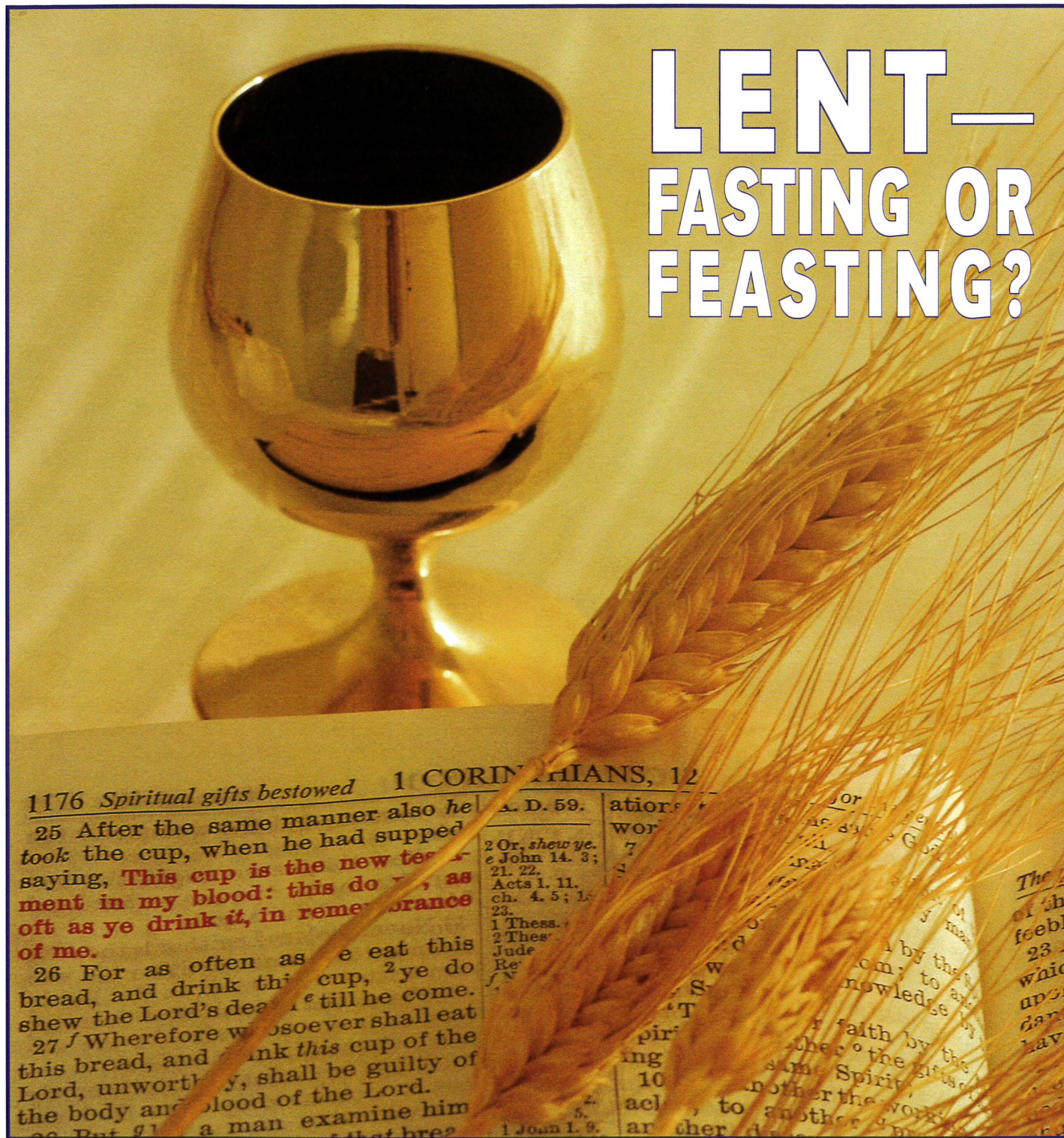


MARCH 2005

Forward in Christ

God's wisdom, WELS' witness

LENT— FASTING OR FEASTING?



1176 *Spiritual gifts bestowed* 1 CORINTHIANS, 12

25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped saying, **This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.**

26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

28 But let a man examine him

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Are there Muslims in my life?

“It’s not something I’ve thought much about. I don’t run into many Muslims in my day-to-day life. Then again, maybe I do.

I shop at a large grocery store where I often see women wearing scarves to cover their heads—a common Muslim practice. My husband goes to school with foreign students, many of whom are practicing Muslims. So . . .

I guess I do know Muslims, which means I need to know how to tell them about their Savior.”

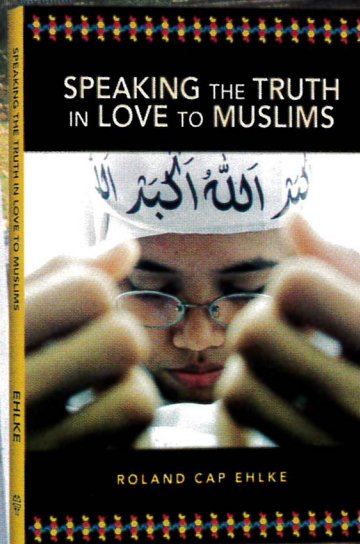
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Forward in Christ

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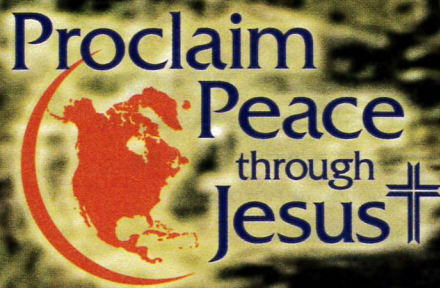
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30

EVERY
soul's a
treasure!

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searching
for one?



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MAY THE LORD OUR GOD
BE WITH US AS HE WAS
WITH OUR FATHERS;
MAY HE NEVER LEAVE US
NOR FORSAKE US.
1 Kings 8:57

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MARCH

WHAT'S INSIDE by Nicole Balza

Corinne Meshke, author of this month's "Whatever," admits, "I could and should be thanking God for so much, but I forget" (p. 18).

I, too, must admit that "I forget." I take God for granted. I overlook his love, his mercy, and his blessings. I know that taking God for granted is wrong, but it's just so easy to do.

James Mattek warns, though, that it can be dangerous to take God's blessings for granted. In his devotion on p. 7, he writes, "Allowing God's good gifts to distract us from him is harmful to our faith, fails to give God glory, and contributes much to conflict and sadness in life."

The solution? Reading God's Word to refocus our lives on his will.

The season of Lent fits into this scenario perfectly, because it is designed to remind us how much God has given us, focusing most on God's ultimate sacrifice. As you read about God's sacrifice of his Son throughout this month's issue of *Forward in Christ*, join me in thanking him for all the blessings that he showers upon us.

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DISTRICT CONVENTIONS

Although some of your readers have criticized Alan Ross ["Feedback," Nov. 2004] for saying that annual district conventions will not dismiss the apathy of the average church member toward what happens beyond the boundaries of a congregation, Ross does raise a valid point about conventions and the way information is disseminated.

One flaw I have consistently observed at district conventions is that a great deal of time is used inefficiently. Conventions typically last for several days with only a portion of that time spent doing convention business. Because of the time commitment required to attend a district convention, some congregations are unable to find men to serve as lay delegates.

While the way we have held conventions served a valuable purpose in the past, could it be time to ask ourselves if we might find a new, more efficient way to do district business? Could we not, as Ross suggests, use modern means of communication—particularly the Internet—to distribute reports and do business that does not require meeting face to face? This might be wiser stewardship of our time.

*Paul Fanning
Kaukauna, Wisconsin*

WELS HERITAGE

Thank you for the many years of inspiration and information. I am always happy to see each new magazine and read the timely articles. An article in the January issue addressed issues related to a concern of mine. The article "God led us to WELS" reminded me again of our continued wonderful heritage. As a lifelong WELS member I have noticed that in some of our WELS churches the recitation speed of our prayers has increased to the point of blurring the words, not being able to keep up, and perhaps not allowing

time for thought. Although this rote recitation exists in many other religions, please keep the thought and thankful reverence in our prayers.

*Elizabeth Donley
Duluth, Minnesota*

ANTICHRIST

In the "Question & Answer" article on the Antichrist [Jan.], the paragraph that begins "2 Thessalonians 2 tells us . . ." is missing a few important words. It should say that "the Antichrist's work within the church has its beginnings at the apostles' time (v. 7) and will end with his overthrow at Jesus' second coming (v. 8)." Without the added words the sentence is confusing and does not clearly identify the time span during which the Antichrist will operate.

*Mike Thom
Eau Claire, Wisconsin*

CARTOON

I usually enjoy, and find comfort and reassurance in, the many features of *Forward in Christ*, so I was troubled after reading the cartoon in the January issue ["Potluck"]. While I can understand the humorous approach to "backyard evangelism," I find the reference to a man's latest potential convert as "his 130-pound trophy," which he is carrying as if she were captured prey, offensive.

Having grown up in Wisconsin, I can also understand the temptation to use a hunting metaphor. Our Savior, after all, spoke about being "fishers of men." But surely an otherwise valid point about personal ministry could have been made in a more sensitive manner. Would you have published this cartoon if the "trophy" had been a man?

*Pat Engel
Laurel, Maryland*

TIMELESSNESS

I have a few comments about the article "Timelessness" [Jan.]. I am

usually cautious about equating timelessness with our future existence in heaven. While we can recognize the problems with the fast pace of life in the United States, the problem is not time but our management of this time of grace. This time pressure lifestyle is somewhat unique to the culture of our country. I have visited many other countries where the lifestyle is less intense and the peace of heaven also eludes those cultures. The devil works through idleness as much as he does through the cares and worries of this life.

As far as biblical support is concerned, Revelation 21:23 is speaking about the brilliance of God, not the passage of time. And 2 Peter 3:8 is referring to God's eternal nature, not our existence in heaven. Timelessness is an attribute of God's eternal nature that he may or may not share with us in heaven. The "souls of the slain" in Revelation 6:10 are aware of the passage of time in heaven. Perhaps this will change with judgment day. Perhaps not.

We also recall that God created time before sin entered the world. Before the fall, Adam and Eve enjoyed peace from the time pressures of life even as they lived with a sequence of time. Whether or not there is time or timelessness in our future heavenly existence, one thing is certain. We will be with the Lord forever.

*John Schuetze
Mequon, Wisconsin*

PHOTO CREDIT

Leo Pilak should have been credited for taking Lynne Barber's photo [Feb., p. 28]. We apologize for the oversight.

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*.

Spiritual therapy

Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Luke 17:17,18

James A. Mattek

Over my 22 years as parish pastor, I became convinced that Satan worked hardest around Christmas and Easter. Each year my counseling load increased as the festivals drew near. Why? There could be many explanations. I believe, however, that Satan works hardest when the potential for spiritual enrichment is greatest.

The months between the festivals came in a close second. Was it the weather? Could it be cabin fever? When people are cooped up together, they find that their unresolved issues never really go away, but are merely hibernating. It's no wonder, then, that they have a bear of a time getting along.

I was happy when people came to me for counseling. Counseling people is part of a pastor's job. It's a privilege to help people resolve their problems during their walk through life. Sometimes the issues were complicated, sometimes not. I found that in most cases, people had simply lost their focus. I often caught myself thinking, "If people just realized how blessed they are, much of this would be resolved." Too often we ignore the words of David: "Forget not all his benefits" (Psalm 103:2).

Ultimately, the best counseling is spiritual in nature, and the simple story of Jesus healing the 10 lepers helps us refocus on how blessed we are.

Common blessings

There's nothing common about being miraculously healed of leprosy. It was an exhibition of Jesus' compassion and divine power. What a blessing!

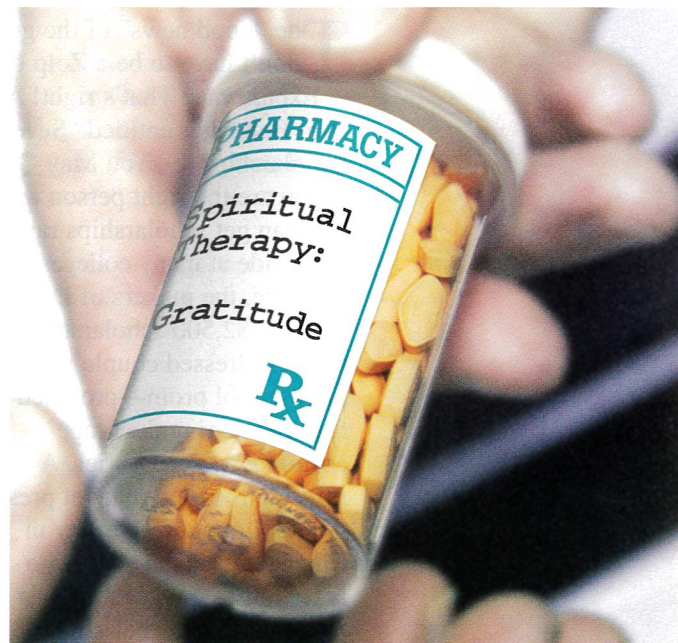
The miracle was common, however, in that each person received the same thing. The fact that many of our blessings are common too often leads us to cheapen their value or diminish their importance. The result is idolatrous discontent. We ask, "What makes it so special if everyone has it?" Millions receive similar blessings: health and wealth, family and friends, food and fun, education and vocation.

For common blessings, God is worthy of our praise. God is rich in mercy, offering birth and rebirth, life and eternal life, forgiveness and faith, salvation from hell and elevation to heaven. Just because God is rich in mercy to millions doesn't diminish the value of his blessings to us.

Blessings that become a distraction

One hundred percent of the lepers were blessed. Ten percent responded to the blessing appropriately. It's not that the lepers weren't happy. One moment they were permanently separated from family and church, doomed to die one inch at a time. The next moment they had their lives back and could return to their homes, hopes, and loves. There was life after leprosy! But like so many people, they became preoccupied with the blessing and forgot about the blesser.

Allowing God's good gifts to distract us from him is harmful to our faith, fails to give God glory, and contributes much to conflict and sadness in life.



