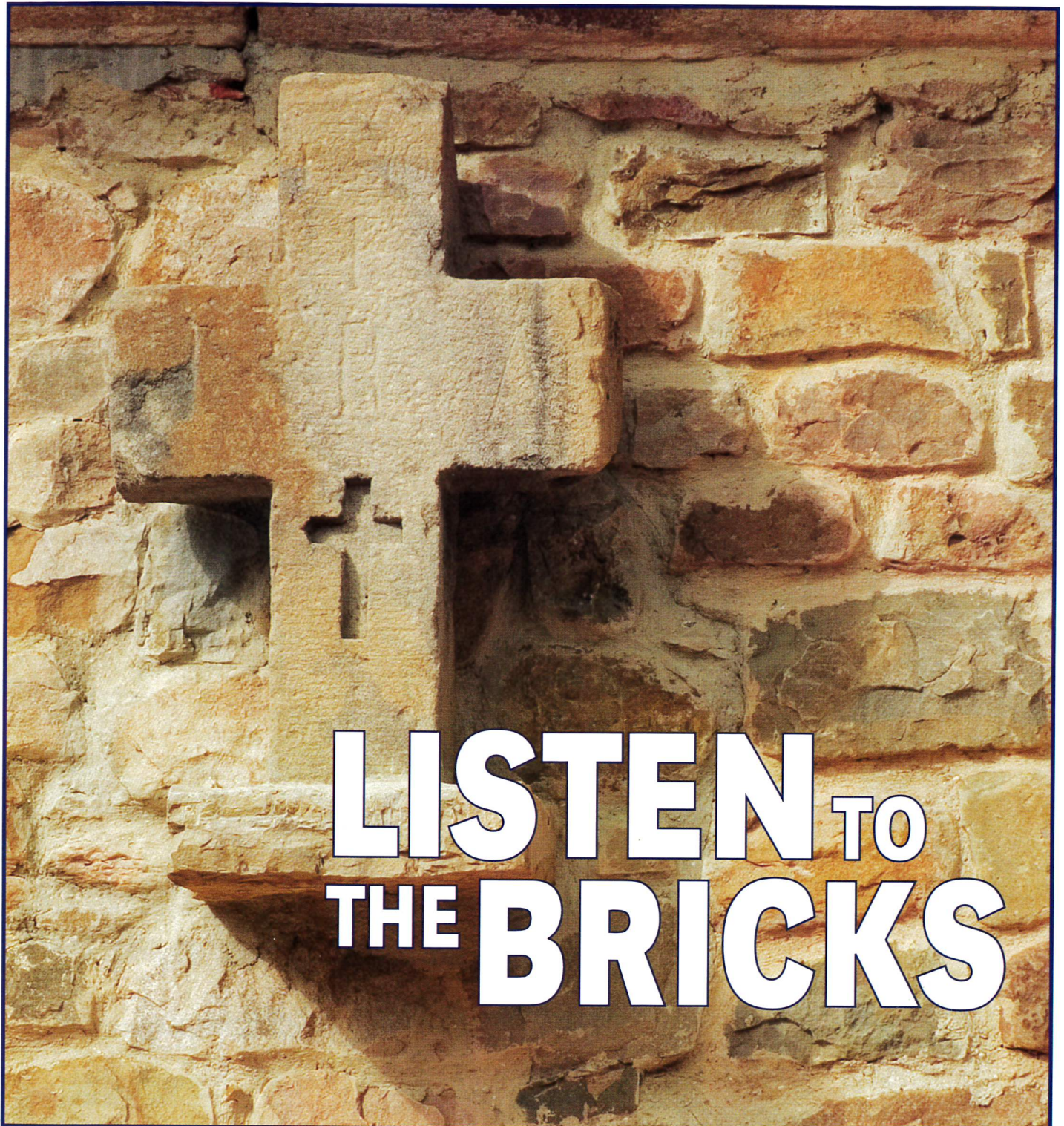


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JANUARY 2008

Forward in Christ

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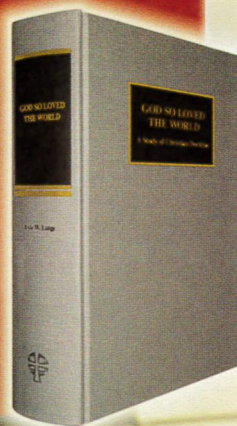
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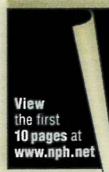
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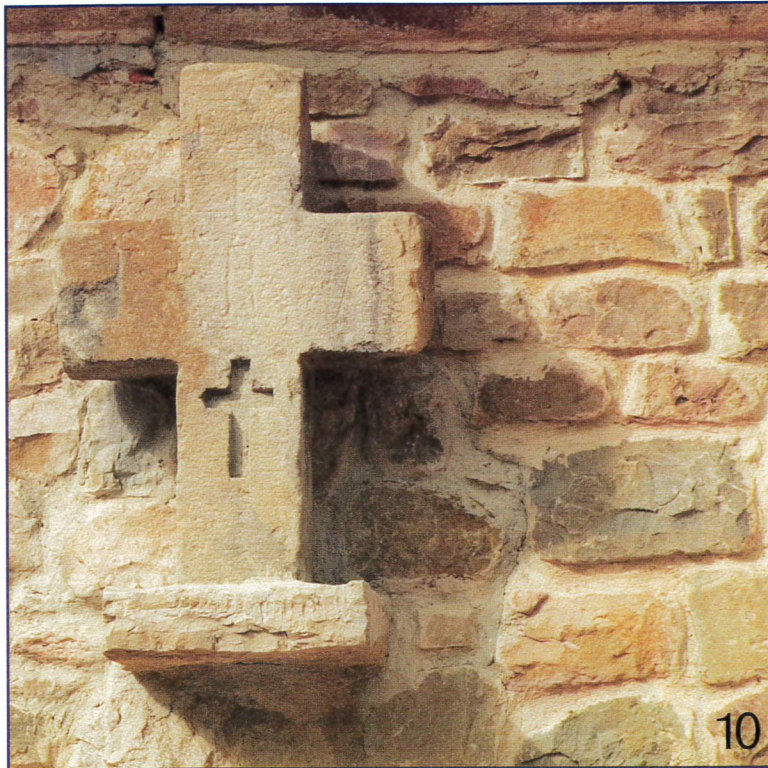
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“ People preach.
So do their bricks.
It’s a both/and. ”



DESIGN PICS



Forward in Christ

✠ The official magazine of the
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

FEATURES

- 10 WHAT ARE THE BRICKS TELLING YOU?** A building not only tells us something about the people who use it, but it also shapes those people.
Aaron L. Christie
- 12 YOU SHALL BEAR MUCH FRUIT** Our New Year’s resolutions fail. But God’s resolution to give us what we need for Christian living succeeds.
Earle D. Treptow
- 14 JESUS WAS A SOCIALIST** Bumper stickers can be funny, but they can also reveal distorted views of Jesus.
Kevin Coffee
- 16 HEED THE SIGNS** God gives us signs that point to his return.
Wayne D. Mueller
- 28 NOT ALONE ON THIS JOURNEY** How do I overcome loneliness?
Wayne I. Schulz
- 29 MARLYS REID: TRUST GOD TO DIRECT YOUR FUTURE** Instability and security issues are part of daily life for the Reids.
Rachel Hartman
- 30 MY CROSS TO BEAR** Deep down, I knew that the homosexual lifestyle I was leading was not one intended by God.
Scott Barefoot
- 36 JEKYLL AND HYDE** God warns us of the two natures within us all.
Rolfe Westendorf

FAITH *focused*



FAITH FOCUSED FINANCES - New training and resources to help congregations and individuals address the challenges and opportunities of finances in their personal lives of faith today



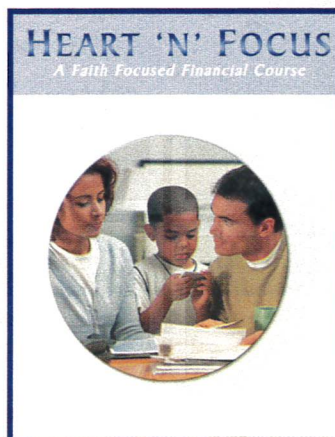
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MAY THE LORD OUR GOD
BE WITH US AS HE WAS
WITH OUR FATHERS;
MAY HE NEVER LEAVE US
NOR FORSAKE US.
1 Kings 8:57

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JANUARY

WHAT'S INSIDE *by Julie Wietzke*

I have to admit: I struggled with what to write this month—but not because there wasn't anything specific to highlight. It was just the opposite. In this first issue of 2008, we have two new Bible studies (pp. 33 and 35), three new series (on architecture, sanctification, and end times) and two new contributing editors (Welcome, Pastor Sternhagen and Prof. Bivens!).

But even with all this new material, I keep coming back to one of our long-running series, which focuses on real life issues of WELS members and how God has helped them through easy and not-so-easy times.

The topic of this month's real life article—homosexuality—might make some of us uncomfortable. But the author's candid look at his life—the good and the bad—is something not to miss (p. 30). Maybe you know someone who is fighting the temptations of homosexuality. In his first Q&A column, Prof. Forrest Bivens also discusses how we can reach out and help our struggling brothers and sisters (p. 9).

DEPARTMENTS



- 6 FEEDBACK**
- 7 DEVOTION**
Resolve to pray *Stephen H. Geiger*
- 8 EDITORIAL COMMENT**
All human life is valuable *Paul T. Prange*
- 9 QUESTION & ANSWER**
Homosexuality *Forrest L. Bivens*
- 18 WHATEVER**
No idea what lies ahead *Megan Schrank*
- 19 NEWS**

- 26 BULLETIN BOARD**
- 27 POTLUCK**
- 32 FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK**
Remember who you are! *Mark G. Schroeder*
- 33 BIBLE STUDY**
I am . . . the way *David D. Sternhagen*
- 34 A THOUGHT**
Is Christianity irrelevant? *John A. Braun*
- 35 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDY**
God's tool belt for unity: Forgiveness *Donald W. Patterson*

HELP IN TRIALS

Re: "A portrait of faith" [Oct.]. A sincere thank you to Alicia Neumann for her article. Surely if only one family was helped in bearing their cross in a similar trial then this article proved to be of special help and blessing.

May the words of the apostle Paul continue to lead and guide us as he writes these words of comfort: "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work" (2 Thessalonians 2:16,17 KJV).

*Henry Klug
Tomah, Wisconsin*

PASS IT ON

When I have a doctor or dentist appointment I take along *Forward in Christ*. I do not throw away old copies. When I have read a few articles, I place it on the table with sports magazines or even Christian Science magazines. I leave it there when I leave. Perhaps someone will pick it up and read it. Perhaps I have reached someone that day with an article they needed to read. Your magazine goes many places besides church.

*Mary Woldt
Pigeon, Michigan*

FREEDOM TO PRAY

The article, "Hallway lessons" by Jane Schlenvogt [Nov.] regarding the storm that occurred near the Westside Christian School in Middleton, Wis., was quite heart-warming and faith uplifting.

Her account of how the pupils prayed and wanted the Bible read during the storm gives us all reassurance and gratitude for maintaining our Lutheran K-12 and college educational system.

It is nice to know that we can worship and pray as we desire knowing we are not going to have interference or protests from the ACLU, a freedom from religion group, or other atheists that want to impose their restrictions upon us.

*Alan Ross
Manitowoc, Wisconsin*

CHRIST-MAS

I enjoyed the article in the December *Forward in Christ*, "Why do we still call it 'Christmas'?"

It disturbs me a bit when [people] use the term x-mas instead of Christmas. Let's not forget the "Christ" in Christmas.

I usually emphasize this fact when writing letters during the Christmas season by hyphenating the word. I try to do this at the end of the line. This does take a little planning. Merry Christ-mas.

*Jerry Hildebrandt
Weyauwega, Wisconsin*

WORD GAMES

I really enjoy the games you put in your magazine in the Potluck section. They are challenging as well as a chance to learn more. I was doing the November match game, where you match the names with its meaning. The answer you gave for the meaning of Lois was "cow" (letter L.) Because I could not find the answer in my research, I asked my pastor. He researched it and found Lois to mean "better" (letter L) in the answer key. I had answered "better" because it was one of the answers I had left after using "cow" for Leah.

*Michele Bryant
LaPorte, Indiana*

Thanks for the catch. Lois does mean "better."—ed.

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*.

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Resolve to pray

Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. 2 Chronicles 20:3

Stephen H. Geiger

“We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you” (2 Chronicles 20:12).

Husbands and fathers, wives and mothers, teenagers and toddlers had gathered in Jerusalem at Solomon’s temple. Outside the walls a vast enemy army massed at their doorstep.

Pray when you’re alarmed

Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, had gotten word not long before that enemies to the east were marching to the west, their sights set on the people of God.

What lies ahead for any of us in the new year? In the case of Jehoshaphat, we have no indication that a new calendar year was about to begin for these people, yet we do know that King Jehoshaphat made a resolution.

He made a resolution to pray.

We don’t know what this new year will bring. It would not surprise us if this new year is filled with challenges. In fact, you might be entering this new year with great burdens already on your heart.

When you think about the moments and days to come, you don’t know for sure what to do. You are troubled. You are alarmed.

When Jehoshaphat was alarmed, he prayed. The whole family of Judah prayed. Old and young prayed: “O our God . . . we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you” (2 Chronicles 20:12).

Expect God to answer your prayers

God’s power and love are amazing. To the gathered family of believers the Spirit spoke: “Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s. . . . Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you” (2 Chronicles 20:15,17).

The next morning they got up early. As the army marched in the dawn of that day, King Jehoshaphat picked out some men—those who could sing. To the front of that army, heading straight for the foe, marched singers who voiced these words: “Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever” (2 Chronicles 20:21).

The battle had not yet begun, but to have the promise of a powerful God was as good as having the victory. Sure enough, the Lord miraculously fought the battle. The allied enemy armies attacked each other. By the time the men of Judah arrived at the scene, not a single opposing soldier lived. Jehoshaphat’s men saw only dead bodies lying on the ground.

Don’t we have a powerful God? Don’t we have a God who keeps his promises? We have a God who also graciously forgives us for the times when we’ve imagined the unknowns of a new year with fear in our hearts. Yes, he forgives us



when we think the problems of the future are unconquerable.

How do we know we have such a God? He shed a precious stream to bring the peace of a washed conscience to your heart. He honors every word he’s ever spoken—not one falls to the ground unfulfilled. He is mighty. No enemy of ours is more powerful than our Friend.

This new year, resolve to confess your confidence in your Lord. Resolve to remind him of the precious promises he has placed into your hands. When alarmed, resolve to pray.

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

All human life is valuable

Paul T. Prange

I'm glad that our side won World War II. Life would have been awful under a regime that allowed and even promoted all of the hideous medical experiments documented in Europe under the Nazis.

