

OCTOBER 2009

Forward in Christ

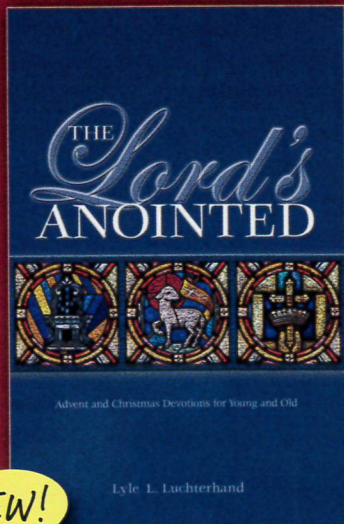
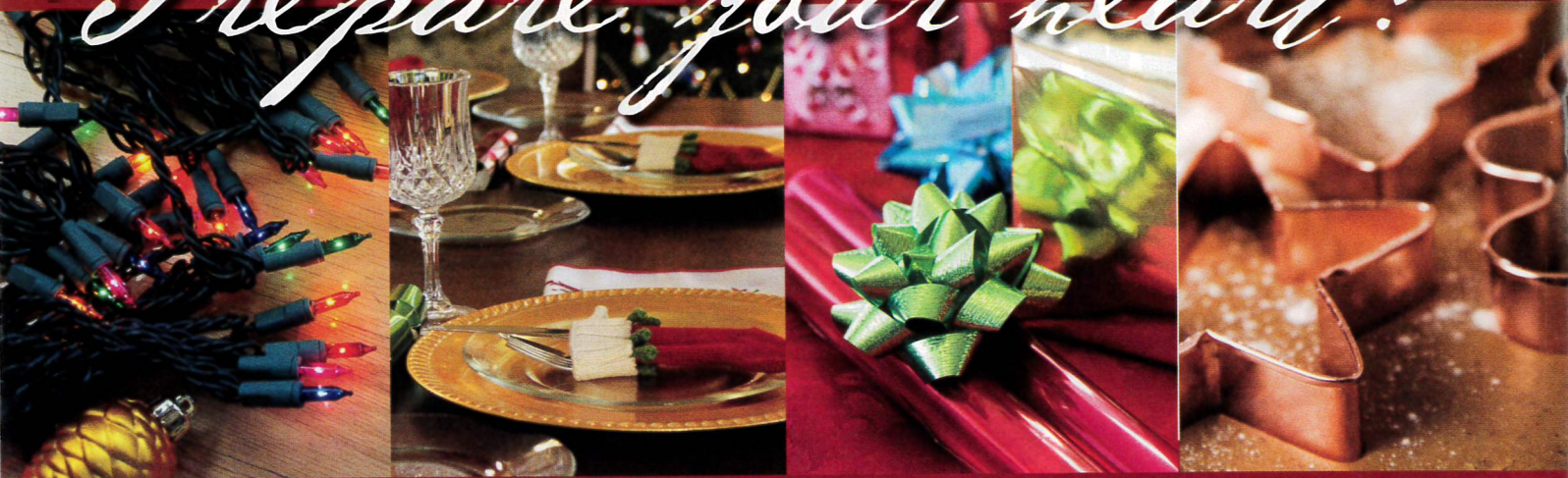
God's wisdom, WELS' witness

What happened at
CONVENTION?



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“Don’t pit missions against ministerial education.” That was the message the delegates heard and acted on.



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Forward in Christ

The official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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Rising Costs.

Reliable Assistance.

The cost of education continues to rise, making it increasingly difficult for WELS families to afford the ministerial education that produces our future pastors, teachers, and staff ministers.

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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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OCTOBER

WHAT'S INSIDE by Julie Wietzke

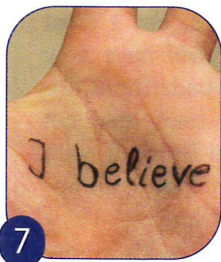
The staff of Forward in Christ spent the last week of July at the synod convention in Saginaw, Mich. We were busy, and time went quickly. But one of my favorite parts of the convention was being able to talk personally to some of our readers. Thanks for all the kudos, comments, and suggestions.

We also had the opportunity to interview several delegates about their feelings on the convention, the new synod theme, and about being Lutheran. Besides reporting on official convention news in this issue (pp. 20-25), we're happy to share their thoughts with you. They were inspiring to us and hopefully will be to you as well (p. 27).

Our "Confessions of Faith" stories for the next few months will feature convention delegates. In this issue, executive editor John Braun talks to delegate Cletus Wolfe about farming, Catholicism, and free forgiveness through Christ (p.14).

Although there is a lot about the convention in this issue, you'll also find excellent articles on the hinges of the Reformation (p.10), the Second Commandment (p. 28), and the teachings of necessity and contingency (p.16). Happy reading!

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BEING BORN AGAIN

I appreciate the series of articles “I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

The third in the series [Aug.] addresses the dialogue in John 3 where Jesus states that “You must be born again.”

That scriptural statement and Ephesians 2:4,5 are described as “just another way of saying that you must come to faith in Jesus and that you cannot do it on your own.”

It is indeed true that in order to be saved, the Holy Spirit must bring us to faith in Christ. But I would suggest that much more happens to us at the moment of conversion.

The passage cited in Ephesians says we are made alive with Christ and seated with him in heavenly realms in Christ. Further into the same chapter we read, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus. . . .”

Being “born again” is not just an expression. It is quite literally the point at which we receive a new nature—the very life of Christ!

*Robert L. Gove
Mosier, Oregon*

STEM CELL RESEARCH

This is feedback on the “Question and Answer” on stem cell research [July].

I was appalled, not because of anything he said, but what he didn’t say just screamed at me! I realize his focus was “on the moral issues involved.” He clearly said that and explained satisfactorily that embryonic stem cells are little persons—“embryonic lives.”

But here was a wonderful opportunity to clearly differentiate between the incredible successes of adult stem cells and the abject failures of the embryonic ones. Instead we read, “No wonder billions of dollars are being poured into this [embryonic] research!” Why? There is so far not one success! However, thousands of suffering people are being helped because of adult stem cells. Money is

being poured into embryonic stem cell research because of money from pro-abortionists and others. It fits their agenda. What do they care if tiny humans are killed for no reason? They keep talking about the great promise of embryonic stem cells, but that’s all they have—promises!

I was greatly disturbed by the tone of the whole piece—as if embryonic stem cells are so wonderful and adult stem cells pose all these problems. I think a little research will show that the opposite is true.

*Miriam Archer
Pleasanton, California*

DOES BAPTISM SAVE?

Re: Feedback [Aug.]. In the letter “Grace alone,” Nancy Growney makes the case that Baptism is not a “requirement” to be saved. She ends by saying, “As Lutherans, we stand firm in our belief that we are saved by grace alone.”

But in the letter “Baptism,” Joel Kluender makes the opposite case. He ends his letter by saying, “Baptism does save!”

Both writers make very strong points in their articles, but I must confess that I think they have now left a lot of people wondering. I, for one, always thought one could not get to heaven without Baptism, with some exceptions in rare circumstances. Now I’m not sure.

Perhaps someone with more knowledge than I can shed some light on this now controversial subject. I think it is extremely important that all God’s children know exactly what role Baptism has in the believer’s journey to eternal life in heaven.

*William R. Krueger
Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin*

Peter wrote, “Baptism . . . now saves you also” (1 Peter 3:21). We are cleansed “by the washing with water through the word” (Ephesians 5:26). Baptism is not a magic charm; it is a means of grace through which the

Holy Spirit works faith in Jesus, who finished our salvation fully. If one believes in Jesus, he or she has the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. To refuse Baptism can be a refusal to accept Jesus and his forgiveness; such a refusal is unbelief and a rejection of forgiveness and life. Believers eagerly desire to “be baptized and wash [their] sins away” (Acts 22:16) as a physical assurance of what God says in the gospel. All this is tied to the grace of God in Christ. Baptism extends the grace of God in Jesus. It is God’s good news of forgiveness extended with water and Word. The Holy Spirit uses this means as surely as he uses the gospel in words to work faith. And faith is nothing but the hand that receives the grace of God.—ed.

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

Re: “What’s in a name?” [Aug.]. While I appreciate taking a principled stand for maintaining the name *Lutheran*, I also see firsthand its challenges when one’s church is not located in the Midwest. More than simply being descriptive or misleading, a name can be an albatross around our churches’ necks, at least from an outreach perspective. . . .

We are sharing the good news about the only way to eternal salvation through the prophesied birth, perfect life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I pray our WELS churches are not withdrawn from the lost souls walking around our neighborhoods because the name *Lutheran* is misused or not understood. How do we put that on our churches’ street signs?

*Danielle Cast
Orlando, Florida*

Send your letters to **Feedback**, *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222 or email them to fic@wels.net. Letters should be between 100 and 200 words. 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*.

The all-important question

"Do you believe this?" John 11:26

James A. Mattek

Lazarus had more than a near-death experience (John 11:1-44). He was gone, and his cold motionless body verified the worst fears of his sisters, Martha and Mary. It was a sad day. The corpse was wrapped head to toe and carried to the family burial cave. It's possible that the skeletal remains of the last relative to die were then removed from the stone bench and placed beneath it with the others in the bone repository. Another loved one "gathered to his fathers." Lazarus was lovingly laid on the stone bench in the cave. One last look . . . then the cave opening was covered. Only memories and tears in the days ahead. Lazarus' soul was with God. The only near-death part of this was with the sisters . . . they were seeing death up close and personal.

Jesus waited

And Jesus knew it. He knew it without being there. As long as a week had passed since Jesus got word that his dear friend was ill. He had decided that he would not make a house call on the sick. He waited. He would instead look for Lazarus in the cemetery. The reason for Jesus' waiting becomes clear as the story unfolds. His waiting would allow his friend to slip from sickness to stillness. His waiting would give people time to ask the deep questions regarding life and eternity. And sometimes things have to get really bad before we let this process happen.

Faith is a funny thing, but it's no laughing matter. It's vital for salvation. We want our faith to be strong,

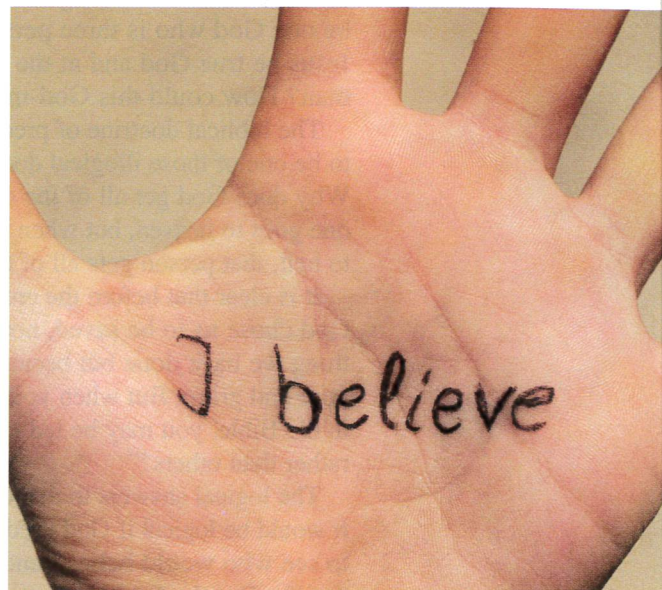
but sometimes it's weak. One part of it trusts, and another part rebels and doubts. When nurtured by the Word, our faith grows and might even surprise us by its newfound strength. But like an unused bicep, our faith atrophies when neglected and becomes too weak to raise our prayers heavenward. Sometimes faith is misguided, leading us to place our faith in our faith instead of in the promises of God. When faith goes unchallenged, we tend to hang on to it out of habit.

Jesus knows how fickle our faith can be, so he bends it and sends circumstances of life to keep us on track. For the benefit of those shedding tears for Lazarus, he waited. Then he went.

Jesus went

When Martha got word that Jesus had reached the city limits, she didn't hesitate. Down the dirt street she ran, with puffy eyes fresh from her last cry. Their exchange included the important things regarding life and eternity: death, the resurrection, hope, and the role Jesus plays in all of it.

Then Jesus asked the all-important question: "Do you believe this?" Jesus smiled at Martha's answer. She trusted him with her soul and with her brother's soul—with her death and with his. That's faith. In the end, that's all that really matters. It's also the bottom line for those of us who wear a path to the graveside of those we love.



Jesus waited, and then he went, not only for the faith of Martha but also for the faith of all who would follow him to the cemetery to witness an eye-popping miracle. They witnessed his ability to treat death like sleep. He understands the pain that the wages of sin brings to us. So he called Lazarus' soul back from heaven. All he wants is for us to believe it too. In life and death, O Lord, you abide with me.

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

No logic

Paul T. Prange

Are you bothered when some doctrines of the Bible are not logical? How can there be one God who is three persons? How can Jesus be true God and at the same time true man? How could this God-man die?

The biblical doctrine of predestination seems to be one of those illogical doctrines of the Bible. Why does God get all of the credit when someone goes to heaven, but when someone else goes to hell, that person gets all of the blame?

It is clear that before the creation of the world, God chose us to be saved, not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. But when you study the doctrine in the Bible, you may be led to ask, "Why some rather than others?"

The logical answers to that question are wrong. It would be logical if God used his foreknowledge to see who would believe and then chose those people. But the Bible is clear. He has chosen us, but not because of anything we have done or anything that God saw we might do.

If God chose us because of something in us, then our salvation would not be certain; it would not be by grace. We would always have to wonder if we could lose that special something. That thought comes especially when things go wrong for us. Just when we need to hear and trust God's promises, we would be tempted to doubt. Just when we need assurance that God chose us, we would find no comfort.

