

NORTHWESTERN

February 1999

LUTHERAN

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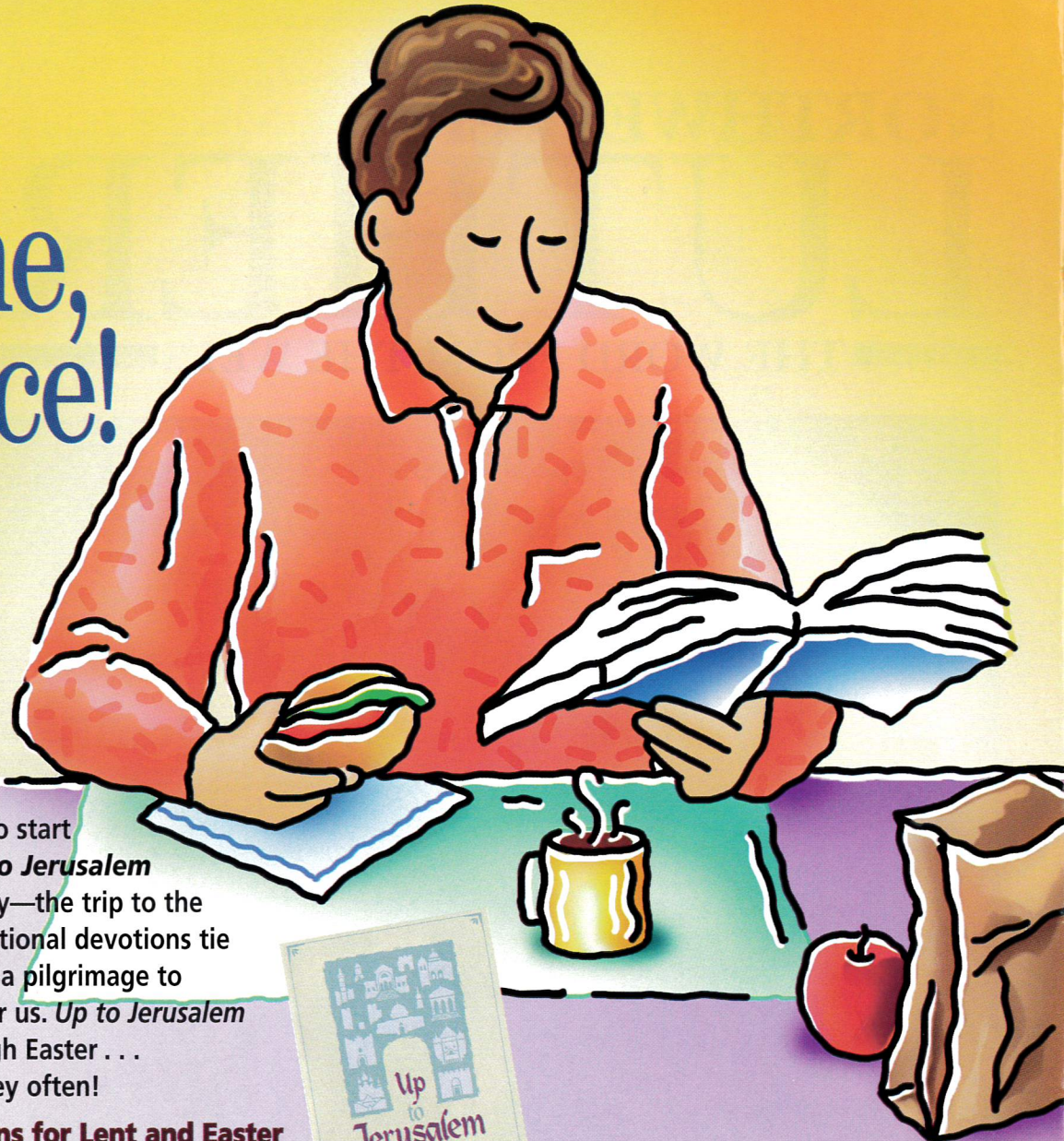
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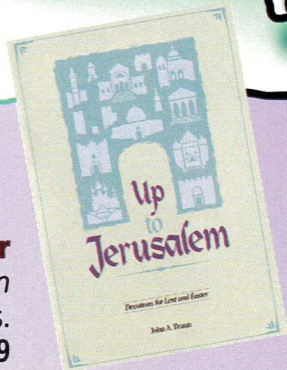
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Keep it to ourselves? No!

Then they said to each other, "We're not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. . . ." 2 Kings 7:9

Thomas A. Westra

It's exciting to tell someone good news. To be the boss who tells employees that they got the big promotion, or the doctor who tells the family that their loved one pulled through surgery, has to be a thrill. Yet, in 2 Kings 6 and 7, four men delayed telling some good news.

Finding earthly treasure

The Aramean army had surrounded Israel's capital, Samaria. So tight was their stranglehold that no food could get into the city.

At the city's entrance were four lepers, forced to live outside the walls. If there was no food inside, there wasn't going to be any outside. They said, "Look, if we stay here, we're going to die. If we go into the city, we're going to die. But, if we go to the enemy camp, surrender, and beg for food, they might feel sorry for us and feed us." So, with nothing to lose, they walked to the enemy camp.

But when they walked into the camp, it was deserted! God caused the Aramean soldiers to hear the sounds of chariots and horses and a great army. Thinking they were being overrun, they fled, leaving everything—food, clothing, riches.

Imagine the scene. These four guys—accustomed to filth and misery, dressed in rags, starving to death—walk into camp and find stuff for the taking. They tear off their filthy rags and put on rich robes. They run from tent to tent, stashing gold and silver in their



pockets. They feast and drink and toast their good fortune. Meanwhile, the people of Samaria are starving.

I can imagine one leper, as he reaches for another piece of roast lamb, saying, "Uh . . . guys . . . don't you think we better tell the others?" Actually, they said: "We're not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves."

Sharing heavenly treasure

You and I are sitting at a banquet table, feasting on God's love. We have exchanged the filthy rags of sinfulness for the rich robe of Jesus' innocence. As Christ's brothers and sisters we are unbelievably wealthy. At Lent we remember how he went to the cross, shedding his precious

blood so we might live with him always, forgiven and loved. We know he is at our side, guiding us with his Word and protecting us with his power.

While we feast on this banquet, a world around us is starving—even when the bread of life and the living water of the gospel is so near. Don't you think we better tell them?

It's not easy. The people of Samaria ran to the camp when they heard the news because they realized that the food would satisfy their hunger. Sadly, many do not run to the gospel because they do not realize that Jesus will satisfy their hunger. But we need to keep trying. If we keep the message to ourselves, we are not doing right, for this is a day of good news.

Begin by asking God's mercy for our lack of concern for our neighbor. Then, assured of that forgiveness, look for opportunities to weave the message of God's love into conversations with friends. Invite them to church activities or worship. Pray. Attend Bible studies so you can give an answer for the hope you have. After all, there is no greater thrill than to share the best news of all.

NL

Tom Westra is pastor at Beautiful Savior, Cincinnati, Ohio.



✦ Many people don't think God has a legitimate place in science. But as the Creator of the world, he has an intense interest in his creation. Moreover, all human scientific theories are nothing compared to the reality that Jesus died and rose for us. Two articles this month address the importance of keeping proper perspective when addressing science.

✓ "Science—through God's eyes" (p. 6)

✓ "Your point of view" (p. 31)

✦ In a new series, John Parlow discusses serious questions for every congregation. The first one "Balance in the kingdom" will promote conversations about creating a balance between ministry to the community and ministry through a Lutheran elementary school. (p. 10)

✦ We've had a change of personnel on our part-time behind-the-scenes work of proofreading. For the past two years, retired pastor William Fischer and his wife, Gladdie, have checked every issue twice. Our sincere thanks to them for their faithful service.

Martin Moldenhauer has agreed to replace the Fischers. An English professor at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Moldenhauer's reputation for detail precedes him. We're sure he'll keep us on our grammatical toes. Welcome!

✦ We welcome another name to our pages—Thomas Westra. He is one of our three "Thought for today" devotional writers. You can read his first (of what we're sure will be many) insights on page 3.

—LRB

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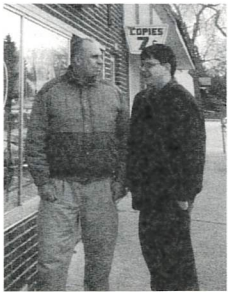
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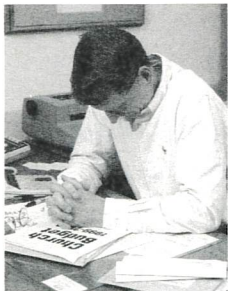


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Science — through God's eyes



Seeking understanding about difficult scientific questions is part of our being. But we should concentrate more on what is essential for our faith—the Word.

Paul R. Boehlke

How did we come to be? What are we that God is mindful of us? What is our relationship with God? These are questions with implications for eternity.

Scripture answers that we are special. Our first parents were made by God at the climax of creation. We sinned. Yet, we are loved so much that the Creator-God sent his Son, Jesus, to save us.

Science doesn't establish truth

Still we question: How does everything fit together? Why are there fossils? What formed the Grand Canyon? Why does creation appear to be old? Can creatures change over time? Why is a particular tribulation happening?

Where God has not spoken, we need to remain humble in proposing answers. These questions are interesting but not essential for faith. True, once we are Christian, we are not required to leave our brains in the church parking lot. Even faith comes in rational packaging. However, Christians cannot make

special truth-claims outside of Scripture. Most important, we dare not confound speculations with Scripture.

What, then, about evolutionary theory that clearly clashes with Scripture? How do we defend ourselves? Evolution implies that we have no purpose; we are nothing special. George Gaylord Simpson, Harvard paleontologist, stated that mankind is “the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind.” Chance and the mechanisms of selection brought us to this point. Harvard professor Stephen Jay Gould said that if evolution could somehow happen over again, we would probably get bacteria but not humans. Humans have just been lucky, he concludes.

How can science be so far from Scripture? We need to recognize and to teach that science is a human activity. Scientists are influenced by assumptions, previously accepted science, and social pressures. The assumptions lead science in particular ways. Science has different methods, tools, and standards for

determining knowledge. Theories are judged by power of explanation and prediction. Even facts are selected to fit the theories. According to historian Thomas Kuhn, scientists share a way of looking at nature, a series of concepts and procedures that structure how they work and what solutions they will accept. They are hardly objective. This is our defense.

Stewardship of Earth requires knowledge.

Not that science is always our antagonist. Our wonder increases with greater knowledge. Seeking understanding is part of our being. Furthermore, our science informs our technology. How often the physician and patient must trust life to technology!

Also, if we are not to harm a neighbor, we must know what we are doing. We need to know that polluting a river endangers others. If we value nature as God's artwork, then we will use the planet in ways that are sustainable. Stewardship of Earth requires knowledge.

However, some think that we can also select and sift science for what is true. Then everything would fit together. Would not theology and science both benefit?

Scientific knowledge changes

History shows that no scientific knowledge is secure against change. Antibiotics were used frequently after World War II. Doctors trusted that they could do no harm by over-prescribing these wonder medications. Today we know that these drugs can encourage the growth of resistant bacteria. The threat of untreatable infections by super strains of bacteria becomes greater with every use. Science changes.

In teaching Batesian mimicry, many biology teachers, including me, proclaimed that the monarch butterfly is distasteful, and has vivid coloration to advertise this fact to predators. Birds learn not to eat them by trial and error and associate the taste, headaches, and nausea with the orange and black colors. At the same time, the viceroy butterfly was cited as palatable, but looked like the monarch. Hence, teachers taught that the viceroy is protected by false advertising. But in 1998 viceroys were found to be distasteful too. Science changes.

Sometimes changes come quickly. In *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, a retired geophysicist mused that, without updating, an oceanographer totally familiar with his field in 1950 would flunk today's freshman examination. Recently, we have seen changes in support of continental drift theory, used computers to predict El Niño's effects, and discovered undersea hydrothermal vents. Richard Barber of Duke University reflected on the fissures in the ocean

floor where the water is heated by molten rock. The warmth allows for unique life forms that absorb nutrients directly from the water. Barber was amazed that they had been overlooked before. He concluded that if your mind is not prepared, you won't see it. His comments remind us of our limits. We "see but a poor reflection," and our knowledge passes away (1 Corinthians 13:8-12).

The Holy Spirit calls us to faith through the Word, not science.

Many things pass us by because our minds are not ready for them. We jump to conclusions. Later we realize that our knowledge is incomplete, and even completely wrong.

Science provides a shifting foundation for faith

Suppose that as a church we would embrace a particular bit of science to support Scripture and faith. What if that science changes? What if we are mistaken? Do we need to determine when the fossils were made? Do we need to find the Ark? Do we need to find human footprints along with dinosaur footprints? We would be no better off trusting in those things than people who put faith in relics of Christ.

Years ago Dr. Alfred M. Rehwinkel, a Lutheran professor, claimed that the worldwide existence of fossils was "convincing evidence for the biblical Flood." At least one person has attacked the idea of flood-made fossils on the basis of modern geology and claimed that the fossils were put in place at creation. The speculative purpose was to warn Adam and Eve about

the nature of death, should they sin. Neither hypothesis is supported by Scripture. We cannot answer this question.

Such speculations need to be labeled as hazardous if tied to faith and outreach. The book of Job is aimed at this problem where God's first challenge in a series of references to nature is, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand" (Job 38:4).

One can elevate reason so that it is no longer a servant but becomes the judge. In Calvinism, reason declares that the bread and wine in communion are only bread and wine. Most Bible-science flows from what Luther called, "a different spirit."

Faith is not something that we work out by ourselves. We cannot argue our way into heaven. We confess in Luther's explanation of the Third Article that we cannot by our "own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ . . . or come to him." The Holy Spirit calls us to faith through the Word, not science.

