

NORTHWESTERN LUTHERAN

March 1999

THE WORD FROM THE WELS



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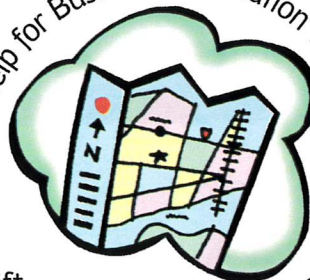
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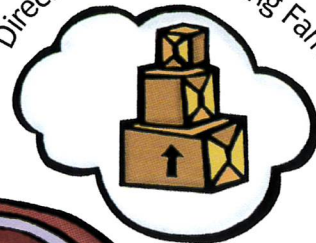


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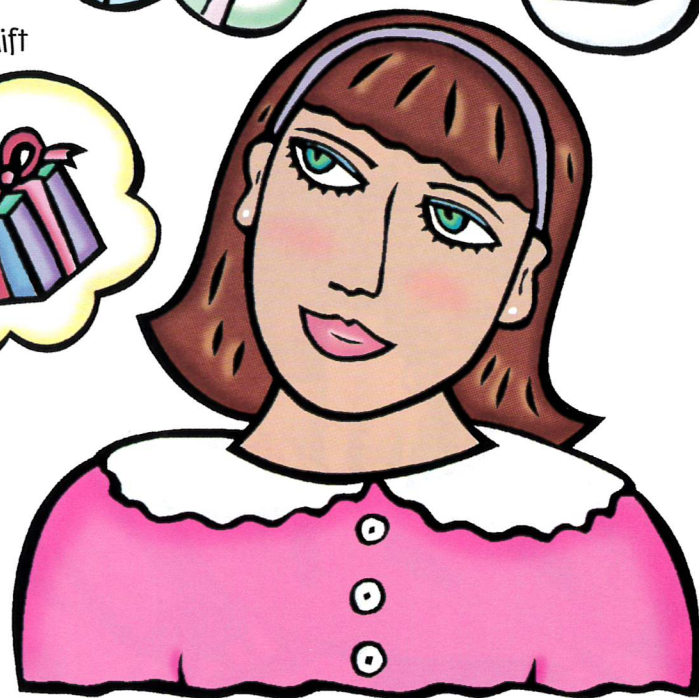


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He has redeemed me

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed . . . but with the precious blood of Christ. (1 Peter 1:18,19).

Thomas A. Westra

“**T**he Bible is hard to understand. When I read it by myself, I just don’t get it.” Maybe you have heard those words from a brother or sister in the faith or have thought them yourself.

Confusing messages

The message of the Bible, thanks to the Holy Spirit who enlightens us, is not difficult to understand. My four-year-old daughter can recite “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). And, thanks to wonderful preschool and Sunday school teachers, she understands what those words mean.

Some words in the Bible, however, are not easily understood by us who live thousands of years after the Bible was written. I used to puzzle over Jesus’ words in Revelation 2:17—“To him who overcomes I will give . . . a white stone.”

“What is that about?” I wondered, and kept reading without understanding what this white stone was or why I would want one. Then a faithful teacher explained that in ancient Greek courts, small stones were used by jurors as ballots. A black stone was a vote for guilty. A white one was a vote for acquittal. When John writes that Jesus, who on the Last Day will judge the earth, gives a white stone to those who remain in the faith, he means that Jesus declares us innocent.



A clear message

Another example of a possibly confusing word is “redeem.” Those who were confirmed in the Lutheran church probably remember that redeem means “to buy back.” I wonder, though, if our unchurched friend understands when we tell him that Jesus redeemed him. After all, today we don’t redeem people, we redeem bank bonds. I also wonder if we, who know the dictionary definition, always catch everything that the word conveyed in ancient times.

To understand all the Lord would teach us with that word, go to the days when the Bible was written and walk with those people. Cry with parents who just learned that their son has been captured in battle.

If they had enough money they could redeem him—buy him back from his captors. But since they don’t, their son will be executed.

Trace the steps of a man as he enters a dark, dank prison where his brother is serving a life sentence. Watch him redeem his brother by taking his brother’s place in the shackles. Witness the brother, tears streaming down his face, walking out a free man.

Embrace your wealthy uncle, overcome by his generosity. When you sold yourself and your family as slaves because you couldn’t pay your creditors, he redeemed you—even though he knew you would never be able to repay him.

What does it mean that Jesus redeemed me? It means that when I fell captive to Satan and was sentenced to die eternally, Jesus came up with the ransom price. He became my brother and took my place in the shackles of sin so that I could walk out of my prison of guilt and shame. When the debt of my sin was far beyond my ability to pay, he generously paid that debt for me with his blood.

Help me understand more clearly Lord, how much you must love me that you redeemed me at such an incredible price, that you would do this for me.

NL

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



- ❑ This Lent, you will no doubt hear of Jesus' death. But you need to remember that through baptism, you have died too—died to sin. Don't miss David Hein's article, "God's river of grace," and remember that we all died with Christ and will all live with him too. (p. 6)
- ❑ Before Jesus could be executed, he had to be put on trial—a mockery of true justice. But, as Eric Hartzell points out, Jesus suffered injustice to bring us perfect justice. (p. 36)
- ❑ Speaking of justice and trials . . . as we went to press, the U.S. Senate was hearing arguments in President Clinton's impeachment trial. While many people talk about what was, what is, and what should be, John Eich shares what we can learn. (p. 18)
- ❑ Sin tears down kingdoms and countries. Armin Panning reminds us that righteousness, however, exalts a nation. (p. 31)
- ❑ James Aderman starts his new Bible study on p. 30. Join us as we learn more about our God through a study of Psalm 91.
- ❑ Are you looking for more Bible studies? Wondering what Christian material is on the Web for your children? Wondering how to get an active prayer life? Don't miss the WELS Web site. From Bible study to daily prayer to activities for kids (of all ages), visit <www.wels.net>.

—LRB

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God's river of grace

The blood that ran down from the cross of Christ became the source of a river that washes our sins away.

David L. Hein

We buried my grandmother this morning. She was the only grandparent my wife and I have had for 20 years. My mind is full of the memories of flocked Christmas trees and the special candy box in her kitchen and Thanksgiving dinner successes and flash bulb failures and that one perfume she always wore. Now she's gone. She turned 94 years old just a few days ago. Today, dead and buried.

How cold those words seem. How final! "Dead and buried." We stood beside the casket on this frigid January morning, feeling a chill deeper than the air could bring. "Dead and buried." I hugged my aunt and then held my mom as we turned to go back to our cars. We were expecting today. After Grandma's second stroke, we were praying for today. But to say goodbye . . .

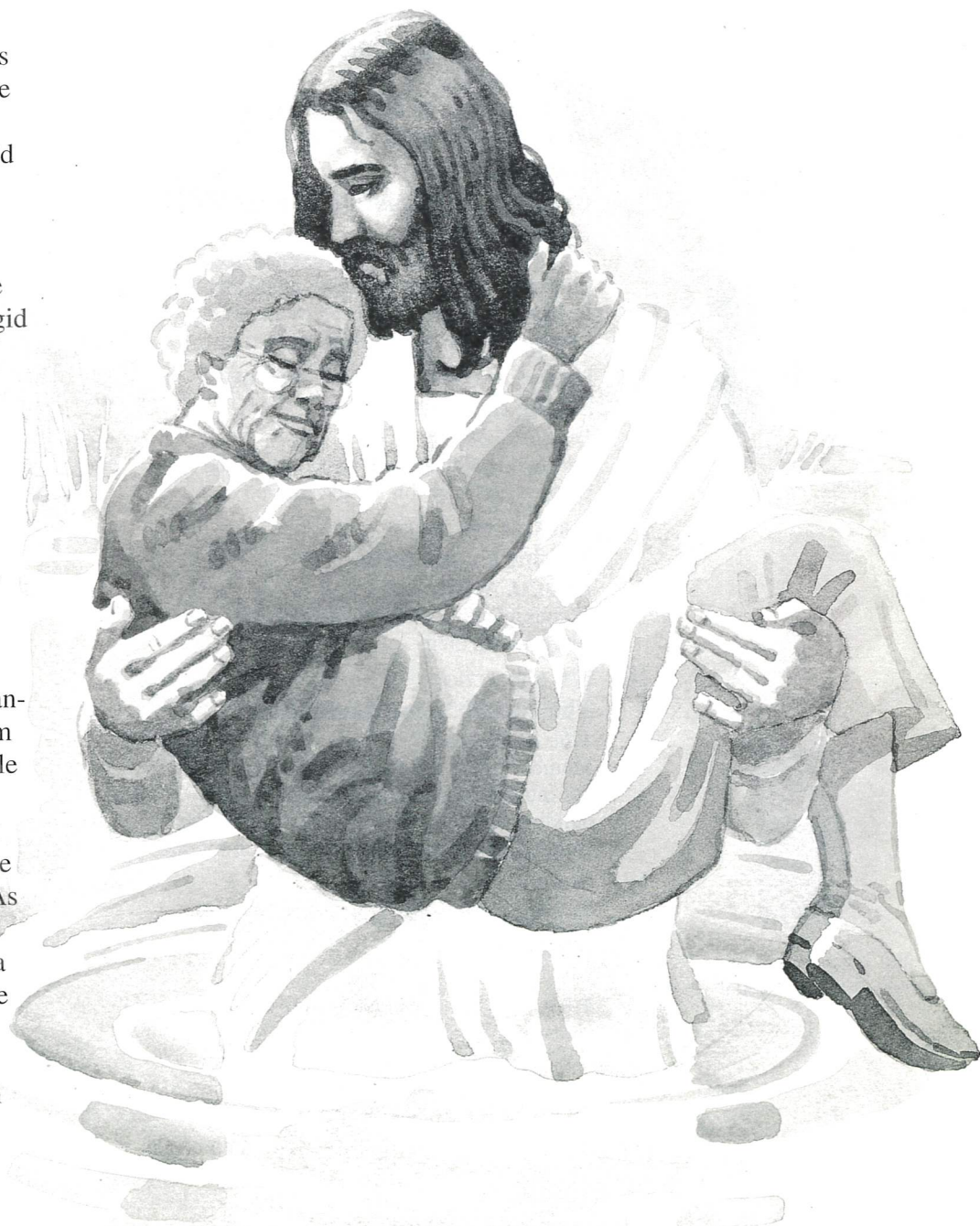
The end?

How do people with no faith handle this when they walk away from the grave? What about those people for whom the words dead and buried equal "The End"? It's hard enough for my family now. But we didn't leave the gravesite empty. As we stepped carefully through the snow, we each carried more than a rose in our hands. We carried hope in our hearts.

For God has taken the words "dead and buried" and given them a twist unlike anything this world

could ever have imagined. He points us to the One who was "crucified, dead, and buried." The Father observed the life of this One and said, "With him I am well pleased."

Then, for our sakes, he turned his back on his one and only Son, placing our sin on his shoulders. He used our guilt to pierce Jesus' hands and feet, affixing him to a cross.



The blood that ran down from the cross of Christ became the source of a river that washes our sins away.

The beginning

My grandmother was carried through that river 94 years ago, when her parents brought her to be baptized. The pastor drew from the river of God's grace as he opened the Scriptures and read the words of the Savior. Life sprung from the waters of the font as the Spirit worked his gift of faith in her heart. Our Lord declared my grandmother, that little child born in sin, dead and buried. By God's power and grace, a new person was born on that day—a forgiven person, a child of God.

The apostle Paul wrote: "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection" (Romans 6:3-5).

In her baptism, God took my grandmother's sinful nature and drowned it in Jesus' blood, the river of grace. In her baptism, God took my grandmother's punishment and canceled it through Jesus' death. In her baptism, God took my grandmother's condemnation and buried it in Jesus' tomb. In her baptism, God gave my grandmother the sure hope of heaven through Jesus' resurrection.

The Lord kept this hope alive in Grandma's heart throughout her life. As she grew to know God's Word more and more, the Lord strengthened that faith and hope in her. So, when she was 27 years old and had to

bury her three-year-old boy who was killed in a street accident, her faith was not buried. When, just seven years later, she had to bury her husband who was killed in a car accident, her hope was not buried. For the Lord had buried her sin and theirs with Christ. He had buried the roots of despair and overwhelming sorrow when Jesus left the grave behind.

No one snatched Grandma out of Christ's hand. No, in his hand he had carried her through his river of grace.

God had poured this same hope into his servant Paul, who clutched its strength as he looked back on all the death he had seen in his years, a reminder of sin's violence in our hearts and lives. The apostle held close the hope that God had given him. Him, the "chief of sinners!" Saul, the persecutor, had died on the road to Damascus: DOA because of the double-edged sword of Jesus' words (Acts 9). The Lord called Saul to repentance, to faith, and then to service. As he was baptized, the Savior washed his sins away in the river of grace and completely buried his past. His sins no longer existed in the eyes of God. And this reborn man, this Paul, rejoiced in the ministry of reconciliation to which the Son of God had called him.

The eternal victory

Christ's love compelled Paul and now compels us to share the good news. The Lord has shown us that though Christians may grieve, we need not grieve like the rest of the

world, which has no hope.

"Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). For our sakes, Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried. Then, by his resurrection, Christ buried the sting of death forever. The grave can no longer bring "The End" for the children of God. Even in our goodbyes, we can rejoice in the Lord always, knowing the joy that God has each time he brings another of his children home to Paradise.

