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DECEMBER 2004

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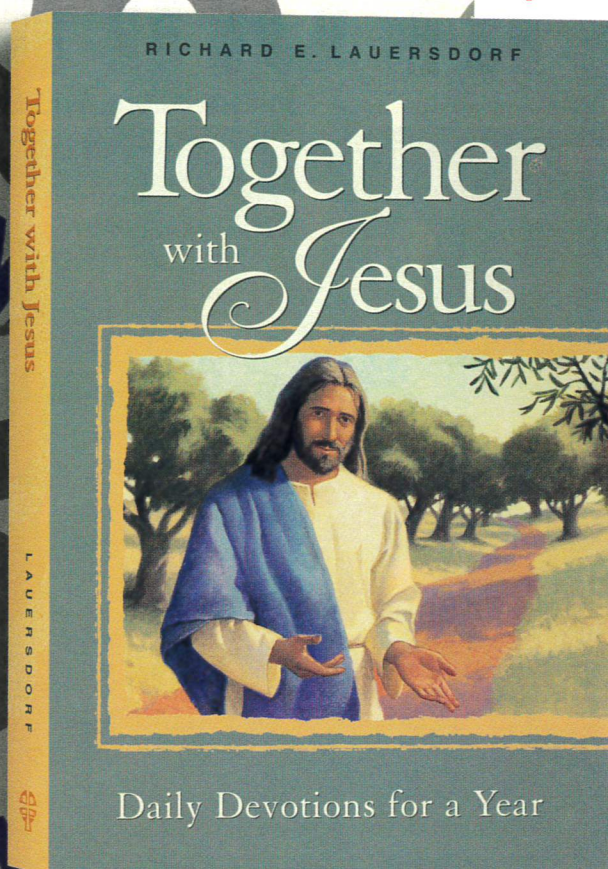


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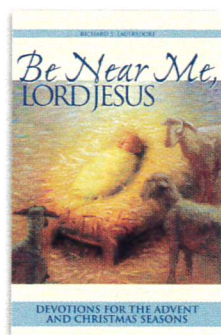
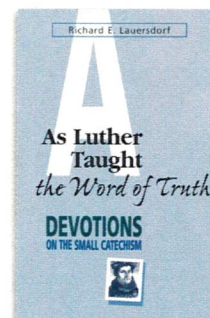
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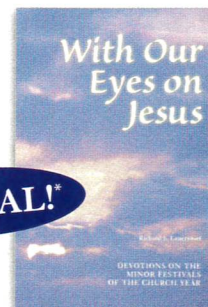
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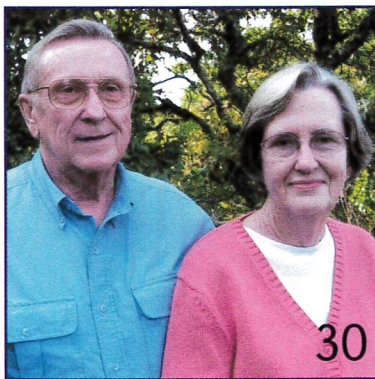
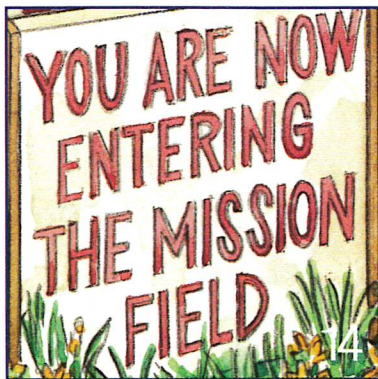


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“Advent is an invitation to wait—quietly, patiently, expectantly, joyfully.”



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Forward in Christ

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1 Kings 8:57

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Forward in Christ magazine
WELS Communication Services
2929 N Mayfair Rd
Milwaukee WI 53222-4398
Phone: 414-256-3210
Fax: 414-256-3862
E-mail: fic@sab.wels.net
www.wels.net

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Rev. Gary P. Baumler
garyb@sab.wels.net

ASSISTANT EDITORS

Nicole R. Balza
nicoleb@sab.wels.net
Julie K. Wietzke
juliew@sab.wels.net

STAFF WRITER

Laura C. Warmuth
laurachristine@wels.net

SEMINARY CONSULTANT

Prof. Daniel Leyrer

ART DIRECTOR

Karen Knutson

DESIGNER

Carianne Ciriacks

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DECEMBER

WHAT'S INSIDE *by Nicole Balza*

Although we strive for every issue to be Christ-centered, I believe you'll find this issue to be especially focused on our Savior. And, although the story of Jesus' birth never changes, our authors have found ways to spark new insights into what his birth means for us.

Three authors explore the aspect of "waiting." As our cover implies, a lot of excitement is wrapped up in waiting for Christmas to arrive. Devotion writer Steve Geiger begins by asking, "Do you ever long to tear the paper off the presents God has waiting for you?" (p. 7).

Then Joel Gerlach's article, "Advent—a time to wait" (p. 10), stresses how important it is for us to prepare our hearts for Christmas. Gerlach reminds us, "It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD." If you're wondering how to make your Christmas "quiet," read Gerlach's article.

Fred Fedke's back page article, "Up and waiting," discusses waiting to get to heaven. His story is heartfelt and personal, but it has applications for all of us.

May your Christmas be filled with the joy of knowing that God's promises are worth the wait!

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FALLING FROM FAITH

Richard Gurgel's answer to the question of "Falling from faith" [Aug.] should have begun by saying forthrightly and strongly, "Yes, believers can fall from faith." He then could have followed with a much better explanation of why this can happen. The belief of "once saved, always saved" must be rejected in a clear and concise manner. I'm not sure that Gurgel's answer was a clear one.

*Arthur Brandt
Mesa, Arizona*

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

I want to thank Jim Schneck for telling all of us about his "drug" problem ["My 'drug' problem," Sept.]. I, too, was "drug" to church by my father and mother. Now my two-year-old son, Joshua, has a "drug" problem, too. Although sometimes I wonder if he'll ever sit still, I know that [church] is right where he needs to be. I also know Jesus is smiling when my little Josh folds his hands and says, "Amen."

*Jennifer Hansen
Omak, Washington*

LUTHERANS AND SCIENCE

I write to congratulate you on the publication of "The miracles of our time" by Dr. Sandra Gade [Oct.].

This is an upgrading to an Intelligent Design position as compared to the distinctive "A Lutheran view of science" by Ronald A. Buelow and Ryan C. MacPherson [Jan.].

Ralph C. Lohrengel

LETTING PEACE RULE

I take exception to the premise presented by Donald Patterson in his article "Letting peace rule" [Sept.]. Is Patterson promoting the concept that any time there is disagreement in a congregation it is better for the "squeaky wheel" to leave to keep peace within the church? Following this logic, WELS would have kicked out Martin Luther for having a "dis-senting" opinion.

What does one do if the pastor is in error? Leave and let him continue to lead others astray? What if the leadership in a congregation is blatantly breaking the law even after being informed of their illegal activities? Is the Lord pleased or glorified when a member is intimidated from standing up for what is right so that the peace might be kept in the congregation?

Yes, God provides us peace through the Holy Spirit. Peace, that we are his children and find our salvation through him alone. Peace, that when we stand up for truth, righteousness, and godly conduct, he will be with us when we are persecuted.

All congregational business should be handled with love and with the mind of Christ. Our mission is to be so rooted in the Word of God that we can deal in a loving manner with those who grate on our nerves. We should not send them away so our consciences will no longer be bothered by their "annoying" message.

*Paul Pergande
Austin, Texas*

Patterson is not encouraging "squeaky wheels" to leave the church. His article also does not address the subject of doctrinal error. The article references "matters of Christian liberty."—ed.

BEING WELS AND SINGLE

I just finished the October issue. I loved the last article, "WELS and terminally single." As a former single, I completely agree with the author. However, it has been my unfortunate experience that the church's attitude has been one of "just wait, your time will come after you are married with a family" rather than "let her do it, she's got the time" as this author has noted.

As someone who desperately wanted to be involved at church and whose talents did not rest in the bake sales and altar guilds, I found it impossible to be active outside of Sunday services. I even changed

churches and still found the same problems. As a church body, we must better utilize our young singles—both men and women—or we will lose them.

*Melissa Kehoe
Germantown, Wisconsin*

LUTHER PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Thank you for noting the accomplishment of the Luther Prep baseball team in your October issue ["District news"]. However, you missed the real story about this group of young men. A 25-1 record is, indeed, noteworthy, but even more noteworthy is the fact that out of the 12 seniors on this team, eight of them enrolled at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., to continue their preparation for the public ministry.

Wins and losses may be a measure of our success on the baseball field, but for a school like Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., the real success is in the number of graduates that the Lord leads to offer themselves as potential full-time workers in his kingdom.

*Pete Kiecker
Watertown, Wisconsin*

CORRECTIONS

Two corrections need to be made to the November issue. On p. 8, in the editorial "Concentration + perspiration = sanctification?", the credit for the Uncertainty Principle should have gone to Werner, not Adolf, Heisenberg. On p. 13, the illustration should have been attributed to Bill Scott. We apologize for these errors.

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*.

God wraps his presents

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son . . . Galatians 4:4

Stephen H. Geiger

A child entranced, lying flat on the floor. Chin in her hands, eyes straight ahead. Under the Christmas tree are packages decorated, the glow of lights bringing soon to her stare a tag with her name.

"Mommy, there's a present under the tree for me! Can I open it?"

Had the day been right, she could have torn off the paper. But when the day is too soon, mothers and fathers must gently explain that Christmas is coming but hasn't come yet.

Waiting to open God's presents

What pain for a child, that wrapping paper. It gets in the way. It keeps joy hidden. It reminds one of the need to wait.

Do you ever long to tear the paper off the presents God has waiting for you?

How many promises has God placed under your tree? How many guarantees has God given which remain wrapped? How many words from Scripture do you treasure, words still waiting for fulfillment? Perhaps your eyes have yet to see how God is working a situation for your eternal good. At times your heart can be worried, wondering whether God will give all you need in years to come. So distant it can seem, final rescue from this evil world to lasting joy in heaven.

All for your good. No need to worry. Eternal happy home. Glorious promises. But for so long they can remain covered in wrapping paper. Do you ever wish to get past the paper and go straight to fulfillments?

Like an impatient child staring under the tree, we ask, "Can I open it? That promise has my name on it. Why aren't you giving it to me

now?" We can imagine that Christmas may never come.

Unwrapping the present of God's Son

"When the time had fully come, God sent his Son."

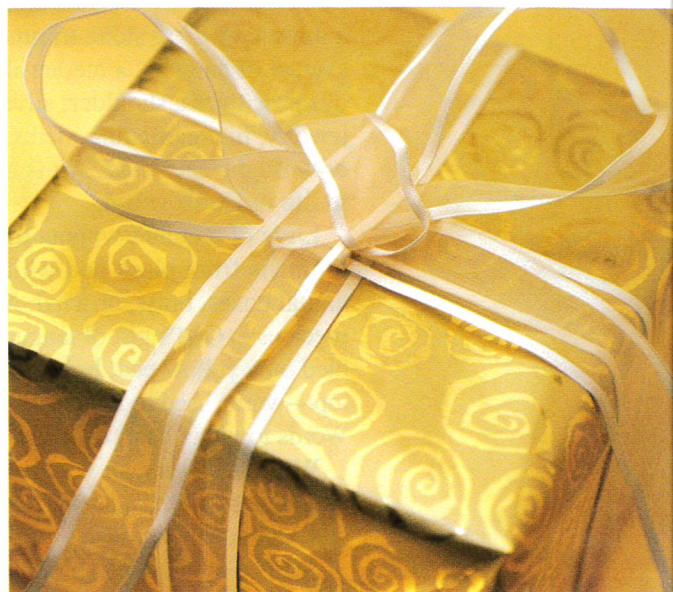
For how many did that promise, the promise of a Savior, remain wrapped under a tree? The first humans saw only colored paper. Abraham and Sarah could only imagine what was inside. Ruth and David, Isaiah and Daniel viewed a present unopened. For how many did death occur while they were still on their stomachs, chin in their hands, staring in awe at a gift beautifully wrapped with their name on it?

When the time had fully come, God sent his Son. When the time had fully come, the paper came off. Yes, God always keeps his promises.

What sudden shame can strike our hearts, recalling every moment we've doubted God's words. We've assumed the worst about him, imagining the passage of time to be evidence of unfaithfulness. God would have every right to erase our name from his promises, even from that greatest of presents once under a tree.

Yet when the time had fully come, God sent his Son to help, not hurt, us doubters. In our place he was content with promises still wrapped. When facing the worst, he was confident his Father was doing the best. He then hung as the price for our questioning impatience. Finally he rose, guaranteeing that all doubts are forgotten, forgiven.

The Christmas present was unwrapped. The promise was fulfilled.



All is well and all will remain well, even though other promises at the moment may still be wrapped.

Marveling at God's presents

Find such promises. Collect from Scripture all God has guaranteed. Place those words under your tree and know that though centuries may pass before fulfillments are observed, not a promise will remain unopened. Not a promise will remain unkept.

For now your joy may rest in the pleasure of lying on your stomach, chin in your hands, marveling at the beautiful paper that covers God's gifts. But only for now.

Yes, God also wraps his presents.

Contributing editor Stephen Geiger is pastor at Prince of Peace, Yankton/Christ Our Savior, Vermillion, South Dakota.

Art imitates life

Thomas J. Jeske

Watercolor, charcoal, the sheen of oil paint on old canvas; little stones assembled in a mosaic or a big stone trimmed for a lintel; an avenue of banners, a medieval tapestry, the drape of fabric over a shoulder; silver and turquoise jewelry, fine gardening, items woven or welded or wrought: this is art. Art is a human response to life in God's world.

Little of it comes without the accompaniment of music from black and white keys, strings, digital boxes, brass, or wind. And just think how precious is God's gift of language! Ideas are scribbled on a yellow pad; lyrics are tapped into a laptop—words used to record, to incite, to soothe. Words to win a heart or to close a mind are art.

