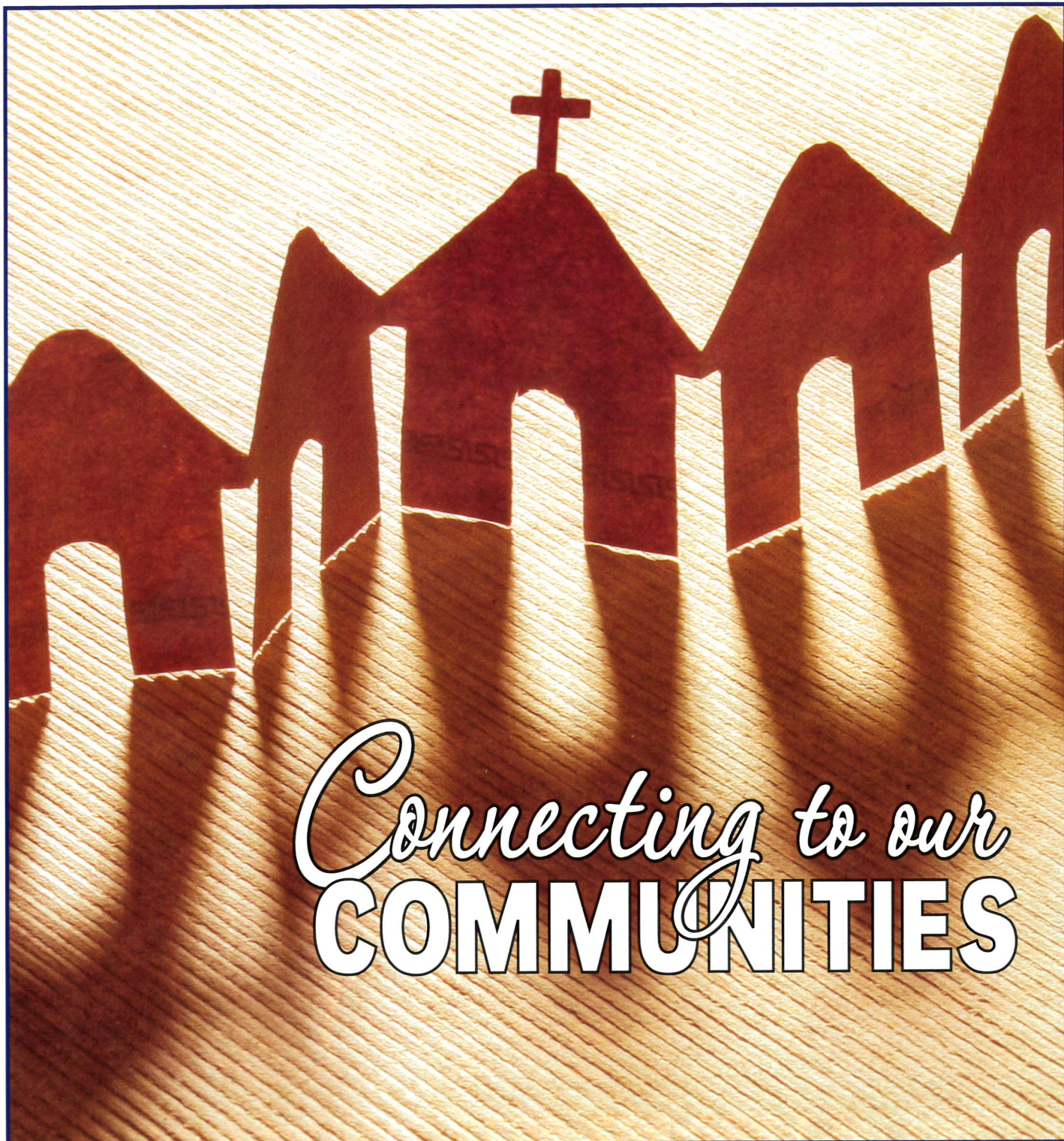


JULY 2008

# Forward in Christ

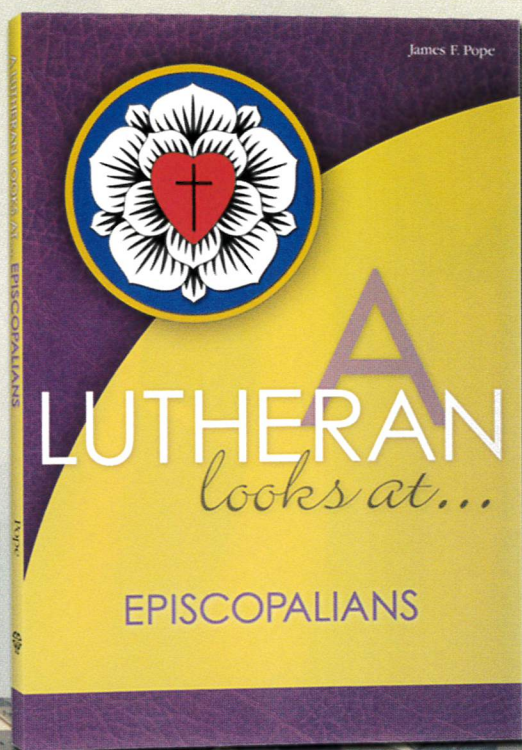
God's wisdom, WELS' witness



*Connecting to our*  
**COMMUNITIES**

# My neighbor's an Episcopalian.

## So, what's the difference?



Did you know that not all Episcopalians accept the same teachings or practices? This first volume in the series **A Lutheran Looks at . . .** provides a confessional Lutheran perspective on the teachings of the Episcopal Church and paints a clear picture of its history, beliefs, and practices. The author includes numerous quotes gathered from a survey of Episcopal Church clergy and shows the tension that exists in this nonconfessional church as it struggles to react to trends and practices in today's culture. *A Lutheran Looks at Episcopalians* will help you understand the beliefs of your neighbor, coworker, or friend and prepare you to better share your faith with them.

**New!**

**A Lutheran Looks at Episcopalians**  
by James F. Pope

Paper cover, 114 pages. LU15N0737, \$12.99

View  
the first  
10 pages at  
[www.nph.net](http://www.nph.net)

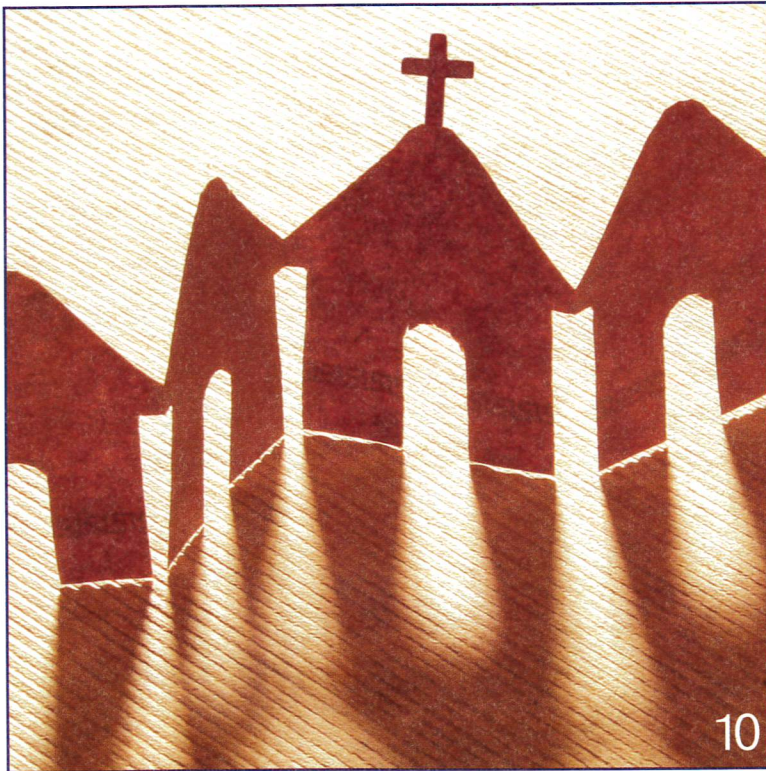


Northwestern  
Publishing House  
1250 North 113th Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53226-3284

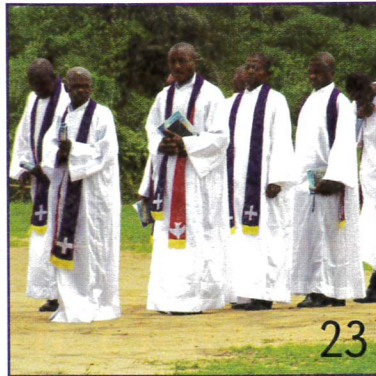
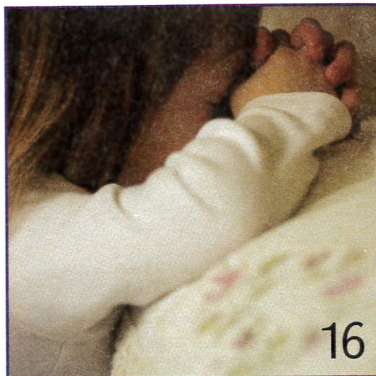
To order, call **1-800-662-6022** or visit **[www.nph.net](http://www.nph.net)**.

Price is subject to change without notice. All orders are subject to shipping and handling fees and sales tax where applicable.

# How do you connect to people who need to know what God has done for them in Christ?



SHUTTERSTOCK



## Forward in Christ

✠ The official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

### FEATURES

- 10 CONNECTING TO OUR COMMUNITIES** When a congregation understands why it exists, it has made the first step to connect with its community.  
*James N. Proeber*
- 12 THE LUTHERAN WAY OF WORSHIP** The pattern for worship we still use today was in place a little more than 100 years after Pentecost.  
*Paul D. Lehninger*
- 14 CONFESSIONS OF FAITH** Moving from Costa Rica, the Vargas family expected new experiences. They didn't expect to become Lutheran.  
*Linda R. Buxa*
- 16 CLEARING UP CONFUSION** Almost everyone prays, but ideas about prayer vary.  
*David D. Sellnow*
- 28 A CLICK AWAY** Opportunities to share the gospel with the world are not always limited by distance.  
*Rachel Hartman*
- 30 SOLDIER IN CHRIST** Moving away from the regular routine of worship comes with challenges.  
*Amelia Wierschem*
- 36 WHY WORRY?** When the car breaks down in the middle of nowhere, a family learns who is in control.  
*Luke Schwecke*

# Take the Word

*to the world.*



*Preparing students to proclaim God's Word to the world.*

Wisconsin Lutheran  
Seminary  
[www.wls.wels.net](http://www.wls.wels.net)

Martin Luther  
College  
[www.mlc-wels.edu](http://www.mlc-wels.edu)

Luther Preparatory  
School  
[www.lps.wels.net](http://www.lps.wels.net)

Michigan Lutheran  
Seminary  
[www.mlsem.org](http://www.mlsem.org)

MAY THE LORD OUR GOD  
BE WITH US AS HE WAS  
WITH OUR FATHERS;  
MAY HE NEVER LEAVE US  
NOR FORSAKE US.

1 Kings 8:57

**EDITORIAL OFFICE**

Forward in Christ magazine  
WELS Communication Services  
2929 N Mayfair Rd  
Milwaukee WI 53222-4398  
Phone: 414-256-3210  
Fax: 414-256-3862  
E-mail: fic@sab.wels.net  
www.forwardinchrist.net

**EXECUTIVE EDITOR**

Rev. John A. Braun  
braunj@nph.wels.net

**MANAGING EDITOR**

Julie K. Wietzke  
julie.wietzke@sab.wels.net

**ASSISTANT EDITOR**

Alicia A. Neumann  
alicia.neumann@sab.wels.net

**STAFF WRITER**

Laura C. Warmuth  
laurachristine@wels.net

**SEMINARY CONSULTANT**

Prof. Daniel Leyrer

**ART DIRECTOR**

Karen Knutson

**DESIGNER**

Carianne Ciriacks

**COPYRIGHT**

©2008 by Forward in Christ. Printed in the USA. Forward in Christ grants permission for any original article (not a reprint) to be photocopied for use in a WELS church, school, or organization, provided that copies are distributed free and indicate Forward in Christ as the source. Artwork may not be reproduced except in the context of its article. For other copyright questions, contact Kristine Laufer, 414-615-5706; lauferk@nph.wels.net.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

**POSTMASTER**

Send address changes to Forward in Christ, c/o Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284.

Forward in Christ (ISSN 1541-8936) is published monthly through Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284. Periodical postage paid at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

**SUBSCRIPTION RATES**

Individual: USA—\$16; Canada—\$16.96; all other countries—air mail \$48.40. Postage included, payable in advance to Northwestern Publishing House. Contact Northwestern Publishing House for multi-year, blanket, and bundle rates. Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284; 800-662-6093, ext. 8. Milwaukee area, 414-615-5785. www.nph.net/periodicals.

**ON AUDIO**

Mission for the Visually Impaired, 375 Bridgepoint Dr, South St. Paul, MN 55075; 651-291-1536.

**WHAT'S INSIDE** by Julie Wietzke

I don't know about you, but many times when I meet another WELS member, we try to determine how we have connected in the past. We ask each other, "Was your father a called worker? Are you related to (fill in the blank)?" The scary thing is that often there is a connection.

But really we should be more concerned about making connections with people outside our church body, connections that may give us opportunities to talk about our Savior. This month we are starting a series on that topic. Based on a seminar offered by the Commission on Evangelism this fall, the series will examine why we—as congregations and individuals—should be involved in our communities. The series also will help us determine who our neighbors are and give practical suggestions of ways to show Christian love in our communities. Check out the first article on p. 10.

Once we have made those connections, watch out! The word (or should I say, Word) spreads quickly. And with new technologies and more global movement, it spreads farther and faster. Rachel Hartman explores how networking within our synod has created new opportunities to get the Word out to more people (p. 28).

JULY

**DEPARTMENTS**



- 6 **FEEDBACK**
- 7 **DEVOTION**  
Serve your nation *Peter A. Panitzke*
- 8 **EDITORIAL COMMENT**  
Even to old age *Paul T. Prange*
- 9 **QUESTION & ANSWER**  
Mormons *Forrest L. Bivens*
- 18 **WHATEVER**  
Turning a life around *Ben Vorlob*
- 19 **NEWS**

- 26 **BULLETIN BOARD**
- 27 **POTLUCK**
- 32 **FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK**  
A synod committed to Christian education *Mark G. Schroeder*
- 33 **BIBLE STUDY**  
I am . . . WHO I AM *David D. Sternhagen*
- 34 **A THOUGHT**  
Tears *John A. Braun*
- 35 **INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDY**  
God's tool belt for unity: Christian freedom *Donald W. Patterson*

**ENTRUSTED WITH GOD'S EARTH**

Prof. Paul Boehlke had a fine article on caring for the creation [April]. Here are a few more thoughts on the subject. . . .

Environmentalism comes in different flavors. The more moderate version of it simply wants to preserve the earth as a good place for man to live in. We could agree with many of the things they say.

Radical environmentalism is another story. Many of its followers are pantheists (god is everything and everything is god). This is idolatry, for they replace God with the earth (Romans 1:25). . . .

The theory of man-made global warming is an offspring of radical environmentalism. They use doomsday narratives to create fear and then demand that everyone make great sacrifices to "save the earth." If you look at the actual climate data, you will see the case for man-made global warming is speculative at best.

The findings of science represent only what we know so far. They are subject to change when the next discovery comes along. Only God's Word stands forever.

*Robert Hellmann  
Montrose, Minnesota*

It has been called the "land," the "environment," the "earth," and most recently the "planet;" it has always been God's creation. As much as "it" has been in the news lately, the article reviewing the Christian concept of stewardship was timely and well done. There's no reason for Lutherans to "bring up the rear" when it comes to sanctified living in harmony with the natural environment.

The follow-up article on "going green" troubles, perhaps even offends, me on two counts. First, I think this sort of specific "technical" information is best left to those who publish about it specifically. . . . Second, in spite of the disclaimer in the beginning, the author makes two references

to greenhouse gases and carbon. I, too, am a scientist, and I know that the real (objective) scientists who do and review real (objective) science have shown conclusively that global warming as caused by human activity is at best a myth and at worst a hoax.

