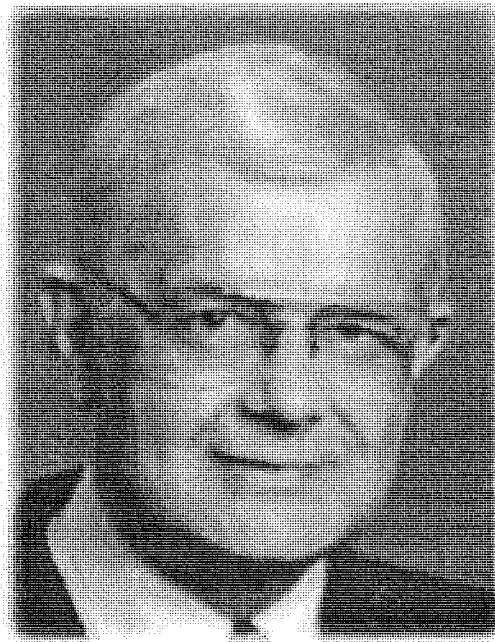


Victor H. Prange



Fingerprints of a Pastor

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How does one gauge influence? Often we look to the person whose name is on major historical documents. Maybe we search the history books and find out whose name comes up over and over. We may also look to those leaders who were out on the front line of battle standing up for their side. Perhaps it is those people who put themselves out in the open with their strong stance on a specific issue.

These marks of influence are certainly justified, but they may not tell the whole story. Sometimes influence comes in the form of a person standing quietly in the background carefully pushing others forward. Sometimes it is a person who was willing to simply ask the question. Perhaps the most influential people are the ones that we would not always expect. Sometimes influence is hardly recognized at all. We may only see mere fingerprints of influence, but the marks are evident.

This is the story of Pastor Victor H. Prange. This is not the story of a man who stood out in the forefront for the sake of leaving a mark, or who walked blindly into arguments just because he had an opinion on the issue. Rather, this is a story of man who was willing to ask the questions, who loved theological study and theological discussion. Did he come down hard on many issues? Maybe privately, but he would never have intended to cause a stir.

So how can I analyze the influence of a man who often sat in the background, who gently encouraged others to faithfulness in ministry, who was willing to ask the questions that others may not have been? Well, I strive not to overstate and at the same time refuse to understate what Prange did for the Wisconsin Synod.

As I analyze the history of the Wisconsin Synod and the ministry of Victor Prange, it is hard to say that he had the same kind of influence as many of our Synod leaders. However,

looking at the issues that have faced the Wisconsin Synod over the years, it is difficult not to see Prange hidden in the background. Victor Prange's fingerprints are evident.

These fingerprints can be seen in a number of areas. We see them in the area of fellowship, the Protestant controversy, discussion on the roles of men and women, encouraging good Christian piety, raising awareness of the what and how of Lutheran worship and hymnody, his encouragement towards becoming a scholarly and well informed pastor, and the list could go on.

Prange always wanted to discuss the issues. He wanted to spur people into discussion so that doctrine would never become dead theology. Pastor Peter Prange, Victor's son, commented about his father,

I think a good descriptive term for my Dad is "churchman." That word doesn't always have positive connotations, but it can be used positively. My Dad has always believed in "healthy debate" about all churchly matters, both theological and practical. But he has rarely engaged in this type of debate publicly where he would have drawn attention to himself. His words were always measured and thought out. This kind of truly healthy debate keeps the church from falling into the natural state of theological slothfulness or "mental inflexibility."¹

While this paper is not a comprehensive study, the topics discussed will show that the fingerprints Victor H. Prange are evident in a number of areas of the Wisconsin Synod.

I. The Child, the Student, the Father

Victor Herbert Prange was born on July 11, 1932 to Rev. Bruno and Concordia Prange in Joliet, IL. He was baptized on July 24, 1932. From a very early age, Prange was fine with being on his own. Concordia Prange recalled the story that once, "President Hoover came to Joliet.

¹ Peter Prange, email to author, December 3, 2009

Everyone was going to see and hear him, so we could not get a sitter. We left Prange asleep on the living room floor, and he was again in the same position when we got home—sound asleep.”²

Shortly after Prange’s birth, his father accepted a Call to serve at Calvary in Watseka, IL. Bruno Prange was a Missouri Synod pastor and his son was sure to follow in his father’s footsteps. When Vic was about seven years old, his mother recalled that they were on a long trip and were not able to make it to church. Prange promptly preached a sermon in the car. He also preached sermons for his grandma when he visited.

Prange was enrolled at Concordia-Milwaukee in 1946. During his time at Concordia-Milwaukee, Prange kept up closely with what was going on theologically in the Missouri Synod. He had a number of conversations with his father on which school he was going to attend after Concordia-Milwaukee. His dad did encourage him to go to Northwestern. P.E. Kretzmann had even invited Prange to join his new Seminary. In the end, he declined and in 1952, he enrolled at Northwestern College.

It was not the smoothest transition for him to join Northwestern. He had a very high respect for the education that he received at Concordia-Milwaukee, and Northwestern was a bit different than Concordia. Prange’s impression was that “Northwestern plowed deeper, but not as wide. It was digging into the text, but you didn’t quite understand the context of what you were studying.”³

Early in his years at Northwestern, he really tried to stretch his education. Classmate and friend, Professor Richard Balge recalled, “What made Vic different was his readiness to raise

² Concordia Prange, “Mom’s Stories About Herself,” pg. 17.

³ Victor Prange, Interview by author, Milwaukee, WI, October 7, 2009.

issues and initiate discussion in an academic setting where discussion was not the usual mode of instruction—even at the Seminary in those days.”⁴

In 1953, at the urging of his classmates, Prange published an article in the Black and Red entitled “Interest Equals Progress.” In the article he was “politely critical”⁵ of Northwestern’s curriculum. Prange wrote,

Education literally means to lead forth, to draw out, and not, as so often happens, to fill up. It means something active on the part of the person being educated, not only activity in the teacher and a numbed passivity on the part of the pupil.

He was not afraid to speak the truth as he saw it.

Without interest there will be no progress. This is what I want to drive home. We must face this fact: The greater portion of Northwestern students in the collegiate department are not interested in their work. Generally they are fed up with this place... Instead of trying to improve themselves, they are trying merely to get through Northwestern, get a diploma, and enter the seminary.

He suggested some things for improving.

Give the student more opportunity and incitement to work on his own. Require longer pieces of written work on which the student is forced to gather his own material, to think for himself, to become interested in his subject. Cut down the number of lecture periods a week in the Junior and Senior year. Add class periods from the improvement of speaking and writing.⁶ for²

Not everyone appreciated his comments on the issue of education at Northwestern. Prof. Balge recalled that one of their professors (who became a good friend of Prange) got to class the day after the article was published and said, “Mr. Prange, leave the room! I can’t stand to look at you this morning.”⁷

⁴ Richard Balge, email to author, November 19, 2009

⁵ Richard Balge, email to author

⁶ Black and Red

⁷ Richard Balge, email to author

Already in his college career, Prange had left an impression on his classmates. Balge suggested that Prange was not the “NWC product of 50 years ago.”⁸ I believe that as we look at our education today at the collegiate and seminary levels, you can see fingerprints of what Prange was discussing 50 years ago. We have more discussion based classes, an emphasis on speech and interpersonal communication, and the senior year at the Seminary will soon involve a thesis on a topic of the student’s interest.

Prange spent his vicar year in Tucson, AZ where he met his wife Ana. Ana was the daughter of his bishop, E. Arnold Sitz, the first and long-time district president of the Arizona-California District. Victor and Ana were married on July 11, 1958. He had developed a very good relationship with Pastor Sitz, who helped him think through some of the important synodical issues of the day.

Prange was assigned to a recently established mission congregation, Peace in Janesville, Wisconsin, upon his graduation in 1958. He was ordained on August 3, 1958. Pastors E. Arnold Sitz and Bruno Prange were both involved in the service. This was just four years before the Missouri and Wisconsin Synod’s officially split.

Prange spent his entire ministry in Janesville. In 1958, this was a booming community. Many new homes were going in and numerous people found work at the Chevrolet and Fisher Body plants. Prange did much door-to-door canvassing and reaching out to new families in the area. Professor James Tiefel recalled that his father was impressed with Prange’s work because it seemed like the church grew so rapidly almost overnight.⁹ God certainly blessed Prange’s faithful work.

⁸ Richard Balge, email to author

⁹ James Tiefel, interview by author, Mequon, WI, November 20, 2009

Victor and Ana adopted four children: Paul ('62), Beth ('64), Jon ('67), and Susan ('70). Peter was born to them in 1972. Prange was always busy with his pastoral work, but he always found time for family. Like clockwork, the family would eat together at 7:00, 12:00, and 5:00. Friday was always his “day off” when he would do his gardening and play games with the kids.

Losing was never an option for Prange. He played as hard as he could no matter what he was playing. He enjoyed softball, croquet, ping-pong, and board games with the kids. His daughter once recalled when he was playing ball with kids after Vacation Bible School. “He was pitching a softball to 5-10 year olds as if they were Alex Rodriguez. When they did manage to hit the ball he would whip it to first base where my sister was expected to catch the ball and complete the out. I would yell out, ‘slow down, dad! They’re just kids!’”¹⁰

To get an idea for how structured Prange was, another daughter remembered that Friday was “pizza day.” “At 1:30 he would begin the pizza dough. At 4:00 we put on the toppings, and they went in the oven at 4:40. We ate a five and got two glasses of RC with our pizza... This Friday routine did not waver throughout our childhood.”¹¹

One thing that all of Prange’s children saw from an early age was a man who was devoted to his own study in the Word. Beth remembered and admired his studiousness from a very early age. “Before I started Kindergarten I would take Dad his coffee. I would take it in to his study at 10:00, and picked it up at 10:20. 10:20 was the earliest I was allowed to return for the cup. During this time of day, he consistently read aloud in either Greek or Hebrew. I remember the cadence and rhythm of his voice.”¹²

Prange was not only devoted to his own study, but also to raising his children in a Christian home. Family devotions and singing “Now the Light Has Gone Away” every night

¹⁰ Susan Wilson, email to author, November 22, 2009

¹¹ Beth Radich, email to author, November 22, 2009

¹² Beth Radich, email to author

were the norm. Paul remembered how his father comforted him one night. The movie “The Exorcist” had just come out so Prange picked up the book to read it. Paul found the book and read it for himself. This was a scary thing for a young boy. “It didn’t take long before Dad heard me crying. He came into my room, and I explained what I was afraid of. I can vividly recall how Dad reminded me what we had learned in confirmation class the week before, how Jesus has won the victory over the devil and would protect me. I have slept soundly since then.”¹³

Prange was a devoted son, husband, and father. He loves his family and any other mark of a man pales in comparison. It is impossible to talk about the fingerprints of a pastor if you do not talk about the love of a father. Raising a family in Christ’s love truly is a major influence that Prange had.

II. Fingerprints on the Pastor’s Work

In 1965, Prange began his service as the “visiting elder” in his circuit. He was not content with the term “visiting elder” and he had suggested the term “circuit pastor” which finally stuck. He then was appointed as the chairman of the committee that put together the circuit pastor handbook, which is still available, though revised, today.

Prange always seemed to have a desire to help other pastors in their own ministries. He was willing to share his tips on what keeps him going from day to day. He wrote a paper at the 1969 Pastor-Teacher Conference for the Western Wisconsin District entitled “The Wonderful Work of the Ministry.” In that paper he outlined the joys and struggles of the ministry and offered suggestions as to how to work toward a wonderful ministry. He emphasized the importance of a well crafted sermon.

Preaching good sermons to oneself and to one’s people begins with thorough preparation. If we find that other things are taking away the

¹³ Paul Prange, email to author, November 22, 2009

time we should be spending on sermon preparation, then we must simply get rid of some of these other things.¹⁴

Prange was somewhat ahead of his time with some of his other suggestions regarding worship. He said, “If we are going to be sustained through the liturgical worship, then it is necessary that as pastors we participate in this service and not stay by ourselves in the sacristy.”

He continues,

If the only opportunity we have for communing is at pastoral conferences, then we are depriving ourselves of wonderful comfort and consolation. I think it is a very important matter that all pastors take steps to receive the Sacrament regularly in their own churches with their people.¹⁵

At that time, there were pastors who were self-communing, as Prange himself did throughout his pastoral ministry. Some simply were not communing. Prange recognized that the Lord’s Supper was something that pastors needed if they were to maintain in the ministry. Today it is a more common practice that an elder or other member of the congregation will help with communion. This gives the pastor the opportunity to be strengthened through the Lord’s Supper.

In 1978, Prange was asked to present a paper to the WELS Circuit Pastor’s Workshop. This paper also strove not only to help the individual pastor, but also to help them help other pastors. A number of suggestions were given in “Portrait of a Pastor 1978: How to Cope.” First and foremost he mentioned the need for pastors to stay rooted in the Word and prayer every day. He encouraged the use of prayer books like *The Minister’s Prayer Book*.

This is a book that Prange valued for many years. In a letter to his father-in-law in 1960 he says,

Recently came across and bought a very wonderful little book entitled: *Minister’s Prayer Book* by ULC man Dobberstein [sic]. All in all a book which I value highly since it has promoted in my life a

¹⁴ Victor Prange, *The Wonderful Work of the Ministry*, pg. 8

¹⁵ Victor Prange, *The Wonderful Work of the Ministry*, pg. 9

disciplined reading and study of the Word, a regular prayer life which looks away from my own problems, and an awareness of the greatness of God's daily grace in Christ Jesus.¹⁶

Prange encouraged a life of good Christian piety for the healthy Christian.

He thought that it was important for pastors to get together in their circuit meetings in order to maintain continuing education. He mentions, "The summer school program at our Seminary serves this purpose though many pastors find it difficult to get away for three weeks. I think the addition of some one week programs would be very beneficial."

Continuing education is getting more and more of an emphasis at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Not only are summer school courses still offered, but now the professors will travel to circuits and districts to offer brief courses. Was this Prange's idea? Maybe not entirely, but we can certainly see his fingerprints on the idea already in 1978.

Prange also encouraged regular reading and personal study. He encouraged pastors to stay regular in their reading of Luther and the Confessions, but he also encouraged pastors to stay current on the issues opposing them. He felt that there was a need to strike a balance here.

To give you an idea of the kind of study Prange did for himself, he wrote in a letter to Pastor Sitz,

I have enclosed a listing of the titles in the series of writings of the Church Fathers entitled The Library of Christian Classics. The reading which I am doing with Prof. Gehrke and Tutor Rehm is from this series. We completed Vol. 1 and 2 this past winter and intend to continue with volume three next fall. Volume Two (Alexandrian Christianity) contained two excerpts from Clement and three short writings of Origen. This concludes our reading Origen! As you will note from the listing the only early father to whom much attention is devoted is Augustine—something which I think Luther would have heartily approved of. I have not been neglecting Luther, but am continuing to read each volume of the new English edition as it comes from the press. I have finished 13 volumes so far. Last July I set as my goal the reading of one book a week for the next year. The

¹⁶ Victor Prange to E. Arnold Sitz, June 6, 1960

year is nearly up and I have completed 48 books. Next year I want to devote myself to a study of German, a thorough study of the Confessions, and more work in my Greek Testament.¹⁷

Prange certainly practiced what he preached.

Another area that Prange stressed was the home life. Pastors can all too easily begin to neglect their wife and children. He saw the importance of loving your wife and children. “A pastor who neglects wife and children is not being faithful in his calling and makes coping with stress more difficult. There must be times when our family comes ahead of some pastoral function.”¹⁸

We certainly can see Prange’s fingerprints on the work of a pastor. He encouraged pastors not to be islands unto themselves (which many do) but to seek the help and encouragement of the brothers. He knew that wives are a major asset to one’s ministry. He knew that encouraging strong pious living in the area of devotions, prayer, continued study, and worship could only serve to help make a stronger pastor.

III. Fingerprints on Doctrinal Disputes

Prange was always interested in good, healthy doctrinal discussion. Everyone may not have agreed with every stance that he took, but he would not present himself in a disrespectful way, he just wanted to discuss and to encourage study. He found that in personal discussions with a number of Synod leaders that “sometimes these leaders are much more open on these issues than some of their followers. When you meet and talk to a person that is really knowledgeable on an issue, they need to take that stand, but they probably have some questions

¹⁷ Prange to Sitz, June 6, 1960

¹⁸ Victor Prange, *Portrait of a Pastor*, pg. 6

in their own mind.”¹⁹ So Prange was a person that would bring up issues and force Synod leaders to think and study as well.

a. Church Fellowship

Prange watched very closely the dealings between Wisconsin and Missouri. Besides his natural interest in everything doctrinal, his father remained in Missouri and he in Wisconsin Synod. He also had much respect for the education he received and respected a number of people in the Missouri Synod.

By 1960, fellowship was certainly the hot button issue. Prange would regularly meet with a group of people for study and they had taken up study on fellowship. He worked together with Merlin Rehm (at the time a Northwestern tutor), Professor Richard Jungkuntz, and Professor Ralph Gehrke. The result of their study together was *A Study of Our Wisconsin Synod's Doctrinal Commission's Presentation on Church Fellowship*. This paper reached the conclusion that the Synod's stance on fellowship at that time was not sound and therefore a break with Missouri should not follow.

The paper did not have lasting effects Synod wide, but Jungkuntz, Gehrke, and Rehm were all under the supervision of the Northwestern College board. They were called before the board for doctrinal reasons. All three of them eventually left the Synod. Prange fell under the doctrinal supervision of the Western Wisconsin District President who he described as “sympathetic to the Missouri Synod.”²⁰ He called for a meeting with Prange, but the meeting never occurred.

Prange cherished his work in the Wisconsin Synod as a call from God. He wrote to Pastor Sitz,

¹⁹ Victor Prange, interview by author

²⁰ Victor Prange, interview by author

The work and word of the Gospel rests in the hand of God. My calling into the ministry in the Wisconsin Synod likewise is a work of God's grace. And I shall continue in this calling as long as God gives me strength. But when called on I am going to bear witness to the truth as God by His Spirit as led me to see it. If this means finally that I shall be put out or called out of this Synod, then that is what I shall accept as a working of God.²¹

Prange returned to Peace and wrote a brief explanation of what happened in the Sunday morning bulletin dated August 20, 1961. He wrote,

ALL ONE IN CHRIST

Peace Lutheran Church is a mission station of the Wisconsin Synod and receives financial support from that Synod. This past week our Wisconsin Synod voted in convention to "suspend fellowship" with the Missouri Synod. Your pastor was personally much opposed to this course of action. We are very disappointed that it came. We do not believe that there was sufficient reason for this suspension of fellowship. However, in discussing this suspension of fellowship, it must be made very clear (and we hope that you will make it clear) that the Wisconsin Synod does not thereby consider that the people in the Missouri Synod are not Christians. We believe that there are Christians in every Christian church body, whether Methodist, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist or any other. But a suspension of fellowship does mean that because of a difference of opinion in certain religious matters, the two Synods will no longer be able to work together as they have so wonderfully in the past. These differences of opinion may yet be worked out and the fellowship resumed. Let us all pray that this will happen.

Meanwhile as individuals this suspension of fellowship means very little to us. We will continue to worship and pray and act as we have in the past. We may disagree with those who made the decision to suspend fellowship. But we know that pastors and laymen who voted on this matter can make mistakes just as can anyone else. In the Church we will not always agree with one another and with our Synod. That doesn't mean that we will stop being Christians. All who are baptized and truly believe in Jesus Christ are united in Him and are members of His Body (Gal. 3,26-28). Let us be certain that we all continue to hold firmly to Christ our Savior and follow His

²¹ Victor Prange to E. Arnold Sitz, May 30, 1960

Word without fail. This is what really counts—that we are all one in Christ. God grant that we remain in Him.²²

In the end, Prange may have his reservations about the split with Missouri, but you can certainly see his fingerprints on the Synod as a pastor who took this very personally, but saw the importance of his work as a pastor. He certainly heeded the advice of his close friend Pastor James Schaefer who wrote to him, “It was a sad, sad day in church history. It was schismatic. But I come back to my congregation feeling there are souls to be saved and reclaimed here. Let’s do it.”²³ Prange remained faithful to his call. This was certainly a lesson that many pastors had to learn.

Prange did force many people to think long and hard about fellowship principles. He challenged people, but did not overwhelm people with his questions. Professor Balge commented, “Vic made me (and others, I’m sure) ponder, rethink, but not necessarily change our thinking in the area of Christian fellowship on a personal (not official, ecclesiastical) level—Christian fellowship as distinguished from church fellowship.”²⁴

b. Protes’tant Controversy

Prange had an interest in the 30 year old Protes’tant Controversy. H.C. Nitz asked him to take a look at the Beitz paper without reading up on the history, without too much prior knowledge, just simply as a young man to read and react to the paper. The result was his 1962 Western Wisconsin conference paper, “A Review of the Beitz Paper.” Prange wrote in a letter to his father concerning the Beitz Paper,

I have finished my work on the Beitz paper. I concluded that Beitz was no heretic, but perhaps did not speak as clearly as he might.

²² Peace Evangelical Lutheran Congregation bulletin dated August 20, 1961 (I quote this in its entirety because it gets to where Vic’s heart really is. He may disagree with what took place, but he maintains respect and a desire to do the Lord’s work.)

²³ James Schaefer to Victor Prange, September 5, 1961

²⁴ Richard Balge emailed to author

Pastor Nitz read my paper and was pleased with it. He said that it should bring forth some discussion at our conference. General Conference meets in two weeks at Fort. It should prove very interesting. Perhaps I shall be 'suspended' for not calling Beitz a heretic!²⁵

After delivering the paper, Prange recalled, "I remember some of these old timers got up and said to me, 'If you had given this paper thirty years ago, you would have been out on your ear.'"²⁶ As a result of this work and others working with him, the thirty year old suspensions were lifted.

