

FORWARD IN CHRIST

November 2003

The Word from the WELS

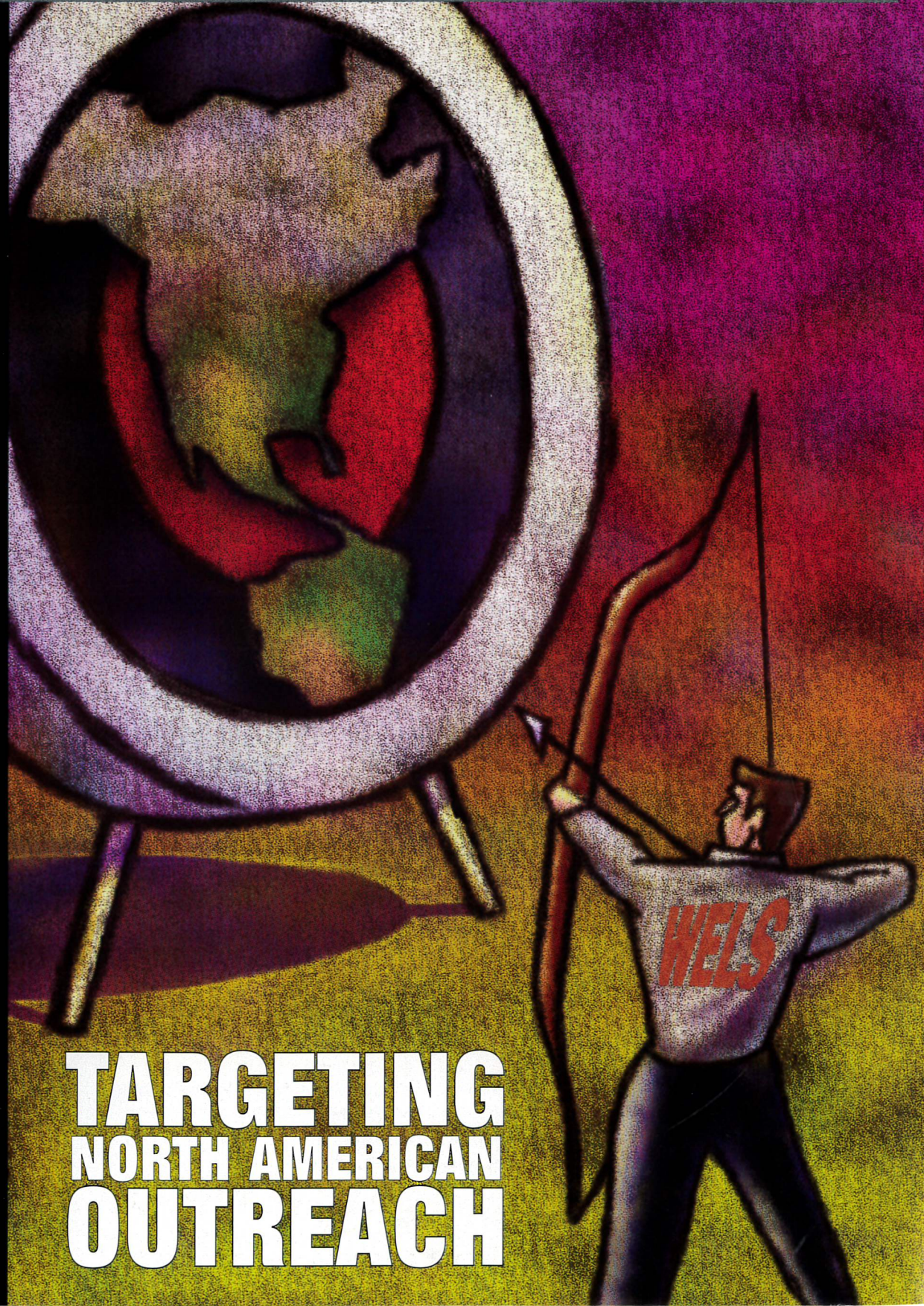
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How to give
thanks in all
circumstances

Worship
that works

Is gambling
a sin?

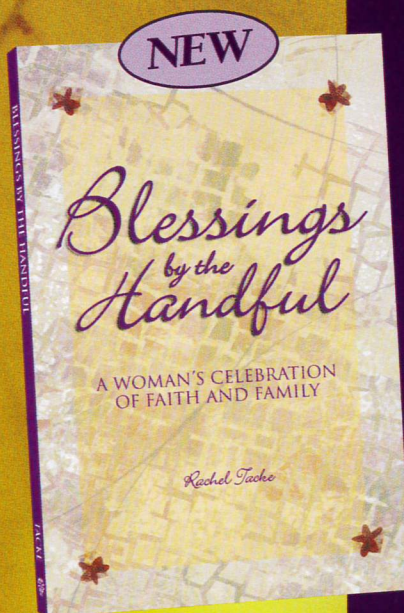


TARGETING NORTH AMERICAN OUTREACH

Blessings— come in all shapes and sizes.

In *Blessings by the Handful*, author Rachel Tacke explains how our lives are blessed as we live for God and that contentment comes when we trust in him for all our needs.

Blessings by the Handful shows busy women how to recognize the simple joys in everyday things. Tacke describes blessings in her life that have come in different shapes and sizes—taking walks in the woods, watching her children grow, sharing a cup of coffee with her husband. Mothers will identify with Tacke as she celebrates God's work in her life amid the chaos that is contemporary motherhood.



Blessings by the Handful

A Woman's Celebration
of Faith and Family

by Rachel Tacke

Papercover. 108 pages.

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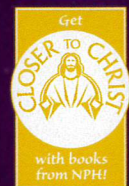
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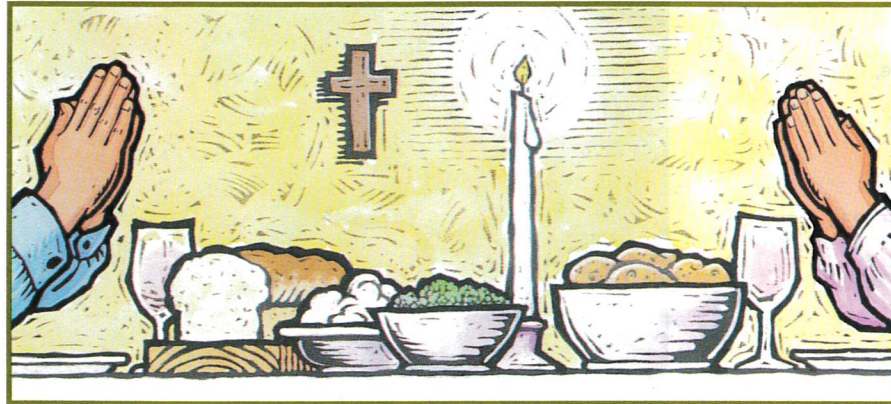
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God's goodness

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. Psalm 118:1

Paul M. Janke

How many times have you used this verse from the psalms as a table prayer? Thousands of times, perhaps. "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good." And how many times have you heard someone respond to the prayer



by challenging the statement about God's goodness? Probably never. What's to challenge? God's goodness is incontestable. The end of the prayer is simply the signal to start shoveling the food onto our plates.

But if that's the case, then why did the Holy Spirit move his psalmists to assert so frequently this and other similar statements about God's goodness?

God's goodness questioned

The fact is that God's people have at times questioned his goodness. Shortly after they crossed the Red Sea, hunger caused the people of Israel to wonder out loud whether the LORD had brought them out of Egypt only to starve the entire assembly to death in the desert.

In the depths of his misery, Job's faith grew weak, and he ventured the opinion that God had turned on him ruthlessly and denied him justice. Injustice and impulsive changes of mind are not qualities we typically associate with a "good" God.

Psalm 73 begins with the stock confession, "Surely God is good to Israel." But immediately after that the psalmist begins to vent the thoughts that vexed

him—that the wicked prosper while the righteous are punished every morning. The prophets Jeremiah (12:1) and Habakkuk (1:3) also aired their concern that the LORD was distressingly tolerant of evil and evildoers.

It seems that particularly in times of adversity, believers may begin to doubt the goodness of God.

Man's goodness ruined

But it is not God who is goodness-impaired; it's man. Here's God's verdict: "There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins" (Ecclesiastes 7:20). Every inclination of our hearts is evil from childhood. What issues from our mouths is so often at odds with what we confess as Christians, like a spring that produces both fresh and salt water. Our sins of omission and our sins of commission are a distressing, daily reminder that we are not good but evil by nature.

It was not this way at the beginning. God, the Creator, made man in his own image and declared the male and female he had created to be "very good." But Satan succeeded in planting the seed of doubt about

God's goodness. Rebellion followed, and evil invaded our world and touched everything in it.

God's goodness prevails

It's in his response to the deadly predicament of sinful

humanity, however, that God's goodness stands out most clearly. As the psalmist noted, the Lord may at times chasten us severely, but he has not given us over to death (Psalm 118:18). It was this thought that sustained Job, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk even as they wrestled with their doubts about God's goodness. We will not die but live, believers know, because Jesus carried our sin and conquered death for us. Now we know that in all things—even adversities—God works for the good of those who love him. In his goodness, he hears our prayers and rescues us. "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble," Nahum wrote (1:7)

If "O give thanks . . ." has begun to sound like a bit of believer's boilerplate, then the solution is to contemplate that little word "good" as it applies to God. We'll see very quickly that God's goodness provides no end of reasons for offering him our heartfelt thanks.

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

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Cover illustration by Bill Scott

A four-year focus on North American outreach was overwhelmingly adopted by the delegates at the 2003 synod convention.

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bits & pieces

It's easy to give thanks when everything is going well. But try being thankful when troubles come or things don't go as smoothly as you hoped. Two writers this month remind us that we should be thankful in all circumstances—even when there doesn't seem much to be thankful about. Read more in "God creates thankful people" (p. 18) and "My Thanksgiving resolution" (back page).

Last month we reported on key decisions from the 2003 synod convention, including a four-year focus on North American outreach. This month First Vice President Wayne Mueller shows some ways that we as individuals can carry out this directive and also how we as a synod plan to do so. Future articles will expand on this topic. Read "Love your neighbor" (p. 8), and keep this new initiative in your prayers.

For the past five months, Billy Carter has shared lessons that he learned while serving as an EMT at the Quad/Graphics fire in 2002. He finishes the job this month with his final article, "Assignment completed" (p. 16). 10-24, Pastor Carter! Good work!

Is worship successful in your congregation? James Tiefel shows us what can't be missing if we want our worship to work (p. 14).

If you want a sure bet this issue, don't miss our two-page Cross Hairs article on gambling (p. 30).

—JKW

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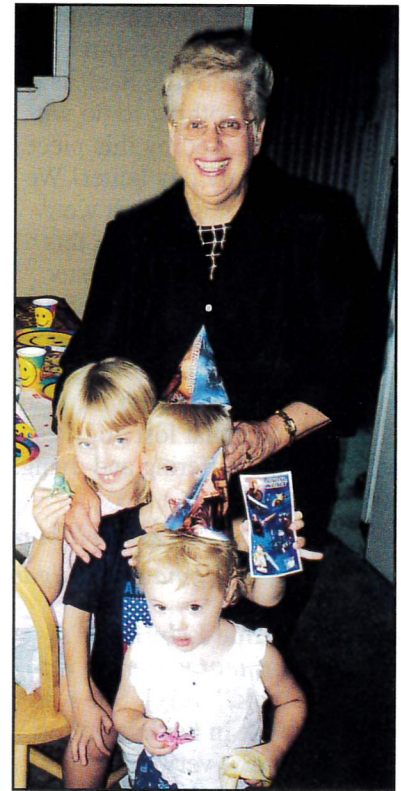
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Thank you so much for the wonderful article, “Not lucky, but blessed” [Sept.]. The title itself is so true—luck has nothing to do with it. I was so encouraged by this piece, and it truly made my day better! We must remember that although we must suffer bad things here on this sinful earth, we will be with Jesus in heaven one day, which is such a positive thought! We all, like sheep, have gone astray; but our loving and merciful God is always with us, leading us on. Just like that lost dog, Jesus “found” us by his suffering and dying. Amazing grace!

 *Lauren Moore
Saginaw, Michigan*

Thanks for Jeanne Lehninger’s review of *A garment woven in victory* [“Book nook,” July]. She was refreshingly frank in her evaluation of a book that’s not very good. It’s not often we read a good review of a bad book.

 *Jim Schulz
Indianapolis, Indiana*

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.

In a month when our “Readers forum” yielded only two letters, we share other submissions from our readers.—ed.

Here is a direct quote from my three-year-old son, Riley: “When I get big, I’m going to be the Incredible Hulk. When I’m done being the Incredible Hulk, I’m going to be Spiderman. When I’m done being Spiderman, I’m going to be a pastor.”

The real superheroes through the eyes of a three-year-old.

*Christy Fregien
Waukesha, Wisconsin*

Recently, our house was visited by two Mormon missionaries. My children were all playing, so I took the chance to meet them at the door and witness to my faith. After a few moments, the talk turned to “sin” and how they believed that little children are neither sinful nor capable of believing. Having three young children, I simply laughed at the “not sinful” comment. With a smile on my face, I then called my two-year-old daughter, Jenna, to the door.

“Jenna, what did Jesus do for you?” I asked.

She responded, “Mommy, he died on the cross!”

“Now where do you get to go?”

I continued.

“I get to go to heaven!” she confidently stated.

I figured I would try just one more, asking Jenna, “Why did Jesus do this for you?”

With a big smile on her face and a heart filled with joy, my daughter proclaimed, “Mommy, he loves me!” As she walked away, singing, “Jesus in the Morning,” I turned to hear the two Mormons’ response: silence.

