

GOSPEL FREEDOM • WHY DOES GOD LET BAD THINGS HAPPEN?

SEPTEMBER 2005

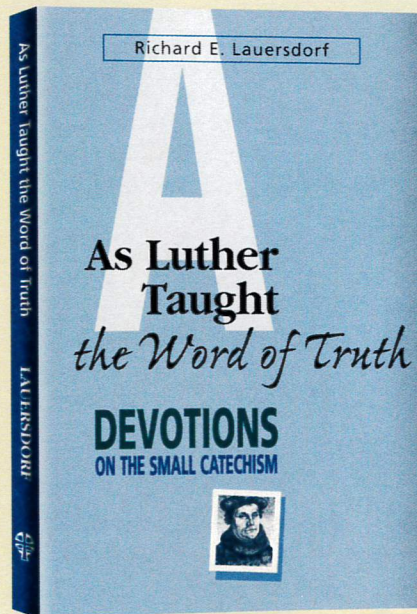
Forward in Christ

God's wisdom, WELS' witness



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FREE**

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As Luther Taught the Word of Truth

Devotions on the Small Catechism

by Richard E. Lauersdorf

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DESIGN PICS



Forward in Christ

✝ The official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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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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SEPTEMBER

WHAT'S INSIDE *by Julie Wietzke*

Most people don't like to think about death or dying. I know I don't. As Prof. Mark Goeglein notes, "The world fears physical death, and it spares no expense or effort to postpone it or try to avoid it." Three articles this month talk about why we don't need to fear death anymore.

In our cover story, Goeglein shares that although all mankind was on death row, we are all set free through Jesus' death and resurrection.

In his first article in a series on Christian freedom, Pastor Paul Kelm relates how the gospel message has set us free from sin's curse, death. Now we can enjoy life.

Pastor Alan Gumm gets a little more personal in his article. In describing his father's death, Gumm shares the comfort he received by Jesus' resurrection as described in the popular Easter hymn, "I know that my Redeemer lives."

Now that we know that we don't have to fear death, let's spread the Word to all people not only so that they aren't afraid of death but also so they can look forward to eternal life.

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RELEVANCE

In "Relevance" [June], Pastor Parlow says Gen-Xers and Mosaics want PowerPoint technology, video clips, and dramas in worship services. This seems to contradict what he wrote in the first of this four-part series: "America's two youngest generations harbor a great amount of skepticism. . . . Many point . . . to the NASA space shuttles Challenger and Columbia as evidence that you can't trust science or technology" ["Skepticism," May]. Why would we want PowerPoint technology in worship when Gen-Xers and Mosaics don't trust it?

There is evidence that today's "channel-surfers" want more liturgy in worship and, in fact, less relevance. They want worship to reflect the mystery of God in an atmosphere very different from what they get during the week.

*James Schulz
Indianapolis, Indiana*

In "Relevance," it is implied that speaking God's Word without the use of visual aids is not as "effective" as speaking God's Word with the use of visual aids. But we notice that in the Sermon on the Mount, to which the article refers, the Lord Jesus spoke God's Word without the use of visual aids. . . .

At times Jesus did use visual aids, but he was not dependent on them. Neither did he say that they make the Word of God "more effective."

Parlow's article was correct: "Today's hearers greatly resemble Jesus' audiences on the hillside." They all need God's law and gospel, from Seniors to Mosaics. If we see that a visual aid will help us make our point, then let's use it. But let's never forget that with or without visual aids, if we clearly and confidently speak God's law and gospel to today's hearers like Jesus did to the audiences on the hillside, the Word will continue to be effective.

*Jim Strand
Morton, Minnesota*

I feel that Pastor Parlow probably unintentionally insulted those who have no strong desire to use the new technology that is available at this time in their worship services. He asked (perhaps tongue in cheek) whether pastors who don't consider using new technology are "boldly leading people into the 1950s or seeking better ways to teach timeless truth to today's people. . . ."

The truth is, when all is said and done, PowerPoint and other technical advances are simply tools that God gives to us. This doesn't necessarily mean that one tool is always better than another. . . .

Many pastors have a limited amount of time to prepare a sermon. I would rather see this time spent in thorough research and planning of the material so that the sermon message is clear, meaningful, and scripturally accurate rather than worrying too much about the technical side.

Mark Krause

THE POPE

When I read the editorial entitled, "The pope has died" [June], I was grateful for the overview of the media attention surrounding the death of Pope John Paul II. After recounting the tributes and accolades given the now-dead pontiff, Baumler said, "Now think about all of these things and of what is missing. Christ is not in the forefront." That is well-said.

However, when I reached the end of the article, the searching question came to my mind, "Now, think about this whole editorial in an orthodox Lutheran magazine regarding the death of the pope and what is missing. Where is the confession of the truth that the papacy is the very Antichrist?"

*Thomas Ehnert
Midland, Michigan*

"BORED" IN CHURCH

I was puzzled by the use of Jacob at Bethel ["How awesome is this place!" June] as an example of why we should

never be bored in church. Since Jacob encountered God alone there, that experience can't qualify as "church." Pastor Engelbrecht says, "Where else but in God's house will you learn . . . how much you need God," but we can learn that from God's Word in private. He asks, "Where else will you hear that but in your Bethel?" But Bethel does not equal "church." The real answer is "in the Bible," whether in public worship or in private devotion.

One senses a subtle false guilt trip laid on anyone who would be "bored" in church or possibly criticize aspects of the worship experience, seeming to imply that such a person is bored with or complaining about God or his Word. That would be an unjustified and harmful implication unless there is clear evidence to substantiate it.

*Jonathan Rupprecht
Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

MOTIVATION FOR REACHING OUT

I just recently finished the article entitled, "God's lightning rod" [June]. I thoroughly appreciated the first half of the article. Indeed, the fuel for my Christian life and confession to this world flows from the cross of Christ. I am thankful for this wonderful connection and a good illustration.

My problem with the article, however, was in the last half, which barraged the reader with a host of statistics. These statistics seemed to be cited in order to tell the reader, "See, we haven't been doing our job. We better start getting active." While statistics can be helpful, we dare not use them to motivate Christians. The cross, as the author himself says, is what motivates us.

*Paul Meitner
Iron Mountain, Michigan*

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Many books make you tired

Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. Ecclesiastes 12:12,13

Stephen H. Geiger

Dread. Relief. Anticipation. Excitement. Emotions may vary. Reality is inescapable. It's time to go back to school.

For teenagers and parents, six-year-olds and scholarly adults, summer vacation is over. School busses run. Young and old hit the books.

Earthly education can wear you out

Books. Math books, science books, history books, business books. There seems to be no end of books. Studying them can wear us out.

Yet we keep doing it. We keep telling our children to do it. Perhaps we imagine an end to the weariness, when reaching an educational goal will bring eventual peace and calm.

Gaining earthly knowledge can begin to feel like the heart of life. Without even trying, our thoughts wander from the importance of teaching Scripture, giving children the chance to serve others with Christ's love, and focusing our own lives on sharing Jesus. Instead, "If one could just get a good education . . ."

Someone got a great education.

He then became very sad. The reason? "The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both" (Ecclesiastes 2:14).

Death. Death made all efforts to gain wisdom and knowledge seem meaningless. In the end, what was accomplished? The student succeeded in wearing himself out. Completely.

Is earthly education then pointless? It is if we imagine that true meaning in life comes from good grades and added degrees.

If we try to grasp success and happiness in this way, we will fail. We may seem to succeed, but we will waste our lives—much effort and much weariness and then death.

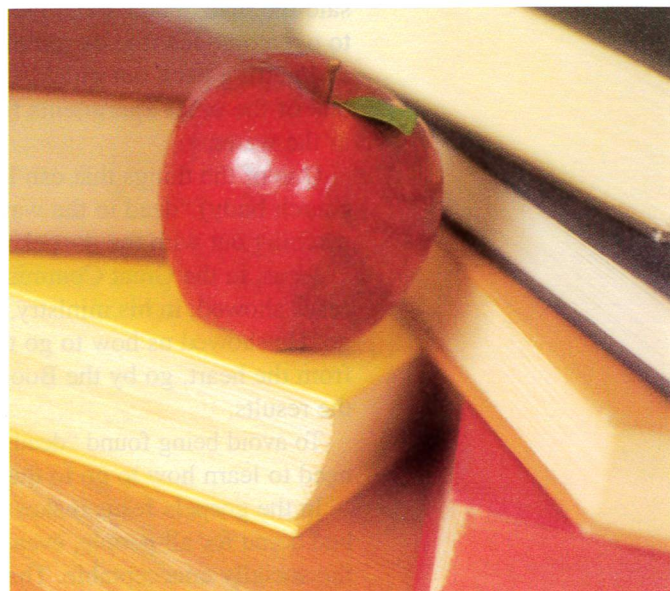
God warns us that a wasted life is like taking a treasure and refusing to invest it. Harsh words rightly come our way: "You wicked servant" (Luke 19:22). How fair it would be for God to finish off a wicked servant. Fear God.

One book gives life

As you recognize God as great and powerful to judge, know then that he is great and powerful to love. Stand in awe of God.

There was somebody who had in his grasp the capacity to pursue knowledge and retain every bit of it, using his time on earth to be seen by others as the wisest, most knowledgeable of all. He lived not for earthly glory. He humbled himself and lived first to do his Father's will. Even when the opinions of others labeled him a fool, he lost no time in loving the truth, sharing the truth, and living the truth of a book full of direction and promises, a book that prophesied a perfect Savior. For all our misdirected priorities and for our sinful love of earthly success, he then died. Justice rained down in full. Love flowed out, also in full. Through the suffering and blood, then his death and Easter life, came our forgiveness, our life.

Somebody loved you more than he loved himself. More than he loved his own education. More than he loved books. Most books, that is.



It's not wrong to love first the book that is eternal life. It's not wrong to love the book that tells you of tragedy, your own, and triumph, your own. It's not wrong to love the book that describes a path of thankful obedience for you to follow in every detail.

God does bring blessing through a Christian's faithful study of other books. Education can help us gain worldly wealth to use for sharing Christ. Reading books can increase abilities for use in showing love to others.

But these books mean nothing if the best book is left behind.

On its own, the study of books only makes us tired.

There is one book that gives us life.

Contributing editor Stephen Geiger is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.

Go!

Douglas J. Engelbrecht

A newspaper article told the story of a man who drowned in his apartment building's swimming pool in an attempt to overcome his fear of . . . guess what . . . water! Authorities said the man, a non-swimmer, apparently tried to overcome his fear by jumping into the pool and getting back out quickly. A resident in one of the other apartments found him dead in the water.

One of the things that can leave a church (or church body) "dead in the water" is its fear of reaching out with the gospel.

Jesus, in the Great Commission, said, "Go!" Jesus showed, in his ministry, how we should go. He showed us how to go to the weak, go from the heart, go by the Book, and go with the results.

To avoid being found "dead in the water," we need to learn how to go to the weak.

In the gospels Jesus makes it clear that he had come for all people, even the weak and the socially unacceptable. That's a lesson we need to learn.

Most of us are willing to welcome a new family from the "good" part of town to our congregation: a doctor, a lawyer, someone with a couple of kids for our school and a couple of dollars for our collection plate. But how many of us feel the same way about that single mother on welfare or that guy who just got out of prison? If we don't want to be found dead in the water, we need to learn from Jesus to share the gospel with all people regardless of who they are or what they are.

To avoid being found dead in the water, we need to learn how to go from the heart.

A church may get people to serve on the Evangelism Committee. But proper motivation may be missing. The Evangelism Committee

might only go out into the community in the hopes of getting more members so the church can finally get off mission status. Outreach must come from the heart—from a compassion for people and a sincere desire to share with them the good news of salvation in Christ. Where do you get that? At the foot of the cross! There we see the compassion of Christ for sinners like you and me. There we grow in our desire to share that good news with others.

We also need to learn how to go by the Book.

The trend today in some churches is to do outreach "by hook or by crook"—get them into the front doors any way you can. If that means taking no stand on abortion, the gay lifestyle, or the inerrancy of Scripture, "Hey, numbers, that's the name of the game!" But even though we want to obey Christ's command to "go and teach all nations," we don't do people any favor by failing to bring them the whole counsel of God. We need to go by the Book. A church that gets fantastic results from its "by hook or by

crook" outreach efforts will eventually be dead in the water if, in the process, it loses its source of power, the Holy Scriptures.

Finally, we need to learn to go with the results.

Our sharing of Jesus with others may not always work out the way we want it to.

People may not respond to our sincere effort to share

Christ with them. But we need to faithfully witness for Christ and let God work the miracles and produce the results he wants.

Do we want to avoid being found dead in the water? Then we need to learn from Jesus how to go . . . how to go to the weak, go from the heart, go by the Book, and go with the results.

One of the things that can leave a church "dead in the water" is its fear of reaching out with the gospel.

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



at the foot of the cross. Richard L. Gurgel

TOPIC: God's purpose for my life

How specific are God's purpose for my life (Psalm 138:8: "The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me . . .") and the "good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10)? Is God's purpose in my life general (trust Christ for my salvation, love God and my neighbor, etc.) or is it also more specific (I've been set apart for a certain occupation or for a certain area of service in a certain place)?

