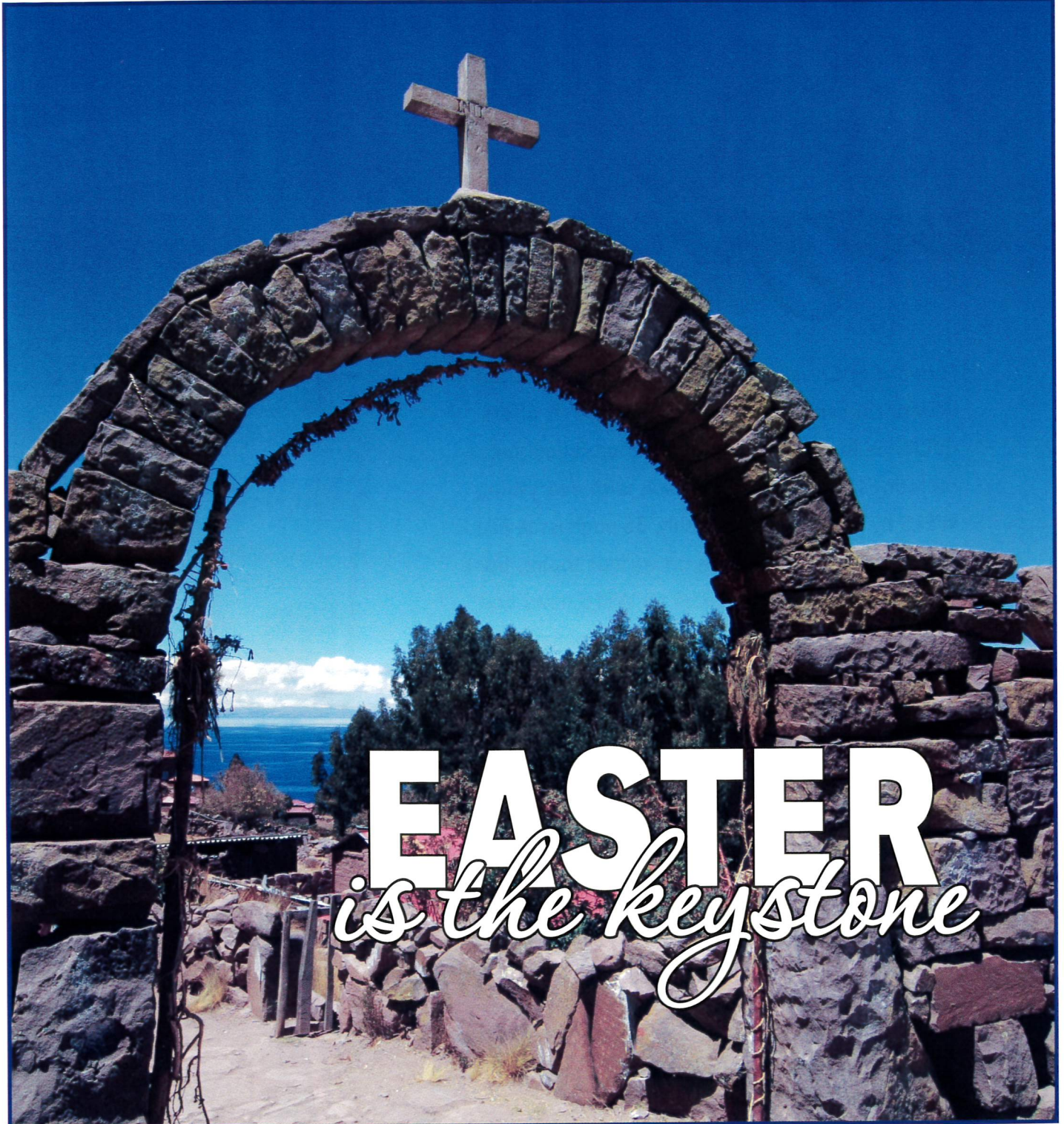


PEER PRESSURE • DOES GOD LOVE BAD GUYS?

APRIL 2009

Forward in Christ

God's wisdom, WELS' witness



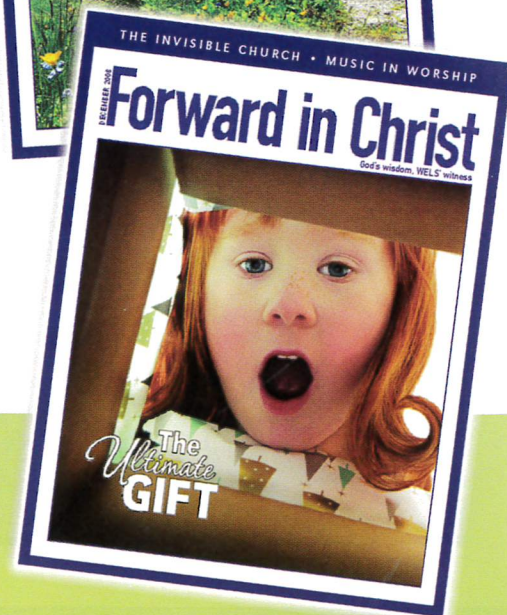
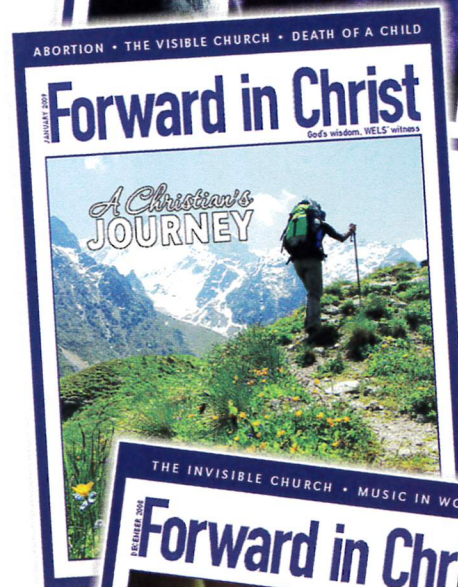
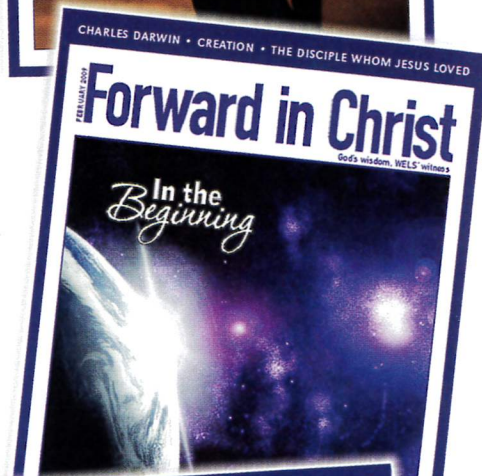
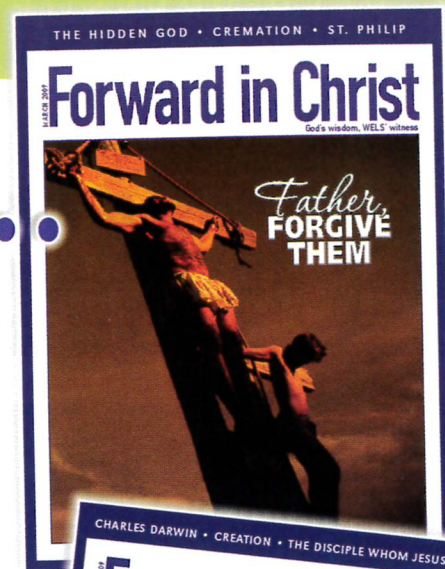
EASTER
is the keystone

Keep in touch with... Christian topics the synod your faith the Bible everything!

Forward in Christ is the official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. It offers guidance for Christian living and a biblical focus on today's issues. **Keep in touch with everything WELS** by reading each monthly, 36-page issue filled with articles and editorials on various topics, book reviews, reports and updates on WELS news and events, young Christian and campus ministries, brief Bible studies, "Q & A," and more.

Bring this Christ-centered magazine to your home or congregation today! **Bulk subscriptions are available** for your congregation or organization. **Individual subscriptions** are also available.

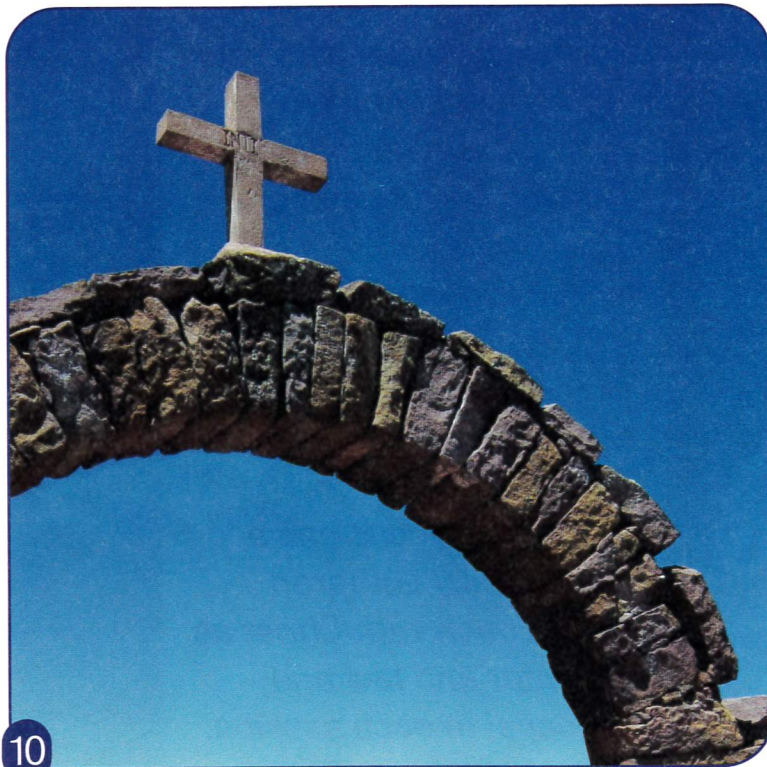
To order a subscription, call **1-800-662-6093**, or visit **www.nph.net/fic**.



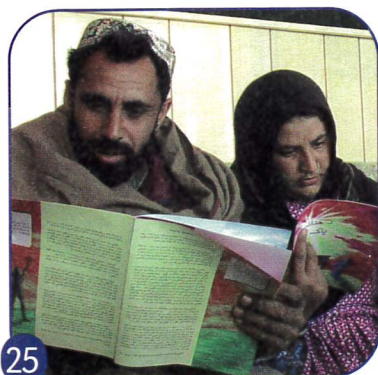
Northwestern
Publishing House

1250 North 113th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53226-3284

“Remove Easter and the other festivals of the church year are useless and meaningless.”



10



25



30

Forward in Christ

✝ The official magazine of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

FEATURES

10 EASTER IS THE KEYSTONE
 Of the many festivals Christians observe, one of them is the greatest.
Armin W. Schuetze

12 CONFESSIONS OF FAITH A rash teenage decision could have cost me eternal life.
Thomas Lindeman

14 WHERE DID IT COME FROM?
 We sometimes don't have answers to significant questions. We simply trust what we are told.
James J. Westendorf

16 ONLY NATURAL CAUSES; GOD ABOVE NATURAL CAUSES Science is a narrow view of life that by assumption rules out God, Scripture, the natural law in us, and what nature truly declares to us.
Paul R. Boehlke

28 REMEMBERING OUR LEADERS: DR. ADOLF HOENECKE For more than 40 years, Dr. Adolf Hoenecke was our synod's spiritual leader.
James C. Danell Jr.

30 WRAPPED IN GOD'S COMFORT
 How one cancer survivor uses earthly comforters to share the love of the heavenly Comforter.
Linda R. Buxa

36 DADDY, DOES GOD LOVE BAD GUYS? The real joy of Easter is Jesus saying, "I still love you, even when you are not good."
Donn G. Dobberstein

Heart in FOCUS



NEW!
CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCES

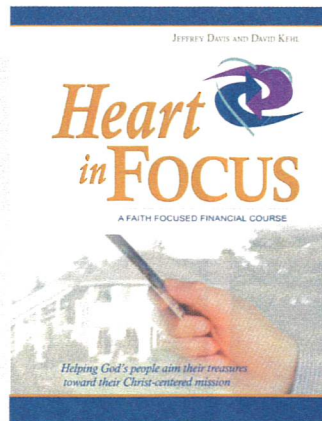
VIEWING MONEY MATTERS
THROUGH SPIRITUAL EYES




- ◆ Drowning in debt or just seeking focus with your finances? Heart in Focus is a beneficial study for all people.
- ◆ Participants will discover practical tools and support to move in the right direction.
- ◆ Heart in Focus has a decidedly Lutheran approach with Christ as center and law and gospel in each session.

This six-session Christian financial course provides a unique opportunity for individuals to grow in their relationship with God as they make wise financial choices.

Heart in Focus products are available through Northwestern Publishing House, www.nph.net or call 800-662-6022.



For more resources and information
www.wels.net/jump/faithfinance

 **Adult Discipleship**
A ministry of WELS Parish Services

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

EDITORIAL OFFICE

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

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

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

MANAGING EDITOR

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

ASSISTANT EDITOR

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

STAFF WRITER

Laura C. Schaefer
laura.christine.schaefer@gmail.com

SEMINARY CONSULTANT

Prof. Daniel Leyrer

ART DIRECTOR

Karen Knutson

DESIGNER

Carianne Ciriacks

COPYRIGHT

©2009 by *Forward in Christ*. Printed in the USA. *Forward in Christ* grants permission for any original article (not a reprint) to be photocopied for use in a WELS church, school, or organization, provided that copies are distributed free and indicate *Forward in Christ* as the source. Artwork may not be reproduced except in the context of its article. For other copyright questions, contact Kristine Laufer, 414-615-5706; lauferk@nph.wels.net.

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

POSTMASTER

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

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

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

ON AUDIO

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

WHAT'S INSIDE *by Julie Wietzke*

Keeping our youth connected to the church is not an easy task. In his monthly message, Pres. Schroeder talks briefly about what the synod and congregations are doing to hold on to young people after confirmation (p. 32). But his article mainly emphasizes the importance of parents and their responsibility to raise their children in the Word.

That responsibility starts early on. On the back page, Donn Dobberstein relates a teachable moment he had with his preschool-age son, which ended up epitomizing the Easter message of peace through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Keeping young people in the Word may get harder as they get older. Our "Whatever" article focuses on the challenging decisions teens face every day due to peer pressure (p. 18). These decisions may affect their faith, and parents must be ready with spiritual support and advice. And sometimes teens will fall away. In "Confessions of faith" (p. 12), Thomas Lindeman shares how in his teenage years he "turned his back" on God. Now Lindeman is back in the fold and working with teens to help them in their struggles. How can we help to do the same?

APRIL

DEPARTMENTS



7

6 **FEEDBACK**

7 **DEVOTION**

Life in the Dead Sea *Peter A. Panitzke*

8 **EDITORIAL COMMENT**

Give us Barabbas *Paul T. Prange*

9 **QUESTION & ANSWER**

Fearing death *Forrest L. Bivens*

18 **WHATEVER**

The pains of peer pressure *Cheryl L. Peters*

19 **NEWS**

26 **BULLETIN BOARD**

27 **POTLUCK**

32 **FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK**

Where are all the young people? *Mark G. Schroeder*

33 **BIBLE STUDY**

To die is gain *Bruce A. McKenney*

34 **A THOUGHT**

Should the church change? Part 1 *John A. Braun*

35 **INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDY**

The apostles: St. Bartholomew *Jonathan E. Schroeder*



18



33



NO-SPLASH BAPTISM

The November 2008 issue has an article on worship that touches on the matter of Baptism. The author wrote: “. . . the gentle splash (of water) is part of every Baptism.” I do not take issue with what the writer had in mind, but not every Baptism has a “gentle splash” of water.

