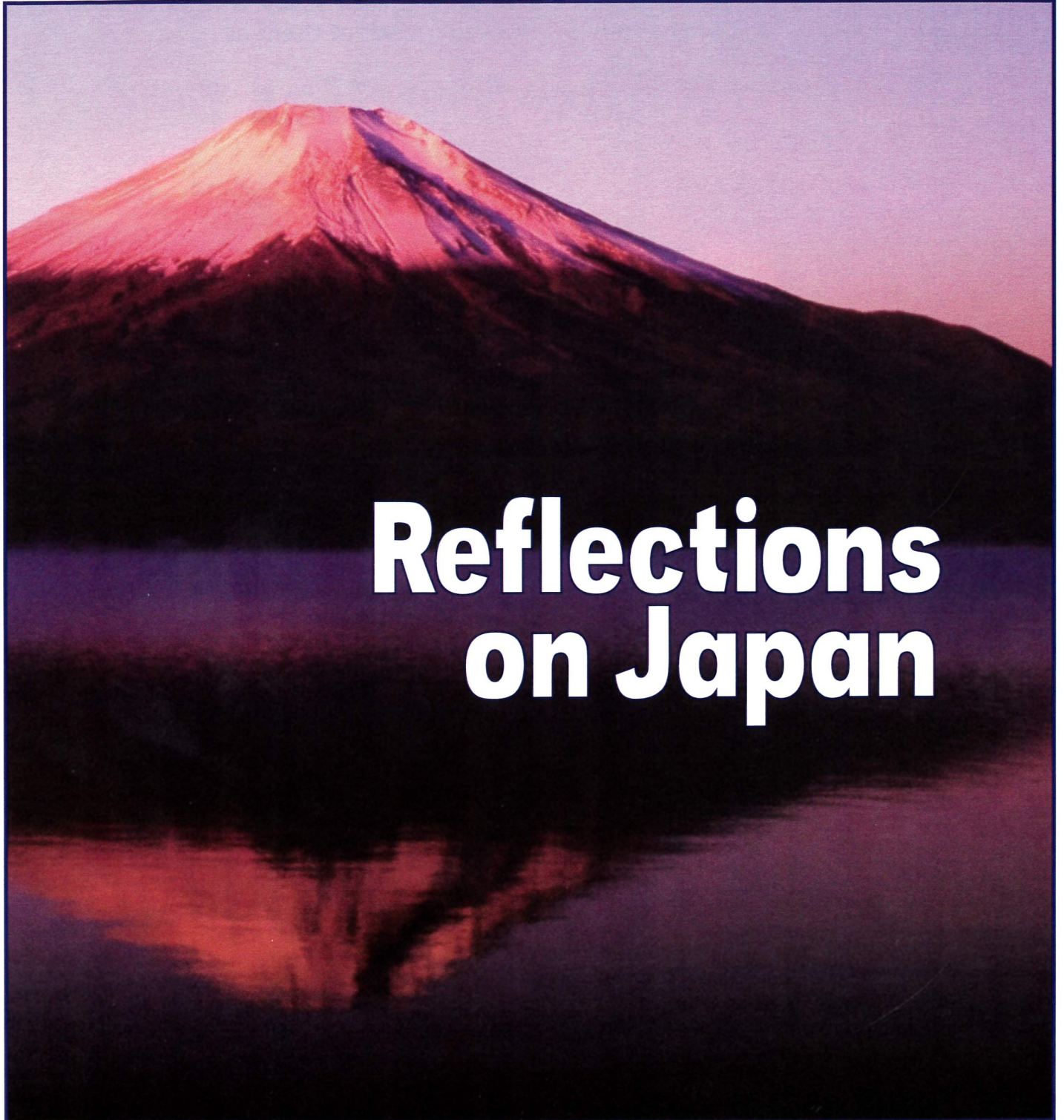


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JULY 2007

# Forward in Christ

God's wisdom, WELS' witness



## Reflections on Japan



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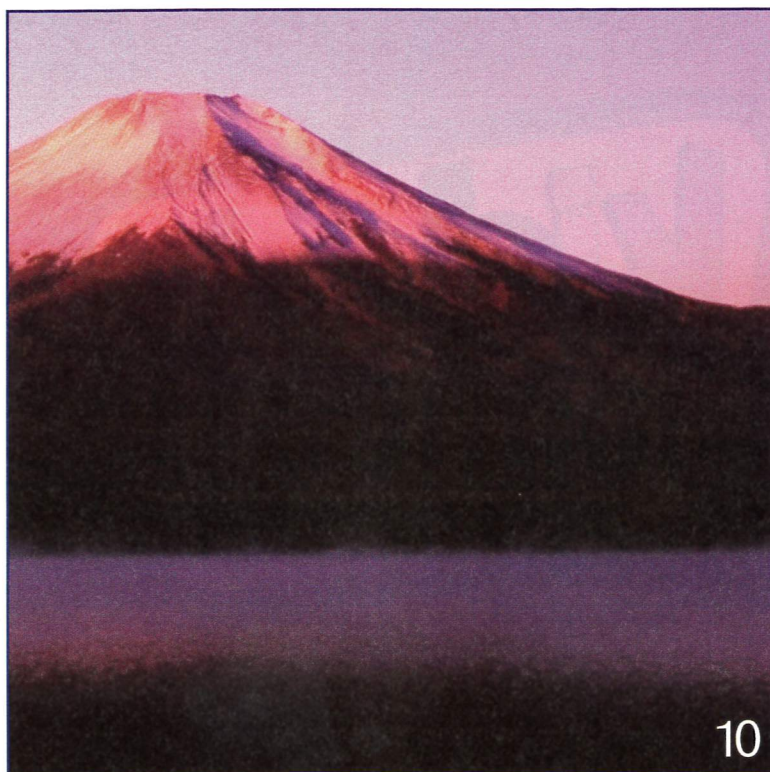


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“The land of Japan still beckons to missionaries, holding the door open for mission work.”



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## Forward in Christ

✝ The official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

### FEATURES

**10 REFLECTIONS ON THE GOSPEL IN JAPAN** A missionary looks at God's love in Christ to WELS' sister church in Japan over the past 50 years.

*Kermit D. Habben*

**12 SERVING TOGETHER** How differently Christians view words like submission and Christian headship!

*Kathie L. Wendland*

**14 HOLY SPIRIT: GIVER OF GIFTS** Whether exciting or mundane, spiritual gifts are all the work of the Spirit.

*John F. Vogt*

**16 WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY GRADUATES FOR 2007**

**28 EVERY LIFE FOR CHRIST: BECAUSE OF CHRIST AND FOR OTHERS** God called us by grace and placed us where we are for the benefit of others.

*John A. Braun*

**29 ELIZABETH FRY: LABORER FOR THE NEEDY** Because of Christ and what he did for her, Elizabeth Fry reached out to others in need.

*Theodore J. Hartwig*

**30 NO REASON TO DESPAIR** A simple ride home created a sudden and dramatic change for one young life.

*Cari Bade*

**36 SEE YOU AT THE LAUNDRY!** A story about laundering washcloths teaches us the importance of meeting together for worship.

*Rennie Heuer*



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*1 Kings 8:57*

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## WHAT'S INSIDE by Julie Wietzke

When you spend 40 years at the same place, you really get to know the ins and outs and understand the people and the customs. Kermit Habben has spent his entire ministry—40 years—as a missionary to Japan. On p. 10, he offers insights on the WELS mission in Japan, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. You can see his love for the Japanese people and for the gospel that he has been privileged to share with them.

Forty-one men are looking forward to new opportunities to share this same gospel. These graduates of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (p. 16) received their assignments on May 24 (p. 19). Keep them in your prayers as they strive to tell more people about Jesus.

Please also pray for the delegates at WELS' 59th biennial convention, which meets July 30-Aug. 3. You can find out more about what they will be discussing in the news section (p. 20-26). One important task at the convention will be electing a new synod president. WELS' current president, Karl R. Gurgel, has decided to decline nomination to serve for another term. In an interview with Executive Editor John Braun, Pres. Gurgel shares some thoughts on WELS and getting the Word out to more people (p. 22).

JULY

## DEPARTMENTS



6 **FEEDBACK**

7 **DEVOTION**

Faith and forgiveness *James A. Mattek*

8 **EDITORIAL COMMENT**

A lesson from history *Paul T. Prange*

9 **QUESTION & ANSWER**

Meditation and yoga *Richard L. Gurgel*

18 **WHATEVER**

Strength in God *Alyssa Allister*

19 **WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY ASSIGNMENTS**

20 **2007 SYNOD CONVENTION PREVIEW**

26 **BULLETIN BOARD**

27 **POTLUCK**

32 **FROM THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE**

Self-evident truths *Karl R. Gurgel*

33 **BIBLE STUDY**

Lessons from the Creed *Charles F. Degner*

34 **A THOUGHT**

Arrows away! *John A. Braun*

35 **INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDY**

Wrestling with God: Hard choices *Jonathan E. Schroeder*



**WINDOW STORIES**

The article, "Window stories" [Jan.], brought back many memories of my trips to Luther land. In addition to using windows to tell stories and doctrinal truths, there are many carvings, statues, woodcuts, and paintings that did the same.

What interested me the most were the paintings and woodcuts done by the artists of the Reformation.

Favorite Bible stories were painted with the Reformers and others who lived at the time included in the pictures. They may also have included their whole families. These paintings showed what the people believed. . . .

Windows do tell Bible stories and teachings beautifully, but other pieces of artwork told them too.

*Evie Drews  
St. Francis, Wisconsin*

**GRAVE IMAGE**

The article written by Pastor Jon Buchholz, "The grave cannot hold us" [April], was the most soul-awakening thing I have ever read. I have had copies made and am sending them to family and friends. I hope it does for them what it has done for me.

*JoAnne Fruechtl  
Peshtigo, Wisconsin*

Concerning "The grave cannot hold us" [April]. Pastor Buchholz gave us the truth of Christ's resurrection and our own release from the grave in the last part of his back-cover article. However, I wonder how many people laid it aside in horror and disgust after reading the first part because of the poor imagery used to lead us to the truth of Easter joy. How can non-WELS readers but wonder if we really teach consciousness in the grave? Sounds to me like a horror movie about being buried alive. Rather than Buchholz's "horrifying, stifling, claustrophobic" picture of

death and the grave "that will claim us all," I prefer St. Paul's approach to his own death: "We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8).

*John R. Schultz  
New Ulm, Minnesota*

**LESSER-KNOWN CHRISTIANS**

I am writing in regards to the article on Elizabeth of Thuringia [April].

Perhaps I misunderstood the author, but the following quote disturbed me. "After Ludwig's [her husband] death of a fever in 1227, Elizabeth committed her three children to the care of others and moved from the Wartburg Castle to the nearby city of Marburg."

The article hailed her as someone who was full of love and compassion, not only in words but also in actions. But it appears that her children missed out on those loving and compassionate actions. . . . We have too many parents today who do the same thing to their children by "warehousing" them while they chase their own career goals and other wants, neglecting the calling that the Lord has most obviously placed before them in their children.

*James E. Douglas  
Pierre, South Dakota*

In reading over the April issue of *Forward in Christ*, I want to thank you so much for including an article on women. "Elizabeth of Thuringia: Giving for others" by Theodore Hartwig is wonderful! Please make it a point to include future articles about women and women's issues.

*Laura V. Borchin  
Lewisville, Texas*

**ORIGIN OF THE SOUL**

I'm writing to you about the Q&A article, "The Origin of the Soul" [April].

I thought that this paragraph and the paragraph that led into it were really special: "That's why we don't

treat human beings at any stage of development as disposable biological material. At whatever state of development, a human being is a sinful body-and-soul creature known to God and redeemed by Christ."

*Earl Reichert  
New London, Wisconsin*

**LOVE**

I have enjoyed reading Pastor Gunn's articles on love [Feb.-June]. They have thoroughly covered the subject in a well-thought-out manner. Love is at the heart of Christian discipleship and the center of everything we say and do in life. I pray that Jesus' words as well as the thoughts that Pastor Gunn expressed from them are continually remembered. The articles, I thought, were especially timely as we wait for the members of our synod to gather at this year's convention. While tensions there are sure to be high, it is all the reason more we remember to "love one another."

*Todd Rausch  
Waukesha, Wisconsin*

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

**DEFINING RELIGION**

**Regeneration:** a synonym for conversion. It is the act in which the Holy Spirit creates new life or faith in a person who by nature is spiritually dead. Those who have been converted or regenerated by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace are born again (John 3:3-6; 1 Peter 1:23).



# Faith and forgiveness

*Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Mark 2:4,5*

James A. Mattek

**P**astor, when I was in the hospital I had lots of time to think." Illness often makes us exit the fast lane and shift life into park. The wise person uses this time to think.

## Jesus looks for faith first

The paralytic that was brought to Jesus had things on his mind. His life had probably been in park for some time, and he had plenty of time to think. Now he was coming to Jesus for help. He came on his cot, powered by four friends with strong backs and equally strong determination. Jesus was preaching to a standing room only crowd and the only way of making the house handicapped accessible was to punch a hole in the roof. That's what they did.

What a scene. First there was the sound of feet on the roof above. Then the scratching sound above Jesus. I picture a grin on Jesus' face. He knew who was coming and why. People stepped back from the noise as dust and dirt rained down. Then sweaty arms lovingly lowered the cot into the reaching hands of people below. The paralyzed man was placed on the floor.

How did the people respond to what they witnessed? No doubt most were surprised. Maybe some were upset. The owner of the house might have been angry. But Jesus was pleased, for he saw more than the people saw. He saw five men of God who had faith. "When Jesus saw their *faith* . . .".

Faith is what Jesus looks for first, and faith is what each of us needs

above all else. "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'" Note that before Jesus helped this man physically, he helped him spiritually. Jesus could have simply healed the man and left it at that. However, healed people still die eventually . . . and then what? Forgiveness of sins won by Jesus solves the "then what?" problem. Afterward is eternal life!

## Jesus assures us of his forgiveness

This man had faith, but he needed assurance that he was forgiven. Jesus recognized this man's struggle with past sins. This man might have lain on his cot for years, with plenty of time to think. It's probable that skeletons in yesterday's closet were very real, and they danced in his memory, pointing their bony fingers directly at him.