We might ask why God would leave such an illogical truth in his Holy Word. One answer is that our God, who created us and knows us better than we know ourselves, is very practical. Illogical answers may bother our reason, but they match our human nature. The illogical answers God gives about predestination are very practical.

Our human nature would like to take some credit for our salvation. But there is nothing good in that sinful human nature, and giving it any credit would lead to a false hope of heaven for us. It is much more practical and beneficial to trust God entirely for our salvation.

It also would be logical to say that if God chose some to be saved, then he chose others to be damned. That idea also would be wrong. God wants everyone to be saved. He would be contradicting his own will if he predestined some to hell.

Our human nature would like predestination to hell to be true so that we could give up on the crabby people who do not believe and oppose the gospel and Christians. But because predestination to hell is not true, we do not give up on people. We know that God's law and gospel apply to everyone we meet. We continue to pray for unbelievers and provide a witness to God's love in Jesus.

There is no logic to the love of God for unworthy and undeserving sinners. But it is the most practical truth in the world.

Grace is not logical. God's Son taking the punishment for our sins goes way beyond logic. God's thoughts are not our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8). No human mind could come up with such an answer to sin and death. There is no logic to the love of God for unworthy

and undeserving sinners. But it is the most practical truth in the world. In fact, it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

Contributing editor Paul Prange, administrator of WELS Board for Ministerial Education, is a member at St. John, Burlington, Wisconsin.

QUESTION & ANSWER



Forrest L. Bivens

The reason for Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction (Genesis 19) is hotly debated, and people's conclusions usually reflect basic presuppositions the debaters bring with them. A look at the biblical evidence will serve us well and allow us to offer a suitable answer.

Look at the passages

Genesis 19:5-8 and Jude 7 confirm that the Sodomites were guilty of homosexuality. Both references, in their original Hebrew and Greek, use idiomatic language to identify and describe homosexual sin, and it pays to be aware of this. Those who deny that homosexuality was involved seek linguistic loopholes from the idiomatic language. Nevertheless, biblical language dictionaries confirm that homosexuality prevailed in Sodom and its surrounding towns.

Ezekiel 16:49,50 does not explicitly mention sodomy or homosexuality as the cause of divine judgment on these lost cities but tells us that they were guilty of additional immoralities. Arrogance and social injustice are highlighted. Second Peter 2:6,7 leaves the nature of their ungodliness unspecified.

Letting all of these passages speak leads us to conclude that Sodom and Gomorrah were guilty of homosexuality; arrogance; violence; inhospitality; and a self-centered apathy toward others, especially the poor and needy. These cities impenitently spurned God's grace in a number of ways and invited divine judgment.

Look at powerful presuppositions

People who have already made up their minds that homosexuality is morally acceptable desire to understand the biblical testimony differently. Invariably, modern defenders of homosexuality conclude that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of their violent and greedy behavior. They interpret Genesis 19 as condemning homosexual rape, which would be parallel to heterosexual rape. These texts are said not to apply to consensual homosexual activities. These defenders say that "loving, committed, same-sex relationships" are approved.

Q. Is it true that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of homosexuality? Does this teach us homosexuality is a greater sin than others, perhaps unforgivable?

Advocates of homosexuality also say that Jude's words "strange flesh" (the idiomatic expression he uses in the King James Version for sexual perversion) refer not to homosexuality but to the desire to have sexual relations with angels. It takes some exegetical mind-bending to arrive at this conclusion, but powerful presuppositions are able to pave the way for these advocates.

Look for balanced conclusions

You ask if God's severe judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah teaches us that homosexuality is a worse sin than others and perhaps qualifies as unforgivable. Here is where other Bible sections guide us to a balanced conclusion. In Matthew 11:20-24, Jesus denounces other cities for being unrepentant despite the miracles he performed among them. While he does not excuse or deny the guilt of Sodom, he makes it clear that others may sin even more grievously and pay a greater price on the Last Day. First Corinthians 6:9-11 confirms that homosexuality is a serious sin that calls for divine judgment, but it also affirms that it is fully forgivable and that many former homosexuals enjoy new life and heavenly citizenship through faith in Christ. In Romans 1:21-27, Paul uses homosexuality as an example of how God may deal with hardened sinners and use sexual perversions as a judgment. But other passages remind us that homosexuality, like other sin, is forgivable despite deserving God's anger and punishment.

For a balanced biblical perspective on this important subject, I hope that all interested readers will take the time to examine the Bible sections mentioned above and walk away with a renewed appreciation of the seriousness of all sin and the greatness of God's love in Christ.

Contributing editor Forrest Bivens, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Calvary, Thiensville.

Hinges of the REFORMATION

The Reformation still matters today. Sin, guilt, forgiveness, God, eternity, heaven, and hell remain important.

Daniel M. Deutschlander

On Oct. 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. Just what was on Luther's mind at the time that he just couldn't keep it to himself? What ended up making him one of the most beloved and hated men in history?

One way to think about Luther and the Reformation is to see that church door in Wittenberg as a door with two hinges on it. On Oct. 31 Luther opened the door a crack, just a crack. The rest of

Luther's life was devoted to swinging that door wide open to let in all the fullness of God's grace and mercy in the Christ of the Scriptures.

The first hinge

The first hinge on which the door of the Reformation swings is this:

Luther took God seriously. He saw in God an angry judge. That judge is holy and righteous in all that he does. He demands obedience to his law. And the law demands above all else that we love God with our whole heart and mind and strength. If we fail, he threatens his wrath in this life and an eternity of torment in the life to come.

But how can I or anyone else love a God who must be angry with me every moment, since I do not love him perfectly? In fact, God's anger can only move me to hate him because of his impossible demands and his threats. But if I don't love him, then I am lost, doomed, damned.

Luther became a monk and took the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to try to still the

anger of God. He became a priest and offered the sacrifice of the Mass to try to still his own fear of the wrath of God. He even became a doctor of theology and a university professor, studied and taught, fasted and prayed, confessed and then confessed again. He did it all in his struggle to turn away God's wrath. But the more he struggled, the more he despaired.

It wasn't that the church of Luther's day didn't take God seriously. It did. After all, it was the church that portrayed God as an angry judge demanding satisfaction for our imperfect love. It's just that the solution of the church only made matters worse. It pointed Luther to ever more works—all of them, of course, flawed by that lack of perfect love. Then it offered—and still offers—the solution of indulgences. They were additional works, prayers, fasts, pilgrimages, the purchase of masses, and the imagined excess merits of the saints to make up for our imperfect love and flawed works.

But how does any of that take God seriously? Can the holy God really be bought off so easily? Can we really get around his anger at our failure to do the works he commands and the love he demands with works he never asked for? The more Luther studied, the more convinced he became that works cannot turn away God's anger.

The second hinge

But if taking God seriously only leads to anger against God and to despair, where will the soul ever find peace? How can the holy, the righteous God ever be satisfied with sinful, unrighteous, always imperfect men and women?

Luther struggled for certainty in his own works. But they failed to bring any peace because they were never perfect and never could be. He sought it in the solutions offered by the church, but those solutions had no solid foundation. God in his own Word never asked for such works and never promised any reward for them, and God's Word certainly never gave the church the right to make end runs around his own demands. Even the imagined solution of a purging in purgatory after this life was no help. For, again, God never said that we could be cleansed after this life from what remained undone in this life. Even if the invented purgatory did exist, how could one ever suffer enough for a failure to be perfect?

Well, then, if no certainty, no peace, no help is to be found in our own works or in the works commanded by the church, then where should the soul ever find rescue from despair in this life and hell in the next?

After searching the decrees of the church and the lives of the saints for answers, Luther finally searched the Bible, God's own Word, for the solution. And there

he found it. The solution, the certainty, was not in anything that we do. The solution was alone in what God himself has done! The solution was in Christ and what he did. It was in Christ's death for the sins of the whole world and therefore also for my sins—all of my sins! It was the assurance that God did demand perfection, but that perfection came from the work of Jesus on our behalf and in his perfect sacrifice for our total failure.

Ah, there is certainty! For what Jesus did for us and for our salvation lacked nothing. It was perfect and complete in every respect. Our rescue, our peace, our assurance of heaven itself is not a work in progress that he merely began; it is an accomplished fact on the cross and at the empty tomb!

So why does this matter to us today?

There is a very real danger among us that we miss both of these hinges on the door of the Reformation. In our world it is just too easy not to take God seriously. How common it is for us to think: *Well, I know that I am supposed to keep God's law, but nobody's perfect. If I just do the best I can, that should be good enough. If I pray, if I read the Bible sometimes, if I go to church, that's more than most do. Surely God will be satisfied.* That

Only when we recognize our total failure to keep God's own law, only then will we really be ready for the certainty only God can give.

kind of thinking doesn't take God seriously. He is holy and righteous. He demands nothing less than perfection. To imagine that somehow I am good enough without that perfection trusts in flawed works for our salvation. And that kind of a trust is blatant unbelief. Finally, it rejects all that the Bible has to say about God and about us.

Only when we recognize our total failure to keep God's own law, only then will we really be ready for the certainty only God can give. Yes, only then can the Holy Spirit create in us the longing for Jesus' work of salvation. Only then can he fill that longing with the sweet gospel message of full forgiveness, life, and salvation at the cross of Christ and before his empty tomb. Then, trusting alone in Christ, in his grace and pardon, we can grow in love to God and obedience to his Word.

The hinges on the door of the Reformation still matter!

Daniel Deutschlander, professor emeritus at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. Mark, Watertown, Wisconsin.

MARRIAGES

are not disposable



We toss aside almost everything. It's no wonder that disposable marriage is the norm.

Lance A. Hoff

We have disposable eating utensils, disposable flashlights, disposable diapers, and disposable cell phones. We even have disposable marriages.

Unlike disposable cell phones, divorce is not new to the 21st century. Even Moses had to deal with it 3,500 years ago. When Jesus said, "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce'" (Matthew 5:31), he was referring to the book of Deuteronomy where Moses wrote: "If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce" (24:1). Moses then stated that once she married another man and he in turn divorced her, the first husband was not allowed to remarry her.

At the time of Jesus, people held at least two different opinions on the meaning of Moses' words. The rabbinic school of Hillel stressed the words "displeasing to him" and said a man could divorce his wife any time she displeased him, even if she burned his food while cooking it. The rabbinic school of Shammai stressed the "something indecent" of Moses' words and claimed that the only legitimate reason for divorce was sexual infidelity. That was the controversy in which the enemies of Jesus tried to get him embroiled in Matthew 19 and Mark 10.

Things haven't changed a whole lot. Divorce continues to be a controversial and hotly debated issue. No wonder. It affects so many so deeply.

Jesus clears the controversy

But divorce should not be all that controversial because Jesus spoke quite clearly on the subject. In his Sermon

on the Mount, Jesus helped people to correct their view of God's law. He said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27,28). In these verses Jesus takes us to the heart of God's will for marriage.

In Matthew 19, Jesus said that the only reason Moses allowed divorce was "because your hearts were hard" (v. 8). Moses insisted on a divorce paper because folks were dumping their spouses anyway. The certificate provided a formal dissolution of the marriage and would provide some protection for the innocent party. Jesus added, "But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery" (Matthew 19:8,9).

Jesus said quite clearly that marriage is not disposable. God's original intention is that marriage be for a lifetime. God joins . . . only God has the right to separate. Divorce always reveals that something is wrong. Even in the case of marital unfaithfulness, at least one party is wrong. Divorce is always a sin against the greatest earthly gift we have outside of life itself. In Malachi the Lord says bluntly, "I hate divorce" (2:16).

Besides marital unfaithfulness, God gave the apostle Paul another reason for divorce—desertion—which Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 7. But God doesn't approve of divorce. He simply protects the innocent party who has been deserted in marriage. Then with tears in his eyes God states, "Your marriage is broken." Note, he doesn't command divorce. God's will is clearly if it is broke, fix it; don't throw it away.

The Christian view of divorce

When Christians think of divorce, they go back to the beginning. God created marriage; it is as sacred as life itself. It is no coincidence that in the Old Testament when God placed the death penalty on murder, he placed the same sentence on adultery (Leviticus 20:10). To violate the marriage vow is as serious as murder.

What a difference in our thinking! If the can opener breaks, you throw it out. If your dog gets cancer or your horse breaks a leg, you put it out of its misery. But if your daughter gets cancer or your son breaks a leg, you do whatever can be done to fix it. It is clear in which category God places marriage. Marriage is not disposable. If it's sick, you heal it, no matter what the cost. If it's broken, you fix it, no matter what the effort. You do not shoot it and put it out of its misery.

In our sin-sick world, marriages get sick and break. We need to realize that a hurting marriage hurts just as bad as a broken body. All of us need to have compassion for those who hurt. There is no greater hurt. Divorce hurts as bad as death. People have had half of themselves torn away unjustly and violently. It is a blow from which many never fully recover. They need our love and compassion.

But those who plan divorce as the best solution for their difficulties need to be impressed with the seriousness of this sin. They must be reminded that divorce is not the solution needed. God says it isn't, and the society we live in witnesses that God is right. Divorce solves nothing. It simply perpetuates and complicates the problem. The little children are the broken pieces. One out of every five children is torn to pieces because his or her mommy and daddy thought they were wiser than God and disposed of their marriage.



Yes, there are times when I too feel that a marriage is hopeless. But God doesn't give me that choice any more than he gives me the choice of when my life should end. I don't know of anyone who would hesitate to spend an enormous amount of money to get needed medical help. Marriage is one of God's greatest gifts to us; each marriage is worth every dime and ounce of effort we have to make it the very best it can be.

Sadly, the world says that marriage is one of those disposable items. If it is not working properly, toss it aside and get a new one. If we think we're going to be in trouble because of the mountains of garbage from all the disposable things we toss aside each year, that's nothing compared to the wreck we are making of society with our disposable marriages. The Christian view of marriage is so very different. This is one view that we dare not compromise.

