

NORTHWESTERN

July 1999

LUTHERAN

THE WORD FROM THE WELS



150 YEARS

1850-2000

For the next two years, WELS will celebrate our 150th anniversary using the theme "Forward in Christ." *Northwestern Lutheran* wants to be part of the celebration too. Starting this month, we're adding the name *Forward* to our cover. While the magazine may look different on the outside, rest assured, it's the same magazine on the inside.

**Check the
new look
inside!**

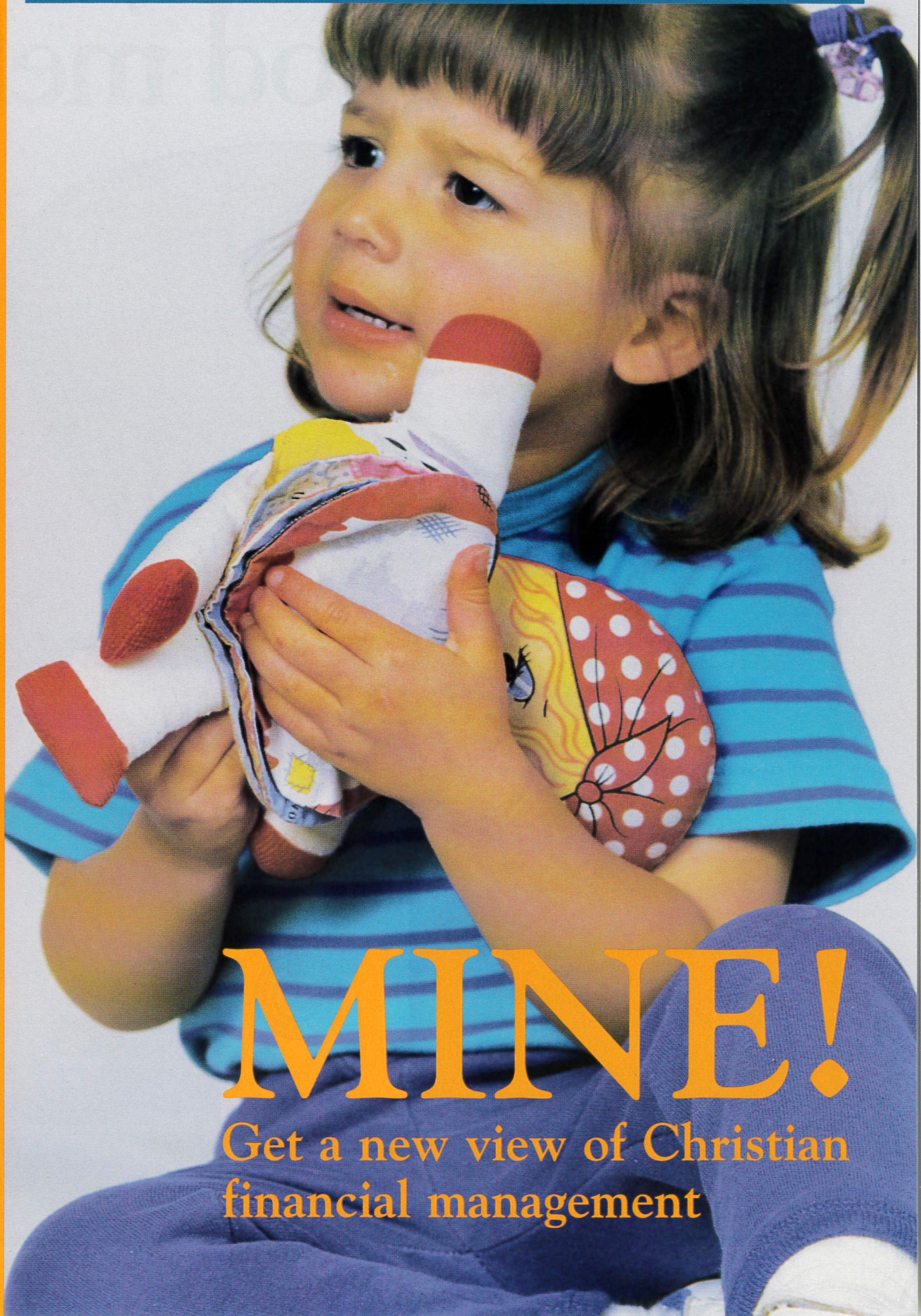
FORWARD

Northwestern Lutheran • The Word from the WELS

Shintoism
and Japanese
culture

What's the
CELIC?

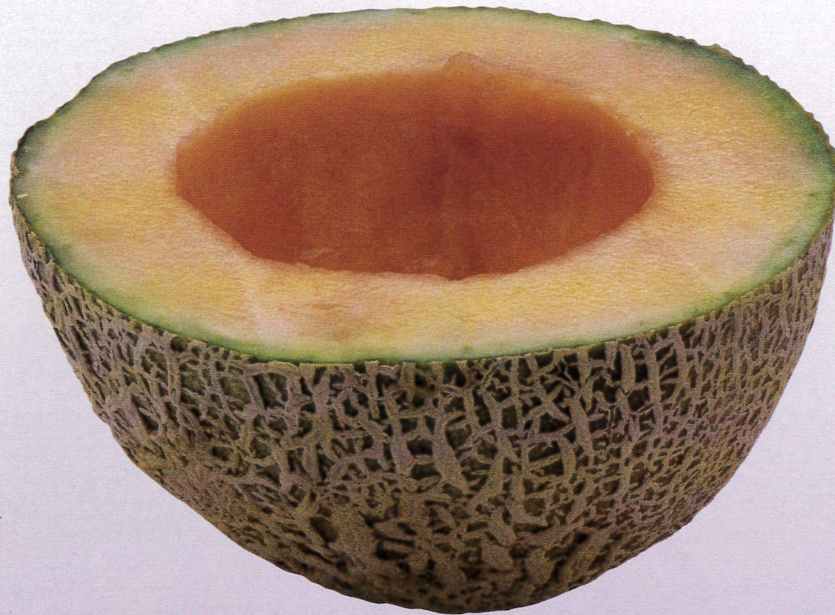
"Forward"
in Christ



MINE!

Get a new view of Christian
financial management

How do you spot a good melon?



Some people think they're able to smell a good melon, while others discern by color. The tactile shopper claims to know one by feeling it, and the "thumper" detects goodness by sound. But none of us can really tell a good melon until we've tasted it.

As is true of melons, what looks good on the outside of a church may not be good on the inside. Throughout the history of the Christian church, its confessions and creeds have been its "taste" because these writings define beliefs.

The delegates at the 1955 Wisconsin Synod Convention were compelled by deteriorating inter-church relations to pass a resolution that called for drafting a "single, concise confession of our doctrine and practice . . . pertinent to present-day controversies." The response was the booklet *This We Believe*, first published in 1967.

The Commission on Inter-Church Relations has just completed a revision of the text, simplifying its language and adding points of doctrine not included previously. Northwestern Publishing House increased the booklet's size, making it more reader-friendly.

This We Believe



This We Believe, a public summary of the main teachings of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, is now available for \$1.50 (\$1.25 for orders of ten or more copies).

Order online at www.wels.net/nph, or call 1-800-662-6022 (Milwaukee area 414-475-6600), 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. weekdays. Discover, MasterCard, and Visa accepted. All orders are subject to shipping and handling costs and sales tax where applicable.

This We Believe, LU15N0627

Firstfruits, not leftovers

“Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.” Proverbs 3:9,10

Paul M. Janke

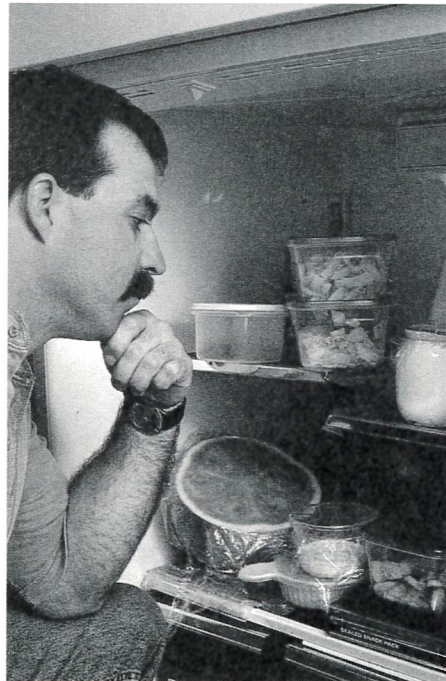
Do you like to eat leftovers? Some people claim that the leftovers from Thanksgiving are a bigger treat than the festival meal itself. Others will happily polish off a slice of cold leftover pizza for breakfast. And there’s that rare individual who actually relishes the Tupperware™ buffet that’s served whenever it’s time to clean out the refrigerator.

Most of us, though, would have a hard time hiding our dismay if the host of a dinner announced that the menu consisted of leftovers. The remnants of some earlier meal aren’t what we typically serve to guests—at least not if we value those guests.

Giving God leftovers

What’s true with our guests is true with our God. We make a statement when we present God with our leftovers. Giving the LORD less than our best says, “Something else holds the real place of honor in my life.” Yet it happens, even among Christians. Maybe that’s because we don’t have to sit across from God at dinner after we’ve offered him something that was obviously third-rate.

You’ve seen the little plastic receptacles at checkout stands. Many charities use them for fundraising. All they want is our leftovers. Rather than putting your change into your pocket, drop it into the slot and help them find a cure. Or leave a bag of old clothes on the



front step and they’ll pick it up. Used furniture and used up cars are fine, too. Just the leftovers, that’s all they ask.

The Bible’s message is different. Moses instructed the Israelites to give the LORD their firstfruits, the earliest and best of their produce. In Proverbs, King Solomon holds out the promise of the LORD’s blessing on those who offer him their firstfruits. It’s not that the LORD had a taste for Israel’s finest grain or wine or olive oil. There’s nothing we have that God needs. But an offering is an act of worship. An offering of firstfruits says to God, “I reserve for you my highest honor.”

God gave no leftovers

Giving the very best originated with God. When he created Adam and Eve, he gave them Paradise for a home. By the Lord’s own assessment, the world he had made was “very good.” Incomparable beauty and unperturbed harmony were the rule.

Then came the sin and ruin of the Fall. It might have been understandable if God had given us something less than his best. After all, how can stubborn rebels expect to continue reaping God’s generosity?

But God’s grace was not deterred. In love God gave his one and only Son. The Father loved his only Son dearly. Yet he gave Jesus to be lifted up on the cross. He gave him up to death and the grave, but in so doing he ransomed us. A second-rate offering would not have sufficed. Only God’s best would do. That was Jesus.

When we plan our offerings in keeping with our income, when we use our gifts without complaint, or spend our time serving God and his people, we are honoring the God who didn’t give us leftovers, but gave us his very best.

Paul Janke is pastor at St. Peter, Modesto, California.



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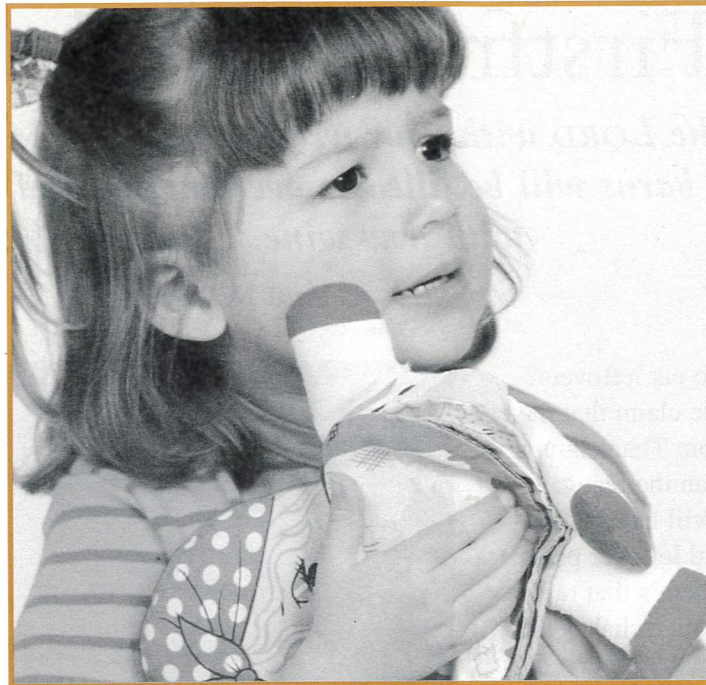
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Ever feel like
a child who
doesn't want
to share toys?
Gain a new
perspective
of your
possessions.

8

bits & pieces



Did you notice the new look on our cover this month? In addition to the redesign, we put an additional name on our masthead. As part of the 150th anniversary celebration, we're adding *Forward*. To read more about why we made this change, turn to Editor Gary Baumler's comments on page 34.



On July 26-30 our synod convention will be held. Our October issue, which will replace the *WELS Herald*, will carry the convention's news and photos. Be sure to look for it.



For readers who can't visit our world missions in person, personal stories are the next best thing. Since you can't pack your bags to go, we've packed this issue with news and insights from and about Christians all around the world.

Here's your itinerary . . .

- ✓ Japan: "Shinto—the way of the gods" (p. 10)
- ✓ Finland: "Firm faith in Finland" (p. 14)
- ✓ CELC: "One Spirit, one spirit" (p. 18)
- ✓ Mexico: Real time with a missionary (p. 23)
- ✓ Cameroon: "Seminary graduation—in Africa" (p. 24)
- ✓ Sweden: "First WELS missionary in Scandinavia commissioned" (p. 25)
- ✓ Russia: "Russia update" (p. 27)



Two series end this month. Thanks to the six authors who wrote about stewardship. Thanks also to Paul Kelm who applied the lessons from Nehemiah to today's spiritual leaders.

—LRB

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Re: "How to raise godly daughters" [Apr.] I take exception with the statement: "These self-help books contain chapters on makeup and house-cleaning as if these superficialities constitute commitment to Christ."

I believe these details do exemplify my response to Christ's love for me.

My goal as a Christian woman, wife, and mother is to make my life a living testimony of the faith that resides in me because he chose me.

In order to do that, everything I do must reflect my Christianity. This includes making myself look as good as I can, dressing to glorify him, and making my home the best it can be. These acts I do as a homemaker are a form of prayer, praise, and worship and are not superficial in any way. They truly constitute my commitment to Christ. They exemplify my desire to make every moment a response to his love and grace.

It is my duty to teach my daughters how to dress, wear makeup, and clean house to the glory of God. I thank Christian writers for sharing their wisdom on how to better do these things.

*Jill S. Fury
Houston, Texas*

Re: Lutheran worship? [May]

In our rush to incorporate new technologies in service of the gospel, let's remember beauty and artistry when we think of ways to enhance public worship. Worship, which centers on Word and sacrament, desires this. God chose words, water, wine, and wheat to communicate his love in a way that changes us spiritually while touching us emotionally. There is something mysterious about all this—that an infinite God would come to us in finite forms. Therefore Lutheran worship is not perfectly practical and always relevant.

*Al Hains
Marina del Rey, California*

Overhead projectors with power point appeal to the intellect and therefore are appropriate for the classroom. Music and artwork, on the other hand, inspire the beautiful and mysterious images of God's plan of salvation without saying one complex sentence. They appeal not only to the head but also the heart, and seem well suited for Lutheran worship.

