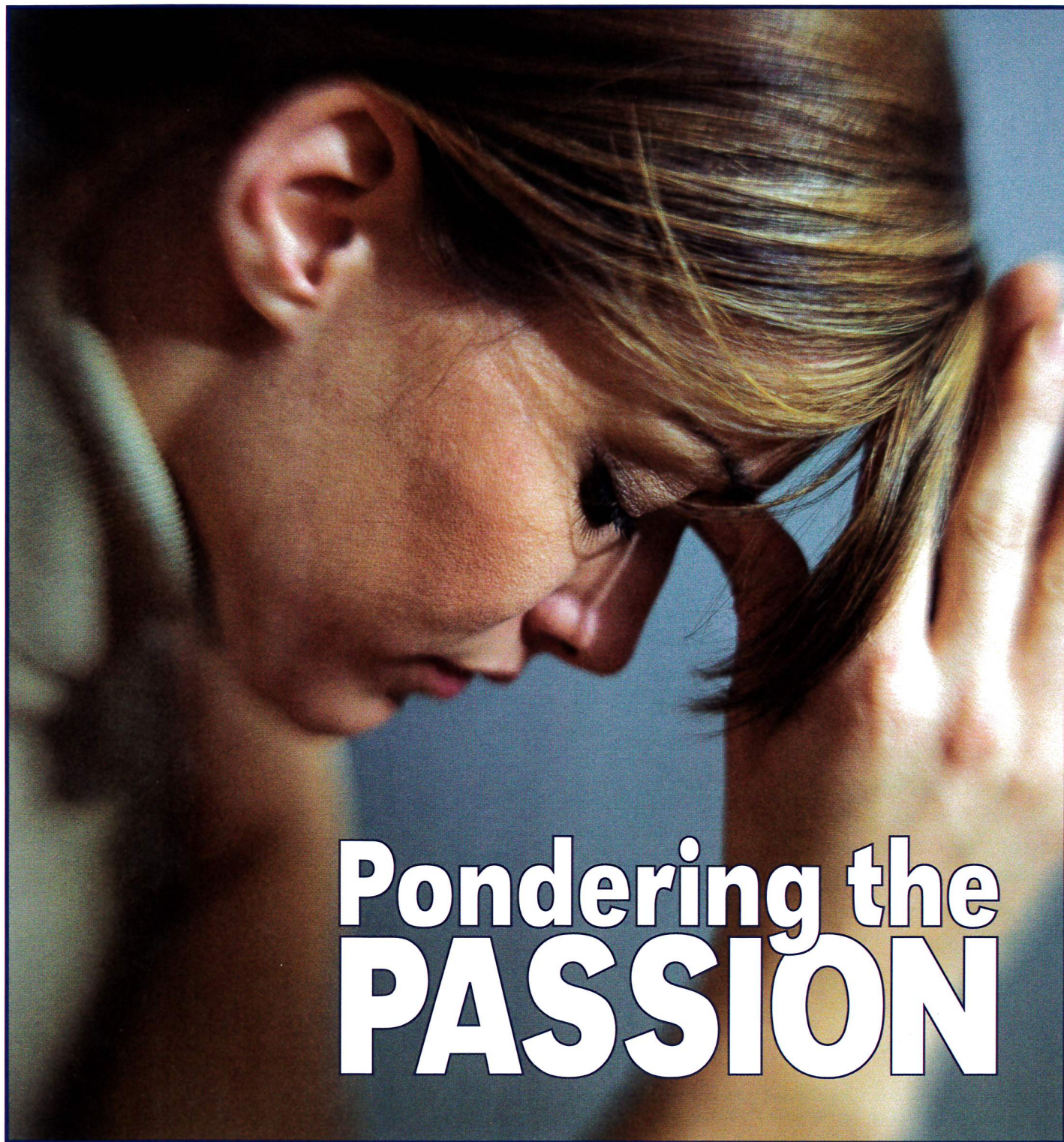


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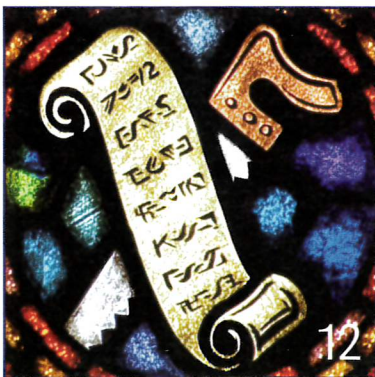
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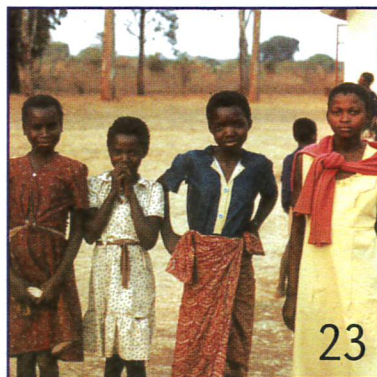


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Forward in Christ

✝ The official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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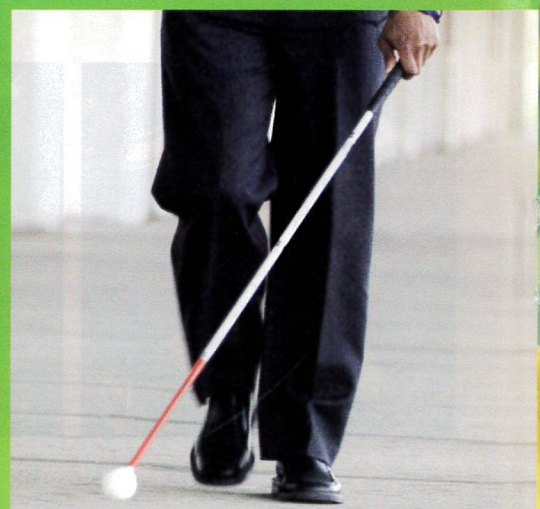
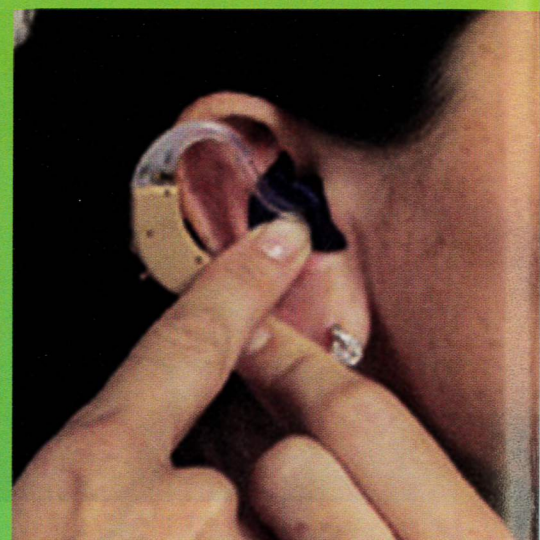
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BE WITH US AS HE WAS
WITH OUR FATHERS;
MAY HE NEVER LEAVE US
NOR FORSAKE US.
1 Kings 8:57

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MARCH

WHAT'S INSIDE *by Julie Wietzke*

One of the things that I look forward to the most during Lent is the opportunity to hear the Passion history read from the lectern. For some reason, hearing it read aloud in church makes it seem more real and more intense. Hearing the gospel account also makes me feel incredibly blessed because it reminds me, so vividly, of God's love for me and all sinners.

Our cover story this month (p. 10) talks about pondering Jesus' passion and its meaning in our lives. It also gives some wonderful ideas for how to contemplate Jesus' suffering and death this Lenten season. Maybe one of these ideas will give you a new way to think about what your Savior has done for you.

Two other articles help us see another reason to rejoice when we hear those gospel readings—we know what we're hearing is true! Using *The Da Vinci Code* as an example of a book trying to refute the Bible, Pastor Brian Keller shares how we know that the Bible is truly God's Word (p. 16). And in this month's Q&A, Prof. Richard Gurgel explores the miracle of inspiration.

God be with you as you ponder his passion once again this Lenten season.

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ARMED FORCES

I've been a lifelong member of WELS and have read many of the publications and found them to be helpful in connecting God's Word to my personal life through the variety of stories that have been provided. The article about "Where there are wars . . ." [Dec. 2006] and the link to read more of what Ziemer writes is very good. My son who is in the Marines and my son-in-law who is in the Navy have heightened my sensitivity of all who are in the Armed Forces, which then makes me gravitate to any and all articles in these areas.

Tim Zimmermann

While I commend civilian chaplain Pastor Paul Ziemer on his trips to this dangerous region [Dec. 2006], I am disturbed by the fact that he attempts to meet with as many WELS service people as he is permitted to do. It is my hope that while searching out WELS people that Pastor Ziemer does not overlook Christians of other denominations that might want spiritual guidance from a chaplain from the United States.

*Georgia Browne,
Sturgis, Michigan*

JESUS AND EMOTIONS

May I respond to my brother Dave Dahlke who is troubled by those who refer to human actions as affecting Jesus' emotions [Feedback, Dec. 2006]. . . . Jesus is 100 percent God, but he is also 100 percent man (c.f. John 11:35; Luke 15:7). As a man he feels every emotion that I feel. Did that change on Resurrection morning? Certainly not. Jesus Christ will always and forever be a man. . . .

But I too am bothered by attempts to manipulate children by telling them that if they eat their broccoli, Jesus will smile on them. That is not teaching grace. It is pure law.

*Robert Gove
Meridian, Idaho*

ADOPTION

Thanks for printing Heidi Luchterhand's "Color Me Loved" article about her adopted children [Jan.]. We've been blessed to be able to adopt our son from Guatemala, and, while we haven't received any negative comments on his skin color, we've found that adoption itself is a process that's often misunderstood, even among some WELS Lutherans. One lady even expressed the opinion that adoption is wrong, reasoning that if God had wanted a couple to have children, he would have blessed them with biological children. This could not be further from the truth. God also creates families through adoption.

Rather than viewing adopted children as "second-rate," let's remember that as Christians we are all former spiritual orphans who have been adopted into God's family and have "received the full rights of sons" (Galatians 4:5), through Christ, who is "not ashamed to call us brothers" (Hebrews 2:11).

*Josh and Christie Buschkopf
Manawa, Wisconsin*

LITURGY

As a WELS member from infancy, I grew up singing and saying the hymnal liturgy week after week. Although as a child and teenager I sometimes found it monotonous, now as an adult I easily revert back to those phrases that I am able to share with my children and those who don't know about Jesus. In this world of constant change, is it necessary or prudent to alter the liturgy or wording of the Lord's Prayer so often? Are new members requesting these changes, or are we being overly sensitive or even trying to keep up with the "proverbial Joneses?" Just a thought for pastors and worship planners as we move into 2007.

*Debbie Dyjak
Benson, Arizona*

FINANCIAL REPORTS

I don't think there has been a financial report of the synod in its "official magazine" since 2002. Why is this? Are not members of the synod entitled to this information in its "official magazine?"

Editor Rev. John Braun at the end of his article in the January issue "rakes over the coals" a man who had written him. I have a feeling that man is a giver and probably a generous giver. Give us some figures. My pastor speaks of the synod's problem, but I see no figures.

*M. Kerstner
Westerville, Ohio*

In conjunction with Financial Services, we decided to stop printing WELS financial statements in Forward in Christ because these statements would be out of date (and therefore inaccurate) by the time the magazine went to press. This is due to the lead time needed to put together the magazine. Up-to-date, accurate synod financial information can be found online at www.wels.net/jump/fin. We will print articles that update you on synodical finances, including Congregation Mission Offerings (p. 22).—ed.

FELLOWSHIP

Thank you for the thoughtful discussion of fellowship principles [Jan.]. The author addresses some important biblical fellowship principles; however, I fear that he takes the analogy of a mother protecting her family from illness far beyond what Scripture teaches. . . .

*Kyler Kuehn
Irvine, California*

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*.

He knows

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:15,16

Stephen H. Geiger

His eyes were robbed of sleep. His friends had stolen away. In so many ways he was alone.

Judge after judge had heard his case. Injustice had run away with the truth. Pain seized his back and head, his hands, his chest. Yet as enemies surrounded, the one so hated thought first of love. His persecutors heard a prayer for forgiveness. His mother received words of care.

For us to remember the events of the passion and to witness in Jesus such reactions of strength is to consider our own struggles and the reactions that follow.

How different it can be for us

To go through a sleepless night and to face challenges in a new day is a recipe for short-tempered frustration and meltdown. When companions profess friendship for many months but then are nowhere to be found when times get tough, we are tempted to accuse and hold grudges. At a hint of unfairness we think vengeance. When pained in illness or injury we embrace complaint.

To consider Jesus as he approached the cross is to witness the opposite of who we are. Jesus was strong. We are weak. Jesus followed his Father's will. We disobey the simplest of commands. Jesus faced challenge and trusted. We view pressures as good reasons to doubt.

Has hurt or rejection or disappointment provided a trigger for doubt or disobedience?

Trauma can turn professed confidence into blatant denial. The apostle

Peter walked that frightening road. He faced a challenge. He fell. His denial deserved divine desertion. Our failings deserve no less. The glance of Jesus rightly penetrates our heart too. Terror can strike. Bitter tears fall.

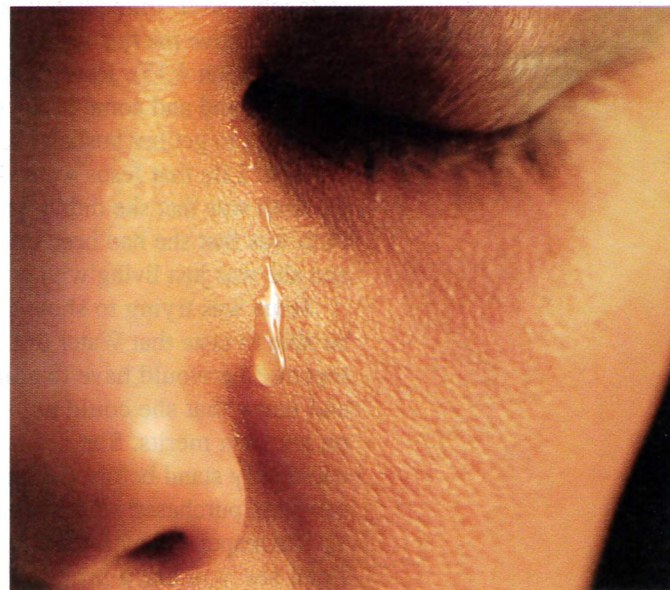
Yet Jesus so quickly returns with love. He sympathizes. He hurts with you. He has faced temptations just like you. He too was tired. He also was abandoned. He faced injustice. He felt the worst physical pain. But he doesn't just understand those situations. He knows the temptations that come in those situations. Jesus knows the strong pull of the temptation to despair, to retaliate, and to complain.

Jesus knows

His sympathy and understanding also recognize that we are weak. He knows that we have a sinful flesh. He knows how easily we can be tricked.

He also knows that in this respect he is not the same. He is not weak. He has not sinned. While his temptation enables him to sympathize, his powerful refusal to fall qualifies him to be our divine help. He knows that we need mercy. He knows that we will sin even though we don't want to sin. He promises us help in our time of need.

