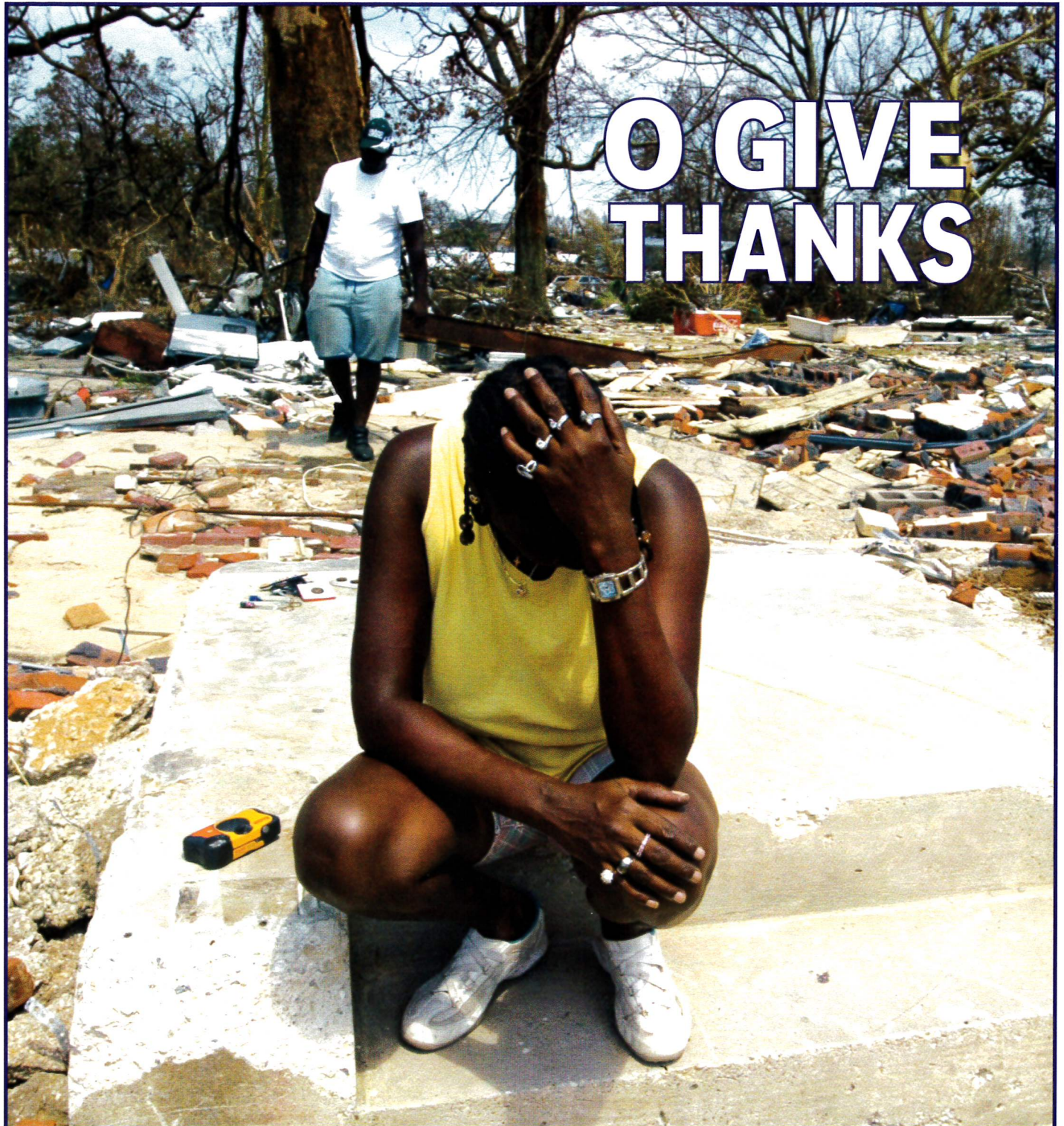
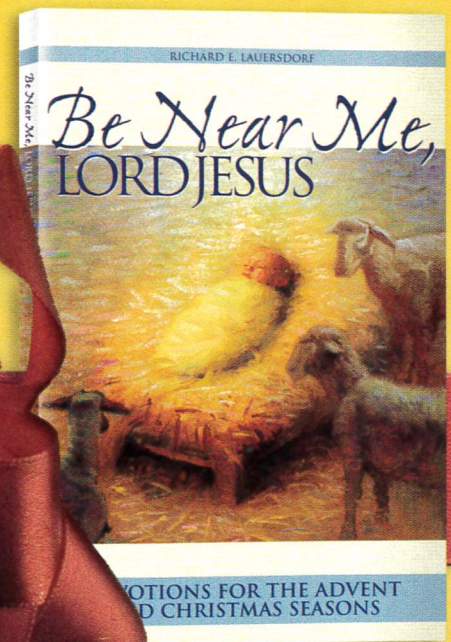
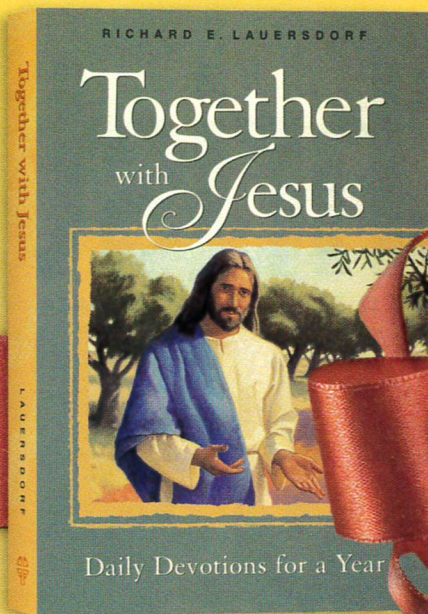


NOVEMBER 2005

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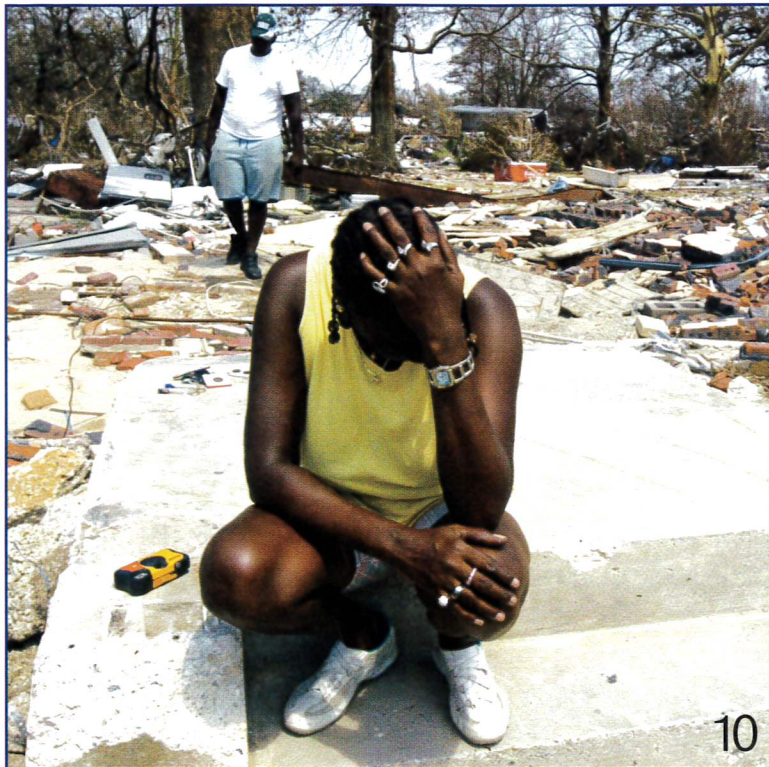
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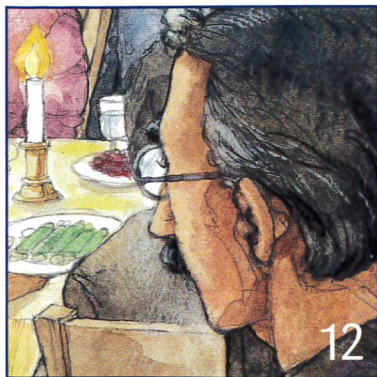
Northwestern
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Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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MAY THE LORD OUR GOD
BE WITH US AS HE WAS
WITH OUR FATHERS;
MAY HE NEVER LEAVE US
NOR FORSAKE US.
1 Kings 8:57

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NOVEMBER

WHAT'S INSIDE *by Julie Wietzke*

As we were beginning to work on this issue of *Forward in Christ*, Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast. Since the November issue is our Thanksgiving issue, we thought that it would be eye-opening for you, our readers, to see how the hurricane and its aftermath will shape the Thanksgivings of two WELS congregations. Pastor Dave Sternhagen from Crown of Life, New Orleans, La., and Pastor Harmon Lewis from Saving Grace, Mobile, Ala., share what they and their congregations have to be thankful for on pp. 10,11.

Usually articles are scheduled months ahead of time for an issue. We had to postpone one article to make room for the story mentioned above. But God surely directed some of our other planned articles. Two Thanksgiving articles we offer this month share messages that hurricane survivors will especially relate to.

You'll also meet Mark Vance, a volunteer disaster relief project coordinator for WELS Committee on Relief, and learn how he helps after disasters like Hurricane Katrina (p. 28). A news article then reports how other WELS members are sharing their time, talents, and treasures to help with hurricane relief (p. 20).

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PANIC ATTACKS

I relate well to the article “Panicked!” [July]. However, I feel there is some critical information that could help with anxiety without having to resort to non-Christian psychiatrists and side-effect riddled drugs. It’s something of a war within yourself, and your best weapon is knowing your enemy—panic.

While it is true that panic attacks are something millions of people have suffered from (me included), it does, in fact, have some of its base in a weak faith. It uses it and exploits it to its maximum potential. A panic attack is something of a monster that starts out small and feeds off fear, worry, and weakness to grow into something we can’t handle on our own.

Now, imagine if you will another possible outcome and the way that God has helped me overcome the monster of anxiety. It starts small with your heart racing and your lungs constricting and scary thoughts running through your head. *Stop. . . . Breathe. . . . Remember.* I understand our author when she remarks that “reading the Bible was not going to help, since I could not concentrate . . .” [emphasis added]. That’s true. But remembering the Bible is just as crucial. *Trust. . . .* The harder we fight, the more control we lose, not gain. Trust involves letting it all go. We have only as much control as God allows us to have, and God often asks us to give his gift of control back to him. *Pray.* Not with the frantic praying that doesn’t expect any good to come of the situation anyway, but a confident prayer.

Marney Israel

LEAVING YOUR COMFORT ZONE

I really appreciated Pastor Eich’s article “Get out of the boat” [Aug.]. I have my own business and just realized that when I go outside of my comfort zone, I have a blast and love what I do, also making it a great way to witness my faith. Why is it that

when it comes to our faith, we clam up and don’t always know what to say? When we can go outside of our comfort zone, we may just realize that we love talking about our faith, our church, our Savior, and it becomes something that we want to do wherever we go!

*Paula Sulzle
Rapid City, South Dakota*

I can relate to “Get out of the boat.” God took me out of my “comfort zone,” step by step. Multiple sclerosis came into my life in my 30s, then diabetes. A few years later it was cancer, including a mastectomy. Arthritis forced a knee replacement. Then 15 years ago, he allowed spinal stenosis, a painful back and leg problem that has caused my mobility to deteriorate rapidly over the past few months.

This span of “getting out of the boat” has taken over 50 years of my life, but I soon learned to keep my eyes on Jesus and walk on the waters to his safe, comforting arms. He has been my source of strength, my peace.

*Ruth Knoke
Bradenton, Florida*

REACHING OUT TO ALL PEOPLE

I applaud the Christ-centered literary piece “Go!” [Sept.] by Pastor Douglas Engelbrecht.

I have seen over the years, even in my own congregation, where the only people we have reached out to are well-educated, Anglo, monied professionals. There is also a good cross section of low-income people of all backgrounds and races that need to hear the gospel message.

I applaud WELS for standing on gospel truth when it comes to teaching the great news in its truth and purity, but from my own experience, we have done a poor job reaching out to everyone. This article definitely shows where we must be looking to reach out with the gospel of Christ!

*Laura Borchin
Lewisville, Texas*

GOD-FEARING WOMEN

On behalf of the God-fearing Christian ladies in our congregations I feel compelled to write about “God bless the pastor’s wife” [May].

Please do not overlook the other ladies in the congregation who are highly visible, valuable, under appreciated, and underpaid, in addition to the pastor’s wife.

Let’s not forget the loving wife and mother who cares for six children while her husband (an officer of the congregation) is away from home day and night week after week because of the duties of his employment.

Let’s give thanks for Christian loving partners (female and male) and treat them as a precious gift from God.

*Wallace Rascher
Sacramento, California*

GENERATION X

The series on reaching out to young adults by Pastor Parlow [May-August] seems to have made quite an impression. Here’s the impression it left on me. First, some young adults who are spiritually lost will feel comfortable with things not typically found in a traditional church setting. Second, it’s good to share the law and gospel with them in a way that they can relate to.

I didn’t get the impression from the article that law and gospel preaching was not effective with young adults. It sounded more like the efforts of the apostle Paul to become all things to all men so that by all possible means we might save some.

*Dan Krueger
Kenosha, Wisconsin*

Send your letters to “Feedback,” *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee, WI 53222; fic@sab.wels.net. Letters between 100 and 200 words are preferred. Include full name and address. Letters are edited for clarity, conciseness, and relevance. Not all letters received can be acknowledged or used. Writers’ views are not necessarily those of WELS or *Forward in Christ*.

Role playing . . . God's way

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Colossians 3:13

James A. Mattek

If you're a parent you can relate to this. Your child steps over the line again. The child presumes to have authority that only parents are to have. He has stepped out of his role as child and into a role he's not ready for. Maybe you've had to say these words: "I'm the parent, and you're not."

We need to live a life of love and forgiveness

Sometimes even adult children of God act like children. Sometimes we step out of our role as God's child and into his role as God. I've done it . . . you've done it.

How, you ask? By withholding forgiveness from someone who has wronged us. When we withhold forgiveness, we hold on to our anger and become resentful. That's not our role. When it comes to withholding forgiveness, God has reserved that for himself. "It is mine to avenge; I will repay" (Romans 12:19). When we withhold forgiveness we abandon our role and assume God's role. We make ourselves little gods. That's a First Commandment violation: "You shall have no other gods."

As children of God, what is our role? Our role is to live a life of love. This includes "forgiving whatever grievances you may have against one another." To the unrepentant we dare not assure them of God's forgiveness lest we harden them in their sin. But to everyone, repentant or not, we are to offer our forgiveness. With God, offering our forgiveness is not optional. No matter how hellish the hurt or humiliation has been, our role is to forgive "whatever grievances you may have."

Forgiveness is not always easy. The evil we suffer is real. The hurt we feel is real. The injustice we experience is real. Sometimes we feel cheated out of a happy childhood or marriage. Sometimes it feels like we've been robbed of our money or perhaps of our sexual innocence. The wounds are deep. The memories are vivid. The tears are many. Anger comes easily. Forgiveness comes with difficulty. But "man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires" (James 1:20). Not anger, but forgiveness of others, is what God desires in us.

