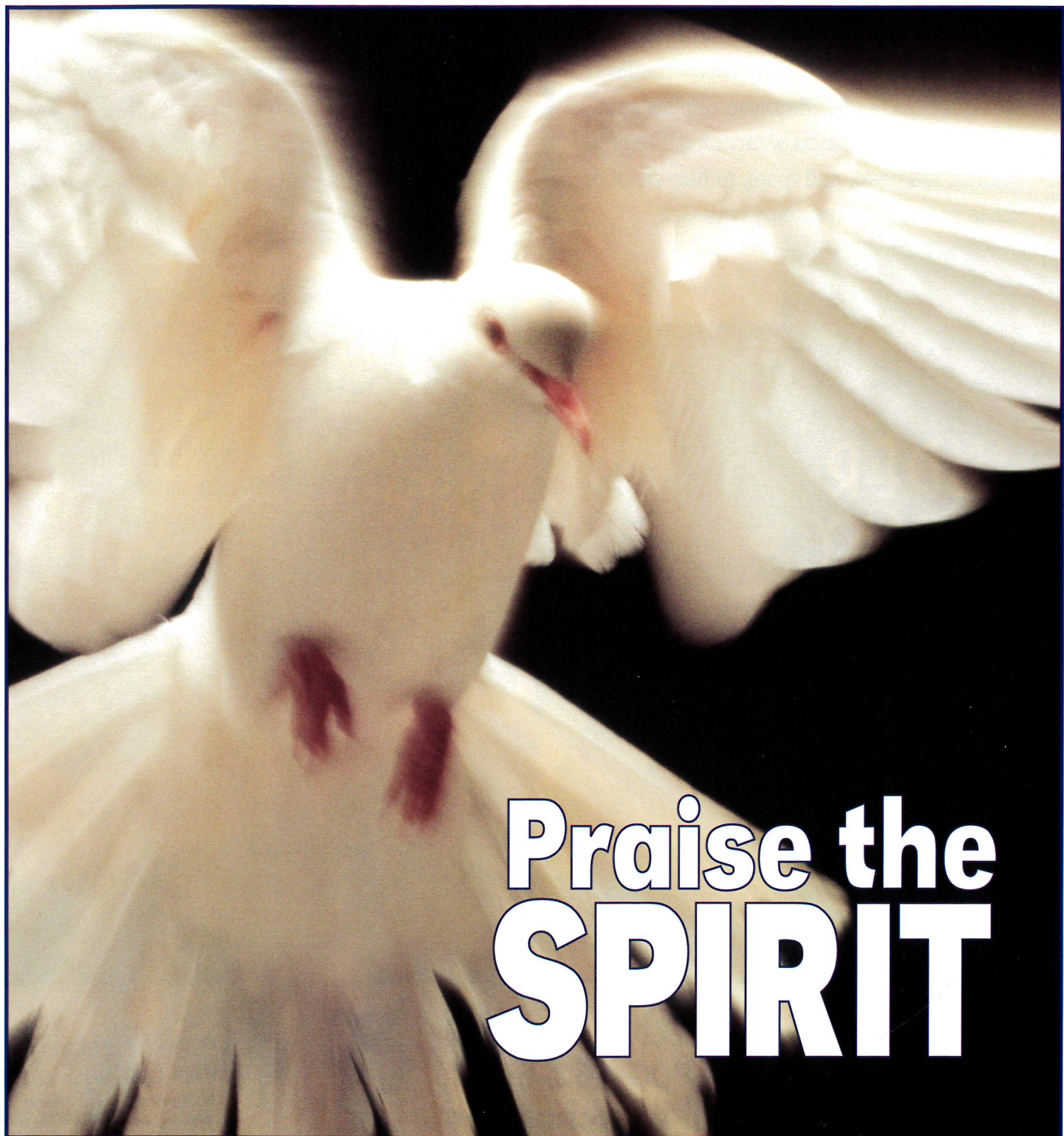


LOVE AND LEADERSHIP • THE IMPORTANCE OF FATHERS

JUNE 2007

# Forward in Christ

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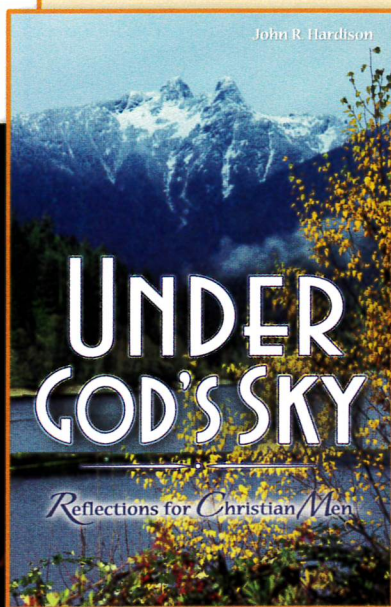
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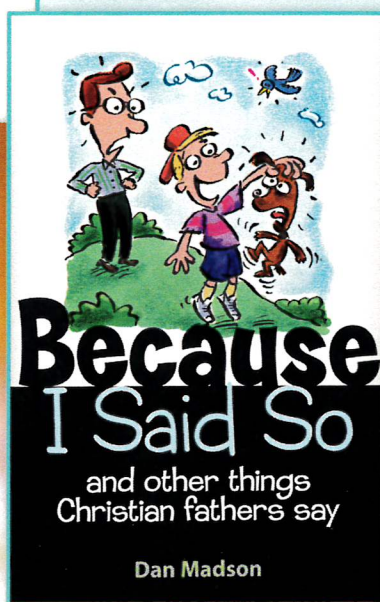
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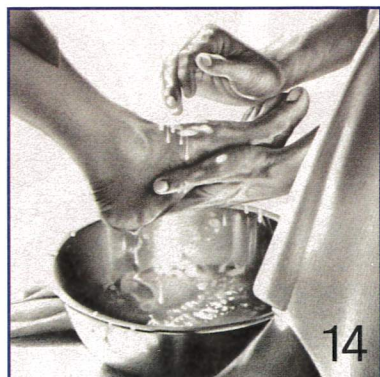
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## Forward in Christ

✠ The official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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WITH OUR FATHERS;  
MAY HE NEVER LEAVE US  
NOR FORSAKE US.  
*1 Kings 8:57*

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## WHAT'S INSIDE by Julie Wietzke

This month is traditionally the time that we stop and give thanks to the Lord for all the blessings in our life.

But wait a minute. This isn't the right month to celebrate Thanksgiving . . . or is it?

We should thank the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit every day for all our blessings—physical and spiritual. Several articles this month remind us not to take what the Lord has given us—or done for us—for granted. On p. 10, John Vogt focuses on the Holy Spirit's work in Bible times and in the present time. He also shares how we can show our gratitude for the Spirit's work through our words and actions. Jonathan Schroeder, in his interactive Bible study, uses events in Jacob's life to show how God's hand directs everything that happens to us—both the good and the bad (p. 35). Finally Dana Kirchoff cautions us about how easy it can be to lose our sense of wonder (and maybe our level of thankfulness) about God's forgiveness and grace (back page). Have a wonderful Thanksgiving Day every day (even without the turkey!).

# JUNE

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**MENTAL ILLNESS**

I enjoy your magazine every month. Some articles really seem to reach out to me, personally. I wrote a letter last year in response to "Panicked!" but I feel moved to respond on a more personal level to your piece on mental illness ["Something's just not right," March]. I suffer from major depression, OCD [obsessive-compulsive disorder], and anorexia. . . . Mental illness often seems to be the loneliest cross to bear as many Christians don't see the suffering and will sometimes even look down on my (what they call) negative attitude. . . . There are other Christians who feel the loneliness and pain of the "demons" and "dark days," my terms for depression.

Thank you . . . for the work you do in creating this magazine. It reaches us even way down here in Texas! I always pass our congregation's extras on to the local library's magazine exchange.

*Lori Thompson  
Georgetown, Texas*

God is amazing that he would lead you to publish "Something's just not right" [March] when my family would need it the most. You see, it was in March 2005 when carrying the cross of mental illness became nearly unbearable for us. A sheriff's deputy had come to our door to inform us that our 20-year-old son, Michael, had lost his lifelong battle with mental illness. What a comfort it was for us to read the message from Pastor Thomas Wilsmann. Our son lost his mental abilities and his life due to his illness; but he did not lose his faith, since "faith is not a gift of the mind."

Two other statements from this article also stood out for me. "He's living with the disorder and continues to serve as a pastor." And, "His congregation has been supportive and understanding." What a blessing for Pastor Wilsmann! He has a congregation that practices Ephesians 4:1,2: "Bearing with one another in love."

And what a blessing for Pastor

Wilsmann's congregation! They have a pastor who understands the struggles of mental illness and knows how to minister to the spiritual needs of those who carry such crosses.

*Terri Baur  
Brillion, Wisconsin*

Thanks for an honest look at mental illness in "Something's just not right" [March]. Usually a hidden secret, mental illness can be mild to debilitating. Those who manage usually do so because of incredible support from family and friends.

In addition to praying for a person with mental illness and advising them to seek the help of a psychiatrist or mental health professional, it is important to patiently remain by that person's side with ongoing and unconditional support. It is difficult to do this without an understanding of the specific mental illness and support from others who understand.

*Nancy Huwe  
Deerfield, Wisconsin*

Thank you for your accurate and encouraging article on mental illness. There are many people, including devoted Christians, who suffer with mental illness. Unfortunately, some Christians believe that mental illness is only a spiritual problem that will be overcome by prayer and greater spiritual faithfulness. While prayer and spiritual faithfulness will help a Christian through any life-problem, mental illness must also be treated by a professional working in that area. To not seek appropriate treatment for mental illness robs an individual of the joys life does provide.

*Dr. John Juern  
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin*

Thank you for the fair and biblical view of mental illness presented in "Something's just not right" [March]. I've heard a lot of well-meaning, Christian advice say that depression and mental illness is caused by a weakness of faith and the Word of

God alone is all that is needed. This is an unhelpful and unfair assessment of someone in the throes of deep depression or mental illness. We look to the Word of God to guide financial decisions, yet no one would condemn the use of a financial planner. We look to the Word of God to guide us in health-care decisions, yet who would question one's faith when they visit a licensed physician to treat an illness? Why then should a Christian's faith be questioned when he or she receives help from gifted and knowledgeable mental-health professionals? By doing so, an opportunity is missed to demonstrate God's love and compassion during a lonely and sometimes frightening time in a believer's life.

*Lisa Denninger  
Maple Grove, Minnesota*

**FELLOWSHIP**

The article "My Neighbor has the Measles" [Jan.] begins, "God warns us to avoid those who believe something other than the Bible's teachings. He doesn't want us to be infected and lost to his grace."

First of all, it is of utmost importance to note: submersion in God's Word is our only vaccination for all infectious false beliefs.

Secondly, let us never forget that each of us was at one time "infected" with sin and something other than the Bible's teachings. However, by the grace of God, someone was obedient and loving enough to teach us the truth of Jesus—that he died for our sins and rose again. Thank God that they did not stay in their homes/churches because they thought they might become "infected"! . . .

*Carlene Hammonds  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma*

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# Our heavenly home

*All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Hebrews 11:13-16*

James A. Mattek

I believe that during my 22 years in the parish, the most requested funeral hymn was “I’m but a Stranger Here” (*Christian Worship* 417). Interestingly, this hymn isn’t found in the “Death and Burial” section of our hymnal, but in the “Trust” section. The words of this hymn reflect a longing and restlessness that God’s people have always had.

Hebrews 11 is a “Who’s Who” of Old Testament heavyweights. Their names are mentioned not because they were always faithful, but because they had faith in the one who truly was always faithful: God. From Abel, whose spilled blood still speaks volumes, to Noah who built a ship in clear view of unbelieving hecklers. They trusted. From Enoch, who needed no funeral service, to Mr. and Mrs. Abraham who needed no fertility service. They trusted. From Joseph, whose bones would be transplanted, to Moses, who would transplant a nation. They trusted.

## Longing

In these trusting people God had placed a longing, and he had told them what to long for. They were to long for a better place . . . the heavenly city which he had prepared for them.

When my grandmother was dying, she said, “Why can’t I just die and go to heaven?” These were not the words of a weak believer who lacked contentment. Instead they were the words of a godly woman who trusted

that God had a better place in store for her. Like the believers of old, she longed “for a better country—a heavenly one.” The suffering Job confessed the same, “How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:27). He was longing to see his Redeemer in the next life. Paul said it too, “We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). We have an inner longing because heaven is our home.

## Restlessness

Recently I asked a Christian friend about his wife’s health. In his response he commented that their situation reminded them that this life is only temporary and that they shouldn’t get too attached to it. “We’re simply passing through,” he added. That’s what someone from the “hall of faith” in Hebrews 11 would have said. “They admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.” They were just passing through.

To a certain degree God’s people don’t fit in, and they know it. We are in the world but not of the world. We view this life as temporary and its troubles as momentary compared to the eternal glory that will be revealed in us in heaven. We have a healthy dissatisfaction with the here and now.



To keep us from developing a cozy love affair with the temporary and to help us keep our eyes on heavenly things, God lovingly sends and bends situations in our life that aren’t so pleasant. Our restlessness then returns, and we long once again for the home our Savior won for us.

*Contributing editor James Mattek, chief executive officer at Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service, is a member at Trinity, Waukesha, Wisconsin.*

# The stewardship of our faith

Douglas J. Engelbrecht

Recently I read an article about things that people have said that they would probably like to take back. Maybe the best one was the Federal Communications Commission chairman, Mark Fowler, commenting on a new heart monitoring device. He said, "If somebody has a bad heart, they can plug this jack in at night as they go to bed and it will monitor their heart throughout the night. And the next morning, when they wake up dead, there'll be a record."

A lot of people would probably like to take back something they once said about sharing the Christian faith with their children. Some have said, "Don't worry, they'll get that on their own." Parents sometimes don't want to be accused of forcing their children to accept their ideas. But is this like Mark Fowler's statement? Having a record of your heart activity doesn't do you any good if you "wake up dead." Not teaching your children the Christian faith doesn't do you or them any good if they grow up dead . . . spiritually!

We can't assume that our children will just "get that on their own," any more than Moses assumed that the next generation would get it on their own. Most of those who entered the Promised Land were not even born when God brought Pharaoh to his knees with the plagues or when he parted the Red Sea. One generation would need to teach the next what God had done. "These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you . . . so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD . . . Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 6:1,2,7).