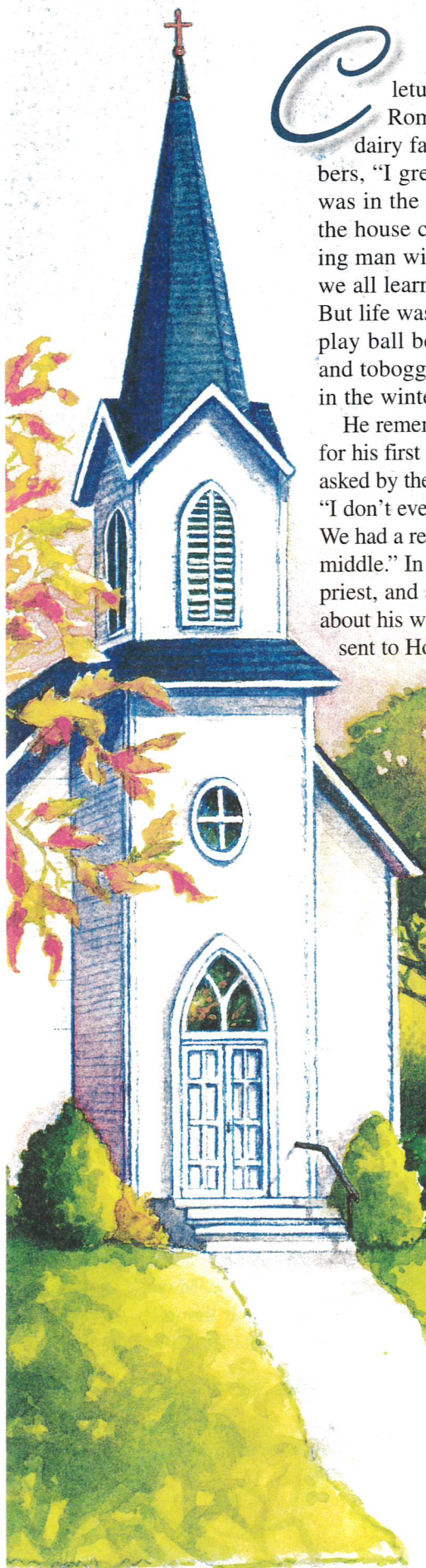
At the foot of his cross

All of us descend so easily into angry words, jealousy, and conflict. Marriages are plagued with such sins. Every married person and some who are not married have violated God's gift of marriage. For those who have a heavy burden of guilt because of sins connected in the most important area of

life, know this: marriage is not to be taken lightly. It is not disposable, but every sin we have committed is disposable . . . there at the foot of the cross of our dear Savior. May God's undeserved love and forgiveness give you the will and strength to change and rescue your own marriage.

Lance Hoff is pastor at St. Peter, Helenville, Wisconsin.

This is the fourth article in a six-part series on marriage. To read other articles in the series, go to www.wels.net/forwardinchrist and search by the author's first and last name.



Cletus Wolfe was named after the third Roman Catholic pope. He grew up on a dairy farm—one of five boys. He remembers, “I grew up in a strict Catholic family. I was in the middle so I got to help Mom with the house chores. My father was a hardworking man with really strong moral values, and we all learned the value of a good day’s work.” But life was not only work. “We took time to play ball before chores and had sleigh rides and toboggan rides on Saturday and Sunday in the winter months.”

He remembers wearing a suit for the first time for his first communion and answering questions asked by the bishop for confirmation. But, he says, “I don’t ever remember reading out of the Bible. We had a really nice one with a family tree in the middle.” In spite of that, he had a desire to be a priest, and after eighth grade he told his father about his wish. His aunt was a nun, so his family sent to Holy Cross Seminary for four years of high school to prepare him for further study and the priesthood.

During those years, Cletus says, “The fire died,” and he no longer wanted to be a priest. He never remembered studying the Bible, even at Holy Cross. He confesses, “Seeds of doubt started to enter my mind way back then. But as a Catholic you don’t question things that are happening around you. You just accept what the priest or bishop tells you.”

He came home to the family dairy farm and went to the University of Wisconsin–River Falls. Through 4-H, he met a Lutheran girl. Their paths crossed as they competed, showing and judging cattle. Her name was Geri Lynn Passow; her family had a dairy farm nearby. The families knew each other, but the first time Cletus asked Geri for a date, her family thought she was too young for a first-year student at the university.

Once Geri showed a cow that Cletus wanted to buy. When he asked if she would sell the cow, Geri said it was not for sale. But Cletus says, with a twinkle in his eye, that he remembered that if he married Geri he would get her and the cow.

They were married in the Lutheran church, but they each remained loyal to their own religious beliefs. Cletus remembers that Geri

*Confessions
of faith*

Why are you a member of WELS? What does this church body have that makes it unique from hundreds of others? In this series, you will read about why some choose to join WELS and what members treasure most about being WELS.

John A. Braun

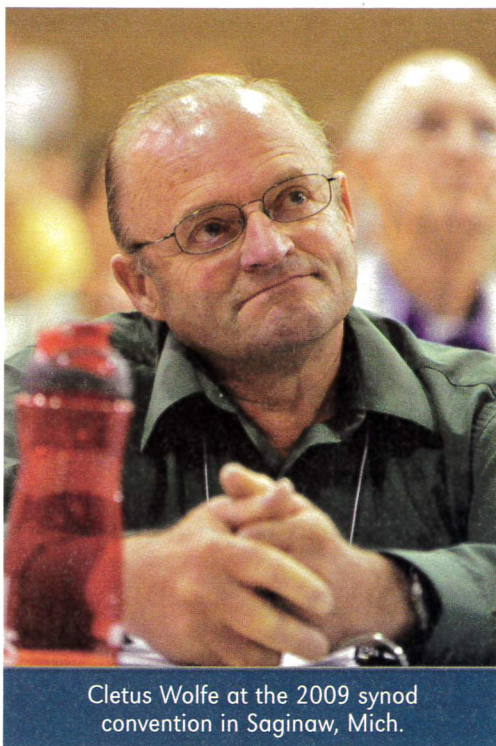
argued with his priest about inter-faith marriage and confession to a priest. Permission from the bishop to marry did not arrive until the day before the wedding, but they had decided to marry with or without permission.

At the time, Cletus was in the army, so for the first 18 months of their marriage, they were separated from their families and learned to lean on each other. They would go to the Catholic church one week and the Lutheran church the next. Once back home, Geri went to her Lutheran church and Cletus remained Catholic. They bought a farm and began building their life together. But Cletus did not always go to church. "I was busy farming, so for two or three years I did not even go to church," he says.

After seven years of praying and waiting, the Lord blessed them with a son, Ryan. But Geri worried about Cletus and his apparent loss of faith. She even asked her parents what to do. They advised her to pray and wait for the Holy Spirit to help Cletus see the way. Life went on. Two years later, they had a daughter, Tiffany.

When the children started going to Sunday school, earlier questions and doubts that Cletus had returned. Three things bothered him: "First, if you miss church on Sunday, that's a mortal sin and you're going right to hell. Second, the pope was infallible when it came to matters of the church, but he is just a man. Third, putting money in and lighting candles was a way to have sins taken away."

He finally shared his doubts with Geri. She advised him to talk to her pastor. Cletus knew a few things about Lutherans from his wife and from attending services. He said, "I loved the singing, and I always heard about Jesus when I attended." The Holy



Cletus Wolfe at the 2009 synod convention in Saginaw, Mich.

Spirit had opened the door to his heart, and Cletus was ready to listen.

Once he talked to Geri's pastor, he was impressed that the answers the pastor gave came from the Bible. One winter Cletus decided to take classes to become a Lutheran. "It was neat because as I studied my lessons I could ask my children for help to learn about Jesus for myself," he says. "The pastor was good at answering questions, and he always went back to the Bible."

After instructions, he became Lutheran and now serves on the church council. In addition, he was a delegate to the 1999 synod convention in New Ulm, Minn., and again served as a delegate this year.

He says, "The hardest part for me was to accept that Jesus did it all for us. We don't earn our way to heaven. Because of what Jesus did for us we follow his commands as laid out in the Bible." Lutherans and Catholics are opposites. What Catholics do brings forgiveness. What Lutherans do is because of forgiveness. As Cletus confesses, "Jesus did it all for us."

The faith that the Holy Spirit put in his heart spills over into his life. His son Ryan loved challenges as a boy. At times he became bored with school and got into trouble. Once when Ryan was helping milk their 50 cows, he asked his father about life's challenges. Cletus responded, "What greater challenge could there be but to help someone save their soul." Ryan chose to begin studying to be a pastor, eventually graduating from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. He now is a pastor in Wisconsin. Cletus says, "I do believe the Holy Spirit put these words in my mouth." What a father wanted to do by being a priest God has purified and a son does now as a Lutheran pastor.

Tiffany attended Wisconsin Lutheran College and "married a wonderful man who has also taken classes and has learned of the joy of being a believer in Jesus, our Savior," says Cletus.

Cletus looks for opportunities to talk to Catholics. "I love talking to Catholics," he says. But it is often hard to strike up a conversation. His advice is simple, "Listen carefully to what they say and pray for the Lord to help you say the right things."

As a delegate to the 2009 convention, he remembers the opening worship service and the Thursday evening worship as highlights. Also included in his highlights are the essays. While he was there, he talked with other delegates in the dorm and at mealtime. He was surprised at how many former Catholics he ran into. It was an opportunity to praise God for his blessings and for bringing him to the truth of God's grace in Jesus.

John Braun is executive editor of Forward in Christ.



Are we PUPPETS?

Does God control us like puppets, or do we determine what will happen?

Mark J. Lenz

“Should I wear the blue tie or the brown tie?”
“Yes.”

That wasn't the answer you expected. Maybe she didn't hear the question.

“Should we go to the steakhouse or the Mexican restaurant?”

“Yes.”

Maybe she wants to go to both?

Either I should wear the blue tie or the brown tie. I'd look pretty silly wearing both. Either we should go to the steakhouse or the Mexican restaurant. Going to both on the same evening wouldn't be too good for the waistline. Either/or questions require a choice. Answering “yes” is possible only if a person didn't hear the question, didn't understand the question, didn't want to commit to a decision, or was just trying to be funny. Except when it comes to this question: Does everything have to happen the way it does, or could things happen otherwise? The only proper answer to that question is “yes.”

Yes, everything has to happen the way it does because God is in control of everything. That's what is referred to as *necessity*. And, yes, things could happen otherwise depending on decisions people make. That's what is referred to as *contingency*. Necessity means things have to happen the way they do. Contingency means things could happen otherwise.

Christ's death—a necessity

Take, for example, the most important thing that has ever happened in the history of the world, Christ's death on the cross. Was it God's will that Jesus died on the cross,

or were wicked people responsible for his death? That's an either/or question, of course, but the correct answer is "yes." In Gethsemane when the soldiers seized Jesus, Peter reached for his sword, but Jesus told him to put his sword back. This had to happen so that the Scriptures would be fulfilled (Matthew 26:54). Christ's death was a necessity because it was God's plan from all eternity to save sinners.

On one occasion the apostles Peter and John were put in jail for preaching the gospel. Upon their release they joined their fellow believers and prayed. Their prayer acknowledged that Herod and Pontius Pilate and others had conspired against Jesus but that they "did what [the Lord's] power and will had decided beforehand should happen" (Acts 4:28). They confessed that Christ's death was a necessity. God so controlled events that everything took place just as he had planned.

That's true for you and me too. Everything that happens in our lives happens as part of God's plan. Where and when we were born, the direction our lives have taken, the kind of work we do—everything has taken place according to God's plan.

Yet there was a choice

Does that mean we are puppets on a string? No! No more than Christ was a puppet. The Son of God freely became a human being. Jesus willingly went to Jerusalem, allowed himself to be arrested, to be nailed to a cross, and to die. All of this happened contingent on what Jesus thought and did. Judas Iscariot also was not forced to betray Jesus. The Jews were not forced to shout, "Crucify! Crucify!" (John 19:6). Pontius Pilate was not forced to pronounce the death sentence on Jesus. They all chose to do what they did. They were not robots programmed by God to act in a certain way.

What you and I decide to do makes a difference too. Where we choose to live, what kind of work we decide to

do, whom we decide to marry—all these decisions determine what happens in our lives.

Bound to means

Because things don't necessarily have to happen the way they do, because things happen contingent on the decisions we make, we are bound to use the means God has provided for our welfare. Take food for example. A person can go without food for only so long, so it's foolish and wrong to act as if God will keep us alive without food. God created food to be "received with thanksgiving" (1 Timothy 4:4). Of course, it's also true that the size of my body and my general health are contingent on how much food I eat and the kind of food I eat.

Making a living—providing for ourselves and our families—is contingent on our working. The apostle Paul worked as a tentmaker to provide for himself so he wouldn't be a burden on others. He admonished others to work too (2 Thessalonians 3:12). To quit my job and sit back and expect God to provide for me is not only foolish, it's wrong.

The same is true when it comes to our physical safety. Once, the devil took Jesus to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. " 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down' " (Matthew 4:6). Jesus refused to do that because his personal safety was dependent on what he did. So today our personal safety is contingent on what we do. To jump from a high building without a parachute or a safety net would be wrong. To drive recklessly or to refuse to wear a seat belt would be foolish.

We are also bound to the means God has provided in times of sickness or injury. When King Hezekiah was suffering from a boil, the prophet Isaiah suggested preparing "a poultice of figs" (2 Kings 20:7) and applying it. The good Samaritan in Jesus' story bound up the wounds of the man who had been beaten and left half dead (Luke 10:34). It is not an indication

of lack of faith to turn to doctors and medicine. It is what God expects us to do. Our health and welfare are contingent on doing that. The Christian Scientist who refuses all medical treatment is going against God's will.