*James Schulz
Jackson, Wisconsin*

Praise God for John Parlow! We need more pastors and members to ask why do we do what we do. **All four of his articles were excellent**—particularly the "tough" questions raised in part four.

Many churches today are plagued with complacency and spiritual pride. Have you gotten caught up with a denomination and the way it does things, or do you search the Scriptures and God's heart for his ways of communicating the gospel? Good news is not good news at all if it's not being communicated.

It's a tragedy when the church gets comfortable believing that what they're doing is so right but the world Jesus died for isn't getting God's message of love and hope! God is reaching people. Is it through you?

*Charles D. Krueger
Virginia Beach, Virginia*

I am only halfway through reading this terrific issue [May] but have to write and express my appreciation for such inspiring articles as "Sharing the white man's religion," "Don't let your sons grow up to be cowboys," and the one that brought tears of joy to my eyes, "Something's fishy here." Wow! Thank you NL staff for bringing us such inspiring and educational Christ based stories and information—each issue just gets better and better.

Thanks to St. Mark, Watertown, Wis., and Trinity, Brillion, Wis., for the taped services provided over the past four years. With the coordination of the WELS Taped Services Committee, overseas assignments are made much easier for many military members and families. Missionaries try their best to reach out and touch as many of God's children as possible. For those of us who know the Lord and the riches he provides, it is rekindled by the taping of services at churches like St. Mark and Trinity. Many thanks to Pastors Henzi, Scheibe, Werner, and their congregations for making me a member of your church while I was stationed in Okinawa, Japan, and Seoul, Korea. Kudos to the Taped Services Committee. God's warmest blessing to you all.

*Scott Welch
Woodbridge, Virginia*

Re: Tradition! Tradition? [Mar.]

Pastor Parlow seemed to suggest that using men as ushers is a tradition that has no basis today other than, "It's our tradition." Was it a good tradition for a gentleman to hold the door for a woman, to offer her his place if no other seat was available, to allow a lady to go first when getting on or off an elevator? Society is forgetting many such traditions. Yet these traditions reflect Biblical principles. Men are to treat women with respect. Men are to serve women.

By only using men as ushers, a church is demonstrating these principles. And when people ask, "How come girls never get to usher?", the church has an opportunity to explain what God's Word says about the role of men and women.

*Dale Raether
West Melbourne, Florida*

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

Why should we be good?

Joel C. Gerlach

“Why should we be good?” was the question posed to 10 representatives of various faiths in the Phoenix area: a Sikh minister, a Muslim editor, a Jewish rabbi, a Buddhist temple leader, a spokeswoman for the Baha’i faith, and five Christians—a Roman Catholic priest, an Episcopal Cathedral dean, a Methodist, a Baptist, and a director of the Arizona Ecumenical Council.

All 10 answered essentially the same. Tragically, none of the Christians gave the biblical answer. The Roman Catholic priest said, “Challenged to think about what that means, I turn to Jesus Christ. If I can successfully follow his way of holiness, take his yoke upon my shoulders and learn from him, my life will be in harmony with God. . . . This fills me with hope that God’s plan for me will be realized.”

The Episcopalian dean wrote, “From the very beginning, goodness was the hallmark of creation. We human beings are good. We were created for goodness. Why be good? Because we are good.”

The Methodist answered, “Goodness is an inherent part of our nature and essential to our relationship with God. . . . Those of us who follow the teachings of Christ believe we have been given the model of goodness—the example of how to live our lives in perfect relationship with God and with each other, and, therefore, to achieve victory over chaos. . . . Why be good? Because that is what we were created to be.”

The Baptist was equally disappointing. He wrote, “Both our identity and purpose have been good from the beginning. So when we are good, we are fulfilling our divinely created potential. . . . You can’t have good without God. Why be good? It’s the godly thing to do.”

“My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray,” the Lord lamented in Jeremiah’s day (50:6). He still has reason to lament.

WELS pastors sometimes hear lifelong Lutherans give similar answers to this question. In catechism class, I asked my students, “Why will a Christian want to try to keep the Ten Commandments?” One student who attended our day school for seven years wrote, “So I can get to heaven when I die.”

He didn’t learn that from me nor from any of our teachers. So I arranged a meeting with his parents. I showed them their son’s paper and expressed concern. His mother, a Lutheran high school graduate, responded, “What’s wrong with his answer?”

I trust that you know what is wrong with that answer. But you can be sure that some of your acquaintances who regard themselves as good Christians do not know what’s wrong with that answer or with the answers of the religious leaders above.

Are you ready tactfully and evangelically to give the right answer when you hear someone who’s got it wrong?

Say it as simply as you can. Jesus lived a perfect life to make me holy and perfect in the eyes of God. He died to wash away all my sin—yours too. Now I want to be in word and deed what he has made me to be by grace. Striving to live up to his expectations of me is my way of saying, “Thanks, Jesus, for making me good.”

Why should we be good? Because that’s what we are, not by nature or by sincere effort, but by grace alone through faith alone. That’s the biblical answer.

Joel Gerlach, a retired pastor, is serving as a mission explorer on Kodiak Island, Alaska.

Striving to
live up to his
expectations
of me is my
way of saying,
“Thanks,
Jesus, for
making me
good.”

“Mine” games

Paul S. Soukup

How you can have a radically Christian view of “things.”

Not too long ago I was visiting a faithful Christian couple. We were at the table in the dining room. Behind me the children were playing in the family room. The tempo of the children’s play was heating up a bit when it suddenly became very obvious that both children wanted the same toy at exactly the same time. The younger child, under the age of 18 months, suddenly turned up the decibels and at the top of his lungs screamed, “M-I-I-I-I-I-N-E!”

The “mine” complex

Isn’t it amazing that at such a young age, this child could give such an honest portrayal of our sinful nature? Demanding, greedy, cruel, and selfish. Picture that defensive stance. Fists clenched, arms bowed out in front of him . . . “This is mine, and you can’t have it.”

The adult Christian isn’t nearly as dramatic. In a very sophisticated way, we can say, “I worked hard for everything I have.” “It is time I start thinking about myself.” “I don’t know how much I’m going to need.” I even had one elderly gentleman tell

me, “I think I’m just going to take all I have with me when I die.” Do you hear the little child in all those statements saying, “M-I-N-E!”? Human nature drives us to get things, to place our priority on things, and to do things for self-indulgence.

God’s ownership

Now let us contrast this with the truth of Holy Scripture. The Lord says, “I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it” (Psalm 50:9-12).

God owns it all. There is the first radical truth we need to take to heart. God alone dispenses it where and when he pleases. He makes some rich and allows others to get along with bare subsistence living. If any of this makes you feel uncomfortable, that’s good because it suggests that God’s law is at work in you. It is the truth of God’s law that first must humble our proud, selfish spirit.

Then the truth of the gospel, which we hear so often, can fill our hearts. Through hearing, his grace floods in and thoroughly changes our perspective on the things of life.

Management with a full view of the cross

Christian management of possessions starts by viewing the cross and all the blessings Christ has won for us there—our complete salvation, forgiveness, peace, joy, love, and ultimately eternal life in heaven. Christ has done it all for us. He gives us all these blessings by his grace.

Christian stewardship is my individual response to these truths. It is not just meeting the budget at church, or raising a few extra bucks to replace the roof, or a few more dollars to build a new church. That may be quite radical for some of us.

If life is a stage, then Christian stewardship is managing my whole life with the cross of Jesus Christ as the backdrop. It is the realization that all I am and all I have comes from God. The earthly possessions God has loaned to me are to be held loosely and managed well. Not with



Radical truths about Christian financial management

- God owns it all.
- Christian stewardship is my response to the blessings Christ won for me.
- By designating a percentage of income, Christian giving can become a joy.
- I want to do the very best I can for my Lord who gave his all for me.

a defensive posture, but offensively, looking for opportunities to use these gifts in the best possible way to his glory.

I want to be a shrewd manager of the part that I need for myself. It isn't good to live way above my means and then pay huge amounts of interest on my credit card. I need to resist the messages trumpeted in my ear by radio and television, "Buy now! Pay later!" They don't tell you it is going to cost twice as much and probably be worn out before it is paid for.

How much I need to live

With good management I find that I can easily live on 90 percent of my income, perhaps even 85 percent. (The average among WELS members right now is between 97-98 percent of their income.) Some can't live on 110 percent and are mortgaging their future with only the prospect of living in bondage for many years to come (Proverbs 22:7). Some miserly hold on to 99 percent and miss out on the wonderful promises of God (2 Corinthians 9:6). I found it rather interesting that a *Good*

Housekeeping article (Nov. 97), in speaking about saving, said, "Anyone can put money aside, at any level of income. You just have to do it. . . . Most people can save up to 10 percent of their incomes and hardly notice." I say most Christians can give 10 percent of their income and be much more blessed for it. That's quite radical, isn't it?

Commitment with joy

Now my Christian giving becomes a real joy. Christ and his love always remain in full view.

I have committed a generous portion to my local church. That's where my soul gets fed regularly on God's Word and his precious sacraments. I want that to continue and be there also for an increasing number of people.

Yes, I said "committed" because I found that when I commit myself to a plan, I run better, like a train on a track. A study showed that people who make percentage commitments give three times more than those who don't. I can understand that because I have felt Satan threatening me every time I consider a

gift for the Lord's work. By making an annual commitment, I minimize that battle with Satan to once a year. Next year I'll take up the battle again, and by God's grace and power I'll increase my giving level again. That works best for me, and another radical aspect of Christian stewardship is that I want to do the very best I can for my Lord who gave his all for me.

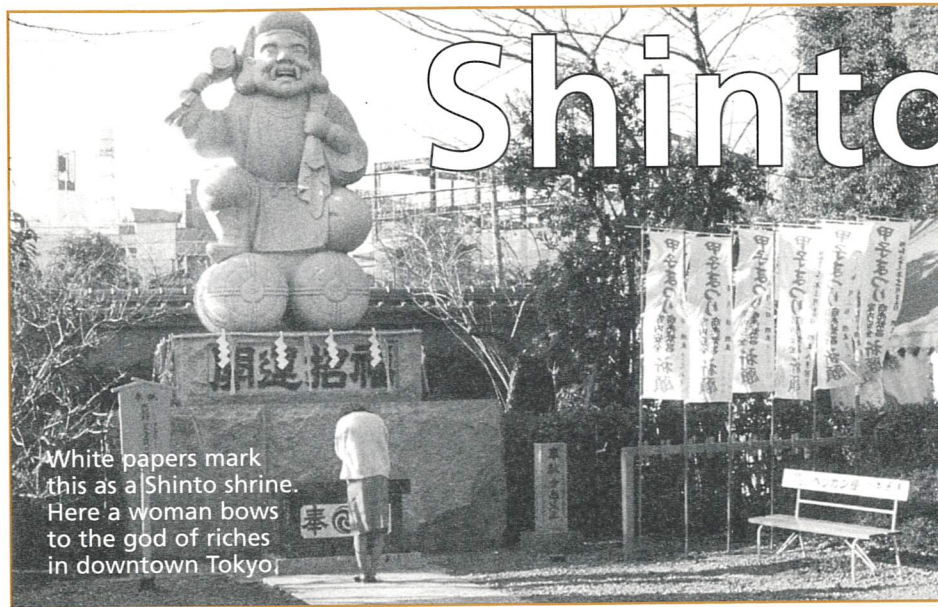
So far we have only been talking about wisely managing our current income. Another radical thought is that I can give gifts from my accumulated income. Maybe I want to do some of that now for special needs. Or perhaps I want to consider leaving a legacy of love in my estate plan, both for my family and above all for the Lord's work.

Isn't that a radically wonderful idea?



Paul Soukup is a gift planning counselor for the Pacific Northwest and Western Wisconsin Districts.

For more information about Christian giving, contact the Ministry of Planned Giving, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; 1-800-827-5482; <<http://www.wels.net/sab/frm-ccfs.html>>.



White papers mark this as a Shinto shrine. Here a woman bows to the god of riches in downtown Tokyo.

Shinto — the way of the gods

What missionaries face as they bring the gospel to Japan.

Kermit D. Habben

On a hot summer day at the city swimming pool, the old man swam over. “What are you doing in Japan?” he asked.

“We are here as Christian missionaries.”

With gusto and pride he confessed, “You people believe in only one God, don’t you? Well, I believe there are thousands of gods, and I worship them all. Don’t you think that is better than worshiping just one god?” With that he swam away.

The old man didn’t use the word, but he was telling us that he was a believer of Shinto.

Many gods

Shinto is the so-called “native religion” of Japan, as opposed to Buddhism, Confucianism, or Christianity, which entered Japan from foreign countries. The old man was right. Shinto, which means “the way of the gods,” claims an uncountable number of gods. It has no written scriptures or set doctrine.

Years ago a 70-year-old grandma was dumbfounded when I told her that there is only one God who created and sustains all things.” You

mean that if I become a Christian, I don’t need to worship the sun any more? Every morning I get up at 4:30 AM. When the sun comes up, I go outside, turn to the east, and worship the sun. Then I go into the house and offer newly cooked rice and tea on the Buddhist altar. You know the sun gives warmth for our bodies and the earth. I just thought I should give thanks to the sun.”

Grandma Kimura did what she had seen her mother and grandmother do for years. She worshiped the sun and any other Shinto gods that might influence her life, besides worshiping her dead ancestors at the Buddhist altar. Anything that influences your life might qualify as something you “need to worship or revere.”

By worship we mean revere by, for example, tossing a coin into the offering box, clapping two times and standing in a pose of reverence before an object of worship, placing an offering of fruit and drinks on an altar, bushwhacking through the mountains to visit a sacred peak or waterfall, walking over smoldering coals, or making pilgrimages to designated sacred areas and shrines.

Simply put, Shinto is the worship of the forces of nature or anything else that seems to have supernatural power or might influence a person’s well-being. The sun, moon, and stars, certain mountains or trees, or even odd shaped rocks may be objects of worship and said to harbor a spirit that needs to be revered to insure good luck or to avoid something bad in your life. Animals like the fox, the horse, and snakes, especially a white snake, are revered.

Great men who have died may also be worshiped as gods. The first three days of every New Year, over three million people visit Meiji Shrine in Tokyo, dedicated to Emperor Meiji (1868-1914). One of the most famous shrines, Nikko Shrine in the mountains north of Tokyo, is dedicated to the Shogun Ieyasu, who was one of the first rulers to persecute Christians in earnest.

Many sects

Shinto is not monolithic, but is splintered into countless sects. Thousands of shrines, big and small, have adherents who have their own beliefs, good luck charms, and

superstitions. It's like the people of Judges when "each one did what was right in his own eyes." Certain shrines and festivals are similar to the Canaanite religions with their fertility cults and objects.

One woman in my Bible class told me about a Japanese scholar who is researching Shinto and believes that there is a connection to Old Testament Judaism. In the Shinto shrine, there is no image or idol. The gate or doorway is supposed to be in the shape of a five-pointed star or Star of David, and even the highest god of Shinto, the Sun goddess, is said to have worshiped a higher god. In other words, that scholar feels that Shinto started out as monotheism. That's a new idea for me, although there are books about the closeness of Japanese thinking and Jewish ideas. There is even a shrine in northern Japan that is supposed to be the grave of Jesus, who is said to have escaped crucifixion and then came to Japan. However, many old symbolic writings or markings in Japan are claimed to be Canaanite religious symbols. This I can believe.