Thank you, Jesus, for the gift of faith you have worked in my daughter’s heart through your Word. I pray that I testify to my faith as boldly as she does.

*Julia Boggs
Mobile, Alabama*

THROUGH MY BIBLE IN 3 YEARS

DECEMBER 2003

This Bible reading series is designed to take only a few minutes each day. To help you through your Bible study, consider this anecdote: Peter the Barber once asked Martin Luther how he, an ordinary kind of guy, could read the Bible with profit.

Luther answered, “Ask yourself:

1. What does God tell me here?
 2. What makes me glad?
 3. What makes me sad?
 4. What do I want to pray for?”
- Try it in your Bible reading.

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1. John 17:1-5 | 18. Is. 11, 12 |
| 2. Jn. 17:6-19 | 19. Is. 13:1–14:23 |
| 3. Jn. 17:20-26 | 20. Is. 14:24–16:14 |
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| 14. Is. 6 | 31. Is. 38, 39 |
| 15. Is. 7:1–8:15 | |
| 16. Is. 8:16–10:4 | |
| 17. Is. 10:5-34 | |

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Consider how you can become involved in *Forward in Christ* magazine. Do you have a comment or question about an article that can be published in “Readers forum?” What about a picture that can be used in “Potluck,” or a theological question to ask seminary professor Richard Gurgel?

Please also share your stories of faith—whether they are happy, sad, funny, or a combination of all three. Send all reader contributions to <fic@sab.wels.net> or *Forward in Christ* magazine, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222. We value our readers’ contributions and look forward to hearing from you.



This is only a test!

Douglas J. Engelbrecht

BEEP . . . “For the next 30 seconds this station will be conducting a test of the Emergency Broadcasting System. This is only a test! In the case of a real emergency, you would have been given instructions on how to proceed. I repeat, this is only a test!”

BEEP . . . “For the next 24 hours God will be conducting a test of the thankful heart. It’s called Thanksgiving Day. This is only a test! I repeat, this is only a test!”

To some people Thanksgiving Day is the sum and substance of a thankful heart. It’s the day you go to church and say “thank you” to God. It’s the day you show a little compassion and concern for others in the world. But I repeat, “This is only a test!” It’s only one day out of 365. An hour in church and a food basket for some needy family in town mean little if it all ends at midnight on Nov. 27. In the case of a real thankful heart, there will be regular worship and lasting concern for others.

God doesn’t demand that we be in church every Sunday. But if you and I know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in suffering the pains of damnation for worthless sinners like us, if we are sincere about our love for him who died for us and has given us every blessing under the sun besides, it will show itself in thankful worship week in and week out.

So when you’re sitting around the dinner table on Nov. 27 with turkey and mashed potatoes staring you in the face, don’t feel too comfortable about the fact that you were in church on Thanksgiving Day. Remember . . . this is only a test. In the case of a real thankful heart there will be regular worship and thanksgiving for the One who died that we might live.

And in the case of a real thankful heart there will be lasting concern. When Howard Hughes died, all the casinos in Las Vegas were asked to have a moment of silence in his memory. At the appointed time there was dead silence as all the machines stopped. But before the minute was up, a voice was heard saying, “All right, he’s had his moment. Roll the dice!”

It seems sometimes that that’s the way many people observe Thanksgiving Day. They are overwhelmed with gratitude and thanksgiving to God for his many blessings on that day. Then they feel a moment of concern and compassion for their fellow man who may have far less than they do and even go so far as to send a basket of food to a needy family. But as soon as the fourth Thursday in November is over, you can almost hear them say, “All right, they had their moment, back to normal!”

BEEP . . . “For the next 24 hours God will be conducting a test of the thankful heart. It’s called Thanksgiving Day. This is only a test! It’s only one day out of 365. In the case of real thankful hearts, you will find regular worship and lasting concern for others. I repeat, this is only a test!”

So don’t feel too comfortable about being in church on Thanksgiving Day. But do be thankful that God has given you the temporal and eternal blessings that you have and 364 other days in the year to show just how thankful you are!

Doug Engelbrecht is pastor at Trinity, Neenah, Wisconsin.

An hour in church and a food basket for some needy family in town mean little if it all ends at midnight on Nov. 27.

TARGETING NORTH AMERICAN OUTREACH

Recognizing that loving our neighbor is a way we express our love for God, this year's synod convention delegates set a four-year focus on North American outreach.

Wayne D. Mueller

Jesus summarized the whole law in two great commandments. The first, he said, was: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37).

We all remember what our Savior said was the second great commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). But do we recall how our Lord tied the second great commandment to the first? He said the second great commandment is like the first.

What did Jesus mean? How are the two great commandments like each other? Is it that both commandments require obedience? Or, is it merely that both commandments require love? Are they alike in that both are a summary of other commandments?

I think that Jesus meant more than that. Jesus wanted us to see the inseparable connection between loving God and our neighbor. You don't really love God if you ignore your neighbor, and your love for your neighbor isn't real unless it flows from your love for God. Loving our neighbor is a way we express our love for God.

This is the connection the delegates at our most recent synod convention made.

One great commission

Tough times always force members of Christ's kingdom to reevaluate their core purpose. Our 2003 convention had to do that too. The delegates were compelled to answer the question, "If you don't have money to do everything you'd like to do, what will God's love compel you to do with or without money?"

This emphasis on North American outreach is God's empowering

The convention's floor committee #11 came back with an answer. Their proposal for a four-year focus on North American outreach was overwhelmingly adopted by the delegates. In order to refit ourselves for the Savior's Great Commission, we need to begin at home.

The synod's Operations Team* is giving definition to this new direction for WELS ministry. The Synodical Council and other leaders will approve and carry out the plan.

One Lord of the church

What is true of individual believers, however, also pertains to those who gather as a synod to do the Lord's work. All new direction for ministry begins not with plans, but with repentance.

All of us, beginning with leadership, must ask ourselves the hard questions. Have I loved my neighbor as myself? Am I always too busy to counsel a straying member of my congregation? Have I shared my abundant material blessings to support the outreach of the gospel to my neighbors? Have I prayed for a missionary in Africa but not spoken about Jesus to the troubled woman next door? I am secure in my own trust in God, but has my life always displayed the intimate connection between loving God and loving my neighbor?

Humbly, we acknowledge that outreach to our North American neighbors—or to anyone anywhere—began not at our synod convention. It began in God's eternal heart. It started when he demonstrated his love for us sinners by sending Christ to die for us. Because Christ extends forgiveness

to us, who have not always loved our neighbor, we may make plans to demonstrate our repentance.

The shape of the mission

This emphasis on North American outreach is God's empowering invitation to all of WELS—every congregation, every member. So the main part of our effort will be to visit every congregation and lay the Great Commission before every believer.

Representatives from every area of WELS ministry will make these visits to our congregations over a four-year period. Ministerial education professors, home and world missionaries, and ministry board members will encourage WELS members and churches within their own districts.

In one annual visit in each of the next four years, these men will bring a Bible-based message encouraging North American outreach. The themes include the Great Commission, the universal priesthood of believers, the doctrine of redemption, and Christian love. Each visitor will bring a menu of activities from which a congregation or its members may respond to the urging of the gospel.

During the same four years, 2004-2007, all areas of ministry will partner with congregations to extend the saving message of Jesus. New outreach openings, cross-cultural work, member retention, personal evangelism, visitation ministry, recruitment for ministry, and turning our elementary schools to outreach are high on the agenda.

But our organized efforts are not as important as our individual efforts. Just as North American outreach

begins with personal repentance, so God's blessing on this effort will be most obvious in our personal witness to our neighbors, our fervent prayers, our increasingly generous gifts, and our personal time dedicated to ministry efforts at our local church.

North American outreach begins and ends with the gospel-wrought change in our individual hearts. The same sacrificial death that led us to love the Father also moves us to love our North American neighbors as ourselves.



Wayne Mueller is WELS vice president for mission and ministry.

*The Operations Team consists of the president, the vice president for mission and ministry, the executive director of Support Services, the administrators of the four areas of ministry (Home Missions, World Missions, Parish Services, and Ministerial Education), the director of Communication Services, and the administrator for Communication on Financial Support.



invitation to all of WELS—every congregation, every member.

When does life end?

New technologies enable us to prolong life and to postpone death, forcing us to wrestle all the more with the moment of death.

John D. Schuetze

We often say nothing is more certain than death and taxes. There's no doubt that taxes are still a sure thing. Yet when it comes to death things aren't quite so certain. Consider the moment of death. We know death happens, but the difficult question is, "When?" Pinpointing the moment of death has always had an element of uncertainty. In his book, *Death to Dust*, Kenneth Iserson speaks about cases of premature burial. He lists some examples from history where the "dead" surprisingly came back to life.

Modern medicine faces a similar dilemma. New technologies enable us to prolong life. They also allow us to postpone death. So we wrestle all the more with the moment of death.

Brain death criteria

According to the medical and legal community, death is determined by brain criteria. Since the brain is the central command system for the body, when the brain is dead and no longer functioning, the person is declared dead.

Brain death criterion is not without problems, however. Some will question how much of the brain needs to die before a person can be declared dead. Another problem is that some associate the ability to think and reason with the presence of human life. God did create human beings with an



amazing ability to think. This is a gift we are to use to his glory as we honor him with our lives. Yet the ability to reason does not make us human. We can lose our reasoning and thinking abilities and still be a human being.

Some would disagree—even some within Christian circles. They base their arguments on their wrong view of the image of God. In some Christian

circles the image of God and thus personhood is associated with rational abilities. The conclusion is clear. Without rational abilities we have no image of God. Without the image of God we cease to be a human being. One Christian medical ethics manual shows this connection: "If the fetus has a condition that is seemingly inconsistent with the fetus ever becom-

ing a person or ever coming close to having God-imaging capacities, we would recommend an abortion.”¹

A Christian definition of life

How do we as Lutheran Christians define human life? And how do we determine the moment of death? We begin with a biblical view of the image of God. In the opening chapter of Genesis, God reveals that we human beings were created in his image. This image or likeness sets us apart from the rest of God’s created world. But while Genesis 1:26,27 says we have been made in God’s image, it does not define the image. To learn more about the image we must look elsewhere in Scripture.

Ephesians 4:24 gives a simple answer to what some see as a complex problem. It defines the image as “true righteousness and holiness.” The image of God refers to our original spiritual condition. As male and female we were made without sin. We were made holy and righteous, just as God is holy and righteous. Even though we lost this holiness through the fall into sin, God still sees each person as one in whom he wants to restore that image through faith in Christ.

The Lutheran view on the image of God doesn’t end with creation. It also draws in our redemption through Christ. Christ died for all human beings, regardless of their brain power or thinking abilities. The person suffering from Alzheimer’s is just as much a human being as the rocket scientist. The anencephalic infant is just as much a human being as the Gerber baby.

When death occurs

But what about the other question: “When does death occur?” Scripture teaches that physical death is the

separation of soul and body. In Ecclesiastes 12 Solomon describes the aging and dying process poetically. In verses 6 and 7, he states, “Remember him—before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” This answers the moment of death question from a biblical viewpoint. It doesn’t answer it from a medical perspective. The soul is an immaterial part of the body. No CAT scan or MRI can detect the location or presence of the soul.

Our ultimate goal in life is not to prolong life. Our main goal is to glorify God.

Yet this biblical truth does have some practical applications. Suppose the physician comes to a woman and tells her that her husband is brain dead. According to the tests, there is no activity in all parts of the brain, including the brain stem. Since the brain is the central command center for the body, we would have to ask whether that person is still alive. Perhaps the soul has already left the body. Perhaps our loved one is already with the Lord in heaven. Perhaps medical technology leaves us with only a mechanically sustained human body but not a living human being. This could enable the woman to disconnect the life support systems without feeling that she is shortening her husband’s life. She is simply recognizing that God is taking or has already taken her loved one to his heavenly home.

Organ transplantation

This may also help her feel more comfortable about donating her husband’s organs for transplantation. God neither commands nor forbids us to donate our organs and tissue for transplants. Whether or not we indicate on our driver’s license that we wish to be an organ donor is a matter of Christian freedom. We can be good managers of our body and life in many ways, just as we can care for and seek to prolong the lives of others in many ways. One way is to sign an organ donor card. It can be an important way, provided we do not shorten the life of one person with the hope that we can prolong the life of another.

When we keep the biblical principles before us, we can make decisions that are pleasing to God. Our ultimate goal in life is not to prolong life. Our main goal is to glorify God. We give glory to God when we recognize that God has called a loved one home. We can also give glory to God when we offer his or her organs for donation.

This brings us back to the matter of certainty. Life and death decisions can be confusing. We may not be sure what is the right thing to do. Yet decisions made in the fear of God and guided by the Word of God are decisions God will bless. They are decisions that will glorify God. We can be sure of that.



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

¹Hessel Bouma III, Douglas Diekema, Edward Langerak, Theodore Rottman, and Allen Verhey, *Christian Faith, Health, and Medical Practice*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989, p. 248.

The waiting game

Waiting for a liver transplant taught me to trust God's timing.

Jane Oswald

By the grace of God and the difficult decision of a family in the midst of tragedy, I received a liver transplant on Sept. 8, 2001.

My story started in 1993 when my regular physician noticed that my liver enzymes were steadily getting higher. Further testing revealed I had Hepatitis C. The likely cause: a blood transfusion I received in 1975. I prayed, knowing God would have a plan for me and would get me through this.

As the years went on, I felt fine. We left Milwaukee as my husband's job change took us to Chicago. It was time to get acquainted with new specialists, new routines. Blood tests showed elevation in several areas, so the doctors decided to try a regimen of injections. It was of no help. I was told that there was a 50/50 chance that I would need a transplant someday. I liked those odds. The glass is

always half full, isn't it?