I look to FIC for a combination of "pure" and "practical" theology from our confessional Lutheran perspective. I trust the editor(s) to solicit, screen, and select articles on the basis of timeless or contemporary relevance, law and gospel properly separated, justification and sanctification properly differentiated and balanced, with a watchful eye for the influence of popular American "Christianity" (the likes of Osteen, Warren, et al.).

Please keep up the mostly good work but beware the temptation to venture into areas such as the recent "green" stuff.

*Jeff Wischer*

I studied natural resources in college for six years and worked in natural resources for 35 years. In those years, "Entrusted with God's earth" [April] by Paul Boehlke is the best article on the topic I have ever read. I wish I would have had such a scriptural explanation for resource stewardship much earlier in my life.

*Bill Thorn  
Mountain, Wisconsin*

**DEPRESSION**

The author of "Counting the casualties" [April] seems to blame depression on drugs and Satan. I have no doubt Satan has a hand in it. But depression and anxiety are real illnesses, just as flu or broken bones. I have both, and it isn't pleasant. . . . I don't want people to look down on those of us who do suffer from these illnesses. We know that Jesus loves us. We, like Paul, have a thorn in our side. It just happens to be something God, in his wisdom, chooses not to heal in this lifetime.

*Name withheld*

**THANKS**

You outdid yourselves in the May issue. I tore out seven pages to use as introductory topics in my Sunday Bible class. From the "Confessional synod" article to the "Question and Answer" article on why we use the masculine when speaking of the Holy Spirit to "Are you as smart as a 5th grader?", there was relevance and genuine interest. The articles were not too lengthy and got me studying on those issues in a fresh light. God bless your dedicated efforts—they are much appreciated.

*Lyle H. Rasch  
Cincinnati, Ohio*

**WONDERFUL HYMNS**

What a blessing we have when our worship services strive to educate our members through God's Word, with dedicated men and women leading us in song. We need to be challenged as not to take those wonderful hymns for granted. Maybe I am biased because I struggled with every hymn because of lack of music in my life as I grew up, being an adult confirmand. I was privileged to have Pastor Gerlach as one of many shepherds. He was instrumental in showing us how to worship and not just attend church.

I don't really care how bad I sing, because God hears perfect pitch. Responding to God for his grace and mercy is what I look forward to in each and every Sunday and especially those special services throughout the year. The love of those words and their meaning are what I focus on. We are truly blessed to have among us pastors who carry on what we have been blessed with from the beginning.

*Paul Baker  
Citrus Heights, California*

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

# Serve your nation

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Psalm 122:6*

Peter A. Panitzke

**A**s a Christian, you can serve your nation in a way that no one else can. You can pray for her. In Psalm 122, King David encourages his people, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.”

## Jerusalem, the nation

Jerusalem at David’s time had several connotations. Jerusalem was the new capital of a united nation of Israel. In the United States it would be the equivalent of saying, “Pray for the peace of Washington, D.C.” The nation’s capital stands for the whole nation.

Pray for the peace of your nation. Someone once asked me, “What caused the Berlin Wall to fall?” I thought it was a history question. I launched into a “this event caused the next event to happen” monologue. After I had exhausted myself, he just smiled and said, “The Berlin Wall came down because every week for 20 years our congregation prayed that God would defeat godless communism.”

I grew up during the height of the Cold War. I remember crouching in the school hallway as part of our civil defense drill. But the Soviet Union we feared is gone! Why? Because someone prayed! “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).

Our nation is at war today. A new threat exists. Pray for our nation. Pray with confidence that, if it be God’s will, he will grant our nation victory over our enemies. “Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few” (1 Samuel 14:6).

## Jerusalem, the church

Jerusalem in King David’s day had another connotation. It was the center of worship. “For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your prosperity” (Psalm 122:9). As we pray for our nation, we are also praying for the Christian church that carries out its work in our nation. Paul told us to pray “for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” (1 Timothy 2:2).

It boggles my mind to think that a friend of mine served as a missionary in Siberia. My wife and I have had the privilege of hosting a Ukrainian pastor and a Latvian pastor in our home. The world has changed. What made all this possible? The short answer is God’s people were praying for the peace of Jerusalem, God’s church. Pray that the God who controls nations will somehow use the current turmoil among nations to spread his Word in ways and places that we cannot even imagine. As you pray for the peace of Jerusalem, pray that God will use his church to bestow peace upon others.

An Iraq War veteran shared with me the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder. She couldn’t get out of bed for three months. She was angry and irritable toward the family that she loved. Thousands of men and women are coming back into our churches and homes that have been profoundly affected by their war experiences. “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.”



Jerusalem includes those fellow Christians who are dealing with the lingering effects of war. Pray that God will grant them healing in Christ. Pray that the church will recognize this opportunity to share love and compassion to returning veterans.

Your nation, your church, and individuals within your church need help. “Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth” (Psalm 124:8). Serve your nation by praying for her. “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.”

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

# Even to old age

Paul T. Prange

I married into a healthy family. My wife's family members live for a long time. Her maternal grandparents are in their 90s. They just celebrated their 73rd wedding anniversary. They have 86 descendants. Not one of their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, or great-great-grandchildren has preceded them in death.

My wife's grandparents have had their share of old-age aches and pains recently. Both of them need regular pain medication to keep going. It would seem appropriate to ask why God is still letting them live on this earth. Why doesn't he take them home?

It's a common question from people who are elderly. They ask more frequently when they are suffering. Why doesn't God just take them home? They groan, "longing to be clothed with [their] heavenly dwelling" (2 Corinthians 5:2). They "would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (5:8).

God may be letting them live so that my wife and I and all of the other descendants have an opportunity to serve them.

"Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone," says David (Psalm 71:9). I'm seeing a growing trend in our society to discard not just the ideas of the elderly but even the elderly themselves. That is exactly the wrong direction. Instead, "show respect for the elderly and revere your God" (Leviticus 19:32).

The letters and cards that my children received from their great-grandparents are precious, loaded with the sage advice of experienced Christians. Even if they can no longer write, my wife's grandparents are living reminders of the grace of God for my children and all of their other descendants.

They also constantly remind their descendants of the importance of church, of worship, and of

the Word of God. They've said that it grieves them when any of their descendants do not come to worship every Sunday. They know the importance of worship.

They made it to worship themselves every Sunday until this year. Now their pastor brings the Lord's Supper to them at their home, and the relatives who are visiting get to hear law and gospel. They get to hear the confessions of faith from these elderly believers.

Even when my wife's grandparents are on their deathbeds, the relatives who are visiting will get to hear law and gospel. The workers who take care of them in the hospital or the hospice will get to hear all about Jesus, forgiveness, and heaven.

Eventually there will be a funeral. I'm sure my wife's grandmother has chosen hymns from her childhood Scandinavian Lutheran tradition. I'm sure my wife's grandfather has asked the pastor to preach on the passages that meant the most to him when he learned Lutheran doctrine as a young bridegroom.

And if the Lord comes again before that? How glorious it will be as the entire family is taken up into the air with all of the other believers in Jesus who long for his appearing.

In the meantime, we rejoice at how God has blessed the elderly among us, the spiritually healthy,

the people with white hair ("the hoary head"), and those with no hair at all! He has declared them righteous through faith in their Savior, Jesus. "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness" (Proverbs 16:31 KJV).

**[My wife's grandparents] constantly remind their descendants of the importance of church, of worship, and of the Word of God.**

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



# QUESTION & ANSWER



Forrest L. Bivens

Yours is a fair and frequently asked question. At issue is someone's definition of a Christian. There is, however, no commonly accepted definition of a Christian.

*Merely labeling people "Christian" or "non-Christian" is not helpful*

By some definitions, 75 percent of Americans are Christians; by other definitions, five percent or less are Christian. Why the discrepancy? Many define Christians as people who consider themselves to be Christian. That would include you and me. Others narrow the definition and require assent to certain doctrinal statements or participation in certain church rites. At this point you and I will part ways. Because there is no agreed-on standard of how broadly or narrowly "Christian" or "Christianity" should be understood, merely labeling people is often a waste of time.

*Defining and appraising the basis and content of belief is more helpful*

People with differing religious convictions should review what each believes, noting what is the same or downright different. What is the source of doctrine? For Lutherans it is the 66 books of the Bible. For Mormons it includes additional writings, the *Book of Mormon*, plus hierarchical ongoing pronouncements. You believe that God is not finished revealing his truth. Even our definitions of who the true God is and how he is to be defined are not the same. Our understanding of who or what Jesus Christ is, what he has done, and why he did it are also different.

Maintaining that "Christ is the center of everything we teach and believe" does not make one a Christian. Using his name, even on a repeated basis, is not enough (as Jesus made clear in Matthew 7:21-23). We owe it to each other to examine, explain, and clarify more precisely what we actually believe and teach. Identifying and

**Q. You say that we Mormons are not Christians. Christ is the center of everything we teach and believe. Why do you say such things?**

clarifying these similarities and differences will not immediately resolve the issue of who is "Christian" or "non-Christian," but it will allow convictions and concerns to be aired. Then we can do what is even more valuable.


*Focusing especially on the person and work of Christ is most helpful*

At the heart of my convictions is how we sinful humans may have and enjoy peace with God

and be assured of eternal life in his presence. Here we speak specifically about concepts like salvation, redemption, atonement, and forgiveness. In a word, we are speaking of the gospel, the "good news" that outranks all creeds and ceremonies. We define the gospel as the unconditional declaration that our sins are fully paid for and forgiven through Christ's substitutionary life and death on our behalf. We maintain that the gospel is inseparable from the person and work of Christ. Our conceptions of who Jesus is and the purpose of his life, death, and resurrection are crucial. We would say that confessing these truths makes one a Christian.

We consider the gospel to be the mark of the true Christian church. Without that, despite any other claim to Christianity, the sinner is lost. This essential issue best serves as the basis of how we appraise each other's relationship to Christ. Our chief concerns are the nature of Christ's deity, the result of Christ's work, and the way we sinners may possess and enjoy the blessings Christ won for us. Giving attention to these issues simply must be a higher priority than attaching disputed labels to each other.

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



When a congregation understands why it exists, it has made the first step to connect with its community.

James N. Proeber

# Connecting to our COMMUNITIES

**B**ill loved his Savior. He also loved his church. There wasn't a day when he wasn't there doing something. Regularly he adjusted his schedule not to miss anything. Bill also showed his love by using his gifts to serve. He was recognized as a tireless worker and a reliable resource.

One of Bill's most amazing gifts was his attention to detail. He knew what was happening. It didn't make any difference if it was 10 minutes ago or 10 years ago. His friends referred to him as a walking statistical report. This made Bill valuable.

But what Bill saw made him a little concerned. Although there wasn't a visible problem, some signs caused him to think. Worship attendance was consistent. Bible class participation was good. The school held its own. Still, Bill noticed some little changes. Yes, there was a full sanctuary, but the discussion of an additional service was put on hold. The pastor still had an instruction class, but this was looking like the last one for a while. The school used to have a waiting list, but now new students were easily assim-

lated. Bill also noticed how the congregation was "graying." Every age group was represented, but after high school the young adults were moving away. "Empty-nesters" were becoming more prevalent.

He shared his concerns with his pastor. Then he initiated a fact-finding mission. What Bill came to realize was a surprise—even he didn't see it coming. The community had changed. Instead of a rapidly growing new neighborhood, it had transformed into part of a larger urban community. Ethnically it was more diverse. Fewer young families lived in the neighborhood. Property values had closed the door to many. Schools that had sprung up quickly were now standing partially empty. The community had changed, but Bill realized his church had not. His first response was echoed by his pastor and the rest of the council: "What should we do?"


## What should we do?

Every congregation seems to come to this question sooner or later: "What should we do?" Worship attendance may be stable but has hit a plateau. The enrollment in Sunday school or

the Lutheran elementary school might be declining. At first glance, nothing seems to be terribly wrong, but sooner or later the trend cannot be ignored. The congregation seems to be going nowhere. Upon further assessment, it also seems to be disconnected from the community.

Too often congregations feel frustrated because they don't know what to do next. They want to maintain sound doctrine, but it seems new people aren't interested in that. Congregations, then, look at other churches and see how they seem to be growing rapidly through proclaiming a "social gospel." This adds to their frustration. What should be done? How does a congregation connect with its community, or how does it reconnect when the community changes?

Before solutions are considered, one has to exercise caution. A congregation needs to be aware of the danger of proclaiming a "social gospel." This turns the precious message of salvation into a rallying cry to solve the community's problems. Homelessness. Hunger. Civic wrongs. Immigration. Gangs. A congregation could easily champion any or all of these needs. But would this really fulfill the Lord's commission to "make disciples of all nations"?



Every congregation wants to connect with its surrounding community. If the “social gospel” doesn’t provide what is really needed, then what? The answer is putting the good news of the Savior into a social setting. So, how do you connect to people who need to know what God has done for them in Christ?

### Looking for solutions

There is no quick fix. It is a process. It starts with looking inside the congregation and asking questions. It requires time, effort, and commitment.

The first step is that a congregation has to understand why it exists. There is only one answer to that question: to herald the gospel. A church is not a bastion for social activism. Nor is its sole purpose to make everyone’s lot in life just a little better. A congregation is a hospital for sin-sick and dying souls. It is a lighthouse for those who need to see the path to heaven. It is a place of refuge where Jesus’ offer of rest is freely proclaimed. When a congregation understands why it exists, it has made the first step to connect with its community. What follows will strengthen that connection.

The next step is to understand the neighborhood. Communities vary and continually change. In order to connect with the community, a congregation needs to know it. Start with a demographic survey. Look at the trends. Learn who the

people are. Recognize the needs. Start walking the streets. Start talking to the neighbors. Then, a congregation will be able to “tailor” its gospel proclamation to the social setting.

It sounds simple, but the path is filled with obstacles. No congregation likes to change or move out of its comfort zone. It is easy to cling to the cliché, “This is the way we have always done it.” Still, for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of many blood-bought souls, a congregation may need to re-evaluate how it connects to the community.

Communities are changing, so congregations must ask themselves hard questions. If a community is “graying,” is a preschool or Lutheran elementary school the most effective tool? If a community is changing ethnically, is “English only” the right approach? If a congregation sees a transformation in its neighborhood, does it install a security system or look for ways to lift people up physically and spiritually? If a community goes through a revitalization, does the congregation’s ministry change appropriately?

As a synod—particularly in world mission settings—we have connected to communities of people effectively. Examples include a medical mission in Malawi and Zambia, a nursery among the Apache in Arizona, and student study centers in Hong Kong. Each has been effective in providing opportunities to share God’s love in Christ. As individual congregations in unique and specific settings, we need to consider how we can create more opportunities for the power of the gospel to be released.

This is what connecting with the community is all about. It is taking the gospel and applying it to each congregation’s social setting. Without belaboring the point, it is what our Savior did. He responded to people’s needs as each setting required. We can do nothing less.

Bill’s congregation made some difficult choices. They moved away from some traditional ministries. They also initiated some non-traditional ones. Along the way they remarked, “The change was never easy, but it was the right thing to do.” In the end, the changes created new opportunities for the gospel. We need to undertake the same process. We want to be effective in proclaiming the precious message of our Savior’s love. We want to connect to our communities.

*James Proeber is pastor at Our Redeemer, Santa Barbara, California.*

*This is the first article in a three-part series on how to connect to your community.*



## CONNECTING TO COMMUNITIES WORKSHOP

The Commission on Evangelism is offering seminars to help congregations build bridges to people in their area. For more information on seminars in your district, go to [www.wels.net/jump/conncomm](http://www.wels.net/jump/conncomm). Learn more on p. 22.

# The LUTHER

The pattern for worship we still use today was in place a little more than 100 years after Pentecost.

Paul D. Lehninger

A few weeks ago I attended a major-league baseball game. After the national anthem, the game got underway. When a batter had three strikes, the umpire called him out; when he hit the ball, he ran to first base, always counter-clockwise around the diamond—a diamond, not a triangle or circle. Everyone stood up and sang “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” during the seventh inning. How predictable. How boring, right?