**Let's teach our children, while they are young, to fear the Lord and stand in awe of him.**

Where will our children learn what Jesus has done for us? Where can they pick it up along the way? In our public schools? In some schools, the Ten Commandments have been barred from the classroom, and mentioning Jesus is considered to be a greater threat than any weapon of mass destruction. From television and movies? Isn't God openly mocked and sin openly glorified? From society? Many view God as a fumbling old buffoon and transgression of his law no more serious than burping at the dinner table.

Where will they learn to come to the cross of Christ? Where will they hear that without his holy precious blood, they will have to stand someday before a God who means it when he says, "Thou shalt not!"? Where, unless you and I teach them? Where, unless we pass the Christian faith to our children so that they may enjoy long life and enjoy the longest life of all . . . eternal life!

What a privilege! What an awesome responsibility! We can practice good stewardship of the faith that God has given us by passing it on to those who are nearest and dearest to us—our children. Let's not wish that some day we could take back the idea that our children will "get that on their own." Let's neither hesitate nor be afraid to do everything we can to avoid having our children grow up spiritually dead. Let's teach our children, while they are young, to fear the Lord and stand in awe of him. Let's love them enough to share the priceless treasure of Jesus with them.

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





at the foot of the cross. Richard L. Gurgel

## TOPIC: Mortal vs. venial sins

**In *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, Koehler speaks of mortal and venial sins. I thought that was Roman Catholic teaching. Do Lutherans speak of mortal and venial sins?**

Lutheran theologians have used those terms. Our class notes at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary acknowledge that the terms “mortal” and “venial” can be useful. They are useful in identifying two truths: 1) Willful sinning destroys faith; and 2) Christians do not fall from faith with every sin.

It’s important to note that Lutherans don’t use the terms mortal and venial to categorize specific sinful actions as serious or not-so-serious. Instead we view sin from the perspective of the spiritual state of the one who has sinned. Since every sin shatters God’s law (James 2:10), every sin is mortal for an unbeliever. Paul plainly warns: “If you live according to the sinful nature, you will die” (Romans 8:13).

But a believer clings to forgiveness in Christ. By the word “venial,” we speak of sins of weakness or ignorance in the heart and life of a believer. Even though all those sins are damnable by merit, those who take refuge in Christ know they have pardon and forgiveness by Christ’s merits.

As you indicated, the problem with the terms comes from their abuse in Roman Catholicism. Here are definitions from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

**Mortal sin:** A grave infraction of the law of God that destroys the divine life in the soul of the sinner (sanctifying grace), constituting a turn away from God. For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must be present: grave matter, full knowledge of the evil of the act, and full consent of the will (p. 889).

**Venial sin:** Sin which does not destroy the divine life in the soul, as does mortal sin, though it diminishes and wounds it. Venial sin is the failure to observe neces-

sary moderation, in lesser matters of moral law, or in grave matters acting without full knowledge or complete consent (p. 902).

We agree about the danger of sinning with “full knowledge” and “full consent.” But unbiblical confusion is caused when specific sinful actions are categorized as “grave” or “lesser matters.” Such categorizing lulls the sinner to sleep about the seriousness of every sin.

If we believe that small sins don’t matter, we minimize sin and its consequences. As C. F. W. Walther commented in *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*: “Small sins become great when they are regarded as small” (p. 332). If I treat any sin of heart or life as venial and therefore harmless, I soon may believe I don’t need Christ and his forgiveness.

So where does that leave us? Don’t fall into the trap of trying to separate every sin into categories of venial or mortal. That only leads to empty rationalizations for why, in our case, a particular sin was justified and therefore less grave. Instead, run daily to the cross of Christ and plead guilty of every sin of heart and life for the damning evil it is. With King David we confess even faults that are hidden to us (Psalm 19:12).

But most importantly, at the cross we rejoice that God doesn’t waste time asking whether our sins are big or small. He knows they are all big. Because of that God gave us an even bigger Savior. That is why he always assures us that “the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

*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.



The Spirit may at times seem to be the forgotten member of the Trinity, but saving faith in our hearts and holy living in our lives honor and praise him.

# THE HOLY SPIRIT:

John F. Vogt

## *Lutherans praise him*

*H*e's been called "the silent member of the Trinity." In fact, some accuse Lutherans of making him the "forgotten member." Do we give the Holy Spirit the attention and praise he deserves? Are we guilty of slighting him and losing the gifts and excitement he wants to give?

### WE PRAISE THE HOLY SPIRIT FOR WHAT HE HAS DONE

The Holy Spirit is specifically mentioned in nearly every major event in the Bible. If you haven't noticed him, it's simply because he does not draw attention to himself.

Together with the Father and the Son, he created the universe. Job says: "The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (Job 33:4).

The flood came only after an intense and prolonged effort by the Holy Spirit to call the people back to God. "Then the Lord said, 'My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years'" (Genesis 6:3).

When God's people cried out from their slavery in Egypt, the Holy Spirit provided leaders and confirmed them into their offices by miraculous signs. "Then the Lord . . . took of the Spirit that was on [Moses] and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied" (Numbers 11:25).

It was the Holy Spirit who called and equipped the judges, the temporary leaders who rescued God's people from their oppressors. The Spirit, for example, gave the skirt-chasing Samson his supernatural power: "The Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat" (Judges 14:6).

God gave kings, and the Holy Spirit guided them. "Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed [David] in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power" (1 Samuel 16:13).

Read on through the Old Testament. You also will see that the Holy Spirit spoke through prophets.

The Holy Spirit's actions in the Old Testament directed events until the time was right for Jesus to come. The Spirit's actions in this New Testament age bring Christ's salvation to us.

The Spirit was the Trinity's instrument to bring about the conception of God's Son in the virgin Mary. The angel explained to Mary: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35).

John needed to be absolutely sure, so God promised there would be a clear sign. "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit" (John 1:33). The Spirit gave that verification at Jesus' baptism. The Spirit also was an active force in Jesus' miracles. Our Savior said: "I drive out demons by the Spirit of God" (Matthew 12:28). The Spirit was even on Golgotha when Jesus "through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God" (Hebrews 9:14).

The Holy Spirit did not go into retirement on Good Friday. He became the source of power that propelled the saving gospel across the globe. Jesus promised: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The Spirit began his gospel-spreading work in the New Testament church on Pentecost, continued it through the missionary journeys of Paul, and hasn't stopped to this day.

### WE PRAISE THE HOLY SPIRIT IN OUR CHURCH

Does the Spirit get the proper amount of attention and praise in Lutheran churches? Some answer: "No." In fact, underlying the charismatic movement is the accusation that most churches slight the Spirit. We beg to differ.

Just page through any Lutheran hymnal. Notice that we usually invoke the Spirit's presence as we begin the service "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." We draw upon his authority and power in the absolution: "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (*Christian Worship*, p. 26). The creed describes him and his work. At times, after the sermon we sing: ". . . take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with your free Spirit" (*Christian Worship*, p. 20). The Holy Spirit is addressed regularly in our prayers. Most important, his tools—the gospel in Word and sacraments—are at the heart and core of Lutheran worship.

It is in the nature of the Holy Spirit and his work to deflect attention from himself to Christ.

Lutherans around the world use a variety of orders of worship. They vary in the specific words used, but the Holy Spirit gets his share of attention in all of them. In the Ukrainian Lutheran Church, where I serve, members make the sign of the cross each time there is a reference to the Trinity. In one service I counted the people crossing themselves 28 times! Whenever we honor the Trinity, we recognize that all three members are equally important and equally cherished.

To those who wonder if Lutherans give the Holy Spirit his proper share of attention, we would also point out that the Spirit is honored by Pentecost, one of the three major festivals of the church year. In addition, half of the church year is counted as Sundays after Pentecost. This long season, up to 24 Sundays a year, focuses on Spirit-produced spiritual growth.

### WE PRAISE THE HOLY SPIRIT IN OUR LIVES

Perhaps the most important question remains: Is the Holy Spirit praised in our lives?

It is in the nature of the Holy Spirit and his work to deflect attention from himself to Christ. This is exactly what Jesus said the Spirit of truth would do: "He will testify about me" (John 15:26). Scripture does not say: "Believe in the Holy Spirit and you will be saved," but rather, "Believe in the Lord Jesus . . ." (Acts 16:31). The Holy Spirit is content to stand in the background. His role is to lead people to saving faith in Jesus and then to keep them in that faith. We praise and honor the Spirit, therefore, when we place our trust in Jesus.

The Holy Spirit causes the faith he has given to show itself in our lives. He changes how we think and act. "Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. . . . But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:16,22,23).

The Spirit is not interested in drawing attention to himself. He focuses the attention on Christ and what he has done. The Spirit may at times seem to be the forgotten member of the Trinity, but saving faith in our hearts and holy living in our lives honor and praise him.

*John F. Vogt serves as rector (president) of St. Sophia Seminary in Ternopil, Ukraine. He serves the Ukrainian Lutheran Church and Thoughts of Faith, an organization affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.*

Read more about the Holy Spirit in *The Holy Spirit, Giver of Life*, an NPH publication written by Vogt. Find a related Bible study on this topic after June 5 at [www.forwardinchrist.net](http://www.forwardinchrist.net)

**We are confronted by gender issues and must wrestle with the callings God lays out for us in Scripture. Future generations also will struggle with them. These articles, written as a series of e-mails from a grandparent to a grandchild in the year 2032, share wisdom from our study of the Scriptures to the next generation. This series follows the outline of a Bible study prepared by WELS Adult Discipleship's Women's Ministry Committee. The study will be available this summer.**

Dear Emily,

Grandma and I were glad to hear that your Bible study is going well! We know the workings of God's kingdom in human hearts are usually hidden from our view. Yet it is wonderful when the Spirit grants us little glimpses of how he uses the gospel to "turn on the lights" in hearts as they grasp ever more clearly his glorious truth!

The answer to your question about the gifts God gives to men and women is a simple "Yes!" Yes, God has given to women a set of spiritual gifts just as wide and broad as he has given to men. But we cannot understand our own spiritual gifts—or that of others around us—without an understanding of two simple yet beautiful words: *calling* and *callings*.

That word *calling* takes you back, Emily, to that day 23 years ago when you were only 10 days old. There at the baptismal font your pastor spoke your name. More importantly, he spoke the name of the Triune God as he applied the water. That startled you and made you cry! But that only meant your tears matched the

tears of joy in our eyes.

We were filled with joy.

On that day, God called you to faith and brought you into his church. He made you part of his glorious bride—yes, that was

the significance of that miniature wedding gown you wore that day.

And with that calling to faith, God poured out all the gifts every Christian—both male and female—has. Paul begins a magnificent

inventory of the awesome gifts we share as those called to belong to God: "one body, one Spirit . . . one hope . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all" (Ephesians 4:4,5).

Paul knew that there were many more blessings God gave to his "called." He was only listing the highlights of the family treasure every one of us holds in common as children and heirs of God. That's why we cannot emphasize enough that what we have in common as Christian men and women far exceeds what is unique about us.

And yet, what we have in common does not cancel the unique place Christ has in mind for each member of his body. All of us are in the body of Christ. That's where our one common *calling* broadens out into the unique set of *callings* God gives each of us. And that's where our unique spiritual gifts come into play as well! In each of the unique callings God places before us, his grace also equips us with every gift needed to carry out those callings to his glory and honor.

Of course, we must remember that such gifts are never given to make us proud like a miser counting up his treasure! They are not given in order to lead us to wonder who may be more or less important in the body because of their unique "package" of gifts. How foolish! They were given for one purpose alone: for active service in specific God-given callings as we serve those God puts around us day by day. We become his tools

*God called us all to faith in Jesus, but he*

# SERVING



to bring blessings into the lives of others in whatever callings he gives us.

That's what has been so fascinating for us to watch during the past 23 years of your life. God has slowly given glimpses of how he molds and shapes your life by his grace. He has given you gifts and talents that fit perfectly all the varied callings he's placed before you.

While God gave you the calling of student, we marveled at the talents and abilities he gave you to process all the information you learned.

Early on we recognized that God gave you a heart that can understand and empathize with the needs of others. We have watched how God has used you in his calling as a Christian friend. How often God has used your gifts to encourage and comfort the friends and acquaintances he gave you. You even found open doors to share the faith with sheep not yet of Christ's flock! As your mom and dad shared such stories with us, I was reminded of young Jonathan helping David find strength in God (1 Samuel 23:16). I think your parents even said that you helped your brothers sort through challenging situations in their lives!

In these last two years we saw the Lord equip you for your calling as an employee with the gift of people skills. You are able to set your accounting clients at ease as you helped balance their books. Sometimes you even had

an opportunity to give the reason for the hope that you have as God's called child! And yes, now we are thrilled to watch God pour out his gift of being able to teach. God has given you a calling to lead the women's Bible study in your congregation.

Through it all, we have been very thankful that God has helped you to see that his callings do not merely confront us within the walls of church and school. We recognize callings from God far beyond the opportunities for service listed in the church bulletin or newsletter. We aren't Lutheran "monks" who believe that activities are only valuable if done within the walls of the "monastery." As his called ones, all our callings lived out by his gracious gifts become high and holy service to our Savior. Isn't that what Paul meant when he told us, in view of God's glorious mercies, to offer our bodies as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1)?

So richly does God bless both the men and women he has called to faith. Possessing common and unique spiritual gifts, we are sent by God to an ever-new and often rapidly changing array of callings. There, in the midst of this fallen world, we can be the salt and light he has declared us to be!

No, Emily, I did not forget your other questions. Merely possessing gifts does not overrule God's fatherly wisdom in directing us how to use them. As we interact

as men and women at home, at church, and in the world, we will forever be challenged by a single pressing question asked in limitless variation: how can we make the most of every man and woman's unique gifts without violating God's good principle of head and helper?

Well . . . that's why I'm especially glad that Kathie tells me she's written an e-mail for Lauren that seeks to answer that precise question!

An heir together with you of his gracious gift of life,

Grandpa

*Richard Gurgel, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Calvary, Thiensville.*

Learn more about spiritual gifts and callings at the *National Women's Leadership Conference*, held at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., on *July 7, 2007*. The conference will encourage and edify women throughout WELS and introduce the new Bible study—Heirs Together - Serving Together—with discussions, skits, worship, and more! Sign up by June 15 at [www.wels.net/jump/womenconf](http://www.wels.net/jump/womenconf), or call 800-567-8669.

*has given us all different callings in this world.*

# TOGETHER

Richard L. Gurgel

# Love makes leadership contagious

Jesus is the humble, loving servant-leader that claims us as his disciples and inspires us to follow his example.

