

# Forward in Christ

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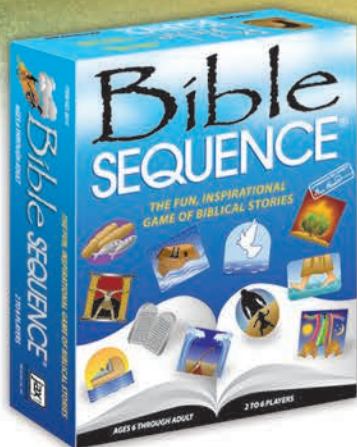


## Land of smiles

Thailand is known as the land of smiles. In this country that is 95 percent Buddhist, a small church body works to proclaim the true Word of God. *Page 28*



# This Day IS THE THE LORD HAS MADE

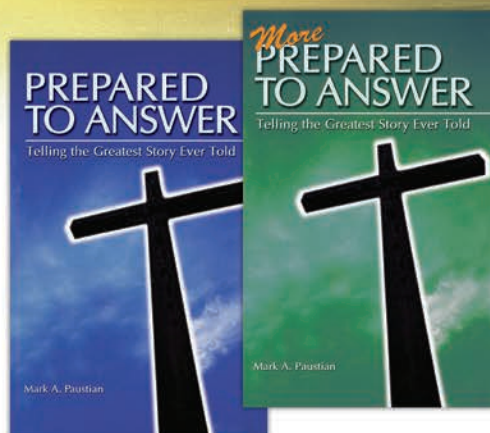


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*May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. — 1 KINGS 8:57*

## WHAT'S INSIDE

"One in Christ." That's the theme of the 63rd biennial convention, which takes places this month in Saginaw, Michigan. This issue previews some of the items that will be discussed at the convention and lets you know how to keep up-to-date with convention happenings (see pp. 8,22,23).

When looking at our cover this month, I realized that the convention theme also would make a good theme for the magazine. We are all one in Christ, whether we're from the land of smiles (Thailand, p. 28), a land of civil unrest (South Sudan, p. 24), or a land once torn apart by genocide (Armenia, p. 14). As Pastor Adam Manian says, "I belong to Christ's family. That is a name worth carrying around" (p. 15).

That's also a name worth sharing here at home and around the world. While we all have God's calling to proclaim his name, 32 men received their first assignment into full-time ministry this past May (pp. 20,21). Please keep these men in your prayers as they nurture our family under God and reach out to others with the one true Word so that more may become our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Julie Wietzke



7



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30

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## OLD-FASHIONED MISSION FESTIVALS

Your article about mission festivals [Sept. 2014] stimulated my thinking that you might not have a copy of the enclosed poster (pictured), a now-famous mission festival service held June 4, 1950, at St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Redwood Falls, Minn.

I am an active member of the international Studebaker Drivers Club. My wife and I are also members of Bethlehem, Carmel, Ind. . . .

I am responsible for a five-page Q&A column in each month's issue of *Turning Wheels*, the official publication of the Studebaker Drivers Club. As such, I became interested in the story behind this Sunday service poster as soon as it was published by Frank Frost of Hastings, Minn., in 1989. I contacted Frank, and he put me in touch with the Baker brothers of Redwood Falls, both now deceased, who supplied a little more information about the photograph. From there, I contacted the then-pastor at St. John's and gradually assembled the rest of the story behind the photograph.

Subsequently, I organized the enclosed history behind the photograph. My wife and I had a copy of the poster professionally matted and framed, and it is displayed, with the story in a separate frame alongside it, in Bethlehem's fellowship hall.

Bob Palma  
Carmel, Indiana

## LETTER OF APPRECIATION

I want to express my appreciation for *Forward in Christ* magazine. It is part of my daily devotional. I am enjoying Pastor Degner's series about Jesus and his prayer life.

As a published Christian poet, much of my inspiration comes during the time I spend each morning with God's Word and the *Meditations* publication. The May installment of Pastor Degner's series inspired the following poem:

### My Prayer

Father forgive them,  
Let this be my prayer.  
I would not wish malice,  
Nor savor revenge's bitter taste,  
But seek my Lord's mercy,  
For those who cause me harm,  
So we could meet in heaven,  
Eternally friends through Christ.

Your magazine is an important part of my life. Keep up the good work.

Lawrence Palubecki  
Stanley, Wisconsin

## SWITCHING PRINTERS

Regarding "changes in the paper" and "switching printers" in "What's inside" [May].

Let's hope it is just a coincidence, but the May issue arrived in my mailbox with a one-inch tear on the right edge through the entire magazine. There was also some serious crumpling in the top and bottom right side corners, again through the entire magazine.

The outdoor mission festival service at St. John, Redwood Falls, Minn., on June 4, 1950. Guest preacher Rev. Martin Galstad delivered his sermon from an unusual "pulpit," a new 1950 Studebaker Model 2R5 pickup truck. The man seated on the right side of the truck is the congregation's "regular" pastor, Rev. Edward Birkholz, who served St. John's from 1932–1961. Thelma Birkholz, one of Rev. Birkholz' daughters, is the young lady seated closest to the camera. The new Studebaker had been loaned to the congregation for the day by local businessmen Cecil and David Baker of Baker Brothers Motors, Redwood Falls' authorized Studebaker dealer.

Was this caused by the new printer? I have been a subscriber for over 40 years and this kind of physical damage has not been a problem in the past. I hope this was a onetime event.

Finally, please bring back paragraph indentation. I receive several periodicals in print and online and view many others online. Paragraph indentation is the standard by far. Let's bring back this centuries-old English language tradition to help us follow the writer's flow of thought. (And, yes, I realize "no indentation" is the standard in e-mail.)

And, of course, I love the magazine. Thank you.

Gary Cox  
Appleton, Wisconsin

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The new cover stock is a welcome improvement. Great cover printed on it too!

Gary Baumler  
Waynesville, North Carolina

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*.



# Perilous times call for purposeful prayers

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “. . . consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. Acts 4:23-31

Norman F. Burger Jr.

The world news reports are disturbing and all too frequent. Christian churches ransacked and burned. Christian villages destroyed, and the people massacred, raped, or abducted. Christians at schools or workplaces singled out and summarily executed. How much does that bother you?

Are you also bothered by what you see happening in America? Bible-based beliefs are increasingly mocked and marginalized. The voices of those who speak against Christianity and the Bible are getting louder, and their tone is getting more hostile. Have you experienced that hostility as a Christian? Does it scare you? Are you worried about what kind of persecution your kids and grandkids may end up facing one day right here in the United States?

## PERSECUTION AND PRAYER IN THE EARLY CHURCH

We could agonize over what we see or what we see coming, withdrawing into our churches to join fellow believers in shaking our heads in dismay and wringing our hands in fear. But that is not what the early church did when it faced persecution. Early church members prayed.

When the disciples Peter and John reported to the believers in Jerusalem that the religious leaders had threatened them with punishment if they did not stop speaking about Jesus, “they raised their voices together in prayer to God.” But their prayer was not a worry-filled “Oh, Lord, what are we going to do?” It

was not a fear-filled “Lord, spare us!” Faith doesn’t pray that way.

They addressed God as the “Sovereign Lord” and Creator of everything, reminding themselves that their enemies were puny in comparison. They remembered how the Lord had said in Psalm 2 that it is futile for mere men to try to stand up against the Lord and “his anointed”—the promised Savior.

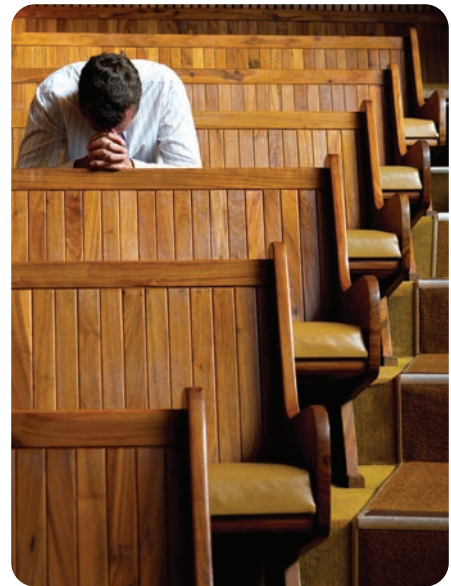
## Pray that the Spirit enables you to speak God’s Word boldly.

They confessed that they had seen how true that is in how the Father used the conspiracy against Jesus to achieve his plan to save the world through the suffering, death, and resurrection of his Son. The Father’s plan for them was to spread the good news of salvation through Jesus to the world. So they prayed with purpose, asking the Father to enable them to speak his Word with boldness, despite the persecution they were facing.

And the Father heard their prayer. “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”

## PERSECUTION AND PRAYER NOW

Perilous times call for purposeful prayers. Remember that when you



are tempted to respond to all the hostility against Christianity in the world with anxious worry and paralyzing fear. Remember that no force on earth could keep the Father from carrying out his will to send his Son to be your Savior, and no force has to keep you from sharing his message of salvation with others.

Pray that the Spirit enables you to speak God’s Word boldly. Redevote yourself to hearing, reading, and studying God’s Word. Faithfully receive the Sacrament, where the Spirit comforts fearful hearts and replaces cowardice with courage, conviction, and compassion for the lost.

*Contributing editor Norman Burger is pastor at Shepherd of the Hills, Lansing, Michigan.*





*Mark Schwede*

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In July we will  
gather again around  
God's Word and  
in his name for  
another convention.  
But it's not just  
a meeting.

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## About our Father's business

It happens every two years. Four hundred people from all over the country, and some from overseas, travel to one of our synodical schools. They are farmers and factory workers, accountants and architects, pastors and teachers. The group includes millennials and retirees, and every age in between. It's a diverse crowd to be sure, but one whose members have several important things in common. They have faith in their Savior. They are committed to carrying out his mission. And they have the trust of those who have asked them to represent them.

I'm referring, of course, to the biennial convention of our synod. It will take place at the end of July at Michigan Lutheran Seminary in Saginaw, Mich. There, convention delegates will gather to worship, to engage in brotherly debate, to hold elections, and to make prayerful decisions that will shape the nature and direction of the work that we do together as a synod.

Some have jokingly observed that the best conventions are boring conventions. That observation is not meant to imply that any convention is truly boring. There can be no boredom as the four hundred delegates gather for the opening service—a worship service so moving that no one who attends ever forgets it. There can be no real boredom when the reports of God's abundant blessings on our ministries are shared with the delegates and certainly no boredom upon hearing the exciting opportunities that God continues to give to us.

Who could be bored when hearing personal accounts of missionaries serving in faraway places, as they share the stories of people from every tribe, language, and nation brought into God's kingdom by the power of Word and sacrament? How could it ever be boring to hear how God uses weak and sinful people like us to be his workers and witnesses, united in

a common faith and joined in a common mission? These things are evident at every convention, and they combine to make boredom impossible.

Sometimes no major issues threaten to fracture our unity; no huge problems face us that cause us to lose sleep at night and worry for the future of the synod. Some conventions feature no floor debates that cause delegates to lash out in anger, frustration, or bitterness. If that is what is meant by boring, then it's true that the best convention is a boring convention. We can pray for that kind of boredom.

So in July we will gather again around God's Word and in his name for another convention. But it's not just a meeting. There we will elect those who will serve on our behalf. We will adopt a ministry financial plan (budget) that outlines how we will use the resources that God makes available to us. We will make decisions and pass resolutions. We will hear reports of the gospel being proclaimed and the Spirit at work. There we will pray that God would keep us faithful to his Word and that he would bless the work we do in his name. And as the delegates are about their Father's business, fellow believers will be praying that God would grant delegates wisdom and courage.

Anything but boring, this convention promises, like all previous conventions, to be an opportunity to marvel at God's continuing grace and love for his church.

The synod convention takes place July 27–30. Follow convention coverage that week at [www.wels.net/2015synodconvention](http://www.wels.net/2015synodconvention). Learn more about what will be discussed on pp. 22,23.



# Light for our path

**Jesus explains his use of parables in Mark 4:11,12. Doesn't Jesus want people to repent and become believers?**

James F. Pope

Before we look at that passage in its context, we want to review the nature and overall purpose of Jesus' parables.

## STORIES THAT REVEAL

Like me, you may have learned this simple definition of a parable: an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. When he told parables, Jesus pointed to something his hearers knew and understood about this life and then made a comparison to a spiritual truth that was naturally beyond their knowledge.

For example, Jesus talked about a farmer sowing seed (Matthew 13:1-9) or fishermen casting a net into a lake (Matthew 13:47-50). The people who first heard these parables could easily picture those activities. They knew what sowing seed was all about, but then Jesus used that earthly activity to describe what can happen to the sowing of God's Word in people's hearts and lives. Similarly, those people knew that fishermen pulled up nets with fish that were "keepers" and others that were discarded. Jesus used that earthly activity to explain how believers and unbelievers will be forever separated on the Last Day. Jesus' parables had the overall purpose of connecting the known to the unknown, revealing spiritual truths that would have otherwise remained unknown.