Of course, nature and the Bible agree, and nature's wonderful complexity directs us to seek the Creator (Romans 1:20). But it ends there. We and others need to hear the gospel, not clever church-endorsed arguments of amateur science. Let us remain humble, and resolve like St. Paul to focus on Jesus Christ in preaching and teaching, knowing only him.

NL

Paul Boehlke is a biology professor at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee.

Next month: Check out Thomas Mellon's article on the stewardship of God's creation.



Kids, ^{1 2 3} tips parents can use to talk openly with and set boundaries for teenagers. drugs, and alcohol

Joel D. Leyrer

She sinks the winning bucket, and her dad beams. As her son rushes out the door, mom spots a smear of ketchup on his shirt, and she winces. Parents rise and fall with their children. Solomon put it this way: "A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son grief to his mother" (Proverbs 10:1).

Safe to say we prefer joy to grief, but foolish behavior is the bad fruit of a sinful nature that all children have. Raising foolish-free children is impossible we admit, so we hope earnestly that no single foolish act will result in tragedy.

The menu of foolish behaviors available to our children is, sad to say, lengthy. Among the most dangerous is the unlawful use of alcohol and drugs. Because we can't remove alcohol and drugs from the world, we look for the formula that keeps our children from using them.

That's a problem. The formula is right next to the fat-free French fries and the cream that reverses aging.

This is not to say that drug- and alcohol-free kids do not exist or that parents are powerless to discourage drug use. Let's recognize, however, that our kids may choose to experiment with alcohol or drugs regardless of what we have done to prevent it. Unfortunately, if the pain or peer pressure is intense enough, the perceived benefits of using an illegal substance can, in a given moment, outweigh every reason we have

given them to stay clear of drugs and alcohol.

So what can we do? First, commend our children daily to the care of our Lord. If we aren't praying regularly for their spiritual and physical welfare, we have no business placing confidence in any strategy.

Second, counter the perceived benefits. Teens typically drink or take drugs to numb emotional pain, pursue a rite of passage, rebel, find a thrill, relieve boredom, fit in with others. Each of these perceived benefits warrants its own discussion, but one feature in our homes counters all of them: security. Creating and maintaining homes and families in which our children know they are secure is worth any effort we expend. Secure kids have fewer reasons to seek the perceived benefits that drugs and alcohol offer.

The blueprint for a secure home begins with a foundation on Christ. The features that help specifically to discourage the use of drugs and alcohol include the following:

A clear position on the unlawfulness of drug use and underage drinking.

At this point in history, the United States government has declared that using certain non-prescription drugs—including marijuana—is illegal, as is alcohol consumption by anyone under 21. Romans 13 directs us to submit to this law of our land. Is it the law in your home?

Your teen needs to hear from you that crack, pot, beer, and those pretty wine coolers that look like Kool-Aid and taste like fruit juice all share the same status for him: illegal. They're illegal because the government says so. We abide by this distinction because God told us to



submit to the government he established. Do not allow the blurring of this line. Illegal is illegal regardless of taste, availability, or effects.

Every year an alarming number of otherwise intelligent parents buy the twisted thinking that says, "They're going to drink anyhow, so we'll make sure they're safe." So they collect the car keys, roll out the sleeping bags, and tap the keg. When the party's over they assure themselves that the controlled environment they monitored surely avoided a disaster. Unknowingly they conducted a seminar in Confusion 101. The thesis: The law is really for other people. You're free to make your own laws as long as you're careful.

The irony is that in the name of security they created insecurity. Don't expect them to admit this, but teens are afraid to set their own boundaries. Sure, they'll debate ours and criticize the government's, but secretly they're happy, relieved, and secure to know consistent limits.

2 Responsible use of alcohol and prescription drugs by parents. Every parent should ask, "What do my children learn about alcohol and drugs from my use of them?" If your answer is "They probably don't pay attention," challenge your thinking. Not only do they notice, they also compare your use with that of their friends' parents. The adults in their lives serve as a gauge for what normal use is. If she observes careless or excessive use,

she's likely to assume that's acceptable until she meets a different standard. Insecurity sets in when your child learns from health class, peers, and church that excessive use is harmful, abnormal, and not God-pleasing.

As a precaution, some parents remove all alcohol from their homes. That's an individual choice. Take care, however, to avoid setting a standard God hasn't set. The Bible does not condemn the use of alcohol, so we can't. Make it clear that the absence of alcohol in your home is a choice you've made, not a commandment you're following.

Regardless, talk about the legitimate role alcohol may play in celebration and recreation. Show them that a doctor has prescribed the pills you take. Explain that you only take aspirin and other over-the-counter medications when you're experiencing symptoms they can treat. Security comes in knowing that alcohol and other drugs have proper applications.

3 An open door for the sinner. At some time, someone in your child's school, neighborhood, or acquaintance will get caught underage drinking or taking drugs. Consequences will follow, and your child will watch. He's not likely to ask this question out loud, but know it will cross his mind: "If that were me, what would my parents do?"

Talking to your child about how you would respond can be an opportunity to build security. Don't back away from the clear expectation that drugs and alcohol are off limits. Acknowledging that your son or daughter could slip, however, tells them that you understand temptation is real. One parent put it this way: "If that were you, I'd be disappointed, and I can't guarantee that I wouldn't be angry. But I would not stop loving you, this would still be your home, and we would work through this and put it behind us." Hasn't our heavenly Father given us the same assurance? Secure kids know they aren't above temptation and that their parents are there when they fall.

Remember that even the most secure home is not a germ-free bubble in which sin has been sterilized. In the moment of temptation, however, kids from secure homes are more likely to see the risk rather than the benefit. Pray for the wisdom and strength to head such a home, and start with the foundation.

NL

Joel D. Leyrer is pastor at St. John, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.

Are you concerned about these issues? *Lutheran Parent* is. The March/April edition is a special issue dealing with teens and drugs and alcohol. To subscribe, contact *Lutheran Parent*, 1-800-662-6093 ext. 8.



Balance in the kingdom

Long-range trust in the Savior's Great Commission makes us confident that a balanced ministry will enhance our great schools, not hurt them.

John M. Parlow

“Boy, this was tougher than I thought,” said Tom, a gasping 30-something athlete whose body only slightly resembled the one in high school.

“I know what you mean. I didn't realize how out of shape I was,” Dave said, wiping the sweat from his flushed face as the cardio-karate session ended. “I never realized how uncoordinated my left side was. I understand what the instructor means by, ‘Balance is foundational.’ I'm strong with my right leg but lousy with my left. I'm falling all over the place.”

“I just try not to humiliate myself publicly out there,” Tom said with a smile.



In karate, balance is everything. One side must move as fluently as the other. It's not healthy for one to be stronger. Bottom line: Your left punch needs to be as strong as your right. Otherwise, a person may be vulnerable and ineffective.

The same is true in the church. There needs to be balance. Law and gospel. Nurture and outreach. Fellowship and service. Where there isn't balance, the ministry suffers.

The debate

“Are you attending the open forum tonight at church?” Tom asked as he drove back to the office. “I really believe we need to look at our ministry priorities. We allocate 70 percent of the congregation's budget to nurture 121 children while the remaining 30 percent nurtures 1,050 adults and reaches out to 10,000 unchurched folks in our community. That doesn't sound right.”

“The school makes a difference in kids' lives,” Dave replied, “and our school can be an effective tool to reach unchurched families through their children.”

“Listen, Dave,” Tom shot back aggressively, “I'm all in favor of Christian education. My Kadie loves first grade. But you have to admit the key word in your argument is *can*: our school *can* be an excellent outreach tool. But reality is, it's not. You can count the unchurched families currently served in our school on one hand. Don't misunderstand

me. I'm not saying those families aren't important. I just believe it's a question of balance. The question I struggle with is, ‘Which needs to be the higher priority: teaching arithmetic to believing children or reaching out with the gospel to unbelieving adults who know how to add?’ I realize some think that is a ‘straw man’ argument, but our budget does indicate priorities.”

“It's going to be an interesting meeting,” Dave said shaking his head.

The divine call for balance

“Kingdom balance” is the phrase often used to describe the conversations that echo in council meetings and members' homes. “Kingdom balance” is often misunderstood as a criticism of spending too much money on children's education or as a devaluation of the Lutheran elementary school. As a result, parish school supporters become as defensive as Dave. Some believe that many are out to sacrifice the children on the altar of ecclesiastical fairness. Lines are drawn. Friendships are strained. Gospel ministry suffers—and the devil laughs as he sweeps us to the floor.

Truth is: Jesus' Great Commission is all about kingdom balance. “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . . and teaching them. . . .” Long-range trust in the Savior's Great Commission makes us confident that a balanced ministry will enhance our great schools, not hurt them. But that trust means

honest examination needs to occur in all areas of ministry—and in many cases—some change.

Our Lutheran elementary schools continue to be a jewel in the crown of WELS ministry. Faithful teachers. Long hours. Prayer-filled dedication to each student. In my community those outside our fellowship recognize the excellence of our schools.

But what needs to be examined is not the need for the school but its function in the congregation's overall mission. All souls are precious. Do we really believe we can best reach the people of our community for Christ by "winning the adults through the children"? Apart from a few exceptions, the current church dropout rate of people age 16 to 25 and the spiritual health of many churching adults would render such thinking poor strategy.

The real issue

"Let's remember the real issue," Steve Schneider, the 58-year-old grocery store owner, said at the open forum. "My kids went through this school and now my grandchildren are. I'm all for children, but I'm also for teens, singles, widows, single parents, and the seasoned citizens. It seems to me that we have neglected some of those people."

"I'd like to echo Steve's comments," said Mabel Hanson, 79, retired Sunday school teacher, who many believed had taught Moses in one of her first classes. "Many of the children I taught are not in church anymore. I know it wasn't that they didn't receive good training," she said with a smile. "I think many followed poor examples at home."

Dave then spoke with obvious emotion, "I was one of those kids

who learned about Jesus because of this school. I will be forever indebted to it. I understand the need to strengthen the adults, but just don't forget how valuable this school is."

"No one is questioning the importance of our school, Dave," Steve said calmly. "The point is that the soul of the drifting Gen Xer and the soul of the single mom are just as precious in Jesus' sight as second-graders."

The task

Let's ask some honest questions: Has your congregation been spending too little money and devoting too little attention to other important areas of ministry? Instead of reducing efforts at outreach and adult spiritual growth, don't we need to commit more resources and energy to the spiritual needs of the entire congregation? Maintaining kingdom balance may mean placing additional emphasis upon nurturing youth and adults, building Christian families, loving the hurting and the lonely, involving members in the church's mission, reaching out to the unchurched community, and supporting the synod's worldwide ministry.

Children grow best when adults are spiritually well-fed. Adult spiritual growth is critical to the nurture of children. Many adults are excellent Christian role models. However, many are not. There is room to improve.

It is once again a question of balance—a balance between home and school. Are we really helping parents nurture and model Christianity rather than doing it for them? One analyst reports a "strong correlation between the effectiveness of our churches' Christian educational efforts and the modeling of truth by parents at home." He insists, "Future

planning for child discipleship needs to take adult discipleship into consideration." Children are so precious, too precious for us not to better minister to the adults in their lives.

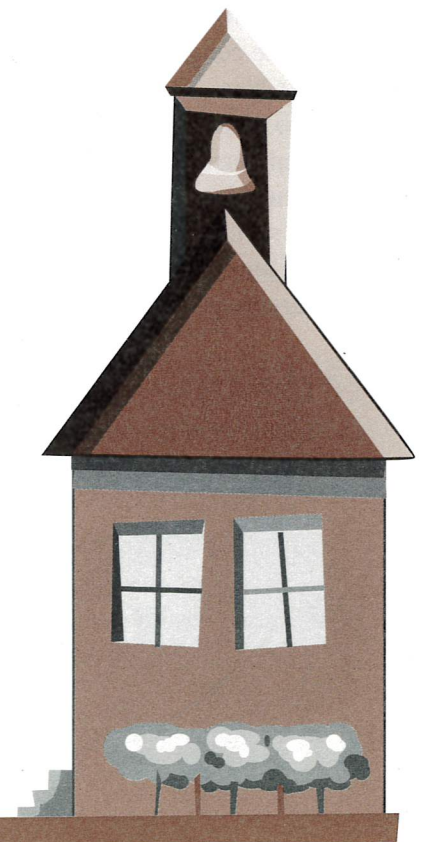
"Well, that wasn't as bad as I thought," Dave said with a relieved smile as he walked to the church parking lot. "I didn't realize how 'off balance' our congregation's ministry might be."

"I think Pastor hit it on the head," Tom said, "when he said, 'If we are going to reach the people of our community with the gospel, we need to have a strong stance on Scripture and a balanced attack in ministry.' You know, Dave, he sounds just like our karate instructor."

"Hey, Tom, do you think Pastor would come to our class?"

NL

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



THE LITTLE CHURCH THAT COULD

The small group at Redeemer, Roswell, N.M., has worked hard to spread the gospel and stick together. Linda R. Baacke

It pays to be persistent. Just ask the 29 people in Roswell, N.M., who have been waiting for a pastor.

Challenging past

The story began 16 years ago, when El Paso pastor Steve Blumer began visiting WELS members in Roswell, a city in southeast New Mexico whose major industry is agriculture—dairy cattle, cotton, grain, chile peppers, pecans, vegetables.

After three years of visits from area pastors, exploratory status was granted and a pastor was called. Membership grew to about 40. But over the next few years, the congregation had its share of troubles—from personal problems to building program frustrations to membership declines.

So the mission reverted to a preaching station in 1993. The remaining members faced debt from a parsonage they had built.

Redeemer

Exploratory work begun: 1983
 Communicants: 15
 Baptized: 28



Faithful present

But the members weren't going to give up. They felt they had something worth preserving. They may have been waiting for a pastor, but they weren't sitting and waiting. They were working and waiting.