God shows us how to forgive

So how do we, the walking wounded, fulfill our role as forgiving children of God? We remember that we are forgiven children of God. "Forgive, as the Lord forgave you." We're not the only ones with grievances. The Lord is grieved by our sinning. Compared to the hurts inflicted on us by others, our debt of sin toward God is enormous. Not only were we conceived sinful, we have often walked forbidden trails and followed the wrong paths. We have wronged our holy God.

In God's holy mind, he must do something about sin. He will either punish us for it . . . or assume it upon himself for us. He compassionately chose the latter. He did it in Jesus. He punished himself for our wrongs against him. "The Lord forgave you." We will never forgive anyone more than we have already



been forgiven. The heavy lifting of forgiveness has already been done when the Son of Man was lifted up on the cross.

Beneath the cross is where children of God find their forgiveness and bury their hatchets. From beneath the cross we look up and see "sorrow and love flow mingled down" (*Christian Worship* 125:3).

With faith in the forgiving work of Jesus, we're reminded of our role . . . not to be a little god, but to be a little Christ—a Christian. We forgive as the Lord forgave us.

Contributing editor James Mattek, chief executive officer of Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service, is a member of Trinity, Watertown, Wisconsin.

Refugee

Thomas J. Jeske

“Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations” (Psalm 90:1)—Moses, the wanderer.

There’s a varnished wooden box upstairs. Painted on it in careful, black script is one woman’s story: *Christine Glück, über Antwerpen nach New York*. A paper sticker with a faded red star and the word “steerage” still holds to the side of the trunk.

As 2005 winds down, human beings all over the planet are on the move, like Christine was long ago. A body will shift position, we learned in physics, when something forceful applies pressure to it. Like loneliness or love. Loss or liberty. Maybe fear of God.

This year water floated people from Louisiana to Texas. As these lines are being written, my city awaits any evacuees flown out of New Orleans. They will be people who don’t have the resources to get out on their own. They will be people placed on planes, bound for destinations typically divulged only after the plane is in the air. “These may not be happy campers,” says Edwin Hullander of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Other people are moving this November because the overthrow of a corrupt government has brought its own new and fearful conditions.

Or they’re moving because famine with its dry breath and bony knees has paid a visit. People are afoot because civil war in their land has become genocide. Sometimes closed borders swing open, unpredictably and precariously, and for a time human beings squeeze out.

Young couples willing to study are also on the move. Their countries of origin are anxious to help them get to the United States to take advantage of university programs. An impromptu backyard barbecue this past summer in Lincoln, Neb., brought together 20 agronomy graduate students. Their passports? Uruguay, Northern Ireland, Colombia, Canada, China, Argentina. Four Yanks.

Our God is the God of the un-homed.

Children move (or are moved) in international adoption programs. Little orphans from Vietnam, Guatemala, Russia, and Korea get new last names.

Sometimes families move in pieces, a few at a time, like cards being dealt. That’s how it is for one tiny woman who speaks just enough English to open a tiny restaurant in an empty storefront on an old main street in far southwest Iowa.

Even young suburban couples move. Nothing was particularly wrong with their house or school or church. But success suggests newer, bigger, more comfortable. Moving five or six miles in a big metro area likely means new schools, different stores, neighbors, and congregation.

Small-town, high-school grads on the Great Plains move because jobs are scarce. So they rent in Denver or the Twin Cities or Kansas City. A medical doctor from Pakistan opens a practice in Germany, while Latinos willing to do difficult, dangerous, and dirty work come to meat-packing plants in western Kansas.

Some people will move when a wall comes down or a wall goes up. A woman shops at a thrift store in Omaha. She left Khartoum, Sudan, because radical Islam presented Christians with blunt choices: slavery, exile, or death.

God spoke through Moses of his special love for the alien, the widow, and the fatherless. Flesh and blood without a protector, without rights, those most easily overlooked and easiest to take advantage of. Refugees all. Our God is the God of the un-homed.

It’s November. The calendar of the Christian Church has moved to “End Times.” This worship focus is designed to comfort the believer living in the tent cities of this earth. To put an arm around the bent shoulders of the widow, to relax the homeless man in his anxiety, to talk with the orphan of her place at her Father’s table. This is God’s offer in Jesus Christ. This is our offer too, Christians: refuge.

Contributing editor Tom Jeske is pastor at Living Hope, Omaha, Nebraska.



at the foot of the cross. Richard L. Gurgel

TOPIC: Christian motivation

In light of our synod's financial problems, wouldn't it be better if all our synod's pastors preached sermon series on texts such as 2 Corinthians 8,9 rather than trying to increase member contributions by describing sad conditions in world and home missions and synodical schools? Don't WELS theologians believe that the surest way to change sinners' hearts is by explaining God's Word, both law and gospel, and letting the Spirit make changes?

Isn't the answer "both/and" rather than "either/or"? Certainly, nothing changes hearts and empowers Christians other than God's Word. His law daily crucifies our money-loving sinful nature, and his gospel daily empowers our new man to live out greater trust in our real treasure.

There's also little doubt that there's plenty for God's law and gospel to accomplish in the area of money in materialistic America. The greatest danger in all this isn't that the synod's (or congregation's) budget falls short, but that our natural love of stuff snuffs out our Spirit-created love for Christ.

Our natural inclination is to put our hope in what hurricanes blow away, fires burn up, and recessions break apart. At such times, we are bowing down to deaf, mute, and blind idols of gold, aluminum, and steel. How foolish to devote ourselves to "gods" who don't protect us! We are arrogant fools if we believe we can prove Jesus wrong by successfully serving both God and money.

But isn't that why Paul urges Timothy to command the wealthy (and, dear WELS Lutherans, that's almost all of us) "not to be arrogant nor to put [our] hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put [our] hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Timothy 6:17)? Isn't that why Jesus pleads with us to trust in him so that we "store up for [ourselves] treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Matthew 6:20)? Isn't that why Hebrews encourages us: "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'" (13:5)?

Such gospel-empowered trust in our Father, who provides for every need, transforms us from consumers of human goods to channels of heavenly grace. Since we know our God loved us enough to give us himself to make us his own, we find confidence to "be generous on every occasion" (2 Corinthians 9:11). We who are loved so dearly and provided for so richly learn to imitate our Father, joining Abraham as those blessed to be a blessing.

Certainly only such law and gospel changes hearts, but isn't there more to our answer? I typically don't give special thank offerings to needs I don't know exist! Since Christ's love compels us, the "compelled" want to know where "compelling" opportunities are to do Christ's work.

Being a motivated Christian giver doesn't end discussions on giving—it begins them in earnest. Now, with gospel-opened ears and eyes, I stay alert for opportunities God prepared in advance also for this area of my life. Where can I best hallow God's name and play a part in making his kingdom come—even beyond regular first-fruit gifts? Is there an opportunity in my congregation? In a high school federation? In the synod? In the needy in my community (remember, "He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD," Proverbs 19:17)?

So, if our synod holds needs before its members, does that mean our theologians have forgotten that only God's law and gospel change hearts? I pray not! I hope that it means we trust that God's law and gospel are at work changing hearts. I hope that it means we are seeking to match motivated givers with kingdom opportunities. And I hope and pray that we all continue to be immersed in God's law and gospel so that future needs find an ever more generous response from givers searching for just such needs!

Contributing editor Richard Gurgel, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Calvary, Thiensville.

Have a question? Send it to "Q & A," *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@sab.wels.net. Look online at www.wels.net/jumpword/qa, for more questions and answers.

As we were working on the Thanksgiving issue of *Forward in Christ*, who have churches in areas that were hit hard by the hurricane to share



“Hello, Pastor”

David D. Sternhagen

“Hello, Pastor, this is VV. That’s a big storm; you better get out. Why don’t you come and stay with us in Memphis?”

As you read this, you are getting ready to celebrate Thanksgiving. As I write this I can’t even think that far ahead. How will I celebrate Thanksgiving? Where will I celebrate Thanksgiving?

We grabbed some clothes and some papers. This was the storm they had talked about for the 20 years I have lived in the city known as “the city that care forgot.” It was a Category Five storm coming up from the Gulf. Our little caravan joined the others on the highway out. My wife and I, two grown kids, a friend, a church member, a dog, two cats, and some frightened fish. Safe in the care of our friends and the good Lord, we watched as our home and church disappeared under water.

“Hello, Pastor, we made it out safely, but Bill stayed behind with the house and so did Tabitha. We don’t know where they are.” I wonder how they will be celebrating Thanksgiving this year?

“Do not be anxious about anything” (Philippians 4:6).

“Hello, Pastor, are you okay? I’ve been trying and trying to get through, but the phones are not working.” “Our houses are gone, aren’t they?” “You know we weren’t rich, but we were working hard and trying to get it all together, and now we lost it, haven’t we?”

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Matthew 6:19,20).

“Hello, Pastor, it is so good to hear your voice. Our house is okay, and if any of the members of the church need a

place to stay they can stay with me.” “I got through to Katherine; she is in a shelter in Cameron.” “Can we get her back here?” “How many of us are still missing?” I wonder how they will be celebrating Thanksgiving this year?

“Hello, Pastor, I like your idea of having worship service for the scattered members who are staying in Baton Rouge.” “I’ve gotten a lot of calls from people of the synod who are willing to help in any way.” “You can have the service at our place.”

“Greet one another with a holy kiss” (Romans 16:16).

So we worshipped together, and George was there.

“Hello, Pastor. I held Lydia in my arms as the water came up, but you know she is not as tall as me. I couldn’t hold her above the water anymore, and she slipped away.” From his arms to the arms of Jesus! I know how she will celebrate Thanksgiving this year.

“Hello Pastor, I heard about Lydia. I’m so sorry. We’re in Houston hoping that our house in Slidell is okay. You e-mailed to ask me how I will celebrate Thanksgiving this year. I’ve already had it, most of our members are safe, and Lydia has been spared this ordeal.”

“I’m but a stranger here, heaven is my home” (Christian Worship 417:1).

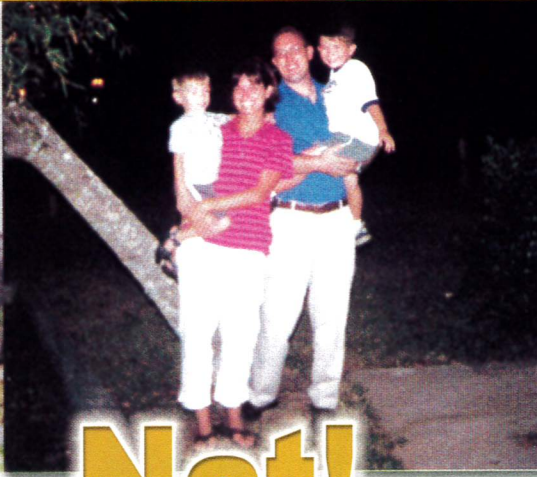
The members of Crown of Life Lutheran Church will celebrate Thanksgiving a little differently this year.

Our choir may sing again and we may sit on pews again, but not this year. I hope we will be thankful for jobs, electricity, our own bed, but probably not yet. We will always be thankful for Jesus and our WELS brothers and sisters.

The real question, however, is, “How will you celebrate Thanksgiving?”

David Sternhagen is pastor at Crown of Life, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast. We asked two WELS pastors what Thanksgiving will mean to them and their congregations this year.



Pity me. Not!

Harmon E. Lewis

Have you ever had a perfectly good “pity party” ruined?

Fourteen months after I was ordained into the ministry, I was enjoying a good one. Katrina had been the second major hurricane to visit the Mobile area since I had been assigned as the pastor of Saving Grace, Mobile. Days after Katrina came ashore I was in the middle of recalling all my woes when the phone rang. “Well at least something is working,” I grumbled.

The man on the phone asked me if I was thinking about Thanksgiving. “Well, not really,” I admitted. I was thinking about the church we have waited to build for three years that is now lying in a pile on the ground. I was thinking about the smell of stagnant water that sat three feet deep in the home of one of my members. I was thinking about the fear in the eyes of a member who is running out of gas to power the generator her handicapped son needs. I was thinking about my members that I can not get in touch with after the storm. “No, sir, Thanksgiving has not yet crossed my mind.”

The man persisted, “I would like you to spend some time thinking about Thanksgiving.”

So as I hung up the phone I forced myself to think about Thanksgiving. Nov. 24 was 11 weeks away. Maybe by then we would be back to normal and have a reason to be thankful.

I started to think about the pastor in New Orleans. With the power restored, I was able to see the images that you saw on the television. I had started to get e-mails about the condition of our churches. They were worse off than we were. I realized that I knew that we had a place to worship. I already knew most of my

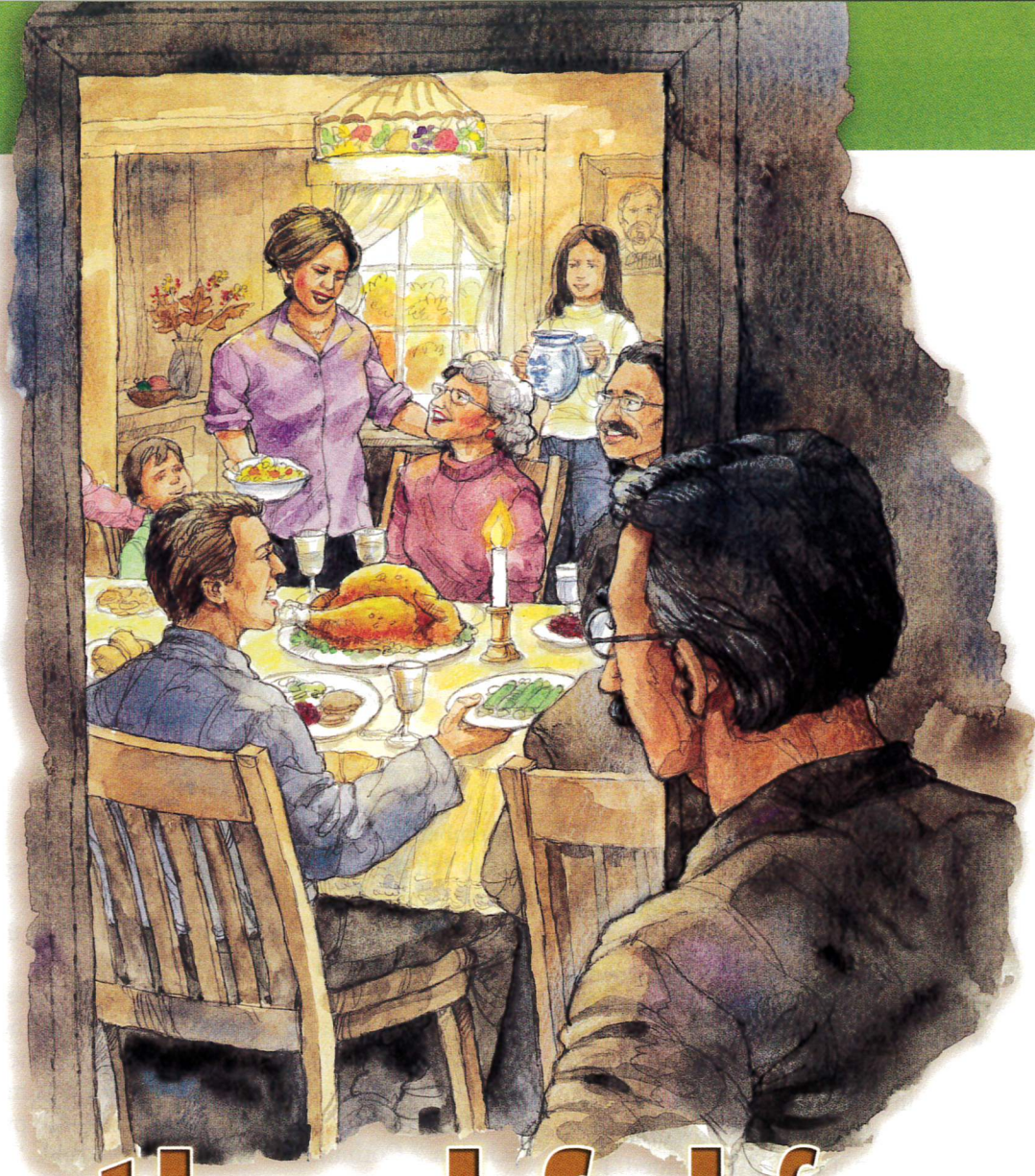
members were alive and had homes to go to. We had only felt the rim of the storm, but the congregation in New Orleans had seen the eye. It was going to take it a lot longer to get back to normal. It was at this point that my pity party came to an end.