Mordecai's words to Esther are helpful in answering your question: "Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14)? As the plot took shape to assassinate all the Jews in the Persian empire, Mordecai was convinced that Esther was in a specific role for a specific purpose. In that particular threat to the Jews, Esther was in the unique position of influence that God allowed her to have. Or consider Joseph in Egypt. He understood that God was using him for a specific purpose—to save the lives of his family in a famine (Genesis 50:20).

Specific plans for specific people isn't a principle that is true only for Jewish queens in Persia or Hebrew princes in Egypt. This isn't true only for "big event" moments in salvation history. We believe in a God "who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Ephesians 1:11). Mordecai and Joseph indeed had grasped something that applies to each of us. The God who numbers the very hairs on our head (Luke 12:7) isn't a God who guides the world merely "in general." He who ordained for each of us all our days before one of them came to be (Psalm 139:16) works in the details and in the specifics of each of those days.

This doesn't remove at all the freedom God has given to the Christian in the decisions in life where we have more than one God-pleasing option. We don't need to wait for some sign from heaven or some whispered answer in our hearts as we pray about which job to

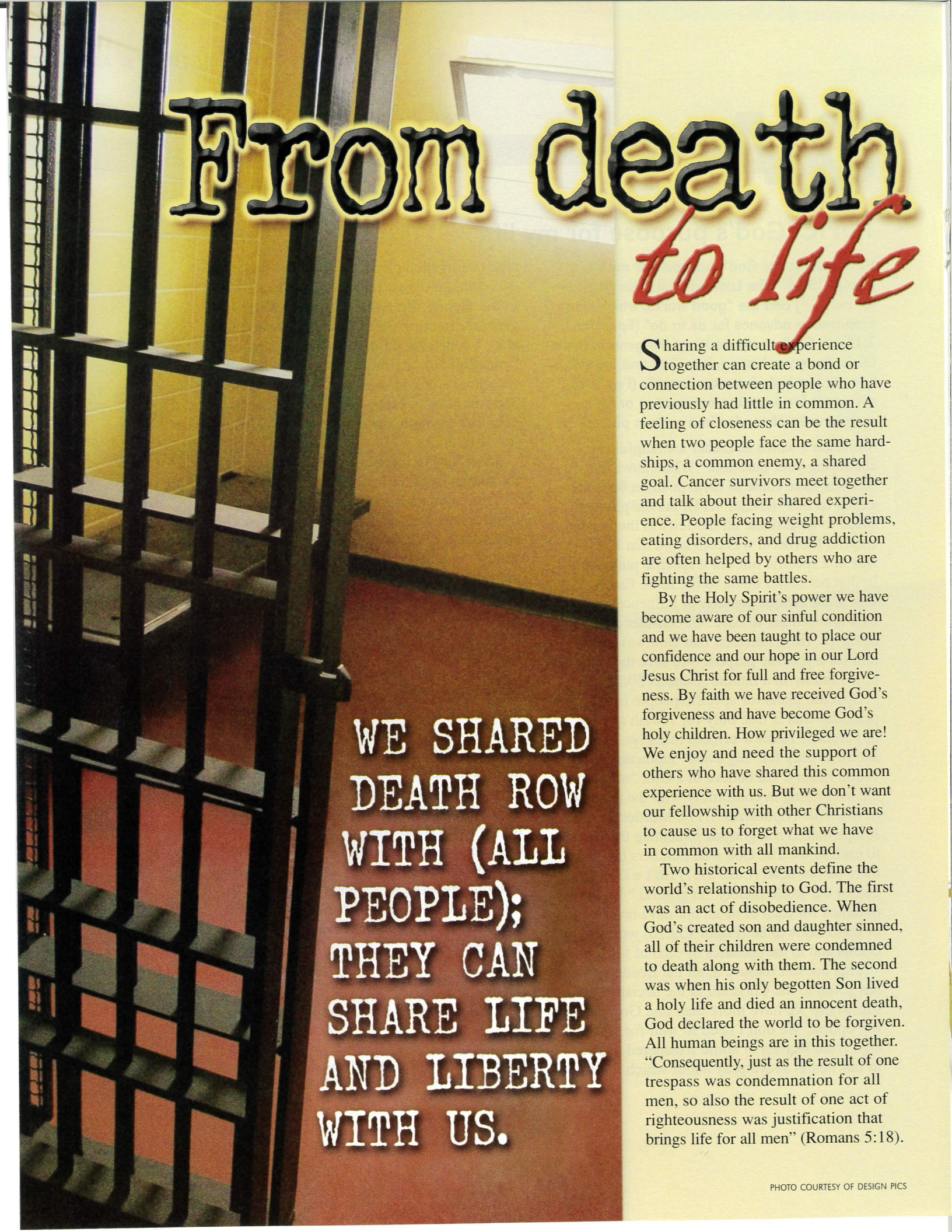
take or in which city to live. As we make our decisions, we trust that God will be at work in the details. He not only provides us with general direction (love God, love your neighbor), but he also allows us to have a particular "vocation" or "calling" in the world. In that vocation he provides us daily with very specific opportunities to bring him glory and serve our neighbor through works "prepared in advance for us to do."

There's even more comfort here. Through the means of grace he empowers us both "to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:13). In whatever vocation God has placed us (employer, employee, single, spouse, parent, child, friend), he does more than put before us specific opportunities to live out who we are in Christ. He is so gracious that he even supplies the power to act! That power was first given us in our baptism where we rose to live a new life (Romans 6:4).

Certainly, we find great comfort in God's "general" promises that Jesus has risen and died for all and desires the salvation of all. We find our name written in every "general" promise. But there's more. Our Good Shepherd "calls his own sheep by name" (John 10:3). He takes delight in each of us individually. In our lives and in the opportunities for service to God and our neighbor that each day brings, we are to see his guiding hand. Day by day he lays before us what his perfect wisdom prepared in advance just for us. In such detailed love we find that which gives meaning to even the most dreary Monday morning!

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.



From death *to life*

Sharing a difficult experience together can create a bond or connection between people who have previously had little in common. A feeling of closeness can be the result when two people face the same hardships, a common enemy, a shared goal. Cancer survivors meet together and talk about their shared experience. People facing weight problems, eating disorders, and drug addiction are often helped by others who are fighting the same battles.

By the Holy Spirit's power we have become aware of our sinful condition and we have been taught to place our confidence and our hope in our Lord Jesus Christ for full and free forgiveness. By faith we have received God's forgiveness and have become God's holy children. How privileged we are! We enjoy and need the support of others who have shared this common experience with us. But we don't want our fellowship with other Christians to cause us to forget what we have in common with all mankind.

Two historical events define the world's relationship to God. The first was an act of disobedience. When God's created son and daughter sinned, all of their children were condemned to death along with them. The second was when his only begotten Son lived a holy life and died an innocent death, God declared the world to be forgiven. All human beings are in this together. "Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men" (Romans 5:18).

WE SHARED
DEATH ROW
WITH (ALL
PEOPLE);
THEY CAN
SHARE LIFE
AND LIBERTY
WITH US.

ROW

We were all on death row because of sin.
But God has set us free through his Son Jesus.
We need to share that message with the world.

and liberty

Mark A. Goeglein

Everyone condemned to death

God said, "When you eat of [that tree] you will surely die" (Genesis 2:17). They ate and they died. All their children down to the present day were sentenced to the same fate. There was no suspending or softening of the sentence because it was a first offense, and there was no suspension of the sentence for Adam and Eve's children or grandchildren. One hymn says it this way: "All mankind fell in Adam's fall; One common sin infects us all. From one to all the curse descends, And over all God's wrath impends" (*Christian Worship* 378:1).

The wages of sin is death, and it is not necessary to commit some specific, personal act of disobedience before the death sentence applies. Paul points out that death reigned even before there were any laws given on Mt. Sinai. All are condemned to death because of original sin. We show that sin dwells in us when we fill our lives with sinful thoughts, words, and actions.

Doesn't this give us the perspective that we have a lot in common with the rest of humanity? We were all on death row because of sin. The wages of sin was not a monetary fine or a few years in jail. The penalty was and is death. Sinners are condemned to be cast out of God's presence now and forever.

The world fears physical death, and it spares no expense or effort to postpone it or try to avoid it. People who face death can be greatly encouraged by others who have faced similar circumstances and have overcome them.

Physical or temporal death, however, is the least serious of the three

kinds of death that sin has brought into the world. Physical death is the temporary separation of the soul from the body, but spiritual death, if not corrected, leads to eternal separation from God, in both body and soul, in hell. Should not we who have been given the cure for spiritual death and the prevention of eternal death be willing to be a support group that can give others hope and encouragement?

We may be tempted to look at others as different. We might see one person as a hardened sinner who won't listen or another as a morally upright person who will somehow escape the death sentence. Let's remember that we were all under the same condemnation. We have no right to look down from a "holier than thou" perch over the rest of humanity and consider them worse than us or more deserving of God's wrath and punishment. Neither is anyone good enough to escape the condemnation: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

I don't want to speak to others about their relationship with God as though I am in a different category. When I speak of sin and its consequences, I want to regard others as fellow convicts. It is not your sin, your condemnation, but our guilt, our death sentence.

Everyone declared free to live

But let's remember that second great event in history that affected the legal status of all mankind before God. God's incarnate Son was born under the law and lived a righteous life. Because of his obedience, the judge considers all of humanity as obedient.

When Jesus died, the judge considered the wages of sin to have been fully paid. He announced that publicly on Easter morning when Jesus rose.

Jesus is not just my Savior. He is the world's Savior. God's announcement of forgiveness for sinners is not being withheld until the sinner shows himself deserving or worthy. God has already declared sins forgiven—he has justified the world.

As I view the world and as I speak to other individuals, I don't have to be a mind reader or guess what kind of person I am talking to. I may not know whether the person feels guilty, but I know for a fact that in God's eyes each person is guilty and is under the same condemnation—death! I may have questions about whether the person knows Jesus or believes in him for salvation, but I know for a fact that God has already declared forgiveness for the whole world. I have the privilege of telling people so. The Holy Spirit can and does use our testimony to work faith, and by that faith people personally receive forgiveness and eternal life that Christ has already won.

The bond of faith with fellow Christians is a precious gift and gives a great deal of support and encouragement. But let's not forget the bond that unites us with all the descendants of Adam. We shared death row with them; they can share life and liberty with us. We have the joyful task of showing them the way.

Mark Goeglein, the theological educator for Hispanic/Latino Outreach and Training, is a member at Risen Savior, Orlando, Florida.

A REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE OF WHAT IT MEANS TO CALL UPON THE LORD IN TROUBLE.

Frederick A. Kogler

As I sat in church with my wife, off to my right and just ahead were Lanni and Shayne Gustaveson, both in their early fifties. She was sitting in her wheelchair singing the hymn with the congregation. As we sang, there was a sudden thump, followed by a disconcerted grunt. Lanni had lost control of her propped-up hymnal, and it had fallen to the floor. With chagrin she painfully turned her head toward her husband. He calmly bent down, picked up the hymnal, repositioned it under her immobile hand, and they continued singing and honoring the Lord with thanksgiving and praise.

I couldn't sing on with them, however, because of the thoughts that flooded in on me and the lump in my throat. Let me explain.

Some 30 years ago I can remember Shayne calling me. With a grief-filled voice he had stammered out his plea: "Pastor, could you come right away? . . . Something terrible has happened." Then he simply hung up.

I didn't know what to do. I didn't know where they lived. My heart

began to pound, and my imagination ran wild. What had happened? Should I call back? Should I call the young mother's parents? Instead, I grabbed a Bible from my desk, a church directory, my communion set, and a flashlight and dashed to my car. Without speaking a word to my wife, I left.

I remembered that they lived near the Capitol over by the Midway, so I headed that way. At the first stop sign, I opened to their names in the church directory. At the next stop sign, I used my flashlight to read and memorize the address. As soon as I had crossed the river, I pulled into a gas station to get directions.

I found their little house set back in the darkness of a long narrow lot. I bolted for the front door, and, just as I was about to knock, it opened and Shayne beckoned me in. There in the middle of the tiny, sparsely-furnished front room, I saw Lanni. She was kneeling on the floor weaving back and forth, sobbing uncontrollably. In her arms was their tiny baby boy, less than three weeks old. Shayne had asked me to come to their home because their newborn son had just died!

I knelt beside her and began to weep. Even as I tell you now, the tears come back. I didn't know what to say. We'd never talked about SIDS at the seminary. What do you say to a young mother and father? I didn't know, so I knelt there with them and wept. I

don't know how long. It seemed like an eternity flashed by. Then Shayne reached out and touched my arm. His request was simple enough: "Pastor, would you mind if I prayed?" I lifted my head and nodded my affirmation.