That joy drove the chill from our hearts as we climbed into our cars at the cemetery this morning. The tears were frozen on our cheeks, but Satan could not bury the warm memory of the Word we had heard at the funeral: "I am the good shepherd. . . . I lay down my life for the sheep. . . . I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:14,15,18,28). No one snatched Grandma out of Christ's hand. No, in his hand he had carried her through his river of grace. Now he has carried her home.

"Dead and buried." According to the world, that would be the ending to most life stories. But it wasn't for Jesus. And through him, it isn't for Grandma. By God's grace, it won't be for you or for me.

As we closed the car doors, I think each one of us gave thanks to the Lord for giving us Grandma, even as we gave thanks that he took her home.

And, while driving away, we smiled.

NL

David L. Hein is pastor at Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee.

Tradition! Tradition?

Congregations should ask themselves “Why do we do what we do the way we do it?”

John M. Parlow

An outsider watched with fascination as the Danish village people filed into the Lutheran church for worship. Each one walked up the center aisle to the break between the pews and a plain white wall. Every worshiper paused, turned, and genuflected with bowed head and knee facing the blank wall, and then went to sit in the usual pew.

The visitor asked the pastor and members the meaning of this ritual. But no one knew. “We’ve always done it that way” was the sincere but uninformed answer. Further research revealed that an elaborate painting of the Virgin Mary was behind the white paint on the blank wall. The painting dated back before the Protestant Reformation, when the church was Roman Catholic.

The village people had bowed to the Virgin for generations as Catholics. When the church became Lutheran and the Virgin was painted over, the worshipers kept on bowing. Generations later the bows continued, even though the reason had been forgotten. It was tradition.

Traditions get questioned

“Hey, mom, how come teenage girls never get to usher?” asked



Traditionally in most WELS congregations, only men serve as ushers. But does it have to be that way? Although traditions are often valuable, not all are automatically necessary. Each generation must check its traditions to see if they follow tradition for the sake of tradition—or for the sake of God’s kingdom.

Tina, 16, third generation Lutheran and frustrated.

“Well, men have always done the ushering. That’s just the way it is,” replied Lois, mother of three, two of them ushers, as she turned her minivan onto Washington Ave.

“Wouldn’t it make more sense to involve more people in church stuff by letting women usher if they want? It’s not like we’re asking to be an elder or pastor or something. I know the Bible says we can’t do that. But why not give us a chance to serve as ushers? We could do a good job. I mean a lot of ushers just stand there! Some don’t look too helpful.”

“I hope your brothers don’t hear you say that!” Lois said with a smirk. “I’ll talk to your Dad. Maybe he can bring up the subject with the church council.”

“That’s the kiss of death,” Tina thought. “It’ll suffer the same fate as

the praise choir and the Monday night church service.”

Traditions have staying power

Traditions generally begin when someone does something new that others imitate. It has meaning, often purposeful and significant. Those who value the meaning participate. When the practice is passed to the following generation, it becomes a tradition. Naively, each generation thinks its creative new ideas are tradition-proof. But the truth is that today’s innovation becomes tomorrow’s tradition.

“I promised my daughter I’d mention it to you,” Tom said as he walked into the pastor’s office. “Tina was excited about the possibility of having some of the young women help with ushering.”

“It certainly is interesting,” Pastor Timrick said. “I’ve often thought

about how we can plug more young people into service. But I don't think the idea of young women serving as ushers will fly around here. We may upset too many people. Tell Tina that if the girls wanted to do something, maybe they should have a cookie sale or offer a free babysitting night at the school gym. The youth group years ago used to do those things all the time."

"But, Pastor, why couldn't young people, especially young women, help usher now? I think it would be great for the congregation to see them serving as ushers. Everyone seems so concerned that there aren't too many teens around. Maybe we aren't giving them enough to do!"

"Here at St. Peter the ushers have always been men," the pastor said, "It's been our practice for over 100 years. It's our tradition." Tom looked at Pastor with a grin that questioned that tradition's current value.

Traditions bring mixed blessings

Tradition is at times a mixed blessing. Seldom does a tradition mean the same thing to a generation as it did to the previous generation. Danish village worshipers kept the tradition but changed the meaning. Christmas traditions go back hundreds of years but mean something different to modern secularists than to earlier Christians. Sunday as a "day of rest" meant going to church for yesterday's Puritans and staying in bed for today's party-types. In the past, men in many Lutheran churches sat on the pulpit side of the church while women sat across the aisle. It was said that men sat closer to the pulpit because Adam had not listened to the Lord but listened to Eve. Therefore, the men sat under the pulpit to listen to the Lord and

thus be better able to instruct their wives and families. In the past men were sitting apart from their wives to be better husbands. Today, men sit with their wives to be better husbands and fathers.

Don't misunderstand . . . we all need traditions. Our lives would be frighteningly unstable if they were not anchored in some traditions. In our services, the predominance of the gospel, the importance of the means of grace, and the participation of the people identify us as Lutherans.

Tradition is at times a mixed blessing.

Tradition determines our daily schedule. (Almost everyone is awake days and sleeps at night.) Tradition in the family often determines the cars we drive. (The non-traditionalists were our grandparents who switched from horses.) Tradition even determines the way many of us cut our lawns. (Dad always did it this way!)

Good traditions have good purpose

The critical question about tradition is meaning. What do the traditions mean to those who practice them? Communication theory teaches that meaning is in the mind of the person, not in the words or deeds.

Examples abound. Plunging a knife into another person may mean homicide, self-defense, or abdominal surgery. A cross may mean criminal execution to an ancient Roman, salvation to a Christian, and jewelry to a fashion model. Singing the national anthem before sports events means patriotism to some, nationalism to others, and "it's almost time to play ball" to others.

If we are going to nurture the saved and save the lost, ongoing efforts must be made to determine the meaning of words and actions. Many traditions need to be passed on to the next generation with careful instruction. Some traditions must and will be established. Some old traditions must be abandoned. The essential issue is not the tradition, but the meaning.

For example: Eighth grade confirmation (see next month's article), Sunday school (does it need to be on Sunday?), a 20-minute sermon (too long or too short?), church offering (weekly envelope or automatic withdrawal?).

Begin talking about the emotionally-charged topic of tradition by asking, "Why do we do what we do the way we do it?" That moves us to reexamine our practices. That question will force us to differentiate between helpful traditions and apathetic comfort zones. We insure that we are using God's people to carry out God's work with God's Word in the best possible manner so that more can know him as their God. If we don't do this, our ministries may be hindered, and God's people may unknowingly bow to yesteryear customs.

In every area of ministry it is wise to ask: "Does the way we carry out ministry indicate that we are hindered by the battle cry, 'Tradition! Tradition!,' or carefully exercising Christian freedom to gain the lost so they might cry, 'My Lord and my God?'"

People matter to Jesus. Let's make sure our traditions communicate that.

NL

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

Creation Appreciation 101

God's command for environmental consciousness and care has gone unheeded. Christians need to attend Creation Appreciation class every day.

Thomas Mellon

Teaching Christian stewardship has become a customary fall program in many churches to remind us that faith without works is dead. A common three-pronged approach to stewardship is time, talents, and treasures.

But stewardship is not limited to those three areas. For example, God commanded us to "rule over the earth," to take care of it. Yet God's command for environmental consciousness and care has gone unheeded for generations.

How can Christians promote environmental stewardship? To answer that, we must look to the past and the present to promote a Christian environmental ethic in the future.

A spoiled world

The world God created in six days was perfect in every way. No acid rain, global warming, or ozone depletion. God, the author of all creation, provided organisms with a perfect environment.

But the effect of the fall into sin includes living in a world that "has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (Romans 8:22).

That perfect surrounding was spoiled by the effects of sin, just as we were corrupted. The godly perfection of land, air, water, and living things—and the interactions between them—had been squandered away. Even though God intervened in our eternal fate with the gift of Jesus, there was no promise of another "heaven on earth." Our environment has been altered from its created status.

A responsibility from God

The fact remains—the earth is still a gift of the Lord. How are we to treat it? Some ancient civilizations wor-

shipped the land, the sea, and the sun. Others thought they were "one spirit" with the land and the creatures on and in it. Pagan worship, directed at specific aspects of God's creation, defied the words of God "Do not have other gods." Secular earth-respect has been revitalized with the popularization of the writings of Aldo Leopold. "The earth," Leopold writes, "is worthy of respect in and of itself."

An imperfect earth has been entrusted to imperfect human beings. How can Christians respond to this challenge of stewardship? With proper motivation, Christians can model themselves as the Lord's caretakers of his creation. We know our limitations. We are not evolving into more favorable beings, and the earth is not progressing into a heavenly state. But Christians can do many things.

The earth, with all its stains and scars, is still a magnificent work of art! We need to subscribe to the "Creation Appreciation" course every day. Our sense of earth-worth goes beyond-respect for the physical factors of the environment. Our loyalty should be to our marvelous Creator, who not only knew us before we were born, but provided a marvelous setting for us to do his work.

Students appreciating nature. Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School transformed a reed-canary bottomland on school property into a 25-acre wetland prairie and environmental classroom. This classroom helps students understand ecology and appreciate God's creation.



If Christians can instill a creation-respect for the earth, other earth-sustaining benefits will emerge. Using resources frugally, recycling, reusing instead of “landfilling,” and other resource-conscious activities will demonstrate our Christian environmental ethics. Some activities will not be easy. Some seemingly may be counterproductive in a materialistic world. But whose world is it, anyway? It is a product of an all-powerful God.

A practical application

Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis., has been blessed immeasurably. What was once a sterile, reed-canary bottomland on the school property has been transformed into a vibrant, 25-acre wetland prairie and environmental classroom.

When 10,000 cubic yards of soil were removed, four wetland scrapes (ponds) attracted native plants and animals to return. The invasive canary grass is being replaced by native Wisconsin species of wildflowers, grasses, and sedges. Waterfowl habitats and nesting structures are encouraging the return of birds. Wildlife ponds have attracted thousands of amphibians, insects, and teeming microbes. When newly-purchased land showed signs of erosion and nutrient-loss, the slope was replanted with upland prairie grasses and wildflowers. A mature fish pond below benefited from less sediment and a lessening algae population.

How does changing the landscape of an undeveloped area at a Lutheran high school affect environmental stewardship? Students who are daily instructed in God’s Word attend the Creation Appreciation class every day.

Students not only attempt to locate and examine creatures of God’s creation, but also are taught to look for the invisible arrows that exist between and among his living things. Relationships between things—the big picture, called ecology—are emphasized.

An imperfect earth has been entrusted to imperfect human beings.

Harmony in nature is visualized. The sounds of his creatures ebb and flow as the sun arcs its path across the sky. A community of life, not present four short years ago, resounds in joyful appreciation for what has been given them. Can we be far behind?

A lesson for Christians

This hands-on learning area is called an outdoor classroom. Students (of all ages) acquire skills of observation and measurement. The effect on feelings and values is more difficult to measure. By interacting in the environment, students achieve a feeling of ownership of God’s collective resources to them. Also, students feel the need to respect and care for resources entrusted to them—Christian stewardship. Finally, the environmental classroom evokes an environmental awareness and activism in students. What better way to motivate young Christians to become stewards of the land than to be on the land!

In demonstrating the fruit of our faith, we seek to become Christian stewards—of time, talents, and treasure. We also can be faithful stewards of our environment, by

“Enviro-factoids”

- Think globally . . . act locally. What we do affects many other people.
- When camping, practice “leave no trace” camping.
- Try to use water efficiently; less than one percent of the world’s water is useable.
- Buy items that have less packaging; landfills are closing when full.
- Demand and buy automobiles that are energy-efficient and pollution-free.
- Reuse/recycle items whenever possible; most items can be reprocessed cheaper than new resources can be obtained.
- Plant trees. So many have been harvested that the world could use more.
- Respect all of the wonders of God’s creation—they’re precious gifts.

learning to appreciate creation—no matter how flawed by sin—and by actively serving God in a spirit of Christian environmental caretaking.

As we see the annual rhythms of life and death, we reflect on Isaiah: “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8).

NL

Tom Mellon is a teacher at Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wisconsin.

Seeing the possibilities

Spiritual leaders have a passion for God's purpose and a vision for the future.

Paul E. Kelm

What kind of person do you think of when you hear the word "visionary"?

Impractical idealist, dizzy dreamer . . . or imaginative innovator, bold barrier-breaker, passionate prophet? Sometimes, how we understand labels explains how we react to leaders.

I wonder what they were calling Nehemiah at the Persian court. Because God had kindled a fire in him, Nehemiah was staking his career on a high-risk project in a homeland a thousand hostile miles away, one that he'd probably never seen.

Passion

You don't understand Nehemiah unless you see the significance of Jerusalem, Zion, the City of God. Feel the passion of exiles like Nehemiah in Psalm 137: "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy."

What's your passion? It may not have anything to do with the role your church elected you to fill. What grabs your heart and gets you

going? What excites you or angers you? What do you care about enough to risk doing?

Maybe young people drifting away from their Lord eats at you. Maybe you've always been excited about mission work. Do you have a burden on your heart for neglected kids . . . or older people? Perhaps you believe passionately that music in worship ought to be the best we can offer God.

Passion drives leaders, a passion for God's purpose. The church does not need crusaders sanctifying their own agenda. Too many congregations are driven by a budget or by the members' comfort zones. What does God want done? What in the kingdom needs doing? What gives God glory, what builds his church and grows his people? Whose hurts can we heal, what opportunities can we run with, where are the lost to be won? Passion moves God's people with God's purpose.

Could we ask candidates for election in our church what their passion is before we ask them to lead us? Can we match what people really care about with what we ask them to do?

Vision

To paraphrase Bobby Kennedy: some men saw the problem and asked why; Nehemiah saw the possibility and said, why not.

