

# Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE

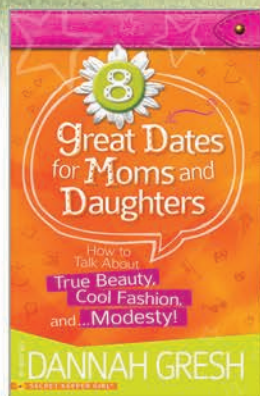


## Alive to God

To set us apart for holy living, Christ made a momentous change within us. He brought our dead souls to life. *Page 10*



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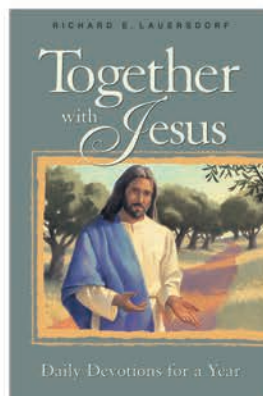
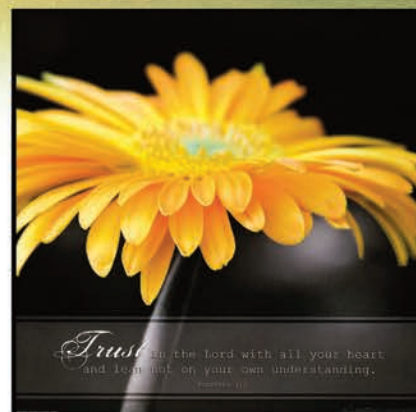
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**POSTMASTER**

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

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

**SUBSCRIPTION RATES**

Print: USA—\$17; Canada—\$17.85; all other countries—air mail \$62.12. Digital: USA—\$15; Canada—\$15.75; all other countries—\$15. Premium: USA—\$18; Canada—\$18.90; all other countries—air mail \$63.12. Postage included, payable in advance to Northwestern Publishing House. Contact Northwestern Publishing House for multi-year, blanket, and bundle rates. Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284; 800-662-6093. Milwaukee area, 414-615-5785. [www.nph.net/periodicals](http://www.nph.net/periodicals).

**ON AUDIO**

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

## WHAT'S INSIDE

Change is inevitable. Whether it happens to us or through us, one thing is certain—things never stay the same.

In a new series on sanctification and good works starting this month, Pastor James Borgwardt talks about the biggest change in our lives—how Christ changed us from being dead to alive (p. 10). That change empowers us in our sanctified living as we strive each day to serve God and our neighbors.

Living our sanctified lives can be difficult, especially when it sometimes seems as if Satan and the world are winning. One of our goals with Forward in Christ, as Executive Editor John Braun shares, is to give you courage, comfort, and strength through God's Word and Christian witness as you continue on your journey (p. 34).

An important part of our work with the magazine is maintaining sound Christian doctrine in each issue. To help us with that task, Prof. Dan Leyrer from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has served as our theological consultant for 13 years. Each month, he faithfully reviewed articles, shared insights, and helped provide clarity—and always with a servant-like attitude. We thank him for his service as we welcome our new consultant, Prof. Bill Tackmier, next month.

Julie Wietzke



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The Scriptures provide graphic details of our Savior's last week before his death. How much do you remember?

Each year we listen to the combined accounts of the Lord's Passion recorded in the four gospels. All of the gospel writers focus on the Savior's death. Matthew records Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem in chapter 21. He shares the Savior's teaching in the temple during Holy Week before turning to Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Mark begins his account in chapter 11 and takes a similar approach. Luke begins with Palm Sunday in the middle of chapter 19 and spends a little more time on the resurrection. John records Jesus' entry into Jerusalem in chapter 12 and then concentrates on the words of Jesus after he reached the disciples' feet.

Not all the events of the week are recorded in each gospel. John reminds us, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (21:25). But what we have, John also reminds us, "are written that [we] may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing [we] may have life in his name" (20:31).

For that reason we hear the record of what Jesus did each year during Lent. I encourage you to listen carefully this Lenten season once again. The little quiz is created to help you listen so you not only rediscover the little details but also marvel at the big picture: Jesus died and rose again for us unworthy sinners. May God bless your Lenten meditation.

26 March 2015

**Test your memory**

John A. Bruhn

1. What was the name of the festival Jesus and his disciples celebrated in Jerusalem?  
a. The Attonment  
b. The Passover  
c. Both  
d. Neither

2. What directions did Jesus give two disciples when he sent them to prepare for the festival?  
a. He told them to follow a man carrying a jar of water.  
b. He told them to avoid the scribes and Pharisees.  
c. He took money from the treasury kept by Judas.  
d. He gave them no specific directions.

