

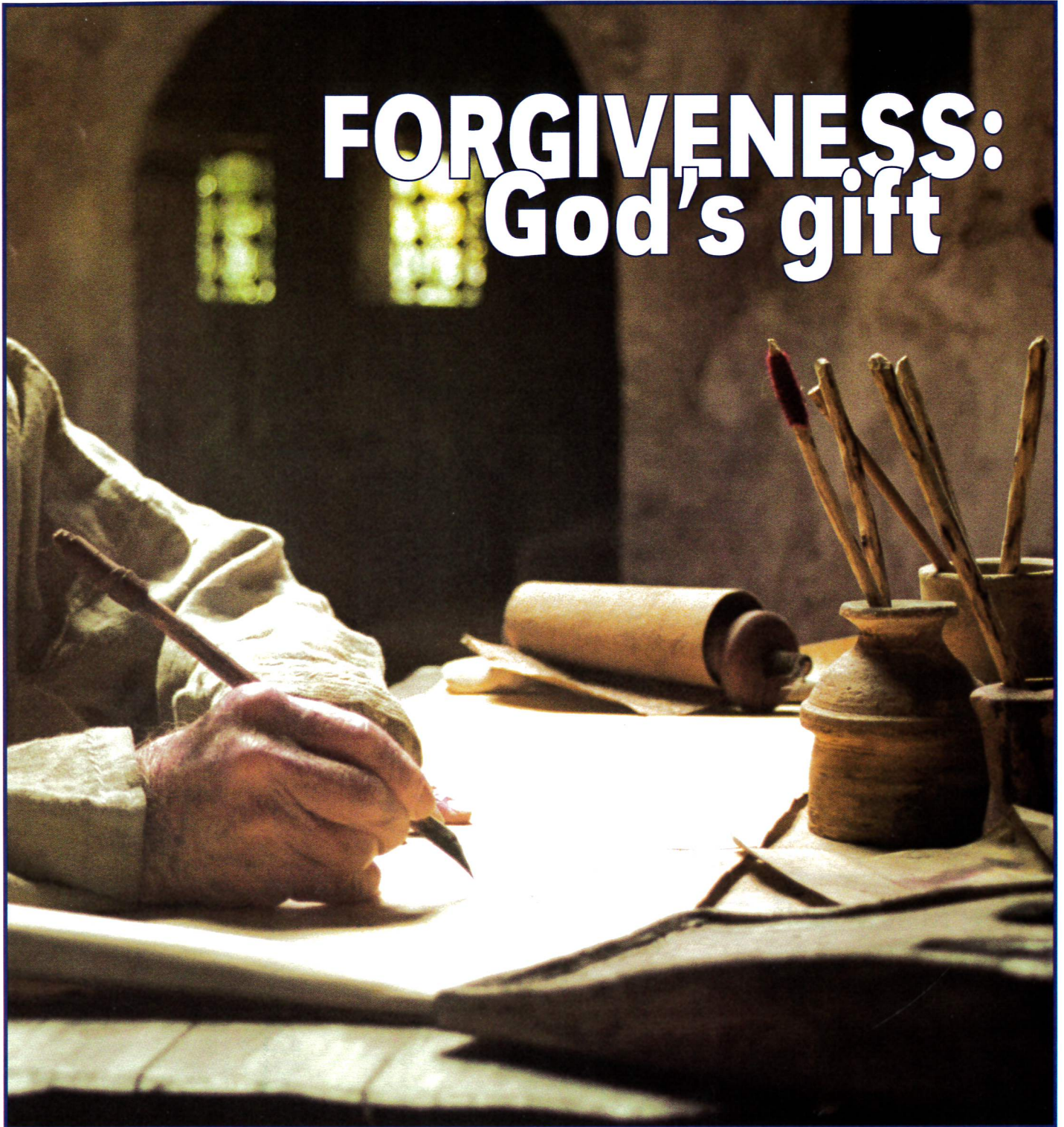
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OCTOBER 2007

# Forward in Christ

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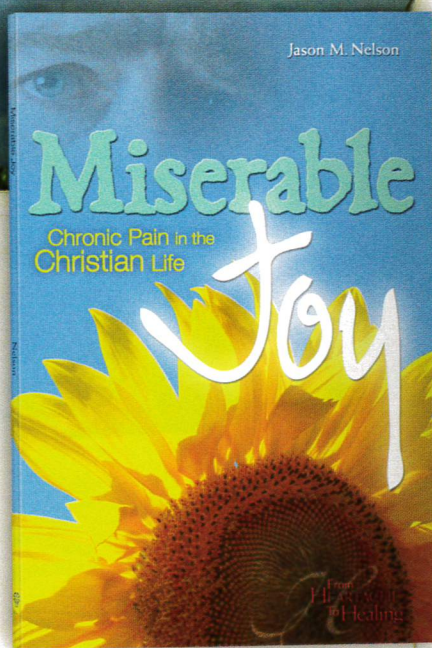
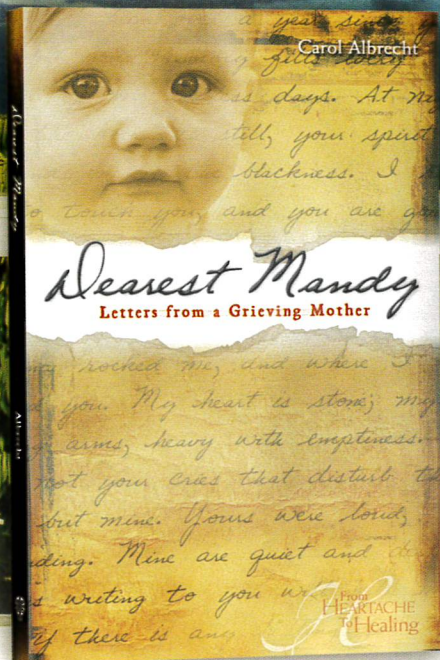
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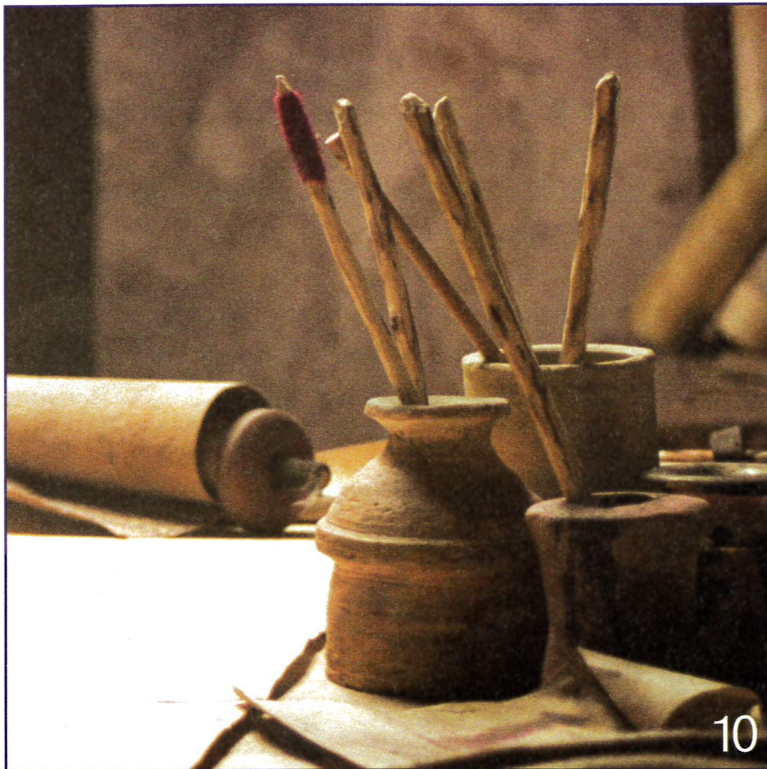


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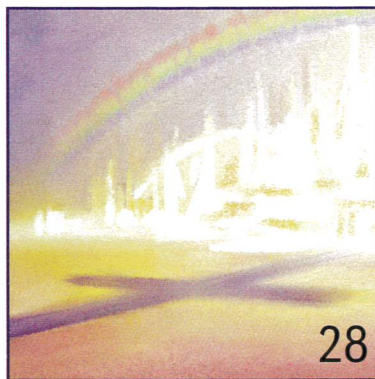
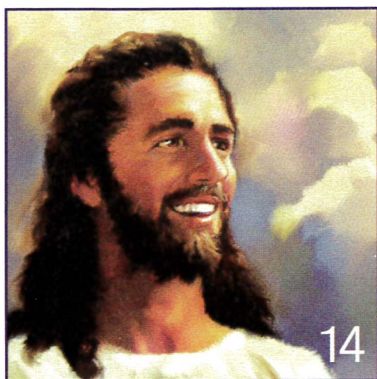
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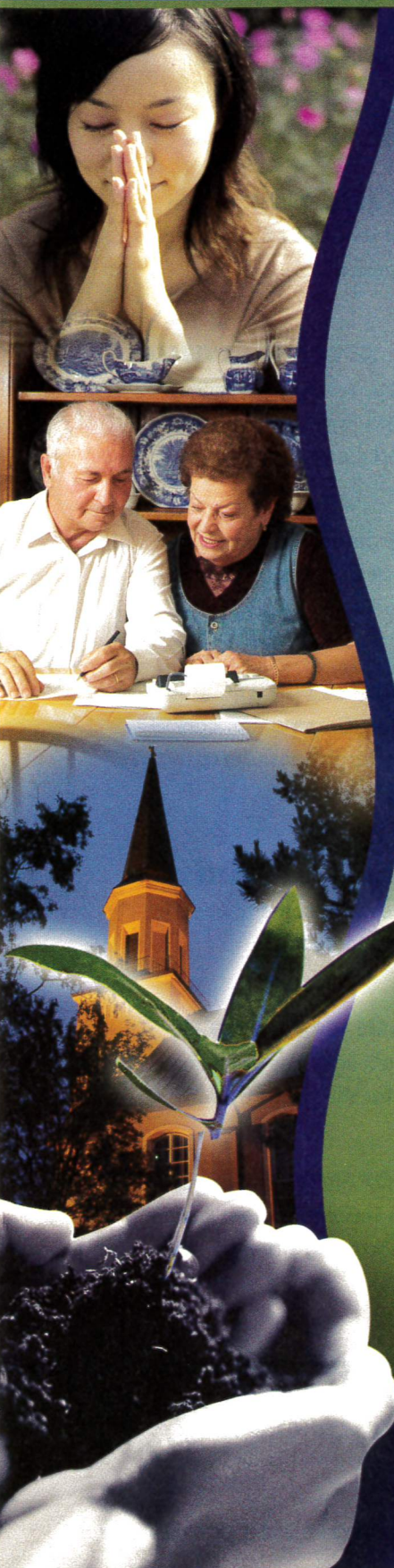
## Forward in Christ

✠ The official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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

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OCTOBER

**WHAT'S INSIDE** *by Julie Wietzke*

Traditionally, the October issue of *Forward in Christ* has covered news from the synod convention. But by now, many of you probably have heard or read about the decisions made this past summer. This year, our coverage is designed either to give you additional background on the issues or to expand your understanding of what those decisions mean for us as a synod and for us as individuals. Some things to look for include:

- An interview with WELS' new president, Mark Schroeder, that explores what "the synod" is and what challenges and opportunities Pres. Schroeder sees ahead (pp. 20-21).
- A look at the importance of Congregation Mission Offerings for supporting the decisions made at the convention (p. 25).
- An understanding of how we might disagree on issues as long as we are united in doctrine and practice (p. 23).

Of course, convention coverage isn't the only thing in this issue. Make sure to read the articles on the Reformation (pp. 7 and 10), which we celebrate this month, and the first articles of two new series (pp. 28 and 29).

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**HOLY SPIRIT**

I just want to express my thanks to John Vogt for his article, "The Holy Spirit: Giver of Gifts" [July]. It was beautifully written. While we all may get bogged down at times by the stress of the duties we carry out in our churches and schools, he reminded us of the reason we continue to serve. It is not because we have to or not because we think others expect us to. It is not because we think no one else will do the job. It is because "we want to serve God because of the forgiveness and love he has shown us in Christ." It is my prayer that we all—called workers and members alike—find the joy in serving our Lord because Christ's love motivates us to use our gifts to benefit his church!

*Paula Sulzle  
Rapid City, South Dakota*

In "The Holy Spirit: Making hearts alive" [May], the author questions statements like "you must invite Jesus in your heart," "having a personal relationship with Jesus," and "God hates sin but loves the sinner." These statements are misunderstood by most lifelong Lutherans.

The Holy Spirit uses Scripture to create faith in people's hearts. This happens at different times for different people. Those who journey longer without Christ have a more dramatic story of their conversion. They refer to having a personal relationship with Jesus because they know how lonely it felt without that relationship.

Luke records a story of a woman anointing Jesus feet while he ate dinner at a Pharisee's house (Luke 7:36-50). My friends who say, "God hates the sin but loves the sinner" relate more with the prostitute in this story than the Pharisee. They are trying to comprehend the unfathomable gift of grace.

Maybe these catch phrases are not scripturally as accurate as we would like. Perhaps as lifelong Christians it's difficult to comprehend life without a

loving Savior. But before we draw conclusions about people, take the time to try to understand their perspective. Maybe, like me, you'll be blessed with more Christian friends. I know for certain you and whoever you're talking to will both have an opportunity to witness about your faith. Witnessing for Christ is always God-pleasing.

*Steve Kemerley  
West Chicago, Illinois*

**WELS IN JAPAN**

Re: "Reflections on the gospel in Japan" [July] about the start of WELS mission program in Japan.

The date of the first WELS missionary in Japan was omitted. Pastor Fred Tiefel was called by the Spiritual Welfare Mission Board of WELS in, I believe, [1952] to serve our people in the service of the United States who were stationed in Japan. . . .

Since this was during the time of fellowship with LCMS, Pastor Tiefel and the congregation left WELS.

Thus Pastor Seeger was really the second pastor call to the Japanese mission field.

*Ralph Bailey  
Pardeeville, Wisconsin*

I appreciated Pastor Habben's article, "Reflections on the gospel in Japan" [July], as it brought back good memories. I was one of thousands of servicemen stationed in Japan during the Vietnam era. Missionaries Seeger, Maier, and Habben went out of their way to minister to us by holding services at their home and at the homes of families on bases. It was also an honor to be an original member of Aganai (Atonement) congregation in Tokyo and attend the dedication of this church on Mar. 7, 1965.

*Tom Kugler  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

**MORMONS AND CHRISTIANS**

As I read "Every Life for Christ: Ordinary People Believe" [Aug.], I

was surprised to see the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints included in a list of churches the author labels as Christian. It seems clear to me as I read Pastor Mark Cares' *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons* that the Mormons are about as far from being Christian as other pagan faiths. . . . Labeling Mormons as "Christian" does no one a favor—least of all the lost Mormon souls.

*John Keibel  
Concord, California*

Re: "Every Life for Christ . . ." [Aug.].

The Mormons have been trying to insinuate themselves into mainstream Christianity in recent years with such moves as building stake houses and temples without the angel Moroni on the spire and church signs that emphasize the name of Jesus Christ and de-emphasize the "Latter Day Saints" part. Another ploy is they debrief the young missionaries they send out to knock on doors daily with answers to convince Christians they meet that they are Christians. One explained to me, "Well, we have the name of Christ in our name." I countered, "Well, so does the anti-Christ."

In fact, the Mormons, like the Jehovah Witnesses, are not Christians. They have an entirely different belief system than any mainstream American Christian denomination I know of.

Your listing them this way makes it seem as if you are including them in the list of Christian denominations populating the world today. I sure hope this is not the case.