## STORIES THAT CONCEAL

Your question references a time in the Lord's ministry when Jesus' disciples asked him why he spoke to people in parables. His answer seems to call for another parable to help us understand it. "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!' " (Mark 4:11,12, quoting Isaiah 6:9,10).

Don't misunderstand Jesus. He does want "all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). He does not want "anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). The key to understanding Jesus' answer to his disciples is recognizing what he says about people who were "on the outside" of the kingdom of God. These were people who had heard Jesus' teaching and preaching. They had enjoyed a unique opportunity to see and hear the Son of God speak to them, but they continually hardened their hearts to his message. In that way they resembled Jews in Isaiah's day: people who had hardened their hearts to the messages God's prophets had brought them.

To both groups of people with hardened hearts, God delivered a harsh judgment: They would no longer derive meaning from what he said. God's followers would understand his Word—even his parables—through the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit, but these self-hardened enemies of God would walk away from the treasures of his Word like people who cannot see gold bars in a bank vault.

Even when God carried out that judgment in reaction to people's unbelief, his promise rang true: "[My word] will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11). Jesus' parables are that powerful. They can reveal truth to changed hearts and conceal truth to hardened hearts.

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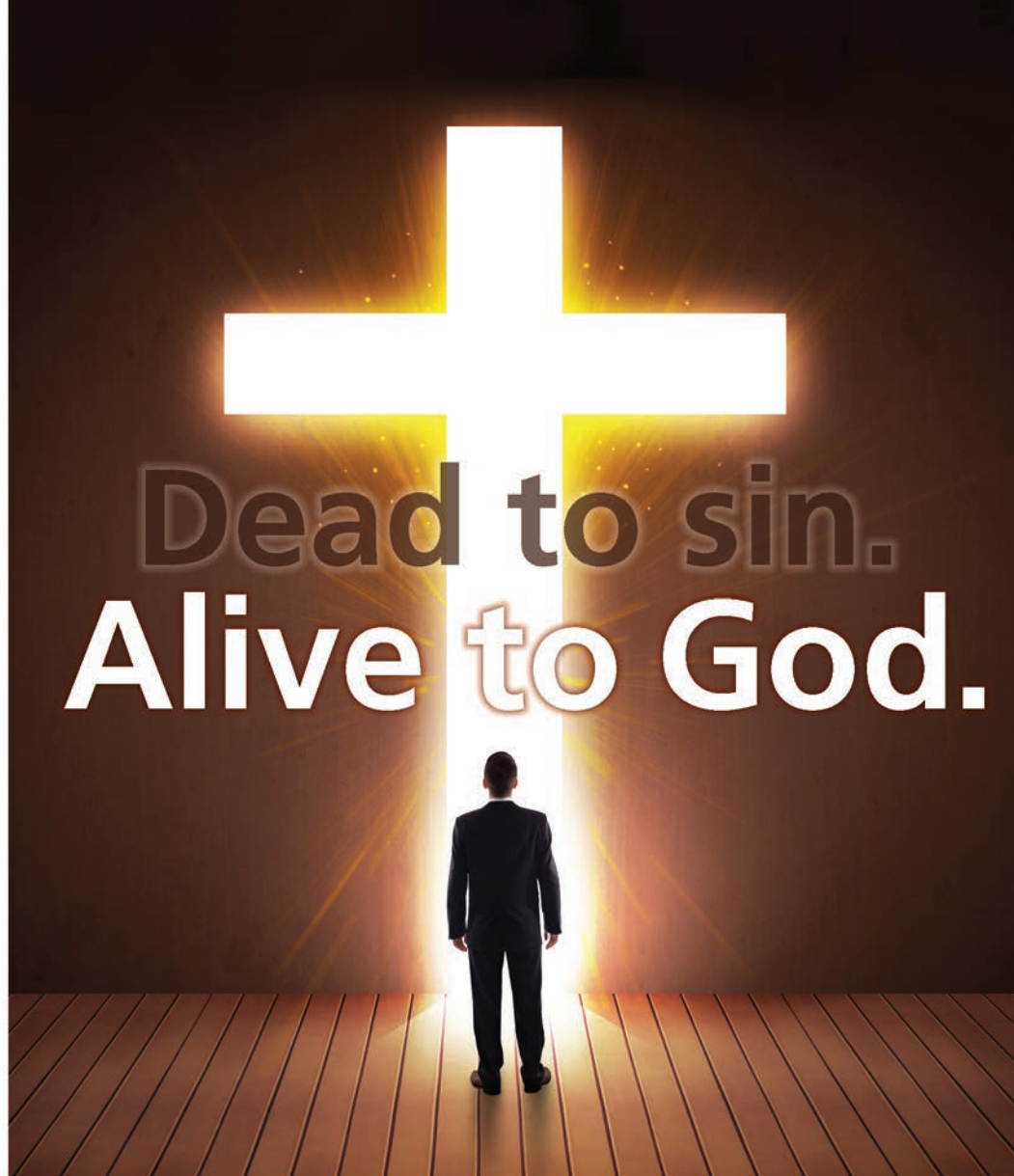
*Contributing editor James Pope, professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. John, New Ulm.*

James Pope also answers questions online at [www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net). Submit your questions there or to [fic@wels.net](mailto:fic@wels.net).

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

Psalm 119:105





**Christian living is more than just following God's will.  
It's understanding who you are—a child of God in Christ.**

James F. Borgwardt

Monica prayed earnestly for her son. She had raised Augustine in the Christian faith, but he rejected her teaching in his teenage years. He left home for school and took up with a group of boys who loved to brag of their sexual exploits. Soon Augustine was no different than his new friends.

#### **LIVING OUR OLD IDENTITY**

His conscience accused him of his immoral lifestyle, but that didn't stop him. Augustine believed the lie that living a Christian life would destroy all his fun. In his autobiography *Confessions*, he admitted to this selfish, youthful prayer: "Grant me chastity . . .

but not yet." He figured there was too much "fun" to be had first. Like many people, he gambled that he could get serious about morality later.

He rebelled against all of God's commands. He recounted when he and his friends once stole pears from an orchard. He was neither hungry nor poor. He didn't even want the forbidden fruit. So why did he commit the crime? Because he could. The sinful flesh gets a thrill in doing wrong for its own sake.

Augustine was a deep thinker and wanted to find answers to life's questions. As a young adult, he explored

the philosophies of the Manicheans. Compared to the Bible, their teachings seemed more sophisticated and engaging. Their complicated mythology taught, in part, that all human sin comes from outside the human will. This helped to excuse Augustine's guilt by blaming an outside cause for his sins, especially his sin of living with a woman who wasn't his wife. Lust was a particularly strong temptation for Augustine, who freely admitted it wasn't the woman's companionship that he wanted.

He found a successful career as a teacher, but he did not find peace in



his heart. No matter how intelligent he was or how actively he searched for truth and meaning in life, his mind remained clouded and his search frustrating. You could say that Augustine was living in darkness. More accurately, darkness was living in him. Both as a law-breaking youth and as an immoral, yet cultured, young man, Augustine was merely living out his identity: a sinner pursuing his selfish desires.

The apostle Paul described Augustine's life four centuries earlier when he pointed the Ephesian Christians to the same immoral and empty life they once lived apart from Christ: "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed" (Ephesians 4:17-19).

Paul used no less than four phrases to underscore the lifeless mindset of the unbeliever: "futility of their thinking," "darkened in their understanding," "ignorance," and "hardening of their hearts." Those separated from the life of God have the completely wrong view of life and don't know it. Their deceitful desires promise pleasures, riches, and earthly happiness but lead instead to discontentment and a frustrating emptiness—something Solomon called a "chasing after the wind" (Ecclesiastes 1:17).

### SEEING OUR NEW IDENTITY

Augustine's mother, Monica, continued to pray for her son. She lived just long enough to see how God would answer her prayers.

Augustine moved to Milan to visit the cathedral and learn from Ambrose, the town's bishop and famously talented preacher. Still a skeptic of Christianity, Augustine had no personal plans to hear the gospel. He planned to grow in

his professional skill as a teacher. While the eloquent delivery of Ambrose's preaching drew Augustine to Milan's cathedral, the gospel content of Ambrose's sermons pulled this skeptic all the way to Calvary's cross. He saw Jesus in the bishop's messages. He now understood the only way to peace with God. And when God's Word revealed Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, it also exposed man-made philosophies for the lies that they were.

---

Good works are not  
merely outward. . . .  
Above all, it's the  
new mind-set given  
to a child of God.

---

The gracious Father welcomed another child home. "This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:24). Augustine was baptized. He finally knew who he was—a forgiven child of God.

Now that Augustine was at peace with God, the battle lines shifted. His new identity clashed with his old habits. God's will regarding immorality was clear, but his sexual habits were strong. The conflict wouldn't be resolved as quickly as a 30-minute sitcom. His mom offered advice. His friends gave examples of saints who supposedly turned from all worldliness. Neither helped much. The one thing that strengthened his new self to conquer his old, sinful habits was the Word of God.

Overwhelmed with this struggle one day, he hurried to his garden, grabbed his Bible, opened to Romans 13:13,14, and read: "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do

not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh."

### LIVING OUR NEW IDENTITY

Christian living is more remembering *who* we are in Christ than remembering a list of dos and don'ts. Good works are not merely outward. They are not even *mostly* outward performance. Above all, it's the new mind-set given to a child of God. As Paul wrote, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

Augustine came to understand his new identity and to let his identity guide his actions. In the Word, he found life in Christ and the power to live as one dead to sin and alive to God. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The church father's most well-known passage is probably this one: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you" (*Confessions* by Augustine).

There's another passage often attributed to Augustine. In reality, it's more likely a story he heard from the pulpit than one he lived out in life. Told by Ambrose in his book *Concerning Repentance*, the story illustrates the new identity we have in Christ, who enables us to turn from our old self.

A onetime immoral man was walking down the street when he ran across one of his old mistresses. She called out to him and suggested that he come away with her.

He replied, "No," and walked away.

Surprised, she looked at him and said, "But don't you remember who I am? It is I! It is I!"

He looked around and said, "Yes, but it's no longer I."

---

*James Borgwardt is pastor at Redeemer, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.*

This is the second article in a six-part series on sanctification and good works.





# Touching heaven

## DIALOGUE WITH THE DIVINE

**God talks with us, and then we respond and bring our praise and petitions to him in prayer.**

Stephen M. Luchterhand

One Internet provider with a national reach is advertising something called the Gig Life. Simply put, it's really, really superfast Internet service. Technically, it's described as up to 100 times faster than average broadband. The ads invite you to imagine what you could do:

- Run all your devices at the same time.
- Download 100 tunes in 3 seconds.
- Download an HD movie in less than 60 seconds.
- Upload 1,000 photos in about a minute.

No doubt about it, that's fast, and while availability of one gig service is still quite limited, we've come a long way from the "stone age" of dial-up Internet service.

In the future, will there be better, faster, more powerful ways to communicate? Definitely—and soon—as exciting new advances in technology continue.

The flash and dash of the digital age can cause us to overlook this amazing truth: We need to look *back* in time in order to find the best, fastest, most reliable, and most powerful way to communicate. There is such a mode of communication, always has been: the two-way communication of prayer. In this dialogue with the divine, God speaks to us and, in turn, we can speak to him.

### WE LISTEN

Many use prayer as one-way communication, tossing brief requests and comments God's way without intending to hear from him. It's easy to mimic our selfie-taking, self-promoting culture and treat God like he's simply a follower on Twitter, Facebook, or other social media outlets. Do people (and God) really need to know where you are every single moment of every day or see a picture of every meal you eat? No, but God knows and sees anyway.



This one-way emphasis on dialogue with the divine screams, “Look at me, Lord! Pay attention! Listen, Lord, your servant is speaking!” It’s a terrible twisting of young Samuel’s words, “Speak, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:10). It’s an approach that ignores the most important aspect of prayer: listening to God. It’s an approach that ignores the fact that a conversation with God isn’t even possible until God speaks to us.

How does God speak to us? Jesus the Good Shepherd says, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). In John 15, Jesus speaks as the vine to the branches, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (v. 7). The connection between the words of Jesus and the invitation to pray is clear.

There is only one place to hear the voice and words of Jesus: the Word of God in the Bible. Here God’s Word is clear and unchanging. In the Scriptures, the voice of God is plain and powerful. If we want to be guided by God, we need to hear and know the Scriptures.

In the Scriptures, God invites us to pray, “Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me” (Psalm 50:15). In the Scriptures, we learn of God’s great love for us. We learn of his plan to save us from our sins, and we delight in the fulfillment of that plan. In the Scriptures, by way of the Lord’s Prayer and other directions, Jesus teaches us how to pray.

