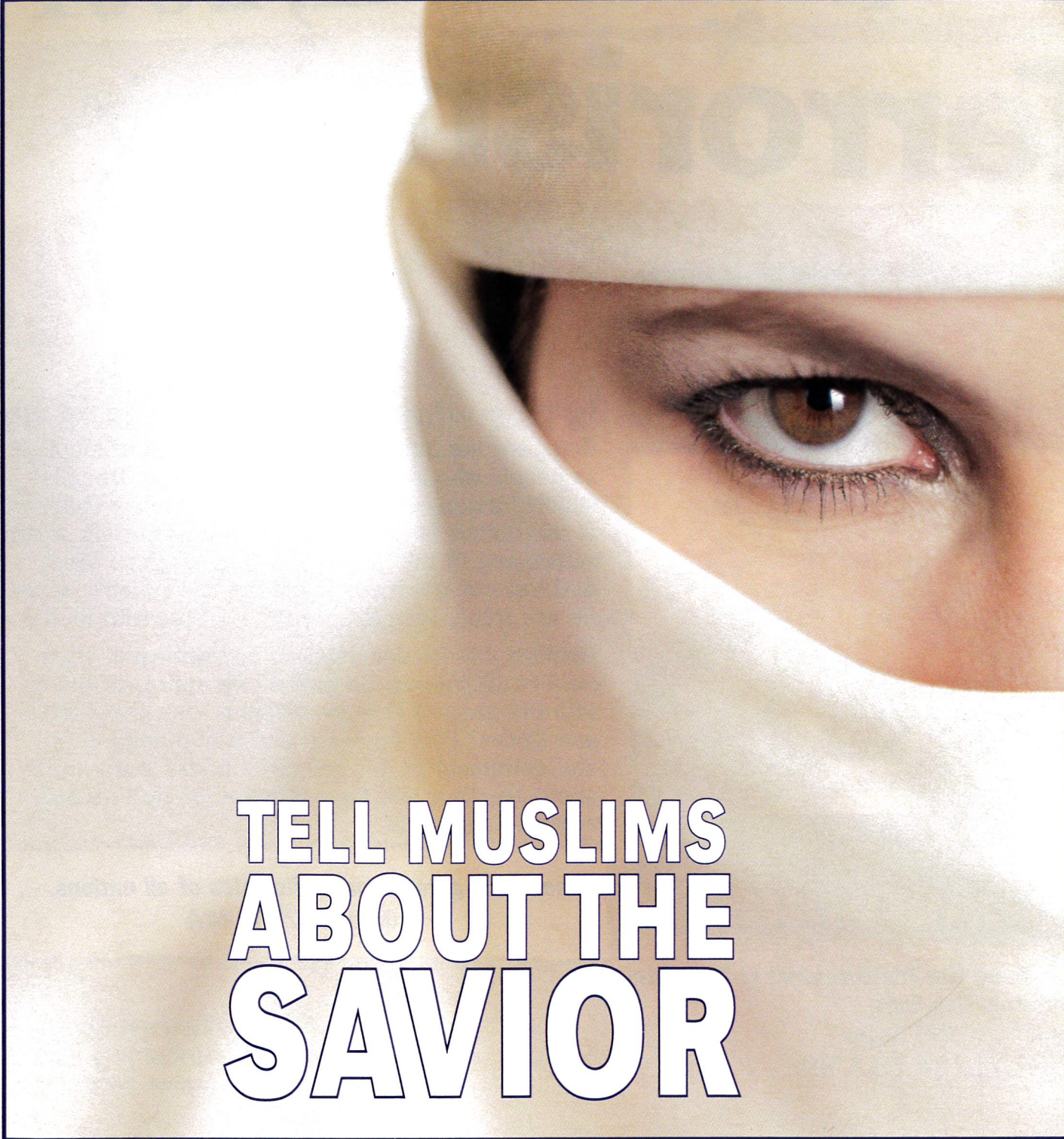


TERMINALLY SINGLE • WHERE'S YOUR CATECHISM? • HURRICANES

OCTOBER 2004

Forward in Christ

God's wisdom, WELS' witness



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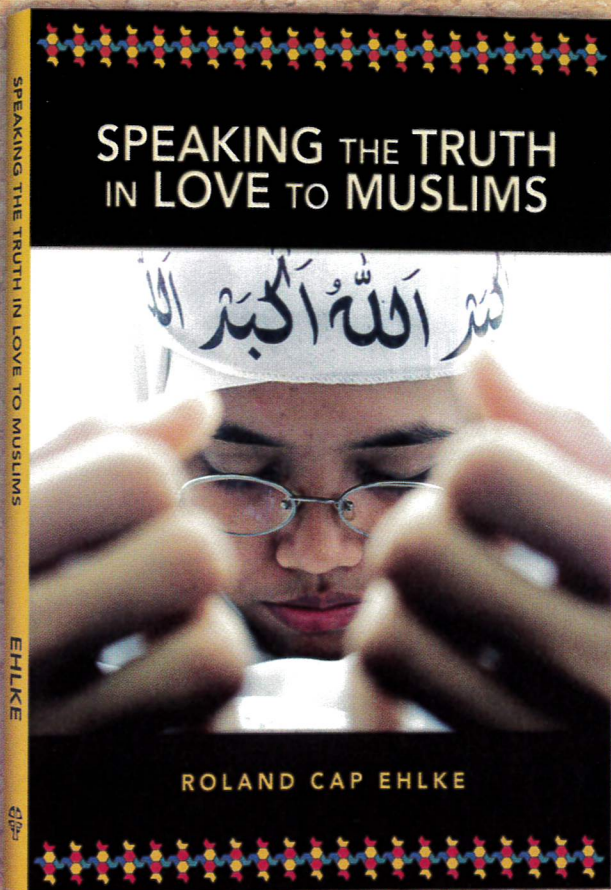
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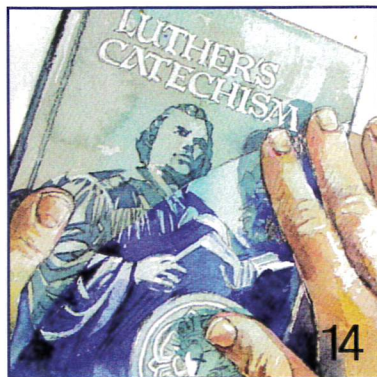
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“Muslims need to hear both the law and the gospel.”



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Forward in Christ

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NOR FORSAKE US.
1 Kings 8:57

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OCTOBER

WHAT'S INSIDE *by Nicole Balza*

Reaching out to Muslims. It's not something I've thought much about. I don't run into many Muslims in my day-to-day life.

Then again, maybe I do. I grocery shop at a large store where I often run into women wearing scarves to cover their heads—a common Muslim practice. My husband goes to school with many foreign students, a number of whom are practicing Muslims.

So, I guess I can't use that excuse any more. I do know Muslims, which means I do need to know how to tell them about their Savior. Until I read Cap Ehlke's book, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Muslims*, I was clueless. Ehlke's book has given me more confidence. Now I understand why Muslim women wear headscarves. I understand how Islam started and what motivates Muslims to serve Allah. There's so much more to learn, but it's a start.

I hope the articles about Islam that we've been printing have also been a start as you consider how to reach the Muslims in your life. This month's article by Ehlke (p. 10) gives a quick summary of how to share God's law and gospel with Muslims. Read it and reflect on what opportunities you may have to put your new knowledge to use so that you may see the Muslims in your life in heaven.

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Nothing else matters! *Peter A. Panitzke*

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ISLAM

Re: Roland C. Ehlke's article on Islam, "The rising crescent" [Aug.]. Unless we adopt higher standards of morality, Islam will continue to grow, and we Christians will continue to face ridicule because the lack of morality in the United States does affect us Christians.

*Daniel Wortman
Rhineland, Wisconsin*

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

The July *Forward in Christ* article "When Christ's grace moves hearts" offered a strange definition of confession and absolution. Wayne Laitinen refers to Christians "who daily say 'no' to themselves and 'yes' to Christ in confession and absolution." One gets the impression that confession is our saying "no" to ourselves and that absolution is our saying "yes" to Christ.

Our Lord moves us to repent of our sin, that is, to have a change of heart or say "no" to ourselves. He summons us to confess our sin and promises to forgive us. Absolution is the proclamation of forgiveness to the penitent. It is the voice of Christ, usually spoken by a pastor, declaring, "I forgive you . . ." Absolution is the voice of Christ applying his death and resurrection to the sinner and returning the penitent to his baptismal covenant, i.e., ". . . in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Absolution is Christ pronouncing forgiveness to me, not me saying "yes" to him.

*Thomas E. Schroeder
Novi, Michigan*

In the quoted sentence, if we understand "in" to mean "in connection with," it can remove the misunderstanding. In repentance, we turn from our sins and turn to Christ, "no" and "yes." That happens in confession and absolution.—ed.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

The letter about capital punishment in the August "Feedback" reveals the writer's heart for the lost, but it does so at the expense of a correct understanding of the functions of what Luther called God's left hand and his right hand. With his right hand God rules in his church (with the means of grace), while with his left hand he rules in his world (with the law).

The writer takes issue with the fact that Richard Gurgel bases "his endorsement of capital punishment on the section in Romans about government 'bearing the sword.'" He goes on to say, "The problem I have with that is that that passage of Scripture is a word of law."

But that shouldn't be a problem if one understands correctly that according to God's arrangement, the government uses the law, not the gospel, to carry out its God-given responsibility. It is the church's responsibility to see to it that a condemned person hears the gospel, not the state's.

*Joel C. Gerlach
Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

In other correspondence, the author of that letter, Phil Merten, explains that he is not denying the government's right to exercise capital punishment, but is asking whether a Christian moved by the gospel will always want the government to use that right.—ed.

FRIEND IN HEAVEN

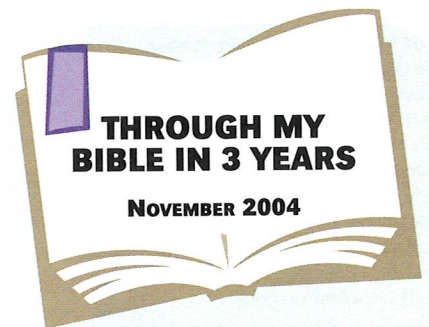
Some readers were concerned that Becky Favorite's article, "When someone is gone" [Aug.], did not give a sure testimony of her friend, Lisa's, faith. The editorial staff should have made it clear that both Becky and Lisa attended Emanuel Lutheran Church and School in New London, Wis. Lisa was a bap-

tized child of God. She worshiped with her family regularly and actively lived her faith, which is why Becky could confidently write that Lisa will be "waiting in heaven" for her. We apologize for the confusion.—ed.

CORRECTION

Martin Luther College graduate Lisa Storicks was incorrectly identified as a graduate of the Seminary Certification Program in the August issue (p. 26). Storicks actually received a bachelor of science in education with a staff ministry emphasis.

Send your letters to "Feedback," *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@sab.wels.net. Letters between 100 and 250 words are preferred. Include full name and address. Letters are edited for clarity, conciseness, and relevance. Not all letters received can be acknowledged or used. Writers' views are not necessarily those of WELS or *Forward in Christ*.



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| 1. 2 Chronicles 25 | 16. Ecc. 3:1-4:8 |
| 2. 2 Chron. 26-28 | 17. Ecc. 4:9-6:12 |
| 3. 2 Chron. 29:1-31:1 | 18. Ecc. 7, 8 |
| 4. 2 Chron. 31:2-32:33 | 19. Ecc. 9:1-10:7 |
| 5. 2 Chron. 33 | 20. Ecc. 10:8-11:8 |
| 6. 2 Chron. 34, 35 | 21. Ecc. 11:9-12:14 |
| 7. 2 Chron. 36 | 22. Song of Solomon 1:1-27 |
| 8. Esther 1 | 23. Sg. Sol. 2:8-3:5 |
| 9. Es. 2:1-18 | 24. Sg. Sol. 3:6-5:1 |
| 10. Es. 2:19-3:15 | 25. Sg. Sol. 5:2-6:3 |
| 11. Es. 4 | 26. Sg. Sol. 6:4-8:4 |
| 12. Es. 5, 6 | 27. Sg. Sol. 8:5-14 |
| 13. Es. 7, 8 | 28. 2 Peter 1:1-11 |
| 14. Es. 9, 10 | 29. 2 Pet. 1:12-21 |
| 15. Ecclesiastes 1, 2 | 30. 2 Pet. 2 |

Nothing else matters!

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Galatians 6:14

Peter A. Panitzke

Martin Luther made some questionable career choices. He had received his Master of Arts degree from the University of Erfurt. He had just begun studying law. The peasant's son would soon become a prosperous lawyer. Then he gave it all up to become a monk.

Luther prospered in his new "career." Within two years he became a priest. Just five years later he received his doctorate. He was teaching theology at the University of Wittenberg. Then he put this new career in jeopardy. He not only requested to debate the issue of indulgences, but later refused to recant his position.

The cross mattered to Luther

Luther made those choices because nothing else mattered to him except having a right relationship with his Creator. First he sought that right relationship in the monastery. Shut out from the world's temptations, he hoped to perfect himself. But the more he sought the perfection that God demanded, the more convinced he was that it was hopeless. No matter how much he gave up, no matter what service he offered, no matter how harshly he treated his body, he recognized that the action was motivated by a selfish desire to curry God's favor. It was impossible for him to love God with all his heart.

But as he studied the Bible to teach his students, he came to understand the cross of Christ. The cross was Luther's entrance into a right relationship with God. His imperfection brought down God's wrath.

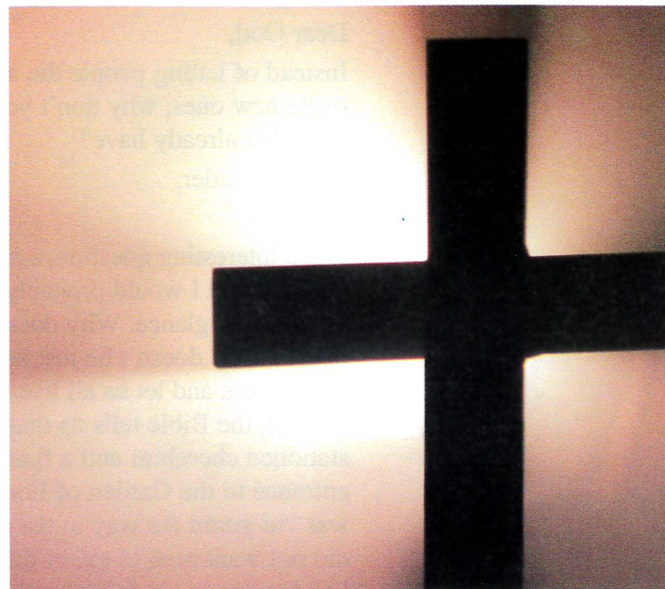
In the cross Christ took that wrath upon himself. In the cross God saw Luther as perfectly forgiven.

