

FORWARD IN CHRIST

January 2004

The Word from the WELS

“The night my
mom died”

Retirement—
a time to eat,
drink, and
be merry?

A Lutheran
view of
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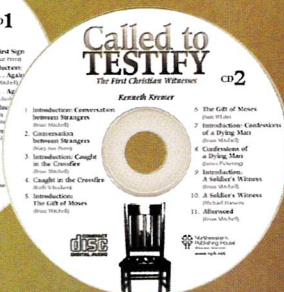
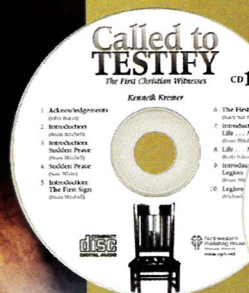
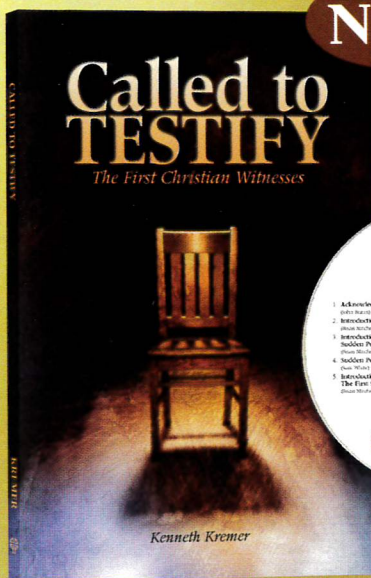
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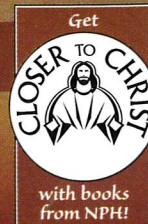
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Lead us, Father

“And lead us not into temptation.” Matthew 6:13

Paul M. Janke

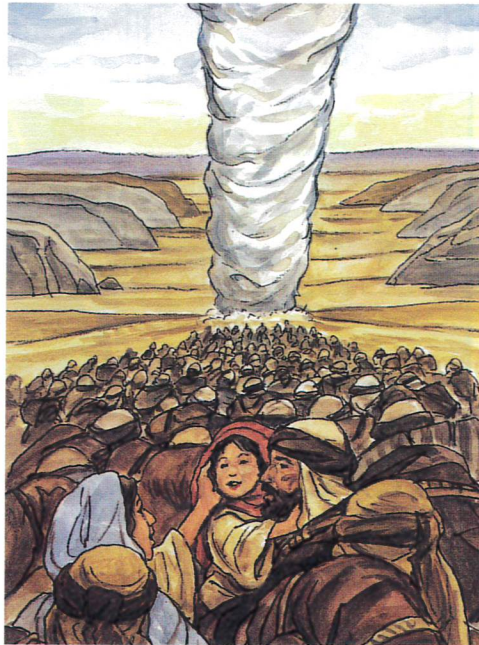
“If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here” (Exodus 33:15). Moses spoke those words as he interceded for the people of Israel following their idolatrous calf worship at the foot of Mount Sinai. In mercy, God had already relented and promised to go with the Israelites. With heartfelt relief, Moses observed that without God leading the way, it’s futile to go forward. The Israelites needed the Lord’s leadership as much then as when, as a pillar of cloud, he first led them out of Egypt.

We Christians are of one mind with Moses as we prepare to enter a new year. If the LORD is not leading us, then the days ahead will be fraught with danger for body and soul. That’s why we pray so often, “Our Father in heaven . . . lead us not into temptation.” Though the year ahead is filled with uncertainties, there are these two unequivocal certainties: temptations will come, and God will protect us.

Temptations will certainly come

There’s much that we don’t know about what lies ahead in 2004. Some of it is mundane: Who will win the Super Bowl or the World Series? Some of it is momentous: Will this be the year I die? Will my Savior return in majesty this year?

The necessity of facing temptation, though, is one of life’s great certainties. Under no circumstances will the devil ask God’s forgiveness in 2004 and beg to be restored to the



ranks of those ministering spirits who serve believers. Without qualification we can say that 2004 will not be the year when this fallen world becomes our ally in the walk heavenward. Nor will this be the year that our sinful nature is converted.

Those things won’t happen. Even now Satan is arming himself with more flaming arrows of temptation. Even now our old self is spoiling for a fight with our new self, and the ungodly world is egging our old self on. Under these circumstances it would be foolhardy not to give thought to the danger we face. Luther wrote in his *Large Catechism*, “Yet such is life that one stands today and falls tomorrow.”

God will certainly protect us

What should we do with this information? Live the rest of our lives on the edge of our seats,

uncertain of the final outcome? Give up hope, expecting that at any moment we could crash and burn?

God’s promises and his protection place believers in a far better position. The prayer, “Lead us not into temptation,” is the petition of those who entrust themselves to God’s constant, gracious care. We believe that Christ successfully resisted the very temptations that so frequently overpower us. More than that, we believe that by offering his holy life at the cross, Jesus dealt the devil a defeat from which he will never recover. In Christ who rose from death and now reigns on high, we have overcome.

Temptations will come. Satan cleverly tailors them to make them as effective as possible for each victim of his assaults. But God knows the devil’s tactics, and God knows us better than we know ourselves. To Satan’s great rage, God regularly uses Satan’s fiercest attacks to bring us closer to our Savior.

In light of this, the year ahead will be neither a year characterized by feelings of fleshly security nor a year of runaway fears. God is present in his Word and sacraments to lead us successfully past our assailants to the abiding security of heaven. Of that we can be certain.



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

FORWARD IN CHRIST

formerly Northwestern Lutheran

Official magazine of the
Wisconsin Evangelical
Lutheran Synod

January 2004 / Vol. 91, No. 1
www.wels.net

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Comstock, p. 14; Punchstock, p. 16; Rubberball
Productions, p. 20; Corbis, p. 21; Hare Strigenz
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Forward in Christ
Forward in Christ (ISSN 1541-8936) is published
monthly by Northwestern Publishing House,
1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284.
Periodical postage paid at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Rates: USA—\$14; single copy—\$1.50. Canada—\$14.98;
single copy—\$1.61. All other countries—air mail \$45.20.
Postage included, payable in advance to NPH. Write for
multi-year, blanket, and bundle rates. For single issues,
Wisconsin add 5% sales tax; Milwaukee County add 5.6%
tax. Also available on audiocassette from Mission for the
Visually Impaired, 559 Humboldt Ave, St. Paul MN 55107.

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

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

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Printed in the USA.



Cover photo by Brice Photography

Blended worship brings together worship forms that have been used in Christian churches for centuries and joins them to contemporary musical styles.

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bits & pieces



Since 1914, *Forward in Christ* (then *The Northwestern Lutheran*) has brought you, our faithful readers, information and inspiration founded on God's Word. A medallion on our cover commemorates this, our 90th anniversary. Throughout the year, we'll also be looking back at past issues (p. 27) and bringing you a few other surprises. Editor Gary Baumler starts us off with a short history on the origin of the magazine (p. 34).



Prof. James Tiefel shares with us a new way to help spread the message of Christ in worship—blending new musical styles with the traditional forms and progression of the liturgy. Don't miss "Blended worship that works" (p. 8).



Last year we learned all about the Old Testament in our Interactive Bible study. This year we bring you the New Testament. Prof. Mark Lenz breaks it down into 12 sections but reminds us that, in the end, "It's all about Jesus" (p. 31).



Throughout the year we will be helping you get to know 12 congregations in our WELS family, including their challenges and blessings as they share the gospel within their church and community. This issue we meet Lord of Life, Thornton, Colo. (p. 18).



We'd also like you to meet three new members of our *Forward in Christ* family. We welcome Pastor Stephen Geiger, Prince of Peace, Yankton/Christ our Savior, Vermillion, S.D.; Pastor Donald Patterson, Holy Word, Austin, Texas; and Pastor Thomas Jeske, Living Hope, Omaha, Neb. Look for their bylines in upcoming issues. We thank our outgoing editorial board members—Pastor Eric Hartzell, Pastor Randy Hunter, Pastor Paul Janke, and Prof. Em. Armin Panning—for their insights and hard work.

—JKW

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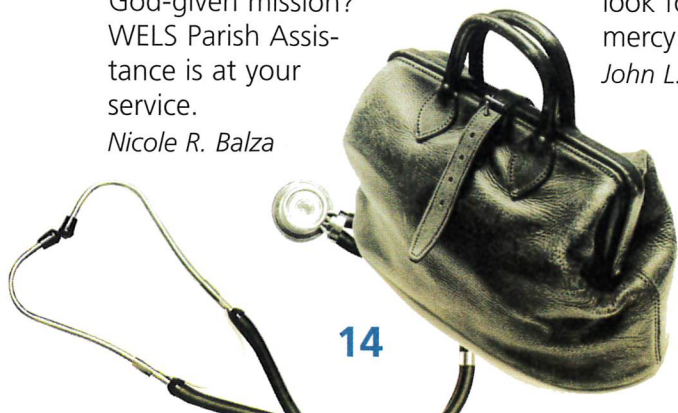
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Thank you for your article “God’s plan” [Oct. 2003]. As a senior at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, I find myself questioning my future plans for college and what’s to come if I go into the ministry. It was reassuring to hear God’s Word in the article and how he has a plan for everyone. God promises that our present troubles and even our future troubles are all part of his plan. And when God promises to give me hope and a future, it makes all my worrying go away.

 *Jamie Jurek
Saginaw, Michigan*

“Jesus, my public defender” [Oct. 2003] was an awesome article, and it hit home. I never thought of that analogy, and it was interesting to read that. Thanks so much for the article and for helping me understand how it relates in my life.

 *Dianne B. Neumann
Rhineland, Wisconsin*


I was surprised to read “Worship that works” [Nov. 2003]. James Tiefel states that Christians “come to church to carry out the Great Commission” and that “Peter’s sermon on Pentecost worked.” Is this really consistent with what WELS teaches? Where does the Bible say that evangelism is to be the purpose of Christians gathering together? In my understanding, when the church gathered together, it was for the purpose of fellowship and building up one another in understanding God’s Word. Notice that Peter’s “sermon” at Pentecost was not directed to a gathering of believers, but to Jews gathered for an Old Testament religious festival. The same is true for the Bible’s descriptions of the apostles’ other evangelistic efforts—they were directed toward crowds of unbelievers, not gatherings of those who already knew Christ.

Instead, when speaking of the church as a body, Acts 2:42 says, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellow-

ship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Focusing our weekly gatherings on evangelism does a great disservice to the body. It encourages members to remain spiritual infants, and it makes fellowship and Bible study activities that take place outside of the regular weekly gathering.

This idea also brings up two practical questions: 1) Why focus evangelism on those who already know Christ?, and 2) Why celebrate communion, which necessarily excludes unbelievers, in a gathering intended to engage unbelievers?

I certainly agree that “the whole service should center on Word and sacrament,” but not for the purpose of preaching to unbelievers. The focus should instead be on building up each church member in knowledge and love for Christ and encouraging everyone to live lives that glorify God.

 *Ruth Westendorf*

Prof. James Tiefel responds: *The Great Commission authorizes believers to proclaim the gospel, and the gospel is not only for the lost but also for the found. The article did not say that the objective of public worship is evangelism; it said the objective is proclaiming the gospel, which Luther calls the highest worship of God. When unbelievers attend church, they are evangelized by the gospel; when believers attend church, they are nurtured by the gospel.*

This at first may seem like a little thing, but really it is not. **I am writing in regard to a billboard message that was shown in district news [Nov. 2003]: “You can harley get to hog heaven without David’s son.”**

This method was “a new approach to evangelism . . . for more than 300,000 Harley-Davidson riders.” Obviously the message was meant to catch the attention of Harley-Davidson riders. I want to evangelically encourage us all to remember that if we are going to use catchy phrases and words to proclaim law

and gospel, we must make absolutely sure that they are doctrinally sound.

Without in any way condemning the church who used this message, is it true that “You can harley get to hog heaven without David’s son”? When I first read this I took it to mean that I can “barely” get to heaven without David’s son, but I will still get there. Assuming that “harley” meant “hardly,” according to *Webster’s Dictionary*, “hardly” means “with force; vigorously; severely; harshly; with difficulty; painfully; not quite; barely.” I don’t believe any of these meanings really fits according to Scripture. Even if the sign’s author meant “not quite” by using the word “hardly,” how can you “not quite” get to heaven? The plain and simple truth is that you can’t get to heaven without David’s son.

Two temptations occur in regard to sermon themes, evangelism messages, etc. One is to think that something has to be catchy to work. It doesn’t. Not that it’s wrong to use catchy statements if they are doctrinally sound. We are to do all we can to “catch” the attention of our hearers. But sometimes we get so caught up in being “catchy” that we forget that God’s Word will not return void whether it is catchy or not. The second temptation is to use something that sounds good to the world and yet have it be doctrinally questionable.

Let’s just be careful. We are all guilty of doing this in one way or another. Whatever new approaches we use, may they be the same old clear message of God’s pure Word.

*James Krueger
Stoddard, Wisconsin*

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The Church's foundation

Douglas J. Engelbrecht

A small-town newspaper's front-page article opened: "We are pleased to announce that the tornado which blew away the Community Church last Friday did no real damage to the town." The paper did not intend to imply that the destruction of that church was no great loss to the community, merely that most of the other buildings in town remained unscathed.

But that brings up a good question. When does a church cease to be of any value to the community? At what juncture does it merely become a city landmark instead of a wellspring of life and salvation? Answer: When the stones that make up the church's foundation are removed.

One of our hymns says, "The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord" (*Christian Worship* 538). So I guess that it's safe to say that as long as a church is Christian, it's doing okay. Wrong! A church may call itself Christian, but if it were blown away by some disaster it may do no real damage to the community if it has already removed some of the important bricks that are built upon the Church's one foundation.

