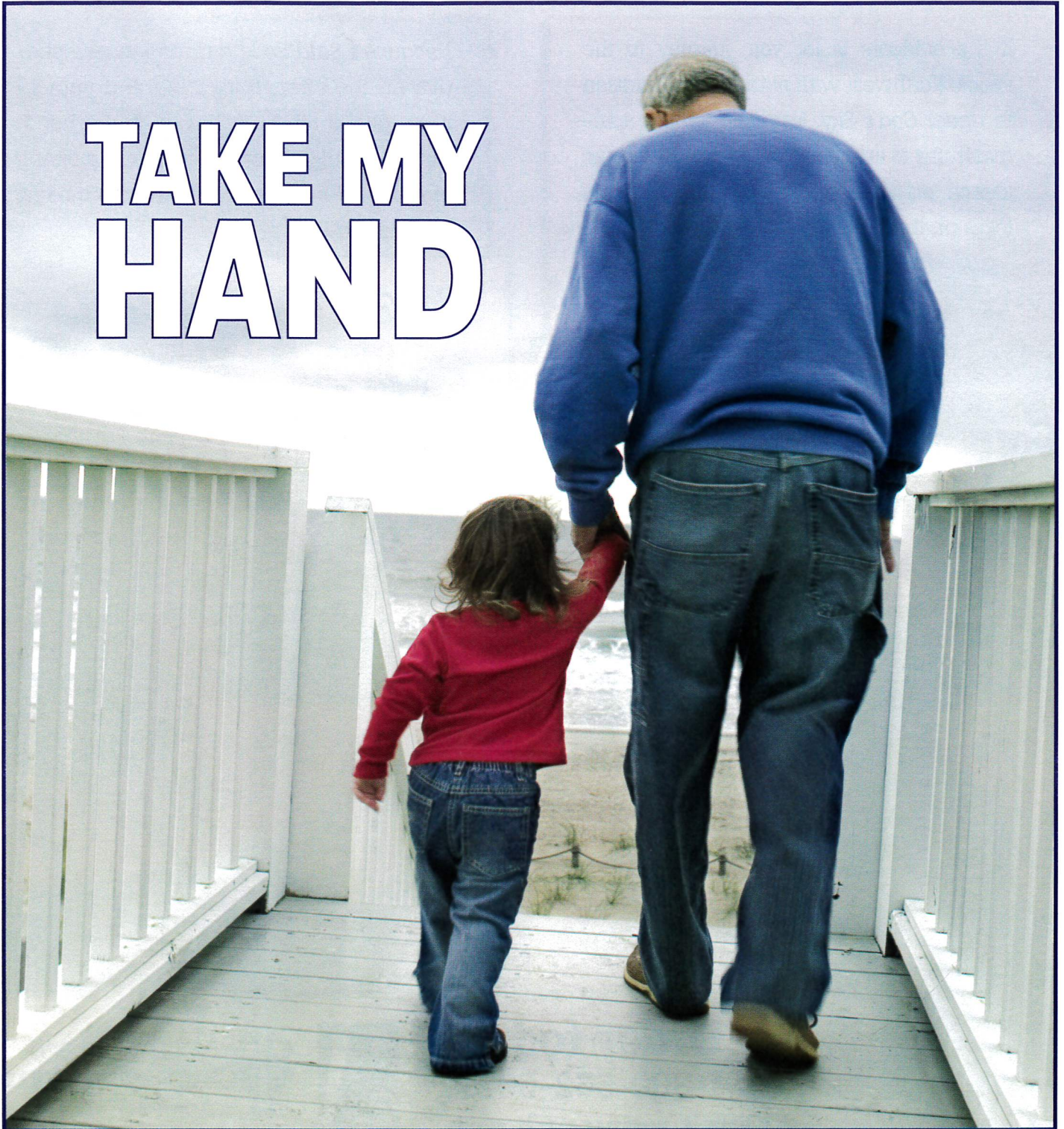


JUNE 2006

Forward in Christ

God's wisdom, WELS' witness

TAKE MY
HAND

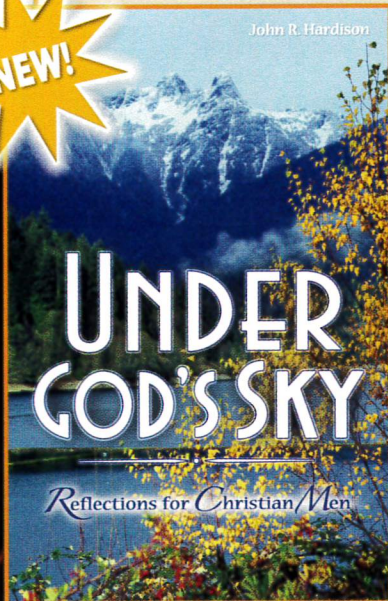


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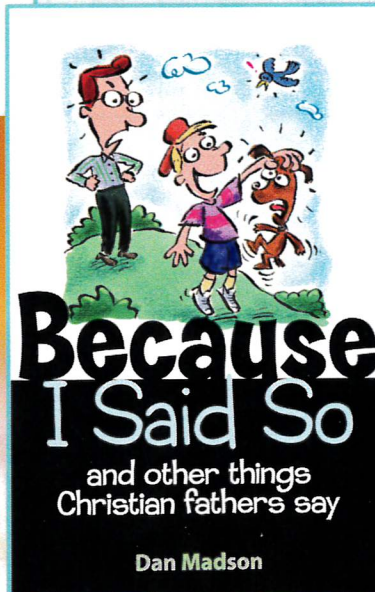
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“I could take her hand and rescue her from the terrible reality of her fears.”

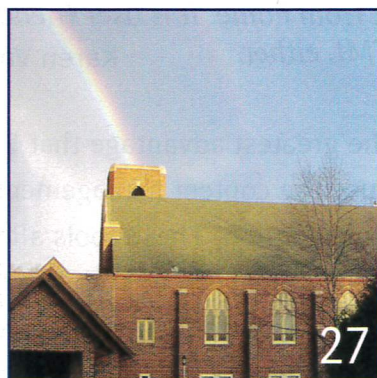


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Forward in Christ

✠ The official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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WELS Technology Solution >> Web Hosting

WELS has recently partnered with a Web hosting provider (FinalWeb) to provide a low-cost service that allows congregations, schools, and other WELS organizations to quickly and easily produce a professional looking Web site.

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The WELS Web hosting solution is an effective communication tool in helping to reach our school families.

Rob Dusseau, St. John's School Principal

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Neil Hankwitz, Webmaster

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Karen Vasatko, Web Site Coordinator

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NOR FORSAKE US.
1 Kings 8:57

EDITORIAL OFFICE

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

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Rev. John A. Braun
braunj@nph.wels.net

MANAGING EDITOR

Julie K. Wietzke
julie.wietzke@sab.wels.net

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Abby L. Janssen
abbyjanssen@sab.wels.net

STAFF WRITER

Laura C. Warmuth
laurachristine@wels.net

SEMINARY CONSULTANT

Prof. Daniel Leyrer

ART DIRECTOR

Karen Knutson

DESIGNER

Carianne Ciriacks

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WHAT'S INSIDE *by Julie Wietzke*

Many of the features in *Forward in Christ* are one- or two-page articles on a single topic. We try to keep them short and easy to read. Sometimes—either when several articles fit under one theme or when a topic can't adequately be covered in 1,100 words—we run a series of articles over multiple issues.

This month we are completing two series. One is on a single topic—justification. Jon Buchholz wrote the entire series, finishing with an article on sanctification, which flows from justification (p. 14). Four different people authored our second series under the theme of “stewardship.” The last article in this series is on Christian estate planning (p. 28). If you're having trouble remembering all the details from earlier articles in these series, look them up in our online archive, www.wels.net/jumpword/ficarchive.

We're already planning some new series. One will be covering doctrines of the Bible, including creation, predestination, and the Lord's Supper. Another will be telling real life stories of how God has helped WELS members dealing with difficult situations in their lives. Look for these series in upcoming issues. We hope that they will instruct, inspire, and encourage you as you live your life for Jesus.



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HUMANITARIAN AID

Re: Habitat for Humanity [Feb.].

I will certainly agree that Pastor Janke's answer is technically and academically a correct response to the inquiry. . . . Yet I rely heavily on outside resources and assistance to help me with basic living needs. . . . From personal experience, resources on an ongoing permanent basis for housing needs, education, job hunting assistance, etc., are not offered through the Lutheran church at any level. This means that our membership must rely on outside resources for assistance. . . . Opening up food pantries or a soup kitchen and offering housing opportunities, educational assistance, or job hunting leads on a permanent ongoing basis is certainly an opportunity to share a Christian witness!

*Laura V. Borchin
Lewisville, Texas*

NO STRINGS ATTACHED

Thank you for your fine publication. Paul Prange cites a Baptist seminary professor who was mistaken about the terms of salvation ["Free forgiveness," April]. That professor was also mistaken that conservative Lutherans are "the only Christians who teach that you are freely forgiven, without any strings attached." The vast mainstream of evangelical Christian scholarship would disavow the Baptist professor's soteriology. Informed readers should recognize that conservative Lutherans are not alone. Happily, millions of non-Lutheran believers also proclaim the wonderful grace of free forgiveness.

*Doug Clevenger
Sleepy Eye, Minnesota*

CELEBRATING EASTER EVERY DAY

Pastor Panitzke's article ["When should we celebrate Easter," April] indicates correctly that we should celebrate Easter every day. Luther's Small Catechism includes a similar statement under "The Significance of Baptizing with Water." But I also found Panitzke's use of Psalm 118:24

interesting. If any of your readers bought eggs for use at Easter as symbols of Jesus' resurrection and bought them from Aldi, of which there are some 700 stores in the United States, upon opening the egg carton, he or she would have seen printed inside the lid, "This is the day that the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24).

*Lee Butz
Zionsville, Indiana*

GENEROUS GIVING

I am not sure what the authors of the article, "Generous Christian Giving" [April], intended to say, but I am certainly surprised that it was published in the official publication of WELS in the form it took.

I have three difficulties with the article.

1. Don't we give our offering gifts first to the Lord not as was stated in the article that we first provide for family and second provide for the church?

2. Notice in my first point we are giving our offerings to the Lord. The article states over and over that we are giving to the church.

3. I had no idea that God will punish us financially if we don't give enough to church.

I know how busy a person can get and so some things can slip through. But I would expect that there will be some kind of clarification of this article at the very least if not a complete retraction of this article.

*Robert Dick
Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin*

John Braun, executive editor of Forward in Christ, responds:

First, I understand your concern about the priority question. I'll admit it would have been clearer if the paragraph would have said that the Lord should always come first. That's just an application of the First Commandment. It may not have been clear enough. I'll take responsibility for that. Simply God does give us what we have to give to his work—which he

suggests as 10 percent using the Old Testament as a guide—and to care for our families—which takes usually the lion's share of our resources.

Second, we are to give ourselves first to the Lord as Paul directs in Corinthians, but it becomes difficult to give to the Lord without giving to his church. My check is made out to my local congregation because my congregation needs my offerings. I understand that my gift is given to the Lord just as the widow in the temple understood that all her financial resources were given to the Lord and the temple service.

Finally, I do understand that we are not to give in order to get. That would be a quid pro quo principle that violates grace. I may give all I have, and the Lord does not promise to restore my financial resources. Nevertheless, the Lord does challenge us to test him (Malachi 3:10). It isn't a matter of giving enough—who can measure that—but whether our gifts flow from hearts that treasure God's love for us unworthy sinners.

My stewardship is not measured by what I want to get in return—that would be from a heart polluted by my selfishness and perhaps my desire for recognition. That's perhaps the danger you see, and I would agree. If my sinful flesh prompts me to give for some hope of reward or to avoid punishment, I've destroyed the grace of giving the Spirit has worked in my heart. If God chooses to graciously provide financial resources or to bring financial hardship, I humbly accept it. He has his plan for me; he promises that he will provide me with daily bread and that I have all things because by faith I'm connected to Christ.

Send your letters to **Feedback**, *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee, WI 53222; fic@sab.wels.net. Letters between 100 and 200 words are preferred. Include full name and address. Letters are edited for clarity, conciseness, and relevance. Not all letters received can be acknowledged or used. Writers' views are not necessarily those of WELS or *Forward in Christ*.

That the mark might be removed

Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. Proverbs 27:5,6

Stephen H. Geiger

I must have been moving a bit fast that morning.

Was it yogurt? Was it milk? It was definitely white, and it was plainly visible to those who saw my face. I knew nothing of it until a brave friend whispered, and quickly I wiped it off.

It's embarrassing to walk out of one's house with a bit of breakfast hitchhiking. It is uncomfortable finding out that someone else has noticed. Far worse would be to come home in the evening and to discover only then the milky mark that all were seeing for the entire day.

It's also embarrassing to be guilty of sin. As Christians who struggle with a stubborn sinful flesh, we don't always realize that we're doing something wrong. In weakness we can even become trapped in a sin that at one time we fought so hard to avoid. To have a friend point out our sin may make us uncomfortable. But what a blessing when one is so brave. "Better is open rebuke than hidden love."

It's easy to remain silent

Unfortunately it is so easy for our friends—for us—to remain silent.

When we notice that another seems caught in a sin, we properly hesitate for a moment so that we might first consider our own guilt. To speak to a friend while proud of personal obedience is dangerous not only for our friend but for us. Yet when the Lord brings to our hearts sadness over sin and then fills our hearts with humble joy in Jesus, we are properly prepared to see one sinning and help.

But still we are tempted to be silent.

And in our silence, we can become angry. We can't understand how someone who should

know better keeps acting so thoughtlessly. Sometimes we get frustrated. We imagine that anything we might try will do no good. Sometimes we vent. Words that describe the sin of another reach the ears of all but the one who needs to hear.

So quickly the sin of someone else leads us into sin ourselves.

"Better is open rebuke than hidden love."

Sense God's seriousness in his warning to Ezekiel: "When a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil . . . Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin . . . and I will hold you accountable for his blood" (Ezekiel 3:20).