During World War II, the Japanese military government created "State Shinto" as a tool to further its neo-patriotic and militaristic purposes. Then, not only Christians but also Buddhist and even non-government Shinto called "Shrine Shinto" were persecuted. After World War II, religion and state were separated under Japan's constitution.

Many beliefs

Shinto beliefs, along with Buddhist beliefs and Confucian teaching, are so intertwined with Japanese culture that it is hard to determine where one starts and the other ends. One woman said, "You

can't expect us to throw overboard what we Japanese have believed and done for hundreds of years."

When I came to Japan over 30 years ago, a good neighbor whose husband was a German professor told me: "If you don't allow us Japanese to keep our old beliefs and practices, you are never going to get in any place in Japan. If you allow us to keep our religious customs and believe in Jesus too, you are going to have success." In her home she had a Buddhist altar, a Shinto god shelf, and a cross on the wall.

In fact, tolerance is a point of pride. The Japanese find no contradiction in practicing the two or even all three. There are 80 million Buddhist believers and 70 million Shinto believers, but only 123 million Japanese. Many, while not staunch believers, claim to practice these religions mostly as customs when society and family dictates. Most Japanese are married in a Shinto or Christian ceremony but buried in a Buddhist ceremony.

One good aspect: the Japanese usually do not object to the existence of a god of some kind. Thus, Genesis

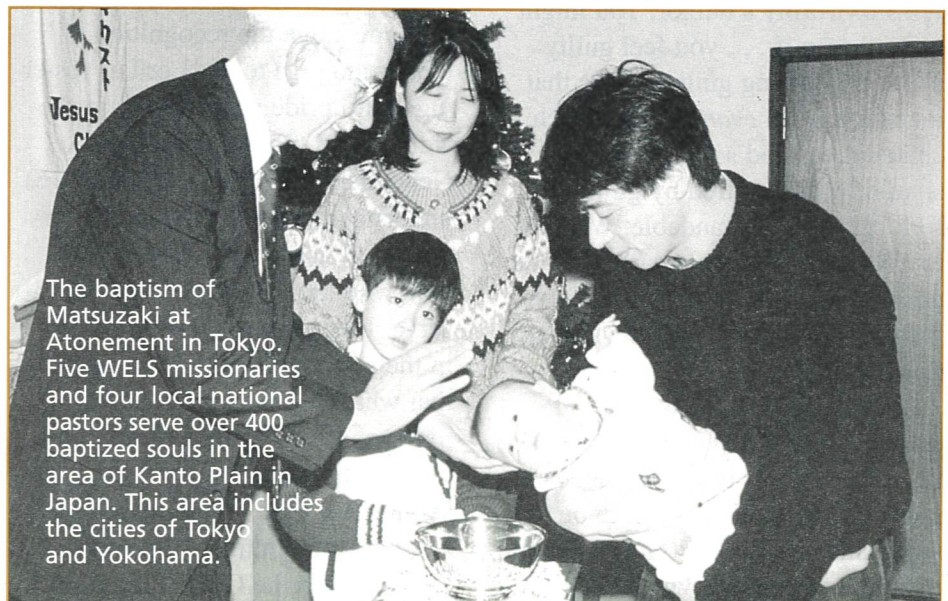
is often a good place to start. A man who was dead set against Christianity and had vowed never to set foot inside a church, upon studying Genesis with me, suddenly said, "Now all this (the world, where it came from, and its purpose) makes sense to me." To his wife's great joy, he and the children were baptized.

The Lord has given you and me a challenge of faith, no, perhaps a testing of the resolve of our faith, by leading us to this land where less than one percent of the people knows about Jesus as their Savior. Here there is no governmental hindrance, yet this land is so steeped in tradition, religious customs, and superstition that becoming a Christian seems to many to be the very betrayal of their own culture, and their heart and soul as Japanese.



Kermit D. Habben has been a WELS missionary in Japan for 32 years.

For more information on the Japan mission, see the WELS Web site at www.wels.net/sab/frm-wor.html



The baptism of Matsuzaki at Atonement in Tokyo. Five WELS missionaries and four local national pastors serve over 400 baptized souls in the area of Kanto Plain in Japan. This area includes the cities of Tokyo and Yokohama.

Celebrate

Spiritual leaders remember that “the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Paul E. Kelm

God's blessings

If there was a theme verse for the book of Nehemiah, it would have to be: “The joy of the Lord is your strength.” In chapter 8, Ezra read the Book of the Law to a huge assembly in Jerusalem, and the people began to weep as they understood the enormous gap between God’s will and their lives. Nehemiah responded: “This day is sacred to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep. Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (8:9,10).

Joy for God’s people

Maybe you’ve seen the parody of Jeff Foxworthy’s humor: You might be Lutheran if . . . you feel guilty about not feeling guilty. Ironic that members of an *evangelical* church centered on God’s forgiving grace should be caricatured by guilt. Ironic, but understandable. We tend to hear the law more clearly than the gospel. We seem to relate our faith better to the solemn and the serious than the joyful and celebratory.

Nehemiah reminds us that our spiritual strength does not come from the law. As important as the law’s condemnation of sin to our repentance is, the guilt that the commandments produce will rob us of

any strength or will to serve God if it is not answered by the gospel. The joy the Lord gives us in his Son our Savior, the joy we experience in contemplating all that our God is for us—that joy is the Christian’s strength. Spiritual leaders understand that.

Chapter 3 of Nehemiah reads like the acknowledgments in a dedication service folder, people and families appreciated for their work in rebuilding Jerusalem’s wall. You might wonder why God put all those impossible-to-pronounce names in your Bible, but he has an appreciation that we may lack for history and an appreciation for people. Nonsense, task-oriented types may even misjudge the recognition of those who give to the Lord as fostering sinful pride and catering to the well-heeled. Spiritual leaders like Nehemiah (and Paul in Romans 16) understand that celebrating the service of God’s people glorifies the God who moved those people to serve. It encourages those people in their service, with the realization that what they do for the Lord matters. And it models to new and young Christians the joy there is in serving our God. “The joy of the Lord is your strength.” Spiritual leaders celebrate God’s blessings.

Joy in celebration

When the walls of Jerusalem had been completed, Nehemiah scheduled a celebration. He had a flair for the dramatic. The people, the gates, and the wall were purified in a rite of rededication. Two mass choirs met atop the city walls after their processions through the city. A variety of musical instruments took the people back to the time of David. “And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy” (Nehemiah 12:43). Remember, “the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

We can have fun worshiping God, with creative flair and a sense of celebration.

Busy, turn-of-the-millennium Americans too often forget the importance of celebration, maybe especially in the church. We drive ourselves and the people we recruited. We meet and organize, work and critique. When the project is done, some leaders disappear to recuperate, while others are already at work on the next project. The people who’ve worked and prayed and given for the project never hear

a final report, never receive a note of appreciation. They don't have a chance to thank God together and share a sense of spiritual accomplishment.

The result is that, for both leaders and workers, a project of Christian ministry is reduced to "church work"—you know, like housework that is trivialized into menial and repetitive tasks that are never finished and seldom appreciated.

It doesn't have to be that way. We can provide meaningful closure to significant projects with Christian celebration. We can foster joy, not simply need, in the special projects of mission and ministry we undertake. We can have fun worshipping God, with creative flair and a sense of celebration. Spiritual leaders celebrate God's blessings.

Joy in Scripture-based tradition

Nehemiah tells us there was a grass-roots reintroduction of traditions long neglected, once people understood their significance from Scripture. In chapter 8 the people celebrate the Festival of Booths. "From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great" (Nehemiah 8:17). In chapter 13, with the celebration on the walls, came a restoration of the largely-lost musical heritage of David. "For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there had been directors for the singers and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God" (Nehemiah 12:46). Something else happened. The people increased their offerings to support the ministry they so enjoyed. Remember,

"the joy of the Lord is your strength."

It is said that some people are consciously ineffective (they know what they're doing doesn't work, but it's what they know to do); some people are unconsciously ineffective (they don't know why what they're doing isn't working); some people are unconsciously effective (they've stumbled onto what works); and some people are consciously effective (they're doing what works because they understand what works). Read Nehemiah and appreciate a spiritual leader who is consciously effective. It will help you to be one too.



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



Firm faith in Finland

A letter from Juhanni Viitala tells you what it means to be a confessional Lutheran in an unconfessional Lutheran country.

Juhanni Viitala

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

I am Juhanni Viitala, and I come from Finland. I studied at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary this past year. I admire the clearness and doctrinal unity of the teachings I have received. Your seminary is a miracle of God. Let me tell you how I came here.

I had studied theology at Helsinki University and was ordained in 1984 as a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. During my theological studies, I read a lot of Luther and also Walther's *Law and Gospel*. I also read Prof. Siegbert W. Becker's writings in Swedish and his translation of "*Foolishness of God*." These writings had a tremendous influence on me. I began to see that true confessional Lutheranism was completely founded on the clear teaching of the Bible.

Upon graduation I was called as a pastor to a congregation in western Finland. In that area was a small but strong pietistic group called the Prayers. In 1985 I was sent by them and another revival group within the state church as a missionary to Japan. I made mission work in Tokyo for six years.

In Japan there are six different Lutheran church bodies. My church body, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Japan, was the only one that had women pastors. It also accommodated ancestor worship. I had a hard time working in that

church because the missionaries were discouraged from teaching against Japanese traditions and customs even when they went against the Word of God. But while I was in Japan, I met WELS missionary Pastor Kermit Habben. He taught me in practice what it means to be a confessional Lutheran pastor in a gentile country like Japan. He was a wise and patient counselor for me.

After six years of service in Japan, I was called back to Finland to teach religion and Bible courses in a state church school. During that time, Professor John Brug from WELS and Pastor Jukka Söderström—a pastor of a tiny WELS sister church in Finland—contacted me. I invited Prof. Brug to give lectures at a summer conference. The ordinary laypeople loved to listen to Prof. Brug's masterful, biblical, simple but deep teachings, but the leaders of the evangelical movement in the state church did not.

They dismissed me from my teaching position for the following theological reasons: I believed in the inerrancy and inspiration of Scripture, I spoke for creation in six days and rejected evolution, and I promoted confessional Lutheranism. I was allowed to teach religion for seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-graders in a public school, where the emphasis is on world religions and all denominations are treated equally.

But again I was dismissed because of my confessional emphasis.

I began to serve a congregation in Lapland. It soon became obvious that there was no longer any hope of reformation from within the state church, and I accepted the invitation of the WELS Board for World Missions to come to the USA to study at the seminary for one year. We moved to Jackson, Wis., where the members of David's Star congregation welcomed us with open arms and made us feel at home in our strange new surroundings. My wife, Paivikki, has volunteered at the WELS family and counseling center in Milwaukee. My son, Pauli, is a sophomore and daughter, Annina, a freshman at Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School. My daughters, Heli Johanna and Katja, study at David's Star elementary school. We thank God for this great gift and possibility to our children to study in these Christian schools.

We have had a blessed rich year in the fellowship of WELS believers. When we return to Finland this year in June, we will—if God allows—start a free conference movement, a confessional information center, and a new confessional WELS sister church. I ask your prayers and support.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Juhanni Viitala



Pastor Juhanni Viitala and his wife, Paivikki, meet with WELS President Karl Gurgel on Call Day at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon.

Lutheranism in Finland

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is a state church. About 85 percent of Finns belong to it. Its pastors are trained at the University of Helsinki where the inspiration of Scripture is denied and the Bible is studied as just another human book. The Lutheran Confessions, especially the Formula of Concord, are treated as historically interesting but

not relevant for modern day Lutheran churches.

Within this state church today, there are five different revival groups who seek reform in some way or another:

- Laestadians (who are a very splintered group)
- Awakened
- Evangelicals
- Prayers
- Fifth Movement

In their early years, all of these groups criticized the state church for its dead faith, but nowadays the criticism has mainly ceased. Many people within these groups are still opposed to the practice of ordaining women and to the acceptance of the Joint Confession with the Catholic Church.

Mission Expansion

The Board for World Missions frequently receives requests from Christians around the world who want to have the gospel proclaimed to the people of their native land. The board's Committee for Mission Expansion evaluates these requests to determine whether mission explorations should be made.

At times national Christians like Juhanni Viitala are authorized to act as agents of the Committee for Mission Expansion to gather information for determining the mission potential of countries like Finland. This is why Juhanni and his family receive temporary support

through the world mission expansion/exploration fund.

For more information contact the Board for World Missions, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398.

ALIVE in Christ

God works through St. Mark's, Citrus Heights, Calif., to spread the message of eternal life in the neighborhood, school, and church.

Julie K. Tessmer

Even though St. Mark's, Citrus Heights, Calif., held its first services in 1965 in a mortuary, the people attending were alive—in body and soul.

You can still see that "life" in the church and its members—new and old—today. Being alive in Christ is the message the congregation still spreads.

"The most wonderful thing about serving here," said Jim Holman, minister of family and youth, "is that the people, regardless of age, see the Great Commission to go and tell as job #1."

Going

But now when members invite others to worship, they don't take them to the mortuary. St. Mark's, located across the street from a mall, is near one of the busiest intersections in the county.

"We have a wonderful location, and you can't overestimate that in terms of evangelism," said Ronald Waterstradt, pastor.

You also can't overestimate personal contact. A group from St. Mark's goes out every Saturday and canvasses the surrounding area.

Friendship evangelism is prevalent. "Our biggest advertising draw is our members," said Holman. "We have a lot of visitors every Sunday, and usually they come because someone from church invited them."

But reaching out to the

unchurched in California isn't easy.

"In the Midwest, when you knock at a door in a canvass, most people that come to the door instinctively believe that they need what the church represents, whether they are actually active in church or not," said Waterstradt. "But here that's not the case at all."

He continued: "People just don't think spiritually. Being a Christian is just one of many choices. They think, 'I've never been to church. I think people who go to church are very nice but I have no idea why I would ever go. I don't have anything against it—I just don't do it.'"

Telling

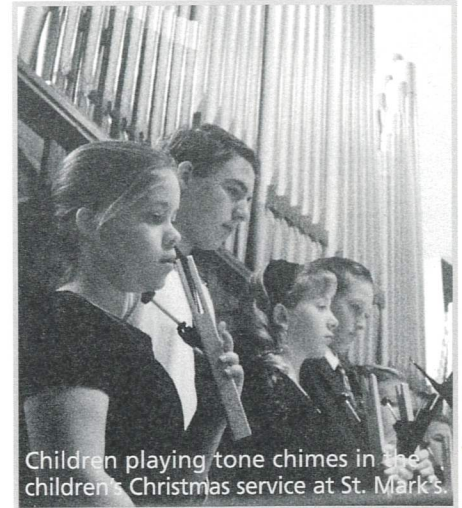
So how do you reach the people with such attitudes? You need to get into their lives.

"Our school certainly attracts people," said Waterstradt. "We have a good number of people coming to us with the most important things in their lives—their children. And we have an opportunity."

An opportunity to reach children—and adults with God's Word.