God has also provided means for our spiritual welfare. We refer to them as the means of grace. Because God cleanses people from the guilt of sin and makes them heirs of heaven by the washing of Holy Baptism, we need to baptize people. Because the gospel message is the means whereby God creates and strengthens faith, we need to hear it regularly. Because Holy Communion is a means whereby the Lord strengthens our faith, we need to receive it regularly and often. Our spiritual welfare is just as dependent on using the means of grace as our physical welfare is dependent on using the means God has given.

The dangers of denying necessity and contingency

Does everything have to happen the way it does, or could things happen otherwise? The scriptural answer to that question is yes. To say that things do not have to happen the way they do suggests there is no God and he cannot exercise his control. To say that everything always has to happen the way it does is fatalism. The former leads to an "eat, drink, and be merry" approach. The latter leads to an "I don't care" approach that refuses to do anything. Neither has anything to do with Christianity.

Necessity? Contingency? It's not an either/or question. It's a both/and statement.

Mark Lenz, a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. John, New Ulm.

*This is the final article in a three-part series on God's providence. Find a related Bible study after Oct. 5 at www.wels.net/forwardinchrist. Read more in Mark Lenz's book, *God's Providence—He Cares for You*, available from Northwestern Publishing House, www.nph.net.*

WHATEVER

Asleep in Jesus

Death is like sleeping for believers; it's only temporary and then we will have heaven.

Alyssa Schumacher

God tells his disciples in Matthew 10:7, "As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' "

When I read this passage I immediately thought of my friend who was killed in a car crash. When I was thinking about this, I remembered a Bible lesson in seventh grade when the teacher talked about the likelihood that as we moved on with our lives after graduating from grade school, high school, and college that eventually we would have people close to us pass away. Of course, like most 13-year-olds, I already knew that. In fact, I remember hearing awful news every year about friends of mine who had grandparents or other older relatives who passed away. I knew that it was just the cycle of life. We as Christians have the hope that God will eventually take us to be with him in heaven. At the time I didn't really think too hard about death. It didn't cross my mind that God would choose to end the life of a friend who was my age, just three years later.

My friend's death made me realize that life is incredibly short compared to eternity. God could take us to be with him at any time—a minute, a week, or maybe 50 years from now. It doesn't matter.

God put us on this earth for two main reasons. The first reason is to come to faith ourselves. The second is to help bring God's Word to as many people as possible, telling them just as Matthew 10:7 stated: "The kingdom of heaven is near." Our job is not to create faith in others; the Holy Spirit does that. But what we can do is share our hope of eternal life through Christ Jesus with others.

Before my friend's death, no matter how many times I was told that it was possible that God could end my life or a life of a friend at any time, I really didn't believe that death at a young age would happen to me or to people close to me. But thinking this way is not being prepared at all.

Be honest. Have you ever caught yourself thinking, *I'll have tons of time later when I'm older to have a strong faith?* I have come to realize that these are the things Satan uses to tempt us and if we keep thinking these things our faith will wither and eventually die.

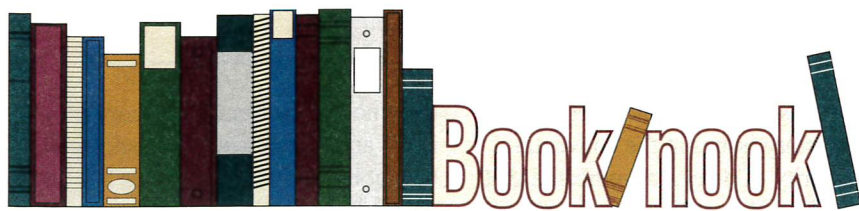
Every obstacle in our lives gives us an opportunity to turn to God's love for strength. He strengthens us through those promises. But obstacles might also turn us away from Jesus and his promises. Then faith grows weak.

There are stories in the Bible about death and how Jesus dealt with it. One story talks about how the heart of Jesus went out to a widow who lost her son. Jesus told her not to cry, and he showed his power over death by raising the widow's son from the dead. Jesus was human like us, and he went through the same things we go through.

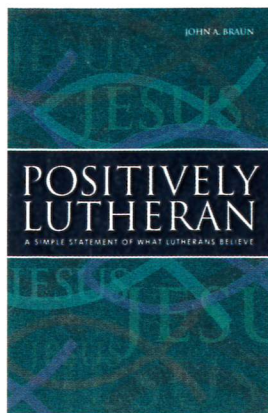
God tells us that death is like sleeping for believers; it's only temporary and then we will have heaven. That fact helped me cope with my friend's death. It helped me realize that I shouldn't be scared of death but rather share with others the hope I have for eternal life.

Alyssa Schumacher, a senior at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wisconsin, is a member at St. Paul, Lake Mills.





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\$5.00

POSITIVELY LUTHERAN

John A. Braun has written *Positively Lutheran* in an easy reading style. For many, being Lutheran is a life-long experience. Consequently, what it means to be Lutheran is taken for granted. In this encouraging book, Braun uses the early Christian ID symbol, the fish, as a framework for his simple statement of what Lutherans believe.

Why is the fish a symbol for Christians? The five letters in the Greek word for fish serve as an acronym. Each letter has a significance pertaining to our Christian faith. I (*iota*) stands for Jesus, X (*chi*) for Christ, TH (*theta*) for God, U (*upsilon*) for Son and S (*sigma*) for

Savior. Because of persecution, early Christians used this picture shorthand to identify one another.

Each of these words symbolized by the Greek letters has great significance to us as Lutherans. Braun cites historical references and modern applications, with each letter serving as a focal point of what it means to be Lutheran. The reader finds the truths of Scripture frequently applied in support for our beliefs. Reading this book reassures Lutherans that what we believe and profess is firmly grounded on God's Word. We are reminded that forgiveness is God's gift to all humans, and we rest our confessions on grace alone, faith alone, and Scripture alone.

Those who have wondered why we are called Lutherans, those who want to know what Lutherans believe, and those who need reminding of God's love for all are encouraged to read this book.

Ron Wels, St. Paul, New Ulm, Minnesota

Obituaries

David Arthur Krenke, 1936–2009

David Krenke was born April 18, 1936, in Oshkosh, Wis. He died June 21, 2009, in Leesburg, Fla.

A 1961 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Peace, Isabel/St. Paul, Timber Lake/Immanuel, Trail City, S.D.; Good Shepherd, Sioux Falls, S.D.; Zion, Mobridge/St. Jacobi, Glenham, S.D.; St. John, Rock Springs/Faith, Reedsburg, Wis.; Good Shepherd, Midland, Tex.; and St. Mark, Leesburg, Fla.

He is survived by his wife, Betty; 1 son; 3 daughters; 16 grandchildren; and 2 great-grandchildren.

Edward Henry Krueger, 1907–2009

Edward Krueger was born Sept. 25, 1907, in Sleepy Eye, Minn. He died on June 23, 2009, in Spokane, Wash.

A graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Redeemer, Mandan, N.D.; First Lutheran, Green Bay, Wis.; and Our Savior, Monte Vista, Colo.

He is preceded in death by a brother; his first wife, Ruth; his second wife, Esther; and one daughter. He is survived by 5 sons, 4 daughters, 12 grandchildren, and 10 great-grandchildren.

Gerhard F. Rolloff, 1916–2009

Gerhard Rolloff was born March 15, 1916, in Freedom, Wis. He died June 25, 2009, in Appleton, Wis.

A 1937 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at St. John, Glencoe, Minn.; St. Matthew,

Appleton, Wis.; and Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.

He is preceded in death by his wife, Eleanor; one brother; and one great-grandson. He is survived by 5 children, 8 grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren, and 3 sisters.

Through my Bible

IN 3 YEARS

11/2009

1. John 10:22-42
2. Jn. 11:1-27
3. Jn. 11:28-44
4. Jn. 11:45-12:19
5. Jn. 12:20-36
6. Jn. 12:37-50
7. 2 Kings 1, 2
8. 2 Kgs. 3:1-4:7
9. 2 Kgs. 4:8-44
10. 2 Kgs. 5:1-6:7
11. 2 Kgs. 6:8-7:20
12. 2 Kgs. 8, 9
13. 2 Kgs. 10
14. 2 Kgs. 11, 12
15. 2 Kgs. 13, 14

16. 2 Kgs. 15, 16
17. 2 Kgs. 17
18. 2 Kgs. 18:1-19:7
19. 2 Kgs. 19:8-37
20. 2 Kgs. 20, 21
21. 2 Kgs. 22, 23
22. 2 Kgs. 24, 25
23. John 13:1-20
24. Jn. 13:21-32
25. Jn. 13:33-14:14
26. Jn. 14:15-24
27. Jn. 14:25-15:8
28. Jn. 15:9-25
29. Jn. 15:26-16:15
30. Jn. 16:16-33

Balanced budget and more

“Don’t pit missions against ministerial education.” That was the message the delegates heard and acted on at the WELS 60th Biennial Convention, held July 27–31 at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

In the months before the convention, all areas of ministry had made serious and painful reductions in their budgets. But looking ahead suggested additional cuts. In the preconvention meetings of the Synodical Council,

In a straw poll after the open hearing on budgetary issues at the convention, the majority of delegates indicated that they did not like either Option A or Option B. Instead, they were looking for another alternative. With that information Pastor Joel Otto, chairman of the Finance and Budget Floor Committee, and other committee members went back to find a way to fund both. Somewhere they needed to find an additional \$1 million in other budgetary cuts so

by synod in convention as core ministry” and recommended balancing the budget by avoiding the choice between A and B. Instead, it recommended cutting the budget in other places to provide the money to fund both missions and ministerial education. After a considerable amount of debate, the resolution was adopted by a vote of 291 to 69—or 80 percent of the delegates supporting the resolution.

Budget cuts recommended in the resolution included \$50,000 from Communications, \$100,000 from Financial Services, \$150,000 from Technology, \$200,000 from Parish Services, \$100,000 from mission counselors, and \$400,000 from corporate travel expenses. Making these cuts meant that neither missions nor ministerial education would be cut more than the severe cuts that had been already made.

In addition to balancing the budget without further cuts in missions and ministerial education, the resolution reaffirmed the definition of the synod’s core ministry. Delegates in the 2005 and 2007 synod conventions said that “the purpose of our synod has been to do together what we cannot do as individual congregations.” That core synodical ministry has been mission outreach, training for future called workers, and publications.

If more cuts necessary

Two other significant resolutions also came from the Finance and Budget Floor Committee. Looking ahead, the committee recognized that the uncertain economic situation may result in lower financial support for the work of the synod. If lower financial support does become a reality, the resolution adopted read “the Synodical Council first utilize furloughs as a way to balance the budget.” This resolution would preserve the concept of core ministry adopted by the past two conventions and reaffirmed by the 2009 convention.



Pastor Joel Otto (right), chairman of the Finance and Budget Floor Committee, and Pastor Michael Enderle, committee member, listen to comments made at the open hearing on budget issues on Monday evening.

the council had adopted a budget proposal for the 2009–2011 biennium that offered two options—each with significant cuts to all areas of ministry. The options allowed the convention to choose between further funding missions or ministerial education. One of the options would balance the budget by giving Ministerial Education an additional \$1 million but only by cutting \$500,000 from World Missions and \$500,000 from Home Missions (Option A). The second option split \$1 million between Home and World Missions and cut that amount from Ministerial Education (Option B).

neither missions nor ministerial education would be cut further.

Members of the committee had come to Saginaw early to work on the budget and spend long hours poring over budget documents and discussing financial issues with advisory delegates. Convention delegates waited for no other committee’s resolutions more than the Finance and Budget Floor Committee. When the resolution was finally completed and passed to the delegates, the wait was over.

The committee’s resolution suggested that “budget Options A and B negatively impact ministries previously identified

The second resolution involved a WELS VEBA one-month premium holiday. Because the reserves of the insurance program are sufficient, WELS VEBA declared a one-month premium holiday for 2009. The holiday would result in saving the synod's budget \$375,000. The convention adopted the committee's resolution to place the savings to WELS from the premium holiday into the Financial Stabilization Fund, which is designed to make sure resources are actually received and on hand before their use. This would make sure that these funds were available for mission and ministry expansion.

Congregations and others involved in the insurance program would also see savings to their budgets. The committee estimated that the one-month fees would result in a total savings of \$3 million for all entities participating in the insurance program. The resolution strongly urged congregations and other entities to remit the monthly premium holiday amount to the synod so that it could be used for mission and ministry expansion.

By adopting these resolutions, the committee and the convention said "our desire is for mission and ministry expansion."

In addition WELS VEBA also announced it expected a freeze on premium increases for 2010. This would result in additional savings to the synod and to congregations and schools participating in VEBA.