Coupled with his passion for the City of God was Nehemiah's vision of that city restored. But this was more than an architect's renderings.

Nehemiah's vision was for a restoration of Zion so that the city would look like God dwelled there, the people would see themselves as belonging to God, and the life of the city would mirror the will of God. The walls were rebuilt in 52 days. It took 12 years for Nehemiah to complete the vision.

Passion drives leaders, a passion for God's purpose.

It's funny, but building projects are still what seem to rally God's people. They are visible, tangible ways of expressing our passion for God's purpose. It's harder for most people to wrap themselves around a concept or get excited about a program.

But leaders must have a bigger vision than a building. The construction can symbolize our love for God and facilitate expanding ministry to people. But a godly vision is about removing obstacles and fashioning bridges between God and his people, between brothers and sisters in Christ, between a lost world and the Savior who redeemed it.

A vision begins with an idea of what should be and, nurtured by God's promise, takes shape as a project that could be. It translates the mission of the church into a clear and compelling long-range plan uniquely tailored to a church's situation. A vision focuses energy and marshals support. It stops the



gripping and groping, and starts the grouping. It establishes where we're going, so we can direct our efforts toward getting there.

Direction

Rebuilding the temple had been the vision of those who'd initially returned from exile. But when that was done (nowhere near how Solomon had done it, the critics pointed out) people once more settled into a routine and settled for the

status quo that spurred Nehemiah's passionate vision. This sort of thing had happened before. One generation after the first temple was built, politics divided God's people, and idolatry quenched their passion for his purpose. One generation after Joshua led Israel on a miraculous conquest of the land, the people settled in and accepted pagan practices that produced the spiritual disintegration recorded in Judges.

God's people seem to need a new sense of direction every so often, a goal to grow toward, a project to get excited about. A mission congregation buys land and builds a chapel, then plateaus in numbers and loses its sense of urgency. A few years later people are questioning where the enthusiasm went, why things have stagnated. A new pastor brings some refreshing ideas and challenging goals, and people are excited about where their church is going. Ten years later everybody's content to just "do church." The energy burned off, and people burned out.

What's needed is leaders who have a passion for God's purpose and a vision for the future. It may be easier for an outsider, like Nehemiah, to challenge churches with a vision. But it's the insiders—spiritual leaders—who have to own the vision and make it work.

Nehemiah had a big vision for Jerusalem, a project that would completely restore the city's walls, image, and spirit. The size of our vision may be one measure of our faith. The size of our vision may even be the parameters within which God chooses to bless us. It may be that if we aren't prepared to handle big blessings from God, he's wise enough not to send big blessings. The kingdom in which we work and the God we serve are too big for little dreams.

A big vision ought to scare us a little, just because it's bigger than we think we can handle. That's why God gives us spiritual leaders who point us once more to him, remind us of his promises, redirect us to his purpose. With a passion!

NL

Paul Kelm is a parish consultant for the Board for Parish Services.





Talking to our teens

Communicating with teenagers begins with appreciating them.

Jason M. Nelson

“Hi, son.”
 “Hey.” (in an artificially low voice)
 “How was school today?”
 “School.” (with a shrug)
 “What did you do?”
 “Stuff.”
 “What kind of stuff?” (dumb question)
 “Ugh, Dad, you’re so annoying.”
 “Sorry, uh—can I get you some milk?”

Conversations with teenagers are usually . . . different. Difficult to start. Sometimes even more difficult to finish. Often unfulfilling to both parent and child. But understanding and appreciating teens—especially the ones in our home—will make meaningful communication possible.

Appreciating teens today

Much has been said about the challenges of adolescence in modern Western society. Some has been insightful and valuable. Some,

condescending. Either way, it’s true: adolescence is difficult for many young people.

But let’s be honest. Teens are not responsible for most of the junk they have to deal with. Their generation did not knock America off the foundation of biblical morality—ours did. Their generation did not introduce drug use into popular culture, did not dismantle the family through easy divorce, did not devalue human life with abortion, did not strip character from public conduct—ours did. This post-Christian society pulled the rug of security out from under teens and then asked them to excel.

Do you know what? Lots of them are doing it—and doing it well. Some happily live out the pattern they have learned in stable homes.

But many face a most difficult challenge—breaking the pattern of their dysfunctional homes and charting a new course. By God’s grace they are doing it. Every day they are

on the front lines in this booming service economy. Nearly every consumer outlet is staffed with teenagers who know what they are doing. The rise in ACT and SAT scores is not as much the result of better instruction as the result of the work ethic of students. Many tirelessly hold jobs, volunteer at the hospital, participate in co-curricular activities, and do their homework. Pray for their success daily.

Soon they will be in charge. They will lead the world and the church in which we will grow old. Their strong hands will be on the switch when ours slip away in frailty. They will either make things worse or make things better. This is sobering.

But I am optimistic if the young people I have known will lead the way. I pray that the young people in our Christian homes, churches, and schools will become the leaders of the future and exert a Christian influence on society. We need them to be salt and light, not sticks in the mud. We will serve them better if we redirect our energies away from troubleshooting their adolescence to challenging them with their momentous role as Christian adults.

Communicating with teenagers begins with appreciating them. Appreciate them as God’s redeemed children. Appreciate them as the generation of the new millenium. Invest your confidence in them. Respect them. Love them from the heart. You will find that communicating with them is a pleasure.



Appreciating your teens today

But here is a tough fact. It is easier to appreciate teens other than your own. It is easier to talk with teens other than your own. It is easier for teenagers to talk with parents other than their own.

Outside the family an objectivity and safety frees both parents and teenagers from the haunting fear that makes family communication difficult. At some unflattering level of adolescent criticalness and insecurity, our kids are afraid they are going to be like us. And at some uncomfortable level of unresolved parental guilt, we are afraid they are going to be like us. Every teenager and parent knows that kids don't catch the quirks of other parents. They are seriously at risk of catching the flaws of their own. So, we dare not get too close.

Sometimes during family banter, I mischievously play on this fear. When my teenagers want to redesign something about my wife or me, I remind them that when they look at us, they are looking into the future. They laugh and groan and insist they will never talk/act/look like that. They will. Yet some families' disapproval of each other's idiosyncrasies goes beyond affectionate teasing. It is profoundly heartbreaking and sinful. This disease will kill relationships, let alone communication.

The cure was carried by the blood. Jesus' blood, flowing down the rough edges of Calvary's cross, made it possible for God to look

beyond our sins and redeem us as children. In grace he did not hold our sins against us. The blood of Christ smooths over the rough spots in our relationships with our children. It is the pivotal point in our communication. Since God loved us, we also love one another.

Fulfilling your responsibility

In human interaction, the more mature person needs to adjust to make the relationship work. Parents must establish the basis for communicating with their teens by appreciating them and building them up in faith with love. No matter how awkward our teens appear or how awful their tennis shoes smell, God has a place in heaven for them and has equipped them to carry out his purposes on earth. No matter how smart their mouth or dumb their mistakes, God is not done with them yet.

Parents also lead in the finishing. They persistently teach their kids, carefully discipline, set an example, and never give up on them. They lead them to repentance, assuring them of God's and their forgiveness. They insist God has something wonderful for them in this life.

Each day parents have the assignment from God to unlock their children's potential by appreciating who they are and what they can do in Christ. Every interaction between parent and teenager will have one of two effects. There is no neutral territory. Either, it will help Satan tear down teens' faith in Christ and confidence in the abilities he has given

Adolescence

is a troubling time. Many look at teens as delinquents or unmotivated. Jason Nelson, however, has a different view:

"I want to express my sincere appreciation for the special young people we find in our Christian homes, churches, and schools. After a prolonged period of adolescence myself, and 22 years of working with teens in the teaching ministry, I believe that today's teenagers may be the most impressive we have ever had. Their competence, cleverness, adaptability, and survival are nothing short of heroic."

How to appreciate your teen:

- Persistently teach them
- Carefully and consistently discipline
- Set an example
- Never give up on them
- Assure them of God's forgiveness
- Insist that God has a plan for them
- Respect them
- Love them

them, or it will reinforce their trust in God's great promises. "'I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jeremiah 29:11).

God declares his plans for teens through loving Christian parents.

NL

Jason Nelson is a parish assistance consultant for the Board for Parish Services.



The church's one foundation

Members at St. Martin's, Watertown, S.D., use more than bricks and mortar in their building projects. They use God's Word to build up the congregation and the community.

Julie K. Tessmer

If you build it, they will come." This line from *Field of Dreams* does not just talk about baseball fields. When St. Martin's, Watertown, S.D., had the first service in its new handicapped-accessible building, a shut-in who hadn't been to church in years was able to come.

But physical buildings aren't the only things St. Martin's is constructing. They're building our family in Christ—in faith and in numbers.

Building a church

About 20 Christian families laid the foundation of St. Martin's on Jan. 24, 1886, when 18 men signed this new church's constitution.

Over the next 113 years, St. Martin's experienced many blessings and challenges. Dedicating the first church building; starting and closing the first school; needing to build a new church; restarting, building, and later adding on to a Lutheran elementary school—all helped build St. Martin's into the church it is today. Through it all, the people and the Word remained constant.

Now the church, with 1,444 members, comprises 10 percent of



Some of the boys in the St. Martin's confirmation class. St. Martin's also has an active youth group and is involved with Great Plains Lutheran High School.

the communicants in the Dakota-Montana District. Eleven full- and part-time teachers teach 177 children in the school. The new church building is connected to that school.

The building was a long time in coming. When the planning committee first met in the 1980s, they decided to add on to the school first. It wasn't until 1992 that the committee again began talking about a new church. Two years later, after a close vote, they began making plans for the building. It was dedicated in February 1999.

Even though the building is new, members still care about their roots. They moved the organ and bells into the new church and use refurbished stained glass windows and altar furniture from the old church.

The new church seats 650 and includes a larger narthex, a bigger fellowship area, and more parking.

"Now people can stand around and visit and get acquainted," said Marvin Schwanke, a lifetime member of St. Martin's and co-chair of the building committee. "The space is there, so the people don't have to grab their coats and get out the door because someone else is coming out of church."

Building up the congregation

Sometimes grabbing your coat and leaving right after church is easy to do in a big congregation.

"A church can get so big that you lose people," said Schwanke. "Some people fall into it [church committees] and get involved right away. Others don't take the initiative."

St. Martin's is working to bring all their members closer together—with God and their family of faith. What better way to bring people closer together than to give them more space—space in which they can gather for fellowship and worship.

"The old basement only seated 200 people. Older people would stay away from the special services to make room for school parents," said Dennis Hayes, pastor at St. Martin's. "Now we can do things without having it be an inconvenience."

The congregation is offering more Bible studies, including one before every meeting, to build up more people in the faith.

Organizations such as choir, junior choir, handbells, ladies' groups, teen groups, Sunday school, and evangelism committee abound.

The energy and dedication of the organizations' members are evident.

"You have something you want done, you call one of the women's groups, and you have it done," said Hayes.

However, the completion of the building project posed new problems.

"After 120 building committee meetings, I won't know what to do on Monday night," said Schwanke.

How about watching a taped Sunday church service on TV? For the past 10 years, St. Martin's has videotaped its services and broadcast them on the local cable channel. St. Martin's also has run promotional spots on its school and other church events.

"Adding on" to the family of faith

At first, the goal of the videotaped services was to involve shut-ins. But God had different plans in mind.

"Evangelism wasn't our original intent, but it's an added blessing," said John Carter, pastor at St. Martin's. "The Lord works in surprising ways. We have people who come and visit because of the TV broadcasts."

The promotional spots have also caught the community's attention. But St. Martin's wants them to learn

about Jesus, their Savior, not just about the church. That's why Carter wants to produce gospel-oriented spots on area cable networks.

"Even if they don't come to church, they will still have a 30-second spot to get a little bit of the Word," said Carter.

St. Martin's, however, is already planning on having community members visit. The new building has made the church "the talk of the town," according to Carter. An open house will help fill its prospect list with names of curious neighbors.

"Building a new church shows that St. Martin's wants to do things and share the gospel with the community," said Hayes.

Still, St. Martin's most effective evangelism tool is its members. Whether canvassing the community or inviting the neighbors for the Festival of Friendship, members have shown their enthusiasm, not only for building themselves up in the faith, but for adding others into their church family.

"If you build it they will come." Maybe a new building will bring in some new prospects. But God's true Word will keep them there.

NL

Julie Tessmer is a communications assistant for Northwestern Lutheran and WELS Communication Services.