St. Mark's school, with 138 students, is about 60 percent nonmembers—30 percent unchurched, and 30 percent from different churches. Only three out of 14 kindergartners are members.

"Cindi Holman [kindergarten teacher] is pioneering with those kids," said James Brandt, principal.



Children playing tone chimes in the children's Christmas service at St. Mark's.

"We see them wide-eyed, listening to Bible stories for the first time."

The teachers aren't the only ones spreading the Word.

"I have a seventh-grader who's been at St. Mark's all her life," said Brandt. "She has friends in class who don't have that experience. We need the children who have that foundation. In Bible class, they can remember the stories and witness to their faith."

Having nonmembers in class also helps member children and teachers practice their faith in a special way.

"Questions are asked in Word of God that may not have been asked if there were only members in the class," said Brandt. "This pushes you as a teacher, challenges the children, and forces you to get into the Word."

Parents of nonmember students also get into the Word. St. Mark's requires them to attend four classes—a parent information class and the first three sessions of the Bible Information Class. After that they are invited to stay for the remaining classes. Some stay, some don't.

"We don't overwhelmingly succeed," said Waterstradt. "We don't gain everybody who comes."

Sometimes it just takes time.

The parents of first-grade twin boys didn't continue after attending the first four information classes. Several months later the mom came back and said, "I think I'm coming back to Bible information classes. My boys have something I don't have, and I want it." She was recently confirmed.

"That's our outreach," said Holman. "Sometimes it takes longer. It's the timing of the Holy Spirit."

But oh the joy when nonmember parents and students start to show that life in Christ.

"Sometimes I think I get a glimpse of heaven in their eyes as they start to understand God's Word," said Brandt.

Involving

The church location and the school help get people to church. But that isn't the hard part.

"The challenge is retaining people—getting them to make a commitment to church and stick to it," said Bill Tackmier, pastor. "We're just at the size where people can feel disconnected if we're not doing specific things to get them to interact with others."

The California culture heightens that challenge.

According to Waterstradt, many in California aren't in the habit of regular church attendance. For instance, he said, people needed to be reminded when Lent begins and when Holy Week services are.

So to involve the people, St. Mark's "looks for ways to bring the congregation together as a family," said Holman. A greeter program, mentoring, and plenty of Bible classes mix up long-time members and newcomers to St. Mark's.

"They [long-time members] have the spiritual maturity to see the importance of reaching out to young families today," said Holman. "They had it [God's Word] when they were younger, and they want to give it to other families today."

The church involves the children through youth programs for four different age groups. Each group meets twice a month for various activities, including Bible study, weekend outings, and laser tag. The programs are popular, with sometimes as many as 30 youth attending.

St. Mark's also teaches kids the importance of regular worship.

"We really work hard to put things going on in school together with what's going on in church so

that we educate kids and get them used to our worship. Then they can become worshipers throughout their life," said Tackmier.

St. Mark's sees this liturgical worship as a priority.

"We only have one-third of our people in some sort of Bible study," said Waterstradt. "But in worship you have the most people involved."

He continued, "What we do is classic Lutheran liturgy, and we try to do it well."

Through strong choirs, special music, hymn variations, accompaniments with varied instruments, and special services, St. Mark's works to bring Jesus to the people.

"Imaginative things are done that are still biblical approaches to worship," said Holman. "To me one of the most rewarding things about being here is that my worship life has been enriched beyond what I could ever imagine."

This enriching worship brings life—to the congregation and to their souls.



Julie Tessmer is the communications assistant for Forward/NL and WELS Communication Services.

St. Mark's

Founded: 1965

Communicants: 598

Souls: 800

Pastors: Bill Tackmier

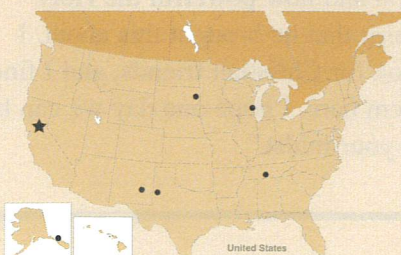
Ronald Waterstradt

Staff minister: Jim Holman

7869 Kingswood Dr,

Citrus Heights CA 95610-7622

<<http://www.stmarkslutheran.com>>



★ = featured congregation
• = congregations already featured



Children of St. Mark's school perform "Once Upon a Lilly Pad." St. Mark's school has 138 students, with about 60 percent nonmembers.

One Spirit, one spirit

Gary P. Baumler

**“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity”
(Psalm 133:1).**

The Norwegian told an Ole and Sven joke. The Russian quipped about bears in Siberia. The American and the Zambian engaged in friendly banter. You could see that these people were enjoying their time together.

You could also see faith shared, God praised, the Word of God studied, the truth of God and his salvation held sacred. You knew the Spirit of God had worked in these people through the Word, and you learned all about the Spirit and his work. You were at the third triennial convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) in Winter Haven, Fla., from Apr. 20-22.



Churches that comprise the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference

- Christ the King Lutheran Church of Nigeria
- Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church (Mexico)
- Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church (Russia)
- Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church (Finland)
- Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church (Puerto Rico)
- Evangelical Lutheran Free Church (Germany)
- Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Australia
- Evangelical Lutheran Synod (Peru)
- Evangelical Lutheran Synod (USA)
- Lutheran Church of Central Africa (Malawi Conference)
- Lutheran Church of Central Africa (Zambia Conference)
- Lutheran Confessional Church (Scandinavia)
- Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church (Japan)
- The Lutheran Church of Bulgaria
- The Lutheran Church of Cameroon
- Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (North America)

One confession

The CELC is an organization—a presence, a forum, and fellowship—for confessional Lutheranism around the globe. The members all confess the teachings of Holy Scripture. Some are relatively new to the Christian faith, and some church bodies are newly formed. Others are lifelong Lutherans in church bodies up to 150 years old. All learn from each other, enjoy their spiritual fellowship, and encourage one another in serving the Lord.

We came to Florida to learn of the Holy Spirit and his work. We experienced how the Spirit has worked in the lives of friends around the world. Rev. Samuel Kawiliza of Zambia, Africa, spoke for many when he wrote, “It is a great encouragement for me to be here personally. We came from different parts of the world. We have different cultural backgrounds. We speak different languages. Yet we have one spirit.”

That spirit was one of unity and mutual encouragement anchored in our Savior. Said Rev. Takeshi Nidaira of Japan, “We have no sister churches in Japan. Here we all have the same doctrine. This is a great encouragement.”

Rev. Martin Andersson of Sweden, where confessional Lutheranism struggles to be heard, echoed the thought: “We are all the

same faith and the same confession, just as we want in Sweden.”

One as equals together

Many of the church bodies represented began as missions of WELS or ELS (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), and we knew them as infants in the Christian faith. Today they deliver in-depth theological essays on the Holy Spirit, full of scriptural insights. We have sent missionaries to them. Now men like Rev. Tse Tai Chiu, a church leader from Hong Kong, speak of themselves sending missionaries, perhaps one day even back to North America.

Rev. Salimo Hachibamba, head of the seminary in Zambia, speaks of being part of “the wider family who believe exactly the same.” He savors the “partnership” we have forged. Now, they are “more than a daughter”; they are “independent.” And that is “tremendous!”

Yes, now we have grown-up sister churches, and the sun never sets on our brothers and sisters in faith and fellowship. As Rev. Gundars Bakulis, an observer from Latvia, said, “This is a very special moment. How great is the Word of God and how powerful the Holy Spirit that he brought this about. I look for Christian friends, and I find them here. I hope one day we can be in your midst.”

One in hope and mission

It was a "very special moment." Special because of the hope we share. President Gerhard Wilde, whose small church body survived decades of atheistic communism in East Germany and who, after 10 years of a reunited Germany, only begins to see some progress in overcoming the effects of communism on the people, said they had fun in Germany calling the place of this convention "Winter Heaven." Then, reflecting on their church's many hardships and on the many heathen they need to reach with the gospel, he said, "We live and work in hope! The heaven won for all who love Jesus."

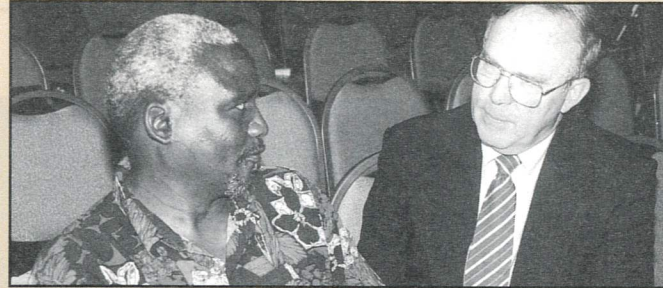
Among the most expressive of the delegates was Rev. Roberto Berrospid from Peru, who did not understand any of the English spoken at the convention but heard every word through a translator. He told us how happy he was about the CELC with its "strong desire to maintain the true church of Christ." He called the reading of the essays a "sublime experience," one that "awakens, encourages, and strengthens our Christian spirit."

Berrospid expressed thanks to God for "the *koinonia* (fellowship) among us." He said he has "never known a doctrine so beautiful and comforting as that of Christ crucified and Christ risen." He thanked God for using the rest of us in taking that message through the world. Then he said, speaking for all of us, I'm sure, "My feet are excited to go back and tell others the gospel."

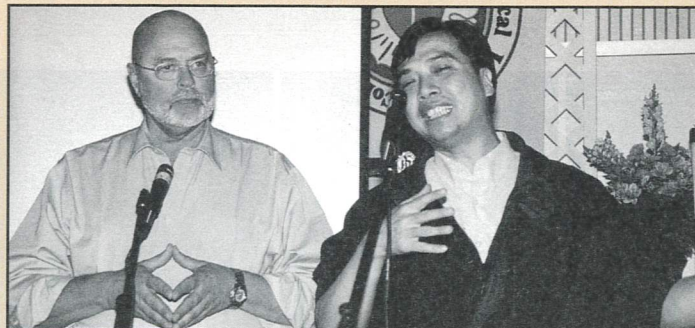
Gary Baumler is editor of Forward/NL and WELS Director of Communications.



Samuel Kawiliza delivers a paper, "The Holy Spirit Sanctifies and Preserves the Church." Said Kawiliza, "Being here encouraged me to go home and share with my brothers and sisters, so they can believe the true God."



Salimo Hachibamba talks with WELS president, Karl Gurgel, during a break. Hachibamba looks to the Congo, the second biggest country in Africa, as a field needing their attention. But they cannot yet reach the people there because of the need for more manpower and the political climate in the Congo.



Tse Tai Chiu, observer from Hong Kong, addresses the assembly in Chinese. Missionary Gary Schroeder translates. Said Tse: "I hope you will continue to pray for us. We also pray for you. In Christ we are one. God bless each one of you."

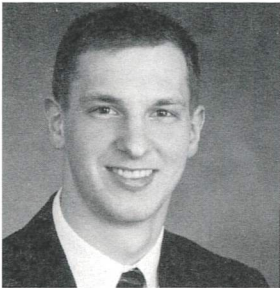


From left: Reinaldo Rivera, Puerto Rico; Roberto Berrospid, Peru; Takeshi Nidaira, Japan; Manuel Monroig Martinez, Puerto Rico. About 120 people attended the convention, including visitors and wives.



Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Mequon, Wis.



Bart A. Brauer
Oakfield, Wis.



Brent S. Brutlag
Livonia, Mich.



Stephen E. Daley
Monroe, Mich.



Matthew L. Duin
Watertown, Wis.



Craig A. Engel
Bay City, Mich.



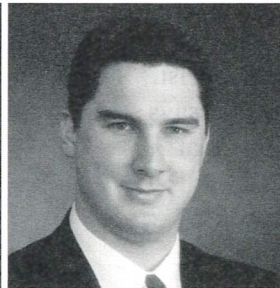
Joel J. Gawrisch
Franklin, Wis.



John R. Gensmer
Saginaw, Mich.



Thomas A. Glende
Columbus, Ohio



Jeremy P. Glowicki
Mayville, Mich.



Daniel J. Habben
Tokyo, Japan



Samuel J. Hacker III
Bay City, Mich.



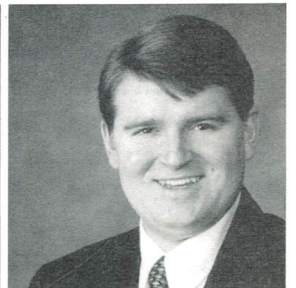
Michael A. Hartman
El Paso, Tex.



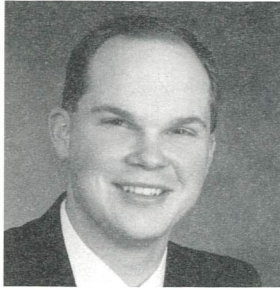
Frank J. Italiano Jr.
La Crosse, Wis.



Michael M. Kober
Bay City, Mich.



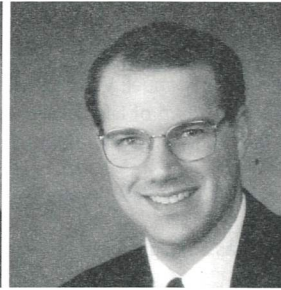
Todd M. Krueger
Hartford, Wis.



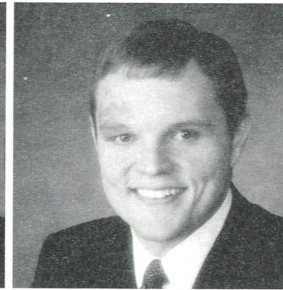
Matthew D. Kuske
Bloomer, Wis.



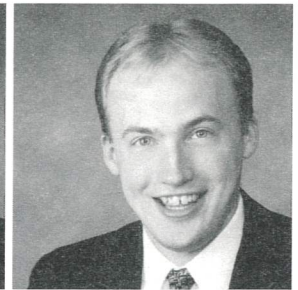
Earl E. Lindemann
Milwaukee, Wis.



Paul M. Meier
Genesee Depot, Wis.



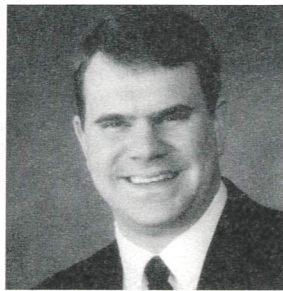
Steven J. Pagels
Johnson Creek, Wis.



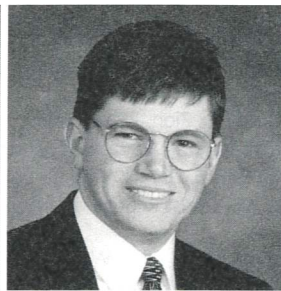
Todd A. Rausch
Benton Harbor, Mich.



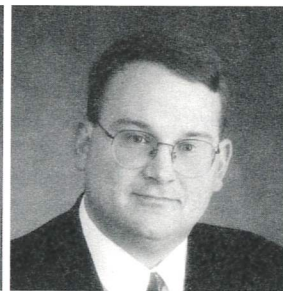
Joel T. Sauer
Kenosha, Wis.



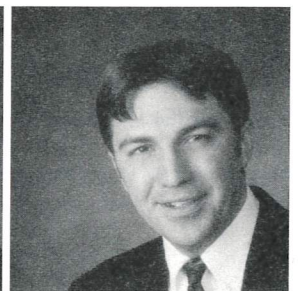
Jeffrey J. Schmidt
New Ulm, Minn.



