

FORWARD IN CHRIST

December 2002

The Word from the WELS

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read all
about it!

A familiar
Christmas

A year-end
report on
Jesus Inc.

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Have you ever seen an angel?

God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. . . . The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Luke 1:26-28

Thomas A. Westra

Have you ever seen an angel? No, I don't mean the one hanging as an ornament on the Christmas tree or pictured on the greeting card. Have you ever seen a real angel? They certainly play a prominent role in our Scripture readings at this time of the year, don't they? They appear to the priest Zechariah, to the virgin Mary, and to the watching shepherds. They deliver startling, take-your-breath-away, life-changing messages.

What is an angel?

The word "angel" means "messenger." A messenger is someone who delivers a message on behalf of another person. An angel is someone who delivers a message on behalf of the Lord. So, if you have ever had a person convey the grace of God to you, whether by words or actions, you have encountered an "angel."

Do you remember that Sunday school teacher who not only taught you the love of Jesus with her words, but also demonstrated the love of Jesus with her acts of kindness? Remember the friend—or maybe even the stranger—who helped you in a time of crisis, a time when you did not know where to turn? Remember the child who gave you a hug when you really needed one? Like the mighty spirit beings who serve God by serving his people, these flesh and blood "earth angels" are messengers of God's love.



Have you ever been an angel?

A New York City resident has his name listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records* more than any other person. He is recognized for such feats as yodeling nonstop for 27 hours, running while juggling three balls for three-and-a-half hours, and doing nonstop somersaults for more than 12 miles. This man will go down in history. But for what?

So many endeavors to which people give their time, their energy, and their focus are not a whole lot more significant than those things. Yet Jesus gives us something significant to be about. He has given us a role in the most critical, adventurous, and meaningful enterprise of all time—the rescue of the world. Our role? Messengers.

He has given us this message: we are sinful; we have offended our holy God by our thoughts, our words, and our actions; we have failed to do what is good; all our righteous acts are like unclean rags; and if left to ourselves we would spend eternity in shame and contempt.

If the message ended there, it would be a sad one to deliver. But it goes on. We have a Savior. We have a God who is not a hidden God, but a God who is nearby. He is the God nursing in his mother's arms in a stable in Bethlehem. He is the God in sandals trudging the dusty roads of Palestine teaching about the kingdom. He is the God riveted to a cross on Golgotha's hill, guilty of all the sins of mankind. He is the God who by his resurrection announces that our sin is covered, our death is defeated, and our life forever with him is certain.

It is a startling, take-your-breath-away, life-changing message that will have an impact on our neighbors, friends, colleagues, and family. It will literally determine where they will spend eternity.

So if someone asks you if you have ever seen an angel, maybe you could answer, "As a matter of fact, I am one."



Thomas Westra is pastor at Beautiful Savior, Cincinnati, Ohio.

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Correction: Dean Lindberg, not Bill Frauhiger,
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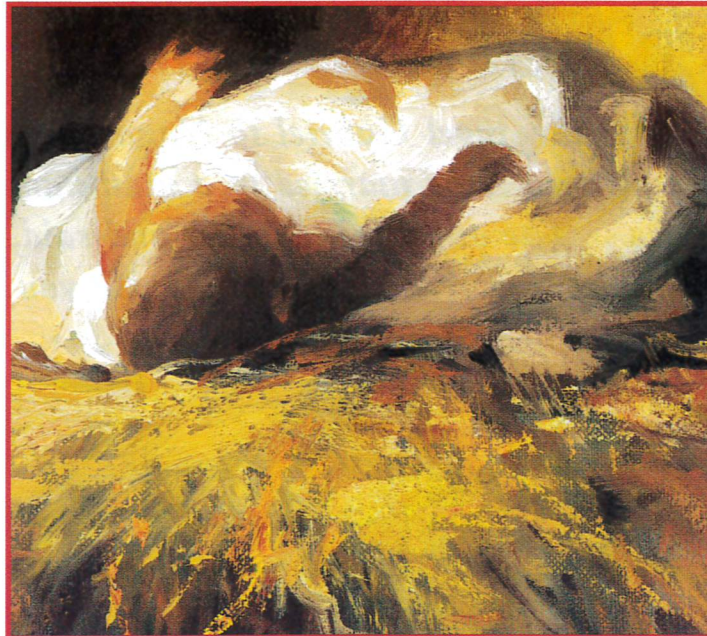
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Christ is the
almighty God
incarnate as a
human child.
Is there any-
thing more
impressive
than that?

bits & pieces



“Peace on earth” is a message heard often at Christmas. However in this sin-filled world, true peace is hard to come by. But it’s here for believers—at Christmas and always.

- A dialogue between a church janitor and a pastor reveals where our true peace should come from. Read “Jesus Inc.” (p. 20).

- Many people focus on earthly peace at Christmastime. Prof. David Sellnow shows us what the true focus of Christmas should be in “What Christmas is not about” (p. 8).

- Pamela Miller writes about how she found peace after her father’s death last Christmas (p. 18).

- Even when things change, true peace in Jesus remains constant. Laurie Biedenbender talks about other familiars of Christmas on the back page.

- Headlines from the *Bethlehem Banner* when Jesus was born may not have shown messages of peace. But the story ends with peace for all believers (p. 31).

- True peace comes at a price. “What price peace?” tells how the price was paid.



Two series end this month. We thank Prof. Richard Gurgel for teaching us lessons on the importance of schooling our home. We also thank Prof. Mark Lenz for painting portraits of redemption through his Bible studies on Jesus’ miracles.



Included this month is a four-page index. Also, check out our on-line database, <www.wels.net/sab/frm-nl.html>, which offers articles from this year and from years past.

—JKW

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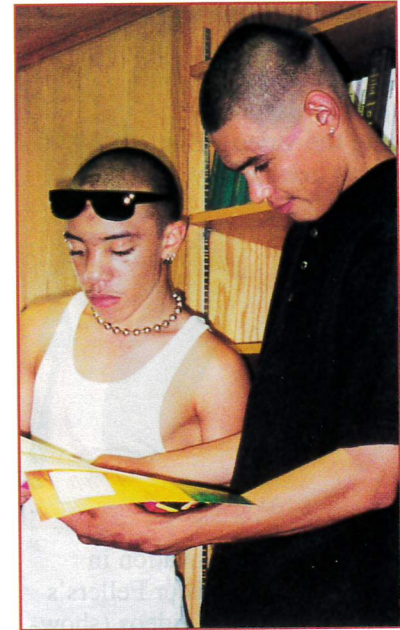
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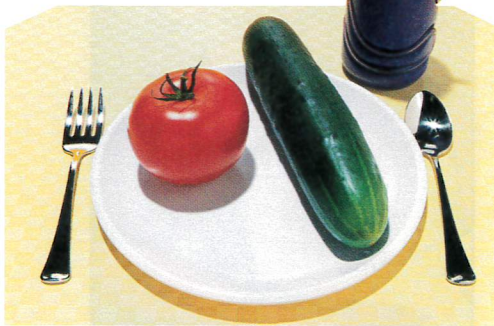
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What price peace?



Thank you for your article on the VeggieTales videos [Oct.]. My children (and I) also enjoy watching the videos. But I, too, was troubled by



the lack of gospel motivation in them. I appreciated Pastor Fellers's even evaluation of the videos (showing their shortcomings without condemning them altogether) and his guidance for how we can use them profitably. I pray that many other parents will benefit from his article as well.

Steven Lange
 *Louisville, Kentucky*

We were troubled to read "Are Veggies good for you?" [Oct.].

The article seemed overly critical of a company that has made biblical morals and values a part of "the second best-selling kid's videos." The producers have done a tremendous job to produce stories that teach the basic concepts of Bible stories without frightening children or twisting the message. Maybe in the author's research he overlooked "The Toy That Saved Christmas," when stating "that they present a Christian veneer yet lack the gospel." Pastor Fellers then hammered the videos for their emphasis on law (which is valuable to us as Christians in its third use as a guide or standard) as videos "without Jesus."

Why tear apart something that even the author uses with his family and with unchurched people?


In an age when many don't know why their church is called Lutheran,

where is the stirring stand Luther took on the Bible? Instead we give time to "Sponge Bob."

Paul and Lisa Ibisch
La Crescent, Minnesota

Prof. Richard Gurgel made some excellent points in his article in the October 2002 issue ["Our children's primary pastors and teachers"]. Parents are the primary teachers of their children. The schools, even Christian schools, only supplement what the parents teach. One question troubled me as I read it: "Where are those parents today?"

The illustration showed father and mother and two children seated around a table (as it should be). The picture, unfortunately, is an anachronism. Although research shows that the strongest families eat together regularly, many families don't have time for that. If they don't have time to eat together, let alone pray together, why are they allowed to have children? Of course, the laws of fertility are not likely to change any time soon, but the wonderful families that Gurgel described are fading fast. As they do, so also fades the spiritual guidance that strong families give. The laws of fertility decree that babies belong to whomsoever can get pregnant. That is the real tragedy of our times.


Rolfe Westendorf
 *Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

[I'm] confused with the article "Believe it or not?" by Gary P. Baumler [Oct.].

The statement, "For example, does WELS teach that I simply cannot pray with my dear Methodist Aunt Tillie? (The answer is 'no')" says to me that WELS is saying it is okay to pray with my Methodist Aunt Tillie. I am not sure we can answer that question either yes or no without additional information about the circumstances of the prayer. Are we praying with Methodist Aunt Tillie in her church or while attend-

ing our church? Is Methodist Aunt Tillie praying with me in my house, or am I praying with her in her house? Is she taking instructions to join WELS, and we are praying together, etc.

I believe the statement as printed cannot be answered yes or no. Another concern is that as the statement reads, I believe it could lead others to interpret that it is simply okay to pray with my dear Methodist Aunt Tillie.

Howard E. Wilch
 *Rawson, Ohio*

You have articulated my point well. My "(the answer is 'no')" was meant to stress that there is more to the matter than some think. Thanks for the follow-up.—ed.

I am a member of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, but have subscribed to *Forward in Christ* for many years. It has been a blessing to me.

I have a solution to all students who are faithful to their Lutheran beliefs, yet are faced with test answers at secular high schools dealing with non-biblical teachings ["My two worlds," Oct.]. A young friend who faced this situation told our Bible class that when she needed to have the "correct" answer for one of those types of questions, she would preempt her answer with, "The book says . . ." and fill in the space with the required answer. In this way, she believed she would not give up her faith, yet meet the requirements to have a good grade.

Marion Kleman
Lincoln Park, Michigan

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Setting the budget

Armin J. Panning

At year's end, congregational budgets become high-profile items. There is concern if our receipts for the year are below budget or our expenditures over budget. Something needs to be done—soon! Coupled with the pressure of ending the current year “in the black” is another task—setting next year's budget for approval by the voters' assembly.

Congregational budgets may be a chore, but they're useful. They're more than just numbers; they're a description of our congregation's ministry plan. Adopting next year's budget is a statement of what, under God, we intend to do in the Lord's kingdom. Viewed in that light, we realize that setting the budget is really a spiritual exercise. It reflects the attitude of our heart and the willingness of our hands. Paul shares that insight with the Corinthians when he writes: “If the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has” (2 Corinthians 8:12).

The numbers themselves are important only to the extent that they measure our willingness to share what we have received. And what have we received? Lots! Again, listen to Paul's assessment: “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). Christ humbled himself and became poor, so that he might gain for us forgiveness of sins, peace with God, the sure hope of eternal life. We are spiritual billionaires. The beauty of it is that God lets us share those blessings. That's where our budget comes in. It helps us plan how we are going to share our spiritual bounty with others at home and abroad.

But in the scramble of everyday living, isn't setting a challenging congregational budget going to be a burden? Isn't it going

to deprive us? Amazingly, Paul says just the opposite. “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly,” he tells the Corinthians, “and whoever sows generously will also reap generously” (2 Corinthians 9:6).

We need, however, to guard against turning this into a mathematical formula: If I give God this much, then he'll be obligated to give me that much in return. God doesn't work on the basis of a straight exchange. He gives infinitely more! Note Paul's assurance to the Corinthians, “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Read that sentence once more. Five times in this one sentence Paul repeats the significant words “all” and “every.” First he says: “God is able to make all grace abound to you.” We might translate that: God can make any and every gift abound for you. He continues: “so that you abound in all things” (temporal and material blessings as well as spiritual); “at all times” (in sickness and health, in retirement or when employed, in economic recession or boom times); “having all you need” (perhaps not all you'd like, but all you need); “so that you will abound in every good work.”

Setting up next year's congregational budget may be a challenge, but think of it as a spiritual exercise, helping us “to abound in every good work.” When we have a creator God whose gifts cause us to abound in all things at all times so that we will have all that we need, then even challenging budgets become manageable.