Apparently there was a movement in those days, in both Europe and North America, called eugenics. It advocated improving human beings by selective breeding for positive hereditary traits. In other words, it said that the lives of people who were healthier or more intelligent were worth more than the lives of the sick or the less intelligent. The movement sanctioned medical experiments on the weak or undesirable for the sake of the strong.

It seems that eugenics was discredited after being associated with the Nazis. But I am afraid that its basic tenets are in danger of being accepted again in North America.

I am distressed that millions of unborn boys and girls have been killed since abortion was legalized in the United States more than 30 years ago. I wonder whether people are desensitized because we have been under this legal situation for so long.

I have been noticing a new lack of outrage when there is the suggestion that the lives of the elderly are worth so little that perhaps their deaths should be hastened. At one point, not so long ago, a Michigan doctor named Kevorkian was considered ghoulish for his preoccupation with helping other people die. Now in some quarters he seems to be a celebrity.

I also hear people promoting medical experiments that destroy embryos, apparently because the lives of bigger people are worth more. Some of the arguments used to defend this kind of experimentation sound just like eugenics to me.

It does not seem right to me to declare one life more valuable than another because of size,

health, intelligence, ethnic origin, or a better chance of accomplishing something.

What I learn from the Bible is how much God values human life, regardless of health or intelligence. Genesis 1 and 2 demonstrate that God created the world for the sake of the lives of human beings. Genesis 3 demonstrates that God planned to send a Savior for the sake of the eternal lives of all human beings.

Jesus came to give us life to the full (John 10:10). He sacrificed his own life so that we can have eternal life (John 3:16). The Spirit gives life when he works in human hearts through the gospel. The words that Jesus spoke are spirit and life (John 6:63).

The most important thing I can do to teach and remind people of the value of life is to remind them of Jesus. He cared about—yes, loved—every human life in all history. He placed such a value on all human life that it brought him to earth to sacrifice himself for our forgiveness. And where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

Some organizations promote the political defense of the small, the sick, and the developmentally disabled. One of them in our fellowship is Christian Life Resources (CLR). The CLR Web site, www.christianliferesources.com, has an amazing amount of material to help people take action both religiously and politically.

Our side won World War II. But an even more important, life-affirming victory took place when Jesus won the war against our enemies: sin, death, and the devil. It's time again to take notice of the enemies of life and to take action.

[Jesus] placed such a value on all human life that it brought him to earth to sacrifice himself for our forgiveness.

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

QUESTION & ANSWER



Forrest L. Bivens

You not only ask good questions; you remind us of a valuable truth. Not all who are classified as homosexuals are brazen proponents of a sinful “gay” lifestyle. Many fight fierce temptations and suffer from burdened consciences. Many have been brought to godly repentance with reliance on Christ. They are Christian brothers and sisters who often struggle with distinct temptations, seek help from the Christian community, and deserve our loving help and encouragement. Can we help them? Yes, especially when right attitudes and information are coupled with our love.

Display proper attitudes

We want to cultivate a blend of compassion for a struggling child of God and confidence in the Word of God. When troubled homosexuals seek help, attitudes of disgust and shock need to be sorted out and rooted out so they are not displayed in vocal or body language. Feelings of alienation and loneliness are epidemic among these suffering brothers and sisters in Christ, and we do not wish to make things worse.

The specific nature of homosexual sin is different from heterosexual sin, but its essence is identical: a failure to be and behave as God’s revealed will demands. Divine law remains the perfect tool to expose and convict sinners of their sin, and the unconditional gospel remains the perfect tool to comfort and empower forgiven sinners to enjoy life in Christ. God’s Word remains “living and active” for us and others. There is no need or room for revulsion or pessimism as we share the pardoning and purifying Word with our sometimes weak and wounded family members in Christ.

Share proper information

It is likely that you won’t always have the perfect words to say, and it is almost certain that you won’t have all the answers. But you can do some homework and choose your words carefully. Don’t weigh in prematurely with an inflexi-

Q. How can we as Christians help repentant but struggling people who used to be homosexually active? Is it really possible to help them?

ble answer to the “nature vs. nurture” question. Consider the possibility that both genetic and environmental factors may be involved, just as they often are in heterosexual sin, alcohol and drug abuse, or a variety of other addictions. Be quick to acknowledge that issues of sexual orientation can sometimes be challenging, but God’s grace and power is more than sufficient to

give his people power to cope with reality.

In fostering fruits of faith, keep in mind that sanctification is not to be equated with marriage and heterosexual activity. Christians who lack heterosexual impulses may please God with celibate chastity that might involve a life-long struggle against homosexual tendencies. To counsel them to “go and get attracted to the opposite sex” betrays a misunderstanding of sanctification and invites unnecessary frustration for those already burdened.

Make use of proper resources

Sometimes referral counseling and the use of trained professionals is fitting. Our pastors are trained to display right attitudes and share reliable information, and your pastor may be called on for assistance—assuming that no betrayal of confidence is involved. Helpful resources are available in published works (e.g., *A Christian Perspective on Homosexuality* by Daniel Puls) or on the Internet (e.g., Exodus International, www.exodus.to). These resources should be used discriminately and perhaps with pastoral guidance. Our responsibility to appraise all things in the light of God’s Word remains real.

Professional counselors or therapists may be asked to work in tandem with your pastor or yourself. Different situations call for differing approaches, while the goal remains the same: providing trustworthy and loving help for people who are dealing with homosexuality.

Contributing editor Forrest Bivens, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Calvary, Thiensville.

Read about a WELS member’s struggle with homosexuality on p. 30.

So what are the bricks telling you? Our natural response would be: “Nothing.” During our Lord’s Palm Sunday procession, he proclaimed that the stones would cry out if the crowds were silenced (Luke 19:40). The crowds continued to rejoice, so the stones remained mute. We have one example in Scripture of a donkey speaking (Numbers 22), but never once a stone, brick, or block. “Dumb as a brick” is a common phrase.

But I ask the question again: “What are the bricks telling you?” If you take the time to look and listen, the bricks will begin to tell you more than you might imagine.

We shape our buildings

Let me give you two examples.

I visited Italy with family and friends this past spring. We visited Rome and took a private tour of the first-century cemetery underneath St. Peter’s Basilica. Several stories directly above us stood the immovable altar of the largest basilica in the world. St. Peter’s was built at the time of Luther to intentionally display the splendor of the Roman popes and their church. Outside the basilica is a plaza stretching for several acres, surrounded by monumental columns and colossal statues of the saints.

On Sunday morning, while we witnessed the pope’s birthday mass in St. Peter’s Square, it all came together. The man dressed in white is a pretty significant figure in the Catholic world. He sat on a white throne, with Michelangelo’s magnificent dome rising up hundreds of feet directly behind him, with massive colonnades surrounding him, and with Peter’s alleged bones

tucked away stories beneath the altar. He’s held to be the successor of St. Peter by 1.1 billion Roman Catholics. The bricks were speaking loudly. You couldn’t miss their sermon!

This past spring, I also witnessed a service in one of America’s premier megachurches, Willow Creek in South Barrington, Ill. It struck me that the “narthex” looked like the lobby of a concert hall. As I entered the sanctuary, I was awed by the size and quality of the building. As I began to look more closely, I saw massive screens and state-of-the-art sound equipment. I could see well-groomed landscaping through the clear windows. Then something began to dawn on me: I didn’t see a single Christian symbol. Later on, I did see some Christian art in the food court. I began to wonder “What sort of theology places Christian art in the food court, but not in the sanctuary?” I began to wonder, too, if it was mere coincidence that the sermon I heard contained no gospel. It was a generic religious message—excellently communicated—about good communication skills. Nothing in the sanctuary nor the sermon would have offended—let alone saved—an unbeliever. The bricks were speaking in Barrington, Ill., too. Their sermon was far different from their marble cousins in Rome.

Our buildings shape us

By now, you may be thinking, “So what?!” After all, the bricks aren’t preaching. It’s the pope’s preaching that’s the problem, not his plaza. It’s Willow Creek’s view of Jesus and the sacraments that’s the problem, not its taste in art and architecture. You’re right. But you’re missing the message of the bricks. The architecture of St. Peter’s in Rome visually displays the false claim that the pope is the visible head of the Christian church. Conversely, St. Peter’s can only encourage the pope to preach and teach that very thing! Willow Creek misses the gospel-centered nature of the sacraments and reduces Jesus to a non-offensive friend. You can see that by what is missing in its sanctuary. Conversely, without seeing any art

What are the
bricks tel

or architecture that highlights the sacraments, there is little incentive to preach them. The point? People preach. So do their bricks. It's a both/and.

As confessional Lutherans, we loudly proclaim, "Scripture alone." Praise God that we do! We confess that all we truly need to do the Lord's work is the Lord's Word. Period. But if we are not careful, we possibly might overlook some things that can be powerful tools in service to the Word. We need to keep our eyes and ears open to what the bricks might be telling us. Are our buildings deliberately in tune with the Word that rings from our pulpit? Or might our buildings speak some unintended messages? Winston Churchill once observed: "We shape our buildings; thereafter our buildings shape us." Churchill was correct.

Think about it. We preach about the wonderful fellowship we enjoy in the family of believers. We preach this in a church building that forces people to stare at the back of their neighbor's head and provides no common space for people to talk and share. Pew to steps to parking lot in three easy steps! The church building relentlessly reinforces this progression for several generations. Could this be a contributing factor in making a church unfriendly? Long, narrow, no-narthex churches were generally designed to focus worshippers' attention on God. Good! An unintended side effect may be a minimization of the body of Christ at worship. Not so good. Over time, bricks speak and their message shapes us. Is it possible to design a church that emphasizes both God and fellowship?

Build something that looks like a church

Our parish recently went through a building project. Members' opinions on color and building materials varied. One comment we consistently heard, however, was "build something that looks like a church." That sounds easy, but it's no easy task!

In the Old Testament it was easy. God was the architect and building committee. He gave detailed

instructions on what his tabernacle was to look like. God handed down blueprints from heaven. Moses, and later Solomon, simply connected divine revelation to silver and gold, wood and stone. The results must have been stunning!

That was the Old Testament. We live in the freedom of the New Testament. We have Jesus' clear Word about Baptism. He has no recommendations about buildings. We have the apostles' admonition to gather together in worship to encourage each other. We don't have an apostolic word about the "where" these gatherings take place. We are completely free when it comes to the buildings we use for worship.

Early churches often worshiped in large homes. In the twilight of the Roman Empire, large public buildings called basilicas were retooled for Christian worship. Basilicas evolved into a style of architecture called "Romanesque." Later this "heavy" style of architecture lightened into what we call "Gothic," with soaring ceilings and walls of stained glass. Eventually, "Baroque" became the preferred style—an explosion of art and decoration, specifically designed to assault the senses. In the modern era, clean lines, simplicity, and functionality were once the rage. Christians have done wonderful things with their freedom!

Each of these styles has its own advantages. Each one also comes with a list of disadvantages. Next month we will "listen to the bricks" as they stack up against clear biblical principles used by Martin Luther.


Now thank God for your church building. And then listen closely to what the bricks are—or are not—telling you.

Aaron Christie is pastor at Faith, Antioch, Illinois.

A building not only tells us something about the people who use it, but it also shapes those people.

ling you?

Aaron L. Christie



YOU SHALL BEAR MUCH FRUIT

Earle D. Treptow

Our New Year's resolutions fail. But God's resolution to give us what we need for Christian living succeeds.

The eternal optimist absolutely loves Jan. 1. A new year means new resolutions. The eternal optimist's list of resolutions makes *Moby Dick* look like a short story. "A New Year is a new opportunity," she bubbles. "It's a clean slate. It's a fresh start. It's a time for positive changes."

The hardened cynic views Jan. 1 quite differently. While he enjoys the day away from work and revels in the football games that run from morning to night, he hasn't even an ounce of interest in making New Year's resolutions. "What's the use?" he asks. "I've tried it in the past and it never works. I end up feeling worthless because I can't keep my resolutions."

On Jan. 1, are you the eternal optimist or the hardened cynic? Here's the diagnostic test: would you resolve to live a more upright and decent life in 2008? If you agree, call yourself a member of the "Eternal Optimist Club." If you disagree, consider this permission to print "Certified Hardened Cynic" cards.


The eternal optimist

The eternal optimist resolves with confidence to live a more upright and decent life. She knows that she can set herself apart from others by the changes she'll make. The key to making those changes, she feels, is to keep her resolution

firmly in the front of her mind. She laminates copies of her resolution and affixes them to her children's bedroom doors. That way, she figures, she won't resort to screaming at her kids in anger even after seven unfruitful attempts to rouse them from sleep. She posts her resolution on her rearview mirror as powerful encouragement to greet the person honking at her with a smile and a pleasant wave. Even her phone at work bears a copy of the resolution so that she doesn't respond to the caller's stupidity with the words she'd really like to say.

Do you see the error in the eternal optimist's ways? She believes that she can do whatever she sets her mind to doing. She believes that upright living comes from within. Isn't that the ultimate in arrogance? She has come to a conclusion different than the Lord's clear Word. She covers her ears and dismisses as useless pessimism the Lord's description of her natural ability: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). Human beings, since the Fall, are spiritually dead, unable to do anything good on their own. All sinners can do is sin, even with their best efforts, yes, even with their laminated resolutions. Those who think they can change their lives by their own power and thus attract God's attention are idolaters. They bow to themselves in worship.

How easy it is for us to fall into that trap! We begin to think that Christian living or



sanctification is our work and hinges on our diligent effort. We often act as if it comes down to healthy doses of our blood, sweat, and tears. Our dedication. Our devotion. Our power. What is God's assessment of our attempts at self-sanctification? " 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty" (Zechariah 4:6). We may think we have the power to alter our lives, but we are sadly mistaken. Spiritual reformation is the Spirit's work, not ours.

The hardened cynic

Hip, hip, hooray for the hardened cynic! He knows that he doesn't have the strength within himself to change his life. Experience has taught him a hard lesson: he is thoroughly sinful, unable to set himself apart from other people. He readily confesses his failures to live in line with the law of God written in his heart. There will be no laminated resolutions posted in his home or at work.

Perhaps the three cheers for the hardened cynic were premature. God did not write his law on human hearts so that people would, in hopelessness, surrender to sin and live at peace with their sinful words and actions. In giving his life for sinners, the Lord Jesus always envisioned a life of service in response. "He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Corinthians 5:15). Everyone redeemed with the blood of Christ—and that's everyone who has ever lived or will ever live—is to live for Christ.

In the final analysis, the hardened cynic and the eternal optimist actually share the same problem. Neither can stop staring at themselves. One says, "I can live an upright life, no matter what," and the other says, "I can't live a God-honoring life, no matter what." Both comments flow from hearts fixated on self. Such hearts unceremoniously shove the Lord out of the picture, as if he were unnecessary or useless.