Encouragement to all congregations

Finally, the convention adopted a resolution encouraging the congregations of the synod to continue "to place their trust in Christ as the source of every blessing, to use the resources provided to learn of the Lord's gracious blessings and opportunities within the world-wide ministry of the synod, and to give to the Lord also by supporting the ministry program of the synod, not reluctantly or under compulsion, but

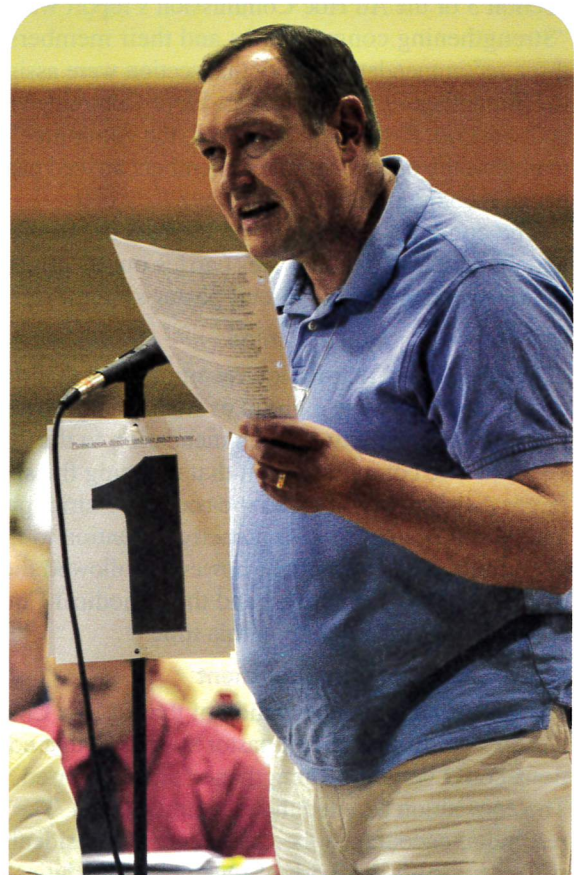
joyfully and generously, according to the ability Christ gives."

This encouragement has become more important recently because of the economic uncertainty congregations and the synod face. Large gifts from foundations and individuals have decreased dramatically in the last eight months. Serious cuts in all areas of ministry have forced ministries to cut missionaries, teachers, and programs. Previous budgets have depended on the expectation of receiving these gifts rather than on the actual gifts themselves. When the gifts were not as significant as planned, serious budgetary cuts were necessary.

Synod planners and administration made two significant changes. The first was the creation of a Financial Stabilization Fund. All significant gifts are placed into the fund to be spent *after* they are received rather than creating a budget based on expected gifts. The plan is for these gifts to be used the year after they are received in order to minimize the negative impact on the synod's work

The second change was to depend on the Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) to fund the budget. Significant gifts from individuals and foundations are still important to the work of the synod, but the most stable source of funding over the years has been contributions from congregations. Future planning will be based on that stable source of financial support.

That means that the work of the synod belongs first to the congregations of the synod and the people in



Dana Rabenberg, a lay delegate from the Nebraska District, comments on a resolution brought by the Finance and Budget Floor Committee.

those congregations. The work the synod does—doing what individual congregations find it more difficult to do, that is, missions beyond the congregation's own environment and training future workers—becomes every member's work. All congregations and members of WELS are encouraged to make the work of the synod part of their financial offerings.

Read all the resolutions from the synod convention in the 2009 Proceedings. All delegates, congregations, and male called workers will receive a hard copy in early October. It also can be found online at www.wels.net/proceedings.

Strengthening congregations

Section 3 of the Ad Hoc Commission's report was entitled "Strengthening congregations and their members." The three recommendations from that section were assigned to the Strengthening Congregations Floor Committee for study and reaction. Pastor Joel Jenswold, the committee's chairman, and the other committee members arrived early and began meeting on Sunday evening.

The committee's resolutions resulted in changes to the way in which Parish Services carries out its ministry and in improvements to the circuit pastor system.

Redistricting proposal denied

The Ad Hoc Commission recommended that the 2009 convention authorize a group to study and prepare a comprehensive redistricting recommendation to the 2011 convention. The commission felt that reducing the size of the larger districts would make it easier for district presidents and circuit pastors to give proactive attention to their congregations. The convention, however, followed the direction of the floor committee and the Synodical Council by not pursuing redistricting at this time.

Circuit pastor role improvement

The second recommendation of the Ad Hoc Commission was to improve the circuit pastor system so that congregations could better be strengthened and supported. The convention adopted the recommendation. The resolution encouraged the Conference of Presidents (COP) to finish the work of revamping the duties and responsibilities of the circuit pastors, limited the size of circuits so that they would normally be eight congregations, and asked circuit pastors to be in close personal contact with their congregations and called workers on a regular basis.

Redeploy and reconfigure Parish Services

The third resolution received the most attention from delegates. The Ad Hoc Commission recommended that the synod redeploy and reconfigure the functions of Parish Services. The Strengthening Congregations Floor Committee agreed and presented a resolution on Wednesday. The discussion that followed ended by recommitting the resolution back to the committee for further study.

After consulting with Parish Services personnel, district presidents, and members of the Ad Hoc Commission, a new reso-

lution was presented on Thursday. The resolution altered the role of Parish Services.

Most significantly, Parish Services was placed under the direct responsibility of the Conference of Presidents (COP) so that it could serve more closely with the district presidents in focusing its resources on congregations needing assistance. The Board for Parish Services was reconfigured as a council instead of a board. The pattern for its role would be the same as Communications and the Ministry of Christian Giving (MCG) in that the COP would have the authority to call administrators of Parish Services just as it does with the Ministry of Christian Giving.

The issue that caused the most discussion was the role of the various commissions that comprise Parish Services (Evangelism, Worship, Special Ministries, Adult Discipleship, Parish Schools, Youth Discipleship, and Parish Assistance). The revised resolution found value in keeping the commissions in some form. The resolution read, "Retaining all the present commissions and their respective chairman, Parish Services would continue to receive 'grassroots' input through them as well as through the members of the COP."

In addition, the position of administrator of Parish Services was eliminated in favor of a coordinator, who would report to the Conference of Presidents. Budgetary realities

also made it clear that Parish Services would need to consolidate and reduce administrative and clerical staff. Parish Services was already discussing plans to do that. The convention outlined an orderly procedure for redeploying its ministry. The resolution suggested that Parish Services present a reorganization plan to the Conference of Presidents "so that the COP can make decisions about the termination and the extending of divine calls for Parish Service Commission administrators."

Because these changes also involved changes to the bylaws of the synod's constitution, the resolution had to pass by a two-thirds majority. When the vote was taken, it passed.

Parish Services is currently working on a reorganization plan to submit to the Conference of Presidents.



Pastor Joel Jenswold, chairman of the Strengthening Congregations Floor Committee.



Pastor Joel Voss, chairman of the Ad Hoc Commission (at podium), and several members listen and react to comments made at the Ad Hoc Commission open hearing on Tuesday evening.

ELECTIONS

The following people were elected at the 2009 synod convention to serve on various boards and commissions:

First vice president

Rev. James Huebner

Second vice president

Rev. Joel Voss

Recording secretary

Rev. Robert Pasbrig

Board for Ministerial Education

Chairman—Rev. Philip Hirsch

Layman—Tracy Linn

Teacher—Kurt Rosenbaum

Parish pastor—Doug Free

Martin Luther College

Governing Board

Chairman—Rev. Michael Woldt

Board for World Missions

Layman—Keith Moore

Northwestern Publishing House

Board of Directors

Laymen—Edward Wolf and

Christopher Snyder

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

professor—John Hartwig

Synodical Council

Teacher-at-large—James

Moeller

Pastor-at-large—Jonathan

Schroeder

Synod Board of Appeals

Pastor—John Vieths

Layman—Peter Dorn

Teacher—William Zeiger

Commission on Youth

Discipleship

Chairman—Rev. Thomas

Schneider

Commission on Adult

Discipleship

Chairman—Rev. Randy Hunter

New vice presidents are ready to work

After serving as chairman of the Commission on Evangelism for 16 years, Pastor James Huebner from Grace, Milwaukee, admits, "I have a love for and an interest in helping churches and pastors proclaim Jesus in the best possible way."

That interest will serve him well as the synod's new first vice president. Elected to this position at the convention this past summer, Huebner, who previously served as WELS' second vice president, is excited to be involved in what he feels is an important goal for the synod—strengthening churches and called workers.

"Everybody is wringing their hands about finances. Well, how do you get to the position where you're financially stable?" he asks. "You raise Jesus in the hearts of people more. You get people into their Bibles more. You get people studying Scripture more. You get people worshipping and hearing the proclamation of Jesus more."

As first vice president, Huebner will be working closely with WELS president, Pastor Mark Schroeder, and the new second vice president, Pastor Joel Voss from Resurrection, Centerville, Ohio, also elected at the convention. Voss and Huebner will be members of the two synodical leadership groups, the Conference of Presidents and the Synodical Council. They also will serve in advisory and consultative roles on several boards and committees.

At the synod convention, delegates voted to make the once full-time first vice president position part time, for a savings of \$80,000. Now both vice presidents' duties are in addition to their full-time calls as parish pastors—with no additional compensation. "I probably won't get at some things here at my congregation," says Voss. "But here's an opportunity [for my congregation members] not only to share my time with the synod as a way of work-

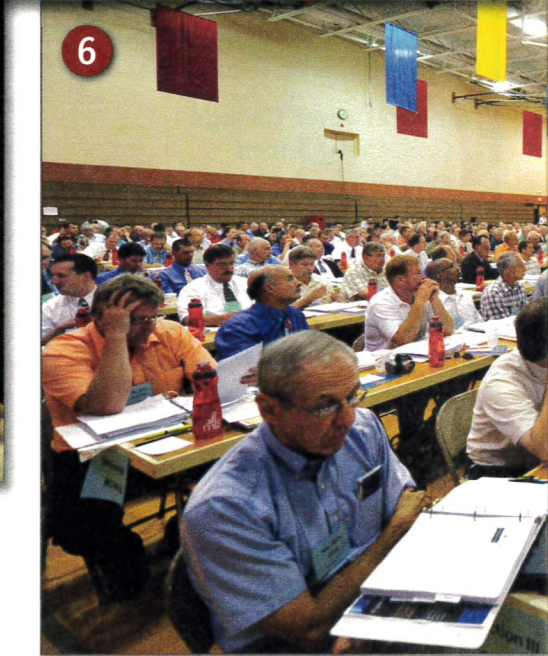
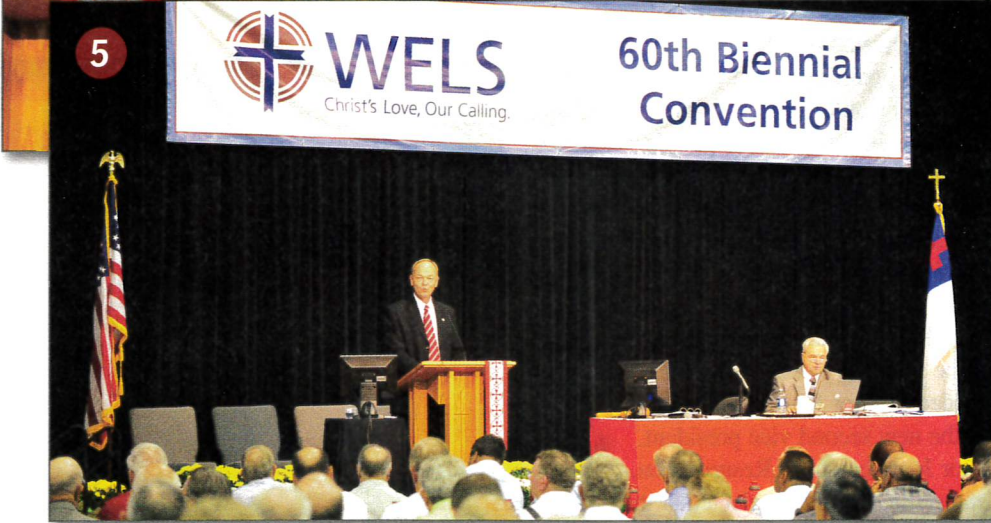
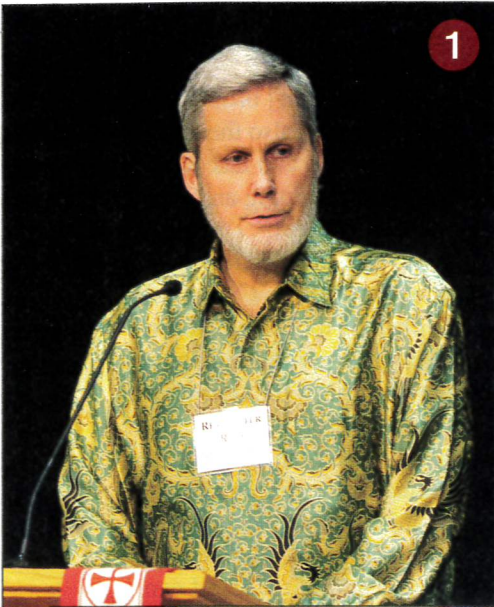
ing together with [their] brothers and sisters in the faith but also then to have the chance to step up and take some of the things that I was doing and accomplish them [themselves]."

Voss, who just finished serving as chairman of the Ad Hoc Commission, says he's excited to be involved in implementing the commission's recommendations that were approved at the synod convention, including the redeployment of Parish Services and the reworking of the circuit pastor system. But he admits that there will be a learning curve. "I need to watch and listen and find out where I can help," he says.

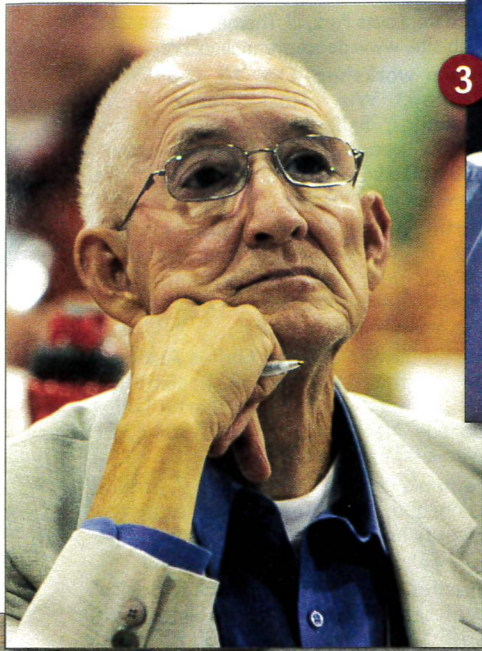


WELS synod officers (left to right): Pastor Robert Pasbrig, recording secretary; Pastor Joel Voss, second vice president; Pastor James Huebner, first vice president; and Pastor Mark Schroeder, WELS president.