3. In the upper room, Jesus...  
a. Sat at the table quietly because he knew what was going to happen.  
b. Laughed with the disciples because it was their last meal together.  
c. Singled out John to tell him what was going to happen.  
d. Washed the feet of the disciples.

4. At the table, Jesus...  
a. Made a new covenant with his disciples, giving them his body and blood with the bread and wine.  
b. Gave the disciples a new commandment to love one another.  
c. Told Judas to buy what was needed for the festival.  
d. All of the above.

5. How many words did the disciples have when they left the upper room?  
a. 1  
b. 5  
c. 2  
d. 11, one for each remaining disciple.

6. Jesus told his disciples they would be scattered before the night was out. But he also promised that...  
a. He would rise from the dead.  
b. They would gather again in Jerusalem.  
c. Peter would be their leader from that night onward.  
d. He didn't know if he could go through with everything.

## TEST YOUR MEMORY

I wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed the "Test Your Memory" quiz [March]. It was a great review of part of Christ's passion, and it encouraged me to open my Bible to check for the correct answers.

I would be pleased if you could include articles of this type in each issue of *Forward in Christ*.

Marjorie Heldman  
Jenera, Ohio

## WORDS FROM THE CROSS

Thank you for your answer to what did Jesus mean by quoting Psalm 22 ["Light for our path," March].

Your lead paragraph made me happy. Jesus was not agonizing over why he was suffering his Father's rejection. Our Redeemer made it very clear several times over that he knew exactly why he was on the cross suffering sin's shame and pain.

And, yes, the fact that Jesus spoke the first verse of Psalm 22 shows the depth of the suffering he invited to himself.

Only Mark records this. Interesting since Mark was not at the cross. Or was he? Mark also tells us Jesus cried this in a voice loud enough for critics to ask if he were calling for Elijah to help him. If only we could hear his tone of voice, see his face, and hear his expression of the words.

I've often thought that Jesus might have recited quite a number of the well-known verses of Psalm 22 from the cross. I can imagine him reciting those words with great wonder, even victory, as acknowledgement that every detail of his experience on the cross was fulfilling the finest details of the psalm.

Imagine that Jesus spoke not only seven sayings from the cross but that he launched into the psalm's prophecies about surrounding dogs, divided garment, visible ribs, parched mouth, and pierced side.

That only verse 1 is quoted may be Mark's authorship. For in quoting verse 1 he is indicating the title of the whole psalm, just as we do with our hymns. "The people sang 'A Mighty Fortress'" is our way of indicating the whole hymn. Is that the way Jews referred to their psalms?

At least, this is how I like to think of what Jesus was saying when he cried out, "My God, my God!"

Douglas Weiser  
WELS missionary to Nigeria

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*.

# Through my Bible in 3 years

2015  
JUNE 2015

- |                     |                     |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Judges 3:7-31    | 11. Jdg. 14, 15     | 21. 1 Pet. 3:1-12   |
| 2. Jdg. 4           | 12. Jdg. 16         | 22. 1 Pet. 3:13-4:6 |
| 3. Jdg. 5           | 13. Jdg. 17, 18     | 23. 1 Pet. 4:7-19   |
| 4. Jdg. 6           | 14. Jdg. 19         | 24. 1 Pet. 5        |
| 5. Jdg. 7:1-23      | 15. Jdg. 20         | 25. Ruth 1, 2       |
| 6. Jdg. 7:24-8:35   | 16. Jdg. 21         | 26. Ruth 3, 4       |
| 7. Jdg. 9:1-10:5    | 17. 1 Peter 1:1-12  | 27. 1 Samuel 1      |
| 8. Jdg. 10:6-11:28  | 18. 1 Pet. 1:13-2:3 | 28. 1 Sam. 2:1-11   |
| 9. Jdg. 11:29-12:15 | 19. 1 Pet. 2:4-17   | 29. 1 Sam. 2:12-36  |
| 10. Jdg. 13         | 20. 1 Pet. 2:18-25  | 30. 1 Sam. 3:1-4:1a |

Read or listen online at [www.wels.net/spiritual-help/through-my-bible](http://www.wels.net/spiritual-help/through-my-bible).



Friday, August 14

Join WELS churches and members to watch the Milwaukee Brewers take on the Philadelphia Phillies.

Tickets are discounted up to 50% and are reserved in a block.