The Lord's resolution

While it is true that we can't sanctify ourselves by our own striving and effort, that doesn't mean we can't be sanctified. Our weakness is not God's weakness. Nothing, including our sanctification, is impossible with God. He sets us apart, all by himself, without any assistance from us. That's

the way it had to be, because sinners could not offer anything even remotely helpful to set themselves apart for God and Christian living.

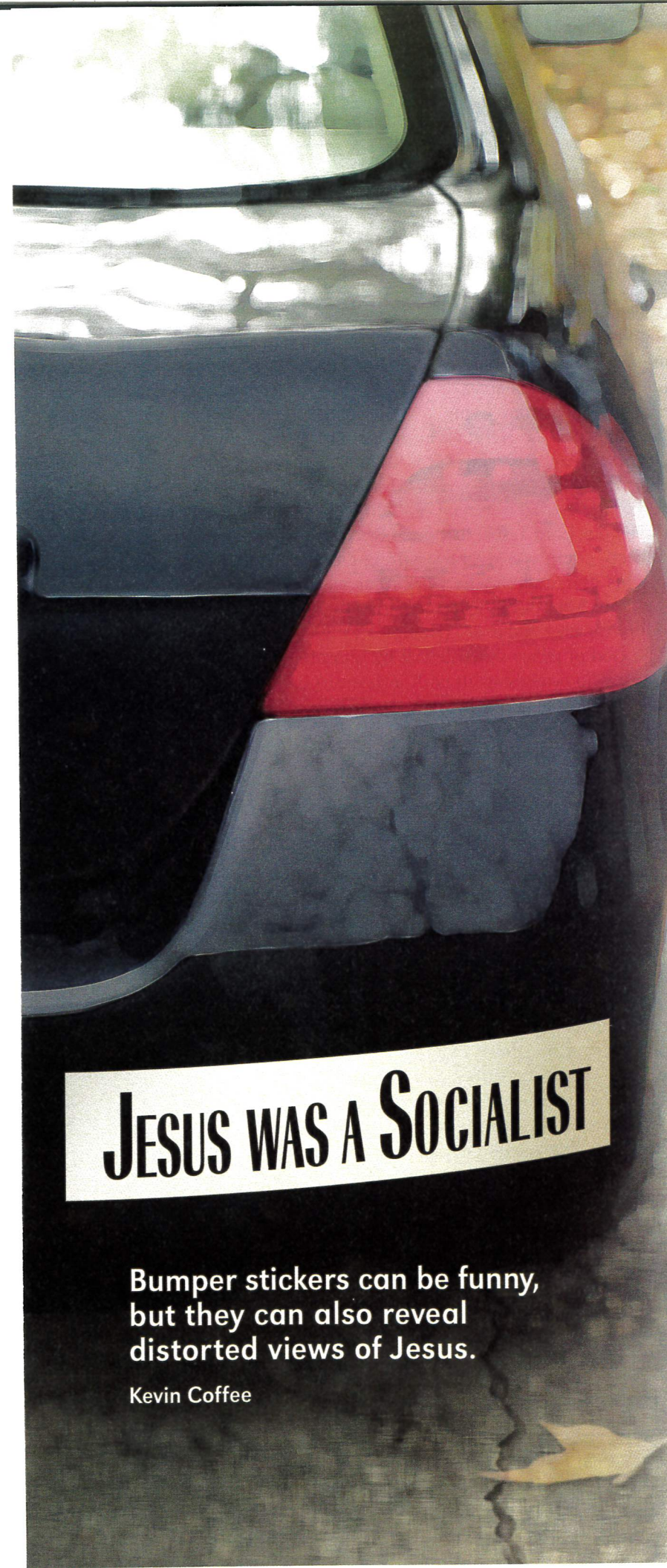
The writer to the Hebrews closes his letter with these clear, powerful words about sanctification: "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever" (Hebrews 13:20,21).

The God of peace sanctifies all by himself. The one who brought us to faith in Jesus as our Savior also forms in our hearts a desire to glorify him. All by himself. Never does he instruct us, "You do your part and then I'll do mine." Just as the God of peace needed no assistance in raising the Lord Jesus, so he needs no help in equipping his people for service. You'll search the Scriptures in vain for a passage expressing the pop theology all around us: "Dig deep within yourself to find the strength to change."

Here's the greatness of the Lord's grace: he doesn't present us a laminated list of helpful tips and practical skills for Christian living and leave it to us to put it to work. He continually equips us with everything we need to serve him. Everything. No gaps or deficiencies. The Lord who raised the Good Shepherd from death raises his people to a new life. He energizes us for service to his name and works in us what pleases him. Our resolutions don't matter much. God's resolutions do. Our sanctification is God's resolution. Day after day, the God of peace resolves anew to equip us for a life of service. Moment after moment, the Lord resolves to work in us what pleases him. And what God resolves, God does!

Earle Treptow is pastor at Zion, Denver, Colorado.

This is the first article in a five-part series on sanctification. Find a related Bible study on this topic after Jan. 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net



I have a habit of reading bumper stickers. At a glance, you can tell if the person in front of you is conservative or liberal, a baseball fan or a football fanatic. In Los Angeles, it is a courtesy to provide your fellow drivers with reading material on your vehicle's backside. I personally tell the folks behind me that "Old Guys Rule" and that I've visited both Cayucos, Calif., and the U.S. Midway in San Diego. For a 30-second traffic light, two or three bumper stickers are worth a thousand words.

Occasionally you get a bumper sticker that really makes you think. Recently I was at a red light, and the car in front of me had a sticker that read, "Jesus was a Socialist."

"Wait a minute," I thought. "What exactly does THAT mean?"

Jesus was a socialist?

On the surface, I suppose, this sentiment is understandable. Adherents of the "Jesus as socialist" theme admire Christ for his ability to care for the multitudes of people he encountered. Christ feeding the five thousand and healing paralytics and the sick create a wonderful picture of an earthly king whose concern for the poor and downtrodden outweigh his desire to rule as other leaders do. There is mercy here, and there is compassion. Missing are the flashy displays of power, legislative red tape, and the ugly class distinctions that befuddle our own society. The Jews during Christ's time wanted this type of kingdom, and many people today want it too.

Strictly speaking, socialists admire Christ for his ability to get things done that we find difficult to do. By "we," I mean nations, governments, towns, political bodies, schools, churches, and individuals. Christ was an effective minister to the poor, the sick, and the hungry. Were we as effective, there would be no national health care debates, food banks would be full, and our "homeless problem" would disappear.

But the danger in thinking this way is that it is easy to confuse things. Jesus did not come to earth to demonstrate how to be a good socialist. He did not come to us simply to demonstrate how to obey the "Golden Rule"

JESUS WAS A SOCIALIST

**Bumper stickers can be funny,
but they can also reveal
distorted views of Jesus.**

Kevin Coffee

and get along like everyone does on *Sesame Street*. Our bumper-sticker friend, in limiting his focus to one aspect of Christ's ministry, fails to see Christ's divine purpose—that he came to rescue us from sin and hell, to reconcile us to God the Father. This is the central message of the New Testament.

Missing the point

For socialists—and perhaps adherents of Marxist Communism—the gift of salvation Jesus provides does not give them what they so desperately crave: an earthly paradise where mercy and justice rule, where money is secondary, and where power is used for the common good. The basic tenet of a workers' state, one where the working class rules and where private industry cannot exist, is built upon man-made foundations. Unfortunately, without a clear understanding of sin, such “utopian” visions are doomed to failure. They contain, in their omission of sin, a fatal misunderstanding of human nature. People are not going to share their wealth; nations are not going to provide for the masses. Why? Sin.

When socialists talk about a level economic playing field, one where everyone is equal under the law and everyone has the same resources, they cannot admit that humanity, in and of itself, is incapable of such mercy and equality. Our bumper-sticker friend makes this same mistake. Jesus can only be considered a socialist if you remove sin from the equation. This negates the very reason Christ came to earth. What a horrible mistake this is! Jesus came to defeat sin, death, and the devil. His miracles and works of mercy sprang from that first concern, his concern for our souls.

In coming to rescue us from sin, Christ also provided for the physical

needs of those he met. How could he do otherwise? Yet consider the context in which he fed the five thousand. Did he do so simply to avert their hunger, or was he first preaching to the crowds that had followed him? Did Jesus heal the sick simply to demonstrate that he could or as a testimony to the forgiveness of the Father? Jesus was our Savior first—everything sprang from that first concern. He preached, and then he fed. He preached, and then he healed. For Jesus, healing the body is never a separate task from healing the soul. The message is forgiveness. In Christ's kingdom, that same forgiveness makes us whole—in mind, body, and soul.

Get the message right and get the message out

Platitudes such as “Jesus was a socialist” are altogether too neat and tidy to be useful, though they seem accurate if you don't give them much thought. “Why yes,” one thinks, “Jesus

you think? Why not put them on a bumper sticker and spread the word?

However, war, environmental degradation, greed, and similar evils are not things that a socialist government—or any government for that matter—can control, change, or make right. While we live in this world, these things are part of our everyday lives. Christ counseled his disciples when they worried too much about the world and how it would end: “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come” (Matthew 24:6).

So what finally do we actually need from our time on earth? Do we need a government that cares totally for us, as a parent does for their child? Don't we already have that caring parent in Christ? Though well-intentioned, our bumper-sticker friend clearly understands neither socialism nor Christ. Unfortunately, he is not alone. As Christians, we

Jesus can only be considered a socialist if you remove sin from the equation. This negates the very reason Christ came to earth.

did concern himself with the hungry. That is something I should do as well.” This same line of thought applies to many social issues—left, centrist, and right. A good look around our world yields plenty of evidence that capitalism is horribly flawed too. Our environment is collapsing, a moneyed class that wields both cultural and political power controls our society, and war and terrorism blight the international scene. Certainly these are things that Jesus would favor correcting, don't

have our work cut out for us: a world of people who admire Christ for his actions but who do not understand his divinity; have not heard the gospel; or at best, have heard it only selectively. Clearly, we need to get busy and spread the word to all nations about who Jesus truly is and why he came to us.

Kevin Coffee is a member at St. Paul First, North Hollywood, California.

People predict the outcome of sports events and put money on the line to back up their predictions. We sit with our financial advisor and predict within a few dollars the value of our retirement portfolio in 20 years. Health advisors don't shy away from predicting what impact the environment, our lifestyle, and our diet will have on our physical well-being down the road.

Why is it, then, that we have so much trouble reading and heeding the signs of Christ's imminent return? Jesus once expressed the same frustration: "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times" (Matthew 16:2,3).

Our Lord himself made it clear that no one on earth knows the exact time of his return. At the same time, however, out of love for his people, he put clear and accurate signs along the path of life. He wants believers at all times to be prepared to greet him at his return.

Notably, Scripture offers three different signs to remind us that his return will be "soon" (Revelation 22:7,12,20). These signs offer both warning and comfort to believers.

Sign #1—The gospel will be preached in the whole world

In Matthew 24 Jesus offers a whole list of signs to mark the beginning of the end. In this list is a remarkable statement as to the timing of his glorious return: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

Has the gospel of the kingdom been preached in the whole world? You be the judge. According to the American Bible Society, the Scriptures have been translated, printed, and distributed worldwide in more than 2,000 different languages and dialects. Advances in electronics and communications allow the gospel today to reach the heights of the Himalayas and the most remote islands in the South Seas. Some estimate that 10,000 souls per day are won to Christ in mainland China, mostly through the Internet.



HEED THE SIGNS

We want to know when Jesus will return and the world will end. We will never know the exact time, but God did give us signs that point to his return.

Wayne D. Mueller

One might argue that a lot of mission work still needs to be done—even if WELS is involved in mission work in 24 world fields. We are constantly seeking the means, money, and manpower to enter new fields that beckon. Yet we feel a special urgency when we hear Christ's sign of his return. Jesus didn't say the whole world would be converted, only that the gospel would be heard worldwide. And it is safe to judge that this is close to, if not at, completion.

Sign #2—Anomalies in nature

The second sign of the end times is the increase of anomalies in nature. Jesus spoke about famines and earthquakes in various places as beginning signs. Seismological events such as earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions have occurred with much greater frequency in the last 10 years than in the previous 40. Famines in Asia and Africa are regularly reported in the news.

Immediately before our Lord's return there will also be astrological events. "There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. . . the heavenly bodies will be shaken" (Luke 21:25,26).

Sign #3—Spiritual and moral decay

The third sign is the spiritual and moral decay inside and outside the church. Wars will increase, Christians will be persecuted, many will turn away from the faith, and false prophets will abound. Paul writes, "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons" (1 Timothy 4:1). The proliferation of false churches and apostasy from Christian faith are both evident today.

Perhaps most disturbing is Paul's description of people's moral quality in the last days: "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:1-5). Sadly, Paul's words hit the nail on the head for our times—for today's American society and for much of the world.

Be prepared for his coming

There have always been skeptics about the signs of the end. Peter heard such doubt in his own day. "You must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is this "coming" he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation'" (2 Peter 3:3,4).

Jesus also said that when he returns, most people will be as unheeding of the signs as they were before the flood. They will be "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" (Matthew 24:38), as though life must always go on as it has.

Yet let's remember Jesus' warning signs are there to prepare us not only for the time when he will come to us, but also for the time when we will be called to him. We may meet our own end before the end of the world. Seldom does anybody wait more than a hundred years to see Jesus. The thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:3) can also come in the middle of the day.

For those who read and heed the Savior's warning signs about his return, preparation is much more a matter of anticipation than fear. Fear will always be present in our old sinful self who never wants to be called to account. But anticipation and hope are the dominant feelings of our new self whom the Holy Spirit implanted by faith. Jesus' own encouragement is in place for those who acknowledge his signs: "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28).

Reading the signs and looking forward to the Savior's return makes a difference in the lives of Jesus' followers. Peter asks the question almost rhetorically and then provides the obvious answer: "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. . . . Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him" (2 Peter 3:11,12,14).

Wayne Mueller is the first vice president of WELS.

Read more about the end times in Revelation, an NPH publication written by Wayne Mueller. Find a related Bible study on this topic after Jan. 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net

WHATEVER

No idea what lies ahead

Although uncertainty can be scary, worrying about the future is just as effective as trying to solve an algebra equation by chewing bubble gum.

Megan Schrank

Near my friend Kelsey's house, there are some abandoned train tracks. A few years back, we would walk down the tracks and have contests to see who could last the longest without running back toward the street. Since the tracks had not been used for some time, the vegetation around the tracks was thick. There was little or no light in the thick brush. The farther down the tracks you walked the darker it got. Gathering our courage, a group of us would begin to walk down the tracks. Each time, someone would scream for no reason, and the entire group would scramble back toward the light.

Though we had no reason to believe that there was anything terrible lurking in the darkness, we were still frightened—frightened by what could be there. As we walked down the tracks, a thousand thoughts raced through our minds. Most were completely illogical, but the fact that we had no idea what to expect scared us. As we would walk farther and farther into the unknown, the fear grew stronger, so we ran back to what we were familiar with—the street.