We are in a similar plight. Dishonesty, resentment, materialism, gossip, and lust are just a few of our skeletons. What Jesus saw in these five men he also looks for in us. He invites us to trust that his sacrifice won for us full and unconditional forgiveness. He has opened the closet doors of our past and has quieted the skeletons. His Spirit cleans our closets, removing our fear of facing God and in its place gives us the peace of forgiveness. Our spiritual paralysis is healed.



Jesus went on to heal the man and told him, "Get up, take your mat and go home." To the amazement of all, that's what the man did. He left with gratitude in his heart. After all, the skeletons of his past were lying in a heap at the feet of his Savior.

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



# A lesson from history

Paul T. Prange

**M**y oldest daughter was confirmed last spring. She made a public confession that Jesus is her Savior. I am deeply grateful to the pastors and teachers who helped her mother and me instruct her in the truths of the Bible, especially as they are found in Luther's Small Catechism and in Lutheran hymns. I am also deeply grateful to all of the Christians who sacrifice and pool their resources to allow those pastors and teachers to do their work.

It seems too easy to take the blessing of a faithful congregation with faithful pastors and teachers for granted.

My daughter wants to be a Lutheran elementary school teacher. I am deeply grateful to all of the Christians around the nation who are sacrificing and pooling their resources so that she can begin focused study for that high calling already this fall at the high school level.

It seems too easy to take the blessing of a ministerial education system with faithful teachers and faithful students for granted.

My whole family can follow Jesus openly in our home, in our church, and in our schools. Many men and women have sacrificed their lives in the Armed Forces so that we enjoy freedom of religion where we live. I am deeply grateful to them.

It seems too easy to take the blessing of freedom to practice our religion for granted.

History can teach us not to take such blessings for granted. Almost 500 years ago, a group of families moved to where a mine had opened in the present-day Czech Republic. They named their new town Joachimsthal. The year after they founded their town, Martin Luther nailed the Ninety-Five Theses to the church door at Wittenberg, and the Reformation began.

The mining families all became Lutheran. They opened and supported two Lutheran elementary schools, one for the boys and one for the girls. They supported a number of pastors in a large congregation that contained, at its peak, 5,000 mining families.

Many of their legal and church records have been preserved, and their story is told in the book *Singing the Gospel* by Christopher Boyd Brown. What is striking is the documented evidence of each family being sure that the children learned Bible accounts, Luther's Small Catechism, Lutheran worship, and in particular, the words of dozens of Lutheran hymns.

What happened when the town lost the freedom of religion is also striking. After imperial armies took over the territory and banned Lutheranism, a priest named Franciscus Albanus was sent to the village. He had his doctoral degree from a college where they trained men to oppose the unconditional gospel. Franciscus Albanus worked hard in Joachimsthal. But the children under his care told him the truths of the Bible as they had learned them in Luther's Small

Catechism. The men and women of the village patiently insisted on forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus as their Savior. And the families sang Lutheran hymns in public and private. Even armies could not stop the singing.

Albanus was forced to begin reading through the Lutheran theological volumes stored in the Joachimsthal library in order to "strike the people with their own sword, and convince them out of their own writings."

Instead, he himself was convinced by the Holy Spirit. Albanus resigned from the priesthood and became a Lutheran pastor.

May the Lord bless our own efforts at thorough Christian education in our homes and around the world so that even in the hardest times our children remain strong in the faith, testifying to Jesus throughout all generations.

**It seems too easy to take the blessing of freedom to practice our religion for granted.**

*Contributing editor Paul Prange, president at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Michigan, is a member at St. Paul, Saginaw.*





at the foot of the cross. Richard L. Gurgel

## TOPIC: Meditation and yoga

**I'm a social worker. In mailings for continuing education, ads for exercise classes in the newspaper, and brochures from our local hospital, more encouragements for meditation/yoga/Eastern religion are creeping in. What are Christians to do?**

In order to provide context for FIC readers, I'll quote material you included with your question.

Here's a segment of a newspaper article about a class at a medical clinic:

Jin Shin Jyutsu physio-philosophy is an ancient art harmonizing the life energy in the body. Our bodies contain several energy pathways that feed life into all our cells. When one or more of these paths become blocked, this barrier effect may lead to discomfort or even pain. Through Jin Shin Jyutsu, our awareness is awakened to the simple ability to harmonize or balance ourselves physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Here's a course offered by a hospital:

Divine Heart Meditation—Learn meditation that can be practiced at any time, but is particularly beneficial in the morning. If done regularly, this practice leads to opening of the heart center, filling you with positive energy, more connection, tolerance, and joy. This meditation helps arrest negative thoughts, emotions, and perceptions and helps to ground you in heart energy so feelings of abundance and love are rediscovered.

Another brochure announced a "Mindfulness" seminar. This seminar was approved in several states for continuing education credit for counselors, social workers, and nurses. The seminar leader listed in her credentials that she and one of her mentors were students of Buddhism.

As America moves into a post-Christian era, it shouldn't surprise us to see more of such things. It's amazing what people will believe as long as it's not in the Bible. While organized religion is a dirty word in America, do-it-yourself spirituality is hot.

This is nothing new. "Christian" mysticism—the attempt to contact God directly, apart from his means of grace—has existed for centuries. Many mystical practices are strikingly similar to what is becoming popular in our country.

Those who advocate these techniques often scoff at the closed-minded Christians who hesitate to become involved. Or they try to soothe consciences by claiming that Christians have practiced similar forms of meditation for centuries. Others insist they have cleansed their practices of all religious connotations so they are nothing but tools to help people relax and improve overall health.

It's possible, theoretically, to imagine an exercise technique originating in Eastern religion so divorced from its philosophical origins that it becomes a spiritually neutral way to promote physical health. Yet remnants of religious philosophy often remain.

Most helpful of all is to understand the completely opposite worldview of Eastern religions and Christianity. Eastern religions teach that the human problem is ignorance. They teach that "God" isn't found outside of us so much as within us. The goal is to unleash our divine potential locked up within. One path to reach that divine inside is to "turn off" our conscious minds polluted by the world so that we can reconnect to the purer subconscious. Enlightenment comes from within.

Christians recognize that nothing good lives in us by nature. Our human heart is the problem, not the answer. While we certainly seek to get our minds off the sinful world's deceptions, Christian meditation doesn't seek to empty our mind of conscious thought but to fill our hearts with God's promises. Our path to "enlightenment" comes not from within but from God's redeeming power in Word and sacraments.

*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.





A missionary looks at God's love in Christ to WELS' sister church in Japan over the past 50 years.

Kermit D. Habben

# Reflections

on the gospel in Japan

“Do you take your shoes off at the door before entering your house?” the woman asked. “It must have been very difficult for you to learn the many strange customs in Japan!”

She continued, “Just think of how difficult it must have been for the first missionaries! Do you think that the first Christians should have obeyed the Japanese government when it commanded the Christians to despise Christ by stepping on his picture?”

The Japanese government banned Christianity in 1600. That ban and the persecution of Christianity were so effective that Christianity in Japan was virtually wiped out for more than 250 years. During that time anyone caught practicing Christianity lost not only his life, but also the lives of his family and even the lives of all who lived in his village.

The ban on Christianity officially was lifted in 1889, but it still was not easy being a Christian.

## WELS begins in Japan

Protestant missionaries from America and Europe began to arrive after the ban was lifted. Among the first Protestants were Lutherans from the United Lutheran Church in America (now ELCA). Our own synod wrestled with the question of sending missionaries to Japan at that time, but in 1893

WELS instead decided to do evangelism in Arizona among the Apache Indian tribe.

Finally, in 1957, Missionary Richard Seeger arrived in Japan. Seeger's family was joined by Missionary Richard Poetter in 1958. The mission that gave birth to the Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church (LECC) had begun in earnest. Official incorporation as a church body under Japanese law took place in 1963.

In the first 30 years of mission effort the church grew from zero to 200 members. This growth matches and even surpasses the growth of other Christian bodies doing work in Japan. An executive of a major American company who regularly visited on business has remarked, “It just amazes me that you have as many believers as you do.”

Over the years, the Holy Spirit has moved young men to prepare for the ministry. Through the LECC seminary program, the Holy Spirit has supplied five well-trained and faithful pastors. These pastors and the missionaries work as

THE LAND OF JAPAN STILL BECKONS TO MISSIONARIES,



equal partners in doing evangelism, training young men in the seminary program, and teaching the lay training program. Japanese and expatriate missionaries share equally in every aspect of the work and administration of the LECC. This is important in a society that is beset from within and without by every conceivable kind of philosophy and religious charlatan clamoring to be heard. It is no wonder that the average Japanese is suspicious of religious teachings and tends to cling all the more to what is familiar in the old customs and teachings.

### Reaching out in Japan

One of the important ways of reaching out into countless homes in Japan is the radio program, "Walking Together With Jesus." Started in 1963, this program is broadcast to a potential listening audience of more than five million people. A recent postcard from a listener said, "Thank you for your broadcasts. I just wanted to ask you to please continue them. I wanted to die, because I had no hope. Please continue to broadcast these messages that give hope and encouragement to those who are hopeless like I was."

Another letter suggested more: "We have been listening to 'Walking Together With Jesus' for over 20 years. We feel confident that your church teaches all of God's Word. We would like to come and study to become members, if that is okay!" The writers of that letter did come and not only became members, but also brought their daughter and son-in-law too.

In addition to the radio program, the LECC has tried almost every conceivable method for sharing the gospel. English classes were used long before they became a popular method of evangelism. Cooking classes, sporting events, outdoor camps, ski camps, summer Bible camps, parenting classes, and numerous other ways to do evangelism have been employed. The best way to reach out is when members bring their family and friends to hear the gospel.

Even simple methods, like a phone book listing, have reaped results. One caller asked, "Is this the Lutheran church? I found the name of your church in the phone book. To tell you the truth, I have been looking for you for a long time. I have been to several churches and read their teachings. After comparing their teachings with the Bible, I believe that what the Lutheran church teaches is the closest to the Bible. Will you teach me?"

The land of Japan still beckons to missionaries, holding the door open for mission work. With a Christian population of less than one percent, the need is obvious. But as the 50th anniversary of mission work in Japan rolls around this year, the removal of missionaries and

the aging of two of the five Japanese pastors have put a tremendous strain on the staff and the work of the church. While deeply troubled and apprehensive about the future of their beloved church, these faithful believers are resolved to do their best as they give thanks and celebrate the 50th anniversary of the church that brought them the story of Jesus' love.

Until about 100 years ago the Japanese didn't even have the word "love" in their vocabulary. There was no such word until the Japanese began having contacts with foreigners. When Christians talked about God's love, Japanese couldn't understand what they meant. God's love didn't mean anything.

However, without a concept and understanding of sin, the message of Jesus' love falls on self-righteous ears both in Japan and America. Law and gospel and their correct and timely application to daily life in Japan are and will continue to be what mission work is all about.

### A word of thanks

In this 50th anniversary year, a heartfelt thank-you goes out to our gracious God who moved you, the members of WELS, to generously give your sons and daughters to bring the gospel to Japan. Thanks to the many missionaries and teachers—especially to their wives and families—who came to share Jesus here in Japan. Thanks to the many mission board members and their families who gave of their time and energy to help the fledgling mission develop into a sister church.

Perhaps the best words of thanks come from a young woman in Bible class. "Do I understand you correctly that Jesus has paid for my sins, all my sins? Because of what Jesus has done for me I have eternal life and that he will raise me from the dead?"

"That is correct," I assured her.

"Oh, I am so happy."

Thanks to all the members of WELS for sharing this happiness—and God's love in Christ—with the members of the LECC. May God continue to bless our walk together in Christ our Lord and our partnership in sharing the gospel around the world.

*Kermit Habben has served his entire ministry—40 years—as a missionary in Japan.*

*WELS will be celebrating with the Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church (LECC) at the 2007 synod convention in July. Pastor Takeshi Nidaira, one of the LECC's national pastors, will be preaching at the convention's opening service (see p. 24). The Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church will celebrate the 50th anniversary of WELS mission work in Japan in October.*

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HOLDING THE DOOR OPEN FOR MISSION WORK.



**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 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 Lauren,

Professor Gurgel also referred his granddaughter to me to answer questions about some rather difficult words and concepts from the "Heirs Together . . ." Bible study. He hasn't changed a bit! He was always perceptive and recognized that human nature, being tainted by sin, likely will resent what is being said just because of who is saying it.

While it's not right, it seems especially true in areas of what men or women "should" do. Human beings tend to see advice or instruction from the opposite gender as lacking credibility. Our sinful nature thinks that if you "haven't walked a mile in my high heels, what do you know about my world." That attitude, even among Christians, seems to be a pretty big stumbling block, no matter who's doing the talking and who's doing the listening.

I've also noted with interest the consistency among Christians of all cultures when dealing with application of the concepts of gender differences, God's "order of creation," helper, head, submission, and calling. Each gender is very good at pointing out the expectations and failings of the other gender. Not wanting to be at all flip-pant, I need to point out that I bet that God, who made us, knew we'd do

exactly that. I bet that's one reason he made it very clear through Paul's letter to Titus that instruction, especially of young Christian women, was to be by mature and older Christian women (Titus 2:4,5).

The Lord also made it clear through Paul's instruction to Timothy that Christian women were not to be exercising authority over, publicly arguing with, or undermining their adult Christian brothers (1 Timothy 2:12). Other men are to do that when it's necessary! To do otherwise makes it all too tempting to try to remove the speck in our brother's or sister's eye while ignoring the plank in our own.

Now then, on to your question. Arguably this is the point at which "the rubber meets the road" in this study. You ask why there seems to be a problem understanding God's good will and order in the way his children are to interact and work with each other for the good of his kingdom.

That perplexed me too. As our committee did the study, it became clear to me that I, and now you too, have been blessed to have a mother and father, grandmothers and grandfathers, and even great-grandmothers and great-grandfathers who "got it." These Christian family members demonstrated what Christian headship involves as well as what submission and being highly esteemed as a "suitable helper" is really about. We grew up with concepts that both men and women in God's kingdom are equal in value and equal in importance, but distinctly different in the calling for which God has made them.

What opened my eyes to the truth that not all Christians fully understand these concepts was an incident I witnessed about 40 years ago. While working in Central Africa I visited a Christian hospital run by

*How differently Christians view words*

# SERVING





a mission from South Africa and accepted an invitation for tea from the Christian doctor who was running the hospital.

I was appalled at how he spoke to and treated his wife. He obviously had no idea what being the head of the household was all about. Equally appalling were his wife's black eye and facial bruises as well as her inability to lift her head to look at me or her husband. Obviously she had no idea what submission or being her husband's God-given helper was all about either! They must have been married for 20 to 25 years, judging by the pictures of the children on the walls. The memory of that incident still makes me sad.