One of those bricks is the law. A church that does not preach the law will lose its effectiveness in bringing people to Christ as Savior. Unless people are made aware of the fatal consequences of sin, the gospel message of Christ crucified for sinners receives no more than "ho-hum" status in their hearts. Therefore, a church that fails to preach sin as well as grace, hell as well as heaven, is on a direct course to becoming just a city landmark instead of a vendor of God's blessings.

The same is true for the blood-atonement of Christ. The Jews thought that

their ticket to heaven was their birth certificate or the fact that they fasted twice a week and tithed. Today it's church membership or "keeping the golden rule." But Jesus tells us that only through his blood shed on Calvary's cross can we ever be free from the curse of sin and have the hope of heaven. When a church removes that foundation stone, it is in danger of becoming just another uninteresting stop on the sightseeing tour of the city.

Likewise the Great Commission. The minute you remove that foundation block from a church's structure, it begins to turn into nothing more than a social mecca for its members' benefit. *Newsweek* carried an article about a church that voted to spend \$34 million on a worship facility that will sport athletic facilities, restaurants, and a bowling alley. But if all that is not an integral and necessary part of its main purpose to "Go and make disciples of all nations . . ." it will transform that church from a wellspring of life for those in the community who sit in darkness to a mutual admiration society for those who sit in comfort!

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord. But that doesn't mean that just because a church bears the name "Christian" it is a valuable structure in the community. If it has removed the important building blocks of the law, the blood-atonement of Christ, and the Great Commission, it isn't worth the cement and steel of which it's made.

Doug Engelbrecht is pastor at Trinity, Neenah, Wisconsin.

If [a church] has removed the important building blocks of the law, the blood-atonement of Christ, and the Great Commission, it isn't worth the cement and steel of which it's made.

Blended worship THAT WORKS

Blending the gospel-proclaiming forms of the church's past with musical styles that are part of the church's present may help us spread the message of Christ into the future.

James P. Tiefel

A grand piano, three guitars, a flute, a string bass, and a tambourine. Eight vocalists, dressed in black slacks and white shirts, all under the age of 25. An upbeat musical style.

Where are we? In church, where a group of musicians is accompanying the songs of the Christian liturgy. The congregation sings along enthusiastically: "Lord, Have Mercy," "Glory to God," "Holy, Holy, Holy," "Lamb of God," and the "Psalm of the Day."

Some people call it blended worship. It brings together worship forms that have been tested and tried in Christian churches for centuries and joins them to contemporary musical styles. Blended worship is one way Lutheran churches can retain public worship's historic emphasis on gospel proclamation and at the same time accompany that proclamation with music many people understand and enjoy.

Maintaining traditional forms

Although you won't find the term "blended worship" in the writings of Martin Luther, his worship reforms demonstrate the concept. Luther treasured the historic Christian liturgy but saw the advantage of presenting

it in different settings. His first version retained the traditional Latin language and Gregorian chant music. Luther also retained some of the traditional church music in his second setting of the liturgy but added songs from a musical tradition that, although well known in Germany for hundreds of years, had not often been used in public worship. He was careful about what he chose (he supervised the selections himself and even composed some of the music), but saw no reason why music that the common man knew and loved could not accompany the great songs and hymns of the liturgy.

Blended worship is different from the kind of contemporary worship we might find in many Protestant churches today. Lacking a biblical understanding of how the gospel interacts with faith, most Reformed churches have never been interested in the gospel-proclaiming forms of the Christian liturgy. Especially among Pentecostals and Evangelicals, public worship is for stimulating people to make decisions about Christ and Christian living. Experience tells them that there are better ways to achieve their goals than using historic worship rites.

In blended worship, new musical styles blend with the traditional forms and progression of the liturgy. Worshipers continue to sing the liturgy's gospel-centered songs such as "Glory to God" and "Lamb of God." The Christian church year still sets weekly worship themes that focus on the Savior's life, ministry, death, and resurrection. The historic progression of Scripture lessons and sermon is still punctuated by psalms and hymns so that both called ministers and the congregation are able to participate in proclaiming the specific gospel message of the day. The great hymns of the church, some new and some ancient, teach the gospel truths of the Bible. The objective of worship remains what Lutherans always have wanted it to be: to proclaim the great things God has done for us in Christ. With that gospel, the Holy Spirit works to create, strengthen, and preserve faith.

Adding new musical styles

What's different about blended worship is the music. "Contemporary" and "upbeat" are difficult terms to define, but it could be said that the music is more rhythmic and percussive than music in our hymnals. Pianos and guitars handle the accom-

paniment rather than the organ, and many settings include parts for flute, string bass, and a percussion instrument such as a tambourine or hand drum. Congregations that blend worship often sing several traditional hymns, sometimes even accompanied by the organ, but they also sing well-known gospel hymns, Scripture songs, or spirituals found in resources such as *Let All the People Praise You**. Many Lutheran composers are writing hymn-based piano music that can be used before and after the service and during the offering.

Although the music used in blended worship is different, it doesn't encourage worshipers to sit back and be entertained. It's written so that people of all ages can participate. When first used in worship, the music may draw attention to itself simply because it's different. Eventually the difference fades, and the real work of worship takes center stage: to tell in word and song the story of God's love in Christ.

Planning for blended worship does take extra work on the part of a congregation's pastor and musicians. A good piano is a necessity. Someone has to gather and rehearse with instrumentalists who probably haven't had much experience playing in worship. Congregations are wise to start small, perhaps with a new setting of a psalm or a new hymn. A helpful resource is *Christian Worship: New Service*

Settings, published by the WELS Commission on Worship in 2002. Available either in a paperback pew edition or an electronic version that enables congregations to customize service bulletins, it contains several services scored for piano, guitars, and percussion.

Remembering the purpose of public worship

Some church consultants suggest that blended worship doesn't usually work in a congregation. They sense that those desiring to retain historic Christian worship rites won't accept the new music, and those favoring new musical styles won't be happy with the traditional worship patterns. These challenges can be overcome, however, if all members remember the purpose of public worship—to proclaim the good news about Jesus—and then work together in love—love for the gospel and love for one another.

Blended worship may not be the answer for every congregation. Some recent studies indicate that many people have tired of their experience with contemporary music in worship. But where there is a desire for these styles, blended worship may be something congregations will want to study and think about. Blending the gospel-proclaiming forms of the church's past with musical styles that are part of the church's present may enable us

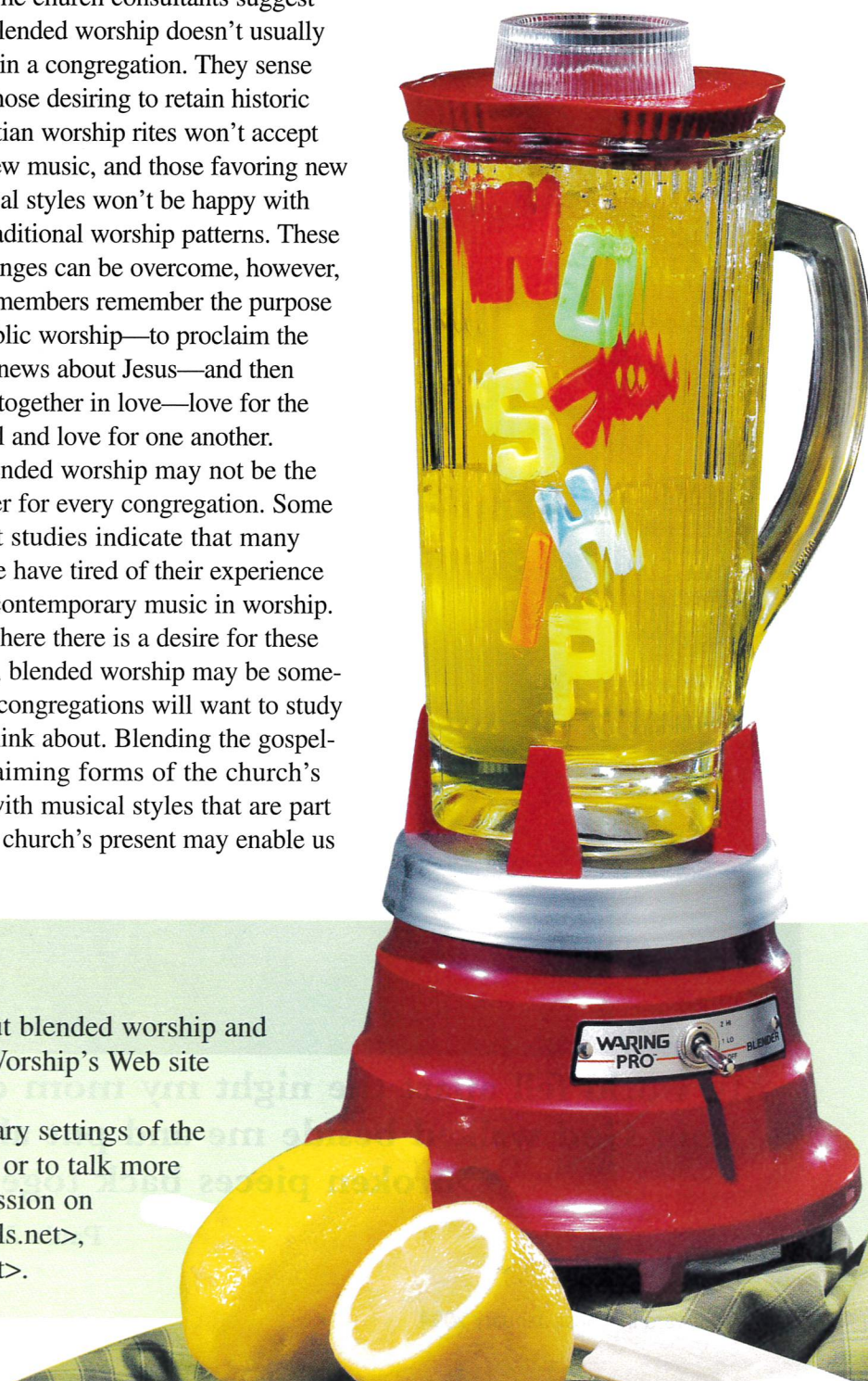
to offer the people of today the timeless message that Jesus saves.

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

*Compiled by the WELS Commission on Worship, *Let All the People Praise You* contains 183 hymns and spiritual songs from a variety of cultures. It is available from Northwestern Publishing House, 1-800-662-6022 (product 033018).

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

- Check out other resources and articles about blended worship and worship in general at the Commission on Worship's Web site <www.wels.net/worship>.
- WELS congregations can adapt contemporary settings of the entire liturgy. For more information on this or to talk more about blended worship, contact the Commission on Worship, 414/256-3265, <worship@sab.wels.net>, or Prof. James Tiefel, <tiefelj@wls.wels.net>.



THE NIGHT MY MOM DIED



My world fell apart the night my mom died, but God walked beside me and put all the broken pieces back together.

Paula Ashman

Like many, I was nervously excited about going into high school. My freshman year would start in five days. It had been a routine summer evening. I said my prayers and went to sleep.

Sometime after 1:00 AM my dad called to me, telling me I needed to come downstairs. I had no idea why. I didn't expect to see him performing CPR on my mom, who lay on the living room floor. Instinctively, I called out her name. There was no answer. My mind told me this was a dream, so I called her again, this time louder. I stood stunned, thinking she would eventually sit up and say she was fine. Becoming frantic, I continued calling.

Dad and I were alone in the room. He turned and gently said she was gone. He explained how he and Mom had fallen asleep while watching television. When he tried to wake her up, Mom was in heaven. I was certainly not prepared for this, but I did not doubt my dad's words. I knew Mom's soul was peacefully with God the moment she died.

Just hours later, I told my brother that I would quit school to take care of Gloria, our oldest sibling. She was born with a severe mental disability, and we all loved her deeply. We knew God made her too, just differently. Mom called Gloria her angel. Some ridiculed my parents, yet they remained completely devoted to caring for Gloria at home. I irrationally thought that I could keep things the same for her. Within days, she went to a care home. While I hugged Gloria,

I cried for her. I knew she could not understand why Mom wasn't there for her anymore. I cried for myself, too. Gloria couldn't live with us anymore. Now my only sister was gone too.

It still felt like a dream as we went to pick out Mom's casket. We drove into the funeral home parking lot, and I noticed our pastor standing outside the building. He surrounded me in his arms when I ran over to him. At that moment, I felt some comfort. My pastor was familiar to me, and through him, I also felt the presence of God. As strongly as I was hurting, God was reminding me that he was right there beside me.

God's guiding light turns the storms of this life into rainbows.

At some point, I recalled the words that Jesus spoke in Gethsemane, "Not my will, but yours be done." Medically speaking, doctors could not give a cause for Mom's death. Extensive autopsies remained inconclusive. I remember people saying, "But, she had so much to live for!" and "She was only 51." Some simply asked, "Why?" I was only 14 at the time, but I knew the answer—because it was God's will. That was all we needed to know. None of us can humanly understand God's omniscience. He works in ways that are mysterious to us. It doesn't matter why. We need to trust God—there was a purpose for Mom's death. I was distraught, but I knew "that in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28).

A former teacher approached me at the funeral home visitation. He said, "This is what we talked about

in school, isn't it?" At first, I didn't know what he meant. I never had a class entitled "What to do when your mom dies." Later, I recognized that he was referring to a much larger picture of life and death from the viewpoint of a Christian.

The blessing of Christian parents became apparent to me. I was thankful my parents had prioritized my spiritual needs over material ones. They had led me to God through baptism, church attendance, Christian example, and parochial schooling. The Holy Spirit had created and strengthened faith within me. By grace, I knew Jesus as my Savior. Therefore, I had the tools to face this and all tests of faith.

When I started high school, few classmates knew that I had attended my mom's funeral the day before.

I wasn't able to share my sorrow, so I hid it and didn't tell anyone what I was going through. As time passed, it became easier going to school, but increasingly harder to come home to a place where happiness and stability were gone.