The same is true in the larger sense. In high school, the possibilities that lay before us are endless. The colleges we can attend, the majors we can choose, the professions we can someday get in to. I know that I personally get freaked out thinking about my future. I have it so easy now, living with my parents. They provide me with everything I need and also a lot of the things I want. But in a few years, that's all gone. I'm going to be on my own. Though the freedom is exciting, it's also extremely frightening. How am I supposed to handle providing for myself?

I have no idea what lies ahead of me. I know what I'd like to happen, but there is no guarantee that my wants

will be fulfilled. I will work my hardest, but ultimately what happens to me from the next 10 minutes to the next 10 years and beyond isn't up to me.

I know that whatever happens to me is for my benefit. Even if I am a college student without money, attending my third-choice college, and living off of instant ramen, I trust that God knows what he's doing with my life. When it comes right down to it, worrying about college and my future in general is completely pointless—like trying to solve an algebra equation by chewing bubble gum. God already knows what he wants for me, and he knows what I will end up doing even if I don't know. And that's a good thing. Because if we are completely in charge of our futures, we will all end up in pretty bad shape. God is so much smarter than we can ever imagine. He knows what's best, and he's got it under control. So we don't need to worry about anything that lies ahead, as long as we trust that God has our best interest at heart.

Just like the train tracks, life can seem dark and scary. We don't know what's ahead. But with God as our leader we can trust that he knows where he's going and where we are going too.

Megan Schrank, a junior at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is a member at St. John, Wauwatosa.



Obituaries

Vera Genevieve Von Haden 1921-2007

Vera Von Haden (nee Gruen) was born Aug. 23, 1921, in Wilton, Wis. She died July 31, 2007, in Baraboo, Wis.

She taught for 24 years at St. John, Baraboo, Wis.

She is preceded in death by her husband, Gerhardt; one brother; one sister; and two nephews. She is survived by one son, three grandsons, one granddaughter, 10 great-grandchildren, one sister, and many nieces and nephews.

Lyle Frederick Schalow 1937-2007

Lyle Schalow was born May 6, 1937, in Stratford, Wis. He died Oct. 29, 2007, in La Crosse, Wis.

A 1963 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at St. John's, Carson/Trinity, Flasher, N.D.; Immanuel, Tyler/Zion, Island Lake Township, Minn.; and St. Peter, Chaseburg/St. Peter, Hamburg Township, Wis.

He is preceded in death by his first wife, Edna. He is survived by his wife, Mary; four sons; two daughters; four grandsons; and five granddaughters.

Arthur John Meier 1912-2007

Arthur Meier was born May 24, 1912, in Rural Ormsby, Minn. He died Nov. 5, 2007, in Phoenix, Ariz.

A 1933 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at St. John, Sleepy Eye, Minn., and at East Fork, Whiteriver, Ariz.

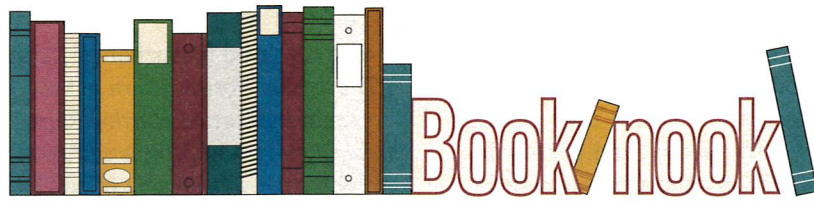
He is preceded in death by his first wife, Doris, and one daughter. He is survived by his wife, Wilma; two sons; four daughters; 30 grandchildren; 36 great-grandchildren; and three great-great-grandchildren.

Keith Frederick Bender 1934-2007

Keith Bender was born Dec. 8, 1934, in Rockford, Ill. He died Nov. 15, 2007, in Springfield, Mo.

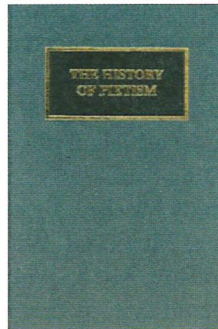
He served as pastor at Lincoln Heights, Des Moines, Iowa, and Zion, Morgan, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Kay; two sons; two daughters; one brother; 13 grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.



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

The History of Pietism



\$38.50

This book is not meant for light reading. It is really for the person who is ready for an in-depth review of how Pietism came to be such a force in Lutheran Christianity.

The History of Pietism, written in German by Heinrich Schmid in 1863 and recently translated by James Langebartels, pastor at Christ, Imlay City, Mich., contains a veritable blizzard of names, dates, places, and problems. It traces the beginnings of Pietism with Spener's disillusionment with the current condition of Christianity in Germany. Spener rightly condemned many problems within Lutheranism, but he could not contain—or maybe did not want to contain—the move-

ment he loosed. Others took his thoughts further—to the point where you could not tell the difference between pietistic Lutherans and the Quakers, enthusiasts, millennialists, and other false teachers. The book also shows how letting in a little heresy quickly opens the door to other false doctrines.

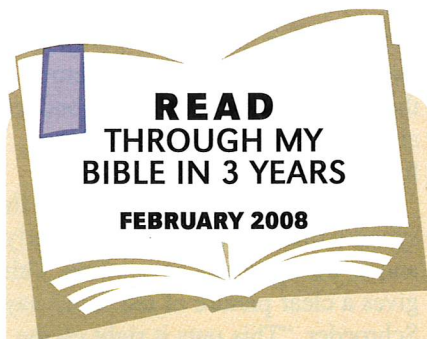
When others realized that there were serious problems with Pietism, they failed to be judicious or brotherly in how they confronted Spener, Francke, and others in the movement. They made many leaps of logic and personal attacks. This is a great book for someone to read or find out how not to con-

front heresy—that is until Valentine Ernst Loescher came on the scene. Loescher finally was able to get to the root of the problems within Pietism and presented his arguments against Pietism in a manner that was effective, scriptural, and brotherly.

Pietism is still with us today, though maybe not as openly as before within our circles. Our old Adam is always looking for ways to convince us that we either help make ourselves right with God or that our piety is what makes us acceptable to God. Confusing gospel and law is something we need to fight at all times. This book helps us look at previous heresies and teaches us how to properly defend Christianity.

I would recommend the book to the pastor or layperson who can take the time to work through it.

Mark Bannan, Salem, Owosso, Michigan



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|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. Luke 1:1-25 | 16. Lk. 6:37-49 |
| 2. Lk. 1:26-38 | 17. Lk. 7:1-17 |
| 3. Lk. 1:39-56 | 18. Lk. 7:18-35 |
| 4. Lk. 1:57-80 | 19. Lk. 7:36-8:3 |
| 5. Lk. 2:1-20 | 20. Lk. 8:4-21 |
| 6. Lk. 2:21-40 | 21. Lk. 8:22-39 |
| 7. Lk. 2:41-52 | 22. Lk. 8:40-56 |
| 8. Lk. 3:1-22 | 23. Lk. 9:1-17 |
| 9. Lk. 3:23-4:13 | 24. Lk. 9:18-36 |
| 10. Lk. 4:14-30 | 25. Lk. 9:37-56 |
| 11. Lk. 4:31-44 | 26. Genesis 1, 2 |
| 12. Lk. 5:1-11 | 27. Gen. 3 |
| 13. Lk. 5:12-26 | 28. Gen. 4 |
| 14. Lk. 5:27-6:11 | 29. Gen. 5 |
| 15. Lk. 6:12-36 | |

First-time meeting for pen pals of 31 years

We met for the first time in October after being pen pals for 31 years.

It started in 1976. A time before e-mail, cell phones, and personal computers. A time when two little girls loved to write with pen(cil) and paper. One 10-year-old girl was from Webberville, Mich. The other

10-year-old lived in Anchorage, Alaska.

The Junior Northwestern, a kids' version of the former *Northwestern Lutheran* magazine, got us started. On the back page was an area titled "I want a pen pal." I put my name into the mix and asked for a pen pal.

I received letters from approximately 25 to 30 girls and responded to each of them. But over the months and years almost all failed to keep writing back—all except Wendy Mosher, a member at Memorial, Williamston, Mich., who thought that my description was a perfect match for her despite the miles that separated us.

We initiated our friendship by talking about families and schools, sports and friends. Years passed.

College degrees, jobs, boyfriends, marriage, children. Life (and death) happened . . . and through it all we maintained our friendship. We never heard the sound of each other's voices; we preferred to write rather than talk on the phone. We tried to get together once or twice, but schedules conflicted.

Finally on Oct. 28, 2007, the Lord opened the gateway. We hugged each other for the first time in Tomah, Wis., and hunkered down for a meal. Six hours later we parted, after sharing many memories and building new ones.

What is it that kept us connected for more than 30 years? We love to write; we love to run; we love our families; but most of all we love the same God. We share a common faith that binds us to one another in life here on earth and the life eternal that is to come. Praise God for his wonderful blessings of friendship!

Kathy Hester



Kathy Hester (left) and Wendy Lutzke. These women met for the first time in October 2007 after being pen pals for more than 30 years. Kathy is a member at Faith, Anchorage, Alaska. Wendy is a member at Bethany, Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

Synodical Council meets, consolidates debts

WELS President Mark Schroeder led his first full Synodical Council meeting in November.

"What's most striking is the complexity of the issues that the Synodical Council is responsible for dealing with," says Schroeder. "What's also striking is the commitment that these men show in wanting to do what is very best for their synod as it carries out its work. Their faith and their love for the Lord shine through in what they're doing."

One of the bigger decisions the council made was to approve a proposal to consolidate the synod's four debts, totaling \$22.4 million, into one single debt.

This consolidation helps reduce confusion over the variety of interest rates and a feeling among some that the Board for Ministerial Education was carrying a disproportionate share,

\$15.1 million, of the debt. Now the entire debt will be one line item in the synod's general operating budget and will be repaid over 10 years at four percent interest.

"The convention wanted to see the synod's finances presented as clearly and as transparently as possible. This gives a clear picture of the debt," says Schroeder. "This puts it right on the table—this is our debt and this is how we're going to service it. It also gives us a very clear target as we try with the Lord's help to eliminate that debt completely."

The four debts included \$7.3 million for costs associated with the amalgamation of Dr. Martin Luther College and Northwestern College, and Martin Luther Prep School and Northwestern Prep in 1995; \$7.3 million for operational borrowing for 2001-03; \$6.9 million for the boiler

house at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minn., and the science wing at Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, Mich.; and \$900,000 for a dormitory at Luther Preparatory School in Watertown, Wis.

In other business, the Synodical Council

- established a compensation committee to review synodical salaries,
- approved a proposal to conduct an independent study of WELS' program for health care coverage, and
- released funds for the MLC chapel project (see p. 24).

In February, the Synodical Council will look at an updated support forecast for the 2008-09 fiscal year and determine if any budget cuts will need to be made. The council also will hear a progress report from the newly formed Ad Hoc Commission.

New program helps LCCA members live their faith

Strengthening faith and improving lives is the two-fold purpose of the new Lutheran Health and Development Program, a program that supports the gospel ministry of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa (LCCA) and the Lutheran Mission Zambia.

“It is the aim of this ministry to enable, support, strengthen, and provide opportunities for Christians [in the LCCA] to live their lives of faith in their congregations and communities,” says Jason Paltzer, program director. “At the same time, we provide a bridge to the gospel ministry by giving outlets for members to share their faith with others.”

This program was an outgrowth of another program developed by the Central Africa Medical Mission in 1998. The initial program focused on basic health education and disease prevention. Paltzer expanded it in 2003 to include helping with community development programs such as digging bore holes and counseling people with HIV. Now the program works to train LCCA members to conduct these and other programs on their own.

“Many times we are just a conduit and enabler for what people already know they want to do or can do, be it home-based care or becoming a better leader in the church,” says Paltzer.

The program uses several avenues to prepare lay members for service:

- The Literacy Program trains educated lay members to establish, organize, facilitate, and supervise literacy circles in their congregations. “Many women in our congregation (more than 40 percent) are not able to read and write, a basic skill that provides confidence, empowerment, and opportunities to get more involved with Bible studies and worship,” says Paltzer. Five groups have been developed so far, with a goal of 20 by July 2008. Says Paltzer, “One pastor noted that more members are bringing their Bibles to church and participating in Bible study.”
- Home-Based Care focuses on teaching congregational teams how to care for people suffering from HIV, tuberculosis, cancer, or other terminal diseases. Scripture-based spiritual counseling is emphasized along with caregiving skills and basic health training.
- The Peer Education Program reaches out to the youth in Zambia by training youth in the LCCA to facilitate

discussion groups and presentations with their peers in the areas of sexuality, relationships, HIV, and alcohol.

- The Seminary Nutrition Project offers cooking classes and nutrition education to the wives of the seminary students.

The program is also piloting a small-grants project that gives funding to congregational groups who have other ideas for reaching out in their congregation and community. One youth group in Lusaka started a tailoring program to give youth a productive way to spend their time. Another congregation planted a vegetable garden, bought an ox cart, and now delivers firewood and food to the elderly, homebound, and chronically ill people in its community.



The Lutheran Health and Development Program gave the congregation of St. Timothy, Mfuwe, a grant to dye batik fabric. Income from the sale of this fabric goes to assist orphans with school uniforms, food, and clothing.

Four people work for this program—Paltzer; his wife, Amanda; and two national lay workers. The program is under the Africa Administrative Committee of the Board for World Missions, but projects are funded by special gifts.

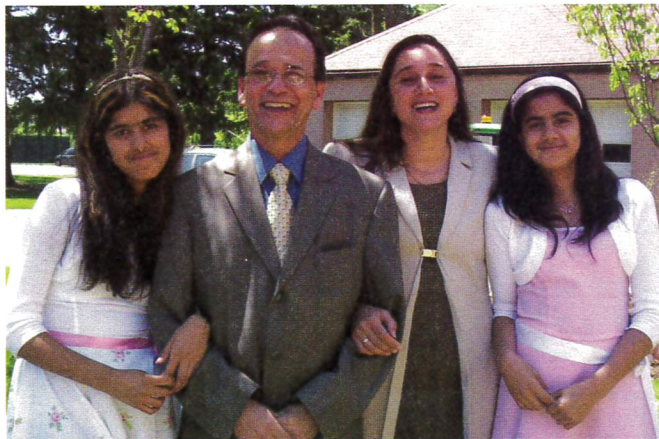
Says Paltzer, “[LCCA] members may not have money but they do have their time, bodies, and hearts of Christ-centered compassion to share with others. . . . This program needs to be founded in the faith of the members, to strengthen that faith, and to use that same Christ-centered faith to address the various spiritual, social, and physical issues facing our members here in Zambia.”

Learn more about this program at www.healthlcca.com.

WELS' Hispanic outreach continues to grow

According to estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau, more than 42 million people of Hispanic origin currently live in the United States (www.census.gov). "Hispanic ministry is a necessity," says Mel Schuler, associate administrator for WELS Home Missions. "We've been commissioned to spread the gospel to all nations, and those nations are coming to our neighborhood."