With this understanding, nothing else mattered to Luther except the cross. The world was crucified to him. Nothing could compare to knowing Christ and his forgiveness. No risk or sacrifice was too great to teach this good news to others. And Luther was crucified to the world. Many thought he was courting death by his refusal to recant.

Does the cross matter to you?

Nothing else matters except the cross of Christ. Is that also true of you as an heir of the Lutheran Reformation? It is when, through the study of God's Word and your own life, you agree with Luther that we are unable to love God as he demands. Others may praise our activities in the church. They may compliment us at work. But they cannot look into our hearts and see the selfishness and the pride. God can. These outward activities cannot give us a right relationship with God. When it comes to being right with God, nothing else matters except the cross of Christ.

Because nothing else mattered except the cross of Christ, Luther risked everything on earth. Because he did, you and I now understand the cross. Is that also true of you, as an heir of the Reformation? Are you ready to risk your financial future as Luther did? Are you willing to risk



your good name, your family, even your life?

May the world be crucified to us. It offers us nothing compared to the cross. May we sacrifice ourselves for the world so that more might know that they are forgiven, perfect in God's sight, for the sake of the cross.

Nothing else matters except the cross of Christ. It was true of Luther. By God's grace it is also true for us.

Contributing editor Peter Panitzke is pastor at St. Paul, Muskego, Wisconsin.

Living forever through Jesus

Douglas J. Engelbrecht

Some little children were asked to write a letter to God. One of the more interesting letters went like this:

Dear God,

Instead of letting people die and having to make new ones, why don't you keep the ones you already have?

Second-grader,
Jason W.

An interesting question, isn't it? It's a concept that you and I would probably agree with—at least at first glance. Why does God allow people to die? Why doesn't he just keep the ones he already has and let us all live forever?

Well, the Bible tells us that one reason God stationed cherubim and a flaming sword at the entrance to the Garden of Eden after the Fall was "to guard the way to the tree of life." God did not want man to eat of that tree of life and live forever in his fallen state.

Think about it for a second. When we are young, we probably think that we would like to live forever and often act as if we will. But ask someone who is advancing in years and feels the results of sin in his body and in his life, and you shouldn't be surprised to hear him say, "I am ready to go." The existence of sin in the world brings with it sorrow, sickness, and pain—and the end result, death. Who would want to live forever and see no end to the troubles and pains?

So God, in his mercy, lets us die. But death is not God's ultimate purpose for us. In love and mercy God has created a plan to allow us to shed our mortal, sin-filled bodies and be made new again through the resurrection. That plan revolves around Christ. Jesus, the Christ of God, conquered sin and death by his death on the cross. By the power of the Holy Spirit he was raised to life with a glorious body. Believers in Christ follow him also into death so that they, too, might be raised again some day with a

body that is glorious, free from sin and the power of death.

As the apostle Paul pointed out in 1 Corinthians 15, the great resurrection chapter, "What you sow does not come to life unless it dies" (verse 36). We must die and be put into the ground in order to be raised a new creature, free from all the effects of sin. When that happens, God will allow us to eat of the tree of life and live forever, as John tells us in the book of Revelation.

But that resurrection to eternal life and that new body will not happen automatically to all who die. The Bible tells us that "whosoever believeth in [Jesus] shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life" (John 3:16, KJV). Only those who cling to Christ as their Savior will experience eternal life with a body free from sin and death. Those who reject him will also rise again, but with a body that is still captive

to sickness, sorrow, and pain—death will never come to end their misery! Praise God that we have been called to faith in Christ! Though we all will have to face temporal

death, we who are Christians can look forward to an eternal life in heaven with a glorious body like our Lord's, free from sin, sickness, sorrow, and eternal death.

So God, in mercy, does not just "keep the ones he already has," as that little second-grader proposed, but allows them to die so that they might shed their sinful body and rise with a glorious body and live forever with the Lord. Truly, as the Bible says, "He has done everything well!" (Mark 7:37).

Death is not God's ultimate purpose for us.

Contributing editor Doug Engelbrecht is pastor at Trinity, Neenah, Wisconsin.



at the foot of the cross. Richard L. Gurgel

TOPIC: Our bodies in heaven

On the Last Day, when we are reunited with our souls, will we have a body with flesh and bones?

Some words in 1 Corinthians 15:50 might lead Christians to wonder whether the answer is “No”: “I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” At first reading, this passage might seem to indicate that we won’t have flesh and bones in heaven.

But that misunderstands Paul and ignores other Scripture passages. Consider Job’s beautiful confession in the midst of suffering: “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:25-27). Job takes comfort that his own flesh rises so that his own eyes will see his Redeemer.

Consider Jesus’ words in John 5:28,29: “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out.” What goes into the grave comes out of the grave.

So what’s Paul saying in 1 Corinthians 15? Paul isn’t denying that our present bodies rise from the grave, but he emphasizes that a wondrous change occurs. Our bodies rise—but they’re better.

In verses 42-44 we see his point most clearly: “So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.” All that is true about our bodies in this sin-filled world—subject to death, slowly wearing out, housing our old Adam—will be changed. That’s the key difference between “a natural body” as we know it in this sinful

world, and “a spiritual body” as we will know it in heaven. They’re still our bodies. Otherwise, what rises from the grave would be another, and not, as Job said, “I myself.” But these bodies are glorified.

Compare this to what we know about our Savior’s body after his resurrection. It was clearly his same body. He still had flesh and bones (Luke 24:39) when he stepped out of the grave. Even the marks of nail and spear—glorious marks of victory—were evident to his disciples.

But that body was also glorified. Paul reminds us that, having died and risen, Christ “cannot die again, death no longer has mastery over him” (Romans 6:9). All that he once in his body willingly submitted to—pain, suffering, death—is gone. He still possessed a body of flesh and bones, but that body was glorified as our Savior stepped out of his grave.

So it will be for us on the Last Day. All that sin inflicted upon our physical bodies will, in an instant, be removed. Paul draws this same comparison: “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Philippians 3:20,21).

Certainly all this means for us goes beyond our understanding now. Yet, as we consider what our gracious Savior will do for us on that Last Day, don’t our hearts join Job in yearning within us?

Contributing editor Richard Gurgel, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Calvary, Thiensville.

Have a question? Send it to “Q & A,” *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@sab.wels.net. Look online at www.wels.net, jumpword “qa,” for more questions and answers.

WITNESSING

Can Muslims be won to Christ? It is often assumed that Muslims simply cannot change. There are too many obstacles: the ingrained idea that their revelation is newer and truer, the pressures of family and society, and the fear of physical retaliation if they convert. Yet, in spite of the difficulties, Muslims do come to know Christ. The Holy Spirit is able to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Proclaiming the law and the gospel

Witnessing to Muslims includes lovingly speaking both the law and the gospel, the two great doctrines that run through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

The law declares what God's will is. It includes divine commands—the things we are to do or not do, in thought, word, and deed. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declares: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). God's law demands perfection. But the law does more than demand perfection. It also sets forth the wages of breaking it—"the judgment," eternal separation from God.

Nowhere does the Bible say that good intentions are sufficient. "I did my best" is not enough. That is where the gospel comes in. The word gospel comes from the Middle English word *godspel*, a term that means good spell, good story, or good news. It is the same as the Greek word *euangelion*, *evangel*, which means the good message.

What is the good news? It's simply that what we cannot do for ourselves, God has done for us. Jesus summed up the gospel when he said, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Just as the law shows us what we are supposed to do and fail to do (it shows our sin), the gospel shows what God has done for us—sent his Son for our salvation (it shows our Savior).

The Holy Spirit is able to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles when we share the law and the gospel with Muslims.

Roland Cap Ehlike

TO MUSLIMS

In the gospel, there are no demands, threats, or words of judgment. It is pure grace, undeserved love. “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,” says Jesus, “and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

This is the same gospel that Paul exulted in “because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). Believing is nothing more than taking what God freely offers—forgiveness, peace with God, the joy of salvation, and everlasting life.

Witnessing to Muslims includes lovingly speaking both the law and the gospel.

Muslims, like all of us, need to hear both the law and the gospel. Without the law, we do not see how sinful we are and how much we need a Savior. Without the gospel, we are left in the hopeless condition of pleasing the holy God with flawed and utterly insufficient human efforts. The gospel without the law brings indifference. The law without the gospel breeds either despair or a self-deceptive self-righteousness that fools no one, least of all the omniscient God who knows our every thought and deed.

Islam has a law. It is a religion of countless rules governing every

aspect of life from what people can eat and drink to how they are to bow down, which direction to face, and just what to say when praying. But Islam doesn't know the gospel. Driven by the law, the most devout Muslims will go to unbelievable lengths—including self-destruction in a holy war or jihad—in hopes of pleasing Allah, that distant god who has given a book, the Qur'an, but nothing of himself. There is a better way. That is to share the love of Jesus.

Proclaiming Christ

Only God knows how ready some Muslims may be for the gospel. Although distorted and confused, they do have some knowledge of Jesus. For instance, the Qur'an teaches that Jesus raised the dead, providing a segue for the biblical truth that Jesus himself rose from the dead.

It is possible that some readers of this article have never met a Muslim. With the number of Muslims at six million and growing in North America, that is not likely to be the case a few years from now. The Bible has a wonderful message for Muslims—namely, that salvation does not depend on our good works. Rather, salvation comes as a free gift, through Christ alone. In the words of Peter: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Even if we do not now have the opportunity to witness, we can pray. Matthew's gospel beautifully reminds us of the call to prayer: “When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disci-

ples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field’ ” (9:36-38).

Some dos and don'ts

Here are some practical tips for reaching out to Muslims.

TEN DOS:

1. Do know what the Bible teaches. Being well grounded in the faith is essential.
2. Do respect Muslims as people for whom Jesus died. The Bible says that “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19).
3. Do show sincere respect and friendship to Muslims.
4. Do listen to their real needs.
5. Do ask questions.
6. Do focus the conversation on Jesus Christ. Use the Word of God.
7. Do give literature about Jesus and the Bible.
8. Do invite a Muslim friend to a church service or some function at church.
9. Do become well informed about Islam. Books about missionaries to Muslims or Muslim converts to Christ are especially inspiring.
10. Do be available. We may not appreciate what a tremendous step it is for Muslims to convert. Even in North America, they face ostracism from their families, and, especially in the case of Muslims from the Middle East, they live with the fear of physical reprisal and even death.

continued on p. 12

10. Do pray that the Muslim heart may be softened for the gospel. “Whatever good may be done is done and brought about by prayer,” wrote Luther, “which is the omnipotent empress. In human affairs we accomplish everything through prayer” (*What Luther Says* 2:3497).

TEN DON'TS:

- 1.** Don't treat the Qur'an disrespectfully. It is one thing to disagree with the teachings of Islam, another to ridicule them.
- 2.** Don't treat the Bible disrespectfully, by placing it on the floor, for example. Above all, don't undermine the Bible by ungodly living. Remember that being a Christian means living by the Word as well as talking about it.
- 3.** Don't get into a battle of the books—the Qur'an versus the Bible. Let the Bible speak for itself. The straightforward assertions of the Bible are powerful, and through them the Holy Spirit works.
- 4.** Don't make assumptions about what the Muslim believes. Ask him or her.
- 5.** Don't attack the name Allah as a false god. This is a touchy issue, since many Arabic-speaking Christians use the name Allah to refer to the God of the Bible. At the same time, some scholars point out that the very name Allah is related to the pagan moon god of pre-Islamic Arabia.
- 6.** Don't attack Islam, Muhammad, or the Qur'an. Light candles instead of cursing the darkness. Depending on their relationship to Islam, some Muslims may themselves be critical of the faith and ready to hear the other side.
- 7.** Don't be insulting. It would be foolish, for example, to invite a practicing Muslim over for a pork dinner and wine, since Islam forbids these foods.

- 8.** Don't witness alone to a person of the opposite sex.
- 9.** Don't give up. St. Augustine's mother prayed and witnessed for over a dozen years before her son became a Christian, and he became one of the great theologians of all time.
- 10.** Don't be afraid. It can be intimidating to share our faith—both for us and the other person(s) involved. Paul writes, “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7). Various books on witnessing to Muslims offer a variety of approaches. One is that we begin with Christ in the Qur'an. In spite of its vociferous denials of the divinity and substitutionary death of Christ, in many ways the Qur'an speaks more highly of Christ than of Muhammad. Look up the Qur'an's passages dealing with Christ (some editions have indexes in the back) and use them as links to the truth of the Bible.

Muslims meet Christ

Sin keeps people from being close to God. The Qur'an even urges Muhammad, “Ask forgiveness of thy sin” (Sura 40:55). Yet nowhere does it mention sin in connection with Jesus. When all is said and done, the Qur'an has nothing to offer but a fallible prophet who lies buried in Arabia. The Bible presents a sinless Savior, who has offered

WORLD'S FASTEST GROWING RELIGION

Islam's annual growth rate of 2.15 percent exceeds Christianity's rate of 1.45 percent. Nevertheless, 96 percent of Islam's growth is biological, attributable to children born into Muslim families. Islam is flourishing in parts of the world where population growth is high. Where Christianity has its traditional base, population growth is slow or has come to a standstill. Consequently, overall trends show Islam growing faster than Christianity.

There is, however, a significant contrast in conversion growth. According to the 2000 edition of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, each year some 950,000 people convert to Islam from other religions. Christianity sees some 2.7 million each year shift their affiliation to Christianity.

(“Muslims tell ‘Why I Chose Jesus,’ ” *Mission Frontiers*, J. Dudley Woodberry and Russell G. Shubin)

his life on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of the world and who has conquered death. The medieval cleric Riccoldo da Montecroce wrote long ago, “The fact is: Christ lives, Muhammad is dead. A living advocate is better than a dead one.”

Jesus Christ is our Advocate, whose blood washes away our sins: “The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin” (1 John 1:7). Through the Word of God, the Holy Spirit brings us to saving faith. “Through faith in Christ Jesus,” we are now God's children (Galatians 3:28), who can approach our heavenly Father in confidence and joy.

This is a faith worth sharing. A friend of mine, a former Muslim from Iraq, says it most eloquently, “Allah calls on Muslims to sacrifice their sons so that they can go to paradise. God sacrificed his Son so that we can go to heaven.”

Roland Cap Ehlke is a member of Gloria Dei-Bethesda, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Ehlke teaches the “World of Islam” course at Concordia University, Mequon, Wisconsin.