Many years ago, I was called to the hospital to baptize a newly born baby who was struggling to live. When I got to the maternity ward, I was gowned, masked, and gloved and then led to an incubator where the baby lay, motionless and hooked up to sensors and tubes. I was used to having a parent or sponsor hold the baby so I could easily “splash” the water to administer the Sacrament. How, I wondered out loud, could I baptize this baby?

I will be forever grateful to the enterprising nurse who got me a bottle of sterile water and some sterile cotton and showed me how I could easily reach into the incubator and baptize the helpless child. There was no splash of water, only a gentle movement of a water-soaked daub of cotton in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

While that baby did not make it in this life, he now enjoys the immeasurable blessings of eternal life with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Marcus Nitz
Placentia, California

GOOD ARTICLE

Re: “Cleaning our glasses” [Jan.]. Excellent article. For many years I have been reading *Northwestern*

Lutheran and now *Forward in Christ* from the back to the front. For my reading and age, it is more productive. Even though all our members do receive *Forward in Christ*, some might not get to the end. So as being one of the shepherds in our church, I am going to copy the article and send it to my “sheep,” just to make sure they read it.

Wayne J. Pluckhan
Citrus Heights, California

SERMON WRITING

I must offer my heartfelt thanks to Pastor Lindemann for his article, “Where do good sermons come from?” [Jan.]. I would guess that the average Lutheran sitting in the pew on Sunday has no idea what amount of time and energy is spent by our pastors in preparing their sermons. I have walked into my pastor’s office as he is writing his sermon, and there on his desk may be as many as five or six texts open, including the Hebrew and Greek as well as various commentaries. To me, it appears to be an overwhelming task, yet he faithfully delivers God’s message of law and gospel week in and week out.

One of the greatest treasures we have as WELS worshipers is that on any given Sunday, we can travel to any WELS church and hear the same message being shared from the pulpit, that of God’s pure grace through the fulfillment of the law and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Credit our worker training schools and the gifted men who devote their lives to serve us as the shepherds of their flock. The best we can do for them is to faithfully support their ministry through our words of encouragement, our financial gifts, and our prayers. Thank you, Pastor!

Gerald Evansen
Appleton, Wisconsin

TEENS AND DIABETES

I just had to respond to Ashley Loberg’s article “Struggles for strength” [Feb.]. Ashley, you are truly an inspiration

for us all. I have had Type 2 diabetes for over 20 years and now I am on insulin. As you know it is common for anyone with diabetes to go through these struggles.

I just had to write and tell you how very proud I am of you and also thank you for writing this inspirational article. We all have to remember that God is always with us and will help us with all our struggles.

Sharon Waterstradt
Mesa, Arizona

WAYS TO REACH OUT?

The January *Forward in Christ* included a story titled, “Congregation finds new way to share the gospel,” describing a newly designed WELS church made to feel like a coffee house. Ironically, the January 2009 edition of *Christianity Today*, representing American Evangelicalism, featured an article questioning the very same approach described in the *Forward in Christ* story. Rather than learning from our Evangelical counterparts, it appears that we are now picking up the ideas that some of them have discarded. . . .

Johnold J. Strey
Belmont, California

ABORTION ARTICLES

Thank you for devoting five articles to the topic of evolution/creationism in the February issue. I am glad to see this topic being addressed. However, I couldn’t help but notice that the January issue had only one section (Q&A) addressing the topic of abortion. After almost 50 million souls lost, isn’t it worthy of more attention? If the church does not speak up for the defenseless, who will?

Brent Nemmers
Allen, Texas

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*.

Life in the Dead Sea

"Why do you look for the living among the dead?" Luke 24:5

Peter A. Panitzke

The Dead Sea is a fascinating place to visit. You don't see any fish or creatures of any kind. The mineral content of about 30 percent makes life impossible. Nothing. Dead.

You won't drown

Recently I visited another kind of Dead Sea. This visit was frightening. I was in the Intensive Care Unit as a family member was dying. The lines on the monitors flattened. There was no joyful talk of the future. Our lives were suddenly empty. Nothing. Dead.

The walk out to the tomb on Easter morning must have been that way too. On Good Friday Jesus surrendered all the life from his body. With his death, there was no life in the hearts of his followers. No joy. No talk of the future. Empty lives. Nothing. Dead.

But there is something amazing about the Dead Sea. You can't drown there. Wade out as deep as you can. Just beyond waist-deep, your body begins to bob up and down like a cork.

So too, the walk out to the tomb on Easter morning didn't end with the women sinking down in despair. Death was present. The tomb. The stone. The grave clothes. Wade in as deep as you want into this place of death. But you can't drown. Not here. For the grave clothes were empty. The stone was rolled away. Death was defeated. "Why do you look for the *living* among the dead?" the angels asked.

In fact, it is that walk into the empty tomb that kept our family from drowning in the ICU. For our loved one, hope for this life was

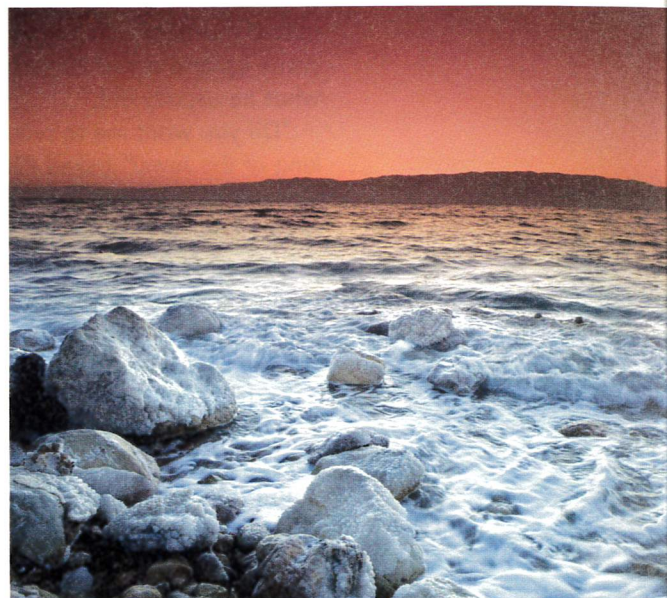
gone. But the farther we walked into the depths of her death, the more our eyes focused on the life beyond this life. We heard that she has come out of the great tribulation. God has wiped away every tear from her eyes (Revelation 7:14,17).

You will be buoyed up

Let me share one more thing about the Dead Sea. I didn't see any boats on the Dead Sea. But it was not always that way. On a sixth-century map called the Madaba Mosaic, two boats are pictured sailing across the Dead Sea. The ancients understood that it is possible to carry far heavier cargo on the Dead Sea than anywhere else!

That's true of the Dead Sea of the Easter tomb as well. It causes everything to be more buoyant. It helps us carry every kind of load. Marital discord. Job loss. Difficult financial decisions at congregational and synodical levels. National economic woes. Loved ones serving in war zones. The burdens of life are too heavy to bear alone.

But wade deep into the empty tomb. The man who laid down his life is also the God who took it up again. If this man gave up his own life for you, there is nothing that he will withhold from you. The greatest burden, the weight of your guilt before God, has been removed. The burden of God's anger is lifted. This



man will give you only what he knows is best. And in the empty tomb, see that this God who raised himself from the dead also has the power to help you in every circumstance. "Your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Wade deep into the empty tomb this Easter season with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Read the conclusions to their gospels. Wade in with Paul by meditating on 1 Corinthians 15. You cannot drown here. This "Dead Sea" will buoy you up.

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

Give us Barabbas

Paul T. Prange

A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

“Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate, knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

“What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked them.

“Crucify him!” they shouted.

“Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them (Mark 15:7-15).

The world seems to want Barabbas.

I hear the echoes of the crowd calling to Pilate, “Give us Barabbas!” when I listen to the results of a vote choosing a candidate who will allow women to kill their unwanted, unborn children.

I see the chief priests and elders persuading the crowd to ask for Barabbas when I watch government leaders arguing that voters should legalize assisted suicide.

I can’t understand why Barabbas was so attractive for the crowds on Good Friday. The original man, mentioned in all four gospels, was in prison for insurrection and murder. He was against the rule of law and the culture of life.

Perhaps he was a compelling figure; Matthew calls him “notorious.” It wasn’t as if the crowds did not know for whom they were asking. Maybe

he was famous for following his own inner laws and beliefs rather than the laws of the land or the laws of God. Crowds seem to admire people with sincere convictions, regardless of what those convictions are—that is, as long as those convictions are not Christian.

We don’t actually know much about Barabbas. All we really know is that the crowds asked for him to be released rather than Jesus, and Pilate honored their request.

But in that small action we can take some comfort that God is still in control, even when the culture of life and the author of life, Jesus himself, seem to be besieged.

God took the foolish choice of a crowd and made it turn out for the good of the entire world. Rejected and despised, Jesus went the way of the cross.

The crowd thought it knew what was good for it. God knew better and caused all things to work for the good of those who love him.

God took the foolish choice of a crowd and made it turn out for the good of the entire world.

It sure did not look like Jesus was winning any battles, much less any elections. But in humility, he beat the greatest enemies of all: sin, death, and the power of the devil. He proved that his death was really a victory by rising from the dead.

Even though Barabbas was released, his death was only delayed. Barabbas, chosen once by the crowd, died. Those who choose or love or just tolerate the culture of death will end up in death too.

There is a different end for the child of God. No matter how much it appears that life is threatened and death has won, remember: Jesus lives.

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

QUESTION & ANSWER



Forrest L. Bivens

Your honesty is appreciated. Your question allows us to review various approaches to death and seek what is compatible with God's Word and fitting for a child of God.

Ignore death?

Much of humanity tries to ignore death or downplay how real and inevitable it is. The use of mild or vague terms for death is common. Young people like to see it as something reserved for the old, and old people have been known to focus on "bucket lists" in order to push thoughts of death aside. But death remains something we all must face. No immersion into a flurry of activity, no exercise or diet regimen, no methods of meditation, and no amount of money can avoid it.

Fear death?

You are not alone in fearing death. Death is an enemy and a thief—not a well-meaning friend. Death reminds us of our sin and the curse of divine law for sinners. Death separates us from our loved ones, bringing grief and sorrow. Jesus wept over the death of his friend Lazarus and its impact on his family—even though he knew he would be raising Lazarus to life again.

But to hate death and wish its destruction is not the same as fearing it. At times, our emotions may not always distinguish between these similar reactions. Sometimes we fear not so much death, but the process of dying. We wonder if death will be painful and prolonged. We each have to sort out our own feelings in this matter, but let's distinguish between fearing the process of dying and fearing death itself. Fearing death is not taking the high road. It remains less than God's will for us. Scripture encourages us not to be afraid of death. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me" (Psalm 23:4). Paul said to the Philippians, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (1:21). The many repeated encouragements not to fear and many arguments

Q. I'm sometimes afraid to die. Is it always sinful to fear death?

that equip us to deal with fear point us to better approaches.

Desire death?

The object of our faith, Jesus and his substitutionary death and resurrection, provides the key to rising above our fear of


death. Death has been defeated. Its sting has been removed when Christ obeyed the law and won forgiveness for us. For believers in Christ, death becomes a divine tool that releases us from our earthly pilgrimage en route to glory. Alongside feelings of uneasiness as we face this enemy, in Christ we may see it as a servant of our Savior and of us, his redeemed people.

Calmly anticipate death?

God repeatedly calls us to remain alert and take our death into account as we live each day. Here is a balanced, fitting path. We may confidently and calmly remain aware of our death, dealing with anxiety by focusing on Christ's perfect work for us, keeping it in mind as we maintain readiness to depart this world, and cultivating a healthy eagerness to accept the reality when and where our Lord chooses.

Peter gives one of my favorite descriptions of Jesus during his suffering and crucifixion: "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23). Jesus entrusted himself to his Father in the depth of his suffering. Despite the unimaginable agony he endured and despite his need to face death in a way that we will never have to, he faced it confidently. He accepted death as he gave up his life of his own accord (John 10:18). While we struggle with fears and weaknesses, we have the privilege to imitate our Savior as we face death. We remain more than conquerors through him who loved us.

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



EASTER *is the keystone*

Armin W. Schuetze

OF THE MANY FESTIVALS AND SEASONS CHRISTIANS OBSERVE, ONE OF THEM IS THE GREATEST!

All the festivals are great, very great. But of them all, the greatest is Easter.

An arch of religious festivals

Picture the festivals as forming a stone arch, with each festival as one of the stones in the arch. Rising on one side is Advent, then Christmas and Epiphany, Lent, and Holy Week with Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. On top is the keystone of the arch, Easter. The other side of the arch has Ascension Day, Pentecost, and the many Sundays after Pentecost.

What a marvelous arch! The stones are reminders of the major events in the life of the Lord Jesus, the Eternal Word Made Flesh. The arch as it stands complete tells us: "God has come to your rescue. He caused his eternally begotten Son to become incarnate, born of the virgin Mary. He lived a holy life, yet he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, died, and was buried. He rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven. He did this to purchase and win you from sin, death, and the power of the devil, that you might be his own, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally. Your salvation is com-

plete in Christ. You are declared righteous. You are an heir of heaven."

What a blessed experience for us each year to go from Christmas to Easter to Pentecost as we worship in our congregations. Every stone in the arch, every festival, reminds us of the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation that are ours through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The keystone of that arch

But the greatest of these festivals is Easter. Its message is astounding: "But God raised him from the dead" (Acts 13:30). Jesus' resurrection is the keystone in the arch. What happens when you remove the keystone? The arch falls, and all its stones become a heap of rubble.

But how can Easter be called the keystone? Did the church somehow make it that important? No, it is the keystone because God made it so. Remove Easter and the other festivals of the church year are useless and meaningless. St. Paul by inspiration wrote: "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. . . . Your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:14,17). The inspired Scriptures make Easter the keystone.

If Jesus' resurrection is just a myth, if it is not a historical event, if his body did

not truly come alive out of the grave, then Isaiah's prophecy of a virgin-born child who will be called "Mighty God . . . Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6) can't be true. Then the angel was lying in announcing to the shepherds that their Savior was born in the city of David. Then the words of the crucified and dying Jesus, "It is finished," referred only to his painful suffering and nothing more. "Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost" (1 Corinthians 15:18). Then any benefits received through Christ pertain only to this life and "if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men" (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Then all the preaching during the past two millennia announcing that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus has been and still is useless. "You are still in your sins." Then we may as well join those who say "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow

we die" (1 Corinthians 15:32). That's all there is without Easter.

"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:20). The women who went with spices for the dead Jesus on Easter morning can tell you. Angels said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!" (Luke 24:5,6). Thomas, who doubted,

REMOVE EASTER AND THE OTHER FESTIVALS OF THE CHURCH YEAR ARE USELESS AND MEANINGLESS.

can tell you. Peter, who denied Jesus, can tell you. The Twelve can tell you. More than five hundred who saw him at one time can tell you. James can tell you. They touched him. They ate with him. He spoke with them. And Saul, who persecuted the church, can tell you: "Last of all he appeared to me also" (1 Corinthians 15:8). All, eye-witnesses of Jesus' resurrection!