WELS President Mark Schroeder will throw out a ceremonial first pitch, and Koiné lead singer Brian Davison will sing the National Anthem.

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# Jesus keeps us passionate about serving

**Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Romans 12:10,11**

Norman Burger Jr.

He had been away from church and had drifted from God for a number of years. But now he was back, hearing the gospel again, and the first time he mowed the church lawn he shed tears of joy just to do this work for Jesus.

## STORIES OF SERVICE

She was hoping to get back home soon after six weeks in the hospital and the rehab center. Her face lit up in a smile when she told me, “Oh, Pastor, I can’t wait to get back to my card writing!” Before her time in the hospital, she sent notes and Bible passages to shut-ins every month. Now she asked me how all the shut-ins were doing.



The most compelling story of loving devotion and selfless service is the story of Jesus’ commitment to serve and save you.

He was the go-to guy I called when something needed fixing at the parsonage, when someone needed a ride, or when just about anything else came up. “Yes, Pastor!” he would enthusiastically say when I called and identified myself. When I would thank him for his willingness to drop what he was doing and help out, he would just chuckle and say, “Pastor, that’s what I’m here for!”

He was near the end of his life when I visited him. He spoke with cheerful confidence about going to heaven because of his Savior. But when this faithful servant talked about his time of

serving here on earth coming to an end, he got choked up. “I just wish I could do more for my church family,” he said.

## LESSONS FROM OUR SAVIOR’S SERVICE

Why are the stories of these people compelling? Who drops what they are doing to cheerfully put others first? Who thinks that a couple of hours of mowing lawn for God is a precious privilege? The stories are compelling because these are people who know their Savior, Jesus Christ. That’s what makes the difference.

The man who sat on that mower under the hot summer sun found that work deeply fulfilling because he knew Jesus “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). When your God is so passionate about serving you that he is even willing to die for you, whatever you do to serve him is a privilege.

That woman who, in her own suffering, found joy in encouraging shut-ins is simply reflecting the heart of her Savior, “who for the joy set before

him endured the cross” (Hebrews 12:2) for her.

The man who would drop everything to help others did that for the sake of Jesus, who did not consider leaving heaven; becoming a human; or suffering temptation, pain, and death too great a sacrifice for people who need God’s forgiveness and salvation.

That dying man who just wanted to serve the family of believers had that passion because he knew how precious that family is to Jesus. He knew from experience how committed Jesus is to taking care of his own.

The most compelling story of loving devotion and selfless service is the story of Jesus’ commitment to serve and save you. In the gospel, your God assures you that he will help and comfort you in all your needs. More than that, he will live in you to make your own life a beautiful story of devoted service to others in all their needs.

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





*Mark Schweden*

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There is no  
reason to fear.  
God comes to us,  
as he did to Elijah,  
with the same gentle  
whisper of his  
gospel promises.

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## Come out of your cave

With his own eyes, Elijah had seen the powerful hand of God at work (1 Kings 16:29–19:18). Elijah had delivered a message from God to Ahab, who was described as an Israelite king more wicked than all the kings before him. The prophet told Ahab that there would be no rain until Elijah gave the word. Then the rain stopped, just as God had said. While the drought and famine raged, God fed Elijah by ravens and sent him to the home of a widow in Zarephath, where God miraculously took care of him. Then, in the most dramatic demonstration of God's power, we find Elijah in his memorable confrontation with the 450 prophets of Baal. He prayed for God to consume the sacrifice with fire, and he saw with his own eyes how the true God sent fire and ended a contest that was no contest at all. God's power is real.

How quickly Elijah forgot what his own eyes had seen and his experience had proven. When wicked queen Jezebel heard that her prophets of Baal had been put to death, she swore that she would see to it that Elijah would meet the same fate. Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. Then he huddled in a cave. While he was worried and fearful, God sent a great wind, a powerful earthquake, and a consuming fire. But God's power was not in those things. Next came a gentle whisper—a whisper spoken by a God whose power is best demonstrated in the Word he speaks and in the promises he keeps.

We live in an amazing world created and sustained by the power of his Word. We receive the blessings of food and clothing and shelter from the hands of a gracious God. We know from experience the power of God, who with simple water coupled with his Word shattered our hard and unbelieving hearts and replaced them with hearts of faith and trust in his promises. We have witnessed how

the same powerful Word in the mouths of a handful of disciples has changed the world, bringing people of every language, tribe, nation, and people to know the salvation won by a crucified and risen Savior.