"Something supernatural is going on in Roswell," says Gene Ahlswede, WELS mission counselor. "But it's not about aliens," he said, referring to the famous "Roswell Incident." Some believe that in 1947 the government covered up information about a crashed "flying disc" that was reported to be a weather balloon.

"The supernatural is the spirit of the little group. It is excellent. They are willing to do what it takes to share the gospel," he says.

"We've been very faithful," says Virginia Bailiff, who has been around for all 16 years of changes. "Everybody works very hard."

She's right. From youngest to oldest, everyone has a job to do.

Elders conduct worship using prepared sermons. Members hold Sunday school, adult Bible class, confirmation class, pre-confirmation class, and vacation Bible school. Two young people trained to be accompanists. Elders conduct baptisms. In addition, in April 1998, two teens—one of them Hispanic-American—were confirmed by Pastor Paul Hartman from El Paso. The service was conducted in both Spanish and

English. Also, the congregation meets its budget of \$19,000, and still owns and maintains the parsonage and five acres of land.

But the congregation doesn't want to keep all these good things to themselves. "Each one of us has brought somebody to the church," says Bailiff.

For Easter 1998, the congregation publicized the service, prepared door hangers, and put up signs announcing their Easter services. Over 30 people were at worship that Sunday. Members invited more than half a dozen people. Later, they followed up on the prospects.

All this work is done by people with little or no WELS background.

Not only do the members of Redeemer witness to their community, but their example also has witnessed to people from other countries.

The Arizona-California District Mission Board called Pastor Bruce Marggraf from Brazil to serve them. Although Marggraf turned down the call, when he was talking to one man in Brazil, he explained that the people in Roswell have been without a pastor for years, yet continue to work and worship. The man said, "There must be something worthwhile for these people, so I guess I can go to church too."



At Redeemer, Roswell, N.M., teens train as musicians for worship services. All the members of this small church use their gifts in some service to the Lord and each other.

Some members were Roman Catholic, others were from Reformed churches, still others have a Lutheran heritage.

“The congregation was not formed by birth and tradition, but by the Word of God,” says Ahlswede.

Hopeful future

The congregation’s determination and prayer paid off in October 1998 when the Board for Home Missions once again granted them exploratory status. But if the mission status was revoked before, what changed to make it viable now?

Preaching station: Sometimes there just aren’t enough WELS members in an area to warrant the service of a full-time pastor. In this case, a pastor may regularly travel from his home congregation to the area—once a month, or every two months, or four times a year. This way, the group benefits from a pastor’s service, yet mission dollars are available where the opportunities for outreach appear to be greater.

“One factor was the group’s determination, but that isn’t the only reason,” says Frederick Casmer, chairman of the Arizona-California District Mission Board. “There are new opportunities for outreach—especially to retirees and Hispanic-Americans.”

Retirees are a growing opportunity for service because the June 1998 issue of *Kiplinger’s Magazine* named Roswell as one of the six best cities in the United States in which to retire. Now, more seniors are flocking to the city.

Cross-cultural work is also an exciting opportunity because 41 percent of the population is Hispanic-American, but only three Catholic churches exist in Roswell. “The other churches don’t appear to be reaching out to Hispanic-Americans,” says Casmer. “We can do that.”

Yet this fledgling congregation knows that once they get a pastor, their challenges—and their work—won’t end. In many ways it will just

begin. They are looking for someone who will join them and lead them in ministry.

They want a full-time pastor to bring consistency to the church. “When we invite someone to come, they go to churches that have more to offer,” says Bailiff. “Especially for children, we just don’t have the services available.” They hope a pastor will help show others that the church does have something important to offer—but not just programs and services. “We have the true Word of God,” says Bailiff.

If you still can’t understand why this small congregation has worked so diligently while waiting for a pastor, Virginia Bailiff can sum it up for you: “This is my church family. We just stick together.”

NL

Linda Baacke is the senior communications assistant for Communication Services and Northwestern Lutheran.

How a group of people becomes a “church”

When the Board for Home Missions decides to open a new mission field, the congregation usually experiences these five stages as they move to self-support:

Manpower: Funding is provided to call a missionary to a new area.

Exploratory: Permission is granted to canvass, gather names, teach Bible classes, and eventually worship in an area that looks promising for growth. In most cases the missionary works with a small nucleus of WELS members.

This stage determines if there is enough potential to plant a congregation. In some cases, an exploratory is closed, not because the gospel isn’t effective, but because good stewardship says

the missionary could be better used in another area.

Mission status: When an exploratory group’s efforts have been blessed with growth, they organize as a congregation, adopt a constitution, and are received into WELS membership at a district or synod convention.

Land search authority: The mission receives permission to search for land to eventually build facilities and have community identity.

Facility planning authority: A mission congregation receives permission to plan a facility for its ministry. This includes space for worship, education, fellowship, and offices.



FROM MISSION

How to make the critical connection between our mission in Christ and the moment-by-moment choices we make.

“**W**hat’s wrong with Jesus?” They were on the road as usual, but something was different. He wasn’t holding back for stragglers, tussling children’s hair. He was out in front. He wasn’t gently painting pictures of the kingdom of heaven.

He was scaring them.

“They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid” (Mark 10:32).

The final trip: Jesus is striding toward Jerusalem. Your shame and punishment lie waiting. “I set my face like flint” (Isaiah 50:7). Those following were troubled; but from our vantage point, we see his entire life as just that, a striding for Jerusalem.

We’ve sensed the utter harmony between his purpose—“to give his life as a ransom for many”—and his footsteps. The rabbi pauses at the tax-collector’s booth. Carpenter hands grip the corners of the table. He leans in. “Follow me.” See a man living each moment absolutely at one with his mission—“to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Trusting a person, not following a plan

“What’s wrong with me?”

Compared to Jesus, my life is an aimless meandering through a forest of distractions. And it’s not for lack of a compelling mission. The mission is clear. My life is for knowing Jesus better through his Word. My time is for bringing honor to him as my “walk” makes him known.

But something gets lost when I try to translate mission to moment. There is a dreadful disconnect between what I know my life is for, and what I do. The choice I make in a given instant is subject to a dizzying array of influences. Such a “still small voice” is my purpose in Christ compared to the “tyranny of urgent things” clamoring outside, and the “desires that battle within” (James 4:1). What mattered most failed to capture my attention.

I’ve wasted time.

I can develop the perfect time-management system, but I’m not a perfect man. I remain a wretch holding a planner, still crying, “The good I want to do, I don’t do.”

I spoke on time management to a conference center full of missionaries. After comparing our mission to

TO MOMENT

Mark A. Paustian

our moments, uncovering the wounds, I was given “the right word at the proper time.” I said to these pastors, as if they didn’t know: “We have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1,2).

It was an unforgettable moment of perfect quiet. A thousand demands ring in all our ears—“do more of this,” “be more of that.” But it all faded away, leaving one exquisite command, and only one: “Believe the good news.” The Spirit led us on the path that runs past Jerusalem. You’ve been to that awful hill . . . and you’ve heard the “gardener” whisper, “Mary.” Don’t forget what you’ve heard. He has taken your sins away.

I still wander in the same forest of distractions as before, yet everything is changed by this peace of forgiveness. We are changed. “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). Your life is not ultimately about a plan to follow, but a person to trust. By faith in him, the choices we make now are being brought into sweet harmony with our eternal purpose.

What follows is my sinner-saint’s attempt to make that critical connection.

What’s my mission?

If you were lost in the forest would you want a compass or a clock? A clock is what most time management systems offer—tools and methods to do more, faster, more efficiently. What a relief to be given a compass instead, to realize that the critical matter is not how fast, but what direction!

I have a personal mission statement, but it’s not a humanistic pep talk. It’s a simple statement of my mission in Christ, arranged according to seven roles for carrying it out (e.g., husband, preacher, evangelist), so that nothing is neglected. My mission statement crushes me in repentance. It’s full of gospel to absolve me. It throws me in complete dependence on the Spirit to work Christ’s purposes in me through the Word. It awakens me to my calling. It excites me. The action plan I draw up for a given week, having first reconnected to my mission, bears little resemblance to the plans I write when I see only crushing lists of things to do.

I still wander in the same forest of distractions as before, yet everything is changed by this peace of forgiveness.

What’s most important?

With my mind full of my mission, I ask one critical question about each role: “What’s truly most important for me to do?” So simple, but the answers, two to three for each role, do not tend to be “do me now” urgencies. Focused on mission, the answers tend to be vital goals such as witnessing, spiritual growth, prayer, and relationship building.

What’s my plan?

The lecturer held up a jar containing large rocks. He asked his audience if it was full. They thought so. But he added gravel that worked its way into the spaces. Is it full? Next came sand. Then water. He asked, “What’s the point?” Someone answered, “When it comes to time, you can always get more in.”

Wrong! Traditional time management would say that, but the real point was that if he hadn’t put the big rocks in first, they wouldn’t have fit at all. Things that are truly important need to be built into our schedules and plans first, or the “tyranny of the urgent” will crowd them out entirely.

In weekly planning, block out time to address one vital goal for each role. Schedule them as appointments with yourself, giving them a sense of urgency. Include a daily appointment for unhurried time with Jesus in his Word. You now have a weekly plan that reflects your mission. That which matters most has been honored in your planning. Keep these appointments sacred. Let the urgencies fill in the spaces.

What now?

Whether I’ve spent the last hour watching TV or reading Scripture has hinged on a single decision made in a single instant. We need to learn to pause at those critical moments of choice. To do what? Martin Luther said, “Thinking must be turned a new direction. Christ must be thought of if you are to say ‘Christ lives in me.’” Pause in the moment of choice. Think of him striding toward Jerusalem—and why. Think of him bringing the new Jerusalem—and soon.

Where you once would have chosen based on urgency or sinful desire, now choose differently, based on the love you’ve found in him. This moment, the one called “now,” is the one that matters most. Bring it into harmony with the mission prepared for you before time began.

NL

Mark Paustian is pastor at New Life, Rockford, Illinois.

Doing **God's** thing, **God's** way

Christian leaders who understand God's Word and seek God's will have God's direction.

Paul E. Kelm

God must have a sense of humor. To lead the construction project that would rebuild Jerusalem's walls, he chose not an engineer or a stonemason, but a "cupbearer." Now, Nehemiah's role in the Persian court was a great deal bigger than recommending the right wine for the king's dinner; but his qualifications wouldn't have recommended him for the job God had in mind. God reads résumés differently than we might.

God is serious about the spiritual life of those who lead his people. People with superior skills but no prayer life can't lead in Christ's Church. Men who have a wealth of experience in administration but no experience with Scripture don't get God's call. The last thing your church needs is a headstrong chairman, so sure he knows what the church should do that he doesn't have time to listen to the Lord of the Church. Church councils too busy with business to invest time in devotional Bible study may easily do the wrong thing the right way . . . or the right thing the wrong way.

Nehemiah is a good example of spiritual leadership, doing God's thing God's way.

Spiritual leaders pray

Most of Nehemiah 1 is a prayer. When this leader-in-waiting heard of the sorry state of the city of God,

he "mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven for some days." Spiritual leaders take the state of the church personally, agonize over it, and pray repeatedly about it. It is not the eloquence of a perfunctory prayer that opens a meeting at the church, but the passion of his private prayers that measures a leader.

All the business of Christ's church is spiritual.

Read Nehemiah's prayer. Appreciate the confession of sin, which accepts responsibility for why things aren't going well with God's people. Recognize Nehemiah's familiarity with Scripture, quoting back to God the promises he'd made through Moses as the basis for asking help. Discover how close this exiled child of God was with his merciful Father. Spiritual leaders don't use policies or public relations to fix problems in the church; they use repentance. They know God's will so well that they dare to confront him with it in their petitions. They treasure his love and beg to see more of it.

Before his appeal to King Artaxerxes, Nehemiah offered a silent prayer. The first thing he did in the face of opposition was pray. There are more prayers per page in Nehemiah than in any other book

of the Bible. Leaders serious about God's work are in continuous consultation with God. Perhaps that would be more apparent if there were more prayers in the middle of meetings at church, not just at the beginning and the end. What we do when we're stuck, how we deal with disagreement, where we turn for a decision—that is what defines spiritual leadership.

One of Nehemiah's prayers might make you uncomfortable. The prayer in chapter four calls God's judgment upon those who mock the ministry of God's people. You probably haven't heard a prayer like that at church: righteous anger poured out to God because arrogant humanists mock his right to give and take life, pleas for the overthrow of godless governments that persecute Christians, calls for summary judgment upon blasphemous teachers of spiritual lies. After all, we live in an age of tolerance. Still, like Nehemiah, spiritual leaders care and dare to get angry at what opposes God, in and outside the church.

Spiritual leaders lead others to pray

Spiritual leadership is more than saying prayers, however. It's leading prayers. Nehemiah 9 describes a national day of prayer. For a quarter of the day God's people stood and read the Word of God. For another



A true spiritual leader prays passionately about the Lord's work—both in public and in private.

quarter of that day they confessed their sin and praised their God. They recalled God's promises and recounted God's blessings. They recommitted themselves to his service, and they petitioned his help.

Perhaps we would do well to bring back the concept of prayer vigils and meditative retreats. In our fast-paced lives we've lost a sense of sabbath, of rest with God. We're so preoccupied with problems that we don't sufficiently enjoy our blessings. Spiritual leaders have a bigger agenda than building church walls. Like Nehemiah, they help people rebuild their lives with God.

People who are regularly in Bible study will lead the Body of Christ. Others can only manage an institution called the church.

Nehemiah knew his Bible. More than that, he saw to it that the people in Jerusalem knew their Bible.

Chapter eight is a good example of the public reading of Scripture that was a hallmark of Nehemiah's leadership. Chapter 12 describes the dedication service atop the new city walls and, once more, the public reading of the "Book of Moses." It wasn't simply to rebuild walls that God directed Nehemiah to Jerusalem. It was to lead spiritual renewal.