This is the last of a three-part series on Islam. To read the first two articles, go to www.wels.net, jumpword “ficarchive.” Search the keyword “Islam.”

*To learn more about reaching out to Muslims, read Ehlke's book, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Muslims* (#12-1784). Order it from Northwestern Publishing House, www.nph.net or 800-662-6022.*

The miracles of our time

God has been using molecular scientists to uncover a level of complexity in cellular systems that is so stunning it shouts out in testimony to a supernatural creation.

Sandra Gade

In the not too distant future, people will remember evolution as a religion on life's origin that lost favor in the 21st century.

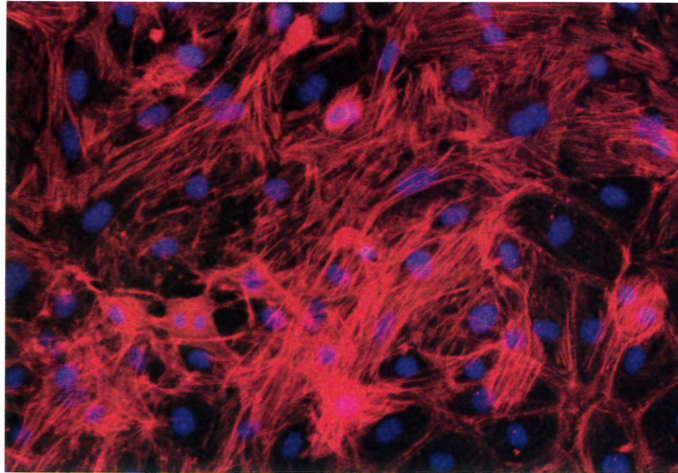
"Not likely!" you say, since this militant form of atheism is presently so pervasive in our society. But that very pervasiveness may be causing our Lord to say, "Enough of that!"

The way he is doing that is by revealing the mysteries of cellular life to humankind. He has been using molecular scientists, many of whom are atheists, to gradually uncover a level of complexity in cellular systems that is so stunning it shouts out in testimony to a supernatural creation.

Witnessing the miracles of cellular life

Scientists have been completely stifled in their attempts to explain the existence of cellular systems, such as the making of proteins, the facilitation of virtually all biochemical reactions by enzymes, the signaling of cells by hormones and neurons, the precise replication of DNA during cell division, and the transport of materials within cells by conveyances with protein motors. The explanatory power of science is limited to the natural laws, and something far beyond them is needed to account for the existence of these systems in cellular life.

Every entity in cells, whether it's a single molecule or a system of molecules, is carefully crafted to perform a specific task. Then these individual entities, which number in the thou-



sands, cooperatively combine their tasks for a definite purpose, such as making a particular protein or signaling a big toe to wiggle.

I believe that the systems of cellular life provide the strongest objective evidence that God exists and that he is the creator of the universe and everything in it. This evidence is so strong, in fact, that as we examine it, it becomes clear that we are looking at miracles—the miracles of our time.

Sharing the miracles with others

What should we do with these recent revelations that testify to a miraculous origin? Shout them from the roof tops! Proclaim them in the square! Just as God used miracles in Old Testament and New Testament times to further his kingdom, so should we with the miracles of our time. Make them known to everyone just as was done with miracles of the past. Miracles were performed in public so that all could benefit from their testimony that God existed and was active in the world. Believers and unbelievers, poor and wealthy, wise and foolish, learned and unlearned, young and old were all witnesses of

past miracles as they should be of the miracles of our time.

But how do we make these miracles known to everyone? Most people will not get much, except possibly a headache, from studying formidable textbooks on biochemistry or the molecular biology of the cell. Many books exist on the evolution/creation

controversy but hardly any with the primary purpose of explaining the complexity of cellular systems. Therefore, synods and publishers of Christian books must cooperate to fill the void, making educational materials available that target pastors, lay leaders, parents, and our youth. If this were to happen, Christians all over the nation would have the conviction, based on their own knowledge, that evolution is foolishness. As a result, its corrosive influence in our public schools, colleges, the courts, and the public media may be greatly reduced and eventually eliminated.

As more Christians learn the truth about the complexity of cellular life, evolution will be exposed for what it is, unbelievable dogma masquerading as science. That is exactly what we need if in the not-too-distant future, evolution is to be remembered as a minor religion that flourished briefly but vanished in the 21st century.

Dr. Sandra Gade, a retired professor of physics, is a member at Bethlehem, Oshkosh, Wisconsin.



Where's my CATECHISM?

It's time to dig out my catechism, not because it reveals something new, but because it summarizes God's timeless truths.

Richard E. Lauersdorf

On the hospital bedside stand were the usual box of tissues and container of ice water. Next to them was a Bible with Luther's Small Catechism resting on top. When the patient noticed my eyes on her catechism, she explained, "Last week when I couldn't sleep, I pulled out my catechism after all these years and starting reading it again. And it brought back so much."

Where's my catechism? In my youth it was my instruction book. Pastors used it to teach me. Parents

drilled me in memorizing it. On my confirmation day I repeated words from it to witness to and confess my faith. But where's my catechism now? In this 475th anniversary year of Luther's Small Catechism, might it be time to dig out that little volume, reread the precious truths it summarizes, and thank God for what those truths mean to us?

Concise summary

Luther didn't write the catechism as a replacement for Scripture. His

aim was not to add "vitamin enrichment" or "calcium supplement" to God's all-sufficient Word. Rather, in simple language, he summarized the truths of God's Word so that people might learn them, lean on them, and live them. In his catechism Luther presents what it means to see God's amazing love in the face of his Son sent from heaven. To behold how the Savior fulfilled God's law with his holy life and fully paid for the world's sins with his innocent death.

To marvel how he sends his Spirit through Word and sacrament to create and continue faith in our hearts. To learn that we can talk to our dear Father, appreciate his will for our lives, and dedicate our lives to his service.

No wonder Luther wrote, “The Catechism is the Bible of the laymen. In it the entire body of Christian doctrine, which every Christian must know in order to be saved, is contained. . . . Therefore we should by all means love and esteem the Catechism and diligently impress it upon youth; for in it the correct, true, ancient, pure divine doctrine of the holy Christian Church is summarized” (*What Luther Says* 1:359).

Luther placed his catechism where that hospital patient had—resting on top of the Word!

Christ-centered message

Ever notice how positive the catechism is? There’s no hint of the religious storms swirling around Luther at that time. Instead, with positive language Luther centered on golden nuggets mined from the depths of God’s Word. What could be more positive or more precious than the news of our salvation in Christ Jesus? To this day we have no more clear, concise, comforting summary of our salvation than Luther’s words explaining the Second Article.

“He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil,” we confess with joy.

This he did “not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death,” we continue with gratitude.

“All this he did,” we conclude, “that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as

he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally.”

Where’s my catechism? In it I find the story of my salvation summarized so beautifully. Like the Bible, this little book was written “to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15).

Where’s my catechism? In it I find the story of my salvation summarized so beautifully.

Authentic answers

We live in an age of more questions than answers. Truth is to be found in the eye of the beholder. Life is to be lived according to one’s own personal values. Needed like never before are God’s clear instructions of what his children should believe and the way they should go. For example, the Reformer presents God’s commandments not as so many prohibitive “dos and don’ts,” but as the framework for his rich blessings on our lives. Luther also reminds us why we want to walk in this delightful road. It’s because we “fear and love God,” revering him above all and showing our responsive love by walking in his ways.

So where’s my catechism? Do I want a “lamp for my feet” and a “light for my path”? Do I want my children to lead God-pleasing lives? Do I want answers for those who ask about the hope that is in me? Do I want the truth and nothing but the truth? Then it’s time to reach again

for my catechism, not because it reveals something new, but because it rests on top of God’s Word.

Priceless comfort

Sometimes biblical truths are clearer when viewed through tear-streaked eyes. At such times, as for that critically-ill Christian in the hospital, Luther’s words take on new meaning. Take, for example, his words explaining the Seventh Petition of the Lord’s Prayer.

“We pray in this petition,” he wrote, “that our Father in heaven would deliver us from every evil that threatens body and soul, property and reputation, and finally when our last hour comes, grant us a blessed end and graciously take us from this world of sorrow to himself in heaven.”

Sentences like these learned in our youth are precious truths to hold in our aging hands of faith. They offer priceless comfort to us, since we know that the words are true because they rest on the promises of God’s unchanging Word.

Others have described Luther’s precious little book as “the Bible of the laymen” or “the Gem of the Reformation.” I prefer to call it “my catechism.” Never will I outgrow my need for it. Never can I learn too much from it.

One day when Luther asked his son how much he knew, Hans answered, “The whole Catechism, Papa, because I know it by heart.”

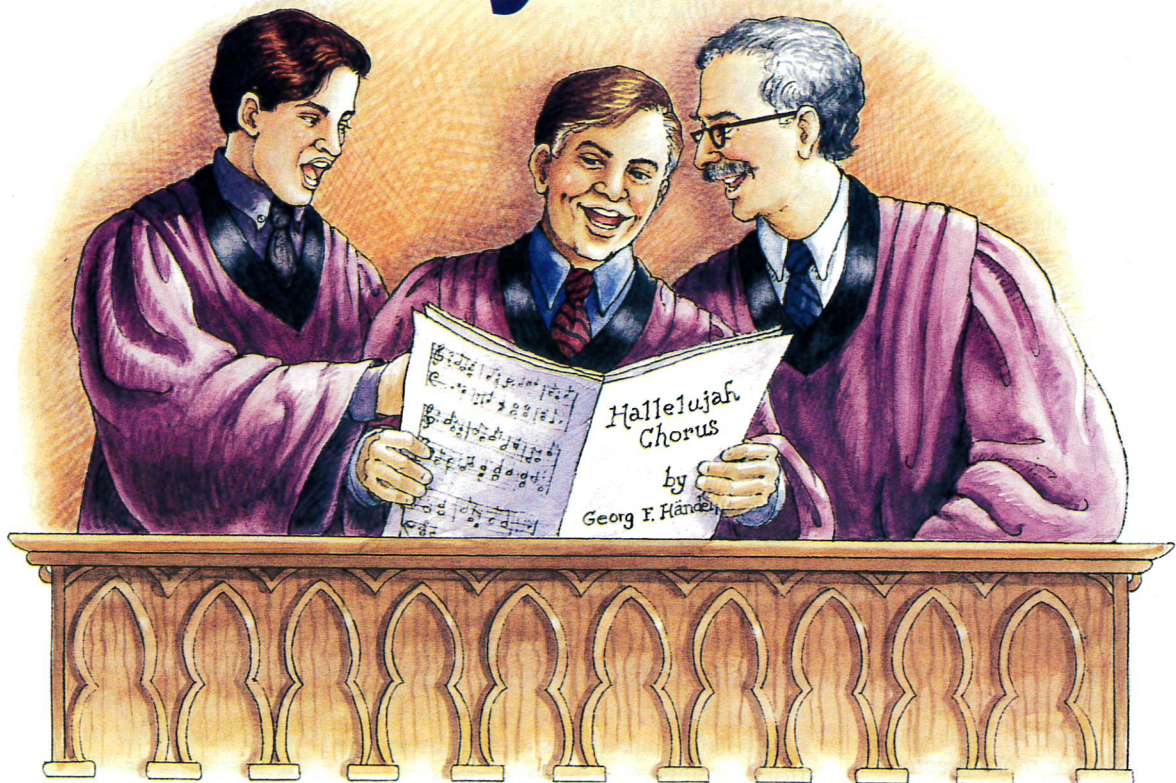
“Is that so?” Luther replied, “I have to study it every day.”

Can I do anything less?

Thank God for giving me this gift through his Reformer, Martin Luther.

Richard Lauersdorf serves as a visitation pastor at Good Shepherd, West Bend, Wisconsin. He has written many books, including As Luther Taught the Word of Truth, a book of devotions on the Small Catechism.

BUILDING UP the body of Christ



Just as I was enabled to glorify God by singing the “Hallelujah Chorus” through three gifted tenors, congregations with less experience in evangelism and missions will be empowered to work in ways they have only dreamed about before.

Donald W. Patterson

Something wonderful happened to me last Easter. I got to sing the “Hallelujah Chorus” with our church choir at the conclusion of our Festival Service.


You might say, “Big deal.” But it was a big deal for me. You see, in fifth grade I was sent back to home-room from music class because the teacher said I didn’t belong there. From that day forward I figured that I was not made to read or sing music. For the next 29 years I suc-

cessfully avoided anyone’s attempt to teach me. Until just a few years ago, I didn’t even know that there were four parts that could be sung for most hymns. I thought everyone was singing the melody line.

Even so, when our choir director said she wanted to sing the “Hallelujah Chorus” this past year, I longed to join them. All of my life I have quietly sung along as choirs raised the roof with “and he shall reign forever and ever!” It is one of my all-time favorites

because it is so worshipful and Christ-centered.

I still don’t know how to read music. I couldn’t tell you the difference between a measure and an octave. But there I was this Easter, singing the tenor line in four-part harmony with the rest of the choir. How could that be? Well, one of the tenors, a dear friend of mine and principal of our school, took my copy of the song and, with a yellow highlighter, colored the tenor part



throughout the entire song. With his help I could follow the yellow brick road as we sang. Another tenor who faithfully stood beside me would lean over and sing into my ear when he heard me straying off toward the basses. Still another tenor would always point to the place where we were to pause for a second longer before jumping back in.

On Easter Sunday I sang the tenor part with other tenors in a large choir that sent praises reverberating throughout our new sanctuary to the glory of God and fulfilled a lifelong dream—all because other people in the body of Christ walked lock step with me every inch of the way. I now have more confidence that in time I will be able to read music well and serve my Savior in song more often.

Equipping our members to reach out

What I experienced this Easter with choir music, Jesus wants all of his people to experience throughout their lives in Christian ministry. Jesus wants his body to be joined and held together by every supporting ligament as it grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work (Ephesians 4:16). God has arranged the parts of the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be . . . so that there will be no division in the body, but that its parts will have equal concern for each other (1 Corinthians 12:18,25).

Remember this when you start hearing about a new initiative in our church body geared toward equipping us to more aggressively reach North America with the gospel. Under the theme “Proclaim Peace through Jesus—Every Church a Mission!”, leaders throughout the entire synod will be encouraging and equipping every WELS congregation to reach its own mission field. Just as I was enabled to glorify God by singing the “Hallelujah Chorus” through three gifted tenors, congregations

with less experience in evangelism and missions are going to be empowered to work in ways they have only dreamed about before—that is, if they will let themselves stand next to the “tenors” coming to walk together with them as they do ministry.

There is no “you and me” but only we in Christ.

