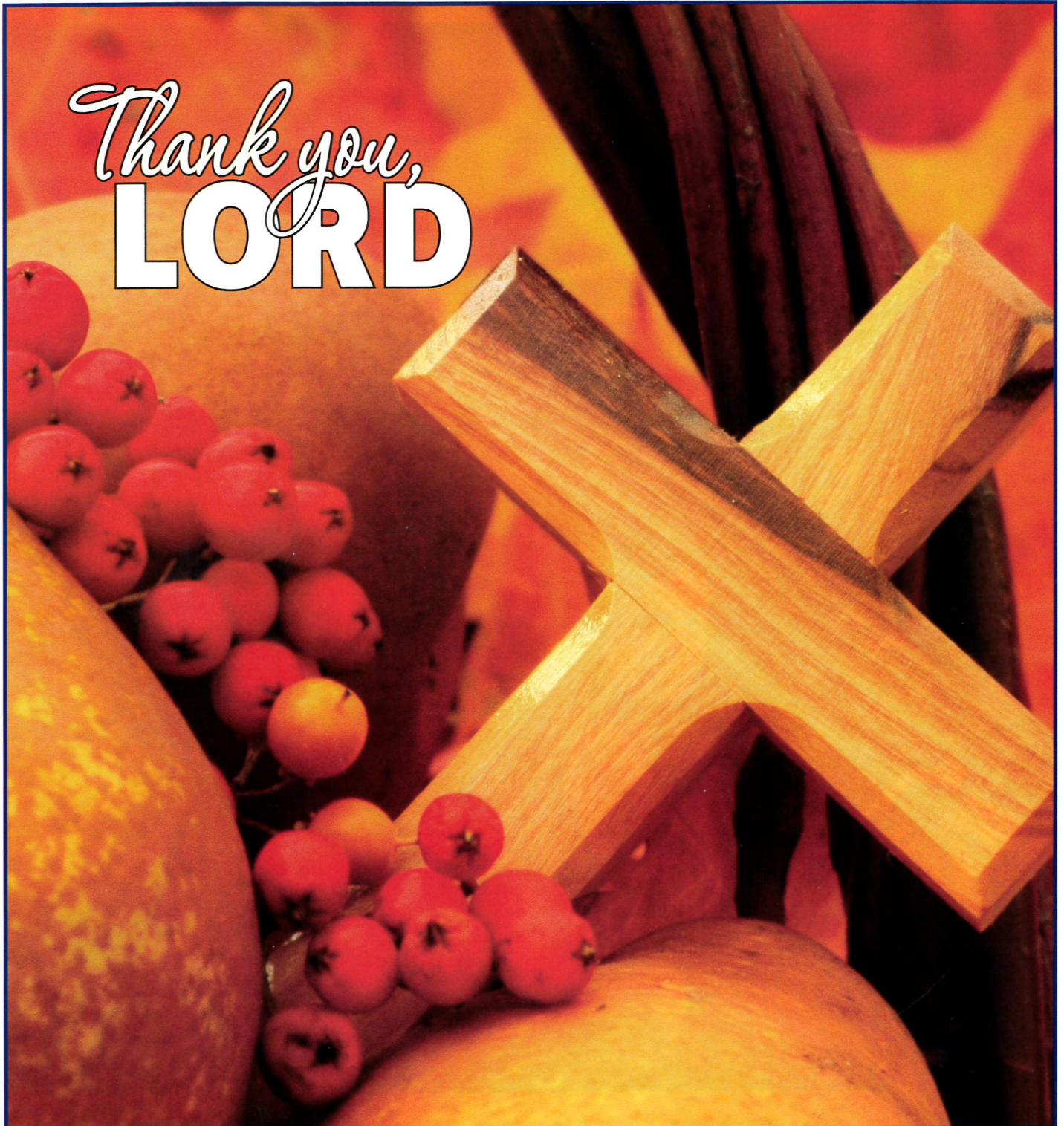


NOVEMBER 2008

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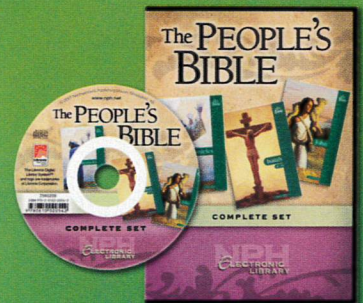
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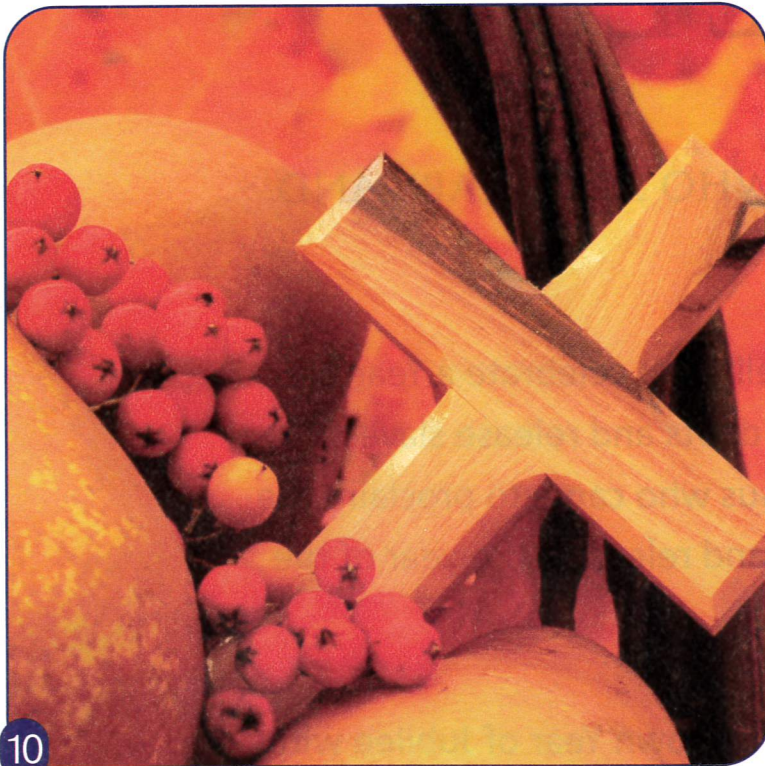


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The official magazine of the  
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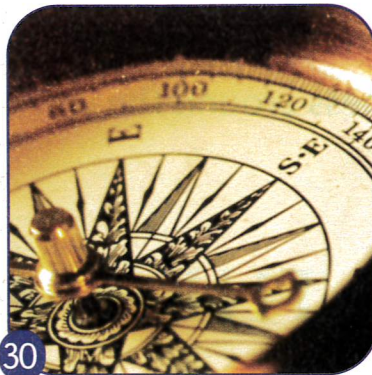
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looks to heaven.”



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*Year of*  
**JUBILEE**

# WELS

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MAY HE NEVER LEAVE US  
NOR FORSAKE US.  
*1 Kings 8:57*

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NOVEMBER

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

Being thankful when you have everything should be easy, right? As Christians we have everything that we need for our eternal futures—forgiveness of sins and the promise of heaven. So how come it's so hard to be content with what we have now, in this world, today?

Former Forward in Christ editor Gary Baumler reminds us that it's not about having the most toys in this world; instead it's about the eternal gifts that God has given us (p. 10). Pastor Tony Schultz talks about the fruit of faith of contentment—and how we don't have to look farther than our refrigerator door to see how blessed we are physically as well as spiritually (back page).

Because we are so spiritually blessed, we can be thankful even when we have earthly difficulties. The Heberlings share how their faith continues to help them be content despite devastating illnesses and accidents (p. 30). An inspiring story (p. 21) about a Hmong pastor who on the outside appeared to have lost everything shows us how God works through our problems to open up new opportunities to share the only thing we truly need: the message that our sins are forgiven through Jesus.

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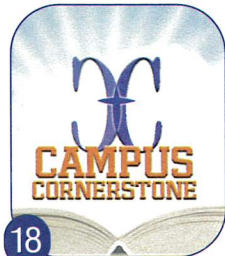
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**HOW WE DRESS**

In the August issue of *Forward in Christ*, there was a letter in the feedback section regarding the article "How we dress." The letter was from a woman who wanted her name withheld.

While I understand her point—and I realize that views are not necessarily that of WELS or *Forward in Christ*—I have a concern with part of her letter.

She states that she was never sexually harassed because she "looked, dressed, and acted like a lady." Sexual harassment has very little to do with sex but a great deal to do with power. She seems to be saying that if a woman is harassed, it is because of something she did. I've known several people who have been

sexually harassed or raped who were very modest in dress and actions.

Despite your disclaimer about writers' views, I think FIC also needs to address when a writer's view can be damaging to someone else. The last thing a victim of harassment needs is someone telling them they brought it on themselves, which is in essence what this woman was doing.

*Katie Wolski  
Appleton, Wisconsin*

**TAKE BACK SUNDAY**

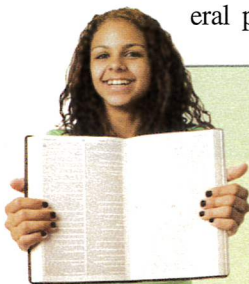
Re: "Take Back Sunday" [Sept.] by Pastor Joel Petermann.

I couldn't agree more with Pastor Petermann. When we don't agree that worship is important, what can we expect from our local community? I remember a few years ago, our

pastor contacted the local soccer group that had scheduled soccer games on a Sunday morning. His sons were involved with playing soccer, and thus it became an important issue with our pastor because it was important to him that his sons be in Sunday worship learning about God's Word. The Bereans searched the Scriptures daily . . . can we do any less on a Sunday morning?

*Ray Miller  
Carlsbad, 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*.



**Potluck Poll Results: WHAT BIBLE PASSAGES HAVE HELPED OR INSPIRED YOU?**

*We received several responses to our August Potluck poll. Here are just a few:*

When I am faced with life's challenges, I go right to Psalm 91. The entire psalm gives me hope and encouragement, especially verse 2: "I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.'" When I sometimes forget that God is my refuge and fortress, this passage helps remind me of that fact. When my girls were young, I always read them this passage. Even now that they are out on their own, they often call just to hear Mom's voice. If one is especially upset, I will get my Bible and read this to them over the phone as a reminder that God is there for them as well. . . .

*Debbie Miller  
Corvallis, Oregon*

During the past two years there were many times I needed the comfort and hope God's Word has to offer.

The first time was when my mom passed away after a long illness. I chose Ecclesiastes 3:1-8: "A Time for Everything." Almost a year later when I lost my brother after a short illness, I reread the same chapter. Although it did comfort me, I found Proverbs 3:5 more comforting: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." I turn to these passages more than most because we live by God's timetable, not our own.

*Michele Bryant  
LaPorte, Indiana*

My father died when I was nine, and my mother died when I was ten. I lived in two orphanages and three foster homes. I never was able to confide in anyone, so I read my Bible to get knowledge of what God wants me to do in my life. I got a lot of comfort. I especially like Romans 8:28: "All things work together for good" (KJV).

*Bertha Laven  
Forestville, Wisconsin*

The verse that helps me is Psalm 46:10. Life had smacked me upside the head. I was in a spiraling depression. While I was in the hospital trying a new medication, I had a severe reaction to it, which caused me to pace the halls. . . . My husband was visiting me and noticing how hard it was for me to rest and even lie down. We were walking the halls when Pastor came for his visit. I'd had no sleep for several days. He looked me in the eyes and said, "Be still, and know that I am God," or Psalm 46:10. Pastor said I should lie down and say this verse over and over to myself. I actually started to relax. My visitors left as I was still reciting this verse. After about five minutes, I fell into a deep, peaceful sleep and slept for hours. Now whenever I am tired and stressed out, I say Psalm 46:10, and I know my Lord is near.

*Anne Ascoli  
Payson, Arizona*

# Lessons from Joseph's story

*Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you." Genesis 45:4,5*

James A. Mattek

**M**oses gives Joseph lots of ink in Genesis. When one reads Genesis in one sitting, it becomes obvious that the Spirit had Moses slow the story down in order to tell it. It's an epic tale with many twists and turns. It's a riches-to-rags-and-back-to-riches story. The plot contains elements of a Hollywood blockbuster: lying, cheating, murder, adultery, injustice, hatred, and sibling rivalry.

## A story of sin

Joseph could have been a poster child for dysfunctional families. His father had four wives and didn't hide the fact that Rachel and her two sons, Joseph and Benjamin, were his favorites. Jealous brothers wanted to kill Joseph but compromised and sold him to Egypt-bound slave traders instead. They lied to their aging father, Jacob, and for years let him believe that Joseph had been killed by a predator. Years later it all came full circle. With Joseph a mere distant memory, the brothers came face to face with him in Egypt, where Joseph had risen to a role of power in the world's superpower.

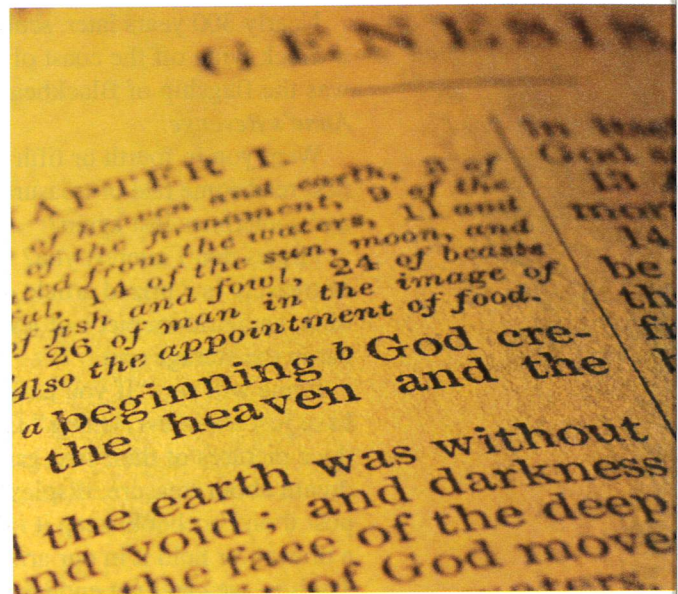
This story brings to light the destructive power of sin. Sin divides and separates. It divides spouses. It divides entire families. It divides churches. Sin separates people from God. Even for believers, sin stifles the growth of faith and can separate us from our Savior.

## A story of grace

The story of Joseph is also a story of God's goodness. It's a classic example of how God doesn't give up on his people . . . even when they fail him miserably. In fact, the Bible could be described as a big picture album of a large dysfunctional family. Page after page shows people who have failed God. From Adam and Eve to Peter . . . from King David to Judas Iscariot . . . all flawed family members to whom God reached out with his goodness and grace. You and I are members of the same flawed family, yet he hasn't given up on us either.

The story of Joseph is a story of a gracious God who takes risks. Jesus is linked to Joseph, Jacob, and Judah. From sinful offspring after sinful offspring all nations on the earth are blessed because of one sinless descendant. God's plan to save people was inherently linked to his stumbling and defiant creatures. The risks are breathtaking. Yet an all-knowing God accomplished the improbable. We are left amazed at the extent to which he would go to rescue us from our sins.

