

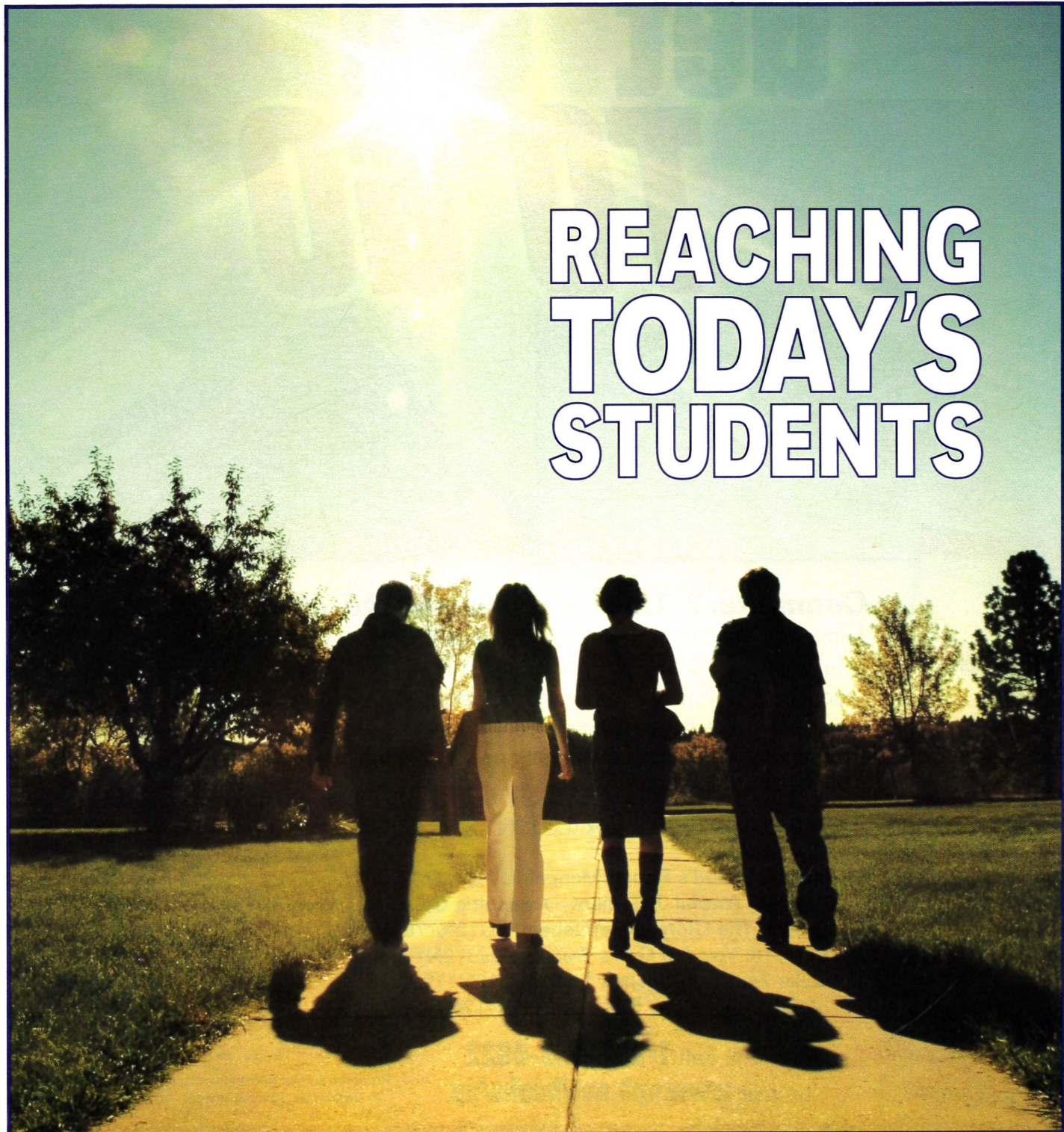
A LETTER OF HOPE • MEASURING YOUR SPIRITUAL WELLNESS

JANUARY 2006

Forward in Christ

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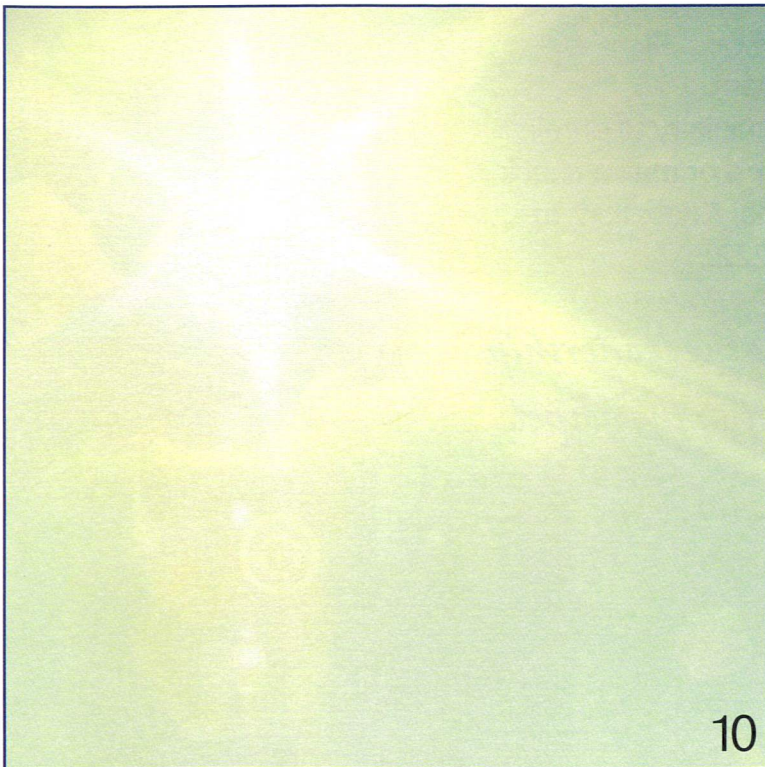
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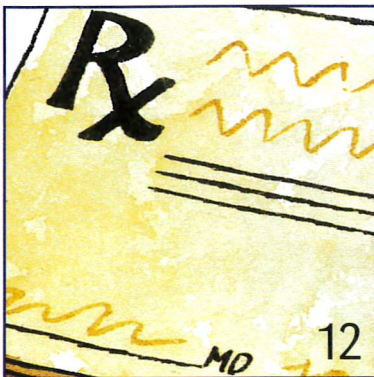
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“Tomorrow’s church leaders need to be fed with the Word today.”



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Forward in Christ

✠ The official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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HELP WANTED

in bringing up the next generation of WELS leaders

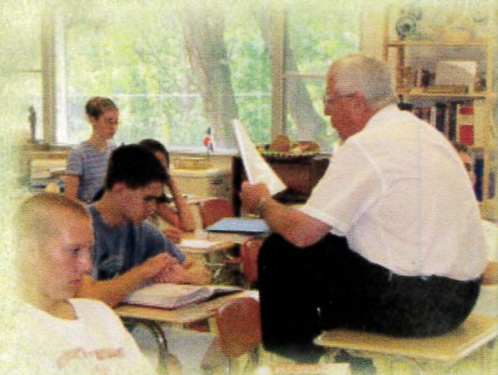
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BE WITH US AS HE WAS
WITH OUR FATHERS;
MAY HE NEVER LEAVE US
NOR FORSAKE US.

1 Kings 8:57

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JANUARY

WHAT'S INSIDE *by Julie Wietzke*

Often at the start of a new year, we think about what we want to do differently.

Maybe you want to put together a new exercise program for yourself. But have you thought about your spiritual health? Pastor Fred Toppe's article (p. 12) can help you diagnose your spiritual fitness and develop a program to stay spiritually fit.

While strengthening your own spiritual health is important, it's also vital to reach out to others. This issue contains articles that explain different ways your fellow WELS members are sharing the gospel. Pastor Thomas Trapp shares various methods that campus ministries—the University of Wisconsin–Madison, specifically—are using to reach students in a postmodern world (p. 10). Pastor Paul Hartman, on the other hand, explores the concept of using oral communication—stories, poetry, psalms, and proverbs—to spread the gospel to those who are illiterate (p. 18). Hopefully these articles will get you thinking about how you can tell others about Jesus.

We at *Forward in Christ* are changing as well. This issue we welcome our new executive editor, Pastor John Braun. Find out more about him on p. 20.

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LUKE AND STEWARDSHIP

Prof. Hartwig's series on Luke is a "good read." In addition to a thorough analysis of the man Luke, he emphasizes one of the principal tenets of good stewardship—only the gospel, not "exterior agencies," motivates believers to God-pleasing giving [Oct. 2005]. . . . As the professor writes, ". . . solutions prompted by human enterprise and its gimmicks will not achieve a genuinely sanctified sacrifice of material resources." Only selfless giving motivated by personal thanksgiving for God's wonderful gift, his Son, who selflessly gave up his life on the cross for us undeserving, worthless sinners will achieve that!

*Howard Rauch
Manitowoc, Wisconsin*

PANIC ATTACKS

I feel compelled to write about Panicked [July 2005] and Panic Attacks [Nov. 2005]. I also sympathize with anyone who is severely depressed and encourage them of hope and help with modern medical drugs!

I, by God's grace, am a survivor of approximately eight years of major depression.

Believe me, it is not a weak faith, irrational thinking, or as easy as some ignorantly say, "Just snap out of it!" . . .

Just as prayer will not mend a broken and mangled arm on its own without physical treatment of a doctor so also prayer will not help cure my depression without mental treatment of pills and a psychiatrist.

Fortunately, God has blessed me with a most wonderful, understanding wife and family. I have had more than 10 years of symptom-free depression and will need medicine for life; without medicine the depression will reoccur. Not three hours in a day go by that I do not thank God for his graciousness.

I pray that this letter would encourage anyone not to hesitate using God's saving medicine and live life again!

Name withheld

Thank you for the article on panic attacks [July 2005]. It was timely and comforting for one of my elder members.

She was troubled by a letter published in November, however. This letter seemed to pick at a scab that had mostly healed by the power of the gospel. The letter seemed to question her faith and her memory of God's Word and promises. This woman has a good storehouse of memory passages and a good understanding of the Christian faith. Her personal faith, as evidenced in her life and witness, is strong. Yet she suffered from depression and panic attacks. Her faith did sustain her, but the physical, chemical causes of her anxiety needed to be treated by drugs.

The original article was not lacking the information that the writer of the letter provided. I do not want to say to someone suffering from panic, "You need to trust more." I would rather say, "God is with you, knows what you are feeling, loves you, and has forgiven you in Christ." The Holy Ghost will bring trust through those words.

Kudos to Mrs. Heins for a well-balanced and gospel-full article.

*Dan Wagenknecht
Yorba Linda, California*

LOG IN

Our daughter in Virginia sends me, a retired confessional Lutheran LCMS pastor, *Forward in Christ*. Prof. Gurgel's "Unconditional love" [Oct. 2005] made me think of the following.

Although he correctly used the term "beam in" your own eye, referring to Matthew 7, those of us familiar with KJV, Beck's, and RSV recall it as God's direction to his

people, "How can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck out of your eye,' when there is the LOG IN your own eye?"

Every time your computer uses the term "LOG IN," let it remind you of the *log in your own eye* which you should remove (by repentance and faith).

Now: try to forget that "LOG IN" reminder. If you try to, really hard, I'll bet you . . . can't! You'll think of it each time you "log in."

*Lee A. Butz
Zionsville, Indiana*

CORRECTIONS

Dean Lindberg, not Ed Koehler, created the backpage illustration [Dec.]. We thank him for his work.

In Bits o' the Bible [Potluck, Dec. 2005], Question 8 should end with "at Jesus' presentation in the temple" instead of "at Jesus' circumcision." We apologize for the error.

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*.

Let's celebrate!

"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you." John 14:2

James A. Mattek

The retired pastor broke the news at a pizza party he was hosting. When the moment was right, he rose and addressed his closest friends. "I'm going home. My doctor told me this morning that I have terminal cancer. I'm going home to heaven soon. Let's celebrate!"

God's promises are true

Had that reality not yet sunk in? No, he knew what he was in for. He had ministered often to the sick and dying. The six-month road to heaven's gate wouldn't be easy. But he would be home, and that's what mattered most. The painful road of cancer would end, but the streets of gold would not . . . and he couldn't wait.

Was he overconfident? What was he? A super Christian? I wouldn't put it that way. Someone once told me that the highest compliment you can pay God is to believe what he says. This dying man was simply a believer. Jesus said, "Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life" (John 5:24). God promised it. The pastor believed it. Jesus promised, "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you." God promised it. The pastor believed it. Period. God's Spirit convinces us that the unbelievable is to be believed because it's true.

God's promises are inviting

God's promises are not only true; they're also wonderfully inviting. God has room for us. This promise is so inviting because too often we've heard just the opposite. Some of life's saddest words are: "We have no room for you." I know of an adult who can still

feel the sting of childhood rejection. She was always the last one picked when choosing sides at recess. In essence she was being told "We have no room for you on our team." Have you heard those words in the workplace? "Sorry, I have no room for you in my business plan." From someone you love? "I have no room for you in my heart." From a bigot? "There's no room here for your type." Maybe even from someone at church? "There's no room for you and your ideas." Sad words indeed.

Jesus heard those sad words too. Before he was born, there was no room for them in the inn. The neighbors Jesus grew up with tried to stone him. Were they not saying "We have no room in Nazareth for a self-proclaimed Messiah"? Many of the clergy of his day were saying "We have no room for your nontraditional methods or unconditional love." From the cross Jesus heard: "We have no room for you in our world." He too knew the sting of rejection.

The cross was much more than human rejection; it was rejection from his Father. The crucifixion was heaven's thundering statement of judgment: "Jesus, there's no room for you in my heaven or in my good graces!" Jesus endured the ultimate rejection so that we could enjoy the ultimate acceptance. He was shoved out so that we could be welcomed in. Jesus became humanity's doormat, a place to leave the dirt of its sin.



As a result the red carpet of forgiveness points the way to the Father's front door. Behind that door are many rooms, one custom made for you.

The light comes on for people as the gospel invitation takes root. We become convinced that in a world rocky with human rejection there is a land lush with divine acceptance. We simply believe it. That's doesn't make us super Christians. The gospel reminds us that we have a super Savior and a super reason to celebrate . . . even with pizza. We're going home. Let's celebrate.

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

Your eye is the lamp of your body

Thomas J. Jeske

We're born with such complex bodies. Muscles and bones in your hand coordinate to pick up a hot drink. The smooth chain of your spine moves as you bend to lace on a shoe. Now imagine that you have to pick up a glass or tie your shoe . . . in the dark.