Despite the large number of Hispanic people in this country, and a much smaller number of called workers who are fluent in Spanish, "the Spanish ministry in WELS has grown quite well," says Schuler.



Germán Novelli, pastor at Gethsemane and St. Peter, Milwaukee, Wis., and his family. In addition to providing weekly worship services in Spanish, Novelli also helps revise and modify Spanish materials and resources for use in Milwaukee's Hispanic ministry.

Part of this growth can be attributed to Cristo Palabra de Vida, WELS' national ministry to Hispanics and Latinos, which exists to promote and assist the Spanish ministries of WELS. Currently, more than 50 WELS congregations are starting or already involved in Hispanic ministry in the United States.

In Wisconsin, a group of five congregations joined forces to reach out to the large Hispanic population on Milwaukee's south side. Gethsemane, St. Peter, Christ, St. Andrew, and Centennial began Ministerios Palabra de Vida (Word of Life ministries) in 2005. Together, these congregations are reaching more people with the gospel.

One example of this collaboration is the Family Altars program, led by Pastor Martin Valleskey, coordinator of Ministerios Palabra de Vida; and Germán Novelli, Spanish pastor at Gethsemane and St. Peter. Before inviting people to church, these pastors go into peoples' homes and lead Bible studies. "There are a number of people that have started in those Family Altars in-home Bible studies, and they've become members now," says Valleskey.

This personal aspect of the ministry is supplemented by

fellowship opportunities. Last October, for example, a joint Reformation service was held at Risen Savior, Milwaukee. More than 175 people attended the service, which was also broadcast online around the world. "The Reformation service was huge," says Valleskey. "The idea is just to get more Hispanic Lutherans together for fellowship, and also around God's Word and the sacraments."

Another way these churches are bringing people together is by tailoring worship services to the language needs of its members. "A lot of the kids speak English better than Spanish, so during the Spanish service we have a kid's sermon in English," says Valleskey. "We can maintain the traditions of the Hispanic culture while at the same time helping the kids adapt to the new culture they're in."

As this ministry progresses, more Hispanic people are becoming involved. Valleskey hopes that in the future, there will be a Hispanic worker at each of the five churches. "The [overall] goal is to have the Hispanic groups take charge of their ministry," he says.

Schuler says the same applies to Hispanic outreach on a larger scale: "We want [people from the Hispanic culture] to tell us, rather than us telling them, what is needed, how to proceed, and where we should go."

Taped Services changes name to Media Worship

The Taped Services Program, a non-budgetary program of the Board for Home Missions, now will distribute worship services on CD and DVD as well as on the traditional audiocassettes and videotapes to people who are unable to worship in a WELS congregation. The change came about in an effort to keep up-to-date with current technology as well as to cut costs. To reflect this change, the program has changed its name to Media Worship.

Media Worship sends out video recordings of services at Trinity,

Brillion, Wis., and St. Mark, Watertown, Wis., and audio recordings from Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis., and Emanuel, New London, Wis. About 100 people receive materials at no cost.

People using this service include WELS members in the military, those who live overseas, and those who aren't in close proximity to a WELS church.

"As an over-the-road truck driver I am often away from home on Sunday mornings," writes Steve Morrison, from Medina, Ohio. "I can play the

tapes while I am working and sometimes replay them several times."

Eugene Wempner, who was stationed in Okinawa, and his family shared their tapes: "We have been receiving the videotaped services and sharing them with our group that meets every Sunday here. Thank you for your support of us and others who are far from a WELS church but wish to continue to worship the Lord in their faith."

For more information, contact Jean Peterman at jean.peterman@sab.wels.net; 414-256-3286.

Aid in aftermath of California fires

WELS Committee on Relief traveled to southern California in November to assess the needs of WELS members and congregations affected by wildfires. Fortunately, no members were injured, and no WELS churches were destroyed.

“The Lord’s protective hand was evident,” says Phil Schupmann, chairman of WELS Committee on Relief. “We saw firsthand evidence of fires that just missed our churches. Many times if the winds blew just slightly in a different direction this house or that church would have most likely burned to the ground.”

The Committee on Relief contributed \$10,000 to two churches to help with immediate needs. “The initial support that was received helped the congregations distribute funds in their church and to people locally,” says Schupmann. “The two congregations we helped did have members that had property loss, but for the most part, everyone we visited out there had insurance.”

Moving forward, the Committee on Relief plans to focus on long-term support for the areas affected. “Most importantly we will work with local congregations to find and use opportunities to share the love and forgiveness of Christ as they go about the work of providing humanitarian aid in their communities,” says Schupmann.

In 2007, the Committee on Relief provided more than \$800,000 in aid to disaster victims around the world. For more information, visit www.welsrelief.net.



One of the homes destroyed by the California wildfires.

Where are they now?

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

In March 2004, Beth Leverage shared the story of her son’s schizophrenia.

Here’s a recap

At age 14, Aaron Leverage began exhibiting signs of mental illness and eventually was diagnosed with schizophrenia. His parents struggled with why God would allow this to happen to their son who was considering becoming a missionary. After struggling with the disease for six years, Aaron spent most of his time in a care facility on medication.

So what is happening now?

Aaron’s story took a dramatic turn on Jan. 29, 2006. After a visit with his family, Aaron and Beth were driving back to the facility where he was living. Aaron became agitated and bolted from the car when Beth pulled over. Running across a busy highway, Aaron was struck by a car. Beth watched in horror as her son’s body flew through the air and hit the pavement.

Miraculously, Aaron’s leather jacket cushioned his head as he fell, saving his life. Aaron sustained multiple leg fractures and severe knee ligament damage, but his prognosis was good. His family left the hospital that evening thanking God for helping them weather one more storm with Aaron.

The next day, though, as Aaron’s family waited to hear the results of his knee surgery, they discovered that the storm was still raging. During surgery, Aaron developed a cerebral fat embolism, which caused him to slip into a coma.

Neurologists concluded that the embolism caused such severe brain damage that Aaron would be in a vegetative state for the rest of his life. Aaron’s parents were concerned that he would never regain consciousness. They were encouraged to issue a “do not resuscitate” order.

However, the Great Physician had other plans. Aaron slowly awoke from his coma and his family saw encouraging signs that his brain may not have been damaged as badly as the neurologists believed. Yet Aaron was denied admittance to many facilities because he was deemed incapable of rehabilitation.

Aaron’s family fought until they found a facility that believed that Aaron could heal. Therapists worked with him to develop his physical and mental strength. Their success—and Aaron’s—can be measured by the high school diploma that he recently received. Far from a vegetative state, Aaron is devouring books and taking college classes to obtain his associate’s degree. Although he still struggles with physical side effects from the accident, Aaron made a wonderful recovery.



Aaron Leverage enjoys his first cheeseburger after his accident.

Perhaps even more miraculous than Aaron’s mental and physical recovery is his recovery from the schizophrenia that plagued him since 1999. As Beth explains, when Aaron’s brain was healing from the embolism, the part of his brain that was malfunctioning and causing the schizophrenia was also healed. She says that Aaron’s schizophrenia is almost entirely gone.

“We have our son back because God performed this awesome miracle,” says Beth.

Hear a personal account of this story from Mark and Beth Leverage on <http://streams.wels.net>.

Nicole Balza

Meet the editorial staff—uncut

Ever ask yourself, "Who are these people who write for Forward in Christ magazine?" Through this series you can find out. Read on:

He fishes in the bayous of Louisiana. He gets nervous before preaching. He's lived in Africa and survived a hurricane. His favorite part of being a pastor is studying the Bible. His name is David Sternhagen, and he is pastor at Crown of Life in New Orleans. He is also a new contributing editor for *Forward in Christ*. (Look for his first article on page 33.)

Sternhagen spent his childhood on a dairy farm in Florence, Wis. "We got into some trouble, you know, but not too much," he says, referring to the adventures he and his four siblings had. After watching his older brother prepare for the ministry, Sternhagen decided to follow suit. "Even as a little kid, I liked reading the Bible. It was such a fascinating thing for me, just to read it and to understand it and put it all together," he says.

After graduating from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Sternhagen served in Illinois before taking a call to Zambia, Africa. "It was one of those things that really changes your life," he says. "You read the story of Pentecost, and you think it must have been amazing to be there when so many people were coming to the Lord to be baptized. But when I went to Africa, that's exactly what was happening there. The people were coming faster than we could handle." Sternhagen says Zambia was also a good place to raise his four children, one of which was born in Africa. "It changed the kids. They have a different view of life, and it helped broaden their perspectives."



Dave Sternhagen (fourth from left), pastor at Crown of Life in New Orleans, vacations with his family in Colorado in 2007.

In 1986, Sternhagen accepted a call to Crown of Life. Perhaps one of the most trying experiences for the congregation was when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005. "It could have destroyed us, actually. Most of the churches in our neighborhood here haven't rebuilt; they are just gone," he says. "But we've rebuilt. We've committed ourselves to this neighborhood as we have in the past. And with the help of God we'll see how it turns out."

Sternhagen says throughout his ministry he's relied on the words God spoke to an uncertain Gideon in Judges 6:14. "The truth is, none of us in this ministry are able to do this job," he says. "But the Lord says, 'Go in the strength that you have . . . Am I not sending you?' And as long as we have the Lord behind us, with his strength, we should be able to [accomplish] what God wants us to do."

New chapel planned for Martin Luther College

Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., is moving ahead with its plans to build a chapel on campus. Construction will begin in the summer of 2008 and be completed by the start of the 2009-10 school year.

"There is a desire [on campus] to be able to gather in a worship space that reflects the gospel of Jesus and the power of the means of grace through its architecture and art/furnishings," says Mark Zarling, MLC president.

The \$7.5 million chapel and organ will be funded entirely from designated gifts given as part of the synod's 150th anniversary thank offering in 2000, from individual gifts for the chapel since that time, and from interest earned on those gifts. The Synodical Council released these funds to the col-

lege at its meeting in November 2007.

"The project is moving forward now because we were able to bring the cost of constructing the chapel in line with the amount of money that is available for the chapel project," says Peter Kruschel, administrator for the Board for Ministerial Education. The college will be working with Plunkett Raysich Architects to construct the approximately 20,000 sq. ft. building that will seat 1,000 worshippers.

Students currently worship in the school's auditorium, an all-purpose space that also houses concerts, lectures, and plays. "Martin Luther College is the only school in the [ministerial education] system that doesn't have an appointed, designated space for worship," says Kruschel. "It serves nearly

all future called workers, and yet it is somewhat limited to model styles and forms of worship to these students."

According to Zarling, Martin Luther College and its students are grateful to the people who have given thank offerings to be used for a chapel: "It is an encouragement to students preparing for the public ministry to know that God's people are concerned for their growth in faith through the daily use of the gospel in chapel and worship."

Zarling continues, "It is exciting to have a visible testimony on campus that demonstrates to all—students and faculty, staff and visitors—that Jesus and his Word are at the very center of our campus existence."

View drawings of the proposed chapel at www.wels.net/jump/chapel.

District news

Michigan

Three hundred members of **Good Shepherd, Alma, Mich.**, gathered to dedicate their new facility on Sept. 30, 2007. Unfortunately, a temporary occupancy permit was not issued for the building until 10 days after the dedication, so members held the service in a rented circus-style tent. Larry Houghton, member at Good Shepherd, says, "Perhaps Isaiah had Good Shepherd in mind when he wrote, 'Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes.'"

Northern Wisconsin

Members of St. Paul, Algoma, Wis., are making quilts for Northside Ministries, a WELS ministry to the economically deprived in Milwaukee, Wis. Previous quilt recipients include a mission in Mexico and victims of Hurricane Katrina. To date, this congregation has sent more than 250 quilts to support WELS mission efforts.

Southeastern Wisconsin

Ned Goede, principal at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, traveled to Nepal Oct. 1-18, 2007. Goede and Paul Hartman, coordinator of WELS Multi-Language Publications, presented a 10-day workshop to more than 40

Christians in Nepal. With the help of three interpreters, 60 Bible stories were shared with workshop attendees.

Randy Watts, fourth-grade teacher at David's Star Lutheran School, Jackson, Wis., was selected to conduct field research on whales with world-renowned scientists in Massachusetts last summer. Watts' experience was part of the JASON project, which provides multimedia science curriculum and professional development to teachers across the country.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

AZ-CA—Reformation, San Diego, Calif., celebrated its 45th anniversary on Oct. 28, 2007.

Rev. Lowell Smith celebrated 44 years in the ministry in December 2007.

Rev. Donald Seifert celebrated 44 years in the ministry in November 2007.

California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, Calif., celebrated its 30th anniversary on Oct. 20, 2007.

MI—Wanda Ogg, organist at Faith, Harrison, Mich., celebrated 61 years of musical service in November 2007.

The district reporters for this month are: MI—John Eich; NW—Joel Lillo; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; CA—Hermann John.

WELS news briefs

WELS Church Extension Fund 866-511-7793; cef@sab.wels.net

Audit results show that WELS Church Extension Fund (CEF) closed the 2006-07 fiscal year with more than \$70 million in member investments—up about 10 percent from a year ago. In cooperation with WELS Board for Home Missions, WELS CEF completed 24 construction loans totaling nearly \$28 million during the past fiscal year. In addition, a dozen new projects were approved. Individuals, congregations, or WELS-affiliated organizations may invest with WELS CEF, a self-supporting, not-for-profit, corporate affiliate of WELS. Those investments allow WELS CEF to provide loans—primarily to mission congregations—so they can purchase land, renovate, or build new worship facilities.

For information or to view an offering circular, visit www.wels.net/cef.

Ministry of Christian Giving 800-827-5482; mcg@sab.wels.net

In January the Ministry of Christian Giving will send materials for the fourth Walking Together Sunday to every congregation. This year's materials will focus on the continued cooperation between home mission and world mission fields—and the role the Pastoral Studies Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has in supporting both. The DVD presentation will tell the story of Paul Thao, a Hmong pastor in Appleton, Wis.

Walking Together Sunday was started in 2005 to tell members about the work that we carry out as a synod and to celebrate what has been accomplished by the grace of God. Materials include a DVD, brochures, promotional posters, and worship resources.

Information about Walking Together Sunday is available at www.wels.net/jump/walkingtogether.

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

Southeastern Wisconsin



WELS National Choral Festival was held Nov. 9-11, 2007, at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis. More than 450 singers from 22 area Lutheran high schools performed together in a pops and a sacred concert. The 2007 festival marked the 40th anniversary of WELS National Choral Festival. Pictured are singers from the Echoes of Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis., performing at the pops concert.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

- Krause, Thomas G.**, to Friedens, Kenosha, Wis.
- Meyer, David J.**, to Good Shepherd, Beloit, Wis.
- Siegel, Randall S.**, to retirement
- Uhlhorn, Ronald W.**, to Light of the Valley, Layton, Utah
- Werre, Jonathan D.**, to Good Shepherd, Sioux Falls, S.D.