*Ginger Schlote  
Denver, Colorado*

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

# Celebrate the Reformation

*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. Galatians 5:13*

Peter A. Panitzke

I'm convinced that the best day to celebrate the Lutheran Reformation this year is Wednesday, Oct. 31. That may seem obvious. After all, that is the 490th anniversary of Martin Luther posting the 95 Theses on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany. But most of our churches observe the Reformation on the Sunday before or after Oct. 31. I challenge you to celebrate the Reformation on Wednesday this year.

I'm not suggesting a special worship service. In worship you will be reminded of the events and truths of the Reformation. But the term "celebrate" speaks of our reaction to these truths. That celebration cannot be confined within the walls of our churches. That celebration needs to take place in our homes, in our schools, and at our places of work.

## Let people see your freedom from guilt

We have been "called to be free." Paul was speaking about freedom from the law of God. People were trying to convince the Galatian Christians that their salvation was dependent on their obedience. But we have been freed from the law's condemnation because Jesus became "a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). This is a truth reclaimed in the Reformation. We are saved through faith in Christ Jesus apart from anything we do.

Do you celebrate that freedom at work? Is it evident to your coworkers that you know that you are forgiven? Or does the heavy load of guilt still cause your shoulders to stoop? Sometimes people joke about "Catholic

guilt," but Lutherans carry around plenty of guilt too. On Reformation Sunday, reclaim that freedom from guilt. Hear the announcement of forgiveness in Christ. Look at the baptismal font and see all your sins washed away. Taste and eat that forgiveness in the body and blood of your Savior.

Then let the Spirit use you to model the joy of that freedom throughout the rest of the week. Let your confidence be evident. Because you are free from the law's condemnation, you know that God is with you. You know that God is working in you. You know that the future is bright because God is going to make everything work out for your good. This is all part of your freedom in Christ. The people around you desperately need to see you celebrate that you are free.

## Serve one another in love

But Paul warned that we can misuse that freedom. "Do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love." We have been freed from the fear of punishment so that we can become willing servants, servants of Christ and so also servants to our family, coworkers, and friends.

In the Lutheran Reformation the church reclaimed what a good work really is. Your service as priests of God Most High isn't limited to things you do at church. Your priesthood as a Christian includes all that you do. The kindness you show toward a co-



worker is part of your celebration of the Reformation. Your commitment to carrying out the assignments your employer gives you is also a part of your celebration. Your faithfulness to Christ in your words and actions is part of your celebration.

We can celebrate the Lutheran Reformation in our churches. But the people who really need to see and understand the Reformation aren't going to be there the Sunday before or after Oct. 31. They are in our places of work. Our schools. Our homes.

Celebrate the Reformation by letting your confidence in Christ be evident. Celebrate the Reformation by serving others in love.

*Contributing editor Peter Panitzke is pastor at St. Paul, Muskego, Wisconsin.*

# Are you good enough to do what God wants?

Paul T. Prange

Living a Christian life is not easy. We struggle each day with our failures and shortcomings. We examine ourselves often. How have we carried out our responsibilities as a spouse or single person, a parent or child, an employer or employee, a teacher or student?

We well might wonder if we are good enough to handle the Word of God correctly. He's given his Word to us as a gift. Yet here too we look within our hearts to discover how we have carried out our responsibility to pass on the promise of forgiveness of sins through Jesus. God demands that we love him with all our heart, gladly hear his Word, and patiently endure affliction. Do we? No, we are dirty with sin and need cleansing. We are not good enough to do his work.

It was the same in Old Testament times. Not one of God's people was good enough to do God's work. God set his priests between himself and his people. He asked the priests to carry out detailed animal sacrifices that would point to the coming Savior, but God knew that not even one of the priests lived a good enough life to deserve that special honor.

So God designed the temple, the place for the animal sacrifices, with a sea in the southeast corner. The sea was a cast metal basin in which the priests washed each time they approached the altar of the Lord. That washing made them ceremonially clean—good enough to do the work the Lord had given them. After the washing, the priests put on special robes that were themselves ceremonially clean. God was training all his people that they must be cleansed before they can serve him.

**When you are tempted to think that you cannot handle whatever you face in life, remember your baptism.**

We live in New Testament times. Jesus, the great High Priest, has come, and, with the sacrifice of himself, the Old Testament regulations about animal sacrifices and ceremonial cleansing were both fulfilled and abolished.

Now God calls all of us believers "priests" (1 Peter 2:9). He gives us work to do. We sacrifice our own bodies and lives (Romans 12:1). And as the hymn writer puts it, "And for your gospel let us dare to sacrifice all treasure" (*Christian Worship* 536:4).

But no one lives a good enough life to deserve

that special honor. So for his New Testament priests the Lord also provides a place for washing. Baptism is our washing of rebirth and renewal in the Holy Spirit. In our baptisms God connects us to his Son, Jesus, and declares us clean. In our baptisms we are clothed with Christ.

Ezekiel had a vision of the New Testament temple of the Lord. In chapter 47 we find out that the sea has been replaced by a torrent of water flowing

out of the southeast corner of the temple. The water gives life to everything it touches.

God declares you perfect through faith in Jesus. He cleanses you through Baptism. When you are tempted to think that you cannot handle whatever you face in life, remember your baptism. When you have failed in your responsibilities, repent and remember that baptized children of God receive forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. They are cleansed so that they can do the work of the Lord.

*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: Christian vs. Muslim worship of God

### Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God?

The clear response of Scripture to your question is “No.” Nevertheless, many Christians are becoming confused.

Especially since Sept. 11, 2001, a significant number of Christians are convinced that insisting Jesus is the only way of salvation (as John 14:6, Acts 4:12, and the rest of Scripture clearly proclaim) puts us almost into the same category as the terrorists. All too many Christians have begun to believe that those who claim to know the only way to heaven are dangerous extremists who destroy any hope for outward peace in our world. More than a few media editorialists and commentators draw the same conclusion.

Other Christians point to the sincerity and devotion of many who worship Allah. Those same Christians may contrast that with many who call themselves Christians but whose lives disgrace Christ’s name. They wonder how anyone can say that the devout Muslims of the world are lost when they seek so sincerely to be right with God as they understand him.

Before we dismiss such arguments out of hand, we need a dose of humility. We simply must admit that the visible Christian church does not have a spotless record in the treatment of those who oppose her teachings. At times the church has sought victory for God’s kingdom at the edge of the sword of men rather than by the double-edged sword of the Spirit. Consider also how easy it is for us to step away from Muslims with a combination of fear and suspicion rather than to reach out with love and compassion.

And yes, hypocrisy in the name of Christ is another ugly stain on the church’s record. The devotion of many Muslims for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year often puts me to shame. How often do we allow our confession of Christ to be restricted to the safety

of our churches? Then in our daily lives our words and actions proclaim a different message. The growing decadence of Western culture—the polluted sea in which we swim—isn’t only a horrid offense to God but also to the moral sensitivities of Muslims.

Yet none of that changes the simple fact that Allah, as Muslims confess him, is not the God of salvation. Because Muslims deny original sin, their hope is in earning Allah’s eternal favor by obedience shown in pious lives or heroic deeds. The truth of the gospel, that the world’s salvation was won for us by the eternal Son of God become flesh, they call blasphemy. Worshiping Jesus is the greatest sin because it associates another person with God. Their devotion and zeal won’t save them any more than the misguided zeal of the Jews of Paul’s day saved them (Romans 10:1-4). What we by grace alone will find glorious—standing before Jesus on the Last Day and confessing the Judge as our Lord and God—they will find terrifying.

If our only concern is preserving world peace for this life, then we would be wise to join the great deception and declare every path to God as good as any other. But if our concern is that people enjoy true peace with God now and forever, we will look for every opportunity to speak the truth in love. And remember, such opportunities often come when by the gospel’s power we love as we have been loved.

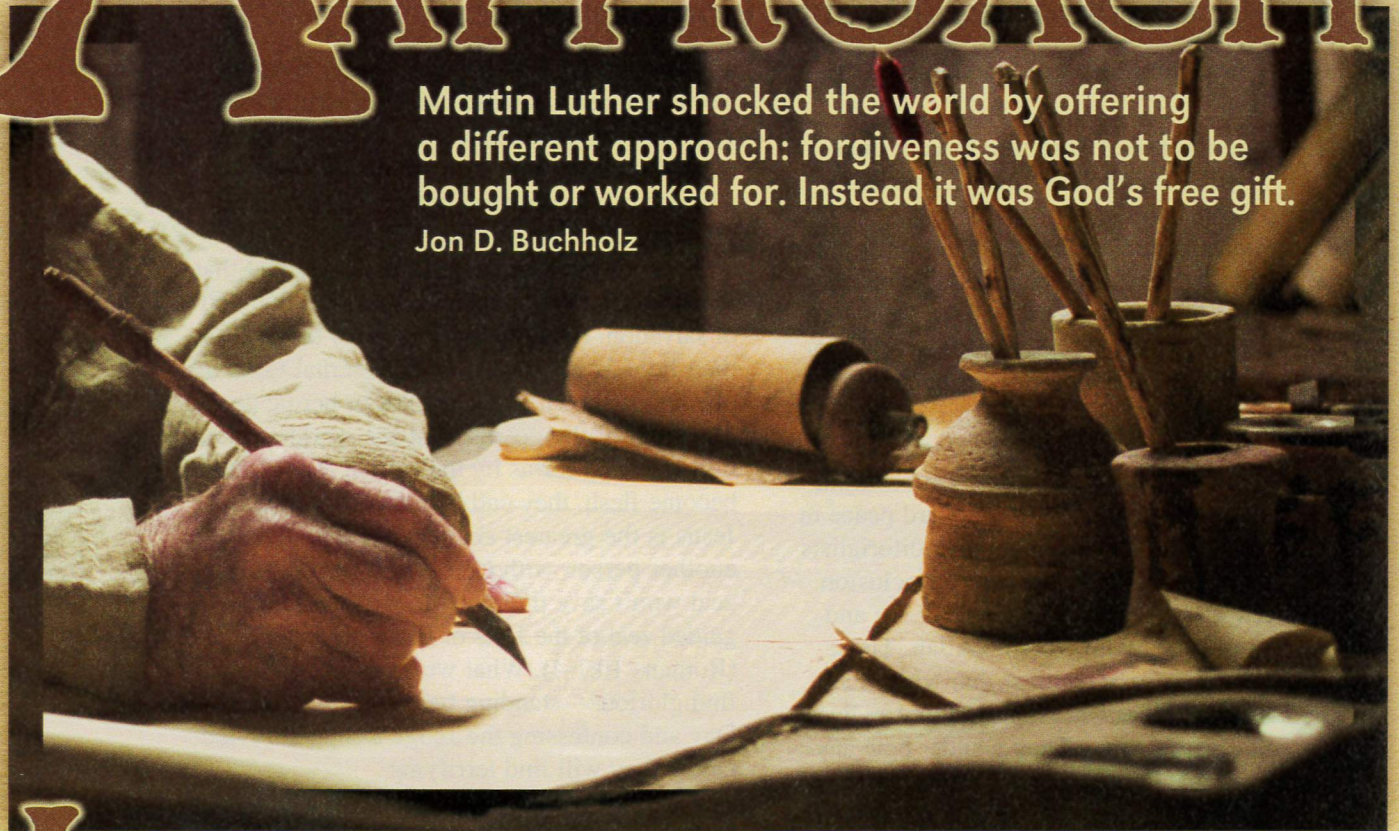
*Contributing editor Richard Gurgel, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Calvary, Thiensville.*

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 DIFFERENT APPROACH

Martin Luther shocked the world by offering a different approach: forgiveness was not to be bought or worked for. Instead it was God's free gift.

Jon D. Buchholz



**I**t was the last day of October, All Saints' Eve, in the year of our Lord 1517. The little town of Wittenberg, Saxony, buzzed with anticipation for the dawn of All Saints' Day. Once a year, Frederick, elector of the Holy Roman Empire and prince for Saxony, opened up his relic collection for the benefit of the faithful.

Frederick had compiled an impressive collection of Christian relics: pieces of bone and hair from saints long deceased, a piece of the true cross, and snippets of cloth and other personal items that had once belonged to heroes of the faith. In 1517 Elector Frederick boasted of more than 17,000 items in his impressive collection. For only a nominal fee to participate in this once-a-year extravaganza, the pious Christian who took pains to view all of Frederick's relics could earn himself a reprieve of nearly two million years from purgatory!

## FORGIVENESS FOR SALE

Just down the road from Wittenberg there was competi-

tion with Frederick's relic collection. John Tetzel, a friar of the Dominican order, was getting souls out of purgatory in a different fashion. The indulgences he sold bore the coat of arms of his holiness, the pope himself. The coin paid to Tetzel bought a plenary indulgence—full forgiveness and release from all penalties for sin.

As a salesman, Tetzel excelled. He peddled pardons to people for sins they had committed. He peddled pardons for sins they were going to commit. He offered his indulgences as payment for penalties to the living and the dead: "As soon as the coin in the coffer clinks, the soul from purgatory springs!" So powerful were his indulgences, Tetzel thundered, that they could even remove the stain of sin from one who had violated the virgin Mary. Tetzel boasted that he had saved more people with his indulgences than the apostle Peter did with his preaching. Tetzel was brash and crude—and he hauled in money for his indulgences hand over fist.

Elector Frederick kept Tetzel and his indulgences outside

## THE THESES THAT LAUNCHED THE LUTHERAN

of Saxony; paper pardons were bad for the relic business. But that didn't stop droves of Wittenbergers from heading down the road to Jüterbog to clink good Saxon money into Tetzel's coffers.

## NO INDULGENCES

Martin Luther was one very upset monk!

It wasn't the gold leaving the realm that infuriated Luther. He was a doctor of theology, a priest in the church, and a pastor of souls. Luther despised the notion of forgiveness for sale, pardon at a price. He grieved for God's sheep, deceived and abused by their spiritual caretakers.

With measured hand and careful consideration, he drafted 95 theses, or propositional statements, that he wanted to debate. Little did he know that on Oct. 31, 1517, the words he penned would turn the world upside down!

A walk through Luther's theses yields interesting insights to his thinking. At this point, Luther still believed in the notion of purgatory. He was terribly naïve with his confidence in the pope's integrity. He did not know that Pope Leo X was intimately bound up in Tetzel's indulgence scheme—even skimming 50 percent off of Tetzel's profits. Luther revealed his pastoral heart, his desire to see Christians taught the truth and properly cared for by their shepherds. He urged Christians to grow in works of mercy and love, instead of paying for penance.

## A CHRISTIAN'S ENTIRE LIFE IS ONE OF REPENTANCE

But it's Thesis One that really upset the whole medieval system of penance, set Europe ablaze with the gospel, and recaptured a truth that for the most part was hidden for a thousand years: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' (Matthew 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

To the medieval mind, the thought was revolutionary. Medieval Roman Catholics looked at their faith life in linear terms. Baptism erased original sin and brought a soul into the church. From there, confession, penance, and Communion took over. As a person lived from day to day, his sins piled up. They were erased through an elaborate sacramental system, in which sins were confessed, absolution was pronounced, and satisfaction was made through penance. Then the cycle started all over again. Happy was the person who died just after receiving Communion; his time in purgatory would be short. But woe to the person who had allowed his sins to accumulate without confession or Communion; he would languish in purgatory until every stain was removed.