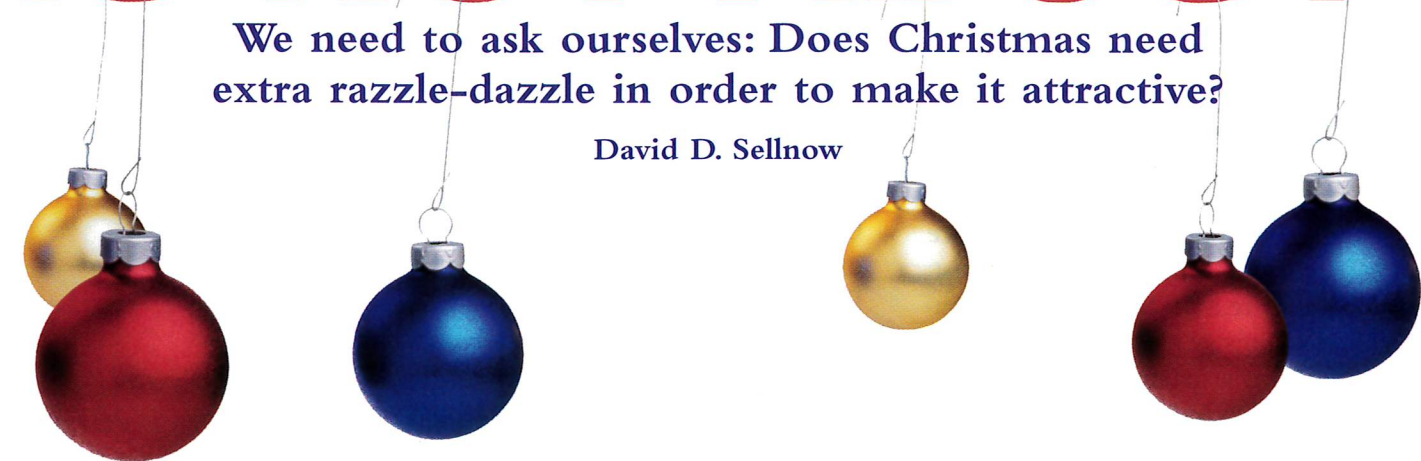
Armin Panning, a member at St. Matthew, Port Washington, Wisconsin, is a professor emeritus at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.

We are
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What Christmas IS NOT ABOUT

We need to ask ourselves: Does Christmas need extra razzle-dazzle in order to make it attractive?

David D. Sellnow



This month you will undoubtedly see human-interest stories in the news . . . stories of people helping people, random acts of kindness, maybe even some momentary cease-fires in wars and skirmishes going on around the globe. It happens each year at this time. People call it “the Christmas spirit.”

Not about human harmony

Supposedly, the Christmas spirit means laying aside animosities, renewing relationships, coming together in human harmony. But, as you well know, that sort of Christmas spirit is superficial and short-lived.

At home and at work, the holidays can have as much bickering and tension as any other time of year (sometimes more). Shopping malls see their share of shoving. As for wars around the world, Christmas rarely has been a reason to cease hostilities. One of our national heroes,

George Washington, made a surprise attack at Trenton in 1776 as the redcoats were sleeping off their Christmas dinner, taking over 900 prisoners and leaving 30 dead.

Peace and harmony between humans is not, in the first place, what Christmas is about. Before there can be any genuine love between humans, love must come from God. It is the supreme love of God for all humanity that we celebrate—the sending of his Son into flesh to dwell among us. He gives us peace that the world cannot give.

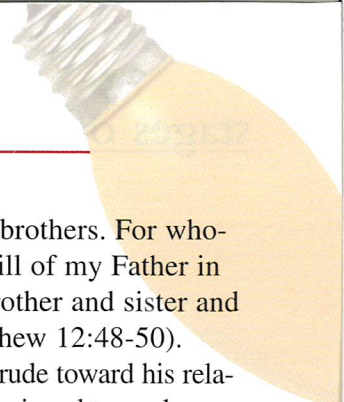
One of the most misconstrued statements in the Bible is the angels’ song: “On earth peace to men on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:14). Skipping over the part about the one born as the bringer of peace, people seek to find peace all by itself as a feature of this world. But Jesus himself would later state that global accord is not an achievable goal: “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. . . . Such things

must happen . . . Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (Matthew 24:6,7).

Peace on earth in any political sense was far from the angels’ meaning on Christmas Eve. Peace *toward* mankind was being shown by God in Christ. True peace among humans can’t exist without Jesus.

Not about lights and glitter

In cities across the nation, people try to make bigger, brighter, bolder Christmas displays each year. A family in Florida boasts of over 30 years of holiday displays—presently using 400,000-plus lights, over 100 animated figures, and more than 2,000 amps of electrical current, costing \$4,000 to keep it lit for the month. A Pennsylvania family touts an “exploding” tree, a honey-eating bear, a golfer, a carousel, and a snowman playing drums. (Oh, they also have a nativity scene with life-size, moving figures of Joseph, Mary, a donkey, a cow . . . and off to the



side, shepherds under a 12-foot-high star.) Drive by a certain Virginia home and you can tune your car radio to a narration that accompanies the display in their yard.

Even when a nativity scene is sandwiched in between the ice skaters and the jack-in-the-box, are those outlandish exhibits bringing glory to Christmas or merely glorifying themselves? Sometimes we justify our elaborate, even gaudy, celebrations and traditions by saying we want to make the season special. There's nothing wrong with that. Celebrating Jesus is good. But we ought to ask ourselves: Does Christmas need extra razzle-dazzle in order to make it attractive? Does Jesus need extra decorating in order to make him worthy of our full attention?

Christmas is special in and of itself, without all the glitter and lights. A woman, a baby, and a manger—it's already spectacular and sacred, without anything added to it. Christ is the almighty God incarnate as a human child. Is there anything more impressive than that? Even if you put 100 million multicolored, twinkling bulbs of light atop your roof in a giant 3-D sculpture of the Tower of Babel, you could not outshine the radiance of the Son of Man, God in the flesh, Jesus Christ. "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world" (John 1:9). The myriad of other lights on display are artificial, incandescent. Only Jesus can say, "Whoever follows me . . . will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Not about family and friends

A flyer arrived in the mail. "Season's Greetings," it said. "May your holidays be filled with warmth, family . . . and free pizza!" The pizza

place was not the only one using homey emotions as holiday advertising. A realtor's ad read, "Let us put you in a home for the holidays." Grocery store sacks carried the slogan, "A Season for Togetherness." Holiday programming on TV had the same theme: "It's a time for family and closeness with friends."

Those are wonderful sentiments. Who wouldn't want to go a-wassailing in good company or have familiar faces around the dinner table? But Christmas is more than a cozy cuddle by the fire, more than can be captured in a wintry scene on a greeting card. We value immensely our relationships with near and dear ones, but there is one more precious and more loving than any of our loved ones on earth. God has adopted us to be his own children. Christ became our brother to give us life. The greatest family is God's. Human relationships are important for this life, but spiritual relationships are important forever.

Let us celebrate this Christmas, but let the cause of our celebration remain always in view.

Jesus himself considered spiritual family concerns more pressing than human family concerns. An episode in the middle of Jesus' ministry career demonstrated his perspective on family. "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" he asked when his family members came to where he was preaching and wanted to speak with him. "Pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my

mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother' " (Matthew 12:48-50).

Jesus was not rude toward his relatives. Jesus never sinned toward anybody. The record of his life shows him properly attentive to family concerns from beginning to end: as a boy, perfectly obedient to his parents (Luke 2:51); in his dying hours, arranging for the care of his mother (John 19:25-27). Jesus was the perfect son, the perfect brother, the perfect friend. But at the same time, Jesus made it clear that God was his Father first, and no other relationship would ever overrule that.

You are always home for Christmas when you have a relationship with God through Christ. If you are in church with fellow Christians for worship, you can truly say that the family gathered together for the holiday.

The right focus

By all means let us celebrate this Christmas, but let the cause of our celebration remain always in view. We rejoice that we have peace and harmony with God. Our lives are lit up by the Lord's glory that shines in Christ. We are privileged to be part of a spiritual family with mansions in heaven awaiting us. If we keep such gifts in mind at all times, all our Advent activities and Christmas festivities will find their focus. ✨

David Sellnow is a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota.

God had different plans for us

We planned to have two or three children by the time Sally turned 30, but God took us down a path we never expected.

Scott and Sally

“In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps” (Proverbs 16:9).

When we got married eight years ago, we had a plan. We planned to have two or three children by the time Sally turned 30, assuming that God’s plan was the same as ours.

But God had different plans for us.

The first two years of our marriage went just as we planned (from a children perspective). However, God took us down a path we never expected by giving us jobs working in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. This experience strengthened our marriage as we worked together as a team in the same office and spent 24 hours a day, seven days a week together for four years. It was a wonderful detour that God took us on. Little did we know that learning to trust in his will would be so valuable in the future.



After our self-imposed child-free time expired, we started trying to have a child. The first few months were full of hope and high expectations. We were excited every time we were “late” a day or two. Several months later, doubts started creeping into our minds. Our plan did not include a delay in pregnancy.

We encouraged each other, talked extensively, cried, and started to realize that perhaps our plan did not run parallel with God’s plan for our lives.

Friends, family, and coworkers started getting curious about our child intentions: “So when are you going to have kids?” It was much easier to casually answer, “We’ll see,” when we were still within our plan. The comments and questions started to

hurt as they reinforced our own doubts about our ability to have children.

“Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails” (Proverbs 19:21).

Another nine months went by.

Our plan indicated we should have a child. God’s plan was different.

We started to dread that time of the month. Twelve months of high expectations and deep disappointment wore our patience thin. Questions entered our minds—why is this happening to us? Would we be bad parents?

The questions and comments intensified. We had been married for over three years and had no chil-

dren. The well-intentioned comments from others that we should already have children poured salt in our wounds.

We kept praying that God's will be done but dropped heavy hints about the direction we wanted his will to go. We knew that God's answer to our prayers was not "yes," but telling the difference between "no" and "not right now" was impossible.

this decision might need to be made. We prayed about it, talked about it, and had already decided.

We strongly respect the value of human life and did not want to use fertility drugs, artificial insemination, or test-tube babies to ensure that our plan for our lives became reality instead of God's plan.

Despair gave way to indifference as we started to believe that

much as he did early in our marriage.

We began the process of adopting a child earlier this year. It has opened our eyes to the wonderful miracles that God can work by bringing two families together.



Sally and Scott

"There are times we just cried."

The search for medical reasons began with Sally undergoing a couple of biopsies and Scott getting a sperm count. The doctor said everything looked normal—just keep trying.

There are times we just cried.

Six more months elapsed, and the doctors ordered more tests. They injected Sally with a dye visible by x-ray to see if there were any blockages. The doctor said everything looked normal—just keep trying.

Despair started to set in. Our original plan was failing miserably, and we were not sure what God had in mind for our lives. We continued to pray but put more emphasis on accepting God's will than directing it.

Sally underwent surgery to remove the effects of endometriosis that the doctors thought may be preventing her from getting pregnant. Our expectations rose quickly, and we hoped that this would be the answer to our prayers.

Six months later our hope started to dwindle. The doctors' solution was to "stop worrying about getting pregnant." Much easier said than done.

Soon the doctors started discussing other methods of creating a pregnancy. Long before the doctors mentioned it, we knew that

perhaps God was answering our prayers with a "no." As each month went by we expected nothing and received it in full measure.

But our trust in God's will kept us strong. We knew the Lord had a plan for us: " 'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future' " (Jeremiah 29:11).

After trying to have children for five years, the doctors still say everything is fine. We are labeled an "unexplained infertility," but we know it is God's plan for our lives—the only explanation needed.

This entire experience brought us closer to God and closer to each other than we had ever been before. The temptation to point fingers at God or at each other is great. Always remembering that God put us together in marriage and that he always works for our benefit helps us avoid the blame game that comes so naturally.

We still do not know whether God's answer to our prayers is "no" or "not right now." Neither God nor a doctor has ever told us that we cannot have children. Over time we came to the realization that the Lord is taking us down a different path,

We are now at the brink of adopting a baby. We have come full circle both emotionally and spiritually. We are again full of hope and expectations, but with a new appreciation for the path that God has chosen for us.

Our life is completely in his hands, and sometimes the path that he takes us on isn't exactly what we expect. Sometimes it can be thrilling, and sometimes it can be heartbreaking. It's hard to see the purpose of his plan when emotions run high and doubt clouds our vision.

In our case, perhaps God believes we will make good adoptive parents, or he wanted us to have more years together as a couple before having children or before we would have a deep appreciation of what a blessing a child can be. Maybe it's all these things! But we know it is by his grace that we have reached this point with faith and marriage intact.

Scott and Sally are members of a Milwaukee-area WELS congregation. They requested that their last name be withheld to protect their privacy during the adoption process.

God presents us with opportunities to speak the gospel to our children and to show them what it means to live our faith in that gospel.

Moving ahead with



God's plan

Richard L. Gurgel

How can we put into practice the beautiful model of schooling the home that God sets before us? How do we help more parents move from assistants to leaders in the spiritual nurture of their children? Where do we begin?

It begins in the home

Taking steps to make a difference in the lives of future generations begins for each of us in our own homes. There is a double reason for that. Our homes are our first responsibility of ministry. Second, the blessings that God sends when his Word is prominent in our homes allows him to use our homes as an example for others.

We believe God's promise that those who delight in his Word are those in whose lives the will of God prospers (see Psalm 1:1-3). So take God at his Word and look for ways to make your home the strong fortress of the gospel that God designed it to be. It can begin as simply as taking the time to read Bible stories to young children every night at bedtime. It can be as uncomplicated as teaching young ones simple songs that tell the saving truths of Jesus.

It can be as spontaneous as being ready for the unplanned opportunities God will give to share your faith in Christ with your children in the midst of everyday life. Although

planned time in the Word together (reading Bible stories, sharing a family devotion time) is the strong backbone of the Christian home, some of the most powerful lessons from God's Word are learned right in the midst of life's unplanned joys and sadness.

In the midst of life's successes, let your children know that those victories are not to be chalked up to human ingenuity but to God's genuine mercy. Remind them in life's defeats that God is still in the business of making all things serve the good of those whom he has called as his children.