That experience helped me to see how grossly the world around us has distorted God's words and concepts. Just as the world has turned the word "love" into mere emotional self-gratification, so the world has turned other good words of God into the opposite of what God intended. Then, even Christians react negatively not to what God is saying but to what the world has twisted his words into meaning. A couple of examples are probably in order.

The world says headship is synonymous with being the boss and being superior to others in position and value. When Paul is writing to the Ephesians, however, he defines headship in terms of being given authority and responsibility for the physical and spiritual well-being of your family. He specifically instructs husbands to "love your wives, just as Christ loved

the church and gave himself for her" (Ephesians 5:25). The word here for love is "agape," which means to give of yourself even for those who don't deserve it. Christ died for us while we "were still sinners" (Romans 5:8). Jesus reprimands his disciples who were vying for a place in his kingdom, telling them that they were not to think they will be "regarded as rulers of the Gentiles [who] lord it over them . . . Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Mark 10:42,43).

Headship as God defines it is about loving and humble service. It includes authority from God and responsibility and accountability to God himself for those under the head. Jesus is, of course, the example: not only his death out of love for us but also his active responsibility to the Father for his disciples. Jesus' high-priestly prayer on Maundy Thursday is an example of the responsibility for the disciples that goes along with the authority given (John 17:6-19).

Just as love and headship are distorted beyond recognition by the world around us, so are the words "helper" and "submission." While the world paints them as secondary, inferior, and weak attributes, our God uses them in the opposite manner. "Helper" is also used to describe the Lord's actions on behalf of mankind. "Submission" is what Jesus exemplified when he willingly set aside his rights as God and King and "humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death

on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). There is nothing inferior or secondary about that!

I'm guessing that as you read this you're thinking, "That's not what my friends at work think these things mean." You are probably correct, unless they're Christians. Remember my last letter when we talked about "aliens and strangers" in the world. On issues like this, as we live our lives according to what the Lord says, it is so clear that we are not in step with the world around us.

I hope this helps as you work through the Bible study with your class. When we're working together as the body of Christ, each one using his or her God-given talents to the fullest, Christ is proclaimed clearly just as he ought to be.

I'll continue to pray that the Holy Spirit opens the hearts and minds of all present in these studies that all may be blessed personally and as a church carrying out its mission.

Love and kisses,

Your Godmother who prayed for you and your Christian spouse from the day you were born.

*Kathie L. Wendland is a member at St. Peter, Mishicot, Wisconsin. She is serving on the Women's Ministry Committee of the Commission on Adult Discipleship.*

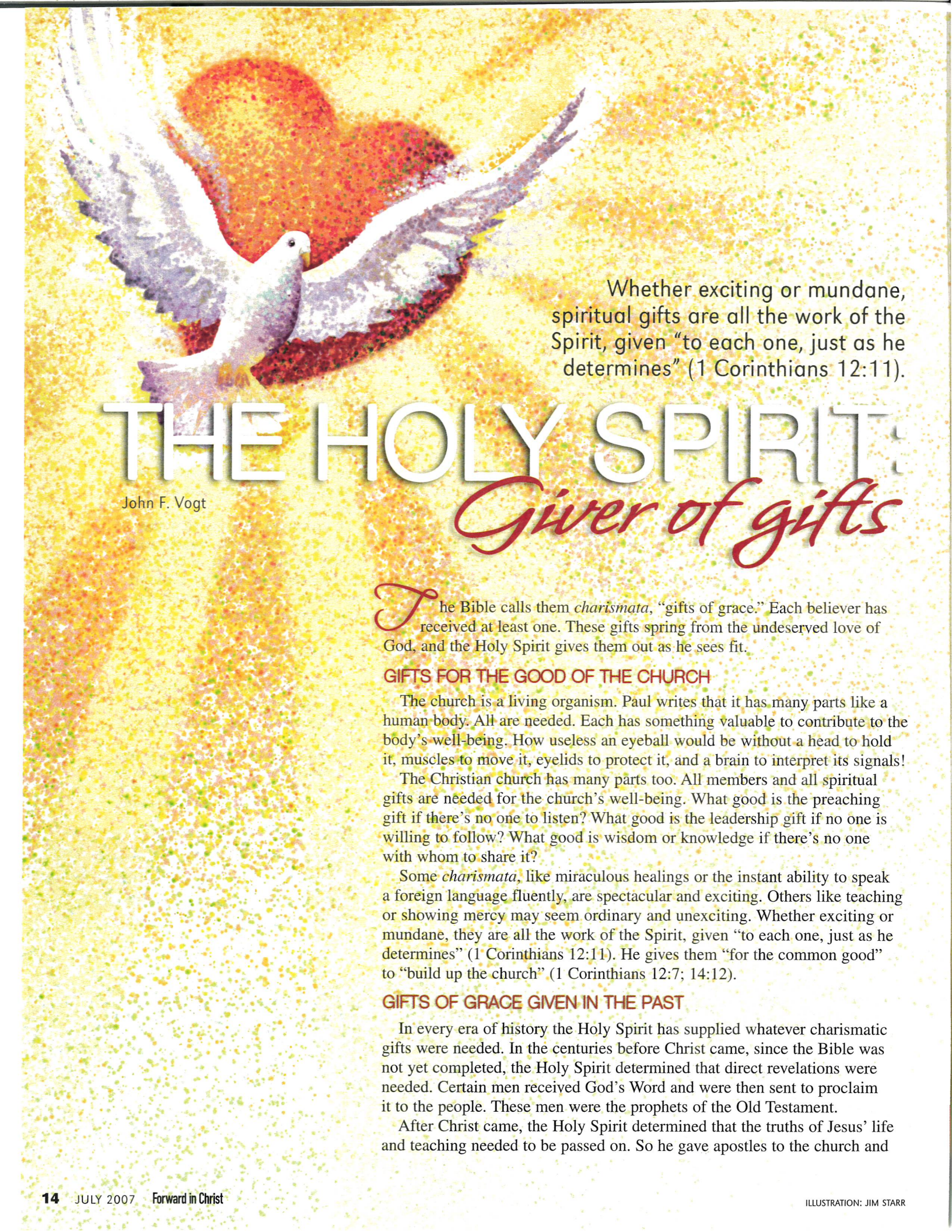
Learn more about the Bible study "Heirs Together of God's Gracious Gift of Life" at [www.wels.net/jump/womenstudy](http://www.wels.net/jump/womenstudy).

*like submission and Christian headship!*

# TOGETHER

Kathie L. Wendland





Whether exciting or mundane, spiritual gifts are all the work of the Spirit, given “to each one, just as he determines” (1 Corinthians 12:11).

# THE HOLY SPIRIT:

## *Giver of gifts*

John F. Vogt

The Bible calls them *charismata*, “gifts of grace.” Each believer has received at least one. These gifts spring from the undeserved love of God, and the Holy Spirit gives them out as he sees fit.

### GIFTS FOR THE GOOD OF THE CHURCH

The church is a living organism. Paul writes that it has many parts like a human body. All are needed. Each has something valuable to contribute to the body’s well-being. How useless an eyeball would be without a head to hold it, muscles to move it, eyelids to protect it, and a brain to interpret its signals!

The Christian church has many parts too. All members and all spiritual gifts are needed for the church’s well-being. What good is the preaching gift if there’s no one to listen? What good is the leadership gift if no one is willing to follow? What good is wisdom or knowledge if there’s no one with whom to share it?

Some *charismata*, like miraculous healings or the instant ability to speak a foreign language fluently, are spectacular and exciting. Others like teaching or showing mercy may seem ordinary and unexciting. Whether exciting or mundane, they are all the work of the Spirit, given “to each one, just as he determines” (1 Corinthians 12:11). He gives them “for the common good” to “build up the church” (1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:12).

### GIFTS OF GRACE GIVEN IN THE PAST

In every era of history the Holy Spirit has supplied whatever charismatic gifts were needed. In the centuries before Christ came, since the Bible was not yet completed, the Holy Spirit determined that direct revelations were needed. Certain men received God’s Word and were then sent to proclaim it to the people. These men were the prophets of the Old Testament.

After Christ came, the Holy Spirit determined that the truths of Jesus’ life and teaching needed to be passed on. So he gave apostles to the church and



inspired them to write the New Testament. But how could the people tell for sure that the prophets and apostles were speaking God's Word? To remove all doubt, the Holy Spirit confirmed their message. The prophets were shown to be speaking God's Word when all—100%—of their prophecies proved to be true. The Holy Spirit confirmed the apostles' message with miraculous signs such as healing instantaneously and even raising a dead person.

The Spirit also gave the spiritual gift to “[distinguish] between spirits” (1 Corinthians 12:10). This gift enabled some Christians to determine whether a message or messenger was truly from God. One of the ways such a distinguisher between spirits made his judgment was by comparing what the prophet or teacher wrote with the rest of Scripture. Since all Scripture is God-breathed and therefore true, no new message from God would in any way contradict what God had already revealed.

In order to give us the Bible and get its message well-established, the Holy Spirit determined that foundational gifts such as prophets and apostles and confirmatory gifts such as healing and speaking in tongues were needed. Miraculous gifts were not everyday occurrences, however, and did not come whenever someone wanted a healing or a tongues-speaking episode. Such signs were given only when the Spirit saw a clear reason for them. Consider the case of the apostle Paul. He wrote regarding one of his faithful co-workers: “I left Trophimus *sick* in Miletus” (2 Timothy 4:20). In another instance, rather than heal Timothy's chronic stomach condition, Paul advised him regarding proper health care (1 Timothy 5:23). Paul couldn't even cure himself. His earnest prayers for healing were not answered with a miracle. Rather the Lord helped Paul accept his illness and see that God had a good purpose for it (2 Corinthians 12:8,9).

### GIFTS OF GRACE GIVEN TODAY

The Spirit's gifts are not the same in every age or situation. Rather the Spirit gives whatever *charismata* are needed for the good of the church at that particular time and place. The Holy Spirit continues to give his gifts to this day. Some are common among Christians. Others are special gifts, not given to all, but given at the right time to the right people, “so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:12).

I think of individuals I've known who have been given an evangelism gift. All Christians are to be witnesses of the gospel. Some, however, have a special gift which enables

them to speak boldly, sincerely, and powerfully about Jesus Christ and what he has done. Like Peter and John, they “cannot help speaking about what [they] have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

The Holy Spirit has always provided the church with the gifts he determined were needed.

Think what a special gift to the church it is when the Holy Spirit leads a young person to train for the public ministry. With all the options available to youth today—and with all the temptations of our materialistic world—certainly each pastor, teacher, or staff minister is a special gift of God's grace.

Serving is one of the Spirit's gifts (Romans 12:7). Every congregation has one or two men or women who serve faithfully—and go almost unnoticed—as they clean the church, pull weeds on the church grounds, or help at all church dinners. I think of an elderly man in a congregation I served. For years he faithfully came to church 15 minutes before anyone else—even in rain, snow, and ice—to unlock the doors and turn on the lights.

The Bible's list of special gifts includes leadership, administration, showing mercy, giving help, and inspiring others by heroic faith. We could add other gifts as well. The Holy Spirit has always provided the church with the gifts he determined were needed. We can be confident that he continues to do so today!

### GIFTS GIVEN TO US TO BE USED

The Holy Spirit wants us to use the gifts he has given us. Part of his encouragement comes from inside us. The Spirit gives us interests and an inclination for a particular form of service. Part of his encouragement comes from without. The Spirit sets opportunities before us to use our gifts. The Sunday school superintendent's request that you help out with a class, for example, may be the Holy Spirit's way of calling you to develop and use a latent teaching gift. A sick relative or a troubled co-worker may be a call from the Spirit to a personal ministry of mercy or sharing the good news.

The gospel motivates us to use faithfully the Spirit's gifts for the common good. We want to serve God because of the forgiveness and love he has shown us in Christ. We want to serve our neighbor because such conduct glorifies Christ and helps to build up his body, the church.

*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 July 5 at [www.forwardinchrist.net](http://www.forwardinchrist.net)



# WISCONSIN LUTHERAN Seminary graduates

At the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary graduation service on May 25, 41 graduates received diplomas for successfully completing their seminary studies. Look for where they were assigned on p. 19.



John C. Berg  
Winona, Minn.



Scott W. Bergemann  
West Allis, Wis.



Adam M. Bode  
Saginaw, Mich.



Jeffery G. Bolwerk  
West Bend, Wis.



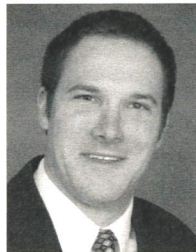
Emile J. Burgess  
Sacramento, Calif.



Paul M. Burk  
Prescott, Ariz.



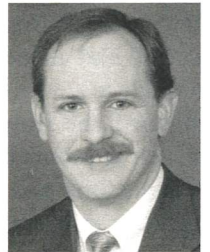
Philip J. Casmer  
Phoenix, Ariz.



Seth D. Degner  
Santa Maria, Calif.



Aaron J. Dolan  
Eden Prairie, Minn.



Kevin L. Draper  
North Richland Hills, Tex.



Chadwick L. Graham  
Bay City, Mich.



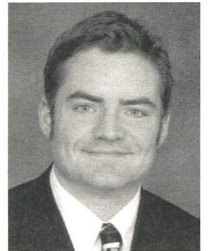
Brian P. Hackmann  
Greenfield, Wis.



Philip J. Huebner  
Wauwatosa, Wis.



Christopher E. Koschnitzke  
Lannon, Wis.



Brad D. Krause  
Watertown, Wis.



Michael J. Kuschel  
South Milwaukee, Wis.



Bounkeo Lor\*  
Kansas City, Kan.



Daniel C. Lor\*  
Kansas City, Kan.



Dewid Lor\*  
Kansas City, Kan.

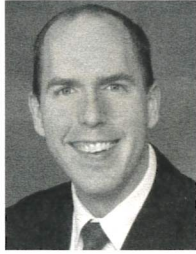


Ger Lor\*  
Kansas City, Kan.





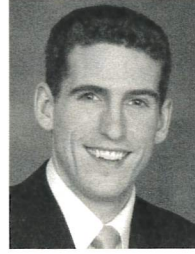
Nicholas C. Maglietto  
Oceanside, Calif.



Jonathan L. Munson  
Mesa, Ariz.



Germán Novelli M.\*\*  
Milwaukee, Wis.