Luther's eyes were opened by the gospel to see the

true status of a Christian before God. The entire life of a believer is one of repentance! It doesn't take place only during confession or before the communion rail. Instead, repentance is the believer's daily breath. Each day the believer stumbles and sins but turns to the Savior for his full forgiveness. The Christian grieving over his sin returns to Jesus Christ in simple trust and clings to the full and complete forgiveness won by Jesus. The penitent believer abides in a state of grace, in which God's forgiveness is all-embracing. Through simple faith, a believer is always clothed in the perfection of Jesus Christ himself. He's dressed in garments of righteousness—spotless, pure, and holy before God.

The converse is also true: where there is no repentance there is no believer. Deliberate, willful, and unrepented sin places a person outside of the grace of God. There is no turning toward Jesus and his forgiveness. No substitute for Jesus will work. No indulgence purchased to cover the sins of the upcoming weekend can keep a person in the grace of God. Sins of weakness do not destroy saving faith, but impenitent defiance of God's will most certainly does.

Luther's personal discovery of the gospel brought to light this wonderful truth that was so long obscured beneath man-made rituals and canon laws and medieval superstitions: Christ is our righteousness. The obedience that God demands from us is the obedience that God gives to us in Christ. No amount of money can buy what has already been bought and paid for with the blood of Christ. No sacrifice or penance on our part can remove our sins or make us more holy. Jesus has done everything. His perfect life fulfilled God's law in our place. His death paid the price for sin's penalty. He sent his own Spirit to baptize us into his family and dress us up for eternity. All of the riches of God's free grace and salvation are given freely to the soul who clings to Jesus in simple trust!

After Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses, Tetzel found that the indulgence business wasn't what it used to be. He died only two years later, shunned and vilified by the public. Elector Frederick continued to add to his relic collection for a bit longer, but soon it was only an interesting sideshow. The gospel took center stage as Luther's rediscovery of free salvation by God's grace through faith swept Europe.

The theses that launched the Lutheran Reformation still resonate today, as we celebrate with joyful hearts the free gift of salvation: By grace alone! By faith alone! By Scripture alone! To God alone be the glory!

*Jon Buchholz is pastor at Emmanuel, Tempe, Arizona.*

# REFORMATION STILL RESONATE TODAY.

A visitor to a small mission church in the South spoke negatively to the pastor as she left Sunday worship. What was the great offense? Had the people not greeted her warmly? Did the Communion practice bring her to boil? Not at all. This visitor was upset because the pastor had used written prayers during the service instead of praying "from the heart." She had no interest in a church that used "canned" materials and wasn't "filled with the Spirit."

That brief encounter in a small narthex reveals the tension in worship attitudes in modern America. On the one hand, some feel strongly about using the historic patterns of worship Christians have handed down over the centuries. On the other hand, some feel strongly about worship being more of a spontaneous, personal expression of faith. Which is better?

### *Printed patterns or freedom*

Scripture depicts both. Temple worship, for example, followed patterns formed around the daily rituals of sacrifice. Before the Lord's altar the priests meticulously followed instructions for worship drawn from Leviticus. On the sanctuary steps the priestly choirs, sometimes including children, stood and sang the psalm assigned for each day of the week. In synagogues across the Mediterranean region, like those in which Jesus and Paul preached, worshipers followed a standard "liturgy" and heard the set order of readings taken from the law and the prophets. Think of the Passover celebrated in Israelite homes. Over the centuries believers developed and used a simple devotional pattern that reviewed important spiritual truths.

On the other hand, there were times when God's people broke out in spontaneous songs of praise and thanksgiving. Moses erupted in song on the shores of the Red Sea following the defeat of Pharaoh's army, and Miriam's song of praise followed in its wake. Mary joyfully chanted her song, the Magnificat, in response to the Lord's goodness to her. The children of Jerusalem welcomed Jesus on Palm Sunday with song. Finally, almost all the worship John describes in Revelation resounds with impulsive bursts of praise from the redeemed in heaven.

### *Forms for worship*

- *New liturgies*
- *Historic liturgies*
- *Familiar patterns of worship*

*Mix well and worship from the heart.*



# *Forms: Old, new, and revised*

The forms of our worship change, but our response flows from hearts touched by God's grace.

Keith C. Wessel

### What will bring the greatest good?

Since both approaches to worship still exist in our day, how is it even possible to create a worship book that will be a blessing to everyone, such as *Christian Worship: Supplement* hopes to be?

The small committee entrusted with producing the worship section of the supplement wrestled with that question. The overriding question became: What type of worship book will be of greatest benefit to most people in WELS churches today?

Both God's people and worship leaders know from Scripture that neither Jesus nor the apostles gave us a prescribed order of worship to follow as we gather together. Since using forms of worship belongs within Christian freedom, we can't say one way is right and another wrong. It's wrong only when it disagrees with scriptural truth in some way. Jesus himself declared that the most important feature of worship is that his worshipers have proper hearts; the Father desires that his people worship "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23).

But while "right" and "wrong" may be improper labels, in Christian love we can discuss which forms of worship may be more beneficial than others to the greatest number of people.

WELS members who will use the supplement to *Christian Worship* will find that the service section contains patterns of worship that are well-known in our circles. Divine Service I, the new musical setting of The Common Service, is already familiar to those who have used *Christian Worship: New Service Settings*. There is also an entirely new service, Divine Service II, based on the historic liturgy of the church, but also including some "teaching" elements for congregations. Filled with footnotes explaining the various parts of the liturgy, Divine Service II is designed to help worshipers understand more clearly the reasons for the patterns and traditions we follow. The service has old canticles written in a new way—as metrical stanzas that can be adapted to a variety of familiar hymn tunes. Also in this service worshipers will find something so old that it is new again: a short thanksgiving prayer included as part of the communion liturgy. In its most ancient form this prayer reaches back to the earliest days of Christian worship.

### Historic patterns and changes in worship

It is true that many pastors have written special orders of worship for various occasions. It is also true that some worship planners do that every week. Such services certainly can be beneficial and uplifting to the worshipers. But the worship subcommittee of *Christian Worship: Supplement* chose to employ more historic forms of wor-

ship, decorating them with some different music and responses. The worship subcommittee opted to do this because it deemed it to be the most beneficial to the greatest number of people. Even though a pastor may have a special gift for writing new orders of worship every week—and indeed there are some with such gifts—such worship services represent the voice of the pastor. Pastors take calls, retire, and pass away, and that unique voice is quieted. But historic liturgies echo the voice of the church, the words God's people from many generations have learned, understood, and drawn great comfort from. That voice will continue long past this worship book or any other hymnal of the future.

But not all in the supplement is old. There are new items as well, such as a series of devotions for personal, family, and small group use. Keying off the warm reception that the similar devotions of *Christian Worship* received, the worship subcommittee penned seven more of these for God's people to use. A unique feature of these devotions is that many of them set before the worshiper parts of the Lutheran Catechism for review and deeper reflection. These devotions were written not only with church councils in mind but also for families gathered for devotions.

Worshipers also will find another new form in *Christian Worship: Supplement*—two gathering rites. These alternative beginnings to the worship service provide both simple variety and a sound Lutheran focus on the Word and sacraments.

Some items are revised. One particularly ambitious task the worship subcommittee undertook was to study the current lectionary (the list of Bible readings for Sunday worship) and suggest alternate texts for most Sundays. Since we live in a society that is increasingly less knowledgeable about the Bible, the group felt supplying lessons that told Bible stories offered a healthy variety for both preacher and worshiper. Other alternate readings provide greater thematic unity among the day's lessons. In connection with this phase of the work, another committee was appointed to create a new worship resource, *Planning Christian Worship*.

It is an intimidating task to be entrusted with producing worship materials for God's people to use in proclaiming his holy Word, and we held that task in trembling hands. But with God's blessing, the new supplement will be a benefit to many as they appear before him week after week and worship him from the heart.

*Keith Wessel, a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. John, New Ulm.*

# GOD *Smiles*

The Bible is a serious book because it presents a life-or-death message. But in the Aaronic blessing, God reminds us of how he smiles upon us.

Wayne D. Mueller

I can't remember how many times I've been asked why there aren't any jokes in the Bible. Parishioners, noting the ironies of life, sometimes comment that God must have a sense of humor. But that, too, is without scriptural basis.

There is an obvious reason for the scarce mention of laughter in the Bible. The Bible is a serious book with a serious life-or-death message. A news story 20 years ago reported that a widow was suing the paramedics who worked to revive her husband. The health workers were joking and kidding around with each other as they applied their lifesaving techniques. She overheard their banter on her police band radio and felt it was criminally inappropriate for them to be laughing in such a serious situation.

## **GOD SHARES HIS HAPPINESS WITH HIS PEOPLE**

Whether we end up in heaven or in hell is also a serious matter that does not lend itself to humor. Our eventual destination is what



the entire Bible addresses. At the same time, while the Bible does not communicate a human style of laughter, it reverberates with joy and happiness. The Aaronic blessing in Numbers 6:22-27 is a demonstration of how God shares his own happiness with his people.

Most of us know the Aaronic blessing by heart because we have heard it so many times at the end of our

worship services. The words, "The Lord bless you and keep you . . ." are called the Aaronic blessing because they were first given to Aaron as the head of the Old Testament priesthood. "The Lord said . . . 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites'" (6:22).

Various blessings of God are recorded in the Bible. Also well-known is the apostolic blessing in 2 Corinthians 13:14: "May the grace

of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Yet the Aaronic blessing remains in regular usage by the church to this day. That is because it conveys the glory of God to his people so well. Although there are many aspects of God’s glory, the predominant feature of God’s qualities is his grace. He is the God of free and faithful love, the covenant God who cannot forsake his people, the God who forgives and restores. This blessing paints the picture of a smiling God.

### THE FATHER SMILES ON US

The Aaronic blessing sets forth the grace of God in a remarkable way by prophetically revealing the Holy Trinity. Long before the fuller revelation of the persons of the Triune God in the New Testament, the simple outline of the Aaronic blessing follows the order of persons that Jesus used in his Great Commission: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). The gracious work of each member of the Holy Trinity is briefly described with a two-part blessing.

“The Lord bless you and keep you” describes the saving work of our heavenly Father. The word “bless” means to speak well of someone and, in so doing, to bring happiness to him. The Aaronic blessing is more than a spiritual wish. It is a statement assuring believers what the Father does for them. Before time began he not only designed our perfect creation but also planned our salvation and chose us individually to receive his grace by faith.

In explaining the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed, Martin Luther wrote, “And I believe that God still preserves me.” God’s gracious preservation of our physical and spiritual gifts is captured in Aaron’s blessing

with the words, “and keep you.” Luther goes on to explain how this preservation reinforces the Father’s undeserved love for poor sinners: “All this God does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because I have earned or deserved it.”

*In Jesus,  
we see the  
face of God  
shining, or  
smiling, on  
his people.*

### THE SON SMILES ON US

“The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you” foretells the work of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the shining face of God. John explains: “From the fullness of his grace we have received one blessing after another. . . . No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (John 1:16,18). If ever we doubt what God is like, all we have to do is look at Jesus.

When God wanted to display his grace in visible form, he sent his only Son to become fully human. Above all, in Jesus, we see the face of God shining, or smiling, on his people. God’s resplendence is his righteousness, or perfection. God also demands sinlessness in the lives of his people. When we were not able to provide moral perfection,

God sent his Son to live in our place the righteous life he demanded of us. Through faith Christ’s righteousness becomes our own possession. In that way, God, through Jesus, has been gracious to us.

### THE HOLY SPIRIT SMILES ON US

The saving work of the Spirit is reflected in the third part of the Aaronic blessing: “The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” The image of God’s face turned to us describes the activity of his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit presents the face of God to us by telling us about the Father and the Son. Jesus promised this Spirit before his ascension: “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26).

In our most pressing need, God turned his attention to us. The Holy Spirit uses his gospel to draw us to see God’s face in Jesus Christ. When the Spirit accomplishes his purpose in our lives, he brings us peace of heart. This is the peace that passes all human understanding. We are confident that our sins are forgiven and that heaven awaits.

The Aaronic blessing summarizes the Bible’s message of the gospel. It foreshadows the saving efforts of the Holy Trinity. It put God’s grace on the lips of his Old Testament priesthood, and it puts his grace on the lips of his New Testament priesthood of believers. No wonder God’s people still today treasure this ancient blessing and use it regularly in their worship.

Although God doesn’t tell jokes, the Aaronic blessing reminds us that he is always smiling on his people.

*Wayne Mueller, the first vice president of WELS, is a member at St. Paul, Ixonia, Wisconsin.*



# Connected to JESUS

John A. Braun

About 2,000 years ago, Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples in the upper room. It was the night he was betrayed by Judas. Unleavened bread, wine, and the traditional food of the Passover meal dotted the table that night.

Long before this Passover meal, Jesus repeatedly told the disciples he was going to Jerusalem for one purpose—to suffer and die. The time had come, and he entered Jerusalem riding a lowly donkey while the crowds shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David.” Along with their shouts, they honored him with palm branches cut from the trees. During the week, Jesus stayed in Bethany, but he returned to Jerusalem to teach in the temple on Monday and Tuesday.

We assume that Jesus quietly remained in Bethany on Wednesday and directed his disciples to prepare for the Passover meal in Jerusalem. When it was time, Jesus left Bethany and went to the upper room to cele-

brate God’s great Passover. Each year the faithful were to remember how God delivered his people from the bondage of Egypt. Jews still celebrate the event in our age. That night long ago Jesus celebrated with his disciples.

### **The Passover meal transformed**

For Jesus this Passover meal in Jerusalem was more than a celebration of past deliverance. He took the unleavened bread from the table, broke it, and said, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance

Lutherans believe that Holy Communion connects us to the forgiveness Jesus has achieved for us. The sacrament is a means of grace that strengthens us and keeps us as his disciples.

of me” (Luke 22:19). Then Jesus took a cup filled with the wine used for the Passover meal and said, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28).

With these words Jesus turned the Passover meal into something different for his disciples in the upper room and for his disciples of all time. The meal no longer celebrated deliverance from the hard labor and slavery in Egypt. Instead it celebrated the sacrifice of Jesus for the deliverance of sinners.



I've often wondered what the disciples thought when they heard the words of Jesus. They heard him talk of forgiveness often. They treasured his words of forgiveness for themselves. But when they heard Jesus tell them again and again that he would be arrested, beaten, and crucified in Jerusalem, they didn't make the connection between his death and their forgiveness. Confused, they were even ready to go and die with him in Jerusalem (John 11:16).

### **Jesus accomplishes forgiveness for all humanity**

But in the next few days, they would learn how the Lord's suffering and death—his body and blood—would accomplish forgiveness. They could not achieve their own forgiveness. Like all humans, they were trapped in their own sins—slaves to a brutal and heartless taskmaster. Not even dedicated disciples, who had followed Jesus for years, could escape sin and achieve freedom. But Jesus would take their place. He would substitute himself for them and all humanity to win forgiveness, life, and salvation.

His body would be beaten, bruised, and spit on. It would be cruelly nailed to a cross and propped up for everyone to see. His blood would stream from the wounds inflicted by the crown of thorns, the lashes of the whip, and the nails. Perhaps he even bled from the cuts inflicted by the beatings he endured at the hands of Jewish guards and Roman soldiers during the night.

In that upper room the night before it all took place, Jesus said his body was given for them and his blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Once the Lord's suffering was complete, the disciples did have a much clearer understanding of what Jesus meant. The bread and the wine were their connection to what Jesus did for them because they were his body and blood as well.

The bread and wine were not just

symbols of what he had accomplished like an object lesson we might use to explain some concept. Jesus said the bread and wine were more; they were his body and blood. They were a special connection—real and physical—with the work of Jesus and his cry, "It is finished!" (John 19:30).