Is a similar rebuke owed us? When gentle and loving words would have been right, were we silent?

It's better to rebuke openly

God's rebuke is open. God's warning is serious. The consequences are eternal.

What a blessing that God tells us this. He warns so that we might never experience the judgment.

A broken and contrite heart God will not despise. For all the times we have been silent, our Lord Jesus humbly and confidently spoke. For all the moments of inaction, our Savior willingly died. The sprinkled waters of baptism have covered us in our Savior's obedience. The red of perfect blood has washed each of us clean.

What a blessing to be rebuked. Rebuke is a repeated step on our road to eternal joy.

Share that gift with others.



The words need not be harsh—we speak knowing that we are just as capable of accidental sin. We need not assume the worst—Christians who get stuck in sin also have a new person inside that rejoices in loving correction. We need not hesitate because we fear a negative response—the Lord invites us to be patient, to involve Christian friends as appropriate, and to remember that repentance is a miracle worked only by divine power.

Our longing in all this is to have the privilege of saying, "You're forgiven. Jesus loves you. All is wiped clean."

Like a mark from a mouth after the whisper of a friend.

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

Blind love

Douglas J. Engelbrecht

A Sunday school teacher asked, “Who would like to suggest a hymn to sing today?” A little boy raised his hand and said, “Let’s sing the one about the loud necktie.” The teacher, with a puzzled look on her face, said, “Which one is that?” He said, “Blest Be the Tie That Blinds.” The teacher said, “No, Johnny, that’s not the name of the hymn. It’s ‘Blest Be the Tie That Binds . . . not Blinds.’” The teacher was right. We sing the hymn to express the Christian love that ties us together as God’s church.

But what that little boy said was not all that wrong. That hymn could very well be titled, “Blest Be the Tie That Blinds,” because the holy Christian church is the tie that not only binds us to one another, but also blinds us to all sorts of things. For one, it blinds us to our differences.

We make so many distinctions among people today. You can’t get an American Express Gold Card unless you make so much money. You can’t golf at certain courses unless you are a member of “the club.” Depending on the color of your skin you are labeled either a “minority” or a “majority.” The government even taxes us according to our income brackets. Isn’t it wonderful that the Lord’s family, the church, makes you blind to such differences? You and I can know that if we are in the 33 percent tax bracket or on welfare, we’re part of God’s family. Whether we’re a highly skilled professional or a factory worker, Jesus died on the cross for all of us. Whether we’re black, white, or brown, we’re just as precious to the Lord Jesus Christ as the next person. Whether our forefathers came over on the Mayflower or we are first generation Americans, we all have the same hope of heaven some day through the cross of Christ.

Indeed, blest
be the tie
that blinds!

Indeed, blest be the tie that blinds! In a world that puts so much emphasis on differences, social classes, who you are, and where you came from, what a wonderful blessing the church is—the communion of saints that overlooks all our differences and makes us all one in Christ!

The holy Christian church also blinds us to our weaknesses. One of the things that characterizes our society today is its unwillingness to forgive and to accept anything that is less than perfect. Fetuses that are detected by amniocenteses as being abnormal are aborted. The corporate world lets heads roll for the slightest mistake in judgment or performance. Marriages are ended at the first sign of a burnt pot roast or the first failure to remember an anniversary.

What a blessing, then, is the church and the tie that blinds us to each other’s weaknesses. In the church we are reminded of the marvelous forgiveness that God, for the sake of our Lord Jesus, has given us. What a blessing to be part of a fellowship that encourages us to overlook one another’s weaknesses and bear with one another’s shortcomings. God taught us how to do that when he, for the sake of his Son, bears with our weaknesses and shortcomings and, for his sake, forgives us.

May God help us always to see what a blessing we have in our membership in the holy Christian church and the tie that blinds!

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



at the foot of the cross. Richard L. Gurgel

TOPIC: Baptism

What did the Ethiopian in Acts 8 receive from baptism that he didn't already possess through faith? Hadn't he already received forgiveness, life, and salvation through believing the Word before baptism?

Let's set the scene. By special angelic direction, Philip found himself on the desert road from Jerusalem to Gaza. There he encountered the chariot of an Ethiopian returning home after worshiping in Jerusalem. The man was a convert to Judaism, but he had not yet learned that the Messiah had come.

As the Spirit directed Philip to approach that chariot, Philip overheard the man reading Isaiah. The Ethiopian was reading perhaps the most beautiful gospel section of the Old Testament (Isaiah 52–53). In those words the prophet painted the Servant of the Lord's suffering, death, and resurrection.

Seeing an opportunity, Philip asked the Ethiopian if he understood what he read. The man responded, "How can I unless someone explains it to me?" (Acts 8:31). Philip wasted no time in using that passage as a springboard to proclaim Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. The gospel Philip shared brought the Ethiopian to faith.

What did he receive as the Spirit brought him to faith? Everyone who believes what the gospel proclaims possesses everything the gospel offers: forgiveness of sins won by Jesus' death, perfect righteousness fulfilled by Jesus' life, spiritual life now, and eternal life with God. This all belonged to the Ethiopian the moment the Holy Spirit through the gospel in the Word brought him to see Isaiah's suffering Servant as his Savior. Did he lack some gift he needed for heaven if he had died that instant? No.

Yet Philip had mentioned another gracious gift of grace, and the Ethiopian clearly desired it. That gift was baptism. Had Philip perhaps mentioned that Jesus sent out his church to baptize and teach all nations? Certainly in describing baptism Philip would have mentioned how through water and the Word the Triune God places his saving name on us, marking us as his

very own as the Spirit showers us with all the blessings won for us by a crucified and risen Savior. It isn't surprising that this new believer asked why he couldn't be baptized right then.

But why baptize him if he already possessed everything baptism gives? Well, why does a spouse or a child continue to crave new expressions of love even though they have already received that love? While they exist in a state of being loved by that parent or spouse, they also eagerly desire to receive new expressions of that love, reassuring them of where they stand. So too, the Ethiopian eagerly desired an additional gift of what he already possessed. Therefore, for his strengthening and assurance, he received in baptism the very same gifts he received in the gospel Philip spoke to him. These gifts would flood the heart of this Ethiopian many times in his life. As he remembered his baptism, studied the Word, and received the Lord's Supper, the very same gifts would be given to him again and again to strengthen and preserve his faith.

Such is the richness of God's grace and overflowing goodness to us through the means of grace. If we are brought to faith through the gospel in baptism, then through the Word and Supper we who already stand in his grace and possess forgiveness, life, and salvation receive those same gifts anew day after day. Those who are first brought to faith through the Word receive those same gifts anew through their baptism, through continued study of the Word, and through reception of the Lord's Supper.

Yes, I know, God seems to be acting a bit extravagantly in distributing to us anew every day gifts we already possess. But as with this Ethiopian, our Lord's desire is to send us on our way rejoicing until heaven. If that means overwhelming us with gifts of grace again and again, he is more than willing to oblige!

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.

"Grandpa, hold

The other day, my wife and I dropped in at our youngest daughter's home. It was one of those early spring days when you would expect it to be much cooler in Minnesota, but as the local weatherman keeps repeating, "Things are different these days." It was warm and sunny, a beautiful day to be alive.

I had just returned from a meeting in Milwaukee. It had been both an invigorating as well as an exhausting trip. Still, with all the activity of conducting business, the renewing of relationships with pastor friends, and holding special meetings during hurried lunches and breaks, I was nagged by this feeling of loneliness for my family, especially my grandchildren.

When I got home, I suggested to my wife that we visit our daughter and her husband and their two children. Grandma didn't hesitate.

As soon as she had made the warning call to let them know we were coming, we were on our way.

When we got there, still stiff from sitting for the last couple of days, I made my way to the backyard where Abigail and her dad were romping around playing a game of "Catch me if you can." When Abigail saw me come around the corner of their house, she squealed, "Oh, look who's here! It's Grandpa! C'mon, Grandpa. Let's run!"

So, mustering up all the energy I had, I managed a few bursts for the chase. It didn't take very long, however, and I was ready to stop and drop. But not Abigail. When I said, "Slow down, Abigail. Grandpa needs to rest," she came running over to me with her four-year-old energy and eagerness, saying, "Here, Grandpa, take my hand. I'll help you run."

Her dad rescued me, suggesting that maybe Grandpa would like to read her new book, and besides, it was getting dark and the mosquitoes were starting to come out for supper. Whew! Was I ever glad her dad is so smart!

As we made our way into the house, I said, "Thanks, Mike, I needed that!"

He simply laughed and said, "It's good to see you. How'd the trip go?"

I was eager to share. After a hug from Abigail's mother and a tweak of my youngest grandson's cheek, we sat down and visited for a while. I told them about the many different things that were being done by our

I could take the hand of little Abigail and rescue her from the terrible reality of her fears.

synod to help people with special needs, the hard work that still needs to be done, and how good it was to see so many of my dear friends of many years.

After I had talked too long, my daughter suggested that it might be time for a snack and a refreshing drink. Several choices were offered, but when asked, I simply said, "How about a glass of water with some ice cubes?" Little did I realize how problematic that request would be. You

see, the ice cubes are kept in the basement. That meant that someone had to make his way down the narrow steps to the utility room where an old freezer/refrigerator made and kept ice cubes for just such an occasion.

Abigail's mother suggested that Abigail show Grandpa where the ice cubes were and help him bring enough for everyone. That's when everything changed. The happy, bubbly, little girl who had just had me read about the cat and the hat, and who had insisted that we play "Ring around the Rosie," turned somber and said quietly: "Oh, no, not the basement!"

"Why not?" I asked.

"It's dark down there," she said.

"Don't be afraid," I replied. "We'll just turn on the lights."

Abigail's mother joined in, "Show Grandpa where the light switch is and take him to the refrigerator."

There was a pause . . . maybe a second long, or two, but I felt it and so did everyone in that room. Then a brave, trusting little girl overcame her fears with a request: "Grandpa, hold my hand . . . please?" My heart leapt, and a lump rose in my throat. I remembered the same sort of struggles in my life and offered my hand. I was glad to be needed and thrilled to be able to help.

Then it came to me: "But he took her by the hand and said, 'My child, get up!'" (Luke 8:54).

I know that going for ice cubes in a darkened basement is not a resurrection! But it is similar in that as the Lord Jesus took the hand of that little girl and brought her back for her parents to love, so also I could take the hand of little Abigail and rescue her from the terrible reality of her fears. As I made my way to that basement

my hand

Helping my granddaughter when she was afraid reminded me that we need to reach out with the Lord's message of forgiveness and peace to help others with their fears.

Frederick A. Kogler

freezer with that little hand squeezing mine so hard it almost hurt, I thought about the work so many of God's people do to help others with their troubles and their fears. That work is extending the Lord's hand, his message of forgiveness and peace, to everyone, but especially to those with special needs.

Little do we realize, perhaps, how important it is to project ourselves and who we have become by God's grace beyond our little circles of thought. In the Bible we are told of the love of Jesus and how he had compassion on all those who suffered and were burdened with fear and uncertainty. With powerful words and actions he reached out and rescued, healed, and embraced. In fact, it is expected that his children, those who call him Savior Lord, will do the same, expressing their love for him by reaching out in love for others.

When it was suggested that I take the hand of my granddaughter and we descend into the darkness of the fearful, I didn't stop to calculate how many steps it might be, whether I thought it was childish for her to be afraid of the dark, or even if I would be pleasing God by supporting and encouraging her. Instead it was automatic. I simply did it. I love her very much. I care for her. She is special to me, and when she is troubled by something that she does not understand I want to help her through her fear and uncertainty.


That's the way it is for our Lord toward us. He loves us, he cares for us, and when he sees us in need he accompanies us along the path of darkness, showing us the way and overcoming our fears.

May we all take the hand of Jesus and, together, reach out with the gospel to everyone, especially to those whom he has brought before us with special needs. This way they too may hear, "But he took her by the hand and said, 'My child, get up!'"

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

please!"





Are you one of those people who gets excited and energized by church work? Have you ever considered that maybe the full-time ministry would be a good fit for you?

In my case, the answer to the question was yes. But I had spent 26 years working in corporate America, gotten two business related degrees, and had jobs that I enjoyed. Why change careers? I knew that I could serve God in any vocation. For me it came down to pondering my life's purpose. My purpose is to serve God and others. I felt that I was really only giving God part of me.

In 2002 my daughter, Lori, was a senior in high school, so we went to visit Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., with her. While there, I spent a couple of hours with two professors discussing whether a middle-aged man like me should even consider such a career change . . . and what about a father and daughter being at MLC at the same time?

I came away from that meeting with some good practical advice and a great deal of spiritual wisdom and encouragement. I was given a clear and realistic picture of what college would be like and of the type of things that second-career people sometimes strug-

gle with. Before we left that weekend, we met again, with my wife, Barbara, included. Once again, we felt encouraged, yet Barbara and I had a clear understanding that our lives would likely be a bit different were I to be in the full-time ministry.

Over the next 18 months we prayerfully considered making such a move. It was a blessing that during that time I was able to take two classes through the college's distance learning program. It exposed me to the curriculum and allowed me to get a head start.

With our sons Jason and Nick graduating high school, Barbara and I decided to take the leap of faith. I enrolled as a full-time student in August 2003, at 49 years old.

God's blessings have always been so evident in our lives. He continued to bless us as we transitioned to our new situation. Barb was able to find a good job in New Ulm. We found a small, comfortable house with great neighbors.

There was a period of awkwardness of course. Here I was, a new guy, with graying hair, in class with all of these bright young minds who already knew the ropes. In my first class of the semester we were given the assignment to form groups by the next class period. I knew no one! I figured I would end up in class the next period,

MY LIFE'S PURPOSE

After 26 years of working in corporate America, I decided to change paths and go back to school to become a full-time called worker.

Jack Meyer

with the professor asking if one of the groups might take me. It took me back to my sandlot baseball experiences. But a classmate, Rachael, approached me and spared me the humiliation!

It was a new experience having Lori keep tabs on me through her friends (always letting me know if I had embarrassed her). Yet the rest of the students and professors treated me like any other student. I was impressed with the gifted young men and women that I was studying with. They knew why they were there, they were serious about their studies, and, above all, they loved their Lord.