We love a story, so we love the stage. The attendant costumes, scenery, lighting, sound, and movement to music—all art.

Art is a created thing. God created the originals. He designed, he invented, he directed. God set the boundaries, while we work inside them. Artistic expression finds a rightful place beneath its Creator.

"Art imitates life," we say, learning by watching as Adam searches for words to describe Eve, as the woodworker touches chisel to wood, as the seamstress purses lips lined with pins.

Art must serve the Master's purposes. When he directed his human creatures to "subdue [the earth]" (Genesis 1:28), God knew that he had included in his bundle of gifts the capacity to think artistic thoughts, to invent pencil and paper, to fabricate Stradivarius and Stratocaster.

"Everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer" (1 Timothy 4:4,5).

But the whole creation has been groaning in bondage to decay (Romans 8). Included is art, worshiped as a god by many. "If I have a thought, that thought needs to be expressed.

I must be true to myself; I must follow my Muse. Should someone set limits for me, it is my duty as an artist to step across them."

So the eyes God gave our children to study his world now take in sights, ideas, and practices that sicken and stimulate to sin. In editorial, in the theater district, in the dance, at the cinema, God is ignored, insulted, lied about. An hour in Borders or Barnes & Noble shows us via fashion designer, storyteller, and photographer uncounted images of wrong sex and brutality and occult.

Just because I have a thought does not mean that thought is to be spoken. Just because you have an impulse does not mean that impulse requires expression. As a sinner-saint, the Christian must learn the discipline of suppressing many thoughts and impulses . . . and repenting of them.

"We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). So the Christian does not banish, eradicate, or marginalize art, muttering something about "all this useless beauty." But we also remember that God did condemn those improvising on musical instruments when they did not view themselves as accountable to him (Amos 6:5).

Content yourselves with his statutes, Christians. It's no sin to be glad you're alive. Bach would write Jesus' name on top of a piece of paper and then get down to writing a new piece of music each week for his congregation.

"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17).

Contributing editor Tom Jeske is pastor at Living Hope, Omaha, Nebraska.

Artistic expression finds a rightful place beneath its Creator.



at the foot of the cross. Richard L. Gurgel

TOPIC: Losing salvation

I know that I can contribute nothing to my salvation. I also know that “once saved” doesn’t mean I can’t lose salvation. But if I can lose my salvation because of bad behavior, wouldn’t this suggest that although my salvation is a free gift through faith initially, that keeping my salvation has to do with works (prayer, not sinning, living a good life, loving my neighbor, going to church, devotions)?

Scripture makes it absolutely clear we cannot contribute the least speck to our salvation. Our baptism clothed us in Christ’s perfect righteousness (Galatians 3:27). By his Son’s life, death, and resurrection God declared us—by nature wicked—to be righteous in his sight (Romans 4:5). Even our faith, which clings to Christ’s salvation, is part of God’s complete gift package (Ephesians 2:8,9) worked by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3) through the gospel (Romans 10:17).

You are also correct that salvation can be lost. In the final analysis, it’s only unbelief that damns and not “bad behavior” itself. Yet carelessly persisting in sin destroys faith. In Luke 8 Jesus speaks of those who fall in times of testing and others whose faith is choked by life’s worries, riches, and pleasures. 1 Timothy 1 mentions those who shipwrecked their faith by not “holding on to faith and a good conscience.”

We cannot contribute one speck to our salvation, but by our own arrogance or carelessness we can throw it away. Therefore, Scripture urges us repeatedly to fight the good fight of faith (Ephesians 6 and 2 Timothy 4 for example). We can participate in this good fight because the Spirit planted a new self within us when he brought us to faith.

However, this cooperation in sanctification is in no way a meritorious work that partially earns salvation. Our sanctified life does not make us any more children of God than we already are. We are already heirs of heaven in Jesus.

Second, it’s not our good works that preserve faith. Good works aren’t a means of grace. Good

works flow from faith worked in us by the means of grace. The most crucial battle of the good fight is living in daily repentance. That’s hardly a meritorious work!

Daily repentance means that the Spirit through his law crushes our natural proud arrogance. Daily we learn to hate what our sinful nature loves. Then daily through the gospel the Spirit cheers our spirit through Christ’s forgiveness that is new every morning. Through daily repentance the same gospel that created our faith preserves and strengthens our faith.

My sins threaten and weaken my faith, but the Spirit through the gospel in Word and sacraments strengthens and preserves my faith. That’s why Lutherans typically speak of God’s preservation of faith and not the perseverance of the saints. The key is not our perseverance but the Spirit’s preservation.

The rest of our sanctified life then flows from this strengthening and preserving work of the Spirit. Fruits of faith don’t strengthen or preserve faith but flow from a faith that has been strengthened and preserved. What is more, although our new self participates in this sanctified living, the praise belongs to the Spirit. That same gospel that preserves our faith graciously empowers our sanctified living. “It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

Evil works can lose salvation by destroying faith. But the reverse isn’t true. It isn’t my good works that preserve faith. Keeping my faith has everything to do with the gospel, and that is purely the work of the Holy Spirit.

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.

Advent — a time to wait

The waiting of Advent elicits expectation and joy.

Joel C. Gerlach

*W*ait! That's not one of our favorite words. Who likes to wait? In a long line at a checkout counter in a supermarket, for a freight train going four miles an hour at a railway crossing, for a prospective employer to make up his mind, in an airport when the monitor says your flight has been delayed, for your doctor to get back to you with the results of a biopsy? For most of us, waiting is not something we relish. It's not a pleasant pastime; it's a frustrating waste of time.



Sometimes perhaps, but not always. Especially not now at the beginning of a new church year. It's Advent again, that perennial four-week season of the year that Christians set aside to prepare for the coming of the Lord. Advent is a Latin word that means "coming." Coming implies waiting.

Advent is an invitation to wait—quietly, patiently, expectantly, joyfully.

Quietly and patiently

Advent waiting is something the people of God have been doing ever since God first promised a Savior from sin after the fall in Eden. God's Old Testament people waited 4,000 years for that promise to be fulfilled. That was a long wait. The promise finally reached fulfillment with the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God. Before Jesus left this world and returned to his throne in heaven, he issued another promise: "I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:3). That was 2,000 years ago. We are still waiting. That's what Advent is all about.

The author of the book of Lamentations says, "It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD" (3:26). That is why the church, ever since the Synod of Lerida in A.D. 524, has designated the four weeks before Christmas on the church's calendar as Advent. It is definitely a good thing to be waiting "for the salvation of the LORD."

Waiting quietly, that is. And that's not always an easy thing—given the prevailing moods that pervade the pre-Christmas atmosphere. As the masses see it, this is no time for waiting quietly. This is a time for hurrying and scurrying. You know the routine. Perhaps you get caught up in it too.

It takes conscious effort to resist the temptation to get swept up in the tide and then carried away in the secularization that is the hallmark of the Christmas season.

Advent says, "Wait, slow down! Don't get entangled in the hustle and

the bustle of the season. Get focused instead on what really matters."

But what does it mean to "wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD?"

When the author of Lamentations wrote those words, Israel was at the nadir of its existence as a nation. It was 586 B.C., the date for the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (Saddam Hussein's predecessor). Wholesale slaughter and devastation engulfed kings, priests, princes, prophets, and common people alike. Starving mothers ate their offspring. The nation's elite ended up in exile. The fall of Jerusalem was a wake-up call. God was using drastic measures to teach his apostate people to "wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD." His promise to send a Savior had not been invalidated by the rebellion of his people.

Shades of 9/11? A grim reminder that we too live in troublesome times—exacerbated by the constant and growing threat of terrorism, the erosion of basic morality, and the lack of respect for the sanctity of life? The season's misplaced emphasis may be a diversion. But it's hollow. It's only temporary. In the midst of all the seasonal trappings, Advent is reminding us, "It is good to wait quietly." For what? "For the salvation of the LORD."

The exhortation to "wait quietly" presupposes that in this world "we do not have an enduring city," and that we are "aliens and strangers on earth . . . longing for a better country—a heavenly one" (Hebrews 13:4; 11:13,16).

Expectantly and joyfully

The Advent disposition of waiting quietly for the salvation of the LORD evokes two dominant moods—expectation and joy. Advent expectation is nourished by the confidence that the LORD, who came once as he promised, will come again—as he promised. And when he does, all lamentations will come to an end as we are ushered, finally and endlessly, into the presence of our LORD. Meanwhile he says, "Lift

up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28).

Advent joy is nourished by the awareness that what we are waiting quietly for is the salvation of our LORD. What God's Old Testament people awaited for 4,000 years is now an accomplished fact, signed, sealed, and delivered by the birth, death, and resurrection of our LORD. The Advent joy we have in Christ is a theme that St. Paul wove like a silver thread into his letter to the Philippians. Though he was being "poured out like a drink offering," he could still say, "I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me" (Philippians 2:17,18).

This coupling of the moods of expectation and joy is prominent in many of the 32 Advent hymns in *Christian Worship* (CW). Perhaps none of them expresses those moods to affect us more than does the familiar and beloved "Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel." The contrast between the opening lines and the refrain is unmistakable—and intentional. It makes the hymn what it is. The plea for Emmanuel to come "and ransom captive Israel" is somber, plaintive, and expectant. The refrain that follows is irrepressibly exuberant: "Rejoice! Rejoice!"

This year in Advent (Nov. 28-Dec. 23), read and ponder an Advent hymn a day. Look for the words "come," "wait," and "rejoice." "The Advent of our King our prayers must now employ, And we must hymns of welcome sing in strains of holy joy" (CW 1:1). That's the first of the Advent hymns. The last one ends on a similar note. "All grief must flee before his grace, And joy divine will take its place" (CW 32:1).

Let this Advent season be for you what our fathers meant it to be when they incorporated it into the Church's calendar more than 1,500 years ago. May blessings abound to you as you remember that "it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD."

Joel Gerlach, a retired pastor, is a member at St. John, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.

I'm such a loser

Through Christ, I've lost my sins and my fear of damnation.

Deborah Koestler-Kuck

I'm such a loser.

Pretty negative comment if I do say so myself. One could say it's even self-destructive. It knocks down one's self-esteem.

But if we're honest, haven't each of us, from time to time, sighed it or mumbled it under our breath? We got dumped for the first time, or second, or third. We didn't make the cut for the sports team of our choice, and all our friends did. We failed that important test, even after we studied so hard. We weren't able to afford some luxury for our family, and it seems everyone else is able to. We didn't get the promotion even after we put our best efforts forward. Worse yet, we got laid off.

If only I could have landed that parallel park, I'd have passed my driver's exam. My husband or wife left me, as hard as I tried to make it work. My children aren't perfect, where did I go wrong?

Yup, we've all felt it from time to time.

Sadly, as hard as we may try, things will never be perfect. We'll lose or have things go wrong some of the time. We were never promised that everything would be perfect in this life. Adam and Eve's fall into sin allowed unhappiness and evil to enter the perfect world God created. Imperfection, sin, deceit, temptation surround us daily. It's exhausting to a human heart. And try as we may to overcome it, sin still beats us down. Jesus even tells us, "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33). Sin is trouble.



**Praise God,
we are losers!
But with Christ
we're winners
too!**

But Jesus didn't stop there. He said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world!" He has overcome the world. What a wonderful message. How comforting. Our loving Savior Jesus

came as a gift to our sin-drenched world that first Christmas Eve. His perfect life is a substitute for ours. His demeaning death on the cross for our sins, not for anything he had done, is a gift beyond compare. Most important, his glorious resurrection on Easter Sunday won for us salvation. Ah, yes, he has overcome the world and the hold it has on us. Praise be to God!

But what about the phrase I started with: "I'm such a loser"?

I am. You are too.

We lost our sins when Jesus died on the cross and wiped them all away. We lost our loneliness, when our Savior stepped into our life and said, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). We lost the anxiety the world brings us when Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you" (John 14:27). We lost the fear of damnation when he proclaimed, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

Praise God, we are losers! But with Christ we're winners too! He won peace, forgiveness of sins, and salvation for us by crushing Satan. Through him we've lost, and thus we've won!

It is my prayer that during this holiday season and all through the upcoming year, you will never "lose" sight of God's love for you. May you enjoy a Christmas filled with wonder and a new year touched with the peace of knowing that, thanks to your Savior, you're such a winner!

Deborah Koestler-Kuck is a member at St. Paul, New Ulm, Minnesota.

Humble beginnings

A story of love

Jon D. Buchholz

It started out downright embarrassing. The couple wasn't married, and the girl was pregnant.

Born under humble circumstances

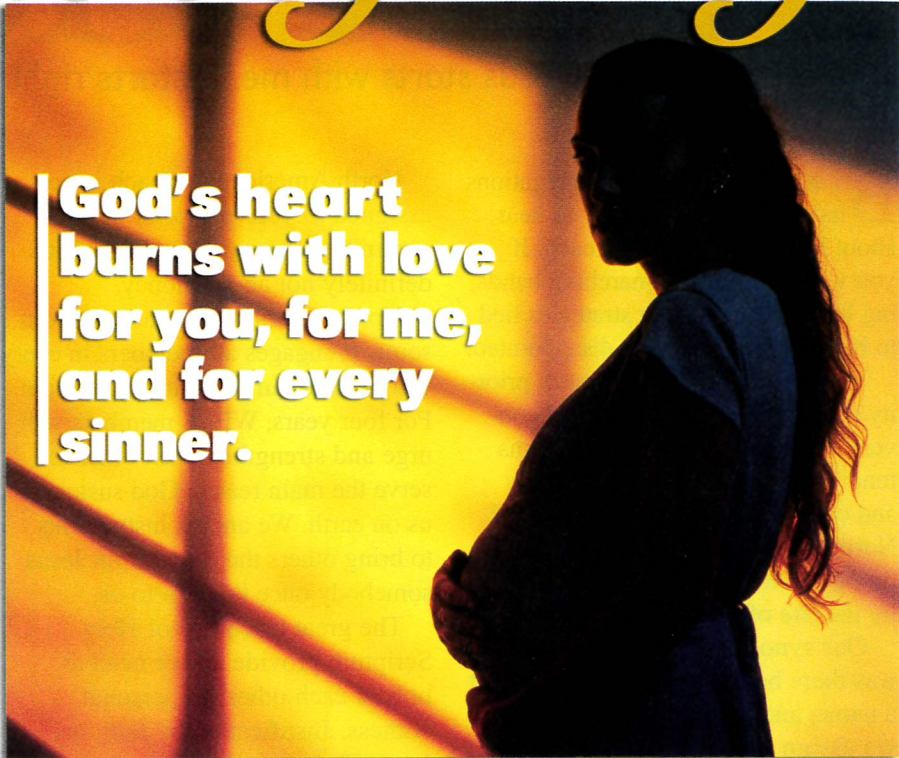
The girl's fiancé knew that the child wasn't his. He was heartbroken. She was such a beautiful girl, and he loved her. He had been looking forward to taking her as his wife. How could something like this happen? It seemed as if the only option for the jilted fiancé was to call off the engagement and move on.