God has a use for people who can manage a building project, run a meeting, organize an event, and put together a budget. But leaders in the church are bringing people and their lives closer to God. People who are regularly in Bible study will lead the Body of Christ. Others can only manage an institution called the church.

The mark of a spiritual leader is integrity—walking the talk, modeling God's truth and love. For Nehemiah that meant standing up to threats against his life to demonstrate his confidence in the Lord and his work. It meant championing the cause of the poor when the upper class abused them with unscrupulous loans. It meant enforcing the Sabbath laws for people whose misguided priority was making a buck. It meant carrying

out discipline with people who compromised their faith by marrying outside of it. It meant consistently living out what God's Word had put into his heart.

Spiritual leaders "see" God's answers to prayer

There is one last evidence of spiritual leadership in Nehemiah. So fervent in prayer, so devoted to Scripture was Nehemiah that he was in tune with God's leading. Repeatedly he says things like: "So my God put it into my heart to . . ." or "I had not told anyone yet what God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem" (Nehemiah 2:12). Christian leaders who understand God's Word and seek God's will have God's direction. It isn't mystical, and they don't manipulate people with it. But spiritual leaders know what God wants them to do, and they trust God to show others.

It is a mistaken model that sees pastors and teachers taking care of the spiritual side of the church, while members manage the business side. Nehemiah had a healthy respect for priests and prophets, and he deferred to their calling in public worship. But he would never accept the customary cutting of life in the church into two parts: "spiritual" and "business." All the business of Christ's church is spiritual. Nehemiah was a lay leader characterized by the Word and prayer. Spiritual leaders always are.

NL

Paul Kelm is a parish consultant for the Parish Assistance Office.

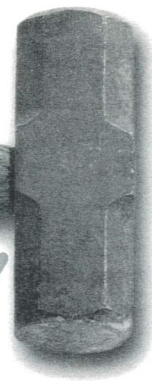
Jesus uses his cross

as the ultimate

Jesus, the great destroyer
weapon of destruction,

destroying all the

bad things of this world.



Eric S. Hartzell

Devils can talk. Hear what one said to Jesus: “Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” (Mark 1:24).

“Have you come to destroy us?” You know the answer. Yes! Jesus came to destroy devils—and other things too. Jesus comes as a destroyer. It is a drastic, but true, description.

Fierce to destroy

Jesus called Judas one “doomed to destruction.” That is the awful reality of the human condition in rebellion against its Maker. “A destroyer will come against Babylon,” Jeremiah prophesied. Peter spoke about preachers who twist God’s words: “Their destruction has not been sleeping.” Even the elders in heaven speak of Jesus as destroyer: “The time has come . . . for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

Destruction is God’s plan for those who have messed up his divine ecology by destroying good names, marriages, bodies, minds—a good world. These destroyers are doomed to destruction.

That’s all you can do with some things: destroy them. Old and dangerous buildings, rabid dogs, and trash are destroyed. Jesus comes to destroy the equivalent of those things in our lives. What do you do

with a dirty thought or darkness or despair? With the radioactive sinful waste contaminating us and everyone in contact with us? What about spiritual trash talk: gossiping, cursing, complaining, doubting? Or the crumpled pages of wasted days and opportunities? God knows of one way with these things: destroy them.

It is God’s good gift to us when bad things are destroyed. Jesus uses his cross as the ultimate weapon of destruction, destroying all the bad things of this world.

One catalog offered a fist-sized piece of the Berlin Wall to shoppers for \$9 (graffiti intact!). Berliners liked only one thing more than selling chunks of that wretched wall—slamming sledgehammers into its cursed side until their arms could raise the hammer no more. The wall had kept them from freedom, family, friends—from life. It was a good day when they could destroy it with their own hands.

Thank God Jesus came a destroyer. “For he himself . . . has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations” (Ephesians 2:14,15).

Powerful to save

Destruction frightens us. It is scary to fall into the hands of the living God. Those hands destroy.

But the hand that is so fierce to destroy, is the same hand that is powerful to save. As sure as God’s hand is in destroying, so sure it is in creating, saving, and sustaining.

Our greatest joy takes place against the backdrop of destruction. The new heaven and the new earth come as a result of God’s destruction.

It is scary to fall into the hands of the living God.

Revelation 20 talks about Satan and his followers’ doom. It says “fire came down from heaven and devoured them.” It talks about death and Hades and anyone whose name is not found written in the book of life being thrown into the lake of fire. Terrible and complete destruction.

Then in chapter 21 it says, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. . . . The old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’”

Even so, come quickly Lord Jesus. Come the Destroyer. Come the Savior.

NL

Eric Hartzell is pastor at Cross and Crown, Georgetown, Texas.



Inter-Act

"The word of God is living and active."—Hebrews 4:12

Introduction

Some biologists say there's an adultery gene, a pride gene, an anger gene, and even a greed gene. That would explain a lot, wouldn't it? If they're right, our destiny is sealed and life is pointless. But if we can change, then the possibilities are endless. The alcoholic can become sober. The depressed can find reasons to celebrate. The estranged couple can find happiness together. The bitter can forgive. The selfish can become selfless. It's more than change. It's transformation. It's what Jesus brings about.

I. Text

Read Luke 19:1-10.

¹Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ²A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

⁵When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." "So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

⁷All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"

⁸But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

⁹Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

II. Questions

1. Roman officials hired Jews to collect taxes in Israel. The collectors had to remit a set amount, but could collect as much as they wanted. The more ruthless the tax collector, the wealthier he became. Zacchaeus survived by overcharging. What evidence do you see that Zacchaeus was greedy?
2. Zacchaeus's office allowed him to cash in on the helplessness of others. We call it unethical. What words tell you that Zacchaeus was unethical?
3. Greedy. Dishonest. But what do verses 3-4 tell you about Zacchaeus?
4. Jesus spoke one sentence to Zacchaeus (verse 5). In one word answers, what did that sentence communicate to Zacchaeus?
5. According to Jewish law, Zacchaeus was only required to pay back what he had taken plus 20 percent. After meeting Jesus, he offered to pay back four times the amount. Why the change from greedy to generous?
6. This account began with Zacchaeus searching. How would you describe him at the end?

III. Application

1. If you can be bought at any price, the price doesn't matter. All that matters is you can be bought. Zacchaeus' price was money. What's yours—what could tempt you to dishonesty?
2. The world is bent on getting. The Christian is bent on giving. Paul wrote, "No immoral, impure or greedy person" will inherit the kingdom of God (Ephesians 5:5). Zacchaeus confessed his sin of greed. What opportunities do you have to do the same?
3. Zacchaeus only hoped to catch a glimpse of Jesus. He got much more. In what ways have you received from Jesus more than you hoped for?
4. Jesus reveals his personal mission statement in verse 10. How do his carefully chosen words comfort you?
 - Son of Man
 - Came to seek
 - Came to save
 - What *was* lost
 Is it possible to change? Not by ourselves. But each of us can be transformed by Jesus. Jesus told Zacchaeus, "I came here for you." It changed him. Jesus tells us, "I came here for you." It changes us.

IV. Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank you for your perfect, selfless life and for paying the awful price for our selfishness. As I consider your saving Word, transform me more and more into your selfless image. May your love inspire in me a spirit of generosity and confidence. Thank you for the certainty: "Salvation has come to this house!" Amen.

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



Church destroyed by fire

Our Savior, Lena, Wis., caught fire in the early morning of Nov. 5, 1998. A truck driver noticed the flames while driving through town. He stopped and woke Our Savior's pastor, Ryan Landwehr, who lives next to the church. When firefighters arrived, flames were already through the roof. Hours later, firefighters were still battling strong flames.

Although the church was burned down, spirits are still up. A few days after the fire, the congregation unanimously voted to rebuild and appointed a building committee. Until the new church is built, the congregation is holding services at the American Legion Hall—and church attendance is up.

The congregation even held a Christmas party. Says Landwehr, a 1998 seminary graduate who started serving the congregation last fall: "Some said there were more people there than in a long time.

"It's drawing the congregation together."



Our Savior, Lena, Wis., was destroyed by an accidental fire on Nov. 5, 1998. The congregation continues to hold services, and other area WELS churches have already pitched in by donating hymnals.



Anniversary celebration update

How are you and your district preparing for the 150th anniversary of WELS?

Bruce McKenney, chairman of the Northern Wisconsin District Forward in Christ (FIC) committee, shares their committee's initial plans:

- Before the end of January 1999, explain to all the pastors and teachers of the district what Forward in Christ is and isn't.
- By January 1999, send all congregations a bulletin/newsletter insert that announces Forward in Christ and its logo.
- Ask all congregations to appoint an FIC committee to help congregations plan how to celebrate the anniversary.

Start thinking about how you want to celebrate Forward in Christ. Then decide how you can help your congregation and district with their plans. Include the work of the synod in daily and personal prayers and thanksgiving.

To get you started, remember the FIC objectives:

- Remember
- Rejoice
- Grow
- Anticipate opportunities
- Involve people

Please share your ideas about how we can celebrate this milestone. Send ideas to Gerald Free, executive director of Forward in Christ, 954 Solar Parkway, Neenah WI 54956; FAX, 920/729-1210; <ficwicks@tcccom.net>.

MLC invites comments on accreditation

Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., is seeking comments in preparation for its periodic evaluation by its regional accrediting agency. On March 22-24 the college will undergo a comprehensive evaluation visit by a team representing the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

MLC has been accredited by the commission since 1995, when the college opened as a new institution from the amalgamation of Northwestern College, Watertown, Wis., and Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm. Its accreditation is at the bachelor's degree level. The team will review the institution's ongoing ability to meet the commission's Criteria for Accreditation and General Institutional Requirements.

Comments must be received by Feb. 20 and address substantive matters related to the quality of the institution or its academic programs. They must be written, signed, and include name, address, and telephone number. Comments cannot be treated as confidential. Individuals with a specific dispute or grievance should request the separate Policy On Complaints document from the commission office. Complaints will not be considered third party comment.

Send comments regarding the college to Public Comment on Martin Luther College, Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, 30 North LaSalle St, Ste 2400, Chicago IL 60602.

WELS members say "thank you"

Through extra-budgetary gifts the WELS Committee on Relief brings relief to victims of tragedy through cash grants, food, clothing, and medical supplies. From October 1997 to October 1998, the committee donated \$400,750. Two couples wrote to thank all WELS members and the committee for their help. Here are the letters.

On behalf of St. Peter, St. Peter, Minn., we express our heartfelt thanks for all the kindness our fellow WELS congregations have shown us after the Mar. 29, 1998, tornado ravaged our town and surrounding areas.

In all, 11 members lost their homes. Many others have substantial damage. Our church was destroyed, and our education wing severely damaged. Thanks to God, our damaged fellowship hall was usable and we are holding services there.

It will take months to rebuild. A daunting task, one that would be disheartening if not for the kindness of volunteers and congregations who

helped. You've buoyed our spirits tremendously. We praise God for you.

Your financial assistance was greatly appreciated as well. Not until one puts pencil to paper (or finger to calculator!) does one realize the costs, and how they pile up. However, your gifts, totaling over \$250,000, were extraordinary. Thirty-seven congregation members were helped, as well as 14 members of congregations in New Ulm, North Mankato, Nicollet, Le Sueur, and Cannon Falls. Twenty-four individuals in our community also were aided.

But what reaches one's heart the deepest is the compassion of Christian to Christian. In that respect, a disaster such as this tornado is the true meaning behind "an act of God," from which so many blessings flow, to both giver and receiver. Thank you to everyone connected with the WELS Committee on Relief, WELS congregations, and all donors and volunteers. We ask God to bless you.

Janet and Duane Schultz

Dear Pastor Strack,

I don't believe David and I ever properly thanked the Committee for Relief for the kindness you showed us in 1995. When you told me you were granting us \$10,000, I went into a state of shock. It didn't really hit me what an enormous amount of money this was. It did finally soak in that afternoon. I had hooked the trailer to the three-wheeler and had driven up to the field that lies east of our farm. David needed to work that field, but the debris had to be picked up first. As I drove across the area picking up wood, I began to cry. I couldn't stop. I couldn't understand why I felt so rotten after just being given \$10,000!

The tornado shook me up. I don't remember crying, but I know I was dazed for a few days. I did shed a few tears from the hailstorm that hit us four days after the tornado. It did a lot of damage to the house and wiped out our crops, our income for the year. But that was nothing in comparison to the buckets I cried the afternoon you called. You see, in my mind I knew we deserved the destruction the storms had caused, but we didn't deserve the grant. We had done nothing to justify getting it. Worst of all, I knew we could not pay it back. I cried the entire time I picked up debris.

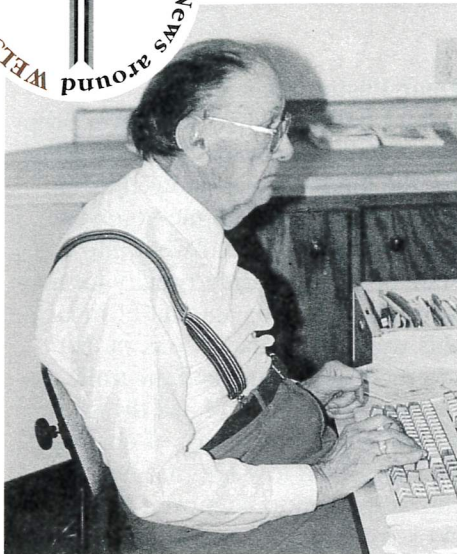
Not until I was unloading the trailer could I understand exactly what Jesus has done for us. We, because of our sin, deserve every kind of destruction God can give, but Jesus' gift of salvation is free. There is not one who deserves it, who can do anything to gain it, and who can ever repay it. Salvation, too, is a grant.

Thank you not only for the money, which was a tremendous help with our financial situation, but for what this grant taught us.

David and Krista Ulrich



Members at St. Peter, St. Peter, Minn., worship in their fellowship hall after a tornado hit last March. They ran into unexpected delays in building a new church and hope to begin construction as soon as weather allows.



