

# FORWARD IN CHRIST

April 2003

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# Justice done, forgiveness won

*He was delivered over to death for our sins  
and was raised to life for our justification. Romans 4:25*

Paul M. Janke

**H**ow did God deal with our sins? Was he like some ethically challenged judge who fixes parking tickets for his friends? Did he simply ignore our guilt and sweep our sins under the carpet? If he did, he's not a just God.

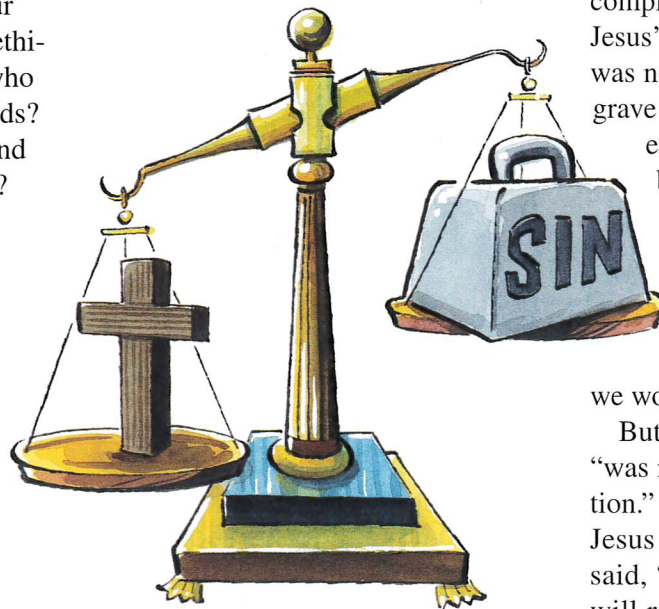
The apostle Paul writing in Romans says that God is both just and the "God who justifies the wicked." That sounds like a contradiction. True justice would not allow the guilty to be acquitted.

There is a way, though, to resolve this contradiction. His name is Jesus.

## Handed over for our sins

Jesus "was delivered over to death for our sins." In fact, Jesus was delivered over—handed over—several times as he went to the cross. The New Testament uses the word translated "delivered over" to describe what Judas in his disillusionment with Jesus schemed to do. "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" Judas asked the chief priests (Matthew 26:15).

Later, when the chief priests had carried out the fiction of determining that Jesus was worthy of death, they handed him over to Pontius Pilate, so that he could approve the death sentence. Pilate, when he could find no politically expedient way of avoiding the execution of an innocent man, handed Jesus over to the crucifixion detail.



Described this way, it can seem as though Jesus was just a pawn, handed this way and that—and helpless to prevent it.

The reality is that Jesus had predicted it. He told his disciples, "As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified" (Matthew 26:2). Not only did Jesus know what was going to happen—he was in complete agreement with the plan by which his holy life would be offered in place of our wretched, sinful lives. His refusal to escape when he had the chance is proof of his determination to do his Father's will and die for our sins.

## Raised to life for our justification

But what if Mary Magdalene and the other Mary had come to the tomb on Sunday morning and mournfully

completed the work of preparing Jesus' body for burial? What if there was no angels and no neatly folded grave clothes? What if there was no empty tomb? Then there would be repercussions beyond the fact that Jesus' body was decaying in a Judean grave. Then we are to be pitied for our futile fascination with Christ. Then no one rises from death. Then we would still be mired in our sins.

But the apostle tells us that Jesus "was raised to life for our justification." It's just as correct to say that Jesus raised himself to life. Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19). But the Spirit leads Paul to speak of Jesus being raised to life by God the Father because he wants to make an important point. If God had left Jesus in the grave, we could only conclude that there was some deficiency in Jesus' sacrifice for sin. But the Father didn't abandon Jesus. He raised him to life. In the moment that God raised Jesus to life he pronounced a whole world of sinners "not guilty." The resurrection of Jesus is our justification. Because Jesus lives, we know that our sins have been forgiven.

At the cross, justice was served. On Easter morning, the forgiveness Jesus won at the cross was announced to the world.

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



## FORWARD IN CHRIST

formerly Northwestern Lutheran



April 2003 / Vol. 90, No. 4

www.wels.net

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Ed Koehler, p. 3; Bill Scott, p. 8; courtesy of  
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courtesy of Michael Ewart & Lynda Grass,  
p. 14; Rubberball Productions, p. 16; PhotoDisc,  
p. 17; courtesy of Donald Patterson, p. 18;  
Hare Strigenz Designers, p. 30; Bill Clark, p. 36

### Forward in Christ

*Forward in Christ* (ISSN 1541-8936) is published  
monthly by Northwestern Publishing House,  
1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284.  
Periodical postage paid at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

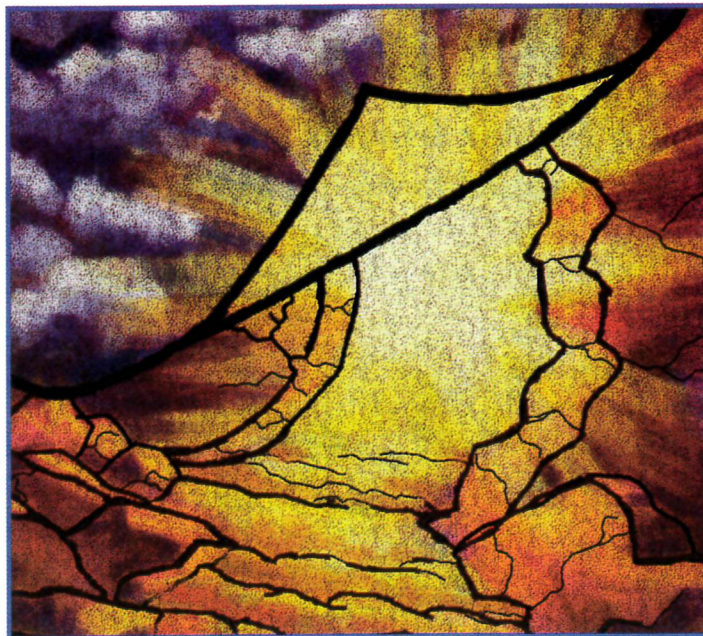
**Rates:** USA—\$12; single copy—\$1.50. Canada—\$12.84;  
single copy—\$1.61. All other countries—air mail \$43.20.  
Postage included, payable in advance to NPH. Write for  
multi-year, blanket, and bundle rates. For single issues,  
Wisconsin add 5% sales tax; Milwaukee County add 5.6%  
tax. Also available on audiocassette from Mission for the  
Visually Impaired, 559 Humboldt Ave, St. Paul MN 55107.

### Subscription Services

**1-800-662-6093, ext. 8.** Milwaukee  
area 414/615-5785. Or write NPH, 1250 N 113 St,  
Milwaukee WI 53226-3284. Order on-line:  
<www.nph.net>

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to  
*Forward in Christ*, c/o NPH, 1250 N 113 St,  
Milwaukee WI 53226-3284.

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Printed in the USA.



Cover illustration by Bill Scott

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The despair of Saturday gives way to the rejoicing of Sunday.

## bits & pieces



Easter—what a joyous time for Jesus' disciples, the women at the tomb, and for us and all believers. But can you imagine what the Saturday before Easter felt like? Or how we would feel if Jesus had not risen from the dead? Our Easter articles this month focus on those emotions:

- Both Stephen Geiger in "After Saturday comes Sunday" (p. 8) and Kristine Wendlandt in "Easter—God's 'yes' to sinners" (p. 17) talk about the despair of Saturday and the rejoicing of Sunday.
- Jeffrey Samelson in "No bones about it" (p. 36) looks at what life would be like if Jesus' bones had remained in the tomb that Easter morning and how life is different because they didn't.
- In Theodore Hartwig's poem in Potluck (p. 33), relive how Mary Magdalene, the women, and Peter and John felt after seeing the empty tomb.



We look at our last stage of marriage this month as Richard and Charlene Lauersdorf talk about the "Now what?" years of marriage in retirement (p. 10). We thank all our authors for sharing stories and experiences that help us understand how marriage and relationships may change over the years but can remain strong if firmly rooted in Christ.

—JKW



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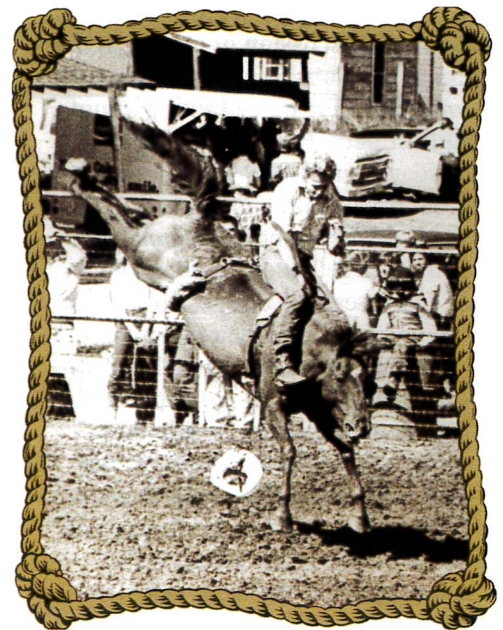
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Re: Prof. Gurgel's article "Ministry cutbacks" [Jan.]. **Before we as a synod begin any discussion of closing active foreign missions, it is important to remember that we're talking about children here.** Recent converts to Christianity in WELS world missions are our true children in the faith. Parents do not abandon their children when times get tough. They cut whatever expenses they can possibly cut in order to provide for their children.

In recent years our synod has initiated a slew of special programs and standing commissions. While these may be wonderful ministries for our synod, they should face cuts or even elimination before we decide to recall foreign missionaries whom we've already sent into the field. When our synod opens a world mission, we assume the responsibility of parenthood, a responsibility we cannot abandon. We can't recall a missionary from his mission without the almost certain risk of alienating the converts from Christianity and from Christ himself. And remember that many of these converts are children in the literal sense, too.

 Chris Rodenbeck

*Your concerns have been addressed by the responsible parties. We are pleased to report that no mission field will be abandoned. For more information, see p. 23.—ed.*

In the "Let your light shine" section [Nov. 2002], Dick Miller submitted an article of interest about how he spends part of his retirement playing instruments and teaching songs to the children at St. Paul's Child Care Center in Franklin, Wis.


**The children love Mr. Miller and sing their hearts out for him when he comes to practice with them.** He is so patient and great with the kids, and they respond to him so well. Just ask 22-month-old Dawson Bastian what happens when he hears the guitar play. "Mr. Miller! Mr. Miller!" he shouts. For someone

that young to respond in such a positive way is truly heartwarming. But, Dawson is not alone there. All of us feel the same way. God truly has blessed us by sending Mr. Miller to us. On behalf of the staff and children at St. Paul's, thank you, Mr. Miller! God bless you always.

*St. Paul's child care staff  
and all the children*

**I have been enjoying Pastor Kieselhorst's series on Daniel but am very puzzled by one statement in January's issue,** namely that Christ "was driven into hell" for our sins.

In my confirmation class (49 years ago) we learned that Christ's descent into hell was part of his state of exaltation and was a visit of triumph. 1 Peter 3:18,19 says, ". . . He was made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison . . ." To my knowledge this is the only place in the Bible that refers to his descent into hell, so I can't help wondering where the author found the basis for his statement.

*Joyce Robbins  
 Sacramento, California*

*Pastor Kieselhorst meant that Christ had to suffer the very torments of hell for our sins. He was not referring to the descent into hell that we confess in the Apostles' Creed. We regret the confusion.—ed.*


**Thank you to Pastor Engelbrecht for reminding us that the church is a spiritual enterprise built by the means of grace, not a religious institution evaluated by human metrics ["The numbers game," Feb.].**

The analogy he used, however, assumed that all the patient's vital signs were healthy and the only issue was that the man had stopped growing. To make the analogy consistent, the patient actually shrunk an inch or two, and the doctor might have had a concern about that.

In church health as in human health, numbers can give us a reason

to thank God or a clue for investigating what isn't as it should be. When the synod has experienced a decade of decline in most statistical categories and when there has been a precipitous drop in the number of home missions opened, the numbers urge further analysis and perhaps remediation. Maybe there should be more concern about declining numbers, not just the numbers prefaced by a dollar sign.

The book of Acts records numbers to describe the growth of the early church because each one of the numbers represented a soul won by the gospel. Christ's church is still concerned about numbers, because the numbers stand for people. When numbers decline, we ought to ask ourselves if we are being as faithful with law and gospel as we have been to law and gospel.

*Paul Kelm  
 Brookfield, Wisconsin*

**The virus that Vice President Wayne Mueller does not identify in "Answers to your budget questions" [Feb.] is sin and the old Adam.** Luther tells us that this virus is to be drowned in daily baptismal contrition and repentance.

Spiritual growth takes place through the means of grace. Faith is strengthened and love and hope increased only in water, wine, and Word. Will a spiritual growth project director tell us anything different?

*Mark F. Bartling  
La Crosse, Wisconsin*

Send your letters to Readers forum, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; FAX, 414/256-3862; <fic@sab.wels.net>. Include full name, address, and daytime phone number. Letters are edited for clarity, conciseness, and relevance. Writers' views are not necessarily those of WELS or *Forward in Christ* magazine.



# The “Jesus diet”

Kenneth A. Cherney Jr.

A veteran pastor once warned me never to say: “Now I’ve heard everything.” The minute you do, he said, something even more bizarre will turn up.

His words came to mind yesterday as I read the latest catalog from Christian Book Distributors. They’re fine folks who offer, at reasonable prices, all kinds of useful resources for both pastors and laypeople. In their catalog, though, there’s a lot of chaff in with the wheat. Witness the offering *What Would Jesus Eat?* by Dr. Don Colbert.

No, I’ve not read the book; the catalog blurb alone confirms my worst fears. “Does Scripture teach us how to live and *eat* [sic]?” it asks. “Based on medical and historical research, this health specialist says yes! Dr. Colbert shows you why those foods Jesus ate are ideal for 21st-century living—and why those he avoided continue to pose health risks.” Readers are invited to “discover a comprehensive nutrition plan that incorporates Bible-based eating.”