The story of Joseph is also a story of faith in the darkest of times. Joseph interpreted a dream, and his brothers threw him into a cistern. He resisted



sexual advances and landed in an Egyptian jail. There he interpreted a dream to save a fellow prisoner, and the cell mate promptly forgot about him. Joseph's valiant stabs at goodness landed him in nothing but trouble. But in the darkest of times, the Lord led Joseph to see his hand of blessing as it elevated Joseph to a new level of spiritual maturity.

When it was all said and done, Joseph was able to find God behind it all. Can you too?

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

# True treasure

Thomas J. Jeske

The decks were awash. What about his treasure? Scant moments later the masts of a sailing vessel slid beneath the surface of the Atlantic. The year: 1718. Like all sinking ships, this one scattered artifacts and question marks over its debris field.

Nearly 300 years later, scuba divers identified a wreck lying off the coast of North Carolina. It was the flagship of Blackbeard's fleet, *Queen Anne's Revenge*.

Were you in fourth or fifth grade when you first read some tale of treasure lost and found and sometimes lost again?

Pirates don't interest you? Maybe your idea of treasure is a prized article of sports memorabilia, an heirloom piece of jewelry, or that old car in the storage unit.

Some will say, "If you have your health, you have just about everything." Others quickly produce pictures of their first grandchild. We daydream about treasure, display it on our walls, post it on Facebook, keep it in a drawer, or hold it in our arms. Truth is, we can't get enough of what we love.

But hold on for a second. Name something you once considered to be treasure but which you no longer possess. Was it lost? Damaged? Taken from you by fraud or force?

Would it surprise you to learn that Jesus himself had a strong interest in treasure? Why not? He shared our flesh and blood. Satan even tempted him with the treasures of the world. He was aware of the human desire to possess a treasure, to say, "I count on this thing to make my life good." Jesus went so far as to suggest that an ordinary person should be able to recognize genuine treasure by asking three questions: Can a moth nibble on it? Can rust break it down? Can a thief steal it? (Matthew 6:19,20).

Visualize your prize. If your answer is yes to any of Jesus' questions, your treasure doesn't

qualify simply because it's vulnerable, so exposed to loss.

Name a person you once relied on for help or attention but who is gone. Did he or she move? Die? Forget about you?

A treasure worth the name ought to be something that you can depend on in good times and return to for comfort in tough times.

Can your treasure transport you beyond the limits of your life? Is yours something that withstands the shivers of the stock market? Something that retains its value in spite of inflation? Something that is not susceptible to the fading of a current fashion or the fall of a flag? "Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matthew 6:20). Listen as Jesus tells of a treasure that neither aging nor hurricane nor motivated thief can take from you!

*Queen Anne's Revenge* may tantalize our imaginations, but she was compromised and sent to the bottom. The Father sent his Son down to share our experiences with loss inflicted by thieves, moths, and rust. Alone on his planks of wood, Christ also sank from sight, consigned to a dreadful fate. The gospel, however, is the greatest of all treasure tales, for this Jesus has been brought up again into the sunlight. He is

your treasure, now revealed more sparkling and appraised more breathtaking than any competition.

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21).

Christians contentedly treasure their return to their Father's side via Jesus. In his house there are no chewing moths, no corrosive rust, and no motivated thieves. The baptismal treasure proves out Jesus' appraisal. Truth is, we can't get enough of what we love.

The gospel is the greatest of all treasure tales.

Contributing editor Tom Jeske is pastor at Living Hope, Omaha, Nebraska.





Forrest L. Bivens

When unbelievers mention religion, questions about churchgoing surface early and often. Distrust of “organized religion” and disinterest in what might require effort and commitment quickly lead to disgust for churchgoing except when a favorite niece is playing a shepherd in the Christmas pageant. The clever but glib words of functionally atheistic Winston Churchill appeal to them: “I’m not a pillar of the church but more of a flying buttress—I support it from the outside.” Remaining outside any church suits unbelievers just fine.

#### A serious question

However, I take your question as a sincere inquiry of a believer. We do emphasize churchgoing a lot. Active participation in church activities is not always pleasant and church members are not always perfect companions, so there is value in asking this question periodically for a reality check.

Let’s start by clarifying that the external act of going to church does not earn or contribute to a right relationship with God. Nor does mere churchgoing make a person a Christian any more than going to a garage makes you a car, as the saying has it. Christ accomplished salvation, and the Spirit creates saving faith through the gospel. This is divine, not human, activity. And it may be grasped and enjoyed in private as in public.

#### Suitable answers

Still, the Bible supplies many reasons why churchgoing is and will remain an integral part of a Christian’s lifestyle. Here we must be brief. Each point deserves expanded treatment. Why does God want believers centered in the gospel to gather, worship, and serve alongside other believers?

- *God wants this.* We know this from his direct commands (Hebrews 10:23-25), his establishment of public ministry for gathered believers (Ephesians 4:11-13), and his insistence that his family members act like loving siblings (Romans 12:10-13).

## Q. Aren’t there advantages to practicing Christianity alone? Why our emphasis on going to church with others?

- *Christians want this.* The biblical portrait of believers is that of an active fellowship whenever and wherever possible. Any idea of you or me enjoying salvation or being a Christian in isolation is foreign to Scripture. Mutual love and reciprocal service delights God and us (John 13:34,35; 1 John 4:19-21).

- *Christians need this.* Though it’s technically possible to live the Christian life in isolation, it is neither the norm nor is it wise. We are given diverse gifts to complement and supplement one another, charged with mutual discipline and encouragement, and genuinely need each other (1 Corinthians 12, 1 Peter 4:8-10).
- *The world needs this.* Believers function as God’s representatives on earth. Our shared gospel teaching and nurture, financial support, missionary activity, charitable endeavors, and daily intercessions serve souls worldwide.

#### A satisfactory combination

I thank you for mentioning “advantages to practicing Christianity alone.” Any attempt to make our joint Christ-centered activities a substitute for personal and family nurture finds no support in Scripture. Personal spiritual maturity serves congregational life and vice versa. We want and derive blessing from both.

The pattern exhibited in the life of C. S. Lewis is one likely found in many of us. When brought to faith in 1929, he said, “I had as little wish to be in the church as in the zoo. . . . I couldn’t see how a concern of that sort should have anything to do with one’s spiritual life.” Later his appraisal of church life was quite different: “We must be regular practicing members of the church.” His change of attitude stemmed from growth in Bible knowledge and spiritual wisdom.

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

# Real thankfulness looks to HEAVEN

Thank you, Lord! No matter what my physical condition or material welfare, I have Jesus' forgiveness and the promises that come with it.

Gary P. Baumler

**D**o you remember the old bumper sticker: "The person who dies with the most toys wins"? It's all about one-upmanship. It's a game we are tempted to play—getting the most toys—every time we compare what we have with what our neighbors and friends have.

### **Real thankfulness has to be learned**

It's insidious. You know the drill: The more you have, the more you want (and think you need). Often too the more you have, the less likely you are to feel heartfelt thanks for what you have. You reason that you have earned it and that you deserve it. It's all about you and what you have gained.

Or do you remember each day to say, "Thank you, God"?

The reverse can also be true. The less you have, the less likely you'll see reasons to give thanks.

Let me ask you: What is the climate for thankfulness in your life right now? Are you thankful that gasoline costs nearly \$4.00 a gallon, that you can't afford to make your house payments, that you can't sell your house, that the stock market has been in a twirl, that terrorism remains a real threat?

Are you thankful for the pain in your back that never goes away? Your arthritic hands? Your cancer? Heart disease? Allergies?

What about the floods, the fires, the tornadoes, the hurricanes that destroyed some of your "toys"?

A childhood friend of mine contracted a debilitating disease at a young age. She cursed God for it. What would you have done?

Saying "Thank you!" does not come easily or naturally. Grandma gives Junior \$5.00, and Mom barks at him: "Say thank you!" We need the reminders. What we get we think we deserve, unless it's something we don't want. We have an entitlement mentality. That frame of mind leaves little room for gratitude.

So we set aside a national holiday in the hopes that we will all take time to think and so to thank. But that too can miss the mark—thankfulness "forced" into one day and focused on the wrong things such as "toys" and other material or physical benefits.

### **Real thankfulness is dependent**

Real thankfulness happens each day and becomes a part of our being.

Real thankfulness is humble and thoughtful, aware and introspective. Most of all, the deeply thankful person knows that he or she is dependent and beholden. We depend on God—for everything.

One of the signs hanging in our old football locker room read: “There is no *I* in TEAM.” So too there is no *I* in THANKS. To be able to show thanks from “my inmost being” (Psalm 103:1), I need to see my own unworthiness and God’s great “love and compassion” (Psalm 103:4). I need to see what’s most important for my well-being; namely, that God “forgives all [my] sins and heals all [my] diseases” (Psalm 103:3). I need to see that God throws in the toys as blessed extras.

To illustrate, let’s think about a person with a debilitating disease. The lesson here will apply also to financial cares and other heartaches. Were I the person who was down and out and suffering a dreadful disease, I have no idea if I could handle it as well as I can write about it. But I know, even as the ancient patriarch Job demonstrated, that there is still room and reason to praise and thank God.

Before there ever was a debilitating disease, there was the debilitating and death-dealing force of sin that is at work in me. Though I may live to be 100, never be sick a single day in all that time, and be prosperous, still I am dead by nature. In that condition, the troubled climate on this earth is as good as it gets. Ahead lies only the suffering of hell, separated forever from God and his goodness. Ahead lies eternal death.

So here I am, having done nothing to deserve anything better than eter-

nal damnation for my sinful condition and sinful acts—and helplessly ill as well.

But God doesn’t want me to lose everything that way. He sent his one and only Son to live the perfect life for me and to die my deserved death. For what Jesus has done, God forgives all my sins.

Take the case of a man, dying of cancer, who said to his pastor, “I thank God for my cancer.” He explained that before his cancer he did not know Jesus and his eternal blessings. He could have died suddenly in unbelief. Instead, he lived in the comfort of Jesus’ forgiveness and eternal life.

No matter what my physical condition or material welfare, I have Jesus’ forgiveness and the promises that come with it. Jesus is my Savior. He is with me to comfort me. I may be deathly ill, but I am cradled in his loving arms. I may be suffering beyond description, but my suffering will have an end. I may have suffered great loss, but I have everything with Jesus. The blessings that Jesus holds out for me will last forever.

Thank you, Lord.

Now recall the other major promise from God in Psalm 103; namely, he “heals all [my] diseases.” On the surface that might seem like a contradiction as I lie helpless from a disease with no cure. But it’s true. God heals all my diseases. What healing I enjoy from day to day is alone by his grace, and the great healing is still to come.

When I join my Savior in the great resurrection, I will have a body like his: imperishable, strong, immortal. No more disease! No more pain or sorrow! I will enjoy the glories of

heaven. Jesus made it possible for helpless, worthless me.

So, you and I can look beyond our suffering and our helplessness. We can bask in the radiance of God’s goodness and mercy. And we can breathe thank-you with each new breath. Real thankfulness looks to heaven.

### Real thankfulness shares

Life is not about “toys.” It’s about the joys of serving our loving God and Savior. When God works in us the faith to see our lives from heaven’s perspective, we worry less and less about what we can have for ourselves and we care more and more about how we might help others. It’s been said that *thanksgiving* is an action word. We give thanks, and we give in thanks. Real thankfulness shares God’s goodness.

When we realize how, even while we were dead in sin, Jesus died for us and has forgiven us all our sins, we are ready to forgive others and to tell others of Jesus’ great love. When we marvel at the undeserved gifts of all kinds that we receive from our benevolent God, we feel blessed also to be able to give to others. Yes, when God even throws in a pile of toys for us to enjoy, can we in thankfulness not help but share with the less fortunate in this world?

The bumper sticker that we quoted earlier had it all wrong. The person who dies with the most toys doesn’t win. He or she just loses the most toys. But the person who lives and dies with Jesus Christ, gains all the eternal riches of heaven. If you are that person, you will live with real thankfulness.

*Gary Baumler, a retired pastor, is a member at Living Savior, Asheville, North Carolina.*

# The LUTHER

“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Do you hear any sounds when you think of these words?

I think it might be important to hear the sound of pouring water. In many congregations, as the invocation is spoken at the beginning of each worship service, all eyes are on the baptismal font, which stands at the front center of the church. How often haven't we seen the water poured from the cupped hand of the pastor as it cascades over the head of an infant. We may be too far away to hear the sound, but the gentle splash is part of every baptism. The words we take for granted so often at the beginning of worship are connected with the water of Baptism. Those words are always a reminder of the tremendous treasure God has given each of us through this sacrament.

## Worship reminds us of our baptism

Perhaps you have never connected the words of the invocation—or the sign of the cross that the minister makes as he says those words—with your baptism. But think back to the last baptism you witnessed. What words did the minister say as he poured water on the head of the person being baptized? “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” And what sign did the minister make on the head and heart

of the person being baptized? “Receive the sign of the cross,” he said, “on the head and heart to mark you as a redeemed child of Christ.” Every time we begin worship with the words of the invocation, we return to that momentous event in our own lives when, as water was poured over our heads, those powerful words were spoken over us. And every time the sign of the cross is made, we are reminded that Baptism ties us to the cross of Jesus as his redeemed children. That tie remains throughout our lives.

It is not by accident that we begin worship with such a powerful reminder of our baptisms. Worship, after all, is that incredible time when the Lord of the universe, whom angels serve unceasingly in heaven, invites us poor sinners to come into his presence so that he might serve us. While our service to God is an important part of our worship, it is not the heart of our worship. God's service to us stands at the heart of all our worship, for without God's service to us we could never serve him.

## God gives us his gospel through Word and sacraments

Since this is so, it is not surprising that worship from its earliest roots has kept the means God uses to serve us at its heart. Readings from the Holy Scriptures, “which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus”

(2 Timothy 3:15), have always been an important component of the service.

But the Word is not the only way in which God gives us his gospel, which “is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). Baptism is “the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” through which we become “heirs having the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:5,7). In the Lord's Supper, Jesus' body and blood is “given for you” (Luke 22:19) and “poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28). When we come together in worship, our Savior-God invites us to come to his banquet table so that he can serve us a rich feast of his gospel. That feast comes in three equally important courses: Baptism, the Word, and Holy Communion.

As we enter God's banquet hall, we return to the place where God first welcomed us into his family: our baptisms. We remember that our baptisms did not happen a long time ago; they are something in which we live every day of our lives. As we confess our sins and receive God's forgiveness, we relive our baptisms, in which God washed away all our sins and raised us from spiritual death to new life in him. United through Baptism with Christ's life, death, and resurrection, we stand before God as his holy people. We receive his service as he feeds us with his Word.

## The Lord's Supper

Then, fully satisfied by the first two courses of God's gospel banquet, we

# AN WAY of *worship*

Steven A. Lange

approach his table again to receive his Holy Supper.