Smartphone technology shapes our communication with others. Listening to God’s voice through his Word enables us to pray smart prayers. God’s Word shapes our prayers by informing us of God’s will. God’s Word guides our prayers by teaching us what to ask for and how to ask. God’s Word strengthens our faith, assuring us that our prayers are included in James’ declaration: “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).

## WE SPEAK

Armed with God’s invitation to pray and equipped with the knowledge and power of God’s Word, we speak to the God who so graciously speaks to us. Prayer is always accompanied by God’s Word. We respond to God’s invitation to pray. We trust his promise that he will hear and answer according to his Word and will. Often, we speak his very words—the Word of God in Scripture—back to him in our prayers.

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## Prayer and the Word go hand in hand.

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God himself provides templates for our communication with him. While hundreds of prayers can be found throughout the Bible, there are three main places to find words of God to speak back to him in prayer. One place is essentially one prayer: the Lord’s Prayer. How often do you pray the prayer Jesus taught us to pray? Weekly? Daily? Likely, more times than you can remember. It is easy to take this prayer for granted. It is easy to gloss over the rich texture of each petition.

Consider Martin Luther’s thoughts on what the Lord’s Prayer says about our heavenly Father:

We should be all the more encouraged and induced to pray by the fact that, in addition to giving us his command and promise, God himself takes the first step by supplying and putting into our mouths the words and pattern for the how and the what of our prayer life. He wants us to see how genuinely he is concerned about our needs, so that we may never question whether our prayers please him or are really answered. This gives the Lord’s Prayer a great advantage over all other prayers that we ourselves might devise (Luther’s Large Catechism).

The second storehouse of prayer is the book of Psalms. This book is both

a beginner’s introduction and a master’s degree course in prayer. Gifted and Spirit-filled King David wrote nearly half of the 150 psalms. Every conceivable emotion and experience is found here: from fear and worry to praise and honor, from confession and repentance to joy and gratitude. The psalms speak to ordinary people experiencing the ordinary ups and downs, joys and sorrows, blessings and challenges of life. Many psalms are ready-made personal prayers, first-person missives both relevant and real. The book of Psalms is truly a prayer book for believers.

A third repository of prayer is found in the apostle Paul’s letters. His 13 New Testament letters feature dozens of prayers, both short and long. Some of Paul’s prayers are deeply theological, expressing spiritual truths in memorable ways. His Spirit-generated prayers direct our focus away from self, often expressing joy and thanksgiving to Jesus Christ. Paul often offers prayers for practical, ordinary things as well: sick friends, safe travel, courage to witness the gospel. The “others-centered” nature of his prayers teaches us to do the same.

Prayer is always accompanied by God’s Word. Prayer and the Word go hand in hand. Even when we don’t use specific Scripture in our part of the conversation, God’s Word is the focus. The invitation to pray, our desire to respond, and the content and form of our prayers all stem from contact with God and his Word.

True prayer is two-way communication, a dialogue with the divine. God speaks first, and we listen. Then we respond, and God listens. And the conversation continues.

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*Stephen Luchterhand is pastor at Deer Valley, Phoenix, Arizona.*

This is the fourth article in a seven-part series on prayer.

## A family history, name, and heritage are great treasures but not as important as being children of God in Christ.

Adam S. Manian

My grandfather was named Vengeance. For good measure, his sister was also named Vengeance, just the feminine version of the name.

Some things must be remembered. Some things must be carried with you wherever you go, like your name. My name is Adam Manian. I am an Armenian. You can tell because my last name ends in “-ian.” In Armenian, the “-ian” ending means “son of.” Therefore, I am Adam (“man” in Hebrew) Manian, “son of man.”

We weren’t always Manians. Back in Armenia, the name was Karamanoogian. But that was too long for Ellis Island, so it was shortened to Manian.

Growing up, I was always proud that I was Armenian, although I was a bit disappointed that I am only one-quarter Armenian. In fact, like many WELS members, I am more German than Armenian. But as a child, my heritage and my name were of great importance to me.

### ARMENIAN HERITAGE

If you have been watching the news closely this year, you may have noticed Armenia being mentioned in

the news. This year is the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. It began in the 1890s, but 1915 is the year set aside to recognize that genocide. The Turkish regime killed about 1.5 million Armenians. The Turkish government won’t recognize it, and America also has trouble doing so because they don’t want to anger Turkey. But my great-grandma Anna used to say, “Some people say it didn’t happen, but it did. I was there. I saw it. Don’t tell me it didn’t happen.” Then she—or maybe her sister Moko (a shortened version of the Armenian word for *aunt*)—used to tell us how the Manian family got to America.

That story is why I am proud of who I am. My great-grandma was one of the Armenians who fled Armenia during the genocide. In order to come to America, she married an Armenian-American soldier who was wounded during World War I. Because she was a civilian and he a soldier, they came to America on separate boats. After they got to America but before they could consummate the marriage, he died from his wounds. Widowed and with few prospects, she made contact with her uncle in Chicago. There she was married a second time. That husband died after six months. Finally, her third husband survived her self-proclaimed “curse,” and she began her life in America.

My great-great-aunt Moko’s story was not much happier. She was younger and stayed in Armenia longer, fleeing

the country a little later. Great-grandma Anna’s husband had a friend who needed a wife. Moko was suggested. After some correspondence and picture exchanges, they agreed to get married. Since she wasn’t an American citizen, nor was she married to one, she couldn’t come to America. So they met in Cuba to get married. She wasn’t old enough to get married in Cuba, but miraculously a birth certificate was “found” that said she was two years older than she thought she was. I still remember Moko telling us how she argued with the American government because they started sending her Social Security too early.

Sadly, Great-grandma Anna’s older sister remained in Armenia and didn’t fare as well. She and her daughter Osanna went on a forced “death march” into the desert. Osanna miraculously survived and went on to be the nanny to the future king of Jordan, King Hussein. Sadly, Osanna’s mother didn’t survive.

### CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

After a few years of living in America, things began to change for those who were fortunate enough to come here. The desire for vengeance that caused my great-grandparents to name two of their children Vengeance softened. My grandfather’s name was legally changed from Vengeance to Victor, and his sister’s to Virginia. By the time I came along, the family stories I heard were about the challenges, yes, but more so about being thank-



# Confessions OF FAITH



ful. That was the way the stories always ended. "Thank God that you are here in America. You don't know how good you have it; you could be back in Armenia." That was especially poignant after the terrible earthquake in 1988.

But even as we were encouraged to be thankful, you could tell that Great-grandma Anna and Moko were thankful too. They were thankful that they were in America. They were thankful that they were able to worship God.

You see, the story that I most remember isn't of the hardships of my grandparents and their generation. It is the story of my great-great-grandfather Kaspar. He was confronted by the Turks. They ordered him to renounce Christ and adopt Islam. His response was "Christ lives. Muhammad is dead. I will never renounce my Savior." The Turks executed him on the spot.

Armenia was the first country to ever adopt Christianity as its national faith. Long before Constantine, Armenia was a Christian state. You can argue the benefits of such a thing and the separation of church and state, but this I know to be true: My ancestors weren't persecuted primarily because of their nationality; they were persecuted because of their religion. Throughout their lives they could have chosen the easy path and believed whatever the person in power told them to believe, but they would not. Christ was too important to them.

They preferred to flee, to live in poverty, to endure hardship, to die, rather than denounce their Savior.

For years I was embarrassed that I carry what I consider a noble Armenian last name while being only one-quarter Armenian. Then, like my father and my grandfather, I married a mostly German wife, and now I have children who have an Armenian name and are only one-eighth Armenian. That used to bother me too. But as I think back on the lessons of those who went before me, I realize that the name that mattered most wasn't the name Armenian or Manian or Karamanoogian or any other last name they had. What mattered to them was the name Christian.

That is a name, thankfully, I also bear, as do my children. It is a name my parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents bore. That is the heritage and the name worth carrying—Christian. And although the "-ian" of Christian might not mean quite the same as the Armenian "-ian," the concept is similar. I belong to Christ's family. That is a name worth carrying around. That name puts aside the vengeance. It shrugs off the hardship; it looks to God and is thankful. I am thankful to be a child of God.

I take pride in my family heritage. I am part of a family that worshiped God above all else, but even more so, I am part of the family of God.



(Above) The Manian family at Victor's confirmation in the 1940s at St. Marcus, Milwaukee: (left to right) Virginia, George Sr., George Jr., Anna, and Victor. (Right) Anna and Moko in 1991.



Some things must be remembered. Some things must be carried with you wherever you go, like your name. My name is Christian, just like those who went before me.

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*Adam Manian is pastor at Immanuel, Tyler, Minnesota.*



**heart to heart**  
parent conversations

**It's a common criticism of parents today. We're often accused of overparenting and overprotecting our children—creating weak adults who are unable to make simple decisions or handle life's inevitable ups and downs. Just the thought of it makes me cringe. I know I can be guilty of this with my young children. How do I avoid it—and should I even try? Three Heart to heart authors share their insights, giving me something to consider as I continue down this path of Christian parenting.**



**Join the conversation!**

Visit [www.wels.net/forwardinchrist](http://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.

## ARE WE OVERPARENTING AND OVERPROTECTING OUR CHILDREN?

**Are we overparenting** our kids? I've asked many friends about this issue. Most were in agreement that, yes, to some degree, overparenting is common today. Yet I'm having a hard time putting my finger on what exactly overparenting is and whether it's a good or bad thing that it seems to be the trend.

In my eyes, overparenting is being overprotective, too helpful, too quick to jump in and do for my kids instead of letting them figure out their own problems. Basically, I see it as being so involved in my children's business that they are deprived of the freedom to learn how to do things for themselves. Hover, smother . . . oh, brother.

Almost every mom I spoke with about this topic admitted to overparenting her kids at some point. I overinvolve myself in conflict management between my kids. To keep them from facing difficulties, I step in and solve their problems for them. Of course I want them to learn how to solve their own problems, but I tend to jump in a little too early to help them "work it out." I'm working on that (especially

**Paul, my son-in-law**, and I sat together on a park bench. His kids played around us.

"It's sad," I said. "Kids aren't free to be kids like I was in the 1950s."

My baby boomer buddies and I lived under the neighborhood rule: "Never go beyond earshot of your parents' shouts." But within that radius, we could be kids. The lightly traveled street was our playground. The large sugar maples sheltered our clumsily built forts. The sidewalks were bicycle raceways. Parental interference was minimal.

"Today it's helicopter parents," Paul said, "parents who hover over their kids . . . well into adulthood."

Overprotection does seem to be today's parenting strategy. No matter how safe the neighborhood, some parents can't envision their kids playing outside alone. No matter how old their children, these parents intrude on their kids' lives. No matter how culpable their kids, some parents insist someone else is at fault.

**I found myself** cringing when I thought of writing about overparenting because I struggle against it on a daily basis. I know that children need freedom to make choices and have experiences so that they can become confident and independent adults. I also know that my daughters are intelligent and thoughtful people, capable of being given age-appropriate freedoms. Even so, I must constantly check my internal desire to control every aspect of their lives. It helps that my husband is natural about giving freedoms and responsibilities to our girls and is encouraging in helping me feel confident about it.

When I find myself wanting to overparent and I examine my motivation, I am usually not worried about how my girls will handle responsibilities or danger. I am usually worried about how others will view my parenting. I feel like I will be seen as a bad mother if I give the girls too



since I'd like to hang up this referee whistle I seem to be sporting so often).

Other friends mentioned the fear of predators and the constant bombardment of horrific news stories involving kids as a source for their overprotectiveness. What is the right age to let our kids play outside alone? Have we had the "tricky people" conversation enough that they'll remember what to do if a situation arises? I don't think there's a universal right answer here. Since I'm the one who knows my kids best, it's up to me to make those calls for them. That is both comforting and frightening.

Parenting is not the cakewalk I imagined it to be. Before I had kids, I was the world's best mom. I knew exactly how my kids would behave and what they would *never* do in public (are you rolling your eyes yet?). My child would never wear bunny slippers with a sundress in July (false) or use the safety scissors for anything other than cutting paper (false—the cat had a lovely spikey 'do after an impromptu visit to the toddler salon). My kids would never, ever have a meltdown in public (false, on more occasions than I can count). These tiny humans are

blessed with *big* personalities from an early age. All of my "alwayses" and "nevers" went straight out the window when those personalities came into play. I learned to pick my battles and be flexible whenever possible.

So, are we overparenting our kids? Possibly, but I'm inclined just to call it parenting. It feels judgmental to say we're overparenting when I really only know my situation. I have to weigh my kids' safety (and that of others) against the benefits of letting them experiment with their freedom. Sometimes that means letting Henry climb the rope ladder at the playground without hovering underneath him with arms outstretched or trusting Anna to grab a gallon of milk while Henry and I wait by the cereal. I hope my kids look back as adults and see that I tried my best to give them freedom while keeping them safe—even if that meant being too "in their business" sometimes.