Bernhardt (Ben) Boese works on a computer at Emmanuel, New London, Wis.,

After graduating from Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., in 1929, Boese received his first call to Emmanuel, New London, Wis. He served as principal for the next 42 years. For many of those years, he was also the choir director, basketball coach, and organist.

After he "retired," he worked on the church's computer, doing data entry full time until he turned 85—that was five years ago. Then he retired again—sort of. For the past five years, he has volunteered his time doing that same work four hours per day, five days a week.

In March, he'll turn 90. Then in May he'll attend his 70-year DMLC class reunion. Boese's granddaughter will graduate from Martin Luther College on the same day.

Run for the prize

When the Bible says, "Run in such a way as to get the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:24-27), members at Immanuel, Findlay, Ohio, take it seriously.

On Oct. 10, 1998, they held their first "Run for the prize" 5K run and walk, and included a one-mile fun run for children. About 120 runners and walkers, plus children, turned out. The congregation awarded plaques, ribbons, T-shirts, and door prizes donated by local businesses.

But the race wasn't only about physical training. The members also shared the message of training for eternity. The race packets included information about Immanuel's church and pre-school and the Ukrainian Medical Missions.

Some people showed interest in Immanuel's membership classes, and the congregation sent a check for \$1,000 to Ukraine.

"This style of outreach may be different, but it is getting information about Jesus out to the lost," says Dave Braun, race director. "If this run results in one person attending a Sunday service or entering a membership class, then the run and all the work put into it will have been worth the effort."

All the work took six months—a lot of planning and coordination to reach one soul. But that's just another example that members at Immanuel want everyone to run for the prize and get a crown that will last forever.



Runners wait to "Run for the prize" at Immanuel, Findlay, Ohio. The run/walk gave members a unique opportunity to reach out to the community. "We were truly blessed in the results and are looking forward to the second annual Immanuel Lutheran Church 'Run for the prize' 5K run," says race director, Dave Braun.

Summer service for students

This summer, WELS ministerial education students will get a practical taste of the ministry—in cross-cultural settings.

Using a new pilot project, students will work in cross-cultural in-service ministry and field projects. They will receive stipends that can be applied toward college costs, says John Lawrenz, administrator of ministerial education. If the program is successful, it will be officially launched in 2000.

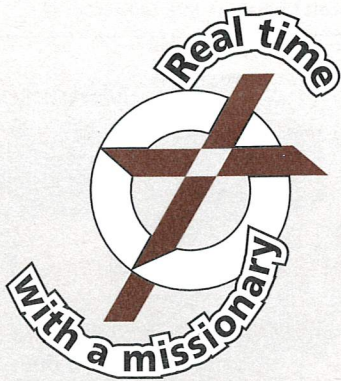
All WELS ministerial education schools will be involved: Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.; Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw; Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon.

This pilot project is funded by a \$25,000 grant from Aid Association for Lutherans.



When my husband had a call out West last year, I thought I could attempt to explain the call process to our then-four-year-old daughter. Apparently I was not very clear. After I told her there were some people who live far away from here that wanted Daddy to go tell them about Jesus, she paused nonchalantly and said, "Aww, I'll miss Daddy."

*Connie Paustian
 Rockford, Illinois*



In this section, you'll hear news from missionaries that came via the Internet. We hope you enjoy these tidbits from our missions.

From Mike Bartsch, missionary in Bulgaria:

"Where are you from?"

"America."

"America! That's everyone's dream!"

That's part of a conversation I had with a cab driver one snowy night. It reminded me what a privilege it is to live in the United States.

During the past year in Bulgaria, we see what didn't happen here that did happen in the United States over the past 50 years. Here people still do much of the manual labor by hand. Most sidewalks and curbs are handlaid pieces of stone. Power outages are regular and do not make the headlines.

Recently, a Bulgarian family from our church in Sophia visited the United States. The teenage daughter was visiting for the first time. When she returned, she was telling her friends that what the United States looked like in the movies was really true. The streets were so clean, the

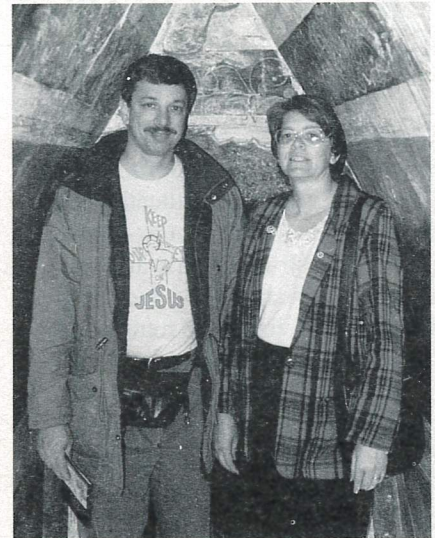
houses were so beautiful, and the people were so friendly. What she saw there was a beautiful dream compared to the way things are here in Bulgaria.

Think about it. In the United States, you live in the land of dreams. Jobs are plentiful. Houses only lose electricity in terrible storms. Though the government isn't perfect, police work to protect people, corruption is fought on all levels of government and society, and people are free to live how they choose. As you consider whatever sorrows and difficulties that you may encounter, remember that you face those difficulties in the land of dreams.

We noted that on Dec. 2, 1998, we had been in Bulgaria for one year. Anna read her first impression of Bulgaria. Once we got inside the terminal and were waiting to pass through customs, the doors were locked and guarded by soldiers carrying machine guns. I now realize that one of the reasons that used to be done (things have changed in the past year), was to keep people from escaping this country. I didn't realize that at the time, and I wondered what I had led my family into.

Yet God has truly blessed us. He has helped us grow in faith and patience. He has given our family a peace and stability that only comes from Jesus Christ. Katie and Ben are having wonderful years at Luther Prep. Jon and Chris are enjoying their new school. It is small, but has the wonderful atmosphere of a Christian family growing together in faith.

I know the United States isn't the land of dreams others believe it is. I've seen difficult things in the States. The mixture of leisure time



Mike and Anna Bartsch

and money provides young people with the opportunity for drugs. Lack of responsibility in the culture causes people to abandon their responsibilities to their family and their God. It is a challenge to live in the land of dreams, the land where there is so much.

As I think about the contrasts between the two countries, I'm reminded of the proverb: "Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God" (Proverbs 30:8,9). If you live in the land of dreams, I pray that God will not give you too much so that you forget who the Lord is and what he has done for you. I pray also for the people of Bulgaria, many of whom are so poor that they are tempted to lie and steal just to survive, and thus dishonor the name of God.

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Defining religion

Election: The biblical teaching that God in his grace chose in eternity those who will be saved. He chose them apart from any merit or worthiness in them (Ephesians 1:3-6,

Ephesians 2:8,9). God, however, did not choose anyone to be damned; those who are lost have only themselves to blame (1 Timothy 2:4, Matthew 23:37, Hosea 13:9).



District news

These are the reporters for this month's featured districts. NA: Kevin Schultz
SA: Mark Haefner WW: Elton Stroh SEW: Scott Oelhafen MN: Jeffrey Bovee

North Atlantic

St. Paul, Amherst, N.H., dedicated a new Ahlborn-Galanti digital organ on Nov. 1, 1998. The dedication coincided with the Reformation—fitting because an instrument that aids in singing praises should be dedicated the day we celebrate the return of the Word as the central part of the service.

. . . 120 WELS members gathered for the 27th annual **North Atlantic District Labor Day retreat**, held Sept. 5-7, 1998, in the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts.

Activities included Bible studies for adults, teens, and children; swimming; campfire sing-a-long; outdoor worship service with a joint choir; and, of course, lots of good food. . . . **Our Savior, Springville, N.Y., held an "All Saints Party,"** as a Christian alternative to Halloween, on Oct. 25, 1998. Thirty-two people attended, including 10 non-members.

Participants dressed up as biblical characters (including the burning bush), played Christian games (e.g., pin the cross on Calvary), enjoyed food and cider, and listened to an object lesson about the way Halloween got started and the true All Saints Day rituals. . . . **Hope, Markham, Ontario, purchased its first worship facility** in November 1998. The 11,000 square foot church seats over 300 and is only five years old. . . . The **Steel Drum Band of Hope, Markham, Ontario,** presented a sacred Christmas concert on Nov. 29, 1998. Recently the band recorded its own CD and hopes to market it. . . . **St. Paul, Ottawa, Ontario, held a Civic Appreciation Sunday** on Nov. 22, 1998. Those who

serve in the community were all invited: the mayor, councilors, ministers of the Federal and Provincial Parliament, police officers, firefighters, a community action committee, and a tenants association. The day consisted of a service of thanks to God for blessing the community with faithful public



Minnesota

The 1997 pre-Kindergarten class of Martin Luther Preschool, St. Louis, Mo., in front of "the Giving Tree." The children bring pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters to school to put on the tree. Then they give the money to a special project. This helps them learn about money and how it can be used to help others. In 1997, they sent the money to Partners in Apache Learning; in 1998, to Mission to the Visually Impaired.

servants, followed by a potluck dinner in their honor. . . . **Abiding Word, Orleans, Ontario, had a float in the Christmas Parade of Lights.** The float was a "living manger scene" with hundreds of lights, Christmas decorations, and members handing out flyers inviting people to Christmas activities and worship services.

South Atlantic

Risen Savior, Orlando, held its opening service on Oct. 11, 1998. The exploratory group is renting the gym of a local high school. Sixty-five people attended, three times the size of the nucleus. . . . **Living Savior, Valrico, Fla.,** broke ground for its new 5,000 sq. ft. facility. Clearing of land and construction will begin in early 1999.

Southeastern Wisconsin

On Oct. 18, 1998, **Lord and Savior, Crystal Lake, Ill.,** celebrated four milestones: 25th anniversary of its first worship service, 20th anniversary of the church's dedication, third anniversary of its mortgage burning, and then its 1998 dedication of a new four-room mobile classroom. The congregation began a preschool in January.

Happy anniversary

NA—The Ladies Aid Society of St. Paul, Ottawa, Ontario, celebrated its 100th anniversary on Nov. 14, 1998. They recognized the occasion with an evening celebration that included all the women of the congregation. Special honor was given to their senior members. On Nov. 15, 1998, **Resurrection, Virginia Beach, Va.,** celebrated its 30th anniversary with special services, a potluck, and a reading of the church's history.



WW—Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., celebrated three faculty anniversaries in December: from left: Ronald Hahm (25), Dan Kirk (40), and Robert Behnke (40).

News briefs

WELS pastor, author, and lecturer **Mark Cares** was guest speaker on VCY/America's **CROSSTALK** radio talk show. On Nov. 18, Cares discussed his best-selling book, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*. CROSSTALK, a call-in program, reaches all 50 states and the Caribbean.

Be sure to check out the **Lutheran Girl Pioneer Web site**. It includes the history of LGP, its organization, and current news. You can find it at <www.lgp.org>.

Obituary

Waldemar R. Hoyer
1914-1998

Waldemar Hoyer was born Jan. 29, 1914, in Winneconne, Wis. He died Oct. 24, 1998, in Rochester, Minn.

A 1939 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Hoyer served Trinity, Neenah, Wis.; Mt. Calvary, Waukesha, Wis.; Mt. Calvary, Flagstaff, Ariz.; Christ, Grand Island, Neb.; Immanuel, Sault Sainte Marie, Mich.; St. John, Sleepy Eye, Minn.; Grace, Sioux City, Iowa; Resurrection, Rochester, Minn.; Military Services, Milwaukee; and WLIM, Inc., Milwaukee.

Hoyer is survived by his wife, Gunhild; four children; 13 grandchildren; and a sister.

Clarification . . .

Regarding the illustration on page 10 of the November issue: Any resemblance that the balls used for juggling may have had to the yin-yang symbol was unintentional. We regret any confusion.



In the spirit of Matthew 5:16, we're sharing examples of people who live their faith. Maybe they'll inspire you to let your light shine even brighter. If you have an example to share, send it to us at 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; <nl@sab.wels.net>.

Pastor Todd Denoyer writes: *Karl and Troy Price are members of Good Shepherd, Deltona, Fla. Through a voice-activated computer they write for the church's monthly newsletter. We thank God for allowing Karl and Troy to serve him.*

Holding on to faith

We suffer from a genetic disease called Duchene Muscular Dystrophy. It causes slow deterioration of our muscles. Our muscles have deteriorated to the point that we rely on ventilators to breathe for us. Our older brother, Keith, died from the same disease in 1982, two days before his 22nd birthday. We mourn the loss of our brother, but at the same time we have learned important facts for us to survive as long as we have.

A good sense of humor is second only to faith as essential to our survival. We are also fortunate to be blessed with parents who rely on their faith and sense of humor to see them through the good and bad times. They are there for us every day, enabling us to live fairly normal lives. Thanks to our dad, we have an accessible van that can accommodate us for trips to the beach, visiting family, and going on vacations. Our mother has always been there for us while our dad worked. Since his retirement, they

spend their days doing the necessary tasks that pertain to our survival, such as feeding us, bathing us, and putting us in our chairs. Many in our condition are not as fortunate.

Just like anyone else, we get frustrated and mad sometimes. But we concentrate on the positive, rather than the negative. Our most recent challenge was getting new wheelchairs. Our comfort was greatly improved, but we could no longer use our hands to control the chairs safely. We had to learn to operate them using our chins. We still do things we have always enjoyed, such as long rides through our neighborhood with Henry, our residential mutt. We see our neighbors, while taking in the beautiful nature that God has created for us.

Sometimes people see us and wonder how we can be so happy. Our answer for them is that our faith in God, a good family, and sense of humor can get you through anything.

We thank God every day for the tools that make it possible for us to lead the happy lives that we do. We hope this article can benefit others who may be going through tough times in their lives.

Karl and Troy Price



When I reviewed the Bible lesson, "The Three Men in the Fiery Furnace"

with my kindergarten class, I asked the question, "What are the names of the three men who were thrown into the furnace?"