In what form does that help come? God's mercy comes in the form of forgiveness for our disobedience. Jesus' perfect blood cleanses our souls. God's love comes in the form



of credit to us for Jesus' victories of obedience. In Jesus you were tired but continued serving with joy. In Jesus you were abandoned yet continued honoring your Father with confidence. In Jesus you were unjustly accused but responded with love. In Jesus you have faced temptation but never have fallen.

Such help is yours because Jesus knows. He knows temptation. He knows your weakness. He knows what you need.

Contributing editor Stephen Geiger, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Risen Savior, Milwaukee.

The truth about sin

Douglas J. Engelbrecht

Come to WELS . . . you might be surprised at what you hear. You might be surprised to hear that repentance turns the heart away from sin to Jesus for peace.

That was the case with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. Immediately after she said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty" (John 4:15), Jesus says to her, "Go, call your husband and come back" (John 4:16). What did going to get her husband have to do with this Water of Life that Jesus wanted to give her? Well, the truth was that she didn't have a husband. The truth was that she had been divorced five times, and she was just living with guy number six.

Jesus was trying to show her that for her to be able to taste that Water of Life, she needed to repent. She would have to admit her sinfulness and know that she could not stand before God on her own merits. She needed to know that she could only stand before God robed in the righteousness purchased with his blood.

She responded by saying, "Sir, I can see you are a prophet" (John 4:19). In other words, "You got me!" You see, she had tried to play dumb and act as if everything was "cool" in her life. But Jesus exposed her sin . . . not in a condemnatory way, but in love, so that she might thirst for the water that Jesus could give her. This woman came to the well, and she was surprised at what she heard . . . the truth about her sin.

Come to WELS, and you might be surprised to hear the same thing. Surprised, because so many churches today do not want to touch the subject of sin. It's so negative; it turns people off. People want to go away from church feeling good about themselves.

Repentance turns the heart away from sin to Jesus for peace.

Well, the truth is, it is impossible to feel good about yourself! The apostle Paul said, "What I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil that I do not want to do—this I keep on doing" (Romans 7:19). Unless you and I are on a much higher spiritual plane than the apostle Paul, there's no way we can feel good about ourselves.

But we can feel good about Jesus! We can go away from church feeling good about what he has done for us by dying on the cross and taking all our sins away. But that isn't going to happen if we try to change the subject every time our sin is brought up, or if nobody ever reminds us that everything in our life is not "cool." We can't feel good about Jesus until we are ready to say to God, like the Samaritan woman, "You got me!"

Come to WELS . . . you might be surprised at what you hear. You might be surprised to hear that repentance turns your heart away from sin to Jesus for peace. Surprised, because so many churches today do not preach repentance. Surprised, but not disappointed. Yes, you will hear each week that not everything in your life is "right down the middle." You and I are sinners. But we turn away from sin to Jesus. Each week, then, you walk away from WELS feeling good . . . not about yourself, but about Jesus and what he has done to wash away all your sins, what he has done to make you right with God.

Come to WELS, but don't be surprised to hear that repentance turns your heart from sin to Jesus for peace. Be thankful!

Contributing editor Douglas Engelbrecht is pastor at Trinity, Neenah, Wisconsin.



at the foot of the cross. Richard L. Gurgel

TOPIC: The foundation of Scripture

I've always believed in the primacy of Scripture over tradition, until recently when I began studying early church history. It now seems more like the "chicken and egg" conundrum. For isn't the Bible itself a result of tradition? Jesus didn't hand the complete New Testament to his followers, but instead faithful Christians (with the Holy Spirit's guidance) worked out over a number of years what should be included. Furthermore, many key Christian doctrines, like that of the Trinity, are extremely vague in Scripture, and it appears that there must have been further revelation to get to the beliefs written in the creeds. In light of this, how does "sola Scriptura" (Scripture alone) work?

It's true. On Ascension Day, Jesus didn't hand the New Testament to his disciples all proofed and ready for publishing. Yet that in no way implies that the Bible is the "result of tradition" or that Christians were left to "work out" what to include in Scripture with only nebulous "guidance" by the Spirit.

In fact, Scripture specifically rejects the "will of man" as its source. "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20,21).

Notice how Peter understands your question's urgency. "Above all" Peter wants us to understand that the scriptural foundation under our feet isn't built on the shaky material of human beings "working out" what should and shouldn't be in Scripture.

Yes, in the miracle of inspiration God gave us the Scriptures through human authors—even using their experiences and unique vocabularies. Yet the Spirit's "guidance" was more than just assisting an otherwise human process. Peter pictures those human authors as being "carried along" by the Spirit. Therefore every subject about which they wrote and all the words about that subject are in reality God's words, not man's. That's why Paul speaks of Scripture as "God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16), not "man-made."

Church history also eloquently testifies that the church did not "develop" the New Testament. The church received the New Testament as a gift from her Savior's hand. Through inspiration, each book came from the apostles and evangelists within decades of Christ's ascension.

While it is certainly true that many other letters written during that time claimed apostolic authority, God also blessed the early church with the long life of the apostle John. John lived until about the end of the first century A.D. That "disciple whom Jesus loved" helped the early church distinguish between the Spirit's inspired voice and those singing deceptive songs.

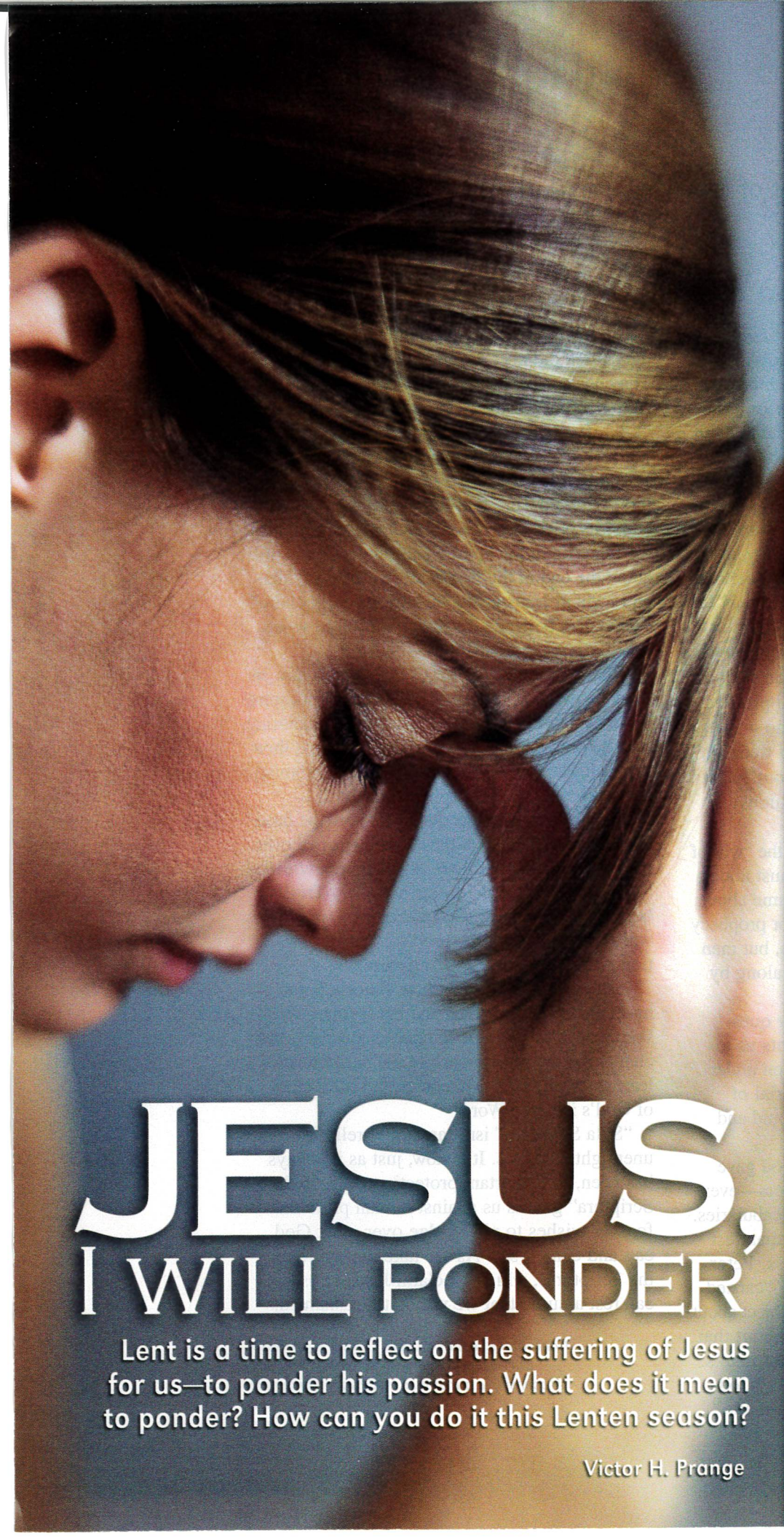
What really is a story of God's grace is how little disagreement there was in the church despite the considerable number of false books clamoring for attention. God's inspired letters possess their own self-authenticating power. As Jesus promises, his sheep recognize his voice (John 10:3).

That helps answer the question about the false doctrines against which the church wrestled over the centuries. For example, as the church wrestled to confess clearly the doctrine of the Trinity, believers searched the Scriptures. The wrestling was not evidence of the need for further revelation or the inadequacy of Scripture.

Instead, it's evidence of how fiercely Satan hates the truth about God and his saving gospel. For those who continue to confess the truth, such challenges drive them back to the Scriptures to learn anew the beautiful clarity and sufficiency of God's inspired Word.

"Sola Scriptura" isn't an empty relic from unenlightened eras. It is now, just as it always has been, an important protecting wall. "Sola Scriptura" guards us against human pride that forever wishes to play judge over what God can and cannot say. As we take our stand on the Scriptures, which proclaim Jesus to us, we can rest assured that we will not be ashamed.

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



JESUS, I WILL PONDER

Lent is a time to reflect on the suffering of Jesus for us—to ponder his passion. What does it mean to ponder? How can you do it this Lenten season?

Victor H. Prange

It's the middle of Advent as I write words meant for readers in Lent. All around are the sights and sounds of Christmas. No one is thinking Lent these days. No one, seemingly, but me.

I pondered this question: what connections are there between Advent and Lent? Both are seasons when repentance is emphasized. Both seasons vibrate with a sense of anticipation, the one for Christmas, the other for Easter. Yet both evoke a somber mood, a calm before the outburst of celebration.

As I considered the connections, I thought of the great Lutheran composer, Johann Sebastian Bach, and how in Advent 1734 he was putting the finishing touches on his *Christmas Oratorio*. In this musical retelling of the Christmas story, Bach made the connection with Lent by choosing for his final number the familiar melody, "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded."

And who can forget Mary as someone connecting the seasons. It's Lent when we celebrate the angel Gabriel's announcement to her of the coming birth of our Savior (March 25). At the Presentation of Jesus, Mary heard a prophesy from Simeon: "A sword will pierce your own soul too" (Luke 2:35), whose fulfillment she experienced at the foot of the cross. After the visit of the shepherds to Bethlehem's manger, Luke tells us that "Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19).

PONDERING LENT

Mary "pondered" all these things. I checked the Greek word Luke used to characterize Mary's action. It's a word that suggests throwing things around. Luke used it to describe conversation, when words are thrown around between people. Mary threw thoughts and questions and emotions around in her heart. She pondered all that had happened to her and what it meant.

Mary is a model for believers throughout the year and especially during the Lenten season. One of the most familiar and often used Lenten hymns begins, "Jesus, I will ponder now on

your holy passion" (*Christian Worship* 98:1). In both *Christian Worship* and *The Lutheran Hymnal* this hymn comes first in the Lenten section. This hymn was originally written by a prominent German poet and hymn writer, born during the Thirty Years War.

The word "ponder" has several synonyms that help us better understand its meaning: contemplate, think over, weigh, evaluate, meditate, reflect, dwell on. One interesting expression is "mull over," which comes from a word meaning "to churn about continuously." That's what we do when we ponder.

We're addressing Jesus when we sing this hymn. We're saying to Jesus: "I will now ponder your passion, your holy suffering and death." We're making a commitment to do something, something we all agree is important. That's why we observe this season of Lent: to ponder the sufferings of Jesus.

HOW WILL YOU PONDER?

But how will we do this? If Advent has its distractions, so does Lent. The days are lengthening. Spring training is in full swing. There's yard work, garden work, and farm work to do. People in the Midwest begin to experience some nice days and want to get outside. Who has the time and desire to ponder the passion of Jesus?

It's up to you to find a way. Ask the Holy Spirit to create in you a mind and heart to ponder anew what the sufferings of Jesus means for you. When Luther gave his barber suggestions for improving his prayer life, he advised slowing down. He urged him to pray the Lord's Prayer meditatively, giving each word and phrase due attention. That's not only a good suggestion for prayer but also for pondering the passion of Jesus. Slow down.

Here are some other possibilities for pondering the passion.

1. All four gospels report the sufferings and death of Jesus (Matthew 26,27; Mark 14,15; Luke 22,23; John 18,19). **Choose one of the gospel accounts. Read slowly.** Repeat what you read previously.

Ponder. Emphasize quality of reading not quantity. Read other translations. Look up words you don't understand in a dictionary. Make some written notes. Ponder what this means for your life here and now and for your eternal salvation.

2. **The gospels for the six Sundays in Lent are another resource for pondering.** All are from Luke's gospel.

CHOOSE ONE OF THE GOSPEL ACCOUNTS. READ SLOWLY. PONDER.

- Lent 1 (4:1-13): Ponder how the devil tempts you.
 - Lent 2 (13:31-35): Ponder the great concern of Jesus for sinners.
 - Lent 3 (13:1-9): Ask what events God is using to call you to repentance.
 - Lent 4 (15:1-3; 11-32): Ponder whether you are like the prodigal son, the waiting father, the older brother, or all three.
 - Lent 5 (20:9-19): Ponder what it means that Jesus has become the "capstone."
 - Lent 6 (19:28-40): Connect the shout of the crowd, "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest," to the angels' song of praise at the birth of Christ (Luke 2:14).
3. **Individual Bible passages are excellent aids for pondering the benefits of Christ's passion.** Mull over some of the words from the Old Testament.
 - Contemplate the words of Micah: "You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea" (Micah 6:19).

- Or contemplate this assurance: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18).

- Read Psalm 22 or Isaiah 53.

4. **Regularly reading or singing the hymn "Jesus, I will ponder now" during this Lenten season will help you focus on Christ's sufferings.** We are reminded that our sins caused his anguish and affliction. Yet the very cross on which he died is meant to disarm our fear and give peace of conscience. Ponder these words: "If for me he (God) slays his Son, God must have compassion." The final two stanzas pray for holy living and a renewed faith.
5. This next suggestion may not be for everyone but was of great spiritual benefit to me during the years when each week I prepared sermons for both Sunday and Lenten worship. **I listened with text in hand to recordings of the St. Matthew and St. John passions of Bach.** Pondering the Bible words interspersed with hymn stanzas and interpretive arias refreshed my soul and deepened my appreciation for the sufferings of Christ for my salvation.
6. **Finally, Christian art can stimulate pondering the passion.** When instructing adults on the meaning of Christ's suffering and death, I showed paintings of the crucifixion of Jesus. The most striking of these images was the famous Isenheim Altarpiece of Matthias Grünewald. We talked about what Jesus suffered and what this means for us personally. We pondered his passion. As I write, I don't know when during the Lenten season you might be reading these words. But it really doesn't matter. Whether it's in Advent or Epiphany or Lent or the season of Pentecost, pondering the passion of Jesus remains vital for Christian faith and life.