I was thankful that we had been spared the destruction they were facing in New Orleans. But then it struck me: it really wasn’t the differences in destruction that gave me reason to be thankful. What I was most thankful for was what we have in common—the promise of God in 2 Corinthians: “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” (4:6-9).

When your storms come—when walls fall down, waters rise, supplies run low, and the future is uncertain—I encourage you to take some time and think about Thanksgiving. God’s promise to you is the same. By grace his light shines in our hearts. We will not be crushed, we will not be in despair, we will not be abandoned, and we will not be destroyed. The promise we share from the creator God weathers all our storms.

As a clay jar that graciously had a pity party ruined, I give thanks to God that I did not have to wait until Thanksgiving to share this comfort with my members.

Harmon Lewis is pastor at Saving Grace, Mobile, Alabama.



I'm thankful for . . .

Even the smallest things can stir your heart to gratitude, especially when you realize you don't deserve any of God's blessings.

Mark A. Paustian

"I'm thankful for my new guinea pig, Buddy, and how he purrs like a cat when . . ." (giggles)

"I'm thankful that my family could all be here today, well, except for . . ." (heavy sighs)

The table is a Thanksgiving graveyard, littered with turkey bones and the dirty dishes that gave their all . . . and it's my turn.

"I'm thankful for . . ."

But I have a problem. Few things make me less thankful than hearing

how thankful I should be. *Lex semper accusat* "the law always accuses," even the law that says, "You should be grateful." "And the good that I would, I do not." Oh, I'll count my blessings in the perfunctory way, and I'll mean what I say. I may even surprise myself and get a bit "*verklempt*." (About this I'll feel noble, since God knows there are people a whole lot better off . . . not pretty, is it?)

Sometimes, the truth is, I'm disappointed . . . mostly in myself. Life is

hard, whether I have a good excuse for it to be or not. Watch the news for five minutes, and tell me all is as it's supposed to be. And when you tell me how I ought to count my blessings, you should know about the world that I'm carrying on my shoulders, and how tired I am much of the time, and how often I'm sad. Sometimes I'm just bored. So, all I'm saying is that it's not as though you're getting the whole story of me and my heart, when

I take my turn and say, "I'm thankful for . . ."

Maybe it's just me.

If you're anything like me, the path to gratitude that startles and overwhelms is a hard one, running through some difficult territory.

C.S. Lewis tells the story about 100 people who go to live in the same building. Fifty of them were told the building was a hotel, and 50 were told it was a prison. The 50 who seemed to have the optimistic point of view found themselves complaining, "What kind of a hotel is this!? The plumbing is bad, the walls are thin, the rooms are cramped and drafty . . . it's not supposed to be like this!" But the 50 who thought the place was a prison were far from being miserable: "No locks on the doors, plenty of privacy, fully furnished . . . you know for a prison, it's not too bad!"

C.S. Lewis was saying something to those people who hold onto a naïve view of this world (as if it's a place designed to make us happy), about what life is like (easy, really, once you figure it out), and what people are like (basically good). He wanted people to understand how that sort of thinking can only end in the sob, "What's the matter with this place? It's not supposed to be like this."

We are those who ought to know better and have our eyes fully opened about the place we live in and who we really are. I mean, have you read your Bible? Close your eyes and contemplate for five minutes the crucifixion of God the Son at the mercy of the people he made, here in this place we live. Then open your eyes . . . and tell me this world is neat, and that people are swell, and that you're not so bad yourself. There is something so dreadfully wrong with you and with me that this suffering and disgrace were the only possible solution. We live in the still-falling world all lined up in hostility to Christ, a world where everything burns in the end, and do we expect things to work out in a perfectly

pleasant time of it here, happy and secure? Are we surprised when it doesn't? We live among people every bit as proud and self-centered as we are, destined for the grave. And we're shocked that they let us down?

A hotel?!

Even a dandelion can stir the heart to gratitude . . . when you realize you don't deserve even that weed.

I need to contemplate the Scriptures until I see the world as the biblical writers see it, a wicked and depraved generation, with all creation groaning—and ache right along. I need to see myself and wither under that unflattering mirror of God's law, the prescriptions in his Word detailing all that he had every right to expect and demand from me. His disappointment drips off the page.

Yet, "he has not yet treated us as our sins deserve." With that thought, I'm in my right mind again, with my ungrateful heart torn out, and my entitled head held under the baptismal water, all by the severe mercy of the Holy Spirit's convicting power.

I have no illusions, about the world, about life, about myself.

I make no claim.

So the moment is prepared . . . for gratitude.

"While we were yet sinners . . ."

"For God so loved the world . . ."

"Take and eat; this is my body . . ."

"I am with you always . . ."

"In my Father's house are many rooms . . ."

I am forgiven. I am loved. He lives in me by his own Spirit, while I look

for that great city that is to come. I wait for a Savior from there. He was dead but is so no longer. I will see him, and together we will sing the song of the redeemed. Then, says the prophet, God, our God, will sing a song over us. Imagine. All will be as it is supposed to be.

Then I think, which of these did this sinful man have the right to expect or demand? What of all this, did I have coming? I see Jesus, again. And I'm grateful. I thank God . . . for God.

It's still Thanksgiving. May I take my turn again? Because there's more, you see. There's the love of a warm Christian woman, and two little girls to read books with at night. They love me, and it's something only God could have done. The same is true of my students and the sincere way they all believe in him, too. I live in a cozy little house in a quaint little town. I have meaningful work to do, and colleagues and friends that humble me with their character and their gifts. I kiss the dear cross which I carry as I must, and I drink this cup, this life he chose for me, which I wouldn't trade.

I have my list; you have yours.

G. K. Chesterton observed that even a dandelion can stir the heart to gratitude . . . when you realize you don't deserve even that weed. (It works for guinea pigs named "Buddy," too.) And that you cannot truly enjoy a sunset, before you realize you have someone to thank for it. With thoughts like these, blessings suddenly flood the mind, and not because someone said they're supposed to. My list suddenly shimmers, for God has been good to me. I have someone to thank. That's the whole story.

Given what I know of myself, given what I am to be prepared for in a world such as this, I suddenly find that I live among surprises, unbearably sweet.

For a prison, it's not bad.

Mark Paustian, a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. Paul, New Ulm.

*choked up

LUKE: SYMPA

THE PHYSICIAN
TELLS US ABOUT
MATTERS MEDICAL
AND DETAILS
DELIGHTFUL.

Paul's esteem for Luke was strongly conditioned by his friend's kindness. It certainly exhibited itself in the loyal service that kept Luke at the apostle's side during his last days in prison. It shows also in his literary work. Throughout the gospel and the book of Acts, Luke comes across as a sympathetic physician.

Luke's sympathy

This quality is highly visible in Luke's considerateness for women. On this subject he proved himself a worthy follower of his Lord Jesus. As mentioned, he gave attention to women more than any other New Testament writer. His concern is all the more noteworthy in view of contemporary attitudes toward women among non-Christians. Even in Jewish society, it was not uncommon to regard women as morally weak. They were separated from men in public worship and in marriage were subjected to male domination in all things.

By contrast, Luke exhibits a respectful attitude and sympathy for women. His gospel introduces a uniquely Lucan gallery of feminine portraits: righteous Elizabeth, poetic and meditative Mary, devout Anna, the grieving widow of Nain, the reverently repentant sinner who wet Jesus' feet with her tears, demon-liberated Mary Magdalene, generous Joanna and Susanna, sentimental Martha in need of Jesus' gentle correction, the pleading widow, and the wailing daughters of Jerusalem. There are more examples in Acts: charitable Dorcas, hospitable Lydia, and mentoring Priscilla.

When reading in Luke, one furthermore cannot miss his sympathy for people burdened with life's cares and miseries. The widow of Nain's loss of her only son, the weeping woman of ill fame at pietist Simon the Pharisee's house, the woman suffering from curvature of the spine for 18 years, the man afflicted with dropsy, conscience-stricken Zacchaeus, the repentant criminal on the cross: all these persons are unique to Luke's gospel.

He also gives evidence of special medical observation and insight in noting that leprosy covered the man who begged Jesus for help, that Peter's mother-in-law suffered a high fever, that the demoniac was healed with no personal injury to his body, that it was the man's withered right hand that Jesus healed, that the demonized man ran naked among the tombs, that Jairus's daughter brought back to life should be given food to eat, and that it was Malchus's right ear, cut off by Peter's sword, which Jesus healed.

Luke is also concerned for people spiritually endangered by materialism. His gospel accentuates the Lord's warning that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. In parable and real life we meet people led astray by their wealth: the self-centered rich fool building his barns to take life easy, high-rolling Dives* unmindful of beggar Lazarus at his gate, the young ruler loving his riches above Jesus, and Zacchaeus liberated from his passion for money making.

Luke's medical knowledge

Choice of the precise word reflects

"ON BYWAYS
WITH THE
BELOVED
PHYSICIAN"



THE SYMPATHETIC PHYSICIAN

Theodore J. Hartwig

Luke's medical background. Of the woman, whom Mark describes as having spent all she had on doctors and getting only worse, Luke writes with deeper insight that her condition was beyond medical help. The proverb Jesus quoted to the miracle-hankering people of Nazareth has the medical twist of "Physician, heal yourself," that is, Jesus should do miracles in Nazareth as he did in Capernaum. As for the needle through which a camel would be threaded with great difficulty, in Luke it is not an ordinary needle as in Matthew and Mark, but a fine, slender, surgical needle of the kind Luke would have used in his profession.

This care for word precision is also noteworthy in his choice of technical terms (in Greek) to distinguish between an actual healing and a more general giving of medical assistance. The two terms occur side by side in Luke 9:11, more precisely translated "[Jesus] healed those who needed medical assistance." Again, in a more precise translation of Luke 14:3,4, Jesus asks, "Is it lawful to give medical assistance on the Sabbath?" and then "taking hold of the man, he healed him."

The example in Acts 28 offers a case of careful word choice that exhibits Luke's modesty. There he writes of the official's sick father on the island of Malta that "Paul . . . healed him" (v. 8). Thereupon, all the island's other sick people came and, in precise translation, Luke writes that they "were given medical assistance" (v. 9). This choice of word surely indicates Luke's care for historical exactitude as well as the sym-

pathetic physician's hidden contribution of his own expertise to the medical ministry on Malta.

Luke's focus on the Son of Man

As a sympathetic physician, Luke would be naturally attracted to this same quality so prominent in the Master Physician. The author of the letter to the Hebrews states it well when he writes that we do not have a Jesus "who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses" (4:15). As a human being like us, but without sin, "he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows" (Isaiah 53:4). Whereas foxes had their dens and birds their nests (Luke 9:53), Jesus had no guaranteed place of refuge where he could lay his head.

[A] focus on humanity was entirely in keeping with Luke's interests as a physician of both body and soul.

This humanness of Jesus must have been especially precious to the human-minded Luke. More than any other writer, he focuses on Jesus' prayer life as a human being. Twenty-five times in Luke, Jesus refers to himself as the

Son of Man. Luke portrays Jesus living an ordinary life, eating and drinking like ordinary people, accepting invitations to the homes of prominent citizens friendly and unfriendly, showing familiarity with activities in the kitchen and on the farm, and aware of current events in his homeland. Jesus was no ascetic. In sum, he lived as a normal human being "in the busy hum of men." We see him as a guest at the home of critical Simon the Pharisee. We hear him giving the recipe for bread making, quoting the price of sparrows, and describing the farmer's care for his stock. He knows the details of Pilate's bloodbath at the expense of the Galileans and of the Siloam tower tragedy. This divine Physician, also perfectly human, had a natural interest in mankind. Even his parables recorded by Luke, 18 of which are unique to this gospel, deal less with nature and more with people.

This focus on humanity was entirely in keeping with Luke's interests as a physician of both body and soul. For him, far more than an occupation or profession, the medical practice was a merciful labor of love. In emulation of his Lord, it was a vocation of service to his fellowman.

Theodore Hartwig, a professor emeritus at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. John, New Ulm.

This is the fifth of a seven-part series on Luke. To read the other articles in the series, go to www.wels.net/jumpword/ficarchive, and search by the author's first and last name.

**name applied to the rich man in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) in the Vulgate.*

OPEN DOORS

Martin Luther College students and graduates are pursuing ministry opportunities in places beyond the traditional classroom and pulpit.

Laurie Biedenbender

AROUND THE WORLD

As a student at Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, Ryan Cortright would have laughed if someone had told him he would spend a year in Mexico during college. “I wasn’t even studying Spanish at the time—just Latin and German,” he says. “Now, four years later, here I am in Mexico. It’s weird how things happen as God presents different opportunities in our lives.”

Weird, yes. But in a good way.

Cortright, a Martin Luther College (MLC) student studying to be a pastor, is spending the year in Torreón, Coahuila, in north-central Mexico. He teaches English as a second language (ESL) in two different missions, reaching about 70 students in 10 classes a week.

“The purpose of the program is basically that of friendship evangelism,” Cortright says. “We get to know people in the community with the free classes, and through the friendships that we develop with them, we can share our faith and offer them a church home if they currently don’t have one.”

TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Cortright is just one of many MLC students and graduates who teach ESL classes in foreign countries, developing relationships, and sharing the good news of Christ crucified with their new friends. Even as we speak, MLC grads and students are busy in Japan, Mexico, and China. In the past Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., has also supplied educators to Colombia, Bulgaria, Taiwan, the Czech Republic, and the Dominican Republic.

MLC Professor Tom Hunter, who trains students to teach English as a second language, notes the blessings both for the teachers and the foreign students. “The teachers get to use their education, their desire to learn, and their desire to share the gospel in ways they would likely not get in the United States,” he says. “The foreign students become more successful in their own country by knowing English better. More important, they have the

chance to hear the true Word.”