Often we grope through life situations like a blind man feeling his way along a wall. Our "eye" is bad. We think life is all about accumulating created things, and so we worry.

Sure, we need to see God as Creator. But he wants you to know him in the warm light of his name, Father. The Lord God was grieved that his first humans rebelled and hid in the gathering dusk. Satan did much damage to our first parents' ability to see life clearly. Adam and Eve, post-Fall, seem entranced, as if they didn't recognize him. So a Father's heart arranged for an eye transplant. He sent his Son to serve them and us in a special way.

Jesus exhibited a good eye. His vision and focus were on trusting the Father's promises to provide and protect in the face of evidence to the contrary. He submitted to his Father's will. He lived under the limitations of a human being. Jesus completed the task set before him, finding and feeling the cross. He followed into the darkness of his grave. This was how the family relationship was restored between a holy Father and his stumbling guilty children. Jesus' insight into his Father's will and into our need shows that his body was full of light.

Each of us faces a new year. For his brothers and sisters who worry about what may be lurking ahead, Jesus makes the odd comparison that your eye is your body's "lamp" (Matthew 6:21-23). As a boy, Jesus learned to carry a little clay lamp that ran on maybe an ounce of olive oil. As he

held it in his palm, his lamp gave just enough light to see for the next few steps.

Where we're looking controls what we're doing with our lives. Think about these statements:

"Kelly can't take her eyes off her boyfriend."

"Bill doesn't let that car out of his sight."

Good light or poor light regulate a body's response. What holds one's interest even disciples look at and find themselves following.

What sights have you already permitted to come through the windows of your eyes today? A stream of changing, disturbing news? Sports, the Dow, menace, and tragedy from around the world? Advice on dating or fashion? Or catalogs, sales, soft-porn ads, and trips to anywhere but where you are? Jesus?

Jesus reminds his disciples—again—who they are: children of the heavenly Father! Count how

many times Jesus uses the word "Father" in Matthew 6. When the Holy Spirit works this belief in our hearts through water and the Word, then we are full of light and our bodily responses are well-lighted. Then your eyes are where they need to be. Then your body is full of light. As a useful lamp puts out the proper light, this light provides confidence for its carrier to move

safely and work productively.

God's children truly have a good eye. Their outlook on 2006 is that of a good Father's well-cared-for children. They view each day through the window of the cross. They have perspective on their own struggle with greed and worry. They are an example to friends and family. For where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also.

Hand me that lamp for a minute, would you?

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

Jesus exhibited a good eye. His vision and focus were on trusting the Father's promises to provide and protect.



at the foot of the cross. Richard L. Gurgel

TOPIC: The end of your time of grace

How do we answer those who wonder if catastrophes like hurricanes Katrina and Rita are special judgments of God on human sinfulness?

We can begin to answer this question in no better way than to share Jesus' response to those wondering about similar current events during the days of his earthly ministry. Although they didn't quite come out and ask the question directly, Jesus, who knew their hearts, answered their implied question.

"Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you all repent, you too will all perish.'" (Luke 13:1-5).

Did you notice what Jesus did? He turned the question back on those who were—at least in their hearts—asking the question! Without denying what God may have been doing by using those two "tragedies" to end peoples' time of grace, Jesus asked everyone listening to examine their own hearts and lives. Essentially he was asking all those gathered around him to consider this: "If that had been me on the wrong end of a Roman sword—or buried under the falling bricks—would I have been ready? If my time of grace had come to a sudden halt . . . would I have been ready to stand before my Judge?"

Well . . . would you? If that earthquake's epicenter had been in your town and your house had collapsed over you—if the sudden tsunami had washed you, your family, and your entire town off the face of the earth—if the much feared bird flu epidemic had erupted

in your hometown and left you among its first casualties—would you have been ready for your time of grace to be suddenly cut off?

Would I?

Am I any less a sinner than those who have already perished in the catastrophes I see in dying color on my TV screen? "I tell you, no!" Are those who become dead clay buried under piles of rubble any more guilty by nature than I? "I tell you, no!" Unless I live in daily repentance—turning from the evil of my sin to the merciful love of my Savior—I, too, won't just die. I will perish—forever!

So the next time your eyes scan the bold print headlines or catch the breaking story of the latest catastrophe, remember not to speak proudly about what God must be doing in that event. God has not given us inspired words by which to judge those specific tragedies as he did for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Abraham's day or Jerusalem in Jeremiah's. Instead of wondering about "them"—for whom it is useless to wonder—always ask yourself this: would I and those my life touches have been ready if that had been us?

As we flee for refuge in this new year to the tenderhearted mercies of our Savior, the answer is "Yes!" Thanks be to God!

But what about those in your life for whom the answer appears to be "No!?" Pray for the boldness of the Savior. Then, when discussions turn to such current events, you will have the humble courage to raise the same question for them.

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.

The Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel & Student Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison is the oldest and the largest of 385 WELS campus ministries* across the country. Using stories from UW-Madison, Thomas Trapp shows us different methods that campus ministries use to bring Christ to people in a postmodern world.

Stories from a Postmodern Campus

Thomas H. Trapp

Web surfing

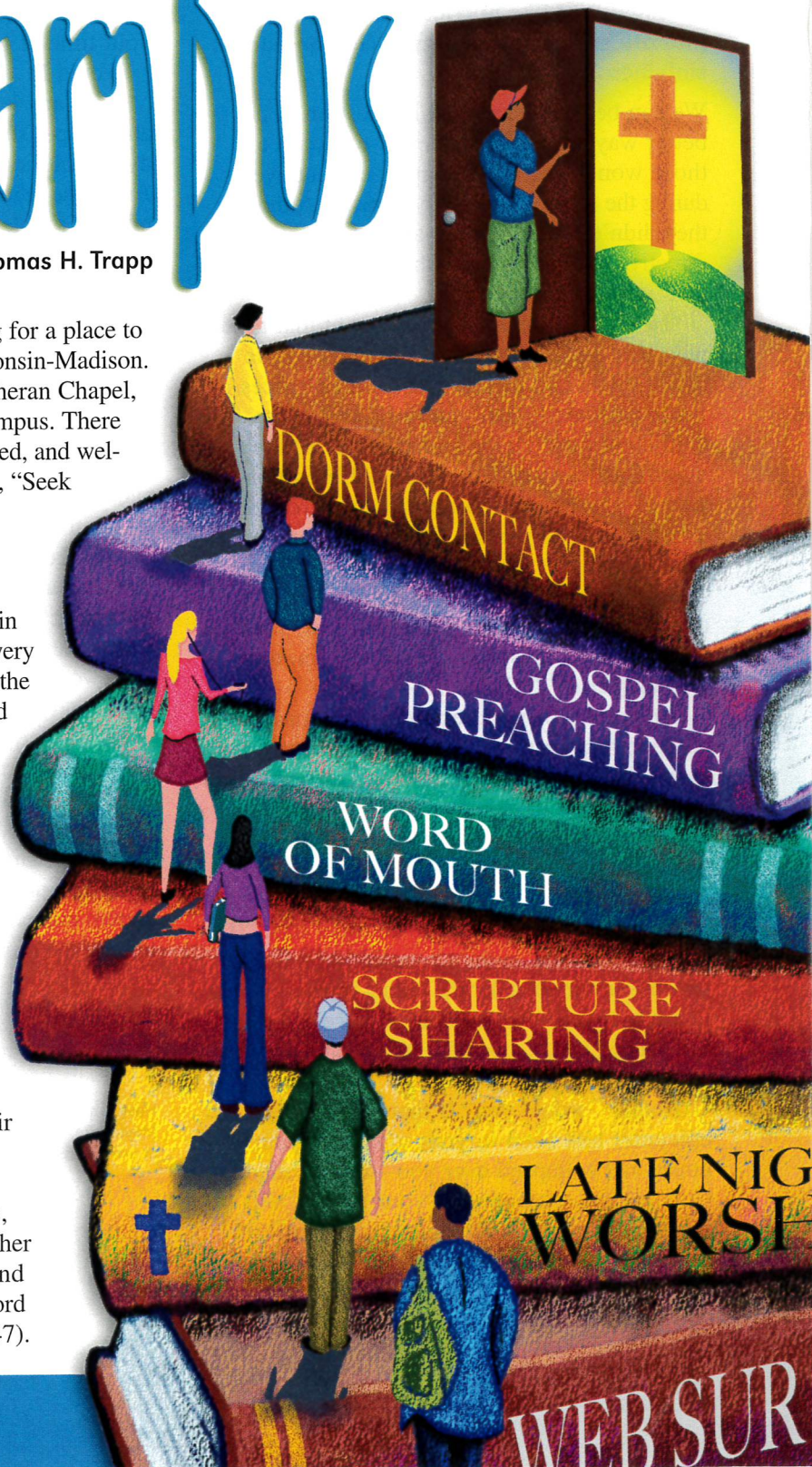
Stephanie, a pre-medical student, was looking for a place to learn more about God at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She went to the Web. She found Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, www.wlchapel.org, a five-minute walk from campus. There she met Jesus in his Word, was baptized, confirmed, and welcomed into God's chapel family. The Bible says, "Seek the LORD while he may be found" (Isaiah 55:6).

E-mail connecting

Lindsay e-mailed the campus pastor, "I am a student at UW-Madison . . . I am writing to you in hopes that you can lead me on my path to discovery of God." She met with the campus pastor, heard the good news of Jesus through Bible instruction and at worship services, was baptized, confirmed, and welcomed into God's chapel family. It all started with e-mail. The chapel follows in the steps of the apostle Paul, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel . . ." (1 Corinthians 9:22,23).

Delectable eating

Raspberry cheesecake, tortellini, chicken curry . . . it doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that food brings students through the chapel's doors. Julie invites her friends weekly. In fact 40 percent of chapel students bring their unchurched friends to Monday Night Dollar Dinner, a chapel tradition. The fellowship is powerful. Of the early church the Bible says, "They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily . . ." (Acts 2:46,47).



Late night worshipping

It's 8:45 P.M. on Wednesday, and Marty puts on his coat and heads out of his student apartment. His roommates ask, "Where are you going?" Marty responds, "To church." They say, "Yeah right." He says, "Try me." One of them does and ends up at the chapel's 9 P.M. Vespers, a weekly informal worship service. " 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked. 'Come and see,' said Philip" (John 1:46).

Scripture sharing

A Catholic, a former Evangelical from Asia, and a WELS Lutheran from the Black Hills get together weekly in a graduate small group facilitated by the campus pastor. They use the Lutheran dogmatics textbook *A Summary of Christian Doctrine* as a springboard for discussing the Scriptures. Along with the other chapel small group Bible fellowships, they believe "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

Word-of-mouth inviting

One of the largest international student populations in the nation is found at UW-Madison. Each week more than 150 international students study English and learn about Jesus in cultural and biblical English as a Second Language (ESL) classes conducted by chapel teachers. How do we get so many to come? Word of mouth. In one ESL Bible study Goa invites Su and Linda. Su invites Wei. Wei invites Yi, and Yi invites Juan. Then Juan tells Ivy. A Bible study for two has become a class of eight! And the Kingdom of God grows in Madison. Sound familiar? When Andrew heard about Jesus, he told Simon Peter. When Philip heard about the Messiah, he told Nathanael (John 1:41-45).

Dorm contacting

Karissa and Martha met in class and later were surprised to see each other in chapel! Along with other chapel students, they visit their peers who live in the dorms but have never received a personal invitation to the chapel. There are about 700 students on our mailing list—real people—on a campus of 41,000. Sounds like Matthew 9:36: "When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

Intentional planning

Spontaneous events are always welcome at the chapel, but we don't wait for them to happen. Creating them—through special worship services, picnics, bonfires, meals, musical programs, guest speakers—is crucial to bringing in the lost, bringing back the drifters, and building up those who come to us. "Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed" (Proverbs 16:3).

Gospel preaching

"Your sermon about Jesus washing away all our sins is too good to be true. I don't understand such mercy," said the student. I replied, "Now you understand the good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for a lost world." To our reason it is too good to be true. "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him . . ." (1 Corinthians 2:14).

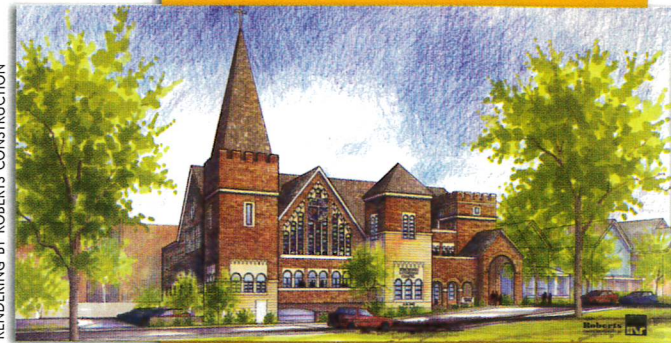
Leadership training

"Lord, you lead me! I am strong in your might. I am eloquent in your Spirit. I am merciful in your forgiveness. I am loving in your grace," wrote one student at this year's Chapel Leadership Training. Tomorrow's church leaders need to be fed with the Word today to be "thoroughly equipped for every good work" on campus (2 Timothy 3:17).

Thomas Trapp, campus pastor at Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel & Student Center, serves students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

*Campus ministries are defined as gatherings with one or more WELS students. The pastors who serve the 385 WELS campus ministries serve full-time (only two) or part-time. The majority serve as contacts for college students. Check the WELS Campus Ministry Web site, www.wels.net/cm, for a full list of campus pastors.

RENDERING BY ROBERTS CONSTRUCTION



New Chapel & Student Center

The new Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel & Student Center—four blocks from Wisconsin's State Capitol, just off State Street, and a five-minute walk from campus—is almost completed. The center is designed to build up a Christian community on campus and be a witness center at UW-Madison. The first level is a student center with activities and TV rooms, laundry, Christian library/computer lab, study and conference rooms, an International Friendship Center, fireplace lounge, and offices. The second level has a sanctuary, fellowship hall, a kitchen and housing for six students who will serve the ministry, and a guest room for an intern studying international or campus ministry.

The Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel & Student Center will be dedicated Feb. 26 (not Jan. 29 as previously announced), with worship services at 8:30 & 11 A.M., lunch at noon, and building tours at 9:45 A.M. and in the afternoon. Parking is available under the building.

By the numbers— University of Wisconsin-Madison

- 41,000 students on campus (70 percent unchurched)
- 2,000 estimated WELS students on campus (700 identified)
- Thousands of spiritually lost American students on campus (many parents abandoned Jesus)
- 100 nations represented on campus (74 percent Asians, most not Christians)
- 1 Savior, Jesus Christ, who died for them all

Do you know students who are away at college? Send their school information to WELS Campus Ministry so it gets to a WELS pastor in their area. Register online at www.wels.net/cm or by calling 414-256-3279.