When Jesus first celebrated that Supper with his disciples, he told them, "Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:25). Jesus' "whenever" left wide open how often his disciples should celebrate this sacrament. Jesus set no minimum for how often they should partake of his heavenly meal. But he set no maximum either. As is always true of the gospel, Jesus' sacred meal has nothing to do with what we do for him. It has everything to do with what he does for us. In this Holy Supper, Jesus comes to us, who have nothing to offer him but a heart full of sin, and he gives us the very body and blood with which he paid for all our sins. Intimately and individually he comes to each of us and whispers into our hearts, "Do not let your heart be troubled. Here, take my body. I gave this *for you*. Here, drink my blood. I shed this *for you*. Go now in peace, for my body and blood have made you mine forever."

No wonder the early Christians, as they carried out Jesus' instructions to "do this, whenever you drink it," celebrated the Lord's Supper whenever they gathered for worship. No wonder the early Lutherans also chose to celebrate it every week. With their Savior freely offering his people such invaluable blessings in this meal, why would they not want

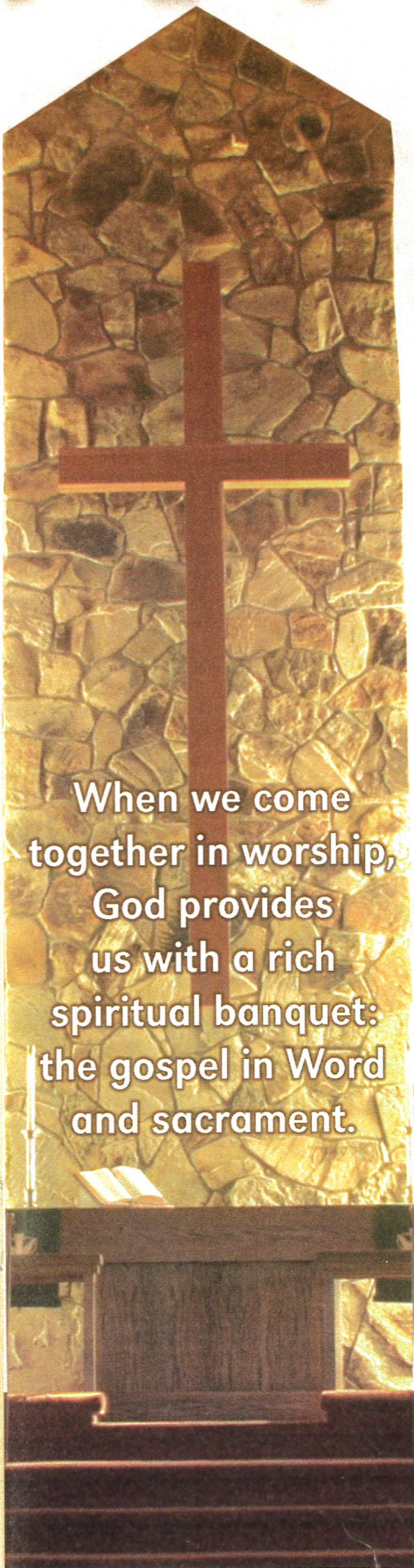
to offer it to those who wanted to partake of it?

This is not to say that our worship is incomplete without the Lord's Supper. Nor does it mean that every Christian who can commune must commune every time the Lord's Supper is offered. To make the Lord's Supper a requirement would be to turn this sacrament from pure gospel into law. That would not do anyone any good. Yet, as we consider all that Jesus gives us in this sacrament, we don't want to treat it like a dessert that we might or might not include in our meal depending on our mood. Whenever we dine on our Lord's Holy Supper, it is for us the most magnificent of blessings and can only enrich the already sumptuous gospel feast our Lord has prepared for us.

Baptism, the Word, and Holy Communion are three equally magnificent courses in the lavish banquet God lays out for us each time we gather to worship him. At this fabulous feast, our Savior asks nothing of us and in return gives us everything. Come to the feast, eat, and be satisfied.

*Steven Lange is pastor at Hope, Louisville, Kentucky.*

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



When we come together in worship, God provides us with a rich spiritual banquet: the gospel in Word and sacrament.



**M**y journey to WELS is different from most adults. I was not “grown up” when I decided to become a member. I was a sophomore at Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School (NELHS), Waco, Neb. While I attended NELHS, I had my first opportunity to examine my faith and to examine what God’s Word actually says. I have learned so much since that time.

**I was raised in a smorgasbord of denominations.** Baptized Missouri Synod Lutheran, I attended a Missouri Synod school in Sioux City, Iowa, for a few years. I spent many years in various Methodist churches. I took my first “communion” before age eight. Yes, I was a prime example of why close Communion is a healthy and necessary practice. I had no idea what it was about, and my brother and I even reenacted our experience at home with cookies and Kool-Aid.

In fifth grade I spent a lot of time with a Baptist youth group.

I was eventually confirmed at a Methodist church in

Houston, Texas. While the church did an amazing job at getting young people involved, its education about the one thing needful was sorely lacking in substance. My six-month confirmation class consisted mostly of videos and opinions. I remember more about my confirmation dress and celebration than I do about what I actually learned in class.

In 1999, on a whim, I decided to attend a boarding school that my mom had found on the Internet. Ever since reading *The Secret Language*, a book about two little girls who attend a boarding school, it had been a dream of mine. That’s a little bit corny, but what an amazing way for God to expose me to his plan! With my mother’s blessing, I enrolled.

My first year at NELHS wasn’t a smooth acceptance into the WELS experience. Being a non-WELS student was tough, as I was judged for my faith—or lack of faith. One student told me in simple terms that “I should go back to Texas and go back to my Methodist church.” I even had one teacher who suggested that whispering one morning in chapel—a minor violation of the code of behavior—was due to the fact that I was not

# 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.

Emily Sulzle

WELS. But God is bigger than mistaken and sinful people, and WELS is made up of far more passionate, understanding, and wise people than the few who judge others based on their own ignorance.

**One of the first things that caught my attention about our synod is that the truth of God's Word is accessible to its members.** While everybody in the United States has free access to the Bible, not everyone necessarily has even the vaguest idea of where to begin with that intimidating book. But WELS equips its people to understand and use the Bible. One night, a former student of NELHS came back to give the evening chapel. He was just a normal person, not someone with years of seminary training. He gave an insightful and powerful message about Romans 7:14. And I understood it.

I remember a debate in government class during my sophomore year. I was hotly condemning all the practices of the Wisconsin Synod. The teacher told me bluntly that if I was going to condemn the Wisconsin Synod's practices, I better get my facts straight and take a Bible information class. With a little more encouragement, I began my adult Bible information class. That year I really had the opportunity to examine the Bible in the light that it is God's inspired Word and that it means what it means, despite what I think. And, honestly, to a confused teenager, that was a strong reassurance! That May I was confirmed as a member of Bethel Lutheran in Waco, Neb.

I've been a Christian just as long as most WELS members. I was baptized as an infant and grew up with the reassurance that I was forgiven through Christ. But the difference



The Sulzle family: (left to right) Aurora, Emily, Joshua, and Olivia.

between all the churches I attended growing up and WELS is knowing that I am in a community of people that believes the same thing. We have a standard of belief. There's not much room for interpretation in our doctrine, and that is a blessing!

I've received the opportunity to grow in my knowledge of the Triune God and also of the synod in so many ways. I finished at NELHS and went on to Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minn. (a college connected to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod). Over the years I have been a member of four churches—Bethel, Waco, Neb.; Lord of Life, Houston, Texas; St. Paul, North Mankato, Minn.; and Grace, Sioux City, Iowa. I've learned so much about why our church does things the way it does and how Christianity has organized itself the way it has. WELS is not afraid to defend itself or God's Word. That's so important in today's world.

**Making my decision to join WELS as a teenager was tough because I was diving into uncharted waters.**

But so many people have taken an interest in me, helping me to become an active and growing member of

our church. I am also blessed to have married into a wonderful WELS family, including my mother-in-law, Jeanne, who has been an amazing example of a Christian woman, and of course, my husband, Josh, who encourages and challenges me to be who God wants me to be.

WELS is not perfect. It's made up of people like me—imperfect humans! I think it's hard to make the transition from a teenage confirmand to an active adult member. I feel like too many young adult members don't cherish their relationship with their church enough, and it

seems like too many people my age are skipping out on church. I think that will be a problem because they are losing the opportunity to mature their faith and prepare themselves for the time when they will need God and their church. Life with all its challenges—particularly parenthood—needs a mature faith.

I am thankful for the many blessings that God has allowed in the last nine years of my life. He has used WELS to deepen my relationship with him. I met my husband, Josh, through NELHS. And I have the assurance that our two little girls, Aurora and Olivia, will grow up knowing their Savior and knowing that we have the WELS community there for us. I look forward to the many opportunities my family will have to grow in Christ.

*Emily Sulzle is a member at Grace, Sioux City, Iowa.*

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

# Overseeing



## God's people

Michael A. Woldt

God holds public ministers of the gospel accountable for the work they do in his name.

When we dial 911, we expect help to come in a timely manner. We place a great deal of trust in those who serve and protect us. It's devastating when that trust is violated. Quick, efficient responses save lives. Delay can result in death. Officers routinely perform heroic acts, putting their own lives on the line, serving above and beyond the call of duty.

Yet individual instances of poor judgment, communication breakdowns, mistakes, and misconduct have plagued almost every level of law enforcement. Police officers are accountable for their actions. Ineptitude and negligence cannot be overlooked. Too much is at stake! When officers prove themselves unwilling or unable to perform their sworn duties, they lose their badges.

### Those who serve and protect are accountable

God's people place a great deal of trust in their called workers. God's people expect their shepherds to give

them spiritual nourishment, free of Satan's deadly toxins. God's people expect their called workers to serve with competence and to live lives worthy of the calling they have received. Yet, because called workers are sinners living in a sinful world, problems can and do arise as they serve and protect God's people.

Problems in ministry dare not be ignored. Some require swift action. High profile cases of sexual abuse by clergy or marital unfaithfulness horrify church members and the general public alike. Fragile lives are demolished by the very ones charged to serve and protect God's people. A called worker who violates the trust of his office with grievous, public sins has destroyed his reputation and is no longer qualified to serve in the public ministry, even if repentance follows.

Why do these things arise within Christ's church? Answers don't come easily. We do know that the same Lord who gave some to be pastors and teachers has



promised that he will make *all things* work for our good and that nothing would separate us from his love (see Romans 8). It should be noted that unfounded allegations of abuse can also destroy the lives and reputations of faithful called workers.

Concerns raised about those serving in the public ministry often require compassion; patience; and, in some cases, loving admonition. Called workers become easy targets when congregations decline in membership or face financial challenges. “We need a different pastor!” “We need better teachers!” Remember that public ministers of the gospel are not hired and fired; God himself calls them through his people. God’s people should be cautious and charitable in their assessment of the public ministers God has given them. Few people can speak like angels or preach like Paul. Each called worker has a unique personality and set of gifts to be used in service of the gospel. The power of the Spirit lies in the message, not the messenger.

However, when called workers demonstrate that they are either unwilling or unable to carry out the duties of their office, when they persist in false teaching despite repeated admonition, when they disqualify themselves for public ministry by the way they live, Christians have a right and duty to terminate the divine call extended through them. In our church body, district presidents are called to oversee doctrine and practice. District presidents and circuit pastors are advisors, not executives. They help congregations and called workers to work through difficult ministry issues for the good of the kingdom.

God holds public ministers of the gospel accountable for the work they do in his name. God told his Old Testament prophet Ezekiel: “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood” (33:7,8). The writer of Hebrews reminds believers that their spiritual leaders watch over them as “men who must give an account” (13:17).

As a pastor, the thought of giving an account to an all-knowing, holy God for my service in his ministry is more than humbling. It terrifies me. My best efforts are far from perfect and much less than God and his people deserve. My eternal hope is found only in Jesus and his righteousness, which is now my righteousness. I daily confess with the hymn writer, “Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed his blood for me” (*Christian Worship* 385:1).

### Those who serve and protect need our support

Police officers need our support as they work to serve and protect us. Neighborhoods benefit when citizens and police work together to stop crime and maintain order. It has to be difficult for any officer to serve without the support of the people in the community.

God wants his people to support their called workers. The author of Hebrews states: “Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you” (13:17).

What a joy it is when called workers see God’s people respond to a loving rebuke with godly sorrow and true repentance. What a joy it is when called workers see God’s people embrace Jesus and grow in faith as the Spirit works through Word and sacrament. What a joy it is when God’s people stand shoulder to shoulder with their pastors and teachers as they fight unpopular battles in today’s world, using the sword of the Spirit. The apostle Paul once told the believers in Rome that he longed to see them, not only to strengthen their faith but also to receive encouragement from them (see Romans 1:12).

God also wants his people to support their called workers financially. God’s Word says, “The worker deserves his wages” (1 Timothy 5:18). The apostle Paul also wrote, “In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:14). When God’s people pay their called workers a livable wage, they show respect and honor for the gospel work called workers do.

There’s another way God’s people support their called workers. This one doesn’t cost a dime! God’s people pray for their pastors and teachers. Jesus once told his disciples to “ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matthew 9:38). The prayers of God’s people dare not stop once the laborers are supplied! The apostle Paul made this plea for support: “Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith” (2 Thessalonians 3:1,2).

The head elder at the congregation I serve includes this encouragement at the bottom of every meeting agenda: “Stay in the Word and pray for our called workers!” That’s the kind of support all public ministers of the gospel desire and need as they work to serve and protect God’s people!

*Michael Woldt is pastor at David’s Star, Jackson, Wisconsin.*

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



Bill F. Limmer

# —What's my purpose?—

By living out your story, you are doing what God has created you to do.

When Jay asked me to meet him for coffee, I could hear the distress in his voice. "What am I supposed to do?" he asked. "What's my purpose in life?"

These are everyday, if not every minute, questions on college campuses and in various corners of our lives.

Karen asked herself the same questions as her first-grader marched off to the bus on the first day of school. Mike had five years under his belt in a job that seemed to be taking him nowhere. John couldn't volunteer like he used to, and he often wondered if anyone would miss him if he didn't show anyway.

We beg God to post his clear directions on some lighted billboard. We would even settle for a text message. "Just let me in on the plan," we scream!

**So what's your story?** Answers to the questions "What am I supposed to do" and "What is my purpose in life" are often revealed in your story! Why not take a closer look at what's going on inside!

**S—What are your strengths?** Strengths are the things that you have always been good at doing.

Maybe you have always been creative. Maybe you have always had a desire for organization.

**T—List your topics.**

Who or what do you like to work with? Is it people? animals? numbers? steel? What is it that fascinates you?

**O—Optimal conditions.** What motivates you? Is it to fill the need of someone else? Is it the security of a structured routine? Maybe you work best under stress? Or do you like variety in your day-to-day affairs?

**R—What about relationships?** When you think back over the successes and satisfactions of life, how were you relating to people? Were you all alone, or were you on a team? If you were on a team, were you taking the lead, or were you following joyfully?

**Y—What makes you say yes?** When your strengths, optimal conditions, and relationships come together in such a way that makes you say yes, you are living out your story.

When you are living out your story, you are doing what God has created you to do. You are glorifying God.

We have heard Satan whisper, "It's not good enough to be you. You need to be someone else." Our culture entices us to be someone we are not. "I want to be like Mike." "I wish I had her body." We go to movies and imagine ourselves as the heroes. It seems that the hardest thing to do is to be ourselves!

The coolest thing about our story is it is wrapped inside *his* story from the very beginning.

