

Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



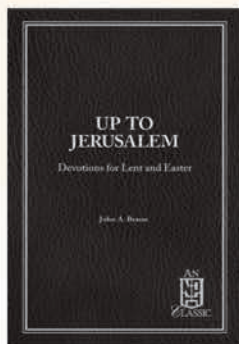
Crown jewels of Scripture

The symbols of the four gospels remind
us of vital Christian truths. *Page 10*

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is February 18!



Up to Jerusalem

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by John A. Braun

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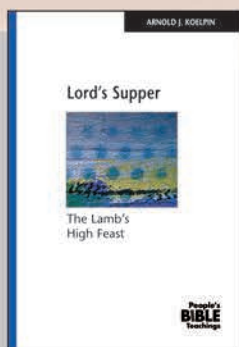
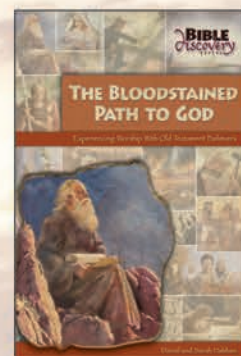
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Connor Johnson and Lauren Klika
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ON AUDIO

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*May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our fathers;
may he never leave us nor forsake us. — 1 KINGS 8:57*

WHAT'S INSIDE

What do you read first when you get your issue of *Forward in Christ*? Is it . . .

- the monthly question and answer, which looks at your religious questions and discusses them in the light of God's Word (p. 9)?
- features on biblical doctrines like the church (p. 12)?
- personal stories from your fellow WELS members overcoming adversities (p. 30) or discovering the true gospel message for the first time (p. 14)?
- news articles sharing what is going on in WELS and its congregations (p. 20-25)?
- stories from our teens or about our campus ministries (p. 18)?
- editorials that shed God's light on what is happening in the world (p. 32)?
- Bible studies on specific topics like Jesus' prayer life (p. 33) and the Nicene Creed (p. 35) to help you dig deeper in God's Word?

Our goal is to continue printing a good balance of articles that help instruct you in your faith, inspire you for your Christian life, and inform you of what is happening in WELS and the world. How are we doing? Let us know.

Julie Wietzke



7



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NEW PARENTING COLUMN

I was delighted to read about the new parenting column debuting in January. I'm looking forward to it!

Thanks, FIC, for keeping fresh and current with real issues that apply to timeless issues for all believers in Christ. I look forward to each and every issue!

Stacy Tomhave

Read Stacy's comments on her experiences with the first topic covered in "Heart to heart"—"How are today's families adjusting to life in the digital age"—on the column's site, found at www.wels.net/forwardinchrist.—ed.

DECEMBER COVER

Re: December cover. I love it. . . . The cover made me want to read what was inside.

Robert Boe

A BLESSING TO READ

In a life of seeking and studying and in God the Father's purpose and timing, we came upon your monthly publication and its 100-year anniversary. As previous members of a mainline church, this proved to be an informative and educating read for us. The commentaries and shared living expe-

riences of *many* Christians on their paths in missions, teaching assignments, and pastoral ministries were a blessing to read.

We could not let the opportunity go by to thank you all who work so diligently and in faith to bring it to others.

Continued blessings to one and all and for the New Year ahead of us.

*Robert and Barbara Samuel
Crystal Lake, Illinois*

WELS ISN'T PERFECT

Kudos to Pastor Samelson for stating the obvious but necessary fact that WELS is not perfect [Dec. 2014].

In my opinion this "mea culpa" needed to go one step further. No sinful human being and therefore no member of WELS has a perfect understanding of the truths contained in God's Holy Word. . . .

"Oh, but show me where even one fault is?" one might be tempted to ask. It's unnecessary by virtue of WELS' very own doctrine and confession to man's inherent natural sin and imperfection. The Word of God is perfect, but our sinful condition limits our understanding and application. . . .

The useful point here is not to try to identify specific fault or lack thereof; we spend enough time doing that. What we all need to do is always begin any discussion or witness with the proper humble perspective and attitude—that while the Bible itself is truth and perfection, we simply don't "know it all." That alone will go miles in changing the perception we've given over the years.

*Jerry Zimpelmann
Eagle River, Wisconsin*

Send your letters to **Feedback**, *Forward in Christ*, N16 W23377 Stone Ridge Dr, Waukesha WI 53188; fic@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*.



heart to heart
parent conversations

We want to hear from you! Let us know your thoughts on this month's topic of parenting mistakes (p. 16).

Or perhaps you have something to say about next month's topic—how to talk about Jesus in your home and incorporate natural opportunities for your children to grow spiritually.

You can join the conversation by visiting www.wels.net/forwardinchrist and looking for the link to the *Heart to heart* site. Or send mail to fic@wels.net or *Forward in Christ*, N16W23377 Stone Ridge Dr, Waukesha WI 53188.

Through my Bible in 3 years



FEBRUARY 2015

- | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Leviticus 8 | 11. Lev. 21, 22 | 21. Heb. 4:14–5:10 |
| 2. Lev. 9, 10 | 12. Lev. 23 | 22. Heb. 5:11–6:8 |
| 3. Lev. 11 | 13. Lev. 24 | 23. Heb. 6:9–20 |
| 4. Lev. 12:1–13:46 | 14. Lev. 25 | 24. Heb. 7:1–14 |
| 5. Lev. 13:47–14:32 | 15. Lev. 26 | 25. Heb. 7:15–28 |
| 6. Lev. 14:33–15:33 | 16. Lev. 27 | 26. Heb. 8 |
| 7. Lev. 16 | 17. Hebrews 1 | 27. Heb. 9:1–15 |
| 8. Lev. 17 | 18. Heb. 2 | 28. Heb. 9:16–28 |
| 9. Lev. 18 | 19. Heb. 3:1–6 | |
| 10. Lev. 19, 20 | 20. Heb. 3:7–4:13 | |

Read or listen online at www.wels.net/spiritual-help/through-my-bible.

Days of remembrance

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Hebrews 13:7

Michael A. Woldt

In my home state, statutes require public schools to observe three special days in the month of February: the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln (Feb. 12), Susan B. Anthony (Feb. 15), and George Washington (Feb. 22). Special observance days provide opportunities to remember noteworthy people who helped shape our nation.

Our Lutheran church year calendar also includes special days of remembrance called minor festivals. Minor festivals often commemorate men and women named in the Scriptures. One of the “saint” days falls in the month of February: St. Matthias, Apostle (Feb. 24). You can read about St. Matthias in Acts 1:15-26.

REMEMBER YOUR SPIRITUAL LEADERS

These minor festivals often pass without notice. No statutes require that they be observed. However, they provide valuable opportunities to recall the gracious work of our Lord. On these “saint” days, we remember how the Lord planted saving faith in the hearts of unworthy sinners and then used them as his vessels to carry the gospel to the world.

Special days help us remember important historical people of the past that have had an influence on our world and our church. The writer of Hebrews wants us to take our remembering to a more personal level. “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you.” Who are the leaders who spoke the Word of God to you?

If you were raised in a Christian home, those first “leaders” were your parents. Moms and dads who love Jesus want their children to love Jesus too. They spend time teaching their children God’s Word. Christian parents know that the biblical accounts of Noah’s ark,



David and Goliath, and Jonah and the great fish are more than cute children’s tales. These are key events in the inspired record of how a gracious God deals with a fallen world. Christian parents help their children see Jesus in every page of Holy Scripture. Christian parents lead not only with words but also with their actions and attitudes. When was the last time you remembered the leaders God gave you in the home of your youth? Thank God for Christian parents!

Who are the leaders who spoke the Word of God to you?

As we remember the leaders who spoke the Word of God to us, our thoughts will naturally turn to faithful teachers and shepherds who served us in the public ministry. What a blessing to have pastors who proclaim the gospel of Christ crucified for sinners every Sunday! Perhaps you have memories of Christian teachers or staff ministers

who connected with you on a personal level when you were troubled or doubting. God provided leaders who applied biblical precepts and promises to your specific circumstances in life. Remember those leaders. Thank God for them.

IMITATE THEIR FAITH

As we remember our leaders, the writer of Hebrews issues a call to action: “Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” Christian leaders in the home and church have taught us by word and example that life in this present world is only temporary. Learn from those leaders. Believe like those leaders. Our future is secure, thanks be to Jesus. Our citizenship is in heaven.

Leaders like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Susan B. Anthony helped shape our nation, but Christian leaders who speak God’s Word impact lives for eternity. Take time to remember the Christian leaders in your life, with gratitude to the Lord who provided them because he loves you.

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



Mark Schweden

Lent is a perfect
reminder never
to take God's
greatest blessings
for granted.

Lenten repentance, Lenten appreciation

It's so easy to take daily blessings for granted. Step into the shower, and you just *expect* the water to be warm. When mealtime rolls around, we simply assume that there will be food on the table. Taking things for granted happens all too easily. The worst part about taking things for granted is that we fail to appreciate and remember the blessings that are ours every day.

Taking ordinary things for granted is one thing. But what about the extraordinary, amazing blessings of God? What about his grace, his forgiveness, his mercy? Do we take those things for granted as well?

When I let a day go by without pausing to acknowledge my utter sinfulness and unworthiness before God, could it be that I've begun to take God's grace in Christ for granted? When I knowingly commit a sin and shrug it off as nothing serious, have I begun to lose an appreciation for the sacrifice made to take that sin away from me? When God's forgiveness comes to me in the gospel as a daily gift of his grace, do I hear it only casually, as if it's nothing special? Taking for granted the greater blessings of God's grace and forgiveness robs us of the greatest joys and of the perfect peace that God wants us to enjoy.

We are about to enter the season of Lent. It's that six-week period in which we prepare ourselves to recall the suffering and death of our Savior during Holy Week and to celebrate the resurrection victory on Easter Sunday. As a part of that preparation, each Wednesday during midweek Lenten services we will review the Passion History from the four gospels. We will hear sermons that focus on the words and actions of our Savior and the words and actions of people—friends and foes alike—who played a part in that story.

Far from being passive observers of that crucial time in history, the Lenten season for Christians is a time of active participation. It is, after all, a season of repentance. Genuine repentance involves much more than being sorry and confessing our shortcomings. God-pleasing, genuine repentance in believers begins first with something God does. He speaks his law to us not just in order to remind us that we are something less than we should be but to force us to our knees in fear because we are by nature the exact opposite of the perfect people God demands. In that law, God thunders words that cut to the very core of our being. He says to you and to me, "The soul that sins shall die!"

God-pleasing repentance continues as God leads us to believe him when he tells us that in Christ all our sins are gone and all our guilt has been removed. God-pleasing repentance lives on in our daily lives as we strive, with the help and desire that God himself gives, to turn from our sin and serve God in love and thanks.

Maybe one of the greatest blessings of this time of Lent is that Lent is a perfect reminder never to take God's greatest blessings for granted. As we see our Savior suffer, we can't help but remember that it was "my burden in your passion, Lord, you have borne for me" (*Christian Worship* 105:4). In somber Lenten worship, we hear both messages we need to hear—the stern message of God's law calling us to heartfelt repentance and the sweet message of the gospel assuring us that the Savior we worship is the Savior who died for us.

And that's nothing to take for granted.

Light for our path

I hear a lot about Christian fasting programs. Should I be participating in them?

James F. Pope

You're right. Christian dietary programs have been growing in popularity. It would be worth our while to see what the Bible says about fasting and Christian freedom.

RARE REQUIREMENT

In Old Testament times mandatory fasting was uncommon. The Mosaic Law called for Israelites to fast on only one day of the year—on the great Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29; 23:27).

Of course people were free to go beyond that requirement, and some did just that. Without being compelled by any divine directive, individuals like Hannah, David, Ezra, and Nehemiah—just to list a few—fasted. People often fasted in times of sorrow, repentance, and intense prayer. After Jonah's reluctant missionary work in Nineveh, the Bible tells us that the king of Nineveh decreed a fast for all inhabitants—including animals (Jonah chapter 3). Eventually, Jews like the Pharisees fasted twice a week to make plain their claims of spiritual superiority (Luke 18:9-12).