Aaron E. Schoenike
Ixonia, Wis.



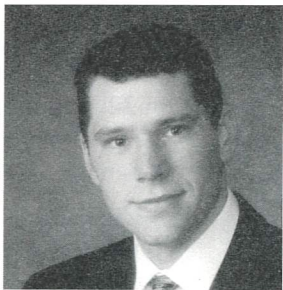
Jonathan E. Schroeder
Bay City, Mich.



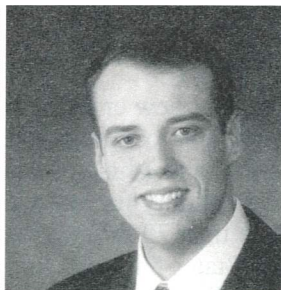
Andrew C. Schroer
Stevensville, Mich.



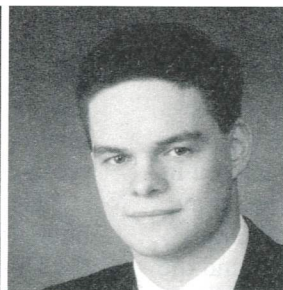
Clark R. Schultz
Johnson Creek, Wis.



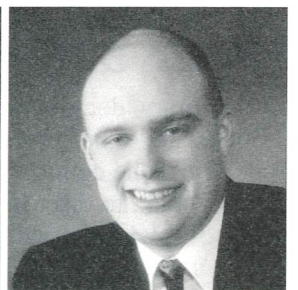
Jason A. Schulz
Cottage Grove, Wis.



Matthew E. Schwartz
Saginaw, Mich.



Timothy M. Schwartz
St. Paul Park, Minn.



Wayne A. Shevey
Franklin, Wis.



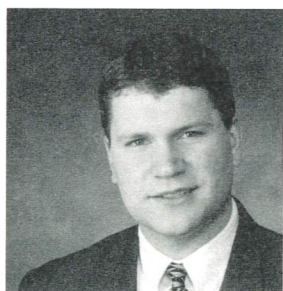
David M. Shilling
New Ulm, Minn.



Timothy J. Smith
Mequon, Wis.



John F. Toppe
Fond du Lac, Wis.



Paul S. Waldschmidt
Fond du Lac, Wis.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary is our synod's graduate school for preparing pastors. These men have all studied for at least eight years as they prepared for their ministry.



Assignments

Bode, Timothy L., Abiding Savior, Elk River, Minn.
Boggs, John H., Living Word, Mobile, Ala.
Brauer, Bart A., Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.
Brutlag, Brent S., Prince of Peace, Traverse City, Mich.
Daley, Stephen E., assistant to the Dakota-Montana District President, Mobridge, S.D.
Duin, Matthew L., Bethlehem, Hortonville, Wis.

Engel, Craig A., Immanuel, Willmar, Minn.
Gabb, Mark D., Crown of Life, Marietta, Ohio
Gawrisch, Joel J., Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.
Gensmer, John R., Faith (exploratory), Tallahassee, Fla.
Glende, Thomas A., Light of the Valley, Layton, Utah
Glowicki, Jeremy P., Beautiful Savior, Portland, Maine
Habben, Daniel J., St. Peter, Saint Albert, Alberta, Canada
Hacker III, Samuel J., Bethany, Gibsonia, Penn.
Hartman, Michael A., missionary to Mexico City, Mexico
Italiano Jr., Frank J., Trinity, Crete, Ill.
Kober, Michael M., Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.
Krueger, Todd M., Zion, Eitzen, Minn.
Kuske, Matthew D., Our Savior's, Bylas, Ariz.
Lindemann, Earl E., Trinity, Winner, S.D.
Meier, Paul M., Christ Redeemer, Trumbull, Conn.
Pagels, Steven J., St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis.
Rausch, Todd A., St. Paul, Batesland, S.D./Our Redeemer's, Martin, S.D./Rock of Ages, Gordon, Neb.
Sauer, Joel T., Abiding Savior, Weslaco, Tex.

Schmidt, Jeffrey J., Trinity, Merrill, Wis.
Schoenike, Aaron E., St. John-St. Peter, Cleveland, Wis.
Schroeder, Jonathan E., Faith (exploratory), Sharpsburg, Ga.
Schroer, Andrew C., Hispanic outreach, Miami, Fla.
Schultz, Clark R., Risen Savior, Cedar Grove, Wis.
Schultz, Donald G., Beautiful Savior (exploratory), Michigan City, Ind.
Schulz, Jason A., Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.
Schulz, Joel A., exploratory outreach, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada
Schwartz, Matthew E., Nebraska Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb.
Schwartz, Timothy M., Redeemer (exploratory), Roswell, N.M.
Shevey, Wayne A., exploratory outreach, St. Charles County, Mo.
Shilling, David M., St. Paul, Timber Lake/Peace, Isabel/First English, Dupree, S.D.
Smith, Timothy J., exploratory outreach, Covington, Wash.
Toppe, John F., St. John, Whitewater, Wis.
Waldschmidt, Paul S., St. Mark, Normal, Ill.

News briefs

- In February, doctors, nurses, theologians, and other professionals from across the country gathered in Orlando, Fla., to discuss the "gray areas" of Christian medical ethics. The conference centered around the idea that, as medical technology broadens and the opportunities for benefit expand, opportunities for abuses and misapplication grow as well. Tackling such diverse areas as hospice care, organ transplantation, and birth control, the **Decisions in Medicine Conference** served as a forum for discussions on ways to deal with difficult ethical decisions. WELS Lutherans for Life sponsored the conference.
- **WELS congregations have a new opportunity to fund outreach programs.** Projects could include leadership training, congregation assessment, public relations strategies,

development of new entry points to invite people into congregations, and cross-cultural and ethnic outreach.

"The opportunity for outreach is huge. More than 75 million people in the United States have no church home," said Jim Yagow, AAL director for church grants. AAL is giving \$100,000 for this project, which is called Openings.

- In March, **19,000 more copies of "The Promise,"** a 16-page brochure presenting the basic biblical message from the fall into sin to life in heaven, were printed in six new languages—Russian, Hmong, Laotian, Vietnamese, Korean, and Czech. In total, about 190,000 copies of "The Promise" have been printed



in 22 languages. Study guides are also available in English, Spanish, Japanese, Hindi, and Korean.

- **Martin O. Westerhaus received a 1998 CHI Award.** This award is given by the Concordia Historical Institute to people who make contributions to Lutheran literature or service to Lutheran archival and historical work. Westerhaus, a former seminary professor, is the synod's archivist.
- In December, NL ran the article "A habit in Hungary" about how Sharon Burow spread the gospel in Hungary the past two summers. **Keith Kruck, pastor at Ascension, Sarasota, Fla., saw the article and shared it with a member who came from Hungary.** The member and his wife shared it with a Hungarian Lutheran magazine. The editors in Hungary picked up the story and reprinted it.

REAL TIME WITH A MISSIONARY

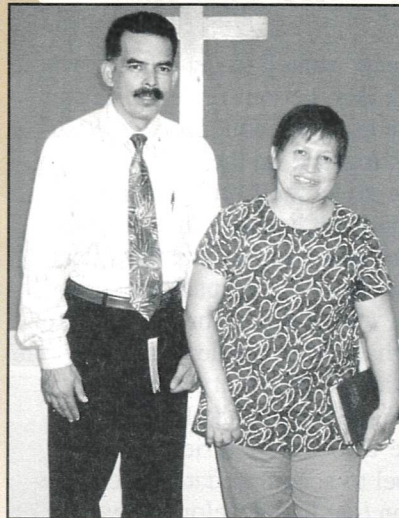
In this section, you'll hear news from missionaries that came via the Internet. We hope you enjoy these tidbits from our missions.

From Steven Wagenknecht, missionary in Mexico:

Pastor Eduardo Vázquez in Monterrey told me this story.

Maria lives across the street from the house where we hold worship on the front porch and carport. When services started there in 1998, Maria always seemed to be outside sweeping her sidewalk during the service. The pastor and others noticed her and always invited her to come. She politely declined.

As time went on the pastor noticed that Maria started to sweep the curb in addition to the sidewalk, getting closer to the house where we hold services. He kept on inviting her. She kept on declining. Then she began sweeping her side of the street. Before long she



Pastor Eduardo Vázquez and Maria Pérez at her confirmation on March 21.

was sweeping the whole street, ending up just outside the porch when the service was over.

The invitations paid off, and she eventually attended worship. She began Bible information class. Through her hearing of the Word, the Holy Spirit worked faith in Maria's heart. She was confirmed in March 1999. God is blessing the preaching of his Word in Mexico.

Signs from God

It started out as a practical way to teach the gospel to her child and turned into an outreach program.

Two years ago, Linda Christ started signing church services for Alexis (Lexi)—her then-two-year-old, hearing-impaired daughter. Linda Berg, a teacher at St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wis., saw Christ doing this and invited her to teach the fourth-grade class some sign language.

"They caught on so quickly. I was impressed," said Christ.

Because the students were so interested in sign language, Christ formed a sign language club called "Expressions." Eight children joined. More keep joining.

The children learned quickly, and since the beginning of the 1998-99 school year, Expressions has been signing choir songs. They also help sign a portion of the worship services. Wendy Wolfgrahm signs the sermons and the readings. Wolfgrahm is a hearing-impaired member who hadn't been able to participate in worship. By signing, she's found a way to get involved and be active.

Since they began signing services, many hearing-impaired people have come regularly. "These people all say they're impressed because the hearing children are reaching out and serving them," says Christ.



Ron and Karen Baerbock, missionaries in the Dominican Republic, had a small family reunion in February—both of their mothers came to visit. This was Lois Baerbock's first trip to the Dominican Republic, where she finally saw where her only child lives. They traveled with Dr. Carl Toepel, a member of the Latin America administrative committee of the WELS Board for World Missions. Pictured here (left to right) are the Jiminez family, Lois Baerbock, Ron Baerbock, Hertha Kasten, and Larry Schlomer. They were visiting the Jiminez family's home in the mountains in the Jarabacoa area.

Celebrating freedom this month?

Help someone celebrate freedom in Christ every month. Give them the gift of *Forward/NL*.

Call toll free **1-800-662-6093** ext. 8; (Milwaukee 475-6600 ext. 5) weekdays 8 AM to 4 PM. Charge it—Discover Card, MasterCard, or Visa—or bill it.

Seminary graduation—in Africa

In Cameroon, on Palm Sunday, March 28, palms were cut from the surrounding trees and over 600 voices joined in praise. Why? Because 15 students graduated from the Lutheran Theological Seminary of the Lutheran Church of Cameroon (LCC). The graduation was the fulfillment of four years of intensive study and was evidence of God's goodness and grace.

When the seminary started in May 1995, the LCC had about 1,500 members in 25 congregations in one town and 24 villages scattered over two provinces of Cameroon. Some congregations were accessible only on foot. Only one pastor served all those congregations. Two WELS missionaries served in Cameroon. Their purpose was to help the LCC establish a seminary and help the first class graduate.

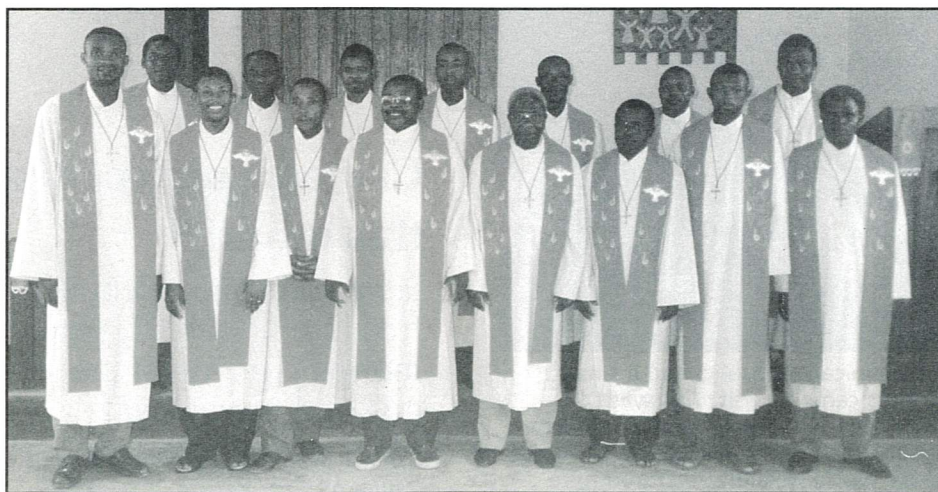
The seminary classroom and living conditions were extremely crowded. Sixteen students were housed four to a room that was seven by eight feet. They ate their meals on a concrete slab in front of their rooms, and carried their water from a spring almost a mile away. The chapel/classroom was so small that if someone sitting on the inside

of a row wanted to get out, the whole row had to get out first. But in spite of the cramped conditions, the students focused on their ultimate goal—to be the Lord's servants.

The Lord honored that patience. By the beginning of the third year, the students had a spacious classroom with a small library, a dining hall that could double as a classroom, two dormitories that could even house the wives and children of those who were married, and a chapel to accommodate the congregation that had developed near the seminary. Many people and several congregations in the United States helped make those facilities a reality.

So on Palm Sunday, amid choruses of praise and palms, the students graduated. But the work isn't done. More pastors are needed. Not only are one-third of those LCC congregations still without their own pastor, but also many Cameroon villages are without a Christian presence. May the Lord use WELS members as a blessing to the people of Cameroon, a channel to share the life and the love of Jesus.

Norbert Meier



The graduating class of the Lutheran Theological Seminary of the Lutheran Church of Cameroon (LCC). Fifteen students graduated in March.

Obituaries

Donald C. Sellnow 1928-1999

Donald Sellnow was born Mar. 8, 1928, in Embarrass, Wis. He died Apr. 9, 1999, in Watertown, Wis.

A 1954 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Sellnow served at St. Paul, Rapid City, S.D.; Christ, Menominee, Mich.; and Our Redeemer, Ladysmith, Wis. He also taught at Northwestern College, Watertown, Wis., for 30 years.

He is survived by his wife, Ruth; three daughters; two sons; six grandchildren; one brother; and two nieces.

Reinhold H. Roth 1909-1999

Reinhold H. Roth was born Jan. 25, 1909, in Blumenfeld, Russia. He died Apr. 8, 1999, in Fort Morgan, Colo.

A 1933 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Roth served at St. John, Brewster, Neb.; Trinity, Grafton, Neb.; Zion, Fort Morgan, Colo.; St. Paul, Morris, Minn.; Beautiful Savior, Topeka, Kan.; and Trinity, Clear Lake, S.D.

He is survived by wife, Frieda; two sons; five grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

Arnold J. Lober 1909-1999

Arnold J. Lober was born July 24, 1909, in Nobles Township, Minn. He died Apr. 20, 1999, in Columbus, Wis.

A 1933 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at St. John, Newburg, Wis.; Bethesda, Milwaukee, Wis.; and Zion, Columbus, Wis.

He is survived by two sons, two daughters, 15 grandchildren, 26 great-grandchildren, one great-great-grandchild, and nieces and nephews.