Blessings and God's silence

Did Jesus send a posse of disciples after the ungrateful nine? Did he shower down fire and brimstone on them or inflict them again with leprosy? No . . . to them he was silent.

God is the same way with us. He doesn't drop a note from heaven each time we receive his goodness without gratitude. But don't misread his silence. He breaks the silence on the pages of his Word where he vividly reminds us that he has a rightful claim on our gratitude.

We are so blessed, and we're so undeserving of any of it! Realizing this makes us happier and more productive servants—and just might lessen our pastor's counseling load.

Contributing editor James Mattek, chief executive officer of Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service, is a member of Trinity, Watertown, Wisconsin.

A full ride to heaven for being “nobody special”

Douglas J. Engelbrecht

The “good news” of the gospel is that you don’t have to be a Zolp or wear duct tape.

Excuse me? That’s right! An article by Paul Bannister entitled “Seventeen Bizarre Scholarships . . . You May Qualify” says that if you are the right person or do the right thing, you can get scholarships ranging from \$500 to a full ride at many colleges and universities. For example, the makers of Duck brand duct tape award a \$2,500 scholarship to the best dressed couple at a high school prom—provided they’re wearing duct tape costumes or accessories. A full ride for four years at prestigious Loyola University in Chicago awaits anyone who is Catholic—and has the last name of Zolp. Other sizeable scholarships go to those who are left-handed, can speak fluent Klingon, or can produce the best duck call. All of these scholarships are for doing something or being someone. Granted, in most cases, it’s doing very little or being no one outstanding.

The gift of God—a full ride to heaven—is just the opposite. A full ride to heaven is offered to you not for who you are or what you have done.

You don’t have to be a Zolp to get a full ride to heaven. You don’t have to be anyone special. And that is really good news, because you and I are “nobody special.” The apostle Paul says, “There is no difference, for all have sinned” (Romans 3:22,23). But God sent his Son into the world with this announcement from the angel, “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people” (Luke 2:10). God did not send his Son into the world to suffer and die for a select few or a special class of people. He

sent his Son to die for all. As a result, you and I have a full ride to heaven, paid for by the blood of Jesus. No, it’s not because of who we are, but because of who he is—the Son of God.

Thank God we don’t have to be a Zolp or anyone special to qualify for a full ride. We simply accept in faith who Jesus is—the Son of God, our Savior.

You don’t have to be anybody special, and you don’t have to do anything special. That, too, is good news, because you haven’t done anything special. Paul reminds us, “No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law” (Romans 3:20). But Paul also tells us that “a righteousness from God, apart from law, has

been made known” (Romans 3:21). God sent his Son into the world to live a life of perfect righteousness and die a perfect death of atonement to satisfy every demand of God in our stead.

We have a full ride to heaven offered to us. We don’t have to wear duct tape, be left-handed, speak Klingon, or produce a duck call convincing enough to mystify a mallard. In faith, we receive the gift of his Son and his redemptive work on our behalf. That’s good news—good news to keep in your heart and good news that you can share.

You and I have a full ride to heaven, paid for by the blood of Jesus.

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



at the foot of the cross. Richard L. Gurgel

TOPIC: Close Communion

If someone—such as a Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) member who understands the real presence—would receive Communion in a worthy manner, why does WELS withhold forgiveness from that person? Would Christ withhold forgiveness from someone who believes but is caught in some “small” errors?

We don't withhold forgiveness from that LCMS member. Certainly in Communion we receive a beautiful gift of forgiveness, yet that isn't the only way forgiveness is given. Every time absolution is spoken, forgiveness is distributed to all in worship. Absolution doesn't lose power at the eardrums of those not in fellowship with us.

Similarly, the gospel in lessons, hymns, and sermon heals hearts without discriminating by denomination. To those within our visible fellowship and without, God's gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation are dispensed with gracious liberality. Only unbelieving impenitence prevents these gifts from achieving their goal.

Yet we still don't invite those outside our fellowship to the Lord's Table. Have we suddenly opted for man-made rules rather than imitating the gracious ministry of Christ and his apostles?

By no means! Lord's Supper “restrictions” are God's doing. Jesus broadcasted his gospel in every corner of Israel, yet he instituted the Supper within the close fellowship of the Twelve. Likewise, Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 5:20 that we are God's ambassadors to the world, yet in 1 Corinthians 11 he warns us that communing those who cannot examine themselves and recognize the Supper's gifts brings judgment, not blessing! In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul also reminds us that communing together is an intimate seal and sign of unity in faith. As much as we want LCMS worship guests to hear the gospel, we would be proclaiming a deception if we knelt together to express unity that doesn't fully exist.

But should a few “small” errors separate us from those who in many ways share a common faith with us?

If no, then why does Paul compare false teaching to gangrene in 2 Timothy 2:17? To use a similar picture, would we say a “little” cancer is no big deal? A scar on my shoulder testifies that we react to the smallest hint of cancer because we recognize its power to spread and kill. Should we react differently when false doctrine is as dangerous to our souls as cancer is to our bodies?

Wasn't it love for Scripture and souls that led the psalm writer to exclaim, “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path” (Psalm 119:103,104)? Isn't that why Paul pleads with Timothy, “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Timothy 4:16)?

Although we gladly grant that countless sincere Christians are in our former sister synod, the LCMS, for that reason we owe a loving witness that we no longer walk together in God's truth. Only God knows the blessings to both synods that springs from this call to faithfulness.

Isn't such a witness needed in this postmodern world? Many believe truth as a whole can't be found. Postmodernism casts a cynical eye on any desire to hold to details of biblical truth. Practicing close Communion may mark us as being out of step with culture. And yet, lovingly and humbly practicing close Communion may be more important than ever.

If with pharisaical pride we limit access to our altars, then we must repent. But if we are lovingly concerned for souls, ours and others, and if we love the Word by which we are saved, then we must be steadfast and unmovable.

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.

A golden chalice filled with a dark liquid, likely wine, sits on a Bible page. A stalk of wheat lies across the page, partially overlapping the chalice. The Bible text is visible, including "1 CORINTHIANS, 12" and "After the same manner also he...".

Lent— fasting or feasting?

The more you and I realize that Jesus suffered, died, and rose to bless undeserving people like us, the more we will want to feast on God's powerful Word.

James F. Pope

I can't say that I can relate very much to fasting. Eating a meal a couple of hours later than I normally do is as close as I've come. Yet many people over the years have found value in fasting—either not eating at all or avoiding certain kinds of foods.

People fast for spiritual reasons, especially during one season of the church year—Lent. I'm proposing that instead of fasting during Lent, we Christians feast. The feasting I have in mind is not indulgence in food and drink but generous consumption of God's nourishing Word.

Fasting as a requirement

God's people, from the time of Moses, fasted. They did that because God made that one of his requirements in the Old Testament ceremonial laws.

Yet, God's requirement to fast was hardly harsh. God's people were to fast only one day each year. That was on the great Day of Atonement. Any other fasting that people did was entirely their choice. You can see, then, how the Pharisee in Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector far exceeded the law's demands when he said self-righteously that he fasted twice a week.

New Testament Christians enjoy freedom from God's requirement to fast, but in Christian freedom God's people can choose to fast. Over the years, Christians, including Lutherans, have done just that. Years ago, fasting was a common practice for people preparing to receive Holy Communion. Our Catechism reflects that practice when it says: "Who, then, is properly prepared to receive this

sacrament? Fasting and other outward preparations may serve a good purpose, but he is properly prepared who believes these words, ‘Given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins’ ” (The Sacrament of Holy Communion: the Reception of Holy Communion).

Those words underscore the limitations of fasting. Although fasting can be a means by which people exercise discipline and self-denial in their lives, it is not a substitute for faith in God’s Word.

Feasting as a picture of salvation

Fasting and feasting are opposites, and yet feasting does not necessarily suggest overindulgence or excessive behavior. In fact, Scripture uses the imagery of feasting to describe people partaking of God’s salvation. The prophet Isaiah painted such a picture. “On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines” (Isaiah 25:6). The prophet’s words tell us that God spares no expense in lavishing his love on people. He is stingy with none of his blessings. He gives only the best, and there is no end to his generosity.

Isaiah used similar imagery when he relayed God’s invitation for people to enjoy his spiritual feast: “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare” (Isaiah 55:1,2).

Jesus even used parables to describe heaven as a great wedding banquet. The items on God’s menu, though, are spiritual in nature. The guests at God’s heavenly banquet feast on his love and mercy.

Feasting on God’s Word

The season of Lent provides special opportunities for focusing on what it cost God to throw that banquet. One of the customs of the Christian church is offering special worship services during Lent. I have to say that my childhood memories of those midweek services include such things as a dimly lit church building where a visiting pastor, whom I didn’t know, read a very long portion of Scripture. On top of that, it seemed that we sang slow, mournful hymns.

Lent is a special time for Christians to feast on God’s Word.

I am happy to say that my appreciation for those services grew as I matured physically and spiritually. Now that I’m an adult, the church sanctuary during midweek Lenten worship services doesn’t seem to be as dark; I usually know the visiting pastor (I’m sometimes one of them); the Scripture reading isn’t that long; and the hymns are meaningful, no matter how slowly or rapidly the organist plays them.

Special worship services provide me with extra opportunities to feast on God’s Word with my congregational family. In addition, the season of Lent gives me extra incentive to increase my personal devotional life. Alone, or with others, the focus of God’s Word is on Jesus Christ.

The season of Lent highlights the “passive obedience” of Christ, as our Catechism describes it. Jesus’ journey to the cross is front and center. His sacrificial love is on display. Jesus suffers mistreatment and humiliation

for you and me. Jesus endures betrayal and denial for you and me. Jesus experiences death and abandonment for you and me. The more you and I realize that Jesus suffered, died, and rose to bless eternally undeserving people like us, the more we will want to feast on God’s powerful Word.

And spiritual eating is the imagery of Scripture. The prophet Jeremiah told the Lord, “When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight” (Jeremiah 15:16). Jesus spoke of his followers hungering and thirsting for righteousness (Matthew 5:6). One of the old prayers of the church spoke of “inwardly digesting” Holy Scripture.

Inviting others to feast

Lent is a special time for Christians to feast on God’s Word. Yet something is wrong with that feasting if we don’t share our spiritual smorgasbord with others. While we are feasting, many others are starving spiritually. Those people may or may not have enough food and drink for their bodies, but their souls are severely malnourished because they lack the Bread of Life and the Water of Life, Jesus Christ. Appreciation for our own blessings in Christ and concern for the spiritual welfare of others will lead us to do what we can to share Jesus with others. Then the Lord’s words will find fulfillment: “I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 8:11).

So, what’ll it be? Fasting or feasting? I’ll take feasting any day. Make that 40 days—of Lent. Feasting on God’s Word. How about you?

James Pope, a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. John, New Ulm.



TSUNAMI MYSTERY

Where is God when tragedy strikes? We don't know why he allows what he does, but we do know that he still rules in love.

Christopher J. Pluger

A tsunami sweeps across the Indian Ocean, burying thousands of people under billions of tons of seawater. More than 180,000 people are dead, and many more will die from the diseases left in the tsunami's wake. Hundreds of thousands are homeless. Billions of dollars of property are destroyed. Whole towns are wiped off the map. The entire island of Sumatra is now several feet to the east of where it used to be. One report estimated that over 50,000 children were orphaned by the disaster.

We question God

The question "Why did this happen?" seems like an appropriate one to ask here. This isn't the question of geology and physics, of tectonic plates and energy transferred in waves. The greater question that

needs to be answered, especially by Christians who believe in a loving God who is actively involved in the maintenance and preservation of his creation, is "Why did this happen?" in the sense of "Why did God allow this to happen?"

You don't have to look very hard on the Internet to find people with answers and explanations. They say the tsunami is God's judgment on the idolatry of Islam, Allah's judgment on the immorality of Christians, Buddha's destruction of those who destroy the earth, Mother Nature's self-preservation instinct fighting back at the overpopulation of the region. The speculation is endless, and one theory is more ludicrous and blasphemous than the next. From a worldly perspective, this seems like an unjustifiable tragedy. To claim that a loving God exists who permit-

ted this to happen seems like an epic mockery of everything good. So God must not exist. Or if he exists, then he can't be good. The searching question, "Why did this happen?" becomes the arrogant challenge, "Why did God do this to them?"

God doesn't do cost-benefit analysis. He is not like the emotionless Vulcan Spock who passively intones, "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few." Each creature is precious to God. He doesn't say things like, "This disaster is worth it if . . ." or "One soul is worth 'x' number of deaths."

We trust God's providence

Still, it is helpful to look at this disaster, tragic though it is, from the perspective of eternity. Why did God allow this to happen? Perhaps one or two of the aid work-

ers volunteering in the region will give Christian witness to a Muslim or Hindu person affected by the tragedy. Maybe that person will become a believer, washed clean in the waters of baptism, when just a few short weeks ago water was washing away everything he formerly held dear. The angels in heaven rejoice over one such sinner who repents.

Maybe a few hundred of the orphans from the tragedy will be adopted by American parents. Maybe some of those children will grow up in Christian homes and receive the training and admonition of the Lord. Maybe one of those orphans will be led to the public ministry and sent as a missionary back to the land of his birth. Maybe the Spirit will use his preaching to plant a strong Christian congregation in that country. Maybe that orphan will die a martyr's death for his faithful service, and maybe his preaching will result in the conversion of many souls, who without this tragedy would never have been reached with the gospel.

Is this a simplistic explanation? Perhaps it is. Maybe God's plan is much more complicated than this. Maybe God's system of cause-and-effect is so complicated and inter-

twining that no one will ever be able to unravel all the "whys." But that's the point. "Who has known the mind of God, that he may instruct him?" asks the apostle Paul (quoting from Isaiah in 1 Corinthians 2:16).

God himself challenges us, "Are not my ways higher than your ways? Are not my thoughts higher than your thoughts?" (Isaiah 55:9). To him who would give counsel to the Wonderful Counselor, God replies, "Where were you when the earth was made? Where were you when I laid its foundation?" (Job 38:4).

"Who has known the mind of God, that he may instruct him?" asks the apostle Paul.