I knew my three older brothers needed Mom, too. One was starting college, another married and expecting his first child, and the third struggling with his faith. My dad was 62 and understandably devastated at the loss of his wife. We all shared sorrow, but it did not make our individual pain go away.


I felt so completely alone. I wished my grandparents were alive or that relatives lived nearby. It was hard watching others return to their normal lives after the funeral, because I couldn't. Telephone solicitors would ask for Mom, and I would hang up the phone in tears. Life wasn't getting any easier. I began hating it. Church attendance was important to me, but at times I allowed my faith to become too weak.

God was always ready and waiting, yet I would forget to call on him to help me. Many times, I was distressed and weary and wondered how I would get through one more day.

1 Corinthians 10:13 told me I could go on: "And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." Every time I grew weak, the Holy Spirit strengthened my faith with this promise. What a consoling message for the weak and weary! I heard and believed it. I prayed for strength and asked forgiveness for my failures.

Our lives will not be problem free, but as Christians, we have the assurance of knowing we can turn to God at any time. God promises that he will never leave or forsake us. Scripture assures us, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

God walked beside me all the way and put the pieces of my broken world back together, according to his plan. In time, God gave me a steadfast friend of the same faith who reached out and allowed me to share my sorrow. That friend later became my husband. God blessed us with five healthy, wonderful children. As we train them in Jesus, we see how the Holy Spirit can work such strong faith in their young hearts.

What joy we have as Christians! Joy that we know our Savior, joy that he knows us! God's guiding light turns the storms of this life into rainbows. He strengthens our faith through our trials. Our faith shows us our future in heaven where God will wipe away every tear forever. I can hardly wait. 

Paula Ashman is a member of Immanuel, Greenville, Wisconsin.

A Lutheran view of science

Ronald A. Buelow and Ryan C. MacPherson



In April 2003, Lutheran educators gathered at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., for a symposium on science. Dr. Ryan MacPherson and Dr. Ronald Buelow presented different interpretations of science, which attracted much interest from the audience. In this article, the two educators present their shared understanding of a Lutheran approach to science—science understood in two different senses. These distinctions may serve as a guide for teaching a proper understanding of the subject. The authors emphasize the words of Hebrews 11:1,3: “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. . . . By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”

Lutherans distinguish carefully between two senses of “science.” On the one hand, science refers to true knowledge. (“Science” comes from the Latin verb *scire*, “to know.”) Science must, therefore, agree with Scripture, where God reveals the truth about himself and the world that he created. Because of this agreement, we can speak of science as “divine.”

On the other hand, the word “science” can refer to human behavior. Science is what people do and think

when they wear lab coats, conduct experiments, and interpret God’s creation. This human science differs from divine science since scientists’ conclusions always are tentative and often are proven false by the scientists of later generations.

To be clear about which sense of “science” is meant, the remainder of this article will specify “divine” or “human” science.

Lutherans value the blessing of human science. God created humans with reason and senses.

We can observe God’s world and try to figure out how it works. The result is human science, with its laws of nature that enable scientists to make weather forecasts that aid travelers, to perform surgeries that help people with diseased or injured organs, and to build bridges that can support the weight of heavy trucks. In short, human science is one of many ways that God answers the prayer: “Give us this day our daily bread,” which includes everything that we need for this body and life.

Lutherans recognize the limits of human science. As wonderful as human science is, it also has limits. Human science is limited by the human mind itself, which always is humbled by the incomprehensibility of God's mind (Isaiah 55:8,9). Human science is limited also by original sin, which clouds the thinking of all scientists, Christian or not.

Over the centuries, many versions of the scientific method have been proposed. Some have worked better than others, but in all cases the conclusions reached by human science are always subject to revision. Newton's laws of gravitation had to be dramatically revised in light of Einstein's work. Biologists already have found it necessary to modify Darwin's theory of evolution. Nothing in human science remains the same for very long.

Lutherans confess the certainty of divine science. The knowledge of God revealed in the Scriptures is 100 percent certain. Sometimes this certainty enables Christians to determine which theories of human science are false. For example, the Bible's teachings on creation show that Darwin's theory of evolution to explain origins must be false. The Bible does not, however, enable Christians to know if a particular theory of human science is true. For example, the Bible makes no claims as to whether people should prefer Newton's or Einstein's version of the theory of gravity. In fact, from a scriptural perspective one must remain open to the possibility that neither is correct.

Divine science concerns itself primarily with salvation issues. Though Christians cannot say with certainty whether Einstein's human science is true, they can confess the eternal truths of divine science, such as, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16).

Lutherans respect the vocations of scientists. As noted above, God uses scientists—both believers and unbelievers—to bless all people with the things included in "daily bread." When Christians pursue careers in human science, they have a special opportunity to glorify God and show love to their neighbor by using God's gift of human reason to the best of their abilities.

Notable Lutheran scientists include Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), who discovered that planets orbit the sun in elliptical paths; Carolus Linnaeus (1707–1778), who invented a new way of cataloguing plant species; and the Lutheran pastor John Bachman (1790–1874), who became his generation's leading expert on four-footed animals in America. More recently, a Lutheran physiologist named J. Robert Cade invented a beverage designed to prevent athletes from becoming dehydrated—Gatorade.

God could have used other people to accomplish these great things, but in choosing Christians, he provided them with opportunities "to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). In other words, a Christian's scientific career is a special calling in sanctified living.

Lutherans bring a unique contribution to science education. All science educators have the opportunity to serve their neighbors (both students and society in general) by teaching about human science and its benefits. Science educators in Christian schools have the additional responsibility and privilege of teaching all science from a Christian perspective. Lutheran teachers and students praise God for the incredible design and beauty that human science has revealed in God's creation—design and beauty that also are proclaimed as divine science in the Scriptures.

Lutherans also recognize that human science, in its attempts to discover God's workings in nature, sometimes misidentifies God's designs. Lutherans teach human science as human science, and divine science as divine science, recognizing that the limits of human science often prevent the two from matching up perfectly.

Lutherans proclaim divine science, without trying to support it with arguments from human science. Lutherans believe that human science can never make divine science more accurate or more convincing. The Holy Spirit brings people to a knowledge of divine science by planting faith in their hearts through the Word and the sacraments. Human science, which relies on human reason, cannot create or strengthen anyone's trust in God. Therefore, it would be wrong to use human science as a "proof" of divine science.

Lutherans are careful, for example, not to allow arguments from creation science to take the place of the plain words of Scripture. Lutherans know that when the basic conclusions of creation science agree with Scripture, they must be correct. But Lutherans also keep in mind that the detailed arguments of creation science are drawn from human science and go beyond the plain words of Scripture. Lutherans do not rest their faith in the arguments of any human science, not even creation science. Faith must look to the Word alone, which is to say, to divine science alone.



Dr. Ryan MacPherson, who teaches history of science at Bethany Lutheran College (ELS), Mankato, Minnesota, is a member of Peace (ELS), North Mankato. Dr. Ronald Buelow, a mathematics professor at Bethany, is a member of St. Paul, North Mankato.

JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED



Nicole R. Balza

Does your congregation need help to fulfill its God-given mission? WELS Parish Assistance is at your service.

How healthy is your congregation? Is a ministry opportunity becoming a problem as members struggle with which direction to head?

Is the disease of sin running rampant, creating conflict and dissension?

Are members experiencing moments of wonderful, Christ-centered ministry, followed by periods of inactivity?

Are things that used to go well now beginning to fail?

No matter what your congregation's situation might be, conducting a spiritual check-up every now and then can keep the body of Christ fit for battle—which is where the WELS Parish Assistance consultants come in.

These consultants' job is to conduct ministry check-ups for WELS congregations. They do this by bringing in a group of two to six trained men to evaluate the current situation of a particular congregation. One-on-one interviews with congregation members and called workers, group discussion sessions, community surveying, and personality inventories are all used to assess the current health of a congregation and to help set new directions for its ministry.

Pastor Ron Heins, director of the Board for Parish Services' Parish

Assistance program, says, "We take a photograph of a congregation at a particular point in time. Then, we focus on helping that congregation plan and carry out the ministry that God has intended for them to do. We focus the energy of the congregation on the mission of Christ and how to apply that mission both within and outside of the congregation."

Parish Assistance consultants base their partnerships with congregations on three key premises:

1. The Word of God works.
2. God's promises are sure.
3. The Lord has work for his people to do.

As consultants work with congregations to strengthen their ministries, God's Word in individual members' lives is always emphasized. Consultants also work to emphasize the strengths and blessings in a congregation rather than the weaknesses and problems. They've found that churches that thank God for blessings and emphasize their strengths will find ways to serve the Lord better, enjoy each other's company, and attract other people.

The results speak for themselves.

Take Grace, Tucson, Ariz., for example. Things were going well in this 450-member congregation. However, "members did not share an overall forward-looking plan," explains Ron Koehler III, Grace's pastor. "We wanted a purposeful ministry."

So, Grace called in the services of Parish Assistance. As the consultants worked with the congregation, more people became involved with planning the congregation's ministry. In July 2003, the congregation finalized its new vision and mission statements. It is now working on a five-year plan. With the congregation's new outlook, though, some changes have already been put into place, including adding a staff minister and a second Sunday worship service.

"Even though we're only halfway through the process," says Koehler, "the benefits have been so obvious. Most importantly, we have built consensus because we're all working together."

Members at Ascension, Antigo, Wis., were also looking for direction. A mission congregation that had recently gone off of synod subsidy, Ascension's members wondered, "Now what?"

As Parish Assistance consultants helped this congregation, members

realized that adult Bible study was key to carrying out God's work. A core curriculum of Bible study was organized, including a 50-lesson class focusing on Bible basics taught by Mike Spaude, Ascension's pastor.

"Inner spiritual growth was the biggest benefit of our work with Parish Assistance," says Spaude. "As [lead consultant] Pastor Paul Kelm emphasizes, 'Adult spiritual growth is job one.' As a result, we now have three laymen who are leading Bible studies. That is a step of maturity for this congregation."

Members of First Lutheran, Lake Geneva, Wis., found that Parish Assistance allowed them to take giant steps forward in both nurture and outreach. As congregation president Jim Gaugert explains, "Parish Assistance helped us take a lot of complicated areas of church

work and boil them down to two things—nurture and outreach."

With that in mind, First Lutheran began a Wednesday evening dinner and Bible study event that takes place the first three Wednesdays of each month. Known as "F3" for faith, family, and friends, the event focuses on bringing people together around God's Word.

Gaugert also appreciates Parish Assistance's approach of considering "what must change, what may change, and what must never change. It really helps to realize that anything keeping us from proclaiming the Word of God in its truth and purity must change."

Finally, Gaugert notes, "We are making progress to where we want to be, but we are still a work in progress. However, we would not be where we are today without the help of Parish Assistance."

"Parish Assistance is not a quick fix, though," Heins insists. "We are not miracle workers. We are partners working with you to help accomplish God's work."

The process involves a large time commitment, particularly for called workers and lay members who make up the congregation's main task force. Task force members keep the five-phase process going, including working on the congregation's vision and mission statements and developing the congregation's ministry plan.

Is all this work worth the effort?

Heins thinks so. "When God's people get serious about being and doing what God has called them to be and do, he blesses them."



Nicole Balza is a senior communications assistant for Forward in Christ magazine and WELS Communication Services.

More about Parish Assistance

Parish Assistance began in 1992 and has grown to a service that touches almost 10 percent of WELS congregations at any given time. In 1998, Parish Assistance expanded its services to offer consultation to WELS congregations considering opening new children's ministries or revitalizing existing ministries for outreach opportunities.

Parish Assistance is a fee-based service to cover a portion of its costs to the synod. The first phase is free, and financial assistance is available to help with the cost of subsequent phases.

The five phases of WELS Parish Assistance are:

1. **Introductory:** A pastor and church council ask to meet with a WELS consultant to learn about Parish Assistance. If they agree to continue, a seminar for all congregational members and workers is scheduled.
2. **Analysis:** A systematic and thorough analysis of the congregation and its programs is produced by the consultants with the help of the congregation.
3. **Mission and vision:** The congregation's leaders zero in on the special opportunities and directions the Lord has placed before them.
4. **Strategies:** Leaders are trained to think like God thinks and develop strategies to accomplish his work in their midst. Help in training and equipping for special areas of ministry is offered at this level.
5. **Implementation:** God's people carry out the work God has set before them.

For more information about Parish Assistance, call 414/256-3219.

This information comes from the Parish Assistance Web site <www.wels.net/pa>.





WALKING WITH ST. JOHN

CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 2

CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER 4

CHAPTER 5



A SECOND WATERSHED

Events at the close of Jesus' ministry foreshadowed his path from cross to crown.

Theodore J. Hartwig

In this unit John brings his readers to the second watershed of his Gospel. The first happened after Jesus' Bread of Life sermon in chapter 6, when many of his followers deserted him. Now, at the second watershed, the high priest became spokesman for the great national verdict: "It is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish" (11:50).

Though issued from a blind, self-secure heart, the high priest's testimony, by the mystery of the Holy Spirit's inspiration, was pure gospel. In God's eternal counsel it was indeed necessary that this man from Nazareth, the Father's eternally begotten Son, should die for all mankind.

This gospel is surrounded, before the high priest's speech, by Jesus' most comforting sermon

and, except for his own resurrection, his most amazing miracle. After the speech, several unusual words and acts bring his public ministry to a close.

My sheep shall never perish (10:1-42)

The Lord's comforting sermon about shepherd life flowed from his healing of the blind man. This man's bold confession of Jesus to the Jewish authorities had resulted in his suspension from the synagogue to endure the social ostracism that usually follows. His faith, however, had enrolled him into a fellowship and sheepfold far more secure. Now, in his sermon, Jesus revealed a new set of I Am's: "I am the gate" and "I am the good shepherd." In his office of bringing people to salvation, he is the gate. In his office of caring for them, he is the good shepherd. The goodness of Jesus

exceeds that of all other shepherds because he lays down his life for his sheep. He does so willingly, in harmony with his Father's will, for he and his Father are of one mind, one will, one identity.