The commissioning of Missionary John Vogt (center). Clockwise from left: Alvar Svensson of Ljungy, Sweden; Steven Sjoqvist of Stockholm; Lars Gunnarsson of Ljunby; Stefan Hedkvist of Pitea; and Egil Edvardsen of Stavanger, Norway.

First WELS missionary in Scandinavia commissioned

On March 21 at Ljungby, Sweden, the Lutheran Confessional Church (LBK) of Sweden and Norway installed Pastor John F. Vogt as a friendly counselor. Vogt is the first WELS missionary in the Scandinavian countries. The Board for World Missions called and is supporting him in this short-term ministry.

More than 50 members and all six of the LBK's pastors participated in

the service. The installation was done in English and Swedish.

The service marked a full weekend of activities that included a pastoral conference and the dedication of the new Biblicum facility, which serves as the LBK's Bible study center and the school for training future pastors.

Vogt's foremost responsibility is to train pastors to fill vacant pulpits and enable outreach throughout Scandinavia. Vogt will also serve as

vacancy pastor in two congregations, Gothenburg and Vasteras, which are more than 250 miles apart. Vogt began offering services to them on Easter weekend. These congregations and three other small groups worship together each Sunday morning by means of telephone conferencing. An attempt will be made soon to link the groups by a live television transmission.

John Vogt

Forward in Christ is for kids too!



Forward in Christ is the theme for the next biennium and the synod's 150th anniversary celebration. The Commissions on Youth Discipleship and Parish Schools are working on plans for promoting Christian nurture and involving youth in service projects around this theme.

- Beginning in January 2000, episodes of *WELS Kids Connection* will feature special moments in the history of WELS.
- An evangelism curriculum to encourage and teach children to witness about their faith will be published for elementary school children.
- A special offering will be collected from children and teenagers in support of our home mission efforts in New York City.
- The Commission on Youth Discipleship Web site will contain special sesquicentennial information for children.
- In 1999 every congregation will receive a planning resource for promoting Christian nurture. The resource will include ideas for outreach, involving families, and promoting Christian education—classroom devotions and chapel talks, a children's anniversary anthem, and outline for developing a Christian Education Sunday.
- The 2001 International Youth Rally will focus on outreach and evangelism.



District news

Arizona-California

Aubrey MacDonald, an eighth-grader at King of Kings, Garden Grove, Calif., participated in the state level of competition in the National Geography Bee. Qualifying for this event in California is noteworthy because over 2,000 schools competed and only 103 students advanced to the state bee in Sacramento. Because only four of these 103 students were girls, Aubrey was interviewed by *The Sacramento Bee* and KOCE television in Orange County.

Dakota-Montana

Bethlehem, Watertown, S.D., honored **Ellen Heisner** on April 18 for 25 years of serving as organist. . . . **Redeemer, Mandan, N.D.**, dedicated its new church on April 18. Having sold their old church building in October 1998, the congregation has since been meeting in temporary facilities. The first service in the new building was on Feb. 17.

Michigan

No damage was done to our churches when a tornado moved through Cincinnati, Ohio, in April. This from Nathan Cordes, pastor at Abiding Word, Maineville: "The worst of the damage hit three miles south of Abiding Word. Twenty homes are a complete loss; it's estimated about 120 homes were damaged. I picked up about 50 pounds worth of shingles, plywood, insulation, and drywall." He continues: "The Lord accomplishes great things in those whom he allows to suffer hardship. May we always see difficulties as part of his fatherly divine care." . . . **Shepherd of Peace, Powell, Ohio**, dedicated its new church on April 11. The new facility has about 7,000 square feet and is designed for future expansion.

North Atlantic

King of Kings, Clifton Park, N.Y., has three of its four previous vicars receiving calls this year. Joel Sauer, a senior, is receiving his first full-time call. Steve Pagels, also a senior, will receive his first pastoral call because he accepted an emergency call to teach at Huron Valley Lutheran High School after his vicar year. Joel Schulz received a graduate tutor call to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, so will be receiving his first call into the parish this year. (See where these students were assigned on page 22.)

Northern Wisconsin

Martin Luther School, Neenah, Wis., won \$25,000 in "Champions for Education," a statewide contest sponsored by Roundy's/Pick 'n Save and General Mills. From September to December 1998, the school collected about 3,200 boxtops, the highest percentage of boxtops compared to the school enrollment. The school plans to use the money, which was the grand prize of the 46 prizes awarded, to upgrade technology at the school. . . . **Art Prosek**, a member of Martin Luther, Neenah, Wis., was named "Wisconsin's Elementary School Principal of the Year" for 1998. He was one of 66 people throughout the nation honored at an awards banquet in Washington, D.C., on Oct. 9, 1998. The award was given by the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Prosek has served as an elementary school principal for 24 years. He is also an officer at his church.

Southeastern Wisconsin

An article in the St. Paul, Muskego, Wis., newsletter recently told about third-grade teacher Kristin Nelson's trip: Kristin and her husband, Erik, like to travel. They had a memorable trip in Washington D.C. They were there in July 1998, the same time as

the lone gunman who went on a shooting rampage. Both Kristin and Erik heard the shots and then saw the gunman. Kristin proceeded to run the 200-yard dash like never before. They both have a different recollection of exactly what went on. However, they both remember Kristin's sandal was left in the building after she fled. That sandal never was found, but St. Paul was blessed to get both Kristin and Erik back unharmed.

Western Wisconsin

Members at St. John, Barre Mills, Wis., had a celebration in honor of **Willard Drecktrah's** 60 years of singing in the church choir.

Happy anniversary



Martin Luther College marked the anniversaries of six professors on April 25. They are (standing left to right): Barbara Leopold (25 years), Steven Thiesfeldt (25 years), John Schmidt (25 years), Robert Stoltz (40 years). Seated: Joyce Schubkegel (40 years), Darvin Raddatz (40 years).

WW—On Feb. 7, 1999, **Goodview Trinity, Winona, Minn.**, celebrated its 50th anniversary.

DM—**Ascension, Mitchell, S.D.**, celebrated its 25th anniversary on June 27.

These are the reporters for this month's featured districts: CA—Herman John; DM—Jon Hadler; MI—David M. Zahn; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NA—Kevin Schultz; NW—Joel Lillo; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Elton Stroh

Russia update

April was a good month for our mission in Russia.

On Easter in Iskitim, 160 children attended the children's service, and 81 participated in the regular service. In Akademgorodok, 167 people attended, and in Novosibirsk 100 people celebrated the resurrection.

In Iskitim, they've held Bible classes for almost two years at a local deaf club. Many weren't baptized and wanted to be. So during the Sunday service on April 18, six adults, one teenager, and two babies were baptized. Also in Iskitim, a total of 180 people attended worship—85 at the children's service and 95 for regular worship.

Voters from the three congregations also met on April 18 and decided to conduct Russian only worship services in Akademgorok, with occasional English services for those who are interested.

THROUGH MY BIBLE IN 3 YEARS

August 1999

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Job 11, 12 | 19. Ps. 46-48 |
| 2. Job 13, 14 | 20. Ps. 49 |
| 3. Job 15-17 | 21. Ps. 50 |
| 4. Job 18, 19 | 22. Ps. 51 |
| 5. Job 20, 21 | 23. 2 Samuel 1 |
| 6. Job 22-24 | 24. 2 Sam. 2, 3 |
| 7. Job 25-27 | 25. 2 Sam. 4:1- |
| 8. Job 28, 29 | 5:16 |
| 9. Job 30, 31 | 26. 2 Sam. 5:17- |
| 10. Job 32, 33 | 6:23 |
| 11. Job 34, 35 | 27. 2 Sam. 7 |
| 12. Job 36, 37 | 28. 2 Sam. 8, 9 |
| 13. Job 38:1-40:5 | 29. 2 Sam. 10, 11 |
| 14. Job 40:6-42:6 | 30. 2 Sam. 12:1- |
| 15. Job 42:7-17 | 13:37 |
| 16. Psalm 42, 43 | 31. 2 Sam. 13:38- |
| 17. Ps. 44 | 14:33 |
| 18. Ps. 45 | |

CONGREGATION MISSION SUBSCRIPTION PERFORMANCE

Three months ended March 31, 1999

	Total Subscription		Offerings Received				
	Communicants 12/31/98	1998	Year to Date Projected	March Offerings	Three Months Offerings	Percent of Subscrip'n	Annld Ave Per Commun
Arizona-California	17,469	\$1,044,147	\$204,831	\$96,942	\$233,723	114.1%	\$53.52
Dakota-Montana	9,156	440,574	65,008	35,985	68,656	105.6	29.99
Michigan	36,375	2,143,046	401,254	199,897	420,800	104.9	46.27
Minnesota	43,400	2,429,655	398,337	154,637	379,511	95.3	34.98
Nebraska	10,329	598,475	89,972	43,924	96,379	107.1	37.32
North Atlantic	4,039	350,734	78,380	30,768	71,041	90.6	70.36
Northern Wisconsin	60,967	2,620,104	441,158	204,585	547,823	124.2	35.94
Pacific Northwest	5,134	263,368	52,259	20,891	53,820	103.0	41.93
South Atlantic	6,830	484,537	108,933	52,030	108,697	99.8	63.66
South Central	4,585	450,143	88,384	44,532	89,762	101.6	78.31
Southeastern Wisconsin	57,332	3,396,332	537,264	235,007	553,919	103.1	38.65
Western Wisconsin	59,815	3,141,882	520,670	280,948	590,775	113.5	39.51
Total - This Year	315,431	17,362,997	2,986,450	1,400,146	3,214,906	107.6	40.77
Total - Last Year	315,355	16,937,503	2,953,825	1,169,462	2,913,079	98.6	36.95

CURRENT BUDGETARY FUND

Statement of activities/Nine months ended March 31

	1999 Actual	1998 Actual	1999 Budget
Changes in Unrestricted Net Assets			
Revenues:			
Congregational Mission Offerings	\$ 13,019,014	\$12,495,711	\$12,281,700
Gifts and memorials	2,394,802	2,166,694	7,697,500
Bequest/planned giving	876,423	344,424	603,700
Tuition and fees	7,424,756	7,206,461	7,251,500
Other	176,003	214,244	104,600
Satisfaction of restrictions	-	2,085,000	-
Transfers-endowment earnings	240,880	231,347	195,000
Transfers-gift funds	5,895,387	6,529,818	5,879,700
Transfers-continuing programs	3,168,829	2,956,358	3,921,400
Transfers-other	-	20,060	-
Total revenues	33,196,094	34,250,117	37,935,100
Expenditures:			
Home Missions	7,380,456	6,676,397	7,233,700
World Missions	6,343,696	5,887,993	7,021,600
Ministerial Education	15,798,734	15,798,750	16,183,300
Parish Services	1,358,702	1,145,928	1,591,200
Administrative Services	4,147,763	3,815,140	4,832,700
Total expenditures	35,029,351	33,265,208	36,862,500
Changes in unrestricted net assets	(1,833,257)	984,909	
Changes in Temp Restricted Net Assets			
Gifts and memorials	-	90,800	-
Bequest/planned giving	-	(31,000)	-
Change in value of trust agreements	-	(27,800)	-
Satisfaction of restrictions	-	(2,085,000)	-
Change in temp restricted net assets	-	(2,053,000)	-
Net assets - beginning of year	5,939,285	5,909,760	5,939,285
Net assets - end of period	4,106,028	4,841,669	4,841,669

Statement of Financial Position

	March 31, 1999	March 31, 1998
Assets:		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$2,158,238	\$2,610,855
Due from other funds	47,833	30,072
Accounts receivable-cash adv.	102,250	106,250
Other accounts receivable	151,732	48,657
Contributions receivable	3,024,800	3,211,827
Mortgage note receivable	12,787	15,901
Allowance for doubtful accts	(92,000)	(92,000)
Prepaid expenses	14,425	4,425
Total assets	5,420,065	5,935,987
Liabilities and Net Assets:		
Due to schools	1,208,488	973,613
Accounts payable	105,549	120,705
Total liabilities	1,314,037	1,094,318
Unrestricted	1,081,228	1,629,842
Temp restricted	3,024,800	3,211,827
Total net assets	4,106,028	4,841,669
Total liab. and net assets	5,420,065	5,935,987

Mark Meissner, director of finance



Persecution continues—Saudi Arabia still leads the world in persecution of Christians. It is closely followed by Sudan (South), Sudan (North), and Somalia. These are followed by Yemen, North Korea, Laos, Vietnam, and China. The tiny Islamic kingdom of Brunei is in 10th place.

The list comes from the Open Doors World Watch Persecution List for 1998. [Assist Communications, Jan. 29, 1999]

Teens commit to honorable standards—More than 73,000 teenagers gathered in Pontiac, Mich., at a two-day evangelical Christian conference that encouraged them to commit to “honorable standards.”

In the end, tens of thousands attendees affirmed a “Teenage Bill of Rights” that speaks of living honorably, telling the truth, and refusing drugs, alcohol, and premarital sex.

“The Teenage Bill of Rights is all about taking a stand for righteousness,” urged Ron Luce, president and CEO of Teen Mania Ministries, the Garden Valley, Texas-based organization that sponsored the gathering in April.

Baby Hope lives for three hours—A pregnant woman, 22 weeks along, went to the Women’s Med Center abortion facility in Dayton, Ohio, in April. After going through the first part of a three-day abortion process, she had abdominal pains the following morning. She was rushed to Bethesda North Hospital, Cincinnati, where she gave birth to a baby girl.

The tiny baby was called Baby Hope by medical staff. According to the *Cincinnati Post*, Shelly Lowe, a medical technician, said, “A doctor examined the baby immediately after it was born and said it had no chance to survive.” Baby Hope died early on April 7, spending her first and last three hours in the arms of hospital staff. [*Cincinnati Post*, CMDS]

Underground Chinese Protestant churches raided—Bibles were



confiscated and worshipers detained when a Chinese underground Protestant church was raided in late April.

A Hong Kong-based human rights group said that the raid took place in Henan province’s Sui county and that 25 congregants were taken into custody. This was at least the fifth raid since October in Henan county, an area of wide-scale underground Protestant church activity, the Associated Press reported.

Fifteen of those detained in the latest raid were still in custody in May. At least 225 other Christians have also been detained during the series of raids, with some being fined the equivalent of \$240—nearly equal to the average yearly income in rural China.

One in three adults doesn’t attend church regularly—Almost one third of America’s adults have not attended a Christian church service in the past six months other than a special event, a Barna Research Group study reports.

The study found that 31 percent of Americans could be classified as “unchurched”—a proportion that represents between 60 and 65 million adults—because they did not attend a Christian service during the past six months other than an event such as a holiday service or a wedding or funeral.

Eighteen months earlier, researchers found that 27 percent of adults could be considered unchurched.

The random telephone survey of 1,015 adults in July 1998 has a margin of error of plus or minus three percentage points.

Atheist can’t be forced to attend AA meetings—A federal appeals court ruled that an atheist cannot be

forced to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

This ruling upheld a lower court ruling, but also declared that the atheist’s award of \$1 for damages was “just about right.”

Robert Warner argued that New York’s Orange County Department of Probation ignored his constitutional rights when it required him to attend AA meetings. The requirement was part of his probation after he was convicted of driving while impaired.

Warner said the order would force him to take part in religious exercises in violation of his First Amendment rights, the Associated Press reported.