WEAK *OR* STRONG?

Wellness is the new focus of medical care. Health care professionals do not just wait for something to go wrong and then fix it. They also promote wellness to keep the body healthy and prevent problems. Doctors do not want to wait for a heart attack, stroke, or diabetes. They encourage people to eat the right foods, avoid bad health habits, get regular checkups, and adopt a more active lifestyle.

All this is common sense. Pursuing wellness will keep many problems from happening.

That's easy to say, but asking people to change is more difficult. Although wellness is common sense, many people find it difficult to pursue good habits and avoid bad ones. They want to think that the bad things aren't going to happen to them—to other people, yes, but not to them. So to get people to actually take the necessary steps to achieve better health is a great challenge. Sadly, it's hard to get people to care, even when their own bodies are at risk.

What about our spiritual health? Though good spiritual health should be an obvious concern to every Christian, in truth it is often difficult for Christians to adopt good spiritual habits. Our sinful nature makes us lazy and self-indulgent

about our spiritual health. We think that good spiritual health habits are too much trouble and effort. We'd rather take the easy course and not have to struggle. It's hard to eat the good spiritual food when there's so much junk food available. We don't want to adopt good spiritual habits when it means that we have to get rid of the bad habits that feel so comfortable. We reason that

we can put off spiritual health until we need it. Everyone else seems to get by without giving any thought to their spiritual health. We simply don't think that our bad spiritual habits will get us into trouble.

But every Christian should see the need for spiritual wellness. We need to be spiritually healthy and strong rather than flabby and weak. Why? We know what will happen if we don't remain close

to Jesus and drift away from him toward evil. Sooner or later temptations will come, and we will need strength to resist them. How can we serve God when we don't have the strength to resist evil and do what he asks us to do? When we read and hear all the spiritual garbage in the world, where will we find the courage to cling to the truth of God's mercy in Christ? How can we participate in the growth of God's kingdom when we are more interested in the glitter and possessions of this world than in the grace of giving?

What shape are you in, not the levels of your weight and body fat, but the levels of your sanctification?



Prescription for spiritual health

The gospel gives us God's answer to our fatal disease. He forgives our sin through the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God, Jesus our Savior. God imparts strength to us through the gospel. He hasn't promised to do it another way.

There are some simple steps that you can take to help you become spiritually fit:

1. Read the Scriptures daily. Think of it as a daily dose of God's love.
2. Attend church. In the weekly worship service you will hear the gospel, and the Holy Spirit will work to strengthen you. It happens even when you don't think it's working.
3. Come to the Lord's Table and receive the body and blood of Jesus for your forgiveness.
4. Begin a regular pattern of devotions first for yourself and then for your family. Again by contact with the gospel, the Holy Spirit will work within you to give you spiritual health.

Christian virtues like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control develop when we are spiritually healthy. We grow to be spiritually mature so that not only do we know the words of God but we also stand only with his truth. We need to be filled with faith in our Savior so that we have comfort and hope in every kind of trouble. That strength of faith will help us bring comfort and hope to others who also face trouble and pain.

Include spiritual wellness in your plans for the new year. What are your numbers—not the cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar numbers—but your godliness, spirituality, and your commitment to Jesus and his work? What shape are you in, not the levels of your weight and body fat, but the levels of your sanctification and your devotion to the concerns of God? We often think that we are in better spiritual shape than we are, until we actually look at God's law and see his standards. The diagnosis will always show room for improvement.

Perhaps you don't want to know what spiritual shape you're in. Perhaps you are like so many people, who want to do whatever they want but hope that it will still turn out okay. Perhaps you want to think that some magic pill will make things right again. But like the people who get into physical problems because they have neglected their physical health, people get into all kinds of spiritual problems, including the loss of their faith, when they neglect their spiritual health.

Are you like Joseph in Egypt, refusing the temptations that came to him by insisting that he would not do such wickedness and sin against God? Are you like John, in exile on an island in his old age but still devoted to his Lord Jesus Christ no matter what the cost? Are you like Sarah, wife of Abraham, absolutely committed to her husband? Or are you like Jezebel, scheming and deceiving to get what belongs to someone else? Or like David, yielding to lust just this one time? Or like King Saul, disobeying the explicit commands of his God?

Spiritual health comes from the Holy Spirit working through the gospel. What does that mean for you? It means that you need to find ways to stay in contact with the Lord Jesus through the gospel. Read it, listen to it, think about it. Receive the body and blood of Jesus for your forgiveness. The Holy Spirit will speed the strength of the gospel into your heart so that you can shed your spiritually flabby sinful self and become stronger for the days ahead. When you daily repent, you grow stronger. In repentance, you turn away from the sagging effects of sin and toward the power of God's forgiveness in Jesus. Then your spiritual health improves because you are close to your Savior God and to his love for you.

*Fred Toppe is pastor at Redeemer,
Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.*



WEAK STRONG

LUKE: PREMI

IN HIS GOSPEL
AND THE BOOK OF
ACTS, LUKE PROVIDES
FAITHFUL TESTIMONY
TO DIVINE MYSTERIES.

We are surrounded by mysteries both in the world of our physical environment and of God's revelation. We give words to natural phenomena, but the words do not explain. Why does the heart muscle beat? Why do salmon spawn return to the stream where they hatched? Among animals why those countless examples of what we call instinct? With these mysteries, we observe and give labels, but we do not know.

How much more true of heavenly mysteries. Among these, the two greatest are the article of the Holy Trinity, of one God in three persons, and the article of God and man in the single person of Jesus Christ. We may speak of these two as theological mysteries.

Next to them we place a second pair of what the New Testament also identifies as mysteries. We shall call them historical mysteries. It is with this latter pair that Luke deals as a premier witness to the divine mysteries.

The mystery of the gospel shared with Gentiles

Paul names the first of these two mysteries in his letter to the Colossians. There he writes that he was given God's commission "to present . . . the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints" (1:25,26). What is this mystery? In a word, the good news of salvation through Jesus. Paul wrote of that mystery also in his first letter to the Corinthians (2:7-10), where he called it "God's secret wisdom." The good news is not a secret or mystery to us as believers. It has been "disclosed to the saints" by the power of the Holy

Spirit. To those who do not believe, it remains a mystery they can never unravel without the work of the Holy Spirit.

Paul's great privilege was to share that good news with Gentiles. In the Old Testament, non-Israelites had to submit to the rules that hedged in the Israelites in order to be enrolled among God's chosen people. The work of Paul and his missionary team announced the release from all the past dietary and ceremonial regulations. That Old Testament dispensation was only a shadow of better things to come. Its purpose had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Released from the past regulations, everyone now has free access to divine grace and forgiveness through faith in Christ.

To carry out this mission was no small task for Paul and his fellow apostles. Put yourself into the place of their Jewish countrymen who for untold generations had their whole way of thinking and living shaped by rules laid down by God. Now, in the twinkling of an eye, this is all overturned. It is never easy to give up cherished ways and traditions from the past. It is doubly difficult to surrender traditions commanded by God.

It ought not be so for New Testament Christians who live under the freedom of the gospel. All things are ours. When cherished traditions not commanded by God have, due to constantly changing times, outgrown their usefulness and become more a hindrance than help, then change is the God-pleasing course of action.

To know what Paul in Colossians calls the divine mystery sharpens our

"ON BYWAYS
WITH THE
BELOVED
PHYSICIAN"



ER WITNESS

Theodore J. Hartwig

awareness of Luke's constant witness to this mystery. Luke's focus often stretches our attention away from the narrow Jewish world to the whole of humanity. How faithfully Luke wrote of the angels' message "on earth peace" (Luke 2:14) and Simeon's praise for Jesus who would be "a light . . . to the Gentiles" (Luke 2:32). We also meet it in the teaching of Jesus, especially in his parables.

Luke's witness reverberates more incisively in the book of Acts. Indeed, his primary aim in writing this book was to show the forward march of the gospel from its Jewish home base in Jerusalem to the Gentile headquarters of the then known world in Rome. Throughout Acts, the release from Old Testament prescription to New Testament liberty is given forceful attention. Peter's experience at the home of Gentile centurion Cornelius sounds the first major chord in this new outreach of the gospel. It grows louder with Paul's missionary journeys into foreign lands.

Here the great tragedy also emerges. What could have been a joyful doxology of Jews sharing the good news with Gentiles turned into a dirge of the gospel taken away from the Jewish nation that rejected it to become the possession of the Gentile world that accepted it. Jesus' prophecy went into rapid fulfillment. The stone that the Jewish builders rejected had become the capstone of the Gentile building. The Jewish house was left desolate.

On this note Luke brings the book of Acts to a close. There Paul tells the Jews at Rome: "This people's heart has

become calloused. . . . Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles" (28:27,28).

The mystery of testifying to Christ's resurrection

The other historical mystery is described by Paul in 1 Corinthians. He writes: "Listen, I tell you a mystery" (15:51). In 1 Corinthians 15 he speaks, first, of Christ's resurrection, then of the resurrection of his followers, the first being the guarantee of the second. As we sing in one of our hymns: "Shall I fear, or could the head rise and leave his members dead?" (*Christian Worship* 167:2).

Everyone now has free access to divine grace and forgiveness.

It all hinges on Christ's resurrection. "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile," Paul writes (1 Corinthians 15:17). Luke's book of Acts records eyewitness testimony to Christ's resurrection. Every apostolic sermon in Acts makes mention of the resurrection. Peter sounds the theme in each of its first five chapters, then five chapters later to Gentile Cornelius's household. Paul repeats the message in his recorded sermons both on the mission trips and at the meetings with his judges in Jerusalem.

This is how it should be. Gospel preaching needs the perfume of the resurrection message. Without it, all other gospel testimony falls to the ground. Our traditional time of worship on the first day of the week commemorates Easter Sunday and thus becomes a constant witness to the resurrection. Yes, a resurrection of the entire person defies human wisdom. How can bodies returned to dust and scattered over the face of the earth be raised again to life? So Christ's resurrection and our resurrection have been largely consigned to legend. But we possess Luke's faithful testimony together with that of his fellow apostles and 500 believers who saw the risen Lord at one time.

Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off the doubt and skepticism of the worldly wise and run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:1,2). As Luke the trustworthy historian has assured us in his gospel and Acts, "The Lord is risen; he is risen indeed."

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

This is the last 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.



Breaking through the

Since many in the world learn by hearing rather than reading, there is a need to use oral communication—stories, poetry, psalms, and proverbs—to spread the gospel.

In Juarez, just across the border from El Paso, Texas, Marta lives in a small house with her mother and some of her children and grandchildren. The house is on a hill just above her church. Marta supports her family by setting up a little cart in front of the middle school nearby where she sells candy and popsicles to the students.

David lives only two blocks from church. He's had many jobs—taxi driver, a meatpacker, and a handyman. He'd like to open a shop across the street from the church to sell small items to repair homes and cars. David and his wife have a baby born with Down syndrome and heart troubles.

Marta and David attend a WELS

mission, Cristo Redentor, in that border city of Mexico. They read simple materials in a simple church with little organization and few resources. A few torn hymnals and Bibles are stacked on a table in back, and a cleaning chart hangs on the wall near the entrance. Printed words are scarce.

But Marta and David have stories to tell. They think in terms of the episodes in their lives—of betrayal, lost employment, abandonment, sickness, crises. They come to church to hear the story about Jesus Christ who shared their humanity, suffered the consequences of their sins, and offers them forgiveness and hope.

A trip to *Cristo Redentor* from my publications office in El Paso takes

only 30 minutes, but it seems far longer, as one world is left behind for another. Gone are the broad, well-maintained boulevards and freeways. Street signs and traffic lights become scarce, while advertisements change from English to Spanish. At night, the lighting along the streets and in the homes grows dimmer. In the winter the buildings are cold, and in the summer they're hot and dusty. It seems as if we entered a time warp—that we left a modern era of bank cards and e-mail to a former era of cash transactions and personal contact. We're back in a time when most adults dropped out of school long before they might have earned a high school diploma, when the one educated person in the congregation is the pastor.

WELS works to reach out to oral communicators

"We tend to teach the way we learned," Dr. Grant Lovejoy observed at a conference about communicating the gospel to illiterate people. If our understanding of the good news developed in a classroom, we tend to use literate forms to teach others the same message. But most people in the world who do not know Jesus Christ learn by hearing rather than reading. They are "oral communicators." A literate teaching style strikes against a barrier that the teacher may not even recognize when he attempts to share the story of salvation with an oral communicator.

Now mission workers and teachers in WELS are grappling with that "invisible barrier." Last summer nearly 70 WELS

workers from a wide variety of ministries attended a conference at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, to explore ways to teach the unchanging truths of God's Word to people who learn through story and song rather than literate means.

Here are some of the comments and plans of those who attended the conference:

- Over half of Muslim men and 70 percent of Muslim women are illiterate. Therefore, the outreach effort to Muslims is very interested in telling Bible stories. Those reaching out to Muslims feel that a "big picture overview" is a good approach to take. The stories need to be told in chronological rather than thematic order.



invisible barrier

Paul J. Hartman

It's true, there are wealthy people in Latin America. There are skyscrapers, and modern communications. But most people live in shantytowns on the outside looking in. Nearly 80 percent of the working population has less than eight years of education. They read comic books or nothing at all. Just three percent of the population has a college education. This situation is not unique to Latin America.

During the last 20 years, some have discovered what they call the "invisible barrier." Because most missionaries are well educated and literate, they teach the way they have learned and use methods that are comfortable to them. They use lists, outlines, and maps. They analyze and discuss concepts in abstract language. But people who have little or no education process and remember information differently.

They listen to stories, songs, poems, and proverbs. The information is organized and stored in their heads, not filed in cabinets or recorded on hard drives.

Many missionaries have grown to appreciate that the Bible itself reflects oral communication. Most of the inspired writers recorded stories, poetry, psalms, and proverbs so that their audience could hear the message read out loud. A highly literate style of communication did not become common in Christianity until the Reformation, shortly after Johannes Guttenberg invented moveable type.

This simply means that, while churches continue to use literate styles to teach educated people and thereby establish well-trained leaders, there is also a need to use the old style our forefathers understood well generations ago. It's the same style many of us used as children when we

learned Bible stories at our mothers' and teachers' feet. Want to tell Bible stories effectively to adults? Start by telling stories to children!

It may surprise us that half the adult population in the United States prefers to learn by hearing rather than reading. Immigrants to the United States often are just beginning to learn to read English and even their own language. Therefore, the use of storytelling, drama, proverbs, and illustrations supports the efforts of missionaries and pastors not only in places like Juarez, Mexico, but also in urban and small-town ministries across America.

Paul Hartman, coordinator for Multi-Language Publications, El Paso, Texas, is a member of Christ our Redeemer, El Paso.

