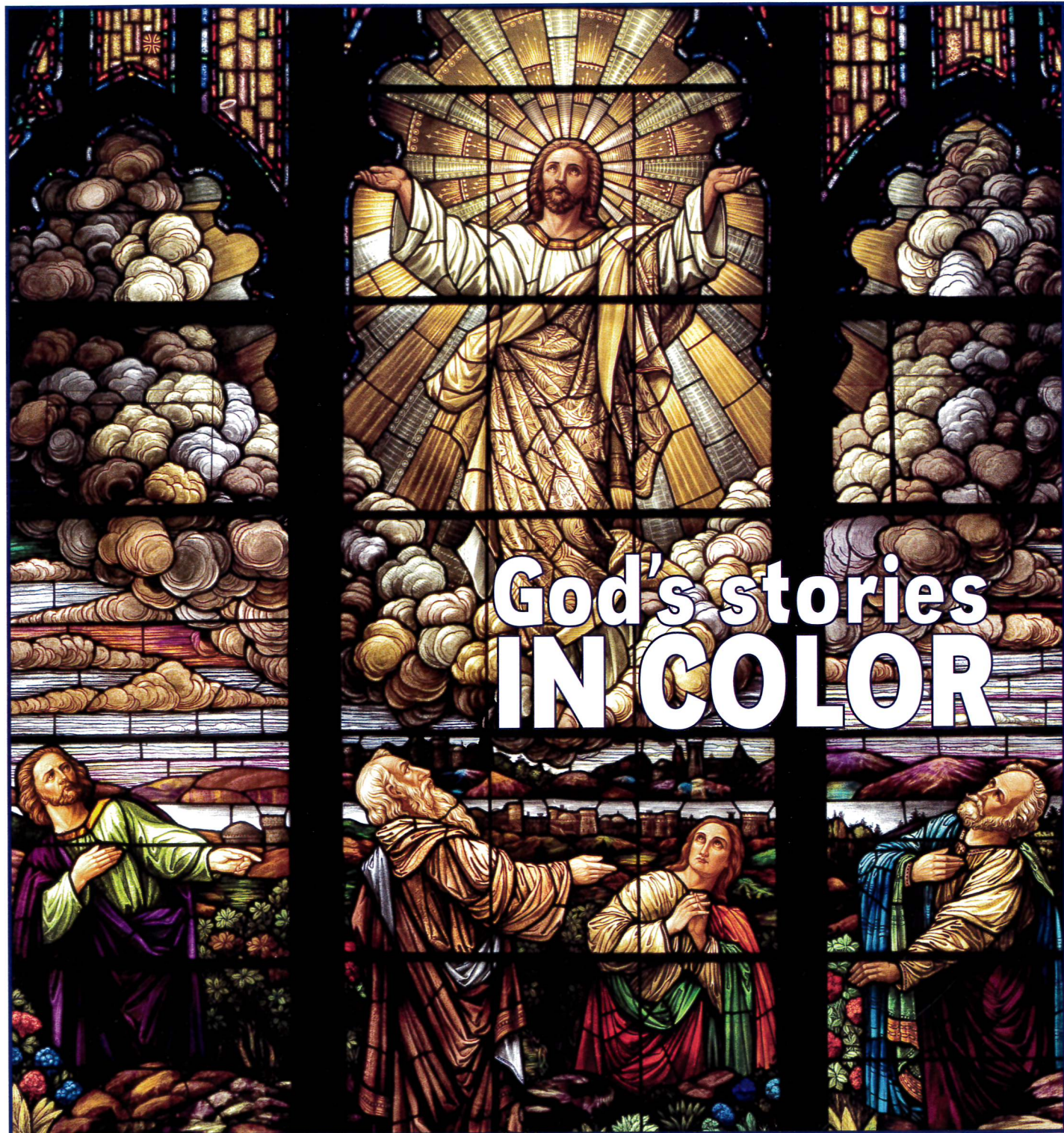


A MESSAGE OF LOVE • LIVING AS JESUS' DISCIPLES

FEBRUARY 2007

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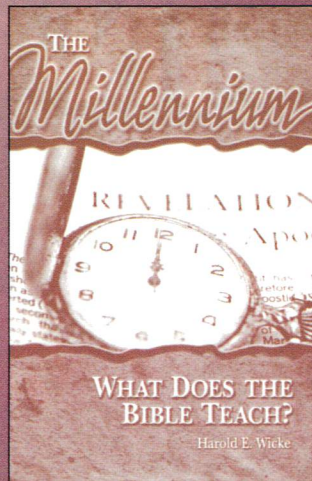


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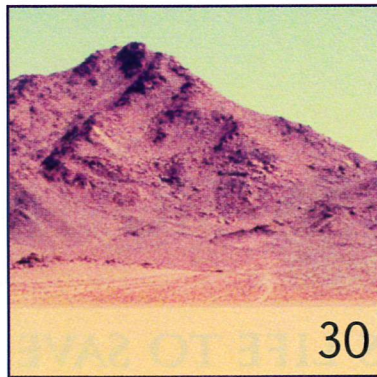
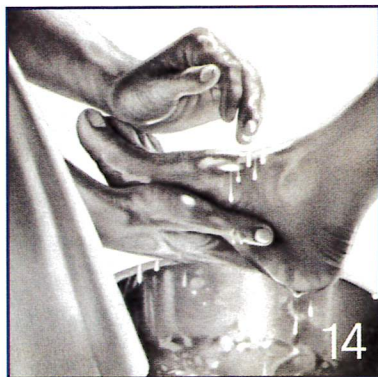
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“**Stained glass is art in the service of the Lord.**”



ROBERT J. KOESTER



**Forward in Christ**

✝ The official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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TO EVERY NATION, TRIBE, LANGUAGE & PEOPLE

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MAY THE LORD OUR GOD  
BE WITH US AS HE WAS  
WITH OUR FATHERS;  
MAY HE NEVER LEAVE US  
NOR FORSAKE US.

1 Kings 8:57

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FEBRUARY

**WHAT'S INSIDE** by Julie Wietzke

"Proclaim Peace through Jesus" should be a familiar phrase to you. It has been our synod's theme for the past three and a half years. Throughout these years, Forward in Christ has discussed North American outreach, including various articles on how every church is a mission, how every soul is a treasure, and how every member is a missionary. This month, Dr. John Lawrenz's article, "It's not about me" (p. 12), emphasizes how you can be a missionary in all circumstances of your life.

Now the fourth phase—Every Life for Christ—is about to begin. (Read more about this phase on p. 22.) This phase focuses on how everything we do in our day-to-day lives can point to Jesus. To illustrate this point, two new series start this month. One discusses vocation—how each Christian has a call from God to be his full-time disciples (p. 28). The other looks back at lesser-known Christians from the past and how they served Jesus in their daily lives (p. 29)

We at Forward in Christ hope that each issue helps you see the peace that you have with God through his son, Jesus. We also hope that the articles motivate you to share that peace with everyone around you.

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**DYING BEFORE ENTERING HEAVEN**

I found Prof. Gurgel's explanation to the question about why God would take a prophet to heaven without first experiencing death to be enlightening [Dec. 2006].

As I read through his explanation I pondered the question and have another opinion on why God may have used this situation for the benefit of his people who have lived and are living today. In the transfiguration of Matthew 17, Elijah and Moses were seen talking with Jesus. I see this as a tremendous comfort to believers who see their fellow Christians taken to heaven through death. I believe this incident solidifies the belief that at death our body, only, is relegated to the grave. The spirit of the believer is alive in heaven waiting for the final day of Jesus' return. Elijah was taken to heaven alive and Moses died, and yet both are seen talking to Jesus. What a comfort this should bring to Christians as they deal with the death of fellow believers. Although the believers died and their bodies rest in the grave, their spirits are alive in heaven.

Romans 14:8 states, "If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord." So even in death believers are with the Lord, as I believe the transfiguration starkly and beautifully exemplifies.

*Dave Dahlke  
Port Orchard, Washington*

**SYNODICAL SCHOOLS' SERIES**

Over the last few months it's been encouraging to read the many stories written by and about teachers who have elected to attend Martin Luther College (MLC) for their training in education. We should be careful, however, not to forget those teachers who spent their college and university years at other institutions. The Holy Spirit has called many of those people to serve in our churches and schools as well. With all of the recent articles, it almost

seems that the only path to service as a teacher in WELS is through MLC. We should be encouraging all of our members, both those at MLC and those at other colleges and universities, to think about how they can serve and to pray for opportunities and guidance.

*Nate Amundson  
Onalaska, Wisconsin*

In his article on the future of our synodical schools [Dec. 2006], Peter Kruschel began by looking toward our Lord's return, which was very comforting. From there he went on to explain the system of education with which God has blessed us for 143 years. As he did, I was struck by the incarnational nature of these schools. For a century and a half, students traveled long distances by trains, automobiles, and planes to meet with professors—not in chat rooms or on blogs, but face to face—just the way we assume their respective ministries would be carried out.

But as the article began focusing on the future, I sensed that I should keep my mind open for something less incarnational, perhaps more Orwellian. I have nothing against distance learning, Smartboards or PowerPoint in themselves. But I sensed that in the face of a financial challenge, technology would be considerably cheaper than hiring flesh-and-blood professors and maintaining campuses. The thought of it sends an escatological chill—of synodical proportions—down my spine.

Nevertheless, we were reassured that God is with us. Yes he is. And at great personal expense, he came to us—in the flesh. And as such he is with us always. Not a bad precedent there.

*Wayne A. Laitinen  
New Ulm, Minnesota*

**PARENTS' RESPONSIBILITIES**

In answer to Katrina Meinel's letter [Nov. 2006], stating that she "doesn't think a person can afford not to send

a child to a Lutheran high school," I ask, who is responsible for a child's upbringing and religious training: the school or the parents? In areas outside Wisconsin, the majority of Lutherans do not attend WELS schools. Yet our churches are full of Christians, young and old, who are, I will venture to say, better able to communicate their beliefs to the non-Christian than someone who has known nothing but the shelter of the WELS educational system.

The parents are ultimately responsible for bringing up a child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, not the schools. It is true that the parents need to daily discuss what happens at public school and what is being taught as "truth," but this offers an ideal opportunity to teach the child how our beliefs differ from others'. If Meinel's elementary school classmates no longer attend church, I would not say the exposure to public school is the reason, but perhaps the lack of active involvement by the parents.

*Jan Kolva  
Haymarket, Virginia*

**GIVING THANKS**

I appreciated John Braun's editorial in the November issue. It is easy to thank and praise God when he answers our prayers as we want him to or as we expect him to. Braun's editorial speaks of recognizing or anticipating blessings even when the things the Lord does are not in line with our way of thinking or our desires. That's total trust! God grant us such maturity in our relationship with him.

*Harold R. Johne  
Fife Lake, Michigan*

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*.

# When the mess is of your making

*Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" Matthew 14:29-31*

Stephen H. Geiger

**“Y**ou made the mess. You need to clean it up.”

These words are familiar to the ears of many children. Toys choke a bedroom. Game pieces cover a floor. Play-Doh creations fill a kitchen table. Those responsible are told to clean up their clutter.

But what if a child can't clean up a particular mess? What if the “mess” is something far more serious than a board game not put away? What if a Christian, young or old, commits a sin that creates a problem seemingly impossible to fix?

## **Our sin can make a mess of our lives**

Some of the hurt that a Christian experiences is hurt that comes without any obvious connection to something specific we've done wrong. A grandmother contracts cancer. A teenager loses a friend when speaking up for the Lord. One longing for a godly spouse endures loneliness.

In such suffering, we hold to promises. God works for the good of his children. If God is for us, who can be against us? The Lord helps us when bad things happen to us.

But what about those situations when we have brought trouble upon ourselves? What if we were unfaithful to our spouse and now are living alone? What if we are so filled with worry and now can't sleep? What if we lost our temper and now have lost a friend?

## **What if we are drowning, and it is all our fault?**

Peter had no one else to blame.

There is no report of fellow disciples trying to distract him as he walked on water. There is no evidence of fish nibbling his toes, taking his focus away from the Almighty. There was no divine power outage.

Peter was sinking because Peter doubted. Peter was sinking because Peter saw the wind and forgot his Savior. Peter was sinking because Peter sinned.

When we are in trouble because of our sin, we may understand so clearly that we deserve no help from the Lord—so quickly that we may become afraid. We know our evil. We feel the guilt. We feel all alone. We've treated like an enemy the only one who can help. We're drowning.

## **Jesus is our friend when we're drowning**

Yet as Jesus stands so close, is there something inside us that almost tries to ignore that he is there? Pride? Does the devil, at moments when our life seems in ruin, offer us the empty “victory” of imagining that somehow we will fix our troubled future by ourselves? Despair? Does Satan insist, “You've caused damage so great that there's no way the Lord can bring you peace?”

Let us see these suggestions as deceptions. Let us hear from Peter words that are for our lips as well: “Lord, save me.”



“Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.”

Your trouble may be of your own making. But Jesus is a friend to those drowning because of their own sin.

He reaches out his hand to you.

The hand of the Lord that rescued Peter was the hand later stretched to receive a nail. The hand that rescued Peter was a hand later displayed to show resurrection victory. The hand that rescued Peter was a hand later raised in blessing as the Lord ascended to the right hand of his Father.

His hand is the hand that holds you even when the mess is of your own making.

*Contributing editor Stephen Geiger, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Risen Savior, Milwaukee.*

# A high-stakes encounter

Thomas J. Jeske

The two had known each other a long time. The one said to his rival, “You came here for a kingdom. All this I will give you.” The prince of this world then led Jesus up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. “Here it is. Take it.”

The person with Satan appeared to be a far cry from a king. He’d been exposed by day to the scorching sun and by night to the cold of these shadowlands. Only in his memory were pictures of home; this was a world with unending lines of men, women, and children crying for help. Even worse, Satan’s goal from Eden onward had been to eliminate this individual. So the devil worked his plan.

He might have said, “All by yourself . . . no followers, no money, no organization. How do you hope to influence people? Your father doesn’t seem to be taking very good care of you. Permit me to show you some other possibilities.”