Victor Prange, a retired pastor, is a member at Grace, Tucson, Arizona.

ART IN THE LORD'S SERVICE

Through the years artists and craftsmen have helped tell the story of Jesus through their art. Stained-glass windows surround many of our churches with vivid images that help us glorify God.

Robert J. Koester

John signed up for a stained-glass class at the local stained-glass shop. At his first lesson he was given some pieces of colored glass, some came (tin or lead channel), and a few tools. By the end of the evening, he had a nice-looking picture of a hummingbird drinking from a flower.

Colored glass joined with lead and set in a frame—that's stained glass at its basic level. It's also how stained-glass work has been done since its beginning. But if you were to take John's hummingbird picture into the sanctuary of a modern cathedral, or even a WELS church, you would notice some differences. Glass, lead, and frame would be there, but the glass in the sanctuary would be much more elaborate.

What is stained glass?

In the early years of stained glass, the glass was quite simple, like John's glass. Glass was "blown." Sand, which is what glass is made of, and other agents were heated until the mass melted. Pigments were added. Glass blowers then would take a long hollow tube, scoop out several pounds of molten glass, and blow into the tube until a large bubble formed at the end of the tube. As they continued to blow, they rotated the hot glass until a cylinder was formed. At that point other workers would slice the cylinder lengthwise, open it up, and lay it flat. This simple glass is called pot glass.

But artists saw the need for new procedures to make their images more beautiful and more lifelike. Simple monotone glass gave way to glass with swirls and folds. Artists would cut this glass to aid in shaping facial features and to make realistic flowing robes. But this only took the stained-glass craftsmen so far. They wanted to make hair, eyes, noses, mouths, and to embellish the outer areas of the window with decorative patterns. Paint was the logical answer, so highly skilled painters were commissioned to paint the glass. In time, a type of paint was developed that could be brushed on. The painted glass

was reheated and when it softened, the paint would fuse permanently into the glass. Later, a silver paint was developed that could be applied to the back of plain glass. When heated, this paint would work its way into the glass and truly "stain" it. This added a variety of yellow colors to the glass and enabled the glaziers to create richer patterns. Etching, colored washes, thin layers of colored glass fused together, the use of stencils, and many other techniques, often carefully guarded, added to the glass-makers' tool box and distinguished one stained-glass company from another.

Reaction to stained glass

Stained glass flourished in the days before the Reformation. Magnificent cathedrals were built with money from rulers. Later, when the middle class arose in Europe, local benefactors built churches in their towns and continued to use stained glass.

In the days following the Reformation, however, the use of stained glass slowed, and by 1800 it almost came to a halt. The Reformation reaction against Catholic churches led to the destruction of many windows, and in some places most of the stained glass was removed. Some believed that making statues and stained-glass images was idolatry and fostered saint worship. But even those who did not object to statues and images had a problem with the stained-glass windows in their churches. When a church became Lutheran, its members could not bear to have false teaching portrayed all around them. So they replaced the stained glass with clear glass.

WELS people can identify with this. When our synod bought the Prairie du Chien campus from the Catholic church to house Martin Luther Preparatory School, parents and children worshipped in the beautiful church there. Yet the stained glass, as beautiful as it was, gave honor to Mary and the saints and clearly reflected Catholic teachings. It would have been costly to replace the glass, so the school

was forced to let it stay. Many Reformation churches refused to do that.

In the early 1800s, there was a stained-glass revival, first in England and then in the United States. Churches in WELS reflect the wide variety of techniques used in stained-glass work over the last 125 years.

In the years when stained glass became a major part of church architecture, entire cities and the surrounding territories would become involved in building cathedrals. Construction would last decades. Glassmakers would work with stone masons and carvers. The people of the land, all members of the same church, would be working together for a higher purpose, for the glory of God.

Using your stained glass to God's glory

It would be hard to parallel that kind of effort today. But stained glass can still help people meditate on the faith and give glory to God. Here are a few suggestions for doing that.

Help your congregation understand the windows. Take pictures of your windows. Be sure you find all the stained glass in your church. You may be surprised to find one or two windows that you didn't know existed. Print the pictures, organize them on poster board, and learn about them. Books are available to help you identify Christian symbols. A helpful online source is www.christiansymbols.net. Find sequences of windows, pairings, or groups arranged to tell a story or to link Old Testament prophecies with New Testament fulfillments. Which windows teach abstract theological truths? Ask your pastor to consider a series of sermons on the windows.

If your windows need repair, contact a company that specializes in restoration and see if your congregation can afford to have the work done.

If you don't have windows, consider purchasing some. The price will vary widely depending on the style and complexity of the windows. Most major cities will have one or more stained-glass companies.

Whatever you do, stained glass can help your church meditate on God's Word to his glory.

Robert Koester, an editor at Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is a member at Good Shepherd, West Allis, Wisconsin.



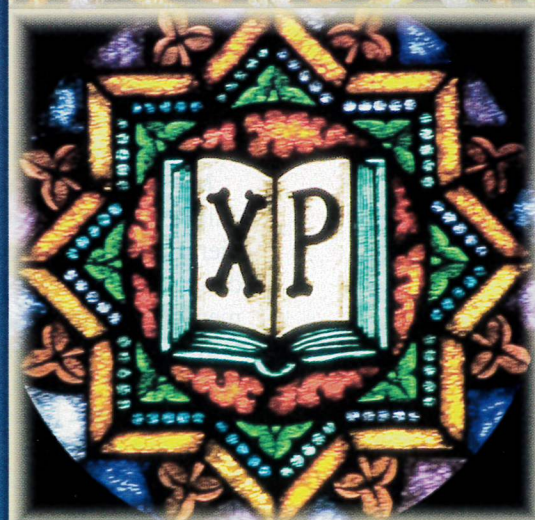
Understanding what symbols mean can make the artwork on stained-glass windows much more meaningful for your worship life. Here are some examples of common symbols as well as the meaning of these symbols. For more information about Christian symbols, go to www.christiansymbols.net.

Agnus Dei (Latin for Lamb of God)

—Jesus lying on a book with seven seals. This image is a very common symbol of Jesus as depicted in Revelation 5. It represents the final judgment when Christ returns in glory. (Jordan, West Allis, Wis.)



Saw/Scroll—Each of the Old Testament prophets has one or more symbols. This piece of stained glass contains two common symbols for Isaiah: a scroll symbolizing his book and a saw symbolizing how he met his death. (Grace, Oshkosh, Wis.)



Chi Rho—There are many symbols for Jesus. Chi and Rho are the first and second letters of Jesus' name, equivalent to our "CHR" (Zebaoth, Milwaukee, Wis.)



New Jerusalem—The New Jerusalem symbolizes the church. It is built on the immovable rock of Christ's life and death for all people. The church is safe from the attacks of Satan and all his allies. (St. James, Milwaukee, Wis.)



Love is

By loving one another, we reflect the greatest act of love: Christ's suffering and death for us.

Jeff Gunn

Following the Korean War, a study was undertaken of 1,000 former prisoners who had all been interred in one particular set of North Korean prisoner-of-war camps. The soldiers who had been in these camps had not been treated poorly. They had been given plenty of food, water, and shelter. They were not subjected to exceptionally harsh torture methods. Surprisingly, the camps had no barbed-wire fence to contain the prisoners.

Some prisoners just gave up. Why?

Yet, after the war when the prisoners were sent home, they did not try to maintain any relationships with one another. In fact, even before reaching the United States, when the Red Cross offered them the opportunity to phone loved ones to let them know they were alive, very few took the offer. Noticing this, American doctors began to ask questions. They discovered that an incredible 38 percent of the prisoners in these camps had died, the highest POW death rate in U.S. military history. Former prisoners related stories of soldiers who had gone into a corner alone, sat down, pulled a blanket over their heads—and simply given up.

Major (Dr.) William E. Mayer, who would later become the Army's chief psychiatrist, was the one who conducted the study of these soldiers. Mayer discovered that the North Korean captors had used what he described as the "ultimate weapon" of war. Their objective was to "deny men the emotional support that comes from interpersonal relationships."

Imagine if God had decided to use this "ultimate weapon"! What if he no longer loved us? It's pretty hard—actually devastating—to imagine. You'd have to take away God's creation that supplies us. You'd have to remove the plan of salvation that injects hope into our life. You'd have to eliminate God's Son, Jesus, and his gift of forgiveness. You'd have to leave behind the Spirit's gift of faith. That's why God's love is vitally important. In fact, his love for us is essential. Quite simply, without God's love for us we would, like those prisoners, cease to exist.

You and I deal well with the lack of a lot of things. But a lack of love? That's like a lack of oxygen. It's not easy to get by for very long when those who are supposed to be supplying the love just don't. That's exactly what those prisoners of war discovered. And it killed them—quite literally.

Why love is important

Not surprisingly, then, the Bible tells us that our love for others is also critically important.

God explicitly commands us to love! One Christian author says that the command to love is the most repeated command in the New Testament, appearing at least 55 times. If you look in your Bible's concordance to see what the Bible says about love, you'll see that

important

Christ commands love, calling it “the greatest commandment in the law” (Matthew 22:34-40). The apostles also command love: “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart” (1 Peter 1:22). So do the prophets: “But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always” (Hosea 12:6).

Love both sums up and completely fulfills God’s will. If we fall into debt, most of us work hard to get out of it as soon as possible. In the case of love, Paul calls it the one “debt” we are to leave outstanding (Romans 13:8-10). We are to love more than we think we are loved in return. Paul descriptively says that love is essentially the “glue” that holds all virtues together: “And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (Colossians 3:14). When we love without expecting anything in return, we are doing exactly what God commands in every one of his commandments. Love perfectly sums up—and fulfills—God’s commandments.

Love is an overflow of your faith that brings glory to God. A Christian cannot just take in. Spiritually speaking, it’s not possible to take and take without, at some point, giving back. In the Bible this is referred to as “producing fruit.” Jesus tells us that—as a spiritual result of receiving God’s gift of salvation—we have a “need” to produce fruit: “Likewise every good tree bears good fruit” (Matthew 7:17). As a fruit of faith, love is so important that Jesus encourages us to “bear much” of it and bring glory to God: “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. . . . My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:8,12).

Love is a mark that identifies you as a follower of Christ. Jesus declares love to be the instrument by which we are recognized as disciples of Jesus: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you

love one another” (John 13:35). Do you want to make it easy for others to identify you as a disciple of Jesus? According to Jesus, love is how you do it.

Love gives your spiritual gifts “teeth.” Ever been on a slippery road without good tires? You go nowhere because you just sit there spinning your wheels. The apostle Paul says that without love, our spiritual gifts are neutralized—or worse! 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, Paul’s famous poetic description of love, begins with the description of a person who has tremendous gifts, but does not have love. Read it for yourself. Pay particular attention to these three phrases: “I am only . . . I am nothing . . . I gain nothing.”

Love is both a thermometer and a thermostat for the church. It’s vital for us to love others who are followers of Christ. The church in Ephesus was apparently struggling with this concept. Paul used the Ephesians’ lack of love as a key piece of evidence—a gauge—regarding their lack of maturity as believers (Ephesians 4:14-16). He also encouraged them to set the temperature of their church back to “warm” by getting back to loving one another: “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:1,2).

Christian love is important. It’s oxygen to an air-starved life. It’s the key for an imprisoned heart. It can do wonders.

Best of all, our love of others gives us the opportunity to speak about the source of love—Jesus Christ—and the greatest act of love ever committed, the cross. Now that’s love!

And there’s nothing more important than that!

Jeff Gunn is pastor at CrossWalk, Phoenix, Arizona.

This is the second article in a five-part series on love. To read other articles in the series, go to www.forwardinchrist.net, and search by the author’s first and last name.

*Love perfectly sums up
—and fulfills—
God’s commandments.*

The Bible is God's Word

We confess that the Bible is God's Word, but not everyone confesses that truth. Distortions of the Bible seem to be everywhere. Are they threats to our faith?

Brian R. Keller

Isn't it amazing how God can turn a threat into a great opportunity? I believe that's what happened in many places where God's Word was applied to Dan Brown's best-selling novel, *The Da Vinci Code*. Let me share with you my personal experience.

I obtained my copy at a library book sale for 50 cents. But, due to all the negative comments, I wasn't that eager to read it. Finally, I picked it up and started reading. I must admit that I found the mystery interesting and didn't want to put it down . . . at first. Some comments were troublesome, but I just highlighted them and kept reading. On page 231, my copy is full of pink highlighter marks. That's where Leigh Teabing, the supposedly well-informed character (who seems to reveal the author's viewpoint), says, "The Bible is a product of *man*, my dear. Not of God . . . Man created it. . . ." The rest of that chapter is full of false statements and anti-biblical claims.

Threat or opportunity?

The many false statements and claims made in *The Da Vinci Code* pose a real threat. It hinders outreach when people do not have respect for the Bible. It serves Satan's goal of lur-

ing God's people away from God's Word. But would members of our churches fall for such blatant lies? I would love to say, "No, our members would never fall for that." But I can't. Some did.

But the Lord turned this threat into an opportunity. I began working on a Bible study to address the threat. We planned a date and publicized the Bible study inside the congregation and within our community. There was much interest, and many people attended. It was an opportunity to apply God's Word to the threat. God brought together an audience of many members and plenty of nonmembers. God used his Word to strengthen his people in faith and to work in the hearts of others who gathered. It was a great opportunity!

Word of man or Word of God?

The Bible reveals that Leigh Teabing was wrong. Man did not create the Bible. "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). The Bible was given by inspiration of God. The Holy Spirit moved the writers to write the very words they wrote. That is true of every part of the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All

Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."

We can and should say that the entire Bible is God's Word. The inspired apostle Paul wrote, "We also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Paul was not the only writer inspired to write that way. Hebrews 4:12 states plainly, "The word of God is living and active."

That truth, by the way, is why I first addressed *The Da Vinci Code*'s claims by quoting Bible passages, instead of trying to make a persuasive argument based on history from outside of the Bible. Extra-biblical history can make a good case, but the most powerful weapon we have against Satan's lies is the sword of the Spirit, the pure and plain Word of God.

Which gospel is God's Word?

On page 231 of *The Da Vinci Code*, I highlighted a few more false anti-biblical claims made by the supposedly knowledgeable Teabing. After sipping his tea, he asserted that "more

than eighty gospels were considered” to be included in the New Testament. When asked, “Who chose which gospels to include?” Teabing answered, “The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great.” At that point, any true Bible scholar would be trying to avoid spitting out his tea. Even a liberal scholar would know that both claims are completely wrong. But an uninformed person might be misled.