Again, when it suited them, the Jewish antagonists caught the meaning of Jesus' announcement correctly: "You, a mere man, claim to be God." Yet Scripture, in Psalm 82, supports the use of divine names for human beings, and certainly these detractors, Jesus told them, would agree that Scripture does not go back on its word. It cannot be frustrated from fulfilling God's spoken will and purpose. He enunciated that eternal will and purpose of his word most eloquently in Isaiah 55:11: "It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."



I am the resurrection and the life (11:1-57)

The death and resurrection of Mary and Martha's brother Lazarus, having happened shortly before Good Friday and Easter, served this Gospel's writer as a fitting prelude to the death and resurrection of his Lord. It is also, perhaps, the most powerful witness to the dual nature of Jesus: perfect God, perfect man, yet not two persons but one. See him emotionally overcome by the grief of his friends and by sin's hideous death-dealing ravages. There he stands before the tomb of his dead friend and weeps as a natural human being. Grief is not wrong! But see him also at the next moment, as true God, summon the dead man from the grave. We are confronted by a mind-boggling paradox. We are awed by it. We bring reason into captivity and in simple, unreasoning faith, humbly and gratefully adore what is beyond our understanding.

Together with its revelation of a comforting work, the raising of Lazarus was attended, on the one hand, by an equally comforting word from the lips of Jesus. It came in the form of another "I Am" and ranks among the most consoling passages in all of Scripture. Jesus told Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

On the other hand, however, the raising of Lazarus was attended by the most criminal counsel in all of history. For the Jewish high court, the miracle and its anticipated fallout—everyone will put their trust in Jesus—became the last straw. It hurried them to a decision that, by their reckoning, would rid them of Jesus but that also, in the divine master plan, effected the redemption of all mankind.

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified (12:1-50)

Four events at the close of Jesus' ministry foreshadowed his path from cross to crown.

First, Mary's costly gift. To the practical mind, it seemed wasteful, a robbery at the expense of the poor. However, when the heart is right with God, such lavish love can be done without leaving the other love undone. So Jesus defended the fragrance of Mary's devotion against her loveless detractors.

Like Mary's gift, the Palm Sunday procession heralded Jesus' death. It added, furthermore, to the exasperation of the Pharisees.

Their prophetic outcry, "Look how the whole world has gone after him," exhibited its first buds with the appearance of Gentile Greeks who wanted to see Jesus. Jesus recognized this request from the Gentile world as another sign of

his approaching glory. This glory of a worldwide harvest of Gentiles would have to wait, however, until the seed had been planted into the ground and had died. First came the suffering and death of Jesus, then the future glory.

But as a true human being, Jesus was terrified over the prospect of that death by crucifixion. He prayed the prayer that he would pray again in Gethsemane, and again he received his Father's spoken answer. But God's voice, mistaken for thunder by the bystanders, needed the mediatorship of Jesus to be understood by people. Through Jesus alone God will speak to his people and reveal who he is.

Jesus' public ministry closes with John's report that the apostasy of the Jewish nation has become almost universal. So John had written of Jesus at the beginning of his Gospel, "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (1:11). It was another sign that the path of Jesus lay on a course of first the cross and then the crown.



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

To read Prof. Hartwig's commentary on the first nine chapters of John, go to <www.wels.net/nlarch/search.pl> and search the "author" category for Theodore Hartwig.

LORD OF LIFE

THORNTON, COLORADO

A place where everybody knows your name

Linda R. Buxa

You almost expect to hear a collective “Norm!” when the church doors open at Lord of Life, Thornton, Colo. That’s how friendly it is. At this northeast-Denver area congregation, you feel more welcomed than Norm Peterson did when he walked into Cheers.

“We went to Lord of Life the first Sunday and never even tried the other church!” says Kristi Geisz. “We felt so welcomed and comfortable there. The congregation was extremely friendly, relaxed, and informal.”

Getting to know each other

The cliché goes: People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. Lord of Life’s members recognize this and show their love for Jesus by simply getting to know each other.

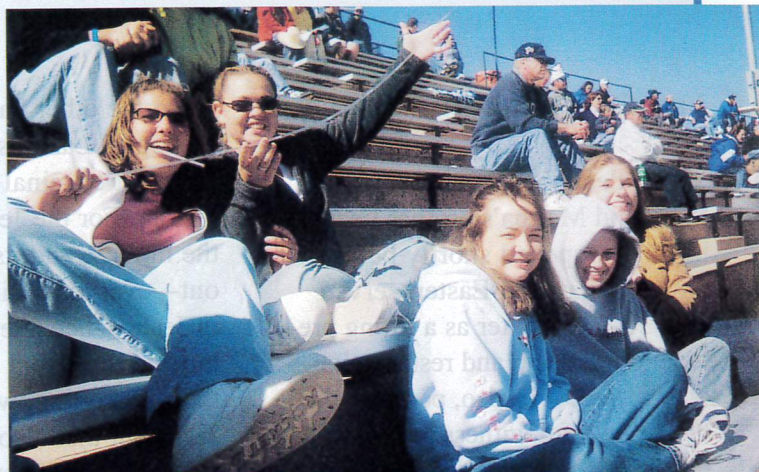
“We’ve been blessed with an incredible location, and it’s common to welcome two to five visiting single adults or families each Sunday,” says Mark Birkholz, pastor at Lord of Life.

The Holy Spirit blessed this well-located, friendly congregation, and it has grown rapidly. Of the church’s 317 communicants, 170 joined since January 2000. That meant the 147 members who joined before 2000 had a lot of work to do.

“Pastor maintains that the church belongs to us—the members—and encourages us to be the leaders,” says Geisz. Birkholz continually reminds them that although he may be the pastor, they are the ministers.

So the members took responsibility for turning these new faces into familiar faces. “I introduce myself to someone I don’t know each Sunday. I ask about their work, church background, where they heard about Lord of Life,” says Geisz.

This isn’t always easy. Christina Cateora admits, “We as a family are learning to become ‘brave’ and actually go over and introduce ourselves.” She explains why they overcome their fear: “We figure that this is the best way to express our thanks for others talking to us when we were the newcomers.”



Lord of Life has an active youth group. Here youth group members watch a football game between the Air Force and the University of Las Vegas.

Once newcomers become regulars who then become members, they are assigned a sponsor family. Sponsors take responsibility for integrating them into the church—finding out how new members can be served and how they want to serve.

The goal is to make “the new member feel part of the total group,” says church chairman Jim Noelder. But never at the expense of the Savior. Geisz points out that Pastor Birkholz is open and understanding, “yet does not give in to worldly distortion of God’s Word to appease people.”

That’s where Bible study plays its role.

Getting to know the Savior

“Our commitment to Bible study has not wavered during our dynamic growth,” says Al Hooks. He should know. Nineteen years ago, his brother brought him to the church. “Soon after that I became their first adult baptism.” Since then, he has watched the congregation grow from 11 families to over 400 believers.

Of those believers, about 40 percent attend Bible study. Compare that to a synodwide 14.3 percent attendance. Still, Birkholz isn’t resting on those laurels. “We have a lot of work to do, getting an even higher percentage of adults into some sort of regular Bible study.”

To help reach that goal, Lord of Life offers plenty of opportunities—eight Bible studies are available throughout five days of the week. Studies range from basic Bible information to 19-minute overviews to challenging subjects—currently the Smalcald Articles. They are held at church, in restaurants, and in members' homes.

“We are blessed with a pastor who is an excellent teacher,” says Noelder. “The learning experience is fun here. I continue to grow with every class he teaches.”

Growing with every class means getting to know the Savior better, which changes people's lives. “Practical guidance is given so that a person is well-prepared to think and apply what the Bible teaches,” says Cateora.

Applying what the Bible teaches brings us back to the beginning of this congregation's story. It is the motivation for the members' friendliness to each other.



Lord of Life's coed softball team. The members of Lord of Life feel like they are part of an extended family and work hard to make newcomers feel the same.

“The general attitude of the congregation seems to be that we are all sinners, forgiven by Christ, so we should love one another as equals in God's eyes and out of gratitude for his grace,” says Geisz.

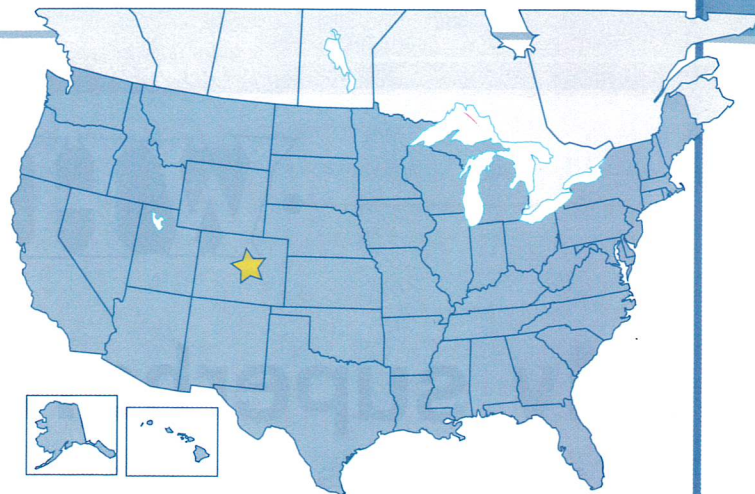
This is why Lord of Life is a true Christian family. As Cateora says, “There's a genuine spirit of brotherhood that exists in the congregation. We're all in this together, and we're here to help each other.”

Helping each other means that they make sure everybody knows your name when you walk through their doors. But more important, they help you make sure Jesus knows your name when you walk through his heavenly gates.



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

This is the first of a 12-part series. Each month of this year you can get to know more about another WELS congregation.



QUICK FACTS

Lord of Life, <www.lordoflife.net>:

- began in 1984 with eight WELS families and three previously unchurched families.
- has 422 members.
- baptized 25 children and confirmed 23 adults in 2002.
- has had over 100 different Sunday school teachers.
- has participated in five major building or remodeling projects in its 20-year history.
- helps organize Rocky Mountain Christian Camp each summer with over 100 teens from several states.
- is served by six organists and keyboardists.
- plans to open a pre-school and/or grade school in 2004.

HOW YOU CAN GET TO KNOW OTHERS

Members at Lord of Life, Thornton, Colo., share tips on welcoming visitors and integrating new members.

- Offer even a brief “hello” and a smile.
- Introduce yourself to someone new each Sunday.
- Ask about work, church background, where they heard about your church, their family.
- Sit in the center of the pew so others can easily find a place to sit.
- Park in spaces farther from the building so visitors can park closer.
- Hang members' and prospects' pictures in the entryway.
- Follow up on people who sign the guest book. Contact them the next day to thank them for attending and ask how your church can serve them.
- Hold a new-member potluck.
- Hand out talent sheets to find out what new members are interested in—then get them involved!
- Pair each new member with a sponsor family who hands out a new-member packet and gets feedback on how your church can serve them.

What about making sure that members stay members?

- Hold every-member visits every year. This allows all members to know that they are cared about individually—not just as another face in the crowd.

WHATEVER

My superhero

My superhero does lots of wonderful things, but the most important thing is what she did for me—she taught me that **I am saved**.

Faith Schmitzer

My superhero is like no other. She doesn't fly around cities saving damsels in distress. She doesn't hide behind a mask or have this "awesome bod." She's an everyday human to everyone else. But she is a superhero to me!

As the old saying goes, "The early bird gets the worm." That's my superhero. Every morning she rises to put on her "cape" to get an early start on her busy day ahead.

She doesn't save people from evil villains, but she does share with them how Jesus saved her and how he also has saved them. My superhero, a Christian woman, spends one day a week at an International Friendship Group, where people from all different nationalities share their customs and religious beliefs. She may not have an "awesome bod," but she definitely is spiritually fit.

My superhero also spends several hours a month teaching English as a second language to a Japanese woman, Rumi. Here she struggles, trying to understand everything her student says. Even though she is a superhero, she is also human.

She may not wear a mask, but behind the scenes she does many things that most people don't even know. She visits the nursing home to talk to the elderly and to fill up their water pitchers. She participates in ladies aid, organizes the flower committee, and teaches part time at a local Christian day school. She sews napkins, bibs, and tablecloths. Singing in the church choir, hosting dinners for new members, and making dinners for new moms consumes more of her energy. Besides all these things she does for other people, she cares for her own six children and is a loving wife to her husband.

Superheroes usually have a romance story along with all the action. This is one way in which my superhero is like the others.

She didn't have to save him from anything; she just flew into the arms of a pastor in training. She ended up marrying him and became everything a pastor's wife should be. She supports him, gives her opinion when asked to help in a decision, and stands by him through thick and thin. She supports his work, rescues him during the sad times, and rejoices with him in happy times. She's there to be his helper.

Having six children is a pretty big job, but this superhero handles it well. She is a smart mother who budgets, buys groceries at a bargain price, and uses coupons to save money.

Of all these things, the most important thing is what my superhero did for me—she taught me that I am saved. From day one I was told that Jesus loves me and that he died to take away all my sins. Because of his death and resurrection, I will go to heaven.

In everything we do or say, we should do it all for the glory of God. My superhero has made sure that not only should she do this, but that her children should do everything to God's glory as well.

That is why I want to be like my superhero, my mom.

Faith Schmitzer, a freshman at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member of Trinity, Jenera, Ohio.

God

This dreamer

After much trouble and heartache, a young woman finds the fulfillment of her dream to meet her Bridegroom, Jesus.

Lynette Bade

Once I met a “cobra” in the foothills of the Ozarks of Arkansas.

