission/outreach tool for our synod. Stand by for the Holy Spirit to encourage hundreds to hear God's Word."

"What a wonderful way to feed Jesus' lambs! Children are especially fascinated by computers, and this is an innovative way to spread the Word. Thank you for this Web site!"

YOUTH NEWS

Pack it in, pack it out

If you want to plan a meaningful family program that unites grade school children, high schoolers, and their parents it might be considered impossible in the '90s.

Not so on the Appalachian Trail. Each year the Bay Pines, Seminole, Fla., pioneer program culminates with a weeklong hike for boys and girls on the Appalachian Trail in Georgia and North Carolina. We walk a 40-mile segment with a pack bearing a week's worth of food, clothes, medicine, tent, and sleeping bag. The more advanced hikers tackle 100 miles!

I've seen parents and their kids do more talking in this one week than they do in a year. Each meal is a community ritual of boiling water on the open fire for instant meals, muffin contests on the coals, and a cup of coffee or hot chocolate to take the chill out of the night air.

After supper, hikers take turns planning, preparing, and presenting the evening devotion. Some of the most heartfelt expressions of faith from God's saints and thoughtful, loving prayers have been delivered in the twilight of a Georgian sunset.

Later we may have a sing-along featuring silly camp songs, rounds, or hymns. Other nights we enjoy charades or a card game by flashlight. The final night we each share what the trail has meant to us. Many speak of friendships made, difficulties overcome, and the accomplishment of doing something often thought impossible.

But the week does even more than exercise a few muscles. When Christians invite their friends to try the trail, it provides a golden opportunity in God's creation to speak of deeper matters. Our congregation has grown in membership because of evangelism practiced on the hike.

Burning holey socks, tripping on rocks, and snatching edible food from the ground within the first 30 seconds it falls, may not be your idea of a fun-filled week. But come July you will find 40 or more of us, young and old, packing it in, and packing it out, walking the Appalachian Trail.

David Priebe



Members of the Bay Pines, Seminole, Fla., pioneer program enjoy an after-dinner treat. Each year, their pioneer program culminates with a 40-mile hike on the Appalachian Trail.



Synodical Council meets

After an intensive planning session, the Synodical Council revised the WELS Mission Objectives Vision (MOV) statement and pledged to use it as a guide in their work.

The proposed version will be presented to the 1999 synod convention for approval.

At their April meeting in Milwaukee, various Synodical Council committees also conducted the following business:

- The Budget Committee released non-budgetary funds for student assis-

tance and adjusted the 1998-99 budget to include seed money for the 150th anniversary celebration.

- The Human Resources Committee began addressing funding and benefits of the Pension Fund. The committee also is gathering information to help develop future levels of compensation for called workers.
- The Strategic Planning Committee adopted the Outreach Opportunity Grants guidelines (see June NL, p. 23). After discussing the WELS 150th anniversary celebration,

members acknowledged that the possible projects funded by anniversary's thank offering are in the planning stages and will be taken to the 1999 synod convention for approval.

- The Support Services Committee released non-budgetary funds for world mission projects.

Coming next month: the proposed MOV statement.

District News

South Atlantic

In May, St. John's, Antigua, celebrated **Veronica Abraham's** 10th anniversary as a teacher. She was the first local worker to be called to share in the ministry at St. John's.

Southeastern Wisconsin

At Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary on Apr. 26, Professor **Richard Balge** celebrated his 40th anniversary in the ministry. . . . **Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wis.**, dedicated a new school wing/fellowship hall on Feb. 22. A new gymnasium, classrooms, and learning center were added. With the growing suburban area, many in the community have expressed interest in the new facilities.



Fred and Catherine Plichta celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary by reaffirming their vows at St. Paul the Apostle, Detroit, Mich. Ninety-year-old retired pastor Carl Miller (left), who 50 years earlier officiated at the Plichta's wedding, renewed their vows.

Five greatest blessings bestowed upon WELS in the past five years

1. WELS has remained true to God's Word
2. WELS has numerous outreach opportunities
3. WELS is rich in resources
4. WELS is blessed with strong educational systems
5. WELS rejoices in adult spiritual growth

Five most critical vulnerabilities of WELS as we approach the year 2000

1. Youth retention/family breakdowns
2. Ministerial education/manpower needs
3. Reluctance to any change
4. Doctrinal issues
5. Not enough focus on the lost

Five most compelling opportunities to be seized by WELS as we approach and enter the 21st century

1. Outreach (cross-cultural)
2. Use our educational heritage better
3. Use of technology
4. Laity usage (universal priesthood)
5. Transfer of wealth

Five greatest challenges that face WELS as we approach and enter the 21st century

1. To be faithful to God's Word while still being aggressive with his Word
2. Mobilize priesthood/more laity involvement
3. Education to meet today's and tomorrow's changing needs
4. Use of technology
5. Total trust in the Word

Sixth-graders compete in Bible challenge

Congregations in Wisconsin reviewed Sunday school lessons and got to know each other better—all at the same time.

The first annual sixth-grade Bible challenge was held Apr. 26 at Zion, Peshtigo, Wis. Five teams from area WELS congregations competed.

The challenge was styled after the game show "Jeopardy." Players chose

a category and the point value and then needed to come up with the correct question. Questions were based on materials covered in the past year's Sunday school classes. To keep the contest as fair as possible, a regular rotation was followed, and the others could answer questions only after a contestant was unable to answer or answered incorrectly.

The idea originated with Sunday school teachers Nancy Larsh and Vicki Lange, who developed the rules and the board for the game.

The rules are available from Zion, 221 S Ellis Ave, Peshtigo WI 54157.

Arthur Callies

A process, not a program

Even though the 1998-99 stewardship emphasis, *We are family under God*, is a three-week program, its emphasis will be on stewardship as a process, not as a program.

"Stewardship is part of our life as a Christian," said Bruce Becker, Commission on Adult Discipleship administrator. "A program puts the emphasis on stewardship, but stewardship doesn't stop after three weeks."

We are family under God offers a broad range of tools to address the issues of stewardship. Bible studies, sermon outlines, worship resources, and event planners are available on hard copy and computer diskette.