Jeff Gunn

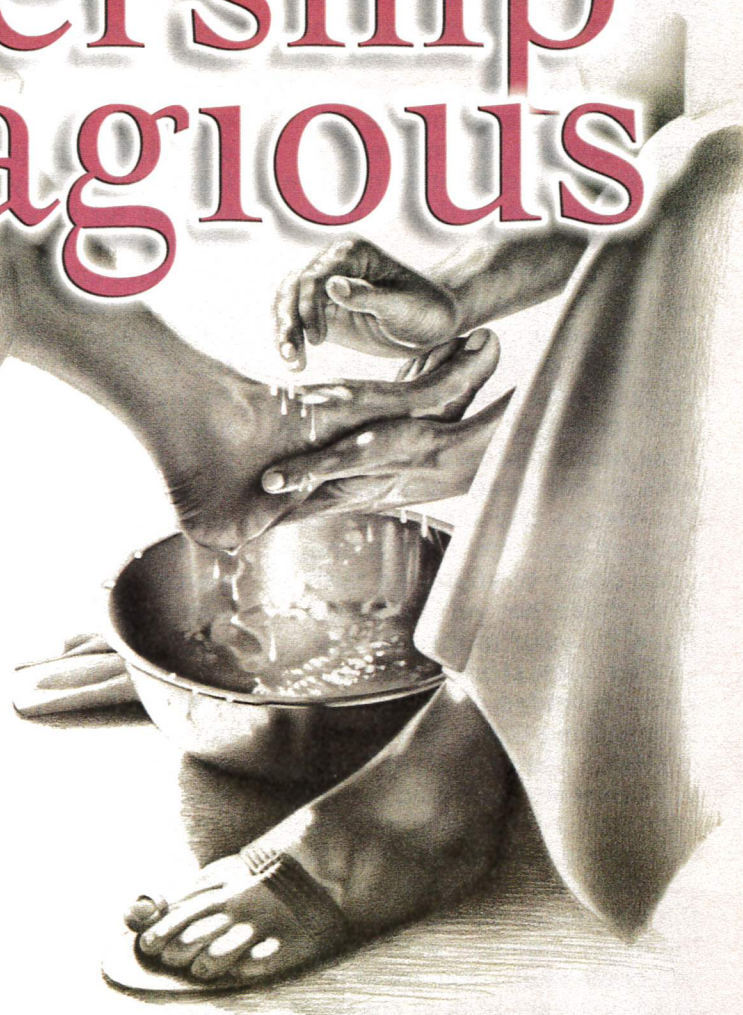
**E**motion is contagious. If you don't believe it, try this little experiment. Smile at others. Researchers say that of all emotional signals, smiles are the most contagious; they have an almost irresistible power to make others smile in return.

But which emotions are more contagious than others? Would you say, for instance, that love is more contagious than hatred, or hatred than love? Yale University did a study a number of years ago that tried to determine which emotions were more contagious. What they discovered is actually pretty interesting: "Emotions may spread like viruses, but not all emotions spread with the same ease. A study at Yale University School of Management found that among working groups, cheerfulness and warmth spread most easily, while irritability is less contagious and depression spreads hardly at all" (*Primal Leadership—Realizing the Importance of Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, p. 10).

## POSITIVE LEADERS

The best leaders seem able to do what many often find impossible. They seem to intuitively get the importance—and the contagious nature—of the positive. They draw from a well of faith that seems bottomless, even when every circumstance surrounding them seems to virtually demand doubt. Perhaps most difficult, they stay kind when confronted by a thousand unkindnesses.

Do you ever wonder how they do it? It certainly takes great courage. Yet isn't courage exactly what God requires of those in positions of leadership? One of my favorite



passages is Paul's parting words to the Corinthians: "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love" (1 Corinthians 16:13,14). These words are practically a formula for courageous—and contagious—leadership.

## 1. BE ON YOUR GUARD

Contagious leaders have to be constantly vigilant. When we are passionate about something, as most leaders are, that passion is going to draw criticism. That's even more true when it's something to do with our Christian faith. Jesus once told his disciples, "All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Mark 13:13).

Sadly, the attacks don't always come from the outside.

Most of all, we have to be on guard against our own sinful pride. One of the things that helps me with sinful pride is to have a circle of trusted Christian friends who really can be honest with me.

Then, we practice dialogue. Dialogue comes from a Greek root that means “get through to the word or the meaning.” The purpose is to go beyond any one individual’s understanding. We are not trying to win in a dialogue; we are trying to collaborate. We all win if we are doing it right. In dialogue, we gain insights that simply could not be achieved individually. It is more like a soccer match than a tennis match. The ball is still moving back and forth, but no one person has “the answer.” This takes humility.

When I lived in Africa, I learned this wise proverb: “*Maanu oonse taakali m’mutwe omwe!*” (All the brains don’t reside in one head.) When you think this way, you can move the “ball” back and forth like soccer teammates so that you gain a strategic advantage in reaching “the goal.” Each one contributes.

## 2. STAND FIRM IN THE FAITH

To “stand firm in the faith” actually means two things. First, it means that contagious leaders stand firm in the gospel, which is the basis and the power for faith. Remember the “blessed man” described in Psalm 1:2: “But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.”

But “stand firm in the faith” is also an encouragement to lean on the words and promises of God and rest fully in them. Hebrews 11 contains a list of leaders who remained firm in the faith in this way. The list starts with Abel and ends with unnamed believers, leaders—male and female—who all stood firm in the faith. The list is preceded by this simple verse: “But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved” (Hebrews 10:39).

## 3. BE MEN OF COURAGE; BE STRONG

There are many ways to be strong. Being truthful with an erring brother or sister might be a display of strength. Standing up against evil or lies can be a display of strength. Remaining optimistic or kind in the face of opposition is also a great way to show strength.

While contagious leaders remain strong and optimistic, they can still be careful. There’s a huge difference between being careful and being fearful. Good leaders understand that difference and remain positive and strong. At the same time they always understand the importance of care and

caution. One Christian leader detailed the difference beautifully: “Careful is cerebral; fearful is emotional. Careful is fueled by information; fearful is fueled by imagination. Careful calculates risk; fearful avoids risk. Careful wants to achieve success; fearful wants to avoid failure. Careful is concerned about progress; fearful is concerned about protection.”

## 4. DO EVERYTHING IN LOVE

When I was a missionary and worked across cultures, I learned that there are a million little ways to demonstrate love. Working across cultures forced me to be intentional about it all because I had to learn what my host cultures considered to be respectful and kind.

Keeping this in mind, contagious leaders in Africa ask questions like: Will I sleep in this hut with dead mice drying into “jerky” over my head? Will I eat the food they place before me—even if it’s kapenta (minnow-sized fish with the heads still on)? Will I sit around the fire late into the night listening to stories I don’t understand very well, and then make my own lame attempt to tell a story?

Another great way to “do everything in love” is to have the flexibility to make changes when necessary. Along

with the ability to listen and to dialogue, I believe that a willingness to stand outside of your way of doing things and examine your way is a sign of loving leadership.

I first learned this in Africa when I had a talk one day with my language tutor about the concept of


independence. We had a long “dialogue” about whether independence is a good quality or a bad one. With my American glasses, I viewed independence as the highest good. He, with his Zambian glasses, thought independence was the highest evil. He was patient with me, and finally he got me to understand where he was coming from. Now like any Zambian, I believe the highest good is not independence, but interdependence.

We need more contagious leaders in the world today. Love, above all, makes leadership contagious. And what an example we have: Jesus. He washed the feet of his disciples and showed them the full extent of his love. Love and lead as he did.

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

*This is the last article in a five-part series on love. To read other articles in the series, go to [www.forwardinchrist.net](http://www.forwardinchrist.net), and search by the author’s first and last name.*

# CONTAGIOUS LEADERS STAND FIRM IN THE GOSPEL, WHICH IS THE BASIS AND THE POWER FOR FAITH.



FIVE EASY STEPS TO HELP  
CREATE AND SUSTAIN A  
WELCOMING WORSHIP  
ATMOSPHERE IN YOUR  
CONGREGATION.

Michael G. Geiger

“They’re here!”

Every Sunday morning the doors open and people come to church. We don’t make people stand outside and tell them, “I’m sorry. We’re not ready for you yet!” Instead, the pastor, organist, choir, and others have prepared for the service so members and guests can come in.

So what can we do to make sure we are ready for visitors each and every week, whether we specifically invite them or they just drop by?

Consider these five easy steps . . .

**STEP 1:** *Expect visitors*

For years the Motel 6 chain has used as its advertising slogan, “We’ll leave the light on for you.” With this simple phrase, it is telling the consumer, “No matter what time of day or night, wherever you come across a Motel 6, we will be expecting you and will be ready for you.” Visitors are expected! The rooms are ready. The beds are made, and fresh

*Welcome,*  
**VISITORS**



towels are hanging in the bathroom. The person at the front desk will never say, "Oh, I'm sorry we weren't expecting you," because the staff is always ready for visitors to stop by.

This is how it needs to be on Sunday mornings at our churches. If we are going to welcome visitors into our congregation and give them a good rest for their weary soul, we have to be expecting them. Whether there are visitors every week or only once a month, a congregation *must* expect them. We have to be ready for the visitors that have attended a WELS service before or the visitors that are stopping by for the first time. This way, no matter who comes or when they come, we are ready. And when we're ready, God may just give us even more visitors to welcome!

### STEP 2: *Know the purpose of worship*

Our theology says that no one can come to church for the first time for the right reason. In other words, someone without the Spirit can't do the things of the Spirit. Yet, to use the Motel 6 analogy again, while people may not know why they have stopped at a Motel 6, the goal of Motel 6 is to do everything possible to give their visitors a good night's sleep. The fact that you have "Church" on your sign tells people they will experience something spiritual inside.

No matter who comes on a Sunday morning, you must think through what you will provide for all those in attendance. The fundamentals will be the same. First, in worship God speaks to his people through his Word and sacraments. Second, God's people, in response, speak to him in their songs and prayers. Third, God's people speak to one another with "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (Colossians 3:16).

It doesn't matter if someone is there for the first time or the 101st time, the fundamentals of worship remain the same even if the form varies. It's just as if you're a first-time visitor to Motel 6 or have been staying there for

a month—its goal is to provide a place to get a good night's rest. The room style and size may change, but the purpose is the same.

### STEP 3: *Consider first impressions*

If you've ever been on the road traveling and looked for a place to sleep, you probably had an initial impression based on what you saw on the outside. If the sign was burned out, the shrubs were overgrown, and the paint was peeling off the walls, you probably opted to move on. If you made it inside and your room was dirty from the previous occupant and smelled, you may have asked for a refund and made a quick exit.

First impressions are vital to any visitor's experience at your church as well. Have you ever experienced a Sunday morning at your church through a visitor's eyes? Are the grounds and facility kept up or unkempt? Can I find a place to park? Do I know which door to use, and are the seats easy to find? Does someone greet me? If I need help, will someone show me around and answer my questions? Do wires dangle from the exit light? Can I tell that those who regularly gather here care about their place of worship? When I sit down for worship, is it easy to follow along? Can I hear what is going on? Within the first few minutes, visitors make judgments about your congregation—oftentimes even before they sing the first note of the first hymn.

### STEP 4: *Worship as a visitor*

There is a hotel in Myrtle Beach, S.C.—sorry, not a Motel 6—that my family has stayed at about six times. We know where everything is. We know what to bring to enjoy our stay there. We know the general area where our room is. We know to ask for an extended checkout time and that our room key won't work after 11 A.M. on the day of checkout. Compared to the first time we stayed there, we are much more comfortable and familiar with what to expect.

When is the last time you were a first-time visitor to a Lutheran liturgical worship service? The patterns and forms of worship are probably so familiar you could probably recite them in your sleep! You know what book to use when. You know where things are and know the people surrounding you. All these are *not* true about first-time visitors. Although your visitors are perceptive and bright, they probably don't know the "worship code" of CW, LAPPY, NIV, liturgy, close communion, and other terms we take for granted. They don't know where the bathrooms are, what to do with their kids if they get fussy, or how to break into a "holy huddle." So help them out!

Greet them so they feel welcome. Guide them so they know what's going on. Give them your attention to make sure that their time with you is pleasant, their questions are answered, and their needs are taken care of.

### STEP 5: *Attend a "Welcoming Worship" seminar*

I could add more to this list, but I'm out of fingers. Besides, during the next year throughout all 12 districts, the WELS Commission on Evangelism will be presenting a half-day seminar entitled "Welcoming Worship: A Seminar of Worship and Outreach." You and other members of your congregation will learn about and plan for creating a welcoming worship environment that will be a blessing to visitors and all your members. The seminar includes discussions entitled "First Things First," "First Impressions," "Faithful Follow-up," "The Worship Experience," and "Rite Worship for Outreach." Find resources and a location near you at [www.wels.net/evangelism](http://www.wels.net/evangelism) or contact your district evangelism coordinator to bring a seminar to your church.

Oh, and by the way . . . "We'll leave the light on for you!"

*Michael Geiger is pastor at Tree of Life, Cary, North Carolina.*

# WHATEVER

## Outward appearances

No matter what the situation, we need to be careful not to make assumptions just by the way people look. God sent his Son, Jesus, to live and die for all people.

Justin Barkhurst

**S**ome of my friends and I enjoy going to a rock concert every year called Vans Warped Tour. It features many rock bands that play all day at different stages. Each band has its own distinctive style. Some play for fun, and some try to incorporate a message for its fans and the world.

**Besides many different bands, there are many different people who attend this event.** There are people with mohawks, shaved heads, spiked hair, long shaggy hair—colored brown, blonde, green, and yellow. There are people dressed all in black, some shirtless, and some wearing shirts of their favorite band.

A lot of them looked weird to me, and it was easy to pass judgment on them. If I wasn't careful, I could take a look at someone next to me and suggest that he was part of a gang. I might think, "I don't want anything to do with him because he looks like he does drugs."

I go to a Lutheran school, so to me I think that in order to be a Christian, you must dress reasonably nice, have semi-normal styled hair, and behave well. But in the real world, one does not have to do these things to believe in Jesus. The Bible does not require a dress code in order to go to heaven.

**You cannot judge people by how they look.**

You have heard the phrase, "Don't judge a book by its cover." I was standing in line to buy some lunch at the concert, and I really needed a cell phone. I became separated from some of my friends, and I wanted to find them. I had quite a few people around me in this line so I asked a friendly looking guy to help me out. He said

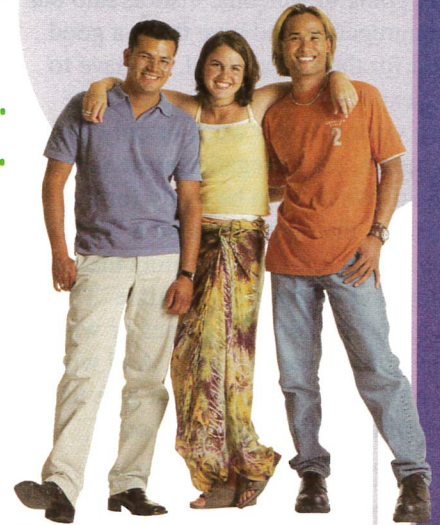
that he didn't have one on him. I asked a friendly looking woman if I could possibly use her cell phone. She thought I might run away with it, and she said its battery was dead anyway. I started to wonder if I could ever find my friends in this humongous crowd.

