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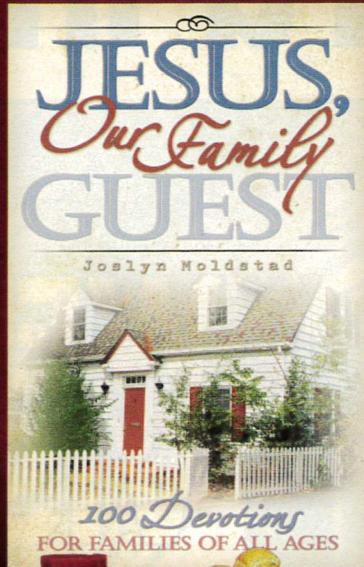
MAY 2007

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for visitors at worship
each and every Sunday.”

Forward in Christ

✠ The official magazine of the
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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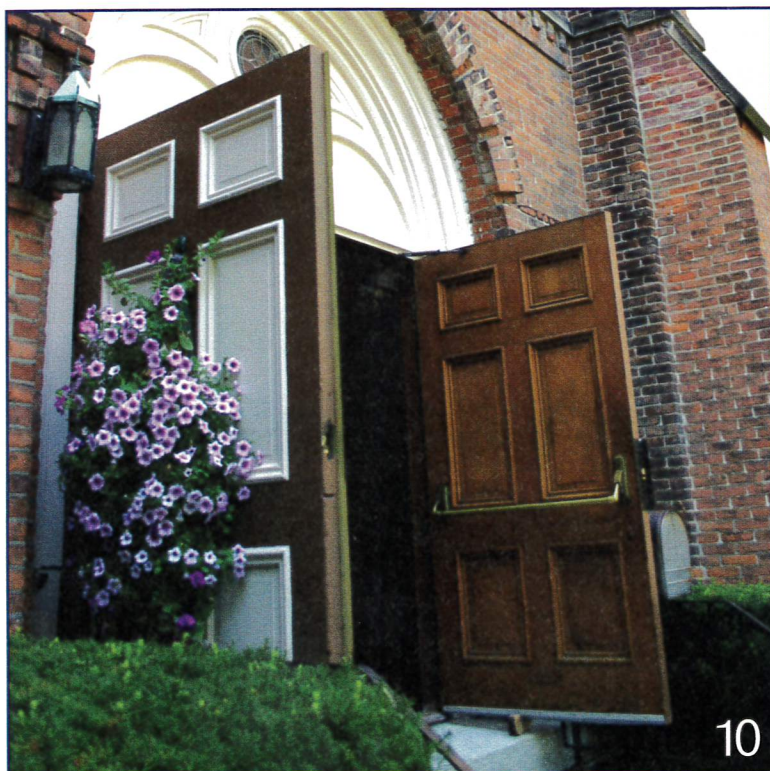
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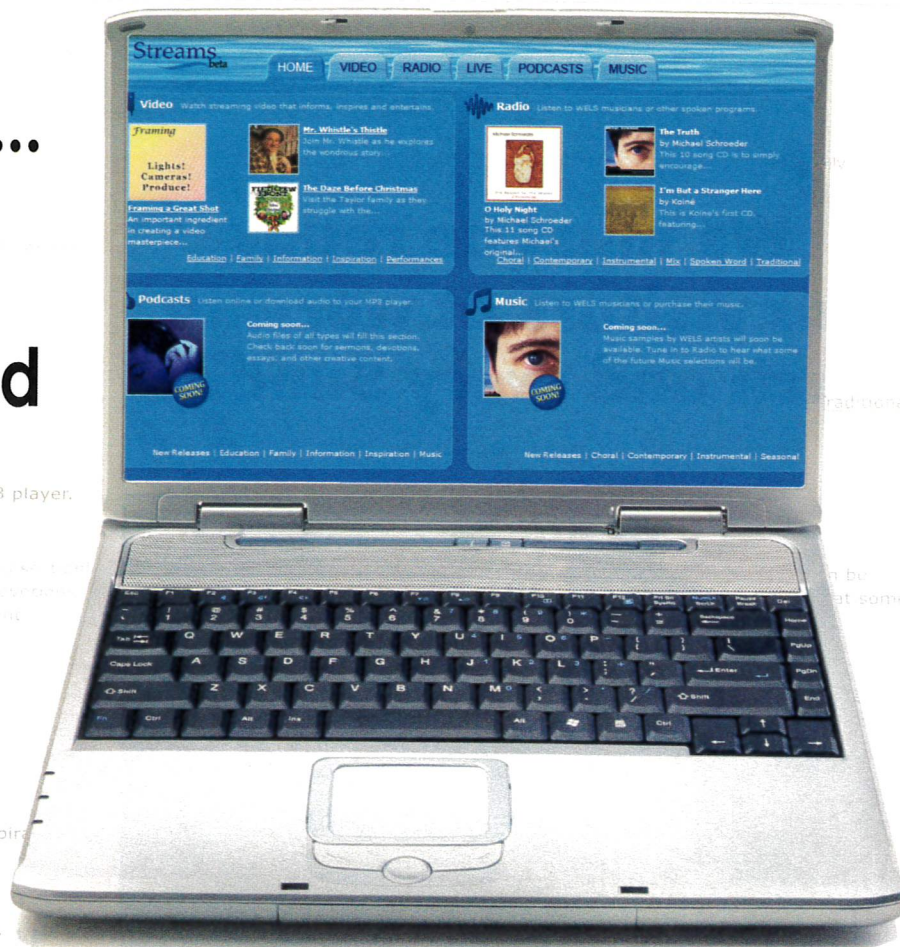




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MAY THE LORD OUR GOD
BE WITH US AS HE WAS
WITH OUR FATHERS;
MAY HE NEVER LEAVE US
NOR FORSAKE US.

1 Kings 8:57

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WHAT'S INSIDE *by Julie Wietzke*

It's easy to get caught up in our own little world—whether it be at home, at work, at church, or anywhere in between—and forget the big picture. But God doesn't want us to forget the spiritual big picture. He told us to preach the good news to all people. In his editorial, "Still standing on the hill?", executive editor John Braun reminds us that we need to get moving and "be the disciples Jesus called [us] to be" (p. 34).

Other articles this month give some ideas of how we can live our lives with that spiritual big picture in mind. Examples include welcoming visitors to our churches (p. 10); volunteering at mission congregations (p. 22); giving money, a kind word, and a devotion booklet to the poor (p. 8); or helping a stranger with physical and spiritual needs (p. 18).

I guess what I learned is that we, as Christ's disciples, need to make the most of every opportunity that God gives us to let our faith show. You never know when it will happen. So you always need to be prepared and thinking about that big picture.

MAY

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PASTORAL TRAINING

I read with some concern . . . about pastors who received doctoral degrees from theology schools we are not in fellowship with. I know we have the example of Luther who also received a doctoral degree from people soon to be outside his fellowship. We also have the example of a Lutheran synod that helped WELS immensely years ago but now endures the effects of a lapse in vigilance. . . .

For years I've told anybody who would listen that if *Star Wars* were real life our pastors would be the Jedi Knights. They are the very best of the best. If someone was trained and qualified to chauffeur a Mercedes limo, why would they go to Checker Taxicab driving school? If he was still here, would Bach study music with Meatloaf? Would Satchmo study with a rapper? With whom would a member of the French Foreign Legion study weapons and tactics?

I am finishing up a lifetime of trucking, so I see most things in black and white instead of various shades of gray. Either one is on the road or in the ditch. When looking for a destination one's never been to before, one is either on the right road or one is lost. There's no little bit right or little bit lost, just like there's no little bit pregnant. Things just don't work out that way. WELS has always held a holy commission to run fast on a very narrow road. I don't think we're in the ditch yet, but I wouldn't see these things if we were centered up in our lane.

*Dave Flood
Pickrell, Nebraska*

FELLOWSHIP

If my neighbor's children had the measles and their house was on fire, I hope I would do everything I could to get them out of their burning home, even if it meant exposing myself to the measles ["My neighbor has the measles," Jan.].

Our WELS "Theses on Church Fellowship" presents this conclusion: "From all this, we see that in the matter of the outward expression of Christian fellowship, the exercise of church fellowship, particularly two Christian principles need to direct us: the great debt of love which the Lord would have us pay to the weak brother, and His clear injunction (also flowing out of love) to avoid those who adhere to false doctrine and practice and all who make themselves partakers of their evil deeds. Conscientious recognition of both principles will lead to an evangelical practice also in facing many difficult situations that confront us, situations which properly lie in the field of casuistry" (Doctrinal Statements of WELS, p. 34).

I failed to see evangelical balance in your January and February articles on church fellowship.

*Robert A. Bitter
Oakfield, Wisconsin*

I enjoyed the article "My neighbor got better" [Feb.] by John Liebenow. I believe that fellowship goes beyond that of confessional Lutherans, as suggested by the author. . . .

We in WELS are in the minority, and we should not become so doctrinally exclusive that we become a stumbling stone to believers of other faiths that base their faith on Christ alone. As layworkers we are in the world and not of the world. We need to become witnesses to unbelievers and can only do this through sharing Scripture and through praying.

*Bill Hanson
La Crescent, Minnesota*

Regarding "My neighbor has the measles" [Jan.]. Pastor Liebenow is certainly right in warning us to be discerning in our contact with people of other faiths. But that's not the whole story. . . .

It's almost impossible to avoid coming into contact with disease. It's better to maintain good health and

resist disease. Spiritually, we do that through a sound understanding of God's Word. Worship, Bible study, and daily devotions are the "booster shots" that keep us from succumbing to the error of others.

When my neighbor has the measles, the love of Christ compels me to bring him the chicken soup of truth. It's not enough to be right if we won't share what we've been given with people whose spiritual lives aren't healthy. As the article states, measles can be fatal if not taken seriously. If my neighbor's faith is contaminated with error, don't I have an obligation to do more than avoid him? Maybe I won't attend his church, but shouldn't I invite him to mine?

*Reg Draheim
Green Bay, Wisconsin*

BIBLE STORIES?

I am writing this letter in regard to the articles "Window stories" and "It's not about me" [Feb.].

I appreciate your articles and the time you put into them. They continue to edify me. My concern is that we are using the phrase "Bible stories" too much. Those that are Christians and WELS understand what is meant by Bible stories. However, when we are encouraged to share this magazine with friends or leave it at doctor offices, hospitals, etc., then those that might not understand what is meant by a story could be misguided or confused. We ought to be using/writing what is going to edify all people at all levels.

Instead of using "Bible story," perhaps we should say "Bible truths" or "God's true story."

Inge Jakobson

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*.

Why me?

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.” John 9:1-3

James A. Mattek

If you haven’t spoken the actual words, you’ve probably thought them from time to time: “Why me?” From the depressed and exhausted Elijah to the distressed and childless Elizabeth, “Why me?” seemed like a reasonable question. From emergency rooms and intensive care wards the same question still echoes.

Why me?

When Jesus’ disciples stumbled upon a man who was blind from birth, they didn’t ask, “Why him?” They had already drawn their own flawed conclusions. Common in their day was the thinking that God dealt out levels of suffering to match the severity of the person’s sin. But this man was born blind. The disciples concluded that it was unlikely that this man sinned while floating in his mother’s amniotic fluid, so they looked around for another culprit. They asked Jesus, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Just maybe, they thought, God punished the child because of his really bad parents.

Jesus’ response is instructive. The man’s blindness had nothing to do with sinning in the womb or poor parenting. His blindness “happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.” How wrong the disciples had been. How human they had been. Often it’s easier to label than to love. It’s easier to talk about a person than to help a person. It’s easier to bemoan divorce than to help the divorced. It’s easier to condemn out-of-marriage pregnancy

than to reach out to a struggling single mom.

We tend to obsess over the dirty laundry of others and forget that our own best efforts at righteousness are like filthy rags. If God treated us as our sins deserve, we would not only be blind from birth, we would be damned by God. “If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins . . . who could stand?” (Psalm 130:3).

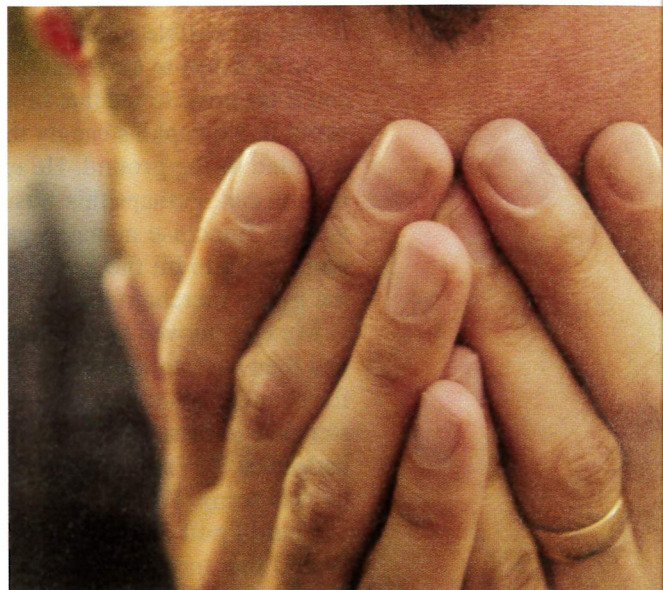
Why not me?

Instead of lamenting “Why me?”, we could more appropriately ask, “Why not me?”

“[The LORD] does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities” (Psalm 103:10). Instead, the Father repaid Jesus according to our iniquities and treated him as our sins deserve. What do we get? A slate as clean as the wind-driven snow, a heavenly Father whose face shines at us with divine approval, and the darkness of our spiritual blindness replaced with the light of faith.

We’re also put to work—God’s work. This man’s blindness “happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.” Jesus gave him sight. After gaining sight, this man was a bold witness in front of the befuddled Pharisees and spoke courageously about Jesus.

Whatever our situation, whether we’re healthy or not, our forgiving God has work for us to do. Even the sick and suffering have work to do.