A new feature this year is customized home devotions. These 28 devotions—available with different applications for singles, seniors, couples, and couples with children—work to get people to continue home Bible study after the stewardship program is over.

Bible studies include the 1997 synod convention Bible studies plus one that deals with family financial planning—how we manage what God has given to us.

To order, contact the Commission on Adult Discipleship, 414/256-3278 or 1-800-567-8669; <usr8@sab.wels.net>.

Governor's wife reads to WELS students

Michelle Engler, wife of Michigan's governor, was a guest reader to the second grade at Emanuel, Lansing, Mich., on March 10. She read *The Tale of the Three Trees* to the students and then answered their questions in a mini-press conference.

Engler's visit was part of Reading Month in Jane Neils' classroom. She was just one of a whole month of readers, including the news anchor-woman from the local television station, the chief judge of District Court, a Michigan State University vice president, as well as the school princi-

pal, Ronald Zahn. Among the readers was also the Big Bad Wolf, in full dress costume, who told the true story of the three pigs.

For several years, Neils has used guest readers to teach her students the importance of reading. There's been one unexpected benefit of Neils' efforts. Sherri Jones, the news anchor, requested information about the school. She said she was so impressed with her visit that she will seriously consider enrolling her son when he is old enough.

John Vogt



Second-grade students at Emanuel, Lansing, Mich., listen as Michelle Engler, wife of Michigan's governor, visits their classroom. Engler read to them as part of "Reading Month" at the school.



God's design— up for grabs?

The National Academy of Science, saying creationism does not belong in public schools, has issued a guidebook for teaching evolution.

The guidebook offers advice on how to discuss evolution and answer questions—including those from parents—about the controversial topic.

“We are finding that more teachers are reluctant to teach about this central idea,” said academy president Bruce Alberts. “Our hope is that this will help them.”

American scientists have long contended that public schools should bar talk of creationism because they consider it a religious concept not supported by scientific evidence. Yet this comes at a time when many Christians want schools to give the same credibility to creationism as they do to evolution.

School districts are not required to accept the academy's advice, but the academy's guidebook may encourage educators who want to teach evolution.

Academy officials said they are not attempting to discredit religious beliefs. They do not see the contradiction between believing in God and accepting evolution.

The guide concentrates on how life forms evolved over time, rather than the questions of how the process first began. “That one is still up for grabs,” said Alberts, the academy president.

CONGREGATION MISSION SUBSCRIPTION PERFORMANCE

Three Months Ended March 31, 1998

	Total Subscription		Offerings Received				
	Communicants 12/31/97	1998	Year to Date Projected	March Offerings	Three Months Offerings	Percent of Subscrptn	Annld Ave Per Commun
Arizona-California	17,110	\$1,025,567	\$204,749	\$84,137	\$194,399	94.9%	\$45.45
Dakota-Montana	9,195	429,512	65,933	28,779	60,625	91.9	26.37
Michigan	36,777	2,129,606	404,678	174,124	393,439	97.2	42.79
Minnesota	43,636	2,385,271	392,960	144,438	384,341	97.8	35.23
Nebraska	10,334	590,248	94,035	41,989	96,320	102.4	37.28
North Atlantic	3,831	321,867	71,159	38,295	78,084	109.7	81.53
Northern Wisconsin	61,019	2,513,989	413,349	146,422	472,555	114.3	30.98
Pacific Northwest	5,067	264,918	54,849	25,276	50,047	91.2	39.51
South Atlantic	6,661	467,354	106,999	45,176	109,560	102.4	65.79
South Central	4,531	416,738	89,803	32,108	78,731	87.7	69.50
Southeastern Wisconsin	57,563	3,334,263	532,670	189,446	499,226	93.7	34.69
Western Wisconsin	59,631	3,058,170	522,641	219,272	495,752	94.9	33.25
Total - This Year	315,355	16,937,503	2,953,825	1,169,462	2,913,079	98.6	36.95
Total - Last Year	315,377	16,765,951	2,936,158	1,153,733	2,863,565	97.5	36.32

CURRENT BUDGETARY FUND

Statement of activities/Nine months ended March 31

	1998 Actual	1997 Actual	1998 Budget
Changes in Unrestricted Net Assets			
Revenues:			
Congregational Mission Offerings	\$ 12,495,711	\$12,205,712	\$12,321,000
Gifts and memorials	4,251,694	3,775,906	4,223,000
Bequest/planned giving	344,424	806,256	704,000
Tuition and fees	7,206,461	6,661,457	6,705,000
Other	214,244	219,613	140,000
Transfers-endwmt/trust earnings	231,347	219,496	207,000
Transfers-gift trust	6,529,818	5,763,249	6,569,000
Transfers-continuing programs	2,956,358	2,602,990	3,165,000
Transfers-other	20,060	20	-
<i>Total revenues</i>	<u>34,250,117</u>	<u>32,154,699</u>	<u>34,034,000</u>
Expenditures:			
Home Missions	6,676,397	5,381,624	7,079,000
World Missions	5,887,993	5,999,403	6,795,000
Ministerial Education	15,739,750	14,157,173	15,538,000
Parish Services	1,145,928	1,020,275	1,292,000
Administrative Services	3,815,140	3,536,897	4,288,000
<i>Total expenditures</i>	<u>33,265,208</u>	<u>30,095,372</u>	<u>34,992,000</u>
<i>Changes in unrestricted net assets</i>	984,909	2,059,327	
Changes in Temp Restricted Net Assets			
Gifts and memorials	90,800	93,645	
Bequest/planned giving	(31,000)	27,702	
Change in value of trust agreements	(27,800)	(44,759)	
Satisfaction of restrictions	(2,085,000)	(2,510,644)	
<i>Total revenues</i>	<u>(2,053,000)</u>	<u>(2,434,056)</u>	
<i>Change in temp restricted net assets</i>	<u>(2,053,000)</u>	<u>(2,434,056)</u>	
<i>Net assets - beginning of year</i>	<u>5,909,760</u>	<u>5,109,960</u>	
<i>Net assets - end of period</i>	<u>4,841,669</u>	<u>4,735,231</u>	