So for the moment, flags and banners replaced Jesus’ flapping robe. Burned rocks of the wilderness of Judea became cut marble and inlaid wood. Sounds of court musicians replaced a keening wind. Royal kitchens dispensed aromas to his pinching stomach. Here the rustle of silk, there a tingle of fur. Gold coins spit out into boxes. The scent and voices of princesses mocked his loneliness. Flashes of bronze from rank on rank on rank of armor-clad soldiers illuminated Jesus’ empty hands. “Look, Son of God, here is art and color and organization and accomplishment . . . justice and music and order and activity and science and scholarship. You want a kingdom, Jesus? Take it from my hand. Right here, right now.

“Only avoid the cross.”

Some people comment on this episode as if Satan’s approach was clumsy and transparent. Was Satan’s temptation a feeble grab at power?

Was it easy for Christ to contend with the idea that there might be a second way to royalty and glory besides yielding to his Father’s will? Was Satan’s temptation so pitifully obvious, subtle like a garish carnival midway is subtle? Or was this the most difficult obedience of all, that to be the Son of the Father means to wait upon the Father’s will and words?

Jesus was learning obedience by what he suffered (c.f. Hebrews 5:8). The only thing he possessed to defend himself were words from the Old Testament. He’d heard these and memorized these as a boy. A misstep now on this very high mountain meant calamity for all humanity. Impatience here meant the rapid unraveling of the promise the Father made in Eden, to gather to himself a family in spite of Satan.

In the other two temptations related in Matthew 4 and Luke 4, the unclean spirit had taken a swipe at the Father. To paraphrase: “If you’re going to save anyone, Jesus, I suggest you start by eating some food. Isn’t anyone looking out for you?” Satan also disparaged the servant-role he hated as he contemptuously remembered Psalm 91, “He will command his angels concerning you.”

Maybe the devil’s “If you are the Son of God” was not so much a denial of the fact. After all, the combatants both knew it was the truth. Rather, perhaps, “*Since* you are the Son of God. Act. Just avoid the cross.”

It had been the Holy Spirit, who gathers the church, who drove Jesus into the wilderness of Judea for this time of difficult testing: Fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

Jesus was keeping the First Commandment for you, Christian.

**Jesus was learning obedience by what he suffered.**

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





at the foot of the cross. Richard L. Gurgel

## TOPIC: Letting God's love reach out to all sinners

**In an interview in the Observer newspaper's *Music Monthly Magazine*, pop star Elton John comments: "I think religion has always tried to turn hatred toward gay people. Religion promotes the hatred and spite against gays." He added, "From my point of view, I would ban religion completely. Organized religion doesn't seem to work. It turns people into really hateful lemmings, and it's not really compassionate." How do we respond to such statements?**

Would it stun you if I began by admitting that there is a measure of truth in what Elton John said? We human beings love to categorize sin into the mildly offensive (usually ours) and the really awful (usually others). It's convenient to forget that my sins of hidden pride and quiet coveting are just as damnable by nature as the more open and obvious sins of those practicing a gay or lesbian lifestyle. If we carelessly persist in those "hidden" and "quiet" sins of the heart, we will find out just how true that is! We can fool others, but "God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction" (Galatians 6:7,8).

Luther spoke about relinquishing the vain self-deception that we are only "painted sinners." He urged us to face the reality that by nature every one of us can rightly join Paul in the personal confession that of sinners "I am the worst" (1 Timothy 1:15). Grace is grace. My need of it is no lesser or greater than anyone else in this world.

If that two-by-four of arrogant pride isn't daily dislodged from my eyes, I all too easily begin to look down on those I label as "big sinners." That's precisely that kind of "compassionless religion" by which the Pharisees looked down on the "big sinners" of their day. Blind to the rebellious wickedness of their own hearts, they were too proud to reach out to win a fallen brother or sister.

Whenever we allow our religion to be distorted into something other than rejoicing in Christ's compassion, Elton John's words justly strike us!

But, of course, Elton John has missed the purpose of organized religion. In that he's not alone! The purpose of organized religion isn't to affirm my chosen "lifestyle choices" no matter what they may be. It is to bring all sinners to Christ and repentance. It is a travesty of "love" to allow someone to continue in a sin that will finally lead them to an eternity apart from God's love.

What parades in our world under the banner of "tolerance" or "love" doesn't care enough to bother calling another to repentance. If you truly want to find lemmings helping others to rush blindly over a cliff, that's it! Where's the love in permitting someone to continue in what will destroy them forever?

You want to know what love really is? "My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins" (James 5:19,20). That's love. That's the kind of love we know in the Good Shepherd who sought and won us! That's a love that reaches out to all sinners. It's the same kind of tender-hearted, Good Shepherd love that works through the Word to lead us to repentance and joy in forgiveness every day.

That's not lemmings running over the cliff.  
That's sinners rushing into their Savior's arms!

*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/jump/qa](http://www.wels.net/jump/qa), for more questions and answers.

# Window

**We come to worship our Savior with songs and the spoken word. Many of us worship in churches that surround us with stained-glass pictures of God's truth.**

Robert J. Koester

If he tried hard, Jimmie could swish his feet on the church floor, which he was doing when his mother turned and gave him the look. He stopped. But it was five minutes into the sermon, and he had done pretty well that Sunday morning. He turned his head to the right, and his eyes went to the picture he was so familiar with—Jesus standing in the temple with teachers around him. Soon he was there with Jesus. He knew the story from Sunday school. How could Jesus talk about religion with these men? Because he was God, of course. Jesus' mom and dad would soon come into the picture. They should have known he would be in his Father's house. His eyes wandered to symbols higher up on the window. He tried to guess what they meant. "Amen," the pastor said.

It was Joan's turn to clean the church. It had been a long week, and she was tired. It was late Friday afternoon, and the sun was low in the sky. She paused to rest and sat down in a pew. The low light was coming through the stained-glass window, casting a glow on the opposite wall of the church—not a warm glow, for the ascension window was mostly made of deep blue glass. Her eyes went from the ascension window over to the

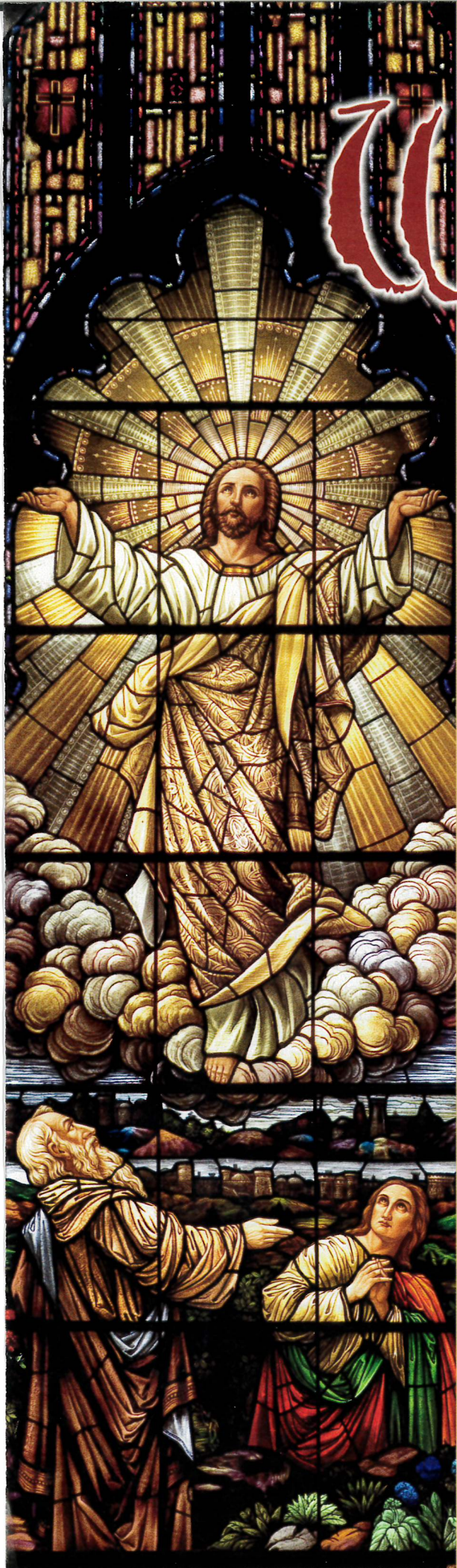
crucifixion window on the other side. She was too tired to think, and so she let the windows do her thinking for her. It was a good end to a long week.

George and Mary were members of a small country church. They had built a new church building 15 years ago because they needed the room. Then, eight years ago the church upgraded the clear glass of the side windows with stained glass. "Okay, George," Mary said. "Tell me what they mean." She pointed at the cross in the crown on the first window. "Jesus suffered so he could be our king," George answered. "Good," said Mary. "Now what about that one?" she asked, pointing to the city on the rock. Their church had been a good place to worship. But putting in those stained-glass windows gave their building something more. A little extra preaching took place there on Sunday morning.

## **The value of stained-glass windows for our spirits**

Stained glass is art in the service of the Lord. An abbot in the ancient church by the name of Abbot Sugar shared Jimmie's, Joan's, Mary's, and George's experience as he stood below the stained glass in his church. Here's how he put it:

Thus sometimes when, because of my delight in the beauty of the house of God, the multicolor loveliness of the [pieces of stained glass] has called me away from worldly cares, and worthy meditation, transporting me from material to immaterial things, has persuaded me to examine the diversity of holy virtues, then I seem to see myself existing on some level, as it were, beyond our earthly one,



# STORIES

neither completely in the baseness of the earth nor completely in the purity of heaven. By the gift of God I can be transported by pictures from this inferior level to that superior one.

Stained glass has been creating a sense of awe in God's people for hundreds of years. Using colored glass to produce pictures goes back to pre-Christian times. The art of stained glass was developed even before it began to be used to create the religious windows we find in the great cathedrals of Europe. Between A.D. 1100 and 1200 a change in church architecture sparked its use on a large scale. Up until then, churches were built of massive stone walls, necessary to hold their massive roofs. These earlier churches had windows, of course, but they were small so as not to weaken the walls.

In the 12th century this changed. A new type of architecture called Gothic architecture was introduced. Large sloping wings were built off the walls on the outside of the church. These wings, called flying buttresses, were like giant "L" brackets you might use to mount bookshelves on your walls. These buttresses took most of the weight of the roof. Walls could now be much lighter and large openings could be created in them for huge windows.

From that point on, some of Europe's best craftsmen and artists spent their entire lives creating the huge stained-glass panels that would rest in church walls. Abbot Sugar oversaw the construction of the first Gothic cathedral of Saint-Denis. Since then up to the time of the Reformation, churches were built with windows designed to give the sanctuary a feel of heaven, of being in God's presence.

## Colored glass instructs God's people

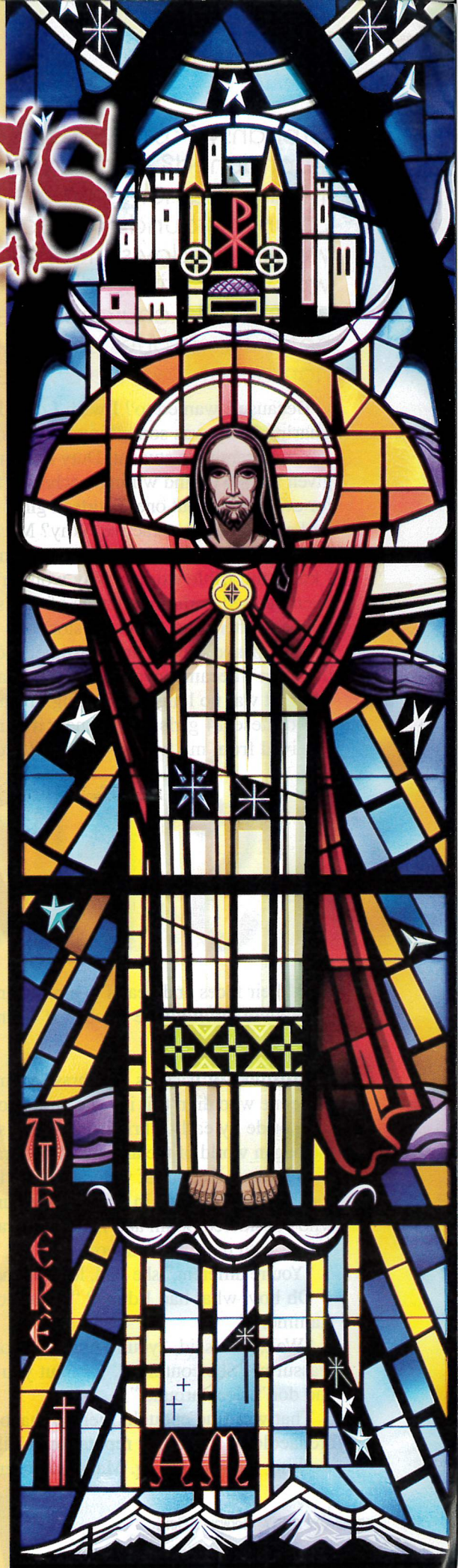
Pictures of Bible stories and symbols of theological truths—hundreds of them packed into the windows of a single church—also instructed the worshippers about God's Word. We can pull a Bible off a shelf and read it anytime we want. But in those days Bibles were chained to library reading tables because they were so scarce and so valuable. And only a few could read a Bible even if they had one. So the artwork in stained glass became important. In the art of the windows, the people could see the stories and theological truths they had heard from their pastors. The walls of the church were the people's Bible. For example, the windows in many churches matched Old Testament predictions of Christ to their fulfillment. On the left wall a picture of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness would be matched on the right wall with a picture of Jesus on the cross, and so on.

We sometimes lose the scope and unity by having to read our Bibles all the way through. The people of that day could easily gain such a perspective by looking at the stained glass in the windows of their churches.

*Robert Koester, an editor at Northwestern Publishing House, is a member at Good Shepherd, West Allis, Wisconsin.*

*Next month: How is stained glass made and what place does it hold in WELS churches.*

The window on the left and on the cover is from St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis. The window on the right is from Mount Lebanon, Milwaukee.



