

LUTHERAN



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MML 19486 0 0 1 2/97
 REV FREDERIC H NITZ
 604 MAPLE CREST LN
 WATERTOWN MI 53094

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Stopping for his ascension

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. Acts 1:9

Richard E. Lauersdorf

“**S**cenic view ahead,” says the road sign. There’s a car on your bumper and you’re in a hurry to find a motel, so you don’t pull off. Later you learn you’ve missed one of the better views on the drive.

Something similar can happen with Ascension, a day rapidly becoming a forgotten church year festival. We can learn much when we stop to view Christ’s ascension.

The upward view

Never before and never again would the world see a rescue mission like the one that brought God’s Son to earth. This mission dared not fail, nor could it be aborted. It was designed to rescue captives from sin’s unyielding chains and hell’s unending fires.

*What does that sight
of our ascending Savior
show ever so sweetly to
all who stop to look?
He leaves, not with half
a sacrifice for sin,
but a complete one.*

Now, 40 days after Easter, the risen Savior stands with his followers on the Mount of Olives. The Scriptures have been fulfilled. The cross has been erected and bloodied. The tomb has been filled and emptied. Jesus has finished his mis-

sion and is ready to return to a glorious heaven.

What does that sight of our ascending Savior show to all who stop to look? He leaves, not with half a sacrifice for sin, but a complete one. His work of salvation requires no finishing touches, no loose ends to be tied together by us. His ascension shows us “we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10).

Thank God for that upward view of Christ’s ascension. It assures us his mission is all done.

The outward view

Before Jesus was “taken up before their very eyes” that first Ascension Day, he gave them a mission. “You will be my witnesses,” he said. He even told them how far they were to go—“in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” “Look outward,” he said. “Look around you and see how many need to hear of my salvation.” Faithfully they took up their assigned mission: “They spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:31).

How goes it with us and our mission of telling others of

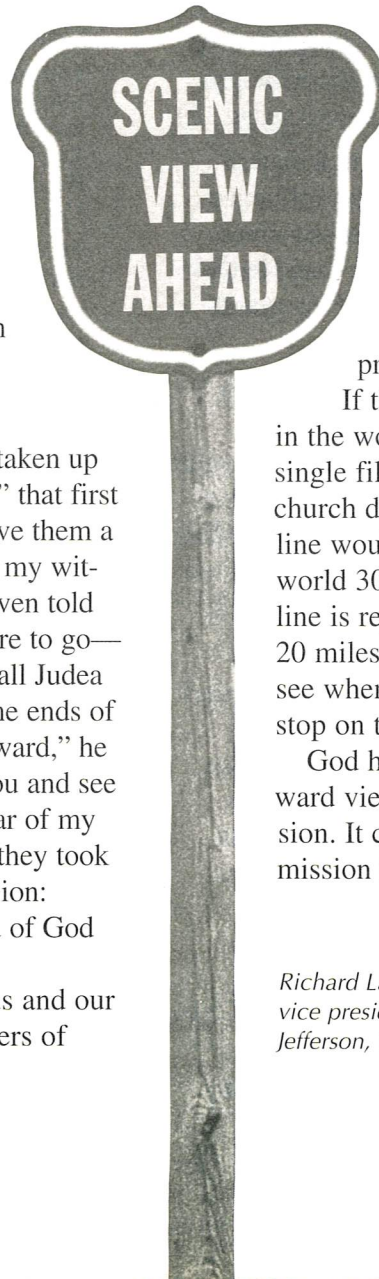
their full salvation? Have we told our family all we can? Not just through our church services and classes, but in our home, the first church a child ever attends? Have we told our community all we can? Not just through our congregation’s evangelism committee, but with our ongoing efforts toward those with whom we rub elbows daily?

Have we told our world all we can? Not just through those 66 overseas missionaries who labor for our synod in 22 countries and 33 languages, but with our dedicated offerings and daily prayers?

If the unbelieving people in the world were to line up single file in front of our church door, we are told, the line would stretch around the world 30 times. Moreover, that line is reportedly growing by 20 miles a day. That’s what we see when we take the time to stop on the Mount of Olives.

God help us take the outward view of Christ’s ascension. It challenges us: “Your mission is only begun.”

Richard Lauersdorf, the synod’s first vice president, is pastor at St. John, Jefferson, Wisconsin.





NORTHWESTERN LUTHERAN

Official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
May 1996 / Vol. 83, No. 5

Editor

Rev. Gary P. Baumler, 414/256-3230

Communications Assistants

Linda R. Baacke, 414/256-3232

Julie K. Tessmer, 414/256-3231

Northwestern Lutheran

WELS

2929 N Mayfair Road

Milwaukee WI 53222-4398

Phone 414/256-3888

Fax 414/256-3899

Communication Services Commission

R. J. Zink (chairman), R. D. Balge,
J. M. Barber, W. F. Bernhardt, M. D.
Duncan, T. L. Schultz.

Contributing Editors

J. A. Aderman, R. D. Balge, W. F.
Beckmann, M. E. Braun, J. F. Brug,
T. B. Franzmann, J. C. Gerlach,
R. H. Hochmuth, R. E. Lauersdorf,
F. E. Piepenbrink, V. H. Prange.

Art Director

Paul Burmeister

Graphic Designer

Melissa Homan

Photographs and Illustrations

Melissa Homan, p. 3, 9, 10, 12, 14,
30, & 36

Chad Hug Photography, p. 6

Matthew Vanselow, p. 17

Sue Voegeli, p. 18

Subscription services

1-800-662-6093 ext. 8

Milwaukee area 414/475-6600 ext. 5

Northwestern Publishing House

1250 N 113 St

Milwaukee WI 53226-3284

USA and Canada—one year \$9. All
other countries—one year, air mail \$40;
one year, surface mail \$24. Write for
multi-year, blanket, and bundle rates.

Available on audio cassette from
Mission for the Visually Impaired,
559 Humboldt Avenue, St. Paul, MN
55107.

NORTHWESTERN LUTHERAN (ISSN
0029-3512) is published monthly by
Northwestern Publishing House, 1250
N 113th Street, Milwaukee WI 53226-
3284. Second class postage paid at
Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to
Northwestern Lutheran, c/o Northwestern
Publishing House, 1250 N 113th Street,
Milwaukee WI 53226-3284. ©1996 by
Northwestern Lutheran. Printed in the
USA.

- This month we're covering a number of important church events.
 - ✓ Ascension—stop and view Christ's ascension (page 3). Who was at the Ascension? The answer's on page 32.
 - ✓ Baptism—take a minute to think about the day God staked his claim on you (page 29).
 - ✓ Confirmation—it's not too late to renew the promises you made on confirmation day (page 14).
 - ✓ Pentecost—learn about the gift of speaking in tongues (page 12).
- Mother's Day—it's not a church event, but we honor the influence mothers have in Christians' lives. Turn to page 8, where Carl Henkel reflects on the effect of his grandmother's faith.
- Two familiar authors are starting two new series this issue. Paul Wendland will be writing a four-part series on prayer. The first, "Prayer as conversation," is on page 6. Mark Braun is writing our other series on speaking in tongues. See page 12.
- You don't see our proofreader's name on the masthead, but his work is essential. From 1986 to April 1996, retired pastor Roland Ehlke proofread every issue four times before it went to press. We thank him for his faithful service. Next month, retired pastor William Fischer will take on the job. We welcome him on board.

—LRB

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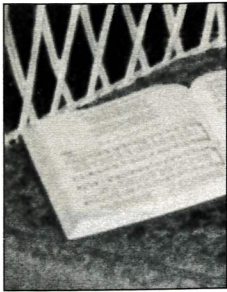
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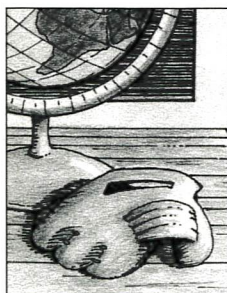
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How can I talk to you, God?

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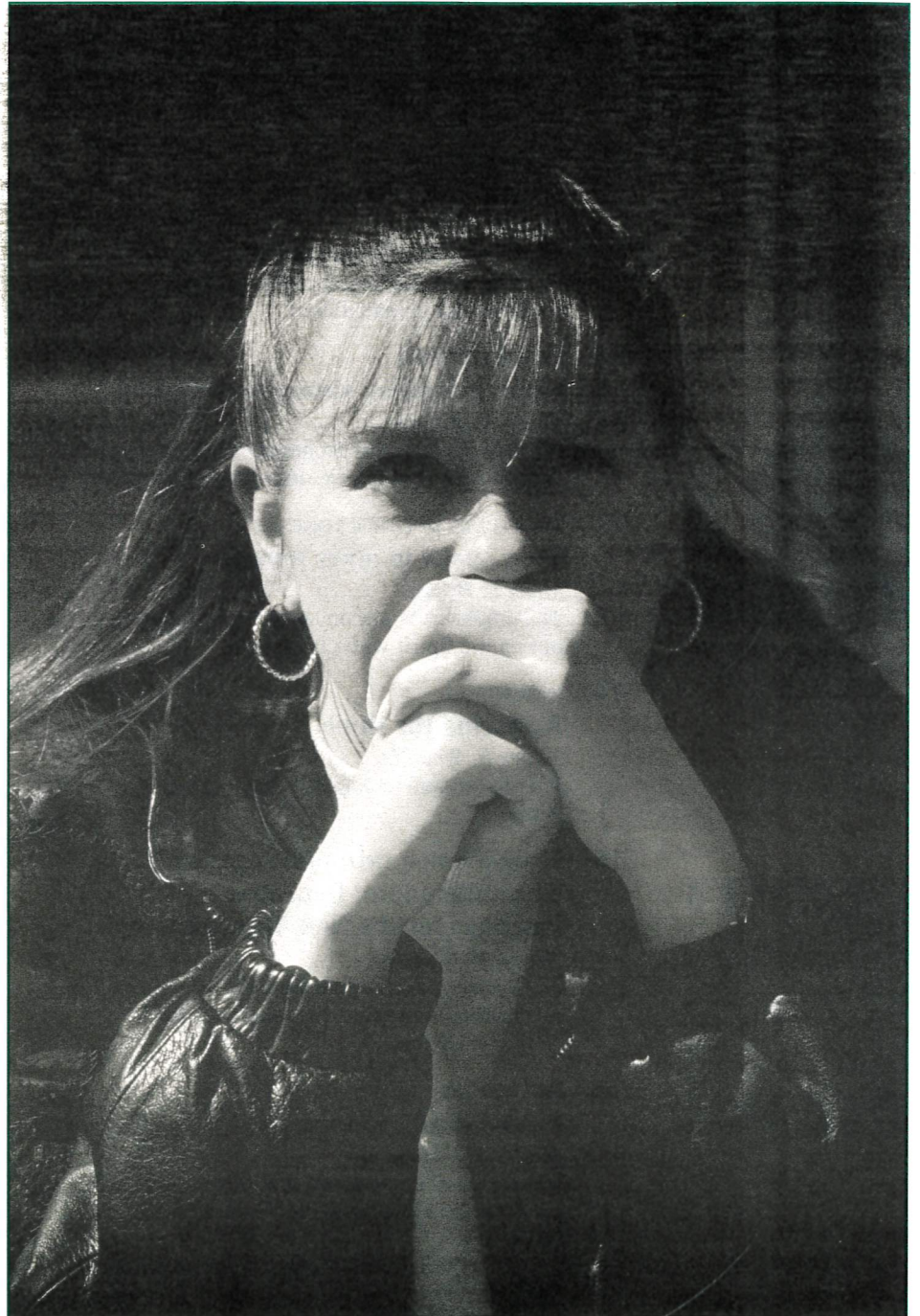
Paul O. Wendland

How can I talk to you, God? It seems a simple enough question, but I have to tell you, Lord: there is a lot going on that makes it hard for me.

I'm living at a time when there's this suspicion and unbelief hanging over everything like a cold, gray mist. Some people say that our prayers just drift off into space, unheard. Others run in circles searching for some glimpse of you. They believe in everything, they believe in nothing, they will not trust your Son. Mostly, I'd say, Lord, we're all just turning back in on ourselves, to focus on the great god "me."

Maybe all that stuff out there wouldn't bother me so much, if it weren't for the way suspicion and unbelief creep into my soul, too, making your Spirit's voice sound muffled and distant. It grieves me to know how cold my own heart can become to your Word.

Besides this, there's the matter of time. There just doesn't seem to be enough of it. At least, that's what the Liar wants me to believe. My days are so full of all the things I must do, I have little time to spare for prayer to you. My head is so full of all my own dreams and schemes that your words and promises find themselves nearly squeezed out. See what I mean about turning back in on myself?



And then there's sin, Lord. I consider your Word, and how you say you hold all our secret sins in the light of your presence. You leave me no place to hide. I may fool others, taking refuge behind a thousand masks. But I can't pretend with you. And I think, "Why should you listen to me? I'm not what I ought to be and have not done what I ought to do."

What makes it even worse is that, after all these years of knowing you, I seem to be getting no better. I hear myself asking you for help on so many of the same things, over and over again. I know that it's not for any lack of love or readiness to help on your part. But it seems as if every time your Spirit gives me a measure of control over one defect, the power of sin within me immediately produces two more to take its place. I find I was born with a nature incredibly creative in its ability to figure out new ways of doing wrong.

Father, prayer is not about me, who I am, what I've done or left undone. Prayer is about you, who you are, and what you've done for me.

It may not be sins of youth still haunting me, but by sad experience I've learned that sin is at its worst when it's on its best behavior. It puts on a Sunday-dress suit of "being spiritual," and it takes me a while to figure out that it's just pride in disguise again. Funny, isn't

it, Lord? I know I never fool you; I probably don't even fool others. But I sure fool myself. Over and over again. It all gets so sickening, so wearisome to me. So wearisome I often feel like giving up. If I'd been you, I'd have given up on me long ago.

How can I talk to you, Lord? Teach me to pray . . . again. Give me the heart, and the words, and the way to pray.

You answer me now—as you answer all my questions—in your Son Jesus. I remember what he said to his disciples when they asked him for the heart to pray the way he did. He told them, "When you pray, say 'Father.'"

That one word—Father—really says it all. Prayer is not about me, who I am, what I've done or left undone. Prayer is about you, who you are, and what you've done for me. I'm not saying my sin doesn't matter. But I can look at it forever. I can analyze it and classify it and put it down in a thousand different categories to suit my gloomy mood, and it will still be there the next time I look because I can't make it go away. If you don't help me, I'll be stuck with me forever. Sin does matter—I know it does—but you matter more, and your love is far greater than my sin.