In many ways MLC is a typical college campus. Practical jokes abound, there is enthusiasm for the athletic teams, and there is a well-used grapevine that shares what can be expected of this professor or that class.

But in other ways, it was different than my first college experience. Students take learning seriously and strive to do well.

The Christian love between the faculty and students is always evident. Daily chapel brings everyone together at one time to sing a hymn and hear God's Word. I was blessed to be part of this special community.

Perhaps one of the things I appreciated the most from my experience was the fact the professors have experienced life as a called worker in a parish and/or school setting.

Their practical wisdom is invaluable to the students. Being involved in active congregations, I had experienced much of what they shared. Yet there are so many more things that only a called worker can experience. My professors strived to prepare me spiritually, theologically, intellectually, and emotionally for a career in staff ministry.

Upon graduation, I was blessed to receive a call to serve as family minister at Ascension, Plymouth, Minn. As I look back over my first year in the ministry, I marvel at God's blessings. He has blessed his church with so many gifted people. We, as full-time called workers, can accomplish so little by ourselves. God blesses us with members who have great ideas and others with strong backs. He gives us those who find joy in sharing God's Word with the children in Sunday school and others who cheerfully take on even menial work so that things run smoothly. There are those who see an outreach potential in every program and those who ask the tough questions about the programs we consider. All are motivated by God's grace and mercy. All have picked up where my professors left off. My Christian education continues . . .

Jack Meyer is a staff minister at Ascension, Plymouth, Minnesota.

Lawrence Olson, director of the staff ministry program at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., shares insights on the role of staff ministers in a church's ministry:

"What does a staff minister do?" Excellent question . . . but a question that is not always so easy to answer. Perhaps it would be good first to answer the question, "Why would a church call a staff minister?"

That leads to the difference in roles between a pastor and a staff minister. While a pastor is trained for the broadest scope of ministry and provides theological leadership for a congregation and oversight of its ministry, a staff minister is equipped with basic theological training and practical skills to serve in various focused areas of ministry.

When a congregation has determined that it needs to expand its called staff as it seeks to carry out God's work, the first step is to decide whether or not it needs someone to share in the preaching

task. If so, then that congregation would call another pastor. If not, it might well consider whether a staff minister would fit the bill.

Staff ministers are trained to serve in youth work, evangelism, family ministry, visitation, administration, and

Christian education (through programs such as Bible studies and Sunday school). Most parish staff ministers work in

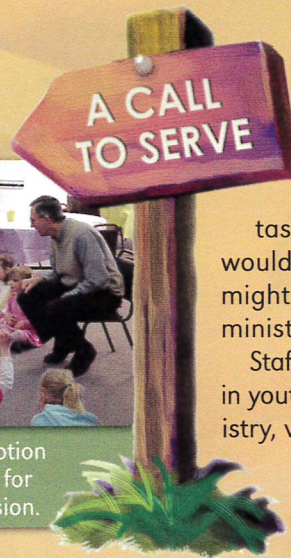
a combination of two or possibly three of those areas, while others—based on their personal gifts and experience or training in Martin Luther College's music program—include parish music. The individual mix of responsibilities may vary widely from church to church, because each church has its own unique set of needs and opportunities. That's why that "What does a staff minister do?" question doesn't have a simple, single answer. However, the common thread is that he positions a more limited focus to them, unlike the broader scope that most pastoral positions have.

A staff minister recently wrote, "Together with lay members of a congregation, staff ministers now join pastors and teachers as an integral part of the overall ministry of a church among its own members and in its community." Praise God for that!

Find out more about what Jack Meyer does as a staff minister at Ascension, Plymouth, Minn., in the summer issue of Mission Connection.



Jack Meyer gives a devotion during the 2006 Easter for Kids program at Ascension.



SANCTIFICATION: HEAT AND GLOW FROM THE FIRE

Justification and sanctification can't be separated.

IF YOU TURN ON THE STOVE AND place a pot of water over the heat, the water will warm and eventually boil. There's no doubt about the consequences that follow. We depend on those consequences to prepare our meals or to have a cup of coffee.

A person who has heard the loving call of Jesus, who has received the forgiveness of sins won at Calvary, who trusts in Christ as his Redeemer and calls the Son of God his friend—such a person will produce the fruit of repentance and righteousness. There's no doubt about the consequences that follow from the fire of the Holy Spirit burning in a Christian's heart.

The first four articles in this series have treated the subject of justification, God's verdict of "not-guilty" that was declared objectively upon the whole world and has been declared personally upon each Christian. Our final article deals with sanctification, the natural result of justification in a believer's heart and life.

Sanctification flows from justification

To sanctify means "to set apart as holy." Something that is sanctified has been elevated above that which is common, and it has been set aside for a greater, nobler purpose.

We must always distinguish between justification and sanctification, for they are two very distinct things:

- Justification is what God has done *for us* by his grace through the merits of Christ. Sanctification is what God continues to do *in us* as he daily calls believers out of this dark world, turns us away from the temptations of the flesh, and shuts our ears to the seductions of Satan.
- Justification is finished, accomplished forever by the completed sacrifice of Jesus. Sanctification is ongoing and incomplete, as the Spirit continually works in believing hearts a life of devotion and thanksgiving.
- God's justification *caused* our salvation. God's sanctification is a *consequence* of our salvation, flowing naturally from our connection with Christ.
- Justification is the result of God's exclusive work for us in Christ; there is no human participation whatsoever. Sanctification is the result of the

Holy Spirit's work in believers' hearts, which produces a new creation made in God's image.

- Justification has given us a *new status* before God. Sanctification gives us a *new life* with God.

Yet, even as we must maintain the distinction between justification and sanctification, we cannot separate them, as if one can occur without the other. Sanctification cannot take place without justification, because "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). Personal justification always produces sanctification, because faith without actions is dead (James 2:17).

- "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- "If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth" (1 John 1:6).
- "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God" (Hebrews 10:26,27).

Sanctification is no basis for salvation

But wait a second here! If I look at my own heart, I find nothing there but sinful thoughts, evil desires, and rebellious attitudes. If I listen to my own lips I hear hurtful words, lies, gossip, slander, and blasphemies. Where is this sanctified life that I am to be living? If I examine myself, I find nothing in me but sin and death—which I can in no way overcome and from which I can in no way set myself free! The good that I want to do, I do not do. The evil that I don't want to do—this I keep on doing (Romans 7:14-25).

We must be very careful that we never look at ourselves for proof of our Christianity. Self-examination that seeks proof of salvation ends up producing excellent Pharisees—con-

fident and self-righteous, but utterly dishonest. Or it breeds frustration and despair—a hopeless terror of having to face God to give an account for a failed and wicked life.

Remember, the proof of who we are in Christ comes from the outside. God has decreed our identity by cleansing us with Jesus' blood, clothing us with Christ in baptism, declaring us forgiven through his absolution, and joining us to himself in Holy Communion.

The amazing truth is that even as we wrestle with our sins, struggle mightily against them, and frequently stumble and fall, we are still continually found righteous before God! The myriad of sins that we commit daily are not taken into account, because they were paid for centuries ago at the cross. All our efforts to serve the Lord, though they appear so feeble and inadequate, are fragrant and delightful to God, because they are done in the righteousness of Christ.

Sanctification is Christ—who lived for us—now living in us and living through us.

Sanctification is unassuming

Sanctification is Christ—who lived for us—now living in us and living through us. The apostle Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

On the Last Day, Jesus will point to the sheep on his right and say to believers, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was

GLOSSARY OF TERMS



JUSTIFICATION—
God's action of declaring sinners righteous or "not guilty."

SANCTIFICATION—
Our works of faith done by the power of the Holy Spirit.

SANCTIFY—
To set apart as holy.

JUSTIFY—
To declare righteous or holy.

hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in. Then the righteous will reply, 'Lord, when did we see you . . . ?' " (Matthew 25:34-40). The righteous were not even conscious of the good works they had done, and they certainly didn't trust in them. They simply lived what they believed.

Good works that flow from faith are not always outstanding acts of philanthropy or highly visible demonstrations of charity. They are done by Christians, and they may go unrecognized by everyone but God himself. Sanctification is a Christian mother putting food on the dinner table. It's a Christian father helping his son comb his hair before church. It's children doing their homework, employees working faithfully, authorities governing diligently. A life of good works is the humble, unassuming Christian life.

But in the end, all who have lived in Christ and his righteousness and who have had Christ living in them, will hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant! Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:21).

Jon Buchholz is pastor at Emmanuel, Tempe, Arizona.

This is the last of a five-part series on justification. These articles are taken from essays that were presented by Pastor Jon Buchholz at the 2005 synod convention. To read other articles in the series, go to www.wels.net/jumpword/ficarchive, and search by the author's first and last name.

There is a story about a Christian barber who listened carefully to his pastor preach a sermon about the importance and urgency of sharing our faith in Jesus. On the way home from church, he resolved to witness to the first person who came to his shop the next morning. He gave the matter a lot of thought, playing out the scene in his mind and rehearsing the words he intended to say. Nervously he unlocked the door of his barber shop early Monday morning, and a little while later his first customer appeared. There was a little chit-chat while he carefully cut the man's hair. Then he applied a generous amount of warm lather in preparation for a shave. As he stroked the razor on the belt hanging from

the chair, he abruptly launched into the statement that he so carefully prepared: "Friend, are you ready to die and meet the Lord?" The man was shocked as he looked at his barber holding the sharpened blade, and instantly he jumped up from the chair and bolted out the door.

We may have the best intentions to share our faith, but often we struggle with getting a spiritual conversation started. To make our witnessing efforts more of a natural progression in our conversations with people, we need to hone the skills of listening and asking questions.

Hone your listening skills

Turning conversations from everyday life to matters of eternal

life requires the skill of listening. A college student placed this ad in a local newspaper: "I'll listen. You do ALL the talking and I'll do ALL the listening. Your cost is \$25 per half hour." To his surprise, he had dozens of responses. People have a need to talk about their lives and to discuss their concerns. Listening is an excellent way to demonstrate that you care about people and are interested in them. Taking the time to listen to people strengthens the connections that you have with them. Those "bridges" will help you cross over from small talk to talking about God.

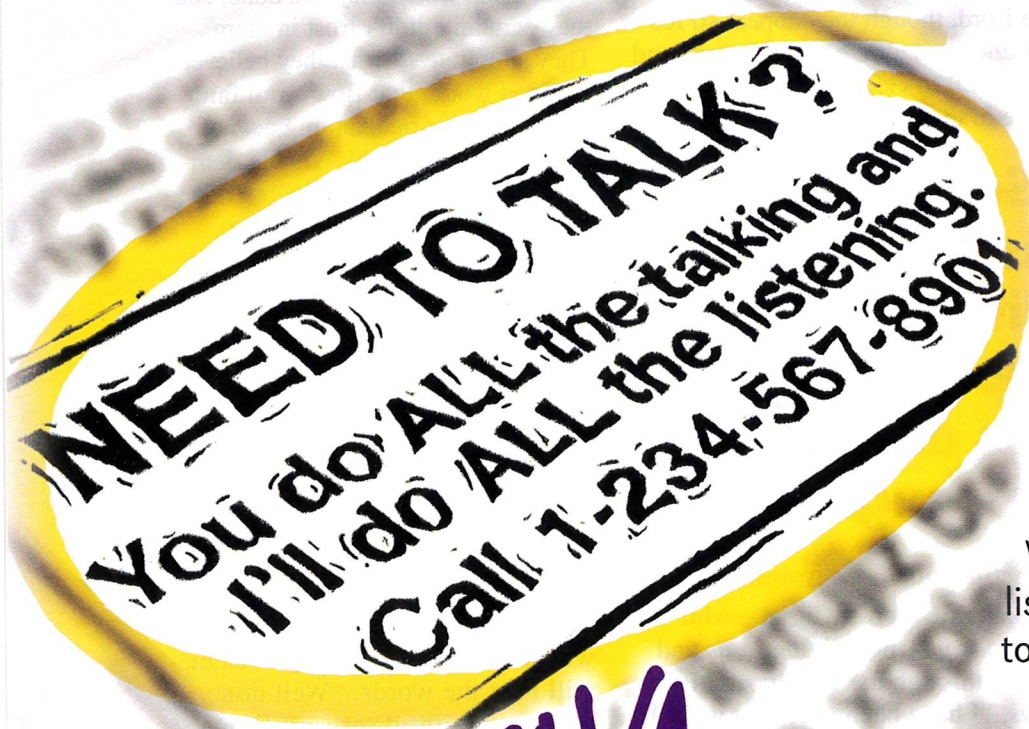
Telling about Jesus comes after listening to people talk about their feelings and fears, their problems and opinions. Draw people out as they speak about things that concern them. Say something like, "That's interesting. What makes you say that?" With this question, you clarify issues and learn more about people. By patiently and intently listening, you foster respect and trust, so that people are more inclined to listen to you when you turn the conversation to spiritual matters.

Learn to ask questions

Asking people questions about their lives will help you make meaningful application of God's Word.

We need to hone the skills of listening and asking questions to make our witnessing efforts more of a natural progression in our conversations.

Michael L. Hintz



**STARTING
A**

SPIRITUAL

Telling about Jesus comes after listening to people talk about their feelings and fears, their problems and opinions.

Friends with whom you have a close relationship won't feel threatened or uncomfortable about answering serious questions about life. That's why the relationships that you have with people are important for witnessing. People you know will have an easier time talking about the deeper issues of life because they know that you care and that they can confide in you. The close relationships that you enjoy with people make it easier for you to raise questions that can lead to sharing your faith.

Bringing up questions about religious background or experience will lead to opportunities for sharing what you believe. Explore matters of life that have significant impact on the people you know, such as job changes, marriage and family issues, or health concerns. As you relate to some of these matters, you can share how your faith is important to you. Talk about accomplishments and successes, or disappointments and letdowns. Then apply the promises and direction of God's Word.