- In *his* story our sins were like scarlet but now are as white as snow.
- In *his* story we are to die for.
- In *his* story we are redeemed.
- In *his* story we are loved unconditionally.
- In *his* story we are priceless.
- In *his* story we are ambassadors.
- In *his* story we are coheirs with Christ!
- In *his* story we get to live life to the full.
- In *his* story we find our meaning and purpose for life!
- In *his* story we find salvation.

May we never be caught off guard when someone asks us, "What is your story?"

*Bill Limmer is campus pastor at The Point of Grace, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.*

*Campus Cornerstone, a new department in Forward in Christ, explores issues that college-aged students are experiencing.*



## READ THROUGH MY BIBLE IN 3 YEARS

DECEMBER 2008

- |                       |                          |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. 1 Corinthians 5, 6 | 17. Ps. 35               |
| 2. 1 Cor. 7           | 18. Ps. 36               |
| 3. 1 Cor. 8, 9        | 19. Ps. 37:1-20          |
| 4. 1 Cor. 10:1-11:1   | 20. Ps. 37:21-40         |
| 5. 1 Cor. 11:2-34     | 21. Ps. 38               |
| 6. 1 Cor. 12          | 22. Ps. 39               |
| 7. 1 Cor. 13          | 23. Ps. 40:1-10          |
| 8. 1 Cor. 14          | 24. Ps. 40:11-17         |
| 9. 1 Cor. 15:1-34     | 25. Ps. 41               |
| 10. 1 Cor. 15:35-58   | 26. 2 Corinthians 1:1-11 |
| 11. 1 Cor. 16         | 27. 2 Cor. 1:12-22       |
| 12. Psalm 30          | 28. 2 Cor. 1:23-2:17     |
| 13. Ps. 31            | 29. 2 Cor. 3:1-4:6       |
| 14. Ps. 32            | 30. 2 Cor. 4:7-5:10      |
| 15. Ps. 33            | 31. 2 Cor. 5:11-6:10     |
| 16. Ps. 34            |                          |

**Congratulations!** If you have been following this series of readings, you have just completed reading the entire Bible. But don't worry if you started in the middle. We will be running the list again, starting in the December issue.

## GOT A STORY TO TELL?

Teens, do you have a story that will help your peers or provide encouragement to other teens? We'd love to hear it! What do you appreciate about being Lutheran? We'd love to know.

We're looking for 650-word articles with a Christ-centered focus to share in *Whatever*, a bimonthly column in *Forward in Christ* magazine that is written by teens, for teens.

You can mail your stories to *Whatever*, *Forward in Christ* magazine, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee, WI 53222; e-mail [fic@sab.wels.net](mailto:fic@sab.wels.net); or fill out the online submission form at [www.wels.net/jump/whatever](http://www.wels.net/jump/whatever). Please include your name, year in school, and home congregation.



# Whatever

## Obituaries

### Franklin Frederick Zabell 1938-2008

Franklin Zabell was born Aug. 24, 1938, in Pigeon, Mich. He died Aug. 11, 2008, in Watertown, Wis.

Before graduating he served as tutor at Northwestern Lutheran Academy, Mobridge, S.D. Upon graduating from Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at Grace, Benton Harbor, Mich.; Gethsemane, Milwaukee, Wis.; and Northwestern Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

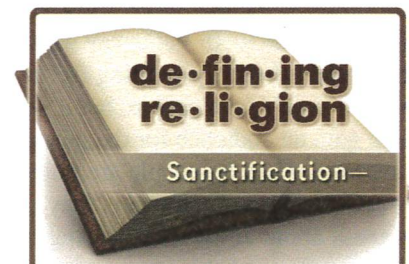
He is survived by his wife, Bethel; one son; two daughters; 11 grandchildren; and three sisters.

### Paul Gerhard Albrecht 1936-2008

Paul Albrecht was born May 12, 1936, in Bay City, Mich. He died Aug. 27, 2008.

A 1962 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Good Hope, Ellensburg, Wash.; Good Faith, South Cle Elum, Wash.; Divine Peace, Renton, Wash.; and Gethsemane, Omaha, Neb.

He is preceded in death by one sister. He is survived by his wife, Carol; two sons; two daughters; and seven grandchildren.



The Holy Spirit's work of making us holy through the means of grace. In the wider sense sanctification includes his entire work in believers, including conversion and preservation in faith (1 Thessalonians 5:23). In the narrow sense it is the Holy Spirit's work of leading us to hate sin and bring forth good works in our lives (Ephesians 2:10).

### CORRECTION

In the September issue, FIC reported that the North Atlantic District agreed with the Ad Hoc Commission's recommendation to form three new districts (p. 20). The district actually defeated a resolution that was in favor of it.

## Experiencing humanitarian aid in Africa

Driving on rustic roads peppered with potholes, eating fried goat meat and *nshima* (thickly cooked corn meal), and watching literacy lessons scratched into the dirt with a stick—these were just some of the adventures the three members of the Humanitarian Aid Committee had when they traveled to Africa in July. The purpose of their trip was to assess how committee-funded humanitarian aid projects are helping pastors and evangelists gain an audience for the gospel in Malawi and Zambia.

During their two-week stay, Pastor David Valleskey, Mr. Kent Raabe, and Staff Minister Tom Hering met with approximately 20 national pastors and vicars, visited 14 local congregations, and met with 7 WELS missionaries in the region. Through these visits, Valleskey says the committee discovered that humanitarian aid projects like bore holes (deep wells) and home-based health care and education were accomplishing their goal of “building bridges” to share the gospel.

For example, in places where deep wells are dug, Bible studies or even church services are held nearby during times of the day when most villagers use the well. Valleskey says the project itself—providing fresh water—won’t save people, but it will help gain an audience for the gospel. Likewise, when laypeople are trained to provide home health care, they can witness about Jesus while caring for sick members of the community.

“One of the things we always have to be clear on is we are not saying to members of the community, ‘We will help you in your need if you listen to us,’” says Valleskey. “We simply want to show them the love of Jesus. At the same time, we want our members to be aware that this might provide great opportunities to tell others about the love of Jesus.”

Valleskey, Raabe, and Hering also saw vocational training projects in action, like group literacy lessons and tailoring classes. According to Valleskey, the benefits of vocational training are



Mr. Kent Raabe (second from left), Pastor David Valleskey (right), and Staff Minister Tom Hering (not pictured) met with national pastors from Malawi and Zambia while assessing committee-funded humanitarian aid projects July 24–Aug. 10.

twofold: members of the community not only gain the skills necessary to support their families, but they also have an opportunity to learn about Jesus.

“The trip was very enlightening,” says Valleskey. “We came to understand better the unique needs and opportunities for humanitarian aid in Zambia and Malawi.”

He said the meetings with the church leaders were especially beneficial. “We found the national church is taking on much more of the work on its own, looking to the missionaries more as advisors and counselors,” says Valleskey. He says it’s part of the process of indigeneity—meaning the mission fields are becoming more self-sufficient and reliant on their own national pastors.

As these fields progress, Valleskey says the Humanitarian Aid Committee will begin to work more directly with the national church in assessing the needs of the countries.

The group did get encouraging reports as they traveled the African countryside, but Valleskey says one of the most memorable parts of the trip was fellowship with African brothers and sisters. “Worshiping with fellow Zambians at Mt. Olive in Chipata was a highlight,” he says. “[I enjoyed] just being a part of worship and listening to the choir.”

Although the committee is not planning to visit any other international mis-



A Zambian woman draws letters in the dirt as part of a literacy lesson.

sion fields in the near future, they will use information they gathered on this trip to help prioritize future aid projects that will facilitate gospel proclamation both in Africa and around the world.

“We are simply showing the love of Christ toward people who may not have as much in the way of worldly goods as the Lord has blessed us with in America,” Valleskey says. “If people in these countries ask, ‘Why are you doing this?’ we can point them to the love of Jesus that led him to go all the way to Calvary for them.”

*The Humanitarian Aid Committee, part of WELS World Missions, is funded entirely by gifts from WELS members. To learn more about the work of the Humanitarian Aid Committee, contact Chairman Valleskey at [djvalleskey@sbcglobal.net](mailto:djvalleskey@sbcglobal.net).*

# Where are they now?

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

In December 2005 we told you about the installation of Neng Lor as pastor to the Hmong people in the Sacramento, Calif., area in August 2005.



## Here's a recap

Lor, a Hmong pastor, was partnering with St. Andrew, Sacramento, to reach out to an estimated 25,000 Hmong souls within a five-mile radius of the church.

## So what is happening now?

Lor is no longer in the full-time ministry, though his outreach to the Hmong—and to others—continues in a different way.

Lor's ministry in California started out strong. Approximately 30 people were attending worship services regularly, and Lor was making inroads in the community.

But after a trip to Minnesota to visit relatives in January 2006, Lor began to feel feverish and his face started swelling. Doctors initially couldn't determine what was wrong. By the end of January, Lor was in intensive care, where he would stay for more than a month. His stroke-like symptoms included an inability to speak or to move the right side of his body, swelling, and headaches. Still unable to pinpoint the problem, doctors weren't sure if he would survive.

The doctors finally diagnosed him with a brain infection but were not sure of the exact cause. By the end of March, Lor was finally well enough to leave the hospital, but he needed to go through extensive rehabilitation. "Physically he was no longer able to carry out the duties of the ministry," says Pastor Leon Piepenbrink, Hmong ministry coordinator.

After resigning from his call, Lor and his wife and eight children moved back to St. Paul, Minn., where many of his relatives live. There he went through the slow process of learning how to speak and walk again. "It was frustrating

for him," says Piepenbrink. "For a guy who had been so busy and so active and so used to being around people . . . now his whole world was just within the four walls of his house."

Gradually Lor made progress. Now he can walk short distances with a cane, have conversations, and move his arm and hand. "The Lord certainly used a lot of people—Pastor Pheng and his congregation [Immanuel Hmong], Neng's [extended] family, and a variety of WELS members—to support and encourage [the Lors], to pray for them, to visit them regularly, and to provide help in whatever way they could," says Piepenbrink.

And as Lor improved, the Lord opened up new ministry opportunities for him. Piepenbrink says that Hmong relatives—some Christian and some not—began calling and visiting Lor, often asking him what he did wrong so that this evil force had afflicted him. "When people questioned him about what happened to him, he would witness to them. [He would say], 'This is God's will. It is not a force of evil. As a child of God, I am still being cared for by God,'" says Piepenbrink. "God's grace is sufficient for me—that's really the witness he has given to people over the past couple of years."

Even attending Immanuel Hmong in St. Paul is a witness to the church's members. "Just him being [in church] is a miracle," says Piepenbrink. "The fact that he can physically make it from his house to the church and can sit in the pew and can worship, pray, sing, and hear the Word of God is a testimony of God's grace. When you see it, you don't forget it."

As Hmong ministry coordinator, Piepenbrink is looking into ways to use Lor further, perhaps for translating materials into Hmong and making mission visits in the future.

And the Hmong ministry at St. Andrew? That ministry continues. In August 2007 Ger Lor, a relative of Neng, took over the work started by Neng in Sacramento. Currently 15 attend worship and Bible classes, and Lor continues to make contacts in the community.

**Little three-year-old Olivia was disturbed.** Her father had the quarters she had planned to put into the offering plate—but he was ushering.

Another lady overheard her dilemma and gave her two quarters.

When Olivia looked at the money in her hand, she asked her mother, "Can I keep it?"

"Oh, no, Olivia. That's what you can give to the LORD to help build our church."

Then, looking at the money again, she responded, "Well, this isn't enough to build our church. I need two more!"

*Pastor Bruce Wietzke, Lusby, Maryland*

**Teachers at the Early Childhood Learning Center,** where Martin Luther College students in early childhood education do their student teaching, overheard these comments from the little learners:

- When meeting a new teacher: "Hi, teacher. Are you a girl, a lady, or a grandma?"
- Upon hearing that sometimes even children, like the daughter of Jairus, can die: "Whew! I hope I make it till spring!"
- In music class: "Why don't we sing the song about the baker? You know, 'Our help is in the name of the Lord, the baker of heaven and earth.'"

*Laurie Gauger, New Ulm, Minnesota*

# On the bright side

## Technology helps reach a worldwide audience

When John Shoosmith, member of Redeemer, Yakima, Wash., started helping with Redeemer's Web site redesign project, the congregation got more than just an updated online look. With the help of Shoosmith's technology skills, the congregation of 90 souls is now reaching almost 7,000 people each week through the Internet, where users can download closed-captioned video of Pastor Timothy Schwartz sermons.

"It's just amazing how the Lord provides people for your church and how your congregation takes on the shape of the people and their gifts God has given to you," says Schwartz. "John is incredibly talented, and he's the kind of guy that if I don't give him stuff to do, he gets bored and will just start trying this and that."

After revamping the Web site, Shoosmith began experimenting with closed-captioning software to enhance the sermons that were being posted on Google video each week. Approximately 150 people had been downloading the sermons each month; but with the addition of closed-captioning in January 2008, that number jumped to several thousand per week.

"The most radical climb was our Good Friday service—all 64 minutes of it were closed-captioned, and we had 37,000 views," says Shoosmith. "We didn't expect the kind of response that we got from adding captioning. We looked into it and found that almost no one was doing the same thing."

Schwartz says many different groups, besides the deaf and hard of hearing community, have benefited from the closed-captioned video. "We've had people from other countries write us and say, 'English is my second language, and I like having the words on the bottom of the screen to help me so I can understand and read at the same time,'" he says.

Although the feedback has been positive, Schwartz says the next challenge is to bridge the gap between watching online and contact with local congregations. "I'll make announcements that say, 'We're glad you're watching, but it's important that you become part of a local congregation. So if you want more information, here's a Web site you can go to.' Then we give them the WELS church locator (<http://wels.locator>

[search.com](http://wels.locator)). The Internet is not going to get people into your church, necessarily, but it might bring them into contact with someone who will."

One viewer from New Jersey had been downloading sermons and finally called Redeemer. He talked to Pastor Schwartz, who asked him some questions and got him in touch with Pastor Timothy Wempner of Our Savior's, East Brunswick, N.J. After what Schwartz says was "faithful, quick follow-up" by Wempner, the caller did visit Our Savior's.

Schwartz says stories like this—and the fact that several thousand people are downloading sermons each week—give the congregation a boost of confidence. "We're just putting the Word out there and the Holy Spirit is making it spread," he says. "It's neat to see that a little group can do something that has an effect on this many people, and I think it makes people excited to reach out to people all over the world."

### ONLINE SERMONS

Redeemer, Yakima, Wash., began providing closed-captioned sermons online in January 2008. Since then, John Shoosmith, Redeemer's Webmaster, has produced high-definition video of a baptism (at left) and is exploring the possibility of posting short videos on YouTube in response to questions people send in. Redeemer has also been working with WELS Multi-Language Publications to get captions translated into Spanish—the first video they produced had approximately 2,000 views in a month.

"When we have a service, we think about the many thousands outside of our walls viewing sermons with us," says Shoosmith. "This is encouraging us to think of ways to spread the Word in more effective ways through this medium, and people are enthusiastic and eager to participate."