The message of the complete arch

As witnesses, what they had seen they passed on to the world, to us. Listen to Paul: "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3). According to the Scriptures the passion and death of Jesus and his resurrection belong together. You cannot have one without the other. "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:25). "Of first importance" is the message that the complete arch proclaims, with the keystone in its place. This is the message that these faithful witnesses still pass on to us in their inspired writings. This is the message we too as God's people are commissioned to preach in all the world (Mark 16:15).

Be assured! It's true when Jesus says: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25,26). It's true when Jesus says: "Because I live, you also will live" (John 14:19). It's true when the risen Lord says: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of

the age" (Matthew 28:20). It's true when he tells you in the Lord's Supper: "This is my body, this is my blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Your ever-present, living Lord still invites: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). You can speak to him, pray to him, anytime, anywhere; he always listens; he always answers.

On Easter we celebrate a victory—our Savior's victory over sin, death, and hell. "Death has been swallowed up in victory. . . . Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:54,57). His victory over death is our victory. Like Stephen, the first martyr, we can say when our body fails: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). And to us too, our crucified and risen Lord will say: "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

"Jesus lives! The vict'ry's won! Death no longer can appall me.

Jesus lives! Death's reign is done! From the grave Christ will recall me.

Brighter scenes will then commence; This shall be my confidence" (*Christian Worship* 145:1).

Christmas! Good Friday! Easter! Ascension Day! Pentecost! They are all great. But the greatest of these is Easter.

Retired pastor/professor Armin Schuetze is a member at Trinity, Watertown, Wisconsin.



When we're teenagers, we're expected to make adult decisions without actually being an adult. In some cases, we make the right choices, like not to drink alcohol until we're 21. In other cases, we make the wrong choices, and the consequences can be severe.

In my case, a rash teenage decision could have cost me eternal life.

Falling away from the faith

I was raised in a Lutheran family and was faithful well into my mid-teens. As a child, it was easy to believe without question. I knew God loved me and that he would watch out for me. Without fail, I would be at Sunday school and later church almost every Sunday. With my entire family attending a Lutheran church, my beliefs were solidified. I felt that I could never stray from the Lord.

Growing up, I was teased quite a bit by my classmates for my faith and for other reasons, but I never had a single twinge of doubt. As I

entered my junior year of high school, that changed. The

teasing got meaner. People who used to be friendly to me turned cold. Most disturbing to me was the fact that people I saw who sinned quite openly seemed to get all the breaks, while I struggled to keep my head above water.

I became much like my biblical namesake and started to question what I had accepted so easily in my youth. For as much as I learned about God in church and Sunday school, I had never considered why I believed. When faced with the teasing and general disdain my classmates seemed to have for me, I couldn't reconcile what I had learned with what I thought God was doing. In my 16-year-old mind, it appeared to me that God had turned his back on me. So I turned my back on him, and I didn't look back.

Entering college, I kept my self-imposed exile. For a while, I dabbled in atheism and agnosticism, thinking I was "too smart" to believe in God. My complete lack of faith came to fruition during a public debate my college held about the existence of God. During the question and answer period, I rattled off a logic problem I had read in a magazine designed to show that God wasn't nearly as caring as we were led to believe. When the gentleman

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.

Thomas Lindeman

arguing in favor of God's existence didn't come up with a suitable answer, I was proud that I'd justified my lack of faith.

Rediscovering my spiritual home

After college, God never really entered into my equation. But my friend Pat really got me to reconsider my position on God. She encouraged me to seek out my own path. Our discussions about God and faith opened my eyes and heart somewhat, but I was filled with a great guilt over what I'd done in my youth. This guilt built yet another wall between God and me. The wall was difficult to scale. I felt I could never earn his love because of my sinful nature and past.

Then God broke down the last of the barriers. It was the Friday after Thanksgiving three years ago when I heard about a horrible situation involving a crowd pushing down a pregnant woman and then trampling a young woman who tried to protect the pregnant woman from being injured. I went into a deep depression. My mind simply could not wrap itself around the situation, so I asked others what they felt I should do. Their sentiments of "get over it" offered no solace.

Then I was inspired to pray. Folding my hands as I had done so many times before, I asked God for help. This time I prayed with a heart opened like it was in my youth. As I quietly prayed aloud, I felt as if I had begun a journey home. I remembered the love and forgiveness God promised, and I felt my burden lift. After 20 years, my self-imposed exile was over, and I was with him again.

The next step was to find a church that I felt comfortable with. I looked for Lutheran churches first out of a sense of familiarity. I figured the doctrine wouldn't be too far from what



Thomas Lindeman.

I'd learned, so I already had a small foothold on the subject matter. I drove by a Lutheran church every night coming home from work. I decided to try attending, but it didn't turn out as well as I'd hoped. I tried one more. I went to a WELS church. As soon as I walked in, I was greeted by the organist, Harriet, as though I'd been going there for years. A few minutes later, I met the pastor and talked with him briefly—not as an outsider, but as a potential new member of the congregation. As I sat down, more people noticed me and took the time to extend a hand of friendship. It was that Sunday that I found my spiritual home, both on earth and in heaven.

Fanning the flame into a fire

For someone with an inquiring mind, WELS is a perfect fit. WELS provides a great learning experience to its members, one that appeals to the intellectual and the spiritual. After so long, I finally understood why I believed. That helped me grow as a Lutheran. Today I understand Christ's sacrifice to save me from myself in a

way I'd never considered before. The greatest lesson I learned from WELS and my own experience is that even the smallest flicker of faith can grow into an unquenchable fire if given a chance.

I've grown to be much more active. I am a substitute teacher for our adult Bible study classes when our pastor is unable to lead the class. Our discussions are always lively and full of fun and education. Leading this class has broadened my spiritual understanding immensely and has given me more confidence in my ability to be a leader in the church.

As part of my spiritual homecoming, I made a promise to try to help pre-teens, teenagers, and college students avoid the pitfalls

I encountered. I am working to start a youth group and also help with the fourth- through eighth-graders at a midweek church program where adults and children can have a good meal and great fellowship while learning about God. If I can help even one of them stay away from the path I took, I will have fulfilled God's purpose for me.

Twenty years ago, I made a big mistake turning my back on God's infinite, unfailing love. During that time, I was like Saul, the persecutor of Christians. I believed I knew all the answers and didn't need to listen to God. But also like Saul, I realized the folly of such thinking and was reborn in the light of the one true God. The old me is dead, as he should be, and the new me is here to stay!

Thomas Lindeman is a member at Lincoln Heights, Des Moines, 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.

Where did it come from?

James J. Westendorf

We sometimes don't have answers to significant questions. We simply trust what we are told.

You are sitting at the table during the wedding reception looking at your cup of wine. It is good wine, some of the best you have ever tasted. Then the person sitting next to you asks, "Where did this wine come from? I thought they ran out of wine."

Wine, creation, God's power

The answer seems so obvious, doesn't it? Like all wine it must have a vineyard and grapes in its past. Then there must have been a skilled winemaker who made it into such good wine. Why are those the correct answers to where this wine came from? Simple. That is how wine comes into being.

And did they run out of wine? Well, you just don't have enough information to answer. Maybe the host didn't really run out of wine. Or maybe somebody delivered more while nobody was paying attention, and suddenly there was wine to be served. Something like that has to be the right answer. That's the only way wine can get to a wedding reception.

These are all good answers to your neighbor's inquiry, but they are all wrong. The only thing in this wine's history is water poured into large jars and the amazing divine power of Jesus of Nazareth. There is no vineyard, no grapes, no winemaker, no wine distributor in Cana of Galilee—just Jesus. Now there is nothing distinctive about the wine, except that it is of the highest quality. If you could put it under the microscope and study it scientifically, you no doubt would notice nothing unusual. So how can you possibly know the true answer to a question about this wine's origin? The answer is: you can't. There is no way of knowing unless somebody saw what happened, and that witness told you, "Jesus turned this water into wine. I saw it happen."

I have always thought that it is interesting that John ends this account in the second chapter of his gospel with the words, "... his disciples put their faith in him." Isn't that strange? Word must have gotten around to everybody at the wedding about what happened, but only his disciples, those who already followed him in faith, put their faith in him. Other guests at the wedding must have looked for natural explanations of what took place. They would have speculated. Whatever it was, there had to be a rational explanation. Only the disciples believed that Jesus had made wine with his miraculous power.



Impossible questions asked

The application of this event from Jesus' ministry to our topic of the Christian and science is clear. We find ourselves looking at the universe around us. It is an amazing place. Where did it come from, and why, and how? The natural reaction to these questions is to say that there must be some natural chain of events that brought it about. Of course, that is where our problem becomes more complex than the one at Cana. We know how and why wine is made. We don't know how universes such as the one we live in can be made naturally. We can't even prove that it is possible that such a universe such as ours can begin naturally. Is it possible for planets to coalesce out of space dust? It is impossible to prove that life of any kind can come by natural processes out of inanimate material. Nobody can show that one species of plant or animal can develop from another unrelated one. The questions abound. So do the theories. Yet none are satisfactory. Still the search goes on.

"We just don't know enough yet," the evolutionary scientist insists. "When we do, the answer will be obvious." Why is the rationalist so certain that evolution or something similar is the answer? It is because like the wine there just has to be a natural history behind what we see and experience in our universe. Every effect—like the universe—has to have a natural cause that preceded it. This is a basic presupposition of scientific study.

Now the questions really begin to flow! If the source of the universe is a cosmic egg that exploded the way the big bang theory alleges, where did the egg come from and why did it explode? And what came before that? Some scientists theorize that space is curved like the surface of a ball. You can walk on the surface of a ball like the earth and never come to an end. Fine! But every ball takes up space in a room. How big is the cosmic room? Does it have limits? It is impossible to imagine something that has no limits. And what lies beyond that? Then what about time? Does it have no beginning? That too is impossible to accept. The whole concept of space, time, material, and energy are impossible to get our minds around. Finally, our theories make things so big, or so small, or so old that in frustration we quit asking questions.

Impossible questions answered

Do you see what huge and absolutely impossible questions the first verse of the Bible answers? "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This statement may not satisfy our logic. I still cannot comprehend all that this sentence implies, but I can believe it. Thank God, I do, and so do you. Wonder of wonders that the eternal God for whose existence there are no causes created time, the universe, and the space that contains it. He created all of that out of nothing but his almighty Word. How do we know? The only Being who was present at the moment, the Creator himself, has told us. Otherwise, we would never know. Human science, whether it is conducted by evolutionists or creationists, can never arrive at the true answer of how the universe originated.

Only divine revelation in God's Word will accomplish that task.

The Bible also tells us why the universe exists. God created it out of an incomprehensible love for the crown of his creation, the human race. He created the universe with an appearance of age. He had to; otherwise human beings could not have survived.

That is what he wanted, a place for those creatures on whom he was going to pour the fullness of his grace and loving care. His love was so great that he even had the salvation of mankind all planned out before he began to create the place where his creatures would live. St. Paul says, "For he chose us in [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Ephesians 1:4).

What more can anyone say expect to praise God as Paul did:

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

'Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?'

'Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?'

For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen" (Romans 11:33-36).

James Westendorf, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Calvary, Thiensville.

HUMAN
SCIENCE . . . CAN
NEVER ARRIVE AT
THE TRUE ANSWER OF
HOW THE UNIVERSE
ORIGINATED. ONLY
DIVINE REVELATION IN
GOD'S WORD WILL
ACCOMPLISH
THAT TASK.



ONLY NATU GOD ABOVE NA

SCIENCE IS NOT THE ONLY WAY TO KNOW. THAT IS A
OUT GOD, SCRIPTURE, THE NATURAL LAW IN US, AND

Whenever we think, we make assumptions. Taking things for granted allows us to move on as we deal with life. But when the results of different thoughts cause dissonance, as in humor or with evolution, it is vital to uncover and question the assumptions.

When modern science began in 16th-century Christian Europe, the basic assumptions were shared. Scientists saw their investigations as trying to figure out how God had designed his marvelous works. Today, science and theology have different assumptions. Science is limited to natural causes, and theology is accused of having a “blind faith.”

But Lutherans have never advocated anti-intellectualism. Since the Reformation, comprehensive schools and colleges have been founded. Reason is viewed as a gift of God that makes us human. On the other hand, while believing that, Luther warned against allowing reasoning to overrule clear Scripture. Dr. Siegbert Becker’s finest work, *The Foolishness of God*, covers this subject.

THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN SCIENCE

Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), British mathematician and philosopher, actually credited Christianity with providing the very foundation for modern scientific investigation by teaching that God was orderly and had established a lawful nature with dependable causes and effects. Another assumption was that humans could then discover these laws.

During Reformation times Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543), a Catholic, determined that the motion of the planets was better described as being centered around the sun, not the Earth. In 1539 Philipp Melanchthon, “Germany’s Teacher” and Luther’s good friend, arranged that a Wittenberg mathematician, Georg Joachim Rheticus, should study under Copernicus.

Rheticus studied for two years and wrote *Narratio Prima*, a first report of Copernicus’ theory. On his return to the Lutheran university at Wittenberg, Rheticus saw

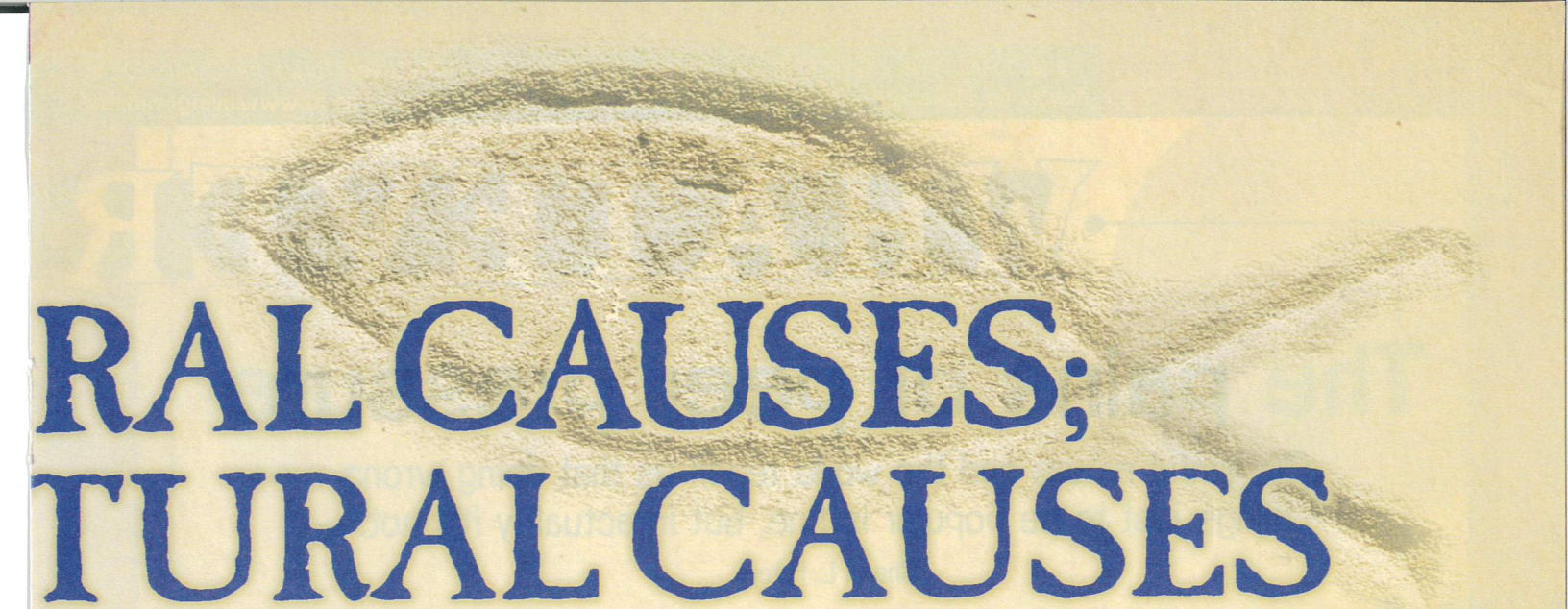
the theory enjoy a favorable reception and urged his mentor to publish. Copernicus was encouraged and sent his *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* to the Lutherans with permission to publish.