He did. Not eloquently, but ever so sincerely. With his arm around Lanni and their baby, he poured out his heart to the Lord Jesus. When he ran out of words, he wept again. Then I asked, "Do you guys know the Lord's Prayer?" How thoughtlessly inexperienced I was. But we prayed, and calm came over us. The Lord heard and answered our prayers that night.

I won't kid you or insult your intelligence, but I'm sure you understand what I mean when I tell you that the next few days were difficult for everyone in that family. Through all of it, from the questions about a funeral for an unbaptized baby, to the time we spent picking out a shoebox-sized casket, and the small family gathering at the side of the grave, we kept praying. The Lord continued to sustain us. The Sunday following the committal service for their little one, this young couple was in church, and they communed with the Lord.

Years passed. Three children, two boys and a girl, were born to them. I baptized all of them at the hospital the day after each birth. I confirmed all three of them, and they've grown to young adulthood, strong in their faith and in their love for the Lord.

Glorifying the

WHOM HE LOVES AND WHO LOVE HIM.

A few years ago Lanni's sister died an early death from cancer. Not too long after that, her brother's wife died of a rare heart disease. Then Lanni's mother had a paralyzing stroke, and she became an invalid. Meanwhile, Shayne lost his job. Through all of it, their quiet, firm witness was repeated: "It's hard, Pastor, but the Lord knows best."

From where I stood, I never saw them angry or embittered. Sometimes they seemed very tired, sometimes a little nervous and confused, but through it all they continued to call on the name of the Lord.

I know as I write this that many have similar stories to tell—stories filled with the details of suffering, pain, heartbreak, death, and sickness. Such stories overflow with the evidence of our imperfection, sinfulness, and the brokenness of our world. I know that for each of us there is the great need for peace, understanding, closure, and complete forgiveness. Sometimes it seems that what we seek most is so illusive. Sometimes we are tempted to think that God has singled us out for an unusual amount of hardship, redirection, and training and that we live the lives of those who are most miserably punished.

But this is not the case, no matter what happens. I know that because of Jesus' death and resurrection. I know that God, who was separated from his

Son in the interest of this world's children, would never turn his back on those whom he loves and who love him. He didn't, and he won't. Oh, how important it is to keep that in mind!

About a year ago Lanni suffered a brain aneurysm and almost died. She languished, comatose, in the intensive care unit for weeks. Shayne asked our pastor and our congregation and so many others to pray. Lanni began to improve. There were months of therapy, a shaven head, ugly scars, but her spirit remained intact. We continued to call on the Lord in her behalf. God rescued and sustained her.

When I heard of her suffering, I cried out, "Enough! Enough! They've suffered enough!"

Oh, how foolish I was to

think I knew best. God has forgiven my foolish outburst. What is more, he has continued to remind me of my foolishness. I have seen Shayne and Lanni more in the last few months than ever before. Each time I do, I am reminded of God's words in Psalm 50:15: "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me"—words that I suggested this couple memorize and teach their children.

Not only have Shayne and Lanni heard the words of their God and Savior, not only have they experienced the fulfilling of his promises each time that he has delivered them,

but they also continue to teach their old pastor a lesson that he once taught them—in response to the Lord's deliverance and compassion in their lives, they continue to honor him.

Fred Kogler, a retired pastor, is a member at Crown of Life, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Lord

LUKE: LOYAL

LUKE STUCK WITH PAUL TO THE END.

Ranking high among God's blessings for the good life are proven friends. Proverbs describes them as loving at all times and as sticking closer than a brother. Luke proved himself such a friend to the apostle Paul.

Luke and Paul's imprisonments

This becomes most obvious at the end of Paul's life. The sea voyage that took Luke and Paul to Rome (Acts 27) closed with the apostle's first imprisonment. It is surmised that this lasted from AD 60 to 61. Paul enjoyed considerable freedom during these two years. Acts 28 informs that, under the custody of a soldier, he lived in his own rented lodging, received many visitors, and pursued mission work even in Caesar's household (Philippians 4:22). Luke stayed with Paul for part, if not all, of this time and included his greetings in Paul's letters to the Colossians and to Philemon. Then he probably returned to Philippi.

Paul's first trial at Rome must have resulted in acquittal. Subsequent letters to Timothy and Titus indicated that he was again on the move, possibly even reaching Spain. Records at Tarragona on Spain's east coast treat Paul's visit there as history.

With the beginning of Nero's notorious persecution of Christians in AD 64, Paul suffered his second imprisonment, either that year or soon after. As his second letter to Timothy informs, he languished now as a chained criminal in a dungeon where his friends had difficulty finding him (2 Timothy 1:17). Paul also now realized that death was near. In this crisis, he was alone. He told Timothy that "everyone deserted

me" (4:16), all, that is, except for Luke: "Only Luke is with me" (4:11). Luke was the friend who stuck closer than a brother, the friend who remained Paul's loyal companion to the end. According to later church records, that end came for Paul in about AD 68 when he was executed by the sword.

Luke and Paul's second missionary journey

Luke's companionship with Paul is brought to our attention the first time during Paul's second missionary trip from Syrian Antioch with Silas, his partner. This marked Paul's first transit to Europe.

After visiting the young congregations founded on the first missionary journey in central Asia Minor (now Turkey), Paul and Silas pushed on to Troas in the northwest corner of that country. Here Paul saw the vision of a young man (Acts 16:9) pleading with him to bring the gospel to European Macedonia. Immediately, Paul and Silas set out for this new field of work, now accompanied by Luke (16:10).

The clue lies in the change of pronouns. Earlier on this journey, the author of Acts referred to Paul and Silas as "they." This new undertaking in Europe, Luke writes, is carried out by "we." Now Luke has joined the missionaries. His use of "we" in Acts permits the reader to follow Luke's on-and-off companionship with Paul through the rest of the book.

On the basis of this first encounter with Luke on the short trip from Troas to Macedonian Philippi, some Bible students have surmised that he was

"ON BYWAYS WITH THE BELOVED PHYSICIAN"



COMPANION

Theodore J. Hartwig

a native of the Troas region, site of a famous medical sanatorium, or, even more likely, of Philippi. Luke has also been identified with the man whom Paul saw in his vision. Other ancient writers have connected him to Antioch in Syria. He may, at different times, have been a resident in both cities. It is also clear that he was a Greek Gentile.

With the help of the “we” in Acts and with somewhat indistinct comments in two of Paul’s letters, it is possible to form a tentative picture of Luke’s future walks as Paul’s companion. He was with Paul and Silas in Philippi but did not suffer their flogging and overnight incarceration in that city’s prison. Also, he did not accompany them on their further journey south into Greece or on the trip back to the mother church in Antioch. Luke’s staying behind in Philippi becomes more reasonable if he had been living there. He would be able to give this tiny congregation spiritual and moral support for strengthening the foundations laid by Paul and Silas.

Luke and Paul’s third missionary journey

Luke again emerges on our historical horizon during Paul’s third mission journey. Another brief stay for Paul in Macedonia must have featured a joyful reunion with Luke. At this time, it seems, Paul penned his second letter to the Corinthians. Therein he wrote that he was about to send three men to Corinth to gather that congregation’s offering in behalf of poverty stricken Christians at Jerusalem. One of these men Paul identified by name as Titus,

“who is coming to you with much enthusiasm” (2 Corinthians 8:17). The others were nameless, perhaps because they were so well known. Paul called one “the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel” (8:18), a description for which there seems to be no better candidate than Luke. Since the embassy involved highly accountable money matters, the older Luke, probably of the same age as Paul, would handle this trust expeditiously. Given Luke’s personality as “the beloved physician,” the high esteem in which everyone held him is quite natural.

Luke was the friend who stuck closer than a brother, the friend who remained Paul’s loyal companion to the end.

On leaving Macedonia for Corinth to the south, Paul must have crossed paths with Titus and Luke returning to Philippi. Here at Philippi, Paul and Luke rejoined each other, the use of “we” being the evidence (Acts 20:5). Now the companionship of the two continued homeward bound through Troas to Jerusalem and ultimately to Paul’s imprisonment at Rome. As

mentioned earlier, Luke remained with Paul in Rome for some time, then returned, most likely, to Philippi.

Luke and his writings

Luke’s companionship with Paul may assist in approximating the years when he wrote his two books. A natural date for completing the gospel would be AD 61 or 62, right after his research work in the Holy Land had been completed. The Acts may have been written while Luke remained with Paul in Rome, before his return to Philippi and before the Neronian persecution in AD 64. Whether Luke planned to write more is moot. The purpose for his two books was to trace the course of the gospel from its beginnings in the Holy Land to its arrival at the headquarters of the then known world in Rome. This had been achieved. His work as a historian was done.

So we leave Luke, the loyal companion, alone with his friend during the apostle’s second imprisonment. He may have been instrumental in giving Paul’s body proper burial. What more is known of this beloved physician comes from early witnesses. According to their records, Luke died a natural death in Greece at the age of 84.

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

This is the third of a seven-part series on Luke. To read the other articles in the series, go to www.wels.net, jumpword “ficarchive”, and search by the author’s first and last name.

OPEN DOORS

A story of how God used an entire district to spread his Word in one city.

Julie K. Wietzke

When Michael Biedenbender, pastor at Faith, Mt. Pleasant/Redeemer, Big Rapids, Mich., saw opportunities to reach out to and serve the people in Cadillac, Mich., a city more than 50 miles away, he knew something had to be done.

“When the Lord opens a door,” he says, “you have to walk through it.”

Open doors into Cadillac

Doing mission work in Cadillac wasn't new. In the early 1990s, Redeemer was working with the Michigan district mission board to reach out in that community but had to stop when funding ran out. When Biedenbender was called to Redeemer, he tried to start it up again but had difficulty maintaining his two growing congregations in the process. He grudgingly stepped back.

In the spring of 2004, Biedenbender contacted Brent Brutlag, pastor at Prince of Peace, Traverse City, Mich., to talk about what they could do at Cadillac. “I said, ‘Between you, me, and my vicar, we could accomplish something,’” says Biedenbender.

They brainstormed and prayed and in the end decided to set up a preaching rotation. “It was just an idea and the three of us trying to service it,” says Biedenbender.

But that's when God really started opening doors.

At a pastor conference not long after, several congregations from all over Michigan stepped up and said they were interested and wanted to help.

Brutlag and Biedenbender soon discovered that 21 committed WELS members from six different WELS churches lived in Cadillac. The two pastors began meeting with this core group and teaching them how to canvass. While they were meeting, a realtor informed them that a Missouri

Synod church in Cadillac was for sale. Not four days later, the house next door also went on the market.

“The only thing stopping us was this little piece of paper that says, ‘In God we trust,’” says Biedenbender. “So it was time for us to trust in God.”

Although Biedenbender and Brutlag had already been working with their district mission board and the Board for Home Missions, they felt that it was time to get the entire Michigan District involved. They presented the opportunity at the Michigan District convention in June 2004 and asked for the district's support.

Open doors into people's hearts

Little did they know how God would open members' hearts.

The district voted to adopt Crown of Life as a districtwide mission project for two years (January 2005-January 2007). As of June 2005,



Attendees at Crown of Life's first worship service.



(From left) Jim Getka, Brent Brutlag, and Michael Biedenbender worked closely with Crown of Life.

117 Michigan District congregations (81 percent) have financially supported the mission. The mission has also received offerings from 24 Sunday schools and Lutheran elementary schools, 18 women's groups, and 112 individuals. Prince of Peace even put off its building project for two years so it could support the Cadillac mission.

"But the largest gift we ever received was \$1.30 from a little kid," says Biedenbender. "That came out of his piggy bank. It is evidence of what God has placed in his heart."

People not only gave of their money but also of their talents.

Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, allowed Prof. James Getka to take a year-long sabbatical to do outreach in Cadillac, through a grant given by Thrivent

Financial for Lutherans for North American Outreach.

Students from Michigan Lutheran Seminary came for a weekend to do canvassing and received an unprecedented 100 positive responses after knocking on 250 doors. More than 50 youth and chaperones from the Lansing area also came to help get the word out.

Open doors to spread God's Word

In October 2004, Crown of Life started holding services in the parsonage, which was paid for by donated monies and a bank loan. A grant and a loan from the WELS Church Extension Fund helped the mission buy the church. The first service in the church was held in December 2004. More than 60 people attended.

When the church was dedicated last January, 240 people from all over Michigan attended. "This was their mission," says Biedenbender. "This was their opportunity to get personally

involved, and they wanted to see what was going on."

God has continued to bless Crown of Life. James Hoogervorst, a 2005 Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary graduate, was installed as Crown of Life's full-time pastor in June. He will continue to work with the core group to reach out into the community.

God has also blessed the witnessing that has taken place. Fourteen adults have been confirmed, and nine more adults and five teens are enrolled in Bible information class.

"One thing has become clear," says Biedenbender, "it's the power of God's Word. I can list 100 reasons why this shouldn't be working, but when God's Word is professed he is the one who changes hearts. We leave the results up to him, and he's said, 'This is the place I want to start a church.'"

He continues, "All you need to do is ask God for opportunities, and he gives them to you."

Julie Wietzke is assistant editor of Forward in Christ



Looking for open doors?