Suddenly, I got a tap on my shoulder, and a tall skinny guy with a tattoo on his arm and piercings everywhere graciously offered his phone to me. I probably wouldn't have asked him for help, but I learned that what someone looks like on the outside doesn't determine what is on the inside.

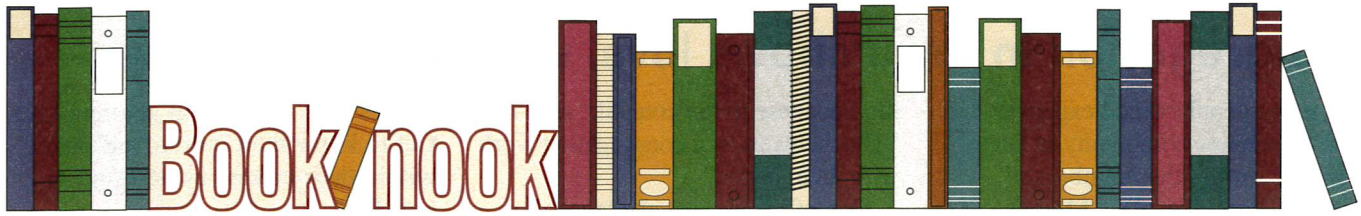
I hope that no one judged my friends and me at the concert. We wore some "weird" orange hotpants that we got free from a booth. We walked around and took pictures with people. I think they all knew that we were just having some fun, but some gave us strange and disturbed looks.

No matter what the situation, we need to be careful not to make assumptions just by the way people look, whether it's their fashion style or the color of their skin. God says to love because he first loved us. He doesn't play favorites. He sent his Son, Jesus, to live and die for all people, not just for a certain type of people. God is planning a party for us, and we all are invited.

Justin Barkhurst, a recent graduate of Illinois Lutheran High School, Crete, Illinois, is a member at Trinity, Crete.

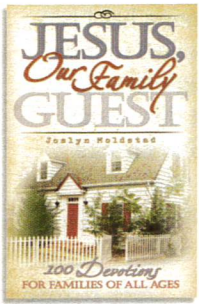


play favorites



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

### Devotions for all ages



\$16.99 each

“Cozy” is the word that springs to mind when I think about Joslyn Moldstad’s devotional, *Jesus, Our Family Guest*.

Comprised of 100 short family devotions, Moldstad’s book begs to be shared around a family supper table or beside a flickering fireplace hearth. Each devotion begins with a Scripture verse, highlights a problem the fictional Bailey family is facing as Christians, and ends with a prayer.

Moldstad allows her characters to tell their own stories, thus relying

heavily on dialogue as a writing technique. While I found this method a pleasant way to give voice to the Bailey family, I also found myself wanting more action and internalization. By utilizing dialogue to the great degree that she does, Moldstad inadvertently produces characters who are prone to sounding quaint and cutesy versus realistic and believable. Based on my own family’s experience, it’s my opinion that the Baileys will appeal most to children ages 10 and younger who haven’t yet reached an advanced level of reading comprehension.

Regardless, *Jesus, Our Family Guest* was clearly written as a devotional guide for families of all ages as it covers such simple topics as lying

and forgiveness and more sophisticated ones such as abortion and adultery. Moldstad includes a logical application of law and gospel with each devotion and uses a gentle family-friendly approach throughout her book, despite the sensitive nature of some topics. Parents of young children won’t feel forced to avoid any devotions, and parents of older children won’t experience any embarrassing moments when faced with more mature subject matter. The devotions take only a few minutes to enjoy and are, overall, a pleasant way to either begin or enhance a Christian family’s devotional life.

Heidi Luchterhand  
Deer Valley, Phoenix, Arizona

## Obituaries

### Gertrude Agatha Krueger 1906-2006

Gertrude Krueger (nee Dey) was born Sept. 15, 1906, in Vergas, Minn. She died Dec. 30, 2006, in Menasha, Wis.

A graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught for 23 years at Trinity, Neenah, Wis.

She was preceded in death by her brothers and sisters. She is survived by a son.

### Elwood H. Lutz 1931-2007

Elwood Lutz was born April 25, 1931, in Town of Liberty, Wis. He died Mar. 17, 2007, in Manitowoc, Wis.

He taught for 35 years at Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis.

He was preceded in death by two sisters and two brothers. He is survived

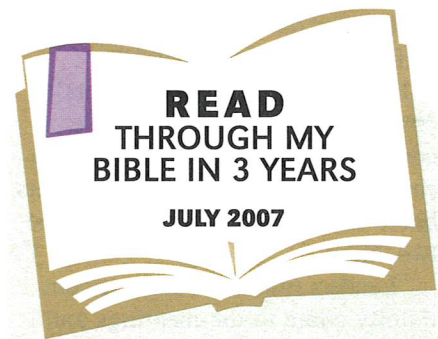
by his wife, JoAnn; one son; three daughters; one brother; one sister; six grandchildren; and many nieces and nephews.

### Lucy Dora Nimtz 1906-2007

Lucy Nimtz (nee Kutchinski) was born Oct. 11, 1906, in Big Rapids, Mich. She died Feb. 26, 2007, in Berrien Center, Mich.

She taught for 25 years at St. Matthew, Benton Harbor, Mich.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Ernest; a daughter; and five sisters. She is survived by one son; two brothers; one sister; and two grandchildren.



- |                       |                     |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Ezekiel 42:1-43:12 | 17. Ez. 7           |
| 2. Ezek. 43:13-44:31  | 18. Ez. 8           |
| 3. Ezek. 45, 46       | 19. Ez. 9, 10       |
| 4. Ezek. 47:1-12      | 20. Nehemiah 1      |
| 5. Ezek. 47:13-48:35  | 21. Neh. 2          |
| 6. Colossians 1:1-14  | 22. Neh. 3          |
| 7. Col. 1:15-23       | 23. Neh. 4          |
| 8. Col. 1:24-2:7      | 24. Neh. 5          |
| 9. Col. 2:8-23        | 25. Neh. 6          |
| 10. Col. 3:1-17       | 26. Neh. 7          |
| 11. Col. 3:18-4:18    | 27. Neh. 8          |
| 12. Philemon          | 28. Neh. 9:1-21     |
| 13. Ezra 1, 2         | 29. Neh. 9:22-37    |
| 14. Ez. 3             | 30. Neh. 9:38-10:39 |
| 15. Ez. 4             | 31. Neh. 11         |
| 16. Ez. 5, 6          |                     |

## Congregation in Iowa shows love, welcomes Sudanese

Not many people would expect to find a Sudanese community in Des Moines, Iowa—the members of Lincoln Heights in Des Moines included. Although this congregation did not expect to see two Sudanese visitors at a September 2006 church service, members gave them a warm welcome. Since then, many people from the Sudanese community have been attending services regularly—and Lincoln Heights has been doing everything it can to welcome its new neighbors.

The Sudanese originally came to the United States in the wake of a civil war in Sudan. “Like thousands of other Sudanese, they went through the difficult refugee process—leaving everything they know, even their families—to come to America and escape civil war and religious persecution,” says Pastor Andy Fix of Lincoln Heights. “After going through this dramatic process, we are trying to help them adapt to this country’s culture, as well as our church culture. Mostly, we are focused on supporting and training their leaders in God’s Word.”

For example, Lincoln Heights’ council asked that the Sudanese community appoint men to sit on the church council—not as voting members, but to foster a joint spirit between the two “tribes.”

“Leaders from the Sudanese community come to the meetings and communicate the spiritual needs of

the Sudanese to the council,” says Fix. “This helps us as a congregation work with them better.”

One of the biggest challenges for ministering with the Sudanese is the language barrier. After discovering the lack of translation resources, Lincoln Heights is in the process of getting one of the Sudanese to serve the Sudanese community. Members of the congregation are also helping the Sudanese through English as a Second Language classes, held jointly with Beautiful Savior, also in Des Moines. “The participants are so appreciative; one even hugs her mentor,” says Fix.

As Lincoln Heights builds bridges to share God’s Word with the Sudanese, they are also looking for ways to reach out beyond the group currently attending classes and services. “There’s a world of possibilities,” says Fix. For example, the congregation has talked about sponsoring a refugee program to help other Sudanese—often friends and relatives of those already in the area—that might be coming to Iowa. “We’re looking at this very realistically. We’re thinking about the Sudanese and how we can practically weave the gospel of Jesus Christ through their global community,” says Fix.

But more important than what programs are provided to the Sudanese is the attitude Lincoln Heights has toward ministry. “The best advice I can give about ministering to different cultural

groups is to show them genuine love. Get to know their culture and work within their culture as best you can,” says Fix.

As this ministry continues to grow, Fix counts the blessings that Lincoln Heights, as a congregation, has received. “The congregation has been great. [Members] are excited to help the Sudanese, even though they don’t always understand what they’re saying. It’s amazing how God knocks down the barriers. This ministry is a blessing and an opportunity for the congregation.”

*Jenni Petersen  
Alicia Neumann*

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**Streams**

<http://streams.wels.net>

Videos to view on WELS’ Internet media network.

- **Window to the World:** Experience the culture, traditions, and customs of other countries as well as learn about WELS mission work through interviews with WELS missionaries. The first episode of this video series focuses on Malawi.
- **New Opportunities in New Orleans:** Find out about the volunteer opportunities that are still available in New Orleans as Crown of Life, New Orleans, continues to reach out into the community in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.
- **Love in Action:** Learn more about WELS Special Ministries and how WELS members can be involved in reaching out to those with special needs. The first episode of this video series is an overview of the eight areas under Special Ministries. Future episodes will highlight prison ministry and the civilian chaplaincy.



Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service (WLCFS), an independent, not-for-profit agency that offers counseling and training services along with a continuum of senior care, launched its newly redesigned Web site, [www.wlcfs.org](http://www.wlcfs.org), in May.

The redesign offers a more inviting aesthetic and a more user-friendly navigation system. Enhancements to the site include online donation capabilities, profiles of WLCFS counselors, video tours of its senior care facilities, and online registration for events. Also included is a full integration of [www.lutherhaven.net](http://www.lutherhaven.net), the Web site for Luther Haven, an independent retirement community and a subsidiary of WLCFS.

## The word-for-word Word

“My role is that of a storyteller,” Daniel Dexter begins. “It just so happens that the story I get to share with you is the word-for-word Word of God—John’s gospel about Jesus,” he explains to his audiences. “Having said that, I hope that for the rest of the night you really won’t notice me. As a storyteller, I want to fade to the background as the story, the Word, takes center stage. . . . So sit back and relax as you hear, see, and in some way experience the eyewitness accounts about the one called Jesus.”

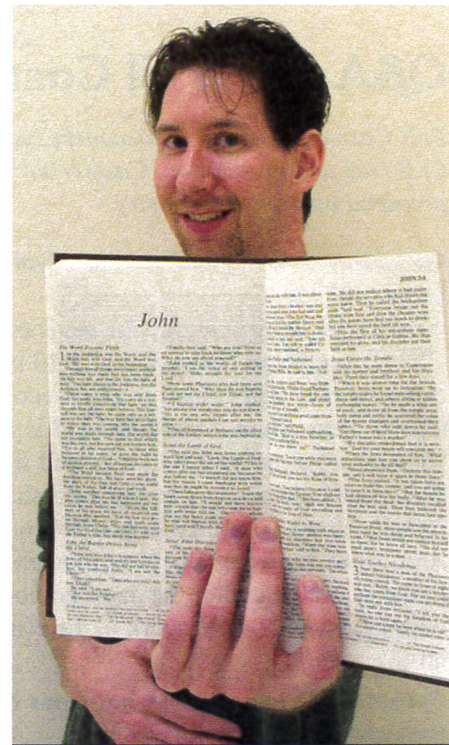
Dexter, a member of Christ our Redeemer, El Paso, Tex., first shared the gospel this way at his home church in January 2006. Since then he has told the story about 30 times, including 18 engagements in 12 days this past March. Inspired by professional stage actor Max McLean who has been doing this with various portions of the Bible since 1983, Dexter spent about six months memorizing the book of John. “I picked John because of its confrontational, power-

ful statements of the law and its unique, beautiful statements of the gospel,” Dexter shares.

“For a sermon, we usually get a small portion of the text; for a study, maybe a chapter or two; perhaps several chapters for our own personal reading. But to be able to take in the whole gospel in one sitting, you just see all the more the power and drama of Christ going to the cross for our salvation,” Dexter reflects.

When members of the audience walk away excited about the Word, realizing that what they just heard were the very same words on the pages of their Bibles, Dexter feels he has succeeded. “It has been especially rewarding to see and hear this [reaction] in teens,” he says.

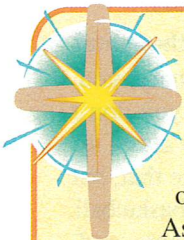
In the coming years, Dexter hopes to present the gospels of Matthew and Luke, Acts, and portions of Genesis. “I want this to be a blessing to strengthen the saints, but I also hope that we can reach the lost sharing the Word this way,” he says. Dressed



Daniel Dexter.

plainly, without a preacher’s suit or an actor’s costume, Dexter is doing what he loves: telling the story of Jesus.

Contact Dexter about his storytelling at [word4wordgospel@aol.com](mailto:word4wordgospel@aol.com).



## LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

“Rejoice always” (1 Thessalonians 5:16) is one of Walter Oelhafen’s favorite Bible passages. As pastor at Grace, Flint, Mich., he works to instill that joy in his members and in those he serves.

“The joy of the gospel is not only you coming to the church to hear how the Savior died for you,” he says, “but also helping to pass that message on.”

Many of his members do spread the Word—even those who can’t come to church regularly. Right now Oelhafen has five members who are serving time in five different correctional facilities throughout Michigan. These members and five other prisoners whom Oelhafen serves are sharing their faith with fellow inmates.

Oelhafen recently saw the eternal impact of this. One of his inmates was sharing *Forward in Christ*—as well as his newfound faith—with his sister. His sister moved to Spain and was tragically killed in a car accident this past year.