Photos: Missionary Terry Schultz (ELS) uses storytelling in his ministry in Peru.

- Missionaries to Native Americans commented that "the Apache people we serve . . . fit the descriptions of an oral culture almost exactly."
- Professors at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary will "teach ways of sharing law and gospel witness through Bible stories," while professors at Martin Luther College may model the "Bible storying" method in Old Testament and New Testament survey courses.
- Pastors active in urban ministry noted that "many in the city are functionally illiterate (or prefer oral communication)." They intend to use drama or the dramatization of Bible stories to teach the gospel.
- Northwestern Publishing House editors and Parish Services see a value in developing "a video of 'moving' still pictures that tells the account of God's grace to us centered in Christ

as it unfolds in the Old Testament and blossoms in the New Testament." This would become "a 60- to 90-minute panoramic view of the Scripture stories on which further understanding can be built."

- Teachers and editors engaged in children's ministry will consider "creating lists of appropriate stories to be used with different audiences [such as] hurting people, outreach prospects, at risk families, [and] mature Christians." They also hope to identify opportunities and venues that are appropriate for witnessing through Bible storying to children that do not attend Lutheran elementary schools or Sunday schools.

If you like more information about communicating the Bible orally, contact Pastor Walter Westphal from the Board for World Missions, 414-256-3293; walter.westphal@sab.wels.net.

WHATEVER

Survivors

God sent his angels to guard and protect my family during dangerous and life-taking moments.

Kelsey Erdman

I have experienced a year in which three people whom I care very much about came close to death.

Uncle Jim was going to work one morning on his motorcycle, when a car pulled out of a driveway in front of him. Realizing that he wouldn't be able to stop in time, Jim tipped his motorcycle over so that he was sliding along the road. Knowing he was not wearing a helmet, Jim put his arm over his head to protect it. As he lay in the road all scraped up, Jim saw car headlights rushing toward him and crawled to the side of the road. Someone—God's helper—stopped and called 911. Thankfully, Uncle Jim wasn't hurt seriously, even though his arm became swollen and infected. I thank God for sparing his life.

God's angels were watching over Jim's life, so I think of this passage: "Then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways" (Psalm 91:10,11).

The second person God saved was my dad. He hurt his neck and had to get a disc removed from it. The surgery went fine, but then in the recovery room he stopped breathing for a few seconds. But God didn't want him to die then. He let my dad breathe again. My dad did end up with pneumonia and had to stay in the hospital for a week. He was only supposed to stay for one day. I thank God for sparing my dad's life.

My dad could have died that day, so I think of this passage: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

Aunt Mardee was on her way to work when she got a flat tire. She went out to look at it and then climbed back into her car to call a tow truck. Glancing in the rearview mirror, she saw a truck with a trailer driving towards her. The truck hit the front of her car, and the trailer hit the back. Her car was totaled, and she had a shattered nose with two black eyes. She still has to go to the chiropractor. Yet I thank God for sparing Mardee's life.

Now each time I read this well-known passage I can't help but see a connection to my relatives' close calls: "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me" (Psalm 50:15).

I am surprised how close some of my relatives have come to death. Yet if I think about it, God has saved so many people in the Bible whom he could have let die. The 10 lepers, the daughter of Jairus, Job, and Jonah come to mind.

I thank God for saving Jim, my dad, and Mardee. God sent his angels to guard and protect my family during all of these dangerous and life-taking moments. Jesus has also saved you, me, and everyone else in the world by dying on the cross—a salvation far more important than just preserving physical life.

Kelsey Erdman, an eighth-grader at Trinity-St. Luke School, Watertown, Wisconsin, is a member of St. Luke, Watertown.

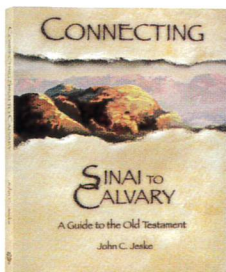


God

Book/nook

A look at new books published by Northwestern Publishing House. For more information, visit www.nph.net or call 800-662-6022. Note: These reviews are not meant to represent the opinions of WELS or Forward in Christ.

Connecting Sinai to Calvary



\$19.99

In *Connecting Sinai to Calvary*, Professor John Jeske does a superb job of showing God's great grace, mercy, and love tracing from Adam and Eve through the Old Testament to our New Testament era.

The book begins with Adam and Eve after they had sinned, follows the promise of a Savior, then discusses the unconditional covenant that God made with Abraham. It continues with the second covenant, a conditional covenant given to the people of Israel at Sinai, then proceeds to the final covenant to all Christian believers through our Lord and Savior.

I found to be of special interest the various names that God identifies himself in various parts of the Old Testament, such as Elohim, Adonai, Yahweh, El Shaddai, and Immanuel.

Jeske also reviews Christ's various roles of Prophet, Priest, and King in his relationship with Israel and also with New Testament Christians.

This handbook further stresses the importance of faithful leaders—faithful to Christ, the Word, and the sacraments.

This book also carefully articulates the key difference between Christianity and other religions. Others are based on a bargaining or performance based system with their particular gods, whereas, in Christianity God gave us his only Son, Jesus, without any conditions attached.

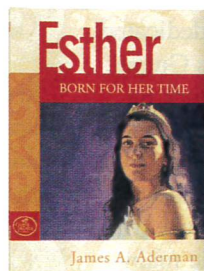
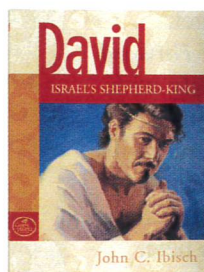
Jeske skillfully links the Old and New Testament segments and passages, which establish total and unquestionable continuity of the true gospel message throughout both Testaments.

As a layperson who has been reading and studying both the Old and New Testaments for 50 years plus, this book with its many references has further enhanced my knowledge of many connections in doctrine between the Testaments. Jeske's writings connect key Scripture verses in both Testaments thereby reinforcing a believer's faith in the true gospel message.

Connecting Sinai to Calvary should be considered an exceptional summary of Old Testament Scripture and a highly recommended study suitable for students who have reached confirmation level.

I would also recommend *Connecting Sinai to Calvary* to adults who have not had as much biblical training as they could enhance their knowledge of connecting key doctrine in both Testaments.

John Peterman
St. John, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin



Editor's note:

Two more books are available in NPH's God's People series: *David: Israel's Shepherd-King* by John C. Ibisch and *Esther: Born for Her Time* by James A. Aderman. Each book costs \$6.99. Or you can subscribe to the entire God's People series and save 10 percent off the cover prices.

READ THROUGH MY BIBLE IN 3 YEARS

FEBRUARY 2006

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|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Leviticus 8 | 14. Lev. 25 |
| 2. Lev. 9, 10 | 15. Lev. 26 |
| 3. Lev. 11 | 16. Lev. 27 |
| 4. Lev. 12:1-13:46 | 17. Hebrews 1 |
| 5. Lev. 13:47-14:32 | 18. Heb. 2 |
| 6. Lev. 14:33-15:33 | 19. Heb. 3:1-6 |
| 7. Lev. 16 | 20. Heb. 3:7-4:13 |
| 8. Lev. 17 | 21. Heb. 4:14-5:10 |
| 9. Lev. 18 | 22. Heb. 5:11-6:8 |
| 10. Lev. 19, 20 | 23. Heb. 6:9-20 |
| 11. Lev. 21, 22 | 24. Heb. 7:1-14 |
| 12. Lev. 23 | 25. Heb. 7:15-28 |
| 13. Lev. 24 | 26. Heb. 8 |
| | 27. Heb. 9:1-15 |
| | 28. Heb. 9:16-28 |

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.

Christian Life Resources Web site, www.christianliferesources.com, has a new look. The Web site's look now mirrors the look of Christian Life Resource's official publication, *Clearly Caring*. On the site, you can find current news articles relating to life and family issues, online resources such as medical directive statements and a searchable Life Library filled with articles on life issues, subscription information for periodicals and e-mail services from Christian Life Resources, and much more. This site also provides links to other sites maintained by Christian Life Resources.

Meet the editorial staff—uncut

Ever ask yourself, "Who are these people who write for Forward in Christ magazine?" Through this series you can find out. Read on:

Celebrating blessings

Growing up the oldest of three in St. Paul, Minn., John Braun admits that at one time he thought about being a psychologist or a surgeon rather than being a pastor. But it was an encounter during a summer job in high school that led him to reconsider his calling in life. "This guy that I worked with, I don't even think he was Lutheran, asked me, 'Why is it that you don't want to be a pastor?' And the only reasons I could come up with were that I wanted more money and more prestige. I decided those weren't very good reasons." The rest they say is history.

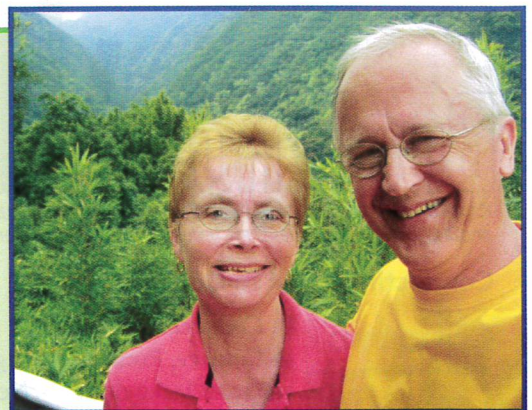
Braun has spent his 36-year ministry in many different capacities. He has

served as a parish pastor, a college professor at Northwestern College, the vice president for publishing services at Northwestern Publishing House, and now, added to that, the executive editor of *Forward in Christ*.

A self-described workaholic, Braun confesses that even in his free time he often can be found writing. However he does manage to get away from time to time, traveling with his wife of 37 years, Sandy. "We love the beach, the rhythmic rush of the waves, and the sunshine," says Braun.

The Brauns have two grown daughters, Katie and Jenny, and three grandchildren.

When asked what he sees as the greatest challenge in his new role, he thoughtfully answers, "I'm not sure that I know. I think it would



John Braun takes a break from writing to visit Hawaii with his wife Sandy.

be to continue to find a way to help laypeople understand and appreciate God's grace and help them appreciate what God has given us as a confessional Lutheran church body. We have great blessings, and I hope that what I may be able to do, if the Lord grants it, is to help us all celebrate those blessings, rather than hide them."

New executive editor named for *Forward in Christ*

With the retirement of Pastor Gary Baumler in December, the Conference of Presidents has accepted a proposal from Northwestern Publishing House to assume the responsibilities of executive editor of *Forward in Christ* magazine. The Conference of Presidents has named Pastor John Braun as the new executive editor.

Braun, serving part time in this position, will continue in his current call as vice president of editorial services for Northwestern Publishing House (NPH). His position will continue to be funded by NPH.

"John serves faithfully and well as the vice president of editorial services," says WELS President Karl Gurgel. "He loves his church and is committed to having people understand the mission of WELS."

This move follows the 2005 convention recommendation to separate the positions of director of communications and executive editor of

Forward in Christ in order to provide better and more consistent communication.

"The proposal from Northwestern Publishing House is also in line with its desire to help synodically with funding," says Gurgel.

The executive editor of *Forward in Christ* will work closely with WELS Communication Services and its director of communications. The Conference of Presidents is currently calling for this full-time position, which had also been held by Baumler.

"There are few more dedicated workers than Gary," says Gurgel, referring to Baumler's work on *Forward in Christ*. "He has listened well to the interests and expressed needs of his readers and sought an attractive way to accommodate them while maintaining the confessional integrity of the magazine."

FOLLOWING PASTOR BAUMLER

Before coming to Northwestern Publishing House (NPH), Pastor Gary Baumler was the recruitment director for Northwestern College. When he left, the college filled the vacancy by asking me to assume his role.

About four years later the Conference of Presidents called Gary to become the new editor of *Northwestern Lutheran*. That left a vacancy at the publishing house. The Board of Directors of NPH filled the vacancy by calling me. So I followed Gary again.

Now I find myself following him one more time. I become the executive editor of *Forward in Christ*, the new name for the former *Northwestern Lutheran*, with Gary's retirement.

Two things come to mind. First, Gary always left behind work well done. It was easy to pick up where he left off and move on. Second, we are both on the same journey to our final destination. I pray that God will keep him and his wife in his gentle care. Then at journey's end—whether I follow him again or precede him this time—we will join in praising God for the blessings he has allowed us to share.

John Braun

Youth Discipleship receives research findings on WELS youth

At one of the final phases of the Commission on Youth Discipleship's (CYD) research project on why youth and young adults are leaving WELS, I had a chance to observe a focus group of 12 individuals, ages 17 to 24, through a two-way mirror. The focus group explored the reasons why youth are leaving WELS and also sought reactions to the data gathered in the national, online surveys of WELS pastors and teens who had left WELS or were inactive. The 12 participants (five males and seven females) represented an equal distribution of youth very committed to WELS, somewhat committed to WELS, or not very committed to WELS. Almost all had been in the synod for most of their lives, and several had been educated through the WELS school system.

After preliminary introductions and directions, one of the participants asked the researcher, "Are you WELS?" Everyone quickly turned to him and silently waited for the response. When he answered that he was not and this was purposely done to make the process totally objective, the tension in the room melted. I braced myself for 90 minutes of WELS bashing, but was blown away by what I saw and heard—12 young people, pouring out their hearts, admitting their shortcomings, demonstrating their faith, and not wanting to radically reconstruct WELS, but wanting it to be more responsive, more caring, more communicative,

After two years, the research, conducted by an independent, non-WELS research firm, is done. Many of the recommendations can be wholeheartedly considered. Some must be looked at carefully in the light of God's Word. What we all do with the results, not only as a commission but also as individual WELS congregations and members, will have a greater impact on WELS' future. May God give us wisdom and courage.

What follows are some of the recommendations from the 112-page report:

- WELS [at all levels] needs to lobby parents more aggressively, communicating the critical role they play in their children's future WELS relationship.
- WELS pastors and congregation leaders need to better tune in to the needs and interests of their young adult members.
- Congregations need to reduce the degree of repetitiveness in worship services and consider some music variation. They should also evaluate opportunities/potential to incorporate some contemporary aspects into religious services.
- WELS leadership [at all levels] needs to demonstrate more respect and introduce more positive roles/participation opportunities for young adults. The current feeling that "young adults don't count" needs to be reversed.



The future of WELS has a lot to do with its youth today.

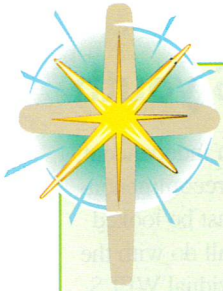
and more in touch. These young people were articulate, passionate, and concerned. They loved God, but wondered about WELS and their future in it.