A simple approach for turning conversations to spiritual talk is to remember the words "Feel . . . Felt . . . Found." After listening carefully to your friend's concern, respond by saying, "I can see how you might feel that way . . . Others have felt the same way (or 'I once felt that way myself.') . . . But what I've found is . . ." Then talk about the truth of God's Word and apply it to your friend.

When people speak with you about their problems, you may use this approach to lead the conversation to God's Word. Think of these four letters: p, P, S, s. Our problems (p) are rooted in our main Problem (P), which

is sin. In his love, God sent Jesus who is the Solution (S) for our sin. Since God saved us from sin through Jesus, we can be confident in his promises to help us with solutions (s) to the problems we have in life.

Don't be afraid when people question you

Often we are unnerved about witnessing because we fear that people might challenge something about Christianity and question us. We are afraid that we won't know the answers. The Bible teaches us that people who do not believe in Jesus cannot understand spiritual truth. The apostle Paul wrote, "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (1 Corinthians 1:18). So they will object to the truth of God; that's their nature. Sometimes Christians will also challenge the things we say because they have been misguided in their learning of the Scriptures or in the past have been offended in some way.

Do not argue. Your goal is not to win an argument. Your goal is to

plant the seed of God's Word, which the Holy Spirit uses to win people for Christ. Arguing or debating with people will not get them into heaven. Only the gospel has the power to save, as the apostle Paul went on to say in 1 Corinthians, "But to us who are being saved it [the message of the cross] is the power of God" (1:18). Listen to people's objections and acknowledge them as genuine concerns. This doesn't mean that you agree with them but that you seek to keep the lines of communication open. Understanding their concerns, you can turn the conversation to what God tells you in his Word, which is not arguable. It is the only power that can persuade the minds and hearts of people to see Jesus as their Savior and follow him as their Lord.

You want to connect people with God's Word as much as you can. Therefore, the inability to answer objections or questions on the spot is not necessarily bad because you can return later and talk about Jesus. Respond by saying something like this: "That's an interesting thought. I need to think more about it and study God's Word for help." Then study the Scriptures for answers. Ask other Christians for their thoughts. Talk to your pastor for guidance. Finally, go back and explain what you have found—always emphasizing the main thing that Jesus is our Savior.

Michael Hintz, administrator for the Commission on Evangelism, is a member at Christ the Lord, Brookfield, Wisconsin.

Next month: Communicating our faith

This is the second of a four-part series on confidently sharing Jesus with our friends. To read other articles in the series, go to www.wels.net/jumpword/ficarchive, and search by the author's first and last name.

CONVERSATION

WHATEVER

Switching letters

Friends and family may not have the answers to your problems, but Jesus does.

Joe Janke

Forty-two points! Are you kidding me?" my cousin blurted in shock.

"How did you ever think of that word?" laughed my uncle.

"Ugh, I give up," another voice blurted out from across the table.

"Why do you have to be so good?" I asked, jokingly.

We were all used to it by now, nothing new. Grandma was dominating in Scrabble™. Again.

At every family get-together—every Christmas, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, or simple visits to Grandma's—we play Scrabble. Well, in reality, we lose to Grandma in Scrabble.

I don't think that she has lost more than five games over the years. She should be in the "Scrabble Hall of Fame." Well, at least by my standards. No one that I know can consistently beat her without some kind of help.

Grandma, being the loving lady she is, would assist me when I was younger and got in a tight spot. She would do nearly anything to help me in the game—trade letters with me and set me up for big points. When I was down and out of the game, she would always pick me up and give me new life.

Do you have someone in your life that always seems to pick you up? Now I'm not talking about someone who just helps you in a game. I'm talking about someone who will be with you and get you through the tough times in life.

Do you have a loving father who teaches you lessons that he learned so that you might avoid some pain? A caring mother or grandmother that you can go to in any situation because you know that she will be there for you? Is there that one great friend in your life that you can dump your problems on and go to when you feel alone?

In a perfect world, you would have at least one person like this in your life.

However, as we all know, this world is not even close to perfect. Parents get divorced. Friends betray you. You feel alone and minuscule in a colossal world. You go through low moments; everyone does. You need Grandma to bail you out, but no one seems to be around.

But there is someone right around the corner! Do you know who it is? I'll tell you. Jesus. That's right, Jesus. He's the one person you can count on. He knows you better than you know yourself!

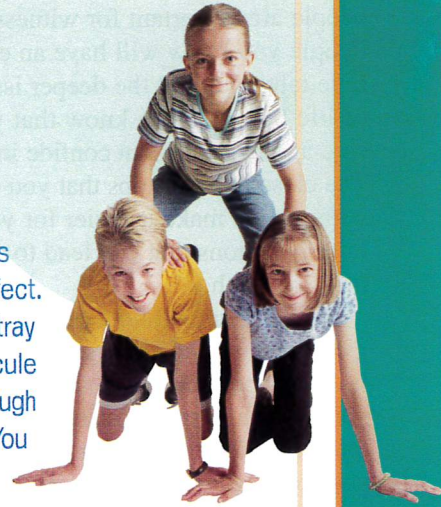
I'll be the first to admit that I often forget about this priceless lifeline I possess. I think that I'd rather rely on myself and my own wisdom instead of going to my Creator for help.

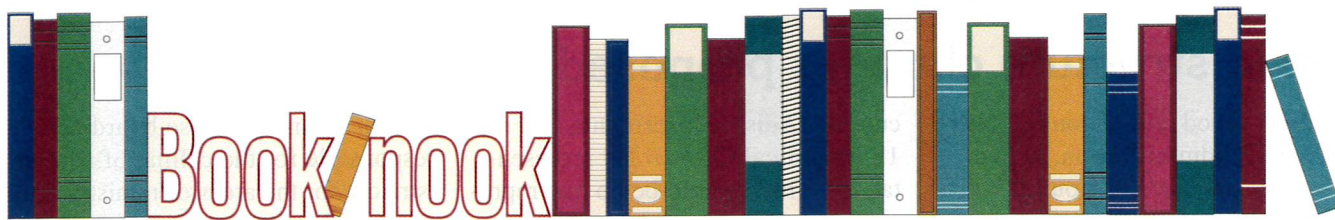
Unlike the sinful people who often disappoint, Jesus is the perfect friend. You can count on him to be waiting for your worries. 1 Peter 5:7 tells me, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." And Psalm 9:9 says, "The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble."

With God as our refuge and stronghold, why do we continue to rely on sinful people to solve our problems? I'm not saying that you shouldn't go to friends and family for guidance and help, but friends and family shouldn't be the only source you go to. After all, they may have some of the same problems that you do and don't have the answers to those problems either. But Jesus does.

In a sense, he switches letters with you in Scrabble. You give him a useless "O" for that "U" you need to use with your "Q". You give him all your troubles and worries, and, in return, he blesses you with his love and peace. Jesus always gives you the perfect Word.

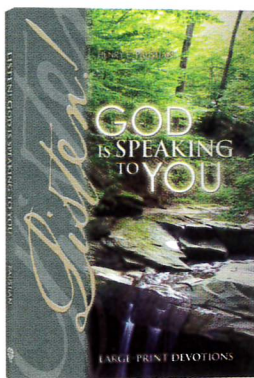
Joe Janke, a sophomore at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, is a member of Christ, Big Bend, Wisconsin.





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

Large-print devotions for anytime and anywhere



\$14.99

Often we may be looking for just that right book to help us get through the worries we have and the questions that crop up. The devil would like us to look to the worldly media for the

answers, but those answers are so lame and do not focus on the cross or the endless love and mercies of God.

Listen! God Is Speaking to You is that book. Each of its 65 short personal devotions starts with a Bible passage. Pastor Henry Paustian expounds on the passage, directing us to God and his love for us. Whenever or wherever the book is being read, the passages

are at your fingertips. For a shut-in that is important—the thought process is not broken. To those reading to shut-ins, the message flows smoothly and simply. At the end of the devotion, Paustian closes with a prayer.

The style of writing in this large-print book is reader friendly, using up-to-date wording to cover 65 situations of everyday life at the understanding level of young adults as well as seniors. These devotions do not have to be read in chronological order, but as needed for the situation. A lesson on being guilt-ridden could be followed by a lesson on the Lord's Table. But what “if we leave the altar and do not feel forgiven?” The author answers that question for us with loving words from Scripture.

This book eloquently prepares the reader's heart when studying the readings during the church year. Paustian

makes it clear that God loved us so much he sent his only Son who willingly lived and died for our salvation and is now living with God the Father “in heaven, . . . interceding for us when we sin.”

This book can be a wonderful nightstand companion or a personal carry-with-you book for guidance anytime, anywhere. I personally found it to be a real blessing while in the hospital recovering from pneumonia. Everyone can find suitable readings in *Listen! God Is Speaking to You* for comfort and knowledge and will be hard-pressed to find just one favorite.

Elisabeth Wells
Open Bible, The Villages, Florida

Obituaries

Dale W. Arndt 1938-2006

Dale Arndt was born Nov. 10, 1938, in Echo, Minn. He died April 5, 2006, in Marshall, Minn.

A 1963 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Immanuel, Hubbleton/St. Mark, Richwood, Wis.; St. John, Newburg, Wis.; St. Matthew, Flora Township, Minn.; Bethany, Emmet, Minn.; Pilgrim, Minneapolis, Minn.; St. Peter, Balaton, Minn.; Good Shepherd, Pipestone, Minn.; and St. Paul, Seaforth/St. John, Sheridan Township, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Gloria; two sons; one daughter; and five grandchildren.

George E. La Grow 1940-2006

George La Grow was born Nov. 8, 1940, in Mount Pleasant, Mich. He died April 8, 2006, in Manitowoc, Wis.

A 1962 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he served St. John, Juneau, Wis.; Centennial, Milwaukee, Wis.; Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis.; Parish Assistance, Milwaukee, Wis.; Ocean Drive, Pompano Beach, Fla.; Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; and Immanuel, Salem, Ore.

He is survived by his wife, Judith; two sons; three daughters; and four grandchildren.

READ THROUGH MY BIBLE IN 3 YEARS

JULY 2006

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. 1 Samuel 4:1b-22 | 15. 1 Sam. 23, 24 |
| 2. 1 Sam. 5:1-7:2 | 16. 1 Sam. 25, 26 |
| 3. 1 Sam. 7:3-8:22 | 17. 1 Sam. 27, 28 |
| 4. 1 Sam. 9:1-10:16 | 18. 1 Sam. 29, 30 |
| 5. 1 Sam. 10:17-11:15 | 19. 1 Sam. 31 |
| 6. 1 Sam. 12 | 20. Ephesians 1:1-14 |
| 7. 1 Sam. 13 | 21. Eph. 1:15-23 |
| 8. 1 Sam. 14 | 22. Eph. 2 |
| 9. 1 Sam. 15 | 23. Eph. 3 |
| 10. 1 Sam. 16 | 24. Eph. 4:1-5:2 |
| 11. 1 Sam. 17:1-54 | 25. Eph. 5:3-6:9 |
| 12. 1 Sam. 17:55-19:24 | 26. Eph. 6:10-24 |
| 13. 1 Sam. 20:1-21:9 | 27. Job 1-3 |
| 14. 1 Sam. 21:10-22:23 | 28. Job 4, 5 |
| | 29. Job 6, 7 |
| | 30. Job 8:1-9:24 |
| | 31. Job 9:25-10:22 |

Synod structure changes proposed

The 2005 synod convention resolved that WELS administration, with a review by a Synodical Council-appointed panel, develop a proposal for a new administrative structure. The new plan will be presented at district conventions in the summer of 2006 and, after considering any alterations proposed by the districts, a proposal will be made to the 2007 synod convention for approval.

The proposed streamlined structure allows for clearer lines of responsibility, authority, and accountability for all administrative personnel; greater agility in addressing and meeting ministry needs; better efficiency and economy in managing mission and ministry; and more involvement of individuals with specialized skills.

Currently, there are two top-level governing bodies within WELS: the Conference of Presidents, made up of a district president from each of the 12 districts, and the Synodical Council made up of 12 lay members, three Conference of Presidents members, and six at large members—a pastor, a male teacher, and four area of ministry administrators. The Conference of Presidents deals with doctrine and practice, while the Synodical Council focuses on programs and budget.

The structure, in its current state, shows weaknesses in coordination both within areas of ministry and across areas of ministry. In addition, some areas of ministry have multiple lines of accountability that hinder the decision-making process.

In the new proposed structure, the synod president would answer to a combined council. The council would be made up of the

current 12 district presidents and the 12 Synodical Council lay representatives. There would be no one representing any particular area of ministry, making the council an objective governing body. For this to happen, an amendment to the synod constitution would be required. The synod constitution cannot be amended by one convention. Rather, the amendment would be initiated at the 2007 synod convention, discussed at the 2008 district conventions, and finally voted on at the 2009 synod convention.

“These are matters to be freely debated, as we decide what outward structure would serve us best in proclaiming the gospel,” notes WELS President Karl Gurgel.

Changes to each area of ministry are also being considered. Currently, a board or commission governs each

area of ministry. These boards are responsible for the calling of administrators for the areas of ministry. This structure has led to many areas having a dual allegiance: to the board that called them and to the Synodical Council acting through the president of the synod.

In a proposed new structure, two things would change. First, all administrators would be called to their positions by the combined council rather than by a board. Second, the governing boards would become standing committees and act as an advisory council to the administrator. Unlike the two-convention process needed to amend the constitution and establish a combined council, a bylaw change that allows governing boards to become standing committees only takes one convention.