*Kerry Ognenoff and her husband, Andy, have two young children.*



"It's not good for parents to protect kids from everything," Paul continued. "Kids need to know our world will rough them up now and again. They need to learn their actions have consequences. They need to be held responsible for their choices." I almost hugged him, but I settled for a manly double thumbs-up.

We scanned the playground, accounting for our kids. My four-year-old grandson had been crawling within a tubular play area that looked like a cross between a 20-foot-long anteater and a sailing ship. When an older child climbed on top of the tubes, Thatcher followed.

"Many parents view their children as fine china that chips and easily shatters," I said. "They don't realize kids are Corelle ware that bounces and rarely breaks. Their fears insist that every situation is dangerous. Their fears drain confidence from their kids. Their fears stymie their children's independence."

"There must be a balance, though," Paul countered, "a middle ground between the extremes of free-range parenting and over-protective parenting. What's hard is knowing if you are standing

in that middle. Look at Thatcher." Thatcher's feet dangled two feet above the ground as he attempted to dismount from the anteater. "Where's the middle ground? Do I let him fall or do I help him down?"

That middle ground can be hard to find, but the ultimate parent has provided us with a map for finding it. In his Word we see our Father's parenting strategy; even better, we see the cross-won grace that directs it. Whether he snatches us from the consequences of our mistakes or allows bruised-knee lessons, God's parenting flows from an open-spigot love we never deserve. Christian parents stand on that middle ground when they love their children in the same way—when grace determines whether they rescue their children or allow a tough life lesson.

And Paul? He helped Thatcher down. Then he set him free to clamber over the anteater again.

*James Aderman and his wife, Sharon, raised three daughters and are now enjoying their eight grandchildren.*



many freedoms or seen as lazy and uninvolved if I give them maturity-appropriate responsibilities. Again my husband's encouragement and leadership are of such value in the daily struggle with this, but it is also a constant exercise of prayer and looking to God's Word. In the words of my heavenly Father, I find the confidence to give my children freedom.

**I can trust God.** My children belong to the Lord. They are his. My *hope* comes from the Lord. My hope for my children is the eternal hope of heaven. This is the crux of my purpose as a parent. I want to share my hope in Christ with my children on a daily basis. What better way than to live each day with confidence that the same Lord who loved them enough to send his Son to die also has a plan for each of them!

**I can foster responsibility.** When my girls experience pain and heartache and hard days, I want to jump in and fix things for them. When my girls neglect responsibilities or are just

plain sinful, my mother's heart wants to intervene so that they don't suffer consequences. A part of me also wants to do it so that I don't look bad. Yet I know that God will work through my daughters' natural consequences (and my own discomfort).

How do I know if this is a moment that needs intervention or a moment that needs a silent and prayerful mother? When I take a deep breath, talk with my husband, and take some time for prayer, it becomes easier to evaluate the situation. If the issues at stake are not ones that endanger the children's physical or spiritual safety, we try to let the girls take care of it independently. Sometimes this is painful, but it is equipping our children to handle the ups and downs of life with trust in their God.

*Wendy Heyn and her husband, Juerg, have two daughters, ages three and nine, and a seven-year-old son with severe cognitive and physical disabilities.*



# Empty nesters

College graduation causes empty-nest syndrome for hundreds of WELS campus pastors around the country.

Glenn L. Schwanke

It's summer. Everything is settling down after college graduation. My wife and I are empty nesters again. We saw Rachel off to further her graduate studies at Virginia Tech. Calvin packed up his van and headed down the road for his new job in Tennessee. Another Rachel plans on pursuing graduate studies in Illinois. Jon and Ashley are off to the Twin Cities, where Jon starts his new job as "a project engineer designing hardware setups that will run software to monitor the power grid in various countries." Please note: It's *countries* not *counties*. I sure hope he gets it right. There are quite a few more who are leaving our nest, but I just don't have space to list them all.

**For more than 18 years now, graduation has caused my wife and me to ride the same roller coaster of emotions:** proud, thrilled, and yet sad to see our nest emptied. Exactly how many have left through the years? I've lost count. It must be in the hundreds.

What? So many? How is this possible? I suppose by now it is time I make clear what you have probably already guessed. The young men and women who leave our nest each year are not our biological sons and daughters. They are your sons and daughters, your grandsons and granddaughters. You have entrusted them to us through WELS Campus Ministry. But we develop a close relationship with so many of these fine young Christians. Remember that Paul called Timothy "my true son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2). That's how we feel about the young men and women who spend four, five, or sometimes even six or seven years with us here in Houghton.

We watch them grow and mature. We rejoice to see them "fan into flame" the gift of God that has been given to them by Baptism and then nurtured through Word and sacrament over the years (2 Timothy 1:6). We cry with them when their hearts are broken. We laugh with them when they are happy (Romans 12:15). We celebrate with them when they walk on commencement day, hear their names read, and proudly grasp their diplomas.

Then we send them out into the world with our prayers, hugs, and also a few tears. The good-byes aren't always so easy.

**Not that the good-byes come easy for the other 384 campus pastors in our Wisconsin Synod either!** Did you know that we have a full-time campus ministry at Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel at UW–Madison? We have part-time-plus campus ministries here in Houghton and at Point of Grace in Milwaukee, True North in Minneapolis,

the Rising Son Campus Ministry in Oshkosh, and the Beacon Lutheran Student Center in Mankato. We have campus ministries as far away as the Light of the World Campus Ministry in Fairbanks, Alaska, and even a few in Canada. And we all share a common goal.

Just what is that goal? Nurturing sons and daughters in the faith. Preparing them for the day when they will leave the nest. Sending them out with the prayer once offered by Paul: "For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church" (1 Corinthians 4:17).

We pray you will welcome our "adopted children" when they come. We pray you will be blessed by them, as we have been.

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*Glenn Schwanke, pastor at Peace, Houghton, Michigan, serves as campus pastor at Michigan Technological University.*

Is your son or daughter going to college this fall? Campus Ministry will send *Forward in Christ* magazine, *Meditations*, and other helpful materials to students for free. Register at [www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net).





## CHANGES IN MINISTRY

## Pastors

**Backus, James D.**, to St. Mark's, Watertown, Wis.  
**Bivens, Forrest L.**, to retirement  
**Blauert, Timothy K.**, to Redeemer, Saint Croix Falls/St. John, Centuria, Wis.  
**Blum, Jay S.**, to retirement  
**Brug, John F.**, to retirement  
**Dolan, John H.**, to retirement  
**Fleischmann, Robert R.**, to St. Paul, Slinger, Wis./Christian Life Resources  
**Fritz, Lester G.**, to retirement  
**Geiger, Gerald E.**, to retirement  
**Hella, Dale E.**, to St. Peter, Juneau, Wis.  
**Huebner, Paul E.**, to retirement  
**Koelpin, Philip A.**, to retirement  
**Meyer, Jonathan P.**, to Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis.  
**Retberg, Lawrence A.**, to retirement  
**Robinson, Aaron T.**, to Fairview, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Schroeder, Winfried J.**, to Prince of Peace, Yankton, S.D.  
**Schulz, Dale R.**, to retirement  
**Schwerin, Richard C.**, to retirement

## Teachers

**Baehman, Lisa M.**, to Trinity, Neenah, Wis.  
**Bain, Benjamin**, to St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis.  
**Berg, Karen M.**, to Martin Luther, Oshkosh, Wis.  
**Blumer, Bonnie J.**, to retirement  
**Buelow, Amanda K.**, to Mt. Olive, Mankato, Minn.  
**Coffin, Kristi N.**, to Divine Grace, Lake Orion, Mich.  
**Dolan, Jeffrey D.**, to Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis.  
**Elder, Terri E.**, to Michigan Lutheran High School, Saint Joseph, Mich.  
**Falck, Kari A.**, to St. Jacobi, Greenfield, Wis.  
**Felgenhauer, Kathryn**, to Hope, Manhattan, Kan.  
**Gabb, Sarah A.**, to Building Blocks, Los Angeles, Calif.  
**Grebe, Sarah J.**, to retirement  
**Gumm, Elizabeth A.**, to Trinity, Caledonia, Wis.  
**Hein, Amy L.**, to King of Grace, Golden Valley, Minn.  
**Hoffman, Paul C.**, to St. Paul, Appleton, Wis.  
**Holem, Patricia A.**, to Good Shepherd, West Bend, Wis.  
**Humann, Amanda M.**, to Faith, Tacoma, Wash.  
**Humann, Brian J.**, to Faith, Tacoma, Wash.  
**Hussman, Renee A.**, to St. Paul, Algoma, Wis.  
**Johnson, Amber**, to Crown of Life, West Saint Paul, Minn.

**Kassulke, Tammie M.**, to St. Mark's, Watertown, Wis.  
**Khandasammy, Dahomey**, to retirement  
**Koester, Brenda S.**, to St. John, Goodhue, Minn.  
**Kramer, Randall A.**, to retirement  
**Krause, Mark J.**, to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.  
**Kroll, Amanda C.**, to Salem, Loretto, Minn.  
**Kuenn, Donna B.**, to Peace, Green Lake, Wis.  
**Lau, John J.**, to retirement  
**Leinen, Doreen K.**, to Trinity, Aberdeen, S.D.  
**Lettner, Lauri A.**, to Immanuel, La Crosse, Wis.  
**Leyrer, Philip M.**, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Metzger, Glenn R.**, to St. John, Redwood Falls, Minn.  
**Mielke, Timothy M.**, to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.  
**Mierau, Marie**, to St. John, Lewiston, Minn.  
**Nehls, Melissa A.**, to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.  
**Nolte, Marilee J.**, to Grace, Yakima, Wash.  
**Rosenow, Stephanie M.**, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Rust, Anne K.**, to St. John, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Scharp, Greta L.**, to Mt. Calvary, Waukesha, Wis.  
**Schlavensky, Lori J.**, to St. John, Fox Lake, Wis.  
**Schlicht, Samuel A.**, to Word of Life, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Schmanke, Roxanne M.**, to retirement  
**Schultz, Kathleen M.**, to retirement  
**Schultz, Nathan L.**, to Peace, Hartford, Wis.  
**Seefeldt, Andrew P.**, to Salem, Stillwater, Minn.  
**Springer, Benjamin D.**, to St. Paul, Ixonia, Wis.  
**Tjernagel, Debra L.**, to Redeemer, Mandan, N.D.  
**Toepel, Rebecca L.**, to St. Peter, Modesto, Calif.  
**Treder, Stephanie L.**, to Apostles, San Jose, Calif.  
**Vieth, Lisa J.**, to St. John, Lewiston, Minn.  
**White, Kailey B.**, to St. Paul, Saint James, Minn.  
**Wordell, Elise A.**, to Divine Savior, Doral, Fla.

## Staff minister

**Sebald, John A.**, to Truth in Love Ministry, Nampa, Idaho

## ANNIVERSARIES

**Twin Lakes, Mich.**—Camp Lor-Ray (50). July 4 weekend. Mike Brenner, camp lorry@gmail.com. Website, www.camp-lor-ray.org.  
**Savanna, Ill.**—St. Peter (125). July 12. Worship, 9 A.M.; brunch, 11 A.M.; special service,

2 P.M. RSVP requested for brunch. 815-273-2816 or stpetersavanna@yahoo.com.  
**Yale, Mich.**—Emanuel Redeemer (50). July 19. Worship, 3 P.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. Fran Gerds, 810-387-2125. Website, www.emmanuelredeemer.org.  
**Eagle River, Wis.**—Christ (125). July 19. Worship, 8 & 10:30 A.M.; meal to follow. 715-479-8307. Website, www.christeagleriver.org.  
**Whitefish Bay, Wis.**—Divinity-Divine Charity (50). July 19. Worship, 9:30 A.M.; ice cream social to follow. Website, www.ddclutheran.org.  
**Kewaunee, Wis.**—Immanuel (150). July 19. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal to follow. Aug. 1. Worship with Koiné, 10 A.M.; picnic, noon. Website, www.immanuel-lutherankewaunee.org.  
**Tomah, Wis.**—St. Peter (150). Aug. 23. Worship, 10 A.M. and 2 P.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested for meal. 608-372-2984.  
**Minocqua, Wis.**—Trinity (100). Aug. 23. Worship, 9 A.M. Website, www.trinity-minocqua.org.  
**Buffalo, Minn.**—Immanuel (125). Sept. 20. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal and special activities to follow; worship, 2 P.M. Website, www.myimmanuel.org.  
**Dalton, Wis.**—Grace (100). Sept. 20. Worship, 10:15 A.M.; meal to follow at Town Hall. RSVP requested for meal. 920-394-3293, allan\_nancy@hotmail.com.  
**Milwaukee, Wis.**—St. Matthew (150). Sept. 20. Worship, 2 P.M. Website, www.stmattwels.com.