Each person's time of grace is set by God. Whether tens of thousands at once in a tragic disaster or one at a time by "natural" means, God is the

one who ultimately determines the length of our lives and brings them to a close when and how he sees fit. We can live confident in God's promise that he works all things together for our good according to his purposes. When tragedy strikes us, when we are tempted to challenge God for the way he chooses to run his universe, we should remember the limitations of our human point of view and the loving eternal perspective of God's providence and care.

And maybe when we ask, "Why did God allow this to happen?"—maybe we will get to be part of the answer. Maybe we will be the aid worker or the adoptive parents. Maybe we will be the supportive friend, the shoulder to cry on, the person to talk to over coffee. Maybe it will be our relief money, our prayers, our witness, or our example that God uses to take a tragedy—for the tsunami can be seen as nothing less—and turn it into a blessing for one of his beloved children.

Chris Pluger is a member at Grace, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Editor's note: The girl pictured in the photo is walking through debris in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on Dec. 28, 2004. Sri Lankan officials estimate that more than a million people have been forced from their homes.

TSUNAMI DISASTER RELIEF

WELS members are responding in Christian love to the tsunami disaster that struck Southeast Asia in December. As of Jan. 31, the WELS Committee on Relief has gathered more than \$400,000 for aid to the tsunami victims. The Schwan Foundation matched the first \$50,000 in donations. A Thrivent grant contributed another \$170,000 toward the total.

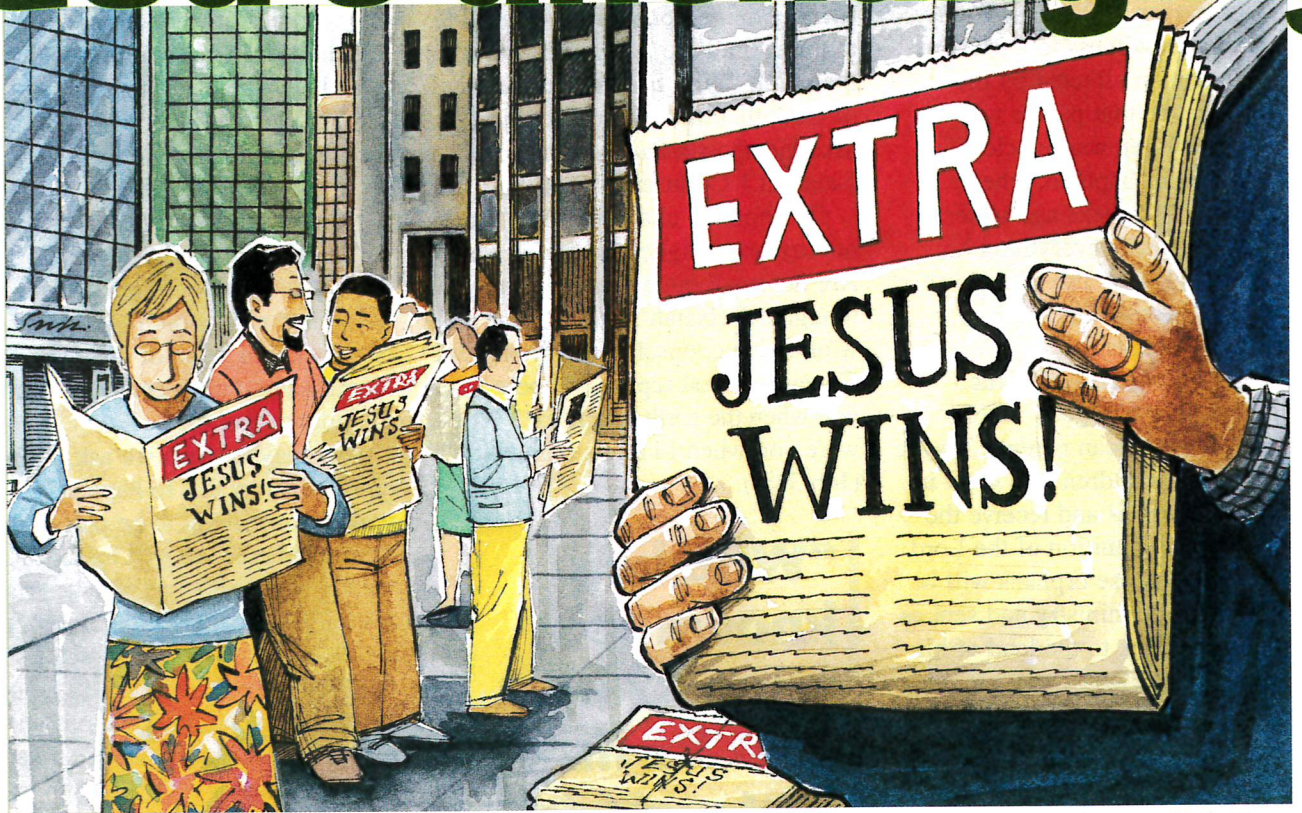
The Committee on Relief sent initial gifts through the international relief agency CARE, which it has worked with through the years.

The Committee on Relief is also working through WELS missions and missionaries to help with rebuilding and

humanitarian needs. Pastor Philip Schupmann, chairman of the Committee on Relief, says, "As dollars continue to be received, we will be using some of them long term through our own gospel outreach efforts in that part of the world. Our experience with disasters is that our more limited funds can sometimes be better used to do more good in the months after the disaster—long after the media and other relief agencies have left."

To help tsunami victims, send gifts to Committee on Relief at 2929 N Mayfair Road, Milwaukee WI 53222. Or you can donate online at www.wels.net, jumpword "donations". Find out more about our relief efforts in Southeast Asia at www.wels.net, jumpword "relief".

God's unchanging



People everywhere need to hear the unchanging message of law—that all fall short of the holy behavior God has a right to expect—and gospel—that God’s forgiving, justifying mercy is universal, covering the whole human race.

Mark A. Jeske

Sometimes it seems as though everything in life changes. Even middle-aged people look back at their childhood as though from another era. Everything changes. Six hundred cable channels. TiVo. iPod. Blackberry. Satellite radio. Kazaa. Flat screen. Videophones. Google. Desperate Housewives. T3. MP3. HTML. DVD. SUV. HDTV. ISP. WiFi. GPS.

Sin doesn't change

And yet nothing changes. As is often said: “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” What William Faulkner called the “eternal verities” still characterize human identity and behavior. People are still driven by sex and money. People still get born the same old way, struggle to survive, get sick, and then die. People still struggle with guilt, depression, identity confusion, and loneliness.

People still suffer from self-hatred, haunted by the inner voice that taunts them for being ugly, fat, dumb, friendless, incompetent losers. People are still restless for the favor of the God they know exists. They are hungry for his acceptance and approval, although without the testimony of the Bible they will never find it and cannot contrive it.

Left to themselves, uninformed by the Bible, spiritually hungry people will construct a religious philosophy that resembles their everyday civic and business life. Here is part of that man-made creed:

- “The principal human obligation is to try to be nice to other people.”
- “There is good in everyone,” and its corollary, “I’m not such a bad person. I try my best.”
- “I can define my own truth, what is right and wrong for me.”

- “With a reasonable effort you can surpass whatever expectations the Divinity may have.”
 - “If you’ve been bad, do one of three things: try harder, perform religious rituals, or pay.”
 - “Only wretchedly bad people will end up in hell, if it even exists. Pretty much everybody will get to heaven, whatever that may be.”
- You know what else never changes?
- God’s terrifying indictment of human sin.
 - God’s rock-steady love for all of his lost children.
 - The compelling power of God’s Word to build faith in a human heart.
 - The steady flow of forgiving mercy that comes from the cross of Christ.
 - The restless working of the Holy Spirit to bring Christ to all.

message

God's law and gospel don't change

Partway through his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul summarized God's timeless, unchanging double message to the human race with memorable poetic elegance. He wrote, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). These 11 words are a bomb that destroys all human pretending, all comfy denial, all smugness, all illusions.

This verse explains why the human race is so universally plagued with crime, abuse, hatred, racism, tyranny, and war. It's because sin is universal. That is, every human being is born predisposed to re-enact Adam and Eve's original rebellion and thus become co-conspirators. In fact, that rebellion makes every human being a collaborator with Satan himself. All fall short of the holy behavior God has a right to expect. All fall short of the approval from God that we all need and crave.

Popular literature celebrates the feats of heroes and heroines who defeated the enemy on their own. Dorothy slew the Wicked Witch of the West. The tin man, scarecrow, and lion acquired their own heart, brain, and courage. Frodo and Aragorn defeated Sauron by their own integrity and courage.

But you can't. In real life, you cannot defeat Satan, and you can't undo his defeat and enslavement of the human race. That's why the second half of God's message to the human race in Romans 3 is so thrilling—Christ the champion did it for you. In Paul's words, ". . . and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). Pay attention—what is the subject of the verb "are justified"? Yes! Unbelievable! It's the word "all"! In these matchless words God is telling you that his

forgiving, justifying mercy is universal, covering the whole human race.

Our need to tell God's message doesn't change

This incredible message has two main uses. The first is for internal purposes—for you personally. It's for comfort for your own heart, for instruction and encouragement within your family, and for spiritual strength in your congregation.

Does its changelessness seem boring to you? Not to me. I love watching replays when my team scores. I can't get enough—show it to me from seven different angles, overhead cam, slow motion, stop action. I thrill every time the ref's hands go up to signal a touchdown. Replay touchdowns are unstoppable! In the same way, reading the Bible for its gospel message is like picking up a newspaper where the headline is always "Jesus Wins!"

The second use for this incredible rescue story is to provide you, your family, and your congregation with its message for external purposes—evangelism. God has placed you in a context where you have associations and relationships with people who still walk in darkness. Only those who hear the message and believe it will receive its wonderful blessings.

Do you find it hard to talk about your faith? The United States, after all, exists to protect religious tolerance. Are you afraid that you will sound preachy? Pompous? Self-righteous? Exclusive? Arrogant?

Fear not. It's not your message—it's God's. Outreach is not your idea—it's God's. It's not your golden tongue or smooth sales pitch that creates faith—it's God's power. Just tell people the truth, the way you want your auto mechanic or physician to tell you the truth.

Mini-dictionary of mega-concepts

Justified: God, the righteous Judge, pronounces you "Not guilty" and awards you the status of saint, for Jesus' sake.

Freely: Against all expectations from people who are used to having to pay for anything worthwhile in life, God gives it away. And this in spite of the crushingly expensive cost to Christ.

Grace: Question: Why should God like you? Answer: Because he chose to. This takes all the pressure off you.

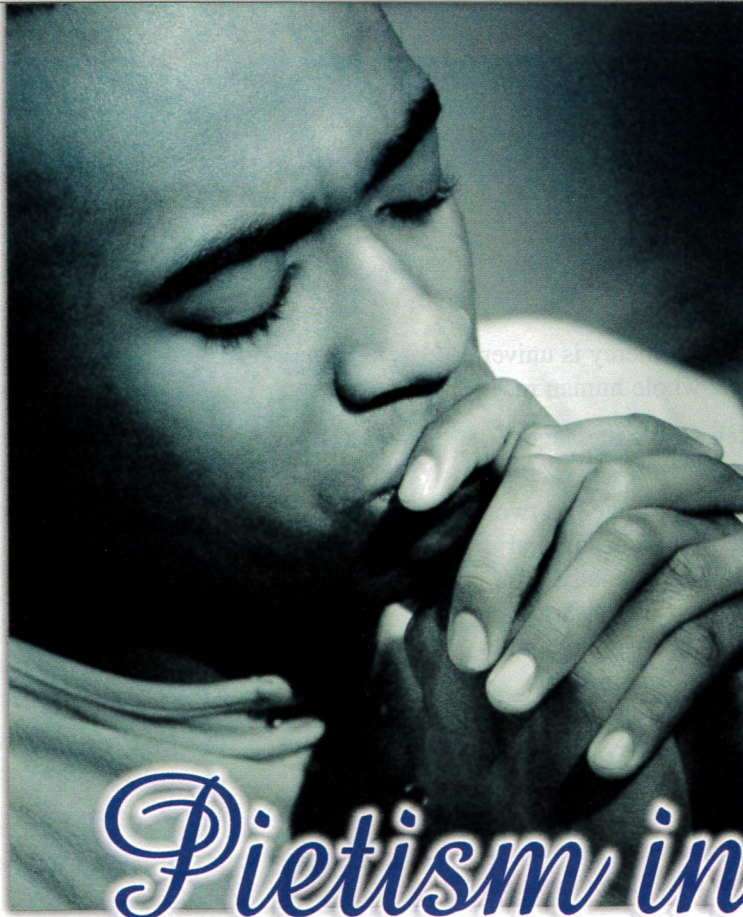
Redemption: Christ paid a tremendous price—first, to buy you out of all your legal trouble, and second, to acquire you for himself.

When the walls of water from the Indian Ocean tsunami smashed into Sri Lanka and Sumatra, people were caught completely by surprise. Almost immediately came accusing cries in the ears of oceanographic scientists, "Why didn't you tell them!" Our world considers withholding life-and-death information as tantamount to murder.

Go. Tell people of God's universal condemnation and universal love. While there's time.

Mark Jeske is pastor at St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

EXTRA! EXTRA! EXTRA! EXTRA!



Pietism in America

pi•e•ty *n. pl.*

The condition of reverence and devotion to God that comes with faith in Christ.

pi•e•tism *n.*

Making subjective standards of piety and religious experience the essential measure of Christianity or the Christian faith.

Although the spirit of Pietism pervades Christianity in America today, Confessional Lutheranism has something better to offer.

John M. Brenner

The spirit of Pietism tends to emphasize sanctification rather than justification; deeds rather than creeds; and subjective, human, religious experience rather than the objective truths of God's Word. Pietism involves an overemphasis or a misplaced emphasis on Christian truth, resulting often in false teachings and false practices.

The spirit of Pietism pervades Christianity in America today, as seen in these characteristics associated with much of American Protestantism:

- Emphasizing personal religious experience over faithfulness to the teachings of God's Word.
- Believing that conversion is not God's work alone but that we must do our part in order to be saved (synergism).
- Rejecting infant baptism and baptismal regeneration.
- Denying the real presence in the Lord's Supper.
- Viewing Baptism and the Lord's

Supper as rites in which we show our faithfulness to God rather than means of grace through which God creates or sustains faith.