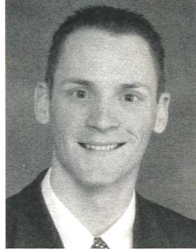
Michael T. Novotny  
Green Bay, Wis.



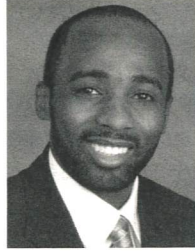
Jonathan D. Quinn  
Watertown, Wis.



Benjamin A. Radtke  
Tucson, Ariz.



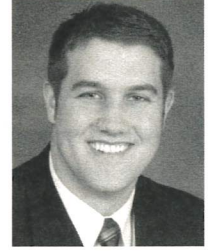
Christopher J. Rathje  
Saginaw, Mich.



B. Jason Richards  
St. John's, Antigua, West Indies



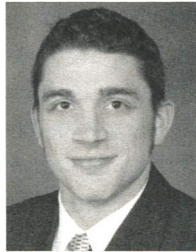
Clint A. Rogas Jr.  
Austin, Tex.



Nathanael R. Scharf  
West Allis, Wis.



David W. Schmidt  
Noblesville, Ind.



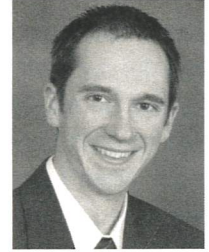
Eric D. Schroeder  
Appleton, Wis.



Mark J. Schroeder  
Hemet, Calif.



Paul W. Schupmann  
Aurora, Ill.



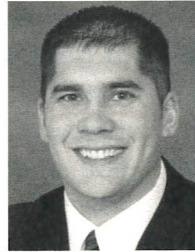
Mark E. Schutz  
Menomonie, Wis.



Nathanael P. Seelow  
Rice Lake, Wis.



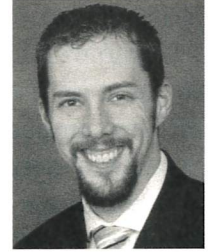
Dustin D. Sievert  
Watertown, Wis.



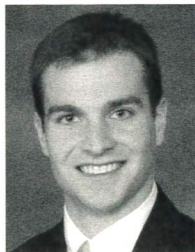
Bradley P. Taylor  
Watertown, Wis.



Paul Cher Pao Thao\*  
Appleton, Wis.



P. James Wilcox  
Seattle, Wash.



Jonathan G. Zimpelmann  
Eagle River, Wis.

\*a graduate of the Asian Ministry Training Program, a satellite program under the auspices of the Pastoral Studies Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

\*\*a graduate of the Cristo Palabra de Vida Training Program, a satellite program under the auspices of the Pastoral Studies Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.



# WHATEVER

## Strength in God

If your faith is in God, then you can get through anything and everything.

Alyssa Allister

**H**ave you ever felt like you just wanted to give up because something was so hard or you felt it wasn't going your way? You may want to give up, but all you need is strength in God. If your faith is in God, then you can get through anything and everything.

**About 13 years ago my father passed away from cancer.** Yes, I was only two, but I still wonder and dream about my dad. Now, all I have left are just stories from my brothers and mom about my dad and how he was an amazing man. My mom always told me that Dad couldn't believe it when the doctor told him I was a girl. When I was asleep, he would nudge me just to make sure I would move and was still breathing. I was his little princess.

I was two when the doctor told my mom that my father would pass away before she would give birth to their fourth child. My father was now at the stage where he couldn't talk because the cancer was spreading throughout his whole body. My dad fought to stay alive until my youngest brother was born. God let him see the newborn, and a couple of weeks later he passed away. My mother was left to take care of three children and a newborn by herself, while still carrying the sorrow of my father's death.

**I know that my mom wouldn't have been able to watch over all of us if it wouldn't have been for Jesus.** My mom didn't know why God took my father away from her, but she knew that God had his reasons. So what did she do? She kept her faith strong in God and knew that he would do what was best for her.

So what did my mom keep doing? She kept teaching us the Word of God and taking us to church to keep our faith strong. About two years later my mom went on

a blind date, and that gentleman ended up becoming our new stepdad. We also gained three awesome step-siblings.

God has blessed my family in so many ways since we have moved to Lake Mills, Wis. In my old town, Menomonee Falls, my siblings and I attended a public school, which there is nothing wrong with. But now that we have moved, we attend a Lutheran grade school and high school. Some of my brothers and sisters decided to attend Lutheran colleges also.

**So in the end, God has given my family some hard times, but he has also always been there for us and has given my mom the strength to get through the hard times.** If something bad happens to you, you may think at the time that God hates you and is just giving you a hard time. But you have to remember that God works for the good of those who love him. If you love God and put your faith in him, then you know that he always will do what is best for you. My mom tells me whenever I have a problem or am in a fight that if I put my faith in God he will help me get through the battle and I will become victorious in him.

In the end, my dad was the luckiest one of us all because he got to go home first! God gives us all the best eternal present . . . heaven!

Alyssa Allister, a junior at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wisconsin, is a member at St. Paul, Lake Mills.



for the good



## Assignments

At the Call Day service held at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., on May 24, 46 men received assignments. Of the 41 graduates from the class of 2007, 40 received assignments and one deferred for a year. One from the class of 2006 was assigned, and five from the class of 2005 were reassigned to new locations. Six more were reassigned to their present fields.

**Berg, John C.**, to English, Viroqua, Wis.  
**Bergemann, Scott W.**, to Mt. Zion, Kenosha, Wis.  
**Bode, Adam M.**, to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.  
**Bolwerk, Jeffery G.**, to Trinity, Jenera, Ohio  
**Burgess, Emile J.**, to Trinity, Caledonia, Wis.  
**Burk, Paul M.**, to St. John, Waterloo/Immanuel, Marshall, Wis.  
**Casmer, Philip J.**, to Christ the Lord, Brookfield, Wis.  
**Degner, Seth D.**, deferred for one year  
**Dolan, Aaron J.**, to Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.  
**Draper, Kevin L.**, to St. John, Sleepy Eye, Minn.  
**Graham, Chadwick L.**, to Grace, Oshkosh, Wis.  
**Guillaume, Nicholas J.**, to Abiding Word, Maineville, Ohio  
**Hacker, Jason C.**, to Prince of Peace, Traverse City, Mich.  
**Hackmann, Brian P.**, to Peace, Eagle River, Alaska  
**Huebner, Philip J.**, to New Mission, Palm Coast, Fla.  
**Koschnitzke, Christopher E.**, to Christus, Delavan, Wis.  
**Krause, Brad D.**, to Nebraska Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb.

**Kuschel, Michael J.**, to St. Matthew, Flora/St. Matthew, Danube, Minn.  
**Langbartels, John P.**, to Petra, Sauk Rapids, Minn.  
**Lor, Bounkeo**, to Rock of Ages, Kansas City, Mo.  
**Lor, Daniel C.**, to Hmong ministry, La Crosse, Wis.  
**Lor, Dewid**, as mission developer/educator, Thailand  
**Lor, Ger**, to St. Andrew, Sacramento, Calif.  
**Maglietto, Nicholas C.**, to Immanuel, Manitowoc, Wis.  
**Manian, Adam S.**, to Immanuel, Tyler, Minn.  
**Mattek, John P.**, to Crown of Life, Hubertus, Wis.  
**Munson, Jonathan L.**, to Peace, Hartford, Wis.  
**Novelli M., Germán**, to Southeastern Wisconsin Mission Board, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Novotny, Michael T.**, to Eastside, Madison, Wis.  
**Peil, Tyler R.**, to St. John, Stanton, Neb.  
**Quinn, Jonathan D.**, to Good Shepherd, Midland, Mich.  
**Radtke, Benjamin A.**, to St. Martin, Watertown, S.D.  
**Rathje, Christopher J.**, to Immanuel, Taylor/Immanuel, Springerville, Ariz.

**Richards, B. Jason**, to St. John, St. John's, Antigua, West Indies  
**Rogas, Jr., Clint A.**, to St. Paul, South Haven, Mich.  
**Scharf, Nathanael R.**, to Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.  
**Schmidt, David W.**, to St. John, Tappen, N.D.  
**Schroeder, Eric D.**, to Bloomington, Bloomington/Living Hope, Shakopee, Minn.  
**Schroeder, Mark J.**, to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.  
**Schupmann, Paul W.**, to St. John, Juneau, Wis.  
**Schutz, Mark E.**, to Hope, Spearfish, S.D.  
**Seelow, Nathanael P.**, to Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D.  
**Sievert, Dustin D.**, to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.  
**Taylor, Bradley P.**, to Mountain View, Calgary, Alberta, Canada  
**Thao, Paul Cher Pao**, to St. Paul/Northern Wisconsin Mission Board, Appleton, Wis.  
**Wilcox, P. James**, to Abiding Word, Rapid City, S.D.  
**Zimpelmann, Jonathan G.**, to Apostles, Billings, Mont.

## Obituaries

### Edwin August Adolf Nolte 1908-2007

Edwin Nolte was born May 16, 1908, in Rolling Green Township, Minn. He died March 30, 2007, in Edina, Minn.

A 1930 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught for 50 years at St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Emma; a sister; two brothers; an infant son; and a great-grandson. He is survived by his five sons; six daughters; two brothers; 33 grandchildren; 45 great-grandchildren; one great-great grandson; and many nieces and nephews.

### Theodore A. Sauer 1915-2007

Theodore Sauer was born May 25, 1915, in Saginaw, Mich. He died April 29, 2007, in Manitowoc, Wis.

A 1940 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.,

he served on the World Mission Board, Milwaukee, Wis.; at St. James, Portage, Mich.; in Zambia, Africa; at Grace, Manitowoc, Wis.; Grace, Oshkosh, Wis.; St. Paul, Livonia, Mich.; and Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis.

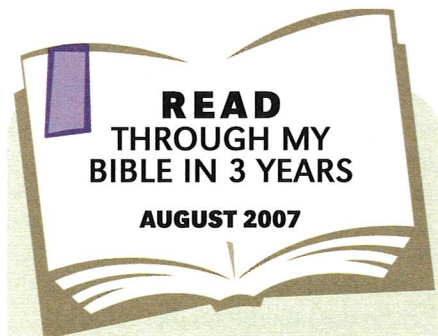
He was preceded in death by his wife, Althea; and a brother. He is survived by one daughter; one son; one sister; two brothers; seven grandchildren; five great-grandchildren; and many nephews and nieces.

### Richard Douglas Yecke 1929-2007

Richard Yecke was born March 25, 1929, in Sheboygan, Wis. He died May 27, 2007, in Lancaster, Calif.

A 1956 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at congregations in Arizona, Michigan, and California.

He is survived by his wife, Kathleen; two daughters; three sons; one sister; and seven grandsons.



- |                   |                     |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Nehemiah 12    | 17. Haggai 1        |
| 2. Neh. 13        | 18. Hag. 2          |
| 3. Psalm 90       | 19. Zechariah 1, 2  |
| 4. Ps. 91         | 20. Zech. 3, 4      |
| 5. Ps. 92, 93     | 21. Zech. 5, 6      |
| 6. Ps. 94         | 22. Zech. 7         |
| 7. Ps. 95, 96     | 23. Zech. 8         |
| 8. Ps. 97, 98     | 24. Zech. 9, 10     |
| 9. Ps. 99, 100    | 25. Zech. 11        |
| 10. Ps. 101       | 26. Zech. 12, 13    |
| 11. Ps. 102       | 27. Zech. 14        |
| 12. Ps. 103       | 28. Malachi 1:1-2:9 |
| 13. Ps. 104       | 29. Mal. 2:10-3:6   |
| 14. Ps. 105       | 30. Mal. 3:7-4:6    |
| 15. Ps. 106:1-33  | 31. James 1:1-18    |
| 16. Ps. 106:34-48 |                     |



# WELS' 59th biennial convention to discuss ministerial

The 400 WELS members serving as delegates to WELS' 59th biennial convention this summer will grapple with many important issues as they set the direction for the synod for the next biennium. Perhaps the most critical issue they will determine is how to balance the synodical budget in the midst of limited growth in financial support.

The Synodical Council—the synod's governing board responsible for WELS' ministry plan—has made several recommendations to help delegates make these crucial decisions when they meet July 30-Aug. 3, in New Ulm, Minn. The three recommendations are

- to maintain a 1+1+1 ministerial education system (1 seminary, 1 college, and 1 synod-subsidized prep school). To accomplish this and support the system, the Synodical Council recommended that Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS), Saginaw, Mich. (one of the two current synod-subsidized prep schools), be closed at the end of the 2007-08 school year.
- to sell the MLS school property for one dollar to any WELS members, group, or affiliate who will use the school for synod purposes.
- to pass a budget of \$34.8 million for fiscal year 2007-08 and \$35.7 million for fiscal year 2008-09. This includes using a \$2.5 million annual gift from an anonymous donor for the next five years to offset reductions to Missions and Parish Services for fiscal year 2007-08 (July 1, 2007-June 30, 2008) and in fiscal year 2008-09 to apply about half of it to partially offset these same reductions and the other half toward debt reduction.

## Maintaining ministerial education

The current WELS ministerial education system—responsible for training the synod's called workers—consists of one seminary, one college, and two preparatory high schools. However, maintaining all four schools has become increasingly difficult due to limited growth in financial support to the synod and declining enrollments (and therefore, lost tuition).

To cover costs, the Synodical Council increased the ministerial education budget by \$2.6 million for fiscal year 2006-07 in spring 2006, and by another \$2.6 million for the 2007-09 biennium in fall 2006. Yet the synod still is facing operating budget shortfalls of \$2 to \$4 million a year to support the four-school ministerial education system for the next biennium.

To deal with these shortfalls, the Synodical Council—looking at the Board for Ministerial Education's priorities and risk assessments—proposed closing

Michigan Lutheran Seminary after the 2007-08 school year. "The aim and the intention of the proposal was not just to balance the synod's budget but to maintain the long-term stability and support of our ministerial education system as a whole," says Wayne Mueller, first vice president. This will be accomplished financially by distributing funds from the ministerial education budget to three schools instead of four.

If the convention votes to keep both preparatory schools open, an additional \$2.3 million in cuts need to be made in 2008-09 or revenue must increase by the same amount. These cuts could result in bringing home as many as 16 world missionaries and defunding as many as 20 home missionaries over the next two years. These displaced called workers will fill most of the existing pastoral vacancies in the synod, leaving fewer places to put graduates.