## COMING EVENTS

**WELSTech conference**—July 9–11. 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. For teens entering grades 9–12. youthrallyfreedom513@gmail.com. Website, www.welsyouth.net.  
**17th annual retired called workers reunion**—Aug. 5, 10 A.M. Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis. RSVP by July 15. 262-677-2602, jjfenske@gmail.com.  
**WELS night at Miller Park**—Aug. 14, 7:10 P.M. Order tickets at reduced rates at www.brewers.com/wels. Deadline: Aug. 3.

## NAMES WANTED

**Fenton, Mich.**—People in the area looking for a WELS church. Shepherd of the Lake, PO Box 14160 Fenton Rd, Fenton MI 48430. 810-750-2997.

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

# WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY GRADUATES

At the graduation service on May 22, 32 graduates received diplomas for successfully completing their seminary studies.



**Stephen P. Apt**  
Crete, Ill.



**Nathanael J. Brenner**  
Mequon, Wis.



**Peter C. Bur\***  
Omaha, Neb.



**Kendall R. Cook**  
Sebewaing, Mich.



**Isaac M. Crass**  
Watertown, Wis.



**Jeffery J. Drake**  
Redding, Calif.



**Aaron C. Duve**  
Saginaw, Mich.



**Benjamin P. Ehlers**  
Vernon, Conn.



**Thadeus H. Flitter**  
Groton, S.D.



**Brock D. Groth**  
Hastings, Minn.



**Jacob S. Haag**  
Fond du Lac, Wis.



**Philip M. Hunter**  
Middleton, Wis.



**Andrew J. Hussman**  
West Allis, Wis.



**Aaron M. Jensen**  
Ixonia, Wis.



**Mark S. Kahrs**  
Clatonia, Neb.



**William R. King**  
Saint Paul, Minn.



**Allen Kirschbaum**  
Milwaukee, Wis.



**Clinton J. Kreuziger**  
Milwaukee, Wis.





**Paul M. Krueger**  
Midland, Mich.



**Nathan F. Loersch**  
Watertown, Wis.



**Daniel P. Marggraf**  
Delano, Minn.



**Kirk Massey Jr.\***  
East Fork, Ariz.



**Timothy J. Matthies II**  
Lake Mills, Wis.



**Matthew R. Mueller**  
Watertown, Wis.



**Adam R. Pilarski**  
Portland, Ore.



**James D. Roecker**  
Saginaw, Mich.



**Benjamin S. Schmudlach**  
Downers Grove, Ill.



**Joshua S. Schultz**  
Juneau, Wis.



**Benjamin D. Steenbock**  
Bellevue, Wash.



**Aaron M. Voss**  
Williamston, Mich.



**Jason M. Williams**  
Milwaukee, Wis.



**Benjamin K. Zuberbier**  
Fond du Lac, Wis.

\*A graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary through programs that work in harmony with the seminary's Pastoral Studies Institute.

## Assignments

At the Call Day service held at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., on May 21, 35 men received new assignments (listed below). From the class of 2015, 32 students received assignments. Three candidates from previous years received new calls. Seven were reassigned to their present fields of labor; four had their current call made permanent.

**Apt, Stephen P.**, to new mission, Liberty Hill, Tex.  
**Brenner, Nathanael J.**, to Holy Scripture, Fort Wayne, Ind.  
**Bur, Peter C.**, to coordinator for South Sudanese Ministry  
**Cook, Kendall R.**, to Shepherd of Peace, Norfolk, Neb.  
**Crass, Isaac M.**, to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.  
**Drake, Jeffery J.**, to Trinity, Hartford, Wis.  
**Duve, Aaron C.**, to Holy Redeemer, Port Huron, Mich.  
**Ehlers, Benjamin P.**, to Trinity, Temple, Tex.  
**Flitter, Thadeus H.**, to Zion, Valentine, Neb.  
**Gawel IV, Joseph W.**, to Victory, Lexington, Ky.  
**Groth, Brock D.**, to friendly counselor, Guntur, India  
**Haag, Jacob S.**, to Redeemer, Ann Arbor, Mich.  
**Hunter, Philip M.**, to Bethel, Menasha, Wis.  
**Hussman, Andrew J.**, to associate to the Dakota-Montana District president, St. Paul, Rapid City, S.D.  
**Jensen, Aaron M.**, to St. Stephen, Adrian, Mich.  
**Johnston, Daniel J.**, to new mission, Blair, Neb.  
**Kahrs, Mark S.**, to Calvary, Glenwood, Minn.  
**King, William R.**, to St. Paul, Tomah, Wis.  
**Kirschbaum, Allen**, to Spirit of Life, Caledonia, Mich.  
**Kreuziger, Clinton J.**, to Crown of Life, Marietta, Ohio  
**Krueger, Paul M.**, to Shepherd of the Hills, Winchester, Va.  
**Loersch, Nathan F.**, to Shepherd of the Lakes (new mission), Fenton, Mich.  
**Marggraf, Daniel P.**, to Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.  
**Massey Jr., Kirk**, to Apache mission  
**Matthies II, Timothy J.**, to Cross of Glory, Washington, Mich.  
**Mueller, Matthew R.**, to Living Hope, Peoria, Ill.  
**Pilarski, Adam R.**, to Peace, Isabel/Christ, Morristown/Christ, Bison/St. Paul, McIntosh, S.D.  
**Roecker, James D.**, to Divine Word, Plover, Wis.  
**Scheuerlein, Seth A.**, to St. Luke, Grand Rapids, Minn.  
**Schmudlach, Benjamin S.**, to First, La Crosse, Wis.  
**Schultz, Joshua S.**, to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.  
**Steenbock, Benjamin D.**, to Abiding Grace, Covington, Ga.  
**Voss, Aaron M.**, to Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.  
**Williams, Jason M.**, to Green Valley, Henderson, Nev.  
**Zuberbier, Benjamin K.**, to Trinity, Eugene, Ore.



—|SYNOD CONVENTION 2015|—

## Why is a convention important?

*Mark Schroeder, WELS president, shares his perspective on the significance of holding a synod convention every other year.*

The synod convention provides the opportunity for genuine grassroots input and decision-making when it comes to the work that we do together as a synod. Delegates representing congregations across the synod come together to adopt a ministry financial plan (or budget), which describes in detail how we will use the financial resources God provides to carry out his work. The convention sets the priorities and charts the direction of all of our mission and educational activities.

The convention is an opportunity to look back and review the work that God has enabled us to accomplish. Reports from every area of ministry will highlight the blessings that God has provided. We will hear of the gospel's spread in foreign lands, the establishment of new mission congregations in the United States and Canada, the training of future called workers at our synodical schools, and countless other efforts to assist congregations in carrying out the work that they do.

Gathering together at the convention gives WELS members an opportunity to look ahead to the opportunities and challenges facing us. The convention adopts both long-range and short-range plans and goals, and then entrusts that work to the blessing that God will provide.

The convention is a time to choose people who will serve and represent all of us in positions of leadership and responsibility. From chairmen of various boards, commissions, and committees, to the president and vice presidents, delegates will prayerfully entrust people to make decisions on behalf of us and see to it that our common mission is carried out faithfully.

Convention delegates and their committees address major issues, some practical and some theological. They also respond to "memorials," which are requests from individuals or groups to take specific action on a specific subject.

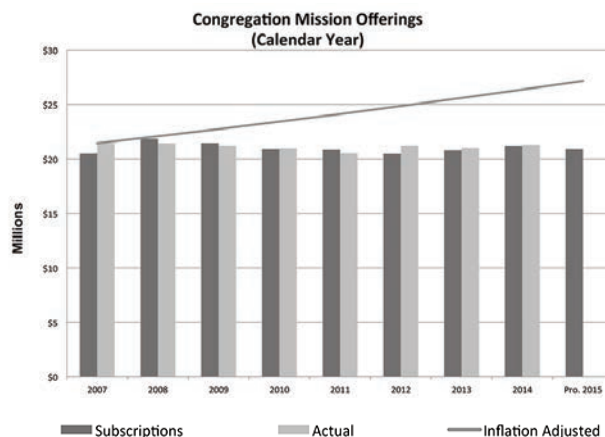
The convention is a time of celebration and thanksgiving for the blessings that God has provided, such as continuing faithfulness to his Word, unity in our doctrine and practice, and the continuing opportunity to preach Christ crucified to a dying world.

## What are the highlights of the proposed budget?

*Todd Poppe, WELS chief financial officer, shares a summary of the proposed ministry financial plan (budget) that delegates will examine at the convention.*

With Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) levels uncertain, the Synodical Council recommended that synod support funding remain flat at fiscal year (FY) 2015 levels for each year of the upcoming biennium. For most areas, this proved challenging, with modest wage increases and expected increases in insurance and other fees over the next biennium. To accommodate these increases, certain areas plan to use approximately \$1.2 million more in reserves than what is expected to be used in FY15 or to use additional funding sources to sustain ongoing ministry. Other critical assumptions include retirement of the synod debt in FY16 and a drawdown of the Financial Stabilization Fund of nearly \$1 million by the end of FY17 based on planned support, needs, and the debt retirement.

Historical levels of CMO have been relatively flat to slightly declining since its peak of \$21.4 million in 2007. CMO 2015 subscriptions are \$20.9 million or 2.5 percent below receipts from 2007. CMO is planned to increase 1 percent for calendar years 2016 and 2017. CMO growth is vital to the support of Home and World Missions, our ministerial education schools, strong congregational support and evangelism programs, and competent and necessary support in synod leadership, finance, and technology.





## Ad Hoc Commission 2 recommendations

The 2013 synod in convention approved a resolution to establish a new ad hoc commission to “look at all areas of the synod structure and programs especially in the areas not addressed by the previous commission.” Following the convention, President Mark Schroeder appointed such a commission, which took the name Ad Hoc Commission 2.

The previous Ad Hoc Commission presented its findings to the 2009 synod convention. Some major changes were approved based on the Ad Hoc Commission’s recommendations, including reorganization of the Board for Parish Services to the current Congregation and Ministry Support Group.

Joel Voss, chairman of both ad hoc commissions and second vice president of WELS, notes in his report to the 2015 delegates that as the Ad Hoc Commission 2 began its work, “it identified far more reasons to rejoice than to be concerned.”

The commission sought input from as many WELS members as possible to help direct its work. President Schroeder encouraged called workers to give their thoughts and suggestions to the commission. The commission also interviewed many synod leaders. The result was more than 200 suggestions and comments, all of which were studied and categorized.

Ultimately, the commission addressed 13 topics in depth. Topics included:

**WELS compensation issues**—In 2003 the Synodical Council developed the current compensation guidelines. The Ad Hoc Commission 2 believes that it is time for those guidelines to be studied again and updated. The Compensation Review Committee of the Synodical Council is beginning work on this and will share a draft of a proposal with the 2016 district conventions, with a final recommendation made to the 2017 synod in convention.

**WELS convention delegate preparation**—As the commission’s report

states, “The 12 districts of the synod presently have no uniform way of preparing delegates for their important roles at the WELS convention. Since the convention determines the work of our church body for the next two years and beyond, is there a way for the delegates to be educated better in the workings of synod and its convention?” The recommendation by the Ad Hoc Commission 2 is for delegates to serve for two consecutive conventions with approximately half of the delegates at each convention serving their first year and the other half serving their second year. Because this change would affect the synod bylaws, the convention would need to pass this recommendation by a two-thirds majority.

### **Nomination for election of WELS president and synod praesidium**

Currently the synod president, vice presidents, and secretary are elected by nominations from the floor of the synod convention. Those receiving nominations make up the list of candidates. The Ad Hoc Commission 2 recommends that the Synod Nominating Committee receive nominations for these positions prior to the convention. This change would also affect the synod bylaws and requires a two-thirds majority to pass. The commission has also made a similar recommendation regarding the election of members of each district’s praesidium.

Retired teacher Michael Hein organized the categorization of the suggested topics. He explains that the commission selected the topics and issues that it felt would best benefit from its attention. Yet, he says, “The Ad Hoc Commission 2 is just a small group, so I’m grateful that these topics are now moving forward to a larger body to consider. I pray that God’s will be done and that positive things come from our suggestions.”

To read the entire report of the Ad Hoc Commission 2, visit [www.wels.net/2015synodconvention](http://www.wels.net/2015synodconvention) and choose 2015 *Book of Reports and Memorials*. The report begins on p. 185.

## How can I learn more about the convention?

Visit [www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net) for all your synod convention news. WELS Communication Services is debuting a redesigned site for the convention.

Amanda Klemp, web content manager for WELS, says that the new site will include more functionality, be easier to navigate, and be more responsive for those on mobile devices. She adds, “The information that is important to you should be easier to find on the new site.”

