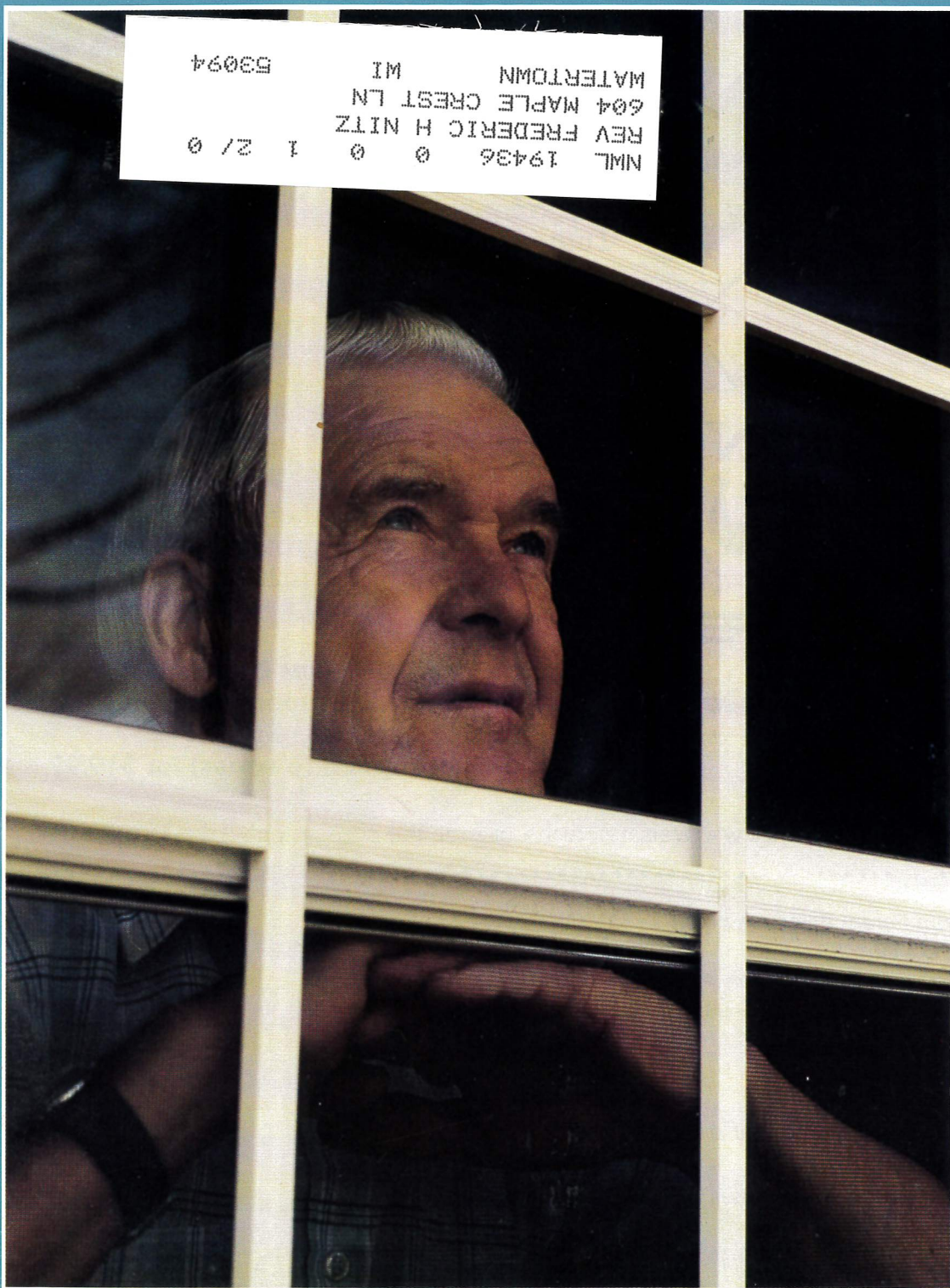


NORTHWESTERN LUTHERAN

June 1998

THE WORD FROM THE WELS



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families



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God has come to help his people

Jesus went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said.

"God has come to help his people." Luke 7:14-16

Richard D. Balge

A dead person was being carried out." It happens every day, doesn't it? To old and young, by disease or by accident, for obvious and for hard-to-understand reasons. Part of growing up is accepting that "in the midst of life we are in death."

Death conquers mankind

Many followed the funeral procession for the young man at Nain. He and his mother had been well-respected members of their community. Death, however, is not impressed by anyone's reputation. Medical science extends life, but we are still "like the new grass of the morning—though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered" (Psalm 90:5).

Death may be inevitable, but it is still crushing—doubly so in a case like this. He was an only son, the sole support of his widowed mother. People must have asked, "Why does God let things like this happen?" "How can God be powerful and good if he lets rascals and rogues live on and takes this young man?" Did his mother feel as though God had turned his face away from her? Several times the Old Testament characterizes the death of an only child as "bitter."



Death conquers man, it is universal and inescapable. All the more bitter that we ourselves are responsible for it! It is not natural, not something the Creator intended. It happens because "sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). With the young man of Nain, we too must return with Adam to the dust.

Christ conquers death

The funeral procession on the way to Nain's burial ground met the procession following Jesus. Jesus' heart went out to the widow. "Don't cry," he said. He didn't say anything about clouds and silver linings or promise that someone would take her son's place or say that time heals everything. He knew it was impossible for her to stop crying.

But then he took away her reason for crying. He said, "Young man,

I say to you, get up!" The dead man sat bolt upright. He spoke. He was restored to his mother. In simple words, Luke, a physician, recorded this event as truth. He knew, as we know, as the people going to the cemetery knew, that things like that just don't happen.

God, however, makes things that can't happen happen. What happened at Nain took place because he who said, "Don't cry," and "Get up," is the eternal Word made flesh, the Son of God, the Lord.

Those present did not doubt what happened. "God has come to help his people." The raising of the young man pointed forward to the resurrection of Christ himself and to the day of the resurrection of all the dead. Our lives need not be a melancholy waiting for the inevitable. Through faith in Christ, we can live and die in the hope of that day when the King of kings will say to us: "Get up." We may be slow to grasp it, we sometimes forget to live it, but we are doing more than whistling in the graveyard when we confess: "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."

NL

Richard D. Balge is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon.



- ☐ Death. It's not exactly something we want to talk about, but we can't deny its existence either. We must be ready to face it confidently at any time.
 - ❖ Are you ready to die? Pastor David Zietlow, who is facing death, reminds us that we all want to be in heaven, but we don't want to die. (p. 18)
 - ❖ Humans are conquered by death. Yet death is conquered by God. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, "God has come to help his people." (p. 3)
- ☐ It's not the most celebrated church holiday, but Pentecost can't be overlooked because it marks the work of the Holy Spirit. Read "A forgotten festival?" (p. 31) and "The first, but not the last" (p. 10) and remember God the Holy Spirit's importance.
- ☐ Homosexuality is becoming an accepted lifestyle in many Christian churches today. But Tom Trapp explains why we still believe it is sin. This is the first article of a three-part series on homosexuality. (p. 12)
- ☐ We start another series this month, on another tough topic—addiction. Over the next six months, various authors, in connection with God's Word, will address addictions and addictive behavior. (p. 8)
- ☐ The final article of our series on marriage appears this month. We thank our six authors. The entire series is on the WELS Web site at <www.wels.net>.

—LRB

Cover photo by Jerry Harders

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A model for marriage

A marriage based on the Bible will help couples fulfill their God-given roles and experience true and complete oneness.

Wayne D. Mueller

The bride did everything wrong. Again and again, she brought grief to her husband. He was the perfect spouse, but she willfully offended him by her public unfaithfulness.

The marriage came to the point of breaking up. On several occasions communication between the two stopped completely. The husband refused to talk to his bride for long periods of time, hoping she would again long for his voice and his company. But each time contact was reestablished only to be quickly broken off again.

The husband longed for the intimacy he had pledged to his wife. He did not cause the rift, but he knew that as the head of the marriage he was responsible for restoring the union.

Finally, he carried out his ultimate plan of love. He assumed the role of a servant and entered his bride's home in order to restore the marriage. Because he was dressed like a servant, his bride didn't recognize him. But he humbly went about his work of restoring the marriage. He did all the things that his bride refused to do. He exhibited perfect faithfulness in matters where she had been unfaithful. And when she was tried and found guilty of her many crimes, he willingly substituted himself to the executioner.

Acknowledging roles

This is the story of a real mar-

riage—the marriage of Christ to his bride, the church. This bridegroom-bride picture appears over and over on the pages of Scripture. It shows us how we break our own relationship with our Savior and how he renews our trust in his faithfulness. But beyond its application to all sinners, Jesus' servant role toward his church is also the motive and model for our roles as husband and wife.

The very idea of assuming a humble role rankles the secular mind. Yet

In spite of secular aversion to servant roles, humble, mutual service is more important in marriage than in any other social relationship.

God's greatest act of love asked Jesus to do just that. We are amazed to learn that Jesus did not take on this role as an obligation or duty. Rather, his love for his bride moved him to accept his role willingly. Jesus said, "I lay down my life for the sheep. . . . No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:15, 18).

How and why Jesus brought us back to God is key to all good human relationships. There is no unity in families unless children and parents honor their distinct roles. There will be no peace in the workplace if the roles of employees and

supervisors are ignored. Society devolves into anarchy when the line between rulers and citizens is obliterated. Even our antiauthoritarian society seems to have some respect for these role distinctions.

Ignoring roles

Society's pagan logic becomes strangely inconsistent, however, when it labels marital roles politically incorrect. In their relentless pursuit of money and professional accomplishment, many husbands and wives neglect each other's need for companionship. More often than not, husbands fail their role as spiritual leaders. Young women refuse to submit to their husbands. Divorce is common. Children are offended. Schools struggle. Crime rates rise. Morality declines.

Marital unity is the cornerstone of a stable society. In spite of secular aversion to servant roles, humble, mutual service is more important in marriage than in any other social relationship. Except for our unity with God himself, marriage's one-flesh union is the closest possible relationship between two individuals. As Jesus reunited us with God by humbly accepting a servant's role, marital unity is promoted by our willing acceptance of husband and wife roles.

Let's admit that our sinful flesh will naturally side with the sinful world on this issue. That's why God in his Word so often appeals to our

new man when he speaks about roles. He invites us to see our assigned roles in life as an opportunity to serve the Lord, who assumed the form of a servant for us.

Accepting roles

To elicit this kind of willing response to our roles, the holy writers frequently tie their role descriptions to Jesus. "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord" (Colossians 3:20). God urges employees, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (Colossians 3:23). To citizens St. Peter writes, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority

instituted among men" (1 Peter 2:13). Christians fulfill all their roles with this willing, loving acceptance for the sake of the Lord Jesus: "Each one of you should retain the place in life that the Lord has assigned to him and to which God has called him" (1 Corinthians 7:17).

Important as it is to accept all our servant roles in society, it is most important to accept the roles God gives to husbands and wives in marriage. Home is where the Holy Spirit creates our spiritual attitudes toward every role God will ask us to accept in later life.

Yet, because of its intimate nature, marriage is also the most difficult place to accept our roles and put them into practice consistently. So, where we need the most help in accepting roles, God provides the most incentive. He preaches his gospel of forgiveness and hope with his many pictures of Christ's marriage to his church.

Isaiah pictured God's love for his church as marital bliss: "As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:5). Jesus explained the spiritual working of God's kingdom with parables of wedding feasts

and bridesmaids. Heaven itself is pictured as the consummation of the perfect love of Jesus for his church: "For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear" (Revelation 19:7).

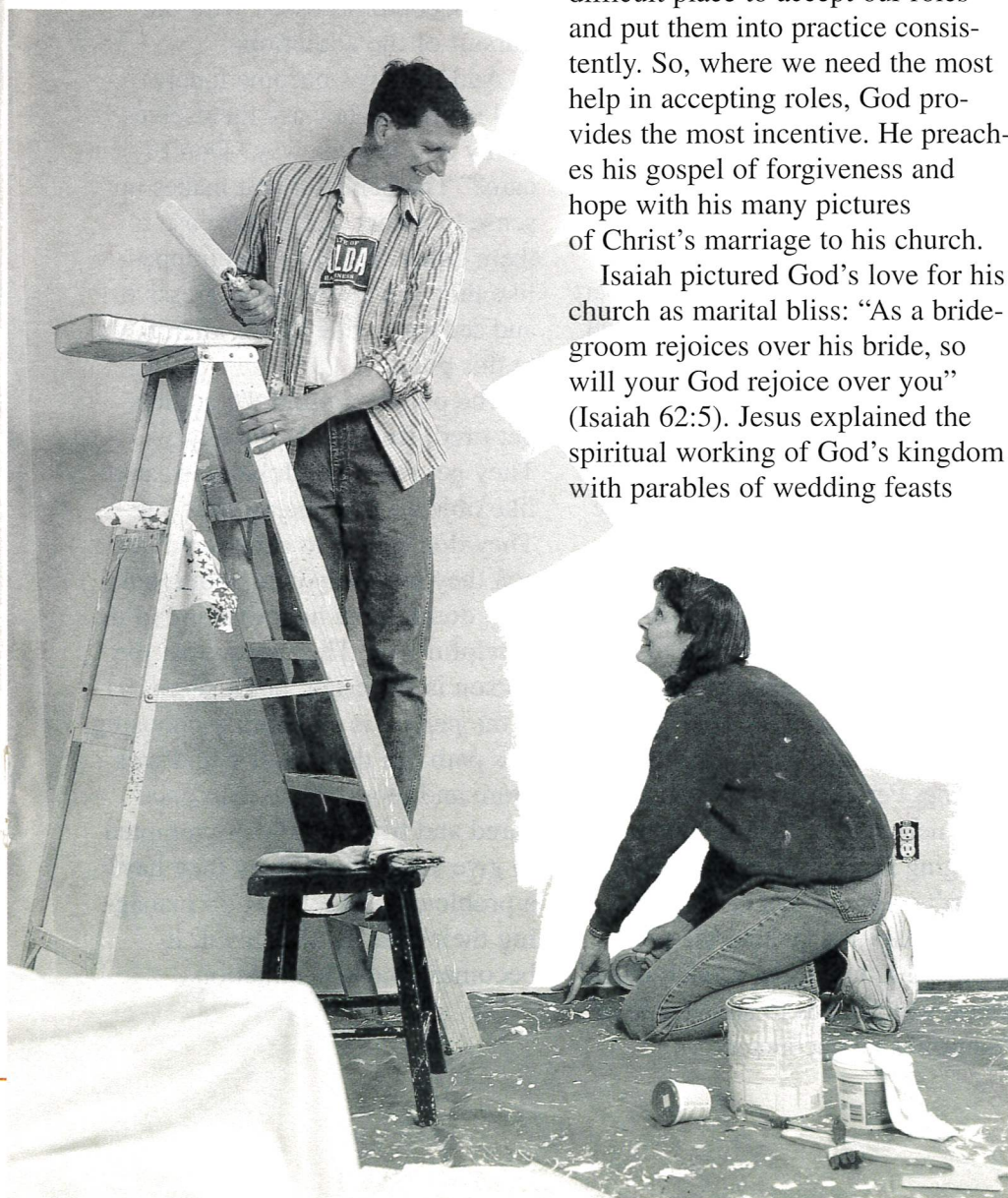
The most quoted picture, of course, is Paul's address to husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:22-33. There, too, God appeals to the new man we have in Christ. Jesus' love moves husbands and wives to imitate the Savior's actions toward each other. One pastor I know asked newlywed couples to read these words to each other daily.