Orphans? Possibly. Abused? Probably. Abandoned? Certainly. Society placed 14 girls in a home on the Milwaukee County grounds 40 years ago. My weekly Sunday school class with them was within driving distance of several dozen WELS churches. These girls were not the only ones placed in a group home. But they were mine to teach.

Because I wanted to? I wish I could say yes. But no. Sharing Jesus was something for missionaries. I was a reluctant seminary student. Duty made me do it. I had been given the job to find willing teachers. I found a classmate for every group but one. Fourteen girls, ages 9 to 12, were, perhaps, the least attractive. Why? My classmates and I had been in an all-male school environment for years! Oh, I knew the Bible stories. Why wouldn't I? My life had been blessed with three levels of Christian education. So week after week I told the stories.

It happened about Christmastime, about halfway through the year. I became aware. And the awareness grew. By spring it was no longer an inkling. It was a certainty. Jesus loved these 14 girls. They knew it. And the love they received from my words—God's Word—radiated back

ents to get a taste of their ancestral roots, and, at the same time get out of the house for the summer. It was a formula for no-holds-barred freedom.

"No, I love my wife and don't need to get high to feel good about myself," I said. It was the beginning of a dialog that moved from sex and drugs to morality and religion. Little by little, week by week, we talked about Jesus. He was, after all, Jewish. He came to save all people. Wendy gave me a present on the last day of the dig. It was a Star of David with a cross in it. Our friendship started about me. But it wasn't about me.

### **Yes, I believe in miracles**

What shakes the nerve of a young pastor? Being ordained but without a congregation? It could. Having no place to worship? It could. Having someone you never met actually read your mind and dredge up uncomfortable things in great detail? That did it! It really happened—the devil knows how. This exposure of the dark corners of memory soon stood in the way of sermon-making, people-serving, and searching for the lost. The zest was gone.

But God sends miracles even when you don't ask. I had once stopped at a house where the resident told me that he had no time for God, but that I should come back for a chat with his wife. My evangelism chairman insisted that I return.

Timidly, reluctantly, I went. This time the wife was home. "What can you tell me about near death experi-

# IT'S NOT ABOUT

from their faces and hearts to a reluctant "missionary." They were teaching the teacher. It wasn't about me!

### **You're different!**

A fish out of water is the phrase Mom used to describe someone who didn't fit in. The outline of a fish was worn with pride by early Christians as they spread out to turn the pagan world of the ancient Mediterranean upside down. Now I was a fish out of water. Married less than a year, I found myself digging in Israel. I was surrounded by people who considered Stalin and Hitler illustrative of all that was wrong with the Christian world.

"You're different," she said, looking me straight in the eye.

Oh boy, what had I done? "What do you mean?" I stammered.

"Well," she said, "you're normal—sort of . . ." That was reassuring. She continued, ". . . but you don't smoke pot and don't sleep around."

That was true enough. Field archaeology, even biblical archaeology, had a bad reputation. College kids were the working crew at the dig. Many had been sent by their par-

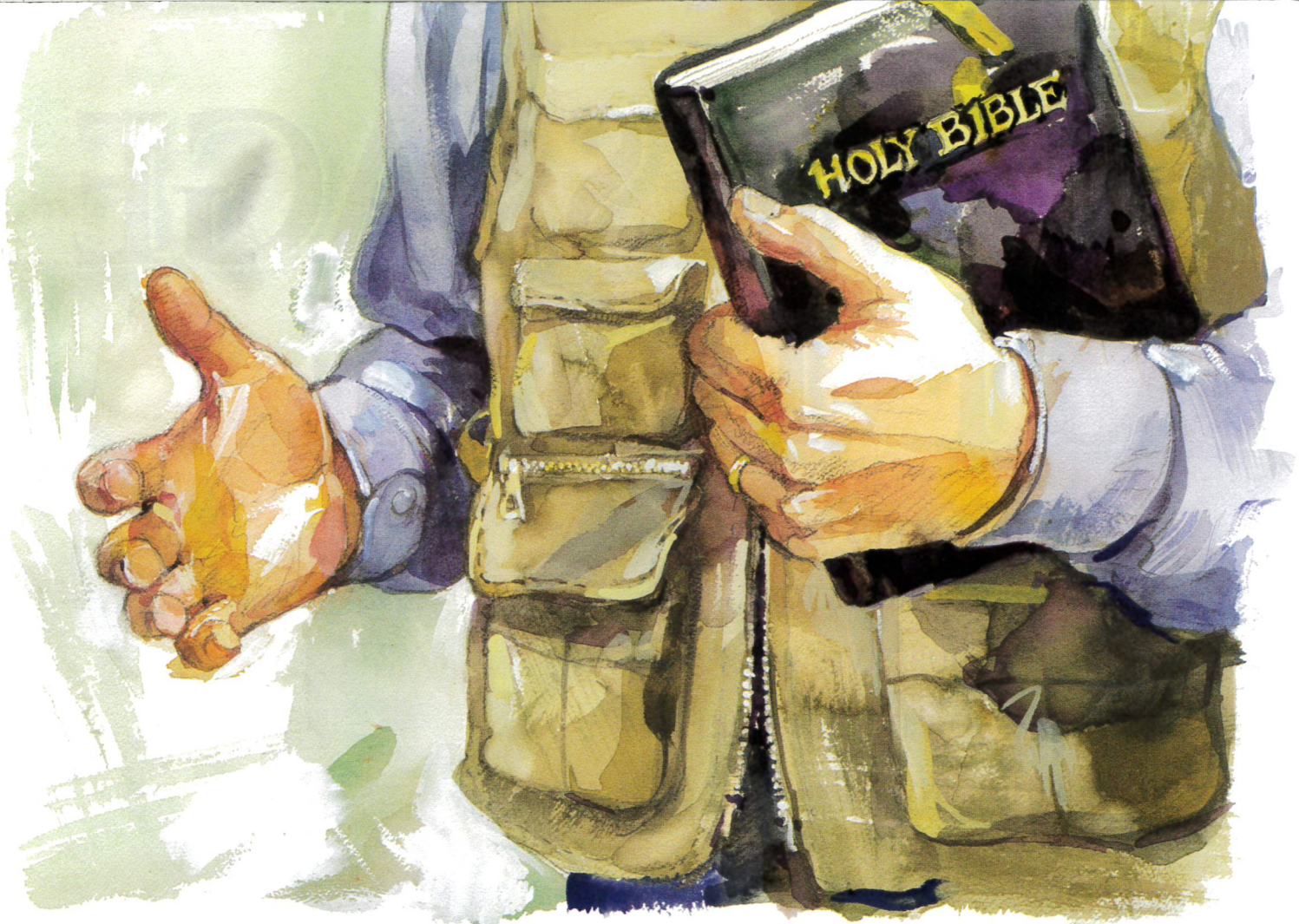
ences?" she asked. Yes, she had a master's degree in religion. No, she had not read the New Testament. But what did I think? Did people actually die and come back and remember "the other side"?

Then it happened. A little girl entered the room. She crawled into my lap, put her tiny arms around my neck, and gave me a kiss. The mother was wide-eyed. Her husband was speechless. The parents hated God because their daughter had never given them love. The child was autistic. It wasn't about me. I told them about Jesus and how his love was perfect. They believed that God had sent me. In time the family joined our church. The girl was baptized. It wasn't about me.

### **Entrusted to the care of Jesus**

Boarding schools can be a place for hard-to-handle kids. The hardest thing for a prep school principal is to return kids to the care of their parents when the Word has had no apparent effect, and a pattern of inappropriate behavior threatens to poison the atmosphere.

Two boys, one under warning for a previous misdeed and



# ME

MAKING A NAME FOR OURSELVES AND ACHIEVING GREAT THINGS FEED OUR EGOS, BUT SHARING JESUS IS NEITHER ABOUT US OR OUR ACHIEVEMENT. IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS.

John C. Lawrenz

the other enticed by the thrill of living dangerously, had toppled a virgin Mary statue in the backyard of an elderly couple in our neighborhood. Police were involved. What to do now? I walked the block several times, praying for wisdom. Both boys had forfeited their right to live in the dormitory. This I knew. I returned the boy under probation to the care of his parents. The other lad found dorm space in my home for half a year. He graduated, has long since married, and become a solid leader in his congregation.

The one sent home returned six years later. "I hit bottom," he said, "but, lying in the gutter, I remembered words you said about the love that Jesus has, even for the worst of sinners. That recollection became the first day of my long road back. Thank you." In either case, it really wasn't about me.

### China is so far away!

Our seminary had one too many professors for the budget. I volunteered to leave the campus for a year to live in Ukraine under a temporary call from a mission society of our fellowship. My wife and I lived in the bustling capital. I taught and preached and offered advice when asked. My

wife taught English as a second language. We got to know the gracious people of a new nation that had suffered much too long under the political and religious thumbs of autocrats. I learned to type the Cyrillic alphabet and became comfortable with a new liturgy, one with roots in fifth-century Eastern Christianity.

A phone call came the month before our return to the United States. Would I make Hong Kong my next home? Would I be willing to live permanently 14 time zones from Wisconsin? Would I help establish a confessional Lutheran seminary for China and East Asia? Would I struggle with Chinese, a tonal language with thousands of written characters that one-sixth of humanity uses?

It has never been about me. It's all about Jesus—when we are reluctant . . . alone . . . troubled . . . responsible for others . . . and when God opens our eyes to see his harvest field. That's true about all of us, all the time.

*John C. Lawrenz is president at Asia Lutheran Seminary, Hong Kong, China.*

# A MESSAGE OF LOVE

EACH DAY THOUSANDS OF MESSAGES BOMBARD US TO THINK ABOUT OURSELVES AND OUR NEEDS. HOW DO WE THINK ABOUT OTHERS INSTEAD?

Jeff Gunn

**P**aul Harvey, on his daily radio program, recently cited research that says that we are exposed to more than 3,000 advertisements each day. All I could think was, “Wow! That’s a lot of messages, all focused on getting me to buy something.” To an advertiser, getting me to buy something usually means getting me to focus on me. That means I’m going to hear 3,000 messages a day, virtually all asking me to think primarily about meeting my own needs and desires.

Stuart Ewen, professor of communications at Hunter College, says that what affects us in this is not our experience of any one ad but of “the totality which repeats certain kinds of messages again and again.” This constant stream of messages—3,000 “impressions” a day on television, radio, billboards, buses, T-shirts, sports events, even urinals—forms the neural network of our self-centered society.

So how do we break into that “neural network” of me-focused messages with a message of love? On the one hand, we don’t. It takes the supernatural force of God himself to break into hearts hardened by a constant barrage of “think about yourself first and foremost” messages. It takes the love of Jesus Christ—the love expressed in the gospel—to change any of us into people who can look past all the world’s messages. It takes the love of the cross to discover and maintain a passionate focus on God and on the people God has placed around us—our neighbors.

## WHAT MESSAGE DOES THE BIBLE SEND?

The biblical message of love is in its vocabulary of love. In the Old or New Testament, when God commands us to love him, notice that he also demands us to keep an exclusive relationship with him, a relationship that includes a renunciation of all competition for our affections (Deuteronomy 5:7; Matthew 6:24). The ideal of love is also associated with a deep humility (Deuteronomy 10:16; Philippians 2:1-8) and self-sacrifice (Genesis 22:2; John 15:13). Love is described as an act of one’s will, one that extends to a foreigner or even an enemy (Deuteronomy 10:19; Matthew 5:43-48), and in fact—whether it is love toward God or our neighbor—extends beyond the will, to action (Deuteronomy 10:12,13; Luke 10:27).



## WHAT MESSAGE DOES JESUS SEND?

It should surprise no one that in Jesus we find a beautiful and perfect portrait of love. John writes in his first epistle that if Jesus is, as the Bible tells us, the perfect revelation of God, then he must also be the perfect revelation of love. “God is love” (1 John 4:16). In John 13:1, we read: “Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.”

John then goes on to relate how Jesus washed his disciples’ feet and ate a final Passover meal. From a deeply caring heart, he also took a last opportunity to teach, admonish, comfort, and reassure his disciples. The whole night before Jesus’ death was a powerful testimony to the love Jesus had for his disciples. One could hardly do much better for a definition of love than to point to Jesus’ actions on the first Maundy Thursday evening.

## WHAT MESSAGE DOES THE APOSTLE PAUL SEND?

Many people consider 1 Corinthians 13 to be the clearest and most precise description of love in the Scriptures. In this chapter, the apostle Paul literally drills down into the very substance of love. As he drills into the layers of what love means, we gain insight into the depths of Christian love.

Love is the “guts” of all the gifts that the church possesses. We may have many wonderful talents and abilities—the ability to move people deeply with our words or to speak about what God has revealed, or a faith that can work miracles, or even the willingness to sacrifice and surrender ourselves—but if these are not filled with love, they are nothing. They lose their effectiveness in the sight of God. We become only “a resounding gong or a clanging symbol” (1 Corinthians 13:1). From the outside things may still look good, but such loveless actions possess no more life than the work of a taxidermist.

Love emerges from a heart that is willing to put itself in second place, behind a neighbor’s heart. To illustrate this kind of love, Paul builds a “sandwich” of short phrases. He starts with two positives, then piles on eight negatives, and concludes with a final positive. “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth” (1 Corinthians 13:4-6). This kind of love is also a constant. Check out the repetition of the word “always,” as Paul concludes: “It always protects,

always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (1 Corinthians 13:7).

## WHAT MESSAGE IS THE CHURCH SENDING?

The Bible says: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers” (1 John 3:16). As John says, every follower of Christ has been exposed to God’s supreme act of love. We know the gracious love that led Jesus to seek sinners like us. We know the sacrificing love that led Jesus to yield even his own life for our sake. We know the love that promises that eternal life is ours as a gift and that restores our hope. We know the empowering love that—through the work of the Spirit in the Word—enables us to love him who loved us first.

All of this leads to the question John intimates: “When the world looks at the church do they actually see a love that can only be explained by the supernatural work of God?” To rephrase, when the world looks at the followers of Christ, do they get a reflection of the love that moved him to embrace the cross for us?

Jesus certainly indicates that the world will see a clear reflection of love in the lives of believers. In John 13:35, he states: “. . . all men will know that you are my disciples,

if you love one another.” Jesus—the whole Bible, in fact—makes it clear what message we should be sending, and why.