In 2004, the Board for Home Missions set a goal to establish 100 new outreach ministries within the next two years. This doesn't mean that all of the synod's money will be directed to Home Missions. Actually Home Missions will hardly be starting any traditional new missions for the next few years. Instead Home Missions' goal is to train and equip congregations to initiate mission work in their area. "Our guiding principle is to help reach the lost with the gospel," says Harry Hagedorn, Home Missions administrator. "We do that through partnering and team ministry."

He continues, "Cadillac is an excellent example of how God's people partnered together to reach out."

You don't have to start a new church to reach out. Home Missions offers several simple ways for existing congregations to develop new ministries including

- using your school as an outreach tool,
- reaching out on college campuses,
- ministering to the elderly in nursing homes, and
- reaching out to different cultures in your neighborhood.

Congregations who want to do even more can think about establishing daughter congregations or dual/multi-site parishes.

Several resources are available to help you as you consider your options:

- Your district mission board and your district evangelism coordinator can offer support and assistance.
- A Web site dedicated to North American Outreach, www.wels.net/nao, provides many resources and tips for reaching out.
- Home Missions is directly involved with the second phase of North American Outreach. Find a list of district representatives at www.wels.net/jumpword/naophase2. Learn more about Home Mission's involvement on p. 20.
- *Proclaim!*, a bimonthly newsletter that offers witnessing helps, can be delivered right to your e-mail. Sign up at www.wels.net/jumpword/proclaim.
- The Commission on Evangelism is offering Prospecting Seminars in each district. Learn more at www.wels.net/evangelism or by calling 414-256-3287. See how Home Missions is doing on its goal of establishing 100 new outreach ministries at www.wels.net/jumpword/toward100.

WHATEVER

Take a chance

Don't miss the opportunities to witness that God sends your way.

Kiara Winters

"Hey, Taylor! Come here!" I yelled. "What?" said my close friend and neighbor, who had come over to play in the snow with me.

"Is that what I think it is?"

"It is! That's a deer track."

"But why would a deer be in our neighborhood?"

"I don't know, but let's tell your dad."

I plowed through the snow, heading toward the front door of my house. Taylor was hot on my heels. I burst through the door, and dragging snow along with me, ran up to my father.

"Dad! Taylor and I saw a deer track!" I said excitedly.

"Are you sure?" he asked suspiciously.

"Yeah!" Taylor said, coming up behind me, "I swear it is. I swear to God, man!"

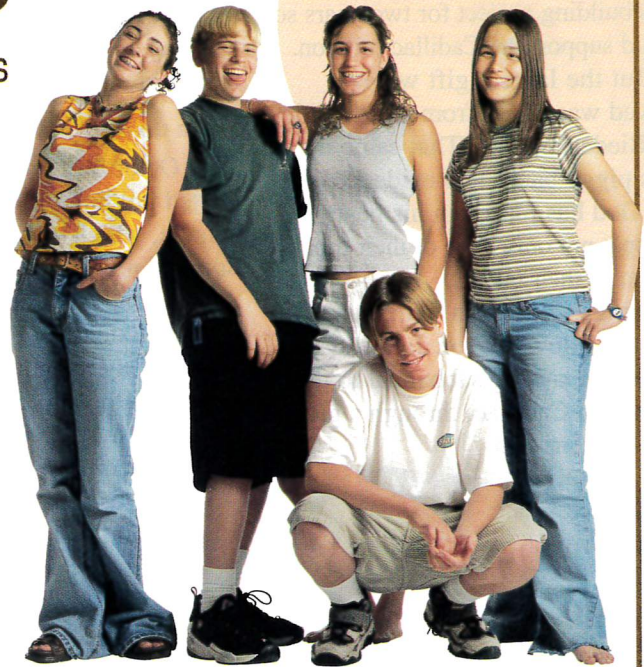
I stared at him. Did he just say what I think he said? Out of the corner of my eye, I saw that my dad was staring at him, too. But I said nothing.

How could I have said nothing? He was my friend, and I just realized that perhaps he didn't believe in Christ. I had heard people say it all over TV and on the radio, but I was so shocked when Taylor said it. What did he mean when he said, "I swear to God"?

That was years ago.

He moved away not long afterwards. Oh, how I regret keeping silent at that moment! Had God been testing my faith to see if I would spread his Word? I don't know. I may never know.

"I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips" (Psalm 34:1). If only I had known this verse then. I often wonder what Taylor is doing now.



God works in mysterious ways. I wish God would send me another soul to bring to him. Maybe he already has. I just never noticed it.

Out of the six billion people out there in the world, only a small fraction are Christian. Matthew 28:19 says, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Notice the words "all nations." I know that we can't convert all the Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus, but let's at least try to connect to the people around us, in our neighborhood.

God may give you a chance, so don't miss it.

Kiara Winters, a member of St. Luke, Watertown, Wisconsin, is an eighth-grader at Trinity-St. Luke, Watertown.

His Word

Obituaries

Marvin H. Volkmann 1914-2005

Marvin Volkmann was born Dec. 28, 1914. He died June 8, 2005, in West Bend, Wis.

A 1941 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served St. Peter, Globe, Ariz.; St. Paul, Colome, S.D.; Zion, Allenton, Wis.; St. Paul, Hurley, Wis.; and Mt. Calvary, Waukesha, Wis.

He was preceded in death by his first wife, Elizabeth. He is survived by his wife, Florence; one stepson; and two step-grandchildren.

Gerhard C. Bauer 1926-2005

Gerhard Bauer was born Nov. 3, 1926, in Mission, S.D. He died July 7, 2005, in New Ulm, Minn.

A 1947 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he served St. John, Fairfax; St. John, Goodhue; Bloomington, Bloomington; Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, all in Minn.; Jordan, West Allis, and Peace, Green Lake, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Elvera; three sons; two daughters; 17 grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren.

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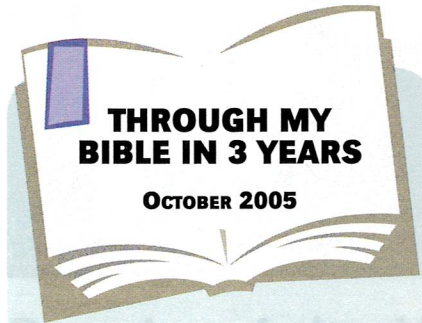
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GIVE IT AWAY!

DEFINING RELIGION

Forgive: to pardon or not count a person's sins against him. When God forgives us, he justifies us or declares us not guilty, he frees us from sin's guilt and punishment, and he "remembers our sins no more" (Isaiah 43:25).



- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Proverbs 10:1-11:13 | 12. Prov. 26:13-27:27 |
| 2. Prov. 11:14-12:28 | 13. Prov. 28, 29 |
| 3. Prov. 13:1-14:21 | 14. Prov. 30 |
| 4. Prov. 14:22-15:23 | 15. Prov. 31 |
| 5. Prov. 15:24-16:33 | 16. Romans 1:1-17 |
| 6. Prov. 17, 18 | 17. Rom. 1:18-32 |
| 7. Prov. 19:1-20:13 | 18. Rom. 2:1-16 |
| 8. Prov. 20:14-22:16 | 19. Rom. 2:17-29 |
| 9. Prov. 22:17-23:35 | 20. Rom. 3:1-20 |
| 10. Prov. 24 | 21. Rom. 3:21-31 |
| 11. Prov. 25:1-26:12 | 22. Rom. 4:1-15 |
| | 23. Rom. 4:16-25 |
| | 24. Rom. 5:1-11 |
| | 25. Rom. 5:12-21 |
| | 26. Rom. 6:1-14 |
| | 27. Rom. 6:15-7:6 |
| | 28. Rom. 7:7-25 |
| | 29. Rom. 8:1-17 |
| | 30. Rom. 8:18-39 |
| | 31. Rom. 9:1-13 |

Untangling the Web

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

Missed church on Sunday? Going on a vacation in an area without a WELS church? Need an extra boost from God's Word during the week? You can find a collection of links to online audio and/or video worship at www.wels.net/jumpword/onlineworship. Several WELS churches and affiliate organizations offer these online sermons and worship services. Some services are streamed live, while others are archived and available for download at any time. All you need to listen to or watch the files is a media player, which most churches provide right on their sites.

A bear on a mission

When the name Barnabas is mentioned, many think of the apostle Paul's companion during his first missionary journey. However, when you mention the name Barnabas to the members of Hope, West Chicago, Ill., a different type of missionary comes to mind.

Barnabas the Missionary Bear was born out of an idea of the Stewardship Committee at Hope in early 2002. The idea was to encourage the congregation to participate in home Bible studies. Members were instructed to keep track of how many Bible verses they read each week and how many of their family members were included in the Bible study. At the end of each week they turned in their records to Barnabas's



No stranger to mission work, Barnabas assists Pastor Jonathan Zietlow with canvassing in Lexington, Ky.

Bible Bucket, and a tally was kept. To give the congregation a chance to see their studies at work, all the verses were converted to "miles," with 20 verses equaling one mile. Those miles would then be used to send Barnabas, a 24-inch stuffed bear, to mission congregations around the country.

As miles accumulated, Barnabas was outfitted with a Bible, a disposable camera, a letter of encouragement, and a donation from Hope's Sunday school for outreach to children. With his bags packed, Barnabas was sent off to his first WELS mission congregation. While at the mission site, Barnabas participated in congregational life and kept a photo and written diary of his adventures. After the trip, Barnabas's chronicles were published and displayed at Hope.

In the three years since Barnabas set out on his first journey, he has seen a great deal of the country. Besides worshipping with his host congregations, Barnabas has done street survey work, assisted with a wedding, played the organ at Martin Luther College, assisted with shut-in calls, and directed a band. He almost lost his way home from a mission trip to Canada and has been featured in *WELS Connection*.



Barnabas checks out a map before his next missionary journey.

"Wherever Barnabas has gone, he has brought smiles and encouragement to our missionaries and their congregations," reports Alan Gumm, pastor at Hope. "He has taught the members of Hope that others are working hard for the Lord, and they continue to need prayers and support."

Recently, the members of Hope surpassed the one million mark of Bible verses read. The congregation has been encouraged to continue to read and hand in their Bible verses until Jan. 6, 2006, four years to the day that the program started. Until then, Barnabas will continue his journeys to home mission congregations.

If you would like to hear more about Barnabas and his travels, e-mail him at pastor@hope-lutheran.net. In the subject line write "Barnabas."

North American Outreach Sunday set for fall

As part of the 2003 synod convention, the directive was given to make North American outreach the top priority for the next two years. Last year, the Board for Parish Services sent churches a packet of information entitled "Every Church is a Mission Church" to help them begin the outreach process in their community.

This fall, part of the second phase of the North American Outreach directive will be presented to congregations by the Board for Home Missions (BHM). Under the banner of "Every Soul's a Treasure," congregations will learn more about

how they can proclaim peace through Jesus. Through sermon materials, an adult Bible study, and presenter's guide, the Board for Home Missions hopes to help congregations move forward in their outreach efforts and help them identify what fields are right for the harvest.

"The Bible study is especially important because it will allow congregations to look closely at who they are, what obstacles they are struggling with in their outreach, and how they can enhance the efforts they already have in place," notes Pastor Harold Hagedorn, BHM administrator.

In addition to study packets, all district mission boards will be available to provide counsel and resources as they are able.

"This helps give expression to 'walking together' and allows congregations to partner with each other and/or Home Missions with an outreach goal," Hagedorn adds.

For more information about "Every Soul's a Treasure," visit the North American outreach Web site at www.wels.net/nao or contact your district mission board.

WELS schools accreditation receives approval

In June, the WELS School Accreditation (WELSSA) process was approved by the National Council for Private School Accreditation (NCPA). Jeff Inniger, Commission on Parish Schools associate administrator and WELSSA executive director, was in attendance to receive this national endorsement.

Prior to the NCPA approval, the Commission on Parish Schools had in place 10 standards for WELS schools and a self-study evaluation process. Those standards were formally published and presented to schools in 1993. Meanwhile, WELS schools have grown to become the fourth largest denomination-affiliated school system. With this growth, the need for a more formal and rigorous accreditation process became apparent.

The endorsement by NCPA caps off a two-phase course of action that began in 2003. The first phase consisted of submitting the entire WELSSA plan to the NCPA Commission on Standards and Reviews to obtain candidate status. Once accepted as a candidate, WELSSA was appointed a consultant from NCPA, Dr. Lawrence Bowman,

to assist in the second phase. This second, more intensive phase included Bowman observing the process in action, interviewing Commission on Parish Schools administrators, and talking with WELSSA site visitation teams. Then Bowman presented his findings to the NCPA Executive Committee.

"The WELSSA accreditation process meets or exceeds expectations of the National Council for Private School Accreditation," says Bowman. "Under the capable leadership of Jeff Inniger, it is being carefully implemented to assure quality of reporting and accountability. I believe the future growth and vitality of the [WELS] schools will be greatly enhanced as more and more schools undertake the WELSSA accreditation program."