- Being willing to ignore doctrinal differences for the sake of outward union (unionism).
- Using subjective standards of behavior and making legal requirements where God has not.
- Expecting unprecedented success or a heaven on earth for God's people (triumphalism).
- Believing that Christians can reach a point at which they no longer sin consciously (perfectionism).

The Pilgrims brought the spirit of Pietism to America

The spirit of Pietism came to America with the Pilgrims, who were intent on establishing a "pure" church. To become an official member of a Puritan congregation, a person had to describe his "conversion" experience, which turned attention away from God's promises to human experience

and from what people are to believe to what people are to experience or feel. The Great Awakening (ca. 1740-1742) helped make the conversion experience a part of American culture.

The Moravians under Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf also came to America during the colonial period. Zinzendorf (1700-1760) was the godchild of Philipp Spener (1635-1705), the father of Lutheran Pietism. The Moravians were extremely mission-minded but were willing to ignore doctrinal differences. They did not understand that doctrinal compromise ultimately undermines mission work and the proclamation of the gospel.

John Wesley (1703-1791), the founder of Methodism, was influenced by the Moravians. Methodism with its subjective approach to Christianity and its overemphasis on sanctification took deep root in America.

Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) and the other revivalists of the Second Great Awakening (ca. 1795-

1840) employed methods of psychological manipulation to produce conversion experiences and “decisions” for Christ. From Methodism and the Second Awakening came the Holiness Movement with its emphasis on Christian perfection. Pentecostalism with the so-called “baptism in the Holy Spirit” and charismatic gifts like speaking in tongues and faith healing developed from the Holiness Movement. The revivalists and the Holiness Pentecostal Movement placed primary emphasis on what people are to experience or what they are to do rather than on God’s forgiveness and mercy.

Germans brought Lutheran Pietism

Lutheran Pietism came to America in the 1700s. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (1711-1787), the “father” of Lutheranism in America, was sent to America by the Pietists in Halle, Germany. His reports on his work in America include an account of his asking a prospect to relate to him the circumstances of his conversion.¹ Although he could criticize some of the false teachings of George Whitefield (1714-1770), Muhlenberg had no qualms about inviting that great Calvinistic revivalist to occupy his pulpit.²

By the mid-nineteenth century Pietism and American Protestantism had influenced some Lutherans enough that they issued the Definite Synodical Platform and sent it to Lutherans throughout the United States. This document included a revision of the Augsburg Confession that eliminated everything that separates Lutheranism from generic American Protestantism. The authors believed that the only way Lutheranism could survive in America was to conform to American Protestantism with its revivalistic techniques and its rejection of liturgical worship, baptismal regeneration, the real presence in the Lord’s Supper, and the practice of confession and absolution. Nearly every Lutheran synod in America rejected the document.³ In 1856 the Wisconsin Synod

in convention called this American revision of the Augsburg Confession “the definite suicide of the Lutheran Church.” But in many ways the spirit of these “American” Lutherans eventually began to make inroads, particularly in some of the synods that are today part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Our own Wisconsin Synod has roots that reach back into Pietism. The mission houses and societies that supplied so many of the early pastors for our synod were pietistic and unionistic. Several of our early leaders came from the area of Wuerttemberg, Germany, a center of a “mild” form of Pietism that avoided the excesses that arose in other areas. Nevertheless, it took our synod fathers a decade and more to break away from their roots and make our synod a truly confessional Lutheran synod.

Pietism thrives in American Evangelicalism

Today the spirit of Pietism is alive in American Evangelicalism. Evangelicals emphasize the importance of a subjective “born again” experience of salvation. Many proclaim decision theology, teaching that an unbeliever has the spiritual power to “decide for Christ” and thus make a contribution to his own conversion. Much contemporary religious music displays a subjectivism that stresses experiential Christianity, decision theology, and Christian lifestyle rather than the objective truths of the gospel.

Books and programs aimed at spiritual renewal and church growth often exhibit a faulty understanding of original sin and the work of the Holy Ghost. As in the revivalism of the 19th century, these programs often involve the use of methods designed to guarantee the results that those who use them are looking for. Books aimed at spiritual renewal often seem to make the efficacy of the means of grace dependent on the proper use of these methods or on the character or personality of the minister. They don’t recognize that

God’s Word is powerful and effective in and of itself. Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement emphasize experiential religion over doctrinal theology and look for power other than the power God has given us in his Word and sacraments.

Confessional Lutheranism runs counter to Pietism

Confessional Lutheranism has something better to offer than the Pietism evident in American Christianity. As Lutherans we understand that the law and the gospel will touch hearts and feelings. But we will never want to manipulate emotions or base our certainty of salvation on our feelings. Our salvation is sure because of the certainty of God’s promises.

Lutherans will never suggest that good works are unimportant. But we recognize that the only way to encourage good works or fruits of faith is to encourage faith. Faith is strengthened through the gospel in Word and sacraments.

We desire to grow in faith and want our congregations to grow numerically. We recognize that it is important to organize our congregations and carry out the work of the church with all the wisdom that God gives us. But we also know that the power to achieve our purpose lies in the means of grace and not in human methods and devices.

God’s Word will always achieve the purpose for which he sent it.

John Brenner, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Calvary, Thiensville.

This is the third of a four-part series that will show historically and biblically the struggle between piety and pietism that regularly troubles the church. To read the first two articles, go to www.wels.net, jumpword “ficarchive”, and enter the keyword “piety”.

¹“The Influence of Pietism in Colonial American Lutheranism” by Theodore Tappert. *Continental Pietism and Early American Christianity*, p. 30.

²*A History of Lutheranism in America, 1619-1930*, p. 33.

³*Lutherans in Crisis: The Question of Identity in the American Republic* by David A. Gustafson.

WHATEVER

Amazing

God does not just forgive and forget. He forgives and loves.

Corrine Meshke

On Sundays when I was little, my mom would help my sister, Danielle, and me get dressed. This was quite an ordeal. First we had to somehow squeeze into one of various pairs of brightly colored tights. We then had to wiggle into an extremely uncomfortable (and remarkably frilly) dress. Then, we proceeded to worm our way into our "fancy pants," which gave other churchgoers something nice to look at whenever we decided to bend over. Finally we strapped on a pair of shoes. My mother also forced our baby-thin hair into some sort of hairstyle that would support a bow. The whole process took about half an hour. To my four-year-old brain, half an hour may just as well have been an eternity. I hated dressing up.

On one particular day the whole "Sunday morning" routine was frustrating me almost to the point of a temper tantrum. I remember asking Mom (with quite a large pout on my face), "Why do we have to get dressed up so much just to go to church?"

"Because we want to look our best when we go into God's house. God deserves only our best, and you want to give him that, don't you?"

At this point I looked at the ground, unsatisfied with this answer. My next thought was one that I will forever be ashamed of: "I hate God."

If there are three words that could hurt God the most, it would be those three. I am so ashamed that I, a person who God put an incredible amount of love, thought, and precision into creating, would even think something so horrible.

But out of my shame comes great wonder. Wonder that my God loves me enough to forgive even thoughts as malicious as those. What amazes me even more is that he does not merely forgive and forget. He forgives and loves. He loves all of us with a love that we will never be able to comprehend. We get so many

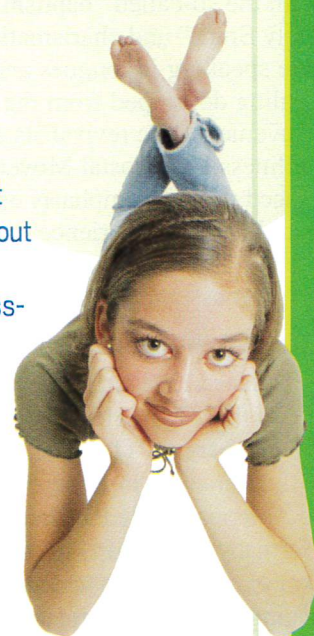
glimpses of his perpetual love, yet we often look right over them without really seeing.

Typically when I look at the blessings God has given me, I fail to notice the simple and wonderful ones. I overlook the blessing of never experiencing life outside of God's love. I overlook the blessing of forgiveness. I overlook the basic fact that I am his child. I could and should be thanking God for so much, but I forget.

When I consider how much God really has done for me, I am overcome with an overwhelming sense of gratefulness. That is when I want to dedicate my entire life to God and give him my everything. I also want to get on my knees and just cry in thankfulness. The deeper I dig into the Word and into all the aspects of God, the more my amazement, gratefulness, and delight builds. David expresses his wonder at God's unfailing love in Psalm 36:5: "Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies."

When you really think about the sacrifice God went through for all of us unworthy, selfish, forgetful, sinful, and disgusting people, how can you not be staggered by the sheer love God has for us? It is so amazing that God gave up his perfect Son to a horrible fate—for us. That God could forgive and love instead of just forgiving and forgetting. Wow! That is the most complete and awesome form of love to ever have taken place. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1).

Corrine Meshke, a sophomore at Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, is a member at Bethlehem, Menomonee Falls/Germantown, Wisconsin.



Obituaries

Richard E. Buss
1930-2004

Richard Buss was born March 20, 1930, in Manitowoc, Wis. He died Nov. 27, 2004, in New Ulm, Minn.

A 1957 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Redeemer, Hettinger, N.D.; Zion, Reeder, S.D.; Christ, Brookings, S.D.; Northwestern Academy, Mobridge, S.D.; and Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

He is survived by his sister, Lois.

Dale R. Schultz
1945-2004

Dale Schultz was born Aug. 29, 1945, in Manitowoc, Wis. He died Dec. 24, 2004, in Manitowoc.

In 1990, he completed his WELS teacher certification. He served Bethany, Manitowoc.

He is survived by his wife, Phyllis; two daughters; three sons; six grandchildren; two sisters; and two brothers.

Eugene C. Caruss
1945-2004

Eugene Caruss was born April 1, 1945, in Lansing, Mich. He died Oct. 23, 2004, in Mesa, Ariz.

A 1967 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he served East Fork, Whiteriver, Ariz.

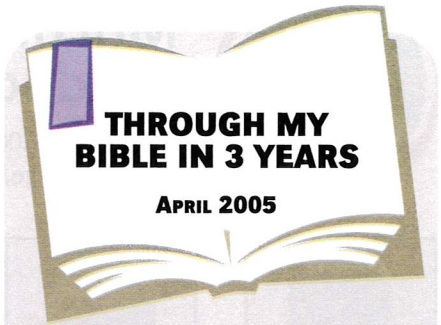
He is survived by his wife, Carol; one son; one daughter; and two granddaughters.

Loren E. Steele
1943-2005

Loren Steele was born Aug. 19, 1943. He died Jan. 8, 2005, in St. Paul, Minn.

A 1986 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served First German, Manitowoc, Wis.; Emanuel and Mt. Olive Chinese, both in St. Paul, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Charlene; two daughters; and one grandchild.



- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Luke 17:1-19 | 17. Gen. 37 |
| 2. Lk. 17:20-37 | 18. Gen. 38, 39 |
| 3. Lk. 18:1-17 | 19. Gen. 40:1- |
| 4. Lk. 18:18-34 | 41:13 |
| 5. Lk. 18:35-19:10 | 20. Gen. 41:14-57 |
| 6. Lk. 19:11-28 | 21. Gen. 42 |
| 7. Genesis 27:1-45 | 22. Gen. 43 |
| 8. Gen. 27:46- | 23. Gen. 44 |
| 28:22 | 24. Gen. 45 |
| 9. Gen. 29:1-30 | 25. Gen. 46:1- |
| 10. Gen. 29:31- | 47:12 |
| 30:43 | 26. Gen. 47:13- |
| 11. Gen. 31:1-32:2 | 48:22 |
| 12. Gen. 32:3-32 | 27. Gen. 49 |
| 13. Gen. 33 | 28. Gen. 50 |
| 14. Gen. 34 | 29. Luke 19:29-46 |
| 15. Gen. 35 | 30. Lk. 19:47- |
| 16. Gen. 36 | 20:47 |

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

Our choir sang a closing hymn to end an evening worship service. As soon as the choir finished singing the final verse, all the lights in the church went out. They stayed out for only a few minutes due to some malfunction at our local transformer. When the lights again came on, the choir chuckled, and most of the congregation probably thought it had been planned for the lights to go out, because the hymn we had just finished singing was "Now the Light has Gone Away."

Arnie Strehler
St. Peter, Monticello, Minnesota

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..... ✂

Name

Street address

City State Zip

E-mail



Martin Luther College graduates

On Dec. 15, 2004, 16 students graduated from Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.



Craig R. Bretkreutz
Bentonville, Ark.
B.S. in elementary education



Michael P. DeRuiter
Lake Orion, Mich.
B.S. in elementary education



Keturah E. Garbow
Saginaw, Mich.
B.S. in elementary education



Mark T. Gibson
West St. Paul, Minn.
B.S. in staff ministry



Natalie L. Habeck
Puyallup, Wash.
B.S. in elementary education



Ryan A. Jaeger
Ixonla, Wis.
B.S. in elementary education



Joel D. Krieger
Tecumseh, Mich.
B.S. in elementary education



Kristin L. Kuerschner
Watertown, Wis.
B.S. in elementary education



Karl F. Mantzke
Sparta, Wis.
B.S. in elementary education



Katie L. O'Brien
Greenfield, Wis.
B.S. in elementary education



Alan D. Scharrer
Fort Atkinson, Wis.
B.S. in elementary education



Carrie L. Schmidt
Two Rivers, Wis.
B.S. in elementary education



Philip P. Stuebs
Platteville, Wis.
B.S. in elementary education



Aaron J. Trimmer
Valley City, N.D.
B.S. in elementary education



Micah J. Walz
Wauwatosa, Wis.
B.S. in elementary education



Rachel M. Weimer
The Woodlands, Texas
B.S. in elementary education

Synod Sunday set for May 1

The Conference of Presidents has authorized an annual synod Sunday so that congregations can learn more about the work that we do together as a synod.

Walking Together Sunday: A Celebration of God's Grace Among Us, is scheduled for May 1. Its purpose is to strengthen the commitment of WELS members and congregations to carry out Christ's saving mission together.