Huebner says that for him, time management will be a challenge, but he is ready to get busy. "From the worship services to the devotions to the convention essays and all the presentations, everybody [at the convention] knows what the ultimate purpose and goal of our individual lives and congregations and synod is all about," he says. "Finally you can look at what happened at convention—okay, we're short on funds—but we've got work to do. We all want to use the means of grace to touch the hearts of more and more people."



PHOTOS: BILL PEKRUL & PHILIP SCHUPMANN



3



1 Pieter Reid, friendly counselor to Indonesia, announces at the convention that when the Lutheran Church of Indonesia heard of WELS' financial challenges it voted at its convention to give up 25 percent of its subsidy from WELS. The church is planning to cut back on administration, travel, and wages, but not on outreach—it opened up three new mission outposts in August.

2 Almost 750 people attend the convention's opening worship service at St. Paul, Saginaw, Mich.

3 Delegates listening and conversing at the convention.

4 Kids from the Saginaw area serve as pages at the convention. More than 200 local people helped at the convention with tasks such as working in the dining hall, doing maintenance, shuttling delegates to the airport, and manning the hospitality tent.



4

5 WELS President Mark Schroeder addresses the delegates at the convention. This was Schroeder's first convention as WELS president.

6 Three hundred sixty-eight delegates—105 pastors, 75 teachers, and 188 laymen—and 44 advisory delegates attend the convention.

7 Prof. John Brenner from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. (at podium), presents one of two essays at the convention. His was on "Christ's Love," while Pastor Jon Schroeder from Faith, Sharpsburg, Ga., presented on "Our Calling." Their topics were taken from the new synod theme "Christ's Love, Our Calling," which debuted at the convention.

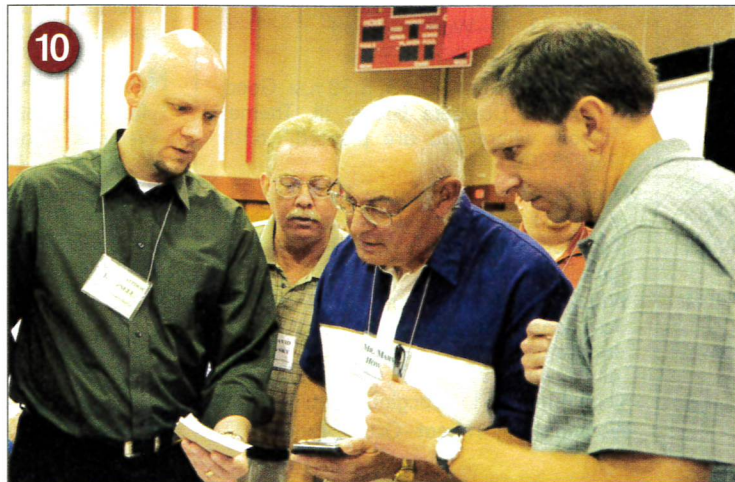


7

8 Delegates were divided into 25 different floor committees to develop resolutions to bring to convention delegates. Members of the Finance and Budget Floor Committee (pictured) met for more than 20 hours to develop their resolutions.

9 Delegates sing hymns from *Christian Worship: Supplement*, a new publication that came out in fall 2008 that complements the 1993 hymnal. Daily devotions at the convention also featured new liturgies from the Supplement.

10 The Elections Floor Committee tallies the votes cast after the budget discussion.



10



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Scharf, Ralph E., to Living Water, Hot Springs Village, Ark.
Witte, Steven L., to vice president, Asia Lutheran Seminary, Hong Kong

Teachers

Borck, Sara N., to Reformation, San Diego, Calif.
Campbell, John D., to California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, Calif.
Chernohorsky, Nicole, to Pilgrim, Minneapolis, Minn.
Clarke, Amoci, to St. John, St. John's, Antigua
Cole, Michelle M., to St. Paul, Saginaw, Mich.
Cortez, Theckla F., to St. John, Lannon, Wis.
Denney, Christopher W., to Our Saviour, Lake Havasu City, Ariz.
Duquaine, Heather L., to St. John, Lannon, Wis.
Edenhauser, Mary E., to retirement
Enger, Alana J., to St. Paul's, Fort Atkinson, Wis.
Freese, John R., to St. Philip, Milwaukee, Wis.
Grimm, Mariel A., to Promised Land Pre-school, Saint Paul, Minn.
Grubbs, Mary J., to retirement
Haag, Andrew, to Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fond du Lac, Wis.
Heyn, Molly M., to Illinois Elementary School, Crete, Ill.
Imbach, Melissa, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.
James, Donnette, to St. John, St. John's, Antigua
Kirk, Daniel B., to Rocky Mountain Lutheran High School, Northglenn, Colo.
Kruse, Andrew J., to Pilgrim, Minneapolis, Minn.
Laabs (Kanter), Erin R., to Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.
Langenhahn, Jodi, to St. Matthew, Marathon, Wis.
Lawson, Mary E., to Barre Patch Christian Childcare, La Crosse, Wis.
Lindner, Heidi R., to Redeeming Grace, Rogers, Minn.
Markgraf, Michelle L., to Good Shepherd, Sioux Falls, S.D.
Muente, Kari A., to Rocky Mountain Lutheran High School, Northglenn, Colo.
Munson, Melissa A., to Peace, Hartford, Wis.
Nelson, Joel A., to Garden Homes, Milwaukee, Wis.
Phelps, Susan M., to St. Paul, Howards Grove, Wis.
Pringle, Laura, to Trinity/St. Luke, Watertown, Wis.
Proeber, Kenneth A., to King of Kings, Maitland, Fla.

Race, Karrie L., to Martin Luther, Neenah, Wis.
Rehberger, Phillip F., to St. John's, Burlington, Wis.
Schubkegel, Joyce C., to retirement
Seeger, Rebecca A., to Good Shepherd, Midland, Mich.
Stubalt, Shanna L., to St. Mark's, Watertown, Wis.
Underwood, Denise L., to Cross of Glory, Peoria, Ariz.
Ungemach, Margaret A., to Trinity, Union Grove, Wis.
Weichel, Amy G., to Northdale, Tampa, Fla.
Wendland, Sandra J., to Peace, Hartford, Wis.
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary assignment
Bater, Noah, to Prince of Peace, Salt Lake City, Utah

ANNIVERSARIES

Plymouth, Minn.—West Lutheran High School (30). Oct. 2-4. Web site, www.wlhs.net.
Morton Grove, Ill.—Jerusalem school. Century of Christian education celebration. Oct. 9-11. Web site, www.jerusalem.lutheran.org/jels100.
Tacoma, Wash.—Faith School (50). Oct. 10. Worship, 4 P.M.; meal, 5:30 P.M. 253-537-2696; office@faith-wels.org.
Fort Wayne, Ind.—Beautiful Savior (40). Oct. 11. Worship, 10:15 A.M.; meal to follow. pastor@beautifulsaviorfw.org.
Holiday, Fla.—Peace (40). Oct. 25. Worship, 10 A.M.; luncheon to follow. Tracy, 727-937-5893.
Milwaukee, Wis.—St. Peter (150). Apr. 25, 2010. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal to follow at Serb Hall. RSVP requested. Elaine Metoxin, 414-764-8847.

COMING EVENTS

Camp Phillip—920-787-3202, office@campphillip.com.
 • Oct. 2-4—Women's retreat
 • Oct. 9-11—Scrapbooking retreat
 • Oct. 16-18—Confirmation retreat
 • Oct. 23-25—Work weekend
 • Nov. 6-8—Quilting retreat
Women's retreat—Oct 3, 8:30 A.M. Good Shepherd, Downers Grove, Ill. Theme: "Bloom where you are planted." 630-960-3530.
Friends of the Seminary Day—Oct. 3, 8 A.M.-1 P.M. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Lori Guse, 262-242-8104; gusel@wls.wels.net.
WELS Church Librarian's Organization fall conference—Oct. 3, 9:30 A.M. Immanuel, Manitowoc, Wis. Betty or Howard Wilsman, 920-682-5351; jhbwilsman511@sbcglobal.net.
Woman's Day retreat—Oct. 3. Peace, 502

Orth Rd, Loves Park, Ill. Theme: "Got peace?" Web site, www.peaceevangelical.org.
Autism workshop—Oct. 10. Our Savior, Grafton, Wis. Host, Jesus Cares Ministries, Belle Plaine, Minn. Theme: "God's people are differently abled." 888-600-8542, jcm@tla.org. Web site, www.jcministries.org.
Martin Luther College homecoming—Oct. 10-11. Alumni and friends of MLC, DLMC, and NWC are encouraged to attend. Steve Balza, 507-217-1731. Web site, www.mlc-wels.edu.
Martin Luther College Ladies Auxiliary annual meeting—Oct. 14. Registration, 9 A.M.; meeting, 9:30 A.M. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 507-354-8221. Web site, www.mlc-wels.edu.
Women's fall retreat—Nov. 7. Trinity, Minocqua, Wis. Theme: "In search of security and peace of mind." Judy Rathke, 715-385-0088; duje@centrurytel.net.
Christian Life Resources "Back to Basics" conference—Nov. 7. St. Paul, Slinger, Wis. Cost: \$15, includes lunch. 800-729-9535. Web site, www.clrevents.com.
In the Footsteps of Paul study trip—Jan. 2-16, 2010. Hosts: Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Tour sites include Ephesus, Aphrodisias, Sardis, Pergamum, Troas, Istanbul, Philippi, Thessaloniki, Delphi, Athens, and Corinth. Rome extension offered. Non-students welcome. Joel Pless, 414-443-8930, joel.pless@wlc.edu. Stephen Geiger, 262-242-8161, geigers@wls.wels.net.
Christian Woman Today retreat—Mar. 19-21, 2010. Olympia Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Maureen, 262-784-0412.
POSITIONS AVAILABLE
Choir director/accompanist—for Jordan, West Allis, Wis. The choir meets weekly for practice and sings twice monthly and on holidays. There are concerts before Christmas and on Good Friday. Responsibilities are from September through May. The person should be a WELS/ELS member. Also looking for an accompanist. Both are paid positions. Victor Janicki, 414-510-3201, vjanicki34@msn.com.
NAMES WANTED
Tyler, Tex.—Bible study held Tuesday evenings. Vilas Glaeske, 903-860-7411; cell, 214-681-0062.
Weatherford, Tex.—Second site for Abiding Faith, Fort Worth, Tex. Nate Bourman, 817-845-6807; pastor.bourman@gmail.com. Web site, www.abidingfaithwest.com.

To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.

From the delegates

Forward in Christ caught up with several delegates at the synod convention to discover what they thought about the convention, the new synod theme, and about being Lutheran. Here's what they had to say . . .



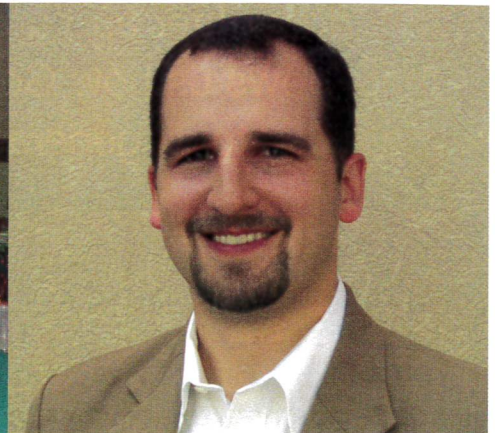
Layman **Daren Matthew-Ward**, St. John's, Antigua, West Indies

"To me [the new synod theme] brings home how significant what the Lord has done for me as an individual and for my family and how I can demonstrate that love in how I live and how I relate to my fellow human beings."



Pastor **Nathan Strobel**, campus pastor at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis.

"I think that our synod president and praesidium have done a great job of laying the groundwork [at the convention] through the Word of God to get us thinking on the same page regarding the work of the Spirit among us through the Word so that now we're prepared to deal with the tough issues."



Layman **Robert Slattery**, Living Hope, Redmond, Wash.

"Christ's Love, Our Calling serves as a reminder that God is in control. He knows everything that's going on. He knows how everything will work out. He has tested us with these challenging times, but through it all, that's what we're here for. We're here to serve him, to work through these issues, and to seek guidance."



Teacher **Ron Wels**, Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minn.

"Our calling is living in the understanding of Christ's love. When we know Christ loves us and he's working in us as we learn more about how much he loves us, we just tell others. We can't keep quiet."

"One of the things being WELS Lutheran means to me is that I can go so many places in the United States, or the world for that matter, and know that I can find a church that will teach and show me God's will. . . . So it's a heritage of using the Bible as a source of information about what God has done for me."



Layman **Stephen Ludwig**, Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, Madison, Wis.

"I think [Christ's Love, Our Calling] is a great theme because it starts with the right motivation—that's Christ's love. . . . Even in the state of being his enemies, Christ has redeemed us. He came and loved us so much that he saved us. The Creator dying for his created is just such a wonderful picture. Starting from there—because God loved us first—we want to go out and do what he asks us. We want to obey his commands. We want to spread his gospel and tell everyone else how much God has loved his whole world."



Pastor **John Hartwig**, professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.

"[The convention] was a very positive experience. You really do see God's hand working in bringing lots of his people together from all different places and then realizing that we are walking together and it's for the same purpose—the purpose for which God has made us his children, for which God has called us."

Even in an age of e-mail, God's law still guides us. Follow this imaginary conversation between a granddaughter and grandfather that shows us how God's law applies to all generations.