Constantine had no more to do with selecting the gospels than you or I had to do with signing the Declaration of Independence! The four gospels were God’s Word as soon as they were written (A.D. 50-90). Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were widely regarded as God’s Holy Word at least two centuries before Constantine, who ruled A.D. 306-337. There weren’t 80 so-called “gospels.” At most, there might have been 30 apocryphal books that were written much later than the four true gospels and were never considered part of the Bible. For example, the so-called *Gospel of Thomas* was written no earlier than the middle of the second century, long after the death of the apostles. So it could not have been written by the apostle Thomas.

Many people do not realize how strange some of the contents of these books really are. *The Da Vinci Code* seems to leave the impression that these texts were much more in tune with modern feminism. But, consider this quotation from the *Gospel of Thomas*: “Simon

Peter said to them [the disciples], ‘Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of Life.’ Jesus said, ‘I myself shall lead her, in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven’ ” (v. 114).

When I read that quotation in our Bible study, I asked all the women if

**The most powerful
weapon we have against
Satan’s lies is the
sword of the Spirit,
the pure and plain
Word of God.**

they wanted to convert to this strange view. They laughed at the ridiculous suggestion. What an odd “gospel” this would be! Can you imagine trying to tell women that the way to heaven for them is that they need to become male? The *Gospel of Thomas* does not record the words of Jesus.

The gospel according to St. John does record the words of our Savior who said,

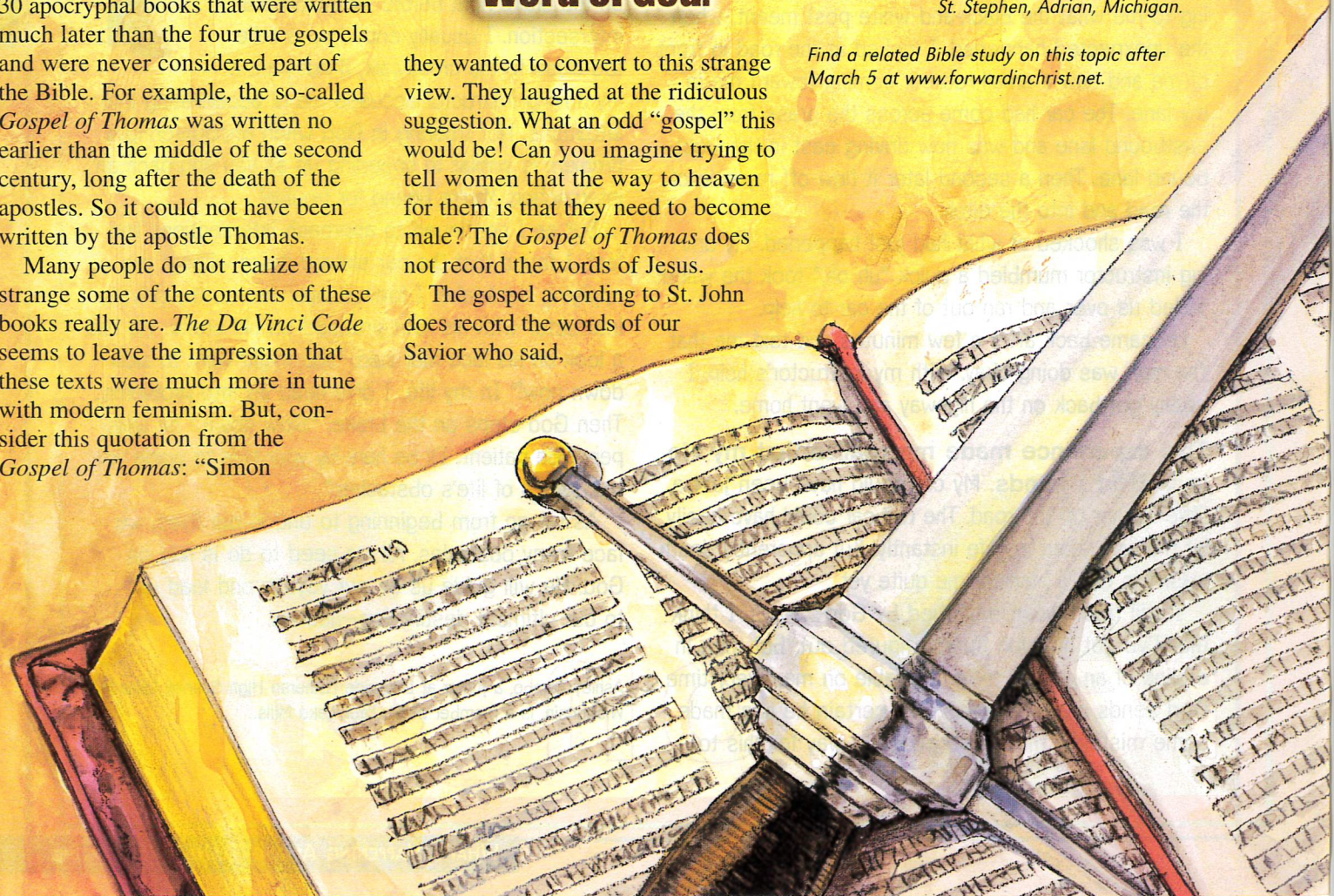
“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). That is the way to heaven. Believe in Jesus as your Savior from sin, and you will live forever in heaven! The real Bible reveals the real good news. The real Bible comforts our hearts. The real Bible is God’s Word.

**Who is that hiding behind
*The Da Vinci Code?***

In the Garden of Eden, the devil tempted our first parents to reach out for something that was not good for them. Sense his temptation. It’s really the same old thing. Through *The Da Vinci Code* and similar sources, he’s saying, “Try this ‘gospel.’ It’s better!” Don’t. It isn’t. The Bible reveals God’s love for all of us. The Bible is all we need.

Brian Keller is pastor at
St. Stephen, Adrian, Michigan.

Find a related Bible study on this topic after
March 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net.



WHATEVER

God steers my life

God will guide us on our voyage and lead us to our ultimate destination—heaven.

Ashley Zambo

Driving on the highway for the first time is frightening—at least I thought so. Not to mention it was the day before Thanksgiving, the busiest traveling day of the year. I remember my mom clearly saying to me, “Don’t let your driving instructor let you go on the highway. It’s going to be crazy out there, and you don’t know what you’re doing.” My driving instructor wasn’t convinced. He replied, “You’re going to have to face it someday, and it would be best if you were with me.” That was the end of it. I went on the highway.

We were driving along smoothly. He was explaining to me what the black-and-white post meant, when the unexpected happened. I looked at the road in front of me and saw a small red car coming toward me in my lane. The car had come across the grass from the eastbound lane and was now driving east in the westbound lane. Then a second later it flew off my side of the road and into the ditch.

I was shocked at what had just happened. My driving instructor mumbled a quick “uh oh,” took the wheel, pulled us over, and ran out of the car to help.

He came back after a few minutes and told me that the man was doing okay. With my instructor’s help, I safely got back on the highway and went home.

This experience made me realize that my life is in God’s hands. My car could have been just a little farther up the road. The red car could have easily hit me and taken my life instantly. But apparently death wasn’t in God’s plan for me quite yet.

I still find myself mystified by God’s ways. I think that I’ve got his plan for me figured out, but then in a blink of an eye he turns the table on me. Every time God sends me difficulties, I’m certain he has made some mistake. There’s no possible way for this to

turn out for my good. I’m never going to benefit from working around this obstacle he’s made for me. I convince myself that God doesn’t know what he’s doing, and I try to figure out my problems without his help. I end up being in way over my head and extremely frustrated.

When I first started driving, I wasn’t too good at stepping on the brake at the right time before a stop. I would slam on the brake right before we reached an intersection. I usually ended up a little too close to the crosswalk, if not past it. My driving instructor accused me of accelerating into situations. Not trusting in God when encountering a problem is similar to speeding up as you approach an intersection. You’re bound for trouble!

But as I continued to approach intersections too fast, I found that the car slowed down without me applying the brake. I looked over to see my driving instructor with his foot pressed on his brake. He had a look on his face that said, “You might want to slow down now!” In my life, I dive head on into problems. Then God steps on the brake. “Slow down,” he whispers. “Be patient. I’ll be here by your side to guide you through all of life’s obstacles.”

As we go from beginning to end in our lives, we face many obstacles. All we need to do is rely on God. He will guide us on our voyage and lead us to our ultimate destination—heaven.

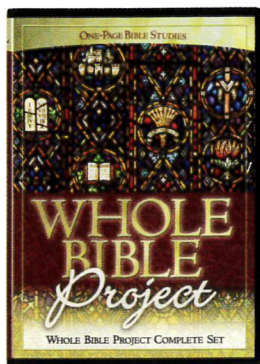
Ashley Zambo, a junior at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wisconsin, is a member at St. Paul, Lake Mills.



Booknook

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.

Bible studies for the entire Bible



Complete set, \$299.90

What do you call hundreds of concise, accurate, and adaptable Bible studies on one CD for just less than \$300? A great deal, no matter how you buy it.

Northwestern Publishing House has recently released *The Whole Bible Project*, an admirable and ambitious attempt to give pastors, teachers, group leaders, parents, and anyone else who needs to do a Bible study the tools they need to lead a lesson on any section of Scripture. They have succeeded.

Designed using the format of NPH's popular "19-Minute Bible Studies," the materials in *The Whole Bible Project* will not replace the in-depth studies that pastors and other leaders have been using. The one-page lessons, which cover several verses to several chapters of Scripture, will be of greatest value in three situations: when a brief or not-so-deep Bible study is required, when the study leader is short on time or resources for preparation, or when a study leader doesn't have the knowledge needed to put together or lead a more thorough lesson.

The studies from *The Whole Bible Project* will probably find their most common use in a congregation's regular Sunday morning adult classes and for occasions like men's and women's groups or board meetings. These materials, however, should also see a much wider use: family devotions, youth groups, dormitory studies, basic-level Bible classes for those still learning English or who know little of our faith

(I plan to use the Matthew studies with a group of Chinese immigrants), neighborhood Bible study groups, and even one's own personal devotions.

On the CD a leader will find, organized by book of the Bible, student lessons and teacher's guides in both PDF format and as RTF files, which allow for easy customization and adaptation. Leaders are referred to the appropriate pages in *The People's Bible* series. The teacher's guide includes answers to every question.

I used a selection of the studies from *The Whole Bible Project* over a few weeks with my Sunday morning adult Bible class and asked the participants to evaluate them. While all found them valuable and many really liked them, some felt that the studies—as written—were too simple and failed to challenge them. As a leader (and in reviewing many other studies we did not use), I did find many "softball" questions included—the basic "What does this say?" questions that no one wanted to answer for fear they misunderstood or missed something deeper. An experienced leader should, however, be able to easily adapt or recast these questions to better fit the group's level of knowledge and participation.

The Whole Bible Project is available as a complete set or in smaller installments that meet your need or budget. Its flexibility and utility make it well worth the investment.

Jeff Samelson
Christ, Columbia, Maryland

The *Whole Bible Project* is also available in two collections (*Old Testament and New Testament*) or 10 smaller sets. For prices, visit www.nph.net/wholebible.

Obituaries

Kenneth W. Strack 1932-2006

Kenneth W. Strack was born Nov. 6, 1932, in Milwaukee, Wis. He died Dec. 8, 2006, in Tecumseh, Mich.

A 1958 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at St. Paul, Naper, Neb.; Redeemer, Merrit Island, Fla.; and Grace, Tecumseh, Mich. He also served as chairman for the Committee on Relief.

He is preceded in death by his parents. He is survived by his wife, Charlotte; two sisters; three sons; one daughter; and 10 grandchildren.

Christopher Brian Zamenski 1970-2007

Christopher Brian Zamenski was born April 10, 1970, in Bay City, Mich. He died Jan. 18, 2007, in Zumbrota, Minn.

A 1993 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at St. Paul, Tomah, Wis.; Immanuel, Gibbon, Minn.; and Christ, Zumbrota, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Alissa; one daughter; his parents; and his parents-in-law.

READ THROUGH MY BIBLE IN 3 YEARS

APRIL 2007

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Matthew 22:1-14 | 16. Matt. 28:1-20 |
| 2. Matt. 22:15-46 | 17. Jeremiah 26 |
| 3. Matt. 23:1-22 | 18. Jer. 27, 28 |
| 4. Matt. 23:23-39 | 19. Jer. 29 |
| 5. Matt. 24:1-31 | 20. Jer. 30:1-31:26 |
| 6. Matt. 24:32-25:13 | 21. Jer. 31:27-40 |
| 7. Matt. 25:14-46 | 22. Jer. 32, 33 |
| 8. Matt. 26:1-16 | 23. Jer. 34 |
| 9. Matt. 26:17-29 | 24. Jer. 35 |
| 10. Matt. 26:30-56 | 25. Jer. 36 |
| 11. Matt. 26:57-75 | 26. Jer. 37, 38 |
| 12. Matt. 27:1-14 | 27. Jer. 39-41 |
| 13. Matt. 27:15-31 | 28. Jer. 42, 43 |
| 14. Matt. 27:32-50 | 29. Jer. 44, 45 |
| 15. Matt. 27:51-66 | 30. Jer. 46, 47 |

Martin Luther College graduates

On Dec. 20, 2006, 18 students graduated from Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.



Benjamin L. Bartsch ■
Milwaukee, Wis.



Jennifer N. Boggs ●
Indianapolis, Ind.



Scott R. Gibson ▲
Sleepy Eye, Minn.



Mark A. Gnewuch ●
Fort Atkinson, Wis.



Jason T. Leitz ●
Mason, Mich.



Joy M. Marks ●
Waukesha, Wis.



Lori E. Meyer ●
Maple Grove, Minn.



Marilyn J. Miller +
Spring, Tex.



Timothy D. Petrie ●
Fond Du Lac, Wis.



Abby A. Prah ●
New London, Wis.



Jimmie L. Roberts ●
Millington, Mich.



Benjamin J. Schramm ●
Redwood Falls, Minn.



Naomi K. Seidl ●
Volga, S.D.



Michael A. Soman ●
Toronto, Ontario, Canada



Katherine L. Voss ●
Waupun, Wis.



Rachel L. Wehrenberg ●
Apple Valley, Minn.

Not pictured:

Samantha J. Manthe ●
Minneapolis, Minn.

Jonathan W. Zarlino ●
Sterling, Va.

- Bachelor of Science in Education—Elementary Education
- ▲ Bachelor of Science in Education—Elementary and Secondary Education

- Bachelor of Science in Staff Ministry
- + Staff Ministry certification

Assignments of December 2006 graduates

Teachers

Boggs, Jennifer, to Garden Homes, Milwaukee, Wis.
Gnewuch, Mark, to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.
Meyer, Lori, to Christ-St. Peter, Milwaukee, Wis.
Schramm, Benjamin, to St. Mark's, Watertown, Wis.
Wehrenberg, Rachel, to Gethsemane, Oklahoma City, Okla.

Staff ministers

Miller, Marilyn, to Abiding Word, Houston, Tex.

Graduates from previous years were also assigned. Go to www.mlc-wels.edu/home/academics/resources/assignments for a complete list of assignments.

Where are they now?

In Forward in Christ, we report the news but aren't always able to follow up. "Where are they now?" is our way of giving you the rest of the story.