By telling me to call you "Father," your Son helps me see you as you really are, helps me understand that you hold in your heart nothing except a Father's love for me. How can I understand a love like that? I know I don't deserve it. I know I have no right to be called your child. But he did,

and he says (with the same voice that called Lazarus out of the grave) I can call you Father, just the way he did, and I am your child, just the way he is. He took my place and died under your anger to make things right between us. You raised him to life again to show forever and always he was speaking the truth about your love.

How can I talk to you, God?

I'll call you "Father." And that sets me free from myself. Free to be like a little child who jumps up when daddy comes home, to tell him all that's happened during the day. Before the time comes when caution and self-consciousness teach him to hide his thoughts and guard his tongue. Freely he rattles on, giving every detail, listing every item, in order and disorder, things of great consequence, and matters of no consequence at all. For that little one, there's no better gift he can receive from his father than to have him home and the whole family together again.

How much more and how much better do you know how to give good gifts, and how to listen to your children, as you listen to me now. There's nothing better you could give me than to let me be here with you, together with all your children everywhere, together forever in Jesus.

I'll call you "Father!" Our Father.

NL

Paul Wendland is a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota.

Grandma's "church"

There is no time better spent than molding the lives and shaping the futures of our children and grandchildren.

Carl R. Henkel

I was just a little tyke, but I remember as if it were yesterday. Funny how certain things stay vividly imprinted in our memory, while other events seem never to have happened.

Grandma's parlor

This memory is about the parlor in my grandmother's home, which often became a special place—a holy sanctuary of sorts. There I preached my first sermons. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

In the corner stood an old pump organ, a fine instrument for its day. A pedal for each foot provided the wind, and a lever for each knee controlled the volume. A good number of "stops" allowed for a rich variety of quality tones. I sat on the round, wind-up stool and fingered the organ keys long before I had my first music lesson, learning to play "Abide With Me" by ear. Whenever we visited Grandma's house, I quickly made my way to the parlor organ. There I stayed for what seemed like hours. There were no TV programs or video games to compete for my time.

When I got a little older, I started taking lessons from the organist of the little country church up the road. She lived, conveniently, right across the road from Grandma's house and charged 50 cents a lesson. She served milk and cookies, too.

Grandma's "church"

The special moment came when it was time to have "church." I chose a "text," prepared a "sermon," and decided upon the hymns. Then it was time to begin.

Grandma served as the "congregation," and her favorite wicker chair as the "pew." A makeshift lectern and altar completed the decor. Yours-truly served as the organist, the preacher, and the usher who took the offering. (Every church service must have an offering.)

*Grandma served as
the "congregation,"
and her favorite wicker
chair as the "pew."
A makeshift lectern
and altar completed
the decor.*

I don't ever recall Grandma telling me she was too busy to come to "church." I don't recall her ever saying this was "foolishness" or "a waste of time." I clearly remember, however, her singing each stanza of the hymns I played, listening to me read from the Bible and preach my "sermon," reciting the creed, praying the Lord's Prayer, and, oh yes, putting her offering in the basket.

Now that I think about it, this time was probably as precious to her as it was to me. Bless her heart.

I don't know if the Lord was using these opportunities to plant a seed for the preaching ministry or to prepare me for the future, but I do know they were priceless moments. Those moments, melded together with a multitude of other meaningful memories, became the foundation that supported me through high school, college, seminary, and to this day.

Years later that same parlor would serve another purpose. There, next to the organ, the comfortable wicker chair, and the table that had earlier served as an altar, stood Grandma's casket. Floral bouquets transformed the room into a funeral parlor. Visitors paid their last respects. In a couple days, the procession would make its way to the country church and the casket placed into the ground in the adjacent cemetery.

Grandma's influence

Grandma didn't live to hear her grandson preach a "real sermon." Just as well, the earlier ones may have been a lot better. My first "real sermon" was delivered to a congregation not a whole lot bigger than the one in Grandma's parlor. It was preached to a congregation of eight in a rented space in a Slidell, La.,

shopping center. Ironically, a few weeks later, I played the organ, preached, and took the offering in a service conducted in a rented funeral home in Fort Myers, Fla. The congregation numbered three elderly ladies.

St. Paul writes tenderly to his dear friend Timothy: "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also" (2 Timothy 1:5). Precious words. Important words.

Dear mothers and grandmothers, please do not for one minute underestimate the value of the moments you share with your children and grandchildren. To be sure, you are molding lives and shaping futures. You are laying a foundation and setting a course. You are preparing the way for the day when your sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters, will rise up to call you blessed. Take time. Make time. There is no time better spent.

Soon the auctioneer will sell the old organ to the highest bidder. He's guessing the round stool will sell for more than the organ. Will the old organ grace another parlor, and its music fill other souls? Will another grandmother find a comfortable seat in the cozy wicker rocker?

There, in Grandmother's parlor, stood an organ, a wicker chair, and a makeshift altar and lectern. These are incidental. The only thing really important about this parlor is Grandma. She was there. She was there for me. The Lord Jesus has

already given her the happiest (Grand)Mother's Day of all when he called her to his waiting arms. Yet to this day, on earth, her faith lives on.

Carl Henkel is pastor at Mt. Olive, St. Paul, Minnesota.

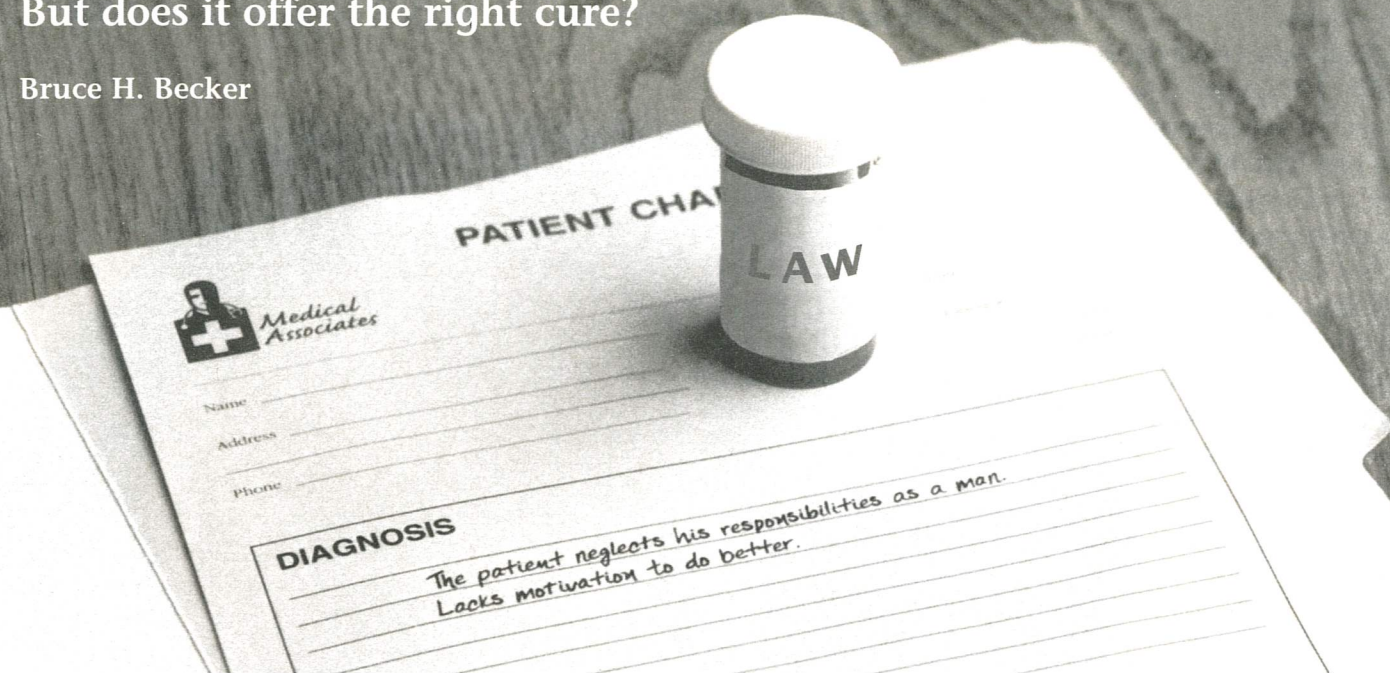
NL



Right diagnosis, wrong prescription

Promise Keepers has accurately diagnosed society's ills. But does it offer the right cure?

Bruce H. Becker



The parking lot is jammed. The stadium is filled to capacity. The spirited roar of thousands cheering fills the afternoon sky. A major league baseball game? A mega music festival? Hardly. It's a religious event for men sponsored by Promise Keepers.

Promise Keepers, a contemporary religious movement sweeping America, wants to produce a spiritual awakening in our society through godly men. Men are invited to regional conferences to learn more about becoming godly influences in their world. At the heart of the movement are the "Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper," characterized as "holding the keys to unlocking the power and potential of men." (Various writers, *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper*,

Colorado Springs, Focus On The Family Publishing Co., 1994).

The Promise Keeper movement, conceived in 1990 by Bill McCartney, former head football coach of the University of Colorado, has experienced dramatic growth over the last six years. The first men's conference, held in Boulder, Colo., had 4,200 men attend. In 1995, nearly three quarters of a million men attended one of 13 regional conferences held across the United States. More are expected to attend this year's regional conferences than all previous years combined.

Right diagnosis

The message of Promise Keepers has great appeal. It makes a compelling diagnosis of the problems

influencing our society: "Moral foundations are crumbling today under the weight of broken promises. The pressure is shattering marriages and families, erupting into domestic violence, and creating widespread unrest." (Promise Keepers promotional brochure, "A Man's Man is a Godly Man," 1995).

Promise Keepers is right. Our society is indeed characterized by moral decay. We call it sin. Lack of values, integrity, and commitment top the list. Wrong priorities, dishonesty, selfishness, sexual impurity, and materialistic greed are all outward symptoms of an internal spiritual cancer. Promise Keepers has made the right diagnosis. Unfortunately, it offers the wrong prescription.

Wrong prescription

Promise Keepers looks for the solution to society's moral problems in men and through men. The entire movement is centered on men—men's promises, men's faithfulness, men's persistence, men's relationships, and men's power. Promise Keeper author, Wellington Boone, emphasizes this when he writes: "our problem is that we have no understanding of the great power within us" (*Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper*, p. 30). Although one will hear casual references to God, Christ, and the Bible, the emphasis of Promise Keepers is consistently on men and what men must do.

With such a man-centered emphasis, it isn't surprising that Promise Keepers uses the law, rather than the gospel, to motivate men. The Promise Keeper's seven promises are nothing more than a law-inspired, dictated course of action. Conspicuously absent are the gospel promises of God, the good news of Jesus as the Savior of all and the power of the gospel in Word and sacrament to work faith and change. Promise Keepers offer law solutions, not gospel promises.

Promise Keepers also seeks to unite men despite their differences in beliefs. Outward unity is championed at the expense of the Bible's teachings. This is not done in a subtle way—it's a foundational principle of the movement. The sixth promise states that a Promise Keeper is committed "to reach beyond any . . . denominational barriers." This requires sacrificing the truths of God's Word. Such a principle clashes with Jesus' own words: "If you hold to my teaching, you are

really my disciples" (John 8:31).

One example of Promise Keepers' disinterest in what the Bible teaches is their open invitation to Mormons, non-Christians who deny the deity of Christ and his saving work of redemption. Mormon leader, Chip Rawlings, responded to Promise Keepers by saying: "The [PK] movement's seven promises are like something straight out of the men's priesthood manual for the Mormon church." He went on to indicate that

*Jesus is the one true
Promise Keeper. His promises
to us, in turn, motivate us
to respond in love and joy
to God, our families,
and our world.*

"Mormon leaders would attend the L.A. Promise Keepers' convention" (*L.A. Times*, May 6, 1995, p. B4).

Right prescription

Promise Keepers makes the right diagnosis, but fails to offer the right prescription. The right prescription is not found in men's commitments or in their promises to one another. It is not found in the requirements of the law. It is not found in despising what the Bible teaches.

The right prescription is found in Jesus Christ and his gospel promises to us. The right prescription treats not only the symptoms, but also the disease. Jesus is the only cure for the spiritual cancer that infects and destroys all relationships. Jesus is the one true Promise

Keeper. His promises to us, in turn, motivate us to respond in love and joy to God, our families, and our world.

Christian men will do well to devote their efforts to the right prescription. The message of God's promises comes to us through the gospel in Word and sacrament. Christian men and their families will do well to worship regularly, receive the blessings of the sacrament frequently, and study God's Word faithfully. That is the right prescription. It will produce the results God has promised. "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:13).

Are there other opportunities for men to grow in their Christian faith and life? Certainly. Husbands and fathers, consider how to spend more quality time at home with your families around the Word. Single men, search out others in your church for mutual support and encouragement. Congregations, consider offering a men's Bible study that addresses issues specific to men. A group of congregations, consider sponsoring an annual men's retreat.

We always want to make the right diagnosis about the many challenges facing our families, churches, and society. We also want to offer the right prescription. We will not find it in men or in what men promise to do. We will only find it in Jesus Christ and his promises to us.

NL

Bruce Becker is administrator of WELS Commission on Adult Discipleship.

They spoke in other tongues

The emphasis is not on speaking in tongues, but on the Spirit who gives them.

Mark E. Braun

On the last Sunday in May, Christians everywhere will hear again how the disciples were all together in one place on the day of Pentecost, and how they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

Recognizable foreign languages

It's obvious in Acts 2 that the "other tongues" in which the disciples spoke were recognizable foreign languages. "God-fearing Jews from every nation . . . heard them speaking *in his own language*. Utterly amazed, they asked, . . . 'How is it that each of us hears them *in his own native language*? . . . We hear them declaring the wonders of God *in our own tongues!*'" This spectacular outpouring of a supernatural ability to speak languages they had not learned, but as "the Spirit enabled them," was the fulfillment of a promise Jesus made a week and a half before: "In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). There's no evidence anywhere in the New Testament the disciples kept this gift throughout their ministry.

In Acts 8, Philip the evangelist began preaching the good news in Samaria. Peter and John were sent to them and prayed for a group of new believers who had not received a special outpouring of the Spirit. When Peter and John placed their hands on those believers, "they received the Holy Spirit." Although

Luke, the author of Acts, doesn't specify how the Spirit came on them, others could see it. Likely, this was the same gift given in Acts 2—recognizable foreign languages.