Apparently Luther informally commented on Copernican theory, and a guest recorded it (*Table Talk*). While the attribution is questionable, our reformer seemingly quipped that scientists like to take a thing and stand it on its head. Some have taken this as being merely negative toward new science, but it is actually very perceptive. Placing the sun in the center of our planetary system was just that type of science. With different assumptions the facts *can* be fit to a different theory. If Luther had been truly bothered, he could have stopped the teaching of Copernican theory at Wittenberg, but he did not.

Johann Kepler (1571–1630), who prepared for the Lutheran ministry but accepted an assignment to teach mathematics, followed the Copernican model. In the spirit of the shared assumptions he would burst into praise for the Creator as he speculated about the spacing of the planets around the sun.

A Catholic contemporary, Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) is often used as an example of a fundamental conflict between “objective science” and a “blind church.” Galileo also embraced Copernicus. However, many in the church held to the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic model of an unmoving Earth. This fit well with common perception and a literal interpretation of Joshua 10:12–14 where the sun stood still at Gibeon. So Galileo ran into resistance, but the affair was not so much the church against science as it represented a problem with embedding any science within the church.

Interestingly, and for our benefit, Augustine (354–430) had warned the church against using scientific arguments that would support Scripture lest the science would be disproven and then faith would be damaged. In *The Literal Interpretation of Genesis* he wrote, “It is too disgraceful



NATURAL CAUSES; NATURAL CAUSES

NARROW VIEW OF LIFE THAT BY ASSUMPTION RULES
WHAT NATURE TRULY DECLARES TO US. Paul R. Boehlke

and ruinous . . . that he [the non-Christian] should hear a Christian speaking so idiotically on [science], and as if in accord with Christian writings, that he might say that he could scarcely keep from laughing when he saw how totally in error [the Christian was].”

In the Galileo affair, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church had failed to heed Augustine’s warning that human understanding is fragile. We trust that nature follows laws but must add in humility that we have limited vision of them. So our science changes.

PRESERVATION LOST

England’s Isaac Newton (1642–1727) steered scientific explanation toward natural causes. Newton saw creation as guided by natural laws with very rare interventions by God. This mechanical view of nature placed God at a distance. Newton’s view encouraged Deism, the problem that Darwin had, where God was active only at the beginning and has left us to deal with the way things are as best we can. But an unconcerned “god at a distance” is not the God we know from the Scriptures.

Science is right to be limited to the study of natural causes. However, if some assume that natural causes are all that exist, they are operating with a different worldview that even many scientists reject. God is not bound by nature; he is above it. He is active in everything.

Might not God cause a scientist to notice something previously missed because it is his will that a discovery should be made? Moreover, if a terrible cancer goes unexpectedly into remission, one can suggest that there must be a natural cause—such as perhaps the immune system was able to overcome it. We know, however, that God uses natural causes for his purposes. If he wishes, God can also make nature bend to his will.

When someone says that a matter has been explained without God, this does not disprove God’s existence or his providence. Consider that science is first limited to the study

of natural causes and so will discover or invent natural causes. But there is more to reality than science can study. Science is not the only way to know. That is a very narrow view of life that by assumption rules out God, Scripture, the natural law in us, and what nature truly declares to us.

Assuming first that there are only natural causes led Darwin to look for a natural mechanism to explain the various species. Some prod us to look at evolution now. Here we need to note that many think that Christians do not believe in any changes. However, we have no theological objections to the microevolution that is observed within populations of creatures. For examples, Christians do not question the development of resistant strains of bacteria or that a population of *Daphnia* (water fleas) by natural selection would produce more individuals with defensive spikes if predators are present.

However, to extrapolate natural selection to the beginning of life and to claim that it is the cause of our origin is another matter. Operating with the false assumption of philosophical naturalism can allow one to build a logical “just-so” story that is reasonable but false.

Some objectors dwell on unsolved problems to attack Darwinism. For example, a biochemist, Michael Behe, has said that “irreducible complexity” in the cascading chemical reactions of blood clotting points to a supernatural designer and falsifies Darwin. The reply from opponents, however, is that in time we will see how natural causes could have accomplished this. To this we must again say, “What are you assuming? You are begging the question.” More than looking for more gaps in evolutionary conclusions, we need to look at the assumptions that guide this thinking.

Paul Boehlke, a member at Salem (East Side), Milwaukee, Wisconsin, teaches biology at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee.

This is the third article in a four-part series on creation and evolution.

WHATEVER

The pains of peer pressure

Our sinful nature and the world teach us that doing wrong things just to be popular is fine, but in actuality it's not.

Cheryl L. Peters

You look at the plastic cup of beer being offered to you. Should you accept it? You were taught by your parents, pastor, and teachers that underage drinking is a sin, yet you still really want that evil red cup full of poison.

Your "friends" push the cup into your hand. "It's not like one little beer is going to hurt you," they say.

Now you are having an internal struggle. You will look cool if you just drank it. One beer can't hurt, and who will know? Your stomach clenches. Maybe your parents won't find out . . . but Jesus will know. You try to give the cup back.

"Don't be such a pansy," they tell you.

Now you don't want your friends to think that you are a pansy. What if everyone will think that? Jesus will always forgive you, right? Yeah. You take the beer and drink it.

How many times have you been in a similar situation? Maybe it wasn't drinking. Maybe it was being talked into letting someone cheat off your test. Maybe it was when your friends got you to shop-lift, use drugs, or just break some of the rules.

Peer pressure is hard to deal with because it comes from our friends and others that are just like us. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (Matthew 26:41). Our sinful nature and the world teach us that doing wrong things just to be popular is fine, but in actuality it's not.

You may be asking yourself, "What should I do?" There is one thing that you can do: look to Jesus. He is always going to be there for you. He will help you through all the challenges that you face. He will be

there to guide you through the rough patches in life. "He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber" (Psalm 121:3).

Easier said than done, right? Well, I have experienced my fair share of peer pressure, and nothing good has ever come out of it. I have had my struggles, and I thought that people wouldn't like me if I didn't do what they told me to do. But I was wrong. After I asked Jesus to help me and sought advice from my parents, I was able to overcome peer pressure, *and* I still have friends.

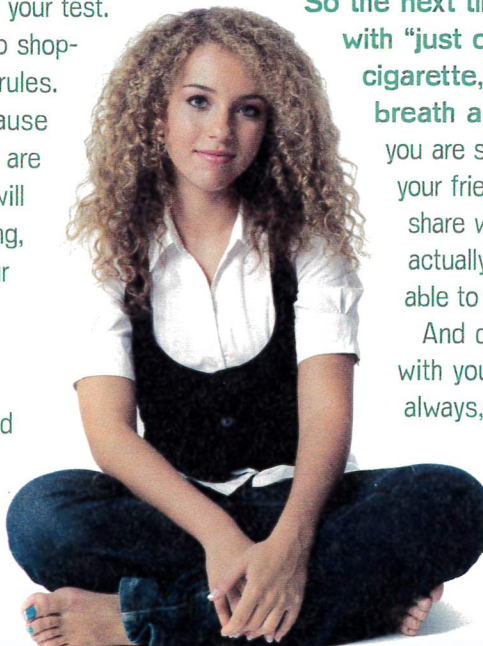
Remember the devil is always trying to make you fail, but you can pray for help. "Lead us not into temptation" (Matthew 6:13). You can say no peer pressure. You can do the right thing. If someone doesn't like you for not giving into peer pressure, there is a good chance that they don't have your best interests in mind. And by not giving in you are setting a good example for others and giving them the confidence to stand up to peer pressure.

So the next time you are tempted with "just one beer" or "just one cigarette," take a deep mental breath and plunge in. Say no. If

you are still skeptical about losing your friends, I have a little secret to share with you: your friends will actually look up to you for being able to resist peer pressure.

And don't worry. Jesus will be with you. "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Cheryl Peters, a sophomore at Goodhue High School, Goodhue, Minnesota, is a member at St. John, Goodhue.



Obituaries

Loretta N. Matthews 1920–2009

Loretta (Lutz) Matthews was born Dec. 31, 1920, in Mauston, Wis. She died Jan. 11, 2009, in Marshfield, Wis.

After attending Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at St. Paul, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis.

She is preceded in death by her husband, Donald; one brother; and two sisters.

She is survived by three sons; one daughter; nine grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

James L. Vogt 1918–2009

James Vogt was born July 5, 1918, in Vassar, Mich. He died Jan. 13, 2009, in Bradenton, Fla.

A 1943 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Mt. Olive, Bay City, Mich., and Peace, Bradenton, Fla.

He is survived by his wife, Frieda; three sons; one daughter; nine grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren.

Martin Carl Birkholz 1916–2009

Martin Birkholz was born Aug. 12, 1916, in Roscoe, S.D. He died Jan. 21, 2009.

A 1941 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.; he served at St. Mark, Mankato, Minn.

He is preceded in death by his wife, Lila; two brothers; and one sister.

He is survived by 2 sons; 8 grandchildren; 17 great-grandchildren; 1 brother; and 2 sisters.

John Weaver-Hudson 1958–2009

John Weaver-Hudson was born Aug. 10, 1958, in Detroit, Mich. He died Jan. 27, 2009, in Hartford, Mich.

After being accepted by colloquy into the Wisconsin Synod, he served Hope, Hartford, Mich.

He is survived by his parents.

Daniel Lee Sabrowsky 1937–2009

Daniel Sabrowsky was born Apr. 20, 1937, in Cleveland, Ohio. He died Jan. 29, 2009, in Federal Way, Wash.

A 1962 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served congregations in Illinois, California, Wisconsin, Washington, and Australia (ELS).

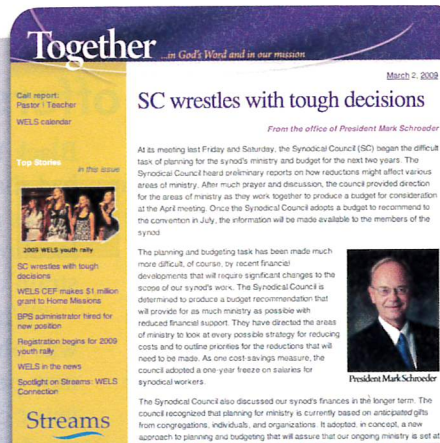
He is survived by his wife, Georgene; two sons; one daughter; and five grandchildren.

Marcella A. Wagenknecht 1938–2009

Marcella (Riemer) Wagenknecht was born Dec. 8, 1938. She died Feb. 1, 2009, in Sun City, Ariz.

She taught at Cullman, Ala.; Huntsville, Ala.; and Immanuel, Fort Worth, Texas.

She is survived by her husband, Myrl; three sons; and six grandchildren.



Find out what more than 3,100 subscribers already know:

WHAT'S GOING ON IN WELS.

Through the "Together" e-newsletter, people are staying informed and connected to the work we do as a synod.

Subscribe today to have biweekly news delivered to your e-mail.

**BONUS
ISSUES**

Subscribe now and receive daily issues of "Together" during the synod convention.

<http://together.wels.net>

through my Bible
IN 3 YEARS



05/2009

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Deuteronomy 14, 15 | 17. Mk. 11:1-19 |
| 2. Dt. 16, 17 | 18. Mk. 11:20-33 |
| 3. Dt. 18, 19 | 19. Mk. 12:1-27 |
| 4. Dt. 20, 21 | 20. Mk. 12:28-44 |
| 5. Dt. 22, 23 | 21. Mk. 13:1-23 |
| 6. Dt. 24, 25 | 22. Mk. 13:24-37 |
| 7. Dt. 26 | 23. Mk. 14:1-25 |
| 8. Dt. 27:1-28:14 | 24. Mk. 14:26-52 |
| 9. Dt. 28:15-68 | 25. Mk. 14:53-72 |
| 10. Dt. 29, 30 | 26. Mk. 15:1-21 |
| 11. Dt. 31 | 27. Mk. 15:22-41 |
| 12. Dt. 32:1-47 | 28. Mk. 15:42-16:8 |
| 13. Dt. 32:48-34:12 | 29. Mk. 16:9-20 |
| 14. Mark 10:1-16 | 30. Judges 1:1-2:5 |
| 15. Mk. 10:17-31 | 31. Jdg. 2:6-3:6 |
| 16. Mk. 10:32-52 | |

Dual-site ministry offers new opportunities for outreach—

Just four miles apart in the unincorporated community of Cataract, Wis., two WELS congregations had dwelt since their foundings in 1896 and 1920. In 2007, the two congregations merged and began holding worship services in a new community 15 miles north—Black River Falls. And so the dual-site congregation of Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church was formed.

“There are over twenty dual-site congregations in WELS,” shares Pastor Wayne Schulz, a mission counselor for the Board for Home Missions. “A dual-site is one congregation, one board, one treasury, and one staff serving at two locations. While each situation is unique, most have the goal of reaching more people with the good news of Jesus without abandoning the area of the mother congregation.”

In the case of Cataract, both congregations had been facing challenges. “St. Paul’s averaged 25 people in worship and was struggling with an aging and declining membership due to the fading out of the family farm,” explains Pastor Nathan Berg, who has served the two congregations since 2004.

Although Peace didn’t have the same issue—they had a core group of members who were driving 15 miles from their homes in Black River Falls—both congregations were facing the challenge of how to do outreach. “It’s very hard to convince someone to visit a church in the middle of the country, 15 miles from where they live, when there are numerous churches right in town,” Berg shares.

The idea to merge picked up steam when Peace passed a motion to actively look into starting a worship service in

Black River Falls. Peace and St. Paul had shared a pastor since 1923, and it was agreed that worship at three locations would be too much of a strain on their pastor’s time.

“While the benefit of the merger was obvious—being able to reach new people that would likely have never come because of the distance—the drawback was that two congregations with long histories were going to have to change what they had always known,” Berg reflects.

The process of merging didn’t happen overnight. First each congregation voted on the merge individually. Then

viously untapped area with the truth of God’s Word,” Berg says.

A town of about 5,000, Black River Falls offers the potential for growth. Add to that the fact that it lies midway along an 80-mile stretch where no WELS churches previously existed, and you’ll see why WELS Board for Home Missions also had its eye on the town as a promising mission site. “Ironically, the day after we decided to seriously look at Black River Falls, Home Missions contacted us about the same prospect,” Berg recalls.

Faith has undertaken different events to encourage outreach: friendship Sundays, canvassing the city, fair booths, a potential church-sponsored community concert, and even a social group that organizes events for adults in the community. “In reality, it’s hard to be truly ‘one’ when we are separated by such distance,” Berg shares. “And yet, we have a fellowship through Christ that is evident in how each place supports the other that we didn’t have as two separate and distinct congregations.” As members of Faith look to the future, they hope to have a permanent worship facility—they worship in a high school library now—and possibly an early child-

hood education program in Black River Falls as well as a thriving ministry in their current facility in Cataract.