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	March 31, 1998	March 31, 1997
Assets:		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 2,610,855	\$ 3,119,130
Due from other funds	30,072	40,207
Accounts receivable-cash adv.	106,250	101,750
Other accounts receivable	48,657	141,548
Contributions receivable	3,211,827	2,263,211
Mortgage note receivable	15,901	17,790
Allowance for doubtful accts	(92,000)	(92,000)
Prepaid expenses	4,425	16,862
<i>Total assets</i>	<u>5,935,987</u>	<u>5,608,498</u>
Liabilities and Net Assets:		
Due to schools	973,613	659,331
Accounts payable	120,705	213,936
<i>Total liabilities</i>	<u>1,094,318</u>	<u>873,267</u>
Unrestricted	1,629,842	2,472,020
Temp restricted	3,211,827	2,263,211
<i>Total net assets</i>	<u>4,841,669</u>	<u>4,735,231</u>
<i>Total liab. and net assets</i>	<u>5,935,987</u>	<u>5,608,498</u>

James C. Huska, Treasurer

Who owns you?

Most Americans believe in God or a higher power, but fewer believe their God or higher power has absolute primacy in their lives. Nevertheless, the percentage who say their life belongs to God or a higher power exceeds those who choose family, community, or self.

Which of these four statements best describes your beliefs?

My life belongs to:

God or a higher power	_____	56%
My family	_____	20%
Myself	_____	18%
To the community around me	_____	2%
Don't know/no answer	_____	4%
Total	_____	100%

The results are from a 1997 survey by The George H. Gallup International Institute.

Presbyterians ratify full communion with the ELCA

An unofficial tally of votes by presbyteries—local governing units—of the Presbyterian Church (USA) shows that enough of them have voted in favor of full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to bring the agreement into effect.

As of March 11, 88 of the 172 presbyteries had voted to approve the agreement—two more than the majority necessary—bringing to completion 36 years of theological dialogue and increasing cooperation between these denominations.

According to the ELCA, a festival worship service will be held on Oct. 4 to formally declare the Lutherans, Presbyterians, and two other Reformed

denominations—the Reformed Church in America and the United Church of Christ—in full communion.

Last summer, the four denominations all approved “A Formula of Agreement,” which outlines their shared views on key theological issues. The agreement allows pastors to preach in these churches and all denominational members to receive Holy Communion in each other’s congregations.

WELS does not share this accord because there is not doctrinal agreement between the Lutherans and the Reformed on such teachings as the sacraments. —ed.

Church can keep donations of bankrupt couple

A court in Minneapolis ruled that a Minnesota church may keep money given by a couple who shortly thereafter declared bankruptcy.

The couple, Bruce and Nancy Young, gave tithes—10 percent of their income—to the Crystal Evangelical Free Church in New Hope, Minn., between February 1991 and February 1992. The couple filed for bankruptcy in 1992.

Some groups had wanted the church to return the money in order to help cover the couple’s debt.

Religious groups active in church-state relations called the victory an important one for religious freedom. But they also said a law is still needed that applies to the states.

Legislation is currently pending in both the U.S. House and Senate to amend the bankruptcy code to prevent creditors from suing churches to confiscate offerings received in good faith from parishioners who later go bankrupt.

Did you know . . .

In Pakistan, blasphemy against the Islam religion has been punishable by death since 1986. Islam sees blasphemy as serious a crime as treason.

Although no one has been executed under the Pakistan law, mobs have slain some of those who have been accused or convicted of blasphemy. According to reports, some 200 Christians are imprisoned in Pakistan on blasphemy charges.

Christians comprise just two percent of Muslim Pakistan’s more than 140 million people.

CHANGE IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Bernthal, Thomas J., from Christ the Redeemer, Barre, Vt., to Peace, Tucson, Ariz.

Crass, Matthew A., from St. Peter, Weyauwega, Wis., to LPS, Watertown, Wis.

Ewings, Brian E., from Rock of Ages, Kansas City, Mo., to Grace, Hutchinson, Minn.

Gerlach, Joel C., from St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis., to retirement

Henning, Philip M., from Our Savior, Two Rivers, Wis., to Trinity, Jenera, Ohio

Schreiner, Keith W., from St. John, Westland, Mich., to Christ, Marshall, Minn.

Snyder, Peter J., from Prince of Peace, Howell, Mich., to Beautiful Savior, College Station, Tex.

Steinbrenner, Eric E., from St. Paul, Menomonie, Wis., to St. Paul, Livonia, Mich.

Tessmer, Charles L., from St. John, Mukwonago, Wis., to retirement

Tessmer, Paul C., from Good Shepherd, Omaha, Neb., to Zion, Winthrop, Minn.

Thierfelder, Paul E., from Beautiful Savior, Green Bay, Wis., to Shoreland LHS, Somers, Wis.

Thomford, Joel W., from Immanuel, Willmar, Minn., to Zion, Chesaning, Mich.

Warning, Gregg M., from Immanuel, Tyler, Minn., to Zion, Tyler-13NE, Minn.

Teachers:

Banbury, Kathryn A., to St. John, Watertown, Wis.

Bilitz, Matthew P., to Wisconsin LHS, Milwaukee

Brandt, James A., from Crete, Crete, Ill., to St. Mark, Citrus Heights, Calif.

Buelow, Ronald A., from Shoreland LHS, Somers, Wis., to Bethany Lutheran College (ELS), Mankato, Minn.

Campbell, John D., from Ascension, Escondido, Calif., to California LHS, Wildomar

Dretske, James L., from St. Paul, Saginaw, Mich., to St. John, New Ulm, Minn.

Eggers, Kris A., to St. Paul, Menomonie, Wis.

Emmrich, Beth A., from St. Paul, Cudahy, Wis., to Morning Star, Jackson, Wis.

Freudenwald, Kathryn, from St. Matthew, Janesville, Wis., to Gloria Dei-Bethesda, Milwaukee

Hughes, Linda L., to St. John, Waterloo, Wis.

Jensen, Vicki L., from Lincoln Heights, Belmont, Calif., to St. Paul, Algoma, Wis.