Well, no. The game did have some slow moments, of course, but occasionally a player made a spectacular play. For the entire top of the ninth inning, the crowd was on its feet cheering on the home team nonstop as the visitors failed to score. The structure and tradition of baseball allowed the game to proceed smoothly. The fans could focus on the very essence of baseball without having to deal with the fleeting whims of owners, managers, umpires, or popular opinion. The team members, the stadiums, and the fans themselves had changed over the years, but baseball had not.

We humans do not thrive on change for the sake of change. Instead, we look for change within a familiar and reliable framework. This is one of the advantages of liturgical worship with historical roots. Flexibility within a framework permits Christians to focus on the essence of worship—God the Holy Trinity nourishing us with his grace in Word and sacrament—without being distracted by one-week-only innovations and interruptions. As C. S. Lewis wrote, “A good shoe is a shoe you don’t notice. Good reading becomes possible when you need not consciously think about eyes, or

light, or print, or spelling. The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God. But every novelty prevents this. It fixes our attention on the service itself; and thinking about worship is a different thing from worshipping.”

This does not mean that nothing in the order of service can ever change. Christians have carefully and gradually made changes to their central act of worship—gathering to hear God’s Word and receive his sacraments—since the earliest days of Christianity. But they always preserved the unchanging truths within a structure that complemented those truths. Then they handed it down—that’s the origin of the word “tradition”—from one generation to the next.

## The beginnings of the order of worship

It all began on Pentecost. St. Peter quoted and interpreted the Scriptures as he told the story of Jesus and then, with the other apostles, baptized 3,000 people. This fledgling Christian church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). As the church grew and spread, this pattern continued. Along with continuing to read the Old Testament writings as they had in the Jewish synagogue service, Christians told and retold the indispensable story, the story of Jesus. They read the letters the apostles sent to them. They surrounded these readings with chants and prayers. Every Lord’s Day they also remembered Christ’s death and celebrated the presence of the risen Christ among them as they received his body and blood in the meal he instituted.

Justin Martyr (100-164 A.D.) wrote that Christians in Rome followed an order of service in which Scripture lessons were read, followed by a sermon. After prayers were offered for all people in their various needs, the people exchanged a kiss of peace as a symbol that they were reconciled to one another.

The elements for Holy Communion were then brought forward by deacons, and the presiding minister spoke a prayer of thanks-

# AN WAY of worship

giving over them. After Christ's words of institution and a prayer of intercession, communicants came forward to receive the Lord's body and blood. So the basic structure of the Western rite—the pattern for worship we still use today—was in place a little more than 100 years after Pentecost.

By the year 200 A.D. at the latest, members of the congregation engaged in this familiar dialogue with the presiding minister before the prayer of thanksgiving was offered and the Words of Institution were spoken:

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And with your spirit.

P: Lift up your hearts.

C: We have them with the Lord.

P: Let us give thanks to the Lord.

C: It is fitting and right.

Over the centuries, the Western rite and Eastern rite—still used by the Eastern Orthodox churches today—grew apart. Both, however, retained the basic structure. Christians made additions to the Western rite, but also deletions, and at times either elaborated or simplified the content and ceremonies. But at the time of the Reformation, the service in use was still recognizable as the worship pattern set by the earliest Christians.

## The Lutheran Reformation and the order of worship

The Lutheran reformers recognized that some of the additions that had been made to the Western rite had strayed from biblical principles, so a reform—but not a revolution—was necessary. Martin Luther's reforms of the mass, the *Formula Missae* in Latin and the *Deutsche Messe* in German, followed this conservative guideline. In the Lutheran Confessions, the reformers carefully balanced their assertion that the New Testament establishes no laws for worship with their affirmation of the value of continuing to use the edifying worship forms passed down by previous generations of Christians: "We gladly keep the ancient traditions set up in the church because they are useful and promote tranquility, and we interpret them in an evan-

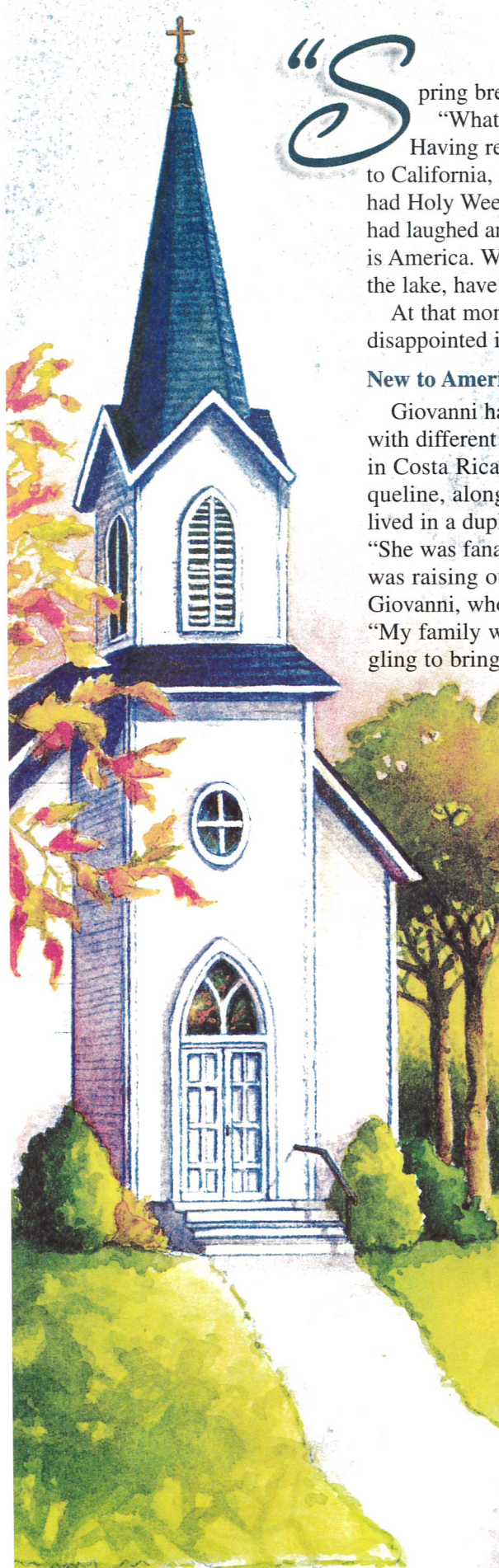
gelical way, by excluding the opinion that they justify" (Apology XV:38).

Following the Reformation, various "church orders" appeared in Lutheran churches throughout Germany and the Scandinavian countries. They varied. But in the area of the order of service, the pattern of Introit, Kyrie, Gloria, Epistle, Gospel, Sermon, Creed, Prayer of the Church, Preface, Sanctus, and Words of Institution shows up with predictable regularity. The Pietists and Rationalists ravaged the historical liturgy, but faithful Lutherans who returned to the Reformation and pre-Reformation roots of the church for guidance produced the Common Service, a form of which is still used in most of our churches today.

G. K. Chesterton wrote: "Tradition means giving a vote to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our groom; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our father." Most people seem to accept this principle when it comes to Thanksgiving dinner at Grandma's, lilies at Easter, and baseball. Worship deserves the same respect.

*Paul Lehninger, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, is a member at St. John, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.*

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



“Spring break?” asked Giovanni Vargas. “What is spring break?”

Having recently moved from Costa Rica to California, he wanted to find a church that had Holy Week services. Instead his friends had laughed and said, “Holy Week? Dude, this is America. We have spring break. We go to the lake, have fun, and meet girls.”

At that moment, says Giovanni, “I was disappointed in America.”

#### New to America

Giovanni had come to the United States with different hopes. For the past few years in Costa Rica, Giovanni and his wife, Jacqueline, along with their three daughters, lived in a duplex next to Jacqueline’s mother. “She was fanatic to the Virgin Mary, and she was raising our daughters Catholic,” says Giovanni, who belonged to a Baptist church. “My family was divided, and I was struggling to bring them back.”

In addition, they lived in San José, the capital of Costa Rica. This city is dangerous.

Drug use is rampant, prostitution is legal, and underage kids are on the street. “I wanted to take my family away from that, so we started praying for God to lead the way,” he says.

A friend in Sacramento, Calif., invited them to the United States. Though the Vargas family saw moving as a great opportunity, it also would be a great sacrifice. With two degrees in business administration and economics, “I was ‘someone’ in my country,” says Giovanni. “In a different country, you’re nobody.”

Still, they decided to make the sacrifice. While Jacqueline and the girls stayed behind, Giovanni, who in addition to his native Spanish is fluent in English and French, arrived in February 2007. He lived with his friend and began working for a moving company, but his biggest priority was finding a church. He found a Baptist church two blocks away from his home. “I felt uncomfortable,” Giovanni says. “Nobody talked to me, not even the pastor.” When he called and left a message for the pastor, he didn’t get a response.

Disappointed with people’s attitudes toward Holy Week and the lack of response from the church, he wasn’t sure what he was going to do. Then he met Jim Oswald. After they had

## 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.

Linda R. Buxa

worked together on a number of moving contracts, Giovanni told Oswald that he couldn't find a church that focused on Holy Week. Oswald, a member at St. Mark's, Citrus Heights, Calif., said, "Come to my church. We believe in Holy Week."

### New to WELS

Giovanni accepted the offer to attend St. Mark's and noticed an immediate difference. People walked up to him and introduced themselves. The very next day, a pastor visited and asked, "How was the service? How can we help you?"

Giovanni admitted it was a drastic change in worship format, but there was a larger issue. "I thought Lutheranism was a sect, almost like Mormons," he says. So the pastor invited him to the Bible information class to learn more about Lutherans.

"I had a lot of questions. I was the only one in class asking questions," says Giovanni. "What impressed me was that every question I asked, the pastor opened his Bible. I started seeing the difference because the pastors said, 'We will stick in the Bible.'"

The class lasted four months, and during that time Giovanni got more active and the pastors spent a lot of time with him. "They take the time in Bible study to really explain. They call. They care." After the class ended, Giovanni said, "I firmly believe in your teaching. I like it."

There was still one last hurdle—Jacqueline. Here he was, by himself, away from home for the past four months, and now he wanted to switch churches without his wife having seen it. "I was scared," he says. "I was waiting for Jacqueline to come because you have to be together as a couple in your faith."



Jacqueline and Giovanni Vargas with their daughters (left to right) Maria José, Ganeline, and Nicole. This seemingly typical photo is actually an example of God's goodness. Because of an injury he suffered while playing professional soccer, Giovanni was told he'd never have children. Three daughters later, he is continually grateful for God's love. Then, when Maria José was two, she was diagnosed with a heart condition. They held off on surgery until she was five because the survival rate was only five percent. Of the seven children who had surgery that day, only two lived—one was Maria José. Says Giovanni, "These are a wonderful witness to show how God works miracles for believers."

When his family arrived on a Saturday in June 2007, he took them to St. Mark's the very next day. Speaking only Spanish, Jacqueline understood none of the service, but having a Catholic background, the liturgy was familiar. She noticed everyone's kindness and immediately agreed to attend this church.

Jacqueline, who alternates between practicing English and having Giovanni translate, says she was impressed with the church. "Everybody loves God, the members are really interested in God, and the pastors really stick to the Bible."

What she also loves is St. Mark's school, especially the teachers. "The teachers in Costa Rica do it for the money. The teachers here do it from their heart. They teach with love and care. That is something to be admired," she says.

While she loves the church, she struggles because she is not yet a member and she misses taking communion.

To solve that, Jacqueline will take classes with Giovanni translating, so she can join St. Mark's and receive communion.

### Same trust

For all the challenges they face in a new country and a new church, the Vargas family has an unchanging trust in God. "We wonder and we struggle, but wherever we go, he opens the door," says Giovanni. "He'll lead the way. We'll follow."

That's a lot of trust for someone who owns two homes in Costa Rica and worked as a customer service manager. In the United States, they rent their home and, because Giovanni's work visa has expired, can only remain as visitors.

Still they trust even in the midst of financial uncertainties. "Every day we prayed,

and God supplied our daily needs," says Giovanni. "When I worked at the moving company, all the rich people who moved had no use for some of their things. They just say, 'Do you know someone who wants this?' It took us 12 years to furnish our house in Costa Rica. Here, they filled my house in months."

He continues, "Every day I see the love of God, so I've got everything I need. Nothing more. Nothing less. Materials are not as important as grace of God. That's what I want to pass on to my daughters."

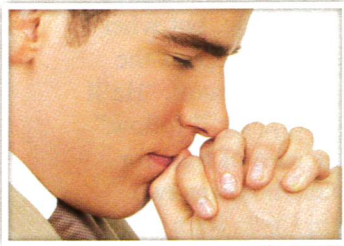
And now he wants to pass it along within WELS too. Giovanni would like to attend Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., and maybe return to Costa Rica to start a mission. "If that doesn't work, I can be a missionary here. St. Mark's has opened doors, and we feel blessed."

*Linda Buxa is a member at St. Mark's, Citrus Heights, California.*

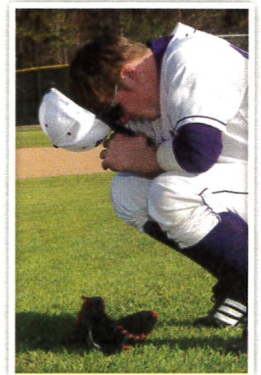
# Clearing up CONFUSION

Almost everyone prays, but ideas about prayer vary. We need to sort through some of those ideas.

David D. Sellnow



Does God answer prayer? Yes, he does . . . according to a report published in *Research on Social Work Practice* (March 2007). Arizona State University Professor David S. Hodge scrutinized 17 previously published studies on the effects of intercessory prayer. He concluded: “Overall, the meta-analysis indicates that prayer is effective.” He cautioned that prayer was not so potent that the sick or suffering should discard medicine and rely on prayer alone. Nevertheless, he contended that “praying for people with psychological or medical problems may help them recover.”



## Prayer is not a proof

Has Christian faith in the power of prayer been bolstered by Hodge’s analysis? Not at all. His surveys included praying persons of various religions—certainly not an endorsement of true Christian prayer. His findings acknowledged only some unknown power or transcendent being—not specifically the God of the Bible.

A rival \$2.4 million study examined the results of prayer on behalf of cardiac patients. It concluded that intercessory prayer had no positive effects on complication-free recovery from coronary bypass surgery. In fact, persons who knew that people were praying for them were more likely to experience post-surgery problems than those who were unaware about prayers being offered (*American Heart Journal*, April 2006).

Experiments seeking to prove prayer useless need not rattle Christians. Neither should research claiming to confirm prayer’s success reinforce Christians. Why would we resort to pseudo-scientific measurements of observable data as

evidence of God’s benevolence? “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). Do we believe in God because God gives visible, affirmative answers to each of our prayers? If that were so, we’d need to abandon faith when our requests were denied.

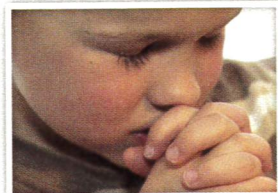
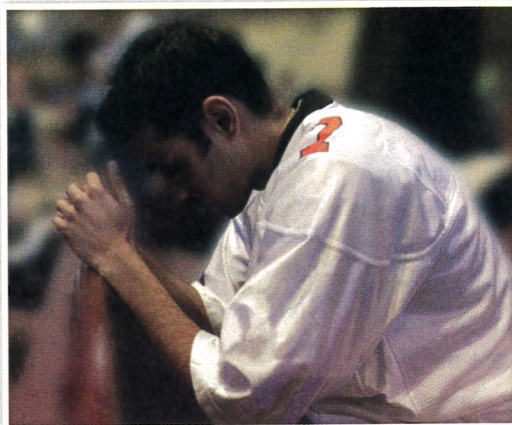
Television mogul Ted Turner did exactly that as a young man. Deeply spiritual and planning to become a missionary, Turner turned his back on God at age 15 because God did not grant his petitions to spare the life of his younger sister. Turner’s example is a cautionary tale. We do not believe in God less when he denies our requests. Nor should we think that getting what we want is a reason to believe in God more.

Jesus called it “wicked and adulterous” when people asked God for evidence of his divinity, demanding signs or miracles in answer to their desires (Matthew 12:39). We do not look for prayer to prove that God is there or that he cares. We do not rate his responses to prayer and therefore trust him. We simply trust him—and therefore we pray.