In December 2004, we reported that the Commission on Adult Discipleship had established a Women's Ministry Committee.

Here's a recap

Committee members were studying God's Word to learn about God's purposes for women so that they could share their findings with all WELS members. The committee had also established a Web site with resources for women's ministry leaders and was planning a leadership conference for women leading other women.

So what is happening now?

The Women's Ministry Committee completed its study of Scripture and wrote a Bible study, titled "Heirs Together of God's Gracious Gift of Life." Committee member Richard Gurgel, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, led the writing of the study, which focuses on the shared and unique callings that God created for men and women. The study also discusses God's plan for how men and women should work together in his kingdom. The study will be available to all WELS congregations and members in July.

"This study is to help more and more people get back to the Scriptures to understand the underlying will of God in these matters," explains Dave Kehl, the administrator of the Commission on Adult Discipleship and a member of the Women's Ministry Committee. "Many times we like to look through a narrow window of selective passages on the issues about the relationship of men and women. That often tends to draw lines of separation rather than encourage the interdependent activity of the body of Christ. This study attempts to paint the panorama of what God has made us together and how he uses us in the common mission he has given us."

Fellow committee member Judith Metzger adds, "Through the intense study of the issue of all God's people working together for the good of the kingdom, I have been profoundly impressed by the 'leveling' effect the Word has on us. In the kingdom of God, not one of us is more important to God. Not one of us has a greater pull with the King."

To help women's ministry leaders understand their important roles in God's kingdom, the Women's Ministry Committee is also following through on its goal of organizing a national women's leadership conference. The first conference is planned for July 7, 2007, at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon. The day's events will focus on introducing "Heirs Together of God's Gracious Gift of Life."

Committee members believe that examining this new Bible study will build the foundation for a new perspective that will uplift the hearts of many women—and men.

To learn more about the Women's Ministry Committee and its upcoming conference, visit www.wels.net/jump/women.

Nicole Balza



Lutheran high school closing for 2007-08

At the December 2006 board meeting of East Fork Lutheran School, White-river, Ariz., it was decided that the high school would close for the 2007-08 school year. Although the elementary school (grades K-8) will remain open, board members felt it would not be wise stewardship for the high school to begin another academic year, given the school's financial situation.

"This transition is going to be tough, but it's not all gloom and doom," says Rich Carver, principal. "There is some good that's coming out of this. There are some new doors opening up."

For example, an arrangement has been made so students can attend Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich., next year. A generous individual is willing to pay tuition for any East Fork students who want to attend Michigan Lutheran Seminary, leaving them to pay only personal expenses.

Likewise, another individual has offered to pay the tuition for a few students to attend Arizona Lutheran Academy in Phoenix. "We already have students who are interested in these options, and we are working to put together a team of people that can help them with the transition," says Carver.

A support group is also in the works for students choosing to attend nearby public high schools. "We're hoping to build on the youth ministry of East Fork church by focusing on high school kids and their families. We'd like to stay in touch with the students, help them with school work, and get some Bible studies going," says Carver.

Even though change can be hard and painful, "we're trying to look at this the way God would want us to look at it," says Carver. "Instead of focusing on the negative, we're looking at new opportunities. It's a way of reinventing our ministry."

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:

Meet Alicia Neumann. Creative. Entertaining. Spirited. As the new communication projects manager for WELS Communication Services and assistant editor for *Forward in Christ*, she helps to bring you news through *Forward in Christ* and other synod publications.

Neumann has always enjoyed writing and loves to tell stories. “I’m afraid I’m almost as bad as the old men and their fish tales,” she confesses. “I tend to do a bit of embellishing to make a story more dramatic—it’s much more interesting that way!” Even though she doesn’t use these storytelling tactics at work, Neumann feels blessed to have a meaningful job in which she can use her writing skills and other communication experiences to the glory of God.

Growing up in a Minnesota farming community with three rambunctious younger sisters, Neumann says that her childhood adventures are a hilarious book just waiting to be written. “I’ll take on that project just as soon

as my sisters are old enough not to be embarrassed, or I am living a ‘safe’ distance away from them,” she says, laughing.

Neumann graduated from Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minn., in December 2004 with a degree in communication studies. While in school, she worked as an intern for a local newspaper and then in Gustavus’ marketing and public relations office. She interned at Mayo Clinic’s communications department and later joined their freelance writing staff. She and Matt, her husband of two and a half years, also lived in Florida for a year while he trained as a motorcycle mechanic at the American Motorcycle Institute.

While Neumann enjoyed her work for Mayo, she is positive that God was guiding her mouse as she browsed the WELS Web site and ended up on the



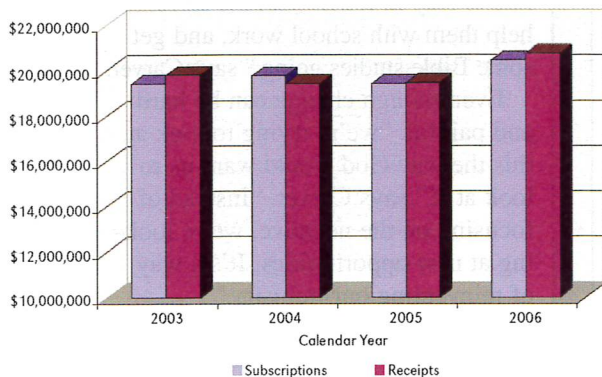
Alicia and her husband, Matt, on one of their fishing adventures in Kabetogama, Minn., this past summer.

Human Resources page, reading her current job description. Within two weeks of accepting the position, she and Matt packed their things and moved from Elgin, Minn., to Waukesha, Wis. Since her first day in the office in November 2006, she’s been slowly but surely learning all of the WELS acronyms and, of course, delving into each new aspect of her position. She is looking forward to serving God alongside her coworkers at WELS Communication Services.

Congregation Mission Offerings increased in 2006

Congregations followed through on their 2006 Congregation Mission Offering commitments by submitting more than the projected amount for the calendar year. The amount, \$20.2 million, was a four percent increase over the \$19.5 million in 2005. WELS

Congregation Mission Offerings



ministry costs, however, increase annually at a rate of five to six percent.

“I cannot find enough ways to say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servants,’” said Dave Liggett, director of Christian Giving. “I’m confident that as we strive to ‘excel in the grace of giving’ we will see our rate of giving keep up with the costs of carrying out ministry year by year, and, with God’s blessing, we can increase giving to the point where current ministry can be expanded.” Churches are presently submitting their commitments for 2007.

Congregation Mission Offerings is a portion of member offerings committed each year by WELS congregations for synod-level ministries. It is the primary

source of synod support, making up 63 percent of total revenue. Other sources include gifts from individuals (8%), foundation grants (24%), and bequests (5%). All sources fund the 2006-07 fiscal year budget of \$32.7 million. Nearly 75 percent of the WELS budget goes to support missions and ministerial education, while the remainder goes toward such things as support for the Conference of Presidents, mission advancement, administration, and infrastructure like technology and accounting.

More information about the synod’s budget and the gospel ministry being carried out through your offerings can be found in the WELS 2006 Annual Report. Your church may have a copy. Otherwise view it online at www.wels.net/jump/annualreport.

World Missions: planting churches and spreading the gospel

For more than 50 years, WELS World Missions has been reaching out to lost souls around the globe. Through the hard work of missionaries, pastors, teachers, and laypeople, World Missions is able to raise up churches in some of the world's most powerful—and most desolate—nations.

“The Earth's population is approximately 6.5 billion people,” says Dan Koelpin, administrator for World Missions. “That means right now we have the largest mission field that's ever existed in the history of the world.”

Spreading the gospel to that many people is no easy task. Gospel work in foreign lands requires a certain amount of funding—something that's been hard to come by in the past few years due to synod budget cuts. “Because we have limited funds, we're using alternate strategies,” says Koelpin. “We're identifying areas with minimal growth, in spite of faithful effort, and redeploying funds and resources to areas where the Lord appears to be blessing efforts and providing great opportunities.”

And the opportunities abound. For example, South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission (SALEM), the Chinese national church in Hong Kong, operates a government-sponsored high school. Many of the 1,200 students become attached to the church through the Christian instruction received at the school.

“We're also teaching leaders for tomorrow to reach out to the Chinese-speaking world through Asia Lutheran Seminary, opened in May 2005,” says Koelpin. With a strong Lutheran foundation and a curriculum framed for modern Asia, the seminary is training lay and pastor candidates for outreach work. The seminary will soon complete its second year of teaching and rejoice in its first graduate.

In the same fashion, World Missions, together with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's Pastoral Studies Institute, is training Apaches for ministry through

the Apache Christian Training School (ACTS) program. Instead of making students leave their culture for extended ministerial training in the Midwest, this new program brings courses to students in Apacheland. Other Native Americans have attended Arizona State University to become accredited counselors, and are helping families with social, cultural, and religious issues. “We need professionally trained people and peer groups capable of addressing problems and helping one another on the reservation,” says Koelpin.

Leadership training is very important. Native persons are the best witnesses in their own culture. For example, the national church in Indonesia—a country that is 85 percent Muslim—is growing by 100 to 200 members per year. This growth is possible because many of the members of the church are former Muslims, and they know how to reach out to the Muslim people. “This church is being served by one friendly counselor, but the national leaders are taking part in leadership and planning,” says Koelpin.

And that's the goal of World Missions: to go into a country; “plant” a church; and, as it grows, to help that church become self-sufficient. Once leaders have been trained and the church can stand on its own, missionaries will go to a new region and start the planting process all over again. “We're not trying to create WELS international. We want a consortium of churches in our fellowship that are our brothers and sisters in doctrine and faith, but at the same time they carry out their church government and worship in the context of their own culture,” says Koelpin.

Although the number of souls in WELS' world mission fields has doubled from 33,000 to 75,000 in the



Local children outside after a worship service in Malawi, Africa. This region of Africa is one of WELS' largest and most established mission fields. Between Malawi and Zambia, there are approximately 50,000 members.



Residents of Nepal participating in a Bible study. In the countries of Nepal and Pakistan, roughly 3,000 souls gather around the literature WELS provides—and this happens without the presence of a resident missionary.

past 12 years, and more than 50 missionaries are currently operating in 23 different countries, “We've hardly started our work,” says Koelpin. Even though thousands are confirmed or baptized into the Christian faith each day, there are still millions—perhaps billions—of people who haven't heard God's Word. “We need to have a sense of urgency about it,” says Koelpin. “This work is not about us. It's about the Lord and his kingdom.”

For more information about World Missions, visit www.wels.net/jump/bwm or call 414-256-3233. (Note: For the security of missionaries and their families, not all mission fields will be listed online.)



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.

I have always wondered why when I have had almost 30 years' experience of God's undeserving grace that I continue to pray for my faith to be that of a child's unwavering and ever-trusting faith. Watching my daughter answers that question.

At a young age, my daughter always seemed to be full of questions. When she started going to Sunday school and preschool, she seemed fascinated by the Bible stories. When she was three and a half, she began asking questions about heaven. One day she asked if her grandmas and grandpas knew about Jesus, and then if her aunts and uncles and cousins did as well. At first, I was shocked because two of her uncles were pastors and one of her grandmas was a WELS school teacher. But then I thought about what she was asking me. In her way she was reaching out with her faith and wanted to know if the people she loved needed to know about Jesus.

Over the years my daughter has been faced with many opportunities to share her faith, including at school. Since we don't have a Lutheran school with our church, this year was the first year that my daughter was in a

public school full time. While growing up, I had been blessed with a faithful Christian family that had been able to put me through a Lutheran day school, high school, and college. I wanted the same for my daughter—for her to go to a school where she could hear about Jesus every day and where she could pray with her class and teacher.

But I quickly realized what a blessing it was that she was in public school. After the first month of school, my daughter proudly announced that she, Joseph, and Morgan prayed before lunch and snack that day. Two months later my daughter said that she had a friend at school that didn't believe in Jesus. She went on to say that she had asked her friend if she believed in Jesus and her friend told her: "No. Jesus is just a ghost." My daughter's response was: "No, he's real!" The next day my daughter came home and said that she asked her friend Terri, who is in her Sunday school class, to help her talk to this other friend about Jesus. My daughter certainly is persistent.

If only I could always have that simple and persistent faith of a child and shout it from the mountaintops that Jesus is our Savior!

Amy Holtz

WELS news briefs

Joint Mission Council

414-256-3286; bhm@sab.wels.net



In October 2006, the WELS Hmong-Lao Mission Committee (Pastors Leon Piepenbrink, Pheng Moua, Jim Plitzuweit, and Bob Edwards) visited Thailand and surrounding areas to see the blessings and challenges of WELS mission work there. Pastor Tom Chaleunsouk took the committee to various villages. While there, the

committee attended an area worship service with nearly 100 in attendance and participated in 13 baptisms and 11 confirmations. Pictured are the committee and the newly baptized individuals. For more information about this trip, check out the Spring 2007 *Mission Connection*.

Adult Discipleship

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

Thanks to WELS Kingdom Workers, "The Service Zone," the fifth episode in the *Fifth Pew from the Front* series, has been distributed free to all congregations for group and individual use. Each episode in the series contains a 30- to 45-minute Christian sitcom, Bible study vignettes, and accompanying printable materials available online at www.fifthpew.com. Other episodes are available online

at www.nph.net/welsproducts, or by calling Northwestern Publishing House at 800-662-6022.

Evangelism

414-256-3287; coe@sab.wels.net

The Commission on Evangelism has developed materials to assist congregations with holding an Evangelism Sunday in 2007. The theme will follow the North American outreach emphasis for 2007, which is "Every Life for Christ." Materials will include a sermon, worship helps, children's message, and Bible study. You can download the materials on the Evangelism Web site, www.wels.net/evangelism.

These updates are from the offices of the synod administration building at 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398.

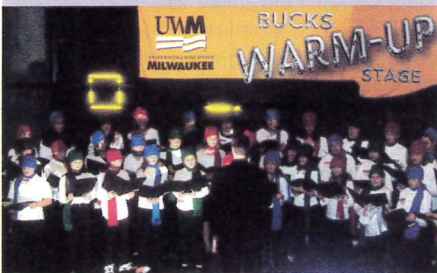
District news

Western Wisconsin

St. Peter, Schofield, Wis., dedicated its new childcare and ministry center in January. The center is part of the congregation's multi-site ministry to the town of Weston, Wis., and was funded in part by WELS Church Extension Fund loans.

These pastors are reporters for the districts featured this month: MI—John Eich, SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Brett Brauer.

Southeastern Wisconsin



Students in the junior choir at Peace, Hartford, Wis., sang Christmas carols at the Bradley Center just before the Milwaukee Bucks basketball game on Dec. 23, 2006. Directed by teacher Mike Marquardt, the choir also sang the National Anthem at center court.

Michigan



St. Paul, South Haven, Mich., dedicated its new church building on Dec. 17, 2006. Among the attendees were eight people who attended the dedication of the former church building exactly 80 years ago. Pictured are: (back row) Elizabeth Barner and Frieda Antonson, (front row, left to right) Erdmann Haase, Gerhardt Radtke, Edna Schlaack, Martha Schnake, Margaret Harsch, and Ilene Muth.