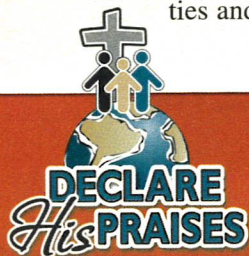
## Ministerial education concerns

Some, however, are concerned about losing Michigan Lutheran Seminary because of the number of graduates that continue on to Martin Luther College and eventually Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The Board for Ministerial Education projects that of the 134 anticipated graduates from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary over the next three years, 25 will be Michigan Lutheran Seminary graduates.

"The ministerial education system that we have set up depends strongly on prep schools," says Paul Prange, president of Michigan Lutheran Seminary. "We have a domino effect if we lose one or both schools." That would mean fewer students and then potentially not enough workers for congregations and schools.

If Michigan Lutheran Seminary is closed, efforts will be made to replace the number of graduates that it sends to Martin Luther College. "We need future workers in the church," says Mueller. "Institutionally we have committed ourselves to recruitment." This means implementing an aggressive recruitment strategy at Martin Luther College; working with area Lutheran high schools on recruitment; and encouraging current and future MLS students to attend Luther Preparatory School, the preparatory school geographically closer to the greater concentration of WELS members and whose campus can accommodate more students.

Yet Prange equates the success of the prep schools to the schools' single-purpose focus—to train students for the ministry of the gospel. "We're a recruitment school of Martin Luther College disguised as a high school," he says.



## PRE-CONVENTION COVERAGE

WELS' 59th Biennial Convention, July 30 - August 3, 2007



## education, the budget, and synod direction

Prange highlighted another important distinction about Michigan Lutheran Seminary: "Michigan Lutheran Seminary has always positioned itself as the school that is willing to try things for the whole educational system." This means developing models for outreach experiences, integrating computers and Spanish into the curriculum, and even establishing a mission advancement office. "We are a neat, small place to experiment," he says.

He also emphasized the importance of well-trained called workers: "Ministerial education and outreach are hand and glove. You have to have well-trained people if the outreach is going to last."

### Stewardship emphasis

While the Synodical Council is wrestling with balancing the synod's budget, the Conference of Presidents, in its role of funding the budget, is working to encourage offerings that would support all of the synod's ministry. The 12 district presidents, in conjunction with the circuit pastors, are asking congregations to reconsider their Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) commitments for the current calendar year and to estimate their level of commitment for next year. "[God's] resources are so exceedingly generous that it's never a question of resources," says WELS President Karl Gurgel. "His gospel motivates our hearts to part with what we think is ours but is really his."

A 21 percent increase (or \$3.9 million) in 2008-09 will allow WELS to maintain all of its current ministries, including Michigan Lutheran Seminary. Once Congregation Mission Offerings reach that level, support needs to continue to grow 5 to 6 percent annually (for inflation) in order to maintain ministry. But this is no small task. Current commitments for 2007 were up only 1.4 percent over receipts for the last calendar year.

### A special gift

A recent \$2.5 million annual gift for the next five years already may help to maintain ministry and pay off debts. With impending cuts to Home and World Missions and Parish Services of \$2.3 million in fiscal year 2007-08 and \$2.9 million in fiscal year 2008-09, the Synodical Council is recommending that the first year of this new gift be used to fully offset these cuts. The second year of this gift will be divided—half will go toward reducing cuts in these areas and the other half to pay back internal debt.

"The Synodical Council didn't want to have a sudden drop-off in support for our ministries at the end of the five-year gift," says Mueller. "Debt retirement will be a way for that gift to be the gift that keeps on giving."

While the Synodical Council is not recommending to use this gift to keep Michigan Lutheran Seminary open, it is recommending that if Michigan Lutheran Seminary closes, the facilities will be sold to WELS members, groups, or affiliates for one dollar.

### Other business

Besides working through the important budget issues, convention delegates will be busy with other issues at this year's convention:

- Electing a new synod president. (Read more about Pres. Gurgel's decision to decline nomination on p. 22.)
- Voting on a restructuring proposal (p. 24).
- Looking at other important synodical business that will help set direction for the next two years.

The decisions at this year's convention won't be easy to make, and delegates may disagree. But, like Prange says, "We are all in it together."

Read more about the issues coming up at the 2007 synod convention at [www.wels.net/convention](http://www.wels.net/convention).

## NEW THEME SETS TONE for the 2007 synod convention

The new two-year synod theme of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod is "Declare His praises." This theme not only emphasizes the mission of the church and directs the work of WELS during the next two years, but it also sets the tone for the convention.

The theme originated from 1 Peter 2:9,10, which states that God chose us, so that we may "declare the

praises of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light." A logo was also developed to visually represent this passage.

"The theme 'Declare His praises' was chosen to reflect the mission that God has given his church," says Wayne Mueller, first vice president of WELS, "and it serves well as a theme because every area of ministry—leadership and support services—in some

way serves to accomplish this great goal of the church."

The theme also emphasizes the involvement of every single member in the church's mission. "It is not only reflective of the official work that we do together as a synod," says Mueller, "but it also sets the theme and direction for the individual Christian life for every day."



## Get the Word out: An interview with President Karl R. Gurgel

*In 1993 the synod in convention elected Karl Gurgel to serve as its president. On May 9, 2007, President Gurgel announced that he would step down as president with the election of a new president at the synod convention in New Ulm this summer. We spent a little time talking with President Gurgel, mostly about his view of WELS at the time of this transition.*

**Question** – During the 14 years you have been president, what is the most significant change?

**Answer** – I would say that it is the growing awareness of ministry opportunities God provides beyond what our human eyes can see. The world is shrinking. God is bringing these opportunities to our table.

**Question** – As you look ahead, what is the greatest challenge?

**Answer** – I know my brothers are concerned about the quality and quantity of future called workers. Some think that we are minimizing both. We have to find a way to achieve the same quality and the same quantity. These are both challenges. If we minimize those challenges, then we are not being completely open. But we have to acknowledge that the quantity, from our human perspective, looks like it will diminish. We also have to acknowledge that without effort the quality could suffer. Those are not the conclusions that any one of us wants.

**Question** – How does Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS) and the proposed closing of MLS fit into that picture?

**Answer** – That's a real issue. For me, personally, I believe strongly that preparation leads to proclamation. MLS is a great blessing to us. The quality and quantity of the workers it produces have been a gift to us. The fact is, though—and I don't like to say that this is simply a monetary decision—the resources to keep ministerial education strong are not sufficient to support all four schools adequately. As strange as it seems, in order

to make the system strong, we need to concentrate the resources on three of the four and still maintain the system of prep-college-seminary.

**Question** – I'm hearing you say that the goal is to prepare quality workers in the quantity necessary for proclamation, but we face a tension between preparation and proclamation. Are there other challenges besides that?

**Answer** – Yes. I think another one and a very large one too—an important one—is the way all of us view all of the resources God gives to us individually, as families, and as a synod. Stewardship is an overworked word and maybe not the best word. Maybe management is a better word. How are we going to care for those legitimate, personal, family needs that God commits to us and how do we see beyond our own family table to the needs of all those

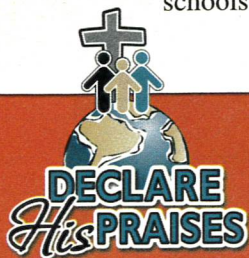
outside? I think this is a big, big challenge.

**Question** – How do we see beyond?

**Answer** – It's so easy to retreat inward—circle the wagons—and say, "We're really confronted with an issue right here. Take care of the problem right here." When that occurs, two things happen. One is that we don't look upward toward our God as we should. We think the ability to solve the problem is right within our own heads. And the other thing we do is fail to look outward and to recognize that others besides ourselves have spiritual needs.



President Karl Gurgel



## PRE-CONVENTION COVERAGE

WELS' 59th Biennial Convention, July 30 - August 3, 2007



**Question** – How do we overcome that tendency?

**Answer** – I think it has to be with personal and corporate study of the Scriptures. That's the only solution that works because it's there that the power of God is unleashed. Then we can work together to proclaim God's message.

**Question** – How do we Christians work together?

**Answer** – In many things there is no right or wrong. How can we take these individual preferences we have, which are not in themselves wrong or right, and blend them to work toward a common purpose? How do we structure our synod to do that? I don't know whether the restructuring proposal is the best way to do that. But it was intended to facilitate the movement toward a common goal. Maybe we haven't designed it well, and maybe we haven't communicated it correctly. But what I wrestle with is trying to find a way to allow individuality and yet not allow the individuality to subvert the oneness in direction we are seeking to achieve.

**Question** – What will the convention need to do?

**Answer** – We need to agree on what is our overall priority and purpose and then prioritize under that all the other important ingredients of what we do together. Linking ministerial education, missions, and publications is linking three horses that are not of equal size. I believe we have to say a bit more specifically how you do that. I would hope that the number one purpose is to share the gospel both with those who know it and especially with those who don't. If we ever lose that, then we don't have very much that binds us together.

**Question** – As you lay down the gavel, what do you see ahead?

**Answer** – Someone might conclude that I'm very pessimistic about the future, but I'm very optimistic. I really think that the best is yet to come.

**Question** – Why are you optimistic?

**Answer** – Any number of times when I thought I had failed—and it would be understandable because it accentuated my weaknesses—God's greatness and grace intervened and brought about a success I could not claim as my own. It reassured me that as Paul said, "When I am weak then I am strong." As long as we know that God's grace is sufficient, it's going to come out all right. I know that's the reason for my optimism.

**Question** – How are we going to get ourselves out of our financial difficulties?

**Answer** – I would be naive if I believed there wasn't going to be a struggle over that. We want to be good stewards of what we have. In my mind it seems simple. We have to keep the highest priority on reaching out beyond ourselves. We may need to be more realistic about how far we can reach, but it would be a mistake, in my opinion, not to reach out at all. There are suggestions to that effect, but I think most people would not agree with them. I think we must always be reaching out.

**Question** – What will a future historian say about the past 14 years?

**Answer** – I haven't really thought about it succinctly. I think of myself as a sincere, frail human being who knew that his only chance of success was his Savior and who wanted that message that was so valuable and necessary for him to be the possession of anyone he could reach.

**Question** – If you had one wish, what would it be?

**Answer** – I would like everyone in WELS to have the privilege of being in a world mission field. To see the absolute eternal joy of those who have positively nothing earthly. That is such a life-changing thing. I think of the mothers in Africa. Their kids have two outfits—one they wear, and one they wash. They live in huts with dirt floors. They come to church spotless. Their big smiles radiate. It's nothing fragile or shallow. It is so solid and so deep. It's the faith that God has worked in them. If everyone could see that, it would change things overnight.

*To read an extended version of this interview with Pres. Gurgel, go to [www.forwardinchrist.net](http://www.forwardinchrist.net).*

**CONVENTION**  
reports

Watch for post-convention reports in  
the October issue of *Forward in Christ*.



## Synod convention worship leaders selected

Worship leaders for the 2007 synod convention have been selected. These men will lead the convention delegates in devotions and doctrinal presentations throughout the convention.

"If we are to make God-pleasing resolutions, maintain godly respect for one another as brothers in Christ, and set a direction for our church that reflects the guidance of our Good Shepherd, we must immerse ourselves in his Word," says Wayne Mueller, first vice president of WELS. "The more business we have before us and the more serious the matters before the church—the more important it is to have the Word predominate."

**Mark Paustian**, professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., and **Ken Cherney**, professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., will be presenting "Gospel Gems"—devotions based on gospel texts from the Old and New Testament.

**Earle Treptow**, pastor at Zion, Denver, Colo., will be presenting an essay on sanctification. "The essay and the accompanying Bible studies will give convention participants an opportunity to reflect on the Holy Spirit's astounding work in their hearts and lives," says Treptow. "By his powerful Word and sacrament, the Spirit . . . continually reforms the people of God, so that they are increasingly eager and able to serve the Savior and others in every station of life."

**Takeshi Nidaira**, a national pastor in Japan, will preach at the opening worship service at St. Paul, New Ulm, on July 30. At the convention, WELS will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of WELS mission work in Japan. Dakota-Montana District President **Peter Naumann** will preach at the closing service at Martin Luther College on Aug. 2.



Mark Paustian



Ken Cherney



Earle Treptow



Takeshi Nidaira



Peter Naumann

## Proposed restructuring plan moves WELS toward a new synod structure

Delegates at the synod convention will be voting on a variety of proposed revisions to constitutional bylaws—revisions designed to streamline synod structure, establish clear lines of authority, and save money—in line with the direction set by the 2005 synod convention.

The revisions are substantially modified from a more sweeping restructuring plan that was rejected by the districts in convention last summer.

Perhaps the most significant revision among the current proposals is that administrators for various areas of ministry (Ministerial Education, Parish Services, and Home and World Missions) be called by the Synodical Council (SC) and be accountable to the synod president acting for the SC.

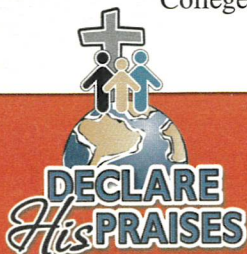
Under the current structure, the administrators are called by their boards, who are elected by the synod convention. In some cases lines of authority have been unclear since administrators are answerable, in various situations, to their boards, the Synodical Council, and the Conference of Presidents (COP).

Under the plan rejected by the districts, the administrators would have been answerable to a National Council—a combination of the SC and the COP. "After listening to the districts, it's really evident that they would like to see—in any structure we have—greater accountability, clearer reports, and see . . . the process to review actions of the synod," says WELS President Karl Gurgel. "Overall, to increase accountability is a very desirable goal."

The plan presented to the Synodical Council and the districts in convention in 2006 was modified and reviewed by an independent panel in accordance with the 2005 convention resolution. The panel agrees with the proposed changes but is still encouraging the 2007 synod in convention to consider going further with restructuring.

"While the panel agrees with the recommendations, additional important issues need to be addressed, [such as] rebuilding trust, developing leadership beyond the parish level, and looking at the organizational design and decision-making at the synod level," says George Martin, facilitator for the independent panel.

"All of these suggested revisions are practical in nature. None of them have to do with the doctrinal foundations of our synod," says Gurgel. "Consequently, open discussion is encouraged as we seek to carry out the objectives of our synod in the best possible way."



# PRE-CONVENTION COVERAGE

WELS' 59th Biennial Convention, July 30 - August 3, 2007



## Convention coverage comes in all shapes and sizes

The 400 convention delegates will be making decisions that will affect all WELS members. Therefore it's important that members stay informed about what is happening at the convention. WELS Communication Services and WELS Technology Services are preparing more ways for WELS members to learn about convention decisions.