The pastor's son excitedly blurted out, "Shadrach, Cadillac, and Abednego!"

Dawn Hinn
North Fond du Lac, Wisconsin



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

Through my Bible in 3 years

March 1999

1. Hebrews 10:1-18
2. Hebrews 10:19-39
3. Hebrews 11:1-22
4. Hebrews 11:23-40
5. Hebrews 12:1-17
6. Hebrews 12:18-29
7. Hebrews 13:1-8
8. Hebrews 13:9-25
9. Numbers 1, 2
10. Numbers 3, 4
11. Numbers 5:1—6:21
12. Numbers 6:22—7:89
13. Numbers 8:1—9:14
14. Numbers 9:15—10:36
15. Numbers 11, 12
16. Numbers 13:1—14:10a
17. Numbers 14:10b-45
18. Numbers 15
19. Numbers 16:1-35
20. Numbers 16:36—18:7
21. Numbers 18:8—19:22
22. Numbers 20
23. Numbers 21
24. Numbers 22
25. Numbers 23, 24
26. Numbers 25, 26
27. Numbers 27, 36
28. Numbers 28, 29
29. Numbers 30
30. Numbers 31
31. Numbers 32

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.

Lutherans back away from signing joint declaration

In June the Lutheran World Federation, a group of Lutheran church bodies, had hoped that Lutherans and Catholics could resolve their understanding of justification by signing a joint declaration on the doctrine. Now, however, the LWF says it is not ready to sign this statement drawn up between representatives of the Vatican and the LWF.

The statement said that both faith bodies had essentially the same understanding of justification—how people are saved. This would have led Lutherans and Catholics to lift the mutual condemnations they leveled at each other during the Reformation.

A week after the LWF originally announced its support of the declaration, the Vatican said they would sign the document, yet their official response appeared to cast doubt on their willingness to state that Catholic condemnations no longer applied to the Lutheran teaching.

On Nov. 14, Ishmael Noko, general secretary of the LWF, issued a statement saying that despite two days of intense negotiation between Vatican and LWF officials, the two sides could only agree on “further consultation.”

“Joint signature can take place only if there is a common understanding of what is being signed,” Noko said.

Bishop Christian Krause, president of the LWF, said it is unlikely there will be any definitive ruling by the Lutheran body on signing the statement until at least the middle of next year.

WELS is not a member of the LWF. For more information about this document, see NL October 1998, p. 27.—ed.

What people look for in a church

American churchgoers cite three significant factors as “extremely important” in their choice of a church—its beliefs and doctrine (58%), how much people in the congregation care about each other (53%), and the quality of sermons (52%), according to a poll by the Barna Research Group.

About 45 percent of adult churchgoers also said three other factors were “extremely important”—friendliness to visitors, involvement in helping the poor, and the quality of children’s programs.

The study found marked differences among churchgoers of different denominational backgrounds. According to the survey, Catholics were less concerned than Protestants about theology and doctrine, quality of sermons, how much members cared about one another, friendliness toward visitors, and the quality of adult Christian education. Catholics were more concerned than Protestants about the convenience of service times, the length of sermons, and the denominational affiliation of the church (specifically, whether it is Catholic or not).

“The most fundamental differences are those between Protestants and Catholics regarding doctrine and practice,” Barna said. “Apart from that, however, the big story is that people are people. They want substance from their church; they want to make a difference in the world through their church; and they need to feel connected to God and to other God-loving people as a result of their church experience.”

“If a church does not satisfy these particular needs, people will feel spiritually unfulfilled and restless and probably search elsewhere for a church home,” added Barna.

The results were based on a random telephone survey of 1,015 adults in July. The survey had a margin of error of ±3 percentage points.

Charities ride the stock market roller coaster

Most U.S. charities had a bumper year in 1997, according to new figures, but the rosy glow may already be evaporating as fundraisers agonize over whether the erratic stock market will discourage donors.

In 1997, with the stock market still soaring, donations to religious and other charities rose 13 percent, according to the *Chronicle of Philanthropy's* annual survey of private giving to the 400 largest charities in the country.

But the future looks uncertain. "Initially I was optimistic there would not be a huge change," said Angela Sosdian, director of gift planning for the Nature Conservancy.

"But the first four months of our fiscal year, from July 1, 1998, have not been as strong as we'd hoped. We hope that people are just waiting to see where the market goes," she said.

Religious-based charities, especially those active in providing human services, were among the top dollar-catchers. The Salvation Army came out on top of the overall list for the sixth year in a row, raising \$1.2 billion with an impressive increase of 16 percent. Close on its heels came the YMCA of the USA. The American Red Cross was in third place. Catholic Charities, with \$425 million, came in seventh.

Persecution prevalent in Pakistan

According to the law, no one should have been able to take Seema and Khushi Masih's three daughters away from them.

All parents in Pakistan—including Christian parents such as the Masihis—have the right to raise their children in their own faith. But the law isn't always followed in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Particularly when it comes to Christians.

The three girls were taken last January by the family's landlady and her husband, who had police escorts. They contended the children had converted to Islam and should no longer remain in a Christian home. The Masihis maintain that their daughters are still Christians, and even if they did convert to Islam, they should stay with their parents.

But the three girls—ages 9, 11, and 14—are gone, and it's unclear whether they'll ever be allowed to return home.

This is not unusual in Pakistan. Although Pakistan's constitution promises to safeguard the rights and

interests of religious minorities, human rights organizations say that's not happening.

For example, under the country's blasphemy law, a mere complaint by a private citizen can result in an arrest without a warrant, even if there is no evidence. Bail is often hard to obtain or not granted at all. Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto tried to amend the law, but he backed away when radical Islamic groups called for the death of anyone supporting change.

According to Compass Direct, an American-based Christian news service that monitors worldwide religious persecution, more than a dozen people have been jailed on blasphemy charges in the past seven years. No one has been executed, though four have been sentenced to death and five have been killed while in custody, the organization says.

In Pakistan, 97 percent of the population is Muslim; the rest is made up mostly of Christians but also of Hindus, Buddhists, and other groups.

U.S. teen pregnancy rate hits 20-year low

The U.S. teenage pregnancy rate in 1995 hit a 20-year low, according to a report released by the Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI).

The institute, a New York and Washington-based group that concentrates on reproductive health research and policy analysis, found there were 101 pregnancies per 1,000 females between the ages of 15 and 19. At its peak, the rate stood at 117 in 1990.

The number of teen pregnancies in 1995 was 889,980, the lowest recorded number since 1973, when there were 916,630.

"While the trends are encouraging, we must not forget that the pregnancy and birthrates for U.S. teenagers are still extraordinarily high compared with rates for teenagers in other industrialized countries," said Patricia Donovan, senior associate for law and public policy at AGI.

[*Guttmacher Report on Public Policy, October 1998*]

News brief

The Lutheran Church of Australia's Commission on Theology and Interchurch Relations met to vote on the ordination of women. By a vote of 10 in favor of ordination and five against, the church body will prepare a report of issues for the church to study. Special seminars and workshops to present and discuss the report will be held in early 1999.

["Newsletter to Pastors," written by President Lance Steicke, of the Lutheran Church of Australia. Oct. 26, 1998]

CHANGE IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Bentz, Martin J., to Christ, Cambridge, Minn.
Fischer, William E., to Bethany, Manitowoc, Wis.
Froehlich, Richard A., to Beautiful Savior, Green Bay, Wis.
Kolander, Paul H., to Good Shepherd, Fond du Lac, Wis.
Krueger, James R., to St. Matthew, Stoddard, Wis.
Meyer, Gerald L., to St. Paul, Muskego, Wis.
Priestap, Douglas L., to St. Paul, Calgary, Alberta
Scheibe, Richard A., to Trinity, Wayland, Mich.
Schmeling, Steve J., to St. Paul, Menomonie, Wis.
Schumann, Daniel L., to Faith, Prior Lake, Minn.
Seefeldt, Curtiss W., to St. Paul, Litchfield, Minn.
Vogt, John F., to Scandinavian countries

ANNIVERSARIES

Winona, Minn.—Goodview Trinity (50). Feb. 7. Service, 2 PM.
Racine, Wis.—First Evangelical (150). Feb. 14—Matrimony-theme service, 9:30 AM. Any couple married at First Evangelical may participate in a processional. Reception follows. March 28—Confirmation-theme services, 8 & 10:45 AM. Anyone confirmed at First Evangelical is invited. RSVP, 414/633-8267.
Hemlock, Mich.—St. John (100). Feb. 21—Old-time founding, 8 & 10:30 AM; German potluck follows. March 21—Friendship outreach/inreach, 8 & 10:30 AM. 517/642-8757.
Crete, Ill.—Trinity (150). Feb. 28—Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Chorus, 8 & 10:45 AM. March 28—Youth services, 8 & 10:45 AM. John Stellick, 708/672-8125.
West Allis, Wis.—Woodlawn (70). April 18. Anniversary celebration services, 8 & 10:30 AM; potluck follows. Thomas Kneser, 414/321-2126.
East Troy, Wis.—St. Paul (125). March 7—Anniversary service, 10 AM. May 2—Confirmation reunion service, 10 AM. 414/642-3200.
Colorado Springs, Colo.—Salem, (25). April 25—recognition of baptisms and confirmation classes. Services, 8 & 10:30 AM; coffee hour between services. July 18—Services, 8 & 9:30 AM; picnic follows. Oct. 17—Services, 8 & 10:30 AM; dinner follows. 719/599-0200.

COMING EVENTS

Dedication service—St. Martin, Watertown, S.D. Feb. 7. Dedication service, 11 AM; potluck following. Service of praise and thanksgiving, 3:30 PM. Dennis Hayes, 605/886-2928.
Women's retreat—Circle of Love retreat. March 12-14. Manitowoc, Wis. Karen McVey, 920/757-9401.
Women's retreat—Christian Women Today retreat. March 12-14. Olympia Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Jan, 414/781-1955.
Workshop—Minn. District Church Councilmen's workshops. March 13—at Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minn. March 20—at St. Croix Lutheran High School, West St. Paul, Minn. Opening devotion, 9 AM. Registration precede devotion. Rev. Paul Schmeling, 715/425-0023.
Band concert—3 PM, March 21, at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

For a weekly updated bulletin board, see the WELS Web site <www.wels.net>.

Bulletin BOARD & NOTICES

To place an announcement, call 414/256-3210;
FAX, 414/256-3899; <karenb@sab.wels.net>
Deadline is six weeks before publication date.

Martin Luther College 1999 choir tour—507/354-8221

March 27—Our Savior, Springville, N.Y., 4:30 PM
March 28—Hope, Markham, Ontario, noon; St. Paul, Ottawa, Ontario, 8 PM

March 29—St. Paul, Amherst, N.H., 7 PM

March 30—Good Shepherd, South Attleboro, Mass., 7 PM

March 31—Messiah, South Windsor, Conn., 7:30 PM

April 1—Christ Redeemer, Trumbull, Conn., 7:30 PM

April 2—Our Savior's, East Brunswick, N.J., 7:30 PM

April 4—St. John, Newark, Del., 9:30 AM; Grace, Falls Church, Va., 7 PM

April 18—St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn., 7:30 PM

National WELS handbell festival—April 10-11, at Wausau, Wis. Sunday concert, 2 PM. Cheryl Diener, 715/258-7203.

Alcoholic awareness retreat—for recovering alcoholics and family members. April 16-18. Includes keynote speakers, workshops, support meeting, and Christian worship. Wonderland Camp and Conference Center, 30 miles south of Milwaukee. John Cook, Wisconsin Lutheran Christian Counseling, 6800 N 76 St, Milwaukee WI 53223; 414/353-5005; <wlcfs@execpc.com>.

Women's retreat—Today's Christian Women's retreat. April 16-18. Treetops Sylvan Resort, Gaylord, Mich. Laurie, 248/391-1133; <tcwr@hotmail.com>.

Women's retreat—Spiritual Renewal Weekend for Women. April 16-18. Rochester, Minn. Bev, 507/931-1866, AM only.

Conference—The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference third triennial convention. Winter Haven, Fla. April 20-22. 414/538-1462.

Church Librarians' Organization—WELS-CLO meeting. April 24 at Trinity, Waukesha, Wis. 414/256-3222; <jaweber@sab.wels.net>.

Tour—sponsored by Camp Phillip. 15 days to Central Europe. Departs June 5, 2000. Kenneth Fisher, 414/354-7320.

SERVICE TIMES

Eagle, Colo.—Planning a trip to Colorado's Ski Country this winter? Worship with us at Mountain Valley, Eagle, Colo. (30 minutes west of Vail on I-70). Sunday worship, 9 AM; Sunday school & Bible class, 10:15 AM. Brent Merten, 970/328-6718.

Sun City, Ariz.—Winter visitors, join us at Our Savior during your stay. Sunday service, 9 AM. Bible classes, Monday, 9 AM and Thursday, 7 PM. 9925 N 103 Ave, Sun City, Ariz.; Paul Siegler, 602/977-2872.

Yuma, Ariz.—Winter visitors coming to Yuma, worship at Prince of Peace. Worship times—Dec. through March, 8:15 and 10:45 AM; April through Nov., 9 AM. 2500 S 8 Ave, Yuma, Ariz.; Alan Gumm, 520/726-8716.

Tucson, Ariz.—Winter visitors worship at Holy Cross, Eastside Tucson. Service, 9 AM; Sunday school & Bible class, 10 AM. 520/296-5129.

NAMES WANTED

WELS ham-radio operators—Interested in meeting other WELS hams on the air? Contact Joel Kluender, NF9K, 870 Prairie Street S, Shakopee MN 55379 or e-mail <NF9K@aol.com> with your name, address, and callsign.

Manhattan, Junction City, Ogden, Wamego, Fort Riley, Kan.—for Hope Exploratory, Manhattan, Kan. Phil Hirsch, 785/770-9656; <revpchirsch@email.msn.com>.