Dear Grandpa,
I'm confused. We started a unit on dinosaurs today in biology. "For over 160 million years dinosaurs ruled the world" was how the teacher began the lesson. At first I thought, "I've heard all this before, and I know it's not true." But here's what confused me: The teacher is a Christian. She's really into her church. We've talked about how cool it is to have Jesus as our Savior. I've looked up to her. So, is it okay to be a Christian who believes in evolution?
I love you,
Denali

The Second

The Second Commandment:
You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not use his name to curse, swear, lie or deceive, or use it superstitiously, but call upon God's name in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

Dear Denali,

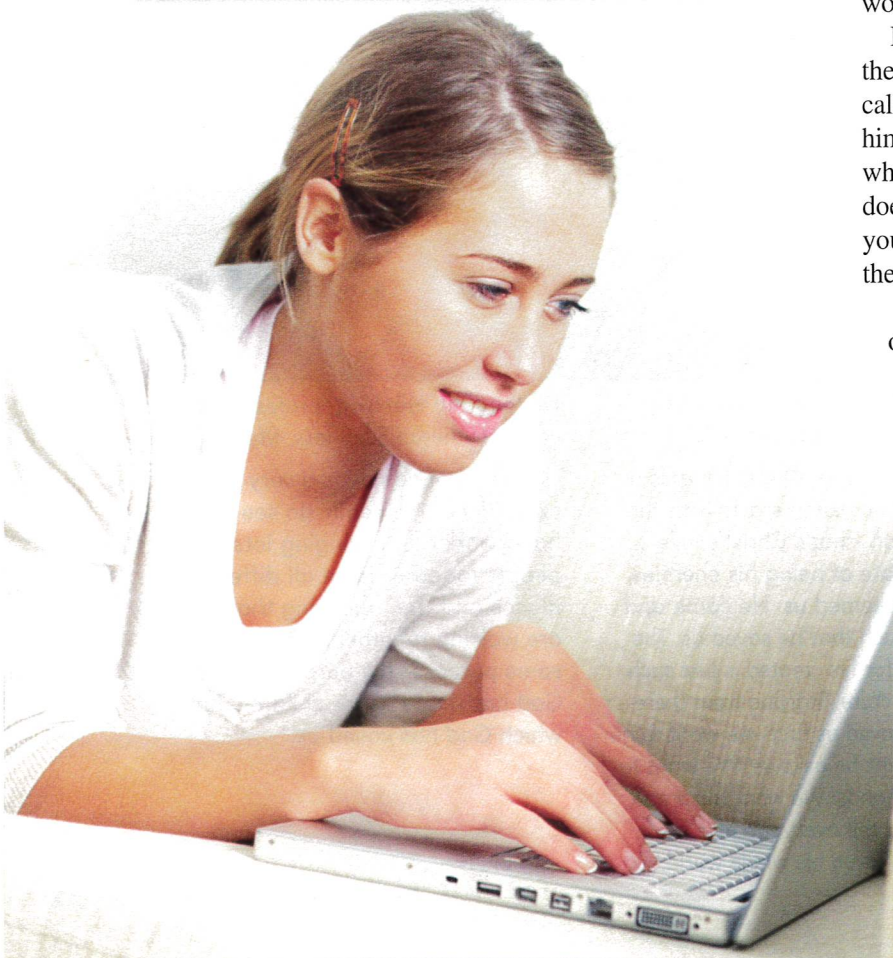
I almost wrote to you about the reasons dinosaurs could not have existed on earth 160 million years ago. Then I noticed that you were asking a different question: Does God care if we Christians believe the universe evolved? I think one way to answer that is to think what it means to be a friend of God.

That's what the Second Commandment is about. Remember: "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God." In other words, God commands, "Be the kind of friend who won't do or say anything that will give me a bad reputation."

Part of not misusing God's name is making sure we honor the titles and terms he uses to describe himself. For example, calling on God to damn people to hell will never set well with him because he wants everyone in heaven. Shouting "O God!" when we are surprised or "Jesus Christ!" when we are angry doesn't please him either. Imagine if every time the kids in your school were upset they screamed, "Denali!" That's not the kind of popularity anyone wants.

But watching the way we speak about God's titles is only one way we keep the Second Commandment. God's name is much more than what he calls himself. God's name is his whole reputation. Your name is like that too. When people think about you, Denali, they don't just consider the sounds that make up your name. They think about everything they know about you. Your long, auburn hair. Your helpfulness. The beautiful singing voice you have. How you show your faith in Jesus. Everything others know about you gets mixed into your name.

Now imagine how hurtful it would be if your friend McKenna began telling your classmates untrue things about you—like you are stuck on yourself or you take drugs. A person who would tell such lies would



Commandment

James A. Aderman

not be much of a friend. Your good name would be tarnished, perhaps ruined.

That brings us back to your question: Can people who trust Jesus as their Savior refuse to trust him when he says he created the entire universe? The Bible says the universe was created by God in six normal days. That's what Genesis 1 insists. Exodus 20:11 confirms that: "In six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them." Jesus testified that Genesis 1 had it right when he said, "Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female?'" (Matthew 19:4).

God has taken credit for constructing every molecule, every planet, every galaxy, everything. Any time we Christians say, "That's not the way the universe happened," we rob God of his good name. We say that his Word deceived us and that we know better than he does. We become poor friends of God.

Some Christians have found other ways to rob God of his reputation. Some today have doubts about the miraculous ways that the Lord cared for Israel during 40 years in the wilderness. Others deny that Jonah could have been swallowed by a huge fish that coughed him up on a beach three days later. Some are skeptical that the Spirit inspired every word of the Bible. Some even reject the resurrection of Jesus as a fact of history. These are all events that God says took place. To explain them away or to maintain they never happened calls God a liar. That's hardly the stuff of friendship.

Denying what God says is true is serious. In the Old Testament, God decreed, "Let no one be found among you who . . . practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD. . . . A prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death" (Deuteronomy 18:10-12,20).

Somehow that doesn't stop a number of Christians from trusting superstitions rather than God. Years ago I had a friend—a Christian old enough to be my mother—who insisted on giving me advice about my future based on her reading of my horoscope. I had football playing friends at my Lutheran high school who refused to launder their socks for fear of washing away the good luck they thought lived there. Some believers even find comfort in the religious art they wear—as though their cross-shaped earrings or Jesus-shaped tattoo have power to keep them safe. All superstition robs our great friend in heaven of his good name. No wonder God hates it.

When McKenna tells you something, you believe her. When others say untrue things about her, you defend her. Our friendship with God works the same way. We take him at his word. We defend him when others attack him. After all, God is an infinitely better friend to us than we could ever be to him.

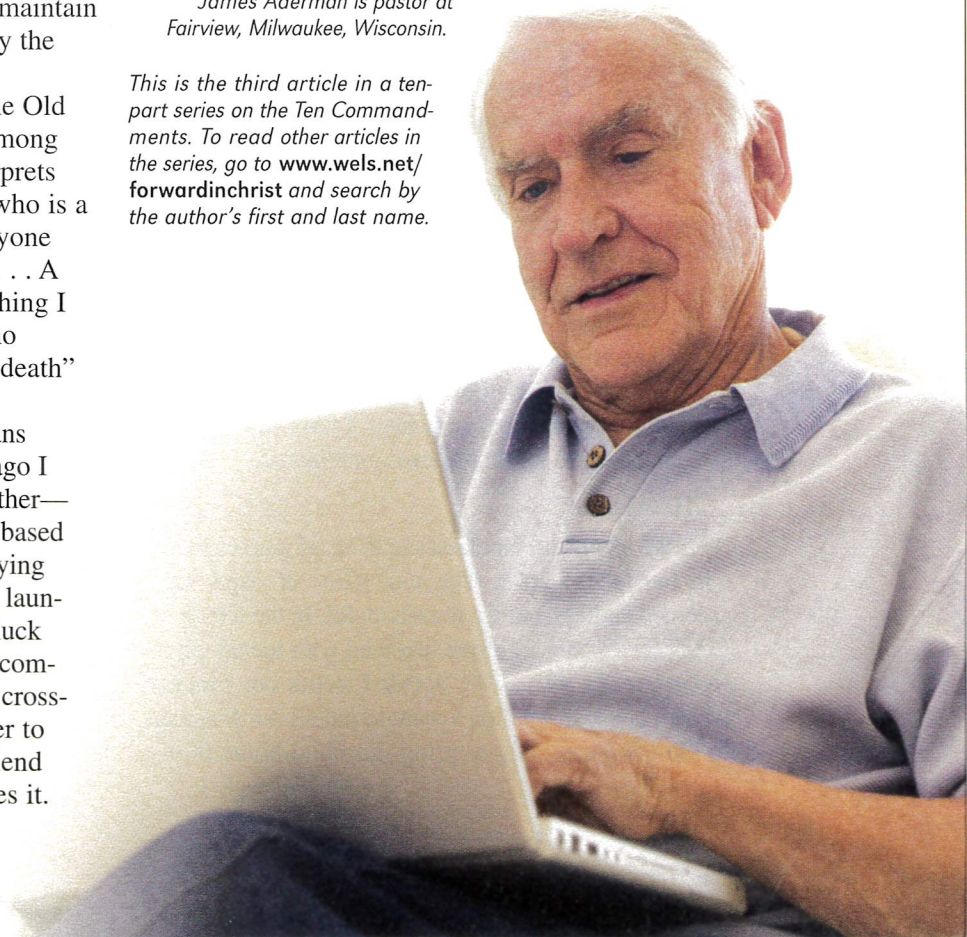
"I have called you friends," Jesus promised his disciples after he explained, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13,14). Hours later Jesus did just that. He laid down his life for us all on Golgotha's altar. There our rightful punishment for being his enemies rather than his friends was fully paid for by Jesus' sacrifice. There he replaced our sin with his perfect life. There he endured our hell so we could share his heaven. There we became God's friends. No wonder we sing, "What a friend we have in Jesus!"


Is it okay to be a Christian who believes the universe evolved? Because of our friend Jesus, we Christians live to bring God honor and praise. We trust his Word. We defend his reputation. We want everyone to know exactly who he is and what he has done for us. That's what a friend does.

I love you,
Grandpa

*James Aderman is pastor at
Fairview, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.*

This is the third article in a ten-part series on the Ten Commandments. To read other articles in the series, go to www.wels.net/forwardinchrist and search by the author's first and last name.



A photograph of a wooden crib with a white blanket. Several colorful hanging toys are suspended from the top of the crib, including a yellow chick, a blue and white bird, a green and red ball, and a red flower. The title "Heartache & Joy" is overlaid on the image in a large, dark red, serif font.

Heartache & Joy

Adopting can create painful delays and twists.
But a little child makes it all worthwhile.

Jennifer Schmeling

Three and a half years ago, I had begun to question whether or not I would ever be a mother. My husband Nate and I were in the beginning stages of the adoption process, a road that seemed so long and winding. I didn't know if we would make it to the end. Now here I sit, writing on my computer as my 22-month-old son naps in his crib. The last three and a half years were the longest and most difficult of my life. I hit rock bottom and questioned God's plan several times; however, I have also experienced more joy than I ever anticipated.

Heartache

We signed up for classes with an adoption agency in the fall of 2005. The mountains of paperwork seemed endless, but we were hopeful. In the winter of 2005, the financial burden involved with the adoption process really hit us. We decided to put our process on hold, because we didn't want to put all our finances into the adoption, only to bring our child home to his

or her very own cardboard box. My mom, however, continued to hand out our adoption brochures.

Six months later we got a call saying that a young girl wanted to meet with us. After the meeting, she wanted to know if Nate and I would parent her child. We were on top of the world! Over the next three months, everything seemed to be going well. Nate and I decided it was time to register for all the wonderful baby items. We registered for everything from diapers to a big screen TV (Nate's idea). We were in the baby department when my phone rang. It was the birth mother, and she was crying. In that moment I knew it was over. I heard her say, "I'm sorry. I've decided to keep my baby." Until that moment, I never knew what it felt like to have your heart ripped out of your body and stomped on.

Nate and I went home and grieved. I didn't know if I could trust another birth mother again. Deep down, I knew that God would help us through this

Those painful years of waiting and wondering, hoping and praying now made sense to me. God had created the greatest gift for us.

tough time, but it was still difficult to trust him. Yet we still had hope that God's plan for our lives included children. We decided to get back with our agency and were placed in their *Waiting Families* book at the very end of 2006.

Very soon we got a call. This time a birth mother and father wanted to meet us. The birth mother was expecting twins within the month. We cautiously attended the match meeting. Once again, we were asked to parent the twin girls. We had questioned whether or not we would ever be parents, and now there we were—preparing for twins.

Six days later, the birth mother's labor was induced, and she wanted us to be at the hospital. Nate and I were cautiously optimistic, knowing full well what could happen. We trusted that God would do what was best for us. The next day we went to the hospital and waited with the birth mother's family. Because the twins were premature, they had to remain in the NICU for awhile. After spending four days with the girls in the hospital, I learned to feed them and care for them and memorized every detail of their tiny bodies. I was at peace, reveling in God's wonderful miracle.

Of course, this story has one more turn. Four days after the birth of the twins, we received another phone call. This one was from our social worker. The twins' birth parents had decided to parent the babies.

Once again, my heart was ripped out of my chest and trampled to bits and pieces. I remember collapsing to the ground, unable to move. It was a tough time, but Nate and I still held on to the hope of one day becoming parents. We knew God loved us and wanted what was best for us.

Joy

Many of our friends and family thought we were completely nuts, but in February 2007, we again entered our adoption agency's *Waiting Families* book. After some impatient waiting, we received another call. We again went to the match meeting, cautiously optimistic. The walls around my heart were higher and stronger than ever, but we sat and talked with the birth mother for over an hour.

