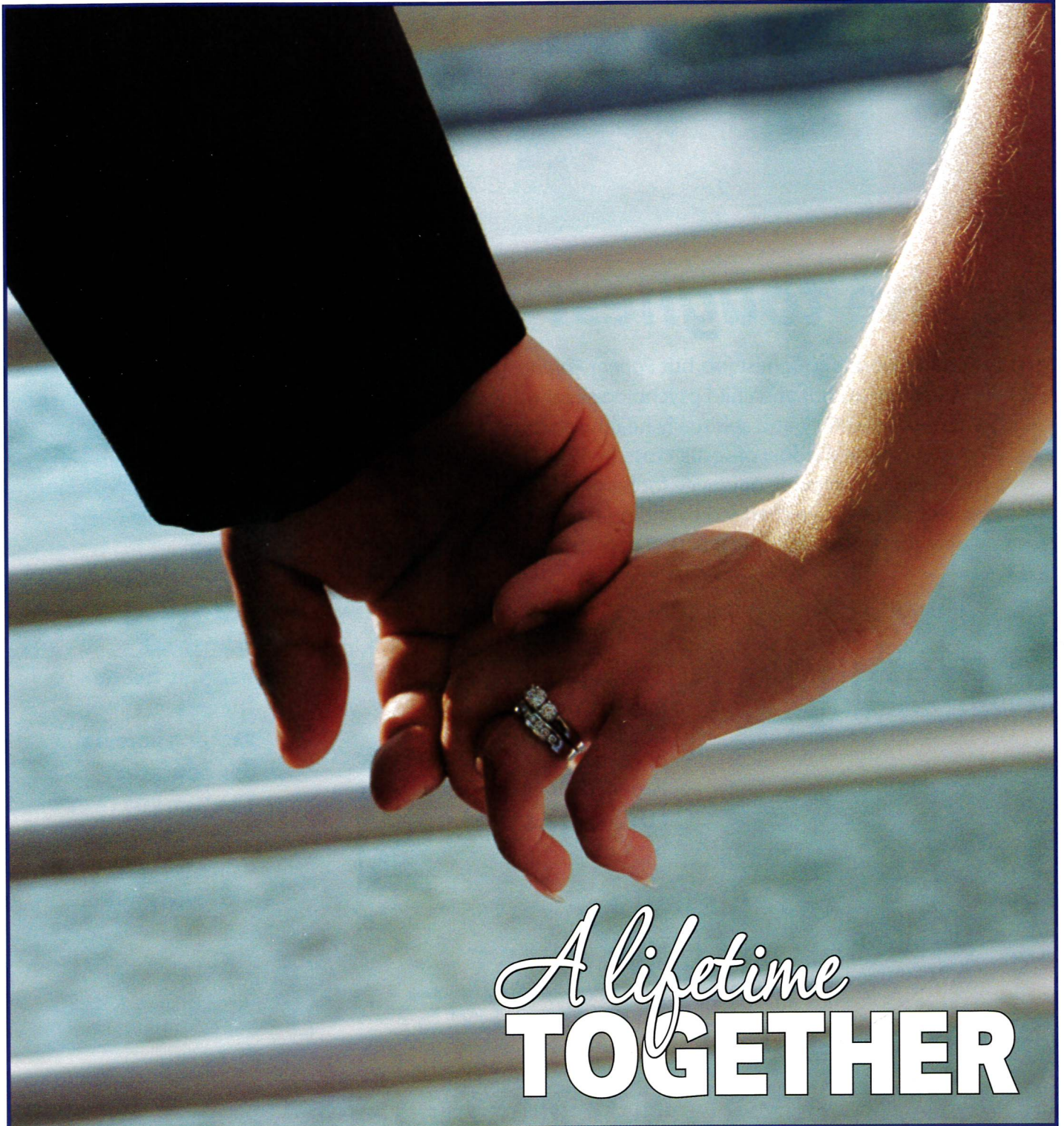


LUTHERAN WORSHIP • INTERVIEW WITH AN ANGEL

JUNE 2008

# Forward in Christ

God's wisdom, WELS' witness



*A lifetime*  
**TOGETHER**



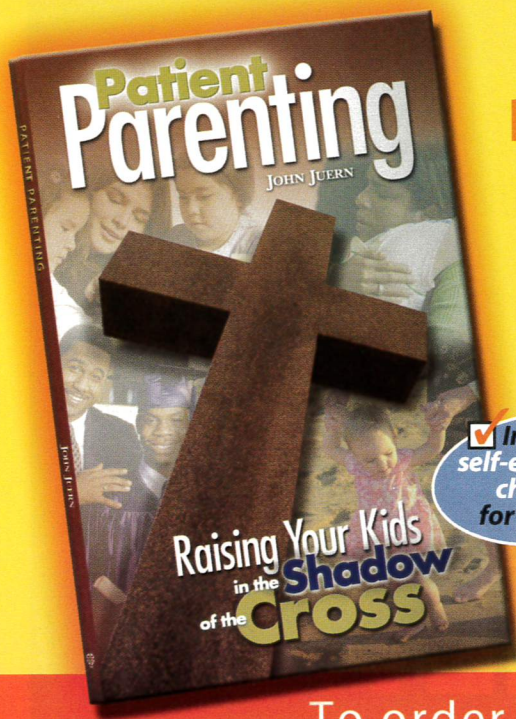


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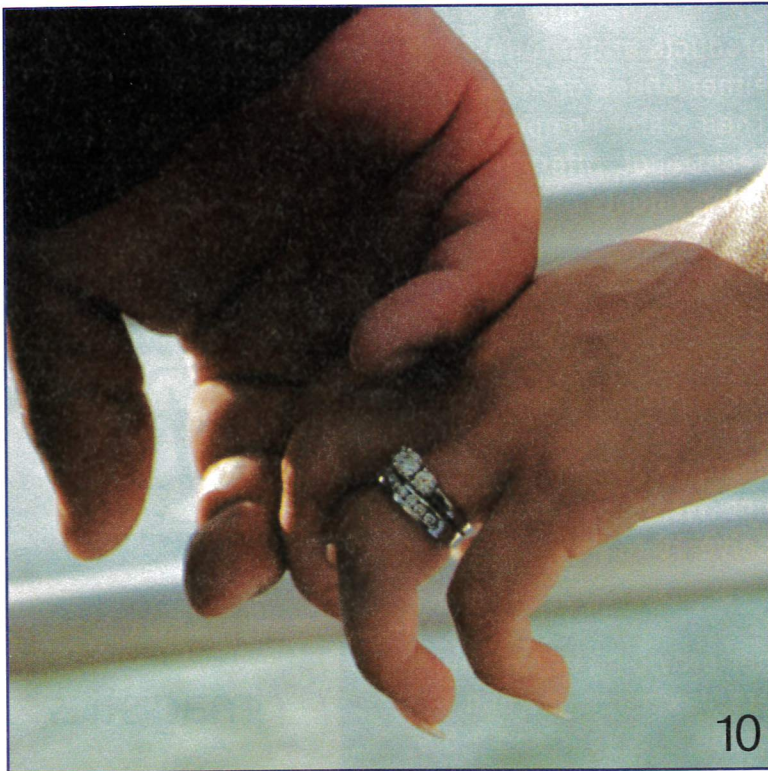
## Forward in Christ

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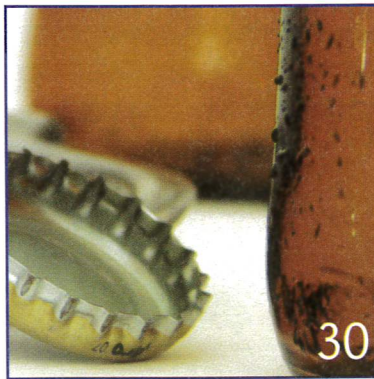
### FEATURES

- 10 A MARRIAGE IS A LIFETIME**  
Married life together is a joy when shared with one who trusts the same Savior.  
*Laura C. Warmuth*
- 12 THE LUTHERAN WAY OF WORSHIP** What Lutherans believe, teach, and confess is reflected on Sunday morning.  
*Joel D. Otto*
- 14 CONFESSIONS OF FAITH** While looking for a church for their wedding, a couple finds much more.  
*Julie K. Wietzke*
- 16 BIBLICAL PROFILES: INTERVIEW WITH AN ANGEL** God sends his angels to protect us and to carry us home to heaven.  
*John D. Schuetze*
- 28 WEAR YOUR FAITH** Christians are different from the world. They show it by how they act, but they also show it by how they dress.  
*Jon D. Buchholz*
- 30 ADDICTED** Drinking can consume anyone, and often the way out is difficult. But God does extend his hand to us.  
*Laura Herrmann*
- 36 AMAZING GRACE** The tender voice of a special child touches my heart.  
*Marlis A. Kremer*

“  
**A wedding is just one day.  
A marriage is a lifetime.**  
”



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NOR FORSAKE US.  
*1 Kings 8:57*

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

What are you doing this summer? Summer days are usually filled with home improvement projects, vacations, trips to a cabin or the lake, picnics, and other fun-filled activities.

One other event often happens during the summer—weddings. *Forward in Christ's* own staff writer, Laura Warmuth, is getting married this summer. In "A marriage is a lifetime" (p. 10), she shares her thoughts on her upcoming wedding day and, more importantly, on her and her future husband's life together. Pastor Joel Petermann reminds us about the sanctity of marriage and how God's commitment to us serves as an example for us in our marriages (p. 8).

Weekly worship also remains a constant in summer. Three articles this month talk about corporate worship. President Mark Schroeder (p. 32) and Pastor Joel Otto (p. 12) discuss how Lutheran worship services are designed to revolve around the gospel in Word and sacraments. (Look for future issues to go into more detail about the different parts of a Lutheran worship service.) Pastor Don Patterson's interactive Bible study (p. 35) examines another reason we go to church—to encourage one another in our Christian lives of service.

JUNE

**DEPARTMENTS**



- 6 FEEDBACK**
- 7 DEVOTION**  
Power for the battle *Peter A. Panitzke*
- 8 EDITORIAL COMMENT**  
For better or for worse *Joel V. Petermann*
- 9 QUESTION & ANSWER**  
Repentance *Forrest L. Bivens*
- 18 WHATEVER**  
Is it worth it? *Kelsey Erdman*
- 19 NEWS**
- 26 BULLETIN BOARD**
- 27 POTLUCK**
- 32 FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK**  
A synod that values worship *Mark G. Schroeder*
- 33 BIBLE STUDY**  
I am . . . the life *David D. Sternhagen*
- 34 A THOUGHT**  
Making your own god *John A. Braun*
- 35 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDY**  
God's tool belt for unity: Encouragement *Donald W. Patterson*



**SOURCE OF DISHONESTY**

Re: "God's Tool Belt for Unity" [Feb.]. [Pastor Patterson asks,] "Where did dishonesty come from anyway?" John 8:44 says that the devil is the father of lies. The article said that it came from Adam and Eve. I think that while we can use the genetic argument to prove the lineage of all sin, including lying, to come from Adam and Eve, the original source says it is the devil. That is a stronger threat than our inherited sinful nature. And the two of them working together are the strongest threat to the good intentions of our "new man."

*Howard Heup*

**GOD'S LAW**

Many thanks to Pastor Wayne Laitinen for his article on God's law [Mar.]. It reminds us of what Holy Scripture truly teaches, both God's law and the gospel message of forgiveness in Christ Jesus.

If we are to be faithful to God's Word, it is essential that both law and gospel be preached, regardless of public opinion, membership, attendance numbers, or how it may offend visitors. As it is often said, "The truth hurts sometimes." The Christian also needs the law as a reminder of what the cost was to pay for our sins, namely the innocent, precious blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. As it is written in Isaiah 53:6: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

*Andy Petri  
Des Plaines, Illinois*

**ADOPTION**

I would like to comment on the "Adoption into Christ" article by Jillian Dunigan [Mar.].

I am glad that her adoptive parents took the opportunity, as it arose, to tell her of her adoption. It was a good time for it.

I, too, was adopted and found out about it in a much different way with very shocking results. I must have been about eight or nine years old when a neighbor boy called me an orphanage brat. I don't know how he found out about it. Jillian's article brought that back to my memory and how I cried all the way home and faced my parents with the problem.

Parents, if you have an adopted child, please take the opportunity to tell them.

*Jerry Hildebrandt  
Weyauwega, Wisconsin*

**GOD'S EARTH**

We were surprised and disturbed when we read the article by Paul R. Boehlke entitled "Entrusted with God's Earth" [April]. This is the kind of article we might expect in a publication of the Presbyterian or Methodist Church. We have been made aware of the dangers of the social gospel taking a prominent role in many churches. The environmental gospel is new and much more subtle. The environmental gospel elevates nature above man (would this meet with God's approval?) and the created—both nature and man—above the Creator.

The environmental movement is a political movement with political agendas. Mr. Boehlke seems to indicate he thinks "profit" is a bad word. Anyone who profits from "resources" would be a fool indeed to waste the very thing that brings him those profits. Mr. Boehlke failed to mention that the environmental industry has become a billion-dollar industry using scare tactics and "facts" not accepted by a large number of respected scientists.

Please . . . no more political articles in *Forward in Christ*. Let's keep the spotlight where it belongs.

*Jean and Ron Husemann  
Tucson, Arizona*

Had to put my vote in feedback for Paul Boehlke's story on useful information regarding, "Entrusted with God's earth" [April]. I'm 95 pushing 96 and my "Opa" (that's Grandpa in German) cared about taking care of our earth where our food and beauty come from. Opa could talk and warn by the hour to thank our Triune Savior.

We Christians, with Mr. Boehlke and our students at Wisconsin Lutheran College: let's be real busy now and prayerful about God's earth.