St. Martin's

Founded: 1886

Communicants: 1,035

Baptized: 1,444

Pastors: John Carter Jr., Dennis Hayes

1200 2 Ave SE Watertown SD

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FAX, 605/886-6362



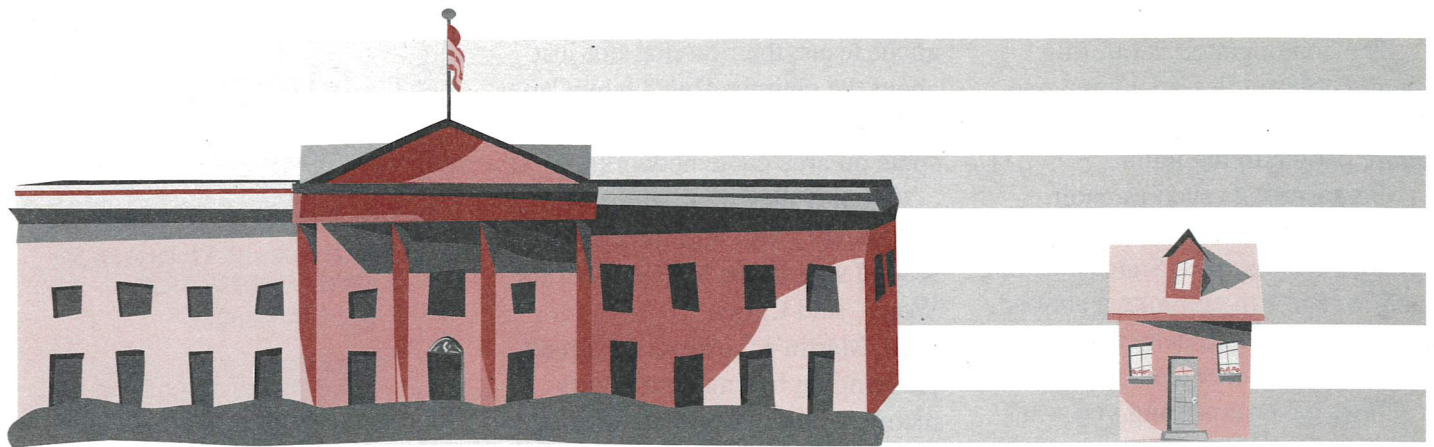
You've read about a church on the east side of Milwaukee, an exploratory in New Mexico, and a large congregation in South Dakota. All their ministries have different aspects, but the same goal.

Here are churches to look for in upcoming issues:

- Shepherd of the Plains, Lubbock, Texas
- Christ, Juneau, Alaska
- Christ our Savior, Columbia, Tenn.
- St. Mark, Citrus Heights, Calif.
- St. Paul, Livonia, Mich.
- St. Peter, St. Albert, Alberta, Canada
- Crown of Life, New Orleans, La.
- Peace, King of Prussia, Penn.
- Our Savior, Sun City, Ariz.

Learn about these congregations' work. See how God has blessed them and their work. Join us as we continue to explore "WELS in action."

St. Martin's just finished building a new church, which seats over 600 people. The congregation plans to have an open house for the community, which will satisfy the curiosity of the neighborhood people as well as build St. Martin's prospect list.



TEN LESSONS FROM THE WHITE HOUSE SCANDAL

What your house can learn from the White House.

John L. Eich

When an appliance breaks or a piece of furniture squeaks too much, we repair or replace it. What do we do if our character has been reduced to splinters by repeated bashings and abuse?

There is no easy way to replace a reputation, no quick fix for a critically cracked character. However, with the president's scandal presented in graphic detail in the media, with our children having been exposed to things we hoped they wouldn't, perhaps it is time we draw 10 biblical character lessons from the White House mess.

1 Acknowledge your sin. Before we shake our fingers and say, "How dare he," we better ask, "How dare I?" Temptations surround us. Satan knows which buttons to push, and we all have our buttons. The Bible teaches that "all have sinned and

fall[en] short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Promiscuity is bad. Adultery is bad. Murder is bad. So is cheating, gossip, abuse, lust, coveting, hatred, jealousy, and stirring up discord. We have all sinned against God's standards.

2 Don't blame somebody else. That's how many people live. Shifting blame. Pointing fingers. David could have said, "Well, God, what did you expect me to do with that woman taking a bath on her roof?" Peter could have blamed the snoopy servant girl for his denial. But they didn't.

We need to stop blaming our spouse, our brothers or sisters, the pastor, the boss, and the neighbor. We are responsible for our own actions. No one forces us to sin. Until we take full responsibility and stop blaming others, we can never be open to God's forgiveness.

3 Be honest. Someone once said, "To err is human, to cover it up is human too." Perhaps, but for a repentant person, the cover-up is over. Someone who is truly repentant is honest.

Now couple that with who we are—Christians. We are commissioned to share God's grace and forgiveness. But why would people believe us if we have the reputation of being liars? Besides, people are smart enough to know we all do wrong things. What they don't know is that in Christ Jesus we can admit our sins and go on in a newness of life.

4 Don't make light of sin. In our obsession with self-esteem, we sugarcoat sin with words like weakness, mistake, and problem. "I committed adultery" becomes "I had an affair" or "I had an inappropriate relationship." "I lied" becomes "I misled people." Each expression camouflages the

full ugliness of the offense. It lessens the impact of a full admission of guilt.

"I misled you" has a ring of good intentions to it, rather than the more blatant "I lied," which portrays malicious intent. We fool ourselves to the point that we never face the sinfulness of what we did. Whether gross or small, private or public, all sin is a disgrace and an abomination to God. We must keep it a disgrace in our eyes too.

5 Understand consequences. Behaviors have consequences. Although we are forgiven, we may still need to suffer the consequences. We may lose our job, our health, our reputation, or our freedom.

Consequences aren't just paid by us individually, but also by those who love us. We hurt ourselves, we hurt our God, we grieve the Holy Spirit, we hurt our families and friends. Even if we think that nobody knows about this sin, it still affects how we act and relate to others. We can't be genuine, truthful, and open. Everything we do affects someone.

We fool ourselves to the point that we never face the sinfulness of what we did.

6 Be concerned for God's presence. "But it was between consenting adults. No one got hurt." "What a person does in his private life is no one else's business." These phrases leave someone out of the equation—God.

David writes in Psalm 51:11, "Do not cast me from your presence

or take your Holy Spirit from me." David, in his repentance, was deeply concerned that he would lose his fellowship with God—that his sin might cause God to turn away.

We need to ask ourselves just how important the presence of God is in our lives. All sins are against God—even what we call "little sins" are disgusting to him. Each sin, even the sinfulness with which we are born, would justify God turning his back on us. Each sin could be the wedge that drives us further from God. That's how seriously we need to take sin. In terror we need to pray, "Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me."

7 Forgive others. We are to forgive much in others because we have much in ourselves to be forgiven. The wood of Christ's cross is able to splint any flaw or fracture. An outpouring of Christ's love can repair any reputation, no matter how smashed. Christ's blood is able to glue any broken relationship or personality. This is why Paul, the "foremost sinner," celebrates "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

8 Repent. First, repentance involves contrition. Contrition is more than mere sorrow that I did something wrong. Why am I sorry? Because I got caught? Because I hurt someone else? Because I should have made a better choice? No! Real contrition looks at the anger of God against sin and admits that we deserve to take an eternal dip in the lake of fire. Real contrition admits that our whole sinful nature is a total abhorrence to a perfect God who detests anything unclean.

Second, grab hold of forgiveness and believe that God has washed us absolutely clean of all sin and guilt. God's grace produces fruit in keeping with repentance. The fruit of repentance is to stop sinning. The fruit of repentance is to restore, if possible, what sin has ruined. The fruit of repentance is to replace evil with good. The fruit of repentance is to do everything to God's glory, whether we eat, drink, work, or play.

The fruit of repentance is to stop sinning.

9 Rejoice in God's gift of forgiveness. Repentance brings true joy only when we have genuine sorrow over our sins, and know that, if God were to deal with us with justice instead of mercy, our repentance would never be enough. Faith that leans on Christ alone is a joy-filled faith. It marvels at Jesus' love and how high and deep and wide his forgiveness is that it can even cover a sinner like me.

10 Be part of the solution. When some were living out of sync with God's plan and purpose for them, Jesus healed them. In fact, Jesus was always less interested in public opinion than in restoring a person with fresh outpourings of God's grace and love. That's why the best way we can deal with this White House mess is to pray . . . for ourselves, for our children, for Bill Clinton, for his family, and for our country.

NL

John Eich is pastor at Grace, Alma, Michigan.



Calling all photographers

Check through your old pictures. Start taking new ones. *Northwestern Lutheran* (NL) wants to use your photos. Beginning in April, a new feature will use one picture a month supplied by you, our readers.

We're looking for photos with spiritual meaning or value—pictures that show Christian fellowship, worship, and faith.

Ideas for photo opportunities include:

- church activities
- men's or women's retreats
- youth group activities
- special church services
- camping weekends
- trips to world mission fields
- outreach activities



Photos may be either color or black and white.

We prefer 4x6 prints. Tell us about the photo, why you took it, who is in it, what it means to you. Include your name, address, and phone number. Please do not write on the back of your photos.

Those whose photos get printed in NL will receive a small gift. Some photos will be used as postcards on the WELS Web site <www.wels.net>. Photos will be returned only if accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Send photos to *Northwestern Lutheran*, Picture this, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398.

If you have any questions, please e-mail us at <nl@sab.wels.net> or call 414/256-3232.

Including the Lord's Word in estate plans

With the assistance of WELS gift planning counselors, 347 WELS families and individuals completed estate plans in 1998. The current value of their planned gifts is \$35.5 million.

WELS members provide for these gifts in their estate plans because in thankfulness they want to return a portion of their estates to God. They also know that they have planned wisely for loved ones and those institutions within WELS for which they have a particular love, such as their congregations, high schools, and synod.

Of the \$35.5 million in planned gifts arranged in 1998, WELS is designated to receive \$18.2 million; congregations, \$8.6 million; and WELS agencies, \$8.7 million.

Slightly over half of the gifts will be distributed through wills, others through living trusts, charitable remainder trusts, charitable gift annuities, and life insurance.

The WELS Ministry of Planned Giving is relatively new, yet substantial gifts are already maturing. In 1998 the WELS Foundation Inc. distributed \$4,121,726 received in bequests. Congregations and WELS agencies received \$665,350. Of the 11 areas of ministry within the synod that received funds, the budgetary fund (\$1,210,335), Church Extension Fund (\$1,231,290), and student assistance (\$689,298) were the major beneficiaries.

Ron Roth

For more information about the Ministry of Planned Giving, call 1-800-827-5482. Or see the Funding Services Web page: <www.wels.net/sab/frm-ccfs.html>

150th anniversary update



In the year 2000, WELS turns 150 years old. From the 1999 synod convention to the 2001 synod convention, WELS will celebrate this anniversary. Each month, we'll bring you a bit of news about how the anniversary planning is progressing.

- Here's what one district suggested for the anniversary celebration:

The South Central district committee wants to challenge all WELS members synodwide with a mass evangelism effort.

They suggest a goal of one million canvass calls synodwide between Pentecost 2000 and Reformation 2000. This includes training people for follow-up visits.

"This would serve as a great opportunity for congregations and our synod to go forward in Christ as we hold out the Word of life for others to celebrate along with us," says David Kapler, South Central District Chairman.

- A congregational manual was sent to each district's Forward in Christ committee members and the district presidents. Each committee will share the manual with congregations. **The congregational manual helps churches consider ways to observe and celebrate our synod's 150th anniversary.** If you'd like a copy, check with your district's chairman.

Do you have any ideas? Please share suggestions that you feel our districts, conferences, and congregations could use to celebrate our synod's milestone. Send them to Gerald Free, Forward in Christ, 954 Solar Parkway, Neenah WI 54956; <fcwicks@tcccom.net>.

Weathering the storm

This year's WELS National Campus Rally was a huge blessing! Just after Christmas 1998, more than 300 WELS college students traveled to the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Students came from 64 colleges and universities, including some from Arizona, Louisiana, and Liverpool, England.

The rally, sponsored by the WELS Campus Ministry Committee, was organized by 19 students from Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel and Student Center in Madison. It focused on "Weathering the Storm"—appropriate for college students facing life-changing decisions. Bible study was emphasized as nine WELS campus pastors facilitated the studies that were interwoven through the four-day rally.

The rally featured famous WELS members from across the nation, including Betty Mahmoody, who escaped Iran with her 5-year-old daughter, and wrote *Not Without My Daughter*. Other speakers included Mark Sievert, a Toronto Blue Jays AAA league pitcher who is trying to get to the big leagues; missionary and undercover police officer, Rick Loewen, who shared how life on an Apache Reservation compared to the challenges of his secular job; and Christopher Orr, an actor who is also the lay contact man for the WELS mission in New York City.

Hearing these stories of witnessing and faith in action motivated students to give back to their Savior. Several students now are planning to spend spring break throughout the United States, helping several home missions through the Travel Canvass Witness program.

The rally was truly an opportunity to grow in faith personally, be comforted by other Christians, and feel more equipped to weather any of life's storms.

Wendy R. Sampson is a senior at UW-Madison.



Justin Stuebs and Rachel Thiele at the national campus rally in Madison, Wis. These two Lakeside Lutheran High School grads joined over 300 WELS college students to be supported during a time and age when faith is constantly challenged.

1998-99 WELS school statistics

High school

21 Lutheran high schools
5,501 students
413 teachers

Elementary school

366 schools
30,677 students
2,007 teachers

Early childhood education

289 schools
224 with a Lutheran elementary school
65 without a Lutheran elementary school
4,889 students
306 teachers

Breakdown of students who attend Lutheran elementary school



The figures for high schools do not include Calvary Academy, Milwaukee; Luther Prep, Watertown, Wis.; or Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw.



Mission update

An earthquake, registering six points on the richter scale, hit in Armenia, Colombia, near the city of Pereira on Jan. 25. Over 1,000 were reported dead. This quake did not affect any of our mission families or members who live in Medellín or Bogotá—over five hours away—although those cities felt a slight trembling.

One missionary said, "We thank the Lord for his goodness in sparing us, but our hearts and prayers go out to the many who are now grieving for loved ones who died and to others who lost their homes and all they had. . . . Our trust is that the Lord will work this disaster for the good of his children and as part of his master plan for his kingdom."