Prange was part of a group that took this news to the Protes'tants at Immanuel in Manitowoc. Despite the Western Wisconsin District's lifting of these suspensions and considerable efforts on the part of Prange and many others, reconciliation with the Protes'tants could not be reached. His desire to reach out to the Protes'tants and his attempts to reestablish fellowship with them certainly display his heart that all Christians should be united. This work may have led Prange to gain more of a name when it came to working on other projects.

c. Roles of Men and Women

In 1980, the Wisconsin Synod produced, *Man and Woman in God's World: An Expanded Study*. Following its initial release for editing purposes, each district was to do a study on it. In the Western Wisconsin District Paul Eickman was appointed to do the Old Testament exegesis, Kent Schroeder was appointed to the New Testament exegesis, and Prange was to cover the dogmatic or systematic study. The focus of Prange's paper was "the will of God." He asked the question,

Is it the will of God that all women be subordinate to all men? Is it the will of God that only wives be suborintate to their husbands? Is it the will of God that women be subordinate to men in the church but not in the world? Or is it the will of God that we New Testament Christians be free of all cultic, ceremonial, social, and regulative

²⁵ Victor Prange to Bruno Prange, October 11, 1960

²⁶ Victor Prange, interview by author

rules, free to make our own appropriate rules for the sake of order in the world, free to live in love and to the glory of God?²⁷

In the paper, Prange implies that he does not agree with the Synod's official stance on the roles of men and women as applied to the world and to the church. However, as with most of his arguments, he does not say it point blank. At least not in this public forum. He ends the paper as he began, "This is the question which is before us."²⁸ It is as if Prange says, "Here are the issues. Here are the principles. Let's discuss them."

Prange's personal view came out in a number of letters he wrote to Synod leaders. In a letter to the former Western Wisconsin District President Karl Gurgel he wrote,

I think the question which has not yet been settled in our synod is this: is the subjection of women to men a part of God's moral law? Of course, if it is, then we must tell Christian women also in society that they cannot rule over men in positions of authority. We cannot make rules which only apply to the Church because that is setting up a new ceremonial law.²⁹

His stance on the roles of men and women came out in his work on the Hymnal Committee. Professor James Tiefel recalled that when discussing the marriage rite in *Christian Worship*, Prange "absolutely refused to use the word 'obey' in the marriage rite."³⁰ This was a real battle that took place between a number of people on the committee and in the Synod. They came to a resolution and used the word "submit." Tiefel says, "I would say that women's issues in the marriage rite was a battle that he doesn't reflect in his history [*Not Unto Us*], but really was a battle."

Again, Prange's fingerprints are certainly visible on the roles of men and women. Women are more active then they may have been 30 or more years ago. There may not be an

²⁷ Victor Prange, *The Role of Man and Woman According to Holy Scripture*, pg. 1

²⁸ Victor Prange, *The Role of Man and Woman According to Holy Scripture*, pg. 5

²⁹ Victor Prange to Karl Gurgel, November 7, 1989

³⁰ James Tiefel, interview by author

official doctrinal shift in our official teaching, but what he was able to do was to keep the discussion going. We should never blindly accept what a church body teaches, even if it is our own, but to ask the difficult questions when it comes to roles of men and women and to have a beneficial conversation on the basis of Scripture will only benefit us.

IV. Fingerprints in the Northwestern Lutheran

A position that Prange held for many years was a contributing editorialist for the Northwestern Lutheran. He served in this capacity from 1983-1997. During his time with the Northwestern Lutheran he wrote editorials on everything from worship, to domestic violence, to stewardship in connection with taxes. Prange had a wide variety of interests and was considerably knowledgeable in many areas. This is what made him a valued editorialist.

Besides editorials, he wrote a number of other articles such as a ten part series “Why So Many Churches,” “Lutherans in America,” and “Dateline Eisleben,” in which he told the story of the city in which Martin Luther was born and died.

In his editorials he took the opportunity to teach. In his August 1985 editorial entitled *Who Owns the Synod?*, he wrote,

Are you a member of one of the congregations of the Wisconsin Synod? Then you are one of the partners who own the synod. It's not 'they' and 'them' who decide what the synod will do. It's 'we' and 'us.' All of us together determine what the synod will do.³¹

In the March 1986 article *Living With Less*, you can even see Prange's affinity for sports. He tells the story of Todd Bell who turned down a contract offer from the Bears and missed the Super Bowl. But Todd was happy with his place in life.

In May of 1988 he wrote an article on domestic violence. He used this opportunity to mention just briefly the roles of men and women. He writes,

³¹ Victor Prange, Northwestern Lutheran, Aug. 1985

Sometimes a husband will justify the abuse of his wife by suggesting that she had it coming: "She did not obey me." That is to make a travesty of the word, which has often been included in the woman's marriage vow. To say the least, it is a word subject to gross misunderstanding when seeking to describe the proper relationship between husband and wife.³²

Leading up to and just following the release of the new *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*, Prange took opportunity to write a number of articles in regard to worship. *A Tool for Worship* (January 1987), *The Language of Worship* (June 1987), *In Defense of the Liturgy* (May 1990), *Our New Hymnal—Blessed By God* (June 1993), *Cherish Your Church Musicians* (September 1994), *The Greatest Praise Chorus* (December 1996), and there were others that fell under the worship category.

The Northwestern Lutheran (currently Forward in Christ, a name which Prange suggested) has been a very influential magazine for many years. It has been, in a sense, the voice of the Wisconsin Synod. As we look at all the articles that he wrote, we can certainly see his fingerprints on Synod thought in a number of areas. Not all of his articles were well received, but this certainly gave him opportunity to spur on discussion.

V. Fingerprints on Worship

I had opportunity to talk with a number of close friends of Victor Prange. I asked them what they thought his greatest contribution to the Synod was. They all agreed, it was worship. From early on, Prange had a great passion for music. This is the man that I remember as a child taking notes on Bach Cantatas. He understood music, he loved the liturgy, he had a passion for good, well done worship, and he wanted the same for others as well.

Prange was perhaps ahead of his time when he encouraged pastors to work harder at the liturgy in his paper *The Wonderful Work of the Ministry* in 1969. The WELS did not have a very

³² Victor Prange, *Northwestern Lutheran*, May 1988

strong liturgical background in those days. This is one area where His training and upbringing in the LCMS may have served to benefit the WELS.

While Prange was working with the Protestant Controversy, serving on the synod's stewardship board, and his normal work as a pastor, he always had worship in his mind. He recalled a trip in a car with Carl Mischke and others. They were talking about Prange's work on the stewardship committee and Prange said, "What I'd really like to do is get involved in worship."³³ Right about that time, in the 1983 Synod Convention, synod had passed a resolution to start a new hymnal project. Kurt Eggert was called in 1984 as the project coordinator and there was a vacancy on the Commission on Worship. Prange was then assigned to fill the vacancy. When the Joint Hymnal Committee was formed, he became the chairman.

Professor Tiefel commented on Prange's influence in worship when he said,

Vic brought a sense of organization. I don't think that Vic's association with worship was long standing, except in his own practice. What Vic's great task, his talent was, was to keep the Commission and the committee on task. He was very good at making sure that people got their work done, that people were on task, that things got done in a timely way.³⁴

Prange mentioned that whenever there were letters of disgust about the hymnal, the office of the President would promptly redirect the letters to the Chairman of the Commission on Worship. Vic was very often the voice of worship in the Synod. He recalled some of the angry letters that came after the Commission released *A Sampler* as a field tester for the new hymnal. There were many strong voices speaking very vocally against the *Sampler* and the prospect of a new hymnal. Prange wrote an article in the *Northwestern Lutheran* regarding the *Sampler* in January 1987 entitled *A Tool for Worship*.

Prange almost seemed to go on the defense with this article. He wrote,

³³ Victor Prange, interview by author

³⁴ James Tiefel, interview by author

One of the most important tools for worship is the hymnal. But remember: it's only that, a tool. A tool is as good and useful as the person using it. New or revised liturgies and hymns won't make for better worship unless we make them work better.³⁵

He notes in *Not Unto Us* that this particular article provoked a very strong letter directed towards him.

I have talked to people from 20-25 congregations in the 5 western states and have yet to meet anyone who can say one word for the *Sampler*. The old saying still goes 'if something works, don't fix it.' The *Sampler* is the devil's work and nothing less. If you people in Milwaukee and Wisconsin would just listen, you might hear something.³⁶

Whenever there were discussions on issues in the hymnal, Prange would have been right in the middle of it with a well-informed but not overpowering voice. Whether it be the name of the new hymnal (*Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*, a name which Prange suggested), the marriage rite issue, the placement of the *Kyrie*, revision of hymn texts, revisions in liturgical texts, or any other issue.

Did Prange directly influence the Synod in the area of worship? Maybe not as clearly as some others, but in the way that *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* came together, and the quality with which it was presented, it certainly can be said that Prange's fingerprints are evident.

VI. Conclusion

Much more could be said about Prange's work for the Synod? This is not a comprehensive paper. I did not even mention his influence on his brothers and sisters, all of which are active members in the church, his two boys, Pastors Peter and Paul Prange, who have done valuable work for the Wisconsin Synod, his work on the *People's Bible: Luke*, his work on

³⁵ Victor Prange, *Northwestern Lutheran*, January 1987

³⁶ Victor Prange, *Not Unto Us*, pg. 190

the Synod's stewardship board, his involvement on forming the synod's Worship Conferences, his latest venture as an associate editor for the new *Lutheran Study Bible* recently released by Concordia, not to mention his faithful work as pastor at Peace in Janesville for forty years. Certainly much more could be said of the valuable work of Pastor Victor H. Prange. However, in the few things discussed in this paper, his value is undeniable.

Those who might say that Prange had influence are those that knew him best, those who were challenged by him, who were pushed by him. Prange's greatest synodical influence is in the discussions that he continues to pursue. But the area in which Prange may most want to be remembered is found in his 1975 paper delivered for the 125th Anniversary of the Wisconsin Synod. He wrote,

But times are changing. The confidence in Americans has been shaken. We are finding limits to what we can do, limits to freedom, limits to food, limits to energy. Man is not so much the master of his own fate as for a time he imagined. The old optimism is beginning to fade. For such a time as this God sends us into the world with a Gospel proclaiming free grace: God is the Maker; God is the Redeemer; God is the Sanctifier. As His people by grace we are called to represent Him in our world and to communicate His message of grace to this world. Will we be a rosebush or a snail?

During this 125th anniversary year, we have been doing a lot of looking back. Soon the anniversary celebrations will be over; GRACE 125 will be history. Not a few persons may breathe a sigh of relief. Celebrations and anniversaries get a little old after a while. But we dare never forget what is most important about this celebration, the renewed appreciation for God's plan of salvation, a plan of pure grace. President Naumann said this well at the very beginning of the celebration: "If the celebration is to be pleasing to God, the accent must fall upon what God has done for us, not what we have done for God." God has done great things for us; by grace He has made us His people "that I should be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness; even as He is risen from death, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true."³⁷

³⁷ Victor Prange, *By Grace: God's People*, pg. 13

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"FINGERPRINTS OF A PASTOR"
ADDENDUM

A Collection of Northwestern Lutheran Editorials

By Victor H. Prange

Compiled by Gregory Lyon

	TITLE	DATE
1.	Lord Teach Us To Pray	February 1984
2.	Hidden Faults	March 1984
3.	In Praise Of The Ordinary	May 1984
4.	Our Mission: To Give	June 1984
5.	The Making Of A Preacher	August 1984
6.	Why Marriages Fail	October 1984
7.	Thank You, Lord	November 1984
8.	Three Cheers For The Liturgy	January 1985
9.	Don't Despair	March 1985
10.	Form 1040 And Christian Stewardship	April 1985
11.	The Difference Between A Gnat And A Camel	June 1985
12.	Who Owns The Synod?	August 1985
13.	Every Day Happenings	October 1985
14.	Lest We Forget	November 1985
15.	What's In A Name?	January 1986
16.	Living With Less	March 1986
17.	No Sad Songs?	April 1986
18.	The First Step	June 1986
19.	Black Or White?	August 1986
20.	The Talent For Making Money	October 1986
21.	What It Takes To Be Thankful	November 1986
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24.	Witness Where You Are	April 1987
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30.	We Are All Sinners	March 1988
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32.	Fathers Remembered	June 1988
33.	The Road To Success	September 1988
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50.	A Lesson From The Chicago Flood	June 1992
51.	The Golden Age Is Not Always So Golden	March 1993
52.	Our New Hymnal--Blessed By God	June 1993
53.	A Season Of Growing Discontent	September 1993
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65.	Children's Confirmation Classes	September 1996
66.	The Greatest Praise Chorus	December 1996
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LORD TEACH US TO PRAY
FEBRUARY 1984

As usual the agenda for the September meeting of our Ladies' Aid included the item: "Suggestions by the pastor for this year's educational program." My list included a number of topics which I thought would vitally interest the women. But as an afterthought I decided on an addition: "Lord, teach us to pray." When the preferences were tabulated, it was this topic which was nearly the unanimous choice.

I learned again how the request which the disciples of Jesus made of their Lord is important for Christians today. The stress and strain which so many experience makes the yearning for a richer life of prayer so persistent. The women's choice revealed a lack so often felt.

It's not unlikely that a bit of guilt was also showing through. Not a few Christians (including pastors) have on occasion sighed: "I should pray more." There seems little doubt that devotions are missing from the daily routine of many church members.

Recently a person seeking to interview confessing Christians about their devotional life told me that he found only his wife willing to talk on this subject: Were others too shy? Or did they have nothing to talk about?

We'll soon be into the Lenten season, a good time to get started with--or improve--one's devotional life. First must come the commitment to make room for prayer. Determine the best time and place. Perhaps one will have devotions alone; perhaps with other family members. It is best to settle on a fixed time and place for daily prayer.

When using words like "prayer" and "devotions," one must understand more than just talking to God. Prayer begins with listening to the Word of God. We must hear our Lord speak to us; then we talk to him. This listening and talking does not come naturally. As the disciples of Jesus recognized, we must learn to pray.

To practice and cultivate the devotional life one needs models and helps. A booklet with daily devotions like Meditations is basic. Here the Word of God is expounded and short prayers are provided. Your pastor will be able to suggest other good prayer books. The hymnal is an excellent resource. Families with children will want to use devotional aids which speak to youngsters.

Ultimately one will want to get into the Bible itself. I believe that for someone just beginning private Bible reading and study, the temptation is to try to take too big a bite. Better to read through the Gospel of Matthew or John slowly several times in a year than to attempt the whole Bible at once. Reading aloud even when alone may help one concentrate better.

The summertime of life, when things are going well for us and all is serene, is the time to initiate the devotional life. Then when the wintertime of affliction and tribulation comes, one will have reserves to endure to the end.

Pastor Prange is at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

HIDDEN FAULTS

MARCH 1984

No one ever accused Adolph Hitler of being overly kind. Rather he is viewed as a person capable of almost any crime. He tyrannized the small nations of Europe, was responsible for the murder of millions, and brought destruction to his own people. Hardly a good-hearted man who impressed the world with his kindness!

Yet it has been reported that three days before his death, Hitler made the remark to some of his companions: "Afterwards, you regret the fact that you've been so kind." How does one explain such a startling statement? Had Hitler gone completely mad? Was he living in a fantasy world in that underground bunker?

Whatever the ultimate explanation for this remark, it proves again how terribly blind a person can be to one's own faults. This is admittedly an extreme example but serves to signal us that we all have our hidden faults. Since these faults are hidden from us, we are not aware of them.

The poet Robert Burns exposes this common human failing in some verses he addressed to a louse, which was feeding on a fine lady's bonnet--at church. The beautiful lass tossed her head proudly little knowing that the louse was lodged on her fancy bonnet. Which led Burns to pen this wish:

"O would some Pow'r the giftie give us to see ourselves as others see us!"

I imagine we have all at times joined this Scottish bard in wishing that the Lord would give us a bit of insight to see ourselves as others see us. We don't much like the idea of having faults, which others know but to which we are blind. Our assumption is--as Burns seemed also to suppose--that if only we would know our hidden faults, we would set about correcting them.

And no doubt we might make a few corrections. Some faults could be eliminated here or there. But considering how difficult it is for us to do much about correcting faults we know quite well, what real chance do we have of getting rid of the hidden faults in our lives--even if we knew them? Perhaps it is one of God's blessings that he does not after all let us see ourselves as others see us.

Another poet had something to say about hidden faults. His prayer is not that the Lord would make these hidden faults known to him. He is much bolder. He asks for much more, knowing the power and kindness of his God. King David, in the 19th Psalm, prays: "Forgive my hidden faults." Not show them to me or help me eliminate them but forgive them!

The Lenten season focuses on our need to examine our lives and plead guilty for all sins. These words from a prayer of confession say it well: "Forgive me those sins which I know and those sins which I know not, the sins which I have labored so to hide from others that I have hid them from my own memory." In Christ we know that we do have forgiveness for all sin, also our hidden faults.

Pastor Prange is at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

IN PRAISE OF THE ORDINARY
MAY 1984

Questioned about your occupation, have you ever replied: "I'm just a mother"? It sounds so ordinary that your voice may have betrayed a tinge of embarrassment. The thought might have surfaced: "If only I could have said: receptionist or clerk or nurse. But I'm just a mother." I suppose one reason we tend to think of mothers as being quite ordinary is because there are so many of them. All of us are different in many ways; but all of us are alike in this: we all have (or had) a mother. Even the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had a mother.

It's not only mothers whom we tend to take for granted. Generally we have little regard for the ordinary. The extraordinary is so much more striking, so exciting, so noticeable. The ordinary is around us all the time. And so we tend to neglect the ordinary.

The tiny "O ring" rubber seal, which fits a groove on the oil plug of an airplane engine, is very ordinary. It is an inexpensive part. It is not difficult to install. But this past year six of these ordinary parts were missing when an Eastern Airlines jumbo jet took off from Miami for the Bahamas. Over the Atlantic the oil drained out of all three engines causing them to stall. The pilot was preparing to ditch in the ocean when he revived the tail engine and coaxed the plane back to Miami for an emergency landing. The passengers and crew of that airplane no longer thought of a tiny "O ring" as anything ordinary.

Many of our days are quite ordinary. Some might even call them boring. But praise God we have so many ordinary days when no disaster strikes, when the phone does not bring news of death, when all goes relatively well. The ordinary gives us breathing space, a chance to practice the daily routine of Christian living without being overwhelmed with crisis.

Mothers are like that: ordinary. Chosen by God they gave us life and nourished us. They took care of all those ordinary needs we had: changing diapers, doctor's appointments, and transportation to and from so many places. They answered our questions--oftentimes more than once. They put up with our complaining. They reminded us to brush teeth and wash faces. For many of us it was on mother's lap that we first imbibed the story of Jesus; from her we learned our bedtime prayers.

Not a few times mothers grow bored with the ordinary routines of childcare. Part of the problem may be with the rest of us who aren't mothers, who too often take the ordinary for granted. Really it's anything but ordinary to be able to say: "I'm a mother!" And that's for the rest of us to celebrate.

Pastor Prange is a Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

OUR MISSION: TO GIVE
JUNE 1984

It's a glorious mission: the church is here to give things away. The church is not here to turn a profit. The church is not here to amass power and prestige, to seek after fame and fortune. The church is not here to police the world. The church is here to give things away.

Christ pointed the way: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." Again and again he counseled giving things away. The early church put giving into practice: "Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need." The crippled beggar at the temple gate heard these words from Peter: "I have no silver and gold, but what I have, I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." On Pentecost Sunday there was nothing for sale. What the apostles offered to the multitude were pure gifts: forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, eternal salvation.

The church is able to give because first of all we have received. As Luther lay dying, he scribbled words on a scrap of paper: "The truth is, we are beggars." We have no life but the life God gives us. We have no hope but the hope God gives. Time after time we pray: "Give us this day our daily bread." And time after time the Lord gives. He gives all that we need to keep this body and life--and more than enough. Without him we could not live. Without him we could not give.

It is God's very nature to give. It's been that way all through history. "God so loved the world, that he gave...." Life, world, bread, possessions, income, abilities, forgiveness, salvation--all gifts to us. There will never come a time when we will be anything but beggars.

We are beggars whose mission is to give what God has given to us. We're here to give to the lost of the world the directions to heaven. We're here to give away to the hurting of the world the love of Christ. We're here to give to the guilty and depressed of this world the assurance of forgiveness and new hope in Christ. The church is here to give things away.

We carry out our mission of giving within the context of our families as we care for one another. We carry out our mission in our church, among our friends, in our community. It's a glorious mission we have: to give the love of Christ, to comfort the afflicted, to share with the needy.

We carry out our mission by supporting the work program of our congregation and our Synod, a program of giving things away, of giving away the gospel of Jesus Christ. Here the money we give is important because it takes money to carry out this work of giving things away. And what we give is in every case something, which has first of all been given to us. The truth is, we are beggars.

Pastor Prange is at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

THE MAKING OF A PREACHER AUGUST 1984

A few months back my wife received a letter from a friend who is a longtime Lutheran. One can sense her pain as she reports that she and her husband have been going to the Methodist church in town. Why? "Our biggest problem is not getting a thing out of the sermons. Pastor uses ideas and words that are way beyond the average person and no one understands what's being said."

That's not the first time I heard such a complaint from church members. It set me to thinking (again) about the making of a preacher. Our Synod has committed itself to a strong emphasis on the study of languages in preparing our pastors for ministry. English, Latin, German, Greek, and Hebrew--all are normally required for entrance to our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. At our seminary the study of God's Word in the original languages is stressed.

Most of our seminary students begin their study of the languages on the high school (prep school) level. Students entering the seminaries of other Lutheran church bodies may have had little language study. I recently heard of a student entering a Lutheran seminary who was required to take a one-month crash course in Greek before being admitted.

Does all this language study produce good preachers? Is it wise for us as a Synod to use our financial resources, the offerings of our people, to maintain our prep schools and their emphasis on language study?

One can hardly argue the point that language study is the first step to the making of a good preacher. For language study prepares the pastor to apply himself to the text of the Holy Scriptures. There can be no good preaching which does not grow out of such serious study of the Word of God, which is not rooted in the Word of God. As a Synod we must continue to give our future preachers the tools, which will enable them to dig deeply into the Scriptures. We members of WELS should be prepared to support our worker-training program with our offerings if we truly want to have good preachers.

But for preachers it's not enough simply to apply oneself to the text of the Bible. It's not enough to know the meaning of all the words, know the proper grammatical terms, and know the historical context of the writing. The Word of God must be applied to people where they are. Sermons need to be practical and down-to-earth. Sermons must touch listeners where they hurt. To feel the pulse of the world is a requirement for good preaching. Preaching needs to be useful and relevant. That's a challenge for us preachers. It's work. It means knowing people--their frustrations, their fears, their anxieties, their doubts. And it takes the blessing of the Holy Spirit. All this goes into the making of a preacher.

Pastor Prange is at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

WHY MARRIAGES FAIL OCTOBER 1984

It can hardly be called a scientific poll but the results are nonetheless interesting. Twelve thousand Americans visiting the Walt Disney Epcot Center in Florida were asked why marriages fail. Sixty-nine percent were of the opinion that "peoples no longer work at marriage." Forty-two percent blamed "the decline in morals." The other reasons cited: "women are now more independent" (38%); "a so-so marriage is no longer enough" (35%); and "men are now more restless" (4%).