"It's a really important endorsement that NCPA has approved us," says James Brandt, Commission on Parish Schools administrator. "It means, really, that any WELS school that becomes accredited through WELSSA can also be accredited through other regional accrediting bodies because we are a member of NCPA."

The accreditation process is important to WELS schools in three ways. First, it provides quality assurance not only for the school's own supporting congregation but also for the community at large. As schools are increasingly used as outreach tools, this endorsement shows communities that WELS schools are high quality schools. Second, it assists in creating a school improvement plan and goal-setting initiative. Finally, it acts as a development tool to help schools plan for the future.

The WELSSA process takes approximately 12 to 24 months to complete. The first accreditation was granted to Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wis., in April. Currently, 25 schools are applying for accreditation, and another 50 schools have requested information. The ministry plan of the Commission on Parish Schools is to have 100 schools, or approximately one-third of WELS schools, accredited by 2010.

"We would love to accredit all WELS schools across the board," noted Brandt.

For more information on parish schools and the WELSSA process, visit www.wels.net/cps.

CELC gathers to "eagerly await the Savior"

The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) met in Tokyo, Japan, from May 31 through June 2. Church leaders from 20 countries gathered under the theme "Eagerly Await the Savior."

Pastors from Russia, Zambia, Latvia, Japan, and Mexico presented essays expounding on the conference theme.

"The conference essays were very uplifting and communicated well the joy and peace we have in the gospel of Jesus Christ," observed Dan Koelpin, Board for World Missions administrator.

At this year's conference, *Geraja Lutheran Indonesia*, the confessional Lutheran church of Indonesia, was taken into full membership of the CELC.

Other business included the election of a new president. Pastor Steve Petersen of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod was elected, replacing Prof. Armin Panning, whose term of office had expired. "Steve's knowledge, particularly of the overseas national churches, makes him an excellent choice," noted Panning.

The CELC was formed in 1993 to provide a worldwide forum for confessional Lutherans. The group meets every three years for fellowship, encouragement, and mutual strengthening in God's Word. With the acceptance of *Geraja Lutheran Indonesia*, the CELC has grown from an initial membership of 13 national churches to 20 churches on six continents. The next triennial conference will be held in Ukraine in 2008.



Members of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference gathered in Tokyo, Japan, for its triennial conference on May 31-June 2.

Sewing group serves its congregation and its community —

When Ruth Buchholz was growing up she remembers her mother spending long hours quilting for World Relief, an organization of the Missouri and American Lutheran Synods. Now she and 18 other sewers meet in the basement of St. Mark, Green Bay, Wis.,

turning out dozens of handmade items to donate in the community.

Over the years Loving Stitches, as the group is called, has completed 429 patchwork lap robes, 59 walker carry bags, 220 pillows, 140 knitted and crocheted caps for newborns, and 16

afghans. The women, ranging in age from 40 to 85, meet most Wednesdays. Whether it's knitting, crocheting, measuring, cutting, or sewing, Buchholz makes sure every member has a job she enjoys and feels comfortable with. You'll find six sewing machines humming together while many other hands silently stitch and tie.

The items are donated to hospitals, nursing homes, hospices, and the local YWCA. Kris Guido, the activity director at Grancare Nursing Center,

stressed how important it is to residents that their churches remember them.

"These ladies could be home making gifts for their grandchildren. Instead, they're doing wonderful outreach for their community." After a newspaper article spotlighted Loving Stitches in December 2004, the group has received many donations of fabric, sheets, blankets, and batting from community members who appreciate their efforts.

Loving Stitches celebrated its 30th anniversary in January 2005. While members certainly serve their congregation and community, they also support each other. "We have fun," Buchholz says. "We exchange recipes and sadness and help each other out. . . . We sit and have coffee and chitchat. . . . One lady said we're a family. A lot of the women have been here the full 30 years."

The tiny labels on their finished work read "Made with Loving Stitches," and that pretty much sums it up. Every stitch these ladies make is out of love for their Savior and their fellow human beings.



From left, Myrtle Pagel, Clarice Athey, Eileen Martin, and Irene Houck look at a handmade afghan at Grancare Nursing Center in Green Bay. Pagel, Martin, Houck, and other women from St. Mark Lutheran Church make hundreds of afghans, pillows, and caps for hospitals and nursing homes.

PHOTO BY EVAN SIEGLE, GREEN BAY PRESS-GAZETTE (USED BY PERMISSION)

Leaning on church family

Brenda Cortez and Pam Kafka have been acquaintances for several years. Their families both attend St. Jacobi in Greenfield, Wis., where their daughters are in sixth grade and their sons are in third. Although their relationship had never moved past running into each other at church functions and volunteering side by side for school activities, these two women's lives are now linked in a very meaningful way.

More than 30 years ago, Kafka was diagnosed with Berger's Disease, a condition that damages the tiny filtering units of the kidney. In the last 10 years the organ's function began to fail. As she became increasingly ill and exhausted, it became apparent that she would need a kidney transplant.

Kafka approached family members about donating, but due to age and

medical conditions, no one proved a good fit. Her church's newsletter explained her situation, and she had a woman from her Mom's Bible study offer to be tested. When these efforts didn't lead to a donor, "things kind of came to a halt for some time," Kafka shares. "But I continued to pray to God for help and knew he would see to my needs as he saw fit."

In September 2004, Brenda Cortez approached Kafka to ask her to work the school's Market Day sales. As the two women chatted, Cortez learned that Kafka needed a kidney transplant and hadn't been able to find a donor. Cortez offered that day to be tested.

"Was I surprised?" Kafka asks. "Yes and no. Yes, because Brenda and I really didn't know each other well, and it takes a special person to come forward to do something like this. No, because what I did know of Brenda was that she

was a fellow Christian . . . with a huge heart for helping and giving to others."

Cortez turned out to be a match. But if she hadn't, several other women from St. Jacobi had offered to be tested. Pastor Timothy Spaude recalls, "A lot of people thought this was out of the ordinary. But this is a church family, so it makes sense." The rest of the church family showed their support through prayer groups and fundraisers.

The transplant took place on March 23. Recovery has not been easy, but both women thank God for his blessings to them through the process. Kafka reflects, "All of this has been a great tool for witnessing to people the power of God and what can be accomplished by turning to him in prayer for all things."

WELS seminary opens in Hong Kong—

In an effort to continue the spread of the gospel in Asia, the Board for World Missions has established a seminary in Hong Kong that will train Asians to be evangelists and pastors. Asia Lutheran Seminary was formally opened on May 29 in Kowloon, Hong Kong.



(Left to right) Yvonne Yeung, secretary at Asia Lutheran Seminary; Phoebe Lawrenz; John Lawrenz; Rob Siirila; Judy Siirila; and Connie Leung, secretary for LifeNet. The governance of Asia Lutheran Seminary is entrusted to a board of directors composed of Chinese and Americans.

Opening a seminary in Hong Kong is not an easy task. At least 20 seminaries are already in Hong Kong. But Asia Lutheran Seminary is working hard to show how it is different. "Asia Lutheran Seminary is building a curriculum framed for modern Asia, yet resting on a strong Lutheran foundation," says Dr. John Lawrenz, who serves as president and a professor at the school.

Pastor Robert Siirila, who once served as a missionary in Taiwan, will serve as an associate professor at the seminary. Temporary calls to WELS pastors for up to four months will cover some classes until the third teaching position at the school is filled.

The seminary will focus on five areas of theology: biblical theology, systematic theology, historical theology, pastoring a gathered flock, and outreach to the lost.

"Our intent is to do most practical theology in the field," says Lawrenz. "We really won't learn in the classroom how to do evangelism. We won't learn

in the classroom how to preach a sermon. We won't learn in a classroom how to teach a class. Teaching will be done with faculty supervision among the Chinese in the area."

According to Lawrenz, this will help produce Asian Christians who

are "grounded in the Word of God but have a mission spirit." It will also help spread the gospel in an area where Christians are under five percent of the population.

Besides providing advanced training, the seminary will assist in the translation of Lutheran literature into Chinese.

The first students in the seminary will be from the WELS

mission in Taiwan and South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission (the WELS sister church in Hong Kong). But, according to Walter Westphal, associate administrator for the Board for World Missions, "The seminary in Hong Kong has potential for outreach to a much wider area." Asia Lutheran Seminary will coordinate its work with the Pastoral Studies Institute in Mequon, Wis.

Lawrenz told the 100 people who gathered for the opening of the seminary, "Who knows but that Asia Lutheran Seminary opens its doors today for such as time as this? The seminary is small, but its Savior is big. God says, 'Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock' (Matthew 7:24)."

For more information about Asia Lutheran Seminary and its ministry, contact Jim Holman, 414-347-1535, jim.holman@stmarcus.com.

WHERE are they now?

In the July 1996 issue, we reported on a new Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries program called Grace Oasis.

Here's the recap:

In 1995, Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries (WLIM) partnered with Salem (Cramer St.), Milwaukee, to start a program that would follow up on recovering addicts.

Grace Oasis brought together recovering addicts, pastors, and volunteers for fellowship, games, songs, and Bible study every Friday night at Salem.

So, where is the program now?

Grace Oasis is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. While the original concept is still the same, some things have changed.

One person showed up on Grace Oasis's first night. Now 35 to 40 people attend each week for a meal, a recovery meeting, singing, prayer, Bible study, and fellowship. Some of these people are also attending church at Salem—25 to 30 percent of those in church on Sunday are from Grace Oasis.

Originally Grace Oasis used many volunteers to meet and talk to the people who came. Now recovering addicts who came when Grace Oasis first started are helping newcomers. "People with problems are helping people with problems," says Phil Merten, WLIM chaplain. "It gives them so much more ownership of the program."

Though word of mouth is still Grace Oasis's best advertising tool, Merten also is now working to get referrals of people who have just gotten out of jail.

As part of its 10th anniversary celebration, members of Grace Oasis in Milwaukee are contributing money to help other programs like this get started. Merten is working with Our Savior, Bylas, Ariz., to set one up.

"It's an awesome way to be able to reach the "non-church" people," says Merten.

From law enforcement to gospel ministry

Larry Clark was happily retired after 30 years as a police officer in La Crosse, Wis., when his pastor, Ed Ungemach of Mt. Calvary, La Crosse, showed him a job description for a staff minister. "You know who would be perfect for this job?" Ungemach asked.

"Tell me," Clark said.

"Oh, maybe a retired person, someone with administrative experience . . ."

Clark chuckles as he explains how that was the beginning of his second

career. Mt. Calvary called him, and now Clark's ministry includes administration, youth ministry, jail ministry, outreach, and shut-in and hospital calls. "He's the pastor's right-hand man," says Ungemach. "He's involved in every area of ministry."

Although he already had a Master's degree, Clark pursued staff ministry certification through Martin Luther College (MLC). He traveled to New Ulm every summer and took courses

in Milwaukee during the school year, leaving La Crosse around 2 P.M. for a 6-9 P.M. class and returning at 1 A.M. "It's been over 40,000 miles," he says. "And in all that time, there was never a mechanical failure, never a tired moment behind the wheel, and only two days of bad weather. You can see the hand of the Holy Spirit in that!"

Was it worth the long haul? "Absolutely," he says. "It's been a wonderful journey—a journey into my faith. MLC has just been wonderful

about anything I wanted or needed. These professors are wonderfully blessed men, very knowledgeable and able to teach that knowledge in a way that is acceptable for non-traditional students."

"Paul tells us that not everyone is going to be a pastor or teacher," he adds. "If your love is the ministry, there are many avenues to follow."

MLC Professor Lawrence Olson would agree. "Many churches are understaffed for the broad scope of their parish ministry. A staff minister—who is trained to serve in youth work, evangelism, family ministry, visitation, administration, and part-time Christian education—may be a good choice to work along with and under the direction of the pastor."

According to Olson, approximately 75 staff ministers serve in WELS congregations, and the number is increasing. About 50 men and women are currently pursuing long-distance certification—this in addition to the full-time students at MLC.

Of his journey from law enforcement to gospel ministry, Larry says there is only one bad thing: "I had 30 years in law enforcement, and I truly loved it. I only wish I had 30 more to put into this. I thank God for all of it. To him alone be the glory."

Laurie Biedenbender



Larry Clark (center, seated) has finished his staff minister certification with the help of Martin Luther College staff ministry professors Lawrence Olson (left) and James Pope (standing).

WELS news briefs

Commission on Adult Discipleship
414-256-3278; cad@sab.wels.net

Adult Discipleship has further developed the **Bible studies keying off the "20 Key Issues" of the Spiritual Growth Project**. These studies, with additional passages, discussion questions, and application challenges, are prepared for widespread congregational use. They are categorized into four areas:

- Main Focus,
- Body of Christ,
- Called Worker's Gifts, and
- Developing Future Leaders.

This updated Spiritual Growth material was mailed to every congregation this summer and will also be posted on the WELS Web site.

Adult Discipleship is offering a marriage retreat on Nov. 4-6 at the Heidel House, Green Lake, Wis.

A combination of large group activities and activities just for couples will lead participants through biblical and practical principles for enjoying God's gift of marriage. Space is limited. Go to www.welsmarriageretreat.org for more information and online registration. Fifteen additional marriage retreats throughout the United States will be offered in 2006.