*Margaret Wardius  
Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin*

**ADD**

To the author of "Jesus, ADD, & me" [April]: thank you so much for writing the article. It really encouraged me. Even though I don't have ADD, it helped me understand those who do. It has given me even more patience than I thought possible. When you are ready, could you write some more articles or even some words of encouragement?

I don't have ADD but do have chronic depression and major depression. God sure used your article today to help me focus on Jesus and not how I was supposed to "fix" my depression.

My depression is so severe that it is too much for me to work a small part-time job. This turned out to be a good thing. Now my husband and I have a better marriage and our little girl has her mom's attention.

We don't live in a house and rent a small duplex where rent is cheap. I try to keep up with daily chores. Sometimes it is hard. Thanks again for the article. Hope to see your writing again.

*Name withheld*

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# Power for the battle

*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. Acts 1:8*

Peter A. Panitzke

“**M**om is in hospice care. On Saturday Dad told us he has advanced cancer. And our son is saying he doesn’t believe in God anymore.”

“Our daughter is living with her boyfriend.”

“I can’t stop thinking that the world would be better off without me.”

These are a sample of the battles that God’s people face every day. The Holy Spirit has warned us: “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). The devil wants to devour our families, our youth, and each of us.

## The power of the Holy Spirit

Near the end of the time of the judges, “a young lion came roaring toward [Samson]. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands” (Judges 14:5,6).

Notice that when “the Spirit of the LORD came upon [Samson] in power,” he had the strength to destroy that roaring lion.

When David, as a young boy, was anointed to be the next king of Israel, “the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power” (1 Samuel 16:13). This gave David confidence to face Goliath: “The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine” (1 Samuel 17:37).

When the Spirit of the Lord comes upon God’s people, they have the confidence to confront lions and giants.

## The promise of power

Now think of the promise that Jesus gave to his disciples just before his ascension: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.” The Holy Spirit, who gave Samson the power to tear apart a lion and David the power to slay Goliath, also gave power to the apostles to defeat Satan that first Pentecost. With newfound courage they proclaimed Jesus as the crucified and risen Christ. Three thousand were rescued from Satan’s paws that day!

That promise of power is for all of us. Peter said, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children” (Acts 2:38,39). The promise of the Holy Spirit that Jesus gave the apostles he has given to you. The power that Samson used to tear apart that lion is also promised to you in your baptism.

I’m not suggesting you jump into the lion pit at the zoo. But when the devil, like a roaring lion, seems about to devour you and your family, you have the power to resist him. In your baptism, the Spirit of God has come upon you in power. In the power of the Spirit, tear Satan apart with the promise that your sins are forgiven. Strike the devil down by speaking the truth of God’s Word in love. Pray that God will “strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that . . . you, being rooted and established in love, may have



power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ” (Ephesians 3:16-18).

Will every trouble go away? That didn’t happen for Samson, for David, or for the apostles. But in the power of the Spirit we will have the courage to face Satan and resist him, confident that in Christ Jesus the final victory is ours.

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



# For better or for worse

Joel V. Petermann

**I**t happened in Boston more than 30 years ago. Joseph Salvati, then 35 years old, was accused of murder and sentenced to life in prison without parole. One problem: he wasn't guilty. He spent 30 years in prison for a crime he did not commit.

But the most captivating part of the story was when Joseph spoke to his wife, Marie, about getting a divorce. "If you want one, I won't contest it," he told her. "I'm not in here for a year or two. This is for the rest of my life."

"Are you crazy?" Marie responded. "I took a vow for better or for worse. We love each other." She visited him every weekend. He sent her a greeting card every week by saving up the 15 cents-a-day wages he got in prison (*Reader's Digest*, March 2008, p. 125).

I'm not sure how religious Joseph and Marie were, but I am sure that what they did for 30 years is what God wants. Marriage is for life. Marriage is first and foremost a commitment by two people. Marriage is for better or for worse. I can't imagine how much worse it could get for Marie to be separated from her husband for 30 years and to have to raise and support four young children by herself. Was it difficult? Yes. Was it what she had dreamed about when she got married? No. But she made a commitment she intended to keep.

As Christians we need to think carefully about what marriage is. Jesus said it clearly to the loophole-seeking Pharisees when he reminded them, "What God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:6). Marriage is a commitment before God. It is his institution. When two people make that commitment, God is joining them together for life—no matter what. The only exception is "marital unfaithfulness" (Matthew 19:9). That's not, "We don't get along." It's not, "She/he isn't attractive anymore." It's not, "The love just isn't there like it was before."

**Marriage is  
a commitment  
before God. It is  
his institution.**

Is marriage a wonderful thing? Yes. Is it often strained and difficult? Yes. We live in an imperfect world that puts health, governmental, societal, and psychological pressures on marriages. Also two people who make such a commitment to each other are sinful human beings with selfish natures and naturally unforgiving hearts. Such a commitment in the face of such human weaknesses and failings is difficult without eyes that look to the cross of Jesus and the empty tomb of our Savior.

We all must confess our shortcomings and sins at the cross. We all must cry out for mercy from the Lord who wants us to love our spouse more than ourselves. We all fall short of his perfection. However, there at the cross we see the Bridegroom himself giving his life for his bride, the church. We see his love for her who prostituted herself to other gods—gods of things and self and pride and vanity. Yet he forgave her. Indeed he took her sin to himself and paid for her with his life. He loved her with committed, unconditional love and with that love drew her heart back to himself. At the cross we find forgiveness for all our marriage sins. In that empty tomb we find victory over the sin of this world. We find the power to forgive as we have been forgiven, to love as we have been loved, to commit ourselves with unconditional love—no matter what.

Whether we are contemplating marriage, just married, or approaching our 30-year anniversary, it's appropriate for us to think again about what marriage is. God joins us together. He is committed to us so that we can commit ourselves to each other—for better or for worse.

*Contributing editor Joel Petermann is pastor at St. Paul, Amherst, New Hampshire.*



# QUESTION & ANSWER



Forrest L. Bivens

I commend you for reading your Bible thoughtfully and asking a question that surfaces frequently. Urgings or commands to repent are fairly common, as familiar passages such as Acts 2:38, 3:19, and 17:30 confirm. A careful analysis of the statements, their immediate contexts, and the wider context of Scripture will yield these thoughts:

**Q. The Bible says that John the Baptist and Jesus told people, "Repent!" (Matthew 3:1,2, 4:17). If people are by nature spiritually dead and unable to repent, what can these commands mean?**

the body of Lazarus when he commanded, "Lazarus, come out!" (John 11:43).

There is value in thinking these issues through. Professing Christians in our society have largely adopted synergistic language and assumptions regarding the conversion of sinners. Synergists believe that conversion is a cooperative work between man and God and end up making repentance

1. It is certain that mankind is by nature utterly sinful, spiritually dead, and unable to repent in active obedience to the command or invitation (see Romans 8:6-8, 1 Corinthians 2:14). Additionally, in passages like Acts 5:31, 11:18, and 2 Timothy 2:25, repentance is clearly said to be the work of God, not of sinners themselves.
2. Many of the exhortations to repent are a vigorous preaching of divine law, assuming and declaring people's utter sinfulness. As declarations of law they will have the impact of law; they will create a painful personal knowledge of sin.
3. Some statements may be serving as pronouncements of law and gospel, not only exposing sinfulness but also identifying what provides a right relationship to God. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). These calls to repentance need not be understood as implying that sinners themselves should do the work. They simply call for conversion without any reference to the agent or power that can bring it about.
4. If these invitations are issued as gospel calls, they carry with them the power to produce repentance and faith. This would be parallel to invitations to believe in Jesus Christ (as in Acts 16:31). These invitations neither require nor expect sinners to respond on their own power. Sinners respond by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the gospel. The invitations accomplish for the soul what Christ accomplished for

or believing in Jesus a required human work. Roman Catholicism is no longer the only major group within Christendom that makes repentance a human work earning favor from God. Many Protestants have succumbed to the same disease and sometimes cite the same passages you mentioned to defend their error.

By clarifying that only God can give repentance and faith, we can help the evangelical community explain something that rightly troubles and often confounds them. Statistical evidence shows that about 50 percent of people who supposedly "make a decision for Christ" or "decide to repent" abandon the ranks of practicing Christians within months of being "saved." How can the most incredibly wonderful experience—the creation of repentance and saving faith in a sinner—be so casually dismissed so often? Synergistic language and assumptions among too many evangelicals may have resulted in many faux conversions, expressions of repentance rooted in nothing more than an emotional surge or intellectual consent that seemed good at the time. In true repentance and conversion, born of the Holy Spirit through law and gospel, we may confidently expect a more substantial and enduring blessing.

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





# A MARRIAGE IS A *lifetime*

Married life together is a joy when shared with one who trusts the same Savior. **Laura C. Warmuth**

*There I was.* Standing on a bridge, looking down at my boyfriend who was on one knee holding a jewelry box . . . and wearing a Post-it® Note on his forehead. “This is the one, Laura.—God,” it read.

When Will asked me to marry him, he said that I hesitated, but if I did it was only because of the tears that were forming in my eyes. I said yes and the rest is history. Okay . . . since we have three months left until our wedding day, perhaps our story doesn’t yet qualify for the history books, but I’m convinced that God has such great things planned for us, that one day it will.

To any other girl, the Post-it® Note may have seemed a bit peculiar, but it was exactly what I had asked of God. You see, several summers ago, a couple other gals and I imagined, “Wouldn’t it be great if God would just slap a note on the forehead of the man he’d chosen for each of us so that we could skip the confusion of dating the wrong guys and breakups and heartaches?” While I could see that Will’s Post-it® Note was written in his own hand, I didn’t need a sign to trust that God had answered my prayers by bringing us together.

And now . . . let the wedding planning begin! Actually, I’m not the only future Mrs. Schaefer making big plans. With Will’s two brothers getting married within six months of us, it would be easy to let wedding talk dominate our lives. But a wedding is just one day. A marriage is a lifetime.

Looking forward to a lifetime together in this day and age brings some thoughts we just can’t ignore. Are we scared by high divorce rates? No way. Do the in-law jokes, the not-so-happily-ever-after stories, and Hollywood’s typically dysfunctional American families intimidate us? Not a chance. Why not? It’s not because we’re ignorant or don’t take our vows seriously. It’s because Will and I share a confidence that is out of this world—not just a sense of security in each other, but full confidence that God in heaven will be with us throughout our marriage.

## **What is love?**

How awesome it is to know that God is faithful and his love is constant. After all, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16). We know how to love only because we’ve experienced Christ’s unconditional, self-sacrificing, word-and-action love for us. As a single girl, I knew that God’s love was all that I really needed. It was enough. It was more than enough. It overflowed! Will and I were two content believers, each separately relying fully on God. Now that God has given us to each other, we are discovering what it means to serve him together.

A friend once told me that one way you know you’ve found your match is if you serve God better together than apart. What a blessing to be able to encourage each other to use our spiritual gifts and



hopefully bring out the best in the other. We're learning to rely on each other, while knowing all along that God is our indispensable support. We must remember that, just like before we were together, God is the center of our universe.

### A life of training

It's also comforting to know that years of thought and prayer went into our marriage before Will and I ever met. He and I both grew up with incredible Christian parents who gave us daily lessons in how a godly marriage works. I can still picture my mom in the corner chair of the living room, reading her Bible before the bustle of the day began. I now know that while I still thought boys had cooties, she was already praying that God would send a Christian spouse for each of her children.

Will's mom recently told me about the day Will's oldest brother asked her how to find the perfect bride. "Well," she explained, as four-year-old Will and his brother listened, "you keep your eyes open for a nice girl that believes in Jesus like you do and you pray to God. God will help you find her." But Will thought that he already had it figured out. "Nooooo," he explained. "You just go to the bride fair. You can pick out whatever kind you want!" That's when his mom decided she had dragged him to too many craft fairs.

When I was in eighth grade, a bit closer to dating age than Will was when he learned how to find a bride, my dad gave me some valuable advice that I'll carry with me throughout my life and marriage. In the note inside my confirmation Bible, he wrote: "Dear Laura, God has blessed you with a rich spirit and deep emotions. This is great when the spirit and emotions are high, but not so great when they are low. Remain rich and deep in the Word of your God. It is the one thing we can always count on no matter what our feelings are."

As I got older, I used to get together with some close girlfriends for Bible studies. A discussion during one of these evenings brought up the question, "What does the verse in Proverbs really mean when it says that a wife of noble character brings her husband good all the days of her life?" We concluded that "all the days" must mean even those days before

THIS IS  
THE ONE,  
LAURA.  
-GOD

they ever meet. As Christian girls, God's Word was enough to convince us that we should remain celibate until marriage. But beyond that, keeping in mind what our future husbands might think or feel also gave us a good guideline for dating and intimacy.

### Hopeful is the word of the day

When Will and I first started dating, he asked me how I would describe myself in one word. No fair. He obviously had a well-thought-out answer ready before he put me on the spot. But I thought for a minute and was satisfied with my answer: hopeful.