Kahrs, Mark A., from Crown of Life, Hubertus, Wis., to St. Lucas, Kewaskum, Wis.

Kaiser, Jill M., to Prince of Peace, Salt Lake City, Utah

Kasten, Kenneth C., from Good Shepherd, Benton Harbor, Mich., to Trinity, Marinette, Wis.

Knicker, Julie A., from St. John, Stanton, Neb., to St. John, Burlington, Wis.

Kruschel, Linda, to St. John, Redwood Falls, Minn.

Lochner, Debbie, to Salem, Stillwater, Minn.

Meyer, Lance, from Immanuel, Waukegan, Ill., to Bethany, Fort Atkinson, Wis.

Neujahr, Jane E., from Emanuel, New London, Wis., to California LHS, Wildomar

Nolan, Krystal K., to Salem, Owosso, Mich.

Proeber, Jill M., to St. Matthew, Janesville, Wis.

Qualman, Nancy A., to St. Matthew, Iron Ridge, Wis.

Roloff, Jeffrey L., from Bethany, Manitowoc, Wis., to Good Shepherd, Sioux Falls, S.D.

Schroeder, Elroy J., from St. Peter, Fond du Lac, Wis., to retirement

Smart, Carolyn M., from St. Paul, Livonia, Mich., to retirement

Strutz, Paul W., from St. Paul, Mt. Calvary, Wis., to Zion, Columbus, Wis.

Bulletin BOARD & NOTICES

To place an announcement, call 414/256-3210;

FAX, 414/256-3899; <nl@sab.wels.net>

Deadline is six weeks before publication date.

Thiesfeldt, Gregory D., from Faith, Fond du Lac, Wis., to Evergreen LHS, Des Moines, Wash.

Waage, Lance D., from Trinity, Marshfield, Wis., to St. John, Maribel, Wis.

Wickert, Roger H., from Trinity, Marshfield, Wis., to Mt. Calvary, Waukesha, Wis.

REQUEST FOR COLLOQUY

Rev. Kenneth D. Bartelt, Exeter, Calif., formerly a pastor of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, has requested a colloquy for the purpose of entering the pastoral ministry of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Correspondence related to this request should be addressed to President Marcus Nitz, Arizona-California District, 13741 Newhope St, Garden Grove CA 92643.

The synod administration building will close: July 3—Independence Day. Callers may leave voice mail messages, 414/256-3888.

ANNIVERSARIES

Campbellsport, Wis.—Immanuel (75). July 12—service, 10:15 AM; picnic follows. Call to attend dinner. JoAnn Maedke, 920/477-2806.

Sheridan Township, Minn.—St. John (110). July 12. Services, 10:30 AM & 2 PM; meal, noon. Call for reservations. 507/734-5101.

Goodwin, S.D.—St. Peter (100). July 12. Services, 11 AM & 2:30 PM; lunch, noon. RSVP for lunch. 605/756-4260.

New Ulm, Minn.—St. John (50). July 26. Service, 9:30 AM at Martin Luther College auditorium; dinner, 11:30 AM. Call to attend dinner, 507/354-6744.

Burke, S.D.—Grace (75). Aug. 16. Services, 10:30 AM & 2 PM. 605/775-2462

Manchester, Wis.—St. Paul (125). Aug. 16—service, 10 AM; picnic follows. 920/398-2885.

Helenville, Wis.—St. Peter (150). Aug. 23—services, 8 & 9:45 AM; picnic follows. 920/674-3307.

Chesaning, Mich.—Zion (125). Aug. 23—Christian education (school's 15th anniversary). Services, 8 & 10 AM; pig roast follows. 517/845-3006.

Alexandria, Minn.—St. Paul (30). Aug. 23. Service, 9:30 AM; meal follows. 320/762-1644.

Slinger, Wis.—St. Paul (125). Aug. 30—outdoor service, 9 AM; picnic follows. Call to attend dinner. 414/644-8890.

COMING EVENTS

Lutheran Vanguard of Wisconsin 1998 performances, 920/269-4729

July 3—Colorado Springs; July 4—Greeley, Colo., 9 AM; July 6—Casper, Wyo., 8 PM; July 7—Casper, Wyo., 10 AM; July 8—Mt. Rushmore, 7 PM; July 9—Wall, S.D., 10 AM; July 10—Great Plains LHS, Watertown, S.D.; July 11—St. Cloud, Minn.; 10 AM; July 12—Litchfield, Minn., 1 PM.

OWLS convention—July 7-9, Paper Valley Hotel, Appleton, Wis. 6420 W Beloit Rd, West Allis WI 53227; 414/321-9977.

Church dedication—St. John, Christie, Wis. July 12. Services, 10:30 AM & 2 PM; pig roast, noon. Six miles north of Neillsville on Hwy 73. Kevin Hanke, 715/743-2480; Duane Boon, 715/743-4873.

Special education seminar—Special Ministries in Lutheran Education religious training seminar, July 24-26 at Holiday Inn West, Madison, Wis. Bruce Cuppan, 920/929-4232.

Women's retreat—WELS/ELS summer ladies retreat. July 17-19, Woodlands Lutheran Camp, Montverde, Fla. Judy Becker, 941/355-6591.

Workshop—Managing your ministry. 8 AM to noon, Aug. 4. Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis. \$50 per school. Hosted by the La Crosse area Lutheran grade schools principals' conference. David Niemi, 608/784-1050 or 608/782-1110.

AVAILABLE

Church furniture—New oak altar and pulpit. Free for cost of shipping. Paula Roberts, 920/743-1197.

Electric organ—Lowrey. Solid-state. Full-range keyboard. Free to a church or school for cost of shipping. 715/359-7883.

Hymnals—*The Lutheran Hymnal*. Over 200 available. Free for cost of shipping. Lord of Love, De Forest, Wis. Mike Wilson, 608/285-4562 or the church, 608/846-9036.

Ride—charter bus to youth rally in Wheaton, Ill. July 28-31. Seats available for pickup along I-94 corridor. Stop at Chicago. Pastor Bob Knippel, Redeemer, Rice Lake, Wis.; 715/234-2412.