People were sure to jump to the wrong conclusions. The man would have to make it clear that the child didn't belong to him. His reputation would be at stake. He couldn't allow people to believe wrongly that he had taken advantage of his intended.

When it was shown that the man had nothing to do with the pregnancy, there could be reprisals against the girl, especially if it was shown that she had not been violated. She would be the talk of the small Galilean town. Worse yet, she could be tried and punished as a fornicator.

Under such humble and ignominious circumstances God chose to enter the world. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin. His earliest days of human existence could have been the subject of scurrilous comments by gossipy townspeople.

When Jesus was born, it was in the humblest of circumstances. There was no room for his mother in the inn at Bethlehem, so the child was born in a stable. His first mattress was straw, his first bed a feed trough. The first visitors to come and worship the newborn babe were lowly shepherds, fresh in from the fields.



**God's heart
burns with love
for you, for me,
and for every
sinner.**

It wasn't a likely start for a king, but then, this was no ordinary king. "No garb of pomp or pow'r he wore. A servant's form like mine he bore. To lead the devil captive" (*Christian Worship* 377:6).

Born out of love for sinners

There is only one word that describes what God did in sending his Son: love. God's heart burns with love for you, for me, and for every sinner on the face of this earth. Why else would God endure such shame, scorn, and humility? God's passion is you! And he was willing to enter this world and finally go to hell and back—so awesome is his love.

At Advent and at Christmas we see and hear God's love so clearly and beautifully. We hear God's love in the messages of the angels that Christ would be born. We hear God's love, joy, and peace when we listen to the angels sing to the shepherds on Christmas night. And we see

God's love in the flesh when we gaze upon the baby Jesus and look into the eyes of love.

God's love has penetrated our hearts. The Christ Child still comes to dwell with us in humble circumstances. He chooses sinners—weak, failing, filthy, wretched sinners—and he justifies us. He declares us "not guilty" for our sins. God makes our bodies his temples and our hearts treasured sanctuaries of peace. He renews, cleanses, uplifts, and daily encourages us in our struggles, reminding us that he has called us to a holy life and made us children of his love.

At Christmas we rejoice that the child once born in shame and humility does not spurn us in our shame and humility, but instead rules us with his love!

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!

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

Start here

Telling others about Jesus starts with me. It starts right here, and it starts right now.

Wayne D. Mueller

By now, most WELS congregations have set aside a Sunday to hear about North American outreach. If you were looking for marching bands, big banners, and clever strategies tied to big budgets, you were disappointed.

The North American outreach priority designated by our last synod convention is not a program. Programs tend to fizzle out when the money and original enthusiasm are depleted. North American outreach is directed by the Savior and will be sustained by the fire of his Spirit.

Our synod's four-year emphasis was there before we decided to give it a name, and it will be there long after we assign it another name. Foreign missionaries cannot do North American outreach for you in some distant land. It was not designed by and will not be implemented by a church official in an office somewhere.

North American outreach is not assigned to your pastor or to some committee in your church. And it's definitely not about money.

North American outreach is about souls. It engages all members in every congregation in our primary mission. For four years, WELS members will urge and strengthen each other to serve the main reason God sustains us on earth. We are his instruments to bring others the peace from Jesus somebody once brought to us.

The great teachings of Holy Scripture provide all we need to bolster each other for personal witness. Justification by faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord's own Great Commission, and the universal priesthood of all believers provide motive, incentive, and direction.

Justification by faith

Although all deserve to be condemned and punished for their sins, God justified the whole human race in the life and death of his Son. Not only did Jesus die for all (2 Corinthians 5:15), but the death of God's Lamb took away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Since Christ atoned for all, God declared the whole world

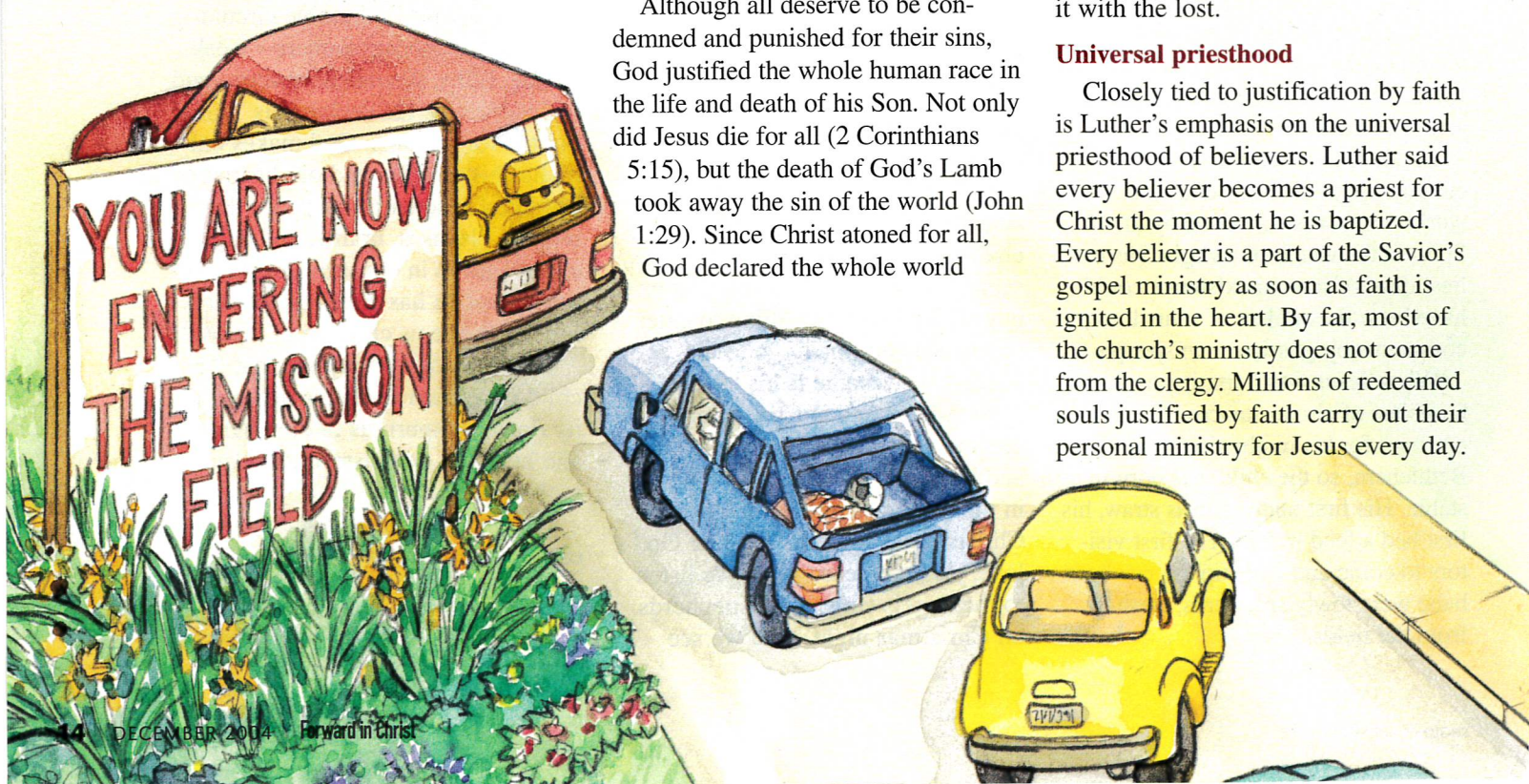
reconciled to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). God's declaration that the whole world is considered righteous for Jesus' sake is what the Bible calls justification (Romans 5:18).

Does God's declaration of justification for the whole race of sinners mean everyone will be saved and go to heaven? No. God does not force his love on people, and many—the majority—reject God's love and forgiveness. Those who do not receive justification through faith in Jesus do not enjoy God's forgiveness in this life and will be eternally lost.

This truth creates both love and urgency for our North American outreach efforts. "[Jesus] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). To trust the Savior's love for yourself goes hand in hand with a desire to share it with the lost.

Universal priesthood

Closely tied to justification by faith is Luther's emphasis on the universal priesthood of believers. Luther said every believer becomes a priest for Christ the moment he is baptized. Every believer is a part of the Savior's gospel ministry as soon as faith is ignited in the heart. By far, most of the church's ministry does not come from the clergy. Millions of redeemed souls justified by faith carry out their personal ministry for Jesus every day.



The general aim of our personal priesthood ministry is to bring glory to God. Peter writes, "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). Jesus stated it in fewer words: "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

But our Savior also commissioned us, his priests, to bring glory to God in a specific way. As we go about our daily priestly duties, Jesus asks us to give personal witness to his forgiving love. God is to be glorified for many things: his power, his holiness, his wisdom, and his infinite presence. Yet the most resplendent aspect of God's revelation of himself is his love. When we share God's justifying grace with lost souls, God's highest glory is displayed.

Jesus' last will and covenant bequeaths to every believer the privilege of doing what he did while on earth. He brought good news to everyone he met. So as he left this earth, he left with us his earthly mission: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). Just before the clouds hid him from sight, he told his followers, "You will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

Start here

Where do we start with this priestly service to the Savior? Our reluctance to give personal witness may be our propensity for imagining that it is much more difficult and complex than we can handle. We wrongly presuppose the need for professional training, trips to

remote places, permission from some church figure, or a schedule of visits.

But Jesus made it simple. He told his disciples that they would start their witnessing in Jerusalem, and from there it would spread into all the world. "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This was not a command but a prediction as to how witnessing begins. It starts right here. It starts where you are.

To trust the Savior's love for yourself goes hand in hand with a desire to share it with the lost.

North American outreach is our mutual effort to encourage each other in the simplicity of our Lord's Great Commission. It begins with me, right now and right where I am. With my family at the kitchen table. With my friends at work. In my e-mail correspondence. With my personal note at the bottom of a birthday card. In my conversation with another parent in the bleachers at the basketball game. During my visit to the nursing home. In my dentist's chair. At ballet lessons and at the dog groomer's.

The simple way Jesus said Christian

witness would start is still the way it most often happens. More than nine out of 10 new members in our WELS churches are brought in not by an evangelism committee, not by a pastor, not with Yellow Pages ads, not with a big church sign out on the highway, but by the personal invitation and encouragement of a member like you and me.

My North American outreach prayer is, "Start with me, Jesus. And let me start right here."

Wayne Mueller, first vice president of WELS, is a member at St. Paul, Ixonia, Wisconsin.



GOING STRONG

Looking back at how our synod's English-speaking magazine has evolved during its 90-year history shows how things have changed—and how they've stayed the same.

at 90

At the 1913 synod convention, delegates resolved that the synod should publish an English-speaking church paper. Synod President Carl F. W. Gausewitz followed up by appointing four pastors to lead the publication: John Jenny, John Brenner, Fred Graeber, and Hans Moussa. The first issue of what was called *The Northwestern Lutheran* was published on Jan. 7, 1914. From 1914-1939, an editorial board managed the bi-weekly magazine.

The magazine's editors set the tone

John Jenny, in his introduction in the first issue, comments on the language transition: "Whether we note this change with or without regret, we fully realize that language, like other externals, can never be an essential

factor in the make up of the Church of God. We are bidden to read the signs of the times. There is an urgent demand for an English parish paper in our synod, and the time has come to act."

In 1925, the synod's 75th anniversary year, Hans Moussa writes, "If the world stands another 75 years," and if "our descendants delve into the distant past to read their future by their past . . . they will thank their German founders in one breath for the gospel they brought to these shores, for their zeal in keeping it pure in doctrine, and for their tireless devotion to schooling in the hearts of the young."

The June 18, 1939, issue was the first to list one man as the magazine's managerial editor. William J. Schaefer served until February 1957.

As Morton Schroeder noted, "Schaefer's editorship was to be a ministry of reaching out. Without losing the readers who occupied the classrooms and the pulpits, he was to strive . . . to touch the people in the pew. . . . His actions . . . demonstrated that he was a calculating man. And all of his calculations centered around one concept: make *The Northwestern Lutheran* interesting and readable to the laity" (*Northwestern Lutheran*, 6/15/89).

The next two editors, Werner Franzmann (1957-1968) and Harold Wicke (1970-1982), served as both *The Northwestern Lutheran* managerial editor and the Northwestern Publishing House literary editor. Wicke took the call to be the first full-time



editor of the magazine on July 14, 1974, when the Conference of Presidents recognized that the responsibilities of this dual role were too much for one man.