FASTING FREEDOM

In the New Testament, Paul wrote, "Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink. . . ." (Colossians 2:16). When Jesus completed his redeeming work and abolished the ceremonial laws, the number of required fasting days for God's people decreased from one to zero.

As was the case in Old Testament times though, Christians today are free to fast if they like. To help people who wish to fast, there are programs like The Daniel Fast, among others. Programs like this are popular in the season of Lent and throughout the year.

PRUDENT PARTICIPATION

So, should you fast? It is entirely your call. That is the freedom of adiaphora—those activities that God has neither commanded nor forbidden. Of course, you will want to

understand what the programs are about. Do the fasts deprive you of food and/or water for extended periods of time? Are there health risks associated with them? Are there spiritual concerns of any kind? A physician can help you with the first two questions; I can help you with the last.

As is the case with any adiaphoron, motives for fasting can be important. Some of the literature I have seen speaks of fasting serving the purpose of "assisting and enhancing" our prayers. In view of that, you may want to ask yourself: "Am I thinking in any way that God is going to hear and answer my prayers because of something I am doing? Am I fasting like the Pharisees—thinking that fasting will put me in a better standing with God and make me superior to non-fasting Christians?" Any thoughts like these would rule out fasting.

On the other hand, are there thoughts of controlling the body and its desires—not being mastered by anything, even food (1 Corinthians 6:12)? Are there thoughts of taking good care of your body in which God lives (1 Corinthians 6:19)? Are there thoughts of eating to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31)? Thoughts like these can exemplify good motives for fasting.

Martin Luther wrote in his Small Catechism that "fasting and other outward preparations may serve a good purpose" in preparing ourselves to receive the Lord's Supper. But the best preparation, he said, is believing Jesus' words. Fasting—prior to the Lord's Supper or any time—can be a beneficial practice, but there is no substitute for faith.

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

James Pope also answers questions online at www.wels.net/what-we-believe/questions-answers. Submit your questions there or to fic@wels.net.

Your word
is a lamp
to my feet
and a light
for my path.

Psalms 119:105

MATTHEW



MARK



LUKE



JOHN



SCRIPTURE'S CROWN JEWELS

The four gospels have always been precious to believers. Their symbols remind us of vital Christian truths.

Theodore J. Hartwig

America's flyways today are dominated by business people. It was different on the dirt highways and byways of Europe a thousand years ago. Then, and for several centuries after, the roads were dominated by pilgrims. They were making their way by foot to the holy places where the bones of the saints rested. Devotion at these sites would lessen their stay in purgatory.

At many of the large stone churches which they visited, they might view, above the main western portal, a sculpture of Jesus surrounded by four living creatures. The sculptures begin with a man at the upper left corner and proceed counterclockwise with a lion, an ox, and an eagle. Since the 400s, these living beings had become the symbols for the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. All four serve Jesus at the center of the sculpture.

Each gospel serves Jesus in a distinctive manner. It has been suggested that each symbol identifies the opening story of that gospel's message. Thus Matthew's symbol is a man because the gospel begins with the human genealogy of Jesus, descended from Abraham. Mark is a lion because the gospel begins with John the Baptist's powerful preaching of repentance in the desert. Luke is pictured with an ox, the beast of sacrifice, because his gospel begins

with Zechariah's sacrifice of incense in the temple. John is an eagle because his gospel begins with a clear vision, like an eagle's, of the eternal sonship of Jesus as God.

The gospels are worthy of being called the crown jewels of Scripture.

THE JEWELS OF THE GOSPELS

Why is "crown jewels" an appropriate description of the four gospels? Because they are mightily persuasive in recording the truth. A Christian professor of history in the 1900s at the British University of Cambridge stated it like this: "The Gospels are so honest in presenting the life of Jesus that they might be said to carry their own self-authentication that they are telling the truth."

One example of jewel-like luster in the gospels is the often matter-of-fact manner in which they record the astounding miracles of Jesus. Take, for example, the story of the feeding of the five thousand (Matthew 14: 13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15). It's told in such a low-key manner that it sounds like an everyday occurrence. No fanfare. No public relations spin. No hype that people should pay attention and recognize that they have just witnessed a mind-boggling miracle. The gospels report just the facts: Jesus took five loaves and two fishes, blessed them, had them distributed

to the people, and they all received plenty to eat plus 12 baskets of leftovers. How differently this story would be treated in today's media!

The gospels are crown jewels because of their passages of comfort. High on this list are Jesus' words: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11: 28-30). *Comfort*, one of the loveliest words in our language, cannot be expressed more beautifully.

THE MEANING OF THE SYMBOLS

So let us now restrict ourselves to the messages pictured in the traditional symbols of the four gospels: a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. In its opening story, each symbol enunciates a major truth about the gospel of Jesus Christ. First, the symbol of a man represents Matthew's gospel. Matthew begins his story with the human genealogy of Jesus, the son of Abraham. For us, separated by centuries from the flesh-and-blood Jesus, the truth that he was fully human often becomes more challenging. How can he, as a child, grow in knowledge? How can he say he does not know everything? How can he from the cross ask why his Father has forsaken him? We may reach theological solutions for these mysteries, but in doing so we begin to tamper with the mystery that he was fully human. Better to leave our solutions unsaid and simply confess that Jesus was a true human being. Leave the mystery alone and recognize that it is beyond our finite understanding.

Next we look to the lion representing the gospel of Mark with John the Baptist's opening message of repentance.

Matthew's symbol is a man because the gospel begins with the human genealogy of Jesus, descended from Abraham.

Mark's is a lion because the gospel begins with John the Baptist's powerful preaching of repentance in the desert.

Luke's is an ox, the beast of sacrifice, because the gospel begins with Zechariah's sacrifice of incense in the temple.

John's is an eagle because the gospel begins with a clear vision of the eternal sonship of Jesus as God.

Repentance also is vital to Christian faith. It is one of the identifying benchmarks of Christianity. Faith begins with repentance, acknowledging that we are lost and condemned creatures and surrendering to God's Word with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength, and all our mind. Many people honor Jesus as a great human being but will not believe that he was God. They claim to be spiritual yet remain servants to the supremacy of their minds. This is no repentance. Real repentance surrenders the mind to Jesus. The first words of Jesus in Mark's gospel encourage us to "Repent and believe the good news!" (1:15). The lion representing Mark's gospel stands beside Matthew's figure of a man. Both represent vital messages of the Christian faith: Jesus is true man, and we are called to repent and believe.

Next in the order of symbols around Jesus is an ox representing the opening story of sacrifice in the gospel of Luke. There we meet John the Baptist's father, Zechariah, serving as priest in the temple and burning incense when Gabriel appeared to him. Zechariah was doing what repentant Christians do. They dedicate their lives to the worship of God their Savior. Worship is the natural and necessary sequel to repentance. In this manner the symbols round out the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

One truth needs to be added to complete the message of these four jewels.

The symbol of the eagle for the gospel of John adds that truth. John begins his gospel with a testimony that the One who became a human being of flesh and blood existed eternally as the Word who was with God and who was God. With this testimony, the story of the gospel of Jesus Christ is complete. Our Christian life of repentance (Mark) and worship (Luke) is flanked by the person of our Savior Jesus Christ, who is both fully human (Matthew) and eternal God (John).

The pilgrims making their way to the holy places a thousand years ago probably understood none of this. All of them, by and large, were illiterate. Yet, without realizing or understanding the dimensions of the message in the sculpture posted above western entrances of churches, these pilgrims nevertheless had and retained in their memories the figure of Jesus and of the four living creatures that surrounded him. The symbols may not have enhanced their faith, but when interpreted they certainly do so for us. Printed indelibly in our memories, they keep before us four major themes of the gospel of Jesus Christ and in so doing accentuate the truth that the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the crown jewels of Scripture.

Theodore Hartwig, professor emeritus at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. John, New Ulm.

GOD'S CHURCH



INVISIBLE, YET VISIBLE

Richard E. Lauersdorf

Every weekend I sit among or preach to members of our church. Many of them I know by name, others just by sight. No problem, I can always look them up in my church's pictorial directory. That handy booklet tells me who all belongs to my congregation. It cannot, however, tell me who of them belongs to God's church of true believers in Christ. Only God knows that.

THE DIFFERENCE

Scripture uses the word *church* in two different ways. It refers to the *invisible church*, composed of believers in Christ, known only to God. It also refers to the *visible church*, composed of people gathered around the Word in congregations, synodical groupings, and other forms. There's no contradiction here. Visible groupings like my congregation are not church apart from God's invisible church. We call these earthly gatherings *church* because of the believers, the members of God's invisible church, in their midst.

Scripture uses the term *church* in this way. St. Paul wrote "to the church of God in Corinth" (1 Corinthians 1:2). He calls them God's church because in their midst were those who were sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy. Because of the believers among them, Paul could call the visible group at Corinth a church.

Yet there is a difference. Simply put, the difference is the invisible church is made up of all who *are* believers in Christ. Visible churches are made up of all who *say* they are believers in him.

Sadly, hypocrites can be found in the visible church. Let's call them *make-believers*, because for one reason or another they only pretend to believe in Christ. Perhaps they're members because their parents

were. Confirmation certificates may carry their name and a special Bible verse for them, but they've long ago left that behind. Maybe their name is on the congregational roster because of their spouse. Love for their spouse, instead of love for the Savior, brought them in. Others may be looking for the respectability and personal advantage that might come from associating with God's people. Still others might view membership as a form of burial insurance. Though their names are on the roster of a visible church, such make-believers are not in God's invisible church.

How do we deal with such make-believers? We don't! Remember, we can't look into a person's heart and identify faith. Nor can we look at a person's life and point out faith from the works we see there. Even the hypocrite and the heathen can pursue good and honorable lives. Instead we wait and let Jesus deal with the weeds in the wheat field of the world (Matthew 13:36-43).

Does this mean we show no concern toward unbelievers who are members of a Christian church? Of course not. Elsewhere Scripture tells us how to deal with openly impenitent sinners in the visible church. But with hypocrites, rather than trying to pull up the weeds and damaging some of the wheat in the process, we follow Paul's advice and wait till the Lord comes. "He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts" (1 Corinthians 4:5).

I can see who belongs to my church or congregation. You can see who belongs to your church too. But only God can see who belongs to his church. Pray that God in his grace keeps us in that blessed number. Pray that God sends his Holy Spirit through the gospel to sanctify and keep us in the one true faith.

THE MARKS

We can't point out who are members of God's invisible church, but we can point out where to find them.

One time when traveling across North Dakota, I had forgotten to check the fuel gauge. Sure enough, the needle was hovering in the red. For what seemed endless miles we saw no town or filling station. Finally at an isolated crossroads stood a small convenience store with several gas pumps out in front. Imagine our relief when we saw those pumps.

What should we look for to find believers who are members of God's invisible church? Do we look at the size of the visible grouping? Its programs?

Where the good news of salvation in
Christ Jesus is proclaimed, we will find faith.
And where there is faith, there is God's church.

Its attractive building? Its friendly clergy? Its active members? What about the one that has the best ads or is in the news regularly? Of course, none of this is wrong in and of itself. But such outward signs are not an indication that believers are present.

Just as we looked for those gas pumps to find fuel for the car, so we look for the gospel to find believers. Why? God tells us clearly, "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). Paul summarized it this way for the Thessalonian Christians, "From the beginning God chose to save you through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through the gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 2:13,14).

These passages tell us that where the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus is proclaimed, we will find faith. And where there is faith, there is God's church, believers in Christ.