Pen pals—Sunday school or Lutheran elementary school students can connect with WELS Christians in a safe, age-appropriate environment. Give phone number and e-mail to Jerry Kastens, CYD administrator, 414/256-3224; <gkcyd@sab.wels.net>

Organ—organ and speakers. Free for cost of shipping. New Salem, Sebawaing, Mich. 517/883-2062 or 517/883-3880.

NAMES WANTED

Fort Knox/Radcliff/Elizabethtown, Ky.—Faith, 549 N Wilson Rd, Radcliff KY 40160; 502/352-4545; <faithlutheran@bluegrass.net>

NEEDED

Furnishings—furniture, hymnals, desks, bookshelves, filing cabinets, fireproof safe. For Grace (ELS), Hobart, Ind. Frederic Lams, 1031 Hickey St, Hobart IN 46342; 219/942-0836.

Preacher—Use of parsonage in exchange for preaching in Portland, Maine during its pastoral vacancy. Kieth Kuschel, 203/378-1270.

SERVICE TIMES

Eagle River, Wis.—Visiting Wisconsin's Northwoods this summer? Worship at Christ. Sunday, 8 & 10:15 AM; Saturday, 7 PM. 3rd and Spruce Sts, Eagle River WI 54521; 715/479-8307.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Director of Operations—The Lutheran Home Association, Belle Plaine, Minn. Responsibilities: direct company's administrators, establish policies, evaluate operating results of locations, long and short-term goal and budget planning, develop marketing and quality assurance plans with local administrators. Send resume to The Lutheran Home, Attn. Sue Wessin-Cradle, 611 W Main St, Belle Plaine MN 56011.

Development director—Thoughts of Faith, Inc. (ELS church-related organization focusing on mission work in Eastern Europe). Pastor David Meyer, Thoughts of Faith, Inc., PO Box 14502, Madison WI 53714; 608/243-3227.

INTER-ACT

Mark J. Lenz

"The word of God is living and active." Hebrews 4:12

Introduction

It has been said that if the besetting sin of youth is passion, and of old age avarice, then of middle age it is ambition. Do you agree?

None of these sins is necessarily limited to a particular age group. How might even young people be guilty of sinful ambition?

Being ambitious is not necessarily wrong. What makes it sinful?

Text

Read Matthew 20:20-28

²⁰Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

²¹"What is it you want?" he asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

²²"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered.

²³Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

²⁴When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. ²⁵Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—²⁸**just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**"

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are the one before whom every knee should bow. Yet you came, not to be served, but to serve and to give your life as the ransom price for all people. When I crave position, power, and prestige, satisfy me instead with the cup of suffering you came to drink on my behalf. When I delight in lording it over others, bring me to my knees to be a servant instead. Keep me from being jealous or envious of others. Fill me instead with a holy ambition to dedicate my life in service to others. Hear me for your mercy's sake. Amen.

Questions

1. The mother of James and John had asked Jesus to give her sons special positions in his kingdom (v. 21). How did Jesus gently correct their misunderstandings about his kingdom (vs. 22, 23)? "Drink the cup" means to experience suffering.
2. Why do you suppose the other disciples were indignant (v. 24)?
3. How did Jesus say his disciples could become great? How could they be first?
4. What evidence is there from Jesus' life that he did not come to be served, but to serve?
5. The word "ransom" refers to the price paid to redeem a slave in Bible times. In what sense were we slaves? What was the price Jesus paid to redeem us? (See 1 Timothy 2:5,6 and 1 Peter 1:18,19.)
6. The word "for" emphasizes Christ's death as a substitute, and the word "many" is used here in the inclusive sense of "all." What comfort do you, therefore, find in the words "for many?"

Application

1. There is such a thing as "sanctified" ambition. How would you define it? How might it demonstrate itself? How was the apostle John himself in later life an example?
2. What might sometimes cause church members to become indignant with one another?
3. How might you be asked to drink from Jesus' cup in your life?
4. Someone once defined authority as "lording it under" others. Discuss the adequacy of this definition.
5. Think of specific ways you can be a servant to others in your family, among your friends and acquaintances, at work, or at school. Why will you want to serve others—even if they take advantage of you because of it?
6. What does Christ's death as a substitute for all people have to say regarding the importance of mission work?

A last word

The Holy Spirit equips us for ministry, not at Sinai but through the gentle whisper of the gospel.

Mark E. Braun

“Elijah was a man just like us,” James wrote (5:17). God’s fearless mouthpiece, who poked a bony finger in Ahab’s face and announced, “It won’t rain until I say so”? That Old Testament champion, who challenged his spineless countrymen and bested the prophets of Baal? *He* was just like *us*?

Just like us

Yes, in more ways than we may recall. After his victorious showdown with Jezebel’s prophets, Elijah suffered the prototype case of ministerial burnout. He hightailed 300 miles into the Sinai desert, crawled under a broom tree, and prayed to die. “I am no better than my ancestors,” Elijah admitted. (Had he thought he was?) “I have had enough, Lord.”

That sounds more like us.

Or take James himself. Inspired apostle, pillar of the church, brother of our Lord—impressive titles, all. But then we remember James had not believed during Jesus’ lifetime, thought his brother was out of his mind, and tried to obstruct his ministry.

Does it surprise you that God chooses people just like us to do his work? What other kind of people does he have to choose from?

James wasn’t interested in making his readers more like Elijah, or like himself. The goal is to become more like Jesus.

More like them

What was the secret to Elijah’s success? **“He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops” (5:17,18).** Prayer connected him to the captain of the universe. Elijah couldn’t control the rain, but his God could. Maybe Elijah had hoped God would do something awesome at Sinai, as he’d done for Moses. Instead, the Lord came to Elijah in a gentle whisper.

James was changed when Jesus appeared to him after the resurrection, and on Pentecost the Holy Spirit empowered him for service. James could only concur

with Paul: “By the grace of God I am what I am.”

The empty grave assures us that the Lord Jesus lives, and because he lives we live too. The Holy Spirit equips us for ministry as well, not at Sinai (never at Sinai!) but through the gentle whisper of the gospel. We are linked to God in prayer just as powerfully as Elijah was.