## Prayer is not a means of grace

People try to draw closer to God through prayer. Popular author M. Scott Peck once wrote, “Those of us who are religious believe that God actually often speaks to us . . . that a contemplative lifestyle dramatically increases either the frequency with which God speaks to us or else our capacity to hear [God].” Is that so? If a person finds a quiet corner, empties her mind, and thinks in the direction of God, will God be listening and, in return, be filling her spirit with his presence? God himself instructs us otherwise.



Our prayers are not a means by which we bring ourselves up toward God. If we try to approach God on our own terms, he is unapproachable. Our sins separate us from God, so that he will not hear us (Isaiah 59:2).

Peck's method of meditation and prayer was not directed at any particular deity. God would call that a form of idolatry, no better than uttering prayers to a statue of wood or stone. Not until we are brought to faith in Christ do we have a pathway by which our prayers can rise to God. Only in Jesus and through faith in Jesus may we “approach God with freedom and confidence” (Ephesians 3:12).

The gospel of Jesus is the means by which God's grace reaches to us. If we want to be closer to God, his Word is the vital connection. If we want to hear God when we pray, then prayer needs to be combined with the word of the Scriptures, where God has, in fact, spoken.

Martin Luther recommended a pattern for prayer that stayed connected to the Bible. He would ask himself:

- What is this word of God teaching me?
- What prayer of thanksgiving does this word of God prompt from me?
- What confession or lament does it evoke in me?

Then he would weave a prayer out of such thoughts, based on the portion of Scripture that lay open before him.

“With practice,” Luther commented, “one can take the Ten Commandments on one day, a psalm or chapter of Holy Scripture the next day, and use them as flint and steel to kindle a flame in the heart.”

Prayer alone kindles no flames; the Word of God does that. Prayer is the flickering of the flame that God has already lit by his Word.

## Prayer is not a shortcut to create unity

In 1952, the United States Congress resolved—and President Truman signed into law—a National Day of Prayer. The National Day of Prayer Task Force listed the goal of fostering unity within the Christian church for this day of prayer. In addition, a worldwide organization sponsors the World Day of Prayer, intended as a springboard to bring together persons “of various races, cultures and traditions in closer fellowship, understanding and action throughout the year.”

As concerned and caring Christians, we share the desire that the different peoples of the world be brought together as one in Christ.

However, prayer is not a shortcut that creates unity among those who are praying. Rather, unity comes from sharing the same beliefs. Prayer is an expression of that deep bond of unity or fellowship established in our hearts by God's Spirit.

We see an example of how prayer flowed from fellowship in the first-century church in Jerusalem. “They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). Prayer was not a means to unify them, but an expression of a oneness stemming *from* a common faith, rooted in the teachings about Christ. As the apostle John wrote later in that century, “We proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us” (1 John 1:2,3). Fellowship is established by proclaiming the Word of God, not simply by joining hands in prayer.

This month's article discusses frequent misunderstandings about prayer. We should not look for prayer to do things it cannot do. Next month we'll look at what prayer can do. In the meantime, “always keep on praying” (Ephesians 6:18)!

*David Sellnow, a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. Paul, New Ulm.*

Find a related Bible study after July 5 at [www.forwardinchrist.net](http://www.forwardinchrist.net)

# WHATEVER

## Turning a life around

God had a purpose for sending two abused children to our house.

Ben Vorlob

**I** was 11 years old when we received a call from the Waukesha County Social Services. I didn't know it at the time, but this one phone call was going to change my entire life.

**My family had been part of the foster program for more than two years at the time of the call.**

We previously had five kids stay with us at different times for about two years. I thought that it was pretty cool we had a chance to bring these kids into our house while their parents were in jail or because they were abused. As sad as this may seem, that's the society that we've come to know so well.

The call was for two children: Danny, who was four, and Sarah, who was six. They had been brutally beaten and neglected, and had been moved to multiple relatives and foster homes. No one seemed to be able to handle their wild behavior.

**When Danny and Sarah came to our house the first day, they seemed pretty normal, but they were shy. It didn't take long for things to change.** Danny looked like an innocent, small kid on the outside, but he wasn't. Every day he'd have violent mood swings. He'd run around the house like a madman. My parents had to hold him down numerous times to stop him from destroying the house. He would destroy toys, put holes in walls, write on the TV with crayons, and threaten to kill us. This went on for many days to the point where I actually thought about running away.

The one thing I will never forget was his blood-curdling scream. When my parents held him down, it was as if he was being stabbed with a knife over and over again. In our house, he was never abused or hurt; he just didn't like being confined. It was the most unbearable thing for a person to hear, but we never gave up on Danny. We knew God had a purpose for sending him to our house.

Then there was Sarah, who was completely the opposite. She never showed any emotions and was stone-faced. You could sometimes hear her in her room talking to herself, as if there was another person in the room with her. This really creeped me out. The blank expressions on her face made her seem emotionless. She had a hard time adapting to our family and to a new school. She had been moved to three different schools in one year.

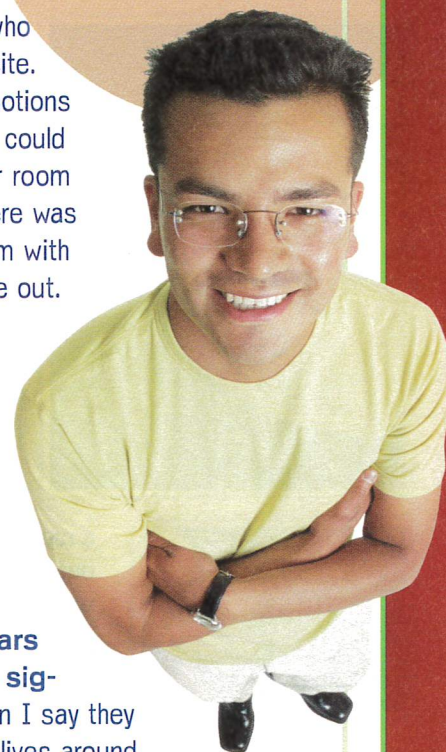
**But after five long years they've both changed significantly.** I mean it when I say they have changed their whole lives around.

Danny's anger-management problems changed drastically. He went from a wild, crazed boy to a fun-loving boy. Most importantly he now has Christ in his heart.

Sarah's expressions have improved, and she is doing great at school. She even is making friends. She has also accepted the fact that she can be a part of our family. She knows we will never abandon her.

Our family adopted them both. I think the true key to their changes was bringing them to church. They didn't even know who God was when they first came to live with us. As a Christian family we had the chance to teach these two children the whole new idea of God and his holy, precious love in Jesus.

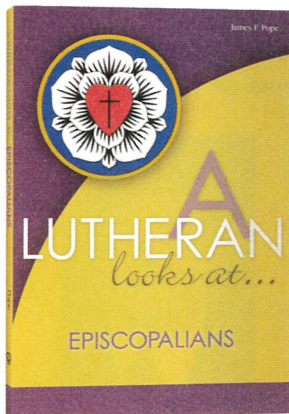
Ben Vorlob, a senior at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, is a member at Mount Calvary, Waukesha, Wisconsin.



# gave up



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



\$12.99

### Learning about the Episcopal Church

A few months ago a family event brought me—a lifelong WELS Lutheran—to my first visit to an Episcopal church service. I was impressed by the lovely sanctuary and the professional-level musicianship. The liturgical order and hymn selection not only seemed familiar, it was familiar, drawn from the same historic roots as liturgical forms and hymns used in WELS parishes. I found the experience

reassuring—that I was standing among Christians, in a place where the gospel was proclaimed and the sacraments were being administered. But I couldn't resist that overwhelming WELSian urge to analyze what—exactly—is wrong with what they're doing at this church.

I wish that prior to attending the service I had read Pastor James Pope's new book—*A Lutheran Looks At Episcopalians*. In roughly 100 pages of very easy reading, Pope, a professor at Martin Luther College, offers a brief history of the Episcopal Church and its roots in the Anglican Communion, overviews its structure and terminology, and compares confessional Lutheranism to Episcopal beliefs and practices in a thoughtful and loving way. The author

provides anecdotal color to the book by interviewing several Episcopalian clergy and lay members, including the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Rev. Katherine Jefferts Schori.

What becomes overwhelmingly clear from Pope's work is that the Episcopal Church is a very big tent, joined not so much by adherence to biblical truths as expounded in the confessions as by a love for its traditions, by a love for celebration of reason and dissent, and by a desire to find a middle road to Christ. Pope quotes one Episcopalian theologian describing his church body as a "both/and" church in an "either/or" world, able to embrace diversity only because it has no confessional writings.

As the first in a series of NPH books providing perspective on other denominations, this work on the Episcopal Church is particularly relevant for reminding us not only what it means to be an Episcopalian but also what it means to be a confessional Lutheran. As the 2.3 million-member Episcopal Church is in altar and pulpit fellowship with the 4.8 million-member Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—a church body also struggling with "both/and" issues in an "either/or" world—WELS readers can use this book to revisit the significance of where we must always turn for guidance when God's Word and man's reason intersect.

Peter Dorn  
Grace, Portland, Oregon

## Obituaries

### Ruth J. Krueger (1915-2008)

Ruth Krueger (nee Seehusen) was born Feb. 7, 1915, in Renville County, Minn. She died April 20, 2008, in Port Edwards, Wis.

A 1936 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught for 25 years at St. Paul, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis.

She is preceded in death by her husband, Lester; one son; one brother; and four sisters. She is survived by two sons; one daughter; 12 grandchildren; 14 great-grandchildren; and one brother.

### Stuart Raymond Steffen (1945-2008)

Stuart Steffen was born Sept. 19, 1945, in Springfield, Minn. He died April 29, 2008, near Sanborn, Minn.

A graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at St. Peter, Chilton, Wis.; Immanuel,

Gibbon, Minn.; St. John, Sleepy Eye, Minn.; and Zion, Sanborn, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Elaine; one son; four daughters; 15 grandchildren; and two brothers.

### Jerome Norbert Kieselhorst (1943-2008)

"Jerry" Kieselhorst was born Jan. 11, 1943, in Manitowoc, Wis. He died May 2, 2008, in Milwaukee, Wis.

A graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at Zion, Rhinelander, Wis.; Bethany, Hustisford, Wis.; Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.; Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minn.; and Christ-St. Peter, Milwaukee, Wis.

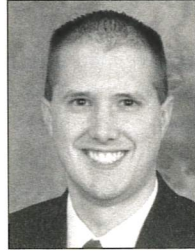
He is preceded in death by a brother and infant sister. He is survived by his wife, Janet; three sons; two daughters; and 19 grandchildren.

# WISCONSIN LUTHERAN Seminary graduates

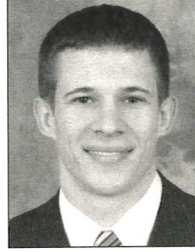
At the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary graduation service on May 23, 42 graduates received diplomas for successfully completing their seminary studies. Look for where they were assigned on p. 22.



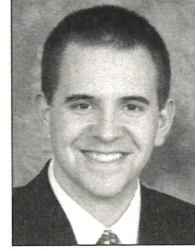
Steven R. Abramowski  
Franklin, Wis.



Jonathan M. Bare  
Owosso, Mich.



Jonathan P. Bauer  
Lake Mills, Wis.



Jeremy R. Belter  
Appleton, Wis.



Daniel L. Berg  
Chicago, Ill.



Joseph M. Berg  
Plymouth, Mich.



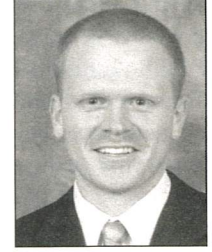
Dustin A. Bergene  
Sturgeon Bay, Wis.



Dustin S. Blumer  
Orlando, Fla.



Daniel S. Bondow  
Appleton, Wis.



Craig T. Born  
Cleveland, Wis.



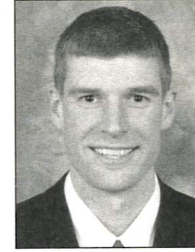
Jonathan H. Bourman  
Rochester, Minn.



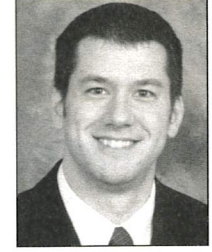
Timothy C. Bourman  
Rochester, Minn.



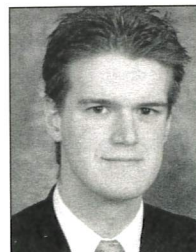
David T. Brandt  
St. Louis, Mo.



Jeremy P. Cares  
Nampa, Idaho



Geoffrey C. Cortright  
Clovis, Calif.



Sean C. De Frain  
Phoenix, Ariz.



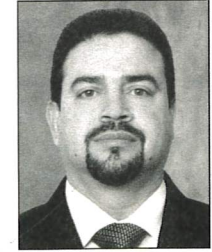
Gonzalo Delgadillo\*  
El Paso, Tex.



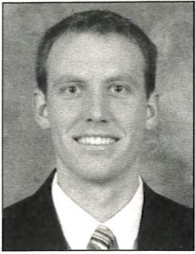
Justin T. Diestler  
Shawano, Wis.



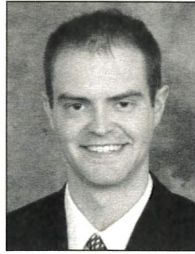
Seth P. Dorn  
Oshkosh, Wis.



Nelson Encarnación\*  
Deltona, Fla.



Thomas M. Engelbrecht  
Yorkville, Ill.



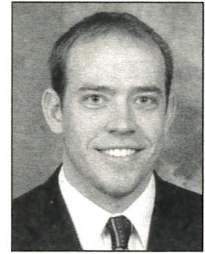
Daniel J. Frey  
Belleville, Mich.



James M. Hein  
Saginaw, Mich.



Jeremy J. Husby  
Westland, Mich.



Philip E. Janke  
Neshkoro, Wis.



Paul W. Jenkins  
Wauwatosa, Wis.



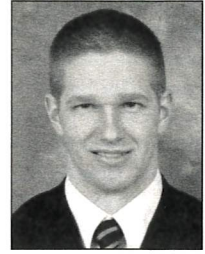
Brian E. Koschnitzke  
Lannon, Wis.



Paul M. Kuehn  
Neenah, Wis.



Douglas M. Lange  
Fond du Lac, Wis.



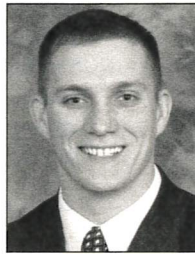
Matthew J. Langebartels  
Imlay City, Mich.



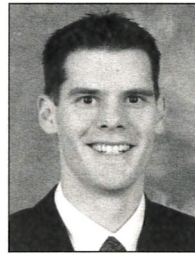
Albert H. Meier II  
Spirit, Wis.



Matthew S. Natsiz  
Saline, Mich.



Andrew T. Naumann  
Mobridge, S.D.



David A. Panitzke  
Muskego, Wis.



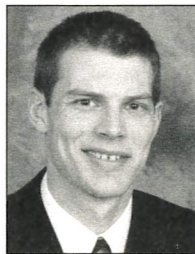
David L. Parsons  
Montrose, Colo.



Bramdeo Ramgolam  
St. Lucia, West Indies



Brian J. Schuessler  
Livonia, Mich.



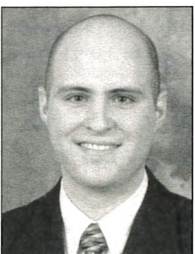
Joel M. Schwartz  
Waterloo, Wis.