“At a time of budgetary shortfalls in WELS, traditional new starts may be few,” Schulz recognizes. “But Home Missions encourages congregations to brainstorm on how to bring the good news of Jesus to more people in their regions. A dual-site parish may be an excellent way to accomplish this goal.”



A group of members from Faith, a dual-site congregation in Cataract and Black River Falls, Wis., and members from neighboring congregations gathered in summer 2007 to canvass in Black River Falls.

a joint constitution was formed and approved. The name was changed to reflect the new group—Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Berg says that some members still had misgivings and asked questions like, Why couldn’t people drive to Cataract where there is already a church? Why is it okay to “close” one church just to open another? “On the other hand, many people saw this as a wonderful opportunity to do something that many congregations never get to do—reach out to a pre-

Scriptures come alive in Holy Land tour

Real places. Real people. Real history. In January, a group of students from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS), Mequon, Wis., traveled to the Holy Land and were reminded that biblical revelation and the Christian faith are not mere philosophy or ideology. They are truths based on historical realities.

Now the sites and cities that served as Jesus' classroom during his earthly ministry served as classrooms for the 31 students who went on the trip.

This overseas study tour was the first of its kind sponsored by WLS as part of its Winterim, a two-week January session that provides students with opportunities for additional work in areas of personal interest or in subjects that are not normally part of the seminary curriculum. The seminary has conducted Winterim classes since 2004. Other off-campus opportunities include a Spanish immersion program in Mexico and urban outreach (ethnographic surveying in a home mission field).

The tour itinerary included stops at numerous locations, including Capernaum, Nazareth, Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives, and Bethlehem. Knowledgeable local guides accompanied the group and shared information about the historical and biblical significance of each site. In addition to the historical information offered at each stop, 21 devotional presentations linked Old and New Testament Scripture accounts to various sites beginning at Mt. Nebo where God showed Moses the Promised Land.

Accompanied by Professors Forrest Bivens and Daniel Leyrer, the students were required to fulfill coursework

prior to the 11-day tour and complete a media project following their return.

Walking on the paths trod by our Savior was not an exercise in mere sightseeing. Leyrer, who teaches pastoral theology and New Testament courses, is certain the tour was a great benefit to his students: "I was excited for my students on this trip. They study the Bible intensely in their seminary training, and this was an opportunity for that study to 'come alive.'"

Students were not the only ones who experienced such growth in the Word. "I was also excited for myself," says Leyrer. "This experience will allow me to teach the New Testament accounts of Christ and the apostles with more color. To walk the Sea of Galilee's shores and travel on her waters deepen your understanding of Jesus' walking on the water (Matthew 14:22-33) and his post-resurrection breakfast with the disciples (John 21:1-14)."

To men preparing for their own public ministries the opportunity was invaluable. Senior Kelly Huet is thankful for the "instant mental images" that now bring Scripture even more to life for him. "Now, when I read about events at places like the Jordan River, Bethany, Capernaum, and Caesarea my understanding is broadened because I can better understand the topography of the landscape, as well as the cultures and the languages. I know that this experience will help me to teach, preach, and share the message of Christ in a more vivid way."

Sarah Malchow

Court upholds ruling in favor of WELS high school

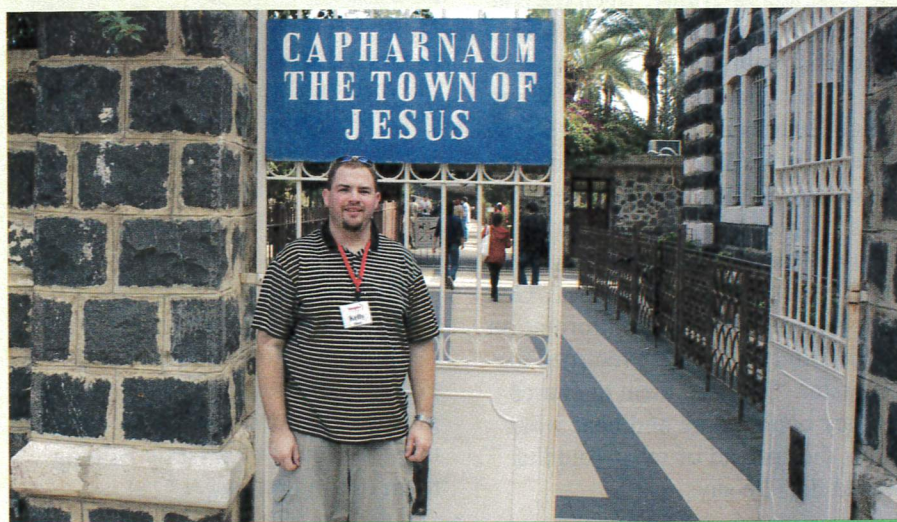
An appellate court ruled in favor of California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, Calif., in an antidiscrimination lawsuit in February.

In 2005, the school expelled two students for engaging in conduct characteristic of a lesbian relationship, in violation of the school's Christian Code of Conduct. The parents of the two girls sued, claiming discrimination based on sexual orientation.

The Fourth District Court of Appeal in San Bernardino ruled that California Lutheran High School—operated by an association of WELS and Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) congregations—is a social organization entitled to follow its own principles, not a business subject to state antidiscrimination laws. The ruling upholds a 2008 lower court ruling.

"Our prayers continue to be with California Lutheran High School as it defends our right to practice our faith and follow our beliefs," says Mark Schroeder, WELS president. "WELS has clearly stated that we hold to the biblical teaching that homosexual practices are wrong and not in keeping with God's Word. We have taken that position in love—both for God's Word and God's truth, as well as for those who have fallen into the sin of homosexuality.

"While some in our society would view this stand as bigoted and unloving, we maintain that our beliefs are drawn from the teachings of the Bible," he says. "We also maintain that our goal is not merely to condemn sinful behavior, but to reach out to all sinners with God's call to repentance and his assurance of forgiveness in Christ."



Kelly Huet, a senior at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, in Capernaum. Thirty-one students from the seminary went on a Holy Land tour as part of their studies in January.

Storms strike up opportunities to witness

PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK



Northern Arkansas, 2008: An F2 tornado rips through the area in February. The spring months are filled with “flooding galore.” Late summer brings damaging winds from Hurricanes Ike and Gustav. After all of that, David Kapler, pastor at Trinity, Mountain Home, Ark., thought the region had gotten its fair share of severe weather.

Fast forward to Jan. 26, 2009. A storm system produces precipitation and freezing temperatures. Power lines and trees become coated with more than three inches of ice and eventually begin to snap. Hundreds of thousands are left without power. National media report several deaths in Arkansas and surrounding states because of the storm.

“Talking to local people who are in their 70s and 80s, they’ve never seen anything like it,” says Kapler. Thankfully, the members of Trinity were safe, and their homes and the church facilities were not damaged by the storm; but Kapler says almost everyone in the city was without electricity. “It was incredible,” he says. “We had people waiting in line at Home Depot and Lowe’s and anywhere they could find a generator. Truckloads were coming in.”

Kapler says there were many people in Mountain Home that couldn’t get generators, so he called WELS



Members of Trinity take a break from cleaning the yard of a community member. Pictured are: (l to r) Monroe Johnson, Robert Baser, and Pastor David Kapler.

Relief for help. WELS Relief sent \$2,500 and a trailer of relief supplies, making it possible for Trinity to loan out eight generators.

One of them went to a couple that Kapler found through the local radio station. They had arranged to pick up the generator at Trinity; when the couple pulled up, Kapler noticed some interesting bumper stickers on their car. “They had one that said, ‘What would Buddha do?’, another with the little Darwin fish, and my favorite: ‘Gods don’t kill people. People with gods kill people.’” Kapler says they didn’t discuss religion that day—but he did give the couple a booklet, “God Our Refuge,” and some information about Trinity when they returned the generator. “I invited them to church so they could come and hear what Jesus did instead of what Buddha would do,” he says.

Although it remains to be seen what impact, if any, that had on the couple, Kapler says it’s important to take advantages of opportunities to witness and show Christ’s love—and the members of Trinity have been doing just that. Armed with chainsaws, groups swept the neighborhood and asked residents if they needed help cleaning up their yards. The congregation also used some of the WELS Relief funds to help lower-income families purchase necessities like

food and gasoline for their generators.

“With the church, members, and neighbors to look after, it was hard to know where to start,” says Kapler. “But you don’t realize what a difference little things make, like saying, ‘Yeah you can run an extension cord out of our church to your house, and if you need a chainsaw or some help to clean up your yard, let us know.’”

Kapler says community members really appreciated what the members of Trinity did for them—and as a bonus they got to see Christian love in action.

“God wants us to be concerned about the physical needs, but especially the spiritual needs of other people,” says Kapler. “And God has given us this opportunity to show them the love of Christ by helping them out in both ways.”

Student intensifies training, broadens view in Wisconsin

The world is getting smaller for the students at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary—or maybe it's getting larger. Angus Au, a student from Asia Lutheran Seminary (ALS) in Hong Kong, is studying in Mequon this year.

Au joins two other international students—Manuel Drechsler from Germany and Luis Acosta from South America—at the seminary. Both Angus and Luis are studying through the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI), a program offering nontraditional students of various ethnic groups a flexible and innovative path of study that leads to pastoral ministry.

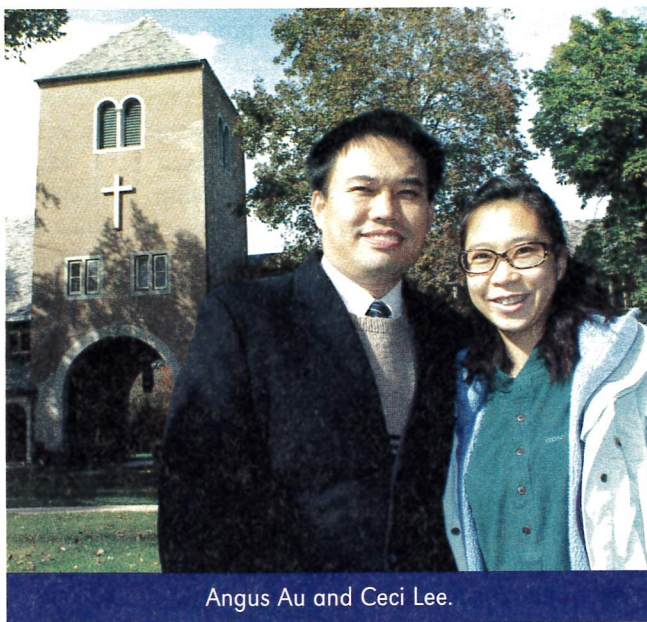
Angus had been attending classes part time at Asia Lutheran Seminary while serving as an evangelist at a church that is part of South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission (SALEM), WELS' sister synod in Hong Kong. His wife, Ceci Lee, was serving as an evangelist in a different SALEM congregation. Sickness—Angus had cancer, now in remission—and complications from a car accident plagued Angus and Ceci, making it difficult for them to maintain their ministries while Angus attended ALS.

Thanks to a grant from the Antioch Foundation, Angus and Ceci were invited to spend a year at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary where Angus is attending school full time to finish his master of divinity degree and Ceci is recovering from her nagging injuries. She is also auditing courses at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee. "God opened the door for me—for us—to be here," says Angus. "I feel very peaceful because God loves us and helps us."

This not only allows Angus to finish his degree more quickly but also offers him an opportunity to learn

more about confessional Lutheranism, study more extensively in the Bible's original languages, and broaden his worldview.

"Angus was touched by the Word as taught by our visiting professors [in Hong Kong]," says Dr. John Lawrenz, president of ALS. "At Mequon he gets a dose of confessional Lutheranism as practiced by more than a hundred young men all heading for a confessional Lutheran ministry."



Angus Au and Ceci Lee.

Angus is also able to dig deeper into the Bible through an extensive study of Greek. "Here I study from the original language of the Bible and I see what they say. It's very difficult to know in secondhand languages," says Angus. "In Hong Kong, we just know how to use the computer to check all the information of the original language. But the taste of the original language is very important."

While in the States, Angus and his wife are also able to meet and observe people in a different culture. This opens up new ways of looking at things, including how the nuclear family works. In Hong Kong, Angus says that both parents usually work and rely on the school or the Internet

to teach the children. Here he has seen something different. "In Hong Kong, we felt we had no choice. We never see a good model," says Angus. "At least here I see something good. We also have theological training—both of us—but we are not always talking about theology or these kind of things. Here we have . . . many opportunities to talk about it. It is really good for us."

Prof. E. Allen Sorum, director of the PSI, says he also wants Angus to experience a cultural commitment to the unconditional gospel. "We want him to be immersed in this institution-wide commitment to the gospel that no matter what . . . we have to endure or sacrifice for this precious gospel, we will do so willingly and joyfully," he says. "Angus is capable of producing that kind of unflinching commitment to the gospel even if there is in Hong Kong, perhaps, a cultural predisposition to make adjustments for the sake of harmony. We must not do that with the gospel."

Having international students on campus is also changing the worldview of the traditional students at the seminary.

"The ministry consumes you. You can lose that worldwide perspective so easily," says Sorum. "But when you have Luis who has a definite Latino accent and Angus who has a definite Chinese accent and Manuel who has a German accent, you have no option but to appreciate the breadth of this church that God has for us in Christ."

This is one of the reasons the PSI is working to have more exchanges of professors and students on an international level.

"When we have international students here among us, it will hopefully increase in us an appreciation for the debt we have to get this gospel out as fast as possible and as far as possible," says Sorum.

New director for ACTS

After a two-year vacancy, the Apache Christian Training School (ACTS), Whiteriver, Ariz., has a new director. Daniel Rautenberg, previously pastor at Open Bible, Whiteriver, accepted the call in January. According to Mr. Kirk Massey, director of the Native America mission, this is an important development for the ACTS program, which is an integral part of the field's goal to raise up national pastors and lay leaders.

"When I received the news that Pastor Rautenberg accepted the call, I was filled with joy," says Massey. "Now the school will be ready to take the next step."

The school started 12 years ago with four men enrolled. Two became evangelists and one went on to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon. Things seemed to be moving along in the ACTS program, which Massey says was a new concept for the Native American field. But then in December 2006 the director, Pastor Kirby Spevacek, was involved in a serious car accident. He retired a few months later.

While calls were being extended for a new director, two part-time ACTS professors, one vicar, and two recent ACTS graduates took on additional responsibilities—but Massey says without a full-time director, it was hard for the program to accomplish some of its goals, especially in the areas of recruitment

and preparing men for the ministry. "Now with Pastor Rautenberg on board, we can step forward with all of the stuff that was on hold," Massey says.

Right now, about 60 people are receiving training through ACTS. Although a few are enrolled in the preseminary program, most are taking leadership classes—one of which Massey teaches. "We're hoping that people take these classes and apply [what they learn] in their lives because they have more contact with other people than the average pastor would have in a week," he says. "We're hoping that we can continue to develop leaders who can go out there and work alongside the pastor."

And Massey says this is already happening throughout the Apache field. More laypeople are stepping up to help the five missionaries that serve the field's nine congregations; members are working to support their church's ministries financially; and the Apache Lutheran Council, made up of leaders from the Native American congregations, is helping set



Students at one of the three Lutheran elementary schools in the Native America mission field. These schools not only provide a Christian education, but also prepare students for service.

direction for the ministry. "One of the blessings is that God's Word is still being given to the people here," says Massey. "But we want more people to get involved in ministry."