How can we say this so confidently? Because we know what the gospel is. "It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes"

(Romans 1:16). The gospel, as God has given it in Word and sacrament, is the tool, the gas pump, that the Spirit uses to fill the human heart with faith. This powerful tool works, even if we can't see it, in the human heart. "So is my word," God promised, "that goes out from my mouth. It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11). Where the Word is preached and the sacraments administered, the Spirit is at work, and we can find the

church, the ABCs, even if we can't point them out individually.

Now do you see why we call the gospel in Word and sacrament the mark of the church? It indicates to us where the church can be found. We still cannot look into human hearts and see who truly believes, but we know believers are present because of the gospel. Among those sitting around me on the weekend as I listen to or proclaim the gospel are members of God's invisible church. All because of the gospel!

Do we have to be told to use and preach the gospel? How foolish I would have been if I had stepped on the accelerator and driven by those gas pumps in North Dakota. Yet some church bodies around us foolishly have abandoned or looked for substitutes for the Spirit's tools. Lord, help us remember that only through the gospel does the Spirit work to craft us and others into God's invisible church, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints.

Richard Lauersdorf is pastor at Good Shepherd, West Bend, Wisconsin.

This is the second article in a four-part series on the holy Christian church.

A burnt-out Baptist searching for the truth discovers the gospel message in the Bible.

Ann M. Ponath

"You were a Lutheran before you knew you were a Lutheran," Pastor Jon Scharf told Bob Finch.

Led by the Spirit, Bob was searching for the truth. But Bob turned out to be hard to find after his visit to the new church in town. Scharf also had to search for him.

THE SEARCH

Bob, a purchasing manager, lives in Conyers, Georgia, 23 miles outside of Atlanta, where he was born and raised. He has been married to his high school sweetheart, Cindy, for 32 years; the couple is blessed with three children. Bob spent 49 years in the Baptist church, but he says, "As far back as I can remember I always knew Baptism was more than just for joining the local Baptist church and the Lord's Supper was more than just something to do four times a year. I was seeking what the Holy Spirit had revealed to me from reading the Bible and letting the Word lead me, not man."

Bob was searching the Scriptures, but he was also "nosy about the new

church that was just being built." He visited Abiding Grace, Covington, Ga., one Sunday, but he didn't want anyone to know who he was or where he lived. Bob didn't reckon with the friendship register.

Scharf recalls that the first time Bob visited he "snuck in right at the bell and out the same way, not giving much chance to talk other than a handshake and 'Good morning' on the way out." He signed the register with only "Bob." The second time it was "Bob . . . Conyers, Georgia." The third time it was "Bob Finch . . . Conyers."

"At that point, I did a quick Google search and found a couple options and picked the most likely," says Scharf.

Abiding Grace uses the friendship register as one of its key ways to connect with visitors. "We encourage everyone to fill in all their info, hoping that guests will follow their example," says Scharf. Once the registers are collected, Scharf highlights first-time visitors for the "mugging coordinator." She assigns mug visits to volunteers who live near the visitor, and they drop off a thank-you package Monday night, including a coffee mug. "I then go and visit on Thursday night and try to have a conversation about the worship experience and their church background—hopefully leading into a 'what do you believe?' question which I can answer by

taking them through a law/gospel presentation," says Scharf.

THE DISCOVERY

Scharf usually shows up unannounced for the first visit—something he also did at the Finch household. "The best part of [his] showing up at my house the first time was that I was out of town on business and my wife got to meet him for the first time because she had told me when I started to visit that she didn't want to have anything to do with 'that church,'" says Bob.

Scharf returned to the Finch home once Bob was home. "My wife still had not visited the church when Pastor came to visit, and I had to really convince her to sit in the meeting, and she did," says Bob. "I had printed information from the different Lutheran [church] bodies. I told [Pastor Scharf] that I wanted to go over what the Lutherans are teaching.

"That opened up all kinds of discussions and questions, and my wife got in on it. The best part about talking with [Pastor Scharf] was that he never made us feel like we had been misguided, but [he] let the Word do the talking. In all the main areas I had questions, when the pastor explained them, I said, 'That is the way I understand it too!'"

Scharf invited the couple to Bible information classes. Cindy joined Bob

Confessions OF FAITH



for a worship service the following Sunday, and after a couple of weeks, Bob began the 12-week class. Cindy joined later, and the couple was confirmed on Christmas Day 2011. “I remember them both really struggling getting past things they had heard all their lives and then seeing in Scripture the truth—it was fun to see the lights go on,” says Scharf. “It was interesting that the light didn’t go on at the same time for both of them on each topic. Some of the things I thought they’d wrestle with were no problem because they had already realized the false teaching they had been hearing previously. It was also so refreshing to see how passionately they wanted to get into the Word and the way that rubbed off on the whole class.”

Since that time, Bob says, “Our total outlook did a 180. I start my day with a reminder of my baptism and what Christ did for me for the forgiveness of my sins. Now for the first time in my life when someone asks me where I will go if I die today, I can say with full confidence, ‘Heaven.’ All praise to God for that!”

THE OPPORTUNITIES

The Baptist church is a “huge” part of the church population in the South, says Scharf. “The 25- to 50-year-olds all seem to have grown up going to

church on the Baptist church buses—often without parents,” he says.

But God’s Word has such grace to offer the struggling Baptist. “[Baptists] have been reminded again and again that they must be obedient—God will love them if they choose him and obey him. When God’s law proves that they are helpless in that and the gospel shows them Jesus as their substitute (not just their example)—wow!” says Scharf. “It’s fun to watch, and the energy is contagious even for someone who doesn’t know a day in his life he didn’t get that.”

Now the Finches are active members at Abiding Grace. Bob has been an elder and is now serving as secretary/treasurer, teen Bible study leader, and teen activities assistant. And things have gone full circle as Bob makes follow-up prospect visits. “His outgoing personality and her quiet faithfulness pair perfectly as they do a great job of helping other burnt-out Baptists come to grips with the fact that things they’ve thought their whole life don’t agree with Scripture, and then celebrating together the freedom of the gospel that isn’t based on our sufficient obedience,” says Scharf.

Our Spirit-led story has a happy ending: Scharf found the Finches, and the Finches discovered God’s comforting truth. Scharf says Bob’s reaction to hearing the pure Word of God was



Bob and Cindy Finch

“like a breath of fresh air. He seemed so relieved that his battle with false teaching, his search for finding the truth, was finally bearing some fruit.”

Bob adds this encouragement: “Be bold in what you believe and trust daily in Christ. Always remember that the gifts God has given you need to be used for his glory and work only. We all have a daily fight with sin, but don’t forget what Christ said on the cross as he was dying for our sins, ‘It is finished!’ Amen!”

Ann Ponath is a member at Christ, North Saint Paul, Minnesota.



heart to heart parent conversations

We all have those “Oh no!” moments as parents. Sometimes they’re funny and give us a story that gets repeated at family reunions. Other times they’re serious. This month our writers share their parenting mistakes—and how they’ve used those mistakes to learn valuable parenting lessons.

Interested in reading more? Visit www.wels.net/forwardinchrist to hear from Kerry Ongenoff about her tendency to become overwhelmed by the day-to-day busyness of life with two young children. Then, share your parenting mistakes and the lessons you have learned.



Join the conversation!

Visit www.wels.net/forwardinchrist and look for the *Heart to heart* link. Read uncut versions of the articles, learn more about the authors, and give us your thoughts and reactions.

HOW CAN WE RECOVER FROM THE MISTAKES WE MAKE AS PARENTS?

I remember telling my dad, “My prayer is never to have to say, ‘If only . . .’ when it comes to parenting.” I’ve been parenting my children for a little over 13 years now. I’ve had to say, “If only,” more times than I’d like to admit.

One such time was last summer when I backed into my 10-year-old son with our van. “If only I had checked.” “If only I wasn’t in a hurry.” “If only . . .”

By the grace of God, my son was fine. He had known I was leaving, but that didn’t get in the way of his desire to play with his Legos, in the sunshine, in the driveway, behind the van. When I backed up, I felt the resistance and stopped. It was like a slow motion movie scene as I rushed to the back of the van to first see scattered Legos and then my son.

When I saw him, I screamed, “I’m sorry! I’m sorry! I am so, so sorry!” He was crying too. His legs were scraped up pretty badly, but he could stand and nothing looked broken.

Recently I was talking to a new mom. It had happened. Her normally stationary infant had gotten just enough strength to roll. And roll she did. Right off the bed.

Tears streamed down the young mom’s face as she lamented, “I just turned my back for a second.” Thankfully, infants are tougher than you think, and her daughter was fine about 60 seconds later.

We have those moments as parents. Those times when we make a decision and our child is negatively impacted. But I have a theory about parenting mistakes that I’m still working out. I think the biggest parenting mistakes are the ones that affect the soul and of which we are ignorant except in moments of rare clarity.

I had one of those moments recently. I was sitting on the couch with my daughter. I reached over to grab my coffee and noticed something. My daughter had grabbed our

If you were to ask my now grown children, they would tell you that my husband and I held them responsible any time they were caught in gross disobedience. They might even tell you that we held them responsible for small and imagined infractions.

What they don’t know is that there were times when one of us wanted to believe our child’s version of events rather than that of the accuser. Against all reason, common sense, and sometimes our conscience, we wanted to diminish or dismiss a major offense.

One incident in particular haunts me. My son was reported to have been extremely unkind to a child, “Jack,” in my care. Jack was challenging in terms of behavior and had bullied other children. When I questioned my child, he assured me that he had done nothing wrong. I accepted my son’s version of events, even though I had nagging doubts.

He then began apologizing to me. He knew he had made a bad choice. But I knew I was supposed to be responsible. I was the mom. I had just hit my son with the van! What mom hits her son with a van?!?!

This mom. This mom had to call the doctor and explain that she needed to bring her son in because she hit him with the van. This mom had to call her husband and tell him that she hit his son with the van. This mom had to explain that she hit her son with the van when friends, family, and curious/nosey people saw the bad scrapes, scratches, and bruises.

That day I had made an obvious mistake in my parenting. But I had made a not-so-obvious mistake as well. Up until that day, I had put much of my value in my own parenting. I had felt like I was a pretty good parent—until I did something characteristic of a bad parent.

I was crushed. In my mind I had lost a big part of my self-worth. But what if I had put my value in being a beloved daughter of the almighty God?

Being a dearly loved daughter who had made a horrible mistake—who could crawl in the lap of her Creator and ask for comfort and forgiveness—changes everything. The same is true for every Christian parent. Our value isn't in our own parenting skills, but in the God who gifted us with children and loved us enough to forgive our failings. If we find value in who we are as dearly loved children of God, we never have to be good enough. We are enough because God made us so.

*Jenni Schubring and her husband,
Tad, have four children.*



iPad. And there she sat, swiping and tapping, squeezing and pressing, right through about three different apps. Did I mention she was not yet two?

Now you might suppose that I'm about to talk about her developing young mind or her language acquisition, but I'm not. Not right now. What I was concerned about in that moment is something that I think is even more profound. What I'm writing about right now is a dad who has at least on occasion absented himself from his daughter with an iPhone. What I'm concerned about is the power of the ding of a text message or the pull of an e-mail that had required me (so I thought) to hand her a replacement parent. What I'm writing about is a young soul who had been taught a lesson about the value of her presence vs. a glowing screen—a lesson that was all too personal for her.

I need grace from Jesus for that. And I know I have it. There was no temptation that would or could pull Jesus

from his higher calling of loving children. Not even when he was exhausted and tired from a long day of dealing with people. That righteousness is mine through faith. I've worn it since my baptism. I believe that so deeply as a parent.

And that righteousness not only covers me, it calls me. It calls me to be better, to work harder, and sometimes even to set family policy. Now when we go out to eat, I leave my phone in the car. When we eat family dinner, my iPhone is set to vibrate in the other room. And when my daughter gets up in the morning and needs a minute to wake up, she sits in my lap with her blankie, and I use the time for prayer.