He lurked in every classroom, small group session, personal devotion, required intercession (speaking in tongues), and work detail.

Thus an average day at the missionary training school called Youth With A Mission (Y-WAM). Loren Cunningham began this nonprofit, nondenominational organization in 1960. He claimed God gave him a vision of the map of the world with waves crashing onto the continents. The waves became young people taking the gospel to every nation.

Now Y-WAM has schools around the globe.

Upon entering the ironclad gates in '79, I tossed to the wind my wretched, perverted lifestyle.

Swoosh-colored leaves danced, celebrating, too, my choice to follow Christ. My heart sang out, “Oh, to be Christ's bride!”

I raced to the school (converted barn) to grab the schedule. Through tall grass the cobra bobbed its head, sizing me up: “She's guilt-ridden, brokenhearted, from a divorced family; she's hungry to experience God, naive, and 17—HA!”

My home was a trailer shared with 16 other sweet, fun-loving girls.

Already we planned a popcorn party, but the bell rang, calling us to our new discipleship training.

Teachers from different denominations, renowned evangelists and professors, captivated me. We read books by nuns, watched videos by theologians, and listened to adventures by famous missionaries. We had one assignment: read the whole Bible and memorize portions of it.

I chose Song of Songs. Each night I dreamt of meeting my Bridegroom. When would I meet him? Am I good enough? After all, I have been wicked. Through the day's ambiguous teaching, the cobra spit half truth, half lies, often leaving me alone with doubts.

In winter we were whisked off to Mexico. We slept in cold, dreary church basements. At night I read a different book of the Bible. Being the rainy season, my teardrops mixed in with the raindrops to the beat of Ecclesiastes: “Meaningless, meaningless, utterly meaningless.”

Why hadn't my Bridegroom

come? We worked hard for him—passing out tracts in Spanish, scrubbing orphanages, holding revivals, and fixing roofs on shacks. Where was the joy in labor for Christ? I grew sullen and ill, for the cobra poisoned my soul, and I doubted my faith.

Back in the United States, we worked in big cities, preaching in soup kitchens, prisons, and rock concerts. We performed skits, dressed up in clown suits—anything to share Christ. Y-WAM's goal was to unite

all churches, to build the kingdom of God, and to disciple all nations.

Despite the inward zeal, the humble display; despite the poor, lowly lifestyle with no pay; despite our religious appearance, really, we were only modern-day Pharisees.

Yet, in my brain a movie played called “Past Sins.” Satan mocked, “You're not saved!” I prayed, fasted, and gave up all personal rights. The Bridegroom I yearned to meet turned out to be a phantom, and he sang a song of despair. Now I thought for sure that I must be demon-possessed.

This inner turmoil continued for years. Leaving me hopeless, fearful of demons, and with nowhere to run, the cobra's bite made me twice fit for hell.

Yet, Christ never gave up on me. Baptized as a baby and again at age 18 while with Y-WAM, Christ Jesus marked me as his own bride.

In 1991, I met a WELS pastor who patiently instructed me in God's holy Word. Through his preaching and adult Bible class, “this dreamer” met her Prince of Peace. It astounded me that Jesus had saved me. It took years of studying God's Word.

My eyes had been blinded by a cobra, but now the eyes of my heart are enlightened, and I stand a redeemed believer sealed with his Spirit. No words can express, only a “song of songs,” forever singing of the mercies of my Lord.

Lynette Bade is a member at Emanuel, Tawas City, Michigan.



Amazing grace— **IN AFRICA**

Guest preachers, special choral selections, invitations, potluck suppers. What do these remind you of? That’s right—a church anniversary celebration. Add in hours of travel, homemade stringed instruments, and songs in Chichewa, and you have a new twist on the typical anniversary celebration—one done African style.

In October 2003, WELS President Karl Gurgel, along with Pastor David Sternhagen, Dr. Don Whitlock, teacher Jeff Dorn, and layman Don Niemann (members of the Africa Administrative Committee), spent 10 days in Zambia and Malawi commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa (LCCA).

“The joyousness of it was overwhelming,” recalls Gurgel. “We were surrounded with music. Choirs everywhere were offering joyful songs of praise and thanks.”

Indeed, music was a significant aspect of the LCCA celebration. Since many of the members could not contribute much monetarily, they showed their love for God by lifting their voices in song and prayer. At the Lutheran Bible Institute in Lilongwe, Malawi, the choir even offered a selection specifically tailored to the WELS guests—Kurt Eggert’s “Not Unto Us.”

“Giving to God was a real pleasure and a privilege for them,” says Gurgel. “You could see their happiness.”

Many people traveled a great distance to celebrate God’s grace in the LCCA, as shown in Malawi, where every African national pastor was present. Services were held at five locations throughout Zambia, with each committee member attending or preaching at a separate service, as well as in Lilongwe, Malawi, and at the Malawi bush congregation of Cholo.

In all, several thousand members turned out to give praise and thanks to God. In Lusaka, Zambia, some didn’t even fit inside the church building—they stood outside and looked in through the windows!

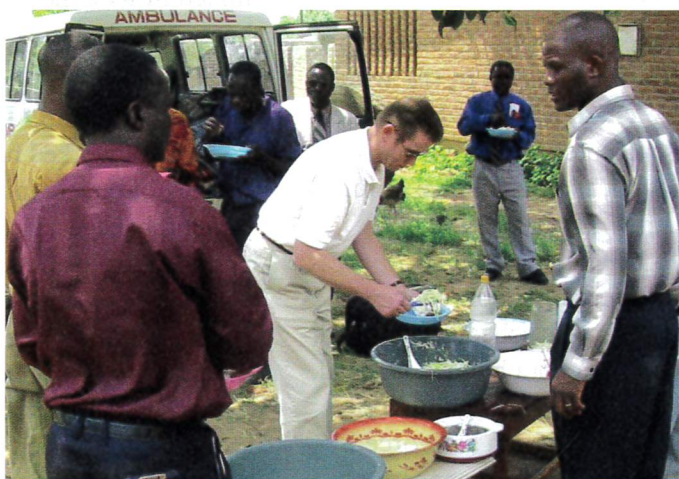
Elizabeth Hudock



WELS President Karl Gurgel greets worshippers in Cholo, Malawi, after a 50th anniversary service.



President Gurgel's wife, Barbara, visits with an original member of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa—Zambia.



National pastors in Malawi met in Blantyre for a conference with the WELS Africa Administrative Committee. Dr. Don Whitlock (center) helps himself to the Malawian potluck served at the conference.

On a mission

You're a senior seminary student sitting in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary auditorium on call day in May 2001. As your name is called, you hear that your task is to start a mission church for the growing Spanish-speaking population in California.

No small task—especially for someone who does not know Spanish. But, after four months of immersion study in Mexico, you are ready to go. But where? Where is the best place to reach the most Spanish-speaking people in California who will be open to hearing the gospel?

Okay, start in Pomona, where a WELS church is already ministering to some Spanish-speaking people. Conduct demographic surveys. Talk to local officials, pastors in other church bodies, and people on the street.

"Santa Ana," they say. "The Mexican Ellis Island."

Only one-and-a-half hours from the Mexican border, immigrants pour through Santa Ana because of its reputation as a good starting point in the United States. The latest census indicates that 76 percent of the city's 350,000 residents are Hispanic.

So, Santa Ana it is. But why won't people talk to me when I go door to door canvassing? Oh . . . Hispanics do not like to invite strangers into their homes. What could we do to meet one of their needs that would encourage them to come to us?

English as a second language classes? Really? But who will teach them?

Wow, WELS Kingdom Workers will provide two workers to conduct English as a second language classes! We can hold six-week sessions of the classes on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays both in the mornings and at nights. After the Thursday classes, we can conduct an optional Bible study.

Between 40 to 60 people come to class each week, and another 30 to



Worshippers at *Pan de Vida* Lutheran Church, Santa Ana, Calif., in August 2003.

45 stay for Bible class. The Sunday worship service averages 25 to 30 people each week, all of whom stay for either a Bible information class or another Bible study. One of the first English-as-a-second-language students, Jose, decides he wants to be a pastor.


You are excited, but skeptical. After all, Jose has barely begun to study the Bible. But, Jose does not back down. He enthusiastically studies the basics, always wanting to learn more and read more. Soon, he is asking about the Book of Concord. You try to scare him off with the size of the book, but Jose does not back down. If it's an important part of Christianity, he wants to learn more about it. So, you give him his own Spanish version, and he is back the next day, asking you thoughtful questions about it.


It is now November 2003. In two and a half years you have learned a new language and a new culture, moved to an unfamiliar part of the country, researched and opened a new church, begun an English as a second language program, shared God's grace with many people, and begun preparing a man to enter the public ministry.


You are Brian Doebler and Chris Schroeder, 2001 seminary graduates who were called as a team to start a mission for the growing Spanish-speaking population in California. *Pan de Vida* (Bread of Life) Lutheran Church in Santa Ana is the result.


A GIFT for any occasion

Looking for a low-cost gift for a relative, friend, or neighbor? Why not feed their souls as well as their minds with *Forward in Christ* magazine. This \$14 gift is good for every month of the year:

 **January**—Start the year out right. Give someone a gift that keeps on giving year-round.

 **February**—Looking for a Valentine's Day gift? Give the one you love the gift that shows what real love is.

 **March**—Need a unique birthday gift? Wrap up a gift subscription to *Forward in Christ*.

 **April**—Trying to fill Easter baskets? Give spiritual nourishment from *Forward in Christ*. Each issue brings the message of the risen Savior.

Call Northwestern Publishing House today. 1-800-662-6093, ext. 8. Milwaukee, 414/615-5785. Or order on-line, <www.nph.net/periodicals>. Charge it—Discover, MasterCard, or Visa—or bill it.

DEFINING RELIGION

Worship: the paying of homage to someone or something greater than ourselves. Christian worship is directed always and only to the Triune God. Public worship in the Lutheran Church involves not only prayer, praise, and thanksgiving to God, but also listening to the reading and proclamation of God's Word and receiving the sacraments.

WELS Synodical Council approves North American Outreach plan

Following up on the 2003 synod convention's resolution to make North American Outreach a priority for the next four years, the Synodical Council in its November meeting adopted the theme "Proclaim Peace through Jesus" with annual emphases:

- 2004—"Every church a mission,"
- 2005—"Every soul a treasure,"
- 2006—"Every member a missionary," and
- 2007—"Every life for Christ."

The plan's aims will be to equip and involve every WELS member in outreach and to equip and involve every WELS church in outreach.

The first thrust of the effort will be to enlist participation. Each congregation will be visited from within its district, study the theological basis for the emphasis, and choose how it will, with God's help, participate in North

American Outreach. Existing budgets will be used, with possible support for travel and materials.

The second thrust will be to re-deploy, that is, reallocate, where feasible, current budget, people, and programs for North American Outreach.

The third thrust will be to open new fronts. When new funding becomes available, it will be applied to North American Outreach ministry initiatives.

After examining newly revised income projections for this fiscal year (July 1, 2003–June 30, 2004), the Synodical Council also directed all WELS ministries to exercise restraint in spending. Although Congregation Mission Offerings are ahead by more than one-half million dollars, the projections at this time are that revenue from all sources (Congregation Mission Offerings, Individual Mission

Offerings, foundations, bequests, etc.) will fall short of budget by about two percent. A strong positive response to Mission Partners* opportunities may help WELS meet its budget and move ahead with North American Outreach.

The call for caution extends into the second year of the biennium (July 1, 2004–June 30, 2005) when higher health costs, the second phase of synod-approved salary increases, and other cost of living increases will be added to the budget. Since revenue projections remain flat, further cuts in ministry personnel are projected for our schools and missions. As much as possible, the cuts will result from retirements and staff attrition.

*Mission Partners <www.wels.net/mpg> is an opportunity for congregations and WELS members to designate gifts for a specific WELS ministry or mission.

Where are they now?

In Forward in Christ magazine, we report the news but aren't always able to follow up. "Where are they now?" is our way of giving you the rest of the story.

Scott and Sally shared their experiences in a childless marriage in "God had different plans for us" [Dec. 2002].

Here's a recap:

Scott and Sally planned to have two or three children by the time Sally turned 30. God had different plans for them. After Scott and Sally tried to have children for more than five years, the doctors labeled them an "unexplained infertility." In 2002, Scott and Sally began the process of adopting a child.

So, where are they now? (according to Scott and Sally)

We can summarize this past year with one word—Nathaniel.

Nathaniel's birthmother invited us to witness his birth on Nov. 12, 2002,

and allowed us to hold him when he was only a few minutes old. She also gave us the privilege of naming him. Nothing seemed more appropriate than Nathaniel Jonathan, both names meaning "Gift given by God."

We joined her family at his baptism in her hospital room the next day. What an incredible experience to be a part of an event so important in his life!

Wisconsin law required that we wait until a court date in December to take him home, so we visited Nathaniel and his foster family regularly. Then at 2:45 PM on Dec. 13, we received the phone call that we had been praying for: "You can come and pick up your son." God had given us the gift of a son.

Like all new parents, our lives changed completely, and it has not been the same since. What a blessing Nate has been in both of our lives. First a tiny infant, then a crawling baby, then a toddler taking his first steps. His great belly laughs. Smiles



Scott, Sally, and Nathaniel at Nathaniel's first birthday party.

and hugs just for Mom and Dad. His first birthday . . . why do they have to grow up so fast?

People constantly tell us how much Nate looks like us, not knowing that he is a spitting image of his birthmother. It is a great reminder for us of the incredible love she has for him.

On July 9, 2003, our ninth wedding anniversary, Nathaniel's adoption was finalized by the court. Nate's adoption has been a wonderful tool to witness how God answers prayer. He has taken us down a path we never expected, and the outcome is a gift we will treasure for the rest of our lives.