Through the Board for Parish Services, each district leadership team is organizing to visit every congregation and help it evaluate its strengths and weaknesses in evangelism and mission work. Then the district and circuit leaders will try to find ways to connect more experienced “tenors” in outreach with those who want to reach the lost souls around their parish. By networking within the body of Christ we will help each other grow up into him, who is the head, as every part does its work.

Walking together as we reach the lost

Since we are a synod of churches and not just a loose collection of independent congregations, we really do belong to each other. Your church is my church, and my church is your church. How well you reach the lost is important to me and how well I reach them should be important to you too. There is no “you and me” but only we in Christ. We are all part of the same body.

As members of his body, the sooner we infiltrate each other’s lives with our voices of encouragement, our yellow markers of guidance, and our fingers pointing to the cross, the sooner we will feel ourselves getting stronger and better at reaching the lost. We will never

improve the gospel of peace that we share, but we can improve how we go about sharing it. Some people in WELS know how to read the music of mission work in four-part harmony. We need their help as much as I needed my friends’ help last Easter.

If you are reading this article and longing for your congregation to more effectively make disciples with Jesus’ peace, then ask your pastor about the new efforts for North American outreach that will be coming to your area. See if you can get in touch with the “tenors” who are waiting to help you and your church proclaim the peace we have in Jesus. If your desire to join the choir is there, the help is there too.

Last Easter when we finished singing the “Hallelujah Chorus,” our congregation broke out in joyous applause for the gift of salvation and the song that proclaimed it. The people who sang in the choir knew that on that holy day they had built up the church in a special way. As I looked at the happy and peaceful faces of our congregation’s members, I knew that at least one member of that chorus had received much more than he ever gave. The body of Christ had equipped him to serve beyond his ability.

With North American outreach, it is our prayer that every WELS congregation would experience the same gracious blessing as we express what it truly means to be a synod—walking together! Walk together with God’s gifted people and sing hallelujah in his resurrection joy! Not one WELS member needs to sit out of this chorus.

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

This is the last of a four-part series on “Peace through Jesus.” To read the first three articles, go to www.wels.net, jumpword “ficarchive,” and search by the keyword phrase “peace through Jesus.”

WHATEVER

True love

God gives us significant others to show us what his love is like.

Alex Truell

My friends and I disagree about whether a teenager is able to find true love. But none of us are well equipped to argue our sides. No one is really sure how to define love, and so it really comes down to each person's view.

I think that everyone on earth believes that they're in love after they first begin to care for someone else. Later on, the word "love" becomes almost feared, as if it brings in a commitment that shouldn't be touched on. Old folks say that young couples can't possibly be in love. Some folks think that everyone's in love. Each has different definitions for love. Our problem with the word "love" is we don't settle on one meaning for it.

Although love is hard to define, it can be identified. People have theories like, "Love is when all you think about is her" or "Love is when you run to her even when she's the problem." But these prove to be incomplete.

You see, everything God gives us in this world serves a purpose, and almost everything is a mirror of a truth of God. Take, for example, mountains. They show God's power and majesty. Or perhaps the water of baptism, mirroring the washing away of our sins. It's the same with love. God gives us significant others to show us, in the limited sense we humans can understand, what his love is like.

I never had trouble accepting that God was strong and powerful and, I guess to some extent, that he cared for me. But I wasn't able to find comfort in knowing that he loved me. What did that mean to me? My parents love me, but I don't always appreciate that bond. God, in his wisdom, grants love in other relationships, and this makes his love clearer to me.

"We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). How much clearer can it get that our love for one another grows out of God's love for us? Jesus' love for us can become clearer to us when we experience love in our own lives.

I believe that true love can be when you see God's love in your girl. When you're sad and God's love double-teams with hers to comfort you, you're experiencing it. When you differ on something but you still never doubt how much you care for one another, you see a reflection of how God deals with your sin without ever hating you. When you spend time with her and every moment is amazing, you can start to imagine how God's love will fill every moment of heaven.

Love is always talked about as a "feeling" for someone. But love is a state of being, a dedication to someone so strong that it will forgive all and help through every obstacle. When we emulate Christ in our relationships, we are truly reaching love as God intended it to be.

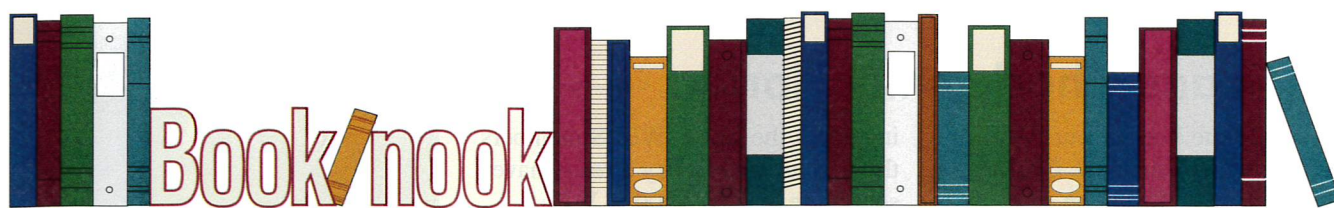
God opened my eyes to what love means when Scripture says, "God is love" (1 John 4:16). I believe that there's no peak to love. It will only get stronger and greater as time goes on. You'll never reach a plateau and say, "Now this is love." Love reaches its peak only in God. For us, it's about the journey. So, to say that a teen can't fall in love is ridiculous. Anyone can be on that journey.

God has a different plan for each of us. Age doesn't matter—not in his eyes. Why limit God? Who are we to say when he in his mercy can grant someone a preview of his love? I thank God every day that he's shown me the comfort available in the love of Christ, and I hope that no one is ever put down for believing that they're on this same trip.

Alex Truell, a 2004 graduate of Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fond du Lac, Wis., is now a freshman at the University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire. He is a member of Martin Luther, Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

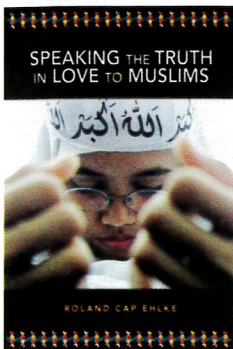


Christ



A look at new books published by Northwestern Publishing House. For more information, visit www.nph.net or call 800-662-6022. Note: These reviews are not meant to represent the opinions of WELS or Forward in Christ.

A foundation for understanding Islam



\$13.99

Speaking the Truth in Love to Muslims, written by Roland Cap Ehlke, takes the reader into one of the fastest-growing and currently most talked about religions in the world.

This is an excellent starter book for those who are interested in beginning their journey into the world of Islam. Modeled after *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons* by Mark J. Cares,

Starting with a brief history of the religion, moving into the customs and practices of Islam, and then finishing with a comparison between Christianity and Islam, Ehlke gives the reader a good foundation for understanding the Islam religion. Some of the strong points of the book center on history, customs, and how Muslims practice their religion. There is an excellent vocabulary section in the back of the book that helps the reader understand those words that are difficult.

Ehlke spends a lot of time giving the reader a solid footing in the Qur'an (the Muslim holy book), its author (Mohammed), contents, and

comparison with the Bible. One wishes that Ehlke shared more of his experience or other Christians' experiences in witnessing to our Muslim friends.

All in all, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Muslims* is an excellent resource for those who want to begin their studies of Islam. Pastors, teachers, students, and laypeople will all be able to put this book to use. As we become more of a global world, contact with our Muslim neighbors will increase. This book will help us in sharing the saving gospel message with them.

Jonathan Meier
Sure Foundation, Queens, New York

Obituaries

Wayne F. Wiechmann 1927-2004

Wayne Wiechmann was born Jan. 12, 1927. He died April 30, 2004, in Milwaukee, Wis.

A 1948 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he served at Trinity, Jenera, Ohio; and Trinity-Bethesda and Gloria-Dei Bethesda, Milwaukee, Wis.

He was preceded in death by one son and one daughter. He is survived by his wife, Esther; two sons; two daughters; 32 grandchildren; and nine great-grandchildren.

Kermit W. Biedenbender 1929-2004

Kermit Biedenbender was born Sept. 19, 1929, in Appleton, Wis. He died July 1, 2004.

A 1955 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Kenosha, Wis.; St. James, Tolstoy, S.D.; Zion, Akaska, S.D.; Our Shepherd, Warren, Mich.; St.

Matthew, Benton Harbor, Mich.; St. John, Sterling, Mich.; and Holy Cross, Standish, Mich.

He is survived by his wife, Carol; two sons; six daughters; 16 grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

Daniel E. Habeck 1932-2004

Daniel Habeck was born March 25, 1932, in Minocqua, Wis. He died July 3, 2004, in Oshkosh, Wis.

A 1957 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Grace, Muskegon Heights, Mich.; Zion, Toledo, Ohio; and Martin Luther, Oshkosh, Wis.

He was preceded in death by a grandson. He is survived by his wife, Carol; four daughters; five grandchildren; and three step-grandchildren.

Timothy J. Hunt 1962-2004

Timothy Hunt was born Dec. 29, 1962, in San Diego, Calif. He died

July 6, 2004, in Brillion, Wis.

A 1985 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he served at Peace, Otsego, Mich.; and Trinity, Brillion, Wis.

He was preceded in death by his father. He is survived by his wife, Cindy; his mother; one son; three daughters; and three brothers.

Ruth Glende 1912-2004

Ruth Glende (nee Lorenz) was born Dec. 2, 1912, in Waterville, Minn. She died July 11, 2004, in New Ulm, Minn.

A 1934 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she served at Bethlehem, Hortonville, and Bethany, Hustisford, Wis.; and St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn.

She is survived by her husband, Arthur; one son; two daughters; 12 grandchildren; and 24 great-grandchildren.

Hurricane Charley hits Florida

God spared the lives of our WELS members when Hurricane Charley hit west central Florida on Aug. 13, causing an estimated \$7 billion in insured damage. Some of our area WELS members' homes were damaged or destroyed.

The damage was evident when driving through the streets of Port Charlotte and Punta Gorda, some of the hardest hit areas. Homes totally destroyed, roofs peeled off buildings, trees bent in half, cars smashed. Electricity was out for more than a week, meaning no traffic lights, no refrigerators, no lights, and no air conditioning (in 90-degree temperatures).

But God uses "storms" to help Christians realize what's important.

"If you know that the Lord is going to watch over you, you can let go of everything else," says LeRoy Martin, pastor at Christ the King, Port Charlotte. "This really highlights how valuable your faith is."

Members gathered at Christ the King the Sunday after the hurricane to praise God and have their faith strengthened through his Word. They met outside, underneath the carport, because of roof and water damage to the church building. They consoled each other and talked about how Jesus calms the storms.

But these WELS members in Port Charlotte weren't the only ones talk-

ing about the storm. WELS members throughout the country already have sent more than \$72,000 to WELS Committee on Relief for disaster relief. WELS Committee on Relief and WELS Kingdom Workers are working with area pastors to determine how to provide aid to the area.

Members from WELS congregations and schools also have traveled to the Port Charlotte area to offer their help—whether it's cutting down trees, picking up debris, working at the church, donating food and water, or providing lunches for workers.

Martin was appreciative of all the help and the prayers. "I'm overwhelmed by all the people thinking about us and praying for us," he says. "You have a tendency to feel isolated here. But even though miles may separate us, there's a closeness and bond."

With such a widespread disaster, opportunities abound to provide relief for the people of Port Charlotte and its neighboring communities—both for their bodies and for their souls.

WELS Committee on Relief and WELS Kingdom Workers put together a national team that traveled to Port Charlotte in September to help Christ the King members and others in the community clean up after the storm. This disaster team included a nurse, a trauma counselor, and able-bodied workers experienced in land clearing.



LeRoy Martin, pastor at Christ the King, and one of his members, Doris Cox, in Cox's front lawn. Damage is extensive in Port Charlotte and the surrounding communities. WELS volunteers are helping with the clean up.

Christ the King also has ordered 500 *God our Refuge* devotional books to give to people in the community who are struggling. "What a tremendous opportunity that God has provided for our churches to share what we know with our community," says Martin. "You think this storm is strong. Let me tell you about our God!"

Hurricane Frances hit Florida over Labor Day weekend. Initial reports indicate minimal damage compared to Hurricane Charley. For more information about both these storms, visit www.wels.net, jumpword "hurricane."

To donate money for disaster relief, send checks to WELS Committee on Relief, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222, or donate online at www.wels.net, jumpword "donations." Indicate that the donation is for hurricane relief.

Looking back

In this, the magazine's 90th anniversary, we bring you articles and news from previous issues.

From the Aug. 15, 1983, issue—

New headquarters purchased

"The Synod's Board of Trustees has announced the purchase of the Mayview office buildings at 2929 and 2949 N. Mayfair Road, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.

"The office building at 2929 N. Mayfair Rd. with 29,000 square feet of office space will become the new

national headquarters building of the Wisconsin Synod. . . .

"The new headquarters will consolidate all the operations of the Wisconsin Synod under one roof.

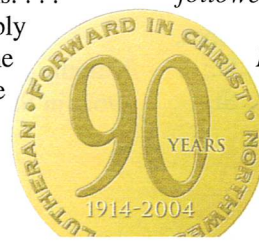
"Our principal aim in making this move," said Rev. Elton H. Huebner, executive secretary of the Synod's Board of Trustees, "was to remedy our shortage of space and the inefficient dispersion of our operations. . . .

Not only can we comfortably house our offices in this one building for the foreseeable

future, but with the second building we can go well into the next century with our space requirements."

The Nov. 15, 1984, issue of The Northwestern Lutheran reported that a special service was held on Oct. 7, 1984, to dedicate the building. Over 700 WELS members from the metropolitan Milwaukee area toured the building during the open house that followed the dedication service.

The Synod Administration Buildings remain at 2929 and 2949 N Mayfair Rd.



WELS news briefs

Board for World Missions

414-256-3233; bwm@sab.wels.net



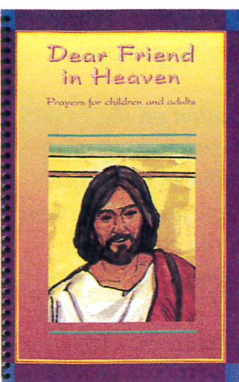
Eighteen men and women headed into world mission work this summer and fall. Pictured are Jim and Jayne Bartz and family (Malawi), Andrew and Cynthia Johnston (Mexico), Alicia Liesener (Central Africa Medical Mission—Malawi), Kim Leyrer (Central Africa Medical Mission—Malawi), Jean Redford (Central Africa Medical Mission—Zambia), Jessie Kunz (WELS Kingdom Workers—Taiwan), Jill Windschitl (WELS Kingdom Workers—Taiwan), Seth Haakenson (Dominican Republic), Larry and Judith Voigt (WELS Kingdom Workers—Zambia), and Peter Langebartels (Apacheland). Missing from the photo are Mark and Hayley Moldenhauer (Apacheland), Monica Haakenson, and Mark and Jane Johnston and family (Malawi).