Let your light shine

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

Robert Kujawski, pastor at Bethany, Manitowoc, Wis., writes:

On April 18, one of our members suffered a stroke. Marvin Mathies is in the process of recovery and dropped off this note of thanksgiving:

"Thanks to the Lord Jesus for my speedy recovery. This stroke—in a moment unable to utter one word—illustrates how necessary it is to have the daily assurance, by the grace of God through the Lord Jesus, that heaven will be your eternal home. There this earth's imperfections are replaced by an eternity of truly perfect blissful enjoyable living with our Savior."

May we always remember and give thanks to the Lord for our everyday blessings!

Congregation mission offerings exceed \$17 million

In 1998, WELS congregations gave over \$17 million, for the first time ever, for worldwide mission and ministry of WELS. Congregation mission offerings totaled \$17,053,347, an increase of \$516,718 over 1997 (+3.1%). This is also the first year in many years that receipts have exceeded subscriptions.

In addition WELS members contributed \$5,749,420 directly to the synod. Mainly ministerial education and home and world missions received these funds. Restricted funds designated by members include student assistance, Church Extension Fund, and the world mission building fund.

"Whether financial gifts come through congregations or directly to the synod from members, they all have the same origin—Christian hearts compelled by the love of Christ to further our God-given mission of making disciples in all the world," said Ron Roth, administrator of the Commission for Communication on Financial Support. "We are thankful to God for each and every gift."

rē · li' giõn Defining religion

Formula of Concord: A Lutheran confession written to settle a number of doctrinal controversies that rose within Lutheranism after the death of Luther. The two main authors of this confession were Jakob Andreae (1528-1590) and Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586). It was adopted by the majority of Lutherans in Germany in 1577 and was included among the Lutheran Confessions gathered in the Book of Concord of 1580.



In July, *Northwestern Lutheran* will be available by subscription in large print. Northwestern Publishing House is taking subscriptions now.

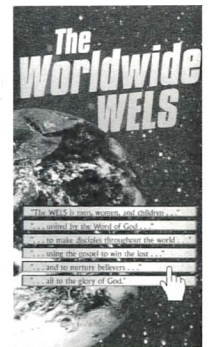
Until now, WELS Mission for the Visually Impaired (MVI), a committee of the Commission on Special Ministries, has been sending out over 310 large-print NLs. This number has increased from the three copies they sent out when the service began in 1998, making it practical to include the large print version as part of the regular NL products.

MVI also distributes other Christian materials in Braille, large print, and audiocassette. They will continue to provide NL on audiocassette.

The large-print NL will cost \$2 an issue, or \$24 a year. Subscribe by contacting NPH at 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226; 1-800-662-6093, ext. 8 (Milwaukee area, 414/475-6600, ext. 5).

Music available

"We are one" was the theme song for *The Worldwide WELS* video. The sheet music and tape of the song are now available. Consider using "We are one" with the church choir or school children. On Friendship Sunday, the choir can sing the song, and the video can be shown after the service.



The Worldwide WELS is a seven-minute music video that depicts the mission of WELS.

For either the music or a copy of the video, contact WELS Communication Services, 414/256-3210; <karenb@sab.wels.net>

A Gift to remember

It's March. Do you remember what gifts you received at Christmas? Probably not.

But Kim Kumwenda will never forget. On Dec. 7, 1998, her husband, Michael, stepped off the plane with their newly adopted son, Gift.

Michael, who was born and raised in Malawi, returned to his rural village to pick up his six-year-old nephew. When Gift's parents—Michael's sister and brother-in-law—died of tuberculosis, there was never a question if they should bring Gift into their home. The only question was how soon they could bring him.

"Living conditions are really poor in my country," says Michael. HIV and tuberculosis are spreading quickly throughout Africa. "We want to give Gift a permanent home and a Christian education so he's comfortable."

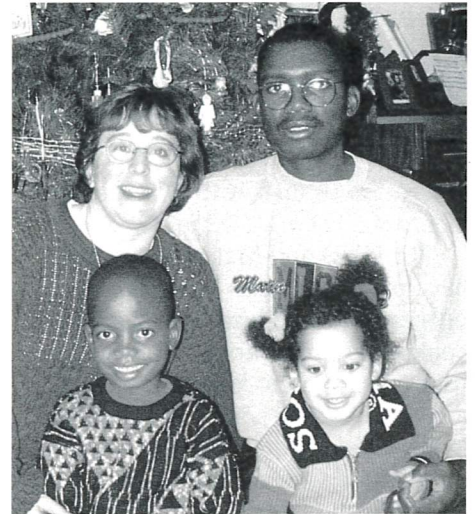
That Christian education is espe-

cially important to Kim and Michael, who met in Africa where Kim was serving as a nurse. They moved to the United States so Michael could attend Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. He graduated in 1997 and now teaches fifth grade at St. Paul, Saginaw, Mich.

Congregation members have been supportive of the adoption. They sponsored a garage sale and spaghetti dinner and donated \$6,000.

Gift, now named Nathan Gift, was baptized and is quickly adapting to this strange culture. He started kindergarten in early 1999, and has been working with a tutor twice a week on the language. Probably the fastest adjustment he made was becoming a brother to Emma, who is three.

"We had three days where they were nice to each other," says Kim. "Now they're just like normal siblings."



On Dec. 7, 1998, Kim and Michael Kumwenda, and their daughter, Emma, added another member to their family—Nathan Gift. The Kumwendas adopted Gift, Michael's nephew, after his parents died. Michael and Gift arrived at the airport in Saginaw, Mich., after a 22-hour trip from Malawi, Africa.

In the news

Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, was ranked in the top tier of Midwest regional liberal arts colleges for 1999 by *U.S. News and World Report*. WLC is also listed as the fourth best Midwest regional liberal arts college when it comes to getting the most for your money.

Corrections:

In the Defining Religion section in January, we wrote that Epiphany lasts one to six weeks. That was using the old calendar. Currently, however, Epiphany lasts four to nine weeks.

Our sincere apology to Philip Leyrer, staff minister at St. Andrew, Middleton, Wis. He wrote "Kids, drugs, & alcohol," the second article in our series "Take time for teens," in the February issue. We mistakenly attributed it to Joel Leyrer.



Bulgarian missionary John Roebke (right) introduces WELS president, Karl R. Gurgel, and his wife, Barbara. In December 1998, a delegation from the Board for World Missions visited missions in Bulgaria and Russia.

Once a year, Gurgel visits a world mission. Why? "Our missionaries are in our thoughts and in our prayers," he says. "Sometimes it's good for them to see us, as representatives of WELS, to know how completely we support them."

To date, Gurgel has personally met, supported, and encouraged missionaries and church members in Japan, Bulgaria, Russia, and Africa.



WELS news briefs

These updates are from the offices at the synod administration building. You can contact these offices and administrators at 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398.

Commission on Youth Discipleship

Contact CYD at 414/256-3274.

The CYD and Mass Media Office have prepared a **new resource for outreach to children**—an Easter kit containing promotional resources, a four-color student lesson, learning activities, crafts, songs, devotion and leader guide. Christmas kits were also distributed. Contact CYD or Evangelism (1-800-884-9312) for information.



Thomas Porter, a sixth-grader at St. Paul, Appleton Wis., won the 1998 children's Christmas card contest. Deadline for the 1999 Christmas card contest is June 1.

Youth Discipleship and Adult Discipleship have published a **manual for planning and implementing a family retreat**. The manual includes organizational information, sample programs, Bible studies for children and adults, and a family ministry bibliography.

WELS Kids Connection, a monthly video magazine for kids, sponsored a

video contest. Twelve schools submitted two-minute homemade *Kids Connection* videos. Shepherd, Albuquerque, N.M., won first prize—a pizza party for the school. Their video showed kids “in action” and how the school is opening doors to the community. The February *Kids Connection* featured the winning video and snippets from the other videos.

Commission on Evangelism

Contact Evangelism/Mass Media at 1-800-884-9312.

Now available:

- The **introductory video for Mr. Whistle**, a video series witnessing to children ages two to eight. Three more videos will complete the basic package.
- The brochure **“Preparing to witness.”** This assists you in your personal witnessing to family, friends, and neighbors.

Commission on Parish Schools

Contact Parish Schools at 414/256-3220.

WELS School Leadership Conference will be held June 29-July 1 in Waukesha, Wis.

From 1993 to 1998, **enrollment in WELS early childhood ministries increased 41 percent**. In the same period, Lutheran elementary school enrollment decreased 3.3 percent, and Lutheran high school enrollment increased 1.6 percent (see more statistics on page 21).

Commission on Adult Discipleship

Six new Bible studies have been published from four Bible study series:

- *Galatians* and *How to Study the Bible* from “His Word—My Life”
- *Man and Civil Government* from “People’s Bible Teachings”
- *Jesus I AM Statements* from “The Gospel”
- *Large Catechism, Part 2* from “Bible Insight”

All are available from Northwestern Publishing House, 1-800-662-6022.

Synodical Council

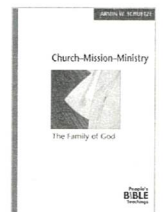
At their November meeting, the Synodical Council approved **outreach grants** totaling \$196,155 for 22 projects in WELS congregations. These projects emphasized involving people in local outreach.

Board for World Missions

Check out the BWM home page at <www.wels.net/sab/frm-wor.html>. Web pages for Brazil, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Japan, Taiwan, and the World Mission Collection are available. These include a history of the country, stats, mission updates, and prayer requests. Future plans are to include regular updates on the current status of almost every WELS world mission field.

Free book to WELS congregations

Every WELS congregation has received a copy of *Church—Mission—Ministry*, made possible by a grant from Aid Association for Lutherans.



“Part of the People’s Bible Teaching Series, *Church—Mission—Ministry* presents the biblical teaching on church and ministry in concise language,” said Richard Lauersdorf, WELS vice president of mission and ministry.

The gift is designed for pastors and teachers to use in their personal and group studies, and also to involve lay leaders and Bible study groups in the discussion.

The book is available through Northwestern Publishing House. *Church—Mission—Ministry*, stock number AA15N0601. \$8.99. Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226; 1-800-662-6022; 414/475-6600 (Milwaukee area).

District news

Northern Wisconsin

Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis., will break ground for its new school building on Mar. 21.

South Central

Abiding Faith, SW Fort Worth, Tex., held a groundbreaking ceremony on Oct. 18, 1998, for its new worship sanctuary adjacent to the original Worship/Education/Fellowship (WEF) unit. The facility should be completed by Easter, in time to host the South Central District Pastor conference. . . . WELS Kingdom Workers is sponsoring the work of a lay evangelist in West Texas. **John Gillespie**, a 1998 graduate of Texas Tech University, is serving as the full-time Evangelism Coordinator for Shepherd of the Plains, Lubbock; Good Shepherd, Midland; and Our Redeemer, San Angelo. He will work to improve and increase outreach of the congregations by coordinating the work and equipping church members for outreach in their communities.

Western Wisconsin

St. Mark, Normal, Ill., completed its new sanctuary in time for Christmas and will dedicate it on the congregation's 25th anniversary—May 9.

Happy anniversary!

MI—St. Paul, South Haven, Mich., celebrated its 40th anniversary on Nov. 15, 1998.

WW—Robert Pagel celebrated his 25th anniversary in the teaching ministry in October 1998. . . . **St. Paul, Tomah, Wis.,** is celebrating its 125th anniversary throughout 1999. The congregation had a mission festival and mission fair on Feb. 21.

These are the reporters for this month's featured districts. MI: David M. Zahn NW: Joel Lillo WW: Elton Stroh SC: Peter Snyder



Even though Christmas is past, it's good to keep the celebration in your heart. Read and celebrate with the congregation in Springerville, Ariz., as they observe the birth of our King.

Christmas in Springerville

The time: December. The place: Springerville in the White Mountains of Eastern Arizona. The lights are burning brightly at Immanuel, the little Lutheran church on a small hill outside of town. It is cold, bitter cold, with the wind blowing in gusts of 50 mph off the Escudilla Mountains.

Pastor and Mrs. Ditter drive up after having services for 30 aged and infirm Apache Indians in the rest home. They have difficulty carrying the boxes of gifts into the church. However, once inside, they are greeted by a warm church, a trimmed tree, loving men and

women, and smiling children. They place gifts, along with bags of candy, under the tree, and the service begins.

Soon the joyous sounds of the hymns of Christmas fill the church. They are sung by men and women—Anglo, Apache, Navajo—a male nurse, a school teacher, bus driver for the handicapped, horse wrangler, carpenter, some Lutherans from birth, others baptized, instructed, and confirmed—all happy Christians.

The service of song and pageant, recitation, and Scripture involves the children—Apache, Navajo and Anglo from age three on up—teachers, elders, and the pastor. It ends with the singing of "Silent Night" in Apache and English. The gifts are distributed, and everyone enjoys a Christmas dinner.

For an hour the howling, chilling wind is forgotten in the little church, while the warmth of the message of the angels, "For unto you is born this day a Savior . . ." fills the hearts of the congregation gathered for Christmas in Springerville.

*Arthur Guenther
Pinetop, Arizona*



Apache, Navajo, and Anglo children participated in the Christmas service at Immanuel, Springerville, Ariz.



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

News briefs

More than one out of seven adults change their church each year, and another one out of six attend a carefully chosen handful of selected churches on a rotating basis rather than sticking with the same church week after week. Americans are religious people, and church remains an important aspect of life for tens of millions of people. However, there is less concern about "brand loyalty" to churches than there used to be. [Barna Research Group, Oct. 7, 1998]

In 1997, 2.5 million abortions were performed in Russia. Seven pregnancies out of 10 ended in abortion. According to Russia's Health Ministry, 10 percent of abortions are performed on women under age 19. More than 2,000 abortions are performed on girls under age 14. These 1997 statistics show a 25 percent decrease in abortions for the last four years; however, Russia's overall population has also declined by over 1.5 million people since 1992. [Pro-Life Infonet, 11/30/98, quoted in WELS Lutherans for Life's LifeWire]

Quick quote

"One of the projections we're making is that by the year 2010, between 10 and 20 percent of the U.S. population will rely exclusively or primarily on the Internet for religious purposes. These people will never set foot on a church campus again."