One wonders, first of all, whence cometh this wealth of information about what Jesus ate. References in the Gospels to Jesus himself eating are few and brief, and details about what he ate are sparse. I’m picturing a diet based on barley bread, broiled fish, water, and wine—along with a 40-day fast at least once in your lifetime, and one meal every year of roast lamb and bitter herbs. As a diet manual, in other words, the Gospels would leave a lot to be desired.

And that’s exactly the point. The Gospels are not a diet manual. They are not a guide to effective weight loss. They were not written to tell you how to do your taxes, raise your kids, manage your relationships, or organize your church for

rapid growth. They are not books about “how to do it.” They’re about how God did it—how he entered human history in the person of Jesus Christ in order to reveal himself to us, to earn salvation for us, and to heal the rift between man and God. Read the Gospels and you’ll find reams of information about that. And it will satisfy you more deeply than a whole shelf of “how-to” books ever could.

For those still interested in “Bible-based eating”: there actually is a diet manual in Scripture, but not in the Gospels. It’s found largely in the Old Testament book of Leviticus. There God lists the animals that can and can’t be eaten, along with his directives on how they should and shouldn’t be prepared—the laws of *kashrut*, of clean and unclean foods. Jesus himself observed these laws. Using them as a foundation, Judaism has constructed a “Bible-based” eating plan that has been around a lot longer than Dr. Colbert’s and that is as “comprehensive” as anything you could ask for.

“But that’s the ceremonial law!” you’re thinking. “Jesus set us free from all that. The New Testament specifically says we aren’t bound by all that (Colossians 2:16; Romans 14). What’s more, it says it would be unloving and legalistic to judge people’s level of spirituality by what they eat.”

Exactly.

*Note: Shortly after he wrote this article, the author became aware of the national, anti-SUV campaign entitled, “What Would Jesus Drive?” He wishes it to be known that he now has heard everything.*

*Ken Cherney is a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota.*

[The Gospels]  
are not books  
about “how to  
do it.” They’re  
about how  
God did it.



# AFTER

The despair of Saturday gives way to the rejoicing of Sunday—for Jesus' disciples and friends and for us.

Stephen H. Geiger

Saturday must have been a very long day.

For Peter, as he remembered the call of a bird and the words of a friend: "This very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." Never, Lord. But Jesus was right. Now Jesus was no more.

For the other 11, now 10. "You will all fall away." We will never disown you. Yet a kiss by one and the rest deserted and fled. Jesus was right. Now Jesus was no more.

For the women. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" They watched from a distance. No help could they offer. Then agonized lips became lifeless, and Jesus was no more.

The sun set on a rough Friday, but the sun rose again. If the night had been sleepless, the next day must have seemed eternal.

## Saturday. The day when death ruled, so it appeared.

That Saturday morning, had guards broken the seal and rolled back the stone, it would have seemed that death was ruling even over the flesh of God. The body lay still. Jesus' eyes did not blink. Jesus' heart did not beat. Jesus' legs did not wiggle. There were no muffled cries to untie, to unwrap, to set free.



Jesus was dead.

On that Saturday there is no doubt that tears were shed. By disciples. By women. Who also had bought spices. They planned to buy more. To care for the dead.

## On a Saturday long, long ago.

"Stop," we say. "He will live!" Had we visited Peter that somber Saturday, we would have whispered, "Don't worry. The third day he will rise." The joy of tomorrow will dry tears from your eyes.

Had we visited the women, their spices and wraps, we would have said, "Kindly count with me. Day one, day two . . . tomorrow is day

three. I don't want to disappoint, but your work is unnecessary."

But he's dead.

"Yes, but this is just Saturday. The day may be long, but it is only one day. After Saturday comes Sunday," so gently we'd say.

Yet we understand those disciples, those women tormented by tears and fear and minds churning plans to wrap and to spice the failed flesh of a friend.

We understand what it's like to live through a Saturday. When all



# COMES SUNDAY

appears lost. To stand in the chill on the plains of Nebraska, the eyes of dear friends swelling beside the earth opened, a bed for their little girl. To sit in the pew with the casket now closed, a grandma who loved to hear of Jesus but who now could hear no more. Or to sit in your home, then a call from a friend: "She's gone." A wife, torn by cancer. Her body eaten away.

It's Saturday. Despair offers its hand. Fears cloud clear vision. Sobs rise from so deep that you cannot discover where they began.

We understand what it's like to live through a Saturday. Our life is one long Saturday. We live shivering under the shadow of death. Everyday we see lives fade, loved ones disappear. In our own mirror we watch time slowing, slipping. In our own paychecks we see dollars disappear in efforts finally futile to ensure life and health. We drive by hospitals, live by cemeteries, and watch panicky or somber processions to each.

Deepest darkness drapes the universe. Death.

On a Saturday it hung heavy over the garden tomb.

**A very long day it must have been. Saturday. But it was only one day.**

Next came Sunday, when the spice ladies carried their purchases and wondered how in the world they'd move the heavy stone.

An angel met them. "I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay" (Matthew 28:6).

The angel didn't say that Jesus hadn't been dead. The angel just said he wasn't dead anymore. The angel didn't say he hadn't been in the tomb. The angel just said, "He's not there anymore." The angel didn't say there hadn't been a Saturday, rough and long. The angel just showed that it wasn't Saturday anymore.

**It's still our Saturday. Long. Hard. But do not despair. Jesus has promised us a Sunday.**

It was Sunday. On Sunday the dark sheet of death draped over a garden grave was ripped away, and eternal sun did shine. On Sunday the seeming victory of death was shown to be a sham, swallowed up by resurrection. On Sunday the tears and fears over lifeless flesh were dried and calmed by living flesh.

To a woman, dear Mary, Jesus appeared. How loving. Not a word about unused spices or the doubts of before. He just spoke a name, her fears forgotten, forgiven by God.

To a man, dear Peter, Jesus also appeared. To disciples, just as guilty, who had run and then feared. Their God they had forsaken, as we also have done, but God for us all had given his Son. Jesus was forsaken in our place, for our sins. Jesus suffered for the weak, who doubt and despair. But he did not just suffer. He did not just die. He did not just lay lifeless in the grave. He suffered through a

Friday, and he was dead through a Saturday, but on Sunday he came to life. He conquered. He rose. He lives that we might know that our hero crushed death, smashed the sin of the world, and assures us that we have been declared innocent of all evil in the presence of the Almighty God. Marvel. Believe. Rejoice.

**It was Sunday, the day of resurrection. So why still death? Why still mourning?**

Why still the slowly creeping crawl of time? Why does it still seem like Saturday?

Jesus had a Saturday. Jesus promised that he would have a Sunday. He did, just as he said.

We have a Saturday. It's still our Saturday. Long. Hard. But do not despair. Jesus has promised us a Sunday. "Because I live, you also will live" (John 14:19).

When you struggle, when you doubt, invite reminders from that rough day so long ago. Invite disciples, who wept through day two but rejoiced on day three. Invite women, who made spice plans on day two but had sweet smells unused on day three.

Remember the dark day of that time long ago. Remember then the day of life that followed and the one that is yet to come. For Jesus did rise, and "he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever" (Isaiah 25:7,8).

It may still be Saturday. But after Saturday comes Sunday.



*Steve Geiger is pastor at Prince of Peace, Yankton, South Dakota.*



# Now what?

**Retirement is not all fun and games. But it's also not the end of life. Each day is a new time to live, love, laugh, and be happy because of our precious Savior.**

Richard and Charlene Lauersdorf

**“I**’m sure glad I’m past that,” my wife comments when we see a mother wrestling with her crying baby in a store.

“Look at all those people hurrying off to work,” my husband chuckles as we head out for a leisurely breakfast.

For so long we look forward to retirement. Then one day it’s here. Now what?

## A time for togetherness

**He says:** All these years I’ve been reading the morning paper at night. Piling up the projects on the workbench in the garage. Promising my wife that I’ll take her to concerts, garage sales, even antique stores. Now I’m retired!

Of course, I miss my job. So much of life has gone into it. Withdrawal from it took almost a year. But you know what? Now I have time for my wife. Now we’re back where we started 42 years ago. Just the two of us!

We do some of the cooking together, though I’ve learned to respect that it’s her kitchen. We work together on projects, like building storage shelves in the basement so she could finally organize our “stuff.” We watch TV together, though I’ll admit I click the remote control more than she does.



Richard and Charlene Lauersdorf

(That’s a “man thing” they tell us.) I brake for garage sales, step into antique stores, “ooh and aah” with her at quilting shows.

I like to tease her that all this activity is penance for the years I was too busy. But really it’s much more. It’s sharing together, taking time to show my love for her.

**She says:** You’ve heard it. Definition of retirement: “Twice as much husband and half as much house.” Not for me. With my husband’s heavy workload for many,

many years, I waited for this day to come, and I’m loving it.

Let me tell you what we’re doing together now. Getting up when we wake up. Taking our walk first thing. Preparing meals together. (Yes, ladies, I’m lucky enough to have a man who enjoys the kitchen, and he doesn’t just cook and run anymore!) Cleaning the house, garage, and basement. I used to enjoy the fact that my farmer-dad upon retirement went grocery shopping with my mom.





planted evergreens in our other son's yard in Iowa and travel together to his wife's homeland of France. Visit the church services when our daughters are on the organ bench. Listen to our sons-in-law as one shares his enthusiasm for sports of all kinds and the other describes the latest acquisition to his sports card collection.

**Next to the Savior, my spouse is one of God's great gifts. So is retirement with its time together.**

Now we can do that. Going to movies. Travel. And sometimes when my arthritis is really acting up, he'll even massage the sore spots.

Also in retirement "little things still mean a lot." I still love it when he touches my hair as he passes my chair, although a back rub is even better. I still enjoy it when he calls me his "beautiful bride," labeling my extra pounds as "return on his investment." I still am soothed when we read together about Paul's journeys and the many passages that assure us of God's love even after all these years.

Now what? Next to the Savior, my spouse is one of God's great gifts. So is retirement with its time together.

**A time for family**

Our children are now adults, bringing us different joys. In retirement there's time to go out on the shooting range in Montana with one son and garage sale-ing with his wife. Admire the newly

And then there's the grandkids. God knew what he was doing when he invented them. There's joy without all the responsibility. What's better than cheering at the games when two of our granddaughters are out on the floor. Attending the concerts at Luther Prep where another one participates. Listening to our grandson telling us on the phone he's lost another tooth. Chuckling as the youngest tells us she's "Brett Favre" at recess time in kindergarten where she's the only girl. Receiving pictures on e-mail of our great-granddaughter in Georgia.

Now what? Family is one of God's gifts to us. So is retirement with its time to enjoy it.

**A time for growth**

Are we ever having fun! We're taking this woodworking class for adults. We even get a reduced rate

as seniors. It's one of our nights out together. We make a good team. One of us cuts, while the other measures. Guess who's who.

That's not the only place we're growing. Spending four months in Montana taught us additional truths about God's wonderful creation. Have you traveled the Beartooth Highway, described as one of the most scenic mountain roads in the world? Watched antelope moving ever so gracefully along the horizon? Marveled at how dry sagebrush acres lie next to irrigated green fields? We don't have to travel across the world to grow in knowledge of God's creation.

Nor do we have to travel far to grow in service. In our congregations, retirees teach Bible classes, function as church janitors, keep track of the pew register, send cards to visitors in the worship services, stuff bulletins, mail newsletters, and serve at hot lunch programs. They may also provide "grey hair" wisdom for the various boards and committees. In the community, hospitals, nursing homes, libraries, schools, and service groups are always looking for volunteers. Retirees are an ever growing manpower pool. The "seasoned citizens" who roll up their sleeves find growth in service.

Now what? The "golden years" can have their tarnished times. Retirement is not all fun and games. But it's also not the end of life. Each day is a new time to live, love, laugh, and be happy because of our precious Savior.



*Richard and Charlene Lauersdorf have been married for 42 years. Richard retired as the first vice president of WELS in 2001 and now serves as a part-time visitation pastor at Good Shepherd, West Bend, Wisconsin. Both enjoy writing in their spare time.*



Part 1: What do the terms “minister” and “ministry” mean, and how should they best be used?

Part 2: What is a Christian’s role as a priest of God?

Part 3: What is the public ministry? Who serves in the public ministry?

Part 4: What is the relationship between pastors and “priests”?

# Every Christian a priest?

**As Christians, we don’t have to suffer from an identity crisis. We know who we are—a holy priesthood.**

David J. Valleskey

In last month’s article we asked, “Is every Christian a minister?” We saw that, because of the way the word can be defined, a case could be made for saying that every Christian is a minister with a ministry to perform. Yet we concluded that it would be less confusing if we would restrict the use of these terms—especially in their definite forms (*the minister, the ministry*)—to their narrower definitions and thus apply them only to those who are serving in what is commonly known as the public ministry.

## No identity crisis here

Our answer to the question before us in this article, “Is every Christian a priest?”, is quite different. It is not of the “yes, but . . .” variety. Rather, it is a resounding, “YES, every Christian is a priest.”

The apostle Peter says of all Christians, “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a *holy priesthood*, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. . . . You are a chosen people, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation, a people

belonging to God” (1 Peter 2:5,9, emphasis added).

As Christians, we don’t have to suffer from an identity crisis. We know who we are. A *holy* priesthood declared holy, righteous in God’s eyes by virtue of the spotless life and sacrificial death of Jesus. We also are a *royal* priesthood, priests who belong to and who are in the service of their King.

**God has given his Word to all Christians and has given them the right, even the commission, to bring that Word to others.**

Martin Luther spoke frequently about the Bible’s teaching of the priesthood of all believers. Commenting on 1 Peter 2:9, he writes:

Peter names the people and the congregations very clearly, and he calls them all together a royal priesthood. . . . Thereby, the Holy Spirit teaches us that ointments, consecrations, tonsures, chas-

ubles, albs, chalices, masses, sermons, etc., do not make priests or give power. Rather priesthood and power have to be there first, brought from baptism and common to all Christians through the faith which builds them upon Christ the true high priest. (*Luther’s Works* [LW], American Edition, vol. 39, pp. 236,237)

Jerome, a church father of the fourth century, said something similar: “Baptism,” he maintained, “is the ordination of the laity.”