My husband was now needed back in Wisconsin, so in 2000 we happily moved. Only God could have planned this as we now became involved with Dr. Jose Franco, the most caring doctor that I have ever known, and a transplant team unsurpassed in its care and expertise.

By 2001, things were steadily going downhill. I was told that I would most likely need a transplant. I was somewhat fearful, apprehensive with the knowledge that someone would die before I would be helped, but I knew that God works together for good. So with full confidence in him, the wait began.

My doctor in Chicago had already put me on the transplant list "just in case," but my status was bumped up in March as conditions worsened. I was told that I should carry a beeper at all times and couldn't be further from home than the one or two hours required to get to the hospital. The transplant coordinators said it would probably be at least six months before I'd get the call.

Imagine my surprise when four days later I got my first call! It's

hard to describe the feeling of hearing the words, "Jane, we have a liver for you. Can you get to the hospital in an hour?" To say I was stunned is an understatement. We hurriedly called our children (who all live out of state) and our pastor, threw some things into a bag, and left for the hospital.

After a battery of questions and many tests and x-rays, we waited for what seemed to be endless hours. At 3 AM a sad-looking resident and a nurse informed us that the donated liver was not useable for me, and I could go home.

Wow, we couldn't believe it. We called our children back and told them to relax—not this time.

Two weeks later came phone call #2. Off we went again. Same tests and x-rays. (I felt like I knew the routine.) I was even getting prepped for surgery. This time the surgeon came out and informed us that upon closer inspection of the liver, it was not so compatible for me, but a critically ill patient at a nearby hospital needed a transplant or he would die. Though sad for me, I was happy someone would be helped who wouldn't survive the day without that liver. I could wait.

And wait I did, for months and months. Each day that you live with a beeper and it doesn't beep at you, you think something must be wrong with it. You go to bed telling your-

DONOR

I urge you to consider being an organ donor. Pray about this life-giving decision. Talk to your family about it. Seek information about organ donation from www.shareyourlife.org. Sign your driver's license. We will not need our organs, tissue, or corneas in heaven, but so many here on earth can and will be helped by your donation.



Jane Oswald and three of her grandkids: Alyssa, David, and Katy Panning. After having to stay close to home waiting for a new liver, one of Jane's first priorities after she received her transplant was a trip to see her grandkids.

self, "Maybe tomorrow or during the night," and you pray for God's will to be done. You play tricks with yourself like, "Oh, it'll be on so and so's birthday, our anniversary, Memorial Day, July 4th, my birthday, your birthday, when I least expect it, when I most expect it." And the phone or beeper just doesn't go off. You are reminded of all the people, 82,000 on transplant lists (almost 18,000 of those needing livers), and so many of them dying before an organ becomes available. You thank God for giving you the strength to get you and your family through each day.

It was Sept. 6 before I got my next call. Off we went. Same routine, and sadly, for the third time, same result. This time as the nurse told us the news, she was crying . . . and so was I.

The trek home at 3 AM was getting to be drudgery. But God knew we were right on the edge. Hours after getting home from the hospital we got another call. Another liver. This time there was no need for tests or x-rays. I'd just had them! So we waited. I went down to surgery, and that was the last thing I remember until Sept. 22.

Everything surgically went smoothly. I was doing fine, but on the evening of Sept. 10, I began having breathing problems. A respirator was attached, and I apparently fought this mightily, requiring the doctors to put me in a medicinally induced coma. I was in this state until I was breathing well again on my own. On Sept. 22, I came back into the real world. I had missed the terrorist acts on Sept. 11. It was strange to miss so much

time, and it took me a while to catch up.

Recovery was slow but sure.

I felt so encouraged by everyone—my family, many friends, nurses, doctors, and prayer chains. I later learned that people all over the country were praying for my recovery. God surely heard the many prayers. I felt wonderful again.

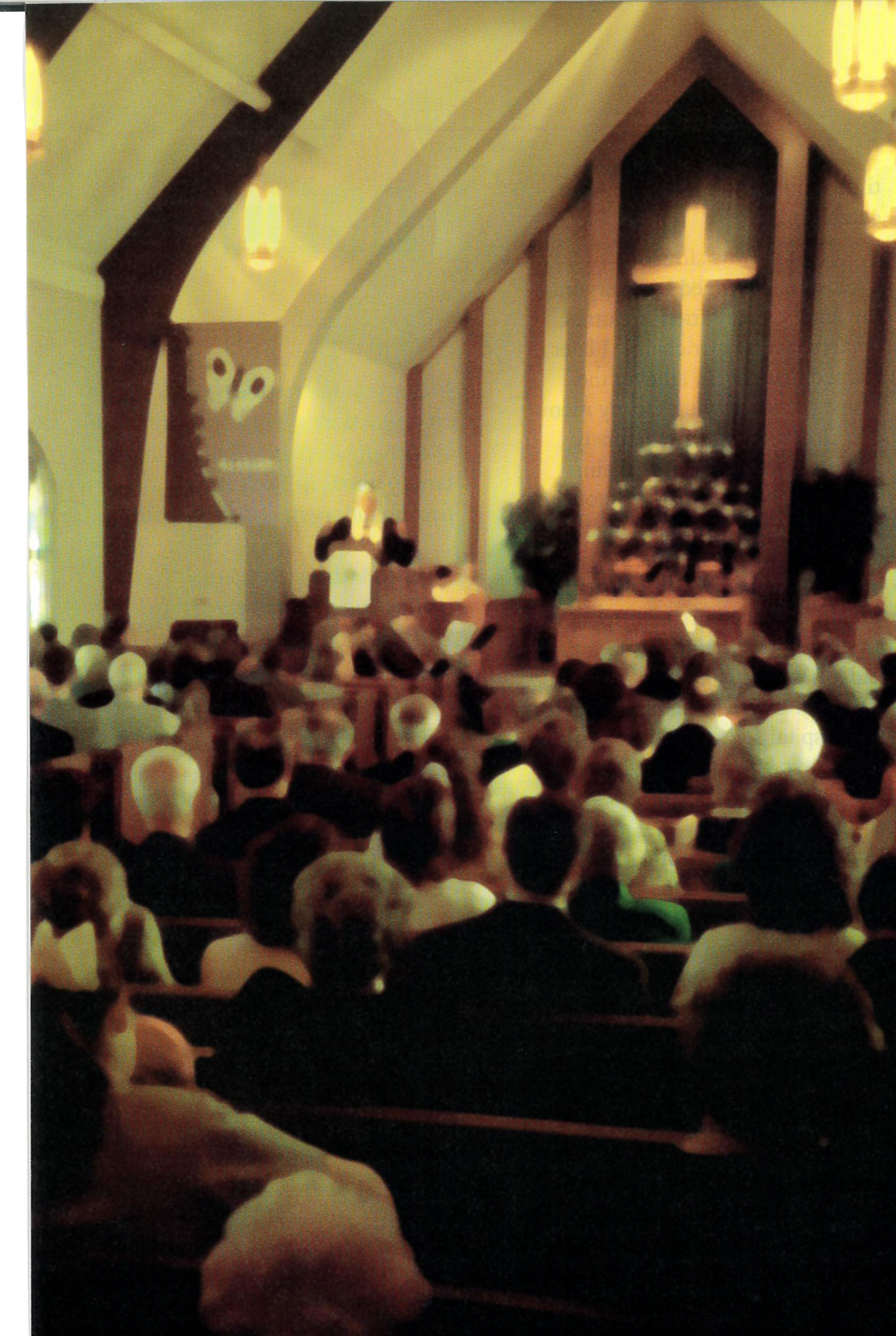
Getting home in early October was such a thrill. Ah, my own bed, own food, own surroundings. A bed had been moved downstairs as I couldn't climb stairs yet. Being in an intensive care unit for so long had left my legs like jello, so I needed a walker. It was necessary to go to the hospital for tests several times a week, so getting out and about became routine, though exhausting at first. Plans were being made once again for trips, something not possible in the many months before my transplant. Our first priority was a trip to go see the grandkids. Now that's incentive!

Things just kept getting better. I'd forgotten what it was like to truly feel well again, to have renewed energy without having to carry around all the extra water weight, to make plans and actually be somewhat assured they would be carried out.

You cannot fathom how grateful you feel for the privilege of waking up each day knowing that through our loving God and because a donor family decided to give the most incredible gift, you are able to feel so well. Hardly a day passes without many silent thank you's and prayers for the well-being of that family.



Jane Oswald is a member at St. John, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.



WORSHIP THAT WORKS

People expect more from worship these days.
How do we know if worship works?

James P. Tiefel

It didn't seem so long ago when church members accepted Sunday morning worship for what it was. We might complain about a long sermon on a hot day, but worship was what worship was. Worship wasn't necessarily fun, but it didn't need to be. We didn't compare going to church with going to the county fair.

People expect more from worship these days. Our lives are fast-paced, and we put a high premium on our leisure time. If something is going to get us off the couch or away from the computer, there has to be some sort of return on our investment. And the return better be as quick as the mouse on our computer. We have become goal-oriented and success-driven. There's nothing wrong with that; it's part of our culture. But it explains why many people have high expectations for worship. Culture has come to intersect with public worship, and people want worship that works.

Does worship work?

How do we know if worship works? How do we gauge success on Sunday morning? Obviously, we can't measure the final results until we know the original objective. We have to ask: Why do Christians worship?

The New Testament doesn't set down rules for public worship. We find some descriptions of how first-century believers worshiped, but neither Jesus nor the Bible's writers insist that we imitate what believers did in the first century.

The Bible does make some assumptions, however, and they are as valid today as they were 2,000 years ago. The Bible assumes that God creates both faith and the fruits of faith as the Holy Spirit works miracles through the Word and the sacraments. The Bible assumes that

the Spirit works in his own mysterious manner, prompting faith and good works in various ways. The Bible assumes that the believer's role in God's plan of salvation is to proclaim the gospel in Word and sacrament. Christians plant and water, but God gives the increase.

When we look across the long span of Christian history, we notice that believers who understood these biblical assumptions viewed proclaiming the gospel as the objective of their public worship. They came to church to carry out the Great Commission. They praised God by proclaiming the good news. In fact, they turned every part of worship into proclamation. They spoke the gospel in creeds and prayers. They sang the gospel in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. They appointed preachers, musicians, and artists to present the gospel verbally and visually on their behalf. Whether they lived before or after Martin Luther, they shared his perspective on worship: "For among Christians the whole service should center on Word and sacrament."

Does worship work? If the purpose of public worship is to proclaim the gospel, then worship "works" when Christians come to church and proclaim the gospel. In their hymns, confessions, creeds, and prayers, God's royal priests "declare the praises of him who called [them] out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). In sermons, readings, anthems, and instrumental music that call to mind the words of the Bible, pastors and musicians speak about what they have seen and heard (Acts 4:20). Public worship is consistent with the Bible's teachings when Christians do what the Savior has commissioned them to do: to proclaim the gospel in Word and sacrament. They do their best and leave the rest to God.

Should worship do more?

Some people come to worship expecting more than that. Some want more joy in their lives and to feel God's presence and power. Others want the church to grow, to retain the youth, to preserve the family, and to bring in more offerings. Considering our culture, it isn't surprising that people come to church looking for results.

Worship "works" when Christians come to church and proclaim the gospel.

Sometimes worship works that way. Many Christians come away from worship overwhelmed by the Savior's promises of forgiveness and power. They leave church and head for home eager to fight temptation and to do God's will in their lives. The gospel often works instantly and obviously. Think of Pentecost, when 3,000 people responded to Peter's sermon by repenting of their sins and being baptized.

But worship doesn't always work that way. The Holy Spirit is always active through the Word and the sacraments, but the Spirit works in his own way and with his own timetable. From what we can see, Peter's sermon on Pentecost worked; Paul's sermon in Athens didn't. Sometimes Christians gather for worship, and nothing seems to happen.

Some assume that worship has failed if they don't leave church with the feelings they were hoping for or the results they were looking for. Some may stop coming to church; visitors may not come back.

What can Lutherans do when we sense that worship in our congregation doesn't seem to be working?

We can carefully examine the way our congregation worships to see if the gospel is being proclaimed clearly and joyfully. We can eliminate whatever might be hindering or even hiding gospel proclamation. We can make public worship a priority in our congregation and rededicate ourselves to giving worship our best efforts.

One thing we dare not do is try to achieve spiritual results with something besides the gospel. A brass band blaring a college fight song can arouse thousands in a football stadium. There are ways to touch the right psychological buttons, and some churches don't hesitate to use them. Many Pentecostal and Evangelical churches can point to instant and dramatic results, much of it generated by what happens at worship. But if the gospel isn't at the center of worship, success is nothing but a mirage. Energy and enthusiasm can be impressive, but they are not always fruits of the Spirit. The Spirit works through the gospel, and without the everlasting gospel, joy is never lasting.

Many Lutherans are reexamining public worship these days, perhaps more than we have in many years. God will bless our efforts as long as we make our plans with his plans in mind. The Lord doesn't operate under the pressure of human expectations, nor is he interested in how Americans define success. He calls us to proclaim the gospel with joy and then to leave the heavy work of producing faith and fruit to the Spirit. And he promises that wherever the gospel is, worship will work.



James Tiefel is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.

Make sure to read Tiefel's article in the December issue titled "Worship that's good."

As a licensed emergency medical technician and a first responder for a volunteer fire department, I helped deal with the huge Quad/Graphics fire on July 12, 2002. Each article in this series will focus on a phrase or two that sticks in my mind as I recall what happened.