*For more information, or questions about how Redeemer is using technology to reach out to a global audience, send an e-mail to [mail@redeemeryakima.org](mailto:mail@redeemeryakima.org).*



## Fighting the good fight in the Dominican Republic

In November 1993 Missionary Ronald Baerbock held the first worship service for a group of believers in Santiago, Dominican Republic. The service was held . . . in a boxing ring!

Fifteen years later, members of the WELS mission in the Dominican Republic aren't worshipping in a boxing ring anymore, but they are continuing to fight against the devil with the power of God and his Word.

Five congregations—one just started this past September—made up of more than 100 souls are reaching out to the people of the Dominican Republic and Haiti, the two countries that make up the island of Hispaniola. One missionary serves the field, and two professors from the Latin America Traveling Theological Educators' (LATTE) team train nationals for the ministry.

The field has had its share of ups and downs. As many as three missionaries served the field at one time. But budget shortfalls in 2005 forced a recall of one missionary, and when another took a call, he wasn't replaced.

"The current direction on the field is a heavy emphasis on leadership training," says Nathan Wagenknecht, the field coordinator and a LATTE professor. "Part of that emphasis came

about because of the reduction in manpower. In order to leave behind the strongest national church possible, we need leaders."

Five men—three from the Dominican Republic and two from Haiti—currently are studying for the ministry. Two of these men also serve as student-pastors. They are on track to graduate in 2010.

In 2007 Haitian Rona Abraham became the first graduate of the seminary program. Because the language of Haiti is French—not Spanish as in the Dominican Republic—Abraham is translating preseminary and seminary materials into French. He also is attending the university to study civil engineering so he can support himself and his family. His goal, according to Wagenknecht, is to return to Haiti

someday and start a church there. Currently all the churches are in the Dominican Republic, although one conducts worship in French to serve Haitians living in the Dominican Republic.

In 2007 the mission began using WELS Kingdom Workers volunteers to teach English as a Foreign Language classes in Santiago. More than 300 contacts have been made; 100 have heard extensive law/gospel presentations; and 12 are in a Bible information class.

The mission is also working with the congregations to get them incorporated and registered with the government. As all five congregations organize on a local level, they are also looking for the best way to work together as a united national church body.

"Even after 15 years, this is still a young church, filled with mostly first-generation Christians," says Wagenknecht. "To establish a national church, it takes two or three generations to have a good foundation."

Meanwhile, the members will continue to fight the good fight to share their Savior with the people of Hispaniola.

Learn more about the mission at [www.wels.net/jump/latinamerica](http://www.wels.net/jump/latinamerica) or [welsindr.blogspot.com](http://welsindr.blogspot.com).



Rona Abraham (left) and Nathan Wagenknecht. Abraham, a Haitian, graduated from the seminary program in the Dominican Republic in 2007 and is now translating preseminary and seminary materials into French for future Haitian students.

## Latin American world mission updates



**Cuba** — Seven national student pastors serve 184 souls in ten house churches. Two students who study under one of the student pastors have applied to study with the Latin America Traveling Theological Educators seminary program, adding to the four students who currently are in the program.



**Mexico** — Because of the increasing drug-related violence in Juárez, Mexico, the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church pulled its national pastor, Juan Jose, and his family out of the city in August. The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church is using Spanish correspondence Bible studies to continue serving the

members of *Cristo Redentor* (Christ Redeemer) in Juárez. Once a month, another Mexican national pastor or seminary student will travel to Juárez to conduct worship, encourage the members, and analyze the current situation.



**Brazil** — The first national pastor in Brazil was called and installed this year, with a second national pastor on track to graduate by the end of 2008.

To learn more about WELS world missions in Latin America, go to [www.wels.net/jump/latinamerica](http://www.wels.net/jump/latinamerica). Read blog posts from missionaries and mission workers at <http://missions.wels.net>.

## Warning: Mission work may be addictive

“Once you start volunteering, you just can’t stop,” proclaims Julie Majerus, a WELS layperson who has spent most of the last ten years as a WELS Kingdom Worker.

Majerus has served world mission fields in Japan, Malawi, and the Dominican Republic and congregations in North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Louisiana. Her service included teaching English as a foreign language, teaching Sunday school and vacation Bible school, managing a reading and learning center, acting as a lay evangelist for a home mission congregation, and cleaning up after Hurricane Katrina.

For the past 20 years, WELS Kingdom Workers has been offering laypeople like Majerus the opportunity to

serve in WELS mission fields. WELS Kingdom Workers receives requests from the Board for Home Missions and the Board for World Missions for projects that are approved but not funded. WELS Kingdom Workers funds lay involvement in many of these projects. The mission fields benefit from the work that the layworkers do, and the layworkers benefit from the opportunity to serve their Lord.

Although most of WELS Kingdom Workers’ layworkers may not be able to serve as long as Majerus has, each one’s service is appreciated. Pastor Harold Hagedorn, Home Missions administrator, says, “WELS Kingdom Workers volunteers are invaluable to our gospel outreach efforts. They bring

enthusiasm and expertise to help the mission and the missionary reach out with the Savior’s love to more and more people.”

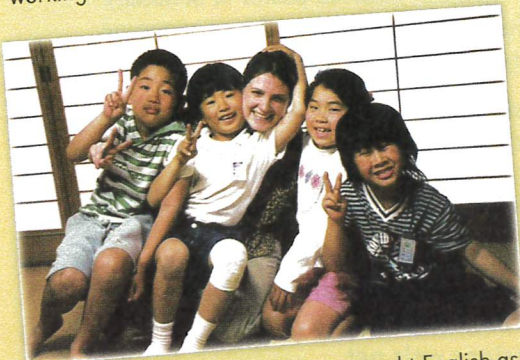
As Majerus reflects back on all her mission experiences, she notes, “Each mission field has its own patchwork of differences, yet one thread remains the same—the need for Jesus as their Savior. Whether I am in Japan, Malawi, the Dominican Republic, or anywhere else in this world, I know that ‘*Jesu akonda ne,*’ ‘*Cristo me ama,*’ ‘*Jesus m’aime,*’ and ‘Jesus loves me’ all translate the same love of our Savior to all.”

To learn more about WELS Kingdom Workers, visit [www.welskingdomworkers.org](http://www.welskingdomworkers.org) or call 800-466-9357.

Nicole Balza



Julie Majerus arrived in Blantyre, Malawi, in 2000 to establish the Christian Reading and Learning Center, a place to read and study God’s Word. Patrick Nguluwe, pictured here with his family, was a regular visitor. Majerus says, “Patrick often read in the afternoon and attended weekly Bible studies led by the missionary. Today, Patrick is one of the members of Beautiful Saviour, a new congregation that sprouted from the reading room. He is currently working full time in the reading room.”



In 1998 and 1999, Julie Majerus taught English as a foreign language and served as a Sunday school teacher and outreach worker in Ashikaga, Japan. Here she is pictured with one of the classes of children to whom she taught English.

## Kingdom Workers LAYWORKER OPPORTUNITIES

**Builders For Christ:** Volunteers build church facilities, usually for home mission congregations.

**Christian Volunteer Corps:** Volunteers assist called workers in world mission fields. Duties may include maintenance; office work; house sitting; teaching English as a foreign language classes, Bible classes, or Sunday school; or helping with church services.

**Faith In Action:** Volunteers assist home mission congregations. Duties may include canvassing, teaching vacation Bible school, helping with Bible sports camps or music, teaching English as a second language, and other outreach activities. Faith In Action volunteers, in cooperation with WELS Committee on Relief, also respond in disaster relief situations to offer a helping hand and a Christian witness in the midst of hardship.



Julie Majerus (left) currently serves as a layworker in Santiago, Dominican Republic, where she teaches English as a foreign language. Here she is pictured with Miguelina, a faithful English student. Majerus notes that after the end-of-the-year English party, Miguelina told her that she wanted to learn more about Jesus. She attended church the next Sunday.



In December 2005, Julie Majerus (right) served as part of the WELS Kingdom Workers Disaster Response Team that helped Crown of Life, New Orleans, clean up after Hurricane Katrina. WELS Kingdom Workers, in cooperation with WELS Committee on Relief, sent almost 1,200 volunteers to help with cleanup.



## Churches plan Jubilee worship in support of WELS

Congregations across the synod are gearing up for the WELS' Year of Jubilee worship services, which are to take place Nov. 23–Dec. 14. The special offering was authorized by the 2007 synod convention to eliminate the synod's debt of \$22.4 million, thereby freeing up as much as \$2.7 million each year for other ministry.

The Ministry of Christian Giving has produced worship services and Bible study materials for congregational use. "Worship resources are based on God's teaching us through the Old Testament Year of Jubilee that he provides for our earthly needs, and, by foreshadowing the Savior, God reminds us that he has taken care of our spiritual needs as well," says Pastor Dave Liggett, director of Christian Giving.

Congregations received these materials in the mail following the launch of the Year of Jubilee at the district conventions in June. Christ the Lord in Clearwater, Fla., decided to use the four weeks' worth of worship and Bible study materials but took things further by scheduling additional offering collections leading up to the conclusion of the effort at the synod convention in July 2009.

Their first offering will take place Dec. 14, Jubilee Sunday, in celebration of Jesus' birth. The second collection will be in late March in thanks

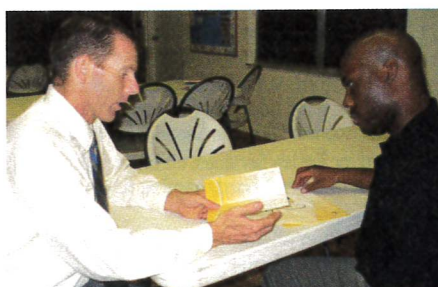
for Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. The final collection will take place May 31, in celebration of Jesus sending his Holy Spirit. "We're hoping by spreading it out that it will give everyone giving opportunities and the chance to participate," says Jeff Mahnke, pastor at Christ the Lord.

In addition, the church has calculated a rough goal for its members. "Of course the gospel of our Savior will be the main motivator," says Mahnke. "But we think that breaking it down this way enables our members to see how reachable this goal is as a congregation and as a synod."

This same "walking together" mentality is on display at Our Savior, Brookings, S.D., where Pastor Ken Brokmeier says his congregation is planning to make the offering a priority during the Jubilee month of worship. "We've talked about the whole aspect of our responsibility and taking ownership of this," he says. "We benefit from the work of the synod and so we want to help be part of the solution."

Mahnke hopes that WELS will be able to eliminate its debt. He says, "If we all pull together with God, this is very possible. It's not always easy, but God always provides."

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



Pastor Jeff Mahnke (left) and Andrew Peart from Christ the Lord, Clearwater, Fla. Peart worked with Mahnke in planning how the congregation would participate in the Year of Jubilee.

## District news

### South Atlantic

**Living Word, Johnson City, Tenn.,** is daughtering a congregation in Morristown, Tenn. The Morristown group has chosen the name Living Promise Lutheran Church and began Sunday worship Sept. 14 in a rented space.

With the help of six teachers from Wisconsin, **Amazing Grace, Myrtle Beach, S.C.,** held its annual vacation Bible school July 21–24. More than 70 children attended each day, and more than 125 adults and children gathered for the closing service. A number of families have since expressed interest in the church.

### South Central

**King of Kings, Alexandria, La.,** experienced significant flood damage following Hurricane Gustav, which hit Louisiana in September. WELS Relief initially granted King of Kings \$60,000 for gutting and cleaning the church and parsonage. The relief dollars also pro-

vided material needs, including temporary housing for Pastor Chris Esmay and his family and support for the congregation as it plans for the future. "Hurricane rains can flood out lots of things here, but they can't wash the name of Jesus off our foreheads," says Esmay.

**Cross of Glory, Baton Rouge, La.,** was damaged by Hurricane Gustav when high winds toppled several trees and caused extensive damage to both the church and neighboring homes. However, since the congregation has insurance, only limited outside funding has been necessary to support their cleanup efforts.

### Southeastern Wisconsin

**Our Shepherd, Crown Point, Ind., and Hope, Portage, Ind. (ELS),** hosted a summer evening of sacred music Aug. 10. Approximately 75 people gathered to listen and participate. Says Glenn Meentemeyer, organist and choir director at Hope, "I believe that since we are

### South Atlantic



Christ the King, Palm Coast, Fla., held its very first vacation Bible school in July. More than 75 children registered. The congregation has also purchased 8.5 acres of land and recently opened a preschool.

in doctrinal fellowship together, we can and should do things together at the church level too."

The district reporters for this month are: SA—Christopher Kruschel; SC—William Gabb; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

## CHANGES IN MINISTRY

### Pastors

- Hilliard, Thomas H.**, to retirement  
**Iwinski, Daniel C.**, to St. Paul, Moline, Ill.  
**Kante, Paul E.**, to St. Michael Lutheran Home, Fountain City, Wis.  
**Retberg, Andrew P.**, to Good Shepherd, The Woodlands, Tex.  
**Riedel, Roger G.**, to Peace, Wautoma, Wis.  
**Rossman, Jonathan L.**, to St. John, White-water, Wis.  
**Seifert, Donald A.**, to Calvary, Canyon Country, Calif.

### Teachers

- Berg, Megan J.**, to Mt. Calvary-Grace, La Crosse, Wis.  
**Braun, Jeremy**, to Siloah, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Cortez, Theckla F.**, to Shepherd of Peace, Powell, Ohio  
**Gnewuch, Faith E.**, to St. Mark's, Watertown, Wis.  
**Hieb, Kate L.**, to Lakewood, Lakewood, Wash.  
**Huebner, Kristin M.**, to Peace, Sun Prairie, Wis.  
**Martin, Anna M.**, to Jesus Loves Me Learning, North Mankato, Minn.  
**Springer, Michelle I.**, to Zion, Toledo, Ohio  
**Travis, Linda M.**, to Bethany, Hustisford, Wis.  
**Wolle, Rhoda S.**, to Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis.

## NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS AND PASTORS

We thank God for you and for your support of the ministry WELS carries out on behalf of all congregations. We ask that you continue to mail your Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) deposit and its processing coupon to our bank lockbox, which provides effective and efficient deposit processing for the synod. The last business day of each month is the reporting cutoff date for the CMO deposit. For the deposit to be included in reported receipts for the month, CMO must be received in the synod's bank lockbox on or before the last business day. An exception is made for December offerings. Gifts received by the bank lockbox up to and including Jan. 9, 2009, will be credited as 2008 CMO, if accompanied by a 2008 coupon. Thank you for your assistance.

## SYNOD CONVENTION

The 60th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod will be held July 27-31, 2009, at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich. The convention delegate fee, usually paid by the congregation the delegate represents, is \$200.

A memorial—usually composed of a series of "whereas" and "resolved" statements—is a formal petition to the synod convention that asks consideration for a particu-

lar item of business. The deadline for submitting memorials to be printed in the *Book of Reports and Memorials* (BORAM) is Jan. 15, 2009; they will be selected for inclusion in BORAM at the discretion of the president. Memorials submitted after Jan. 15 will not be printed but will be posted at the discretion of the president on the convention Web site, [www.wels.net/convention](http://www.wels.net/convention)—if they are received by June 1, 2009. Send memorials to President's Office, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; [carla.martin@sab.wels.net](mailto:carla.martin@sab.wels.net).

## CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The Synod Nominating Committee will meet at the synod administration building on Jan. 7, 2009. The committee will propose three candidates for each of the following positions:

- Synod Board of Appeals: three board members (one pastor, one layman, one teacher)
- Northwestern Publishing House Board of Directors: three board members (two laymen, one Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary professor)
- Board for Parish Services: chairman (parish pastor) and one board member (layman-at-large)
- Commission on Youth Discipleship: chairman (pastor, teacher, or layman)
- Commission on Adult Discipleship: chairman (pastor, teacher, or layman)
- Board for Ministerial Education: chairman (parish pastor) and three board members (one layman, one teacher, one parish pastor-at-large)
- Martin Luther College Governing Board: chairman (parish pastor)
- Board for World Missions: one board member (layman)

Descriptions of these positions are available at [www.wels.net/jump/nc](http://www.wels.net/jump/nc). Any synod voting member is invited to submit nominations prior to Nov. 14, 2008, by completing the online form at [www.wels.net/jump/nomform](http://www.wels.net/jump/nomform). If you do not have Internet access, submit names and pertinent information via surface mail or e-mail to Pastor Robert Pasbrig, 876 Fairview Dr, Hartford WI 53027, [sec@sab.wels.net](mailto:sec@sab.wels.net). The list of candidates nominated will be posted online by May 15, 2009, at [www.wels.net/convention](http://www.wels.net/convention). The delegates will elect one candidate for each position at the synod convention to be held July 27-31, 2009, at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

## COLLOQUY NOTICES

Pastor Mark Story, formerly a pastor in the Canadian Association of Lutheran Churches of Ontario, Canada, and Pastor Alain Chapdelaine, previously a pastor associated with the Association of Free Lutheran Churches in Quebec, Canada, have each requested a colloquy for the purpose of serving in the WELS pastoral ministry. Correspondence related to these requests should be addressed to Pastor

Joel Petermann, President, North Atlantic District-WELS, 14 Cross St, Merrimack, NH 03054; 603-880-8574; [nadpwels@sab.wels.net](mailto:nadpwels@sab.wels.net).

## ANNIVERSARIES

- Columbus, Wis.**—Zion (150). Nov. 2. Worship, 7:45 & 10:30 A.M. Daniel Sims, 920-623-4870.  
**Green Bay, Wis.**—St. Paul (125). Nov. 2. Worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M.; luncheon to follow. RSVP requested. Carla Hoffmann, 920-435-8468; [stpaul@new.rr.com](mailto:stpaul@new.rr.com).  
**Louisville, Ky.**—Hope (35). Nov. 2. Worship, 10:30 A.M. 502-423-1211; pastor. [lange@insightbb.com](mailto:lange@insightbb.com).  
**Sarasota, Fla.**—Ascension School (10). Nov. 9. Worship, 9 A.M.; dinner to follow. Kurt Rosenbaum, 941-371-5909; [school@ascensionfl.org](mailto:school@ascensionfl.org).  
**Janesville, Wis.**—Peace (50). Nov. 9. Worship, 9 A.M.; banquet at Pontiac Convention Center, Janesville, Wis.; 1 P.M. RSVP by Nov. 1. Doug Baron, 608-757-0176.  
**Jenera, Ohio**—Trinity (125). Nov. 9. Worship, 9:30 A.M.; meal and presentation to follow. Arleen Bolwerk, 419-420-5504; [arnjeff@gmail.com](mailto:arnjeff@gmail.com).

## COMING EVENTS

- Women's fall retreat**—Nov. 1; 8:30 A.M.—3 P.M. Trinity, Minocqua, Wis. 715-356-2255; [ronald186@centurytel.net](mailto:ronald186@centurytel.net)  
**Metro-Milwaukee area Reformation service**—Nov. 2. 4 P.M.; meal to follow. Wisconsin Lutheran High School auditorium, Milwaukee, Wis. Sponsored by Greater Milwaukee Area Chapter of WELS Kingdom Workers. 414-771-6848.  
**A Dance with the Lord Pastors' Wives' Renewal**—Nov. 7-8. Burnsville, Minn. Valerie Johnson, 612-267-3017; coordinator [truenorthwels.org](mailto:truenorthwels.org).  
**Women's quilting weekend**—Nov. 7-9. Camp Phillip, Wautoma, Wis. 920-787-3202; [office@campphillip.com](mailto:office@campphillip.com).  
**Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries annual meeting and conference**—Nov. 8; 8 A.M.—4:30 P.M. Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis. 414-259-8122; [wlim@wlim.net](mailto:wlim@wlim.net).  
**Christian Life Resources national convention**—Nov. 15. Country Springs Hotel, Pewaukee, Wis. Web site, [www.CLRevents.com](http://www.CLRevents.com).

## NAMES WANTED

- U.S. Military Academy, West Point, N.Y.**—Donald Tollefson, 908-876-5429; pastor@immanuelnj.net.  
**Williston, N.D.**—Dave Ruddat, 406-635-2180.  
**Sparks/Spanish Springs, Nev.**—Steve Hillmer, 775-354-2800.  
**WELS members living in Hong Kong**—c/o Asia Lutheran Seminary English Language Fellowship, [jcl@als.org.hk](mailto:jcl@als.org.hk).

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

# George Washington's Thanksgiving Proclamation

On Oct. 3, 1789, George Washington, president of the United States, created the first Thanksgiving Day designated by the national government of the United States of America—Nov. 26, 1789.

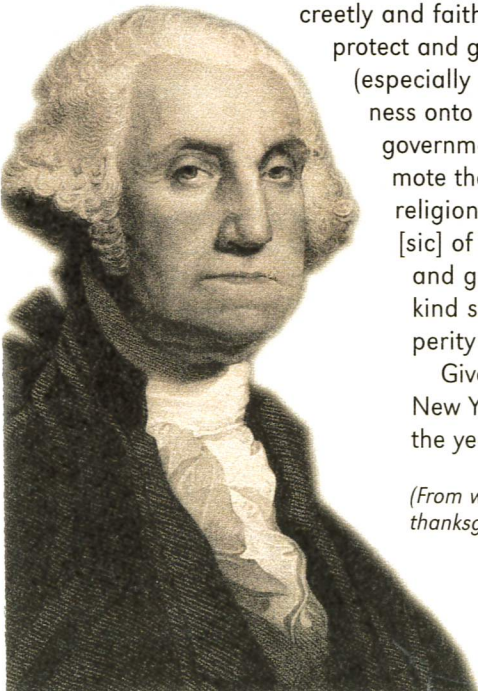
Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor—and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me “to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.”

Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be—That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks—for his kind care and protection of the People of this Country previous to their becoming a Nation—for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of his Providence which we experienced in the tranquility, union, and plenty, which we have since enjoyed—for the peaceable and rational manner, in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national One now lately instituted—for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed; and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and in general for all the great and various favors which he hath been pleased to confer upon us.

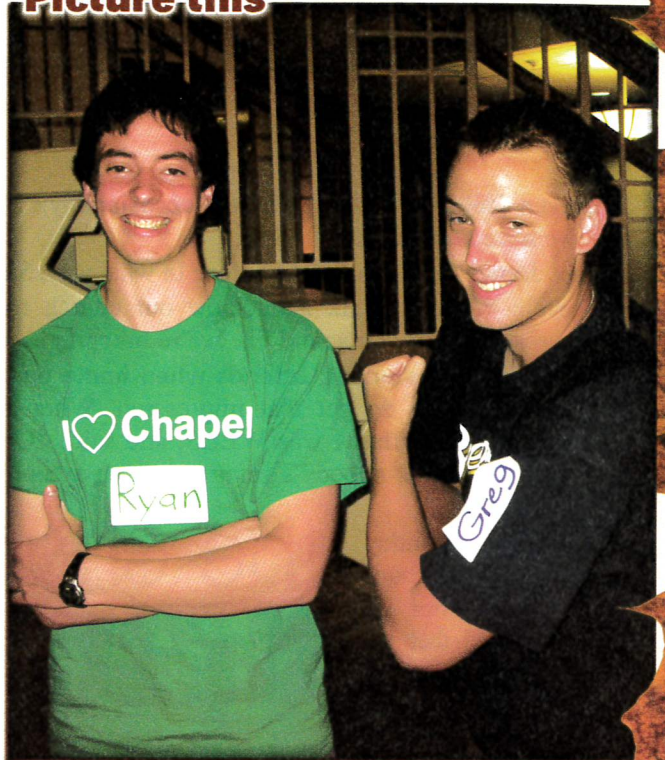
And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech him to pardon our national and other transgressions—to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually—to render our national government a blessing to all the people, by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed—to protect and guide all Sovereigns and Nations (especially such as have shewn [sic] kindness onto us) and to bless them with good government, peace, and concord—to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the encrease [sic] of science among them and us—and generally to grant unto all Mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as he alone knows to be best.

Given under my hand at the City of New York the third day of October in the year of our Lord 1789.

(From [www.allabouthistory.org/thanksgiving-history.htm](http://www.allabouthistory.org/thanksgiving-history.htm))



## Picture this



Ryan Kroiss (left), housefellow at the Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel and Student Center in Madison, Wis., likes to wear his faith on his shirt. Housefellows are student leaders who live at the WELS chapel and student center. This photo was snapped on Sept. 3 during Welcome Week activities. The Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel and Student Center reaches out to college and graduate school students with Christ's love. To learn more, visit [www.wlchapel.org](http://www.wlchapel.org).

Submitted by Judy Metzger

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.

*“The LORD is my strength  
and my shield; my heart trusts  
in him, and I am helped.  
My heart leaps for joy and I  
will give thanks to him in song.”*

Psalm 28:7

# Voices of youth

David D. Sellnow



**Steven (college student, attends occasionally):** I think we have a problem with pride.

**Rev. James (St. Barnabas' pastor):** In what way, Steven?

**Steven:** When we talk about how our church has the purest doctrine, we sound like we're bragging.

**Abby (college student, attends when home on weekends):** People do get that impression. When I told my roommate that I was WELS, she said, "Oh, the ones who think nobody's going to heaven except you!" I was startled.

**Mrs. Bonita (Sunday school teacher):**

My neighbor is convinced that we hate Catholics.

**Rev. James:** Do we really think only our church members are saved?

**Riley (recently confirmed youth):** No, we believe in "one holy Christian and apostolic church"—like we say in the Creed. All people who look to Jesus for forgiveness are included in the true church.

**Mrs. Bonita:** So there are many Catholics and Baptists and others who belong to God just as much as we do.

**Gina (active teen member):** If that's what we confess, how come people think we're arrogant?

**Jacki (inactive young adult member):** I don't think people in other churches realize what we believe. They just think we view ourselves as better than others.

**Mrs. Schnitt (ladies' association president):** But aren't we better? We hold to the teachings of the Bible, while those other churches are full of errors.

**Erin (college student, training to be a Lutheran school teacher):** We're supposed to guard against false prophets. We can't condone or tolerate error.

**Tim (active teen):** I read an article that compared false teachings to infectious diseases. We need to keep away from people who are infected like that, or we put our own faith at risk.

**Mr. Newsome (council member):** Actually, the Bible says that false doctrine is worse than an infectious disease. It's gangrene.

**Abby:** Think of what you're saying though. If so many people have dreadful spiritual sicknesses, and we push them away so we can stay pure, aren't we abandoning people who really need our help?

**Mr. Newsome:** Is there some way we can stay free from spiritual disease that will harm us and still bring help?

**Rev. James:** The doctors and nurses don't go out to help people without taking precautions for themselves. We should do the same. God says that we

should avoid false teaching so we don't lose our faith.

**Nate (inactive teen):** But you can't avoid people unless you're a hermit.

**Tim:** That's right. We are supposed to mingle with others but not participate in their religious practices.

**Mrs. Schnitt:** All of us are witnesses of our faith at all times, in everything we say and do. If you are a light shining in Jesus' name, you won't hide that light from anyone.

**Abby:** Having spiritual conversations with my roommate is better than meaningless chats about movies and stuff.

**Gina:** Besides, our goal is to stay close to Jesus and to get everybody to come to him.

**Nate:** Yeah, let's call attention to Jesus, not to ourselves.

*The conversation is just beginning. Come back and listen to more conversations from St. Barnabas in future issues of Forward in Christ. Meanwhile, start your own conversations in your congregation! See resources at [www.wels.net/jump/youthstudy](http://www.wels.net/jump/youthstudy).*

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

## the church is bigger than just us

Next month: **our calling**

# Witnessing opportunities FOR OUR YOUTH

It's not only about receiving the gospel; it's also about passing it on.

Julie K. Wietzke

*Sharing your faith can be done at any age.*

Think of the six-year-old who comes home from school and sings “Jesus Loves Me” to her non-churchgoing mom. Think of the new mom who invites her neighbor to the Moms ‘n’ Tots program at church. Think of the elderly man in the hospital who shares with the nurses why he is not afraid.

Think of teens from Eternal Love, Appleton, Wis.

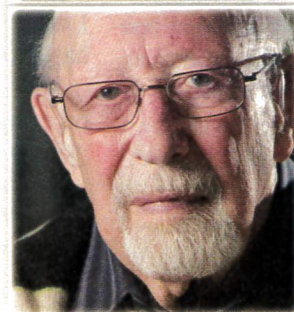
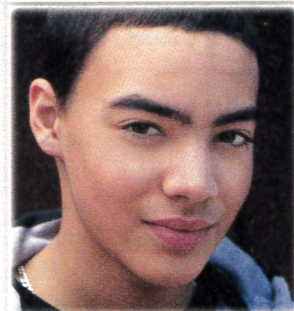
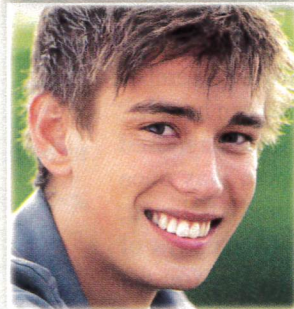
Through WELS Kingdom Workers’ Faith In Action program, eight teens and four chaperones traveled to New Jersey this summer to help two WELS congregations—Immanuel, Long Valley and Our Savior’s, East Brunswick—conduct vacation Bible school (VBS). The teens helped distribute flyers about the event and then helped run the VBS, doing everything from supervising recess to teaching Bible stories to a roomful of children.

“Initially they had the deer in the headlights look—can we really do this?” says Don Tollefson, pastor at Long Valley. “But it became apparent that they could. With help and some guidance, they did a great job.”

## *Receiving the gospel*

The help and guidance started before the teens even arrived in New Jersey. “It wasn’t just, ‘If you want to go, you can go,’ ” says Kirk Lahmann, who served as a vicar at Eternal Love last year and also chaperoned the trip. “There was a lot of training involved.” In special classes over the summer, teens learned how to teach Bible classes and how to canvass.

On the trip, the teens gained more than just hands-on experience. “I learned that I just have to trust that God is with me and that he will do what is best for me and for the work of his kingdom,”



says Malachi Wallander, a 16-year-old who went on the trip.