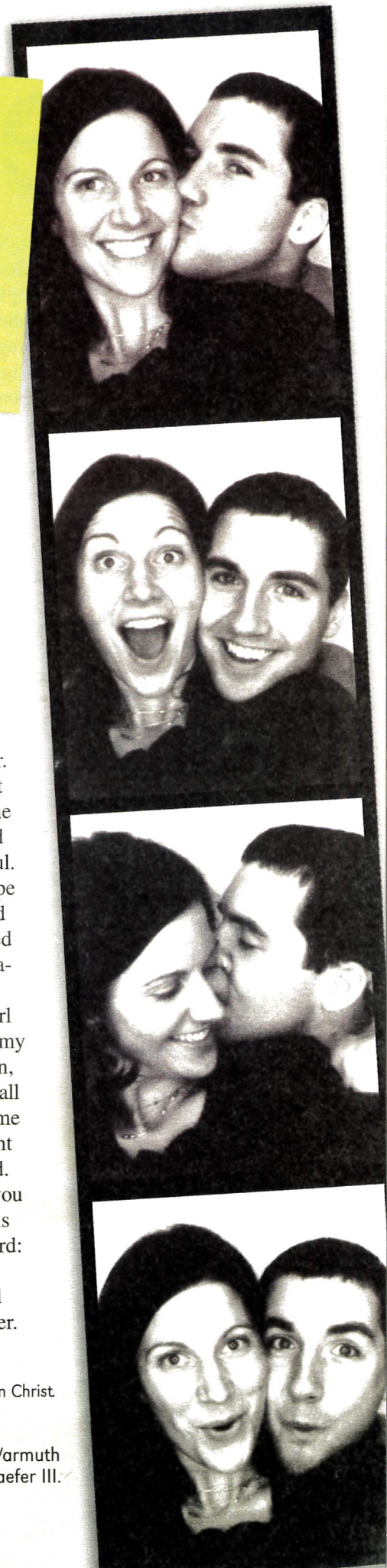
My hope of heaven, the surest hope of my life, certainly defines me. God has been so good to me and promised me so much that I've never had a reason to lose hope. I have a wonderful family and the very best friends a girl could ask for. I hope very much that my friendships, relationships, education, work experiences, world travels, and all other aspects of my life have made me into a person who can be an excellent wife and mother. I'm hopeful indeed.

And Will? His one word? Would you believe that I took it right out of his mouth? He had chosen the same word: hopeful.

Now we pray that the Lord would guide us as we start our lives together. That guidance inspires our hope.

*Laura Warmuth is staff writer at Forward in Christ.*

Pictured: Laura Warmuth and William Schaefer III.





# The LUTHER

What a church does on Sunday morning in worship flows from what it believes. For example, the Roman Catholic Church believes that Mary hears and answers prayers. So they pray to Mary. In addition, they celebrate the Immaculate Conception and Assumption of Mary, two events not recorded in the Bible.

Many Protestant churches teach that people have to make a decision for Christ, and then show that decision in godly living. Worship in their churches becomes a way to move people to that decision. Music is often used to get people emotionally involved or to express their emotion, rather than to proclaim the gospel.

What Lutherans believe, teach, and confess is also reflected on Sunday morning. We Lutherans stand firmly on the biblical truth that we are saved by God's grace alone, through faith in Jesus alone. We cannot save ourselves. Christ has done everything.

We also hold to the truth that this is revealed only in the Scriptures. But the Bible is not mere information. It is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). We believe that the Holy Spirit gives us faith in Jesus "from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

Because we believe that the gospel not only reveals what we are to believe,

but also is the power to believe and live as Christians, what we do in worship revolves around the gospel in Word and sacraments. These are the Holy Spirit's tools to keep us in the one true faith.

## Center of Lutheran worship

Paul's words to the Colossians provide a description of what Lutheran worship is all about: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Colossians 3:16).

The message about Christ—the gospel—is the most important thing in Lutheran worship. From the canticles and hymns to the Bible lessons and sermon, from the Confession and Absolution to the Confession of Faith, from the references to Baptism to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, from the use of Christian art to the use of the Christian church year—all of this allows the gospel to be the center of Lutheran worship.

## "A fitting and orderly way"

The structure of Lutheran worship keeps the message of Christ front and center. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

But worship in the Corinthian congregation was threatening to hide the message of Christ. Chaos in celebrating the Lord's Supper and the clamor of speaking in tongues obscured the gospel. Paul urged them to do everything "in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Lutherans follow this encouragement in worship. "A fitting and orderly way" does not mean that everything is done the same way every Sunday. Lutherans use certain forms in worship so that the gospel is not obscured but highlighted. The flow of Lutheran worship emphasizes the gospel in Word and sacraments.

For example, the pastor wears a robe. By that he and others who serve in the chancel are clearly identified as the ones called to carry out the special work of proclaiming the Word and administering the sacraments.

The arrangement of the furnishings and Christian art is another example. The altar is front and center, symbolizing the presence of God. The pulpit represents the importance of the Word. A prominent baptismal font reminds worshipers that they only can come into God's presence because he has washed their sins away in Baptism. A cross or image of Jesus is usually a central feature. People's eyes are drawn to these symbols of Christ's work. Lutherans generally do not have statues of the saints in our houses of worship. Instead we concentrate on art that helps us focus on Jesus.

## "Sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs"

When God touches his people with love through the gospel, they will respond. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16).



# AN WAY of worship

Faith in Christ will produce lives of praise and thanksgiving.

The importance of participating in worship is evident in Lutheran worship. There's a dialogue. God speaks to us. We speak to God. Our Lutheran ancestors used the German word *Gottesdienst* to describe worship. Literally, the word means "service of God" or "divine service." It first refers to God's service to us as he gives us the blessings of his grace in Word and sacrament. But it also speaks to our service to God in our prayer and praise.

Lutherans recognize that praise to God is not merely expressing how much we love God or how we feel about Jesus. Praise is proclaiming who the true God is and what he has done to save us. For example, the "Glory be to God" is one of the recurring songs of Lutheran worship. We don't just say, "Glory be to God on high." We sing about the person and work of our Savior: "O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sin of the world." We confess our faith in the triune God when we sing: "You only, O Christ, with the Holy Spirit, are most high in the glory of God the Father" (*Christian Worship*, pp. 16,17).

This is especially important in a society obsessed with tolerance where so many believe that Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists

all worship the same God, just in different ways. As we proclaim the gospel in our songs and words of praise, we are teaching and admonishing one another with the truths of God's Word. We are also expressing our gratitude for all that he has done for us.

## Liturgical for a reason

Lutherans are liturgical for a reason. The Lutheran liturgy offers the rich banquet of the blessings Christ gives to us in Word and sacrament. Not only do we need to receive these blessings, but so do visitors to our churches. Liturgical worship affords the opportunity for God's people to "declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). Using the songs of the liturgy, confessing our faith with the ancient creeds, following the church year, singing hymns that proclaim solid biblical truths, understanding that preaching is proclaiming the gospel—all of this reflects what we believe, teach, and confess. In our Lutheran worship, we "fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).


*Joel Otto is pastor at Trinity, Minocqua, Wisconsin.*

*This is the first article in a nine-part series on Lutheran worship.*

**What Lutherans believe, teach, and confess is reflected on Sunday morning.**

Joel D. Otto





**I**t was summer 2007. Patricia Wall and Chris Carrillo wanted to get married after dating for 10 years, eight of those living together. They didn't expect their lives to change that much, but God had different plans for them. When they searched for a church for their wedding, they found something that changed their lives—both in this world and the next.

"We went from non church goers to getting baptized, confirmed, married, and becoming regular church goers, all in like a six-month period," says Patricia.

This started what Chris calls "a new chapter" in their lives.

#### The start of the story

Neither Patricia nor Chris knew much about the Bible while they were growing up. "I was pretty much clueless," says Patricia. "I knew Jesus was the son of Mary and that was the extent of it. We were never baptized as kids."

Chris knew a little bit more. "I knew about Jesus and God. Kind of what he had

done. My mom belonged to the Christian church, but it didn't have my attention."

Patricia and Chris met when Patricia was in high school. When she turned 18, she moved out from her parents' home and moved in with Chris. "Getting married was something we had always talked about, but financially it never really happened," says Patricia.

In 2007, 10 years after they started dating, Patricia and Chris decided to get married. Even though neither of them had a strong religious background, "we knew that we wanted to [get married] in a church," says Patricia. "We wanted to do it the right way because we did so many things the wrong way."

So they began searching. And searching. And searching. "There wasn't any place we felt welcome or comfortable, where we didn't feel stupid for asking questions," says Patricia.

They also felt like churches were giving them the runaround. "I e-mailed churches and they would say, 'We don't want you. You're living in sin,'" says Patricia. "Or

## Confessions of faith

Why are you a member of WELS? What does this church body have that makes it unique from hundreds of others? In this series, you will read about why some choose to join WELS and what members treasure most about being WELS.

Julie K. Wietzke



they would say, 'You're not a member. You need to pay money.' We were getting discouraged."

### A new setting

Then Patricia heard about a church called Grace from a coworker whose sister was married there. The coworker told Patricia how welcoming the church was.

Patricia decided to check it out herself. She and her neighbor drove by the church and "it looked nice from the outside," says Patricia. They

stopped and met Debbie, the office manager. "She just stopped what she was doing. She was really enthusiastic to show me around."

Patricia loved the church and the message that Debbie shared: "We're not here to judge you. We're here to help you." She ran home to tell Chris about the church and Debbie's invitation to Sunday worship.

That Sunday, they returned to Grace and met Pastor David Clark. They also saw an insert in the bulletin, inviting people to Super Saturday classes. These Bible information classes are five-hour seminars, held one Saturday a month for four months. "We figured we had nothing to lose. It was one Saturday a month," says Patricia. So they signed up.

### A thickening plot

The classes were a little overwhelming. "We learned about everything—Adam and Eve and the serpent, how the world was created, even everything with Jesus and the resurrection. I don't know where to start. We learned so much," says Patricia.

It left them wanting more. "We wanted to learn more details—why it happened, how it happened," says Chris. "It was only about a five-hour class, but five hours went so fast



Chris and Patricia Carrillo on their wedding day in February 2008. They are now members at Grace, Glendale, Ariz.

because there was so much we did not know about."

They also learned how to prepare for future classes. "We went home and read the book. Then we kind of jumped ahead and read what we were going to do in the next class so we could already have a list of questions," says Patricia.

By the third class, Patricia and Chris were working with Clark on marriage counseling. And by the end of the fourth class, they had "signed up" to be confirmed.

Before Patricia could be confirmed, she had to be baptized. But she wasn't content with just being baptized herself. She wanted her younger brother and sister, ages 9 and 12, whom she and Chris watch on the weekends, to be baptized as well. When she talked to her father about it, he readily agreed.

On Dec. 9, 2007, Patricia and her brother and sister were baptized, and she and Chris—along with 15 other members of the Super Saturday class—were confirmed.

"I felt relieved," says Patricia. "It's something that I knew that I needed in my life, but I was always too intimidated to do. I felt confident that I was going into it and understanding it and that I was doing the right thing."

### The next chapter

Their newfound faith and understanding of the Bible have changed the lives of Patricia and Chris, who got married in February. "I have a different outlook in life—knowing what I know now," says Chris. "Everything is going to be okay no matter what the current problem or situation. It's going to work out."

Their faith also made a difference in their families' lives. Patricia's dad is trying to rearrange his work schedule so that he can attend church at Grace, even though

he lives 50 miles away. Chris's mom also has started attending services—and Super Saturday classes as well.

As for the Carrillos, they want to get more involved in the church and continue to grow in their faith through Bible studies. They went from not understanding Bible chapters and verses—"I was like what does the 3 and the colon mean?" says Patricia—to knowing all the different parts of the Bible. "When someone says to look up so-and-so, I can actually do it now."

And even though some of the teachings are confusing to them—"In the Trinity, how can one be three?" asks Chris—they accept and believe them. "There was a lot to know once we started taking classes and realized how everything happened and what Jesus had done for us," says Chris. "It was a nice change from when I went to church on Easter and Christmas but never knew the true meaning behind anything. Definitely a life-changing experience."

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

*Do you have a story to share about how you became a WELS member? Send it to Forward in Christ, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee, WI 53222; fic@sab.wels.net.*



# BIBLICAL *Interview with an angel* PROFILES

John D. Schuetze



## I wonder how an interview with an angel might go.

I've imagined a talk show host, whom I call Chris Christian, talking with the angel, Gabriel. In this interview we will learn what God tells us about his angels.

*Chris:* Today we have a very special guest in our studio: the angel Gabriel. Welcome. I'm glad you could join us today.

*Gabriel:* Thank you, Chris. It is good to be here.

*Chris:* I am also happy that you are appearing in a visible form. It certainly makes my job a little easier.

*Gabriel:* I can understand that, Chris. That is why I am appearing to you today as a man. As you know, we angels are spiritual beings. We can assume visible forms, but we do not have a physical body.

*Chris:* Gabriel, can you tell our listeners some of the visi-

ble forms that you or your fellow angels have assumed?

*Gabriel:* Well, sometimes we have appeared to people the way I am appearing to you today—as a human being. That was the case when we appeared to Abraham and Lot. While they may have had the idea that we were angels, other people thought we were just common ordinary men. It is striking how Hebrews 13:2 speaks to this point: "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it."

*Chris:* But at other times your appearance was a bit more brilliant, right?



*Gabriel:* Yes, that was the case when we appeared on Easter morning. Then our “appearance was like lightning” and our “clothes were white as snow” (Matthew 28:3).

*Chris:* I would guess that such an appearance would have quite an impact.

*Gabriel:* The soldiers at the tomb were so afraid they shook and became like dead men. The women who came to the tomb were also surprised to see us. But we quickly told them not to be afraid.

*Chris:* They were also surprised to hear the message you angels shared with them.

*Gabriel:* God sent us to share the news of Jesus’ resurrection. Previously a large group of us had been sent to tell some shepherds about Jesus’ birth and to praise God for that birth. I personally was sent to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, as well as to Mary. What an amazing message I was able to share with her. I told her that she would give birth to the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world.

*Chris:* Didn’t you also appear to Daniel when he was in Babylon?

*Gabriel:* Yes, I visited with him twice as I helped him understand a troubling vision that God revealed to him.

*Chris:* Gabriel, allow me to ask a more general question. Can you tell us something about your ministry?