Assignment completed

When our service to the Lord is complete, we can come home to him filled with joy.

William R. Carter

Many emergency units use a series of codes, called “10-codes,” for common radio transmissions. Many people are familiar with codes like 10-4 “affirmative” and 10-20 “current location.” But codes exist for every number from 10-1 to 10-100. We use 10-76 to say that we’re “en route” and 10-23 to say that we’re “on scene.” 10-50 tells us we have a car accident, and 10-33 alerts us to a critical situation that requires a really rapid response.

10-24 tells the dispatcher we have completed our assignment. The Brownsville Fire Company was finally able to use that code for the fire at Quad/Graphics on July 22, 2002, at 5:12 PM. We had been on scene for nine days, 19 hours, and 39 minutes.

Coming home from the Quad/Graphics fire

It feels good to come home from an emergency call. Some of that feeling comes from leftover adrenaline. But most of it comes from knowing that we were able to use our skills and training to help people when they really needed it. For most of us, that’s

one of the main reasons why we got into emergency work.

The feeling when we brought all the trucks home that evening was similar, but different. The adrenaline was long gone, because our work the last few days had been more like tending a dying campfire than fighting a blazing inferno. Added to the sense of satisfaction, though, besides a little bit of relief that we were finally coming home, was a strong feeling of accomplishment.

We knew that we had been part of something really big. Everything we had heard from other firefighters, from Quad/Graphics employees and officials, from on-scene investigators, from family and friends, and even from the press told us that lots of people appreciated us—even admired us—for a job well done.

Going home to heaven

We don’t always get that kind of immediate feedback when we report ourselves 10-24 from an assignment in the Lord’s kingdom. That’s because we can’t always see what the Holy Spirit does with our efforts. Sometimes he gives us a glimpse right away. Other times

we may not find out until years later how much someone appreciated a time we shared God’s Word with him. And sometimes we never do, at least not while still living on this planet.

That will all change, though, on the day the Lord tells us that we’re 10-24. On the day he returns, or the day we die, whichever comes first, our service to him here on earth will be complete. It’ll be time to bring the trucks home. And not just with a feeling of relief, or even satisfaction, but pure joy!

That joy will be ours because Jesus was able to report himself 10-24, too. At about the ninth hour of the Friday of Passover week, after being 10-23 “on scene” for about 33 years, Jesus told his Father and all the world, in a loud voice, that he had completed his assignment. He had done everything that had been asked of him, and he had done it perfectly. He fulfilled the law for us. He laid down his life for us. In so doing, he provided the only way to salvation for us when we really needed it.

And now that he’s gone back home, he’s promised to come back

Why I became an EMT

I hadn't planned on becoming an emergency medical technician (EMT) when I entered the ministry. I didn't even consider it until I was asked to serve on a debriefing team that counsels emergency personnel after critical incidents. In order to learn more about what emergency personnel do, I was asked to ride along with the local rescue squad for a while. Because those EMTs could tell I enjoyed it—one said that I had "little ambulances in my veins"—they encouraged me to take the training and become an EMT.

I wrestled with the question of whether serving as an EMT would be the best use of my time. But after eight years of wearing a pager, I have seen many benefits that have come from it.

In quite a few situations my pastor skills have been more needed than my EMT skills, and in many other calls I've been able to comfort a patient, a family member, or even other first responders with promises from God's Word.

I also make dozens of contacts each year with people I might not meet otherwise: the patients I help load into the back of ambulances; the firefighters, first responders, and other personnel I rub elbows with at meetings and training sessions; as well as those who see me at calls and at fire company functions.

I don't manage to witness to all of them, but each one is an opportunity to let my light shine. Members have told me of positive impressions I have left with their non-member friends. If those positive impressions continue to make it easier for people to talk to me or listen to what I have to say—and I have some indications that they do—then my work as an EMT will continue to give me opportunities to give glory to God and lead people into his Word.



The Brownsville, Wis., fire company the night of July 22, 2002—the evening that the company's trucks returned from Quad/Graphics after having been on scene for nine days, 19 hours, and 39 minutes.

and take us home with him. Think of the feedback we'll get when he returns. In one of the parables of the talents, he tells the servants who had been faithful with the gifts he had been given, "Well done, good and faithful servant . . ." (Matthew 25:21,23). Because of our faith in his completed work, he will accept the things we have done in his service as fragrant offerings to him. Think of the joy that will be ours as he shows us what we couldn't see before, all the times the Holy Spirit used our words, our resources, or our service, to accomplish his will and bring his precious gospel to souls who needed it.

Sharing the results of Jesus' work

A Greek verb form describes an action that was accomplished in the past but its effects continue into the future. I could probably use that verb form to describe how the experience of the Quad/Graphics fire has affected all those involved. The memories—including the satisfaction over a job well done—will certainly be

with us the rest of our lives. We still tell stories about it whenever we get together with others who were there. Our officers still get invitations to make presentations to fire departments and other groups. Even the media attention has continued. I was asked to do two more interviews during the anniversary of the fire in July.

The Bible writers regularly use that verb form to describe the results of Jesus' completed work for us. In fact, Jesus himself used that form when he said, "It is finished!" from the cross. How awesome that the results of his work will last through all eternity—a lot longer than the memories of a 100-year fire.

What a privilege that he allows us to be a part of sharing the results of that work with other people.

What joy we'll share when he tells us that our assignment is completed, and he takes us home!



Billy Carter is pastor at St. Paul, Brownsville, Wisconsin.

GOD CREATES thankful people

Donald W. Patterson

A college friend taught me how to follow the apostle Paul's encouragement to be thankful in all circumstances.

Have you ever learned a Scripture passage by watching it lived out in another Christian's life? That's what happened to me with God's wonderful little thanksgiving verse, 1 Thessalonians 5:18: "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

I had a friend in college named Mark who taught me this passage from his life. Every time he heard me grouching about something, he'd say, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." I didn't remember memorizing that passage in confirmation class, although I might have. Either way, giving thanks for

How could my friend Mark give thanks when he found out that Jim was dead?

the bad stuff in my life was a new concept for me. But Mark kept challenging me that it was exactly what Paul told us to do in 1 Thessalonians 5:18. I knew he was right, but I still didn't think he could apply it in the most difficult situations. It wasn't long before I saw him do just that.

In the winter of 1982 we had received several inches of rain in a two-day period. The usually tiny Sulfur River in east Texas had become a flowing torrent. Mark and two friends decided to take a canoe and float down that river for 15 miles. It was a college guy thing. There they went, in full camo gear and army boots, three guys in a canoe with no life jackets, on a flowing river. When their mutual friend dropped them off, Mark told him to pick them up in a couple of hours at a place 15 miles away, where the river went under a country highway. That friend arrived at the crossing right on time. But there was no Mark, no friends, no canoe, and no sign of one coming.

Something terrible had happened. Halfway through the journey the three adventurers had passed under a train trestle with a lot of debris piled around its columns. It created rapids that capsized their canoe. Mark and one of the other fellows made it out. One did not. His name was Jim. Mark saw him go under, never to come up alive again. They found Jim's body the next day.

On the evening of the accident we gathered around Mark and the other survivor to hear their story. Mark said, "After I was sure we were safely on shore, I was completely in shock and didn't know what to do. I was scared for Jim. Then I remembered 1 Thessalonians 5:18, and the first thing we did was say a prayer of thanksgiving. We

thanked God that he had spared us. We thanked him that he had brought Jim to faith last semester. We thanked God that he was with Jim wherever he was. And we thanked God that he promised to help us through whatever the days ahead held for us."

Wow! I had a hard time believing my ears. This wasn't just some teacher telling me that we ought to give thanks in all circumstances. This was a living, breathing testimony that God's Spirit leads us to give thanks in all circumstances just as he told us to do through Paul. Thanksgiving is real for the Christian. It isn't just a command. It is a promised blessing that wells up in our hearts through faith.

Just think about the apostle Paul when he wrote 1 Thessalonians 5:18. He had been run out of Thessalonica by crazed Jews who were jealous of his success and fearful of his message. They even threw rocks at him. He was concerned for his church there and wondered if they would survive the pressure of false teachers and persecution. Still he wrote, "Give thanks in all circumstances." He wrote similar things in his letter to the Philippians when he was imprisoned in Rome. He said, "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4).

How could my friend Mark give thanks when he found out that Jim was dead? How could Paul give thanks when he had been so mistreated and so much seemed to be at risk? It was because the Holy Spirit had planted God's promises in their hearts. Those promises became their strength when they had no strength in themselves.

Just think of all the promises God makes to us! He promises that he works everything out for the good of

his people. He promises that anyone who trusts in Jesus will never die but will pass from death to life. He promises forgiveness for every sin. He promises that his Word will bear fruit when it is planted. He promises that he is able to take care of his people. He promises that his power is made perfect in weakness. He promises that heaven is a real place where we will never suffer again. He promises that he will give us all that we need for this body and life. He promises as our Father that he cares for us forever in his love.

When we live in his promises they insulate us from the painful elements of our circumstances. In the warmth of God's promises we don't have to be told to be thankful.

Do you want to have an "authentic" Thanksgiving this year? In your devotional time each day between now and Thanksgiving, read your Bible until you find at least one of God's promises for you. Meditate on that promise. Think of the ways it will comfort you throughout your life. Then write that promise down on a sheet of paper. Add a promise to that sheet every day until Thanksgiving. On Thanksgiving Day, before you pray and cut the turkey, read all those promises to your family. Each promise will renew trust in your hearts and increase your thanksgiving to God.

No matter what the circumstances surrounding your Thanksgiving, the promises of God will strengthen and insulate you from your troubles. See! God makes us thankful people by sending his promises into our hearts so that in all circumstances we can find reasons to praise him.



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



WALKING WITH ST. JOHN

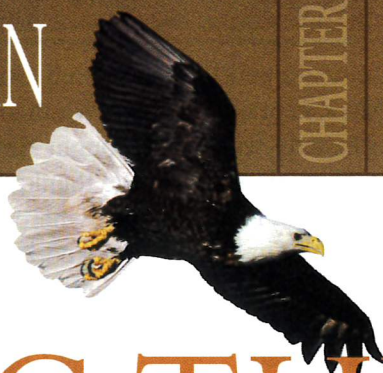
CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 2

CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER 4

CHAPTER 5



CALLING THE LOST TO FAITH

By word and deed, Jesus directs people to believe him for eternal life.

Theodore J. Hartwig

Together with new testimonies (see October *Forward in Christ*, p. 28), this unit shows that the Lord's mission extends beyond narrow national boundaries to include a harvest of Gentiles. It illustrates the major purpose of Jesus' miracles. It explains the deeper significance of God's Son becoming a man of flesh and blood.

Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst (4:1-14)

On his return from Judea to Galilee Jesus would not let old enmities, which kept Jews and Samaritans at loggerheads, deflect him from taking the direct route through Samaria. John writes that Jesus had to go through Samaria; it was a matter of principle for him. When the little band of travelers reached Jacob's well near Sychar, Jesus was "tired from the journey," the author's purposeful testimony to his Master's genuine human nature.

Jesus' own weariness furnished him with the refreshment of winning a lost soul.

Using the circumstances at hand, the well, and the water, Jesus exhibited a masterpiece of mission work. He awakened curiosity. Curiosity led to desire. But satisfaction of desire had to be accompanied by repentance.

Worship the Father in spirit and truth (4:15-42)

The woman's question about the right place to be rid of her sin moved the discussion to its climax. From now on, it pleased God to be found not at Jerusalem and its temple, but in this man of flesh and blood seated at the well. With Jesus, God is worshiped in spirit and in truth.

With Jesus also, as he tells his disciples just returned from shopping in Sychar, the ancient proverb of one sowing, another reaping is

not merely true but comforting. Why? Because with Jesus, the sower enjoys the fruits of his work equally with the reaper, if not seen now, then at the final harvest in heaven.

The Father is always at his work . . . and I, too, am working (4:43-5:47)

Two miracles now serve Jesus for explaining why he does his mighty works. The readily seen reason is mercy. His merciful response to the Capernaum official's plea enhanced this man's faith from conviction that Jesus could cure bodily illness to trust in Jesus as Savior of body and soul. In healing the invalid at a pool called Bethesda or "House of Mercy," the place of the miracle accentuated Jesus' mercy.

But the more important purpose of the miracle comes to light in consequence of its having been done on the Sabbath. Regarded



as work, it aroused the hostility of the Jewish officials. When Jesus defended his action, their hostility swelled into murderous hatred. Blind to the display of love, which liberated a man from a 38-year paralysis, they saw the act only as a violation of the Sabbath. They counted their obedience to the law that forbade work as a personal sacrifice more important than mercy. With such theology they lost the intent of God's kind command to rest in the beauty and gratitude of worship on one day in seven.

Jesus now used their challenge to explain the larger purpose of his miracles. They carry out God the Father's daily governance and preservation of the world. This work, like creation, God also delegated to his Son, to this man of flesh and blood now speaking with them. His audience caught the force of Jesus' testimony immediately: "This man makes himself equal to God!"

So Jesus directed them to other witnesses of his divine calling: John the Baptist, the very miracles which no ordinary mortal can do, as well as their great prophet Moses. The problem with their Scripture study lay in their tunnel-visioned concentration on the individual trees, so that they failed to see the woods. Yet those Scriptures in their entirety,

Jesus told them, have but one main goal—to show them their Savior, the Christ.

I am the bread of life (6:1-71)

John unfolds the further significance of God's Son become flesh and blood in the Lord's sermon at Capernaum after the miraculous feeding of the 5,000. As was his custom, John adds details about this miracle missing in the other Gospels. He tells when it happened. He notes the source of the food. He explains why the crumbs were gathered. He reports the crowd's response to the miracle: they wanted a bread king.