These days, if we're being honest, we all wonder about the future of WELS. I believe that was the motivation behind the 2003 convention resolution, "That (WELS) Youth Discipleship research and publish a report on the extent of and reasons for teen and young adult losses in our church body" (*Proceedings*, p. 64). The resolution authors understood that the future of WELS has a lot to do with its youth today. That's also the position of WELS CYD.

- Congregations should increase efforts directed at those leaving for/away at college and also on the post high school group that is not in college.
- Efforts directed at having children and young adults attend Lutheran schools, particularly Lutheran elementary schools (LES), need to be continued and perhaps stepped up.

An executive summary and the full report detailing the research method, sample sizes, findings, conclusions, and recommendations can be downloaded at www.wels.net/jumpword/youthstudy.

Joel Nelson



Let your light shine

In the spirit of Matthew 5:16, we're sharing examples of people who live their faith. May they inspire you to let your light shine even brighter. If you have an example to share, send it to us at 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398.

There's no place like . . .

Raina Luthra, a member at Abiding Peace, Simpsonville, S.C., recently competed as a finalist in the Mauldin High School Class Pageant, Senior Division. As part of the competition she was asked to complete the following phrase, "There's no place like . . .". Her spontaneous answer was, "There's no place like heaven, because heaven is my true home. Heaven is where I will go when I die, to live eternally with my Savior, Jesus Christ."

Many people who attended the pageant, including the emcee, commented on her bold and heartfelt response. She later confessed that she was sure that God had given her the answer.

While she was thrilled to be named Miss Mauldin High School Senior, Luthra was even more grateful for the opportunity to share her faith publicly



Raina Luthra poses with her parents, Pamela Luthra Pierson and Jamie Pierson, after winning the Miss Mauldin High School pageant. Luthra is also the daughter of the late Narender Luthra.

Duane Rodewald

Strengthening Christian families

Soldiers are loyal. They work together for a common cause. They support each other. At Siloah Lutheran School in Milwaukee, Wis., many students' parents are soldiers: soldiers of the cross, that is. They are members of an organization called Soldiers of the Cross, with the common goal of supporting each other and thereby strengthening Christian families.

The idea for Soldiers of the Cross emerged from Siloah Pastor Rolfe Westendorf's concern for the breakdown of the family. The first meeting was held in 1994 with four families in his living room. Patterned after Alcoholics Anonymous, the program is a support group with a set of goals by which members agree to try to live.

Program coordinator Kathleen Mimis shares, "When you say support group most people think, 'There is nothing wrong with me.' But after they come and see what it is all about, they may even call me to see if they can host a group out of their home or yard." At its highest point,

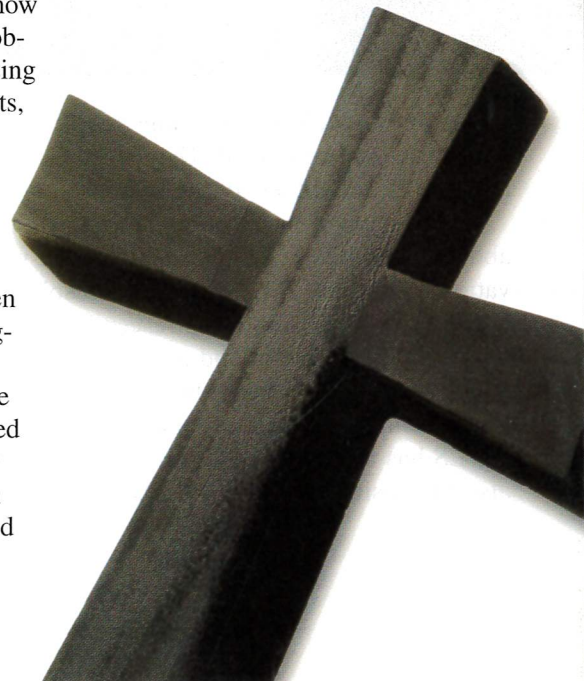
Soldiers of the Cross had 119 parents with eight support groups.

While Mimis sets up speakers and workshops and brings any information for which members ask, it is really the parents that take the floor during the meetings. Most parents in the group are Siloah members, but many belong to different churches and send their children to Siloah. Soldiers of the Cross members bring their parenting concerns, and other parents share how they handled the same types of problems. Some meetings end up focusing on the children, some on the parents, and others on any issue that may cause a parent to take his or her stress out on the family.

Soldiers of the Cross is about parents surrounding each other with support and friendship. When one woman's husband left her pregnant with twins, no money, and about to lose her place to live, she found the Christian love she needed in Soldiers of the Cross. Another mother, disturbed by the direction her daughter was taking in life and

the state of their relationship, drew strength from parents who had been through similar times. Today the daughter has her life together and is about to be married, and her relationship with her mother is great.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, Soldiers of the Cross is helping many parents share the wisdom God has given them as together they work to build strong Christian families.



Can you hear me now?

For WELS members who are experiencing hearing loss, church services can be a frustrating experience. If microphones aren't working correctly or background noise is too loud, those with hearing loss may hear only portions of the message, if they hear it at all.

Fortunately resources are available for WELS churches and members with hearing difficulties. The WELS Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MDHH), a part of WELS Parish Services/Special Ministries, helps congregations share the gospel of Jesus Christ with members of WELS—and others—who are deaf or hard of hearing.



Assistive listening devices are an option for congregations who want to reach out to those with hearing loss.

The mission helps churches reach out to those with hearing loss in a number of ways. In addition to an extensive instructional video and lending library, the mission has assistive listening devices, Sunday school resources, contacts to sign language interpreters, and presenters willing to visit congregations and speak about reaching out to the deaf and hard of hearing. The mission also offers financial aid to congregations interested in beginning signed or oral interpreted services.

Verna Weigand, a sign language interpreter, is a longtime member of the Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. She stresses that congregations have many options when assisting those with hearing loss: "There are so many people within congregations that are hard of hearing. They don't want to say anything because they are embarrassed; this is especially true among the elderly. Many of these people could be helped with technology, and it wouldn't be a huge investment for the congregation. One simple way is to have printed sermons. . . . Another is to provide an inexpensive FM assistive listening system because it helps people who are hard of hearing but don't have a hearing aid."

Mt. Calvary, Waukesha, Wis., is a good example of a congregation working to connect with the hard-of-hearing community. The first way it reached out was by incorporating signed Sunday school classes and church services for deaf children and their families.

Then with the WELS Accessible 2000 program, the MDHH chose Mt. Calvary to be a pilot church for technologies to assist the hard of hearing. This meant outfitting the church with an FM assistive listening system to aid those without hearing aids and an induction loop system for those with hearing aids. The induction loop system allows members with hearing aids to flip a "T" switch on their aids and hear the service directly through the church's sound system. This system cancels out all of the background noise such as rustling paper, crying children, and coughing. For those without a "T" switch-enabled aid, a special loop can be worn around the neck to achieve the same effect.

Mt. Calvary is also exploring remote captioning. In this process, as the pastor conducts the worship service, a volunteer speaks the same words into a computer system that translates the spoken words into writing. The written text is then broadcast onto a laptop computer in the pew. Mt. Calvary hopes to have this system in place within the next six months.

Weigand is quick to point out: "Anyone is welcome to come and observe and to join [Mt. Calvary]. If you have any questions about reaching out to the hard of hearing, contact the Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and we can help you, along with your churches."

For more information on the Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, visit www.wels.net/jumpword/mdhh. Or call 414-259-8122.

Evangelism Sunday materials available

The Commission on Evangelism is providing materials to assist congregations with holding an Evangelism Sunday during the Epiphany season. The theme for Evangelism Sunday will follow the North American Outreach emphasis for 2006, which is "Every Member a Missionary." Materials include a text study, ser-

mon, children's message, worship service suggestions and a one-hour Bible study. The emphasis is motivating and equipping every member for sharing his or her faith.

"Evangelism Sunday will help congregations focus on God's will for outreach and the opportunity that each member has to share the love

of Christ," says Mike Hintz, administrator for the Commission on Evangelism.

You can download the materials on the Evangelism Web site, www.wels.net/evangelism.

WELS Web hosting provides solution—

To help WELS congregations and schools develop and maintain professional looking Web sites, WELS is providing a low-cost Web hosting solution for WELS organizations.

“When I first started looking at what our congregations were doing with the Web, I saw that many of them were really struggling to provide a bona fide Web presence,” says Martin Spriggs, WELS chief technology officer.

He noted that 50 percent of WELS congregations don’t have Web sites, and only 20 percent have active Web sites (sites that have been updated within the last 90 days). “The Web presence of our congregations isn’t representative of the good ministry that is going on in our churches and schools,” says Spriggs.

The WELS Technology Office is partnering with FinalWeb, a Web hosting company, to provide a Web-based tool to help solve that problem.

The solution was developed with two main requirements in mind. It had to be easy to use and include professionally designed templates.

“One of the big barriers to successful Web sites is that updating content all falls to one person,” says Spriggs. “So we tried to find something that

could be distributed across the congregation. Anyone, anywhere, at anytime can update the site.”

He continues, “We also wanted to provide a templated solution so you don’t have to start from a blank page. . . . Within a day, you can have a Web site up with some meaningful information. And it will look nice.”

The Technology Office worked with four WELS churches to test the product. These churches represented different types of WELS churches—large with a school, mid-sized, urban, and mission. Peace, Hartford, Wis., was one of the test churches.

“We no longer have to overburden one Webmaster,” says Aaron Steinbrenner, pastor at Peace, about the Web hosting solution. “Now pastors, teachers, and other congregational leaders can update and edit our Web site with just a few clicks of the mouse . . . and from any location.”

“My prayer is that this offering will help us best leverage the Web to proclaim peace through Jesus,” says Spriggs.

This Web hosting solution is available for \$21 a month. To learn more, go to www.wels.net/jumpword/webhosting.

Log on for EduTech 2006

EduTech 2006, a national conference on teaching, learning, and technology, will be held June 26-29 at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. The conference is geared for all WELS members who teach, preach, or offer technical support—both called workers and lay-people. The focus



of the conference is to show WELS members how technology can be an integral part of ministry in the 21st century and to equip participants with the knowledge of how to use technology to expand their ministries.

Keynote speakers include Dr. David Walsh, president and founder of the National Institute on Media and Family and Mr. David Warlick, director of the Landmark Project. Walsh will speak about the impact of media on children and about how powerful mass media is in shaping attitudes and behavior while Warlick will focus on “The Three Ts of Teaching”—ideas to turn the classroom into a dynamic, exciting, and highly effective learning environment.

Other components of the conference include

- evaluating the latest teaching and learning concepts,
- using technology in the classroom, and
- developing innovative strategies for your expanding ministry field.

“EduTech 2006 will be an opportunity for educators of all types to learn about some of the innovative ways God has provided us lately to teach and preach the good news of Jesus Christ,” notes Martin Spriggs, WELS Chief Technology Officer. “I’m excited about the common goal of being the best stewards we can be.”

To receive registration materials and news about EduTech 2006, visit www.wels.net/jumpword/edutech or call the Commission on Parish Schools office at 414-256-3222.

The screenshot shows the website for Peace Lutheran Church and School. At the top, there is a search bar and a navigation menu with links for Church, School, Calendar, and Links. The main content area features a large image of a cross against a sunset background. Below this, there is a "Welcome to Peace!" message, a "Daily Devotion" section with a quote from Jesus, a "Daily Prayer" section, and a "Peace News" section. A sidebar on the left contains a navigation menu with links to Home, Overview, Church Calendar, Pastor's Update, Bible Studies, Sunday School, Ministry Boards, Leadership & Staff, Community, Mission Society, Moms At The Cross, and OWLS. At the bottom, there is an "Upcoming Events" section listing dates and times for Public School Catechism and Bible Study.

The Web site of Peace, Hartford, Wis., after using WELS Web hosting.

District news

Arizona-California

St. Mark, Citrus Heights, Calif., dedicated its new facility on Oct. 9. The partially remodeled, partially new complex contains additional space for worship, fellowship, and school. Among its many amenities, the new facility has five Bible class spaces available and a new fellowship hall that converts to a gymnasium for youth events.

Michigan

In October, **Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.**, was recommended for exemplary accreditation by the WELS School Accreditation (WELSSA) visiting team.

Minnesota

Students from 23 area WELS high schools participated in the WELS National Choral Festival from Nov. 11-13 at **Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.** Four hundred fifty students participated in the event.

Abby Maxson from **West Lutheran High School, Plymouth, Minn.**, was named one of the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* Athletes of the Week on Sept. 13. She earned the honor for her soccer talents and scoring nine goals in three games.

South Central

Cross of Christ, Universal City, Tex., hosted a fall festival on Oct. 15. More than 90 children from the community enjoyed free food and carnival games with prizes. The day ended with a law and gospel object lesson that reminded the children that they are all a treasure to Jesus.

Western Wisconsin

On Nov. 13, students, teachers, and helpers of the Coulee Region Jesus Cares Ministries (JCM) Bible class led the congregation in special songs at **St. John's, Barre Mills, Wis.** Pastor Andrew Schultz used the JCM simplified "Worship at the Cross" format for the service. This is the 15th year of the Coulee JCM Bible class.

Happy Anniversary!

SC—Trinity, Abita Springs, La., celebrated its 100th anniversary on Oct. 30. District President John Guse

Arizona-California



Water of Life, Las Vegas, Nev., celebrated God's gift of baptism on Aug. 28, when member Mary Clay presented her 10 grandchildren, ranging in age from two months to 16 years, to be baptized. After the service, Clay, who was without a vehicle, received a gift from the congregation of a van filled with clothes and toys.

preached about living in the eye of the storm and the peace that Jesus gives with the storms all around. Choir members from Crown of Life, New Orleans, La., sang at the service.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: AZ—Fred Casmer; CA—Hermann John; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; SA—Christopher Kruschel; SC—William Gabb; WW—Martin Baur.

World news

Lutherans, Catholics continue dialogue—Pope Benedict XVI praised dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics, when the Lutheran World Federation met with the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in November.

He also called on both groups to not ignore their differences on questions of doctrine.

"We should intensify our efforts to understand more deeply what we have in common and what divides us," said Benedict.

In that meeting, the International Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity began making plans for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. It also finished its fourth round of talks and is expected to release a document on the "apostolicity of the church" in early 2006.

WELS is not part of the Lutheran World Federation.

Technology use growing in churches—Protestant churches are increasingly incorporating technology in their ministry efforts, according to a study released by the Barna Group.