John Boeder, MLC campus pastor, adds, “Our students build bridges and make connections. Just being an English-speaking

person gives you a lot of opportunities to talk. The people want to practice their English with you, so you can find a chance to talk about Jesus.

“Kids love to go overseas,” he continues. “It’s a great adventure, and they have a heart for sharing the gospel through friendship.”

Before they go, however, students learn that a year or two in a foreign country will not be all romance and adventure. Reality check: Are they ready for the incredible amount of people, for the traffic and pollution? Are they ready for boiling their tap water, cooking meals on a hotplate, and carefully choosing foods that won’t cause an intestinal riot? Are they ready to be the one person on the street who looks different? Are they ready to reach out to strangers and to humbly learn about another culture? Most important, are they ready to speak confidently about the Savior of the nations?

Many students say yes.

TEACHING IN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Teaching in international schools is yet another venue for teaching abroad. This year MLC graduates will be teaching math, science, history, literature, English, and yes, sometimes even religion, in Thailand, China, Japan, Brazil, and the Dominican Republic.

Many students are interested in teaching in the most populous country in the world, China. Both WELS Kingdom Workers and “Friends of China,” headquartered in the Twin Cities, support MLC teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Several Chinese women from “Friends of China” travel two hours from the Twin Cities to New Ulm every week to teach Mandarin Chinese to interested students and to talk about how their experiences in China have changed their lives.

Last spring Boeder and Hunter traveled to Thailand, a country whose population is only one percent Christian, to speak to administrators at two schools. "They get hundreds of applicants from all over the world," Boeder says, "but they hired three graduates from Martin Luther College."

Hunter is not surprised. "WELS people are not very good about 'tooting their horn,'" he says. "So in a very non-WELSish fashion, I think people should know that MLC graduates are highly appreciated and respected. The two international schools in Thailand said quite clearly that MLC graduates are exactly what they want in their schools. An international school in the Dominican Republic, after having one MLC student teach for a year, contacted us and asked if we could send two more teachers. At one Chinese school every English teacher is from Martin Luther College. And an English school in Japan has said that it wished to hire only MLC graduates."

Both the professors and the international teachers recognize what a blessing—and opportunity—this is.

"The Thai schools, for instance, are supportive of a Christian testimony in the classroom," Boeder says. "They said they preferred Christian teachers. The teachers may even be allowed to have devotions and prayers in the classroom."

The teachers will also help the local WELS missions in these lands. "The missionaries are eager to make use of them: teaching ESL, attending the church, and helping the mission in whatever way they can," says Boeder. "Our missionaries will welcome the fellowship of fellow WELS workers. It'll be a real shot in the arm."

"A lot of teachers want to be in a mission field," Boeder concludes. "It used to be the case that you had to be married to a missionary to do that, but now God has opened a lot of doors for us. Every MLC graduate who has that missionary desire can find a place to go outside of America."

Students who have gone abroad return as different people—stronger, deeper. They understand that the spectrum of humanity God created is much more diverse than they ever imagined. They've picked up teaching methodology from professionals in another part of the world. They've learned what it's like to be alone and needy. They have probably made huge sacrifices. And

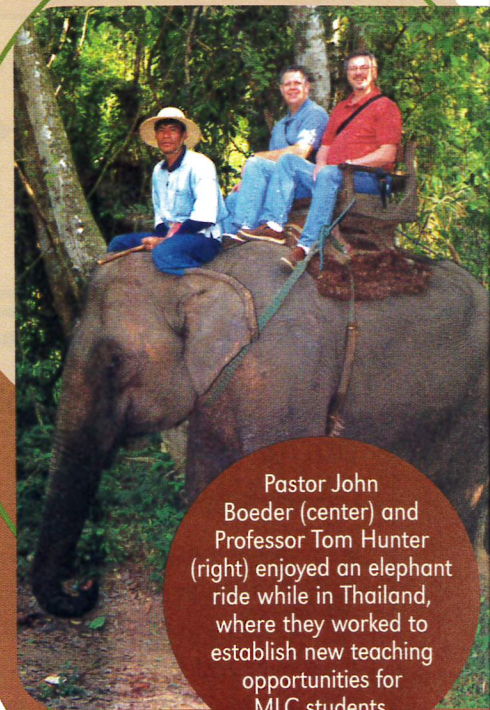
yet they also have lived a great adventure, helping change lives both here and beyond.

Cortright, who'll come back to Martin Luther College in January 2006 to finish his last semester before going on to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., can't say enough about his experience. "Usually, when we look back on an experience, we see how God used it as a blessing in our lives, but I already see many blessings that God has given me here in Mexico. Perhaps the most obvious blessing is the opportunity to do mission work as a job. I hardly consider it work when I'm at someone's house, eating delicious food, and having the opportunity to share the gospel with them.

"Another great blessing of foreign mission work is having the chance to meet Christians who speak a different language, have different customs, yet share the same saving faith.

"The idea of a God of all nations hits home."

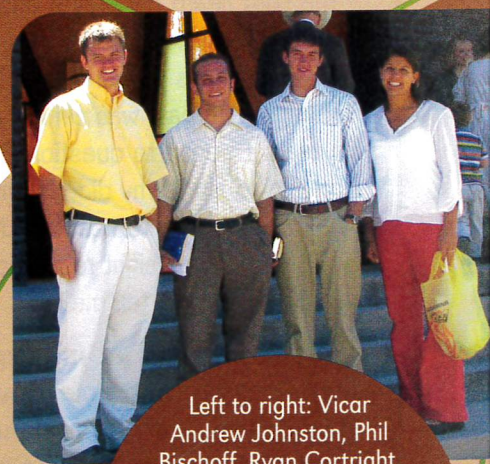
Laurie Biedenbender is a member at St. Paul, New Ulm, Minnesota.



Pastor John Boeder (center) and Professor Tom Hunter (right) enjoyed an elephant ride while in Thailand, where they worked to establish new teaching opportunities for MLC students.

"A growing number of Martin Luther College students are seeing short-term ministry opportunities in places beyond the traditional classroom and pulpit. Without a doubt, Martin Luther College students are on fire to share their faith with people around the globe. We need to continue 'to ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'"

—Tom Hunter
MLC professor of English



Left to right: Vicar Andrew Johnston, Phil Bischoff, Ryan Cortright, and Cindy Johnston at the English Evangelical Lutheran Church in Torreón, Mexico, last spring. Both Bischoff and Cortright served as mission workers through WELS Kingdom Workers.

MLC undergraduates and graduates teaching abroad: about 30

Countries where they presently teach: Brazil, Dominican Republic, China, Japan, Mexico, and Thailand

Countries being explored for more teaching opportunities: Germany, Taiwan, and Hong Kong

WHATEVER

Why me?

A teenager with scoliosis learns that good will always come out of our suffering, even if we can't see it right away.

Hannah Saidler

When I was 13, I found out that I had scoliosis, which is a sideways curvature of the spine. Fear mixed with inquisitiveness clouded my mind. Why had God allowed this affliction to burden me? Out of all the people in the world, why did the Lord choose me?

I began to wear a back brace at night that forced me to bend in the opposite direction of my curve. When I wasn't lying down, tilting to one side made me feel awkward and misshapen. It took a long time to get used to sleeping in the brace. Occasional backaches only added to my problems.

After two years of wearing a back brace, my doctor told me I would have to have surgery. Even though the brace was slowing the curve, it was failing to stop it entirely. Titanium rods would be drilled and fused to straighten my spine and hold it in place. I prayed fervently to the Lord every day, asking him to bless the operation.

The Lord heard my prayer, and after a week in the hospital, I came home. I had a huge bandage on my back, which was so numb that I could barely feel it. One night, the pain was almost unbearable, and through my tears I began to question God. Where was he when I prayed to him? Why did his answer seem to be "no" when I asked him to heal me? Months with no sports and a 10-pound weight restriction awaited me. What was God trying to tell me?

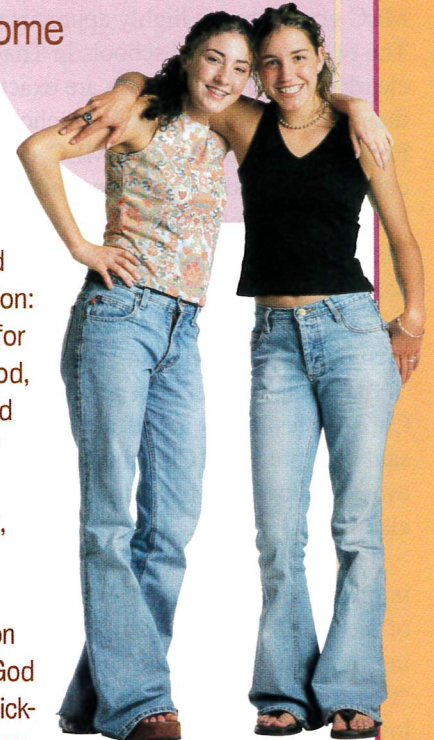
I realize now that my experience with scoliosis has strengthened my faith and still does every day. Good has come out of it by bringing me closer to my Savior. The good that has come out of the surgery is tremendous. I feel so straight, and I no longer have backaches.

Now, one year after my surgery, Romans 8:28 repeatedly comes to mind when I think of my affliction: "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (KJV). Good will always come out of our suffering, even if we cannot see it.

As Christians, we should never doubt God or question him. No one can question God what he knows of torture, sickness, or even death, because he knows. He came to earth and suffered all these things and more. He knows exactly what we are going through. When he became a human, he experienced all these things to save us all from eternal agony in hell. He endured a torment beyond our imagination when he was forsaken by God.

Job 36:15 says, "But those who suffer he delivers in their suffering. He speaks to them in their affliction." No one can expect to go through life and not feel pain. Hardship is a part of this sinful world, but God will always deliver us from grief and despair, even if it is by death. In the midst of our suffering we can smile with joy because we know that everlasting life in heaven awaits us, where there is no pain or sorrow.

Hannah Saidler, a junior at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wisconsin, is a member at Eastside, Madison, Wisconsin.

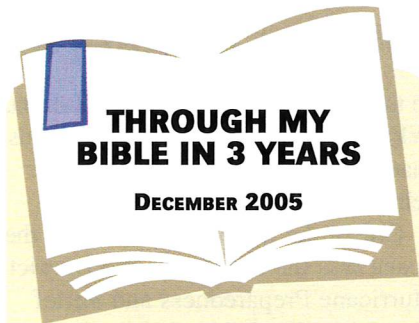
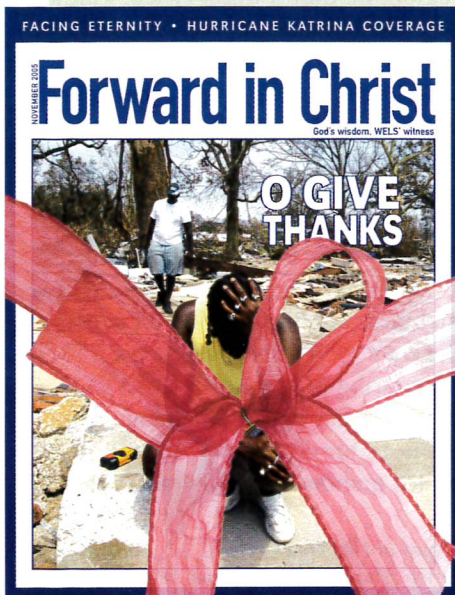


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| 1. 1 Corinthians 5, 6 | 16. Ps. 34 |
| 2. 1 Cor. 7 | 17. Ps. 35 |
| 3. 1 Cor. 8, 9 | 18. Ps. 36 |
| 4. 1 Cor. 10:1–11:1 | 19. Ps. 37:1–20 |
| 5. 1 Cor. 11:2–34 | 20. Ps. 37:21–40 |
| 6. 1 Cor. 12 | 21. Ps. 38 |
| 7. 1 Cor. 13 | 22. Ps. 39 |
| 8. 1 Cor. 14 | 23. Ps. 40:1–10 |
| 9. 1 Cor. 15:1–34 | 24. Ps. 40:11–17 |
| 10. 1 Cor. 15:35–58 | 25. Ps. 41 |
| 11. 1 Cor. 16 | 26. 2 Corinthians 1:1–11 |
| 12. Psalm 30 | 27. 2 Cor. 1:12–22 |
| 13. Ps. 31 | 28. 2 Cor. 1:23–2:17 |
| 14. Ps. 32 | 29. 2 Cor. 3:1–4:6 |
| 15. Ps. 33 | 30. 2 Cor. 4:7–5:10 |
| | 31. 2 Cor. 5:11–6:10 |

CONGRATULATIONS!

If you have been following this Bible reading list for the past three years, you have now made it through your Bible. But don't worry if you started in the middle. We will be running the list again, starting in the December issue.

Untangling the Web

The Internet has become a vast maze of information. Knowing where to look for strong Christian content can make the journey easier.

Parents Crosslink, www.parentscrosslink.net, is a new Web site that works to link parents to each other as well as to the cross. A companion piece to an eight-page printed newsletter, this Web site will expand on the newsletter content and also provide a much larger array of resources, information, links, and interactive ways for parents to connect with each other via discussion boards, live chats, and Q&As. *Parents Crosslink* in both its forms is the product of a ministry partnership between WELS Parish Services and Northwestern Publishing House.

DEFINING RELIGION

Protestant—a broad term usually used to describe those churches which trace their origin in some way back to the 16th-century Reformation. Although the term was first applied to the evangelical or Lutheran rulers who protested the decisions of the Second Diet of Speyer in 1529, it has today become such a broad, vague term that many Lutherans prefer not to use it to describe themselves.

WELS members work together for Katrina relief

In the days following Hurricane Katrina, WELS members were among thousands that worked together to help provide relief in the Gulf region.

One of the first WELS teams on the scene was the South Atlantic District Hurricane Preparedness and Relief Committee headed by Joshua Kesting, pastor at Prince of Peace, Englewood, Fla.; and Nathan Nolte, teacher at Peace, Bradenton, Fla. Along with fellow WELS member Mark Buerger, these men traveled to Mobile, Ala., Abita Springs, La., and Baton Rouge, La., to drop off generators, gasoline, and chain saws. They also worked to clear the parsonage of debris in Abita Springs and provided a temporary cover to the damaged roof.

Upon returning safely to Florida, team members spoke with the Committee on Relief chairman Pastor Philip Schupmann and WELS Kingdom Workers administrator Pastor Richard Warnecke about what they saw. Within a week, a WELS assessment team was on its way to the region to meet with the pastors affected by the storm. The goal of the trip was to survey the damage and learn how WELS Kingdom Workers and the Committee on Relief could best use donated resources.

During that assessment trip, WELS Media Director Steve Zambo taped footage of the region and interviewed members who were displaced by the storm. The footage was put together on a DVD and sent to all WELS churches and high schools to help members get a different perspective on the situation.

The outpouring of donations and number of people willing to volunteer for the relief effort was staggering. Schupmann noted, "It is just overwhelming. People are offering everything from cars to free tuition." As of Oct. 6, nearly \$900,000 (which does not include matching gifts from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans) has been donated to the Committee on Relief.

In addition to WELS' coordinated effort, many WELS individuals have helped serve in the disaster.