Jesus had to go through Samaria; it was a matter of principle for him.

Then, after the return over sea to Capernaum, Jesus again used the miracle as a starting point for a sermon on the first of the fourth Gospel's great "I am's." To win the crowds away from their fleshly desires for stockpiles of stomach food, Jesus urged them to seek him as the Bread of Life come down from heaven and then to eat his flesh and drink his blood for their salvation. How mind-boggling this

invitation! The crowds were scandalized, even entertaining the thought of cannibalism. Yet Jesus used such language to impress on them the intimate nature of belonging to him. As the ordinary food we eat becomes part of us, so Jesus' entire person needs to become ours. This happens not by eating and drinking with the mouth nor by the persuasion of reason, but by believing in him. Such is the all-encompassing nature of faith; it takes possession of one's whole being. As Paul writes, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

True to the nature of sin-blinded flesh and blood, however, the sermon at Capernaum signaled the beginning of the great apostasy. For the many, the sermon carried the flavor of death. For the few faithful, it served as the savor of life.



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

WHATEVER

Don't be a lone goose

Stick together with your congregation of **Christians** for protection **against Satan** and his evil lies.

Janet Georgson

A pack of wolves. A herd of buffalo. A gaggle of geese. All these animal groups stay together for a reason. Wolves stay in groups because it is good protection and it is easier to hunt and ambush their prey. Buffalo stay together for protection and so do geese. When one strays from the group, it is more vulnerable to be chased and killed by a predator.

Put yourself in the place of a fox. You are very hungry, and you have two options. You can go after a gaggle of geese or the one single goose that has wandered off to get better food and more of it. I would definitely go after the single goose, who has nobody to protect it.

It is the same way with the devil. 1 Peter 5:8 says: "Be self controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." The devil will go after those who want the better things in life, just like the goose who wants better food and more of it.

When we don't want to go to church, Bible class, or communion, we are straying from the congregation of Christians. This is the perfect opportunity for the devil to tempt us into doing other things.

"You're too tired," the devil whispers. "Don't go to church. You're only missing one Sunday. It is really no big deal."

Soon after you miss one Sunday, it becomes two, and maybe more. Before you know it, four or five months have gone by, and you haven't gone to church.

The devil works hard to make us turn from God, and, sad to say, many people do. After students confirm their faith, they think, "I don't need to go to church. I know everything." Or maybe they think, "If my friends find out I go to church, they will laugh at me."

In church you not only learn Bible stories, but you also strengthen your faith. It is harder to say "no" to sin if your faith isn't strengthened. I see that myself after missing only one Sunday. The devil uses every opportunity to take you away from God. Why? Because just like the fox, it is easier to get the stray than to go after the whole group of geese.

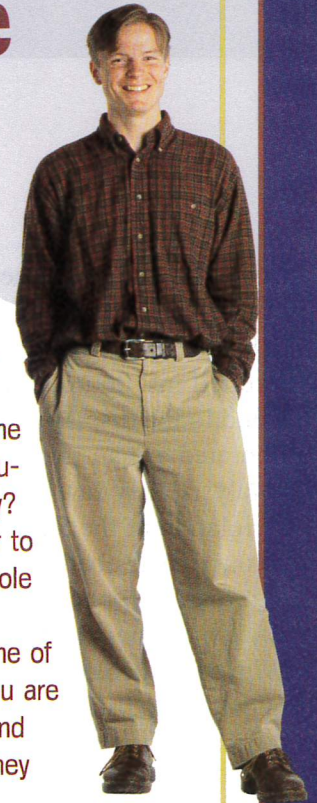
Now put yourself in the place of one of the geese in the group. You know you are protected because all your friends and family are watching for the enemy. They protect you, and you protect them.

It is the same way with Christians. When we are with our fellow Christians and temptations come, everyone can encourage each other to do the right thing. Also, there might not be as many temptations. For example, you should not be asked to smoke, do drugs, or make fun of others who aren't there to defend themselves because everyone knows that it is wrong to do those things.

What do you do if you see a goose all by itself? Waddle over and ask him to join the group again. Don't just stand by and not say anything or wander like him, because then you also put yourself in harm's way. We as Christians should go to our fellow Christian who has left our congregation and ask him to come back and join us.

Just like the pack of wolves, the herd of buffalo, and the gaggle of geese, the congregation of Christians sticks together for protection against Satan and his evil lies.

Janet Georgson, a member of Good Shepherd, West Allis, Wisconsin, is a junior at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee.



Getting to know God's story

Randy K. Hunter

Little Instruction Book. Everything I need to know I learned in kindergarten.

_____ for dummies. These books and shelves of others like them promise to help us make sense out of life. They claim to have captured wisdom, and now they offer it to us. Some of it isn't bad. But what if God himself were to write a book of wisdom?

Five books of the Bible belong to the category of wisdom books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. These books invite us to think deeply, to search our hearts, and to compare the best of our wisdom to the revelation of God's wisdom.

- Jews recognized three of the wisdom books as poetry: Job, Psalms, and Proverbs. Hebrew poetry isn't about rhyming words; it's about parallel thoughts. Numbers 6:24-26 is an example of synonymous parallelism—each sentence says the same thing. Find three more examples of synonymous parallelism in the book of Proverbs.
- A second kind of parallelism is antithetical—the second sentence contrasts the first. Read Proverbs 15:1 for an example. Then find five more examples in Psalms.
- The third kind of parallelism is synthetic—the second sentence takes the first statement even further. Read Proverbs 4:23 for an example. Then find five more examples in Psalms.
- Psalms can be divided into seven categories. For each category, look up the example and search Psalms to find other examples.

Type	Example	Other examples
Praise	Psalms 8:1	
Penitence	Psalms 51:5	
Messianic	Psalms 110:1	
Wisdom	Psalms 1:1	
Lament	Psalms 102:1	
Imprecation*	Psalms 69:22	
Thanksgiving	Psalms 18:49	

- The book of Ecclesiastes spotlights the difference between living the sacred and living the secular life. Summarize the secular view of life in Ecclesiastes 1:4-7, 2:22, and 8:15.
- Read the hope held out in Ecclesiastes 12:1,9-11,13,14. From the truths you read, complete this sentence in as many ways as you can: "Life will not be meaningless if . . ."
- The book of Job helps us analyze the Bible's answers, and non-answers, to pain and suffering. We don't know the exact date of this book, but it's likely as old as Abraham. Other parts of the Bible teach us not to assume that our sin has anything to do with suffering. The message of Job—we cannot assume that our sin has everything to do with our suffering. Job's friends and wife didn't get that. After their relentless accusations, Job began to wonder about God's ways. Read God's response in 38:2-7 and put it into your own words.
- Determine reasons why God may allow suffering from the following passages: Matthew 5:11,12; 2 Corinthians 12:7; Philippians 3:10,11.

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

*Imprecation means "asking God's judgment on evil."

Find this article and possible answers on-line. Go to <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 Nov. 10.

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

District news

Southeastern Wisconsin



Over 700 people gathered on Sept. 7 to celebrate the dedication of a new school built by St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis. The worship service, which was held in the school's gymnasium, was highlighted by music from adult and youth choirs, a brass ensemble, and a handbell choir (pictured above). Steven Pagels, pastor at St. John, says, "It's a school, but it's not just a school. We have already used the new building for an African world mission presentation, an evangelism seminar, and our weekly outreach program to the Chinese. We are exploring more ways to use our facilities to build bridges with the people of our community."

Dakota-Montana

Over 1,200 people filled out survey cards at the **WELS evangelism booth at the South Dakota State Fair** during the last week of July. Nearly 100 people requested follow-up information. On Sept. 20, **Our Savior, Brookings, S.D.**, hosted the Eastern Conference Sunday School Institute.

Michigan

David Biedenbender, a teen member at Faith, Mount Pleasant, Mich., composed a 12-minute piece of music, "Reflections on the Passion." Biedenbender's high school band director had the school's symphonic wind ensemble play it at their final concert with Biedenbender directing.

South Atlantic

Eighty-eight-year-old **Esther Fretwell** became the first organist at St. Mark, Leesburg, Fla., 25 years ago. She is retiring

this fall, and St. Mark held a reception in her honor on Sept. 28.

Happy Anniversary!

PNW—On June 14, 350 people gathered to celebrate the 25th anniversary of **Evergreen Lutheran High School, Des Moines, Wash.**

SA—On Sept. 14, members of **New Hope, Melbourne, Fla.**, celebrated the 25th anniversary of **Dale Raether's** service in the pastoral ministry and the dedication of their new fellowship hall, which was built with the help of Builders For Christ.

SC—On Aug. 31, Holy Cross, Oklahoma City, Okla., celebrated **John Gaertner's** 40th anniversary in the pastoral ministry.

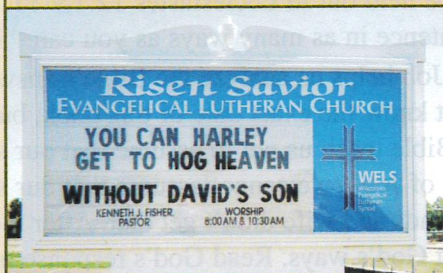
SEW—**Fairview, Milwaukee**, celebrated its 80th anniversary on Sept. 7.

On Sept. 7, Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, celebrated these teachers' service: **Rudy Jeseritz**, 40 years; Pastor **James Becker**, 25 years; **Mark Steiner**, 25 years; **Kathy Weaver**, 25 years.

Five Board for Parish Services administrators have been in the ministry for a collective 145 years: **George LaGrow**, 40 years; Pastor **Carl Ziemer**, 30 years; Pastor **Mike Hintz**, 25 years; **Joel Nelson**, 25 years; and Pastor **Elton Stroh**, 25 years. A celebration honoring these men's service was held on Sept. 16 in Milwaukee.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: D-M—Wayne Rouse; MI—John Eich; NW—Joel Lillo; PNW—David Birsching; SA—Christopher Kruschel; SC—William Gabb; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

Southeastern Wisconsin



Ken Fisher, pastor at Risen Savior, Milwaukee, tried a new approach to evangelism with this billboard's message for the more than 300,000 Harley-Davidson riders who came to Milwaukee in August for Harley's 100th anniversary celebration.

Southeastern Wisconsin



For six years Northside Lutheran Ministries has been working to share God's Word with those who live in poverty in Milwaukee. As of 2002, services are being held across the street from this ministry center at Hope Christian School. The growing number of worshipers are calling themselves "The Family of Hope." During June, July, and August, more than 25 people were baptized into this family. Here seminary student Chris Tasma baptizes a new family member.

Northern Wisconsin



One hundred sixty-eight girls and 34 leaders attended the Lutheran Girl Pioneer National Camp in Crivitz, Wis., this summer. A special achievement award called "Your Synod" was offered. To earn this award, girl pioneers learned information about WELS and its organizations and donated food items to Northside Lutheran Ministries in Milwaukee. Pastor John Baumann and his wife, Carolyn (pictured above), visited the camp in Thai dress and taught the girls about the Hmong ministry that they are involved with in Appleton, Wis.

A new way to offer Jesus' good news

Sitting alone, waiting for the Sunday morning service to begin, I watch as a little boy and his older brother and sister head toward the front of church and freeze in their tracks. "Someone has been sitting in our pew," the boy says, "and they're still there!" Cut. Change the camera angle. Take two!

The pilot episode of a WELS program called *Fifth Pew from the Front* was shot in Lake Mills, Wis., in late 2002. According to writer and director Steve Zambo of WELS Communication Services, *Fifth Pew* is "an opportunity to encourage Christians and to reach out to others with a creative and entertaining approach."

"Beyond entertainment, *Fifth Pew* gives food for thought and may lead to soul-searching and change," says actress Bernie Carow. That's the idea.

The episodes can be used in classrooms, Bible studies, teen groups, and homes as a way "to deal with issues we are confronted with in our Christian lives and to

laugh at ourselves in the process," says actress Karen Spiegelberg. Topics such as moving away, dating, and stewardship are slated to follow the pilot episode that deals with adapting to change and reaching out to others.

The cast includes David Ruprecht, host of cable television's *Supermarket Sweep*, as the father, and many WELS actors and actresses in supporting roles. The first episode—divided into a four-part Bible study series for all ages—was funded by the Commission on Adult Discipleship and the Publication Coordinating Commission.

Bruce Becker, Parish Services administrator, feels that *Fifth Pew* will be "another great way to accomplish family ministry on today's terms." Hollywood isn't giving people what they need to hear, so *Fifth Pew* is offering the good news of Jesus in a way WELS has never seen.

Zambo adds, "The first episode's emphasis on outreach and change is a



Fifth Pew from the Front focuses on the life of the Taylor family, longtime members at Grace Church. In the first episode, see what happens when another family sits in the Taylor's pew.

great support tool for WELS' emphasis on North American outreach."

Fifth Pew (product #387600) will be available Nov. 1. Order it at <www.shopwels.net> or by calling 1-800-662-6022.

Laura Warmuth

A searching soul finds the truth

Just four weeks after arriving as pastor at Beautiful Savior, College Station, Texas, I was working in my office one afternoon when the phone rang. The voice on the other end said, "Hello. I am a recovering Mormon. Did you get my e-mail?" The voice belonged to Tom Bugar, a 32-year-old man who had been struggling with religion for the past 16 years. Somehow, he had stumbled upon the WELS Web site <www.wels.net> and found my e-mail address—the address I had just recently updated as an afterthought!

The subject of his letter read "PLEASE HELP ME," and I must have deleted it thinking it was junk mail. It was the first time in Bugar's life that he had enough courage to contact someone—and I deleted his e-mail! But the Holy Spirit gave him strength for another first in his life—to pick up the phone and call for help.