In Acts 10, the Spirit told Peter to meet three men who'd come for him. They brought Peter to meet Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile, and as Peter preached to him and a large crowd, "the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message." Peter's Jewish companions "were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God." And Peter remarked, "They have received the Holy Spirit *just as we have.*"

*Prophecy is a more
valuable gift because
its clear message
builds up the church.
Without interpretation
(or translation),
tongues are meaningless.*

Peter later recounted his experience to those in Jerusalem who'd challenged his work among non-Jews. "If God gave them *the same gift as he gave us*, . . . who was I to think that I could oppose God?" This was the same gift the Spirit

gave on Pentecost: recognizable foreign languages.

In Acts 19, Paul met a dozen former disciples of John the Baptizer in Ephesus. When Paul asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" they answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." Like the Baptizer, his former disciples were in a transitional period between the Old Testament and the New. Since no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit, Paul must have been referring to an additional Spirit-outpouring similar to what believers received in Jerusalem and Samaria. When he placed his hands on them, "they spoke in tongues and prophesied."

As in Acts 8 and Acts 10, it's most plausible this gift too was recognizable foreign languages. If it was something else, Luke would have described the gift in more detail.

Unlearned languages

While they are significant, we ought not let these four episodes distort Luke's larger picture. His first book (his Gospel) was "about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven." This second book (Acts) is about what Jesus continues to do "after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen." The emphasis

is not on tongues but on the Spirit who gives them.

The Holy Spirit gave the ability to speak recognizable-but-unlearned languages at pivotal moments in the spread of the good news: in Jerusalem to inaugurate the New Testament church, in Samaria to Jews, in Galilee to Gentiles, and in all the world. The New Testament mentions the "gift of the Holy Spirit" many times, but it isn't always referring to this gift. On Pentecost, Peter promised that all 3,000 would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit through repentance and baptism, but they didn't all speak in tongues.

The only other place the New Testament discusses this gift is in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Although some commentators suggest that tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 is a form of ecstatic speech, or a heavenly language even the speaker couldn't understand, it's more likely this was the same gift as described in Acts. Unfortunately, the Corinthians abused this good gift. Because the Spirit chose to give it to some but not all, the church became divided into "haves" and "have nots." Paul reminded them the Spirit gives many and varied gifts, and asked, "Do all believers receive every gift?" No.

Languages in perspective

Paul also put tongues in perspective. Prophecy is a more valuable gift because its clear message builds up the church. Without interpretation (or translation), tongues are meaningless. Understandable words move worshipers to pray with their minds as well as their spirits. Paul mentioned (almost parenthetically)

he spoke in tongues more than all of them, yet he would rather speak "five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue." Uninterpreted (or untranslated) tongue-speaking led to disorderly worship, but "God is not a God of disorder but of peace."

Yet Paul said, "Do not forbid speaking in tongues." This was still a good gift of the Holy Spirit of God, given when and where it pleased him.

Other than Mark 16:17, Jesus never mentioned tongues in the four Gospels. Paul gave no instruction about this gift in any of the other letters he wrote. Peter, James, Jude, John, and the anonymous author of Hebrews never referred to it.

Two things are clear. In the first century, the Holy Spirit gave some believers the supernatural ability to speak in unlearned foreign languages. But the Spirit did not give this gift to all believers in every place, and tongues cannot be considered "normative" for every New Testament Christian.

NL

Mark Braun is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee.



Restoring the shine

It's not too late to start wearing out our Bibles.

James R. Woodfin

Every now and then I browse through a do-it-yourself magazine, just to see if there really is anything I can do myself. Once I ran across an article that told how to restore the shine to a weather-dulled car finish. The author promised with the proper application of various pastes, creams, and miraculous liquids even the dullest, most oxidized, and neglected finish could be made to shine like new money.

Restoring a car's shine

I figured I had found something just for me. Since my car had a paint job you could strike matches on, the possibility of restoring it to the point it would reflect light rather than absorb it appealed to me. I read the article with the interest of one who had discovered the formula for making gold out of aluminum cans.

When I was convinced I had the procedure down pat, I decided to put my new found knowledge to the test. Gathering the appropriate pastes, compounds, and the required number of clean, soft cloths, I set myself to the task. To my amazement and joy, it worked. It wasn't easy, and my elbows would be devoid of grease for several months, but it really worked. I could see myself in the shine. Not that seeing myself was any great thrill. But that down under all that dull was the original shine just

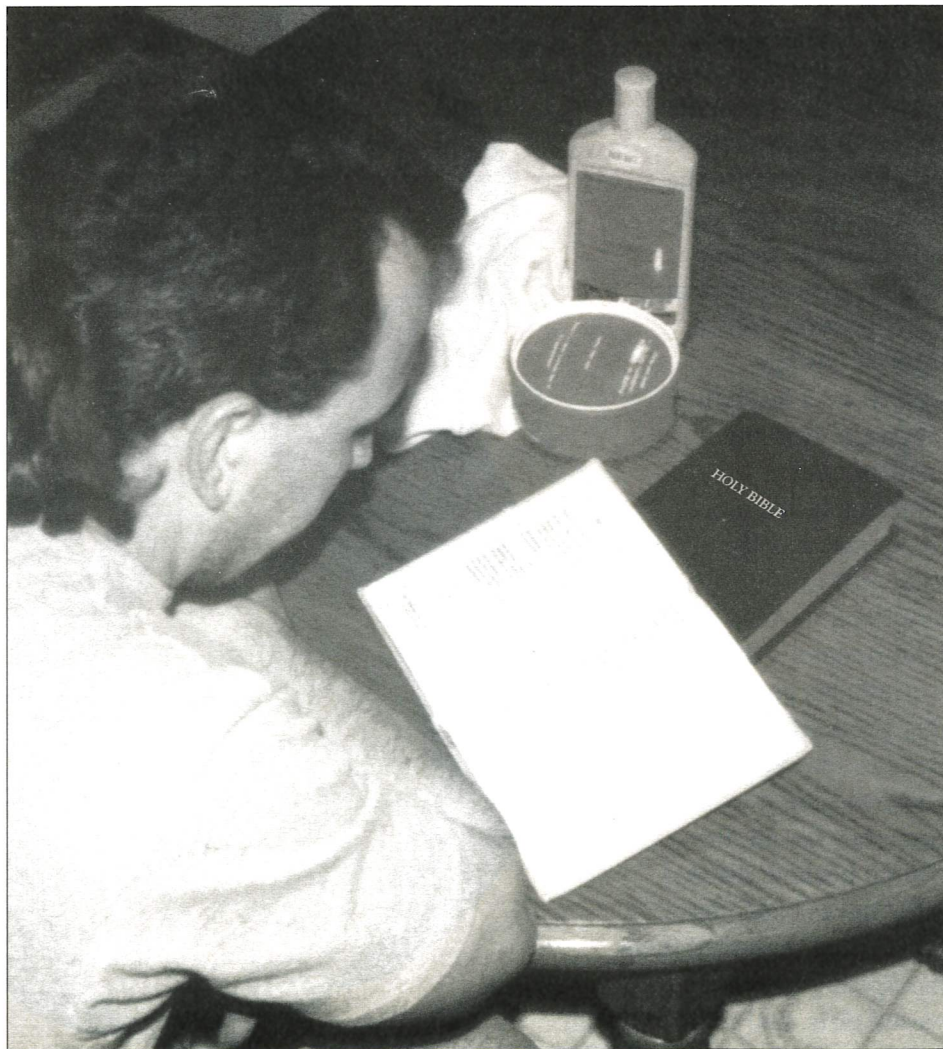
waiting to be liberated, and the one-man cavalry had come, seen, and done the job—that was thrilling.

As I sat back sipping my iced tea and basking in the reflected glory of the new-money shine, a thought hit me. Actually, it didn't hit. It sort of crept up, gently tapped me on the shoulder, and reminded me of an

event that had to do with shiny things.

A shiny soul

It was a soft, warm day in mid-May. Confirmation examination Sunday in a small church. The congregation sat in deep, gray, Lutheran silence, eyes fastened on



the lone confirmation candidate.

Trimmed, combed, and new clothed he sat up front in the center aisle, his folding chair facing the altar. A small, solitary figure made all the more small and solitary by the tingly aura of anticipation that surrounded him.

A shaft of sunlight filtered through a side window and fell softly and perfectly on him. It was as if a great celestial spotlight had been positioned for that single purpose. All was atmospherically correct for the event.

When the first portions of the service concluded, and the pre-examination hymn slid to a majestic halt, the congregation as one breathed out a prayer of intercession for the fragile, vulnerable, and all-too-visible figure who sat before them. What followed was remarkable.

The good news about the good news is it's not too late to start wearing out our Bibles. It is equally true that it's not too late to get back into studying our Catechisms.

Clearly, the Holy Spirit had thoroughly prepared one of his own and was even now prompting him. The prayer of the people was being answered before their very ears. The questions came rapidly and relentlessly, but the candidate flawlessly fielded them all, responding boldly, precisely, and accurately.

As the examination progressed, relief began to replace the congrega-

tion's empathetic apprehension. Relief gave way to admiration which grew gradually into amazement. When it became apparent the candidate was going to make it to the end-zone standing up without the further intercession of the congregation, thoughts began to turn inward.

"Could I answer those questions?" "What if the pastor suddenly called on me, what would I say . . . or do?" "Would my most graceful 'out' be to faint and later blame it on the heat?" "Would I die of embarrassment?"

A dulled soul

Not a few people—myself included—quickly formulated and dispatched a prayer of thanksgiving, realizing we would not be required to publicly demonstrate our inadequacy. At the same time, we mentally crawled under a rug at the thought of how our confirmation shine had dulled over the years.

Why and how and when had the spiritual oxidation done its dulling work? Why had we allowed it to happen? How much had we missed out on over the years? The self-examination was no less probing and relentless than the one the confirmation candidate before us was going through, but his was sparkling with bold assurance, ours was a dismal walk through doubt, guilt, and spiritual discomfort.

I don't suppose that we, on that warm—and suddenly uncomfortable—Sunday morning, were the only ones to ask whether, after so many years of neglect, it was too late to get the shine back. But maybe all have not yet been struck or tapped on the shoulder by the simple truth that if a person really

wants to restore the shine it is never too late. Our heavenly Father has a product—100 percent guaranteed—that puts the best of the creams, polishes, and compounds to shame.

Restoring a soul's shine

Remember the Bible we all received as a confirmation gift? What shape is it in? Is it raggy and worn, dog-eared from use and filled with underlining and marginal notes? Are the pages loose and falling out of a binding held together with layers of tape? Is it a ready-to-retire testimonial to years of seeking and studying and daily reading? Or is it lying in its original box, pristine and untouched?

The good news about the good news is it's not too late to start wearing out our Bibles. It is equally true that it's not too late to get back into studying our Catechisms. Daily applications of these two "polishing compounds," coupled with the catalyst of a sincere desire and determination to get the shine back, will, under God's grace, cut through the dullest dull and produce a shine we can see ourselves in . . . and we will like what we see.

Perhaps it would be inaccurate to call it a do-it-yourself project since it is obviously the Holy Spirit wielding the polishing cloth. Nonetheless, it does require effort on our part. But it's the most rewarding, joyful, and worthwhile effort we can put forth. Give it a try. It works. It really works.

NL

Jim Woodfin is a member at Redeemer, Huntsville, Alabama.

The millennium: figurative language for the New Testament age

No words of Scripture have been mishandled more than St. John's record of "a thousand years."

Wayne D. Mueller

If the Revelation is known for anything, it is known for the millennium.

Millennium is the Latin word for a thousand. Six times in six verses St. John talks about a thousand years (20:2-7). This is the only place the Bible mentions them.

Misinterpretations

No words of Scripture, however, have been mishandled more than St. John's record of "a thousand years" (20:2). During this thousand years, John wrote, the devil will be "bound" and "locked" up (20:2,3), and believers will sit on thrones with "authority to judge" (20:4). Many use these words to support the notion of a literal, thousand-year Christian rule over the world. Tied to this notion are universal peace, a rapture, forced conversions, and the Battle of Armageddon.

Those who misinterpret the thousand years have two things in com-

mon. They take the thousand years in chapter 20 literally. They also share the idea of a heaven on earth. They want the Christian church to have earthly glory and success in this world.

Jesus' plain words about the last days rule out any thoughts of heaven on earth.

The idea of heaven in the here-and-now has been around for a long time. Strangely enough, heaven on earth notions haunted the church before John wrote the Revelation. Many of the ancient Jews envisioned the Messiah as an earthly ruler who would restore Israel to world dominance. Jesus encountered these ideas from those who tried to make him their king.

Since John wrote the Revelation, false prophets within the church have revived these old Jewish ideas

in many forms. Reformation leaders labeled these false teachings "certain Jewish opinions." Today, those who look for a literal thousand years of messianic rule are called Millennialists.

Symbolic language

How can we be sure chapter 20's thousand years is not literal? First, everything else in the first two verses is figurative. Jesus is symbolized by an angel. Satan is pictured as a dragon. Hell is signified by a deep pit, the Abyss. Though pits do not have keys, Jesus is holding the key to the Abyss. Satan is a spirit who cannot be held by chains, yet Jesus binds him with a great chain. To demand that the thousand years at the end of verse 2 is literal violates the way God is speaking here.

Second, Jesus' plain words about the last days rule out any thoughts of heaven on earth. Jesus said "wars and rumors of wars" (Matthew 24:6), not peace, would characterize

Seven keys that
open the Revelation



the end of the world. Christians will not rule this world, Jesus prophesied, but would be turned over to earthly rulers "to be persecuted and put to death" (Matthew 24:9). Instead of mass conversions predicted by the Millennialists, Jesus foretold "many false prophets" and said "the love of most will grow cold" (Matthew 24:11,12).

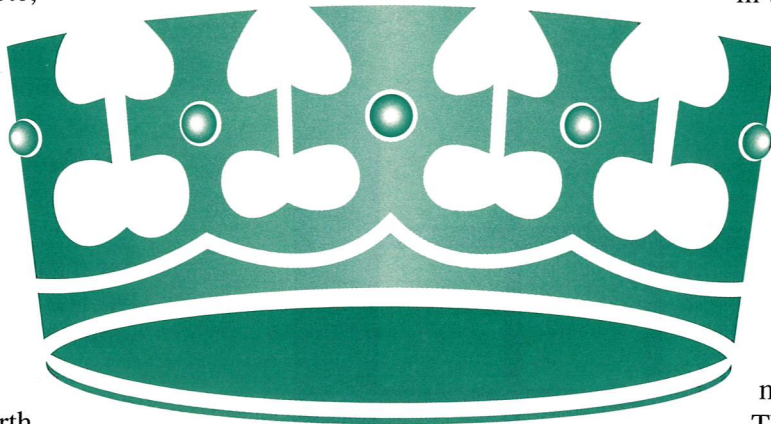
The rest of Scripture, too, warns Christians not to expect any kind of heaven on earth. Paul wrote, "While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly" (1 Thessalonians 5:3). Peter urged his persecuted readers to look for the church's glory beyond earth: "In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13).