Teachers

- Averbeck, Robert L.**, to retirement
- Bare, Andrew M.**, to Holy Trinity, New Hope, Minn.
- Becker, Patricia A.**, to retirement
- Benrud, Jana L.**, to First, La Crosse, Wis.
- Colantonio, Suzanne M.**, to St. John, Juneau, Wis.
- Dable, Paul D.**, to retirement
- Frick, Beverly E.**, to retirement
- Garbe, Robert W.**, to retirement
- Isch, John R.**, to retirement
- Knobloch, Janet S.**, to Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis.
- Lorenzen, Carroll J.**, to retirement
- Meyer, Edward H.**, to retirement
- Olsen, Carol J.**, to retirement
- Polack, Brigitte**, to retirement
- Rothfuss, Catherine**, to St. John, Bay City, Mich.
- Schwartz, Armin J.**, to St. Mark's, Watertown, Wis.
- Shonts, Lynn M.**, to Christ, Oakley, Mich.
- Steinke, Gretchen**, to The Shepherd's Lambs Child Care, New Hope, Minn.
- Thoms, Gunther H.**, to retirement
- Timm, Elaine K.**, to retirement
- Ungemach, Carrie L.**, to Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis.

COLLOQUY NOTICE

Dr. Paul Johnston, Norman, Okla., formerly a pastor in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, has requested a colloquy for the purpose of serving in WELS pastoral ministry. Correspondence related to this request should be addressed to Pastor Vilas Glaeske, President, South Central District-WELS, 565 W El Dorado Dr, Scroggins Texas 75480; 903-860-7411; welsccd@hotmaill.com.

NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS AND PASTORS

Thank you for supporting the ministry WELS carries out on behalf of all congregations. We ask that you continue to mail your Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) deposit and its processing coupon to our bank lock box, which provides effective and efficient deposit processing for the synod.

The last business day of each month is the reporting cutoff date for CMO deposit. For the deposit to be included in reported receipts for the month, your CMO must be received in the synod's bank lock box on or before the last business day. An exception is made for December offerings. Gifts received by the bank lock box up to and including Jan. 9, 2008, will be credited as 2007 CMO. Be sure that the remittance is accompanied by the coupon and is clearly labeled as "December" offerings. Thank you for your assistance.

Todd Poppe, chief financial officer and treasurer

ANNIVERSARIES

Alpine, Calif.—Alpine (50). Jan 20. Worship, 4 P.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. 619-445-5951; alpinelutheran@mindspring.com.

COMING EVENTS

WELS National Brass Festival concert—Jan. 13, 3 P.M. Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis. Focus on music of Samuel Scheidt and Charles Wesley. Patricia Backhaus, 414-643-5116, cornetpat@aol.com.

Faith Stepping Stones training seminar—Jan. 19. St. John, Dakota, Minn. Sponsor, Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service. 877-205-2443; fss@wlcfs.org.

To Rejoice is a Choice Women's Retreat—Feb. 9. Hoenecke Hall, St. Lucas School, Kewaskum, Wis. Cost, \$15. Lynn Garvey, 262-626-4749.

CEO Men's Rally—March 7-8. Brian Lampe, brianandtracey@tds.net. Web site, www.stpaulmuskego.org.

Lutheran Pioneer and Lutheran Girl Pioneer International Conventions—March 7-8. Cranberry Inn Lodge, Tomah, Wis. Lutheran Girl Pioneers, 608-781-5232, lgp@charterinternet.net. Lutheran Pioneers, 888-214-8225, lpoffice@tds.net.

Martin Luther College choir tour 2008—

- March 8—6 P.M., Grace, Glendale, Ariz.
- March 9—10:30 A.M., Peace, Cottonwood, Ariz.; 4 P.M., Christ, Prescott Valley, Ariz.
- March 10—6:30 P.M., Emmanuel, Tempe, Ariz.
- March 11—11 A.M., Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz.; 7 P.M., Redeemer, Tucson, Ariz.
- March 12—7 P.M., Christ our Redeemer, El Paso, Tex.
- March 14—7 P.M., Torreón mission, Torreón, Mexico
- March 15—Mini-concert, Saragosa Sur (Torreón mission), Mexico; 7 P.M., Monterrey, Mexico
- March 16—7 P.M., Our Savior, San Antonio, Tex.
- March 17—7 P.M., Holy Word, Austin, Tex.
- March 18—7 P.M., Victory of the Lamb, Katy, Tex.

- March 19—7 P.M., Abiding Word, Houston, Tex.

- March 30—3 P.M., St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn.

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

Today's Christian Women's Retreat—April 11-13. Radisson Hotel, Kalamazoo, Mich. Theme: "Keep me, keep me as the apple of your eye." Web site, www.tcw.org.

Lutheran Pioneer and Lutheran Girl Pioneer International Pinocar Derbies—April 19. Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis. Lutheran Girl Pioneers, 608-781-5232, lgp@charterinternet.net. Lutheran Pioneers, 888-214-8225, lpoffice@tds.net.

WELS Staff Ministers Conference—April 25-26. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. For registration materials, contact Mike Hennig, mhennig@ttha.org.

WELS-Church Librarians' Organization spring conference—April 26, 9:30 A.M. St. Paul's, Muskego, Wis. Cost, \$10. Joanne Weber, jaweber@wi.rr.com, 414-425-4225 or Howard Wilsman, hbwilsman511@sbcbglobalnet, 920-682-5351.

MLC, DMLC, and NWC Reunion Weekend—July 25-27. Site, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Celebrating five-year incremental class reunion (2003, 1998 and all previous classes ending in three or eight). Steve Balza, 507-217-1731; balzasj@mlc-wels.edu. Web site, www.mlc-wels.edu/home/alumni.

NAMES WANTED

McAllen/Harlingen/Brownsville/South Padre Island, Texas—Joel Sauer, 956-968-5228; pastorsauer@abswels.net.

Brattleboro, Vt./Keene, N.H.—Dan or Pam Meihak, meihaks@hughes.net.

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

English professors—Wisconsin Lutheran College, a Bible-based liberal arts college affiliated with WELS, is seeking candidates to teach English. Areas of expertise in descending order of importance would be composition, non-Western literature, and modern British literature. Membership in either WELS or the Evangelical Lutheran Synod is necessary for employment. Doctorate preferred. Send letter of interest, three letters of recommendation, and current Curriculum Vitae to Dr. Martin Moldenhauer in care of WLC, 8800 W Bluemound Rd, Milwaukee WI 53226.

To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@sub.wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date. View an updated bulletin board at www.wels.net/jump/bulletinboard and a calendar at www.wels.net/jump/calendar.

CHURCH ARCHITECTURE: An opportunity for change

Over the past 50 years, Antioch, Ill., has transformed from a sleepy resort town to a suburb of Chicago. To stay ahead of the growth curve, Faith in Antioch built a new facility in 2005.

"The old chancel communicated 1970s," says Aaron Christie, pastor at Faith since 1997.

In addition to an updated style, the congregation needed a space that would complement their music. "After two separate additions to the old sanctuary, we were worshipping in an acoustical nightmare," says Christie. "There was one area of the old church that the members affectionately called the 'penalty box.'"

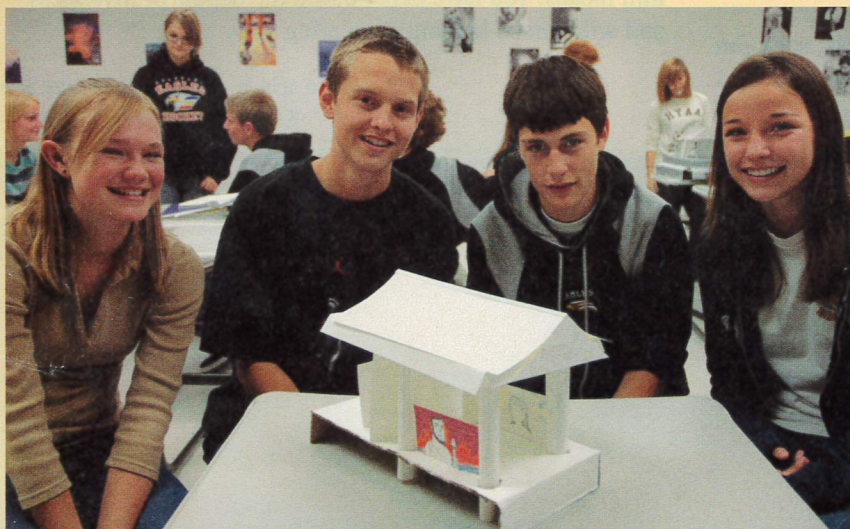
After hiring an acoustical consultant to help design the new sanctuary, the congregation now worships in a space with an updated design that

enhances music and provides plenty of room for members and guests.

"What are the results? Worship now rings!" says Christie. "The new chancel communicates Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. . . . Attendance is up significantly since our move. . . . And God's people now participate in worship at a level that was unattainable in the old church."

Pastor Christie shares more about church architecture and how it shapes the people who use it on p. 10. Read more about the building project at Faith and other WELS congregations in the "Worship the Lord" newsletter, online at www.wels.net/jump/worshipthelord.

Picture this



Sophomores at Rocky Mountain Lutheran High School, Northglenn, Colo., build temples in the style of the ancient Greeks as part of their world history class. Each group received five pieces of paper to build their temples, which had to contain all of the parts of the ancient temples. "The students gained an appreciation for the skill of the ancient Greeks," says Principal John Barenz.

Submitted by John Barenz

WORD SCRAMBLE

How much do you know about church architecture? Read the clues below and unscramble the terms to find out.

1. VENA

The central part of a church, extending from the narthex to the chancel and flanked by aisles.

2. AETNXHR

An entrance hall leading to the nave of a church.

3. HECLANC

The space around the altar of a church for the clergy and sometimes the choir, often enclosed by a lattice or railing.

4. PEAS

A semicircular or polygonal projection of a building, often domed.

5. PRIES

A structure or formation, such as a steeple, that tapers to a point at the top.

6. TLAAR

An elevated structure before which religious ceremonies may be conducted.

7. PENTRAST

The transverse part of a cruciform church, crossing the nave at right angles.

8. PUCALO

A vaulted roof or ceiling.

Definitions from The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 3rd ed. (Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996).

ANSWERS:

- | | |
|-------------|------------|
| 8. Cupola | 4. Apse |
| 7. Transept | 3. Chancel |
| 6. Altar | 2. Narthex |
| 5. Spire | 1. Nave |

Send pictures to **Picture This**, *Forward in Christ*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; [fic@sab.wels.net](mailto:pic@sab.wels.net). On a separate sheet, give us information about the photo. Those whose photos are chosen will receive a small gift.

Loneliness

Loneliness can sneak into life at almost predictable times — after the death of a loved one, a move to another location, a new job amid strange surroundings and people who seem distant, an unexpected end to a relationship, a spouse being deployed to Iraq. Loneliness can also invade for no understandable reason when your life seems normal to everyone except yourself. You feel blue and alone. You believe that no one understands you or your situation in life, your emptiness, your aloneness.

The good and bad of loneliness

At times it is good to be alone, to live with yourself, to make the most of your time of loneliness, to pray and meditate on God's love and forgiveness and the truth that in Jesus you are his new creation. You come away refreshed and renewed. Page through the hymnal and see how hymn writers dealt with difficulties of life that must have triggered loneliness. See how they found their strength in God and marched forward in his company and with his forgiving power. Then they saw a new life of opportunity to display his love to others.

But loneliness generally does not feel good. Whether you are single or married, it can infiltrate your thoughts and well-being and strip you of energy, creativity, and cheerfulness. It can lead you down a spiraling staircase to desperation or unhelpful relationships if left unchecked. This can turn into self-pity, which makes you miserable to yourself and those around you. Its prolonged agony is not good. It can turn to despair and danger, which may require medical help and further attention.

Walking out of loneliness into a new role

No matter what the cause of your loneliness, seek out a Christian who will listen to you and guide you toward God's help and that of others.

The comforting words of Jesus, "I am with you always," can lead you to sing "What a friend we have in Jesus," and turn your pathways back to stability and a productive walk with the Spirit. You know that God has helped in the past, that his help endures, and that he is a present, inspiring power in your life.

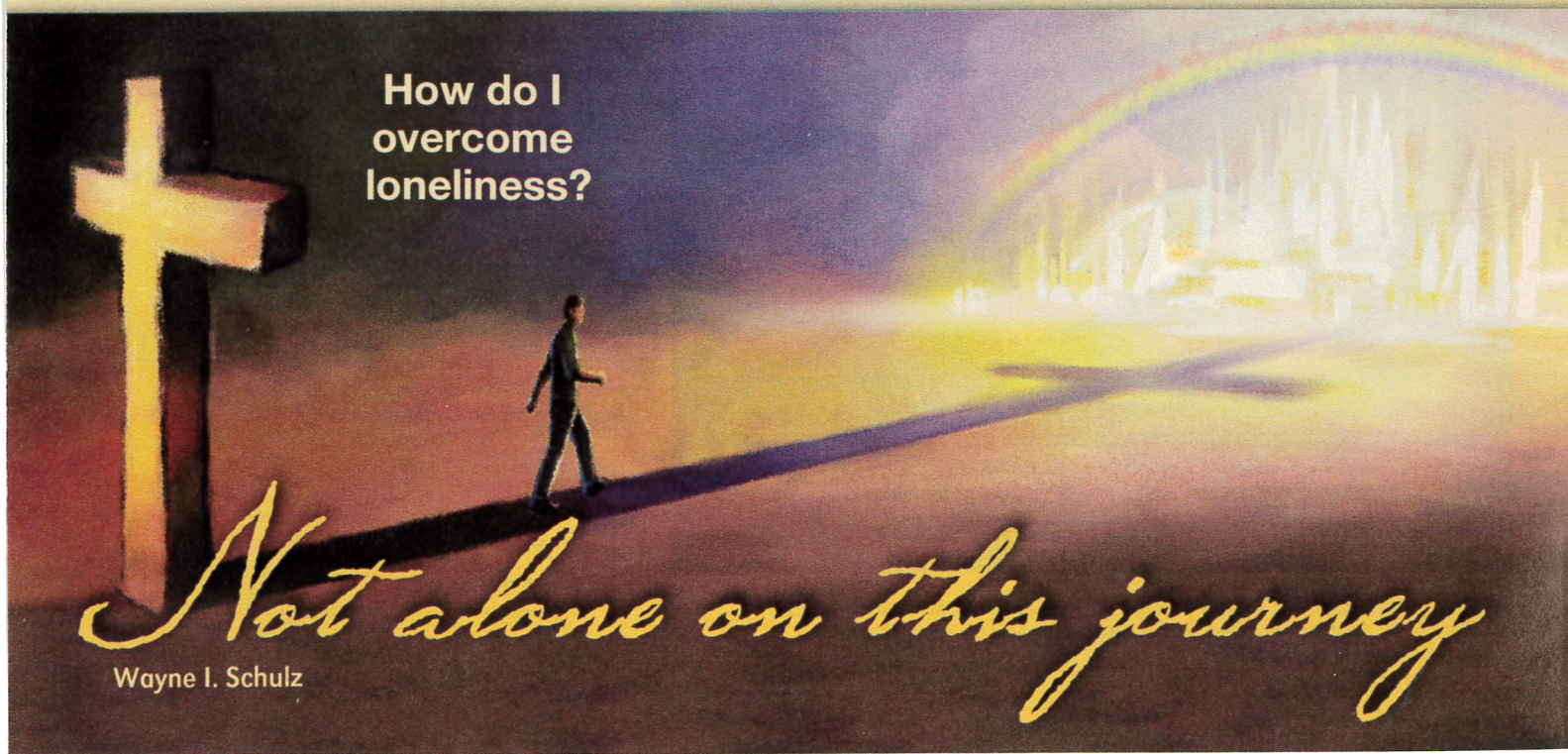
In Christ there is a ray of hope and brightness for you after your long night of loneliness. His hand lifts up your chin to see the sunshine of God's love. He gives you the encouragement to stand up and walk in the joy of a new day, a day in which you will see your life in a new perspective. It doesn't take long, but you soon realize that many around you have walked in your shoes and marched out of loneliness into the fullness of a productive life.