District news

Arizona

Grace, Glendale, Ariz., dedicated its new church and fellowship hall on June 12. Grace is the oldest non-Native American WELS congregation in Arizona.

Cross of Glory, Peoria, Ariz., a WELS mission congregation, dedicated its new ministry center on April 10. The new church is located in the growing, greater-Phoenix area and plans to open a preschool in the fall of 2005.

Dakota-Montana

On April 24, **Apostles, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada**, dedicated a new church building. The church was a former Anglican church and came equipped with pews, chancel furnishings, and a sound system.

Minnesota

St John's, Lake Benton, Minn., held a Music in the Park Concert on June 18. A variety of singers and musicians from the congregation participated, including the vacation Bible school students. During the concert, St. John's youth group sold refreshments to raise money for its trip to the WELS International Youth Rally in Orlando.

South Central

The youth group of **Holy Word, Austin, Tex.**, traveled to **Open Bible, White-river, Ariz.**, in June to assist with an

World news

More claim to be evangelicals than actually hold the beliefs—Four in 10 Americans identify themselves as evangelical or born-again Christians, but a smaller percentage actually subscribe to “core evangelical doctrine,” according to recent Gallup polls.

In a mid-April poll, 42 percent of respondents said they consider themselves to be born-again or evangelical. But in a similar poll taken in early May, only 22 percent agreed with all three beliefs that Gallup said “most evangelical leaders would say are core evangelical doctrine.”

The poll found that 52 percent said they had encouraged someone to believe



The girls track team from Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis., won the WIAA Division 2 state track meet held June 3-4. Lakeside broke a three-way tie in the last event, the 1600-meter relay, to win the championship. The team is coached by Jim Bauer, Lance Johnson, Dan Krueger, and Craig Matzinger.

evening vacation Bible school. The teens performed puppet shows for the young children of Open Bible, while adults led Bible studies.

Camp Shiloh, Pittsburg, Tex., hosted its annual Lutheran Teen Retreat during the week of June 13-17.

Western Wisconsin

The *Warrior Times Weekly*, the newspaper of **Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis.**, recently won first place in the American Journalist Press Association contest for scholastic newspapers.

Happy Anniversary!

MI—Pastor Joel Ehlert, St. John,

Frankenmuth, Mich., celebrated 40 years in the ministry.

SC—Louise Reik, Holy Word, Austin, Tex., celebrated her 35th year in the teaching ministry.

Pastor Vilas Glaeske, Grace, Scroggins, Tex., celebrated 40 years in the ministry on July 31.

WW—Luther Preparatory School (LPS), Watertown, Wis., commemorated its 10th anniversary on May 28. LPS also celebrated the 140th anniversary of the school's founding on the Watertown campus.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: AZ—Fred Casmer; DM—Wayne Rouse; MI—John Eich; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; SC—William Gabb; WW—Martin Baur.

in Jesus, 32 percent said they believe the “Bible is the actual Word of God,” and 48 percent said they “have been born again or had a born-again experience.”

The polls, each of about 1,000 U.S. adults, were conducted April 18-21 and May 2-5. Both had a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

News briefs—The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy announced that **the United States' teen pregnancy rate fell nearly 30 percent in the 1990s and is expected to plummet in 2005.** The teen rate hit its peak in 1990 (117 pregnancies for every 1,000 women ages 15 to 19). By 2000, data

showed a 28 percent decline to 84 pregnancies per 1,000 women, based on the most recent statistics available. [LifeWire, May 26, 2005]

In June, Spain became the third country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage. The law that was passed gives full marriage rights to homosexual couples and allows child adoption and full inheritance rights. Belgium and the Netherlands are the other countries that recognize same-sex marriage nationwide. [LifeWire, June 30, 2005]

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

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Gaertner, John P., to retirement
Greenlee, William P., to retirement
Kurth, John H., to Apache Christian Training School, Whiteriver, Ariz.
Piepenbrink, Leon E., to Mt. Olive Chinese Christian, Saint Paul, Minn.
Rutschow, Paul D., to Peace, Cottonwood, Ariz.
Schulz, Thomas A., to Planned Giving Ministry, Milwaukee
Stuebs, Martin T., to St. John, Ixonia/St. Mark, Ixonia, Wis.
Voss, Verne N., to retirement

Teachers

Beckman, Jordan D., to Wisconsin LHS, Milwaukee
Biedenbender, Catherine J., to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.
Bischhoff, Philip S., to Wisconsin LHS, Milwaukee
Boggs, Julia R., to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.
Bogue, Helen L., to St. Peter, Modesto, Calif.
Cambrice, Steven, to The Hope School (HS), Milwaukee
Cambrice, Willette M., to Hope Middle School, Milwaukee
DeRuiter, Melissa S., to Palos, Palos Heights, Ill.
Duin, Myron L., to retirement
Ehlike, Kimberly A., to St. Lucas, Milwaukee
Hartog, Laura, to St. Mark, Citrus Heights, Calif.
Hirschfeld, Ruth E., to Lakeside LHS, Lake Mills, Wis.
Howell, Kathryn A., to Peace, Livonia, Mich.
Korth, Junel A., to St. Paul, Livonia, Mich.
Korthals, Jean L., to David's Star, Jackson, Wis.
Novotny, Kim A., to Bethel Little Lamb, Galesville, Wis.
Pastorek, Matthew R., to St. Paul, Fort Atkinson, Wis.
Prahl, Ellen C., to St. Peters, Sturgeon Bay, Wis.
Prange, Leanne M., to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.
Rimpel, Rachel C., to Living Word, Mission Viejo, Calif.
Schmugge, Paula S., to retirement
Strid, Paula R., to retirement
Tank, James A., to Riverview, Appleton, Wis.
Taylor, Susan A., to St. Paul, Ixonia, Wis.
Thoms, Gunther H., to retirement
Wendland, Sandra J., to Trinity-St Luke, Watertown, Wis.

Wiedmann, Celeste K., to St. Paul First, North Hollywood, Calif.
Wilson, Kip D., to St. Peters, Sturgeon Bay, Wis.

ANNIVERSARIES

Milwaukee, Wis.—Atonement (75). Sept. 18. Services, 8:15 & 10:45 A.M. Meal to follow. 414-871-3744.
Lansing, Mich.—Emanuel First (150). Sept. 18. Services, 8 & 10:30 A.M. 517-485-4118.
Eldorado, Wis.—St. Peter (100). Sept. 18. Service, 10 A.M. Catered dinner to follow. RSVP by Sept. 11, Linda Jahn, 920-922-4706. Dedication of new church. Service, 2 P.M. N7987 Town Hall Rd. Pie and ice cream social and Builders For Christ construction video to follow.
Brown Deer, Wis.—St. Mark (40). Sept. 25. Service, 10 A.M. Potluck to follow. 414-354-7980.
Caledonia, Wis.—Trinity (150). Sept. 25. Service, 3 P.M. Banquet to follow. Ticket required. RSVP, Susan Schroeder, 414-571-9000.
Milwaukee, Wis.—Milwaukee Campus Ministry and Wisconsin Lutheran Student Center (40). Oct. 9. Service, 6:30 P.M. Catered dinner served 4:30-6:00 P.M. Dessert reception to follow service. Dinner cost, \$10 per person. RSVP, 414-963-2047 or paula@wlsc.org.
Milwaukee, Wis.—St. Philip (50). Oct. 16. Service, 10:30 A.M. Fellowship to follow. Banquet, Oct. 15, 6 P.M. Bavarian Inn, Glendale, Wis. Tickets needed. Barbara Allard, 414-263-7614.
Frankenmuth, Mich.—St. John (125). Oct. 16. Service, 10 A.M. Noon dinner to follow.
Lomira, Wis.—St. Paul (150). Oct. 16. Services, 10 A.M. and 2 P.M. Catered dinner, 11:30 A.M. Adults, \$9.25; children 4-9, \$4.75; 3 and under, free. Light luncheon to follow afternoon service. Wendy Zahn, 920-387-3785.
Benton Harbor, Mich.—Good Shepherd (50). Oct. 16. Service, 9:30 A.M. Pig roast and potluck to follow.

COMING EVENTS

WELS North Atlantic District Annual Labor Day Retreat—Sept. 3-5. Camp Taconic, Hinsdale, Ma. Worship, recreation, and program for all ages. Meals included. Judy Becker, 518-210-5590.
WELS South Atlantic District Annual Labor Day Retreat—Sept. 3-5. F.D.R. State Park, Pine Mountain, Ga. Tracy Heintz, 404-680-1723.
Life-a-thon—Sept. 10, 9 A.M.-noon. Annual walk-run supporting the pregnancy counseling centers operated by WELS Lutherans for Life, Metro-Milwaukee.

Held at NPH Christian Books & Gifts, 1250 N 113th St, Milwaukee. Peter Georgson, 414-727-8176.

WELS Church Librarians' Organization fall conference—Sept. 10. St. John, Lomira, Wis. 920-269-4788.

Waukesha Chapter Lutherans for Life annual life banquet and silent auction—Sept. 25. Auction, 3 P.M. Dinner, 4 P.M. Country Springs Hotel, Waukesha, Wis. Kathy Gates, 262-513-9590.

Faith Stepping Stones training seminars—Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service, Inc., will be hosting regional training seminars for a new family ministry program called Faith Stepping Stones. This ministry tool is designed to help parents nurture the physical, emotional, and spiritual development of their children. The training seminars are intended for congregational leaders (lay and called). Upcoming training events include

- Golden Valley, Minn., Sept. 30-Oct. 1
- Nampa, Idaho, Oct. 21-22
- Middleton, Wis., Nov. 11-12
- Omaha, Neb., Jan. 26-27, 2006.

Find out more at www.wlcsf.org.

A day at the Seminary—sponsored by Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Auxiliary. Oct. 1, 8 A.M. to 1 P.M. Worship, 9 A.M. Lee Abraham, 414-453-3320.

NAMES WANTED

West Point, N.Y.—Donald Tollefson, 908-876-5429.
Pinehurst, N.C.—David Schmidt, 910-868-1907.
Texas A&M University, College Station, Tex.—Beautiful Savior, Caleb Schoeneck, 979-693-4514.

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".

Picture this



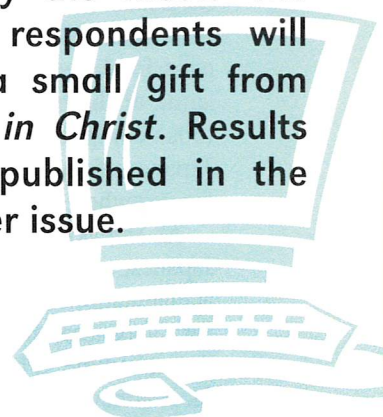
On June 18, the Faster Pastor Race took place at the 141 Speedway in Francis Creek, Wis. Nine WELS pastors participated in the event with ticket proceeds going toward synod mission work. Louis Sievert of Our Savior's, Two Rivers, Wis., won the 10-lap race. Pastors who participated included: (back row, L-R) Mark Walters, Tom Pankow, Steve Hahm, Dave Arndt, Beck Goldbeck, Bob Johannes, (front row, L-R) Louis Sievert, Darin Lindemann, Paul Schossow.

Submitted by Pastor Steve Hahm, First German, Manitowoc, Wis.

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.

Potluck Poll

During the 2005 synod convention in July, there was expanded coverage of the proceedings. News reports, online chats, and blogs were just some of the items available to visitors at www.wels.net/convention. Tell us what part of the convention Web site did you enjoy the most? The first 10 respondents will receive a small gift from *Forward in Christ*. Results will be published in the December issue.



SIGNS OF THE TIMES

When it comes to attracting attention, some congregations find that the right sign can make all the difference.

When the restaurant next to the local Lutheran church erected a sign with red letters that said, "Open Sundays," the church reciprocated with its own message: "We are open on Sundays, too."



A MIRACLE MISSION

Planting the seed of God's love one child at a time.

Abby L. Janssen

When Minori Yamaki, a native of Okinawa, Japan, was called to St. Matthew's school in 2002, she was just another Martin Luther College graduate going to her first teaching assignment. She had no idea at the time how God would use her to do international outreach in her own backyard.

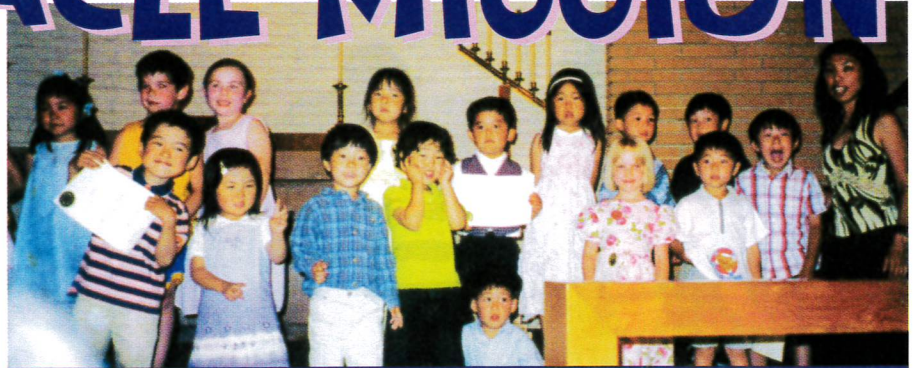
St. Matthew, is in Niles, Ill., 15 miles northwest of Chicago, a popular area for international companies, some of them Japanese-based. With those companies come a number of Japanese families who live in the area for anywhere from one to five years.