Two millenniums

We must not dismiss Millennialism lightly. It is not merely a matter of theologians quibbling over words. Only God's truth builds faith. Error destroys it. Millennialism does more than violate God's truth. It harms faith. With its short range focus on earthly victory, it takes the believer's eyes off the final victory Jesus promised. Millennialists often confuse the roles of church and state.

They make Jesus out to be a bread king instead of the eternal Savior of souls.

What is the millennium of Revelation 20? In most verses, it is figurative language for the New Testament age. The first three verses make this clear. The thousand years begins with the binding of Satan. "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8). Jesus' death



and resurrection "disarmed the powers and authorities" (Colossians 2:15) of the devil. While he was on earth, Jesus said, "The prince of this world now stands condemned" (John 16:11). The "thousand years" of the New Testament age began when Jesus defeated the devil.

Throughout the New Testament age, those who die in faith will rule with Jesus in heaven until the last day (v. 4). Those who die in unbelief will be raised at the end of the thousand years to face the judgment

(v. 5). At the end of the New Testament age, Satan will be loosed for "a short time" (v. 3). He will be allowed "to deceive the nations" (v. 7,8) as a sign that the end is near.

In verse 6 there is another "thousand years." From what John writes, this thousand years follows the first. From the rest of Scripture it is clear that this thousand years figuratively represents heaven.

To understand the thousand years in the Revelation, we need to remember that "all Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16). That thousand years can mean nothing but what the rest of the Bible teaches. Although the devil is limited during the New Testament age, the church will face many troubles.

Those who look for a heaven on earth place themselves in danger of losing heaven in heaven. "Some things that are hard to understand . . . ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16).

Through this thousand years we will trust Jesus. "In this world you will have trouble," (John 16:33) he told us. But "in my Father's house are many rooms" (John 14:2). For us there will be heaven in heaven.

Wayne Mueller is administrator of WELS Parish Services.

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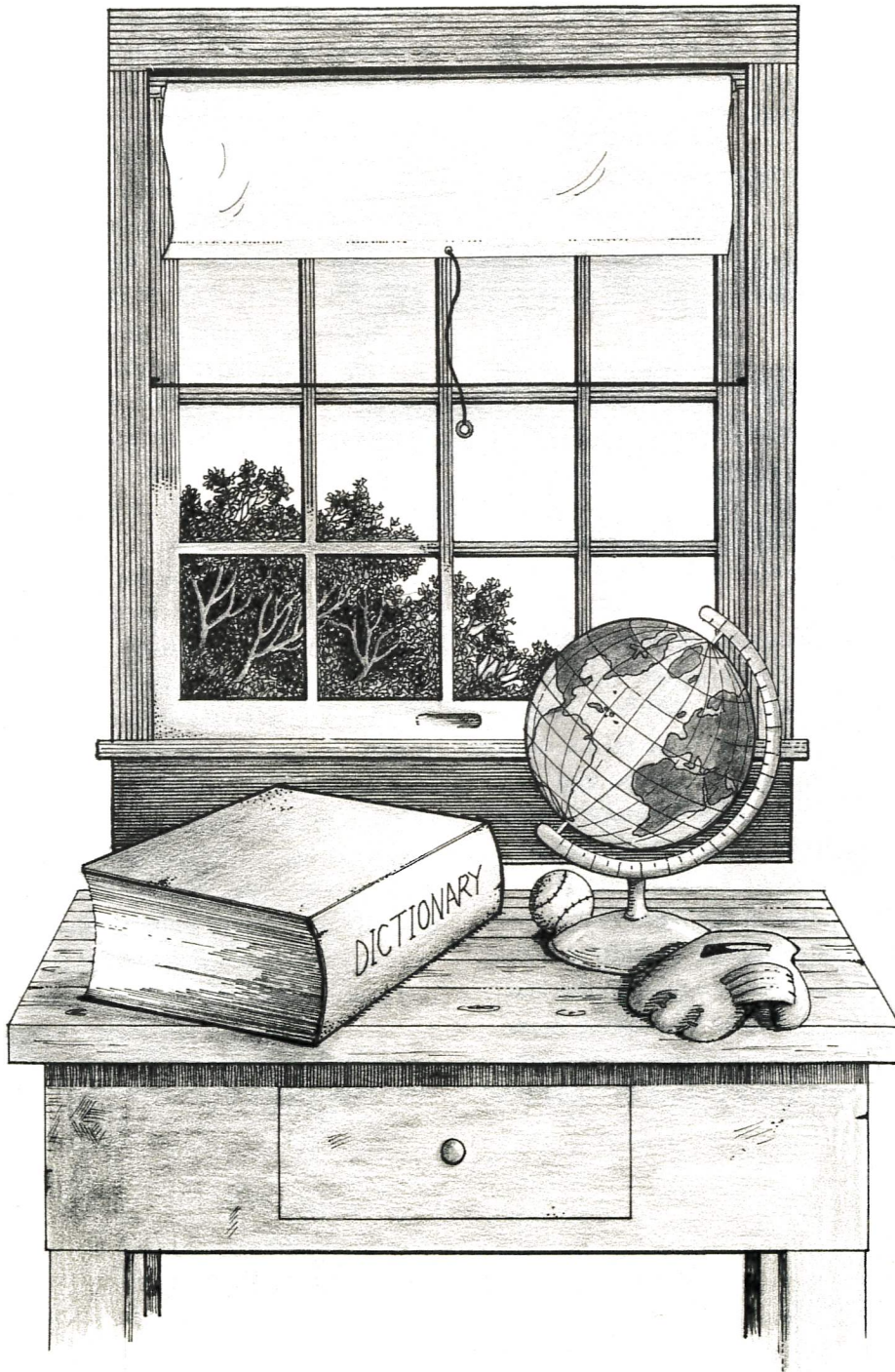


Next: the faithful

School days

Memories of a one-room school where children flourished and the Word of God reigned.

Mildred O. Meyer



School days! Nostalgia floods over me as I recall those glorious, fun-filled, challenging grade school days.

The school I remember so fondly was a Lutheran elementary school. It was in the basement of our church. One room, all grades. The Word of God reigned in our school. Sincere praise, loving correction. Instinctively, we realized our instructor desired the best for us. The best? Eternal life in heaven with our Lord Jesus.

A large pot-bellied stove was in the middle of the room. Boys sat on one side, girls on the other. Despite this separation of the sexes, we were allowed to play together on the playground. Of course, some correct young ladies felt those who played ball with the boys were a disgrace to womankind. This, however, did not deter my friend Alvina and me.

A student named Heinrich built the fires in the pot-bellied stove. Heinrich took great pride in being the keeper of the fires. He relished this self-assigned task. Even on the coldest mornings he arrived at school long before anyone else.

Our teacher sat on a raised platform in the front of the room. From this vantage point he saw all that went on. We sat in double desks. It was permissible to help one another, as long as we kept our voices subdued. There were few teaching

aids and no special programs for the exceptional student.

We had classes rather than grades. If I read well, I was in an upper class for that subject. If I had trouble with math (arithmetic we called it), I found myself in the lower group. There was a recitation bench beneath the teacher's dais where we assembled for our classes.

Corporal punishment was allowed. A door in the back led to a woodshed. I remember our teacher taking a child into that dreaded room only once. The scoundrel was my brother. When we reported the incident at home, he received further punishment.

One day, a student from the local high school appeared at the edge of our playground. In a small town like ours, news spread rapidly. Most of us were aware Chuck had been expelled from school for a week. Lonely Chuck wanted to join our play. He offered to make "Prisoner's Base" more exciting. He would umpire our ball games. He received a resounding no. We had no sympathy for the miscreant. The cause for his punishment was unknown to us. We did know, however, that teachers and school boards were just. We were too simple-minded to realize the guilty had his rights. Leave that to a later generation of judges and lawyers.

There were no school buses. We walked to and from school. No one seemed concerned about two or three miles. When the winter snows fell and the temperature dropped, a horse-drawn sleigh drew up to school at closing. The children who lived in the rural area would scramble in, sit on bales of hay, and wrap

themselves in heavy robes. It looked like a lot of fun. Living in town, I felt a bit envious.

Minnesota winters can be very severe. When the mercury dipped below zero, mother packed lunches for us. We could eat at school rather than walk four blocks home at noon. Most of the children brought their food in an emptied syrup or lard pail. When noon arrived, I took my lunch home and ate it there. I preferred the cold walk to taking a trip to the outhouses behind the school. I'd rather freeze my nose than another part of my anatomy. At least at home we had indoor plumbing.

We had no library, but our school did have a big dictionary and a large globe. When my assignments were completed, I spent much time discovering strange words in the dictionary. The globe took me to the faraway places of my history books. Tilting the globe a bit, I would be in a land of palm trees and sunshine. When I slanted the globe in another direction, I was transported to a land of eternal snow. There was no end to what the globe could provide for a budding imagination. In later years I would dream of these distant lands and pray the necessary mission work had been enacted so these people, too, had become acquainted with their Savior.

Every morning began with a devotion in which we implored the Lord to be our ever-present companion. Catechism and Bible history lessons followed. A good foundation was laid for days ahead when our pastor would take over religion instruction in the upper grades.

We were supposed to have singing every day, but having so

many classes that was often impossible. However, the first 15 minutes on Fridays were always devoted to singing. How we loved that! There was a portable organ in our classroom. Pumping demanded quite some energy. Most of the time we sang a cappella. We sang hymns, folk songs, and always "America." How straight we stood and how our voices rang as we sang. We truly believed this land of ours, created by God, was the greatest on earth.

Ten years ago I visited my former hometown. The church and basement school no longer existed. The area had been transformed into a playground complete with slides, swings, and monkey bars. Across the way stood a large church and school with many rooms, evidence the congregation had flourished.

It was evening as I lingered at the site of our school. The playground was deserted. Deep in reminiscence, I thought I heard voices from long ago—at first a sweet, almost inaudible sound, gaining volume until the voices rose in a mighty crescendo. Now the words were audible, ones we had sung so often at the closing of the day: "Jesus, Savior, wash away all that has been wrong today. Help us every day to be good and gentle more like thee."

I stood transfixed until the voices subsided. In vain I listened, hoping to recapture the sound. It was gone. Perhaps it had been a figment of my imagination; perhaps it had just been the sobbing of the night wind rushing through the treetops.

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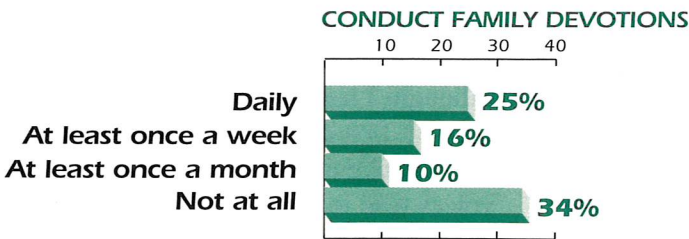
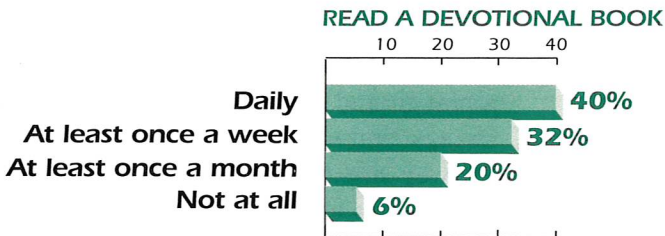
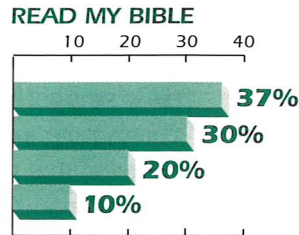
Mildred Meyer is a member of St. John, Jefferson, Wisconsin.



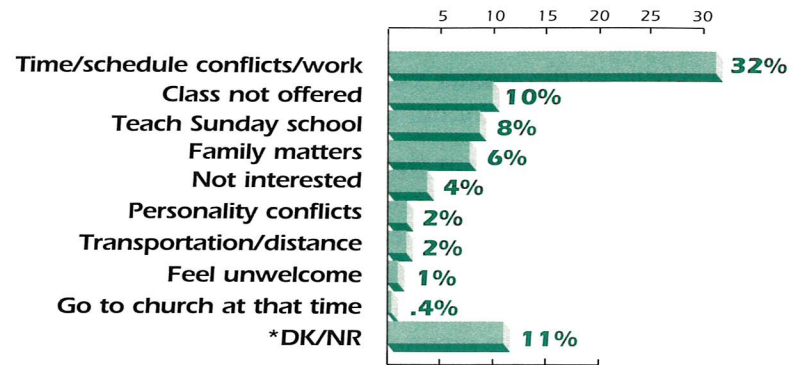
WELS members strive to learn and share God's Word

This report is the third in a series that will bring you the results of the 1995 WELS congregational survey.

How often do you conduct the following activities in your home?

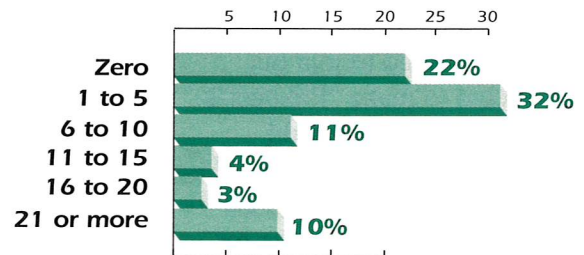


What is the number one reason keeping you from Bible study?



Let us thank God for the relatively high level of attention to God's Word exhibited by those who filled out this survey and pray that the whole church be renewed spiritually by the Word.

In the past year, with how many unchurched people have you personally shared the gospel of Jesus Christ?



How many times in the past three months have you attended church services?