Says Oelhafen, “When I saw him in January, he said to me, ‘Without you I don’t believe that my sister would

be in heaven. You helped me to know my faith and you helped me to share my faith with my sister. . . . Thank God that she knew Jesus.’ ”

In his monthly visits with these inmates, Oelhafen teaches them about Jesus and encourages them to tell others.

Recently, he asked each of them to identify five people to whom he could send *Forward in Christ* magazine. “One said, ‘Can we only give you five names?’ ” Oelhafen says, chuckling.

Oelhafen has been working in jail ministry since the early 1980s, although this is the most inmates he’s ever served at the same time. His congregation supports him by helping visit inmates when they can and by being active in the church so he has time to travel.

“I have a passion for souls, and I’ve tried to pass that on to our people,” says Oelhafen. “The Holy Spirit used his Word to work in our hearts and minds, and then we need to share that with people whose lives we touch.”

## Q&A with Phil Casmer, seminary student

*Phil Casmer, a senior at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., graduated with 40 classmates on May 25. Before Call Day and graduation, Casmer sat down with Forward in Christ to talk about how Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has prepared him for the ministry.*

**Question** – Can you describe a typical day at the seminary?

**Answer** – A typical day for me starts at 7:20 A.M. Classes run from 7:30 A.M. to 12:30 P.M. There are five class periods, and chapel is after second hour every day. Chapel lasts about 20 minutes and is led by the students. Classes are done by 12:30 P.M., and then it's off to work. This year I am doing a senior vicarship at Mt. Lebanon in Milwaukee, Wis. My responsibilities include visiting shut-ins and writing a new sermon each month—things like that. At the end of the day I go home for dinner, visit with my wife, do homework in the evening, and then start all over again.

**Question** – In general, what types of classes are required at the seminary?

**Answer** – The curriculum is broken down into four sections. There's systematic theology, where we study doctrines that you learn from Scripture. Then there's practical theology, which includes things like preaching and counseling. Biblical theology is the study of Scripture in its original languages—and that takes up a good portion of the credits that a guy takes every year. And the last one is historical theology, where we look at the past and see where the church has been to learn in preparation for the future. We have classes in each of these four divisions, and they all kind of intersect in a way.

**Question** – What's your favorite class?

**Answer** – Homiletics (preaching) is always a favorite of mine. I enjoy putting sermons together and hearing the other guys preach in class. As a junior [first-year student], you spend six months learning how to write a sermon, and then you preach in front of your classmates. It's encouraging to see your own and others' skills develop. I also like exegesis, or drawing meaning out of Scripture and studying it in its original language. When we go through books like Romans, it's fun to dig in and see how it all fits together.

**Question** – What aspect of your seminary training has been the most helpful as you prepare for the ministry?

**Answer** – The level of scholarship and the in-depth training we receive from our professors is awesome. The men that come out of [the seminary] are extremely well-prepared. But when you get out into vicar year, you realize what ministry is like—it's real people and real ministry. You find that people have real difficulties with sin, and you see the gospel at work. Vicar year teaches you that you can [spread the Word] with God's help. So I'd say that was the most valuable for me.

**Question** – Tell me about your vicar year.

**Answer** – I served at Apostles Lutheran Church in Billings, Mont., a church of approximately 300 souls. I'd get practice in sermon delivery because I was preaching at least once a month and by the end [of my vicar year], every other week. I led Bible classes, wrote a series of Bible studies, and got experience with church council and elders' meetings. And then there was Easter and Christmas for Kids and vacation Bible school. I was in charge of all three of those with varying degrees of responsibility. Working with my bishop [supervising pastor] was a great experience—we became good friends. It was a great learning process.

**Question** – Any other thoughts?

**Answer** – At the seminary, you have a brotherhood that you don't get elsewhere. You go to class, do homework, and things like that, but you also play intramural basketball, have racquetball tournaments, and get together with other students and professors. As you train for ministry, your professors urge you on and support you, and your brothers do, too. That's a neat thing about the seminary—the things we're doing and this brotherhood we have with each other in Christ.

*To see more questions and answers with Phil Casmer, go to [www.forwardinchrist.net](http://www.forwardinchrist.net). To find out where Casmer will be serving, check out the July issue of Forward in Christ.*



Arizona native Phil Casmer, a senior at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, has been preparing for the ministry since high school. "The called workers that taught me in high school really showed me that ministry is an amazing, wonderful gift," says Casmer. He graduated with 40 classmates on May 25.

## Where are they now?

In the December 2004 issue, we told you about four Hmong men—all brothers—who decided to go into the ministry.

### Here's a recap

Growing up in a refugee camp in Thailand, the Lor brothers didn't have much, but they did have a strong Christian family. Surrounded by animistic beliefs and Buddhism, the brothers wanted to share their faith and began training to be pastors through the Pastoral Studies Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

### So what is happening now?

All four of the Lors—Dewid, Daniel, Bounkeo, and Ger—have completed their studies and graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., in May.

The brothers began their training in Kansas City, Kan., with a group of pastors. "They've been very dedicated students all along," says James Plitzuweit, pastor at Rock of Ages, Kansas City. "Some have been working full-time jobs while studying and taking the courses. They've also done some outreach and evangelism work—they are a very dedicated group of men."

Since then, each of the brothers has been working with different Hmong populations in the United States and abroad. Dewid has been teaching at the Ministry Center in Chiang Rai, Thailand. Daniel has been doing Hmong outreach in La Crosse, Wis., and Bounkeo and Ger have been leading the Hmong mission church in Kansas City.

"It is very exciting, and it is a big challenge," says Ger. "We hope that the Lord will lead us to proclaim his gospel to all the people that haven't known Jesus Christ. Some of them have heard, but they [don't] really understand the words of God."

Part of the problem is a lack of resources in the Hmong language. "We [only] have two or three books that are really in Hmong that talk about Christ besides the Bible," says

Bounkeo. Considered the "linguist" of the group, Bounkeo recently compiled a Hmong theological dictionary and hopes to continue translating. "After I graduate from the seminary, I told my father that I don't plan to have a big congregation. . . . I want to write up many Christian doctrine books as possible for the Hmong people."



Members of the Lor family at Rock of Ages, Kansas City, Kan. Back row (l to r): Bounkeo and wife Fueyseng, Moses, Elijah, Vansing and husband Ger. Front row: Parents Sao and Sia Lor, and daughter Choua. Dewid (currently teaching in Chiang Rai, Thailand), Daniel (serving in La Crosse, Wis.), Bounkeo, and Ger graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary on May 25. All four brothers began studying for the ministry in 2003.

Once translated, materials can be shared with Hmong people around the world. "The Hmong people in Thailand and the Hmong people in Laos they are very [hungry] and they are very eager to learn about God's Word," says Ger. "In the past they used to worship their ancestors, and they have been in the dark for their whole life."

Even those that have heard God's Word don't always recognize his saving grace. "They try to do everything good so they can get favor and they can get salvation through their work," says Bounkeo. "The important point that we need to clarify with the

Hmong Christians is that we are not saved by works but by grace."

With a mission field of approximately 25 million Hmong people worldwide, the Lors are grateful for the training and preparation they've received. "I think it's really important and necessary for us to have more trained workers to reach the lost

souls," says Bounkeo. "It is a blessing that God led us into WELS and we can have chance to study and to learn from those pastors. We [can] bring this to the Hmong population . . . we can share with them the purest gospel and the best gospel we ever heard."

Two other students also graduated from the Pastoral Studies Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary on May 25. Paul Thao has been evangelizing and conducting Hmong worship services in Appleton, Wis. German Novelli

has more than 20 years of pastoral experience at the Lutheran church in Venezuela and is currently assisting with Latino ministry in Milwaukee, Wis.

"God's hand of blessing rests upon this program," says Dr. E. Allen Sorum, director of the Pastoral Studies Institute. "It is a high privilege of the Pastoral Studies Institute to take these men, who come with such energy and enthusiasm, and train them in the ministry so that we can be partners together in worldwide evangelism."

See where these six men have been assigned in the July issue of *Forward in Christ*.

## WELS news briefs

**Commission on Special Ministries**  
414-256-3240; [csm@sab.wels.net](mailto:csm@sab.wels.net)

WELS Prison Ministry is going strong. From March 2006 to March 2007:

- 4,500 inmates have completed WELS Prison Ministry Bible correspondence courses. Many complete multiple courses over a year—some as many as 16 courses.
- 40,000 Bible correspondence courses have been distributed.
- 35,000 Bibles have been distributed.

About 1,200 people volunteer with WELS prison ministry. Of these, 200 correct completed tests from inmates, 900 serve as pen pals, and 100 assist with mailings and other tasks. Learn more at [www.wels.net/jump/bps-csm](http://www.wels.net/jump/bps-csm).

**Board for World Missions**  
414-256-3233; [bwm@sab.wels.net](mailto:bwm@sab.wels.net)



Pastor Paul Hartman, director of Multi-Language Publications, and Jim Brandt, administrator for the Commission on Parish Schools, presented a **10-day Bible workshop to leaders of Christian house churches in Nepal** in late March. Forty men and 10 women attended the workshop.

Brandt taught Old Testament and Bible Background, which consisted of sharing 46 Old Testament Bible stories. Hartman, using 32 different Bible stories, taught the Simplified Catechism and a course on the Christian family. After the Bible stories were taught, participants

broke into groups (pictured) and retold the stories to each other.

WELS doesn't have a missionary presence in Nepal, but it sends Bible literature through Multi-Language Publications and holds Bible workshops for church leaders. The next workshop will be held in October 2007.

**Northwestern Publishing House**  
414-615-5744; [rebilott@nph.wels.net](mailto:rebilott@nph.wels.net)

At its February meeting, the Board of Directors of Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) approved the recommendation from NPH management to **combine operations to one location** at 1250 N 113 St., Wauwatosa, Wis. Currently Northwestern Publishing House, the self-supporting publishing ministry of WELS, operates out of two locations—the facility at 1250 N 113 St., and leased office space at 2949 N Mayfair Rd., in Wauwatosa. Reduced staff numbers resulted in the need for less office space at the Mayfair Road location. The relocation is estimated to be completed by Spring 2008.

**Commission on Youth Discipleship**  
414-256-3224; [cyd@sab.wels.net](mailto:cyd@sab.wels.net)

From Dec. 1, 2006, to March 30, 2007, WELS Youth Discipleship conducted an **online survey of WELS confirmed teens**. More than 400 teens participated. The survey was conducted to communicate to WELS teens that their views are important, to obtain teen insights on various youth ministry topics, to seek reactions to findings from the “Why Young People Leave WELS” national study, and to develop discussion starters for the 2007 WELS International Youth Rally in July. Survey results can be found at [www.wels.net/jump/bps-cyd](http://www.wels.net/jump/bps-cyd).

**Board for Ministerial Education**  
414-256-3236; [bme@sab.wels.net](mailto:bme@sab.wels.net)

Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., announced the creation of the **Professor Gerhard Bauer**

**Scholarship**, which was established upon the death of Gerhard Bauer in 2005 by his wife, Elvera. Through his 20 years of ministry at Dr. Martin Luther College, Gerhard Bauer influenced many of the present teachers of the Wisconsin Synod. The recipient(s) of this scholarship will demonstrate exceptional abilities in teaching as well as display a high level of spiritual maturity.

**WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc.**  
866-511-7793 (toll free);  
[cef@sab.wels.net](mailto:cef@sab.wels.net)

The WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc., is offering a special **six percent interest rate on new money invested in an 18-month certificate**. This offer is available to individuals, WELS congregations, and affiliate organizations through June 30, 2007. Investors should read the Offering Circular, available by calling the toll free number or on the Web site: [www.wels.net/cef](http://www.wels.net/cef).

**Technology**  
414-256-3250;  
[martin.spriggs@sab.wels.net](mailto:martin.spriggs@sab.wels.net)

On April 24, at least 51 people from four countries and Puerto Rico participated in the **first chat conducted in a foreign language—Spanish—on www.wels.net**. Half of the participants lived in or came from Latin American countries. The other half included missionaries, pastors, and other church workers engaged in outreach to the Latino population in the United States and south of the border. The discussion centered on the *Lutheran Messenger*, a new Bible correspondence program, and the development of a virtual church for isolated confessional Lutherans who speak Spanish. A follow-up chat is planned by Multi-Language Publications on Aug. 21 at 8 P.M. CDT.

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



## District news

### Minnesota



(Left to right) Lauren Moll, Nicole Lehman, Jess Gierach, and Claire Hagen, students at Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., hand out invitations to the Easter services at Abiding Savior, Killeen, Tex. Seventy-five MLC students spent their spring breaks volunteering for Martin Luther College's Daylight program. Students canvassed neighborhoods; evangelized; prepared for Easter for Kids programs; and helped construct houses.

### Northern Wisconsin

**The WELS National Band Festival** was held March 9-11 at Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis. More than 100 festival participants were selected from various WELS high schools around the country. The band premiered a special sacred selection, titled "All Loves Excelling." The piece was composed by guest clinician and conductor Mr. Ralph Hultgren from Queensland, Australia.

### Southeastern Wisconsin

In March, **St. Paul, Muskego, Wis.**, held a Christ Empowered Opportunities (CEO) men's rally. For the past three years, CEO rallies have encouraged participants and helped them mature in their faith. The rallies are part of CEO's men's ministry, which is committed to helping men solve daily problems through a Christ-centered approach.

### Western Wisconsin

On April 1, **Bethel, Arcadia, Wis.**, had a groundbreaking ceremony for the congregation's first facility. Building

plans include a 7,000 square-foot facility and sanctuary that seats approximately 200. When completed, this will be the first WELS church in Arcadia in more than 40 years.

### Happy anniversary!

**SEW**—An open house was held on May 19 to celebrate the 25th anniversary of **Luther Haven, Milwaukee, Wis.**, an independent retirement community managed by Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service, and the 10th anniversary of **Wisconsin Lutheran Living Center, Milwaukee, Wis.**, a community-based residential facility that provides assisted living services to seniors.

Our Savior, Grafton, Wis., celebrated the 25th anniversary in the ministry of **Pastor Mark Wagner** on April 22.

**WW**—**John Ruege**, pastor at Our Redeemer, Ladysmith, Wis., celebrates his 50th anniversary in the ministry on June 17.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NW—Joel Lillo; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Brett Brauer.

## World news

**One-third of adults unchurched in the United States**—One out of every three adults (33%) in the United States is considered unchurched, according to a recent survey conducted by The Barna Group, Ventura, Calif.

This means an estimated 73 million adults in the United States have not attended a religious service of any type during the past six months, according to Barna. When teens and children are added, that total equals almost 100 million Americans.