### **PRE-CONVENTION**

Visit [www.wels.net/2015synodconvention](http://www.wels.net/2015synodconvention) to see who the nominees are for elections; to read the *Book of Reports and Memorials*, which includes reports from all the areas of ministry and will guide delegates in their work at the convention; and to see a list of delegates and the floor committees on which they’re serving.

### **CONVENTION**

Plenary meetings, open forums, and missionary presentations will be streamed live at [wels.net](http://wels.net). Other communication vehicles include:

**Video news updates**—Three updates per day will inform WELS members about the important work and decisions being made at the convention and will feature interviews with key synod leaders and delegates.

**Social media**—WELS’ Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages will be active each day.

**News articles**—As decisions are made, articles will be posted to [wels.net](http://wels.net). Each evening, an issue of “Together,” WELS’ e-newsletter, will be delivered to subscribers as a wrap-up of the day’s events and a look ahead to the next day.

### **POST-CONVENTION**

A special issue of “Together” will be sent to subscribers to summarize the actions of the entire convention. Additional convention coverage will be printed in the October issue of *Forward in Christ*.

To subscribe to “Together,” visit [www.wels.net/subscribe](http://www.wels.net/subscribe).

## New outreach opportunities through livestreaming

Technology is offering a new opportunity for WELS to serve the Hmong—both here in the United States and abroad—with the saving gospel message.

This fall Immanuel Hmong, St. Paul, Minn., is planning to start livestreaming its worship services online. While this 220-member congregation has been posting sermons and parts of services already, now the entire service will be able to be viewed as it is happening, providing a more communal experience.

“We will promote and share information because we know that many places around North America do not have a pastor,” says Pheng Moua, pastor at Immanuel Hmong. “This will give people opportunity to watch and worship with us in their own homes.”

The idea of livestreaming Hmong worship services came about because St. Paul, Appleton, Wis., wanted to offer a group of Hmong it is serving the opportunity to worship weekly in the Hmong language. The congregation approached WELS Home Missions and the Technology office and asked about the possibility of one of our established Hmong congregations streaming its services. Monies from special funds and Appleton-area gifts provided the funding for the equipment and set-up. Immanuel Hmong congregation members will be trained to run the equipment, which Moua says also will be available to St. John, the Anglo congregation with which Immanuel Hmong shares the church building.

“Wherever we have an established ministry and content that has global appeal, this will be a way to distribute that content in a much broader fashion,” says Martin Spriggs, WELS chief technology officer. “Given the size of



Immanuel Hmong, St. Paul, Minn., already posts videos on YouTube of various archived portions of its worship services, including Pastor Pheng Moua preaching (pictured). In the fall, the congregation will begin livestreaming its services so more Hmong—both in the United States and abroad—can hear the gospel.

our synod and given these little pockets of ministry, we really have to take advantage of these opportunities and hopefully have these areas as hubs of cross-cultural ministry.”

This may also offer another way to reach out to the millions of Hmong around the world, in countries such as China, Vietnam, and India. “We have WELS [Hmong] members who have contacts with larger groups of Hmong in communist countries. Some have asked for assistance and training,” says Robb Raasch, chairman of the Asia-Pacific Rim Administrative Committee of the Board for World Missions. “We’re beginning to see that there is a much stronger connection between domestic and global work. We need to leverage the people we train here in the United States to have an even greater effect overseas.”

Moua says that people from China, Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos already access the congregation’s archived YouTube videos. “We believe that as technology spreads around the world, as long as people have their phones, they can connect to the Internet from any place to view,” he says. “This will give people the opportunity to listen to the gospel preached.”

## Hope for his people

He doesn’t think small.

“My vision for my work is to ultimately reach every South Sudanese here in North America and in Africa to share the Word. I want to bring them to faith (or back to faith) and tell them about Jesus.”

Peter Bur’s vision as the new coordinator of South Sudanese Ministry is a huge undertaking but shows his heart for his Savior and his people.

A 2015 graduate of the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., Bur now will take on the role of coordinating the pastoral training of South Sudanese leaders in North America and also in refugee camps in Africa. More than 20 South Sudanese men in several locations in North America are in training or want to be trained; most will work with their local pastor. Pastors and leaders in Africa also need further theological training as they reach out to eight churches in different areas and refugee camps.



Peter Bur (left) and his family and friends at his graduation.

“We have the training program through the Pastoral Studies Institute, but it’s up to Peter Bur to make sure the training gets done,” says Paul Prange, coordinator of global cross-cultural outreach under the Joint Mission Council (JMC). The JMC, which consists of representatives from both Home and World Missions, issued this two-year renewable call, made possible by funding from the Antioch II Foundation.

Bur, originally from South Sudan, is a member at Good Shepherd, Omaha, Neb., where he has been worshiping since 2010. Working



with Good Shepherd's pastor Michael Ewart, Bur—who was already serving as a spiritual leader for Sudanese immigrants—began taking PSI courses to deepen his theological training. He has served other South Sudanese people in North America by connecting them to their local WELS congregations and pastors. In addition, last October he traveled with another South Sudanese man, Simon Duoth, and Prof. Allen Sorum, PSI director, to Gambella, Ethiopia, to determine how WELS might be able to serve the South Sudanese refugees there.

While most of Bur's time will be spent creating a strong base in North America for South Sudanese ministry, his heart—and those of other South Sudanese refugees in the United States—is back with his people in Africa, who have fled from their country because of civil unrest.

"As we preach the gospel, we will bring hope to a discouraged people near despair from war and constant physical danger," says Bur. "The gospel will bring healing to those who lost their loved ones in war and because of genocide."

He continues, "This work is very important to me because I love my people, and they are losing their faith. They have so many years in exile. They do something else besides worshipping the one God in Jesus Christ. Perhaps God is choosing me to help bring my people back to faith, to know and believe in the one true God."

Once peace returns and the South Sudanese refugees can return to their homeland, this work may also open up more opportunities. Says Sorum, "Peter's vision is to reach and train and disciple his people now in their travail as refugees. He recognizes that their hardship is an opportunity. When his Nuer people can safely return to South Sudan, their Christian Lutheran training will not only establish them in God's kingdom but will also equip them to develop the potential of their nation. This is his dream. Our support of him in his pursuit of this dream will be an important part of our heritage."

## WELS news briefs

### WORLD MISSIONS

414-256-3234; bwm@wels.net

In April, ten pastors from the Lutheran Church of Central Africa (LCCA) completed a degree program in continuing education and received bachelor of divinity degrees from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS), Mequon, Wis., at a ceremony in Lilongwe, Malawi. Developed in 2010, the program—dubbed "GRATSI," the Greater Africa Theological Studies Institute—is a partnership between the LCCA and WLS to train a select group of LCCA pastors for positions of leadership in that church body. The curriculum was taught by visiting WLS professors working in close partnership with the faculties of the LCCA Bible Institute and seminary.



### CHRISTIAN AID AND RELIEF

262-334-7881 revrhein@gmail.com

Our mission contact in Nepal has traveled to the rural areas of the Dhading district, an area hit by the earthquakes that killed more than 8,000 people in April and May. WELS Christian Aid and Relief provided \$32,000 to our contact so he could bring blankets, medicine, sleeping mattresses, and food. He shares that 39 members died, and all 10 churches in the area were destroyed. Pictured are a group worshipping in the area and WELS materials found in the wreckage of one of the churches. Further relief efforts are being assessed, including helping 40 families whose homes were destroyed in Sichuan in the Chitwan district and returning to the Dhading district to provide a medical clinic, clothing, and tents for churches that were destroyed. Learn more at [www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net).



### HOME MISSIONS

414-256-3279; cm@wels.net

More than 60 pastors and laypeople attended the Campus Ministry Staff Conference in May to discuss opportunities in their local congregations and beyond to reach out to WELS college students. Charles Vannieuwenhoven, new Campus Ministry Committee chairman, shares that the goal of the conference is "to get the pastors together, to network together, to know one another, to encourage each other, to learn some new ideas." Maintaining contact information for students is important to help Campus Ministry keep them connected to the Word. To submit information, new or updated, fill out the online form at [www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net).

## Obituaries

### Donald Herman Zimmerman 1924–2015

Donald Zimmerman was born May 1, 1924. He died Mar. 16, 2015, in Milwaukee, Wis.

He taught at Trinity, Marinette, Wis.; New Salem, Sebewaing, Mich.; St. Stephen, Adrian, Mich.; Zion, Monroe, Mich.; and St. Paul's, Stevensville, Mich. He also served as secretary of the Board for Parish Education, Milwaukee, Wis.

He is preceded in death by one brother and one sister. He is survived by his wife, Emily; 1 son; 5 daughters; 25 grandchildren; 32 great-grandchildren; and 1 brother.

### Thomas R. Zahn 1950–2015

Thomas Zahn was born May 13, 1950, in Fort Atkinson, Wis. He died Mar. 20, 2015, in St. Peter, Minn.

A 1976 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served St. Peter, Rib Lake, Wis.; St. Andrew, Medford, Wis.; and St. Mark, Mankato, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Cathy; one son; two daughters; one grandchild; one brother; and one sister.

### Norma L. Walworth 1936–2015

Norma Walworth (née Kurtzell) was born July 21, 1936, in Dearborn, Mich. She died Mar. 25, 2015, in Cocoa Beach, Fla.

She taught at St. Stephen, Adrian, Mich.

She is preceded in death by her husband, Dale; one brother; and one grandchild. She is survived by four sons, six grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

### Marvin W. Zank 1928–2015

Marvin Zank was born Dec. 8, 1928, in Lake Mills, Wis. He died Apr. 16, 2015, in Green Bay, Wis.

A 1953 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Grace, Fort Madison, Iowa; Good Shepherd, Beaver Dam, Wis.; Immanuel, Medford, Wis.; St. Paul, Tipler, Wis.; and St. Mark's, Iron River, Mich.

He is preceded in death by one brother and two sisters. He is survived by his wife, Joanne; 2 sons; 5 daughters; 10 grandchildren; and 11 great-grandchildren.

### Susan Mae Post 1946–2015

Susan Post was born June 12, 1946, in Bay City, Mich. She died Apr. 20, 2015, in Saginaw, Mich.

She taught at St. John, Two Rivers, Wis.; Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; and Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

She is preceded in death by her brother. She is survived by one brother and one sister.

### Harold Julius Hagedorn 1944–2015

Harold Hagedorn was born Oct. 4, 1944, in Neillsville, Wis. He died Apr. 17, 2015, in Boise, Idaho.

A 1970 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Grace, Bisbee, Ariz.; St. Paul, Douglas, Ariz.; St. Peter, Fort Collins, Colo.; and St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis. He also served as administrator of the Board for Home Missions, Milwaukee, Wis., for 24 years.

He is preceded in death by his wife, Kathie. He is survived by one son, two daughters, six grandchildren, one brother, and one sister.

### Theodore B. Olsen Jr. 1940–2015

Theodore Olsen was born Feb. 29, 1940, in Green Bay, Wis. He died Apr. 23, 2015.

A 1966 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served St. Mark, Brown Deer, Wis., and Zion, Gainesville, Fla. He taught at Doctor Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., and served as president of Martin Luther Preparatory School, Prairie Du Chien, Wis., and Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

He is preceded in death by one brother. He is survived by his wife, Joanne; two sons; one daughter; five grandchildren; and one brother.

## Through my Bible in 3 years



Read or listen online at [www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net).

2015  
JULY 2015

- |                       |                        |                    |
|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. 1 Samuel 4:1b-22   | 12. 1 Sam. 17:55–19:24 | 23. Eph. 3         |
| 2. 1 Sam. 5:1–7:2     | 13. 1 Sam. 20:1–21:9   | 24. Eph. 4:1–5:2   |
| 3. 1 Sam. 7:3–8:22    | 14. 1 Sam. 21:10–22:23 | 25. Eph. 5:3–6:9   |
| 4. 1 Sam. 9:1–10:16   | 15. 1 Sam. 23, 24      | 26. Eph. 6:10–24   |
| 5. 1 Sam. 10:17–11:15 | 16. 1 Sam. 25, 26      | 27. Job 1–3        |
| 6. 1 Sam. 12          | 17. 1 Sam. 27, 28      | 28. Job 4, 5       |
| 7. 1 Sam. 13          | 18. 1 Sam. 29, 30      | 29. Job 6, 7       |
| 8. 1 Sam. 14          | 19. 1 Sam. 31          | 30. Job 8:1–9:24   |
| 9. 1 Sam. 15          | 20. Ephesians 1:1–14   | 31. Job 9:25–10:22 |
| 10. 1 Sam. 16         | 21. Eph. 1:15–23       |                    |
| 11. 1 Sam. 17:1–54    | 22. Eph. 2             |                    |



## ARIZONA-CALIFORNIA



On May 16, the Southern California Lutheran Elementary Association met for the first time. The association is made up of three congregations: St. Stephen, Fallbrook; Christ the Vine, Temecula; and Living Hope, Wildomar, all in California. A board of directors was elected and a resolution was passed to open a school on the campus of Christ the Vine this coming fall. The name of the new school will be Concord Lutheran Academy. Pictured are the new board members as well as those who attended the May 16 meeting.

## SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



During the weekend of April 18 and 19, three regional WELS handbell festivals were held. Pictured is the Southeast Region Festival hosted by Wisconsin Lutheran High School and St. John's, Milwaukee, Wis. Eighteen congregations participated with 24 choirs and 250 ringers. The Northeast Region Festival was hosted by St. Peter, Weyauwega, and Immanuel, Waupaca, Wis. The Western Region Festival was hosted by Salem, Stillwater, Minn.

## SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



Trinity, Crete, Ill., sent 20 study Bibles to All Saints Lutheran Church of Nigeria to be given to trained lay preachers there. These preachers fill in when the pastor is busy. Pictured is one ceremony when certificates and Bibles were distributed. Trinity is working to collect 30 more Bibles to fill the current need.

## District news

## SOUTH ATLANTIC

In July 2014, a hot water heater leak flooded the fellowship hall of **Prince of Peace, Englewood, Fla.** On April 12, members and friends of Prince of Peace gathered to rededicate the repaired and renovated space to the glory of God.

## SOUTH CENTRAL

Truth in Love Ministry, <http://tilm.org>, led an outreach event involving four WELS congregations in the Houston area in March. Utilizing the same approach and methodology as the Utah outreach campaigns coordinated by Truth in Love Ministry, canvassers learned how to engage people at their door and share the gospel with them. Almost two dozen high school students from Illinois Lutheran High School, Crete, Ill.; Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.; and Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fond du Lac, Wis., participated along with pastors and lay members from the congregations. Participating congregations included **Victory of the Lamb, Katy; Abiding Faith, Pinehurst; Christ the Lord, Alief; and A Mighty Fortress, Fulshear, all in Texas.**

## SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis., completed its building expansion in 2015 and celebrated with a ribbon cutting ceremony and dedication service on April 25 and 26. The new expansion includes a spacious atrium/student center, family and consumer education classrooms and kitchen, a choir room with storage and practice rooms, green rooms, music labs, and a modern front entrance.

The district reporters for this month are: AZ-CA—Michael Schroeder; SA—Jonathan Kuske; SC—Andrew Retberg; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.





# Missionaries

## A reflection of God's love Kenneth H. Pasch

Standing in the bamboo house, Missionary David told me, "The people believe if someone removes the shaman's altar from the house, that person will die." And then he added, "... within 24 hours. Do you want to remove it?"

"No problem," I said.

We proceeded to remove the altar along with the talismans and charms that draped the doors and windows of the house. All of them were believed to ward off evil spirits. We then took them outside where they were burned.

I must admit that it caught me off guard. We were in a remote village at the home of a couple who had renounced their pagan beliefs and become Christians. What I witnessed was a simple, but pointed, ceremony that is conducted for the Hmong when they become Christians. After the ceremony and a short devotional service, these new believers confessed their faith and were baptized.

With us that day was Vichai SaeVang. For him it was a very special day. At the time he was a fourth-year student at our seminary. The people who proclaimed their Christian faith that day were his parents. "I was very, very happy," he says, "because now I no longer have to worry about their future when they die."

### DISCOVERING A BRAND NEW LIFE

About ten years ago, Vichai was introduced to the Christian faith through a relative from America who was visiting family members in Thailand. He had asked Vichai to drive him to our church for worship. It was the first time Vichai had set foot in a Christian church. Over the next few months, an elder from the church met with Vichai and introduced him to Jesus. Over time, Vichai began to see the futility of his old beliefs, and the Holy Spirit led him to faith and a brand new life.

It was not an easy transition for him. He had become the only Christian in his family, and his parents were not pleased that he had left the religious beliefs of his people. One of those beliefs involved inviting their dead ancestors to join them in festival meals and celebrations to ask for protection from evil spirits. By no longer participating in these family rituals, Vichai would be viewed as disrespectful of his ancestors and his family.

I asked him how he handled the situation, and he told me he showed them the love of Christ through his actions. "I helped them all the more where I could and when I could, always telling them it was a reflection of God's love that he wanted me to show my family."

He did not give up. Through his words and actions, Vichai reached into the lives of his family members, who eventually came to see and understand the same love and forgiveness of Christ.

### PROCLAIMING CHRIST

Vichai was determined to learn more and to dedicate his life to proclaiming the love of Christ to his fellow people. In his village there were two Christian families, but no one to serve them or proclaim the gospel. He was encouraged to enroll in our seminary Pastoral Studies Institute in 2009 where he spent the next four years in study and training to become a pastor.

"I am very thankful to WELS," Vichai says. "Unlike our university system, where the poor could not hope to go or study, WELS made it possible for me and others to study even though we are poor."

Like the other students with him, it was not an easy path to follow. Most of the villagers in the hill tribes of northern Thailand live on subsistence farming. Though WELS provides seminary lodging and educational assistance for our pastoral studies students, it still means leaving their families at home in the villages during their time away at the seminary. For many, as was the case for Vichai, it also meant there were times when little more than rice could be afforded for his wife and four children to live on. Others found it necessary to



leave the program since it became increasingly difficult to provide for their families during their time away.

Vichai graduated from our seminary in 2013 and was assigned to begin a new exploratory mission in the village where he grew up as a child. Reaching into the village has been a challenge. Other Christian groups have attempted to work in the area but have been met with rejection by community leaders and those who are antagonistic toward Christianity. Still, with the Lord's blessing and a relationship in the village that was established in his youth, Vichai has successfully gathered a group of people who are eager to be fed with the lifesaving words of the gospel. He now conducts worship services and Bible classes in the home where we witnessed his parents' baptisms. New people are

coming from a neighboring village to join the others in learning about their Savior. Vichai is now looking at a plot of land between the two villages where he can someday build a small church that will give them permanence in the eyes of the community as well as provide them with a house of worship.

*Ken Pasch is a missionary in Thailand.*

Learn more about the mission in Thailand in this month's edition of *WELS Connection*.

Photos: Vichai SaeVang and his wife, Paan-pita; Vichai and his father; the baptisms of Vichai's parents; the house where Vichai's parents live and where Vichai conducts worship and Bible study in Haui Han village; Vichai (fourth from right) and his graduating class from the seminary in Chiang Mai in 2013.

Cover photo: The mother of one of the national pastors in Thailand.

## LUTHERAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF THAILAND

**Baptized members: 1,100**

**Congregations: 6**

**Missionary stations: 13**

**National pastors: 18**

**National evangelists: 4**

**Missionaries: 2**

**Unique fact:** The mission in Thailand ministers to several different cultures, including Hmong, Lao, Issan (Lao-Thai), and Thai. Part of the missionaries' work is to coordinate those efforts as well as to create the framework for the national association of churches.

Go to [www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net) to learn more about WELS missions.



# God gets you through every day

**After losing three family members, a woman finds peace knowing God is in control.** Alicia A. Neumann

"A very important part of my day is doing my devotion every morning," says Sandy Tauer. "Now I need that even more than I did before, just to get my day started right. I need God's guidance every day, and I know he's listening. When things get tough, it's time to sit down and pray."

Sandy says she's done a lot of praying during the last nine years. In that time, her husband and two of her children passed away. In the midst of the sadness, however, she found comfort in God's peace.

## LOSING RON

"It was very devastating and difficult," says Sandy, remembering when her second son, Ron, died of a sudden heart attack at age 38. "Ron died around Easter time, and the congregation sang I Know That My Redeemer Lives at his funeral. It's such a beautiful hymn. After the funeral, I felt like I was walking on air—almost floating out of church. It was such a peaceful feeling knowing Ron was in heaven."

Even though they rejoiced knowing their son was with Jesus, Sandy says the months that followed were hard on her and her husband, Mike. They eventually went to a support group with some friends who also had lost a son. "It was good to hear other people talking about their losses and things they

did to cope," says Sandy. "The pain was really raw in the beginning, but God gets you through it. You just feel his presence and know he's there with you."

## SHARLA'S STORY

A few years after Ron's death, Sandy found herself facing another trial when her daughter got sick. Sharla, 43, was a mother of two and a "very healthy person," recalls Sandy. But then one morning Sharla called Sandy and said she wasn't feeling well. "I'm a retired nurse, and normally I would recommend waiting it out for two or three days before going to the doctor," Sandy says, "but I just had this feeling. I told her she had to go get checked out." The doctor told Sharla she had a virus, and she was sent home to rest. However, later her symptoms got worse, and Sandy took her daughter to the emergency room.

Things were serious; Sharla's liver was shutting down. She was transferred to the University of Minnesota Medical Center, where she had an emergency liver transplant. Sharla made it out of surgery, but soon after, her body unexpectedly shut down. She died on Dec. 5.

"Sharla's favorite time of year was Christmas," says Sandy. "She always made sure Jesus' birthday was celebrated in a very special way."



Even though her grandchildren had lost their mother just a few weeks earlier, they got out the Christmas things and decorated the house. “The house was so peaceful, and we had such a beautiful Christmas,” Sandy says. “You’d think there would be sadness and crying, but everyone was just praising God and appreciating everything we have. It’s so beautiful how God gives us that comfort and peace.”

She says it’s also amazing to see how God always takes care of his children. In the months following Sharla’s death, people helped set up car pools to get the kids to and from school and took turns sending meals throughout the rest of the school year.

“God’s plan is perfect,” says Sandy. “There’s a reason all of this happened. We don’t know what it is, and we don’t understand it. But when it comes down to it, Jesus is in control of every step we take every day.”

### SAYING GOOD-BYE TO MIKE

“Mike and I were very close; we shared everything,” Sandy says of her husband of nearly 50 years. So it was especially hard for her when he was diagnosed with colon cancer. “It had metastasized to the liver, and he was going to need chemotherapy for the rest of his life,” she said. But in the midst of it, he still had a positive attitude. “Mike loved life! He loved every day, and he had such a sense of humor. He made life fun to live.”

About a year after his diagnosis, Mike had some complications and was admitted to the hospital. Sandy’s oldest son, Darren, was there and noticed his dad’s breathing had slowed. “I went into the room and took Mike in my arms,” says Sandy. “He took two more breaths and then he went up to heaven. How beautiful it must have been for him! I laid on his chest for 20 minutes and thought, *Mike must be feeling such peace*. And God gave me just a piece of that peace, and it was so beautiful.”

Sandy says adjusting to life without her husband was really hard. “It was about three months until I went to the family room and spent time there by myself,” she says. “That’s where we used to sit in our recliners and read books, watch TV, and visit. It was really hard to go in there and see that empty chair.” She says she also had to learn to do things on her own that Mike had always taken care of. “You go on. You learn how to change light bulbs, and you take out the garbage. And you do it all with God’s help.”

### COUNTING HER BLESSINGS

Sandy says she has learned a lot about death and grieving in the past decade and is now trying to provide help and



The Tauer family. Back row (l to r): Darren, Ron, and Sharla. Front row: Mike and Sandy.

comfort to others whenever possible. “I am much more careful about remembering people who have gone through a lot,” she says. “It was really meaningful to us when someone sent a basket with books and chocolates and tea after Ron died. So now I will try to find a special book or fix a basket if someone has lost a loved one. I never realized before how much all those little gestures mean.”

The support of family and friends has also helped her through. “I don’t know what I would do without my family,” she says. “They have been with me through this whole thing and helped take care of me. It’s such a big part of grieving to have your immediate family, your church family, and your friends praying for you and sending cards and calling.”

And finally, Sandy says she’s learned to slow down and appreciate the time God has given her. “Mike used to say, ‘Forget about the past, don’t worry about tomorrow, and live for today.’ When people ask me, ‘How do you do it?’ I tell them it’s God—he takes care of me all of the time. He leads me every step of the way, every single day. I have so much to be thankful for. All the joy that God has given me through my family and friends, it’s been wonderful. God is good, life is good, and I look forward to the day when I can be with the rest of my family in heaven.”

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*Alicia Neumann is a member at Resurrection, Rochester, Minnesota.*

# Religious freedom

Kenneth L. Brokmeier

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[Christ's] atoning  
sacrifice is all  
inclusive. But  
with the Bible  
we can properly  
state that heaven  
is exclusive.

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"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America." I recall reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in eighth grade each Friday following our afternoon devotion. The pledge concludes "with liberty and justice for all." As we celebrate the Fourth of July, we are truly grateful for our many freedoms as citizens of the United States. But recent legislation, and often the litigation that goes with it, may have some Christians contemplating how long we might enjoy such freedoms.