Commission on Special Ministries

414-256-3240; csm@sab.wels.net

Jesus Cares Ministries, a ministry of The Lutheran Home Association in Belle Plaine, Minn., in cooperation

with the Special Education Services Committee, has put together a prayer book that can be used by or with children and adults, including those with and without cognitive



disabilities. *Dear Friend in Heaven* offers four different types of prayers—prose, rebus (picture), personalized (fill in the blank), and song—for each of 17 different topics. Order online at www.nph.net (#38-6918) or call 800-662-6022.



In July, retired professor Jerald Plitzuweit was commissioned as an assistant chaplain who will help Chaplain Michael Schroeder serve WELS members and military personnel living in Europe. Plitzuweit and his wife, Lois, arrived in Germany in August and will serve for a year.

Commission on Adult Discipleship

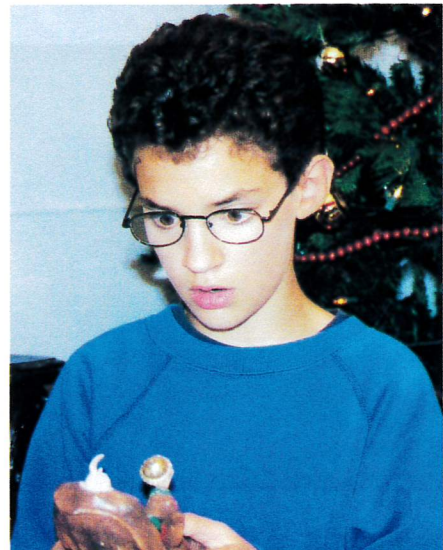
414-256-3277; cad@sab.wels.net

The Commission on Adult Discipleship is planning a Marriage Retreat and Get-Away Weekend in two locations in 2005. It will be a weekend to renew your commitment and love for each other; to discover God's blueprints for a healthy, happy marriage; and to restore romance in your relationship.

The retreats will be held at The Pink Shell in Ft. Myers Beach, Fla., on Jan. 20-23, 2005, and at The Heidelberg House Resort in Green Lake, Wis., on Feb. 11-13, 2005. Find out more at www.welsmarriageretreat.org or call 800-567-8669.

Adult Discipleship and the WELS Spiritual Growth Project Team have joined efforts to produce a practical spiritual growth emphasis entitled "Reflecting Jesus' Ministry in My

Life." The themes for this three-week program—compassion, teaching, and equipping—follow the three aspects of Jesus' ministry. Included in the program are expanded sermon outlines with introductions and applications, Bible study for each week, object lessons for children's sermons, home devotions, worship helps, reflections on spiritual growth, bulletin inserts, and optional commitment cards for ministry opportunities and financial support. Order the complete kit, which includes a CD "Tool Box," for \$39. Shop online at www.shopwels.net (#38-7505) or call 800-662-6022.



The Commission on Adult Discipleship is working on two new episodes of *Fifth Pew from the Front*, a 30- to 45-minute Christian sitcom featuring the Taylor family, Bible study vignettes, and discussion materials. "The Daze Before Christmas" shows what can happen when you get too caught up in holiday festivities and forget the true meaning of Christmas. "That's Easy for You to Say" covers the important topic of personal witnessing. Ordering information, including special offers, can be found online at www.fifthpew.com or by calling 800-662-6022. Pictured is Timothy Sherman, who plays Noah Taylor on the show.

These updates are from the offices of the synod administration building at 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398.

Starting a home mission in the Corn Belt

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) established a home mission in Indianola, Iowa, in 1999. The mission's pastor, Robert A. Harting, details the congregation's journey to become an established congregation.

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Indianola, Iowa, began on Dec. 11, 1998, in the home of Mike and Cheryl Dee. This couple had a deep concern over false doctrine and practice at their local Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod congregation. They invited other concerned members, ELS pastor Karl Heck, and some members of St. Timothy, Williamsburg, Iowa, to speak with them about starting a mission.



Vacation Bible school students make bread at Good Shepherd, Indianola, Iowa.

The charter meeting of Good Shepherd took place on Feb. 11, 1999. Heck conducted the first services the next month in the Indianola City Hall.

A church building was purchased and then dedicated on Aug. 14, 1999. I accepted a divine call to serve there in March 2000. The congregation was welcomed into the ELS at the synod convention in 2000 and has been a home mission of the ELS for the past five years. Good Shepherd numbers 69 souls today.

During those five years the congregation has improved the land and existing buildings. One of the members made the furniture for the church. Stained glass windows have been an ongoing project by members.

Bible classes are an important part of the life of the flock, and an annual vacation Bible school has reached community children. The congregation takes an active part in all Bible classes. It has been a joy to see them grow in their knowledge of Lutheran theology. Nine of the children today are in Lutheran homeschools or enrolled at Bethany Lutheran College. Christian education also includes Sunday and Wednesday

Bible classes, studies before most meetings, and catechism classes.

Hymnody and liturgy are important to Good Shepherd. Many talented musicians present sacred music in services throughout the year.

Support for missions and seminary students has been an ongoing priority. The congregation has "adopted" three seminary students and supports their years of study. Good Shepherd has received many gifts and enjoyed the prayers and encouragement of many other ELS congregations.

Ongoing evangelistic outreach includes newspaper ads, church signs, canvassing, tract distribution, new resident follow-up and visits, a Web site, and the regular witnessing of members to others in their daily lives. Members of all ages are encouraged to participate in these congregational and personal efforts. The youth have participated in a substantial way.

By God's grace, Good Shepherd looks to the future as God grants time to look for others to be included in his flock about whom Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

World news

The Passion Of The Christ available for home viewing—*The Passion Of The Christ* made its VHS and DVD debut on Aug. 31.

Mel Gibson's depiction of the final 12 hours of Jesus' life grossed more than \$375 million at the North American box office—earning a spot in the top 10 grossing movies of all time.

The film's Web site, www.thepassionofthechrist.com, features trailers, film synopses, etc., as well as information on buying the movie.

Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod meets in convention—The 2004 convention of the Lutheran Church—

Missouri Synod (LCMS) met in St. Louis this July under the theme "One Mission—Ablaze! . . . To the Ends of the Earth."

Some decisions arrived at during the convention include the following:

- The convention voted to raise \$100 million over the next six years to support *Ablaze!*, the 13-year initiative to share the gospel with 100 million people worldwide.
- The convention elected Dr. Gerald B. Kieschnick to his second three-year term as LCMS president. The convention also elected Pastor William Diekelman as synod first vice president. He narrowly defeated incumbent Pastor Daniel Preus.

- Delegates affirmed "on the basis of Scripture, marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5-6)."
- Delegates voted to allow women to hold any congregational office that does not involve pastoral functions.

For more information on the LCMS convention, visit www.lcms.org. Prof. James Pope, a member of the WELS Commission on Inter-church Relations, was an observer at the convention. Look for his commentary on the convention in the Winter 2005 edition of The Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly.

School of Outreach celebrates milestone

The 100th School of Outreach will be held this October at St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis.

Begun in 1987 under the leadership of Paul Kelm, the Commission on Evangelism's School of Outreach was originally held at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., as a week-long event. Since then, nearly 700 congregations have been equipped with the tools and insights to "go and make disciples."

In 1993, the Commission on Evangelism decided to take the School of Outreach on the road. Individual congregations now host the weekend seminar for up to 15 congregations in their areas. Since the emphasis is on planning for outreach, congregations usually send their pastor and a team of five to 12 leaders to the event.

In just three motivational days, Michael Hintz, administrator of the Commission on Evangelism, and some

of the seven other trained presenters lay the groundwork for and educate attendees in the main components of a congregational evangelism program. In frequent "huddle sessions," the presenters help individual congregations apply these components to their work and send them home with plans and goals by the end of the weekend.

"I was frightened by the written schedule," said one attendee of the vigorous agenda. "But it went quickly and every bit was helpful and enjoyable."

Although it was thought that the School of Outreach would fizzle out by the year 2000—most congregations having already attended if they planned to—the program is still in demand. Many congregations return to the seminars with new personnel or to refocus and further their plans. One congregation is bringing its entire church

council to its second seminar and hosting a third in 2005 for all members.

"God is blessing the School of Outreach because it cuts to the very heart of the mission of our church on earth," says Hintz. "We are seeking to reach more people with the gospel of Jesus."

For more information about Schools of Outreach, call 414-256-3287 or visit www.wels.net, jumpword "bps-coe."



Risen Savior, Orlando, Fla., hosted a School of Outreach this year from Jan. 9-11.

The life of Jesus in art

Swimming and sculpting. Kayaking and conservation lessons. Painting and proclaiming the gospel. This June, 30 children created hundreds of new pieces of Christian artwork while playing in the Texas sun on the 15 acres of God's creation called Camp Shiloh.

The "Life of Jesus in Art" camp served not only as a fun learning experience for WELS children, but also as an opportunity to share the gospel with unchurched children in the area. Generous contributions from many WELS members, WELS Kingdom Workers, and especially two local business leaders made the camp affordable and provided scholarships for nine Hispanic children from the community to attend without cost.

Dr. Kay Aragona, a professor of dentistry and volunteer art teacher, taught art history lessons from the annunciation to ascension, while two vicars from Wisconsin Lutheran

Seminary, Mequon, Wis., taught coordinating Bible lessons.

After learning how Vientiane art icons were used to teach about the Bible to people who couldn't read, one 12-year-old camper said, "We made pictures of what we see Jesus



Retired pastor Roy Brassow helps Hannah Fenske, a member of Holy Word, Austin, Texas, make a birdhouse as part of the nature study activities at the "Life of Jesus in Art" camp.

to look like. We used glitter and markers to make it look really good!"

Many volunteers donated their time and expertise to make this camp a success. A geologist taught about the foundations of the earth and helped the campers make stone crosses. While studying the nativity, one local artist made clay ornaments with the campers. Campers even made terrariums with a local "Master Gardener."

"When you try to make life work on your own, you fail," he explained to them, "but when you put Jesus in your life, you thrive."

"I believe that [this week] was a significant turning point in our ministry," says Dan Schmeling, camp director. "It was the first children's program implemented by Camp Shiloh. In the past, we have been a camp that hosted others who conducted their own programs. This was also an initial step in reaching out to the community with a camp that proclaimed the gospel."

Making a difference

"You'll never find anyone who will love as much as a person with special needs," says Hannah Buschkopf.

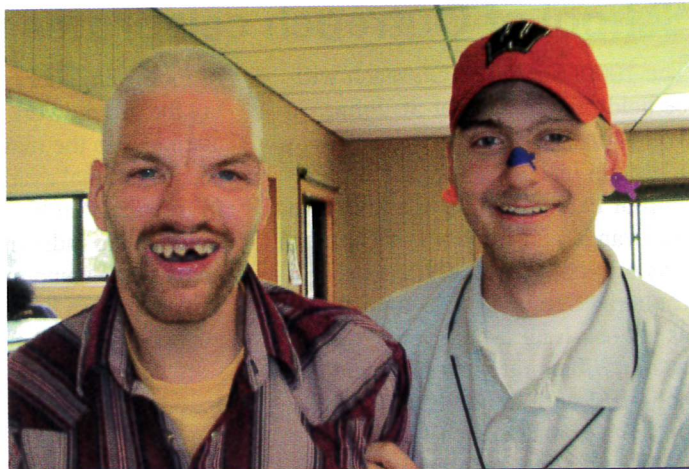
This summer, Buschkopf and five other young people took part in a new summer ministry experience sponsored by the The Lutheran Home Association, Belle Plaine, Minn. The six paid interns worked side-by-side with trained coordinators and volunteers from The Lutheran Home Association who provide Christian worship, Bible classes, fellowship, and support for those with developmental disabilities.

Much of the interns' time was spent serving as camp counselors at two WELS special-needs camps. There they cared for campers with developmental disabilities, taught them Bible stories, and helped them enjoy camp activities. The interns also operated one-day special-needs Bible camps at three congregations in Minnesota, helped staff the Special Ministries in Lutheran Education Conference in Milwaukee, and encouraged special-needs homes to attend Jesus Cares Ministries Bible classes.

Buschkopf, a sophomore at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., is

excited by all that she learned and the many ways that she can apply those lessons in her teaching career. "The unconditional love that those with special needs display is amazing. They demonstrate unconditional love for people like Jesus wants us to do."

Steve Balza, who coordinated the program for The Lutheran Home Association, is happy with the experience and insights that this opportunity gave to all those who were involved and expects that the program will be repeated in 2005. "This type of training helped prepare the interns to minister to those with special needs in the future. It gave them an awareness that they may not have had before."



Jim Snyder (left), a camper at Camp Basic, with summer ministry experience intern Aaron Punke. Mary Balza, Hannah Buschkopf, Cynthia Deno, James Hatzung, and Garth Perry also participated in this new ministry training program from The Lutheran Home Association.

Buschkopf agrees and encourages others to take the time to help those with special needs. "You can make a huge difference in a person's life, even if you spend just a little time with them."

To learn more about The Lutheran Home Association's summer ministry experience, call 888-600-8542 or info@tlha.org.

WELS working to reach out to Muslims

The religion of Islam encompasses 20 percent of the world's population, and it is growing.

Realizing this, the Joint Mission Council, which consists of the Home and World Mission administrators and chairmen, has made reaching out to Muslims an important priority. It has appointed Joel Spaude to chair a task force that will develop and implement strategies for sharing the gospel message with Muslims both in North America and in world mission fields. Spaude was once a missionary to Malawi and now is a pastor at Saint Peter, Fort Collins, Colo.

In 2002, the Committee for Mission Expansion appointed a special study committee to make

recommendations and study strategies to reach out to Muslims. This Outreach to Muslims Committee presented its report to the Board for World Missions and the Board for Home Missions this past spring.

The report covered

- demographics,
- resource materials,
- interviews with Muslims to better understand the Muslim thought process and their needs and to understand the methods that work best for reaching Muslims, and
- recommendations.

Spaude and his task force will develop and implement strategies based on these recommendations. Recommendations include using

Christians who previously were Muslims to witness to Muslims; calling a Muslim mission coordinator to educate pastors and WELS members about Islam and methods of outreach to Muslims; identifying and training women to reach out to Muslim women; preparing and publishing literature about Islam for WELS members and about Christianity for Muslims; developing a Web page with materials for Muslims; and using WELS missionaries to reach out to Muslim populations overseas.

The task force will be making an initial report to the Joint Mission Council in November.