Timothy J. Shrimpton  
Medina, Ohio



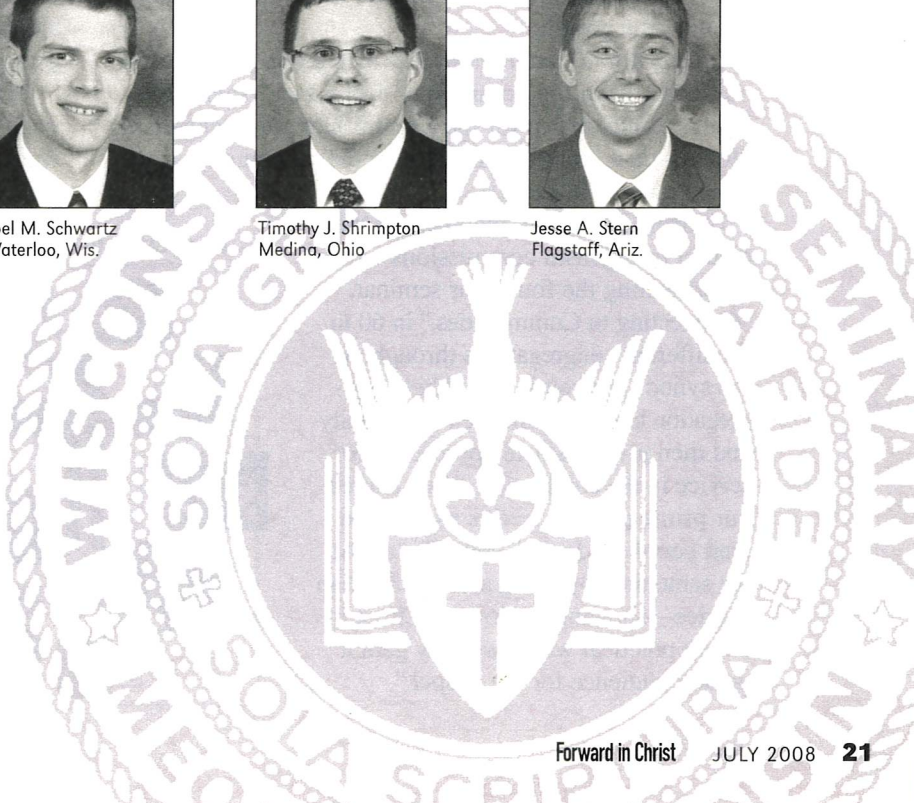
Jesse A. Stern  
Flagstaff, Ariz.



Aaron M. Strong  
Loretto, Minn.



Daniel H. Tomczyk  
South Milwaukee, Wis.



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

## Assignments

At the Call Day service held at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., on May 22, 45 men received new assignments. Of the 42 graduates from the class of 2008, 41 received assignments and one deferred for a year. Four from the class of 2006 were assigned to new locations. Seven from the class of 2007 were reassigned to their present fields.

**Abramowski, Steven R.**, to Bethlehem, Lakeville, Minn.  
**Bare, Jonathan M.**, to graduate mission associate, Southeast Asia  
**Bauer, Jonathan P.**, to pastoral assistant to the president of the Arizona-California District  
**Belter, Jeremy R.**, to Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.  
**Berg, Daniel L.**, to Sola Fide, Lawrenceville, Ga.  
**Berg, Joseph M.**, to Nain, West Allis, Wis.  
**Bergene, Dustin A.**, to Trinity, Abita Springs, La.  
**Blumer, Dustin S.**, to new mission, New Lenox, Ill.  
**Bondow, Daniel S.**, to Beautiful Savior, Marietta, Ga.  
**Born, Craig T.**, to Gethsemane, Oklahoma City, Okla.  
**Bourman, Jonathan H.**, to Trinity, Brillion, Wis.  
**Bourman, Timothy C.**, to Sure Foundation, New York, N.Y.  
**Brandt, David T.**, to St. Paul, Tomah, Wis.  
**Cares, Jeremy P.**, to Trinity, Kiel, Wis.  
**Cortright, Geoffrey C.**, to Mighty Fortress, Red Deer, Alberta, Canada  
**De Frain, Sean C.**, to Messiah, North Hollywood/St. John, Tarzana, Calif.  
**Delgadillo, Gonzalo**, to Multi-Language Publications, El Paso, Tex.  
**Diestler, Justin T.**, to Hope, Irmo, S.C.  
**Dorn, Seth P.**, to Shepherd of the Hills, Fredericksburg, Tex.  
**Encarnación, Nelson**, to Risen Savior, Orlando, Fla.  
**Engelbrecht, Thomas M.**, to Amazing Grace, Roscoe, Ill.  
**Frey, Daniel J.**, to Gethsemane, Lee's Summit, Mo.  
**Hein, James M.**, to Resurrection, Rochester, Minn.  
**Husby, Jeremy J.**, to Peace, Hartford, Wis.

**Janke, Philip E.**, to New Hope, Racine, Wis.  
**Jenkins, Paul W.**, to St. Paul, Appleton, Wis.  
**Koehler, Jeremy M.**, to St. John, East Mequon, Wis.\*  
**Koschnitzke, Brian E.**, to Calvary, Glenwood, Minn.  
**Kuehn, Paul M.**, to Risen Savior, Austin, Tex.  
**Lange, Douglas M.**, to Light of the Valley, Layton, Utah  
**Langebartels, Matthew J.**, to Our Savior, Bylas, Ariz.  
**Meier II, Albert H.**, to St. Luke, Jackson, Mich.  
**Natsis, Matthew S.**, to St. Paul, St. James/St. Matthew, Butterfield/St. John, Darfur, Minn.  
**Naumann, Andrew T.**, to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.  
**Naumann, David C.**, to pastoral assistant to the president of the Minnesota District\*  
**Panitzke, David A.**, to Shepherd of the Hills, Knoxville, Tenn.  
**Parsons, David L.**, to East Fork/Canyon Day, Whiteriver, Ariz.  
**Ramgolam, Bramdeo**, to Trinity, St. Lucia, West Indies  
**Schmidt, Daniel T.**, to Cristo Palabra de Vida, Detroit, Mich.\*  
**Schuessler, Brian J.**, to St. Paul, Amherst, N.H.  
**Schwartz, Joel M.**, to Peace, Holiday, Fla.  
**Seelow, Adam J.**, to St. Martin, Roscommon, Mich.\*  
**Shrimpton, Timothy J.**, to Zion, Moberg/St. Jacobi, Glenham, S.D.  
**Stern, Jesse A.**, to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.  
**Strong, Aaron M.**, to new mission, West Las Vegas, Nev.  
**Tomczyk, Daniel H.**, deferred for one year

\*class of 2006

## Seminar helps congregations connect to their communities

A new seminar put together by WELS Commission on Evangelism is aiming to help congregations get involved in their community in order to gain more opportunities to share the gospel.

"Jesus doesn't want us to stay as a group and insulate ourselves from the community around us," says Mike Hintz, administrator for the Commission on Evangelism. "Rather than being insulated from the community, Jesus wants us to infiltrate it."

Starting in the fall, members of the district evangelism commissions will be presenting the four-hour seminar, "Connecting to Communities," in 60 to 70 different congregations throughout the synod. The seminar will help congregation leaders define their community and then give practical approaches for service in the community. "As a church our prime purpose in this world is to lead people to Jesus," says Hintz. "At the same time by doing acts of Christian service—showing the love of Christ in a very practical way—we may gain a greater audience for the gospel."

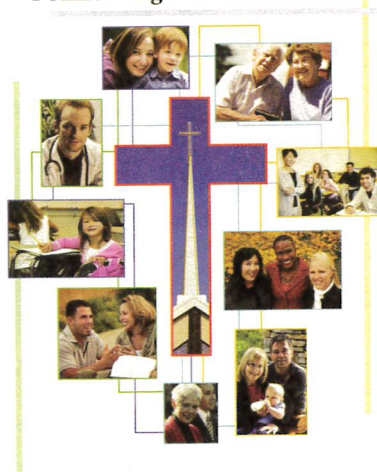
This seminar is the fifth in a series of seminars that explore the areas a congregation should look at when creating a plan to reach the unchurched with the gospel. Previous seminars are available through the district evangelism commissions.

While the most recent seminar is focused on helping congregations develop goals and plans, Hintz says that getting involved in the community is something individual Christians should be thinking about as well.

"The things that we do in the community aren't going to save anybody, but what we pray they will do is attract attention so that people will become more aware of the church," says Hintz. "In that way, it will give us an opportunity to tell people the gospel—perhaps an opportunity that we would not have had otherwise."

To learn more about these seminars, go to [www.wels.net/jump/conncomm](http://www.wels.net/jump/conncomm) or call 414-256-3288. To read more about the importance of connecting to our communities, go to p. 10.

### Connecting to Communities



## Nigerian reflections

“You are welcome.”

I cannot count the number of times that this greeting rang lovingly in my ears during our stay in Africa. Spoken by our sisters and brothers in Christ and nearly always accompanied by a warm handshake or warmer hug, these words are more than just a polite social greeting. These words are an expression of joy-filled fellowship. What a blessing it is to meet with so many members of the body of Christ on behalf of our sisters of the Lutheran Women’s Missionary Society (LWMS).

Michelle Markgraf, Carol Egelseer, Ima Udofia, and I had the privilege to travel throughout our sister synods in southeastern Nigeria in April as ambassadors of Christ and the LWMS. It was the first visit of its kind by American WELS women—a visit specifically targeting the spiritual life and growth of the women of All Saints Lutheran Church of Nigeria and Christ the King Lutheran Church of Nigeria.

Accompanied by Pastor Doug Weiser, WELS liaison to Nigeria, our group became known to local church members as “Sisters Serving Jesus.” Presenting six, day-long conferences under that same theme, the goal of the visit was to encourage women in their study of God’s Word and help equip them to share it with those around them in their homes, villages, and communities. “It was an extraordinary opportunity for the Nigerian women to be instructed by their American sisters and enjoy a oneness in Christ,” says Weiser.



LWMS members visited Nigeria in April to encourage women in their study of God’s Word and equip them to share it. (Left to right) Ima Udofia; CKLCN women’s group president, Deaconess Affiong Umoren; Michelle Markgraf; Sarah Malchow; and Carol Egelseer.

Three conferences were held in the more urban setting of Christ the King synod, and three took place in the rural or bush areas of All Saints. In all, more than 900 women and men attended the presentations, which included devotions, Bible study, practical witness helps, encouragement, and prayer.

Says Markgraf, “Our hope is that they have an increased awareness of the women in the United States praying for them as beloved sisters of faith, and that they may build one another up in Christ’s love.”

While the formal presentations were translated into the local dialects of Efik, Yala, Boki, or pidgin English, the joyful praise songs and dancing needed no interpretation. It was truly life-changing to worship and pray with our sisters whose lives are so different, yet who are so similar as daughters of Christ.

*Sarah Malchow*

## Nigerian seminary students graduate

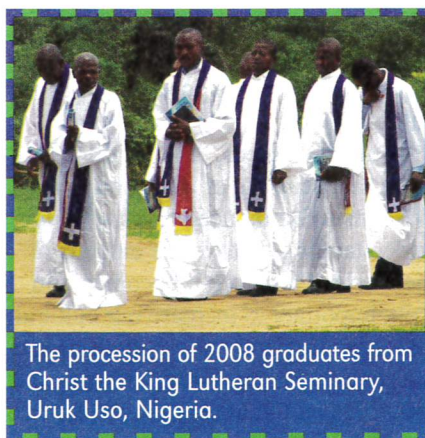
On April 5, the grounds of Christ the King Lutheran Seminary in Uruk Uso, Nigeria, were transformed into an outdoor sanctuary as family and friends of the seminary graduates gathered together for worship and formal ceremonies.

Ten men—three from Christ the King and seven from All Saints Lutheran Churches—celebrated their seminary graduation in a joy-filled service that included dancing, singing, the traditional giving of gifts, and a fellowship meal.

Two weeks later, the seven graduates from All Saints were ordained and assigned. More than 300 people attended the ordination service. Christ

the King graduates will be ordained and assigned in December following a six-month vicarship.

From 2005-08, 11 WELS pastors



The procession of 2008 graduates from Christ the King Lutheran Seminary, Uruk Uso, Nigeria.

and one former mission professor taught one-third of the class hours at Christ the King Lutheran Seminary.

“This was an important contribution by them, their families, and their congregations to the overall quality of studies at the seminary,” says Pastor Douglas Weiser, WELS liaison to Nigeria. “We also rejoice that Christ the King Lutheran pastors taught the majority of the class hours. This seminary, not supported by the WELS World Mission budget, is living proof of the value of volunteer assistance to overseas sister synods.”

Go to <http://missions.wels.net> to learn more.

*Sarah Malchow*

## New world mission assignments for seminary graduates

The May 2008 assignment service at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, marked the first time a student was assigned to be a graduate mission associate—a new category of world mission assignments created by the seminary and WELS World Missions. Graduates will now be able to gain cross-cultural experience in world mission fields without foregoing important stateside training their vicar year.



2008 seminary graduate Jonathan Bare was assigned to be a graduate mission associate in Southeast Asia.

Jonathan Bare of Owosso, Mich., was the only mission associate assignment this year. He will serve in Southeast Asia and provide spiritual care for American volunteers teaching English as a Foreign Language to Chinese-speaking people.

"I'm very excited to go over to Asia and be part of this new ministry," says Bare. "Doors are opening up that allow us to share the gospel message with people who are starving to hear it, and what a privilege and honor that is."

According to seminary President Paul Wendland, this new assignment category was created in response to

the growing number of requests for vicars to serve in mission settings. He says the cross-cultural experiences students receive in foreign mission fields are an important part of ministry training—but after their senior year, most graduates are assigned to a stateside parish.

"If they go [into world mission settings] as vicars, they may feel a deficit in experience in their call to a stateside parish," says Wendland. "For that reason, we thought the best of all possible worlds—where a person can have both the cross-cultural experience and [stateside] experience as a vicar—is to send them out as graduate mission associates."

Requests for graduate mission associates come from the various world fields and their administrative committees. Associates are then selected by the Assignment Committee.

Mission associates serve for two years and partner with workers already in that field. Following an evaluation at the end of their two years, the mission associate may receive a permanent call to that field or be reassigned to a stateside parish. "If it doesn't seem to be a good fit, well, that's unfortunate—we just lost some time and

foreign missions are an expensive prospect," says Pastor Dan Koelpin, administrator of WELS World Missions. "But we are still benefitting by getting people exposed to cross-cultural work."

Wendland agrees. "I think more and more that servants of the Word in the Wisconsin Synod need to grow in our understanding that we are citizens of the world. Therefore it becomes critically important to increase our cultural understanding and our ability to handle the changing culture without losing our moorings on the unchanging Word."

## WELS news briefs

Commission on Adult Discipleship  
800-567-8669; cad@sab.wels.net

Starting in September, Adult Discipleship again will be offering **marriage retreats** in several locations throughout the United States. Conducted by Pastor Randy Hunter and Pastor Dave Kehl, these retreats combine large-group activities and activities just for couples to lead participants through biblical and practical principles for enjoying God's gift of marriage. Space is limited. Go to [www.welsmarriage.org](http://www.welsmarriage.org) for more information and online registration.

Committee on Relief  
[philipschupmann@msn.com](mailto:philipschupmann@msn.com)

WELS members, through the synod's Committee on Relief, have donated \$50,000 to support **relief efforts** in the wake of the earthquakes in China and the cyclone that struck Myanmar in May. WELS Relief, with the assistance of WELS Board for World Missions, is channeling \$25,000 through SALEM—the South Asia Lutheran Evangelical Mission in Hong Kong—for work in China. The remaining \$25,000 went toward relief efforts in Myanmar through the international relief agency CARE. Learn more at [www.welsrelief.net](http://www.welsrelief.net).

Board for Ministerial Education  
414-256-3236; bme@sab.wels.net

The official groundbreaking ceremony for the **new chapel at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.**, was held in May. Plans for the new facility include seating for 1,000 worshipers; a pipe organ; and an unfinished basement that can have future use as a reception area, classrooms, and storage. A majority of the construction is scheduled to be complete by fall of 2009. The \$7.5 million project will be funded entirely from designated gifts given as part of the synod's 150th anniversary thank offering in 2000 and from interest earned on those gifts.

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



## District news

### Minnesota

Students at **Salem Lutheran School, Greenfield, Minn.**, collected pennies in February to benefit the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. After three weeks of bringing their change to school, the students raised \$2,670. "I am so proud of our students," says Principal Matt Meitner. "They did a great job of giving selflessly to help children and others battling blood cancer." When the students reached their fundraising goal, three teachers kept true to their promises: two shaved their heads and one dyed her hair.