When you stumble into sin in your children's presence, you can

teach them a powerful lesson about contrition and repentance when they see you honestly admitting your sin and rejoicing in forgiveness from God—and from them when necessary. When your children stumble in your presence, never forget that the highest concern for Christians parents in discipline is *not* that their children understand the evil of their actions (as important as that is) but that they understand the certainty of God's forgiveness and the power of the gospel to live differently the next time. Of course, nothing can model God's forgiveness better than showing them your forgiveness that acts as if yesterday's sins were indeed gone "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12).

Taking steps to make a difference in the lives of future generations begins for each of us in our own homes.

There is no substitute for such sharing of the gospel in the ebb and flow of daily life of a home that consciously lives under the shadow of the cross. It is in the day-by-day living of life that God presents us with rich opportunities to speak the gospel to our children and to show them what it means to live our faith in that gospel. Parents, your classroom is as large as life, and lessons are being taught there every day.

Pray for God's wisdom to see and to seize those precious opportunities that God gives. Every day you get to apply God's truth to your children's

hearts and lives. Pray for the spiritual wisdom to understand what it means to "let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6).

It continues in our family of faith

But we dare not develop a spiritual myopia that cannot see beyond the walls of our own homes. What begins in our homes continues as we lift our eyes to the family of faith. Where God has granted you a position of leadership or influence in your congregation, encourage other Christian families by example and by word. Work with your called workers to assist in any way you can so that your congregation does not unintentionally proclaim to parents that their role as spiritual nurturers of their children is unimportant.

Remember that many who are new to the faith have never seen what it means to be a Christian father or mother. They need patient and careful instruction in the Word and humble spiritual mentors to show them the way. In fact, even for many that are not so new to the faith, experience with the gospel being found in the homes may be slim.

Help your congregation plan ways to exalt the role of Christian parents as the high calling it is. Encourage your congregation to provide materials that will aid families in keeping Jesus at the heart and center of their homes. Promote ministry plans that equip and enable families to take the lead in sharing Jesus with their children.

It reaches to future generations

Imagine for a moment that God's amazing patience (2 Peter 3:9) with this world has allowed mankind to see the close of the 21st century. You have long since been transferred from the church militant to the church tri

umphant. Your grandchildren and great-grandchildren have gathered together and the conversation has turned to what they remember (or had only heard) about you. What stories of God's spiritual blessings through you do you want your grandchildren and great-grandchildren to be telling?

Right now, the power of God's gospel is seeking to write that story deep within the hearts of your children. Pray for the day when our descendants will tell the story of how God has blessed them through us. Pray that many others even beyond our family circles will thank God for the gospel that shone so clearly in our homes that it now also glows in theirs.

Parents, your classroom is as large as life, and lessons are being taught there every day.

There is no greater power in the world than the influence of Christian parents who share the gospel of Jesus Christ with their children. Such gospel-powered parental influence can reach across generations and even around the globe. Already now, God at times gives us a glimpse of how that is true. But rest assured, one of the great joys of heaven will be knowing fully just how the Holy Spirit used us as his tools through his gospel. There we will revel in the lasting blessings of God's plan for schooling the home.



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

Around the Christmas tree

Our sister churches in Norway, Sweden, and Finland work hard to let the light of Christ shine at Christmas and all year around.

Charlene H. Lauersdorf

“Walking around the Christmas tree.” Our Christian friends in Norway, Sweden, and Finland look forward to this Christmas tradition each year. If the group is large, the children make the inner circle and the adults form the outer circle, holding hands, singing carols, and moving to the music. With their short days and long hours of darkness, Nina Edvardsen says, “Christmas and Jesus shine for us in the darkness.”

Our sister churches work hard to let the light of Christ shine in these Scandinavian countries.

Remaining faithful in Norway and Sweden

Pastor Egil Edvardsen heads up the Lutheran Confessional Church (LBK) of Norway and Sweden. In Swedish it's called *Lutherska Bekännelsekyrkan*. In Norwegian they say *Den lutherske bekjennelseskirke*. They have 280 members in nine congregations with five national pastors. One of many chal-

lenges the church faces, Edvardsen says, is “for every member of the church to remain faithful to the gospel in spite of all the indifference and materialism which is so prevalent in the society and all the false teachings and practices in the big national churches and the sects.”

In 1970 the bishops of the Church of Sweden published a book about the Bible in which they took an official position against the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures. This action led some pastors in the state church who earlier had founded the Biblicum Foundation to contact WELS. By 1974 some laymen and pastors left the state church, and in September they founded the LBK. They entered into fellowship with WELS and became a member of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) at its foundation in 1993.

On Aug. 18, 2002, the LBK, in cooperation with Biblicum, opened a new seminary. With joy and thanksgiving Edvardsen says, “This is perhaps the greatest event in the whole history of our church. For the first time our church will have its own seminary where it can train new pastors and workers in the Lord’s kingdom. We thank God for this!” Five students are settled in at Biblicum in

Ljungby, Sweden, and are working hard in their classes. Professors from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, and other pastors will be traveling over for short periods of time to teach courses there. For the members of that small church body, this is really exciting news.

Gaining souls in Finland

We also have exciting news out of Finland. After struggling for 25 years, the Lutheran Confessional Church (*Suomen Luterilainen Tunnustuskirkko*) now at last has grown to sufficient size to meet the requirements for registration as a church body. This means having formal status among churches in Finland. Pastors get the legal right to solemnize a marriage and teach religion in public schools. They will receive more publicity and more respect as a faithful Lutheran church, offering a new spiritual home for those who are not able to stay with the deeply liberal Lutheran national church of Finland.

Pastor Juhani Viitala heads up this small church body of 33 members in two congregations with three national pastors and one evangelist. The beginning of this group goes back to 1979 when some Finnish individuals became members of the

LBK in Sweden. The first congregation in Finland was founded in 1988 and the second in 1997. In spite of miles between them, they came together in 1999. The Lutheran Confessional Church was in fellowship with WELS from its beginning and with the CELC from its conception.

With joyful hearts, nearly the entire membership of this church body came together for its convention on July 11-12, 2002. The highlight was when one by one the members came forward to sign the official registration document. To God be the glory, great things he has done!

Can you imagine the challenges these courageous pastors face every day? Pastors Jukka Söderström and Juhani Viitala tell us, "We offer a spiritual home for those Pentecostals who have realized the wrong doctrines of their church. . . . The recent big challenge has been to win unchristian refugees to Christ. The four members of an Islamic Kadyrov refugee family from Turkmenistan were converted into Christianity by God's grace." So they continue to gain souls for Christ one by one.

From our fellow believers miles away comes this short Christmas greeting for us, "Hyvaa Joulua ja onnellista Uutta Vuotta tt. Suomen Luterilainen Tunnustuskirkko." (Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from Lutheran Confessional Church in Finland).

Just as we join hands with this group and the LBK of Sweden and Norway in celebrating our Savior's birth, so we "join hands" via the CELC with all our fellow Christians around the world in bringing the true message of Christmas to a troubled world. What a joyous event in our history the Lord is allowing us to realize.

"Oh, come all ye faithful, Joyful and triumphant, . . .

"Oh, come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord."



Charlene Lauersdorf, author of the book *Worth Far More Than Rubies*, is a member at *David's Star*, Jackson, Wisconsin.



The Lutheran Confessional Church in Finland was officially registered as a church body in Finland on July 12, 2002. Various members signed the documents, including Eva Söderström (the oldest member of the church) and seminary student Jan-Erik Tiri (one of the youngest members).

Lutheran Confessional Church in Finland

- Members: 33
- Established congregations: 2
- National pastors: 3
- Evangelists: 1
- WELS friendly counselor: 1*

Lutheran Confessional Church of Norway and Sweden

- Members: 280
- Established congregations: 9
- National pastors/evangelists: 5
- WELS friendly counselor: 1*

*Friendly Counselor John Vogt serves both the Lutheran Confessional Church of Norway and Sweden and the Lutheran Confessional Church in Finland.



A Norwegian family celebrates Christmas. National Pastor Egil Edvardsen is the fourth person from the left. A traditional part of the celebration on Christmas Eve is that the whole family walks around the tree while singing famous Christmas hymns together.

Bringing the written Word TO THE WORLD

Multi-Language Publications brings God's promise to all nations, peoples, tribes, and tongues.

Janet Klann

In Novosibirsk, Russia, a businessman visits a Christian Information Center and is given a Bible tract, *How are we Saved?*.

In Tsuchiura, Japan, a university student receives a copy of *The Promise*, a 16-page booklet outlining God's plan of salvation.

In Las Cruces, N.M., a man recently released from prison receives *A Bible Handbook*, an easy-to-read, self-study course.

The common thread in these three incidents is that all the printed materials—in Russian, Japanese, and Spanish—involved the office of Multi-Language Publications (MLP) in El Paso, Tex. The mission of the MLP is to list, gather, and produce confessional Christian literature in the languages of countries where WELS is working, and in other areas, “so many more people throughout the world may come to faith in Jesus . . . and thus have hope of eternal life.”

“Multi-Language Publications is a critical part of getting the gospel to the world,” says Wayne Mueller, vice president for mission and ministry. Mueller has visited missions in Latin America, Sweden, and Mexico and has observed the MLP materials in use—from simple evangelism tracts to Sunday school lessons to training materials for national pastors.

The work

Before the MLP began its work, missionaries had to translate much of the material they used. “When I began working in Puerto Rico in 1963, we had the Bible, the Small Catechism, and a hymnal in Spanish,” says Pastor Roger Sprain. “Everything else we needed we had to translate ourselves.”

Translating a text from one language into another is not as easy as one might think. Beginning students of a language generally look up each word in a dictionary and make a word-by-word conversion. The result is stilted prose that a native speaker would find amusing and perhaps unclear. For this reason, the MLP works toward a translation that emphasizes meaning, using a team approach on each project.

“One member of the team is a native speaker of English, and the other is a native speaker of the target language,” explains Ron Baerbock, Spanish publications director. The two members act as a check and balance system, making sure the translation is accurate, smooth, and culturally correct. One word can make a difference, as the following examples show:

- I painted the red bicycle./I painted the bicycle red.
- We will arrange to have you pay./ We will arrange to have you paid.

The people

Translating is done by as many as 35 native speakers around the world who work on various texts. These people generally are recruited by resident missionaries and are paid for each word they translate. Communicating via e-mail makes it easy for these translators to work closely with the MLP headquarters.

Most of the MLP staff have firsthand mission experience. Coordinator Paul Hartman was a missionary in Puerto Rico for five years and in Mexico for eight years. Baerbock spent seven years in Puerto Rico and seven years in the Dominican Republic before joining the MLP in 2000. Assistant Spanish Editor Letty Connell taught English in several schools in Mexico before she and her husband, Missionary James Connell, moved to Colombia, South America, for seven years. The staff also includes two part-time workers in administration and editing.

The materials

The MLP catalog lists over 410 titles in 28 languages. The low cost of these publications makes it possible for many to be distributed free.

The most widely distributed title is *The Promise*, a solid introduction to law and gospel for those unfamiliar with the Bible. Written by

Harold Essmann in 1994, this booklet tells in simple language the story of creation, man's fall into sin, Jesus the promised Savior, and God's gift of eternal life to all who believe. *The Promise* is available in 24 languages, including Japanese, Chinese, Hindi, Tonga and Chewa (for Africa), Thai, Russian, and Telegu (for India). Translations in Arabic and Farsi are planned to reach the Muslim world. Almost 300,000 copies of *The Promise* have been printed, with additional orders received daily.

Available in English and Spanish, *The Bible Story in Pictures* is easy to read, with large illustrations and brief text. Translation is underway into Albanian, Portuguese, Russian, and Swedish, as well as versions for India and Indonesia.

One of the MLP's largest projects has been translating the volumes of The People's Bible into Spanish. Begun in 1987, the last of the 41 volumes will roll off the press by the end of next year. With their Bible text and helpful commentary, these volumes are ideal for individual or group study.

El Mensajero Luterano (The Lutheran Messenger), a bimonthly periodical written by and for Spanish-speaking members and friends in the Americas, contains articles on practical Christian living, short devotions, and Bible studies. Circulation is 1,000 copies, mailed to 135 mission addresses, from Anchorage, Alaska, to Santiago, Chile.

In addition to printed works, the MLP also distributes material in other formats. *Communicating Christ*, a video containing 12- to 15-minute lessons on the doctrines and sacraments of the Lutheran church, is available in Albanian, Bulgarian, Japanese, Portuguese, and Russian

as well as English and a signed version for the hearing-impaired. Designed for individual or group use, the video comes with a teacher's guide and student workbooks. *The Promise* is available in video format in English and five other languages. Some materials, such as Spanish songbooks, Sunday school worksheets, and clipart graphics, are available on CD-ROM.

Another project of the MLP is the World Mission Collection, a multi-language literature collection of confessional Lutheran resources housed at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. This collection of 1,700 titles is a resource for materials for evangelism, Sunday school, adult Bible study, and worship. Works may be viewed on-line or borrowed by pastors and workers so that they do not needlessly duplicate materials that already exist.