In fact, the sick and suffering believer is in a unique position to do the work of God. I have visited many a sick bed and have left inspired by the sufferer. I know doctors who have been won for Christ as their dying patients let their light of faith shine. The patients’ laments were not “Why me?” Instead, their motto was “Send me!”

Contributing editor James Mattek, chief executive officer at Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service, is a member at Trinity, Waukesha, Wisconsin.

Coffee and humble pie

Thomas J. Jeske

My car idled in the drive-through. Coffee was on the way. I was mentally preparing for a meeting when he just showed up in the rearview mirror. Late-afternoon sunlight lit a red tangle of hair. Something in the way he moved spoke of difficulty—of mind or body, it was impossible to tell.

As he fished in the restaurant's designer trash can it occurred to me that he was being careful about it. No napkins caught the wind; no cups tumbled to the ground. He extracted an aluminum can. Perhaps this was a regular route, and the franchise manager gave conditional permission to hit the garbage bins provided the gypsy merchant did not leave a mess.

My eyes moved to the change in the ashtray and then back to the young man sifting the trash for change. What industry—imagine, to dumpster-dive in broad daylight only 20 feet from the badges of SUVs. I wondered if I would do what he was doing. Would my pride prevent me?

Could I pull out of line? Offer him money? Would that turn out to be more trouble than it was worth?

Could I somehow mention Jesus to him? Which words would be the right words?

I watched him walk to the next can. He held a pop-stained backpack by the top loop. One of his legs couldn't quite keep up with the other one. My van sat trapped in line as he disappeared around the corner. I asked God to bless him in a way suited to his needs and went back to my meeting agenda.

The line of cars cleared the corner of the McBuilding and aimed for the interstate ramp. But look! There he was again across the parking lot. Now he had a vehicle . . . a homemade

three-wheeler with a big compartment to haul his treasure. Surprised at myself, I stopped 30 feet from him and got out. Most of that ground was covered before he noticed me. "Red" looked a little worried to see a man in business attire approach him directly.

"Hi there." His eyes were bright blue and there was a question in them. "Good for you to work so hard. I think that what you are doing is good." He looked at me and nodded three or four times.

"My name is Tom. What's your name?" He spoke, but the sounds from his throat just spun as if the words he wanted to say wouldn't catch. He patted his coat and found a wallet. Opening it carefully, he held up its plastic window with a photo ID card so I could read his name and address. It struck me that he had probably been forced to do this before. No doubt he thought I was challenging his right to be on the street collecting cans.

"Here is some money to add to your cans." I held it out. "And here is something to read when you get home." I held out a little book of daily devotions. "These are prayers to Jesus." He nodded with energy, not taking his eyes off of mine. I put the bill in for a bookmark. "Good-bye." I repeated his name. "God bless you."

He tucked the booklet into his backpack. I climbed back into my ride as he stood next to his. Surely I was an important man on my way to an important appointment! The late sun lighted the cornstubble red as he pedaled off to his.

"All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor" (Galatians 2:10).

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

Could I somehow mention Jesus to him? Which words would be the right words?



at the foot of the cross. Richard L. Gurgel

TOPIC: Pride vs. thankfulness

The Bible tells us to be humble. It also tells us that all our gifts/blessings are from God. Therefore I don't believe God wants us to use the words "proud" or "pride." For instance, I shouldn't be saying to my son, "I am proud of you for getting such a good report card," or "I take such pride in my work." Rather, I believe we should be saying, "I'm so thankful you have such a good report card," or "I am so grateful God has given me the ability to be a good nurse." Is my concern biblical?

We certainly do not want to judge too quickly what people mean with such words. However, someone pretty significant shares your concern. It's Paul.

There's a noticeable pattern in the vast majority of his inspired letters. Those letters begin with a very brief statement identifying the author, for example, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus . . ." (Romans 1:1). After that Paul often continues by marveling at some truth of God's grace in Christ.

But it's what follows, almost without fail, which speaks directly to your question. Paul continues by highlighting something praiseworthy in the hearts and lives of those Christians. What does he say?

"I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge—because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you" (1 Corinthians 1:4-6).

"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:3-6).

Paul's pattern is to give thanks to God for what he has noted in the hearts and lives of God's

people. Do you see the double benefit in this way of recognizing fruits of faith in believers' lives?

Despite what they often seem to see to the contrary, it brings joy to God's people to know that God's gospel has not returned empty. As promised, that rain and snow of God's Word is causing their lives to bud and flourish (Isaiah 55:10).


But at the same time, Paul's ultimate goal is not to point those Christians to themselves. Instead he points their hearts toward God. That way, rather than growing proud of what's been accomplished, they are led to join Paul in thanksgiving. Paul isn't trying to puff them up. He's seeking to build them up by focusing them on the wonderful power of God's grace.

In fact, where pride in personal gifts or accomplishments begins to show itself, Paul addresses that head on. "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). Everything in our lives is God's gracious gift to us in Jesus (Romans 8:32). That is true from the saving faith that clings to Christ (Ephesians 2:8,9) to the power and strength to produce fruits of faith (Philippians 2:13).

We don't have reason to be proud in life, nor do we want to foster pride in others. We have reason for humble thanksgiving. "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14).

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

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



CREATING AND SUSTAINING
A WELCOMING WORSHIP
ATMOSPHERE IS A PART
OF EACH CONGREGA-
TION'S MINISTRY.

Michael G. Geiger

"They're here!"
The doorbell announces the visitors have arrived. Your child runs to the door to open it and welcome the guests you have been eagerly expecting. There they are, standing at your front door.

Of course, it would be quite another thing if you weren't expecting guests. Then the doorbell might send a quick flash of panic. You might dash to pick up the papers that are lying all over. You might quickly clear off the countertop. You may even want to put on a clean pair of slacks or comb your hair. Instead you find that the yardwork wasn't finished, and the kids' sleepover last night left a mess too big to pick up before you open the door.

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VISITORS

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Then the panic deepens when you remember that you invited your guests to stop over for an evening together, but you have not prepared for their coming. The doorbell tells you that they are there—on time and on the right day. But you have nothing to offer your invited guests except left-over macaroni and cheese and flat soda. You just forgot all about your invitation. Perhaps you thought they would never show up, but there they are. Yes, “they’re here!” Oh no!

No one likes to be caught with unexpected visitors. It’s a source of discomfort and awkwardness for all parties involved. It is especially embarrassing when you had invited the individuals over and then forgot to prepare for their arrival or simply never expected them to show up. Needless to say, the likelihood that they will ever accept another invitation to come to your house is probably slim to none.

THE GUESTS AT WORSHIP

How many times does this scenario play itself out on a weekly basis on Sunday mornings at our churches? Encouragement comes often to invite our friends, neighbors, and relatives to church. We even mail fliers to all the surrounding homes inviting them to Christmas, Easter, or a Friendship Sunday. Then someone shows up for worship. Are we expecting them? Are we ready for them?

On one level, we are ready because we have the rich banquet of God’s grace in the gospel. In the liturgy and in the sermon, the Holy Spirit works his miracle on the hearts of all who come—regular members and guests too. That’s the one thing that is absolutely necessary for the visitor.

But sometimes other things distract from the one thing needful. As a pastor or parishioner are you embarrassed when a visitor shows up because the building looks like no one cares? No one turned up for the workday that

was scheduled for the Saturday before, leaving the grounds unkempt and overgrown. Inside the leftovers from the midweek teen party are still lying around. The person who was supposed to bring refreshments didn’t show up. The hymns are hard to sing. It is a communion Sunday, and the visitors aren’t WELS members. There is no explanation about close communion, and it creates an awkward situation.

Then to make matters worse you see the visitors standing in the corner waiting for someone to greet them. Regular members in their “holy huddles” seem oblivious to those who took their time to visit your gathering on Sunday morning. They leave wondering what kind of congregation is this that doesn’t take care of the yard, doesn’t care to talk to them, and makes them struggle through worship.

You leave wondering if they will ever show up again. Perhaps you even wonder if you should invite someone else to come. You pray the Holy Spirit has been able to work in spite of your failings.

MAKING GUESTS WELCOME

Whether we think that worship is for the believer or the unbeliever, we need to make our guests feel welcome. No matter what we think worship is to accomplish, the reality is that the main entry point for first-time contacts to our church’s ministry is through our Sunday morning worship service. These guests often don’t tell us they are coming. They show up unannounced. With almost the same mindset as we have toward Christ’s unexpected second return, we must be ready

for visitors at worship each and every Sunday. On the Sundays we have specifically invited new people to attend, we should be *especially* ready for them.

Creating and sustaining a welcoming worship atmosphere is a part of each congregation’s ministry. As a Head and Shoulders shampoo ad once said, “You only have one chance to make a first impression.” Just like white flakes on your shoulders gives an initial impression to the person you are meeting, so a visitor’s initial visit will give him perceptions about your church, its people, its priority, and yes, even its theology. The overall impression your congregation leaves on a visitor will affect that individual’s desire to attend again. Sometimes the sinful flesh will find any excuse not to come back to hear the gospel. You should seek to remove as many obstacles as possible.

So what kind of marks would you receive if someone sent a “secret worshipper” to your congregation? Are you ready, or would they catch you unprepared? What would their report be? Would it surprise you? Maybe that’s not a bad idea to help your congregation get a “read” on how you are doing at welcoming people to worship! You might want to ask someone you know to visit and then evaluate how ready you are. The visitors God brings your way are far too important to let them catch you off guard.

How do you prepare for these visitors? Tune in next month to find out.

*Michael Geiger is pastor at
Tree of Life, Cary, North Carolina.*

We are confronted by gender issues and must wrestle with the callings God lays out for us in Scripture. Future generations also will struggle with them. These articles, written as a series of e-mails from a grandparent to a grandchild in the year 2032, share wisdom from our study of the Scriptures to the next generation. This series follows the outline of a Bible study prepared by WELS Adult Discipleship's Women's Ministry Committee. The study will be available this summer.

Dear Lauren,

Another Easter Sunday evening to enjoy reveling in the wonderful truth of our risen Savior. The dishes are done, the guests are gone, and I'm going to take a few minutes to respond to your e-mail. Easter has always been my very favorite holiday. To me, Easter gives joy and purpose to my life as a Christian.

I'm so sorry you couldn't join us this year, but it was so good to hear from you again when you sent your regrets for our family Easter gathering. I can't believe how fast the time has flown! You're 26 now, married, and becoming involved in the work of your congregation.

I'm happy to answer the questions you have about the Bible study you're beginning. I know that like your mom, you have questions about how you as a Christian woman can use your talents to serve in a God-pleasing way.

About 25 years ago I was discussing the same matter with some of the ladies at your first birthday party. As a matter of fact, I'd just completed the section about the universal priest-

hood of believers with the women's Bible study I was leading at the time. That's the very section you have questions on. Interestingly, your questions are the same as a lady at your party.

You perceptively wondered how such a close look at the "universal priesthood of believers" would answer the questions you had about serving in your

church. There is probably no idea more helpful in laying the groundwork for the practical and applicable aspects of God's plan for us as women and men.

Your birthday is in October, shortly before Reformation Day. At that party so long ago, the "big" people talked about how undamental the "universal priesthood of believers" concept is to Lutheran theology. It was one of the lesser-known but major topics of disagreement during the Reformation itself. You see, before the Reformation, laypeople were given the impression that they didn't have direct access to God through prayer or in his Word, nor were they "allowed" to be active in service among God's people or outside them.

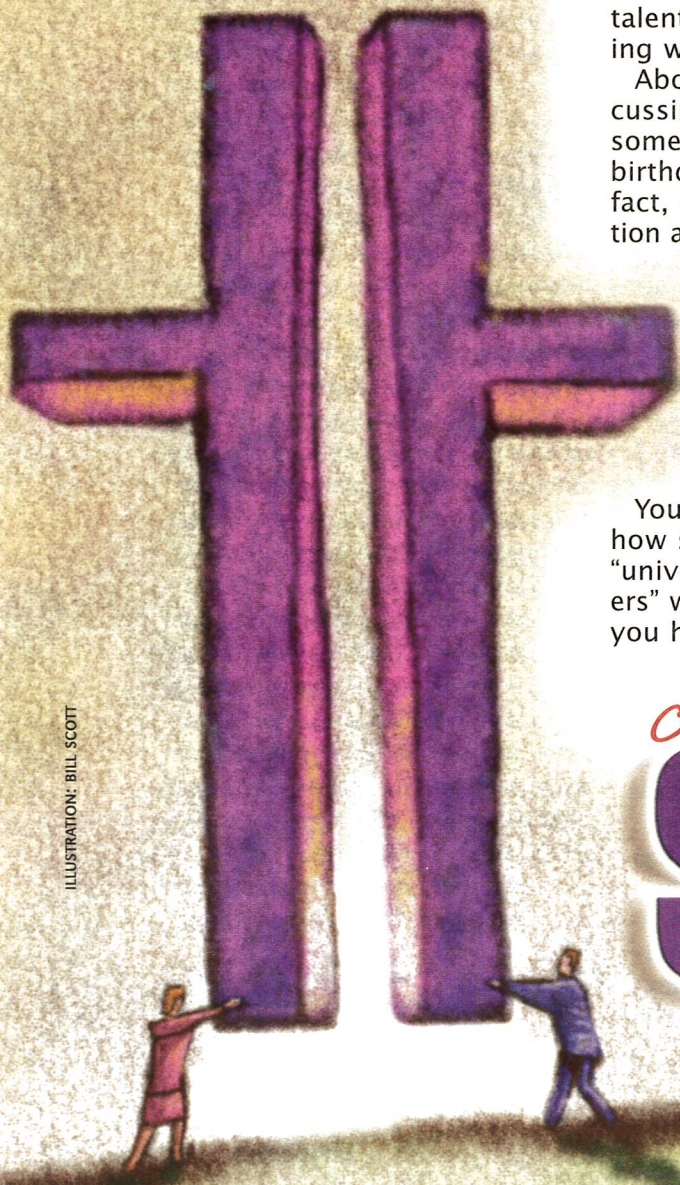
Martin Luther really rattled some cages on this issue. By the way, the more I study about Luther, the more I like him. I always was taught to respect him (and I do), but I think that I would have liked to have had him as a friend and pastor.