## IS YOUR MESSAGE GETTING ACROSS?

How are you doing at getting your message of love across? Can you step outside yourself and listen to the message you’re sending? Have you asked yourself: “Did my comment sound unloving?” or “Did my reaction seem selfish?”

None of us can cut through the “neural network” of messages of selfishness that we’re surrounded by on our own. Only God’s love-filled power—contained in Word and sacrament—can help us send the right message. Only God’s love in the undeserved forgiveness of Christ can heal us when we fail.

*Jeff Gunn is pastor at CrossWalk, Phoenix, Arizona.*

*This is the first article in a five-part series on love.*

**ONE COULD HARDLY DO MUCH BETTER FOR A DEFINITION OF LOVE THAN TO POINT TO JESUS’ ACTIONS ON THE VERY FIRST MAUNDY THURSDAY EVENING.**

**Sharing a common faith in Jesus makes us a family of believers. Fellowship brings joy in the grace that has brought us together and joy in sharing that grace.**

John A. Liebenow

**J**esse's been out with the measles, but today's his first day back! "Welcome back, Jess!" "Look who's here!" "Oh, look, there's Jesse! How are you, honey?" "How nice to have you back again." Hugs abound; affection flows. There are lots of waves and shouts across the parking lot. During his illness, a separation had occurred, but now that he's healthy again it was time to renew the family bonds. "Welcome back!" was the word of the day, but welcome back to what?

The simplest answer is everything! Welcome back to class, to learning, to recess, to projects, to hot lunch, to practice, to sleepovers, to parties, and to God's family. Welcome back to everything a school is meant to be.

**Church fellowship expresses our amazing unity**

When we think about church fellowship we again realize that the dynamics of earthly life often imitate our spiritual lives. School families help us see that

once again. Christians are by nature a family—all Christians are. St. Paul said, ". . . so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Romans 12:5). It brings an amazing joy to the Christian soul to recognize the unity and oneness of Christ's body. So many people from so many backgrounds, circumstances, and experiences all gather together to be one family in Christ. They all believe and confess the same truths. "There is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all" (Ephesians 4:4-6). Beautiful wholeness—that is the Christian church.

Sacred Scripture reminds us that such an amazing unity, such an amazing family, was created by the blood of Jesus shed for sinners. Paul told the Ephesians, "His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of [Jew and Gentile] . . . and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross" (Ephesians 2:15,16). It was the blood of Jesus that reconciled Jew and Gentile to God through the forgiveness of sins. Christ's sacrifice made peace between God and man, but, more than that, it made peace between man and man, Jew and Gentile. It made all Christians one family, bound by one Spirit, loved by the same Father, and co-heirs with one and the same Jesus.

**We celebrate our unity**

When that unity and oneness is shattered by false teaching there is

deep sadness in God's family. But when it is restored, when it is whole—wow! The family celebrates!

The Christian faith that Christ uses to make the bond is supported by Christian love that celebrates the bond. You see an illustration of such love in many close-knit school families. Sharing, participation, partnership, or fellowship—call it what you like, it is the blossom of community. We share the carpool, the after-school practices, Grandparents' Day, birthday treats, the spring program, and many other things. When someone has to be excluded because of illness or injury, everyone mourns. The bond of love breeds empathy and community. Even when the group experiences moments of stress and disharmony, they are bridged by the ties of fellowship.

The meaning and value of genuine Christian fellowship has been demonstrated in the Church since its birth. Luke wrote, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). Devoted to fellowship, to sharing, to participating with one another—this was a powerful passion in God's fledgling family. Whether it be sharing Christ's body and blood at the Lord's Table or sharing joy and sorrow with one another, God's family always shares. Because of Christ's redeeming love, the fellowship is more than just a shared familiarity.

# My neighbor GOT BET



It is a commitment to Christ and his truth, a sharing of common beliefs.

### **We share our treasures**

The passion to share is powerful. At school you've seen the camcorders rolling and the cameras flashing, all capturing plays, recitals, games, and celebrations so that others can share in the moment. "I'm recording this for Jesse," a parent says, "because he can't be here and we don't want him to miss this!"

## **Christian fellowship—church fellowship—is the celebration of life and health through faith in Christ Jesus.**

The Christian church feels the same way about its family celebrations. More than anything the church loves to share the story of its marriage and life with Christ. "I love to tell the story" is the theme of the church. God's family loves to share the story of unconditional love, of mercy granted to the unworthy, of grace shared with the undeserving. We love it because we've all shared in it. We've equally shared in offending our

God, and we've equally shared in his redeeming love. "All of us also lived among them at one time . . . Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:3-5).

As confessional Lutherans we share that amazing story in an amazing way. We share the story of an inerrant and infallible Word of God that reveals a righteousness from God for every sinner. It is righteousness enjoyed by faith alone. Truly we don't want anyone to miss that, so we work together. We walk together to declare that message not only in our own homes and schools but also throughout the world in pregnancy centers, learning groups, medical missions, and preaching stations.

As confessional Lutherans we share a common truth that's uncommon to many other church bodies. As we travel from "house to house," we share the same message of law and gospel, sin and grace, authority and privilege, hope and heaven. Challenged by the shallow religious

madness of the world we share an objective, biblical, and confessional treasure that is a living and enduring fortress for the soul. Sharing it together and with others is a profound joy.

When false teaching destroys that joy, we avoid the teaching, the teacher, and those supporting it. But when our neighbor gets better, it is a great reason to celebrate. Christian fellowship—church fellowship—is the celebration of life and health through faith in Christ Jesus. It shares the joys and struggles of living for him. Let us celebrate that through his blood we are better—the whole family is! That is reason to share.

*John Liebenow is pastor at Cross of Glory, Washington, Michigan.*

*Find a related Bible study on fellowship after Feb. 5 at [www.forwardinchrist.net](http://www.forwardinchrist.net)*

# TER



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

# WHATEVER

## A change of heart

Even when the world fails, God will remain unchanged and a solid rock to lean on.

I had looked up to my friend Maria for as long as I had known her, and I had known her for my whole life. She was a little bit older than me and always seemed to know everything. We grew up together and, though we fought, we were always there for one another. We shared our deepest and darkest secrets. Maria was so different from me, yet we had a connection.

One of the most important things we shared was our faith. We'd have hours of discussion about religion, usually ending by deciding that beyond what the Bible told us everything else was just an opinion.

**Last year Maria met a guy named Philip.** She had just turned 18, and, since she was sure she was in love, she moved in with him. I was shocked when I heard about it and wondered how my best friend could not know better than to do something so plainly sinful. As she stayed longer, I began to see her less and less. I learned that Philip had an alcohol addiction, claimed to be an atheist, and had been in trouble with the law many times.

Maria's parents had wanted their brilliant daughter to go to college and were heartbroken by the path she decided to take instead. They began to join me in trying to make Maria see that the way she was living her life had to change. Though I began talking to her regularly about it, she continued living where she was and stopped going to church altogether.

**When she stopped visiting me, I began to feel like I had lost her as a friend.** I kept wondering why God would allow me to lose my best friend and how he could let her fall away from the faith. As I continued to think about it, I realized I did not lose her as a friend, but instead had gained an opportunity. God was giving me a chance to share and encourage

someone in his Word.

But even as I continued to talk with her, I began to feel as if my words were not doing anything.

Then one day at church, Proverbs 3:5 was read in the sermon, and I realized how much it applied to my situation.

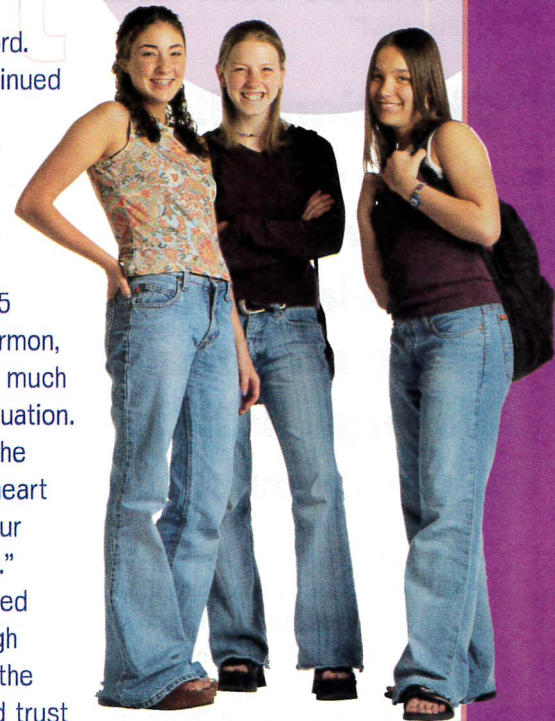
It reads, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."

This passage showed me that even though things may not go the way I want, I could trust

in God as I continued to speak with Maria. He would do the rest. Another thing I could trust God to do was listen to my prayers. God himself told us to pray and that he will answer us. The last thing I realized was that God's understanding of all things and situations is far beyond what I think is best.

**I keep on talking to Maria when I get the opportunity and continue to pray that God will change both her and Philip's hearts.** I believe that only God can change the blackened hearts of all people and cleanse them with the blood of Christ. Please remember to keep Maria and Philip and all those who need a change of heart in your prayers.

*Due to the personal nature of the article, the author has asked to be kept anonymous.*



## Obituaries

### Valborg S. Nesseth 1910-2006

Valborg Signe Nesseth was born July 6, 1910, in Eddy Township, Clearwater County, Minn. She died Feb. 28, 2006, in Bagley, Minn.

A graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at Trinity, Caledonia, Wis.; St. Stephen, Beaver Dam, Wis.; St. John, St. Paul, Minn.; and St. John, Milwaukee, Wis.

She is preceded in death by her husband, Everett; two sisters; one brother; and her parents. She is survived by two nieces; one great niece; two great nephews; and two cousins.

### Donna Marie Bickel 1943-2006

Donna Marie Bickel (nee Steinke) was born Sept. 5, 1943, in Clarkfield, Minn. She died Nov. 14, 2006, in Elkton, Mich.

A 1965 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther

College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at St. John, Alma City, Minn.; St. Paul, South Haven, Mich.; Zion, Toledo, Ohio; and St. Stephen, Adrian, Mich.

She is survived by her husband, Elton; three brothers; and many nieces and nephews.

### Roger H. Wessel 1928-2006

Roger H. Wessel was born May 29, 1928, in Fairmont, Minn. He died Nov. 30, 2006, in Fond du Lac, Wis.

A 1950 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at St. John, Fairfax, Minn.; Emanuel, New London, Wis.; First, La Crosse, Wis.; Trinity, Johnson, Minn.; Zion, Columbus, Wis.; and St. Peter, Fond du Lac, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Alice; six children; seven grandchildren; five brothers; two sisters; a sister-in-law; and many cousins, nieces, and nephews.

## READ THROUGH MY BIBLE IN 3 YEARS

MARCH 2007

- |                      |                       |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Matthew 12:22-50  | 17. Jer. 8:4-9:22     |
| 2. Matt. 13:1-23     | 18. Jer. 9:23-10:25   |
| 3. Matt. 13:24-52    | 19. Jer. 11, 12       |
| 4. Matt. 13:53-14:12 | 20. Jer. 13           |
| 5. Matt. 14:13-36    | 21. Jer. 14, 15       |
| 6. Matt. 15:1-20     | 22. Jer. 16:1-17:18   |
| 7. Matt. 15:21-39    | 23. Jer. 17:19-18:23  |
| 8. Matt. 16:1-20     | 24. Jer. 19, 20       |
| 9. Matt. 16:21-17:13 | 25. Jer. 21, 22       |
| 10. Matt. 17:14-27   | 26. Jer. 23           |
| 11. Matt. 18:1-35    | 27. Jer. 24, 25       |
| 12. Jeremiah 1       | 28. Matthew 19:1-22   |
| 13. Jer. 2:1-3:5     | 29. Matt. 19:23-20:28 |
| 14. Jer. 3:6-4:31    | 30. Matt. 20:29-21:22 |
| 15. Jer. 5, 6        | 31. Matt. 21:23-46    |
| 16. Jer. 7:1-8:3     |                       |

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## Mozambique: An open door

When someone opens a door, it's a sign of welcome, an indication to proceed and be part of what is inside. God opens doors too. Recently a WELS mission exploratory team found a wide open door to proclaim the gospel in the country of Mozambique in southern Africa.

In October 2006, Malawi Missionary Bill Meier, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary World Missions Professor Ken Cherney, Board for World Missions member Stephen Valleskey, and his wife Sally met in the Mozambican capital, Maputo, for a two-week exploratory visit. The purpose of the visit was to follow up on a number of previous proposals, going back to 1989, that WELS enter Mozambique to share the gospel, and two recent surveys of Mozambique by Malawi Missionaries Paul Nitz and Bill Meier.

Mozambique is a large country—twice the size of California—with a 1,500-mile coastline on the Indian Ocean. It is divided into distinct north and south regions by the Zambezi River. Less than 10 years ago it was a broken country with doors closed,

reeling from years of war (for independence and a civil war) and from a major flood in 2002.

During the wartime years, more than a million Mozambicans fled into Malawi and Zambia. Some of these people came into contact with the Lutheran Church of Central Africa (LCCA) and carried the Lutheran faith back with them into Mozambique after the war. For a number of years the LCCA has been serving about 1,000 Mozambicans informally in 15 locations just across the Malawi border.

The cities of Lichinga and Nampula in the north had been previously identified as possible sites for a center of WELS mission activity in Mozambique, so the exploratory team's visit concentrated on these two areas. Rapid development envisioned in the north, with major road improvements funded by the United States and Japan, will open up areas previously inaccessible to the gospel.

Everywhere the exploratory team went it found open doors: in government offices, radio stations, teacher training colleges, and in meetings

with missionaries of various denominations. The door to the Department of Religious Affairs was open when the team heard: "Yes! Come and proclaim the gospel. Only tell us clearly what you intend to do." Visits to two major radio broadcasting agencies convinced the team that radio is a powerful tool for evangelistic outreach in present-day Mozambique. A visit to a public community radio station an hour northeast of Nampula confirmed that WELS gospel broadcasting would indeed be a workable approach and welcome in this region.