There was a time not so long ago that divorce was rare among our church members. That's no longer true today. And it's not because we don't work hard at trying to prevent marriages from failing. Many pastors require engaged couples to attend some kind of pre-marriage counseling sessions. Husbands and wives are often quite eager to attend programs designed to improve marriages. When problems do develop, it is not unusual for counselors (including pastors) to spend many hours seeking to patch things up.

Why do more marriages fail today than a generation ago? No doubt a number of factors are involved. But at the risk of oversimplifying I'd like to propose that a large part of the failure of marriage results from a misunderstanding of the concept "love."

I've had husbands' say of their wives: "I don't love her anymore." The tone of voice and supporting evidence suggested that something had really gone wrong with the wife. And perhaps it had. But we must recognize that when one says, "I don't love you anymore," the real problem lies with the speaker of those words. It is a confession of sin and failure on our part when we say, "I don't love you." To marry is to make a choice; it is to commit oneself to a life of loving. Many couples today would prefer having an escape clause in the marriage contract; or better yet take out only a learner's permit. But marriage is not a basket of goodies to consume till it is empty and then discard it. Marriage is a lifelong commitment to "love, honor, and cherish." If we fail to love, marriage is likely to fail.

Love for another must be rooted in the love God has for us. God does not love us because we are so very lovable. He loves us because "God is love." And our love for another cannot ultimately be based on how lovable the other is. Love is a quality of the soul, which the sanctified person possesses, a gift of the Holy Spirit. If we find ourselves unable to love our spouse, we must search out the reason for this failure in ourselves. We must ask: what is wrong with me? It is in the heart that marriages fail.

Pastor Prange is at Peace Janesville, Wisconsin.

**THANK YOU, LORD
NOVEMBER 1984**

I had planned to write something about Thanksgiving Day in this editorial comment. As I was casting about for the right words, my attention was drawn to a magazine page with the bold heading: FOR AFRICA, 1984 PROMISES TO BE A RECORD YEAR: OF SUFFERING.

For American Christians who worry about their weight but rarely fret over food for the morrow, the report that worldwide up to 10,000 persons die each day of starvation seems hard to believe. That's 3.65 million people each year; nearly six times the population of Milwaukee. That's a lot of people dying for lack of food. And even if the figures are inflated, we find such extensive starvation hard to comprehend.

Here our problem is what to do with all the trash. New York City has a huge garbage dump on Staten Island known as Fresh Kills. Trucks at special piers in Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens dump into barges. Tugs pull these to Fresh Kills. Cities throughout the United States struggle with the best way to collect and dispose of wastes. It's a big operation.

Meanwhile the report comes that Africa is experiencing the worst famine since 1974 that already an estimated 100,000 Mozambiquans have died. Farmers are eating the seeds meant for planting crops. Those who can walk are fleeing the countryside for the city. But there they are finding many more like themselves ... and not enough food.

I'll not forget the reminder my parents used to give when there was a complaint about some food item we did not care to eat: "A starving child would be happy to have it." In view of the appalling waste of food in our country this reminder is much in place today. Many Americans have become used to a standard of living which calls for a closet full of clothes, a house stuffed with all kinds of electrical equipment, and a cooler bursting with booze. Meanwhile the report comes that African children. ...

In one of our hymns we sing: "In sickness, sorrow, want, or care, Whate'er it be, 'tis ours to share." To share with the poor and needy of the world is an act of thanksgiving. A way of sharing is to make a contribution to our Synod's Committee on Relief. Your gift will be put to good use in feeding the hungry.

Perhaps we might also put a picture of a starving child on the refrigerator door to become more conscious of the extent of world hunger. We will be reminded of the food and drink our Heavenly Father gives to us; of the clothing and shelter we enjoy which comes without any merit or worthiness on our part. For all of which we say, "O give thanks unto the Lord for he is good."

Pastor Prange is at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

THREE CHEERS FOR THE LITURGY JANUARY 1985

One reason the Pilgrims left the Church of England was because the worship was too formal. The early Baptists faulted Luther for failing to abandon the liturgy of the Roman Church. Many an adult confirmand, joining the WELS congregation, puzzles over the whys and wherefores of our service. And even a veteran Lutheran pastor of 54 years writes "our overemphasis on liturgy works to the detriment of the church."

As our synod begins work on the new hymnal, shall we perhaps publish only a book of hymns with no liturgy? Or if a liturgy is included, should it be exactly the same as what we know from *The Lutheran Hymnal*? Shall several options be included in some parts of the liturgy? Shall someone skilled in liturgical lore be asked to create an entirely new order of worship, suitable for American Lutheran Christians living in the last decades of the 20th century?

These are questions, which will be addressed by our hymnal committee with input from WELS members. They are important questions; they need to be discussed and debated; the answers we give will impact our churches for years to come. The most basic question is this: should we have a liturgy at all? Should there be a set order of worship, a form to follow? I answer "yes."

The Bible says of the earth immediately after creation that it was "without form." Everything was confusion. The Lord God set all in order: he separated light from darkness, sky from earth, water from land. There is beauty in this order.

So also with our liturgy. There is beauty in the order of our worship. It has been shaped over the centuries, tested and tried by generations of Christians. When we come to church, we know where the worship leader will take us. We have a form to follow not a *performance* at which to gawk.

A prominent critic has expressed an extreme aversion to the formlessness, which characterizes so much of what passes for art today. "All humans require moorings in order to make sense of things," he says; "the contemporary arts undercut our moorings." The liturgy gives moorings to our faith. We come to worship not to be entertained but to stand in the awful presence of the Almighty: to confess our sine, to plead his mercy, to hear his voice, to sing his praises, to bring our thanksgiving. Our liturgy is the form we follow to do these things.

In many respects liturgy is for the weak. The strong really need no order for their worship. They soar to worlds unknown with help from no one else. But the weak--those of little faith, the uncreative, the stammering, the children, the ordinary--the weak need and appreciate the familiar forms of worship. I say, "Three cheers for the liturgy." I'm one of the weak.

Pastor Prange serves at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

DON'T DESPAIR
MARCH 1985

Spiritual and emotional depressions are everywhere apparent in our world. Visit church members who have been absent from worship for a while, and one is likely to uncover some form of depression. Get to know a person with a drinking problem, and you will probably find someone depressed. Our young people are not spared this malady.

One reads words like these in a recent novel: "I've just been talking to a young woman who was telling me that she'd decided to burn herself to death as a protest. She didn't say what she wanted to protest against. Though it's obvious. Disgust. Helplessness. Defiance. Anguish."

Undoubtedly a multitude of factors contribute to youthful depression. There are those latchkey children left unsupervised for periods of time (estimates are that 2 1/2 to 5 million children, 6 to 13 years old, fall into this category). There are the varieties of child abuse. It is projected that one in four girls born in the U.S. today will be sexually assaulted before their 18th birthday. Of the reported cases of sexual abuse today 1525 percent affect children under the age of six years. For many children the stability and security of home and family is a total unknown.

The church has neither the resources nor the call to remedy this situation. Yet we Christians dare not throw up our hands in despair and say there is nothing we can do. Christ has commissioned us to be lights in the world, to be the salt of the earth.

As citizens we have the right and duty to work for policies, which will strengthen the family, which will punish the lawless, which will defend the innocent. We should willingly become involved in seeking solutions to pressing social problems.

As parents we have a glorious ministry: to serve our children as Christ served us. This service does not shy away from the exercise of authority: parents serve their children when they admonish and punish. Yet parental authority gives no license for any form of child abuse in word or deed. The home, which provides compassion and security, will be a strong defense against youthful depression.

Pastors and teachers have a splendid opportunity through instruction classes to lift youthful spirits. Many hours are spent nurturing tender hearts and minds. What a challenge to strengthen and build up!

A young lad recently confirmed called me the other day wishing to change the pledge he made for the Lord's work in 1985. He had gotten a job and was earning some money and wanted to increase his pledge. That's not the sort of thing, which happens every day. But if we look around, we're not only going to see depression; we'll also see signs of God's blessing on our labor. Don't despair!

Pastor Prange is at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

FORM 1040 AND CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP
APRIL 1985

Few people find filling out income tax forms a pleasurable activity. An astonishing figure suggests just how many Americans require help to get this job done. Each year taxpayers spend \$11.7 billion to have their federal income tax forms prepared. That's only slightly less than the tax money disbursed annually to maintain all the police forces of all the cities, towns, and villages of our nation.

I happen to be one who fills out my own income tax form. It's not a task I relish. Yet there is something wholesome about the entire process. It gives one the opportunity to take account of one's stewardship. One finds out how many dollars God puts into our hands to manage. And those who itemize deductions are able quickly to compare total contributions with income (divide line 18 of Schedule A by line 32 of form 1040 to find the percentage of adjusted gross income given as contributions).

A common reaction of many people who total up income for a year is to exclaim: "Where did all the money go!" Most of us would be surprised to find out where all our money did go if these figures were available to us. And we would not be altogether pleased.

I read recently that about 50,000,000 Americans play binge regularly for money. The average player spends \$14 on the game and four dollars on food, beverages, snacks, novelties, and good luck charms. Each week binge players consume some five million bags of popcorn, two million bags of potato chips and related snack foods, one million bags of peanuts, three million sandwiches, one million gallons of milk, soda, beer, and 80,000 pounds of coffee. They use 15 million cups, two million plastic paper plates, and five million napkins.

In managing income one needs to learn to say "no." We are bombarded with advertisements enticing us to say "yes." Our sinful flesh cries out to be gratified with the things of this world. We are not easily convinced that Jesus is speaking the truth when he declares that "life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." We need to be reminded often that "the love of money is the root of all evil." St. Paul had no income tax forms to fill out. But Paul did say something about the Christian's obligation to pay taxes: "if you owe taxes, pay taxes." Paying our taxes is good stewardship. And maybe even filling out form 1040 is not without value.

Pastor Prange serves at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A GNAT AND A CAMEL
JUNE 1985

One Saturday afternoon a mother was peeling vegetables for a salad when her daughter came to ask permission to go to an amusement center of bad repute. The daughter admitted it was a questionable place but "all the other girls are going."

As the teenager pleaded her case, she suddenly saw her mother pick up a handful of discarded vegetable peelings and toss them into the salad. Startled, she cried, "Mother, you are putting garbage into the salad." "I know," her mother replied, "but I thought that if you didn't mind garbage in your heart, you certainly wouldn't mind a little garbage in your stomach."

This modern day parable recalls the observation Jesus made: "Whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out the body. But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man unclean." The Pharisees were sticklers for keeping the Old Testament dietary laws, even enlarging them. It upset them that the disciples of Jesus would eat without first washing their hands. Jesus cared more about the condition of the heart than about unclean hands.

The world today is greatly agitated over the quality of the food we eat, the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the milk, which is bottled. There is a growing stress on the importance of physical fitness. Hardly a day passes without some reminder of the risks to the body from smoking. The proper disposal of wastes has become a pressing national issue. Standards of purity are imposed by various governmental agencies. Yet even these standards hardly inspire confidence in what we consume.

It goes without saying that Christians should practice good stewardship of body. The danger is that one becomes absorbed in the care of body to the neglect of soul. To stop smoking is not so important as to start daily devotions. Jogging to keep in good physical condition is fine; but is there an equal dedication to prayer and good works? Should not a critical evaluation of the sights and sounds of television weigh more heavily than watching what one eats and drinks? Consider the effect on the heart of this shocking statistic from the National Institute of Mental Health: the average American sixteen-year-old has witnessed 18,000 murders on television!

Jesus vividly characterized the priorities of too many of the pious of his day: "You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel." One needs to be able to distinguish between dangers, which are temporal, and those, which are eternal. There is a difference, you know, between a gnat and a camel. Jesus expects us to recognize that difference.

Pastor Prange serves at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

WHO OWNS THE SYNOD?

AUGUST 1985

Pronouns are very useful words. They help language work well. Pronouns allow us certain indefiniteness in our talk. We can say, "it's raining outside" without caring what the antecedent of the pronoun "it" might be.

Unfortunately pronouns may also be used in a rather elusive way. A church member asks, "What are they going to decide about getting another teacher?" Or a pastor might be heard to say: "It's up to them if they send some missionaries to Brazil." Who are meant by the pronouns "they" and "them?"

To whom does the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod belong? Is President Mischke the owner? Does it perhaps belong to the people who work at 2929 N. Mayfair or to the seminary faculty or to the pastors of the synod?

Yes, the synod does belong to President Mischke and to the people who work at 2929 N. Mayfair and to the seminary faculty and to the pastors. But ownership extends also to all the congregations who comprise the synod.

Are you a member of one of the congregations of the Wisconsin Synod? Then you are one of the partners who own the synod. It's not "they" and "them" who decide what the synod will do. It's "we" and "us." All of us together determine what the synod will do.

One does not have to be a delegate voting at a synod convention to chart the course of WELS. We each cast our vote by the interest we take in our synod's work, by our prayers, which ascend to God's throne, by the service we are willing to render, and by our offerings for the work program of WELS.

We own the synod. The business of the synod is our business. And that business is to keep on planting the seed of the word of God in the entire world. Planting the seed has always been the business of the church. The ministry of Jesus Christ was one of sowing the seed. Jesus sent his apostles into the entire world to preach the gospel to all creatures. Keep on planting--that was his charge to them.

Keep on planting--that is the will of Christ for us today. The synod plants the word in ways which we can't do well locally: by maintaining worker training schools for future pastors and teachers; by establishing and overseeing the development of new churches here in the United States and throughout the world; by exercising evangelical supervision over member congregations, pastors, and teachers so that the word is rightly proclaimed to the glory of God and for the benefit of lost sinners.

We people who own the synod will want to see that our business is going well. If it's not doing as well as we think it should, we will want to find out why. We care because we own the synod.

Pastor Prange serves at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

EVERY DAY HAPPENINGS OCTOBER 1985

Every day has its happenings: 110 golfers make a hole in one; 200 Americans become millionaires; 2,250 cows die to feed McDonald's customers; we buy 426 bushels of paper clips; and 20 mail carriers are bitten by dogs. Daily we eat and drink, listen and talk, brush our teeth and watch TV.

Is it also happening each day that we take time for the word of God and prayer? If we realize the importance of maintenance, we will. Car owner manuals stress the value of proper maintenance: oil changes, rust prevention, tune-ups, periodic inspection of brakes and similar critical parts. Lawn mowers, farm machinery, household appliances, even cameras, require maintenance to function well.

Yet many people are tempted to cut corners here. Maintenance is easily put off to another day. The cost may seem excessive and so the necessary work is not done. Proper maintenance is not a priority for some people. That's equally true of spiritual life. It's so easy to put off those things that maintain and foster Christian faith and life: no time, don't know how, forget, does it really matter?

Poor maintenance of spiritual lives appears to be a problem with pastors as well. A new book title *Pastors in Ministry: Guidelines for Seven Critical Issues* reports on a three-year study which analyzed questionnaire responses from 1300 Lutheran pastors and spouses in parishes across the country. For one of the authors a major surprise was that 65% of the clergy sampled were bothered by a "so-so devotional life." Half the respondents said that their dissatisfaction with their devotional life was a source of stress.

Analysis of the questionnaires showed that pastors who feel negative about their devotional life also feel negative about many aspects of ministry and their lives in general. It's important for pastors to make a commitment to regular meditation time.

What's true for pastors is true for everyone. Jesus is the bread of life; he gives living water. Our Savior is the true vine nourishing growing and fruit-producing branches. To find no time in one's daily schedule to feed on Christ is to risk spiritual malfunction and breakdown. The Christian faith and life need proper maintenance.

If you have allowed rust to corrode the battery of your faith, now is the time to go to work and clean it up. A healthy dose of God's word and prayer will do the trick. If the engine of your Christian life too often sputters and coughs, put in the octane, which will give you go-power. Make spiritual maintenance an everyday happening.

Pastor Prange serves at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

LEST WE FORGET
NOVEMBER 1985

There are churches, which celebrate Thanksgiving Day by inviting worshipers to publicly enumerate blessings received. It is a way of sensitizing one to the multitude and variety of favors bestowed by our heavenly Father. The danger is that in the midst of our woes we fail to remember. We need reminders lest we forget.

Thank you Lord for farmers. It's a tough time for some farmers. Unemployment in the agricultural sector of our nation's economy tops the list. An AP story was headlined: "Farm buying power hits 50-year low." Prices farmers get for raw products have been declining month by month. Bad weather, high interest payments, and declining land values have created anxiety and tension for many of our Christian brothers and sisters who cultivate the soil. Too often we enjoy our bountiful Thanksgiving feasts without remembering the toil, sweat, and sometimes tears, which go into food production. Lest we forget: thank you, Lord, for farmers.

Then there are the wives of our world missionaries. A husband gave this beautiful testimony: "I know for myself that if it had not been for the efforts, encouragement and spirit of my wife, I could not have lasted or worked as a missionary ... I know all the missionaries will second that." Missionaries as well as pastors of stateside churches hear many a "thank you" from people whom they serve. They stand in the limelight of public recognition. Lest we forget: thank you, Lord, for missionary wives.

What about our feet? Often called ugly, they may be smelly and dirty. But feet are a remarkable part of the body. These rather small structures support our weight for a lifetime. With them we jump and run and walk. These 26 bones carry us down the street to deliver cookies and a smile to someone not able to walk. They take us to the door of a new family in our neighborhood to extend a welcome to worship. With our feet we stand on Thanksgiving Day and sing the praises of God. Isaiah exclaims: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation." Lest we forget: thank you, Lord, for feet.

In the midst of general prosperity it is easy for us to focus on the material, the good things of this earth, which we enjoy. We are rich; we have many things for which we must give thanks. But ultimately our food and stereos and houses and recreation vehicles will crumble in the dust. Only One is lasting and abiding, faithful and true. Lest we forget: thank you, Lord, for eternal salvation.

Pastor Prange serves at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

WHAT'S IN A NAME? JANUARY 1986

Juliet was deeply in love with Romeo. His name, however, caused her anguish. He was of the enemy family Montague; she was a Capulet. She cried out ruefully: "O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?" Yet a bit of reflection cast new light on her dilemma. She asks: "What's in a name? That which we call a rose/by any other name would smell as sweet."

What's in a name? Is it really true that names make no difference? Some names are rich in symbolic meaning. The name "United States of America" could hardly be replaced with other words quite so significant. A bit of history would slip away if the mountain west of Colorado Springs lost its name "Pike's Peak." And one might well wonder if even a rose would smell quite so sweet if the plant were renamed "stink."

Nonetheless the question of Juliet does have validity. Many a woman has the experience of gaining a new last name with no change in her personality. Movie stars and Roman popes take on new names as a matter of choice. We get used to changed names. Some years ago our synod adopted the name "Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod." No one seemed to regret the passing of the old name: The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States.

One of the tasks, which will eventually face the committee working to revise The Lutheran Hymnal, is to find a suitable name for the new book. There are already hymnals named *Lutheran Worship* and the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Shall our book be called *The New Lutheran Hymnal* or *The Lutheran Hymnal II*? Or do you perhaps have a better suggestion?

Sometimes names lose their original significance. When Northwestern College opened its doors in 1865, the name was much more fitting than it is today. But hardly anyone would be pleased if the name were changed to the geographically accurate but regionally lackluster handle: "Midwestern College." Name changes need to be done with care lest more be lost than is gained.

For some the name "Northwestern" has come almost to be a synonym for the "Wisconsin Synod." It has taken on nearly confessional overtones. But what does the name of our synod's periodical, *The Northwestern Lutheran*, really say to readers in New York City or Ferry, Georgia; in Seattle or Barre, Vermont? Is it a name worth retaining simply for the sake of history? Is there a meaningful and suitable substitute?

Jesus said of people in general: "No one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, 'The old is better'" (Luke 5:39). We are used to the old; we feel comfortable with the old; sometimes we will fight to maintain the old.

But when it comes to names, it may not always be true that the old is better. Would something be gained by changing the name of this periodical? How much truth is there in the question of Juliet: "What's in a name?"

Pastor Prange serves at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

LIVING WITH LESS MARCH 1986

Todd Bell missed the Super Bowl. But he has no regrets. Bell is the NFL all pro defensive back who did not play with the Chicago Bears in the 1985 season because he refused to sign a four-year, \$1.6 million contract. "I'm glad the Chicago Bears did to me what they did," Bell is quoted as saying. "It built character in me." Instead of playing football he went back to school at Ohio State.

Bell said he has analyzed his decision not to sign and concluded he was right. "Look, the Bears have taken away three things from me: they've taken away popularity, which is nothing. They've taken away money, which takes wing. They've taken away fame, which is vapor. And the thing I've learned is character."

Bell learned to live with less. So did Karen Blixen who took the pen name Isak Dinesen. Her story is told in the film *Out of Africa*. After losing her Kenyan farm, she writes: "You must not think that I am frightfully depressed and see everything in a tragic light. That is not at all the case; on the contrary, I think that these difficult times have helped me to understand better than before how infinitely rich and beautiful life is in every way and that so many things that one goes around worrying over are of no importance whatsoever."

One is reminded of the words of the Apostle Paul to the Philippians: "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength."

Living with less is likely to be the way of the future for many Americans (as it already is for the vast majority of people in our world). We have lived through a period of sustained prosperity. We have come to take the perks for granted. But there are clouds on the economic horizon: huge deficits, trade imbalance, wage reductions, low farm prices. Some of our so-called necessities may again become luxuries.

The season of Lent has traditionally challenged Christians to learn to live with less. We must become people who are able to put off: to put off the material things when it is necessary; to put off the fun and games; to put off the selfish life of ease; to put off even those loved ones whom the Lord takes from us.

Learning to live with less can't be done on our own. We need Christ. Paul said it: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." When we center our lives in Christ, when we cling to him as our priceless treasure, then we will also be able to live with less.

Pastor Prange serves at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

NO SAD SONGS?

APRIL 1986

Recently a writer in the International Bible Society publication *Bible World* remembered only one thing from boyhood Good Friday services: "those slow, mournful hymns sung in a minor key." He would likely second the suggested improvement in *The Lutheran Hymnal*: drop the sad songs.