For the person who likes to know every detail and all the breaking news as it happens, sign up for the RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed, which will notify you each time new information is posted on the synod convention Web site. Or, if you have the time, watch the convention unfold live on Streams, WELS' Internet media network, <http://streams.wels.net>. Streaming video and audio will be available. The live coverage will then be archived for later viewing and as podcasts.

For those who like the *Reader's Digest* version of the news, subscribe to one or both of the convention news services. One news service publishes breaking news. The other publishes a summary of each day's events. Or watch a short video wrap-up that will include scenes from that day, along with commentary and interviews.

## CONVENTION Web site

All convention news coverage can be accessed from [www.wels.net/convention](http://www.wels.net/convention). Julie Duran, WELS Webmaster, says, "The best way to find items on the convention site is to use the top tabs for main topics. Remember, all of our pages are available to you via RSS (Really Simple Syndication) readers. Subscribe to the RSS feed or the e-mail notification, and let our Web site do the work for you."

Items available on the convention Web site include

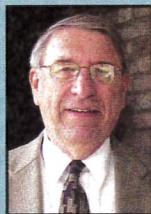
- pre-convention information, including the *Book of Reports and Memorials* and its supplemental reports;
- a list of delegates, including e-mail links and floor committee assignments;
- official information such as approved resolutions, minutes, election results, and schedules;
- convention worship services, devotions, and essays;
- photos;
- delegate interviews conducted during the convention;
- daily news and headline news, both of which can also be delivered to you via e-mail;
- links to video and audio coverage;
- links to chats and blogs involving delegates; and
- post-convention information, including a news release and *Proceedings*, the official record of convention business that is published following the convention.

Joel Hochmuth, WELS' communication director, says, "My philosophy on convention communication is that we must include laypeople. We need to find ways to communicate not just what happens, but how what happens at the convention affects laypeople individually and in the congregations they attend. That's why we're trying new things like nightly video wraps of the day's main developments. We're also continuing to promote the live streaming of the convention itself. Laypeople can directly access all of these tools, at home, on their own computers."

All synod convention coverage is available at [www.wels.net/convention](http://www.wels.net/convention).

## CHAT schedule

Participating in a convention chat will allow you to learn more about important convention topics as well as give your input on the issues. To participate, use the "Enter Chat" icon in the upper middle portion of the convention homepage located at [www.wels.net/convention](http://www.wels.net/convention), and follow the directions.



William Gabb

**Sun., July 29, 8:00-8:30 P.M.**—Pastor William Gabb, Restructuring Committee chairman, will answer questions and listen to comments about the synod restructuring plan being presented to the 2007 synod convention. Independent panel member George Martin will also be online during this chat.



Joel Voss

**Mon., July 30, 12:15-12:45 P.M.**—Pastor Joel Voss, Provide Committee chairman, will discuss financial support for the synod's work. Ministry of Christian Giving Director Dave Liggett will also be online during the chat.



Donald Patterson

**Tues., July 31, 12:15-12:45 P.M.**—Pastor Donald Patterson, Prepare Committee chairman, will chat on ministerial education. Board for Ministerial Education administrator Peter Kruschel will also be online during the chat.



Takeshi Nidaira

**Wed., Aug. 1, 12:15-12:45 P.M.**—Pastor Takeshi Nidaira, a national pastor in Japan, will share the excitement of celebrating the 50th anniversary of WELS mission work in Japan.



**CHANGES IN MINISTRY****Pastors**

**Balza, William D.**, to Crown of Life, Fort Myers, Fla.  
**Ellenberger, Larry G.**, to retirement  
**Frey Jr., Edward A.**, to Zion, Kingston, Wis.  
**Hayes, Dennis A.**, to St. Martin's, Watertown, S.D.  
**Kesting, Joshua W.**, to St. Paul, Neosho, Wis.  
**Koelpin, David A.**, to Living Savior, Littleton, Colo.  
**Moore, David W.**, to Lord of Life, Flagstaff/Trinity, Winslow, Ariz.  
**Pundt, Gerald A.**, to St. Paul, Manistee, Mich.  
**Stratman, Paul C.**, to St. Stephen, Beaver Dam, Wis.  
**Walta, Chad G.**, to Rocky Mountain Lutheran High School, Northglenn, Colo.

**Teachers**

**Avila, Christopher C.**, to First, La Crosse, Wis.  
**Balza, Susan K.**, to St. Peter, Appleton, Wis.  
**Becker, Karen K.**, to Trinity, Aberdeen, S.D.  
**Becker, Mark A.**, to retirement  
**Biesterfeld, Kirsten M.**, to Good Shepherd, West Bend, Wis.  
**Cares, Stephanie**, to Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.  
**Carmichael, Jo A.**, to Living Hope, Shakopee, Minn.  
**Crowder, Marilyn R.**, to retirement  
**Degner, Isaiah**, to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.  
**Dretske, Philip J.**, to Siloah, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Ebeling, Nancy L.**, to St. John, Newburg, Wis.  
**Ehlke, Mark S.**, to Risen Savior, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Engelbrecht, Jacquelyn M.**, to St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis.  
**Falck, Jeffrey K.**, to Riverview, Appleton, Wis.  
**Flohr, Beth Ann**, to The Shepherd's Lambs, New Hope, Minn.  
**Garceau, Heather, M.**, to Bethany, Manitowoc, Wis.  
**Grebe, Karl E.**, to King of Kings, Garden Grove, Calif.  
**Grebe, Sarah J.**, to King of Kings, Garden Grove, Calif.  
**Groth, Arleen R.**, to retirement  
**Haefner, Erica J.**, to Risen Savior, Mankato, Minn.  
**Hahnke, Steven M.**, to Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis.  
**Jaeger, Ryan A.**, to Risen Savior, Mankato, Minn.  
**Janke, Richard P.**, to St. John, Montello, Wis.  
**Kissingner, Wally**, to retirement  
**Kluck, LeeToie**, to retirement  
**Krueger, Mary J.**, to St. John, Jefferson, Wis.  
**Kuerschner, Kristin L.**, to St. John, Jefferson, Wis.

**Kurtzahn, Rebekah A.**, to Lord of Life, Friendswood, Tex.  
**Lauber, Stephen S.**, to Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis.  
**Lindesmith, Francesca**, to The Shepherd's Lambs, New Hope, Minn.  
**Loberger, Kelly J.**, to Mt. Olive, Delano, Minn.  
**Luehring, Jamie C.**, to Hope Christian School, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Luehring, Rachel E.**, to Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.  
**Luttman, Susannah J.**, to Risen Savior, Mankato, Minn.  
**McQuade, Lorri**, to Beautiful Savior Little Lambs, Spooner, Wis.  
**Neujahr, David J.**, to Zion, Hartland, Wis.  
**Olsen, Joanne H.**, to retirement  
**Pfeifer, Carrie F.**, to St. Croix Lutheran High School, West Saint Paul, Minn.  
**Reese, Maria R.**, to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.  
**Rhode, Steven J.**, to retirement  
**Roth, Ryan N.**, to St. Peter's, Plymouth, Mich.  
**Russ, Todd A.**, to St. Croix Lutheran High School, West Saint Paul, Minn.  
**Rust, David M.**, to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.  
**Schlafer, Tara B.**, to Immanuel, Greenville, Wis.  
**Schmandt, Sarah E.**, to Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.  
**Schoeller, Michelle L.**, to Bethany, Fort Atkinson, Wis.  
**Schoeneck, Jonathan R.**, to retirement  
**Sievert, Scott R.**, to Crete, Crete, Ill.  
**Stanley, Marietta**, to Our Savior, Bylas, Ariz.  
**Steil, Luella J.**, to Waucousta, Campbellsport, Wis.  
**Steinberg, Rebecca B.**, to Immanuel, Medford, Wis.  
**Schulz, Paula K.**, to Peace, Hartford, Wis.  
**Tietz, Trudy K.**, to Faith, Fond du Lac, Wis.  
**Tjernagel, Julie L.**, to Apostles, San Jose, Calif.  
**Uttech, Frederick H.**, to St. Mark's, Watertown, Wis.  
**Van Brocklin, Frank C.**, to Mt. Olive, Las Vegas, Nev.  
**Weimer, Pamela J.**, to Shepherd of the Valley, Westminster, Colo.  
**Wendt, Joshua J.**, to St. Peter, Mishicot, Wis.  
**Wentker, Margaret R.**, to St. Peter, Mishicot, Wis.  
**Zanto, Mary E.**, to retirement  
**Ziemer, Jessica M.**, to Growing in Grace Child Care, Le Sueur, Minn.  
**Zimmerman, Suzanne L.**, to Bethany, Kenosha, Wis.

**LAY MISSIONARY**

**Meier, William L.**, to Mozambique, Africa

**REQUEST FOR COLLOQUY**

Daniel C. Iwinski, an LCMS pastor at Almond, Wis., has now requested a colloquy for the purpose of serving in the pastoral ministry in WELS. Correspondence related to this request should be addressed to President Herbert H. Prah, president of the Western Wisconsin District, 58441 Michael Dr, Eau Claire WI 54701-8473, 715-878-4297; wwdpwels@sab.wels.net.

**ANNIVERSARIES**

**Arlington, Tex.**—Our Savior (25). July 8. Service, 5 P.M.; dinner to follow. RSVP requested. Patti Brosh, 817-461-8220.

**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.

**Dakota, Minn.**—Grace (100). July 15. Service, 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. Service, 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**

**2007 Lutheran Pioneer National Camp (grade 3 and above)**—July 8-14. Camp TaPawingo, Mishicot, Wis. 262-534-5124; office@lutheranpioneers.org.

**WELS Summer Youth Camp (grades 5-8)**—July 8-13, 15-20, or 22-27. Hosted by Lutheran Youth Encampment; site, Camp Bird, Crivitz, Wis. Edward Stelter, 920-553-4800; estelter@lakefield.net.

**Operation Science Training (WELS K-8 teachers)**—Aug. 1-2. Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. Web site, www.operationsscience.org.

**MLA class of 1977 reunion**—Aug. 10-12. New Ulm, Minn. Christa Andersen, 218-828-4844; candersen4844@charter.net; or Sue Sledge, ssledge@amphi.com.

**Retired WELS called worker reunion**—Aug. 15, 9:30 A.M. Site, St. John's School, Two Rivers, Wis. Edward Stelter, 920-553-4800.

**POSITIONS AVAILABLE**

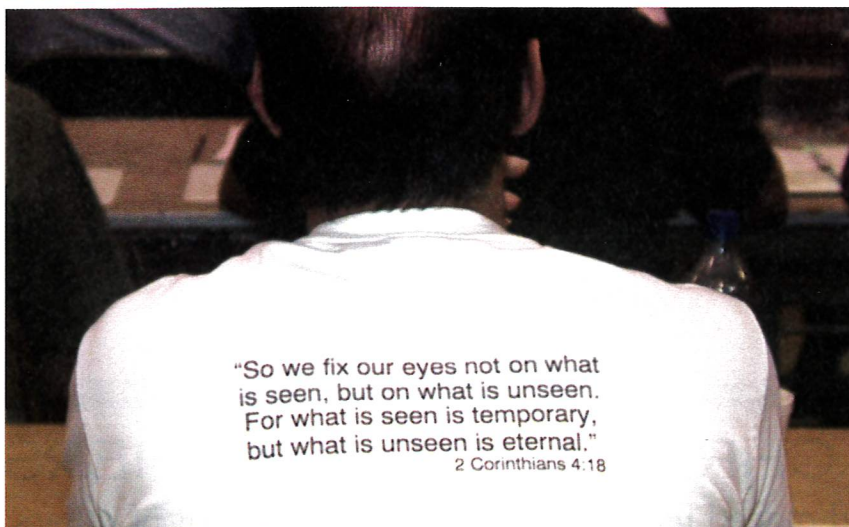
**Various positions**—Calvary Academy will be moving to Mulberry, Fla. There will be employment opportunities in these areas: administrative assistant, youth workers, overnight staff, building/grounds, and kitchen staff. Contact the Mulberry Campus, 863-428-2071, or the central office, 800-510-3989.

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

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



The verses on the T-shirt that this delegate was wearing at the 2005 synod convention are as appropriate today as they were then. With many weighty issues before them, the 2007 synod convention delegates will need to rely on God's Word to strengthen their faith for the task ahead.

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.



"Whenever I use a bottle of ketchup, I have to beat on the bottom of it, and it splashes out over everything making a huge mess. I know that some people think this 58th convention of WELS may splat all over the place as we beat on some touchy issues. That cannot be the case. With God and his Word as our guide, we will pray, praise, and plan in his name and for his glory!"

—Jeffrey Wiechman, principal at Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis. Wiechman was one of five 2005 synod convention delegates who shared his feelings in a WELS blog.

# VIEWS FROM THE INSIDE

Delegate blogs—or online journals—will give five delegates to the 2007 synod convention the opportunity to describe an insider's view of the convention. These blogs will also allow you to ask questions and make comments on the delegates' journal entries. Here is the list of bloggers and a portion from each delegate's biographical profile. To read more about these delegates, visit [www.wels.net/convention](http://www.wels.net/convention) and click on the *Imprint—WELS Web log* logo in the center of the page.

**Robert Brander**, member of St. Paul, Calgary, Alberta, Canada:

"This will be my first synod convention but I have attended a district convention and three WELS-Canada conventions. . . . [These conventions put] the seemingly big problems/concerns of our local congregation in perspective when examined in context with what is going on elsewhere in the synod, showing the true needs of our church body."

**Donovan Kemerley**, member of Immanuel, Findlay, Ohio:

"After prayer, [delegates must] 'sift and discern' the issues and keep to the point of what's best for the future work of God's kingdom. This requires people to look past the present and see to the future welfare of coming generations in our church body."

**Wayne Laitinen**, pastor at St. John, New Ulm, Minn.:

"[I] see our synod at a defining moment in its history. It is time for wholesome introspection. Have we, who claim to have 'the gospel in its truth and purity,' subtly succumbed to a market paradigm?"

**Paul Patterson**, teacher at Peace, Sun Prairie, Wis.:

"This will be a convention filled with passion. . . . We are at a crossroads. With the election of a new president we will be selecting a man who, God willing, will lead us through these troubled times."

**Daniel Witte**, pastor at Risen Savior, Bradenton, Fla.:

"I'm concerned about the priorities of our synod, our congregations, and of us all, individually. Are we seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? Are we honoring God with our firstfruits?"