Upon return to the United States, the exploratory team proposed

- that WELS immediately place a missionary team in Nampula, using a community radio ministry to establish initial contacts in rural Nampula Province and a Christian Information Center as a venue for urban ministry; and
- that WELS encourage and assist the Lutheran Church of Central Africa in organizing and carrying out gospel ministry efforts in the areas that border Mozambique.

The Administrative Committee for Africa has approved this proposal in concept, and will present it to the Board for World Missions in February for adoption.

Since no funding is available in WELS for opening new world missions at this time, work in Mozambique, if approved, would probably be carried out by reallocating manpower and funding from existing programs.

*Sally Valleskey*

*Watch for more information on this exploratory visit in the March edition of WELS Connection.*



The exploratory team that visited Mozambique in October 2006 went to a public community radio station, RTV Rede Rural Radio, to determine if radio ministry was a way to reach out in that area of Mozambique. Left to right: Angelo (consultant assistant), Pastor Stephen Valleskey, Missionary Bill Meier, C. Sabonete (RTV director), Prof. Ken Cherney, and the radio assistant.

## WELS hires a communication director

In an effort to fully coordinate communication and provide messages effectively and efficiently to various constituents, WELS has hired Joel Hochmuth to be its full-time director of communications.

In this position, Hochmuth will be responsible for strategic planning, communication coordination, WELS publications, marketing efforts, and public relations for WELS.

"My initial goal is to hear from people and listen to their concerns, . . ." says Hochmuth. "It's a huge animal because you have so many communication concerns. . . . Trying to focus it all will be really difficult. But what it comes down to is our ultimate mission—to communicate the gospel."

Pastor Gary Baumler served as director of communications as well as executive editor of *Forward in Christ* from 1993 until his retirement in December 2005. In 2005, the synod convention passed a resolution to call a full-time director who could spend more time on strategic communication planning and coordination. From October 2005 through June 2006, the Conference of Presidents called seven different pastors to serve as the director of communications. In October 2006, members of the Conference of Presidents determined that they would hire rather than call a full-time director.

"Pastors don't see themselves as professional communicators, with mass media skills," says WELS President Karl Gurgel. "The Conference of Presidents concluded that a WELS layman, trained in this field, might best coordinate our communication efforts."

A member at Beautiful Savior, Marietta, Ga., Hochmuth worked for 15 years at Cable News Network (CNN) in

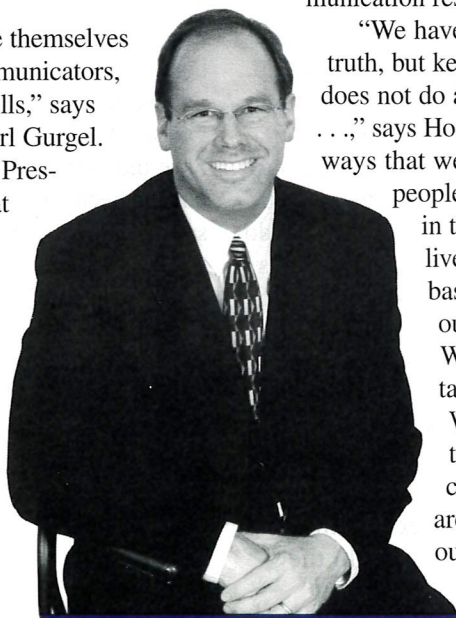
Atlanta, Ga., where he produced hundreds of network-quality, long-form video reports and series. He also taught communication courses at Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, Ga.

"One thing that teaching at the university has opened my eyes to is how this new generation has embraced technology," says Hochmuth. "If we're going to reach them, we have to embrace that same technology, because that's their world."

Hochmuth has a B.A. in Communication Studies from California State University, Sacramento, Calif.; and an M.A. in Radio and Television from San Francisco State University. He has served on the Communication Services Commission since 2000. During that time he produced *Walk in My World*, a WELS Youth Discipleship spiritual growth video resource for use with teens and their parents. "Working on that project was a family decision," says Hochmuth, regarding the contributions of his wife, Heidi, and his son, Adam. "Coming to Wisconsin was also a family decision."

Hochmuth brings a unique perspective to the position because he spent his entire life in outlying WELS districts. But the perspective he really stresses is that WELS members are the best communication resource.

"We have the rock-solid truth, but keeping it to ourselves does not do anybody any good . . .," says Hochmuth. "Let's find ways that we can energize our people to be evangelists in their own personal lives and on a daily basis. Our people are our best resources. What's most important are not programs. What's most important is not even what certain congregations are doing. It's what our people are doing."



Joel Hochmuth

## World news

**New Jersey approves same-sex civil unions**—In December, both houses of the New Jersey legislature voted to give those in same-sex civil unions "all of the same benefits, protections and responsibilities" the state confers on married couples. New Jersey's governor signed the bill soon afterward.

The court-ordered legislation came after November's New Jersey Supreme Court ruling that determined the state must either allow same-sex couples to marry or create civil unions that provide the same legal rights and benefits. Under the bill, a civil union will be defined as a legal partnership, allowing the same marriage protections and benefits to same-sex couples as those given to married men and women, ranging from prenuptial agreements to equal application of adoption, child support, and alimony laws.

New Jersey becomes the third state, after Vermont and Connecticut, to allow civil unions. Only Massachusetts allows couples of the same sex to marry.

**News briefs—A Muslim congregation broke ground** for the first mosque in former East Germany in January. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community claims 200 adherents in Berlin and 30,000 across Germany. There are already about 80 mosques in Berlin for other Muslim denominations.

**Evangelist Billy Graham** has been named in the Gallup Poll's top 10 "most admired" men list for a record 50th time. The 88-year-old evangelist came in fifth in this poll taken in mid-December. Ranked before him were President George W. Bush, former President Bill Clinton, former President Jimmy Carter, and Senator Barack Obama, D-Ill.

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

## Fourth phase of North American outreach ready to begin—

For the past three years, North American outreach has emphasized that outreach evangelism is not only a responsibility, but also a privilege for WELS members. After members have learned about different ways to witness, both in the United States and abroad, the fourth North American outreach phase, “Every Life for Christ,” emphasizes how we are witnesses through our daily lives.

“This theme helps us understand that witnessing doesn’t happen only at certain times or by certain people,” says Peter Kruschel, administrator for Ministerial Education. “We glorify God by who we are and what we do—everything about us should point to Christ.”

By recognizing witness opportunities in our day-to-day lives, we can proclaim the gospel to many people. “As you do everything to the glory

of God, you are also telling the world, ‘I am a child of God in Christ,’” says Kruschel. “And that opens up many opportunities to witness.”



“Every Life for Christ” builds on the last three years’ outreach phases: “Every Church is a Mission Church,” “Every Soul’s a Treasure,” and “Every Member a Missionary.” As part of the North American outreach initiative, “Proclaim Peace Through Jesus,” all four phases share a common theme: telling others about Jesus.

This fourth and final phase will be accompanied by resources to prepare and equip congregations for outreach. Worship materials for an annual recruitment Sunday or mission festival will be included, as well as copies of the three doctrinal vocation presentations given at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary’s annual Fall Symposium in 2006. A CD containing these materials will be mailed to all congregations in early April. Pastors and congregations are encouraged to incorporate these and other “Proclaim Peace Through Jesus” resources into worship plans both now and in the future.

*For more information about the fourth phase of North American outreach, go to [www.wels.net/nao](http://www.wels.net/nao) or call 414-256-3236.*

## WELS works to reach out to Muslims

Since more and more Muslims are living in the United States, WELS is working to reach out to this group of 1.5 billion people that comprise a quarter of the world’s population and can be living as close as next door.

“Jesus says go to all nations,” says Pastor Joel Spaude, chairman of the WELS Outreach to Muslims Ministry. “It would be sad for us to disregard a whole group because we’re cautious or fearful because of what’s going on in society around us. The gospel works on their hearts just as it does on anybody else’s heart.”

In 2003, the Joint Mission Council put together a committee to study how WELS should reach out to Muslims. The committee put together 10 recommendations, including that a task force be developed to implement the ideas. Spaude was named chairman of that task force, now called the WELS Outreach to Muslims Ministry.

The task force, partly consisting of two Muslim background believers (Christians who were formally Muslims or of Muslim descent) and a

retired admiral who lived in the Middle East, was uniquely qualified for the job. The group decided to hire Jacob, one of those Muslim background believers, and a pastor mentor to serve part time in this ministry of reaching out to Muslims with the gospel. In April 2006, Jacob began serving full time.

But, since some Muslims believe that the punishment for leaving Islam is death, it is dangerous for Jacob to witness directly to Muslims. “So I am doing it indirectly,” says Jacob, “by encouraging congregation members to go out and be personal witnesses for Christ because unfortunately I can’t do it myself.” (Learn more about Jacob’s background and how he came to faith on p. 30).

The way he does this is by conducting presentations throughout the country that inform WELS members about Islam and how to reach out to Muslims. He is also working with the pastor mentor to become more fully trained for his work. In the near future, he will be working

more closely with campus ministries and with congregations that have Muslim populations in their communities. The Outreach to Muslims Ministry also is looking to train a female Muslim background believer to be Jacob’s counterpart.

Besides promoting congregation presentations, the group has recently completed a DVD that provides information to better equip WELS members to share the gospel with Muslims.

“We want to have that hands-on, grassroots effort actually happen and have that translate not to a presentation but the heart of a Muslim changed,” says Spaude.

He continues, “Their souls are meant for heaven, too.”

*For more information about the WELS Outreach to Muslims Ministry, e-mail [love2muslims@wels.net](mailto:love2muslims@wels.net).*

## Q&A with Pastor William Bernhardt, host of *WELS Connection*

*This year WELS Connection is celebrating its 20th anniversary. More than 900 congregations subscribe to this monthly video that has featured more than 500 stories of ministry happenings in WELS. We caught up with Pastor William Bernhardt, the host of WELS Connection for most of those 20 years, to ask him about his role and the importance of this medium.*

**QUESTION** – How did you get involved with *WELS Connection*?

**ANSWER** – [In 1987], Steve Boettcher [the producer of *WELS Connection*] asked me if I would like to help them out temporarily as kind of a pilot thing, and we would see how it would go. I thought, ‘Well, since I’m not a professional, I can help them out temporarily. This will last only for a little while.’

**QUESTION** – What is your role in *WELS Connection*?

**ANSWER** – If this is working, and I believe it is, then it’s due to Steve Boettcher and the Ministry of Christian Giving. Really what I do is very minimal. I’m on camera for a little while. . . . But for the most part I’m reading scripted material. I’m very appreciative of that. I figure Steve has to be pretty good if he can make me last this long.

**QUESTION** – Are you nervous being on camera?

**ANSWER** – I’ve never been camera-shy as such. My father used to say that when I was small and he would open the refrigerator, I would do a five-minute routine because of the light. . . .

When I look at the camera, I look at the camera as if I’m looking at a person. I’m not talking to a piece of technology; I’m talking to my fellow WELS people.

**QUESTION** – What is your favorite part about hosting *WELS Connection*?

**ANSWER** – Just the joy of sharing the Lord’s work. I would be content to have this be a voiceover so that nobody saw me. I know that I have picked up a certain



Pastor William Bernhardt. Bernhardt has been pastor at Divine Peace, Milwaukee, Wis., for the past 30 years.

notoriety, and sometimes that is a little awkward. But we have fun with it too. You may have heard this story about the kids who were going through the synod administration building, and when they were asked who the synod president was, they mentioned my name instead of President Gurgel’s. . . .

I’ve sat down in restaurants, and a waitress will come up and she will know who I am because she watches *WELS Connection*. So I say, “Thank you, as long as you are listening and watching all of it.” Because that’s the important part, you know. Not that I’m there.

**QUESTION** – What are your favorite types of stories on *WELS Connection*?

**ANSWER** – For me the joy is really in communicating a message that says ‘Look at what God has made of us.’ Here we are his clay vessels, and look what God has allowed us to do and the blessings that he has given us. And if we do have problems, look at how we can address them with God’s people.

**QUESTION** – What do you feel is the importance of having something like *WELS Connection*?

**ANSWER** – The word “connection” tells that we connect with our people and really bring people together because they see what is happening in other parts of the synod and they realize the potential. They also see what we are doing as a synod. I think that is very important—to be informed—because that information not only tells you what is happening but there is also an ownership that happens.

**QUESTION** – What do you see as the future of *WELS Connection*, and what will your part be in it?

**ANSWER** – Well, that’s where the Lord knows how long he wants me to do this. . . .

As far as the direction, I hope and pray that we can use the technology that is there to really communicate with our people most effectively.

**QUESTION** – Any last comments?

**ANSWER** – I thank the Lord that he has allowed us to do this. The success really is his. I feel like I am just following my Lord where he wants me to go.

*For \$95, congregations can order a yearly subscription to WELS Connection, which includes stories on three videos: January-April, May-August, September-December. To order, call 800-827-2237 or e-mail [mcg@sab.wels.net](mailto:mcg@sab.wels.net).*

## Partnerships help Home Missions reach more lost souls with the gospel

Partnering with other organizations and groups has been an important element of WELS Home Missions' ministry in the past; however, when financial cutbacks significantly reduced its budget over the past five years, these relationships became more important than ever. By utilizing different partnerships and changing the way ministries are established, Home Missions has helped many congregations and set a goal to establish 150 new ministries in the next two years.

"We're approaching things differently," says Mel Schuler, associate administrator for Home Missions. "Instead of doing stand-alone mission projects, Home Missions and district mission boards are working with existing congregations to help them get involved in new ministries."

New ministries take many shapes and forms. For example, Bread of Life, Santa Ana, Calif.—a primarily Hispanic congregation—is moving into a permanent ministry and worship center. "They noticed their new location is near a large Vietnamese community," says Harold Hagedorn, administrator for Home Missions, "and wanted to reach

out to these people, their new neighbors." The congregation is working with its district mission board to address this opportunity and is connecting with Peace in Jesus Vietnamese in Boise, Idaho, for counseling assistance.