Not everyone will agree as to which are the "sad songs" in our present hymnal. But my guess is that few will argue with the designation of #607 as a sad song: "Day of Wrath, O Day of Mourning." A check of the table of contents of *Lutheran Worship* and *Lutheran Book of Worship* reveals that both these hymnals published in the last decade have dropped this sad song. This despite the fact that the eminent hymnologist John Julian wrote some years ago: "In Great Britain and America no hymnbook of any note has appeared during the past hundred years without the 'Dies Irae' (Day of Wrath) being directly or indirectly represented therein."

Have we come to a time in the life of the church when worshipers should no longer be asked to sing sad songs? Judged by the slight exposure I've had to the electronic church, hawking its wares on television, one might draw such a conclusion. All seems to be joy and brightness. One hears only happy songs. Glory is everywhere. And some of those who frequent worship via the tube fault those Lutherans who dare to preach about sin because "born again Christians" should be able to overcome sin.

Would that there was no need to sing sad songs! Would that there was no death, no pain, and no anguish in our lives, would that we were free of sin and that grief was unknown! But such is not our human condition. Jesus indicated as much when he declared: "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."

We are not helping people by glossing over the realities of sin, death and judgment. Numerous studies demonstrate that contemporary mainstream American culture is deeply death denying. The church fails when we do not appreciate the hurt people feel when death strikes. There is a proper place for the expression of grief at the funeral of a Christian. There is room for sad songs in our hymnal.

A profound difference exists between the church and the world. The world never willingly abandons joy. The world believes the heresy that we shall be happy here and now; it is one of man's inalienable rights. Worldly people hang on to happiness with all the gusto they have until, without fail, it is taken from them. They want to forget that one must go down into the darkness of sorrow to rise to new life. The church must be willing to give up the joy -- to sing of sin, death, and judgment -- so that she might experience the victory of the resurrection. Easter comes only to the heart that has known Lent.

Pastor Prange serves at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

THE FIRST STEP

JUNE 1986

It's happening all over: men and women, girls and boys, graduating. At universities and colleges, at high schools and technical schools--even at some kindergartens--it's graduation time. It's happening also at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon.

The term "graduation" is derived from a common Latin word (gradus) that means, "step." Students tend to think of graduation as the last step. Seminary graduation comes after a long period of schooling, which includes four years of what secular universities call "graduate" study. Graduation does seem to be the last step. But one may better approach it as the first step.

We members of the synod can be thankful for the training, which our seminarians get. Graduates will be firmly grounded in the Holy Scriptures, will have received instruction in the practice of ministry, and will have matured in Christian faith and life.

A young minister (not of our synod), serving his first pastorate after the seminary, told of visiting a dying lady who reached out her hand asking, "Can you help me?" "I had nothing to say to her," he said sadly afterwards. "Nothing. They didn't teach us anything about this in seminary." We can expect our graduates to know what to say when called to the bedside of a dying person.

Good preparation for ministry does not, however, negate the suggestion that seminary graduation is anything other than a first step. One might look upon the seminary as a kind of nursery or cold frame where seeds (Latin: semen) are planted, nourished, and to some extent protected from the elements. The seminary graduate is like a tender plant set out in the field of this world, to grow and bear fruit. There will be stress in this transplanting; the seedling will be exposed to the storms of life; the danger is that it will not flourish.

The first step into the ministry will be made easier if the advice of the English parson/poet George Herbert is heeded. Writing of the country parson he urged: "The chief and top of his knowledge consists in the book of books, the storehouse and magazine of life and comfort, the holy Scriptures. There he sucks and lives." To suck the sweet honey of the word--what a marvelous metaphor and a good advice for all to follow.

Members of our congregations must thank God for the young men willing to spend years of study in preparation for shepherding. We can make the first step easier by keeping them in our prayers, by caring for them as persons called to serve us with the word of life, by supporting them as they take up the task of ministry. Then, with the blessing of God, the first step will be in the right direction.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

BLACK OR WHITE? AUGUST 1986

One who has the opportunity to visit around in the congregations of our synod is likely to discover that an old tradition is slowly changing: the color of the pastor's vestment. There is a movement away from black to white robes of various sorts. Which raises the question: what should a pastor wear for worship?

The Old Testament gave specific instructions to Israel as to what the priests should wear. Exodus 29:5-9 tells us how Aaron was vested: tunic, robe of the ephod, ephod itself, breastplate, waistband (skillfully woven), turban, sacred diadem, with headbands and sashes for his sons. Elsewhere the law prescribes the colors: white linen; blue robe; ephod of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet. As the motive for this elaborate and colorful vesting: "give them dignity and honor" (Exodus 28:40).

Of course, these Old Testament ceremonial laws don't apply to us Christians today. Pastors are under no rule, which legislates what should be worn when leading the people's worship. Our Lutheran confessions remind us that in matters of church usage (vestments included) we have the Christian liberty to make changes so long as these are not made to please the enemies of the gospel (Formula of Concord, X).

When Martin Luther proposed a new Latin order of worship in Wittenberg, he passed over the subject of vestments with this short comment: "We think about these as we do about other forms. We permit them to be used in freedom, as long as people refrain from ostentation and pomp."

Why was the black gown so commonly worn in our Wisconsin Synod? Many of the early pastors of our synod came from areas of Germany where the black robe (or no special vestment at all) was customary. In 1811 King Frederick William III ordered that all the clergy in Prussia wear black robes, an action which obviously influenced many in their choice of vestment and color.

The black robe was very practical on the American frontier. It did not show dirt (and many a pioneer pastor carried his gown to more than one church on a Sunday). It was warmer in a day when church buildings were often poorly heated. And it was distinctly different from what the Roman Catholics wore.

The practical advantages of wearing a black gown have nearly disappeared. Many of the new white robes are machine washable and less expensive than black; churches are better and more evenly heated; vestments today aren't likely to be a denominational badge. In favor of white is the symbolism: joy, light, and the purity of forgiveness. The saints in heaven are described as being clothed in white robes as were the angels at the tomb of Christ who first preached the Easter message.

Black or white? That's up to each pastor to decide in consultation with the people he serves. Ultimately it really doesn't matter that much as long as he fulfills well his calling.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

THE TALENT FOR MAKING MONEY OCTOBER 1986

Every three years the members of our congregation fill out a talent sheet. A variety of service opportunities are listed: sing in the choir, serve as an usher, help with church office work, visit unchurched people, teach a Sunday school class, and many more. Most of our members check several items.

One talent sheet was returned, however, with nary a check mark. Written at the bottom were these words: "I won't be able to do any of these things but I'll donate more money." Congregations need people who will usher and teach and count offerings. We also need those whose special talent it is to "donate more money."

It might surprise some to learn that the word "talent" originally had nothing at all to do with the abilities and skills, which a person possessed. The talent was a unit of weight; talents measured gold and silver. The talent was a sum of money.

People--and this is true especially of Christian people--must feel that they are useful, that they can do something, that they can do something for someone else in particular. It may be a sad fact but nonetheless true: money is often the major factor in allowing one person to do something useful for another.

Pastors and church leaders know quite well how to ask a person, one on one, to teach a Sunday school class, to repair a leaky faucet in the women's restroom, to pick up a senior citizen for worship. We are much less comfortable with asking a fellow Christian to donate more money for some designated need.

One of the blessings of the Reaching Out offering was to help us accept the concept of asking members whom the Lord has richly blessed financially for gifts of \$25,000, \$50,000 or more. The talents God dispenses are not limited to physical abilities and communication skills. To some people God grants the talent of being able to make money, to become wealthy. This talent is to be valued and appreciated as much as any other.

A sermon I heard more than a score of years ago made this point. The preacher was a prominent churchman of WELS; it was New Year's Day. The text for the sermon I've forgotten but not the theme. Not once but many times it was repeated: "God grant you a happy and prosperous New Year."

The implications of the word "prosperous" were drawn out: "may you farmers have bountiful harvests which sell for high prices; may you merchants do a lively business and make many trips to the bank; may you factory workers gain good contracts and work much overtime. God grant you a prosperous New Year so that you might generously donate more money for his work."

Talents come in all shapes and sizes. We dare despise none, which the Lord distributes; that includes the talent for making money. May this talent also be used to his glory and praise.

Pastor Prange serves Peace in Janesville, Wisconsin.

WHAT IT TAKES TO BE THANKFUL NOVEMBER 1986

It seems that the word "vulnerable" has recently crept into more common usage. I hear people speaking the word; I read it in print. It's a word which came to our English language in Shakespeare's day from the Latin; there "vulnero" means "to wound or damage." It's a good word to have around.

A modern dictionary gives meanings like this for vulnerable: "susceptible to injury; unprotected from danger; liable to censure or criticism." A person who is vulnerable is open to being wounded; there is helplessness in such a condition, a need for defense and rescue.

Jesus Christ was a vulnerable person. He was vulnerable not by nature, but because he chose to set aside his divine power. For our sakes he became vulnerable, subject to censure and criticism, susceptible to being wounded. His total vulnerability is manifested on the cross: he died.

Jesus Christ became what we are: vulnerable. We don't always want to see or believe this. We like to think we are stronger and better and more secure than we really are. In us all there is a large dose of the Pharisee. Too often we compare ourselves with others and come away looking pretty good: safe, secure, smug.

One who fails to acknowledge vulnerability will find it difficult to be thankful. This is evident from the "thanksgiving" of the Pharisee: "God, I thank you that I am not like all other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all my income." Rather a bizarre thank offering!

In contrast the tax collector recognizes his vulnerability. "He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' " Jesus pronounced this verdict: "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God." The tax collector not only went home justified; he went home thankful.

What does it take to be thankful? More than anything else it takes an awareness of our vulnerability coupled with recognition of God's goodness to us sinners. One cannot be thankful who is unable to receive a gift. Daily God gives: forgiveness, life, hope, protection, and guidance. We are in no position to refuse God's favors; we are vulnerable before him.

We are likewise vulnerable in our relationships with one another. The policeman, the teacher, the milkman, and the parent--how much we need them; how vulnerable we are without them.

Thank you, Lord, for all you give us. Keep us ever mindful of how vulnerable we really are and how good you have been to us.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

A TOOL FOR WORSHIP JANUARY 1987

The WELS Hymnal *Sampler* has been out in the pews for a bit over a month. The initial reactions of delight, confusion, or disappointment are beginning to fade. The wording and sounds of the revised liturgy seem less strange; some hymns are starting to catch on. That's a normal process when one acquires a new tool.

And that's just what a hymnal is: it's a tool for worship. To make a new tool work properly requires time and effort. There is a period of adjustment; a learning process to determine how best the tool can be used. Ask anyone who acquires a computer: a great tool once one learns to use

The purpose of the *Sampler* and the upcoming new hymnal is to improve our worship. This is a worthy goal since worship is the most important thing a church does. Public worship is central to the life of the congregation. Most of our pastoral counseling is done from the pulpit. Liturgy is theology, the theology of the people, the only continuing religious education many adults have.

We spend much time and effort on religious education, evangelism, special ministries, stewardship and the like. But our evangelism efforts will fall flat if the worship of the congregation is dull and uninviting. Baptized saints, moved by the good news of the gospel proclaimed Sunday after Sunday in worship, make good stewards. Worship holds everything together in the parish.

We must not only think of the importance of the sermon and preaching; also the liturgy and hymns are vital. What a sermon often fails to accomplish in nurturing faith and life will come to pass through liturgy and hymns. Here is the word of God as much as in the sermon.

One of the most important tools for worship is the hymnal. But remember: it's only that, a tool. A tool is as good and useful as the person using it. New or revised liturgies and hymns won't make for better worship unless we make them work better.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was not enthused with attempts to establish new rites and forms for worship. He called such projects "vain." Rather, he wrote, "Let the breath of new life be breathed by you through the forms already existing. For, if once you are alive, you shall find they shall become plastic and new."

The danger is that we depend too much on the tool and not enough on the Spirit. We will not improve our worship if only a new hymnal is published with a better liturgical section and a better selection of hymns and tunes. The forms lie as dead music and words until they are put to good use. Pastors, organists, choir directors, teachers, worshipping congregations must work at making worship lively and edifying. The hymnal is a tool for worship. Let's learn to use it well.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

A TIME FOR LENT MARCH 1987

"To everything there is a season," wrote Solomon, the preacher; there is "a time to weep, and a time to laugh; time to mourn, and a time to dance." Life has a rhythm; not every day is the same; there are ups and downs.

The church senses this rhythm by setting aside a time for Lent. Luther reminds us that our lives must daily include repentance. But there are times of the year when we become more serious about self-examination and more aware of the need for self-discipline. Lent is such a time.

The Lord Jesus Christ showed self-discipline by rejecting the temptations of Satan in the wilderness. Forty days of fasting had left him intensely hungry, but Jesus refused to turn stones into bread. He would not jump down from the temple peak to prove his Father's protecting power. He did not bow to Satan to gain authority over all the nations of the world. Jesus rejected the way of self-indulgence; he practiced self-discipline.

Lent is a time to recognize more clearly how legion are the temptations to self-indulgence. The self-indulgent person sets no limits; anything goes so long as it feels good and the self is gratified. We are quick to categorize drunkenness, gluttony and drug abuse as manifestations of self-indulgence, less obvious are other forms.

Our local paper reported that three boys around the age of 10 victimized two younger boys using their fists and threatening to burn them with cigarettes if they did not turn over money. One wonders if the aggressors in this case may not themselves have been victims of parents who found self-satisfaction in abusing their own children.

Self-indulgence is insidious; it creeps into our lives disguised. What else, for example, is faultfinding but a form of self-indulgence! Marking the sins and flaws in the life and character of another gratifies the self.

Advertising thrives on the knowledge that the human being is prone to self-indulgence. It works as well as it does because it appeals in the words of one critic "to the love of material gratification." Too often one is unable to practice self-discipline and say "no" to what is offered.

John Milton observed: "None can love freedom heartily, but good men; the rest love not freedom, but license." We Americans are freedom-loving people. But if we are not also good people, the freedoms we enjoy are lures to self-indulgence.

We rightly celebrate the freedom we have in Christ. Lent is a time to hear with more sensitive conscience the questions asked by St. Paul: "What shall we say, then! Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase! By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer!"

Lent gives us time for serious self-examination; it points us to a life of self-discipline and exposes the snares of self-indulgence. Use well this time of Lent.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

WITNESS WHERE YOU ARE

APRIL 1987

It was Easter Sunday evening. The disciples were gathered behind locked doors. Suddenly the Lord Jesus stood among them. He ate a piece of fish. He unfolded the Scriptures. And he gave his disciples a mission: be my witnesses.

There is no separating the resurrected Christ from his command to be witnesses. During his earthly ministry Jesus sometimes did tell his disciples to say nothing of what they had seen and heard. But Easter changed all this. His commission is plainly stated several times: be my witnesses.

It's an assignment all Christians have. It's an assignment we are capable of fulfilling with the Spirit's help. But not all must jet to Africa's sunny shore or rap on strange doors to be a witness. Wherever you are in life, whatever your situation, there is your mission field. Witness where you are!

Parents, witness where you are. By your love for spouse and children, by speaking the word of forgiveness when sin is confessed, by taking time for family devotions and daily prayer, you witness where you are.

Employers and employees, the world of business and the factory floor are your mission field, the place where Christ is glorified by your words and deeds. Perhaps it's the pin you wear in your lapel, which opens a door for words about your faith; or the firm "no" to temptation, which provokes the question "why not!" Witness where you are.

Our witness to Jesus Christ is not only for the unbeliever; it is for the believer who needs to be strengthened in the faith. On the inside cover of my confirmation notebook I've taped an article clipped several years ago. A Lutheran pastor makes the point that "confirmation ministry is the front line for evangelism in most Lutheran churches." He says this not in a critical way but to emphasize what an important ministry this is. Pastors and parents who work together in confirmation instruction are busy witnessing. It's a task, which needs to be done well.

What a mission field is found around the hospital bed. One really has a captive audience confined to bed. In addition there are often roommates, visitors, doctors, nurses, housekeepers. The prayer book by the bedside, the conversation, the expression of confidence and hope--all are witnesses to him whose own we are.

We witness by the way we spend our money. Very few of us will be sent into pagan cultures to bring Christ to the natives. Many of us may never knock on the door of an unchurched person to tell of Jesus. But with our offerings to support the ministry of those who do, we witness where we are.

Evangelism seminars and workshops help us to become more conscious of the privilege the risen Christ gives to his people: be my witnesses. We witness to one whose love brought him to the cross for our salvation, to one whose resurrection insures eternal life for all who trust him. Express your Easter joy. Witness where you are.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

THE LANGUAGE OF WORSHIP
JUNE 1987

As the congregations of our synod close out the half-year trial use of the Sampler, one question seems to have provoked the most debate: what is the proper language of worship!

The proper language of worship cannot be discussed in isolation from the language of the Bible. As the foreword to the Sampler points out, the increasing change and variety in the use of worship forms and materials "is largely the result of the growing use of modern Bible translations.... In many of our schools the children are memorizing their Bible passages in the language of the *New International Version*."

Martin Luther in his introduction to the *Small Catechism* advised that "the preacher should take the utmost care to avoid changes or variations in the text and wording" of the six chief parts. To some extent one might say the same about the language of worship. Yet there are times in the history of the church when text and wording do change. One example was our synod's move from the German language to English.

With the growing use of the *New International Version* among us, we are called on to make changes in the language of worship. We are moving away from Elizabethan language to the language of the late 20th century. One of the goals of our new hymnal will be to again standardize the basic texts used in worship and instruction.

Some who object to the changes in the *Sampler* say that the language as revised is too plain and lacks dignity. In fact our English language today is less ornate compared with Shakespeare's day. The King James translation, made when Shakespeare was in his prime, is more literary than most contemporary Bible translations. There was opportunity for more variety in Elizabethan English. One example is the second person pronoun. The King James translation works with eight different forms of the second person pronoun: thou, thy, thee, thine, ye, you, your, yours. A modern translator is limited to three: you, your, yours. This results in language, which is flatter, tending to monotony when often used as in the liturgy. It is a price, which must be paid if we would speak the language of today.

Moving away from the familiar may have hidden benefits. The English author C. S. Lewis opines that "we must sometimes get away from the Authorized Version (King James) if for no other reason, simply because it is so beautiful and so solemn. Beauty exalts, but beauty also lulls. Early associations endear but they also confuse."

What is the proper language of worship! Our goal must be to use the best possible contemporary English. It must be language well crafted and expressive, yet readily understandable; there needs to be rhythm and balance; worship requires language which is vibrant, not drab and dull. The words we sing and speak in worship glorify the Lord of heaven and earth; they proclaim his saving gospel to people he loves. The language of worship needs to be the very best we can bring forth.

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MORE FOR YOUR MONEY

AUGUST 1987

Every convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod includes considerable discussion and debate on financial matters.

Delegates attending the convention in Watertown, Wisconsin during the first week in August can expect the same this year.

What the delegates and all members of the synod need to realize is the good return we are getting on the money we bring as offerings to the Lord for the total work of our church in the entire world. In the year 1986 we members of WELS contributed \$115,559,718 for all purposes. That figure includes what we gave for the support of all local congregations (\$93 million), for the work of the synod (\$14.7 million), and for many area educational and charitable agencies (\$6.2 million). An additional \$1.5 was given to Reaching Out.

Let's spell out in detail some of the things the \$115 million did:

- * supported the work of 1104 pastors and 1649 teachers
- * paid the expenses of 1190 congregations and 376 schools
- * constructed new churches, schools and parsonages or made debt payments on previous construction
- * supported 19 area Lutheran high schools, 3 synodical high schools, 2 synodical colleges, 1 seminary, and Wisconsin Lutheran College
- * funded 42 world missionaries and teachers and their ministries in various regions of the world
- * subsidized 211 mission churches in cities nationwide
- * maintained the administrative leadership and staff necessary to carry out this mission to the world
- * supported agencies of Christian social work

The \$115 million, which we contributed last year, is less than what several of the TV ministries received in 1986. For example, Jimmy Swaggart received \$140 million. Who got more for their money? Those who sent money to television evangelists or those who gave offerings to support their local congregations and the worldwide mission of our synod and other agencies?

No pastor or church leader is getting rich serving in WELS. Boards and committees of laymen, pastors and teachers elected at synodical conventions carefully account for our offerings. All are concerned with getting the most in kingdom work for the dollars spent.

More for your money--that is certainly true of the offerings contributed by the members of WELS. The average offering of each confirmed member in synod, whether teenager or on social security, was \$364.17 last year. Those dollars could not have been spent in any other way to bring a greater return. That's getting more for your money!

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

THE GIFT OF ADMINISTRATION OCTOBER 1987

One resolution approved at the recent convention of the Wisconsin Synod was to change the position title of "executive secretary" to "administrator." The vast majority of synod members will be unaware of this change, and it's not likely to cause even a ripple on the sea of congregational concerns. Only the changed title, and they will affect a few people working mostly at 2929 N. Mayfair Road in Milwaukee but slightly.

Yet there is something rather significant in that word "administrator." When Paul writes about the various spiritual gifts, which God has given to his church, he includes "those with gifts of administration" (1 Corinthians 12:28 NIV). The Greek word for administration is rooted in the idea of the "steersman" or "pilot" of a boat. The administrator is one who has his hand on the rudder and guides the path of the ship. One is easily persuaded that this is a rather important person.

Proverbs 11:14 makes the point as applied to the affairs of a nation: "For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisors make victory sure." Just as a nation needs administrators who will faithfully guide its business, so also does a synod and a local congregation. Members of congregations generally don't appreciate how many hours their pastors spend doing the work of an administrator. It is done behind the scenes with little fanfare and less appreciated than a well-preached sermon.

In the English word "administrator" lies buried the Latin "ministro" which means, "to serve, wait on; to tend; to execute, carry out (orders)." A good administrator is one who serves as an aid to a person or group. Administrators are vital if an organization is to function effectively.

Congregations expect of the synod a variety of services: trained workers for church and school, materials to aid evangelism and stewardship efforts, a vigorous mission outreach to the world's masses, help in cultivating and fostering the parish educational agencies. As more demands are made of an organization, more administrators become necessary.

Administrators are a gift of God to the church. Sometimes there is the temptation to pit the work of the local congregation against the work of the synod as guided by administrators who have been called or elected. There is no room in the church for an "us" against "them" posture. We're in this work together. Let's appreciate the gift of administrators. Once in a while we might even let them know we do.

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THANKSGIVING DAY DINNER NOVEMBER 1987

Dad and mom and the kids sitting around a table laden with the rich fruits of God's earth that will be the scene in many homes come Thanksgiving Day. All of us who have been privileged to share that experience treasure the memory.