This past spring while the city of Indianapolis was putting on its final touches to host the NCAA Final Four men's basketball championship, Indiana's Governor Mike Pence was putting his signature on a piece of legislation called the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). Both events drew national attention, but it seems more ink was spilt over the latter.

Opposition to RFRA sprang up immediately, including public demonstrations. In protest, some states withdrew funding for their officials to travel to the Hoosier State for business purposes, including to attend the Final Four. National businesses threatened to leave the state or withdraw proposed plans for future expansion unless the law was repealed or modified.

Let me be clear by stating that I do not claim to know all the legal issues surrounding this hotbed topic. But viewpoints, including legal ones, appear to be all over the map.

Some supporters of the original bill fervently contend that a person who owns a private business should have the right to refuse services to individuals or organizations for religious reasons. Others will passionately argue that permitting such behavior constitutes a blatant act of discrimination.

For example, should a bakery or florist be forced by law to make a wedding cake or floral arrangements for a couple whose marriage they feel is not in keeping with

the owner's religious beliefs? In recent years in several states there have been cases in which business owners were sued for refusing to provide such services. On more than one occasion, those owners lost their court case, and in at least one instance, the business was forced to close.

Where exactly does that leave the Christian business owner? This question becomes even more pressing if judges and courts can seemingly dictate with whom a company must do business. Will the day come when local congregations or national church bodies may lose their tax exempt status because they refuse to follow certain laws that violate not only their consciences but also the truths of God's Word?

The Bible reminds us, "There is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). God's children, including those who operate businesses, have always had to struggle with the viewpoints and, at times, even mandates from the ungodly world. In some cases it may mean suffering loss for refusing to violate one's own conscience. Other circumstances might afford the opportunity not only to fulfill a service but also, by "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15), to keep a doorway open for further witnessing to the truth of God's Word.

As we celebrate the Fourth of July and the freedoms we enjoy, remember that God's Word clearly speaks that Christ did not practice discrimination when it came to saving the world. His perfect life and innocent death paid for the sins of all people. His atoning sacrifice is all inclusive.

But with the Bible we can properly state that heaven is exclusive. "Whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

In his freedom, that is still God's way of conducting "business."

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*Contributing editor Ken Brokmeier is pastor at Our Savior, Brookings, South Dakota.*



# JESUS

## PRAYED FOR US



### Jesus prayed with confidence.

Samuel C. Degner

"It is finished." These three English words—just one in Greek—say so much. Finished was Jesus' work of living perfectly as our substitute. Completed was his suffering for our sin. Fulfilled were all the prophecies about him. Paid in full was our debt. Finished!

#### JESUS' DYING PRAYER

Yet Jesus was not finished speaking. Before he bowed his head and gave up his spirit, he had one more thing to say. In fact, even though "it is finished" seems to beg for an exclamation point, the next word from the cross is actually the one that the Bible says Jesus shouted: "Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit'" (Luke 23:46).

Fittingly, Jesus' last words in his state of humiliation were a prayer. Once more he pulled a page from David's prayer book (Psalm 31:5). Once again he was able to speak to God as his Father. There was no longer any hint of agony or anguish. He needed nothing more and had no more requests. All that was left was to place his life into the hands of his Father.

He did so with confidence. He knew that he would be raised again. He knew that he would return to his Father's side. He knew that he would reign in glory over all things. So he prayed to his dear Father. Then he bowed his head and breathed his last.

#### OUR CONFIDENT PRAYERS

Let such confidence be ours on our dying day—as well as every day we live! All of our sins have been removed from us as far as the east is from the west. All of God's requirements for us have been checked off the list by the One he sent in our place. We know that the kingdom,

the power, and the glory belong to him. Jesus' life and death for us are the "Amen!" to all of our prayers. He is the reason the Father hears us and the reason we want to pray in the first place.

We don't have to worry that our prayers must be perfect so that God will accept them. Jesus' prayers were perfect, and therefore God accepts our petitions in his name. Our prayers need not come to our Father with just the right words in just the right way in the hope that he will hear us. We can speak to him with the confidence of children talking to their dear father. We can cast all our cares on him, and he will take care of them. We can pray for our-

selves, for our families, for our neighbors and coworkers, for our congregations and the church, for our friends and even our enemies. We can pray at any time and at all times and every time know that the Father hears us. After all, when we speak to him in Jesus' name, he hears his own Son's voice.

And when it is our turn to breathe our last, we can pray as Jesus did. Even if the words are barely a whisper floating over quivering lips or

nothing more than the Spirit's groaning in our heart, they will be words of confidence. It will not be our last prayer—just our last prayer here on earth. We can speak it with the assurance that our next prayer will be one of praise, shouted with sinless clarity and deathless volume in the presence of our Father.

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

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




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If we deny our sin,  
our helplessness,  
and our inability to  
please God by our  
own efforts, we will  
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the good news.

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## Getting past denial

Some news and some messages are difficult to hear. In fact, some of them are so disturbing that we deny them. Denial is our built-in defense. Some cancer patients deny the diagnosis at first. It allows them time to adjust to shattering news. All of us may have first responded to bad news by saying, "No! That can't be." We continue to deny bad news until the truth becomes undeniable and inevitable.

God also has a message we do not want to hear. His bad news is that we are hopeless and helpless sinners. That's brutal. God's prophet Isaiah describes our situation, "We all growl like bears; we moan mournfully like doves. We look for justice, but find none; for deliverance, but it is far away" (Isaiah 59:11). It's painful to read most of that chapter. We might even put it aside or skip to a more pleasant section.

I wonder what visitors to our worship services think when, with others, I stand to confess, "I am by nature sinful and . . . have disobeyed you in my thoughts, words, and actions. I have done what is evil and failed to do what is good." Together we go on to say publicly that we deserve God's punishment.

We have come through denial to that confession. The Holy Spirit has broken our self-assurance and pride and brought us a better confidence and sense of worth in Christ's forgiveness and love.

Is it possible that visitors will not listen to the bad news we confess? They have come for some uplifting news that makes them feel good. As they look over their lives, things are pretty good. Job, family, children all are normal and happy. Sinful? Deserving God's punishment? No, that can't be.

Should we change the message? Should we hide it under a layer of "happy church talk"? Some suggest that is exactly what we should do.

Others have already done it. They have never gotten past the denial of sin residing in all human hearts.

But even those of us who attend services and confess our sins regularly have a tendency to minimize sin. Our sinful nature concludes that such a grim and harsh assessment is true for everyone else but not for us. Like others, that part of us rushes to hide behind the good we do.

Yes, many do positive things in this world. Law-abiding citizens of all kinds make commendable contributions to the world, assist the poor and helpless, and seek to make society a better place. They should be honored for their contributions and receive the benefits of their efforts.

But before God we cannot deny his assessment: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away" (Romans 3:10-12).

If we deny our sin, our helplessness, and our inability to please God by our own efforts, we will not be ready to hear the good news. It's like the sick patient denying the diagnosis. As long as the denial persists, the patient is not ready to hear the remedy and cure. The good news for sinners is that God loves them and has declared them right and holy because of Jesus. If we deny sin, we miss the depth, width, length, and height of God's love in Jesus. We remain in denial and without God's hope and love.

That's why the announcement of God's mercy in Christ follows our confession, and we are ready to sing, praise, listen to his Word, and live as his people.



## "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son."

Joel D. Otto

When the first Nicene Creed was written in A.D. 325, the article about the Holy Spirit was very succinct: "We believe in the Holy Spirit." The ensuing decades, however, saw controversy over the place of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity. Some claimed that he was only a power of the Father. Others believed he was inferior to the Father and the Son. Still others taught that the Holy Spirit was a created angel.

When the Nicene Creed was completed in A.D. 381, the article on the Holy Spirit was greatly expanded in order to clear up the confusion. By identifying the Holy Spirit as "the Lord," they taught that the Holy Spirit is true God, equal with the Father and the Son (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 2 Corinthians 3:17; see also Acts 5:3,4).

Perhaps a more meaningful phrase is confessing that the Holy Spirit is "the giver of life." At the very beginning, the Holy Spirit was involved in creation (Genesis 1:2). The book of Job testifies to the Spirit's involvement in the giving of physical life. "The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (Job 33:4).

But most beneficial for us is that the Spirit has given us spiritual life. We were born dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1). Jesus told Nicodemus that to be a member of his kingdom requires rebirth through the powerful working of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8). To be born again means to believe in Jesus. Only the Spirit gives us such spiritual life (1 Corinthians 12:3). Without the Spirit's work, the teachings of the Bible and the message of Jesus' cross are foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:14).

It takes a miracle of the Spirit's power to raise us from unbelief to faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit works that miracle every time he creates faith through the gospel (Romans 10:17; Titus 3:5,6). The Spirit has been the "giver of life" for every Christian down through the centuries because he has worked the miracle of faith in each of us.

### EXPLORING THE WORD

1. At a local church gathering in A.D. 589, the Western church added that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father *and the Son*." The Eastern Orthodox church objected to this addition, and it is one of the reasons for the great schism between the Eastern and Western churches. Read John 15:26. What are some reasons that the Nicene Creed is accurate as we confess that the Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son"?
2. Pentecostals and charismatics emphasize a "baptism of the Spirit," evident in special gifts of the Spirit, especially the ability to speak in tongues. How do Jesus' words in John 16:13,14 help us see the real role of the Spirit? Why is this so important to understand?
3. What tools or means does the Holy Spirit use to give us spiritual life (see Titus 3:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13,14; Matthew 26:26-28)? How does this help us prioritize our lives? How does this inform the mission of the church?
4. In John 3:7,8, Jesus compares the Spirit's work to how the wind blows. What did he mean? Why is this important to remember as we carry out the church's mission?

*Contributing editor Joel Otto, professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Salem, Milwaukee.*



This is the ninth article in a 13-part series on the Nicene Creed. Find this study and answers online after July 5 at [www.wels.net/forwardinchrist](http://www.wels.net/forwardinchrist).

We  
believe  
as all  
believers  
have

# Truly free



**The United States celebrates its freedom every July. Through Christ we have reason to celebrate our independence every day.**

Pamela K. Holz

The red-and-white-striped tents start appearing at their designated locations the second week of June. Almost like Christmas presents, the contents of the tents remain closed and hidden. Suddenly, the flaps are up and fireworks are for sale everywhere. Crowds flock to the tents, stocking up on sparklers and screamers, firecrackers and fountains, rockets and Roman candles. While the days on which these pyrotechnics can be legally launched are limited, the anticipation builds as people stockpile for their big Independence Day displays.

My kids are always begging for fireworks. The older they have gotten, the more compliant their father has become to their pleas. In fact, it seems that he is as pleased as they are when they come into the house with their sheepish grins, reveling in their loot. The boys strategically plan the order in which they plan to set off each of their flashy treasures, while I utter silent prayers for their safety.

## **A NATION'S FREEDOM**

Living in the shadow of one of our nation's military bases has an impact on a person's perspective of our nation's Independence Day celebrations. Neighbors are gone—deployed—hearing the impact of missiles. Soldiers who have returned from deployment often can-

not participate in the festivities due to PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and the effect that the noises and flashes have on them.

Looking back at United States' history, we remember how Independence Day came about. Tired of being under the excessive taxation of a distant king, the American colonists were fighting for the chance to be a free nation. Amidst the battles of the Revolutionary War, the leaders of the colonies met together to document their declaration for independence. The group of leaders included John Adams, Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Robert R. Livingston, and Roger Sherman. This declaration, originally drafted by Thomas Jefferson, had 86 changes made to it before it was approved and adopted by all 13 colonies on July 4, 1776. The Declaration of Independence has since become one of our nation's most cherished symbols of liberty.

Fifty years later, in the last letter he would ever send, Jefferson wrote: "For ourselves, let the annual return of this day forever refresh our recollections of these rights, and an undiminished devotion to them" (Monticello, June 24, 1826).

## **A CHRISTIAN'S FREEDOM**

As Christians, it is not hard to relate a nation's day of celebrating freedom to

our own need for independence. We were born into this world, slaves to sin and the devil. On our own, we were doomed not just to paying high taxes but to suffering eternal damnation in hell. God rescued us through the waters of Baptism, placing his seal of approval on us, freeing us from the tyranny of sin and death and hell.

Not only on a hot July day—surrounded by family and friends, with hot dogs and hamburgers, parades and pyrotechnics—do we celebrate this freedom. Daily, as we drown our old Adam, we are forever refreshed in the freedom we have in Christ. Daily, our new man arises to live before God with an undiminished devotion to him. We reflect on the sacrifice our Savior made for us, not with flash and fireworks but in humility. He endured the pain of the cross, the utter darkness of being separated from God, in order to pay fully the debt that we owed.

It is because of Christ's sacrifice that we are truly free. That is something we need to celebrate and rejoice in every day!

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*Pamela Holz, who lives down the road from Fort Campbell, is a member at Beautiful Savior, Clarksville, Tennessee.*