Although many churches start their own ministries, some congregations take part in existing programs, such as *Cristo Palabra de Vida*, WELS' national ministry to Hispanics and Latinos, or the Hmong outreach program.

"I think what the Lord has permitted us as a church to do in the Hmong and Hispanic communities is an amazing thing," says Hagedorn. For example, Pastor Pheng Moua is conducting services in Hmong at Immanuel Hmong, St. Paul, Minn.—one of a growing number of churches participating in Hmong outreach. In Phoenix, Ariz., Pastor Tim Otto at St. Thomas is conducting two services in Spanish each week and has approximately 150 Spanish-as-a-first-language attendees each Sunday.

Many new ministries and outreach programs require a variety of resources and skills; therefore, Home Missions often partners with other groups to

assist congregations with their outreach opportunities. For example, Home Missions and Ministerial Education are working to help WELS members receive training through the Pastoral Studies Institute—a program that guides non-traditional students through their preseminary and seminary training. Likewise, Home Missions and World Missions, through the Joint Mission Council, are utilizing the training Hmong men receive through the Pastoral Studies Institute and other programs to reach out to the large Hmong populations in Thailand and Laos.

The idea of "partnering" is taking off at the congregational level as well. Many churches are working together on different projects and ministries. For example, Faith, Sharpsburg, Ga., agreed to mentor a mission church being started in the Atlanta area. To help the new church gather members, Faith helped distribute 4,000 flyers around town and assisted the new group with a "Christmas for Kids" program.

This shows how partnering with other churches is more than just pooling resources—it's encouraging and supporting one another while spreading God's Word. "Local partnerships really make a difference," says Schuler. "More and more churches are asking, 'What can we do?' 'How can we help?'"

Even though congregations are becoming more mission-minded, there's still a lot of work to be done. "There are so many opportunities for outreach ministry in the United States and Canada—we have to take action on this," says Hagedorn. "We have so much to offer."

Visit [www.wels.net/jump/bhm](http://www.wels.net/jump/bhm) or call 414-256-3286 for more information about Home Missions or for starting outreach in your area.



Hispanic students and two of the pastors who teach at the Pastoral Studies Institute. Designed for non-traditional students (older men or men from a different culture), this program offers preseminary courses in a modified "distance learning" format to the student's home, congregation, and home culture. For more information about the Pastoral Studies Institute, visit [www.wls.wels.net/pages/Academics](http://www.wls.wels.net/pages/Academics) or call 262-242-8153.



## District news

### Western Wisconsin



Students at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis., recently planted a "rain garden" on campus to reduce pollution entering local water sources. By participating in the planning and planting process, students were able to provide a solution to Lakeside's facilities run-off problem as well as getting some hands-on experience in environmental science.

### Michigan

**Huron Valley Lutheran High School, Westland, Mich.:** hosted the Eastern Regional Choral Festival for the first time on Nov. 10-12, 2006. More than 150 students from nine area Lutheran high schools participated in the music-filled weekend, which concluded with a joint concert Sunday afternoon.

### North Atlantic

**Our Shepherd, Val-Des-Monts, Quebec:** is in the process of registering the congregation with the province of Quebec. Since Our Shepherd is currently the only WELS-Canada congregation in Quebec, registration is an important step in establishing an official presence in the province.

### South Atlantic

On Nov. 12, 2006, **Grace, Spring Hill, Fla.:** hosted an organ recital after purchasing a new Allen organ. Pastor Aaron Christie, of Faith, Antioch, Ill., was guest organist.

These pastors are reporters for the districts featured this month: MI—John Eich; NA—Harland Goetzinger; SA—Christopher Kruschel; WW—Brett Brauer.

## In the news



The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* covered the Dec. 24 performance of **Koiné, the church band of St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.** The band, which has been gaining popularity, plays for the contemporary service held at 6:30 P.M. on Sundays. Lyrics from *Christian Worship* are set to new music, giving the pieces a blues, pop, folk, or rock 'n' roll feel. Brian Davidson, the band's vocalist and the church's youth and music minister, said in the article, "We are trying to give new life to some of the old hymns that taught so well and had such beautiful words."

The *Post-Crescent* in Appleton, Wis., covered the Oct. 22 wedding anniversary celebration for **Norman and Virginia Julius**, members of Immanuel, Greenville, Wis. The couple, married 60 years, was treated to a horse-drawn buggy ride through Greenville. Family and friends arranged the surprise trip for the couple in an effort to recreate the surrey ride Norman and Virginia took on their wedding day.

## WELS-Canada meets

The 2006 WELS-Canada Annual General Meeting was held Nov. 18 at Our Shepherd, Val-Des-Monts, Quebec. Delegates from 14 of the 15 WELS-Canada churches attended the meeting and resolved to recruit and raise up Canadian people to work and serve in Canada. Those wishing to enter the pastoral ministry can now receive training through the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI), an academic program offered through Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to guide and assist non-traditional students through their preseminary and seminary training.



The attendees of the 2006 WELS-Canada Annual General Meeting.

**CHANGES IN MINISTRY**

**Pastors**

**Bode, Douglas L.**, to retirement  
**Glasgow, Robert G.**, to St. Paul, Las Animas, Colo.  
**Meyer, John H. VI**, to Trinity, Belle Plaine, Minn.  
**Mittelstadt, Jeffrey**, to Christ, North Saint Paul, Minn.  
**Schult, Gary F.**, to New Beginnings, Aurora Colo.  
**Smith, Robert S.**, to Redeemer, Hastings, Neb.  
**Valleskey, Thomas A.**, to retirement  
**Ziemer, Paul C.**, to Beautiful Savior, Fayetteville, N.C./chief military officer, Commission on Special Ministries

**Teachers**

**Bode, Charlene K.**, to retirement  
**Draeger, Linda J.**, to St. Paul, Beverly Hills, Fla.  
**Horton, Jacqueline I.**, to Trinity, Kiel, Wis.  
**Lauber, David A.**, to retirement  
**Miller, Natalie**, to retirement  
**Ohrmundt, Marla R.**, to St. Paul, South Haven, Mich.  
**Pfeifer, Gene R.**, to St. Croix Lutheran High School, West Saint Paul, Minn.  
**Rehberger, Phillip F.**, to Trinity, Aberdeen, S.D.  
**Riley, Karen K.**, to Peace, Sun Prairie, Wis.  
**Schmill, Greg R.**, to Parish Assistance, WELS Board for Parish Services, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Thomford, Karen J.**, to Zion, Chesaning, Mich.

**ANNIVERSARIES**

**Muskego, Wis.**—St. Paul (150). Feb. 3, 6 P.M.; Feb. 4, 8, 9:30, and 11 A.M.; Feb. 5, 7 P.M. The weekend's theme, "Growing Stronger in the Faith," covers years 1878-1911. The annual chicken dinner will be held Feb. 18 in the school gymnasium. Vince Kirchoff, 414-327-1619.  
**Springville, N.Y.**—Our Savior (25). Feb. 4, 10 A.M. A meal will follow the service. Marcie Denzien, 716-592-8903.  
**Flower Mound, Tex.**—Prince of Peace (25). May 6, 4:30 P.M. Dinner to follow service. RSVP requested. Lee Niethammer, 972-317-6016; LeeFN@aol.com.

**COMING EVENTS**

**WELS National Marriage Enrichment and Get-Away Weekend**—Feb. 2-4. Osthoff Resort, Elkhart Lake, Wis. WELS Adult Discipleship, 414-256-3278; Web site, www.welsmarriageretreat.org.  
**Reach the World WELS Choir**—from Tucson, Ariz. Web site, www.reachtheworldchoir.com.  
 Feb. 10—Shepherd of the Hills, Tucson, Ariz., afternoon, TBA  
 Feb. 11—Redeemer, Tucson, Ariz., afternoon, TBA  
 Feb. 18—Emmanuel, Tempe, Ariz., 10:30 A.M. worship; 4 P.M. concert

Feb. 25—Pilgrim, Mesa, Ariz., 10:30 A.M. worship; 4 P.M. concert  
 March 2—Grace, Tucson, Ariz., 7 P.M.  
 March 10—Hope, Chino Valley, Ariz., 1 P.M.  
 March 11—Mt. Calvary, Flagstaff, Ariz., morning worship  
 March 24—Beautiful Savior, El Paso, Tex., evening concert, TBA  
 March 25—Trinity, El Paso, Tex., 10:15 A.M. worship; Emmanuel, Las Cruces, N.M., afternoon, TBA  
 April 11—St. Paul's, Douglas, Ariz., 10 A.M.  
 April 15—Peace, Cottonwood, Ariz., Sunday morning worship  
 April 28, 29—Immanuel, Lakeside, Ariz., Saturday concert and Sunday morning worship  
 May 20—Resurrection, Phoenix, Ariz., 10 A.M.  
**Women's Retreat**—Feb. 23-25. Paradise Shores, Holcombe, Wis. Hosted by St. Mark, Eau Claire, Wis. Rebekah Carey, rebekahcarey@sbcglobal.net.  
**Tour**—Prep Singers, Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.  
 March 14—Sola Fide, Lawrenceville, Ga., 7 P.M.  
 March 15—Abiding Peace, Simpsonville, S.C., 7 P.M.  
 March 16—Hope, Irmo, S.C., 7 P.M.  
 March 17—Messiah, Alpharetta, Ga., 5:30 P.M.  
 March 18—Faith, Sharpsburg, Ga., 10:30 A.M.; Lamb of God, Madison, Ala., 7 P.M.  
 March 19—Saving Grace, Mobile, Ala., 7 P.M.  
 March 20—Saint Paul, Beverly Hills, Fla., 7 P.M.  
 March 21—Bay Pines, Seminole, Fla., 7 P.M.  
 March 22—Crown of Life, Fort Myers, Fla., 7 P.M.  
 March 25—Beautiful Savior, Marietta, Ga., 8:15 and 11 A.M.  
**Christian Woman Today Retreat**—March 23-25. Olympia Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Maureen Sertich, 262-784-0412.  
**Concert**—Lakeshore Lutheran Chorale, March 25, 7 P.M. St. John St. James, Reedsville, Wis.  
**WELS Regional Handbell Festivals**—A concert will be held at 2 P.M., on each of the respective Sundays. Kim Pilz, kim@tomah.com; Web site, www.welsbells.com.  
 April 14-15. Host, Salem, Loretto, Minn.; site, West Lutheran High School, Plymouth, Minn.  
 April 21-22. Host, St. Peter, Schofield, Wis.; D.C.; site, Everst Junior High School, Schofield, Wis.  
 April 21-22. Host, Peace, Hartford, Wis.; site, Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.  
**Women's Enrichment Weekend**—April 20-22. Salem, Stillwater, Minn. Karen Diethert, 715-549-6519; diethert@sbcglobal.net.  
**WELS Church Librarians Organization spring conference**—April 21. Peace, Sun Prairie, Wis. \$10 per person. Betty, 608-837-7468; Web site, www.wels.net/jump/clo.  
**WELS Summer Band Camp**—for grades 6-9. June 24-29. Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis. Housing is available. Rich Mannisto, 414-525-9232; rmannisto@aol.com.

**WELS' National Women's Leadership Conference**—July 7. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Sponsored by the Adult Discipleship Women's Ministry Committee. Web site, www.wels.net/jump/womensministry.

**Greece tour/cruise**—July 11-21. "In the Footsteps of St. Paul" includes Athens and Corinth and a seven-day cruise of the Greek Isles. James Humann, Jhumann383@aol.com.

**S.E.E. TOUR 2007**—Oct. 3-14. Travel through western Turkey and Greece along the route of Paul's third missionary journey from Ephesus to Athens and Corinth. Sponsored by Woodlawn Men's Club, West Allis, Wis. Hosted by Pastor Joel Gerlach and Gene Schultz, 414-774-3711; eschultz20@wi.rr.com.

**POSITIONS AVAILABLE**

**Organist/music coordinator**—Good Shepherd, Plymouth, Wis., is seeking an individual or individuals willing to serve part time as its organist and/or music coordinator. Charles Heup, 920-893-0207.

**Counseling positions**—Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Services, Inc., through its ministry of Christian Family Counseling, is looking to hire Licensed Psychologists, Licensed Professional Counselors, and Licensed Clinical Social Workers with specific area(s) of specialty for its offices located in Eau Claire, Onalaska, West Allis, West Bend, Fond du Lac, and Appleton, Wis. Applicants must be an active WELS member and have advanced training or possess at least one of the following areas of specialization: school psychology; traumatology; certified employee assistance professional; chemical dependency counseling; addictionology; marriage, family, and child therapy; sex therapy; mood or anxiety disorders; or distance counseling. Mary Schoultz, human resource director; PO Box 245039, Milwaukee WI 53224-9539; 888-685-9522; mschoultz@wlcfs.org.

**NAMES WANTED**

**South Padre Island, Brownsville, or Harlingen, Tex.**—Joel T. Sauer, 956-968-5228; pastorsauer@abswels.net.

**People moving to or vacationing in Bella Vista, Ark.**—Neil Hansen, 479-855-7853; neil.hansen@cox.net.

**Soldiers and families at Fort Drum, N.Y., or Binghamton, N.Y. region**—Jeremiah Gumm, 315-622-2843.

**Students and other WELS members living in the greater Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, N.C., area**—Rob Guenther, 919-847-0579.

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/jump/bulletinboard.

## Picture this



What do these six couples have in common? They all renewed their wedding vows before the Lord on Oct. 22, 2006. Since the Scripture readings for that Sunday focused on marriage and family, Pastor Paul Lidtke of Bethlehem, Oshkosh, Wis., offered the opportunity for couples to renew their vows during the service. "Many people remarked how the renewal brought tears to their eyes," Lidtke shares. The couples are Edward and Sandra Gade (front, next to Pastor; June 11, 1960), Daryl and Darcy Duchatschek (Darcy is next to Sandra and Daryl is behind his wife; May 4, 1991), Michael and Ruth Brandt (front right; Dec. 15, 1945), Troy and Beth Rothe (back right; Sept. 30, 1988), Allen and Carolyn Henslin (back middle; June 13, 1964), and Russ and Barb Sulewski (Russ is in the back left and Barb is to his right in the center row; June 15, 1985). Sandra Gade even wore her wedding dress, and her husband Edward rented a tux for the occasion. "Following the service we held a 'renewal reception' in the parish hall, complete with wedding cake and punch," says Lidtke.