Even though Caleb Schoeneck (right) accidentally deleted his e-mail, Tom Bugar (left) managed to contact Schoeneck by phone—and the Holy Spirit reached out to Bugar through God's Word.

Bugar and I met first thing the following morning and read Scripture together for two hours. He came to church on Sunday and met again with me during the following week.

When Bugar arrived at my office on Thursday afternoon, I asked him about his week. The low point, he said, was that his Mormon friends had called and asked him why he wasn't at church. And the high? "Tonight, Pastor," he said. "I've been waiting for this all week."

That night, Bugar and I talked about baptism, among other points of Scripture. Bugar was baptized the next Sunday in a private ceremony after the worship service. Now, one month later, he comes to church every Sunday, attends Bible study, and is taking Bible information classes to become a member.

Caleb Schoeneck

How your congregation's offerings support WELS

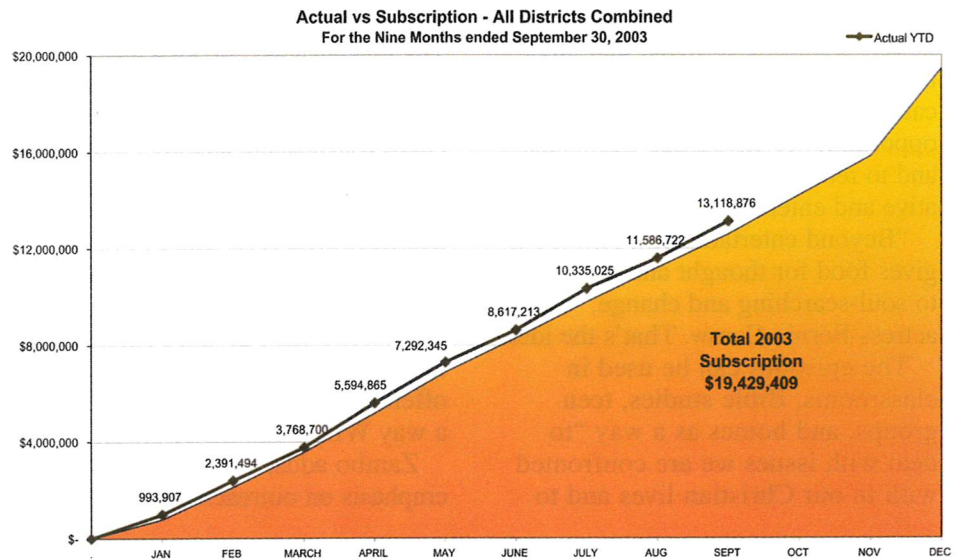
Below are graphs showing the Congregation Mission Offerings that you gave over the past nine months. Congregation Mission Offerings, a way for congregations to help provide for Christ's global mission throughout the synod, account for about 31 percent of the support for the synod's ministry program. Other income comes from tuition and fees from our ministerial education schools, bequests, individual mission offerings, Mission Partners, and foundations. For current, in-depth financial statements and auditor's reports, go to www.wels.net, jump word "fin." We thank you for your support of the synod's work.

What is a subscription?

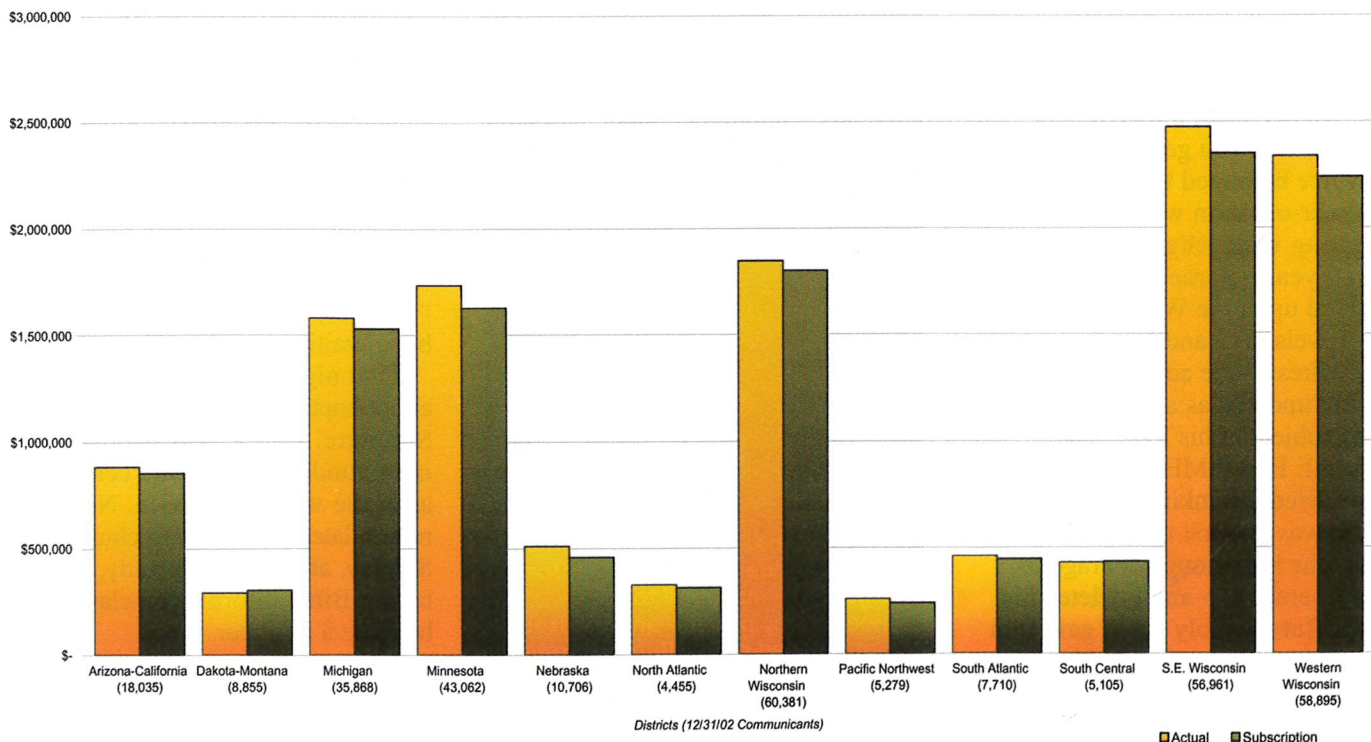
Annually your congregation's leaders set a goal or commitment for how much your congregation will contribute for synod support. That commitment is your congregation's subscription. Congregation subscriptions—along with forecasts of other kinds of support—are important because they enable your synod leaders to plan how much ministry we can do in the coming year to carry on Christ's saving mission.

How do I contribute?

You can contribute to your congregation's subscription in several ways. In some congregations you designate your gift for synod support. In other congregations, a portion of your offering is designated for synod support by your congregation's leaders.



Year-to-Date Actual vs Subscription - by District
For the Nine Months ended September 30, 2003



Judith Ann Vogel, 1941-2002

Judith Vogel (nee Groth) was born Nov. 3, 1941, in Winner, S.D. She died Nov. 4, 2002, in Kennewick, Wash.

A graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she served at St. Andrew, St. Paul Park, Minn., and North Trinity, Milwaukee, Wis.

She is survived by her husband, Vaughn; six children; five grandchildren; one sister; one brother; three nieces; and one nephew.

Karen Jean Schneck, 1959-2003

Karen Schneck (nee Trapp) was born April 30, 1959, in Woodruff, Wis. She died Feb. 15, 2003, in Lake Havasu City, Ariz.

A 1982 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she served at Grace, Muskegon, Mich.; Holy Trinity, Okauchee, Wis.; and Our Saviour, Lake Havasu City, Ariz.

She is survived by her husband, James; two daughters; one son; her parents; five sisters; 13 nieces; and 12 nephews.

Edwin Carl Schmelzer, 1923-2003

Edwin Schmelzer was born April 11, 1923, in Ainsworth, Neb. He died July 24, 2003, in Jackson, Wis.

A 1947 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he taught at Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., and served congregations in Butterfield, Darfur, and Boyd, Minn.; North Monroe, Flat Rock, Escanaba, Remus, Broomfield Township, Mount Pleasant, and Big Rapids, Mich.

He is survived by his wife, Chrysta; seven daughters; one son; 22 grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

Joel P. Sauer, 1928-2003

Joel Sauer was born Jan. 27, 1928. He died June 28, 2003, in Green Bay, Wis.

A 1952 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served congregations in Bylas, Ariz.; Campbellsport, Peshtigo, and Kewaunee, Wis.; Temple, Texas; and at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

He is survived by four sons, five daughters, and 23 grandchildren.

Ella B. Duin, 1904-2003

Ella Duin (nee Bohlsen) was born Jan. 27, 1904. She died July 6, 2003, in Arden Hills, Minn.

She served in West Salem, Wis., and at Grace, Glendale, Ariz.

She is survived by one son, two daughters, 24 grandchildren, 17 great-grandchildren, and 42 nieces and nephews.

Kathy Lee Beyer, 1950-2003

Kathy Beyer was born July 15, 1950, in Milwaukee, Wis. She died July 17, 2003.

She served at St. Paul First, North Hollywood, Calif.

She was preceded in death by her mother, and is survived by her father, one brother, one sister, two nieces, and two nephews.

Youth rally rocks

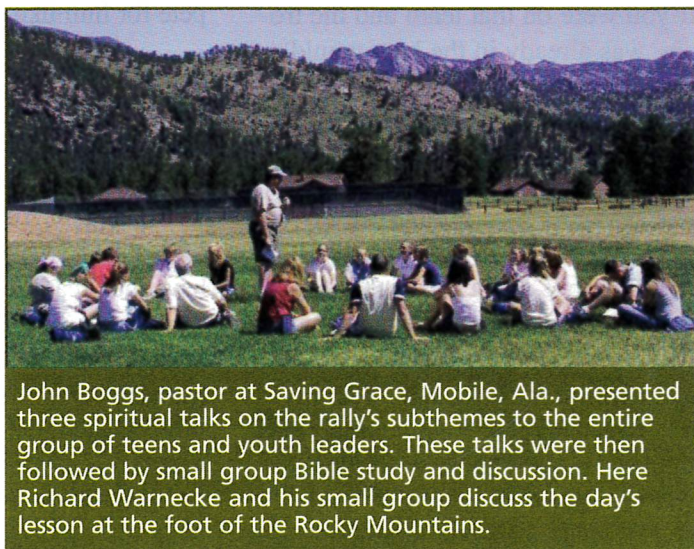
On July 9-12, 1,900 teens and 600 adults attended the 2003 International Youth Rally in Estes Park, Colo., making it the largest attended WELS youth rally ever. Teens and youth leaders focused on the theme "Nothing Higher," with the subthemes "God's Power is Matchless," "God's Presence is Miraculous," and "God's Purpose is Made Known."

Because all available slots for the rally were filled 12 days before the application deadline, 754 people who applied could not attend. This inspired two alternative youth rallies—one in San Diego, Calif., with an attendance of 250 and the other in Newport News, Va., with an attendance of 400.

The Commission on Youth Discipleship is already beginning to plan the 2005 International Youth Rally. For the first time ever, three WELS teens will be part of the rally planning committee.



Music played an important part at the 2003 International Youth Rally. Teens and adults enjoyed listening to Joyful Noise (above), Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School's "house band." Both Joyful Noise and Marika, a WELS performer from Ottawa, Canada, are featured on the rally photo CD.



John Boggs, pastor at Saving Grace, Mobile, Ala., presented three spiritual talks on the rally's subthemes to the entire group of teens and youth leaders. These talks were then followed by small group Bible study and discussion. Here Richard Warnecke and his small group discuss the day's lesson at the foot of the Rocky Mountains.

LIFE IN THE SONLIGHT: compete like crazy!

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.”

Jon D. Buchholz

Picture yourself sitting in the locker room getting ready to play football for the state championship. The whole season has been preparing you for this moment. You're steeling yourself mentally to go out and do your best.

Then the coach comes in with some stunning news. The outcome of the game has already been decided. The final score will be 21 to 18, and you will be the victors. You're still going to go out and play the game, but it won't matter whether you play hard or half-heartedly—the final score will be the same. Now, Coach asks you and the team to go out and play your hardest as the champions you already are.

How would a team of devoted athletes respond to such a situation? If you were on that team and the trophy was already in the bag, would you goof off? Or would you play to the utmost of your ability, just to live up to the title “champion” that you have already been given?

You are on the winning team

You're not going to see that happen on the gridiron, but that is exactly what has happened in the eternal competition for your soul. You, my precious Christian friend, are on the winning team! The score is: Jesus and his church, everything; Satan and those deceived by him, nothing.

Your forgiveness has already been secured. Your eternal garments have already been dipped and made white in the blood of the Lamb. Your eternal place in heaven is already being prepared. Your name is written in Jesus' blood in the book of life, and heaven is your final destination. It's yours, a free gift of God's grace, signed, sealed, and delivered by the blood of the covenant, spilled for you for the forgiveness of your sins on Calvary's cross.

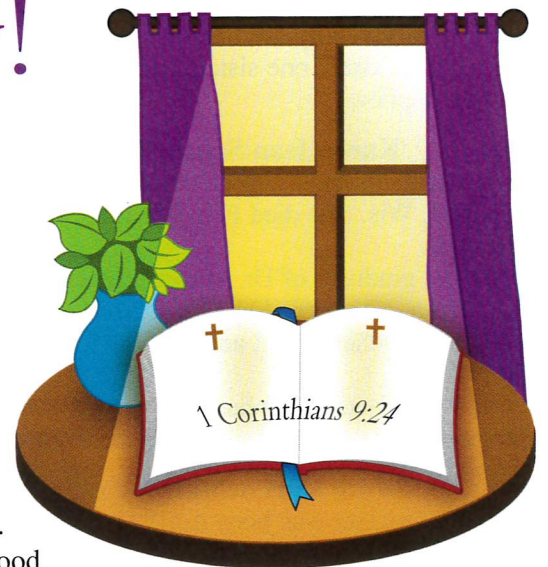
Now there's only one question left: How will you play the game?