District news

Nebraska

On June 4-5, 128 WELS members ages eight through 80 gathered in Hastings, Neb., for the fifth annual all-night lock-in at a local sports and recreation center. **Fourteen congregations from Nebraska and Kansas** were represented.

Minnesota



About 300 teenagers attended the Minnesota District Regional Youth Rally in Brainerd, Minn., on July 11-13.

Northern Wisconsin

On July 22-24, 181 church leaders gathered at **St. Mark, De Pere, Wis.**, for a worship conference that focused on contemporary and blended worship. Praise bands from St. Mark, De Pere; Bloomington, Bloomington, Minn.; and Apostles, San Jose, Calif., demonstrated many of the points that were made at the conference. DVDs from the conference are available from St. Mark, De Pere.

South Atlantic

The dedication for **New Hope Lutheran Academy, Melbourne, Fla.**, took place on Aug. 8. This new middle school was formed after extensive surveying showed that the community feels its greatest need is a school to serve middle-school-age children.

On July 18, members of **Faith, Sharpsburg, Ga.**, dedicated their first facility.

On Aug. 8, **Good Shepherd, Deltona, Fla.**, hosted an unexpected 800 visitors who showed up there for a vigil that was meant to be held at a nearby high school. The vigil was being held following the brutal slaying of six young people in Deltona. Todd DeNoyer, pastor at Good Shepherd, used this

opportunity to speak about sin, death, and God's grace. Several people have since inquired about worshipping at Good Shepherd.

Voices of Victory, the choir of Crown of Life, New Orleans, La., toured the Midwest in June. Crown of Life is isolated from most other WELS churches, so the choir appreciated the opportunity to meet fellow members. The gospel choir also used this opportunity to thank WELS members for supporting its church when it was started as a mission congregation.

Michigan



Seven members of St. Paul, Saginaw, Mich., graduated from Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., on May 15. More than 200 of St. Paul's members have entered the full-time ministry in the 152 years that St. Paul has existed.

South Central

Abiding Savior, Killeen, Texas, purchased its first building this summer, a home for its pastor and his family. Members are now beginning to work on building their own worship facility.

Southeastern Wisconsin

The **Milwaukee Federation of WELS Churches** used its booth at the Wisconsin State Fair in August to conduct a religious survey. Over 4,000 fairgoers filled out the survey, 343 of whom indicated that they did not know Jesus as the way to heaven and would be interested in someone following up with more information. These names were shared with the closest WELS congregation to each respondent.

Two members of **Siloah, Milwaukee, Wis.**, presented on abstinence at a community event held in Mequon, Wis., on Aug. 18.

Western Wisconsin

The baseball team from **Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.**, finished first in the Midwest Classic North Conference, first in the regional and sectional tournament, and second in the state. The team completed a 25-1 season, only losing in the state championship game.

Three science club members from Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis., won first place in the Wisconsin Science Olympiad held on April 3 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Seniors **Joshua Schultz, Mark Whiting, and Scott Johnson** built a Rube-Goldberg-style device that lit and blew out a candle for this prestigious competition that takes place throughout North America.

Happy Anniversary!

PNW—On July 25, members of St. Matthew, Spokane, Wash., celebrated **Douglas Scherschel's** 25 years in the pastoral ministry.

SEW—On Aug. 24, Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis., celebrated **Tom Bauer's** 20th year in the pastoral ministry.

On Aug. 18, the Commission for Communication on Financial Support honored **Ron Roth** for 40 years in the pastoral ministry. Roth has served the commission since 1988.

WW—**Ardin Laper's** 60th anniversary in the pastoral ministry was celebrated at Peace, Sun Prairie, Wis., on Aug. 8.

St. Luke, Watertown, Wis., celebrated the 25 years that **Anthony Schultz** has served in the pastoral ministry on Aug. 8.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: MI—John Eich; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NE—Donald Wichmann; NW—Joel Lillo; PNW—David Birsching; SA—Christopher Kruschel; SC—William Gabb; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Martin Baur.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

- Bonow, John G. II**, to Zum Kripplein, Iron Ridge/St. John, Woodland, Wis.
- Duquaine, Jeffrey A.**, to St. John, Lannon, Wis.
- Finn, William A.**, to Gethsemane, Davenport, Iowa
- Glaeske, Aaron H.**, to Ascension, Escondido, Calif.
- Goeglein, Mark A.**, to Hispanic/Latino Outreach and Training, Milwaukee
- Haldorson, Jeffery J.**, to Tree of Life, Calgary, Alberta, Canada
- Johnson, Gail B.**, to retirement
- Lidtke, Paul J.**, to Bethlehem, Oshkosh, Wis.
- Wright, Chad E.**, to Immanuel, Hadar, Neb.

Teachers

- Adickes, David M.**, to retirement
- Bauer, Sarah M.**, to English, Viroqua, Wis.
- Bolda, Kristin A.**, to Grace, Oshkosh, Wis.
- Cowling, Sheryl**, to Siloah, Milwaukee
- Dahlberg, David L.**, to Parkland, Tacoma, Wash.
- Granberg, Leslie E.**, to Bethlehem, Menomonee Falls, Wis.
- Hain, Barbara**, to Faith, Antioch, Ill.
- Hardman, Aimee G.**, to Northdale, Tampa, Fla.
- Huebner, Elaine M.**, to St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wis.
- Hurst, Jane D.**, to First, La Crosse, Wis.
- Karas, Amy**, to St. John, Milton, Wis.
- Krueger, Todd M.**, to St. John, Caledonia, Minn.
- Lippert, Pamela**, to St. Jacobi, Greenfield, Wis.
- Mueller, Sarah R.**, to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.
- Raddant, Meg**, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee
- Rohick, Hayle**, to Christ, Grand Island, Neb.
- Salzwedel, Kelly J.**, to Faith, Anchorage, Alaska
- Schellpfeffer, Tammy**, to St. John, Lomira, Wis.
- Vettleison, Laura A.**, to Trinity, West Bend, Wis.
- Wendland, Louise A.**, to St. John, Waterloo, Wis.
- Zander, Lois M.**, to Samuel, Marshall, Minn.

ANNIVERSARIES

- Madison, Wis.**—Our Redeemer (50). Oct. 3 & 24 & Nov. 21. Services, 8 & 10:30 A.M. 608-274-6608.
- Moline, Ill.**—St. Paul (50). Oct. 10. Service, 10:30 A.M. Meal to follow. RSVP, 309-762-5927.
- Watertown, Wis.**—St. Mark (150). Oct. 16. Service, 6 P.M. Oct. 17. Services, 7:30, 9, &

- 10:45 A.M. Choir concert, 7 P.M. Nov. 20. St. Marcus Gospel Choir concert, 6 P.M.
- Newburg, Wis.**—St. John school (100). Oct. 17. Services, 8 & 10:30 A.M. Brian Mensching, 262-675-6852.
- Merritt Island, Fla.**—Redeemer (40). Oct. 17. Services, 10:30 A.M. & 4 P.M. Meal to follow afternoon service. 321-453-1000.
- Pittsburg, Kan.**—Faith (20). Also dedication of fellowship hall addition. Oct. 17. Service, 10:30 A.M. Fellowship meal at noon. Paul Seiltz, 620-232-1506.
- Lomira, Wis.**—St. John church building (100). Oct. 24. Services, 8 & 10 A.M., 2 P.M. Fellowship to follow afternoon service. 920-269-4650.
- Fairport, N.Y.**—Prince of Peace (25). Oct. 24. Service, 4 P.M. Meal to follow. RSVP, 585-381-4670.
- Saginaw, Mich.**—Bethany (50). Oct. 31. Service, 10:30 A.M. Meal to follow. 989-793-7747.
- Salinas, Kan.**—St. Mark (30). Oct. 31. Service, 10:30 A.M. Fellowship meal to follow. Bill Cornelius, 785-825-7455.
- Batesland, S.D.**—St. Paul (75). Nov. 7. Services, 8:30 A.M. & 4 P.M. 605-685-6494.
- St. Paul, Minn.**—Divinity (50). Nov. 7. Service, 10:30 A.M. Catered dinner to follow. 651-776-1786
- East Troy, Wis.**—St. Paul (130). Nov. 7. Service, 10 A.M. Dinner to follow. 262-642-3200.

COMING EVENTS

- Regional women's retreat**—Oct. 1-3. Massanetta Springs Conference Center, Harrisonburg, Va. Lynnette Hupman, 703-361-1419.
- "A day at the Seminary"**—sponsored by Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Auxiliary. Oct. 2, 8 A.M.-1 P.M. Worship, 9 A.M. Eunice Heckendorf, 262-677-2498.
- Choirfest**—hosted by The Lutheran Festival Chorus of Chicagoland. Oct. 9. Concert, 7 P.M. Christ the King, Palatine, Ill. Clay Horath, 708-672-4512 or Sonja Hummel, 708-672-1032.
- Martin Luther College Ladies Auxiliary annual meeting**—Oct. 13, 9 A.M. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Theckla Schultz, 507-354-2568.
- Run for the prize 5K run/walk**—sponsored by Immanuel, Findlay, Ohio. Oct. 16, 10 A.M. Dave Braun, 800-688-8151, ext. 210.
- Congregational team workshops**—sponsored by Southeastern Wisconsin District Parish Services. Oct. 16, 8:30 A.M.-4:15 P.M. Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee. 19 different workshops. Tammy Miller, tmiller@wels.net.
- Dedication**—Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis., new sanctuary and renovated school. Oct. 17. Services, 8 & 10:30 A.M. & 2:30 P.M. 262-679-1901.

Family ministry training—sponsored by Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service. Oct. 23, 9 A.M.-4 P.M. Holiday Inn Neenah Riverwalk, Neenah, Wis. Cost, \$89/person (includes meals & materials). 888-685-9522, ext. 209.

Marriage enrichment retreat—Nov. 6 & 7. Heidel House, Green Lake, Wis. \$250/couple, including housing, meals, and materials. Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service, 888-685-9522, ext. 201.

Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries, Inc., annual meeting & conference—Nov. 13. Antiqua Bay Hotel & Resort, Wisconsin Dells, Wis. 888-214-6490.

Sunday school teacher and superintendent conference—Jan. 22, 2005. 9:30 A.M.-3 P.M. St. John, Baraboo, Wis. Cost, \$10/person. Jerry Kastens, 920-261-3511.

Christian Woman Today spring retreat—April 8-10, 2005. Olympia Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Maureen, 262-784-0412.

NAMES WANTED

- Adult choir members**—to sing in the July 17, 2005, opening concert of the National Conference on Worship, Music, & the Arts. Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minn. Worship office, 414-256-3226 or worship@sab.wels.net.
- WELS musicians**—submit names of conductors, composers, vocalists, and instrumentalists with advanced training to the Commission on Worship. Send short resume to Worship, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; worship@sab.wels.net; 414-256-3226.
- U.S. Military Academy, West Point, N.Y.**—Donald Tollefson, 908-876-5429.
- 29 Palms Marine Corps Base, Calif.**—Gene & Marty Olson, 760-369-1403.
- Redlands/Yucaipa/Calimesa, Calif.**—Mark Mammel, 909-794-2554.
- Vacaville/Travis Air Force Base, Calif.**—Scott Stone, 707-469-1546.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

- Christian therapist**—for Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service, Christian Family Counseling branch. Full-time position available in Illinois. Phil Koestler, 877-855-0936.
- RV couple**—to serve as volunteer part-time caretaker and/or housekeeper at Camp Shiloh in northeast Texas. Minimum one-month commitment. Dan Schmeling, 903-855-1800.

To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@sab.wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date. An updated bulletin board is available at www.wels.net, jumpword "bulletinboard."

Bits o' the Bible

You've often heard the story of Samson from Judges 13-16, but how much do you really know about him? Test the strength of your knowledge here.

- 1. What was surprising about Samson's birth?
- 2. Why did the angel tell Samson's mother-to-be that Samson's hair should not be cut?
- 3. What two restrictions were placed on Samson's mother until his birth?
- 4. What amazing thing happened when Samson's father offered a goat and grain offering in thanks to the LORD?
- 5. Where did Samson get his power to kill a lion with his bare hands as his first show of great strength?
- 6. What were the answers to Samson's riddle at his wedding feast: "Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet"?
- 7. What did Samson mean when he told the Philistines, "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have solved my riddle"?
- 8. Why did Samson torch the fields of the Philistines?
- 9. How did Samson torch the Philistines' fields?
- 10. What weapon did Samson use to kill a thousand Philistines?
- 11. How many years did Samson lead Israel in the days of the Philistines?
- 12. What happened when Samson's hair was cut?
- 13. Who was the woman who betrayed him?
- 14. Why did cutting his hair have that effect?
- 15. How did the Philistines punish Samson when they took him captive?
- 16. How did Samson kill more people when he died than while he lived?
- 17. How many men and women died who were on the roof of the temple watching that day?

RESULTS: Score one point for each correct answer to discover your strength rating.

- 1-3: Ninety-pound weakling.
- 4-8: Looking good.
- 9-13: Weight lifter.
- 14-19: Power champ. How long is your hair?

Picture this



Pastor Dave Beckman (left) and Joe Dvorak discuss "deep" theological issues at the front door of Luther's house (now a museum) in Wittenberg, Germany. The tour of Wittenberg and Berlin was part of a three-week exchange program between Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis., and Gymnasium Bersenbrück. Beckman is the German teacher at Manitowoc Lutheran High School. Dvorak is the third sibling from his family to take part in the exchange program, which began in 1998.

ANSWERS

- ANSWERS**
- 1. His mother had been sterile. 2. Samson was to be a Nazirite set apart to God. 3. She was to drink no fermented beverage and eat no unclean food. 4. The angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the burnt offering. 5. The Spirit of the LORD came on him. 6. The strong eater was a lion, and the sweet to eat was honey. 7. They had used Samson's wife to get the answer. 8. His wife was given to another man following the betrayal at the wedding feast. 9. He tied torches to the tails of pairs of foxes. 10. The jawbone of a donkey. 11. 20 years. 12. He lost his strength. 13. Delilah. 14. He broke his Nazirite vow, and the LORD left him. 15. They gouged out his eyes. 16. He pulled down the pillars that supported the heaven temple, destroying the temple and everyone there. 17. 3,000

Send pictures to "Picture this," *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; fic@sab.wels.net. On a separate sheet, give us information about the photo. Those whose photos are chosen will receive a small gift.

TREE OF LIFE

CARY, NORTH CAROLINA

Planted firmly on God's Word

Janet Klann

Cary, N.C., is a picture of the American dream—nice homes in a lovely green setting, a moderate climate with good jobs nearby, good schools, and plenty of churches. *The Wall Street Journal* raved, “This one-time sleepy outskirts of Raleigh has become THE suburb of choice.” *Money Magazine* rated Cary “the hottest town in the East.”