Zero to three	1%
Four to six	2%
Seven to 10	12%
More than 10	80%
*DK/NR	5%

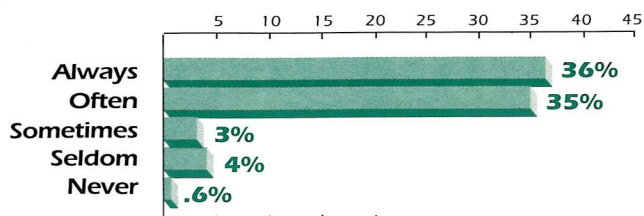
On a five-point scale, with five being very effective, how would you rate the following based on their effectiveness in helping you feel a part of the overall mission of the church? Don't rate areas you are unfamiliar with.

	5	4	3	2	1	Mean
Northwestern Lutheran	46%	29%	12%	3%	1%	4.28
WELS Connection video	43%	28%	9%	3%	3%	4.24
President's Newsletter	15%	19%	12%	4%	4%	3.72
Visiting conventions and conferences	17%	18%	12%	6%	4%	3.68
WELS Connection bulletin insert	16%	22%	14%	5%	4%	3.68
Mission festivals	18%	27%	22%	8%	4%	3.61
Guest speakers	15%	29%	22%	8%	4%	3.57
Parish Leadership Journal	10%	14%	12%	6%	5%	3.36
This and That in WELS	8%	13%	13%	6%	4%	3.32
Circuit Pastor News	9%	13%	16%	8%	8%	3.14
Synodical administrators and elected officials	5%	14%	20%	12%	7%	2.95
Lay synodical contact men	6%	13%	20%	15%	11%	2.80

How many times in the past year did you attend Bible studies at your church?

Zero	18%
1-11	12%
12-24	8%
25-35	13%
36 or more	41%
*DK/NR	9%

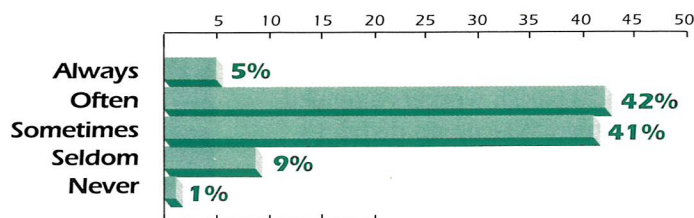
How often do you make it a point to greet visitors and make them feel welcome in the church?



Those who have the good news of Jesus Christ are eager to share it.

*DK/NR means don't know or no response.

How often do you talk to friends, both church and unchurched, about Jesus?



Next month we will bring you more overall results from this survey. The costs for the survey were covered primarily by a generous grant from AAL. The Leede Research Group of Manitowoc, Wis., collected and reported the data.

Confirmation class meets missionaries through e-mail

Paul Tullberg, pastor at Good Shepherd, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis., is using Internet chameleon (a way to send a group of letters to a group of people) to teach his confirmation class about missions. "I want the confirmands to have direct access to missionaries," says Tullberg. "Mail is a hard way to develop a relationship because of the time delay, and phone calls don't work because of time zones and cost."

But cost was also a factor in setting up the computer for Internet use. When Tullberg mentioned his idea to a congregation member, she immediately wrote out a check for the Internet connection and cost of the first month. The Ladies Aid bought the modem. "Although the women will probably never use this, they saw how valuable it is for our confirmands," says Tullberg.

For the cost of a local phone call, the 12 confirmands sent an initial letter to 10 missionaries. Here's what some of them wrote:

- We're praying for you. I hope you get people and God connected.
- It must be a real privilege being a missionary. It's a big responsibility. I know you are having fun.
- What made you want to become a missionary person? Our thoughts and prayers are with you and your family.
- Was it hard learning the language?



The confirmation class of Good Shepherd, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis., uses the Internet to encourage and learn about WELS world missions.

What are some funny things that have happened to you while you are trying to share Jesus?

- What does your country and home look like? Wisconsin is still here, and the Packers beat the Vikings!
- I'm glad you are helping all those people know the Word of God.
- I really appreciate what you are doing. I'll bet God does too! I find it really amazing that you can give hope to people who don't have any. I am happy to see God working through people. I don't see it happening a lot. I know it is there, but I don't notice it.
- Dear Mr. Missionary Dude, Is it really fun teaching people about

Jesus? It must be fun to know that you are saving lives. Is there a lot of different things over there? Are there radios, chocolate, gameboys, cars? Did it take a lot of time adjusting to your place? Gotta go.

"We don't want to consume their time. We only want to encourage them," says Tullberg. "Any response is gravy." Responses have come from Japan, Africa, Russia, Puerto Rico, Canada, and Taiwan.

"The students don't want to crowd around one computer, so I find time to work one-on-one with them. They're a great group of kids," says Tullberg. "They're excited about missions, and they're excited about Jesus."



District news

Western Wisconsin

About 120 parish workers attended the **Western Wisconsin district's parish workers retreat** on Feb. 9-10 in Wisconsin Dells. Participants could attend seven different workshops from the 18 offered as well as enjoy fellowship and relaxation time.

Elton Stroh

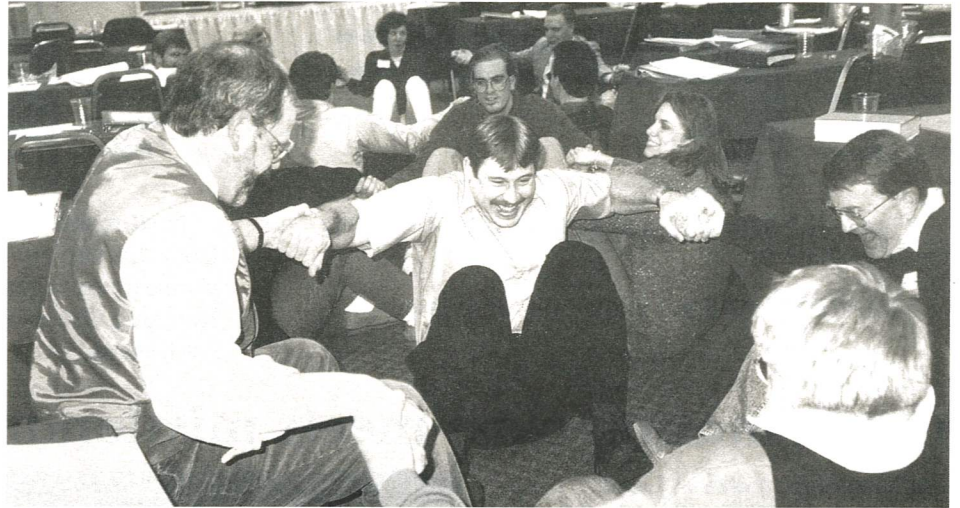
Minnesota

Peace, Marshfield, Mo., dedicated their purchased and refurbished church on Feb. 18. The congregation began three years ago and has since met in homes, public buildings, vacant churches, and fairgrounds.

Bradley Pearson

California

Hope, Penryn, will open a new school next fall. They have already called their first teacher. . . . **St. Peter, Modesto**, became self-supporting on Jan. 1. . . . **Jon Ruddat**, the first staff ministry intern from Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., is completing his one-year training at Green Valley, Henderson, Nev. . . . Pastor



Parish workers enjoyed fellowship games at the Western Wisconsin district's parish workers retreat. The retreat's theme was "retreat from the pressure, relax for the weekend, and renew for the kingdom—a haven of helps to better the body of Christ."

Marcus Nitz celebrated his 25th year of service to King of Kings, Garden Grove, on Mar. 10.

Hermann John

Michigan

St. Paul, Saginaw, will celebrate the 75th anniversary of their church building on June 9. . . . **Kenneth**

Kasten, principal of Good Shepherd, Benton Harbor, celebrated his 25th year in the ministry on Apr. 20. . . . The **Michigan district convention** will be held June 11-13 at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, under the theme "Tend like a Shepherd—Follow like Sheep."

David Zahn

Weyauwega church members evacuated

Over two-thirds of the 1,200 members of St. Peter, Weyauwega, Wis., were evacuated from the town for 19 days in March because of the threat of an explosion involving tank cars containing liquefied propane.

A freight train derailment on Mar. 4 started this disaster, which forced everyone within a three-mile radius to leave their homes.

"Praise the Lord—this could have been a lot worse," said Matthew Crass, pastor at St. Peter.

"Nobody's dead. Nobody's injured. We're all in the same boat. There's just a lot of stress and inconvenience."

St. Peter held weekly Sunday worship services at Immanuel, in nearby Waupaca, Wis., during the

evacuation. Although members were scattered throughout Wisconsin, 350 to 400 attended the first worship service the Sunday after the evacuation. "It was a wonderful experience to gather together again with St. Peter members," said Crass.

Over 60 grade school children attended school half-time with St. Peter teachers in the church basement of Immanuel. The rest attended area Lutheran schools and public schools close to where they were staying.

"Surrounding churches have been wonderful to us," said Crass.

There was no damage to St. Peter church or school.



WELS receives gift

In 1996, WELS will receive a \$5 million gift from the Schwan Foundation. Marvin Schwan, who died in 1993, designated seven organizations, including WELS, to benefit from his legacy. This gift is in addition to \$5 million received annually from the foundation and \$1 million for work in Eastern Europe.

"What a blessing—but so are all the others gifts, large and small, of God's people," says Karl Gurgel, WELS president. "Every one of them, motivated by love for the Savior, is of equal worth in his sight and is equally used by him in the spreading of his Word."

Through this gift and increasing gifts of WELS members, WELS has been able to expand its work.

To help spread the Word in congregations, \$1.5 million will be given to help produce *Christ-Light*, the new

coordinated religion curriculum for youth. All district presidents will be served by graduate assistants, allowing presidents to offer more assistance to their district's congregations. In addition, ministry enhancement, a week of education for first-year pastors, will be made available for teachers also.

Parish Assistance, intended to help strengthen WELS congregations, will also receive additional funding.

To help spread the Word in mission settings, WELS will consider 10 new home openings. It will also support more intense work in cross-cultural settings. For world missions, a missionary will be called to Albania, as will a Cuban specialist to be based in Latin America.

Finally, additional professors will be called to ministerial education schools to strengthen the training of future called workers.



Our family visited Grace in downtown Milwaukee, Wis. Seminary professor James Tiefel was the guest preacher that Sunday. On the way home I explained that the preacher was a professor. Our son Noah, six, emphatically said, "No he's not." When I asked him why he thought that, Noah answered, "Because he doesn't have a pencil behind his ear."

*Bob Weimer
Appleton, Wisconsin*



Wisconsin Lutheran College Warriors, Lake Michigan Conference (LMC) champions and the Great Lakes Regional champions, advanced to the NAIA National Basketball Tournament in Nampa, Idaho, Mar. 6-12. In Idaho, the Warriors defeated sixth-seeded St. Joseph, Maine and eleventh-seeded Mount Mercy, Iowa before falling in the quarterfinals to Albertson, Idaho.

"We hope to return next year," said coach Ed "Skip" Noon. "The Lord blessed us in unbelievable ways. We are grateful for all he's done." Noon was voted coach of the year for the LMC, and sophomore Kon Knueppel was voted LMC player of the year.

Along with their victories, the players were admired for their attitudes. Mark Cares, pastor at Messiah, Nampa, writes:

"The word most often used to describe the Warriors was class. More than one community member stopped to tell me how impressed they were by the team. Even the local paper described them as the team 'that was never outclassed.' This indicated what fine representatives they were for Wisconsin Lutheran College."

Photo by Nicholas Patrinos.



youth news

Please send photos or news on teen activities to: **youth news**, Northwestern Lutheran, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398.



Naomi Fenske, a student at Lakeside LHS, Lake Mills, Wis., joined 70 other cross country runners in London,

England over her Christmas break. She ran with the World Sports Exchange International Team in two different races.

Eric Sievert, Miki Zwiers, and Brian Vannieuwenhoven, students from Fox Valley LHS, Appleton, Wis., competed at the WISAA State Wrestling Tournament this winter. Sievert and Zwiers became state champs, undefeated in both regional and state competition.

Students "let their light shine"

"When we talk to the students about their behavior, attitude, or actions, we use the words 'let your light shine' in encouraging them to follow Jesus' advice," said Paul Hartwig, principal at Fox Valley LHS, Appleton, Wis.

And students are doing just that. Guided by the theme "Living as children of light," students are busy this year using their talents in service activities, academics, and extra-curricular events.

The student council raised several thousand dollars for new chapel hymnals. Over \$750 was collected for the African Medical Mission from students, faculty, and staff.

Many give blood at the school's annual blood drives.

Students introduce others to FVL by leading tours for visitors and by representing FVL at Lutheran elementary schools. Their STOP group (Students Take on Prevention) spreads the message of drug/alcohol abuse prevention.

Academically, about 55 percent were on the fall semester honor roll. Forty-four juniors qualified for nomination to the National Honor Society with a GPA of 3.6 or higher. Besides academics, many students have jobs or participate in extra-curricular activities after school.

**DON'T
KEEP THIS
MAGAZINE!**

One reader shares:

I have taken our Northwestern Lutheran, after having read it, to our local laundromat. Also, the extra copies from our church I place in local libraries and other laundromats. People in these places are always looking for some really good digestible reading material.

How have you shared NL?

Write or call us to let us know how—and if you want, why—you shared your copy. We'll send you another—free. Northwestern Lutheran, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; 414/256-3232; FAX 414/256-3899.

Anniversary marks renewed focus

This year, Lutheran Girl Pioneers (LGP) celebrates the 25th anniversary of its Sunbeams. Sunbeams provides an organized program for girls in kindergarten and grades one and two who are too young for Pioneers.

In conjunction with the anniversary, LGP has renewed its focus. "We are focusing on the girls' opinions and views, allowing them to contribute to the organization's progress," says Jalaine Naumann, LGP public relations chairperson. "The girls asked and we listened." One of the things the girls asked for was a pinecar derby. The first International Pinecar Derby was held in June 1995.

As the program grows LGP adds special achievements and adapts others to fit the changing society. For instance, an evangelism program was started in 1994. "This gave the girls strong interaction skills through service to the Lord and the world around them as they shared the message of God's unfailing love," says Naumann.

LGP's next convention, its first international convention, will be in Lansing, Mich., in May. Girl Pioneers has caravans (branches) in mission and self-supporting congregations in Canada, Germany, and the U.S.

For information on LGP and how to begin a program, contact the LGP national office, 1611 Caledonia St, La Crosse WI 54603.

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Defining religion

dogmatics: the systematic study of the teachings of the Bible. In a dogmatics class doctrine drawn from Scripture is presented in an organized and orderly manner according to a number of theological categories.

Life issues television series completed

"*Life: A Gift of Love* assists individuals and families as they wrestle with confusing life issues," says producer Steven Zambo.