### South Atlantic

**Living Word, Gray, Tenn.**, is starting a daughter congregation in Morristown. Currently, they meet every Thursday evening for Bible study with tentative plans for worship in the fall.

### Southeastern Wisconsin

**Samantha Koerchner** and **Cole Weber**, both students at Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis., were chosen to be the new hosts of *Kids Connection*, a kid-friendly video magazine produced by the Commission on Youth Discipleship. Says Hoerchner, "I'm just looking forward to being able to tell God's Word in a different way that is especially applicable to younger kids."

### Nebraska



Two Sudanese—Zakaria Gangra and his daughter, Ikhlas—were confirmed April 20 at Christ, Grand Island, Neb. Pictured are Pastor David Wietzke; Zakaria; Ikhlas; and one of Zakaria's other daughters, Nora. The family came to the United States four years ago and has been attending Christ for almost a year. "During the classes, Zakaria would tell stories about things that happened in Africa that really showed me he knew what I was trying to teach," says Wietzke. "My take on it is the Lord wanted him to be here and brought him here. It's a powerful lesson of how the gospel unites us when not much else would."

### Arizona-California



The A Cappella Choir of Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, performed in Carnegie Hall on June 1. The students spent five days in New York City and rehearsed for almost 10 hours each day before the festival performance, which included performing Mozart's *Vesperae Solennes de Confessore*, K.339 with other choruses across North America. The group was accompanied by the New England Symphonic Ensemble and professional soloists.

### Western Wisconsin

**Bethel, Arcadia, Wis.**, a dual-site ministry with Bethel in Galesville, dedicated a \$2 million facility on April 27. Since the congregation began worshipping in the new facility, attendance has jumped from an average of 45 to 70, with almost 140 people in worship on Easter. Membership is now nearing 100.

### Happy anniversary!

**MN**—The following professors at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., celebrated anniversaries in April: **Prof. Lawrence Olson (25)**, **Dr. John Nolte (40)**, **Prof. Ronald Brutlag (40)**, **Prof. Richard Ash (40)**, and **Prof. John Gronholz (40)**.

**SEW**—**St. John, Slades Corners, Wis.**, will be celebrating 150 years throughout 2008.

**Mr. Ronald Schultz** celebrated 43 years in the teaching ministry in June.

The district reporters for this month are: **AZ**—Fred Casmer; **MN**—Jeffrey Bovee; **NE**—Timothy Kemnitz; **SA**—Chris Kruschel; **SEW**—Scott Oelhafen; **WW**—Brett Brauer.

## READ THROUGH MY BIBLE IN 3 YEARS

AUGUST 2008

- |                   |                       |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Amos 6         | 17. Ps. 20, 21        |
| 2. Amos 7:1-8:3   | 18. Ps. 22:1-21       |
| 3. Amos 8:4-9:15  | 19. Ps. 22:22-31      |
| 4. Hosea 1, 2     | 20. Ps. 23, 24        |
| 5. Hos. 3         | 21. Ps. 25            |
| 6. Hos. 4:1-5:14  | 22. Ps. 26            |
| 7. Hos. 5:15-8:14 | 23. Ps. 27            |
| 8. Hos. 9, 10     | 24. Ps. 28, 29        |
| 9. Hos. 11, 12    | 25. 1 Thessalonians 1 |
| 10. Hos. 13, 14   | 26. 1 Thess. 2        |
| 11. Psalms 13, 14 | 27. 1 Thess. 3        |
| 12. Ps. 15, 16    | 28. 1 Thess. 4        |
| 13. Ps. 17        | 29. 1 Thess. 5        |
| 14. Ps. 18:1-30   | 30. 2 Thessalonians 1 |
| 15. Ps. 18:31-50  | 31. 2 Thess. 2:1-12   |
| 16. Ps. 19        |                       |

## CHANGES IN MINISTRY

## Pastors

**Bickel, Elton R.**, to retirement  
**Caauwe, Johann W.**, to Trinity, El Paso, Tex.  
**Dorn, Steven P.**, to Abiding Savior, Killeen, Tex.  
**Fischer, Wayne L.**, to Shiloh Retreat Center, Pittsburg, Tex.  
**Freeman, Leonard C.**, to Zebaoth, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Gehl, Michael L.**, to Grace, Charlotte, N.C.  
**Helwig, Stephen G.**, to Gethsemane, Omaha, Neb.  
**Holz, Kent D.**, to Beautiful Savior, Clarksville, Tenn.  
**Schewe, John P.**, to retirement  
**Schwarz, Bryan E.**, to Our Savior's, East Wenatchee, Wash.  
**Weigand, Michael J.**, to Faith, Fond du Lac, Wis.

## Teachers

**Agenten, Beverly J.**, to St. John, Baraboo, Wis.  
**Anderson, Sharon M.**, to Trinity, Belle Plaine, Minn.  
**Bauer, Sarah M.**, to St. Mark, Citrus Heights, Calif.  
**Beilke, Jonathan G.**, to St. Paul, Mount Calvary, Wis.  
**Boche, Jonathan P.**, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Brohn, James R.**, to Morning Star, Jackson, Wis.  
**Dorn, John M.**, to Illinois Lutheran High School, Crete, Ill.  
**Draeger, Jason S.**, to Growing in Grace, Spring Hill, Fla.  
**Dressel, Michelle M.**, to Risen Savior, North Mankato, Minn.  
**Felsing, Catherine A.**, to Emanuel, Tawas City, Mich.  
**Fischer, Trudy A.**, to St. Paul, Appleton, Wis.  
**Gorseger, Erica B.**, to Peace, Livonia, Mich.  
**Guenterberg, Wendi L.**, to Immanuel, Greenville, Wis.  
**Hackbarth, Donna L.**, to St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wis.  
**Haefner, Erica J.**, to Shining Light, Maple Grove, Minn.  
**Hamann, Lois J.**, to retirement  
**Hinz, William S.**, to Trinity, Jenera, Ohio  
**Kjenstad, Aaron M.**, to Faith, Tacoma, Wash.  
**Koestler, Michael L.**, to St. Lucas, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Krause, Sandra Lee J.**, to retirement  
**Lefebber, Kathryn L.**, to St. Paul, Mount Calvary, Wis.  
**Loberger, Jeffrey J.**, to Good Shepherd, Omaha, Neb.  
**Luebke, Kathryn L.**, to Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis.  
**Maciejczak, Kurt E.**, to St. John, Lake City, Minn.

**Markgraf, Carol L.**, to Beautiful Savior, Cincinnati, Ohio  
**Mayhew, Sandy L.**, to Bethel, Bay City, Mich.  
**Mensching, Brian A.**, to Resurrection, Aurora, Ill.  
**Moldenhauer, Helene**, to retirement  
**Neujahr, Jane E.**, to Zion, Hartland, Wis.  
**Novotny, Kim A.**, to Eastside, Madison, Wis.  
**Oldenburg, Dennis E.**, to retirement  
**Pearson, Amy J.**, to Abiding Word, Houston, Tex.  
**Peek, Michael H.**, to Redeemer, Tucson, Ariz.  
**Sankey, Erin R.**, to Northland Lutheran High School, Mosinee, Wis.  
**Schliewe, Neil A.**, to Calvary, Thiensville, Wis.  
**Schram, Margaret L.**, to Wisconsin, Racine, Wis.  
**Schram, Max F.**, to retirement  
**Schramm, Amy L.**, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.  
**Steinke, Therese M.**, to St. John's, Dowagiac, Mich.  
**Wendland Paul A.**, to Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.  
**Wigley, Lisa D.**, to Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Staff minister**  
**Roth, Joshua M.**, to Divine Peace, Largo, Md.

## ANNIVERSARIES

**Jenera, Ohio**—Trinity (125). July 13. Worship, 9:30 A.M.; fellowship to follow. Aug. 10. Worship, 9:30 A.M.; fellowship to follow. Arleen Bolwerk, 419-420-5504; arnjeff@gmail.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.  
**Burlington Wis.**—St. John (150). July 20. Worship, 8 & 10:30 A.M. Aug. 3. Worship, 8 & 10:30 A.M. Service of thanksgiving, 3 P.M.; potluck dinner to follow. RSVP by July 25. 262-763-8229; office@stjohnsburlington.org.  
**Milwaukee, Wis.**—Nathanael (50). Aug. 3. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; luncheon to follow. Tobin Schuster, tobin.j.schuster@gmail.com.  
**Red Wing, Minn.**—St. John (150). Aug. 15. Concert with Koine, 7 P.M. Aug. 16. Cemetery walk, music recital, pig roast. Aug. 17. Worship, 9:30 A.M., at Red Wing High School; dinner and program to follow. RSVP requested. Janet Gehlhar, 715-792-5397; jgehlhar@redwing.net.  
**Marinette, Wis.**—Trinity (125). Aug. 17. Worship, 9 A.M.; picnic to follow at Red Arrow Park. Oct. 5. Worship, 9 A.M.; German meal to follow. 715-732-9868.  
**Allegan, Mich.**—St. John (140). Sept 21. Worship, 3 P.M.; open house and light luncheon to follow. Ron Kruse, 269-673-2079; lutheron@charter.net.  
**La Crosse, Wis.**—Mount Calvary-Grace school (50). Oct. 12. Worship, 11 A.M.; meal to follow at All-Star Banquet Hall. RSVP requested by Sept. 1 Pictures and memories requested

ASAP. 608-784-8223, principal@mcglutheran.org or excare@mcglutheran.org.

## COMING EVENTS

**National Conference on Worship, Music & the Arts**—July 28-31. Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minn. Web site, [www.wels.net/jump/worship-conf](http://www.wels.net/jump/worship-conf).  
**Camp Phillip, Wautoma, Wis., events**—920-787-3202; office@campphillip.com.  
 • **Grandparent/Grandchild Camp**—Aug. 3-6.  
 • **Homeschooler's Retreat**—Aug. 22-24.  
 • **Fall Family Camp**—Aug. 29-Sept 1.  
**Retired WELS called worker reunion**—Aug. 6. 9:30 A.M. Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis. J. Fenske, 262-677-2602.  
**WELS Church Librarians' Organization fall conference**—Sept. 13, 8:30 A.M. Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis. Jan Fleming, 262-547-1961, jrfleming@wi.rr.com or Howard Wilsman, 920-682-5351, hbwilsman511@sbcglobal.net.  
**Martin Luther College Ladies Auxiliary annual meeting**—Oct. 8. Registration, 9 A.M. Meeting, 9:30 A.M. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 507-354-8221. Web site, [www.mlc-wels.edu](http://www.mlc-wels.edu).  
**A Dance with the Lord Pastors' Wives' Renewal**—Nov. 7-8. Burnsville, Minn. Valerie Johnson, 612-267-3017; coordinator@truenorthwels.org. Web site, [www.choicesforyou.org/pwrenewal](http://www.choicesforyou.org/pwrenewal).

## NAMES WANTED

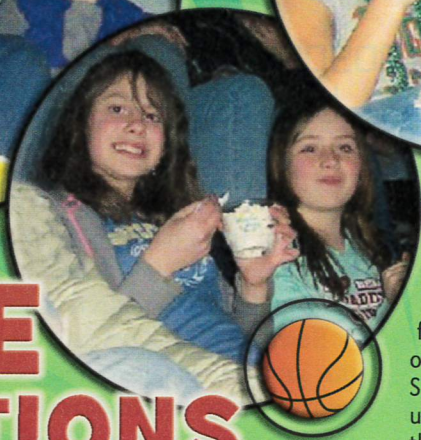
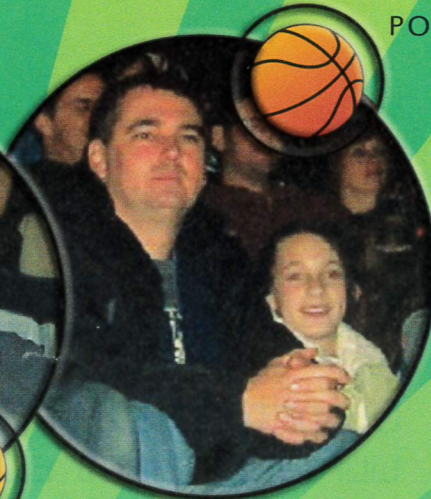
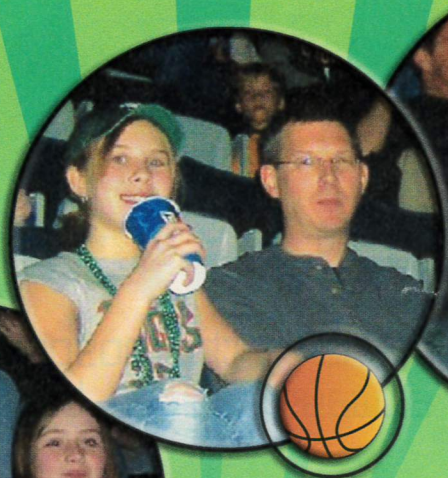
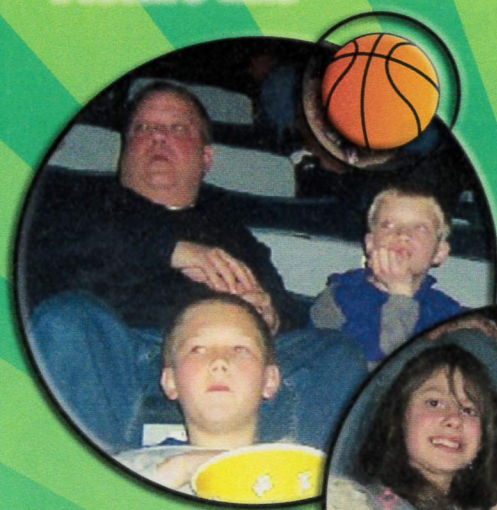
**Hawaii**—service men or women. Charles Gumm, 808-423-7044; pastor@comm-lutheran.org.  
**Bella Vista, Ark.**—Neil Hansen, 479-876-2155; neil.hansen@cox.net. Web site, [www.beautifulsaviorwels.org](http://www.beautifulsaviorwels.org).  
**Former students of Jerusalem School, Morton Grove, Ill.**—for a Century of Christian Education celebration on Oct. 9-11, 2009. Dan Hoffman, 847-965-8596; danny.hoffman@comcast.net.  
**Gray/Morristown, Tenn.**—Thomas Kock, 423-467-9673; ThomasKock@cs.com.  
**Volunteers for Camp Shiloh, Pittsburg, Tex.**—July & August. Maintenance, janitorial, and office workers needed. 903-855-1800; [www.campshilohretreat.org](http://www.campshilohretreat.org).

## POSITIONS AVAILABLE

**Manager**—Arizona Lutheran Retirement Center, Phoenix, Ariz., is looking for a full-time, live-in manager for a 24 apartment complex. Handyman skills preferred. Bob King, 602-885-8599.

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/bulletin/calendar](http://www.wels.net/jump/bulletin/calendar).

## Picture this



# “FIVE QUESTIONS from a 5th-grader”

Below are some of the questions from students at St. Paul's and responses from Milwaukee Bucks players. The interviews were placed online at [www.bucks.com](http://www.bucks.com):

Parents and 5th-grade students from St. Paul's Lutheran School, Muskego, Wis., received free basketball tickets to watch Wisconsin's NBA team, the Milwaukee Bucks, on April 12. Throughout the 2007-08 basketball season, students from the Milwaukee area submitted questions for the Bucks' online reality series called "Five Questions from a 5th-grader." Several questions from students at St. Paul's were selected and used to interview Bucks players. Teacher Christine Kruschel says the kids really enjoyed themselves, and it was really neat that many of the Bucks had Christian responses. "It was quite amazing to read the players' witness of their faith and fun to learn more about the people on the court!"

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

## Bucks guard Charlie Bell

**Question:** My mom and dad help my faith grow the most. Who helps to make your faith grow?

– Teagan Poole

**Answer:** Probably the same—my mom and dad. They were always by my side my whole life, and whenever I had a problem, I knew I could go to them and they'd let me know where to go with it.