Unfortunately the Thanksgiving Day dinner, where it still happens, is hardly characteristic of the way most Americans get their meals. The worthy and ancient ritual of the family dinner is rapidly becoming a thing of the past,

A psychologist with the Institute for Juvenile Research in Chicago says about the family dinners: "It's all but gone. People have gotten busier and busier. Meals in a lot of families are just everyone for himself.

"People more and more eat meals away from home and on the run. And even if they stay home to eat, food can be individually prepared quickly in a microwave to suit each family member's preference. And when mother does put a meal on the table for her family, her efforts just might be greeted with a chorus of complaints."

"People not having dinner together is a bad sign," observes a father whose family still struggles to maintain the practice. "When the family starts to fall apart, the whole country starts to fall apart." A family therapist agrees: "The breakdown of dinner is a symptom of the general disintegration of traditional family systems."

It's all part of what has been called the "uncoupling" of the family. There was a time when spouses would not think of going their own separate ways to eat. Now married people are going all sorts of places alone.

In a growing number of families there is no father to take his seat at the table with wife and children. And a young babysitter may replace even mother as she goes off to work. One-parent children are frequently poor students, sick more often, twice as likely to drop out of school short of graduation and apt to end up unemployed.

What's to be done? Talking and writing about the situation may seem to do little good. Nonetheless, people who see what is happening and who care about the welfare of others need to keep beating the drums of concern. We need also in our own lives to work against the divisive selfishness, which uncouples spouses and families.

As Christians we will appreciate anew the units, which God has created, for our good: family and church. Of husband and wife Jesus said: "They are no longer two, but one." And of the church Paul writes: "We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

Eating and drinking at the Lord's altar celebrates the oneness we have in Christ. Eating and drinking at the dinner table, whether on Thanksgiving Day or any other day, celebrates the blessed community of the family.

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ARE WEDDINGS TOO ELABORATE? JANUARY 1988

The middle of January hardly seems the time to ask questions about weddings. June is the favored month for lively wedding celebrations, not the dead of winter.

However, what finally comes to pass in June may well be on the drawing board in January or earlier. Now is as good a time as any to ask whether or not weddings, including receptions, are becoming too elaborate.

One does this with a degree of trepidation for fear of offending some reader. Couples may have a large number of friends and relatives whom they desire to invite to the celebration. Family traditions and customs often shape what is done at weddings and receptions. Feelings can be easily hurt.

There are those who will say that little expense should be spared in celebrating this significant and important day in a person's life. The danger is that too much thought and money is spent on the wedding, which lasts a day, and not enough planning goes into the marriage, which should last a lifetime. Some couples seem to believe that if they can "pull off" the wedding, they can "pull off" the marriage.

A good place to start in wedding planning is to focus primary attention on the marriage service rather than the reception. It sometimes happens that couples will first rent a facility for the reception and then see if the church and pastor are available for the chosen day. This is putting the cart before the horse. By the way, the hope is to include a Service of Christian Marriage in the new hymnal.

The concerns of the bride and groom to keep things simple are sometimes overwhelmed by their families' need to plan a memorable occasion. Couples may find themselves mired in constant haggling over the expanding dimensions of their wedding. The day itself, one that should be filled with joy and goodwill, becomes something to get over with.

Too often couples or their parents will spend more than they can really afford for the wedding and reception. This may be motivated in part by a desire "to keep up with the Joneses." Christian stewardship dictates that we live within our means and wisely manage the money God puts into our hands. Money spent for elaborate weddings might be better used in other ways.

One woman in looking back on her big day commented: "I will always treasure the memory of our wedding day, but not because of the money that was spent on the celebration; rather for the celebration of my husband's and my love and commitment to each other. If we had it to do over, our marriage celebration would be much simpler, more personal and less costly." Here is a person who likely feels that weddings generally are too elaborate. Do you agree?

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WE ARE ALL SINNERS MARCH 1988

It is a Bible teaching etched deeply in the memory of many: "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Each of us individually knows the truth of Paul's statement to the Roman Christians: we are all sinners. It is a truth not to be forgotten or belittled.

But does the fact that we are all sinners make all sins the same? I pose this question for the members of my adult membership class: "Are some sins greater than others in your opinion?" One reason for this question is to be able to explain that in God's sight there is no distinction between greater and lesser sins, no categories for sin labeled "mortal" and "venial." Sin is sin. The person who breaks even one of God's laws is a sinner.

But does this fact make all sins the same? A prominent political figure excused his own immoral actions by saying: "We are all sinners." He observed that some of the nation's most effective leaders "have not led perfect lives. We have never expected perfection from our leaders, and I don't think we should start now."

This statement obscures an important distinction. Sin as it affects a person's relationship with God must be distinguished from sin as it affects a person's relationship with other human beings in society. From a human point of view eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden would not be classified as a dreadfully wicked act; yet this "little" sin destroyed the perfect, holy relationship between God and the human race. In our relationship with God every sin, no matter how trifling, takes away from his glory.

But in our relationships with one another in this world not all sins are the same. The hateful word is not nearly so serious as the smoking gun. The inattentive participant in worship is not so harmful to the church as the treasurer who robs from the offerings. The political candidate will not be judged nearly so harshly because of broken campaign promises as for unfaithfulness to his wife.

Ben Franklin carried on a correspondence with the famous English preacher George Whitefield. In one letter Franklin expresses his pleasure to Whitefield for his "frequent opportunities of preaching among the great. If you can gain them to a good and exemplary life, wonderful changes will follow in the manners of the lower ranks."

Franklin knew well the truth of the maxim, which says that people will follow the example the king sets. Citizens of a nation do well to look for leaders who set high standards of personal morality. The truth that we are all sinners dare not become a trashcan in which to dispose of evil deeds.

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE MAY 1988

The reality spawning the name is calculated to send shivers down one's spine: "Shelter for Battered Women." We have such a facility in our town. Last year 93 women and 104 children made use of this refuge from violence.

FBI statistics show that every 18 seconds, somewhere in the United States, a woman is beaten. Twenty-five percent of all reported victims of domestic violence are pregnant women. Fifty percent of all injuries presented by women in emergency rooms are the result of battering. Eighty percent of all men in America's prisons were abused as children. Battered women who finally press charges have been attacked an average of 35 times. It is estimated that 2000 children die each year from abuse.

These are grim statistics and more of the same might be cited numbering the casualties from family battlefields. But the saddest commentary on domestic violence is the recent poll, which reports that 20 percent of all Americans approve of hitting a spouse on some occasions.

It is unlikely that domestic violence is on the rise; rather we are becoming more aware of what has been going on for centuries, oftentimes behind closed doors. There was a time when wife beating was tolerated if not encouraged. The common-law rule of thumb indicated that a husband had the right to whip his wife provided that he used a switch no bigger than his thumb,

And in 1890 the Supreme Court of North Carolina put legal sanction on wife abuse by acquitting a man of beating his spouse, choosing to ignore the entire episode with the following excuse: "... it is better to draw the curtain, shut out the public gaze, and leave the parties to forget and forgive."

Sometimes a husband will justify the abuse of his wife by suggesting that she had it coming: "She did not obey me." That is to make a travesty of the word, which has often been included in the woman's marriage vow. To say the least, it is a word subject to gross misunderstanding when seeking to describe the proper relationship between husband and wife.

A Wisconsin lawyer involved in prosecuting cases of domestic violence makes a startling statement: "Men use prisoner-of-war torture tactics on women as far as I'm concerned.... It's real common for men to wake up their wives numerous times during the night and harass them. It disorients them and as the women wear down and make 'mistakes' during the day, the men feel they can justify physical abuse."

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus speaks this beatitude: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). Here is a call for every Christian to fit one's feet with the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15). Let us root out all shapes of domestic violence from our own homes and reach out with love and concern to the battered of our world.

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FATHERS REMEMBERED

JUNE 1988

There it has stood for ten years, a small wooden tripod atop my file cabinet, its face bearing this brief prayer: Thank you God for sending Dad he's the best that one could have!

That some professional scribe employed by the manufacturer of knickknacks penned these words makes no difference. I've read them many a time because that small wooden tripod was selected by a thirteen-year-old daughter as her Father's Day gift.

There is something profoundly theological about this prayer. It says that the father God sent us is "the best that one could have." There is no choosing our fathers; God does the choosing. God gives us our fathers. It's for us to remember them with gratitude.

For some that's not hard to do. We've had fathers whom we remember with great affection. I had a father whom I remember as always keeping his word to me, one who had a cheery greeting for us children every morning, a father from whom I learned many a truth about the world around. Above all I remember a father who brought his children up "in the training and instruction of the Lord."

Ben Franklin remembered his father with appreciation. Franklin tells in his Autobiography how his father was much more interested in the "ingenious or useful topic for discourse" at the dinner table than in the "victuals" set before him. Franklin credits this for a lifelong indifference to the kind of food he might have to eat, preferring instead good conversation.

Not all fathers will be remembered quite so fondly. The 19th century American artist Andrew Jackson Grayson grew up in the bayous of Louisiana. He came to know birds well and to develop a talent for drawing them. But after a clash with his schoolmaster who caught him at drawing instead of his lessons, Grayson's stern father forbade him ever to draw birds again. It took twenty-five years and a move to California for Grayson to go against his father's will. He completed almost 170 masterful bird paintings in his later years and might have become as famous as Audubon if it were not for his father.

There are many children living today who remember no father at all or who are confused about their father's identity. They need to know the one Father who will never forsake them, the One who ever remembers them. It is only when we know our heavenly Father that any of us can say from the heart: "Thank you, God, for sending Dad; he's the best that one could have!"

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THE ROAD TO SUCCESS SEPTEMBER 1988

Alexander Pope, the 18th century English poet, penned a line, which has been often quoted: "Hope springs eternal in the human breast." That line came to mind as I listened to a gifted young woman address her classmates at their high school graduation. Hers was a message filled with promise: "We've laid the groundwork," she said; "now we have to build for the future. There's no set timetable for success, but eventually it will come to each of us."

As I looked out over the heads of the young men and women sitting in rows of chairs on the gymnasium floor, I wondered if this promise would be fulfilled: "Success will eventually come to each of us." Is success something we can necessarily expect? And will we know success when it happens!

A century ago the *San Francisco Examiner* published a poem considered by many to be the most popular in our country's history, a poem that celebrates not success but failure:

"Somewhere men are laughing, and little children shout; But there is no joy in Mudville--mighty Casey has struck out."

A young star of comic opera named De Wolf Hopper had much to do with making Casey's failure a part of American folklore. It is estimated that Hopper recited this poem 10,000 times before his death in 1935. Eventually the ballad was set to music, made into silent movies, and served as the plot for an opera called: "The Mighty Casey."

This poem was rewritten to make it a success story, to turn Casey into a hero, by having him smash out a home run in his last time at bat. But the happy ending never did catch on with people. Casey is loved for being a failure.

It's not that we don't prize success. Some years ago a young pastor asked with frustration in his voice: "What is success in ministry?" He was hardly the first to raise the question. And not only pastors want to be successful; so do persons in business, politicians, parents and teachers as well as church bodies and congregations. To measure success we sometimes set goals and evaluate our performance by them. Yet who can say if our goals were realistic and whether attaining them is really a measure of success! There persists that nagging fear that after all we have done, we are still failures.

It is good to aim for success; it is also good to learn to live with failure. Thank God, even failures can be loved. The example of Casey is a case in point. More convincing is the fact that Christ died for all the failures who ever lived. When we rest in this truth, then hope will spring eternal in our breast. The road to success that counts is via Christ.

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ON ELECTING A PRESIDENT OCTOBER 1988

Martin Luther calls attention to the importance of good government when in his *Large Catechism* he comments on the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer: "The greatest need of all is to pray for our civil authorities and the government, for chiefly through them does God provide us our daily bread and all the comforts of life. Although we have received from God all good things in abundance, we cannot retain any of them or enjoy them in security and happiness unless he gives us a stable, peaceful government."

Luther valued the blessing of government. Therefore he came down hard on the peasants who rebelled against the established authority in 1525. Though he sympathized with some of their grievances, he could not condone the violent measures they took to seek remedies.

Government is much on the minds of Americans as we pursue our task of electing a new president. The vast majority of political campaigns are marked by charge and countercharge, sometimes-extreme rhetoric, and often more heat than light. There will not be agreement among us as to which candidate will make the best president, who can best govern our nation.

Sometimes citizens genuinely fear for the nation's future if a particular candidate should be elected. Yet a fact often noticed is that the person who puts on the mantle of power will usually moderate extreme political positions.

Henry Adams, grandson of one American president and great-grandson of another, makes this point in his classic history of the administrations of Jefferson and Madison. During the War of 1812, after the British had sacked Washington torching both the capitol and the White House, Secretary of War James Monroe proposed a regular army of 100,000 men. Such a large national force appalled his dear friend Jefferson and flew in the face of the Virginian ideal of limited government.

Here Adams makes the trenchant observation: "As Jefferson lost the habits of power and became once more a Virginia planter, he reverted to the opinions and prejudices of his earlier life and of the society in which he lived. As Monroe grew accustomed to the exercise and the necessities of power, he threw aside Virginian ideas and accepted the responsibilities of government." A person chosen to govern will usually moderate extreme positions.

Some of our readers will work actively and fervently for the election of one of the presidential candidates. All of us will want to cast our vote for that person whom we believe is best qualified to govern. Whomever the nation chooses, he will be president of all the people. Let us have the confidence that God will use our newly elected president in answer to our prayers for daily bread.

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A GIFT SUGGESTION DECEMBER 1988

Advertisements litter the pages of our newspapers these days before Christmas. One finds a panoply of gift suggestions. There are even items "for the person" who has everything."

One out of the ordinary gift recommended especially for persons who might be traveling abroad is a nasty little volume titled *The Insult Dictionary*. It's for someone who feels cheated, frustrated or otherwise abused. Should one's dining experience be less than satisfactory, a couple of sample insults are: "Do you run your own hospital for people who eat here!" or "What lovely patterns those grease stains make on your shirt."

Why is it necessary to advertise gifts "for the person who has everything?" Because we obviously live in the midst of great material abundance, it sometimes makes shopping a genuine chore. Many people must throw out the old sweater to make room in the dresser for that new one.

And people do seem to be getting rid of old clothing at a record pace. A news item from the town of Champlain in upstate New York reports: "For the first time in its history, St. Mary's Mission Center is turning away donations of used clothing. ... The mission center is nearly full to the rafters with bags and barrels of used clothing. It has such a surplus; it is now forced to turn donations away. 'I never thought I would see the day that we would have to turn donations away, but we just don't have the room,' said a center spokesperson." Little wonder that knowing what gift to buy may become a real conundrum: people already have so much.

Do you need a last minute gift suggestion? It's for the person who already has much--or for the person who has little or nothing. It's not a gift, which requires a trip to the jammed shopping mall to jostle with the crowds. It's a gift quite expensive but not in dollars and cents.

The gift is simply yourself, you, a child of God. Many people out there need you: spouse, children, parents, aunts and uncles, friends, fellow workers, members of your church, neighbors, and chance acquaintances. The list goes on and on.

Christmas is a lonely time for many people. Getting through the holidays can be especially hard for someone who has lost a loved one by death or been recently divorced or who is struggling with an addiction problem. These are people who need people. They need love and goodness, a word of encouragement, an expression of caring.

To give oneself is to do what God did that first Christmas. His gift to the world was nothing material. His gift was a person, the Word made flesh, God's communication of love and goodness. He responded to human sin not with an insult but with a gift. Here's a gift suggestion to take to heart.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

WORSHIP THAT MATTERS FEBRUARY 1989

This past October worship leaders gathered in Philadelphia to mark the 100th anniversary of the "Common Service." This liturgy is essentially "The Order of Holy Communion" familiar to us from *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Those attending the conference spent time assessing the current state of worship. According to one report "many participants agreed that there has been a loss of reverence or a 'sense of the holy' in recent practice. Some said this trend is not a product of the current liturgy texts as much as it is an importation of the wider culture."

The "wider culture" generally calls for what is contemporary, what is new and different, what is exciting, what is people-centered. To satisfy the "wider culture" worship tends to become "folksy." It is characterized by congeniality and affability with a consequent loss of the transcendent. For the sake of the crowd, God is crowded out.

Liturgical forms like the "Common Service" do not measure up to the expectations of the "wider culture." They are judged to be boring. A Lutheran worship leader agrees: "All corporate, liturgical worship is boring---just as a waterfall is boring into a rock underneath it. Sooner or later, the water will wear down the rock or bore through it. In like manner the liturgy with its sameness of form based on the word wears down the walls of our forgetfulness, of our isolation, of our hurts, of our puny efforts in God's kingdom."

Liturgical worship keeps saying the same thing again and again even if it seems no one is paying any attention. I am reminded of the story about an old Jewish fool who ran through his town proclaiming the truth to scoffers who were totally unimpressed with what he had to say. When a friend asked why he kept talking to people whom he knew would never change, he answered: "Don't you see: not in hope of changing them, my friend, but rather so that at least, at least, at least they won't change me." In the liturgy we keep repeating the same old truths so that at least the wider culture does not change us.

In a recent issue of *The Lutheran* a woman who was church shopping reports that some pastors she heard "were excessively cute, playing the crowd for laughs like a stand-up comic." She looks to the sermon "as a source of spiritual nourishment and renewal." Such sermons will of necessity be the result of prayerful grappling with the word of God and manifest a "sense of the holy." And there will be worship orders which support such preaching rather than detract from it.

One might be tempted to wish for worship which is totally new and different, something judged to be really exciting. But if as a result there is the loss of reverence and a "sense of the holy," then we have paid too great a price. What matters in worship is that God's truth is proclaimed and that he is glorified.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

OUTREACH IS HARD WORK MARCH 1989

We do almost nothing for the truly "unchurched." The speaker was the director of the National Catholic Evangelization Association. He went on to charge that 99 percent of U.S. Catholic parishes consciously choose not to try to reach the average of 4000 unchurched people who live in each parish. "The vast majority of our time, effort and money is spent on maintaining the faith of the active."

Pollster George Gallup reports that in the last ten years the number of Americans described as "unchurched" has increased from 41 to 44 percent. These unchurched people are all around us: relatives, friends, neighbors, co-workers, chance acquaintances. Are we reaching out to them?

Outreach is hard work. It's hard because of the sinful nature of those to whom we would bring the gospel of life. Take an extreme example: a 22-year-old drifter cut off his burglary victim's head on a whim and used the blood to write the word "redrum" on the apartment wall. That's "murder" spelled backwards. Here is only one of many caught in the web of crime and drugs, one of many with a perverted moral outlook. Yet here is one for whom Christ died, one who needs to be reached with the gospel.

Outreach is hard work because of our own sinful nature. We know our failings and shortcomings. We feel inadequate to be witnesses for Jesus Christ when by word and deed we bring shame to his name. How dare we talk to another person about faith when we are so often weak?

Outreach is hard work because there may be little response (or negative response) to the words we speak. The results seem not to be worth the effort we put forth. Rather than risk being discouraged, we do nothing at all.

Outreach is hard work. But that's not unique to the 20th century. Consider Jesus and his apostles: they met rejection, persecution and death. Yet they kept at the task of reaching out with the word. The first Lutheran missionaries to India in the early 1700s faced tremendous obstacles. But that did not keep them from pursuing their mission of touching people of another culture with the love of Christ.

Outreach is hard work, but we dare not overlook what we have going for us. We have the freedom to confess our faith without fear of reprisal from our government. We come into contact with people who for the most part speak our own language. And though there are many unchurched people, only four percent of Americans think that religion is unimportant. There are people with spiritual needs just waiting to be satisfied.

We know the good news of Good Friday and Easter Sunday. We have been reclaimed by Christ as his own dear children through baptism. We have been nourished by word and sacrament. The promised help of the Holy Spirit is ours to seize. Outreach is hard work. But we can do it.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

PASTORAL BURNOUT MAY 1989

In recent years there has been a rash of books and articles on the subject of personal stress. There seems to be little question that stress factors in our lives today are much greater than those of fifty years ago. A term often used to describe the end result of too much stress is "burnout."

Burnout is happening also to pastors. In my files I have an essay written in 1985 by a WELS pastor with the rather plaintive title: "Clergy Stress and Burnout or All Stressed Up and No Place to Blow."

This is not a problem for the congregations of our synod to dismiss lightly. The pastor who experiences burnout will not only suffer personal pain and likely bring distress to his family; his trauma will hinder the mission of the church. And we as a synod can ill afford losing pastors to burnout when a serious pastoral shortage is looming.

What's to be done? Much has been written and said suggesting remedies for the problem of pastoral burnout. I'd like to focus on one area of pastoral ministry which seems to me to contribute significantly to producing stress: counseling. I believe that pastors must be careful about becoming too deeply involved in a ministry of personal counseling. And members of congregations do well not to make unrealistic demands on their pastors in this area of ministry.

Our church council is presently studying a book with the subtitle: "Ways to Create a Caring Congregational Fellowship." The author certainly emphasizes the importance of effective pastoral care. Yet he makes this important point: "The crucial message here seems to be that pastors should make a caring ministry possible, yet not be dominated by the need to do the majority of that caring ministry themselves."

An extensive ministry of personal counseling has some built-in dangers: 1) a pastor may give so much time to a few individuals with problems that the larger calling of preaching and teaching the word of God is neglected or slighted; 2) a pastor may be tempted to become too intimately involved with a person he is counseling, leading to sins against the sixth commandment; 3) a pastor who is skilled as a helper but does not limit his counseling ministry will shortly be overwhelmed with people who desire this service.

The pastor's first concern must always be preparation for the corporate, public worship of the church. One needs to trust that the preaching and teaching of the word of God will eventually bear fruit in the individual lives of members. Luther told his Wittenberg congregation: "While I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emp&ror ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the word did everything."

A pastor needs to conduct his ministry with that same confidence in the effectiveness of the word of God. This will do much to lessen the threat of pastoral burnout.

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THE WORST EFFECT OF TELEVISION JUNE 1989

One of the questions in our adult membership study book is this: "What bad effects may television have on family life?" Class members usually have little difficulty responding and will likely lament what they see as the "evils" of television.

No doubt television has contributed much to the moral decay evident in our world. What viewers witness on television does shape attitudes on questions of right and wrong. But seemingly less obvious to most people is the bad effect which television advertising has.

Advertising has become really big business. Ads are growing in number and intensity. In newspapers 65 percent of the pages are now ads. Advertising has replaced subscriptions as the main source of newspaper and magazine revenue. In fact there are magazines which no longer are simply supported by advertising; they actually exist for the sake of advertising--the rest is filler. There are studies which suggest that advertising is the essential cultural influence of our time.