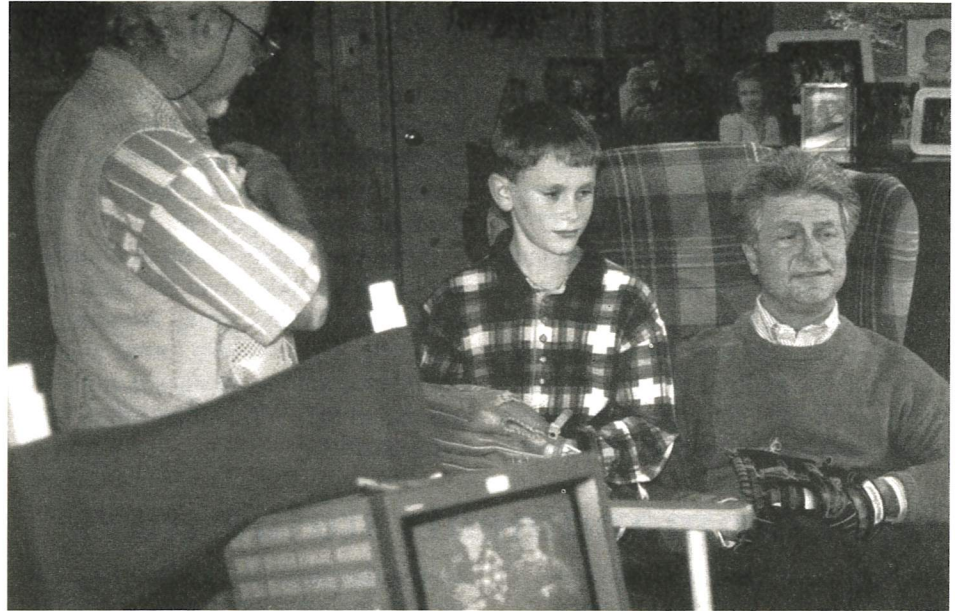
Through flashbacks to events in "Grandpa's" life, and narration from life issues professionals, the series applies God's Word to the important life decisions people face. "As far as life-issue related Bible class materials go, there is nothing out there like this series," says Zambo.

This television project was three years in the making and includes five episodes. The topics covered are

- making right decisions
- God creates and ends life
- qualitative vs. quantitative life
- purpose of life
- role of suffering

Life: A Gift of Love, available in two versions, can be used for personal or group Bible study. The first version contains all five episodes on one tape. The second includes all five episodes, a printed Bible class leader's guide, and the guide on computer disk.

Because everyone will face these issues, the series will be promoted to WELS members and also to other Christian outlets. "This biblically-



Ben Zambo and David Rupprecht prepare to film a scene from *Life: A Gift of Love*. The video series addresses life issues everyone will face.

based series can help many who are searching for direction with these important issues," says Zambo. "Congregations could base a Bible study on this, but they could also offer it on local cable access television." After showing the series, the pastor could hold a question-and-answer period for viewers.

"Our goal is to get people thinking

about life issues before a crisis occurs. The video series isn't supposed to have all the answers, but they need to know there is a WELS Lutherans for Life out there to call. There is their pastor. There is a great deal of help available," says Zambo.

To learn more, contact WELS Lutherans for Life, 2949 N Mayfair Rd Ste 309, Milwaukee WI 53222-4304; 1-800-729-9535.

CELC convention

The second triennial convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) was held Apr. 23-25 in Quebradillas, Puerto Rico. Together with WELS and ELS, the CELC is made up of 13 member churches from Africa (Nigeria, Cameroon, Malawi, Zambia), Mexico, Puerto Rico, Sweden and Norway, Finland, Germany, and Japan. The members heard a presentation of seven essays on the doctrine of justification and considered applications for membership from other Lutheran churches.

Lyle Lange

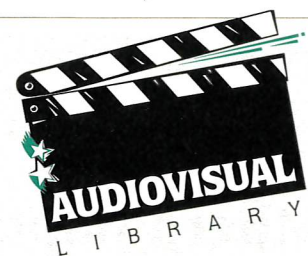
Obituary

Lydia Winter Sperling 1901-1995

Lydia Winter Sperling was born Jan. 15, 1901 in Leigh, Neb. She died on Dec. 31, 1995 in Lake City, Iowa.

A 1920 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, she taught at Medford and Marshfield, Wis., and Gaylord, Minn. She also served as an assistant librarian at DMLC and translated many German choral texts into English.

She is survived by children Katherine (Leon) Kutz, John (Marion), and Robert (Meredith).



Lutheran Mobile Clinic—Malawi (Code 5182)—1996, 20 min. color PIJSCA This video takes us to Central Africa where we see the healing work of our medical staff there. Every LWMS group will want to see this video.

Order from Audiovisual Services, Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284; 414/475-6600; 1-800-662-6093.



Who's in the pews?

Church attendance has fallen to its lowest level in a decade because baby boomers are dropping worship from their schedules, according to a survey by the Barna Research Group Ltd.

Although 82 percent of Americans called themselves religious, just 37 percent of the 1,004 adults questioned reported attending a worship service within the week prior to the poll.

This is the first time the percentage of attenders has dipped below 40 percent—the lowest since Barna Research began tracking religious involvement

in 1986. Church attendance has dropped most significantly among the baby boom generation, those born between 1946 and 1964. Only 31 percent of the boomers had attended church in the past seven days. In 1991, the figure was 50 percent.

The most steady group of church attenders are those over 50, with 50 percent of that age group attending regularly. The poll also found worship attendance among all ages is higher among women (46 percent) than men (28 percent).

Ten Commandments statue stays

The Supreme Court, without comment, allowed Colorado to keep a monument engraved with the Ten Commandments in a public park near the state Capitol. The High Court turned down an appeal by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, who argued that the monument violates the separation of church and state.

In addition to the Ten Command-

ments, the three-foot by four-foot statue also includes the phrase "I Am the Lord Thy God," two Stars of David, an American flag, and a bald eagle. Jay Sekulow, chief counsel of the American Center for Law and Justice, said the ruling is "in tune with the consensus of people of faith who are tired of being marginalized in an increasingly secular society."

Catholic ordinations increase

The number of ordinations to the Roman Catholic priesthood increased slightly in 1994, according to the Vatican's 1996 yearbook. The overall number of priests worldwide continued to decline due to deaths and resignations.

The number of ordinations in 1994 rose 0.86 percent from the previous year. The number of priests joining dioceses rather than religious orders has increased 10.7 percent since dropping to a low point in 1988.

Southern Baptists start record number of overseas congregations

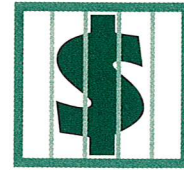
Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) missionaries established a record 2,612 new congregations overseas during 1995. The increase brought the number of congregations overseas affiliated with the SBC to 39,073.

Growth was especially strong in Eastern Europe, according to the SBC's mission board report. Romania

led overseas affiliates with 313 new congregations. Russia had 130 new congregations.

The board also reported 287,806 overseas baptisms—the Baptist way of joining the church—boosting overseas membership over the 4 million mark for the first time.

No state aid for prison chaplains



The Colorado House's State Affairs Committee voted 5-4 to reject the bill providing \$300,000 to pay for

chaplains at the state's prisons. The chaplaincy program was discontinued in 1993 because lawmakers objected to the cost.

Rep. Phil Pankey, a Republican lawmaker from Littleton, Colo., said churches should support chaplains as they do other missionaries. "If we can send thousands of missionaries all over the world, why can't we (the churches) do this?" Pankey said during debate.

Freedom of speech for street preacher

U.S. District Court Judge Ancer Haggerty has permanently blocked the city of Portland, Ore., from enforcing a city ordinance restricting speech in a downtown public park.

The ordinance prohibited anyone from attempting to talk to users of Portland's Pioneer Courthouse Square who were more than 10 feet away—unless the speaker was at a small spot in the northeast corner of the park.

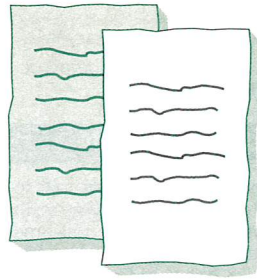
In July 1995, Ron Rohman, a street preacher since 1970, filed suit against the city contending that the policy violated state and federal free expression guarantees. In November 1995, Haggerty issued a temporary injunction blocking enforcement of the ordinance and on Feb. 26 made the injunction permanent.

"The court reaffirmed the value of free speech and religious liberty," said Kelly Ford, Rohman's lawyer.

Tennessee lawmakers honor Ten Commandments

With only one lawmaker objecting, the Tennessee Senate approved a bill urging that the Ten Commandments be posted and observed in homes, schools, churches, and businesses from May 5-17.

Sen. Ben Atchley told the Associated Press it is designed to uphold family values. Lone dissenter Steve Cohen said, "People have a right to worship God as they see fit," adding that he believes in the Ten Commandments but doesn't believe government should force them on



anyone.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Ten Commandments could not be posted

in public schools when not integrated into a course of study. However, the court rejected a suit that sought to force a Colorado public park from removing a monument with the commandments on it.

rē·li'giōn

Defining religion

Zion:
a rocky
hill in
Jerusalem

that served as a natural fortress for the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem before David's conquest. The name is also used in Scripture for Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 11:5), the Christian church (Hebrews 12:22-24), and heaven (Revelation 21:1-4).

Through my Bible in 3 years

June 1996

1. Judges 3:7-31
2. Jdg. 4
3. Jdg. 5
4. Jdg. 6
5. Jdg. 7:1-23
6. Jdg. 7:24-8:35
7. Jdg. 9:1-10:5
8. Jdg. 10:6-11:28
9. Jdg. 11:29-12:15
10. Jdg. 13
11. Jdg. 14, 15
12. Jdg. 16
13. Jdg. 17, 18
14. Jdg. 19
15. Jdg. 20
16. Jdg. 21
17. 1 Peter 1:1-12
18. 1 Pet. 1:13-2:3
19. 1 Pet. 2:4-17
20. 1 Pet. 2:18-25
21. 1 Pet. 3:1-12
22. 1 Pet. 3:13-4:6
23. 1 Pet. 4:7-19
24. 1 Pet. 5
25. Ruth 1, 2
26. Ruth 3, 4
27. 1 Samuel 1
28. 1 Sam. 2:1-11
29. 1 Sam. 2:12-36
30. 1 Sam. 3:1-41a

U.S. Catholics change attitudes on priesthood

Support for married clergy and women priests has grown among Roman Catholic parishioners in the U.S., while support for the teaching authority of the pope has declined, according to Thomas P. Sweetser, co-director of the Parish Evaluation Project.

Sweetser said 61 percent of Roman Catholic parishioners favor allowing priests to marry and still do their ministry, up 13 percent since 1992.

The same trend is apparent in reac-

tion to women priests, he wrote. In 1992, just 29 percent of those surveyed favored allowing women's ordination. In 1995, the figure was 42 percent.

As for the pope's teaching authority, in 1992, 30 percent agreed with the statement that "Catholics should follow the teachings of the pope and not take it upon themselves to decide differently." In 1995, the figure dropped to 25 percent.

In brief

- American organists prepare for a really big concert. The American Guild of Organists celebrated its 100th anniversary with the **world's largest organ recital**. Simultaneous concerts in churches, synagogues, and concert halls nationwide were held on Apr. 14. From Washington's National Cathedral to the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, Calif., more than 500 organists performed in 260 locations across the United States.
- Russian commission reports atrocities against clergy in former Soviet Union. **Some 200,000 clergy, many crucified, scalped, and otherwise tortured, were killed during the approximately 60 years of communist rule** in the former Soviet Union, the commission reported in November 1995. In addition, another 500,000 religious figures were persecuted and 40,000 churches destroyed in the period from 1922 to 1980.

To place an announcement, call 414/256-3231; FAX 414/256-3899. Deadline is six weeks before publication date.

CHANGE IN MINISTRY

Pastors:

Cox, Raymond G., from Lutheran Church of Cameroon, Cameroon, to Christ, Keystone Heights, Fla.

Dorn, John S., from Grace, S. St. Paul, Minn., to Grace, Pickett/Zion, Oshkosh, Wis.

Fisher, Kenneth J., from MLS, Saginaw, Mich., to Novosibirsk, Russia

Green, Darren L., from Novosibirsk, Russia, to Grace, Geneva/Trinity, Grafton, Neb.

Gunn, Jeffrey W., from Lutheran Church of Central Africa, Lusaka, Zambia, Africa, to ALA, Phoenix, Ariz.

Krieger, Freddy M., from First, Prescott, Ariz., to West LHS, Hopkins, Minn.

Merten, Brent C., from St. Paul, Algoma, Wis., to Eagle, Colo., exploratory

Moll, John, to Messiah, N. Hollywood/St. John, Tarzana, Calif.

Rupprecht, Jonathan H., from Arlington Avenue, Toledo, Ohio, to St. Lucas, Milwaukee, Wis.

Schwarz, Bryan E., from Christ, Lodi, Calif., to Calvary, Canyon County, Calif.

Correction: Kevin McKenney did not accept a call to Messiah, N. Hollywood/St. John, Tarzana, Calif., as was reported in the March issue.

Teachers:

Brenn, Deborah A., to Calvary, Thiensville, Wis.

Brutlag, Ronald D., to St. Paul, Livonia, Mich.

Carlovsky, Steven C., to Salem, Milwaukee, Wis.

Doletzky, Deborah C., from Immanuel, Kewaunee, Wis., to St. John, Libertyville, Ill.

Fleming, Susan M., to St. John, Burlington, Wis.

Fluegge, Myron R., from St. John, Lannon, Wis., to St. John, Baraboo, Wis.

Haag, Cheryl L., from Japan, to Zion, South Milwaukee, Wis.

Janetzke, Karen M., to Nebraska LHS, Waco, Neb.

Lecker, David P., from Holy Trinity, Wyoming, Mich., to Martin Luther, Oshkosh, Wis.

Mastrocola, Christine, from Jordan, West Allis, Wis., to Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis.

McLean, Irma R., from MLC, New Ulm, Minn., to St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn.

Mielke, Tammy L., from St. Paul, Columbus, Ohio, to Zion, Monroe, Mich.

Miller, Lori S., to St. Paul, Algoma, Wis.

Naumann, Michael S., from St. John, Lake City, Minn., to Jerusalem, Morton Grove, Ill.

Price, Jane A., from St. John, Redwood Falls, Minn., to Trinity, Kaukauna, Wis.

Schultz, Natalie M., from St. Mark, Citrus Heights, Calif., to Shepherd, Albuquerque, N.M.