“It would please me very much,” wrote Luther, “if this word ‘priest’ were used as commonly as the term ‘Christians’ is applied to us” (LW, vol. 30, p. 63). Even more strongly, Luther asserts, “Worthy of anathema [condemnation] is any assertion that a priest is anything else but a Christian” (LW, vol. 40, p. 19).

## No doubt that we should live as priests

What is our calling as priests? Our calling is to “offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.”

What are those spiritual sacrifices we offer up to God? The apostle Paul



explains in his letter to the Romans: “I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1). As priests we give nothing less than our entire selves as “living sacrifices” in gratitude to God who in mercy gave his Son as a dying sacrifice for us.

Practically speaking, how do we as priests of God, made priests in baptism, do this? How do we “offer our bodies as living sacrifices”? We function as priests with the way we live our lives. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “You [all Christians, all of whom are priests of God] are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13,14). When the purity of our lives serves as a silent seasoning in a decaying world, when the light of our faith shines as a bright beacon in a sin-darkened world, we are functioning as priests of God. When we live our lives to the glory of God wherever God has placed us—in our home, our place of work, our neighborhood, our church—we are carrying out our calling to serve as priests. Luther writes:

There is no true, basic difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, between religious and secular, except for the sake of office and work, but not for the sake of status. They are all of the spiritual estate, all are truly priests, bishops, and popes. . . . A cobbler, a smith, a peasant—each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops. (LW, vol. 44, pp. 129,130)

In God’s eyes there is no difference in status, no difference between “secular” and “sacred” work. Whatever God’s priests do to the glory of God is sacred, a “spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1).

We also function as priests with our lips. God has given his Word to all Christians and has given them the right, even the commission, to bring that Word to others. Luther writes: “No one can deny that every Christian possesses the word of God and is taught and anointed by God to be priest. . . . But if it is true that they have God’s word and are anointed by him, then it is their duty to confess, to teach, and to spread [his word]. . . . (LW, vol. 39, p. 309)

Even more emphatically, Luther says:

There is no other word of God than that which is given to all Christians to proclaim. There is no other baptism than the one which any Christian can bestow. There is no other remembrance of the Lord’s Supper than that which any Christian can observe and which Christ has instituted. There is no other kind of sin than that which any Christian can bind or loose. . . . These make the priestly and royal office. (LW, vol. 40, pp. 34,35)

Our gracious God has certainly put a marvelous treasure—the gospel—into the hearts and upon the lips of every Christian, each of whom is a holy and royal priest. There is no treasure in Christ’s church that every Christian does not have the right to use.

*David Valleskey is president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.*

## Important terms

**Minister:** one who serves God (broad definition); one who is authorized [called] to perform religious functions in a church (common definition).

**Ministry:** service to God (broad definition); the profession, services, and duties of a minister of religion (common definition).

**Personal ministry:** the service that every Christian renders to God in response to God’s love and mercy in Christ.

**Public ministry:** ministry performed in the name of and on behalf of a body of believers (broad definition); ministry that has to do with the proclamation of the gospel (preaching and teaching the Word and administering the sacraments) performed in the name of and on behalf of a body of believers (narrow definition).

**Member ministry:** a type of public ministry of the gospel carried out on a part-time basis by a congregation member.

**Priest:** every Christian (also referred to as the “universal priesthood” and “priesthood of all believers”).

**Pastor:** a public minister of the gospel who oversees the entire ministry of the church.

**Immediate (direct) call:** a call that doesn’t involve an intervening agency.

**Mediate (indirect) call:** a call that involves an intervening agency (such as a congregation).





# Out of the Darkness

**Two more Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference churches emerge out of the darkness of once closed societies.** Gary P. Baumler

## Where are we?

We hold our annual church picnic at the sandy beaches of the Ob Sea.

Nearly 40 members of our five congregations are deaf.

One of our congregations consists of 95 percent women.

After the children's Christmas Eve service, Jan. 6 (!), 2001, the temperature was 40 degrees below zero.

Does that last sentence give it away? We are in Siberia, Russia, looking in on the 600 baptized souls of the Christian Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia. Ten years ago the church began as the Christian Information Confession, a charitable organization created as a legal basis for mission activities. A year later it opened a Christian information center in Akademgorodok, a suburb of the Siberian capital of Novosibirsk, a city of 1.6 million people.

The center distributed free Bibles and offered a video instruction course. Regular Sunday worship and Bible study began. Four adults and six children were baptized, 12 adults confirmed, and the church was under way. In 1995 it registered under the name Confessional (now Christian) Evangelical Lutheran Church.

If the name Siberia means a place far away, barren, cold, and forbidding

to you, imagine trying to start a church there. Think of the challenges:

1. The country is expansive and remote.
2. The economy is as cold as the winter temperatures. Members cannot afford to support national pastors or basic rented facilities.
3. The congregations are short on male leadership.
4. The Russian culture is saturated with Eastern (Russian) Orthodox customs and thinking. Other churches are usually called sects. Once a lady offered a bottle of holy water that was filled and sanctified in the Orthodox church to our pastor in Akademgorodok to drink. Many members continue to keep icons in their homes.
5. Russia has inherited the legacy of the atheistic emphasis of communist times. God is ignored, and man is the measure of all things.

Nevertheless, you are in a fertile mission field among friendly people. "When a pastor visits members at home," says Missionary Michael Ewart, "he can't simply visit and leave. At the very least he will have to stay for tea and cookies—sometimes the member will insist on a whole meal!"

So the ministry moves ahead, aided by Christian information centers and

English language classes to introduce people to God's Word. Helped by WELS subsidies, the church has established a seminary/Bible institute, found adequate facilities for worship and study, and distributed humanitarian aid. A publication program and ministry to the deaf reap abundant harvests.

Says Ewart, "After 70 years of communism, many are discovering God's Word. For them it is new and exciting. Many are suffering under the economic depression that has resulted from a switch from communism to a free-market economy. They find joy and relief when they come to know the eternal riches that are theirs in Christ Jesus."

## Where are we now?

Our country, too, is predominantly Orthodox and was held in the grip of atheistic communism.

We are a small country that was also oppressed by the Ottoman Empire for over 450 years.

We are located north of Greece and Turkey and south of Romania.

We are in Bulgaria, with challenges much like those in Russia. Since we entered the country 10 years ago, we have made many contacts through Bulgarian Lutheran literature, a Mission of Mercy program





Russian funeral customs are different from what we're used to. During a Russian funeral, mirrors in the home are covered with sheets. Shots of vodka are often passed around at the gravesite. At the memorial meal, only spoons are used.

### Christian Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia

Members: 621  
 Established congregations: 5  
 Mission stations: 2  
 National vicars: 3  
 Seminary students: 2  
 Bible institute students: 4  
 WELS missionaries: 6\*



Bulgarians gather for worship at the Christian information center in Sofia.

### Bulgarian Lutheran Church

Members: 211  
 Established congregations: 2  
 Mission stations: 2  
 National pastors/evangelists: 2  
 Seminary students: 3  
 Bible institute students: 11  
 WELS missionaries: 4\*

\*One from each field must leave due to budget cutbacks.

of humanitarian aid, and Christian information centers. In 1997 the Bulgarian Lutheran Church dedicated a church building, central office, and worker training facility in the center of the capital, Sofia. The Lord has blessed the church with over 200 adult confirmands.

Missionary Michael Bartsch tells the story of Raina to illustrate the gospel at work in Bulgaria:

"As a young girl, Raina studied in English at a Protestant school and learned about her Savior. After she graduated, the atheistic communists came into power and arrested the headmistress of her school. The husband of one of her teachers, a widely respected pastor in Sofia, was imprisoned for 12 years. Her family's property was confiscated by the state.

"Raina eventually got married and began a family. However, her husband had served in the Bulgarian military during World War II. In the wake of another purge by the communist leaders, he fled the country. Border guards killed him as he was leaving a neighboring communist country for Italy.

"Even through all this persecution, Raina kept her faith in Jesus. Because she knew English, she was asked to instruct the children of the communist leaders. There, in spite of everything, she had the Christian courage to tell their children at Christmas time, 'And now we will learn about the baby Jesus.'

"Because so few people were left after the purges who could teach English, the communist leaders did nothing to her. She had the Christian courage to speak privately about Jesus, but it took some time to overcome her fears of the public ridicule heaped on those who attended worship services during those years.

"To support herself she continued

to teach English, and, after the fall of communism, she began to take in English-speaking boarders, including some missionaries. In due time, through contact with some of our pastors, Raina confessed her faith publicly and joined our Bulgarian Lutheran Church. She often brings friends to church and rejoices in now being able to help in publicly proclaiming the Savior whom she learned about during her youth and still confesses in her life."

Challenges abound. New members need nurture and strengthening in the Word even as they reach out with the Word. Many outside of the church still look on this church as a sect. Between emigration and a low birth rate, the population is declining. Average monthly income is \$120.

Meanwhile, God works through his Word to set captive souls free. One woman, Gina, asked her Orthodox priest to teach her child about the Bible. The priest laughed at her and said, "We don't teach the Bible. Just come to our church, light a candle, and kiss the icons. That is our religion." Gina kept looking and found Bible teaching for her son and herself at our church in Sofia.

So the church grows and counts many blessings. It continues to publish the gospel message in Bulgarian. It shares food and medicine and the gospel with over 4,000 people a month. It is well on its way to working out of four regional centers to reach the greatest number of people.

In both Bulgaria and Siberia, Russia, God has opened doors once closed with an iron curtain and has brought light to a people living in darkness.



Gary Baumler is editor of *Forward in Christ* magazine and WELS Director of Communications.



# WHATEVER

## Materialistic rap

Christian teens have to sift through all kinds of songs and music to find something that is appropriate.

Kenneth Cherney III

Today, the youth of our nation can listen to many different kinds of music. With the Internet in almost everyone's home, it is easier than ever to get any kind of music that you want. Often, the music of choice is rap and hip-hop.

**The lyrics of these popular songs present some problems for Christian young people.**

They are not only obscene, vulgar, and coarse, but they promote a materialistic attitude, the classic: "whoever has the most toys at the end wins." This attitude is evident in almost every rap song. All the songwriters seem to talk about is how much money, how many cars, and how many women (sometimes men) they have. For some reason, they can't think of anything else to write about. At least they mix it up every once in a while with a little cop killing or drug trafficking.

The following lyric from Snoop Dog's "Gin and Juice" illustrates the problem: "... laid back; with my mind on my money and my money on my mind." This implies that even while relaxing, Snoop can't stop thinking about his money. What happens when all your money is gone? Diddy's Crystal will dry up, Eminem's hair will fall out, and eventually all of their lives will end. Then what?

As Christians we know that we will go to heaven, but what do they have to look forward to? They can't take their money with them and even if they could, it wouldn't help much. For them, "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die" isn't just a saying. It's a way of life. Often, because of their way of life, they die way too soon. Between gang violence, drugs, alcohol, and many other dangers, it seems that the odds are stacked against them.

**I believe that the worst part about this whole situation is that these rappers become idols and role models to kids like me.** Teenagers end up acting and thinking like these people. They start envying the sinful ways and actions of the superstars, which can lead to trouble quickly. The materialism replaces Christianity, and stuff replaces God.

Also, listening to this kind of music numbs our consciences to bad language, idol worship, and many other sins. When teenagers hear all the sinful and evil things that these people do, they start to believe that this way of life is the norm and the true way to happiness.

Not all rap songs are bad, and not all rappers are evil. But we have to be careful. Not all rock songs are good either. We as Christian young people have to sift through all kinds of songs and music to find appropriate and right music.

The purpose for music is to entertain people. It is not a place to get your doctrine, and it is certainly not a reliable place to receive lessons on life. We need to go to the Scriptures for those things.

Ken Cherney, a member at St. John, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a senior at Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm.



# consciencences



# Easter—God’s “yes” to sinners

**Easter is more than brightly colored jelly beans, dyed eggs, and chocolate bunnies.**

Kristine Wendlandt

**I**magine you were there the night before the first Easter. . . .

**Do you see those people silhouetted against the moonlit sky?**

Their cloaks hang from stooped shoulders; heads bowed, they huddle together for comfort. Despair hovers over them like a dark cloud.

We are just able to hear the murmur of muted voices—voices trying to make sense of it all—questioning, answering, remembering.

“I saw him perform miracles with my own eyes!”

“He healed me!” chimed in another.

“He talked about the forgiveness of sins,” remembered one with yearning in her voice.

“And he said he was the way to heaven,” whispered another.

Could they possibly have misunderstood? Was he not who he claimed to be? Had they put their hope in this Jesus only to be bitterly disappointed? Their doubt and bewilderment all but swallowed them up, because their Jesus was now dead—crucified by Roman soldiers. His limp, lifeless body was sealed away in a tomb, and all their hopes with it.

The gathering slowly dispersed into the darkness, a fit companion for the despair of their souls.

**We have much in common with this hopeless group.** We, too, walk this earth in darkness and despair, without hope, because we know that

God judges sin and that we don’t come close to qualifying for heaven’s perfection. Without forgiveness of our sins, there is no hope for heaven and an eternity with God—for any of us.

We’ve heard plenty of well-meaning advice about eternity. Think of those sugar-coated sentiments—“Oh, you’re a good person, you’ll get into heaven” or “Just do your best, I’m sure God will accept you.” Sadly, the net spiritual value is similar to the nutritional value of the bunnies and candy we enjoy at this time of year: none. Such platitudes are as hollow as the chocolate bunnies we find in our baskets on Easter.

As much as we might like to put our trust in these sweet, but spiritually-bankrupt assurances, we know better. The solid truths of the Bible ring in our ears:

- “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).
- “. . . because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed” (Romans 2:5).

Who of us can stand under such scrutiny? When we look inward and see our own sin and guilt before God, our despair matches and maybe even exceeds that of the desolate group we met earlier. Who can help us? Jesus of Nazareth, their hope and ours, was apparently defeated and helpless . . .



dead. Scripture tells us, “If Christ has not been raised . . . you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17).