Back to your questions on the universal priesthood of believers: I think it's especially helpful for those of us not in the called ministry of the church. For a long time I thought of myself as a bit of a "lesser" Christian because of that. You know how many relatives we have in our family who are called pastors and teachers in the Christian church and active in the public ministry. What a heavy responsibility and high calling they have!

The concept of the universal priesthood, however, communicates to the rest of us what our

All Christians serve Jesus as his people

SERVING



purpose is in the mission of the church. 1 Peter 2:9-12 helps define the concept of the universal priesthood of believers, and many other passages—especially from the writings of Paul—write the “job description” for it.

Personally, during the committee Bible study, I grew in understanding that the universal priesthood of believers included my “outside” profession and had the same ultimate goal as the called workers—but among a different audience. That goal, of course, is to glorify the Lord God with words and actions. Other additional responsibilities called workers have are to shepherd souls for growth in faith and equip them as the body of Christ for “works of service.”

Those very works of service are the center of my life as part of the universal priesthood and the means through which the Lord has chosen to reveal himself, especially to the unbelieving world. My nursing profession and my work outside of the church walls became the tools through which the Lord reached out to those who didn’t yet know or understand him. In your dad’s case, a big part of his workplace in the universal priesthood is in the world engineers inhabit. In your mom’s case it was—and still is—raising you and the rest of your brothers and sisters.

You wondered why this topic is so important to study before getting to the question of what you could/should or couldn’t/shouldn’t do as a laywoman in

your home, church, and society. Well, one answer is that being a part of the universal priesthood is going to make us “aliens and strangers in the world” (1 Peter 2:11). As Christians, we think differently. We value different things than the world does. We have different priorities. As you saw in the beginning of your study, we as sanctified Christians can again think, feel like, and want to do what the Lord thinks, feels, and wills. Does that put us out of step with our society or what?

Additionally, in the antiquated phrasing of 25 years ago, being a part of the universal priesthood of believers is a 24/7 job. It isn’t something just for Sundays or Bible class. It isn’t for “inside the church walls” to be left there. Whatever the Lord has created us to do as part of his priesthood is the center of our lives of service. In his eyes there is no superior or inferior service; he has given it all. When at work in the universal priesthood, a cup of cold water becomes valuable service. I know Prof. Gurgel is currently corresponding with his granddaughter Emily on that very topic—spiritual gifts.

The relevance of this to your question of women serving in the church is that on the issue of men and women serving together in our families, congregations, and even in society, we’re going to stick out like sore thumbs when we do things God’s way, when we value what he values. Unless we first understand that, we’ll be ask-

ing the wrong questions and getting the wrong answers. Until we understand that, we’ll be tempted to turn God’s instructions into a rule book to follow mindlessly rather than to see them as his own guide to help us reveal him to the dying world, which still doesn’t know him.

I pray that your study on the universal priesthood of believers will fill you with the wonder and the “wow” at what the Lord has asked you and all Christians to be part of. I pray that the study will open your understanding to what it means to be an alien and stranger in the world as well as why it’s so important to your universal priesthood calling. Finally, I pray that it will make the rest of the study a joy that you are eager to put into practice in your everyday life.

Love and kisses,

Your Godmother who’s been praying for you since you were born.

Kathie L. Wendland is a member at St. Peter, Mishicot, Wisconsin. She is serving on the Women’s Ministry Committee of the Commission on Adult Discipleship.

at work, as well as in the home, the church, and society.

TOGETHER

Kathie L. Wendland



Love requires practice

God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son. We are to love because he first loved us, but it requires effort to love others. Jeff Gunn

Mark Morey's Vermont Wilderness Survival School teaches some interesting skills. Students, for instance, learn how to build a fire with bow drills. One 10-year-old boy named Jacob learned how to build a fire in 10 minutes. Pretty impressive! On the flip side, it took Jacob *two years* to actually build that fire using only a bow drill. When Jacob was asked if he would now consider himself a "master" at this skill, he replied, "No, it would take a lifetime to master this."

The apostle Paul tells us that even a lifetime won't do when it comes to mastering the skills required to demonstrate love in all our relationships. The problem is that even the believer constantly struggles against an innate rebelliousness. Paul writes, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out" (Romans 7:18). While the Holy Spirit brings us to faith rather quickly, he uses a life-long process called sanctification to mold us and help us grow as his children.

Even when we want to do the right thing, as Paul did, we still need the power of God's Spirit in order to do it. Left to ourselves we would fall back into our loveless and selfish ways. Growing as disciples of Jesus takes time and repeated contact with God's power in the gospel. It took young Jacob two years to learn the skill of fire building. He struggled again and again to do what he was taught, but again and again he failed.

Love and listening

As a child of God, we are attempting the impossible. We cannot love as we should without the power of God. For instance, I know that God wants me to be a good listener (James 1:19). But it has taken me a long time to learn even a little about listening. So often I have struggled, but Jesus patiently forgave me and encouraged me to keep at it. Sometimes it just takes a little thought to put Christ's love into action.

For example, as a missionary in Zambia, I was intrigued to learn that in several African languages, the word for "listen to" is the same

as the word for “respect.” When I worked alongside of Apache people in eastern Arizona, I noticed they paused to listen and consider before responding to my comments.

From observing Zambians and Apaches, I developed a definition for listening: to give another person’s words the opportunity to influence me. But having the definition is not the same as having the skill. I’m still working on that. At times I succeed as I remember the patient love of Jesus and find the will to do as he wants.

Over time, I’ve also learned that when I don’t want to listen and get stubborn about dumb stuff that doesn’t really matter, I can burn a relationship pretty quickly. That’s a fire I usually don’t want to start.

Love and compassion

Another action that can help us demonstrate our love is the act of walking—in the other person’s shoes. The apostle Paul reminded the Colossians to put their “compassion shoes” on daily: “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Colossians 3:12).

Good questions to ask ourselves about feeling compassion for others are:

- “Will I work hard to ‘get’ where this person is coming from and why they are hurting? Will I realize how I might feel if I walked where my neighbor is walking?”
- “Do I automatically rationalize why I would never allow myself to be in such a situation as they are in?”
- “Do I find myself minimizing their pain and suffering, even before I think the situation through thoroughly?”
- “Do I find myself devising simplistic solutions for other people’s problems, while simultaneously I am blind to the fact that I have quite a few rather sticky problems of my own?”

Even asking such questions of ourselves requires practice.

While we’re walking in those compassion shoes, we can’t forget honesty and truthfulness. “[Speak] the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). While it may not always be appreciated immediately, people will understand the love behind it in the long run. On the flip side, people also soon will come to understand that you really don’t love them if you don’t think enough of them to redirect them when they are on the wrong path.

Of course, while you’re being truthful, don’t forget that there’s room for optimism and sincere confidence. It’s easy to be critical of others without reminding our-

selves or our neighbors of their good qualities. A tremendous act of love is to simply affirm people, to say kind things to your neighbor—genuinely. Solomon wrote: “Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones” (Proverbs 16:24). Morgan Wooten, the most successful high school basketball coach in history, often had to give critical feedback to his players to make them a successful team. But he made it his personal goal to consistently give at least twice as much praise to each individual player as he gave criticism.

Love and forgiveness

The most powerful act of love is the act of forgiveness. “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Jesus saw relational brokenness and did not give up. Instead, he pursued healing and persevered—to the cross and beyond the cross to an empty tomb. We too, motivated by the grace of God, can seek to restore relationships and offer forgiveness. People notice when you quickly give up on a relationship. If you fight to keep it going, however, and are even willing to humble yourself and apologize, that’s quite an eye-opener for many people.

I like to think of the practice of love as another type of “wilderness survival school.” It does not take a long time to learn what to do, but it’s quite another thing to actually do it. We will never master all the skills. Just the opposite, in fact—we’ll fail miserably and often. There have been and will continue to be plenty of times when we “die” in the wilderness due to the inability to master these skills.

When it comes to love, practice is required. But when we fail, we can return to the Master. When we return, it’s not just for an example or a remedial lesson. When we go back to our Master Jesus, it’s for forgiveness, mercy, and grace. When we come again to Jesus, we have the power to ask him—yes, one more time—to be our stand-in and allow his mastery to be counted as our mastery. His answer is always the same: “You’re forgiven. Try again.”

What better way to practice than by rediscovering that in God’s eyes our love is perfect already in Jesus?

Jeff Gunn is pastor at CrossWalk, Phoenix, Arizona.

This is the fourth 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.



THE HOLY SPIRIT:

Making hearts alive

The Holy Spirit changes us spiritually dead sinners into believers.

John F. Vogt

*I*t's got to be personal. You must invite Jesus into your heart." The hairs stand up on the back of my Lutheran neck as I hear these words. They are coming from an Australian missionary who attends our English worship in Ternopil, Ukraine. He wants to counterbalance the idea that Christianity is little more than bowing and making the sign of the cross whenever you pass a church. His concern is commendable, but his understanding of conversion and "coming into a personal relationship with Jesus" is unclear. The Bible tells us: "The Spirit gives life" (John 6:63).

OUR GREAT NEED

Why is that important? Look inside your heart. We nurse grudges, and we harbor hate. We're tempted to cast longing glances at other people's riches and entertain covetous thoughts about their spouses. Like hazardous waste, buried and forgotten, sin contaminates us inside and seeps out into our actions.

The saying goes: "God hates sin but loves the sinner." God's law tells us, however, that God hates not only sin. He also hates the sinner—every sinner. King David confessed: "You hate all who do wrong" (Psalm 5:5). That wasn't a slip of David's pen either. Sin puts us under God's curse. It damns us. The only true God is a holy God, without a trace of wrong. He threatens to punish all sin, and therefore he must punish me. And you. Paul writes, "You were dead in your transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). A dead body cannot give itself life.

GOD'S ETERNAL PLAN

Because we cannot come to God, he must come to us. He does. "[God] chose us in [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Ephesians 1:4).

God started the task of saving us already back before day one of creation. Even before he created Adam and Eve, he elected us—that is, he chose us to be his own. Election is vivid proof that salvation is entirely because of grace. God chose us before we did anything or could do anything for ourselves. Our eternal well-being was too important to God to be left to chance or accident or to anything we sinful humans must do.

THE PLAN'S FULFILLMENT

God chose us before time began. Then he carried out his plan in time. Jesus was born, lived a perfect life, suffered, died, and rose again. Jesus did what we could never do and undid what we had done.

Every law demands obedience. Since we could not keep divine law's demand for perfect obedience, Jesus obeyed the law for us. Every law demands punishment. Jesus endured the punishment for our sins. Now because of Jesus' perfect life and innocent death, God has declared the world righteous. "For all . . . are justified [that is, declared righteous in God's eyes] freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:23,24).

God calls out to the world: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!" (Isaiah 55:1). Jesus invites: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). It is at this point that the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life, begins his work in us. He calls us by the gospel—the good news of Jesus and what he has done. The Holy Spirit comes through Word and sacraments to make our dead hearts alive with faith.

The Holy Spirit changes us spiritually dead sinners into believers. The Bible uses a number of picture words for this life-giving work. It is called repentance, which means a change of heart and mind so that the person regrets his sinfulness and through faith embraces the merits of Christ. Regeneration is another picture word. It means to be born again, as Jesus told Nicodemus: "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3). The Bible uses the picture of turning on the light. Our natural condition is blindness until the Holy Spirit calls us "out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). Then there's "to make alive." We see an example of that when Paul writes: "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions" (Ephesians 2:4,5).

Conversion, repentance, regeneration, illumination,

making alive—all referring to the moment saving faith was placed in our hearts—are entirely God's doing. It's that plain and simple! "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith . . . it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

In conversion the human is passive. There is no cooperation on our part, no personal decision springing from any power within. But we are not forced to believe against our will. Rather "it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:13). No longer do we want to live in rebellion against God. We want to put our trust in Christ and what he has done. The Holy Spirit has converted our will. "God makes willing people out of the unwilling" (Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article II:15).

God's eternal plan does not stop with our conversion. No, it continues throughout our lifetime as the Holy Spirit guides us into the "good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). Moreover, the Spirit will stay on the job until we are fully glorified, which is the final step in God's eternal plan for us.

To be sure, the Scriptures contain warnings. "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Corinthians 10:12). We need such warnings from God's law because the old sinful nature still lives in us. But the Scriptures balance such warnings with rich gospel promises. "And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (13). Such gospel promises comfort and encourage the new faith in us.

My Australian friend encourages people to invite Jesus into their heart. Such words can be understood correctly if one realizes that the heart can receive Christ only through the Holy Spirit's work. Better, however, is to be totally clear in our speaking. The Holy Spirit gives spiritual and eternal life. The Giver of Life calls us through the gospel and converts us. He and he alone makes our sinful hearts alive with faith. To God alone be the glory!

The *heart* can receive
Christ only through
the Holy Spirit's work.

John F. Vogt serves as rector (president) of St. Sophia Seminary in Ternopil, Ukraine. He serves the Ukrainian Lutheran Church and Thoughts of Faith, an organization affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Read more about the Holy Spirit in *The Holy Spirit, Giver of Life*, an NPH publication written by Vogt. Find a related Bible study on this topic after May 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net

WHATEVER

Lost sheep are precious

A teenager and her family use every opportunity to share the good news of Jesus.

Meg Stewart

When unexpected things happen, sometimes we lose our cool. We might say or do things that will drastically change not only our lives but someone else's as well. Negative or positive, the impact is made and seldom forgotten. I don't know how our words and actions affected all of the people involved that day, but I hope and pray that it was something good.

We had just spent a gorgeous afternoon across the lake near our friends' cabin up north. As evening approached, my family and I became hungry and tired, so we decided to head back for the cabin. We directed the boat toward the pier.