"Confirmation, the children's Christmas service, and weddings are such joyous occasions because everyone assembled together shares a common purpose. A synodwide Walking Together Sunday can be the same. All together we celebrate the grace of God and the privilege he gives us to proclaim peace through Jesus," says WELS President Karl Gurgel.

Besides learning more about missions, ministerial education, and parish services, WELS members will have an opportunity to make a special contribution to the WELS general fund to support our synod's mission and ministry.

In March, congregations will receive materials—including a video focusing on home missions and other ministries, brochures and special offering envelopes to distribute to members, and a sermon outline and litany—for this special service.

For more information, contact the Commission for Communication on Financial Support at 800-827-2237; joycet@sab.wels.net.

To read more about WELS members' shared mission, go to Gary Baumler's Editor's Pen, "The 400,000" (p. 34).

Spanish magazine is a valuable resource

Protected by a plastic bag, *El Mensajero Luterano* is passed from neighbor to neighbor by church members in Cuba. The same magazine disappears quickly from the waiting area of an insurance company in Texas.

El Mensajero Luterano, Spanish for *The Lutheran Messenger*, is a bi-monthly publication that instructs, informs, and inspires Spanish-speaking people around the world. With

Who subscribes to *El Mensajero Luterano*?

- Spanish-speaking members of WELS congregations in the United States and Latin America
- Pastors, teachers, missionaries
- Caucasians who want to improve their Spanish
- Congregations who want to reach out to Hispanic/Latino neighbors

1,400 copies of each issue printed, it brings the gospel to people in the United States and in WELS foreign missions as well as places where missionaries can't go. It has been continually published since 1993.

Because of great distances between WELS Spanish-speaking congregations in Latin America and in the United States, the *Mensajero* provides information about congregations, pastors, and members throughout the synod.

"This helps feed a spirit of unity and dispels the feeling of loneliness that comes from being separated by great distances or culturally as may be the case in the United States," shares Ron Baerbock, director of Spanish Publications at WELS Multi-Language Publications.

The *Mensajero's* 16 pages also contain Bible studies, meditations for all ages, family counsel, book reviews, music, poetry, and art. At least half the articles are written by native Spanish

speakers, and Baerbock has held Spanish writing workshops in several countries to raise interest in writing and help bring that percentage to 90 in the next year. The Spanish editor, Letty Connell, is from Guadalajara, Mexico, where she taught Spanish and English. Flabia Perdue, who also has Hispanic roots, does the layout.

"I must say," shares Evangelical Lutheran Synod missionary Terry Schultz, "the *Mensajero* is an extremely valuable asset to our work in Peru. The more remote the village of the congregation, the greater the comfort to the members knowing they are part of a larger brotherhood of Bible-believing Lutherans!"

For more information about *El Mensajero Luterano*, call 800-876-1388.



North American Outreach update

The first phase of WELS' North American outreach emphasis saw district leaders visiting congregations with materials to encourage, equip, and involve members in personal and community outreach. The visits began in September 2004, and some are still taking place (see table).

Each visit included a viewing of the *Proclaim Peace through Jesus* video that highlights God's grace and the mission that he gives each Christian—to go and tell more people about Jesus. Responses to the video and other materials shared at these visits have

been exceptionally positive. One member noted, "Seeing that presentation and remembering what my Savior did for me has energized me to want to go straight from church out to the mall to tell others about Jesus!"

Telling others about Jesus is at the core of the synod's four-year North American outreach emphasis, which was designated by the delegates of the 2003 synod convention. If you have a story to share that involves telling someone about Jesus, go to www.wels.net/nao and click on "Sharing your experiences."

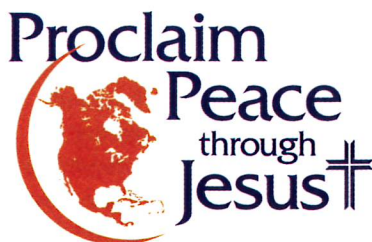
Plans for phase two are underway. In 2005, synod leaders are planning to showcase alternative ways that individuals and congregations can spread God's Word. More details about phase two will be available in the April issue of *Forward in Christ* and online at www.wels.net/nao.

Congregation involvement

This table shows the percentage of congregations in each district that have received North American Outreach visit materials as of 01/19/05.

Arizona-California	40.0%
Dakota-Montana	73.4%
Michigan	55.0%
Minnesota	64.8%
Nebraska	43.1%
North Atlantic	76.1%
Northern Wisconsin	47.7%
Pacific Northwest	100.0%
South Atlantic	96.8%
South Central	63.0%
Southeastern Wisconsin	23.7%
Western Wisconsin	42.7%
WELS total	54.0%

A limited number of North American Outreach visit materials are still available. If your congregation hasn't received a visit, contact the Parish Services chairman in your district.



Why one prisoner can smile

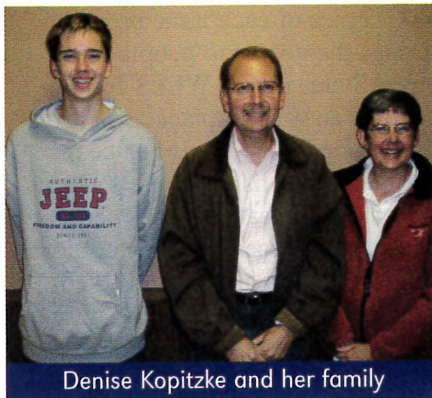
Ten iron bars lock me in, a cell of stone and steel, 48 square feet of room. Fear is often what I feel. I see the hurt and all the pain in this place each day. So why can I smile? What took my fear away? Yes, I'm a prisoner in this jail, but not in my heart. I have someone special who's always here with me. So don't feel bad because I'm here. You see there's a good part. I have my Bible and my faith in Jesus. He lives in my heart. He gives me strength to continue on, hope to face each day, and when things get difficult I close my eyes and pray. I also thank God for WELS. God has used you to open my heart.

Inmates in a prison system today find the rules governing them to be tightly controlled. For many, life becomes a series of embarrassing, humiliating, degrading, and sickening moments. Mail is searched and screened. Conversations are frequently recorded or monitored. Freedom is on the other side of the walls.

This gives Christians an opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Inmates need to hear what Jesus has done for them. He has done what we could not do. He promises that all our sins have been forgiven in Christ's blood. We no longer huddle under the dark cloud of guilt; we live in the daylight of his grace.

WELS Prison Ministry, an arm of WELS Special Ministries, has been richly blessed. Our Lord has allowed us to bring this message to those "behind the walls." Besides sending the inmates religious material, our ministry provides a Pen Pal Program for inmates. WELS members are able to share Christ with inmates on an individual basis. Thousands of prisoners have asked us to find them a pen pal. When we have been able to do so, God has blessed both inmates and pen pal writers.

Denise Kopitzke and her family have served as pen pals for a number of years. Some of their pen pals have



written many times, while others have corresponded only a few times.

One inmate writes, "Your friendship has truly been a blessing to me. Before I became a Christian I never thought I would or could have a friend to talk to because of the hate I had in my heart. Hardly any of my family has anything to do with me because of the way I was. I truly thank you for taking the time to write me and tell me about God's love."

"I appreciate being able to ask questions about God and his Word," writes another inmate. "Through this program, I am growing in my faith, and in recent months I have a much better understanding of what God says in his Word. I have much less anger in my life because I know what Jesus has done for me. Thank you for being there for me."

WELS Prison Ministry includes 900 pen pal writers who are sharing their faith with more than 1,200 inmates throughout the United States. Yet, our need for additional pen pals is great. Each day we receive requests from inmates asking for a Christian pen pal, but many of those requests must go unanswered. If you would like to learn how to share your faith with a prisoner through the WELS Prison Ministry Pen Pal Program, call 507-354-3130 or e-mail welspm@newulmtel.net.

*Denise Kopitzke, volunteer
David Nack, administrator*

WELS news briefs

Commission on Special Ministries

414-256-3241;

csm@sab.wels.net

A new booklet from the Commission on Special Ministries, *Facing Freedom*, offers help to released inmates as they begin their new life.

The Commission on Special Ministries' prison ministry distribution center is sending the booklet to inmates who are looking forward to release and to prison chaplains for possible distribution. *Facing Freedom* (#388286) is available online at www.nph.net/welsproducts. Search the online catalog by catalog item number. Or call NPH at 800-662-6022.

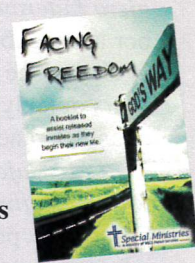
The Commission on Special Ministries and Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries are also offering three prison ministry symposiums, the first on April 8-10 in Kimberly, Wis. These Facing Freedom symposiums will equip and encourage Christians to provide assistance and spiritual support to people serving time in prison, to inmates upon their release, and to families of the incarcerated. Registration deadline for the April symposium is March 15. For more information, go to www.wels.net, jumpword "facing-freedom", or call 414-256-3241.

Synodical Council

414-256-3202; usr85@sab.wels.net

The final report of the Prep School Study Committee-2 was released in January.

The 2003 WELS synod convention directed the appointment of this 15-person committee to study the prep schools (Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., and Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.) in light of WELS' entire system of ministerial education. Following a comprehensive study, the committee has reaffirmed the value of the prep schools and called for retaining the



A new way to communicate with WELS members

existing two-school system. It also recommends that the two schools seek third-source funding to help alleviate the need for subsidy from the synod's budget. This report will be presented to the 2005 synod convention in July. You can access the full report at www.wels.net, jump-word "prepstudy".

Commission on Parish Schools

414-256-3221; cps@sab.wels.net

The Commission on Parish Schools is sponsoring the National School Leadership Conference under the theme "Press Toward the Goal." Held June 28-30, in Lake Delavan, Wis., this conference is not only for principals, but also for teachers in leadership positions, early childhood directors, pastors of congregations with schools, board of education members, potential principals, leadership teams, and staff ministers. For more information, call 414-256-3222.

World Missions

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

In February, Pastor Armin Panning, professor emeritus from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., was commissioned as friendly counselor to Bulgaria at St. Matthew, Port Washington, Wis. Currently there are no expatriate missionaries in Bulgaria. The Administrative Committee for Japan Europe Asia Missions called Panning to provide support and guidance to the national pastor and church leaders. He will mentor the national leaders, supervise doctrine, monitor ministry activity, and assess current and future ministry needs.

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

In an effort to communicate more directly and more frequently with WELS members, top synod leaders have started using online virtual journals—known as blogs (short for Web logs)—to share their thoughts.

In February, WELS Technology Services rolled out Imprint, a WELS blogging site, to give synod leaders a way to post these journal entries and WELS members a way to comment on those entries. A couple of times a week, synod leaders will be sharing their thoughts and opinions.

"I believe that our members will be able to 'hear' us as though we were speaking to them face to face," says Peter Kruschel, administrator for ministerial education. "It has the potential to provide them with information that we sometimes overlook or forget to add to our formal communications."

Blogs have gained in popularity for individuals and businesses over the past few years. This informal, two-way communication vehicle makes the blogger and his thoughts more available to online readers.

"If you want to know what makes a synod leader tick, this is a good place to look," says Martin Spriggs, WELS' chief technology officer.

The title of the Web log, Imprint, was inspired by 2 Corinthians 3:3: "You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."

"Our Savior has 'imprinted' each one of us with the status of family member, citizen of heaven, and disciple," says Spriggs. "Now the things

that we do, say, and think are as representatives of Jesus, whether in conversation with a family member or coworker or via a Web log like this one."

Administrators are excited to try this new way of communicating with WELS members.

Says Kruschel, "Our hope is that [our blogs] are blessed by the Lord and become yet another means of communicating with our fellow members and others so that together we can get on with the work of proclaiming the peace of Jesus to the world."



A step-by-step process to accessing synod leaders' blogs

1. Go to www.wels.net/imprint. This page will show the most recently posted entries.
2. To view the blog of a particular area of ministry, click on the corresponding blog category in the left menu bar.
3. Read the blog.
4. Click on "Print article" underneath the blog to print.
5. Click on "Comments" to read comments. Underneath the already submitted comments is a place for you to leave your comment. All you need to include is your name and e-mail address.
6. Make sure to check out other information on the site, including synod leader biographies, blog archives, and blog ethics.

Blog (or Web log): a frequently updated, personal Web site featuring diary-type commentary and links to articles or other Web sites. Most blogs allow readers to post comments on entries.

Shattering glass

True North Campus Ministry is located across the street from the heart of the University of Minnesota in the Twin Cities. Looking out the windows you can see the hustle and bustle of people coming and going from the campus. Within those windows the saving message of Jesus Christ is proclaimed.

My home congregation of Emanuel, New London, Wis., is located just a few blocks off Hwy 45, the gateway into New London. Looking out the windows you can see the commuters entering and leaving town every day. Within those windows the saving message of Jesus Christ is proclaimed.

The challenge happens to be those annoying windows. There is so much Jesus being proclaimed inside, yet so many people outside. At True North we gave this a name. We call it The Jesus Challenge. It is a challenge to get beyond those windows. This challenge is to the heart, and it is a daily



More than 110 WELS students from the University of Minnesota and other nearby WELS schools participated in The Jesus Challenge on Oct. 11, 2004. Teams distributed more than 5,000 brochures, 400 Gospels of Luke, 3,000 buttons inviting others to read about Jesus, and 660 trivia quizzes to students at the University of Minnesota.

Joe Johnson, campus pastor, shares: "On the day of The Jesus Challenge an atheist asked about Jesus and said he had never read the Bible. In the course of the conversation he found out that there was more about God than just the Gospel of Luke that we were giving away. At the end, he asked if he could have a whole Bible to read."

challenge. Will I stand up for Christ today? Will I bring his message to at least one of the 6.4 billion people wandering around? Or am I not up to the challenge? No matter what the answer is today, the challenge continues to exist every day.

On Oct. 11, 2004, True North moved outside the windows. More than half our members took The Jesus Challenge and then challenged others to get to know Jesus in a large on-campus outreach event (see picture). It was a great day. However, when the sun rose on Oct. 12, the challenge rose again.