*Gabriel:* Well, Chris, as angels we are first of all God’s messengers. In fact, the word “angel” means messenger. During the Old and New Testament periods we delivered God’s messages to his people here on earth. However, there were also times when God himself—or more specifically Christ before his birth—delivered those messages. He is called the Angel of the Lord. Even though his name is similar to our name, the Bible account makes it clear when this special Angel of the Lord is more than just one of my fellow angels, but God himself.

*Chris:* What other tasks are part of your job description?

*Gabriel:* Besides serving as God’s messengers, we also protect God’s people. Like you, Chris, we love to search the Scriptures. One of my favorite sections is Psalm 91. These words are so comforting because they reveal that God cares about you human beings and even sends us angels to protect you.

*Chris:* One of your fellow angels must have been watching over me as I came to work today. I just missed being involved in a car accident. A large truck drove right through a stoplight. I don’t know what made me see it, but I was fortunate to stop in time.

*Gabriel:* Yes, we were there. God still has a purpose for you on this earth. He has prepared a place for you in heaven, but he still wants you here for a time. And it is important to remember, Chris, that angels are not

only concerned about your physical safety but also your spiritual welfare. We are often sent by God to hold off the attacks of Satan and his evil angels.

*Chris:* You were even sent to strengthen the Savior in his time of need.

*Gabriel:* You must be thinking of when Jesus was praying on the Mount of Olives. Yes, “an angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him” (Luke 22:43). This was a difficult yet exciting time for us as angels. It was painful to see the Son of God suffer in this way. But for centuries we had been watching God’s plan of salvation unfold. It was interesting to see how all the Old Testament prophecies were being fulfilled.

*Chris:* Are there any other tasks that you carry out as God’s ministering spirits?

*Gabriel:* Do you recall the parable of the rich man and Lazarus? Jesus said that when Lazarus died, the angels carried him to heaven. That is another job we have and a special one at that. We are able to usher each child of God right up to the gates of heaven.

*Chris:* That is comforting to know that when our last hour arrives, we not only have the promise that God will be with us. He even sends his angels to be with us and take us to our true home. By the way, Gabriel, do you know that you and your fellow angels have been a popular subject with some people? There have been TV programs about you such as “Touched by an Angel.” There was a magazine called *Angel Times*. Some even say that angels are so important because they are a common positive theme that is found in almost all the religions of the world.

*Gabriel:* Actually these comments disturb me. As angels we are created beings, like you human beings. God made us during the six days of creation. I am always concerned when people give too much attention to angels. It tends to take the focus away from God. He is the one who made us. He is the one who redeemed you human beings. He is the one to whom we all owe our worship and praise. When the apostle John was ready to worship one of my fellow beings, the angel quickly told him, “Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!” (Revelation 19:10).

*Chris:* That reminder is a good way to end our program for today. On this segment of “Biblical Profiles,” we have been interviewing the angel, Gabriel. We look forward to the time when we will see you—and our Savior—in heaven. Until that time comes, remember to give thanks for angels but give all glory to God.

*John Schuetze, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Grace, Milwaukee.*

Find a related Bible study on this topic after June 5 at [www.forwardinchrist.net](http://www.forwardinchrist.net).



# WHATEVER

## Is it worth it?

The choices you make in life will not only affect you, but everyone around you as well.

Kelsey Erdman

It was getting late when the phone rang. I thought it was probably just some telemarketer wanting us to buy their merchandise, so I ignored it. Just as the phone stopped ringing, I remembered that my brother had been at his girlfriend's house watching a movie. I grabbed my cell phone and quickly turned it on in case it was him and he needed to get a hold of us. But then the home phone started ringing again.

"Hello?"

It was my brother. "Is mom there?"

"Hold on. She's in bed, but I'll get her. Are you okay?" I asked anxiously.

To my relief my brother said he was fine.

**When my mom had finished talking to my brother, she told me that there had been an accident at the end of our road.** Logan (my brother) had discovered it. As Logan passed the little country intersection, he had started to notice fast-food wrappers and cigarette cartons sprawled across the road and ditches. Then he saw the smashed, bent-up pile of metal that had once been a jeep. It had rolled over four or five times.

Logan thought the driver or passengers had already gone for help since he couldn't see anyone inside the vehicle. He was wrong. A few minutes later he saw a man lying under the jeep between the front two tires.

The man died at the scene, but it wasn't until later that we found out that he wasn't alone. Logan didn't see or hear the woman in the ditch. The police found her soon after they arrived. She was unconscious and in critical condition. This whole thing happened because they were out drinking.

**God gave us these bodies as temples to serve, worship, and thank him for everything he has done for us.** The people in the jeep were in their 40s

and knew they shouldn't be drinking and driving. But they made that choice—the wrong choice. What resulted because of that choice? One person dead—never to live again. One in critical condition—she may never get better. Friends and families worrying about one person, while mourning the other. My brother always remembering the horrific scene of death.

Did you know just in 2006, an estimated 17,602 people died in alcohol-related traffic crashes—an average of one every 30 minutes? About three in every ten Americans will be involved in an alcohol-related crash at some time in their lives. In 2005, 39 percent of fatal crashes (all age groups) involved alcohol.\*

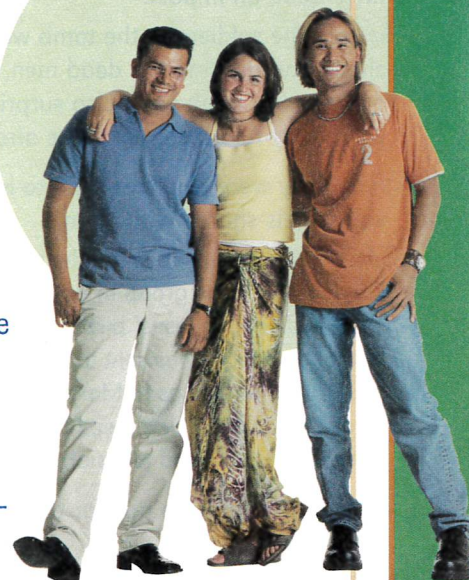
I thanked God over and over that night that Logan hadn't been in front of or behind that jeep. He could have been killed or injured as well. My cousin was about 18 years old when he was hit and killed by a drunk driver 22 years ago. I never had the opportunity to meet my cousin. I never even saw him—all because of a few drinks.

The choices we make in life can be fatal. There isn't a restart or undo button. People mess up by driving drunk. God has a lighted path for all of us; we just have to watch where we are going when we are walking on it so we don't stumble and fall.

So the next time a "friend" offers you a drink or anything that will affect you negatively, you have to ask yourself—is it worth it?

Kelsey Erdman, a sophomore at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wisconsin, is a member at St. Luke, Watertown, Wisconsin.

\*Statistics taken from [www.sadd.org](http://www.sadd.org) and [www.madd.org](http://www.madd.org).





## Obituaries

### Cyril Walther Spaude 1930-2008

Cyril Spaude was born Feb. 6, 1930, in Lake Benton, Minn. He died Mar. 26, 2008, in Watertown, Wis.

A 1957 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Northwestern Lutheran Academy, Mobridge, S.D.; Trinity, Aberdeen, S.D.; Northwestern College, Watertown, Wis.; St. Mark, Watertown, Wis.; Apache Christian Training School, Whiteriver, Ariz.; and WELS Outreach to Muslims.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Adela, and a sister. He is survived by four sons, four daughters, 27 grandchildren, three brothers, and three sisters.

### Elroy J. Schroeder 1932-2008

Elroy Schroeder was born Nov. 5, 1932, in Dale, Wis. He died April 8, 2008.

A graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at Our Savior, Princeton, Minn.; St. Peter, Fond du Lac, Wis.; St. John, St. Paul, Minn.; and Our Savior, Grafton, Wis.

He was preceded in death by a brother and an infant sister. He is survived by his wife, Dorothy; three

daughters; seven grandchildren; and one brother.

### Lynne Marie Henrich 1962-2008

Lynne Henrich (nee Bitter) was born Jan. 17, 1962, in West Bend, Wis. She died Mar. 28, 2008, in Milwaukee, Wis.

A 1984 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at Siloah, Milwaukee, Wis., and St. John, St. John's, Antigua.

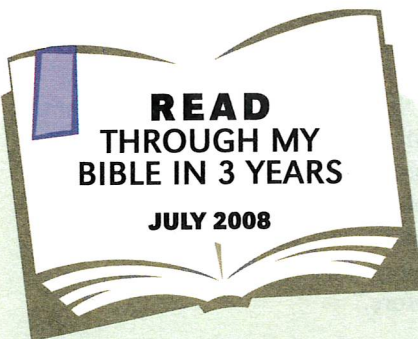
She is survived by her husband, Mark; her parents; three daughters; one son; five brothers; and two sisters.

### Lisa Lynn Clark 1962-2008

Lisa Clark (nee Buchholz) was born Aug. 31, 1962, in Fond du Lac, Wis. She died Mar. 20, 2008, in Fond du Lac, Wis.

A graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at St. Matthew, Oconomowoc, Wis.; Waucousta, Campbellsport, Wis.; and St. Paul, Mount Calvary, Wis.

She is preceded in death by her father. She is survived by her husband, Clifford; two daughters; two brothers; one sister; and her mother.



1. Acts 15:1-12	17. Acts 22:17-29
2. Acts 15:13-34	18. Acts 22:30-23:10
3. Acts 15:35-16:5	19. Acts 23:11-35
4. Acts 16:6-15	20. Acts 24:1-21
5. Acts 16:16-40	21. Acts 24:22-25:12
6. Acts 17:1-15	22. Acts 25:13-27
7. Acts 17:16-34	23. Acts 26:1-18
8. Acts 18:1-17	24. Acts 26:19-32
9. Acts 18:18-28	25. Acts 27:1-20
10. Acts 19:1-20	26. Acts 27:21-44
11. Acts 19:21-41	27. Acts 28:1-16
12. Acts 20:1-16	28. Acts 28:17-31
13. Acts 20:17-38	29. Amos 1, 2
14. Acts 21:1-16	30. Amos 3, 4
15. Acts 21:17-36	31. Amos 5, 6
16. Acts 21:37-22:16	



*The Internet has become a vast maze of information. Knowing where to look for strong Christian content can make the journey easier.*

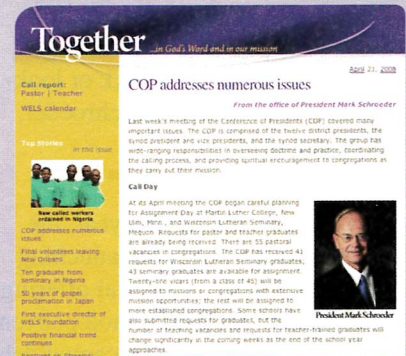
**Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries, Inc. (WLIM)**, a WELS parasynodical organization, brings the gospel to institutionalized men, women, and children in prisons, jails, hospitals, nursing homes, treatment centers, and juvenile detention centers. Its newly redesigned Web site shares more about this ministry, including

- newsletters that share real-life stories about the people WLIM serves;
- downloadable Bible studies for reaching out to the institutionalized;
- a list of ministry locations and contacts;
- volunteer opportunities; and
- giving options.

Check out the site at [www.wlim.net](http://www.wlim.net).

## FIND OUT WHAT MORE THAN 1,500 SUBSCRIBERS ALREADY KNOW:

what's going on in WELS. Through the "Together" e-newsletter, people are staying informed and connected to the work we do as a synod. **SUBSCRIBE TODAY** to have biweekly news delivered to your e-mail.



<http://together.wels.net>





## District conventions set to meet

The launching of a special debt retirement offering as well as the initial report of the Ad Hoc Commission will be two major items coming to the 12 district conventions, all held during the second week of June.

The 12 districts meet individually every even-numbered year to study God's Word, hear reports about work done on their behalf since the last synod convention, examine and comment on current and future synodical and district issues, and elect district officials. Every pastor, male teacher, and male staff minister—as well as a representative from each congregation—attends.

"It's really an attempt to gain grassroots input on a whole range of issues, either looking back or looking forward," says Mark Schroeder, WELS president.

### Year of Jubilee

At the conventions this year, the district presidents will be launching the Year of Jubilee, a special offering authorized by the 2007 synod convention to address the synod's capital debt of \$22.4 million. "If God blesses us with the elimination of this debt, we will have \$2.7 million annually to use for the expanded mission and ministry efforts approved by the convention," says Schroeder.

The Ministry of Christian Giving will be sending materials—including a Bible study, sermons, worship suggestions, offering envelopes, a DVD,

and promotional materials—to each congregation in June. Convention delegates will be the first to see the DVD, which shares the inspiring story of a new member who came to faith through the ministry efforts of Beautiful Savior, Las Vegas, Nev., one of WELS' home missions. The DVD emphasizes the point that even more ministry can be conducted if the synod's debt is eliminated.

"The Year of Jubilee offering is an opportunity for a fresh start—a time for us to be freed from this debt so we can carry out more ministry," says Schroeder.

Congregations will have flexibility in how much time they use to celebrate the Year of Jubilee. Christian Giving has designed it for use during the four-week period of Nov. 23 to Dec. 14. The celebration will culminate at the 2009 synod convention.

### Ad Hoc Commission report

At the conventions this year, delegates also will be given an opportunity to provide input on recommendations from the Ad Hoc Commission, which was authorized by the 2007 synod convention to analyze the way the synod works and to propose strategies to help the synod carry out its mission.

The commission's timetable was to bring recommendations to the 2009 synod convention, but Schroeder says commission members worked to finish the bulk of their work before the

2008 district conventions. "[Commission members] have been very mindful of the fact that district input is important," he says.

A commission member will be at every district convention to answer questions about the recommendations, which, according to Commission Chairman Joel Voss, will fall into three categories: ministry, support, and structure. (Specific details of the report were not available at the time of this writing.) Commission members will then reconvene in late summer to review any district feedback. "We may think our idea is the best thing since sliced bread, but if 10 of the 12 districts say they don't like the idea we need to go back and rethink it," says Voss.