## Bucks center Jake Voskuhl

**Question:** What's your favorite Bible story, and why?

– Julia Beyer

**Answer:** That's a tough one. Just pulling one out, I'd say David and Goliath. Because he comes in as a young man, and when he shows up there, he's actually just dropping off food for his brothers. He's not going for a fight. Then all of a sudden he comes up, and Goliath would go up there every day and say, "Challenge me"—sort of trash-talking the Israelites. All of the Israelites were scared. David saw all of this and thought, "Who does this guy think he is? We're the army of God!" So he goes up and says, "I'll take this guy on." No one else would do it. King Saul finds out and loads him up with all this armor, and says, "All right, go fight him."

And David is like, "I can't fight the guy dressed like this." He was only a boy, about 13 years old, and that armor was too heavy for him. So he takes it all off and takes up those smooth stones, and goes and does his job.

## Bucks guard Michael Redd

**Question:** What's the best thing about being a professional basketball player?

– Andie Pfeffer

**Answer:** There are so many answers to that one. The travel is one of them. The travel is phenomenal—getting to see so many places that you may not have seen if you weren't playing pro basketball.

Then there's the opportunity to compete at the highest level of basketball in the world. Not too many people can say that. There are only 400 NBA players in the world, out of millions and billions of people. That's definitely an honor.

And witnessing . . . giving God all the glory and all the credit. That's so important to me, because I know where I come from. I just keep him first, and he won't fail me.

See more online at [http://www.nba.com/bucks/features/questions\\_5th\\_grader.html](http://www.nba.com/bucks/features/questions_5th_grader.html)



# A click away

Opportunities to share the gospel with the world are not always limited by distance.

Rachel Hartman

“Do you know who I am?” the caller asked. Pastor Bob Sawall held the phone. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I’m afraid I don’t recognize the voice.”

“This is Sharon.”

“I don’t know many Sharons.”

“Do you know my mother? Her name is Yola.”

Sawall thought for a moment. “The only Yola I know was Ibu Yola, my secretary from Indonesia.”

“Yes, that’s the one!” Sharon exclaimed.

Just then, the call-waiting beeped on Sawall’s phone. When he clicked over, he heard Ibu Yola’s voice on the other line! She quickly explained her situation to him, saying she and her family had come to the United States to seek asylum. They had been persecuted for their faith in Indonesia and were now living in Maryland.

When Ibu Yola started looking for a church in her new neighborhood, she found only disappointment. She told Sawall that she had not been able to find a church that taught the same doctrine as *Gereja* Lutheran Indonesia (the Lutheran Church of Indonesia). Her daughter, Sharon, had been searching online and found Sawall’s contact information. They were calling to see if he could help them find a Lutheran church to call home in the United States.

“Sharon and her mother called me prior to Christmas 2007,” Sawall recalls. “I left Indonesia in 1989, so it had been awhile since we had been in contact.” He was able to catch up quickly with Ibu Yola, who had worked as his secretary during the time he had served as a WELS missionary to Indonesia.

Since that phone call, Sawall, who is now retired and lives in Wisconsin, has made several trips to the Northeast region of the United States. He has helped Ibu Yola and her family find a WELS congregation in their area that welcomed them with open arms. He is also working with other Indonesians in the region. “There are over 3,000 Indonesians living in Maryland,” Sawall notes.

Many of them have come to seek refuge in the United States and are looking for a church to join.

Sawall’s goal is not only to help this group of people to find a church home but also to train leaders. “We want to reach those who want to serve the people,” he says. Through programs like the Pastoral Studies Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Sawall hopes to build up evangelists, pastors, and leaders to help guide others in both the United States and Indonesia.

## Globalization opportunities

Sawall’s work in the Northeast began with a simple Internet search and phone call. Many more opportunities are presenting themselves in the same way. “With globalization going on, news of one’s spiritual life, discoveries, and exciting things that have happened half a world away are instantly transferred by e-mail,” notes Pastor Dan Koelpin, administrator of WELS Board for World Missions. Such close networking systems make it easier to stay in touch with others around the globe.

People not only are communicating at the touch of a button, but they are also traveling more. Ibu Yola is just one of many immigrants coming to the United States for a better life. WELS congregations can offer them something even better than a good job: salvation through Christ.

That’s just what happened in Des Moines, Iowa. “There are several thousand Sudanese refugees here,” says Andy Fix, pastor at Lincoln Heights. He says they were looking for a church with solid doctrine, and in September 2006, a group of them just walked through the door.

Fix is currently working with this group, which consists of about 60 men, women, and children. He has been offering them Bible instruction classes. By

God's grace, many of them will be confirmed soon.

But the work will not end there. "We're exploring many different possibilities for the future," says Fix. He hopes to reach other Sudanese refugees in the community and even help get the gospel message back to their home country.

As immigrants feel comfortable in our churches, they can use the connections they have to draw even more souls to Christ. "If people from the Sudan or a different country come to a church, become members of the church, and like the church very much, they then become a receiving port for successive waves of immigrants," says Koelpin.

### **To the ends of the earth**

While many newcomers settle in the United States and Canada, they remain close to their friends and families back home. As they learn about Jesus, they want to share the news with these loved ones. This brings up excellent opportunities for gospel outreach in other areas. "Most of the mission work being done in northern Thailand is a direct result of our work with the Hmong here in the United States, especially in places like the Twin Cities, Appleton, and Kansas City," says James Plitzuweit, pastor at Rock of Ages, Kansas City, Mo., and member of the Hmong/Lao

Committee. Ministry among the Hmong in the United States began in 1988. Over the years, numerous Hmong men were led by the Holy Spirit to study to become pastors. One of these men now lives in Thailand and helps serve two congregations in the northern section of the country.

Similar steps have been taken at Brooklyn Lutheran Church, Brooklyn Park, Minn., which is located in an area with a large population of Liberians. "Minnesota is home to approximately 20,000 Liberian immigrants, and between 16,000 and 17,000 of those are in our neighborhood," says Curtis Holub, pastor at Brooklyn.

Various Liberians have been involved with the congregation. Two different women became members and then helped establish two churches back in Liberia. The congregation has looked for ways to help these two groups. "We've sent books to them, like Luther's Small Catechism," notes Holub.

### **Countless opportunities**

God has provided many opportunities through an increase in communication around the globe. From e-mails to cell phones and the Internet, it is getting easier to get in touch with people all over the world. People like Ibu Yola can find a former missionary through an online search.

We can play a large role in this trend. By inviting new people in our neighborhoods to church, we are bringing them to the one thing needful in this life. They, in turn, can help us reach many more. What blessings! May God help us take advantage of these opportunities and spread his gospel to the very ends of the earth.

*Know of a networking opportunity in your area? Contact Dan Koelpin and tell him your story: 414-256-3233; dan.koelpin@sab.wels.net.*

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

# SOLDIER *in Christ*

Moving away from the regular routine of worship comes with challenges, but the Lord remains ready to speak to our hearts and strengthen our faith.

Amelia Wierschem

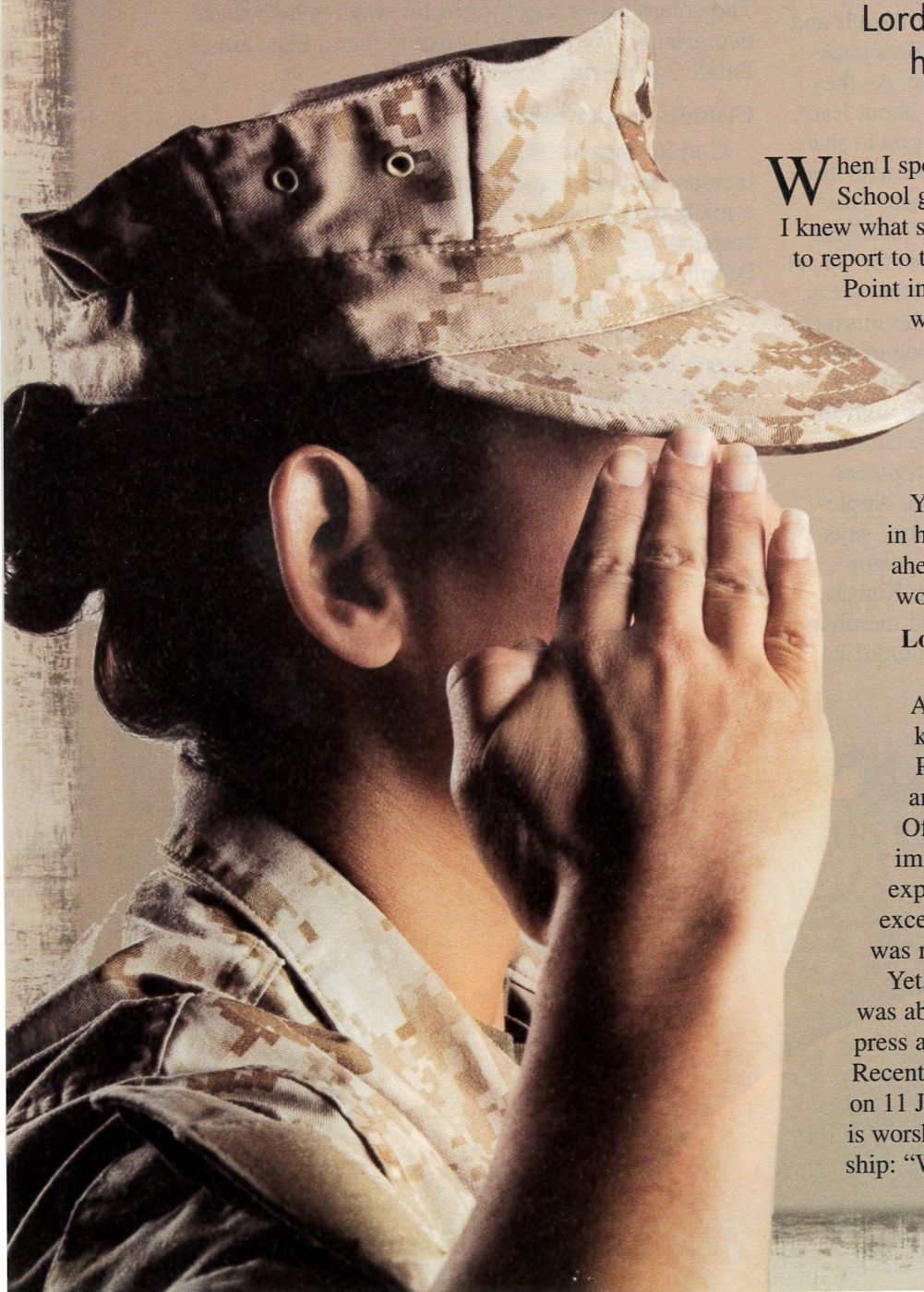
When I spoke for the Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School graduating class of 2003, I truly thought that I knew what steps lay ahead of me. I knew that I was going to report to the United States Military Academy at West Point in less than a month. I understood that there would be high standards demanded of me daily and even higher stress levels. I realized that I was entering a completely different lifestyle, and with that would come many challenges. And of course I already “knew it all.”

Yet, even though I thought I knew everything, in hindsight I really had no idea what steps lay ahead of me and to what extent those steps would change my life as I knew it then.

## Looking for worship

After reporting to the United States Military Academy, I quickly found out that I actually knew little about anything. The three West Point pillars—academics, physical fitness, and military tasks—constantly challenged me. Officers and cadre would emphasize daily the importance of these three requirements and expect me to meet the high standards set for excellence. My life was consumed, and time was not on my side.

Yet, during the six weeks of Beast Barracks, I was able to find a few minutes each day to decompress and reflect by writing in a devotional journal. Recently I paged through that journal and saw that on 11 June 2003 I raised the question: “Exactly what is worship?” Later, I gave my own definition of worship: “Worship is part of me. God is always in my



presence and I will serve him through my actions.” The definition I gave came from the reality of my life at the time. I was not going to have a worship life that included daily chapels at school and regular church attendance on Sunday with the family. Worship had to be different, and I had to choose to ensure that worship became a fourth pillar in my new lifestyle, moreover, the foundation.

Sadly, I can’t say that I took my own advice as my West Point experience continued. I kept up with the devotional journal in the beginning when time allowed, but soon the pages were blank. I attended Sunday services, but after one particular negative worship situation I was not too eager to return the next weekend. Encouragement from loved ones back home continued, but excuses on my part came much more easily than proactive solutions. My foundation had cracks, and I seemed to be the one with the hammer.

Even though I was not attending a weekly structured service, I still felt close to my Lord and knew that I could count on him in times of struggle. However, the relationship was not at the same comfort level of my childhood. I felt almost hypocritical when I prayed or attempted to do devotions because I was not on that routine Sunday-to-Sunday church schedule that was a tradition as a child. I was confused and also overloaded with the demands of the Academy. I wanted to have a close relationship with God, but I didn’t seem to know how to obtain that. God did not move away from me . . . it was me moving and being preoccupied with a different lifestyle that kept me too busy to find time to be close to him or find quiet time to listen to his message of love and peace in Jesus.

#### **God provides strength**

But God stayed just as busy. As I reflect back to a few portions of my life, it is encouraging to realize that God continued to walk by my side as

I walked in the opposite direction. I found comfort in the love of friends as God worked through them. I also found God encouraging me at the most random times. For example, one weekend during the summer our company was released from training for the day. I took a canoe out on the lake to enjoy the sunset, and I heard singing in the distance. I navigated my way to the music and found a group of individuals having a small service at one of the facilities. I joined them from the serenity of the lake, and God truly touched my heart that night. None of those cadets probably knew it, but their worship was my inspiration throughout the rest of the summer, which then continued to rebuild a stronger personal relationship with God.

## **I KNOW GOD WILL WALK BY MY SIDE AND GUIDE ME THROUGH THE UNKNOWN.**

I was also strengthened in Christ through the work of Pastor Tollefson. Once a month during the academic year, he would commute from New Jersey to share a WELS service and communion for West Point cadets. Two classmates, Lisa Becker and Mike Meyers, also attended on a regular basis, and we soon became good friends. It was so encouraging to have a WELS service and fellowship with other WELS members. My spiritual foundation was being strengthened, and it was nice to have some form of spiritual structure in my life again, even if not on a regular basis.

But even with those blessing in my life, I still felt somewhat lost, and I struggled to walk with God on a daily basis.

My junior year I had the opportunity to attend the United States Naval Academy for a semester exchange program. Not only did I have a great

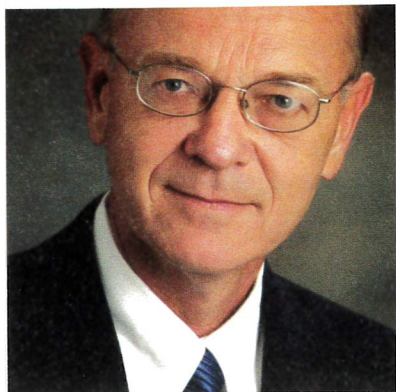
military experience but a spiritual experience as well by finding a church home and being spiritually fulfilled again.

When I returned to West Point, I once again didn’t have that church home, but the Lord found a way to nourish my faith.

Today I live in Alabama and am stationed at Fort Rucker, attending flight school. One would think that I would have no problem finding a church in the middle of the “Bible Belt,” but even after visiting 10 different churches, I have yet to find a permanent home church. And in one year, I will once again relocate to another base or be deployed. Even if I find a church home now, it will only be a temporary fix.

I do not know what my future holds. I do not know what struggles lay ahead or what challenges the Army has in store for me. However, I do feel like I know one thing now more than I ever have before. I know God will walk by my side and guide me through the unknown. I have learned to turn my ears to his Word. God continues to reach out his hand in more ways than one when I am struggling and stumbling from his path, and I know he will provide solutions for my worship life. I am content to know that worship is not about where I am as much as it is about finding strength in Jesus. I feel completely confident taking steps with God one day at a time. Together we march on.

*2LT Amelia Wierschem is a member at Morning Star, Jackson, Wisconsin.*



Mark Schwede

## A synod committed to Christian education

The blessing of parenthood brings with it some weighty responsibilities. Christian parents take to heart God's reminder of what Christian parents do for their children: "Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). This phrase is not just a catchy motto. Rather, it defines the essence of what distinguishes Christian parents from all others.