Double-digit growth has occurred in the use of many technologies since 2000:

Technology used in churches	2000	2005
A Web site	34%	57%
Large-screen projectors used during worship	39%	62%
Electronic fund transfer for donations	7%	12%
Live video segments shown during worship	30%	61%
E-mail blasts used to communicate with members	NA	56%

[From "Technology use is growing rapidly in churches," Barna Research Group, Ltd., Ventura, Calif.; www.barna.org; Sept. 13, 2005]

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

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

- Baumler, Gary P.**, to retirement
- Clement, Arthur J.**, to retirement
- Dale, Rodger M.**, to Open Bible, Summerfield, Fla.
- Engel, John M.**, to retirement
- Green, Darren L.**, to St. Peter, Monticello, Minn.
- Hein, David L.**, to Redeemer, Mandan, N.D.
- Hoepfner, Harold H.**, to retirement
- Ninmer, Donald P.**, to retirement
- Unke, Thomas G.**, to St. Paul, Howards Grove, Wis.
- Warnke, Richard E.**, to retirement

Staff minister

- Rehberger, Phillip F.**, to Trinity, Aberdeen, S.D.

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 Pope, chief financial officer

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

There will be vacancies in several WELS boards and commissions as of July 1, 2006. The Synodical Council is seeking names of individuals to serve on these boards and commissions.

The following boards and commissions have vacancies:

- WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc.
- WELS Foundation, Inc.
- WELS Investment Funds, Inc.
- Pension Commission
- VEBA Commission

All pastors, professors, male teachers, congregations, and voting members of congregations are invited to nominate qualified individuals. Position descriptions can be found at www.wels.net/jumpword/nomhr.

Nominations should be sent by Jan. 31 to Roger Crawford, Human Resources Director, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; roger.crawford@sab.wels.net. The list of candidates will be published at www.wels.net/jumpword/nomalert in early

February. At its Feb. 24-26 meeting, the Synodical Council will elect the board and commission members from the slate of candidates who have consented to serve.

ANNIVERSARIES

Manitowoc, Wis.—First German (150). April 9. Service, 3 P.M. Dinner, 5 P.M. RSVP, 920-684-0101, ext. 111.

COMING EVENTS

Women's retreats:

- WELS/ELS Ladies retreat, Jan. 13-15. Spring Hill Suites, Sarasota, Fla. Retreat, \$75. Lodging, \$89. Judy Becker, 941-355-6591.
- God's Gift of Renewal, Feb. 11, 8 A.M. St. Lucas, Kewaskum, Wis. Registration fee, \$15. Includes presentations and lunch. Lynn Garvey, 262-626-4749.
- Pathways to Christ, March 17-19. La Sure's Hall & Hawthorn Inn, Oshkosh, Wis. www.martinlutheroshkosh.com.
- Christian Woman Today, March 24-26. Olympia Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Maureen Sertich, 262-784-0412.
- Pastors' wives renewal, June 9-10. Crown of Life, West Saint Paul, Minn. Valerie Johnson, 612-378-1346 or coordinator@truenorthwels.org. Deadline, May 1.

Christian singles winter retreat—Jan. 20-22. Camp Phillip, Wautoma, Wis. SHARE, 262-534-7852 or share@wels.net.

International WELS Brass Festival—Jan. 21-22. 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.solideogloria institute.org.

Mission and Ministry workshops—Feb. 7-9. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. John Stelljes, 414-477-7607.

Dedication—Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel & Student Center. Feb. 26 (not Jan. 29). Services, 8:30 & 11 A.M. Building tours, 9:45 A.M. and 1 P.M. Noon lunch. 608-257-1969.

Apacheland and Mexico Mission Partners tour—April 29-May 7. Visit our missions in Apacheland, Phoenix-Santo Tomas, Tucson-Dove Mountain, and Mexico-Mission to the Children. Includes worship services and visits with missionaries. Also Grand Canyon, Petrified Forest, and more. \$915 land/\$1,289 air from Milwaukee, Wis. Registration deadline, Feb. 24. Sponsored by WELS Ministry of Christian Giving. Dennis Kleist, 920-740-5899; dennis.kleist@sab.wels.net.

National Men's Rally—March 4, 2006. St. Paul, Muskego, Wis. Register by Feb. 28. Brian Arthur Lampe, 414-422-0320, ext 119.

Cascade Lutheran Chorale spring concert—April 2, 4 P.M. Grace, Portland, Ore. Rehearsals, Jan. 29, Feb. 12 & 26, and March 12 & 26. Joy Williams, 503-493-0465.

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

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

Walk in the Shadow of St. Paul—trip hosted by St. Peter, Appleton, Wis. May 30-June 8. Trip includes Greece, a Greek Isles cruise, and Rome. rvash@new.rr.com or thegorskes@new.rr.com.

Lutheran Women's Missionary Society national convention—June 22-25. Tacoma, Wash. Hosted by Evergreen and Cascade Circuits. 414-321-6212.

Class reunion—Martin Luther Academy classes of 1975 & 1976. July 8-10. New Ulm, Minn. Doug Weishahn, 402-484-5557.

NAMES WANTED

Evansville, Ind.—Paul Horn, 270-351-2391; revhorn@yahoo.com.

WELS members in the U.S. Army stationed at Fort Drum, N.Y. (10th Mountain Division) and Binghamton, N.Y. area—Cross of Christ, Liverpool, N.Y., Jeremiah Gumm, 315-622-2843 or pastorgumm@yahoo.com.

Corpus Christi, Tex.—Chris Horn, 806-898-0855. Gethsemane, Sunday worship, 9:30 A.M.; Bible study, 10:45 A.M.; and Wednesday Bible study, 7 P.M. Church, 361-854-8481.

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

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

POSITION AVAILABLE

Music Coordinator/Organist—Good Shepherd, Plymouth, Wis. Responsibilities will be to provide a solid foundation used to shore up all aspects of musical roles used and desired by the congregation on a year-round basis. Details, 920-893-0207; church@goodshepherdplymouth.com.

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



In October, the WELS Civilian Chaplaincy for Europe held its annual Reformation Retreat at a youth hostel in Homburg, Germany. Among the attendees were Americans living in various European countries as well as families from Germany and Switzerland.

It so happened that three sisters and one mother of members of the praise band Koine from St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis., attended. Pictured from left to right are Sarah Schroeder (living at a military base in Germany while her husband is deployed to Afghanistan with the U.S. military), Leah Bauer (living as an au pair in England), Eunice Reese (from the United States, but visiting her daughter), and Maria Reese (a Martin Luther College graduate now teaching for the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, WELS' sister synod in Germany). They are displaying the CDs that Koine donated to sell at the retreat. Sarah Bachmann, who came with her family from Switzerland, also sold her Christian artwork. Money from both the CDs and the artwork was donated to the chaplaincy.

WELS has just one chaplain stationed in Europe, Pastor Michael Schroeder. He and his wife Monica live in Germany and travel to Switzerland and England on set Sundays of the month to hold worship services and Bible classes.

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.

A Perfect Church

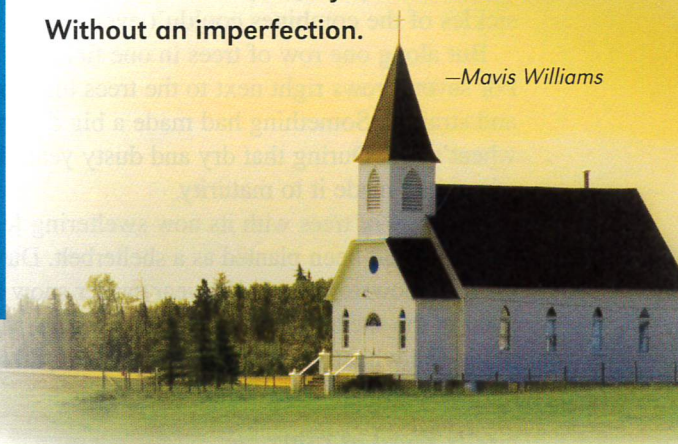
If you should find the perfect church
Without one fault or smear,
For goodness sake! Don't join that church;
You'd spoil the atmosphere.

But since no perfect church exists
Made of imperfect men,
Then let's cease looking for that church
And love the church we're in.

What fools we are to flee our post
In that unfruitful search
To find, at last, where problems loom
God proudly builds His church.

So let's keep working in our church
Until the resurrection.
And then we each will join that church
Without an imperfection.

—Mavis Williams

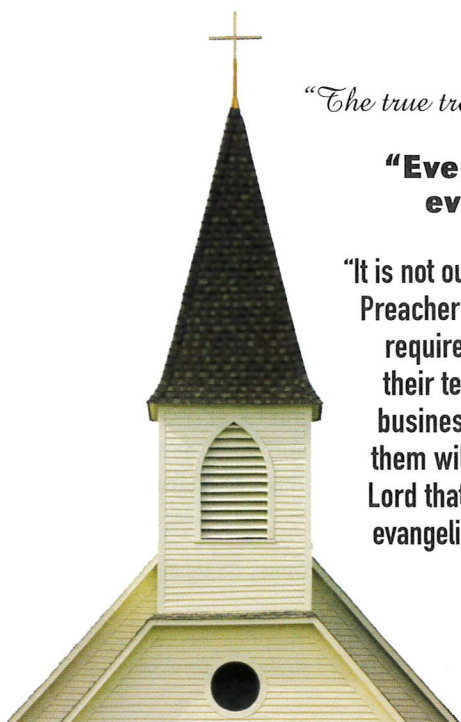


"The true treasure of the church is the gospel of the glory and the grace of God."—Martin Luther

"Every man is a missionary, now and forever, for good or for evil, whether he intends or designs it or not."—Thomas Chalmers

"It is not our business at all to save the Church or to build the Church. That is the Lord's business. Preacher and people have only one business—to be witnesses for Jesus Christ. One thing is required of them—that they love their Lord and Master and be obedient to his will. Then, by their testimony to his teachings, God wants to build and preserve the Church. It is not their business at all to consider whether these teachings are popular or whether those who hold them will be regarded as bigots, fanatics, as narrow and pharisaical. They are to trust the good Lord that he has made no mistake in commissioning them to preach exactly what he taught his evangelists and apostles . . . to set forth in the Scriptures."

—Theodore Graebner (1876-1950), Missouri Synod pastor and professor



God's Word is like the snow that falls from heaven.



Your church is like a South Dakota shelterbelt. It is the place that allows the “snow” to collect and build up and soak into your soul.

Eric S. Hartzell

Your spiritual shelterbelt

The year 1975 was a bad one in eastern South Dakota. It was dry. Very dry. The wheat was so short the sickles of the combines couldn't even pick it up.

But along one row of trees in one field it was different. For several rows right next to the trees the wheat stood tall and straight. Something had made a big difference in that wheat's life. During that dry and dusty year, that particular wheat had made it to maturity.

That row of trees with its now sweltering leaves and branches had been planted as a shelterbelt. During one of the few snowstorms a half a year earlier snow had accumulated in the shelter of this row of trees. That snow is what made the wheat grow, even though everything else was burnt and brown.

God's Word as rain

In Isaiah, God compares his Word to the rain and the snow: “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth” (55:10,11).

In this comparison, we understand right away what the rain does. It helps plants immediately. Sometimes during a summer drought one good rain will make the grass green by the next day. God's Word is like that. It comes on our dry and dusty lives, and immediately there is a difference, a freshening and quickening in our spirits. This is according to God's promise: “It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). God's Word has its good effect on us even before we walk out of the church.

God's Word as snow

God's Word is also like the snow that falls from heaven. But this is more difficult to understand. Snow isn't usually good for plants. Early snows kill plants. Late snows do too. Plants don't flourish and grow in the snow.

But the snow that lies along a shelterbelt is a different story. That snow sustains and keeps the seeds and plants and brings them to maturity. It is unseen. It melts and goes under the ground. But it is there, and the plants that have it in the soil under them are happy. The plant that grows where the snow used to lie is like Jeremiah's tree planted by the water: “It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit” (Jeremiah 17:8).

God's Word is like this snow that comes down from heaven. It lies in the human heart and mind for months and even years, and then in time of drought and distress it blesses and sustains those who have it in their spiritual subsoil.

In a way your church is like that South Dakota shelterbelt. It is the place that allows the snow to collect and build up and soak into your soul. There it will be when you are in trouble, when you are discouraged and down, when your family is experiencing loss and turmoil. There it will be when you are lying on the white sheets of a hospital bed.

You and I can't afford to miss a single chance to have God's Word come down on us like the snow from heaven. He has a present and future purpose for his Word. God's Word as snow is his long-term support and sustenance for our souls as the rain is his present support and sustenance.

The moisture of the Word as rain and snow is the only way for our church and its people to have seed for sowing and bread for eating.

Eric Hartzell is pastor at Cross and Crown, Georgetown, Texas.

Freedom

FROM SELFISHNESS

Jesus gives us the new life that overcomes the selfish tyrant human nature.

Paul E. Kelm

I live with a tyrant. My human nature wants me to believe that I have to be better than anyone else.

Life with selfishness

This win/lose view of life puts me in a competitive relationship with others; I can't accept them for who they are. This comparative view of myself means that I will feel inferior or superior; I can't just be who God made me. My sinful nature thinks that I have to get my way, so you may have to be wrong just for me to be right. That sinful nature tries to convince me that I need all kinds of things, from material tokens of success to sensual experiences of pleasure. And no matter what I have, it isn't enough. The tyrant I live with wants to make my life miserable. Romans 7 tells me you have the same tyrant.

I read the Sermon on the Mount and get uncomfortable. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you" (Luke 6:27)? My sinful nature suggests that's not going to work, Lord. "If anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back" (Luke 6:30)? Do that and people are going to take advantage of you. "What about me?" the nagging fear inside keeps asking. It makes me suspicious, cynical. How about you?

I know that the Bible teaches submission because we are under authority (Romans 13:1). In fact, the apostle Paul says, "Submit to

one another" (Ephesians 5:21). But I don't like someone else telling me what to do. Doesn't freedom mean that we get to do our own thing?

Life with freedom

In *A Treatise on Christian Liberty*, Martin Luther wrote: "A Christian is a free lord of all and subject to no one. A Christian is a ministering servant of all and subject to everyone." The gospel explains both halves of that paradox. Jesus has freed us. We are forgiven saints of God, and our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). And Jesus has liberated us from the selfishness that makes us insensitive to the needs of others. Here's how.

This is what Jesus did for us. Through the forgiveness he accomplished, he made the Ruler of the universe our Father once more and thereby freed us from fear. Selfish-

ness is driven by fear. Jesus gave us the confidence to trust God's promise to be with us when he fulfilled God's greater promise of salvation at the cost of his life. Our "self" is secure with God, emotionally and physically. We have nothing to prove and nothing to fear. Jesus made us members of his Church, the body of Christ, in which we complement rather than compete with each other. We look at others as part of the body of Christ. Love works. It treasures instead of measures people. It banishes suspicion and resentment. Jesus gave our life a sense of mission, the same purpose that moved him to serve instead of being served (Mark 10:45).