Strasser, William A. Jr., from Zion, Valentine, Neb., to Manitowoc LHS, Manitowoc, Wis.

Troge, Kurt W., from Minnesota Valley LHS, New Ulm, Minn., to Manitowoc LHS, Manitowoc, Wis.

Bulletin BOARD & NOTICES

Westphal, Peggy R., to Faith, Fond du Lac, Wis.
Zak, Kelly S., from St. Matthew, Oconomowoc, Wis., to Apostles, San Jose, Calif.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

President Armin J. Panning accepted the call to serve the 16th professorship at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. With his return to full-time teaching, the position of seminary president has become vacant. The WLS Board of Control, with the approval of the BME, requests voting members of synod to nominate theologically trained candidates for the position of seminary president.

Send names with pertinent information by May 20 to secretary Paul A. Manthey, 8419 W Melvina St, Milwaukee WI 53222. The list of nominees will be published in the July *Northwestern Lutheran*.

The synod administration building will be closed the following date:

May 27—Memorial Day

Callers may leave voice mail messages on that day, 256-3888; FAX 256-3899.

Northwestern Publishing House summer store hours:

From Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend

Mon. - Fri.—9 AM to 5:30 PM

Sat.—9 AM to 1 PM

ANNIVERSARIES

Cataract, Wis.—Peace (100). May 19. Service, 10 AM; dinner at the Cataract school, noon. Seventh & Acorn avenues, Cataract WI 54620; 608/272-3844.

Elk River, Minn.—Abiding Savior (10). May 19. Service, 10 AM; lunch follows. 12942 193rd Ave NW, Elk River MN 55330; 612/241-9444.

Milwaukee, Wis.—St. James (75). May 26. Services, 10 AM and 3 PM. Dinner follows afternoon service. 414/453-5770.

Colome, S.D.—St. Paul (75). June 9. Services, 10:30 AM and 1:30 PM; lunch, noon. PO Box 113, Colome SD 57528; 605/842-1523.

Mauston, Wis.—St. Paul (100). June 23. Confirmation reunion. 517 Grayside Ave, Mauston WI 53948; 608/847-4108.

COMING EVENTS

Commencements—

Luther Prep School, 1 PM, May 22

Martin Luther College, 10 AM, May 18

Michigan Lutheran Seminary, 10:30 AM, May 25

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 10 AM, May 31

OWLS hostel—Training in spiritual, cultural, and personal growth issues. LPS, Watertown, WI 53194. July 12-17. Commission on Special Ministries, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; 414/256-3241.

Men's convocation—Western Wisconsin district. June 2, 6-8 PM. St. John, 304 N 6 St, Watertown, Wis. Mark Johnston to register, 608/849-7027.

NEEDED

Organ—For mission congregation. Can pay cost of shipping. Valley View, Helena, Mont.; 406/443-6326.

Campbell's soup and product labels—For WELS school needing equipment, games, and teaching tools. Good Shepherd, 2900 42nd St NE, Cedar Rapids IA 52402.

Information on church and school construction—What was built first, church or school? How many classrooms? Addition or new construction? What rooms were included? How much time elapsed from beginning to end of construction? Send to Faith, 1275 S Main St, Antioch IL 60002.

ITEMS AVAILABLE

Brochures—Information on the Luther lands. Contact Communication Services Commission, WELS, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; 414/256-3210.

Altar and pulpit—For mission congregation. Free for cost of shipping. Pastor Stephen Luchterhand, Beautiful Savior, Spooner, Wis.; 715/635-7125.

Paraments—Two sets, green or white. 90x21.5 altar paraments, pulpit, lecturn, altar covers. Free for cost of shipping. Wilma MacDonald, 909/359-4507; Glen Wenzel, 909/781-9455.

Church directory—For Olympic visitors to the Atlanta area. Free. John Meyer, 160 Chantilly Ln, Lawrenceville GA 30243; 770/963-0409.

Organ—Baldwin Cinema II, 32 bass pedals. Price negotiable. Ron Burhans, 1421 Ravine St, Janesville WI 53545; 608/755-0799.

Choir robes—46 cobalt blue with unattached reversible stoles in silver and gold. \$20 each. Peace (LCMS), 300 Lincoln St, Antigo WI 54409; 715/623-2200 or 715/623-2209.

NAMES WANTED

Yucca Valley, Calif.—Mark Mammel, Prince of Peace, 31785 Yucaipa Blvd, Yucaipa CA 92399; 909/794-2554.

Prince Rupert, British Columbia—Eugene Ludwick, secretary, WELS-Canada, c/o Box 21041, Prince Rupert, B.C. Canada V8J 4P2; 604/627-7545 (day), 604/624-9060 (evening).

SERVICE TIMES

Risen Savior, Chula Vista, Calif.—Sun., 8 AM and 10:30 AM. Sunday school, 9:15 AM. 625 Otay Lakes Rd, Chula Vista CA 91919; 619/482-7748.

Yucca Valley, Calif.—Services held second Sunday of each month in a home near Yucca Valley. Includes military personnel at 29 Palms. Pastor Mark Mammel, Prince of Peace, 31785 Yucaipa Blvd, Yucaipa CA 92399; 909/794-2554.

Peace, Shenandoah, Iowa—Sun., 8 AM, starting May 5. 411 Church St, Shenandoah IA 51601; 712/328-0157.

Redeemer, Council Bluffs, Iowa—Sun., 10:30 AM. 2756 Third Ave, Council Bluffs IA 51501; 712/328-0157.

ADDRESS CORRECTIONS

Boulder, Colo.—Pastor James Tauscher, 2788 Jay Rd, Boulder CO 80304; 303/444-4174.

Benton Harbor, Mich.—Pastor Ronald Freier, 92241 Fairview Ave, Benton Harbor MI 49022; 616/944-1892.

Have you thought about your baptism lately?

James R. Schulz

Although it happened over 30 years ago, I'm often reminded of my baptism. I thought about it again when I took my family to see the Disney movie *Toy Story*.

Toy Story is about the adventures of a little boy's toys, which come to life whenever human beings aren't around. The boy's name is Andy, and the two main toy characters of the movie are Woody, a cowboy doll, and Buzz Lightyear, an action figure who really thinks he's an intergalactic space warrior.

Woody and Buzz are Andy's favorite toys, and to show it, Andy wrote his name on the bottom of one of each of their boots so that no one, not even the third-grade teacher's nightmare Sid from next door, would mistakenly or intentionally take Woody or Buzz away from Andy.

And so it happened at my baptism. There the pastor poured simple tap water from a bowl no bigger than a candy dish. Yet there, through simple washing and God's powerful promise, God put his name and staked his claim on me. No one can mistakenly or intentionally take me away from my God.

Do you often think about your baptism? Do you know how God feels about you because of that event which took place so many years ago? So many sully the sacrament by forgetting the name put on them—the name of God: Wonderful Counselor, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. In a society where drug dealers steer our kids wrong, in a community where dad is so often delinquent, in a world where there is so much turmoil,

wouldn't you agree we need those names of God engraved on our hearts—to give us guidance, protection, and contentment?

Realize what comfort is found in the water of life. Because of your baptism, no one can steal you away from God. The Old Testament writer Isaiah wrote in chapter 43 of his prophecy: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine." Those words apply also to baptism.

Experience what power is connected to the promise. All the blessings Jesus the Christ purchased through his ministry here on earth become yours in the humble, simple sacrament of baptism. There God clothes you with his Son's perfect life. There God cleanses you of all your wrongs against his holy name. There God puts his holy name on you and sends you off to live as his child.

Have you thought about your baptism lately? Think about it now. And take to heart that God has claimed you as his own.

James Schulz is pastor at David's Star, Jackson, Wisconsin.

Through simple washing and God's powerful promise, God put his name and staked his claim on me.



Reserving sex for marriage

God's precious gift of sex is only for those who publicly promise faithfulness to one another for life.

Fredric E. Piepenbrink

Since the sexual revolution of the '60s, the idea of reserving sexual relationships for married couples has become utterly old-fashioned. Today sex is used to satisfy one's own innate drives—a cheap thrill. It's a way to get people to watch TV, to buy movie tickets, to sell something—anything. Some think sex is a way to become popular, to get someone to marry them, or to have children without getting married.

But this is contrary to God's Word and dishonors marriage—a holy state instituted by God for the good of mankind, in which two people commit their all to one another. Married couples hold nothing back. They sacrifice themselves for one another. And only to those who made that commitment and publicly promised that faithfulness to one another for life does God give his precious gift of sex.

Another godly guideline

Hebrews 13:4 says, "**Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure.**" Only in the marriage bed are sexual practices not a sin. Every other bed is impure—the prostitute's bed, the homosexual's bed, the bed of those who have no intention of getting married to each other, or

the bed of those who do intend to marry each other but not now.

How serious is God about his gift of sex? "**For God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral**" (Hebrews 13:4). When God says "judge," he means condemn, punish. Sometimes judgment starts in this life with trouble, disappointment, shame, revenge, hatred, or disease. Sometimes it doesn't come until the second death in hell. The Bible says the sexually immoral will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. They don't have a chance to be saved unless they recognize their sin, plead for God's forgiveness, and trust in Jesus. And with that, they will shun further sexual immorality.

Jesus' faithfulness to his church

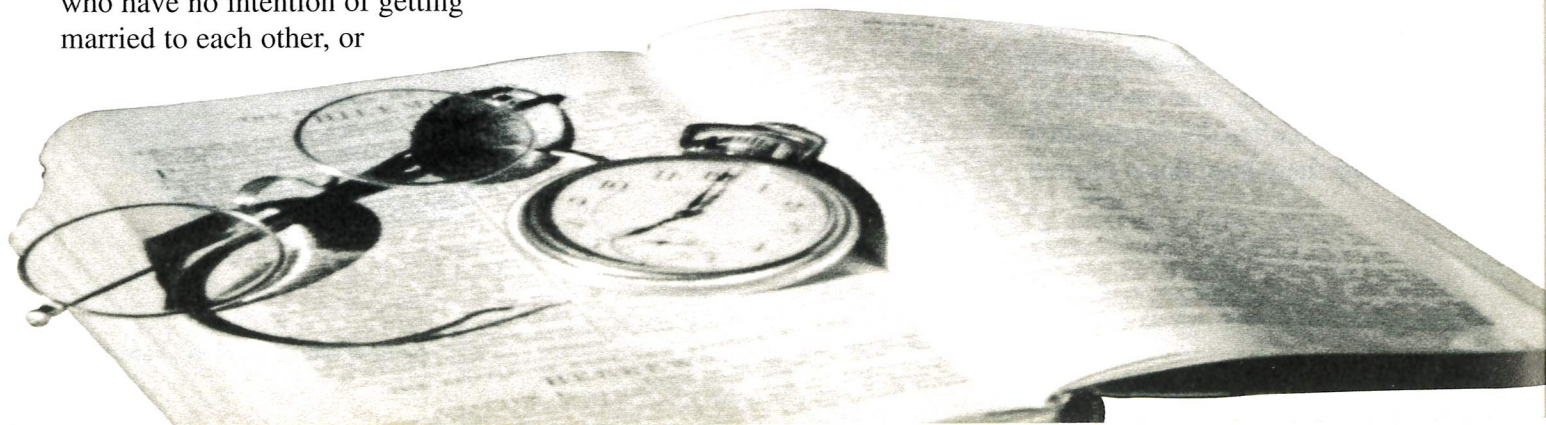
Reserving sexual relationships for marriage is a way Christians express Christ's faithfulness to his church. Paul says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). Jesus is committed and faithful to his church (that's you, the believers). Jesus gave his all to the church. He sacrificed himself for the church. He is never

going to take back his promises of forgiveness and salvation to the church. He is not going to be unfaithful to the church. So when married couples are faithful to each other, they reflect Jesus' faithfulness to them.

When single Christians are faithful to their future spouse (whom they maybe don't even know yet) by not practicing illicit sex, they demonstrate Jesus' faithfulness to them. When single Christians who will never marry, and divorced and widowed Christians who will never marry again, remain pure, they are faithful to the Lord. They put their body in subjection, give themselves fully to the Lord as Paul did, and thereby express the Lord's faithfulness to them.

Those who practice sex according to God's unchangeable will demonstrate a living faith in the Lord's loving relationship with his church and avoid his judgment. Sound old-fashioned? Only to unbelievers who don't know the intense love and faithfulness between Christ and his church.

Fredric Piepenbrink is pastor at Atonement, Milwaukee.



Profanity—never acceptable “adult language”

Walter F. Beckmann

The news media are expressing concern about the alarming increase of profanity. *USA Today* carried a cover story, “Public Profanity is on the Rise.” About the same time, a documentary showed little children, six or eight years old, blueing the air to such a degree that almost every word had to be bleeped out. Though I appreciated the concern, I couldn’t overlook the irony that it was a TV program doing the study. It was like a fox doing a study on bloodshed in the henhouse.

But children don’t learn profanity only from TV. They pick it up on the school bus, from music, from adults who should be role models, and even from their parents. It’s referred to as “adult language,” implying it’s okay for adults to use it, but not for children.

This raises an interesting question. At what age is it permissible to use so-called adult language? Never.

Why is profane language wrong? There are several reasons, depending on the type of profanity. Swearing by God’s name, calling upon him to verify what we’re saying, is usually wrong. It’s a frivolous use of our Creator and Redeemer’s name, a name that should always be held sacred. In certain instances, the Lord allows the government and the church to put us under oath as they carry out the responsibilities he’s given them. But ordinarily such a use of his holy saving name would be forbidden in the Second Commandment.

Another type of profanity is cursing—using expressions involving the concepts of hell and damnation. James warns us the tongue is often set on fire by hell and begins to curse. The Lord tells us to bless rather than to curse. To curse someone by

God’s name is blasphemous because it implies that God, who wants all people to be saved, would damn someone because they’ve displeased us. If God actually damned everything he’s asked to, there would be a lot fewer computers, lawn mowers, remote controls, and automobiles in the world. It’s only by his grace he doesn’t carry out all those curses.

Still another profanity involves the sordid use of sexual terminology. Such language offends God because it expresses a disregard for his Sixth Commandment. He commands us to avoid all obscenity and even a hint of sexual immorality. In Luther’s explanation to the Sixth Commandment, he urges us to be pure and decent in our words as well as our actions.

One final example is using what we might call bathroom words. We can’t point to any Scripture passage that condemns this; it may be a question of crudeness and coth rather than one of sin. Since the world isn’t always aware of that distinction, we could be using our freedom as a cover-up for evil (1 Peter 2:16) if we were to insist upon our right to use such words. It’s a commonly accepted practice to install doors on restrooms and keep them closed. It’s advisable for children of God to close the door on scatological terminology as well.