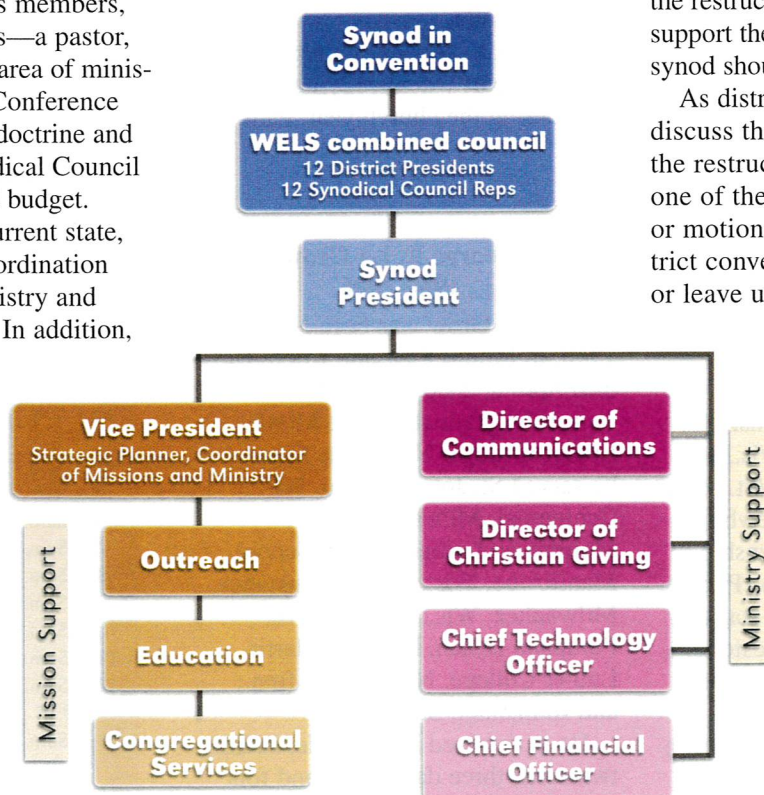
Review panel member, Kenneth Hull, a certified public accountant from Downer’s Grove, Ill., says, “We have reviewed and agree with all aspects of the restructuring proposal and strongly support the direction in which the synod should be governed.”

As districts meet this summer and discuss the business of the synod, the restructuring proposal will be one of the biggest issues. Memorials or motions could come out of district conventions that either amend or leave unchanged the bylaws governing

the area of ministry boards. Other suggestions and proposed changes to the entire restructuring proposal could result as well.

“We are interested in the input we receive from the district conventions. It is important to hear the concerns of all our WELS members,” says Gurgel.

PROPOSED NEW ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE



News briefs

WELS Kingdom Workers

800-466-9357; kingwork@wkw.wels.net

Communicating Christ Today is now available on DVD. In 31 entertaining episodes, this five-disk set covers basic truths of law and gospel and also reviews timely topics such as marriage and divorce, the roles of men and women in the church, the doctrine of fellowship, and the differences between Lutheran church bodies. The course is designed for use in adult information class, Sunday morning Bible study, confirmation class, catechism class, or for basic doctrine review. *Communicating Christ Today* also is used by laypeople, who teach it in the homes of relatives, neighbors, and friends—sharing Christ one-on-one.

Communicating Christ Today (DVD, 382518; VHS, 382510) is available at www.nph.net/welsproducts. Search the online catalog by catalog item number. Or call Northwestern Publishing House at 800-662-6022 (Milwaukee area, 414-475-6000, ext. 5800), 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. CDT.

World Missions

414-256-3233; dan.koelpin@sab.wels.net



WELS President Karl Gurgel (left) receives a check for \$2,100 from Jim Holman (center) and Pastor Dave Priebe, members of the Southeast Asia Administrative Committee of the Board for World Missions. This was money raised by SALEM, the Chinese national church in Hong Kong that is affiliated with WELS, to give to Crown of Life, New Orleans, La., for hurricane relief. Says Gurgel, "Half a world away, we see the wind of the Spirit creating faith, and its fruits are more powerful than any hurricane."

Handshake and basketball evangelism

During the summer of 2005, Tim and Anna Bourman, volunteered at Resurrection, Rochester, Minn., as Member Ministry Assistance layworkers. Member Ministry Assistance, a WELS Kingdom Workers program, gives laymen and women opportunities to assist congregations with outreach. Here Tim shares some of his experiences:

It's often hard to meet people, but sometimes all it takes is a handshake and a basketball.

The handshake

"We have to do vacation Bible school in the park across the street from church, at the apartments. I met some of the tenants and they are excited to hear about Jesus. They want us to come," said Anna, my sister and fellow volunteer.

Anna worked with the kids, and I spoke with the adults. I figured I had the harder task. Then I met Justin. While Anna taught the craft, Justin walked over to see what was happening. I approached him and shook his hand. He was a gentle and kind man. We spoke about the Wiccan religion. As I shook his hand, I noticed a satanic symbol tattooed on his hand. He explained how he left the occult because he had seen his friend become possessed. I shared the good news that Jesus has power over everything, even demons. This was the beginning of a friendship.

Each week, I spoke with Justin about life and about Jesus. He shared things I cannot share with anyone. I shared things about Jesus I want to share with everyone. He asked me about forgiveness, and I told him about Jesus and the forgiveness that he offers everyone. By the end of summer, Justin walked into the church to hear more of God's Word. And it all began with a handshake.

The basketball

"Man, it was like a bad dream. People were getting shot in the streets like dogs, just because they

were Christian." I can still remember the look on his face when my new friend told me about the civil unrest of his home country, Sudan.

Some Sudanese now have taken refuge in the United States, near Resurrection. This group of Sudanese boys dreams of taking the NBA by storm and following in the footsteps of NBA stars like Luol Deng and Manute Bol, their fellow tribesmen. All they want is peace and prosperity.



Tim Bourman made friends with Sudanese boys through playing basketball. He also had the opportunity to share God's Word with them.

They came to the church to play basketball, but we also shared our faith with them. They came several Wednesday nights to play games and have a short devotion. We shared the peace that only Jesus can bring, and they continue to hear about this peace at Resurrection.

I began the summer with trepidation, knowing that I had to meet people. I ended the summer with new friends with whom I continue to share the gospel. How awesome it is to share the Word.

For more information on how you can volunteer through WELS Kingdom Workers, go to www.welskingdomworkers.org or call 1-800-466-9357.

Reprinted from WELS Kingdom Workers Update, Winter 2006.

Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service looks to the future



Finding counseling resources where you live can often be a difficult task. Finding a

Christian counseling resource

can be even trickier. But what if you were able to connect with a counselor through the phone, a private chat room, or a Web-based interactive video via your computer? As impossible as it sounds, it may be closer than you think.

Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service (WLCFS), headquartered in Milwaukee, Wis., is looking at ways to use technology to reach all members of WELS and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) who desire counseling and assistance. Distance counseling methods through computer and phone use have been approved by the American Counseling Association.

As WLCFS Chief Executive Officer, Pastor James Mattek, explains, “We recognize that as technology changes our industry, we need to reevaluate how our agency can best meet the needs of those we serve.” Mattek cites changes to operational and staffing requirements that are becoming industry norms as well as insurance companies and managed care organizations’ tight limits on mental health care reimbursements as additional catalysts for change.

A distance counseling program would also allow WLCFS to counsel pastors and teachers who desire to help members within their own congregations. Mattek says, “Pastors from around the country frequently call Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service asking for advice or assistance on how to help members suffering from various emotional difficulties.

A program like this would allow us to connect with them and provide them with support and answers.”

With the backing of its board of directors, WLCFS hopes to pilot a distance counseling approach later this year and conduct research to see how receptive WELS/ELS members are to this type of service. Mattek notes, “We are confident that the Lord will continue to lead our organization in providing new ways to assist God’s people.”

For more information about the services provided by Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service, including counseling, senior living residences, Christian leadership training, and ministry support services, visit www.wlcfs.org or call 1-888-685-9522.

Family network will help families with developmentally disabled members

Every parent struggles to understand and nurture his or her child through each new stage of life. Often lingering after school or phoning their own parents, they seek advice from others who have been in their situation. But parents who have children with developmental disabilities face distinct challenges and may often feel unsatisfied by these consultations. For this reason, the Special Education Services Committee (SESC) of WELS Special Ministries is developing the Special Needs Family Network, a network for families of children with developmental disabilities.

Committee members working to establish the network all share one thing in common: they have children with developmental disabilities. “Parent to parent contact is invaluable,” committee member Lorna Leyrer shares. “They are the best resources and know

where the best resources are. Their experiences with their children who have developmental disabilities make them the ‘professionals.’ When you can receive this help from others who also share your same faith that alone brings great comfort.”

“Our first goal,” committee member Pastor John Zeitler recalls, “was to implement a network of parent mentors who would be willing to encourage other parents and families in WELS who are struggling to raise a child with disabilities and provide spiritual nurture for them.” That network of 12 mentoring families has been established, and they have received training materials. Now the publicity phase has started—getting the word out to families that this service is available.

This March, Thrivent Financial for Lutherans granted the Special Needs

Family Network funds that will make possible a toll-free number, a Web page, and promotional materials. Both the need among WELS members and the Christian willingness to help one another assure the growth of this network. The network is simply a means to aid Christians in helping other Christians meet the special challenges in their lives and in this way ‘fulfill the law of Christ’ ” (Galatians 6:2).

To learn more about this network, contact one of the committee members: Tim or Joan Schroeder, schroetj@mlc-wels.edu, 507-359-9412; Lorna Leyrer, lornaleyrer@wi.rr.com, 414-257-3412; John Zeitler, jzeit@frontiernet.net, 952-873-2078.

Where are they now?

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

In the April 2005 issue, we told you about two seminary graduates receiving tent ministry calls to Redeemer, Tucson, Ariz.

Here's a recap

When members of Redeemer saw the opportunity to reach out to a rapidly growing area eight miles away in Dove Mountain, they didn't let the fact that they couldn't afford another pastor stand in the way. Instead, they called two pastors as tent ministers and formulated a plan to work them up to full-time ministry. Starting in the summer of 2004, Aaron Boehm, working in civil engineering, and Mark Jacobson, working for an apparel printing company, put in 40-hour work weeks while managing a growing ministry in Dove Mountain.



Purchased last summer, this house near Dove Mountain is being used for church activities. The three-car garage on the 4.5-acre lot hopefully will be turned into a sanctuary.

"joyful, but not necessarily easy." There is more time for ministry, but much work to be done. The four-man ministry team (Redeemer already had two pastors) first met to discuss personal gifts and ministry needs. After much prayer and discussion they decided to split the ministry into different areas: Phil Koelpin, lead and member care pastor; Timothy Westendorf, spiritual growth pastor; Aaron Boehm, youth and family pastor; and Mark Jacobson, outreach pastor.

"As youth and family pastor, I oversee our 20/30 group, cradle roll, and everything in between, all the while equipping, encouraging, and promoting family," Boehm shares. "I am able to concentrate specifically on my area of ministry, as are the other pastors, and the hope is that this will enable us each to serve God's people more efficiently and effectively."

Redeemer's ministry in Dove Mountain has been further blessed with a new site: a 4.5-acre plot of land with a house and garage. The house is being used for small group Bible studies, youth group, and other activities, and Redeemer has received permission to turn the three-car garage into a sanctuary. God-willing, worship services will be held there within months.

As Boehm often reminds himself, "God doesn't wear a wristwatch." The ministry in Dove Mountain will grow at the Lord's pace. God may have very different plans for the garage in Tucson. Or perhaps, as he's proved himself capable of time and again at Redeemer, he will move things along even more quickly than anticipated.

So what is happening now?

The plan was for Boehm and Jacobson to gradually work fewer hours at their secular jobs until Redeemer could support them as full-time pastors. According to their most optimistic estimates, this could have happened by April 2006. Yet, as a result of an anonymous offering, they began full-time ministry in October 2005—six months ahead of schedule!

Jacobson describes the transition to full-time ministry as



Left to right: Mark Jacobson, Tim Westendorf, Phil Koelpin, and Aaron Boehm when Redeemer dedicated its new property near Dove Mountain last September.

Synodwide purchasing program offers price breaks

WELS congregations, organizations, and individuals are able to take advantage of lower prices in computer hardware and software, office products, and telecommunications through ShopWELS, a synodwide purchasing program.

"Because of the volume that we represent to vendors, many are willing to offer discounted prices on their products and services," says WELS Chief Technology Officer Martin Spriggs.

Participants in the program can expect to save 10 to 25 percent off posted prices, depending on the vendor and the number of orders. Participating vendors include Hewlett Packard, Software Spectrum, and Office Depot.



Organizations and individuals can request information at www.shopwels.net. Vendors will e-mail registrants a username and password to access procurement sites that have been set up specifically for WELS organizations. For the most part, participants will shop online for products.

"The more we can walk together and buy into the purchasing program, the lower the prices will get for us," says Spriggs. "This makes good 'business' sense, but it is also wise stewardship."

A 2004 WELS technology study first brought up the idea of a synodwide purchasing program and its advantages. Future plans include broadening the products and services offered through the program to such things as copiers, travel agencies, and moving companies.

For more information, go to www.shopwels.net. Organizations can apply immediately, and individuals can apply after June 1.

WhatAboutJesus.com redesigned

WhatAboutJesus.com, a Web site developed by WELS Commission on Evangelism four years ago, has recently undergone a major redesign. Intended as a non-threatening, easily accessible way to share the gospel with the unchurched, WhatAboutJesus.com has seen a dramatic increase in visitors within the last six months.

“People around us have many questions when it comes to the Bible, current issues, and the church. Here is a place that they can anonymously raise questions, explore answers, and grow in grace,” says Kenneth Fisher, pastor at Risen Savior, Milwaukee, Wis., and project manager for WhatAboutJesus.com.

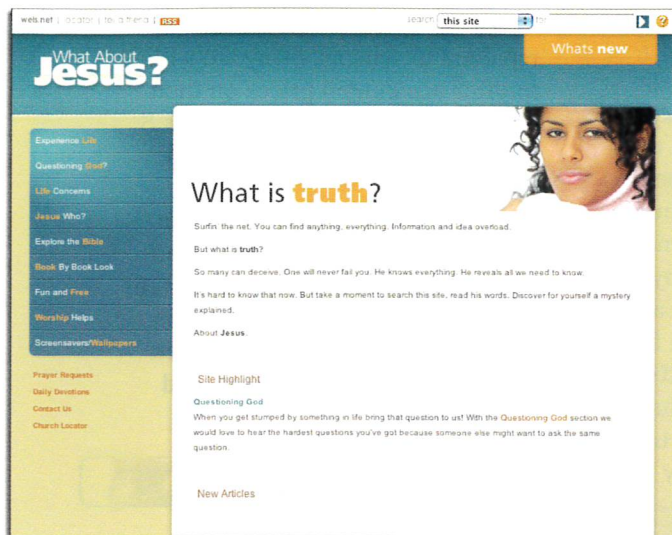
A new addition to the site is worship helps, short Bible studies written by WELS pastors that are delivered via e-mail each Monday morning. With each reading, a series of questions and answers help readers prepare for the following Sunday’s worship.