### Other business

Delegates will also hear about other ministry work done since the 2007 synod convention as well as a financial update stating that total operating support will exceed expenses by \$2.2 million or more by the end of the fiscal year, June 30. "The challenge is that we maintain our support and grow from there," says Schroeder. "We can't just go back to where we were, or we may be facing the same problems."

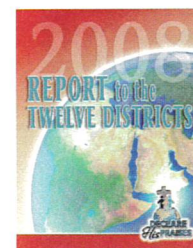
Schroeder says that the conventions will be a time for humble and sincere thanks. "It's a time to say, 'Lord, you got us through this' and then to pray that he will equip us to keep going and go further than we've gone before."

## For MORE information

See where and when your district's convention is being held at [www.wels.net/jump/diconventions](http://www.wels.net/jump/diconventions)



Learn more about the Year of Jubilee at [www.wels.net/jump/jubilee](http://www.wels.net/jump/jubilee)



Read the 2008 Report to the Twelve Districts at [www.wels.net/jump/rtttd](http://www.wels.net/jump/rtttd)



## Growing St. Lucian congregation adds a new building and a new pastor

With a building project ready to be started this summer and a new pastor on his way, Trinity, St. Lucia, is poised to make a difference to an entire nation.

The congregation is reaching out to a diverse group of people in a country where half of the population is made up of citizens 21 or younger and the education system suffers. Thomas Spiegelberg, pastor at Trinity, shares: "We want to spread the gospel. Our community is saying, 'Do something for our youth.'"

To reach this group, Trinity has adjusted its approach to education to serve both adults and youth. In addition to Sunday school and teen and adult Bible studies, Trinity developed after-school programs, including reading and homework lessons coupled with the Word of God.

Then in 2006, with help from the WELS Church Extension Fund, Trinity purchased 7.5 acres of land where it plans to build a church, education building, and sports facility that will "pulse with the gospel message," says Spiegelberg. "On an island of no more than 250 square miles where real estate is sold by the square foot, 7.5 acres is huge."

By St. Lucian standards, the planned church building will be an evangelism tool in itself. The new sports complex will be the only covered basketball court on the island, hopefully drawing many youth to the leagues as well as training programs in coaching and Christian leadership.

With the construction of the building beginning this summer, Trinity is gearing up for growth by calling a second pastor, Bramdeo Ramgolam, a May 2008 graduate from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.

Ramgolam was born in Guyana, South America, to devout Hindu parents and moved to St. Lucia with his mother at nine years old. He and his mom began attending Trinity when neighbors invited them to church. He was confirmed when he was 16 years old.



Members of Trinity, St. Lucia, on Easter morning at the high school auditorium. Members come from diverse backgrounds—some still have a plywood pit toilet behind their houses while others have swimming pools.

Ramgolam's decision to study for the ministry in the United States was influenced by Pastor Joel Jaeger, who he lived with in high school when his mother moved to Canada. But he was even more inspired by the students from Luther Preparatory School (LPS), Watertown, Wis., who came to help with vacation Bible school in 1997. "I was surprised at how they, from a very young age, wanted to be pastors and teachers," Ramgolam recalls. With this encouragement, Ramgolam traveled to the United States to attend LPS as a high school senior and then went on to finish his education to become a pastor.

"We are grateful that Bramdeo is willing and able to serve. This is another step in Trinity congregation assuming more of this expanding ministry," says Harold Hagedorn, administrator of the Board for Home Missions, which is involved in the outreach ministries of the islands of St. Lucia and Antigua.

With the addition of Ramgolam to the ministry team and a plan for new facilities, the Lord is certainly blessing this ministry. Says Spiegelberg, "We have been given an opportunity not just to be another church on the block, but to influence a whole nation."



## Q&A with Pastor Cross, Minnesota district president

*Pastor Larry Cross, president of the Minnesota District for the past 16 years, is retiring June 30. With his last district convention approaching in mid-June, Cross sat down with Forward in Christ to talk about the importance of district conventions and to reflect on his years as president.*

**Question** – Give me a general overview of district conventions.

**Answer** – The districts meet in convention every two years, or years in which the synod convention does not meet. The purpose of the district convention, in addition to deciding local issues, is to study the issues that are going to be before the synod in convention.

One of the big issues this year is the district conventions will be hearing about and hopefully putting into good effect the Year of Jubilee offering, which is aimed at either debt reduction or debt elimination for the synod. And that's important because if we can eliminate that debt we will have almost \$3 million a year we can use for ministry.

We will also receive a report from the Ad Hoc Commission—that's the commission that was authorized by the last synod convention. They are studying how the synod does its work or better ways to do the work more efficiently and the like. The districts will study it and pass on their thoughts to the synod for its further study.

**Question** – Tell me about Minnesota's convention.

**Answer** – When the Minnesota District meets in convention, it's about the same size as a synod convention—around 400 people. It's held at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minn., so we hold our opening service at St. Paul's in New Ulm. It's always a neat thing just to participate in that service when you get all of the people gathered into that wonderful church and the music is fantastic. That's probably the highlight of the whole convention and it sets the tone for the convention.

One of the things that I believe is true about the Minnesota District is that it kind of reflects "Minnesota nice." I really have always appreciated the spirit of the guys who are there. We discuss issues, but we do it in a wonderful brotherly way. We really enjoy that, and we enjoy our unity in the Word. So it's a neat thing.

**Question** – Why are district conventions important for the work we do as a synod?

**Answer** – The main thing in the church is the preservation of the true Word of God—the guarding of the doctrine. So whether it's at the conference level, the district level, or the synodical level, the most important things are the doctrines that are considered and discussed, and just continuing in that brotherly unity that we have in the Wisconsin Synod.

**Question** – Since you are retiring, this will be your last convention as district president. Is it going to be special for you?

**Answer** – Yes, certainly special. I've said this to others: when people congratulate me on my retirement, I always respond, "I'm not sure [congratulations] is the right word."

Actually all of these things are a bit filled with melancholy, because it is the last time. And it's not something that I relish giving up.

**Question** – But you won't feel melancholy once you're living down in that nice Texas sun, right?

**Answer** – We're going to find that out. It's going to be a very great change between living in Rochester, Minn., and living at the lake in Texas. So it's going to be something!

**Question** – What were some of the memorable conventions during your years as district president?

**Answer** – I was elected in 1992, and shortly after were the years of the amalgamation when [Northwestern College and Dr. Martin Luther College merged and] Martin Luther College was established in 1995. Those were very difficult years. . . . But it's such a wonderful thing that that time of the amalgamation, it seems to me, is pretty well over and the synod has adjusted. I think the synod is well-poised for moving into the future.

Read an expanded interview with Pastor Larry Cross online at [www.forwardinchrist.net](http://www.forwardinchrist.net).



Pastor Larry Cross and his wife, Kathy.



## Weathering the storm

After two and a half years, WELS clean-up efforts and building projects have come to a close in the neighborhoods surrounding Crown of Life church in New Orleans. The final group of volunteers left in April, and a special worship service was held to thank the WELS members who have helped out in New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina devastated the region in August 2005.

According to reports from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Katrina was one of the most intense hurricanes ever recorded in the nation's history and affected more than 1.5 million people. More than 800,000 citizens were forced to live outside their homes—the largest displacement of people since the great Dust Bowl migrations of the 1930s.

"It was a watershed moment in the lives of the people who live here," says David Sternhagen, pastor at Crown of Life. "If you talk to people here for half an hour, you will hear them say at least once: 'before the storm' or 'after the storm.' That's been the defining moment in everyone's lives."

Many members of Crown of Life lost their homes, and the church was destroyed. When news of the damage spread, WELS volunteers from around the country poured into town, eager to help this congregation rebuild.

"Life was hard, it was difficult to get around, and there were no fun things [for the volunteers] to do but sit in their campers in the church parking lot," says Sternhagen. "But they weren't here for that. There were here to serve God."

When all was said and done, more than 1,200 volunteers gutted 71 homes, helped rebuild 41 houses—including the parsonage—and constructed the church's fellowship hall. The volunteer groups were part of WELS Kingdom Workers' Faith in Action and Builders for Christ programs, and financial support was provided by WELS Committee on Relief.

Although this was a difficult period for Crown of Life, the hurricane gave rise to new outreach opportunities for the congregation. "Before the storm there was no growth because all of the houses [in our neighborhood] were filled," says Sternhagen. "Now there are new people moving into the area, and that gives us an opportunity to reach them."

Sternhagen says one of the most effective tools has been friendship evangelism. "Most of the growth has come from people who know people—like when members know their neighbors. So we try to encourage that personal evangelism and we try to make



Members and guests enjoy a crawfish boil following the volunteer farewell service held at Crown of Life on April 20.

our church as obvious to the community as we can."

Sternhagen says that whether it's through Christmas or Easter for Kids programs, handing out flyers, or canvassing neighborhoods, Crown of Life will continue to reach out to the recovering community of New Orleans. "My hopes for this congregation have never changed—we want to be the voice of the gospel in our neighborhood," he says. "We want to grow and bring more people to Christ. That will continue to be our goal."

*Look for more on Crown of Life in the November edition of WELS Connection. Several videos and podcasts on Katrina—from the earliest cleanup efforts to the final farewell service—are also available on Streams. Visit <http://streams.wels.net> and search for "Katrina."*

## WELS news briefs

**Commission on Youth Discipleship**  
414-256-3274; [cyd@sab.wels.net](mailto:cyd@sab.wels.net)

A three-year grant from a WELS family is allowing Youth Discipleship to continue producing *Kids Connection*, a kid-friendly video news magazine that features interesting and spiritually uplifting stories about people, places, and programs around WELS. "*Kids Connection* shows how living for Jesus and sharing him with others is what we are called to do and also something that brings great temporal and eternal blessing," says Dr. Joel Nelson, administrator for Youth Discipleship. About 350 congregations subscribe, generating half the revenue needed to fund the ministry.

Learn more about *Kids Connection* at [www.kidsconnection.tv](http://www.kidsconnection.tv).



**WELS Foundation**  
414-256-3249; [jim.holm@sab.wels.net](mailto:jim.holm@sab.wels.net)

Mr. Jim Holm, former president of WELS Investment Funds, Inc. (WIF), is now the first executive director of the WELS Foundation. Holm will provide strategic leadership and direction for the foundation as well as oversee day-to-day operations. The WELS Foundation manages gifts for donors who want to support the work of the synod, congregations, and other WELS ministries. The executive director position is funded through the WELS Foundation and reports to Pastor David Liggett, president of WELS Foundation and director of the Ministry of Christian Giving. Learn more about WELS Foundation at [www.wels.net/foundation](http://www.wels.net/foundation).



## Loving moms

When Jenny\* walked through the doors of Associated Pregnancy Services, she knew her life was going to change; but it changed in a way she didn't expect. She went in searching for information about an abortion—how and when she could get one. But she walked out that day with a different game plan: she was going to keep her baby, and the Loving Moms program was going to help her.

Associated Pregnancy Services—a pregnancy center operated by WELS Lutherans for Life, Metro-Milwaukee—began the Loving Moms program last year to provide expecting mothers with ongoing support, encouragement, and the saving gospel message. “Our mission is to provide facts to help people make pro-life decisions and to share the gospel,” says Pat Johnson, client services director. “The Loving Moms program gives them a reason to come back so we can continue that relation-

ship with them, share the love of Jesus, and hopefully have a bigger impact on their lives.”

In the Loving Moms program, a group of expecting mothers and brand new moms meet once a month with an instructor to learn about their changing bodies, the development of their baby, and parenting skills. They also participate in a Bible study.

Johnson says these meetings have helped a lot of women, including Jenny. “She tells me how glad she is that she came to [Loving Moms],” says Johnson. “She received material items for her baby, she made new friends, but most importantly she heard the saving Word of God.”

Although the program is still new, Johnson says she hopes there will be many more “success stories” like this in the future. “We are committed to helping this program grow,” she says.



The Loving Moms baby boutique is where women can spend the “baby bucks” they earn by attending Loving Moms’ meetings.

“Through it, we are meeting a mother’s need to be nurtured, so she can nurture her children with Christian values in a Christian way. And ultimately we hope the mothers will teach their children about Jesus.”

For more information about the program, visit [www.welsflmilw.com](http://www.welsflmilw.com).

\*Name has been changed.

## Music ministry focuses on the Word

“My song will silence never, I’ll worship him forever.”\*

These words sum up how Charles Bonow feels about his life and his ministry of presenting service concerts on organs in WELS churches across the country.

“I definitely am not the world’s best organist or the most talented person, but to have the opportunity to get people into the Word through my offerings of music is the greatest privilege,” says Bonow, a member at St. John, Lewiston, Minn.

Since this ministry’s beginnings in 1984, Bonow, a former pastor, has presented service concerts to nearly 550 churches in 24 states and Canada. He has developed eight programs that follow different themes from God’s Word. These concerts, conducted during normal worship times, begin with a devotion and then include a series of Scripture readings interspersed with organ selections and congregational singing.

His goal: to reach people with the gospel through his devotions, the Scripture readings, and the words of the hymns.

The role of the music, he says, is to help worshipers “better understand and reflect upon the meaning and message of the words they are singing and the spiritual applications for their lives.”

Bonow wrote many of the organ interludes himself. “I try to proclaim the Word more fully through the music I

make and play by working to reflect the mood and convey the thought [of the Bible text],” he says. “You can play the most difficult Bach fugue and if it doesn’t direct people to the Word, you’ve just done an exercise in art.”

A student of Paul Manz, Bonow has played on organs ranging from “little itty-bitty organs that people donated . . . to really beautiful, grand, monstrous organs.” He adjusts his programs and music to fit the instrument. “I’ve never said no because of the organ,” he says.