Paul said we should devote our thoughts to whatever is noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. Jesus himself said we should learn to use clear and simple words—yes and no—for “anything beyond this comes from the evil one” (Matthew 5:37).

Walter Beckmann is pastor at Grace, Falls Church, Virginia.

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Witnesses to the Ascension

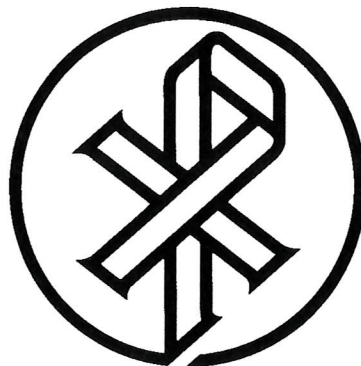
John F. Brug

What reason could there be for changing the last stanza of "A Mighty Fortress" from the powerful "take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, let these all be gone, they yet have nothing won" to the colorless, meaningless "do what they will, hate, steal, hurt, or kill"? Aren't Luther's words relevant anymore?

Usually the most unpopular thing about any new hymnal is changes to the wording or melodies of familiar, well-loved hymns, especially sentimental favorites associated with important holidays. When I was serving a congregation that included many Lutherans from a non-WELS background, the version of "A Mighty Fortress" in *The Lutheran Hymnal* was initially one of the least-liked hymns because the people had been used to different music for this hymn (CW 201) and to a different translation. For them our version (TLH 262, CW 200) took some getting used to.

With time the new versions of old favorite hymns in Christian Worship will become "old favorites" too.

With time the new versions of old favorite hymns in *Christian Worship* will become "old favorites" too. In the meanwhile, those of us who have been around long enough to have known and



loved *The Lutheran Hymnal* for many years are entitled to a few cases in which we feel "they should've left well enough alone." The changes in *Christian Worship* were attempts by the hymnal committee to make the old favorites clearer and more beautiful for the next generation.

In this case, I agree with you that the new version is not an improvement over the old, which is a more literal rendering of Luther's thought. But finally, this is a matter of opinion.

In a sermon the pastor spoke of blind Bartimaeus being able to use his new sight to see Jesus ascend to heaven. Is it clear from the Gospels and Acts who was present at the Ascension? Was it only the 11 or could it have included more people like Bartimaeus?

The events of Jesus' ascension are described only in Luke 24 and Acts 1. The Ascension account follows without any further introduction after Jesus' appearance to the Eleven and those with him (Luke 24:33).

This permits and perhaps suggests the presence of others at the Ascension. The verses of Acts 1 that describe the Ascension explicitly mention only the apostles, but Acts 1:4 seems to refer back to Luke 24:42-48, which describes events witnessed by more people than just the Eleven. Other disciples were present at events immediately following the Ascension in Acts 1. The brief allusion to the Ascension in Mark 16:19 does not add any additional evidence to the discussion.

Even though the accounts of the Ascension do not explicitly mention the presence of others beyond the Eleven, it isn't safe to conclude that no other disciples were present, since the Gospels frequently omit mentioning some participants in events. (For example, compare John 19:39 and Mark 15:43). In short, it seems possible that others beyond the Eleven witnessed the Ascension, but we have no specific evidence of who they may have been.

John Brug is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon.

***Have a question?
Send it to Your question, please,
Northwestern Lutheran,
2929 N Mayfair Rd,
Milwaukee WI 53222-4398;
FAX 414/256-3899.***



I commend Jeske's "Preaching that deserves the name Lutheran"

[Feb.]. It was an essential article from which I gained more than a cursory homily. I would love to see more theology in *Northwestern Lutheran*, instead of simple devotional and synodical articles. I realize many believe simple is best and don't want heavy theology, but theology means knowledge of God. I don't think we can afford to gloss over the truths and subtleties that make WELS different from other denominations. It is important to open a forum to challenge and educate souls beyond confirmation class. I challenge the editors and contributors of NL to risk teaching theology in the hope of expanding the readers' knowledge of God.

*Christopher Orr
Allston, Massachusetts*

I appreciated "Preaching that deserves the name Lutheran,"

especially since the message of many tele-evangelists has no law and gospel. Maybe it was not the intent of the article, but no mention was made of any application of law/gospel as it pertains to situations in our lives. The people sitting in the pews—children and adults alike—need that to keep interest during the sermon, and to give them something specific to relate to after they've left church.

*Esther Schultz
Denmark, Wisconsin*

Your article about how Luther Prep students excel

[Feb.] confirmed what many Canadians have long considered to be the situation with the state of American education. My rationale for saying that is the results reflected in the mathe-

matical bar chart don't add up. Here in Canada we teach 1 percent plus 28 percent plus 72 percent add up to 101 percent, not 100 percent. In humour . . .

*Ken Winges
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada*

We rejoice at the high caliber of students attending Luther Prep

[Feb.]. Luther Prep, of course, would take no credit for these scores, measured at the beginning of the students' stay there. I would like to know the rest of the story. How many freshmen came from Lutheran grade schools? I have a feeling the answer will reflect favorably on the dedication of the Christian day school teachers who helped prepare these youngsters for success.

*Beverly Bornschlegl
Waco, Nebraska*

I couldn't agree more with Prof. Mark Braun's article

[Mar.] concerning our freedom to use all forms of worship which give glory to God and edify the believer. His arguments from the New Testament and the Confessions are indisputable. As a student at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, I encourage WELS members everywhere to give thanks to God that we have a faculty at our seminary who shares those very same convictions.

*Peter Prange
Janesville, Wisconsin*

Kudos to Mark Braun for having the courage to warn us against legalistic obsession with ancient music and arcane rites of worship.

If we truly love the lost and selflessly wanted them to hear the gospel, why would we erect artificial barriers by insisting on only one particular form of public worship, especially one so alien to the majority of people we are trying to reach?

*Terry Hahm
New Berlin, Wisconsin*

Re: "Getting the right rite."

Perhaps a quote from our Lutheran Confessions might help us understand why some "liturgical" Lutherans worship the way they do: ". . . the Mass (the main, historic Christian service) is retained among us, and celebrated with the highest reverence. Nearly all the usual ceremonies are also preserved. . . . This worship pleases God" (Article XXIV of the Augsburg Confession). "We do not abolish the Mass, but religiously maintain and defend it" (Article XXIV of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession).

*James R. Schulz
Jackson, Wisconsin*

Pastor Baumler had an interesting editorial

[Mar.] on the WELS survey. One item mentioned prominently is finances. When discussing money and other necessities for the work of the kingdom, we should look at Luke 12:31 or Matthew 6:33, which say "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you." If you begin the work, the means will be provided. It took over 60 years to learn that, but I look at my own congregation and see ample proof that the "simple-minded" approach works.

*Richard H. Engelmann
Cincinnati, Ohio*

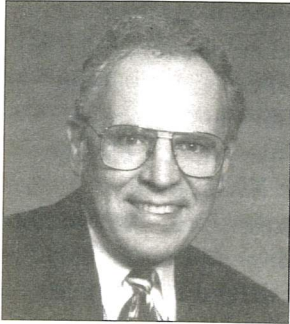
I am enjoying Pastor Wayne Mueller's articles on the Revelation.

As a subscriber to *The People's Bible*, I also look forward to the time when Revelation will come out. The *People's Bibles* have wonderful commentary that enhances one's understanding of God's Word.

*Laura Frohmader
Kendall, Wisconsin*

Pastor Mueller is writing The People's Bible on Revelation. Watch for word from Northwestern Publishing House for its release. —ed

Ours is not to measure but to strengthen



Gary P. Baumler is editor of Northwestern Lutheran and WELS Director of Communications.

*If we don't know
what's in the
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the Bible.*

“Is Christianity alive and well in the U.S.?” Or “is Christianity sick and dying in the U.S.?” What do you think?

I don't know the answers. God alone does. But think about the questions.

Essentially those questions were asked in a PBS program in January on “States of Faith: A Look at Religion in America.” The response was mixed.

George H. Gallup Jr., of the Gallup Polls offered early optimism when he said that religion in the U.S. has stabilized over the past 50 to 60 years. He emphasized: “Stability is the remarkable thing.” So, we who think things were better for the Christian church, say in the 1950s, should know they haven't changed much.

Or have they? Gallup added, “People today are not as educated in their faith.” For example, eight of 10 call themselves Christian, but only four in 10 know who delivered the Sermon on the Mount. He stressed there is “a great ignorance about religion” among us. People are getting involved, yes. But “a great gap” exists between practice and belief.

Then followed examples of religion, ranging from the Christian family who made their faith an integral part of their family life and witnessed to Christ as “the light of the world” to the mother who feels God lures people to him a “zillion ways,” including through her husband's fishing and other outdoor activities.

That latter example set the stage for the rest of the program. In summary, the message was

- religion is doing all right in America,
- religion needs to be more actively a part of our whole life,
- religions need to come together as community,

- religions need to deepen faith in people,
- people with deep faith will help make a better America.

How do we measure the strength of Christianity in the U.S.? Those who have no other measure will look at the lives of Christians and what contribution they make to society. And we should measure up to that standard. However, there is no way of telling whether we have been motivated by the love of Christ or some vague idea that life is spiritual. With that as the measure, logic compels us to conclude that all religions should come together and make this a better world to live in.

But look at what is ignored as inconsequential in that approach:

- people's eternal welfare,
- God's Word and sacraments,
- Jesus Christ as the only way to God,
- Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world,
- the forgiveness of sins made ours through Christ's death,
- Jesus Christ risen from the dead.

My list is not exhaustive, but it is exclusive. Without those, Christianity ceases to be Christianity no matter what we call it or how wonderful its followers are.

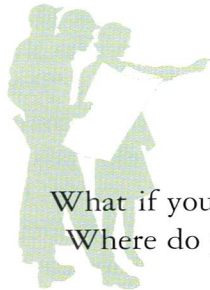
The most disturbing item, when it comes to how strong Christianity is in the U.S., was the indictment that people are not educated in their faith. For Christians that means we don't know what is in the Bible. And if we don't know what's in the Bible, there comes a point at which we cannot know the Christ of the Bible.

Meanwhile, ours is not to measure the strength of Christianity in the nation but to work to strengthen Christianity in the nation.

Gary P. Baumler

WE'RE WORKING ON BETTER TOOLS TO SERVE YOU.

Your congregation's ministry needs:



- People growing in God's Word
- Sharing Different Gifts
- Giving Their Time

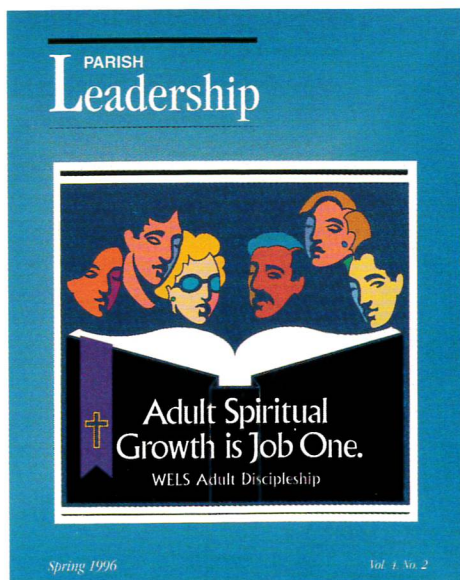


What if you're just learning how to help your congregation grow?
Where do you go for ideas and encouragement on how to serve?

Your WELS Board for Parish Services has developed tools and services to help people serve their local congregations in the areas of youth nurture and education, adult spiritual growth, stewardship education, outreach, school administration, ministry to special needs and leadership training. One of the most affordable tools is *Parish Leadership*, the journal for members who serve.

For several years, *PL* journal has included

articles from member leaders for member leaders in every area of parish ministry. And that's not going to change! What will change is the look, the title, it's practicality and how easy it will be for you to get and use—now 4 times per year. Starting with the November, 1996 issue, the journal will be called *Lutheran Leader*. These changes reflect our on-going commitment to helping member leaders who serve the Body of Christ.



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Get real

When you point his flaws out to a real Christian, he won't be angry—but you're probably not telling him anything he doesn't already know.

Kenneth A. Cherney

The other day I heard about a set of record albums you can order through the mail. They come in a case made of “red genuine imitation leather.”

Artificial and perfect

The ad was a joke, of course. Something that's “imitation” is by definition not “genuine.” The ad was a dig at (among other things) a society that has given up on ever seeing anything real again. Today, an “honest phony” is the best we usually hope for.

You can understand why that is. For years we've been drowning in a sea of the artificial. We top our sandwiches with slices of something yellow called “processed cheese food.” We wash them down with glasses of “orange drink” that shares no attribute with real oranges other than color, and even the color isn't right. We slap vinyl siding on our houses, stamped with a little woodgrain for effect.

Still, our nostalgia for real things is powerful. And real things are still available, to those who can afford them. We treasure them as prizes. “Look at this,”

we say proudly. “This is real silk. Real mahogany. Real hollandaise sauce.”

Real and flawed

Of course, it's not always easy to tell the real thing from a counterfeit. But there is one good rule of thumb to follow. Usually, the real thing has flaws. Real cheese sometimes crumbles; it doesn't peel neatly from its cellophane bodysuit like “processed cheese food.” Real leather scuffs. Real antiques have nicks, warps, and imperfections.

Real Christians are the same way. Real Christians have sins.

Obviously they're not proud of them. They struggle with them everyday. When you point his flaws out to a real Christian, he won't be angry—but you're probably not telling him anything he doesn't already know. His very Christianity consists of his trust that God, too, knows all about his imperfections—and forgives every last one of them, for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Real Christianity like that is simply not going to present a smooth, flawless face to the world. A real Christian who always greets the world with a “Praise the Lord!” and a Pepsodent smile is as improbable as a world-class athlete who never breaks a sweat. In spiritual things, if something looks too polished and flawless to be real, it probably is.

It's not easy to tell the real thing from a counterfeit. But there is one good rule of thumb to follow. Usually, the real thing has flaws.

You might notice something about us Lutheran Christians. Because of our history, we've learned to distrust anything that looks just a little too “holy.” It's like vinyl siding where the woodgrain is a little too perfect. Real holiness, and the pursuit thereof, almost never looks that way.

If you've ever felt similar mistrust, come and pay God's church a visit. Come exactly as you are. And we'll all be real together.



Ken Cherney is pastor at Living Hope, Mandeville, Louisiana.