Submitted by Paul Lidtke

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.

# FEBRUARY HISTORY 101

Ready for a little history lesson? During the month of February, several noteworthy events in the Lutheran church took place.

**Feb. 3, 1468**—Johann Gutenberg died. He developed a printing press with movable type that helped the Protestant Reformation by allowing the easy distribution of reformers' writings.

**Feb. 3, 1518**—Pope Leo X ordered the Augustinian Order to discipline Martin Luther for his writings.

**Feb. 3, 1809**—Felix Mendelssohn, a devout Lutheran German composer, was born in Hamburg. His compositions were light and easily understood, noted for their gracefulness, sweet melody, and delicate details. His *Elijah* oratorio is considered by many to be one of the greatest oratorios of the 19th century, second only to Handel's *Messiah*. He is responsible for rediscovering Bach, whose music had been forgotten for 80 years.

**Feb. 5, 1555**—The fifth and final Diet of Augsburg began. The assembly resulted in the Peace of Augsburg, officially recognizing Lutheranism as a religion.

**Feb. 10, 1604**—King James authorized an English Bible translation, which was completed in 1611.

**Feb. 14, 1546**—Martin Luther preached his final sermon, on Matthew 11:28, at Eisleben, Germany.

**Feb. 16, 1497**—Philipp Melancthon, one of the original leaders of the Reformation, was born.

**Feb. 18, 1546**—Martin Luther died. Luther was a monk whose attacks on the corruption within the Roman Catholic Church began the Protestant Reformation.

**Feb. 25, 1835**—Adolf Hoenecke was born in Brandenburg. He came to America under the sponsorship of the Berlin Missionary Society. Hoenecke was a leading figure in the Wisconsin Synod as pastor, professor of theology, editor, author, and spiritual leader.

Permission granted by the Concordia Historical Institute to reprint facts from its Web site: <http://chi.lcms.org>.

# Every Life for Christ:



John A. Braun

## MADE FOR HERE AND NOW

When it comes to human beings, we assert that we are all different. Yet, in the church, we are united together to serve the Lord.

Sit down sometime and watch people pass by in a shopping mall or on a busy sidewalk. You will soon discover an endless variety of people. If you engage them in conversation, you will find that the variety in background, personality, and talents matches the variety in their appearances.

Another place to notice the variety of people is to sit in any pew in any church. Every Sunday or whenever

time and effort we spend on the affairs of the visible church. God does need our volunteer efforts, our offerings, and our special gifts for the work of his visible church. But there is more.

God has created us for the here and now of our daily life. We are mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, parents, children, employees, and friends. We fit into a host of additional categories too. However one categorizes our lives,

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time and effort we spend on the affairs of the visible church. God does need our volunteer efforts, our offerings, and our special gifts for the work of his visible church. But there is more.

God has created us for the here and now of our daily life. We are mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, parents, children, employees, and friends. We fit into a host of additional categories too. However one categorizes our lives,

## ALL CHRISTIANS HAVE A CALL FROM GOD TO BE HIS FULL-TIME DISCIPLES. IT'S OUR VOCATION.

you attend worship draws a variety of people to hear the message of Jesus and worship the God of grace. You will see rich, poor, large, small, old, young, and every stage in between. We are all different.

### We are full-time disciples.

The apostle Paul wrote about the church using the illustration of the human body—different parts united together to serve the Lord. It's a familiar picture. All of us are drawn together by God's grace in Jesus. We are his people living in the here and now. He gave us all different backgrounds, personalities, and talents and then gave us the privilege of serving him.

Sometimes we think that our service to him is measured by how much

God made us for such a time as this. He didn't put you or me into another time. We're here. We're here now.

When God called us to faith by the gospel, he didn't intend that we should be his people on Sunday morning in church only. Nor did he want us to limit our service to the meetings and activities we share with our fellow believers at church. We all are called to be disciples of Jesus on Monday morning and Saturday night too.

### Our calling as Christians

All Christians have a call from God to be his full-time disciples. It's our vocation. That's an important thought sometimes lost in our church activities. Last fall a symposium at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

focused on the calling or vocation of all Christians. We thought that it would be a good idea to share some of the thoughts of that symposium with the readers of *Forward in Christ*.

A while ago we received a series of articles from Prof. Ted Hartwig dealing with a number of lesser-known Christians of the past. We thought that his series would help illustrate the service that disciples of Jesus render in their daily lives. His point is that the lives of these Christians can help us find encouragement for our own faith and life of good works. We hope you will agree.

The first of these people is Hilary of Poitiers (p. 29). God used him to defend the truth against error. We all need the encouragement to remain faithful to God's truth.

Your life, your opportunities, your challenges, your joys, your fears, and your heartaches are uniquely your own, just as mine are. But in his great plan, God has a place for us all. He made us for this time and placed us where he needs us. May he bless your efforts to live as a disciple of Jesus.

*John Braun is executive editor of Forward in Christ.*

**READ THE ARTICLES ON VOCATION PRESENTED AT WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY'S SYMPOSIUM LAST FALL AT [WWW.WLSESSAYS.NET](http://WWW.WLSESSAYS.NET). LOOK UNDER "VOCATION" IN THE SUBJECT INDEX.**

# HILARY OF POITIERS:

Faithful defender of God's truth

Is Jesus like God or is he true God? Is God triune? Early Christians struggled with such questions. God called faithful witnesses to defend the truth in those ancient days.

Theodore J. Hartwig

The name of Athanasius is familiar to Christian readers, chiefly for the confession which bears his name—the Athanasian Creed.

Less well-known is the story of his zeal to defend Jesus as true God. History has entitled him “Father of Orthodoxy” and “Hammer of Heretics.”

Athanasius’ contemporary, Hilary of Poitiers, a native of France, came to be known as the “Athanasius of the West.”

## Hilary becomes a Christian

Born 20 years after Athanasius in about A.D. 315, Hilary grew up worshipping false gods in a still largely pagan environment. His conversion to the Christian faith resulted from his intensive study of the Bible. There, God’s description of his eternity as “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14) made a deep impression on the young man. When he then came to the words in John 1:14, that this eternal God took on human flesh and blood and made his home among us, Hilary’s heart was opened to believe and be baptized.

A married man, he was consecrated at the age of 38 to be bishop at Poitiers in central France. In this office Hilary devoted himself to opposing the government-supported heresy that denied the deity of Christ. For his faithfulness to the truth, the Roman emperor exiled him to Phrygia, in what is now Turkey. During this enforced retirement he wrote his theological masterpiece, *On the Trinity*, in defense of Bible truth. Not only did he maintain the truth

of the triune God, but he also maintained that Jesus is truly God not just like God.

When a new emperor with a policy of religious toleration came to the throne, Hilary was restored from exile to his congregation in Poitiers. He shepherded his flock until his death, at 52 years of age, on Jan. 12, 367, six years before Athanasius died. Hilary’s last years were spent in tireless witness to the two central mysteries of the Christian faith—that God is triune and that the man Jesus Christ is also true God.

## Defense of the truth in our time


Acquaintance with this early champion of the Christian faith has largely disappeared in our times. However, the name itself, if only superficially, is still on the tongues of students and teachers at the University of Oxford. Here, the annual trimesters have names inherited from the school’s beginnings in the 1100s. There is the Michaelmas term in the fall; the Trinity term in the spring; and the Hilary term, which begins about Jan. 12, the date of Hilary’s death. All three names, connected to church history, remain in use at Oxford. But nowadays this university, once a stronghold of Christian education, is riddled with agnostics and atheists. Even C. S. Lewis, the formidable Christian apologist who taught at Oxford for some 30 years, was deemed an embarrassment by many of his colleagues.



This story has repeated itself at countless educational institutions of higher learning throughout the world, especially in Europe and the United States. It brings to mind Luther’s well-known warning: “Make use of God’s grace and word while it is there. For you should know that it is like a passing thunder shower which does not return where it has once been. When it’s gone, it’s gone. And you Germans need not think that you will always have it. For ingratitude and contempt will not let it stay. Lazy hands are bound to have a lean year.” If Luther were with us today, he would apply the same words to the United States—“sloping toward Gomorrah” in materialism and paganism.

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

*Next month: Notker the Stammerer*



God's plan for a Muslim from Iraq included a harrowing escape over a mountain, a phone call from a WELS church in Wisconsin, and a new life of service to the Lord.

Julie K. Wietzke

# God PROVIDES

“Jacob,” a Muslim background believer from Iraq, is passionate about the gospel and its message of salvation through faith in Christ. If there is anything else that he is more passionate about, it’s sharing that message with other Muslims.

“We need to make friends and try to speak to them about Christ,” says Jacob. “If we don’t tell them, who else is going to tell them? I use myself as an example. If no one had told me, I wouldn’t be a believer.”

When you hear Jacob’s dramatic story, you can readily understand why he is so passionate about wanting to tell Muslims about Jesus.

## Leaving the Islamic faith

Jacob was born to Muslim parents in Kurdistan, in the northeast part of Iraq. His parents somewhat practiced the Muslim rituals, though he never saw his father pray.

“When I was in high school, I became an avid believer in Islam,” says Jacob. “I would pray five times a day. I would try to fast during Ramadan for 30 days. I read the Qur’an from cover to cover a few times because that’s one of the good works of Islam.”

Because Jacob wanted to truly understand the faith and not just practice it blindly, he also began reading other books and writings about the

Islamic faith. “Ironically, the more I read, the less attractive it became to me,” says Jacob, in speaking about the inhumane practices of Islam and the way women were treated.

Yet he struggled with what he should do because he was afraid of being punished by God because of his doubts.

Then one day, Jacob had what he calls a “life-changing” event. A good friend told Jacob that there was no Allah (the god of the Muslim faith). “When you grow up in one sort of teaching and that’s all you know, you don’t know that there is something else out there,” says Jacob. “So I was shocked, but intrigued.”

His friend then brought Jacob books that were forbidden in Iraq—books like *The Theory of Evolution* by Charles Darwin. Jacob began reading everything he could, including books on Marxism, philosophy, and existentialism. By the time he was through college, he had lost his faith completely and was an atheist.

## Leaving Iraq

In looking back, Jacob now wonders if he was truly an atheist. “It takes a lot of faith to be a complete atheist because you always have that little voice in you that says, ‘What if there is a god?’,” he says.

He especially was asking that question in 1991, when he was trying to escape Iraq by crossing Mount Goyzha into Iran. He was fleeing from his homeland because Saddam Hussein was reclaiming the cities in Kurdistan that had earlier been freed of Iraqi forces due to the Gulf War and a popular uprising.

Jacob and five others were halfway up the mountain when tanks rolled into the city where he lived. “I was scared,” he says. “If I would go and try to climb to the top, they would shoot me. If I would go down and give myself up, they would shoot me.”

“So I thought, ‘I’m going to pray to Jesus.’ Then a cloud came and covered the area I was in.”

This gave Jacob and the others the opportunity to climb to the top of the mountain without being seen. Six days later they were in Iran.

During this time more than 2.5 million people fled Kurdistan and were staying in refugee camps or in the mountains on the Iraqi border. When Hussein was forced out of Kurdistan, Jacob and the other refugees came home—at least for a short time. Five years later, Hussein returned, and Jacob fled again to Iran. This time he was able to apply for political asylum because of his work and was flown out of the Middle East to the United States.



# LEARN MORE

WOULD YOU LIKE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT JACOB, THE ISLAMIC RELIGION, OR REACHING OUT TO MUSLIMS IN YOUR AREA? HERE ARE SOME ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Chat with Jacob online on March 6 from 8 to 9 P.M. CST. Watch for more details at [www.wels.net/jump/chat](http://www.wels.net/jump/chat).

To schedule a presentation by Jacob, contact the World Missions Promotion Center, 1-800-466-9357; [wmspeaker@wels.net](mailto:wmspeaker@wels.net). Or fill out the online form at [www.wels.net/jump/wmspeaker](http://www.wels.net/jump/wmspeaker).

Read Jacob's 12 dos and don'ts when witnessing to Muslims at [www.wardinchrist.net](http://www.wardinchrist.net).

Find more practical tips about reaching out to Muslims at [www.truthinlovetomuslims.com](http://www.truthinlovetomuslims.com) or in the Northwestern Publishing House book, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Muslims*.

Watch the February *WELS Connection* video for an interview with Jacob.

## Becoming a Christian

Jacob lived briefly in Texas before starting a job at a cheese factory in Wisconsin. One night when he came home there was a message from a WELS congregation on his answering machine inviting him to church. Jacob decided to go.

"The pastor asked me where I was from," says Jacob. "I told him that I was from the Middle East and that I was Muslim but now I don't believe in anything. He said, 'Well, do you think you would like to study the Bible with me?' . . . I thought, 'Why not.'"

In all his studies, Jacob had never read the Bible before. "I thought Christianity was another religion like Islam where you have all these work-righteous things that you have to do and all the burden was on you," says Jacob. "When [the pastor] told me that you are saved by grace, I was shocked. 'How can this be?' I said. 'I can't do anything to save myself?'"

He continued studying and asking questions. After the attack on 9/11, Jacob even began doing presentations at area churches to help members better understand the Islam religion and how something like this could happen. He was baptized in 2002.

## Becoming a witness for Christ

But Jacob wasn't content to keep the good news to himself. He wanted to share it with other Muslims, even though it was dangerous for him because some Muslims believe that the punishment for leaving Islam is death.

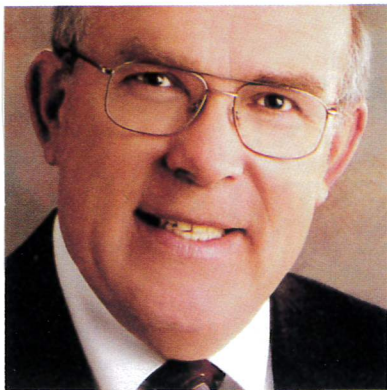
So he witnessed indirectly—by telling others how to reach out to Muslims. He became a member of a WELS committee in 2003 that studied how WELS should reach out to Muslims and the resulting ministry committee, the Outreach to Muslims Ministry. (See p. 22.) Jacob joined the Outreach to Muslims Ministry part time to conduct presentations for WELS congregations about Islam and reaching out to Muslims. That position became full time in April 2006. He is also studying with a pastor mentor to become more fully trained for his work as a missionary for outreach to Muslims.