*Jonathan Bourman is pastor at Peace,
Aiken, South Carolina. He and his wife,
Melanie, have a two-year-old daughter.*



As the day wore on, I noticed that my son became quiet and had no appetite. He then told me he had a tummy ache. My son was not a very accomplished liar. Guilt was written all over his little face and had even started to manifest itself in his body.

Reality hit me. I asked my son if something was bothering him. He tearfully confessed that he was, indeed, guilty of the unkindness. The words rushed out of his mouth as though he'd been holding them in. He wanted to apologize immediately to Jack. I too wanted to apologize. I felt terrible that I had not believed Jack.

Later, when I paused to reflect on this incident, I realized the great disservice I had done to my son. By not holding him accountable, I had denied him the chance to repent and then feel the healing balm of forgiveness. For without acknowledging his trespass, my son carried it as a burden of guilt. I was complicit in strapping that burden on him.

Only when he laid it down did he feel the relief that repentance and forgiveness can bring.

In the following years, I would have occasion to remember this incident. The remembrance was not of my son's misdeed but mine. It helped me to be firm in my resolve to hold my children accountable.

When a friend told me she didn't think I was an "advocate" for my children, I shared this story with her. When we as parent's advocate for the truth, it may sometimes mean we are faced with our child's transgression. When that happens, we have the greatest answer to any sin—forgiveness.

*Mary Clemons lives in Tucson, Arizona,
with her husband, Sam. They have three
grown children and four grandchildren.*





teentalk

Social networking: An adversary or ally?

Instead of using social media to tear others down, let's use it help others and to share the gospel message.

Aaron Petersen

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are just a few of the social networking sites out there. They are a great way to catch up with friends you haven't seen in a while. They can help invite people to events and let people see what you are doing. I believe that people like to see what other people are doing and the things they have done.

With these new ways to connect, there are also new ways to destroy. Cyber bullying is one of the hot topics in the news right now. It has even led people to take their own lives. Where does most cyber bullying come from? You guessed it, social media.

Social media gives a bully a whole new way to victimize people, without even looking that person in the eye. There is absolutely no confrontation when someone is a cyber bully. They can say what they want and not worry about others around them. It's totally different than when someone is bullying in a school setting when there are teachers everywhere and others around who could stop the bullying. Cyber bullying is online, and, sadly, it isn't usually known until the victim notifies an adult or does

something so people take notice. The bad thing is that these people sometimes don't talk to anyone else and believe the only answer is suicide. So social networking receives a bad rap.

But what if we teens worked to change that? I invite you to try out my new idea: cyber gospel. Think about how many people have computers at home, travel with laptops, and have smartphones and other Internet devices. What if we turned that into a whole new mission? Jesus says in Matthew 28:19, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." I say, "Why not go and make disciples without even leaving your couch?" We can use these devices to spread God's infallible Word to the ends of the earth.

Now some might say, "WELS already has a website. They are already doing that." But think how many people wake up in the morning and search the WELS website on Google. I don't think there are too many, but I can tell you how they get led there. You! I always think of the analogy of five friends. If I have five

friends and they have five friends, and so on—you quickly realize that you are connected to everyone in the world. Just think, after the great flood, only Noah and his family were left. All the six billion people on this earth came from one of those survivors. So everyone on this earth is related to one another. Would you let your own brother go down to cyber bullying, or would you stand up for him and give him hope? Could you tell him that even though he is going through a tough time, God is there to support him and loves him even if a thousand bullies say he's no good?

How do you cyber gospel? It's really easy. Instead of posting what you are eating for lunch, try posting something encouraging and helpful for others. Instead of posting how ugly someone's shoes are, try complimenting them. These kinds of things are contagious. All it needs is one person, and that person is you.

So I encourage you, brothers and sisters in Christ, let's go cyber gospel . . .

Aaron Petersen, a junior at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wisconsin, is a member of St. Paul, Lake Mills.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Aderman, James A., to retirement

Barthel, Thomas J., to Trinity, Neenah, Wis.

Berger, Frederic E., to St. Paul, Plymouth, Neb.

Duncan, Michael D., to friendly counselor for Nepal/Pakistan

Jacobson, Mark R., to Grace, Glendale, Ariz.

Koschnitzke, Christopher, to St. John, Waterloo, Wis.

Peters, David G., to retirement

Rosenow, David D., to Trinity, Osceola, Wis.

Schultz, Aaron C., to Messiah, Green Bay, Wis.

Turriff, James E., to Gloria Dei, Memphis, Tenn.

Teachers

Eggers, Judith K., to retirement

Thies, Janine H., to Bethlehem, Hortonville, Wis.

Weigand, Cindy A., to Faith, Fond du Lac, Wis.

ANNIVERSARIES

Neenah, Wis.—Trinity (150). Mar. 22. Worship with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Chorus, 8 and 10:30 A.M. 920-722-6712. Website, www.trinityneenah.net.

Kewaunee, Wis.—Immanuel (150). Apr. 19. Worship with guest organist Charles Bonow, 10 A.M.; brunch to follow. July 19. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal to follow. Aug. 1. Worship with Koiné, 10 A.M.; picnic to follow. Website, www.immanuelutherankewaunee.org.

Garden Grove, Calif.—King of Kings School (50). May 9. Worship, 11 A.M.; meal to follow. office@kingofkingsgg.org.

Appleton, Wis.—Mount Olive (100). May 17. Worship, 8, 9:30, and 11 A.M.; meal to follow. Oct. 11. Worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M. Website, www.mountoliveappleton.com.

COMING EVENTS

Marriage enrichment—WELS Adult Discipleship holds marriage enrichment weekends around the country. See a list of upcoming retreats at www.wels.net/events.

Mission and Ministry—Feb. 3–5. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Theme: “Should I not be concerned about that great city?” (Jonah 4:11). WELS Home Missions, Ministry Support, and World Missions share information and resources. Jason Williams, williamj@wls.wels.net. Website, www.wls.wels.net.

Biblical worldview conference—Feb. 6–7. Faith (ELS), San Antonio, Tex. Designed for high school and college students and their parents to learn about false worldviews in our culture today and how to answer to them in Christian love. Website, www.flc-sa.org.

Martin Luther College Choir spring

tour—Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Website, www.mlc-wels.edu.

- Feb. 27, 7 P.M., Zion, South Milwaukee, Wis.
- Feb. 28, 7 P.M., Trinity, Saline, Mich.
- Mar. 1, 11 A.M., Peace, Livonia, Mich.; 7 P.M., St. Paul, Saginaw, Mich.
- Mar. 2, 9:25 A.M., Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.; 12:45 P.M., Huron Valley Lutheran High School, Westland, Mich.; 7 P.M., Immanuel, Findlay, Ohio
- Mar. 3, 7 P.M., Beautiful Savior, Cincinnati, Ohio
- Mar. 4, 3:30 and 7 P.M., Trinity, Crete, Ill.
- Mar. 5, 2 P.M., Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.; 7 P.M., St. Paul, Howards Grove, Wis.
- Mar. 6, 1:30 P.M., Northland Lutheran High School, Mosinee, Wis.; 7 P.M., Trinity, Minocqua, Wis.
- Mar. 7, 7 P.M., Our Redeemer, Madison, Wis.
- Mar. 8, 10:30 A.M., Peace, Sun Prairie, Wis.

The Seminary Chorus spring tour—

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Website, www.wls.wels.net.

- Mar. 4, 6:30 P.M., St. Paul, Stevensville, Mich.
- Mar. 5, 10 A.M., Michigan Lutheran High School, St. Joseph, Mich.; 7 P.M., Emanuel, Tawas City, Mich.
- Mar. 6, 1:30 P.M., Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.; 6:30 P.M., Bethel, Bay City, Mich.
- Mar. 7, 7 P.M., Resurrection, Maumee, Ohio
- Mar. 8, 8 and 10:30 A.M., Trinity, Jenera, Ohio

The Prep Singers spring tour—

Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. Website, www.lps.wels.net.

- Mar. 12, 7 P.M., Good Shepherd, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
- Mar. 13, 7 P.M., Grace, Lowell, Ark.
- Mar. 14, 6 P.M., Calvary, Dallas, Tex.
- Mar. 15, 7:45 A.M., Atonement, Plano, Tex.; 10:30 A.M., Divine Peace, Garland, Tex.; 7 P.M., Holy Word, Austin, Tex.
- Mar. 16, 7 P.M., Our Savior, San Antonio, Tex.
- Mar. 17, 7 P.M., Lord of Life, Friendswood, Tex.
- Mar. 18, 7 P.M., Abiding Word, Houston, Tex.
- Mar. 19, 7 P.M., Christ the Lord-Sienna, Houston, Tex.
- Mar. 20, 7 P.M., Abiding Faith, Fort Worth, Tex.

- Mar. 21, 7 P.M., Mount Olive, Overland Park, Kan.

- Mar. 22, 9 A.M., Our Savior, Harrisonville, Mo.; 7 P.M., Gethsemane, Davenport, Iowa

- Mar. 23, 7 P.M., St. John, Watertown, Wis.

Pathways to Christ (Ladies) retreat—

Mar. 13–15. Hawthorn Inn, Oshkosh, Wis. Theme: Psalm 46:10. 920-233-1069. Website, www.martinlutheroshkosh.com.

WELS Nurses Association spring conference—

Mar. 20–21. WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, Waukesha, Wis. Theme: “The heart of healthcare—the heart of WELS.” Website, www.welsnurses.net.

Christian Woman Today retreat—

Mar. 20–22. Theme: “Be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). Maureen, 262-784-0412. Website, www.christianwomantoday.org.

Ironmen of God 2 men's conference—

Mar. 21. St. Paul, Ixonia, Wis. Theme: “His sacrifice . . . our response” (Galatians 2:20). Website, ironmenofgodwi.org.

Tour to Germany—

May 24–June 4. Hosted by Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Registration deadline: Feb. 10. Website, www.wls.wels.net/seminary/2015-germany-tour.

WELS National School Leadership conference—

June 15–18. Hosted by WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools. Country Springs Hotel, Waukesha, Wis. Website, www.wels.net/events.

52nd annual Lutheran Women's Missionary Society convention—

June 25–28. Rushmore Plaza Civic Center, Rapid City, S.D. Hosted by the Black Hills and Central Dakota Circuits. Theme: “Lift high the cross in the Hills.” Early registration deadline: April 1. Website, www.lwms.org.

WELSTech conference—

July 9–11. For those interested in learning how technology can aid the ministry efforts of churches, schools, individuals, and other gospel-sharing organizations. Hosted by WELS Technology office. Country Springs Hotel, Waukesha, Wis. Website, www.wels.net/welstechconf.

Regional youth rally—

July 13–16. Villanova University, Philadelphia, Pa. Hosted by the North Atlantic and Michigan Districts. For teens entering grades 9–12. Theme: “Freedom 513 (Galatians 5:13).” youthrallyfreedom513@gmail.com.

63rd biennial WELS convention—

July 27–30. Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich. Website, www.wels.net/2015synodconvention.

To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.

Martin Luther College graduates

Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., held its midyear graduation on Dec. 18, 2014.



Carrie A. Fleischmann ●
Austin, Minn.



Hannah H. Hackbarth ●
Lake Mills, Wis.



Morgan A. Jacob ■
Saginaw, Mich.



Josiah E. Jahns ●
Rosendale, WI



Aaron E. Luedtke ●
Troutville, Va.



Lynn M. Marggraf ●
Sussex, Wis.



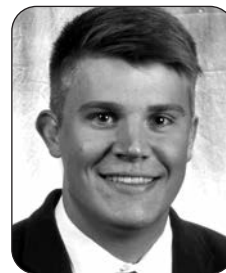
Kirsten M. Michael ●
Bainbridge Island, Wash.



Douglas M. Peavy ●
Muskego, Wis.



Brittany L. Rue ●
Racine, Wis.