As Yamaki became involved with the Japanese community in the area, many acquaintances stressed to her the need for a Japanese immersion preschool. At the same time, it became apparent that St. Matthew's school would be closing in the spring of 2004. Although the traditional school closed, Yamaki saw an outreach opportunity that would allow the school doors to stay open and St. Matthew to maintain a foothold in the community. The congregation agreed, and in the fall of 2004, a Japanese immersion preschool program began.

"They were banging down the doors. We just had to open the doors for them," says Yamaki.

Although the preschool is culturally appropriate for the Japanese families, there is also an opportunity to share the gospel with the children each day in the classroom. "Our mission is to reach out to these families and plant the seed," she adds.

For most of the families involved, returning to Japan always looms on the horizon. Therefore, St. Matthew does not look for membership



Minori Yamaki (far right) and the first class of Japanese preschoolers on graduation day. Twenty-four families have enrolled their children for the 2005-06 school year.

increase as one of the fruits of its labors. "It was a new idea for our congregation, to reach out to non-potential church members. That's a scary thing to do," notes Yamaki.

That does not mean that there haven't been rewards. "We have seen so much success in our ministry such as children praying at home, and parents asking us what time church is. Even though there is a language barrier [in church], they still ask what time the services are so they can attend. Because of the preschool, they are curious about church and what their kids are doing," continues Yamaki.

"Our mission is to reach out to these families and plant the seed."

Success is also evident in other ways. After just one year of the program, word spread so quickly and the need was so great that St. Matthew added an afternoon session for the 2005-06 school year. In addition, the preschool program has revealed other opportunities for outreach. A pilot English-as-a-second-language (ESL) program was started for preschool

parents as well as a day camp for preschoolers during the summer that was filled to capacity.

"Our efforts have been blessed," states St. Matthew staff minister, Leonard Eppe. He tells the story of a family who was transferred back to Japan last spring. "The mom was so impressed by the love of the members, staff, and other families that she said she would enroll her daughter in a Christian preschool in Japan. By God's grace and power, the mom became a believer in Jesus. Shortly before she left the United States, she asked for a Japanese-English Bible that we had at the school. When we presented it to her, she said she had received a great treasure."

"It is a miracle mission," says Yamaki. "For many of these families, after they return to Japan, they will not see one another or have the opportunity to attend a sister church. But God gathered them together in the United States, in Niles, at St. Matthew, and we have the opportunity to talk to them about Jesus. [Then] when they go back to Japan, although we will probably never see each other again on earth, there is the hope that we will one day see each other again in heaven. It's a wonderful thing to think about."

Abby Janssen is assistant editor of Forward in Christ

INTRODUCTION

Americans are freedom-loving people. We abhor political tyranny. We resent the intrusion of government into our personal lives. The price of freedom is usually measured in budgets and body bags, but we're discovering that there is another price to freedom. The price of First Amendment freedom is rampant pornography. The price of Second Amendment freedom includes drive-by shootings and right-wing paramilitary groups. The price of Fourth Amendment freedom has been millions of aborted babies. Without legal restraint, freedom becomes anarchy. Without moral accountability, freedom becomes licentious license. Ironically, the law that guarantees freedom must curb freedom.

Real freedom is not a legal right, but a gospel heritage. The Savior who is the heart of the gospel promised his disciples that the truth will set us free (John 8:32). The gospel is the proclamation of freedom from sin's curse. It is the power of freedom from sin's slavery. The gospel protects freedom from legalism. It preserves freedom from formalism. Gospel freedom precludes selfishness. It pre-emptly subjectivism. Those six statements of Christian freedom frame this series.

Freedom FROM SIN'S CURSE

Sin's curse is death, but Jesus endured that curse for us.

Paul E. Kelm

Adam and Eve must have regretted the loss of paradise and the onset of aging, but much worse was realizing that the curse they caused resulted in the death of their son at the hands of his brother. Was God getting even? Would life be defined by funerals?

Have you ever viewed the setbacks and heartaches in your life as judgments of God? Maybe even connected them to a particular sin that haunts you? The curse of sin is knowing that you deserve God's judgment and wondering when it's going to happen. It is getting angry at God and then feeling guiltier still. It is doubting that God could really love someone like you.

Gospel freedom is hearing deep in your heart the words: "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" (Romans 5:9). The curse is lifted. We are free to love God.

We try to escape sin's curse

People spend time and money escaping the secondary conse-

quences of sin's curse, things like pain and wrinkles, unhappiness, and dysfunctions. Maybe that's because there is no escaping the ultimate curse of sin—death.

We can put a brave face on death with the pseudo-scientific argument that it's "natural." We can pretty death up with quasi-religious euphemisms like "going to a better place." But look into the hollow eyes of a 30-year-old widow or keep vigil with the gaunt and writhing body of a cancer victim, and you understand that death is sin's curse. Paul pulled no punches: "The sting of death is sin" (1 Corinthians 15:56).

Jesus endured sin's curse for us

The apostle didn't stop there. "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Not victims of sin's curse, but victors over death. Not prisoners of fear, but liberators with hope. That's gospel freedom. We aren't bed-ridden objects of disease; we're "more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37). We aren't tongue-tied mourners at a graveside; we're witnesses to the "Tomb Raider" Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 2:14,15 explains freedom this way: "[Jesus] shared in their humanity so that by his death he might . . . free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."

Sin's curse is death, but Jesus endured that curse for us. Paul says that Jesus became that curse for us. We are now free to enjoy life.

Paul Kelm is pastor at St. Mark, De Pere, Wisconsin.

This is the first of a six-part series on Christian freedom.



I Know that REDEEMER

A son shares the comfort and the hope that Jesus' resurrection gave him when his

I closed my father's eyes. My father had entered the hospital to have an angiogram—a procedure in which they check all the blood vessels of your heart to see if any of them are blocked. The doctors found that my dad had several blocked blood vessels and that his heart was in bad shape. They opened a couple of blood vessels, but they told us that there wasn't much else they could do for my dad because his heart was tired.

*"I know that my Redeemer lives;
What comfort this sweet sentence gives!
He lives, he lives, who once was dead;
He lives, my ever-living Head!"*

We followed Dad back to his hospital room in the intensive care unit. We stayed for a little while, prayed, spoke of our love for him, and pointed him to Jesus. One by one we said our "Good nights"—our son Jeremiah and his wife Lisa; my brother Tom and his wife Carol; and finally Carolyn and me. Jeremiah ran back for one last "good-bye." Mom was going to stay with her husband of 51 years.

*"He lives triumphant from the grave;
He lives eternally to save."*

Carolyn and I were staying at a hotel with the intent to go back to the hospital in the morning to give Mom a break. My brother and his wife were scheduled to fly back to Seattle. Mom called us before we left the hotel to let us know that Dad had another episode in which his heart briefly stopped beating. Carolyn and I went to the hospital immediately.

*"He lives all-glorious in the sky;
He lives exalted there on high."*

When we arrived, Dad was doing better. Carolyn and Mom went for a walk. I sat with Dad. We spoke of many things that morning. I told him that I loved him. He spoke his love for me. We spoke of Mom and how she had stayed up all night long. Dad decided that it would be good if

Carolyn would take Mom home so she could get some sleep and take care of other things. Then she could come back to the hospital on her own. Dad was thinking of Mom. He really loved her, and she really loved him.

*"He lives to bless me with His love;
He lives to plead for me above."*

Mom and Carolyn came back to the room. Soon after their arrival, Mom and Dad's pastor came to pray with my dad and point him to the comfort of the Redeemer's love. After the devotion, my dad asked the pastor to take Mom home. Dad thought it would be easier than if Carolyn had to drive all the way out to West Bend and then come back to Milwaukee. Pastor agreed to take Mom.

*"He lives, my hungry soul to feed;
He lives to help in time of need."*

Mom gave Dad a kiss. They spoke their love for each other and Mom left with the pastor. Carolyn and I spoke with Dad for a while, and then Dad said that he was tired and wanted to sleep. He told us that if we wanted to go get a soda and candy bar we could leave. We told him that we would watch him sleep for a while. He fell asleep and was snoring a little bit so Carolyn and I left the room to go to the lounge.

*"He lives to grant me rich supply;
He lives to guide me with his eye."*

We had just purchased a soda and a candy bar when we heard a "code blue" in the intensive care unit. I listened for the room number. It was my father's room. We ran down the hall into the room. The hospital staff was working feverishly to restore my father's heartbeat. There had to be 10 to 12 people in his room. Mom and Dad had told the hospital that they didn't want any resuscitation. I told them to stop, but apparently the wishes of my father were never written down. This went on for about 10 minutes. A part of me wanted them to keep working to bring my father back to us. Another part of me wanted him to be in heaven with Jesus.

MOM LIVES

father died. Alan W. Gumm

*"He lives to comfort me when faint;
He lives to hear my soul's complaint."*

Finally the surgeon came, and I told him that they should stop. He ended the attempt to bring my dad back. The hospital staff left the room. Carolyn and I went to my father's side. He still had a heartbeat. He was still breathing. I rubbed his cheek. Carolyn held his hand. I listed all the kids and grandkids and told him that we all loved him. I told him to go on eagle's wings, to grab Jesus' hand and go with him. I would take care of Mom. God had not taken his life yet, so Carolyn and I began to pray: "Our Father, who art in heaven . . .". He was still alive. I gave him the Lord's blessing: "The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift his countenance on you and give you peace. Amen." As I said, "Amen," I looked at the monitor and it went to "0."

*"He lives to silence all my fears;
He lives to wipe away my tears.
He lives to calm my troubled heart;
He lives all blessings to impart."*

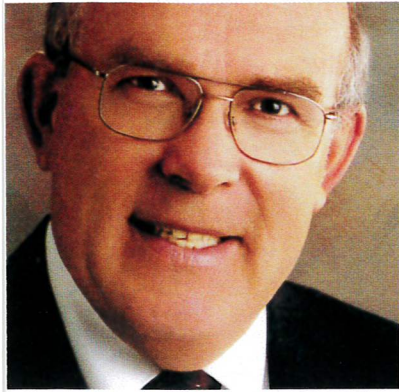
I closed my father's eyes. Those eyes will not stay closed forever. On the last day, the Lord Jesus Christ will open my father's eyes, raise him from the dead, and give him a glorious, immortal body in heavenly bliss. Because Jesus conquered death and the grave, we know that our sins have been forgiven by God's Son and that the grave will not and cannot hold us forever. Jesus rose from the dead, and so will we. I may have closed my father's eyes, but Jesus will open them on the last day. That's the comfort and the hope that the resurrection gives.

*"He lives, all glory to his name!
He lives, my Jesus, still the same.
Oh, the sweet joy this sentence gives:
I know that my Redeemer lives!"*

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Hope, West Chicago, Illinois.

All hymn references are from Christian Worship 152:1-5,8.

father's eyes.



Karl R. Gungl

Every soul's a treasure

As I write this, our country just observed the Fourth of July. My wife and I spent some time at Rhythm and Booms, a daylong patriotic celebration in Madison, Wis. Just before the fireworks, a squadron of jets flew overhead, saluting America. It made my heart skip a beat or two. What a treasure we have in our favored land! No, our nation isn't perfect. No country ever is. But we are among the most privileged people on earth to enjoy such freedom.

A treasure is worth whatever someone is willing to pay for it. Many have paid a dear price, their lives, that we might possess this treasure of liberty. Others lost arms and legs defending freedom. One day is hardly enough to appreciate the treasure they won for us. What a treasure is available for every man, woman, and child living in the United States of America!

But as grateful as we are for this earthly treasure, it can't compare with the heavenly treasure God's Son won for us. No human army fought for it. No mere human sacrifice could ever achieve it. It required the sinless sacrifice of one perfect being. None of us measured up. And yet, God's innocent Son offered himself in our place, winning pardon and eternal peace for every man, woman, and child in the whole wide world.

You will never meet anyone for whom the Savior didn't die. Although everyone, just like you and me, deserves to die because of sin, no one needs to die eternally. We can announce equally to every individual the good news, forgiveness in Jesus Christ. With it, by faith, each one can claim God's eternal freedom.

Every soul is a treasure; at least it is to God. Sometimes we may not value things as highly as God does. Even as we may shun someone who has injured

or angered us, so we may hesitate to extend God's pardon to an erring congregation member. Self-righteously, we conclude certain "wayward" members of our church are unworthy of God's favor. Uncaringly, we may be inclined to just let them keep wandering away from their Lord.