As we approached the pier, we saw a dark figure lying there unmoving. My mother, assuming it was a body, guarded us kids from the sight. My father went to check it out. He went closer to the figure and nudged it with the tip of his shoe. It let out a pained groan. My mother rushed over to help. The "body" turned out to be a woman, and my parents, with the help of my brother, got her into our van.

She explained to us that her boyfriend, in a drunken rage, had pushed her off the pier and into the water and left her to drown. Her foot was badly injured, and she couldn't get herself out of the water. Eventually she had pulled herself halfway onto the pier and collapsed there, exhausted and in a lot of pain.

As she sat in our van telling us the story, her boyfriend stumbled out of the woods. He was clearly very drunk. My father kept him away from the van, but we could still hear him. He swore and screamed at the woman that no one would ever love her and that she was worth nothing. My mother rolled up the windows. My dad got the man to leave by telling him that he was going to call the police.

My father got into the van and drove back to the cabin. Then the woman started sobbing. She said her boyfriend was right, that she was worth nothing and that nobody, not even God, cared if she were alive. She told us that she used to be involved in the church, but she had moved and started a different

life that didn't include God. She was convinced that her situation was God's way of punishing her for leaving him. She said that there was no way that God would be able to forgive her and that he must really hate her.

Then we knew just what to say. It was pretty amazing. The whole thing happened so fast, and it was so surreal, like something you would see on TV. We reminded her about how Jesus had given himself over to death so that the sins of the whole world—hers included—would be forgiven, for the past, present, and future. We told her that she was God's child and that he had loved her for her whole life and would never stop loving her. She just cried.

We arrived at the cabin and called an ambulance and the police. Her boyfriend turned up again and was arrested for assault and attempted homicide. She was taken to the hospital. The next day she was back, and my mother took food to her trailer. She couldn't stop thanking us. We had to leave for home that day and have never seen her since. We hope and pray that she is having a better life and that our words and actions helped her relationship with Jesus.

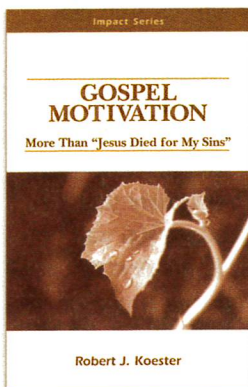
Meg Stewart, a sophomore at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wisconsin, is a member at St. Peter, Helenville, Wisconsin.





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.

Gospel motivation



\$13.99

One cannot walk away from the cross—understanding who was on it and all that he suffered there, realizing that he was there because he knew that this was the price of your eternal freedom—without saying, “I love you, too, Jesus. I will always love you. I will always serve you.”

Yet we are saddened to discover with Paul that what we want to do—love and serve him—we do not do in our sinful flesh (Romans 7:15). In fact, the more we study the Word,

the more we realize just how corrupt our sinful nature is. That sinful nature can even take our pursuit of piety in a completely wrong direction, so that we focus on our efforts instead of on Christ.

In his book, *Gospel Motivation—More Than “Jesus Died for My Sins,”* Robert Koester helps us to see how God empow-

ers us for living for him who died for us and was raised again, and how the Holy Spirit convinces us to live as the new creations we have become.

Many people today are asking for “practical” Bible teaching. Here you have it as Koester shows us how Scripture weaves together the gospel (Jesus died for my sins) and the encouragement to godly living (how God wants me to live). He helps us see the connections Scripture makes between faith and life and between what Christ has made us (justification) and how the Lord wants us to live (sanctification).

This is a great book for pastors, teachers, counselors, and parents who are looking for help in encouraging sanctification. It would be a great resource for a small group Bible study. (There are study questions and a Scripture index in the back.) It will help all Christians grow in spiritual wisdom and in Christian living, as it leads us into the Word and focuses us on our Savior.

Thomas Westra
 Beautiful Savior, Cincinnati, Ohio

Obituaries

Kenneth A. Pahnke 1933-2007

Kenneth Pahnke was born Dec. 3, 1933, in Winona, Minn. He died Feb. 1, 2007, in Menomonie, Wis.

A graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he served Zion, Columbus, Wis.; St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis.; Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service, Milwaukee, Wis.; North Trinity, Milwaukee, Wis.; St. Matthew's, Winona, Minn.; and St. Paul, Menomonie, Wis.

He was preceded in death by his parents. He is survived by his wife, Glennis; and three sons.

Michael Clay Crawford 1948-2007

Michael Clay Crawford was born Dec. 29, 1948, in Adrian, Mich. He died Feb. 20, 2007, in Caledonia, Minn.

A graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Christ, Baxter, Minn.; Atonement,

Baltimore, Md.; St. Peter, Fond du Lac, Wis.; and the Lutheran Home Association, Belle Plaine, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Joan; three sons; five daughters; two grandchildren; his mother; and his sister.

Sarah Ellen Fillner 1952-2007

Sarah Ellen Fillner (nee Schroeder) was born April 29, 1952, in New Ulm, Minn. She died Feb. 16, 2007, in Shelby Township, Mich.

A 1974 graduate of Doctor Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at Grace, Muskegon, Mich.; Martin Luther, Warren, Mich.; and Cross of Glory, Washington, Mich.

She is survived by her husband, Douglas; two sons; one daughter; and her parents.

Willis E.W. Hadler 1934-2007

Willis Hadler was born Sept. 17, 1934, in the township of Belle Creek,

Goodhue County, Minn. He died March 2, 2007, in Tucson, Ariz.

A 1956 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he served 41 years as principal and teacher at Our Savior, Bylas, Ariz., on the San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation.

He is survived by his wife, Lyla; six children; 12 grandchildren; a great-grandson; a brother; a sister; a mother-in-law; and numerous nieces and nephews.

CORRECTION: In the February obituaries, Valborg Nesseth was incorrectly reported as being preceded in death by her husband, Everett. Nesseth was not married. Everett was her sister's husband. We apologize for the error.

Ministerial Education continues to train workers for the Lord

During the past 10 years, Ministerial Education has faced many challenges, including financial difficulties. However, by continuously evaluating and studying all aspects of its educational system, Ministerial Education is able to continue training dedicated and willing servants to do the Lord's work in the synod's churches and classrooms.

WELS currently supports two preparatory high schools, Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., and Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.; one college, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; and one seminary, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.

Many aspects of this educational system have been studied over the years, from curricular programs and ministry tracks to building projects and financial improvements. "We have made adjustments," says Peter Kruschel, administrator for Ministerial Education. "We have reworked tuition and fee structures; expanded student assistance programs; found new ways to fund needed capital improvements; created new mission advancement programs; enacted systemwide, cost-saving measures; and strengthened support for area Lutheran high schools."

While these actions have improved schools and made the ministerial education system more efficient, "they have not altered the fact that as a synod we are not supporting our ministerial schools to a degree that enables us to maintain the system in the way we have in the past," says Kruschel. "It doesn't appear that we're going to be able to support four schools in this three-tier system we have."

Faced with continuing deficits at the ministerial education schools, the Synodical Council resolved to close Michigan Lutheran Seminary at the end of the 2007-08 school year. This recommendation is being sent to the synod convention in July 2007.

"The historic makeup of our system with its prep schools, college, and seminary may change," says Kruschel.



Josh Hanson, a pre-seminary student at Martin Luther College, during a Spanish immersion trip to Ecuador. These and other international programs at WELS' ministerial education schools give students unique opportunities to study foreign languages and cultures.

"WELS' ministerial education system, however, will not change. We will do everything possible to make sure the synod can continue to have the same kind of quality graduates it has had in the past."

Instruction at the preparatory high schools, for example, continues to equip students to bear witness to the law and gospel throughout their lives. The preparatory schools also provide students with unique opportunities to spread God's Word. Through programs like Projects Timothy and Titus, students can volunteer to do mission work in places like the Ukraine, Hong Kong, Germany, and the Caribbean. "In many cases, students come back from these mission trips knowing that they want to devote their lives to the Lord's service and prepare for the public ministry," says Kruschel. Prep school training also helps to ensure that the synod will have enough pastors and teachers to lead WELS congregations and schools.

In the same fashion, Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary prepare students to serve wher-

ever they are called. "Martin Luther College helps students gain early field experience and has great international teaching opportunities for graduates," says Kruschel. "Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary now has Winterim—a two-week session between the first and second semesters—that provides unique classes and opportunities for students, including mission trips."

After much preparation, the students are ready to go out into the world to proclaim the gospel. It is here that their priceless ministerial education will be put to use. "One of the greatest values of WELS' ministerial education system is not only the education the students get," says Kruschel, "but also the fact that the synod's need for pastors and teachers is being met."

As changes approach, Kruschel emphasizes the continuing value of ministerial education. "Even as we face these trying times, we need to remember that ministerial education is a treasure that we need to hold onto. We're making appropriate changes and always looking for ways to improve this valuable ministry. We don't want to lose this."

READ THROUGH MY BIBLE IN 3 YEARS

JUNE 2007

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|------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Ezekiel 22 | 16. Ps. 84 |
| 2. Ezek. 23 | 17. Ps. 85 |
| 3. Ezek. 24 | 18. Ps. 86, 87 |
| 4. Ezek. 25, 26 | 19. Ps. 88 |
| 5. Ezek. 27, 28 | 20. Ps. 89:1-37 |
| 6. Ezek. 29, 30 | 21. Ps. 89:38-52 |
| 7. Ezek. 31, 32 | 22. Ezekiel 33 |
| 8. Psalm 73 | 23. Ezek. 34 |
| 9. Ps. 74 | 24. Ezek 35:1-36:15 |
| 10. Ps. 75, 76 | 25. Ezek. 36:16-38 |
| 11. Ps. 77 | 26. Ezek. 37 |
| 12. Ps. 78:1-39 | 27. Ezek. 38 |
| 13. Ps. 78:40-72 | 28. Ezek. 39 |
| 14. Ps. 79, 80 | 29. Ezek. 40:1-47 |
| 15. Ps. 81-83 | 30. Ezek. 40:48-41:26 |

Daily Devotions prove popular

Almost 10,000 people subscribe to Daily Devotions, a free service provided by **WhatAboutJesus.com**. Through this service, subscribers receive a brief devotion, Monday through Friday, to their e-mail.

A recent survey of the subscribers is helping the Commission on Evangelism, the provider of **WhatAboutJesus.com**, understand how the devotions are impacting the subscribers—and others. Twenty-two percent of the Daily Devotions recipients responded to the survey. “We were blown away by the level of response,” says Pastor Ken Fisher, project director.

Through this survey and its 45 pages of overwhelmingly positive feedback, Fisher and his team discovered that the Daily Devotions service allows many subscribers to, as one respondent stated, “start each day with a devotion—something I never made time for before . . . but now it’s so easy.”

They also found out that many recipients forward the devotions to their friends and family, both WELS and non-WELS members: “There are 25 people here at work that have requested to be put on my weekly ‘forward’—and only one other is a WELS Lutheran.”

This devotion service gives individuals an easy way to get a daily dose of God’s Word. “There is no true excuse anymore [for not reading a daily devotion]. The devotions arrive in your inbox every day; all you have to do is read them,” says Fisher. The devotions are brief, applicable to life, and designed with both the church and unchurched in mind. Two devotions each week are designated for Bible study, while the others focus on general topics. Members of the commissions on Evangelism and Adult Discipleship write the devotions.

The Daily Devotions service is found at **WhatAboutJesus.com**, a Web site devoted to be an easily accessible way to share the gospel with the unchurched. To subscribe, go to **WhatAboutJesus.com**, click on “Daily Devotions,” and follow the directions.

Jenni Petersen

Separated by borders, united in faith—

“They’re just like us!” This is how Nate Scharf, a student at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., describes his first impressions at this year’s Mequon-Mexico Theological Workshop. The workshop, held annually in Mexico, brings together seminary students from Mequon and Mexico. Together with professors from both seminaries and Mexican pastors, they join for two days of fellowship and studies.

The six Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary students that attended the workshop, led by seminary professor John Schuetze, came down as part of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary’s Winterim Spanish Immersion Cultural Experience (SPICE). Students involved in SPICE come down to Puebla, a city of approximately six million people located two hours from Mexico City, in early January. They study Spanish for a week and stay with host families. Besides speaking plenty of Spanish, they have the opportunity to tour different sites and take in cultural experiences. They then attend the workshop, where they enjoy fellowship and gain insight on the ministry in Mexico.

At the workshop the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary students met with four of the five students enrolled in the Mexican Lutheran Seminary. Although languages, cultures, and a border separate them, they share the same bond of faith. Schuetze notes, “That bond allows us to worship together, receive the Lord’s Supper together, build each other up in the Word, and build friendships that will not only exist in this life but in the next as well.”

The Mexican seminary students traveled from Torreón, where the Mexican Lutheran Seminary is located. This 16-hour bus trip is worthwhile

for the students. Due to their small numbers, they at times feel alone and isolated. It is encouraging for the Mexicans to meet fellow men training to be pastors. Carlos Rosales, a Mexican seminary student, notes, “I thank God for this great blessing. I was able to make new friends and grow spiritually.”

The seminary students also have the opportunity to enjoy cultural dif-



Attendees of the 2007 Mequon-Mexico Theological Workshop, held annually in Puebla, Mexico. This workshop give seminary students from Mequon and Mexico an opportunity to join for two days of fellowship and studies.

ferences. This year, they ate meals provided by the Puebla congregation, listened to guitar music, and played dominoes together. “The hospitality was amazing,” Scharf recalls.

One of the workshop highlights was a presentation on a new WELS Spanish hymnal. Pastor Jon Buchholz, the chairman of the committee preparing the hymnal, brought samples of liturgy pieces and hymns that are being considered. Seminary students, professors, and pastors were given the chance to sing through the music and offer feedback.

As this annual workshop continues, seminary students from each country will be given a unique opportunity to grow together and encourage each other in spirit and ministry. They also will form friendships that span across the border and last beyond this life.