Steven Witt, principal at Holy Word, Austin, Tex., heard on the local news that evacuees living at Austin Civic Center were in need of volunteers to help illiterate adults searching for loved ones and to assist in filling out forms. Witt went and spent numerous hours at the convention center. He notes, "My reading specialist certification allowed me a chance to get in and share the gospel and help the evacuees. The time I spent at the convention shelter was life-changing."

While at the shelter, Witt helped 76-year-old Cora Washington find her missing 94-year-old mother who had been airlifted out of New Orleans. In addition to helping Washington search for her mother, Witt also sat with her and prayed.

After Washington learned of her mother's whereabouts, she joined Witt and three other evacuees for church at Holy Word the following Sunday. "We offered a prayer

of thanksgiving to God for answering our prayers," said Witt.

Floyd Palmer was also able to help Katrina evacuees from a distance. Palmer, a WELS member from St. Paul, Mankato, Minn., owns Palmer Bus Company. When the company's general manager and his brother approached Palmer about the possibility of loading up buses with donations and heading to the region, he didn't think twice. Palmer donated three buses, fuel, and drivers to the six-bus caravan that traveled to Natchitoches, La., a city overwhelmed with evacuees from Katrina. The trip spurred the Mankato community to adopt Natchitoches as a sister city. Organizers are now planning twice monthly trips to deliver donations.

As the relief work continues, WELS members are contributing all across the country. As Warnecke notes, "The outpouring of support from WELS members has been tremendous, but the need for donations will stretch on for months and into years."

Crown of Life, New Orleans, La., and Saving Grace, Mobile, Ala., were two WELS churches hard hit by Hurricane Katrina. Read thanksgiving messages from these congregations' pastors on pp. 10-11.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Donate money for disaster relief to the area. Checks should be made payable to WELS Committee on Relief and sent to 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222. Donations can also be made online at www.wels.net/jumpword/donations. If you are a member of Thrivent, please visit www.thrivent.com to obtain the form for matching gifts or call WELS Ministry of Christian Giving at 800-827-5482 for assistance.

If you are interested in volunteering to do humanitarian relief or want to make an in-kind donation, contact Pastor Richard Warnecke from WELS Kingdom Workers at 1-800-466-9357; fia@wkw.wels.net.



The South Atlantic District Hurricane Preparedness and Relief Committee purchased and stocked a mobile trailer after last year's hurricanes. The trailer is designed to be the first response to a natural disaster in the South Atlantic District.

¡Alzad la Cruz!

It was Friday. The newly constructed building stood tall and sturdy. The dedication would take place on Sunday, and all the finishing touches were in place.

All except one. The building had no special markings, no exterior lettering. It needed something to set it apart from the other buildings on the block. It needed a symbol to emphasize its reason for existence.

A few hours later, that symbol arrived. It was a wooden cross, 10 feet long and five feet across. Don Pablo, head of the construction crew, offered to hang it on the building. Pablo gripped the bottom of the cross, holding it up as high as he could. Others looked on and asked him to move left, right, down, and back up, searching for the best location. Finally, his knees beginning to give, Pablo asked his son, Jorge, to help him.

This scene holds so much imagery. Together Pablo and his son held up the cross for the seminary. Together we hold up the cross of Christ. When the classroom building for the Confessional Lutheran Seminary of Mexico was dedicated on Aug. 7, the wooden cross stood out as the theme of the day: *¡Alzad la Cruz!* (Lift High the Cross).

Mexico's first seminary was built after years of proclaiming Christ's message. In 1991, missionaries began to live and work in Mexico. The Holy Spirit worked through their message and brought souls to faith.

Then, in 1995, one of these new Christians expressed interest in becoming a pastor. As the years passed, more men wanted to become pastors. These students remained in their hometowns, and missionaries traveled to visit them. Missionaries taught classes, often on an individual basis, for a few weeks at a time. One by one, seminary students graduated and became pastors.

Missionaries rejoiced as national pastors, seminary students, and members formed their own church body in Mexico. Yet while united in Christ, the churches were greatly separated by



Construction workers Don Pablo (bottom) and his son Jorge (on ladder) hanging the cross for the new seminary building in Mexico. On the day the seminary was dedicated, Israel Rodriguez graduated, raising the number of national pastors in Mexico to five.

distance, forcing pastors and students to spend long periods of time alone.

Mexico's national church recognized the problems of distance and isolation. Redeemer, Torreón, came up with a solution to help scattered seminary students. Together with their pastor, Ezequiel Sánchez, they envisioned a seminary building where students could live, learn, and grow together.

With this vision in mind, Sánchez headed the construction project. Plans were developed to build a seminary on church property in Torreón. In January 2005, the beginning foundations were laid. The following August, the seminary was dedicated. The building consists of four classrooms, a library, and a small cafeteria. Housing for the students is currently under construction.

Missionaries and some national pastors will teach at the seminary. The Latin American Traveling Theological Educators serve in the training process.

It is our prayer that God continues to bless the work in Mexico. Through his grace and his alone, more souls will recognize and adore his sacred name.

Rachel Hartman

Anniversary of tragedy allows for witnessing

On Aug. 6, 2004, six friends died as they lay sleeping in what has been dubbed the Xbox Murders in Deltona, Fla. Two nights after the tragedy, Good Shepherd, the WELS church in Deltona, opened its doors to more than 800 people in an impromptu vigil for the victims. The crowd, made up mostly of unchurched people, showed up at Good Shepherd after they were turned away at the local high school. Pastor Todd DeNoyer took the opportunity to speak to the crowd about sin, death, and God's grace. Six news stations also taped the event. The following Wednesday, DeNoyer preached to more than 400 people who gathered for a memorial service for victim, Michelle Nathan.

On Aug. 5, 2005, DeNoyer again was able to share the gospel with more than 200 people as victims' families and friends gathered at Good Shepherd for a remembrance service. In attendance at the service was the family of Michelle Nathan, all of whom have become members or returned to Good Shepherd since Nathan's death.

DeNoyer will also be with Nathan's mother, Kay Shukwit, throughout the trial of the four men accused in the tragedy. The trial is expected to begin in January. DeNoyer said that he is helping Shukwit construct a victim impact statement that will be read in the courtroom at the time of sentencing. "We will use God's Word to guide us in crafting the statement. If we have questions, we will seek the answer in God's Word. If there is something we don't know, we'll look in God's Word," says DeNoyer.

DeNoyer sees this tragedy as just one more way that God is allowing his Word to be spread. "There is a great evangelism opportunity to reach people through what has happened," he states.

Directing synod stewardship through tough financial times

Stepping into his new job at a time when offerings to the synod aren't keeping up with ministry opportunities, James "Dave" Liggett is ready and willing to meet the many challenges awaiting him as WELS Director of Christian Giving. He has 29 years experience as a parish pastor, four years as a WELS gift planning counselor, and a passion for serving his Lord.

Liggett heads up the Ministry of Christian Giving, which works to fund synod ministries by encouraging and assisting members in joyful giving compelled by the love of Christ. Offerings for the synod's work typically come in at two levels:

- Each church commits a percentage of its members' annual offerings to WELS. This type of synod revenue is known as Congregation Mission Offerings.
- Members give directly to the synod. WELS Christian Giving employs 14 gift planning counselors to help members make these current and deferred Individual Mission Offerings.

Liggett replaces Pastor Ron Roth, who retired at the end of June after working 17 years in synod administration.

Liggett's vision for the synod, which he acknowledges as being energetic, is to raise the percentage of income each member gives his church by one percent each year. WELS members on average gave about three percent of their income to church during the past year.

It is also Liggett's goal to teach people "hilarious" giving (based on the Greek word for "cheerful" in 2 Corinthians 9:7). "Giving is a joyful activity. It's not like a tooth



Dave and Rosie Liggett.

extraction," says Liggett. "It's fun to support the Lord's church."

The biggest roadblock to this way of thinking is materialism. "Materialism permeates society," says Liggett. "In our day and age it is the alternative god that all of us are tempted to worship." His answer to confronting materialism is teaching good stewardship, preaching both the law and gospel (emphasizing the law as a mirror, curb, and guide for Christian living), and emphasizing the abundance we've been given. "God didn't skip over WELS Lutherans when he granted wealth in America," he says.

Liggett is the energetic man for this demanding job. When he does get time for himself he likes to "pontoon, walk the beach, travel with my wife, and finally visit my granddaughter," referring to his first grandchild, born in June. Dave and his wife, Rosie, live in Johnson Creek, Wis. They have six children.

Adam Goede

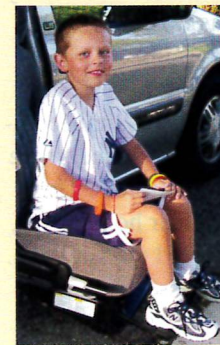
MDA selects WELS member as ambassador

For 10-year-old Cody Keip, the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) Telethon was an extra special event this year. A member of St. John, Doylestown, Wis., Keip was the Southwestern Wisconsin Goodwill Ambassador for the MDA and participated in the telethon in Madison, Wis., over Labor Day weekend.

Since being diagnosed with muscular dystrophy at age two, Keip, his parents, and younger brother Jacob have been avid supporters of the MDA and have participated in numerous events. In January, Cody was selected to serve a two-year term as a Goodwill Ambassador and put a face with the disease for his region.

In addition to participating in the telethon, Cody's ambassadorship also includes a number of events where he speaks publicly about muscular dystrophy and shares stories about his time at MDA summer camp. Cody's mother, Erica, notes, "Many times when people meet Cody the conversation turns to God and his blessings. We are able to tell them that even though Cody has muscular dystrophy, he is a blessing from God and that God helps us do what we need to do."

Erica estimates that they've already put over 1,000 miles on their van so that Cody can participate in as many events as possible. It is not a complaint, however.



Cody Keip uses the lift in his family's van that was made possible, in part, through donations from St. John, Doylestown, Wis., and St. Stephen, Fall River, Wis. Keip is the Southwestern Wisconsin MDA Goodwill Ambassador.

"The nicest part for Cody has been the people who come up after he's done speaking and want to get to know him and just want to help him. The blessings we've received this year are numerous. God has shown us how wonderful people can be," she says.

God's plan for spreading the gospel —

Pastor Steven Petersen, an Evangelical Lutheran Synod missions counselor, shares how a relationship between a Korean Baptist pastor and a WELS pastor gave the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) an opportunity to minister to Koreans in the United States and abroad.

Who would have thought that the chance meeting between a Korean Baptist pastor and an American Lutheran pastor would have such significant impact?

Pastor Young Ha Kim was searching for space to rent for the small Baptist congregation he served in Chicago during the mid-1990s when he met Dennis Kleist, a WELS pastor in the nearby suburb of Morton Grove. Kleist befriended the Korean and began instructing him in Lutheran theology. Young Kim wanted to know more.

In this way, God set Kim on a path that would eventually lead him back to his homeland as a missionary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

With advice and encouragement from the late Larry Marquardt, a WELS businessman and mission supporter, Kim made his way to Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary (ELS) in Mankato, Minn.

After two years of seminary study, Kim underwent a colloquy with the ELS. (A colloquy is a professional theological examination in which candidates must demonstrate their knowledge of and subscription to Lutheran doctrine.) When Kim passed the colloquy, synod officials wondered, "Now that we have a Korean pastor ready to serve, what do we do with this man?" Eventually the synod's Board for Home Missions issued him a call to start Asian Mission Church in Irvine, Calif. The mission would sublet space from Faith, an ELS congregation there.

Southern California, and especially Orange County, welcomes immigrants from all across Asia, and some of them found a home in the mission in Irvine. The wives of visiting Korean graduate school students studied English as a

second language at the church. The congregation helped arrange housing for some newcomers. Relationships were built, the gospel was shared, and many adults were instructed using *Communicating Christ*.

Then, from among the members, another Kim was discovered. Jong In Kim (no relation) had served as a Presbyterian pastor in Korea before coming to the United States. He joined Asian Mission Church and eventually followed Young Ha Kim's trail to the seminary. He too studied and underwent a colloquy.

April 10, 2005, was a special day for both ELS Home and Foreign Missions. On that day Young Ha Kim was commissioned as an exploratory missionary to South Korea, and Jong In Kim was installed as a pastor at Asian Mission Church, Irvine.

In Korea, Young Ha Kim has renewed his relationship with families that had associated with Asian Mission Church in California and then returned to Korea.

He also works among families of students who have enrolled at Luther Preparatory School in Watertown, as well as WELS area Lutheran high schools in Appleton and Winnebago. English-as-a-second-language classes are planned as part of the outreach ministry of the mission, which is located in Seoul. About 40 people are involved in Bible class and worship with several families under instruction.

The story began with a chance meeting of two pastors. Where will it end? One possible long-range goal for the mission is outreach to the Korean-speaking population of the northeast provinces of China.



In April, Pastor Young Ha Kim (left) was commissioned as an exploratory missionary to South Korea, and Jong In Kim (right) was installed as a pastor at Asian Mission Church, Irvine.



The confirmation class in Korea for students preparing to enroll at WELS area Lutheran high schools. Young Ha Kim's contacts in Korea have led to 15 students attending Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. "It is a mission possibility," says Mark Schroeder, president at Luther Prep, "not only for these kids to become stronger Christians, but also so that they may return to Korea as committed Lutheran Christians and carry the gospel to where they live."

One thing we know for certain, God will bless the work in Irvine and Seoul among our new Korean friends. Kleist, now a WELS gift planning counselor, says, "We don't know God's plans and providence. But never underestimate what he can do! He can take our small Christian gestures—like extending the hand of friendship, or encouraging a young boy or girl to consider the public ministry—and use them to carry the precious gospel across the street or around the world. He wants to use each of us to reach precious souls with the good news of Jesus."

Steven Petersen

WELS news briefs

Commission on Parish Schools

414-256-3221; cps@sab.wels.net

More than 300 educational WELS leaders from around the country gathered in Delavan, Wis., in June for the 2005 WELS School Leadership Conference. This event, sponsored by the Commission on Parish Schools, provided school leaders an opportunity to meet together for learning and fellowship under the conference theme "Press on Toward the Goal" from Philippians 3:14. Feature keynote speakers focused on raising the bar in leadership, student expectations, and mission-focused ministry. Twenty-eight different sectionals were offered along with two full-day pre-conferences.

Commission on Youth Discipleship

414-256-3224; cyd@sab.wels.net



Teens participated in small group Bible classes during the Youth Rally.

The 2005 WELS International Youth Rally, held July 13-16 at the Coronado Springs Resort, Lake Buena Vista, Fla., was enjoyed by 3,140 people (2,374 teens and 766 leaders). This was a new record, besting by 640 the old record set in 2003. Two hundred fifty-three congregations sent groups.

The three teens members of the Rally Planning Committee—Laura Merklinger, Littleton, Colo.; Lea Menning, Waukesha, Wis.; and Crysta Miller, Rochester, Minn.—were instrumental in organizing and planning this rally, under the theme, "Wanna See?"

Two alternate rallies—one in Sandusky, Ohio, and one at Camp Phillip, Wautoma, Wis.—gave teens who couldn't get into the Florida rally an opportunity for fellowship and growth in God's Word.