Judge dismisses lesbian suit over married housing—A New York state judge dismissed a lawsuit brought against Yeshiva University, a non-sectarian institution, by two lesbians who wanted the university to grant them married student housing.

The students claimed the university’s housing policy was discriminatory because it grants married student housing to heterosexual students and their spouses but not to homosexual students and their partners. Yeshiva does grant single student housing to homosexual students.

The judge ruled that because New York does not recognize gay marriages, the university may legitimately restrict married student housing to those students whose marriages are recognized by the state. [*Church and State Update*, April 16, reported on LifeWire, a service of WELS Lutherans for Life]

Most news reported in this section is derived from Religion News Service. Items do not necessarily reflect the views of WELS or Forward/NL.

**CHANGES IN MINISTRY****Pastors**

Dolan, John H., to MLC, New Ulm, Minn.
Engel, Todd A., to Christ, Keystone Heights, Fla.
Hadler, Jon W., to St. Matthew, Marathon, Wis.
Kell, Myron R., to retirement
Lindhorst, Paul D., to Crown of Life, Fort Myers, Fla.
Mayhew, William L., to New Salem, Sebawaing, Mich.
Nolte, Paul R., to Grace, Eau Claire, Mich.
Retzlaff, Nathan H., to Redeemer, Fond du Lac, Wis.
Riediger, Galen J., to St. Luke, Pickwick, Minn.
Runke, William E., to St. John, Waterloo, Wis.
Sievert, Phillip D., to Good Shepherd, Omaha, Neb.
Spaude, Cyril W., to retirement
Wagenknecht, Daniel M., to Grace, Yorba Linda, Calif.
Wegner, Martin N., to St. Peter, Elmwood, Wis.
Winterstein, James H., to Pilgrim, Mesa, Ariz.

Teachers

Ash, Allen R., to Evergreen LHS, Des Moines, Wash.
Avery, Christopher J., to Trinity, Belle Plaine, Minn.
Bakeberg, Jean A., to St. Paul, Green Bay, Wis.
Bremer, Steven B., to Grace, Glendale, Ariz.
Buch, Ryan D., to St. Paul, Cudahy, Wis.
Buenger, Patricia A., to retirement
Cole, Stanley R., to Evergreen LHS, Des Moines, Wash.
Cuppan, Else M., to retirement
Doerr, Carrie M., to Good Shepherd, West Bend, Wis.
Dyke, Karen, to St. John, Oak Creek, Wis.
Engelbrecht, Michelle, to Shoreland LHS, Somers, Wis.
Erbe, Jarrod, to WLC, Milwaukee
Fuhrmann, Verlyn A., to retirement
Geiger, Renee L., to St. Stephen, Beaver Dam, Wis.
Greschner, Lori L., to Wisconsin LHS, Milwaukee
Gurgel, Judith L., to St. Lucas, West Allis, Wis.
Henning Jr., Michael A., to Trinity, Caledonia, Wis.
Hering, Thomas P., to Our Savior, Grafton, Wis.
Hopf, Stephanie A., to MLC, New Ulm, Minn.
Jacobs, Paul S., to St. Paul, Tomah, Wis.
Knobloch, Ernest F., to Good Shepherd, West Allis, Wis.
Kriese, Brett T., to Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wis.
Krueger, Connie M., to Children's Garden Preschool, Davenport, Iowa
Krueger, Terri J., to Our Redeemer, Madison, Wis.
Lawrenz, Sarah H., to MLS, Saginaw, Mich.
Lentz, Christine, to Bloomington, Bloomington, Minn.
Melendy, Carla E., to MLC, New Ulm, Minn.
Mundt, Sharon A., to Fox Valley LHS, Appleton, Wis.
Olsen, Carolyn B., to Trinity, Watertown, Wis.
Poetter, Chris C., to Holy Trinity, Des Moines, Wash.
Railling, Joel F., to Trinity, Kaukauna, Wis.
Raiser, Danielle S., to California LHS, Wildomar, Calif.

Schaewe, Peter J., to St. John, Jefferson, Wis.
Schoenherr, Jeffrey A., to Minnesota Valley LHS, New Ulm, Minn.
Schramm, Janette K., to St. John, Libertyville, Ill.
Slattery, Jill L., to Trinity, Neenah, Wis.
Spreeman, Shannon I., to St. Paul, Norfolk, Neb.
Tews, Roger H., to Christ Our Savior, Rockford, Mich.
Treuden, Terry S., to WLC, Milwaukee
Tweit, Julia, to Holton, Holton, Mich.
Wallace, Elizabeth D., to St. Paul, South Haven, Mich.
Weeden, Jody L., to St. Matthew, Winona, Minn.
Wehausen, Cherie R., to St. Paul, Cudahy, Wis.
Winkel, Doris E., to Shepherd of the Valley, Westminster, Colo.
Wirch, Cynthia J., to Immanuel, Waupaca, Wis.
Yerks, Troy D., to Divine Grace, Lake Orion, Mich.
Zank, Ellen M., to Good Shepherd, Downers Grove, Ill.
Zibrowski, Craig S., to Immanuel, Manitowoc, Wis.

REQUEST FOR COLLOQUY

John R.K. Nieminen, Cambridge, Ontario, Canada, formerly a pastor in the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC), has requested a colloquy for the purpose of serving in the pastoral ministry in WELS. Correspondence related to this request should be addressed to President Walter Beckmann, North Atlantic District, 7401 Masonville Dr, Annandale VA 22003.

ANNIVERSARIES

East Troy, Wis.—St. Paul (125). July 4. 9:30 AM. 414/642-3200.
Brighton Township, New Ulm, Minn.—Zion (100). July 11. Service, 10 AM. Catered meal at Courtland Rec Hall follows. Lorenz Wischstadt, 507/359-4167.
Colorado Springs, Colo.—Salem (25). July 18. Service, 8 & 10:30 AM; picnic follows; 719/599-0200.
Gibsonia, Penn.—Bethany (25). July 18. Worship, 10 AM. Anniversary worship, 4 PM; dinner follows. Galen Riediger, 724/443-3890.
Crete, Ill.—Trinity (150). July 25. Anniversary mission service, 8 & 9:45 AM. 708/672-8125.
Duncanville, Tex.—St. Mark (35). July 25. 4 PM; dinner follows. 972/298-0891.
Tappen, N.D.—St. John (75). July 25. 701/327-4271.
Gary, S.D.—First (75). Aug 1. Anniversary worship, 10 AM; noon dinner; thanksgiving worship, 2 PM; meal follows. Bruce Mueller, 605/272-5230.
Stratford, Wis.—Emmanuel (100). Aug. 8. 10 AM & 2 PM; noon lunch. 715/687-3411.
Jackson, Wis.—Kettle Moraine LHS (25). Aug. 29. Service, 2:30 PM; reception follows. 414/677-4051.

COMING EVENTS

OWLS convention—15th annual convention, July 13-15, Holiday Inn and Convention Center, Willmar, Minn. OWLS, 8420 W Beloit Rd, West Allis WI 53227; 414/321-9977.
OWLS hostel—College training and fellowship. July 16-21 at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, MN. Air-conditioned dormitories. OWLS Hostel, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; <usr10@sab.wels.net>; 414/256-3241; FAX 414/256-3899.

Workshop—Training on bloodborne pathogens and presentation by Dr. Dan Schmeling on trends impacting WELS schools. Aug. 3, 8:30 AM-noon at Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis. \$50 per school. David Niemi, 608/784-1050.

CESE summer conference—Aug. 17, 8:30 AM-12:30 PM. Center for Arts & Performances, WLC, Milwaukee. Dr. Alan Spurgin: All Children Can Learn But At What Rate. Eileen Schlavensky, 414/781-0685.

WELS-CLO meeting—Oct. 16, 8:30 AM registration. Our Hope, Chippewa Falls, Wis. Registration materials available. Joanne Weber, 414/256-3222. <jaweber@sab.wels.net>.

Spiritual renewal weekend for women—March 31-Apr. 2, 2000. Rochester, Minn. Deb, 507/931-3383.

AVAILABLE

Pews—14 pews: 6 complete, 8 mixed sizes. St. Paul, Muskego, Wis. Bob Garbe, 414/422-0320.

NEEDED

Preacher—July 11. Hope, Irmo, S.C. Full use of parsonage in exchange for preaching. Close to Charleston, Myrtle Beach, and Atlanta. Daron Lindemann, 803/781-8673.

Preacher—July 18 & 25 (and if possible, the evening of July 19). St. Mark, Bemidji, Minn. Free use of the parsonage in exchange. J.L. Schallert, 218/751-6334.

Preacher—For July & August and maybe longer. Cross of Christ, Liverpool, N.Y. Full use of parsonage in exchange. 315/622-2843; <rbassett4@juno.com>.

Luther's Small Catechism—tan cover, originally edited by C. Gausewitz. Will pay for shipping. Ellen Connell, 2074 W Howard Ave, Milwaukee, WI 53221.

Choir gowns—24 gowns for adult choir. Salem, Lowell, Wis. 920/927-5353.

SERVICE TIMES

Calgary, Alberta, Canada—Mountain View. Sunday, 9:30 AM. Bible hour, 10:45 AM. 403/242-5000.

Mobile, Ala.—Living Word. 1st, 3rd, and 5th Sundays, 10 AM. 2nd and 4th Sundays, 4 PM (with communion). Adult Bible class, 5 PM. Martin J. Scheele, 334/342-4048. <lsimpson@jaguar1.usouthal.edu>.

Grove City, Ohio—Beautiful Savior. Thursday, 7:30 PM; Sunday, 9 AM. Bible study, 10:15 AM. From June 6-Aug. 31. 614/875-9637.

NAMES WANTED

Mobile, Ala.—Living Word, Mobile, Gulf Shores, Ala., and Biloxi, Miss., area. Larry B. Simpson, 334/342-4048. <lsimpson@jaguar1.usouthal.edu>.

1999 YEARBOOK CORRECTIONS

Pastor Paul Schulz's address is incorrect. His address is 738 W Puma Dr, Safford, AZ 85546.

Pastor Russell W. Kloehn's address and phone number are incorrect. The address is 502 County Rd M, Pickett WI 54964-9520; 920/589-2128.

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

Why are you afraid?

It's impossible for anything to happen to us outside of God's will.

James A. Aderman

I spent my morning devotion today in a fishing boat with Jesus and his disciples. A storm raged around us. Rain pelted us. Screaming winds tore at our clothes. The boat pitched and rolled. Wavesurges washed over the gunwales. We bailed water as men wrestling with death—even the seasoned fishermen on board.

But Jesus slept.

Why Jesus could sleep

The Spirit-inspired sage of Psalm 91 explains how Jesus could slumber in the face of that assault. **“If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the LORD, who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent” (9,10).**

That explains Jesus' question. When we shook him awake and demanded his help, he promptly stilled the storm and asked, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?”

Yes, why? The God in Psalm 91 is our dwelling place as well. He offers us the same unbreachable security.

Why we can sleep

The Hebrew word for dwelling describes the place one lives. “Home, sweet home,” is the thought. God is our home because, through Jesus, “the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them” (Revelation 21:3).

But look again. This home is a Rock of Gibraltar refuge, a fortified place of protection and shelter (Psalm 94:22). Here we are not only comfortable and comforted, but safe. Here nothing truly harmful happens. Here disaster (Hebrew: a voracious epidemic) is held at bay.

The walls of this fortress are impregnable. The construction materials are divine. Notice that the psalmist recycles names for God we've seen before. He is *Elyon*, the highest of the high, the ultimate, the infinite God. Nothing can demolish what he has done or break the promises he has made. But beyond being the God of unlimited power, he is the LORD, *Yahweh*, the God of full, free, faithful, and forever grace. He commits to love and to forgive his people. This guarantees he is using his power for our good.

That's why Jesus slept so soundly while that storm shrieked its threats. He might as well have been in his own bed in his Father's home. Danger at a time and in a place outside of his Father's will was impossible.

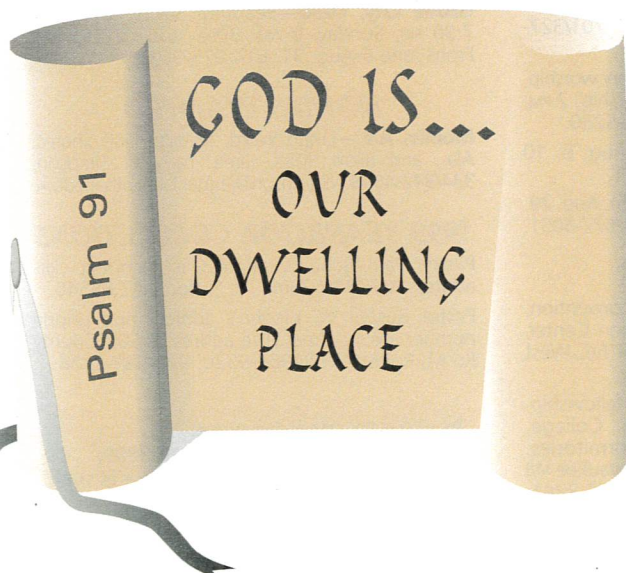
It's equally impossible for anything to happen to us outside of God's will. He's our Father, too. His home is our home. The resurrected Victor's promise is, “I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (John 20:17).

No disaster can come near our tents—that includes the flimsy bodies we live in. Like coconuts, only infinitely better, we have a hard outer shell. We're housed within the walls of a gracious God's power. We are safe. The Lord is our dwelling place.

James Aderman is pastor at Fairview, Milwaukee.

For further study

1. Read about the storm Jesus calmed in Matthew 8:23-27, Mark 4:35-41, and Luke 8:22-25. How is this account a picture of the Church in the world? How is it a picture of your life?
2. List the top five issues that you worry about. How are those fears canceled because you dwell within the love and power of the God who is the Most High and the LORD?





Inter-Act

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

Introduction

Leo Tolstoy, the author of *War and Peace*, once said, "Five years ago faith [in Jesus] came to me . . . and all my life was suddenly changed. I ceased to desire that which previously I had desired, and on the other hand, I took to desiring what I had never desired before. That which formerly used to appear good in my eyes appeared evil, and that which used to appear evil appeared good." In what way(s) can you relate to Tolstoy's experience? What do you as a Christian desire? How do your ideas of evil and good differ from those who are not Christians?

I. Text

Read Galatians 5:22-24:

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

IV. Prayer

Holy Spirit, thank you for working faith in Jesus in my heart and for producing the fruit of faith in my life. Help me put to death my sinful nature with its passions and desires. Let me reflect the love of my Savior, the joy of my salvation, and the peace I have with God every day of my life. Give me patience in dealing with others. Let people see the kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness of Jesus in all that I say and do. Help me be self-controlled in every situation. In Jesus' name. Amen.