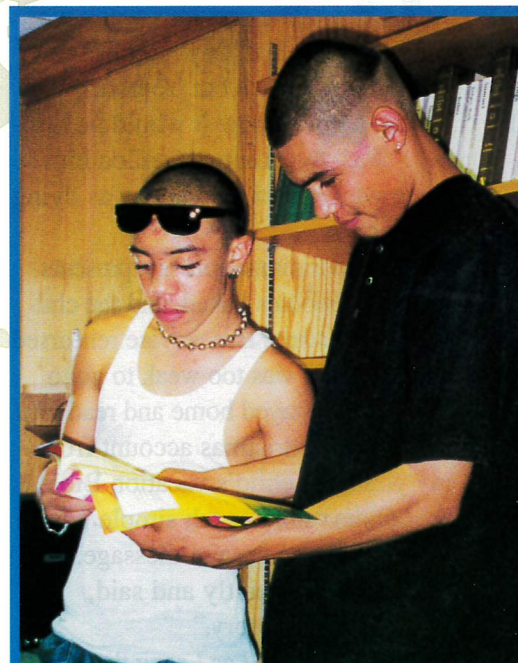
"Go and preach"

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he commanded his disciples, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). This is still his command to the church today. The good news must be brought to people in the words of their own languages.

"The work of the MLP in gathering and providing materials for world missions and cross-cultural ministries is essential," says Chris Cordes, mission coordinator for Colombia. The small office in El Paso is a mighty arm that reaches around the world.



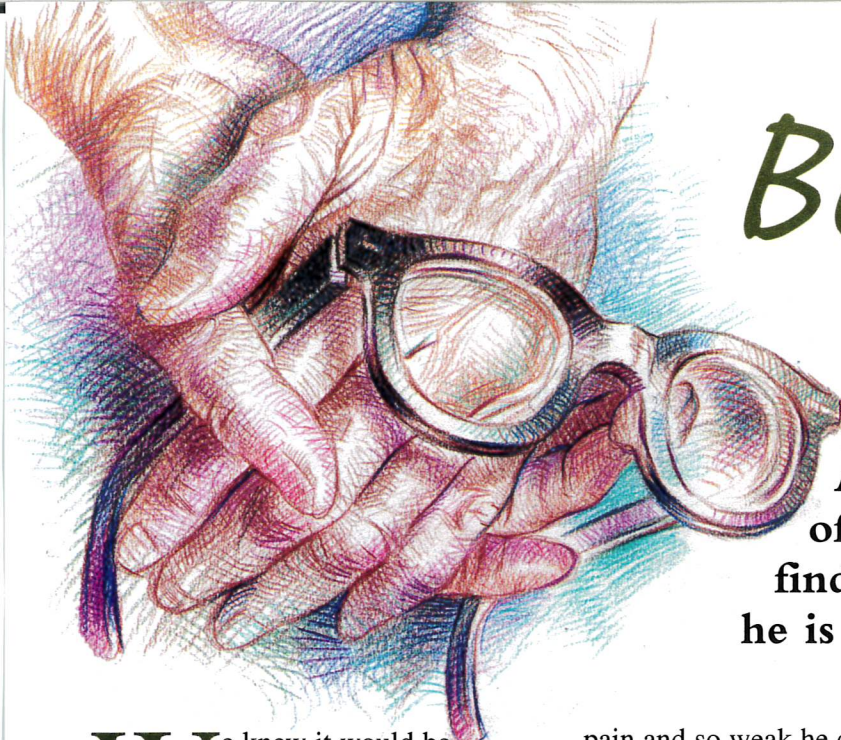
Curt Backhaus (right), pastor at Emmanuel, Las Cruces, N.M., shows a copy of *La Promesa (The Promise)* to Harry and Minerva Miley.



These WELS bookmobile visitors read a solid introduction to law and gospel in *The Promise*, which is published by Multi-Language Publications.

For more information, go to <www.multilanguagepublications.com>. ✨

Janet Klann is a member at Shepherd of the Valley, Surprise, Arizona.



Be still, my soul

A woman struggles with the loss of her father at Christmas but finds peace from the thought that he is now in glory with his Lord.

Pamela J. Miller

We knew it would be a difficult Christmas.

The previous week we sang “Happy Birthday” to our father with happy voices but trembling hearts, for we knew it would be his last. “Pa,” the name we called him since we learned to speak, was dying of cancer.

The decorations were up, presents wrapped, cookies baked, and the children’s Christmas Eve service rehearsed and ready. Pa was too weak to go to church, so I stayed home and read him the Luke 2 Christmas account from my youngest child’s vacation Bible school devotion—such simple words but carrying so great a message.

Pa listened quietly and said, “That is a nice story.”

He now listened as I sang the hymns we performed as children in our Christmas Eve services: “Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful,” “Joy to the World,” and “Silent Night.” He began to sleep a peaceful slumber.

Be still, my soul . . .

The next morning, Pa watched as our extended family of 30 gathered to wish all a merry Christmas and to open gifts and eat brunch. He grew more ill as the day went by.

By Friday, when my own family was returning home, he was in great

pain and so weak he couldn’t keep his balance. We arrived home Saturday evening and received the news the next morning that he had passed away in his sleep. Now he was at peace in his Savior’s arms. It was Dec. 30.

Be still, my soul . . .

Through the last half of the year, I read countless devotions and Bible passages for I knew a great loss was to come. Especially comforting was the *Meditations* series, *For Such a Time as This*. Some say it is difficult to lose a loved one during the holidays, but I was uplifted by a simple phrase I found in one devotion about a woman whose husband died. He was strong in his faith, but she was not. A neighbor comforted her with these words: “Jesus gave us Christmas, but he gave us Easter, too.”

Of course! He was born in a humble stable and lived a sinless life for us. He died in great pain, forsaken by God and left alone by his followers, only to shout, “It is finished!” He wiped our sins away and rose to give us new life with him forever! At my father’s funeral, we were reminded that the rugged wooden cross could not hold Christ back from his glorious resurrection. So too the wooden coffin could not

hold Pa back from the resurrection our Redeemer gives all believers.

My father could never see well. He left school at an early age because he could not keep up—he was legally blind years before his death. But reading this passage in my Scripture calendar reminded me of my father’s life: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17). My father lived that new life with Christ. Now he lives with Christ in glory. He has left behind the pain and suffering. No more flesh weakened and blistered with tumors. No more blindness.

So, Pa, even though my eyes are burning, that is a smile you see, for I’m so happy you are with Jesus now. I look forward to joining you when the Lord chooses—for he has prepared a room for me, too. As you left on the porch light in the days of our youth when we returned home late, I know the glorious light you live in now will never go out. Our Father leaves it burning brightly for us all. ✨

Pamela Miller is a member at Immanuel, Ft. Worth, Texas.

WHATEVER

Last chance

I saw their lips moving, but in my head all that played was, "Lauren shot herself last night."

Angela Willut

Should it all have to come to this?

Teacher: "Angela, will you please come with me?"

Angela: "Am I in trouble?"

Teacher: "No, don't worry."

Pastor: "Come in. Please have a seat."

Angela: "Why does everyone looks so sad? Someone just tell me what's going on! Mom, why are you here? Someone answer me!"

The day this conversation took place was one of the worst days of my life. I didn't understand what was happening, but the knot in my stomach said that it was something bad.

It was eighth-grade year, and it seemed like school was taking forever. I was so excited because I was going to spend the weekend with Lauren. Lauren was my cousin and also my best friend. We were the same age and had the same taste in everything.

Then the unthinkable happened.

I was brought into the pastor's office. All too soon the news flooded me. The first couple of words were enough. I saw their lips moving, but in my head all that played was, "Lauren shot herself last night." This couldn't be! It must be a dream! I was handed a note titled "Good Bye."

My gun is just lying here cold
When I use it my body will be old
The shot of the gun
The bullet's pain
Everything dying as I am laying
The misery and depression is finally gone.
One thing I've forgot is to say good-bye to my mom
I love you mom, there is nothing you could do
I want you to know that even though we fought
I still will always love you.

The next few days I was in shock. Lauren's funeral was terrible. Everyone was crying uncontrollably. The

worst part was—what if Lauren didn't go to heaven? She was a strong Christian, but she took her life, and that was that.

God tells us that when the time is right he will take us to heaven. "For I know the plans I have for you . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you" (Jeremiah 29:11-13). God has great plans for all of us.

Sometimes life doesn't seem like it's worth living, but everyone has bad days. God assures us that he will help us. He says, "Even now . . . return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning" (Joel 2:12). God is always there. No problem is too great for him.

When I lost my cousin I thought that there was no one I could turn to who would understand. I started praying to God more often. Last year I met a girl whose sister had committed suicide. She told me she wanted so badly to die, and she didn't think her sadness would ever go away. I offered her all the love and Christian advice I could. I am happy to say she made the right decision, and we are still friends today.

If someone you know is struggling with life and is even thinking about committing suicide, you can help! Some people may seem to joke about suicide, but they are really crying out for help. They want you to listen. They want their precious lives to be saved. They need Jesus, and they may need him to work through you.

Angela Willut, a junior at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, is a member at St. John, Mukwonago, Wisconsin.



An uncommon dialogue between a church janitor and a pastor reveals where our true peace should come from—this Christmas and always.

Peter J. Leyrer

Jesus Inc.

Bill, the church's janitor, unlocked the door to discover he wasn't the first to arrive that morning: "We're thinking the same thing: this time of year, early morning is the only time to get anything done around church."

"That's right. These floors won't mop themselves, will they?" answered Tim, who had just arrived to work in his study.

"Christmas sermons won't write themselves, either."

"What can a person say about Christmas, really? Hasn't it all been said already?"

"How about a year-end report?" suggested Bill. "I know the traditional church year puts Christmas at the beginning, but for most of us, December is the last month. So every year I think about what has happened since last Christmas. Jesus came to make peace on earth, right? And he's been doing that this past year, hasn't he?"

"So you want a report on 'Jesus Inc.,' eh? Okay, but I'm afraid it looks like the corporation hasn't done too well this year. Remember last spring when the Greene's little girl drowned? It's bothered me ever



since." Tim's face looked troubled. "This will be the Greene's first Christmas without her. They can't be feeling much peace right now."

"Christmas means that God became flesh, living in a body that could die. It seems to me that he became human just so that he could die. And he died so death wouldn't have any more power over us. So Jesus didn't call that little girl anywhere that he didn't go first. He

called her home, gave her peace."

"You're right," Tim admitted. "But still, do you ever wonder how God could let something like that happen?"

"You know that God doesn't tell us all his plans. But I'll say this: the day of the funeral this place was packed with people who heard what Jesus had done for that little girl and for them." Bill smiled. "And I've heard through the grapevine

that the Greene's relatives over in Wilsonville haven't missed church since that day."

"So Jesus Inc. is at work. But I can't help but feel disappointed about Willie. He was making such progress until he violated parole. You know he'll spend Christmas in jail this year."

"I think Willie will struggle with his addiction for a long time, maybe the rest of his life," Bill allowed. "But the addiction isn't Jesus' fault. I knew Willie before he knew Jesus. Now he struggles with his addiction, but he used to struggle with everybody. Christmas is about Jesus coming into the world to bring peace. When Jesus came into Willie he brought peace. I don't know for sure how he knows it, but Willie knows that his problems aren't everybody else's fault. He still struggles, but now he knows what he's struggling with, and he knows who's on his side."

Tim thought for a moment. "He knows that his struggle is spiritual and not with flesh and blood."

"Couldn't have said it better myself. I think Willie's made a lot of progress this year. Or, Jesus has made a lot of progress in him."

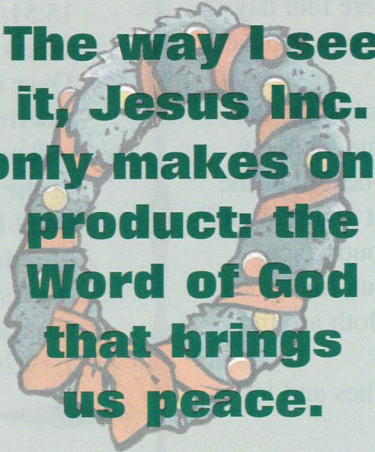
"But this is one little corner of Jesus Inc. What about 'Peace on earth?'" Tim asked. "Every time I turn on the news I wonder if the company lives up to its advertisements. Seems the world gets less stable, less peaceful every day."

Bill leaned against the wall. "Remember the missionary who came through last summer? The people in his pictures looked and sounded so different from us. But the missionary said they're Christians, just like us, and that many of them lost their families

when they became Christians. Now people like us are the only family they have. Peace on earth? Jesus said there will always be wars, but if what that missionary said is true, the number of people I'm at peace with gets bigger every day. Plus all who believe have peace with God."

"So Jesus Inc. saw healthy expansion this year. Reason enough for stockholders to celebrate."

"There's more." Bill spoke faster as he warmed to his subject. "You performed baptisms here—some kids, some grown ups. Jesus made all of them part of the family, too. In Bible classes and sermons we learned more about what Jesus did for us and what he wants us to do for each other. Anybody who cared to drop by on Sunday mornings could see that we believe Jesus is pretty important. And—my favorite part—about once a month we celebrated Christmas."



The way I see it, Jesus Inc. only makes one product: the Word of God that brings us peace.

"Once a month?"

"Sure. The very first Christmas present was God in a body, given to us so that we could have peace forever, right? Every time we celebrated the Lord's Supper this past year we got the same present again. God wrapped it a little different those times, but it meant the same thing: 'Peace on earth, good will toward men.'"

"Now you're going a little too fast," Tim interrupted. "I'm pretty sure that back in the seminary they told us that the Lord's Supper is about Jesus' death, not his birth."

"Far be it from the church janitor to argue with a seminary professor," Bill chuckled. "But before he could die Jesus had to be born, right? I remember you telling us last year that Christmas means the Word of God became flesh for us. And every time we have the Lord's Supper you tell us, 'This is the true body . . .' The way I see it, Jesus Inc. only makes one product: the Word of God that brings us peace. And it works. We have peace."

"So what else do you think about while you're mopping floors?" Tim wondered aloud.