Husbands and wives who accept humble roles of submission and sacrifice epitomize the whole life struggle of every believer. Every day with every breath, we fight to put down our selfish flesh and exert the power of our new spirit to serve others.

When the Lord empowers grooms and brides to fight this fight of faith, love radiates from their marriages in every direction. Their children mature to accept servant roles in their jobs and marriages. Fellow Christians draw strength from their example. Coworkers covet their unity. Unbelievers who admire their togetherness learn that it has its source in Jesus. This world becomes a better place to live. And more are won for the world to come.

NL

Wayne Mueller is the administrator of the synod's Board for Parish Services.



Out of control

People can form addictions in a search for happiness and peace.

Joanne Halter

Logically it doesn't make any sense.

- ✓ How could anyone continue gambling to the point of losing their family's home?
- ✓ Why would anyone shoplift a pair of sunglasses when they already owned four pair and were carrying money in their pocket?
- ✓ What causes a parent to stay online on the Internet for marathon sessions, neglecting the children who need to be fed and cared for?
- ✓ Why would anyone risk having sex with total strangers, taking on new partners every week?

More than excess

Some champions of our overindulgent culture boast that if anything is worth doing, it is worth doing to excess. But this is about more than excess. This is about unmanageable lives. This is about losing control. It is called addictive behavior.

Addictions are cunning. They are baffling. And they are powerful. Ultimately, addictive behaviors can destroy lives.

A comparison has been made between cancer and addiction. Cancer is an uncontrolled multiplying of cells; addictive behavior is an out-of-control drive for an elusive sense of happiness and peace. Both are progressive, both prey on people from all walks of life, and both are tough to arrest.

In the past, the diagnosis of addiction was associated almost exclusively with alcohol and drug abuse. However, many addicts of our times

never use mood-altering chemicals in their rituals of getting high.

There are many brands of addiction, all sharing some critical commonalities. For addicts, objects and events become more important than people. Addicts abandon the God-given way of having emotional needs met. We can enjoy healthy routines and rituals that bond us to family and friends. However, addictive rituals isolate the addicts from others. Addicts learn to distance rather than connect. They are proclaiming through their behavior, "I don't need people," and "I don't want to face anything painful." But addictions start to create the very thing the person is trying to avoid—pain.

Physical or emotional pain, a part of all our lives in this sin-corrupted world, is where the cycle of addiction begins. Rather than dealing with the reality and responsibility surrounding that pain, the addict opts for a process that will provide an escape and replace pain with something more pleasurable.

Perhaps it's the good feeling that comes from treating oneself to a favorite comfort food that culminates in gorging to the point of intense physical discomfort and finally purging. Perhaps it's arriving at the mall, new charge card in hand, and engaging in a spending spree that doesn't end until that card is maxed out. Perhaps it's visiting the porn shop and indulging in x-rated magazines, which leads to an evening of frantic sexual encounters.

Repeated cycles

Whatever the behavior, the cycle is repeated. And the result is the same. The need to act out is followed by an initial sensation of feeling better. However, this leads to pain from the acting out—guilt, shame, and emotional withdrawal. Addicts get stuck in a self-destructive cycle, and their lives become obsessed with the pursuit of the addiction.

Addicts' lives become lonely and isolated. They ask themselves, "Why do I act this way? Don't I care?" The behavior that makes no sense to others makes no sense to them either. Yet, they feel trapped—like they can't stop. A progressive and seductive ride has brought them to this point.

The people around the addicts get tired, frustrated, and angry. They get fed up with being treated like objects, with being shut out. They don't want to abandon a person they sincerely care about, but they don't know how to respond in a helpful way. They sense that the person is suffering, but it seems as if the person is stubbornly choosing this path. As the addict withdraws more and more, those who once cared and tried to help are tempted to give up. Addicts deny they have a problem and seem set on managing their lives on their own. It becomes a no-win situation.



Contributing factors

Although almost anyone may fall prey to addictive behaviors, there are clues about why and when people may be most susceptible. Those who lack mutually fulfilling relationships are particularly at risk. So are those who don't know how to or are afraid to trust others, frequently a carryover from how they were treated when growing up. They seem at a loss of how to successfully connect with people.

Certain life experiences may make one more vulnerable to forming unhealthy behavior patterns leading to addiction. These times usually revolve around a major loss—loss of a loved one (by death, a move, or a falling out), loss of status or job, loss of a life dream or goal. Addicts may fool themselves into believing that they can fill the void—salve the pain—by getting more deeply involved in an event or object (thus avoiding relationships) that may provide temporary relief. Ultimately that pain-numbing step may lead to a roller coaster

ride gone awry—suddenly it becomes frightening and seemingly unstoppable.

Some people are able to put on the brakes and end the behavior that once had a stranglehold on them. Still, addiction changes people in a permanent way, and their addictive personality may reemerge with a new focus. A former addictive drinker said, "I now find myself eating for all the same reasons I drank: I'm lonely, and I'm afraid." That is an admission of a life without resolution or peace.

New directions

How can we find true peace? Our search can end when the Holy Spirit accomplishes what we can't do on

our own. "The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:6).

It is comforting to know that our Savior can empathize with our 20th-century weaknesses. For he "has been tempted in every way, just as we are." Through Christ "we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:15, 16). Conquering addiction must begin with God. It must look to his gospel. He alone can bring healing to broken spirits.

NL

Joanne Halter is the director of program development at Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service, Milwaukee.

What's the difference between an addiction and a frequent, favorite behavior?

There may be things that become part of your regular routine—having that cup of cappuccino, tuning in to the TV shopping channel, jogging three miles (rain or shine)—you know, those things that become as much a part of your day as brushing your teeth.

You may even find yourself getting grumpy if you can't fit them in. You feel an intense craving for the activity and talk about needing your daily "fix." How do you know if you are in danger of becoming addicted, beginning on that downward spiral of self-destruction? Watch for these progressive signs:

- **Denial:** "It's not a problem. I can stop any time. I just enjoy it."
- **Immediacy:** "At times it becomes the most important thing in my life."
- **Compulsion:** "I know it doesn't make sense, but I have to do it."
- **Loss of control:** "It's more powerful than I. I want to stop but I can't."
- **Progression:** "It's getting worse. It's scary."
- **Withdrawal:** "Leave me alone. I don't need you."

The first, but not the last

Jesus is the perfect firstfruit. He was the first to be waived through death to life. But not the last!

John C. Lawrenz

Tiberius, the successor of Augustus, was Caesar in Rome. His man in Judea was Pontius Pilate. It was the time of the grain harvest throughout Judea. A potential uprising had been averted through the execution of a rabbi from Galilee. The man's disciples had deserted him. In fear they hid from the Passover crowd

and waited behind closed doors. Jerusalem lay quiet despite a mid-afternoon tremor.

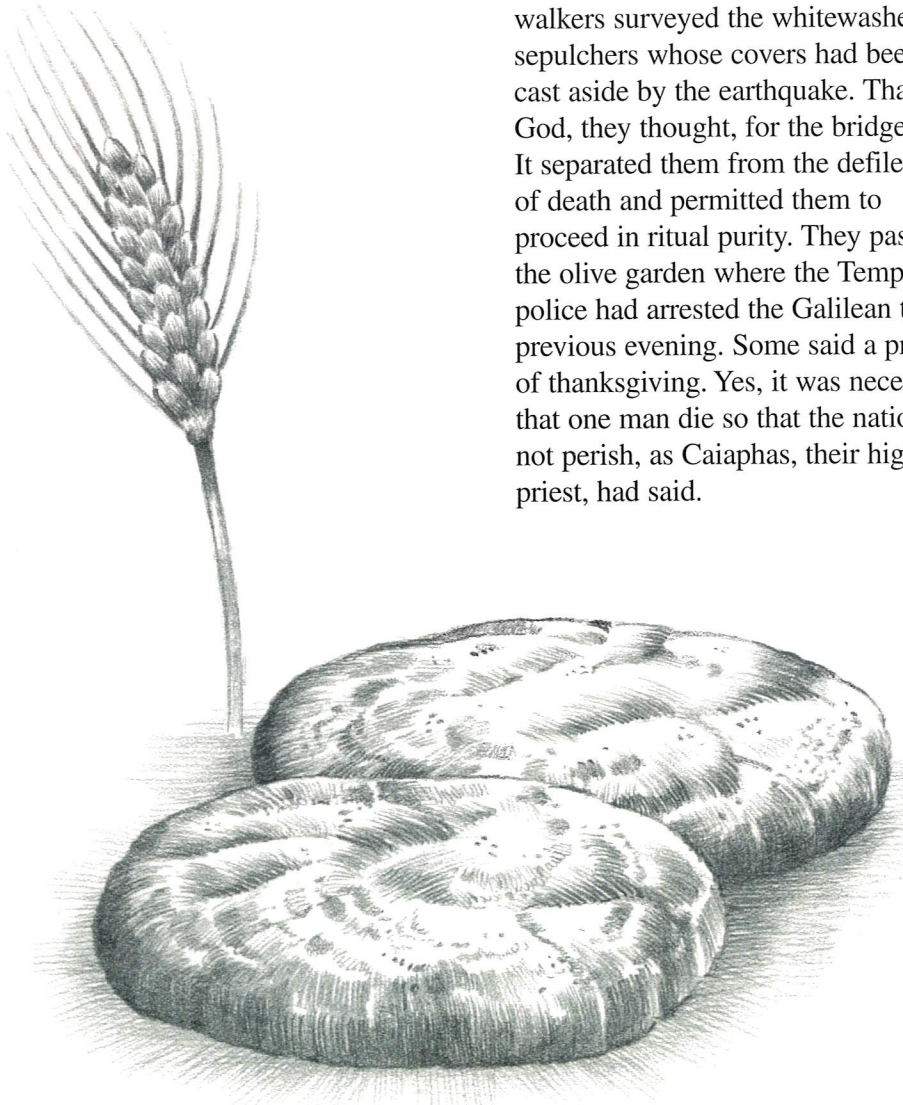
The firstfruits on two fronts

Dark skies had given way to a bright late afternoon sun. Long shadows fell in the direction of the Mount of Olives. A formal procession of priests followed the shadows. As they crossed a bridge over the deepest portion of the Kidron, the walkers surveyed the whitewashed sepulchers whose covers had been cast aside by the earthquake. Thank God, they thought, for the bridge. It separated them from the defilement of death and permitted them to proceed in ritual purity. They passed the olive garden where the Temple police had arrested the Galilean the previous evening. Some said a prayer of thanksgiving. Yes, it was necessary that one man die so that the nation not perish, as Caiaphas, their high priest, had said.

The procession reached the Vale of Ashes, so called because each day in this place outside of the holy city the Levites deposited what the altar of sacrifice in the Temple did not burn. Before them was a plot of land. Seven sheaves of still-standing barley ears were bound, each with a linen cord. The lead priest stood before the waiting sheaves. With seven swooshes of his sacred sickle, the barley was cut.

At that very moment on the other side of Jerusalem, a dead weight dropped ever so slowly from its place into the waiting arms of a member of the Sanhedrin. He had once spoken with the Galilean secretly at night. His friend from Arimathea, another secret disciple, lent a hand. The two carried their burden to its resting place in a chamber cut freshly into the side of the limestone hill.

The priests made their way ceremoniously back across the Kidron to the Temple with the sheaves in hand. As darkness fell, so did the kernels under the thresher's repeated strokes. Cast on a pan over an open fire, the kernels lost all moisture. A mill ground them, hulls and all, into coarse flour. The priests sifted once for each of the tribes of Israel, and added one for good measure. An *omer*, equal to an over-flowing quart, was then measured out, anointed with oil, and sprinkled with the finest incense. All was made ready for the morning after the Sabbath.



Early on the first day of the week, the day after the Sabbath, the prepared *omer* made its way up the steps of the altar on which the morning sacrifice had just been offered. The high priest carried it. Up and down. Back and forth. With a slow and solemn motion he etched an invisible cross in the open air. The sacred waiving of the firstfruits had again been performed according to its full and ancient custom. The high priest then let a handful of barley flour, oil, and incense slip through his fingers. Fire leapt from the burning flesh of the morning sacrifice to consume the fragrant offering of a portion of the firstfruits.

Simultaneously, a Light far brighter than fire leapt from its rock-hewn resting place. The earth quaked violently. A sepulcher on the other side of town became suddenly empty. The defilement of death dissolved forever as the grave stone rolled away. A just, but merciful God had waived forever the consequences of sin—in full! In that moment the grave had lost its victory and death its sting—completely!

The repeated fruits forever

Our story is not over. There would be another waiving on another day. It was the will of God that the Risen One be the first, but not the last.

And so it happened. Counting seven weeks of seven days from the waiving of the *omer*, the Temple priests returned to the Vale of Ashes. Again they cut ripe grain, this time

from the firstfruits of the wheat harvest. Again the kernels were threshed, sifted, and measured. This time, however, the flour was divided. On the eve of the fiftieth day of the waiving of the *omer*, separate priests in separate quarters each kneaded and baked a loaf, each a perfect copy of the other. Each was

four handbreadths wide and seven handbreadths long. Each, when baked, stood four fingers high. Each was turned up at all four corners. But unlike all other bread brought before the Lord in his Temple, these loaves were made with yeast.