Luke J. Schwecke ●
Lake Mills, Wis.



Nathaniel M. Solofra ■
Phoenix, Ariz.



Molly F. Ulland ●
Waterford, Wis.



Rachel L. Van Mun ■
Appleton, Wis.



Rachel E. Veith ●
Lake Mills, Wis.



Hannah M. Zabel ●
Fond du Lac, Wis.

● Bachelor of Science in Education

■ Bachelor of Science

Congratulations class of 2014!

ASSIGNMENT Marggraf, Lynn M., to Northdale, Tampa, Fla.

Sharing the gospel in Sonora, Mexico

Mission to the Children, a nonprofit, volunteer organization based in southern Arizona, is dedicated to sharing the gospel and feeding hungry children in Sonora, Mexico. The organization also helps support two Mexican pastors and their families called to serve Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Confesional congregations in Altar, Sásabe, and other outlying villages. (Read more about one of these pastors on p. 28.) Here John Kramer, one of the group's volunteers, introduces you to Bernadine, a member of the congregation in Altar, and shares how Mission to the Children helps her and others.

Bernadine lives in a small two room house near the church in Altar, Sonora, Mexico. The bedroom has a cement floor, but the front room is dirt. There is a steel and cast iron stove with a tube that penetrates the wall for propane. The propane tank is just outside and useful when there is fuel in it. The rest of the time mesquite wood is used to bake the bread, heat the tortillas, and reify the beans.

Bernadine and her husband have two teenage children. The four all sleep together in one bed. During the Sonoran winter they sleep covered in lots of blankets and in the summer few or, better yet, none. A fan would be a nice addition for the hot summer nights. The house is built of cement block walls and corrugated steel roof. Nothing is insulated.

The house is just across the dirt street from the Lutheran church *El Buen Pastor* (The Good Shepherd). Bernadine has been a member there

for three years, and her children come with her. I've only met her husband once. He works part time at a local ranch. Most of the time they have enough to eat.

Mission to the Children comes to church once a month and shares a few material things with the parishioners and their families, including cotton t-shirts and shoes, school supplies for the kids, and blankets and quilts when we have them. We also share food coupons. Each time we visit we give each family two or three coupons. The coupons are worth 50 pesos each, about \$4. The people take them to the local store and trade for food. Then we visit the store and buy the coupons back. The system works. We are part of the local economy, and the people have a little more to eat. These coupons are prized by the people. You have to be a member of the church to get them.

Recently a church family was going

through a tougher time than normal and welcomed a little extra help. Bernadine gave them her coupons. This story tugs at my heartstrings every time I think about it—those with just barely enough helping those with not quite enough. That's the love of God plainly on display in Bernadine's actions flowing from her Spirit-filled heart.

We share the message about Jesus, and the Holy Spirit does the work. It's a miracle every time.

John Kramer

Learn more about Mission to the Children at www.missiontothechildren.org.



Members of the church *El Buen Pastor* (The Good Shepherd), Altar, Sonora, Mexico.



Each December, volunteers from Mission to the Children present the Christmas message—and gifts—to people living in nine different villages in Sonora, Mexico. More than 1,100 people heard that gospel message in December 2014.

Opportunities for international students

Tassia-Channel Clement used to work in the tourism industry in St. Lucia, but her real love is teaching. She began teaching at a rural government school but soon discovered she wanted more training. Her plan was to attend the local St. Lucian community college for an associate's degree. She mentioned this to her pastor, who immediately encouraged her to consider being a WELS teacher.

Now Clement is a freshman at Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., getting the training she wanted so she better can do a job she loves.



Students from the Caribbean attending MLC: (left to right) Ron Pile, Antigua; Tassia-Channel Clement, St. Lucia; Joycelyn Christmas, Antigua; and Evodia Cassius, St. Lucia.

International students from WELS congregations and sister churches are attending MLC; 15 students from countries such as South Korea, Canada, and Colombia are enrolled this year. A new International Studies Office has been started on campus to support international students as well as to look for opportunities for U.S. students to study or serve abroad.

Four international students on campus this year are from the Caribbean. To make it possible for these students to attend MLC, the three island churches—Trinity, St. Lucia; St. John's, Antigua; and Grace, Grenada—support a scholarship fund through their offerings, with additional monies coming from the Board for Home Missions and individual donors.

"To get them to be WELS certified

teachers with bachelor's degrees while they are in St. Lucia would take years and years. At MLC, it is a much quicker route," says Erik Landwehr, a staff minister at Trinity. "Most of the students . . . are already serving in some capacity in their churches/schools, so we want them back ASAP so that they can continue their ministry with the increased understanding and spiritual depth that they receive from an MLC education."

Surrounding them with students training for the ministry as well as seasoned Lutheran educators helps them in their journey, according to Landwehr. "MLC gives our students a wonderful foundation of gospel-focused ministry," he says. "They may leave the Caribbean as teachers, but they return as called workers of the gospel—in title and, more important, in attitude and understanding."

Their presence on campus also influences the entire student body. "It's good to expand our students' vision and give them a global perspective," says Megan Kassuelke, MLC's international coordinator. "Once they graduate they will be exposed to many different cultures, and they have to be able to communicate well and be open to other perspectives."

Clement is training to be a primary school teacher with a music minor. Landwehr says the hope is that she will return to teach at the WELS school in Antigua or Grenada.

Though it is challenging now to be far away from home and family, Clement appreciates the opportunities for growth she receives from MLC. "It is my sincerest belief that what we need now, more than ever, is the gospel in the classroom," she says. "Being able to bring everything back to Jesus and the most amazing example of love—God's love for us—is one thing that we will not be taught at secular colleges and universities."

She continues, "I still stand in front of the chapel in awe ever since the first day I saw it. Having a chapel on campus has done a lot to my faith in just a few months. What a gift!"

Continuing to reach out to inmates

Serving inmates and sharing the good news with them are some of the main goals of Brad Price, the new WELS Prison Ministry administrator.

As administrator, Price will coordinate the activities and the volunteers at the central office for WELS Prison Ministry in New Ulm, Minn., including facilitating the large ministry-by-mail program. He will also recruit and work with congregations in setting up local prison ministries around the country and in assimilating and mentoring ex-convicts.

Price, who is graduating with his seminary certification from Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., in May, has some experience with working with inmates in that he worked as a detention officer in a jail for three years. "I guess you can say that I have a different insight as far as inmates' lives and the struggles they have when they are incarcerated," he says.

A second-career student at MLC, Price says that a seed was planted for serving in the ministry full time

PRISON MINISTRIES

Brad says an experience he had when working as a detention officer at a jail played a part in him wanting to get more involved in prison ministry.

It all started with Price praying to the Lord to use him at the jail. "I remember thinking that maybe [God] would give me opportunities to minister more to the other detention officers," he says.

But that's not exactly how it worked out. One night, while doing rounds, Price discovered an inmate who had been convicted of murder crying in a cell while holding a Bible. "He was seeing a lot of law, but he wasn't getting enough gospel," says Price. "He was torn up about that."

Price presented the gospel to him. "I don't know where it went," he says, "but the Holy Spirit deals with that. It was an opportunity to minister to that man."



Brad Price is the new administrator for WELS Prison Ministry. Pictured is Brad; his wife, Laura; and their son, Ben.

when he attended a WELS grade school and high school, but “what I wanted to do was law enforcement or military.” After working in the jail system, he served in the Texas National Guard—including a deployment to Iraq—and as a training manager at a large security company. But something was missing. “I enjoyed what I did but there seemed like there was something more to do,” says Price. “So I started considering the ministry. After lots of prayer, my family ended up at MLC.”

Price began volunteering at the New Ulm office, answering the questions inmates would submit through the Bible correspondence courses. When Dave Nack, the Prison Ministry administrator, died last spring, the Conference of Presidents called Price to serve that position after he graduates.

“It almost seems like the Lord has been training me, that this is what I’m supposed to do,” says Price. “I think it’s a unique position in that I’m able to be a person who can help facilitate a way for people to serve, to share their faith with those who oftentimes are forgotten.”

WELS Prison Ministries, a part of the Commission on Special Ministries, has sent materials to over 1,300 facilities throughout the United States, reaching more than 80,000 inmates. Learn more at www.wels.net/special-ministries/prison-ministry.

20 years of connecting with kids

Twenty years ago, the first *Kids Connection* VHS tapes were being sent to WELS schools across the country. Now, marking its 20th anniversary, the children of that first *Kids Connection* audience are viewing the DVDs every month at WELS schools. While technology, styles, and hosts have changed over the years, the message has remained the same: “Stay connected to Jesus.”

That message, says Steve Boettcher, who has been producing the videos for all 20 years, is “as true this season as it was 20 years ago. It’s something we really truly believe in.”

Kids Connection, a video implemented by the WELS Commission on Youth and Family Ministry, was born out of a desire from teachers and pastors who wanted a *WELS Connection*-style video with a message targeted to kids. Nine episodes are made each year, one for each month of the school year.

Boettcher says, “We want to connect Christian kids to other Christian kids,



Connor Johnson, a member at Bethlehem, Menomonee Falls, Wis., and Lauren Klika, a member of Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wis., are the current hosts for *Kids Connection*, now in its 20th season.

showing there are other schools like theirs and other Christians like them across the nation in WELS.” The goal, he explains, is to highlight young Christians as much as possible in the videos, including the high school-aged hosts of each episode.

Helping WELS kids stay connected for the past 20 years is Tony Schultz, pastor at St. Luke, Watertown, Wis. He has offered a reflection on God’s Word in every episode for all 20 seasons. Schultz says, “Month after month to be able to tell tens of thousands of kids that Jesus loves them, that’s a privilege to touch more lives than you ever could in one building.”

The message Schultz hopes viewers take away resonates with kids and adults alike: “Every hour of every day, look for Jesus. Look for his grace, his love, and his wisdom and power in everything around you. Always be looking for Jesus. We always say, ‘Stay connected to Jesus,’ but the fact is Jesus is always connected to us. He’s always watching you; he’s always with you; he always loves you.”



Nearly 300 WELS schools and churches already subscribe to *Kids Connection*. Learn more about *Kids Connection*, view this month’s episode, and subscribe at www.wels.net/kidsconnection.

KIDSCONNECTION

Kids Connection has been using teenage hosts since it started in 1994. Jeremy Mattek, pastor at Garden Homes, Milwaukee, Wis., was one of the first. At the time, Mattek was a student at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., and deciding whether he wanted to follow in his father’s footsteps and become a pastor or pursue broadcast journalism. Being part of *Kids Connection*, says Mattek, contributed to his decision to enter the ministry. “It was really the first time I ever felt like something I do can make a difference positively for the ministry,” he says. “I’m really grateful that I was able to be a part of it.”

Twenty years later, the current hosts, Connor Johnson and Lauren Klika, still realize the importance of their role in sharing gospel-centered stories with a young audience. Says Johnson, “I try to be a good role model for the kids, because when I was little I looked up to the hosts.

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

Members of Eternal Love, Appleton, Wis., have turned an irritant into an opportunity to let their lights shine.

Every September the Fox Cities Marathon is run on a Sunday morning. The marathon's route surrounds our church property, going down the street in front of our church early in the route and then on the street behind our church at about mile 18. As a result, the roads around our church are blocked off and closed at portions of the morning between 7 A.M. and noon. This makes it extremely difficult for our worshipers to get to our church that Sunday, and our attendance (and offerings) drop by about 30 to 50 percent.

For the first few years this happened, we were irritated by the marathon because it kept so many away from the Word. But for the past six years, instead of resenting it, Eternal Love has embraced it and has held hymn-sings down at the road as the runners and walkers go past.

More than five thousand marathon participants are greeted with our testimony of praise and a confession of our faith in the words of our hymns and praise songs. Many marathoners react in kind, pointing to the sky, giving us thumbs up, and running close to give high-fives to the singers. Almost every year runners send notes of thanks after the marathon for the Christian testimony that we give. The marathon is no longer an irritant, but an opportunity to share our testimony of praise to our God.