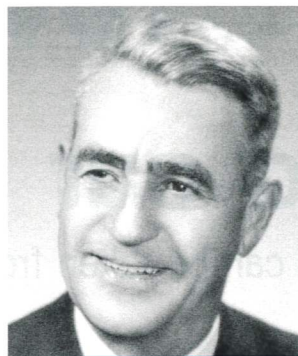
James (Jeb) P. Schaefer, son of William Schaefer, served as editor from 1982-1993. A plaque on the junior Schaefer's desk illustrates the attitude he brought to the magazine: "Crucify the old Adam—don't bore him to death."

His introductory editorial in 1982 prefaced many changes he brought to the magazine: "I want to assure you, *nothing will change*, that is, nothing that *really* counts will change." The subsequent changes that occurred were part of his dream of getting all WELS members to read the magazine. Subscriptions rose to an all-time high of 66,000 in 1990.

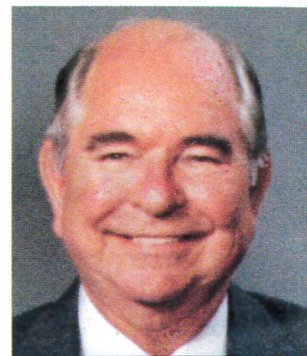
In January 1994, the present editor, Gary Baumler, began his work for the synod's official magazine. In March 1995, he wrote, "We will make design changes from time to time, usually without fanfare, if we feel they will serve you. We will not, however, change our dedication to the principles that have undergirded NL since its beginnings 81 years ago. God's Word guides what we print. . . . Still, may it always be



William J. Schaefer



Werner Franzmann



James P. Schaefer

said of NL, 'The more we change, the more we stay the same.'"

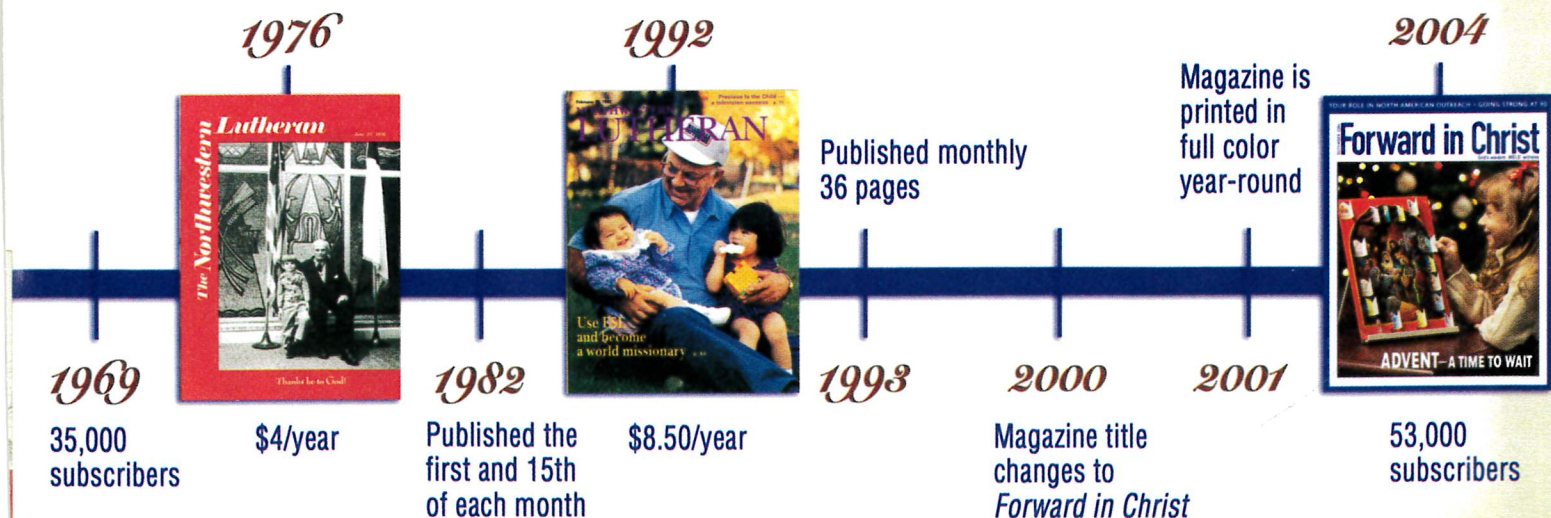
These words introduced some minor design changes that the magazine implemented, yet they foreshadowed other changes that have taken place while Baumler has been editor—changing the name of the magazine to *Forward in Christ*, printing each issue of the magazine in full color, and redesigning the cover more than once.

When asked to comment on the 90th anniversary of the magazine, Baumler writes, "I have thought on occasion of what it would be like to be 90 years old, and the picture isn't all that pretty. But to be a part of something 90 years old that is still young and vibrant has been a gift from God.

"*Forward in Christ* is still young because it brings a message that never grows old and never changes—the good news of Christ. It is vibrant not because of its colorful pages but because it inspires, instructs, and informs its readers—always centered on Christ. *Forward in Christ's* future is bright because God's Word shines from its pages. May he bless its use for decades to come."



Information for this article was taken in part from magazine articles written by Morton Schroeder in 1989 and Mark Braun in 2000-2001. To learn more about the history of the magazine, read their articles online. Go to www.wels.net, jumpword "ficarchive". Search by the author's name and the year the articles were printed.



WHATEVER

Beyond our control

Life is fragile and can be taken from us at any time.

Nicole Krug

I have goats mostly, but I acquired a few chickens. One hen was lying on eggs. A few days after they hatched, a chick left the barn and was peeping for its mother. I caught it and put it near its mother.

At that exact moment, though, a baby goat moved and stepped right on it. However, the chick got up immediately and ran out of the barn. Relieved it was okay, I picked it up to put it back by its mother.

As I held it in my hands, though, the little head rolled back. Its neck was broken. In the few seconds I spent deciding what to do, I watched that little chick die right there in my hands.

This small and common occurrence made me realize how fragile life really is. At any moment we can be taken from this world. It is beyond our control.

From a worldly view, it can be scary not being in control. However, from a biblical view, this can actually offer comfort. We may not be in control, but we have a God who is. Psalm 48:14 reminds us, "For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end." We don't know when that end will come, but God will protect us. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:34). Life may be hard and it may be scary, but we need not fear because we have a God who will watch over us.

But why? Why does God love us if we really are the sinners the Bible tells us we are? 1 Corinthians 15:22 states, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." One day we will die, like that little chick, but, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that who-

ever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). This verse reminds us why we can rest secure in God's loving protection. Jesus died for our sins—yours and mine. He paid the price for us. No matter what happens, we can be assured through that.

I'll still be scared, but I can turn to the Bible for comfort. Isn't it wonderful knowing that our God loves us and protects us? We just need to trust his will and know that he will take us at the right time. We may not think the time is right, but we need to realize that God does. "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God" (Psalm 20:7).

Nicole Krug is a member at Peace, Houghton, Michigan.



God's

will

In the news



WELS member **Victor Manian** was the focus of a June 3 article in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* titled "Judge with a reputation for fairness, calmness hangs up robe." The article details Manian's impressive career as a judge in Milwaukee

County for 31 years and announces that Manian is retiring as of Aug. 1.

Milwaukee County District Attorney E. Michael McCann was quoted as saying, "He's a real loss. He's a piece of history." He added that Manian's reputation for fairness, even under trying circumstances, is well deserved.

Manian, a member at Redemption, Milwaukee, serves on the synod's Board for Parish Services and Committee on Constitutional Matters.

The *Reno Gazette-Journal* honored WELS teacher **Jeff Koepsell** as one of the area's outstanding teachers in 2004. Koepsell is principal at Shepherd of the Mountains, Reno, Nev. In the *Gazette-Journal's* article about him,

he is quoted as saying that his goal is to "make sure that kids are grounded in the Lord."

Kathi Juarez, who nominated Koepsell for the award, says that he "goes beyond his job duties to help his students."

On Aug. 17, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reported that **Ben Moldenhauer**, "one of Wisconsin's few remaining World War I veterans, has died at 107."

Moldenhauer, a WELS member of Bethany, Fort Atkinson, Wis., served as a private in the U.S. Army in France for nearly two years during World War I.

LeRoy Martin, pastor at Christ the King, Port Charlotte, Fla., was quoted by the Associated Press after Hurricane Charley damaged Christ the King's worship facility and many members' homes.

Martin observed, "I guess it is at a time like this when you realize the significance of spiritual values when everything else has blown away."

Martin's words were then reprinted by Religion News Service on Aug. 16.

An easy way to witness

Order a subscription to *Forward in Christ* magazine for someone on your gift list this year. Giving a gift subscription to *Forward in Christ* is an easy way to witness to family and friends because the articles are packed with the law and gospel.

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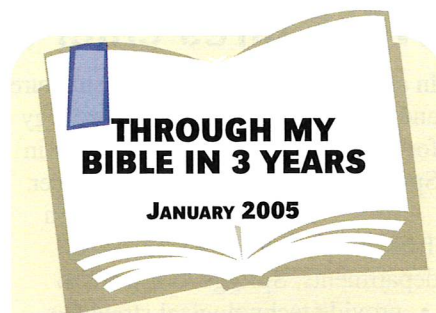
Forward in Christ

God's wisdom. WELS' witness

You have received a _____-year gift subscription to *Forward in Christ*, the official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, from _____.

Forward in Christ is a monthly inspirational and informational magazine with continuing information on Christian living, the Bible, and church life. May it help you grow in the knowledge and joy of the gospel of salvation.

For more information about *Forward in Christ*, visit www.forwardinchrist.net.



1. Revelation 3:1-6	17. Rev. 14:1-5
2. Rev. 3:7-13	18. Rev. 14:6-13
3. Rev. 3:14-22	19. Rev. 14:14-20
4. Rev. 4	20. Rev. 15
5. Rev. 5	21. Rev. 16
6. Rev. 6	22. Rev. 17
7. Rev. 7	23. Rev. 18:1-20
8. Rev. 8	24. Rev. 18:21-19:10
9. Rev. 9	25. Rev. 19:11-21
10. Rev. 10	26. Rev. 20:1-10
11. Rev. 11:1-14	27. Rev. 20:11-15
12. Rev. 11:15-19	28. Rev. 21:1-8
13. Rev. 12:1-9	29. Rev. 21:9-21
14. Rev. 12:10-13:1	30. Rev. 21:22-22:5
15. Rev. 13:2-10	31. Rev. 22:6-21
16. Rev. 13:11-18	



The Internet has become a vast maze of information. Knowing where to look for strong Christian content can make the journey easier.

Are you interested in resources that can help you tell more people about Jesus? Then you should visit www.wels.net/nao. This site gives insights into how to spread God's Word throughout North America—and beyond.

- View a trailer of the "Proclaim peace through Jesus" video.
- Discover communication skills that will help you share Jesus with friends and acquaintances.
- Learn how to handle unbelievers' objections about Christianity without arguing.
- Share the ways you've spread your faith and how you've seen the Holy Spirit work through your gospel witness.

WELS hires chief technology officer

In an effort to improve its infrastructure and to provide a technological strategy for the synod, WELS has hired Martin Spriggs as its chief technology officer.

Besides heading the Information Technology and Web Technology departments, Spriggs will work to

- provide technological strategies, guidance, and direction to the areas of ministry as well as to the synod at large,
- improve the technological infrastructure at the synod administration



New chief technology officer Martin Spriggs and his family. Back row: Martin, Aaron. Front row: Debra, Jana, Alycia.

building to help employees be better stewards of data and resources, and

- use the Internet as a means to improve two-way communication.

“Synodwide we all have the same mission,” says Spriggs. “But we need to take advantage of the technical resources God provides and build tools that we all can use to further that mission and reach more people with the gospel.”

Though this position is new, WELS’ efforts to improve its use of technology are not. In 1996 a temporary Tel/Tech Task Force was developed to create a technological infrastructure for the synod. Under the direction of Pastor Wayne Borgwardt, the task force led the development of major technology advances for the synod including videoconferencing at the synod office and synod schools; a WELS Internet presence, www.wels.net; and Web-based learning from our schools and churches. It also coordinated training in the use of technology for WELS churches and schools.

The now disbanded task force and a consultant’s study recommended the

hiring of a chief technology officer to continue advancing the use of technology in WELS.

Spriggs, a former WELS pastor, earned his MBA from Keller Graduate School of Management, Chicago. He built the Midwest presence for Net Quotient Consulting Group (a firm that provides Internet application development for Fortune 1000 companies) and Qwest Communications (a telecommunications firm), as well as worked on technical development and consulting at these companies. A member at Peace, Hartford, Wis., he, his wife Debra, and their three children live in Slinger, Wis.

Spriggs is excited to be working for WELS. “You always have opportunities to serve,” he says, “but this is an incredible opportunity to do it eight hours a day, five days a week, and in a way that will hopefully impact the entire synod.”

He continues: “It’s wonderful to see how God graciously directed me through 10 years in the corporate world in preparation for this role.”

Four brothers following God’s call

Last December, Dewid, Daniel, and Bounkeo Lor from Rock of Ages, Kansas City, Mo., left on a mission trip to Thailand. During their 10-day stay they met with village and family leaders to discuss spreading the gospel and to hold daily Bible classes. Groups came over the border to hear about Jesus. This mission team could offer empathy and understanding because they themselves had once been refugees.

These three Hmong men along with their brother, Ger, grew up in a refugee camp in Thailand. “We had little education, no chance to see the outside world, no freedom, and little food,” Dewid shares.

But they did have a strong Christian family. Their father was a pastor for more than 20 years in Thailand. “He still has the passion to do what he used to do,” Dewid says, “but because

he doesn’t speak English, he has to put God’s work aside with no choice.”

The religious background of most people in Thailand is Buddhism or animism. With this belief system already in place it is challenging to introduce the gospel to them.

“We realized that so many of our people [were] still in the hand of the devil,” says Dewid, “so in 2002, we decided that we wanted to go into the ministry to study God’s Word . . . and bring the gospel to our people around the world, God willing.”

Each of the brothers has different talents and goals. Dewid and Ger have the vision to be missionaries to the Hmong overseas. Daniel would like to be a pastor either in the United States or abroad. Bounkeo’s goal is to be a translator and perhaps complete

translating a Hmong Bible and other materials that are so badly needed.