Cary's transformation from a small agricultural hub to a mushrooming suburb is largely due to its proximity to a high tech research center employing more than 45,000 people, many of whom have settled in suburbs such as Cary.

The rate of growth is impressive. The 1990 census recorded 16,900 households in Cary. By 2000 that number skyrocketed to 94,000 households. Although the area is home to numerous churches, 56 percent of residents say they have “no religious affiliation.”

Planting roots

This was the situation in 1997 when the North Atlantic Mission Board requested funding and manpower for an exploratory mission in Cary. Seminary graduate Michael Geiger was installed in August and began holding Bible studies in homes. The group chose the name Tree of Life, referring to the Garden of Eden and what was lost from God's perfect plan. The name also refers to the salvation won for us by Christ on the tree of the cross and to the promise in Revelation that believers will eat from the tree of life in paradise. Now numbering 126 souls, Tree of Life is busy growing in grace and spreading the Word.

Branching out

During its relatively short life as a congregation, Tree of Life has experienced numerous examples of God's blessings on its mission. One of these is a high level of member participation. Using a spiritual gifts inventory has enabled each member to discover his or her unique gifts and how these can be used in God's service. A good example is the GROW program, where members work one hour a month on an outreach program. A choice of meeting times and a variety of tasks assures that everyone finds a suitable job. Almost no one in this church sits on the sidelines.

An active, vibrant ministry to families is another blessing. Cathy May says her family appreciates “the



Tree of Life held a 3-D Exploration Camp in July. Here one student gets a lesson in woodworking.

many opportunities for children to be involved in the church.” Led by a Fellowship Ministry Team, the congregation enjoys picnics, outings, service projects, and retreats as ways to enjoy fellowship, strengthen bonds of caring, and reach out to the community.

Members set up a children's craft booth and distributed church information at Cary's annual street festival and craft fair. Shortly after Sept. 11, 2001, members handed out patriotic ribbons in front of Wal-Mart, with donations going to the WELS Committee on Relief. Other projects have included a thank-you dinner taken to a local fire station, raking leaves at a Ronald McDonald house, and providing Christmas gifts for women and children at the Wake County Shelter.

Extra hands

Tree of Life has been blessed with manpower that many mission congregations don't have. Since 2000, they have had a series of vicars, most of whom have concentrated on evangelism and outreach. Jeremiah Gumm, who served as vicar this past year, described his time at Tree of Life as “a phenomenal experience.”

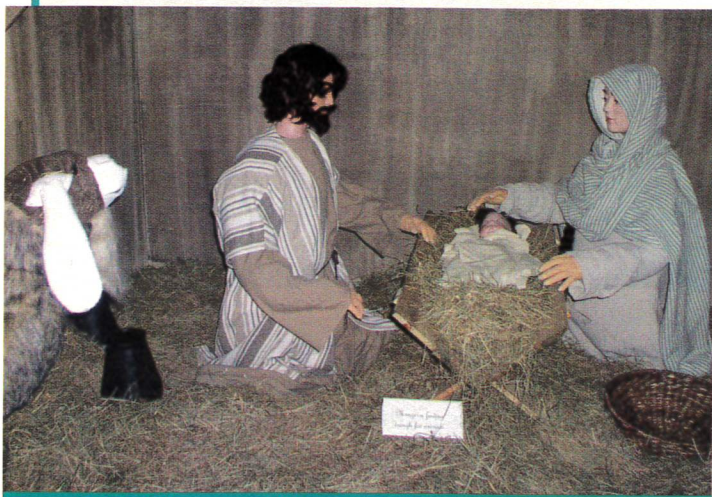
Besides preaching every two weeks, Gumm visited families on the church's prospect list and oversaw several outreach efforts. The congregation has also hosted WELS Kingdom Workers Travel-Canvass-Witness teams each year since 1998. These teams of students from Wisconsin Lutheran College or Martin Luther

College spend one week in Cary, primarily conducting new neighborhood surveys, distributing evangelism materials, and helping with vacation Bible school.

Reaching out

Last December, Tree of Life undertook its most ambitious outreach project. Called Virtual Bethlehem, lifelike nativity scenes were accompanied by recorded narration. Beginning with the Garden of Eden, six rooms told the story of man's fall from grace and the need for a Savior. Mary's humble home, Caesar's throne room, the shepherd's campsite, the stable—each included smells and sounds as well as hands-on learning. At the end of the 30-minute tour, visitors were asked to fill out a feedback form that also asked, "Do you have a church home?"

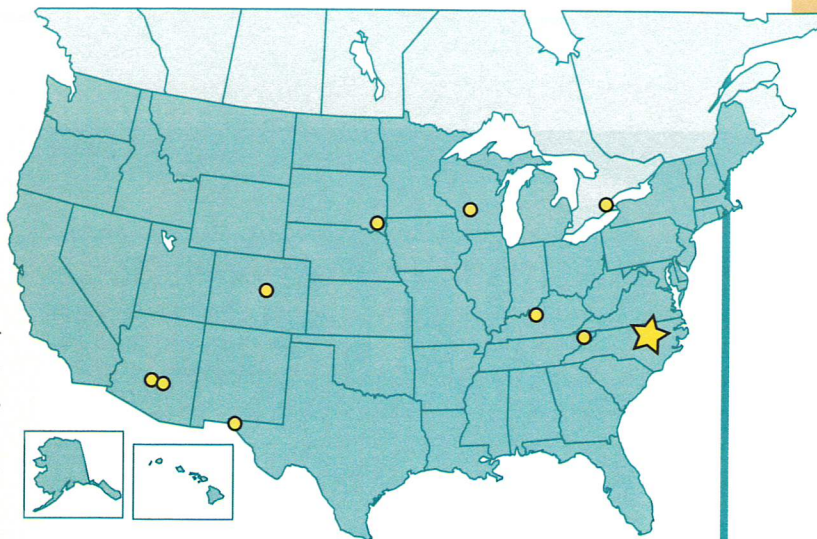
Planning for Virtual Bethlehem required a real leap of faith. Mollie Schweppe says, "We were planning for a project without the money to afford it, the manpower to accomplish it, or the space in which to hold it! We prayed about it, and God's answer was clear: 'Just trust me.'"



Tree of Life's Virtual Bethlehem was a huge success in 2003.

Within weeks a new facility became available, as did sufficient funds. "The Lord's blessing was on this project in so many ways," says Geiger. "When our new vicar arrived, he and his wife had an extensive background in theater, a real help in constructing sets and sewing costumes."

Patti Johnson grins with delight as she tells of finding just the right fabric for the camel, after being told the store had no more of that fabric in stock. Schweppe and Lisa Gumm wrote five versions of the script, each one told from a different point of view. Visitors could choose Mary, Joseph, an angel, a shepherd, or a village girl as the narrator of their CD-guided tour. Newspaper and radio ads reached out to the community, and the response was overwhelming; a total of 620 people heard the real Christmas story.



★ Featured congregation ● Congregation already featured

Quick facts

Tree of Life, www.treeoflifenc.org:

- held its first public worship service in December 1998; 83 attended.
- rents a 6,000-square-foot facility in an office complex, which includes seven classrooms, three offices, a nursery, a kitchen, and a worship area seating 150.
- will probably have to leave its present facility when the lease expires in 2006.
- operates a Web site for its Virtual Bethlehem outreach project, www.virtualbethlehem.org.

"Thank you so much for helping us refocus our Christmas celebration on Christ," wrote one parent at the end of the tour.

Challenges

Like any growing congregation, Tree of Life faces challenges. One of those is finding a permanent home. It will most likely not be able to rent its present quarters after May 2006. Land in the area is expensive, and the building process will be a large task for a relatively small number of people.

Shifting from a small church "family" to a mid-sized congregation will also bring challenges. Geiger says, "We are all very comfortable with each other, but we need to strengthen our efforts with personal outreach so that each member is an active partner in ministry."

Growing in grace

The sanctuary at Tree of Life features two sides of glass walls overlooking a green, wooded area, a visible reminder of this congregation's name and mission. Planted firmly on God's Word, growing in faith and love, this congregation is committed to reaching out and spreading the gospel so that more people will someday share in the heavenly tree of life.

Janet Klann is a member at Shepherd of the Valley, Surprise, Arizona.

One in Christ



"One in Christ" was an appropriate theme for the conferences that four WELS women presented for their Lutheran sisters in Malawi.

Would I go to Africa? It would be a dream come true. How exciting to be asked to meet with Malawi's Lutheran Women's Organization!

Malawi missionary Paul Nitz and his wife, Susan, wrote the proposal for the trip that was approved by the Board for World Missions and funded through the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society. Five one-day conferences were scheduled over a two-week period in the three regions of Malawi with the theme "One in Christ."

As I prepared the devotions and Bible studies with the three other women making the trip, the differences between North American and African women seemed great. They were far away and in a different country and culture. I couldn't

understand their language or imagine their lifestyle.

What a thrill to be met by a group of joyful Malawi women at the airport! They sang praises to God and danced as they escorted us through the small airport and parking lot.

The greetings at each conference were much the same. Such joy in the Lord! It seemed these women had nothing to do that day other than praise the Lord in song and dance. Throughout the day a leader would shout out "Alleluia!" as an exclamation point to something that was said, and the women would respond with a loud "Amen!" Attendance at the conferences ranged from 170 to 1,070.

Any question of women from different cultures being able to connect was quickly dispelled. There

were many "Alleluias!" and "Amens!" as I shared Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." We recognized that we were all daughters and some were wives, sisters, mothers, and grandmothers. More important, we acknowledged that we are all children of our heavenly Father and belong to him and to each other. When I stated that sometimes women don't get along, that there might be gossip and hurt feelings, they applauded—not for the sin, but for the acknowledgment. Whether from the United States or Malawi, we all need to go to the cross for forgiveness and then fix our eyes on Jesus and serve him.

After the Bible study on prayer, we were blessed to hear testimonials

Four WELS women discover what being "one in Christ" really means when they visit Malawi, Africa.

Marilyn Ewart

from these women. One shared how God gave her faith to pray to him rather than go to a witch doctor. Another with a lame child was grateful that she could still attend church functions. In a discussion about serving our Lord with our gifts and talents, we heard about preparing bodies for burial and taking in orphans.

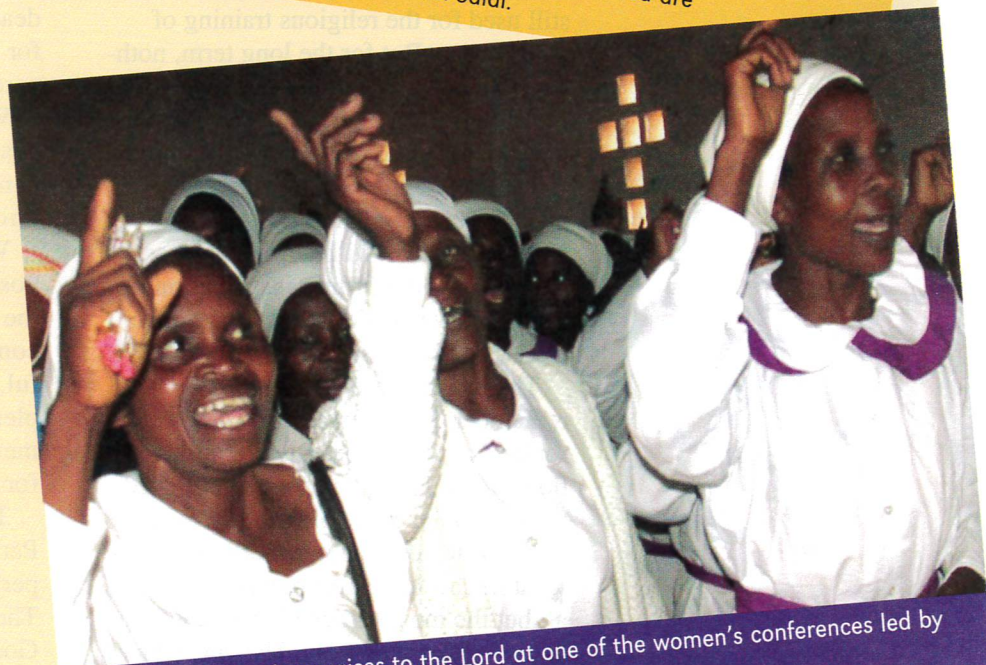
An unexpected blessing was the time we shared with the missionary families. I knew that we would stay with them, but I didn't know that we would almost instantly become family to one another. We stayed in their homes, sat at their tables, and listened while they shared their lives in a foreign country with its challenges and blessings. We were blessed to be "one in Christ" with them as well.

"You'll never be the same." So I was told before going to Africa. It's true. The other WELS women and I learned and were given so much from our sisters in Malawi. We saw how little they have and saw their joy as they sang and danced, praising our God. We saw their desire to learn more about their Savior and saw them rejoice that someone came to share the Word and encourage them. We saw, and learned, that we need to fight the distractions of time and things to be in his Word and to praise our God, with equal joy.

Marilyn Ewart, a member at Mount Olive, Tulsa, Oklahoma, has been a member of the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society since 1985.



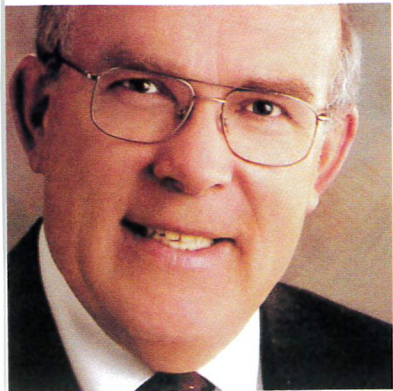
Marilyn Ewart (second from left), Sally Valleskey (middle), Lois Meier (far right), and Ann Warner (not pictured) traveled to Malawi in April to share their faith with Malawi's Lutheran Women's Organization. Also pictured are Mrs. Schanzala, a medical nurse, and Mrs. Saidi.



Malawian women sing praises to the Lord at one of the women's conferences led by American WELS women in April.



After spending the morning visiting our church and medical mission clinic at Mwalaulomwe, these WELS women gathered for lunch at nurse Cindy Hains's home in Lilongwe. From left: Sue Pontel, Marilyn Ewart, Lois Meier, Cindy Hains, and Ann Warner.



Carl R. Ljung

Doctors all

Martin Luther had a doctorate. But more precious to him than any academic degree was the God-given ability to distinguish between law and gospel. If anyone could do that consistently, Luther believed, he ought to receive a doctor's degree.

We ought to remember Luther for many things. Some like his hymns, especially "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." Others treasure his Small Catechism. It's still used for the religious training of youth today. But for the long term, nothing is more essential than the foundations of Christian teaching, which, by God's grace, Dr. Luther restored to the church.