For more information about the rally, go to www.welsyouthrally.net.

Commission on Worship

414-256-3226; worship@sab.wels.net



Several worship services were held at the worship conference at Gustavus Adolphus, St. Peter, Minn.

On July 18-21, 1,000 people gathered for the National Conference of Worship, Music, & the Arts, held for the first time outside of Wisconsin—in St. Peter, Minn.

"Worship at the national worship conference is like the Grand Canyon. Words simply don't do justice to describe it."

This comment shows why so many people have come to appreciate the triennial WELS worship conferences. Since the first conference in 1996, attendees have expressed joy and high appreciation for the worship—three morning services and a variety of services in the evening—they experience.

But they also appreciate the more than 50 practical workshops that equip them to be better worship leaders back home. They appreciate the creative variety modeled for Lutheran worship, variety that keeps the focus on God's gifts.

Worship conference highlights (presentations, sermons, audio files, photos) are posted at www.wels.net/worship.

Commission on Adult Discipleship

414-256-3278; cad@sab.wels.net

WELS' stewardship encouragement for 2005-06 parallels the synod's North American outreach theme, "Proclaim Peace through Jesus,"

which is currently in its second phase: "Every Soul's a Treasure." The program helps us look at ourselves in the light of God's Word to discover our identity, priority, mission, and commitment. Program materials include Bible studies with leaders' guides, sermon and worship suggestions, a PowerPoint presentation, a commitment form, and promotional materials. Materials can be downloaded at www.wels.net/jumpword/stewardship. Call 800-567-8669 to have the materials mailed to you.

Commission on Special Ministries

414-256-3241; csm@sab.wels.net

The Commission on Special Ministries and Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries is offering a prison ministry symposium on Jan. 25, 2006, in Melbourne, Fla. This Facing Freedom symposium will equip and encourage Christians to provide assistance and spiritual support to people serving time in prison, to inmates upon their release, and to families of the incarcerated. Registration deadline for the symposium is Jan. 15, 2006. For more information, go to www.wels.net/jumpword/facing-freedom.

In September, Pastor Paul Ziemer, a member of the Military Services Committee, returned to Kuwait to minister to as many American soldiers as he could. Ziemer first traveled to Kuwait on behalf of the Commission on Special Ministries in March. In addition to ministering to WELS people in the military, Ziemer worked to establish relationships that will enhance the synod's ability to serve WELS troops in the future. You can refer names to the Commission on Special Ministries for follow-up at www.wels.net/jumpword/refer.

The Mission for the Visually Impaired has sold its building. It is in the process of relocating into a new office/warehouse, located at 375 Bridgepoint Dr, South St. Paul,

MN 55075. The purpose of the Mission for the Visually Impaired, a committee of the Commission on Special Ministries, is to reach the visually and reading handicapped with Christian literature for spiritual growth and information. This is accomplished by reproducing and distributing WELS periodicals and books in Braille, large-print, and audiocassette. Contact the mission at 651-291-1536; welsvisimp@aol.com.

Ministry of Christian Giving

1-800-827-5482;

ccfs_mpg@sab.wels.net

WELS Commission for Communication on Financial Support/Ministry of Planned Giving (CCFS/MPG) has begun using "Ministry of Christian Giving" as an all-encompassing name for the department. No changes were made to the structure of the department, which still emphasizes gift planning (MPG) and encouraging congregational gifts (CCFS). The Ministry of Christian Giving serves the synod by providing stewardship materials, conducting the Mission Partners Program, assisting in current and deferred gift planning, and encouraging congregational mission offerings. Pastor Dave Liggett was called as the Director of Christian Giving in June (see p. 22).

Board for Ministerial Education

414-256-3236;

peter.kruschel@sab.wels.net

With the approval of the synod in convention, the ministerial education schools—Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.; Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.; and Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.—have put plans into place for Mission Advancement offices at each institution. These offices, working in cooperation with WELS Ministry of Christian Giving, will integrate promotion of the school's purpose and welfare with opportunities for donors.

District news

California

Living Hope, Wildomar, Calif., a new mission congregation, held its first service on Sept. 11. The congregation, composed of families living in the immediate area of California Lutheran High School, is served by Pastor Thomas Zimdars, Pastor Greg Bork, and several retired pastors from the area.

Minnesota

The Lutheran Home Association, Belle Plaine, Minn., hosted six college students as part of its annual Summer Ministry Experience. The program, funded entirely by special gifts, is designed to provide an early ministry experience for WELS and Evangelical Lutheran Synod students.

Northern Wisconsin

Lutheran Vanguard of Wisconsin, a 112-person marching band composed of students from eight WELS high schools, was named Grand Champion at National Cherry Festival in Traverse City, Mich., this summer. This summer marked the ninth time in 10 trips that the band has won the Grand Champion award. Lutheran Vanguard of Wisconsin performed in 13 parades and several concerts during its 2005 season.

Happy Anniversary!

CA—Pastor Jon Mahnke, Apostles, San Jose, Calif., celebrated 40 years in the ministry on Oct. 23.

Rock of Ages, Payson, Ariz., celebrated its 25th anniversary on Sept. 18.

MI—Ron Briney, Michigan Lutheran High School, St. Joseph, Mich., celebrated more than 25 years of teaching and coaching on Aug. 21.

St. Timothy, Maumee, Ohio celebrated its 50th anniversary on Oct. 16.

NE—Shepherd of the Hills, Greenley, Colo., celebrated its 30th anniversary on Sept. 11.

PNW—Grace, Yakima, Wash., marked its 100th anniversary on Aug. 14. Son of the congregation, Pastor Joe Johnson, preached for the special afternoon service.

SEW—Pastor Gary Baumler, director of communications and executive editor of *Forward in Christ*, celebrated 40 years in the ministry on Sept. 23.

CORRECTION: It was reported in our September issue that Grace, Glendale, Ariz., was the oldest non-Native American WELS congregation in Arizona. That is incorrect. Grace, Tucson, Ariz., founded in 1911, holds that distinction. We regret the error.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: CA—Hermann John; MI—John Eich; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NW—Joel Lillo; NE—Donald Wichmann; PNW—David Birsching; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

Southeastern Wisconsin



Twelve alumni of Milwaukee Lutheran Teacher's College gathered to celebrate their 40th reunion this summer. Pictured are (front) Jim Bilitz, Judy Stuebs, Diane Bilitz, Linda Philip, Lois Tackebury, (back) Doris Koeller, Joanne Hoff, Larry Joecks, Cheryl Moeller, Ralph Mozack, Rev. Jim Sonneman, and Judy Diener. MLTC was closed in the 1970s but provided many teachers to WELS schools.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Franzmann, Thomas B., to retirement
Haakenson, Seth P., to Risen Savior, Milwaukee
Hahm, Martin R., to retirement
Hoenecke, Roy G., to retirement
Leerssen, William T., to Our Savior, Longmont/ St. John, Platteville, Colo.
Otto, Paul T., to retirement
Pope, Nathan R., to retirement
Schaefer II, William J., to St. Croix LHS, West Saint Paul, Minn.
Schmidt, Peter T., to Bethlehem, Menomonee Falls, Wis.
Vaccarella, Lee L., to New Hope, Racine, Wis.
Vogt, John F., to Asia Lutheran Seminary, Hong Kong
Ziebell, Raymond E., to retirement

Teachers

Anderson, Jennifer L., to St. Paul, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis.
Garza, Victor R., to Hope Middle School, Milwaukee
Hilber, Brook, to St. Paul, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis.
Jaeger, Laura M., to St. Paul, North Mankato, Minn.
Koester, Elizabeth M., to Calvary, Thiensville, Wis.
Krebs Jr., Michel W., to Bethany, Fort Atkinson, Wis.
Mattek, Ryan J., to Hope, Milwaukee
Metzger, Joshua J., to Hope, Milwaukee
Price, James K., to Siloah, Milwaukee
Schapekahn, Lizette A., to Siloah, Milwaukee
Tonn, Sarah, to Garden Homes, Milwaukee

Staff minister

Nagel, Levi., to Grace, Falls Church, Va.

REQUEST FOR COLLOQUY

Donald Forss, a 1970 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., has requested a colloquy for the purpose of serving in the pastoral ministry in WELS. Correspondence related to this request should be addressed to President Douglas Engelbrecht, Northern Wisconsin District, 249 E Franklin Ave, Neenah WI 54956-3028; nwdpwels@sab.wels.net.

NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS

The cutoff date for Congregation Mission Offering receipts in the synod's post office lock box is the last business day of each month. December 2005 offerings sent to our lock box will be credited as 2005

receipts through Jan. 9, 2006, 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.

Todd Poppe, chief financial officer

ANNIVERSARIES

Lansing, Mich.—Emanuel First (150). Nov. 13. Services, 8 & 10:30 A.M. Dinner to follow. RSVP, 517-485-4118.
Pompano Beach, Fla.—Ocean Drive (40). Nov. 20. Service 3 P.M. Dinner and program to follow. RSVP, Helen Bascetta, 954-943-2751.
Grafton, Wis.—Our Savior (40). Dec. 4. Services, 8 & 10:30 A.M. Refreshments after each service.
Benton Harbor, Mich.—Good Shepherd (50). Dec. 11. Service, 9:30 A.M. Catered meal to follow. RSVP, 269-926-2095.

COMING EVENTS

Faith Stepping Stones training seminars—Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service, Inc., will be hosting regional training seminars for a new family ministry program called Faith Stepping Stones. This ministry tool is designed to help parents nurture the physical, emotional, and spiritual development of their children. The training seminars are intended for congregational leaders (lay and called). Upcoming training events are in

- Middleton, Wis., Nov. 11-12
- Omaha, Neb., Jan. 26-27, 2006.

Find out more at www.wlcf.org.

WELS Marriage Retreat & Get-Away Weekend—Nov. 4-6, Heidel House, Green Lake, Wis. Adult Discipleship is nearing the maximum registration of 75 couples for this popular retreat, but there still is time to register. This marriage retreat is designed to help strengthen the friendship at the heart of your marriage. A combination of large group activities and activities just for couples will lead participants through biblical and practical principles for enjoying God's gift of marriage. 414-256-3278 or www.wels.net/jumpword/marriageretreat.

WELS Marriage Retreats will be offered in 15 locations in 2006:

- Atlanta, Ga.
- Appleton, Wis.
- Minneapolis, Minn.
- Milwaukee, Wis.
- Flint, Mich.
- Los Angeles and San Francisco, Calif.
- Washington D.C.
- Phoenix, Ariz.
- Tampa, Fla.

- Denver, Colo.
- Omaha, Neb.
- Seattle, Wash.
- Anchorage, Alaska
- Houston, Tex.

Registrations will be limited. For more information, www.wels.net/jumpword/marriageretreat.

Christian Life Resources National Convention—Nov. 5, 9:30 A.M. to 5:15 P.M. Dinner, 6:30 P.M. Four Points Sheraton, Milwaukee, Wis. 800-729-9535 or www.CLRevents.com.

WELS Woodwind Festival—Nov. 17. Wisconsin LHS, Milwaukee, Wis. Workshops, 3:30 P.M. Concert, 7 P.M. All woodwind musicians invited. Sponsored by Soli Deo Gloria Institute for the Arts. Matthew Schlomer, 262-502-4158 or www.solideogloriainstitute.org.

Lutheran Chorale concert—Nov. 27, 3 & 7 P.M., Atonement, Milwaukee.

Lakeshore Lutheran Chorale Christmas concert—Dec. 3, 7:30 P.M., Trinity, Kiel, and Dec. 4, 4 & 7 P.M., Immanuel, Manitowoc, Wis.

WELS/ELS Ladies Retreat—Jan. 13-15, 2006. Spring Hill Suites, Sarasota, Fla. Retreat, \$75. Lodging, \$89. July Becker, 941-355-6591.

International WELS Brass Festival—Jan. 21-22, 2006. Fox Valley LHS, Appleton, Wis. All brass musicians are invited. Festival co-sponsored by Fox Valley and Soli Deo Gloria Institute for the Arts. Translators in Spanish, German, and French available. Dr. Patricia Backhaus, 262-549-1506 or www.solideogloriainstitute.org.

Women's retreat—Christian Woman Today, March 24-26, 2006. Olympia Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Maureen Sertich, 262-784-0412.

WELS Conference of Staff Ministers—April 21-22, 2006. Apostles, San Jose, Calif. Kristen Koepsell, 608-831-8540.

WELS Church Librarians' Organization meeting—May 6, 2006. Christ, Baxter, Minn. Registration, \$10. Bev, 218-746-3732.

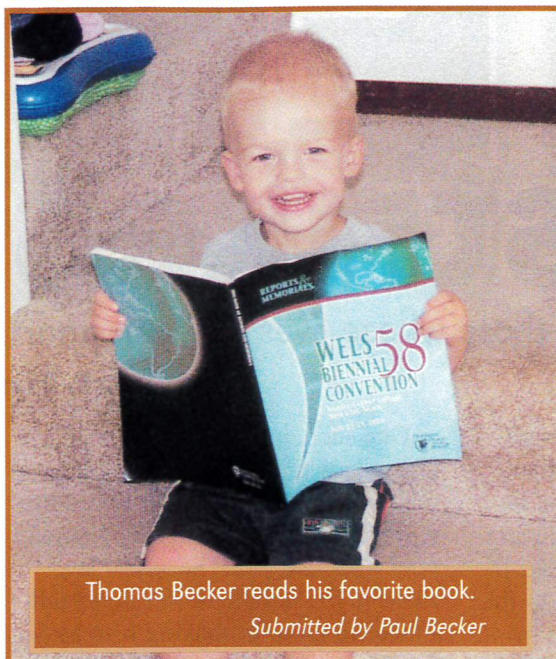
NAMES WANTED

Chicago, Ill.—Mike Borgwardt, 312-409-3204 or info@crossroadschicago.org.

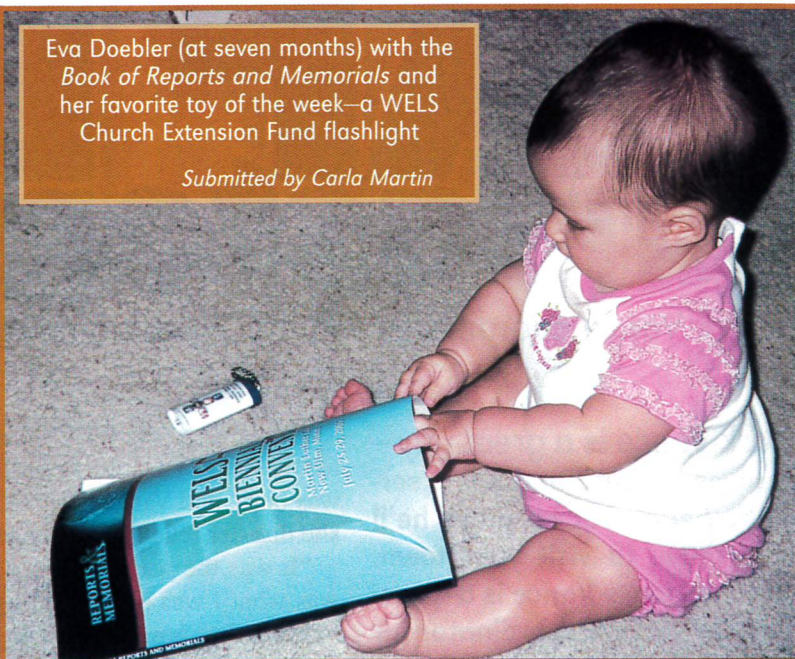
West Point, N.Y.—Donald Tollefson, 908-876-5429.