Yet, even though we have seen the power of God with our own eyes, we may find ourselves with Elijah, huddling in fear. We see a world set on fire by unbelieving enemies of the gospel. We see the church under attack and not seeming to be succeeding in fending off those attacks; in fact, we see large segments of the Christian church crossing over to the side of the enemy. Congregations struggle, Christians fall away, families disintegrate, and mission zeal seems to falter.

That often makes us afraid, but there is no reason to fear. God comes to us, as he did to Elijah, with the same gentle whisper of his gospel promises. "I will never leave you or forsake you." "The gates of hell will not overcome my church." "I am with you always." "This gospel will be preached to the whole world." "Behold, I am coming soon."

Elijah listened to that gentle whisper. It was a whisper that may not have seemed dramatic and powerful, but it was a whisper that reminded Elijah that the power of God remains in his promises to his people. We can come out of the cave of our fears, just as Elijah did, with a steadfast trust and confidence, knowing that God's power and God's grace will come in his way and in his time.



# Light for our path

**“Why does Islam have so many followers, and why doesn’t God stop the spread of that false religion?”**

James F. Pope

While hard numbers are difficult to obtain, current estimates suggest that Islam accounts for approximately 20 percent of the world’s present population, or about 1.3 billion people.

## GLOBAL GROWTH

Islam is the invention of Muhammad, who lived in the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. Initially, his message met resistance, but it did not take long before people began submitting to Allah, Muhammad’s false god. (*Islam* means “submission,” and *Muslim* refers to “one who submits.”)

There were early converts to Islam for numerous reasons. At a time when Christians were debating the nature of Jesus Christ and other doctrines, Islam came along with a “simple faith,” one that had no complicated creeds or mysterious sacraments. Islam proposed five “pillars,” or duties, for its adherents: a confession of Allah as god, daily prayer at appointed times, fasting during Ramadan, almsgiving, and pilgrimage. Other reasons for the numerical growth of Islam in its infancy were militaristic expansion and “tax advantages” for non-Muslims who could forego tax payments by converting.

The growth of Islam today can be attributed, among other reasons, to a higher birth rate of its followers, the illusion of being a peaceful religion, and policies of numerous countries that promote and tolerate only Islam.

Not to be lost in all this is the fact that Islam is a religion of work-righteousness. Unfortunately, that means it naturally appeals to people who think there must be something they can do to be at peace with a higher power of some kind. Any religion like Islam that focuses attention on people’s actions instead of God’s saving actions will naturally—and sadly—attract followers.

## DIVINE DIRECTION

So where is God in all this, you wonder. He is “seated on his holy throne” (Psalm 47:8),

ruling over the nations. He is in heaven, doing “whatever pleases him” (Psalm 115:3). More than that, he is in our world, guiding everything for the good of the members of his church (Romans 8:28).

God is not pleased when people reject his truth and accept falsehood. God’s desire is clear. He doesn’t want “anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). God “wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). And yet, consider how God leads people to repentance and convinces them of his truth. Is it by sheer might and force? No, it is through his Word. Slowly but surely God opens the eyes of spiritually blind people and shows them the Savior they have in Jesus his Son. Since the fall into sin, God has changed the hearts of millions of people, but throughout time, God has referred to his people as a “remnant” and a “little flock.”

That is because as God does his work, so does Satan. As God sows the seed of his life-giving Word, Satan scatters his life-destroying lies (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). God, in his wisdom, allows Satan to carry out his work. That allowance calls for you and me to bow in humility to God’s wisdom (Romans 11:33-36). God knows what he is doing, and in the end everything will redound to his glory and praise (Philippians 2:9-11).

Your questions underscore the need to share the gospel of Jesus with Muslims and all who live apart from God’s kingdom.