This year we made our testimony bigger and better. In spite of the rain, we set up a tent; rolled a keyboard out there; had a trumpet, guitars, and a lead singer; put up witness signs and balloons; and sang and cheered for 30 minutes as the mass of runners went by. It was awesome. We had about 35 participants from our church, in spite of the fact that it was 7 A.M., rainy, cold, and very hard to get to the church.

Next year, if the weather is better, we hope to double the numbers. We actually hope the marathon doesn't change the route.

Robert Balza Sr.



Members at Eternal Love, Appleton, Wis., sang hymns and cheered for runners in the Fox Cities Marathon. Christy Hitter has run in the Fox Cities Marathon two times and says, "I so appreciate Eternal Love being there as a sign to the runners to remember God on this day and always. . . . You only get a small amount of time to hear the choir, as the race is moving so fast—but, wow, what a blessing!"

Obituaries

Robert William Moldenhauer; 1925–2014

Robert Moldenhauer was born Sept. 11, 1925, in Iron Ridge, Wis. He died Nov. 10, 2014, in Milwaukee, Wis.

A graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at St. John, Sparta, Wis.; Trinity, Marinette, Wis.; Trinity, Neenah, Wis.; Trinity, Kaukauna, Wis.; and Trinity-St Luke, Watertown, Wis.

Robert is survived by his wife, Elaine; two sons; one daughter; seven grandchildren; and ten great-grandchildren.

William Kansier Hein; 1928–2014

William Hein was born April 4, 1928, in Oconto, Wis. He died Nov. 21, 2014.

A 1954 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at St. Paul, Faith/First English, Dupree, S.D.; Trinity, Minocqua/First, Woodruff, Wis.; Trinity, Caledonia, Wis.; and Grace, Muskegon, Mich.

He is survived by his wife, Ruth; 4 sons; and 11 grandchildren.

Karen A. Schroeder; 1962–2014

Karen (née Klug) Schroeder was born Dec. 13, 1962. She died Nov. 29, 2014, in New Ulm, Minn.

A graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at St. Mark, Citrus Heights, Calif., and Trinity, Waukesha, Wis.

She is preceded in death by her father and two sons. She is survived by her mother, three brothers, and one sister.

Sandra L. Greenfield; 1938–2014

Sandra (née Harris) Greenfield was born June 25, 1938. She died Nov. 29, 2014, in Milwaukee, Wis.

She taught at St. Paul, Saginaw, Mich.; Redemption, Milwaukee, Wis.; Gloria Dei-Bethesda, Milwaukee, Wis.; Siloah, Milwaukee, Wis.; Jordan, West Allis, Wis.; Fairview, Milwaukee, Wis.; and St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis.

She is preceded in death by her husband, Gary, and two brothers. She is survived by two sons, two daughters, three granddaughters, and one sister.

District news

SOUTH ATLANTIC

For the 14th year, **Beautiful Savior, Clarksville, Tenn.**, held a German Christmas service. The service was followed by a reception featuring German cakes and refreshments. Between 150 to 200 people attend the service each year, and many are from other denominations. Matt Brown, pastor at Beautiful Savior, says, "Our Christmas service is an opportunity for us to teach others about German and Lutheran traditions. . . . There may be someone in attendance that doesn't have a church home. Our Christmas service is a great introduction into how we worship and honor Jesus."

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

In December 2014, **St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.**, purchased a building it had been leasing so it can expand its school. The building is located four blocks from St. Marcus' original campus.

The district reporters for this month are: MI—John Eich; SA—Jonathan Kuske; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

SOUTH ATLANTIC



On Nov. 2, 2014, Victory, Jacksonville, Fla., celebrated the 50th anniversary of Esther Huebner's service as a parish organist and keyboard player. Huebner started playing at Faith, Dexter, Mich., as a 12-year-old. She now shares the bench with her daughter, Rachel Cochran, who celebrated her 30th year as a church organist.

MICHIGAN



On June 29, 2014, St. Jacob, Grass Lake, Mich., recognized Carol Zautner for her dedication and faithfulness in teaching the truths of God's Word in Sunday school for 42 years.

SOUTH ATLANTIC



On Dec. 7, 2014, Peace, Aiken, S.C., held its grand opening service. Eighty-four worshipers were in attendance; 35 of them were first-time guests. Leading up to the event, Peace held a ribbon-cutting ceremony, attended by Aiken's mayor and other city leaders (pictured).

WELS news briefs

SPECIAL MINISTRIES

414-256-3241; specialministries@wels.net

Forty-three people from all over Europe gathered in Cochem, Germany, in October 2014 for a weekend of worship, Bible study, and fellowship at the annual Reformation retreat. Pastor James Behringer, director of WELS Special Minis-



tries, also attended the retreat. He was in Germany at the time to offer encouragement and spiritual support to Pastor Joshua Martin, WELS civilian chaplain in Europe. "Newly arrived WELS families were quickly taken into the circle at the retreat," says Behringer. "I saw a lot of intentional relationship building and support going on between attendees." The Easter retreat will be held in Magdeburg, Germany, April 2–5.

COMMUNICATION SERVICES

414-256-3210; csc@wels.net

WELS Communication Services in cooperation with the Ministry of Christian Giving released the WELS 2014



Annual Report in January. The report, which offers a quick snapshot of the ministry WELS conducts as a church body, is published as an attractive, easy-to-read booklet. Copies of the report were mailed

in January to all congregations as well as to members who have made a direct gift to WELS in 2014. Additional copies are available through Northwestern Publishing House, www.nph.net, or in a digital version at www.wels.net/about-wels/synod-reports.





John A. Braun

The story of one family gives us an example and an encouragement.

Father, mother, and five children lived in Kansas almost 80 years ago. God in his wisdom drew them together as his dear children and nourished their faith through their worship and study of his Word. They became faithful contributors to the work of the church, and the lessons they learned remain a part of two sisters, Thelma and Velma Carlson, members at Our Savior, Longmont, Colo., to this day.

The lessons are important for us all as we think of our own giving. The apostle Paul encouraged the Christians in Corinth to “excel in the grace of giving” (2 Corinthians 8:7) as they considered sharing in the collection for the needy in Jerusalem. He reminded them of the Christians in the Macedonian churches who “gave themselves first of all to the Lord” (8:5), then gave generously in spite of their own poverty.

Like the Corinthians, we can be challenged to excel in the grace of giving. Of course, giving should come freely from Christians who know the love of God in Christ. Paul also reminded the Corinthians that “Christ’s love compels us” (5:14). His love is the motivation for all we do as believers. But we are also plagued by our sinful nature. That often causes us to turn selfish and choose a course that will lead us away from excelling in our giving. The good we desire to do sometimes is overcome by the evil we do not want to do.

Here is one family’s positive example of Christ’s love compelling them to live for their Lord and to give generously to his work.

Oscar Carlson was one of three boys and four girls raised by Swedish immigrant parents in a strong Lutheran farming community. He was remembered as one who had a “quiet but firm faith” that was evident “in regular reading and studying the Scripture.” He had two important goals. First, “giving to the work of spreading the gospel was a vital part of his worship.” Second, “his burning desire was to nurture the children entrusted to him” and “keep them in baptismal grace and forgiveness.”

His faith and life were a contrast to that of his wife, Ferne. Before her marriage to Oscar, her life was difficult. She was the oldest of five children and had to assume the care of her youngest brother because her mother died at his birth. She described her father as “irresponsible . . . a woman chaser (married seven times) a gambler (moved the family frequently to escape debts), and a drunkard.” He left one night to escape the law with one daughter and a son “to live and die under an assumed name.”

Oscar and Ferne married and started their own family—four girls and one boy. Ferne and the children were baptized at a Methodist revival meeting. Six months later a group of Swedish and German Lutherans began church services in an abandoned

school building. Oscar and Ferne became charter members of the newly organized Lutheran church.

Serving a congregation in western Kansas was not easy. Vicars came to serve the small congregation. Oscar and Ferne provided housing for the students, some of them for only three months but others for a year or two. To help the vicars serve the group, an elder pastor came across the state once or twice a year to administer communion and confirm members.

Later, preseminary students would arrive by train at 4 P.M. on Saturday or early Sunday morning to conduct services and then return on the 9 P.M. evening train. Oscar or Ferne would be standing at the train stop to welcome them and to bid them good-bye after services.

The little family, so active in the work of the small congregation, did what the Macedonian Christians did. They gave themselves first to the Lord. Even without the gift of consistent pastoral care, they were faithful in attending worship together. Oscar also insisted on reading Scripture after both morning and evening meals. He did not forget to help his family memorize the doctrine of the Small Catechism. The Scripture and the catechism “became the lasting bedrock for faith.”

Faith was an active force that showed itself not only in a commitment to the Scriptures and the Lutheran teachings but also in a generosity to the work of the Lord. Thelma and Velma remember, “The Depression brought a complex mentality for giving. A generous spirit for sharing conflicted with a tight grasping on to what was needed for survival. God graciously provided parental guidance to strengthen faith for his children to give in trying times.”

Those words are a contemporary American expression of Paul’s words about the Macedonians, “Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability” (2 Corinthians 8:2,3). They are also an encouragement for us all to grow in the grace of giving.

The parents planted the lesson in generosity to the Lord’s work in their children. The girls remembered watching five children on Saturday evening. They received 25 cents for staying with the children—the

oldest six and the youngest in diapers. On Sunday morning, they placed a nickel in the Sunday morning offering. The lesson on giving has not been lost over the years but persists in their hearts to this day.

One story underscores the generosity they learned from their father and mother. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) questioned the gifts Oscar gave to his church. During the Depression and the Dust Bowl years the IRS sent an auditor to the house questioning the amount Oscar claimed on his tax form. It seemed unusually high for such difficult times. But Oscar had a record of all his gifts. “He reached for and opened his little black book to show to an auditor. The older children were impressed and surprised to see how readily the precise record was accepted,” says Thelma and Velma.

[Christ’s] love is the motivation for all we do as believers.

The work of the small mission church had an important effect on the people in the community. One family with six boys heard the witness of one of those part-time pastors while he helped them riding the tractors during harvest time. One of the boys was killed in action during World War II. Three became ministers of the Word, one of them spending time in Africa as a missionary.

Thelma and Velma offer their own words of encouragement to Christians today: “People feel the need to give at times. However, God’s redeemed children give as he has given. In love God the Father gave and sent his Son Jesus. In love Jesus gave his life and sent the Holy Spirit. In love the Holy Spirit gives faith and sends the Word into all nations. Love prompts thankful believers to give faithfully in times of health, in times of sickness, even in times of death.”

John Braun is executive editor of Forward in Christ magazine.



Velma and Thelma, 1947

IT'S GOOD TO BE HERE Rachel Hartman

When asked what there is to see and do in the place where he lives, “There’s not much,” says Pastor Alejandro Sánchez. After a moment, he adds, “Just horses and chickens.”

Sánchez serves *Cordero de Dios* (Lamb of God), a congregation located in the town of Sásabe, Mexico. Sásabe is on the U.S. border, nearly touching the state of Arizona. It has about one thousand habitants and is in the midst of the Sonoran desert, far from any other Mexican villages.

Originally from Puebla, a large metropolitan city in central Mexico, Sánchez felt the change when he arrived in Sásabe in 2010. He quickly learned, however, that the shift in scenery was not the biggest difference between the two locations. “Nearly 90 percent of the people here depend on illegal activities to make a living,” he explains.

A BARREN PLACE

For many, the dry, dusty town of Sásabe, Sonora, “is literally the end of the world,” notes Missionary Michael Hartman, who serves Latin America. There are two ways to get to the village. A dirt road runs through Mexico, connecting Sásabe to the nearest town, which is 30 miles away. Another dirt road leads to the U.S. border. For those without a visa or passport, however, it is legally impossible to enter America.