THROUGH MY BIBLE IN 3 YEARS
FEBRUARY 2004

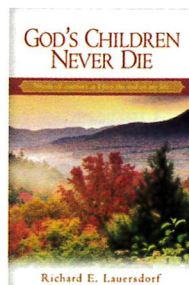
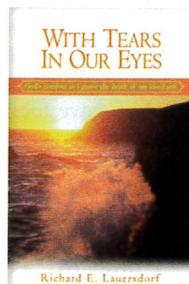
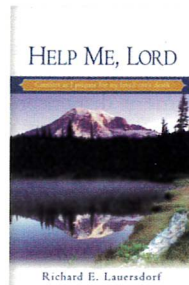
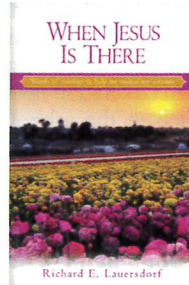
1. Matthew 4	15. Nahum 1
2. Matt. 5:1-16	16. Nah. 2, 3
3. Matt. 5:17-48	17. Habakkuk 1:1-2:5
4. Matt. 6:1-18	18. Hab. 2:6-20
5. Matt. 6:19-34	19. Hab. 3:1-15
6. Matt. 7:1-12	20. Hab. 3:16-19
7. Matt. 7:13-29	21. Obadiah
8. Jonah 1, 2	22. Matthew 8:1-22
9. Jon. 3, 4	23. Matt. 8:23-9:8
10. Joel 1:1-2:17	24. Matt. 9:9-34
11. Joel 2:18-3:21	25. Matt. 9:35-10:23
12. Zephaniah 1	26. Matt. 10:24-42
13. Zeph. 2:1-3:7	27. Matt. 11:1-24
14. Zeph. 3:8-20	28. Matt. 11:25-12:21

Booknook



A look at new books published by Northwestern Publishing House. For more information, visit <www.nph.net> or call 1-800-662-6022.

Words of comfort



\$4.99 each

Experiencing loss, preparing for a loved one's death, grieving when someone close to us has died, facing the end of our own lives—these are among the most emotional, tumultuous times we will face. They are also experiences that we cannot avoid. NPH's newest devotion booklets, *When Jesus is There*; *Help Me, Lord*; *With Tears in Our Eyes*; and *God's Children Never Die*, by Richard E. Lauersdorf, address these situations.

Each is a booklet of 25 devotions, which includes a Scripture text, an easy-to-read message, and a brief prayer. This is a familiar and comforting devotion pattern, which reminds us to turn to our Lord, trust in him, and

remember that he is always with us.

Although this devotion pattern is just what many readers might want, others might find this style a bit too simple and repetitious. However, those looking for more in-depth study can use the Bible

verse as a jumping-off point for further comfort.

Lauersdorf's devotions are obviously heartfelt, addressing extremely emotional issues, but they are similar to others that I've seen in the past. If you enjoy this type of devotion, I would encourage you to try the booklet that best fits your personal situation. Due to the similarity in theme, buying all four booklets at once is probably not necessary as many of the individual devotions are quite similar.

*Terry L. Stetzenbach
 Trinity, Waukesha, Wisconsin*

Editor's note: The four-booklet set costs \$15.99 and is also available on CD-ROM for \$59.95, which includes 20 extra devotions not included in the booklets.

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

Several years ago when my oldest nephew was taking confirmation classes, his nine-year-old brother Tom was extremely interested in the process. Our whole family gathered for the examination service at church, and Tom was both curious and excited about it. After the pastor began the questioning, going from student to student, Tom leaned over to my mother and whispered, "Grandma, now I know! This is just like Jeopardy!"

*Nancy Moldenhauer
 Racine, Wisconsin*

Obituaries

Paul F. Kuehl 1919-2003

Paul Kuehl was born July 14, 1919, in Neenah, Wis. He died Oct. 5, 2003, in Milwaukee.

A 1944 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at parishes in Reeder and Hettinger, N.D.; Redeemer, Mandan, N.D.; St. Paul, Cudahy, Wis.; Northwestern College, Watertown, Wis.; and Northwestern Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Evelyn; five sons; three daughters; 22 grandchildren; and 10 great-grandchildren.

Jane E. Kulow 1952-2003

Jane Kulow was born March 12, 1952. She died Sept. 27, 2003, in Muskego, Wis.

A 1974 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she served at St. Peter, Milwaukee; and St. Paul, Muskego, Wis.

She is survived by her mother, her twin sister, her brother, one niece, and one nephew.

District news

Michigan

Craig Babbert, a teenage member of Beautiful Savior, Grove City, Ohio, won first place for his project at the International Career and Development Conference in Orlando, Fla. Babbert was recognized as the top finance student in his category.

Northern Wisconsin

Twenty students and two teachers from *Lichtenbergschule* in Darmstadt, Germany, visited **Winnebago Lutheran Academy (WLA), Fond du Lac, Wis.**, in fall 2003. The German visitors stayed with WLA students and learned what high school life is like in Wisconsin. In summer 2005, WLA students will have the opportunity to experience life in Germany.

Northern Wisconsin



The Ladies Aid at St. Mark, Stambaugh, Mich., participated in the local museum's Galleria of Trees on display for surrounding communities. With the theme "Joy to World Missions," the women made crosses with globes on them and put the name of each mission on a cross ornament. An angel ornament was hung next to each cross to symbolize the angels protecting our missions. Every time a cross was hung on the tree, the women said a silent prayer for those who belong to the mission identified on that ornament.

Southeastern Wisconsin

The **girls volleyball team at Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.**, won its second consecutive state championship in November 2003.

The Wisconsin Religious and Independent Schools Accreditation announced at its fall meeting that **Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.**, has achieved accreditation. Accreditation takes into account details such as the school's curriculum, facilities, student services, planning, and management.

The **Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Auxiliary** held its 31st annual meeting on Oct. 4, 2003. One hundred twenty people attended the "Day at the Seminary." The auxiliary has funded many projects for the seminary. This year's funds will provide a video editing computer and a condiment dispenser.

Salt And Light Troupe (S.A.L.T.), a drama-based student group at **Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.**, has performed at Shoreland's chapel services and toured area grade schools for the past three years. At Christian Life Resources' national convention on Oct. 18, S.A.L.T. led a workshop entitled "Peer to Peer Counseling." By performing skits and role-plays, S.A.L.T. gave teens some basic tools to help their peers deal with difficult life issues.

Dakota-Montana

On Nov. 2, congregations from the district's **Eastern Conference** worshiped at Our Savior, Brookings, S.D., to celebrate the Festival of the Reformation.

As part of homecoming festivities at South Dakota State University, the **WELS Lutheran Collegians** prepared a chili supper for 31 students at the WELS Lutheran Student Center. Members of **Our Savior, Brookings, S.D.**, supplied many of the ingredients for the meal.

On Oct. 18, **St. Paul, Calgary, Alberta, Canada**, held a special service of thanks as the congregation retired its debt of \$166,000 (Canadian).

South Central

In Sept. 2003, **Living Water, Hot Springs Village, Ark.**, finished paying off its facility. The congregation gave

Arizona



Hope, Chino Valley; Peace, Cottonwood; First, Prescott; and Christ, Prescott Valley, all in Arizona, hosted a booth at the Yavapai County Fair from Sept. 18-21, 2003. The booth won first place among the community and non-profit exhibits with the theme "I am saved through Jesus Christ. Just like you."

thanks that the Lord blessed them to do this in just three-and-a-half years.

Happy Anniversary!

CA—On Sept. 28, 2003, Reformation, San Diego, Calif., celebrated the 40th anniversary of **Lowell Smith's** service in the pastoral ministry. Smith's entire ministry has been spent at Reformation.

On Oct. 12, 2003, Gethsemane, Los Angeles, Calif., celebrated Pastor **Donald Seifert's** 40th anniversary in the ministry.

D-M—**Christ Our Redeemer, Gillette, Wyo.**, celebrated its 20th anniversary on Nov. 23, 2003.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: AZ—Kenneth Pasch; CA—Hermann John; D-M—Wayne Rouse; MI—John Eich; NW—Joel Lillo; SC—William Gabb; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

Looking back

In this, the magazine's 90th anniversary, we bring you articles and news from past issues. See the history of WELS through the pages of our magazine. See how things have changed (in the magazine and in WELS), even as the gospel's message has remained the same.

From the Feb. 7, 1914, issue—

"At the meeting of the Joint Synod in Green Bay last August [1913], the question of training young ladies for their work as teachers in our parochial schools came up for discussion. Attention was called to this subject by the great change that has taken place in our teaching force in the last few years.

"While in the past our schools had been in charge of men almost exclusively, the number of lady teachers has of late been steadily increasing. Thus of the 181 teachers of the Wisconsin Synod 80 are ladies.

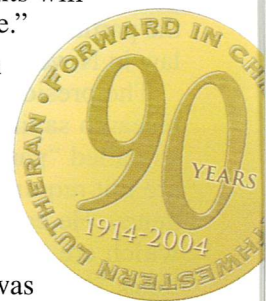
"Though our Teachers' Seminary at New Ulm is prepared to receive ladies, not many have been enrolled to the present time, the majority merely attended some high school which does not offer a normal course. The question therefore was, what assistance can we offer to those who have not enjoyed the advantages of a thorough training for their important position. The situation calls for action, as the welfare of our schools demands a capable and efficient teaching force. A vacation school or teachers' institute was suggested. The synod adopted the suggestion and placed the matter in the hands of a committee. . . .

"This committee has now completed the preliminary work and is able to announce that the institute will in all probability be held next summer either at Northwestern College in Watertown or in Milwaukee. A six weeks' course is planned for

ladies already active in our schools. Definite announcements will be made at a later date."

FYI: The first women were admitted to the normal department (teacher training course) of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., in 1896. In 1898, Lillie Mohr was the first woman to graduate from the college. While a few women did follow Mohr, most didn't pursue higher education until after World War I.

Now Martin Luther College will finish the first semester of the 2002-03 school year with 800 full- and part-time students (287 male and 513 female) in the teacher/staff ministry program. WELS has 1,993 teachers (664 male and 1,329 female), according to the 2002 *Statistical Report*.



LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

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

Learning comes slowly and with difficulty for Debbie. Even though she is a mature lady, Debbie never had a formal education. Worship services, adult Bible studies, even third-grade Sunday school all go too fast.

Debbie told me that she was troubled because she couldn't understand God's Word better. She knew I could teach God's Word because I taught lay Bible studies, and she was comfortable with me from evangelism visits. It was an easy step to study God's Word together.

The study course chosen was basic: God's plan of salvation; Jesus, the promised Savior; the kingdom of God; and the Lord's Prayer.

The subject was serious, but the teaching atmosphere light. At times

I would draw a picture to make a point. Debbie would chuckle and say, "Teech, you crack me up." Other times I would guide her to an answer. Then, knowing that the answer was correct, she would gleefully respond with a high-five, "I'm no dummy," or "Teech, I got it!"

Finally, the studies came to an end. I worried. Was Debbie's faith strengthened? Then I remembered the words from Isaiah 55:11: "So is my Word that goes out of my mouth: It will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." God and the Holy Spirit are in control and

do the real work in matters of Debbie's faith. I could only certify that Debbie completed her course of study.

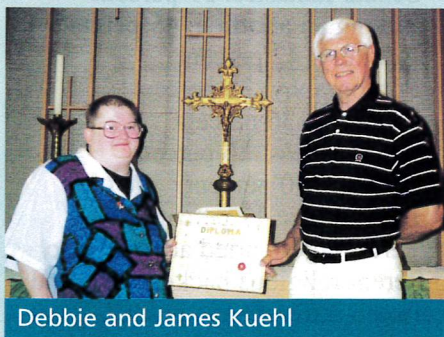
Debbie and I decided a diploma should be awarded. The award would be especially nice since she had never received such recognition. I custom-designed a diploma, including spiritual symbolism that Debbie could understand and remember.

The award ceremony was just Debbie and me. Joy and exuberance followed. I got an impulsive hug, and the diploma was exhibited with delight.

Debbie wrote a prayer when we were studying the Lord's Prayer. It ended like this: "I came to Jesus, He washed my sins away to live with him in heaven. Here, I will come to live away my every lasting day. In Jesus' name, I open my heart and soul to Him. Amen."

How good it is to realize how the promise in Isaiah 55:11 works.

James Kuehl
Neenah, Wisconsin



Debbie and James Kuehl

World news

Bush signs “partial-birth” abortion ban—President Bush signed the partial-birth abortion ban into law in November.

The president cited medical research saying the majority of so-called “partial-birth” abortions are not required by medical emergency. He called the operations, which are used for late-term abortions, “a violation of medical ethics.”

A day after Bush signed the ban, the National Abortion Federation, the professional association of providers of abortion in the United States and Canada, won a temporary stay on the law, preventing prosecutors from enforcing the law. The law imposes a two-year prison sentence and fines on any doctor who performs an “overt act” to end a late-term pregnancy.

In granting the stay, the judge cited arguments by the plaintiffs that the act is unconstitutional because it does not contain an exception to protect women’s health.

The U.S. Department of Justice is seeking a speedy review of the statute.

Bankruptcy judge approves VeggieTales sale—A federal bankruptcy judge has approved the sale of Big Idea Productions, makers of the best-selling VeggieTales video series, to Classic Media, owner of “Lassie” and “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer.”

Classic Media paid a reported \$19.3 million for Big Idea, according to the *Chicago Tribune*.

Man working to illustrate entire Bible—Patrick Hambrecht, the son of a Southern Baptist minister, is trying to illustrate the entire King James Version of the Bible. Not just the main stories, but all 36,665 verses.

Hambrecht came up with the idea for the project in 2002 as a way to get people talking about the Bible.

Between himself, his friends, and people submitting art over the Internet, Hambrecht had collected over 1,300

illustrations by mid November. Illustrations range from professional paintings to line art.

To see the illustrations collected so far, go to <www.flamingfire.com/bible.html>.