Adult honors choir—for the National Conference on Worship, Music, & the Arts, Kenosha, Wis. Must be available July 17-19 for rehearsals and concerts. Mary Prange, 414/873-9105. Application is on Worship Web site <www.wels.net/sab/frm-cow.html>.

Sheridan, Wyo.—picturesque, tax-friendly. John A. Schroeder, 307/686-4080.

East Troy, Wis.—addresses of past confirmands from St. Paul, East Troy, who reside out of state or are no longer in contact with current members. For upcoming 125th anniversary celebration. 414/642-3200.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

New York City, N.Y.—Sunday evening Bible study and worship. Christopher Orr, 404 East 63 St #16, New York NY 10021; 212/715-9688 (home), 212/946-1541 (voice mail). Indeleith Nebeker, 718/786-6251 (home), 212/352-4488 (voice mail).

Livermore, Calif.—Good Shepherd, 486 South J St, Livermore CA 94550. Sunday school and Bible class, 9:15 AM; worship, 10:30 AM. Paul Mueller, 925/371-6200.

NEEDED

Communion ware—Ascension, Eau Claire, Wis. Will pay for shipping. Paul Sullivan, 715/835-5507.

Worship supplies—offering plates, communion ware, paraments, lectern, coat rack, room dividers, or any worship items you no longer need. For exploratory, Roscoe, Ill.; 815/633-6197. Pete or Renee Roen, <peteroen@aol.com>.

Worship supplies—offering plates, banners, paraments, candle holders, or other worship items. For Hope Exploratory, Manhattan, Kan. Phil Hirsch, 785/770-9656; <revpchirsch@email.msn.com>.

AVAILABLE

Room dividing curtains—complete track and rollers included. 60+ feet. Not sound proof. Christus, Delavan, Wis. Gerald Hintz, 608/883-2185.

Hymnals—100+ red *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Free for cost of shipping. David Warskow, 805/943-1025.

Preaching gown—black Geneva preaching gown, medium size, good condition. Free. Robert Lau, 715/755-2317.

Brass altar ware (cross, candlesticks, and missal stand) and 100 stacking chairs—free to mission congregation for cost of shipping. Abiding Love, Cape Coral, Fla. 941/954-2122.

POSITION AVAILABLE

Administrator—for The Lutheran Home's regional office in Reedsburg, Wis. Responsibilities include planning, directing, and evaluating the programs of the region, developing strategies for recruitment and retention of staff, and administering fiscal operations such as budget planning. Experience working with persons with disabilities and the elderly is preferred. Send resume to Sue Wessin-Cradle, 611 W Main St, Belle Plaine MN 56011; FAX 612/873-2760.

Jesus loves you

On Valentine's Day you can be deaf, but if you can still see, taste, or smell, you can get the message of the day. Elaborately designed cards present the language and symbols of love. They picture adorable little cupids shooting their arrows, supposedly passing love from one person to another. People buy their sweethearts bright red roses and deep dark chocolates, the sights and smells of wordless love.

And so, at least on Valentine's Day, without the spoken word and without needing to hear, the message of love is communicated. But what about the rest of the year? What about an even more important message of love—the love of Jesus? How do we communicate God's love to those who, for one reason or another, may not be able to hear it?

In November, while visiting our WELS missionaries in Siberia, I saw the gospel being communicated to the deaf. It sometimes took three people to do it. The missionary spoke in English. One translator spoke it in Russian, and another put it into Russian sign language.

The message was unmistakable for anyone who has even the slightest knowledge of sign language. As the signer touched, with a single finger, the palm of each hand, Jesus was the word "spoken." His hands, his wounded hands, were an important element in the simple, signed sentence, "Jesus loves you."

The deaf of Siberia are considered to be invalids, incapable of doing much of anything. They are regarded as pensioners, when and if there is pension money to distribute. Just looking at them outwardly you see they don't have much. Yet, in the

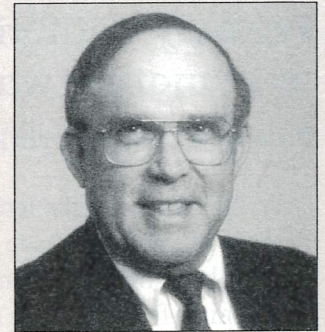
happy smiles greeting their missionary pastor, in their excited, signed responses, you see there is something more, something inward, something real and deep. By God's grace and the Spirit working through the signed Word, they have come to know and trust the love of Jesus.

When we want to, we're very good at symbolizing our meaning or feelings without ever speaking. Valentine's Day is a good example. We may go to great lengths, without spoken words, to show our love to someone. Sometimes that's really important. It's especially important when someone can't hear the sound of our words telling them Jesus loves them.

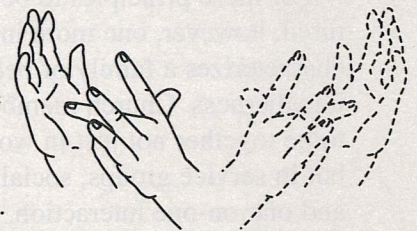
We have opportunities to "tell" the love of Jesus to someone who cannot hear our words directly or understand them as they are spoken. The deaf come readily to mind. Someone once told me that 90 percent of deaf people have no church home. It's not hard to understand why, since they need to be told about Jesus in a special way.

But there are others too. It may be those new people in our neighborhood who don't know English very well. Perhaps an English as a Second Language class (ESL), with us as the teacher, might help them in many ways, especially in the most important way of all—to hear, in a language they understand, about Jesus' love.

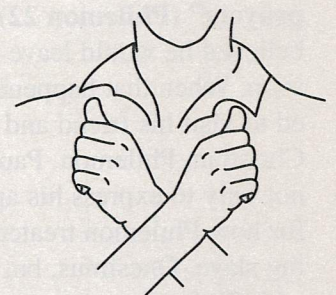
This Valentine's Day, let's reflect especially on our Savior's love, spoken as well as vividly demonstrated from the nail marks in his hands. Then, responding to his love for us, let's communicate Jesus' love in every possible way to those who cannot hear it. God's love, just like any other kind of love, does not have to be spoken to be heard.



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



Jesus



loves



you

Together again

Friendly gatherings are one of the most effective evangelism tools and another way to build the body of Christ.

Fredric E. Piepenbrink

Thanks to Paul's letter to Philemon we have learned about important principles concerning fellowship in a Christian congregation. Members are to be a close-knit family in love, intercession, forgiveness, and respect.

"Hanging out"

For these principles to be nurtured, however, one more ingredient characterizes a family of believers—togetherness. Church members need to be together not just in worship but in service groups, social groups, and one-on-one interaction.

Paul wrote to Philemon, "**And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers**" (Philemon 22). Paul believed he would leave prison soon. When that happened, he wanted to visit his friend and fellow Christian, Philemon. Paul wanted not only to express his appreciation for how Philemon treated his returning slave, Onesimus, but also to be with Philemon.

You can tell when congregations enjoy being together. They "hang out" after services and show up faithfully at potlucks, church pic-

nic, work days. They talk with people they don't know well to become better acquainted. In a world becoming more isolated and less friendly, many look to the church as a social outlet. Friendly gatherings are one of the most effective evangelism tools and another way to build the body of Christ. But this friendship should be genuine and ongoing, and not abruptly end when the prospect becomes a member.

One important role of the church is to provide opportunities where fellow Christians can support, help, and enjoy one another. Notice the close, informal fellowship that Philemon enjoyed with Paul and his companions: "**Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers**" (23,24). These were Christians who cared for each other, and that only comes by spending time together.

Sharing love in Christ

Paul concludes, "**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit**" (25). Similarly, we say in worship: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and

the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." The pastor sends the congregation off saying, "Brothers and sisters, go in peace, live in harmony with one another, serve the Lord with gladness." Both expressions remind us of our fellowship as members of Christ's family. When you hear these words, think of Paul's letter to Philemon and the principles of fellowship it teaches.

Did Philemon accept Onesimus back as a forgiven, fellow-Christian slave? Did he set Onesimus free from his slave obligations? Did he send Onesimus to assist Paul in his imprisonment and ministry? The text does not say.

But we can assume Paul's letter had a favorable impact on Philemon at Onesimus' surprise return. We can picture Philemon, after reading Paul's letter, embracing Onesimus, and the two of them making up for lost time. One thing is certain, for the time being, they were together again but under a completely new relationship—a common love for the Lord.

The book of Philemon presents one isolated, simple incident of fellowship in the lives of Christians a long time ago. Yet, it found its way into the Bible because everyday instances of love is what the Christian life is all about. "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10).

Fredric E. Piepenbrink is pastor at Atonement, Milwaukee.

PHILEMON
family intercession respect
love forgiveness togetherness

Your point of view

Walter F. Beckmann

Washington, D.C. recently offered art lovers a choice of exhibits—the famous van Gogh collection at the National Gallery of Art and another collection described as “incredibly bad art.” The sponsors of the second exhibit said to remember that it all depends on your point of view. If you like it, it’s right for you.

There are situations, however, when your point of view doesn’t make something right. Before 1492 most sea captains thought the earth was flat and if you got too far from land you’d be devoured by monsters or sail off the edge. Columbus had a different point of view. This carried him to distant horizons most Europeans then wouldn’t have imagined.

Some recent television programs show how people are learning to communicate with whales and elephants, and even are teaching monkeys basic computer skills. Such information tends to support the theory that people have been progressing ever since we evolved from a lower form of life, and that we have the potential to do anything we set our minds to. Communicating with animals is an example of such evolutionary progress. But, “it all depends on your point of view.”

The Bible gives us a different view. It pictures humans as being created by God as a magnificent finished product, holy and complete, with the potential to remain perfect forever. Through sin we lost it all, even life itself. It’s only by God’s grace that we live long enough to have the opportunity to hear God’s Word, repent of our sin, and come to faith in the forgiveness God offers through Jesus’ blood. To make this time of grace more bearable, God allows us to regain some blessings we lost through the fall. The ability to begin to communicate with the animals

again is one example.

I said, “to begin to do this again,” because to rule the animal kingdom to the glory of God, sinless Adam must have been able to communicate with them in ways we can’t imagine. Even sinful Noah must have had exceptional communication skills to be able to gather and care for all those animals during the flood.

The Bible shows us how this perfect relationship with the animals came under the curse of sin. God covered Adam and Eve’s sinful nakedness with garments of skin. Animals were offered as sacrifices. After the flood God told Noah that animals would fear man. The relationship wasn’t progressing through human skill and effort. It was collapsing because of sin.

In Romans 8, Paul gives us a brief insight into the frustration all creation feels as it groans under the curse of sin. If God would ever allow animals to put their groanings into words, they could tell us, “This chat we’re having is not because of some wonderful new relationship that we’re developing as we climb up some evolutionary ladder. It’s because God allows us to experience a little of the relationship we enjoyed before sin destroyed it.”

I’m not expecting to have spiritual discussions with animals. God communicates important truths through his Word. Jesus said, “If they don’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they wouldn’t be convinced even if someone rose from the dead.”

Yes, “it all depends on your point of view.” But as Columbus learned, if your point of view rests upon a correct understanding of God’s creation rather than on opinion, your voyage will carry you not into dark and uncertain waters, but to exciting horizons that others can’t imagine.

Walter F. Beckmann is pastor at Grace, Falls

*To make this
time of grace
more bearable
God allows us
to regain some
blessings we
lost through
the fall.*

Questions of leadership, value, and authority

John F. Brug

Since we do not believe that Scripture permits women pastors, how do we look upon the work of these pastors? Does God accept their work and use them in saving souls? If so, how can we be against them?

There are two issues here that must be answered separately.

What makes the means of grace effective? They do not receive their power from the person administering them. They have their power in themselves from the Holy Spirit, who uses them as his tools. If baptism is administered according to Christ's command, it works with saving power even if it is administered by a Catholic priest or a woman pastor. We, therefore, recognize the validity of any baptism that was performed as Christ directed.

If the gospel is present in the preaching and teaching of a false church, people will still be brought to faith through its power. The false teaching that a heterodox church mixes in with the truth is, however, a danger to faith and may turn people away from the gospel.

This brings us to the second question: Which pastors should we accept and support? Scripture says that we are to support only those who continue in the true teachings of the apostles. If we accept false teachers, we share in their sin (2 John 1:9-11). We, therefore, cannot support the work of women pastors because it departs from apostolic teaching. We, nevertheless,

rejoice that God continues to save people through the means of grace wherever the gospel truth is present, also in heterodox churches.

Our congregation won't let people who aren't members of our church sing solos at weddings and funerals since they would be leading the service in violation of fellowship rules. But we let women sing solos at weddings. Aren't they then leading the church, which they aren't supposed to do?

In the two situations you describe, two different issues are involved. The word "lead" is also being used in two different senses.

We cannot support the work of women pastors because it departs from apostolic teaching.

In the case of non-members singing a solo for a service, the question is whether they agree with the doctrine of the Bible as confessed by our church. Individuals, whether male or female, who are not in agreement with the doctrine of our church cannot serve in "a leading role" as visible public representatives of the church, whether that involves singing, teaching a class, or doing evangelism. Only individuals who are one with us in faith can lead the church in such activities.

In the second situation, the question is whether a woman is being asked to fulfill a role that requires her to exercise authority over men. This would be contrary to the principles that Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2. Women can, however, lead a class, lead devotions, or lead a group whenever these activities do not involve authority over men, such as within a group of women or in the ministry of Lutheran elementary school teachers. Our synod's statement on roles of men and women encourages women to serve in any office or work of the church except those that involve authority over men.

The issue of authority over men does not come into play in choral singing that enhances the service, since we do not regard such singing as a role that involves authoritative leadership over the congregation. This is clear because all congregation members, including children who are not yet confirmed, are welcome to serve in this role.