Up and down. Back and forth. With a slow and solemn motion

the high priest held the two loaves and etched an invisible cross in the open air of the Temple courtyard.

It was the fiftieth day after the waiving of the barley *omer*. It was the feast of *Shevuot*. This Hebrew word contained the sacred number seven, used throughout Scripture to proclaim God's gracious dealing with mankind. Like Passover it was a feast on which Jewish men were obligated to gather for worship in Jerusalem. It was a day to celebrate the covenant God made with his people on Mt. Sinai. The pious spoke of the holy covenant between God, the heavenly bridegroom, and Israel, his holy bride. Rabbis in the synagogues read the story of Ruth, the Gentile who said, "Your people will be my people and your God my God." Ruth became an ancestress of King David. Many in Israel were

anxiously waiting for the coming of Messiah, the son of David.

In the Temple courts stood "Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans, and Arabs."

At the moment of the wave offering in the Temple, a violent wind shook a room elsewhere in Jerusalem where the Galilean's disciples had gathered for prayer. There, fire leapt from head to head. Mouths spoke words never before spoken.

Crowds gathered. Peter preached. The word spread. Baptisms happened. The harvest of the heavenly bridegroom began. Jews and Gentiles came together under the new covenant in order to share one loaf and one cup. The Spirit of God testified through the witness of hundreds, then thousands. They spoke of the one who, 50 days earlier, had become the firstfruits of all who had fallen asleep. They declared, "Christ, the firstfruits! Then, when he comes, those who belong to him!"

Jesus is the perfect firstfruit. He was the first to be waived through death to life. But not the last! You and I are the loaves laden with the leaven of sin. Our high priest waves us before God. We pass through death to life. But shall we be the last to be waived? With his eyes on the still-ripening harvest, our firstfruit says, "be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth!"

NL

John Lawrenz is administrator of the Board for Ministerial Education.

Sodom: inhospitality?

Many mainline Christian churches are defending the homosexual lifestyle, but God's Word clearly calls homosexuality a sin.

Thomas H. Trapp

8 No, you yourselves do wrong and defraud, and *you do these things to your brethren!*

9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals,¹⁶ nor sodomites,

10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

condemns the practice of homosexuality if it's a "loving, committed, caring relationship." The real reason for these changed beliefs is a shift in this century away from reliance on God's Word to reliance in scientific judgments and personal experience.

This article will speak to the reinterpretation of Scripture.

Sodom & Gomorrah

Theologians who support the homosexual lifestyles say the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was not the sin of "homosexuality" but "inhospitality." They claim that the Hebrew word *yada* in Genesis 19:5 (KJV "know," NIV "have sex with") should be translated "get acquainted." "Bring them [Lot's guests] out to us so that we can *get acquainted* with them"—that is, find out if they are a danger to our community. The sin of Sodom, pro-homosexual theologians say, was that the men of Sodom broke the ancient code of hospitality and started pounding Lot's door down.

True, *yada* can mean "get acquainted with," but it can also mean "have sex with." Context determines the meaning. If the men of Sodom wanted only to check out whether Lot's male guests were intruders, then why would Lot offer these men the right to have sexual relations with his two daughters? This makes no sense. Lot's terrible offer of his daughters was to satisfy their lust, not their concern for community safety (Genesis 19:5-8).

The context is clear that the men of Sodom wanted to sodomize Lot's

Never in the history of the Christian Church have avowed Christian congregations affirmed homosexuality as a God-pleasing lifestyle—until the late 20th century.

Deceptive claims

Today, more and more mainline Christian churches embrace homosexuality as an alternate way of living. A few years ago in Ohio, a Protestant pastor preached a sermon titled "Homosexuality is not a sin." He asked, "What does the Bible say [about homosexuality]?"

"Not much," he answered and continued, "Jesus says nothing about homosexual acts, nor do the four Gospels. Perhaps, in all Scripture there are only six passages that in any way deal with it. Yet, nowhere in Scripture does the Bible

condemn homosexuality as it is understood or practiced today."

Recently, in a midwestern city, more than 60 church leaders (mostly Christian clergy) signed a document and publicly announced their support of gays and lesbians: "As Christian clergy we embrace gay and lesbian persons as our neighbors. From our reading of Scripture and from our pastoral experience, we believe there is sufficient evidence to conclude that homosexuality is neither sickness nor sin."

How can theologians defend and affirm the homosexual lifestyle? Two major reasons are given. First, people are genetically predisposed or sexually-oriented to be homosexuals; they can't change. Second, theologians claim that Scripture never

male visitors. While the men were undeniably inhospitable, they were also immoral. Jude 7 speaks of Sodom's sins as "sexual immorality and perversion." Such words are not used for sins of inhospitality, but homosexuality.

Levitical laws

"Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman, that is detestable" (Leviticus 18:22). Some pro-homosexual theologians claim that this prohibition, along with all the other Levitical prohibitions against homosexuality, are only cultural-ceremonial laws that apply only to the Old Testament Jews and do not apply today. But the sexual relations laws in Leviticus 18 are not just cultural and limited to Israel. They are moral laws (rooted in the Ten Commandments) that apply to everybody at all times.

God even holds the heathen accountable for such immoral practices because they have God's natural law written in their hearts (Romans 2:14,15) and should know better. Moses warns: "Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways [including homosexuality], because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants" (Leviticus 18:24,25). "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman . . ." still applies today. It's part of the moral law, which Jesus came to fulfill.

Natural and unnatural

Romans 1 states that "even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another" (v. 26,27). Theologians who support

homosexuality say that Paul is describing here an "unnatural, reckless, careless type of homosexuality." They insist these verses do not condemn a loving, committed, caring homosexual relationship.

God's Word alone can guide our feelings to a godly path.

This interpretation misses the whole point Paul is making. Whether the homosexual acts are "reckless" or "caring" has nothing to do with Paul's message. Paul is talking about natural versus unnatural sexual relations. The reference to "natural" in Romans 1 does not refer to homosexual relations, but to the male and female relationship God created and established in Eden before the fall into sin. Paul is condemning *any* human behavior that goes against "nature," that is, against God's created order in Eden. He warns that even if it "feels natural" to desire a same-sex relationship, one's feelings can be wrong. Romans 1:18 asserts that we can "suppress the truth" and make sin feel natural. God's Word alone can guide our feelings to a godly path.

Homosexual offenders

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? . . . Neither . . . male prostitutes [Greek: *malakoi*] nor homosexual offenders [Greek: *arsenokoitai*] . . . will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9,10). Pro-homosexual theologians contend that the Greek word *arsenokoitai* means "a lustful, uncommitted relationship." That's not true. The Greek word simply

means "a homosexual; a male who lies [sexually] with a male." *Malakoi* means "soft, effeminate" and is used to describe the female counterpart in a gay relationship.

A so-called "committed or uncommitted" relationship is not in the text. Just being homosexual, like being any kind of sinner, withholds one from the kingdom of God.

Jesus and homosexuals

What does Jesus say about homosexuals? "Nothing," pro-homosexual theologians respond. It's true. Jesus never spoke against homosexual relations. Nor did he speak against rape, incest, or bestiality. Silence does not mean Jesus approves of those activities. What speaks loudly, however, is Jesus' word on the only legitimate sexual union of two people—marriage between a male and a female. Celibacy, Jesus teaches, is the only godly alternative to marriage (Genesis 2:20-25; Matthew 19:1-12).

Forgivable

According to the Bible, homosexuality is a sin. "So is it unforgivable?" some ask. Homosexuality along with robbery, drunkenness, animosity, and all sins are destructive to one's soul and one's relationship with God. But they are also all forgivable.

They're forgivable in Jesus Christ. "Repent," Jesus calls to all of us, and he invites us to believe in him for forgiveness. He shed his holy blood in death on the cross for all our sins. That blood and only that blood washes us clean of any sin (including homosexuality) and brings us into God's kingdom.

NL

Thomas H. Trapp is a full-time campus pastor for Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel & Student Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Ghost stories

Are ghosts real or not?

John M. Parlow

Ghosts, sometimes called poltergeists, are said to be spirit apparitions through which the souls of dead persons manifest themselves. All of us have heard fictional "ghost stories" from the time we were children. Didn't we all have a ghost in our closet or under the bed?

While we dismiss such stories now as figments of fertile juvenile imaginations, we cannot altogether dismiss the idea of genuine spirit phenomena popularly associated with ghosts.

Ghostly appearances

Thousands of sophisticated, intelligent people around the world are convinced that ghosts not only exist, but that they can and do communicate with the living. Do "ghosts" speak from the shadows of a candle-lit room? Are there actually supernatural spirit phenomena associated with those creaks and knocking sounds in the abandoned house on the corner? And if so, are they adequately explained as the spirits of the deceased?

Milbourne Christopher, once known as America's foremost magician, was also a psychic researcher. Christopher, like many researchers today, was convinced that accounts of ghosts and haunted houses could be explained on a natural level. He offers the following example of a so-called haunted house that was found to have a natural explanation:

There are sounds in old houses that are not made by human hands or human voices. They are heard

during storms or at certain seasons of the year or in some cases on specific days and at specific times. When the sounds persist, rumors spread that houses are haunted, and they are difficult to sell or rent (ESP, *Seers and Psychics*, p. 167).

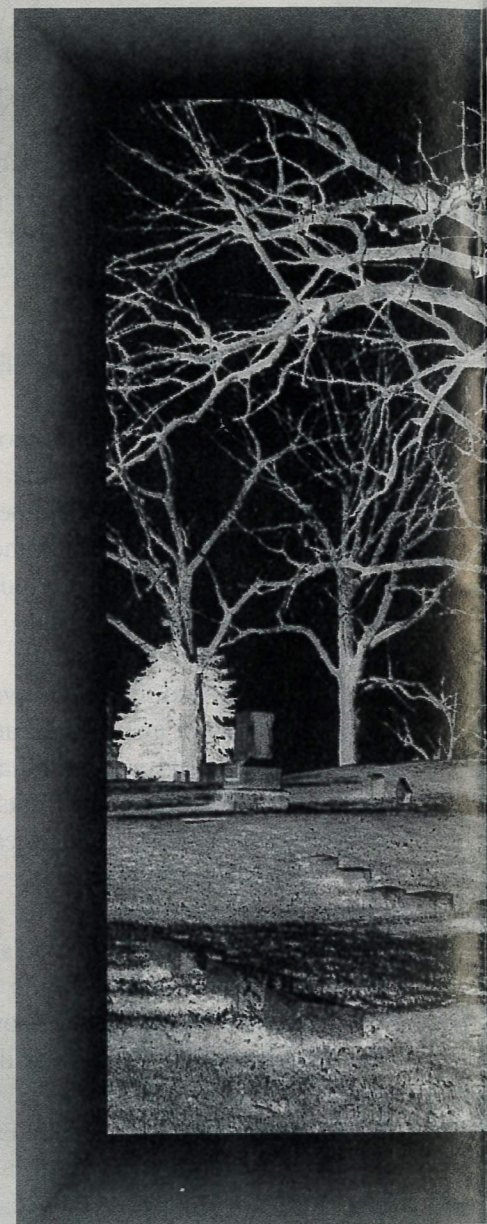
The shrieks and groans of another "haunted house" were discovered to be the work of an adventurous young child. Apparently the child had lodged a toy whistle in the knothole of a tree directly opposite a broken pane of glass. When the wind blew hard, it caused a draft and the wild shrieks that tenants had mistaken for the groans of the walking dead.

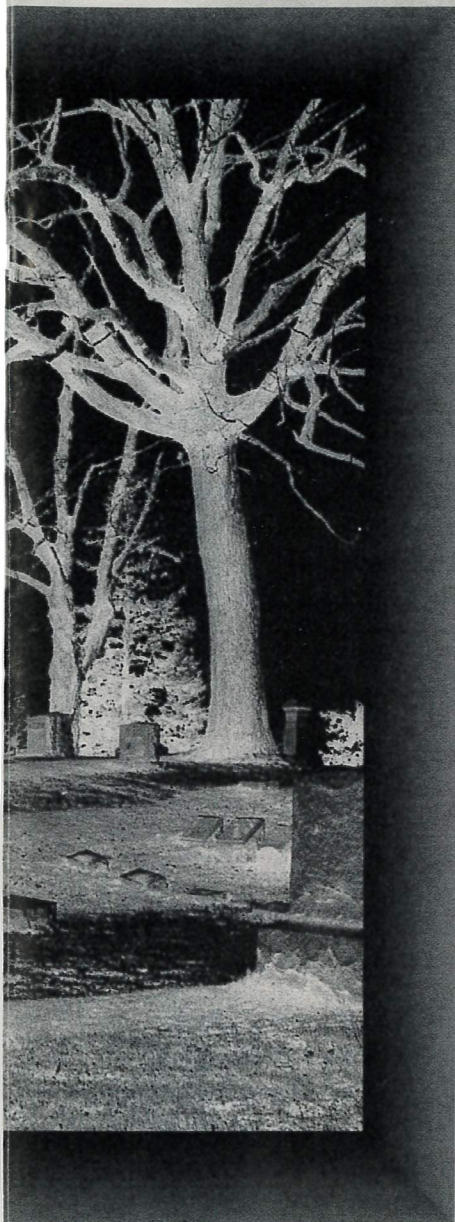
There is no need for a Christian's spirit to return to "haunt" this world.

Scriptural explanations

Examining such cases of "ghostly" apparitions, we as Christians can use scriptural principles to define our response to such phenomena. Remember, much of what is reported as "ghostly" phenomena is fraudulent. It is either deliberately manufactured "evidence," or a natural explanation for the phenomena is more reasonable and probable than a supernatural explanation. We are not concerned here with such natural phenomena, but only with what defies natural explanation.

Scripture clearly teaches that "man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment," and after death occurs "the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Hebrews 9:27, Ecclesiastes 12:7). There is no soul sleep or "wandering" period for the departed soul. Jesus said, "Today, you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Those who die in faith immediately live with the faithful in eternal peace and joy.





Those who die apart from Christ remain so eternally.

A common denominator in the most convincing ghost stories is that the ghosts don't have peace. They are in torment, usually bound in some way to the place or building where they died. As we have already seen, the soul of a Christian would go immediately to be with Jesus Christ. Because he would have peace, he would not have to wander in torment.

Another common denominator is the compulsion of the departed

spirit to see his murder avenged. He cannot rest, it is said, until the crime is punished. This desire for personal vengeance, exemplified by such "hauntings," is denied to one who desires to follow the Lord. "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, 'It is mine to avenge I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19).