Nation’s charities receive decreased contributions—Donations to the nation’s largest charities dropped in 2002, a first in 12 years, according to *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*.

The nation’s largest nonprofits received \$46.9 billion in total donations, down from \$47.5 billion in 2001.

The newspaper attributed the overall decline in giving to uncertainties about the economy and increased competition for money among charities.

The top 10 charities were the American National Red Cross, the Salvation Army, Gifts in Kind International, American Cancer Society, Fidelity Investments Charitable Gift Fund, Lutheran Services in America, YMCA of the USA, Nature Conservancy, University of Southern California, and Feed the Children.

Poll: What’s morally acceptable—A recent poll by the Barna Research Group questioned American adults on whether certain behaviors were “morally acceptable.” The following depicts what percentage consider that behavior to be “morally acceptable”:

- Gambling: 61 percent
- Cohabitation: 60 percent
- Sexual fantasies: 59 percent
- Having an abortion: 45 percent
- Adultery: 42 percent
- Pornography: 38 percent
- Profanity: 36 percent
- Drunkenness: 35 percent
- Gay sex: 30 percent
- Illicit drugs: 17 percent

Percentages varied according to different religious backgrounds and between different age groups. Evangelical Christians and older adults

were the least likely to accept the above behaviors as moral.

The overall survey results were based on nationwide telephone interviews of 1,024 adults in October and have a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

[From “Morality continues to decay,” Barna Research Group, Ltd., Ventura, Calif. <www.barna.org>; Nov. 3, 2003.]

Policy change allows Methodists to advertise on electronic billboard—Reuters, one of the world’s largest media companies, will allow the United Methodist Church to display an ad on a 22-story electronic billboard on its headquarters in Time Square, New York City.

At first Reuters had refused the 30-second video clip because of a company policy that prohibits ads that are “pornographic, political, religious, libelous, misleading or deceptive in nature.” After several churches denounced this policy, Reuters is working on changing it.

“You state . . . that your church should be given the same access and opportunity to speak in the commercial marketplace as corporate advertisers,” Reuters CEO Glocer wrote to the Rev. Larry Hollon, head of the Methodists’ communications agency. “On reflection, I believe that you are right.”

Did you know?—Nearly one in three visitors to adult Web sites is a woman, according to Nielsen//NetRatings, the industry standard for measuring on-line audiences.

After studying the Internet use of 40,000 panelists at home and work, Nielsen//NetRatings estimates that 9.4 million women in the United States accessed such sites in September 2003.

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



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Swanson, George P., to Shepherd, Albuquerque, N.M.

Wessel, Mark W., to St. John, Sparta, Wis.

Teachers

Emanuel, Connie, to St. John, St. John's, Antigua, West Indies

Johnson, Wendy A., to St. Matthew, Janesville, Wis.

Schneck, Deanna C., to St. John, St. John's, Antigua, West Indies

Youngerberg, Kimberly, to St. John, Saint Clair, Minn.

Staff Ministers

Epple, Leonard D., to St. Matthew, Niles, Ill.

Hering, Thomas P., to Our Savior, Grafton, Wis.

COLLOQUY NOTICE

Donald J. Bren, Lewistown, Mont., formerly a pastor in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, has requested a colloquy for the purpose of serving in WELS' pastoral ministry. Correspondence related to this request should be addressed to Pastor Peter J. Naumann, President, Dakota-Montana District—WELS, 620 W 9 St, Mobridge SD 57601-1622.

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

Leesburg, Fla.—St. Mark (25). Feb. 8. Service, 3 PM. Fellowship & supper to follow. 352/326-3211.

West Allis, Wis.—Woodlawn (75). March 20. Service, 5 PM. March 21. Services, 8 & 10:30 AM. Dinner, 12:30 PM. Ticket required for dinner, must RSVP by March 1. March 22. Service, 6:30 PM. Contact Lois or Mary, 414/321-2126.

COMING EVENTS

Anniversary concert—Lakeshore Lutheran Chorale (40). March 28, 7 PM. Joint concert with Milwaukee Lutheran Chorale at Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis.

Camps—for students who have just completed grades 6-8.

• **Music**—June 14-18. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Two years of keyboard experience required. John Paulsen, 507/354-8221 ext. 352.

• **Music**—June 13-18. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. Prof. Randy Bode, 920/261-4352 ext. 129.

• **Science & technology**—July 5-9. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. For students who have a strong interest in science and technology. John Paulsen, 507/354-8221 ext. 352.

Dedications

• **Beverly Hills, Fla.**—Jan. 18. St. Paul's school/gym. Service, 3 PM. Meal & program to follow. RSVP by Jan. 10, Shelia Poole, 352/489-3027.

• **Summerville, S.C.**—Jan. 25. Beautiful Savior. Service, 4 PM. Meal to follow. Mary Groeschel, 843/832-2912.

District youth rallies

• **Minnesota**—July 11-13. Cragun's Resort on Gull Lake, Brainerd, Minn. Cost, \$210. Ron Siemers, 507/232-9868.

• **Western Wisconsin**—July 22-24. Kalahari Resort & Water Park, Wisconsin Dells, Wis. Cost, \$240. Paul Steinberg, 608/847-4108.

Martin Luther College choir tour

• Feb. 21—Saint Paul, Norfolk, Neb., 6:30 PM

• Feb. 22—Gethsemane, Omaha, Neb., 10:30 AM; Saint Mark, Lincoln, Neb., 7 PM

• Feb. 23—Nebraska Ev. LHS, 9:15 AM; Christ, Grand Island, Neb., 7 PM

• Feb. 24—Zion, Denver, Colo., 7 PM

• Feb. 25—Rocky Mountain LHS, 9 AM; Salem, Colorado Springs, Colo., 7 PM

• Feb. 26—Shepherd, Albuquerque, N.M., 7 PM

• Feb. 27—Trinity, El Paso, Texas, 7 PM

• Feb. 28—Our Savior, San Antonio, Texas, 7 PM

• Feb. 29—Our Savior, San Antonio, Texas, 8 AM; Holy Word, Austin, Texas, 7 PM

• March 1—Lord of Life, Friendswood, Texas, 7 PM

• March 2—Good Shepherd, The Woodlands, Texas, 7 PM

• March 3—Calvary, Dallas, Texas, 7 PM

• March 4—Gethsemane, Oklahoma City, Okla., 7 PM

• March 5—Mount Olive, Overland Park, Kan., 7 PM

• March 6—Grace, Oskaloosa, Iowa, 7 PM

• March 7—Lincoln Heights, Des Moines, Iowa, 10:30 AM

• March 14—St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn., 3 PM

• March 21—St. Paul, North Mankato, Minn., 8 & 10:30 AM

Martin Luther College study tours

• **Kenya and Tanzania**—June 13-29. Cost, \$4,350 including air, hotels, and meals. Credits, three semester hours.

• **France, Spain, and Switzerland**—June 14-July 2. Cost, \$3,000 including air, hotels, and most meals. Credits, three semester hours.

For more information, contact Martin Luther College's Special Services, 507/354-8221.

Retreats or conferences

• **WELS/ELS ladies retreat**—Montverde, Fla. Jan. 9-11. Judy Becker, 941/355-6591.

• **WELS seniors rally**—Michigan District. Best Western Executive Plaza, Ann Arbor, Mich. Jan. 16-17. Jerome Spaude, 989/799-3202.

• **WELS marriage retreat**—Eagle Ridge Resort, Galena, Ill. Feb. 20-24. Peg Raabe, 414/256-3278. <www.welsmarriageretreat.org>.

• **Ladies retreat**—St. John, Watertown, Wis. Feb. 21. 9 AM to 1:30 PM. Cost, \$10. Mary Warnecke, 920/262-0789.

• **Christian Woman Today**—Olympia Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. March 19-21. Maureen Sertich, 262/784-0412.

• **Pathways to Christ**—Hawthorn Inn, Oshkosh, Wis. March 19-21. Dorothy Laabs, 920/235-6495.

• **Special Ministries in Lutheran Education Conference (SMILE III)**—For individuals involved in the spiritual training of people with developmental or cognitive disabilities. Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee. July 16-18. Bruce Cuppan, 920/922-8672.

NEEDED

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.

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

Corpus Christi, Texas—Gethsemane, 3434 Holly Rd. Sunday service, 9:30 AM. James Krause, 361/855-5275.

Waukon, Iowa—King of Grace (ELS), Farm Bureau Building, 14 NE 1st St. Sunday school, 9:45 AM. Sunday service, 11 AM. Harvey Abrahamson, 877/394-2296.

Honolulu, Hawaii—Community, 4429 Malakai St. Sunday service, 10 AM. Charles Gumm, 808/422-2933.

Maui, Hawaii area—Hawaiian Canoe Club. Sunday service, 5:30 PM. Charles Gumm, 808/422-2933.

NAMES WANTED

Maui, Hawaii—Charles Gumm, 808/422-2933.

Sonora/Angels Camp/Copperopolis, Calif.—John W. Berg, 510/793-8628.

Chicago—Crossroads Christian Church. 3550 N Lakeshore Dr (at Addison) in the party room. Bible study, first Monday each month, 7 PM. Wendy Greenfield, 773/878-9868.

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

LIFE IN THE SONLIGHT: letters from Jesus

“You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”

Jon D. Buchholz

These days I get very little paper mail that’s worth reading. Most of my mail delivered by the U.S. Postal Service is either junk or bills. Gone are the days when people sat down to draft a fine, handwritten letter. Most of my correspondence today is through e-mail—usually quick, short snippets of communication intended to transmit information in the fastest, most efficient way possible.

God made you to be a letter

Paul’s letters were literary masterpieces. Many of them are preserved in the New Testament: letters to congregations, prison epistles, and pastoral epistles. Paul’s correspondence was more than carefully crafted. It was inspired. When Paul put pen to parchment, the very Spirit of God breathed into the apostle the exact words he wanted him to write. Paul’s epistles are not merely human thoughts and expressions. They are communications from Christ himself.

However, when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “You are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry,” he wasn’t referring to characters written on a page of text. He was pointing to the Christians themselves—living, breathing and talking, testifying believers. Each Christian’s life speaks

volumes about human sin and divine grace. Each member of Jesus’ church is an ambassador for the Lord, a communiqué from Christ.

People around you might not pick up a Bible and read the inspired letters of Paul, but they are certainly reading your life, your actions, and your attitudes. You are a letter from Jesus to your community. You are an epistle of law and gospel to your friends and neighbors. You are an advertisement for God’s plan of salvation. You are a balance statement of charges and credits, of sins that have been blotted out in blood and covered over by the beautiful righteousness of Christ.

You are no piece of junk mail. The Spirit of God has written God’s love upon your breast. God’s grace has transformed your stony, cold heart into a dwelling place for the Most High, a quiet chamber that beats for Jesus. You are a powerful, transforming message to your world, coming from a God who justifies the wicked and calls sinners his forgiven children. Redeemed, reborn, and renewed by God’s Spirit, you have your Savior to share.

God uses you as his letter

During the season of Christmas, we kneel at the manger before God’s bundle of love, wrapped in swaddling clothes, whose delivery was announced



by angels. Epiphany reveals God’s Son as the Savior of the nations, a gift of peace and joy for people of every nation, tribe, and language.

Jesus said, “The gospel must be preached to all nations.” God delivers his message to the world using the feet of missionaries in exotic places. He places his message on the lips of pastors and teachers who proclaim his Word faithfully. God chooses little children to sing his praises. He shapes Christian teens to be models of chastity and morality. He moves Christians everywhere to shout the joy within us, to glorify the Lord who saved us.

God uses you, a letter from Christ, to deliver his wonderful salvation. You deliver Jesus’ love over backyard fences, around office water coolers, at bedsides, and around kitchen tables. You share God’s powerful Word that has transformed you, and through you, God powerfully transforms others.

That, my dear fellow communicator for Christ, is life in the Sonlight!

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

It's all about Jesus

Mighty Savior

Mark J. Lenz

Merciful Savior

"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). John meant his Gospel, but what he says applies to the entire Bible. It's all about Jesus.

bring forgiveness and life for all people. The New Testament tells how it happened. Christ came. He lived. He died. He rose from the dead. Because he did, we have the certainty of forgiveness of sins and life eternal in heaven.

Son of God

From cover to cover the Bible says that Jesus is the Savior from sin. The Old Testament does it by means of prophecies, shadows, and types. It speaks of a Savior whose blood would be shed to

Each book of the New Testament focuses on Jesus in one way or another. In this lesson we will consider the first book, the Gospel of Matthew, and learn that it emphasizes Jesus as the fulfiller of promises.

Savior of all

- To help someone understand that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament you need look no further than the Gospel of Matthew. What does its position at the head of the New Testament suggest about this important feature?
- Matthew 1:1 introduces the family tree of Jesus. What is the significance of the names David and Abraham in the genealogy of the Savior?
- Numbers hold great significance for Matthew. For example, his book includes five great discourses of Jesus, each of which is introduced by deeds of Jesus. It has been suggested that Matthew intended these discourses to correspond to the five books of Moses and the five divisions of the Psalms. As you scan each of the five discourses, see if you can discover the basic content of each: chapters 5-7, chapter 10, chapter 13, chapter 18, chapters 24 & 25.
- In 1:18-4:22 Matthew identifies seven ways in which Jesus is the fulfiller of promises. Discover and explain significant titles for Jesus in these fulfillments: 1:18-25; 2:1-12; 2:13-15; 2:16-18; 2:19-23; 3:3; 4:12-22. Keeping in mind Matthew's purpose to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament, why do you suppose he chose seven prophecies from the many he could have chosen?
- Jesus as the fulfiller of promises is an especially prominent feature of the concluding chapters of Matthew. How do Jesus' words in 26:64 combine the prophecies in Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13,14?
- In describing the crucifixion, Matthew relates Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in rapid succession. As you read 27:35-48, discover how each of the following prophecies is fulfilled: Psalm 22:18; Isaiah 53:12; Psalm 22:7; Psalm 109:25; Psalm 22:8; Amos 8:9; Psalm 22:1; Psalm 69:21.
- In his account of Jesus' resurrection, Matthew also refers to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Read 28:3 and explain how it combines the prophecies in Daniel 7:9 and 10:6.
- Jesus' words in 28:19 are known as the "Great Commission." How are they a fulfillment of Isaiah 49:6? What is our chief purpose as Christians in the world today?
- Luther once wrote, "Take Christ from the Scriptures—and what more will you find in them?" What would the Bible be without Christ?