And television is getting a big piece of the action. A minute of television time costs advertisers thousands of dollars. As a result 15 second commercials are becoming common. Yet researchers are finding that shorter ads with speeded-up voices are better retained by the human brain than longer, slower ones.

One reason short ads work is because the trend is to get away from giving factual information about a product; rather the goal is to create a mood." A survey listed 14 possible items of information about a product (price, quality of performance, etc.) which might be mentioned in an advertisement. Over half the television ads in a single night's viewing did not contain a single informational item. Only one percent contained three or more. Fourteen percent of magazine ads contained no such information at all.

Advertising seems to work because it plays more on people's fantasies than by presenting reality. Notice the "dream world" pictured in many ads on television. Lottery sales are fueled by ad writers who create visions of opulence. There is no mention of the odds against winning. In a beer commercial one does not hear of the dreadful cost to our society by the abuse of alcohol. Viewers are not made aware of the strain put on marriage and family life by persons enticed to achieving the so-called "better life."

No one should be surprised at the growing materialism of .Americans. Higher education is valued by the majority of today's students as a way to make more money. The stock market has become the leading barometer as to how well we are doing as a nation.

Jesus put it bluntly: "You cannot serve both God and money." Television advertising sounds the message of materialism: "If that's the choice, then God must go." That's the worst effect of television.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

**THE WELS HYMNAL PROJECT
SEPTEMBER 1989**

I remember vividly one of my childhood birthday gifts. It was a small black book, the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn Book*. This was one of the predecessors of *The Lutheran Hymnal* which came out in 1941. I recall how excited I was to have my very own hymnal.

Another birthday remembrance of mine comes a few years later. As the day drew to a close my mother offered me the choice of a last birthday favor before I was off to bed. I asked her to play on the piano what was then my favorite hymn: "Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying." (TLH 609)

I recount these two incidents so that you readers will know that I've had a love affair with hymns and hymnals for many years. Now it is my privilege to serve on the joint Hymnal Committee of our synod.

Recently the hymnal project director made available to us on the committee a sampling of the many letters which he has received in recent months since the publication of the master hymn list. Many of the letter writers are also readers of the *Northwestern Lutheran*, I'm sure. So I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you for writing. We are reading your comments.

But you need to understand that when it comes to matters like favorite hymns and what should be included in our new hymnal, there will be great differences of opinion. Let me give you a few examples.

One writer says: "If song 533 ("Nearer My God to Thee") is not in the new hymnal that would be the work of the devil." But another writer is dismayed over the possibility of including that hymn, calling it "almost pantheistic."

Several letters are critical of efforts to use inclusive language where possible when revising hymn texts. But someone else rejoices: "Hooray for inclusive language. 'Men' is no longer a synonym for 'people.' "

One person finds it irritating "when required to stumble through the *Venite* and *Te Deum* ... I hope the new hymnal will omit them." The very next letter says: "We like the Order of Matins in the old hymnal, especially the *Venite*."

There are any number of people who want to be rid of as many "German" hymns as possible, often judging them to be unemotional, boring, and hard to sing. Yet other writers bemoan the omission of a few of the standard Lutheran chorales on the master list and plead for the committee to find a place for them. And so it goes.

One thing I learned early on in this project: no one will be perfectly pleased with the new hymnal, not even myself. But I do hope that somewhere there is a boy or girl who one day will be thrilled to unwrap a copy of our new hymnal as a birthday gift. May God speed the day!

Pastor Victor Prange who serves at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin, is chairman of the Commission on Worship and chairman of the Joint Hymnal Committee.

A WORLD OF MINISTRY OCTOBER 1989

From the pen of Martin Luther: "The idea that service to God should have to do only with a church ... is without doubt the worst trick of the devil." The author of the six part series of articles titled "Everyone a Minister" published earlier this year in the Northwestern Lutheran quoted this statement of Luther.

There is a growing emphasis these days on the priesthood of all believers, that every Christian is indeed a minister. The danger is, however, that this ministry be conceived as service mainly within the local congregation or the synod: Sunday school teacher, church council or Ladies Aid member, serving on the evangelism committee or synodical board and the like. Luther castigates such a "narrow conception" of ministry: "The whole world could abound with services to the Lord--not only in churches but also in the home, kitchen, workshop, field."

Not that serving in "churchly" callings is unimportant or unnecessary. Christian men and women willing to give time and energy to such kinds of ministries are vital to the local congregation and the synod. But there's much more to ministry than what happens in church.

Luther was fond of stressing that whatever our earthly vocation, that was our ministry from God, our call. Even if one's vocation was village hangman, that was a ministry to be carried out as a call from the Lord.

Fathers and mothers have an awesome ministry within their own families. That might include such a menial task as father washing diapers. In an essay on the "Estate of Marriage" Luther makes this very point: "When a father goes ahead and washes diapers ... and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool ... God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling--not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith."

Sometimes one's ministry is to a person troubled, sick, or depressed. This may mean nothing more than being a good listener. It is not unusual for persons to find emotional healing through the ministry of a sympathetic Christian neighbor where professional counselors fail.

On occasion the church member who seems only to "pay, pray, and obey" is demeaned. Yet these works are a legitimate demonstration of Christian faith. Working at a job earning money to support family, church, and government is Christian ministry.

John Milton, the English poet, chafed under the burden of his deepening blindness. He bemoaned his inability to put his considerable talent to full use. In the end he learned that "they also serve who only stand and wait." There is a whole world of ministry out there. Let's seize our opportunities!

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

WHAT CHRISTMAS IS ALL ABOUT DECEMBER 1989

The news out of Hutzel Hospital in Detroit was grim. Tests showed that 42.7 percent of its newborn babies were exposed to drugs while in their mothers' wombs. Doctors had guessed that the figure was nearer 20 percent. The director of the Michigan Department of Public Health commented: "We are not talking about a medical problem. We are talking about a societal problem. We already know that children who get off to a bad start tend to have problems later in life. These babies have lost the battle before they were even born."

Here in microcosm one sees the devastating effect of human sin, one more piece of evidence that our world is a mess. Recently I attended a meeting of church leaders where we were asked to list contemporary issues that make ministry difficult. We ended up with a list far too long to recite here. I'm sure you readers could construct your own lists of what is wrong in our world.

Someone who described vividly the ugliness of human character was Flannery O'Connor. At her farm home in central Georgia she wrote short stories and a couple of novels from the perspective of her Roman Catholic faith. Her first collection of short stories was titled: *A Good Man Is Hard To Find*. She called her book "nine stories about original sin." And grim tales they are.

In all this the temptation for the church is to imagine that it is our mission to clean up the mess in our world. Early in this century some church leaders promoted a "social gospel" movement whose goal was to right the wrongs of our society. It hasn't worked.

Flannery O'Connor had a clearer vision: "I see everything as beginning with original sin, taking in the redemption, and reckoning on a final judgment." She had no illusions that this world could be fixed by any amount of human effort. She saw her role as a Catholic novelist in the South as helping people to know that "evil is not simply a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be endured."

Though she suffered greatly from a debilitating disease which took her life at age thirty-nine, she was not without hope and good humor. She knew the mess and the misery. But she knew also "the central Christian mystery: that (human life) has, for all its horror, been found by God to be worth dying for."

That's what Christmas is all about. It's about Jesus who was born into this mess of human life. It's about the Son of God who lived among sinners and died for us sinners. It's about God's way of righting the wrongs of this world. It's about faith which trusts God's word of pardon and peace and hope. It's our mission as the church to celebrate this good news in our worship and share it with the world. That's what Christmas is all about.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

A CURE FOR MATERIALISM

FEBRUARY 1990

Rich Feldman was a student at the University of Michigan in the late '60s where he became involved in a number of radical protest movements. Later he joined with thirty-five others in going to work at various auto manufacturing plants. "Our goal," he explains, "was to learn from the people, to learn about life and what was necessary to contribute to change, overthrowing the entire system."

After spending eighteen years working in the paint shop of an assembly line plant, Feldman co-authored a book reporting his experiences. He learned early on that his fellow laborers were not really interested in changing how things were done. "All they really wanted was a raise in order to buy a new van or boat."

Feldman concludes that he had been a naive idealist. "I didn't realize how deep-seated materialism was in American society, not just in the middle class, but in the working class as well." In the end he came to realize "that people really would trade their lives for dollars."

What this radical, turned auto worker, discovered about human nature is starkly illustrated by one of America's fastest growing industries: gambling. There is a gambling mania loose in the land. What fuels the mania is materialism, the desire for bucks, the bigger the better.

It is estimated that in 1988 Americans wagered \$241 billion legally and illegally. That's almost \$1,000 bet for every man, woman, and child in the country. Attitudes toward gambling are changing due to the widespread promotion of state-run lotteries. A traveler can drive from Maine to California and play lottery in every state along the way.

Playing the lottery is nearly the same as throwing money out a car window. In a \$115 million Pennsylvania lottery drawing, a ticket buyer was more likely to survive 88 rounds of Russian roulette (one chamber in six loaded with a bullet) than to win any money. Yet people keep lining up to buy lottery tickets at a record pace.

Rich Feldman uncovered materialism in the working place but not its cure. There is only one cure: the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul lifted high the cross "through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14).

We members of the WELS have an opportunity to use our money for something far more rewarding than playing the lottery or even buying vans and boats. We have the opportunity with our dollars to lift high the cross. Elsewhere in this issue you will read of the plans for this \$16 million offering.

There is only one way to change people's lives, to change their thinking about what really counts. There is only one cure for materialism. Only the cross of Christ will do that. Let's all take part in this effort to lift high the cross.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

WHATEVER BECAME OF SIN? MARCH 1990

Some years ago the prominent psychiatrist Karl Menninger came out with a book which asked the question: *Whatever Became of Sin?* The author titled his third chapter: "The Disappearance of Sin: An Eyewitness Account." It disturbed Menninger that the word "sin" was vanishing from the vocabulary of so many. His book details the fact that sin is very much alive and flourishing.

In a recent interview Tom Wolfe, author of the best-selling novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, lists three things as paramount in the life of New York City in the '80s. Second on his list "is this business of license in the sense of freedom to do whatever you want, whether it's accumulating mistresses, making money, or simply acting unethically without having to pay the consequences." No question about it, there's plenty of sin around.

All of which causes a large measure of frustration and even depression for people who see their roles as doing something about sin. That includes Christian pastors and teachers. Pastors are troubled because their confirmation instruction sometimes seems to have so little effect in the lives of the young Christians who sit in their classes. What's wrong? Questions are asked: "Aren't we hitting the subject of sin hard enough? Are we failing to sufficiently emphasize the law?"

Karl Menninger believed that the responsibility for doing something about sin rests with us human beings. Near the end of his book he offers this challenge: "If we believe in sin-*as I do*-we believe in our personal responsibility for trying to correct it, and thereby saving ourselves and our world." This statement displays an abysmal ignorance of what a truly diabolical power sin is in ourselves and our world.

Martin Luther was acutely conscious of the human bondage to sin. But he knew also that no amount of human effort could free one from this slavery or correct the problem of sin. And he warned against those who supposed that the remedy for sin is to regard Christ as the teacher of a new law. In his commentary on Galatians Luther asserts: "Christ is not Moses, not a taskmaster or a lawgiver. He is the Dispenser of grace, the Savior, and the Pitier."

Luther focused on Christ and his cross as the only solution for sin. "Just as we cannot deny that we are all sinners ... so we cannot deny that Christ died for our sins in order that we might be justified. For he did not die to make the righteous righteous; he died to make sinners into righteous men, the friends and sons of God, and heirs of all heavenly gifts."

Because sin is so rampant in our world, we need all the more to focus on the cross. The Lenten season affords a marvelous opportunity to do just that. Don't yawn if once more you hear sermons and sing hymns centering on the cross. Rather rejoice! For only at the foot of the cross will one be able rightly to answer the question: whatever became of sin?

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

IN DEFENSE OF THE LITURGY

MAY 1990

There are few things I enjoy more than worship talk. On occasion, when engaged in conversation, friends who've heard enough about hymn texts and tunes will gently urge a change of subject.

Because I like exchanging views about worship, I've appreciated the letters which have appeared in the Northwestern Lutheran on that topic. It's great that so many people have shown their interest by taking the time to sound off about worship.

Not that I agree with everything written (just as some of you won't agree with what I write). There were letter writers who expressed a strong distaste for the liturgy. It was scored as being "repetitive, boring, and non-exciting." The complaint was voiced that "dictating how every minute of a service is to be doesn't allow for the flame of faith to expand." Not a few people judge our liturgy a minus in mission congregations and for visitors who worship with us.

I beg to differ. I believe that using our liturgy gives us the best of two worlds: structure and variety. We need structure in our lives. That's especially true when we do things together. Worship needs structure, some kind of order. Our liturgy provides that structure of confession of sins, prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. Worshipers know where they are, and where they are going.

Within the structure of the liturgy there is opportunity for variety: hymns, readings, sermon, prayers. Each Sunday and festival day is different as we move through the life of Christ and the life of the church. With imaginative planning there is no limit to the variety which can be expressed within the basic structure of the liturgy.

Now obviously our liturgy must be taught and interpreted. This can be done in adult membership classes, children's confirmation classes, Bible classes, and in sermons when the opportunity presents itself. Those who visit the homes of first-time worshipers might well consider carrying along a hymnal.

The WELS joint Hymnal Committee is determined to make our new hymnal as "user-friendly" as possible. The goal is to avoid clutter and to insure that the parts of the service follow in an orderly way with clear directions. Yet, while striving for simplicity, there needs to remain in the liturgy a sense of mystery and awe. For we stand in the presence of holy God.

The line from a prayer by the church father Augustine says well what should happen in worship: "We bring our work to be sanctified, our wounds to be healed, our sins to be forgiven, our hopes to be renewed, our better selves to be enlivened." All of this the liturgy does.

Pastor Victor Prange who serves at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin, is chairman of the Commission on Worship and chairman of the Joint Hymnal Committee.

HAPPY FATHER'S DAY JUNE 1990

Fathers are getting a bad press these days. When marriages fail or when children go astray, more likely than not it seems that the finger of blame is pointed at father. He is scored for being too often absent from the home and content to leave the task of child-raising to mother.

In cases of divorce, when judges decide which parent should have custody of children, nine times out of ten it won't be the father. For any number of reasons he is usually regarded as the parent less likely to do a good job of caring for his children. Father is the one who gets the children on weekends. And along with the children may come a steady barrage of hostile criticism from his ex-spouse.

Sometimes it is said of a father: "All he does each week is bring home the pay check." Perhaps the father who "only" brings home the pay check each week needs to hear a word of commendation rather than a recital of what else he should be doing.

We hear that a mother's work is never done, that being a mother is a really tough job. And there's no denying the truth of this assertion. At the same time it needs saying that being a father is no easy task. His workplace may be filled with tension and strife. Just getting to work has its own difficulties for some. Temptations to sin are all around. Finding no appreciation on his arrival home will only magnify feelings of guilt at being a less than adequate husband and father.

Those to whom God has given the responsibility of parenting children will not lack for opportunities to find fault with each other's performance. Spouses especially need to take to heart the question asked by Jesus: "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's (spouse's) eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" Far better to build up one another in love than to mark each shortcoming.

Because parenting is so important and so demanding, fathers and mothers will together want to work at improving their skills and strive to do a better job. I found helpful a list of suggestions for fathers which I came across years ago and taped to the inside front cover of my Bible. Here's the list unedited:

1. Love abundantly
2. Discipline constructively
3. Be clear, consistent, and authoritative
4. Punish in private
5. Be flexible, reasonable, and understanding
6. Discourage continued dependency
7. Spend time together
8. Develop mutual respect
9. Really listen
10. Tend to personal and marital needs

And to all of you who are so blessed: Happy Father's Day!

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

ADIAPHORA

FEBRUARY 1992

If you don't know what the word "adiaphora" means, don't feel bad. I went to my 1500 page desk dictionary and did not even find the word listed. I had to go to my unabridged dictionary to check the word out.

"Adiaphora" is the plural form of "adiaphoron," a word which means "a matter of indifference in religion or morals." The dictionary includes a separate theological definition: "a ceremonial or ritualistic observance neither forbidden nor commanded by the Scriptures, and on that account held to be an affair of the individual conscience."

"Adiaphora" is an important word to know and understand when the subject of worship comes up. In worship there are some things which dare never be adiaphora. That the word of God is preached in all its truth is not an adiaphoron; that the sacraments are administered according to Christ's command is not an adiaphoron. But many things in worship are adiaphora, things neither right nor wrong.

Reading the comments of those who participated in the trial use of the new communion service last fall demonstrates how judgments differ about forms of worship. An organist wrote: "I thought, 'Oh no, just what we need, another liturgy to learn.' However, after playing the melodies and singing along during the services, I think it's terrific. . . . Please include this in the new hymnal." An opposite opinion was voiced by the person who wrote: "If services will continue like this, I will find another church."

Many comments were very brief. "Keep it--really new and better. . . . Like this liturgy! . . . A complete negative. . . . Drop it!" Some judged the liturgy to be too Roman Catholic. One respondent questioned why we should "go the way of the world."

Remember that word "adiaphora" when such varied opinions are expressed about an order of worship. Always keep in mind that the exact wording of our liturgies is not prescribed by God. The melodies for our hymns and chants were not handed down from heaven. These are matters of adiaphora. Individual Christians will differ in their opinions about such matters.

When it comes to matters of adiaphora, one does need to recall the words of the apostle Paul: "Everything is permissible--but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others" (1 Corinthians 10:23).

It's important when introducing new words and music in worship to go slowly, to take a little at a time, and furnish as much help as possible to anyone who might be experiencing difficulty in learning the unfamiliar. The reason why our synod resolved to produce a new hymnal was to improve the worship life of our congregations. But it is going to take time--perhaps five or ten years--to become familiar and comfortable with some of the new worship materials.

When our new hymnal is introduced in the summer of 1993, please remember that word "adiaphora." It may come in handy.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin, and chairman of the synod's Commission on Worship and the Joint Hymnal Committee.

THE RELIGION OF THE LODGE

APRIL 1992

Each month a copy of the *Moose Magazine* is delivered to our home. Some years ago I corresponded with an executive of the Moose Lodge and as a result was put on the mailing list to receive complimentary copy of the magazine.

The Loyal Order of Moose is one of the so-called "animal lodges" along with the Elks and the Eagles. These fraternal orders stress the social aspects of membership: the good time. Many lodges have some insurance benefits.

The Loyal Order of Moose also does some religious teaching. A recent issue of the *Moose Magazine* included an article titled "The Roots of Moose Fraternalism." The author makes the point that the founders of this fraternity "were guided by humanitarian principles based upon their belief in a Supreme Being." He states that "the early Moose fraternalists were serious students of the Biblical Scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments" and that "their principles, values, and ethics became based on the Scriptures." They felt compelled to "put into practice God's humanitarian guidelines."

These guidelines are summed up in this statement: "Moose law is the law of divine love condensed into one brief sentence, 'Do unto others as you would that they do unto you.'" The author concludes his article by stating that the Loyal Order of Moose has been kept strong, healthy, and productive because the members of this fraternity continue to believe in the Moose doctrine of the "Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man."

On first reading an article like this, some might be impressed with the religious teachings of the lodge as expressed here. We Christians teach the law of love and stress the importance of doing good to one another.

But careful reflection will reveal some glaring omissions of biblical teaching. One hears nothing about sin and its damning consequences or of the need to repent. The religion of the lodge judges people to be basically good and able to do what is right if only they try hard enough.

Obviously if sin is not a problem, there is no need of a Savior from sin. Jesus is presented as a very good person whose example people ought to follow and not as the Savior from sin. One nowhere hears words like those of John the Baptist: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." The cross is altogether missing in the religious teaching of the lodge.

The central truth of the Bible is not condensed in the sentence: "Do unto others as you would that they do unto you." The central truth of the Bible is condensed in the sentence "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." That good news won't be found in the religion of the lodge.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

LEARNING TO LISTEN MAY 1992

Parents sometimes lament that their children don't know how to listen. But that's hardly a malady which affects only children. Listening does not come naturally to any of us. All of us can improve our listening skills.

First of all we must learn to listen to God. That means getting into his word and really hearing what God is saying. We have to be quiet and not be busy with our own talk and activity. We need to stop doing what we are doing. Listening demands total concentration.

When we listen to God, we will hear him speak law and gospel. We will hear words which condemn us for our sins. We will hear promises which offer forgiveness and encourage hope. The person who has learned to listen to God will be richly blessed.

Listening to God is most important in our lives. But what we sometimes fail to realize is the importance of listening to our brothers and sisters, whether they be members of our own family, our local church, or perhaps persons we don't know very well.

Some years ago I read words of a wise Christian pastor which have stuck with me. He observed: "Just as love to God begins with listening to his word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. He who can no longer listen to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God either."

The first letter of John has a similar thought: "For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen." To listen to a brother or sister is to show love to that person.

I make these comments in the context of a number of criticisms which have been received concerning the "letters" page. Some of the readers of *Northwestern Lutheran* feel this page should no longer appear, that letters for publication should not be accepted.

In my opinion, having a letters page is good. I believe the vast majority of people who write letters to *Northwestern Lutheran* are my Christian brothers and sisters. (I would be hard pressed to point out any letter written by an unbeliever.) I want to learn to listen to them.

At times this listening is difficult, because I don't like what I am hearing. Maybe the writer of the letter is expressing an opinion which differs from my own. Or maybe the letter writer shows a lack of understanding which is the result of poor communication or teaching, and this troubles me.

I believe it is good to give the readers of *Northwestern Lutheran* the opportunity to have their say. Quite often their letters will reveal insights or express a point of view which one needs to consider. Let's put the readers forum page into the context of listening. Learning to listen is good for all of us.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin, and a member of the Editorial Commission for Northwestern Lutheran.

A LESSON FROM THE CHICAGO FLOOD JUNE 1992

For lack of a minor repair the Chicago loop was shut down the week before Easter at a cost of millions of dollars. A cable company survey crew had earlier reported knee-deep silt and water leaking through the crumbling walls of an old underground freight tunnel, but repairs were put on hold. The maintenance work was not done and disaster struck. Examples could be multiplied of what happens to buildings and airplanes and highways when maintenance is neglected.

The dictionary says maintenance is "the action of continuing to keep things going rather than to create anew." Keeping things going rather than creating anew is not very exciting. Chicago's leaders were much more interested in the plans for a spanking new third airport than in what was happening to crumbling underground structures nearly a century old.