Within Sásabe, parks and movie theaters are nonexistent. “There is no gas station or bank,” adds Hartman. Those passing through will find a store selling food items and other trip-related gear, like backpacks and water bottles. There is also a bare-bones hotel, which allows trekkers to claim a space on the floor inside the building to rest for a night.

Due to Sásabe’s proximity to the U.S. border, it is a central hub and final stop for individuals who are trying to cross illegally into the United States. It is not uncommon to see Central Americans pass through the town. After leaving their homeland, these

travelers have undergone a treacherous journey spanning thousands of miles on trains and buses and often on foot to arrive in Sásabe. After staying in the village a short time, and perhaps attending a final Sunday service at *Cordero de Dios*, they move on toward the border.

It falls into place, then, that Sásabe’s economy revolves around this trend. In addition to human trafficking, it is also a place where drug trafficking is alive and thriving. Those who are not involved—either directly or indirectly—in these activities find it hard to make a living.

Given the town’s economy, its residents do not naturally greet newcomers with open arms. “Generally speaking, the people are very distrustful of anybody from the south,” says Sánchez. “That’s the first obstacle I encountered.”

In addition to being met with wary eyes, Sánchez arrived during a time of unrest and violence, as two cartels fought for control of the area. As a result, one of the groups blockaded the road leading out of Sásabe and toward other Mexican villages. It also cut off the water in town.

“For the first three months, I didn’t have any water,” explains Sánchez. The blockade remained in place for a total of nine months.

The only way to access food and water involved exiting Sásabe by way of the road leading to the Arizona border, which was not blocked off. Those that had a visa to the United States traveled there, and returned with food and provisions for others in the town. Residents without a visa, including Sánchez, stayed in Sásabe. Members of the church helped Sánchez with food and also bottles and jugs of water during this time.

Unlike many areas of Mexico, where mild temperatures dominate the climate, Sásabe, Sonora, fluctuates greatly. Temperatures can top 100 degrees Fahrenheit during the summer, and drop below freezing in winter. Most places don’t have central heating, air conditioning, or anything to heat or cool homes.

“This is hard ministry,” explains Hartman. “In many ways, it is reminiscent of WELS missionaries going out to Apacheland one hundred years ago.”

A CHILDHOOD DREAM

When he was a child, Sánchez attended a Lutheran church in Puebla, the fourth largest city in Mexico. He went regularly to worship with his mother and siblings. He enjoyed going to church and admired the role of the pastor. “I saw pastors preaching and wearing a suit and tie, and it really caught my attention,” he explains.

During his younger years, he often pretended to be a pastor. Later on, he decided to study to become a pastor. “When I got to the seminary, however, I realized that being a pastor wasn’t so easy,” he recalls. WELS Latin America missionaries taught Sánchez for the following four years. In 2010, after completing his training, Sánchez graduated from the seminary.

At this time, the Mexican Lutheran Church called him to serve in Sonora, Mexico.

Mission to the Children, a nonprofit, volunteer organization based in southern Arizona, helps support mission work in Sásabe and other villages in the state of Sonora, Mexico. WELS members, who run the organization, began working with Sánchez. Together they attend to some of the physical needs of those living in Sásabe. Mission to the Children has

IGLESIA EVANGÉLICA LUTERANA CONFESIONAL (Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mexico)

Baptized members: 650

Congregations/preaching
stations: 23

Missionaries: 2

National pastors: 7

Unique fact: Culinary delights and hospitality play important roles in Mexican culture. It’s not uncommon for congregations to hold potlucks after Sunday worship for four to six weeks in a row. These events often last for several hours.

Go to www.wels.net/missions to learn more about WELS missions.

also played an instrumental role in the founding of congregations and ongoing work in the area.

A REASON TO STAY

“When people get to know you, they are very receptive,” explains Sánchez. “They are very friendly, and there is a lot of respect toward those that are dedicated to the ministry.”

The violence in the area, which made it impossible to leave Sásabe and get essentials, has tapered off in the last two years, adds Sánchez.

Furthermore, an interest in the Lutheran church, and the saving gospel message of Jesus, is evident. Everyone in town has visited *Cordero de Dios* at least once.

And the church is growing. Members of *Cordero de Dios* currently worship in a house but are looking for ways to expand, as they no longer fit in the current space.

Members may have economic needs, but they are eager to help out in ways that they can. Many attend regularly, help clean the church, and organize church gatherings. And several provide meals and food for Sánchez. “There are some families that consider me to be part of their family,” he says.

“It may be a rough place to live,” adds Hartman. “But the people there need the gospel and want the gospel.”

And for that reason, Sánchez is happy and eager to stay.

Rachel Hartman and her husband, Missionary Michael Hartman, serve in León, Mexico.

Top to bottom: Pastor Alejandro Sánchez leads outdoor Bible studies or worship in small towns in Sonora, Mexico; Sánchez (left) and Pastor Jorge Briones, two of the Mexican Lutheran Church’s younger national pastors; Sánchez; *Cordero de Dios* (Lamb of God), the congregation in Sasabe, Sonora, where Sánchez serves.





Stop, reflect, & give it to God

**All our suffering and challenges have a purpose in God's plan.
Remembering that in the hard times is important.**

Amanda M. Klemp

It was May of 2013, and Samantha (Sam) Schroth had just graduated from college with a bachelor of science in animal science with a pre-veterinary emphasis—a degree she worked hard to earn in three years. As she walked across the stage to receive her diploma, she thought about how to enjoy her summer off before starting vet school in the fall.

But the hope of a relaxing summer and vet school came crashing down the next weekend. Sam was at a friend's cabin in northern Minnesota, and as she was standing outside ready to enjoy the first boat ride of the season, a dead tree fell on her. In what is the exact definition of a random accident, Sam's life was permanently changed.

"The section that fell on me was five feet long and one and a half feet in diameter and knocked me down to the ground really hard. It actually took two people to get the tree off of me," says Sam. "My friend gave me CPR because I wasn't breathing at the time. I assume I got the wind knocked out of me. Then I was driven from that location to the nearest clearing, and from the clearing I was picked up by helicopter and flown to the nearest trauma center, which was actually in Fargo, North Dakota."

The accident resulted in a spinal cord injury, leaving her paralyzed from the waist down.

Sam spent three months in the hospital—three and a half weeks in Fargo and then a rehabilitation hospital in Colorado. "I don't remember any of it," she says. "I'm very thankful that God doesn't let me remember those things, because from what I heard it was a very challenging time—collapsed lung, broken ribs."

She does remember waking up in Colorado. "I remember being shocked and confused that I was in Colorado, because I had no idea where I was," she says. But she was not surprised that she lost the use of her legs. Her parents repeatedly and lovingly told her about the injury while she was unconscious, and she believes their words reduced that shock when she woke up.

Rehabilitation kept her busy while in Colorado and kept her mind off what life was going to be like once she returned to Wisconsin, where she lived. "We had classes from 7 A.M. to 5 P.M., just learning how to live life as a paraplegic," Sam explains. "So many things are different, and the world is very

much not built for a person in a wheelchair. So, it was about learning how to live life and make the world work for you.

"I didn't really realize all that would need to change and all that I would need to adjust to until I came home from the hospital, and I definitely had those 'what in the world am I going to do now' thoughts.

"It was definitely a really challenging time watching my friends go back to school and continue with their lives while I was sitting at home, struggling to find my independence."

Adjusting to life at home had its expected challenges. Sam explains, "Physically, I realized how much I used to take for granted, things that I used to think were no big deal—something as simple as opening a door. That was something we were actually taught in rehab classes: how to open a door in a wheelchair without one of those handicap buttons." However, she adds, "I don't like to press those now anyway, because I'm fiercely independent and I do things how I want."

Emotionally, she learned to stop asking the "what-if" questions. "I realized it put me in this really negative and dark place; it wasn't a place that I needed to be," she says. "I came to the conclusion that it happened because it was supposed to, and God has a purpose for this occurring in my life, and I need to trust that plan even though I have no idea what it is."

The early days being home were the hardest, but knowing that God was with her and learning to trust him helped her get through. "You realize you need to lean on something a lot bigger than yourself, and I'm so thankful and blessed that I have a great and awesome and powerful God that I was able to lean on during that time," says Sam.

Today, Sam has adjusted to life in a wheelchair and can even drive herself. She's able to work remotely for her alma mater, the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities, doing research part time. In addition, she's taking business classes at the University of Wisconsin–Fox Valley and has applied to medical school. Since the accident, she has shifted her focus from veterinary

school to medical school, hoping to specialize in spinal cord injuries.

Besides continuing her education, Sam volunteers at The Ave., an Appleton, Wisconsin–area WELS teen group. She likes to work with teens, particularly encouraging them to interact and find their place. She wants them to know it's okay to be different.

"I'm happy to get out and talk to people, and I'm happy to be out and live the life that I have, even though it's very different from what I ever expected it to be," says Sam. "I can only attribute that to my awesome God, who has brought me through the hard struggles."

She says that even though her life has drastically changed, she wouldn't undo the accident if she could. "It's a hard transition and it's a big transition, but I've learned so much about myself and what I want to do in life, and [I've] grown so much in my faith and met so many people that I never would've met before."

She continues, "That doesn't make it easy, that's for sure. But it would be hard to give up all I gained in a spiritual and emotional sense. If I would change anything, it would be how I was living before the injury. I would definitely have been more grateful for everything I did have."

After her experiences, her advice to everyone dealing with a hardship would be to put their trust in God. "It's really important to stop, reflect, and give it to God," she says. "When you put it on your own shoulders, you're not going to go anywhere, and it's going to get really hard. But when you just stop and realize that there's someone a lot bigger than you and a lot stronger and so much greater and so much more loving—God loves us more than we will ever know or ever be able to fathom—and when you realize that, it all gets a lot easier. All our suffering and challenges have a purpose in God's plan, and remembering that in the hard times is really important."



Sam Schroth was crowned Ms. Wheelchair America after learning to adjust to and advocate for life as a paraplegic after an injury caused by a falling tree.



Sam Schroth has stayed active after losing ability in her legs. She learned to trust that God has a plan for her.

Amanda Klemp, WELS web content manager, is a member at Living Word, Waukeisha, Wisconsin.

The depth of the problem

Earle D. Treptow

Identifying
a particular
action as wrong
and refraining
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different matters.

The problem is significant. According to the *nomore.org* website, “12.7 million people are physically abused, raped or stalked by their partners in one year. That’s approximately the population of New York City and Los Angeles combined. That’s 24 people every minute.”

Recent high profile cases of domestic abuse and sexual assault brought the issue into mainstream consciousness. Capitalizing on that awareness, the No More campaign produced several public service announcements encouraging people to acknowledge the severity of the problem and to do something about it. Celebrity after celebrity pleaded, with passion, “No more excuses. No more silence. No more violence. No more bystanding. No more.” And then across the screen flashed their vision: “Together we can end domestic violence and sexual assault.”

What a noble goal! Adopting that goal, however, requires us to believe that people are basically good, with the innate ability to do the right thing. Give people the right information and furnish them with the right motivation, the theory goes, and they will invariably live the right way. They will not abuse their spouses or their children.

That seems a reasonable assumption. Human beings can, to a certain extent, carry out the outward works the law requires, whether from fear of punishment or from a desire to be considered upstanding citizens. They often, by focused effort, can refrain from actions they know to be harmful to others. But that power is light years away from absolute. Identifying a particular action as wrong and refraining from that action are two entirely different matters.

Ask the apostle Paul. “What I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing” (Romans 7:19). Paul possessed the right information. He knew God’s commands in Scripture. Paul had the right motiva-

tion. He wanted to glorify God and be a blessing to others. Unfortunately, proper information and proper motivation didn’t consistently yield the proper results. He repeatedly fell into the sin he hated.