May we all be filled with Christ every day and take the challenge upon ourselves to shatter the windows that hold us back from proclaiming the name of Jesus.

Eric Michaelson

Learn more about True North and The Jesus Challenge at www.truenorthwels.org.



At True North's annual cookie bake in November 2004, students baked more than 1,700 cookies, bagged them in groups of two with a note containing a Bible passage, and gave them away on campus. Pictured are Eric Michaelson (left) and Drew Seefeldt.

One focus of this full-time campus ministry is to witness to the more than 50,000 students on campus. Says campus pastor Joe Johnson, "We have many people come to church and some being confirmed because of WELS roommates and friends. One great blessing of being surrounded by so many who don't know Jesus is that every day you have the opportunity to shine for him."

World news

ELCA finishes report on sexuality—In a study on sexuality mandated by the 2001 Churchwide Assembly, an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) task force called for no changes in policies regarding blessing same-sex unions or in prohibiting people in such unions to serve in the ministry.

But the task force is recommending that ELCA pastors and congregations be allowed "discretion" in ministering to same-sex couples and in calling homosexual clergy.

"Rather than attempting to resolve our differences through legislative action, we have sought to place matters in the realm of pastoral care and to encourage continued engagement as we minister to one another," the 14-member task force of the ELCA Studies on Sexuality said in the report it released in January.

The study's three recommendations, which will go to several groups and finally to the 2005 Churchwide Assembly in August, discuss

- urging the church to "concentrate on finding ways to live together faithfully in the midst of our disagreements."
- permitting "pastors and congregations . . . to exercise the wisdom of discretion in their ministry to same-sex couples." Such ceremonies, however, are "in no way equivalent to marriage."
- allowing the ELCA to "refrain from disciplining those who in good conscience, and for the sake of outreach, ministry and the commitment to continuing dialogue," hire gay clergy.

For WELS' statement on homosexuality, go to www.wels.net, jumpword "homosexuality".

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

District news

Arizona

Football coach **Doug Meyer** of Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, was voted Arizona's 2A coach of the year.

Dakota-Montana

More than 60 women attended an Advent Tea hosted by **Our Savior, Brookings, S.D.** Ten attendees were non-member guests. The purpose of the evening was to help women prepare their hearts for the Christmas season.

Michigan

High school junior **Margaret Kelly**, a member of Redeemer, Ann Arbor, Mich., was chosen as the Michigan State Division I swimmer of the year.

Minnesota

On Jan. 9, a new chapel was dedicated at **St. Croix Lutheran High School, West St. Paul, Minn.**

Southeastern Wisconsin

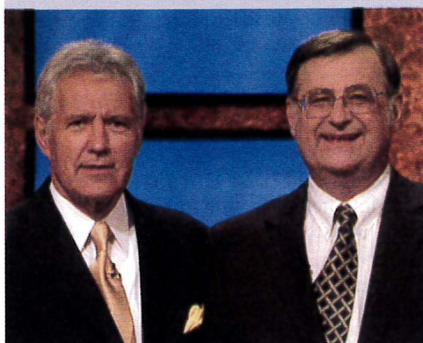


On Dec. 12, 2004, Pastor Ken Fisher (pictured) baptized 14 children in one service at Risen Savior, Milwaukee. Eleven of the children attend Risen Savior's school. Six adults were confirmed in the same service.

North Atlantic

Members of **Cross of Christ, Liverpool, N.Y.**, have been without a full-time, resident pastor for nine years. Retired pastors have filled the vacancy. Cross of Christ is continuing to reach out in its community, though. In 2004, members had four prospects enrolled in Bible information classes,

Michigan



On Oct. 8, 2004, Al Lindke, pastor at Mount Sinai, Montrose, Mich., appeared on *Jeopardy*. Although Lindke lost to the all-time champion, Ken Jennings, he did correctly answer the Final Jeopardy question. Here Lindke is pictured with *Jeopardy* host Alex Trebek.

hosted a Christmas for Kids Day, and began a campus ministry program.

On Oct. 16, 2004, members of **Sure Foundation, Queens, N.Y.**, took the train to **Long Island, N.Y.**, to join members of **Grace of God** for their second annual Fall Farm Fest. Members picked pumpkins, took hay rides, and enjoyed a potluck lunch.

South Atlantic

Pastor David Sternhagen and council member Chris Driesbach of Crown of Life, New Orleans, La., host a live weekly radio talk show on WSHO 800 AM each Saturday afternoon. The show, titled "The Word is Near," is available online at www.wsho.com.

Southeastern Wisconsin

On Nov. 14, 2004, seven students from **Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.**, performed in the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Honor Band concert.

Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service, Inc., hosted three Faith Stepping Stones seminars in 2004. A total of 155 people attended these family ministry training sessions that help attendees teach parents how to foster

physical, emotional, and spiritual growth in their children.

On Dec. 31, 2004, **Abiding Word, Somers, Wis.**, held its first service in its new facility two years to the day after the last service was held at its old church, which was destroyed by fire. Abiding Word's new building was constructed with the help of Builders For Christ, a volunteer organization of WELS Kingdom Workers.

Happy Anniversary!

CA—On Dec. 5, 2004, members of **Prince of Peace, Yucaipa, Calif.**, celebrated the congregation's 40th anniversary.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: AZ—Fred Casmer; CA—Hermann John; DM—Wayne Rouse; MI—John Eich; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NA—Harland Goetzinger; SA—Christopher Kruschel; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

Untangling the Web

Did you know that you can reference your favorite *Forward in Christ* articles online? The *Forward in Christ* online archive at www.wels.net, jumpword "ficarchive", includes articles from as far back as 1981.

Looking for all the articles written by President Karl Gurgel? Wondering how many articles have been written about baptism? Researching church history? Want an article for a church newsletter? Miss an article in a series? *Forward in Christ's* online archive can help you with all these searches—and more. The archive allows you to search by keyword, category, title, author, issue year, or issue month.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

DeNoyer, Matthew P., to Shepherd of the Hills, Duluth, Minn.
Engel, Todd A.; to St. John, Red Wing, Minn.
Krause, Robert P., to retirement
Kuske, Jonathan A., to Good Shepherd, Jacksonville, Fla.
Swartz, Donald G., to Mt. Olive, Monroe, Wis.

Teachers

Ash, Michael P., to Reformation, San Diego, Calif.
Bartsch, Anna L., to Salem, Milwaukee
Dennings, Jeremy L., to Trinity, Jenera, Ohio
Hagedorn, Jason T., to Luther HS, Onalaska, Wis.
Petri, William, to Northland LHS, Mosinee, Wis.
Plath, Timothy M., to Minnesota Valley LHS, New Ulm, Minn.
Sielaff, Ann L., to St. John, Libertyville, Ill.
Walz, Micah J., to Garden Homes, Milwaukee

ANNIVERSARIES

Milwaukee, Wis.—Atonement (75). April 10. Services, 8:15 & 10:45 A.M. Brunch, 9:30 A.M.-1 P.M. RSVP to the church office, 414-871-3744.
Denver, Colo.—Zion (40). April 24. Services, 8 & 10:30 A.M. Church office, 303-985-2334.
Newburg, Wis.—St. John School (100). April 24. Services, 8 & 10:30 A.M. 262-675-6852.
Montello, Wis.—St. John School (75). May 1. Service, 10:15 A.M. Potluck to follow. Jennie Birling, 608-297-8275.
Winona, Minn.—St. Matthew school building (50). May 7. Service, 6 P.M. May 8. Services, 8 & 10:30 A.M. Fellowship between services. Catered meal to follow second service. RSVP, 507-452-2085.

COMING EVENTS

Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, choir tour
 Feb. 25—Bethany, Appleton, Wis., 7 P.M.
 Feb. 26—hosted by Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, University of Wisconsin—Madison, 455 North Park St, 8 P.M.
 Feb. 27—Bethany, Hustisford, Wis., 4 P.M.
Wisconsin Lutheran College band tour
 March 5—Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich., 7 P.M.
 March 6—Hope, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 6:30 P.M.
 March 11—Divine Savior, Indianapolis, Ind., 7 P.M.

March 12—WELS National Band Festival, Wisconsin LHS, Milwaukee
 March 13—Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, 3 P.M. Tickets required. Call 414-443-8802.
Wisconsin Lutheran College faculty art exhibition—March 1-April 7. Free admission. 414-443-8802.
Men's rally—March 5. St. Paul, Muskego, Wis. 414-422-0320, ext. 119 or www.stpaulmuskego.org.
Pathways to Christ retreat—March 11-13. Hawthorn Inn and LaSures Banquet Hall, Oshkosh, Wis. Paula Nimmer, 920-233-1069.
Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, choir tour
 March 22—Trinity, Jenera, Ohio, 7:45 P.M.
 March 23—Shepherd of Peace, Powell, Ohio, 7 P.M.
 March 24—Peace of Our Savior, New Carlisle, Ohio, 7:15 P.M.
 March 25—Beautiful Savior, Cincinnati, Ohio, 7 P.M.
 March 26—Shepherd of the Hills, Knoxville, Tenn., 2 P.M.
 March 27—Sola Fide, Lawrenceville, Ga., 6:30 A.M.; Messiah, Alpharetta, Ga., 10:30 A.M.; Beautiful Savior, Marietta, Ga., 7 P.M.
 March 28—Abiding Peace, Simpsonville, S.C., 7 P.M.
 March 29—Beautiful Savior, Summerville, S.C., 7 P.M.
 March 30—Grace, Charlotte, N.C., 7 P.M.
 March 31—Living Savior, Asheville, N.C., 7 P.M.
 April 1—Hope, Louisville, Ky., 7:30 P.M.
 April 2—Divine Savior, Indianapolis, Ind., 7 P.M.
 April 3—Bethlehem, Carmel, Ind., 10:15 A.M.; Beautiful Savior, Fort Wayne, Ind., 7 P.M.
 April 4—Trinity, Saline, Mich., 6:30 P.M.
Christian Woman Today retreat—April 8-10. Olympia Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Maureen, 262-784-0412.
Christian women's retreat—April 15-17. Schwan Retreat & Conference Center, Trego, Wis. 800-577-4848.
Spiritual Renewal Weekend for Women—April 15-17. Kahler Grand Hotel, Rochester, Minn. Bonnie, 507-931-1866.
Lutheran Pioneer International Pine Car Derby—April 16. Lakeside LHS, Lake Mills, Wis. Tom Deibert, 920-923-5307.
WELS Church Librarians' Organization meeting—April 23. English, Viroqua, Wis. Theresa, 608-637-7389.
Concert—Cascade Lutheran Chorale. Grace, Portland, Ore. April 24, 4 P.M.
National Lutheran Women's Missionary Society convention—June 23-26.

Bloomington, Minn. Hosted by St. Croix and Minnesota Valley Circuits. 414-321-6212.
National School Leadership Conference—June 28-30. Lake Lawn Resort, Delavan, Wis. Commission on Parish Schools, 414-256-3222.
National Conference on Worship, Music and the Arts—July 18-21. Gustavus Adolphus, St. Peter, Minn. www.wels.net/worship. Commission on Worship, 414-256-3226.
Contemporary Worship Conference—Aug. 5-6. St. Mark, De Pere, Wis. 920-336-2485 or www.stmark-depere.org.
EduTech—a national conference on teaching, learning, and technology. For all WELS members who teach, preach, or offer technical support, including church/school workers and laypeople. June 26-29, 2006. Oshkosh, Wis. www.wels.net/edutech or 414-256-3222.
NAMES WANTED
WELS actors—for onscreen work. Send resume and headshot to Steve Zambo, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; stevez@sab.wels.net.
Presenters—for EduTech 2006, a national WELS conference on teaching, learning, and technology. Include presenter's contact information and specialty. edutech@wels.net.
Fort Drum, N.Y.—WELS soldiers deployed in 10th Mountain Division. Cross of Christ, Liverpool, N.Y., wants to "adopt" area servicepeople. bethfitting@usadatanet.net.
Gulf Shores, Ala., to Gulf Port, Miss.—Harmon Lewis, 251-639-4621.
POSITIONS AVAILABLE
Individuals to teach English in a foreign country—one-year commitment. All expenses paid. 651-267-1044 or sbohme@hotmail.com.
Evangelical Lutheran Synod Lutheran Schools Initiative—seeking an ELS or WELS member to lead the development of an ELS Lutheran Schools Initiative. Must have passion for and experience in education; leadership, business, and management skills; fundraising experience; and public speaking skills. Contact ELS President John Moldstad, 6 Browns Ct, Mankato MN 56001; 507-344-7356.
 To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@sab.wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date. An updated bulletin board is available at www.wels.net, jumpword "bulletinboard".

Bits o' the Bible

"Jesus, I will ponder now on your holy passion," goes a popular Lenten hymn. Ponder now and see how many facts you remember from the death of God's Son on the cross.

1. Who was the man who was forced to carry Jesus' cross on the way to the crucifixion?
2. The hill of crucifixion is called "Calvary" in Luke 23:33 (KJV). Calvary is actually a Latin translation of what Aramaic name? What does it mean?
3. What drink was offered to Jesus at the site that he refused to drink?
4. Can you reproduce two of the taunts hurled at Jesus while he was on the cross?
5. How long did darkness descend on the crucifixion scene?
6. At the moment Jesus died, what happened in the temple? In the countryside?
7. Identify the four women who Scripture says watched the crucifixion.
8. When Jesus died, what did the Roman centurion say (one of two things)?
9. What was the sign placed above Jesus' head on the cross? What three languages was it written in?
10. How many shares were Jesus' clothes divided into, not counting the undergarment?
11. What was done with the undergarment?
12. Why did the soldiers break the legs of the thieves crucified next to Jesus? Why didn't they break Jesus' legs?
13. When Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus' body for burial, what man accompanied him?
14. How many times did Jesus speak from the cross as recorded in Scripture?
15. How many of Jesus' statements from the cross can you repeat?

RESULTS: Score one for each correct answer.

1-6: Read the accounts again (Matthew 27:32-61; Mark 15:21-47; Luke 23:26-49; John 19:17-42).

7-15: Average.

16-24: Very good.

25-31: Excellent.