II. Questions

1. Christian character does not come about by trying to live by the law. How does it come about?
2. Sometimes people think that if their sins are forgiven they can do anything they want. What does the Spirit cause a believer to "want"?
3. Think of a practical, everyday example of how you might demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit listed.
4. What is the difference between "kindness" and "goodness"?
5. Why is there "no law against" the things mentioned in verses 22 and 23? Against what things are there laws? (see vs. 19-21 and 1 Timothy 1:9,10)
6. What comfort is there in knowing that you "belong to Christ Jesus"?
7. What are the "desires" of the "sinful nature"? (vs. 16,19,20)
8. What does it mean to "crucify the sinful nature"? (2:20 and 6:14)

III. Application

1. Luther called Christians "masks of God." What do you suppose he meant?
2. It has been said that believers struggle to live the cruciform life—arms reached out to others, because they are freed by Christ to live in faith and to live out their faith in him. Give examples of how you can live the cruciform life at home, at work, in society, and in the community of believers.
3. Believers dare to risk their material possessions or time or anything else to serve others. Why?
4. Which fruit of the Spirit would you particularly like to have at this time in your life?

Conception and abortion

John F. Brug

How would God feel about an abortion in the case of rape? Personally, I am strongly against abortion, yet I feel that it would be acceptable in this instance. I want to know if the Bible would agree with that.

The Bible, of course, does not deal directly with this question since it does not deal directly with abortion. We are against abortion because of what Scripture says about the nature of the unborn child as a human being and the prohibition against murder of any human being.

If the child that is conceived of rape is a human being who is in no way responsible for this tragic situation, on what scriptural grounds could we justify killing the child? Both the unborn child and the woman are victims. This is a truly heartbreaking situation, but on what grounds could we justify killing one victim to decrease the suffering of the other? Wouldn't it be an act of love on the part of the woman to preserve the life of the child? If she feels she could not give a child conceived in such circumstances the love and care it needs, it would be an act of love to entrust the child to the care of others through adoption. We should, of course, give the mother all the support and help we can.

Does WELS have an official stance on assisted reproductive technology, specifically in vitro fertilization? What Bible passages would clearly support it?

There is no official stance, but a number of moral considerations emerge when the question is examined in the light of Scripture.

Even though this human life is at its earliest stage, it is still a living human being.

The Bible indicates that life begins at conception (Psalm 139:13-16; Jeremiah 1:4,5; Psalm 51:5). This is true if the life is created inside a woman's body or outside of it. A concern with in vitro fertilization is that often a number of eggs are fertilized but not implanted into the woman's body. Since life begins at conception, a person would be discarding human life. Even though this human life is at its earliest stage, it is still a living human being.

Another issue is the success rate. Recent figures put the success rate at around 19 percent. We can't say what the success ratio is when the process takes place naturally. Yet a 19 percent success rate seems low. Since life begins at conception, do we want to place our children at risk, knowing that only one in five that are conceived will live to see the light of day?

If egg or sperm donors other than husband and wife are used, this also raises the moral issue of insertion of a third party into the procreation of children within the marriage relationship.

A final matter a Christian would have to evaluate is the financial aspect. Medical technology often comes at a high price, and a Christian husband and wife will have to determine how much they are willing and can afford to spend.

A Christian couple also has to guard against being obsessed with having a child. Scripture teaches that ultimately the Lord gives or withholds the blessing of children. (This is reflected in the account of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1.) This doesn't prevent Christians from making use of medical technology, which, when used properly, is a blessing of God. However, like all blessings of God, it must be managed wisely because it can be abused.

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

For more information on these and other life issues, contact WELS Lutherans for Life at 2949 N Mayfair Rd Ste 309, Milwaukee WI 53222; 1-800-729-9535; <welslutherans.forlife@wfl.wels.net>. Or check out their Web site at <www.wels.net/wfl/>

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

Easy ways to witness

Carry a can of food in your car. When you see someone hungry or homeless, give it to them along with an invitation to visit your church.

Do you have flowers left over from Sunday worship? Divide the flowers into small bouquets and use a ribbon to attach a short prayer or devotion. Deliver the flowers to shut-ins or those in the hospital.

You don't say . . .

Good advice for any husband:



"The church is Christ's bride, not yours. Your bride is waiting for you to love, cherish, and comfort her as you vowed. The Lord has many who tend to the needs of his church. Only one man vowed to be your wife's husband. You're the one—the only one who can fulfill the calling to cherish this special daughter of the King."

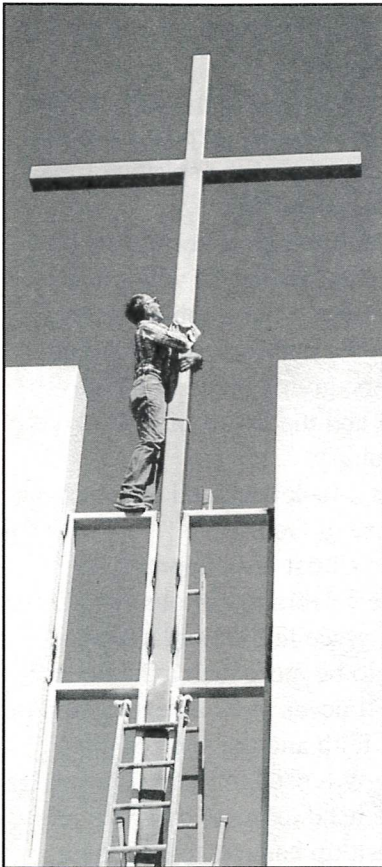
Taken from *Pastor's Family*, Feb./Mar. '98, published by Focus on the Family.

Kindness of strangers

Christmas break 1997 was over. Jacob Sampe had to return to Nebraska Lutheran High School, Waco. After a three-hour drive from his home in West Virginia, his mother dropped him off at the Columbus, Ohio, airport at 9 AM, gave him five dollars for a meal en route, and headed back home.

Due to bad weather, Jacob was rerouted; his flight wouldn't leave until 7:30 PM. He spent part of the day watching football in the airport lounge. Striking up a conversation with a middle-aged man and his mother, detained on their trip to Las Vegas, also helped fill several hours. They had just parted when a huge steak dinner was placed before Jacob. The waiter explained that the gentleman had paid for it and had also left him \$20 for spending money.

*Beverly Bornschlegl
Waco, Nebraska*



Picture this

Elroy Bartsch puts finishing touches on the cross at Lamb of God, Chandler, Ariz., to prepare for the dedication of the new worship facility. In addition to the cross, Bartsch, the evangelism chairman, has worked on the church by building scenery sets out of wood, styrofoam, fabric, and artifacts. He even made a font for the church, using a styrofoam cast of a large rock and a wok.

Liz Brouhard, who sent the photo in, says: "This picture of Elroy at the base of the cross of his Savior is a testimonial picture worth a thousand words. Elroy has been a WELS elementary school teacher, and though now retired, is an active member. He has a gift for creativity and has been a blessing to our congregation since we were 'born' almost five years ago."

Share your picture of Christian fellowship, worship, and faith. On a separate sheet, tell us why you took it, who is in it, what it means to you. Include your name, address, and phone number. Those whose photos get printed will receive a small gift. Picture this, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398.

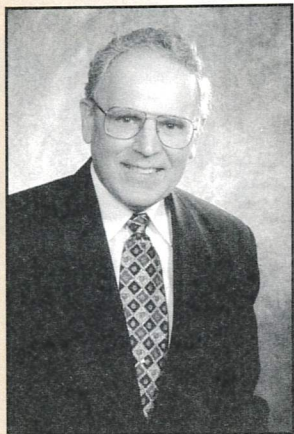
Fast fact

Approximately 1.5 million children were homeschooled in 1998—that's up 500 percent from 1990.

Newsweek, Oct. 5, 1998, quoted in *Current Thoughts & Trends*, Jan. 1999.

WELS homeschoolers, a list serve is now available for you. Already over 70 families have signed up. Go to the WELS Web site

<www.wels.net/sab/frm-cps.html>.



Gary P. Baumler is editor of *Forward/NL* and WELS Director of Communications.

Forward
is not just
a direction.
It is a mindset,
a soul's
conviction.

Let's go FORWARD in Christ

Forward in Christ is more than an anniversary theme.

Several years ago *Northwestern Lutheran*, attempting to be forward looking, began a short introductory feature for each issue and called it "Forward."

Imagine the embarrassment when, in a forum of personnel from several religious magazines, a professional magazine critic lampooned the editors for not knowing how to spell "Foreword."

They knew . . . but it was useless to try to explain.

We still have a similar feature. We call it "bits & pieces" (no reflection on how the hammer of criticism had left the staff).

No more subtleties! Now we boldly proclaim with all of WELS that we are going FORWARD, always in Christ. Let our masthead beckon you each month, as we approach and then enter 150 years of WELS service in the 2,000th year of the Christian era—I say, let us beckon you to go forward in Christ.

Forward is not just a direction. It is a mindset, a soul's conviction. It's the spirit of Jesus in Luke 9:51 when "he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (KJV) to give himself up for our salvation. It is setting our faces to go forward, too, into all the world with the message of salvation.

Forward is making progress because we know where we came from and who brought us where we are. It's continuing to build because we have a firm foundation of the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.

Forward is a promise, the promise of a new life now in Christ and of a life of eternal bliss with him in heaven.

Forward is something we travel together. Together in one faith. Together with Jesus Christ, who is with us each step of the way to the end of time.

Forward is our battle cry, a call to arms, as we struggle "against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil" (Ephesians 6:12).

Forward is our comfort because Jesus will not leave us behind; he will not forsake us, no matter what troubles we face.

Forward is the comfort we in our faith bring to others, giving bread to the physically hungry and the Bread of Life to the spiritually hungry.

Forward is a look back and a leap ahead, all to the glory of God.

Forward in Christ is an appropriate theme for the celebration of our synod's 150 years of grace in the Lord's service. But it needs to be more than a theme to be meaningful. It needs to be an expression of our heartfelt faith and the song of our thanksgiving. We need to live it, not just mouth it. We need to invite others to join us, not just put up banners telling them where we are going. We need to pray to God that he will give us the strength, wisdom, and faith to prevail. We need to count on God in Christ to lead us in love and to fill us with hope.

If we count the past 150 years, indeed the past 2,000 years, as a time of blessing, then we go forward, assured of the blessings that come alone in Christ.

Let's go!

Gary P. Baumler

Going to College or Tech School?

WELS Campus Ministry Is for You!



"Getting involved in Campus Ministry was one of the best decisions that I made during my college years. It was a great place to meet Christian friends and develop a family away from home."

Tara Jacobs
Minnesota State University,
Mankato, 1999

WELS Campus Ministry offers you a chance to meet new Christian friends and to grow in faith and Christian service during the vital college years.

Get your name on the student file and you will:

- Receive Meditations and The Northwestern Lutheran if requested on the form below.
- Get Lightsource, a periodical filled with ideas for spiritual growth
- Learn about the regional and national campus gatherings
- Get in touch with the church/campus ministry that serves your school

To learn more, check out our website at: <http://www.wels.net/sab/cm/frm-cm.html>

Fill out the form below and return to:

WELS Campus Ministry— 2929 N. Mayfair Road - Milwaukee, WI 53222-4398

or fill out the form on-line by selecting "Get Mail" from the Registration Building on our website!

NAME:

Last _____

First _____ Middle Initial _____

Birth Date: ____/____/____

Sex: Male Female

Home Address:

Street Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

E-Mail Address: _____

Home Phone: _____

Church Name (at home): _____

Church Address:

Street Address _____

City, St, Zip _____

Pastor: _____

COLLEGE INFORMATION:

College Name: _____

College's Address:

Street Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Living with parents when college is in session?

Yes No

School Year: _____

College Graduation Date: _____

Program Major: _____

Address while at School:

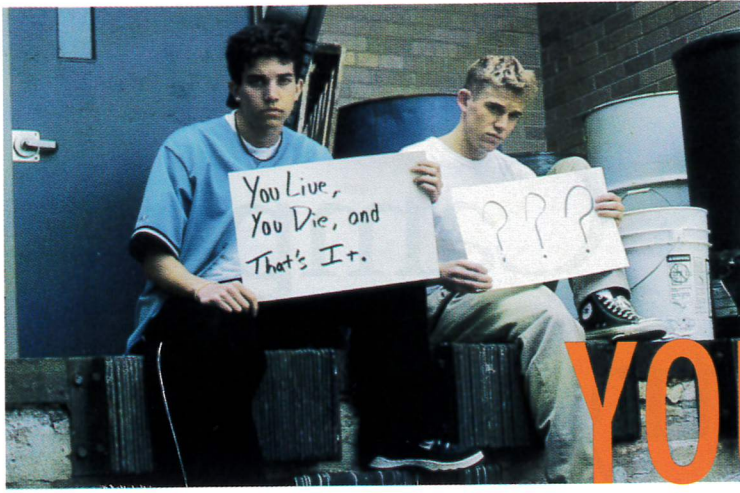
Street Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone No. while at school: _____

FREE SUBSCRIPTIONS

Yes please send me my FREE subscription to *Northwestern Lutheran* and *Meditations*.



TAKE ME TO YOUR TEACHER

A woman shows two boys where they can find the true teacher and his words.

Sarah Owens

I met Eric and Nick at the juvenile detention facility in Milwaukee. Both were facing court dates that weighed on their minds. They also had questions about God, so when we talked, their questions came full force.

“Why didn’t God banish the devil to hell instead of letting him on earth to tempt Adam and Eve?”
“If animals could talk back then, how were Adam and Eve to know to beware of the talking snake?”
“How did we get different races?”

Questions came at me one after the other, giving me little chance to answer. I began to wonder if they even wanted answers.

Finally, Eric asked, “I heard there are 66 versions of the Bible. How can you trust any version?” He added, “I think we’re living in heaven and hell now. We live, we die, and that’s it.”

Still, Eric reassured me, “Don’t get me wrong, I believe in God and all that. . . .” Eric was confused, and as Nick listened he also became more confused. I just had to depend on the Lord to intervene. The devil desperately wanted to distract us from the true issue at hand—God’s law and loving grace.

Between questions, I was able to present creation and the fall to them and explain the terrible implications of the first sin. I was determined not to let these two go back to the unit until they had heard the whole story. Yes, Adam’s sin was passed to us all, but we shouldn’t think that’s the end of the story. Jesus’ perfect record was also passed to us all, giving us forgiveness and eternal life.

Eric objected, “This is just what she believes because it’s what she’s been taught.”

“Yes, Eric, it’s what I’ve been taught, but it’s also what the Bible says.” Then, I read passages from Hebrews and Timothy of the authority and power of God’s Word, which was “breathed into the writer’s minds by God.” Paul also told Timothy to stick firmly to what he believed because he knew who his teachers were.

“You see, Eric,” I said, “I believe what has been taught to me, not because I blindly follow my teachers, but because I know where my teachers get their information.”

For once, Eric went silent. Nick then shared with me that his grand-

ma had taught him about the Lord. We celebrated that he had a foundation to build upon.

Eric seemed to awaken—a little more somber, calm, and thoughtful.

“Wow, that’s really got me thinking about the Bible and all that.”

I couldn’t help but feel that brush with the Holy Spirit’s awe-inspiring work. “Thank you, Jesus,” I thought, “only you can handle the questions and put focus in our studies. Only you can guide, inspire, and teach.”

I don’t have all the answers, and sometimes people find the need to question, test, and even attack. Yet, that’s not going to stop me. Amidst all the confusion, false prophets, and erroneous teaching, we’ve been blessed with the truth. We have access to the true teacher and his words.

The youth of today are confused. They’re looking to find out who’s telling the truth, whom they can trust. Let’s take them to our teacher.

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