Moving forward, Massey says Rautenberg will be working with pastors and congregational leaders to identify more candidates for the program. Efforts are also underway to bring the Apache Christian Training School in line with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's Pastoral Studies Institute, a program for nontraditional students, and the Congregational Assistant Program offered through Martin Luther College.

"Even if people don't go on to be pastors or evangelists, my hope is that they remain committed to Christ, on or off the reservation, and that they always lean on God," Massey says. "God will work through them."

In the news



The Feb. 8 issue of Wisconsin's *Fond du Lac Reporter* featured a story about a **survival deployment workshop** held in the area for military members and their families.

The workshop was presented by WELS Military Services.

The Jan. 31 issue of the *Herald-Tribune*, Sarasota, Fla., featured a story about the new worship facility to be constructed at **Risen Savior, Bradenton**—and how volunteers are helping out through WELS Kingdom Workers' Builders For Christ program.

In the article, Daniel Witte, pastor at Risen Savior, said he was looking forward to working with Builders For Christ—especially since he saw the group complete an addition to his father's church in 2003. "I saw how much fun they were having and how much it meant to the congregation—not just the building, but also the encouragement and the joy of all these Christians showing up to help."

An article about **Grace, Hutchinson, Minn.**, and its weekly Jesus Cares Ministry for persons with develop-

mental disabilities appeared in the Jan. 27 issue of the *Hutchinson Leader*.

An article in the Jan. 22 issue of Wisconsin's *Watertown Daily Times*, talked about the Watertown Area Chamber of Commerce and how its members learned about the roles and functions of **Luther Preparatory School, Watertown**.

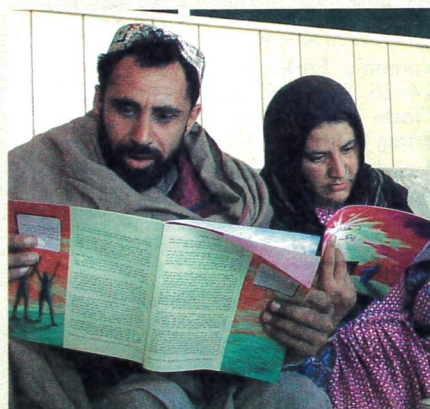
Rev. Roger Knepprath, pastor at St. Paul, Mankato, Minn., was quoted in *The Free Press* following the church's Christmas for Kids event, which drew a crowd of about 80 children.

Reaching souls with *The Promise*

“The man requested me to give him this booklet as this is the first time he came to learn about Jesus. His wife requested to give one booklet to her also. They told me that this was the first time they have seen so beautiful a booklet in their own language. Praise the Lord as the seed has been sown in their hearts.” This is just one of many joyful reports from a national worker in Pakistan who is helping distribute Christian literature in this Muslim country where WELS cannot have a resident missionary.

Since WELS began this outreach program three years ago, approximately 50,000 pieces of literature have been distributed in Pakistan. To help reach even more souls, WELS Multi-Language Publications printed its first materials earlier this year in Pashtu, a language spoken by an

estimated 13 percent of the country’s 160 million people. The piece is called *The Promise*—a booklet sharing basic biblical truths, which is currently printed in 38 languages worldwide.



Afghani refugees read *The Promise*—a booklet sharing basic biblical truths—that WELS Multi-Language Publications has just printed in Pashtu.

“We are in a seed-sowing ministry in Pakistan, and this is just another way to sow the seed of the gospel in areas where the Pashtu language is being spoken,” says Pastor Harold Essmann, coordinator for literature programs in Pakistan and Nepal.

Some copies of *The Promise* have already been sent to Peshawar, a tribal area of Pakistan near the Afghanistan border. Essmann says other versions of *The Promise*, such as the translation into Urdu (Pakistan’s official language), have already gotten into Afghanistan.

Although it remains to be seen what impact this new printing will have on WELS’ ministry in Pakistan, Essmann says, “We know that the printed word is powerful, and the Holy Spirit can move the hearts of people through it.”

WELS news briefs

WELS Church Extension Fund

866-511-7793; cef@sab.wels.net

WELS Church Extension Fund (CEF), which provides financing for mission-minded projects directed by the Board for Home Missions, now offers **Individual Retirement Accounts** (IRAs). “Now you can help build churches while you are building your retirement savings by investing in a WELS CEF Retirement Certificate,” says Tim Probst, vice president of marketing and development for CEF. All monies invested with CEF—whether in IRAs or traditional savings certificates—are used exclusively to provide financing to mission congregations. Find out more at www.welscef.org.

Conference of Presidents

414-256-3202; mark.schroeder@sab.wels.net

The **60th biennial convention** will be held July 27–31 at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich. The theme of this year’s convention is “Christ’s Love, Our Calling.” Two essays at the convention will expand on this theme and form the basis for two years of synodwide Bible studies in circuits, conferences, and congregations. For more information about the convention, check out the convention Web site, www.wels.net/convention, which will go live in early April.

In its January meeting, the Conference of Presidents (COP) discussed some of the new and different approaches and methods in the areas of worship, outreach, and congrega-

tional organization that some WELS congregations are considering. “In keeping with its role of supervising doctrine and practice, the Conference of Presidents is concerned that all decisions in these areas are made with a good understanding and application of clear biblical principles,” says WELS President Mark Schroeder, chairman of the COP.

Schroeder says when specific practices are not specifically commanded nor forbidden by Scripture and are matters of Christian freedom, the Conference of Presidents wants to be sure that as a synod we are asking the questions that the apostle Paul encouraged: Is this wise? Is this beneficial? Is this loving? “We value the freedom that God has given us in these areas,” he says. “Many things are matters of Christian freedom and are permissible. But that doesn’t end the discussion. That’s where the discussion really begins—when, as brothers and sisters in Christ, we ask those questions that Paul would have us ask.”

The Conference of Presidents has directed that a **committee be established to develop study and discussion materials** to guide congregations in understanding scriptural principles and in making all decisions in a way that benefits the spread of the gospel and the faith of WELS members.

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

CHANGES IN MINISTRY**Pastors**

Ehlers, Timothy J., to Messiah, South Windsor, Conn.

Finn, William A., to St. Paul, Dale, Wis.

Goelzer, Christopher, to St. Luke, Oakfield, Wis.

Hillmann, Joshua P., to Christ, Beatrice, Neb.

Riediger, Galen J., to Christ, West Salem, Wis.

Westphal, Erich W., to St. James, North Branch, Mich.

Zickuhr, John G., to Apostles of Christ, Wauwatosa, Wis.

Ziebell, William W., to Zion, Russell, Minn.

Teachers

Holper, Ryan P., to Grace, Kenai, Alaska

Strehlow, Catherine E., to St. Croix Lutheran High School, West Saint Paul, Minn.

Wangerin, Nancy L., to Siloah, Milwaukee, Wis.

ANNIVERSARIES

La Crosse, Wis.—First (150). Apr. 18. Martin Luther College Choir concert, 7 P.M. Apr. 19. Worship, 8 & 10:15 A.M.; meal at noon. RSVP by Apr. 5. 608-784-1050.

Appleton, Wis.—Riverview School (40). Apr. 26. Worship, 9:30 A.M.; reception and school tour to follow. RSVP by Apr. 1. 920-954-8106; sweihing@new.rr.com.

Newburg, Wis.—St. John (150). Apr. 26. Worship, 8 & 10:30 A.M.; presentation between services and meal following the second service. 262-675-6640.

Lansing, Mich.—Emanuel School (25). Worship, 8 & 10:30 A.M.; dinner following the second service. RSVP requested. Daniel Hosbach, 517-485-4547; principal@emanuelfirst.org.

Hayward, Wis.—Peace (25). May 17. Worship, 2:30 P.M.; light luncheon to follow. RSVP by Apr. 30. Emory Steinke, 715-634-8785.

Raymond, S.D.—Bethlehem (125). June 21. Worship, 10:45 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. 605-532-3766; pheasant@itctel.com.

Valentine, Neb.—Zion (75). July 18. Worship, 11 A.M. & 5 P.M.; meal following first service. Site, Cherry County Fairgrounds. July 19. Worship, 10 A.M. at Zion. Matt Krenke, mskrenke@hotmail.com.

COMING EVENTS

Camp Phillip events—Wautoma, Wis., 920-787-3202, office@campphillip.com. Web site, www.campphillip.com.

- Apr. 17–19. Woodcutting weekend.
- May 1–3. Work weekend.
- June 12–14. Family fest.
- June 14–Aug. 12. Summer youth programs. Theme: "The Corner-Stone Age."

2009 WELS Regional Handbell Festivals—Web site, www.wellsbells.com.

• Apr. 18–19. Concert, 2 P.M., Apr. 19. Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fond du Lac, Wis.

• Apr. 18–19. Concert, 2 P.M., Apr. 19. St. Croix Lutheran High School, West St. Paul, Minn.

• Apr. 25–26. Concert, 2 P.M., Apr. 26. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

2009 Staff Ministers Conference—Apr. 24–25. Grace, Falls Church, Va. Theme: "In God we trust." Jim Boggs, 636-978-6791. Web site, www.StaffMinistry.net.

Women's Enrichment Weekend—Apr. 24–26. Salem, Stillwater, Minn. Theme: "Taste and see that the Lord is good." Karen Diethert, diethert@sbcglobal.net.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse Awareness Retreat—Apr. 24–26. Byron Center, Brownsville, Wis. Sponsored by Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service. Elsa Manthey, 920-731-9798; emanthey@wlcfs.org.

The Lutheran Chorale of Milwaukee choral concert—May 3, 3 P.M., Trinity, Waukesha, Wis.; 7 P.M., St. John's, Wauwatosa, Wis. Mary Prange, mjprange@aol.com.

Lutheran Radio Committee annual meeting—May 4, 7 P.M. Fine Arts Building lecture hall, Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. Lois Brunner, 262-251-7159.

An evening for life—May 7, 6 P.M., Grace Center, Milwaukee, Wis. Sponsored by WELS Lutherans for Life-Milwaukee Chapter. Speakers: Dr. Anthony and Cecelia Levatino. RSVP requested by Apr. 25. 414-727-8176. Web site, www.wellsflmilw.com.

Commencement events

• **Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.**—May 15. Concert, 7:30 P.M. May 16. Graduation service, 10 A.M.; call day service and assignment of graduates, 2:30 P.M.

• **Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.**—May 19. Vicar assignment service, 7 P.M. May 21. Call day service and assignment of graduates, 10 A.M.; concert, 7 P.M. May 22. Graduation service, 10 A.M.

• **Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.**—May 22. Concert, 7 P.M. May 23. Graduation service, 10 A.M.

• **Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.**—May 22. Concert, 7 P.M. May 23. Graduation service, 10:30 A.M.

National Campus Ministry Retreat—May 18–21. Metropolis Hotel, Action City, and Florian Gardens, Eau Claire, Wis. Hosted by UW-Eau Claire. Theme: "Walk THIS Way." Web site, www.campusministryrally.com.

Women of WELS Retreat—May 29–31. Cannon Beach Christian Conference Center, Cannon Beach, Ore. Brenda Dowdery, 503-848-6761.

Northwestern Publishing House music reading workshops—Cheryl Nolte, 800-662-6093 ext. 5763, 414-615-5763; noltecl@nph.wels.net. Web site, www.nph.net/music/workshop.

• June 13, Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis.

• June 20, St. Paul, Appleton, Wis.

• June 27, Trinity, Bay City, Mich.

• July 11, St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn.

• July 12, St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis.

• Aug. 8, 9 A.M. Choral music only. NPH, Milwaukee, Wis.

Creation Museum in northern Kentucky tour—June 15–19. MLC, DMLC, and NWC alumni as well as current MLC students and members of OWLS are invited. Hosted by the Martin Luther College Alumni Association. Steve Balza, 507-217-1731. Web site, www.mlc-wels.edu/home/alumni.

Soul ride—June 20. Site, Salem (107th), Milwaukee, Wis. Sponsored by WELS Lutherans for Life-Milwaukee Chapter and WELS Riders. 414-727-8176, office@wellsflmilw.com. Web site, www.wellsflmilw.com.

46th annual LWMS convention—June 25–28. Sheraton Denver Hotel, Denver, Colo. Hosted by the Rocky Mountain Circuit. Theme: "Mission with an altitude." Web site, www.lwms.org.

2009 WELS International Youth Rally—July 8–11. Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. Theme: "Follow the path; lead the way." Web site, www.welsyouthrally.net.

MLC, DMLC, and NWC Reunion Weekend—July 24–26. Site, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Celebrating five-year incremental class reunion (2004, 1999 and all previous classes ending in four or nine). Steve Balza, 507-217-1731; alumni@mlc-wels.edu. Web site, www.mlc-wels.edu/home/alumni.

Prayer conference—Aug. 14–15. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Hosted by WELS Prayer Institute. Steve Witte, 920-499-7405. Reg Draheim, 920-497-1000.

NAMES WANTED

Pastors and missionaries traveling to Hawaii—guest quarters available free 30 minutes from the Kona International Airport on the island of Hawaii. Michiko Sato, 808 325-1035; lucymichiko@netscape.net.

Shepherd of the Lakes, Land O Lakes, Fla.—John Huebner, 813-401-9135; miscjohn@aol.com.

Fort Drum/Watertown, N.Y.—Jeremiah Gumm, 315-652-7951; pastor@nycrossofchrist.org.

Camp Shiloh Lutheran Retreat, Pittsburg, Tex.—Volunteer opportunity for maintenance couples. Wayne Fischer, 903-855-1800; director@campshilohretreat.org. Web site, http://campshilohretreat.org/.

Williston, N.D.—Dave Ruddat, 406-635-2180.

Sparks/Spanish Springs, Nev.—Steve Hillmer, 775-354-2800.

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

Picture this



Comfort from *God's Word*

When Su Hanson gives comforters to women struggling with cancer, she also shares comfort from God's Word. Here are some passages that you can share with those . . .

- **Who are fearful:** "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).
- **Who feel guilty:** "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:22).
- **Who need peace:** "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6,7).
- **Who are suffering:** "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9,10).
- **Who are discouraged:** "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD our God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).
- **Who are tired of the world's ways:** "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

After Su Hanson (large picture above) was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, a friend gave her a comforter. Whenever she was wrapped in it, she felt it was a tangible reminder that she is always wrapped in the love of God—her true Comforter.

She then started a ministry to comfort other women struggling with cancer. You'll find her story on page 30.

Su's witness through her cancer, however, didn't start with the beginning of this ministry. It started with her treatment. Because her surgery had gone so well and she didn't need chemotherapy or radiation, Su was a case study. She was set up on a five-year plan that included monthly check-ups. At that first appointment, her doctor was stunned that the cancer was all gone and said, "This is unbelievable. This is just so wonderful. There is a God."

Without thinking, Su replied, "And there would be a God even if it didn't turn out this way."

The doctor looked surprised at Su's reaction. "I remember thinking, 'That's a pretty worldly way to look at it, that there's a God only if things are good,'" she says. "There's a God even if things don't go well. He would have provided strength to get through it."