"I think about those shepherds. The angels talked to them and didn't say a word to the king or the rest of the upper crust of society. I figure if God wanted people like that in on the good news, he doesn't mind my bucket of suds and overalls, either."

"How about if I swing the mop for a little while and you write the sermon?"

"Nah. You'll do fine. You just need to get out of your books and see what Jesus is doing once in a while. You know what I think about mostly?"

"What?"

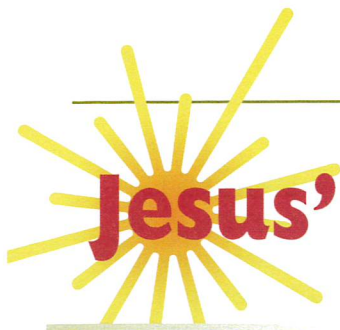
"I think about what I'm going to say to Pastor the next time he's feeling down."

"Your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

"Back at you. Merry Christmas, Pastor Tim."

"Merry Christmas, Bill."

Peter Leyrer is a WELS missionary in Taiwan.



Jesus' miracles: PORTRAITS OF REDEMPTION

Mark J. Lenz

INTRODUCTION

How do you suppose people today would react to a widely witnessed resurrection from the dead? Why?

Why do you think God no longer raises people from the dead as Jesus did during his earthly ministry?

TEXT—JOHN 11:33-44

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴“Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

³⁵Jesus wept.

³⁶Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

³⁷But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹“Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

⁴⁰Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”

⁴¹So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

⁴³When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

QUESTIONS

1. Whom did Jesus see weeping? Why was she weeping? What was Jesus' reaction?
2. How did the Jews react to Jesus' sorrow? How did they react to the death of Lazarus?
3. Why was Martha reluctant to have the stone moved away from the opening to the cave?
4. As you read Jesus' response, what do you think may lie behind Martha's words?

QUESTIONS, CONTINUED

5. What method did Jesus use to raise Lazarus from the dead?
6. Describe Lazarus's appearance as he emerged from the tomb. What did Jesus tell the people to do?

APPLICATIONS

1. In Mark 5:35-43 and Luke 7:11-17 Jesus also raised people from the dead. What method in each case did Jesus use to raise the dead? How is this similar to the way in which Jesus will raise the dead on the last day (John 5:28,29)?
2. Jairus's daughter was a child. The son of the widow of Nain was a young man. Lazarus seems to have been a mature man. With this in mind, what reasons can you suggest as to why these particular miracles of Jesus are recorded?
3. What hope does Jesus' power to raise the dead give us (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-58)? In the light of this hope, how do these verses say we should live?
4. Over the past several months we have been considering the theme “Jesus' miracles: Portraits of redemption.” How, in each case, is Jesus' healing of the blind, deaf, and lame a portrait of redemption? How is Jesus' raising of the dead a portrait of redemption (John 10:10, 20:31)?
5. Agree/disagree: New spiritual life is a less amazing miracle than resurrection from the dead (Ephesians 1:19,20).

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, your raising of Lazarus from the dead assures me that you are the Lord of life and death. Your own resurrection from the dead on the third day guarantees that you will bring my dead body back to life on the last day. Help me encourage others with this resurrection certainty. Cause me always to give myself fully to the work you have given me, knowing that my labor for you is never in vain. Hear me for your mercy's sake. Amen.

SG²

If you've heard the words SG² being tossed around WELS elementary schools, you may have mistaken them for some new slang or an up-and-coming pop music group. But don't be deceived, the real SG² is just as "cool," but much more practical. It is a new program from the Commission on Parish Schools (CPS) called Special Gifts for the Specially Gifted, nicknamed SG².

In December 2001, with the support of Aid Association for Lutherans (AAL), the first ever awards in the SG² program were announced. Six WELS schools that submitted proposals were awarded mini-grants to help elevate the Christian education experience of special-needs students enrolled in the schools.

The six schools that received grants proposed plans to the SG² committee,

outlining the type of programs they hoped to put in place with the money. Martin Luther, Oshkosh, Wis., purchased materials to enhance its full-inclusion program. Trinity, Brillion, Wis., is developing an "at risk" readers program for remedial students. Trinity-St. Luke, Watertown, Wis., purchased a variety of materials to help both special-needs students and their teachers grow.

Special education students can now learn at their own pace and level with the new software at Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis. A grant has allowed teachers at Resurrection, Rochester, Minn., to fund substitute teachers so that the full-time teachers can meet with public school specialists. "For our teachers to take time during the school day to visit his or her student in an alternate setting in

the public school has been enlightening," says Principal Philip Zahn. "Many ideas have been brought into our own classrooms."

These new programs and materials will not only benefit the special-needs students, but also their fellow classmates. As David Allerheiligen, teacher at St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis., emphasizes, "Hyper Studio (software that develops a more inclusive learning environment) will not be just another part of our curriculum. It will allow students to work with [special-needs students] in an enjoyable and productive way. Mentoring students will come away, I strongly believe, feeling that by working with special-needs students, they have gained over and above what the special-needs students themselves have gained."

Laura Warmuth

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

In the spirit of Matthew 5:16, we're sharing examples of people who live their faith. If you have an example to share, send it to us at 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; <fic@sab.wels.net>.

The following is an e-mail sent to Charlie Sykes, a Milwaukee radio talk show host, on Sept. 11. Sykes chose to read this e-mail on the air the next morning.

Tonight I have a "renewed faith" in the youth of today and the future of our country! "Remembering Sept. 11" programming filled the airwaves of WTMJ throughout the day. As I drove in the six county area for my job, I listened intently. . . .

But tonight, after a moving and inspiring "Time of Remembrance" worship service at my church out in Brookfield, including the President's speech on the big screen TV, I was driving back into Milwaukee using Bluemound Road. As I was

approaching the area of 88th Street and Bluemound (the area in front of Wisconsin Lutheran College), there, right in the middle boulevard, were about 150 to 200 college students with lighted candles and song sheets singing with deep conviction and compassion. Many were holding American flags.

I almost drove past them along with the other eastbound traffic. However, I slowed down to see what was going on and realized that they were there doing a tribute to Sept. 11. I quickly made a U-turn, realizing that this would be one of those "Kodak moments in time" that I just couldn't pass up. I parked directly in front of them and with no other cars there, had the best seat in the house!

I grabbed a small flag I had on my dashboard and a small seat cushion from my back seat and sat back and enjoyed the best tribute of Sept. 11 I had ever seen. . . .

I have worried about the young people today . . . that even with the massive significance of the Sept. 11 "Act of Terrorism," this all could still

get lost in their young minds in the near future, like another video game or Hollywood adventure film. . . .

But, tonight, there in the middle of our Milwaukee streets were 200 flag-waving, God-fearing students, thanking the Creator of this country they live in. Singing songs of praise and worship, songs that tell of our country's greatness. There they were filling the cool night air with the unmistakable sounds of patriotism through the words and music of such great songs as the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and "God Bless America." And when they did a rousing finish of our national anthem—wow!

The college and the community can be proud of [these students]! When they finished the last note of the national anthem, I jumped off my ringside seat on the trunk of my car and yelled across to them: "Thank you! You have restored my faith in the youth of America. May God bless all of you!"

Dennis A. Drinkwine

WLIM centennial spotlights volunteerism

Can you imagine looking forward to the foreboding sound of a prison door slamming closed behind you? Or, how about excitedly anticipating the next time that you can go to the hospital or a juvenile detention center?

The seven chaplains and one deaconess at Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries, Inc. (WLIM) know all about these things. They, and nearly 300 volunteers, share God's Word with those institutionalized in Wisconsin, northern Michigan, northeast Illinois, Indiana, and one prison each in Tennessee and Minnesota. Based in Milwaukee, this organization is celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2002.

WLIM kicked off its three-year centennial celebration on May 19. Since then, over 75 congregations have held WLIM centennial services. WLIM is working on many special projects to add to the cele-

bration. The first, a six-minute video, emphasizes lay volunteerism. A WLIM history book, an inspirational booklet, and a "praise" CD are also being developed.

The major thrust of WLIM's 100th anniversary is lay volunteerism. To further develop this program, a volunteer coordinator is being added to WLIM's staff through anniversary thank offering gifts. This volunteer coordinator will identify new volunteers, as well as assist local congregations in recruiting, training, and using the growing number of volunteers.

Although volunteering for WLIM may initially seem scary, Robert Pasbrig, director of ministry advancement, explains, "Fears are to be expected. Everyone has them at first. However, there is very little physical risk. Inmates are very appreciative. They realize that you are taking time out of your life to



WISCONSIN LUTHERAN
INSTITUTIONAL MINISTRIES, INC.

do this. And current volunteers just go on and on about how gratifying it is to lead a Bible study or share a devotion. Remember that the Lord is with you. He'll give you the words to say to spread his Word, and his help and protection are always there for you."

To learn more about volunteering for WLIM, visit <www.wlim.net> or call 414/259-8122.

Another wall comes down

Frederic Kosanke writes the following historical account of one of the churches of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, our sister synod in Germany.

In 1872, a small group in Zwickau determined that the German state church was leaving biblical doctrine. This group bought a piece of land and built a church, even though it was opposed and ridiculed. Dedicated in 1879, this church—and its 131-foot bell tower—still calls out with its clear tone the invitation to hear and follow God's Word.

Because this group did not want its children to be educated without a clear biblical confession of God's truth, it also started a school, which kept going until 1938, when Hitler and Nazi power closed it. A wall was put up against the gospel.

Since this part of Germany was given over to Russian dominance after

World War II, the school could not be reopened. The communist wall was built. The big beautiful state churches became museums and tourist sites rather than places to proclaim God's good news of salvation. The East German Secret police opened, kept, or censored mail to the church and pastor. (Only recently have boxes of such withheld mail been opened.) Part of the parsonage was taken over for other, favored, residents. Parents were urged to have their children "dedicated" to the Communist State, not baptized into Christ, to have teenagers join the Communist Party, not be confirmed as Lutheran Christians.

When that "wall" came down, some conditions improved. Others did not. With unemployment at 25 percent, young families moved to West Germany to find better pay—or any jobs at all. So many families

left the Zwickau area that the school system closed two large schools within blocks of the church.

And yet the church survived! Around 300 members attend services. A children's Bible and Catechism session is regularly held with the church service, and several Bible study groups, as well as a fellowship group and a brass choir, meet often.

Just last fall [2001], the congregation's Christian day school restarted with 15 first-graders, only four from member families. Another first grade was added this fall. The congregation is negotiating for use of the empty public schools in its area. It is amazing that this rebirth of Lutheran elementary education is happening in Saxony, near the Luther sites of Wittenberg, Eisleben, Erfurt, and the Wartburg. Another wall has been breached!

A little goes a long way

Besides giving money and aid for disaster relief, the Committee on Relief has always been interested in helping our world missionaries aid the less fortunate. This past year, the committee dispersed over \$10,000 directly to world missionaries for humanitarian efforts.

That money went a long way. An e-mail from Missionary Richard Warnke in Malawi shows how what we may consider pocket change can affect the needy in Africa. Read on:

“The Lord has enabled me to show a continuing interest in the pathetic conditions endured by the men incarcerated at Maula Federal Prison [where Warnke and National Pastor Daison Phiri lead devotions and Bible study]. . . . They still are fed only one meal per day—and that’s a nutritionless, tasteless meal you and I probably could not survive on—no fruits, vegetables, or meat; only corn-based mush and sometimes brown beans.

“Cabbage continues to be the most popular vegetable in Malawi. As we drove back from Blantyre one Sunday afternoon, we noticed that many cabbages appeared to have been harvested recently. This got me thinking: maybe the price is down these days. Maybe it’s time to buy some again for Maula.

“Another factor got me to act. Later that week, many women were coming here for the LUWO (Lutheran Women’s Organization) meeting. Each congregation sending ladies is to contribute for food, but most have been coming up short.

“This gave me the opportunity to combine several things of interest:

- I decided to donate a large quantity of cabbage myself to the LUWO meeting.



Missionary Richard Warnke (left) and Pastor Daison Mebedi with their truckload of cabbages.

- Pastor Mabedi, a very dear friend, likes to claim he can negotiate better market prices than I can. I wanted to test that claim.

- This was a chance to purchase nutritious food for the inmates at Maula.

“So, I asked Mabedi if he was interested in borrowing a full-size mission pickup truck, getting some money from me, and trying to buy cabbage at a good price. He was more than interested.

“When he and two other national pastors got back, they had the pickup piled high with cabbage. . . .

“When all the finances were sorted out, Committee on Relief monies bought between half and three quarters of a ton of cabbage for the prisoners at Maula and paid for the diesel fuel for the trip. How much relief money are we talking about? Just under U.S. \$39.

“Your gifts of love are being used efficiently and for the aid of some of the poorest of people anywhere—but those needy folks, too, are souls redeemed by Jesus.”

Your gifts to the Committee on Relief, even the smallest ones, go a long way. Warnke says it best: “Think about that price the next time you’re checking out at the local supermarket.”

Obituaries

Robert W. Holtz 1916-2002

Robert Holtz was born Sept. 22, 1916, in Sturgis, Mich. He died July 10, 2002, in Saginaw, Mich.

A 1940 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Grace, Flint, Mich.; Arlington Avenue, Toledo, Ohio; St. Matthew, Freeland, Mich.; Lutheran High School (now Wisconsin Lutheran High School), Milwaukee, Wis.; and Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw.