Jesus gives us the new life that overcomes the selfish tyrant human nature (Romans 6:1-7; Galatians 2:20). The Holy Spirit through the gospel creates the new self that understands serving and submitting as the way to live happily (Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:22-24). Jesus is the hope of heaven and the reason to defer gratification until he perfects us for heaven at his return (Colossians 1:27 and 3:1-4).

"If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

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

This is the fifth 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.



Both the dying person and the survivors a manner that reflects their conviction

Clarence had been married 51 years when he lost his dear wife, Clarice. "It was cancer that took her," he said, as he clenched his jaw and tears filled his eyes.

Like a bitter enemy, cancer took from Clarence the dearest thing to him. The bitterness was evident and distressing for his two daughters and son to witness.

Facing death without hope

It had been two years since Clarice had died. There was no denying that Clarence had not gotten over the loss, but little was said of it. The bitter wounds left by this cancer-incised death were never addressed.

So needless to say no one was quite prepared for the news the doctor delivered to Clarence at his yearly checkup: "You have cancer, and there is nothing we can do. You have about six months to live."

Not only was Clarence going to be taken down, but by the same enemy that took his dear Clarice. The bitterness was overwhelming, and the sorrow became fuel for both his passivity and stubbornness. Clarence immediately went into hospice care without a word of objection. In fact, upon entering the facility he never spoke again. He simply stared out the window, at the wall, or at anything but a mirror.

The doctors weren't exactly right about Clarence. He didn't make it six months. In fact, he made it about one week past three months. He had no fight, provided no words, gave no hope, no witness, no comfort.

Not everyone is given a timeline for their own death. Many die suddenly of a stroke, heart attack, or accident. Medical advances, however, have allowed people to live longer. Doctors are learning more about what ails us, and they can better estimate what maladies can be treated, where the risks are, and what the probability of survival is. An increasing number of people, however, actually do get a timeline for their own death.

Remember the story of Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:1-5)? God gave him 15 more years of life. I would imagine the first 14 years went pretty much as usual. But what do you think the last year was like? How does one prepare both to meet God and say good-bye to loved ones?

Someone once said that you should live each day as though you will die tomorrow and face death knowing you will live forever. That is easier to say than put into practice. Like Clarence, many people feel cheated by death. They are angry at their circumstance, at themselves, and even at God for their approaching death. As we all instinctively do, they measure life by what is lost or missing. They find little cause for thankfulness and praises in approaching death.

Clarence's case also raised interesting challenges for his children. How do you say "good-bye" to someone

who won't talk to you? How do you prepare yourself to lose a loved one?

Facing death with faith

Both the dying person and the survivors have a responsibility to face death in a manner that reflects their conviction about God and his value for life. Remember, even when we're walking around in good health God reminds us that because of sin we are dead (Ephesians 2:1). All our success, all our prosperity, all our health, and all our pleasure received in this life is nothing because sin destroyed everything. Our days are like grass that wither in nature (1 Peter 1:24).

Death is an inevitable and sad reality that resulted from sin (Romans 6:23). Death escapes no one. The rich, the poor, the wise, the foolish—everyone will die (Ecclesiastes 2:16).

It is God, in the person of Jesus Christ, who changed what death means. Through faith in Jesus as our Savior, death is not the end but the transition to eternal life (John 10:10). No matter how wonderful or how painful physical life has been, a Christian's death marks a point of improvement (Revelation 7:14-16). Even the beleaguered Job spoke boldly of how his pain-wracked body would be restored after death (Job 19:25,26). It is this conviction that prompted the apostle Paul to say that death has no sting (1 Corinthians 15:55).

So when you are dying, the promises of God's Word have not changed, but have special pertinence. The bold singing of God's praises in hymns of hope and promise can still be there. The earnest support of God's work

Facing eternity—

Robert R. Fleischmann

have a responsibility to face death in about God and his value for life.

on earth can still be there. The tireless witnessing of the eternity that lies ahead can still go on. But it is the diagnosis of death that actually becomes a wonderful forum to talk about life everlasting.

Some have used their dying moments to burden consciences and to act vengefully toward those who perhaps were not kind to them in better times. Why? First of all, any attitude designed to hurt others is contrary to God's will. Second, our society is more attentive to the words of someone who has few remaining. Why not use that time well by carrying the Christian mission of witnessing and loving?

Saying good-bye when facing death

There is a reality about death that is undeniable. When a loved one dies, people measure what they have lost. Those who are closest to the deceased feel especially empty. As a person who is facing final months and days on this earth, never lose sight of the fact that as you move on to be with the Lord, others will be measuring your passing. Share with those who will survive you the joy you have in Christ and the salvation that is yours. Share with them your optimism and confidence about what God has secured for you. Make amends and be an arrow pointing heavenward.

For those who measure each passing day as they watch a loved one die, there are also things to remember in how to say "good-bye." First, remember the dying person's welfare—both spiritual and physical. Creating trauma, opening old family wounds, or com-

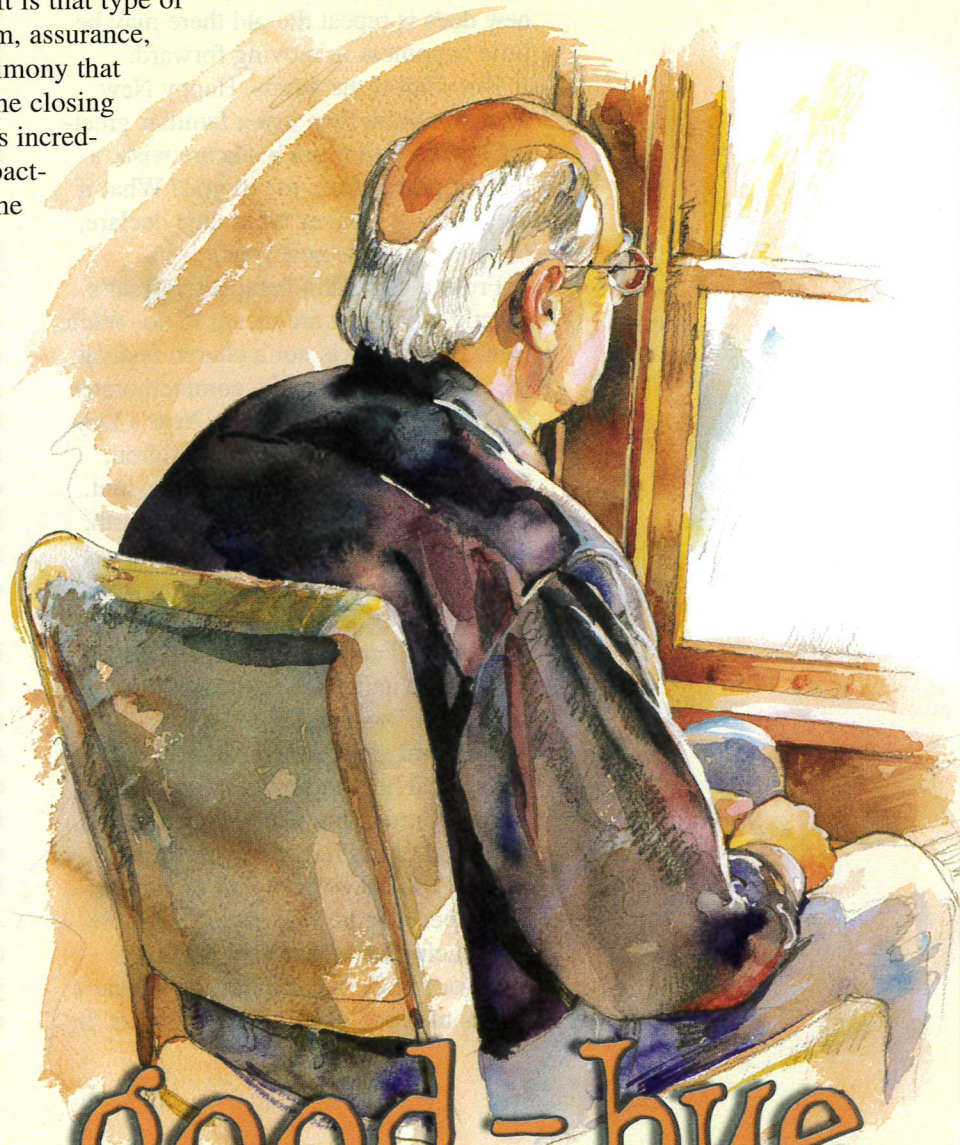
plaining all compromise the opportunity you have. Remember, as your loved one dies he or she is concerned about your welfare for the future. Assure your loved one that all will be well. Especially, however, remind your loved one of your shared faith in Christ as the Savior. Provide the hope of a heavenly reunion.

To paraphrase someone who once spoke of losing a young daughter, "We mourn, not that she has left us, but that we cannot yet go along." It is that type of optimism, assurance, and testimony that makes the closing moments incredibly impacting on the lives of others.

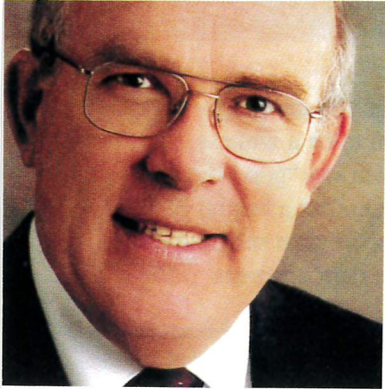
From the moment you came to faith, God called you to be a witness to him. In the way you say "good-bye" you can be that witness, as a bright shining light of hope in what otherwise is considered a dark moment.

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

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



-saying good-bye



Carl R. Gump

Happy New Year

Happy New Year! It's a familiar greeting and sincerely meant. But does it change anything? Not really, unless there is something really new, something truly happy, about this new year.

Usually the passing of the old year and the beginning of the new one is nothing more than tearing off another calendar page, something we do every month. The only other difference with a new year may be remembering to write a new date on our checks. Otherwise the days bear a remarkable sameness. And when all the new does is repeat the old there may be little happiness in moving forward.

But what if the words, Happy New Year, are more than just a familiar greeting? What if they are a sincere wish, a fervent prayer from me to you? What if they actually convey what they declare, happiness for the new year?

From a Christian perspective that's exactly what they are meant to do. While New Year's Day is not a church festival, the church, traditionally, commemorates the naming of Jesus on New Year's Day.

Unlike the naming of our children, Jesus' earthly names were heaven-sent. Seven hundred years before Jesus' birth, the prophet foretold one of Jesus' names to a disbelieving King Ahaz: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). It's a name rich in meaning. It means "God with us."

The Lord also foretold the name of this special heaven-sent child to Joseph, who was struggling with the unexpected condition of his fiancée expecting a child: "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

On our modern calendars, New Year's Day comes one week after Christmas. In

Old Testament times, roughly one week (eight days) after a male child's birth, he was to be circumcised. Joseph and Mary fulfilled this ancient provision of the law, circumcising Jesus on the eighth day, officially giving him the name Jesus.

At that very moment, Jesus began living up to his name, saving his people from their sins. He was submitting to God's law, taking our place under it, on his way to keeping it all perfectly. In addition, his circumcision spilled his blood for us, freeing us from sin's curse, a sacrifice he would complete upon the cross.

Isn't that worth remembering or repeating on New Year's Day? Isn't there enough here to truly make a new year happy? Don't we, on New Year's Day, just like on every other day, need this reminder of our substitute assuming our sin's guilt? For isn't it our guilty fears that rob us of true happiness each day? Don't the prospects for happiness seem remote whenever we conclude that the disappointments in the past, or in the future, are God's ways of getting even with us because of our sin's guilt? How could we ever, truly, have a happy new year with such thoughts dulling our senses?

Then, my friend, may you enjoy a happy new year in the name of Jesus! He assumed our guilt, as he did the sin and guilt of all the world. The shedding of his precious blood paid the price for our redemption. Having given so much for us already, he will see to it that in this new year, happiness will be ours. It is faith's certain recognition that Jesus truly will make all things work out for our good. Isn't there someone you know who needs to hear this happy news this New Year's Day?



Philippians 1:12-15, 18, 23b-25

¹²Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.

¹³As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. ¹⁵It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. . .

¹⁸But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. . . ^{23b}I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith.

I rejoice

that the gospel
keeps moving forward

When the church experiences apparent setbacks, we may whine or worry about what else might go wrong. But even in troublesome times the gospel is advanced.

Paul E. Zell

The first time Saint Paul set foot into Philippi, enemies of the gospel shoved him into a prison cell. The first time he visited Rome, he came as a prisoner bound with chains. Humiliating indeed. Yet both times Paul was filled with joy. He recognized that even in troubled times the gospel keeps moving forward, so his epistle to the Philippians overflows with rejoicing.

Because Christ is preached

The apostle was commissioned to travel the world with the good news of Jesus. So spending two full years under house arrest was a major setback, right? Not from Paul's perspective. "What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel," he wrote. Even in chains he had opportunities to tell his guards and visitors about Christ's rescue work. Many believed. Elsewhere his fellow saints stepped into Paul's pulpit, so to speak. They grew more courageous in their preaching, and the gospel made further advances.

True, some of those preachers had impure intentions. Some were jealous of Paul's fame. Some hoped that his troubles might worsen. "But what does it matter?" Paul asked. "The important thing is that in every way . . . Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."

Then there were those nagging questions about the future. Would Paul ever be released? Might Caesar execute him instead? There was plenty to fret about, but not in Paul's mind and heart. The Spirit of Jesus Christ strengthened him for any outcome. "To die is gain," Paul confessed, because then he could "be with Christ, which is better by far" (vv. 21,23). If he lived, then it would mean he could go on shepherding Christ's sheep for their "progress and joy in the faith."

Because his promises are true

Believers today still face fierce enemies. Noble efforts to expand his kingdom appear to falter. Envy and selfish ambitions disturb the saints. Questions about the future of our congregations and synod distress us. When the church experiences apparent setbacks, we hear ourselves whining about what else might go wrong. Or we grow weary. Or we worry.

May God for Jesus' sake forgive us for not trusting him. May the Holy Spirit then give us Paul's perspective. Whatever happens, Jesus can turn it "to advance the gospel." Jesus' announcement still stands: "You will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). He promised that "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations" (Matthew 24:14). He gives us opportunities to bear witness right where we are. And where we cannot go, other saints keep stepping in to preach, teach, and testify.

Setbacks for the church? That depends on your perspective. Like Saint Paul we trust that the gospel keeps moving forward. For that we will always rejoice.

Contributing editor Paul Zell, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Grace, Milwaukee.



Begin with prayer

New tasks, new opportunities, and new challenges occur in every life. Some are dramatic shifts, while others are doors opening or closing quietly and routinely as we journey through life. Every life encounters such changes. I have a new task—editor of *Forward in Christ*—which I begin with this issue.