In Christ there is a ray of hope and brightness for you after your long night of loneliness.

After a season of loneliness God may use you to listen to another who is going down the path of loneliness. You know that you need to listen first. You do not blurt out all the answers before you listen to the questions and discover the emptiness that causes loneliness. Chances are that others have never been given an opportunity to express what makes them empty and alone. For you this becomes an opportunity for friendship, for caring, and for helping in a way that will lead to the proclamation of Jesus and what life in and with him means. You have experienced the depths of loneliness and will pursue helping in a caring way.

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

ILLUSTRATION: GOODSALT



How do I overcome loneliness?

Not alone on this journey

Wayne I. Schulz

Marlys Reid:



Trust God to direct your future

Instability and security issues are part of Marlys and Pieter Reid's daily life as they work with the Lutheran church in Indonesia.

Rachel Hartman

"We never know, from trip to trip, if we'll be allowed back," Marlys Reid says in a matter-of-fact tone. This uncertainty is part of daily life for Marlys and her husband, Pieter. They live in the United States but travel to Indonesia, where Pieter serves as an advisor to the Lutheran church there.

It wasn't always like this. In 1993, Pieter was called to Indonesia. The Reids moved there and lived in the country for a number of years. During their time in Indonesia, they were evacuated on numerous occasions. Then in 2001, following the Sept. 11 attacks, they returned to the United States. Now they serve the field long distance.

Time is of the essence

Dealing with instability and security issues may seem disheartening. But rather than view them as challenges, Marlys sees them as blessings. "We make the most of the time we spend there," she says. "We also make the most of the time we have in the United States."

The Lutheran church in Indonesia understands the challenges as well. There is a fervent desire among the members to spread the gospel. Marlys observes, "With as little as they have, it's amazing that their first and foremost concern is to reach out to others." Seven years ago, the church body had 300 members; today, there are more than 1,000. There are currently eight

pastors, 21 evangelists, and 25 congregations.

In October 2007, the church body held a synod convention. They decided to carry out the Great Commission in yet another way: congregations are working to start daughter congregations in their areas.

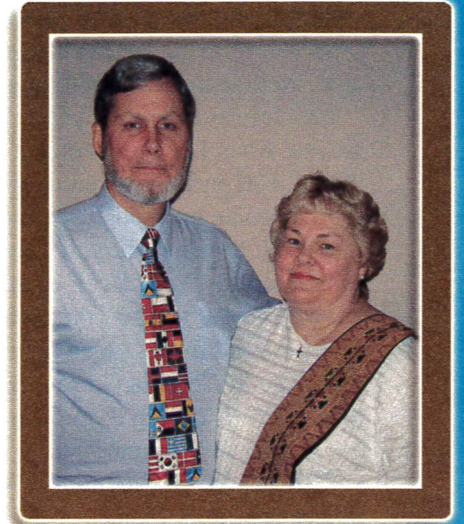
"They are so on fire for the Lord," Pieter observes. Part of this is because of the persecution Christians face there. One man began worship services in his parent's home. His actions were quickly met with retaliation, including having the home ransacked. Yet he didn't give up. Today, 100 people worship there.

Long-distance shepherding

While it's encouraging to hear about the great evangelism efforts in this mission field, isn't it hard to be so far away? Marlys says, "It's kind of like being parents. You step back and watch them grow." The only difference is that you're on the other side of the world.

And yet the church has matured. Leaders have stepped up. Members have recognized the importance of being in the Word. Forty-seven percent of adult members attend weekly Bible study. They understand that a strengthened faith will help them reach out to others.

Ultimately, the church and its souls are under God's guiding hand. On July 20, 2007, the Lutherans in Indonesia celebrated their 20th



anniversary as a church body. With all that's happened, Marlys notes, "It's truly a miracle that God has blessed that field with 20 years."

God continues to watch over the church work and its workers. When the Reids travel to Indonesia, their fellow Christians help direct them. "They're really our guardian angels," says Marlys. They lead the Reids to the safe areas. They also advise them on the best times of the year to enter the country.

What does the future hold? The Reids and the Lutheran church in Indonesia are in God's hands. His divine grace covers all aspects of mission work, at home and abroad. And he promises to look after the rest of his flock in the same way. Regardless of the world around us, on Christ we have a sure foundation.

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

Next month: Marlene Schlomer: We give thee but thine own

Sexually immoral. Homosexual. Unrepentant sinner. If you had told me or anyone that knew me back in my childhood that those terms would accurately describe my life for over a decade as an adult, you'd have been dismissed as crazy. Utter nonsense! Not Scott, the quiet, clean-cut, well-mannered, young man. He earned good grades in school, never was in any trouble, and was always respectful. He and his family were active in the church. A good Christian. While other teenagers his age were hanging out in mall parking lots, he spent his free time volunteering for his community rescue squad. A nice, well-rounded, Christian guy.

Fast forward about 13 years. I'll probably never forget the day when I heard my doctor speak the following words: "Scott, I'm afraid your intuition was correct. Your blood test has come back positive. You have HIV." He went on to say, "It appears that you have been 'positive' for quite awhile already. Your T-cell count is already below the point where we need to start you immediately on medications."

Where did things go so horribly wrong for me? How did a "good Christian" brought up in a loving Christian home—a Wisconsin Synod Christian home and church—go so astray? Why me?

The answer is something not too obscure or foreign to any one of us—sin.

Most boys go through childhood and early adolescence feeling more comfortable in the company of other boys. Girls? Well, they're the "enemy." That is, until, one day—for most boys—a light bulb turns on, and girls suddenly switch from being considered "yucky" to "wow . . . great." At least that's what I've been told by society and all the leading childhood development experts. It's the way things in development occur in a "perfect world."

Well, for me, that day never came. Don't get me wrong, I like girls and now women. I have many close female friends. But, for me, that instinctual attraction to people of the opposite sex never took place.

In high school, I remember making it all the way through my senior prom. After the prom, I asked my father, "Dad, why is it that I have no attraction to girls or desire to date them?" The response was, "Well, some people take longer to reach that point in life than others."

It wasn't until I left home for college that I really began to contemplate

this situation. I began to read and hear more about homosexuality in my day-to-day life. I even encountered some guys who openly identified themselves as being "gay." As a lifelong Christian, I knew what God said through the Bible about homosexuality. But after a while, I still became drawn to it.

I was angry at first. "Why me? Why am I not attracted to women? If I am to follow God's Word, only feeling an attraction to other guys, why is my 'lot in life' seemingly to be celibate? Why can't I know the joys and blessings of being married and having a family?"

I finally reached the point, after having met a number of people identifying themselves as being "gay," that I realized that I must be gay also. I remember that a number of "scientific studies" and "experts" came out around that time, stating that there were "congenital (physiological) reasons" for homosexuality, that people were indeed "born that way."

I succumbed to the mainstream way of thinking. "Well, if I was 'made this way,' then it must be okay with God. He made me that way." I rebelled and embraced the lifestyle. And that sinful lifestyle embraced me in return.

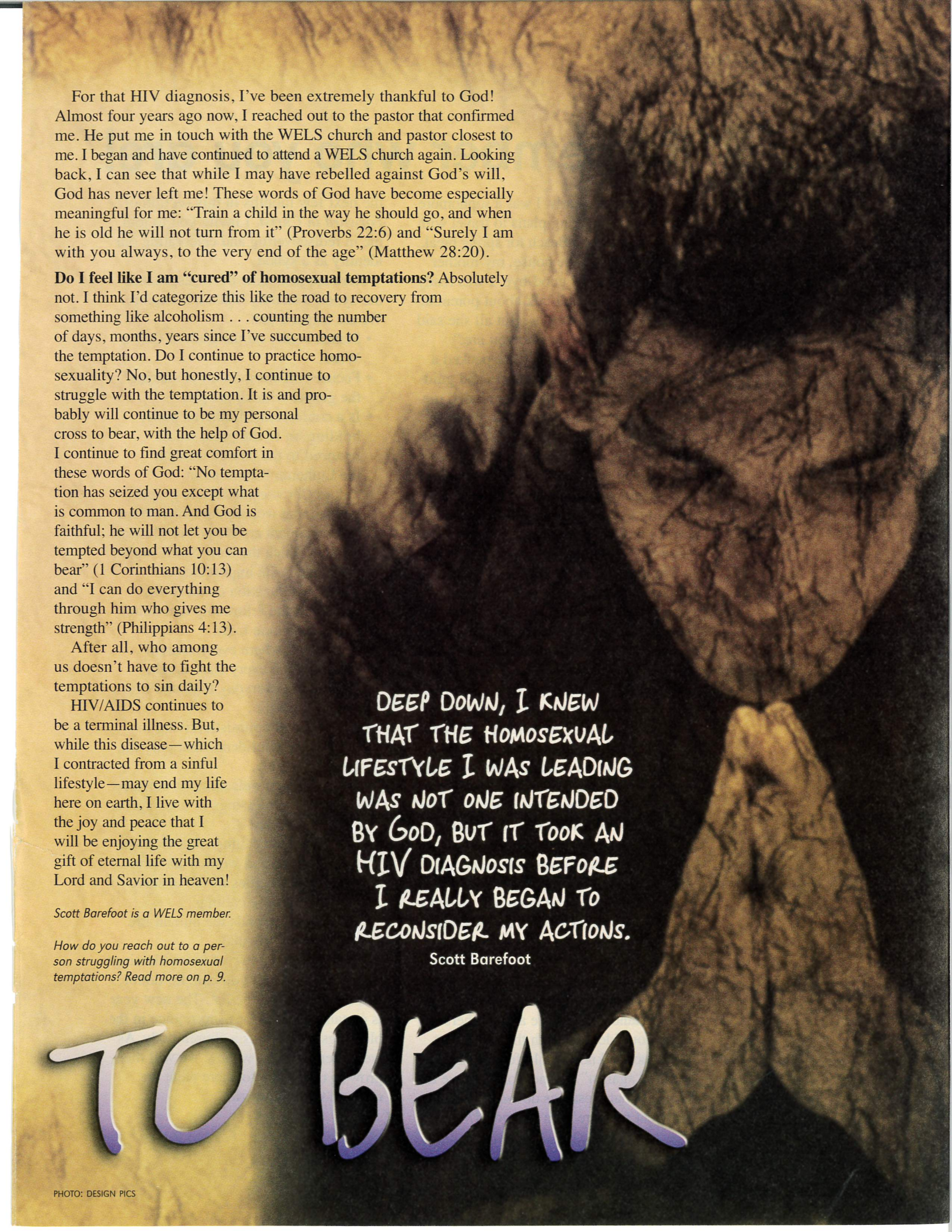
I'm not trying to be boastful, but I was always considered by others to be "halfway decent looking." Once, I began to submerge and surround myself in that subculture, I never had a shortage of friends and romantic interests. While before I always felt a bit abnormal or out-of-place, I quickly felt comfortable and became accepted—even desired—in the gay community.

At the same time, I felt that I hadn't left God behind. Believe it or not, I found myself befriended by other so-called "gay Christians." There are a number of churches that welcome homosexuals with open arms. They say that God is love, God doesn't judge, and we were all created by God the way we are. Their thinking says, "If you're gay, then that's the way God meant for you to be."

Even before the HIV diagnosis, I began to sense that all was not right with this lifestyle "choice." This was not God's will. I began to realize that there was no such thing as a true gay marriage or relationship. I was, after all, in a couple of short-lived relationships. Deep down, I knew that the lifestyle I was leading was not one intended by God.

But in a way, for me, it was similar to that of a drug addict, habitual gambler, or pathological liar. It took hitting rock bottom (with the diagnosis of HIV) before I started to reconsider my lifestyle. I began listening to the voice within me—the voice that had always been there, but for years I had managed to repress.

MY CROSS



For that HIV diagnosis, I've been extremely thankful to God! Almost four years ago now, I reached out to the pastor that confirmed me. He put me in touch with the WELS church and pastor closest to me. I began and have continued to attend a WELS church again. Looking back, I can see that while I may have rebelled against God's will, God has never left me! These words of God have become especially meaningful for me: "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6) and "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Do I feel like I am "cured" of homosexual temptations? Absolutely not. I think I'd categorize this like the road to recovery from something like alcoholism . . . counting the number of days, months, years since I've succumbed to the temptation. Do I continue to practice homosexuality? No, but honestly, I continue to struggle with the temptation. It is and probably will continue to be my personal cross to bear, with the help of God. I continue to find great comfort in these words of God: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear" (1 Corinthians 10:13) and "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

After all, who among us doesn't have to fight the temptations to sin daily?

HIV/AIDS continues to be a terminal illness. But, while this disease—which I contracted from a sinful lifestyle—may end my life here on earth, I live with the joy and peace that I will be enjoying the great gift of eternal life with my Lord and Savior in heaven!

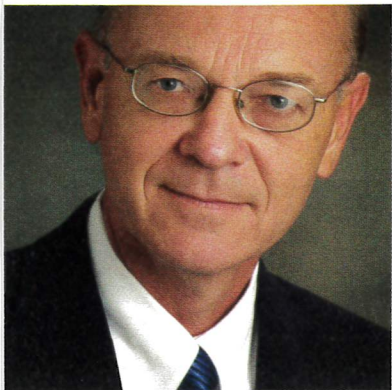
Scott Barefoot is a WELS member.

How do you reach out to a person struggling with homosexual temptations? Read more on p. 9.

DEEP DOWN, I KNEW
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Scott Barefoot

TO BEAR



Mark Schweden

Remember who you are!