Related statistics from the survey include the following:

- In the United States, Asians were the most unchurched (63%), followed by Hispanics (34%), Caucasians (32%), and African Americans (25%).
- Single adults were more likely than married adults to be unchurched (37% versus 29%).

- Residents of the West (42%) and Northeast (39%) remain the most church resistant, while those in the South are the least prone to avoid religious services (26%).

The survey results are based on telephone interviews with 2,006 adults age 18 and older during January 2007. The maximum margin of error for the entire group is plus or minus 2.2 percent. The total number of unchurched adults interviewed was 661, with a margin of error at plus or minus 3.9 percent.

[From "Unchurched population nears 100 million in the U.S.," Barna Research Group, Ltd., Ventura, Calif., [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org); Mar. 19, 2007].

**U.S. Supreme Court upholds partial-birth abortion ban**—In a 5-4 decision in April, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the law banning partial-birth abortion. The decision found that the Partial Birth

Abortion Ban Act is not in violation of a woman's constitutional right to an abortion. This was the first time that the Court specifically banned a method of abortion, rather than placing limits on when an abortion could be done.

The partial-birth procedure involves partially removing a second- or third-trimester unborn baby from the mother's uterus, then crushing or cutting its skull to complete the abortion.

Says Pastor Robert Fleischmann, national director of Christian Life Resources, "It is our prayer that, in time, the illogic of all abortions becomes obvious to others and that the unborn are provided the protection they deserve as fellow human beings for whom Jesus suffered, died, and was raised from the dead."

[Lifewire, Apr. 18, 2007]

**CHANGES IN MINISTRY**

**Pastors**

**Bartz, James S.**, to Grace, Eau Claire, Mich.  
**Bork, Gregory R.**, to Apostles, San Jose, Calif.  
**Gray, David E.**, to retirement  
**Hayes, Dennis A.**, to retirement  
**Hintz, Gerald C.**, to retirement  
**Kehren, Jonathan P.**, to Hope, Penryn, Calif.  
**Kieta, Geoffrey A.**, to Peace, Livonia, Mich.  
**Mattek, John**, to Resurrection, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Olsen, President Theodore**, to retirement  
**Otterstatter, Michael J.**, to St. John, Redwood Falls, Minn.  
**Pundt, Gerald A.**, to retirement  
**Russow, William H.**, to retirement  
**Rydecki, Paul A.**, to Emmanuel, Las Cruces, N.M.  
**Schneider, James A.**, to retirement  
**Schultz, Jonathan E.**, to St. Matthew, Oconomowoc, Wis.  
**Sievert, Phillip D.**, to Lord of Life, Thornton, Colo.  
**Wiederich, Larry L.**, to retirement

**Teachers**

**Baacke, Marliis J.**, to retirement  
**Bailey, Patricia**, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Bender, Kyle M.**, to St. Paul, Beverly Hills, Fla.  
**Brandt, Barbara M.**, to retirement  
**Bruenger, Katherine C.**, to retirement  
**Buske, Terry A.**, to St. Paul, Franklin, Wis.  
**Fluegge, Myron R.**, to retirement  
**Fluegge, Terry J.**, to retirement  
**Greenstreet, Rose M.**, to retirement  
**Hanneman, Barbara J.**, to Trinity, Belle Plaine, Minn.  
**Hintz, Nicole**, to Zion, Denver, Colo.  
**Kastens, Sandra J.**, to retirement  
**Levorson, Ruth H.**, to retirement  
**Luebke, Christopher J.**, to Siloah, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Maresh, Rebecca S.**, to Zion, South Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Nelson, David L.**, to Salem, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Oldfield, Elizabeth K.**, to retirement  
**Plocher, Martin V.**, to King of Kings, Maitland, Fla.  
**Randazzo, Marlene M.**, to Peace, Hartford, Wis.  
**Rittierodt, Lisa A.**, to Light of Life, Covington, Ga.  
**Romsdahl, Jonathan L.**, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.  
**Schachtschneider, Lois**, to retirement  
**Scharf, William A.**, to St. Jacobi, Greenfield, Wis.  
**Schmidt, Jason E.**, to Gethsemane, Omaha, Neb.  
**Stahmann, Kristy K.**, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.

**Unke, Lori L.**, to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.  
**Vilski, Veronica J.**, to Risen Savior, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Wittig, Debbie A.**, to Peace, Hartford, Wis.  
**Zickuhr, Karen L.**, to retirement

**Staff Minister**

**Smith, Adrian R.**, to St. Mark's, Watertown, Wis.

**ANNIVERSARIES**

**Rochester, Minn.**—Resurrection (50). June 10. Worship, 10:30 A.M. and 2 P.M.; meal between services. 507-282-8280; augustin@mayo.edu.  
**Tampa, Fla.**—Northdale (50). June 10. Morning worship, 10 A.M.; anniversary service, 3 P.M.; dinner to follow. 813-961-9195.  
**Lincoln, Neb.**—St. Mark (50). June 10. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal to follow. 402-483-0508; Web site, www.stmarkwels.org.  
**Eagle River, Wis.**—Christ School (50). June 10. Worship, 10 A.M.; pig roast to follow. 715-479-8307.  
**Beloit, Wis.**—Good Shepherd (50). June 17. Worship, 10 A.M.; luncheon to follow. Dawn Martin, 608-362-8720.  
**Reedsville, Wis.**—St. John St. James (150). June 17. Worship, 8 and 10 A.M. Dan Duchow, 920-754-4751; adduchow@lakefield.net.  
**Clare, Mich.**—St. John (125). June 24. Worship, 4 P.M.; dinner to follow. 989-386-7216.  
**Watertown, S.D.**—St. Martin's school (50). July 1. Worship, 8:30 and 11 A.M.; catered meal, noon; program, 1:30 P.M. Mark Renner, 605-886-4976.  
**Johnson, Minn.**—Trinity (125). July 1. Worship, 10 A.M.; catered meal to follow. Jane Fuhrman, 320-748-7686; jfuhr@info-link.net.  
**Arlington, Tex.**—Our Savior (25). July 8. Worship, 5 P.M.; dinner to follow. RSVP requested. Patti Brosh, 817-461-8220; lpb123@sbcglobal.net.  
**Palos Heights, Ill.**—Palos School (50). July 14. Social gathering, 3 P.M.; pizza supper, 5 P.M. July 15. Service, 10:30 A.M.; dinner to follow. 708-448-2260; Web site, www.paloslutheran.org.  
**Dakota, Minn.**—Grace (100). July 15. Worship, 9:30 A.M.; meal, 11:30 A.M.; centennial celebration worship, 2 P.M. 507-643-6355.  
**Springville, N.Y.**—Our Savior (25). July 29. Worship, 10 A.M.; picnic to follow. Marcia Denzien, 716-592-8903; mellen915@iwon.com.  
**West St. Paul, Minn.**—St. Croix Lutheran High School (50). Aug. 10-12. Weekend includes open house, banquet dinner/dance, and Sunday service. 651-455-1521.

**COMING EVENTS**

**Actor/video day camps**—held at Fort Atkinson, Wis. Steve Zambo, 414-256-3281; steve.zambo@sab.wels.net.  
 • June 11-15. Video Production Day Camp Session 1 for grades 7-9.  
 • June 11-15. Actor Day Camp Session 1 for grades 7-9.  
 • June 18-22. Video Production Day Camp Session 2 for grades 7-9.

• June 18-22. Actor Day Camp Session 2 for grades 7-9.  
 • June 23-24. Advanced Actor Television Workshop for all ages.

**Northwestern Publishing House music reading workshops**—Cheryl Nolte, 800-662-6022, 414-615-5763; noltecl@nph.wels.net. Web site, www.nph.net/music/workshop.

• June 16, Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.  
 • June 30, St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn.  
 • July 1, St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis.  
 • July 14, Mount Olive, Appleton, Wis.  
 • July 21, Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis.  
 • Aug. 11, 9 A.M. Choral music only. NPH, Milwaukee, Wis.

**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.

**National WELS 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/womenconf.

**Summer Hebrew Institute**—July 16-20. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Professor Thomas Nass, nasstp@mlc-wels.edu.

**POSITIONS AVAILABLE**

**Organist**—for Hope, Andover, Minn. Robert Schultz, 612-481-7504.

**Female RN or other professional**—The Central Africa Medical Mission is seeking a female RN or other female professional to serve people in Malawi, Africa. The position includes driving and managing a mobile clinic that provides both primary and curative care to 35,000 people a year. The applicant must be an active WELS member and be willing to commit four years for training, service, and a short speaking tour when back in the United States. Cindy Hains, RN, Nurse Recruiter, 310-287-0114; cindyhains@mac.com.

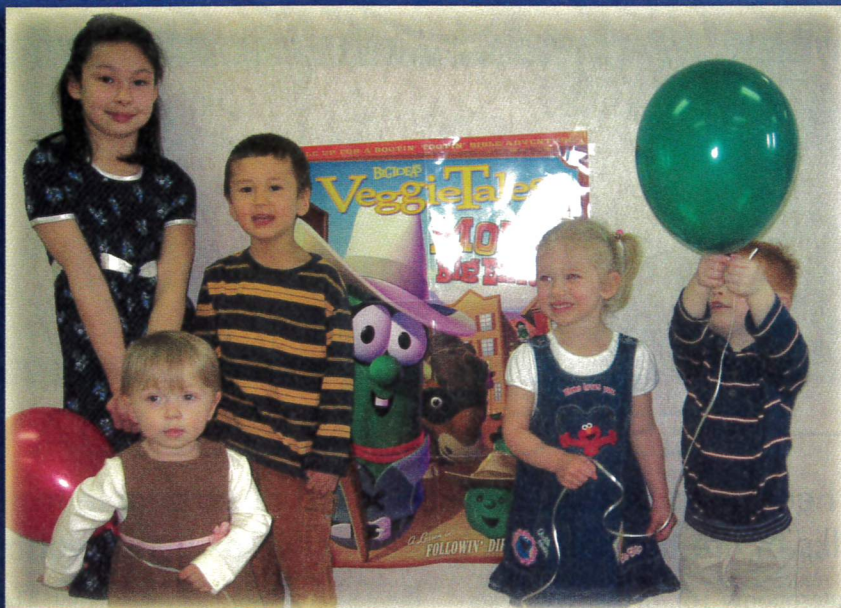
**NAMES WANTED**

**MLA class of 1977 reunion**—Organizers are missing some classmate contacts. Christa Andersen, 218-828-4844; candersen4844@charter.net.

**WELS members in or near Istanbul, Turkey**—James Lake, 3lakes@gmail.com.

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

## Picture this



On Feb. 24, Star of Bethlehem, Savoy, Ill., had scheduled a Veggie Tales community outreach event. Everyone was excited for the debut of *Moe and the Big Exit* (the new movie about Moses leading the children of Israel out of Egypt), but 15 children and families from the church and community ended up eating snacks in the dark because of a power outage at the Best Western. The event was rescheduled. When showtime rolled around again, more than twice the number of children attended! "It just goes to show that while planning community outreach events can be frustrating, the Lord blesses all efforts to share the gospel in his own way and time," shares Jenny Pufahl, Pastor Greg Pufahl's wife. Pictured are: (Back row left to right) Terra and Kai Baumgartner, Annie Povich, and Elijah Grow. (Front row) Sophie Marino.

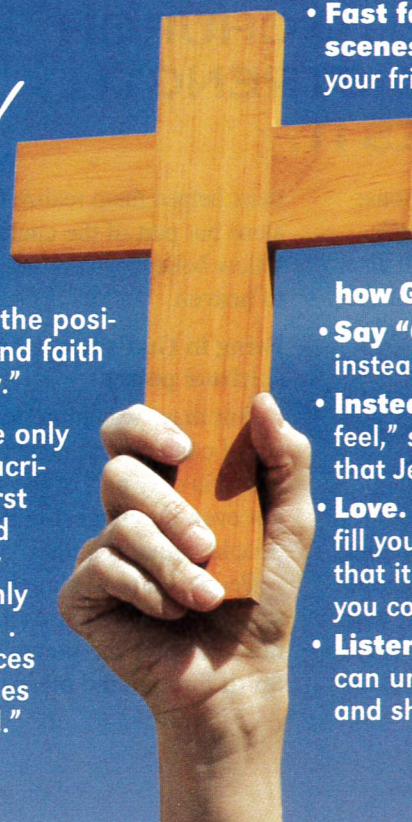
Submitted by Greg and Jenny Pufahl

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.

## MARTIN LUTHER *on service to God*

"What you do in your house is worth as much as if you did it up in heaven for our Lord God. We should accustom ourselves to think of our position and work as sacred and well-pleasing to God, not on account of the position and work, but on account of the word and faith from which the obedience and the work flow."

"The idea that the service to God should have only to do with a church altar, singing, reading, sacrifice, and the like is without doubt but the worst trick of the devil. How could the devil have led us more effectively astray than by the narrow conception that service to God takes place only in a church and by the works done therein. . . . The whole world could abound with the services to the Lord, *Gottesdienste*—not only in churches but also in the home, kitchen, workshop, field."



## WAYS TO CASUALLY SHARE YOUR FAITH IN DAILY LIFE

While we want to share the gospel of Jesus with the people we love and those with whom we come into contact every day, we can't expect to turn every conversation to theology. But, if our daily words and actions constantly give clues or reminders that we are Christians, more opportunities to talk about Christ will arise.

Here are just a few examples of how we can casually share our faith in our daily lives.

- **Thank God for the weather** instead of only commenting on a beautiful day.
- **Say "I forgive you"** instead of "It's okay" or "No problem" when someone apologizes for wronging you.
- **Include your trip to Sunday's worship service** when you talk about your weekend plans.
- **Fast forward the promiscuous scenes** while watching a movie with your friends.
- **Bow your head to pray** before eating your lunch in the cafeteria.
- When venting frustrations, remember to **point out how God helped you** deal with them.
- **Say "God bless your efforts"** instead of "Good luck."
- **Instead of saying** "I know how you feel," say "It's comforting to know that Jesus knows how you feel."
- **Love.** The only way to truly love is to fill yourself so much with Jesus' love that it overflows to those with whom you come into contact. They'll notice.
- **Listen.** Listen closely so that you can understand people's needs and share how Jesus meets them.

# Every Life for Christ:



John A. Braun

## SEE YOU ON SUNDAY

In the gospel we hear each Sunday morning, God gives people from all walks of life the spiritual power to live as his servants.

**W**e hope to see the church full when we walk through the doors each Sunday morning. Many come every Sunday. Some come less frequently. Others have difficulty getting out of bed to get to church. But over the centuries God's people have come to God's house. Many have traveled great distances, endured hardship, or trudged through harsh weather to come.