To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@sab.wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date. An updated bulletin board is available at www.wels.net/jumpword/bulletinboard.

Picture this



Thomas Becker reads his favorite book.
Submitted by Paul Becker



Eva Doebler (at seven months) with the *Book of Reports and Memorials* and her favorite toy of the week—a WELS Church Extension Fund flashlight

Submitted by Carla Martin

This year WELS members young and old enjoyed reading the *Book of Reports and Memorials*, a publication that is the primary source of information for the synod convention.

Send pictures to "Picture this," *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@sab.wels.net. On a separate sheet, give us information about the photo. Those whose photos are chosen will receive a small gift.



CONVENTION COVERAGE

WELS' 58th Biennial Convention from July 25-29, 2005

Did you know?

Some little known facts about the WELS synod convention, held July 25-29 at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

WELS used the Nebraska District's Web server for **live stream videocasting** of the synod convention.

Delegates at the synod convention represented all **12 WELS districts, 37 states, and 6 countries.**

Delegates ate **40 pounds of tiger meat** (raw hamburger and onions) during the fellowship hours after convention.

On the Saturday before convention, when several floor committees were already meeting, the **dew point** reported in southern Minnesota was **86—the highest ever recorded for Minnesota.** Delegates were able to stay cool in the gymnasium through temporary air conditioning provided by Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. "God also

provided some very moderate weather for the end of the week," says Jeff Schone, Martin Luther College professor.

During convention, Imprint Web log, www.wels.net/imprint, featured five guest delegate bloggers. There were **11,474 visitors to the blog** in July, including a single-day high of 1,026 visitors on July 28. There were 42 blog posts and 87 comments during the month. All of these figures represent **more than double the previous high** for each of the areas described.

To learn more about what happened at the 2005 synod convention, check out the October issue of *Forward in Christ* or go to www.wels.net/convention.

AFTER disaster strikes

Mark Vance coordinates volunteer work among those whose lives are torn apart.

Linda R. Buxa

Mark Vance is a great guy—he loves his Lord and has a servant’s heart. But he prays he’ll never have to visit your town. That’s because Vance is a disaster relief project coordinator for WELS Committee on Relief.

Helping after disasters wasn’t work he was considering on Sept. 10, 2001.

But the next day when planes flew into buildings and thousands died, everything changed.

Eight days later, Vance was in Milwaukee for a meeting when Pastor Richard Warnecke asked Vance to join him in New York. Warnecke, Faith in Action administrator for WELS Kingdom Workers, had been asked by the Committee on Relief to see how the money coming in could best be used for relief efforts. “He lived in New York when he was a teen, and I hoped he could show me around,” explains Warnecke. “Most important, he has a passion for souls and a passion to assist that I knew would be valuable.”

They landed in New York on Sept. 21, and quickly discovered that relief organizations had plenty of money. What they needed most were Christian volunteers to help share the healing Word of Christ.

“Pastor Warnecke started gathering the volunteers, and I handled the logistics for when they arrived in the city,” says Vance. “That included transportation, lodging, meals, entertainment, and anything else they might need.”

That’s when the WELS Committee on Relief Disaster Relief Team was born, and Vance became an on-site disaster relief project coordinator.

“It was the perfect job for me. It was what I was used to doing in the military, but now I got to do it to serve the Lord,” says Vance, who served as the operations chief for the largest aviation squadron in the Navy. “To me there is no pleasure like enabling wonderful, talented, and humble Christian volunteers to reach out in disaster situations.”

He doesn’t take the volunteer job lightly. “Disasters are serious business. People die, homes are destroyed, lives are disrupted,” says this 48-year-old grandfather of three who has also served after wildfires in Showlow, Ariz., and hurricanes in Port Charlotte, Fla., Grenada, and most recently in New Orleans and Alabama. “What makes relief work so rewarding and fascinating is that no two disasters are alike, and God always flings the doors of opportunity wide open.”



Mark Vance (left) and Harmon Lewis, pastor at Saving Grace, Mobile, Ala. Vance went to Alabama in September to assess the needs of Saving Grace after Hurricane Katrina.

One such opportunity came in Grenada while Vance was helping rebuild a man’s home. “He asked me why we had traveled so far to help a poor man like him,” he says. “We stood in the middle of the street and I thanked God for making it so easy for me to share my faith. When you get a ‘softball’ question like that, it’s easy to hit a homerun.”

Though every disaster victim served is special, “the people I remember most are the volunteers,” he says. “These people are my heroes. They give of their time and talents—in sometimes-horrible conditions and long hours—and never complain. When the trip is over they say, ‘Make sure you call me for the next opportunity.’”

That spirit of service has inspired Vance and helped his faith grow. “God has taught me that to be a good leader you must *serve* your people,” he explains. “I never really understood ‘serving’ in a Christian way until I became part of this ministry.”

Mark Vance is a great guy—and he understands that you probably don’t want him in your town. But he prays that when disaster strikes, you’ll serve beside him in someone else’s.

For more information about disaster relief volunteer opportunities, contact Richard Warnecke at WELS Kingdom Workers; fia@wkw.wels.net; 1-800-466-9357.

Linda Buxa, a member of Shepherd of the Hills, Anchorage, Alaska, lives in Waldorf, Maryland.

Learn more about WELS relief work in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina on p. 20.

Freedom FROM LEGALISM

Jesus has freed us from the legalism that defines our faith with religious rules and guilty regrets rather than with our Father's boundless grace and our Savior's perfect atonement.

Paul E. Kelm

It's jokingly referred to as "Lutheran guilt." It's the sense of religious obligation that won't let you say "no" when someone from church asks you to do one more thing. It's the feeling that your life is so much better than you deserve and that something bad is bound to happen. It's the somber "church face" that suggests Lutherans more easily believe their confession of sin than the pastor's assurance of forgiveness. "Lutheran guilt" is a subtle form of legalism in which people believe the gospel but live under the law.

The religious rules of legalism

Overt legalism is making religious laws where God hasn't. In the first century it was the re-imposition of Old Testament ceremonial laws on Christians: circumcision, Sabbath regulations, and prescribed forms of worship. The apostle Paul vehemently condemned such legalism in Galatians 5:1,2: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. . . . If you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all."

It's easier to identify legalistic thinking or practice in hindsight. A few generations ago, such legalism meant prohibiting movies, dancing, alcohol, card playing, and even life insurance. Though the Bible didn't exactly forbid such things, religious rules were a way to keep people from temptations and questionable associations. (That's how

the Pharisees of Jesus' day saw it too.) In 1 Corinthians 10:29 the apostle counters: "Why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience?"

Today, some Christians want to turn their social and political agenda into a moral obligation. In Lutheran circles, some would like to make forms of worship a test of orthodoxy. Maybe you've heard people use the expression "synod rules," as though there is a casebook governing the application of church fellowship principles. Freedom means clearly distinguishing what Scripture prescribes from what must remain in the realm called "adiaphora"—what God has neither commanded nor forbidden.

Overt legalism is also using the law where the gospel should be applied. Such spiritual abuse makes people "wear their sins," like a scar-

let letter, as though the punishment Jesus endured for sinners wasn't enough. It manipulates moral behavior with guilt or shame, rather than renewing Christians with forgiveness and empowering them with God's promises. Legalism coerces giving or volunteering with a sense of religious obligation, instead of encouraging the grace of giving and the joy of serving with the love of God.

The freedom that Jesus provides

Jesus has freed us from the legalism that defines our faith with religious rules and guilty regrets rather than with our Father's boundless grace and our Savior's perfect atonement. No more guilt trips. No more, "I suppose I have to." God "canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14).

Jesus has freed us from the judgmentalism of those who would impose their own ideas of right and wrong on our conscience. We follow God's Word because we want to, not religious rules because someone told us to. "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival" (Colossians 2:16).

The gospel has set us free!

Paul Kelm is pastor at St. Mark, De Pere, Wisconsin.

This is the third of a six-part series on Christian freedom. To read other articles in the series, go to www.wels.net/jumpword/ficarchive, and search by the author's first and last name.



A dying woman teaches us a lesson

She called me with a determined tone in her voice. She wanted me to come by and talk. She did not sound panicked. Yet there was an undeniable sound or resolution in her voice. Lilly was not a whiner—nor was she much into small talk. Whenever she wanted to talk, I knew it was important.

I sat down with Lilly at the kitchen table, and she offered me a glass of lemonade. Before she even landed in her chair she announced, “I have cancer, and the doctor has given me six months to live.”

I knew she wasn’t looking for sympathy. In fact, the announcement came like an opening for a lesson she felt it was time for me to learn. Not wanting to pass up the opportunity for some candid talk with a woman of incredible faith, my interview began and ended with just one question: “How does it feel to know you are going to die?”

A bold question, yes, but Lilly was a remarkable woman. Truly filled with zeal for the Lord she was involved in everything—in the church as well as the community.

Her perspective on dying would prove to be invaluable, and her lesson still stays with me to this day.

As though she thought about it her entire life, Lilly articulated three reasons why people are afraid to die:

REASON #1— A fear of what lies beyond life.

Lilly spent many hours volunteering at the local nursing home. Sometimes while playing bridge or visiting with the residents, she engaged in discussions about life and death. Lilly observed, “Many people fear what lies beyond.”

These people feared the unknown. Having never experienced death they didn’t know what to expect and that frightened them. At such times Lilly turned to God’s Word:

“We will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51,52).

“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him” (1 Thessalonians 4:13,14).

In counseling others, Lilly professed boldly about herself, “Jesus died for my sins and at death I will be with him in heaven.” She believed it not because of facts and evidence, but because of faith and the confidence she had in God.

REASON #2— A fear about the path that leads to death.

A diagnosis of a lingering death immediately creates images of declining health, pain, and suffering. At the time of Lilly’s diagnosis, the medical community was only scratching the surface in providing adequate and complete pain management. She readily admitted to losing sleep thinking of her own demise and the corresponding loss of quality of life near its end. Then she recalled an opening devotion given at a Ladies’ Guild meeting. It was based on the passage: “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

In characteristic candor Lilly told me, “I was afraid of the dying process. I was afraid of seeing my life diminish slowly and perhaps even painfully. But then I thought, ‘Weeks or months of decline versus an eternity of glory with God—I can make it.’”

Lilly exhibited one of the Christian faith’s greatest attributes: the ability to look ahead eternally without getting lost in the moment. As she expounded on the temporal nature of life, and even life’s miseries, she recalled its perspective in light of God’s Word:

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ,

Facing eternity—

about faith, life, and life after death.

who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:1-4).

With eternal life lying at death’s door, she could not rationalize any feelings of anguish over the prospect of some end-of-life suffering. “Because God’s there, I will be okay.” It took a few days for her to wrestle with the emotions, but in the end, she placed her hope and confidence in God. She did not fear the declining quality of her life as death approached.

REASON #3— **A fear about who will take care of family that is left behind.**

Lilly was incredible. She was unwavering in her conviction that although life ends in death, it brings life in Christ. Yes, she worried some about the dying process. But, as she thought it through and sought out God’s direction in his Word, she was not about to be intimidated.

Lilly did have one fear: “Who will take care of my husband when I am gone?” She had a wonderfully kind and cordial husband. Though older and often in poorer health than Lilly, he doted on her. She worried whether anyone would be able to care for her husband after she was gone.

Lilly’s husband was a unique challenge. He was a Christian but rarely attended church. While accepting of her diagnosis he was nevertheless rattled by what it would mean for him in the coming months. “Now,” Lilly wondered, “what will happen when I am gone?”

We explored different options, but one thing became clear. In her volunteer work and zeal to help others she had not really developed any close friendships. They had no children, and there didn’t seem to be anyone ready to step in to help care for her aging husband.

That realization led to the sad conclusion that even within her own Christian community she couldn’t be confident that her unchurched husband would be taken care of. With her stern and arthritic finger Lilly pointed at me and said, “You make sure someone watches out for him.”

Though the doctor gave Lilly a prognosis of six months of life, God had a

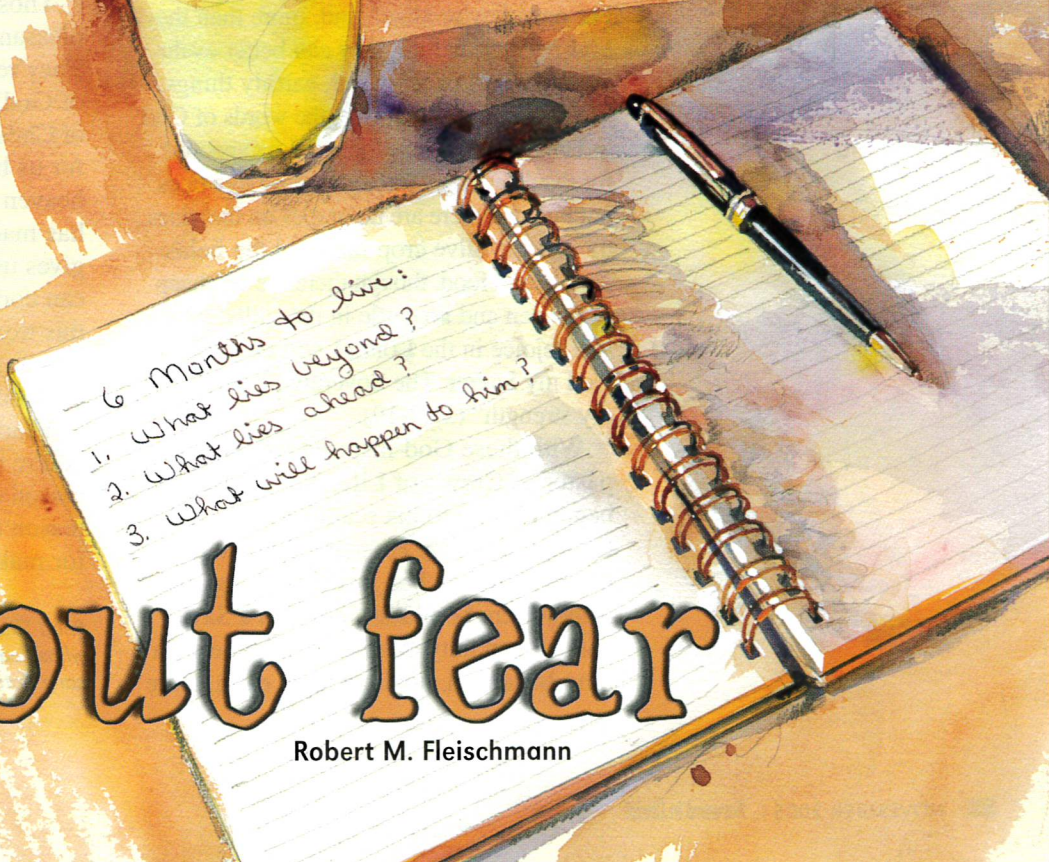
different plan. Three months after her diagnosis, she went to the hospital for tests. In the middle of the night her life was taken by a massive stroke.