When it comes to living a Christian life of love and devotion to the Lord, to say “thank you” to him for his boundless forgiveness, purchased by his eternal sacrifice, we want to compete for him like crazy!

Don't walk off the field

There's only one way to lose the title of champion that we've been given. We can choose to leave the winning team. You can turn your back on Jesus and walk off the field. You have the dreadful power to quit. You can say, “I don't want to serve Jesus.”

Even though Satan has already been declared the ultimate eternal loser, he's constantly working on you to get you to quit Jesus' team. His deceptive seductions beckon from the sidelines. He says, “The



race is too tough. It's too hard to fight with your sinful nature all the time. Just give in. It's too hard to honor Jesus with a decent, upstanding Christian life. Come over here and see what you can do if you leave Jesus behind. Put Jesus on hold while you flirt with immorality. Ask Jesus to wait until the end of the song when the words get raunchy. Harden your heart with malicious thoughts and grudges. Just quit, and leave it all behind.”

Don't be deceived! We've read the playbook, and we know which side wins. The only question that remains is: How will we play the game?

We want to compete like crazy! We want to commit ourselves with complete dedication to our God and Savior, because we count ourselves privileged to live to his glory as champions in Christ.

That's life in the Sonlight!



Jon Buchholz is pastor at Holy Trinity, Des Moines, Washington.



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Meier, Donald W., to Open Bible, The Villages, Fla.
Olson, Steven O., to Prince of Peace, Martinez, Ga.
Schuler, Paul T., to St. Matthew, Appleton, Wis.
Sordahl, Myron F., to retirement
Thierfelder, Paul E., to Jerusalem, Morton Grove, Ill.

Teachers

Hahn, Tabitha M., to St. Paul First, North Hollywood, Calif.
Helmreich, Roland L., to retirement
Schrimpf, Lois I., to retirement
Wiechmann, Jenai, to Timothy, Saint Louis Park, Minn.

The synod administration building will be closed: Nov. 27 & 28. Callers may leave voice mail messages, 414/256-3888.

NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS

The cutoff date for Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) receipts in the synod's post office lock box is the last business day of each month. December 2003 offerings sent to our lock box will be credited as 2003 receipts through Friday, Jan. 9, 2004, as long as they are received in the lock box on or before that date and are clearly labeled as "December" offerings on the remittance coupon. We ask that you continue to mail your offerings to the lock box. That location, our bank, will provide you with the fastest deposit process for your congregation.

Mark Meissner, director of finance

ANNIVERSARIES

- Bloomer, Wis.**—St. Paul (75). Nov. 2. Services, 8 & 10:30 AM. Food and fellowship to follow. 715/568-4322.
- Saginaw, Mich.**—Christ (100). Nov. 2. Service, 10 AM. Brunch to follow.
- La Crosse, Wis.**—Mount Calvary (75). Nov. 15. Service, 6 PM. Nov. 16. Service, 10 AM. Catered dinner to follow. 608/784-5324.
- North Hollywood, Calif.**—St. Paul (75). Nov. 16. Service, 10 AM. Lunch and program to follow. 818/761-1846.
- Milwaukee**—Resurrection (90). Nov. 23. Services, 9 AM & 4 PM. 414/481-5710.
- Grant Park, Ill.**—Our Redeemer (40). Dec. 7. Service time to be determined. Potluck to follow. Christopher Pratt, 815/465-6906.
- Lutheran Girl Pioneers**—50th anniversary. April 23, 2004. Paper Valley Hotel, Appleton, Wis. Judy Hansen, 608/781-5232.

COMING EVENTS

- Women's fall retreat**—Nov. 1, 9 AM-3 PM. Trinity, Minocqua, Wis. Sue, 715/356-7542.
- Capital Area Christian Women's Retreat**—Nov. 7-9. Devil's Head Resort, Baraboo, Wis. Joy Strutz, 262/898-3244.
- Christmas concerts**—
 - Lutheran Chorale, Nov. 30, 3 & 7 PM. Atonement, Milwaukee. Mary Prange, 414/873-9105.
 - Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Dec. 14, 3 PM.
 - Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. Dec. 14, 3 PM & Dec. 19, 10 AM.

- Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich. Dec. 19, 7 PM.
- Mid-year graduation**—Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Dec. 14, 9:30 AM.
- Tour to France, Spain, and Switzerland**—June 14-July 2, 2004. Three credits in history are available from Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Cost, \$3,000. Opportunities to sing in cathedrals. Mark Lenz, 507/354-8221, ext. 345.

AVAILABLE

- Furnishings**—two 7' sections of chair rail & one 4' section with cushions, three wall-mounted literature racks, one brass crucifix-style altar cross, and several sets of paraments. Free for the cost of shipping or pick up from Beautiful Savior, Green Bay, Wis. Ann Wolfram, 920/469-0087.
- Church bell**—cast iron with mounting yoke and pillow blocks for the bearings. Free for the cost of shipping. Dan Moyle, 918/357-9494.

NEEDED

- Translators**—Multi-Language Publications is looking for people to translate basic Lutheran Christian materials into the following languages: Arabic, Farsi, Kurdish, Urdu, Nepali, and Burmese. Paul Hartman, 800/876-1388.
- Let All the People Praise You**—paperback song books for Abiding Faith exploratory in Smyrna, Tenn. Bill Werth, 615/220-9258.
- RV couple**—for Camp Shiloh, Pittsburg, Texas. Twenty hours per week of light housekeeping and maintenance work. RV site provided. Dan Schmeling, 903/855-1800.
- Artwork**—Concordia teaching pictures. Old Testament sets 1 & 2 and New Testament set 2. Christopher Doerr, 920/324-8898.
- Seminary pictures**—in observance of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's 75th anniversary. Pictures of seminary life will be used in an anniversary publication. Identify people and dates. Include your name and address with the pictures. Donated pictures will not be returned but placed in the archives. Pictures will be accepted until Feb. 15, 2004. Send to Leah Leyrer, 11831 N Seminary Dr, Mequon WI 53092.

SERVICE TIMES

- Columbia, Mo.**—Grace, 4540 N Oakland Gravel Rd. Sunday service, 9:30 AM. Micah Ernst, 573/474-8755.
- Austin, Texas**—Risen Savior, 2811 Aftonshire Way. Service, 9:30 AM. Roger Zehms, 512/280-8282.
- The Villages, Fla.**—The Open Bible, Spruce Creek Professional Center, Hwy. 27/441 (across from Wal-Mart), Suite 502. Sunday service, 8:45 AM. Don Meier, 352/728-8492.

NAMES WANTED

- College Station, Texas**—Beautiful Savior is looking for students of Texas A&M University for a WELS campus ministry program. Caleb Schoeneck, 979/693-4514.
- Adrian, Mich.**—St. Stephen is looking for students of Adrian College, Hillsdale College, or Siena Heights University for a WELS campus ministry program. David Koehler, 517/265-5605.
- Grand Junction, Colo.**—St. Paul is looking for students of Mesa State College for a WELS

campus ministry program. Jim Berger, 970/874-7009 or David Haberkorn, 970/523-5433.

- Sonora/Angels Camp/Copperopolis, Calif.**—John W. Berg, 510/793-8628.
- Columbia, Mo.**—Micah Ernst, 573/489-0746.
- Lake of the Ozarks/Osage Beach, Mo.**—Micah Ernst, 573/498-3547.
- Carson City/Mineen/Gardnerville/Dayton/Stagecoach, Nev.**—Michael Langbecker, 775/841-4987.
- The Villages, Fla.**—The Open Bible (The Village Lutherans). Don Meier, 352/728-8492.

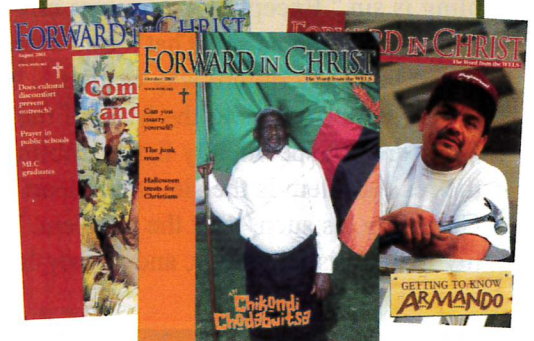
To place an announcement, call 414/256-3210; FAX, 414/256-3862; <BulletinBoard@sab.wels.net>. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.

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Order a new subscription of *Forward in Christ* magazine for someone on your gift list this year. *Forward in Christ* magazine really is the gift that keeps on giving because it equips readers to grow in their faith.

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IN THE CROSS HAIRS

Richard L. Gurgel

TOPIC: GAMBLING

Question: Is gambling sin, or is it Christian liberty?

Answer: Danger lurks on both sides of this question. On the one side is antinomianism. Antinomianism (“against law”) fails to label as “sin” what Scripture calls sin. On the other side is pietistic legalism. Legalism seeks to bind others’ consciences by labeling something as sin that only my conscience, not Scripture, so labels. One fails to afflict consciences that should be. The other afflicts consciences that shouldn’t be.

There’s certainly no lack of ammunition for those who say “all gambling is sin.” Thirteen years ago “Lottery Mania” was an aptly named article in this magazine. Today the title could be “Lottery Hyper-Mania.” Forty-eight states have some form of legal gambling. The PBS Web site reports that legal gambling in the United States increased 2,800 percent from 1974-1994 (\$17 billion to \$482 billion).

On-line gambling is the latest craze. The Government Accounting Office estimates on-line wagering will reach \$5 billion in 2003. The PBS Web site reports that “gambling generates more revenue than movies, spectator sports, theme parks, cruise ships, and recorded music *combined*.”

It might seem like a no-brainer to declare, “All gambling is sin.” Except that Scripture nowhere specifically labels gambling as sin. That’s true even though gambling began before Scripture was written.

But that brings us to the heart of the matter. Does Scripture not specifically list “gambling” as sin because the real problem is the sin of the heart often behind it? Gambling, as such, isn’t the problem. The problem is my materialistic, greedy, and money-loving heart.

That’s what Scripture precisely labels as sin. Paul twice labels greed as idolatry (Ephesians 5:5, Colossians 3:5). Jesus warns that the love of money (literally “*mammon*,” “stuff”) is a deadly adversary to our service to God. Despite our foolish attempts, we cannot serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24). Therefore, what I may be gambling with is far more than my money. When I allow covetousness and materialism to grab hold of my heart, what I am risking is my eternal soul.

Isn’t it here that the danger is simplistically to label all gambling as sin? To make such a blanket statement I would need to know the motivation of every heart that’s ever gambled. Secondly, might I also forget that the greed behind so much of gambling isn’t found only in gambling? I may not be drawn to the physical or cyber casino. I may not purchase that Powerball ticket. I may have no inclination to put my money where my poker chips are. I may, therefore, proudly thank God that I am not like other men. Yet all the while my own personally “acceptable” form of materialism may be choking the life out of my soul. My relentless pursuit of the ever-expanding “American dream” may be even more dangerous

than gambling, because it is even more socially acceptable.

Isn’t the love of “stuff” in our richly blessed land in danger of muting the effective witness of much of American Christianity? The biggest stewardship dilemma in our midst is *not* that synod or congregational budgets lack funding. The greatest spiritual danger is that souls may be foundering—weighted down by all that glitters, shines, and roars. How easily we forget that God did not put us on earth to find our joy in being consumers of goods. He put us here to be pursuers of good—trusting

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our Savior's mercy and living in love for him and those around us.

So where does that leave us with gambling?

(That *was* the question after all!) Anyone contemplating gambling must ask at least four questions:

1. Is my motivation covetous? Is the thrill I enjoy in gambling the fact that others will be unwittingly contributing to my retirement fund? Do I get my "rush" from attempting to beat the odds so others lose for my gain? Then don't walk, run from the gaming table, slot machine, or lottery outlet. Satan is dangling before you all that glitters. He asks a seemingly small price—just a bit of worship at the altar of materialism. There is only one fitting response: "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only'" (Matthew 4:10).
2. Is the money I'm going to use for this "entertainment" truly "discretionary?" Have I remembered that "the earth is the LORD's, and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1)? All that I possess is really God's, not mine. Do I make a clear confession of that truth with a generous firstfruit gift to my Savior? Am I taking care of my responsibilities to reflect his saving love in my love for family and those in need? If I'm robbing Jesus' temple to pay Caesar's Palace, then my gambling is idolatry.
3. Am I content with what God has already given me in life? Do I recognize that what matters in life isn't whether a fictitious "Lady Luck" is smiling on me? Do I understand that all that really matters is that my Father's grace in Jesus is always smiling upon me? Do I have a firm grip on this encouragement from Hebrews: "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'" (13:5)? Have I learned to say with Asaph: "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you" (Psalm 73:25)?
4. Will I harm the faith of another by participating in this form of gambling? Let's assume that entertainment, not greed, is my motivation for gambling. Let's say that my checkbook testifies that everything belongs to God. Let's say I am living in contented trust in my Savior's love and compassion. Still, my heart isn't the only one to consider.



Just because an act itself is not sin (an adiaphoron), doesn't mean I am always right to participate in it. Paul urges us, "Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. . . . It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall" (Romans 14:20,21). Even in situations where gambling wouldn't be sin for me, I still must consider whether my example might lead another Christian into covetousness. If my gambling is too important to bother with considerations about a fellow Christian's soul, that may speak volumes about my own problem with gambling that I haven't acknowledged yet.