Picture this



Redeemer, Maple Grove, Minn., held its sixth annual Birthday Breakfast for Jesus on Dec. 4, 2004. More than 100 people attended the celebration, which included a live nativity, breakfast, Christmas carols, a puppet skit, and a live camel. Pictured with the camel is Laurel Schmeichel. Says Duane Schmeichel, Redeemer's pastor, "[My wife] wants the full circus, but I only let her have one animal per year. We have had a sheep, a calf, a donkey, and now a camel. I am drawing the line at an elephant."

He continues, "The Birthday Breakfast for Jesus is a great outreach event and gets many people involved in the congregation."

This year the congregation received three prospects from the event. Some past attendees have come to Bible information classes and been baptized.

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.

ANSWERS

ANSWERS: 1. Simon from Cyrene. 2. Golgotha; Skull or The Place of the Skull. 3. Wine mixed with myrrh or gall. 4. "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself." "Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God." "He saved others, but he can't save himself." "He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him." "He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." 5. Three hours. 6. The temple curtain split in two; an earthquake; and many dead believers were raised to life. 7. Jesus' mother Mary, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and Salome the mother of Zebedee's sons. 8. "Surely this was the Son of God." "Surely this was a righteous man." 9. "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews"; Aramaic, Latin, and Greek. 10. Four shares. 11. The soldiers cast lots for it. 12. To cause them to die sooner and be removed from the crosses before the Sabbath; he was already dead (and God used the circumstance to fulfill prophecies from Scripture about Jesus' piercing and unbroken bones). 13. Nicodemus. 14. Jesus spoke seven times. 15. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." "Dear woman, here is your son. Here is your mother." "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" "I am thirsty." "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." "It is finished."

Impacting lives on the reservation

Kirk and Sheree Massey are positive Christian role models on the Apache reservation in Arizona.

Laura C. Warmuth

Kirk Massey was a hotshot firefighter with the Bureau of Indian Affairs Forestry Department. His wife, Sheree, was staying home to care for her father, now deceased.

Beginning in the year 2000, this couple began leading a dramatically different life. They started spending their days in training and working at the Family Ministry Center and their nights supervising students at East Fork Lutheran High School, both on the Apache reservation in Arizona.

Why did the Massey's leave behind the life they had been accustomed to? Because their people needed help, and God equipped them for the job.

Kirk and Sheree are both Native Americans who grew up on the Apache reservation and graduated from East Fork Lutheran High School. They both feel blessed to have received a firm Christian education at the school. Strong Christian role models, including their pastor, Eric Hartzell, guided and encouraged them both in their spiritual lives to a point where they can now do the same for others.

The Masseys trained to serve the Lord as part of the pilot Youth and Family Ministry Project of Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service. The goal of the project, in development on the Apache reservation, is to train laypeople to bring the gospel to youth and families.

Through courses in theology and chemical dependency, the Masseys learned to serve as mentors, lead support groups, and train fellow Apaches to be spiritual leaders.

They held weekly youth nights at East Fork with devotions and crafts or games. In Bible studies they dug



Kirk and Sheree Massey have spent many hours working with youth at East Fork Lutheran High School. "We love the kids we get to sit and talk with," Sheree shares. "In a sense, we are inviting them to become a part of our family, but most importantly we're inviting them to be part of God's family."

deeper into some of the issues teens meet today. Native Americans face higher rates of substance abuse, family violence, and suicide than any other group. "We see these kids struggle," Sheree says. "We experienced it too when we were young, so we're able to empathize with them."

The Family Ministry Center is a place where people can come to hear God's Word as well as receive counseling as alcohol or drug addicts. "There are similar services available on the reservation," Sheree says, "but here we use God's Word."

One young man ministered to by Kirk recalls: "The teaching of the Word took on special meaning for me when I met Kirk Massey. Unlike any other teacher or pastor . . . Kirk demonstrated how Jesus could change the life of a young Apache man. Like me, Kirk was also an Apache. Now we're both disciples of Christ."

In November 2004, Kirk accepted the position of Director of Native American Ministries. "I was really pulled in both directions," Kirk

shares. "I loved the work I was doing at the Family Ministry Center, but I was needed to help the Apaches take ownership of this ministry." He now works with Apache leaders on both the north and south reservations to move the mission toward self-efficiency. Sheree continues to work at the Family Ministry Center.

The Masseys' ministries are impacting many lives on the reservation. Whether counseling a victim of abuse, chatting with a student, or training Apache Christians to be leaders, the message the Masseys love to share is that of God's grace—the message that impacts lives.

"The Masseys exemplify that you can grow up on the reservation and, with God's help, overcome the obstacles," shares Rick Loewen, Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service staff minister. "They are humble people who love Jesus and love the Apache."

Laura Warmuth is staff writer for Forward in Christ.



That terrible cross

As terrible as the cross is, it is a wonderful cross for Christians. There we see God's answer to our sin.

Frederick J. Toppe

In a typical Christian bookstore in the United States, you will see scenes of glorious nature everywhere. The pictures for our walls and the greeting cards we send out all communicate a soothing message of tranquility and beauty. You would never know that the central scene of the Christian narrative is a scene of unspeakable ugliness—that the real message of Christianity is found in that terrible cross.

Think of the Christian art around your house. You might have pictures of Jesus, perhaps gathering the little children around him, or Bible verses on plaques, or decorative picture frames with Christian symbols. But do you have a cross, one with Christ hanging from it? Does it show the agony and the horror of death by crucifixion? Do you see the scene of Christ's unbearable suffering, not just from his crucifixion but also from the damnation he must carry as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world?

That terrible cross is the very heart of our Christian faith. The cross was used to execute the most defiant criminals and the most dangerous enemies of the state. It was a deliberate, public, state-sponsored torture to so demean the crucified that everyone would turn away from them in disgust. Christ on the cross was, as Isaiah tells us, "one from whom men hide their faces" (Isaiah 53:3).

Terrible to see, Christ on the cross gives us something even more ter-

rible to think about; namely, we should be on that cross, not Jesus. What does that say about us? Do we deserve to be there? Are we so bad that something so terrible should come upon us? Is God that angry with us for what we have done?

The real message of Christianity is found in that terrible cross.

We are good at seeing terrible things that go on in this world. We see wars and atrocities. We hear daily about evil things others do. We would like to say that it is always someone else who is doing terrible things, someone else who is hurting other people, someone else who is failing to be the father and mother and husband and wife and friend and neighbor that they should be. We would like to say that someone else should be punished, but not us.

But the terrible cross says, "Yes, it is you too." Christ hangs there for the sins of all the people of the world—including you. Ephesians says it bluntly: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins. . . . Like the rest, we were by nature

objects of [God's] wrath" (2:1,3). The terrible cross shows us what would have been our destiny under God's wrath if Jesus had not come and taken our place. "'Tis I who should be smitten, My doom should here be written: Bound hand and foot in hell . . . 'Tis I who have deserved them well" (*Christian Worship* 113:3).

It is a terrible cross, but it shows us how wonderful it is to have the gift of salvation. We should be there, but instead Jesus is there, taking our place. As terrible as the cross is, it is a wonderful cross for us. There we see God's answer to our sin. We see God demonstrating his love for us in giving his own Son, even to death. Jesus is there bearing all punishment for all sin. Therefore, we have nothing to fear from God, and nothing ever to fear. Because of that terrible cross, we can have all those pictures of beauty and calm around us, assuring us that all is well because God is at peace with us.

That terrible cross. Look at it again this Lent and especially on Good Friday. Look at what it says about you and about me and about all sinners. But especially look at the cross to see what it says about our Savior. See what he was willing to do for you. That terrible cross . . . that blessed cross!

Fred Toppe is pastor at Redeemer, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

I have been called a good Samaritan

At first I rejected the comparison of myself to the good Samaritan in the Bible. But, Jesus' love did compel me to help a stranger.

Diane Langton



Jim Wilson Jr. was born with one functioning kidney. He knew that kidney might give out, and it did, during his senior year in high school in Oswego, N.Y. The doctors at the University Hospital in Syracuse tried drug therapy to prolong the time before Jim would need to go on dialysis, but, by the age of 20, Jim was an expert at attaching the tubes of his peritoneal dialysis machine. He underwent the procedure for a total of eight and a half hours every day. School, camping, vacations all had to adhere to his dialysis schedule. His life depended on it.

Jim needed a transplant. Members of his family and even a stranger from a nearby city volunteered to be tested, but none were suitable. In desperation, Jim's parents created a Web site asking for volunteers to be tested. They were excited when a man near Jim's age from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, volunteered. His blood type was right, and pre-

liminary tests showed him to be a suitable match. Then the man asked for money. That's illegal in the United States. Organ donors can't ask for remuneration for donating. The transplant coordinator in Syracuse stopped the process, and Jim's dad called the police in Cedar Rapids. The man disappeared, but the police reporter for *The Gazette* in Cedar Rapids picked up the story.

That's where I came in. I'm the archivist for *The Gazette*. I was archiving the stories from the paper the day that story ran. When I read it, I knew that I needed to do something about it. I knew my Lord would have it no other way. Jim needed help, and I had the means to help him.

I also knew that my hometown was in the news in a negative light because of the donor who disappeared. I was born and raised in Cedar Rapids. It's where I was baptized, learned my first words, read my first Bible verse, went to Sunday school

and church. It's where I picked flowers from my grandma's garden and climbed the trees in my grandpa's orchard. I was confirmed and married here. This is where my children were baptized, confirmed, and married. It's where my grandchildren were baptized. My roots here are deep both in family and in faith.

I also thought of our son, who is close in age to Jim.

I did some research on living donation, then asked my husband, Rich, what he would think if I volunteered to be tested.

"Go for it," he said. "I'll be with you all the way."

In June 2003, I called Ellen Havens at State University of New York Upstate Medical Center in Syracuse to volunteer. She in turn sent me a stack of forms, which was followed by eight months of medical testing between two University hospitals several thousand miles apart—blood tests, tissue typing, screening for diseases and viruses, urinalysis, kidney function tests, psychological testing, an EKG, a CT scan, x-rays, and an ultrasound. I was counseled by a psychiatrist, a social worker, and an advocate who made sure that I understood the risks and consequences of donating a kidney and was not being coerced.

I was never coerced, but rather compelled. I have known for as long as I can remember that my Savior gave his life for me. What I planned to do was pretty insignificant compared to that.

As the months passed, and as we and Jim's family waited for test results, wondering if the transplant would ever happen, I came across an article in *Forward in Christ* (Oct. 2003) called "God's plan." It was based on Jeremiah 29:11. "Perfect!" I thought and shared that passage with Jim and his family: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to

harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Finally, after a conference call between my husband, me, and the transplant team in Syracuse, we had a date: March 16, 2004.

We flew to New York a week early to get settled, to undergo some final tests, and to get acquainted with Jim and his family.

We were delighted to find a WELS congregation nearby, Cross of Christ in Liverpool. We were welcomed there with warmth and friendship. We carried with us their prayers and the prayers of our Christian family back home.

There was no reason to be afraid.

Jim and I arrived at the hospital at 7 A.M. to be prepped for surgery. I went first. As my left kidney was removed, Jim was taken into an adjoining operating room to be prepared for the transplant. After about five hours, the procedure was done.

The real test came after the surgery. We were a long way from home. I was in pain and homesick. Then the Lord stepped in. Through the calls and e-mails of our families my husband and I were made aware of nearly everything that was happening at home. There were e-mails from our pastor and his wife with news, advice, and reminders of the faith that had sustained us. Cards and notes came from relatives, friends, and even strangers nearly every day.

And, of course, members of Cross of Christ were supportive. To have the encouragement and prayers of those special brothers and sisters in Christ and to be able to worship with them was much like being at home. I soon began to realize that God had provided everything we needed until he could bring us safely home.

I have been called a good Samaritan.

At first I rejected that comparison, but the more I thought about it, the more I came to understand that compassionate traveler. He came upon a stranger who needed help. He knew that he could provide what the stranger needed, so he provided it. I would like to think, since it's Jesus' story, that the Samaritan knew that Jesus loved that poor beaten and robbed man on the lonely road as much as he loved the Samaritan. So then, what else could he do? He tended the man's wounds, loaded him on his donkey, and took him someplace safe to recover.

And that's why I volunteered to donate a kidney to a young man I had never met. Jesus' love is the best reason I can think of.

Now we are home. I'm completely healed and well. Jim is doing well, too. He is healthier and stronger than ever. He golfs, swims, and is again enrolled in college.

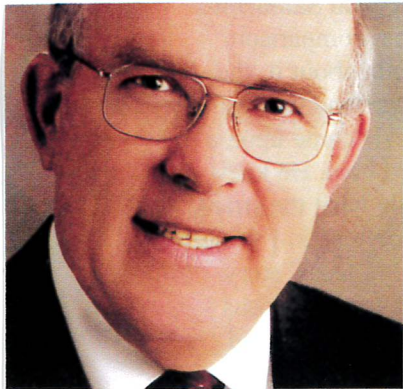
Often people ask me if I was nervous or afraid. That would seem to be a natural reaction to such an undertaking. But I didn't feel any trepidation at all. I felt secure in my Lord's hands. I saw this as his project; I only needed to let him do as he wished. I knew the risks, but the Lord has been with me all my life. Would he leave me now? That was not likely. If I were to die, I could say like Paul, "To live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). There was no reason to be afraid.

What did I get out of this? A sure knowledge that our God is an awesome God. What wonderful things he plans and carries out—everything from our salvation in his Son to allowing us to find ways to serve each other to his glory.

Diane Langton is a member at Good Shepherd, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Pictured are Jim Wilson Jr., Diane Langton, and Rich Langton. To read more about Diane's transplant experience, visit www.gazetteonline.com/blogs/langton.

Spiritual tsunamis



Carl R. Gump

Recently a new word forcefully thrust itself into our vocabulary: “tsunami.” Unleashed by a mighty earthquake, a gigantic tidal wave swept over the Southeast Asia coast in January. At impact, it easily washed away mortals and mortar. Little was left standing in its path except litter and the litters, bearing away the injured and dead. Rarely in our time has the world seen such a powerful display of wind and waves.

The wind and the waves also can often bring spiritual destruction. In Ephesians 4:14, God uses them to teach this lesson: “Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.”