He was preceded in death by one daughter, two brothers, and two sisters. He is survived by his wife, Elaine; three sons; one daughter; three grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

Darleen A. Bailey 1928-2002

Darleen Bailey was born Oct. 29, 1928, in Baraboo, Wis. She died Sept. 30, 2002.

A 1949 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she served at St. John, Neillsville; Zion, Columbus; and Trinity, Neenah, all in Wis.

She is survived by one uncle, many cousins, other relatives, and friends.

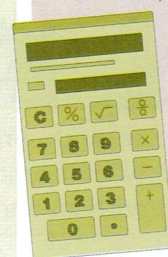
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District news

Dakota-Montana

Trinity, Clear Lake, S.D., hosted an area Reformation service on Oct. 27.

Apostles, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, has entered a new phase in its life as a congregation. The Board for Home Missions granted the 36-member congregation with mission status after six years of exploratory work.

Northern Wisconsin

St. Mark, Green Bay, Wis., held a groundbreaking celebration on Oct. 19. Each family was asked to bring a stone with a Bible passage or reference on it. The stones were piled in the form of a pillar, similar to Old Testament times, to remind people of the God who saves and guides us. When the building is completed, the stones will be used in the landscape as a constant monument to God's faithfulness.

Western Wisconsin

On Sept. 8, **St. Matthew, Janesville, Wis.**, dedicated a nine-classroom school.

South Atlantic

Lamb of God, Madison, Ala., dedicated its new facility on July 28. Little Lambs Learning Center, the first WELS education facility in Alabama, opened on Sept. 3.

Southeastern Wisconsin

On Oct. 6, **St. John, Mukwonago, Wis.**, dedicated its new Christian education center and worship facility.

Michigan

On Aug. 18, members of **St. John, Allegan, Mich.**, attended a groundbreaking ceremony for their new church.

Katie LaPrairie, a member at Trinity, Bay City, Mich., and a student at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, wrote the winning essay in a competition sponsored by a local Christian radio station. Her essay explained how her teachers and pastors have taught her to put her faith into action.

Zion, St. Louis, Mich., now called Good Shepherd, decommissioned its worship facility on Sept. 29. In a special service, members looked back on 122 years of blessings and looked ahead to the new blessings that God will grace them with as they merge with Grace, Alma, Mich.

Happy Anniversary!

CA—On Oct. 20, Ascension, Escondido, Calif., celebrated **Hermann John's** 40 years in the pastoral ministry.

South Atlantic



On Sept. 1, Grace, Grenada, West Indies, hosted a "Back to School Sunday." Audrey Beese, a WELS Kingdom Worker volunteer in Grenada, writes, "As our average attendance is around 35 adults and children, we had 20 packets ready to go. We ended up with 29 children and had to give out IOUs to nine to come back on Monday."

Here Shemorily (left) and Lotoyla proudly hold their back to school packets.

Dakota-Montana



Bethel, Sioux Falls, S.D., recently built both a new school and a new church. The new facilities were dedicated on Apr. 7. On Aug. 26, Bethel Lutheran School opened with an enrollment of 20 students.

On Oct. 20, **Reformation, San Diego, Calif.**, celebrated its 40th anniversary. Reformation was the first WELS congregation established in San Diego County. Five other WELS churches in San Diego call Reformation their mother.

DM—**Our Savior, Brookings, S.D.**, celebrated its 35th anniversary on Oct. 13. Throughout its history, serving students at South Dakota State University has been a main part of the congregation's ministry.

SA—**Sola Fide, Lawrenceville, Ga.**, celebrated its 25th anniversary with a special service on Oct. 6. The congregation operates an elementary school with an enrollment of 40 and a preschool with an enrollment of 60.

SEW—On Sept. 29, a special service was held to celebrate **David Valleskey's** 40th anniversary in the pastoral ministry. Valleskey is the current president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: CA—Hermann John; DM—Wayne Rouse; MI—John Eich; NW—Joel Lillo; SA—Christopher Kruschel; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Martin Baur.

“I’ve always been a supporter”

“If God gives you something, like a certain face, he means you to do something with it.” Within minutes of meeting her, I could see that Helen Baylor of Mequon, Wis., loved these words. She continues, “I hope that it is Christ that people see in me that makes them feel comfortable and know that I care. I try to reflect Christ.” And she does.

Growing up as daughter of a Baptist minister in Mississippi, Baylor learned about Christian stewardship at an early age. “The giving was automatic,” she recalls. “We did not get an allowance, so our parents would hand each one of us a quarter for the offering. And though we did not earn that money, the message was there.” She and her five sisters also gave of their talents when they sang together at neighboring churches.

When Baylor and her husband wanted to pass on their Christian values to their three sons, they joined Siloah, a WELS church in Milwaukee.

Baylor spent about 12 years teaching English and social studies in the Milwaukee Public School (MPS) system. Then, feeling the need to broaden her influence in children’s lives, she worked to receive her Masters of Social Work in 1980. As she worked with poor students and those with personal and emotional problems, Baylor saw opportunity in assignments as trivial as retrieving locks from the homes of dropout students.

“I was never a leader. I’ve always been a supporter,” Baylor says. The years she spent in the MPS counseling center suited her well, but realizing the magnitude of her work, she was grieved by the fact that she could not legally use God’s Word. “Of course, I prayed on my own for the children and took the Lord with me into each session,” Baylor shares, but not being able to share Christ with a suicidal child still troubled her.

Upon retiring, Baylor offered her services as counselor at her home church of Atonement, Milwaukee, and took a certification course



Helen Baylor may look familiar to you. She is one of seven people who discussed Christian stewardship in the *Work While It Is Day* video series. “When we have anything to give, whether it’s our money, talents, or time, that is a blessing in itself,” Baylor says. “Concentrating on the fact that we are so blessed makes it easy to give more.”

through Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Services, Inc., to prepare herself to use God’s Word. She says she is using her talents to “support the mission of the church and the school to bring children up in the fear of the Lord.”

Teachers at Atonement refer students to Baylor if they see that something in the child’s life, especially a changing family situation, is hindering the child from getting the most out of his Christian education. These children already know the gospel, so Baylor’s joy is in helping them discover how God’s Word works for them personally.

The heart of a servant lives within Baylor as she serves the Lord who first loved her. “Look at how easy it is to give to someone we love and adore,” she reminds us. “A man will work that extra job to give a ring to that wonderful woman whom he loves. And look what we do for those we idolize. That’s God. He’s the love of your life. He’s our King. Praise and honor him! Whatever he gives us is to use to glorify him. He has one purpose, and that’s our salvation. When he gives us something, that’s what it’s for.”

Laura Warmuth



So, God, what about ... ?

Want God’s advice, but you’re not sure where to look? We’ll get you started with the basics. Remember these verses—and share them!

Talking to our God, going straight to him with our worries, thanks, and praise, is a privilege to embrace. But how should we pray? What should we say? How do we know God even hears us?

- “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer” (Matthew 21:22).
- “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him” (1 John 5:14,15).
- “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).
- “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6,7).
- “Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear” (Isaiah 65:24).

On your own

Jesus himself prayed to his Father in heaven. He even gives us advice on how to pray. Read Matthew 26:36-46 and Matthew 6:5-15.

This is the last in the “So, God, what about . . . ?” series. In 2003, we encourage you to begin a three-year journey through your Bible. See p. 28 for more details.

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

A diligent, but slightly confused fourth-grader reciting the Tenth Commandment said: “You shall not commit adultery with your neighbor’s wife, workers, animals, or anything that belongs to your neighbor . . .”

Peter Schaeewe
Jefferson, Wisconsin



Poll: A look at American religious beliefs—A new poll by Barna Research Group that questioned Americans on their beliefs shows that many hold beliefs that conflict with the teachings of the Bible and their church.

Those polled were asked to respond to the following statements:

- Praying to deceased saints can have a positive effect in a person's life—

51% agree

39% disagree

- When people are born, they are neither good nor evil; they make a choice between the two as they mature—

74% agree

21% disagree

- God is one being in three separate and equal persons—

79% agree

13% disagree

- Every person has a soul that will live forever, either in God's presence or absence—

79% agree

12% disagree

- The Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon are all different expressions of the same spiritual truths—

44% agree

38% disagree

- Truth can be discovered only through logic, human reasoning, and personal experience—

54% agree

43% disagree

- When he lived on earth, Jesus Christ sinned, like other people—

42% agree

50% disagree

- The devil, or Satan, is not a living being but is a symbol of evil—

59% agree

34% disagree

Data is based on a national telephone survey among a random sample of adults (age 18 or older) living in the 48 continental states. The survey included the responses of 630 people and was conducted in August 2002. Sampling error is plus or minus 4.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

[From "Americans draw theological beliefs from diverse points of view," Barna Research Group, Ltd., Ventura, Calif. <www.barna.org>; Oct. 8, 2002]

New floating church for the Church of England—The Church of England is getting a new chapel this November. But this isn't your normal chapel. It's a 140-foot long converted Dutch barge that will be anchored in Canary Wharf, London.

This will be the first floating chapel for the Church of England in at least 450 years.

Started by St. Anne's, Limehouse, this chapel is expected to serve up to 150 office workers for lunchtime church services and Bible classes.

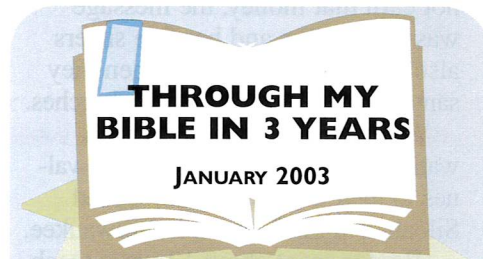
Film to be made about Jesus' passion—Actor Mel Gibson is directing a movie about the last 12 hours of Jesus' life. *The Passion* will feature dialogue in Aramaic and Latin, but will not have subtitles. Production started in November.

The movie will be based on *City of God*, a book by Mary Agreda; the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; and other sources.

Did you know?—In September, Pope John Paul II became the fifth-longest-serving pope of the church's 264 popes.

According to tradition, the longest-serving pope was St. Peter, who is believed to have led for 34 to 37 years. Vatican records put Pius IX second with 32 years, seven months, and 21 days; Leo XIII third with 25 years and five months; and Pius VI fourth with 24 years, six months, and seven days. John Paul II has just finished serving 24 years.

Most news reported in this section is derived from Religion News Service. Items do not necessarily reflect the views of WELS or *Forward in Christ* magazine.



This Bible reading series is designed to take only a few minutes each day. To help you through your Bible study, consider this anecdote: Peter the Barber once asked Martin Luther how he, an ordinary kind of guy, could read the Bible with profit. 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.

1. 2 Corinthians 6:11-7:16	16. 1 Tm. 3:1-13
2. 2 Cor. 8:1-15	17. 1 Tm. 3:14-4:5
3. 2 Cor. 8:16-9:15	18. 1 Tm. 4:6-16
4. 2 Cor. 10	19. 1 Tm. 5:1-6:2
5. 2 Cor. 11:1-21a	20. 1 Tm. 6:3-21
6. 2 Cor. 11:21b-12:10	21. Titus 1
7. 2 Cor. 12:11-21	22. Titus 2
8. 2 Cor. 13	23. Titus 3
9. Micah 1 and 2	24. 2 Timothy 1
10. Micah 3:1-4:7	25. 2 Tm. 2
11. Micah 4:8-5:15	26. 2 Tm. 3
12. Micah 6:1-7:6	27. 2 Tm. 4
13. Micah 7:7-20	28. Leviticus 1
14. 1 Timothy 1	29. Lev. 2 and 3
15. 1 Tm. 2	30. Lev. 4:1-6:7
	31. Lev. 6:8-7:38

The last "So, God, what about . . . ?" can be found on p. 27.



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Elgin, Walter F., to Calvary, Canyon Country, Calif.
Kaesmeyer, Mark A., to Good Shepherd, Burnsville, Minn.
Kuske, Timothy P., to Calvary, Sheboygan, Wis.
Lintner, Joel W., to Mt. Olive Chinese Christian Church, St. Paul, Minn.
Martens, Ralph W., to Mexico
Raasch, Charles A., to Morning Star, Jackson, Wis.
Starr, Richard D., to Trinity, Bay City, Mich.
Weigand, Martin R., to St. Matthew, Benton Harbor, Mich.

The synod administration building will be closed: Dec. 24 & 25, and Jan. 1, 2003. Callers may leave voice mail messages, 414/256-3888.

SYNOD CONVENTION

The 57th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod will be held July 28-Aug. 1, 2003, at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. Details will be announced later. Memorials to be included in the *Book of Reports and Memorials* must be submitted to the president's office by Feb. 1, 2003.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The Synod Nominating Committee will meet at 7 PM, Jan. 8, 2003, at the synod administration building. The committee will propose three candidates for each of the following positions:

- Synodical Council member (pastor at-large)
- Board for Home Missions: chairman (pastor)
- Board for World Missions: chairman (pastor)
- Board for World Missions administrative committee members: Latin America (layman); Native American (pastor, teacher); Africa (layman); Japan Europe Asia (pastor, layman); Southeast Asia (teacher, layman)
- Board for Ministerial Education: three board members (pastor, teacher, layman)
- Martin Luther College Governing Board: chairman (pastor)
- Northwestern Publishing House Board: three board members (WLS professor, two laymen)
- Board for Parish Services: layman
- Commission on Youth Discipleship: chairman (pastor)
- Commission on Adult Discipleship: chairman (pastor)

The list of candidates nominated will be published in spring 2003. The delegates will elect one candidate for each position at the synod convention on July 28-Aug. 1, 2003. Any synod voting member is invited to send names with pertinent information by Dec. 15, 2002, to Steven Lemke, 1108 Ontario Ave, Sheboygan WI 53081; <SecWELS@sab.wels.net>.

NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS

The cutoff date for Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) receipts in the synod's post office lock box is the last business day of each month. December 2002 offerings sent to our lock box will be credited as 2002 receipts through Thurs., Jan. 9, 2003, as long as they are received in the lock box on or before that date and are clearly labeled as "December" offerings on the remittance coupon. We ask that you continue to mail your offerings to the lock box. That location, our bank, will provide you with the fastest deposit process for your congregation.

Mark Meissner, director of finance

ANNIVERSARIES

Sebewaing, Mich.—New Salem (150). Jan. 12, 2003. Service, 10 AM. Meal to follow.

Phoenix, Ariz.—Arizona Lutheran Academy (25). Mar. 23, 2003. Service, 4 PM. Meal to follow. 602/268-8686.

COMING EVENTS

Christmas concerts—

- **Lutheran Chorale**, Dec. 1, 3 & 7 PM. Atonement, Milwaukee. Mary Prange, 414/873-9105.
 - **Lakeshore Lutheran Chorale**, Dec. 7, 7:30 PM, St. John/St. James, Reedsville, Wis. Dec. 8, 3 & 6 PM, Bethany, Manitowoc, Wis. Matt Manthe, 920/684-7448 or Alan Ross, 920/684-5833.
 - **Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.**—Dec. 8, 3 & 7 PM.
 - **Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.**—Dec. 15, 3 PM.
 - **Cascade Lutheran Chorale**—Dec. 15, 4 PM. Grace, Portland, Ore. Joy Williams, 503/493-0465. Rehearsal dates, Oct. 20, Nov. 10 & 24, Dec. 8.
 - **Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.**—Dec. 15, 3 PM & Dec. 19, 10 AM.
 - **Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.**—Dec. 20, 7 PM.
- S.H.A.R.E. (WELS Singles Helping one Another on the Road of Eternity) events—**for WELS singles in the Milwaukee area.
- **Christmas stroll & shopping**—Dec. 7, 12 PM. Sharri H., 414/774-2740.
 - **Christmas party & caroling**—Dec. 14, 1:15 PM. Patti H., 847-587-7941.
 - **Movie night**—Dec. 20, 6:30 PM. Janine H., 414/570-1688.
 - **Voters' meeting, Bible study, & potluck**—Jan. 4, 2003, 5 PM. 262/679-9185.

Kansas City-area Advent/Christmas service—Dec. 18, 7 PM. Mt. Olive, Overland Park, Kan. Joint service of Gethsemane, Lee's Summit, Mo.; Mt. Olive, Overland Park, Kan.; Rock of Ages, Kansas City, Mo.; Beautiful Savior, Topeka, Kan.; and Our Savior, Harrisonville, Mo. <matt.fox@hansonamerica.com>.

Martin Luther College—mid-year graduation. Dec. 18, 9:30 AM.

Retreats—

- **WELS/ELS Ladies Retreat**—Jan. 10-12, 2003. Woodlands Lutheran Campground, Montverde, Fla. Cost, \$110. Judy Becker, 941/355-6591.
- **Pathways to Christ Retreat**—Mar. 21-23, 2003. Hawthorne Inn, Oshkosh, Wis. Dorothy Laabs, 920/235-6495.
- **Today's Christian Women's Retreat**—Mar. 21-23, 2003. Sheraton Lansing Hotel, Lansing, Mich. For more information, visit <www.tcvr.org> or e-mail <info@tcvr.org>.
- **Christian Woman Today Spring Retreat**—Mar. 28-30, 2003. Olympia Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Maureen Sertich, 262/784-0412.
- **Spiritual Renewal Weekend for Women**—Apr. 4-6, 2003. Radisson Plaza Hotel, Rochester, Minn. Bev, 507/931-3945.

Florida retirement community seminar—third weekend in January. Sponsored by the Evangelism Committee of St. Mark, Leesburg, Fla. Various retirement community options will be reviewed to help WELS members relocate near a WELS church if they are retiring in Florida. St. Mark, 352/326-3211.

AVAILABLE

Pews—Fourteen 12-foot pews. Free for pick up from Gethsemane, Lees Summit, Mo. Stephen Helwig, 816/246-5192.

Pinewood racetrack—free for the cost of shipping or pick up from Watertown, Wis. Dan Zastrow, 920/261-0792.

SERVICE TIMES

Clermont, Fla.—new ELS mission congregation. Sunday worship, 11 AM. Adult information class, Sundays at 6:30 PM. Greg Sahlstrom, 352/243-8181.

NAMES WANTED

Clermont, Fla.—Greg Sahlstrom (ELS), 352/243-8181.

WELS-wide adoption group—Looking for support or friends with similar nationality for your children? Wish to attend an adoption group without worrying about fellowship issues? If you're interested in forming a WELS-wide adoption group, contact Matt Manthe, <mmanthe@lakefield.net>.

1953 eighth-grade class—of Jordan, West Allis, Wis. If you are interested in having a 50th class reunion, contact Paul Schoenike, 608/325-9491 or Al Rosenthal, 608/589-5036 by Dec. 15.

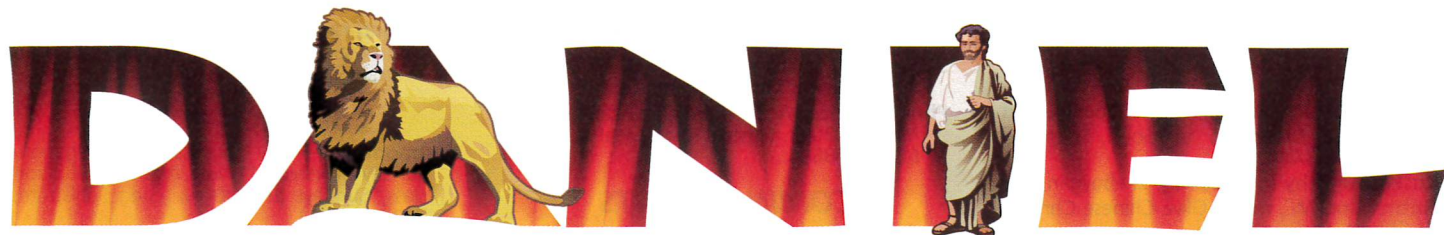
Technology innovators—Names of churches and schools that are using technology in ministry in innovative ways. Send examples to Steve Zambo, WELS Tech 2003 chairman, 2949 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222. Include church/school name (including city/state), one paragraph on the project, and one paragraph on why it is an innovative use of technology in ministry. Due by Feb. 1, 2003.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Environmental Education Program Director—for Camp Phillip, Inc., in Wautoma, Wis. Must be eligible for a call into the WELS public ministry and be spiritually mature. A college degree is preferred; other education and experience will be considered. Must enjoy working outdoors with campers of all ages, possess good communication skills, and present camp programs with enthusiasm, a sense of humor, patience, and self-control. Contact Tom Towner, chairman of the personnel committee, by Feb. 20, 2003, 912 W Parkway Blvd, Appleton WI 54914 or <cpxec@yahoo.com>.

Senior Vice President—The Lutheran Home Association, Belle Plaine, Minn., seeks mission-oriented individual to administer, plan, and coordinate activities in support of established policies, goals, objectives, and strategic initiatives. Qualifications include: four to 10 years related business experience and bachelor's degree; commitment to our Christian mission; demonstrated Christian values; proven leadership; human relations; communication and organizational skills; experience in strategic planning, budgeting, and policy making; and ability to meet scheduling requirements, including traveling 50 to 75 percent of time. Our diverse system spans two states and offers a variety of long-term care and rehabilitation services, assisted living, and community-based residential and supported living services. Send resume to Therese Kaletka, director of human resources, The Lutheran Home Association, 337 S Meridian St, Belle Plaine MN 56011; <tkaletka@tlha.org>.

To place an announcement, call 414/256-3210; FAX, 414/256-3862; <BulletinBoard@sab.wels.net>. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.



Witness through worship

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego gave a powerful witness as they worshiped the King who saves.

Philip L. Kieselhorst

Everyone was watching. What harm could it do to bow down just this once and worship with everyone else? Sure, the crowd was worshipping false gods, gods sprung from human imagination and made by human hands. But for the sake of peace and harmony (and survival!), wouldn't it be better to give in just this once?

Worship my truth, or else!

Few have experienced the degree of pressure endured by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They faced a ruthless king who could execute them with a word. King Nebuchadnezzar tested the loyalty of his subjects. Refusal to worship his god would equal treason. Worship my god, or else!

The devil has not ceased applying pressure on Christians to worship false gods. In view of the huge push for churches of different beliefs and different gods to worship together under the banner "Love your neighbor," it seems the devil is succeeding in burying the banner that declares, "Love the Lord your God above all things."

Although we do not face execution for refusing to worship society's gods, we can expect that we will not

be treated kindly by those who do. Still, we worship someone better.

Although we do not face execution for refusing to worship society's gods, we can expect that we will not be treated kindly by those who do.

Worship God's truth and live!

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Daniel 3:16,17).

Facing death, the three young men gave witness to the power and grace of the God they worshiped.

They could see fire and smoke rising in the furnace, but they feared God more. The king who had been

kind to them in the past offered them a way out, but God's love for them meant so much more.

In their time of trial, they did not look to their own goodness to find reasons for God to save them. They trusted God's goodness.

The God who saves is alone worthy of praise. He sent his messenger to rescue the three men from the consuming fire. By the grace and power of God, the three walked out of the furnace unharmed.

Only the God who sent Jesus to save us from the fires of hell is worthy of our worship. "We have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. . . . And so we know and rely on the love God has for us" (1 John 4:14,16).

"No other god can save in this way" (Daniel 3:29), the king confessed. No god of human invention could love us in the same real way that God loved us. Through Jesus, God saved us from eternal death. The fires of hell will not touch us.

Rely on the perfect love that God has for you and witness to the King through worship.



Philip Kieselhorst is pastor at Gethsemane, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

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Extra, extra, read all about it!

Some of us are old enough to remember the “Extras,” the special early or late editions of newspapers, conveying breaking news—“War declared!” “Armistice arranged!”

Today these breaking headlines often scroll across the bottom of our TV screens, or they interrupt our easy listening stations with the hard realities of life.

Two millenniums ago, when Christ was born, what would the headlines have read in the *Bethlehem Banner*? If not in written form, then talk in the Bethlehem bazaar might have been about the headlines listed below.

Pregnant woman denied accommodation!

Today we are so sensitive to human rights violations. If a woman about to give birth was denied accommodations, it well might lead to a successful discrimination lawsuit. In poor Mary’s case, it leads to bedding down with animals in a stable. Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Maker of heaven and earth, begins his earthly ministry among the animals he created—though it was human beings for whom he came to be sacrificed.

Infants slaughtered!

Isn’t it the height of insecurity for an adult to feel threatened by a newborn? Herod, in name the king of the Jews, envies one whom some foreign visitors claim to be born the real King of the Jews. Herod will never share their trust in the promised deliverance of this King. And so, diabolically, Herod slaughters the infants of Bethlehem, all baby boys two-years-old or younger, desiring to kill Jesus.

Family flees!

Herod’s cruel arm is long; the holy family flees. But it’s not nearly long enough to slaughter God’s Son. The family is safe in Egypt. God’s plan for the world’s salvation is secure, safe in exile.

Exile returns!

But this earthly ruler will not hold hostage God’s magnanimous, heavenly plan for

the world’s salvation. Herod dies. God’s Son lives, returning from exile. Openly and successfully he challenges all the forces of evil, including Satan. Vicariously, voluntarily, he dies. Victoriously he rises. And pardoned by him, all exiles can return home, safely, to heavenly accommodations.

The same exciting headlines apply to us.

Accommodations denied

If anyone deserved to be denied accommodations, it was you and I. By heredity sinful; habitually sinning; defying God in thoughts, words, and deeds, we should be denied heaven. We deserved eternal death, not someone sacrificing himself for us.

Innocent sacrificed

But, in our place, an innocent one sacrificed himself. Jesus died. For our sins he gave up his innocent life. It was his heavenly Father’s gracious, forgiving plan, providing a place for all spiritual exiles to flee.

Family flees

By faith we flee to Jesus. We no longer have to run away from God, afraid in his holy presence. We, as the family of God, can run to Jesus. In faith we cling to him, trusting his saving promise of forgiveness to return us from exile.

Exiles return

We’re exiles no longer! God made us his sons and daughters. We’re only exiles here for however many years the Lord chooses to give us. And then, gloriously, we return to our Father’s home to live with him forever.

Extra, extra, read all about it!

What delightful news, news to be published and proclaimed everywhere to everyone any time, Christmas included. “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord!” (Luke 2:11).



Karl R. Gurgel is the president of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Infants slaughtered!

Family flees!

Exile returns!

IN THE CROSS HAIRS

Richard L. Gurgel

TOPIC: HOW DOES GOD'S LOVE WORK?

Question: Does God love believers and unbelievers equally? Because of their unbelief, does God love unbelievers less? Or due to their belief, does God love believers more?

Answer: Simple “yes” or “no” answers to your questions would only yield confusion.

Remember the truth of John 3:16, “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.” As God looked at fallen mankind, he saw nothing good in any of us, yet he determined to win salvation for all of us. Scripture reveals a gracious love of equal magnitude that desires the eternal salvation of everyone who has ever—or will ever—populate this planet.