Is there any hope for us beyond the brightly colored jelly beans, dyed eggs, and chocolate bunnies? Let’s see what God did for us on that first momentous Easter morning.

**Jesus burst forth from the grave, splitting open the sealed tomb in a dynamic display of splendor and glory.** Death could not hold him! Satan could not defeat him! Sin could not overpower him! He, as our sin-substitute on the cross of Calvary, came forth victorious from the grave. This is Easter, God’s “YES!” for sinners.

- Yes, Jesus was who he claimed to be, the Son of God.
- Yes, because of him your sins are forgiven.
- Yes, he vanquished death so that you may be resurrected.
- Yes, he has prepared a place for you in heaven.

May you have a blessed Easter, believing and rejoicing in all that the risen Christ has won for you.

*Kristine Wendlandt is a member at Mt. Olive, Appleton, Wisconsin.*



# Work with all of your available gifts

**Unique experiences lead  
to unique opportunities.**

**Donald W. Patterson**

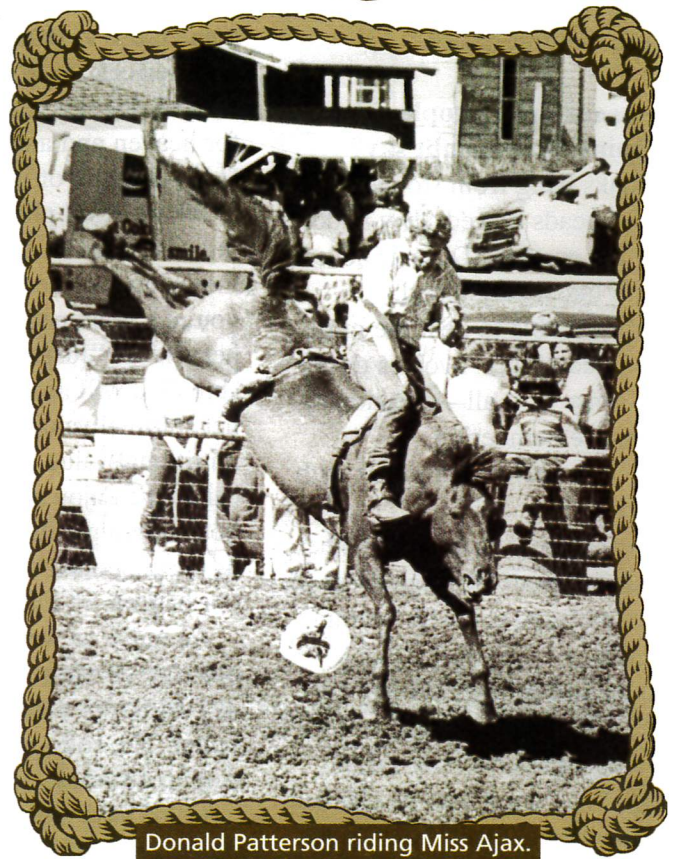
Turn back the clock 21 years and go to Mesquite, Texas. I was an adventurous 18-year-old who had more daring than common sense. I was sitting on a sorrel-colored mare named “Miss Ajax” in chute number two waiting to give the nod for them to open the gate. I had just recited to myself the Apostles’ Creed. If I was going to die, I wanted to die in the faith. I tightened my grip on the bareback rigging, clamped my knees tight on the horse’s shoulders, hunkered down, and nodded.

As the gate slung open, Miss Ajax exploded into the high school rodeo area with me flapping on her back. She bucked high and hard. One, two, three, and off I flew. No score! I hadn’t stayed on long enough. The only thing I took home that day was a hurt wrist and limp applause from the Sunday afternoon crowd. That ride ended my not so illustrious rodeo career. Or was it my parents who ended it? I think it was both.

### **Little event, big results**

You ask, “Now what does that event have to do with Jesus and his ministry?” That’s what I asked for years. I never dreamed that my short career riding bucking broncos would ever have anything to do with the kingdom of God. But it did.

In the first month after I was ordained into the pastoral ministry, I was giving a little girl a ride home from vacation Bible school because her young parents had only one car, which her dad used for work. We had discovered her by



Donald Patterson riding Miss Ajax.

putting out door hangers about half a mile from our church.

Each day as I dropped her off, I would stay to visit with her mom for a few minutes. One day while we were visiting, the phone rang. When she went to answer it, she invited me into the doorway of her home. As I stepped into her den, I noticed a picture of her husband riding a bucking bull. When she got off the phone, I asked her about it. She said he rode every now and then with a bunch of his friends at a local arena.

I said, “I used to ride bucking broncos in high school.” We left it at that.



A couple of weeks later this family showed up at our church with Dad. I had never met him. After the service he stuck out his hand and said, "I visited today because my wife told me that you rode in rodeos in high school. I figured, 'A pastor that rode rodeo?' I gotta see this." A few months later he finished doctrine class and joined the church. He and his family have now been members for over nine years.

**Be yourself, reach others**

God used my short jaunt in youthful foolishness to allow me an open door to a soul who needed Jesus. Doesn't that blow your mind? It really shouldn't surprise any of us. God says that he determined the times set for us and the exact places where we should live (Acts 17:26) and that he works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will (Ephesians 1:11). It makes perfect sense that he uses any part of our lives to help us reach people with his love and truth.

All too often we remember that he uses Scripture and spiritual gifts so that we can be a blessing to his church, but we forget that he uses all of our other unique blessings too. Nothing in our lives is neutral. Ponder these thoughts for a moment: Why did God make you male or female? Why did he put you in that family with those economic opportunities or the lack of them? Why is your personality not exactly like everyone else's? Why are you a natural at sports or art or communication? Why would God let you stutter? Why were you reared in California or Wisconsin? How come you grew to be that tall or didn't? Our height and metabolism are his doing too.

Add your experiences. Why did he let that bully scare you when you were 10? How come you had an uncle that gave you the dream vacation to Alaska? Not everyone gets to race cars or

ride in a hot air balloon. Why did you get to do those things or take other adventures? Why did you have a grandma who taught you how to crochet? Or how come your grandpa taught you to hunt or fish? Everything in our lives is a gift from our heavenly Father (James 1:17).

Even a chronic or terminal illness becomes a powerful tool in the hand of the Creator. Illness is a platform for proclamation. His children can use it to proclaim love and truth. People will flock to your side when you are ill. Many ill people have broken through walls that their visitors hid behind for years.

One of the keys to maturity is to learn to accept and even embrace our God-given uniqueness. He doesn't want a bunch of folks who are wishing they were or trying to be like

everyone else. He didn't make us to be anyone else. He made us to be us! God decided from eternity all of these things about us so that we would be the unique blessing he pre-determined. David tells us that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it (Psalm 24:1) and that he fashioned our un-formed bodies in the womb and ordained the days for us

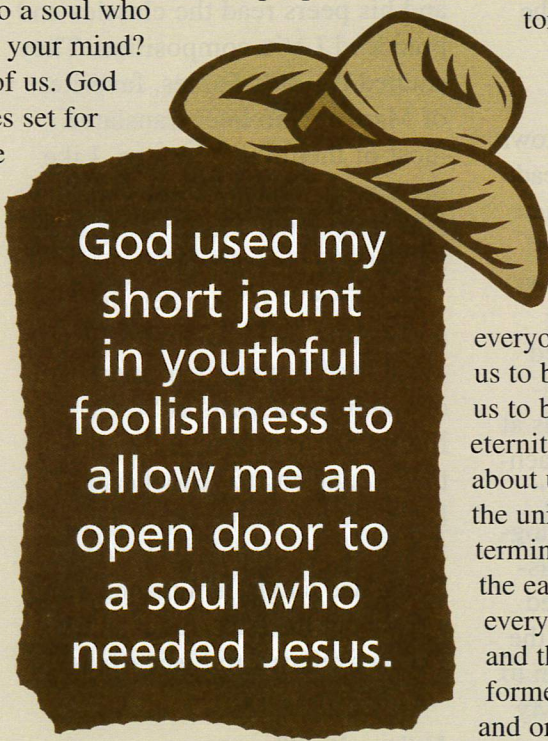
before any of them came to be

(Psalm 139). What are your unique backgrounds, abilities, and experiences? Embrace them as a gift from God and work hand in hand with them to make a difference that only you can make in your unique way.

Oh, and if it so happens that you find yourself in someone's home reaching out with God's love and you notice something that reminds you of your past, mention it to your host. You might find out that a long forgotten memory rises from the dust to help to save a soul for eternity.



*Donald Patterson is pastor at Holy Word, Austin, Texas.*



God used my short jaunt in youthful foolishness to allow me an open door to a soul who needed Jesus.





# Luther the student

**Martin Luther took what he learned during his school years, whether it was classes preparing him to be a lawyer or lessons on the lute, and applied it to his later life.**

Richard D. Balge

**H**ans Luther did not raise his son to follow him into the mines or take over management of the smelters. He was determined that Martin should go to the university and become a lawyer.

## Early schooling

Martin attended the Mansfeld town school for eight years, learning reading, writing, singing, and the basics of Latin. There were daily prayers but no formal instruction in religion.

More than once in his writing and conversation, Martin recalled the rote teaching and harsh discipline that were typical of schools at the time. He remembered the teachers as “tyrants and executioners,” and the atmosphere as one of “flogging, trembling, anguish, and misery.” Nevertheless, he appreciated his father’s good intentions and the sacrifice involved in sending him to the school that was available: “My father meant it heartily by me.”

## The middle years

Martin enjoyed one year with the Brethren of the Common Life at Magdeburg. These men devoted themselves to Scripture study and simple piety without taking permanent monastic vows. Virtually every North European classic scholar of the 15th century, including Erasmus and Philip Melancthon, received part of his education from the Brethren. They offered training equivalent to today’s middle schools.

In 1498, when he was 15, young Luther’s education continued at Eisenach, where he enrolled in the parish school of St. George. He and his peers read the classics and practiced Latin composition. They studied Aesop’s Fables, favorites of Martin, who later translated most of them into German. Like the young Johann Sebastian Bach 200 years later, Martin sang in the St. George church choir.

Relatives of his mother, the pious and well-to-do Schalbe family, provided Martin with room and board during his four years at St. George. Martin was responsible for getting their young son to school every day. Later, Luther remembered that the Schalbes’ married daughter, Ursula Cotta, had taught him manners and a bit about the finer things in life. He later referred to Eisenach as “my beloved city.”

## University life

In April 1501 the miner’s son from Mansfeld entered the University of Erfurt. He undertook the classical liberal arts curriculum to prepare to study law. There were language studies and exercises in literary analysis, as well as writing and daily disputations. What would have been useful preparation for the study and practice of law turned out to be of great value for a doctor of Holy Scripture and professor of theology.

After completing requirements for the Bachelor of Arts degree, he nearly died while preparing for the Master of Arts degree. Returning to Erfurt from an Easter visit home, he accidentally cut an artery in his leg. He called on the Virgin Mary for help, and when the sutures gave way during the night he almost bled to death. “I would have died with my trust in Mary,” he later recalled.

He survived to earn the master’s degree and to enter the university’s school of law, equipped with an expensive gift from his father, the law books he would need for a lifetime of legal study and work.

While recuperating from his leg injury, Martin learned to play the lute. He also learned “from the Italians” that in a song the emphasis of the words and the accent of the music must agree. This was an idea he lived up to in his later work with hymns and liturgy.

*Richard Balge, a member of Calvary, Thiensville, Wisconsin, is a professor emeritus at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.*

Quoted material is largely taken from two of Luther’s works on education and from *Table Talk*.



# Getting to know God's story

Randy K. Hunter

“That’s not written in stone.”  
Written in stone? When was the last time you chiseled a note? Credit the Bible with yet another common expression.

The Ten Commandments, written in stone, summarize the holy will of a holy God for his people. And that will doesn’t change. God gave the two stone tablets to Moses, and 1,500 years later he inspired Paul to describe them as “the message that brings death.” Why? Because although God is holy and God’s will is holy, people

are not. We are not. I am not.

The rest of the book of Exodus (chapter 14 through the end) and the next three books—Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—span about 40 years, until the death of Moses. They reveal God’s love for people who are not holy. They are about faithfulness—God’s faithfulness to his promise to save. Through hills and valleys of his people’s experiences, he cares for them and invites them to trust him and honor him.

- The Lord didn’t lead the 2.5 million Israelites from Egypt to Canaan via the most direct route. You might find a map of their journey in the back of your Bible. Read Exodus 13 and 14 and list as many reasons as you can find for the Lord’s roundabout leading.
- The Lord issued a statement before he made any demands. Read it in Exodus 19:3-6 and again in 20:2. Put the statement into your own words.
- Describe the people’s response to God’s laws in Exodus 20:18-20.
- Compare the people’s response to God’s law during the days of Moses with the responses of people today. List as many similarities and differences as you can.
- During this time the Lord placed a prominent feature into their religious landscape: the tabernacle or tent of meeting. The tabernacle wasn’t so much where the people met. It was the place where the Lord met them. God is into details. Notice them in Exodus 25–40. What strikes you about the instructions for building the tabernacle?
- Group activity: Read the instructions for the tabernacle construction in Exodus 38:9-13 and 26:31-37. Appoint a construction supervisor. Use a track & field tape measure and rope or string to recreate a life-size footprint of the tabernacle courtyard, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place. Others can draw the six furnishings in the tabernacle (37–38:8) on white paper and hold them in the proper places within the tabernacle. Take a picture (wide-angle!) of your finished work to show your congregation.
- Each of the next three books serves a unique purpose. Leviticus is an operating manual for priests. Numbers is a reminder that God cares for each and every person. Deuteronomy is a restatement of the previous record and a statement of blessing. (See Deuteronomy 2 for an executive summary of the 40 years wandering.) Read Leviticus 10:1-3. Read Numbers 20:1-13. From these verses, list three reasons the Lord treated them so harshly.
- Scan Leviticus 1–5 and note the five main sacrifices described there. Make a chart to show 1) the name of the sacrifice, 2) what was sacrificed, and 3) the purpose of the sacrifice.