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

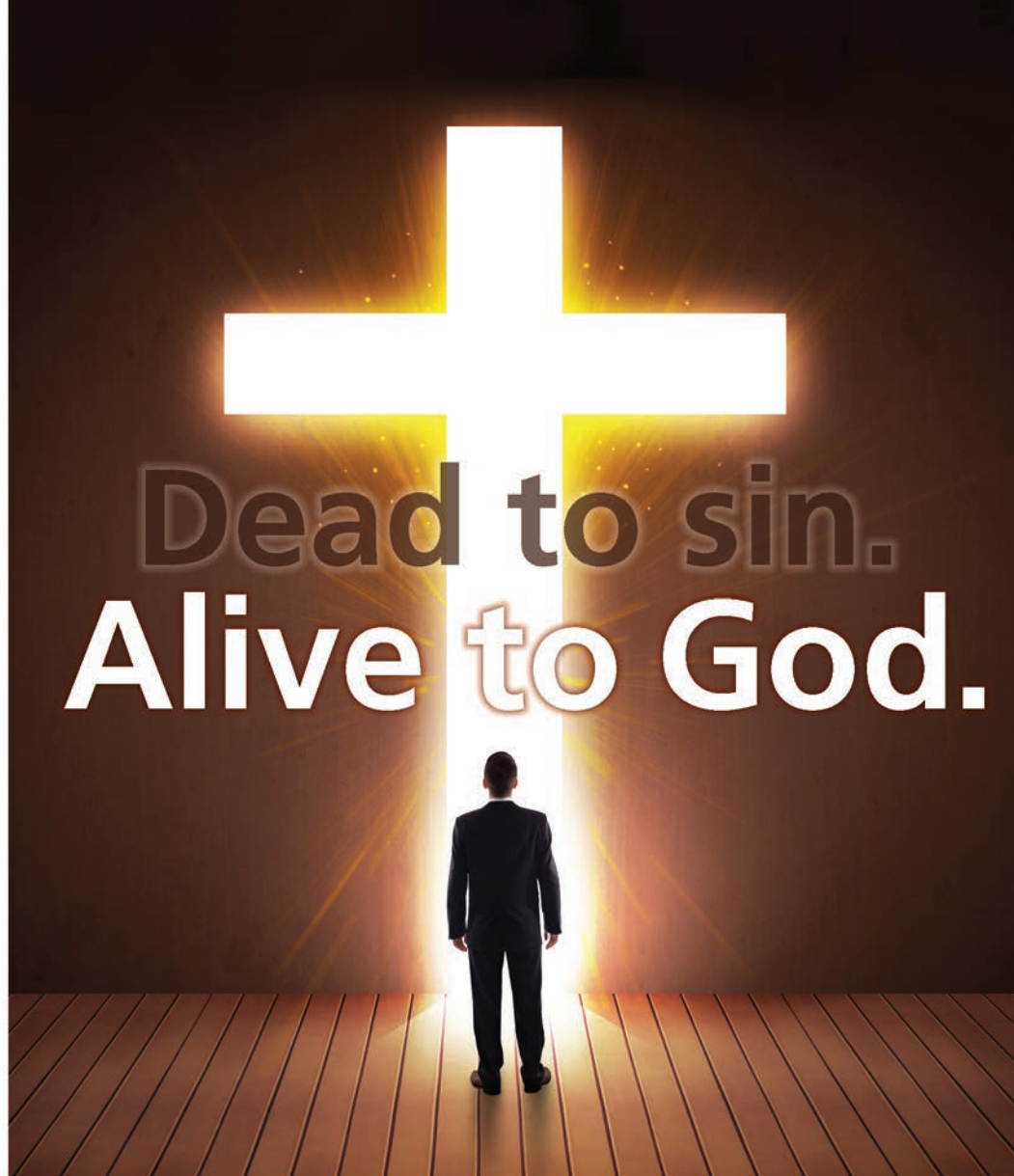
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James Pope also answers questions online at [www.wels.net/what-we-believe/questions-answers](http://www.wels.net/what-we-believe/questions-answers). Submit your questions there or to [fic@wels.net](mailto:fic@wels.net).

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

Psalm 119:105





**So many people want to make personal changes.  
God has changed us from being dead to alive.**

James F. Borgwardt

Americans' dissatisfaction with their status quo has led to many billion-dollar industries. Trainers, cosmetologists, and plastic surgeons use free weights, make-up, and scalpels to help people change on the outside. Consultants, counselors, and life coaches guide their clients to make changes within: abandoning old habits, charting new courses, and achieving personal goals. Such professional help is expensive. Of course, the more budget-minded can find aisles of self-help books that promise do-it-yourselfers all the direction they need.

You could argue that Christians crave change more than anyone. If a person's desire to improve is any indicator, Christians might be the most dissatisfied people on earth. Think about it. We daily admit to failure and resolve to do better tomorrow. This doesn't mean that we're an unhappy or discontented lot. We simply realize that in living a sanctified life—a life "set apart" to honor God—we will never be perfect. There will always be room for improvement.

We earnestly desire those changes, but not because we need to gain God's favor. Jesus already earned that for us

through his life, death, and resurrection. Through grace in Christ, God has adopted us as his children. He's declared us to be holy. He's paid our debt of sin, which means we don't owe God anything. Not one thing.