When fishing for walleyes, my father believed that you had to be in 16 to 18 feet of water, just off a sandbar, right on the edge of a weed bed. That’s where we anchored the boat. However, on a windy day, the waves beat relentlessly against the boat. If we were not securely anchored, we soon were adrift, away from the ideal fishing spot.

Do you get the picture? Do you sense the spiritual danger we are in if our faith is not securely anchored? Do you realize how, potentially, this kind of danger is even more deadly than a tsunami?

The devil has long been using wind and waves, attempting to dislodge the child of God’s faith-anchor. “Did God really say . . . ?” It was Satan’s original ploy to blow away our first parents’ faith in God’s words. The winds of doubt soon produced waves pounding against God’s truthfulness. “You shall not surely die!” Satan challenged, contradicting God’s truth. And soon, adrift on a sea of doubt and disrespect for God, life gave way to death.

It’s no different today, is it? Cunningly, in their deceitful scheming, some would

have us question what God says in his Word. Or, following these winds of doubt, the rising waves would wash God himself away, contradicting what he tells us is true. And with faith’s anchor freed from its secure resting place in God’s revealed truth, we’re adrift on the stormy sea of doubt and despair. We’re left with nothing, just like the victims of a tsunami.

In the language of the Old Testament, one word for idols is *Aven*. Literally it means nothingness, emptiness. It’s like the air we exhale as we breathe. Only if it is chilly enough can we even see there is something there. It’s gone from us; it amounts to nothing. And so it is with all opposition to God and his Word of truth. Even if we pile up words, strong words, contradicting or challenging God, they’re as useless as the air we exhale. In the end, they come to nothing. They leave us with nothing.

That’s not how God wants it to be for us. He doesn’t want us to be like children, tossed back and forth by the waves of doubt. He doesn’t want us to be blown here and there by every man-made teaching. He wants our mature faith to be securely anchored in his Word, trusting his Son as our Savior.

March winds, where I live, can blow both hot and cold. They can chill you to the bone, or they can be a refreshing prelude to a warm spring. The winds of God’s love blow only warm and gentle. His pardon frees us from death’s cold sting. To give faith this confidence, God’s Spirit breathed gospel-revealing, life-giving power into God’s Word, the Bible. It’s a firm anchor for our faith. It keeps us from being tossed back and forth by doubt and from being blown here and there by false teaching. It’s God’s way of defending us against spiritual tsunamis.

Women of faith: the Shunammite mother

Mothers, how often do you reassure your little ones that everything is all right? It is, you know.

Philip L. Kieselhorst

“It’s all right,” she said (2 Kings 4:23). How could it be all right? She held her only son in her arms all morning as he cried out in agony. Then at noon he died. Was she in shock when she told her husband, “It’s all right”? How could it be all right?

Everything is all right

Let’s go back to the beginning. The Bible tells us this woman urged Elisha to stay for a meal. Recognizing him as a man of God, she convinced her husband to build an extra room on their house so the man of God could stay with them whenever he came to visit.

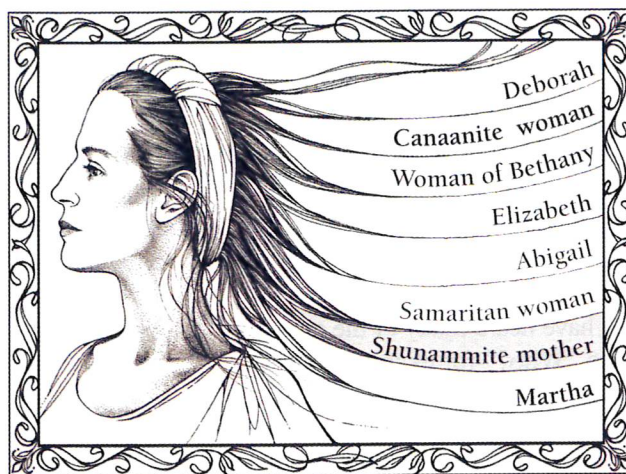
Her generous hospitality was a welcome relief for Elisha during his travels. He was so grateful that he offered her a gift of her choosing. She replied, “I have a home among my own people” (verse 13). Content, she didn’t want anything in return for her kindness.

But Elisha discovered one gift she did not have—a child. So he promised her that God would grant her a son. This God did one year later.

Now everyone would live happily ever after, right? Life in this world doesn’t work that way.

It all goes wrong

After the child had grown, he suddenly developed a severe headache. In terrible pain, he had to be carried home by his father’s servant. His mother was helpless to stop the pain.



All she could do was hold him in her arms until he died.

It was at this point that she placed her son’s lifeless body on the bed of the man of God, went to her husband, and told him, “It’s all right.”

It takes faith with courage to follow Jesus today.

Faith knows: everything is all right

How could it be all right? Even though she knew her son was no longer breathing, she believed that God could help her. Her faith showed in her actions. She wasn’t going to turn against God. She would turn to God.

She told her husband and Elisha’s servant that everything was all right, because she would unburden her heavy heart only to Elisha, God’s man. Little did she know that everything was all right! The Lord looked

with compassion on her and through Elisha raised her son back to life.

Mothers, how often do you reassure your little ones that everything is all right? It is, you know. That’s not just a wishful sentiment or a lie. Everything is all right, even when tragedy strikes a Christian home.

Jesus looks with compassion on our homes and assures us, “Everything is all right.” It is all right

because he will raise us all to live with him in heaven.

For every parent who holds a sick child in her arms, Jesus rose from the dead. For every parent who sheds tears at the grave of his child, Jesus rose from the grave. By raising himself from the dead, Jesus is telling us that everything is all right and will remain so forever.

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

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

This month’s reading: 2 Kings 4:8-37



Gary S. Baumbler

The 400,000

Ever since (and probably before) our church body, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, learned that we have untold mission and ministry opportunities but major financial challenges, people have been asking hard questions:

“What’s the synod going to do about it?”

“How did the synod get in such a fix?”

“Who’s to blame for the synod’s budget shortfalls?”

“Why has the synod brought missionaries home and released professors?”

“Why isn’t the synod starting more new mission churches?”

Yes, “What? How? Who? Why?”

Each question is legitimate and often has multiple answers.

You may have heard many of the answers. In answer to “Who?” for example: “The administrators cloistered in Milwaukee, the elected leaders that failed to monitor spending, the pastors that failed to lead their people, the teachers that should have taught better, the well-heeled members sitting on their wallets, all the members (an extra \$10 from every baptized member per year would bring in \$4 million for the Lord’s work).”

Criticism comes quickly and not always kindly. We point fingers, which is much easier than putting our whole bodies to work to find solutions. We look for faults rather than fixes.

And who are we? We are, ultimately, 400,000 blood-bought souls without whom there is no WELS. Four hundred thousand souls: not some 25 administrators, not 1,257 parish pastors or 4,000 teachers or 1,250 congregations, but 400,000 baptized souls! Those 400,000 comprise WELS. As the world goes, it’s a small number. As our congregations go, it can be a mighty army for the Lord.

But who are these 400,000? We (note the first person if you belong to a WELS church) are 400,000 people who, even at birth, had no inherent hope of pleasing God. We were

born under the curse of God, separated from him and his love.

The Lord Jesus came into this world to bridge the separation, to save us and all people. He lived like us, with hardships like us, but without sin. He—humbled as a human being but still God—suffered and died an unspeakable death for the punishment of the sins of all human beings.

We, the 400,000, are among the millions who have come to believe in the Savior by the working of God’s Holy Spirit. We have been baptized into his grace. We live forgiven and set free from sin, death, and hell. We have been and are being taught all the truth of his holy Word. We have come together in one confession around the crucified Christ and all he has taught us.

We are 400,000 believers united in one faith, one hope, and one Lord Christ. We are 400,000 who want more than anything else for others to share our hope in Christ. We weep together for the lost and rejoice with angels for everyone who is found and believes.

We—buffeted yet by our own sinful natures, the devil, and the world—still make mistakes, show weaknesses, even bungle things. But let not our mistake be that we have any less love and passion for every human being. Let not our weakness be a failure to see and to seize the unique opportunities God places before us to serve in his kingdom. Let not our bungling mean that we aren’t fervently working together as the witnesses that Christ has made of us in his love.

Today, 400,000 is just a number. Tomorrow let it be a growing force of God’s children joined hand and soul in the Lord’s mission. Let it be men, women, and children looking for ways to serve God and to tell more people about Jesus. The 400,000 is the synod. You and I are the synod. We have work to do.

*A song for
the heart
that is . . .*

lonely

*anxious about
finances*

*frustrated with
the wicked*

*anxious about
the future*

feeling guilty

fearful of death

*seeking purpose
in life*

*longing to be
close to Christ*

*seeking Christian
friendship*

peaceful

joyful

*thankful for
God's Word*

Songs for the heart

Donald W. Patterson

Many dedicated believers work hard at growing in their relationship with God and at the same time struggle financially. Has it ever been that way for you? Maybe the struggle isn't with finances, but it is just that to be sanctified is a struggle by itself. Sometimes it seems that although we want to make great progress with God, all too often it is "two steps forward, three steps back." The spiritual life takes vigilance and work.

When we take our lives before God seriously and then see wicked people who could care less about God experiencing prosperity, it chafes us. At least someone besides me must be irritated when ESPN talks about some notoriously rebellious sports figure who received a multi-million dollar contract to bounce, kick, or hit a ball around a playing field. Why does God let wealth and prosperity get so disproportioned over the earth? It is hard to sit and watch wicked people grow more careless, rich, and famous all at the same time. It is even harder when the wicked people work in our office or live down the street. While we watch how unscrupulous

they are, they seem to live with less trouble than we do. It doesn't just make us angry. It causes trauma to our view of God's justice and goodness.

We are not alone in our frustration. One of King David's top musicians, Asaph, had the very same abrasion in his heart. He chafed when he saw wicked people prospering and enjoying life. It didn't seem right or fair that he could be so faithful in following the Lord yet have so much more difficulty than the unbelievers. But he worked through the struggle, and he found gospel truths that gave him a chiropractic adjustment to his attitude. In peace, he wrote a beautiful psalm about his journey. His psalm is God's medicine for any heart frustrated by the prosperity of the wicked. We call it Psalm 73.

In Psalm 73, notice that Asaph is telling you the story of how God helped him through this. Also notice that sometimes he is talking to the reader and sometimes he is talking to God.

Look up Psalm 73 in your own Bible and read it now. Then work through the following questions.

Points to ponder

- List at least three characteristics of the ungodly that Asaph observed (4-12).
- In verses 13 and 14, what is Asaph saying it was that plagued and punished him every day?
- What is happening to a Christian if he or she is feeling that to be concerned about obedience to God is a vain exercise (13-22)?
- How did God shake Asaph out of his frustration with the wicked?
- Using Asaph's journey as an example, what could we do as 21st-century Christians to find help when we are frustrated about the prosperity of ungodly people?

Treasures to share

- Reread verses 23 and 24 and describe to someone the wonderful wealth we have in the four blessings from God highlighted there.
- Think of someone you know who is hurting right now. Take some thoughts from verses 23-28 and write a devotional note to him or her.

Other Scripture verses about spiritual prosperity over worldly prosperity

Matthew 5:1-12; Mark 8:34-38; Luke 12:13-21; Hebrews 13:5

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

Find this article and possible answers online. Go to www.wels.net, jumpword "fic", and click on "Songs for the heart." Answers will be available after March 5.



CELEBRATE EASTER in Lent

The Sundays in Lent can be “little Easters.”

Mark J. Cares

For a long time I have had mixed feelings about Lent.

Lenten solemnity

I had trouble reconciling it to how strongly the early church focused on Christ’s resurrection. In no time at all, the early Christians changed their worship day to Sunday—to commemorate the day Jesus rose. Significantly, they didn’t move it to Friday—the day he died. Lent wasn’t even observed for centuries. “It was not until the seventh century that in Rome the Wednesday in the seventh week before Easter marked the beginning of the season” (*Christian Worship Manual*, pp. 372,373).

The early church’s emphasis on the resurrection naturally instilled a victorious and joyous mindset in the early believers. Paul’s joy in Christ’s victory percolates throughout his letters. Already in the Old Testament, God commanded only one fast day in the midst of numerous commanded feast days. At times I found the prolonged period of Lenten solemnity not only striking in contrast to our victory in Christ, but even clashing.

The other thing that bothered me was how quickly Lent acquired a work-righteous flavor—a flavor that remains today. Just last year we had non-member parents of one of our preschool children upset because we stressed that Lent is not about giving something up. Still today many misinterpret Lent’s solemn nature.

But on the other hand, some of my most memorable services growing up were the midweek Lenten services. Fewer things strike people more than the contrast between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. I can’t imagine not spending time each year taking a prolonged look at Jesus’ passion for me. It would leave me empty.

**Yes, we even
sing Easter
hymns on
the Sundays
in Lent!**

Easter joy

Thus the conflict—until I counted the days of Lent and realized that the Sundays in Lent are not included in the 40 days of Lent. As the season of Lent developed, the church still wanted to emphasize Jesus’ resurrection. Therefore, it excluded Sundays from the Lenten season. It wanted the Sundays to remain “little Easters.”

The more I have followed that lead and consciously made a distinction between our midweek Lenten services and our Sunday services, the more my conflict has been resolved. Black robe on Wednesdays. White robe on Sundays. No flowers on Wednesday. Many flowers on Sundays. Sermons

emphasizing the price Jesus paid for me on Wednesdays. Sermons emphasizing the results of that victory for me on Sundays. Slower Lenten hymns on Wednesday. Joyous, livelier hymns on Sunday. Yes, we even sing Easter hymns on the Sundays in Lent!

People do notice the difference. In some ways, we experience in each week of Lent that striking contrast that many experience between Good Friday and Easter. That contrast was originally built into the Lenten season. The more we reclaim it, the more focused and balanced our Lenten observances will become.

“For many Christians, the preparation for Easter during the season of Lent seems of greater importance than the prolongation of the resurrection celebration throughout the 50 days of the Easter season. The entire Christian year will have its greatest significance, however, when the overriding importance of Easter and its season is emphasized” (*Christian Worship Manual*, p. 373). One way that can be accomplished is by celebrating Easter in Lent.

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