In looking back to his mountaintop experience when leaving Iraq for the first time, Jacob now sees the Lord's hand in his escape. "At the time, I didn't think anything of it," he says. "Now I think back and I think that all of that stuff happened for a reason. God did respond to my prayer. He brought me here without me contributing to it. All these were reasons he was thinking of that I didn't know anything about."

Yet God knew. And God provided. And now Jacob sees the major difference between Christianity and Islam.

"Your salvation is a gift that has been given to you," says Jacob. "Christianity is all about love and giving yourself up for others."

*Julie Wietzke is the managing editor of Forward in Christ.*



*Carl R. Sumpf*

## God's valentine card

We once had a relative who never signed the cards she sent us. But even without the return address, we knew who sent them—Grandma. It wasn't forgetfulness on her part. It was thoughtfulness. If she didn't sign the cards, we could use them again, passing along the same loving thoughts to someone else.

We also receive many unsigned cards from our God, expressing his love for us. In every single feature of our day, God tells us of his love for us in what he sends or even allows in our lives. And, best of all, he does sign his notes of love for us in his inspired Word.

God meant for us to pass along these cards—signed and unsigned—to others. Since in God's address book there is not a single name omitted, we can add any name we please to the cards of love from God and pass along his love.

As you and I declare God's praises, living our lives for Christ our Savior, we're passing along God's love to others. Together, as a synod, we do this in many ways, especially in our home and world mission fields. Each school day, we also prepare future called workers for proclaiming God's love to others.

Recently I returned from a week of teaching at our seminary in India. While I was there, I received cards of God's love. Like my grandma's card, I'll pass them along. Supported by WELS families, children live in Christian orphan homes. While some of these "orphans" may have a parent, or even two, their own parents are not able to provide for them. But they are well taken care of in a Christian environment where, along with their temporal needs, the spiritual necessities are not ignored.

We heard them, with meaningful expression, recite the parts of Luther's Catechism. Some of them sang a song for us, reflecting on the love of the Good Shepherd, who holds precious lambs close to his heart. These children, on a daily basis, hear of God's love in their homes, and many of them also hear it in Christian schools supported by WELS families.

I was there transmitting your love—God's love, really—to the seminary students. Together for a week, we recounted God's love, studying Romans 1–8. One of the memorable verses in that section is Romans 8:32: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"

There's really no question. God has given us the greatest message of love when he gave us his Son Jesus. If God gave us his best, then there isn't anything good he wouldn't do for us. He's already given us the supreme gift of his own Son, a life given into death for us and risen to life for us.

No wonder we want to live our lives for Christ. So, as we declare his praises for having called us out of darkness into his wonderful light, we also want to pass along his love to others in all we do and say. We want to lovingly, joyfully, and generously support the proclamation of the gospel, providing, too, for the training of those who will go for us.

It's a card we can send others every day. This card, signed or unsigned, is better than any valentine you could ever send! It's part of "Every Life for Christ."



**P**erhaps regret, more than anything else, is what draws viewers to watch the television show *Lost*. Each episode is dedicated to revealing the past of one of the characters. Without fail, all of the characters have something in their past that they regret. Charlie regrets that he lost his fame and friends because of his drug habit. Hurley regrets that he lost the simple life that he enjoyed before he won the lottery. Jin-Soo regrets that he lost his wife's respect when she learned that he beat people to a pulp for his father-in-law's money.

But on the island every character receives a new start. Just as the wide ocean separates them from civilization, it also separates them from their former lives. But they still carry their regrets.

### The persecutor

If you could watch a flashback of the apostle Paul's life, this is what you would see: "Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1,2).

Viewing this scene from Paul's past, you see a man who was fanatical about persecuting those who followed Jesus as the way to heaven. God's commandments were

expendable if it meant the advancement of Saul's murderous agenda.

Saul's regret ran much deeper than wishing he could take back a few bad decisions. His regret became full-blown guilt when Jesus appeared to him (cf. Acts 9:3-5) and revealed that Jesus was true Lord. By persecuting the followers of Jesus, Saul had persecuted the Lord himself.

**(JESUS) CALLED SAUL TO FOLLOW A BRAND-NEW PATH— A PATH WITH NO REGRETS, NO GUILT.**

What is your deepest regret? While I'm sure we can come up with a long list of regrets over bad decisions we've made, we all have in common the deepest regret of all: "If only I had not persecuted the Lord."

We persecute Jesus every time we murder someone in our hearts with hate. We persecute Jesus every time we bow down to the idol money and place it as our first priority. We persecute Jesus when we offer our love and devotion to all the secret idols of our hearts.

This creates more than regret. It creates guilt for the worst offense imaginable.

### The peacemaker

"Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do" (Acts 9:6).

While Jesus told Saul to continue on the road to Damascus, at the same time he called Saul to follow a brand-new path—a path with no regrets, no guilt. This new path was the way of forgiveness created by Jesus.

On this new path, Jesus gave Saul the new name of Paul to acknowledge his new identity as a disciple of the Way. On this new Way, the Almighty removed Paul's guilt by washing him with the blood of Jesus applied through baptism (cf. Acts 22:16).

While we are helpless to change our past and wipe from our memory the regrets and guilt we bear, Jesus possesses the power to transform murderers into messengers, persecutors into peacemakers, and idolaters into disciples.

When regrets threaten to rob you of your joy, fill your memory with the good news that you have been washed with Jesus' blood in baptism. He gave you a new identity and called you to follow a new path—a path with no regrets.

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



**LOST**

**PHILIP L. KIESELHORST**

**IN REGRET**

**EVERYONE CAN LOOK INTO THEIR PAST AND THINK: "IF ONLY I HAD ...". BUT WHEN REGRETS THREATEN TO ROB YOU OF YOUR JOY, REMEMBER THE GOOD NEWS THAT YOU HAVE BEEN WASHED WITH JESUS' BLOOD.**



A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John C. Bau".

## Love, listen, lead

Some time ago I sat and listened to a presentation on creative and innovative approaches to ministry. I usually listen quietly and respectfully. But sometimes a presentation will put me to sleep. At other times, it will spur me to think about what was presented. At still other times, the presentation will start me on a mental journey on a completely different topic.

I admit that this presentation sparked a mental exploration of leadership. I've heard a lot about leadership these days. We all have. We've discussed—sometimes heatedly—topics related to pastoral leadership, synodical leadership, political leadership, and leadership in the home.

During this particular presentation, I began to explore what I thought leadership was and what it should be. I began to jot down notes, and I even made a diagram. I suppose the presenter thought I was taking down notes about his presentation, but my mind was racing through what it meant to be a leader.

I imagined that leadership was a kind of process that repeated itself again and again—like a cycle or wheel. The first step is love. As disciples of Jesus, we are to demonstrate love—the same kind of love Jesus had for us. That means we possess a deep concern for others and what they experience. For me, this kind of love is the hallmark of Christian leadership.

Love for others moves disciples of Jesus to the second stop on the wheel of leadership—listening. There are two kinds of listening for Christian leaders. First, love opens the ears of Christian concern for others. We listen to each other's perspective and concerns. We listen for joys. We listen for problems. But there's more. Christians have another set of ears and a second way to listen: we listen to the voice of our great leader, Jesus. He speaks to us in his Word, and we pay attention to what he says.

Both these types of listening—to others and to Jesus—shape the response. After listening to others and to our Savior we adopt a vision for action. We respond to others according to the needs we perceive and in the way that Jesus expects from us as his followers. In some cases that is a word of kindness or encouragement, even an action that helps another overcome the problem we have heard about.

I wonder if the cycle of leadership would apply to pastors, teachers, fathers, husbands, and presidents, among others. The pattern seems simple: love, listen, respond, and lead. Leaders set direction, provide an example, and serve on the front line—like the point of a spear—for others to follow. God put them in roles of leadership, but they love those God entrusts to their care. They listen to them, and they respond to their needs. They lead.

The reason I thought this was a cycle or wheel is that the process repeats. Once leaders set a direction, they continue to love those whom they lead. They listen to them, trying to assess how their response is working, if it's working, and how to refine it. After listening again, they respond. Only to listen and lead again. All this occurs in the context of love for others.

Perhaps my thought is just so much imagination, but I wondered what leadership in the church would be like if we followed the simple and repeated pattern of love, listen, and lead. What would happen in Christian homes if husbands and fathers, loved, listened and led, and then simply repeated the process? What would happen in congregations if pastors and other congregational leaders loved enough to listen and then once they set a course of action they loved and listened again? And then again.

What is your birthright? Birthrights are the privileges that you receive by birth. Most of us are not heirs to trust funds or a corporate empire. But even if birth into our family gave us nothing more than our name, you and I have the birthright to a kingdom.

Esau and Jacob were twin sons of Isaac. God had given this family a special birthright: the Savior would come through their family. But God had told their mother that the birthright wouldn't go to Esau, the first-born child. Instead God wanted the birthright to go to Jacob.

#### Read Genesis 25:27-34

<sup>27</sup>The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. <sup>28</sup>Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

<sup>29</sup>Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. <sup>30</sup>He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.)

<sup>31</sup>Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright."

<sup>32</sup>"Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?"

<sup>33</sup>But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. <sup>34</sup>Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright.

1. Read God's prophesy about these children (Genesis 25:23). Regardless of what God said, what do the actions of these men tell you about which one their father Isaac chose?
2. The men that these boys grew up to be intensified Isaac's wrestling with God's promise of the birthright. How?
3. How did each brother show a sinful attitude about the birthright?
4. What was Jacob's motivation for buying the birthright? What was Esau's for selling it?

5. Agree or Disagree. In the end, the birthright went to the younger child just as God intended. So Jacob was doing God's will.
6. Discuss. Is there ever a reason to use sinful means to reach a godly end?

#### Bringing it home

We, too, have a birthright. Born of water and the Spirit through Holy Baptism, we are entitled to rights and privileges by this rebirth. God has made us not only his children, but also heirs of the kingdom.

1. Esau's problem with the birthright was that it meant delayed gratification. How is our birthright as Christians also one of delayed gratification?
2. The writer to the Hebrews used Esau as an example. He said that just as Esau sold his birthright to ease his hunger, Christians might sell their spiritual birthright to make life easier. Esau sold his birthright for stew. What is your selling price? For what are you willing to despise your birthright among your family? Neighbors? Coworkers?
3. Jacob did the opposite of Esau. He wanted the birthright so much that he thought God needed help keeping his promises. What are some promises God made to you that you think he seems a little slow in keeping? How are you tempted to help God along?
4. Some aspects of our birthright wait for us in heaven; some we enjoy right now. Describe the comfort in knowing that forgiveness is our present possession.

#### Conclusion

Isaac wrestled with his personal wants when it came to giving the birthright. Esau wrestled with giving proper respect to his birthright. Jacob wrestled with God's timetable and the means to bring the birthright to where it was promised. Through it all, God taught his people a lesson: grace and mercy come to undeserving people.

*Contributing editor Jonathan Schroeder is pastor at Faith, Sharpsburg, Georgia.*

*This is the second article in a 12-part Bible study. Find this article and possible answers online after Feb. 5 at [www.forwardinchrist.net](http://www.forwardinchrist.net).*

# WRESTLING WITH GOD: OUR BIRTHRIGHT

An interactive study of Jacob Jonathan E. Schroeder



# MY FRIEND, you are wandering



Mark A. Cordes

A few years ago at a synod convention a computer engineer told me, "There are two kinds of hard drives: those that have crashed, and those that will crash. And 'crash' is literal," he explained. "The tolerances are so close, it's like a 747 flying full speed about six inches above the ground." He was trying to impress on me the need to back up my sermons and Bible study files.

Have you ever thought how there are really only two kinds of sheep in the Good Shepherd's flock? Those that are wandering—and those that will wander.

## Tears of relief

Once I met a layman who enjoyed making calls on wandering sheep. When he moved, he trained new calling elders in his new congregation. Such rare devotion made me ask, "Why do you like calling on fellow members who are not coming to church or receiving the sacrament?"

His answer was even more surprising. "I used to work for the FBI," he told me. "We found bureaucrats embezzling money from the government. It was my job to confront them. So I would wait until the end of the day when they came home from work hungry and tired and dreading another night of torn conscience. You would not believe how they cried tears of relief."

"Tears of relief?" I asked incredulously.

"That's right," he smiled.

"I told them, 'We have you cold. You can either do this . . . and this . . . and this to clear your name, or you will go to jail.' They were so relieved to have a way out that they cried tears of relief."

"That's how I see elder's calls," he continued. "People who

**There are really only two kinds of sheep in the Good Shepherd's flock: those that are wandering—and those that will wander.**

are skipping church are not hearing God's Word or receiving the body and blood of our Lord. They are wandering sheep who do not know what terrible danger they are in. The devil wants them to feel secure and at ease because then he can eventually drag them into his prison of unbelief and sin. I know that as an elder I am doing our Savior's sheep a big favor to search them out, to find them, and to confront them

with this sin. Then we can bring them safe and sound back to the security of Christ's flock in the pastor's care."

## Sheep love to wander

Which kind of sheep are you? Have you been away from hearing God's Word and receiving the Lord's Supper for more than a month? You are wandering, my friend, straying into danger you cannot even see. But Jesus your Savior wants you safe and sound in the care of your

pastor (a Latin word for "shepherd").

Faithful attenders, you also need to be careful. We are all sheep who love to wander. We all need to be called back. Maybe our dear Shepherd wants you to be one of the callers. Faithful sheep not only battle their own sinful nature that loves to wander, but they also have the task of reminding other sheep of the dangers of wandering off on their own.

When we come back to the Good Shepherd, he gives us the cool water of his gospel to drink. We are comforted by his rod and staff as we walk through life's dark valleys. He wonderfully forgives our sins again and again as we receive his body and blood given and shed for us for our forgiveness. What a relief!

*Mark Cordes is pastor at New Life, Shoreview, Minnesota.*