### *Synod convention prayer*

Lord of the church, we ask that you would direct our church through perilous times. We have your promise that you work everything for good—even our trials. Grant an extra measure of wisdom to our delegates to this year's synod convention. Help everyone to be slow to speak, quick to listen, and slow to become angry. Grant us the wisdom of the men of Issachar "who understood the times and knew what Israel should do" (1 Chronicles 12:32). Amen.

Join other WELS members in praying this synod convention prayer that is posted at [www.wels.net/convention](http://www.wels.net/convention).



# Every Life for Christ:



John A. Braun

## BECAUSE OF CHRIST AND FOR OTHERS

God called us by grace and placed us where we are for the benefit of others.

**A**s Lutherans we start our religious discussions in a different place than most. Some begin with their obligations here on earth and what they can contribute to God and their neighbors. For them, the laws of God are meant to be followed in order to make God happy and to ease the suffering of others. They earn God's approval by their service. That principle is not distinctively Christian; anyone can follow some moral compass no matter what the religious faith.

Others suggest a concept that is a little more Christian. They think that God has only given humans a start

do what is good" (*Christian Worship*, p. 15). Yes, God's laws are meant to be followed, but we confess that we cannot keep them well enough to earn God's favor even after we know Jesus.

When we start at that point, we place Jesus at the center of all our thinking. His suffering and death paid the penalty our sins deserved. He made a great exchange with us. Not only did he take responsibility for our sins, but he also gave us credit for his perfect life of service. We are declared perfect on account of Jesus—acquitted of our sins and credited with a perfect life.

so loved us unworthy sinners. We daily turn away from the sinful nature we still possess, embrace the full and free forgiveness of Christ, and find the power to follow his will as best as we can. Then we repeat the process.

### Lutheran focus: For others

When Jesus will assemble the nations at the end of time, he will commend the believers. During their lives, they turned their attention to others and gave them food, clothing, drink, kindness, and attention. The believers will wonder when and how they did all that, but Jesus will tell them, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

God makes us his disciples and places us in this world. Because of Jesus we are freed from the idea that we must live to deserve God's notice. Instead, because of Jesus, we turn our attention to others—the sick, the poor, the prisoners, and all those in need. We start with those surrounding us in our immediate families then move outward to our extended families, our fellow believers, our communities, and the world beyond. We serve because of Christ, and he has placed us here in this world for others.

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

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

## BECAUSE OF JESUS, WE TURN OUR ATTENTION TO OTHERS—THE SICK, THE POOR, THE PRISONERS.

by sending Jesus. In other words, God has opened the door so that his followers can walk through on their own power. After that they're more or less on their own and can follow God's laws and please him.

### By nature sinful

We, however, start this discussion with a deep sense of our helplessness. Lutherans confess regularly that we are "by nature sinful" and have "disobeyed [God] in [our] thoughts, words, and actions." All of us confess, "I have done what is evil and failed to

### Lutheran motivation: Because of Christ

Some object at this point because they claim that Lutherans have no motivation to live a moral and upright life; there's no reward for services rendered. Well, we are not motivated because we want God to be more kindly disposed to us. He already loves us more than we deserve and can't possibly love us more than he did in sending Jesus.

But we do have a powerful motivation to live moral and upright lives. We live each day thankful that God



# ELIZABETH FRY:

## Laborer for the needy

Because of Christ and what he did for her, Elizabeth Fry reached out to others in need.

Theodore J. Hartwig



dren. Certainly there was plenty of time for them. So the women gave permission for the schooling of their children. Teachers were found, and many of the women joined the children in receiving instruction.

Elizabeth did more for the women. She won for them the privileges of work, education, and worship, and laid it on the consciences of the prison authorities that the aim of punishment should be the improvement of character.

Elizabeth's unceasing labor for the needy took its toll on her health. Her work was abruptly cut short by a nervous breakdown. She sought relief at a rest home in Ramsgate on the far eastern coast of County Kent. Here, at the age of 65, she died on Oct. 12, 1845, with this prayer on her lips, "Lord, watch over your servant." Along the entire coast of southern England flags were lowered to half-mast, an honor heretofore reserved only for the crowned heads of Europe.

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

*Next: Blaise Pascal*

**A**s we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10).

Paul's appeal found a deeply sympathetic response in the life of the Englishwoman, Elizabeth Fry. She let no obstacle hinder her charitable endeavors. She reigned as queen in the halls of mercy.

Born in 1780, Elizabeth enjoyed a carefree youth. All of this changed on her hearing the sermon of a visiting Quaker evangelist. She renounced personal pleasures, adopted the simple garb of Quakers, ministered to the poor and sick, and maintained a friendly and loving disposition despite the ridicule heaped on her for her change of behavior.

### Serving others

Displeased by his daughter's turnaround, Elizabeth's father sent her to London to become involved in the city's social activities. Nevertheless, now 19 years old, she adopted Quaker mannerisms in earnest; dressed in drab clothing; and addressed all people, whether rulers or beggars, with the formal "thou" that Quakers regarded as a sign of servile deference instead of the polite "you."

A year later Elizabeth was married to a London merchant, Joseph Fry, with whom she enjoyed a happy marriage blessed by 11 children.

In her new role of homemaker, Elizabeth established a family altar

and supplemented her works of love among the local poor and sick with Christian instruction to their children. Her acts of mercy still radiated in all directions. She furnished lonesome shepherds in the Scottish highlands and lonely lighthouse keepers along the British coasts with reading materials and agitated for the emancipation of slaves. She battled in behalf of the persecuted everywhere, labored at rehabilitating drunkards and prostitutes, and was instrumental in freeing servants from forced work on Sunday.

### Helping prisoners

When Elizabeth was 35 years old, she became involved with the Newgate Prison for women in London. It was located in a windowless cellar. Here both young and old, both sick and healthy were crowded together without reference to the nature of their offenses or their punishment. They were given no work, no books, and no blankets. They slept on the bare ground where they did their cooking, washing, and sleeping. The days were idled away at playing cards and drinking brandy. Crowds of unruly children ran wild in the open spaces, because mothers were granted permission to bring their children with them into prison.

On her first view of this hellhole, Elizabeth assured the women that God treated all alike. But when the women said that they were beyond spiritual help, Elizabeth pointed to their chil-



# NO REASON

A simple ride home created a sudden and dramatic change for one young life. But as promised, God had a plan. *Cari Bade*

**T**ragedy and defeat; love and opportunity. Neglect and lethargy; profit and peace. All of these experiences, diverse as they may seem, have common ties holding them together. We've all experienced each of these in varying degrees. God allows such extremes in our lives to help us grow in character, to bring us closer to him, and to enable us to stare in awe at his wisdom. My story is but one example.

My opportunity to serve came with a sudden impulse that grew out of my faith. I never really considered becoming a teacher until I was at my second college. I woke up one morning in my mass-produced, dorm room bunk bed, and decided to transfer to Martin Luther College. Events up until that day, as well as the training I'm getting at Martin Luther College now, have all been fundamental in my growth. I have grown closer to the Redeemer of humankind, and I have also grown as his ordinary, plain, and lowly servant.

## **A ride home after the game**

One event that has had a monumental effect on my life and my perspective was a car accident when I was 14 years old. It left me paralyzed. It started simply. Catching a ride home after a

Friday night high school football game, I was buckled up in the backseat of a friend's car. My friend's dad was driving, and he swerved to avoid hitting a car that was stalled in our lane. We went off the road and hit a tree. My back proved no match for the impact. It was broken into two pieces. My spine was completely severed, leaving only my skin to hold me together.

Pain engulfed my entire body, I fell unconscious.

I remember hearing the propellers of a helicopter as I was taken to the emergency room. I remember a light being shined into my eyes and somebody's fingers taking out my contacts. I remember the overwhelming pain as paramedics lifted me from the gurney.

Waking up in the Intensive Care Unit, I was forced to acknowledge the fact that I was a freshman in high school who was paralyzed. This couldn't be real.

## **Reality is hard to swallow**

But real it was, and reality proved hard to swallow. After three weeks of intensive care, I was sent to another hospital for rehab. My life was a mixture of white hospital walls, solitude, and lessons on how to do things like go to the bathroom or get into bed. I returned home after three painful months.

I thought about basketball. I thought about how boys would never think that I was pretty. I thought about how I would never be able to run again or take my little sister through the woods by our house. No more ice skating, no more rollerblading. I gave my bike to my older sister; my skis were sold in a garage sale. All my friends' houses had stairs; all the doorways in my own home were too narrow for my wheelchair.

So many things I had once taken for granted became merely a memory.

Things like pressure sores, swollen feet, blood clots, and back pain now required my attention.





# TO DESPAIR

A broken back, a battered face, a shattered self-confidence, and a challenged sense of hope all became my world because of a simple drive home from a football game. What is this foreign object that doctors call a wheelchair? Yesterday I could walk.

I cried, but only in private, of course. Publicly I thought it best to hide my sorrow.

## The struggle with changes

During all this, God was guiding my growth and drawing me closer to him. He showed me how trite life's inconveniences are. He led me to see what is solely important in life. He showed me how blessed I am to have faith and salvation. He captivated me with a desire to tell others about the glorious gift that is theirs by grace alone.

I struggled with my physical change as I continued through high school. After graduation, I redshirted with the University of Illinois women's wheelchair basketball team. My semester there proved to be most influential for my future. I felt isolated. My family and friends were a state away. Most of the girls on my team had no desire to get to know me. My days were filled with basketball practice, weightlifting, and classes. My schedule and my shyness hindered the opportunity to form new friendships. To my teammates I was just a rookie. I felt inferior to these girls and did what I could to work hard in practice, run their errands, and try to maintain a positive attitude.

It overwhelmed me. It hurt. I felt judged. I felt like a waste of space. I soaked my sheets with tears, trying to cry quietly so as not to wake my roommate. It eventually drained my endurance, and I left Illinois with a weary disposition.

## Gaining a new perspective

But I was not beyond the care and infinite wisdom of the One who is so much more discerning than I. He used these trials for my benefit. What I gained was a new perspective.

This made it worth every sleepless night, every tear, and every blow to my silly pride. From these experiences, I learned to accept how different I look now. I learned how to do the little things like climbing up on my washing machine so that I could reach the dryer stacked on top. I learned how to maneuver a shopping cart while simultaneously pushing my own chair and talking on my cell phone. I learned the perfect technique of holding my grocery bags under my chin so that I could do a wheelie off the curb to get to my car.

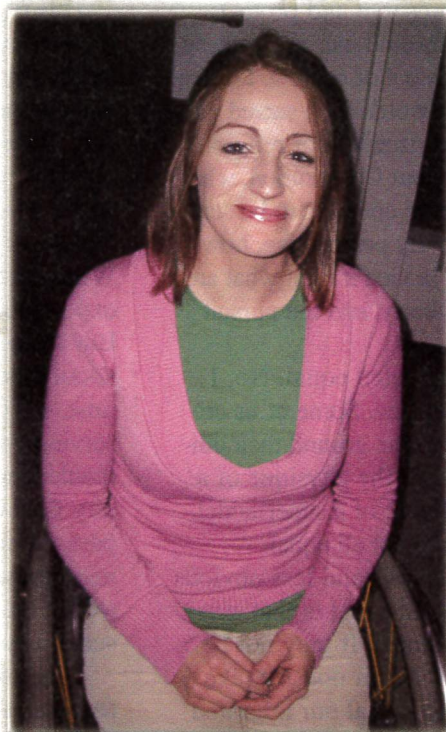
Most importantly, I learned what blessings that prayer and the knowledge of a Savior are.

From Illinois, I transferred to a university in Michigan. One semester there left me seeking a change, and I woke up with the thought of Martin Luther College on my brain. My time there has proved to be yet another opportunity to grow closer to the Lord of compassion.

The struggles and the constant trials still remain. But I cannot deny that these, too, are lessons from the Lord. Watching bipolar disorder, alcoholism, and depression scar my family, while adapting to my physical disability and coping with my inner faults, have all helped to equip me with a caring heart. God knows that effective witnessing takes an open mind and a life of lessons.

So rejoice in tragedy. Acknowledge defeat. Be thankful for love and opportunity. Do not despair when overcome with neglect and lethargy. Be humble in spirit and sustained in peace. With a wisdom greatly surpassing our own,

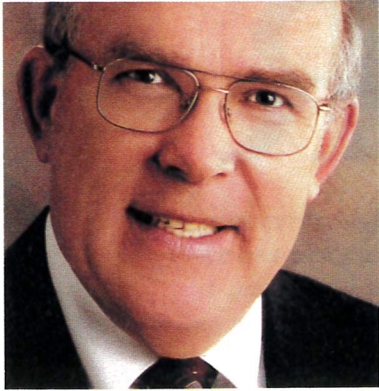
God has placed trials in our lives. We have no reason to despair. We have only hope and perseverance as the brilliant result of complete forgiveness through Christ. No matter how pressing our trials become, we can bear them with a light heart. *Sola gratia!*



Cari Bade. Bade, now a senior at Martin Luther College, was in a car accident when she was in high school that left her paralyzed. Yet she continues to grow in her faith.

*Cari Bade, a senior at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at Emanuel, Tawas City, Michigan.*





*Karl R. Gungl*

## Self-evident truths

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

Remember hearing these words around the Fourth of July? These words are part of the fabric of freedom, woven by the founding fathers of our country into the Declaration of Independence. These self-evident truths are what Americans live for—what they are even willing to die for—in order to preserve and protect.

Today, though, I would like to use these time-honored words out of context. I'd like to use these secular words for a sacred purpose. As we use the freedom of religion, guaranteed to us by our Constitution, what religious truths do we consider to be self-evident? From a godly perspective, how are all men equal? In God's sight what are our rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?

Yes, we all are created equal. No, I don't mean equal in size. Some of us are built a little closer to the ground than others. We don't all have the physique of a pro athlete or the figure of a supermodel. In many ways, we're not all equal.

Yet, despite obvious and less obvious differences, we are all equal in that every one of us is born sinful. It may not be, at first, so evident. But it doesn't take long for all of us to reveal our inherited inner craving for what is forbidden. And, because God demands complete perfection in thought, word, and deed, we're all equally guilty before him, all equally deserving of everlasting death.

This truth may not be self-evident; it may even be largely ignored or publicly denied. But it is self-evident to us, not only because we know it's true in our

lives but also because it's what God plainly reveals in his Word. That makes it self-evident to all who by faith count God's Word as the truth.