Rachel Hartman

Q&A with Rinda Boehm, WELS Kingdom Workers volunteer

Rinda Boehm, a member at Living Savior, Asheville, N.C., has volunteered through WELS Kingdom Workers for the past three years. After completing her most recent volunteer experience in North Carolina, Boehm sat down with Forward in Christ to talk about volunteering and how it has impacted her life.

Question – What kinds of volunteer opportunities have you participated in? Have you ever traveled abroad?

Answer – I was always interested in volunteering for WELS Kingdom Workers, thinking that someday I might go to Africa or India or some other continent—though I thought it would have to wait until retirement. However, as it turns out, there are plenty of mission opportunities right here in the United States, fit for volunteers of nearly all ages and situations. So far I've volunteered in Rochester, N.Y.; Boston, Mass.; and Asheville, N.C.

Question – How did you get involved in volunteering?

Answer – My friend Becky Stuewer first planted the seed of volunteering with Kingdom Workers. She and another volunteer, Julie Majerus, were going to help with outreach at Living Savior in Asheville. Becky said, "You know, they can use one more volunteer . . ." I thought about it and prayed about it. There were no thunderbolts or miraculous revelations, but I couldn't help but think that now was the time—later might not come.



Rinda Boehm (right), volunteer for WELS Kingdom Workers, and Ruth Woods, member of Living Savior, Asheville, N.C., work as aides for Sunday school classes held at Living Savior. Over the past three years, Boehm has volunteered in New York, Massachusetts, and North Carolina. "These volunteer experiences have definitely helped me grow spiritually," says Boehm. "I have been blessed to meet so many people and make more dear friends."

So I packed up my car and drove down to Asheville. I remember meeting members of the congregation for the first time at a Wednesday evening Lenten service. There were so many friendly faces (and so many names to remember!). Their welcome was warm and encouraging. We knew this was going to be a fun experience!

Question – What were your responsibilities in this role?

Answer – Most of our volunteer activities took place during the weekends and weeknights. We helped with any and all outreach opportunities that arose—this meant canvassing neighborhoods; making phone calls to identify prospects; helping coordinate vacation Bible school and the Easter for Kids and Christmas for Kids programs; and helping with "God 101" classes. We also taught Sunday school and helped with women's Bible studies and children's messages. There was never a dull moment!

Question – How have these volunteer experiences enriched your life?

Answer – These volunteer experiences have definitely helped me grow spiritually, especially trusting in the power of God's Word. He brings about results in spite of my failings because his Word is powerful and effective. One of my favorite Bible passages is Isaiah 55:11, because it reminds me that God's Word accomplishes what he desires. Additionally, through volunteering I have been blessed to meet so many people and make more dear friends. Like Psalm 23 says, ". . . my cup runneth over!"

Question – Any other thoughts?

Answer – My experiences as a volunteer with WELS Kingdom Workers have absolutely impacted me spiritually. I encourage others to volunteer—to find their niche and run with it. Unfortunately, I think there is that assumption out there that pastors and teachers can get it all done—but they can't. Even though they are fantastic, they aren't superhuman. They need our help too, so we all need to be in it together. We're a team, and with God's help and guidance more souls might be won for his kingdom!

For more information about WELS Kingdom Workers and current volunteer opportunities, visit www.welskingdomworkers.org or call 414-771-6848.

WELS launches Internet media network – Streams®

Watching a television program and listening to the radio on a computer were inconceivable ideas only a few years ago. Now, though, millions of Americans routinely use the Internet not only as a means to read about their favorite topics, but also as a way to watch and hear them. With this idea in mind, WELS recently launched its Internet media network, Streams, <http://streams.wels.net>.

“The Web has grown out of just a textual experience,” explains Martin Spriggs, WELS chief technology officer. “Web visitors expect their information delivered through multi-media channels. The ability to stream audio and video will add an important dimension to WELS communications.”

Steve Zambo, WELS media communications director, adds, “When people are looking for information—a school, a church, or immediate help—one of the first places they go is to the Internet. Streams allows us to be there in a way that will lead people to dig deeper. I’d like it to be an outreach tool for every congregation, a sound resource for every Christian, and a door to the good news we have for all people.”

Programming on Streams includes items for all members of the family,

What can you find on Streams?

Streams is divided into five areas: Video, Radio, Podcasts, Music, and Live. Programming is available on channels within these areas.

- **Video channels:** Education, Family, Information, Inspiration, Performances, and New Releases
- **Radio channels:** Choral, Contemporary, Instrumental, Mix, Seasonal, and Spoken Word
- **Music channels:** Choral, Contemporary, Traditional, Instrumental, and Seasonal
- **Podcast channels:** Education, Family, Information, Inspiration, Music, and New Releases
- **Live:** Scheduled programming includes Martin Luther College’s and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary’s graduation and Call Day services (see below) and synod convention coverage (July 30-Aug. 3).

from *Fifth Pew from the Front*, which is popular with all ages, to more focused programming such as *Mr. Whistle* for children and live broadcasting of Call Day services and synod conventions for adults.

“We want Streams to focus on the Word by making it applicable to your everyday life,” says Julie Duran, WELS Webmaster. “When you go for a walk or jog, listen to a portable Streams podcast. When you’re down and need a lift, search the site for encouragement. When you’re at work, tune into Streams radio.”

Although much of the programming is geared for WELS members, non-WELS visitors also are engrossed in the content.

“I was passed the link through a friend and found myself on the site for more than an hour,” writes one Streams visitor. “Not being a WELS member, I learned many interesting things through the online sermons, videos, and the radio stations. I think this is a great resource for a church body to have to reach out to others.”

Untangling the Web

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

This May, WELS members from around the world can watch graduation and Call Day services from Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., live over the Internet at <http://streams.wels.net>. The following events will be broadcast:

- Martin Luther College graduation, 10 A.M. CDT, May 19.
- Martin Luther College Call Day service, 2:30 P.M. CDT, May 19.
- Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Call Day service, 10 A.M. CDT, May 24.
- Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary graduation, 10 A.M. CDT, May 25.

This will be the second time these events have been broadcast live online on Streams, WELS’ interactive Internet media network. Learn more about Streams and its offerings in the article above.

DEFINING RELIGION

Regeneration: a synonym for conversion. It is the act in which the Holy Spirit creates new life or faith in a person who by nature is spiritually dead. Those who have been converted or regenerated by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace are born again (John 3:3-6, 1 Peter 1:23). Read more about the Holy Spirit on p. 16.

New opportunities for Milwaukee campus ministry

A lighthouse on the seacoast serves as a beacon to guide ships at sea. A flare acts as a beacon to illuminate a scene or identify a location. With the Lord's blessing, the new Beacon Center at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee (UWM) will draw students to the campus ministry program where they will receive guidance on their walks of faith as the truths of the Bible are illuminated.

For almost 40 years, this campus ministry has been based in a house with several walls removed to create an open meeting space. Students from UWM, Marquette University, and the Milwaukee School of Engineering attended Bible studies and worship services at the campus house, but the space only allowed for gatherings of about 30 people.

But through the efforts of the campus ministry, Jesus Cares Ministries, the Milwaukee Federation of WELS churches, Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, the Antioch and Christian Stewardship Foundation, and many other donors, the Beacon Center was purchased on Dec. 22, 2006. The building had been the home of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) campus ministry. Wishing it to continue being used for the Lord's work, the LCMS worked with WELS to facilitate the purchase.

Located across from the UWM student union, the Beacon Center is visible and accessible to students. The large (36' x 60') chapel and fellowship hall are luxuries compared to the constraints of the campus house. When renovations are complete, the building will have a coffee bar with wireless Internet, a game room, and space for meals and other gatherings.

"We will be able to host concerts, community events, and service events and also provide meeting areas for small group Bible studies and cooperative learning groups," shares Bill Limmer, campus ministry pastor. "The Beacon Center will also be able to house some counseling services such as Lutherans for Life. We anticipate the building to be used by a variety of people and organizations."

Spreading the gospel on Milwaukee college campuses is an awesome mission opportunity. Not only does the ministry serve students from more than 200 WELS congregations, but it also reaches out to the 100,000 students on Milwaukee campuses who need the good news of Jesus. With the new opportunities the Beacon Center provides, Limmer and the students involved will continue their ministry, always relying on the power of God's Word to grow his kingdom.



Pastor Bill Limmer (right) and campus ministry students share a bite to eat.

In the news

Hope Christian Schools, Milwaukee, Wis., was featured in the Feb. 14 issue

of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. The school system received part of a \$1.3 million grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, one of the largest single private donations to a Milwaukee neighborhood. Funds will go toward the Hope Institute, an entity charged with strengthening faculty leadership development, retention, and educational quality. "We're working hard to create an environment that inspires teachers and students to achieve their best," said superintendent Kole Knueppel.

World news

Catholics report large growth—The Roman Catholic Church grew to 69.1 million members in 2005, making it the fastest-growing church in the country (up 1.94 percent).

The Assemblies of God grew 1.86 percent and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints grew 1.63 percent, according to the *2007 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*. The *2007 Yearbook* contains data from 2005 that was reported in 2006.

The 10 largest U.S. churches are the

- Roman Catholic Church;
- Southern Baptist Convention;
- United Methodist Church;
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints;
- Church of God in Christ;
- National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.;
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America;
- National Baptist Convention of America;
- Presbyterian Church (USA); and
- Assemblies of God.

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

District news

Nebraska

Pastor Gary Schult and wife Janice were installed as spiritual leaders and house parents at New Beginnings Home for Unwed Mothers at Christ Our Redeemer, Aurora, Colo., on Feb. 18.

Southeastern Wisconsin

The Association of Lutheran High Schools conference was held in Brookfield, Wis., on Feb. 1-2. The conference theme, "Changing Lives with the Changeless Truth," focused on using the power of the Word to effect positive change in the lives of young people. At the meeting, plans were made to begin a joint recruitment project between area Lutheran high schools and Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

Milton Cockroft, a member of Atone-ment, Milwaukee, Wis., is serving as Pathways Coordinator for Wisconsin Lutheran College in Milwaukee. Cockroft will work with area high schools to prepare students from culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse families for college. Cockroft's position is part of Wisconsin Lutheran College's initia-

tive to support and serve an increasing racially diverse and traditionally underserved student population.

Mark Wilson, a 1993 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis., won the Honda Classic on the PGA Tour in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. Wilson had a come-from-behind victory despite being assessed a two-stroke penalty after his caddie gave advice to competitors (a violation of the rules of golf). Wilson is the fourth Wisconsin golfer to win on the PGA Tour since 1996.

Western Wisconsin

Brenda Arndt, member of St. Paul, Menomonie, Wis., was awarded the fourth annual Julie Olson Humanitarian Award. Recipients are selected by the Hearing Loss Association of America for their dedication and contributions to helping those who are hard of hearing.

Northern Wisconsin

After more than four decades of service at Faith, Oshkosh, Wis., **Norma Lansing** ended her tenure as organist

Northern Wisconsin



Pictured are veteran workers in the Lord's vineyard (l to r): Theodore Sauer, Delmar Brick, Herbert Kruschel, William Fischer, and Waldemar Loescher. They were recognized for their service on Called Worker Appreciation Sunday at Bethany, Manitowoc, Wis., in January. All together, these five men have served a total of 291 years in the called ministry. They still take an active role in the church's work.

in December 2006. The pastor and congregation at Faith thank God for giving Lansing the gift of music and for her willingness to use that gift.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: NE—Tim Kemnitz; NW—Joel Lillo; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Brett Brauer.

WELS news briefs

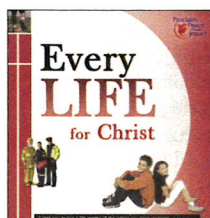
Board for World Missions
414-256-3233; bwm@sab.wels.net

Geraja Lutheran Indonesia, the Lutheran Church in Indonesia, will celebrate its 20th anniversary this year. Pastor Pieter Reid serves as a friendly counselor to this church body, which now numbers more than 1,000 souls.

In its February meeting, the Board for World Missions decided to begin **mission work in Mozambique** by using a reallocation of existing funds and a redeployment of manpower. The plan is to go in strong and strategically with a mission team and a radio ministry. The mission team will consist of one missionary, one staff worker, and hopefully a volunteer couple. The Lutheran Church of Central Africa national church will continue to do outreach along the border of Malawi and Mozambique (as they have been

doing), while the expatriate mission team will start work away from the border in Nampula. Learn more about mission work in Mozambique at www.wels.net/jump/mozambique.

Board for Ministerial Education
414-256-3237; bme@sab.wels.net



Materials for the final phase of North American Outreach will be online after May 1 at www.wels.net/jump/nao.

Resources include worship services, an annual stewardship emphasis, and a Bible study on Abraham. The Web site will also include copies of the three doctrinal vocation presentations given at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's annual Fall Symposium in 2006 as well as links to more information to help

carry out the theme for Phase 4: "Every life for Christ." Materials were mailed to all congregations in April.