## **[The Lord's Supper] is the gospel in a visible and tangible form for us Christians to eat and to drink.**

### **A big deal: his body and blood, the bread and wine**

We Lutherans make a big deal about what the Lord's Supper is for a couple of reasons. First, it is what Jesus said and what the Scripture teaches. The early Christians understood that the bread and wine were at the same time the body and blood of Christ. Critics of believers in the first century mocked them for being cannibals. Flesh and blood, yes, but also bread and wine. The apostle Paul wrote, "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Not only is the sacrament a teaching of the Scriptures, but it also is a special connection to Jesus and to our forgiveness. We insist that Christ's body and blood are with the bread and wine. We receive the very body of Jesus that was given for us and the blood he poured out for our forgiveness.

The Lord's Supper is not just a commemorative meal composed of

symbolic elements to help us remember the Lord's death. Neither is the Lord's Supper a sacrifice for sins; Jesus sacrificed once for all time and announced it for all to hear, "It is finished." Instead the sacrament is our real and physical connection to the Lord Jesus; we receive his body and blood as a special assurance of our forgiveness.

### **Holy Communion is a means of grace**

Christians have observed Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper ever since Jesus instituted it on Maundy Thursday. We walk into our churches today and see the communion vessels covered on the altar. After we hear the readings and sermon, the vessels are uncovered, and we receive Christ's body and blood with the bread and wine.

It appears so common and ordinary, but the sacrament connects us with Jesus. It is the gospel in a visible and tangible form for us Christians to eat and to drink. Jesus instituted it for us so that we could remain close to his complete and full forgiveness. It might seem ordinary, but the sacrament is a means through which the Holy Spirit keeps us as disciples of Jesus. As the Holy Spirit strengthens us through this means of grace, we lay hold on Jesus.

Simple as it may seem, the sacrament is the way God connects with us here in this world. He renews our faith as we receive the Lord's Supper. Yes, he strengthens the connection with the Savior's suffering and death for our forgiveness. When we have that forgiveness by faith, we also have life and salvation.

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

*Read more about Holy Communion in Lord's Supper: The Lamb's High Feast, an NPH publication written by Arnold Koelpin. Find a related Bible study on this topic after Oct. 5 at [www.forwardinchrist.net](http://www.forwardinchrist.net)*

# WHATEVER

## Why?

We don't know why God does what he does. All we know is that he always has our best interest at heart.

Sarah Leverage

**W**hy? It's a tiny word with a powerful punch. I personally find myself asking "Why?" constantly throughout the day. However when you think about it, the question, "Why?" is one of the most disrespectful things you could ever think—that is, when you think about what it means to God. When you ask this loaded question, you're basically telling God that you don't trust in him.

**"Who wants to go see Grandma?" my mom called from the kitchen.** I buried my head in my pillow. Why would I want to spend my Sunday at a smelly old nursing home? The call rang out again, this time it was right outside my door. I held my breath. Maybe she wouldn't hear me. Nope! "Sarah, do you want to go see Grandma? It'd be nice if you went to see her. I'm sure she'd appreciate it." Exhaling, I groaned an okay.

It was just the two of us that beautiful Sunday afternoon. One of my favorite songs came on the radio as we pulled into the parking lot. I thought that I would belt out the refrain before going in, but then my mom surprised me. Instead of laughing or singing with me, she gave me a look that had nothing but bad news in it.

She began by saying, "You know that Grandma has been sick for a while now, right?" I nodded as she continued, "Well she's been getting worse, and they don't think she'll be able to get better." At this she sat and waited for my response. I had no response. How could I? How do you respond when someone tells you that someone you've known for your whole life is going to die?

We got out of the car and went in to see her. As my mom talked, all I could do was think, "How could this be happening? Why did God want my grandma now?" I could barely say good-bye before I felt tears

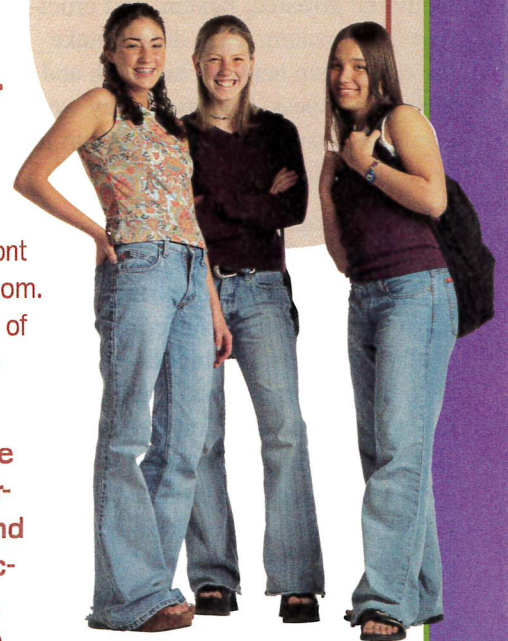
welling up in my eyes. I didn't cry though, not there in front of my grandma and mom. I couldn't make either of them sad; that'd make me feel terrible.

**When we got home I found myself buried in my pillow and blanket for the second time that day.**

This time it was not to hide but to cry. I'm not quite sure how long I lay there crying and asking questions before I realized that I was going in circles. How was I supposed to know what God wanted her for! So I ventured out of my room to look for my mom. She'd know the answers to my questions. I found her in the hall; her eyes were red and puffy like mine.

In that 30-minute conversation, I got all my questions answered. They were not answered as an unbeliever would want them answered but as a Christian would need to hear them answered. Most of what my mom said was that we can't be sure what God has in store for us. We don't know why he does what he does. All we know is that he always has our best interest at heart and that he'd never do anything to harm us. He loves us too much for that, even when we don't always understand why he does what he does. God always has a plan that he promises will work out somehow for our good.

Sarah Leverage, a junior at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wisconsin, is a member of St. Matthew, Oconomowoc, Wisconsin.



has a plan

## WELS on track for meeting \$300 million goal for endowments

Since WELS began promoting its new endowment funds for missions and ministerial education in 2006, members and the Schwan Foundation have contributed \$3.5 million in current gifts (cash, stocks) and \$33.1 million in deferred gifts (as of July 31). This puts WELS on track for meeting the goal set by the 2005 synod convention to gather \$300 million in endowment gifts by 2018.

The WELS endowment funds were created to safeguard missions and ministerial education during times of economic instability by providing predictable support year after year. This is possible because the principal of the funds is locked away permanently and only a portion of the interest is taken annually for ministry support. If support of WELS is down one year, the endowments fill in the gap. If support is up, the endowment funding allows WELS to maximize the ministry opportunities available.

Already following the close of the 2006-07 fiscal year, the WELS Foundation was able to make its first annual distribution from the funds, a total of \$237,758, to support missions and ministerial education. The breakdown among the funds is as follows:

- WELS Ministerial Education Endowment Fund: \$26,656
- WELS Luther Preparatory School Endowment Fund: \$5,062
- WELS Michigan Lutheran Seminary Endowment Fund: \$636
- WELS Martin Luther College Endowment Fund: \$23,043
- WELS Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Endowment Fund: \$7,200
- WELS Missions Endowment Fund: \$156,413\*
- WELS Home Missions Endowment Fund: \$2,992
- WELS World Missions Endowment Fund: \$15,756

"It's wonderful to see already the support these funds are providing," says Dave Liggett, WELS Director of Christian Giving. "Each year these distributions will only increase as we stay on track to meeting our \$300 million goal."

*For more information about the synod's endowments, how to make a gift, or how an endowment fund can benefit your church, visit [www.wels.net/jump/endowment](http://www.wels.net/jump/endowment).*

\*The distribution from the Missions Endowment Fund was higher than the others because \$3.7 million from a previously set-up missions endowment fund was rolled into the new fund. This \$3.7 million, however, is not counted by WELS in its gift total toward the \$300 million goal.



Men attending Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Priorities of the WELS Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Endowment Fund include student assistance as well as the seminary vicar program.

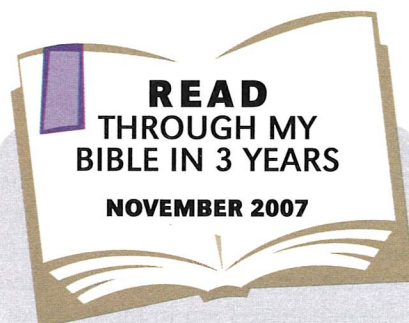
## Obituary

**Thomas Harold Buege**  
1946-2007

Thomas Buege was born Sept. 18, 1946, in Milwaukee, Wis. He died June 1, 2007, in Greenville, Wis.

A 1968 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at St. Paul, Columbus, Ohio; St. John, Pigeon, Mich.; and Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.

He is preceded in death by his parents. He is survived by his wife, Mary; three sons; one daughter; one sister; and numerous other relatives and friends.



- |                        |                            |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. 2 Chronicles 25     | 17. Ecc. 4:9-6:12          |
| 2. 2 Chron. 26-28      | 18. Ecc. 7, 8              |
| 3. 2 Chron. 29:1-31:1  | 19. Ecc. 9:1-10:7          |
| 4. 2 Chron. 31:2-32:33 | 20. Ecc. 10:8-11:8         |
| 5. 2 Chron. 33         | 21. Ecc. 11:9-12:14        |
| 6. 2 Chron. 34, 35     | 22. Song of Solomon 1:1-27 |
| 7. 2 Chron. 36         | 23. Sg. Sol. 2:8-3:5       |
| 8. Esther 1            | 24. Sg. Sol. 3:6-5:1       |
| 9. Es. 2:1-18          | 25. Sg. Sol. 5:2-6:3       |
| 10. Es. 2:19-3:15      | 26. Sg. Sol. 6:4-8:4       |
| 11. Es. 4              | 27. Sg. Sol. 8:5-14        |
| 12. Es. 5, 6           | 28. 2 Peter 1:1-11         |
| 13. Es. 7, 8           | 29. 2 Pet. 1:12-21         |
| 14. Es. 9, 10          | 30. 2 Pet. 2               |
| 15. Ecclesiastes 1, 2  |                            |
| 16. Ecc. 3:1-4:8       |                            |

### DEFINING RELIGION

**Hades**—a Greek term that can mean the realm of the dead or the grave (Acts 2:27,31). In the New Testament it is often contrasted with heaven and is used as a term for hell (Luke 16:23), the place where unbelievers will be punished forever.

## Direction from God's people: An interview with President Mark Schroeder

*The delegates at this year's synod convention elected Pastor Mark Schroeder as the new synod president. He replaces Karl Gurgel, who decided to decline a nomination after serving 14 years. Executive editor John Braun sat down with Pres. Schroeder after the convention to talk about the synod, its mission, and its direction for the future.*

**Question** – What is the most important task as you look ahead?

**Answer** – Obviously, our synod's most important task is to proclaim the gospel wherever God gives us the opportunity. To do that, we need to do all we can to be sure that all our members clearly understand what the synod is and why it exists.

Our greatest task is to keep all of us focused on our common mission as a family of believers. The people in the pew share the mission of the synod because they are the synod.

**Question** – What is the synod?

**Answer** – You can answer the question of what the synod is in two ways. It's two sides of the same coin. On the one hand the synod is the church because God says that wherever two or three are gathered together in my name there I am in the midst of them. So by every definition of Scripture, this gathering of believers is the church and has the mission of the church.

The other side of that coin is what the synod does or what its function is. We have created the synod as a tool to enable us to do the things together as God's people that we can't do individually.

Both of those sides of the coin are very real and very true, but they are two different aspects of what the synod is. The "doing" part of it says that we've gathered together as Christians to carry out those parts of our mission that are difficult to do as individuals or even as congregations. The last two conventions identified these as primarily world missions, home missions, and training people to serve as full-time workers in the church.

**Question** – What do you think was different about this convention?

**Answer** – Having attended the last eight conventions, I'd say that the tone and atmosphere of this convention seemed to be different. There were potentially divisive issues, and people had strong opinions. And yet there was no anger; there was no attack-filled rhetoric. There simply seemed to be a sense of resolution.

The delegates seemed to come to the convention knowing that they needed to do something. They worked together, they talked, and prayerfully they did something in a spirit of cooperation and fellowship.

Some have said this convention has given us a "new direction." The convention's emphasis on sharing the gospel is certainly nothing new. What seemed to be new was that it was the delegates themselves who came to this convention with a clear idea of what needed to be done. It was the delegates themselves who said, "Here is what we want to do as a synod; here are the things we want to emphasize." And because of that, there seems to be a new sense that the people of the synod are saying, "If you lead us in this direction, we will gladly follow and support you."

**Question** – You said that the delegates had a sense of resolution but they also left with a sense of optimism. What's the basis of that optimism?

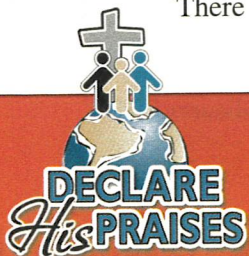
**Answer** – The sense of optimism is rooted in God's promises. That hasn't changed. But what seems to have changed is the sense that the support for our core mission work is something that will receive broad support. After all, this was not a convention in which the synod was an organization telling people what to do. It was a case of the people saying, "Here is what we, under God, want to do and will do with his blessing."

It's not that the challenges aren't great. The challenges are huge, but the sense is that this is a direction that we, under God, prayerfully have been led to go. We will go there because God's people are behind it and God will bless it.

That's going to be a theme of what I'm trying to emphasize. The synod is not just a charitable organization looking for your dollars. The synod is you and me, and it is a tool for us to work together.

**Question** – What's the biggest challenge?

**Answer** – The biggest challenge is to help the people of our synod to share the same confidence and optimism that I have. It is a confidence based on God's



## CONVENTION COVERAGE

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promise and an optimism based on the fact that God's people respond to his grace. My role is to restore confidence in the future based on God's promises and confidence in the synod.

All the members of the synod are important in doing this joint work. We also recognize that our pastors have a key role in connecting the people of our synod with the work of the synod. They're the ones who serve God's people with the Word. They're the ones who share the gospel regularly with their people. It's only the Word and the gospel that can bring any kind of God-pleasing results. If the pastors are doing that faithfully, they play a key role in whatever might be happening in the synod. Very little will be accomplished, humanly speaking, if the pastors are not helping us connect God's people in the synod with the work in the synod.

We can't do this without either the laypeople or the pastors.

**Question** – We have come through a convention with strong opinions on both sides. How do we come back together?

**Answer** – There are certainly many different opinions. There will always be different opinions in the church to how we carry out the work God has given us to do. Those differing opinions are vital for us to make any wise decisions. We need to consider the wisdom that is coming from all directions. It's important that the leadership of the synod listen to all viewpoints and that all different ideas, opinions, advice, and suggestions become a part of the decision-making process. If you only have one side, half the time you will make unwise decisions.

To me a difference of opinion is healthy until the time we make a decision, as we did in this last convention. Then it's vital that

personal opinions are set aside and we all work in the same direction for the same goals.

I also think that many of our differences could be solved if we can discuss the issues, not on the basis of a caricature of each other, but as brothers with concerns. Maybe we've set the stage for a growing sense of unity from the convention and prepared the field for a growing sense of unity. We can affirm the unity in our core beliefs, our trust in the gospel, and our stance on God's Word. Within that unity there is freedom and flexibility. Maybe this is the opportunity to do that.