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

My wife Lisa and I have been teaching our children how to pray before meals and bedtime. One day while we tried to corral our two-and-a-half-year-old son, Micah, to go down for a nap, he ran into his bedroom, stopped at the foot of the bed, put his hands together, and began saying, "Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest. . . ." He made it through the entire prayer before asking to be put in bed. He had the right idea. It wasn't exactly the bedtime prayer of which I was thinking. However, I can't argue that naptime is a gift from God.

Timothy Gray
Onalaska, Wisconsin

In the news



The *Daily Jefferson County Union* featured **Steve Zambo, media director for WELS, and his non-profit movie endeavors** on the front page of its Jan. 2 issue. Salty Earth Pictures is based in Fort Atkinson, Wis. With a new 16,000 square-foot studio, the organization is able to film a variety of projects, including *Fifth Pew from the Front* and the award-winning movie *Movie Critters' Big Picture*. "Our goal is to create entertainment that challenges minds, lightens hearts, and strengthens souls," Zambo said in the story. In addition to shooting and producing movies, the studio is used as an educational facility. Studio tours, workshops, and even scholarships are available for students pursuing careers in the arts. "We really want to be a learning center for people to expand their interest in this area," said Zambo.

The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reported the **Jan. 4 bus accident** involving coaches and members of the girls' basketball team from Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis. Although the bus was hit by a car, swerved into the median, and rolled once before landing on its side, no one was seriously injured. Principal Ned Goede was quoted as saying, "We see God's hand in this."

On Jan. 19, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reported on the dedication of **Risen Savior's** \$1.75 million addition. The article focused on how members in this formally all-white Milwaukee congregation adapted to their changing neighborhood and began reaching out to their Hispanic and African-American neighbors. According to the article, now 26 percent of Risen Savior's members are African-American and 15 percent are Hispanic.

DEFINING RELIGION

Ash Wednesday—the first day of Lent occurring 40 days before Easter (excluding Sundays). It received its name from the ancient custom of Christians putting ashes (from the previous year's Palm Sunday palms) on their foreheads as a sign of penitence.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Bauer, Steven F., to Faith, West Newton, Pa.
Fredrich, Edwin C., to The Lutheran Home Association, Belle Plaine, Minn.
Limmer, Bill F., to Milwaukee Campus Ministry, Milwaukee Federation, Milwaukee, Wis.
Semro, Jonathan M., to Prince of Peace, Houston, Tex.
Wagner, Timothy R., to Abiding Peace, Elgin, Ill.
Weber, Aaron T., to Zion, South Milwaukee, Wis.

Teachers

Doberpuhl, Heath D., to Minnesota Valley LHS, New Ulm, Minn.
Farstad, David R., to St. Paul, Beverly Hills, Fla.
Hahnke, Seth M., to Fox Valley LHS, Appleton, Wis.
Honeck, Tracy, to Shoreland LHS, Somers, Wis.
Houser, Vicki J., to Riverview, Appleton, Wis.
Koepsell, Jeffrey G., to Minnesota Valley LHS, New Ulm, Minn.
Lemke, Steven A., to Trinity, Kaukauna, Wis.
Rupnow, Joni R., to St. John, Milwaukee, Wis.
Warning, Katherine L., to Christ-St. Peter, Milwaukee, Wis.

ANNIVERSARIES

Flower Mound, Tex.—Prince of Peace (25). May 6, 4:30 P.M. Dinner to follow service. RSVP requested. Lee Niethammer, 972-317-6016; LeeFN@aol.com.
St. Paul Park, Minn.—St. Andrew's school (50). May 6, 10:30 A.M. Lunch to follow. RSVP requested. Eric Oakland, 651-459-3021; standrews50th@yahoo.com.
Milwaukee, Wis.—Divine Peace (50). May 20, 10 A.M. Luncheon to follow. William Bernhardt, 414-545-4345 or Amanda Kohlmetz, 262-662-9638; amanda.kohlmetz@wlc.edu.
Lincoln, Neb.—St. Mark (50). June 10, 10 A.M. Meal to follow. 402-423-1497.
Tampa, Fla.—Northdale (50). June 10. Morning worship, 10 A.M.; Anniversary service, 3 P.M. Dinner to follow. 813-961-9195.
Beloit, Wis.—Good Shepherd (50). June 17, 10 A.M. Luncheon to follow. Dawn Martin, 608-362-8720.

COMING EVENTS

Concerts—Reach the World WELS Choir, Tucson, Ariz. Web site, www.reachtheworldchoir.com.
 • March 2—Grace, Tucson, Ariz., 7 P.M.
 • March 10—Hope, Chino Valley, Ariz., 1 P.M.
 • March 11—Mt. Calvary, Flagstaff, Ariz., morning worship

- March 24—Beautiful Savior, El Paso, Tex., evening concert, TBA
- March 25—Trinity, El Paso, Tex., 10:15 A.M. worship; Emmanuel, Las Cruces, N.M., afternoon, TBA
- April 11—St. Paul's, Douglas, Ariz., 10 A.M.
- April 15—Peace, Cottonwood, Ariz., Sunday morning worship
- April 28, 29—Immanuel, Lakeside, Ariz., Saturday concert and Sunday morning worship
- May 20—Resurrection, Phoenix, Ariz., 10 A.M.

Tour—Prep Singers, Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

- March 14—Sola Fide, Lawrenceville, Ga., 7 P.M.
- March 15—Abiding Peace, Simpsonville, S.C., 7 P.M.
- March 16—Hope, Irmo, S.C., 7 P.M.
- March 17—Messiah, Alpharetta, Ga., 5:30 P.M.
- March 18—Faith, Sharpsburg, Ga., 10:30 A.M.; Lamb of God, Madison, Ala., 7 P.M.
- March 19—Saving Grace, Mobile, Ala., 7 P.M.
- March 20—Saint Paul, Beverly Hills, Fla., 7 P.M.
- March 21—Bay Pines, Seminole, Fla., 7 P.M.
- March 22—Crown of Life, Fort Myers, Fla., 7 P.M.
- March 25—Beautiful Savior, Marietta, Ga., 8:15 and 11 A.M.

Pathways to Christ Retreat—March 16-18. LaSure's Hall, Oshkosh, Wis. Paula Nimmer, 920-233-1069.

Concert—Lakeshore Lutheran Chorale, March 25, 7 P.M. St. John St. James, Reedsville, Wis.

Tour—Concert Choir, Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

- March 28—New Hope, Toledo, Ohio, 7:30 P.M.
- March 29—Crown of Life, Marietta, Ohio, 7:30 P.M.
- March 30—Prince of Peace, Martinez, Ga., 7 P.M.
- March 31—Good Shepherd, Deltona, Fla., 4 P.M.
- April 1—Our Savior's, Port Orange, Fla., 9 and 11 A.M.; Risen Savior, Orlando, Fla., 4 P.M.; King of Kings, Maitland, Fla., 7 P.M.
- April 2—New Hope, West Melbourne, Fla., 7 P.M.
- April 3—Hope, West Palm Beach, Fla., 7 P.M.
- April 4—Abiding Love, Cape Coral, Fla., 6:45 P.M.
- April 5—Ascension, Sarasota, Fla., 7 P.M.
- April 6—Abiding Grace, Covington, Ga., 7 P.M.
- April 8—Living Word, Gray, Tenn., 8:15 and 10:45 A.M.; Beautiful Savior, Cincinnati, Ohio, 6:15 P.M.

Concert—Michael Schroeder. April 3, 8 P.M. Weasler Auditorium, Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wis. Hosted by Marquette WELS Campus Ministry. muwels@muwels.org.

WELS Regional Handbell Festivals—A concert will be held at 2 P.M., on each of the respective Sundays. Kim Pilz, kim@tomah.com.

- April 14-15. Host, Salem, Loretto, Minn.; site, West Lutheran High School, Plymouth, Minn.
- April 21-22. Host, St. Peter, Schofield, Wis.; site, D.C. Everst Junior High School, Schofield, Wis.
- April 21-22. Host, Peace, Hartford, Wis.; site, Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.

Women's Enrichment Weekend—April 20-22. Salem, Stillwater, Minn. Karen Diethert, 715-549-6519; diethert@sbcglobal.net.

Concert—Cascade Lutheran Chorale, April 22, 4 P.M. Grace, Portland, Ore.

WELS Summer Band Camp—for grades 6-9. June 24-29. Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis. Housing is available. Rich Mannisto, 414-525-9232.

National WELS Women's Leadership Conference—July 7. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Sponsored by the Adult Discipleship Women's Ministry Committee. Web site, www.wels.net/jump/womensministry.

Greece tour/cruise—July 11-21. "In the Footsteps of St. Paul" includes Athens and Corinth and a seven-day cruise of the Greek Isles. James Humann, jhumann383@aol.com.

Summer Hebrew Institute—July 16-20. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Thomas Nass, nasstp@mlc-wels.edu.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Organist/music coordinator—Good Shepherd, Plymouth, Wis., is seeking an individual or individuals willing to serve part time as its organist and/or music coordinator. Charles Heup, 920-893-0207.

NAMES WANTED

South Padre Island, Brownsville, or Harlingen, Tex.—Joel T. Sauer, 956-968-5228.

People moving to or vacationing in Bella Vista, Ark.—Neil Hansen, 479-855-7853; neil.hansen@cox.net.

Soldiers and families at Fort Drum, N.Y., or Binghamton, N.Y. region—Jeremiah Gumm, 315-622-2843.

Students and other WELS members living in the greater Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, N.C., area—Rob Guenther, 919-847-0579.

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/jump/bulletinboard.

Facts and a quiz about

ZAMBIA AND AFRICA

- the capital is Lusaka
- it's slightly larger than Texas
- its population is approximately 11,502,000
- the life expectancy of its residents is approximately 40 years
- the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is 16.5 percent
- it is estimated that 50-75 percent of residents are Christian, 24-49 percent are Muslim and Hindu, and one percent of residents have indigenous beliefs
- the literacy rate is 80 percent
- there are 231,000 Internet users

Statistics from www.wels.net/jump/zambia



Picture this

Pictured is Vivien Gierach of St. John, Ann Arbor, Mich., and students of the Holiday Bible School, part of Bethel Lutheran Church in Zambia, Africa. Last August more than 200 students attended the Bible school, which Gierach and seven other WELS members helped teach. The group also visited an orphanage and worshipped with neighboring bush congregations. This mission trip was organized by Gierach, who previously lived in Zambia and served with her husband there.

Submitted by Vivien Gierach

AFRICA: TRUE OR FALSE?

1. Africa is the world's largest continent.
2. Africa is the world's most populous continent.
3. Overall, the population of Africa is relatively young.
4. Africa is the world's poorest inhabited continent.
5. Africa has many football teams.
6. Dance is an important part of African culture.
7. Africa has one of the world's largest wild animal populations.

1. False. Africa is the world's second largest continent, after Asia. Including adjacent islands, it covers six percent of the Earth's total surface area. **2. False.** Africa is the world's second most-populous continent, with more than 890,000 people (as of year 2005). This continent accounts for about 14 percent of the world's human population. **3. True.** The last 40 years have seen a rapid increase in population, resulting in a younger population. In fact, in some African states more than 50 percent of the population is under 25 years old. **4. True.** Although South Africa has a wealth of natural resources as the world's leading producers of both gold and diamonds, and Nigeria sits on one of the largest proven oil reserves in the world, Africa is the world's poorest inhabited continent largely due to the effects of corrupt governments and despotism (a political system in which the ruler exercises absolute power). **5. True.** But it's not the same as North American football. Outside of the United States, the term football is commonly used to describe the sport soccer. Currently, more than 50 African countries have football teams, and in 2010 South Africa will host the World Cup tournament (the first African country to do so). **6. True.** African dances serve as a mode of communication, and dancers use gestures, masks, costumes, body painting, and many visual devices. **7. True.** Africa has a stunning combination of density and diversity of wild animal populations, including large carnivores (lions, hyenas, and cheetahs), herbivores (buffalo, deer, elephants, camels, and giraffes), a variety of jungle creatures (snakes and primates), and aquatic life (crocodiles and amphibians).

Statistics from Wikipedia online encyclopedia, www.wikipedia.org.

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.

Every Life for Christ:



John A. Braun

GOD EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

Work is God's calling for us all. The jobs are as different as we are, but no matter the job, our daily hours are in his hands every day in every way.

The grass grows every day. Soon we will have to cut it or let our lawns become the neighborhood eyesore. The birds fly every day, and many will make the long migration back to the Northern Hemisphere. Jesus reminded us that these things happen without our worry (Matthew 6:25-34).

God calls us to work and blesses our labor

When God placed man and woman into this world, he gave them the responsibility to care for the garden (Genesis 2:15). Adam and Eve had

not work, he shall not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

So we go to work every day. At times we grumble; the thorns and thistles of sin are still evident. At times we enjoy what we are doing. Work is a gift of God no less than the sun and the grass. But God attaches a special blessing to work: we get paid.

Perhaps we don't stop and think how God cares for us and for our family through our work often enough. It's so ordinary and common. But there in your everyday work God provides for you and your family, for his church,

pose. But believers in Jesus do have a perspective that can put a smile on their face and a melody in their conversation. They are redeemed and forgiven by grace, fully and completely. They understand that God is giving them blessings through their everyday labor. They now that their greatest blessings in Jesus are hidden away from view, secure in God's hands.

Others don't have the same vision. An atheist has no sense of eternal life through Jesus—or through anyone else for that matter. He works to acquire the most and the best. His treasure is here, "where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal" (Matthew 6:19). Our treasure is in heaven. So smile.

Here we work hard, sweat, and strain. But in all the ups and downs, God is taking care of us and providing us with the resources to live, love, and labor. Work is God's calling for us all. The jobs are as different as we are, but no matter the job, our daily hours are in his hands every day in every way.

John Braun is executive editor of Forward in Christ.

This is the second article in an eight-part series on vocation. To read other articles in the series, go to www.forwardinchrist.net, and search by the author's first and last name.

WORK IS A GIFT OF GOD NO LESS THAN THE SUN AND THE GRASS.

a call from God to work—it was a part of their vocation in this world. As they cared for God's creation, God blessed them. He made the ground respond to their effort.

Sadly, God also later added difficulty to their labor. Adam and Eve disobeyed. Then the ground not only yielded good things but also thorns and thistles. Yet their calling remained. So we find God blessing people through all the ages as men and women worked.

In everyday labor, God is there blessing what we do. When we go to work, we simply do God's will. He connected the dots of work and food when he said, "If a man will

and for others. It's your calling to work. As long as the work is honest, God provides his blessings.

A Christian outlook brings a smile

Of course, you don't have to be a Christian to experience this blessing from God. He tells us that the sun shines on the evil and the good and that he sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous (Matthew 5:45). In other words, you get a paycheck the same way your neighbor does even if he is an atheist.

God doesn't always give his people better treatment in this life than the unbelievers. It seems unfair, I sup-

NOTKER THE STAMMERER:

A cheerful believer Theodore J. Hartwig

How can we wake up in the morning cheerful? Some of us have difficulty grumbling a simple "Good Morning." But a cheerful smile can be an encouragement for others.