Commission on Adult Discipleship
414-256-3278; cad@sab.wels.net

The Commission on Adult Discipleship's Women's Ministry Committee is sponsoring a **National WELS Women's Leadership Conference** on July 7. Held at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., this conference will encourage and edify WELS women through the introduction of a new Bible study, "Heirs Together—Serving Together;" discussions; skits; worship; and more. Kathie Wendland, a member of the committee, will present the keynote address, "A leader . . . Who? Me?" To learn more or to register, go to www.wels.net/jump/womenconf or call 800-567-8669.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY**Pastors**

Else, Ross H., to Emmaus, Phoenix, Ariz.
Krenke, Matthew, to Zion, Valentine, Neb.
Myers, Daniel, to Cameroon
Pederson, Benjy E., to Grace, Spring Hill, Fla.
Rohrback, Mark J., to Redeemer, Cedarburg, Wis.
Stelljes, Ross A., to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.
Wagenknecht, Myrl F., as exploratory pastor, East Tucson, Ariz.
Wiederich, Larry L., to retirement

Teachers

Broring, Karen M., to Resurrection, Rochester, Minn.
Brown, Janell S., to Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz.
Drawa, Anne E., to Good Shepherd, West Bend, Wis.
Eggert, Sandra L., to Immanuel, De Pere, Wis.
Fillner, Eric J., to Apostles, San Jose, Calif.
Hall, Brent, to Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis.
Kemnitz, Nicole P., to St. Paul, Beverly Hills, Fla.
Koepke, Robert B., to retirement
Lange, Dianne R., to St. Mark, Green Bay, Wis.
Leyrer, Julia K., to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
Marohn, Corey E., to Emmanuel, Tempe, Ariz.
Mattek, Joel T., to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.
Mischke, Janet L., to retirement
Moll, Katie M., to Trinity, Kiel, Wis.
Punzel, Janelle M., to St. Peter, Appleton, Wis.
Raymond, Kyle R., to Holy Word, Austin, Tex.
Scharf, Angela R., to Martin Luther, Plzen, Czech Republic
Schultz, Heidi Jo, to Faith, Milwaukee, Wis.
Seeger, Emily A., to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
Seelow, Peggy L., to Redeemer, Rice Lake, Wis.
Steiner, Mark A., to Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz.
Strasser, Kristina M., to Bethlehem, Germantown, Wis.
Tess, Elizabeth C., to Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minn.
Treuden, Jennifer., to Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis.
Troge, Benjamin K., to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
Waage, June K., to Loving Arms Christian Child Development Center, Maribel, Wis.
Weston, Donald S., to Grace, Vero Beach, Fla.

Staff Minister

Schultz, Jason J., to Prince of Peace, Martinez, Ga.

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. Eric Oakland, 651-459-3021; standrews50th@yahoo.com.
Muskego, Wis.—St. Paul (150). May 12, 6 P.M.; May 13, 8, 9:30, and 11 A.M.; May 14, 7 P.M. Vince Kirchoff, 414-327-1619; Web site, www.stpaulmuskego.org.
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.
Reedsville, Wis.—St. John St. James (150). May 20, 6:30 P.M. Concert by St. Marcus United Voices of Praise Choir. Daniel Duchow, 920-754-4751; adduchow@lakefield.net.
Clare, Mich.—St. John (125). June 24, 4 P.M. Dinner to follow. 989-386-7216.

COMING EVENTS**Commencement events**

- **Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.**—May 18: concert, 7:30 P.M. May 19: graduation service, 10 A.M.; Call Day service and assignment of graduates, 2:30 P.M.
 - **Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.**—May 22: vicar assignment service, 7 P.M. May 24: Call Day service and assignment of graduates, 10 A.M.; commencement concert, 7:30 P.M. May 25: graduation service, 10 A.M.
 - **Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.**—May 25: concert, 7 P.M. May 26: graduation service, 10 A.M.
 - **Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.**—May 25: concert, 7 P.M. May 26: graduation service, 10:30 A.M.
- Father/son retreat**—May 18-20. Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. Host, Lutheran Pioneers and the Southeastern Wisconsin District Youth Discipleship Commission. Dale Lorfeld, 262-534-5124; office@lutheranpioneers.org. Web site, www.lutheranpioneers.org.

Music camp—June 10-15. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. For WELS/ELS students grades 6-8 with two years keyboard experience. Registration deadline: May 25. Web site, www.wels.net/jump/worship.

Actor/video day camps—held at Fort Atkinson, Wis. Steve Zambo, 414-256-3281; steve.zambo@sab.wels.net.

- June 11-15. Video Production Day Camp Session 1 for grades 7-9.
- June 11-15. Actor Day Camp Session 1 for grades 7-9.
- June 18-22. Video Production Day Camp Session 2 for grades 7-9.
- June 18-22. Actor Day Camp Session 2 for grades 7-9.

- June 23-24. Advanced Actor Television Workshop for all ages.

Northwestern Publishing House music reading workshops—Cheryl Nolte, 800-662-6022, 414-615-5763; noltecl@nph.wels.net. Web site, www.nph.net/music/workshop.

- June 16, Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.
- June 30, St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn.
- July 1, St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis.
- July 14, Mount Olive, Appleton, Wis.
- July 21, Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis.
- Aug. 11, 9 A.M. Choral music only. NPH, Milwaukee, Wis.

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; rmannisto@aol.com.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Organist—for Hope, Andover, Minn. Robert Schultz, 612-481-7504.

Counseling positions—Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Services, Inc., is looking to hire licensed psychologists, licensed professional counselors, and licensed clinical social workers with specific area(s) of specialty for its Wisconsin offices located in Milwaukee, West Bend, Fond du Lac, and Appleton. Applicants must be active WELS members. Mary Schoultz, Human Resource Director; PO Box 245039, Milwaukee WI 53224-9539; 888-685-9522; mschoultz@wlcsf.org.

Female RN or other professional—The Central Africa Medical Mission is seeking a female RN or other female professional to serve people in Malawi, Africa. The position includes driving and managing a mobile clinic that provides both primary and curative care to 35,000 people a year. The applicant must be an active WELS member and be willing to commit four years for training, service, and a short speaking tour when back in the United States. Cindy Hains, RN, Nurse Recruiter, 310-287-0114; cindyhains@mac.com.

NAMES WANTED

WELS members in or near Istanbul, Turkey—James Lake, 3lakes@gmail.com.

Silver City and Lordsburg, N.M.—Steven Spencer, 520-458-5897; tlcsvaz@cox.net.

Texas A & M former students and Aggie Alumni in College Station, Tex.—Ben Rupp, 512-799-0458; benrupp04@gmail.com.

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*.

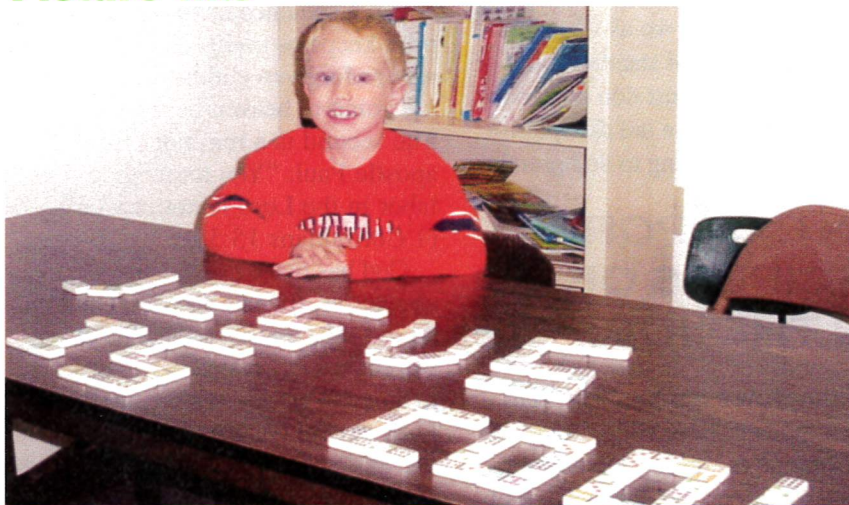
WORD FIND

Twelve books of the Bible are hidden in the following paragraph. Read carefully, as not all names are hidden within a word. If you get stuck, the answers are below.

Your mission is to find twelve books of the Bible in these sentences. Take care when marking your answers—some books will be harder to find than others. If truth be told, many people have difficulties with this puzzle. They are looking so hard that they can't find the names, even when the words are right in front of them—a most peculiar thing! Don't judge so quickly, though. This type of puzzle isn't just for the average Joe—learned men even get a run for their money. It's a tough job, which requires concentration and skill. So grab a banana, hum a tune, or bite your pencil. Do whatever it takes to help you think! Yes, there are some easy ones, but don't be tricked into thinking you'll find all twelve in a hurry. For example, take my friend Jon. "Aha, aha!" he cried, as he worked on this puzzle. Although he found numbers of them right away, he was soon scowling in thought. Like many people who complete this puzzle, he didn't realize he chose a tough one. After looking closely and carefully, however, he did find them all. Can you?

ANSWERS: Mark, Ruth, Kings, Amos, Judges, Joel, Job, Nahum, Esther, Jonah, Numbers, Hosea. If you're still stuck, view the complete answer key at www.forwardinchrist.net.

Picture this



Trayvon Sutherland, one of the children participating in the after-school program at St. Matthew Christian Child Care, Port Washington, Wis., shares his love for Jesus while playing with dominoes during game week. With more than 100 students currently enrolled, St. Matthew reaches out to the community through various programs, including a preschool and state-licensed child care. Although approximately 80 percent of the children attending are not members of WELS, all of the children are learning about their Savior, and many families have become members through this program.

Submitted by St. Matthew Christian Child Care

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.

SNAPPY

SENTENCES TO SHARE WITH OTHERS

Here are some clever ways to deliver a five-second sermon:

- Jesus built a bridge with two boards and three nails.
- Love someone not because they are Christian but because you are.
- You don't become a missionary by crossing the sea but by seeing the cross.
- Man's way leads to a hopeless end. God's way leads to an endless hope.
- Christians are like coals—together they glow, apart they grow cold.
- A brook would lose its song if God removed the rocks.
- There are two things I've learned: There is a God, and I am not him.

—origin unknown

Every Life for Christ:



John A. Braun

LABOR IS NOT IN VAIN IN CHRIST

Trouble and disappointment are guarantees in this life, yet when we are connected to Jesus by faith, whatever we do for him is not useless.

At the end of the day, how many times have you wondered why you got up in the morning?

We've all had those days. Perhaps, like me, you tend toward depression. Nothing seems to work out. Just when you think everything is going well, someone or something unravels the entire plan and ruins all you've worked to do. It's difficult to pick up the pieces and put them all back together, especially when, like a house of cards, everything collapses again. The tendency is to question why we do anything at all.

EACH DAY WE CONFRONT OPPORTUNITIES TO LIVE AS DISCIPLES OF JESUS AT HOME AND ON THE JOB.

You will have trouble

Life doesn't come with a formula for perfect success. We read the fine print only to discover that trouble and disappointment are guarantees in this life. Being a Christian doesn't change that. On their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas encouraged the Christians with these words: "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

That doesn't seem to be much of an encouragement. Early Christians lost their friends because of their faith. Some were persecuted. Others were insulted and ridiculed because they

wouldn't participate in carousing, drunkenness, and immorality.

When they showed kindness to others, it went unnoticed and unappreciated. When they remained faithful to their spouses, they were thought to be unusual. When they forgave each other and those who insulted and hurt them, it was considered strange.

Does all this sound familiar? Many think it strange that we as Christians have a different set of standards. In our daily activities, we just don't seem to get ahead because we are disciples of Jesus and are unwilling to compromise.

At times even our best Christian virtues and behaviors bring disappointment. Marriages—even Christian marriages—where one spouse remains faithful sometimes crumble with the other spouse's infidelity. Christian homes where parents struggle to discipline are torn apart by drugs and rebellion. The relationships with friends, which you try so hard to mend with forgiveness and patience, unravel with harsh words and bad feelings.

On the job it is no better. The company takes advantage of our hard work and diligence. Then it promotes the apple polisher who does the minimum.

Some of our fellow employees belittle us and call us insulting names behind our back. Remaining faithful to Jesus and keeping our language clean and respectful brings accusing stares instead of praise or respect. It's enough to make us want to throw our hands in the air and give up.

It's not in vain

But a sentence or two in the fine print keeps us going. The first is that we are forgiven children of God who are going to heaven because of Jesus. The second is a reminder from the apostle Paul: "You know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

God has made us Christian parents, employees, friends, spouses, children, pastors, and teachers. We are "God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Ephesians 2:10). Each day we confront opportunities to live as disciples of Jesus at home and on the job.

Sometimes it may seem like a futile effort in the face of this world's emphasis on money, prestige, pleasure, and self-indulgence. Yet when we are connected to Jesus by faith, whatever we do for him is not useless. He promises to use our efforts even when we don't see the positive results.

John Braun is executive editor of Forward in Christ.

This is the fourth article in an eight-part series on vocation.

JOHN BRENZ:

Laboring for the Lord

John Brenz worked to get the Word to the common people and, despite danger to himself, fought to further the Lutheran Reformation.

Theodore J. Hartwig



After Luther's death in 1546, John Brenz was recognized as the leading light of the Lutheran Reformation. In 1547 he experienced a near brush with capture and execution at the hands of the papacy. "Hurry, hurry; flee, flee," one of his friends urged him. And so, with only the clothes on his back, he did, finding refuge in Switzerland.

Laboring for the common people

Born in 1499, Brenz entered the University of Heidelberg and graduated with a Master's degree in 1517—the Lutheran Reformation's birthdate. In May of the following year, 19-year-old Brenz, doing graduate work at the university, made the personal acquaintance of 34-year-old Martin Luther. Luther had been invited to Heidelberg to engage in a disputation on questions of theology. His charm, command of Scripture, patience in listening to others, and the persuasiveness of his arguments made a profound impression on all present. Deeply moved by what they heard, Brenz and others requested a personal interview with Luther, who rejoiced that they had found the true teaching of Christ.

After ordination into the priesthood, Brenz spent another five years teaching at a high school in Heidelberg. Then he left the city to begin a parish pastorate at nearby Hall in Swabia. Among the liturgical reforms that he introduced at Hall were an evangelical church service that included German

hymns and the use of German instead of Latin for the words of institution at the Lord's Supper. In 1526, he also authored the first Lutheran catechism.

Laboring for a bigger goal

In the wider world of the Reformation, Brenz took a leading role at meetings that attempted to heal the rupture between Lutherans and Catholics. When all these negotiations failed, Emperor Charles V, in 1546, opted for a military solution to put an end to the Reformation. He then tried to impose a religious constitution on the defeated Lutherans that required obedience to the pope. In this crisis, Brenz boldly published a protest against the emperor's edict. This put him on the emperor's hit list and necessitated his hurried flight from Hall to Switzerland.