The brothers each have a bachelor of theology degree from a Southern Baptist seminary and are now studying to become pastors through the Asian Ministerial Training program of WELS’ Pastoral Studies Institute. They have completed two of the four levels in the curriculum.

Whether it is to the growing Hmong population in the United States or to those across the ocean, these four men are willing to follow God’s call to spread the gospel.

“The Hmong ministry now is like a child that just begins to walk,” Dewid explains. “Without the love of God and support from Christians who already stand firm, bringing the gospel to them is desperate.”

Speaking a universal language

Just north of the Arctic Circle, on the west coast of Greenland, Abigail and Samuel learn to behave in church. They are the only children present. In fact, they compose the entire congregation. Dad reads the sermon. Mom plays the hymns. And they worship.

This is a glimpse into the home of Nathan and Kathy Rausch, missionaries to Greenland. They are not called workers, nor were they sent from their home in Bellevue, Wash., with the Great Commission in mind. Rather, Nathan's job as a research engineer brought the family to Greenland in June 2002, and the Lord is using them to minister on the ice cap.

"Greenlanders are highly spiritual people," Kathy explains. "Although their traditional beliefs have nearly disappeared, reference to spirits and a strong belief in dreams is very common."

A liberal Lutheranism is the state religion, but few practice it. Nathan has been able to discuss Christianity with coworkers and visiting scientists.



Nathan Rausch's work with this radar dish that studies the Northern Lights brought his family to Greenland. The Rausch family (from left): Samuel, Nathan, Abigail, and Kathy.

Samuel and Abigail use their church offerings to buy Bible story books for their friends. And through Kathy's desire to connect with the community, she has been given an incredible opportunity to witness.

Kathy started out as a volunteer at *Fjordskolen* (the public school) and later took on other classes, including sixth-grade "Christendom." Unfortunately, the curriculum presented Christianity more as a philosophical subject than something to believe in. With children's Bibles in Greenlandic and Danish and materials from WELS' Multi-Language Publications, Kathy has turned the course's focus to the gospel message. Multi-Language Publications' *Bible Stories in Pictures* has been especially helpful when Kathy lacks the Danish vocabulary to explain a biblical concept.

Kathy originally requested materials from Multi-Language Publications to use in an English-as-a-second-language class that she teaches for adults. The Bible Teaching series, which uses elementary-level English, and *The Life of Christ According to Mark* challenge the students to improve their language skills while reading the most important message of all.

Students sharing Bible verses with roommates, inviting friends to class, and initiating meal prayers all evidence the Holy Spirit's work. When one student wonders how God understands Greenlandic and Danish and English, Kathy assures him that from her church in Washington to his little school "at the end of the long fjord," God speaks a universal language of love to the world.

Rescue Kit for confirmands

Confirmation is a big day for kids. Long before they are ready to make marriage vows or commit to a career, they promise to be faithful to God for the rest of their lives. In 2000, when his grandson was confirmed, Wally Aswege was contemplating the rough road ahead for young confirmands.

"The Lord was bugging my conscience with the question, 'What would help keep him on the road to heaven?,'" Aswege shares. "I remember in my own life I weakened a number of times, although I was raised in a very devout family."

So Aswege put together what he calls a Rescue Kit for his grandson. He hoped that it would "bring back the memory of his confirmation vows and remind him that God is still in control." Aswege has made 77 Rescue Kits since then, one for every confirmand at Emmanuel, Tempe, Ariz.

The front cover of each kit displays the confirmand's name and Bible verse. Inside, the purpose of the kit reads: "If I should lose my way as I travel on the many highways of life, I need only to open this book which contains my original vows and instructions that started me on the right road to my goal of eternal life with the Lord." The kit also includes the Lord's Prayer, an open letter from a pastor to a confirmand, the confirmation Sunday sermon, and God's Yellow Pages (a directory of Bible verses for daily life). The kids receive a picture of the class and a video tape of the examination and confirmation services with the kit.

"I am over 80 years old and regret that I don't have something like this to look back on," reflects Aswege. "By the grace of God I pray that these young people will remain true to the faith, and in some small way, if they weaken, this Rescue Kit will remind them again that the Lord is still there for them."

WELS helps after Hurricane Ivan hits Grenada

Pastor David Kehl, once missionary in Antigua and Grenada and now administrator for Adult Discipleship, traveled to Grenada in October on behalf of the WELS Committee on Relief to help determine a direction for WELS' relief efforts in Grenada after Hurricane Ivan.

On Sept. 7, Hurricane Ivan built up strength and changed direction, unexpectedly ripping through the island of Grenada. Ninety percent of homes were damaged severely. Massive looting then broke out, demoralizing many.

Pastor Jim and Joyce Radloff have been living in Grenada since 2001, serving the people that have been gathered by WELS outreach efforts there. Now a new ministry has emerged for them—helping people get back on their feet after the hurricane.

Things haven't been easy. During the hurricane, water poured into the Radloffs' apartment and brought the ceiling down. Now they are living in borrowed housing. It took almost five weeks before their electricity was restored—and they were part of the first phase of the process! Finding a place to buy ice cubes was like finding gold and sipping a cold drink like a fantasy get-away. Joyce learned how to shower with just a cup or two of water.

In mid-October seven workers from the United States; two carpenters from the WELS congregation in Antigua; the Radloffs' son-in-law, Pat Gove; and a few Grenadian workers began to rebuild homes. Shipments of supplies have been slow, and volunteers are learning new meaning for the word "soon" as the lumberyards wait for needed supplies.

But progress is being made. Ronda, a regular contact of the outreach effort, had much damage done to her home. Volunteers have rebuilt the roof and even roughed in a room for a future bathroom. Mattresses are being purchased to replace the hurricane-drenched, twin-sized mattress Ronda and her two child-

ren have to share in the only rain protected corner of their house.

Challenges will continue. Local Grenadian Deighton Sylvester, our main ministry contact in Grenada for over 15 years, made his living through his quality photo developing studio. Now that is gone, with no present means of replacing his expensive equipment. He joins the majority of people on the island who will be without work. The agricultural industry that produced nutmeg and spices will take a long time to recover, as will the hotel industry that employed many.

Looking back at my personal experiences with hurricanes in Antigua, I know that God provides faith-building events like these to deepen trust and character. My family still reviews the memories to remember what is really valuable in this world, how God's promises are sure, and how generously Christian hearts respond when they understand the needs.

David Kehl

Update

Four new Grenadian-style homes have been constructed and many more repaired by WELS volunteers. In November another group of volunteers organized by the WELS Committee on Relief will be working in Grenada with a goal of building another 15 to 20 small homes. Gifts of love for hurricane relief in Grenada from local and individual support and the WELS Committee on Relief will exceed \$250,000.



Since the government couldn't promise when the schools would be open after the hurricane, Joyce Radloff offered classes as well as Bible story lesson time to the children. When she had nine (all at different age levels), it was almost too much to handle. By the last week of her "classes," the group had swollen to 30.



Ninety percent of the homes in Grenada were damaged by Hurricane Ivan. Many people didn't have anywhere else to go, so they lived "underneath" the still standing area of their homes.

Wandani means hope for inner-city youth

Three years ago, I went to the home of a seventh-grade boy who had attended *Wandani* to play basketball. His father told me the boy, Jarvis, was with his mother at the hospital.

I met the mother at the hospital. She had been severely beaten, but she didn't want to talk about herself. Instead, she told me that Jarvis had stopped going to his public school because he was getting into a fight every day. She was terrified he would end up like his father, who drank, had no job, and had put her in that hospital bed.

Jarvis transferred into St. Marcus Lutheran School the next week. His two younger brothers followed. His three cousins joined the school the next year, along with several friends. When Jarvis's mother went into a treatment program for battered women, Jarvis read the Bible lessons to his siblings before bed. And so it goes . . .

Wandani Youth Outreach began eight years ago when two members of St. Marcus, Milwaukee, felt the Lord leading them to reach out to the many poor kids who hung out near the church and school. These members began an after-school program one day per week and quickly amassed 10 to 20 kids.

Now *Wandani* is one of the largest youth ministries in Milwaukee, with an operating budget of more than \$50,000 and a staff that includes more than 40 volunteers. Last year, more than 300 children attended one of the many activities offered—tutor-



Wandani kids pray before a basketball game.

ing, arts and crafts, youth basketball, karate, dance, or fine arts. More than 60 *Wandani* children have transferred into St. Marcus Lutheran School. Many *Wandani* families have also transitioned into the church.

The *Wandani* formula is simple. Christ has given us life and salvation as a free gift—so we freely give to meet the needs of the children who come to the program. Christ calls us to live a disciplined and holy life—so we expect *Wandani* kids to behave with respect and dignity. Kids who wear our logo jerseys are living witnesses. They wear the name that reminds their neighbors that God is faithful and loving—so loving that he gave his own Son to die for the

world's sins. This message is emphasized in the Bible studies and prayers that begin each *Wandani* session.

The culture of Milwaukee's inner city desperately needs a source of identification that will make a young person proud. Kids find that in *Wandani*, so they don't look for it through neighborhood gangs. Our kids have crosses tattooed to their arms, not knives.

God has moved the hearts of many to support *Wandani*, and, as we often say, God will grow the program to the limits of our own obedience. Certainly there is no limit to the needs of children in our inner cities.

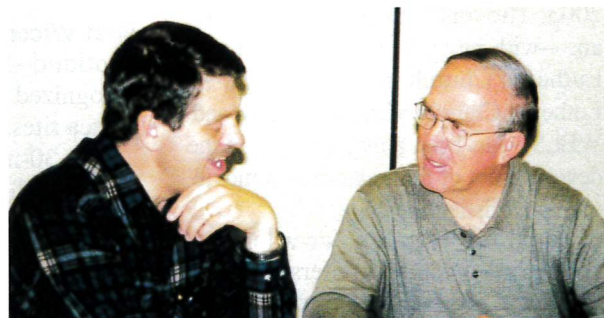
Dr. Peter Fraser

Sister synods meet together

Representatives from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) met Oct. 4-5 in Trego, Wis. This biennial meeting allows the sister synods an opportunity to strengthen their ties and encourage each other through worship, networking, discussion, and sharing ideas and mutual concerns.

"The ELS and WELS are family, sharing a common faith and con-

fession," says WELS President Karl Gurgel. "Good family relations depend on direct communication. This forum provides such an opportunity to talk with each other.



Presidents John Molstad (left, ELS) and Karl Gurgel (WELS) discuss the agenda for The Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum held at the rustic Schwan Retreat Center in Trego, Wis.

Women's Ministry Committee begins its work

"The most important purpose of the WELS Women's Ministry Committee to me," says committee member Jane Schlenvogt, "is to raise awareness in our circles that women have many God-given gifts and that it is God-pleasing for women to serve their Savior in a variety of ways."

This idea has been the foundation of the WELS Women's Ministry Committee, which was created by the Board for Parish Services under the Commission on Adult Discipleship in winter 2003. The committee is composed of six women and three men, and its main focus so far has been to study what God's Word has to say about his purpose for women. Committee member Peg Raabe explains: "If we are solidly grounded in God's Word, then we can reflect that in our goals and action plans."

To do that, the committee spends an hour and a half at the beginning of each meeting reading and discussing Scripture. The committee's work is being

recorded so that it can eventually be shared with all WELS members.

One resource that the committee has already created is the WELS women's ministry Web site. The

WELS Women's Ministry Committee

Purpose: To encourage God's people to welcome and equip women in developing and using their God-given gifts to glorify the Lord Jesus and build his kingdom.

Mission: Together as men and women,

- clarify from Scripture how we are to serve God.
- explore scripturally sound opportunities for service in the church for women who desire to use their individual and special talents.
- develop fresh approaches to ministry in which women can participate.
- offer a variety of venues for communicating and sharing ideas.
- equip women to carry out special opportunities within the church.

site includes guidelines for organizing women's Bible studies, examples of studies that women can use in their congregations, and information on WELS women's ministries taking place throughout the synod.

The committee is also planning a women's leadership conference for 2007. "We want to clarify how women can use their gifts and to help congregations use women in their ministry plans," explains Dave Kehl, administrator of Adult Discipleship. "We don't mean 'headship' or 'authority' when we speak about women being leaders. Leadership is the influence a person makes with God's gifts."

Schlenvogt concludes, "God has gifted his women purposefully to be in the trenches of life, saving the lost. We are not to neglect our gifts but put them to use."

For more information about the WELS Women's Ministry Committee, visit www.wels.net, jumpword "women"; e-mail pegr@sab.wels.net; or call 414-256-3278.

World news

Luther available for home viewing—*Luther* made its VHS and DVD debut on Nov. 30.

Luther covers Martin Luther's life from when he entered the monastery to the Augsburg Confession. *Luther* has played in theaters in nearly 1,000 U.S. cities since its release in September 2003. Thrivent Financial for Lutherans—with input from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and WELS—has been a major player in the development of this mainstream movie with a Christian message.

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

New Testament translated into near-extinct Cornish—The first translation of the New Testament from the original

Greek into Cornish, a Celtic language, was announced in August.

There are thought to be some 400 fluent speakers of the language today, along with another 4,000 or so who have some knowledge of it.

Work is now going ahead on the Old Testament.

First Wicca wedding recognized in Scotland—Scotland's first officially recognized pagan wedding, using Wicca rites, took place in September.

The 30-minute wedding of the two Canadians involved the couple jumping over a broomstick and having their hands tied together with red cord. It was said to be the most important event in the Wicca religion in the past 50 years.

More Left Behind books on the way—Additional books are being written for

the *Left Behind* series, a 12-book series that details a Christian look at what will happen in the end times. Co-authors Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins are writing three "prequel" books that will lead up to *Left Behind*, the first in the series, and one book set after the 12th book in the series.