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

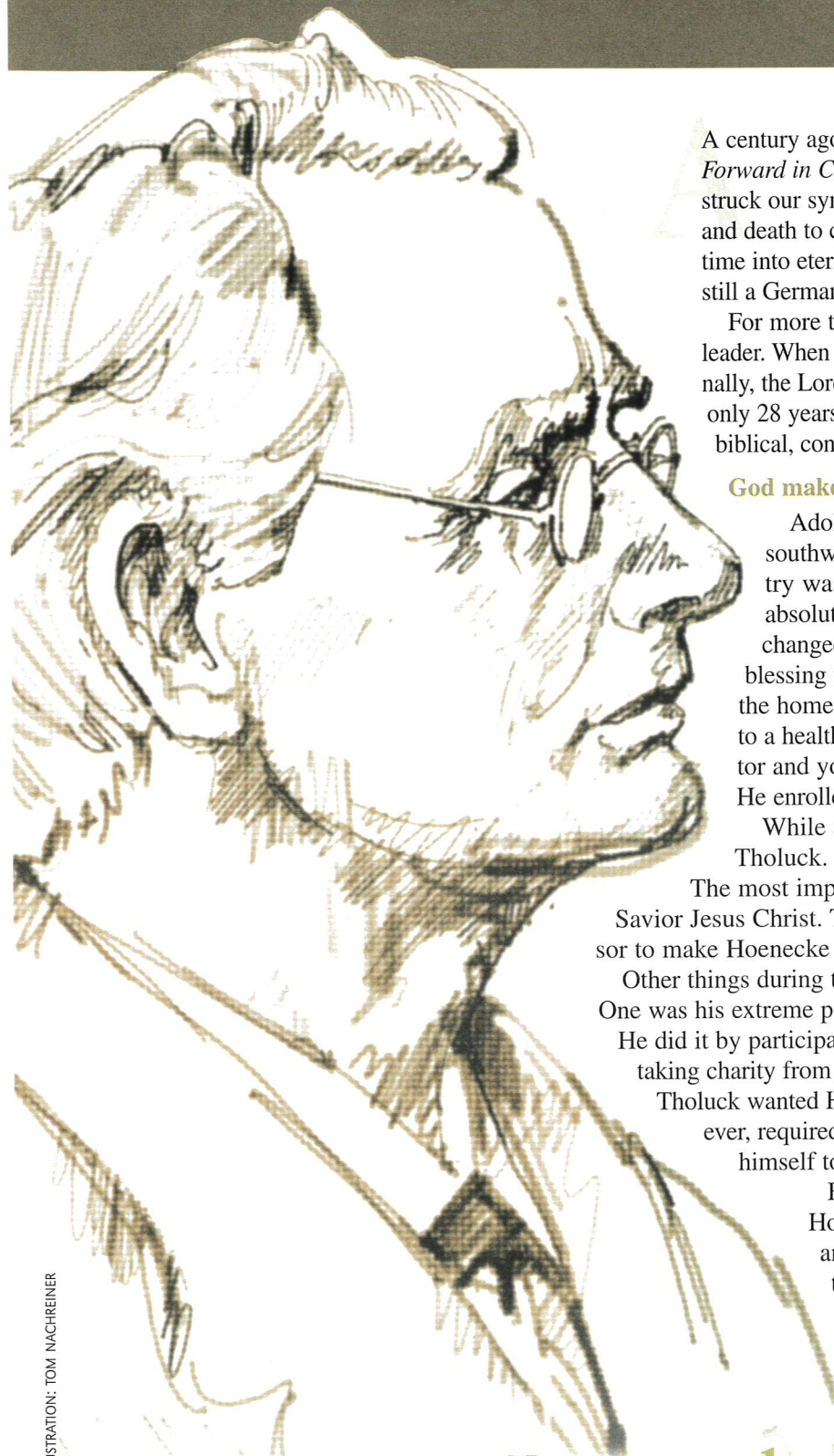


ILLUSTRATION: TOM NACHREINER

A century ago, the readers of the *Gemeindeblatt*, the first version of *Forward in Christ*, received the following news, "A heavy blow has struck our synod. After a short illness, it has pleased the Lord of life and death to call our dear, longtime Professor, Dr. A. Hoenecke, from time into eternity." Of course, it was in German. At the time we were still a German-speaking church body.

For more than 40 years, Dr. Hoenecke was our synod's spiritual leader. When the synod was only 13 years old and still drifting doctrinally, the Lord of the church sent us a theologian. At the time he was only 28 years old, but through his work our synod found its way to biblical, confessional Lutheranism.

God makes Hoenecke a Christian theologian

Adolf Hoenecke was born on Feb. 25, 1835, about 60 miles southwest of Berlin, Germany. Neither his family nor his country was very religious. After finishing high school, he had absolutely no idea what he wanted to do. But a chance meeting changed his life and set in motion events that would bring great blessing to our synod. Hoenecke was a frail young man. While at the home of a friend, the music director from his school pointed to a healthy-looking pastor and said, "Look Adolf! Become a pastor and you will have it good." That was enough for Hoenecke. He enrolled at the University of Halle to study theology.

While at Halle, the young Hoenecke met Dr. August Tholuck. Dr. Tholuck did many things for his young student.

The most important, however, was that he told Hoenecke about his Savior Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit used the gospel witness of this professor to make Hoenecke a Christian.

Other things during these college years brought Hoenecke to our synod. One was his extreme poverty. Hoenecke had to pay for his own education. He did it by participating in academic competitions to win meals and by taking charity from Dr. Tholuck. After finishing his undergraduate studies,

Tholuck wanted Hoenecke to become a university professor. That, however, required further education and money! Adolf couldn't bring himself to do it. Three years of begging had been enough.

But training doesn't only come from university study. Hoenecke needed more training in confessional Lutheranism. Since the Prussian state church had more pastors than it needed, Hoenecke moved to Switzerland where he became a private tutor. There Hoenecke had time to immerse himself in a continued study of Holy Scripture and Lutheran doctrine. As he studied on his own,

Remembering our leaders: DR. ADOLF HOENECKE

For more than 40 years, Dr. Adolf Hoenecke was our synod's spiritual leader. Through his work our synod found its way to biblical, confessional Lutheranism.

James C. Danell Jr.

the Holy Spirit turned Hoenecke into a university-trained, confessional Lutheran theologian, who knew the biblical languages, Latin, and the dogmaticians (teachers of doctrine).

God brings Hoenecke to America

In 1863 the Holy Spirit called Hoenecke to the Wisconsin Synod through the Prussian state church's call for missionaries to America. Hoenecke was assigned to a tiny congregation a few miles south of Watertown, Wis. Again, Hoenecke had time. He continued his intensive study of Scripture and confessional Lutheran theology.

Serving the congregation in Wisconsin also brought Hoenecke into regular contact with our synod's president, Pastor Johannes Bading. President Bading immediately recognized Hoenecke's gifts, and in 1864 Hoenecke was elected secretary of the Wisconsin Synod.

God makes Hoenecke a leader

Hoenecke's first leadership task was difficult. Since its founding, the Wisconsin Synod had been heavily involved with mission societies in Germany that were often Lutheran in name only. These societies supplied the synod's congregations with almost all their pastors and much of the money needed to operate a church body. But the doctrinal position of these mission societies created tension. Should the synod continue to depend on the money and manpower supplied by the mission societies or make it clear that it could not accept the watered-down theology? The synod knew it had to give a clear biblical confession and cut all ties to these groups. It asked Hoenecke to handle the difficult correspondence.

Two years later, Hoenecke, at 31 years of age, became a professor of theology at our young seminary. Beginning in 1866 and for 33 of the next 41 years, Hoenecke taught dogmatics to 80 percent of all the pastors entering the public ministry of the synod. During those years Hoenecke also trained pastors in preaching, pastoral theology, and proper Bible interpretation. The laypeople of our synod received training in Bible doctrine from Hoenecke as well, since he also served as the editor of the synod's newspaper. In addition, Hoenecke served the synod through the doctrinal essays he presented at the majority of the yearly synod conventions between 1869 and 1878.

But his contribution did not end there. His influence was evident in the doctrinal issues that arose with other synods. In 1867 prominent members of the Iowa Synod suggested that some points of Bible doctrine should be left as questions open to different opinions. "They would have bagged us as adherents to their position . . .," one biographer wrote, "if Hoenecke, together with a few pastors, had not stepped in to oppose them very politely but resolutely and victoriously."

During those same years Hoenecke continued to guide the synod to a clear, biblical doctrine and practice in matters of church fellowship. The newly forming General Council was a group of confessionally minded Lutherans in the eastern third of the United States. Their printed public confession seemed promising, but it was not being carried out in practice. Instead of joining the General Council, Hoenecke led the synod into membership in the Synodical Conference, a fellowship of confes-

sional Lutherans whose doctrine and practice were biblical.

God makes Hoenecke reliable in controversy

Early on, however, some may have doubted the move toward the Synodical Conference. A doctrinal controversy soon erupted among the members of the conference. It was called the election controversy, and at stake was the central biblical truth of salvation by grace. At its 1882 convention, our synod needed to take a doctrinal stand. It called on its teacher, Professor Hoenecke. Clearly, simply, and succinctly he presented what the Bible taught about election. Looking back, a later seminary professor said, "Humanly speaking, our synod might well have been torn apart if Hoenecke's theology—not outwardly dazzling, but strong because it was Lutheran to the core—had not held us together."

Some 20 years later the groups involved in the original election controversy would take up the question again. Once more it would be Hoenecke who would help the Wisconsin Synod see that the basic problem was one of proper Bible interpretation. Through a series of articles in the seminary's new theological journal, the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Hoenecke laid out the biblical principles of Scripture interpretation that helped guide our synod in the doctrinal struggles that followed his death on Jan. 3, 1908.

As we remember the life and work of Dr. Adolf Hoenecke, we do so with gratitude to the Lord of the church for his gifts and his guidance these many years.

James Danell, a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. John, New Ulm, Minnesota.

- Feb. 25, 1835** — Born 60 miles south of Berlin, Germany
- 1863** — Came to Wisconsin to serve as a pastor just south of Watertown
- 1864** — Elected secretary of the Wisconsin Synod
- 1866** — Became professor of theology at the synod's seminary
- 1867–1908** — Helped guide the synod through various doctrinal controversies
- Jan. 3, 1908** — Died in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

Want to read more on Hoenecke's biblical teachings? All four volumes of *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics* are now complete and available through Northwestern Publishing House, www.nph.net.

WRAPPED IN *God's* COMFORT

How one cancer survivor uses earthly comforters to share the love of the heavenly Comforter.

Linda R. Buxa

*I*t was 1996. The doctor walked into Susanne Hanson's hospital room and started crying. "Sit down. We need to talk," she said. "I'm so, so sorry. I just don't know how to tell you this."

Su had ovarian cancer. She wasn't even 50.

"It literally took my breath away," says Su. "I was in the hospital for a routine procedure and was planning on going home. I had no idea there was cancer. I had no symptoms."

A week later Su went back for another surgery where doctors completed more than 30 biopsies and removed any suspicious areas. They were so confident that they removed it all that they gave Su a five-year plan; she needed monthly check-ups, but no chemotherapy or radiation.

Though her initial healing was fast and seemed complete, she says that "at every visit you wonder if this is the time you find out the cancer is back."

Through it all, her friends and family surrounded her with their love, support, and prayers. One friend from church gave her a gift—a quilted comforter. "That gift of love was of special comfort to me both physically and emotionally," says Su. "Whenever I was wrapped in it, I felt as though I was wrapped in the love and arms of my Comforter, the source of all comfort, my loving God."

Five years of check-ups passed, and Su was officially declared in remission. Not long after, a friend was diagnosed with breast cancer. That's when the message of 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 kept running through Su's mind: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all





As of February 2009, 37 quilters and groups from 13 states and one Canadian province have made 109 comforters. They have reached more than 142 women with cancer from 23 states, one Canadian province, Australia, Japan, and the Caribbean.

comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.”

Su wanted to be a living fulfillment of those words—to comfort someone else with the comfort she received. “I received comfort from God through the comforter,” she says. “By giving the comforter to my friend, she would be wrapped in the love as I had been.”

Shortly after she put the comforter in the mail, another friend was diagnosed with breast cancer. “I felt heartsick.

I didn’t have another comforter to send her so she too could enjoy this tangleable comfort,” says Su.

“I began to think more about the spiritual tie between a comforter made of human hands and the work of the Holy Spirit as comforter and counselor,” says Su.

That’s when she decided to reach out with God’s Word and earthly comforters to women struggling with cancer. She knew she couldn’t do it on her own, so she began asking people close to her. She drove to Nebraska to talk to a friend and visited her mother’s quilting group—Trinity Quilters—in Minocqua, Wis. “They all jumped right in,” says Su. And so the Comforter Ministry began.

It was important that the quilt recipients knew that “there is no true comfort in this life without the complete healing and full restoration through Jesus,” says Su. So when each woman receives a comforter, she also receives a journal that includes the story of how the Comforter Ministry began and a personal letter from the quilter to the recipient. “Most important, it shares the gospel message of my Savior, Jesus Christ, and the love, peace, and comfort that belong to those who believe in him.”

That message comes through loud and clear and led one recipient to express her faith that all things would work together for her good. “I am so excited to see how God is using this trial to show me his love,” she says. “God is so good.”

The Comforter Ministry continues to grow, even reaching beyond U.S. borders. When Minako, the daughter of a national pastor in Japan, was given

a short time to live, Su reached out immediately. Instead of a journal, which wouldn’t work because of the language barrier, Su included a letter explaining why the quilt was being sent. Another pastor delivered it to Minako and shared the message and mission behind the quilt. Minako used the quilt in her last days and, after she died, it was given to her nine-year-old daughter, Maria, as a remembrance of her mother.

Touched by the love of strangers, Minako’s mother sent a handmade, quilted purse to Su along with a note that read, “Thank you for all of your love in Jesus.—Rii Akagami.” The paper had John 3:16 printed on it. Su, recognizing the connection made between believers who don’t even speak the same language, says, “Oh, the gift of the body of Christ!”

Still, this isn’t only a ministry to remind believers of truths they already know. It’s also for those who haven’t heard the good news yet. To keep supporters, friends, and quilters informed, Su sends out more than 350 quarterly newsletters. “Each time I made copies at Office Max, the same young woman always seemed to help me,” she says. One day Su walked in, and the woman wasn’t there. “When the other employee found out who I was, she said, ‘I wondered how to get in touch with you.’” The woman who usually helped Su had been diagnosed with cancer for the second time, and the treatment didn’t seem to be working.

Su gave her a comforter and a journal, knowing that the woman was an unbeliever but also knowing that she had read God’s Word every time she helped Su copy newsletters and journals. “Now she has it in her hands,” says Su. “Lord willing, the Holy Spirit will work through the Word of God. I don’t know, but the Lord knows.”

That trust—that God works through his Word and his people—is what keeps Su energized—and humbled. “I am in awe of how God continues to use us in spite of our weak faith and often so far beyond what we can even imagine,” she says.

Thirteen years ago when the doctor walked into the hospital, Su knew God would use her diagnosis for good. She just didn’t realize how much good.

The Comforter Ministry isn’t limited to journals, quilts, and newsletters. Su also holds retreats, makes presentations, and is designing a 2010 calendar. For more information on how to contribute a quilt or to suggest a name of a woman who could use a quilt, contact Susanne Hanson at 715-543-8483; comforterministry@yahoo.com.

Linda Buxa is a member at St. Mark’s, Citrus Heights, California. To read how Su witnessed to her doctors, turn to Potluck (p. 27).





Mark Schweden

Where are all the young people?

One of the questions that I am asked most frequently is, "What is the synod doing to keep our young people in church?" It's a legitimate concern and a valid question. For many years we have seen all too many young people drift away from worship and from church life during their teen and college years. It's true that a good number of those young people who disappear from our churches do return, like the prodigal son. But many simply do not come back.