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>



I read "Poll: doctor-assisted suicide is rare" [Aug. '98], and it has bothered me ever since. The article noted that "only six percent of 'front-line' physicians have hastened patients' deaths with lethal injections or prescriptions. . . . 18 percent . . . said they had received requests from patients for help in speeding death."

I would not call that "rare." It disturbs me that any physician would help a person commit suicide, let alone six percent. And 18 percent, almost one of every five doctors, had received requests for help in committing suicide. What a comment on our society when we call those percentages "rare!" I am surprised that NL allowed that statement of assisted suicide being "rare" without adding a comment.

 *Charlene L. Newby
Manitowoc, Wisconsin*

Read with interest the article "God is calling." If a congregation follows the mechanics of a call, "then they pray, vote, and issue a call," aren't we to assume the call is from God since God led them to choose that particular pastor? How does a pastor say no to God?


*Lois A. Uphoff
Payette, Idaho*

God has guided the call to that pastor, but he hasn't sent it as a command. Nor has he rescinded the call the pastor is already filling. The process of God's calling includes the pastor's prayerful deciding.—ed.

I appreciated Laitinen's series on the sacraments. It served as a reminder about the importance God has given the sacraments in our faith and life.

In that vein, it was disturbing to read that "careful and thorough theology" and "sacramental worship" are simply part of our German Lutheran heritage and culture ["Transforming city ministry,"

Nov. '98]. Careful theology and sacramental worship are not part of some ethnic group's "religious culture." They are biblical. They are part of what God intends for all Christians, regardless of race. If other religious cultures do not have a thorough biblical theology and sacramental worship, it is because they have denied what God says. Thankfully, God preserved through our German Lutheran ancestors a careful, thorough theology and sacramental worship. May those never be lost. May they be shared with people of all nations.

*Joel D. Otto
 Manitowoc, Wisconsin*


I'm 39 years old and black, but I enjoy the Lutheran liturgy more than any other form of worship. For me it has it all. I disagree with Pastor Mark Jeske in the article "Transforming city ministry." I support my African-American heritage. But you don't want change if it means compromising sound doctrine. I would rather be unemotional if it means being and staying faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. I love WELS and our commitment to the truth of God's Word, and I fight to keep it that way.

*Benjamin Jones
San Diego, California*

I am concerned by Ken Cherney's article "The principal scriptural principle" [Nov. '98]. From the tenor of this article, it would seem the author has not actually read the book(s) that use scriptural principles for weight loss, which his article criticized.

It is an overstatement to charge that the authors of these books are approaching Scripture with "an agenda" or merely as a "how to guide for the here and now." I have never detected a rejection or diminishing of the central doctrine of Christ's sacrificial redemptive work on any of the pages. All chapters are directed at glorifying and honoring Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Not to approach Scripture for guidance in all aspects of our daily lives, including weight loss, is to "settle for much less than God, the Bible's author, wants to give you." Not to use the very tool God has given, and through which his Holy Spirit works change in a believer, is cutting oneself off from the only weapon that will effectively help a child of God win the battle against Satan in this area.


*Louise A. Wendland
 Blantyre, Malawi, Africa*

Rebecca Levi Detro's article "Do you know a stressed-out Mormon?" [Dec. '98] has to be one of the best I've read in NL! Ceaseless working for perfection does cause stress. She put it so well, "Through Christ, God gave me in an instant the perfection that members of my family work their whole lives to achieve."

What is true of the LDS is true of other cults, too. I am a Christian of Jewish background and know the stress that working for perfection produces. Bulk reprints should be available.

 *Charles L. Baker*

Regarding "Christianity confronts postmodernism" [Dec. '98] in particular this sentence: "A corollary of these tenets is optimism—a utopian confidence in unending progress and a better world." What a great sentence! Too bad my 74-year-old mother and my two teenage daughters don't have a clue what it means! We'll keep our *Funk and Wagnall's* nearby when reading future issues of NL.

*Marlene Duerr
 Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

Send your letters to Readers forum, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; FAX, 414/256-3899; <nl@sab.wels.net>. Include full name, address, and daytime phone number. Letters are edited for clarity and conciseness. Writers' views are not necessarily those of WELS or *Northwestern Lutheran*.

Keep me awake



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

Constructive
criticism done
in love is
something we
all can use.
Don't hesitate
to talk with
your pastor.

Today's e-mail included a challenge forwarded from a WELS e-mail discussion. It asked:

"How do I very constructively tell a new pastor that I have trouble not falling asleep in the pew? . . . And how best to convey that we love them dearly and respect them as our leaders while urging them to wake up in the pulpit so that we can too?"

Maybe I can help. First, let me talk to you, then to your pastor.

Constructive criticism done in love is something we all can use. Don't hesitate to talk with your pastor in private.

Commend him for his strengths (e.g., "Your faithfulness to God's Word is always clear"). Ask him to help you be a better listener. (Suggest something specific: "Can you apply part of the sermon directly to the children?" Don't start by saying, "Your sermons put me to sleep.")

Since you will be asking him to work harder at putting life into his sermons, you ought to work harder at listening: Be sure you're well rested for worship time. As the pastor preaches, repeat thoughts from the sermon in your head and think of what they mean to you. Concentrate on the message from God so the messenger and his delivery become less important to you.

Still, your question implies, and I agree, that there is room for us pastors to improve the mechanics of our preaching. So I offer the following for my pastor brothers to consider:

1. Ask someone you trust* to give you constructive criticism. Be ready to resist defensive reactions, and try to learn from the criticism. (*e.g., your wife, if you can both remain objective; the elders, if they don't try too hard to be nice to you; your catechism class, if you won't be offended by youthful criticism)

2. Videotape your sermons. View those tapes once a month with a critical eye. Check voice. Do you vary it effectively? Do you fall into a monotone or into a repeating pattern, a "pulpit" tone? Check gestures. Do you use them? Are they natural and varied?

3. Mark notes or symbols on your manuscript or outline reminding you to smile or to reflect the joy, sadness, concern, anger, comfort . . . of the message.

4. Make yourself aware of the people in the pew. Eye contact! If you see attentiveness waning, pause. Then, turn up your energy level a notch.

5. Do you talk directly to the people listening? Do you regularly use the pronouns "you" and "we"? Picture yourself talking to one person, alone, in your study.

6. Ask yourself during preparation, "How will this sound to a listener? How would this strike me if I were in the pew?"

7. Always prepare your message as if your listener will be asking, "So what?" Then answer so what.

8. Periodically, change your style: maybe an intentionally shorter message. Add some anecdotes. Have one main point or five (beware of too many) instead of three. Preach inductively; that is, lead listeners to discover the point before you tell it directly.

9. Get excited about God's good news, and let it show in your own way. (Feigned excitement and artificially forced expressions of enthusiasm do not work.)

10. Think of yourself not as delivering a message but as sharing it.

Does this help? I know I'll try harder the next time I preach. But, one last caution: It's not the life in the preacher but the life in Christ that matters in the end.

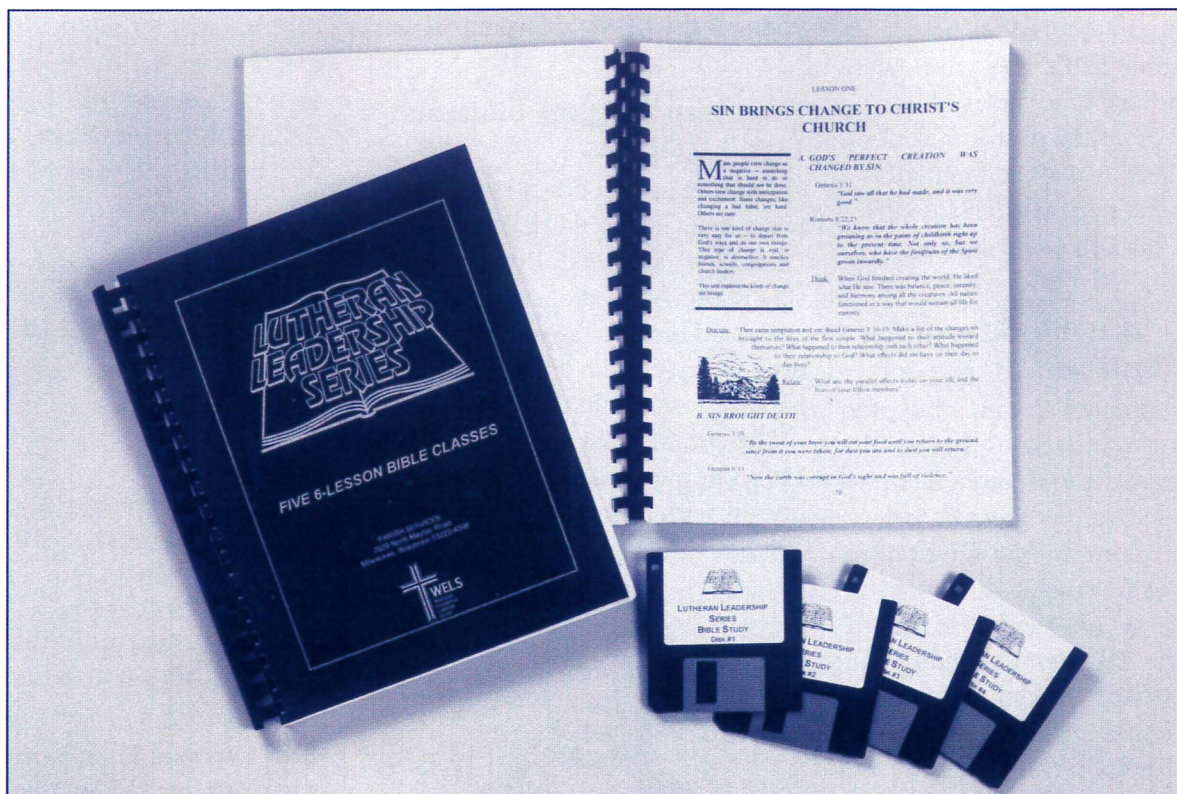
Carry on in Christ.

Gary P. Baumler

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GETTING RELIGION

It seemed he needed “a whack alongside the head with the Bible.”

David A. Tetzlaff

Sometimes, even pastors are tempted to lose their cool, especially when some smart aleck, obnoxious religious novice questions and challenges with out-of-context Scripture verses almost every statement the pastor makes. Finally, a pastor may be tempted to whack such a person alongside the head with his Bible. Figuratively, of course!

“Let’s see what this old preacher is gonna teach me.”

Such a person was Cal, a big guy with a body and muscles that would make Popeye envious and a heart full of pride over his great knowledge of religion. Cal got religion after he was incarcerated and had lots of time on his hands. He started to study the Bible and attended meetings of any denominational group he could enroll in. He acquired a potpourri of religious wisdom, much of which was not founded in Scripture.

Cal started to attend one of my Bible studies at Kettle Moraine Correctional Institution with the attitude of: “Let’s see what this old preacher is gonna teach me.” I’m sure he thought he would teach me a thing or two about the Bible, and he tried every chance he could to expound his opinions and interpretations of the Scriptures. He was not really disruptive, but annoying, and usually tried to manipulate the discussion to get his views across.

A state chaplain who knew Cal and had dealt with him before over-

heard him during one of our classes. He suggested to me later, “Write up a conduct report on him and save yourself the hassle of trying to work with him.”

“You keep using the Bible, and I can’t fight that.”

Writing up a conduct report would mean that Cal would be out of my Bible study for good. But I let him stay in our Bible studies and patiently answered his questions and refuted his challenges with as many Scripture passages as I could think of.

If I couldn’t answer him offhand, I’d go home to study and arm myself with Scripture passages to

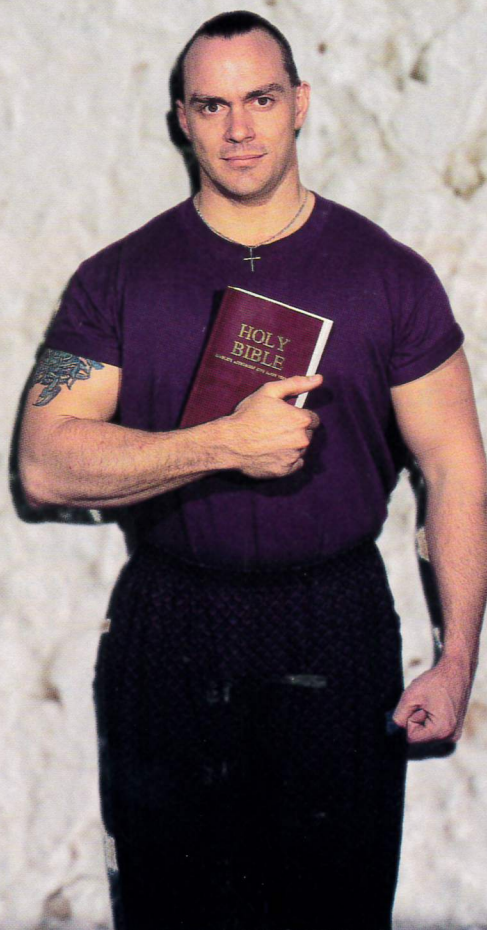
offer him at the next class. It was exasperating, but I guess I was as stubborn as he was and took extra care to back up my doctrinal stand, teaching with as many Scripture passages as possible. Finally, I thought I had gotten the better of him because he stopped attending my class.

Cal got religion after he was incarcerated and had lots of time on his hands.

After a few weeks, Cal came back to Bible study. At the close of class he came up to me and said, “Brother, I tried to hassle you and make you look bad. I’m sorry. You’re not like the others. You keep using the Bible, and I can’t fight that. I want to learn more about what you teach from the Bible.”

The Holy Spirit worked in his heart through patient teaching of the law and the gospel and changed his heart and attitude. Now Cal, with another inmate, is in one of my separate adult instruction classes.

The Athanasian Creed begins with these words: “Whoever wishes to be saved must, above all else, hold to the true Christian faith.” Pray that the Holy Spirit will enable Cal to do so.



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