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

Find this article and possible answers on-line. Go to <[www.wels.net/sab/frm-nl.html](http://www.wels.net/sab/frm-nl.html)> and click on “current issue.” Then click on “Getting to know God’s story.” Answers will be available after April 5.

Creation & promise

Patriarchs

Freedom from captivity

Wandering

Promised Land

Kings

Major prophets 1

Major prophets 2

Minor prophets

Returning home

Wisdom books

Preparation for the coming Messiah



## Sustaining WELS ministries with less

During late January and early February, the board for each area of ministry met, in part, to determine budget cutbacks because of the synod revenue shortfall. Short synopses of their decisions follow. These decisions may still be affected by the Synodical Council, which meets Feb. 27-March 1. More complete reports are available on the WELS Web site <www.wels.net>, jump word "budget," or from WELS Communication Services, 414/256-3210.

### Board for Ministerial Education



Pastor Peter Kruschel,  
Board for Ministerial  
Education administrator

#### Who we are

The Board for Ministerial Education is responsible for the four synod-owned and operated schools that prepare men and women for service in public ministry: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.; Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.; and Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

#### Budget

A budget that was \$22.2 million on July 1, 2002 (and that became \$20.2 million by December 2002) will be \$17.8 million on July 1, 2003, unless the Synodical Council finds revenue resources to bring the funding level up.

The schools plan to use available undesignated institutional funds to augment the budget. (These funds will not last far beyond the next two years.) Other additional funds include

- a \$660/student surcharge at Martin Luther College,
- student fees for keyboard instruction at the college and two prep schools,
- student fees for involvement in extracurricular activities at the prep schools, and
- a 9% increase in tuition and room fees at all four schools for each of the next two years.

#### Cutbacks

At this time, current education programs for the training of our future pastors, elementary and secondary teachers, and early childhood educators will be maintained. The certification program for staff ministry will continue, but entrance into the undergraduate degree program for staff ministry will be suspended.

At Martin Luther College, the following cutbacks were made:

- Six support staff positions will be terminated by June 30, 2003. This includes a previous position termination and two anticipated retirements.

- Eleven faculty positions will be terminated by June 30, 2005. This includes four vacated positions due to retirements, resignation, and call acceptance. Five additional positions will be terminated on June 30, 2003. A 10th position will be terminated by June 30, 2004, and an 11th position by June 30, 2005.

At Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, the needed reductions were achieved by

- a retirement,
- a temporary 18-month call to a foreign mission field, and
- the decision not to call for a full-time director of the Pastoral Studies Institute, a program that enables non-traditional students to complete preseminary and seminary requirements for entrance into the WELS pastoral ministry.

After the Synodical Council meets, Michigan Lutheran Seminary and Luther Preparatory School will announce personnel reductions. Exact numbers will not be known until then.

#### A word to our churches

"We can find places to secure savings, we can scale back our course offerings, we can find alternative ways to fund educational programs and offer services, but we will not jeopardize curriculum and institutional integrity."—Members of the Board for Ministerial Education

### Board for Home Missions



Pastor Harry Hagedorn,  
Board for Home Mis-  
sions administrator

#### Who we are

The Board for Home Missions is charged with helping to establish new or enhanced outreach ministries in the United States, Canada, and the English-speaking Caribbean. Its present emphases are to help establish team ministries and to partner with existing ministries. A special focus is on cross-cultural opportunities.

#### Budget

The Board for Home Missions has \$2.7 million less to work with this coming fiscal year, a 25% reduction. It is working with \$8.2 million for 2003-04, down from \$10.9 million in 2002-03.



**Cutbacks**

Funding was discontinued for six existing positions, effective July 1, 2003. This affects four pastors. One position was at a new start that was discontinued. Two are part of team ministries that will continue but with only one pastor in place. The fourth is a mission counselor position from which the pastor will enter into retirement ministry. The other positions are two teachers, one serving as a staff minister/development director.

One-third of the funding for the vicars in mission settings program was also discontinued.

There are no new outreach efforts in the upcoming budget at this time. Any new monies the Board for Home Missions receives will help with new ministries that have already been authorized and prioritized.

**A word to our churches**

“We have to keep telling one another and as many as possible about the opportunities that God graciously gives us to proclaim Jesus.”—Kenneth Gast, chairman

**Board for World Missions**



Pastor Dan Koelpin,  
Board for World  
Missions administrator

**Who we are**

The Board for World Missions is charged by the synod with sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ to make disciples of all people living in countries outside the United States and Canada and of those people who, because of cultural barriers, have not been made the responsibility of another WELS agency.

**Budget**

In 2003-04, the BWM will have \$1.6 million less than the present

budget or 17.6% of last year’s budget of \$9.1 million.

**Cutbacks**

About 20 missionary positions will be eliminated while eight new positions will be created. Missionary positions eliminated from the 2003-05 budget include Zambia: 4; Malawi: 3; Russia: 1; Bulgaria: 1; Japan: 1; Taiwan: 1; Apacheland: 2; Brazil: 1; Mexico: 1; Cuba: 2; Colombia: 1; Dominican Republic: 2; and Puerto Rico: 1.

Some of these missionaries were already planning to leave the field for reasons of health, retirement, planned phase out, or a stateside call. Others are being re-deployed to other areas of world mission service. The net effect of all these adjustments will result in about 12 missionaries leaving world mission work who hadn’t intended to. WELS will continue to operate in some form in all fields in which we are presently working.

Although six to 10 teacher positions will be at risk in the Lutheran school system in Apacheland, plans are that all Lutheran schools currently open on the reservation will remain open during the 2003-04 school year—but some with reduced staff. East Fork Lutheran High School (EFLHS) continues to seek independent funding for the upcoming school year. A decision will be made by mid-April on the kind of operation EFLHS can support next fall.

One part-time position will be cut in the BWM office. The *World Mission Today* video series is being temporarily suspended. Publication projects for Multi-Language Publications are being reduced in number, and funding for printing and shipping has been eliminated from the budget.

**A word to our churches**

“We’re accustomed to seeing progress in world missions in terms of opening new fields, but progress can also be seen in phasing missionaries out of existing fields after the foundation for a self-dependent church has been laid.

“All of this reminds us that the Lord is in control and may have a different timetable than our own. He is capable of raising up new leaders and new resources within the ranks of the national churches themselves.”—Daniel Koelpin, administrator

**Board for Parish Services**



Pastor Bruce Becker,  
Board for Parish Services  
administrator

**Who we are**

The Board for Parish Services is responsible for providing personal assistance, training, and resources to WELS congregations to help them carry out their gospel ministry. The seven areas of Parish Services ministry are Evangelism, Worship, Youth Discipleship, Parish Schools, Adult Discipleship, Special Ministries, and Parish Assistance.

**Budget**

The Board for Parish Services’ proposed budget is based on a budget allocation of \$2,013,819. This represents a 17% cut from the current year’s budget and is less than 5% of the synod’s total budget.

**Cutbacks**

Parish Services has experienced major cuts in both personnel and programs, including about 20% of our paid staff. Paid personnel cuts included

- our principal mentor, who assisted new principals in our Lutheran elementary schools;

*continued on p. 24*





*Sustaining WELS ministries . . . continued from p. 23*

- a full-time position devoted to addressing changing ministry needs in our congregations;
- our half-time military chaplain in Europe;
- five directors who oversaw specialized ministry areas in Special Ministries; and
- six part-time support staff people, most of whom did ministry project work.

In addition, Parish Services will put on hold plans to add one new Parish Assistance consultant each of the next two years.

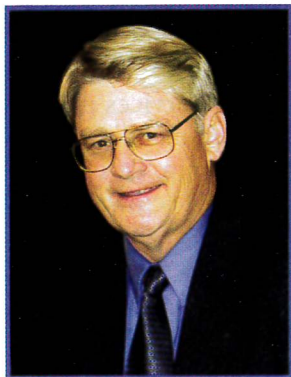
Parish Services also had to cut three more major programs that directly impact called workers. Two of them, entitled Parish Ministry Enhancement, were designed to support first-year and 15-year pastors. The third one was national funding of the Team Ministry Program for teachers.

Specific program cuts in individual Parish Services units included future development of targeted Web sites, ongoing training for military contact pastors and consultants for Parish Assistance, and curtailing of some Commission on Worship programs.

#### A word to our churches

“Parish Services is committed to assisting as many WELS congregations as possible as they carry out the gospel ministry entrusted to them. With the challenges facing our congregations, Parish Services’ ministry is needed more today than ever before.”—Bruce Becker, administrator

### Administration



Pastor Wayne Mueller, vice president for mission and ministry

#### Who we are

The general administration of the synod is carried out by three separate areas: Support Services, Mission Advancement, and Administration. The departments of Support Services (e.g., accounting, human resources, benefit plans, real estate, information technology, support) answer to the Executive Director of Support Services. Mission Advancement includes the Communication Services Commission, the Commission for Communication on Financial Support, and the Tel/Tech Task Force. Administration includes the Conference of Presidents, the Synodical Council, and the president’s and vice president’s office and staff.

#### Budget

The budgets of the three areas of administration were initially cut 21%, the same as other areas of ministry.

Small amounts were reallocated to Support Services to retain the Executive Director of Support Services and to the Communication Services Commission to retain basic services. Also, \$300,000 in budgetary and restricted funds were added to the Conference of Presidents’ budget to provide help for called workers in transition.

#### Cutbacks

Two staff positions in Support Services and two administrative positions, one in Support Services and one in the Communication Services Commission, were unfunded. Salary support in whole or in part for a number of workers in our fiscal offices was transferred to subsidiaries. The director of Tel/Tech retired and will stay on part time for a few months. Three planned giving counselor positions are not being filled. The budget for legal services was eliminated. The Conference of Presidents and the Synodical Council accepted proportionate cuts in travel, lodging, and district support budgets. The president requested and received a considerable salary cut.

We continue to look for further cost-cutting measures. Under consideration are exploring ways to limit the increases in health insurance, outsourcing some of the functions of worker benefits and fiscal services, charging back for legal fees, and asking for user fees for certain services.

#### A word to our churches

“While we pray for those who have been displaced by our budget challenges, we also strive to maintain our support for those who remain in place to bring the gospel to the world.”—President Karl Gurgel

## Help support U.S. soldiers

Hundreds of thousands of U.S. soldiers have been deployed in anticipation of a possible war with Iraq, and it is important for God’s people in WELS to provide them with spiritual support.

The WELS Commission on Special Ministries provides worldwide spiritual support for soldiers (and civilians) who live away from their spiritual homes. Two WELS chaplains stationed in Europe and a network of 120 military contact pastors stand ready to serve all who request their support. The Special Ministries office also maintains a ministry-by-mail program that regularly provides *Meditations*, *Forward in Christ* magazine, printed monthly worship services, cassette and videotape worship services, and e-mail contact.

Help us provide this important spiritual support to our soldiers and their families. Send their names and addresses to WELS Commission on Special Ministries, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222. For more information, call 414/256-3241; <jacki@sab.wels.net>.



## Answers to your WELS budget questions

WELS Vice President Wayne Mueller answers your questions about the current revenue shortfall.

**Question:** Is a budget crisis a valid reason for terminating a call?

**Answer:** We may regretfully withdraw a call when we are no longer able to support that worker. Our congregations and institutions have been doing this as long as the synod existed. Every year four or five of our WELS congregations close or disband. The pastor's call is, of course, vacated. The calls from our Lutheran elementary schools for teachers this year is down nearly 20% from last year at this time. Much of this is accounted for by congregations who decide that shrinking budgets and declining enrollment requires them to vacate previous teaching positions.

The theological rationale for this was presented by former vice president Richard Lauersdorf in a paper that is on-line. Go to <[www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net)>,

jump word "call-termination," to go directly to the article.

**Question:** I've heard that not all of the WELS teachers and pastors graduating this year will receive calls. Is this true?

**Answer:** A part of our trust in the divinity of the call is our waiting on God's wisdom to reveal whom he will call and to what ministry he will call his servant.

This year God is asking us to show even greater patience. We often rely on our human projections when we presuppose that all who have been trained for ministry will be called to some ministry on assignment day. This year we have to look away from our human numbers and simply trust God.

Polls that our district presidents took early in the year indicate that we may not have enough ministry vacancies in our churches and schools to place all our graduates this year. These polls often change as we move

to late spring. Usually the number of vacancies increases as congregations make their final decisions about how to provide workers for their ministry in the coming year.

District presidents are working hard to place all our Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary graduates. They are encouraging congregations to consider calling vicars and pastor, teacher, and staff minister graduates, and they are considering alternate forms of service for some graduates. Most, or possibly all, of our graduates will find service in the kingdom. We will wait on God's reply in May.

Find out the latest on the WELS revenue shortfall at <[www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net)>, jump word "budget." If you have a question about the budget, e-mail <[budget@wels.net](mailto:budget@wels.net)>. Answers will be posted on the Web site.

## That the deaf may hear

Some WELS people don't only raise their voices in song, but raise their hands at the same time.

The Singing Hands choir started from a sign language class taught at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, in the summer of 1985. The choir sign-sang a few songs including the Lord's Prayer at a conference for the deaf and hard of hearing and were asked to sing at a church that fall.

Irene Riege, one of two deaf members of this eight-person choir, prefers this kind of singing. "Since I can no longer sing along with the congregations with voice, sign-singing is my music."

Families who know someone who is deaf or hard of hearing are usually the most interested. "The congregation reacts emotionally sometimes depending on the music," Riege says.

Singing Hands, directed by Mary Braun, is now a part of the WELS Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MDHH). The MDHH is about 25 years old, and Good Shepherd, West Allis, Wis., one of the first WELS churches to have signed services, celebrated its 20th anniversary of signed services on March 2.

"One of the main objectives of the MDHH is to promote congregations' interpreted services," explains Carl Ziemer, Commission on Special Ministries administrator. MDHH also offers support to families who are blessed with a child who may be deaf or hard of hearing and is working on a dictionary of religious signs to expand on the general signs already in use.



Singing Hands praises the Lord in sign language at St. James, Milwaukee.