Why? Why do people come to church? If you listen to some, you'd wonder why anyone would ever come. They complain about the unfriendly

(Deuteronomy 16). In the New Testament, the early church came together regularly and "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42).

Why? First, believers felt the need to be with other believers. They happily greeted them as brothers and sisters—a part of God's family. Even when the church experienced persecution later on, they continued to come together. They even adopted the catacombs as a place to gather, in spite of the damp darkness and danger.

They needed each other.

They encouraged each other. Seeing fellow Chris-

tians helped them realize they were not alone but part of the church of Jesus—fellow believers traveling life's journey to heaven.

### **Being in God's house brings spiritual power**

But there was more to it that just social contact with others. Social interaction is only part of the story, and it's not even the biggest reason God's people gather together.

People come to church for spiritual strength. And God gives it. He has promised to give the power of his Holy Spirit through the means of grace—

the gospel in Word and sacrament. The gospel is not simply a recitation of historical facts from 2,000 years ago. God the Holy Spirit delivers spiritual power to the hearts and lives of believers through the simple gospel of forgiveness by the blood of Jesus.

Really? Yes, really! That's God's promise. The Holy Spirit works through the gospel that is spoken and sung on Sunday morning. Such ordinary means may not seem like a very powerful help for the week's work ahead, but that's the way God chose to work. And he has not promised to work without the gospel. No gospel, no power from God.

What has all this got to do with your calling as a Christian? Remember that the church is a gathering of common people from all walks of life. Our gatherings together to hear God's truth can always be improved. But remember we do not gain strength from the beauty of the music, the warmth of the social interaction, or even the skill of the preacher. What matters is the gospel. When we leave the church after hearing and singing the gospel, we leave with God's power to face the challenges of another week.

I hope to see you on Sunday!

*John Braun is executive editor of Forward in Christ*

*This is the fifth article in an eight-part series on vocation.*

## **PEOPLE COME TO CHURCH FOR SPIRITUAL STRENGTH. AND GOD GIVES IT.**

church; the long, boring sermons; and the songs that are like dirges. If you let them go on, they will also complain about the hypocrisy of the church members. They claim believers put on the good clothes and best appearance on Sunday, but these same lives get pretty dirty and the image quite tarnished during the week.

### **Coming to church is social**

Coming together as God's people is important. God called his people together in the Old Testament with Sabbath worship and the three important festivals of the ceremonial law

# ALOYS HENHÖFER:

## Preacher of the gospel

God's people gather to hear the gospel because it is the power of God.

Theodore J. Hartwig

**B**orn in 1789 in German Swabia, Aloys Henhöfer's pious mother pointed him toward the priesthood already at an early age. She achieved her goal. After seminary education, her son was ordained in 1815 as a Catholic priest.

### Preaching about salvation by faith

Henhöfer began his ministry at the tiny parish of Mühlhausen in Swabia. When his attempts to wean the people from their wayward ways were not kindly received, he lapsed into despondency. Encouraged by the example of a nearby group of Amish-like Catholics who practiced communal Bible study in their homes, Henhöfer applied himself to what had been neglected during his training for the priesthood. He began to study the Bible. His study transformed his preaching from a message of salvation by personal works and merits to salvation by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. His comforting sermons dramatically increased attendance at the church services, and the building itself became too small to accommodate the crowds. It was another case of hunger for the gospel.

Then division broke out in the congregation. The young pastor's tactlessness was partly to blame. He had begun to season his preaching with harsh ridicule of false practices in the Catholic Church. Among these was the requirement to enumerate all one's sins during private confession. It is better, he said, to confess "I am a sinner"

with the tax collector than to try recalling every sin. But instead of instructing the people how to make confession, as Luther had done, he eliminated it completely. Veneration of saints was treated in the same manner. He did not explain the difference between improperly praying to the saints and properly learning from their example.

When the resulting commotion came to the attention of higher church officials in Swabia, attempts were made to relieve Henhöfer of his congregation. After meetings and interrogations that dragged out over many months, the offending priest was expelled from the Catholic Church.

### Conducting Bible classes in the home

At first, he was minded to begin an independent Christian-catholic congregation. A better remedy presented itself when the local baron with his family joined the Protestant church. Following the baron's cue, Henhöfer applied for and was received as a member of the Protestant ministry. He was assigned to a parish in Spöck near the large city of Karlsruhe. At this time, now 37 years old, he was married. His preaching in the new parish continued to attract large audiences, which included many people from Karlsruhe who made the 10-mile trip by foot and wagon.

Henhöfer strengthened the bond between shepherd and flock by regularly visiting and conducting Bible



classes at his parishioners' farms. His pastoral visits also staved off a movement to replace public worship at church with private worship in the homes of the genuinely pious. Because of his policy, Henhöfer kept private household devotion and public worship with the entire congregation firmly united. There would be no divisive little churches within the framework of the large church.

His pastorate at Spöck lasted 35 years. In late November of 1862 he preached what would be his final sermon on the parable of the barren fig tree (Luke 13). Four days later he took sick with tuberculosis and fell asleep on Dec. 5.

The parable text of Henhöfer's last sermon demonstrated the nature of all his preaching. Instead of using academic theological language, he illustrated God's truth like Jesus did with his parables. He was a preacher of the gospel who understood how to share its truth with his people.

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

*Next month: Elizabeth Fry*

# Pain & forgiveness

Laura C. Warmuth

A woman discovers the value of forgiveness in the midst of personal pain.

I first met Julia\* over the phone. She was helping her two-year-old daughter onto the potty chair. Now I thought that walking and talking or cooking and talking were accomplishments, but I suppose only parents can be true multitasking experts.

"I am a single parent and don't know what it is like to have a second set of hands around to help me," Julia shares. Her husband's hands were taken from her through death. But even before that day, he had drawn away from her by his actions.

Left without a husband, and her daughter without a dad, Julia admits that telling her story was more difficult than she had expected. While loss, pain, and struggles certainly surround the theme, Julia says, "I think the most important story I have to share is how forgiveness is so valuable."

## LIFE TOGETHER CUT SHORT

Growing up on a dairy farm in Wisconsin, Julia and her family were members of a WELS congregation. "I had a wonderful Christian upbringing," Julia recalls. "I attended a Christian grade school and a public high school. My parents, teachers, and pastors have been a huge influence in my life. I have much respect for all of them."

Julia met her husband when she was in high school. Eight years went by. Two of those years were spent apart. Then they were engaged. "I was always told that I would know when I met the right person," Julia reflects, "and when we got back together after the two years we spent apart, I knew that he was 'the one' for me."

Julia and Mike\* were married at her home church and left for their honeymoon the next day. They bought a house

*\*real name withheld*

five months later and had a lot of fun making it into a home and spending time with their new neighbors.

"We had been married seven years when Mike died," says Julia. Their daughter was just 11 weeks old when Mike was found dead on his snowmobile in northern Wisconsin. It was a Saturday morning when the sheriff told Julia about the accident. "When I heard the news I was in complete shock," she says. "I don't think I had any feelings. I don't ever remember questioning why he was taken from us. I recalled the night before when he left. He told us that he loved us, and everything felt good."

Mike's funeral was held at his home church. Literally thousands of people came to pay their respects. "We greeted guests for 10 hours," Julia recalls.

Faced with Mike's death, Julia was well aware that God was carrying her through her time of need. "If anyone would have told me that I would lose my husband at such a young age, I never would have believed it," she says.

## MORE PAIN

But Julia was not a stranger to pain and struggles. She had recently been working through marriage troubles, learning what it meant to fully rely on God for guidance.

"Shortly before our daughter was born, my husband told me that he had been unfaithful to me," Julia reveals. "The news was horrifying for me and left me disgusted and shocked. I remember telling my parents first and then immediately calling my pastor."

She continues, "My daughter was a couple months old when her daddy died. Their time spent together was little. He would come to see her, and we would talk a little. My

feelings were very mixed up in the beginning. I remember seeing how he was hurting from the things that he had done and how much love he had for his new baby. He reassured me how he cared for and loved me and felt he did not deserve either of us. I told him that I forgave him for everything he had done to me. It made him cry so hard because he couldn't understand how I could forgive after all the awful things he had done to me."

In the two years since Mike's death, Julia has not been alone.

"My support system has been my parents and siblings, family, pastors, and close friends," says Julia. "I have always been very close to my family. They are a priority in my life."

Inspired by the life they live, Julia looks at her parents as Christian role models. Not only do they set good examples, but they stress the importance of continually growing in God's Word.

#### IT'S IMPORTANT TO FORGIVE

"This tragedy in my life has made me realize that life is fragile and short," says Julia. "There are so many things in this world that are unimportant; our faith and family should be a top priority. It is not

going to matter how many friends you have, what kind of house you have, or how much money you make. All of that can be taken away in a blink of an eye. None of it will matter when God calls you home, and we don't know when that will be."

She continues, "More significantly for me, I learned that it is so important to forgive. I forgave my husband for hurting me and my family. He knew how much I loved him before he died, and I feel very good about that. I would have a much harder time moving on with my life if I wouldn't have done that."

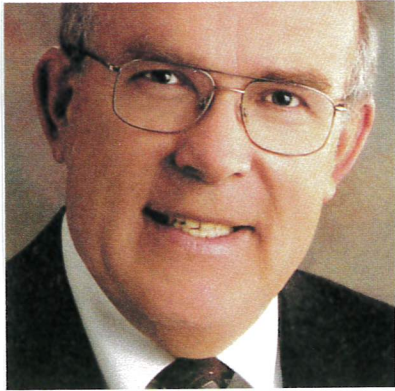
So now, day by day, month by month, Julia is moving on with her life and watching her daughter grow. "I believe God has blessed me with my child because he knew his plan for my husband and didn't wish for me to be alone," Julia says. "I will tell my daughter some day that her daddy loved her very much. I will share with her all the things he liked to do and all the memories I have of him."

A heartbreaking story? Yes. But to erase the heartbreak from the page of life, we'd also need to erase the love. Julia understands love. And she understands forgiveness—even how to forgive when the person closest to her in the world sinned against her. How did she gain that capacity to love? She experienced Christ's love for her. He loved her unconditionally even when her sins drove him to the cross to die. And he forgave her sins—even rising from the dead to prove it.

*"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts . . ." (Colossians 3:12-15).*

Laura Warmuth is a staff writer for Forward in Christ.

**"There are so many things in this world that are unimportant; our faith and family should be a top priority."**



*Carl R. Hugel*

## A wedding invitation

“Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” (Revelation 19:9).

For many people, among their greatest blessings—if not the greatest earthly blessing—is a Christian spouse. But in this popular month for weddings, we need to think of more than just an event complete with food and drink and the gathering of family and friends. A marriage is far more than a wedding day. It’s having a trusted companion through life. Joys are multiplied; sorrows are shared. Dreams can be explored delightfully together. Fears may simply explode harmlessly. Separateness gives way to togetherness.

We could go on with the picture of the ideal Christian marriage. But, of course, marriage is not always ideal. Like every good thing from the hand of God, Satan seeks to wrench it from our grasp. Disagreements can turn dangerously destructive. Harsh words wound deeply. Faithless missteps can turn one flesh into two again. Sin’s ugly notes destroy God-intended harmony, producing discord even in a Christian marriage.

How can couples preserve their union as husband and wife? One suggestion comes in the simple saying, “Couples who worship together stay together.” It’s true. Whenever a couple remembers that God united them, they remember that they share a stronger bond than just human love. Our being one with Christ does not eliminate the occurrences of sin. But what it does do is help us recognize how lost we are in our lives. And then, rather than seeking to pull ourselves up by our own frayed bootstraps, we trust Christ to rescue us. Anchored securely in his perfection is our forgiveness. Attached closely to God’s pardon is the power to push sin away from us, drawing us closer to our Savior as well as the one we’ve offended by our actions. Couples who know Jesus

understand that he forgives them and helps them forgive each other.

In the mutual confession of sin and the comfort of being forgiven, the joy of salvation continually renews the bond between spouses. It’s still never perfect, but it is seeking the perfection that one day will be ours when each of us who is invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb will be finally seated at the heavenly table.

My father-in-law, after 67 years of eating at the same earthly table with his wife, is now enjoying the heavenly marriage supper of the lamb. My mother-in-law is still waiting for that day. All of us, singly or in couples, long for that day, a day made possible by our heavenly bridegroom, Jesus.

In the days right before my father-in-law’s funeral, one of our daughters was walking with a neighborhood friend. Our daughter expressed her disappointment that her children had not seen their great-grandfather since Christmas. But, she went on to say, she was confident they would see him again in heaven. Her friend replied, “Well, then, if they want to see him in heaven, they had better be good enough.”

What an opening! Our daughter explained how none of us is good enough, except Jesus. His innocent life and death pardons us, making heaven a free gift. To this explanation of God’s plan of salvation, her friend responded, “I had no idea.”

Many have no idea. Many long for a happy marriage, not realizing how essential Jesus is to that relationship. Many long for a happy life beyond this world, not realizing how impossible that is without Jesus.

May God’s sure invitation to his eternal table spread a warm glow of hope and joy at every earthly table we share until we enjoy the marriage supper of the Lamb forever.



# LESSONS FROM THE CREED

Charles F. Degner

*“was crucified . . .”*

**C**an you picture wearing a necklace with a little hangman’s noose at the end? Would you wear an electric chair on your lapel as a symbol of your faith? The hangman’s noose and the electric chair make us shudder.

We are thankful that U.S. executions take place behind closed doors so that we don’t have to witness them. Yet when you wear a cross, you are wearing the symbol of an execution.

## **The suffering Jesus endured**

It is hard for us to imagine the brutality of the cross. The Romans used the cross to bring about a slow and tortured death. The saddle-like projection supported the body just enough to keep it from being torn down by its own weight. The feet were not always spiked, but were sometimes held to the timber with ropes. The feet of Jesus were pierced through with a great, rough nail.

Under ordinary circumstances, the victim did not die directly of the wounds. After the clotting process had stopped the flow of blood, the blood was forced to

the head. The victim became feverish, then cold. Soon he experienced a flaming and devouring thirst. Death came when the lungs filled with water and the crucified drowned in his own body fluids. The flow of water and blood which John reported (John 19:34) came when the soldier’s spear was driven up through his side under the ribs and pierced his heart and lungs.

## **WE TREASURE THE CROSS BECAUSE THE CROSS TOOK AWAY THE CURSE OF OUR SINS.**

What hurt Jesus most was not the pain of the cross, but the shame of the cross. Paul wrote: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree’ ” (Galatians 3:13). Look up Deuteronomy 21:23, the verse Paul quoted. God cursed his own Son. Jesus cried out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34).