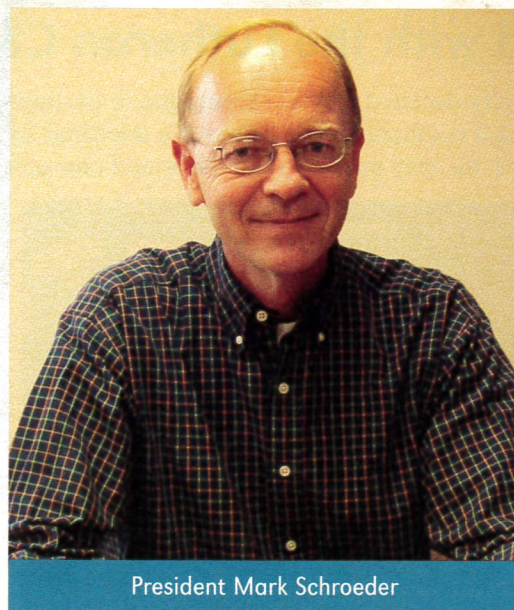
**Question** – How do you want the members of the synod to view you?

**Answer** – I want them to see me as someone whose first call is to serve the Lord by serving them. I think of my job as working for God's people to carry out the common task we all share and to do this in a pastoral way.

**Question** – What one thing do you want to tell the people in the pew of our synod?

**Answer** – Remember who you are as a child of God and what God has done for you. Remember what God has put you on earth to do—to share his gospel—and look for ways as an individual, in your congregation, or together with 400,000 other people like you to share the gospel with the world. If we keep those things in mind, then the future of the synod is very bright. It means that God's people will be joining together to do his work, and God always promises to bless that.

*Pres. Schroeder will be writing a monthly message in Forward in Christ. Learn more about him in his first column on p. 32.*



President Mark Schroeder

## Overcoming obstacles to spread God's love in Japan

Preaching at the opening worship service of this year's synod convention was a special honor for Takeshi Nidaira, national pastor in Japan—not only because WELS is celebrating 50 years of mission work in Japan, but also because preaching to more than 650 people was quite a change from the small congregations he usually preaches to in Tokyo. "The largest congregation in our church body has 50 to 60 [people] on an average Sunday," says Nidaira.

These attendance numbers are common for the eight congregations comprising the Lutheran Evangelical

Confessional Church (LECC) in Japan. But why such low numbers, when more than 127 million people live in Japan? "Many people in Japan have a very negative attitude towards religion," says Missionary Brad Wordell, who serves with Nidaira near Tokyo.

This attitude is just one of the things obstructing gospel work in this ancient culture. The government-mandated teaching of evolution in schools and the importance the Japanese culture places on preserving unity with members of one's family, whether alive or dead, are also factors.

"Like Pastor Nidaira said in his [convention] message, the Japanese people are not so strongly tied to Buddhism—but if they leave Buddhism, now they've broken the unity with their family," says Wordell. "So it's not so much that they're drawn to Buddhism as it is that they're drawn to each other as Japanese people."

To help people overcome prejudices they might have, Nidaira holds Bible lectures—not Bible studies, each week. "For Japanese people that's a little less

intimidating," explains Wordell. "To go to a Bible class, that's a religious activity that they maybe don't want to get involved with. But they may be willing to study the Bible as literature, at first, or hear something about the Bible. If they're willing to listen, then maybe as they hear God's Word the Holy Spirit can work in their hearts."

Other outreach efforts in Japan include English as a Second Language classes, broadcasting the gospel on the radio, and providing online sermons for those living too far away to attend one of the LECC's eight congregations.

As God's Word continues to spread in Japan, even with limited manpower, these faithful servants are thankful for the work that's been done through the efforts of WELS and the LECC. "I would like to thank you on behalf of the LECC for all you have done for the LECC in the past 50 years," Nidaira told WELS convention delegates.

Wordell adds, "Please pray for the people in Japan, they need to hear what we have to tell them. They need Jesus."



Pastor Takeshi Nidaira (middle) presents WELS with a banner created by church members in Japan. Also pictured are Missionary Brad Wordell (left) and former president Karl Gurgel (right).

## Fellowship declared with the Lutheran Church of Portugal

At the synod convention, WELS officially declared fellowship with Igreja Luterana de Portugal (Lutheran Church of Portugal). Pastor Artur Villares, the only pastor in Igreja Luterana de Portugal, and his wife, Maria Isabel, were present as delegates unanimously adopted the resolution.

Says Villares, "It's a real blessing because for us in Portugal and for me in general, WELS was always a reference for solid doctrine, for its theology."

Igreja Luterana de Portugal and WELS first connected in the 1990s. Various WELS pastors and missionaries visited and corresponded with Villares throughout the years. The

Commission on Inter-Church Relations reviewed the church's doctrinal statements and brought the request to the synod convention.

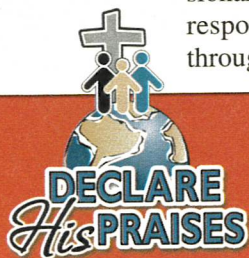


Pastor Artur Villares and his wife, Maria Isabel, were present when delegates voted to declare fellowship with Igreja Luterana de Portugal.

"Being part of the fellowship with WELS and through WELS with all the Lutheran confessional churches will give us a sense of confessional responsibility," says Villares. "This is most important."

He is also excited to be able to work together to spread the Word. "We are a small church, but we have some possibilities of cooperation." This includes working with WELS in its work in Mozambique, whose inhabitants speak Portuguese.

Igreja Luterana de Portugal has two congregations and 17 members.



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## Election results — Committees disagree, yet show support

### Synod president

Pastor Mark Schroeder

### Second vice president

Pastor James Huebner

### Board for Ministerial Education

Area Lutheran high school representative—Daniel Johnson  
Layman—William Finn

### Luther Preparatory School Governing Board

Chairman—Pastor Kenneth Brokmeier

### Michigan Lutheran Seminary Governing Board

Chairman—Pastor George Ferch

### Northwestern Publishing House Board of Directors

Layman—William Strutz  
Parish pastor—John Stellick  
Martin Luther College professor—Keith Wessel

### Board of Appeals

Chairman—Prof. John Brug  
Pastor—David Rosenow  
Teacher—Prof. Philip Leyrer  
Layman—Mark Maurer

### Synodical Council

Pastor-at-large: Earle Treptow

### Board for Home Missions

Chairman—Pastor Charles Westra

### Board for Parish Services

Teacher—Frederick Horn

### Commission on Parish Schools

Chairman—Teacher James Sievert

### Commission on Evangelism

Chairman—Pastor Donn Dobberstein

### Restructured Board for World Missions

Chairman—Pastor Philip Koelpin  
Pastor—Howard Mohlke  
Teacher—Dr. Robert Anderson  
Layman—Ray Solofra  
Layman—Danny Wehmeyer

### Ad Hoc Committee

Chairman—Pastor Joel Voss

After hearing resolutions on both sides of the issue, convention delegates decided to reject a Synodical Council (SC) proposal and keep Michigan Lutheran Seminary, one of the two preparatory high schools, open.

Two convention floor committees—Provide and Prepare—presented the opposing resolutions.

The 31-member Provide Committee proposed rejecting the SC proposal. “It was clear early on that there was a direction the whole committee was going,” says Joel Voss, pastor at Resurrection, Centerville, Ohio, and chairman of the committee.

The Prepare Committee felt differently. “None of the men on my committee wanted to lose Michigan Lutheran Seminary,” says Don Patterson, pastor at Holy Word, Austin, Tex., and chairman of the Committee. “But they were honest with themselves and said we had to let it go.”

Since Voss and Patterson realized that their committees were developing opposing resolutions, they, along with John Qualmann, chairman of the Ministry Direction Committee, and a few other committee members, met to discuss how best to proceed. Although there was much discussion, “there was never any arguing, animosity, or disbelief,” says Voss. “[The committees] knew we needed to be united on this [one point]: No matter what the outcome, we’re going to support whatever the delegates decide.”

The three chairmen even addressed the delegates together before any of their resolutions came to the floor. “We decided to stand up together and say that good men can disagree and still be godly men in Christ,” says Patterson. “We can talk about it in a brotherly way. Then just vote your conscience.”

The Provide Committee presented its resolution first, although Patterson, at the request of the convention steer-

ing committee, did read his committee’s resolution to the delegates before any vote was taken.

Although there was much discussion both for and against keeping Michigan Lutheran Seminary open, Patterson still felt a unity among the delegates. “We have to honestly disagree. We have to speak transparently, lovingly, and without personal accusation. We have to remember that the matters at hand are adiophora—neither commanded nor forbidden in the Bible. But when the vote is made, we all need to love each other enough and trust the Lord enough to get behind it.”



Pastor Joel Voss (left), Pastor Don Patterson (center), and Pastor John Qualmann addressed the delegates of the convention about unity when their floor committees developed opposing resolutions.

Both Patterson and Voss appreciated the opportunity to serve as chairmen, even though it was not an easy task.

One of the blessings Patterson noted was “the opportunity to see God work among his people when they have a hot issue to deal with.” He also appreciated “seeing that we’re united in faith, doctrine, purpose, and mission.”

Voss agrees. “We were not faced as a convention with dealing with a difference of doctrine and practice. We were united on that. As strong and as emotional and as important as we felt some of these decisions were, they pale in comparison when you have the unity of doctrine and practice. Now we’ll do these other things and ask the Lord to bless us.”

## Delegates give direction for next biennium

The following are just some of the important decisions made at the synod convention this summer:

- That we affirm the purpose of our synod is to carry out gospel ministry efforts that cannot be done easily by individual congregations.
- That Michigan Lutheran Seminary not be closed after the 2008-09 school year (see p. 23).
- That \$600,000 be added to the 2008-09 World Missions budget and \$2 million added to the 2008-09 budget for the Board for Ministerial Education. If reduction of the 2008-09

budget is required, it will come primarily from Ministry Support, internal borrowing repayment, or Parish Services.

- That an ad hoc commission be put together to develop a long-term plan. The convention elected Pastor Joel Voss as chairman of this commission. He and the synod president will appoint and convene the commission.
- That a special offering be authorized to reduce synodical debt.
- That the Conference of Presidents maintains and increases efforts to augment Congregation Mission

Offerings, Individual Mission Offerings, Walking Together, and Mission Partners.

- That the Board for Home Missions fills the two vacant positions of mission counselors and makes it a high priority of creating additional mission counselor positions over the next biennium.
- That WELS forms a committee to plan a celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation (Oct. 31, 2017).
- That the director of communications works toward streamlining communications.
- That Martin Luther College continues to implement its recruitment plan with area Lutheran high schools and continues to develop a plan for recruiting in homes, parishes, Lutheran elementary schools, and among WELS students attending public schools.

*To read all the convention resolutions in their entirety, go to [www.wels.net/convention](http://www.wels.net/convention), or ask your pastor to see Proceedings, the official record of the convention, which will be available in late October.*



Three hundred eighty-two voting delegates—115 pastors, 79 teachers, and 188 laymen—filled the gymnasium at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., determined to make decisions to give direction to WELS over the next biennium.

## Delegates take steps to streamline World Missions structure

Delegates at this year's convention spent a lot of time discussing synod structure and the changes proposed by the Synodical Council. Among those recommendations was a plan to streamline the Board for World Missions, comprised primarily of administrative committee members, from 13 to five members.

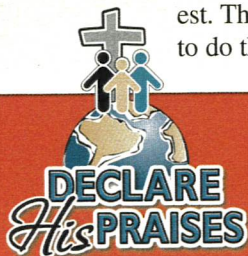
"The administrative committees were both the advocates for their field and the decision makers as to [which fields] got the money," says Dan Koelpin, administrator of the Board for World Missions. "That was the conflict of interest. They found it very difficult to do the cutbacks." According

to the proposal, none of the men on the newly restructured board would be members of an administrative committee; the committees, however, would continue to function independently and provide a grassroots input.

This proposal was endorsed by the Board for World Missions and adopted by delegates. With the new five-man structure, the board will be able to visit different regions of the world and make more objective judgments. "This will make it easier for us to use our limited resources in the best possible way," says Koelpin. "Flexibility and strategic movement are very important in our global-

ized world. . . . The ability to redeploy means that the board can take manpower positions and give them to the fields that really need them instead of every field being weakened by equal reductions."

In addition to changing the structure of the Board for World Missions, delegates adopted bylaw changes in several areas, including the Board for Parish Services. No changes were made in the calling process of administrators of the areas of ministry, and delegates resolved that no bylaw changes were needed to initiate annual reviews of the president, administrators, boards, committees, and other personnel.



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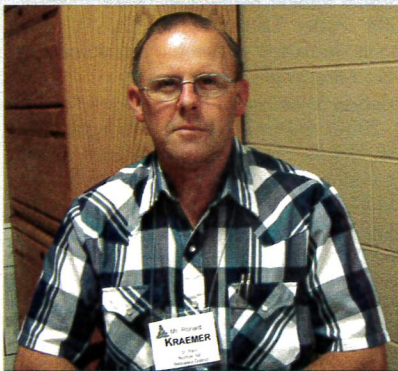


## Meet a DELEGATE

*Ronald Kraemer, member at St. Paul, Norfolk, Neb., was a first-time delegate at this year's synod convention. He comments on the tasks ahead after the convention.*

The funding portion is going to be a big issue. Members have to be helped to realize the great blessings and how they can do more if they really want to. The good Lord has to lead them down that path, and we have to help show them.

Our congregation so perfectly mirrors what the synod is perplexed with. . . . I have to go back and say, "Well, folks, you know that we have our debt. Synod has their debt also. We're part of them. We have to figure out a way to take care of our [debt] as well as help them take care of theirs. . . . We have to look at our talents and treasures to see what we can do to help them." That will be the biggest challenge of all.



Delegate Ronald Kraemer

I would like to encourage each member in WELS to try to see the big picture of God's Great Commission to go out and reach and teach all nations. . . . These are very weighty things that we are discussing that involve our synod, but we dare not forget our commission, which is to evangelize.

## Support needed to carry out decisions

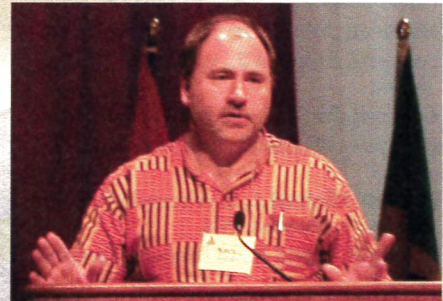
Delegates made crucial decisions at this year's convention—among them to increase the budget of Ministerial Education and to reduce planned cuts to World Missions. Delegates felt these moves were necessary to strengthen and support the work in these areas. However, to preserve the work of the synod, increased financial support is needed from WELS congregations. One way congregations can do this is through Congregation Mission Offerings.

Congregation Mission Offerings (also known as CMO) is the portion of member offerings that a church designates to fuel the work of the synod. Each year, congregations decide how much of their offerings they are going to put toward synod work. Many congregations, like St. Peter in Schofield, Wis., use the biblical principle of first-fruits giving. "We just take a straight percentage of all member contributions and direct it right away to CMO," says Joel Heckendorf, pastor at St. Peter. "Right now we've established 14 percent as the amount, and that number's been consistent for quite a few years."

Maintaining that percentage hasn't been easy for this growing congregation. In the past two years they added an early childhood ministry and community outreach center. "It's been a struggle for our congregation and we have attempted—through all of this expansion and progress—to keep our giving level the same," says Ron Drecktrah, congregation president. "It's a difficult balance to achieve. We know we need to keep making progress at home, but we also know that expenses don't go down [within our] synod."

In the face of these challenges, however, Drecktrah feels St. Peter keeps a good, balanced approach. "There are seldom voices from the congregation saying we should cut back from synod and take care of ourselves first. Our congregation retains

an appreciation for what the synod provides to us, and we need to continue to support it."



Missionary Dan Kroll tells delegates about the Lutheran Church of Central Africa—Zambia. World missions are just one of the things that Congregation Mission Offerings support.