I'm sorry, you asked a simple question. Is gambling sin? Most of what passes for gambling clearly appeals to covetousness. Yet it goes beyond Scripture to speak a blanket condemnation.

Is gambling a matter of Christian freedom? In principle, yes. But consider the impact of gambling mania all around us. Might not a wise and loving use of that freedom often—if not always—lead us to "pass" rather than to "play"? For our own souls, and the souls of others, that may be the safest bet.



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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/sab/qa.html> for more questions and answers.

Clapping in church

John M. Parlow

Is it wrong to clap in church? A quick answer is “no,” but some explanation is needed.

The forgiveness of every sin, the strength to live as a child of the King, and the sure hope of spending eternity with Jesus create joy and gratitude in the heart of every Christian. Believers have expressed this joy and gratitude in worship services in various ways throughout Christian history.

One way is in song. Psalm 71:23 proclaims, “My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you—I, whom you have redeemed.” Paul told the Colossians to express their gratitude to God “as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (Colossians 3:16).

Believers have also praised their God with various musical instruments. Psalm 81:2 proclaims, “Begin the music, strike the tambourine, play the melodious harp and lyre.” Psalms 148–150 provide us with a list of musical instruments in worship services in the Old and New Testament times that can easily be found today in many worship services, including services at WELS churches.

Some even danced for joy. That’s right, they danced in worship. The psalmist writes, “Let them praise his name with dancing” (Psalm 149:3). We are told David “danced before the Lord with all his might” (2 Samuel 6:14). It is clear that dancing was an expression of joy for the believer in Jesus’ day (Luke 15:25). Although not common in Lutheran churches, many use “liturgical” dancing in worship today.

Others expressed their joy in the Lord with raised hands: “I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands” (Psalm 63:4). This posture not only appears to be a means of praise but also a posture in prayer (Psalm 141:2). Some shouted, “Praise the Lord!” (*Hallelujah*) and “Amen” in the worship service itself.

Psalm 106:48 proclaims, “Praise be to the LORD. . . . Let all the people say, ‘Amen!’ Praise the LORD.”

Still others clapped to give their God thanks and praise. Psalm 47:1 says, “Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy.” I have heard it explained that in the Old Testament clapping was a part of the worship rather than a response to it. Even at that, however, we can clap in appreciation for the use of gifts to praise God or clap to indicate our agreement—like saying “Amen!”

God has given his children the Christian freedom to express their joy and gratitude in the Lord in ways that best fit their culture and heart. Bible-believing Lutherans have often echoed this truth with the phrase, “The gospel creates its own forms.”

Certainly we wish to take great care to make sure nothing we do detracts from the praise of our God and the hearing of his Word. A sermon delivered in a monotone voice, a hymn poorly played, or a sticky pew can be a distraction for the most faithful worshiper. Such distraction occurs when a service becomes “entertainment” that focuses on the worshiper rather than “entertaining,” that is, “capturing or focusing the attention” of the worshiper on Word and sacrament. Regardless of the style or format of the service, Christ takes center stage.

Worship services are often one of the greatest opportunities to share God’s never-changing, ever-true good news. Styles of worship and expressions of praise are often preferences drawn by age, religious background, and experience. For this reason some churches offer two different styles of worship so that “by all possible means” we might save more with the gospel that creates eternal joy (1 Corinthians 9:22).



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

God has given his children the Christian freedom to express their joy and gratitude in the Lord in ways that best fit their culture and heart.

TWO BROTHERS AND GOD'S GRACE



Ugis Sildegs (left) and his brother, Ivo, of Latvia on the day of their dedication to the Communist State. It was a day to celebrate for them and their parents.

As youngsters and into their mid-teens, neither Ugis nor Ivo Sildegs was Christian. Both believed that Communism and atheism were right, and the West and Christianity were bad. Ivo served as a leader in the Communist Youth. His brother might have been similarly honored, were it not for his fondness for playing cards—deemed immoral by the authorities.

When the two boys were 15 and 16, their mother worried that the ongoing fighting in Afghanistan might be

the death of her sons. Fearing that they might be drafted into the Soviet army, be sent to Afghanistan, and come home in body bags, she looked for any means to spare them that fate.

A retired Lutheran pastor, Roberts Feldmanis, lived in the apartment upstairs. Although she was not a Christian, Mrs. Sildegs asked the pastor to baptize her sons, hoping that somehow baptism might keep them from dying on an Afghan battlefield.

After only a few hours of instructing them, Feldmanis baptized both Ivo and Ugis. He told them, "Now that you have been baptized, you should begin attending church." Following his advice and moved by the Holy Spirit, the boys began to do so. The Word and sacrament did their powerful work in them, even though the baptism had been requested for them for less than spiritual reasons.

Today, at ages 31 and 32, the two bachelor brothers are both pastors in the Confessional Lutheran Church in Latvia, and their mother is a faithful member of the church.



Ugis (center, string tie) waving his red star along with kindergarten classmates below the portrait of his and every Latvian little boy's hero, Comrade Lenin.



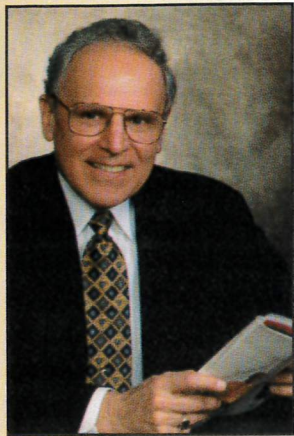
Pastors Ugis (fifth from left) and Ivo (back, second from right) Sildegs at the dedication of the first church of the Confessional Lutheran Church in Latvia (CLCL) and the ordination of four new pastors. WELS declared confessional fellowship with the CLCL at the 2001 WELS convention.

Thanks to Neal Schroeder of Divine Peace, Renton, Wash., for this information and the pictures.



OUTREACH NORTH AMERICA

In the peace of Jesus, we share the good news of salvation. Let us know what special things you and your congregation are doing for North American outreach. Remember, that includes retaining your own members who are in danger of straying. We'll print samplings in the May 2004 issue of FIC (deadline March 1) and as appropriate in WELS news. E-mail <fic@sab.wels.net> or send information to Potluck Poll, *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222.



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

Meditate.
Use regular
quiet time to
remember the
life, death, and
resurrection of
our Savior. . . .
But don't call
it yoga.

Om

Do you recognize the word “om”? It's the sound you hear from persons practicing yoga—a relaxing, meditative sound.

I could imagine at this moment pausing for a time, relaxing, breathing deep, and repeating that sound. Almost certainly it would relieve some of the stress I feel, and my sometimes-high blood pressure would moderate.

It is well documented that proper exercise, proper breathing, proper relaxation, proper diet, and meditation can improve your health. Yoga embraces all five elements.

In spite of the good it can do, however, we haven't promoted yoga in our circles because it is foremost a spiritual practice associated with Hinduism.

“No problem!” increasing numbers of Christians are saying. “We practice Christian yoga. We even repeat Bible passages in our meditating.”

But it is a problem. “Christian yoga” is an oxymoron. The two terms contradict one another.

Take that word “om.” Yoga defines it as a sacred monosyllable that symbolizes Brahman—The Absolute Reality, God. The practice of yoga is to put you in touch with God, who is inherently in you—equally and impartially in every human being. It is “a process of self-transformation to the point of inner freedom.” When you find your real self, you have found “God,” and “you become willing to follow your ‘deepest feelings.’”

In yoga you greet one another with the word “*Namastee*,” “I honor the light within you.” No one objects either if you call that light “Christ.” But, by definition, it is no more Christ than it is Buddha or Allah or whatever name you give it. It is truly ecumenical in that sense.

Yes, we believe that the Spirit of Christ dwells in us. But not inherently—not as the light to be found by our personal efforts, not as a presence to be felt for us to be free. Yes, we want to feel content and at peace in our spiritual lives, but in the peace that Christ gives, not that we discover within. We don't want our spiritual, eternal welfare to depend on finding the right feeling within us. Christ is the light of the world, and that light shines through the gospel and enlightens our souls.

By all means, exercise your body. Learn exercises that do the most good. God wants you to take proper care of your body.

Learn proper breathing techniques. Breathe deep; use all of your lungs. That, too, will help keep you healthy and reduce stress.

Set aside time to relax. From the beginning, God intended that human beings find time to relax and find rest. He built it into his law. Relaxing keeps you physically and mentally refreshed.

Check your diet. The vegetarian diet associated with yoga, for example, works for many to help control heart disease.

And, meditate. Use regular quiet time to remember the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior. Marvel that God has made you his child. Let the reality that you are forgiven and have a home in heaven sink in. Think on God's blessings in your life. Pray fervently and continually.

But don't call it yoga. Yoga is a means to discover the god in you. Turn to God's Word and sacraments to receive the God who comes to you and wraps you in his loving arms.

Gary P. Baumler

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Take a thought-provoking and entertaining look at the Taylor family and the members of Grace congregation.

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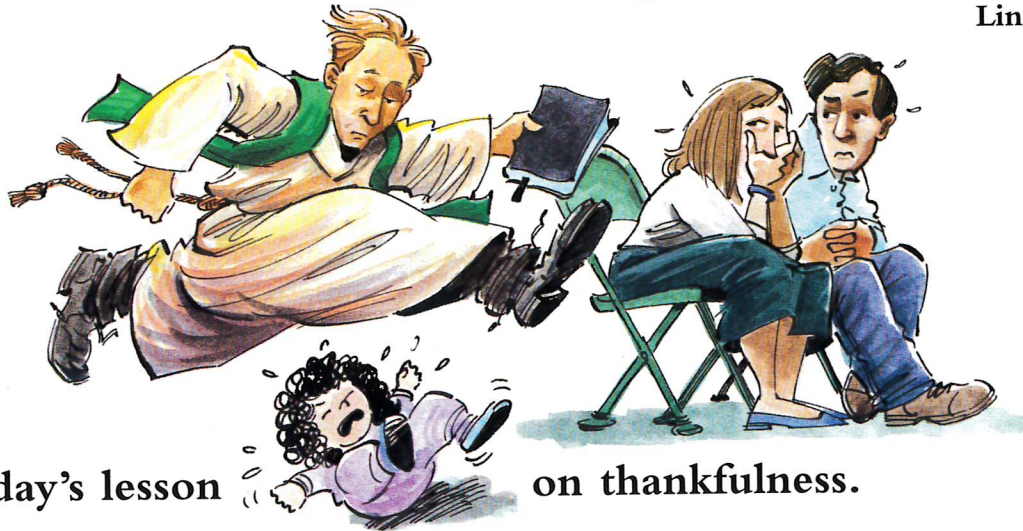
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AVAILABLE NOVEMBER 1, 2003 - also visit www.fifthpew.com

My Thanksgiving resolution

Linda R. Buxa



One Sunday's lesson on thankfulness.

I wasn't thankful for my church that Sunday. We were having evening worship, so we packed up the kids and went to the airport to pick up our pastor. Because his plane was delayed and no arrival time was set, we headed off to "church" to set up.

Arriving at our electric association's meeting room, we set up chairs, unfolded the altar, and plugged in the computer and keyboard—while keeping our nap-less two-year-old from deleting files and rendering us musicless. We put out the hymnals, set up the candles and cross, and poured communion wine—while holding our six-month-old who had sat in her car seat long enough.

Next, we called members (all three of them) to tell them that Pastor was delayed. By the time Pastor's plane landed and worship started, we were one hour and 15 minutes late.

Soon after the opening hymn, one toddler (mine) wanted only to lie on the floor—and threw a fit when we picked her up. (We were in the front and didn't want Pastor to accidentally step on her, not to mention that we're trying to instill some church etiquette.) The other babies were trying to persevere, but starting worship at 7:15 PM is hard on those whose bedtime is 8.

What a relief to sing the closing hymn and to wrap up what I believed wasn't a worshipful experience.

Pastor had another view. On the drive home, he said, "It sure was good to be here. I'm glad everyone stuck around." This coming from a man who had conducted worship and Bible study that morning, drove straight to the airport, waited on a pilot-less plane for two hours, and immediately after landing was whisked to conduct another service over crying children.

Jesus said, "Let the little children come," not "Let only the well-behaved children come."

If he could be thankful, I could too. So, I rethought my Sunday and looked for the blessings in disguise. Here's what I came up with.

Pastor's plane was late

What a privilege to have him here at all. Three Sundays each month we only hear him on our speaker phone. But that evening, we saw our pastor. He didn't have pressing commitments the next two days, so he spent them with other members and with us—talking, fishing, and reading books to my daughters. He's our pastor, our friend, and part of our family.

Church started late

That hour of waiting was a gift. Without extended family nearby, our church is family. Like any family,

our busy lives don't always allow time to sit and visit. That Sunday was a mini family reunion, a good time to catch up.

Twelve people attended

What a committed group we have—almost every member was there. We could have cancelled church and gone home, but hearing from God was the fuel we needed for the week. We couldn't miss it.

The children were cranky

Thirty percent of our members are two and under. It's ridiculous to think every Sunday will go smoothly. Jesus said, "Let the little children come," not "Let only the well-behaved children come." If they heard only the benediction, Jesus' name in a hymn, or a portion of the gospel reading, that's okay. It's more than they would have heard had we gone home.

I learned my lesson that Sunday—I hope. To help remind me, though, a new note hangs on my bathroom mirror. Every morning God reminds me, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

This is my Thanksgiving resolution. Seems appropriate, doesn't it?

Linda Buxa is a member at Holy Trinity, Kodiak, Alaska.