I remember it clearly. I was a sophomore in college, making plans to travel with friends to Daytona Beach for spring break. Just before I left the house, my mother stopped me to say good-bye. I was ready for the long parental talk about potential dangers and temptations. But all she said was, “Just remember who you are.”

Into those few words were packed a lifetime of parental love, care, and guidance. Those simple words reminded me that I was a child of God; that I was to be salt and light; that people would draw conclusions about my Savior by what they saw in my words and actions. Those words reminded me of who I was, of my identity as a redeemed child of God. I can't say that I have always followed that wise advice, but I have never forgotten it.

No one will argue that it's vitally important for Christians to remember who they are. We know that we are sinners. We know that we are people who've been redeemed by Christ and given a new identity, no longer enemies of God but now children of God and heirs of eternal life. We know that we are placed into this world to serve him, to worship him, and to proclaim him. That is our identity as Christians. As we head out into the world to our jobs, to our recreation, to visit our friends and neighbors, the words of a loving Father ring in our ears and remind us, “Just remember who you are!”

Those words of loving advice do not speak only to individual Christians. They also can give wise and important guidance to us as a synod as well: “Just remember who you are!”

But exactly who are we as a synod? What is our identity? Have we forgotten it? Do we even sometimes deny it? What do we stand for? Do we allow others to define our identity, with the result that our synod is known only for the things we are “against” and not for what we are “for”? What blessings do we enjoy that we want to share with the world? During

the next few months in this section of *Forward in Christ*, I invite you to join me in rediscovering and celebrating our identity as a synod.

Here are just some of the aspects of our synod's identity that we'll explore. We are a synod that

- Stands boldly on the truth of God's Word.
- Focuses on our mission of sharing the gospel with all people.
- Is a confessional Lutheran body, holding on to the great truths restored to the church through the Lutheran Reformation.
- Values Christ-centered and gospel-proclaiming worship, in which Word and sacrament are the powerful means through which the Holy Spirit works.
- Recognizes the importance of Christian education on all levels.
- Cherishes the fellowship that unites us in a common faith.
- Is relevant, where every sermon preached and every class taught touches the everyday faith and life of God's people.
- Is joyful and optimistic, living in the joy and confidence that only the gospel can give.
- Is friendly and welcoming to outsiders.
- Upholds the blessings of marriage as God has defined it.
- Celebrates the callings that God has given to men and women and provides opportunities for all to serve joyfully in those callings.
- Values and defends the human life that God has created.

These are just a few of those blessings that come to mind; you can, no doubt, add many more to the list. The new year is certainly a time for us to rejoice in the blessings we have as a church body. As we remember who we are, we will then grow in our desire to share what we treasure with the world.

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” John 14:6

Men don't ask directions. Women do. I've always felt it is because men know the kind of directions that people give: "Turn right before you get to the old Miller place and then go left at the oak tree that blew down last year." There are probably deeper psychological reasons why men don't ask, but whatever the reason the Global Positioning System (GPS) is popular. No one has to ask; it just tells you how to get there. I do find it interesting that most GPS systems have a woman's voice. Enough!

Jesus says he knows the way. But he not only knows the way; he is the way. The way to what? The way to where? To heaven? Well, let's look.

The way to heaven

In Jesus' day many people thought they knew the way to heaven. The Pharisees believed that if they kept the laws of Moses and were basically better than other people they would go to heaven. The Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, weren't even looking for a way. And then there were all those who thought, "If I am a child of Abraham, I'm in."

Jesus sweeps them all away: I am the way. I am the way to God. I am the way to heaven. I am the way to eternal life. I am not a way as if there are many. I am the way, the only way. Only one person hung on a cross to bear the punishment for the sins of the world. No one else forgives sins. No one else paid the price and met the righteous demands of God Almighty.

He is the only way. It may not be stylish in our politically correct world to say it. It almost seems arrogant to say it—exclusive even. But if you wouldn't purposely give a person the wrong directions to a grocery store, why would you give them wrong directions to everlasting life? Jesus is the only way to everlasting life.

The way to other things

But when Jesus says, "I am the way," might he be saying that he is also the way to other things? Does he show me the way to live my life every day? Does he show me the way to live a joyful, rich life? Does Jesus show me the way to find myself? Yes, yes, and yes.

After Jesus washed his disciples' feet, he said to them, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have

done for you" (John 13:15). His whole life of love and service is to be the way we live our lives. St. Paul talks about the riches of having Jesus when he says, "Having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (2 Corinthians 6:10). The way to a truly rich life is the same—Jesus. Want to find yourself? Paul writes, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Ephesians 2:10). The way to find out who you are is also Jesus.

Lots of people today point out the way: the way to happiness, to riches, to life. Some wonder if there is a way—any way. Others say no one can know the way. Jesus cuts through all that. He says, "I am the way." No maps needed. No need to ask directions. No GPS necessary. "I am the way."

And we rejoice every day that he is the one way.

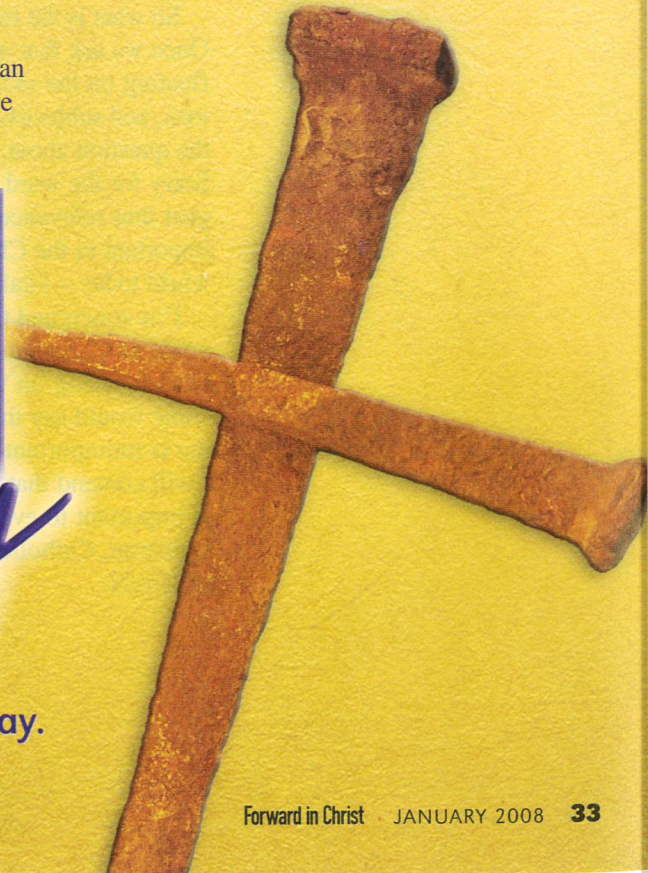
Contributing editor David Sternhagen is pastor at Crown of Life, New Orleans, Louisiana.

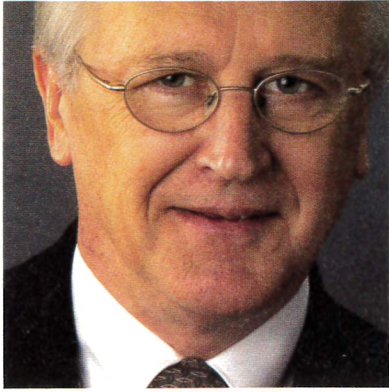
This is the first article in a seven-part series on Jesus' "I am" statements.

LAM *the way*

Lots of people today point out the way:
the way to happiness, to riches, to life.
Jesus not only knows the way; he is the only way.

David D. Sternhagen





John A. Beck

Is Christianity irrelevant?

Before you can answer any question about being irrelevant, I think you must define what “irrelevant” means. One might define it as being too small to matter. Dealing with numbers is a game sometimes, but one could make a point that anything less than one percent—or whatever percentage you determine—is irrelevant or insignificant.

The dictionary has another definition: not relating to the matter or subject at hand. By that definition, relevance or irrelevance is dependant on whatever “the subject at hand” might be. But it also means that someone decides what is relevant and what is not for “the matter or subject at hand.”

Then relevance and irrelevance become moving targets. For example, quantum physics is irrelevant to the carpenter measuring two-by-fours. But quantum physics becomes relevant in the world of physics. Or reverse the example. Accurately measuring materials for building is irrelevant to the physicist, unless he is remodeling his house. It is keenly relevant to any carpenter or anyone with a fix-up project.

So what is the important matter at hand? Once we ask that question, we may begin floating on the sea of preferences, opinions, and subjective worldviews. Maybe the question about relevance is irrelevant. Sorry for the word play. But I would suggest that relevance and irrelevance are important to the Christian church in our world today—vitaly important.

I’m concerned that we have lost our voice as Christians because we have not been focusing on what is important. Yes, some would say that what is important to me is unimportant to everyone else. But I will contend that there is something that is important to everyone whether you’re Lutheran, Catholic, Methodist, Muslim, or Hindu.

If you are an average reader, it would have taken you about a minute and a half to read the paragraphs above: 90 seconds. During that time about 160 people in this world have died.

“What a morbid thought,” you think. Yes, that’s true. We don’t want to think about such things. We spend money to look young, think young, stay young, and deny the reality that faces us all. We want to avoid the thought. Even most of our dreams do not end with our deaths. The mind has a way to avoid death even in our subconscious. But life’s end is the matter at hand for everyone.

We are tourists here on earth. I need to know how to get home. All humans need to know how to get home. It’s not that there are several ways to get there. That idea is a dodge and deception to avoid looking for the one way home.

The way is not hidden. Jesus is the way. He simply and clearly said, “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). In the most often-quoted verse of the Bible, Jesus said that whoever believes in him “will not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

That is a relevant answer for all humanity for all time. It addresses the “subject at hand”—the subject that touches everyone. It is the gospel message we confessional Lutherans announce to the world.

A new year begins. But before this year ends, 56 million people will die. They need to hear about Jesus. During the same time, 134 million babies will be born. Both figures tell us why we are here and remain a relevant part of this world.

One final note: The idea of relevance is a broad and complicated topic. The notes I jotted down for this column suggest that we will have to revisit this topic during the new year.



GOD'S tool belt for unity

Donald W. Patterson

“I love this church, because everyone here is so friendly and united in God’s love!” That’s what a regular visitor proclaimed one day in our weekly Bible study. I was encouraged by her observation, but I knew she probably hadn’t gotten a backstage view of us yet. Many people at our church were still struggling with forgiveness at the time.

Christian unity is easy to conceive but hard to achieve. Why is it so hard? You know why. It’s hard because the devil agitates our sinful flesh. Then he laughs through the halls of hell as Christian brothers and sisters move coldly past one another. What do we do? Well, we turn to Jesus who came to destroy the works of the devil. When we turn to him we will experience unity, not perfectly, but effectively. We just need those tools that Jesus gives. This Bible study series will fill our belt with tools for unity. It will enable us to destroy the devil’s work and silence his celebrations.

What needs to be fixed to give us unity? Our inability to forgive.

Let’s tackle the archenemy of Christian unity—the difficulty we have forgiving each other. If we live and work close to others, we need to forgive and be forgiven. Everyone does. We hurt people without even trying. Sin hurts—often badly. It sometimes hurts so badly that it seems justifiable not to forgive. God doesn’t think so. That’s why he tells us to pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” Why does he so boldly tell us to forgive? It’s because in Jesus Christ, God has given us what we need to heal our relationships. It’s the

forgiveness God has given to us. Here’s where he hands us the tool:

“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:13).

How are we supposed to forgive? Not by reaching deep within our souls. There’s nothing there without Jesus. We forgive as the Lord forgives us. As we think more about how we are forgiven, forgiving others will come more easily. That’s the key. When we dwell on his forgiveness for us, we are empowered to forgive everyone, including ourselves. It does not come from inside us. It comes from inside God.

Familiarize yourself with the tool

- List at least three kinds of sin in your life that the Lord has forgiven.
- Sometimes we have difficulty forgiving because we keep replaying what the other person did. What do we need to keep replaying instead to help us get out of that loop?
- How might those around us be able to tell that we have forgiven them?

Use the tool

- Picture yourself at the foot of Jesus’ cross on Good Friday. You are writing a letter to the person who hurt you. What will you write? Why not actually write that letter?
- Memorize this phrase: “Leave it at the foot of the cross!” Now, say it to yourself each time you catch yourself dwelling on another person’s sin against you.

Contributing editor Donald Patterson is pastor at Holy Word, Austin, Texas.

This is the first article in a 10-part series on Christian unity. Find this article and answers online after Jan. 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net



Jekyll & Hyde

Rolfe Westendorf

Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is a warning for us. We find the same warning—but with a different solution—in God's Word.

On a recent visit to a resale store I bought Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. There was more to the story than I expected.

Good vs. evil

In the book, Dr. Jekyll was a respected physician who had a group of loyal friends. He was relatively content with his life, except that he was acutely aware of his sinful nature. Although his public behavior was beyond reproach, he was disturbed by the sins of his youth. He knew that he was still inclined toward those same evils.

In an effort to find relief from his guilty conscience, he theorized that he'd be much happier if he could somehow separate his good desires from his sinful nature. This way each part could have freedom to do as it pleased without interference from the other.

Most of us can relate to the good doctor's distress. We have read the Holy Scriptures. We know that we have been born with a sinful nature. We are capable of committing the worst of crimes and could do so. In fact, we experience this daily. Although we may refrain from criminal acts, we still end up doing, saying, and thinking things

that we know are sinful. But we do them anyhow and suffer from a guilty conscience because of it.

St. Paul put it this way: "For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. . . . What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:19, 24). Dr. Jekyll would have known exactly what Paul was talking about.

But Dr. Jekyll did not find his deliverance in the pages of the Bible. Instead he concocted a potion that accomplished his solution. The potion changed him into Edward Hyde, a vicious little man who satisfied all his sinful desires, including unprovoked and brutal murder. Then, another swig of the potion would transform him into the kindly doctor again.

Stevenson's story ends in tragedy for the good doctor. The evil Mr. Hyde gains the upper hand until he can be suppressed only by the doctor's suicide.

Forgiveness through Jesus

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is the author's parable, warning against allowing our sinful nature to carry out its desires. We find the same warning in God's Word. But God's

solution to the dilemma is different from Stevenson's.

St. Paul did not despair in his miserable situation. "Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 7:24,25). Yes, the solution is in the forgiveness of Jesus. By nature we are sinful and deserve God's punishment. But God provided forgiveness in Christ for all sin. Faith grasps that forgiveness and is a new godly nature that delights in pleasing God. That new self battles the old sinful nature within us all.

What a different story Stevenson would have written if the good doctor had brought his guilt to the foot of the cross and received daily comfort from a Father in heaven who forgives for Jesus' sake! Mr. Hyde would have been kept in check. The good doctor would have lived out his life in humble service to his patients and his community.

Of course, Robert Louis Stevenson's publishers would not have paid for that story. But when it is our story, it pays huge dividends—in peace with God and peace within.

Rolfe Westendorf, a retired pastor, is a member at Siloah, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.