Lilly was confident to the last moment that upon death she would be before God’s throne. She did not experience much decline in the quality of her life. She was prepared for it yet spared of it. For her husband, a network of support was created. Members of the congregation learned of Lilly’s third fear of death and went into action to alleviate it.

Several decades have passed since Lilly’s lesson on life and death. In her candid testimonial she taught me a perspective that I replay in countless cases. Her faith, too, remains a legacy for me to share and to emulate—a faith that faces eternity without fear.

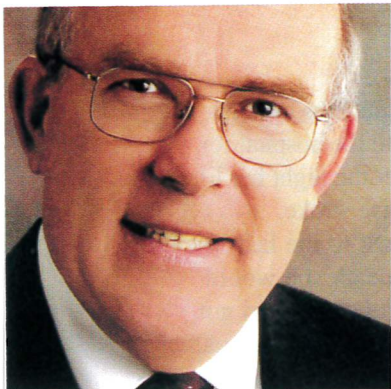
Robert Fleischmann, the national director of Christian Life Resources, is a member at St. Paul, Slinger, Wisconsin.

This is the first of a four-part series on end-of-life issues.



-without fear

Robert M. Fleischmann



Carl R. Gungel

Homeless, but not without a home

Homeless! Most of us have never been homeless. Yet at this writing, hundreds of thousands are homeless in the Gulf Coast area of our country. Perhaps when you read this, more than a month later, most of them will still be homeless.

But many of these people may be more than just homeless. With their homes washed or blown away, nearly all of their earthly possessions are gone. They may have escaped with their lives, wearing only the clothes on their backs. Their cars may be inoperable. With so much of New Orleans underwater, the grocery store, the drug store, their doctor's office, their place of employment all are unreachable. In fact, they may have been transported to an entirely different city. And, even if they have a place to stay there, it's like being homeless, since it doesn't feel like home.

It would seem that these people ought to be thankless this Thanksgiving season. Yet, I suspect that some of them may well be among the most thankful people on earth. For one, they're alive! And, more than they ever realized before, they can better evaluate the worth of temporal, earthly things.

For times such as these, the words of God in Habakkuk give us the right perspective for thanksgiving: "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength" (3:17-19).

With these God-inspired words, the pastor of Crown of Life, New Orleans, began a letter to his scattered flock following the storm. He pointed out to them that even if they had lost everything, even if they were homeless, they had a Savior and the certainty of an eternal home with him. In heaven, not here upon earth, there

will be no more storms, no more loss, no more sorrow or tears. No one can take that away from them.

Isn't that where all of us need to start in evaluating our reasons for giving thanks? For most of us, most of the time, we truly enjoy a great deal more than that. In the words of Luther's explanation to the First Article, here are some more reasons to thank God: "God still preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, property and home, spouse and children, land, cattle, and all I own, and all I need to keep my body and life."

Even if and when God permits these things to be taken from us, look at what still remains. Luther again says it well in the hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God": "And take they our life, goods, fame, child and wife, let these all be gone, they yet have nothing won; the Kingdom ours remaineth" (*The Lutheran Hymnal* 262:4).

Those aren't just words, putting a pleasant face on an unpleasant scene. They're based on the solid foundation of God's Word. Purchased by the blood of Christ, every soul is a treasure. Prepared for us by Christ's death and resurrection, heaven is our home. The treasure God has made us, the eternal treasure God gives us, is not something a moth or rust can corrupt or that thieves can steal. It's this treasure above all else that gives us reason for thanksgiving, even in temporally difficult times.

Thank God your soul is a treasure; you're precious in his sight! Isn't that reason enough to thank him? Isn't it a reason to lead others in thanking him for making every soul a treasure?

Read Thanksgiving messages from two pastors whose congregations were in the path of Hurricane Katrina on pp. 10,11.

Lessons from the Creed

What does God tell us about angels?

Charles F. Degner

I believe in angels, but not like the angels portrayed in movies and television. Angels aren't human beings who earn their wings in heaven by doing good deeds. Little children who die don't become angels. Angels doing God's business on earth are not confused about what their Creator wants them to do or how (Psalm 103:20). This is why Jesus taught us to pray that God's will be done "as in heaven."

What are angels like?

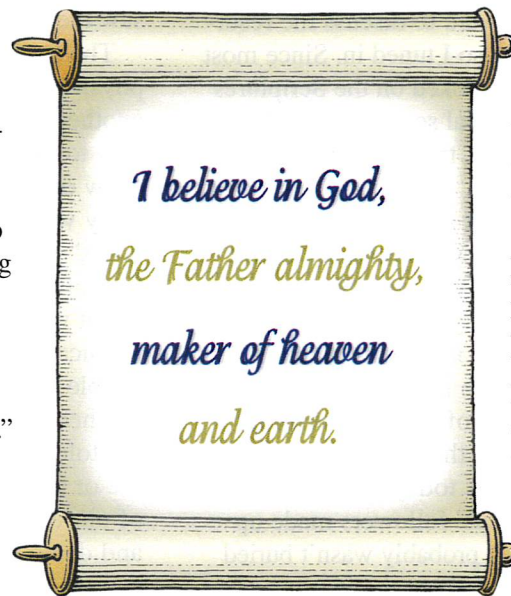
If you saw an angel, what would it look like? God's angels are spirits and do not have physical bodies (Hebrews 1:14). The Bible sometimes pictures them with wings, because they are swift to do God's bidding (Isaiah 6:2). Sometimes they appear as young men (Genesis 19:1-5). Besides the word "angel," these creatures of God are also called "cherubim" (Ezekiel 9:3) and "seraphim" (Isaiah 6:2 KJV).

Here are some other facts about angels:

- God made the angels during the six days of creation (Exodus 20:11).
- God made angels to help and serve God's people (Hebrews 1:14).
- There are at least 100 million angels (Revelation 5:11).
- Angels are very powerful (2 Peter 2:10,11).
- The word angel means "messenger" and describes one of the ways in which God has used his angels (Luke 1:19,26).
- Jesus speaks of children having personal angels in heaven (Matthew 18:10).

How do angels protect us?

In times of trouble or danger, do we remember that God's angels are



there to guard and protect us? The story of Elisha and the Arameans makes us smile (2 Kings 6:8-23). The Arameans were unsuccessful in their raids on Israel, because Elisha was always warning the king of Israel that they were coming. The Aramean king sent a strong force to capture Elisha in Dothan. Elisha's servant woke up, went out, and saw that the Aramean army had surrounded the city. "What shall we do?" he asked Elisha.

God's angels are always there, carrying out God's commands.

"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (v. 16). Even one angel destroyed an army of 185,000 soldiers (2 Kings 19:35,36). God sent an army of angels to protect Elisha! Elisha prayed that God would open his servant's eyes.

Suddenly, his servant could see that the hills were full of horses and chariots of fire. God's angels will always outnumber our enemies!

In this case, God provided a simpler and rather humorous solution. He struck the army with blindness. Elisha offered to guide them to where they would find the person they were looking for. He led them to Samaria, entered the city, and then their eyes were opened. Can you imagine opening your eyes to see yourself in your enemy's capitol? At Elisha's suggestion, the king fed the men and let them return home to tell their story.

Have you ever had that happen to you? You faced a difficult problem. You needed a miracle. Instead, God gave a simple solution to your problem, and you were on life's way. You didn't see any angels, but they were there. God's angels are always there, carrying out God's commands, helping God's people in their time of need.

Have you ever seen an angel? If someone tells you they have, I would not doubt them. We don't have to see angels to believe that they exist, because God says that they do and that he will send his angels to watch over us.

Sometimes seeing is believing. For God's children, believing is seeing.

Contributing editor Charles Degner is pastor at St. Peter, St. Peter, Minnesota.

This is the last of a seven-part series on the First Article of the Apostles' Creed. To read other articles in the series, go to www.wels.net/jumpword/ficarchive, and search by the author's first and last name.



Gary S. Baumler

He is risen

Every now and then television gurus grace us with a TV special on what scholars think about some biblical truth. This time they were to discuss the resurrection of Jesus, so I tuned in. Since most of the “experts” looked on the Scriptures as but one of several sources, and a highly suspect one at that, the results were mostly predictable.

So, if you don’t accept the Scriptures at face value and you seriously doubt miracles, how do you view the resurrection? For starters, you say, “I think . . .,” a lot. The listener is to believe that what you think is more informed than the Bible. Then you offer theories about the phenomenon that has led to two billion Christians today.

Theory 1: Jesus’ followers made up the stories. Jesus probably wasn’t buried in the first place, since the victims of crucifixion were usually thrown into a common pit for the dogs and birds to prey on. Yes, that would probably have happened to Jesus, if his friends had not arranged to get the body for burial. Then, too, the Roman soldiers were sent to guard a real body, Jesus’ body, in a real grave.

Theory 2: Jesus was resuscitated. Such resuscitations happen all the time. Even after a person is declared dead and has a spear thrust into his side to guarantee it? Any resemblance between a man being resuscitated and the account of Jesus’ death and burial is purely imaginary.

Theory 3: The disciples saw dreams or visions. When the original text says that “Jesus appeared,” that can be understood to say that he appeared in a vision. It can, but that means that the Emmaus disciples walked with and broke bread with a vision, Thomas was invited to

put his fingers into the wounds of a vision, a vision cooked breakfast at the sea shore, and more than 500 people saw the vision at once.

Theory 4: The resurrection was not physical but spiritual. The disciples saw another dimension. Had someone been able to snap a picture, Jesus wouldn’t show on it. In truth, Jesus’ resurrected body was what Paul calls “a spiritual body,” no longer subject to the same limitations as before the resurrection. But it was his actual body—present in physical form—right down to the still-visible wounds from the nails and spear.

Theory 5: The resurrection stories are told to illustrate that love cannot die or that death is not the last chapter of our existence. True, love cannot die, and death is not the last chapter of our existence, but how much more sure and promising when realized in the bodily resurrection of our Lord! He is love, and he has prepared a place for us beyond death.

Theory 6: Faith is a leap, a risk. How much better the writer of Hebrews said it: “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (11:1)! Our certainty is built on the rock of our salvation, the risen, living Savior.

I said at the outset that such theories are predictable. Unless God’s Spirit works in your heart by the gospel to believe in the atoning work of Jesus, you won’t accept the Bible as God’s Word and infallible truth. And if you reject the Bible as divine truth, all that matters is what “you think.”

Do you really think that gets you any closer to the truth?

*A song for
the heart
that is . . .*

lonely

*anxious about
finances*

*frustrated with
the wicked*

*anxious about
the future*

feeling guilty

fearful of death

*seeking purpose
in life*

*longing to be
close to Christ*

*seeking Christian
friendship*

peaceful

joyful

*thankful for
God's Word*



Songs for the heart

Donald W. Patterson

When I was in high school I used to raise Angus heifers to show at the State Fair and other livestock shows. I kept them in an air cooled stall during the day and in a small "run around" at night. When I would go to take care of them, I can vividly remember seeing my heifers jump for joy because they knew they were either coming in to eat after a long night or going out to run around after a long day in the stall. Their tails would stick up in the air as they jumped and rambunctiously trotted around. I was always happy that they were glad to see me and experience my shepherding.

The psalmist had these two blessings in mind when he called us to be joyful in Psalm 100. The psalm is divided into two parts. In the first part, verses 1-3, he calls for us to be joyful because we were given the gift of life under God's loving care as our shepherd. Then in the second part, verses 4,5, he leads us to be joyful for the gift of God's love and faithfulness in our lives.

Let God lead you to true spiritual joy. Read through Psalm 100 a couple of times. Think about the specific ways God has blessed you and then answer the following questions.

Featured verses: Psalm 100

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. ²Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. ³Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. ⁴Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. ⁵For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Points to ponder

- What does verse 3 tell us we are forgetting if we cannot find reason for joy in his presence?
- Name some times in your life that you more easily reflect joy before God for the gift of life.
- Try to name as many ways as possible that Jesus has shown you his love?
- Why does it make you joyful to think that God's faithfulness continues through all generations?

Treasures to share

- Take time today to tell someone in your family one thing that you are thankful for that you have received from God.
- Try to imagine how thankful the thief on the cross next to Jesus was when he heard that he would be in paradise. Describe to a friend how you believe he had joy amid his sorrows and pain?
- Think of a Christian who has less than you but tends to show more joy. Write that person a "Thank You" note for being such a good example of Psalm 100.

Other Scripture verses that lead us to be joyful

Philippians 4:4-7; Ephesians 5:19,20; Luke 17:11-19; Luke 15:31,32

Contributing editor Donald Patterson is pastor at Holy Word, Austin, Texas.

Find this article and possible answers online. Go to www.wels.net/jumpword/fic, and click on "Songs for the heart." Answers will be available after Nov. 5.

ANTACID DAYS

A pastor shares how he learned the hard lesson about thanking God for the problems in his life.

"Have you tried thanking God for your problems?" My friend's advice stunned me. I'm supposed to thank God for all this upset in my life?

I was a young pastor, just a couple years out of seminary, serving a recently-born church. The congregational issues I faced would not seem as troublesome after a few more years experience. But in my wet-behind-the-ears state they created haunted nights and antacid days. I complained to Bob, doing my best Elijah-in-the-wilderness imitation:

"I have worked hard for the Lord and all I get is grumbling. No one wants to serve. No one wants to worship. I am the only one who cares. Now the District Mission Board is getting on me."

"Have you tried thanking God for your problems?" asked Bob.

"I'm serious," he continued. "The Bible says, 'Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.'"

"And where in the Bible is that?" Apparently there was at least one day at the seminary that I hadn't paid close attention.

"1 Thessalonians 5:18. Look it up when you get home."

I wasn't convinced that thanking God for personal upending made any sense. But if it was in the Bible . . .

Have you tried thanking God for your problems?

The next morning during my private time with Jesus, Elijah's whine began anew. But Bob's verse intruded. I even checked to make sure 1 Thessalonians 5:18 existed. A long, deep breath crawled into my lungs and departed as slowly. I mulled the words. "Give thanks . . . in all circumstances . . . God's will . . . for you . . . in Christ Jesus."

"Dear Father . . ." The words wedged. I swallowed. "I thank you for the difficulties . . ." Clenched teeth dammed the prayer.

"How can I thank God for the troubles that have put these red veins of sleepless nights in my eyes?"

"Because it's God's will for you," I argued with myself. "God wants you to. He's God. So do it."

"That's a good reason, I suppose. It's not a very comforting reason, but it's a good reason."

"You want a better reason? 'Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you'—here's the reason—'in Christ Jesus.' The will of God that sent his Son to be your Savior is the will of God that empowers you to thank him no matter how your life limps. Don't you get it? The love he demonstrated in Jesus controls and directs your limping."

Another long breath in, then out. "Dear Father, I . . . thank you . . . for the difficulties . . . I've encountered lately. I know you love me. The forgiveness I have in Jesus teaches me that. Because of Jesus I know that you have good to bring out of this. For that I do thank you . . ., even though the hope of any blessing is a mystery right now. I thank you also for people you've put in my life. In fact, let me start with the folks I complained to you about yesterday. . . ."

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