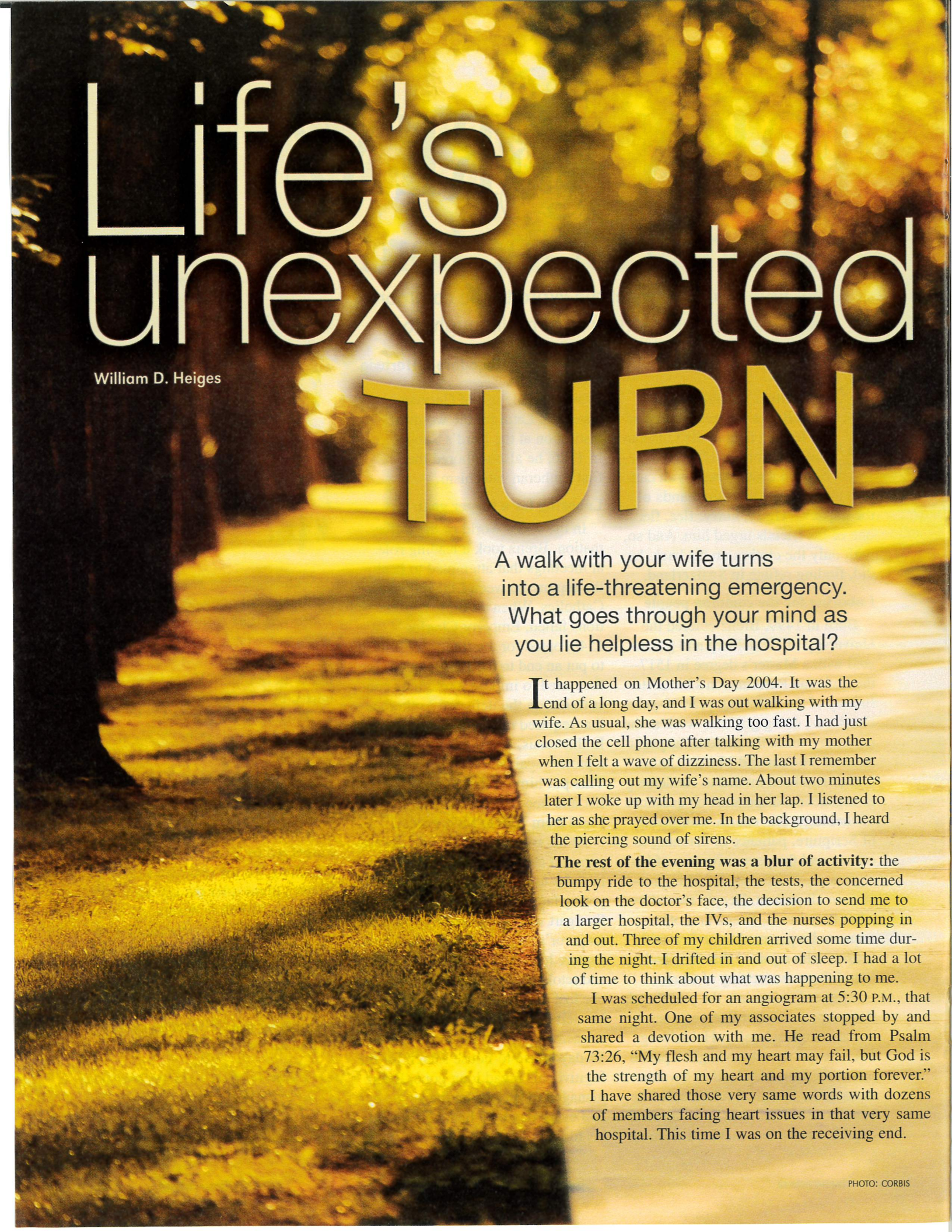
At his wife's death, Brenz, despite personal danger, returned to Germany in order to provide for his orphaned young family. When his presence at Stuttgart was discovered by spies, the emperor's soldiers entered the city to capture him. According to a story told and retold in Swabia, Brenz, with only one loaf of bread in his possession, hid himself in the attic of a sympathetic townsman. During the unsuccessful 14-day house-to-house search for the fugitive, his bread long gone, Brenz managed to survive on the single egg laid every day by a hen who shared his hiding place in the attic.

With brightening prospects for peace between Lutherans and Catholics, Brenz emerged from hiding in 1550. When peace became a reality two years later, he resumed full-time pastoral duties in Stuttgart. Years later, immobilized by a stroke, he died on Sept. 11, 1570. During his last hours, he committed his friends to his life's motto, the verse from Psalm 133: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity."

On one occasion during Brenz's sunset years, a neighboring pastor journeyed to Stuttgart to hear his preaching. As the two men walked to Brenz's home after the service, they came to a bubbling spring. At this moment, the visitor expressed his surprise that so few people had attended church that day. Brenz responded: "Do you know what this spring's loveliest virtue is? It continues to pour out its waters, whether many or few have come here to drink."

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

Next month: Aloys Henhöfer



Life's unexpected TURN

William D. Heiges

A walk with your wife turns into a life-threatening emergency. What goes through your mind as you lie helpless in the hospital?

It happened on Mother's Day 2004. It was the end of a long day, and I was out walking with my wife. As usual, she was walking too fast. I had just closed the cell phone after talking with my mother when I felt a wave of dizziness. The last I remember was calling out my wife's name. About two minutes later I woke up with my head in her lap. I listened to her as she prayed over me. In the background, I heard the piercing sound of sirens.

The rest of the evening was a blur of activity: the bumpy ride to the hospital, the tests, the concerned look on the doctor's face, the decision to send me to a larger hospital, the IVs, and the nurses popping in and out. Three of my children arrived some time during the night. I drifted in and out of sleep. I had a lot of time to think about what was happening to me.

I was scheduled for an angiogram at 5:30 P.M., that same night. One of my associates stopped by and shared a devotion with me. He read from Psalm 73:26, "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." I have shared those very same words with dozens of members facing heart issues in that very same hospital. This time I was on the receiving end.

Finally they wheeled me into the operating room. Let me tell you, it's quite the humbling experience to lie there on a gurney totally naked with only a small towel covering you. I thought to myself, "This is how I came into the world." My cardiologist is one of the best heart doctors around. He explained that the whole procedure should take about half an hour. I was in there for an hour and a half, awake during the whole procedure.

I knew that my family was praying together in the waiting room, but this was just me and God. On the outside I looked totally helpless, but I knew I wasn't hopeless. There was nothing I could do except lie there, pray, and believe the promises of God.

It didn't take long for things to get worse. The doctor and intern were busy examining X-rays of my arteries when I felt my heart start to race. "Hey, Doc, my heart feels like it's going a little wacky here." They raced into action. They pumped some kind of medicine into me, and the doctor urged me to keep coughing. I knew immediately the situation was tense. Later the doctor told me I fibrillated five times on the table. He said he had never seen a heart beat that fast and the patient still lived.

As they started working on my heart, let me share with you what was going on in my "inner heart." People often ask me if I was afraid of dying. Now I can

honestly say, "No," but years ago I would have said, "Yes." My grandmother died from a heart attack at age 44. For years I had a secret fear of dying from a heart attack until a Christian psychiatrist pointed out a simple truth that got me thinking. "The worst thing that can happen to you," he said, "is that you will die and be in heaven. That's not so bad, is it?" I remembered feeling foolish.

So, I was nervous going into that cold sterile room, but a remarkable peace came over me. I wasn't afraid.

I prayed as I felt that little wire snaking its way up to my heart. I told the doctor I was praying for

him. I knew instinctively I was hovering between life and death. I thanked God for his grace. I thanked him for bringing me to faith and giving me the gift of eternal life. I said, "God, if this is my time, I am ready. I leave the outcome in your hands, but, Lord, I'd like to stick around a little longer. I want to walk my daughters down the aisle and live long enough to hold my grandbabies and watch them grow. You invite us to call upon you in the day of trouble, and you promise to deliver us. Lord, save me."

I thought of things like the blood of Jesus. His blood covers me and washes me of every sin. I thought of the sacrifice Christ made for me, how he took my guilt, my shame, my place. All my sins were laid on him. I thought of his righteousness. It was God's gift to me. God saw me as righteous and holy—all because of Jesus' death and resurrection. These weren't just abstract truths I preached from a pulpit. They were real. They were mine. That is why my heart was at peace on that operating table.

It took them a lot longer than they expected. They found two blockages about an inch apart in the same artery. Unfortunately it was my left artery, the main one, the one the doctor called the "widow-maker." One blockage was 99.9 percent. The other was 75 percent. My other arteries were clear. The doctor performed angioplasty on me. He put three stents in me.

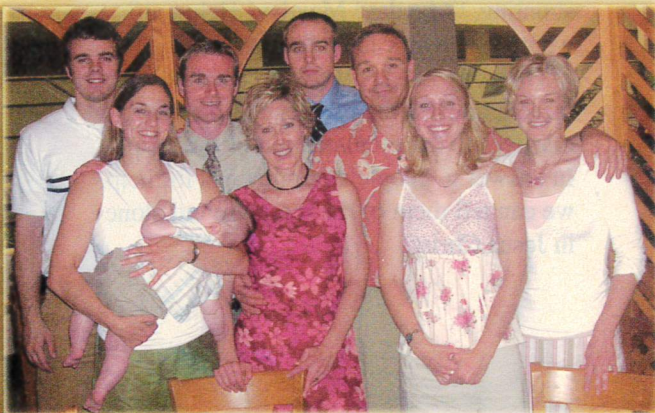
My heart settled down into a normal rhythm after my artery was opened up.

The cardiologist went out and told my family I was alive because I was a praying man. I knew I was alive because God is good and faithful. God delivered me. Now my response is to honor him with the rest of my life.

In a follow-up visit the doctor told me there was absolutely no human reason why I should be alive today. I came as close to dying as anyone he has seen. He said, "You are alive for one reason and one reason only—divine intervention. God still has things for you to do. You're good for another 50 years. Of course, God willing, you may only live five." I laughed and told him, "Doc, my times are in God's hands. Those hands that hold my future have nail wounds in them. They are the hands of a loving Savior who laid down his life for me."

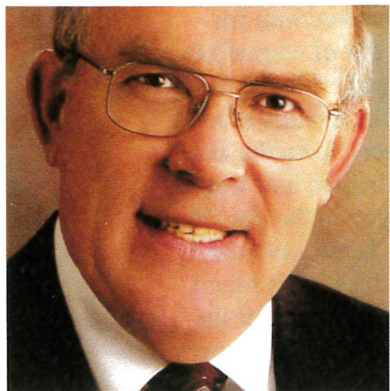
It has been almost three years now. I take my meds. I watch my diet. I exercise. But my trust is still in God, who holds my life in his hands. One of my sons is married, but I haven't walked my daughters down the aisle—yet. On Jan. 20, 2006, I held in my arms William Steven Heiges (we call him Liam), the first of what I pray will be many grandchildren. With tears streaming down my face, I uttered a grateful, "Thank you, Lord."

MY TRUST IS STILL IN GOD, WHO HOLDS MY LIFE IN HIS HANDS.



Pastor William Heiges and his family (l to r): son Brad, daughter-in-law Emily holding grandson Liam, son Bill, wife Paula, son Brent, William, daughters Andrea and Jennifer.

William Heiges is pastor at Emanuel, New London, Wisconsin.



Karl R. Gungl

A May Day mayday!

In some countries May Day, the first of May, is a special day. It's a day off for the ordinary workers. It's like Labor Day in our country.

Last year around May 1 we were in China, visiting our son. The streets were crowded. People poured into the city, enjoying their time off. But many of the workers, though they celebrated that day, still eke out a living by hard manual labor. Their life returns to the daily grind after May Day.

May Day celebrations glorify human achievement, the success of the worker. How ironic it is that in the countries where May Day celebrates workers, generally speaking, the workers are not better off after the celebration. Their hard labor may have benefited the state or some other person, but they see little benefit for themselves.

But there's another use for the term May Day, only it's spelled "mayday." "Mayday" is the international distress call. Until I looked it up I had no idea how this could be a distress call. Now I know. "Mayday! Mayday!" is the anglicized version of the French *m'aidez*, which means "help me."

It only sounds the same in English, May Day and *m'aidez*! There is really no connection between the similar-sounding words at all. And yet maybe there is.

When the people who celebrate May Day flee depressed economies or political tyranny, they are looking for help. We often hear of political refugees, on flimsy rafts, trying desperately to reach shore and asylum in truly free countries. Sadly these flimsy crafts often capsize and sink in the seas. If they even have a ship-to-shore radio, they cry out for help: "Mayday! Mayday!"

We pray those cries don't fall on deaf ears. Not only do we pray that they may be rescued from perils of the seas, but that they might be freed from even worse perils, perils that threaten them eternally.

"Mayday! Mayday!" is what the man from Macedonia cried out to the apostle Paul in a night vision. "Come over into Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9). It was the Lord's way of calling Paul to a new field of labor. It was how the gospel, for the very first time, entered the continent of Europe, eventually finding its way across the sea to America.

Even though in the United States we don't celebrate May Day, we're still tempted to glorify human achievement. And it goes further than just boasting of economic prosperity. The human nature in us wants to believe that by doing enough good to make up for the bad, we can achieve a right standing before God. But it's only God's Spirit, working through the Word to show us that we lack the perfection God demands, who brings us to cry, "Mayday! Mayday! Help me!"

That makes another May day very important to us and to the graduates of Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. For on a special day in May, Call Day, they may hear their name read publicly, indicating where they will be serving the Lord as a full-time public minister of the gospel. It will be their privilege to tell people who are shouting, "Mayday! Mayday! Help me," where true help can be found.

On a day in May we will celebrate with these graduates the privilege of devoting our lives to the proclamation of the gospel. In answer to people's frantic cries for help, we can tell them of the rescue found alone in Jesus Christ.

LESSONS FROM THE CREED

Charles F. Degner

"Suffered under Pontius Pilate . . ."