When people from other ethnic groups move into our neighborhoods, judging from a strictly human perspective, we may see them in competition for jobs and housing. We may not see cultural diversity as a treasure we want to cultivate. Consequently, we may not view their souls, either, as a treasure for whom Christ died.

It's also easy for us to become self-satisfied with the life we treasure here in the United States. We may comfort ourselves in our lack of worldwide concern with the thought that others have chosen a different way for themselves. It's not our fault. Why should we be concerned about either their physical or spiritual needs?

But then we remember that every soul is a treasure to our God. Every soul, no more and no less than ours, has been redeemed by the blood of Christ. When we realize the treasure we are to God entirely by his grace, we will treasure others more. Then, using the earthly resources God gives us—time, talents, treasure—we will seek to make others aware of the treasure they are to God and to us.

Every soul's a treasure! What an important reminder for us all! Grateful for it, let's be more active in proclaiming peace through Jesus. For by the grace of God with us, we want all souls—every one—to recognize what a treasure they are to God.

Lessons from the Creed

Why does the almighty God let bad things happen?

Charles F. Degner

After the attack on the World Trade Center on 9/11, a reporter interviewed a woman for her reaction to what happened. Her face registered the shock of the event. "It makes me wonder," she said. "Can there be a God, if he let this terrible thing happen?"

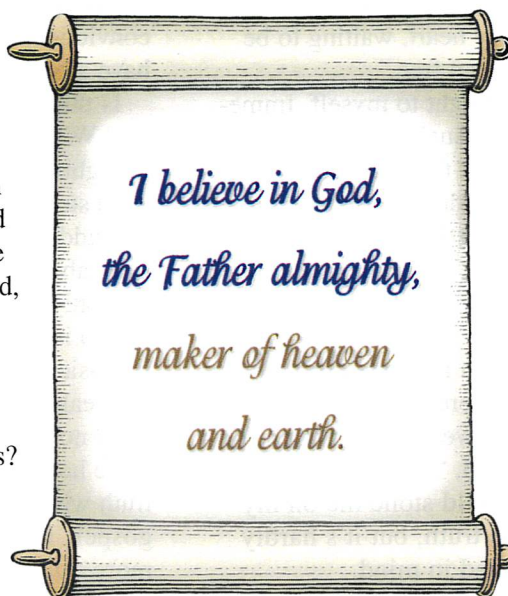
Why does God let bad things happen? If God is good and God is almighty, then why does he permit his people to suffer tragedy and loss?

God lets evil things happen

Joseph must have asked himself that question many times. His faith in God's goodness was tested when he was just 17 years old. His brothers betrayed him. They sold him as a slave (Genesis 37). Can you imagine what it must have been like to be 17, separated from your family, a slave in a foreign land? Why did God let this happen to him?

God was with Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 39). He is always with his children, no matter how far away they go or how isolated they are. God gave Joseph success in Potiphar's house. He rose to the position of being Potiphar's chief servant.

Potiphar's wife also noticed Joseph, but for a different reason. The Bible says that he was well-built and handsome (Genesis 39:6). When she tried to seduce him, Joseph immediately thought of God. "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). Day after day she pressured him. She even physically assaulted him so that he fled from her. When she accused him of rape, her husband sent him to the dungeons.



Why did God let Joseph experience good only to take it away? Why does God let failure follow success?

The Lord was with Joseph in prison, too (Genesis 39:21-23). While he was there, he met the butler and the baker from Pharaoh's household (Genesis 40). With God's help, Joseph interpreted their dreams. God gave them their dreams, and God gave Joseph the interpretation. The butler would be restored, and the baker would be hanged. The butler promised to remember Joseph when he was restored to his position. He forgot. Joseph spent two more years in prison. Why did God let this happen?

God makes evil things work for our good

Eventually, Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams for him (Genesis 41) and became the second in command of Egypt. God used Joseph to save Jacob's family from famine and to bring his brothers to repentance (Genesis 42-45). Jacob's family

prospered in the land of Goshen under Joseph's protection. Jacob's family became the nation of Israel. From these people the Savior was born.

Joseph put all of this into perspective after his father's funeral. His brothers approached him and asked him not to use his power to get even with them. Joseph replied, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20). Why did God let him be sold as a slave? Why did God let him rot in a prison? Because God is so almighty, that he can even use the evil turns in our lives to work out for our good (Romans 8:28).

God is so great that he can even make evil work out for our good.

Why did God let this happen? We ask that question when something bad happens. We seldom ask that question when something good happens. We believe that whether we are experiencing good in our lives or evil, God is still our loving and almighty God. We believe that God is so great that he can even make evil work out for our good.

Contributing editor Charles Degner is pastor at St. Peter, St. Peter, Minnesota.

This is the fifth of a seven-part series on the First Article of the Apostles' Creed. To read other articles in the series, go to www.wels.net, jumpword "ficarchive", and search by the author's first and last name.



Gary S. Baumler

The words have it

“Art with Words” beckoned me into one small room of the gallery. To me the art was nondescript, but the words on one piece made me pause: “Truth is stored up in every heart, waiting to be broken open and set free.”

“Really?” I thought to myself. Immediately the Lord Jesus’ words arose in protest: “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander” (Matthew 15:19).

“Evil thoughts,” says Jesus. “Truth,” counters the artist.

Which is it? I’m reminded of the story told of a revered world missionary: “If my heart were broken open for all to see,” he said, “the very children in the village would stone me on my way.” That’s the truth, but it’s hardly what the artist had in mind.

So, where does truth fit in a heart full of evil thoughts—a heart by nature ensnared by the devil’s lies? What would you find if you broke open your heart?

What the heart has to reveal doesn’t appear very inviting. Still, the artist’s words beg for their due. People have a capacity for truth in their hearts. Some of the nicest people I know are not Christian and have hearts of gold. They know right from wrong. They’re kind. They make fine neighbors. You’ve heard it said, “Mrs. Jones has a big heart.” What about that?

I can’t deny it, nor can I say that people like that don’t know some important truths of God that run counter to the evil thoughts of the heart. “Don’t murder, don’t steal, and love your neighbor,” come to mind. I’m glad when such natural knowledge helps direct the actions of those around me.

It doesn’t prevent evil thoughts, mind you, but it can help keep people from acting on them. It is one level of truth. Break open human hearts and set those convictions free, if you can, and we’ll have a better society.

Is that all that the artist was calling for? With that level of truth, the evil thoughts don’t stop, and the evil actions keep surfacing. The “truth” that surfaces is muddled, contradictory, relative, and debatable. Whatever good results from it is only civil good, helpful to society and to individuals in society, but of no intrinsic, eternal value.

Breaking open the human heart will yield no better than that. However, that same heart has the capacity to hold the truth when God’s Spirit opens it by the gospel. That truth, however, is much more than a set of rules. The gospel truth does much more than improve society and make people feel good. It’s the truth that saves you and sets you free from sin, death, and hell.

For that truth, you can’t rely on your heart. You’ll not find Jesus stored up in your heart. You won’t find the resurrection and eternal life there. You won’t know how Jesus’ righteousness covers your sins and his sacrifice satisfies God’s justice. For that you need the Word of Jesus and his Spirit to break open your heart—break it open not to set the truth free but to let the truth enter. Continue in his Word and teaching and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. (cf. John 8:31,32).

Words will lead us to truth, but the artist picked the wrong ones.

*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*

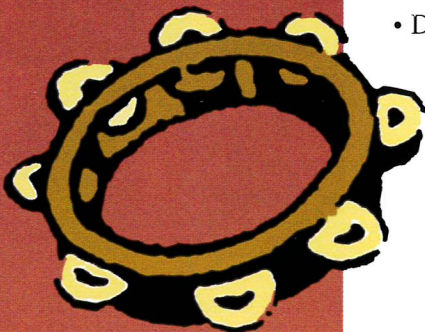
*longing to be
close to Christ*

*seeking Christian
friendship*

peaceful

joyful

*thankful for
God's Word*



Songs for the heart

Donald W. Patterson

God wants each of us to live “the good life.” No, it’s not materialism. It is spiritual peace and joy. Anyone who trusts in Jesus has the good life.

When two or more share this peace in Christ they enjoy friendship that is sweet and pleasant. Christian friendships are the best kind because they are held together by forgiveness. Think about your best Christian friendship. Isn’t it the unconditional love and forgiveness that makes it so wonderful?

Psalm 133 gives words to your feelings. It celebrates the forgiveness that God’s Old Testament people shared in their relationships before Christ had come. In this psalm (printed below) two pictures describe how pleasant close spiritual relationships are.

The first picture of the sweetness of Christian friendship has to do with Aaron, the first high priest. After he was anointed and the Lord had received his first offering for the people, the people praised God wildly because of the peace God gave them through his promised priest (Leviticus 8 & 9). When David wrote this psalm 500 years after Aaron, he was reminding his people that they were united by the forgiveness of God through the high priest the same way

they had been when Aaron was first anointed. The Israelites would sing this psalm on their way to the three great feasts each year.

We are united by Aaron’s greater replacement, Jesus, and we do well to praise God that we are united to God and each other through him. We rally around his cross where we all receive his forgiveness and share it with each other. When we let forgiveness heal our relationships, we enjoy the pleasantness David talked about.

The second picture is of the refreshing dew that was found on Mount Hermon, the highest mountain in the Holy Land. David is saying, “When brothers dwell together in unity it is refreshing like dew from Mount Hermon that has descended upon Zion where the temple is.” The temple and its forgiveness refreshed hearts like Hermon’s dew refreshed bodies.

As Christians we have the dew from heaven not Hermon. We have Jesus who refreshes our hearts. When each of us lives in Jesus’ love and forgiveness we will experience unity of the sweetest kind between us.

The psalm ends with the promise that at Zion, God bestows his blessing and life forevermore. Today, in the New Testament Zion, the church, God gives us this “good life” forevermore.

Featured verses: Psalm 133

How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! ²It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes. ³It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

Points to ponder

- How does Jesus’ forgiveness create indestructible unity between believers?
- What is so refreshing about having close Christian friends?
- What can we do to accentuate our churches as places of Christian unity?

Treasures to share

- Think of a Christian friend or family member that you appreciate and write him a card. Tell him how you enjoy the sweetness of Christian unity with him. Include this psalm.
- Display a framed copy of this psalm in your home for everyone to see.

Other Scripture verses that talk about Christian unity

Colossians 3:12-17; Romans 15:5-7; 1 Corinthians 13; John 13:1-17; John 17

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 Sept 5.



FISHING FOR MEN

There are tons of souls waiting to be caught. So cast the lure of the gospel and see what kind of catch the Lord will bless you with.

Caleb Davisson

The boat skipped across the glassy frigid waters of the deep sea until we finally reached our destination, a hopeful hotbed of hungry halibut. In the boat my feet hovered over a deep dark hidden world teeming with life, a world that I was just about to tap into with my fishing line. Anticipation surged through my veins as we fished the waters off the southern coast of Alaska.

Some fishing spots may be better than others

A day of fishing at sea could lead to numerous results. Within minutes I could be wrestling with a giant halibut, or I may fish for an hour without the slightest nibble. Sometimes I try different spots where I think there are lots of fish to catch. Other times I'll pull up the anchor and just drift over the ocean.

The ministry is a lot like deep-sea fishing. Armed with the gospel as bait, we venture off into a cold, dark world teeming with lost souls. We let our lines plummet into the murky depths below, wondering if we'll get that desired bite. Often a certain place may seem to have great potential, but we come up with nothing. Other times we drift from place to place, and then suddenly, out of the blue, we're catching fish after fish.

We don't always know why some places are better than others. Only God knows. Perhaps a certain spot is not ready to be fished, or maybe there's an area where God wants us to be instead. Like any good fisherman, we have to be patient, we need to persevere, and we need to check our bait occasionally to make sure that we're still using the gospel. Filled with anticipation we always look forward to that hot spot where there are many souls waiting to be caught.

You never know what you will catch

That anticipation, however, doesn't end with finding the good fishing spots. Once we hit those spots we have no idea what we'll catch. When I went deep-sea fishing

I went for halibut, which is like a giant flounder, but I expected to catch anything. If I caught a halibut, even then it could weigh between 10 and 400 pounds. There were also shark; cod; red snapper; the ugly Irish Lord, which had a head bigger than its body; skate, which looked like a sting ray; and a host of other unusual and slimy sea creatures that I would catch regularly.

In the ministry we never know what we'll pull up with the gospel. Sometimes we may go after a certain individual or a certain group of people, and the gospel will catch someone we never would have expected. It could be a criminal, a family member, a co-worker, someone from a different country, a poor single mom on welfare, or a wealthy entrepreneur. There's no telling what we will catch.

Jesus said that the harvest is great but the workers are few. In other words, the fishing is great but the fishermen are few! Have you ever seen a fisherman avoid great fishing?

Neither have I. We have untold opportunities. Tons of souls are waiting to be caught. So cast the lure of the gospel, and let the anticipation surge through your veins as you wait to see what kind of catch the Lord will bless you with.

Caleb Davisson is a senior at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.

**Sometimes . . .
the gospel will
catch someone
we never would
have expected.**