There is no need for a Christian's spirit to return to "haunt" this world. Jesus conquered death and rose from the dead to prove the good news of God's love and grace extended to mankind. It is highly unlikely that these visitors are members of the kingdom triumphant.

Furthermore, Scripture never indicates that a spirit of an unbeliever is permitted to leave its place of torment in hell.

Demonic deceptions

Therefore, it is a fair assumption that the vast majority of "ghost" experiences that defy natural explanation are demonic in origin. Hebrews 2:14 notes Satan's preoccupation with death. It would be fitting for his legions to pretend to be the spirits of the departed. The Bible even tells of a demon-possessed man who had a compulsion to roam a graveyard (Matthew 8:28, Mark 5:2-5).

The account of Samuel and the witch at Endor in 1 Samuel 28 has been a source of fruitless debate among Bible-believing Lutherans. Many, like Martin Luther, said that it was an evil spirit that imitated Samuel in appearance and dress. One argument set forth by such people is that God would not permit one of his saints to be summoned back to earth.

Nowhere is this taught in the Bible. In fact, it would appear to be contradicted to some extent by the appearance of Moses and Elijah at

the transfiguration. If God in his wise providence saw fit to send back a saint for a message of confirmation, could he not also send one back for a message of judgment? We dare not limit God's power and plan by placing him in the "box" of our own limitations.

A closer look at this account also reveals that nowhere is this spirit called evil, but it is simply called Samuel. The language certainly sounds like the message of the departed prophet and, in fact, the prophecy is perfectly fulfilled. Fulfillment is always characteristic of a prediction that comes from God (Deuteronomy 18:22).

Let's not forget, however, that the devil is a clever deceiver who often tells the truth for his own purposes. He is the adversary who takes old lies and skillfully rewraps them. Paul reminds us that Satan even appears as "an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). It is not necessary for us to debate such open questions. As one Lutheran theologian said, "That it was a sinful act on Saul's part to attempt to gain hidden knowledge in this way and that it brought him nothing but grief is made crystal clear in the text."

Sound advice

It is imperative to remember that any effort to seek knowledge about the future through the dark arts is a violation of God's Word. Christians not only sin when they seek to communicate with the beyond but they place their souls in grave danger. The devil plays for keeps. Christians are content to trust the words of the one who holds our future in his hand. Surely his Word is of more value than that of a disembodied spirit!

NL

John Parlow is pastor at St. Mark, Green Bay, Wisconsin.

We are a family—by the grace of God

God chose us and made us one family in faith.

David J. Valleskey



We were not a family, but now we are a family—by the grace of God. It had to be by God’s grace, since we were “dead” in transgressions and sins, unable to change our situation. And, even if we were able, we were unwilling—because by nature we were enemies of God and each other.

We were chosen by God

By God’s grace we have become a family. As Paul writes:

Praise be to the God . . . who has blessed us . . . with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as

his sons through Jesus Christ . . . to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace . . . (Ephesians 1:3-8).

Note the actions: Before the creation of the world, he “chose” us, “predestined” us to be adopted as his sons, and then he “redeemed” us. These actions were solely the work of God. He chose us “in accordance with his pleasure and will.” Christ redeemed us “in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.” In an act of overflowing grace, God chose us to be his children and in Christ redeemed us, paid the price of the death penalty for sin so we have forgiveness.

All that was needed was a way to apply the benefits of Christ’s redemption to the hearts of those whom God had chosen—and thus give them a new start. God supplied that in the gospel. Through Word and sacraments, those born as sinners are reborn as saints.

Chosen, redeemed, reborn—all by God’s grace—we are now part of the one family of God: “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

We are one in faith

We have been reborn into one family under one God. And that links us. Paul tells the Galatians: “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. . . . you are all one in Christ Jesus” (3:26-28).

The church is family. God is Father. Jesus Christ is elder brother. Believers are children of God and thus brothers and sisters of one another.

This is seen dramatically in the way that Jews and Gentiles, formerly separated from each other by a wide chasm, were united as brothers and sisters. Paul writes:

Remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth . . . [were] excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you [Gentiles] who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ . . . who has made the two [Jew and Gentile] one. . . . His purpose was to create in himself one new man [children of God] out of the two [Jew and Gentile], thus making peace, and in this one body to

reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility (Ephesians 2:11-16).

As an example, look at the closing verses of 2 Timothy, where Paul mentions names like Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, and Claudia. Not one is Jewish. These are Romans, Gentiles. Yet Paul, a Jew, calls them “brothers.”

We find it difficult, perhaps, to see the magnitude of this miracle that brought together those who were far away (Gentiles) and those who were near (Jews). Imagine if today Jews and Arabs, who have been hostile for 50 years, suddenly did not just give up fighting but actually become friends. That happened 2,000 years ago between Jews and Gentiles. Enemies became friends, became family, as both were “reconciled . . . to God through the cross by which [God] put to death their hostility.” Reconciled to God they were also reconciled to each other. They could call each other brothers and sisters.

We are family

St. Paul uses the imagery of family lavishly when he writes to congregations and individuals. Timothy is “my son.” Titus is “my true son in our common faith”—a faith that joined Paul, a Jew, and Titus, a Gentile, into one family. Tychicus is “a dear brother.” Onesimus, a slave, is likewise a “faithful and dear brother.” The Colossian Christians are “holy and faithful brothers in Christ.”

Paul’s letters always connect. The church is family. God is Father. Jesus Christ is elder brother. Believers are children of God and thus brothers and sisters of one another. The church is body, Christ is the head. We are the members, attached by

rebirth to the head and, through the head, to one another.

Every time we come to the Lord’s Table together we express this connectedness. “Because there is one loaf,” writes Paul, “we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Corinthians 10:17).

This unity is to be enjoyed, savored, treasured. Paul highly valued those who had been reborn into the family of God.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. . . . She has been a great help to many people, including me. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. . . . Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you. . . . Greet Ampliatus, whom I love in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys. . . . (Romans 16:1-16)

These are all brothers and sisters, chosen, redeemed, reborn by the gospel to faith and membership in the family of God. Paul rejoices in every single one of them.

Paul himself was an adult convert. Sometimes those converted later in life appreciate this fellowship by rebirth more than those who by God’s grace were reborn into the family of God through baptism early in life. More than once, a new convert confided that he or she felt closer to congregation members than to his or her own unbelieving family members. That shouldn’t be a surprise. Nothing can bind hearts closer

together—not even romantic love—than being bound together into the family of God. Our Lord God chose us and through Christ redeemed us and through the Holy Spirit gave us a rebirth by means of the gospel.

NL

David Valleskey is president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon. This series is taken from a paper he presented to the 1997 synod convention.



Now I lay me . . .

A pastor who is facing his own death reminds us that everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die.

David D. Zietlow

We often pray to God, "Take me to heaven." But seldom, if ever, do we pray, "Make me die, so I can go to heaven."

I don't want to die, and neither do you. We'll spend everything we have to keep on living, even if our quality of life isn't good. We say, "I'm not afraid to die," and we're not, because we know we're going to heaven.

But that's all down the road a piece.

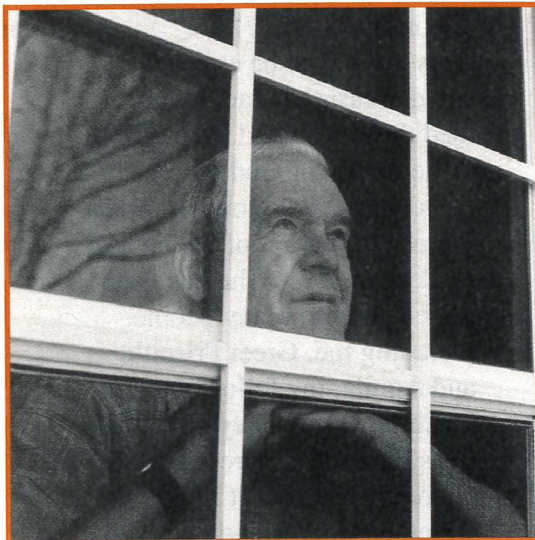
Not until we're faced with death do we really have to think about dying. Will it be painful? Will I be bedridden? Will I be dependent on others to feed me, take me to the bathroom, bathe me? Will I get bedsores and left to lie in my urine and feces?

When I was little, my mother taught me to pray:

Now I lay me down to sleep.

I pray thee Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake, I
pray thee Lord my soul to take. If
I should live for other days, I pray
thee Lord to guide my ways.

I still pray this prayer as the last one each night. I never thought too much of the line, "If I should die before I wake." Death was a long way off, and it always was—until about a year ago, when five doctors at the Mayo Clinic examined my cancer. They simply stated, "You are going to die." I returned to Alaska, and my doctor here said, "I'll guarantee you a pleasant death."



I still don't want to die. I pray God will take away this cancer or put it into remission. But if it is his will that I die, I pray he takes me to heaven.

I ask you, "Are you ready to die?" About 12 people in WELS die every day. Will you be one of them tomorrow?

Death for me now is real. I want to live. But I know death is coming and then comes heaven. That's what keeps me happy. I wish I were already there.

I didn't write this to gain your sympathy or pity. I'm happy. I'm content. I wrote this because I'm still a pastor. True, I've had to retire,

but I'm still a pastor, whose service under God is to help you get to heaven. I pray for you every night. And now I ask you, "Are you ready to die?" About 12 people in WELS die every day. Will you be one of them tomorrow? Or next week? Or next month? Sooner or later you will be.

Let's review how you can be ready to die. Go to church and listen carefully to the sermon. Think about its meaning.

As you sing hymns, think about what they mean. Think what the liturgy and prayers mean for you. Read daily devotions slowly, and think what these words mean. Take time, make time, you've still got time to read your Bible. Start with the Gospel of John and then Luke and Acts. You need only read a few passages, but think of what they mean to you. Pray for yourself and your family and friends that your faith in Jesus grows stronger.

Then, if you still aren't confident you're going to heaven, call your pastor. He'll be more than glad to help. In his call by God, this is the most important task he has to do.

Goodbye, and I'll see you in heaven!

NL

David Zietlow, retired pastor at Faith, Anchorage, is a member at Grace, Kenai, Alaska.

INTER-ACT

Randy K. Hunter

“The word of God is living and active.” Hebrews 4:12

Introduction

“Lord, make me a frustrated individual.”

Have you prayed that lately? You have if you’ve prayed in the Lord’s Prayer, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Luther explained it this way: “God’s will is done when he breaks and defeats every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. . . .”

Because we’re sinners we’re capable of planning sin. We’re also saints. Our new God-given hearts want nothing to do with sin; we want what God wants. So every time we pray, “Your will be done,” we also pray, “Lord, frustrate my plans to sin.”

You know what they say: Be careful what you pray for, you just might get it! The Lord may do for you what he did for a young officer in the court of King Solomon. Jeroboam was on the way to sin. He was planning to lead a rebellion against Solomon, the man God appointed as king. Jeroboam was on his way to sin, but he never got to it.

Text

1 Kings 11:29-31:

About that time Jeroboam was going out of Jerusalem, and Ahijah the Prophet of Shiloh met him on the way, wearing a new cloak. The two of them were alone out in the country, ³⁰and Ahijah took hold of the new cloak he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. ³¹Then he said to Jeroboam, “Take ten pieces for yourself, for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon’s hand and give you ten tribes.’”

Application

1. The Bible says, “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets . . . but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Hebrews 1:1,2). Would you like to have lived in the days when God spoke to us through prophets? Why or why not?
2. Today God speaks to us through his Son, the Word. Recall a time in your life when God used his Word to intervene while you were “on the way,” planning some sin?
3. Sometimes the Lord sends us people to remind us of his Word and call us to forsake sin and trust in him. What people has the Lord placed in your life to “frustrate” your plans?
4. What does this episode of Jeroboam’s evil plan and the prophet’s intervention teach you about our Lord?

Randy Hunter is pastor at St. Andrew, Middleton, Wisconsin.

Questions

1. Jeroboam was on his way out of Jerusalem, perhaps to further his takeover plot. Ahijah the prophet met him. A prophet was the Lord’s spokesman. He received messages from God and passed them on to the people. In your own words, what was Ahijah’s message to Jeroboam?
2. How might that message have changed Jeroboam’s plan to overthrow the king?
3. When Solomon ruled Israel it was one nation made up of 12 tribes. After Solomon’s death, the nation was divided into Israel (the 10 northern tribes) and Judah (the southern two tribes). How did Ahijah demonstrate the future to Jeroboam?
4. Read verse 40. How did Jeroboam respond to the Lord’s message?
5. What does Jeroboam’s response demonstrate about his trust in the Lord, at least at this time?

Prayer

Jesus, grant that balm and healing
In your holy wounds I find,
Ev’ry hour that I am feeling
Pains of body and of mind.

Should some evil thought within
Tempt my treach’rous heart to sin,
Show the peril, and from sinning
Keep me from its first beginning.

Should some lust or sharp temptation
Fascinate my sinful mind,
Let me think about your passion,
And new courage I shall find.
Or should Satan press me hard,
Let me then be on my guard,
Saying, “Christ for me was wounded,”
That the tempter flee confounded.
(*Christian Worship* 121)



Sharing our heritage

What better way to prepare for the celebration of the 150th anniversary of WELS in 1999-2001 than to look at where WELS has been in the past?

The WELS Historical Institute has produced a video to help you do just that. The eight-minute video, *A Heritage Shared*, begins with a brief history of WELS, and then describes the work of the Historical Institute. Included are segments on

the WELS Archives, the restoration of the historic Salem Landmark Church in Milwaukee, the synod museum that is housed at Salem, and the Institute's *Journal and Newsletter*.

The video's goal is to inform synod members about the Historical Institute and to invite people to support its work. The Institute receives no synod funding.

The video, sent to all U.S. and Canadian congregations, ministerial

education schools, and area Lutheran high schools, could easily be shown after worship, at church organization meetings, or in confirmation and American history classes.

The Institute has additional brochures available—414/454-2103. Call 414/443-8835 for general information.

James Kiecker

A corner store for Christ

"How do you change a liquor store into a church?" asks Pastor William Kirchner.

Tough question. Big challenge.

Kirchner's challenge is a different kind of ministry. He is the Missionary to the Economically Deprived on the north side of Milwaukee. His work will be based in an old smoke shop and liquor store that was purchased for \$1. The center, which was renovated by WELS Kingdom Workers and Builders For Christ, opened in May.