An exciting aspect about the site from Fisher’s point of view is the ability to address real life issues from site visitors. “They’ve got questions. We’ve got answers,” he says. “The site asks people to give us their honest questions. People have some raw, tough questions. Here’s a place to explore God’s answers. We’d rather address their questions from a biblical stance than allow our culture to define the answers.”

Fisher continues, “It is my prayer that the redesign will increase awareness by our WELS people of this unique tool that is theirs to share and use. We want more people to take advantage of this tool to share the gospel with their friends, neighbors, and coworkers.”

To help continue the growth of the site, a number of changes and additions were implemented. “This redesign gives us the freedom to make changes more rapidly and gives greater ability to connect with the massive resources that have been developed by WELS.net,” notes Fisher.

Among the changes are an improved layout structure, a search feature to recall past articles, and reconfigured “Life Concerns” and “Questioning God” sections.



ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

In preparing for a School of Worship Enrichment, a worship seminar conducted by the Commission on Worship, a seven-year-old from Risen Savior, Pooler, Ga., filled out a survey about worship in his church. Here are his responses to some of the statements:

My church is comfortable to worship in whether it's cold or hot outside.

"Well yah, duh."

When I listen to my pastors' sermons, I can usually tell the difference between their preaching the law of God and their preaching the good news about salvation.

"I'm usually doing something, but I can also overhear while I am."

My pastors' leadership in worship encourages me to participate in the service.

"I love to pertsipate."

It's quite easy to sing in our church because the acoustics are good for singing.

"I follow my mom beacause I think she sings beautifly and strong."

I find the songs of the liturgy to be enjoyable to sing. (Any hymnal liturgy songs you use, pp. 15-61)

"I love those songs."

The songs we sing in the liturgy (such as "Glory Be to God on High" or "O Lord, Our Lord") help me remember the most important teachings of the Bible.

"That's why I like them."

Our organist(s) and pianist(s) play well and lead the service capably.

"I like it a lot, but maybe babys are scared with the trumpets booming unexpectedly."

Says Bryan Gerlach, administrator for the Commission on Worship, "The first two are funny. The remaining are inspiring, showing how such a young mind is engaged by worship."

Find out more about School of Worship Enrichment at www.wels.net/jumpword/SoWe.

District news

Minnesota

St. John, Renville, Minn., has begun holding "fellowship meals" for young adults who have moved to the Twin Cities yet remain members of St. John. Pastor and Mrs. Richard Tuttle meet with members and encourage them to visit other WELS churches when they're not in Renville. Pastor Tuttle also keeps in touch with the members through e-mail devotions and event calendars.

Lay ministry is growing at **St. John, Redwood Falls, Minn.** Six members have completed the two year Congregational Assistance Program through Martin Luther College and are now involved in leading Bible classes. The entire Jesus Cares program at St. John is led by lay people and has close to 40 participants.

The 212 Teens for Christ, a combined youth group of Zion, Olivia, Minn., and St. Matthew, Danube and Flora Townships, Minn., recently gathered at the Mall of America in Minneapolis for a day of evangelizing. Group members handed out business cards that encouraged recipients to visit www.WhatAboutJesus.com. The group is named for the highway on which the congregations are situated.

Nebraska

Dewid Lor, a member of Rock of Ages, Kansas City, Mo., has been assigned by the Joint Mission Council to serve as a vicar in Chiang Rai, Thailand. He will serve as mission developer and educator in the Ministry Education Center in

Chiang Rai. He will also continue his seminary studies through visiting professors from the United States.

South Atlantic

Crown of Life, Fort Myers, Fla., dedicated its new 16,000 sq. ft. education/multi-purpose addition on April 2. Pastor Don Thompson, Shepherd of Palms, Jupiter, Fla., was the guest preacher.

Eighth-grader **Robert Potter** of Ascension, Sarasota Fla., placed fourth at the state level for the National Geography Bee hosted by the National Geographic Society on March 31. More than 100,000 children in Florida participated in the Geography Bee.

WELS Ministry Center, a satellite ministry of **Peace, Holiday, Fla.**, was launched in Land O'Lakes, Fla., on April 30. The launch is part of Peace's six-year expansion plan, with help from WELS Parish Assistance. To learn more, visit www.welsministrycenter.com.

Good Shepherd, Deltona, Fla., has taken advantage of the state of Florida paying tuition for children to attend preschool. Good Shepherd's first year of offering preschool has resulted in the program running at capacity with a waiting list of more than 100 families. Using the program as an evangelism effort, the congregation has seen several new families regularly attend church and become members.

Southeastern Wisconsin

The **Kettle Moraine Lutheran High**

South Atlantic



The dedication of a new facility at Saving Grace, Mobile, Ala., will take place on June 25. District President Pastor John Guse will be the guest preacher. Saving Grace experienced a temporary setback in its building plans when the area was ravaged by Hurricane Katrina in late August 2005.

School Cheer and Stunt Team, Jackson, Wis., was named Wisconsin Division III Large State Champions for the third year in a row in February. The team is coached by Amy Nass and Shannon Wilke.

Western Wisconsin

Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis., hosted a WELS West Regional Band Festival March 10-12. One hundred ten of the top student musicians from 12 Lutheran high schools participated in the event.

Happy Anniversary!

MN—DeLyte Schultz, Salem, Loretto Minn., celebrated 25 years in the teaching ministry on April 2.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NE—Donald Wichmann; SA—Christopher Kruschel; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Martin Baur.

World news

Lutherans see slight increase in membership—Lutheran church membership increased slightly during 2004-05, according to the Lutheran World Federation, a global communion of Lutheran churches. Worldwide, membership went from 65.9 million to 66.2 million.

Membership in North American churches decreased by 1 percent, from 8.25 million to 8.15 million, while Africa reported 900,000 new members in Lutheran churches, increasing total African membership to more than 15 million. Other countries that recorded

increases in membership were Taiwan, India, Indonesia, and Ireland.

WELS is not part of the Lutheran World Federation.

Survey: Family is top priority listed by adults—Fifty-one percent of adults chose family as their top priority, according to a survey by The Barna Group of Ventura, Calif.

Commitment to faith came in second, but with only one out of six (16%) listing it as their top priority. Other priorities listed included health (7%), lifestyle (5%), vocational matters (3%),

money (3%), achieving success (3%), friendships (1%), leisure pursuits (1%), and having influence (1%).

The survey results are based on telephone interviews with 1,003 adults ages 18 and older throughout the United States during January 2006. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.2 percentage points.

[From "Americans reveal their top priority in life," Barna Research Group, Ltd., Ventura, Calif., www.barna.org; March 14, 2006].

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Beckman, David J., to India
Doebler, Matthew D., to Christ the Rock, Round Rock, Tex.
Enderle, Phillip M., to St. Luke, Millston/St. Matthew, Warrens, Wis.
Foley, Michael L., to Bread of Life/Pan de Vida Exploratory, Santa Ana, Calif.
Gumm, Thomas R., to Salem, Edmonds/Grace, Seattle, Wash.
Lindloff, James W., to retirement
Pautz, Larry L., to Living Water, Wind Lake, Wis.
Pechman, Brian R., to Mt. Calvary, Redding, Calif.
Schalow, Lyle F., to retirement
Schwartz, Andrew D., to Christ the King, Bremerton, Wash.
Vannieuwenhoven, Charles D., to Northdale, Tampa, Fla.

Teachers

Althoff, John, to Divine Savior, Doral, Fla.
Arndt, Heidi R., to St. John, Minneapolis, Minn.
Arndt, William J., to Good Shepherd, Burnsville, Minn.
Bendix, Kristen R., to Peace, Green Lake, Wis.
Bergemann, Rebecca M., to Bethany, Port Orchard, Wash.
Braun, Bruce W., to Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee
Bremer, Steven B., to St. Paul, Muskego, Wis.
Carlovsky, James D., to Kettle Moraine LHS, Jackson, Wis.
Dais, Sarah R., to Beautiful Savior, Grove City, Ohio
Ellingboe, Martha A., to St. John, Wrightstown, Wis.
Fager, Matthew W., to Grace, Yakima, Wash.
Fluegge, Michele R., to St. John, Redwood Falls, Minn.
Groening, Steven F., to St. John, Lake City, Minn.
Kaiser, Mark S., to Emmaus, Phoenix, Ariz.
Kaiser, Ruth M., to Calvary, Dallas, Tex.
Kruse, Merlyn W., to Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee
Kwasinski, Amy K., to Good Shepherd, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
Lindenberg, Rebecca J., to Crown Of Life, Hubertus, Wis.
Luetke, J. Anna, to Zion, Hartland, Wis.
Mattes, Joanne E., to Our Savior, Longmont, Colo.
Medico, Sherri, to Ascension, Sarasota, Fla.
Nelson, Jeffrey D., to St. John, Redwood Falls, Minn.

Norder, Christine R., to St. Peter, Plymouth, Mich.
Patterson, Christopher, to Mt. Calvary, La Crosse, Wis.
Powers, Danielle D., to St. Jacobi, Greenfield, Wis.
Prange, Leanne M., to St. Paul, Saginaw, Mich.
Rathje, Ryan J., to Mt. Olive, Mankato, Minn.
Sadler, Emily, to St. Paul, Franklin, Wis.
Schlender, Mary B., to Bethel, Galesville, Wis.
Schultz, Melissa M., to St. Luke, Watertown, Wis.
Schultz, Stephen L., to Faith, Antioch, Ill.
Staab, Katherine S., to Holy Trinity, New Hope, Minn.
Tess, Paul A., to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.
Wessel, Elizabeth M., to St. Paul, Saint James, Minn.
Wurster, Miles, to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

Staff minister

Wendorf, Todd S., to Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, Madison, Wis.

ANNIVERSARIES

Ashland, Wis.—First English (75). June 4. Service, 10:45 A.M. Dinner, noon. RSVP, 715-561-3242 or huebur@charter.net.
Wonewoc, Wis.—St. Paul school (125). June 11. Services, 8 & 10:30 A.M. Lunch & fellowship, 11:30 A.M. 608-464-3212.
Waterloo (Newville), Wis.—St. John (150). June 11. Service, 10:30 A.M. Church picnic to follow. RSVP, 920-648-5205.
Watertown (Richwood), Wis.—St. Mark (100). June 18. Service, 10:15 A.M. Clint Burow, 920-262-0327.
Clearwater, Fla.—Christ the Lord (30). June 25. Service, 10 A.M. Meal to follow. Ethan Kahrs, 727-441-8239.
Redgranite, Wis.—Trinity (100). June 25. Service, 3 P.M. Dinner, 4:45 P.M. Free will offering. RSVP by May 25, 920-566-2742 or 920-787-2879.
Helena, Mont.—Valley View (25). July 23. Service, 3 P.M. Dinner to follow. 406-443-6663.
Sodus, Mich.—St. Paul (90). Aug. 6. Services, 9 A.M. & 3 P.M. Dinner, 4:15 P.M. RSVP, 269-925-5940 or rduehlme@comcast.net.
Lime Ridge, Wis.—Trinity (100). Aug. 27. Services, 10:30 A.M. & 2 P.M. Dinner, 11:30 A.M. 608-727-4271.

COMING EVENTS

College course—"What is a proper defense of creation?" June 12-30. Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. Graduate credit possible. Limited enrollment. Middle and high school teachers of science preferred. Grant supported. Contact Dr.

Paul R. Boehlke, paul.boehlke@wlc.edu, or check the biology pages at www.wlc.edu.

Northwestern Publishing House new music reading workshops

- June 17—Mount Olive, Appleton, Wis.
- June 25—Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.
- July 8—St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn.
- July 9—St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis.
- July 15—Trinity, Waukesha, Wis.
- Aug. 26—Northdale, Tampa, Fla.

Workshop information, including online registration, is at www.nph.net. Cheryl Nolte, 800-662-6022, 414-615-5763, or noltecl@nph.wels.net.

Lutheran Women's Missionary Society National Convention—June 22-25. Tacoma, Wash. Hosted by Evergreen and Cascade Circuits. 414-321-6212.

OWLS Convention—July 11-13. Holiday Inn and Austin Conference Center, Austin, Minn.; owls@newulmtel.net.

Summer Hebrew Institute—July 17-21. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Prof. Thomas Nass, nasstp@mlc-wels.edu or visit www.mlc-wels.edu/home/administration/offices/specialservices/summer/

WELS Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Convention—Aug. 4-6. Mt. Calvary, Waukesha, Wis. Dean Weigand, 262-547-3096 (V/T) or mdhhdhweigand2005@sbcglobal.net.

WELS/ELS Women's Conference on Mormonism—Sept. 22-24. University of Utah. Hosted by Light of the Valley, Layton, 801-444-1591; Prince of Peace, Taylorsville, 801-261-3808; and Hope (ELS), West Jordan, Utah, 801-963-4151.

Concerts and upcoming class reunions—Dates are listed online at www.wels.net/jumpword/bulletinboard.