According to the authors of *Left Behind*, *Christ will return secretly and "rapture" all Christians from the earth and take them to heaven. A seven-year period of tribulation will then occur on earth, followed by a 1,000-year reign of peace by Jesus himself, concluding with judgment day. This is not WELS' teaching of the rapture. To read an article about the "Left Behind" series and what WELS teaches about the rapture, go to www.wels.net, jumpword "ficarchive", and type "Wassup with the rapture?" in the title field.*

District news

Nebraska

Lord of Life, Thornton, Colo., opened a preschool and grade school this fall. Forty students are being taught by a staff of three teachers. Twelve of the 29 school families do not have a church home.

South Central

Grace, Lowell, Ark., opened a preschool in March and a grade school in September. Opening enrollment this fall was 30 grade-school students and 44 preschool students.

South Atlantic

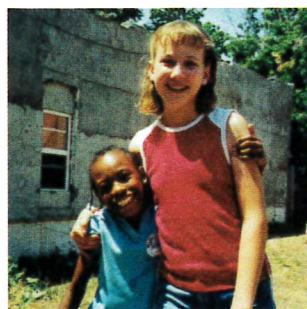


On Sept. 19, St. John, St. John's, Antigua, dedicated its new classroom facility. The new building enables the school to expand its enrollment and the congregation to have separate space for adult Bible study. Pictured are board of education chairman William Ekwere (left) and Missionary Ken Cherney (right).

Happy Anniversary!

CA—Members of Beautiful Savior, Carlsbad, Calif., celebrated **Silas Krueger's** 40th anniversary in the pastoral ministry on Oct. 10.

MI—**Bethel, Bay City, Mich.**, is celebrating the 125th anniversary of its school during the 2004-05 school year. Dedication of some new classrooms took place on Aug. 29. A harvest picnic was held on Sept. 18.



Keneza Henderson (left) and Akeley Shaller met at the summer Bible school held by WELS Denver Urban Outreach. Henderson regularly attends Bible Hours at Christ Lutheran Center, the WELS outreach center in Denver. Shaller is a member of Zion, Denver. This is the sixth summer that WELS volunteers have conducted a vacation Bible school in Denver's inner city.

Nebraska

California



On Aug. 22, members from three northern California WELS congregations—Eternal Life, Concord; Good Shepherd, Vallejo; and Living Word, Petaluma—gathered together for the second annual Northern California WELS Bocce Ball Tournament.

Southeastern Wisconsin



Kristin Zacher, a member of St. Jacobi, Greenfield, Wis., was autographed by Olympic softball pitcher Jennie Finch on July 2. Zacher's softball team played against the USA National Olympic team during the team's Olympic training.

NE—On Aug. 15, a special service of thanksgiving was held to thank God for the 50 years that **Mary Ann Trupp** has played the organ for worship services.

NW—Members of St. John, Wrightstown, Wis., celebrated **Ronald Zindler's** 25th anniversary in the pastoral ministry on Sept. 26.

SA—Not even Hurricane Jeanne could prevent members of **Christ, Keystone Heights, Fla.**, from celebrating the church's 25th anniversary on Sept. 26.

SC—On Oct. 17, the board of directors of Camp Shiloh, Pittsburg, Texas, celebrated the 40th anniversary in the teaching ministry of **Dr. Daniel Schmeling**.

Calvary, Dallas, Texas, dedicated its new sanctuary and celebrated its 40th anniversary on Sept. 26.

On Oct. 10, 91 members from **Abiding Savior, Killeen, Texas**, celebrated their congregation's 10th anniversary.

SEW—On Oct. 3, members of **Siloah, Milwaukee**, celebrated the congregation's 110th anniversary.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: CA—Hermann John; MI—John Eich; NE—Donald Wichmann; NW—Joel Lillo; SA—Christopher Kruschel; SC—William Gabb; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Bitter, David P., to Shepherd of the Valley, West Fargo, N.D.

Kuske, Paul W., to Holy Cross, Standish, Mich.

Leerssen, William T., to retirement

Lehmann, Richard W., to Peace, Janesville, Wis.

Schamber, Stephen P. Sr., to Holy Trinity, Wyoming, Mich.

Schumann, Robert L., to St. Paul, Amherst, N.H.

SYNOD CONVENTION

The 58th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod will be held July 25-29, 2005, at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Details will be announced later.

Memorials to be included in the *Book of Reports and Memorials* must be submitted to the President's Office by Feb. 15, 2005. A memorial is a formal petition to the synod convention that asks consideration for a particular item of business. A memorial may be brought by an individual member or groups of members in the synod. Memorials are usually composed in the format of "whereas" and "resolved." For an example, visit www.wels.net, jumpword "memorials".

Send memorials for the 2005 convention to President's Office, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; carlam@sab.wels.net.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The Synod Nominating Committee will meet at the synod administration building on Jan. 5 & 6, 2005. The committee will propose three candidates for each of the following positions:

- Synodical Council: teacher-at-large
- Board for Ministerial Education: chairman (pastor), three board members (two laymen, one teacher)
- Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Governing Board: chairman (pastor)
- Northwestern Publishing House Board: three board members (layman, teacher, pastor)
- Board for World Missions administrative committee members: Africa (pastor, teacher); Japan Europe Asia (layman); Latin American (pastor, layman); Southeast Asia (pastor, layman); Native American (layman)
- Board for Parish Services: chairman (pastor), member-at-large
- Commission on Worship: chairman
- Commission on Special Ministries: chairman

The list of candidates nominated will be published in *Forward in Christ* in spring 2005. The delegates will elect one candidate for each position at the synod convention on July 25-29, 2005. Any synod voting member is invited to send names with pertinent information by Dec. 15 to Steve Lemke, 1108 Ontario Ave, Sheboygan WI 53081; welssecslemke@aol.com.

NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS

The cutoff date for Congregation Mission Offering receipts in the synod's post office lock box is the last business day of each month. December 2004 offerings sent to our lock box will be credited as 2004 receipts through Jan. 10, 2005, as long as they are received in the lock box on or before that date and are clearly labeled as "December" offerings on the remittance coupon. We ask that you continue to mail your offerings to the lock box. That location, our bank, will provide you with the fastest deposit process for your congregation.

Todd Poppe, chief financial officer

ANNIVERSARY

Watertown, Wis.—St. Mark (150). Dec. 4. Service, 6 P.M. Dec. 5. Services, 7:30, 9, & 10:45 A.M.

COMING EVENTS

Christmas concerts

- **Lakeshore Lutheran Chorale**—Dec. 5, 7 P.M. First German, Manitowoc, Wis. Dec. 12, 4 P.M. St. Paul, Howards Grove, Wis. Alan Ross, 920-684-5833.
- **Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary**—Dec. 12, 3 & 7 P.M. Mequon, Wis.
- **Martin Luther College**—Dec. 12, 2 P.M. New Ulm, Minn.
- **Luther Preparatory School**—Dec. 12, 3 P.M. Dec. 17, 10 A.M. Watertown, Wis.
- **Michigan Lutheran Seminary**—Dec. 17, 7 P.M., Saginaw, Mich.

Retreats

- **WELS/ELS ladies retreat**—Jan. 7-9, 2005. Springhill Suites, Sarasota, Fla. Judy Becker, 941-355-6591.
- **Marriage retreats**—sponsored by WELS Adult Discipleship. Jan. 20-23, 2005. The Pink Shell, Ft. Myers Beach, Fla. Feb. 11-13, 2005. Heidel House, Green Lake, Wis. 800-567-8669 or www.welsmarriageretreat.org.
- **Marriage retreat**—Feb. 18-20, 2005. Schwan Retreat Center, Trego, Wis. 800-577-4848.

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.

NAMES WANTED

Camp Lejeune Marine Corps Base, Jacksonville, N.C.—Stephen Schmidt, 910-937-0022.

Wilmington, N.C.—Stephen Schmidt, 910-937-0022.

Caddo Mills/Greenville, Texas—John Hering, 972-494-4911.

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.

North McAllen/Brownsville/South Padre Island, Texas—Joel T. Sauer, 956-968-5228.

Redlands/Yucaipa/Calimesa, Calif.—Mark Mammel, 909-794-2554.

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.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

Choir director—Jordan, West Allis, Wis. 414-453-2030.

Preschool teacher—Precious Lambs Early Learning Center, Raleigh, N.C. Alicia Brinley, 919-847-2650.

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.

Individuals to teach English in a foreign country—one-year commitment. All expenses paid. 651-267-1044 or sbohme@hotmail.com.

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".

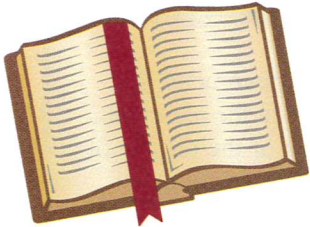
Give of yourself this Christmas

Help those in need by putting a twist on your family gift exchange this Christmas. These activities are great for families.

- Instead of buying a gift for a particular person, donate to that person's favorite charity.
- As a family, research and choose a charity to donate to.
- Buy a bag of groceries for your local food bank.
- Volunteer at a local food bank or shelter.
- Buy Christmas gifts for a family in need in your congregation.
- Get together with other families in the congregation and have a Christmas cookie bake sale, with proceeds going to one of your congregation's ministries.
- Share the Christmas story through song by Christmas caroling in your neighborhood, at a local nursing home, or to your congregation's shut-ins.

"Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" (Romans 12:13).

66 hours, **58** minutes



Did you know that it takes 66 hours and 58 minutes to read aloud the entire Bible from Genesis through Revelation? Don

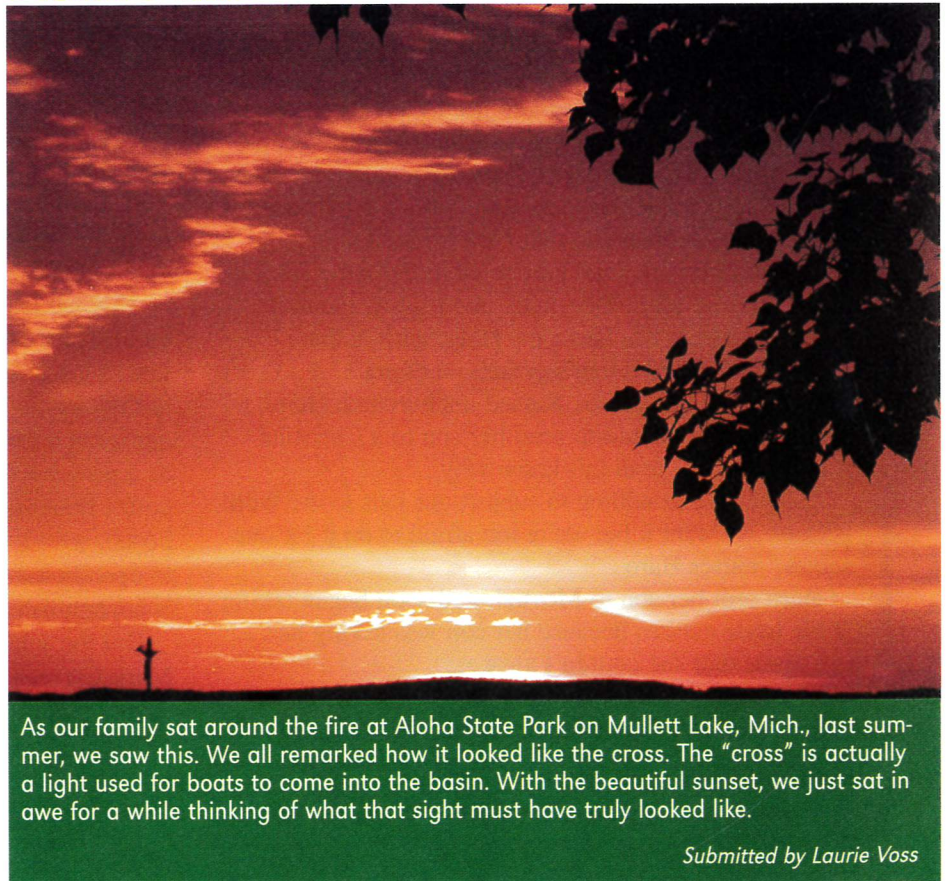
Taggart, a pastor of the Bethlehem Free Will Baptist Church in Pontotoc, Miss., along with eight young volunteers read a King James Version (1,834 pages) to discover this truth.

For the sake of discussion, let's say it took them 67 hours. The Lord has given each of us 168 hours each week. We could, if we were so inclined, read the entire Bible in one week's time, work a 40-hour week, sleep eight hours each night, and still have five hours left over.

The Bible is the vehicle of God's grace by which he would make and keep us as his own, a vehicle through which he brings life to light. Graciously, he has also given time to use it.

Adapted from "66 Hours, 58 Minutes," by Ronald Heins, The Northwestern Lutheran, April 16, 1978

Picture this



As our family sat around the fire at Aloha State Park on Mullett Lake, Mich., last summer, we saw this. We all remarked how it looked like the cross. The "cross" is actually a light used for boats to come into the basin. With the beautiful sunset, we just sat in awe for a while thinking of what that sight must have truly looked like.

Submitted by Laurie Voss

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.

MESSIAH

N A M P A , I D A H O

On fire for the Word

Julie K. Wietzke

A former Mormon spends up to 60 hours a week training others how to share the gospel with Mormons.

A formally unchurched woman now directs a preschool program whose goal is to reach families with the gospel.

Longtime WELS members attend Bible information classes just to review the basics.

“I can talk about my church for days,” says Linda Heuer, who joined Messiah because “WELS ministers use the Bible and don’t add their own bias into it.”

These people are on fire for the Word. They’re excited by their Lord. They’re eager to share their Savior. And they’re enthusiastic about doing ministry in their church—Messiah, Nampa, Idaho.

Excited by their Lord

Although there are some long-time WELS members at Messiah, the majority are adult converts. On average, Messiah has 25 in its Bible information classes, 15 of whom are nonmembers.