The old store is located on a corner that serves as the boundary line for four gangs.

"These people struggle with crime, disease, finances, alcohol and drug abuse, and gangs. They all struggle with belonging," he says. "If we can give them the kingdom of God, then we're accomplishing something."

Bringing them the kingdom—that's his goal.

"Our goal isn't to grab them and make them a church member," he says. "Instead we want to make them family members—a family in Jesus."

Bible study will be the most important aspect of his mission work. Along with meeting spiritual needs, the mission will also reach out to people's physical needs. Food and clothing will be distributed, and WELS Lutherans for Life and Wisconsin

Lutheran Institutional Ministries will work from the center also, bringing their expertise to the community.

He would like to start a congregation in the future. Yet, because this is a ministry to the poor, he foresees that the mission will always need outside support.

But they need to be served.

"We've been withdrawing from inner cities for so long," he says. "We've been missing those in our own backyard because they didn't have the money to support a church."

To Kirchner, it's all about a concern for their souls. Jesus died for everyone, rich and poor alike. "Let's not waste Christ's blood by treating them as if they weren't there. We need to bring what's missing—the gospel."

For all of his goals and dreams, Kirchner is realistic. "I have no dreams of big change. I want to



An old smoke shop and liquor store is the site of a new ministry center in Milwaukee. The ministry will reach out to the community from this building, which was purchased for \$1 and renovated by Builders For Christ.

provide positive influence in the community. But will it stop guns, drugs, gangs? I don't know."

He does know one thing though: "I want to touch someone's life with the love of Jesus Christ."

So how does Kirchner plan on changing a liquor store into a church?

"We'll serve them the water of life instead of liquor," he says confidently.



Where are they now?

In NL, we report the news. But we aren't always able to follow up. We're running this short feature, "Where are they now," to give you updates on news items or inspirational features. —ed.

The feature article "Returning Paradise to Taiwan" ran in February 1996.

Here's a recap:

Taiwan, an island 90 miles off of mainland China, is home to 22 million people. Three WELS missionary families—the Siirilas, Stellicks, and Leyrers—reach out with God's Word to the people, 98 percent of whom are Buddhist.

The article mentioned Roy and Jan Pahn, an unbelieving couple who became friends with Kevin and Sarah Stellick. Through their friendship, Roy Pahn began studying the Bible.

So, where are they now?

Roy has now studied God's Word for four years. In 1996, the Pahns

wanted their daughter, Joy, baptized, but they were not yet ready. They were afraid their families would harass or persecute them.

But then, Roy asked to be baptized. On Jan. 10, 1998, Roy was baptized during the Saturday evening worship in the Stellick's home.

After his baptism, Roy addressed the others attending the service. He said, "I have studied the Bible for four years now. I used to think that the world was an evil place and getting worse day by day. Now I see the world as a wonderful place because I know God created it and gave it to us. Today I am very happy for it is my wife's birthday. She and I do not share the same 'birth' days, but from now on I will always remember that this day is not only Jan's birthday but also the day I was given new life in Christ Jesus."

Roy and his daughter are both baptized and regularly attend the Saturday

evening worship in the Stellick's home. Pray that Jan Pahn will also come forward and ask to be baptized.



Missionary Kevin Stellick baptizes Roy Pahn during a worship service in the Stellick home in Taichung, Taiwan. Roy Pahn is the first adult Stellick has baptized since he arrived in 1993.

Work in Russia grows

Our work in Russia enjoys many blessings even though it was begun only in September 1993. Already there are four Christian Information Centers (in Akademgorodok, downtown Novosibirsk, the east side of Novosibirsk, and Iskitim), a seminary, Bible institute, and possible expansion to other cities. The work in Akademgorodok includes working with the deaf—worship services are signed, and classes are offered.

Missionary Tedd Wendt relates some news about the church in Akademgorodok:

One hundred sixty-two people attended our five worship services in March; 66 people attended our Sunday morning Bible class. Fifty-eight children attended our Sunday school classes. So far this year we're averaging 33 people in church each

Sunday. Thirteen ladies attended our women's group meeting.

Our church had two baptisms and one confirmation in February. One baptism was a baby born to a deaf family who are members of the congregation. The other was a three-year-old little boy, whose great aunt is a member. His parents are wavering between attending our church or the Russian Orthodox church. The woman who was confirmed has been attending our deaf Bible classes for almost two years.

Kay Zehms, wife of Missionary Roger Zehms, tells about their work in Iskitim:

In Iskitim the English classes have also proved to be a blessing. Each week the number of students increases. Last week I went along, and there were 78 students. Each week we get

the opportunity to tell them about our work here and answer any questions. Roger is arranging for a bus to pick up those students (which many have shown an interest) to bring them to Easter services. As of now, there are also at least two young men coming to the Christian Information Center in Iskitim for Bible classes.

Our Russian friend and teacher at the college where we teach English was recently baptized. She asked Roger and me to be her sponsors. Later that day we invited some of her Russian friends and family members over to our house for a celebration dinner. We had an excellent opportunity to explain baptism to many of them. Some also attended the church service that day. She attends church faithfully.



WELS church suffers tornado damage

St. Peter Lutheran Church, St. Peter, Minn., suffered extensive damage from a tornado that ripped through the small town on March 29.

The tornado blew off the roof of the church and caused structural damage to the building. The congregation is unsure if they will rebuild the sanctuary or start from scratch.

The congregation has been holding services and conducting their grade school (kindergarten and first-grade) in their fellowship hall, which has glass and water damage but is still usable.

Many members' homes were damaged; 11 lost their homes. In the community 2,031 homes out of 3,000 were damaged. Over 700 were uninhabitable. There were few injuries and only one death from the storm.

According to Matthew Rauh, pastor at St. Peter, "Support has been pouring in like crazy." People from Martin Luther College, New Ulm; Bethany Lutheran College (ELS), Mankato; Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm; area WELS congregations; and area public high schools helped with clean-up. Donations of food, clothing, money, and time have helped congregation members and unchurched community residents.

But according to Charles Degner, pastor at St. Peter, "Even greater comfort came to God's people in St. Peter through the Word." St. Peter Lutheran Church hasn't missed a service. "I don't think I've ever experienced a more meaningful Easter," said Degner. "It reminded me that the

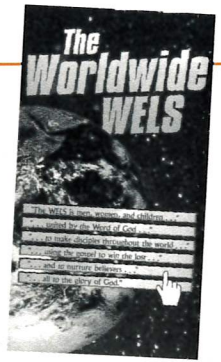
message carried a beauty and glory all its own that circumstances could never diminish."

The WELS Committee on Relief has been sending money to tornado victims throughout the United States. The committee sent over \$50,000 to St. Peter, Minn.; \$30,000 to Florida; and \$10,000 to Alabama. They also continue to offer disaster relief throughout the world. To help with disaster relief, send contributions to WELS Committee on Relief, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222.



The inside of St. Peter Lutheran Church after a tornado came through St. Peter, Minn., on March 29. The picture is just an attempt to show what Pastor Matthew Rauh says "no picture can truly describe."

New WELS video released



We are one. As a synod, we work together and walk together to share God's Word with the world. A new WELS video shows that work.

The video, "The World Wide WELS," is a seven-minute visual demonstration of our WELS mission statement. It reminds us that we are men, women, and children, working together, using God's Word to win the lost and to nurture believers.

The video does not offer in-depth explanation of our synod's structure or doctrinal positions. Instead, pastors, teachers, and laypeople can use it in a classroom, Bible study, prospect visit, or with friends to introduce the WELS mission. The presenter can precede or follow the video with a lesson or conversation about synod structure and beliefs.

The video, produced by WELS Communication Services, was sent to all WELS congregations and schools free of charge. A grant from AAL helped make the video possible. For a copy, contact Communication Services, 414/256-3210; <nl@sab.wels.net>.

Mission news

After two years of not being allowed to conduct an Easter service in a public location, the **members of the Indonesian Lutheran Church (Gereja Lutheran Indonesia) were able to gather together for a special Easter service.** Three hundred twenty-five people from eight congregations and posts in the Jakarta area came for a joint outdoor service at a zoo 30 miles outside of Jakarta. Sixty of those people were Moslems who are neighbors and friends of the members.

Congregation gives books to African pastors

It all started with a sermon, when John Eich, pastor at Grace, Alma, Mich., shared this story:

At summer school at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary last year, Eich visited the bookstore. "I was paging through a set of books. The cost was around \$100, and I was debating whether I could afford that," he said.

Then Salimo Hachibamba and Frackson Chinyama, two pastors from Africa, walked in and started looking around.

Hachibamba picked up a book and said, "This is interesting." But he saw the price. "Oh my, that's too much for me." He put the book back, and they walked out of the store. The price—\$7.98.

Eich continued, "The Holy Spirit convicted me on the spot. There was no way I could justify paying \$100 when he couldn't afford \$8."

So "in the name of Pastor Hachibamba, for the lesson he taught me," Eich decided to purchase books for pastors and seminary students in

Zambia with the money he would have spent on himself.

After church that day, members at Grace joined Eich, and the project "Books for African Pastors" started.

The goal was to provide a copy of *Law and Gospel* for every national pastor in Zambia and Malawi plus the seminary students—60 in all. Though basic textbooks are supplied, the men must acquire advanced books on their own, which is hard to do. At almost \$10 each, the book would require nearly a quarter of some pastors' monthly salary.

At Grace, small donations began to add up. Two or three dollars seemed insignificant to most but was a reminder of God's abundant blessing. One member collected cans for the 10 cent Michigan deposit. He commented, "Every can was trash to someone, but they helped buy a book. Plus, every time I picked one up, I said a prayer for God's blessing to be on those African men and their congregations."

The book fund grew, and a large final gift helped the members meet their goal—and the books were sent.

The members have now heard from grateful recipients, including this letter from Pastor Samuel Kawiliza, chairman of the Lutheran Church in Central Africa. He wrote: "As pastors in Zambia, books are beyond our reach. Only a few pastors who live near the Lutheran Seminary have access to the library. We need books to help us prepare good sermons. We need books to read so we can grow in our knowledge and understanding of the Word of God. Indeed, we appreciate the nice book we have received, and I hope you will continue to remember us in such a manner."

Now, 60 men in Africa have books to expand their knowledge of God's Word. And it all started with a sermon.

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Synod grants to increase outreach

A new challenge grant program will help congregations and members reach the lost with the gospel through new and innovative outreach programs.

In the 1998-99 budget year, \$400,000 is designated for qualifying outreach programs of WELS congregations and organizations. The Synodical Council is making these Outreach Opportunity Funds available.

The objectives of these funds are to provide opportunities for WELS members to gain experience in personal evangelism, to provide financial assistance to congregations that need help implementing new outreach efforts, and to foster teamwork within WELS.

"The best outreach ideas are going to come from those in the congregations," said Ron Roth, administrator of the Commission on Communication

for Financial Support. "With these grants we can give them the resources and the encouragement to be creative."

Applicants are urged to use existing programs and structures as much as possible but to be innovative in these uses. Grants will be given one time only for each specific project. Congregations will also provide some funding for these outreach efforts. Funds are not available for general ministry support.

"We want to foster face-to-face personal sharing of the gospel so that people grow in their evangelism capabilities," said Roth.

Deadline for application are Oct. 1, Feb. 1, and April 1. The Synodical Council's Strategic Planning Committee will review the applications and determine the

recipients of the grants and the level of funding.

For more information contact Pastor Warren Widmann, chairman of the Strategic Planning Committee, 7610 NE Fremont, Portland OR 97213; 503/253-7338; FAX, 503/253-4336; <PNWDP@aol.com>



District news

California

Because the area around **Our Savior, Pomona, Calif.**, is becoming a Latino neighborhood, the church is working closely with their Spanish population: Pastor Ernie Zimdars works directly with them, Guido Salvador is being trained as an evangelist, and Ib Meyer, pastor of the congregation, is receiving Spanish language training. . . . **Gethsemane, Los Angeles, and its pastor, Don Seifert**, appeared in the movie "Mad City." It started out with the director only needing a scene to be filmed outside the church's property. But one chance meeting between Seifert and the director, and a change of script was born. They wrote up a few lines and asked him to play the part.

Hermann John

Dakota-Montana

Peace, Clark, S.D., celebrates its 75th anniversary on June 28. . . . **St. John, Dempster, S.D.**, celebrates its 90th anniversary on June 28. . . . On May 2, **Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D.**, dedicated its new dormitory. Construction on the 14,400 square foot facility began in June 1997. Students moved in the first week of January 1998. The facility can house 44 students in 22 rooms. It also has a lounge with areas for dining, sitting, watching TV, playing games, and studying; an apartment for the housing supervisor; four keyboard practice rooms; two laundry rooms; and a canteen.

Western Wisconsin

Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis., celebrated its 40th anniversary on May 3.

Northern Wisconsin

The Ladies Aid of Trinity, Manitowoc, Wis., celebrated its 60th anniversary in November 1997 with a joint worship service with area Ladies Aids. Their guest speaker was a survivor of the Holocaust. . . . **Trinity, Township of Ellington (rural Appleton area), Wis.**, will celebrate the 125th anniversary of their congregation and the 100th anniversary of their church building on Aug. 2.

Joel Lillo

Minnesota

James Bauer and Joyce Diels, teachers at Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, celebrated their 25th anniversaries on Mar. 22.

Obituaries

Erwin C. Schewe 1915-1998

Erwin Schewe was born May 29, 1915. He died Feb. 23, 1998, in Campbellsport, Wis.

A 1939 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., Schewe served at St. Peter, West Bend; Friedens, Kenosha; St. Paul, Zachow; and Zion, Cambria, all in Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Louise; one son; one daughter; and five grandchildren.

Hilton C. Oswald 1907-1998

Hilton Oswald was born in 1907 in New Ulm, Minn. He died March 10, 1998 in Edina, Minn.

A 1932 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Northwestern Lutheran Academy, Mobridge, S.D.;

Northwestern College, Watertown, Wis.; and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Trudy; two daughters; one son; six grandchildren; and two great grandchildren.

Elden Bode 1913-1998

Elden Bode was born March 16, 1913. He died April 12, 1998 in Nicollet, Minn.

A 1936 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Bode served at Trinity, Terry, Mont.; Mt. Calvary, Estelline and St. John, Dempster, S.D.; St. John-St. Peter, Cleveland, Wis.; Christ, N. St. Paul, Minn.; and King of Kings, Kennewick, Wash. He also served as a member of the WELS Board of Trustees.