Liberator

Righteousness of God

Bringer of joy

Mediator with the Father

Sacrifice for sin

Word of life

Faithful witness

Mark Lenz is a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota.

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 "It's all about Jesus." Answers will be available after Jan. 6.

IN THE CROSS HAIRS

Richard L. Gurgel

TOPIC: RETIREMENT

Question: Is retiring God-pleasing? It doesn't seem that retiring to enjoy life is a goal God sets for us, yet it's a common dream. What's the guiding principle here?

Answer: Obviously, we're talking about situations in which retirement is an option, not something "necessary" because of health or job performance. Even when it's a choice, retirement as such is an adiaphoron—something neither commanded nor forbidden by God. Retirement can be pursued for God-pleasing reasons, and retirement can be pursued for God-dishonoring reasons. The attitude of the heart primarily determines whether retirement glorifies or dishonors God.

For some, the whole purpose of retirement is to say to themselves, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry" (Luke 12:19). For them, God utters two choice words: "You fool!" (Luke 12:20).

Anyone who thinks that life's prime purpose is to "enjoy himself" in this world's pleasures shows himself to be an utter fool. To grab as most important that which this world calls life forfeits real life with God (Luke 9:24). Such foolishness substitutes faith in a god of temporary pleasure for faith in the God of eternal grace.

John's warning also hits home. "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world" (1 John 2:15,16).

Of course, these warnings aren't just for retirees. Do we greedily grab our regular paychecks, focused chiefly on how we will use our "stuff" for ourselves? Such warnings lead us all to search our hearts. They lead us to confess as sin whenever our foolish sinful nature clutches that which does not last. These warnings plead with us

to cling instead to that which makes us rich and wise forever: forgiveness, peace, and eternal hope in Jesus.

But it would be heartless judging on our part to insist that every Christian who voluntarily retires has such selfish goals in mind. Retirement has given many Christians rich opportunities to expand their service to their Savior through community, church, and family.

Many retired grandparents are able to devote time to their grandchildren because "9 to 5" pressures are a thing of the past. I've personally seen the blessings congregations reap through those who have retired from one job only to make the Lord's work their joy and delight. Opportunities

abound to let one's light shine in the community through volunteer efforts impossible when employed full time.

It's also instructive to note that the Lord gave Israel a Sabbath day every week. That wasn't merely for spiritual purposes. He also decreed Sabbath and Jubilee years of rest (Leviticus 25). Would the God who gave Israel such instructions tell us that anything done for rest and relaxation is intrin-

sically wrong? For instance, it is hardly "sub-Christian" if a husband and wife retire to take extra time to rejoice in the gift of a Christian spouse.

Honoring God doesn't mean we must die at the office. And retirement doesn't need to be equated with self-absorbed living. Retirement can afford new opportunities for service. For the believer, the principle behind this is simple: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).



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

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

**Retirement
can afford rich
new opportunities
for service to
our Savior.**



POTLUCK POLL RESULTS

In the October issue, we asked for stories of how you've shared your faith with a neighbor or how a neighbor has shared his faith with you. The one response we received is printed below. For those who are unsure how to start witnessing for Christ, consider the five "Be"s of evangelism (below).

Sharing my faith

Last spring, my husband and I received a letter in the mail with Watchtower literature, so we knew it was from a Jehovah's Witness. I am not sure how this woman happened to find our names, but we have been WELS members all of our lives, and we knew what her religion was all about.

I wrote to Mildred that John 1:1 says it all: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Mildred answered my letter and tried to explain her religion again, so I sent her the notes from a Lutheran Women's Missionary Society rally speaker, a former Jehovah's Witness who was taught that Jesus was less than God. This speaker said that a man in Wyoming got her thinking about who Jesus really is. She searched many translations and found that the Jehovah's Witness translation of the Bible, "The New World Translation," is the only one that translated John 1:1 "the Word was a god" instead of "the Word was God." She then left the organization.

Since I sent the above notes to Mildred, I have not heard from her anymore. I trust that the Holy Spirit will use the contact made with her for her good. I know that her letter was sent to us for a purpose, and I told her I hoped that she would search for answers just as the woman who spoke at the rally did and that she too would come to know Jesus as true God for her salvation.

Karen Mischke
Hazel, S.D.



The five "Be"s of evangelism



Need some help becoming comfortable with sharing God's Word? Consider these five tips:

1. **Be a good listener.** It's said that "Listening is earning the right to be heard."
2. **Be sensitive** to time of need/change in people's lives. These provide doors and windows into people's lives in which we can apply the Word.
3. **Be patient.** Our task is to plant, water, fertilize, and cultivate. God's work is to grant the harvest.
4. **Be joyful.** Have faith. Be joyful even when the going gets tough, because your name is written in the book of life.
5. **Be yourself.** Act normal—not better than others, but happy to be forgiven in Christ.

Taken from *The Olive Branch*, the newsletter of Mount Olive, St. Paul, Minn.



Picture this



The Lutheran Church of Central Africa chose for its 50th anniversary celebration the theme "Amazing grace." Two weeks ago I was at a worship service deep in the bush. Frank Shonga (above) approached me and asked if he could sing a song during the service. He had a homemade guitar made out of an oil can and pieces of wood and string. I told him I would be pleased to have him present a song. His face glowed with delight.

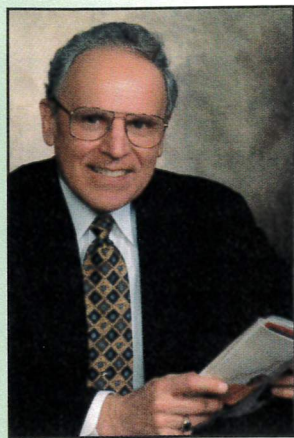
I called Frank forward during the offering. Frank began, soft at first but gaining strength. The song in the Chewa language came across the language barrier—"Amazing Grace How Sweet The Sound."

As I sat listening to his song, seeing the smiles on the faces of the worshipers, I thought of the theme for our approaching anniversary celebration. I saw the determination of Frank to serve with what he had—a simple, homemade instrument mixed with a voice of love and a song of praise. It made me think of all the blessings and accomplishments that have been achieved in Zambia over these 50 years. Things have not always gone well, but the blessings of God's grace can be found in the faces of the members, the works of their hands, and the sound of their voices. There is a strength and a determination that can be found in taking what you have and serving the Lord.

Missionary Daniel Sargent

To read more about the Lutheran Church of Central Africa's 50th anniversary celebration, see p. 22.

Send pictures to *Picture this*, Forward in Christ magazine, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398. On a separate sheet, give us information about the photo. Those whose photos are chosen will receive a small gift.



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

What Jenny promised 90 years ago, we still promise. It's still all about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

90 years and . . .

It was another time with other issues. Some of them seem so obvious now, almost humorous. Still it took a synod resolution to resolve this issue; namely, to publish a national church magazine in the United States in English. You saw right—in English, in the United States!

So the biennial convention in Green Bay, Wis., of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and other States resolved in August 1913 to publish *The Northwestern Lutheran*. “Although German is the leading language in nearly every congregation of our Synod, . . .” reasoned editor John Jenny in the inaugural issue, Jan. 7, 1914, “we cannot deny that the language question is today insistently demanding our attention.”

“Even now,” he continued, “our children are growing less familiar with the German language, and many of our young people use the English almost exclusively. . . .”

“There is an urgent demand,” Jenny concluded, “for an English parish paper in our Synod, and the time has come to act. . . . True Lutheran publications in English are timely, indeed, and . . . we should use all efforts in fostering and circulating them.”

So, 90 years ago, Jenny and a committee of pastors began publishing *The Northwestern Lutheran*. The situation was not humorous. At issue was more than changing language. It was “disseminat[ing] the glorious principles of the Reformation, the doctrines of our Lutheran Church.”

Jenny explained that those doctrines were “the wonderful tenets of true apostolic Christianity. They are embodied in the Gospel. . . .” (His sentence continued for 14 lines, telling of the gift of our salvation by God’s grace in Christ.)

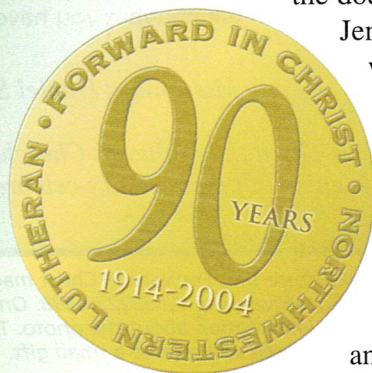
The need was as modern as today and as old as man. “If there is one

thing needed in our days,” said Jenny, “it is this, that we stand forth boldly, as never before, for the old doctrine, the faith once for all delivered to the saints.” He recognized the threat of what he called “the new rationalism.” The means and method of salvation in Christ, he lamented, “is considered out of date and not in accordance with the spirit of the age.”

So, Jenny and the editorial committee promised “to bring to the Lutheran home articles both instructive and edifying, and to keep our people in touch with the current events in the religious world. For this reason it is to be made up of practical and devotional articles, of editorials, of doctrinal, polemical, and historical treatises, as well as of articles communicating such matters of interest to the readers as may increase their knowledge and incidentally enliven their interest in the good cause which our Joint Synod stands for.”

The Joint Synod is now WELS, and *The Northwestern Lutheran* is now *Forward in Christ*. The eight-page biweekly is now a 36-page monthly. Then black and white, now full color, then only one picture, now many pictures. But the essence remains. What Jenny promised 90 years ago, we still promise. It’s still all about the gospel of Jesus Christ and a world that needs desperately to hear its message. As Jenny put it, “. . . it is the same faith, for which the fathers of our Church so earnestly contended in compliance with the exhortation of Holy Writ: ‘Earnestly contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.’”

You still see the motto adopted 90 years ago heading our table of contents: “The Lord our God be with us as he was with our fathers; may he never leave us nor forsake us” (1 Kings 8:57).



WELS Parish Assistance

A Service of the Board for Parish Services
Assisting Congregations with their North American Outreach

Worship attendance is declining.

Getting people to help is becoming harder.

Young people are leaving.

We're growing and changing. How do we adapt without compromising our heritage?

Our outreach efforts never seem to get off the ground.

So many of our members just don't seem to care.

Our school is declining in enrollment.

The same people seem to do everything.

We don't seem to have a direction in what we do nor do we seem to be advancing the work of the Kingdom.

414-771-1235

Whatever the ministry need, there is help!

The Parish Assistance consulting group will come and help you analyze and identify the key issues in your parish and community by sending knowledgeable people to train and assist you, and walk with you through the challenges facing your congregation.

We also provide experienced help in establishing new children's ministries and revitalizing existing schools for outreach.

Our primary goal is to help you establish a God-centered direction for the next steps of your congregation's service to the Lord.

www.wels.net/pa

Helping congregations do their Father's business

Stop! Look! Listen!

It is amazing how much better life gets when you stop to look for God's goodness and mercy in every experience.

John L. Eich

Stop! Look! Listen! Those three words can never be overemphasized. Whether crossing the street, facing temptation, or entering a new year, those words are easy to remember and good to follow.

Reflecting on the past

On New Year's Eve we traditionally stop and look at the past year's record of successes and failures. Look back with me over this past year. Our church gained new communicants through adult and youth confirmation. Unfortunately, it also lost some. Our church reached out into the community and met some of the opportunities God gave us. Others we let slip by.

What about your year just past? Stop and think about its blessings and bad times.

- Look to see the opportunities God gave you.
- Look to see the help God provided.
- Look to see the missed opportunities for success.
- Look to see God's forgiveness and restoration for failures.

As we close out another calendar year and venture into a new one, we realize how quickly we pass through life. Yet God remains a firm, enduring source of strength for us. As one person put it, "The transcendence of God far outweighs the transience of man."

Many of us do not enjoy looking at our past, for we see mistakes and



failures. Israel is called to "look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn" (Isaiah 51:1). Note that God does not call us to look back on our sins but to him who frees us from our sins. Our source is found in God. We are carved from the mind of God by his creative word. We could paraphrase Isaiah: "We are chips off the old block." Looking back at our failures should be looking back to listen to the message of God that he brings blessing out of what only seems failure.

God doesn't create us crippled. He doesn't put us together with handicaps or with hang-ups. Sin does that. Sin corrupted the perfect

creation of God. But God sees us in the womb with these handicaps, and he gives us a place and the grace to use them creatively and constructively for his kingdom. How well have we used our opportunities? Have we wallowed in self-pity or proclaimed the glory of God? Have we fixed blame or fixed the problem?

Facing the future

When you face the future, what do you see? Do you look at it with eyes of doubt or cynicism? With eyes that expect the worst? Or do you face the future expecting God to be with you and his mercy to follow you all the days of your life?

Do we have any reason to fear the future? No! As we listen to the Lord's word of salvation, we can face the closing year without guilt and depression. As we listen to the good news of Jesus, we can face the coming year without fear. Rejoice in the salvation in your past, live for Christ in your present, and do not worry about the future. In this way, Christians close out a year and begin a new one in Jesus.

It is amazing how much better life gets when you stop to look for God's goodness and mercy in every experience and listen to his promises.

It'll change your life.

John Eich is pastor at Good Shepherd, Alma/St. Louis, Michigan.