Bible information classes are just a start for Messiah and its focus on adult education. More than 100 people attend the six Bible classes offered throughout the week.

“We have people who can quote Scripture by memory, and we have people who don’t know how to open the Bible,” says Heuer, “and they’re all in the same Bible class. They all share their faith, and it’s just the most incredible class. You know the Holy Spirit is there.”

Danee Haro, Messiah’s preschool director, didn’t always know her Savior. Raised unchurched, Haro knew that she wanted to send her son to a Christian preschool, but she didn’t know why.

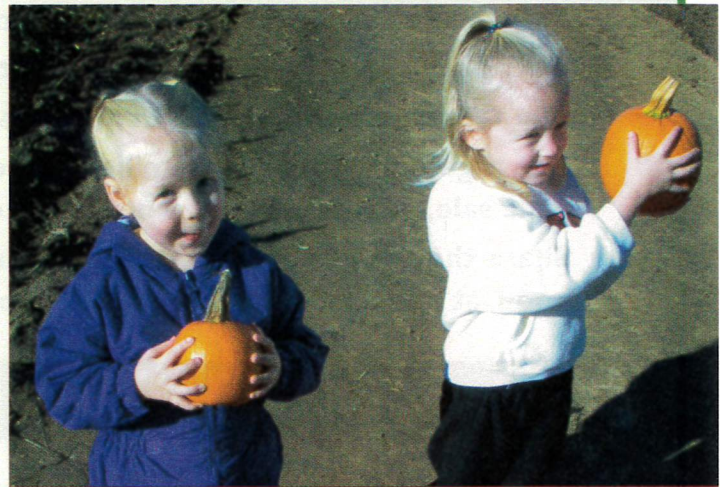
“Maybe we’re willing to subject our kids to the Word because we want it but we’re too afraid to do it for ourselves,” muses Haro.

Haro sent her son to Messiah and soon began taking Bible basic classes because her son was asking her questions that she couldn’t answer.

“I just fell in love with [learning about Jesus],” says Haro. “I couldn’t get enough of the Bible.”

Eager to share their Lord

Haro wanted to go back to work just when a teaching position became available at Messiah’s Children. “I didn’t have confidence because I was so new to the Word,” says Haro. “But everyone in the church and



Four-year-olds from Messiah’s Children enjoy the pumpkin patch on a school field trip.

obviously the Lord had confidence in me. Now I’m in my fifth year of teaching.”

She continues, “My testimony is phenomenal for connecting to our unchurched families in the preschool.”

An important fact when 90 percent of the preschool families are non-members, 40 percent of whom are unchurched.

Messiah just started a preschool outreach team to build relationships with these families. Its strategy is first to get to know the families and to make them comfortable at the church. “What we are trying to do is recognize that they are coming to us as a family—not just as a preschool child,” says Cares. Having monthly coffee hours for the moms (in which members act as hosts), encouraging play groups, and inviting them to open houses are just a few of the ways Messiah is accomplishing its goal.

But the school is not forgetting about the gospel. Mark Cares, pastor at Messiah, meets with all the preschool parents at the beginning of the year. Bibles are handed out to all the families. The Word is taught at the school, and Bible classes are offered to the parents.

The preschool is just one way that members are showing their eagerness to share their Lord. They also are active in spreading the good news to the Mormon community—in Nampa and throughout the United States.

Messiah's Mormon ministry started out with "knocking on a lot of doors," says Cares. After many other failed attempts to reach the Mormons, Cares and his congregation discovered a method that worked—communicating with them in their own language. Using *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, a book Cares wrote in 1993 that details this method, the congregation now equips others—Lutherans and non-Lutherans alike—in ministering to Mormons. Cares and member Becki Levi-Detro (a former Mormon) present seminars across the country. Cares also has a daily message on the local radio station as well as a monthly call-in show. This Mormon ministry, and its \$100,000 yearly budget, just incorporated as a separate entity that is owned by Messiah.

Messiah also has daughtered two congregations in nearby Boise—Cross of Christ and Peace in Jesus. In 1995, many of Messiah's members became the core group of Cross of Christ, which now has two pastors and more than 200 members. Peace in Jesus, a mission congregation that reaches out to the Vietnamese, held its first service in 1999. Its pastor, Dan Kramer, had served as a vicar under Cares when



One of Messiah's founding members at the October groundbreaking for its chapel expansion.

Messiah was sharing the gospel with Vietnamese families that its members were sponsoring. He was assigned after graduation to continue this outreach.

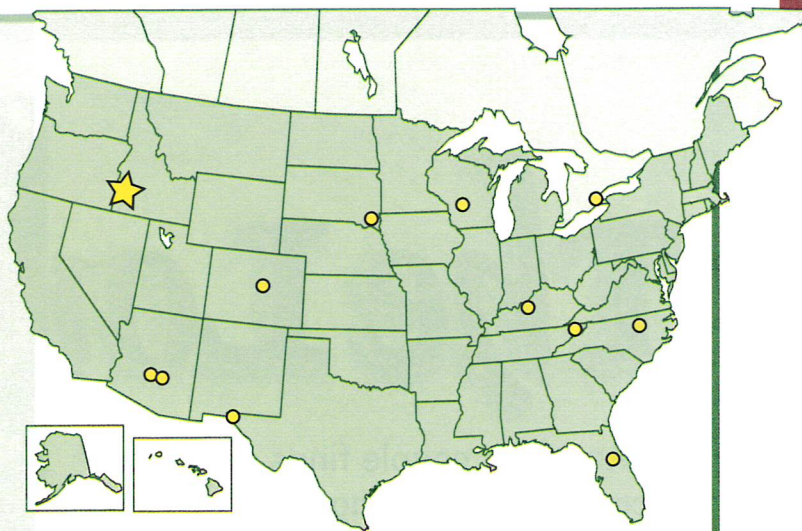
"We don't have an evangelism committee, per se," says Cares. "What we try to do is work [evangelism] through everything we do."

Enthusiastic about doing ministry

One example of working evangelism into everything is the goal that if a new group is started at Messiah, at least 20 percent in that group are nonmembers.

That's a lofty goal when you count the number of organizations at Messiah and the number of members involved. "We're always doing something," says Heuer. "We have so many signs up at church!"

Heuer serves as ministry coordinator at Messiah. Her goal is not to match people up with existing pro-



★ Featured congregation ● Congregation already featured

Quick facts

Messiah, www.forministry.com/usidluthrmelcm:

- and its two daughter congregations are the only three WELS churches in Idaho.
- has 176 communicants, 240 souls.
- is in its second building project within four years. The first enlarged its education and fellowship area. The second is adding on to its chapel. Messiah's vision is to add even more on to its building so it can offer seminars as outreach into the community.
- has two different styles of worship every Sunday. Its traditional style uses the organ and is more liturgical. Its informal service uses praise songs and PowerPoint. Prayer time sometimes lasts 20 minutes because of specific prayer requests from the congregation.
- receives 170,000 hits a month on its Mormon ministry Web site, www.truthinlovetomormons.com.

grams but to help people match their talents with what they want to do, whether it's an existing program or not. "I try to show them that by doing things for the Lord, you're living your faith," she says.

Cares also works to encourage activity and equip his members. "We get our members doing the ministry," he says. "I tell them if it's on the church calendar, go for it."

And that calendar is full of lay-led activities, ranging from play groups to morning Bible studies to visiting shut-ins. Members also teach sixth-grade confirmation class, plan fellowship activities, and help with music.

"I have to go to council meetings to learn what's going on in the church," says Cares.

Sometimes things do get a little "messy," but, according to Cares, that's what happens when a church does outreach.

That's what happens when you're on fire for the Word.

Julie Wietzke is assistant editor for Forward in Christ.

The Lord

An ailing couple finds peace and comfort in knowing that the Good Shepherd is in control of their lives.

Edna A. Woodard

From early childhood the picture of the Good Shepherd hung in my bedroom. You know the one — Jesus dressed in light blue and maroon, sheep around his feet, and a lamb in his arm being gently carried along. This is a story about how that shepherd tenderly takes care of us.



Medical problems

At 4:45 A.M. on a Wednesday in December 2001, my husband woke me to say he was having a problem with internal bleeding and perhaps he needed to go to the hospital.

I drove him to the hospital, and the staff immediately reacted to the emergency and had IVs and other measures in place. Suddenly my husband lost a huge amount of blood, and at 6:10 A.M. his blood pressure was 56/36 with a pulse of 165. Before I knew it, six doctors and nurses were working on my dear husband as I looked on and prayed.

As soon as my husband could be moved to the Intensive Care Unit, a surgeon assessed the situation. I notified our pastor and some family members, and prayers began reaching the Shepherd's ears. Two days later my husband had successful surgery to remove his entire lower intestine. It was Dec. 14. The following day he told me his goal was

to go to services on Christmas Day, and he did.

Meanwhile, I continued to keep appointments for my annual physical. When I visited my primary doctor to hear results of all of my tests, we discussed the growth on the side of my neck, which she had observed during my initial visit. I thought it was a lymphoma (fatty tumor) matching the one I'd had on my back for 35 years. She thought the same thing. On this visit she said she had described the growth to a surgeon, and he agreed with her assessment.

Nevertheless, the doctor said that she would feel better if I had a surgeon look at it. I mentioned that my husband had a final appointment with his surgeon in just two days. I could have the surgeon look at it then, which I did. He also thought it was a lymphoma but then looked at me and said, "I don't want to scare you, but why don't I order an MRI just to be sure."

The Shepherd looks after his lambs

Those weeks flew by quickly with much prayer. I knew that the Lord was in control of everything, but as I look back it becomes even more evident how the Good Shepherd constantly looks after us.

What if my husband's problems had occurred when we were on an all-day bus trip where medical assistance would have been miles away, or on a day that I spent away from home and out of phone reach? Instead, we were safely in our own home, relatively near to our local hospital, and the problem occurred at an early morning hour when there was virtually no traffic.

Think about when we reached the hospital. It was time for the shift change, so the staffs from both shifts worked simultaneously on my husband. Then, the surgery that followed was even more successful than any of the medical staff dared to hope.

is my shepherd

Yes, we were being watched over. I thought back often to what my dad had told us less than a year before as he lay on his deathbed: "Don't let anyone tell you differently. The Lord is in control."

Medical treatments

My MRI was back in a couple of days and showed that I did not have a lymphoma, but the surgeon wasn't quite sure what he was looking at. While we waited in his office he called another doctor, and they decided that the local surgeon should do a biopsy. Results showed that I had cancer. Wow, another blessing—my husband was now well, and he could take care of me.

When diagnosed, I immediately called upon the Lord and asked that his will be done and that he grant me peace to accept his will. I felt such a load lifted from my shoulders as God gave me the peace of knowing that he was in control and that I need spend no time worrying about what would happen to me. Yes, Dad would have been happy that I listened to his admonition.

The tumor was very large, and the first method of treatment was intensive radiation. Within one month of being diagnosed, we were making daily trips for treatment on two different machines. One of them was a state-of-the-art machine of which there were only 10 in the United States, two of them at a facility just 60 miles from our home.

After only two or three treatments, the tumor started shrinking. I was on the one machine for 15 minutes each

day. As soon as the machine was turned on I started thinking of the hymn "The Lord's My Shepherd; I'll Not Want." It was the start of Lent, and when that hymn was finished, I started through one Lenten hymn after another. As time progressed my hymns focused on Holy Week and finally ended with wonderful Easter hymns, the best of which is "I Know That My Redeemer Lives." Because he lives, I will live also.

As treatments continued, my neck, both outside and inside, became burned to the point that it was hard to swallow. I had open skin on the outside of my neck. Again I was blessed with a wonderful nurse who would dress my neck each day. She taught my husband how to do it as well. At times following a shower and redressing of the wound, I felt like I had climbed into that tender Shepherd's arms, such peace and warm, caring comfort I felt.

Once the radiation treatments were over, I went back to my oncologist to start chemo. In January the prognosis was two years, and by the first of October I was in temporary remission!

It is now 10 months later. The cancer cells are again rumbling around, and the newest chemo treatments are being used. I don't know what is ahead for me, but whatever it is, I accept the Lord's will.

The Shepherd blesses his lambs

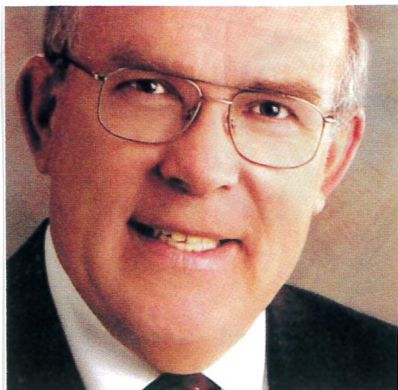
This I know for sure—I have been blessed beyond measure. I lived 66 years with no serious health problems. The "down" times I've had physically

have given me more time to spend meditating and studying God's Word. I've seen how prayers are answered and what power there is in prayer. The Internet has proved to be a most effective prayer circle. It is unbelievable how many persons all over the country, many of whom I do not even know, have prayed for me.

This experience has given me the opportunity to witness to other cancer patients and their families about how prayer helps and how I have accepted God's will and never worried about my future. Why should I worry when I know that Jesus Christ is my Savior and whatever he may have left for me to do here in this life, the best is yet to come? The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want!

Edna Woodard is a member of Shepherd of the Hills, Fredericksburg, Texas.

Editor's note: As Edna wrote this in the summer of 2003, the cancer cells in her bone marrow were 85 percent cancerous. She went to sleep each night wondering if she might wake up in heaven. After five months of a new treatment, though, her bone marrow was clear of cancer cells. Woodard now says, "I don't know what lies ahead for me, but I do know that God is in control and once again is opening doors for me to serve my Savior."



Carl R. Hugel

One size fits all

When you're Christmas shopping and you don't know the size, it really can be difficult to get it right. If you buy something for your grandchild that's too small, he may say, "Grandpa, I'm a big boy now!" If you get something too big for your wife, she may say, "Did you really think I'm a large?"