—David Kinnaman, research associate of the Barna Research Group. He was quoted in the *Washington Times* on Nov. 25, 1998.

Teens don't walk the talk



In a poll of 20,000 middle and high schoolers, 70 percent of high school students admitted cheating on an exam at least once in the past year. In 1996, the cheating rate was 64 percent.

The poll by the Josephson Institute of Ethics also showed that almost all teens lie to their parents. In the 1998 poll, 92 percent of high school students said they lied at least once in the past year while 78 percent said they lied two or more times. In 1996, 85 percent said they lied at least once, and 73 percent had lied two or more times.

Also, 47 percent of high schoolers admitted they stole something from a store in the past 12 months. That is higher than the 39 percent in 1996. Over 25 percent said they had committed a store theft at least two times.

"What's especially troubling is that young people know what they're doing is wrong. There is a staggering inconsistency in what they say they

believe and how they act," said Michael Josephson, president of the institute based in Marina del Rey, Calif.

While often reporting that they stole, cheated, or lied, 91 percent of the students said they were "satisfied with my own ethics and character."

And 78 percent of high school students and 87 percent of middle school students say "it's not worth it to lie or cheat because it hurts your character."

Also, 97 percent of both high schoolers and middle schoolers said "it's important for me to be a person with good character," and 95 percent said "it's important to me that people trust me."

But while 98 percent of middle school students said they were satisfied with the character and ethics of their generation, only 69 percent of high school students said they were similarly satisfied.

The survey of 20,829 students (10,760 high schoolers and 10,069 middle schoolers) was administered by randomly selected schools throughout the country in 1998. The poll had a margin of error of ±3 percentage points.

Religious elderly have far shorter hospital stays than others

Religious elderly tend to have hospital stays that are far shorter than those of their less religious counterparts, a study has found. Patients who are 60 or older with no religious affiliation stayed an average of 25 days in the hospital compared to 11 days for patients with some affiliation with a religious denomination.

Researchers attributed the shorter stays to the use of religion by people to help them cope.

The study, conducted at Duke University Medical Center, also found that religious affiliation was

linked to a lower probability of being hospitalized.

After controlling for factors such as age, severity of illness, and physical functioning, patients who attended religious services weekly or more were 43 percent less likely to have had a hospital stay in the last year compared to those with less frequent attendance.

The study was conducted on 542 patients aged 60 or older who were consecutively admitted to the medical center in Durham, N.C.

Pope offers jubilee indulgences

Pope John Paul II announced plans for the Catholic Year 2000 celebration. Declaring 2000 a Holy Year, or Jubilee, the Pope issued a bull to launch Christianity's Third Millennium.

The bull, a solemn papal document, revives the Catholic practice of indulgences. The pope outlines ways for Catholic souls to lessen their time in purgatory. Acts such as pilgrimages to a church, giving to charity, and not smoking or drinking can earn an "indulgence." He says that doing these certain acts from Dec. 24, 1999, to Jan. 6, 2001, will lessen the soul's punishment prior to entry into heaven.

Bronx teacher suspended

A Bronx elementary school teacher has been suspended on charges he distributed religious books and promoted Christianity in his classroom.

Simpson Gray, a fifth-grade teacher, was suspended after the school board investigated a parent's complaint. Gray provided students and the school library with six copies of the Bible and four religious books that he had written. He acknowledged that he brought the books into the school but said he was merely trying to broaden the selection of reading materials and show the children that at least one of their teachers was also an author.

"I know the law," Gray said. "What it says is that you can't preach, you can't pray, and you can't teach the Bible in school. Nowhere does it say it is illegal for a teacher to bring a Bible into an elementary school," he said.

A spokeswoman for the board of education said other allegations were also considered, including that he advocated religion in his classroom and put down other faiths.

LCMS, ELCA schedule joint theological talks

In June 1999, theological talks will begin between The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA).

LCMS President, A.L. Barry, said the purpose is "openly to share concerns with one another and to discuss the very serious doctrinal issues that divide our two church bodies."

ELCA Presiding Bishop, H. George Anderson, suggested that topics include Lutheran identity, ELCA ecumenical agreements, the nature of the church and ecumenical activity, and the authorization of sacramental ministries for congregations without pastors.

[News and Information Division, Board for Communication Services, LCMS]

Number of single fathers increasing

The number of single fathers has grown 25 percent in the past three years, the U.S. Census Bureau reports.

In 1998, fathers accounted for one in six single parents, *The Washington Post* reported. In 1970, they were about one in 10. In the last three years, the total of single-parent families headed by fathers has grown from 1.7 million to 2.1 million. Currently, there are 9.8 million single mothers.

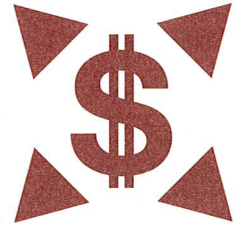
Single-parent families have increased in the past three years, accounting now for 27 percent of all families with children, the report states.

Researchers say children raised by single parents—male or female—have a greater risk of suffering emotional problems, dropping out of school, or getting into legal trouble.

Americans don't know where money goes

Beware of telephone solicitations for charity!

A survey by the American Association of Retired Persons said that although 80 percent of Americans give to charity through phone solicitations, many don't really know where their money goes.



According to the survey, more than two-thirds of those who give to a charity through a telephone solicitation said they weren't sure the callers represented the organizations they claimed to, and about 57 percent never asked how their donations would be spent.

According to an anti-fraud and consumers group, this makes charity fraud a potential gold mine for scam artists who pose as legitimate organizations or for telemarketers who solicit money on behalf of legitimate groups but claim the bulk of what they raise as "fees." In addition, sound-alike charities with titles similar to legitimate groups also deceive consumers by playing on name recognition.

The survey said that of those who responded with a donation to telephone solicitations, 42 percent gave more than \$100 and 10 percent gave more than \$1,000.

In 1995, an estimated \$1.43 billion in donations were misused or absconded with, the Associated Press reported law enforcement officials as saying.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Ewings, Jerry, to Lakeside LHS, Lake Mills, Wis.
Gabb, William R., to Atonement, Plano, Tex.
Kunde, Arnold J., to Grace, Durand, Mich.
Lindloff, Mark A., to St. Paul, Columbus, Neb.
Main, Donald G., to St. Peter, Darwin, Minn.
Merten, Philip W., to WLIM, Milwaukee
Mose, Paul M., to Mt. Zion, Ripon, Wis.
Mueller, Timothy P., to Immanuel, Medford, Wis.
Retzlaff, Nathan H., to retirement
Schwarz, Bryan E., to Divine Savior, Indianapolis, Ind.
Zehms, Roger R., to Risen Savior, Austin, Tex.

Teachers

Bergemann, Gerald A., to retirement
Hoffman, Karen H., to Faith, Fond du Lac, Wis.
Hong, Karen S., to St. Andrew, Middleton, Wis.
Karpenko, Ann M., to Salem, Loretto, Minn.
Leverence, Kenneth L., to retirement
Pautsch, Carl E., to retirement
Pitt, Sharon J., to St. Mark, Eau Claire, Wis.
Raabe, Kelly J., to Centennial, Milwaukee
Schultz, Walter A., to retirement
Voth, Bonnie A., to retirement
Weisbach, Gay L., to retirement
Wendorf, Marilyn B., to retirement

SYNOD CONVENTION

The 55th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod will be held July 26-30, at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., under the theme "Forward in Christ." Details will be announced later.

ANNIVERSARIES

Hemlock, Mich.—St. John (100). March 21—Friendship outreach/inreach, 8 & 10:30 AM. 517/642-8757.
Racine, Wis.—First Evangelical (150). March 28—Confirmation-theme services, 8 & 10:45 AM. Anyone confirmed at First Evangelical is invited. RSVP, 414/633-8267.
Crete, Ill.—Trinity (150). March 28—Youth services, 8 & 10:45 AM. John Stellick, 708/672-8125.
Winthrop, Minn.—Zion (100). April 18—Heritage Sunday. Service, 10 AM; German/American potluck follows. Lori Klockmann, 507/647-5582.
West Allis, Wis.—Woodlawn (70). April 18. Services, 8 & 10:30 AM; potluck follows. Thomas Kneser, 414/321-2126.
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.
Lake Orion, Mich.—Divine Grace (25). May 23. New organ dedication services, 8 & 10:45 AM. Anniversary service, 4 PM; fellowship meal follows. 248/391-1131.

COMING EVENTS

Wisconsin Lutheran College 1999 choir tour—Dr. James Nowack, 414/438-8848.
 March 6—Grace, Glendale, Ariz., 7 PM
 March 7—St. Thomas, Phoenix, Ariz., 9 AM & 10:30 AM; Emmanuel, Tempe, Ariz., 6:30 PM.
 March 8—Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, 9:40 AM; Mt. Calvary, Flagstaff, Ariz., 7 PM.
 March 10—Grace, Yorba Linda, Calif., TBA

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.

March 11—California LHS, Wildomar, 9:40 AM; St. Stephen, Fallbrook, Calif., 7 PM.

March 12—Reformation, San Diego, Calif., 7 PM.

March 14—Ascension, Escondido, Calif., 9 AM; Beautiful Savior, Carlsbad, Calif., 10:30 AM.

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.

Ladies Time Out—March 20, 8:30 AM-4 PM at Salem, 6840 N 107 St, Milwaukee. Bible studies, crafts, workshops on family and social issues. \$12/includes breakfast and lunch. Babysitting available. Lynn Heinrich, 414/796-1814.

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

Alcoholic awareness retreat—for recovering alcoholics and family members. April 16-18. 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; <wlcs@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.

Convention—of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference. Winter Haven, Fla. April 20-22. 414/538-1462.

Seminar—SHARE (Singles) 5th Annual Spring Seminar & Social, April 24, Milwaukee. Pre-registration requested, but walk-ins welcome. Doris Collins, 414/534-7852.

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

Concert—spring jazz concert, May 2, 7:30 PM. Chapel/auditorium, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

Inner city vacation Bible school—June 6-20 at 10 inner city congregations in Milwaukee. Ninth-through 12th-grade volunteers needed. Chris Schroeder, 2533 W North Ave, Milwaukee WI 53205; 414/933-9700. <ckschroeder@juno.com>

Tour—hosted by OWLS. 20-day Tour 'N' Fly Northbound Alaska. Departs June 13. Cost: \$2995. Harris Kaesmeyer, 517/652-8772.

AVAILABLE

Altar cloths—one green for altar (7' 11" long), two green for lecturn and pulpit; one white for altar (7' 10" long), two white for lecturn and pulpit. Free for cost of shipping. Mt. Olive, Detroit, Mich; 313/885-3023.

Computer printers—Panasonic KX-P1180 multi-mode printer, 9-pin dot matrix, Epson FX286 dot matrix. Free for cost of shipping. Mt. Olive, Detroit, Mich; 313/885-3023.

Brass altarware (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.

Song—sheet music and tape from "We are one," the song in *The Worldwide WELS* video. Free. WELS Communication Services, 414/256-3210; <karenb@sab.wels.net>

Steeple—19 foot high fiberglass steeple with 26 inch cross (21' 2" total). Free for the cost of shipping. Abiding Faith, Fort Worth, Tex.; 817/294-9303.

NEEDED

Stand—on which to place Advent candles. Christ the King, Bremerton, Wash. 360/692-8798.

Gowns—30 adult choir gowns, various sizes. Brenda, 608/643-2684.

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>.

NAMES WANTED

Japan—WELS/ELS members in Misawa Air Force Base, Aomori Prefecture. Roger Falk, WELS Japan Mission, 3-29-6 Hyogozuka, Utsunomiya, Tochigi 321-0138 Japan, TEL/FAX +81-28-653-6353. <leccrw@msn.com> or <leccrww@hotmail.com>

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

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

SERVICE TIMES

Sun City, Ariz.—Our Savior service times are 8:30 and 10:30 AM. 602/977-2872.

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.

WORSHIP TIMES

New York City, N.Y.—Sunday evening Bible study and worship. Christopher Orr, 404 E 63 St #16, New York N.Y. 10021; 212/715-9688 (home), 212/946-1541 (voice mail). Indelethio 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.

1999 YEARBOOK CORRECTIONS

Pastor Kevin Schultz's home and office phone numbers are incorrect. His home number is 613/830-7525; office, 613/824-2524.

Pastor Joel Gerlach's phone number and address is incorrect. He lives at 9997 W North Ave #385, Wauwatosa WI 53226; 414/774-3711.

Pastor Steven Spencer's home phone number and e-mail were incorrect. They are 520/439-5418; <tlcsvaz@c212.com>.

Two pastor's names were omitted:

Pastor James A. Renz (Suzanne) CRM, 715 7 Ave N, St. James MN 56081-1608; 507/375-3395.

(retired) Pastor James Wuebben (Esther), 491 Eklund, Peshigo WI 54157; 715/582-9281.

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



Inter-Act

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

Introduction

Have you been a Christian since infancy? The Spirit lit the fire of faith at your baptism, and he's kept it burning ever since. You are blessed.

Can you recall a time when you were not a Christian? The Spirit used the word to grab hold of you and turn you around to follow Jesus later in life. You are blessed.

Your insights might help lifelong Christians appreciate the radical transformation Jesus has brought about. Discuss your "journey in faith."