He illustrates his point by talking about his canvassing experience: “The last time we were out canvassing I ran across a man eating lunch in his truck, and he asked for one of the flyers I was handing out. I gave him one, told him a little bit about the church and the VBS there, and we got into a little conversation. During the conversation I realized that I wasn’t afraid to talk to that guy at all. I didn’t know why because I usually got really nervous talking to people like that, especially when I never really know what to say. . . . Then it came to me: God was there with me feeding me the words to say.”

## *Passing it on*

Tollefson feels that providing the opportunity for teens to grow in faith and trust in God—and then to share what they’ve learned—is important for WELS youth. “It’s not only receiving the gospel, but it’s also passing it on,” he says. “I think that’s a real key in keeping our youth involved—when they realize that what they have is something they can also share.”

And that’s just what the teens did. “My favorite part of the trip was seeing that the kids were having fun and learning what they needed to learn,” says Kyle Lichtenberg, a 15-year-old who participated for the first time this year. “Seeing the thankfulness they express on their faces is something that makes me feel extremely happy and satisfied. It’s an unforgettable experience.”

*Julie Wietzke is managing editor of Forward in Christ*

*This is the third article in a five-part series on keeping youth involved in the church.*

*Eleven congregations sent 60 teenagers on mission trips this past year through WELS Kingdom Workers’ Faith In Action program. To learn more about the program, go to [www.welskingdomworkers.org](http://www.welskingdomworkers.org). Learn more about WELS Kingdom Workers on p. 24.*

*Fred and Linda Heberling  
of Resurrection, Maumee, Ohio,  
have always believed in God's plan.*

Fred was attending Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich., in 1965 when he got hurt in a soccer game and had to return to his hometown of Maumee. He had 21 back surgeries to repair the damage. "I was planning on doing church work; I wanted to be a pastor," says Fred, now 58. "God said I don't want you doing this. He said it very graphically."

Then came marriage and family, but the Heberlings called upon God's plan again when Fred was injured on the job in 1988, never to work again.

The couple continued to hold on to that reassurance when their daughter-in-law, Jolie, fell flat on the floor one morning in 2006 and hasn't worked since, because of possible multiple sclerosis.

"We just know if we give to the Lord, the Lord will take care of us," says 54-year-old Linda. "We always remember that God is never going to give us more than we can handle."

And when their 27-year-old son, Erik, was diagnosed with chronic leukemia in January, God's plan was once again what kept them going. "He was extremely fatigued, losing weight, and having trouble eating," Linda says of Erik. "They did some blood work and they said, 'You get to the hospital now.' His blood was as thick as syrup. They said, 'You could have had a stroke; you could have died.'"

James 4:13-15 gives the Heberlings strength: "Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'"

### *The accident*

Why Fred is alive, only God knows. On March 30, 1988, Fred, then 38, was hit by a forklift while at work.

"I was diving out of the way, and the [forklift] caught me below the knees; [it] spun me around, and that is what knocked me down," Fred says. "It would be the equivalent of getting hit with a very hard hammer."

The extent of the damage was unknown. In June 1988 Fred began having seizures.

"There was a time when [the doctors] were trying to figure out how to control his seizures, and he had 100 at one time," Linda recalls. "I said, 'Can't you stop these because it affects his heart and everything else internally.'"

From 1988 to 1993, Fred couldn't do a thing. "I was down for the count. Whole days were wasted," he says.

"He would spend a lot of time laying down and just trying to stabilize. In the winter, it would get worse," Linda says.

It wasn't until 1993 that Fred was diagnosed with post-traumatic concussion shock; he had a temporal lobe fracture. He continues to suffer from a variety of ailments, including dizziness, migraines, and a balance function disorder. He takes 27 medications a day.

It took him until December 2005 to get permanent disability. Meanwhile, Linda went back to work as a special education teacher for the Toledo public schools. Fred took on the role of running the household and then later being with Erik.

"I always felt as if it was the Lord's way of saying I want your husband alive," Linda says, "because prior to this major accident he had other accidents as well, and we had a lot of unemployment and a lot of difficulty keeping jobs. I thought it was a blessing, and I looked on it as that."

Before the forklift accident, Fred was involved in a trucking accident in 1985 involving nine cars, two semis, five light poles, and two trips through the concrete median with a semi. Fred managed to come away with only an arm injury and two broken ribs.

"That is why I say I think it is a blessing that he is able to be home," Linda said.

### *Their faith*

Daily Bible studies and devotions strengthen the Heberlings, as do their Christian friends. They believe going to church every Sunday is important for their faith.

Fellow church member Betty Thompson and her husband, Keith, are friends with the Heberlings. When Fred was unable to drive, Betty drove him to his doctor appointments and to the hospital for tests.

"I am inspired because Fred has this ability to keep going. He isn't one to sit around. He gets in and gets things done. I do not have that ability. I am procrastinating right now," Betty says, laughing.

"Fred is a people person. He likes to talk with people," Linda says. "I think that is what keeps his spirits up because he just likes to talk about what is going on with them and their lives."

He doesn't feel sorry for himself either. He is thankful for Linda, his wife of 31 years, who has never given up on him.

"When a mate suffers, the other mate does also," Fred says. "[Spouses] need to be strong for

each other. Their love for one another strengthens them, but they need to have an even stronger love for their God who created them, or everything is helpless and hopeless.”

Fred still has a hard time sleeping at night; cannot fly on a plane; and when he looks directly at a person, he sees a spinning image. He says constant pain is his companion. But he also says that being positive keeps him going: “Do all that you can, but not for yourself, that God may receive the glory. God would not have it any other way because he loves us and sent his Son for us. Our God is a ‘can do’ God, and he expects us to be that way also.”

Fred also keeps God’s plan in mind when times get rough. “I have always believed that God has a plan for me—whatever that may be,” he says.

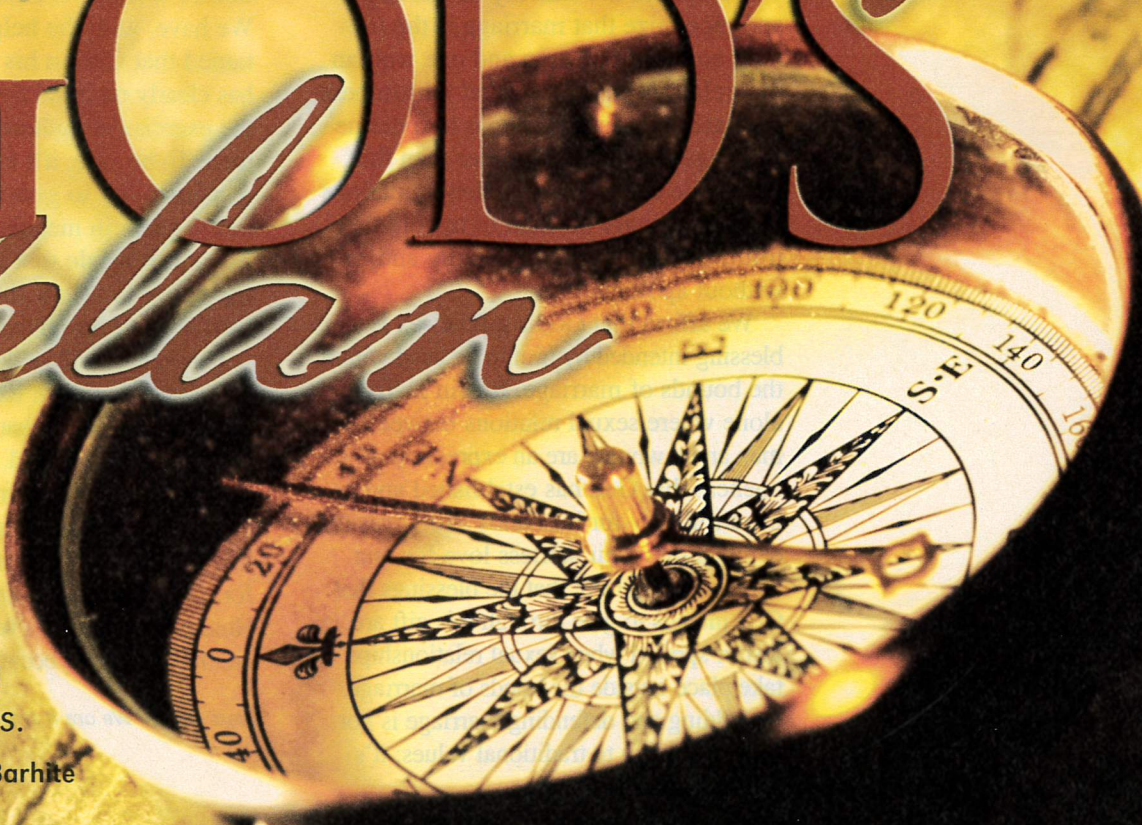
Brent Brutlag, pastor at Resurrection, says the Heberlings are a wonderful

example of Christians who put their Savior first, others second, and themselves last.

“This is why, when things are going ‘earthly wrong,’ they can say that everything is going ‘heavenly right,’” he says. “Outside of what Scripture tells us, the Heberlings don’t know the specific will of God any more than any one of us do, but they are content to know what the Scriptures say: that Christ loved them enough to be their substitute in life and death. This is what keeps them going; this is what keeps us all going through the vile trials of life.”

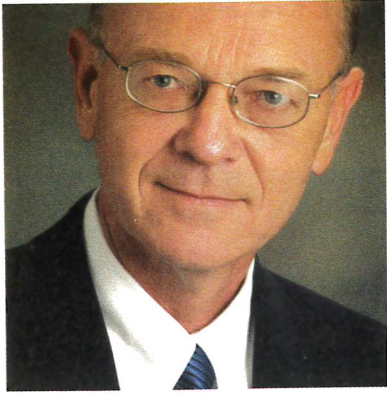
*Brandi Barhite is a member at Resurrection, Maumee, Ohio.*

# Following GOD'S plan



Faith keeps a couple going after lifelong troubles.

Brandi Barhite



Mark Schweden

## A synod that upholds biblical values

Ours is a culture in which values seem to be constantly changing. That impression is reinforced by news and entertainment media that strive not only to report cultural trends but to influence them. People who hold to “traditional” values are often portrayed as closed-minded bigots, loveless and judgmental hypocrites, unwilling and unable to change with the times.

For Christians, the values we hold dear are not simply traditional values that have stood the test of time. Rather, the values that we defend are biblical values. We hold to them because these are truths that God himself has revealed to us. It is God himself who has determined what is right and wrong, what is pure and what is vulgar, what is true and what is satanic deception. We can say, without apology, “We believe these truths because they are God’s truths.”

We uphold the sanctity of marriage and recognize that marriage is the lifelong union of one man and one woman in a relationship of love and faithfulness. As state governments begin to redefine marriage as something other than that, and while even Christian denominations are increasingly hesitant to uphold this truth, we take that stand boldly and without apology.

We affirm that God’s gift of sex is a blessing intended by him to be used within the bounds of marriage. It is in marriage alone where sexual relations between a man and a woman are an expression of the oneness that God has established and a beautiful way for husbands and wives to demonstrate their selfless love for one another. We believe that the blessings that God intends to give through this gift are lost or spoiled when sexual relationships take place outside the bonds of marriage. Upholding and defending marriage is not simply holding to traditional values; it’s holding to biblical values.

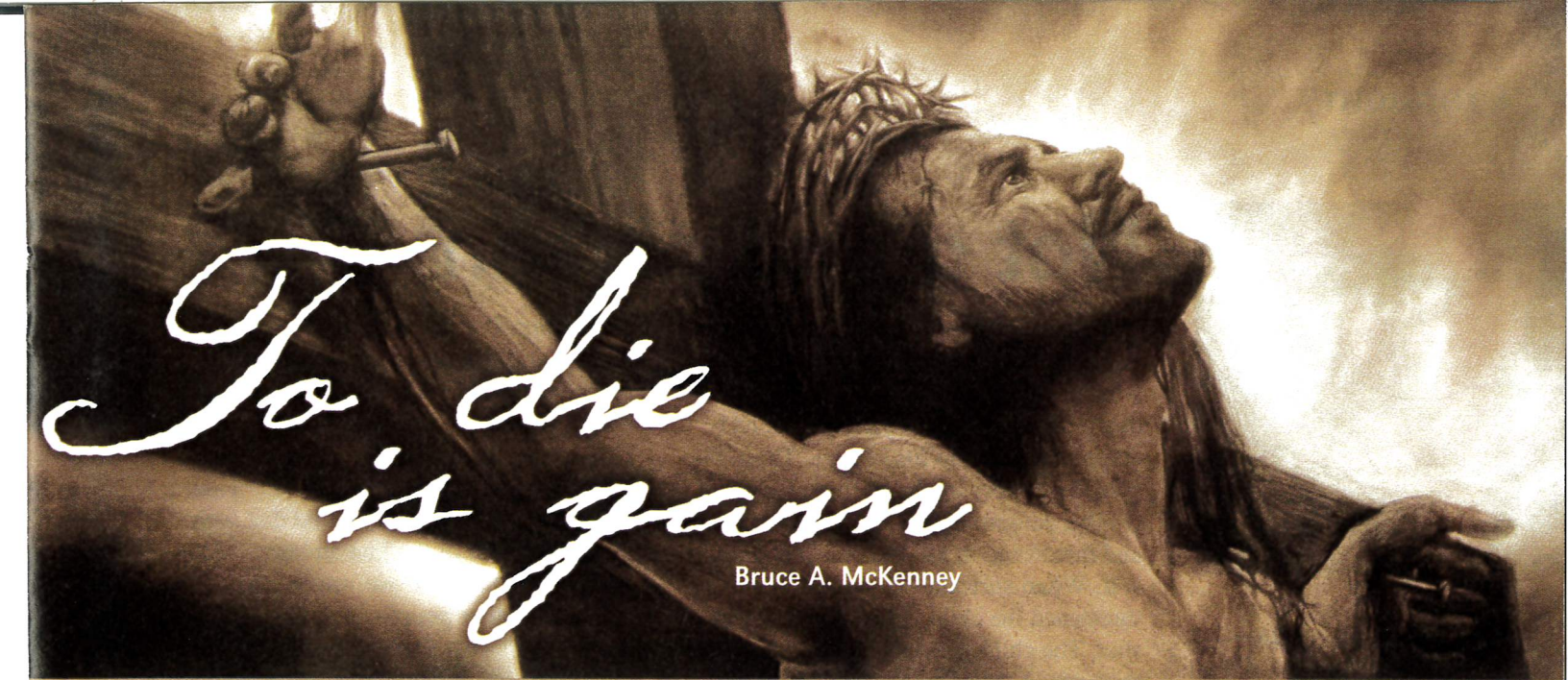
Together we uphold and defend the sanctity of human life. Those who speak in favor of a woman’s “right to choose” conveniently ignore the fact that the choice does not involve the body of the woman alone. It very clearly is a choice that impacts—yes, ends—the life of another human being. There will be many who attack us for our opposition to abortion. In response, we will continue to defend God’s exclusive right to give and take human life—not because it is a traditional value but because it’s a biblical truth.

We belong to a synod that is often accused of clinging to an outmoded and out-of-touch view of the roles of men and women. While many Christian denominations have changed their doctrine and proudly opened the door to the ordination of women, WELS has not done so. We have, with the help of God, maintained that God in his love and wisdom has clearly reserved the role of pastor and the exercise of authority in the church to men. To be sure, it’s every congregation’s responsibility to give women opportunities to serve in meaningful and important ways. But we do that always maintaining our desire to follow the guidelines that God himself has given us in his Word.