He is survived by three sons, one brother, five sisters, and many grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Carleton A. Toppe 1914-1998

Carleton Toppe was born May 3, 1914 in Waterloo, Wis. He died April 18, 1998 in Jefferson, Wis.

A 1937 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., Toppe served at First German, Manitowoc; a joint parish near Bloomer; and at congregations in Elmwood and Ellsworth, all in Wis. He taught at Northwestern Preparatory School and Northwestern College, Watertown, Wis. He was president for both schools, serving 28 years in that capacity at Northwestern College. He served as a contributing editor of *Northwestern Lutheran* for 37 years.

He is survived by his wife, Violet; three daughters, a son, 14 grandchildren, and two sisters.

CELC Theological Commission meets

The Theological Commission of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) held its second meeting at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary (ELS), Mankato, Minn., in March.

In its meeting, the commission completed a statement on Scripture titled, "The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-First Century." This statement about the scriptural teaching that the Bible is the inspired Word of God will be sent to the presidents of each member church for their reactions. The statement will then be presented to the CELC convention in April 1999 at Winter Haven, Fla. When adopted by the CELC, the statement will be presented to each CELC member church for adoption.

The Commission held its first meeting in Steeden, Germany, in March 1997.

The CELC is composed of 15

Lutheran churches around the world that are in doctrinal agreement and church fellowship.

Lyle Lange



Members of the Theological Commission of the CELC: front (from left)—Dr. Wilhelm Petersen (ELS); Dr. Gottfried Herrmann (Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Germany); Prof. Wilbert Gawrisch (WELS). Back (from left)—Prof. Salimo Hachibamba (Lutheran Church of Central Africa); Prof. Lyle Lange (WELS); Pastor Egil Edvardsen (Lutheran Confessional Church of Norway and Sweden).



I've changed my clerical attire for worship. I debuted a white alb on Christmas morning.

At the same time, I had ordered stoles. The stoles arrived in January.

Our congregation also just started to have a time of fellowship following our worship the last Sunday of every month.

So it was that on the final Sunday of January and the first day I wore a stole, five-year-old Bill Grennan looked to his mother after I had made my entrance from the sacristy, and said, "Mom, Pastor must have something new on because it's donut day!"

*Paul Lidtke
 Freeport, Illinois*

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YOUTH NEWS

Fourteen-year-old **Michael Spenn**, a member of Cross of Christ, Universal City, Tex., is a member of the 1997-98 Texas State Junior Boys Homeschool basketball championship team. Area homeschoolers joined together to form this sports association for their children.

Melissa Besch performed with the Texas all-state choir in San Antonio, Tex., on Feb. 14 as part of the 1998 Texas Music Educators Association clinic. Besch, a member of Christ our Savior, Angleton, Tex., also sings solos in church, serves as youth group president, and teaches Sunday school.

Elizabeth Cramer, a freshman at Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis., is one of 24 winners of the Music Educators National Conference's (MENC) 1998 original student composition contest. She performed her piano piece, "The Phantom Waltz," at the MENC national conference on April 16.



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

Poll: Few British know what the millennium commemorates

Fewer than one Briton in six knows what the coming millennium commemorates, according to a Gallup Poll conducted for the Daily Telegraph newspaper in London.

Just 15 percent of those asked what event the year 2000 commemorates

said it marked the 2,000th anniversary of Jesus' birth. In addition, 37 percent of the sample said they did not know, 18 percent mentioned the coming of a new century, and 17 percent said it merely marked the year 2000.

The margin of error for the poll was not available.

Pastors: overworked, but mostly satisfied

A magazine survey of pastors finds that almost half say they work too hard, on average 55 hours per week.

Less than a fifth of the pastors blamed their heavy workload on unreasonable expectations from members, while 68 percent agreed a key reason for their overworking was "I expect too much of myself." In other reasons cited—which were not mutually exclusive—51 percent said "I love what I do so much I don't always know when to stop," and 40 percent acknowledged "I find it hard to say 'no.'"

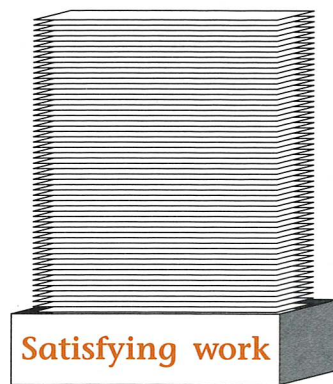
The survey showed that senior pastors and pastors who are the sole leaders of congregations spend about the same amount of time preparing for sermons—11 hours each week. And pastors working without other clergy spend an hour more each week in pastoral care.

Although close to two-thirds of those surveyed said they occasionally dream of having an 8-to-5, Monday-through-Friday job, most are still satisfied with their work.

More than 80 percent of pastors say they are satisfied with their current workload, and 91 percent said they are satisfied with the type of work they do.

Researchers had 62 of the pastors who took part in the original study keep track of their actual work hours for one week. They found that the pastors accurately recalled how long they had worked but not how they worked. For example, pastors estimated they spent 14 hours a week doing administrative work, including leading meetings and worship, when they actually spent close to 25 hours doing those tasks. On the other hand, pastors thought they spent six hours in prayer and devotional time, but only spent four and a half hours.

[The survey of about 600 respondents was conducted by Christianity Today Inc.]



Satisfying work

Fast Fact

The United States is now the third largest mission field in the world. Only India and China have more unbelievers.

Mission America Monthly January 1998, quoted in *Current Thoughts & Trends*, April 1998.

Pastors earn high marks for ethical standards

U.S. clergy rank second only to pharmacists for being in occupations that get the highest rating for ethical standards.

Sixty-nine percent of Americans surveyed said pharmacists have "high" or "very high" standards. Clergy came in second, with a 59 percent "high" or "very high" rating, reported Associated Baptist Press, an independent news service.

The most recent ranking showed a three percent rise for clergy, an increase from 56 percent the two previous years.

Clergy got their highest ranking of 67 percent in 1985. The ranking dropped to 53 percent in 1993 and has risen since then.

Other professions that received high rankings overall are medical doctors, 56 percent; college teachers, 55 percent; and dentists, 54 percent.

[The Princeton Religion Research Center announced the results of the survey taken in late December in its *Emerging Trends* newsletter.]

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Teens feel slighted by adults

Talk to teenagers, and they have a healthy self-image. But ask them how they believe adults perceive teenagers, and the picture changes dramatically. For instance, teenagers are likely to view themselves as happy, responsible, self-reliant, and optimistic about their future. But among the adjectives they believe adults would select to describe teenagers were lazy, rude, and sloppy.

From a survey among 620 young people ages 13 to 18, Barna Research Group concluded that the talk about teenagers as “slackers” and “pessimists” may be born of adult perceptions, but does not mirror the self-perceptions of teenagers.

Most teenagers have a very positive self-image. The survey offered teens 18 adjectives they could choose from to describe themselves. Among the most popular terms were “happy” (92%), “responsible” (91%), “self-reliant” (86%).

However, when teens were asked to identify how they believe adults would describe young people, the most common responses included “lazy” (84%), “rude” (74%), “sloppy” (70%), “dishonest” (65%), and “violent” (57%). A majority admitted that most adults would likely describe teenagers as “friendly” (63%) and “intelligent” (58%).

The sampling error associated with this survey is ± 5 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

How teens describe themselves

The following are the top five answers given about how teens see themselves. The five other answers given describe teens' self-assessment on faith issues.

| | % |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| Happy _____ | 92 |
| Responsible _____ | 91 |
| Self-reliant _____ | 86 |
| Optimistic about the future _____ | 82 |
| Trusting of other people _____ | 80 |
| Religious _____ | 64 |
| A committed Christian _____ | 60 |
| Spiritual _____ | 60 |
| Searching for meaning in life _____ | 56 |

U.S. Supreme Court upholds ruling on abortion

In Ohio, a law banned some forms of late-term abortions. Then a lower court invalidated that law. Now, the Supreme Court will not consider an appeal to the lower court's ruling.

The Ohio law banned “the termination of a human pregnancy by purposefully inserting a suction device into the skull of a fetus to remove the brain.”

In overturning that law last fall, the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said the law would unduly interfere with a woman's right to an abortion and have the effect of banning a more common procedure used earlier in pregnancies.

The justices, by a 6-3 vote, refused to consider an appeal of the Ohio law. While not a ruling on the controversial abortion procedure and setting no national precedent, the justices' action is likely to be hailed by supporters of legal abortion who are fighting restrictions at both the state and national level on what abortion opponents call “partial-birth abortions.”

The proposed federal legislation would ban abortions “in which the person performing the abortion partially vaginally delivers a living fetus before killing the fetus and completing the delivery.”

Wisconsin Senate supports partial-birth abortion ban

By a majority voice vote the Wisconsin State Senate passed legislation that makes it illegal to perform a partial-birth abortion except to save a mother's life. The legislation reflects efforts in other states to outlaw the controversial procedure.

A partial-birth abortion consists of delivering a near-term infant, feet first. Prior to the head being removed from the birth canal, instruments are used to destroy the infant's brain.

Once the child is dead he or she is delivered the rest of the way. Some have estimated this procedure is performed as often as 10,000 times annually throughout the United States.

The procedure caught national attention when a similar measure came before the U.S. Congress. While the House and Senate have passed the ban it has failed to muster the necessary votes to override a presidential veto. In the debate, Wisconsin U.S.

Senator Russ Feingold surprised even those who would oppose the ban when he spoke on the Senate floor in favor of keeping the procedure legal. In response to the question: “Let's assume . . . the head is accidentally delivered. Would you allow the doctor to kill the baby?” he replied, “. . . That is a question that should be answered by a doctor and by the woman who receives advice from the doctor.”

Pastors:

Andrus, Eugene R., to Martin Luther Memorial Home, Holt, Mich.

Aufdemberge, Mark S., from Trinity, Sierra Vista/Bethlehem, Benson, Ariz., to Hope, Penryn, Calif.

Bartsch, Mark O., from St. John, Renville, Minn., to St. John, Jefferson, Wis.

Bodjanac, Theodore G., from Shepherd of the Mountain, Cedar Creek/Gethsemane, Cibecue, Ariz., to Resurrection, Phoenix, Ariz.

Eckert, Mark A., to Calvary, Eaton Rapids, Mich.

Free, Gerald E., to Bethel, Menasha, Wis.

Gartner, Mark R., from Grace, Charlotte, N.C., to St. Luke, Watertown, Wis.

Goldbeck, Beck H., from St. John, Peshtigo, Wis., to Manitowoc LHS, Manitowoc, Wis.

Greschel, Eddie D., from Risen Savior, Austin, Tex., to Russia

Hirsch, Paul A., from St. John, Markesan, Wis., to Redeemer, Hastings, Neb.

Johne, Harold R., from WLS, Mequon, Wis., to Holy Word, Austin, Tex. (retirement call)

Maertz, David C., from Faith, Reedsburg, Wis., to exploratory, Rapid City, S.D.

Raddatz, Stephen H., from Trinity, Jenera, Ohio, to St. Mark, Lincoln, Neb.

Wilde, Mark H., from Beautiful Savior, Portland, Maine, to Trinity, Terry/Salem, Circle, Mont.

Addition to a previous report: **Pastor Allen Lonnquist** also took a call to Living Water, Dawson, Minn.

Teachers:

Adams, Betty J., from Trinity, Marinette, Wis., to St. Peter, Balaton, Minn.

Bain, Gary M., from Cross of Christ, Coon Rapids, Minn., to West LHS, Plymouth, Minn.

Bender, Kyle M., from St. John, Two Rivers, Wis., to Peace, Hartford, Wis.

Blumer, Bonnie J., to Crown Of Glory, Orlando, Fla.

Bollinger, Rodney A., from St. Lucas, Kewaskum, Wis., to St. John, Oak Creek, Wis.

Bufe, Karen E., from Grace, St. Joseph, Mich., to retirement

Collyard, Kathryn M., from Calvary, Thiensville, Wis., to Morning Star, Jackson, Wis.

Dusseau, Catherine E., from St. John, Libertyville, Ill., to Peace, Holiday, Fla.

Dusseau, Robert R., from St. John, Libertyville, Ill., to Peace, Holiday, Fla.

Ehlke, Marilyn S., to Trinity-St. Luke, Watertown, Wis.

Favorite, Robert D., from St. Peter, Fort Collins, Colo., to St. Paul, Bangor, Wis.

Hering, Linda, to Beautiful Saviour, Carlsbad, Calif.

Humann, Vicki L., from St. Stephen, Adrian, Mich., to Zion, Rhinelander, Wis.

Larsen, Sharon L., from St. Paul, Muskego, Wis., to St. Paul, Franklin, Wis.

Leitzke, Mark E., from St. Paul, St. James, Minn., to St. John, Sparta, Wis.

Lemke, Werner E., from Evergreen LHS, Des Moines, Wash., to Malawi

Martens, James E., from Christ, Big Bend, Wis., to Grace, Waukesha, Wis.

Naumann, June M., from St. Paul, South Haven, Mich., to Good Shepherd, Benton Harbor, Mich.

Neujahr, James R., from WLA, Fond du Lac, Wis., to Fox Valley LHS, Appleton, Wis.

Nolte, Brent J., from Kettle Moraine LHS, Jackson, Wis., to St. Paul, Saginaw, Mich.

Pasbrig, Jonathan T., from Nebraska LHS, Waco, to Manitowoc LHS, Manitowoc, Wis.

Patterson, Paul R., from Christ, Zumbrota, Minn., to Peace, Sun Prairie, Wis.

Pinski, Richard J., from Shoreland LHS, Somers, Wis., to Great Plains LHS, Watertown, S.D.

Bulletin BOARD & NOTICES

To place an announcement, call 414/256-3231;
fax, 414/256-3899; <nl@sab.wels.net>
Deadline is six weeks before publication date.

Ricke, Mark E., from Lakeside LHS, Lake Mills, Wis., to Wisconsin LHS, Milwaukee

Ring, David M., from Northland LHS, Wausau, Wis., to Manitowoc LHS, Manitowoc, Wis.

Rust, Anne K., to St. Paul, Menomonie, Wis.

Schroeder, David W., from St. Mark's, Citrus Heights, Calif., to Wisconsin LHS, Milwaukee

Schultz, Paul J., from Our Savior, Longmont, Colo., to Shepherd, Albuquerque, N.M.