God made him suffer hell in our place. No one on this side of hell could ever imagine what Jesus suffered for us while he hung on the cross.

## **The forgiveness we gain**

Paul wrote: “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14). We treasure the cross because the cross took away the curse of our sins. “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). We treasure the cross because we can say that we are children of God and even saints, because our robes have been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14).

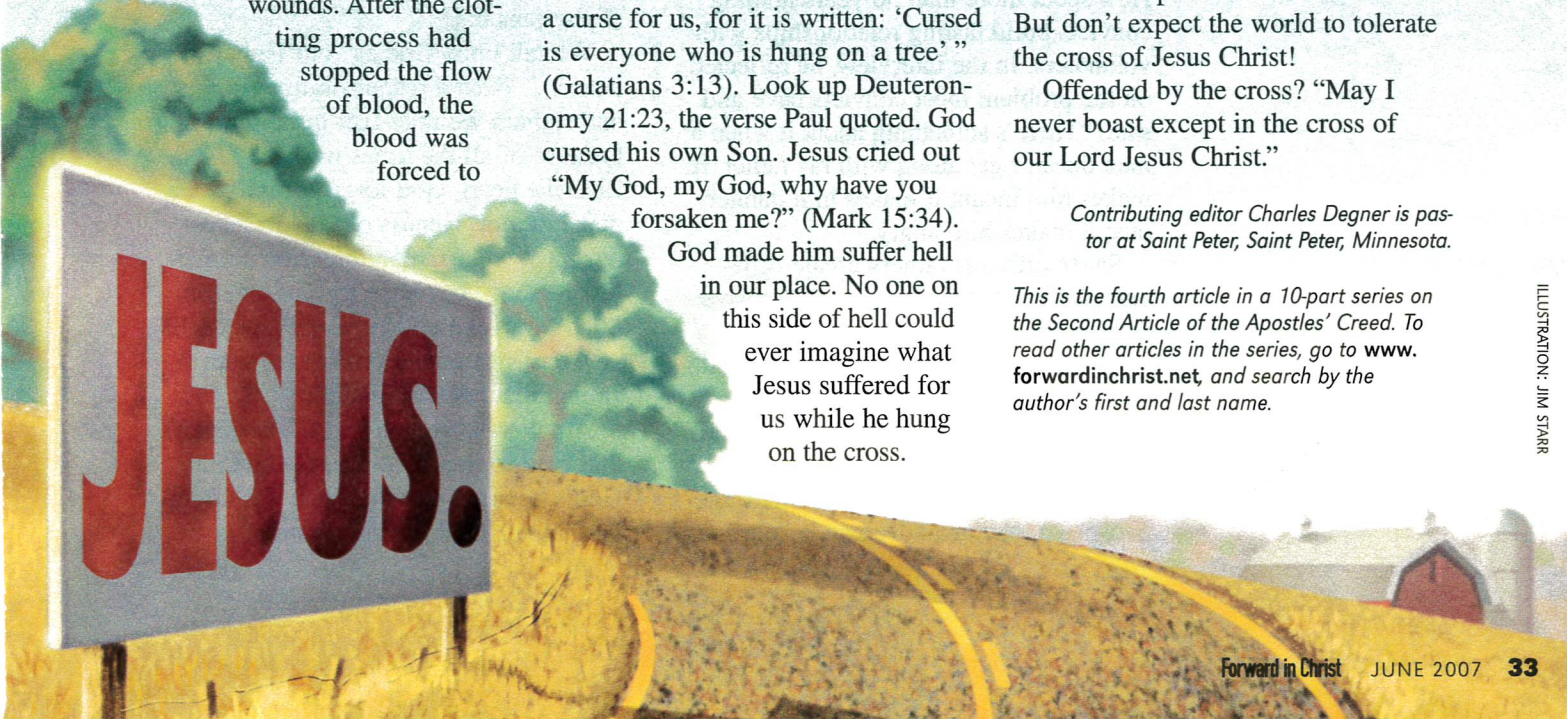
The cross of Jesus is just as offensive to the world today as it was in Paul’s time. Officials at the College of William and Mary removed a gold cross from a campus chapel in what they call “the spirit of diversity” to make the chapel more “welcoming to all.” After a diversity training course, a British Airways clerk was told she could not wear her cross necklace. Imams in airports demand tolerance. But don’t expect the world to tolerate the cross of Jesus Christ!

Offended by the cross? “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

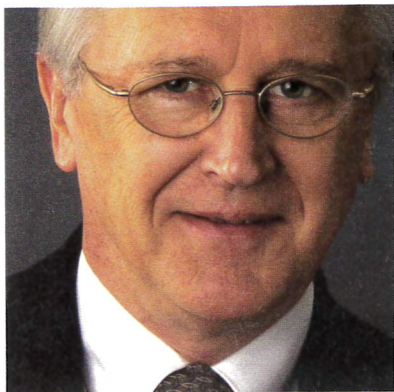
*Contributing editor Charles Degner is pastor at Saint Peter, Saint Peter, Minnesota.*

*This is the fourth article in a 10-part series on the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed. To read other articles in the series, go to [www.forwardinchrist.net](http://www.forwardinchrist.net), and search by the author’s first and last name.*

ILLUSTRATION: JIM STARR



**JESUS.**



*John A. Bran*

## Fathers

More than a year ago I read an article (*Christianity Today*, January 2006) about Bill Glass, an NFL defensive lineman. The article wasn't about football or his athletic accomplishments. It was about the importance of being a good father. I made a copy of the article and put it in a file for future use.

In magazine publishing a year is ancient history. Saving articles for future reference can become a source of guilt and frustration. Those articles keep staring back at you, waiting for your attention. Even if you can't see them, you know they still gnaw at the edges of your memory. Often there isn't time for a lot of reflection.

But the idea of fathers came up again in an article in *USA Today* (Mar. 14, 2007) about David Blankenhorn, who founded the Institute for American Values in New York. He is one of the secular advocates for the importance of fathers.

I suppose that the frosting on this idea cake came when I read an anecdote in *Reader's Digest* about the difficulty of finding a man who is compassionate, caring, and loves children. The anecdote suggested that women would have more success working to ban all war than find such a man.

Bill Glass heads a prison ministry. He's spent more than 30 years helping convicts build lasting relationships with volunteers. In the interview, he reflected on the problem most convicts have and said, "There's something about it when a man doesn't get along with his father. It makes him mean; it makes him dangerous; it makes him angry."

Sadly difficult fathers create difficult children—boys and girls. Abusive fathers pass on their attitudes and tendency toward violence to their sons who become abusive husbands and fathers. The old saying, "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree," is true.

Blankenhorn suggested that marriage between a man and a woman is "our most

pro-child institution." He opposes gay marriage because children in such a relationship will miss out on the strengths associated with married mother-father families.

All this is interesting because it illustrates the plan God had in mind from the beginning. He established marriage and the family for our good. We don't need secular opinion to validate God's truth. God's Word is true whether we believe it or not. But sometimes these secular ideas are important because they underscore the truth. It's like highlighting a passage in a book or a passage from God's Book.

So I want to underscore the value of fathers and marriage. God gave fathers an important role in the development of children. They are also—as fathers—an integral building block in society itself.

Children learn love, compassion, priorities, and values from their fathers—and their mothers too. They also learn how to have fun and how to appreciate others. Many of the lessons are as varied as we are. But one lesson is critical for all fathers whether they like sports and the outdoors or prefer woodworking and reading. Fathers are called upon—at God's direction—to bring up their children "in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

We call upon God as "our Father in heaven." What a responsibility. As men and fathers we may feel quite guilty because of all the times we have failed. But take heart. God forgives, and as we make the forgiveness of God in Jesus our own, we teach our children a priceless lesson. They have forgiveness too. Such forgiveness helps us all face each new day's parenting challenges with strength and determination.

Are there such men? Yes. They aren't that hard to find. I see them come into God's house to worship with their families. Thank God for every one of them.

ave you had one of those times when life worked out perfectly—better than you could ever have hoped? Was it luck or coincidence? Or was it the hand of God?

1. Jacob was on the lam, running from his brother. He had nothing but some amazing promises. Look up Genesis 28:13-15.
2. Faith and doubt often go hand in hand. As Jacob continued on his journey, what doubts might have nagged him regarding these promises?

#### **When things go right—Read Genesis 29:1-12**

1. Jacob traveled for a month, on foot, in a country he had never seen. Where did he find himself?
2. Why does the Holy Spirit record the conversation Jacob had with the shepherds?
3. God brought Jacob at the exact time to the exact place where he needed to be. His tears showed that he knew it was not luck or coincidence, but the hand of God in his life. List three reasons why this would bring Jacob to tears of joy.

#### **When things go wrong—Read Genesis 29:13,14**

1. At first glance, this seems like one more thing working out well for Jacob. What do you remember about Laban? How is this actually the beginning of trials for Jacob?
2. Laban said, “You are my own flesh and blood.” Why is it that the people who hurt you most are the ones who seem so great at first?
3. Eventually Laban would swindle Jacob, humiliate him, deceive him, and take advantage of him. Things were about to go very wrong for Jacob. As you look at this section of Scripture, how was God preparing Jacob for his upcoming struggles?
4. After years of struggle, Jacob returned to the Promised Land safe, wealthy, and with a large family. What does that teach us about seeing the hand of God in our life?

#### **Bringing it home**

1. God gave Jacob specific promises about children, safety, and a return to the land (Genesis 28:13-15). Which of those specific promises did God give to you?
2. What specific promises has God given to you?
3. When Jacob walked hundreds of miles and ended up in the exact place where his family lived and arrived at the exact time his future wife did, he recognized the hand of God. Could you imagine if he thought it happened because he was such a gifted traveler? It sounds foolish, but how do we act like that in our lives?
4. Our lives are not the product of dumb luck or happenstance. What happens in our lives comes from the hand of God. How does that change our attitude when things go right? How does that change our attitude when things go wrong?
5. Choose the correct statement. Why is it correct?
  - a. It is easier to be a Christian when life is good.
  - b. It is easier to be a Christian when life is a struggle.
6. Like Jacob, our lives revolve around the promises of God. Look back at the promises you listed above. How do those promises give you great comfort, no matter what happens in your life?

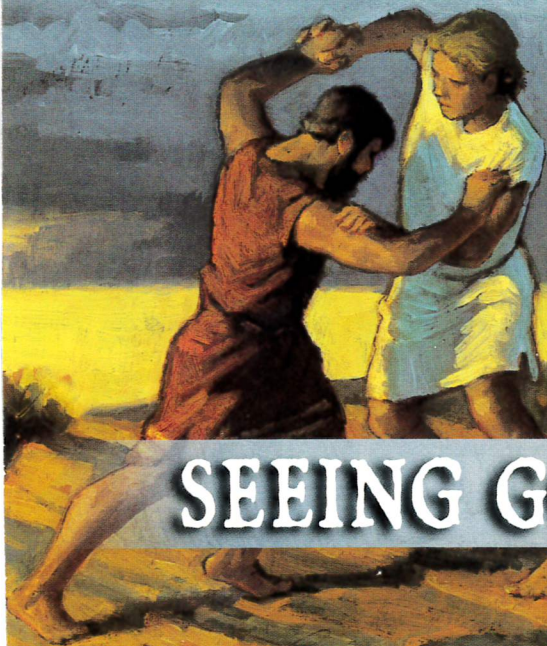
#### **Conclusion**

We need the forgiveness of God when we fail to see his hand in all the good times in our lives. When we despair in times of struggle, we also need his forgiveness. We can find comfort in the cross of Jesus and the empty tomb. As we commit our lives into God’s hands, we also can find strength in the Scriptures.

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

ILLUSTRATION: JOHNSON AND FANCHER



# WRESTLING WITH GOD:

## SEEING GOD’S HAND IN OUR LIFE

An interactive study of Jacob Jonathan E. Schroeder

Every once and awhile I remember that I live in Southern California . . . like when I'm pruning my rosebush on Christmas Eve morning or when I glimpse snow-covered mountains from my poolside lounge chair. I think of it on Thanksgiving when it's too warm to wear a sweater and on 70-degree days when I think it's chilly enough to pull a parka over my head.

#### Getting used to California weather

I am like most Californians—not born or bred here, but easily transplanted into this comfortable climate. Our seasons are subtle, slight variations in precipitation and temperature, a climate regulated by the Pacific. During my first autumn in California, I was in a twilight zone. The palm fronds stayed green and the thermometer held at 80 until December. Where were my Midwestern seasons, the seismic shifts in temperature, the transformation of leaves and landscape?

So I picked up a new weather vocabulary. I became familiar with terms like "June gloom" and "the Santa Anas" and the fact that a rainstorm is considered severe weather. I noted months that passed without a raindrop, the growing seasons of

strange tropical plants that bloomed in my backyard, and the way the temperature plummeted when the sun went down on the desert.

By the end of my second year as a Californian, I relaxed into the subtleties of this Mediterranean climate.

We've grown into acclimatized Christians—born, bred, and raised in God's grace, unaffected by the shivering souls in the world.

Now I am accustomed to and spoiled by our temperate weather and garages without snow shovels. I expect my sunshine in December, and I won't drive in the rain.

#### Getting used to God's presence

All of this makes me think of my Christian life, a life I've lived since I was in diapers, a tiny newborn baptized into grace. There are moments when I am overwhelmed by God's presence in my life . . . whenever I sing "I Know that My Redeemer Lives" or attend a Christian funeral and know that my grasp on this world is weakening. When I see a baby baptized, I marvel at how God works as the water trickles over his head. When I'm hurt and I pray,

and the answer comes straight away, there is no contesting that it was a God-thing.

But I don't stop to think of God's grace during my everyday life. He is not frequently on my to-do, to-call, or to-e-mail list. His calendar page is Sunday morning, and he's penciled in on special occasions. I guess that I've forgotten he's there every day. I've gotten used to his presence like I've gotten used to palm trees, the beach, and the 70-degree temperature. I have grown accustomed to words like *grace* and *forgiveness*, *peace* and *hope*. These words have lost their wonder just like a Californian's suntan in February.

How does this happen? Quite easily, quite quietly. We've grown into acclimatized Christians—born, bred, and raised in God's grace, unaffected by the shivering souls in the world.

What can we do? Let's stop to marvel again at a word like *grace*. See your sin and then read "as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). Remember "how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15) and then share that message with someone who does not know the power of the word *redemption*.

Don't take for granted the comfortable climate of God's grace, the lush landscape of his love, or the beautiful breezes of his blessing.

Remember where you live.

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# REMEMBER where you live

Dana Kirchoff

Sometimes we take our blessings for granted. We get used to God's daily grace.