This attitude of cooperation, as well as strong financial support from WELS congregations, is essential as the synod takes on these challenges. "If we are going to carry out the ambitious and yet faith-filled decisions of the convention, Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO) will be the heart and center of that effort," says WELS President Mark Schroeder. "I understand that congregations throughout our synod are facing their own financial challenges, and so for many of them this will be another step of faith to increase their support for the mission of the synod. I am confident that when they take that step of faith, as always, God is going to bless that decision."

Whether it's carried out through Ministerial Education, World Missions, or another area of ministry, the mission of the synod remains the same: to spread the gospel. "We have to do whatever we can to reach more people with the message of Jesus and encourage each other in the Word," says Heckendorf. "We have to celebrate the fact that we are one in Christ."

Watch the November WELS Connection for more about Congregation Mission Offerings.

## CHANGES IN MINISTRY

## Pastors

**Glende, Thomas A.**, to Christ the Rock, Farmington, N.M.

**Haag, Gerhardt E.**, to retirement

**Holtz, John E.**, to Malawi Mission, Africa

**Huebner, John P.**, to Peace, Holiday, Fla.

**Lawrenz, Stephen J.**, to Malawi Mission, Africa

**Lindhorst, Paul D.**, to St. Paul, Litchfield, Minn.

**Neumann, Michael D.**, to St. Paul, Alexandria, Minn.

**Quandt, Michael J.**, to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.

**Rockhoff, David A.**, to Friedens, Kenosha, Wis.

**Spiegelberg, Thomas C.**, to St. Peter, Globe, Ariz.

**Wenzel, Mark J.**, to Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Winkel, Timothy J.**, to Grace, Muskegon, Mich.

## Teachers

**Agenten, Jennifer M.**, to Shepherd of Peace, Powell, Ohio

**Buske, Deborah L.**, to Trinity, Belle Plaine, Minn.

**Corona, Frank J.**, to St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis.

**Engel, Angie**, to Abiding Word, Houston, Tex.

**Engel, Willard W.**, to retirement

**Enter, Joy L.**, to St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn.

**Flunker, Sandra L.**, to Mt. Olive, Mankato, Minn.

**Gerke, Lindsey**, to Hope Christian School, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Gut, Justin G.**, to The Hope School (HS), Milwaukee, Wis.

**Hanneman, Elizabeth A.**, to Christ-St. Peter, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Hewitt, James E.**, to The Hope School (HS), Milwaukee, Wis.

**Hill, Robert A.**, to retirement

**Johnson, Dawn R.**, to Pilgrim, Minneapolis, Minn.

**Korth, Junel A.**, to Mt. Calvary, Menasha, Wis.

**Krueger, Connie M.**, to Trinity, Jenera, Ohio

**Lange, Eric C.**, to St. Peter, Mishicot, Wis.

**LaPoint, Todd D.**, to Christ the King, Bremerton, Wash.

**Lindloff, Sarah B.**, to Emanuel First, Lansing, Mich.

**Maurer, Kathryn A.**, to Christ Our Redeemer, Aurora, Colo.

**McLees, Cheryl S.**, to retirement

**Mears, Johanna J.**, to Emmaus, Phoenix, Ariz.

**Needham, Douglas W.**, to Good Shepherd's, West Allis, Wis.

**Oberbeck, Melissa**, to The Hope School (HS), Milwaukee, Wis.

**Parsons, Rene W.**, to Morning Star, Jackson, Wis.

**Ross, David W.**, to Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Schewe, Victoria L.**, to Evergreen Lutheran High School, Des Moines, Wash.

**Schroeder, Judith A.**, to retirement

**Schultz, Valerie J.**, to Christ the King, Palatine, Ill.

**Stritt, Amber L.**, to St. John, Libertyville, Ill.

**Stroschine, Lee R.**, to Princeton, Princeton, Minn.

## Staff minister

**Vanissaveth, Saynousone M.**, to St. Paul, Fort Atkinson, Wis.

## Lay missionary

**Paltzer, Jason T.**, to Zambia Mission, Africa

## ANNIVERSARIES

**Bella Vista, Ark.**—Beautiful Savior (10). Oct. 14. Worship, 4 P.M. 479-876-2155.

**Pomona, Calif.**—Our Savior (50). Oct. 14. Worship, 4 P.M.; dinner to follow. RSVP requested. 909-627-1235.

**Thousand Oaks, Calif.**—Prince of Peace (40). Oct. 14. Worship, 9 A.M.; brunch to follow. 805-492-8943.

**Brillion, Wis.**—Trinity (125). Oct. 21. Worship, 3 P.M.; dinner to follow. Darlene Reinke, 920-756-3738.

**Mio, Mich.**—St. John (50). Oct. 21. Worship, 4 P.M.; meal to follow. RSVP by Oct. 14. Alice McManus, 989-826-3468; revsheppard@lycos.com.

**Markesan, Wis.**—St. John (125). Oct. 21. Worship, 10 A.M. 920-398-2928.

**Muskego, Wis.**—St. Paul (150). Nov. 3, 6 P.M.; Nov. 4, 8, 9:30, and 11 A.M.; Nov. 5, 7 P.M. Theme: Celebrating Lutheranism. A Reformation service also will be held on Nov. 4. Vince Kirchoff, 414-327-1619.

**Springville, N.Y.**—Our Savior (25). Nov. 4. Worship, 4 P.M. Meal to follow. Marcia Denzien, 716-592-8903; mellen915@iwon.com.

## COMING EVENTS

**Creating a Legacy with Retirement Assets presentation**—Oct. 4, 8:30 A.M. to 3:30 P.M. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Speaker: Christopher Hoyt, Professor of Law at the University of Missouri. CE credits are being applied for. Web site, [www.mlc-wels.edu](http://www.mlc-wels.edu).

**A day at the seminary**—Oct. 6, 8 A.M. to 1 P.M. Worship, 9 A.M. Sponsored by Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Auxiliary. Barb Bergquist, 414-476-2384; barbie33@netzero.net.

**WELS Military Contact Pastors Conference**—Oct. 10-11 in Jacksonville, Fla. Open to first 25 military contact pastors who register. Carl Ziemer, 414-256-3240; [carl.ziemer@sab.wels.net](mailto:carl.ziemer@sab.wels.net).

**2007 Congregational Team Workshop**—Oct. 13, 8 A.M. to 4:15 P.M. Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis. Sponsored by Southeastern Wisconsin District Parish Services. Web site, [www.wels.net/jump/ctw](http://www.wels.net/jump/ctw).

**Church and Change Conference**—Oct. 15-17. Four Points Sheraton Milwaukee Airport Hotel, Milwaukee, Wis. Web site, [www.churchandchange.org](http://www.churchandchange.org).

**Milwaukee area Reformation festival service**—Nov. 4. Worship, 4 P.M. Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis. A light luncheon will follow the service, provided by the Greater Milwaukee Area Chapter (GMAC) of WELS Kingdom Workers.

**Clergy familiarization tour of the Holy Land**—Nov. 5-15. Jim Lillo, 907-349-3589; [jim39@gci.net](mailto:jim39@gci.net).

**WELS Military Contact Pastors Conference**—Nov. 7-8 in Colorado Springs, Colo. Open to first 25 military contact pastors who register. Carl Ziemer, 414-256-3240; [carl.ziemer@sab.wels.net](mailto:carl.ziemer@sab.wels.net).

**WELS Prayer Institute Conference**—Nov. 10, 8 A.M. to 4 P.M. Faith, Sussex, Wis. Special pre-event prayer gathering Nov. 9, 6 P.M. to 7:30 P.M. at Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wis. Web site, [www.welsprayerinstitute.com](http://www.welsprayerinstitute.com).

**Mexico Mission Partners donor trip**—Feb. 16-25, 2008. Tour includes worship at three churches and the seminary of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church (Mexico). Sight-seeing includes the Cholula pyramid, several cathedrals, and the El Redentor statue of Christ in Torreon. Registration deadline, Jan. 4, 2008. Pastor Dennis Kleist, 920-740-5899; [dennis.kleist@sab.wels.net](mailto:dennis.kleist@sab.wels.net). Sponsored by WELS Ministry of Christian Giving.

**Christian Woman Today Retreat**—April 4-6, 2008. Olympia Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Theme: "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." Maureen Sertich, 262-784-0412.

**Today's Christian Woman Retreat**—April 11-13, 2008. Radisson Hotel, Kalamazoo, Mich. Theme: "Keep me, keep me as the apple of your eye." Web site, [www.tcwr.org](http://www.tcwr.org).

**WELS National Handbell Festival**—April 12-13, 2008. Host, Emanuel, New London, Wis. Site, New London High School, New London, Wis. Concert, 2 P.M., April 13. [www.welsbells.com](http://www.welsbells.com).

## POSITIONS AVAILABLE

**Development director**—Northland Lutheran High School, Wausau, Wis., is looking for candidates for the position of development director. Rick Grundman, 715-359-3400; or mail resume to 2107 Tower Rd, Mosinee, WI 54455.

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

Pastor Douglas Engelbrecht (left) "roasts" former president Karl Gurgel and his wife, Barb.

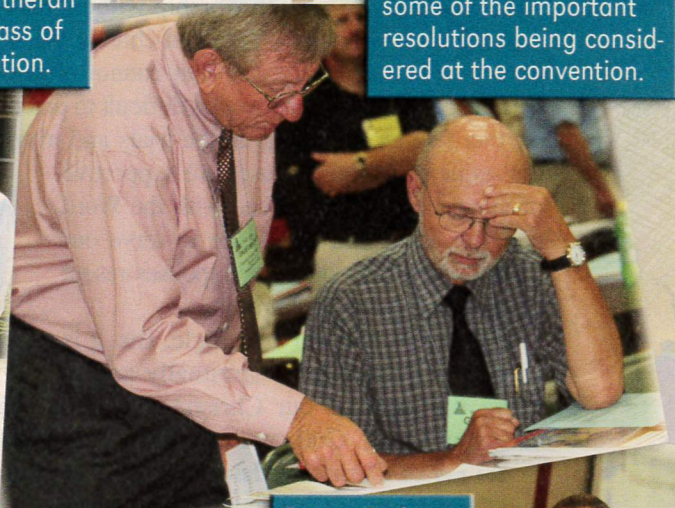
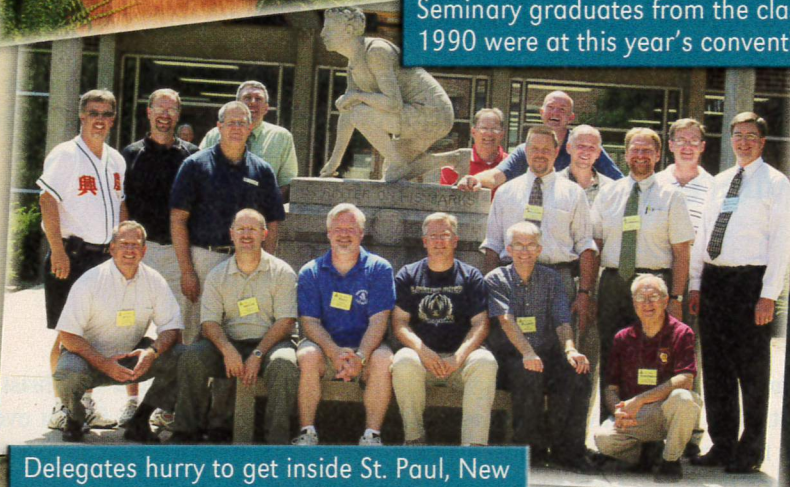


Convention pages prepare to hand out more information.



A large number of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary graduates from the class of 1990 were at this year's convention.

Two delegates discuss some of the important resolutions being considered at the convention.



Delegates hurry to get inside St. Paul, New Ulm, for the opening worship service.

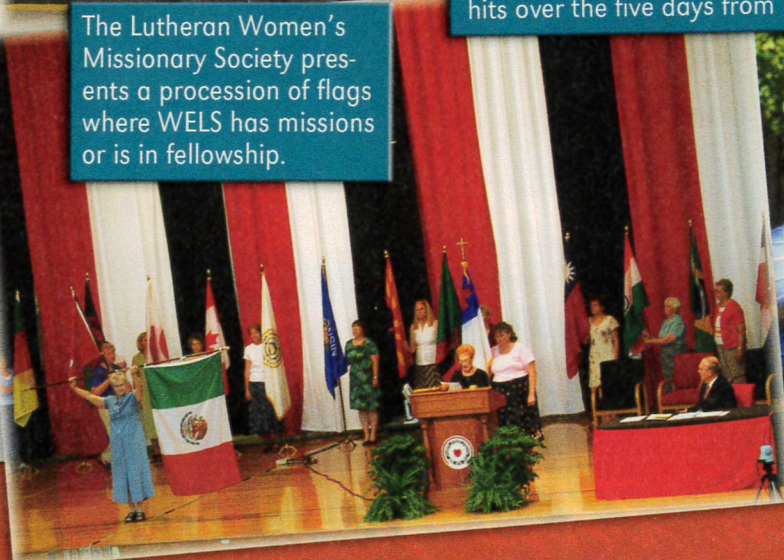
Pastor Earle Treptow from Colorado leads a Bible study.



Almost the entire convention was streamed live at <http://streams.wels.net>. There were 47,816 total hits over the five days from 18 different countries.

The Lutheran Women's Missionary Society presents a procession of flags where WELS has missions or is in fellowship.

Delegates enjoy a picnic on the final night.



For more photos, go to [www.wels.net/convention](http://www.wels.net/convention).

We usually sit alone in the pew. We wear wedding rings, but you seldom see our spouses with us. Sometimes we leave worship early. Our spouses are not of our faith. They may or may not be Christians. Or they may not believe in God at all. Some of you might know us well. Others of you may not know us at all but may wonder what our lives are like.

There are many of us even in our congregations. We are often female, but not always. Statistics from various sources indicate that typical congregations in the United States draw adult crowds that are 61 percent female, 39 percent male. On an average Sunday 25 percent of married, churchgoing women worship without their husbands.

At times it is not easy for us in church. We hear applications to Christian marriages that cannot always be shared directly at home and that may be difficult to practice. At times we can feel terribly alone in the trials and triumphs of life. For some of us, our spouses are supportive of our need to be nourished with the Word and sacrament and our desire to serve our Savior. For others of us, our spouses resent the time we spend at church.

Life for us is often a struggle. But it is an opportunity to grow spiritually and to make the most of our Christian vocation. Through our everyday living, God creates special opportunities to live in the joy of Christ. We have special occasions for prayer and the display of Christian love at its finest. It is a time to share our faith also by living it as honestly and graciously as we are able so that we attract rather than repel. We try to develop the "quiet and gentle spirit" that Peter encouraged (1 Peter 3:4). Our hope is expressed in Paul's words that "the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband" (1 Corinthians 7:14).

We want you to understand that our lives may present challenges different than yours. We ask for your prayers that God will inspire us to do the right things and say the right words, biblical words and language that may instill in our spouses the desire to know more about Jesus. We want to know more of you who are in our situation so that we can support each other. We want our congregations to have gatherings or outings where our spouses will feel welcome. We want our partners in marriage to see what a great and full and secure life it is to be a disciple of Jesus. More than anything else, we pray that our mates will one day become new creations in Christ, be involved in Christian nurture in our family, and rejoice to pray "Our Father" with us.