Further proof is found in Ezekiel, where the LORD proclaims, “As surely as I live . . . I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live” (33:11). If we doubt the depth of Jesus’ love for unbelievers, then pay close attention to his tears in Matthew 23:37. Shortly before his crucifixion Jesus wept for rebellious Jerusalem whose stubborn unbelief would reap damnation instead of salvation.

This seems to give the answer that God loves believer and unbeliever equally, but we must also pay attention to how Scripture speaks of those whom the Spirit brings to faith. As God’s New Testament Zion (see Hebrews 12:22), we can claim a term of endearment that God first gave his Old Testament people, “Whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye” (Zechariah 2:8). Or listen to this, “The Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love” (Psalm 147:11). Nowhere in Scripture does God make such statements about those living in unbelief. The moment we are brought to faith we become sons and daughters of God, clothed through the water of our baptism in the perfection of God’s own Son (Galatians 3:26,27). In God’s eyes we become cherished

children, honored heirs of heaven who possess the privilege to call the creator of the universe our “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15).

Most astounding of all is that Scripture doesn’t just use the Greek word that expresses God’s unconditional love (*agape*) toward us. It also uses the term for affectionate friendship (*philia*)! As Jesus tells us, “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15).

Consider also that only believers can claim many of

God’s promises as their own. Only those who know God as Father through Jesus Christ have the privilege of prayer and the assurance of being heard and answered. “Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night” (Luke 18:7)? Only those who “make the most high their dwelling” know that 24/7 “he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways” (Psalm 91:9,11). Only

those whose hope is in Jesus’ shed blood can say with Paul, “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). Promises beyond number are the privileged possession of those taught by the Spirit to trust their Savior.

Promises beyond number are the privileged possession of those taught by the Spirit to trust their Savior.

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

Have a question you want answered? Send it to 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; <fic@sab.wels.net>. Look on-line at <www.wels.net/sab/qa.html> for more questions and answers.

Picture this



Even two- and three-year-old children can take part in family Advent devotions. Lighting the candles on the Advent wreath was the highlight of their holiday season. Pictured are Emma and Evan Turriff.

*Submitted by Jim and Janine Turriff,
Lamb of God, Madison, Ala.*

Send pictures to *Picture this*, Forward in Christ magazine, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398. On a separate sheet, give us information about the photo. Those whose photos are chosen will receive a small gift.

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School Day brought nearly 160 upper-grade elementary students to Nebraska Lutheran one day in October. Mini-classes were provided for a period of the day, and the English session featured a Jeopardy-type game with the answers furnished. The students needed to define how all were related. One answer was, "John, Paul, George, and Ringo." An obviously puzzled eighth-grader offered, "People from the Bible?"

*Beverly Bornschlegl
Waco, Nebraska*

Working together



What do you call 400,000 people working together to do God's work? The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod! A common mission and vision help us as we work together.

Read on to discover exactly how we express that mission and vision.

Mission statement

As men, women, and children united in faith and worship by the Word of God, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod exists to make disciples throughout the world for time and for eternity, using the gospel in Word and Sacrament to win the lost for

Christ and to nurture believers for lives of Christian service, all to the glory of God.

Vision

The Word is everything—go with it, study it, apply it, teach it!

Logo

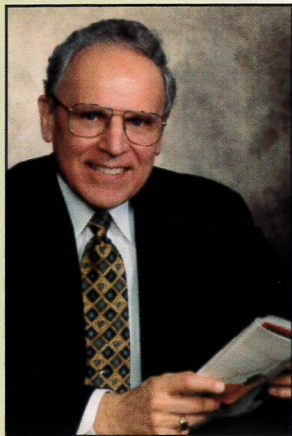
To express our common mission and vision, WELS Communication Services developed the WELS logo shown here. This logo belongs to all WELS churches and organizations and visually shows the unity we share in Christ.

Using the WELS logo in a consistent way maintains its status as a registered trademark and identifies the user as WELS.

Did you know that . . .

- ✚ . . . the four sections that make up the cross remind us to spread the gospel to the four corners of the world?
- ✚ . . . the three layers of the cross represent the Trinity?
- ✚ . . . the cross is purple to signify both the passion of Christ and his royalty?

For a free WELS Mission Objective Vision brochure or a WELS logo manual, go to <www.shopwels.net> or call Northwestern Publishing House at 1-800-662-6022.



Gary P. Baumler is editor of *Forward in Christ* magazine and WELS Director of Communications.

The price of
real peace
cost God his
only-begotten
Son.

What price peace?

The war these days, we're told, is between terrorism and democracy, between tyranny and freedom.

The war these days, say some, is between Muslim and Christian and Jew. It is fed by hatred born of religious differences. The quest for peace leads down uncertain paths.

No matter how you view the war, you have to be out of touch with the world if you are not also aware that serious religious differences among the three monotheistic world religions are blamed for much of the strife.

So, in search of a peace more fundamental than just stopping the fighting, author Bruce Feiller's new book, *Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths*, holds up Abraham, father to all three faiths, as the potential peacemaker. The Sept. 30, 2002, issue of *Time* magazine takes up the case.

The prospect of peace where war prevails is always intriguing, but the case for finding it with Abraham doesn't ring many bells for peace in history. Ever since Isaac (Abraham's son of the promise) and Ishmael (Abraham's son by the servant, Hagar) came together to bury Abraham (Genesis 25:9), the descendants of those two, Jews and Arabs, have had little lasting peace between them.

To find the elusive peace by invoking Abraham, we are asked, in fact, to remake Abraham or, at least, let him be more than one person. For example: We are to allow the Muslim's claim that Abraham once set out to sacrifice Ishmael, not Isaac, at God's command—allow that to stand alongside the biblical account. We are to ignore that God himself had Abraham separate the two half brothers in the interest of his plan of salvation. Most troubling, we are asked to assume that monotheism in whatever form it takes still honors the true God—is somehow still Abraham's God, even without the seed of Abraham in whom all the nations are blessed.

Meanwhile, too, this approach assumes that an artificial alliance forged through the name "Abraham" will possibly work where teachings of love and peace in each religion haven't.

So, the price of peace is to ignore religious differences, to revise history, and to deny that Christ is the only Savior of the world. That's a huge price to pay, and the results are not guaranteed.

Some think it's a small price to pay next to the bloodshed and carnage, the terror and tears that war brings. But they miss the point. First, that approach is no more likely to bring peace than the Ten Commandments do now. Second, a much greater price has already been paid that guarantees peace forever.

The price of real peace cost God his only-begotten Son. That baby lying in a manger was God by whom all things were made, now made subject to his creation. He came to be the sacrifice necessary to guarantee peace. His holy, precious blood would wash away the blot of sin. He lived a pure life but suffered a wretched sinner's death. We who live sinful lives get the benefit of his good life, and he paid the price on Calvary that has given us a peace that the world cannot give.

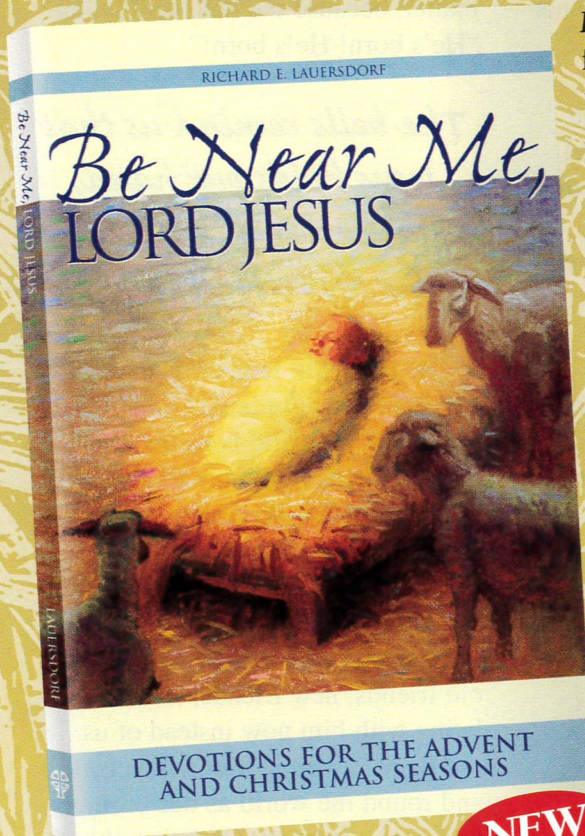
His peace puts us at peace with God and by extension of our faith with one another. His great love for all the world works in us love for the world.

Scripture speaks of wars and rumors of war to the end of time. So we cannot get rid of all wars once and for all, as important as it is to try. But we can go down the certain path to peace. It's the same path that Abraham took, trusting the promises of God.

Gary P. Baumler

Not so far away IN A MANGER...

Although Jesus' actual birthday seems far away in the span of history, *Be Near Me, Lord Jesus*, by seasoned writer Richard Lauersdorf, shows that we can be as close to Jesus as the shepherds were on that first Christmas. Through Jesus Christ the Savior, God has bridged the gap between sinful human beings and himself.



Be Near Me, Lord Jesus contains a devotion for each day from December 1 to January 6 to help the reader reflect and celebrate during the Advent and Christmas seasons. The book is divided into three themes: "Waiting and Watching" looks back at the Old Testament promise of a Savior, "Unwrapping and Wondering" builds up to Christmas Day, and "Worshiping and Witnessing" celebrates God's Christmas gift.

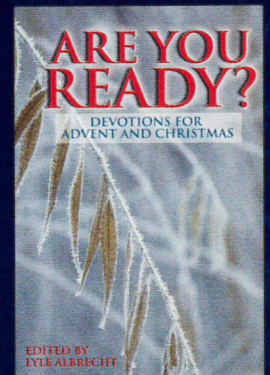
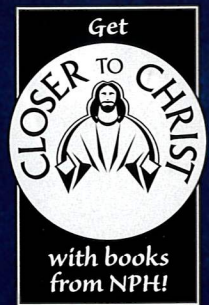
God's people of all ages can use these devotions to marvel at his love in sending Jesus and to look forward to the Last Day, when he will come again.

Be Near Me, LORD JESUS
by Richard E. Lauersdorf
Papercover. 152 pages.
LU06N0725, \$11.99

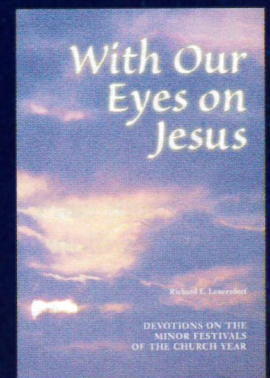
To order call 1-800-662-6022
(Milwaukee area 414-475-6600) 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. CT weekdays.

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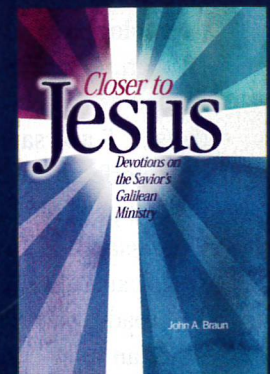
Discover, MasterCard, and Visa are accepted. All orders are subject to shipping and handling costs and sales tax where applicable.



LU06N0719 — \$11.99



LU06N0715 — \$12.99



LU06N0723 — \$12.99

A familiar Christmas

Things change every Christmas, but place and circumstance don't matter, because the bells still chime: "He's born! He's born!"

Laurie Biedenbender

evening tone the sermon would take, and the perfume my friend in the choir saved for special occasions. Those things felt comfortable and right. And there's this puny human part of me that wants the familiarity back.

How much worse that longing must be for those of you who lost a dad and grandpa to an aneurysm this year, those still grieving for a friend crushed in the Towers, those who had a child diagnosed with a

disease you can't even spell.

Every year, in ways big and small, the rug is pulled out from under our feet. Every year some familiars are gone.

But I'm going to cling to other familiars this Christmas.

We'll still walk through the snow and up the steps to a church that preaches the truth of God's Word, mysterious and miraculous.

As the Word pours out over wood and brick, hearts and minds, we'll contemplate the same glory-wonder: the almighty King of all creation lies helpless in a feed trough.

The angels will still rouse those unwashed shepherds to go find their Savior, pink with birth.

Joseph will still protect, Mary will still ponder.

And when we sing "O Little Town of Bethlehem," we'll remember that the location of our little town is

insignificant. Prophecy never dictated where our children should be born or whether they would sing "Glory to God in the highest" in Wisconsin, Minnesota, or Sydney, Australia.

Place and circumstance don't matter, because the bells still chime: "He's born! He's born!"

The bells remind us that Jesus holds our hand, no matter what sidewalks we're walking now.

The bells still remind us that the child God gave because he so loved the world, the child born for us on a dark Bethlehem night, will also die for us on a dark Jerusalem afternoon.

The bells remind us that Jesus holds our hand, no matter what sidewalks we're walking now.

The bells urge us to thank God for old friends, new friends, and friends living with him now instead of us.

The bells chime round the clock and round the world as our brothers and sisters in every Christian church join us in worship. The entire body of Christ praises the Christ who took a body.

These are familiar. These are enough.



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Sitting here in our new house, I hear the church bells ring every 15 minutes. On chilly November mornings like this one, the bells call Christmas to mind. What will this year bring? Who'll be here Christmas Eve? What will the services be like? Where will we put the tree, the stockings? A new house and new town necessitate new arrangements, new traditions.

Christmases past, we walked four blocks of snowy sidewalks to church. The grandmas and grandpas smiled as the kids recited "In those days . . ." and sang "Stille Nacht" with their perfect abandon and less-than-perfect pronunciation. We came back to wassail and fresh kielbasa, lit the Jesus candle, sang "Happy Birthday," and read Luke 2, though we'd heard it not an hour before.

Christmases past, I knew the sounds of the organ, the warm