So as I begin, I turn to the Lord Jesus in prayer and include one of my prayers here on my first editorial page. The Lord asks us to bring our request to him and promises that he will hear us. I offer this prayer to the Lord of the Church, expecting that he will listen and awaiting his response. As you read it, I think that you will find that it is not just a prayer for me at this beginning, but a prayer that others might use. It is a prayer for all beginnings, and I hope that others may use it as they begin a new year, a new challenge, or even an ordinary new day.

Dear Lord Jesus, because of your boundless love for me you have rescued me from my own sins and weaknesses. Your grace has made me your child. I am no longer hopeless, bound for eternal separation from you and the joy of heaven. Instead you have washed away my sins with your blood, filled me with hope by your resurrection from the dead, and given me the expectation of eternal life in your Father's house.

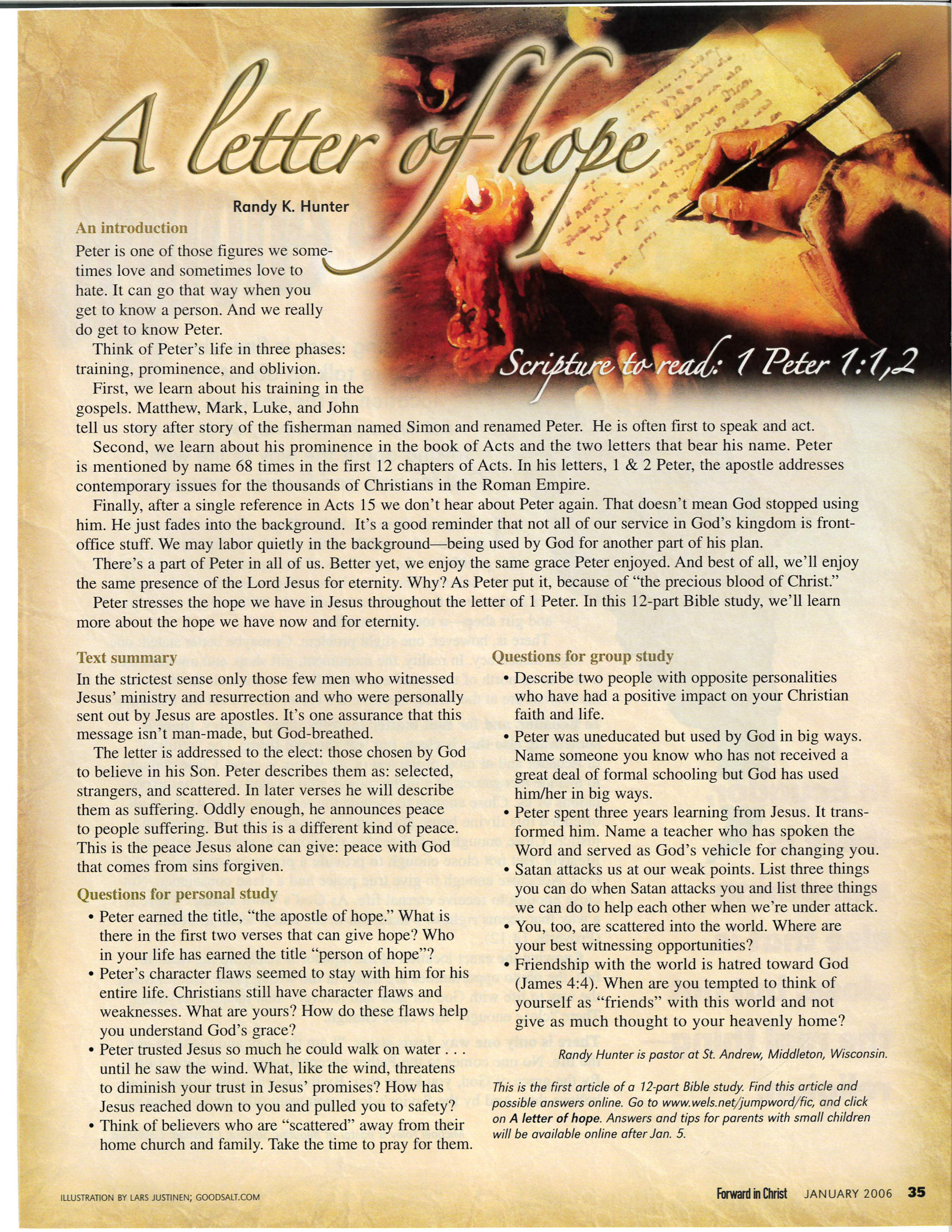
Whatever lies ahead in my journey, give me strength through the gospel to cling to these precious treasures. Keep me in your Word and faithful to your truth. If the days are dark and dreary, shine upon me with the light of your love. Be my staff to lean on and grant me courage and comfort. If the days are bright and happy, keep me close to you that I might not aban-

don your grace. Remain with me, as you promised, that I might continue to be your child through every turn and at every rough detour.

Lord, you have opened a new path before me. I do not wish to step forward unless you come with me. I know that I am still stained by my sins and frustrated by my weaknesses. Without you, I would spoil the opportunity, discredit your name, or discourage my fellow believers. Go before me, Lord, and guide me on the path ahead. Clarify my thoughts, purify my words, and give me strength to act wisely and faithfully. May all I think, say, and do advance your kingdom and spread the gospel.

I pray, Lord, for health and energy to serve you. If it is your will, grant me many days of service. If it is your will to grant me only a few before you call me home, teach me to use each day fully. Sustain the best of the gifts you have given me by the power of the gospel and minimize whatever flows from my own pride, anger, or envy.

Lord, you have also made me one of your children and surrounded me with others who love you and desire to serve you. Breathe a spirit of harmony and peace into the work that we do together. May we value each other as fellow believers. Build us up with your love so that we may love and respect each other. Prevent Satan's desire to sow seeds of conflict and discord. Keep all who love you under your care and fill us with a passionate desire to share your gospel with those we know and then with all the world. Watch over us all and bless all we do for your glory and the good of your church. Amen.



A letter of hope

Randy K. Hunter

An introduction

Peter is one of those figures we sometimes love and sometimes love to hate. It can go that way when you get to know a person. And we really do get to know Peter.

Think of Peter's life in three phases: training, prominence, and oblivion.

First, we learn about his training in the gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John tell us story after story of the fisherman named Simon and renamed Peter. He is often first to speak and act.

Second, we learn about his prominence in the book of Acts and the two letters that bear his name. Peter is mentioned by name 68 times in the first 12 chapters of Acts. In his letters, 1 & 2 Peter, the apostle addresses contemporary issues for the thousands of Christians in the Roman Empire.

Finally, after a single reference in Acts 15 we don't hear about Peter again. That doesn't mean God stopped using him. He just fades into the background. It's a good reminder that not all of our service in God's kingdom is front-office stuff. We may labor quietly in the background—being used by God for another part of his plan.

There's a part of Peter in all of us. Better yet, we enjoy the same grace Peter enjoyed. And best of all, we'll enjoy the same presence of the Lord Jesus for eternity. Why? As Peter put it, because of "the precious blood of Christ."

Peter stresses the hope we have in Jesus throughout the letter of 1 Peter. In this 12-part Bible study, we'll learn more about the hope we have now and for eternity.

Text summary

In the strictest sense only those few men who witnessed Jesus' ministry and resurrection and who were personally sent out by Jesus are apostles. It's one assurance that this message isn't man-made, but God-breathed.

The letter is addressed to the elect: those chosen by God to believe in his Son. Peter describes them as: selected, strangers, and scattered. In later verses he will describe them as suffering. Oddly enough, he announces peace to people suffering. But this is a different kind of peace. This is the peace Jesus alone can give: peace with God that comes from sins forgiven.

Questions for personal study

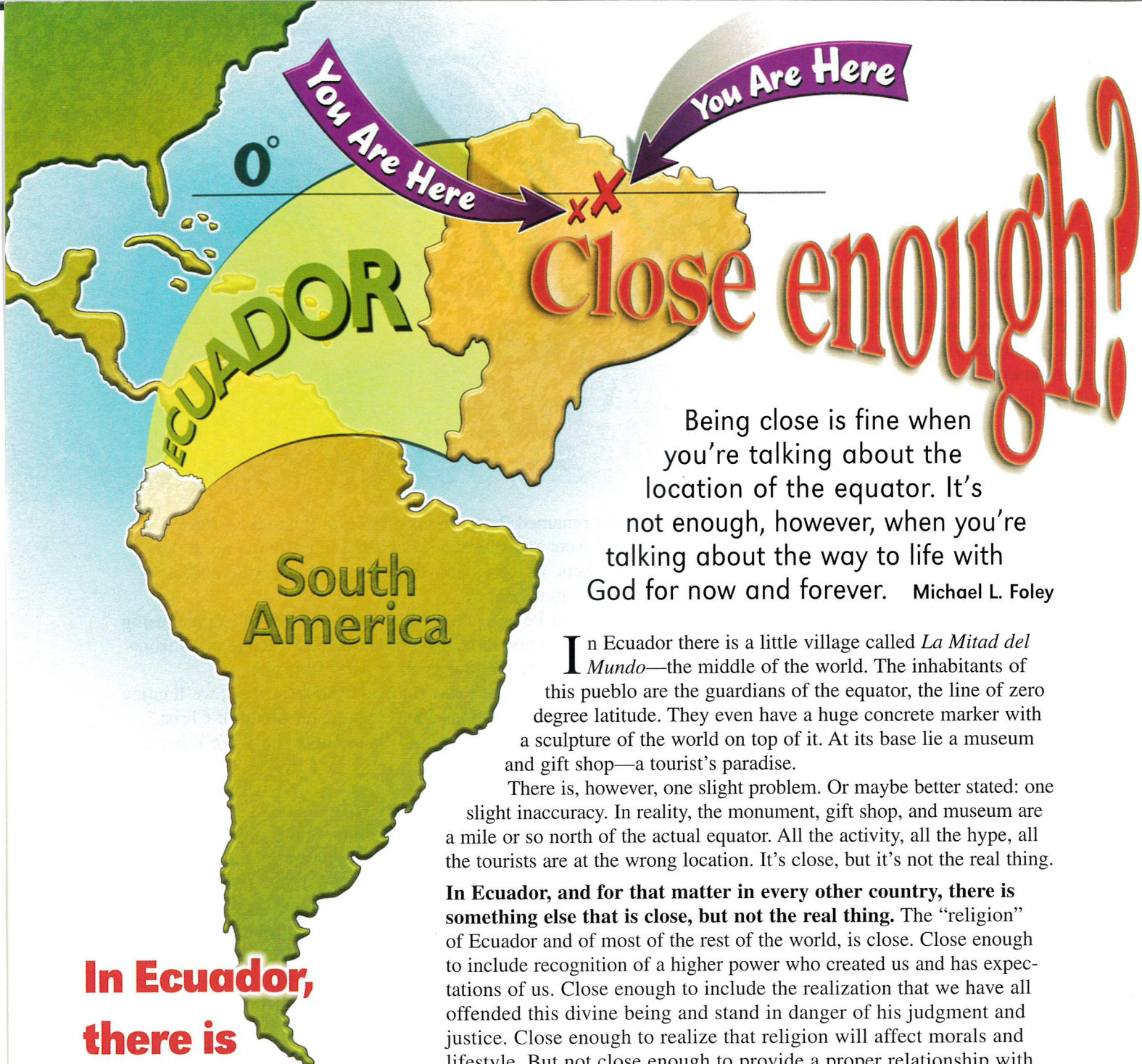
- Peter earned the title, "the apostle of hope." What is there in the first two verses that can give hope? Who in your life has earned the title "person of hope"?
- Peter's character flaws seemed to stay with him for his entire life. Christians still have character flaws and weaknesses. What are yours? How do these flaws help you understand God's grace?
- Peter trusted Jesus so much he could walk on water . . . until he saw the wind. What, like the wind, threatens to diminish your trust in Jesus' promises? How has Jesus reached down to you and pulled you to safety?
- Think of believers who are "scattered" away from their home church and family. Take the time to pray for them.

Questions for group study

- Describe two people with opposite personalities who have had a positive impact on your Christian faith and life.
- Peter was uneducated but used by God in big ways. Name someone you know who has not received a great deal of formal schooling but God has used him/her in big ways.
- Peter spent three years learning from Jesus. It transformed him. Name a teacher who has spoken the Word and served as God's vehicle for changing you.
- Satan attacks us at our weak points. List three things you can do when Satan attacks you and list three things we can do to help each other when we're under attack.
- You, too, are scattered into the world. Where are your best witnessing opportunities?
- Friendship with the world is hatred toward God (James 4:4). When are you tempted to think of yourself as "friends" with this world and not give as much thought to your heavenly home?

Randy Hunter is pastor at St. Andrew, Middleton, Wisconsin.

*This is the first article of a 12-part Bible study. Find this article and possible answers online. Go to www.wels.net/jumpword/fic, and click on **A letter of hope**. Answers and tips for parents with small children will be available online after Jan. 5.*



**In Ecuador,
there is
something
else that is
close, but not
the real thing—
religion.**

Being close is fine when you're talking about the location of the equator. It's not enough, however, when you're talking about the way to life with God for now and forever. **Michael L. Foley**

In Ecuador there is a little village called *La Mitad del Mundo*—the middle of the world. The inhabitants of this pueblo are the guardians of the equator, the line of zero degree latitude. They even have a huge concrete marker with a sculpture of the world on top of it. At its base lie a museum and gift shop—a tourist's paradise.

There is, however, one slight problem. Or maybe better stated: one slight inaccuracy. In reality, the monument, gift shop, and museum are a mile or so north of the actual equator. All the activity, all the hype, all the tourists are at the wrong location. It's close, but it's not the real thing.

In Ecuador, and for that matter in every other country, there is something else that is close, but not the real thing. The "religion" of Ecuador and of most of the rest of the world, is close. Close enough to include recognition of a higher power who created us and has expectations of us. Close enough to include the realization that we have all offended this divine being and stand in danger of his judgment and justice. Close enough to realize that religion will affect morals and lifestyle. But not close enough to provide a proper relationship with God. Not close enough to give true peace and a clean conscience. Not close enough to receive eternal life. As God's Word states, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death" (Proverbs 14:12).

Knowing the exact location of the equator is really no big deal. In fact, the photo opportunities are better in the wrong place. But knowing the way to life with God for now and forever—that means everything. There "close enough" isn't close enough.

There is only one way. Jesus states, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). By the grace of God, you know that. By the Spirit's gift of faith, you believe that. And by the Savior's love, you want other to have that too.

Michael Foley is pastor at Beautiful Saviour, Carlsbad, California.