Shilling, Deborah M., from St. Marcus, Milwaukee, to Beautiful Savior, Milwaukee

Thomas, Margaret E., from St. Mark, Lincoln, Neb., to Gethsemane, Raleigh, N.C.

Ungemach, Joel P., from St. John, Red Wing, Minn., to Michigan LHS, St. Joseph

Veach, Nathan W., from Pilgrim, Minneapolis, Minn., to West LHS, Plymouth, Minn.

Warner, Juliene G., from St. John, Watertown, Wis., to Nozomi (Hope), Japan

Wittershaus, Kurt A., from Luther HS, Onalaska, Wis., to MLC, New Ulm, Minn.

Staff minister:

Dierks, Kenneth J., to planned giving ministry, Milwaukee, Wis.

COMING EVENTS

LWMS National Convention—June 26-28 at the Dallas/Ft. Worth Hilton. For information, call D'Anne Thompson, 254/694-4212 or Fran Pruitt, 972/223-0085. To register, call 414/321-6212.

OWLS Hostel—July 9-15 at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee. Cost: \$240. Commission on Special Ministries, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; 414/256-3241; <usr10@sab.wels.net>

Women's retreat—WELS/ELS Summer Ladies Retreat. July 17-19, Woodlands Lutheran Camp, Montverde, Fla. Judy Becker, 941/355-6591; pager, 941/750-1061; <jbecker342@aol.com>

Youth rallies—Wheaton, Ill.—July 28-31. Michael Turriff, 414/547-6720. **Santa Maria, Calif.**—June 24-27. Michael Schultz, 520/774-8811. **Lansing, Mich.**—June 30-July 2. Paul Lindloff, 517/845-2600. **Orlando, Fla.**—July 2-5. Richard Warnecke, 907/784-1455. **Rapid City, S.D.**—July 13-16. Pam and Jeff Kolb, 605/244-5908.

National campus rally—Dec. 27-30 at UW-Madison. Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, 220 W Gilman St, Madison WI 53703; 608/257-1969; <national.rally@juno.com>

ANNIVERSARIES

Manchester, Wis.—St. Paul (125). May 31. Service, 10 AM; potluck follows; 7:30 PM service; reception follows. W3377 Main St, Manchester WI 53946; 920/398-2885.

Neenah, Wis.—Grace (50). June 7. Services, 8 AM, 10 AM, and 3 PM; light lunch following 3 PM service. 1390 Breezewood Ln, Neenah WI 54956; 920/722-5550.

Clark, S.D.—Peace (75). June 28. Service, 2 PM; meal follows. N 3 Ave & Smith. Mailing address: 111 S Idaho St, Clark SD 57225; 605/532-3766.

Kolberg, Wis.—Emanuel (125). June 14. Service, 9:30 AM; picnic follows. 8612 County Rd D, Forestville WI 54213-9716; 920/825-1301.

Helenville, Wis.—St. Peter (150). June 14—confirmation reunion. Services, 8 and 9:45 AM; dinner follows. N4678 S Helenville Rd, Helenville WI 53137; 920/674-3307.

Memphis, Tenn.—Gloria Dei (25). June 21. Worship, 10:15 AM; lunch follows; festival worship, 4:30 PM; dinner, 6:30 PM. RSVP for meals. 5415 Raleigh-LaGrange Rd, Memphis TN 38134; 901/386-9695 or 901/747-2014.

Hazelton, N.D.—St. Paul (75). June 21. Service, 4 PM; picnic follows. RSVP to Ruben Humann, 6275 Hwy 1804, Hazelton ND 58544; 701/782-6885. 700 Claremont Ave, Hazelton ND 58544.

Benton Harbor, Mich.—St. Matthew (100). June 21—student and teachers reunion. Service, 9 AM; lunch noon. RSVP to Shirley Akrigh, 671 McAllister Ave, Benton Harbor MI 49022; 616/925-7292 or 616/944-5430.

Dempster, S.D.—St. John (90). June 28—service, 10:30 AM; meal follows. 605/873-2256.

Battle Creek, Mich.—St. John (50). June 28. Services, 10 AM and 4 PM; picnic in between. 26 Arbor St, Battle Creek MI 49015; 616/962-3884.

AVAILABLE

Hymnals—100 *The Lutheran Hymnals*. Free for cost of shipping. Orville Taecker, 605/886-2457; FAX, 605/886-3141.

NEEDED

Textbooks—25-30 copies of NPH Primary Bible History, Children's Bible History, and Bible History for grades 1-6. St. Peter, Schofield, Wis. Rency Koeppl, 715/359-3020; <sppls@pcpro.net>

Relief couple or person—New Beginnings' Home for Mothers, Denver. Mid-July for three months or more. Craig Schwartz, 1-800-720-6667.

Preacher—July 5 & 12 at Hope, Irmo, S.C. Free use of parsonage. Daron Lindemann, 803/781-8673; <lindy@axs2k.net>

Preacher—June 28 at Christ Redeemer, Trumbull, Conn. House available. Kieth Kuschel, 203/378-1270; <kbkuschel@juno.com>

Communion ware, offering plates, paraments—for exploratory mission Water of Life, Las Vegas. Pastor Matthew Vogt, 4460 S Durango Ste F, Las Vegas NV 89117; 702/253-7087.

NAMES WANTED

Roanoke / Blackburg / Lynchburg, Va.—Dwight Luedtke, Our Savior, 4756 Lakeview Dr, Roanoke VA 24012; 540/977-0946 or 540/977-4036.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

At Calvary Academy, South Milwaukee, Wis., a Christian boarding school for children in crises

Boarding house parent—full-time child care professionals to provide overnight care to at-risk male and female students. Requires a rotating shift pattern with third shift awake and a third shift asleep. Direct care hours at the school needed.

Resident supervisor—WELS Christian with love and concern for youth whose lives are in crises. Bachelor's degree in social work, psychology, or related field. At least five years' experience working with troubled youth in residential settings. Experience in training child care staff in child and crises management. Strong leadership abilities.

Robert Wasser, Calvary Academy, 2200 9th Ave, South Milwaukee WI 53172; 414/571-1522.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Oakville, Ontario, Canada—Cross Of Life, 300 Callaghan Crescent, Oakville, Ontario L6H 5H6; 905/257-4884.

Las Vegas, Nev.—Water of Life, 4460 S Durango Ste. F, Las Vegas NV 89117 (in Durango Plaza). Worship 10 AM Sundays. 702/253-7087.

Welcome to the family

Karl R. Gurgel

Welcome! Do you know how inviting that word is? It's the opposite of "No Trespassing," or "Keep Out." Sincerely meant, it's warm and friendly. It's almost like you're one of the family. Welcome!

Under God, we are family in our congregations, welcoming others. Soon some of our congregational families will welcome new called workers. During the month of May, more than 200 graduates were assigned to the churches, schools, and new missions of our synod. They may not look or sound exactly like your former called workers who served your families in the past. However, just like them, just like you and me, they are devoted to serving the Lord Jesus. Just like all the others who share a common faith, a common family with you, they will add a new dimension to your congregation. Welcome them, get to know them, make them feel right at home.

Do the same with the new members who will join your congregations these days, particularly those new to the faith. Some of them may not speak English very well. Our forefathers didn't either. Some of them might eat different foods. Have you ever tried sushi? People from other countries, with their wonderful diversity, like the new called workers, will join the family and add new dimensions to the congregation.

Importantly, they may well bring to us a new appreciation for what the Lord has done for us all. So grateful are they for what they have just learned the Savior has done—pardoning them—they have difficulty not telling someone about it. Their obvious joy in the Lord's salvation may bring us to appreciate even more what we

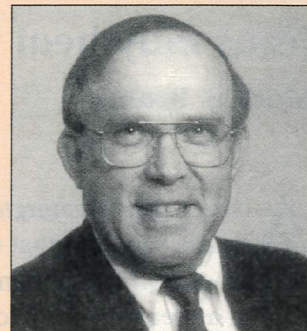
have so long enjoyed, maybe even taken for granted—our own welcome into God's family.

In this all-important way, the Lord treats all family members alike. By nature, not one of us deserves to be a member of God's family. Because of our sins, we all ought to be outcasts. And yet, by his grace alone, through faith alone, worked in our hearts through the Word by his Spirit alone, God has adopted us as members of his family.

Although the Lord receives us all alike in his grace and welcomes us equally into his family, he has not endowed us with exactly the same gifts and abilities. Just look around you at the variety of individuals in your family of believers. Then, looking more closely at each one of them, think of the different talents they all possess. Each one brings something unique to the family. At the same time, see in them all our family resemblance. Look at the family oneness we all enjoy as we with one voice praise our gracious God and with different, but complementary, talents serve him and our neighbor.

So welcome into your congregational family these new family members. Welcome the opportunity to rejoice together in a common Savior. But welcome, too, the delightful blending of a variety of talents and abilities, each harnessed by a common faith to serve a common purpose.

Welcome, we say!



Karl R. Gurgel is the president of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Look at the family oneness we all enjoy as we with one voice praise our gracious God.

Rx for the sick

Jesus may heal us through our medicine or in spite of it.

Mark E. Braun

A December *Washington Post* article reported that only 36 percent of poll respondents “expected that a member of the clergy would offer real comfort to them in their dying days.” Such findings, remarked pollster George Gallup, “suggest that faith communities need to address more effectively the concerns people have about what happens after death, matters such as guilt and forgiveness.”

James takes us to a first century faith community. Some were sick there, as some will always be. Church leaders were on hand to help. What did James prescribe?

Take your medicine

Roman Catholic dogma bases one of its seven sacraments on **James 5:14,15**. What an older generation knew as “Extreme Unction” is now more commonly referred to as “Anointing of the Sick.” The seriously ill are to be anointed on the hands and forehead with duly blessed oil. Extreme Unction may even be given to an unconscious sufferer. If he would have known death was near, (it is assumed) he

would have wanted this sacrament.

James had nothing so exotic in mind. He didn’t use the word for “anoint” generally associated with choosing a special man for an important job. People used oil then (in Palestine, they still do) as a multipurpose medicine, to soothe pain, to dress wounds, even internally. James was simply saying, “Take your medicine.”

**Though we don’t demand
a miraculous cure,
James wants us always
to pray expectantly.**

Good nutrition, a balanced lifestyle, conventional medications, and other “ordinary means” are good gifts from God to sustain and restore our health. We should not despise them for ill-defined sacramental healings.

Say your prayers

James told the sick to “**call the elders of the church to pray over him,**” promising that “**the prayer offered in faith will raise him up.**” Neither the oil, nor their pleading, nor their fervor, nor their churchly office

could make a sick person well. “**The Lord will raise him up.**” He may heal us through our medicine or in spite of it. He heals when and where it pleases him.

Jesus sent his disciples to heal the sick (Matthew 10:8), and the Holy Spirit gave some believers at James’ time the gift of supernatural healing (1 Corinthians 12:9). Though we don’t demand a miraculous cure, James wants us always to pray expectantly: “**The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.**”

Confess your sins

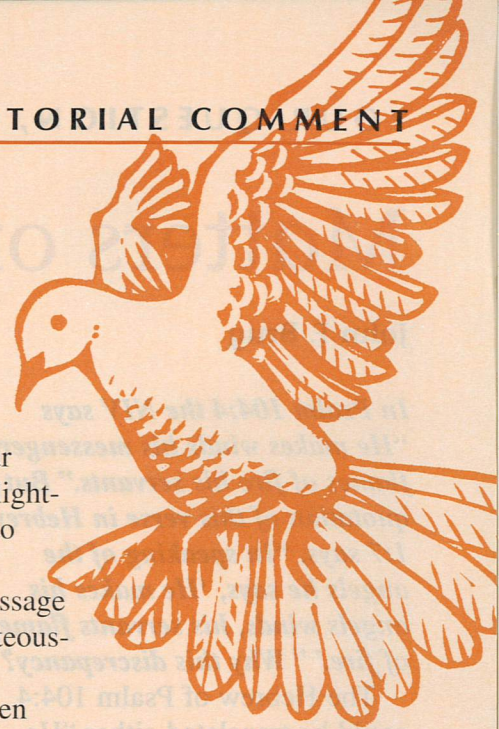
But we may not feel so righteous, especially when illness strikes. As our bodies break down and we face death, old sins return to haunt us. A guilty conscience raises a barrier between us and God. We may even get sick physically because of what remains unresolved spiritually.

James assured his ailing parishioners they were forgiven. His big brother Jesus died to forgive the whole world. We can confess all our sins—long past or most recent—to God or to a pastor or to each other.

After that, one of two things will happen to a sick but absolved sinner: either he’ll get better, or he’ll go to heaven.

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

real faith for real life
james



A forgotten festival?

Armin J. Panning

Ask the man on the street to name the three great Christian festivals and chances are good he'll have little trouble coming up with Christmas. With a bit of reflection he may also think of Easter. But mention of a third festival is likely to draw a blank stare.

That third festival is important, however. God the Father's Christmas gift of his Son, and Christ's Easter victory over sin and death would go for naught if it were not for the work of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost, marking the outpouring of the Holy Spirit 50 days after Easter, is properly a high festival, the third great festival of the Christian church year. If it were not for the work of the Holy Spirit, none of us would know of, or believe in, God's gracious plan of salvation in Christ.

The Holy Spirit works in a quiet and low-key way—through the means of grace, the Word and sacraments—but he accomplishes great things. The Catechism's explanation of the Third Article sums it up by using four verbs to describe the Spirit's saving work: the Holy Ghost has *called* me by the gospel, *enlightened* me with his gifts, *sanctified*, and *kept* me in the true faith.

For each of us, the circumstances surrounding coming to faith were no doubt somewhat different. It may have been by baptism in infancy or later through the Word, taught or preached, that we were called and invited. But in each case it was an invitation to accept a message that would have seemed foolish to us had the Holy Spirit not enlightened us with his gifts. Who would have thought that a few drops of water connected with a few words could have such power? Who would have trusted in the unlikely plan of

a substitute suffering and dying in our stead? Only the Holy Spirit could enlighten our darkened hearts and bring us to trust in such a message.

And now, having accepted that message and by faith having received the righteousness Christ earned for us, we have received yet another gift. We have been enabled to reflect a measure of holiness and righteousness in our own lives, thanks to the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

But the Holy Spirit not only brings us to a living faith and enables us to show our appreciation in a life of love for our Savior, he also keeps us in that faith. Without the Holy Spirit to preserve us, we would long ago have fallen prey to the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh.