The surprise isn’t that they were just like us; it’s that we can become more like them.

More like him

But of course James wasn’t interested in making his readers more like Elijah, or like himself. The goal is to become more like Jesus. **“Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way shall save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins” (5:20).** Jesus died to make us his brothers and sisters, and he calls us to be our brothers’ keepers.

After he restores us, Jesus builds the new self in us, “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). “And when he appears, we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2).

Mark Braun is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee.

real faith for real life
james

The Muslim challenge

Joel C. Gerlach

Thirty years ago basketball superstar, Lew Alcindor, surprised his fans by adopting the Muslim faith and changing his name to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. The three decades since then have seen the Muslim population grow to the point that now there are more Muslims than Jews in the United States. In Milwaukee, Muslims have established an impressive community center and school, Masjid Al-Quar'an.

"Western culture can learn much from Muslim values" is the title of an article in the influential magazine *Foreign Affairs*. Its author, Ali Mazrui, a faculty member at the State University of New York, observes that "of all the value systems in the world, Islam has been the most resistant to the leading destructive forces of the 20th century." The article is an invitation to non-Muslims to be less judgmental and more open-minded about Islam. Therein lies a challenge to Christians.

That challenge was underscored in an op-ed article in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* by staff writer Jamaal Abdul-Alim. After citing several examples of the contrast between an Islamic lifestyle and the loose living so prevalent in America, he wrote, "According to the Qur'an, God (Allah) considers faithful members of the Islamic community to be the 'best evolved for mankind, promoting what is right and forbidding what is wrong.' Perhaps this explains Muslims' sense of obligation to take control, not only over their own lives, but of the societies in which they live" (for instance in Saudi Arabia where Christians are not allowed to practice their faith or to gather for worship).

Abdul-Alim concludes, "Political dominance, however, is not the objective of establishing Islamic rule in any society.

The objective of establishing Islamic rule is to eliminate *fitnah* (temptation), and to make justice and faith in God prevalent throughout the land."

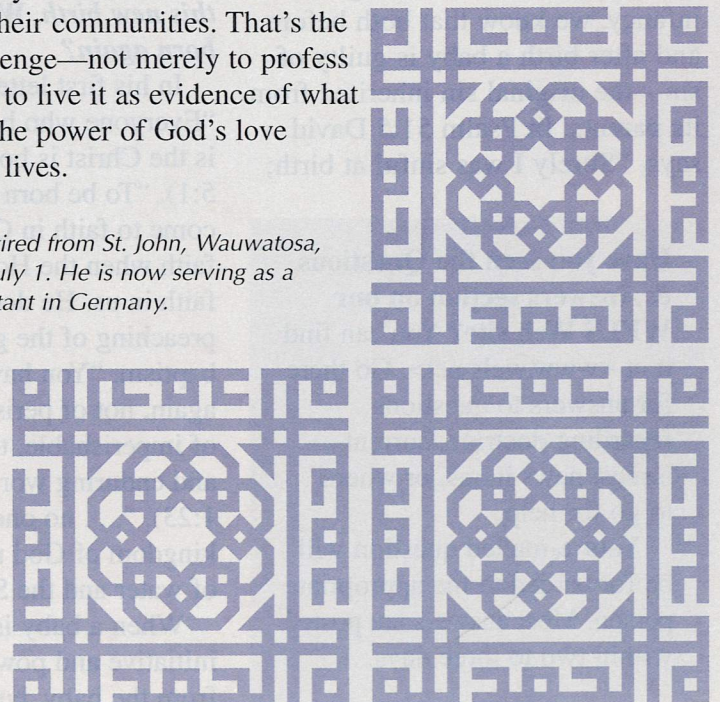
That's a classic example of a failure to understand the purpose of God's law. "Through the law we become conscious of sin," St. Paul informs us (Romans 3:20). The law does not change hearts. Only the gospel has the power to do that. Faith in God is the product of God's love in Christ, not of "establishing Islamic rule."

But having said that, we must admit that Muslims have a point when they expose the inconsistency between Americans' professed beliefs and "the extent to which Americans' religious beliefs do not manifest themselves in any socially relevant way."

Perhaps the rapid growth of Islam across the land is a wake-up call from God to Christians who seem to have forgotten that they are called to be salt and light within their communities. That's the Muslim challenge—not merely to profess our faith, but to live it as evidence of what a difference the power of God's love makes in our lives.

Joel Gerlach retired from St. John, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin on July 1. He is now serving as a chaplain's assistant in Germany.

*Faith in God is
the product of
God's love in
Christ, not of
"establishing
Islamic rule."*



Birth and sin and rebirth

John F. Brug

Psalm 19:13 says, "Keep your servant also from willful sins. . . . Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression." Am I correct in believing that before birth the child does not willfully sin and is innocent until he willfully sins against conscience?

When David claims innocence in Psalm 19, he is not claiming sinlessness. He is saying that as a believer who has not committed malicious sins that would lead to a fall from faith, he stands under the grace of God and has complete forgiveness. As a child of God he is innocent of any charges that Satan or his enemies could bring against him.

We assume that an unborn child does not commit sins, but we do not know this with certainty. Whether or not a child commits sins before birth and during infancy, we know that both before and after birth a baby is guilty of sin—the original sin inherited from its parents. In Psalm 51:5 David says, "Surely I was sinful at birth;

sinful from the time my mother conceived me."

We do not know how God deals with an unborn child. From special cases like John the Baptist (Luke 1:44), we know that God can work in an unborn child.

When we are born spiritually, the initiative and power do not come from us, but from God.

Because every child is guilty of sin already at birth emphasizes the importance of bringing babies to be baptized.

Some of my friends admonish me about the need for a new birth. The way they speak implies that I have to do something to receive this new birth. What do I do to be born again?

In his first letter John says, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1). "To be born again" means to come to faith in Christ. We come to faith when the Holy Spirit creates faith in us. He does this through the preaching of the gospel or through baptism. "You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:23). ". . . no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5).

When a baby is born, the initiative and power do not come from the baby, but from the mother.

When we are born spiritually, the initiative and power do not come from us, but from God.