Singing Hands will be participating in MDHH's triennial convention in Madison, Wis., in July. For more information about the MDHH or to invite Singing Hands to your church, contact Gene Seidel at 414/536-1651 or <[hrgimp@aol.com](mailto:hrgimp@aol.com)>.

*Diane Behm*



## 40 years of prayers and offerings

For 40 years prayers and offerings have flowed freely from the hearts of our faithful women organized under the name of the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society (LWMS).

Annual national LWMS conventions are the highlight of the year for this organization. Two hundred fifty-six women gathered to hear mission presentations for the first convention on June 27, 1964. This summer the 40th convention is being held in Madison, Wis. Over 1,500 are expected to come.

Prayers and offerings. For 40 years the focus has remained constant.

Hearts are moved and offerings pour in. Close to \$250,000 is given annually to support missions through the LWMS.

God doesn't promise that we get to see what happens when prayers and offerings are at work. But sometimes we do. Recently, convention offerings went toward a publications project for translating The People's Bible.

Missionary Chris Cordes relates one outcome:

The timing couldn't have been better for a member serving as a translation reviewer. Grieving over

her only child's suffering and the bleak prospects for his future, she could barely function in her own work, much less concentrate on reviewing the quality of translation in the commentaries she had been given to review. One book, however, was a source of surprising comfort and strength and gave her the spiritual perspective she desperately needed. Time and again as she reviewed the Hebrews commentary by Richard Lauersdorf she saw the hope God gives even in the worst that life can feel. She says, "It was like puzzle pieces that fit together perfectly, God's words with my troubles."

LWMS offerings also have helped spread God's Word through the Taped Ministry program. Responses like this have come in: "My family and I have been stationed on Okinawa for the past four-and-a-half years. During this time we have been receiving the videotaped services and sharing them with our group that meets every Sunday here. The support has been a huge blessing to my family and the rest of our Okinawa group."

Offerings to support missions come in the form of time and talents as well. Many women over the years

have given countless hours to leading the LWMS on the national and circuit levels, to producing Braille materials, to doing mailings, to giving presentations, to sending prayers and cards through the Befriend a Mission program, and to planning and attending

### LWMS mission statement:

"To increase interest in and to support mission endeavors which are part of, or in the interest of, our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod."

LWMS Women of the WELS retreats.

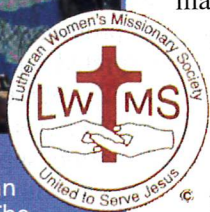
Prayers and offerings. It doesn't seem like much. For 40 years it's all that's been needed to make sure the LWMS mission has been there to support the mission of the church. May God continue to provide his church with such "small things" and mighty miracles!

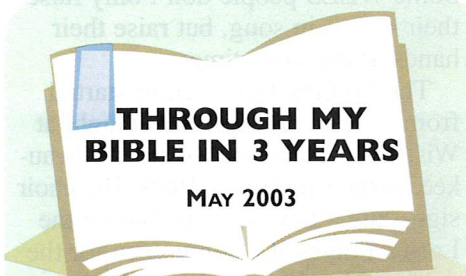
For more information about the 40th annual LWMS convention, visit [www.lwms.org](http://www.lwms.org) or contact the LWMS Central Office, 414/321-6212 or [lwms@execpc.com](mailto:lwms@execpc.com).

Sally Valleskey,  
LWMS vice president



Ten years ago the LWMS funded a tutorial center in Hong Kong where the Southeast Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission could reach out to students. The facilities are also used for English classes, Bible classes, and Sunday church services. WELS missionary Roger Plath started Shatin Church in this facility with six members. Average attendance is now 40.





**THROUGH MY BIBLE IN 3 YEARS**  
MAY 2003

|                       |                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Deuteronomy 14, 15 | 16. Mk. 10:32-52   |
| 2. Dt. 16, 17         | 17. Mk. 11:1-19    |
| 3. Dt. 18, 19         | 18. Mk. 11:20-33   |
| 4. Dt. 20, 21         | 19. Mk. 12:1-27    |
| 5. Dt. 22, 23         | 20. Mk. 12:28-44   |
| 6. Dt. 24, 25         | 21. Mk. 13:1-23    |
| 7. Dt. 26             | 22. Mk. 13:24-37   |
| 8. Dt. 27:1-28:14     | 23. Mk. 14:1-25    |
| 9. Dt. 28:15-68       | 24. Mk. 14:26-52   |
| 10. Dt. 29, 30        | 25. Mk. 14:53-72   |
| 11. Dt. 31            | 26. Mk. 15:1-21    |
| 12. Dt. 32:1-47       | 27. Mk. 15:22-41   |
| 13. Dt. 32:48-34:12   | 28. Mk. 15:42-16:8 |
| 14. Mark 10:1-16      | 29. Mk. 16:9-20    |
| 15. Mk. 10:17-31      | 30. Judges 1:1-2:5 |
|                       | 31. Jdg. 2:6-3:6   |



## Perusing WELS publications

*Need some good reading material? Why not check out WELS publications. There's something for everyone. This series will introduce you to the various publications so you can discover which ones will benefit you.*

### Lutheran Leader

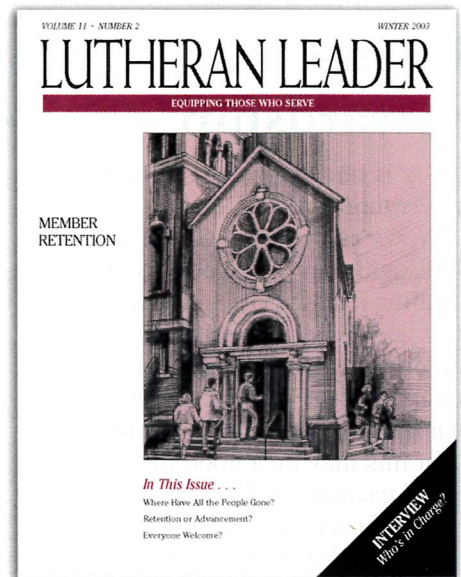
Packed with ideas for how lay leaders can make a difference in their churches, *Lutheran Leader* magazine began in 1993 under the name *Parish Leadership*. Its purpose? To provide Lutheran parish leaders with a scriptural view of leadership and parish ministry support as they carry out their roles within their congregation.

Each issue of this quarterly publication has a theme related to parish ministry. Each Parish Services' unit—Evangelism, Worship, Youth Discipleship, Parish Schools, Adult Discipleship, and Special Ministries—provides at least one article relating to that theme. Recent themes include member retention, joy in ministry, and technology and the church.

It was the Winter 2002 issue on summer ministry that gave Trinity, Watertown, Wis., the idea to hold a community basketball and Bible camp. Each of Trinity's councilmen receives *Lutheran Leader* and shares it with other board and committee members. When they read that Cross of Life, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, held a soccer and Bible camp in 2001, and 84 non-member children attended, their interest was piqued.

"The soccer camp story showed us a way for us to reach the many children in our community who are sports crazy," explains Jerry Kastens, Trinity's staff minister. "We're in the planning stages of following through on that idea right now."

Examples like this please executive editor Bruce Becker, who is also administrator of the Board for Parish Services. He believes that "since the parish is on the front line for gospel ministry advancement,



Lutheran leaders reading *Lutheran Leader* will benefit from others serving on the front lines."

*Want to subscribe? Go to <www.nph.net> and search for Lutheran Leader under periodicals. Or call Subscription Services, 1-800-662-6093, ext. 8. Milwaukee, 414/615-5785.*

## CONGREGATION MISSION SUBSCRIPTION PERFORMANCE

For the Twelve Months Ending December 31, 2002

|                        | Total Subscription       |                   | Offerings Received    |                                |                           |                            |
|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
|                        | Communicants<br>12/31/01 | 2002              | December<br>Offerings | Twelve<br>Months'<br>Offerings | Percent<br>of<br>Sbscrptn | Annld<br>Ave Per<br>Commun |
| Arizona-California     | 18,043                   | \$1,116,570       | \$245,743             | \$1,219,604                    | 109.2%                    | \$67.59                    |
| Dakota-Montana         | 8,889                    | 488,262           | 115,363               | 512,597                        | 105.0                     | 57.67                      |
| Michigan               | 36,078                   | 2,240,222         | 493,051               | 2,273,565                      | 101.5                     | 63.02                      |
| Minnesota              | 43,194                   | 2,508,035         | 553,783               | 2,532,484                      | 101.0                     | 58.63                      |
| Nebraska               | 10,545                   | 679,010           | 171,674               | 713,267                        | 105.0                     | 67.64                      |
| North Atlantic         | 4,445                    | 421,477           | 71,495                | 431,155                        | 102.3                     | 97.00                      |
| Northern Wisconsin     | 60,720                   | 2,723,239         | 584,150               | 2,714,726                      | 99.7                      | 44.71                      |
| Pacific Northwest      | 5,278                    | 332,515           | 62,165                | 350,566                        | 105.4                     | 66.42                      |
| South Atlantic         | 7,565                    | 610,145           | 116,221               | 617,776                        | 101.3                     | 81.66                      |
| South Central          | 5,003                    | 549,212           | 88,077                | 574,683                        | 104.6                     | 114.87                     |
| Southeastern Wisconsin | 56,883                   | 3,595,877         | 728,147               | 3,537,240                      | 98.4                      | 62.18                      |
| Western Wisconsin      | 59,204                   | 3,284,671         | 629,610               | 3,258,186                      | 99.2                      | 55.03                      |
| Total—This Year        | <u>315,847</u>           | <u>18,549,235</u> | <u>3,859,479</u>      | <u>18,735,849</u>              | <u>101.0%</u>             | <u>59.32</u>               |
| Total—Last Year        | <u>316,386</u>           | <u>18,182,765</u> | <u>3,280,463</u>      | <u>17,889,833</u>              | <u>98.4</u>               | <u>56.54</u>               |

Mark Meissner, director of finance



## Responding to God's grace through stewardship

Money is one thing that seems to be on everyone's minds lately.

"We've come out of the prosperous 1990s, and now we're coming back to reality. It hasn't been pleasant for a lot of people," says Ron Roth, administrator of the Commission for Communication on Financial Support. "Our congregations are struggling."

Yet this may be a good time to remind each other about the importance of financial stewardship.

"Stewardship is where we help Christians realize again how rich we are in Christ. It's about encouraging and instructing people on God's ways of responding to his grace," says Roth.

To help WELS congregations train their members about good financial stewardship, the Commission for Communication on Financial Support (CCFS) developed a stewardship emphasis in 2002 called Work While It Is Day. Its goal? To help congregations increase their resources, which could then be shared in part for the WELS worldwide mission.

To spread this stewardship message, 400 people were trained at a conference in Chicago to visit congregations and present the program. Ninety-eight percent of our over 1,200 congregations were visited.

And our congregations responded. Over 80 percent of our congregations participated, and churches reported increases in giving.

Thomas Schulz, pastor at Salem, Scottsdale, Ariz., used the four-week Work While It Is Day emphasis. He incorporated a written plan for giving for the first time in his congregation, and over 50 percent of Salem's members participated.

"Work While It Is Day was the best stewardship emphasis I've seen in years," says Schulz. "A lot of Scripture-based stewardship principles were set forth."

Congregational Mission Offerings also increased by 4.7 percent in 2002

and pledges for 2003 increased by an additional five percent. These offerings help support WELS core ministry and mission.

Because stewardship training is a continual process, a new stewardship emphasis for 2003—Pursuing Godliness with Contentment—is now available.

This emphasis has some similar components to Work While It Is Day, including stressing proportionate giving and the value of a written plan for giving. Worship services and videos that include interviews with WELS members are again available. Added information includes graphs and figures that will help congregations understand how the synod is financed and show how changes in revenue sources affect WELS' bottom-line budget.

The program suggests a goal of increasing personal giving an average of 1 percent or more of members' annual income. It also suggests increasing Congregational Mission Offerings to 10 percent of a congregation's budget. (Right now the synod average is 8 percent.). According to Roth, if this increase occurs, that would be a 25% increase in Congregational Mission Offerings—about \$6 to \$7 million. Both increases would allow for greater opportunities in local and global ministry.

"We can't have strong congregations without a strong synod and we can't have a strong synod without strong congregations," says Roth. "It's not either or; it's both and. All of us need to be the partners."

*The Pursuing Godliness with Contentment stewardship emphasis will be presented to congregational leaders in area and circuit workshops from March to June. Most materials are also available at <[www.wels.net/mpg](http://www.wels.net/mpg)>. Just click on "Pursuing Godliness with Contentment." For additional questions, call 800-827-5482.*

## District news —

### Northern Wisconsin

The tone chime choir at **First German, Manitowoc, Wis.**, was selected by the Wisconsin Music Educator's Association to perform at the Wisconsin State Capitol on March 3.

### Southeastern Wisconsin

**Abiding Word, Somers, Wis.**, was destroyed by a fire on Jan. 3. No one was injured. Members are worshipping at Shoreland Lutheran High School.

### South Atlantic

Members of **Bay Pines, Seminole, Fla.**, dedicated their new school building on Jan. 12.

**Messiah, Alpharetta, Ga.**, hosted a Christian marriage retreat on March 7 and 8.

A group of **WELS seniors at The Villages in Leesburg, Fla.**, have been meeting on Thursday mornings for a devotion and a spiritual growth hour under the leadership of retired pastor Don Meier. After evangelizing during vendor nights on the Town Square in The Villages, attendance is now in the mid-30s for morning devotion.

### Minnesota

About 150 people attended a church councilmen's workshop aimed at empowering ministries on March 1 at **Trinity, Belle Plaine, Minn.**

### California

**Risen Savior, Chula Vista, Calif.**, recently launched an advertising blitz to 10,000 homes within its community. To capitalize on the fitness mentality in the San Diego area, the advertising slogan boasts that the church will be "Getting F.I.T. for life" (F.I.T.=Faith in Training). A Travel Canvass Witness team will be following up on this campaign.

### Happy Anniversary!

**MN—Ascension, Plymouth, Minn.**, celebrated its 25th anniversary on March 2.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: CA—Hermann John; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NW—Joel Lillo; SA—Christopher Kruschel; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.