After playing at different churches almost every Sunday, Bonow has plenty of stories to share. He especially remembers one Sunday when he was scheduled to play in Randolph, Wis. A windstorm had gone through the area the night before. Trees were leveled, barns were torn down, and debris was everywhere. Bonow was wondering how many people would come. “What was so heartwarming was that the church was filled to the rafters . . . with people singing praises to God of how he had spared them,” he says.

This fits right into Bonow’s prayer for his ministry: “That God use me in his service to bring [people] to Christ, not just to hear pretty music.”

For more information, visit [www.charlesbonow.com](http://www.charlesbonow.com).

\*From “O Glorious Love”



Charles Bonow and his wife, Sandra. Sandra does all the scheduling for this ministry. “Her love, patience, forgiveness, and support have been the mainstay of my daily life,” says Bonow.



## District news

### South Atlantic

Seventy-five children showed up at **Abiding Grace, Covington, Ga.**, for its Easter for Kids community day on Mar. 15. Here they learned the real reason to celebrate Easter. On Easter Sunday, 210 people—half were visitors—crammed into the congregation's temporary worship space: a rented daycare.

**Shepherd of the Lakes, Land O Lakes, Fla.**, conducted an Easter for Kids event Mar. 15. With the help of four students from Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., this mission congregation of seven members reached out to the 35 children who attended the event. Following the Easter festivities, 10 families expressed interest in the new mission congregation.

Members of **Open Bible, The Villages, Fla.**, held a groundbreaking service for their new building Mar. 30. More than 75 people attended the service, which was held at the site of the new sanctuary.

**Dave and Dee Mathiak**, members at Prince of Peace, Englewood, Fla., left May 4 for Lusaka, Zambia, where they will serve for the next two to three years as WELS Kingdom Workers at the Bible institute/seminary compound. A commissioning service was held for them on Mar. 30.

**Erik Landwehr**, staff minister at Trinity, St. Lucia, West Indies, was presented with the National Basketball Association Coach of the Year Award by the prime minister of St. Lucia, the Honorable Stevenson King. Landwehr was nominated for the award because of his volunteer work coaching the Corinth Secondary School basketball program for the past several years. The team made it to the national finals in St. Lucia this year.

### Southeastern Wisconsin

**Dustin Blumer**, student at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, appeared on the game show "The Price is Right" on April 21. He and other members of the seminary choir attended the taping while on tour in California in March. Blumer was the first audience member chosen to "come on down." Later in the show, he won a bedroom set. The choir also made their TV debut when they sang "Hoch Soll Sie Leben," a traditional seminary song, while Blumer

### South Atlantic



Pastor Harmon Lewis, pastor at Saving Grace, Mobile, Ala., and 18 of the 23 people that joined the Saving Grace family on Easter Day. Nine were baptized, nine were confirmed, three professed their faith, and two transferred to the congregation—bringing Saving Grace's membership to 109.

spun the wheel in an unsuccessful attempt to get into the showcase showdown.

**Anna Fink**, senior at Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Wis., was awarded the runner-up Youth Award for Volunteering from the Wisconsin Public Service and Volunteer Center of Brown County in April. She was nominated for the hospice pillow project she developed for Holy Family Memorial Hospice.

**Wisconsin Lutheran Family and Child Service**, a non-profit organization affiliated with WELS, is breaking ground for a new senior living center in Hartford, Wis., on June 8. Construction of the apartment complex will be completed mid-2009.

### Happy anniversary!

**SA—Crown of Glory, Orlando, Fla.**, celebrated its 25th anniversary on Mar. 2.

**NE—Immanuel church and school, Hadar, Neb.**, celebrates 125 years on June 8.

**SEW—Martin Schulz**, pastor at St. John, Milwaukee, celebrates 40 years in the ministry on June 29.

The district reporters for this month are: NE—Tim Kemnitz; SA—Chris Kruschel; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

### South Atlantic



Divine Savior Academy, Doral, Fla., participated in the 2008 Humane Society of Greater Miami Walk for the Animals on Feb. 23 at Bayfront Park. The Divine Savior walkers raised more money than any other school in Miami.



**CHANGES IN MINISTRY**

**Pastors**

**Carter, Douglas M.**, to St. Paul, Cudahy, Wis.  
**Cross, Larry E.**, to retirement  
**Ehlert, Ronald J.**, to retirement  
**Elgin, Walter F.**, to retirement  
**Jacobs, Troy D.**, to Shepherd of the Plains, Fort Morgan, Colo.  
**Klein, Carl M.**, to retirement  
**Meier, William A.**, to retirement  
**Pagel, Carl E.**, to retirement  
**Schultz, Aaron C.**, to Beautiful Savior, West Des Moines, Iowa  
**Sullivan, John J.**, to retirement  
**Vomhof, Ervine F.**, to retirement  
**Walters, Mark R.**, to Abiding Word, Orleans, Ontario, Canada

**Teachers**

**Aguilar, Andrew S.**, to California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, Calif.  
**Bahlmann, Debra J.**, to Grace, Prairie Du Chien, Wis.  
**Bater, Melissa**, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Beyersdorf, Scott D.**, to Christ-St. Peter, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Brown, Ronald V.**, to retirement  
**Cross, Katherine M.**, to retirement  
**Dallmann, Gary L.**, to retirement  
**Deglow, Mary M.**, to retirement  
**DeNoyer, George P.**, to retirement  
**Flack, Diane M.**, to retirement  
**Frear, Rebekah A.**, to Risen Savior, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Gosdeck, Donald E.**, to retirement  
**Grove, Gina E.**, to Resurrection, Rochester, Minn.  
**Gruetzmacher, Robert E.**, to retirement  
**Hintz, Christopher M.**, to Emmaus, Phoenix, Ariz.  
**Huebner, Scott R.**, to St. Peter, Schofield, Wis.  
**Kassulke, Timothy J.**, to Mt. Calvary, Waukesha, Wis.  
**Kieselhorst, Jerome N.**, to retirement  
**Kirchoff, Jessica**, to Bethany, Hustisford, Wis.  
**Kriewall, Timothy J.**, to retirement  
**Krug, Nathan C.**, to Illinois Elementary School, Crete, Ill.  
**Kruse, Andrew J.**, to Redeeming Grace, Rogers, Minn.  
**Kuske, Philip L.**, to retirement  
**Learman, Rebekah A.**, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.  
**Leitz, Karla M.**, to St. John, St. Paul, Minn.  
**Manthe, Suzanne M.**, to retirement  
**Mateske, Adam R.**, to Mt. Olive, Appleton, Wis.  
**Micheel, John H.**, to retirement  
**Natalie Jr., Anthony J.**, to Evergreen Lutheran High School, Des Moines, Wash.

**Oblender, Florence P.**, to retirement  
**Pliner, Kelli R.**, to Trinity, Brillion, Wis.  
**Poston, Kevin S.**, to St. John, Watertown, Wis.  
**Retzlaff, Jennifer L.**, to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.  
**Rockhoff, Janice L.**, Friedens, Kenosha, Wis.  
**Rosenthal, Ryan D.**, to Faith, Fond du Lac, Wis.  
**Schlender, Mary B.**, to retirement  
**Schubkegel, Timothy P.**, to Holy Cross (ELS), Madison, Wis.  
**Schultz, John F.**, to retirement  
**Schultz, Ronald L.**, to retirement  
**Schultz, Sandra K.**, to retirement  
**Stellick, Diane A.**, to retirement  
**Tauscher, Lynda J.**, to retirement  
**Tranberg, Tanya J.**, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Travis, Linda M.**, to retirement  
**Wade Jr., James A.**, to Bethany, Manitowoc, Wis.  
**Walker, LaRita E.**, to retirement  
**Wempner, Christine M.**, to Emmanuel, Tempe, Ariz.  
**Westra, Kristine S.**, to Beautiful Savior, Grove City, Ohio  
**Whitney, Susan C.**, to retirement  
**Willems, Paul L.**, to retirement  
**Zubke, David D.**, to Peace, Kissimmee, Fla.

**Staff ministers**

**Hansen, Joel D.**, to Camp Phillip, Wautoma, Wis.  
**Metzger, John L.**, to Grace, Grand Anse, Grenada

**Instructors**

**Schewe, D. Jeanne**, to Martin Luther School, Plzen, Czech Republic, Thoughts of Faith, Inc. (ELS)  
**Schewe, Harold A.**, to Martin Luther School, Plzen, Czech Republic, Thoughts of Faith, Inc. (ELS)

**COLLOQUY NOTICE**

Dr. Paul Johnston of Norman, Okla., formerly a clergyman in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, successfully completed the final step in the WELS pastoral colloquy program on Feb. 23, 2008. He is thus declared eligible for entry into the WELS ministerium as a retired pastor and as such may participate in part-time service in our pastoral ministries.

*Mark Schroeder, President*

**ANNIVERSARIES**

**Maineville, Ohio**—Abiding Word (25). June 29. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; picnic to follow. RSVP requested by June 15. Lynne & Rachel Young, 513-398-6935; rmyoung@cinci.rr.com.  
**Hustisford, Wis.**—Bethany (150). June 29. Worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M. Theme: Ministry. Barb Uecker, buecker@bethanyhustisford.com.

**Lake City, Minn.**—Trinity (125). July 13. Worship, 10:30 A.M. and 1:30 P.M. Dinner between services. RSVP requested. June Henn, 651-345-5196; junehenn@embarqmail.com.

**Kendall, Wis.**—St. John (100). Oct. 5. Worship 10:30 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. Special service, 1:30 P.M. Don Yahnke, 608-463-7536, orot2@yahoo.com.

**COMING EVENTS**

**Single Parent Family Camp**—July 4-6. Camp Phillip, Wautoma, Wis. 920-787-3202; office@campphillip.com.

**Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors Convention**—July 15-17. Holiday Inn, St. Cloud, Minn. 507-254-4403; owls@newulmtel.net.

**Operation Science**—July 23-24. Summer training for Wisconsin area Lutheran K-8 teachers and schools. Site, Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. Beth Weed, bethtweed@operationscience.org.

**Training Camp-A Lutheran Camp for Kids**—July 27-Aug. 1. YMCA Camp Duncan, Ingleside, Ill. Web site, www.newlife-wels.org, click "Training Camp."

**National Conference on Worship, Music & the Arts**—July 28-31. Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minn. Web site, www.wels.net/jump/worship-conf.

**Christian Life Resources 2008 National Convention**—Nov. 15. Country Springs Hotel, Pewaukee, Wis. Web site, www.CLRevents.com.

**NAMES WANTED**

**BRAC movers, civilian and active duty military, to Fort Knox, Ky.**—Paul Horn 270-352-4545, faithlutheranchurch@insightbb.com

**Volunteers for Camp Croix, Danbury, Wis.**—Directors, nurses, and lifeguards needed. Ryan Conlon, ryanconlon78@msn.com.

**POSITIONS AVAILABLE**

**Business professors**—Wisconsin Lutheran College, a Bible-based liberal arts college affiliated with WELS, is seeking candidates to teach in the business department. Deborah Uecker, WLC, 8800 W Bluemound Rd, Milwaukee WI 53226.

**Relief staff (full-time)**—New Beginnings-A Home for Mothers (an affiliate of Christian Life Resources), metropolitan Denver, Colo., is looking for a woman to provide the primary service of on-site supervision of the home and residents when the called house parents are not on duty. Mark Bartels, 800-729-9535; markb@christianliferesources.com.

**GUEST PREACHER NEEDED**

**Casper/Sheridan, Wyo.**—July 13. Lodging provided along with reimbursement for preaching. Philip Spaude, 307-235-2770; philspaude@aol.com.

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





Virgil and Sharon McCallson (pictured), members of Salem, Colorado Springs, Colo., pulled their RV into the parking lot of Crown of Life, New Orleans, on Jan. 4, 2006.

"Virgil had retired, and we were traveling with our RV when Katrina hit," says Sharon. "He said, 'I think we should go down to New Orleans. We take, take, take. And it's time to give back.' So I said, 'Okay, we'll do it.'"

They were part of the first group that came to New Orleans through WELS Kingdom Workers' Builders for Christ program. Most volunteers stayed for two weeks, but the McCallsons were there for two months.

"Virgil wanted to stay; he was not ready to go home," says Sharon. "More people were coming in, and there wasn't enough room for our RV to stay. But God had a hand in that. We weren't home a week, and Virgil started having chest pains. [He passed away] two months to the day, almost."

Sharon says she is thankful Virgil was persistent about going to New Orleans. "When we were there he was up early every morning, looking forward to the Bible study and working with all of the people. I'm glad we did it, because that was one of the highlights of his life—he enjoyed every minute of it."

David Sternhagen, pastor at Crown of Life, remembers Virgil. "As he was leaving [New Orleans], he said, 'This is the best thing that ever happened to me in my life.' Well, that's a big deal," says Sternhagen. "And he was so blessed by it. You could tell that while Virgil was here, he had a great time actively serving his Lord."

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

# HEROES OF FAITH

*In March, we asked our readers who, besides Jesus, is their personal hero of faith. Here are some responses:*

I would have to say John the Baptist. I think he had the best job in the world: the forerunner to the Christ. He was bold and wasn't afraid to preach the good news and to tell people they needed a Savior. How wonderful to be that bold and dedicated to your job!

*Sheena*

Each day my faith is at a different point. I need to look at different people to strengthen whatever is weak at the time.

When I'm tempted to hold a grudge, I read about Joseph. Joseph could have been angry with his brothers when they sold him into slavery, but he chose to forgive them. God . . . turned it into a blessing. Without Joseph going ahead of them to prepare for the coming famine the direct line to the Savior would have died.

When I want to give into peer pressure and follow the crowd, I read about Daniel. When ordered to worship the god of the land he did not follow the order. He would rather have faced

the possibility of death by lions than sin against God.