It is helpful to understand that God knows about our situation. Even a sparrow can't fall to the ground without

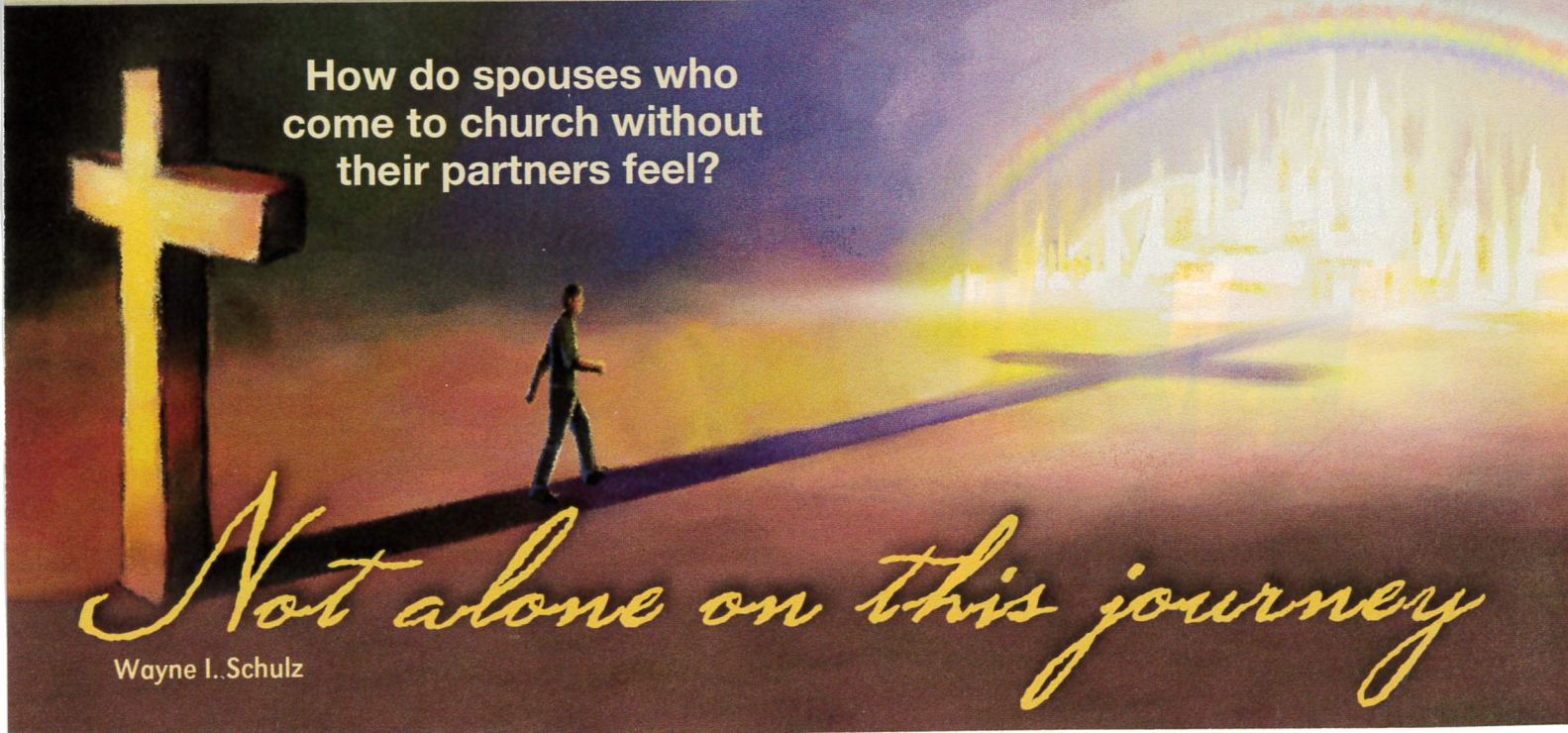
**More than anything else, we pray that our mates will one day become new creations in Christ.**

him knowing about it. It helps to know that in Christ we have a faith and a hope that endures, that in Christ everything holds together, and that our brothers and sisters in Christ are ready to support and encourage us. We may sit alone in the pew, but we rejoice in every display of Christian support you offer.

*Wayne Schulz, a mission counselor, is a member at Eastside, Madison, Wisconsin.*

*This is the first article in a six-part series on challenges we face and how fellow Christians can help.*

ILLUSTRATION: GOODSALT



**How do spouses who come to church without their partners feel?**

*Not alone on this journey*

Wayne I. Schulz

# Wilma Lillian Ibarra:

## Let it shine



Through her daily living, Wilma's light has been shining inside and outside her home in Mexico for the past 60 years.

Rachel Hartman

Wilma Ibarra knew what she wanted; that wasn't the problem. The chili peppers for the salsa she planned to make gleamed under the sunlight in the open-air market. The problem was she didn't know how to ask for them. Searching through the few Spanish phrases she knew and coming up with nothing, Wilma held out the centavos (coins) in her hand and pointed to the peppers.

After some signing and smile exchanging, Wilma walked home with the chili peppers. Soon she became a familiar face at the market in Saltillo, Mexico. It was 1945. The girl from Missouri had no way of knowing that 60 years later she would still be in Mexico.

### It all started with a sack of potatoes

Born in 1916, Wilma grew up in a strong Lutheran home in St. Louis. During the Depression, Wilma's brother volunteered at a nearby mission. They handed out coupons that could be exchanged for food. Juan Manuel Ibarra, a chemist originally from Mexico, heard about the program. He came and eagerly accepted a large sack of potatoes.

The Holy Spirit worked through those potatoes. Juan Manuel returned for food and stayed for Bible classes. Wilma's brother befriended him and introduced him to Wilma. Three years later, Juan Manuel was a confirmed member, and the two were married.

Dr. Walter Meyer, a member of the church where Juan Manuel was confirmed, thought Juan would make a good pastor. Meyer encouraged

Wilma to talk to her husband about it. "I didn't want to force him to make a decision," Wilma recalls, so she did not push the issue. She did, however, regularly attend church services. Their two children were baptized, and Wilma worked hard to keep Christ as the center of the family.

In the 1940s, Juan Manuel decided to introduce powdered soap to Mexico. Wilma followed him to Saltillo. After initial sessions of signing at the market, she learned Spanish. She planted cacti and fruit trees in her garden. Looking for a way to use the pomegranates one of the trees produced, she developed a recipe for pomegranate syrup. She stored the purple liquid in empty Coke bottles.

While Wilma made all of these adjustments, one thing did not waver: her faith. Her emphasis on Christian living resonated throughout the family. Juan Manuel soon saw the need for the gospel in Mexico. He shifted his plans and studied to become a pastor.

After graduating, Juan Manuel began his ministry in Torreón, a city in north central Mexico. "He started *desde cero* (from scratch)," Wilma recalls. The first members were soon confirmed. Today the congregation he founded, *El Redentor* (Redeemer), is part of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church, WELS' sister synod in Mexico.

### Letting it shine

God blessed the Ibarras with two more children. For the next 35 years, Wilma served as a wife and mother. She reflects, "It was a blessing to

support my husband and raise my children in faith." Sundays were festive events. Wilma set out the children's Sunday clothes and shoes and made her husband's favorite breakfast.

Juan Manuel went to heaven in 1989. Now 90 years old, Wilma has no plans to return to Missouri. "My church and home are here," she says. And they are. Every Sunday, Wilma attends Bible class and worship. She welcomes visitors and talks about her faith. Her blue eyes look out from a front pew.

At times the word "evangelism" is associated with knocking on strangers' doors. Yet the gospel can be preached right inside the home. Through her daily living, Wilma's light has been shining in Mexico for the past 60 years.


Rachel Hartman and her husband, Missionary Michael Hartman, are serving in Torreón, Coahuila, Mexico.

Next: Beth Flunker: Here am I. Send me.



# A PORTRAIT

The pages of a photo album reveal a mother's story of courage, heartache,

he sun is shining through the window of Karen Schroeder's kitchen as she prepares two cups of coffee. The house is warm and inviting, and as my eyes scan the room I notice a portrait of two young boys hanging above the fireplace. Following my gaze, Karen tells me she received that painting from her husband at Christmas a few years ago. "I love it," she says, smiling, as she slides a steaming cup of coffee my way.

I am there to talk to her about her sons, Carl and Jeff, who passed away from a rare disease a few years ago. "I haven't talked about it in a long time," she says, sitting down, "but when I think about it, it's like yesterday." Not knowing exactly where to begin, she grabs one of the photo albums that is stacked neatly on the table. As the pages turn, I learn about Jeff and Carl, and how through them Karen learned to trust the love and care of our heavenly Father in every circumstance.

**Opening up the album, Karen shows me a picture of her first baby boy.**

Carl was born March 23, 1988, just three years after Karen married her college sweetheart, David. He was a happy, healthy baby who got a lot of attention from his dad. "Carl was the first son, and they were really close,"

she says, smiling. "Carl was a lot like David—very particular about things."

By the time Carl was two, Karen was

expecting again. Another baby boy arrived on Aug. 31, 1990. Carl was excited about his new status as big brother. "Carl came down the hall saying, 'Jeff! Jeff! Baby brother! Baby brother!'" says Karen. "He was as pleased as punch."

Several weeks later, however, Carl got sick. Schroeder remembers him walking to his room one afternoon and falling over. He was very shaky, so she took him to the doctor. When the pediatrician couldn't find any reason for the symptoms, he referred Carl to a neurologist. The neurologist admitted Carl to the hospital where he slept for several days straight. All tests came back negative, until an MRI detected something unusual in Carl's brain.

Because of his brain complications, Carl lost many of his motor skills; he couldn't support himself or purposefully move most of his muscles. "We were told that it was an inflammation of the brain, and that he would heal in about a year's time," Karen says. At this point, Jeff was just seven weeks old. "We brought a wagon home from the hospital and pulled Carl and Jeff around together," she says. "Here's a photo of Carl and Jeff in the wagon. We were all waiting for Carl to get better."

But even with physical therapy, Carl made little progress in a year. "At that point we knew," says Karen. "He wasn't even close to walking again or recovering." Karen worked to accommodate Carl's growing daily care needs, and remembers how

seemingly simple things, like finding the right wheelchair, turned out to be a challenge.

But the Schroeders' challenges were far from over. Months later Jeff developed pneumonia. He was admitted to the hospital where he slept for several days. "I was in the hospital room, and it just dawned on me—Jeff reminded me so much of Carl when he was sleeping, and then I just knew. . . . I started crying and said, 'This is the same thing. This is just like Carl.'"

Schroeder's fears were confirmed when the MRI results were identical to Carl's. "It was like we were hit by a truck," she says. "I didn't know how I was ever going to take care of both boys with that kind of disability."

Doctors found that the boys had leukodystrophy, a rare, genetic disease that affects the brain's ability to send messages to the rest of the body. "So what ended up happening, ultimately, was that the boys lost their motor coordination," explains Karen.

**The page in the picture album turns, and Karen points to a picture of Jeff smiling**—something he was rarely able to do later in his life. Even though he had already lost his ability to move, see, and speak, it was when he finally lost his smile that she felt the first pangs of loss. "I missed his personality so much! He was such a bubbly, energetic boy. . . . As his mom I was his world. We were always together, and then he just didn't express any of that anymore," she says, as tears



# OF FAITH

strength—and above all, faith. Alicia A. Neumann

run down her cheek. “I felt like I was walking around with a knife in my heart.”

But Karen did not have time to grieve. The boys still needed daily care. A picture shows them sitting by the “big blue bus,” a specialized van needed to load and carry both of them in their wheelchairs. Transporting them to frequent medical appointments was a big job—and that was just part of her responsibilities. She talks about running errands, managing medications, taking the boys for walks, and providing round-the-clock care.

This demanding role took a toll on her. “One day I found myself prostrate on the floor, pleading, ‘Lord deliver me. I cannot do this anymore!’” Deliverance came in the form of God’s Word. “I read a lot of Scripture,” she says. “I had periods where I couldn’t get enough of Scripture and all the promises. It really shines when you’re desperately clinging to your faith.”

Trust in God is what got her through the next few years. “The loving providence of God really shone through and taught me to rely on him in absolutely everything,” she says. “He’s the one that’s carried us through, provided for us, and showed his love for us time and time again.”

**The page turns again, revealing a funeral bulletin.** God finally called the boys home. Jeff went first on Feb. 4, 2001, after a case of pneumonia. “I thought, ‘Lord you can have him now because the disease is just so hard on his body. He will be so much

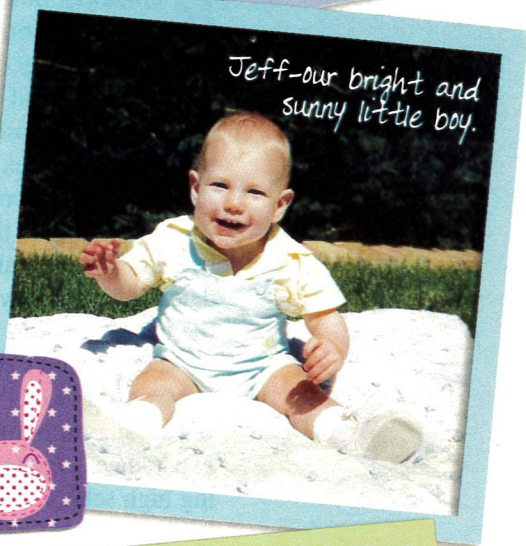
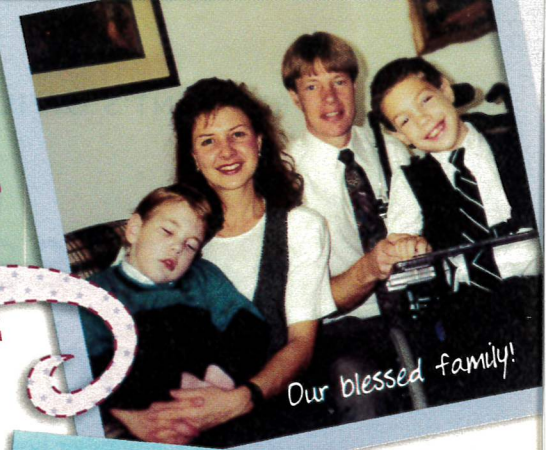
better in heaven,’” Karen says. Jeff was 10 years old.

Carl lived for another year and a half. Toward the end of his life he had painful problems with his spine, and his health continued to deteriorate. One summer afternoon, Karen and her husband knew it was time. “We just sang hymns and read the 23rd psalm and talked to him, and then the Lord took him,” she says. Carl met Jesus face to face on July 13, 2002, at the age of 14.

**Schroeder closes the photo album and takes a deep breath.** “This is really good for me, I haven’t talked about it in a long time,” she shares. “It’s good to have someone ask me so I can tell about it. [Our boys] were such a big part of our lives, and a major part of who I am.”

Schroeder says that although it was very hard, she is thankful the boys went to heaven when they did. “They were really such blessings and such joys, and I’m so thankful that we had them. But I’m also thankful that the Lord took them because they’re just so completely free and they’re so happy now. They’re both running and jumping and laughing and cracking jokes in heaven. . . . I’m very much looking forward to being with them again someday.”

*Alicia Neumann is assistant editor for Forward in Christ.*



# Faces change; God's grace doesn't

**R**emember how you felt on your first day of high school? Excited. Nervous. Self-conscious. Mildly confused. There was a thrilling sense that you had entered a new chapter in your life, a chapter whose pages were sure to bring new adventures, new experiences, new knowledge. At the same time there was also a lurking sense of dread and fear of the unknown. What will this be like? Will I make friends? Will I ever get a date? What will my teachers be like? Will I make the team?

At our synod's convention in August, you were led by God to call me as your synod president. It's been a humbling and almost overwhelming experience. In many ways I feel like that kid starting high school. Thrilled and excited at the opportunity to serve God and you in this office, but at the same time recognizing that I have no idea of exactly what is waiting for me on the unopened pages of this next chapter in my life.