The Christian education of children is a responsibility given first and foremost to parents. From day one, faithful Christian parents are engaged in a continuing effort to bring their children to know and believe in Jesus, just as they do. God-fearing parents recognize the truth of Solomon's proverb, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

But the responsibility of bringing up children in the training and instruction of the Lord is not reserved for parents alone. It's also an activity that is an essential part of the mission of the church. When Jesus defined that mission, he told his followers to go and preach the good news to all creation. They would carry out that mission to people by baptizing them *and by teaching them* to observe all things he had commanded them. The responsibility to teach was given not just to parents but to the church as well. Congregations—individually and together as a synod—provide valuable reinforcement to the Christian education that takes place in the home.

From its earliest days, congregations of our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod recognized that Christian education is closely tied to this mission of the church. Christian education is the process by which believers grow in their faith through the teaching of God's Word.

The importance and emphasis that our synod gives to Christian education can be

clearly seen in our extensive network of Lutheran elementary and high schools. In addition, we operate a system of schools that trains future called workers on the prep, college, and seminary level. You can see our commitment to Christian education also in the Sunday school and vacation Bible school programs that nearly all congregations conduct.

This commitment does not only benefit children and families. It also benefits our synod as it carries out its mission. Nearly 90 percent of all called workers in the synod are products of Christian schools. The schools, then, are incubators not only for Christian faith, but also for full-time Christian service.

Some may question whether Christian education is worth the effort and the cost. But if our emphasis on Christian education results in new generations of Christians equipped with a strong faith and with the zeal to share the gospel, it is worth the cost. Others suggest that Christian education tends to insulate young Christians from the "real world" and feel that children would be better equipped to witness if they are exposed to that world from the start. But for me, as a Christian parent, I would prefer that my children would be able to learn in an environment where God's Word is taught and where Jesus is present—for as long as they possibly can. They will enter that real world soon enough, and I want my children to be as well prepared as possible for life in that hostile world.

We are a synod committed to Christian education and all that it offers—to our children, to our synod, and to a world that will hear about the Savior through those young witnesses that we train.

*Next: We are a synod that cherishes our fellowship with one another.*



*God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." Exodus 3:14*

"I think, therefore I am," René Descartes declared. It was not a joke, even though it almost sounds like one. It was not even a new discovery. It was a cry of despair from the hole of human reason that contemplates humanity's existence apart from God.

Descartes would not be the last. Later philosophers would hang their proof of their own existence on even less than that. Mystics even claim there is a god within that we can access by meditation and prayer. It is part of gaining an enlightenment or a consciousness of what is beyond. "The One enthroned in heaven laughs" (Psalm 2:4).

#### **Who God is**

"What is your name?" Moses asked God. God's answer was words that only he could speak: "I AM WHO I AM." He is the only one who stands alone. Everyone and everything else finds their existence, purpose, and life in him—if they are looking. No wonder the philosophers who sought proof for their existence apart from him ended up digging a hole that can only get deeper and emptier.

Centuries later, Jesus would make a whole series of "I am" statements, a few of which we looked at in this Bible study series. "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6), he would say. All of these "I am" statements are derived from that first revelation God made to Moses back in Exodus. Each of them represents what naturally flows from the statement, "I AM WHO I AM." "I am the way because I AM WHO I AM." There is no other way because no one else is eternally the same—unaffected by change, death, or decay. I am.

Jesus asserted, "I am the truth." Yes, he is the truth because all human thought and effort come and go. Even the universe changes and will "wear out like a garment" (Psalm 102:26).

"I AM WHO I AM." Jesus would make that connection when he told his enemies, "Before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58). His enemies didn't pick up stones to stone him because he was using bad grammar. They knew that he was claiming to be the "I AM" of the burning bush.

#### **Who we are**

So now it is our turn. Are we left with finding ourselves, our meaning,

or even "god" by looking within ourselves? Will we join the philosophers' ever-narrowing circle of human reason?

No! We know who we are. I am a being, lovingly created by God to carry out his great plan for me. My existence is found in the One who always was and always will be. But I am a sinner who has turned my back on the One who made me. Still, I am loved by my Maker, the eternal, all-powerful God of all things. And most importantly, I am redeemed by the suffering and death of my Maker. I am forgiven. So I am his child. I am a new creation by the power of his Spirit. I am his witness. I am immortal.

And because of the great I AM, I am grateful.

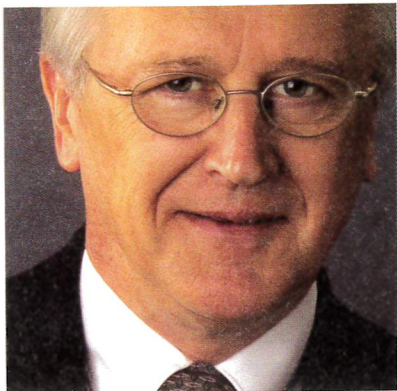
*Contributing editor David Sternhagen is pastor at Crown of Life, New Orleans, Louisiana.*

*This is the last 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.*

**I AM**  
*who I am*

**God is the only one who stands alone.  
Everyone and everything else finds their  
existence, purpose, and life in him.**

David D. Sternhagen



*John T. Bauer*

## Tears

We know the shortest passage in the Bible: “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). On one other occasion Jesus shed tears. He wept over Jerusalem as he approached the city riding on the donkey the disciples brought him on Palm Sunday (Luke 19:41).

This time the Lord’s tears came because of the unbelief of the people in Jerusalem. Later that week Jesus issued harsh words to the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. “Woe to you,” he said and called them “blind guides” and “a brood of vipers.” He wanted to gather their children “as a hen gathers her chicks . . . but you were not willing” (Matthew 23:22,23,33,37).

I think I know what Jesus felt. No, I’m not worried about people rejecting me. That goes with being a believer as Jesus reminded his disciples—even contemporary disciples. I sense the sorrow Jesus must have felt as he understood how people reject him in spite of his love—a love that brought him to Jerusalem to die even for his enemies.

Lately I had a dose of that sorrow as I read a couple of books. The first book has been on the bestseller list for some time, and I thought I should read it to see what everyone found so interesting. The book, *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert, is touted as a pursuit of spiritual devotion and self-discovery. She writes about her recovery from her divorce.

As the book begins, she utters a prayer for God’s help, but the god she seeks is not Jesus. She rejected her Christian roots, turning instead to Indian mysticism. She tells an engaging story, but my sorrow grew as I learned that she preferred Indian mantras to the cross of Jesus. I wonder if Jesus would say, “How I longed to gather you under my wings, but you were not willing!”

Oprah Winfrey has promoted the second book, *A New Earth* by Eckhart Tolle.

He encourages a shift in consciousness as a way to bring about change in the lives of people and in the world. The jacket of his book claims that we can “birth a new, more loving world” through his mysticism. But it’s without the Jesus of the Bible.

I did a little background search. When Tolle made his foundational discovery, he was suffering from fear, anxiety, and the heaviness of depression. Suddenly he had an incredible inner peace, which he claims as the eternal “I am.” For him that was not the God who appeared to Moses but the pure consciousness within. After this experience, he picked up the New Testament. Sadly, he concluded that it was only partially true. He went on to Buddha, Zen, and other mystics to find his answer. My tears come because he and so many of those who follow him are not willing to embrace Jesus. Would Jesus also say, “How I longed to gather you under my wings, but you were not willing!”?

Tolle quotes Jesus along with eastern mystics and philosophers. Like so many others, he chooses to follow only a few words of Jesus, instead of teaching “everything I have commanded you” as Jesus directed (Matthew 28:20). My heart sinks every time I discover another example of someone following only a few words of Jesus, the words that please them.

I think that Jesus has tears of sorrow at their anguished groping in the dark and their rejection of his love. Tears form in my eyes too as I wonder why they are not willing to embrace the Jesus I know. Then I remember that we Christians share the words that invite the weary and burdened to find rest in Jesus.

# GOD'S tool belt for unity

Donald W. Patterson

**What needs to be fixed? A judgmental spirit on disputable matters.**

What should a person wear to church? With which political party should a Christian align himself? Is contemporary or traditional worship more God pleasing? Can a Christian practice birth control?

Should a Christian family send their child through secular education when their church has a Lutheran elementary school? Does God want us to give at least 10 percent of our income to him for gospel outreach? Should we cut staff at our church, school, or in the pastoral office? Should we close a prep school or not?

All of these questions at one time or another have divided Christians and upset church unity. And all of these questions are about disputable matters. The Bible does not settle them clearly. We shouldn't either.

We are certainly entitled to our opinion, but we cannot judge our siblings in Christ if they choose differently. Our unity comes from the love of Jesus that purchased our souls on Calvary, not on agreement on disputable matters.

The apostle Paul helped the church in Rome come together in Christian unity although they had differing opinions about eating meat. In his words we have a compass to help us navigate the waters of disagreement on disputable matters.

**<sup>1</sup>Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. <sup>2</sup>One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. <sup>3</sup>The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must**

**not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. <sup>4</sup>Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand (Romans 14:1-4).**

## Familiarize yourself with the tool

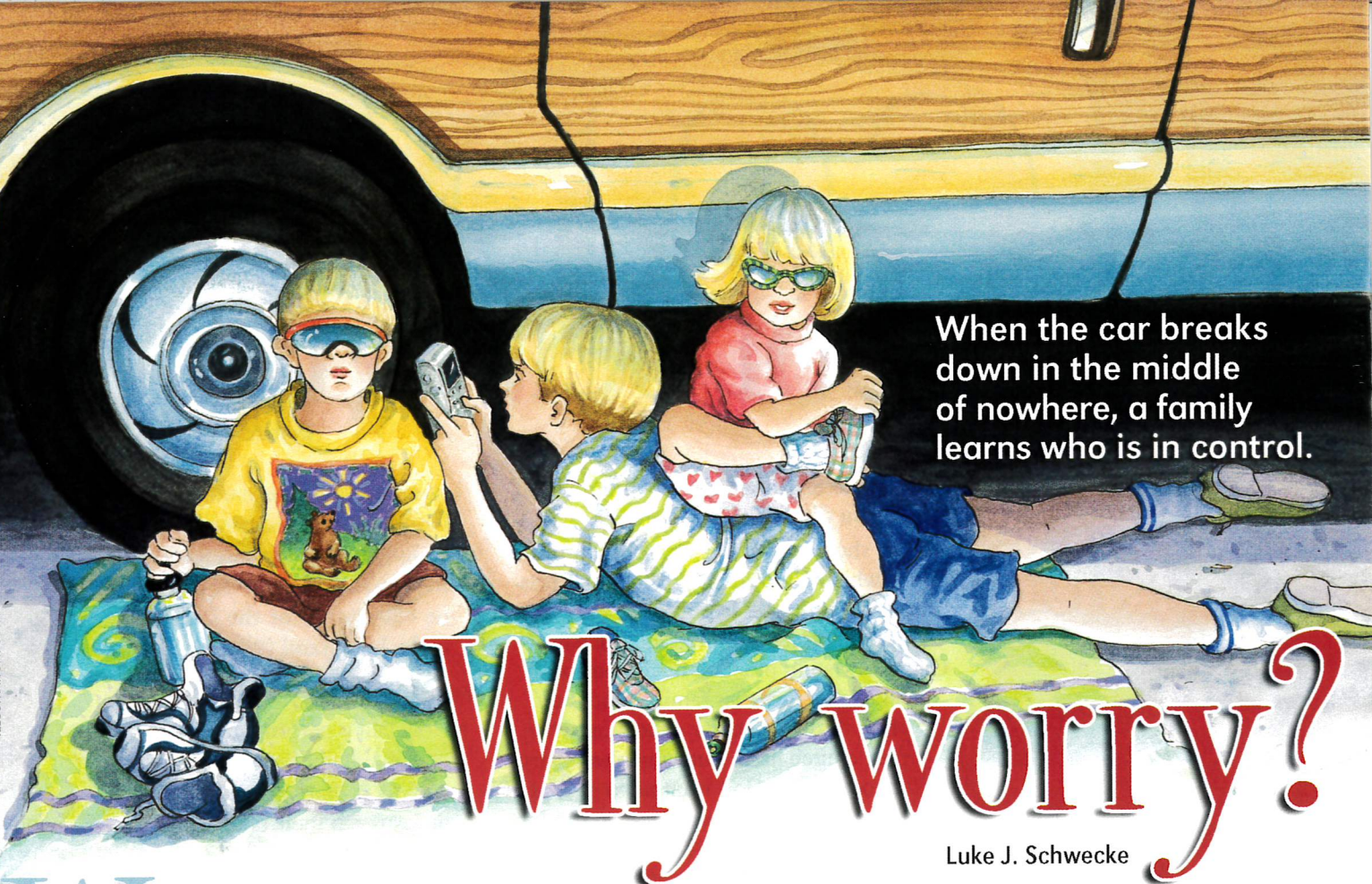
- How can a person who has a more strict personal habit have the weaker faith?
- How is it that two people can have faith in Jesus but their faith will not allow them the same freedoms?
- Reread verse 3. What reason did Paul give to people on both sides of the argument so they would not look down on each other?
- Look at verse 4. What is really happening when we judge another Christian because he disagrees with us on a disputable matter?

## Use the tool

- Identify a disputable matter in your own Christian congregation or home. List at least three ways you could show the people on the other side of the issue that you accept them.
- Why might you read this passage right before entering an important voter's meeting for your congregation?
- Find a Christian who has a strong opinion on a disputable matter. Listen to his opinion with an open mind. Find out what led him to that conclusion. Then ask him to read Romans 14:1-4 with you. Ponder how this passage creates unity between you.
- List three reasons why it is important to keep disputable matters from becoming main topics of discussion in your congregation.

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

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



When the car breaks down in the middle of nowhere, a family learns who is in control.

# Why worry?

Luke J. Schwecke

When was the last time that you worried about something? We all worry. It is simply our sinful human nature to fret when we can't control the little and big things in life. When we face troubles in life, we need to remember who is in control of our lives. I would like to share one story that helps me remember who is in control and that I do not need to worry.

**When I was four, I lived in Western Montana. During the summer my family took a trip to Wisconsin to visit relatives.** On one trip, my father stayed home to work so we could stay longer than usual. The three-day trip there—with my mom; brother, Kaleb, who was 10; and sister, Lydia, who was 2—was problem free. We did have the occasional search for a gas station and McDonald's. These were actually quite hard to find in North Dakota.

We enjoyed being able to see our cousins for two weeks and soon began to pack up for another long trip home. On the third day of our return—after watching Kaleb beat Pokémon twice and exhausting our juice pack supply—we were 30 minutes outside of Billings,

Montana. That was about seven hours away from home. We started talking about getting home, seeing Dad, and all the stories we had to tell him. At that point our car broke down. We were within coasting distance to the nearest exit, so the car came to a stop on a frontage road. This was before the days of cell phones. We had come to a stop in a place that was out of sight of the highway and the state patrol. The car obviously was not going to start, so we rolled out the blanket by the side of the car—the only available shade on this blistering 90+ degree day.

Now they don't call it Big Sky Country for nothing. Montana is unlike Wisconsin. There is not a gas station every 10 miles but rather every 100 or 200 miles. We were stuck in the middle of nowhere with limited water and food. We imagined that we would have to wait a long time.

**This is where the story gets amazing.** After about 20 or 30 minutes a pickup truck came down the frontage road and stopped. Two young men climbed out of the truck. One of them wore a cap with a Christian symbol on it, and they

offered to help us. What a relief! One stayed with us, and the other drove to Billings to call for a tow truck. When he returned, he thoughtfully brought back some pop. (That's what "soda" is called in Montana.) They could have just left, but they wanted to stay until the tow truck came. After a long hour with no sign of a tow truck, one of them had to return to make a second call. Thankfully, this time the tow truck eventually came.

Quite miraculously, one of the men had a friend whose father owned an auto repair shop. After dropping off our old van, they took us to a nearby hotel for the night. Then first thing Monday morning we were on our way home.

**This is such a clear instance where God works through ordinary people in extraordinary ways to care for us.** So when you are worrying about the next obstacle in your life, think about our story.

*Luke Schwecke, a sophomore at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wisconsin, is a member at St. Paul, Lake Mills.*