But it's not only underground tunnels and church roofs which need to be maintained. So do structures like faith and family and personal relationships. That's where worship and Bible study come in. That's why the family gathered for devotions or a single person at prayer is so important. Our faith is in need of daily maintenance.

So are marriages. Couples deeply in love on their wedding day wonder why six months later their relationship has deteriorated. The problem may be a lack of maintenance. The little acts of kindness so important in the courting days are often neglected once the routine of married life sets in.

Love and understanding are two of the most important ingredients in maintaining personal relationships. The father or mother who shouts at the screaming child in the store, "You quiet down or I'll give you something to cry about," is showing little of either. How much better to hug the child and seek to understand the problem.

Pastors need to be especially good at maintenance ministry. Members of congregations often put up with less than inspiring preaching as long as those important little things are done: the telephone call returned, the sick person visited, tactful patience demonstrated, confidentiality guarded.

Relationships are maintained by sharing the joys and sorrows of life. A mother told of sending her young son to the store. When he didn't return as soon as she had anticipated, she ran out to look for him and found him skipping up the street singing. "Where have you been?" she asked. "Well," he began, "Susie dropped her doll and it broke." His mother interrupted, "And you had to stay and help her pick it up?" "No, mommy," he explained. "I had to stay and help her cry."

Each day we have opportunities to maintain good relations with the people around us. Chicago found out what happens when maintenance is neglected. Take a lesson from the Chicago flood.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

THE GOLDEN AGE IS NOT ALWAYS SO GOLDEN MARCH 1993

Several readers remarked to me that the photograph which appeared for the first time with this column in the December issue of *Northwestern Lutheran* made me look old. In truth, since the previous photograph was taken, I have aged. And, dear reader, whether you like it or not, so have you.

At least by some people's reckoning (the threshold is not plainly marked), I've become a golden ager. Life in these golden years conjures up in TV commercials a picture of idyllic relaxation on golf greens and shuffleboard courts, carefree days of retirement filled with happiness and contentment.

The fact is the golden age is not always so golden. That's the conclusion one must draw from a recently released survey by the Gallup organization as reported in the *Chicago Tribune*. It found Americans over the age of 60 often depressed by feelings of worthlessness in a youth-oriented society, fearing a future of lost control over their lives, and killing themselves in record numbers.

The survey indicates that six percent, or a statistical projection of 600,000, have considered suicide and that senior citizens, who make up 26 percent of the US population, actually commit 39 percent of its suicides. Of elderly people who reported suicidal thoughts in the survey, one-third cited loneliness as the motive, and 10 percent gave financial problems, bad health, and depression as reasons.

The aging process is not just happening out there in society; it's happening within our congregations and families. Most religious denominations in the United States report that persons over the age of 65 make up a higher percentage of their membership than in the general population.

The golden age is not so golden for many of our fellow believers. They face the same problems as those surveyed by Gallup. There's a mission here for members of our congregations. If you want suggestions as to what you might do to help, contact our synod's Commission on Special Ministries at 2929 N Mayfair Road, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398.

One of the secrets of getting through difficult times is to look ahead. Prepare for what is coming. Old age never comes suddenly. Usually when people talk about getting ready for old age, they mean financial readiness. We act as if someone who is without money problems really has no problems.

Preparing for old age means getting ready spiritually for days of possible loneliness and pain. It means accepting the fact that we are getting older. It means developing in our younger years the spiritual discipline of living daily in the word of God and prayer.

As physical powers decline, the aging process offers an opportunity for growth in faith and life. Luther suggests in his Large Catechism that the longer we live, the more gentle, patient, and meek we ought to become, the more freed from greed, hatred, envy, and pride. To become that kind of person is to be a golden ager.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

OUR NEW HYMNAL--BLESSED BY GOD JUNE 1993

In August, at the 52nd biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* will be used for the first time. Shortly thereafter shipment of hymnal orders to congregations will begin. In October, meetings in all districts of the synod will supply information about the hymnal and suggest a plan for introducing it in the congregation. On November 28, the first Sunday in Advent, congregations are encouraged to use their new hymnals in worship for the first time.

Ten years ago the synod convention resolved: "That the synod now begin work on a new/revised hymnal of its own, one that under the blessings of God will be scripturally sound and edifying, welcomed and judged to be highly satisfactory for purposes of devotion and worship by a majority of our members, in harmony with the character and heritage of our church body, and will reflect the larger perspective and mainstream of the worship of the Christian church."

A significant phrase in this resolution is: "under the blessings of God." Those of us who were privileged to serve as members of the Joint Hymnal Committee appointed by the Conference of Presidents must acknowledge the abundant blessings of God as we worked on this resolution.

Our meeting on January 17, 1985, was the first of many which brought together individuals with various personalities, each gifted by God in his own unique way. The observation I jotted down after that first meeting was borne out in the years which followed: "Got to meet everyone, and I think it is a good crew." God did give us a good crew.

But we did have a few trying times. Some members were sidelined for a while by illness; difficult decisions confronted us which were settled to no one's complete satisfaction; weariness set in after a long and taxing session. Yet God saw us through these trying times.

Among God's blessings are the gifts of technology: the computer, the copy machine, and the telephone. The completed copy of the entire hymnal was carried to the printing plant on a computer disc. It is hard to imagine producing a hymnal without such means of communication.

Under the blessings of God a new hymnal has been completed. It will take some getting used to. It will replace a hymnal which has served well for more than fifty years. Not everyone will be pleased with this new book, especially at first. Yet I am confident that under God's blessings this new/revised hymnal will fulfill the goals spelled out in the 1983 synodical resolution.

Victor Prange is pastor, of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin, and chairman of the synod's Commission on Worship. He was also chairman of the Joint Hymnal Committee.

A SEASON OF GROWING DISCONTENT SEPTEMBER 1993

"A season of growing discontent" was the headline on a front page story in our local newspaper. It reported that lawmakers were finding voters in their home districts disappointed and disgusted; their mood was described as "dark."

Our synod's Committee on Program Review said in its report to the 1993 convention: "In the institutions of our society, our businesses, and even our churches there is a growing cynicism and loss of confidence. We don't trust people. Almost every part of the church seems to be suffering the same loss in confidence. Selfishness, disrespect for authority, and finger pointing have infested not only society but also the church. In WELS we have similar problems. The church of today is in a confidence crisis!"

What is the reason for this crisis in confidence? There is no single answer to this question. The causes of discontent are complex. No doubt a contributing factor in both society and the church (including the WELS) is the multitude of problems which confront us, problems which call for hard and sometimes costly decisions.

And once decisions are made, there will be people who find fault with those responsible for the chosen course of action. The vision of critics becomes ever sharper as time elapses. After several years they know perfectly well what should have been done back then. Our English language has several expressions to describe such people: back seat drivers, second guessers equipped with 20/20 hindsight, arm chair strategists.

There are always some who imagine that if given the chance, they could fix what ails government and church. Carl Sandburg described the type in a poem, "Under the Capitol Dome." "There are those who speak of confusion today/as though yesterday there was order/rather than confusion. There are those who point to confusion today/as though if given a chance/they could tomorrow transform it into order."

People should not be surprised that even respected leaders make errors in judgment. Biographies of famous world figures reveal, more often than one cares to know, that they muddled through critical moments in history. Modern writers on Civil War battles are very good at pointing out where some famous general goofed. Such historians seem not to appreciate what a mess war is. In our personal and community lives, the choice of the best course of action is not always clear.

All of which is likely to be quite disconcerting to anyone who thinks that human beings are in complete control of their lives and fortunes and futures. A society which prides itself in technological advances is especially prone to the heresy that humans can determine precisely what course of action to take in any given situation.

Fortunately there is one who perfectly controls our destiny. To know him and his steadfast love is to enjoy contentment.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

HE BECAME FULLY HUMAN DECEMBER 1993

No item in the new hymnal has elicited more discussion than the two words in the Nicene Creed: "fully human." The entire sentence says of Jesus Christ: "For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and became fully human."

Some suggest that if Jesus Christ is really fully human, he is in some way tainted with sin. Such a view implies that human nature is essentially sinful, that a person cannot be fully human without being a sinner. We know from Scripture that this is an erroneous teaching. Adam and Eve, as they came from the creative hand of God, were fully human; they lacked nothing essential to their existence. And before falling into sin, they were pure and holy. So also Jesus Christ, though fully human, is without taint of sin. This is so because he "was incarnate of the Holy Spirit."

Another objection to the words "fully human" is the charge that they were chosen to deny the maleness of Jesus. A careful look at the wording of the Nicene Creed will show that the male pronoun "he" is used repeatedly when speaking of Jesus. There is no denial of his maleness.

But the point which the fourth century church fathers are making in the Nicene Creed is this: just as Jesus Christ is fully divine so also he is fully human. They needed to confess this because there were false teachers back then who denied that Jesus was fully human. These false teachers simply could not imagine how someone who was fully divine could also be fully human. In seeking to safeguard the divinity of Christ, they denied his full humanity. The church confesses: Jesus Christ is both fully divine and fully human.

The Gospel for Christmas Day spells out this truth clearly. John 1:1 says of the Word, the second person of the Holy Trinity: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Then in v. 14 we hear: "The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us." To "become flesh" is exactly what the Nicene Creed is saying with its word "incarnate." Jesus is the incarnate Word, fully human.

Martin Luther gloried in this truth. He wrote a model sermon for Christmas Eve which includes the sentence: "I am talking about this so that we may have a foundation for our faith and that we let Christ be a natural human being, in every respect exactly as we are" (LW 52:12).

One of the new hymns in *Christian Worship* has a wonderful line addressed to Christ: "You came into our hall of death, O Christ, to breathe our poisoned air, to drink for us the deep despair that strangled our reluctant breath" (CW 400:3). That's the good news of Christmas: Jesus Christ is one with us in our world. He became fully human.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin. He is chairman of the synod's Commission on Worship and was chairman of the Joint Hymnal Committee.

VIOLENCE AND THE TONGUE

MARCH 1994

The numbers profiling violence in America are shocking. An authority on the subject recites the grim statistics: "We have a homicide rate for young men four times higher than the next most violent country in the world, Scotland, and a rate 70 times that of Austria. The FBI estimates that 1.8 million Americans are victims of violence each year, and that number excludes most family violence. Each month about 420 children die from gunshot injuries. Each year we spend about \$64 billion paying for the costs associated with violence. Each day we become more fearful of violence."

What's to be done? Some suggest building more jails and giving longer sentences. Yet in the past decade we have doubled our prison population. Tougher gun control laws are not likely initially to retard the slaughter of the innocent, considering that half of all homes already possess deadly weapons. Some advocate putting more police officers on city streets.

Blame for violence in America is placed on judges, schools, church, and home. Loads of criticism is heaped on television. And there's no doubt that television deserves its share of blame. What people view repeatedly on television cannot help but affect their actions.

In fact, television may foster violence in ways not always fully appreciated. The 1993 autumn issue of the *Wilson Quarterly* includes three pieces on television and American culture. One of these makes the point that television has replaced church, family, and workplace in shaping behavior and has speeded changes in how we talk and act.

The author, Todd Gitlin, scores television sitcoms and talk shows for encouraging in many people a tendency toward conversation which prizes quickness over knowledge. He points out that Americans increasingly adopt the "one-liner." Mockery and snide comebacks have become part of a national style that manifests hostility toward almost everything and everyone. A "knowingly snide attitude" derisive of all authority has become so prevalent, he concludes, it deserves the tag of "hipness unto death."

Violence begins in the sinful heart, and long before it breaks out in hostile action, is likely to express itself with the tongue. To attack with words is a first step to attacking with a fist or gun or blade. Here is where one must make a first assault on violence: guard your tongue that it speak no evil.

A famous writing from the 15th century, *The Imitation of Christ*, cites the misuse of the tongue as a characteristic of the person who is not at peace: "The man who is at peace is not suspicious of others, but the discontented, restless man is harried by suspicion. He often says what ought not to be said, and fails to do what he should; he is intent on the duty of others and neglects his own."

Whoever is able to bridle the tongue will be able to control the whole body. To check violence, check first the tongue.

Victor Prange is pastor of Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

AN EYE FOR AN EYE JUNE 1994

Not many days after a Jewish gunman murdered the Palestinian worshipers at the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, a reporter interviewed an Arab man living there.

This father of five sons vowed that sometime, before they die, his family would see the relatives and friends who were killed or wounded in the massacre avenged. "This is how it goes here. When a son or a father is killed, we must take revenge. It is a social obligation. We do not rest until the soul of our relative is avenged."

A retired teacher observed: "Goldstein [the gunman] sullied the honor of the clans and nothing can appease them now. . . . The families want revenge, at any price. These Jewish settlers have just made enemies for life."

Here is a graphic example of the law of revenge. The Romans called it *lex talionis* (the law of retaliation by punishment in kind). The ancient Code of Hammurabi spelled it out (though hardly with equal justice for rich and poor): "If a man has caused the loss of a gentleman's eye, his eye one shall cause to be lost. . . . If he has caused a poor man to lose his eye, he shall pay one mina of silver."

The law of retaliation is deeply ingrained in the human heart: you do me a wrong, and I'll get even. One sees it operating on the basketball court and baseball diamond. It plays a big part in gang warfare. Unfortunately, the family does not escape its ravages.

The senseless grudges that separate family members often are the result of "an eye for an eye." One hears of brother who has not talked to brother for many years, all because of some act or word of unkindness. Spouses are good at putting this law into practice: "You hurt me; I'll hurt you." Many "eyes" are gouged in the ensuing grudge matches.

Jesus overturned the law of retaliation. In the Sermon on the Mount he said to his disciples: "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. . . . Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Jesus practiced what he preached: "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats." Paul spelled out the lifestyle of one who is a member of the body of Christ: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. . . . Do not take revenge, my friends."

Whenever the law of retaliation takes hold of a relationship, one of the parties needs to break the vicious cycle of revenge. There are no winners when the prize is getting even. Those who by baptism have been raised with Christ to live a new life will march to the tune of a different drummer.

Victor Prange is pastor at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

CHERISH YOUR CHURCH MUSICIANS SEPTEMBER 1994

Only a few times in my 36 years as a minister has our congregation had to worship without an accompanist. At one service an ice storm interrupted the electrical power shutting down our organ. (We worshiped by candlelight.) Once our organist was unable to get to church due to heavy snow.

It is possible to worship without organ or piano. Doing so occasionally has benefits. But in the long run, for Lutherans especially, to worship without a musical instrument is far from ideal. We value the role that music plays in our worship.

Recently I read an interview with the director of music at a large Lutheran congregation renowned for its music program. He asserted that while for many music is a "time-out, a relaxation," for him music "is a gift; it is a miracle." Music has the power to unify. "Music gives the congregation a voice," he said. "Instead of thinking of themselves as a bunch of people, they see themselves as a unit. The common rhythm and tempo and text bring people together in unison or harmony. Music has that role, to bring us together."

Do congregations appreciate the importance of music in their worship and cherish their accompanists? Or do they take church musicians for granted? Too often, it seems, they are hidden away in the balcony or off to the side, unnoticed, unless some Sunday the organ bench is empty.

One measure of appreciation is payment. A congregation's janitor and secretary, whether part-time or full-time, are usually paid. Serving as janitor or secretary does require certain skills. But neither position demands the study, hours of practice, outlay of cash for lessons and music, and the music preparation for worship necessary to become a proficient church musician.

Paul Manz, a prominent Lutheran organist, reflected on the shortage of competent church accompanists: "There aren't too many musicians available for the churches [in the Chicago area]. Some of my students are playing in two churches: you know, they have one service at nine and then rush over to another place at eleven. There aren't enough organists around. Why is that? Simply because the church does not pay; the church does not recognize the work of the parish musician."

Inadequate pay is not the whole answer as to why the shortage of church musicians is growing more acute. But it is a factor. One way we can show our church musicians that we cherish them is by offering adequate remuneration for their services.

As we were preparing to introduce our new hymnal, a Lutheran pastor who had experience in such a venture said to me: "Not the pastors but the musicians are the most important people in successfully introducing a new hymnal." Cherish your church musicians.

Victor Prange is pastor at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED THAT NIGHT DECEMBER 1994

What was it really like in the stable when Jesus was born? Few if any biblical scenes have been depicted by artists more often: Mary and Joseph and the shepherds gazing at the baby.

I have a book in my library titled *The Bible in Art: Twenty Centuries of Famous Bible Paintings*. It has twelve paintings of the stable scene. Recently my four-year-old grand-daughter and I were looking at some paintings in this book. When we came to the stable scene, she asked a most intriguing question: "Why is the baby lying on the ground?" Sure enough: in six of the twelve paintings, Jesus is lying on the ground.

I did not have a good answer for her, but her question set me to thinking. Luke's Gospel says plainly: "She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger." Then why do the artists show the baby lying on the ground?

It's not only the baby who is out of place in these paintings; there is little attempt at realism. The scene is made contemporary and is glorified. The artists do not depict the stable as it really was.

To get an idea of what it was really like that night in the stable, you might visit a shelter for the homeless. On the night that Jesus was born, Mary was homeless. She found no room in the inn. She was sheltered in a cattle shed. There her baby was born.

Martin Luther describes the sorry scene: "The birth was still more pitiable. No one regarded this young wife bringing forth her first-born. No one took her condition to heart. No one noticed that in a strange place she had not the very least thing needful in childbirth. . . . no warm water, nor even cold. No fire, no light. The mother was herself the midwife and the maid. The cold manger was the bed and the bathtub. Who showed the poor girl what to do? She had never had a baby before. I am amazed that the little one did not freeze."

Luther stands in awe of the shocking contradiction unveiled that night in the stable: "Instead of soft and silken stuff/You have but hay and straw so rough/On which as King, so rich and great/To be enthroned in royal state" (CW 38:11).

What was it really like that night in the stable when Jesus was born? Luther may be more realistic than the old painters in describing the scene. But to picture that baby lying on the ground suggests a profound theological truth: Behold the Word made flesh, God interfacing with earth, come to redeem us sinners from death and hell. That's really what happened that night in the stable.

Victor Prange is pastor at Peace, Janesville, Wis.

THE PURPOSE OF CONFIRMATION MARCH 1995

In the coming months, many young members of our congregations will be confirmed. In 1993 there were 6,057 confirmations in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Just what is the purpose of confirmation?

The word "confirm" means "to support or establish the certainty or validity of; to make firmer; to strengthen." The King James translation uses the word to describe what Paul did at the conclusion of his first missionary journey: "confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith" (Acts 14:22). This is the basic purpose of confirmation: to strengthen faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior.

It is important to emphasize that confirmation does not make one a member of the church. Baptism incorporates a person into the church, the body of Christ. "We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Corinthians 12:13). Those being confirmed are already members of the church.

The process of confirming takes place during the many hours of instruction which precede the rite called confirmation. Among the goals of this instruction is to help young Christians distinguish between the law and the gospel and to prepare them to receive communion for the first time.

Confirming is the work of the Holy Spirit, through the Word of God, which is the basis of the instruction. The rite itself gives public recognition that these Christians have completed a course of study in God's Word and are prepared to receive the sacrament.

The Bible does not prescribe the exact way confirmation instruction should be carried out. Peter gives all believers the admonition to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). Obviously the apostle is not directing these words solely to young Christians of confirmation age. Growing in grace and knowledge should be an ongoing task for Christians, young and old. Through worship, Bible classes, and private study of God's Word, the Holy Spirit continues to confirm believers in the faith.

At the conventions held in the twelve districts of our synod last summer, a report was presented titled "Expanding the Nurture of High School-Age Youth." This report raised questions about the best age for confirmation instruction, the involvement of parents in the process of instruction, the course of studies and number of years of instruction, the question of uniformity among the congregations of our synod, and the wording of the confirmation rite.

Confirmation has a long history among us. As we discuss possible changes, let us not lose sight of the basic purpose: to strengthen faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior.

Victor Prange is pastor at Peace, Janesville, Wisconsin.

IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS THAT COUNT JUNE 1995

Ò It's just little things that cause the problems." How many times have I heard that said by a spouse coming for counseling because of a troubled marriage. Here is confirmation of the old adage, "It's the little things that count."

Martin Luther said the same about Christian living. He was critical of those who felt Christian living meant entering a monastery or running away from home on a pilgrimage to some holy site or torturing oneself with self-chosen works of devotion. Luther would say: "It's the little things that count."

Bo Giertz, a bishop of the Swedish church, makes that point in "Our Daily Calling," recently republished in *LOGIA*. Bishop Giertz writes: "It is a wrong conception to think that I really serve God's cause in the religious activities of my church, or in the societies, and through my prayers. I serve God just as much when for the good of my fellow man I plow a field, or keep the accounts, or wash the breakfast dishes."

He scores Christians "who are so careful about their 'absolutes,' but are careless about their bank loans and neglect their children or their aged parents in order to be out evening after evening at religious meetings. An evangelical Christian life is a matter of simple faithfulness in our calling; such a faithfulness has the greatest blessing to offer, first to our environment, but also to the Christian himself." It's the little things that count!

Take such a seemingly little thing as regularly gathering the family around the dinner table to eat together. That hardly seems to be anything big. Yet you can count blessings from such a little thing.

As evidence I cite an article in the October 1994 *Reader's Digest*, "What's Behind Success in School?" One of the major findings of this study was that students who regularly shared mealtimes with their families tested better than those who didn't. "Sixty percent of students who said their 'whole family sits around a table together for a meal' at least four times a week got high scores. Of students in families that ate together three times a week or less often, just 42 percent scored high--a huge 18-point gap." Why? One educator suggested that "families that eat together are likelier to take an interest in what their kids are doing." It's the little things that count.

Almost everyone agrees that the family is very important in transmitting values and behaviors to the next generation. A professor at the University of Chicago has written a book subtitled "Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature." He makes the case that table manners help to shape morality. His point is no doubt too narrowly focused, but he is onto something when he suggests that what happens at the family dinner table can do much to shape the kind of persons our children become.

It's the little things that count--for good or ill.

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BEWARE OF OVER-BELIEF

SEPTEMBER 1995

As the year 2000 approaches, talk about the end of the world will likely increase. This subject has fascinated Bible students for centuries. Several American religious groups, including the Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses, had their origins in speculations about the end of the world.

One event many such groups anticipate is the millennium. This Latin word means "thousand" and refers to what some expect is coming in the future: a thousand year rule of Christ. This belief is based on verses in Revelation 20 that refer to a thousand year reign of Christ. There is no other reference to a millennium in the Bible.