In Europe of the Middle Ages, it was a general rule that younger sons of the nobility would not inherit the father's title nor property. So it happened that Notker, as the younger son, was sent off to the religious life in Switzerland's St. Gall monastery. Because of a speech impediment, he came to be called "the Stammerer." Yet this less than complimentary nickname did not sour his character. On the contrary, his persistent cheerful disposition won him the love and respect of his fellow monks.

Thoughtful and cheerful

Notker quickly distinguished himself as the monastery's best student. He was skilled in poetry, medicine, and music. So he became the natural choice as the monastery's librarian and physician. His poetic talent was employed at composing hymns. He understood their power for comforting the despondent, refreshing hearts of the weary, and bringing wrongdoers to repentance. He also discovered that when he sang his stammer disappeared.

Not a few anecdotes about Notker have survived in the monastic annals of St. Gall. His intelligence, for example, attracted the attention of Charlemagne's grandson, Emperor Charles the Fat. On one occasion when the imperial messenger arrived at St. Gall for an answer to a question sent by the emperor, he found Notker in the monastic garden hoeing weeds and watering plants. After waiting a long time for some

word of counsel from the monk, the exasperated messenger asked, "What shall I tell the emperor?" With a chuckle, Notker responded, "Tell him what you just saw me doing. That and no more." When this came back to the emperor, it dawned on him after much thought what Notker was advising. He should tear the weeds of worry from his heart, replace them with justice and charity, and protect the garden of people entrusted to his care.

At another time, the emperor's chaplain, a conceited fellow, challenged Notker with a question he thought beyond the monk's competence. "Tell me," he asked, "what at this moment God is doing in heaven?" Looking on his questioner with pity, Notker responded, "He is doing what he has always done. He is performing mighty deeds with his arm and scattering the proud in their conceits."

Singing to lift the spirit

Notker is credited with composing the hymn, "In the Midst of Earthly Life, Snares of Death Surround Us" (*Christian Worship* 534). With this song in his heart, death did not overtake him by stealth. He fell asleep peacefully on April 8, 912, and was buried in the cathedral at St. Gall.

It is said that this hymn was inspired by the sight of workmen, who, at great personal danger, were throwing a bridge over a deep Alpine chasm. In the midst of their lives, they indeed were threatened by death. Familiar

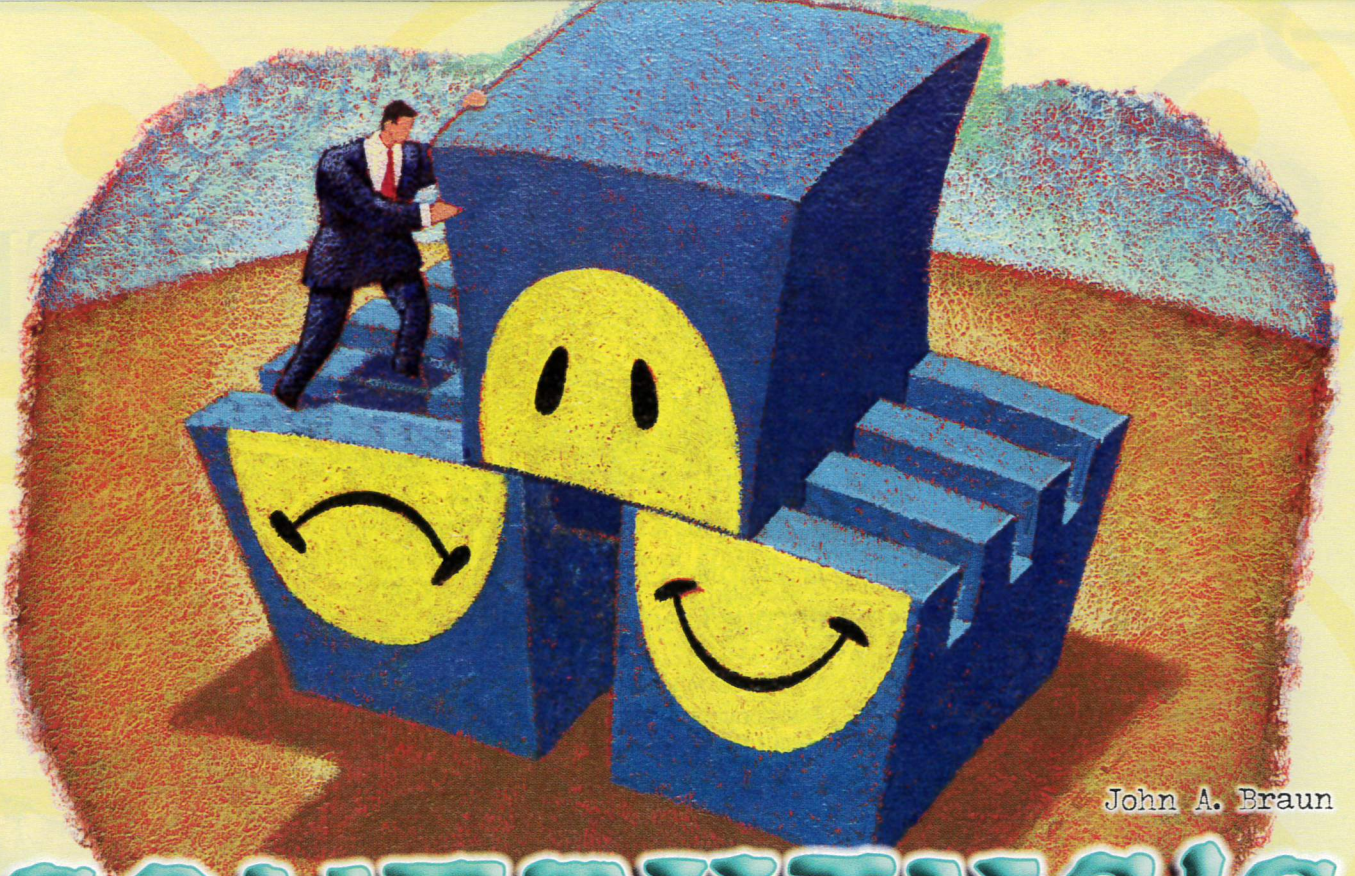


with Notker's hymn, Luther, with his own gift for poetry, translated its single stanza and added two more.

Fond of paradoxes, Luther commented: "Yes, Notker's word rings true, but God says 'No, in the midst of death we live.' Abraham had been told by God that he must sacrifice the son of his old age. He raised the knife to slay his son. The boy bared his throat. If God had slept an instant, the boy would have been dead. But God was watching. The angel cried, 'Abraham, Abraham!' See how the divine majesty is at hand in the hour of death. We say, 'In the midst of life we die.' God answers. 'No, in the midst of death we live.'"

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

Next month: Elizabeth of Thuringia



John A. Braun

SOMETHING'S JUST NOT RIGHT

One Christian's journey through life means bearing the cross of mental illness.

Are you sick? Most people can answer that question simply. A pain somewhere is a symptom that something is wrong. If you have the flu or a cold, you know it. We even measure our sickness by what the thermometer reveals. If you have a fever, you call in sick and stay in bed until you get better.

Mental illness is different. Many don't feel sick. Often it's the behavior that others note. They ask, "Are you all right?" But there is no temperature, no pain, no symptoms that prompt you to call the doctor or stay in bed.

MENTAL ILLNESS CAN ASSERT ITSELF INTO ANY LIFE

Thomas Wilsmann knows how that works. He suffers from bipolar disorder. Now he takes medication for his sickness and checks in with a psychiatrist every two months. He has kept his illness under control since his last episode 18 years ago.

He is the pastor of a congregation in Wisconsin. Once during a Christmas Eve service his mind was racing, he

thought he was getting messages in unusual ways, and he stood up and sat down at inappropriate times.

Four years earlier while he served a congregation in Michigan his mind was racing too. He didn't think it was strange that he was getting messages from the radio. He describes the episode as similar to what happened to John Nash in the movie *Beautiful Mind*. Wilsmann was institutionalized at the time. His family realized something was wrong and sought help for him.

One of the problems of treatment is finding the right medication. Different people need different medications. Often the side effects of a particular medication don't show up immediately but over a period of time. That's one of the reasons he continues to see a psychiatrist.

A FAMILY BRINGS HELP

But this is a story of family and God's care. After his stay in the hospital, he went home to be with his family. His sister graduated from Dr. Martin Luther College during that time, and, like many other families, they traveled

God cares for the mentally ill as surely as he cares for the birds.

to New Ulm for the big day. But he had an adverse reaction to his medication.

The first sign that something still wasn't right was in the motel room in New Ulm. He had a manic episode; his mind raced, and he tossed and turned all night. His brother was the first to notice the problem. Then during the graduation service he couldn't sit still. He got up and walked out once, but when he returned he had a case of "happy feet" as he described it.

After the services his family took matters into their hands. They simply said, "You're not well. We made this appointment for you." Wilsmann came to Milwaukee for treatment. But then back in Michigan he received medication for depression instead of bipolar disorder, and he quit taking it. He told himself, "I don't need this. I'm not sick."

In the end he got the treatment he needed. Now he has the right medication and still sees the psychiatrist that recommended his treatment. Yes, God cares for the mentally ill as surely as he cares for the birds (Matthew 6).

SOME LESSONS

According to Wilsmann those suffering from bipolar disorder fall into thirds. "One-third of them usually have one episode, and then things go well again without a problem. Another third requires constant meds. A final third gets progressively worse in spite of treatment."

At first they thought that he was in the first third—one episode and then no other problems. But the second episode caused a reevaluation. He is in the second third and must take medication for the sickness. He said, "It's the cross I have to bear. It's like anything else in life. Some have another chronic illness; this is mine." He's living with the disorder and continues to serve as a pastor. For him, staying well means taking the medication even when he thinks he doesn't need it, getting enough sleep, and finding ways to reduce stress. His congregation has been supportive and understanding.

He has learned from his experiences. First, he finds comfort in God's gift of faith. The Holy Spirit has given him faith in Jesus. "Faith is not a gift of the mind," he says. Little babies have faith before they have all their mental abilities, and faith persists even to the end of life for those who lose their mental abilities. The washing of baptism is such a rich comfort.

Second, he has become more sensitive to psychiatric illnesses. In two cases, he has provided comfort for families of suicides. Understanding the circumstances in each case, he says that the mental illness was the disease that killed them.

And he is watchful for the return of his own symptoms. Lack of sleep, irritability, and a racing mind usually signal the first signs of trouble ahead. Then he has to take additional medication. He says that his

secretary is the one who notices the symptoms and sounds the first note of concern.

This disorder seems to be more difficult to control during the Thanksgiving and Christmas season and again at Easter. No one knows why for sure. One suggestion is that it seems to have something to do with the changes in the light—less daylight in winter and increasing daylight in spring.

WHAT IF MENTAL ILLNESS IS A PROBLEM IN YOUR LIFE?

Other families experience such trouble too. It may not be bipolar disorder, but other mental illnesses also need the love and care of Christian families.

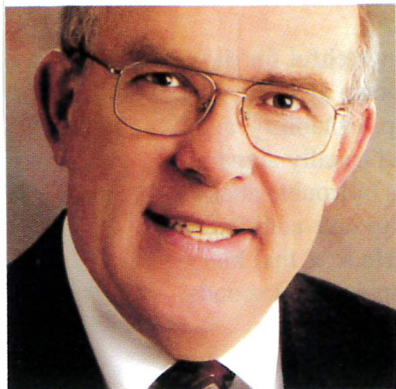
What can we do? Christian concern first begins with prayer. Jesus encourages us to bring our troubles and burdens to him and directs us to pray for each other. Our prayers should ask God for the strength and wisdom to do whatever we can for the one who has some mental disorder.

We can also advise the individual. A loving Christian friend or family member can suggest, "You need help." But don't be surprised when he says, "I'm not sick." Continue to exercise Christian love and sensitivity. Watch for signs that the one you care about is a danger to himself or herself or even a danger to others.

We can also encourage him to go to a psychiatrist or another mental health professional. There are Christian professionals who deal with mental disorders. Seek them out. Ask questions. Family members have an advantage because they can be more aggressive in forcing a loved one to get help. Even then individuals can conclude they don't need treatment because they believe they are not sick. Friends have more difficulty because they have no legal rights. Christian love, however, continues to seek what is best for someone else.

Mental illness is a cross to bear like other crosses. Like other crosses, we can carry it with the help and power of God. The cross may be our own mental disorder. It may just as easily be the burden of seeing a loved one suffer from some disorder that we cannot correct. We simply must endure these troubles too. The crown of life awaits all the faithful no matter what the crosses of this life may be.

John Braun is the executive editor of Forward in Christ.



Karl R. Gungl

Go fly a kite!

The winds of March loft little boys' kites. In days gone by, windmills pumped water from wells. Today the wind powers turbines, providing an alternate form of electricity. Cooling breezes bring welcome relief on a hot summer's day.

Just as often, though, winds are destructive forces. Tornadoes, hurricanes, and typhoons knock down power poles, plunging areas into darkness and filling people's hearts with fear and anxiety.

While visiting our son last spring in China, we saw many young and not-so-young people flying kites. Not all of it, though, was fun and games. In very competitive contests, whether for pride or profit, the tactics were often brutal. Razor blades were attached to the kite's string. Purposefully, assisted by the wind, they would intersect the string of other kites, maneuvering in such a way to cut the kite strings of another. It was hardly a friendly pastime anymore!

That destructive use of the wind is approaching Solomon's self-assessment of his own futile, godless wonderings in life. In Ecclesiastes 2, Solomon defined his course of action. He denied himself nothing his eyes desired. He refused his heart no pleasure. With those as his goals he took great delight in his handiwork. But when he viewed all his accomplishments, he labeled it "meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (v. 17). It was just like running north one day and south the next. He never made any real progress.

If your life isn't headed in one specific direction and if you have all the time in the world, you can afford to let the vicissitudes of the wind drive you here today and there tomorrow. That may be okay if you never want to arrive anywhere specific.

That's Paul's topic in Ephesians 4:14. He's speaking about being blown this way and then that way by every wind

of false teaching. It's all part of the cunning, crafty, deceitful scheming of the old evil foe, the devil. Ever since Satan questioned God's truthfulness in the garden, he's been peddling relativism's uncertainty. The only thing he wants people to be certain about is that there is nothing certain. If Satan wins that argument then even God's truthfulness is questionable.

But we dare not question God's truthfulness, not if we want accurate answers. In John 3 Nicodemus couldn't fathom being born again. Jesus, patiently, provided answers. It was absolutely essential for a person to be born again spiritually through water and the Spirit. Our physical birth leaves us subject to the innate spiritual weakness of our sinful flesh and subject to sin's penalty, death. On the other hand the Spirit, working through water and the Word, provides a new spiritual rebirth, whose final outcome is eternal life.

Jesus knew that seeing was believing for Nicodemus. Yet even skeptical Nicodemus knew he couldn't tell where the wind was coming from and where it was going. More unobservable to human eyes is the coming and going of the Spirit. Yet, thank God, we can see the results of God's Wind, the Spirit. We believe in God's only Son as our Savior.