Sometimes we hear people say, "Your part is to believe what God says and to receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior." This is misleading, since it implies that although God has done everything, your contribution is to believe. Our faith, however, is a gift from God. It is not our contribution to salvation.

It is true that God does not believe for us, but God does create faith in us. We do not come to faith by our own power, but by the power of God. We receive Christ the way we receive a gift. All the credit goes to the giver not to the receiver.

When we know people who need to be "born again" the thing not to do is to keep telling them how much they need to be born again. The thing to do is to tell them about their sin and their Savior—so that the Holy Spirit works faith in them through the gospel.

John Brug is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon.

Have you seen the Questions & Answers section on our WELS Web site? You can find it at <www.wels.net>. Go there for answers to questions regarding doctrine, current issues, news items, or where to go for help.

Your e-mailed question will be forwarded to the appropriate person. Most answers are posted within two to three days.

Send questions to Your question, please, *Northwestern Lutheran*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; <nl@sab.wels.net>

I really appreciate your "Exposing the darkness" series. Being a teenager, some of the subject matter you deal with can be very alluring. Thank you for exposing the truth about these dark and evil practices.

Joel Lauber
Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

I've begun reading *Northwestern Lutheran* again. I'm certainly glad I have. It is a fine, fine publication that offers so much in the line of spiritual insights and Christian perspectives on life in our times.

One piece I am particularly fond of is the "Through my Bible in 3 years" schedule. It helps me to maintain a steady and regular course of study of the Word. Plus, breaking it down into assignments for each calendar day makes the consumption of our Lord's Word a considerably more manageable task.

I have one complaint though. I'm ahead of schedule with no further direction until the next month's issue arrives! Could you please send me the three-year cycle in its entirety that I may continue at the pace I have attained?

Scotty Baron
West Bend, Wisconsin

The entire list of readings is available from our office. Contact us at 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; 414/256-3210; <nl@sab.wels.net>. You can also download the list from the "God's Word" area of the WELS Web site—<www.wels.net>. —ed.

God uses many paths to lead us to Jesus. Some of us are born into a Christian family. We have parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles who helped out with our Christian upbringing. Going to church on Sunday, with the family, was the "norm."

Others haven't had that opportunity. They look at their Christian friends with envy—just as a child without money looks through the window of the candy store. "Gee, I wish I had a family like that. I wish my dad wouldn't drink. I wish I could bring my friends home to a nice family. How could I ever have that?"

Who can satisfy the "hunger and thirst" in the child for what their Christian friends have? We know the answer—the Holy Spirit.

What can we do for that child? Let us encourage one another. Encourage your child to invite their unchurched friends to Sunday school. Are there children who do not have a ride? Offer to pick them up and bring them to Sunday school. Pray for your Sunday school that it may be a blessing to those who hunger and thirst for the Word.

Duane Anderson
Bay City, Michigan

Re: Your question, please. In May you said that when people die they go immediately to heaven or hell. Is this as spirits or souls? What about the body?

Glen Ullman

John Brug replies:

The souls of the departed go to heaven or hell immediately at death. The souls are reunited with the bodies at the resurrection that takes place on the Last Day.

Through my Bible
in 3 years

August 1998

1. Amos 6
2. Amos 7:1—8:3
3. Amos 8:4—9:15
4. Hosea 1, 2
5. Hosea 3
6. Hosea 4:1—5:14
7. Hosea 5:15—8:14
8. Hosea 9, 10
9. Hosea 11, 12
10. Hosea 13, 14
11. Psalms 13, 14
12. Psalms 15, 16
13. Psalms 17
14. Psalms 18:1-30
15. Psalms 18:31-50
16. Psalms 19
17. Psalms 20, 21
18. Psalms 22:1-21
19. Psalms 22:22-31
20. Psalms 23, 24
21. Psalms 25
22. Psalms 26
23. Psalms 27
24. Psalms 28, 29
25. 1 Thessalonians 1
26. 1 Thessalonians 2
27. 1 Thessalonians 3
28. 1 Thessalonians 4
29. 1 Thessalonians 5
30. 2 Thessalonians 1
31. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

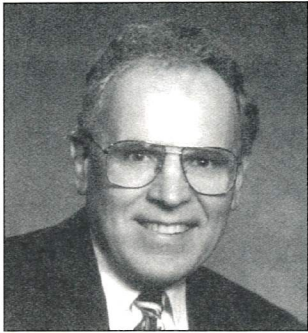
Peter the Barber once asked Martin Luther how he, an ordinary kind of guy, could read the Bible and benefit from it. Luther answered:

Ask yourself:

1. What does God tell me here?
2. What makes me glad?
3. What makes me sad?
4. What do I want to pray for?

Try it in your Bible reading.

The shroud is a shroud



Gary P. Baumlér is editor of Northwestern Lutheran and WELS Director of Communications.

Some think the shroud will help strengthen faith, maybe even prove the resurrection. In reality, it shrouds the gospel truth.

I'd like to see it sometime. Imagine, an ancient burial shroud that reveals the image of a man that includes bloodstains from his feet and wrists (once nailed to a cross?), from his side (by a spear?), head (from a thorny crown?), and back (from flogging?). From April 18 to June 11 this year, some three million people had their chance to see it, as the famed Shroud of Turin was once again put on public display.

Many believe the shroud is the actual linen cloth in which Jesus was buried after his crucifixion and the image somehow a result of the miracle of his resurrection. It is claimed that some of the earliest images of Christ have the same face as that on the shroud, and flower images on the shroud are identified as flowers from Jerusalem.

Others believe equally that the cloth is an elaborate fake from about 700 years ago. They have other scientific data on their side: carbon dating and evidence of a photographic process, known already then, that may have been used to produce the image.

Many questions swirl about the relic: Was the carbon dating flawed? Why would anyone go through the pains to produce the fake? Are there any other explanations for the mysterious image? Why will many believe the shroud is authentic, no matter what scientists say? What difference would it make if new scientific findings indicated the shroud could have come from the first century?