- If you're a lifelong Christian, think of specific blessings you enjoy because of such a gift.
- If you were once not a Christian, compare your attitudes and actions before receiving faith with your attitudes and actions now.

When it comes to radically transformed Biblical characters, Paul is at the top of most people's lists.

I. Text

Read Acts 9:1-6, 15,16:

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." . . .

¹⁵The Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. ¹⁶I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

III. Application

1. What would you do if Jesus appeared in your church narthex this Sunday? Why might any of the following reactions be appropriate?
 - A sudden awareness of guilt
 - A profound sense of awe
 - A deep sense of thanks
 - A feeling of unrestrained joy
2. When the Lord wanted Saul's attention, he took things away from him: his sight, his pride, his whole understanding of God. Then, one by one, God built him back up, God's way. Has the Lord ever taken something from you in order to build you up his way?
3. Some conversions make for interesting conversation and exciting testimony. Why are we intrigued by "dramatic" conversions?
4. How is every conversion dramatic—whether a baptized infant, youth, or grown adult?

II. Questions

1. Saul had advantages—he was a Roman citizen, well-educated, a respected leader. Why would a person use such benefits to oppose the name of Jesus?
2. The Lord could have appeared to Saul in a burning bush as he did to Moses. He could have spoken to him through a whisper as he did to Elijah. Why do you suppose Jesus chose to appear to Saul in a bright light?
3. What does Saul's response in verse 5 tell you about him?
4. As a Pharisee, Saul took great pride in his knowledge of God, gained through the Torah and the traditions. The Lord sent a disciple named Ananias to Saul so that he would "see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." What was the Lord demonstrating to Saul?
5. Paul told the story of his conversion at least twice: once to a crowd in Jerusalem and once to a king in Caesarea. It's easy to imagine that he told it many more times. Why?

IV. Prayer

We who believe and are baptized
shall see the Lord's salvation;
Baptized into the death of Christ,
We are Your new creation.
Through Christ's redemption
we shall stand
Among the glorious, heav'nly band
Of ev'ry tribe and nation.

With one accord, O God, we pray:
Grant us your Holy Spirit.
Help us in our infirmity
Through Jesus' blood and merit.
Grant us to grow in grace
each day
That by this sacrament we may
Eternal life inherit. Amen.

Adapted from
Christian Worship 299

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

Let me tell you about my Lord

Psalm 91 is the testimony of an elder believer.

James A. Aderman

We don't know who penned Psalm 91. I picture the author as a white-haired man astride a low stool. I imagine him dressed in a prayer shawl with long tassels on either end, draped over his shoulders and flowing toward his feet. His long beard puffs up on his chest and ascends toward his ears. Long ringlets of hair cascade down his sideburns and pool on his collar. The black yarmulke¹ on his head doesn't quite cover the bald spot. Ebony leather phylacteries² are wrapped around his biceps and forehead.

Next to him on another stool sits a much younger man. His beard is just sprouting, and the crop looks like it needs to be replanted. His head is matted with thick, wavy hair. He, too, shoulders a shawl, is bound in phylacteries, and sports long curly sideburns. He sits forward, teetering on the stool's edge, lapping up the old man's words like a dog at his water bowl on a sultry August afternoon.

Instructing a young believer

Now read Psalm 91 and discover what the young man finds so interesting. Read the words of a spiritually seasoned mentor instructing a young believer about the security that is his because the almighty LORD has committed himself to his people.

Psalm 91 divides into three parts. In the first two, the veteran believer testifies of God's faithful care and protection. In the third, the LORD confirms the teacher's testimony.

In verses 1-8 the mentor emphasizes God's protection from life's physical difficulties, including war and disease. Verses 9-13 assure that the Most High's security extends to protection from spiritual difficulties, including those caused by Satan. The teacher begins both sections with his personal confession and then explains what his young charge can expect from God. Then comes a dramatic shift in speakers. It's as though the Lord had been eavesdropping and now can no longer contain himself. He provides seven

"I will" statements, promising to care for everyone who trusts him as Savior-God, no matter what their circumstances are.

Instructing today's believers

Romans 8 offers commentary on this psalm—and points us to Jesus as the reason God will honor his promises. "We know

that in all things God works for the good of those who love him. . . . If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? . . . Who is he that condemns? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? . . . in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (v. 28-37).

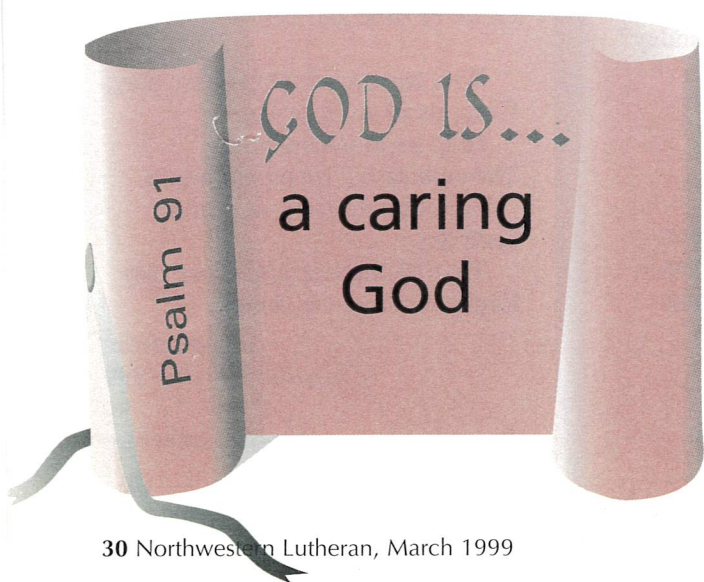
Still not convinced that you are secure in God's care? Then know that nothing "in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v. 39).

We don't know who penned this psalm, but we do know that the Spirit taught him much about God. In this series we'll discover how God is our mighty fortress, our Savior, our fear-fighter, our dwelling place, our victory, and our promise. So pull up a stool, adjust your prayer shawl, lean into the conversation, and let a longtime child of God teach you about our Father.

James Aderman is pastor at Fairview, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

For further study

Compare Romans 8:28-39 with Psalm 91. What assurances do both passages offer about God's care? Which are unique to each section? How do both point to the gospel as the foundation for our security?



¹ Skullcap ² Boxes containing Scripture verses

Exalt a nation

Armin J. Panning

“**R**ighteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people” (Proverbs 14:34).

At this writing the United States is experiencing something that has not happened in over 130 years. Impeachment proceedings against the president of the United States are going on in the U.S. Senate. The Senate’s verdict is not yet in, and it is not our intent to prescribe whether their verdict should be to retain or dismiss from office a leader who has admitted to moral lapses.

The evaluation of a leader’s conduct is not the only or even the main focus of the scriptural proverb quoted above. Solomon’s proverb is directed also and especially to the citizens of a country. Their righteousness exalts a nation, and, conversely, their indulgence in sin and their disregard for its consequences is a disgrace to the nation.

Perhaps polls should not be trusted too far nor taken too seriously. But whatever percentage one accepts as the results, the inescapable conclusion forced on us by the polls is that the majority of Americans do not much care about righteousness. They do not consider sin a disgrace. If a leader appears to be doing a satisfactory job in office, if the economy remains strong, if our comfortable lifestyle is not in jeopardy, then sin can be tolerated or rationalized as simply a private matter. Seen in that light, polls speak volumes about us as a nation.

But what about us individually and personally? We dare never forget that we are part of the nation—and to the extent that we may have been dulled, or jaded and coarsened by life around us, let us repent. Let us in humble and penitent faith ask for forgiveness from the God who in his grace

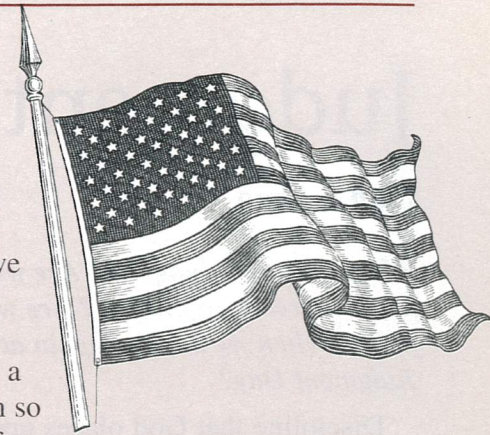
and mercy gives us everything that we enjoy in this favored nation.

Furthermore, let us redouble our efforts to share with our countrymen a knowledge of this God who has been so gracious to us. Through a clear and forceful presentation of God’s holy law let us inform them what his justice and holiness demand. But through a proclamation of the gospel let us just as clearly and forcefully share with them the message of God’s grace in Christ. That gracious message gives the righteousness God demands. What’s more, that message enables them, in appreciation of God’s grace, to produce true righteousness in their own lives now lived to the glory of God.

Finally, as Christians genuinely concerned about righteousness, let us pray for our leaders, asking God to guard them against the temptations that power invariably brings. Rulers are, after all, God’s representatives who are given to bless us. Because of God’s faithfulness to his promise, they accomplish that—despite the flaws that sinful people bring to their office. When the apostle Paul urged the Romans to obey their ruler, supplying the rationale, “For he is God’s servant to do you good” (Romans 13:4), he was speaking of Emperor Nero!

Obviously, we cannot force others to do the right thing. However, with the Holy Spirit working in us through Word and sacrament, we are “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” for our sin-darkened nation. As light and salt, our Christian lives produce God-pleasing righteousness and model it for others. It may be derided and sneered at by the majority, but such righteousness exalts a nation.

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



*Rulers are,
after all, God’s
representatives
who are given
to bless us.*

Judgment Day, eternity, and rest

John F. Brug

When does God judge us? Are we judged already in this life? Are we judged when we die and again at Judgment Day?

Discipline that God places upon a Christian in this life may be called a "judgment" (1 Corinthians 11:29-32). The purpose of such discipline, however, is to correct us, not to punish us. Some of the Corinthians experienced judgment because of their misuse of the Lord's Supper.

As soon as people die, they go directly to heaven or hell.

An unbeliever who has hardened his heart or committed the sin against the Holy Spirit may be finally rejected by God already while he is still alive (1 John 5:16). This appears to have been the case with Saul (1 Samuel 16:1, 28:6) and Judas (John 13:27).

As soon as people die, they go directly to heaven or hell (Luke 6:22,23; 1 Peter 3:19,20; Luke 23:43). God, who knows all, does not need an investigation to determine where they belong. The Bible speaks of no formal appearance before God at the time of our death.

We will, however, appear before God's public judgment when we rise from the grave on the last day (Matthew 25:31-46). The purpose is not for God to determine who belongs in heaven or hell, but to demonstrate the justice of the judgment that God already made.

Assuming that Adam and Eve's bodies were the same as ours physically, were their bodies intended for all eternity?

If they would not have sinned, Adam and Eve would never have died. Before the fall, their bodies were not suffering the effects of sin that our bodies experience now. After they sinned, their bodies began to suffer the effects of sin even before they died. We do not know how their powers before the fall were greater than our present powers of body and mind, though we assume there were differences. We do not know how the bodies that they had before the fall differed from our resurrection bodies. That is all we can say with any degree of confidence.

Some have suggested that if Adam and Eve had resisted the temptation to sin, their bodies would have experienced a glorification similar to that which we will experience in the resurrection. Others have discussed the role of the tree of life in preserving their bodies. All of this is speculation, since Scripture shows no interest in answering this question because it has no practical relevance to us now.

Do you have questions about other religions? Christian living? Relationships? The Bible? Prayer? The Church and its ministry?

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

I've heard people say that God rested on the seventh day because he was tired. I thought that the word "rested" (shaw-bath) could also mean to "cease." But Exodus 31:17 says that God rested and "was refreshed" (naw-fash). Did God actually grow weary from his "work?"

For an answer read Isaiah 40:28-31:

²⁸Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

²⁹He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

³⁰Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;


³¹but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

It is clear from this and other passages that God never grows physically or mentally tired. The verb *naphash* is generally regarded as a synonym of "rest." Notice that the NIV does not use the translation "refreshed" in Exodus 31:17, though it does use it in some other places. If translated "refreshed," the verb refers to God's enjoyment of his creation, which he saw was very good. Compare Genesis 1:31—2:3.

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

I am writing in response to a letter from Chuck Krueger (a seminary student) in the December issue. He asked some additional questions about why urban churches are dying. I would like to address one of them—"Are sermons relevant to the issues they are dealing with?" The question should really be, "Are they preaching the gospel in its truth and purity?" Remember that the gospel is always relevant. The problem comes when the gospel is seen as irrelevant to people's situations, and the pastor decides to replace it with something "better."

Brent Nemmers
 *Allen, Texas*

In regard to "The wolf is at the door" [Oct 1998].

In my experience there are three different reasons why pastors resign from the ministry (today often a result of stress): a) There is personal/moral/family failure; b) There is a doctrinal problem; c) There is trouble with congregation or synodical officials.

Sin is a part and the reason for all these situations. Since all these problems are in essence also problems of *Seelsorge* (the care of souls), it seems that a pastoral approach to these problems needs to be implemented in order to get, if possible, these former pastors/teachers back. If someone doesn't address this situation, then it will simply just continue. In the meantime, the people and the false teachers in the world, as well as our adversary the devil, smile with great *Schadenfreude*, a German word that means being happy when

things go badly for others.


The other solution to vacancies in congregations is training laymen (preferably teachers) to do reading services.