The next day Nate called me. All he said was "So, are you ready to be a mommy?" The baby boy was due in August. I kept my heart guarded for the first few weeks of summer. I



bought a few boy things, but I didn't go overboard. I kept myself occupied and distracted, still trying to take things one day at a time.

Then came the day: our birth mother was induced Aug. 21. She wanted us to be there in the hospital when she delivered. Nate and I arrived early that morning.

Little did we know we'd be waiting more than 14 hours to meet our little man. At about 11:25 that night, our pager went off. At the last moment, our birth mom had decided to have me with her when she delivered. I held her hand and watched my son enter the world. After I cut his umbilical cord, his birth mother looked at him and said "Go to your mommy, Blake."

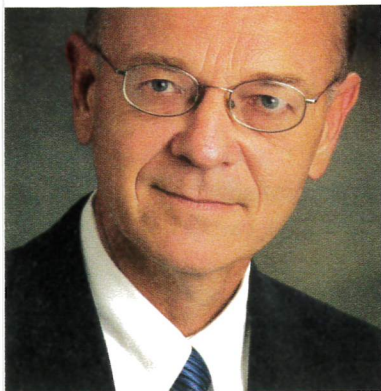
With those words, the entire wall around my heart came crashing down. In that moment I became a mother. When I looked into my baby's eyes, I saw God's plan. The last two and a half years of heartache suddenly became clear. Those painful years of waiting and wondering, hoping and praying now made sense to me. God had created the greatest gift for us, and I was standing in the hospital room holding him.

Fast forward to today. Blake is 22 months old, and not a day goes by that I don't thank God for the gift he gave us. My love for Blake began growing in my heart the minute we began the adoption process. Going through the painful wait made Nate and me much stronger people. It also strengthened our marriage in a way that is tough to explain. Blake is living proof that God has a plan for everyone. I have learned to be patient and trust that God will reveal his blessings in his time.

Life with a toddler is pretty much how I expected it to be. We daily wipe his butt and his nose, we feed him, we play with him, and we chase him around the table. But most of all, we love him with all our hearts. As strange as it seems, I would go through the wait and the heartache over and over again, knowing the love that waits in the end. Loving Blake has made those two years completely worth it.

Oh, and in case you are wondering . . . as I finish this article, I hear Nate and Blake laughing in the living room. It's the greatest sound on the planet!

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Mark Schweden

Either/or?

Which is more important: inhaling or exhaling? Which is more necessary for life: food or water? Those somewhat silly questions are examples of what is called a “false antithesis.” A false antithesis happens when you are asked to choose between two things that are equally important. A false antithesis happens when one truth is set against another truth, and, in favoring one over the other, both become meaningless.

Believe it or not, those kinds of questions are sometimes asked and debated in the church. What is more important: reaching out to the lost with the gospel or nurturing the faith of those who already know Christ? What is more necessary for the work of the church: training mission workers or sending workers to mission fields? Which is more important for congregations: pastoral leadership or active lay members personally involved in the work of the church?

As Lutherans, we would never allow ourselves to be forced to choose between whether law or gospel should be proclaimed. Both are vital. We would never deny that both justification and sanctification should be preached and taught. Both are necessary because both are biblical. But from time to time we do allow ourselves to get drawn into debates and discussions in which we are asked to choose between “either/or” when the only correct answer is “both/and.”


In their commendable desire to reach the lost with the gospel, some may give the impression that taking the gospel to the lost is somehow more important than nurturing the faith of those who already know Christ. But this is not an either/or question. Both are equally important. To do one—no matter how energetically or faithfully—without doing the other is to fail in our mission. In the end, it would be no better than doing neither. Taking

care of souls—sometimes labeled with the less-than-complimentary term “maintenance ministry”—is just as much a part of the church’s mission to “go” as is reaching the lost through evangelism or mission work. On the other hand, neglecting outreach and serving only those within the walls of the church is also a failure to grasp the full scope of the mission that Jesus has given to his church on earth.

What should be emphasized more: training missionaries and workers or sending workers into mission fields? It won’t take you long, if you think about it, to answer that both are equally vital and important. To train workers with no commitment to sending them out is a waste of time, money, and energy. To think that missions can be done without qualified and well-trained messengers will result in a message that is garbled at best and false at worst. This is why both of these activities are recognized to be priorities in our work as a synod.

What about the relative importance of pastoral leadership when compared with lay participation in the work of the church? At times there have been debates as to which of these should be emphasized and stressed. But the only answer to that debate is that both are vital and important. Acknowledging the importance of the pastor’s role in shepherding a congregation does not in any way downplay the importance of the responsibilities and roles of laypeople. Similarly, emphasizing the role of the laity in the work of the church should never be done in a way that downplays the role of the pastoral ministry and the importance of that office for the life and work of the church.

When we are asked to make those kinds of choices, let’s remember that the correct answer is not “either/or,” but rather “both/and.”



believe in the HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit gathers the holy Christian church. Charles F. Degner

“I believe in . . . the holy Christian church, the communion of saints.” I do not believe in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. I love this church body dearly. I love that God’s Word is taught in its truth and purity. I love our focus on teaching sin and grace and not a “social gospel.” I love the fact that my scattered family can worship on Sunday in different churches and yet hear the same precious gospel message.

Still, I do not *believe* in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Would you have imagined 50 years ago that one church body would ordain homosexual bishops? And others openly deny creation and the inerrancy of Scripture? Could this happen in WELS? Yes, it could. The church I belong to may change, and I may have to leave it. That is why I do not believe in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

The invisible church

I believe in the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, even though I cannot see it except through the eyes of faith. Only God knows those who belong to him (2 Timothy 2:19). In the visible church, there will always be those who only pretend to believe. They will make trouble for God’s people and even persecute those who preach the gospel.

Yet, the enemies of God’s church will fail. God’s church is built on an immovable foundation. “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:19,20). Wherever God’s Word is taught and Jesus is taught to be the Savior, there God’s church will be, because God’s Word does not return to him empty (Isaiah 55:10,11).

I believe in the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, because God’s church will endure to the end of time. We know of eight believers at the time of the flood (1 Peter 3:20,21)—yet God’s church endured. Only seven thousand did not bow their knees to Baal in Elijah’s day (1 Kings 19:18)—yet God’s church endured. And it will continue until the last of God’s elect have been gathered (Revelation 7).

The visible church

If we believe in Jesus, then we are members of God’s church. So to which visible church should we belong? Since we cannot look into people’s hearts, we can only judge by what we can see and hear. We can read the confessions of that church body. We can listen to what its preachers preach and teach. We can observe what is done at conventions. Is this church faithful to God’s Word?

While there are believers in church bodies that do not follow the Scriptures closely, I do not want to expose myself or my family to the errors of false doctrine. God’s Word builds faith; false doctrine erodes faith.

That’s why the Bible tells us to stay away from those who teach contrary to what the Bible teaches (Romans 16:17).

I love the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, but I do not believe in it. My first loyalty must always be to the holy Christian church to which, by grace, I belong.

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This is the fifth article in an eight-part series on the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed. Go to www.wels.net/forwardinchrist and search by the author’s first and last name to read other articles in the series.

WHEREVER GOD’S WORD IS
TAUGHT AND JESUS IS TAUGHT
TO BE THE SAVIOR, THERE
GOD’S CHURCH WILL BE.



John A. Braun

What we need

It was one of those days. Hectic, pressure filled, with deadlines and decisions. Every time I sat down to work on something, the phone would ring or there would be another interruption. I thought that if only I could close the door, things would be fine.

But I found that I was still exasperated with the tasks before me. Yes, it was one of those days, and I needed a quiet moment—more than a quiet moment. The problem was not in all the distractions and pressures in front of me. I found the problem in the impatience, worry, anxiety, and fear within. I realized that what I really needed was a reminder of who I was and why I was here. I needed reassurance of God's love in Jesus Christ.

Several years ago I received a gift of a book of Bible passages with Luther quotes arranged for each day. They are short little quotes that fit on one page. What I like about the book is that these quotes bring me back to justification by grace through faith. Luther, understandably, had a way of doing that. I like to read the quote each day, but the book somehow gets buried under things on my desk. Days like this one cause me to look for it.

On this particular day, the reading reminded me that I am a child of God in spite of my sins. God has clothed me with the perfect righteousness of Christ and made me his. That brought peace within. It was what I needed. The reading assured me that being a child of God is God's own designation.

My sinful nature whispers so frequently that I don't need this assurance, and I listen to its seductive temptation. When I do, I find myself spinning my wheels. Sadly, the sound of my own wheels prompts me

to work harder only to discover that at the end of the day, I've been very busy but done little. I've lost the wonder of what God has done in what I want to do. I forget who I am—a child of God declared free of sin because of Jesus.

We've all had those days. Some of them are worse than others. Some people have worse days than others. On those days, I think it helps to remember that we are children of God. That's not wishful thinking or some vague notion of a spiritual connection with the Almighty. His Word says so.

All of our human faults and shortcomings—all our sins—have been covered by the forgiveness that Jesus Christ shed his blood to win. God loves us in Jesus Christ. That's peace. It helps us stop obsessing about what we are doing or not doing even when impatience, worry, anxiety, and fear barge into our lives.

Not only does Christ's forgiveness bring peace, but it also brings freedom. At first it might seem that we are free to do nothing because we've turned it all over to our Lord. But what has often happened for me is that the peace of knowing I am dearly loved in Christ Jesus has freed me to work more boldly and more energetically.

I'm free to serve him because he made me his child. So are you. God provides an energy with the declaration of forgiveness. First, it's peace because our sins are covered. But then it's also joy and excitement—even an eagerness—to serve here since we are his children.

Our wheels don't spin hopelessly and uselessly. We gain traction in Christ. We are the products of his grace, and he has work for us to do. Let's get at it.

THE APOSTLES

James, Simon, Judas son of James: Serving God without recognition

Jesus picked these three men—James; Simon; and Judas, son of James—to serve in the highest office in the New Testament church. He appointed them to the Twelve, the apostles of Christ. Their names are all we know about them. What can we learn from these men who served without special recognition?

READ JOHN 14:21-24

²¹[Jesus said,] “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.” ²²Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?” ²³Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.”

1. Beyond their names in the listing of the Twelve, these verses are the only mention of any of the last three apostles. Verse 22, however, gives insight into the character of Judas, son of James. Name three insights.
2. How do those insights explain the willing service of these three men—even to death—though they would get no recognition?
3. When we serve Christ in the church, what kinds of recognition do we like to receive? Why?
4. What problems can stem from our desire for recognition when we serve Christ?

READ LUKE 17:7-10

⁷“Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’?

⁸Would he not rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself

ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? ⁹Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? ¹⁰So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”

1. What does that parable teach us about our service to Christ?
2. Agree or disagree. It’s inappropriate to thank people who serve the church because that service is our duty as Christians.
3. Agree or disagree. After someone has served Christ as a Sunday school teacher for four years, it’s appropriate to find someone else to teach for a while.

We may serve Christ for years without recognition, but Jesus promises us it won’t be without reward. He said, “It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them” (Luke 12:37).

MORE ABOUT JAMES, SIMON, AND JUDAS

We know nothing about the later ministries of these apostles, other than that they joined the church’s efforts of taking Christ to the world. The church celebrates the Feast of St. James with St. Phillip on May 1, and celebrates the Feast of St. Simon and St. Jude (Judas, son of James) on Oct. 28. The Gospel for that festival is John 14:21-27.

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This is the final article in a 12-part series on Jesus’ apostles. Find this study and answers online after Oct. 5 at www.wels.net/forwardinchrist



Not only **HOPSCOTCH**

A simple child's game had a message for someone with a heavy heart. Donald W. Patterson

Have you ever heard of unintended consequences? Our actions can leave unintended negative consequences in the lives of others. But often it is just the opposite. God takes the good works he leads us to do and creates wonderful consequences that we never imagined. That's when our unintended consequences become God's intended work!

Just the other day a game of hopscotch produced one of these unintended consequences. Let me set the scene for you. One Sunday, a rather shy member, I'll call him James, mustered the courage to ask for an appointment to share his burdens with me. He was in agony as he pressed each word out of his mouth. But the need for relief overwhelmed his misgivings. So we set the date for the following Tuesday.

When Tuesday morning came, the Lord laid on James a greater burden than he ever could have imagined. As James went to awaken a friend who was staying overnight, he found his friend dead.

This new burden outweighed his old ones ten to one. He was tempted to cancel his appointment but didn't. He even arrived early. As he stood there waiting patiently, his eyes caught sight of a hopscotch game that had been sketched in a parking space earlier that day by one of our Lutheran elementary school children. This hopscotch game was a little different than most. Instead of numbers written in the blocks, there was a Bible verse. When you read all the blocks together, it said, "Carry each other's burdens. Galatians 6:2"

As soon as he laid eyes on that verse, his mind was made up. He was convinced that God wanted him to stay right there and learn how to share his burdens with others. The Word of God held him there for me. After I arrived, we had a wonderful time sharing Scripture and praying together.

God helped James that day, and a school girl playing hopscotch was a key player in God's plan. She could never have intended the consequence her sketchings would have. She was just playing hopscotch. But while she wrote out that verse, God was smiling as he thought of James standing there that evening. The apostle Paul described what

happened that day. He wrote, "[Jesus] works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Ephesians 1:11). James found that out, didn't he? The artwork of a little girl led his troubled soul to Jesus.

I think about that hopscotch game a lot now. I wonder what unintended consequences will result from my "hopscotch" games. What blessings will God make of what I leave behind? What word spoken to a stranger through the gap between gas pumps or at the mall? What cell phone text shot off to a friend? What e-mail with embedded Scripture or spiritual thoughts will bounce around the world? From now on, I think I will plant a few more Bible verses in places where others can hear or read them.

I can't wait to get to heaven and see how many great and wonderful unintended consequences Jesus made out of my life. How about you?

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