Theologians sometimes speak of the *active* and *passive* obedience of Christ. In plain language, the active obedience of Christ means that Jesus gave God a perfectly holy life in our place. The passive obedience of Christ means that Jesus innocently suffered the punishment for our sins. These come together in the cross of Jesus Christ.

If you are late making a payment on your credit card, the company charges you a penalty. The next time you make a payment, you not only have to pay the penalty, you also have to pay the balance of your debt. This is what Jesus did for us. By his perfect life, he paid our debt. By his innocent death, he paid our penalty. Both the debt and the penalty we could not pay, but he did.

His active obedience for us

We see a good example of Jesus' active obedience when he stood before Pontius Pilate. Pilate was a self-serving politician. He condemned an innocent man to death because it made good political sense. Still,

Jesus stood before him quietly and respectfully, because God put Pilate

in office (John 19:11). "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23). Jesus made up for all the times we did not keep the Fourth Commandment when we showed disrespect to our parents, teachers, and government officials.

IN HIS LIFE AND IN HIS SUFFERING AND DEATH, JESUS DID EVERYTHING NECESSARY TO DECLARE YOU PERFECT BEFORE GOD.

The writer to the Hebrews points to another episode in Jesus' passion that demonstrates this active obedience. "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission" (Hebrews 5:7). Jesus prayed fervently in the Garden of Gethsemane, with loud cries and tears. He

prayed in reverent submission. "Not my will, but yours be done," Jesus said (Luke 22:42). Such perfect prayers made up for all

the prayers we failed to bring to our Heavenly Father.

Hebrews also says, "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered, and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (5:8,9). The Greek word for "made perfect" can also be translated "reached his goal" or "was made complete." Think of it this way. Imagine a bowler achieving a perfect score. In the fifth frame, he hasn't missed a pin. Still, not until he has thrown the last strike can he record a perfect score. Throughout his life, and even into the last frame of his life, Jesus was perfectly obedient.

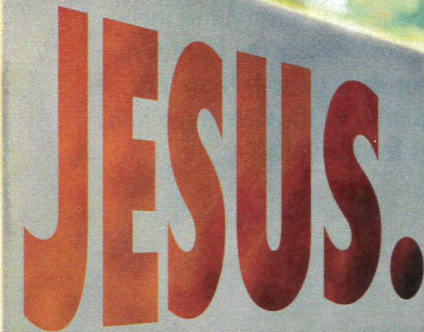
Our comfort

This is a great comfort to us. Remember all the things you wished you had done when you were young? You wished you had spent more time praying with your family. You wished you had spent more time with your spouse or with your children. There are no "do overs." This fills you with shame and regret.

Isn't it wonderful that you can still look forward to heaven? In spite of your imperfect life, you are God's perfect child. In his life and in his suffering and death, Jesus did everything necessary to declare you perfect before God.

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

This is the third article in a 10-part series on the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed. To read other articles in the series, go to www.wels.net/jump/ficarchive, and search by the author's first and last name.



JESUS.

Still standing on the hill?

Peter wanted to stand on the hill of transfiguration. He wanted to build three shelters and capture the moment of Jesus' glory. The glory disappeared. Jesus brought Peter, James, and John back to the valley. We've heard about that misguided desire to hold on to the glory.

But I have something different in mind. Jesus rose from the dead, and for 40 days he made sure his disciples knew he was physically alive. He was not a ghost or spirit. Their interactions with him were not hallucinations. "Touch me," he said. He ate with them. He was alive.

When they were convinced, he ascended and left the work of sharing the gospel to them. The angels told the disciples that Jesus would return just as they had seen him go. They went back to Jerusalem and waited for the Holy Spirit to make them witnesses of Jesus.

It's at this point I want to ask my question, "Are we still standing on the hill of his ascension?"

I wonder if we are still there waiting for Jesus to return and make everything right. We seem to be paralyzed by a host of problems. We don't have enough money to train witnesses after we are gone. We can't agree on a course of action. Even spiritually we can't seem to agree on what is most important or how to take the steps necessary to proclaim the gospel to the world.

We seem to have lost our will. We don't seem to know that we are disciples of Jesus. Maybe we don't want to be his disciples. Sometimes we even cringe when people identify us with the Christian Lutheran faith, like Peter did in the courtyard of the high priest. Sacrifice, confession, resolve, and bold commitment are in short supply, it seems.

Are we still on the hill waiting for Jesus to come again? The Holy Spirit started the New Testament church with only a few men and women. They were not the rich and powerful, rather they were quite ordinary and common. They told others about Jesus. They sacrificed their property and money for the sake of the gospel. They encouraged each other as disciples of Jesus. They even gave up their lives because they believed Jesus rose from the dead and so would they. They weren't on the hill waiting.

You and I have received the Holy Spirit. We are believers—disciples of Jesus in our time wherever Jesus has placed us. I suppose I could talk about the shoulds and oughts of discipleship. But I won't. It won't do any good. A list of shoulds will only make us feel guilty.

What I will do is ask if you will come down from the hill and be the disciple Jesus called you to be. Jesus has redeemed us by his blood, given us hope by his resurrection, and asked us to proclaim the gospel in this world.

Where our congregations are faltering with insufficient financial resources, will you step up and resolve to do more? Will you boldly pray for your congregation, your pastor, your leaders? Can you confess that you are a Lutheran Christian without ducking at the first hint of opposition?

Like those first disciples on the hill of ascension, we are not very many nor are we among the world's elite. No one even notices. But will you come down from the hill and help share the gospel in your congregation and, together with your fellow believers, throughout the world? Who knows where the Lord Jesus will take us or how he will bless our bold proclamation of his rich grace that claimed us as his disciples!



John A. Braun

When was the last time you wanted God to speak directly to you? What did you want him to tell you? If you could ask God any question today, what would it be?

Remember the story . . .

1. Review Jacob's life (Genesis 27–28:9). How did he end up alone on the road in Genesis 28:10?
2. What are some of the big issues that were on Jacob's mind?
3. If he could have asked God some questions, what do you think they would have been?

Read Genesis 28:10-22

1. Of all the times and places in Jacob's life, God comes and speaks to him here. How does that show you God's grace?
2. Look at verses 13-15. What is the impact of each promise (listed below) for Jacob as he lies in the desert with his head on a rock? What fear did God address? What comfort did he give?
 - a. I am the LORD, the God of your father . . .
 - b. I will give you the land . . .
 - c. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth . . .
 - d. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you . . .
 - e. I am with you . . .
3. The stairway filled with angels that Jacob saw was a visible sign of what the words of God conveyed. How does that picture communicate what God was saying?
4. Look up John 1:51. How did Jacob's dream find its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus?
5. Verse 17 says that Jacob was afraid after talking with God. That word could mean "afraid" or "in awe." Which do you think God means here? Why?

6. Talking implies two-way communication. After hearing God speak, how did Jacob respond?
7. Evaluate Jacob's vow (v. 20-22). Look at the two alternate readings suggested in the NIV footnotes. Why would either seem preferable?
8. Part of Jacob's vow was to give an offering to God of 10 percent of his wealth. Explain how our offerings are a way that we talk to God.

Bringing it home

1. What questions do you want to ask God today? List them: "What will the lab report say?" "What am I going to do about my job?" "Why can't I fix my family?"
2. Agree or disagree: God might not come to us in dreams, but he speaks to us all the time using little circumstances or happenings in our life. (Read Hebrews 1:1,2 for help.)

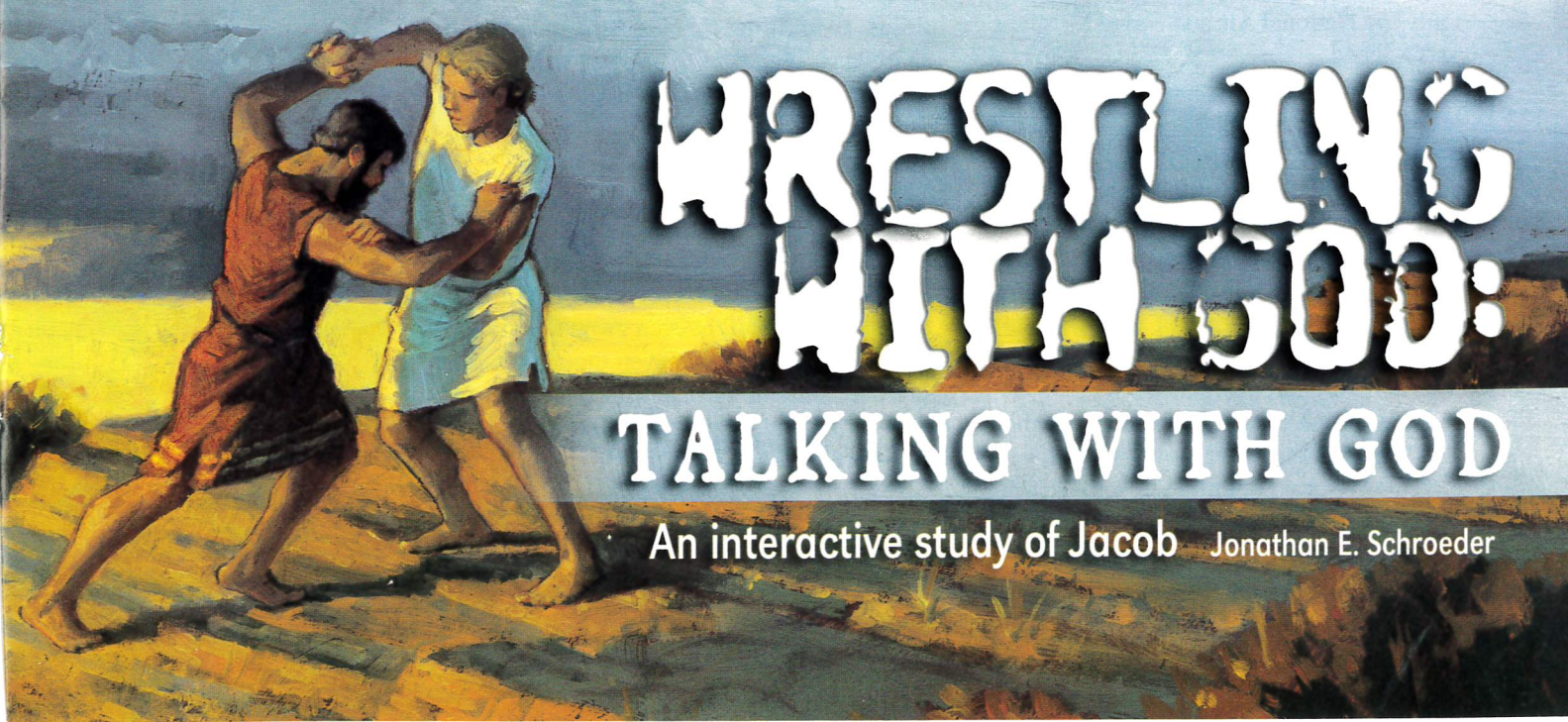
Conclusion

Talk to God: bring those questions to God in prayer. Then trust God's promise that he has spoken to you with words meant for today. He promises to speak to you through the words of Scripture. Hear him speak his promises to you, and then respond in faith. Jesus once spoke this promise: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). How does those words from God answer the question you struggle with today?

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

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

ILLUSTRATION: JOHNSON AND FANCHER



WRESTLING WITH GOD:

TALKING WITH GOD

An interactive study of Jacob Jonathan E. Schroeder



Hate the rain . . . *Love the waterfalls*

We know that even though the rains are bad,
something beautiful is waiting for us.

Samuel J. Hacker III

I was beginning to understand how Noah felt. It seemed like the rain was never going to stop. And this wasn't just a "normal" rain. It was raining so hard that while driving it seemed like someone had a garden hose spraying full blast all over the car. This hard rain came down for hours on end.

Hate the rain

My brother and I were on the road somewhere in Maryland. We planned to spend a day in Washington, D.C., and then move on to camp in Shenandoah National Park for a couple more days. While in Washington, we planned on going to the National Archives, the Museum of Natural History, and the Museum of American History. We didn't plan to go to the National Air and Space Museum because we had already visited it before.

Those were the plans. The torrential rains, however, caused those plans to change. With record amounts of rain came flooding. The National Archives were closed because of a power outage and flooding. So was the Museum of Natural History and the Smithsonian. Only the National Air and Space Museum was opened.

The next day we headed west toward the Blue Ridge Mountains and Shenandoah National Park. We tried to be optimistic about the weather. But the closer we got to the park, the harder it rained. When we arrived at the campground, the rangers thought we were a little crazy to be camping in a tent in that kind of weather. But we pressed on. After all, this trip was turning into the "ultimate adventure."

By the time we got the tent set up the inside was damp, along with most of our clothes. We dried out the tent, but that entire night it rained. More water found its way inside, and everything was damp again.

But the next morning was different. The rain had stopped. There were birds chirping. I unzipped the tent door and peeked outside. There was not a cloud in the sky! For the rest of our time in Shenandoah the weather was perfect for hiking all around that beautiful corner of God's creation.

Love the waterfalls

Shenandoah National Park is known for its peaks and vistas where one can see for miles. But it's also known for waterfalls. My brother and I hiked to a waterfall our second morning in the park.

As we came to the falls, we could see the water pouring over the rocks and hear the roar. I wondered what that waterfall would have been like if it hadn't rained so much. I'm sure that it would have been beautiful, but with all the rain the waterfall was awesome.

Sometimes, as I discovered, the plans that we make in this world don't always work out. But we know that the Lord still goes with us. Our Lord has revealed his deep love for us in the work of our Savior, Jesus. Everything that happens to us, even if it's bad, is part of his plan. " 'I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future' " (Jeremiah 29:11).

Many rains—sickness, family discord, financial distress, and others—come in our life that might cause us to change our plans. Sometimes we might even grow to hate the rain. But we know that even though the rains are bad, something beautiful is waiting for us—living under the waterfall of God's love for eternity.

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Bethany, Gibsonia, Pennsylvania.*