Horst W. Gutsche
Barrhead, Alberta, Canada

I would like to pass on a "thank you" to whoever is responsible for the free Bibles that are available through WELS. I work at a Health & Fitness Center in Conway, the heart of the Baptist Belt, and discovered this through an early morning conversation with a member who visits the local detention center on a regular basis. She talks to the female inmates (mostly teens) about the Bible (prison ministry).

She is very thankful for the cases of *God's Word*, a Bible written at eighth-grade level that she uses during her visits with the inmates. Some other person told her about them, and she has been receiving them regularly.

She is impressed with this WELS ministry!

Karl Lenser
 *Conway, Arkansas*

The Institutional Ministries Committee under the Commission on Special Ministries has distributed over 83,000 Bibles and over 205,000 Bible studies in the past five years. For more information, contact the Commission on Special Ministries, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; 414/256-3241; <jacki@sab.wels.net>.—ed.

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.

Through my Bible

in 3 years

April 1999

1. Numbers 33—35
2. Mark 1:1-15
3. Mark 1:16-34
4. Mark 1:35—2:12
5. Mark 2:13—3:6
6. Mark 3:7-19a
7. Mark 3:19b-35
8. Mark 4:1-20
9. Mark 4:21-34
10. Mark 4:35—5:20
11. Mark 5:21—6:6a
12. Mark 6:6b-30
13. Mark 6:31-56
14. Mark 7:1-23
15. Mark 7:24-37
16. Mark 8:1-26
17. Mark 8:27-38
18. Mark 9:1-29
19. Mark 9:30-50
20. Deuteronomy 1
21. Deuteronomy 2
22. Deuteronomy 3
23. Deuteronomy 4:1-40
24. Deuteronomy 4:41—5:33
25. Deuteronomy 6
26. Deuteronomy 7
27. Deuteronomy 8
28. Deuteronomy 9:1—10:11
29. Deuteronomy 10:12—11:32
30. Deuteronomy 12, 13

Have you been following the "Through my Bible in three years" with us since December 1995? If so, then belated congratulations. You completed reading the Bible. The occasion slipped by us, but an observant reader noticed that the passages started to look familiar. With good reason. Starting in our December 1998 issue (the January 1999 readings) our three-year cycle started again.



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

The Christian message calls for a heart full of compassion, love, mercy, kindness, gentleness.

Hard hearts and enslaved minds

“**R**eligion hardens the heart and enslaves the mind,” wrote Anne Nicol Gaylor, founder of the Freedom from Religion Foundation. It was her 1998 “Christmas message” to society. Sad to see, but no surprise.

But then a Milwaukee radio talk show host expressed surprise that many religious people called in to agree with her.

That gives us pause.

What do you think? Does religion harden the heart and enslave the mind? Does that describe you? Or other Christians?

Before you scoff, consider that Gaylor may see things we fail to see—or to admit—even if she, who hardens her heart against God, is hardly the one to lecture us.

So, let Jesus instruct us. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, who left the wounded man unattended? A priest and a levite—religious leaders of the day. They showed hard hearts. Similarly, legalists—insisting on the letter of the law and letters not in the law—display an unhappy hardness. Think of the Pharisees faulting Jesus for healing people on the Sabbath Day.

The Christian message calls for a “soft” heart—one full of compassion, love, mercy, kindness, gentleness—fruit of the Spirit.

What do we see when we see you in action? Do you, inadvertently or otherwise, give credence to Gaylor’s accusation?

Her malicious message has a haunting appeal. Hers is what God labels “hollow and deceptive philosophy” that “takes you captive” (Colossians 2:8). But, will she, who is a slave to the devil’s will (2 Timothy 2:26), accuse us of being enslaved? Gaylor wants us to be slaves, slaves to sin that leads to death.

Still, she tweaks our collective noses, and many say, “Thanks! We needed that.”

A kind of mental slavishness surfaces

in our lives. Call it a slavery to self. For the Christian it may take the form of needing always to be right. It goes beyond asking and being guided by what the Bible says. It insists on only one way of doing things. It is rigid. It reflects fear—fear to act because we may be vulnerable. It speaks of freedom but refuses to be free.

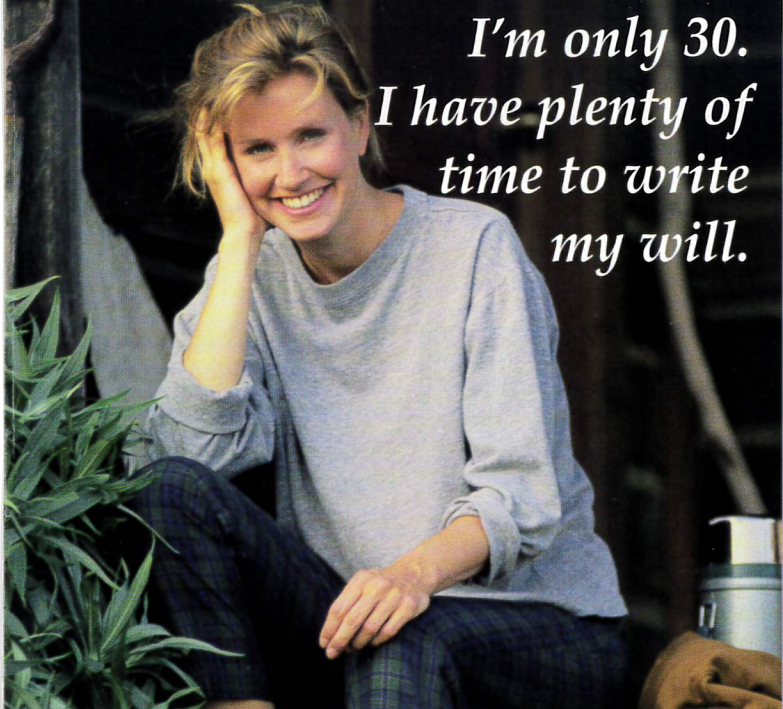
That kind of slavery is little different from Gaylor’s slavery to anti-religion. “You are slaves to the one whom you obey” (Romans 6:16). Whether that one is the devil or self doesn’t make any difference. It’s still the worst kind of slavery. When Christians succumb to this sin, it, too, makes Gaylor’s accusation believable.

But little does Gaylor realize the rest of the story. Yes, we are slaves—and proud to say so. In Christ we have been set free from sin and, therefore, free from death and hell. In Christ we live free from the condemnation of God’s law. Free indeed! Breathe deeply the fresh air of freedom.

Yes, that last paragraph sounds contradictory. I introduced slavery and then spoke only of freedom. No! It’s not double-talk, it’s God-talk. When we are set free from sin, we become slaves to righteousness. “Now that you have been set free from sin and become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life” (Romans 6:22).

Let Gaylor’s words remind us that sin in all its slavishness still casts long shadows in our lives. But remember that Jesus never abandons us. Agree with Gaylor that Christians are indeed slaves. In gaining freedom from the slavery of sin, we enter into slavery with Christ. But contrary to her message, Christ’s slavery is a good thing. It leads to eternal life.

Gary P. Baumler

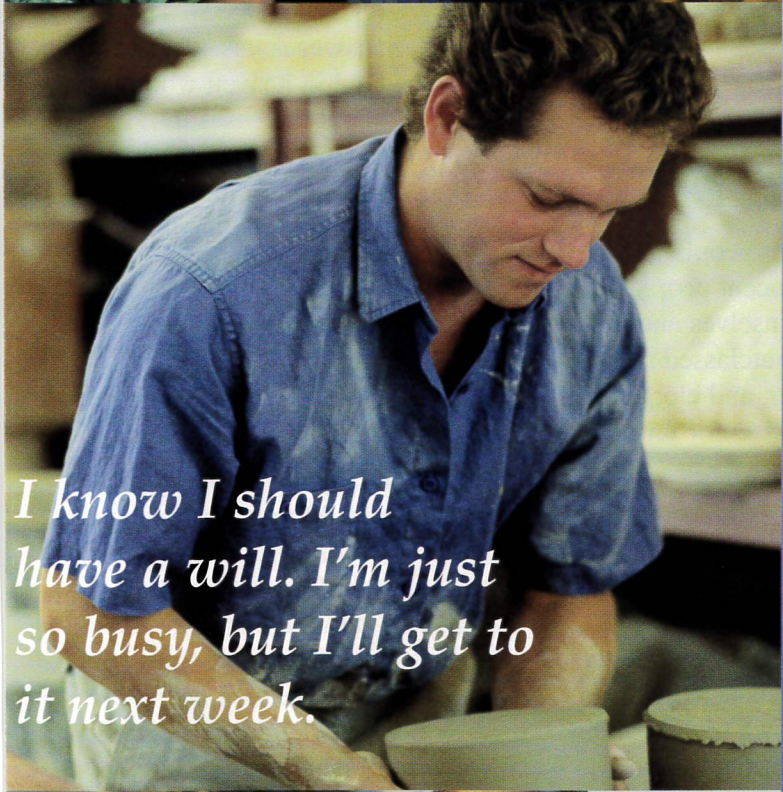


*I'm only 30.
I have plenty of
time to write
my will.*

The Importance of Your Will

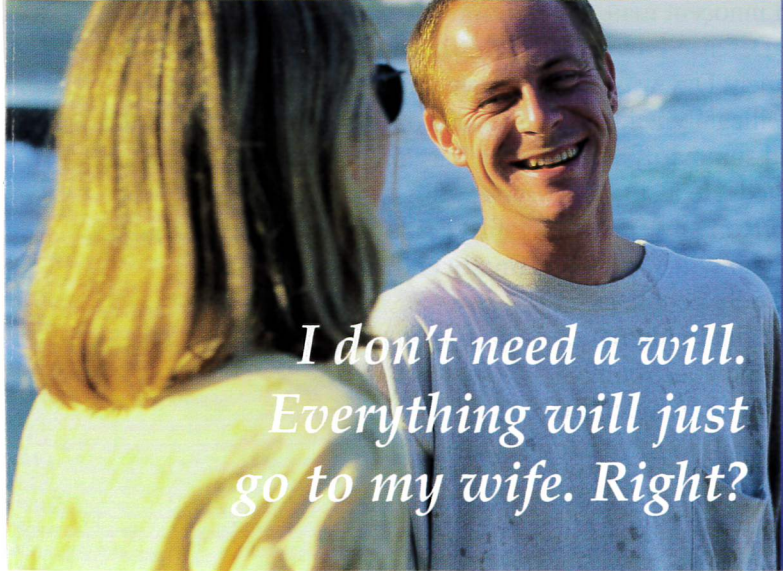
Some things just can't wait!

*By carefully planning
today, you will save your
loved ones unnecessary
anxiety and you'll have
the satisfaction of
knowing your desires
will be carried out.*

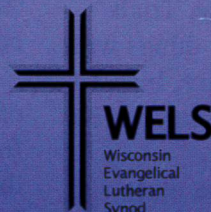


*I know I should
have a will. I'm just
so busy, but I'll get to
it next week.*

Please write or call for
assistance from a WELS
gift planning counselor —
another person just like you —
a fellow Christian.



*I don't need a will.
Everything will just
go to my wife. Right?*



Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Ministry of Planned Giving

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800-827-5482 or 414-256-3881

JUSTICE FINALLY WINS

Although the devil has his day in court, true justice will finally win out.

Eric S. Hartzell

Sometimes Perry Mason takes two hours to solve a case. Most of the time he can do it in one. Ben Matlock can do the same—and in color! In fact, if you take out the commercial time, both lawyers regularly bring cases to successful and happy endings in considerably under an hour.

If you anticipate this speedy finesse in a court case you are interested in, chances are you will be painfully disappointed. Justice may not always be served. Mason and Matlock are fiction. It's different in the real world. You even have to wonder if a fair trial is possible.

Perverted justice abounds

Moses warned God's people, "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly" (Leviticus 19:15).

Jurisprudence probably hasn't become more honorable since the days of Moses. Perverted justice is a possibility with which our world has to reckon. In fact, in some criminal cases, about one half of what is said is not true or is said to support something that is not true. Trials are, by and large, messy things with their own mix of prejudice, bias, filters, ignorance, deceit. Someone has to be championing a lie.

Often, what throws the most weight is not the innocence or guilt. It is the presentation that matters.



That's why innocent people need lawyers. Some innocent people have tried to defend themselves and lost because someone outclassed them in appearance, manner, and eloquence. Sometimes what exists for fairness is itself not fair.

Jesus wins that day for all of his people.

The Bible talks about botched up court cases. The most shameful example was the Lord's own trial. Nothing was right that day. Justice pounded its gavel and sent an innocent man to death. The future Defense Lawyer in God's great Judgment Day was wrongfully arrested, illegally held, shamefully tried, and summarily convicted and executed. He lost.

It was the Jewish/Roman version of a lynching. He, who will successfully represent all God's people as they step before that final judgment, lost his own case in the courtroom of this world. He didn't say much in

that case. Pilate, his judge, marveled at his few words. But there wasn't any use, was there? The court system was corrupt.

Perfect justice wins

Abraham prayed, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25). The answer is yes. There is a God in heaven who cares about the cases in today's courts. "Do not be afraid of any man, for judgment belongs to

God," he still says. He still claims the authority behind the black robe. Although the devil has his day in court—with his spate of perverse perjury—true justice will finally win out.

Judgment Day is coming. Books will be opened. Meticulous and complete records will be searched. No mistakes will be made. No untruth will stand. No diatribes. No slick eloquence. No matter how many rulings before then are skewered by lies and sleight of tongue.

We will all have our day in God's court.

Jesus wins that day for all of his people. He does it solely by the rhetoric of his perfect life. It is the plea bargain of greatest proportion: your guilt for his goodness. "Not guilty!" his Father says. And justice finally and forever wins.

NL

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