Wouldn't it be great if "one size fits all" applied not just to socks but to slacks and sweaters as well? Wouldn't it be great, too, if one size fits all applied to the heavenly gifts we seek to give others?

But how can there possibly be one size fits all in our religious world today? There's so much diversity. No matter how small the town there is almost surely ethnic diversity. It isn't just seasonal either. People from other countries and cultures are actually living among us.

With so much diversity, how could we naively think one size could possibly fit all anymore, if it ever did? And if that's not even true when it comes to earthly things, how in the world could it ever be true when it comes to sharing heaven's treasures with others?

To illustrate, let's take two opposites: rich and poor. The rich seem to have everything, including confidence. They seem to lack nothing. The poor, seemingly, have nothing: no money, no material possessions, no future. How could the same gift be necessary and useful to both?

The one who has everything, from a worldly point of view, has nothing without Christ. The one who has nothing materially, has everything with Christ. Everyone—rich or poor, black or white, African, Asian, and American—needs the Savior. No one can truly be rich without him. With him no one is truly poor. One size does fit all.

Even if one size fits all eliminates the guesswork in buying earthly gifts, it does not eliminate the cost. However, in providing the one-size-fits-all heavenly gift, cost is not a factor. The gift is self-funding. The real giver, God, provides the gift—freely and fully. His Son, Jesus, paid the death penalty for our sins. Then, by faith, he gives himself to us, providing us with the gift of his pardon, making heaven possible. He made possible, too, the giving of this one-size-fits-all gift to others.

Gift giving is part of North American Outreach, our current synod focus. Viewing our earthly surroundings, North American Outreach reminds us of how diverse the population of North America really is. Yet it also seeks to remind us, no matter how different we are from each other physically, spiritually one size still fits all. We are all sinners saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus.

This Christmas, you don't need to worry about the "size," the outward differences in the people all around you. Just seize the opportunities God gives to share the same gift you've received with others. One size does fit all when the gift is the Savior. Do you know anyone who doesn't need him?

Women of faith: Elizabeth

In more ways than one, the Lord showed Elizabeth that all things are possible for God.

Philip L. Kieselhorst

Elizabeth was childless. For many years she and her husband, Zechariah, carried this burden in their prayers to the Lord. They waited on the Lord together. They hoped in the Lord together. But for reasons they did not yet understand, it was not to be. Well along in years, the hope of having a child had faded in their hearts until it had disappeared entirely. It was no longer possible.

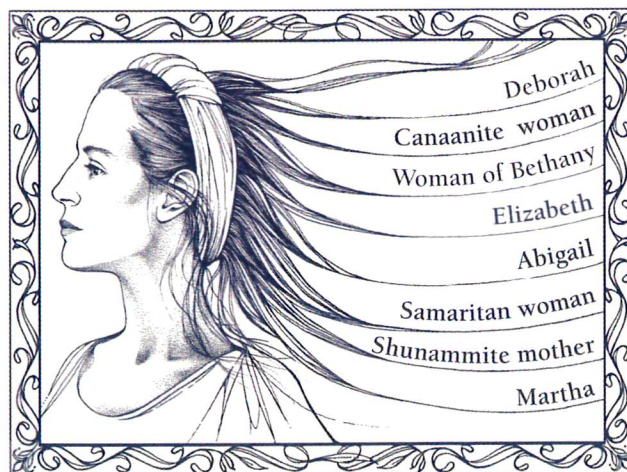
But on an extraordinary autumn day, Elizabeth and her husband learned that nothing is impossible for God.

Impossible joy

Elizabeth waited with the crowd as her husband burned incense in the Holy Place. This was a special honor for Zechariah. When he reappeared before the crowd, however, they realized that it had been special for him in a far greater way: “They realized he had seen a vision in the temple” (Luke 1:22).

Can you imagine Elizabeth’s reaction when Zechariah finally explained in writing what the angel told him? We don’t have to imagine Zechariah’s reaction. It’s impossible!

But God’s messenger said that it’s not only possible, but also that his words “will come true at their proper time” (Luke 1:20). How could this be? Gabriel later explained to another shocked woman named Mary: “Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:36,37).



The Lord showed great favor to Elizabeth in granting her a son. The many tears of sorrow shed by Elizabeth were now replaced by tears of joy as she prepared to hold her newborn son in her arms.

Still, the Lord had a far greater act of grace in store for her.

The Holy Spirit filled Elizabeth’s heart. He enabled her to believe the impossible.

Impossible faith

Even before John was born, Elizabeth received a visit from Mary. “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41).

The Holy Spirit filled Elizabeth’s heart. He enabled her to believe the impossible—that the child now present in Mary’s womb was her almighty Lord! The Holy Spirit enabled Elizabeth to believe the impossible about

the child in her own womb—that he would “be called a prophet of the Most High for [he] will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God . . .” (Luke 1:76-78).

“But why am I so favored?”

Elizabeth asked at the Holy Spirit’s prompting. The Holy Spirit answered that question: “Because of the tender mercy of our God.”

It is the same question we ask when we consider how great, how serious, and how many our sins against God are. It is impossible for us to believe that all sins could be overcome. But nothing is impossible for God. He has shown us favor by pouring the Holy Spirit into our hearts in Holy Baptism. The Holy Spirit called us by the gospel and enabled us to believe what previously seemed impossible—that God came to us as a baby boy who then grew to sacrifice his perfect life on a cross to overcome all of our sins.

As you consider the severity of your personal multitude of sins against God, look to God’s Son and believe the Holy Spirit’s true Word: “Nothing is impossible for God.”

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

This is the fourth of an eight-part series by Philip Kieselhorst on “Women of faith.” To read the first three articles, go to www.wels.net, jumpword “ficarchive”, and search by the key-word phrase “women of faith”.

This month’s reading: Luke 1



Gary S. Baumbach

Happy Christmas

“As each happy Christmas dawns on earth again . . .” The childhood tune runs through my head. “Comes the holy Christ child.” But I pause . . . “Each happy Christmas,” it says. Each one? Should we just assume that each Christmas is happy—for everyone?

My thoughts turn to scenes of illness, death, war, floods, hurricanes, poverty. “Not everyone will have a happy Christmas,” I think. “What about the . . .” I pause again. Do I need to describe the victims for you: the spouse left behind, the grieving family of a roadside bombing casualty, the family that lost everything, the family that has almost nothing, and . . . ?

How about you? Will you have a happy Christmas? I can think of things that might get in the way. Maybe you haven’t had any major setback, but still you feel depressed, distressed, held down. Many do. Are you tired out, wishing for a break from the daily grind? Are you all too aware of your many flaws, the dirt under your fingernails, so to speak? Do you have unresolved issues gnawing at you?

No, I’m not hanging crepe, not trying to make you feel bad. I’m trying to give you the reason that each Christmas is happy. All the things I’ve alluded to are things that happen and keep happening in this sin-scarred world. No one has to look far to find hurt and sadness, guilt and suffering.

Neither do you have to look far for relief. You have it handed to you each Christmas, a gift from heaven. Heaven’s answer to earth’s doldrums entered our lives with the stable-born child of a virgin, the Son of the living God. That’s why each Christmas is happy. It turns your attention to the one thing that gives you reason to be happy, even when you don’t feel so.

Happiness is knowing that no matter what happens to you, you are loved and cared for by God; no matter how you feel, a place awaits you where bad feelings are forever banished. Happiness is realizing that no matter how many regrets you have, you can rest at peace; no matter how much guilt you bear, you are held not guilty and are set free; no matter how big your troubles seem, God’s love is bigger.

Happiness is a baby without sin, a Son sent to fulfill God’s promises, a miracle birth that signals our salvation.

Although you mourn death, Christmas is about life. Although you hurt deeply, Christmas is about healing. Although you have nothing much of earthly value, Christmas is about being rich.

Hurry with the shepherds to the stable of Bethlehem and find happiness in the newborn baby there. That is your Savior. He was born to live for you, to die for you, and to live again for you. He came to make you happy—forever.

But . . . I pause once more. Some truly won’t be happy at Christmas, not with the happiness that ends all sadness. Those who don’t know the Savior cannot sing, “As each happy Christmas dawns on earth again.” They have yet to see the first dawning. They don’t know about forgiveness and eternal life and God’s indescribable love, all wrapped up in swaddling clothes. They need you to tell them.

Do you want to be extra happy at Christmas? Share your reason for happiness with someone who wants to be happy, too, but doesn’t know the happy news of Jesus Christ. Happiness shared is happiness doubled. Christmas is the perfect time for it.

It's all about Jesus

Mark J. Lenz

The book of Revelation belongs to a category of literature known as apocalyptic. Such literature was often produced in times of persecution to encourage believers who were suffering for their faith. In a richly

symbolic way it speaks about what will happen in the future. Like the other books of the New Testament it, too, is all about Jesus. It is actually his revelation as the Faithful Witness.

- What is the purpose of the revelation of Jesus Christ (1:1)? How was Jesus' testimony made known to John?
- What is the significance of each name ascribed to Jesus (1:5-7)? What has Jesus done for us? Who will see Jesus when he returns? Why will people mourn because of him?
- Whom did John see standing among the lampstands (1:12-18)? What do the descriptions of his hair, eyes, feet, and voice suggest about his power to judge? Why were his words comforting to John?
- What do the seven stars and the seven lampstands represent (1:20)?
- What details about Jesus do the introductory words in the letters to each of the seven churches reveal (2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14)?
- Why did John weep (5:1-5)? How did one of the elders comfort him? How is Jesus identified in 5:6? Why is he worthy to take the scroll and open its seals (5:9,10)?
- What is the content of each of the first six seals opened by the Lamb (6:1-17)?
- According to 7:14, what is the reason the great multitude in white robes is in heaven? How is their life in heaven described (7:16,17)?
- What happens when the seventh seal is opened (8:1)?
- In 11:3-14, the "two witnesses" is a reference to the confessing church. What four things will it do or experience?
- Why are those who die in the Lord blessed (14:13)? How is the final judgment pictured (14:14-20)?
- Who will be with the victorious Lamb (17:14)? What is the significance of each of the terms that describes them?
- In 19:7-10, identify the following: the bride, the wedding supper, fine linen. What is "the testimony of Jesus?"
- In 19:11-16, discover five names by which the rider on the white horse is identified. What is the significance of each? Why is his robe "dipped in blood?"
- In 20:6, what is revealed about those who reign with Christ for a thousand years (a symbol for the entire New Testament era)?
- To what is the "Holy City" compared (21:1-4)? Who is her husband? What will make life in the new heaven and earth especially wonderful? What will not be found there?
- What thought is repeatedly emphasized (22:7,12,20)?
- What is the significance of each of the names ascribed to Jesus (22:13,16)?
- In light of the content of this book, why is this final verse so comforting (22:21)?

Conclusion: A witness is one who relates what he has seen and heard. As you think about the book of Revelation, what comfort do you find in knowing that Jesus is the Faithful Witness?

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 Dec. 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

Up and waiting

A tender family moment on Christmas Eve reminds us how our homecoming will be when we get to heaven.

Fred Fedke III

Our three sons have always been close. Our oldest son got married this summer and moved to Atlanta. He and his wife flew to Wisconsin for Christmas. Their schedules, airport delays, “Code Orange,” and delays in Milwaukee meant that they would not be getting to our western Wisconsin countryside until late Christmas Eve. A phone call and we knew that “late” would be quite a bit later.

A holiday homecoming

It was 4:30 A.M. when a car finally turned into our driveway. We were up and waiting for them. All our lights were on. Food was prepared. Drinks were ready. We flung the door open and greeted them with hugs all around.

The boys greeted each other a bit differently. The three of them hadn’t been together for some time. So now, here they were, early Christmas morning, grown men, punching each other. No sooner were they in the living room and they began wrestling. Right there in front of the Christmas tree at 4:30 in the morning.

My wife and daughter-in-law were in the kitchen talking. I took snacks to the living room and found all three boys sitting on the floor joking and laughing. They had tears in their eyes. It seemed these engineers were having trouble assembling a rocking horse.

About 5:00, on my way to bed—I had a church service to lead in a few hours—I stopped at the stairs

and just listened. I couldn’t help smiling. I listened a while longer. It was too good to leave—this joyful noise. From the kitchen soft conversation and eager listening. From the living room hooting laughter.

I knew I was hearing the sound of people who belonged. People who belonged together. Who belonged to a family.

A heavenly homecoming

That’s how it is with Jesus and you. He wants a family. And he wants you to be a part of it.

“Who, me?”

“Yes, you!”

Hard to believe? Sure. Who deserves that kind of acceptance? That kind of honor? Not me.

But he wants us anyway. Soiled and dirty, broken and limping, defeated, ashamed, afraid to look up—he hugs us into the light. That’s what the cross was all about. He came to fix our problems.

Our greatest problem is what we have become. Apart from outward show and social approval, we know our own hearts. We know our own selfishness. Our pettiness. We know our downright meanness. Our holding grudges yet demanding God’s love showered on ourselves.

How dare we? If we come at all, we come reluctantly. We come hesitating.

We come to the door expecting and deserving to be turned away. No. He took all this stuff, all this bad stuff, on himself. He became sin for us, is how the Bible puts it (2 Corinthians 5:21). That is hard to imagine. He—our dirt.

Evidently, he felt that it was worth it. He does really want us. He does bring us into his family. That’s his promise. He brings us in washed, new, head up, bursting into a smile at the thought of being loved so.

We are. But we aren’t home yet. We are on our way home. Jesus knows how long and hard the journey is. He traveled it first. He paved the way. He made it straight and certain. Just keep reading his message. Hold to the way. Hold to his promise. It is sure.

When you finally get there, all the lights will be on. He’ll be waiting for you. The food and drink will be ready. He’ll fling the door open and greet you with a hug.

Unless wrestling is your style.

Fred Fedke is pastor at St. John, Kendall/St. Matthew, Ontario, Wisconsin.