This working of God's Wind keeps us from wavering in other winds, becoming spiritually directionless. It keeps us from Solomon's mistake, seeking fulfillment alone in earthly things. With God's Wind at our back we avoid being tossed back and forth, never certain which way we're headed. God's Wind is propelling us in only one direction, to heaven's safe harbor.

So, this spring, go fly a kite. As the wind lofts it heavenward, remember how God, by his Spirit, causes us to soar heavenward through faith in Jesus Christ.

LESSONS FROM THE CREED

Charles F. Degner

"I believe in Jesus Christ"

If you come into St. Peter, Minn., you will see a large billboard with Jesus' name in 10-foot letters—"Jesus." (Read: "Jesus, period.") In small print on the bottom, you will find the name of the Assembly of God church in town. No one seemed to mind the billboard. In fact, it was refreshing to see Jesus' name out there for everyone to see.

The objections came when the ad was run in the local high school paper. What did people object to? It wasn't the name "Jesus." It was the period after the name. Jesus, period. Our culture will accept Jesus as one of many religious leaders and symbols. But "Jesus, period" is not tolerable. To say that Jesus is the only way to heaven, the only "name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), is unacceptable in our pluralistic culture.

There is one Savior

Yet this is what the Bible teaches. God made fun of the idols that Israel and its neighbors worshipped. "Bel bows down, Nebo stoops low; their idols are borne

by beasts of burden. The images that are carried about are burdensome, a burden for the weary. They stoop and bow down together; unable to rescue the burden, they themselves go off into captivity" (Isaiah 46:1,2). On the other hand, the LORD says, "I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior" (Isaiah 43:11). There are many gods in the world. There is only one Savior.

THERE ARE MANY GODS IN THE WORLD. THERE IS ONLY ONE SAVIOR.

Jesus taught the same to his disciples. "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Those who love to quote John 3:16 should read the next two verses as well. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in

the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:16-18). Jesus, period.

Tell others about that Savior

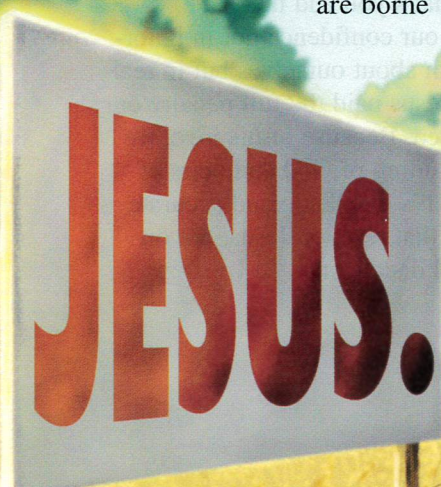
Do you believe this? If so, what are you going to say to your Jewish friend or to the Muslim who works with you? They may argue that they worship the same God that you worship. Your Jewish friend will argue that Christianity had its roots in Judaism. Your Muslim friend will argue that Muhammad improved on what Judaism and Christianity started. What separates Christianity from every other faith in the world is Jesus. Jesus, period.

So what will you say to your Jewish or Muslim friend? Paul used an interesting approach in Athens (Acts 17:16-34). He noticed that there was an altar in the city to an unknown god. A pluralistic culture likes to make sure that it has all the bases covered. So Paul told them about that God—the true God—and about Jesus Christ, who rose from the dead. Finally, that is all that we can do. We tell our friends about Jesus. The Holy Spirit uses us to witness. Then we wait for the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts.

Only, do tell them. Your friends will not get to heaven without Jesus. Period.

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

This is the first article in a 10-part series on the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed.





John A. Baird

Looking in the mirror

Researchers again and again have documented the inflated view many people have of themselves. People generally consider themselves smarter, luckier, better looking and more important than they really are. Some would call it simply “good self-esteem.” Others, including some researchers, consider it to be a disaster in many areas.

For example, one spouse thinks that he or she is contributing much more to the relationship than the other spouse. Conflict results. Sometimes divorce awaits at the end of such conflict. Employees dismiss their average performance, believing they should be worth more to their employer. Students don’t study because they believe they are smarter than they really are.

Most people have an internal dialogue that feeds their superior self-view. They dismiss negative feedback from spouses, teachers, and supervisors and depend often on a few positive comments.

We’ve all been in situations where a legitimate criticism is dismissed with the comment, “Oh, that’s just your opinion.” Sometimes people withhold accurate evaluations because they don’t want to hurt someone. We opt for kindness instead of criticism. Nevertheless, feedback from others is one way to check our exaggerated opinions about ourselves.

Perhaps having such an inflated opinion of ourselves is not as critical as some suggest. But there is one aspect of our lives where an accurate self-assessment is vitally important. We need to see ourselves clearly in our relationship with God.

Even here some believe that they are pretty good—better than most—and warrant God’s special blessing. The view in their mirror is distorted by their inflated self-image. As long as it is distorted, they don’t see themselves as they are.

If we fall victim to an inflated view of ourselves, we can easily dismiss the

work of Jesus as irrelevant and unnecessary. Under the influence of such a view, we think of Jesus as someone who either wards off the evil days of life or praises us for what we do.

Lutherans have resisted the temptation to think of themselves more highly than they should. The outside feedback that we use is God’s law. It is a mirror that reflects a realistic and accurate view of who we are. We might not like it, but the image that stares back at us in this mirror is not pretty. The apostle Paul looked in that mirror and discovered he was a sinner. He wrote, “I am the worst” (1 Timothy 1:15). We can’t be far behind.

Lent is one opportunity to look in that mirror and conclude, “There is no one who does good, not even one” (Romans 3:12). Yes, not even me or you. That’s accurate from God’s perspective too and brutally honest. We are sinners and deserve punishment. We are not as good as we sometimes think we are.

Is it necessary to be so brutal in assessing ourselves? Can’t we just concentrate on the positives? Doesn’t God just overlook the stark truth of sin? The answer to those questions is also discovered in Lent. We focus on the Lord’s suffering and death.

When we understand sin—the brutal truth of our sin—we can also grasp the greatness of God’s love for us. If we don’t understand our own sin, we don’t understand his pain either. Jesus suffered for sinners—that’s you and me.

We find our confidence not in ignoring the truth about ourselves but in realizing that Jesus paid the full penalty our sins deserved. Because of his love, we are dear children of God and heirs of heaven. That’s a realistic and accurate self-image that rests on Jesus, not on our internal distortions.

God promised Isaac that the Savior would be born to his family. But Isaac's wife didn't get pregnant for 20 years. So Isaac prayed. God answered Isaac's prayer for a child with twins. God quelled one spiritual struggle and caused another. He told Rebekah that counter to culture and even common sense, the older child would serve the younger. The blessing would go to Jacob, not Esau. Here is a family that wrestled with God and his promised blessing.

Review Genesis 25:19-34 and then read Genesis 27:1-29.

1. Do you think Rebekah told her husband about this prophecy of the Lord? Why or why not?
2. What about the parents' or children's actions lead you to think that way?
3. Regardless of whether Rebekah told him or not, what were the circumstances regarding the birthright by the time the boys were grown?
4. Describe what each man's life was like at the beginning of this story. How does that highlight God's grace?
5. Try to get inside Isaac's mind for a minute. God said the older son will serve the younger son. Can you suggest three possible ways that Isaac could have interpreted this prophecy?
6. The Eighth Commandment tells us to take our neighbor's words and actions in the kindest possible way. Can you think of a scenario where both Isaac and Rebekah thought that they were doing God's will regarding the prophecy?

7. How would each of those scenarios color our understanding of the rest of the story?
8. Evaluate Rebekah's plan for deceiving Isaac. What are its strengths and weaknesses?
9. This account from God's Word could be understood in two completely different ways. Below are two scenarios. How could each scenario be true? What events or assumptions support each scenario? What spiritual lesson would each scenario teach God's people?

- Scenario 1: Rebekah and Jacob think God needs help keeping his promises and sinfully deceive Isaac.
- Scenario 2: Rebekah and Jacob faithfully follow God's expressed will and rightfully deceive Isaac.

Conclusion

A father deceived; a blessing taken; a family shattered. Why did it happen? Sin and sinful people took the most amazing promise God ever made and treated it like chattel to be bought or sold, stolen, or lost. How great is God's grace that even through people like this, the Savior came! How great is God's grace, that even for people like us, the Savior died! That is the blessing, the promise, the prize.

Contributing editor Jonathan Schroeder is pastor at Faith, Sharpsburg, Georgia.

This is the third article in a 12-part Bible study. Find this article and possible answers online after March 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net.

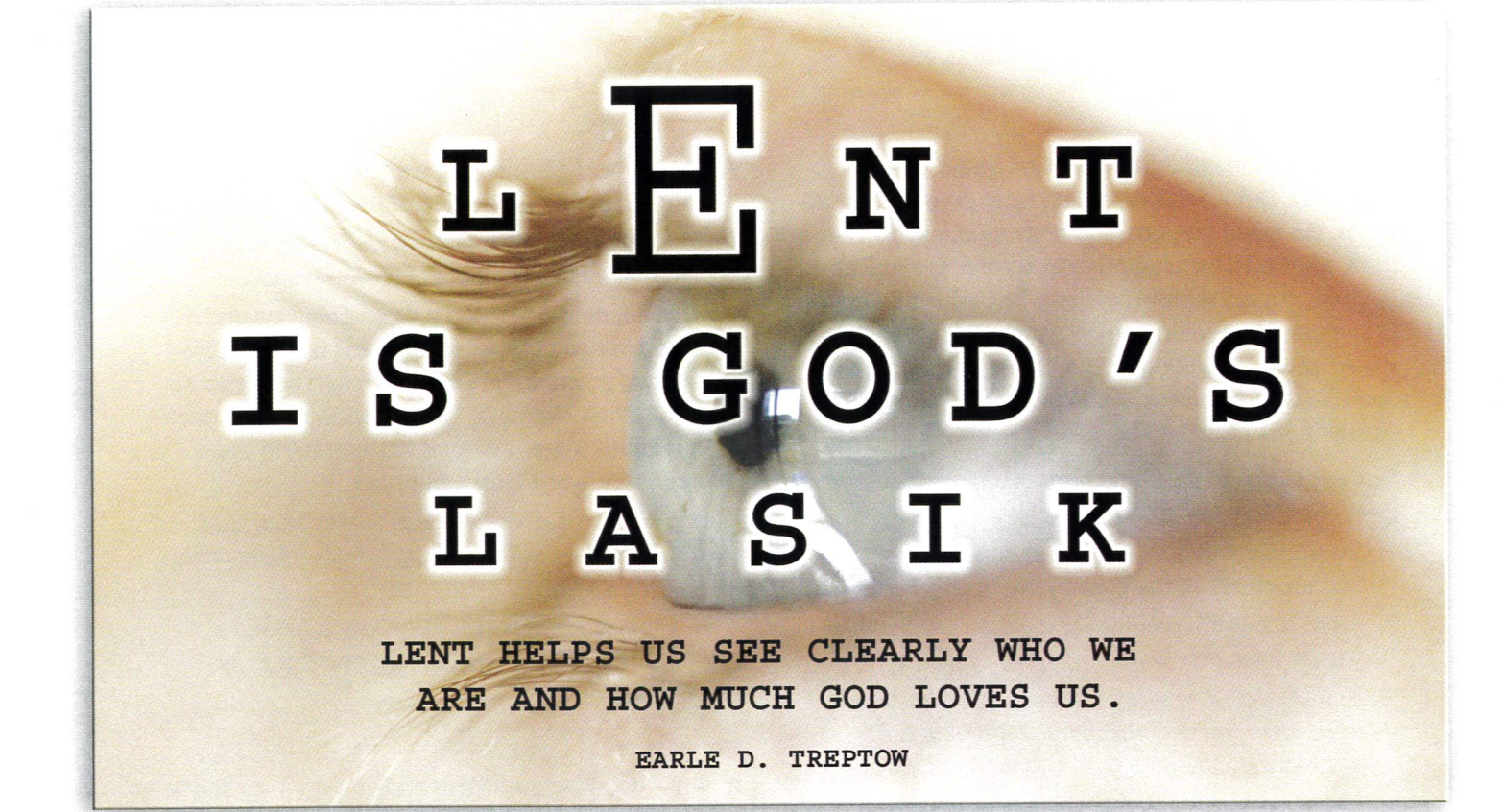
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WRESTLING WITH GOD:

THE BLESSING

An interactive study of Jacob Jonathan E. Schroeder



LENT IS GOD'S LASIK

LENT HELPS US SEE CLEARLY WHO WE
ARE AND HOW MUCH GOD LOVES US.

EARLE D. TREPTOW

Each morning I make a choice I'd rather not make: Do I put in contacts or do I wear glasses? I dislike both equally. The contacts make me want to scratch my eyes out. The glasses are a nuisance. The only other option, as I see it, is not to see.

But there is another option. It's called LASIK. In LASIK surgery, the doctor uses a laser to reshape the cornea and address the patient's vision problem. Though the fine print says that the surgery isn't for everyone, many sing its praises.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could have LASIK for poor *spiritual* vision? Which of us wouldn't like to see the way the Lord would have us see?

We see ourselves and our sin

God does offer LASIK for poor spiritual vision. We call it Lent. During the 40 days of Lent, as we reflect on the passion of the Christ, the Lord operates on our spiritual vision. As we see Jesus mocked, whipped, and nailed to a tree outside Jerusalem, the Lord reshapes our eyes. What we see at the cross is that our lives are not what we'd really like to think they are. Our lives are not "mostly sunny," with the occa-

sional "small mistake." The innocent Son of God would not have endured such soul-rending agony if we had only made "innocent mistakes." At Calvary's cross we see our sins in all their repulsiveness.

God does more than help us see how our many transgressions caused the death of the Holy One. Yes, he reshapes our eyes so that we see ourselves properly. We are wretched sinners. We haven't a prayer of rescuing ourselves. When we consider the suffering Servant, we see how foolish we are to walk to the front of the temple to regale God with stories of our spiritual heroism. Our deeds are not worthy of divine recognition and eternal reward. They are an offense and an abomination to God.

We see God's love for sinners

But there is more. Our gracious Lord doesn't put aside his spiritual laser when we finally see ourselves for the wretched sinners we are. That's only the preliminary phase of the operation. He wants us to see so much more at the cross than that. As we meditate on the suffering that Jesus endured at Calvary, we see something

spiritually shocking—the innocent Son of God considered the needs of sinners more important than his personal comfort. The holy God loves . . . sinners! The holy God loves us.

Sadly, we have a hard time believing that God loves us, because we can't take our eyes off our transgressions. They are always before us. That's why the Lord continues to reshape our eyes by our reflection on the forsaken Son of God. Through our time at the foot of the cross, the Lord leads us to see that every one of our sins has been forgiven. Our iniquities have been completely covered. He enables us to stop staring at our sin and to see instead the righteousness of Christ that covers us.

When we see Jesus coated with our sins, enduring our punishment, and experiencing our death, we see clearly. When we see ourselves wrapped with Christ, clothed in the righteousness that avails before a holy God, we see as God wants us to see. What a sight for sin-sore eyes!

Lent is God's surgical laser to correct your spiritual eyesight. It's 40 days to better vision!

Earle Treptow is pastor at Zion, Denver, Colorado.