## CHANGES IN MINISTRY

### Pastors

- Cordes, Chris A.**, to Beautiful Savior, Beaverton, Ore.  
**Holz, Lavern N.**, to St. Paul, Ridgeland/St. Paul, Dallas, Wis.  
**Liebenow, John A.**, to Cross of Glory, Washington, Mich.  
**Sprain, Roger J.**, to Latin American Missions, Puerto Rico

### Teachers

- Hahn, Jason K.**, to Cross of Christ, Coon Rapids, Minn.  
**Rautenberg, Sarah A.**, to Good Shepherd, Downers Grove, Ill.  
**Wiechmann, Adam J.**, to West LHS, Plymouth, Minn.

The synod administration building will be closed Apr. 18. Callers may leave voice mail messages, 414/256-3888.

## SYNOD CONVENTION

The 57th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod will be held July 28-Aug. 1 at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. Details will be announced later.

## ANNIVERSARIES

- Appleton, Wis.**—Fox Valley Lutheran High School (50). Apr. 5. Community open house, noon-6 PM. Festival worship in gym, 4 PM. Social gathering at Radisson Paper Valley Hotel, 7 PM-midnight, \$5 per ticket. David Wenzel, 920/739-4441.  
**Sebewaing, Mich.**—New Salem (150). Apr. 6. Service, 10 AM. Meal to follow.  
**Jacksonville, Fla.**—Good Shepherd (25). Apr. 27. Service, 4 PM. Meal to follow. 904/778-1491.  
**La Crosse, Wis.**—Mount Calvary (75). May 3. Service, 6 PM. May 4. Service, 8 & 10:30 AM. Reunion brunch between Sunday services. Ed Ungemach, 608/784-5324.  
**Montello, Wis.**—St. John (125). May 4. Sunday worship, 10:15 AM. Catered dinner, 11:30 AM. Adults, \$9.50; children (6-10), \$4.75; 5 and under are free. Anniversary service, 1 PM. James Wachholz, 608/297-9635.  
**Manitowoc, Wis.**—Trinity (150). May 18. Service, 9:30 AM. July 13. Services, 9:30 AM & 1:30 PM. Catered meal on July 13. Adults 12 and up, \$10; children 2-11, \$5; children under 2, free. RSVP by Apr. 1 to Carol Kasten, 920/758-2507.  
**Rib Falls, Wis.**—St. John (125). June 8. Service, 11 AM. Picnic to follow. Terry Reich, 715/443-2119.

## COMING EVENTS

- Cascade Lutheran Chorale Passion concert**—Apr. 13, 4 PM. Grace, Portland, Ore. Joy Williams, 503/493-0465.  
**Prep Singers of Luther Preparatory School concert itinerary**—  
 • Apr. 16, 7:15 PM, St. John, Peshtigo, Wis.  
 • Apr. 17, 6:30 PM, St. Paul, Green Bay, Wis.  
 • Apr. 18, 7 PM, St. Paul, Menomonie, Wis.  
 • Apr. 20, 6:30 AM, St. John, Lewiston, Minn.; 9:30 AM, Resurrection, Rochester, Minn.; 7 PM, Immanuel, Willmar, Minn.  
 • Apr. 21, 7 PM, St. John, Watertown, Wis.  
**Science symposium**—"The Christian, society, and science," a symposium for science educators. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Apr. 24-26. Richard Ash, <ashrf@mlc-wels.edu>.

**Eighth biennial WELS Kingdom Workers National Convention**—Apr. 25-26. Sheraton, Brookfield, Wis. Neil Hankwitz, 800/466-9357.

**WELS Church Librarians' Organization**—Apr. 26. Immanuel, Manitowoc, Wis. Registration fee, \$7. Includes lunch and all handouts. Joanne Weber, 414/256-3222.

**Lutheran Pioneer National Convention**—Apr. 26, St. Matthew, Janesville, Wis. Opening service, 8:30 AM. Closing service, 5 PM. Banquet, 6:30 PM. To register, call 888/214-8229.

**WELS/ELS men's retreat**—May 2-4. Fort Worden Conference Center, Port Townsend, Wash. Cost, \$80 per person. Joel Nitz, 360/923-1961.

**Concert**—Lutheran Chorale spring concert. May 4, 3 & 7 PM. St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis. Mary Prange, 414/873-9105.

### Graduation dates—

- Martin Luther College commencement concert, May 16, 7:30 PM.
- Martin Luther College graduation, May 17, 10 AM. Call service, 2:30 PM.
- Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary call service, May 20, 10 AM. Concert, 7:30 PM.
- Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary graduation, May 21, 10 AM.
- Luther Preparatory School commencement concert, May 23, 7 PM.
- Michigan Lutheran Seminary commencement concert, May 23, 7 PM.
- Luther Preparatory School graduation, May 24, 10 AM.
- Michigan Lutheran Seminary graduation, May 24, 10:30 AM.

**Summer camps**—at Camp Phillip, Wautoma, Wis. WELS summer camp for grades K-12. June 18-Aug. 13. Trained staff and exciting programs. Family camps during the summer, including Family Fest 2003, an exciting and spiritually renewing musical gathering of WELS performers and entertainers. 920/787-3202.

**Luther Preparatory School music camp**—June 20. Registration is being accepted for WELS/ELS youth who have completed sixth through eighth grade. Must have at least two years of keyboard experience. Enrollment limited to 24. LPS, 920/261-4352, ext. 129.

**Confessional Lutheran Worldview Seminar**—June 20-27. Schwan Retreat Center, Trego, Wis. Six presenters will put forth the main tenets of confessional Lutheranism and then compare them with conflicting worldviews and religious trends. Cost, \$229, which includes food and lodging. David Thompson, 715/466-6324.

**Lutheran Women's Missionary Society 40th Annual National Convention**—June 26-29. Madison, Wis. Hosted by Capitol & Rock River Circuits. <www.lwms.org>. 414/321-6212.

**Good Shepherd Bible Camp**—Thousand Oaks, Calif. July 13-19. Charles Found, 805/492-8943.

## AVAILABLE

**Pews**—10 golden oak pews, 8' long with hymnal racks. Free for the cost of shipping or pick up from Phillips, Wis. Mark Wenzel, 715/339-6766.

**Church cushions**—90 gold tweed cushions, 62" x 96" x 13". Free for the cost of shipping or pick up from Menasha, Wis. Ron and Darlene Paalman, 920/739-2583 or Bernice Lopas, 920/766-4440.

**Paraments**—two sets in green & white. Free for the cost of shipping. Terry Reich, 715/443-2119.

## NEEDED

**Volunteer couple**—to assist at Camp Phillip, Wautoma, Wis. Six-month commitment, but time is flexible. The couple must have a trailer or motor home, which can be parked on a campsite. Water and electrical utilities provided. Suggested duties include care of grounds, maintenance projects, supervision of volunteers, housekeeping, office work, and campground hosts. Tom Towner, 912 W Parkway Blvd, Appleton WI 54914; <cpxec@yahoo.com>.

**Volunteer health care staff**—RNs, doctors, or EMTs to work as health care directors for one-week or half-week summer camp sessions at Camp Phillip, Wautoma, Wis. Jason Wiechmann, 920/787-3202.

**Christian couples**—to serve at the Lutheran Mobile Clinic in Malawi. Three-year commitment. The woman should be a registered nurse, and the man would serve as administrative coordinator. Kathie Wendland, 920/682-5694.

**Registered nurses**—for medical mission work in Zambia. Kathie Wendland, 920/682-5694.

## SERVICE TIMES

**The Villages, Fla.**—The Villages Lutherans is an outreach satellite of St. Mark, Leesburg, Fla. Morning devotion service and spiritual growth hour at the church on the square, Town Square, The Villages, Fla., on Thursdays at 9:30 AM. Herb Schaefer, 352/753-7515.

**Kasson, Minn.**—Our Savior. Sunday worship, 9 AM. Sunday school, 10:15 AM. Dean Gunn, 507/634-4692.

**Louisville, Ky.**—Hope. Sunday worship, 8:15 & 11 AM. Sunday school and Bible class, 9:30 AM. Steven Lange, 502/423-1211.

**Rhineland, Wis.**—Zion. Saturday worship, 7 PM. Sunday worship, 8 & 10:30 AM. David Sternberg, 715/365-9357.

## NAMES WANTED

**Chattanooga, Tenn.**—Jim Turriff, 256/233-5255.

**Europe**—Civilian and military people. Services held in London area; four locations in Germany; and Zurich, Switzerland. Need names, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses. Michael Schroeder, <welschaplain@t-online.de>.

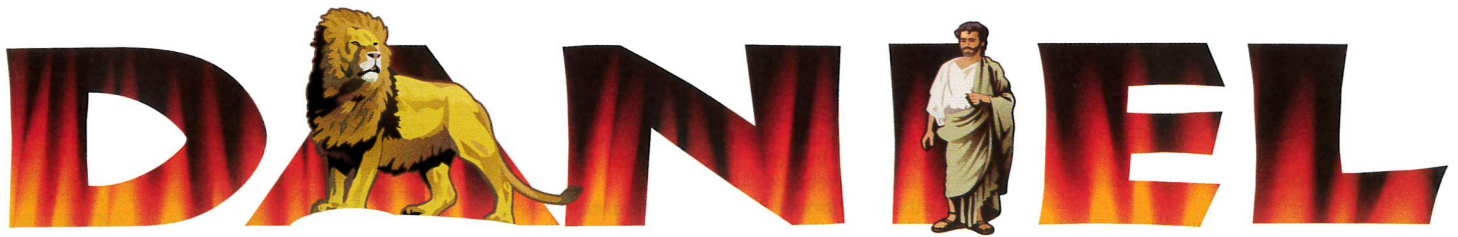
## POSITIONS AVAILABLE

**Admissions counselor**—for Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minn. Candidate must have a bachelor's degree or higher, have a high level of communication skills, and be a member of the ELS or WELS or willing to join one of the synods. Promote Bethany to prospective students in churches, high schools, college fairs, and on-campus visits; also through telemarketing and personal contacts. Application deadline is April 15. Send letter of application and resume to Bethany Lutheran College, Don Westphal, dean of admissions, 700 Luther Dr, Mankato MN 56001; 800/944-3066.

**Summer paid staff**—Camp Phillip, Wautoma, Wis. May 27-Aug. 13. Counselors, head life-guard, adventure coordinator, Bible study leader, kitchen staff, and junior staff director. Jason Wiechmann, 920/787-3202.

To place an announcement, call 414/256-3210; FAX, 414/256-3862; <BulletinBoard@sab.wels.net>. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.





## Witnessing through prayer

**Jesus, the Anointed One,  
turns our sinful prayers into prayers of worship.**

**Philip L. Kieselhorst**

**I**n catechism class, we used the acronym A.C.T.S. as a helpful outline for our prayers. It stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Many prayers change this acronym, however, to mean Anger (that God didn't give me what I wanted), Complaining (that God is being unfair), Taking (what I think I deserve from God), and Selfishness (I want this for me).

Daniel had been in Babylon close to 70 years. He witnessed Babylon's defeat, but he also saw Jerusalem still lying in ruins. After 70 years of praying for an end to exile and the answer repeatedly being "No," which version of A.C.T.S. would his prayer contain?

### **Adoration and confession**

Daniel's prayer is a response to Bible study. Daniel searched the Scriptures and was reminded of God's promise to his people through Jeremiah. God's promise led Daniel to respond in prayer: "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands" (Daniel 9:4). Daniel was not angry with God. He adored God as the awesome God who keeps his covenant of love with his people.

To what is the largest portion of Daniel's prayer dedicated? It is not a glowing report of all that he and his

people deserve. It is a confession of their inexcusable sins. Read Daniel 9:5-14. Before Daniel began his prayer, he took off his royal robes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and fasted to show how unworthy he was to talk to God. Daniel didn't complain. He offers only words admitting guilt "because we have sinned against you" (9:11).

### **Thanksgiving and supplication**

Daniel's prayer weaves his thanksgiving together with his adoration of the Lord. He thanks God for keeping his covenant, for past acts of love (escape from Egypt), and for disciplining his rebellious people. Daniel closes his prayer with a passionate request for the Lord to help his people in the way he promised. Read Daniel 9:15-19.

Daniel could be so bold and passionate in his prayer because he had read God's promises in Scripture. These requests were things God had promised to do for his people. Daniel was not making selfish demands. He merely repeated the loving promises God himself had made. For God's sake, not Daniel's, these requests would be answered.

Before Daniel was finished praying, God sent Gabriel to give an answer. Although the details of his answer are difficult to understand, two things are clear: God would

restore exiles to Jerusalem, and God's Anointed One would come "to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness . . ." (9:24).

### **Our prayers**

We may find it hard to adore God during trying times in our lives. We would rather complain than confess our sins. We prefer to take for ourselves rather than make requests for others.

But Jesus, the Anointed One, turns our sinful A.C.T.S. into A.C.T.S. of worship. As we search the Scriptures like Daniel, we learn how God fulfilled his covenant of love with us through Jesus. We learn also that he bestows the blessings of this covenant on us through Baptism and Holy Communion.

Learning of Jesus, we are led to pray with passion for those things God already promised to give: "We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because . . . your people bear your Name" (9:18,19).

*Philip Kieselhorst is pastor at Gethsemane, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.*



# Easter hope and comfort

**T**ragedy struck the United States again on Feb. 1. Just 16 minutes from the end of its mission, the space shuttle Columbia exploded in a ball of fire. Seven astronauts died. We've grown so complacent about success; it's hard to accept failure.

As we mourn with those who suffered loss in the Columbia accident, we are reminded of even more tragic human disasters. From the moment of our conception, we were sinners in God's sight. David lamented in Psalm 51, "Surely, I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (v. 5).

And, regrettably, it doesn't get any better. Up to our last breath, we're sinners still. With Paul in Romans 7 we must acknowledge, "For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing" (v. 19).

Those tragic facts could leave us more hopeless than the explosion of Columbia. In the face of a flawed beginning, sinners from birth, and adding to it the sins we commit our whole life, we would have been left without hope and comfort, deserving only eternal death—the ultimate tragedy.