What I do know is this: I am deeply grateful to you for the confidence you have placed in me. I want to thank the thousands of people who sent expressions of encouragement and promises of continued prayer. I am thankful to God for giving this "chief of sinners" the opportunity to serve him and you in this office. And, most of all, I know that it is God's grace, God's power, and God's unbreakable promises that will enable us all to serve him.

This is the first time I've served in a calling where I will need to get to know the people I serve from a distance. So here are just a few things I'd like you to know about me and my family.

My parents were originally from a little town in southeastern Minnesota (Eitzen). My father was the first in his family of farmers to become a pastor. He spent most of his ministry as a pro-

fessor of Latin and as the librarian at Northwestern College. My mother, still living in her own home at the age of 90, made our house a home. They had eight children (six boys and two girls). I'm the youngest of those eight, and when I received my first call into the pastoral ministry, I became the eighth of those eight to enter the pastoral or teaching ministry.

I married Andrea Kuester, my high school sweetheart, in 1977. Thirty years later we've been blessed with four children and one grandchild. I can't say enough about the blessings God has given me through my supportive wife and children.

I began my ministry at Faith, Fond du Lac, Wis. After six years there, I served King of Kings, Maitland, Fla. In 1989 I was called to serve as president of Northwestern Prep, and, since the amalgamation in 1995, of Luther Prep, one of our synod's two preparatory high schools.

And now the Lord, through you, has given me a new task. While I don't know the details of what God has in store for us as we work together to share the gospel, I do know this: the future is firmly in the hands of our gracious God. He has adopted us as his children in Christ. He has given us the gift of eternal life. He has called us to share with the world the precious news of a Savior. We can all look forward to the future—the future of our own individual lives and the future of the synod we love—and know, without any doubt, that God himself will guide us with his Word and will bless us with his grace.

*Mark Schweden*



# LESSONS FROM THE CREED

Charles F. Degner

*"He ascended into heaven."*

**T**he Bible tells the story of Jesus' ascension in one simple sentence: "After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight" (Acts 1:9). On that Thursday, 40 days after Easter, there were no bands playing, no fireworks in the sky. There were only two angels to tell the disciples to stop standing around and to get to work!

But what a reception in heaven! "Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!' " (Revelation 5:11,12).

## **Jesus' ascension is worth celebrating**

Jesus' ascension was not only for Jesus but also for you. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the Ephesians. In chapter one he shows us why we can be sure of our salvation. God chose us from eternity to be his adopted children (v. 5). He sent his Son to

redeem us from our sins (v. 7). He brought us to faith (v. 13) and gave us his Spirit as a deposit to guarantee our inheritance (v. 14).

If this was not assurance enough, Paul tells us, "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything *for the church*, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (Ephesians 1:22,23).

## **JESUS' ASCENSION WAS NOT ONLY FOR JESUS BUT ALSO FOR YOU.**

Notice the words "for the church." Jesus ascended into heaven for you. Jesus rules all things for you. Jesus is present everywhere in the world for you.

I once asked a 12-year-old boy in confirmation class what it meant for him to know that Jesus was his King. He said, "It means that Jesus is watching over me." His answer made me remember what God once told King David: "You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler" (2 Samuel 5:2).

Most kings rule only for themselves.

But David ruled

as a shepherd, just like his greater son Jesus. Jesus still watches over you.

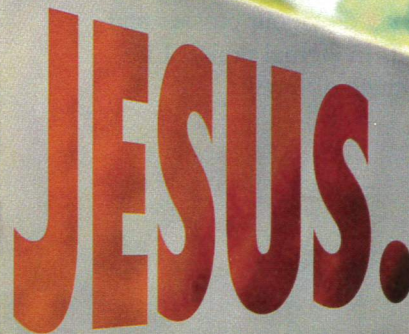
## **The church has work to do after Jesus' ascension**

Later in Ephesians, Paul tells us what Jesus' ascension means for his church. "(... He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (4:10-12). Jesus can no more forsake his church than our heads can forsake our bodies. As the church's head, he gives his church every resource it needs to carry out his work.

Jesus told us to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). We sometimes wonder where we will get the money and the people to accomplish this task. We wrestle with these issues often. "Have no fear, little flock; have no fear, little flock, for the Father has chosen to give you the kingdom; have no fear, little flock!" (*Christian Worship* 442:1).

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

*This is the eighth 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. Beck*

## Faith, love, and the cross

**M**artin Luther once wrote, “This life is nothing else than a life of faith, love, and the cross.” The thought of the reformer has been on my mind since I read it. I’m not sure 600 words can do justice to the thought.

I’ve sensed that many think of religion simply as a way to achieve a happier life here. *Time* and *Christianity Today* recently carried articles that discussed such a “prosperity gospel” in this country and in Africa.

Luther suggested something much different. First, this life is a life of faith. As we read the Scriptures, God tells us clearly how much he loved the world; he gave us his own Son so we might have eternal life. Beyond the words God has given to us in the Scriptures, we see nothing about that. I have not seen Jesus. His forgiveness is not something I can store in a safe, and I only have his word that heaven exists. The Christian’s life centers on Jesus, forgiveness, and heaven, but we have only his word to go by. This is a life of faith, not sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

The second part of Luther’s description of this life includes love. God loves us and his love remains constant and firm even though we cannot see it. We are moved to love God because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). But there is more. God surrounds us with people—our families and neighbors among them. He wants us to love them. Remember the summary of the law: Love God and love your neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). Jesus even said to love your enemies (Matthew 5:44).

The life of a Christian is an opportunity to love God and our neighbor—not just the good neighbor who watches the

house while we are gone, but also the one who causes us fits by his or her antics. The apostle Paul reminds us that if we don’t have love we become nothing more than a loud noise—a resounding gong or clanging cymbal (1 Corinthians 13:1).

These two ideas may be relatively easy to understand, but the third part of Luther’s comment is a little more difficult. This life is a life of the cross. On one hand, we could say that our lives are marked by his cross, and they are. We sing, “In the cross of Christ I glory” (*Christian Worship* 345). But then Jesus directs us to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow him (Luke 9:23).

That sounds painful and difficult. And it is. The world’s opposition is one cross we bear. Christians put up with the disdain of the world around them and cling to the cross of Christ as the greatest treasure even when the world holds money, glory, and pleasure before their eyes.

But there’s more here too. Taking up our cross means that we realize that we are nothing at all and that everything we do—even our good deeds—are nothing but dirty rags (Isaiah 64:6). We turn from the sin that surrounds us and the sin within us daily and cling to the cross where Christ has suffered for us. Again and again—yes, daily—we have to crucify the desire to make ourselves the center. It’s a daily effort to make his cross the key to our lives.

It’s hard and difficult. It’s always been so. But one day Jesus will tap us on the shoulder and call us home. Then we will see him as he is, bask in the reality of his love, and lay down our crosses and raise our hands in eternal praise. Life then will be much different.

Jacob struggled throughout his life. But it was his struggle with God that we hear about in Scripture.

He wrestled with God's promises and God's plans. He wrestled with God's protection and God's provision. Then one night by the Jabbok River in the darkest hours of his life, Jacob did what no one else has: he literally wrestled with God.

### Have your Bible open to Genesis 32.

1. Jacob was about to return home after a 20-year absence. What emotions and issues were in the forefront of his mind? Review Genesis 27–28.
2. Read Genesis 32:1-5. Why did God show Jacob an encampment of angels? How does verse 3 show that Jacob got the point? (Check a map to see where Mahanaim and Edom are.)
3. Verse 1 is so comforting . . . the angels met him. Where do you get visible reassurance of God's love and his promises to you?
4. Read Genesis 32:6-8. Jacob is entering the darkest hours of his life. In the face of 400 armed men, he divided his family and sent huge gifts. Does that show a lack of faith, or is Jacob just using his blessings and talents in a God-pleasing way?
5. In the darkest hours of your life, how do you draw the line between faithful trust and mere fatalism?
6. Read Jacob's prayer in Genesis 32:9-12. Explain the changes that have taken place in Jacob over the past 20 years.
7. How is Jacob's prayer a model for our prayer life:
  - In verse 9?                      • In verse 10?
  - In verse 11?                    • In verse 12?
8. In the dark hours of your life, why would a prayer like this be filled with blessing?
9. Read Genesis 32:22-32. Try and put yourself in Jacob's shoes. You are all alone and suddenly out of the darkness a man starts to wrestle you. What are your thoughts and emotions about this man?
10. Who was this man who was fighting Jacob?
11. What terrible thoughts about God and his promises must have filled Jacob's mind when he realized that God himself had become his opponent? Look at Hosea 12:4 for insight.
12. When does it seem like God is your adversary or fighting against you? What is your temptation at times like that?
13. Explain how Jacob's wrestling and grappling, his pleading and his tears, even his demand of verse 26 were all fruits of faith.
14. Why did God ask Jacob's name? Why did God give him a new name and a wrenched hip? What blessing did God give Jacob?
15. Verse 31 is especially poignant. We see Jacob under the rising sun, limping into his future. When was the last time God wrenched your hip to keep you focused on trusting in him?

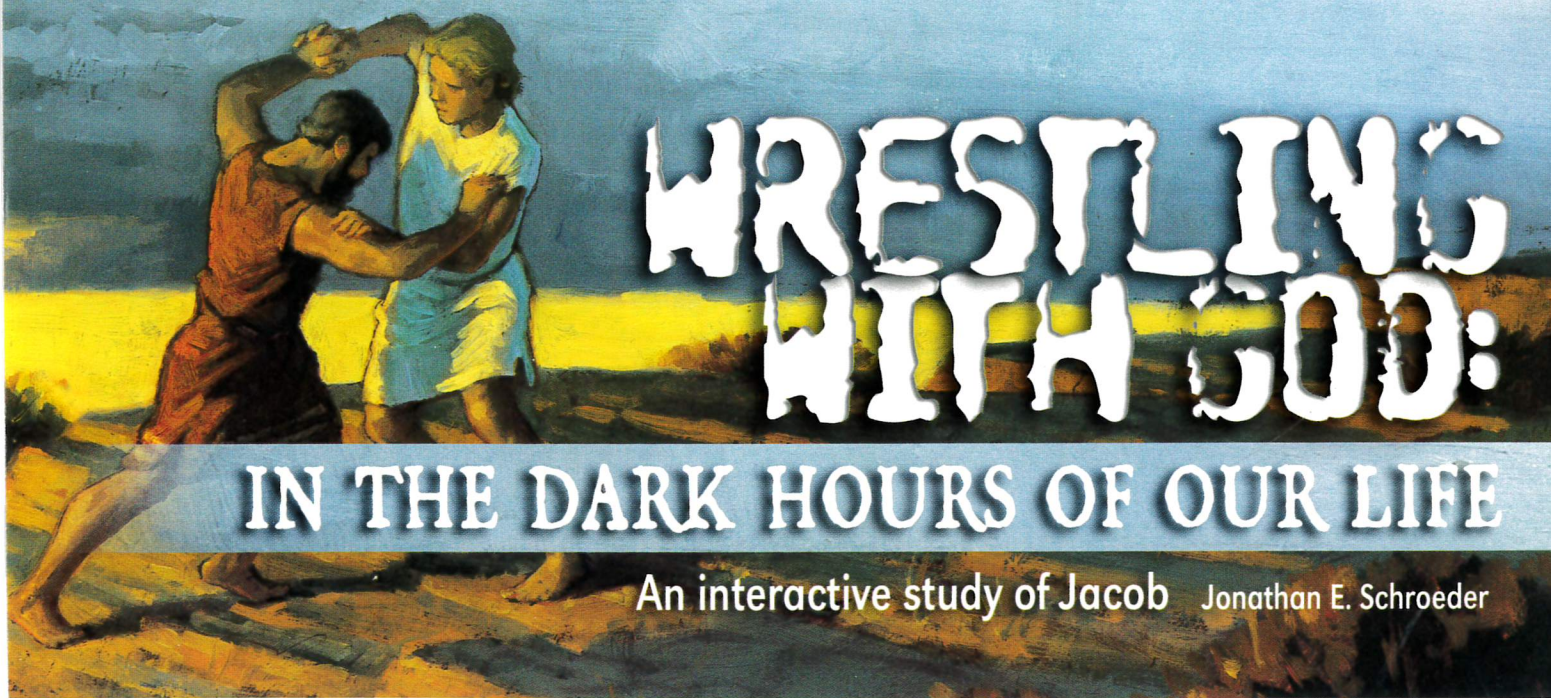
### Bringing it home

In the darkest hours of your life, it seems like God is fighting against you. It seems that his face shows nothing but anger or dispassion. When it seems like God is your adversary, do what Jacob did. Wrestle with God; hold on to him and don't let go; hold on until dawn. "I will not let you go until you bless me" (Genesis 32:26). Then limp into your future, clinging to the promises of your God.

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

*This is the 10th article in a 12-part Bible study. Find this article and possible answers online after Oct. 5 at [www.forwardinchrist.net](http://www.forwardinchrist.net).*

ILLUSTRATION: JOHNSON AND FANCHER



# WRESTLING WITH GOD:

## IN THE DARK HOURS OF OUR LIFE

An interactive study of Jacob Jonathan E. Schroeder

From Midwest small towns to metropolitan congregations, Lutherans from coast to coast are discovering ways to share God's unconditional love in Christ with people who don't look like them or speak their language.

Peace, Kissimmee, Fla., a congregation in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, is striving to meet the God-given opportunity and challenge of serving people from a different culture. More than 40 percent of its community is Hispanic.

Cross-cultural challenges are a good thing. They help us evaluate what really matters in our outreach to others. When Jesus commanded, "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19), he directed us to expend treasure and effort to carry the good news of forgiveness through him to the nations of the world. This is good! But Jesus did not want us to overlook the nations living at our doorstep. Large and small American communities are the new locations where we can find "all nations." How shall we reach them?

#### ALL NATIONS IN OUR NEIGHBORHOODS

Some may have the attitude that the first step in reaching out to those different from us is to wait until they become more like us. Our thinking sometimes includes ideas like these: let them learn English, let them love our culture, let them fit into our schedules. The apostle Paul says just the opposite, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). The first step in reaching others is for us to become more like them. Learning the Spanish language is an important step to bridge the gap with Hispanics.

But there is more to that bridge. We need to learn how well they know their own language, what their view of the Bible and worship

is, what music defines them best, what their goals in life are, and how their families are constructed. After all, Jesus did not live, die, and rise again so that Hispanics should necessarily be in church at 8 A.M., appreciate every Lutheran hymn, or alter their family traditions. But he came to save them from Satan, sin, death, and hell. Our task is to proclaim the gospel so they know Jesus.

#### ALL NATIONS IN HEAVEN

God gave the apostle John a beautiful sight of the church triumphant. He saw a cross-cultural church: "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb'" (Revelation 7:9,10).

Heaven's residents are wonderfully diverse in ethnic, cultural, and language backgrounds. Yet they all wore the same clothing: all were dressed in the perfect robe of righteousness, which was washed white in the blood of Lamb. What a great encouragement this sight is for the church militant on earth where cross-cultural challenges still arise! The Holy Spirit brings together people whose cultures vary so dramatically as brothers and sisters in Christ.

In the end, cross-cultural ministry is always going on everywhere in the sense that all people within Christian congregations have different traditions and habits. No two people are alike. Our challenge will always be to capitalize on this diversity within the body of Christ, so that each believer, regardless of language or culture, serves the Lord as the Holy Spirit provides opportunity and strength.

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# All nations NEXT DOOR

Cross-cultural outreach is closer than we sometimes think.

Herbert Huhnerkoch