Good questions! But the answers for the most part are shrouded in obscurity, confusion, and controversy. The play on words is intended. Some think the shroud will help strengthen faith, maybe even prove the resurrection. In reality, it shrouds the gospel truth, hides the Word that saves in favor of a piece of cloth that cannot save anyone.

As one observer pointed out: even if the shroud proved authentic, it only reveals that the man wrapped in the shroud was dead.

Already the shroud shrouds the truth. It has frail believers looking for proof of what we can only know by faith through God's Word. It distracts people, sapping attention and energy, that might best be turned to spreading the Word and nurturing believers with it. For some the shroud becomes idol-like, an object set up for veneration and worship. For them it were better the shroud of Jesus had been left in his tomb and the Shroud of Turin never discovered.

If there were no shroud, however, the phenomenon that attracts three million persons in an eight-week period would not go away. If we didn't have the shroud, we'd invent one—something equally misleading. That little voice of the natural self in us keeps saying "Prove it" regarding the wonderful ways of God, and it spurs us to seek extra-biblical evidence to fall back on. If it's not the shroud, it's Jesus' cross; if not the cross, Jesus' robe—not to mention Noah's ark.

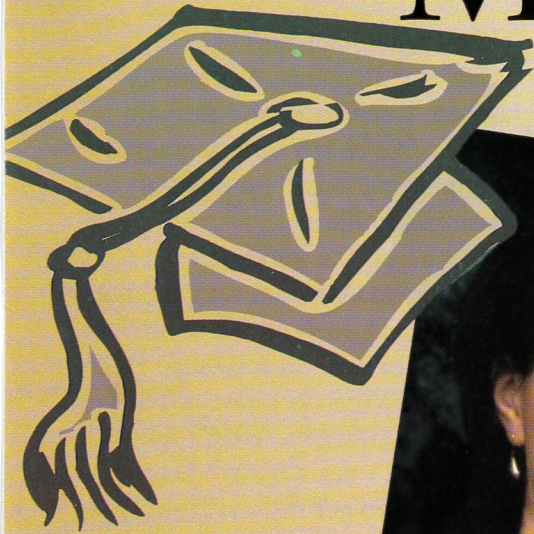
The problem is that we are more likely to trip over "scientific" evidences for faith than to be supported by them. The Holy Spirit has never worked through carbon dating or mysterious shrouds or photographic processes. And heaven help us if we base our faith on a scientific "truth" today, only to have the scientists restudy the matter and come up with a new "truth" tomorrow.

Only when we turn to God's truth in Jesus as revealed in Scripture is the shroud lifted.

Gary P. Baumlér

Going to College or Tech School?

WELS Campus Ministry is for you!



“Campus ministry is where I found friends who shared the same beliefs and values. My faith was strengthened by the Bible study, discussions, and examples of my peers. I found friends I will cherish the rest of my life, including my future husband!”

Jennifer Enter
Mankato State University
1995

WELS Campus Ministry offers you a chance to meet new Christian friends and to grow in faith and Christian service during the vital college years. Get your name on the student file and you will:

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- Get *Lightsource*, a periodical filled with ideas for spiritual growth.
- Learn about the regional and national campus gatherings.
- Get in touch with the church/campus ministry that serves your school.

Fill out the form below and return to:
WELS Campus Ministry— 2929 N. Mayfair Road
Milwaukee, WI 53222-4398

NAME:

Last _____
 First _____ Middle Initial _____
 Birth Date: ____/____/____
 Sex: Male Female
 Home Address:
 Street Address _____
 City, State, Zip _____
 E-Mail Address: _____
 Home Phone: _____
 Church Name (at home): _____
 Church Address:
 Street Address _____
 City, St, Zip _____
 Pastor: _____

COLLEGE INFORMATION:

College Name: _____
 College's Address:
 Street Address _____
 City, State, Zip _____
 Living with parents when college is in session?
 Yes No
 School Year: _____
 College Graduation Date: _____
 Program Major: _____
 Address while at School:
 Street Address _____
 City, State, Zip _____
 Phone No. while at school: _____

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Yes please send me my FREE subscription to *Northwestern Lutheran* and *Meditations*.

Getting up and flying

When we don't follow the instructions we create a mess. Only God can put it together for us.

Kenneth A. Cherney

Did you build model airplanes when you were a kid?

I tried. I really did. Not just because it was a guy thing. I did it mostly because I liked the finished products. I loved the sleek blue and gray planes that circled my friends' bedrooms in perfect formation, and I wanted my room to look like that.

My parents, however, banned me from model airplanes after my third or fourth try, and I don't blame them in the least.

Creating a mess

You may have already guessed why they did that. Each time I got a plane home, I tore it out of the box and began gluing pieces together—without reading the instructions. Instructions are for people who don't know what they're doing, I reasoned. And I already knew what I was doing. I was building a Spitzenhooter PZ-452X, just like the one on the cover of the box.

Only, needless to say, mine never got to look like the one on the box. Mine had big pieces left over. It had large, unexplained holes in the fuselage. It never turned a sleek blue or gray because by then I'd decided my plane was too ugly to bother painting. In fact, it was nothing but a tangled, gluey mess fit only for the trash can.

It's frustrating when this happens with a model airplane.

It's tragic when it happens with a human life.

Fixing the mess

We have, in God's law, complete instructions for how a life ought to be put together. "Do it this way," God pleads in his law. "I ought to know. I designed the plane. This is the way it works best." And we toss the instructions aside and tell God: "Go away! I know what I'm doing!"—and try putting a life together on our own.

And what happens?

Divorce happens. Addictions happen. Loneliness and despair happen. We're left with a tangled, crumpled mess and no one but ourselves to blame.

But here's the good part.

When we take our crumpled mess of a life back to God, we're prepared to hear him say, "You IDIOT! HOW MANY TIMES do I have to tell you to READ THE INSTRUCTIONS!"

But that's not what we hear at all. What we get instead from God, is a warm hug. Assurances that he still loves us. Assurances that we're forgiven.

Then he takes the crumpled plane from our hand and says, "Let me see what I can do with this."

And it never fails. Soon we're up—and flying.

NL

Ken Cherney is a pastor at Living Hope, Mandeville, Louisiana.