And so, by nature sinful and destined for death, we don't have an inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Then, as if out of nowhere, comes another truth that is not self-evident. A perfect life and an innocent death—not ours but the Savior's—liberates us from our sentence of death and makes us eternally happy.

This truth can only be perceived and received by faith in God's Son, our Savior, Jesus. This is the saving truth we're privileged to proclaim: God's pardon for sinners, the eternal peace of sins forgiven.

With you and for you, for these past 14 years, it's been my privilege and responsibility to proclaim this saving truth as WELS president. It's been a satisfying experience, one I will always treasure. But it's not about me. It's always been about God's grace alone. And now it's time to let another have the privilege of serving you for the Lord. It's time, with thanks and appreciation for the opportunity God has given me through you, to pass the mantle to someone else. After much prayerful consideration, I've decided to decline nomination this summer to serve as your president.

That does not in any way alter the truths that are self-evident to us by faith. It is not because of human strength we succeed. Human frailty makes that impossible. But God's grace—his proclamation of full forgiveness—has always brought us peace and eternal success. By faith, that truth remains self-evident. It remains the reason for our continuing hope as individuals and as a synod.



# LESSONS FROM THE CREED

Charles F. Degner

*“died and was buried . . .”*

**I**f you died today, are you sure you would go to heaven?”

Let me ask you that question a little differently. “If you died today, and you stood before God, and he asked you why he should let you into heaven, what would you say?”

## Jesus died for you

When you read those questions and picture yourself standing before God’s throne, does a little fear tug at your heart? You cannot separate thoughts of death and the preaching of the law. Paul wrote, “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Death makes us afraid, because we have all sinned.

“I believe that Jesus died for me.” This answer gives you hope before God. Only Jesus’ death can take away your fear. The letter to the Hebrews says, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. . . . Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his

death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Hebrews 2:9,14,15). How could the eternal Son of God experience death? This is not for our minds to understand but for our hearts to believe.

This verse says that the devil holds the power over death. He tempted

**THE DEVIL DID NOT TEAR JESUS’ LIFE FROM HIM. JESUS WILLINGLY GAVE UP HIS LIFE—FOR YOU.**

Adam and Eve to sin and poisoned the whole human race. He tempted us and poisoned us, too. Jesus called him a “murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44). When Jesus died on the cross, he broke the devil’s power by taking away our sins.

Listen to how Jesus died. “When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’ With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (John 19:30). The devil did not tear Jesus’ life from

him. Jesus willingly gave up his life—for you. He broke Satan’s hold on you by taking your sins into his body and into his grave.

## You don’t need to fear death

Does this mean you will have no fears of death? Remember that God created man to live forever. The Bible calls death “the last enemy to be destroyed” (1 Corinthians 15:26). Death will always be a stranger to us. As a small child is fearful of strangers, so we are fearful of death.

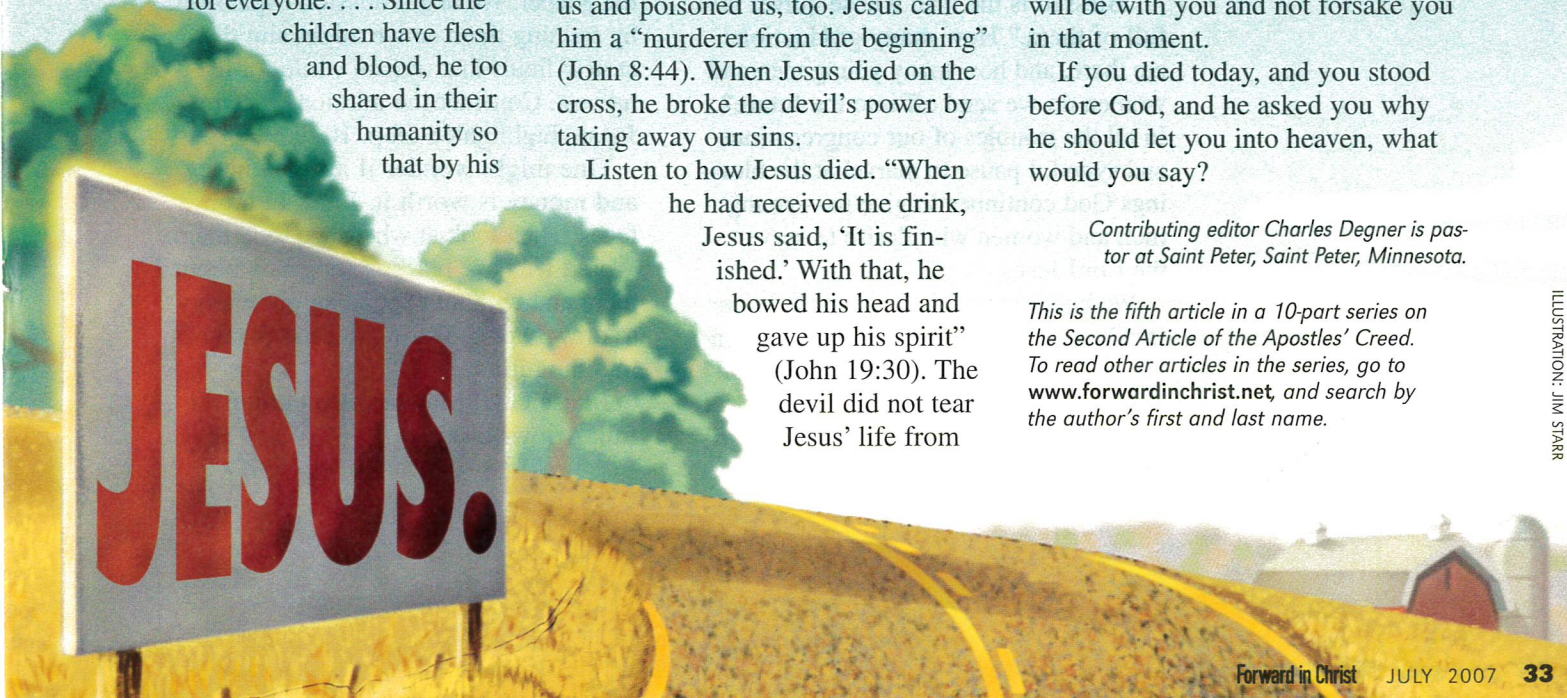
There is another reason for your fears. You still have an old Adam, which keeps you from trusting Jesus perfectly. This makes you afraid.

“Don’t be afraid!” This is the gospel’s message. Because Jesus died for you, you are not a slave to the fear of death. You know that the moment you die, Jesus will bring you home to paradise, just as Jesus promised the thief crucified with him (Luke 23:43). Jesus, who tasted death for everyone, will be with you and not forsake you in that moment.

If you died today, and you stood before God, and he asked you why he should let you into heaven, what would you say?

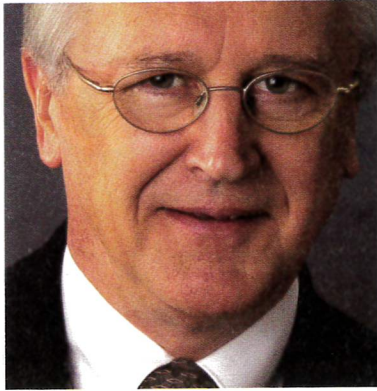
*Contributing editor Charles Degner is pastor at Saint Peter, Saint Peter, Minnesota.*

*This is the fifth 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.*



**JESUS.**





*John A. Braun*

## Arrows away!

Psalm 127 uses “arrows” as a picture for children and suggests, “Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them” (v. 5). Considering children as arrows might seem quaint, perhaps even a bit strange. Yet the idea can give us something to think about as graduations fill our schedules.

Each graduation marks a milestone. We send our children on ahead one more step into the future. We help guide and direct our children as best as we can, then we watch their flight. When they reach the next step, we pull back the string of the bow and send them on again further into their future. All too soon, we can do nothing more than set the direction and let them fly on their own. Then we will not be able to do anything but pray that the wind of the Holy Spirit will keep them on target as Christian young men and women.

Maybe that’s why we welcome the births of children. They are arrows that God allows us to send off into the future. They become our message to a future we cannot see or know. God allows us to shape them in the warm love of our families, pull back on the bow of our hopes and prayers, and send them off on a flight toward the future and toward eternal life.

“Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.” How many graduations are there, and how many young men and women do we send off into the future? In all the troubles of our congregations and synod, I pause to marvel at the blessings God continues to give us—young men and women who desire to serve the Lord Jesus.

We have shaped them not only in our families but also in all our efforts to maintain a Christian educational system. Of course, that includes Sunday school, elementary schools, area Lutheran high schools, prep schools, colleges, and a seminary.

The money and energy we have spent on training our children notch these precious arrows in the power of the gospel, aim them toward their futures as Christians in this world, and send them off toward that target.

Our future as a church is tied to all the young men and women we send off. Celebrate the precious arrows God has placed into our quiver. Praise him for their spirit, their faith, their energy, and their potential. At graduations we rejoice in the privilege of sending those arrows away into the world as God’s missiles aimed at his work in the future. They are all precious and important.

We print pictures of some of these young men and women in the pages of this magazine. They are graduates of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (p. 16) and Martin Luther College (in the August issue). In a special way they are our arrows into the future. We have notched them on the string of Lutheran theology, drawn the string with the gospel’s power, and aimed them at classrooms and pulpits in our churches.

They are God’s wonderful blessings to us all. Our future is their service to the Lord Jesus. We send them to many congregations and schools to proclaim the gospel. We begin mission expansion by training them so we might aim them at new fields that remain white for the harvest. Consider the mission work in Japan, highlighted on p. 10.

One might wonder if all the energy and money is worth it. Look in their faces. Then look at where we send them. Would we have hit those targets without them and without expending our energy to draw back the string to send them off into the future?

Praise God! May he keep our quiver full. Arrows away!



Have you ever had to choose between two bad options? When was the last time you felt you were choosing the lesser of two evils? Jacob had deceived his father and brother. Now he was running for his life. He left home, traveled nearly 500 miles, and arrived at the home of his Uncle Laban with very few options. Even though he had some big promises from God, Jacob soon found himself having to make hard choices.

#### Read Genesis 29:1-14

1. When God appeared to Jacob at Bethel, he made him some amazing promises (Genesis 28:13-15). How do you see God keeping those promises in these verses?
2. In verses 13 and 14 we meet Laban, Jacob's uncle. Why would his words to Jacob be so meaningful at this time?
3. Laban, however, was a hypocrite. Nothing he said was true. Instead, he saw Jacob as a man he could exploit. What weaknesses in Jacob could Laban identify that he could exploit?

#### Read Genesis 29:15-30

1. Jacob loved Rachel and worked seven years for her hand. How was this arrangement an example of Laban taking advantage of Jacob?
2. On his wedding night, Jacob the deceiver, is deceived. How could this ruse possibly have affected Jacob?
3. How is this reminiscent of the deception that Jacob pulled?
4. Agree or disagree: Jacob got hit by the karma truck.
5. Agree or disagree: Jacob committed adultery.

6. Agree or disagree: Leah committed adultery.
7. When morning came, Jacob was faced with some hard choices. What were some of the circumstances that put him in a very difficult position?

#### Bringing it home

What were the hard choices each of these people faced? Which were the two evils each thought they had to choose between? What would have been God-pleasing solutions for each one?

- Laban
- Leah
- Rachel
- Jacob

#### Conclusion

When we are faced with hard decisions and it seems that we have to choose between two evils, God promises us that there will be a third option. Making the right choice in a hard decision might mean sadness or pain for us. But that is why God gives us big promises. God told Jacob, "I am the LORD . . . I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go" (Genesis 28:13-15). That promise also gives us strength and confidence to make the right decisions, no matter how hard they might be.

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

ILLUSTRATION: JOHNSON AND FANCHER



# WRESTLING WITH GOD:

## HARD CHOICES

An interactive study of Jacob Jonathan E. Schroeder



A story about laundering  
washcloths teaches us the  
importance of meeting  
together for worship.

Rennie Heuer

# See you at the laundry!



**W**hy do we launder washcloths?  
Silly question? Well, let's look at  
this for a minute.

## Earthly story

What do we do with washcloths? We get them wet, soap them up, slosh them around, rinse them out, and hang them up to dry. Ready to use again, right? Now, what happens to washcloths when we put them in the laundry? We get them wet, soap them up, slosh them around, rinse them out, and hang them up to dry. They're ready for the next time we need them.

Do you see the point of my question? Logically, when we use a washcloth we do exactly the same thing as when we launder a washcloth. So why bother?

Well, everyone knows that washcloths get dirty. They become soiled with body oils and everyday dirt. They get stiff when they're hung up, and they get scratchy and rough to the touch. They may still do their job, but the experience isn't quite as pleasant. So we take all the washcloths out of the laundry basket, put them in the washer with a lot of other washcloths, get them wet, soap them up, slosh them around, rinse them out, and hang them up to dry so they're ready for the next time we need them.

## Heavenly meaning

So, what does this have to do with you, me, and the church? Simple. We're washcloths. Every once in a while—preferably every Sunday—we get together with other washcloths, get wet with the Word (Bible study) get soaped up with the Spirit (praise and worship), and slosh around with other washcloths (fellowship). In the process God rinses out our dirt and soil (sin) and gets us ready for the next time we're needed (service and witnessing).

Certainly we can stay at home on Sunday, sing a few songs to ourselves, read a few passages, say a

prayer or two for someone, and hang around waiting for some obvious opportunity to serve. Same thing, right? Well, not exactly. Yes, we can study and worship on our own, and if there is no other opportunity we certainly should. We still will be able to serve, but like the single washcloth we run the risk of becoming a bit scratchy and rough to the touch. We still are able to do the work, but we lacking something in the process.

God's Word tells us much about the value of staying in the Word and keeping it close to our hearts. It also has much to say about taking every opportunity to share that experience with other believers. God reminds us simply, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another" (Hebrews 10:25).

God understands our need to be regularly laundered with our fellow washcloths—to join together in praise, worship, and study. When we come together, he works on our hearts through the gospel and gets us ready for our week of service to him and others. He assures us that our sins are washed away in the blood of Jesus, and he strengthens our faith. We gain from those who have come to worship Jesus with us.

The next time you think you can get all the Sunday service you need from the television and self study, or when someone you meet tells you that they don't need organized religion because they have a personal relationship with God and they worship in their own way, remember the story about the washcloth.

*See you at the laundry!*

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