Our synod has devoted time and resources to meeting the spiritual needs of our youth. The Commission on Youth Discipleship has developed a wide variety of materials designed to connect with young people, including newsletters, Bible studies, a Web site (Living Bold), and regional or international youth rallies. Many congregations have also worked hard to provide opportunities for young people to be involved in Bible study and meaningful ways to participate in the life and mission of the church. And we ought not forget the investment in Lutheran high schools. Those are all good things and should continue.

But I believe that the question, "What are we doing to hold on to our young people?" has a more basic answer. It's a one-word answer that will not really surprise anyone. The answer is "parents."

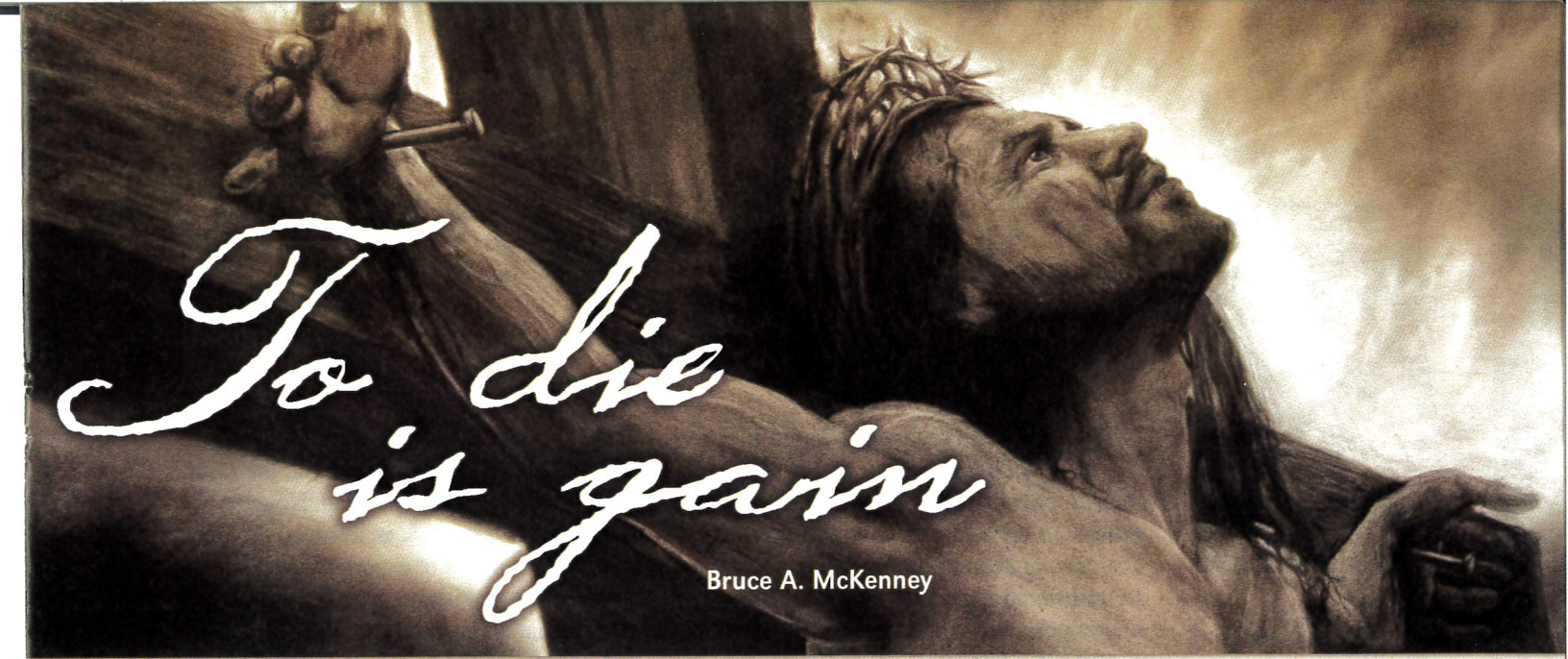
Faithful worship habits are developed from infancy. So are bad ones. When Christian parents establish a home in which Sunday morning worship is a regular and unquestioned part of the family's life, that message hits home with children. When parents talk about the importance of worship and demonstrate a commitment to attending church, children will adopt the same view.

Instilling a love for worship doesn't always come easily. Even the youngest

child has the old sinful nature that tries to avoid worship and the Word. I was blessed to belong to a family in which missing worship was never an option. But I remember that there were times on Sunday morning when I would hide under the covers, thinking my mother would not be able to find me when it was time to go to church. Somehow she always found me. As I got older, the message that Sunday worship was not optional did take root.

Christian parents need to recognize the incredibly important responsibility that God has given to them. It's not hard for most parents to recognize their responsibility to provide for the physical needs of their children. Most parents have no problem providing guidelines and restrictions when it comes to everyday decision-making. But amazingly, more than a few Christian parents act as if their role in guiding the spiritual behavior of their children somehow stops on confirmation day. It still is amazing to me that some parents will allow their teenage children the choice of whether to join them for worship on Sunday. Some parents, when faced with the choice of sending their children to a public or a Lutheran high school, even say, "We're letting our 13-year-old make that decision for himself." The responsibility of parents to be Christian parents does not stop at confirmation or even high school graduation.

What can we do to keep our children and young people connected to the church? There is much that the congregation and the synod can do. But the real solution comes when Christian parents act like Christian parents. "Bring [your children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4) is not God's suggestion to parents. It's the most important responsibility they have.



To die is gain

Bruce A. McKenney

Gene had asked me the same question a number of times in Bible class: "Pastor, what happens to babies who die before they can be baptized?" By the look on his face and the emotion in his voice, it was evident that this sadness had touched his family.

No direct answer from Scripture

Whenever he asked the question, I offered the answer we must give: "Scripture does not answer this question directly."

But what Scripture does say is this:

- All children are by nature sinful and in need of salvation.
- We are told of no other way that God works saving faith in people other than through the means of grace, the gospel in Word and sacraments. We should never deprive children of Baptism, "the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." (Titus 3:5.)
- We know of one extraordinary case in which the Holy Spirit worked in a child before its birth, the case of John the Baptist. (Luke 1:41-44.)
- We are told again and again that God is a compassionate God, whose judgments are fair. "The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. . . . He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him" (Psalm 103:8,10,11).*

So God directs us not to minimize the importance of Baptism and the means of grace. He teaches us that we can look to his great mercy, and hope that although he has limited us to Baptism as a means of working faith in children, he has not limited himself.

Another way of looking at it

I could tell that these answers neither quieted Gene's troubled mind nor comforted his grieving heart. I finally said, "Gene, if you come across something in the Bible that offers more insight and comfort, let me know."

Sometime later, Gene was waiting to talk to me after Bible class. By the look on his face I could tell that he was eager to share something with me. "Pastor, I found a passage I believe gives a good answer to the question about babies who die before baptism. It's found in Ephesians 3:20: 'Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us . . .'"

I asked, "Gene, how does that answer the question?"

His answer was amazing. "Pastor, could a parent *imagine* that God could take his child to heaven if it dies before baptism?" I said, "Yes."

He continued, "Could a parent *ask* God to take his child to heaven if it dies before baptism?" I said, "Of course."

Then he smiled at me and said, "Paul says that God can do immeasurably more than that!"

Paul's words don't specifically answer the question about babies who die before baptism. But Paul's words brought comfort to Gene, and ever since I have shared those words from Paul whenever I have had to visit parents who grieve the loss of a baby before the waters of Baptism could be applied. The words put the whole question back into the hands of a loving God. With all my answers, I was trying to do the same thing.

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

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

*From WELS online Q&A, www.wels.net/jump/qa.

What happens to babies who die before they can be baptized?

Scripture does not answer this question directly, but we leave all things in the hands of a loving God.



Should the church change? Part 1

The question is loaded. I found the question in a brochure that challenged the church's response to some moral questions. Our contemporary world asks us to change and keep up rather than sink back to traditional ideas that no longer apply and appear to be outdated.

But it's a fair question and needs an answer. The idea of change is raised about issues that are just as volatile as contemporary moral dilemmas. Should the church change its worship forms? Should we change our approach to attract more people? Do we change to meet the challenge of our postmodern or post-Christian audience?

I don't really think anyone else will care about a couple of words in a Lutheran magazine, but I believe that there are three answers: no, yes, and maybe. At first that might seem like a way not to answer the question, but the questions involved are complex and in some cases posed by people emotionally tied to their own answers or agendas.

The first answer is easy for us as confessional Lutherans: no. We might even capitalize the answer and add an exclamation point for emphasis so it is written: NO! We believe God has revealed absolute truth in the New and Old Testament Scriptures. Not only does God not change but also the truth he revealed does not change. So we do not change our confession of God's truth.

Part of the world wants to have scientific proof or some reasonable understanding. Even if it cannot prove something, it must at least have some rational plausibility. But Christian truth is different. We walk by faith and believe even when we do not understand how it could be as God said it is. We don't change the truth to accommodate what some might think is believable or acceptable.

In a few weeks we will celebrate a most improbable and impossible event: the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. None of us can imagine how such an event could ever happen. We have not experienced someone defying the persistent and unchangeable reality that all humans die. If we exclude the witness of the prophets and apostles, we don't know anyone who has ever heard or seen someone rise from the dead. But the Christian witness is clear: Jesus rose from the dead.

Over the centuries many have doubted it. Others have explained it as a myth, a desperate hope, or wishful thinking. Some flatly deny it as impossible and ridiculous. Still others, even in Christian churches, speak of new life but have difficulty announcing that the grave of Jesus is empty. Those churches have changed what they teach but the Scripture clearly says: He is risen!

Yes, the first disciples had to be convinced. Jesus spent 40 days convincing them. But they all believed the impossible: Jesus was alive. Was there opposition to what they believed? Of course. Jesus found them afraid and behind locked doors. Could they just have kept quiet about such an improbable event? They might have, but they did not. Peter and John said, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

The opposition grew stronger, and most of them died as martyrs. The idea of a living Lord Jesus was subversive to reasonable citizens in the Roman world and beyond. Many believed such an idea was foolish and naïve and those who believed it should be eradicated. But the church did not change. Their confession of God's truth was firm. No change. So is our confession. Jesus is risen. His grave is empty.

THE APOSTLES

St. Bartholomew: Deepening faith

He grew up in Galilee of the Gentiles, but as a true son of Israel he watched and waited for the True Light to dawn on that land of darkness. Matthew, Mark, and Luke called him by his father's name—"son of Tholmai" or "Bartholomew." But St. John called him simply Nathanael. In the most unlikely place, Nathanael found what every true Israelite longed for: "On those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (Matthew 4:16).

READ JOHN 1:43-51

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

⁴⁴Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

⁴⁶"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.

"Come and see," said Philip.

⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false."

⁴⁸"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

⁴⁹Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel."

⁵⁰Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that."

⁵¹He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

DIGGING INTO THE VERSES

1. What do you learn of Nathanael from the way Philip told him about Jesus in verse 45?

2. How can you follow the Eighth Commandment and take Nathanael's comment in verse 46 in the kindest possible way (cf. Micah 5:2 and John 7:41,42)?
3. What did the Holy Spirit use to overcome Nathanael's reluctance? Find something in verses 44, 45, and 46.
4. What did Jesus mean by calling Nathanael "a true Israelite" in verse 47?
5. When Jesus told Nathanael that he had seen him under the fig tree, Nathanael immediately called Jesus the Messiah. What do you think could have happened under the fig tree that prompted this kind of reaction?
6. How would Nathanael and the other disciples see verse 51 fulfilled?
7. God used the believers around Nathanael to bring him to a deeper understanding of Jesus. How has your membership in the church helped your faith this week?
8. How have you helped deepen the faith or understanding of your fellow members of Christ's church?

MORE ABOUT ST. BARTHOLOMEW

With two sentences, Jesus took Bartholomew from skepticism to the deep faith of confessing Jesus as Lord and Christ and appointed him to be one of his apostles. We know nothing certain about Bartholomew's later mission work. A legend tells that after converting the brother of the King of Armenia, Bartholomew was martyred by being flayed alive. Though only a legend, Bartholomew's martyrdom appears frequently in Christian art. An example is found in the Sistine Chapel where Michelangelo depicts Bartholomew at the Last Judgment with his skin in hand. The church celebrates the Feast of St. Bartholomew on Aug. 24 each year. The Gospel for that festival is John 1:43-51.

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

This is the sixth article in a 12-part series on Jesus' apostles. Find this study and answers online after April 5 at www.forwardinchrist.net





Daddy, does God love bad guys?

Donn G. Dobberstein

It gets chaotic in our house on school mornings. But somehow four kids miraculously get dressed, hair brushed, with books and snacks packed. The kids have mastered the school drop off. Think parachuters launching out the van door landing safely in a tuck 'n' roll position.

The final rendezvous is for my preschooler. He's the quiet one due to the bigger voices of his siblings. Or maybe it's because he's in the back seat. The front seat is in the Eastern Time Zone. The back seat is in the Mountain.

Now it's his turn. "Why does the truck squeak so much?"

"You would too if you were old."

He likes talking about the Bible: "Daddy, you know that story about Joseph and Goliath? Did Goliath fall into the lions' den?"

And then, there was this: "Hey, Daddy? Does God love bad guys?"

"What kind of bad guys?"

"You know—robbers, fighters, bad kung-fu guys." (*He just watched Disney's Kung-Fu Panda.*)

"Yep. God loves bad guys."

"How?"

"He sent someone really special to make bad guys good."

"Oh, you mean Jesus. (*Pause.*)

But Jesus only loves good guys."

"Does Jesus love you?"

(*Giggling boy*): "Daddy, you're silly! Of course he loves me!"

"Are you always good?"

There's a moment of silence.

Finally he replies, "Sometimes I'm not good. But Jesus still loves me."

How simply said!

This gives us a way to sift through the chaos of that first Easter morning: the earthquake, the Roman soldiers running, the angel's announcement, Peter and John's First Annual Empty Tomb Dash, and disciples hiding behind the barred door.

The four-year-old admitted, "I'm not good." But he was at peace. "Jesus still loves me."

I think I need to get in the backseat with a preschooler this Easter—for all the times my troubled mind and accusing conscience wonder, "Does God really love this bad guy?"

Maybe there my ears can better hear the angel's voice calling out from the empty tomb: "He is not here; he has risen" (Matthew 28:6). Maybe my eyes will better see a child's book illustration depicting a brilliant Prince of peace declaring, "Peace be with you!" (John 20:19).

- To teary eyed Mary he asks, "Why are you crying?" (John 20:15).

- To the fear-filled women he announces, "Do not be afraid" (Matthew 28:10).

- To guilt-ridden Peter he reiterates, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:17).

- To the child or adult in the backseat he assures, "My peace I give you."

Real peace isn't freedom from temptation in life; it's knowing we possess a Prince of peace. He's alive! The real joy of Easter is Jesus saying to peace-deprived people, "I still love you, even when you are not good." "Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God" (Romans 5:1).

Jesus wants his family to know that he is alive at this very moment. We really do have peace! Not just any peace, but the kind only Jesus can provide. It quiets the soul and strengthens faith. Easter's peace is why a giggling boy says, "Daddy, you're silly! *Of course* Jesus loves me!"

The next time your peace-deprived, hurting heart wonders if God loves "bad guys," may the message of Easter echo from the empty tomb—or the backseat: "Yes! God still loves me!"

Donn Dobberstein is a pastor at Our Savior's, Port Orange, Florida.

The real joy of Easter is Jesus saying, "I love you, even when you are not good."