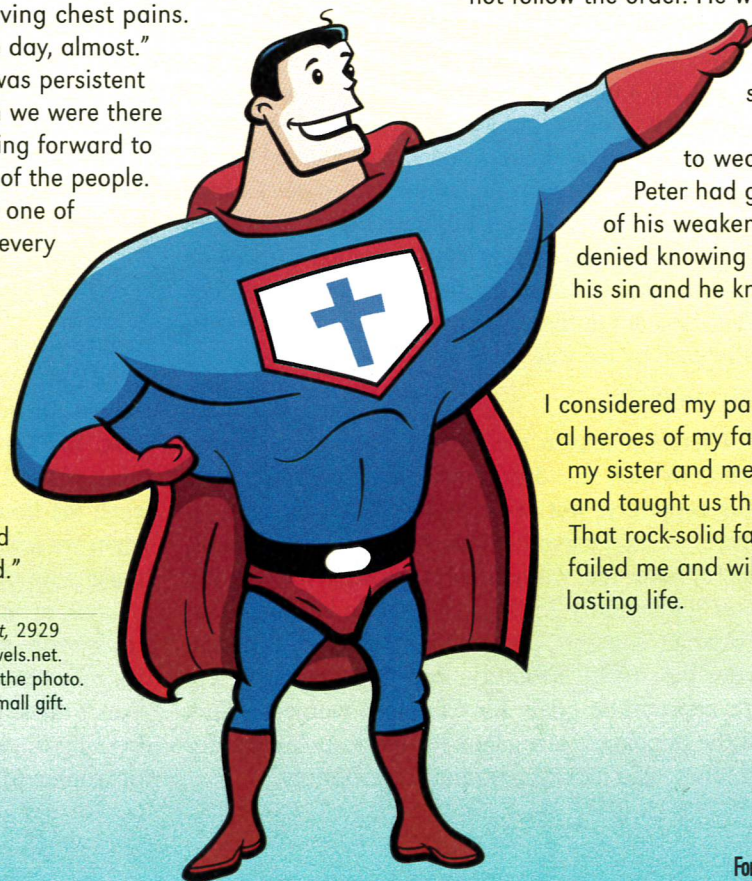
When my faith starts to weaken, I look to Peter.

Peter had great faith. But in one of his weaker moments—when he denied knowing Jesus—he was sorry for his sin and he knew he was forgiven.

*Michele Bryant  
LaPorte, Indiana*

I considered my parents to be the personal heroes of my faith because they raised my sister and me in a God-loving home and taught us that God's Word is true. That rock-solid faith in Christ has never failed me and will be my gift of everlasting life.

*Richard Rimmel  
Saukville, Wisconsin*





# WEAR YOUR

Christians are different from the world. They show it by how they act, but they also show it by how they dress.

Jon D. Buchholz

Please pardon my inconvenient candor, but let's be honest: living in our culture and our society is like living in a moral slime pit. Rivers of disgusting goop slop across the airwaves. Television promotes gratuitous sex and violence. You can tune in to programs that tell all the latest about whom the celebrities are "living with" and how a new breakup is on the horizon. Most of the movies are no better. Song after song on the radio celebrates moral filth. Madison Avenue marketing incites the deadly sins of greed, envy, and lust. Glossy, full-color magazines leave nothing to the imagination. We're living in the middle of a pig sty!

Yes, it's a hog wallow—and it surely is easy to get sucked into the mire, to go with the icky flow, and to become content with the world's way of doing things, especially in the realm of fashion and style. Fashion and style trends call to Christian women as well as others. All of us confront the temptation to go with the flow and conform to the world around us. But Christians are different, and we can demonstrate that difference by the way we dress.

## DRESS MODESTLY

There's a reason the apostle Paul says, "I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God" (1 Timothy 2:9,10). The reason is simply that Christian women understand they are different from the world. Modesty, decency, and propriety are appropriate goals for Christian women. Think of the opposites: arrogance for modesty, excess for decency, and lack of restraint for propriety.

Sometimes it seems that contemporary trends in clothing are deliberately designed to stimulate lust and sexual temptation: tight-fitting clothing, low-cut waistlines, plunging necklines, daring décolletage. Sex sells. But a provocative image is not something women of Christ want to project. How do we want others to consider us? Even businesses have adopted dress codes so that potential customers or clients will not be put off by what someone wears.

Jesus warned us how easily sinful thoughts can enter our minds: "I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell" (Matthew 5:28,29). This is serious business!

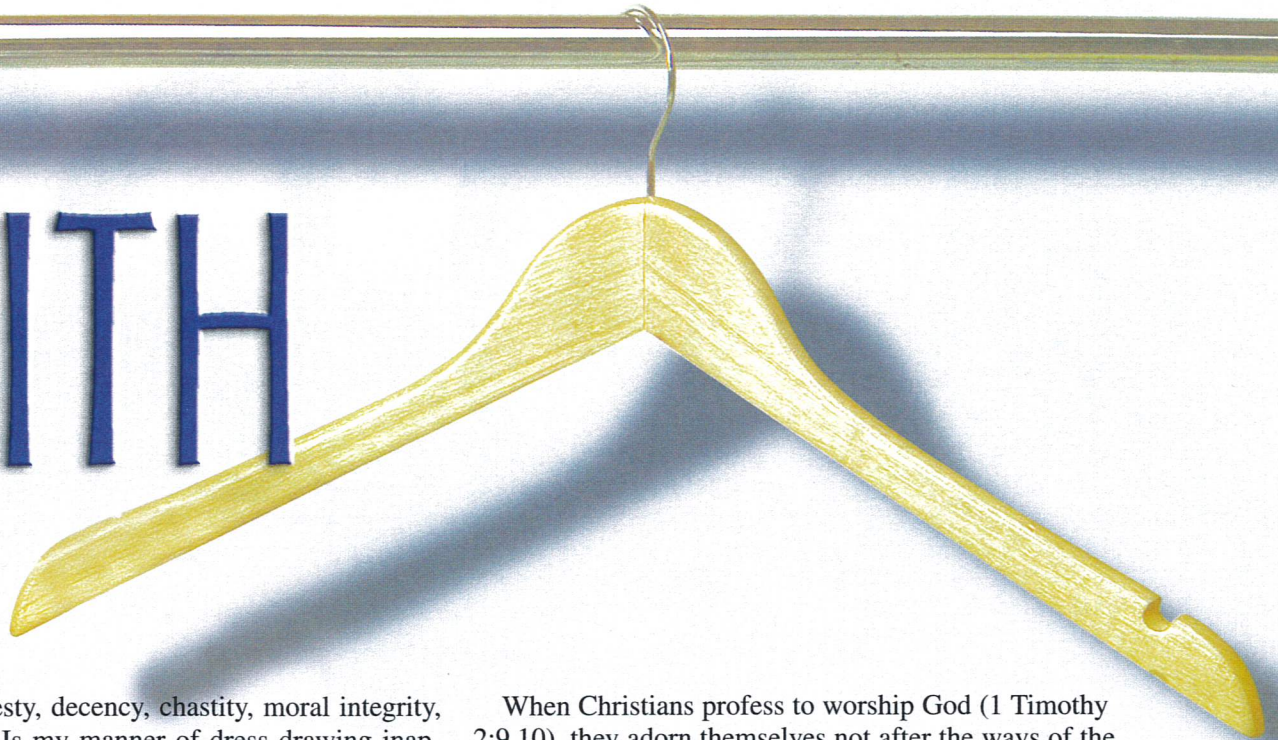
## WE ARE AMBASSADORS

Each of us is an ambassador for Christ. Doesn't that suggest that we dress the part? Ambassadors of nations in our world are careful of the image they project. They know that others will take away an impression of the nation they represent by how they look. Isn't it good for us to ask what others will think of our Lord and Master when we get ready to leave the house? Perhaps it's even more important when we leave our private house and go the Lord's house with other Christians.

Look at yourself. Look at how you're dressed. Look with a critical eye at how your sons and daughters are dressed. Don't forget to ask yourself: "Am I dressing to conform to the world? Or am I dressing to glorify Christ?" I think it might be well for women to ask questions like: Does my wardrobe



# FAITH



communicate modesty, decency, chastity, moral integrity, and sexual purity? Is my manner of dress drawing inappropriate attention, leering glances, and prurient interest? For men a similar set of questions could apply: Do I look like a representative of Christ? Is what I wear neat, clean, and presentable or is it in poor taste for the house of God?

Christian fathers, you have a leadership role for your sons and your daughters. Lead by example. You have a responsibility to shepherd your family in the way of righteousness and decency. One Christian father told me he encouraged his girls to dress in a way that draws attention to their face, not other parts of their body; that's excellent advice. Not only does the dress of your family represent Christ, but it also speaks about you and your family.

## YOUR IDENTITY IS DEEPER THAN YOUR CLOTHES

Here's the kicker: You don't need to draw attention to yourself with a vain, worldly, and provocative image. Your identity isn't wrapped up in how you look to others on the outside. I think that this is especially important for women. You don't have to attract attention to be valuable as a human being. As the proverb says, "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised" (Proverbs 31:30).

The image of a Christian is the righteousness of Christ, that beautiful garment of perfection that he folded you in when you were baptized. Your identity is defined as a new creation of God, reborn into Christ. Your worth as a human being is measured by the price with which you were bought, the blood sacrifice of the Lamb of God. You can't make yourself more beautiful than God has already declared you to be, as he has clothed you as his beautiful bride!

When Christians profess to worship God (1 Timothy 2:9,10), they adorn themselves not after the ways of the world but in the ways of God. Choose a wardrobe that doesn't call vain and undue attention to yourselves and your physical appearance. Dress modestly and decently. Adorn your life with deeds of gentle kindness, compassion, and Christian love. Let your beauty be measured, as St. Peter says, not by outward adornment, but by the beauty of "your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight" (1 Peter 3:4).

And one last thing. The whole life of a Christian is a sacrifice of worship and praise. But worship in the house of God—when we come into the presence of God's Word with other believers—deserves special consideration. Sunday church isn't a fashion show, in which men and women compete to win the prize for best dressed. Sunday church isn't a beach outing, either. We are ambassadors for Christ. God still deserves our most reverent and our most respectful demeanor and dress. We come together not to put on airs or to impress others, but as humble servants of Christ. What we wear is our outward expression of inward devotion and Christian piety.

The world's ways are not the ways of a Christian. Just because the world is a slime pit doesn't mean we have to take the plunge. Christians are a "holy priesthood" (1 Peter

2:5). The word "holy" doesn't just mean "pure" and "sinless;" it means "separate" and "set apart." We have a different outlook, a different image, and a different identity. Christians are different—and it shows. Wear your faith.

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# ADDI

Drinking can consume anyone, and often the way out is difficult. But God does extend his hand to us.

Laura Herrmann

**S**piritually bankrupt, financially bankrupt, a failing marriage, struggling with addiction, losing loved ones, hitting rock bottom. Are any of these familiar to you? Have you experienced one or all of them? How do you dig yourself out from feeling like there is no hope, like you are all alone and nobody will understand?

All of these things applied to me. I've never felt more shameful, humiliated, or alone in all my life. My life had spiraled down as far as it could go.

My sinful nature had me running from my Lord and Savior because I was ashamed of who I had become and what I was doing, not only to myself but to those who loved me too. I was a full-time mom, wife, employee, and a victim of alcohol—a closet drinker, if you will.

I had a secret problem

I had a problem with alcohol in high school, but I straightened out, got married, and had two beautiful boys. But my mother's death and my failing marriage brought me back to alcohol. Drinking began to consume me. It took a 12-pack to get home. Then I was a wife and mother until everyone went to bed. It took another 12-pack to get through the rest of the night. I'd sit at home and drink alone.

I also was cross addicted. After my family went to bed, I would go online. I longed for the male attention I found "cybering."

I hid the beer in the garage. At night, I'd open four or five at a time so no one could hear the top pop or the cap twist. I got rid of the empties in cereal boxes. I'd even put them in a big purse and dispose of them in dumpsters around town.

But I didn't have a problem, at least that's what I told myself. I knew better. I went to a Lutheran grade school and knew Luther's Catechism. But Satan kept chirping in my ear even when I sat in church with a hangover.

**Recovery begins**

I think that the beginning of my recovery happened one Sunday as I was leaving church. You see, it was important for me to be in church; my faith was very strong. Even if I had to sit there with a hangover, I was there. One Sunday I didn't look very good and when my pastor asked how I felt, I said, "You don't want to know." He persisted and eventually got me to a Christian counselor.

For months, I defiantly denied my addiction. But the counselor never gave up on me. I was angry at God, angry at the world, and angry with



# OTED

myself, but I wasn't ready to turn my will and life over to God. I wasn't ready to give up that control. Finally the counselor said that either I go to an alcohol treatment center or our sessions would have to end. Everyone was surprised when I admitted myself because I hid the drinking so well.

I got sober, but just because you get sober doesn't mean life automatically gets easy. My addiction to alcohol had suppressed the emotional pain, which was still there. I had to try to feel and experience pain and sorrow in a healthy, safe way.

But I wasn't ready to deal with living life sober. To override the emotional pain, I cut my arms. The physical pain kept the emotions away. I was convinced I could not live life on God's terms. I started doubting my faith and questioning why things were happening the way they were. God and I had a long wrestling match. The downward spiral included bankruptcy. My husband left after 18 years of marriage, and I was a suicidal wreck.

The book of Psalms helped

During some of my counseling sessions, my counselor would get me into the book of Psalms. After the sessions, I'd go home and mark them in my Bible with the date. I frequently go back to them when I am struggling and feeling alone. So many times the psalms relate to my own troubles.

They speak of the same struggles we have today.

Psalm 13 particularly stands out: "How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; my enemy will say, 'I have overcome him,' and my foes will rejoice when I fall. But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me."