For someone to expect a thousand year reign of Christ based on this one passage in Revelation is a case of what William James, who studied various religious experiences, termed *over-belief*. Over-belief is to affirm something as true that goes beyond biblical evidence. The book of Revelation is rich in figurative language and symbolic numbers. Taking this into account and realizing that no other passage in Scripture suggests a millennium, it is a case of over-belief to anticipate that Christ will reign a thousand years on earth.

Over-belief may be a reaction to *under-belief*. Religious groups that stress the end of the world and teach a millennium may perceive that this is a neglected subject in other church bodies. They compensate by over-belief. In their teachings, they go beyond the biblical evidence about the end of the world.

Over-belief confronted the New Testament church. The apostle Paul had opponents who maintained it was necessary for believers in Christ also to be circumcised. This demand for circumcision was based on passages in the Old Testament. This was a case of over-belief--those who insisted on circumcision did not appreciate Christ's work of fulfilling completely the Old Testament law. The law of circumcision is abolished. Those who today insist on keeping Saturday as a day of rest, the Sabbath, are likewise guilty of over-belief.

The Roman Catholic Church falls into the trap of over-belief by its teaching of transubstantiation: that the bread and wine in Holy Communion are changed into the body and blood of Christ. This goes beyond the Biblical evidence, reading more into Christ's words than is actually there.

The same thing can happen to members of WELS. If we go beyond the biblical evidence in teaching some doctrine or condemning some practice, we become guilty of over-belief. One is especially prone to over-belief when certain doctrines and practices are in dispute. In times of controversy the danger of over-statement is a greater temptation.

It is important that we neither add to nor subtract from what the Word of God teaches concerning Christian faith and life. Over-belief is as detrimental to God's saving message as is under-belief. Let us guard against both extremes.

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**ST. MARY, MOTHER OF GOD
DECEMBER 1995**

If you have the first printing of *Christian Worship*, you will notice that hymn 552, stanza 16, is titled "St. Mary, Mother of God." In subsequent printings this title was changed to "St. Mary, Mother of our Lord." This change was made not because there was anything wrong with the original title but to make it consistent with the way the festival honoring Mary, held on August 15, is listed in the church year calendar (CW, p. 160).

Lutherans may be shocked to hear Mary referred to as "mother of God." They are not always aware that this title is applied to her in our Lutheran Confessions. The summary to Article VII (Person of Christ) in the Formula of Concord, paragraph seven of the affirmative statements, declares: "We believe, teach, and confess that Mary conceived and bore not only a plain, ordinary, mere man but the veritable Son of God; for this reason she is rightly called, and truly is, the mother of God."

One reason this title may upset us is its use in the "Ave Maria," a common prayer among Roman Catholics and set to music by several prominent composers. The words of this prayer are: "Hail Mary (Latin: Ave Maria), full of grace, the Lord is with you! Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death."

The first two sentences of this prayer are taken from Luke 1:28,42 and confess biblical doctrine. The last sentence was added in the 15th century. In 1568 Pope Pius V ordered the daily use of the "Ave Maria."

We have two objections to this prayer. First, it is addressed to Mary. Our prayers should be addressed to the true God and not to any human being no matter how blessed. Second, it is foolish and false to believe that Mary is able to intercede for us before the throne of God now and at the hour of our death. The Lord Jesus Christ is our intercessor before the throne of his Father (Romans 8:34). His intercession is effective because he died and rose for our salvation.

As Lutherans, we do not object to calling Mary "mother of God." To give Mary this title expresses the truth we celebrate at Christmas: the one born in Bethlehem's manger is truly God. To call Mary "mother of God" is not to honor her; rather, the title means to honor her Son. It means to marvel at the miracle of grace that God should choose a fully human being like Mary to bear his eternal Word. It means to move us to sing:

"This is the Christ, our God most high,
Who hears your sad and bitter cry;
He will himself your Savior be
From all your sins to set you free." (CW 38:3)

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FEELINGS AND TRUTH MARCH 1996

"That didn't feel right, and this felt right." So a 34-year-old Chicago suburbanite joined the Mormon church. What bothered him about other churches was their teaching that families aren't eternal, that earthly marriages don't continue in heaven. "You die and you're solo again. That didn't feel right."

Mormonism teaches that a marriage performed in one of their temples is eternal, that such a marriage, though made on earth, is celestial, heavenly. Such a doctrine obviously appeals to people who are happily married on earth. It feels good to believe that our marriages will continue into eternity.

But human feelings dare not determine eternal truth. Eternal truth is established by the one who is eternal. The question was put to Jesus: If a woman is married seven times here on earth, whose wife will she be in the resurrection? His answer: "When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven" (Mark 12:25). These words of Jesus nullify Mormon teaching about eternal marriages no matter what people might feel.

The most dangerous of all human feelings is to suppose that salvation depends on a person's own good works. One of the findings reported in *A Generation of Seekers*, a book based on extensive interviews with the baby boomer generation, was that the typical American moral injunction is "Do the best you can." What you believe counts for little so long as your spiritual life makes you feel good, and you do the best you can. That's the thinking of many.

One young person summed up what life is all about in this way: "Just be the best, and do the best, and treat others as if you were one of them, and just praise God daily and do the best you can, that's all." Another said: "Jesus was a wonderful teacher, he taught us so many good things. But no, I can't say I believe in him more than I believe in Buddha or Mohammed. They were all trying to help us to live a better life."

If a person feels that salvation is the result of living a good life, then the death of Jesus on the cross was a tragedy; his death has no meaning, it was senseless. Then Lent and Easter are stripped of all significance.

But if we accept God's eternal truth rather than depending on our own feelings and thinking, we will rejoice to hear John say of Jesus: "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). We will find comfort in the words of Paul: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Thank God that not human feelings, but rather his divine Word establishes truth. Here is the firm foundation for Christian faith and life.

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THE LOST ART OF MEDITATION JUNE 1996

For Martin Luther, meditation was a habit to be earnestly cultivated. It was an integral part of his life as a Christian, something he could not do without. And he urged others to practice this art.

Luther maintained that the essential ingredients for the study of God's Word are found in the triad from Psalm 119: "prayer, meditation, and trial." He described meditation as "repeating and comparing the actual, literal words in the book, reading and rereading them with careful attention and thought as to what the Holy Spirit means by them."

He warned against the neglect of meditation: "Guard against being satiated or thinking that when you have read, heard, or said it once or twice, you understand it fully."

Luther practiced what he preached.

In his *Large Catechism* he wrote: "Every morning, and whenever else I have time, I read and recite word for word the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Psalms, etc. I must still read and study the Catechism daily."

Are Christians today following the advice and example of this great man of faith? Or has meditation become a lost art?

Many things in our modern world conspire against meditation. First is television. It's difficult to practice meditation while watching television. The visual images keep flashing past with little time for reflection.

Television is only part of the media glut that has hit us. Years ago a Christian with only a few books (often religious) would more likely read and reread them. This promoted the art of meditation. But now we are flooded with reading materials, plus the opportunity to surf for hours on the Internet. One can't begin to keep up with everything that is being written, let alone read again what is classic.

Add to this the human craving for newness, for what is different. Many are tempted to discard the familiar as too ordinary. The sentiment of William Cowper (expressed back in 1785) is affirmed: "Variety's the very spice of life/That gives it all its flavor."

This fondness for variety shows itself also in the proposal that constant change in the words we use in worship will enhance spiritual meaning and prevent boredom.

In fact repeating an order of service Sunday after Sunday may have the effect of fostering the art of meditation. As we sing and speak familiar words, we have the opportunity to roll these thoughts over in our minds. One Sunday it might be one word or phrase that catches our attention; the next week it will be another. At every stage in life, the Holy Spirit guides the believer into a new understanding of and deeper appreciation for what one hears and says and sings.

People regularly complain about being too busy. Martin Luther would understand. He was often overwhelmed with his labors. Yet because he was so busy, Luther said he needed more time for prayer and meditation. It is an art well worth retrieving.

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CHILDREN'S CONFIRMATION CLASSES SEPTEMBER 1996

September marks the beginning of confirmation classes in most congregations of our synod. Over the years I've experienced the joys and frustrations of instructing a variety of students. I've had classes as large as 26 and as small as one. But no matter who the student or what the class size, the goal of confirmation instruction remained the same: to help baptized boys and girls grow in their faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior from sin and eternal death.

Was that goal reached? We must wait until heaven to answer that question. From a human point of view, it often seems confirmation instruction fails to accomplish as much as we would like.

That is borne out by some statistics I compiled for the congregation I have served my entire ministry (and as its only pastor). Of the 398 persons confirmed as children, only 31 percent are still members here. Where are the rest? Some are active in other congregations. But many won't be found worshipping anywhere on Sunday mornings.

Of our communicant membership, 37 percent were confirmed here as children. The other membership sources were confirmed as adults (24%), transferred from other WELS congregations (18%), received from non-WELS congregations (18%), and accepted by confession of faith (4%). Children confirmations represent the biggest source of our membership, which helps show the importance of confirmation classes.

This group of members is also the least active as measured by whether one communed six or more times in 1995. I found that only 22 percent of those confirmed here as children had done so. The percentages for the other membership sources were: confirmed as adults (48%), WELS transfer (69%), other Lutheran (77%), confession of faith (83%). These percentage rankings of activity are the exact reverse of our sources of membership.

Those confirmed here as children are the largest membership source, but they also appear to be the most inactive. This certainly points to the need to work at improving our confirmation instruction. That's obviously something I as a pastor will strive to do.

Parents of confirmands also need to ask themselves how they can help their children grow in Christian faith and life. Here are some suggestions:

1. Remind your child often of the significance of baptism: we have been baptized into Christ.
2. Worship regularly with your child and show the importance of hearing the Word and receiving Holy Communion.
3. Set an example of Christian living, including daily use of God's Word in your home.
4. Pray regularly for your child.
5. Consult with your pastor if you have questions or concerns about the instruction--refrain from criticizing your pastor.
6. Learn along with your child so that you also might grow in faith and life.

Luther concludes his *Small Catechism* with the rhyme: "Let each his lesson learn with care/and all the household well will fare." May that be our experience.

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THE GREATEST PRAISE CHORUS DECEMBER 1996

In recent years it has become customary in some churches to begin the service by singing a series of "praise choruses." One popular praise chorus has the refrain:

"Let there be praise, let there be joy in our hearts.
Sing to the Lord, give him the glory,
Let there be praise, let there be joy in our hearts.
Forevermore let his love fill the air, and let there be praise."

Down through the ages believers have praised the Lord. Many Psalms are expressions of fervent praise. The Hebrew word "Hallelujah," meaning "praise the Lord," has come into our English language. So has the Greek and Latin word "Alleluia," which means the same thing. The Revelation to John transports him to heaven and allows him to hear an endless chorus of praise.

There is no greater praise chorus than the one that the church has been singing for centuries. This is the song titled "Glory be to God on High" (Gloria in Excelsis). In Western Christian churches this song is part of the communion liturgy (Common Service). In Eastern Christian churches it serves as the climax of the service of Morning Praise.

Luther said of this song that it "did not grow, nor was it made on earth, but it came down from heaven." He was referring especially to the song's opening words, first sounded by the mass choir of angels on the night that Christ was born:

"Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

The song continues by piling up words of praise:
"We praise you, we bless you, we worship you,
we glorify you, we give thanks to you, for your great glory."

The contemporary praise chorus quoted in the introduction above is addressed to human beings. It exhorts the worshiper: "Let there be praise." Far superior is the Gloria in Excelsis, which actually praises the Lord God, the heavenly King.

But there is more than praise in this glorious song of the liturgy; there is also prayer and confession. We implore the Lamb of God:

"Have mercy on us; receive our prayer."
And in defiance of all rivals who might claim our allegiance, we confess:

"For you only are holy; you only are the Lord.
You only, O Christ, with the Holy Spirit,
are most high in the glory of God the Father."

Praise, prayer, confession--this is the church's response to the astounding grace of God. This excellent song of praise is especially meaningful on the day of the nativity of our Lord. Even as the angels sang their praises on the plains of Bethlehem, so we join the whole church on earth and in heaven celebrating the Father's gift of his one and only Son.

One sometimes hears that the liturgy is boring. It is hardly boring when one pauses to reflect on such a praise chorus as "Glory be to God on High." It's the greatest!

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BACK TO SCHOOL FEBRUARY 1997

The population of the United States is about 270 million people. Of these an estimated 66 million are full-time students.* That means nearly one out of every four citizens of our nation is heading back to school. This will be the first year of school for some; others will be looking forward to graduation and what follows.

Many students will enroll in public schools, but a large number will be students at private schools including our synod's Lutheran elementary schools, 21 area Lutheran high schools, Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, and four ministerial education schools: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.; Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich; and Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

That 25 percent of all Americans are off to school is an impressive figure. It tells us that education is important. Government knows that; our synod and congregations know that; parents know that. We are willing to devote large expenditures of time, money, and energy to the cause of education.

That 25 percent of all Americans will be going back to school these days is significant. But I won't be one of them. And many of you who read these words won't be going back to school either. We're part of the majority, the 75 percent, the 200 million, who won't be full-time students this school year.

Does that mean that we non-students should not be concerned about learning, that our education is finished? Hardly. Ideally schools should equip pupils with the tools necessary to continue their education. Graduation was never intended to be the end of study; rather graduation should be the commencement of a lifetime of learning.

That has special application for us. As a pastor, my graduation from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, which marked the end of my life as a full-time student, did not mean that my education was finished, that I knew it all. Continuing education

is a must for every pastor.

Continuing education is a must for every Christian. Confirmation does not mean that our Christian education is complete. Ideally, confirmation instruction should equip the baptized child of God for a lifetime of growth in faith and life.

The Christian has many opportunities for such continuing education. Regular worship is priority number one. In worship God comes to us in Word and sacrament to keep our faith flourishing. Most congregations offer opportunities for group Bible study. Every confirmed Christian has the privilege of private or family devotions and Bible study.

There are various tools available for such continuing education: study Bibles, commentaries like the People's Bible, and devotional booklets like *Meditations* and *Lutheran Parent's Wellspring*. Your pastor will be able to give advice as to what might be most helpful for your situation.

Learning is a lifetime adventure. May that be true especially for us who are disciples (learners) of Jesus Christ.

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** Figures supplied by Janesville Public Library's reference department.*

PREACH THE WORD
MARCH 1997

Once upon a time a monk named Anthony of Padua went to his church to preach a sermon only to find no one in the pews to listen. So he decided to go down to the sea and deliver his sermon to the fish, but all in vain.

As the story goes:

The sermon once over, away they go swimming,
The pike to their thieving, the eels to their loving;
the sermon was splendid, but they're still like the others!
The crabs still move backwards, the cod are still bloated,
the carp are still gorging, the sermon's forgotten!
The sermon was splendid, but they're still like the others!

Why keep on preaching when often the results seem so meager? Why should a preacher try to improve his skills when even a well crafted and delivered sermon appears to make little difference in the listeners' lives?

Why preach? Because that is the charge given to ministers of the church: "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2).

This is a charge ministers take seriously. I receive a religious news magazine that regularly advertises books and workshops on preaching. A Presbyterian Seminary answers the question, "Is preaching a dying art?" by declaring that "preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ is still a pivotal vocation." A Baptist Seminary announces a five day "National Conference on Biblical Preaching." A quarterly journal entitled *The Living Pulpit* is advertised. In Canada an Institute for Biblical Preaching announces an intensive workshop titled "Biblical Preaching for Our Time."

WELS pastors certainly do not take second place to any other church body in our commitment to preach the Word. They are thoroughly trained at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in the art of preparing and delivering a sermon. The weekly task of preaching the Word is of the highest priority in a pastor's list of things to do.

Members of our congregations can help those who preach God's Word Sunday after Sunday. They can make sure their pastors have adequate time to prepare. They can encourage (and perhaps finance) opportunities for pastors to attend workshops or classes to enhance preaching skills. They can speak words of appreciation to their preachers; there is also room for constructive criticism.

But above all, members of our congregations must rejoice if they hear again and again from their preachers the message the apostle Paul was determined to proclaim to the churches he served: Jesus Christ and him crucified. To preach the Word is to preach Christ and the salvation that is in Christ alone. That's all the reason a preacher needs to preach the Word in the best way he knows how.

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MARRIAGE IS DIVINE

JUNE 1997

Most couples get off to a better start than the man and woman who were married by a judge here in Janesville, Wis. Everything went downhill following the afternoon ceremony. The groom was arrested that evening for disorderly conduct after witnesses told police that he pushed and struck his wife. Two hours later the pair got into a second argument at home that led the distraught woman to take an overdose of allergy pills, landing her in the hospital. Four hours later the husband cut his wrists with a piece of broken glass. He told officers he had been drinking and slashed his wrists in an effort to get his wife's attention. The honeymoon was over before it began.

The deterioration of marriage and family has become one of the most serious problems facing our congregations. To offer assistance, our synod's Board for Parish Services is actively promoting family ministry. Its objectives are to emphasize biblical principles for families, to raise the awareness of the needs of Christian families, to encourage home devotions, and to provide a model of the healthy Christian family.

One contributing factor to increasing family problems has been society's decoupling of sex from marriage. Sex outside of marriage is commonplace and accepted. There is even the suggestion in some television sitcoms and pop music that good sex happens only outside marriage. One result of this sexual license is that children are born into and find themselves living in unstable and ambiguous family situations.

A basic problem is that many people, especially some who influence public opinion, reject the biblical teaching that marriage is divine. They look on marriage as a purely human invention to do with as one pleases. It may be altered or even discarded based on human tastes and desires.

But marriage is not simply a social custom. The Lord God, moved by divine love and wisdom, created a marriage partner for Adam. Eve was carefully crafted, not fashioned from Adam's ear lobe or little toe but from his rib. This suggests the intimate, side-by-side relationship that God intends in marriage.

For Adam it was a glorious experience to receive from the Creator this divine gift of his wife. He exclaims: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." In marriage the two are one flesh by God's design. God's creative will is at work. Marriage is God's doing.

Because marriage is divine, we will want to do all we can to nourish and protect this institution. Human sin and selfishness are constantly at war with God's purposes, which is nowhere more evident than in marriage and family relationships.

When, with the help of God's Spirit, husband and wife put into practice Paul's counsel to the Ephesians, "Be kind and compassionate to one other, just as in Christ God forgave you," then marriage will be divine, not only in plan but also in experience.

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THE REMEDY FOR CHILD ABUSE
DECEMBER 1997

Little three-year-old Frank was found drowned in a bathtub. His mother Veronica has been charged with his murder.

Social workers were troubled. They asked themselves some hard questions. One said: "When I read about [Frank], I sat and thought, what methods are we using? How are we looking at the mom? A horrible case like this has to change something."

Just a few months prior to Frank's death, a progress report stated that the "biomother has an extremely loving and nurturing relationship with her son." Another therapist concluded that Frank would "receive good nurturing, age-appropriate discipline, and protective supervision in his mother's custody."

But something went wrong. A child died. And there will be more abused children, more deaths.

Almost half of the 1.4 million victims of suspected violence treated in hospital emergency rooms in 1994 were hurt by someone they knew, according to a Justice Department report. Many of these were children, abused by a father, mother, or other relative.

What is the remedy for child abuse? Before anything else, one must go to the manger. One must see the miracle: the eternal Word takes on our flesh and blood, is born an infant. What a wonder: the Almighty becomes fully human. So much God loves us!

Human reason balks at believing such a thing is possible. Gianni Versace was himself the victim of violence. Before his death an interviewer asked whether he was "religious."

His answer, "Yes, I believe in God, but I'm not the kind of religious person who goes to church, who believes in the fairy tale of Jesus born in the stable with the donkey. That, no--I'm not stupid. I can't believe that God, with all the power that he has, had to have himself born in a stable. *Non sarebbe stato comodo*--it wouldn't have been comfortable!"

God did what is not comfortable for God to do: he became one with us sinners. In dealing with children, we adults must often do what is not comfortable for us to do. We must put up with what may be a nuisance for us. We must humble ourselves to be one with a child. We must know the needs of a child even as God knows our needs.

King Herod abused the children of Bethlehem because he was not willing to join the Magi in kneeling before a young child. That would have been below his dignity. Herod's goal was to be rid of this nuisance to his reign as quickly as possible.

Jesus loved children. He blessed them. He held them up as examples of faith. He spoke dire threats to anyone who would lead a little child into sin. His pet name for disciples was "little ones who believe in me."

The remedy for child abuse is to go with the shepherds and behold the wonder in the manger. To love Jesus is to love a child. To abuse a child is to abuse Jesus.

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**A MISSING LINK
DECEMBER 2000**

How often should a congregation celebrate Holy Communion? Once a month? Twice a month? Every Sunday? Should Holy Communion be offered on festivals like Christmas and Easter?

WELS congregations answer such questions in various ways. That is as it should be, since our Lord Jesus Christ has not given New Testament Christians any rules telling us when and how often we ought to celebrate this sacrament. Nor has he told us how often we as individuals should commune. Whenever we celebrate Holy Communion, we do it in remembrance of Jesus and his work of salvation for us.

Since two of the most significant salvation events are the birth and resurrection of Jesus, it would seem to be important to offer the sacrament to our members who desire to commune on Christmas and Easter.

Christmas celebrates the coming into the flesh of God's one and only Son. "The Word became flesh" so that he could give his body and shed his blood on the cross in payment for our sins. The tangible reality of Christ's incarnation ("becoming flesh") is given to us in this sacrament. As certainly as the Son of God took on our human flesh and blood, so certainly he gives us his body and blood in this sacrament. Without Christmas we would not be able to receive Holy Communion on any Sunday of the year. There is good reason to celebrate the sacrament on Christmas Day.

Easter celebrates the truth that "Christ was raised from the dead" (Romans 6:9), that Christ lives also today. The Apology to the Augsburg Confession (X,4) links "the living Christ" with Holy Communion: "In the Lord's Supper the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present and are truly offered with those things that are seen, bread and wine. We are talking about the presence of the living Christ, knowing that 'death no longer has dominion over him.' " It is the living Christ who comes to us in this sacrament. Without Easter we would have no sacrament to celebrate. Because Christ lives, we receive his true body and blood in Holy Communion.

One would not think of omitting the proclamation of God's Word and the singing of hymns of joy and praise in our churches on Christmas and Easter.

Yet many Christians belong to WELS congregations that fail to celebrate Holy Communion on these most significant festival days. Rather than point out that it might be impractical to offer communion on these days, should we not recognize the spiritual benefit for believers who would have the privilege of receiving the sacrament on festivals that recall Christ's incarnation and resurrection? Should we not be a church of Word and sacrament also on Christmas and Easter?

Victor Prange is a retired pastor.