Our beliefs will seldom find approval in the culture in which we live. More often than not, the values that we defend will be challenged, questioned, or ridiculed. In the face of that onslaught from a godless culture, it’s important for us to remember not just what we are against but what we are for. Cherish those values. Defend them. Hold on to them. Not because those values are traditional but because they are biblical.

*Next month: We are a synod equipped to serve.*





# To die is gain

Bruce A. McKenney

She wasn't dying from any accident or painful disease. Her body was just giving out from old age. When I visited her for the last time, she didn't open her eyes but only nodded to acknowledge my presence. After reading Psalm 23 and saying the Lord's Prayer, she mouthed the word *Amen*. I sat quietly by her side for some time as her breathing seemed to lessen. All of a sudden, she asked with a clear voice, "Pastor, do you see them?"

I replied, "See who, Lydia?"

"The angels," she said. Moments later, she took her last breath and fell asleep in Jesus.

Perhaps you have heard stories about Christians seeing or hearing angels on their deathbeds. The question that quickly comes to mind is, "Does that really happen?"

Many of the answers we give can only be anecdotal. But some things the Bible teaches about angels can help us. Hopefully, we will see that it isn't just a nice line to a hymn when we sing, "And when my short life is ended, by his angel hosts attended. . . ." (*Christian Worship* 432:3).

## Served by angels in life

The Bible makes it clear that angels were created by God sometime during the six days of creation. We also know that angels serve believers on earth. Hebrews 1:14 states, "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

Isn't that amazing? Angels from heaven serve believers here on earth! But how? We know that angels often served as messengers of God. Angels announced the birth of the Savior to Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds. It was also the angels who announced on Easter, "He is not here; he has risen!" (Luke 24:6). We also know that angels serve God's people by protecting them. Psalm 91:11 reads, "He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways."

## Served by angels in death

But what about in the hour of death? Are the angels there, and do God's people see them? Perhaps the section of God's Word that sheds the most light on these questions is the account of Lazarus in Luke 16. Recall that Lazarus was a poor beggar who longed to eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. He was so bad off that even the dogs came and licked his sores. But he was eternally rich. He was a believer in Christ Jesus. "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side" (Luke 16:22). Yes, angels serve God's people by escorting their souls to heaven!

But will we see angels before we die? I have certainly had a number of experiences in which Christians have died and their facial expressions or words seem to indicate that they had seen or heard something glorious, maybe the angels. Perhaps you have heard similar stories yourself. If it's true, that God allows his people to see or hear the angels coming for them, what a wonderful and comforting thought! But we can't be sure. God's Word has no clear answer.

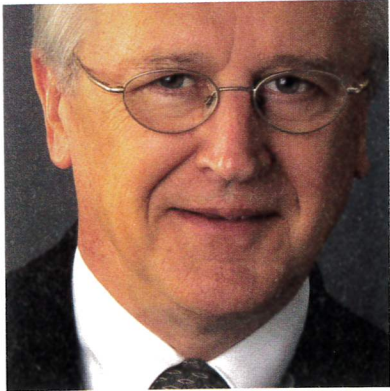
But what we do know is that all those who believe in Jesus will go to heaven. Maybe they won't see the angels before they die, but when they get to heaven, they will see Jesus!

So while we live and especially when we die, let's look to Jesus. He died for our sins. He rose for our justification. We will be in heaven because of what he did! And maybe, just maybe, we will see or hear his angels coming to get us.

*Contributing editor Bruce McKenney is pastor at St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wisconsin.*

This is the fourth article in a ten-part series on death and dying.

*Will we see angels on our deathbeds?* Angels serve God's people by escorting their souls to heaven. But we can't be sure if we will see them.



*John A. Baird*

## Not a bad person

I've heard the comment many times. But today I'm remembering that a woman said it when confronted by the death of her live-in boyfriend. He had abused her often in fits of rage. Those fits gained intensity by the misuse of alcohol. On this occasion, he abducted her child and threatened to kill the child and himself. When surrounded by police, he threatened the child with a gun and was shot. The child was safe and returned to the woman. After the shock of it all, she said, "He really wasn't a bad person."

I wonder how most define a "bad person" and, more important, what they think sin is. If any of us would say that this man was "bad," we might be challenged as being judgmental and insensitive. Yet the law and the courts are responsible for making that determination regularly, and the police made that assessment at the scene. He was a threat—a dangerous threat—bad enough to justify lethal force.

Christians understand that God has decreed standards of behavior. We know God's summary of those standards as the Ten Commandments. One of the reasons God gave us standards is to identify sin. Another is to guide human behavior. A third is to keep the worst sins in check and preserve order.

Yet somehow people believe that Christians and Christian churches should have no standards. Some suggest that there may be standards, but we should not judge others by applying those standards to individual people. It is said that when we accuse someone of sin, we destroy that person's self-esteem and frustrate his or her pursuit of happiness. Sadly even some Christians don't want to talk about sin for fear of turning people away.

But the world is full of sin. Domestic violence, alcohol abuse, rage, and threats to life—including the life of a child—

are wrong. It's not okay to do these things, and it's not okay to harbor the thoughts that lead to them. Those actions and attitudes are different from what God wants. They are sin.

It's not just that the world is full of sin. People are full of sin. Jesus said that such things flow out of the human heart (Matthew 15:19). While we might like to think that other people are full of sin—they're bad—the truth is that all people are full of sin. Include here every person who enters the doors of every church and house of worship in the world. Ouch! That hurts. We are all included. God says so, "There is no one who does good, not even one" (Romans 3:12).

One message of Christians to this world is the law of God. We are to proclaim God's standards boldly, clearly, forcefully, and without apology. That means calling sin, sin. Whether it is a case of domestic tragedy, hook-up sexual behavior, racial prejudice, greed in common and high places, gossip, or a disregard for others, it's still sin. But preaching God's law dare never be a hypocritical pointing the finger at others—a smug self-righteousness. Sin lies in all human hearts, ours too.

God pleads with each human soul to turn away from sin: "I take no pleasure in the death of anyone. . . . Repent and live" (Ezekiel 18:32). God intends to turn sinners—all sinners, us included—away from sin. The first step in repentance, sorrow over sin, comes from God's harsh law. We're bad. The second step comes by announcing God's generous and undeserved forgiveness in Jesus. Men, women, and children need both often. If we don't hear the law, we need no gospel. If we think the law is only for others, the gospel is not for us either.

# THE APOSTLES

## St. Andrew: Finding family first

**H**e grew up in his brother's shadow. Even in adulthood, the young man lived with his brother and worked with his brother. In fact, when the Bible mentions him, most often he is called "Peter's brother." Whenever the apostles are listed, Peter comes first, then his brother. He always seemed to be second in line—except when it came to Jesus. We know him as St. Andrew, but the Greek Church remembers that once he was at the head of the line. They call this apostle "*Protokletos*," the First Called.

### READ JOHN 1:35-42

<sup>35</sup>The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. <sup>36</sup>When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

<sup>37</sup>When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup>Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi," (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?"

<sup>39</sup>"Come," he replied, "and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour.

<sup>40</sup>Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. <sup>41</sup>The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). <sup>42</sup>And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

### DIGGING INTO THE VERSES

1. Andrew was an early disciple of John the Baptizer. Review John 1, especially verses 19-34. What great truths about Jesus did John proclaim when Andrew could hear him?
2. Why does the Baptizer repeat the central message of John 1 to his two disciples? What's his motive (cf. John 3:26-36)?

Why is that such a good reminder for Christians? For the Christian church on earth?

3. The disciples followed Jesus but had troubles beginning a conversation. Jesus loved them and asked, "What do you want?" Jesus' question probed their inner wants and spiritual aspirations, but they didn't answer the question. If they had, what might they have said (cf. the following verses)?
4. They spent the day with Jesus getting all their questions answered. They were convinced that they had found the Messiah. What did that mean for a first-century Jew?
5. As soon as Andrew saw Jesus as the Messiah, he went to find his brother Simon Peter. What are the inherent benefits and challenges of family sharing Jesus with family?
6. Look at the way Andrew found family for Christ. How does each action help you to witness to your family?
  - He did it as the first thing; it was top priority.
  - He did it with the Church; "We have found the Messiah."
  - He did it by bringing Peter to Jesus to see firsthand.
  - He did it with specific Scripture; verse 41 said a mouthful to Peter.

### MORE ABOUT ANDREW

The First Called, Andrew, never stopped calling people to Jesus. Early church historians list his mission fields as Scythia and Greece. Eventually, tradition says that he even witnessed to Jesus with his death, when he was martyred in Greece by the Roman governor. He was crucified on an X-shaped cross, whose shape is now called St. Andrew's Cross. The Church celebrates his feast each year on the day of his death, Nov. 30. The gospel reading appointed is John 1:35-42.

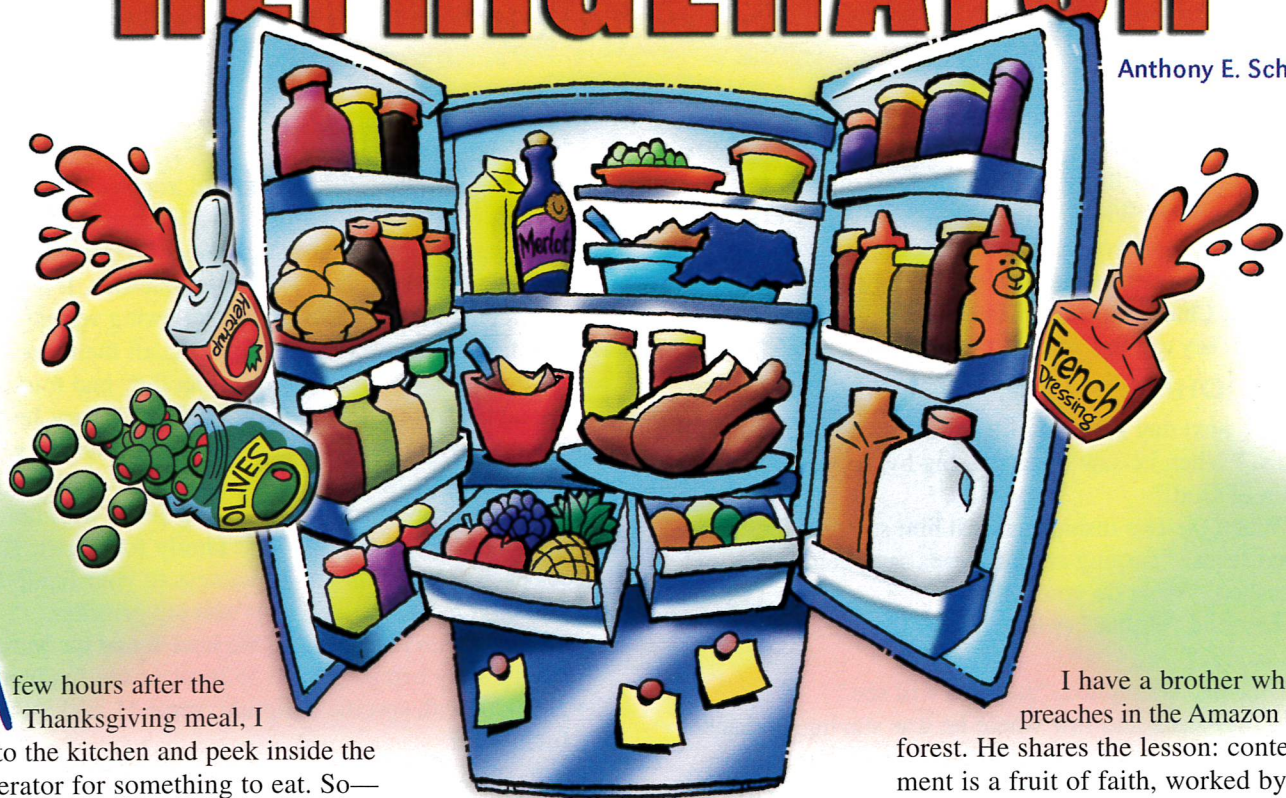
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*This is the first article in a 12-part series on Jesus' apostles. Find this study and answers online after Nov. 5 at [www.forwardinchrist.net](http://www.forwardinchrist.net)*



# Look no farther than your REFRIGERATOR

Anthony E. Schultz



A few hours after the Thanksgiving meal, I walk to the kitchen and peek inside the refrigerator for something to eat. So—what's for supper? The leftovers are all there. Just leftovers? Nothing else?

## Thanksgiving for heavenly and earthly blessings

To see God's blessings you don't need to look any further than your refrigerator door! There's a yellow plastic container—water-separating mustard! There is snooty mustard from France—for three times the price. Ketchup—cap on the bottom—ready to squirt! Sweet barbecue sauce for a rack of baby back ribs. Steak sauce—that purists argue has no business on aged steak with black criss-cross grill marks. We have a multitude of salad dressings—thousands of “islands” of pickle bits. Western—with a spicy red barbecue flavor. Italian—complimenting a side salad with spaghetti. There's peppercorn ranch—and pungent blue cheese! We even have a bottle of Merlot—dark and fruity.

I should be content. I have choices—all kinds of choices. But compared to the gospel everything else is garbage in the tall wastebasket in the pantry! The essential message of God's Word is law and gospel—my guilt and Jesus' forgiving

love, my sins and my forgiveness bought with his innocent blood.

But hearts filled with the gospel thank and praise God for earthly blessings too! It's about attitude—thanksgiving and contentment! The refrigerator door holds so much. That little light shines every time I open the door, but I don't always see.

## The gospel gift of contentment

While I'm standing at the refrigerator door, I think of others. There are people with far less earthly goods, but they have the gospel gift of contentment.

In Nigeria, I gave my shoes to a man who had none. I apologized because there was a hole in the sole. He said, “That's okay. If I had a scissors and a piece of cardboard, I could cut out an insert. Slide it in, and it's as good as new!”

Do we keep socks with a toe poking through? It is a powerful preaching of the law when I have a walk-in closet and my brother in Christ doesn't own a single plastic hanger—because the only clothes he owns are on his back! Yet he is content, and I complain that my shirt is hopelessly *out of style*?

I have a brother who preaches in the Amazon rain forest. He shares the lesson: contentment is a fruit of faith, worked by the Holy Spirit through the gospel. Where he is, little children drink yucca root juice. No, they don't go to the refrigerator to get it. Their moms pound the stuffing out of a mash that looks like rutabaga. They pre-chew golf ball-sized clumps and put them in a plastic pail with river water. Quickly they ferment, making a juice that looks like white wash and smells like turpentine. Small children—tummies swollen from malnutrition—drink this juice. It numbs them through and through. But they don't complain that they are hungry.

We feast not only at Thanksgiving but again and again. And we complain that our plates are too small! *Our plates are too small?* And we even have leftovers in the refrigerator.

There's so much to be thankful for! But only the Holy Spirit can make our hearts thankful—especially that we appreciate forgiveness most of all. Then we will be content in any and every circumstance—to the glory of the Lord!

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