The apostle understood why he regularly failed. “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature” (Romans 7:18). Paul realized that his real problem was not what he did, but who he was. He was thoroughly sinful, unable to submit to God’s law.

To believe that human beings can bring an end to domestic violence once and for all is to fail to grasp the real problem: the profound depth of human sinfulness. It’s lying to ourselves because we desperately want to believe that there must be something good in us for God to praise.

While we cannot end domestic violence, Christians need not sit idly by and watch it continue unabated. We begin by humbling ourselves before the Lord. We cannot look down our noses at those who have abused, because we have the same sinful nature. Assured of his forgiveness, we turn to the Lord in prayer. We implore the Almighty to protect those in harm’s way. We ask him to grant us wisdom and fill us with compassion as we address the issue with family and friends. We pray that he would work through those who make and administer the laws of our country to put strong deterrents in place to curb the violence. We set aside time and money to help those who have been affected by abuse.

Above all, knowing that the Lord changes lives by changing hearts, we continue to proclaim his word of forgiveness. And we look forward to the home of righteousness, where there will be no more abuse, no more violence, no more sin. No more.

Contributing editor Earle Treptow, president of the Nebraska District, is pastor at Zion, Denver, Colorado.

JESUS

PRAYED FOR US



Jesus prayed for the Father's glory.

Samuel C. Degner

It was a watershed moment in the ministry of Jesus.

He stood in front of the tomb of his dear friend Lazarus, with Mary and Martha, the sisters of the dead man. Gathered all around were friends and neighbors who had come to comfort the women. He asked the stone to be rolled away from the entrance of the tomb, and everyone waited to see what would happen.

A PRAYER TO HONOR HIS FATHER

The sisters believed that Jesus was the Messiah. They believed in the resurrection. But they also knew that, after four days, bodies began to decompose. The mourners saw the tear tracks on Jesus' cheeks and knew that he loved Lazarus. They had heard of his healing power. But could that power reach all the way to the depths of the grave?

As the sound of scraping echoed from the shadows of the cave, the onlookers peered into the blackness. Soon they would see the unforgettable. Jesus would speak the dead to life with one divine imperative.

But before he did, Jesus had something else to say. He looked up to heaven and guided the mourners' thoughts in the same direction. He spoke, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me" (John 11:41,42).

Jesus was about to do something that could not be ignored. It would confirm the faith of many and harden his enemies against him. Before he did it, he wanted to be sure that everyone understood what it meant. This sign, like all the others before it, would point to Jesus as the Anointed One. It would bring him glory, as well it should, but not to him alone. Jesus was not a fame-seeking rogue prophet but

God's Son made man. He wanted to ensure that the honor he would receive would also be given to his Father. This was his stated purpose that day (John 11:4,40). Truly this was his goal all his life.

A PRAYER UNLIKE OUR SELFISH PRAYERS

How our outwardly pious prayers fall short! Pastors pray for help in giving a good sermon. Parents pray for their child's success. Workers pray for jobs and then to do them well. All of these are good and godly petitions. The problem is that often we make these requests seeking glory only for ourselves or our families, not for God. See how sin taints even our best efforts!

Not so with Jesus. He honored the Father in everything he did and said, thought and prayed. Only a short time later, as his enemies tightened their snare around him in Jerusalem, Jesus prayed again, "Father, glorify your name!" For the third recorded time, the Father spoke from heaven: "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again" (John 12:28).

Jesus glorified God's name with every mighty miracle and every quiet act of obedience. He honored it again as he was lifted up on the cross to atone for our sins, as he rose from the death, and then as he ascended triumphant to heaven. He fulfilled his purpose on this earth to bring glory to his Father by accomplishing our salvation. Therefore, we know that God has forgiven our self-glorifying desires and selfish prayers.

We know that God accepts all of our petitions for the sake of his Son.

We're happy to pray for the glory of a God like that!

Contributing editor Samuel Degner is pastor at Bethel, Menasha, Wisconsin.

This is the fourth article in a nine-part series on Jesus and his prayer life.

[Jesus] honored the Father
in everything he did and
said, thought and prayed.



Love is not tolerance.
It does not excuse
what is wrong.

God's love and repentance

God loves sinners. His love is undeserved and extends to all sinners of all kinds for all times. He loves the ungodly, the degenerate, and the unwilling—like Paul, who considered himself the worst of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15)

God's love has a purpose. He loves to claim sinners and change their lives, bringing them into a close relationship with himself and altering their behavior. We don't change in order to earn our acceptance from God. No, while we were still sinners Christ died for us. That love from God prompts us to follow his path, not our own. We are changed to love God and our neighbor—the two great commandments that summarize all of God's commands (Matthew 22:37-40). We become new creatures and abandon our old sinful ways.

We understand the simple principle. But so many others do not understand either God's love for sinners or the way it changes sinners. God loves all sinners just as they are—unbelievers; atheists; murderers; thieves; idolaters, including those who persecute and slaughter Christians, children, and families; homosexuals; adulterers; witches; violent disturbers of the peace. All of them. You can add to the list from any newspaper or discussion you encounter.

But God's love is not tolerance. He does not pat sinners on the head and say, "There, there, I love you. It's all okay." He loved us sinners so much he gave his Son so we will have eternal life. But his love does not enable us to continue in our self-destructive ways. We don't treat our children that way. We love them unconditionally, but we don't stand by and allow them to continue in behavior that will bring them trouble or pain. We don't let them attack their siblings or neighborhood children and say, "I love you, and it's okay to do it again."

We shouldn't mock God by suggesting that he accepts and condones all behavior and all opinions. He has said something much different. When Jesus began his ministry, Mark and Matthew both identified his message, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17; see also Mark 1:15). Repentance is always turning away from a wrong path to God's. His path of gracious love and forgiveness brings change, but the path away from God's leads into the abyss of self-destruction. So we turn toward what God wants by the very power he gives in the gospel.

It's a simple principle even if our sinful natures want to distort and dilute it. Love is not tolerance. It does not excuse what is wrong. It does not enable the sinner to continue in sin. Does God love the murderer? Yes. Is murder acceptable? No! When he says that sexual perversion is wrong, does he love those who participate? Yes! Does his love become only a bland and blind tolerance that enables it to continue? No! Does he love the domestic abuser? Yes. Does he excuse the violence? No! He threatens to punish all who transgress, but even that threat is a loving rebuke to lead to repentance and change.

We are to love God in gratitude that he first loved us and gave himself for us. We are also to love others—sinners of all kinds—just as he did but without enabling them to continue in sin and rebellion. Be ready, as Peter says, to respond with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). We seek to bring others to know Jesus so they may proclaim his light by their confession and by the way they live. It is God's plan for us and for all sinners.

"For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven."

Joel D. Otto

"For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven."

Only 11 words in our English translation, 14 in the original Greek. But this little phrase gets to the heart of the gospel. It is the reason theological controversies raged for several centuries over how to express who Jesus is. Everything finally comes down to the question: Why did Jesus come to earth? Why did the Son of God, "through whom all things are made" (John 1:3), become man and make "his dwelling among us" (John 1:14)?

In one little phrase, the authors of the Nicene Creed boil down numerous Bible passages and in so doing spell out what really makes Christianity different from every other religion. Greek and Roman mythology portrayed the pantheon of gods interfering in human events for their own purposes or to punish those who displeased them. Allah is pictured as an aloof deity who only helps those who have lived rightly according to the tenets of Islam.

Only Christianity reveals a God who loved his fallen creatures—all of them (John 3:16)—so much that he literally stepped into his creation to rescue them from the power of their enemy (Genesis 3:15). He did not leave it up to us to pull ourselves out of the death and hell we have earned with our disobedience. He did not come merely to judge and punish. God himself acted in love and mercy. The Father sent his Son to save (John 3:17). "Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him" (Psalm 98:1).

And he did this "for us"—for us who have failed him at every turn; for us who have disregarded his Word; for us who don't fear, love, and trust him above all things. He came to do what we could never do. He came to be our salvation by living perfectly under the demands of God's law (Galatians 4:4)

and dying innocently under the punishment of God's law (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Do you understand what this means? We can be confident that the rescue plan is carried out perfectly and completely because the almighty God has done it. He got his hands dirty and pierced "for us and for our salvation." Since he did it for the world (1 John 2:2), then each of us can be certain that we are included. We can trust him and confess, "For me and for my salvation, he came down from heaven." We can echo the words of Isaiah, "Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation" (Isaiah 12:2).

The next time you confess the Nicene Creed in worship pause for a moment at these 11 words: "For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven." Let them wash over you and refresh you. This is how much your God loves you. This is how much Jesus treasures you.

EXPLORING THE WORD

1. From what has Jesus saved us (see Galatians 3:13; Romans 8:1; John 11:25,26; 1 John 3:8)?
2. For what has Jesus saved us (see Romans 6:4; 2 Corinthians 5:15)?
3. What brings you the greatest comfort in this phrase from the Nicene Creed?

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This is the fourth article in a 13-part series on the Nicene Creed. Find this study and answers online after Feb. 5 at www.wels.net/forwardinchrist.

We
believe
as all
believers
have

Click. Click. Click.

My son Levi loves clicking colorful Legos together to form a solid house for miniature Lego people. He lets me help. Together we built a life for these Lego people.

Did you ever think of marriage that way? It's more than just two people putting together a home, calculating car payments, and initiating insurance plans to keep the bad breaks in life from invading. No, there's more to it than that. You build a life together.

To understand marriage as building a life together, go back to where it started. God built a world and placed a man in a perfectly planted garden. But God had more plans for this man, and it didn't involve flying solo. "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18). God didn't just make a man from mud and a woman from Adam's rib. He created a marriage. And it clicked. Two separate souls combine in marriage to build a life and make each other better than if they simply stood alone.

Here's what it looks like:

BUILDING A SPIRITUAL LIFE

This is where it needs to start. When mistakes make a mess in marriage, remember that you are both God's baptized children, cleansed by water and his powerful Word. Help your spouse

to see worshiping in God's house as the week's highlight. Enjoy the meal of Holy Communion where you are personally told you can depart in peace. Jesus forgives your sins. Use a daily devotional and bring Bible study to the forefront of importance so you grow together. How can a couple pour out God's love and forgiveness to each other if they aren't being regularly filled up with it? What are you going to do this week to make building a spiritual life together your priority?

BUILDING A SELFLESS LIFE

A Christ-filled spiritual life brings out a Christlike selfless life. Let your spouse see Jesus in you. Let it be a love in you that chooses to love your spouse even in times when he or she is being "unlovable." Husbands, see your wife as the precious gem given to you from God's hand. Wives, see your husbands as the man God handpicked especially for you and no one else. What's one thing you can do today to show your spouse that, next to your Savior, he or she is your priority?

BUILDING A FAMILY LIFE

Has God brought the blessing of additional souls into your marriage? You only have so much time to be a daily influence on the next generation of Christians. Model marriage for these future fam-

ily-makers. What you do now doesn't stop with your children. You are impacting your grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and a greater number of souls you will never meet. Be in God's Word with your children. Turn off the TV and talk. Get down on the floor and play games. Walk outside and worship your God with words of praise for his creation. And if you haven't been blessed with children of your own, let others see how you joyfully serve your Savior and spouse, being an example to children around you. What's one thing you can do to build your family life or help build the family life of others?

It takes two in a marriage to build this life together, right? Wrong. It takes three. The one who brought you together, Jesus Christ, is at the center of that life. He built the cosmos, creatures, and a carefully-crafted plan to save souls. But he isn't done. In your marriage, he's building your life together.

Dan Schroeder, an editor at Northwestern Publishing House, is a member at Trinity, Watertown, Wisconsin.

BUILDING a life together

In marriage, Jesus joins two separate souls who work to build a life together with Jesus at the center.

Daniel M. Schroeder



PHOTO: DOLLARPHOTO