NAMES WANTED

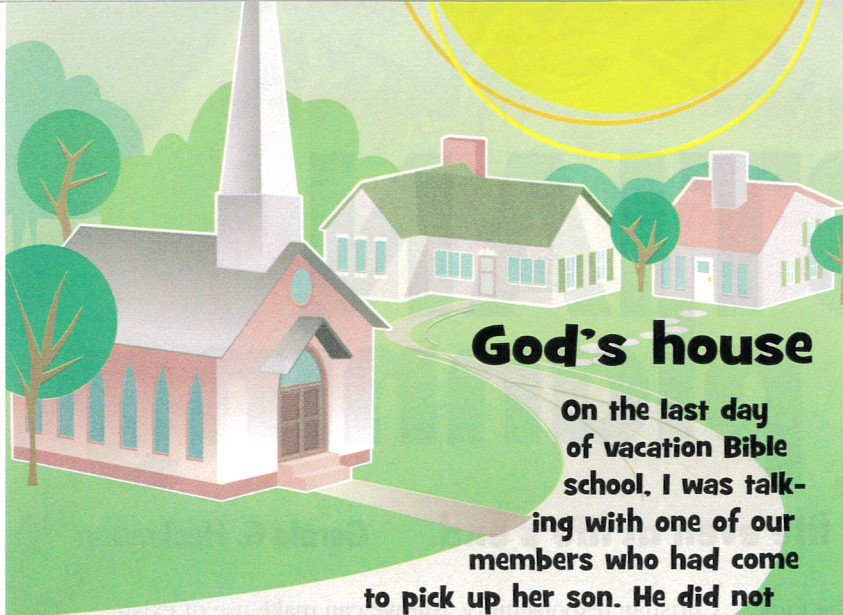
Truman Lake, Mo. (communities of Warsaw, Clinton, and Osceola)—Cliff Petty, 417-644-1166.

Land O' Lakes/Connertown, Fla.—Michael Weigand, 727-967-4649 or pmweig@ij.net.

Portage, Ind.—Hope (ELS), 6322 Portage Ave., Portage IN 46368 or pastor@hopeportage.org.

Soldiers and families at Fort Bragg, N.C.—David Schmidt, 910-868-9214 or ncbeautifulsavior@yahoo.com.

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



God's house

On the last day of vacation Bible school, I was talking with one of our members who had come to pick up her son. He did not want to leave church and stood in the parking lot trying to convince her to let him stay. She finally said, "We are coming back to God's house on Sunday." We soon found out he was confused between "pastor" and "God" (or he thought very highly of my husband), as he pointed to the parsonage and insisted, "No, Mom! That's God's house!"

Laura Schroeder, Novi, Michigan

Picture this



Pastor Dan Schmidt from St. John, St. Clair, Minn., sent Forward in Christ this picture on Maundy Thursday. He writes the following:

On the day that we give thanks for the "New Covenant" of the Lord's Supper, look at the reminder of his promises the Lord gave us this morning! Did you notice where the rainbow appears to stop? Better than any "pot-of gold" is what God's Word tells us:

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7).

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21).

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

In the March issue, we asked you to let us know what your favorite biblical miracle was and why. Several fondly remember teaching their favorite miracle—Jesus healing the paralytic man and Jesus feeding the five thousand—in Sunday school. One wrote a poem about her favorite miracle, Gideon's fleece.

Here are a few other replies:

"When trying to state my favorite, I couldn't decide. I asked my husband what his favorite was. He came up with one I don't think I've every read before. In 2 Kings 6:1-7, we read about Elisha and how he made the axhead float. My husband said he liked it because 'it's a remarkable incident showing God's concern even about the smallest things in life.' I have to agree."

Joan and Ken Guillaume, Sioux City, Iowa

"It is very difficult to choose a favorite miracle. . . . But I think my favorite is from the Old Testament when Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to have their god burn up their offering to him. How he teased them all day long as they prayed and cut themselves and so on. Then, when it was his turn, and he has his offering totally soaked and then offers a simple request. Ah, the answer from God! Not only did God send fire immediately! He sent fire that burned up the offering; the wet, wet wood; and even the very stones that made up the altar! I really would have liked to see the faces of those people! Wow! I love reading about the power of God. . . .

"I don't know if you want secondhand favorite miracles, but my husband said he liked Jesus turning water into wine. . . . My oldest daughter likes the stopping of the sun in the Old Testament story of Joshua in the battle with the Amorites. . . . My oldest son said when God said, 'Let there be light.' It's been an interesting conversation starter."

Charmaine Greanya, Burton, Michigan

Thank you for your answers. Watch for more Potluck polls in the future.

CHRISTIAN! estate planning

How to reflect the Christian values adopted throughout life even at life's end. Gerald G. Heckmann

“I want to give it all to the Lord and all to the kids. Can I do that?” he asked. When I said that he could, he was excited to learn the details.

Down the road the elderly couple acknowledged, “We have three kids and Jesus in our family. What’s the best way to give Jesus’ share to the church?” Here was another dramatic witness to the values by which this family had worked, played, and worshiped.

God’s people want to be good managers, but they seldom understand their options. For many, a Christian estate plan helps them manage what the Lord has given them.

A preamble

What constitutes a good Christian estate plan? It reflects the values a Christian adopted throughout life—the same values he or she wants to confess even at life’s end. A Christian estate plan begins with a preamble that sets down personal beliefs and principles. A preamble can be the source of comfort for the widow of a Christian husband. She can return to the confession and be reassured that her husband died as a confessing believing Christian. He is with the Lord in the glories of heaven. The preamble can serve as a witness to friends and neighbors in the community. I’ve seen it quoted in the obituary.

Thinking through the options

But it’s more than a preamble. It finally comes down to deciding how to distribute assets at the end of our earthly journey. Most people are not aware of all the challenges and opportunities. For example, someone may not have considered the tax liabilities on IRAs, annuities, 401Ks, and other tax deferred dollars. I have met many who desire that 25 percent of their estate should go to their church. Yet the tax liabilities may reduce the amount to less than 10 percent because they simply did not consider everything.

Every Christian steward understands the need to “Render unto Caesar.” We must pay taxes; it’s our

Christian responsibility. But we can make use of existing laws to minimize our taxes and divert more money to our families and the work of the Lord. Many have no idea of their tax liability as they go home to heaven. The deferred taxes accumulating in retirement accounts can result in taxes for heirs. Yet for little or no cost, those dollars can be diverted from taxes to ministry.

Why do people use percentages in their estate planning? As one gentleman said recently, “Job knew it best, ‘The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh.’ I don’t know his plan for my life, but I want to know that my final tithe will be made.” A fine sentiment. Will it happen? Only if the plan covers all the blessings the Lord is asking you to manage.

God also tells us to provide for our families (1 Timothy 5:8). But our obligations to our families diminish as our children develop their own talents, serve their Creator, and earn their own livelihood. The effective Christian estate plan recognizes those responsibilities and the need for change. Then when the nest is empty, there is more flexibility to respond to the Savior’s direction, “Go and make disciples of all nations.”

Through an effective Christian estate plan, your family can be helped and the gospel proclaimed here on earth after the Lord calls you home.

Gerry Heckmann, a WELS deferred Christian giving counselor, is a member at St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wisconsin.

This is the last of a four-part series on stewardship.

Is your plan up to date?

Every time Congress meets, laws are changed. Your family and your estate change every day. Is your plan reflecting his changeless love for you? Call 1-800-827-5482 for help and answers. A Christian giving counselor can help you review your estate plan without cost.

The very first shame of God's people—nakedness—will be forever ushered away as we step into our eternal clothes.

Eric S. Hartzell

NAKED & EXPOSED

Naked. Not many want to write about the topic because it's . . . well, it's embarrassing. Even the word is embarrassing and scary. People don't want to get caught naked. It might even be the topic of recurring nightmares. Parents don't want their children running around the yard naked. The young man who fled naked on the night Jesus was betrayed wasn't having his best day either. People might even get uncomfortable with naked truth.

Physical clothes

But God talks about nakedness. He describes it. And he allows our imaginations to play themselves out on the concept. There it is. Fifty-six short verses into the Bible, we read the word, "naked." "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame" (Genesis 2:25). The word "naked" appears twice more in chapter three.

It is hard to imagine the fact that there could be a time when we would be naked and not be ashamed. Who could feel comfortable when naked? Even though there are nudist colonies, most people still think of them as aberrations . . . and strange aberrations at that. Who can happily stand the thought of being exposed?

It was sin that made Adam feel uncovered and bare before God. God's law working on Adam's heart made him say to his Maker,

"I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid" (Genesis 3:10).

One problem with nakedness is that we can't hide behind anything, and we are uncomfortable having people see that. Billion-dollar cosmetic and clothing industries exist and prosper on the fact that people aren't happy with their naked selves. But this is what God sees all the time. This is the way he who knows all sees and knows us.

He made clothes for Adam and Eve so they wouldn't have to be naked in this world. "The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21).

Eternal clothes

But there was even better clothing offered these wearers of designer leather. This Fashioner of Garments had in mind special clothing for heaven. The apostle John poses a question and provides the answer: "Then one of the elders asked me, 'These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?' I answered, 'Sir you know.' And he said, 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb'" (Revelation 7:13,14).

"Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear" (Revelation 19:8).

The "her" is us! We are the bride spoken of in Revelation. This is the time of our wedding to the Lamb. We need clothes! And God gives them. Clean white clothing. Never was anyone better dressed. Never was anyone more comfortable. Never was anyone less worried about nakedness with clothes like these.

With judgment day getting closer, the danger of impending nakedness looms. Jesus himself warns us, "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed" (Revelation 16:15). When that day does come with its trumpet blast, we will be reaching for our clothes, our fine clothes bright and clean. And those clothes will be there!

The very first shame of God's people—nakedness—will be forever ushered away as we step into our eternal clothes.

"When he shall come with trumpet sound,

"Oh, may I then in him be found,
"Clothed in his righteousness alone" (*Christian Worship* 382:4).

Eric Hartzell is pastor at Cross and Crown, Georgetown, Texas.

Proclaiming Christ



It was a slow registration day. After six hours, only five people had signed up for English classes. It was difficult to hide our disappointment. We had spent the entire week handing out more than 5,000 flyers, putting up posters, and inviting people to come. Now, with only two hours of registration remaining, we wondered if this “free English classes” idea was worth our time.

Ryan Cortright, one of the teachers, went outside to survey the scene. He quickly discovered part of the problem. A large truck had parked in front of our storefront. No one could see the sign offering free English classes. We looked around for the owner of the truck, but could not find him. Chances for more students signing up looked pretty slim.

For a few minutes, we fretted about what to do. Then we came up with an idea. The flatbed of the truck was empty. We could climb into the back of the truck. Standing there, we could hold the sign up high. That way, the traffic along the busy street and the people walking by would see our advertisement.

As the afternoon wore on, we took turns standing in the back of the truck and holding up the sign. Some cars zoomed past us. Others slowed down to stare at the blonde Americans. But a fair number of people did stop and sign up for classes.

My turn for sign holding came. As I stood displaying our advertisement, one couple walked past me. They crossed the street. When they reached the other side, the woman

looked back at me. She nudged the man next to her and pointed to the sign. They exchanged a few words and then walked toward me. They both signed up for English classes. On their way out, the woman thanked me. “If it hadn’t been for the sign you were holding in the back of the truck, we wouldn’t have noticed or stopped by,” she remarked.

Meeting people in the community

Why did we stand in the back of a truck and wave a sign? Simply put, we wanted to meet people in the community. Our goal was to build relationships with those that we might not otherwise meet. We were looking for a chance to serve as a bridge, as a way that God could reach others with his saving gospel.

What can we do to meet people that we

in the community

Rachel Hartman

Peter gives a deeper reason for sign holding. He describes who we are and what our purpose is. He states: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

God chose us to be his own. What a comforting thought! We did not come to him; rather, he came to us. Peter calls us a "royal priesthood." Through Jesus, we have been made priests. We serve our king. We are a "holy nation," set apart by God from the unbelieving world. He bought us with the precious blood of Christ. Now we are his. We belong to God.

changing hearts

God gave us these titles because we have a special purpose. This purpose is to "declare God's praises." We want to tell others about God's plan of salvation. We look for ways to share this precious message with others who have not heard it.

As the English program continued, we watched God change hearts. The sign on the first registration day brought in students. Soon we learned the names of the one particular couple that had stopped because of the sign: Mayté and Arturo. They lived only two blocks from the mission. When Missionary Mike Hartman began Bible classes in the evening, they were among the first to sign up. After a few Bible classes, Mayté started to come to church on Sundays.

Ten months after that first encounter with the English sign, Mayté was confirmed. As she expressed her faith in front of the others attending the service, tears

welled in my eyes. My mind's eye flashed back to the day when Mayté signed up for classes. Then it flickered to numerous discussion-filled Bible classes. When I again focused on the scene in the front of the church, Mayté had turned to face the congregation. Her lips were parted in a huge smile. To watch the Holy Spirit at work on Mayté during the last months had been a humbling, awe-inspiring experience. I knew that she had not come to faith by our own doing. Rather, it was God who had planted us there and used us to bring Mayté to the saving faith in her Savior.

God continued his work through Mayté. He opened her heart, and, as she grew in faith, she began to be a witness to others. At a Christmas party in December, I overheard her talking to a guest. "Have you seen the mission *Jesús Pan de Vida* (Jesus Bread of Life)?" she asked. "I go there on Sundays. You should come, too."

In February 2006, Mayté took another step. She opened her home one evening every week. She invited friends and family members to come. Missionary Hartman and seminary student Ángel Sanabria began holding Bible information classes at Mayté's house. More contacts have been made through these classes.

English classes were held in Torreón, Mexico, for just one year. They started in January 2005 and ended in December. After a slow start, the classes began to fill with students. During the year, more than 300 contacts were made. Additionally, the mission established a presence in the community. It became known as an active church body.

Building relationships

Why English? We knew that many people in the area surrounding the mission wanted to learn the language. By offering English classes, we built relationships with people that we would otherwise not have met. Throughout the year, new faces walked through the mission's doors.

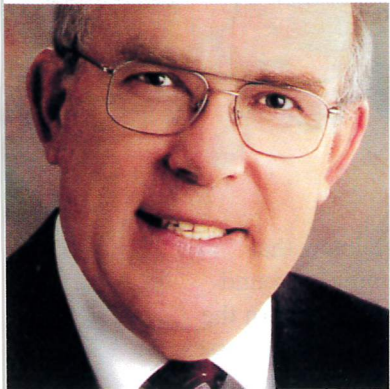
English classes do not have to be the evangelism tool in every place. Perhaps you live in a community that has different needs. The key is to ask: What can we do to meet people that we otherwise would not get a chance to know?