But Easter comes with hope and comfort, which are found exclusively and eternally in Christ Jesus. God inspired Paul to write in Philippians, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead" (3:10,11).

Unlike the beginning of our life, his was flawless. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born to the virgin Mary, Jesus was God's perfect Son. He lived flawlessly his entire life, keeping God's law perfectly in our place. Then, though innocent, he died in our place, bearing our load of guilt.

Therefore, there is power for us in his resurrection. By faith we know it, trust it. Through divine means, God transfers the power of Jesus' resurrection to us.

Perhaps minutes, or maybe days, after birth left us sinful, a new spiritual birth in baptism regenerated us. Through baptism we're now buried with Christ. His substitutionary death counts for us.

So, what began so potentially tragic, has been graciously averted. Rather than the death our sin deserved, the gift of eternal life is ours. We're forgiven! And one day we shall possess the full proof of Jesus' resurrection in our own victory over the grave.

Our personal Easter, our resurrection from the dead, will be a glorious day. But don't wait for its dawning to be comforted and confident. Thanks to the power in Jesus' resurrection, we can have hope and confidence right now.

We surely need Easter courage! The early disciples did, too. On Easter morning, before they knew Jesus was alive, they were frustrated and discouraged. We might be, too, dealing now with our synod's financial challenges. But knowing that Jesus is indeed alive, for the disciples, for us, diminishes doubt and despair. Christ's resurrection is God's unwavering commitment to his cause, the proclamation of Christ's saving work in all the world.

The dawn of Easter's endless day recommits us all to this wondrous mission. The divine certainty of our own Easter dawn gives rise to a new day of support for the gospel's mission. Together, rejoicing in the power of Jesus' resurrection, let's unite our hearts and minds in joyful, willing, thankful gospel service.

That's what it means to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.



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

Through  
divine means,  
God transfers  
the power  
of Jesus'  
resurrection  
to us.



# IN THE CROSS HAIRS

Richard L. Gurgel

## TOPIC: DECISION THEOLOGY

**Question:** Are Christians who believe in “decision theology” our brothers and sisters in Christ?

**Answer:** First, some background on decision theology may be helpful. For centuries Christians have puzzled over why some that hear the gospel are converted, while others, who hear the same gospel, are not. The Bible plainly teaches that all by nature are dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1), hostile to God (Romans 8:7), and consider the gospel to be foolishness (1 Corinthians 2:14). Spiritually dead rebels can contribute nothing to conversion except hostility.

Yet we know Jesus won salvation for all and desires all to possess what he declared to be ours (2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Ezekiel 33:11; John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:4). The Spirit, through the gospel in Word and sacraments, is always at work to convert hearts (Hebrews 4:12; John 3:5,6; Titus 3:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13,14). Faith, whenever it results, is wholly the Spirit’s gift (Ephesians 2:8,9; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

Scripture’s answer to “why some and not others” is clear. If we are lost, the fault lies completely with us (Matthew 23:37). If we are saved, the Spirit gets all credit (1 Corinthians 1:31).

However, human reason raises an apparent contradiction: “If God equally desires everyone’s salvation, and if all equally resist, then all who hear the gospel should either be saved (God’s gospel is stronger) or lost (man’s resistance is stronger).” Instead of permitting God to be God (by letting his Word say what it says), reason seeks to “solve” the dilemma. Reason either denies God’s universal grace or man’s utter inability to contribute to his conversion.

Some teach that God doesn’t want all to be saved (even electing many to damnation!). Therefore the Spirit’s power doesn’t accompany the gospel when preached to those God doesn’t want.

Others insist that the difference be not in God but in man. The Spirit always accompanies the gospel, but at

the moment of conversion, some make “a decision” for Jesus or “choose to let Jesus into their hearts.” In modern Christianity, this “decision theology” is the most popular answer to “why some and not others.”

Decision theology makes human sense. However, it is biblical nonsense. In addition to crediting dead sinners with spiritual power they don’t possess, the whole concept of “faith” is distorted. Scripture clearly pictures faith as God’s gift. It is the polar opposite of works.

In decision theology, faith becomes at least partially a human work. Adding even the tiniest factor of human effort to God’s salvation equation yields the result of pride (“I made my decision when others failed”) or despair (“Was my decision genuine?”). Instead of fixing believers’ eyes alone on Jesus where they find certainty (Hebrews 12:2), decision theology directs believers to the vagaries of the human heart where they find uncertainty (Jeremiah 17:9).

Are those who claim to believe in decision theology our brothers and sisters in Christ? Clinging to false doctrine prevents outward fellowship between us. But are they part of the invisible fellowship of Christ’s church? There is grave danger that false belief leads to unbelieving pride or despair—such is the danger of all false doctrine.

But what if, despite unbiblical reasoning, hearts cling to Christ alone and don’t depend on some “decision”? Then, despite misunderstanding the “how” of their conversion, they possess Spirit-worked faith! God grant such a “happy inconsistency” to the vast majority of those who claim a “decision” for Jesus.

**Decision theology makes human sense. However, it is biblical nonsense.**

*Richard Gurgel is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.*

*Have a question you want answered? Send it to 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; <fic@sab.wels.net>. Look on-line at <www.wels.net/sablqa.html> for more questions and answers.*



# Easter miracle

God's wonders will not be hidden;  
His Easter miracle needed service  
Of faithful witnesses—those women  
Who ministered to Jesus of their means.

Mary of Magdala their leader—  
    (She too restored from death to life;  
    Seven demons cast out of her)—  
This Mary, fear lending wings to feet—  
"Why that earthquake?"—had run ahead.

First at the tomb and, ere she reached it,  
Peering through half-light of early dawn  
She sights the stone removed from sepulcher  
And, drawing near, she sees an empty tomb.

    So disinclined to waiting,  
    To pondering those precious promises—  
    Her Lord had spoken them  
    That he would rise again—  
    His faithful words forgotten,—lost!

Dismayed, confused, she leaves the tomb  
And fails to see the angel by the stone;  
Forfeits the message heard by friends.  
No joy, no hope, but grief lodged in her heart.

One thought in mind, she speeds  
To Peter and to him whom Jesus loved,  
Who dared to stand beneath the cross  
And for his faithfulness received a precious charge.

She finds them, then breaks her news:  
    "Our Lord is gone . . .  
    His body taken . . .  
    I know not where . . ."

She could have published gladsome tidings,  
(Her Lord not taken but risen),  
Had she but tarried at the tomb.

A humbled Peter hears the Magdalen's message,  
His earlier self-confidence now seared by shame.  
He'd tasted Satan's power and his own frailty.  
Yet no suicide he, like Judas;  
"The Lord is merciful:" this was Peter's rock.

Eager now to serve his Lord, though dead,  
And make amends for past misdeeds,  
At Mary's word, impulsive Peter acts.

No time for thought, for contemplation;  
He's on his way, and with him John.

The two men run!—lay dignity aside  
When love, commitment, treasure are at stake.  
And younger John outstrips his friend,  
Comes to the gravesite first  
But keeps his feet from trespassing the tomb.

For these are hallowed precincts  
Where one behaves  
With modesty and tact.

John sees the linens lying—  
    Those linens which loving hands  
    Had wrapped around the body of the Lord—  
Still at their proper place, and orderly arranged;  
John notes it all and wonders: Why?

But Peter, now at hand, does not shrink back;  
Headlong into the holy place he bursts,  
Detects what John had noted,—and more:  
The Savior's headcloth neatly folded.  
How can this be? Who took the lifeless body,  
Yet left the tomb in such a state of tidiness?

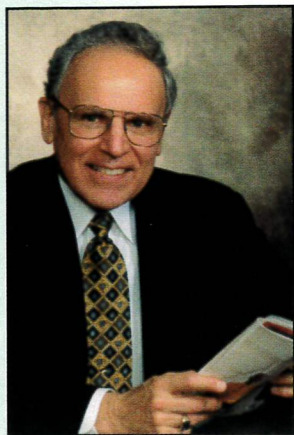
While Peter puzzles over all he sees,  
Perceptive John resolves the mystery:  
No thieves had rifled this resting place;  
Its tidy ambience proclaimed  
Death's impotence to hold Death's stronger Lord.  
He's triumphed o'er the tomb!

God brought these witnesses to the sepulcher  
That from their testimony in Holy Writ  
We too may hear and be assured  
That Christ is risen,  
For in this faith his Easter victory is ours,  
The Lord, being risen, our death is but a sleep.

"WAIT FOR THE LORD;  
BE STRONG AND TAKE HEART  
AND WAIT FOR THE LORD"  
(PSALM 27:14).

*Theodore Hartwig, a member of St. John,  
New Ulm, Minnesota, is a professor emeritus  
of Martin Luther College, New Ulm.*





Gary P. Baumler is editor of *Forward in Christ* magazine and WELS Director of Communications.

Let it be known that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, a glorious heavenly light.

## Oh, no! What next?

Oh, no! What next? Do those words echo anything you might have said in the last few months? You've probably had good reasons. As I pen this, I can think of a few: the threat of war, the threat of terrorism, shortfall in revenues for the Lord's ministry. Others are more personal, but I can guess at some possibilities: health problems, financial loss, family troubles.

But it doesn't take a list, does it? "Oh, no! What next?" is the litany of life in a sinful world. Things will go wrong because they must go wrong, humanly speaking.

Now, isn't that a recipe for doom and gloom? Doesn't it make you want to jump up and face each day with a smile and a burst of enthusiasm? "I wonder what will go wrong today?"

Many people, in fact, feel overwhelmed by adversity. I imagine, if we are honest with ourselves, we have all taken our turns. Maybe right now.

It's not a new phenomenon, something brought on by 9-11 or some other recent turn of events. It's as old as sin. Didn't Solomon warn us in Ecclesiastes that "everything is meaningless"? Wake up and smell the garbage.

What's extra sad right now is that many a Christian is nodding a somber "yes" to these sentiments. We can't escape it.

Or can we? Let it be known that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, a glorious heavenly light.

"Pollyanna!" you say? "In the real world, even if you reach the light for a while, you soon enter another tunnel."

True enough! But we have a light that we can take with us in the tunnel. Dwell for a moment on whatever is troubling you right now. Yes, think hard about it. It's real. It's ugly. It's something you must deal with.

Okay! Have you done that? Now change your focus. Picture an angel whose appearance is "like lightning." Yes, lightning! Don't turn away. Don't be afraid. Listen! Listen to three words the angel speaks: "He has risen."

Remember those words and look again at what troubles you. The troubles haven't gone away, but now you can look at them in a different light, in heaven's light. Now you can see them with the living Savior at your side.

Everything looks different with Jesus. When death threatens you with gloom, the Savior gives you reason for joy. When this world shudders and shakes around you, the risen Lord cries, "Peace, be still." When today's news suggests a future foreboding, Jesus' news holds out a heaven abiding.

Without Jesus, sin rules. With Jesus, there is forgiveness. Without Jesus, sorrow grows. With him, joy increases. Without him, death is king. With him, the King is life. Without, despair. With, hope. Without, suffering. With, comfort.

The light that dawned on the third day after Jesus' death was not just the sun rising over the horizon, it was the light of the glory of God in the living face of Jesus Christ. It was the light at the end of our tunnel.

What next? Jesus will come to take us with him.

*Gary P. Baumler*





BY ALL POSSIBLE MEANS—  
advancing ministries in the digital age



June 22-25, 2003

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# No bones about it

It is good news that there are no bones in Jesus' tomb.  
We Christians count on it.

Jeffrey L. Samelson

**N**ine years ago I came across a newspaper article detailing the controversy that followed the theft of two revered historical relics from a museum in Honolulu. Someone stole something significant to both Hawaii's culture and its native religion—special caskets that contained the bones of 15th- and 16th-century Hawaiian royalty.

Someone in the state Office of Hawaiian Affairs offered an illuminating quote: "It's hard to explain just how significant this is. It would be a little bit, to Christians, as if somebody had stolen the bones of Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

**Come again? Clearly this official didn't understand what Christians believe and care about.** Apparently she had never entered a Christian church on Easter morning and heard our triumphant exchange: "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!" Sadly, no one had ever given her the good news.

It is good news that there are no bones in Jesus' tomb. We Christians count on it. If our Savior's body had remained in the grave, our faith would be futile, and we would still be in our sins. Our hope would be only for this life, and we should be pitied (1 Corinthians 15:17-19).

**You see if Jesus' bones were not missing from the tomb, then it would be clear that he did not finish what he set out to do.** He told his disciples that rising from the dead was part of God's plan to save us; a body left decaying in the grave would mean that he had failed to do what he came to do.

If there were bones left to steal, then we would have to call Jesus a liar—or at least, sadly mistaken. He called himself "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). A lifeless corpse lying in the tomb would prove him wrong and sadly show that there could be no eternal life for those who believed in him.

**That empty tomb proved that his words and all God's promises can be trusted**

If Jesus had left remains to be seen, then we would also see that God himself cannot be trusted. Through the prophets the Lord had given his word

that Christ would not remain in the grave. If God had failed in this, our faith would have no foundation, and none of his promises for this life or the next could be relied upon. We would have no hope and no reason to believe.

**So make no bones about it—Christ's resurrection makes all the difference.** It shows that he finished all he came to do. He suffered and died for us, took away our sins, gave us his righteousness, and crowned it all with resurrection to life eternal. That empty tomb proved that his words and all God's promises can be trusted—not one will go unfulfilled. Our faith is firmly founded and far from futile—we will rise again just as he did and live just as he does.

So if the word gets out that Jesus' remains are missing from their last resting-place, there's no cause for concern among Christians. No one ever stole anything from Jesus' tomb—unless you want to speak that way of the power over us that Christ took from death, or the fear of the grave that our risen Lord removed from Satan's arsenal.

We can get excited about the news, though, and tell everyone the real reason Jesus' bones aren't in his tomb anymore: he took them along when he got up and walked out on Easter morning. Because he lives, we also will live.

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<sup>1</sup>*Miami Herald*, March 14, 1994, "Two of state's most historical relics missing; theft exposes deep divisions."