Justification comes to mind. God declares us to be innocent, covering our ungodliness with Christ's perfect holiness. Undergirding justification, as Luther was led to see it, is the clear distinction between law and gospel.

The law has three purposes. We may remember that it serves as a curb, a mirror, and a guide. The outward prohibitions of the law, when properly aligned with the inner voice of conscience, serve to keep the course outbreaks of sin somewhat in check. Fear of punishment, in all but the most hardened, deters wrongdoing—but not entirely. The law, which demands compliance, can produce only an imperfect, slavish attitude toward godly activity. Willingness is lacking.

Our natural unwillingness to be obedient to God's law becomes increasingly evident the more the law, as a mirror, displays our moral failures in attitude and actions. Our attitude, by nature, is rebellious. We don't want to serve God, at least not always or in his way. Our actions condemn us. Conspicuously absent is the perfection God demands of us in his law. It's not a pretty sight that the mirror of the law reveals. Romans 3:22,23 speaks God's judgment upon us all: "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

But the mirror of God's law that exposes our sinfulness was designed to prepare us to receive God's grace by faith. Paul's inspired words continue in Romans 3:24: "And are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

Here's the very heart of the gospel's proclamation. God distributes to each of us by faith the perfect holiness of God's Son, displayed in his innocent life and death. God declares us to be righteous for Jesus' sake. He forgives all our sins, pardoning us eternally.

What a distinction between law and gospel. The law condemns us. The gospel consoles us. We're reconciled to God through the life and death of his Son.

With motivation supplied by the gospel, we're now gratefully ready for the law as a guide. We look to God's commandments for direction for thankful, Christian living. What pleases God pleases us. Each one of his commandments now becomes a superhighway for thankful, Christian service.

The law demands and disappoints. Perfection is what it expects of us. We perjure ourselves if we say we have it. The gospel declares and delights. It is God's declaration of innocence, his Son's and ours, too, through him. Here is sheer delight, unearned and unending pardon and peace. The law produces only a slavish fear of punishment. The gospel provides a child's delight in serving a loving father. What an important distinction between law and gospel!

Being schooled in the Word as Luther was, may God grant us all a "doctor's degree," making us able to rightly distinguish between law and gospel.

Women of faith: The Canaanite woman

Our gracious Master is pleased when we persist in praying to him, trusting that in the end God will give us far more than we ask him to give.

Philip L. Kieselhorst

A mother watches helplessly as her daughter loses control, speeding toward an early death because of demon possession. Facing powers far beyond her own, the mother seeks help. By God's grace, news of Jesus reaches this troubled woman, and a glimmer of hope is lit within her aching heart—God gives her faith in Jesus.

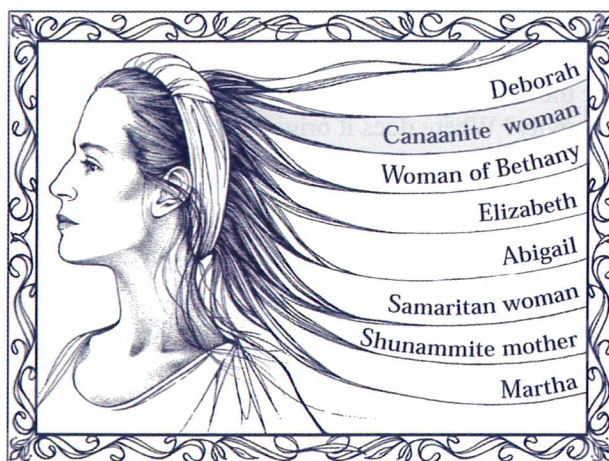
Persistent prayer

In what transpires next we witness the true nature of faith in the hope that God provides. Jesus at first seems to slam the door on this mother's hope by not answering.

Yet, God-given faith sees a glimmer of light where the faithless find only darkness. Jesus does not send her away as his disciples so heartlessly beg him to do. She redoubles her efforts and persists in asking Jesus for help until he gives her an answer. Throwing herself on her knees before Jesus, she pleads, "Lord, help me!" (Matthew 15:25).

Jesus now answers: "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs" (Mark 7:27).

Even in this apparent "No" from Jesus, she finds hope. She finds hope in being referred to as a child's pet dog and in hearing Jesus say: "First . . . the children."



This implies that the pets will receive their food next.

So instead of turning away in disappointment, she persists. "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (Mark 7:28).

God-given faith sees a glimmer of light where the faithless find only darkness.

What immovable faith this is! Admitting that she is a sinner, unworthy of any privileges from Jesus her Lord, she nonetheless trusts in her Master's love and concern even for her and for all the dogs living "under the table." She presses Jesus to fulfill his role as

Master of both children and pets in his home.

"Then Jesus answered, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.' And her daughter was healed from that very hour" (Matthew 15:28).

Persistent grace

From this woman we learn that our gracious Master is pleased when we persist in praying to him, trusting that in the

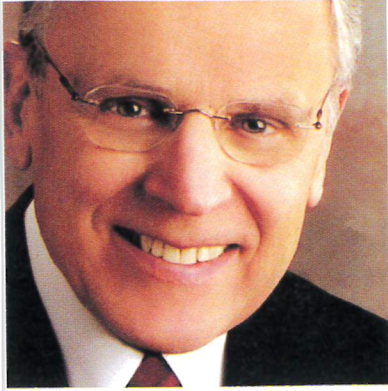
end God will give us far more than we ask him to give.

We are all persistent sinners who have no reason to presume that God should grant us anything at all. But God persists in granting our souls far more than we could imagine. Even though we keep messing things up, he keeps removing us from "under the table" and giving us places of honor instead. He welcomes us to the Lord's Supper, where he persists in feeding us with the Bread from heaven. He refuses to feed us mere crumbs. He persistently feeds our souls with the sweetness of forgiveness that is so richly present in the body and blood of Jesus.

Yes, we are persistent sinners. But God is even more persistent in showing grace to sinners. Believe it and bring your requests to God without giving up.

Contributing editor Philip Kieselhorst is pastor at Gethsemane, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

This month's reading: [Matthew 15:21-28](#)



Gary S. Baumbler

“Where there’s smoke . . .”

Have you heard the buzz? Has your congregation been awash with new activity? Are you trying to sort out the likes of the Spiritual Growth Program, Challenge 2010, the Proclaim Peace through Jesus stewardship emphasis, and North American Outreach? Do you wonder what else is coming?

To some, I imagine, the effect is almost overwhelming, like a hazy smoke settling over the church. What is generating all the activity? Where does it originate? What does it have to do with me? How can I keep up with it all?

Yes, it can seem hazy.

Maybe, too, you’ve heard various theories to help clear the air. “*The synod just wants more money.*” “*We’re getting more programs of questionable value.*” “*What we need is to be left alone with God’s Word.*” “*We’re already doing everything we can.*”

We mustn’t dismiss those thoughts lightly. They reflect some important truths. We need more money to carry out the worldwide mission our Lord has given us to do. Programs can help us focus on issues and organize for action, but they are worthless without proper motivation and properly directed action. Everything starts with individuals getting into God’s Word. Many of us feel that we’ve done just about everything we can.

So what about the present flurry of activity in the congregations throughout our synod? The spiritual growth emphasis is happening first among our churches’ leaders. It asks hard questions like “Are we getting into God’s Word and going out with God’s Word as we should?” It is Word-based and gospel-centered to promote spiritual growth. It looks for ways to get you and me more involved with the study of God’s Word to strengthen our faith. Are you seizing the opportunities set before you?

We have a mission also to our children and their families. Extra efforts are under way (Challenge 2010) to revitalize our churches’ schools and use them also for outreach. If you are a parent of small children, you have a special interest and play an important part in this effort. If you care about unchurched children learning about Jesus, you play an important part.

When the goings-on around you seem more confusing than helpful, reflect on the peace you have through Jesus. Ask yourself what that peace means in your life. How does it change your life? Search your heart for what you might do in faith with the many blessings you enjoy under God. That’s your stewardship.

In this way, the smoky haze should begin to clear, and you can look around you to see how many people—starting with family members, friends, neighbors—don’t enjoy the same peace you have in Jesus your Savior. Consciously look for ways that you can tell others about Jesus.

Can you have a heart-to-heart talk with a relative who has strayed? Can you offer to take the neighbor’s children to Sunday school or vacation Bible school? Can you take part in a neighborhood canvass with your church? Can you tell someone about Jesus? That’s North American outreach. And when your zeal for telling others grows, you won’t stop in North America. You’ll take steps to tell about Jesus also by supporting world missions.

“Where there’s smoke,” the saying goes, “there’s fire.” That usually is not good. However, in this case, my prayer is that you will emerge from this “smoke” with a fire in your heart for the Lord and his work. None of the fine ideals we have talked about will happen and the haze will not clear unless it begins with you and your Savior God and a flame of faith kindled in you to tell others about Jesus.

It's all about Jesus

Mark J. Lenz

Have you ever wondered how many animals were sacrificed in the Old Testament? We don't know for certain, but over the years perhaps hundreds of thousands of lambs, rams, goats, bulls, turtledoves, etc., were sacrificed at the tabernacle in the wilderness and later at the temple in Jerusalem. Not one of those sacrifices paid for a single sin. They all pointed to the future, to the one and only sacrifice for sin, our Savior Jesus.

1 Peter: When Jesus once told his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die, Peter took him aside and told him this would never happen to him. Now, years later, Peter writes that Jesus suffered and died to bring us to God. The Holy Spirit has clearly convinced Peter about the necessity and purpose of Jesus' death.

- Why do we have a "living hope" and an "inheritance that can never perish" (1:3,4)?
- What is the basis of our redemption (1:18,19)?
- What is the significance of each of the four ways by which Peter refers to believers in 2:9?
- What did Jesus' death on the cross accomplish for us (2:24)?
- What advice does Peter give about sharing the faith (3:15)?
- Why does Christ's death guarantee that we will be brought to God (3:18)?
- What is to be the purpose of all our speaking and serving (4:11)?
- Why do we always need to be self-controlled and alert (5:8)?

Hebrews: Certain Jewish converts were tempted to return to Judaism. The writer to the Hebrews warns them not to do that because Jesus is the fulfillment of everything God revealed in the Old Testament. His sacrifice is the full and final payment for the sins of all people.

- Who is Jesus? What has he done? What does he still do? See 1:3.
- Why is Jesus now crowned with glory and honor (2:9)?
- Why did Jesus share in our humanity (2:14,15)?
- Why has Jesus been found worthy of greater honor than Moses (3:3-6)?
- Why can we approach God's throne of grace with confidence (4:14-16)?
- How do some people crucify the Son of God all over again (6:4-6)?
- Read 7:26,27. What is the significance of each of the five ways by which Jesus, our High Priest, is described? How does Jesus differ from the priests of the Old Testament?
- What has the blood of Jesus accomplished for us (9:12)?
- Death/judgment; Christ's sacrifice/the sins of all. What is the point of the comparison (9:27,28)?
- How is faith defined in 11:1? Choose one hero of faith in this chapter and explain how this definition applies.
- How is Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith (12:2)?
- How was Jesus like a high priest bringing a sin offering (13:11,12)?
- What sacrifices are we to bring through Jesus (13:15,16)?
- How is Jesus' resurrection connected to the shedding of his blood (13:20)?

Conclusion: How would you respond to someone who said, "I give of my time and talents at church, and I also practice sacrificial giving so that I can improve my standing with God"?

Contributing editor Mark Lenz, a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. John, New Ulm.

Find this article and possible answers online. Go to www.wels.net, jumpword "fic," and click on "It's all about Jesus." Answers will be available after Oct. 5.

Fulfiller of promises

Mighty Savior

Merciful Savior

Son of God

Savior of all

Liberator

Righteousness of God

Bringer of joy

Mediator with the Father

Sacrifice for sin

Word of life

Faithful witness



It's okay to be a member of God's family and single.

Rhoda Strobel

WELLS and terminally single

"Hi, my name is Rhoda. I'm 36, and I'm single."

"Hi, Rhoda!"

Did you ever feel like you should be in a 12-step program to be "cured" of being single? Being single is a little like being a leper. We are able to attend the same church as the married people, but we're not quite complete members of the community. I may be the first to tell you, but being single is not a disease. And it's not contagious!

Being single isn't a death sentence.

Being single is acceptable

"How's your love life?"

"Have I got the guy for you!"

"My cousin is single. He's 50-years-old . . . but he's a young 50!"

I've heard it all. I've been on more blind dates than I care to mention. I have had many, how do I put it, "distinguished" bachelors express interest in dating me. About when I hit 30, I was told that I needed to start looking for a husband among widowers and divorced men. Ouch!

I am extremely content. I like my life. I have no complaints. I am not interested in changing anything. The common response to this is, "That's

when it usually happens!" When what happens? When I turn into an acceptable human being? When I end the disgrace that is my single-hood?

Being single is an end, not a transition

It is easy to get the impression that the married world feels we singles are eternally in transition. Being single can't be the end. It can't be all there is. It's only a steppingstone to marriage. You're single? I'm sorry. Don't be sorry! Some of us actually are happy. Granted, when I was in my 20s, all I wanted was to meet Mr. Right. But I've been single for 36 years now. I've gotten used to it. I am a family.

Being single has advantages and disadvantages, as does marriage. I don't have to call myself if I'm going to get home late. However, there's no one to greet me when I arrive. I can go wherever I want on vacation. However, I have to enjoy the beauty of God's creation by myself. I don't have the responsibility of children. However, when you are old and surrounded by your grandchildren, I will be alone. I shoulder the responsibilities of my life alone. There is no one else to help, no one else to blame.

Not long ago, a friend wanted to set me up on what would have constituted my millionth blind date. I felt obligated to go, but I wasn't happy about it. I'm tired of first dates. I'm

tired of going to a restaurant to meet some man who has to wear a red carnation so I can pick him out in a crowd. I'd rather be home under an afghan watching a good movie. So, I called my brother, who happens to be a pastor. He said, "Rhoda, I give you permission to be single." What a revelation! It's okay to be a member of God's family and single.

Being single and a member of God's family

As an active member of a congregation, the main pitfall becomes, "She can do it, she's single. She doesn't have anyone waiting at home." Single people can and should be vital, active members of their churches, but they also have lives. They have responsibilities different from married people, but responsibilities nonetheless.

Yes, marriage and children are blessings from the Lord. People who are happily married want everyone to have the joy in companionship that they have. I don't think marriage is a bad thing. However, being single isn't a death sentence. God has richly blessed my life with opportunities to serve him . . . and finally, isn't that what it's all about?

God is in control of my life. I am content with his path for me. Please, be content with me!

Rhoda Strobel is a member at Faith, Sussex, Wisconsin.