At the mission in Torreón, English classes have ended. But the evangelism efforts remain strong. In February 2006, the mission began offering free music lessons. Members of the congregation teach piano and guitar classes on Saturdays. As a result, more new faces have entered the mission. More contacts have been made. This opens another door for witnessing opportunities.

God has called us to be his own. He equips us with the knowledge of who we are. He gives us the desire to declare his praises to others. Whether it be through signs, classes, or other methods, we can use the gifts God has granted us to proclaim Christ in the community.

Rachel Hartman serves with her husband, Missionary Mike Hartman, in Torreón, Mexico.

otherwise would not get a chance to know?



Carl R. Lenz

Wedding guests and more

June, traditionally, is a premier month for weddings. If you, or someone you know, will not be attending a wedding in June, you may not know many people.

Weddings, whatever the month, are great opportunities for social interaction. It would be hard to imagine a wedding where the guests did not freely converse with one another. Wedding guests usually know at least one person at the wedding—the bride or groom. Complete strangers rarely would be invited wedding guests.

And so, generally speaking, there's a lot of conversation at a wedding celebration. People don't seem to be at a loss to know what to say to each other. With the happy occasion in mind, words just bubble to the surface. Conversation is almost non-stop.

Why is it, then, that there is often so much silence when it comes to every member being a missionary?

"You've lost me! What's the connection? Weren't we talking about weddings? What do weddings have to do with every member being a missionary?"

I'll admit it. I'm straining a bit myself to make the connection. But, in reality, not all that much. The Scriptures call us—every one of us redeemed by Jesus' blood—the bride of Christ. It further calls those "blessed . . . who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9).

In Old Testament days already, marriage was a picture of the special relationship between God and his people. Unfortunately, far too often in those ancient days, God spoke about the unfaithfulness of the bride, the people of God, to the marriage vows.

It won't take long to catalog our own unfaithfulness to our heavenly Bridegroom either. We can take any one of

the Ten Commandments, and it wouldn't be long before our unfaithfulness could be established. Because of our spiritual adultery, our sinfulness, our heavenly Bridegroom would be perfectly just in "divorcing" us and separating us from him forever.

Even if that's what shows on the pictures of our wedding with Christ, when the pictures of our marriage to Christ are finally printed in the album, there's quite another sight. The bride, a picture of all believers, is beautifully dressed, all in white. White symbolizes how we all can stand before God, dressed in the wedding garments Jesus, our Bridegroom, provides through cleansing us from our sins by the richness of his blood shed for us.

Sometimes a young couple, considerate of their own or their parent's limited financial means, keep their invited wedding guests to a bare minimum. That's not necessary here! Our Bridegroom possesses inexhaustible resources. He's already paid for wedding garments for everyone and so, through us, extends a wedding invitation to all.

Just like an earthly wedding celebration, it is going to be a joyous celebration. It shouldn't be hard to talk about it already. Just like an earthly wedding, most of us know what to say, don't we? Each of us knows enough about the wedding supper of the Lamb and what it takes to be part of it. It shouldn't be hard then to invite others to it? When the heavenly Bridegroom makes every one of us not only a wedding guest but also a missionary, he desires all of us to extend his heavenly wedding invitation to others.

With true wedding joy, rejoice that God made you a wedding guest. Don't you know someone you could invite to the wedding supper of the Lamb?



I rejoice

when you stand firm
in the Lord

Philippians 3:17–4:1

^{3:17}Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. ¹⁸For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. ^{4:1}Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

Despite all the distractions and temptations, we rejoice when our fellow Christians remain faithful to the Lord.

Paul E. Zell

Though only three of Paul's letters (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus) are called "pastoral epistles," all 13 of them reveal a pastor's heart. They show how Paul was on his guard when the sheep of his flock were threatened. How he was uneasy when they were troubled. How he gave thanks when they were safe. And as his epistle to the Philippians so vividly illustrates, how he rejoiced when they stood firm in the Lord.

Mindful of your heavenly citizenship

Philippi was a Roman colony settled by veterans of Caesar's wars. They dressed like Romans, spoke Latin, and enjoyed legal privileges as Roman citizens. They even indulged in the lifestyle for which Romans were notorious, bragging about their gluttony, greed, drunkenness, and sexual exploits. "Their mind [was] on earthly things."

The apostle wept as he wrote this passage, fearful that these "enemies of the cross of Christ" would mislead the faithful. "Their destiny is destruction," he warned the believers . . . but our citizenship is in heaven." There our loving King knows each of us by name. He assures our right to his protection. He rules all things for our benefit and is pleased when we behave decently.

You and I dare not follow the citizens of this world. While "their glory is in their shame," our glory is in Christ our King. Thankfully he gives us many fine examples to follow: fathers, mothers, grandparents, pastors, teachers, and fellow members of a congregation often provide a godly pattern. Mindful of our heavenly citizenship, you and I wisely mimic their honorable ways.

Hopeful of your glorious transformation

At the same time we who continue to struggle against sin eagerly wait for the Savior. Jesus died once on the cross. He rose from the grave, and he ascended into heaven to prepare that kingdom for us. "This same Jesus . . . will come back," the two angels told his disciples, "in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

Paul made sure the Philippians knew what Jesus will do on that Last Day. "By the power that enables him to bring everything under his control," he wrote, "[Jesus] will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

Imagine that. All disabilities corrected. All illnesses healed. All physical frustrations removed. And that's not even the best part of this transformation. When he returns, the Savior will make us gloriously holy just as he is. That raucous old Adam will be silenced forever. There will be no more sin within us or around us. Death, mourning, crying and pain will be gone (Revelation 21:4).

Stand firm, dear friend. To the joy of the apostle Paul and many other saints who have a pastoral heart, "stand firm in the Lord."

Contributing editor Paul Zell, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Grace, Milwaukee.



A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dan Brown".

Da Vinci, Judas, and Jesus

In April, Anchor Books shipped 5.7 million copies of one book to bookstores throughout the United States—*The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown. The publisher planned to sell those copies because the movie based on the book was released on May 19. They believed that sales of the book will jump again once people head to the theaters. We've all seen the ads by now. Perhaps you've even paid your admission price to see it.

But don't believe everything you see and hear in the movie or the book. Even if Dan Brown claims that everything is the truth, it's still a book of imagination and a fabrication. No reputable scholar, either Christian or secular, supports Brown's claim that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and that the Christian church suppressed the truth through thousands of years. It just makes for an interesting story.

I know that many have expressed outrage at the book and its main theme. I've been disturbed too at how the book makes the truth of God some sinister plot. But it's just another challenge to God's truth. Such challenges have come from the beginning. After all Satan painted God as one who suppressed the truth about the forbidden fruit. He suggested to Eve that God was holding something back from her. The truth—according to the sly serpent—was that the fruit would make her wise and its power would make her like God. It didn't.

Other challenges persist. Think for a moment about another religious news story. The National Geographic Channel aired a special on *The Gospel of Judas*. The special traced the discovery of an ancient text that was suppressed by the church. The promos for the telecast claimed that it was "one of the most significant biblical finds in the past century." That will get your attention even

if you don't know anything about the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in 1947.

What's so special? Well, the manuscript claims that Jesus asked Judas to betray him so he could be released from his body. It appears to be an authentic ancient manuscript, and some would want you to believe that it distorts the Bible's account.

But many ancient manuscripts circulated in the early Christian church. They included the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Mary*, as well as *The Gospel of Judas*, and others. Their message was different from the message of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Early Christians rejected them and discarded them. It wasn't suppression but rejection.

You see, the early Christians were faced with challenges to God's truth just as we are. The Holy Spirit led them to cling to a message they could trust—the record of the eyewitnesses of the first century. After all, that's what the New Testament is. The men who wrote the New Testament knew Jesus and the Holy Spirit inspired them. Their writings were treasured by believers, collected, and then passed down to new generations who also treasured them.

So we will hear about all kinds of ideas that are different from what the Scriptures say. For example, a Florida State University scientist published a study that suggested that Jesus didn't actually walk on water. He claims that an unusual combination of water and atmospheric conditions led to the formation of ice. Jesus walked on the ice. Come now. Isn't it amazing what people will choose to believe as long as it's not the Bible?

Like thousands and thousands of believers before me, the Holy Spirit has led me to believe that God loved this foolish and sinful world so much that he sent his Son to rescue it from its own folly and sin. That truth I treasure, but I have to scratch my head in wonder at some of the silly alternatives.



A letter of hope

Randy K. Hunter

Text summary

Submit. Do you bristle at the word? Maybe sense yourself sitting a little taller, puffing up your chest, holding your head up? Submit? Say the word and watch the body language scream, “Says who?” Says God. Sort of takes the wind out of you, doesn’t it? But when God says, “Submit,” he’s not dressing us down like a naughty dog. We’re his children. Better than any earthly father, he knows what’s best for us. He knows the power of a respectful cooperative spirit. Anyone can be slanderous and vindictive about a person in authority; it takes a Christian to acknowledge that God works through governments—even if the party in power isn’t yours. Anyone can work for a kind and generous boss; it takes a Christian to work cheerfully for a mean one. Peter does more than just tell us how to act; that much we could get from a self-help book. Peter brings us back to the cross of Jesus. After he lived his perfect life, he bore our sins in his body on the cross. His wounds have healed us. We can trust him. We can even let others have their way. Our Shepherd will take care of us. Guaranteed.

Scripture to read: 1 Peter 2:13-25

Questions for personal study

- Submission is a Christian virtue. What makes that difficult for you?
- In Christ, Christians are free. Christians are also servants of God. Describe some of the results of our freedom. Then describe some of the results of being a servant of God.
- When God draws a line in the sand, we want to step over it. The history of God’s people proves it. Give evidence from your own life that also proves it.
- One purpose of a submissive spirit is to “silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.” Think of an example you’ve seen.
- “A Christian is like a tea bag. You don’t know what he’s like until you put him in hot water.” Can you think of an example?
- Imagine you were suffering like the original recipients of this letter; hounded and hunted by the government. What would vs. 15 mean to you?

Questions for group study

- One definition for submit is “to graciously allow something to go someone else’s way instead of insisting on your own way.” Contrast that definition with other definitions: doormat, abused, inferior, or mindlessly compliant.

- Some translations use the word “yield” for the word the NIV translates as “submit.” Read 2:13, 2:18, and 3:1, substituting the word “yield” for “submit.” List advantages for both words.
- The government in Peter’s day was violently opposed to Christianity. What makes it difficult for us to submit to the government? What makes it easy?
- We don’t have a king or emperor. We have a president, congress, judges, governor, police force, etc. Apply vs. 13-17 to these people.
- Christians who want to submit to their employers may face the dilemma of being asked or told to do something unethical or illegal. How have you or someone you know responded?
- Our inspiration for submission comes from Jesus. List as many ways as you can that Jesus submitted to the Father.
- Explain the phrase in vs. 24: we “die to sins and live for righteousness.”

Randy Hunter is pastor at St. Andrew, Middleton, Wisconsin.

*This is the sixth article in a 12-part Bible study. Find this article and possible answers online. Go to www.wels.net/jumpword/fic, and click on **A letter of hope**. Answers and tips for parents with small children will be available online after June 5.*

A Flying Start

Jennifer G. Knoblock

ALMOST 20 YEARS AGO, ROBERT FULGHUM PUBLISHED THE BESTSELLING BOOK, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. In its pages, Fulghum claimed that at an early age, he learned everything he needed to know about how to live a meaningful life. "Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people." And so on. Charming, sweet, simple. We don't believe it for a minute.

Savvy adults of the 21st century know that no child will get far in life armed only with the knowledge and life-skills gained in kindergarten. It has become cliché to say we live in an information age in a rapidly changing world. We want our children to succeed in these "uncertain times." How do we do that?

Insist on the highest educational standards, of course. Make sure that every school day is jammed with reading, writing, math, science, and computer literacy. Fill those after-school hours with fine arts lessons and sports. If Suzy can get a basketball scholarship, we'll be able to send her to the best college. If Joey practices piano two hours every night, he'll surely make it to Carnegie Hall. It all starts in those earliest years. If our kids don't have a flying start by kindergarten, they'll never catch up.

Sounds reasonable. Am I forgetting anything?

My daughter finished kindergarten three years ago. Our first experience with a WELS Lutheran elementary school had been beyond our dreams. My husband and I entered the auditorium and saw everything in place: folding metal chairs, balloons, white-frosted cake, and potted geraniums. On stage, 20 shining faces and squirming bottoms. I watched and waited, eager for proof that my first-born was well on her way to becoming an artist, U.S. President, or both.

Most of the ceremony was ordinary enough. The children sang cute songs. Friends still remind me of the number in which my daughter waltzed across the stage with a paper version of "Katalina Matalina." One by one the kindergartners shook the principal's hand and received their "diplomas." Smiles, laughter, flash photography.

So what left me gaping in wonder and awe? Twenty young children reciting Scripture in unison. Kindergartners proclaiming God's word with joy. Three years later, the memory still makes me glow. A flying start, indeed.

My son finished kindergarten this spring. We didn't have a graduation ceremony, but that's okay. I knew that during his kindergarten year, my son had blossomed as a reader, learned to count money and tell time, memorized any number of cute songs and jokes. (What's a monkey's favorite lunchtime snack? Chocolate-chimp cookies.) He also learned more than 60 Bible stories and Scripture passages. He learned to say the Lord's Prayer with us in church. He learned that Jesus died for him. I believe that someday he'll be a terrific architect, or maybe a Lego-designing astronaut. And something more.

No matter what paths our children take in life, no matter which schools they attend, or how many ceremonies they sit through, there is one final graduation to experience. It's called judgment day. On that day, God willing, our children will be able to say, "I believe that Jesus Christ is my Savior. He died for the remission of all my sins. Now I will be with him forever."

Our children's knowledge of their Savior won't guarantee success in this life. But wherever they learn the saving truth—in grade school, Sunday school, or at the dinner table—it is, ultimately, all they need to know.

Jennifer Knoblock is a member at Trinity, Crete, Illinois.

ILLUSTRATION BY AMANDA HALEY