I wondered how long the garbage could keep going through my head day in and day out, day in and day out. But once I started trusting in God, things got better. I could lay my head down, and the garbage would stop. My pastor had told me to listen to the gentle whisper of God. I think he was trying to tell me not to try so hard but simply let God speak to me. Sometimes we are our own worst enemy. Life is lonely, dark, and scary. It's hard to take the hand that is extended to you.

Psalm 13 helped me to dig out of my black hole. I can't tell you how many times I've read and reread those verses. This psalm

says it all. I have to trust that God has a plan for me. I don't have to look beyond today. Yesterday is history, today is a gift, and tomorrow is a mystery. I've become grateful for another day sober. I'm in a good spot today. God has forgiven me. I know that my kids have forgiven me, and I need to forgive myself. Once I could forgive myself, then things got a lot clearer.

I am so grateful for my dad who never gave up on me. My two sons have never given up either. It hasn't been easy for them. My youngest used to be my go-getter. He would get me a beer and then tell me he thought I had enough. I'd get angry with him. Today he says, "I don't want that mom back." I'm especially thankful for my counselor. He has been there from the beginning of my journey right up to today. I'm also grateful for my pastor who always gave me a shoulder to lean on.

*Laura Herrmann is a member at Trinity, Belle Plaine, Minnesota.*







Mark Schweden

## A synod that values worship

One activity far exceeds all others in involving people directly with the life and work of a congregation. That activity is worship. Public worship is so central to our church experience that we couldn't possibly conceive of the church without it. In worship we join together to confess our sin and to receive the precious news of God's forgiveness in Christ. In worship we kneel beside those who share our faith and receive the body and blood of our Savior. In worship we witness and celebrate the new life that God creates in Holy Baptism. In worship, God conveys his grace to us in Word and sacrament, and we proclaim his grace with our songs of thanks and praise.

The Lutheran church has always been known for its emphasis on Christ-centered and gospel-proclaiming worship. From the time of the Reformation, the Lutheran church has also been a liturgical church. There is good reason for that. Martin Luther himself stressed the importance of holding on to the historic liturgies of the Christian church, since those liturgies provided the framework for regular proclamation—to members and visitors alike—of the timeless truths heard by Christians for centuries. Liturgical worship provides worshipers with a connection to generations of Christians who have gone before.

To be liturgical does not mean to be stale, stodgy, mindlessly repetitive, and tradition-bound. Rather, a liturgical church treasures those elements of worship that the church throughout the ages has found to be valuable and beneficial. Liturgical worship features familiar elements like the Confession of Sins, the Absolution, the Creed, the Psalms, the Scripture readings, the Prayer of the Day, as well as various responses sung by the congregation such as the Kyrie (Lord, have mercy), the Sanctus (Holy, holy, holy), and the Gloria (Glory to God).

At the same time, liturgical worship can and does incorporate new and fresh contributions to our worship heritage. It's not surprising that our own synod has regularly produced new hymnals and other resources for worship. The new worship resources have enabled us to incorporate newer hymns and musical settings into our worship. Some of my (and possibly your) favorite hymns in our current hymnal were not a part of the other hymnal.

Today people throughout our synod are discussing important issues involving the purpose of worship, the styles of worship, and how to conduct our worship in the best possible way. The Bible and the Lutheran Confessions make it clear that the form, style, and structure of our worship are matters of Christian freedom. But this Christian freedom does not imply that we are free to do anything we want. Acting in Christian freedom in an area as important as worship, in fact, implies very careful thought and decision making. Christian freedom in worship decisions involves sanctified and responsible Christian judgment. That means recognizing that the proclamation of the gospel message is vital—both in what is spoken and in what is sung. That means remembering that the purpose of worship is not to please various tastes and preferences, but rather to edify worshipers through the proclamation of law and gospel. That means a commitment to a careful evaluation of what elements of our worship need to be preserved and what can be changed in a way that gives glory to God and benefits those who worship.

I'm thankful that we are a synod that values worship—a synod in which every member can say with the Psalmist, "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD'" (Psalm 122:1).

Next: We are a synod that values Christian education.



*I am the way and the truth and the life.  
No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6*

We are surrounded by it, but it seems that no one understands it. Life, that is.

#### **Jesus gives us physical life**

We can't even seem to agree when it starts. We Christians are right in saying it begins at conception, but plenty of people disagree. Even we seem a little conflicted about it. Pregnant mothers say, "I'm going to have a baby." Don't they already have one? We all remember our birthday. Why? If the day we are born means the day we came to life, that's not it.

We also have trouble figuring out when life ends. Is it when the breathing stops, the brain waves go flat, the last plug is pulled, or something else?

Now Jesus comes along and says, "I am the life." Certainly Jesus is the author and creator of this thing we call life. He created that spark. So everything that is alive is in some way connected with Jesus, the Life.

#### **Jesus gives us spiritual life**

But this physical life is not the end game for Jesus. He said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). Obviously Jesus wants to make us more than physically alive. He wants more for

us than breathing, sleeping, walking, and even laughing.

St. Paul explains how Jesus gave us life to the full: "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross" (Colossians 2:13,14). This greater life is called spiritual life. We even call it being "born again by the Spirit." The connection with the author of life, Jesus, is no longer vague or incidental. It is real, through the conduit of faith and love. And now we are "alive" the way the Life wants us to be. As a matter of fact, without this life—earned by Jesus and created by the Spirit—we would be dead. We would be no better than terminal patients waiting for the end. Without the Life—Jesus—our end would be eternally terminal.

Now that we are spiritually connected to the Life, we are truly alive. We join the ranks of the immortals, the ones who never die. It is the kind of life you would expect from the Life. We find ourselves beginning the never-ending journey of eternal life.

It isn't that we still don't have some struggles living in the world. It isn't that we still don't have to shake off this mortal body before we get the new and improved immortal version in the resurrection. But we are people who have life now and always, thanks to our Life, Jesus. We are not terminal cases without hope. We have life because we are connected to the Life.

And it is going to get better. The day is coming when our connection with the Life will not just be by faith; it will be face to face. There in the joys of heaven, we mortals, having put on immortality, will have that pure life that the author intended from the beginning. Then the fullness of life will be unending, beautiful, joyous, and without tears and sorrow.

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*This is the sixth article in a seven-part series on Jesus' "I am" statements. To read other articles in the series, go to [www.forwardinchrist.net](http://www.forwardinchrist.net), and search by the author's first and last name.*

**L A M**  
*the life*

**We have life because we  
are connected to the Life.**

David D. Sternhagen







*John A. Brann*

## Making your own god

God's prophet Isaiah described the way idols were made in the Old Testament (Isaiah 44). Some gods came from a blacksmith's forge. Others from a carpenter's workshop. The carpenter used some of his wood for the god, and the rest he used to bake his bread and to warm himself. The description is a reminder of the foolishness of making idols. Next to the Lord, who made the heavens and promised to sweep away sins, the idols are less than nothing—or worse than nothing because they offer no real hope in this dark world.

Of course, much has changed since people worshiped representations of gods made of metal or wood. Some primitive people still do worship such gods, but most don't. We have become more sophisticated about our concepts of the supreme power beyond us. Yet I think some are still making their own god.

Humans are wonderful, beautiful, intelligent creatures. The world is filled not only with the wonder of God's creation, but also with the wonder of human effort. Museums are filled with beautiful art and ingenious creations. Music fills the air with sweet or sad expressions of human aspirations, love, or failure. Poetry, drama, and prose present expressions of the human spirit. It's all so interesting even if you don't like some of it.

But sometimes the human spirit steps beyond what it can know. Some imagine God according to their human experience and knowledge. It's true that we cannot penetrate the greatness of God with human intellect any more than we can split an atom with a crowbar. He's so much bigger than we can imagine.

Almost everyone agrees. For many that means that each religion can give

us only a small part of this huge god, like a mosaic pattern of many colors. Expressions of such insights take their place in the array of human efforts along with other expressions of art, music, or literature. Humans seek to grasp a god by choosing which of the ideas about god works for them. At the same time they conclude that someone else's choosing is all right too. Each one makes his or her own god.

As a confessional Lutheran, I have a different view of God. Yes, he is greater, more powerful, and deeper than I can imagine. But God hasn't set me adrift on the sea of speculation and opinion without telling me what I need to know. He has given me and the rest of humanity the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. I know of God from Scripture alone. The empty tomb announced by the Scriptures rescues me from creating my own god. I already have one that loves me and the world so much he gave us all eternal life through his Son.

Yet some still want to create their own god. They choose to pick what they want to believe about him. Today we can download the Bible on our electronic devices. I suppose we could say that the technology has made it possible for us to create our own Bibles. We can delete the passages that we don't like or add passages that are more in line with some political or personal preference. In effect, each human could make his or her own god. We simply make such a god say what we want. It may not be metal or wood, but isn't that making your own god?

May the Lord God keep our ears open to hear what he wants us to hear. That alone is the hope, comfort, and strength we need in this dark world.



# GOD'S tool belt for unity

Donald W. Patterson

## What needs to be fixed? Lack of encouragement.

Why do you go to worship on Sunday? My first response? "I go to listen to God's Word, receive his sacraments, to pray, and to praise." But another reason God wants us to attend church is to encourage each other.

God wants to see us helping each other spiritually when we gather together.

Do you go to church to encourage other Christians? Or are you a slinking saint? You know what I mean. Do you try to slink into church unnoticed, check your mailbox, then slip into the sanctuary and find a seat where you can slink toward the door and the safe privacy of your car as soon as you hear the last "Amen"? Those others at worship are God's people, and he wants you to encourage them and be encouraged by them. If you avoid getting to know them, you are a slinking saint—

a sinning saint too. Listen to how the author of Hebrews puts it:

**<sup>24</sup>And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. <sup>25</sup>Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:24,25).**

In that passage, I don't see any room for friendship dodging at church. I remember going to visit a fallen away member. He told me, "Pastor, you don't have to go to church to be a Christian. I still have my faith!" I praised him for keeping his faith in Jesus, but then I asked him, "How are you going to spur your brothers and sisters in Christ toward love and good deeds if you never come?" Blank stare. He had not thought about encouraging others in a very long time.

Neither have slinking saints. Our church unity grows when we genuinely and lovingly get involved in each others' lives. Being in the same room with me is not being involved. But engaging me in conversations and finding ways to help me grow and serve Jesus is. Let's dig into that passage from Hebrews and see how it can help us encourage one another.

## Familiarize yourself with the tool

- The letter to the Hebrews was addressed to Jews who wondered about Christianity. What makes the encouragement of fellow Christians so critical for them?
- Why do you think the author did not specify exactly how they were to meet together?
- What does it mean to encourage one another in the spiritual sense?
- When we consider that judgment day is approaching, how does that make us more interested in encouraging one another?

## Use the tool

- You simply have to know a person in order to effectively encourage him. What things can we do on a Sunday morning that will help us get to know people well?
- Why might a Bible study be an ideal place to practice our spiritual encouragement?
- Choose a family at church that you do not know very well. Muster up the courage to invite them over for a meal. In that time, make it your express intention to get to know how you can give spiritual encouragement to that family.
- True spiritual encouragement takes on many forms. Name as many different forms of encouragement as you can.

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*This is the sixth article in a 10-part series on Christian unity. Find this article and answers online after June 5 at [www.forwardinchrist.net](http://www.forwardinchrist.net)*



# Amazing grace

Marlis A. Kremer

The tender voice of a special child touches my heart.

About two years ago my husband and I started helping out at our church's Saturday night Chinese ministry. I did some teaching and then started playing piano for Mandarin worship.

That is how I met Simon. Or maybe it was more like Simon met me. Simon and his older brother, Peter, attended Saturday night Bible class and worship. Simon is about 10 years old—a Down syndrome child. He started following me almost as soon as I became a part of the program. As I opened up the top of the grand piano and prepared my music for the service, he would appear at my side, all quiet, with giant, wide eyes of curiosity. I would practice a little. Then Simon would say, "That was beautiful."

At first, I thought Simon would join the other children in an English-speaking Bible class when the service began. Sometimes he does. But most often Simon sits by the piano, even sharing the bench with me. As I play the Chinese hymns, Simon will hum along and imagine that he is conducting a choir. Sometimes he likes to feel the tunes and lets his hands hover above my hands as I play. At first it was a bit disconcerting to have another person's hands shadowing my 10 fingers' every movement, but I quickly got used to it, realizing this has special meaning for Simon.

After many weeks, Simon began asking questions about the crosses he saw decorating

the church's interior. I told Simon who Jesus is and what he has done for us. Each week the questions were the same.

So were my answers. I always tried to connect the dots for Simon's limited understanding and make the message about his Savior a personal matter.

**Then Simon learned the hymn "Amazing Grace."** Incredibly, he remembered most of the words. We began singing the hymn each week, either before or after the service. It quickly became his song. He loves the song because he loves Jesus, and he knows that Jesus loves him.

When we began English worship services on Saturday too, I thought Simon would stop coming. I assumed he would want to be with his brother and the other Chinese children. But he has been in church week in and week out. He is comfortable with me at the piano. The music is a language all of its own for Simon—a language he can understand.

**Simon is one of Jesus' special lambs.** It's an unexpected blessing that God has placed Simon into my life, sitting beside me each week, singing about the sweet sound of God's grace. It's a humbling experience—one that serves as a constant reminder that when special children like Simon become a part of our lives, it is a wonderful privilege. The thought of Simon and his love for Jesus drives me to my knees in humble gratitude to God for giving me an opportunity to share the message of salvation in Jesus such a unique way with such a special child.

All this makes me look forward to that day when I will be together with Simon in heaven, singing about Jesus and praising his name. I'm sure that "Amazing Grace" will be one of the songs we will be singing. And I won't be the least bit surprised if it's a young boy named Simon conducting the heavenly throng.

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