The unregenerate world does not recognize the mighty deeds the Holy Spirit quietly does day in and day out. And it's unlikely that we will ever be able to go to the card shop and buy cards for Pentecost, as we do for Christmas and Easter. That need not, however, keep us from formally honoring the Holy Spirit with our worship on the festival of Pentecost—and from thanking God for the Spirit's work throughout the rest of the year.

Armin Panning is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon.

*God the
Father's
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Matters of interpretation

John F. Brug

In Psalm 104:4 the NIV says "He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants." But the quotation of this verse in Hebrews 1:7 says, "In speaking of the angels he says, 'He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire.'" Why this discrepancy?

The Hebrew of Psalm 104:4 could be translated either "He makes winds his messengers" or "He makes his angels winds." The first means that God uses natural forces like the winds as his messengers. The second means that God's angels are swift as the wind. Both of these statements, of course, are true.

The NIV translators chose to go with the first translation in Psalm 104, apparently because they thought that it fit best with the context of the psalm, in which verse 3 says "He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind." In Hebrews 1 they were forced to go with the second translation because it is the only translation permitted by the Greek and by the context of Hebrews 1.

Although the NIV translation of Psalm 104:4 is grammatically and doctrinally possible, it was not a wise choice because it suggests that the author of Hebrews was misquoting the psalm. Since the Hebrew of Psalm 104:4 permits the translation adopted by the author of Hebrews and since it is not uncommon for Scripture to speak of the natural and supernatural forces of the heavens side-by-side (Psalm 148:1-4), the NIV translators should have trans-

lated Psalm 104:4 so that it agrees with the inspired writer's use of the passage in Hebrews 1:7.

What is the WELS stance on fundraisers? Are they wrong at all times? Or can they be a good thing to get the congregation involved together for a specific purpose?

WELS does not have an official statement on this issue. It does not flatly condemn all fundraisers. Our teachers, however, have consistently warned that fundraisers for the church may undermine the stewardship of the congregation or may give the impression that church members are seeking the help of outsiders to support church programs, which the members themselves are unwilling or unable to support.

Fundraisers by groups within the congregation, such as a project by a youth group to earn money for a camping trip or retreat together, would be less subject to these objections than fundraisers that are intended to raise support for the essential mission of the church, which should be supported by the freewill offerings of its members.

If church members want the joy and satisfaction of working together on a project, couldn't they just as easily accomplish this by participating in an effort to help the needy, rather than in a project to raise money for their own needs or desires? Still, even fundraisers for the needy or the sick should not be seen as a substitute for our responsibility to give freely to those in need.

When did the practice of sponsors for a child's baptism begin in the Church? Is there a difference between a sponsor and a witness? Which is better to have?


In the Lutheran church, sponsors promise to help train and raise the child in the faith of the church as taught in the Bible, especially if the child should lose its parents. To serve as such a sponsor a person must be in agreement with the teachings of the church. Some "godparents" are simply witnesses to the baptism, who make no spiritual promise. Such witnesses would not necessarily have to be members of our fellowship. Parents, however, should be advised to choose godparents who can serve as a good spiritual influence on the child. It would naturally be advantageous for a child to have a true sponsor who could play a role in the spiritual training of the child.

The custom of baptismal sponsors goes back to the ancient church. Contemporary rites of baptism often place less emphasis on the role of sponsors and more emphasis on the role of the parents and the church in the training of the child.

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

Send questions to Your question, please, Northwestern Lutheran, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; <nl@sab.wels.net>

Thank you for Prof. Brenner's article "Battling 'graduation syndrome'" [Mar.]. He mentions youth groups as a way of helping our youth during their teen years. The same issue's inside back page promoted the 1998 Youth Counselors Workshop in October. This is an excellent way for anyone involved with teen youth programs to begin or rejuvenate their youth ministry. It provides a proven, time-tested framework on which to base their efforts. I encourage anyone who has this responsibility to take advantage of this weekend.

 *Jeff Scheibe
Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

I received the March edition and needed to let you know how much the articles meant—such as "Making the honeymoon last," "The forgiven forgive," "The walk of faith," and "If the Lord is willing."

This edition has meant more to me than any other I've ever read. I just wanted to let you know that! May God bless your work as you continue to touch lives like you just have mine.

*Kristin E. Gaeth
North Hollywood, California*

I want to let you know how great the April issue is. I especially enjoyed the following articles: "Darkness out in the open," "Praying in Jesus name," "Worlds apart." Thanks for a great magazine.

I wanted to comment on the article entitled "Pharisees—then and now." The article contained some valuable truths, and I agree that when tradition stands in the way of Scripture it is sin and should be

removed. However, Pastor Kelm should have mentioned that not all tradition is wrong and not placed all tradition under the umbrella of hypocrisy. Many traditions reflect biblical truths and enhance worship.

I was also somewhat confused by his statement "Quoting favorite fathers of the synod to argue disputed doctrinal applications suggests the rabbinical mindset fostered by the Pharisees." Surely I have misunderstood what he was trying to convey. Is he saying we should not quote Luther, Chemnitz, Walther, and many other Lutheran fathers? I would appreciate some clarification. Thank you.

 *Jack Callaway*

Paul Kelm replies:

Thank you for correctly pointing out that not all tradition is wrong. Like Luther, confessional Lutherans today preserve traditions that clearly communicate biblical truth, without insisting on them. We reject traditions that confuse or obscure truth, and we re-evaluate traditions that no longer communicate to a contemporary audience. I don't believe my article "placed all traditions under the umbrella of hypocrisy."

I'm not suggesting we stop quoting Luther and Chemnitz, Pieper or Hoenecke; nor should we abandon the study of these church fathers as part of our courses in systematic theology. But to establish doctrinal truth, we quote Scripture. 1 Corinthians 1:12 suggests that the early church had to fight the Pharisaical propensity for lining up behind revered rabbis, whose interpretations and regulations replaced Scripture. This generation of Lutherans must make Scripture its own, not merely cite sainted theologians or current seminary professors.

Through my Bible in 3 years

July 1998

1. Acts 15:1-12
2. Acts 15:13-34
3. Acts 15:35—16:5
4. Acts 16:6-15
5. Acts 16:16-40
6. Acts 17:1-15
7. Acts 17:16-34
8. Acts 18:1-17
9. Acts 18:18-28
10. Acts 19:1-20
11. Acts 19:21-41
12. Acts 20:1-16
13. Acts 20:17-38
14. Acts 21:1-16
15. Acts 21:17-36
16. Acts 21:37—22:16
17. Acts 22:17-29
18. Acts 22:30—23:10
19. Acts 23:11-35
20. Acts 24:1-21
21. Acts 24:22—25:12
22. Acts 25:13-27
23. Acts 26:1-18
24. Acts 26:19-32
25. Acts 27:1-20
26. Acts 27:21-44
27. Acts 28:1-16
28. Acts 28:17-31
29. Amos 1, 2
30. Amos 3, 4
31. Amos 5, 6

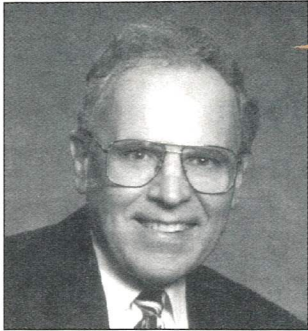
Peter the Barber once asked Martin Luther how he, an ordinary kind of guy, could read the Bible and benefit from it. Luther answered:

Ask yourself:

1. What does God tell me here?
2. What makes me glad?
3. What makes me sad?
4. What do I want to pray for?

Try it in your Bible reading.

The ambivalent ~~society church~~ pew



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

Now is not the time to wring our hands in despair of what is happening in church and society. It is the time to put our hands to work to make a difference.

“America ambivalent on abortion” was the Religion News Service headline we ran in the April issue of NL. “Ambivalent!” The word suggests we are stuck in the middle of a love/hate relationship after 25 years of legalized abortion. It says we as a society are uncertain and indecisive about where we stand on the issue. Uncertain whether we want to go on killing unborn babies!

That’s not all we are ambivalent about. Look at what we call our sexual mores. Even if our president has done everything women have accused him of doing, our society has breathed a loud “ho-hum” in response. So what? We are comfortable.

Lukewarmness rules.

But we have always known that the worldly society was ambivalent, at best, about sin. What about the church? It seems a long time ago that the phrase “situation ethics” grew popular in the Christian church in America. Suddenly, it seemed, church leaders were reluctant to condemn sin. Ambivalence about sin increased. Lukewarmness lulled much of the church into a moral stupor.

Today we are reaping the whirlwind of what we have sown. Practicing homosexuals, corrupt church leaders, abortion advocates, no-fault divorce, live-in lovers, all find support in some (many?) Christian churches—even while we collectively bemoan the trend.

Ambivalence! Call it decadence.

And what about the church’s first love? Its marching orders? Its worldwide mission to preach the gospel to every person? To the degree liberal churches are eager to accommodate non-Christian religions, ambivalence about converting their followers by the gospel grows. To the degree the saved seek home-church

comforts first, the less urgency they feel for reaching the lost—particularly those in other neighborhoods and countries.

Now, lest any of us feel smug about condemning “society” and the “church,” the unsettling reality is we can’t have an ambivalent society and an ambivalent church without ambivalent individuals in society and church. Where are you and I in this mix?

It’s been suggested that perhaps we, too, have grown lukewarm. How comfortable have we become with the moral morass suffocating our society? Where is our passion for reaching the lost with the saving word of Jesus? How much are we willing to sacrifice so others will learn of the Savior? What efforts are we taking to be salt and light in a decaying, darkened world?

Ambivalence will not do. We know what God thinks of us who are lukewarm. He will spit us out of his mouth (see Revelation 3:16).

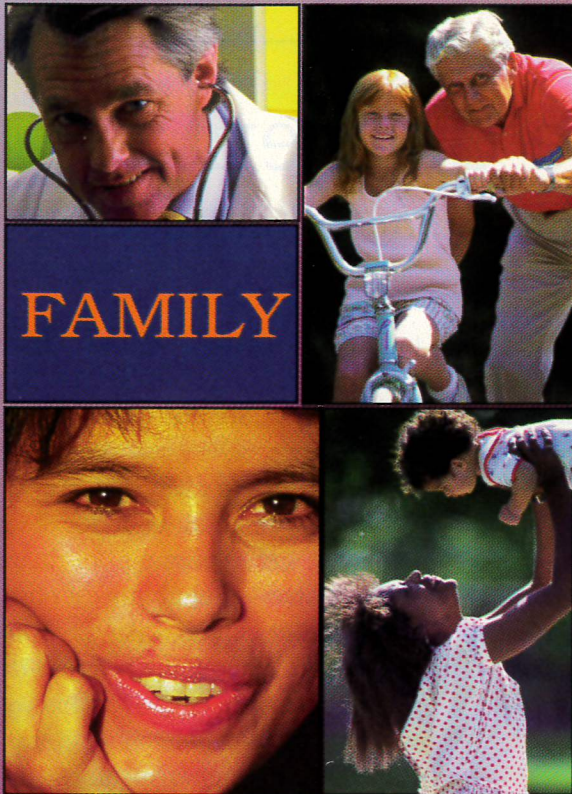
Now is not the time to wring our hands in despair of what is happening in church and society. It is the time to put our hands to work to make a difference. Let our hands hold the hands of our children to lead them in the way of the Lord. Let our hands dig deep into our wallets to fund the work of the Lord. Let our hands embrace our neighbors with aid and comfort in a show of love from our Lord.

The path of least resistance is the easy way, the ambivalent way, the lukewarm way. The path of righteousness in Jesus is difficult, but a way active and energetic and decisive—a way made sure by God’s Word.

Which path are you taking?

Gary P. Baumler

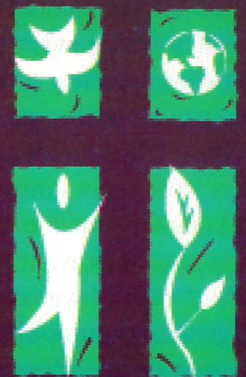
1998/1999 Stewardship Emphasis



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Inspiration from the garden

Tending to a garden teaches a lesson about tending to our souls.

David Danford

My children have become garden fanatics. Long before the last frost of spring, they pick out seeds and nurture them with care in planters under lights in the basement. They watch every day for the seeds to sprout. They talk with great enthusiasm about the salsa they'll make from the tomatoes and hot peppers from their summer harvest. It is 40 degrees outside, the wind howling, and they want salsa recipes.

They dream of watermelons by August, and pumpkins by Halloween. While there are still patches of snow here and there, the child who plants the cucumbers starts negotiating with the child who plants the dill, working out collaborative arrangements for pickles.

Nurturing gardens

In summer they water the garden daily, and they're continually weeding, cultivating, or just messing around. Every day, it seems, somebody's yelling, "Dad! Come look at the peppers turning red!" or "The corn's over my head now!" or "We need stakes for the tomato plants!"

My children's garden produces fruits and vegetables. If it fails, I'll go to the store, and we'll make salsa anyway. In August we'll eat watermelon—even if we don't grow it ourselves. We won't go without sweet corn or pickles or pumpkins.

Without a doubt the children go a little over the edge in their stewardship of the garden. They work at it

like there's no grocery store. They invest so much time and effort, and they speak in such serious tones, that it's easy to see they believe in the project. Belief makes it easy for them to do work they otherwise wouldn't touch without a day's whining.

Amazing, but the garden is usually still a whine-free zone in late July. They've got a good harvest coming, and they know it. I smile when I watch them and think of other fields.

Nurturing souls

Our churches produce their own special crops. If they fail, where would we go? If the stewards of the church let it wither, how will our souls be nourished? Does any grocer sell the fruits of faith? How we would hunger without the teaching of our called workers. How bleak our lives would be without the encouragement born of gathering in faith with other Christians in worship. How empty our spirits would be if we stopped reaching out together

to bring the saving Word to others. How hard should we work to nurture the gift of a Christian church?

Surely we must work even more diligently for our church than my garden-crazed children do for their tomatoes. Let us commit our finances and our time—literally invest ourselves in our church. Like labor in the garden, without the belief in the project, the work of the Lord is work we'd generally whine about doing. It is time we'd rather spend in other ways; it is gifts we'd rather not give.

In the Lord's work, just as in the garden, it's easier for us to perform cheerfully and well when we recall how much we believe in what we are doing. Such reminders come from hearing and studying the Word.

Hear the Word regularly. Work in the Lord's garden. And if you want to check on how tall the "corn" is growing at your church, share time with your fellow Christians there.

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