So, then, why do we strive so hard to change our lives for him? For one thing, it's simply natural. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Second, it's vitally important. Our sanctification is a matter of life and death.

#### **ONCE DEAD TO GOD**

Many people, even a few in the church, suppose that being a Christian and

being a “good person” are one and the same. But if that were true—if being a Christian simply meant good, clean living—then the Pharisees of Jesus’ day would have received Jesus’ highest praise. Instead, they received his harshest rebukes: “You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean” (Matthew 23:27).

Jesus essentially called the Pharisees walking corpses. If zombie stories were all the rage then as they are now, I wonder if Jesus would have called them that. Such a shocking assessment was meant to grab their attention and drive them to repentance. No matter how alive they appeared or how well they thought they kept the commandments, they were dead to God.

It wasn’t just the chronic do-gooders of this Jewish sect who received such a divine diagnosis. Pagan Gentiles who reveled in immorality were also dead men walking. Their lives just didn’t look as pretty. Consider the church members in Ephesus before they became Christians. Paul reminded them, “You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world . . . gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts” (Ephesians 2:1-3).

## NOW ALIVE WITH CHRIST

Whether a self-righteous Pharisee or a self-indulgent pagan, the natural self is spiritually dead until encountering the One who is the Resurrection and the Life. Jesus once described how this vital change happens: “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. . . . The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live” (John 5:24,25).

This is exactly what happened for the Christians in Ephesus. The Ephesians heard the voice of the Son of God

through the preaching of the apostle Paul, and the dead came to life. “Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved” (Ephesians 2:4,5).

Becoming spiritually alive is no less miraculous than when God raised Lazarus to life with nothing more than the power of his voice. Do you remember that dramatic event? Jesus walked to the entrance of the dead man’s tomb and called, “Lazarus, come out!” (John 11:43). Obeying his Creator, Lazarus came to life and walked out of the tomb.

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## Christ reversed the natural progression of things, moving us from tomb to womb.

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Your conversion was less dramatic, but no less miraculous. That’s why conversion to saving faith is also called the first resurrection (Revelation 20:6). That’s where we begin when thinking about the sanctified life. To set us apart for holy living, Christ made that momentous change within us. He didn’t merely smooth out some of our rough edges or refine a few personal weaknesses. He brought our dead souls to life.

Wouldn’t it be silly to think of this radical change as any sort of a do-it-yourself project? God did all the work here. Christ reversed the natural progression of things, moving us from tomb to womb. He explained to Nicodemus, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. . . . No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:3,5). This new life was a spiritual rebirth, brought about at our baptisms.

## AND DEAD TO SIN

When a close friend and I joke back and forth, we can insult each other pretty deeply. If I get him really good, he might jokingly respond, as if gravely offended, “You’re dead to me.” When spoken in jest between friends, it’s funny because it’s such a shocking statement. I couldn’t imagine saying something so hateful and actually meaning it—except when I battle against my sinful nature. Sins that I once loved, I now hate and struggle to stay away from. This is the part of a sanctified life in which I take action: counting myself dead to sin.

Think of Lazarus again. Imagine that hours after he came back to life, when he was ready to turn in for the night, he returned to his grave to curl up for a good night’s sleep. After all, he had slept there the last four nights. Was he starting to get used to it? Unthinkable!

Returning to our old sins is no less ludicrous! God tells us to view sinful choices this way: “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness” (Romans 6:11-13).

God is in the change business. And so are we. Our sanctified living began with the death-to-life change God brought about at our baptisms through the power of Christ’s resurrection. It continues with daily choices he empowers us to make. We consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

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

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





# Touching heaven

## NO TIME TO PRAY?

**To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.**

Stephen M. Luchterhand

Which causes heart palpitations more quickly: a lack of prayer or the lack of a smartphone?

Recent studies suggest that the average person checks his or her smartphone 150 times each day. That's once every 9 minutes and 36 seconds, including sleep time. That number seems low considering all that can be done with these devices: e-mail, text messages, time checks, picture taking, app explorations, and even the occasional phone call.

But we're not concerned here with smartphones as much as prayer. How often does the average person check in with Jesus via prayer? More to the point, which receives more attention from you: your smartphone or Jesus? Do you have time to pray?

### THE B WORD

Have you been part of the following conversations?

How have you been? Busy.

How was your weekend? Busy.

How are things at work? Busy.

How is your family? Busy.

Sometimes the answers vary, as in "so busy" or "very busy." Little wonder small children have been overheard asking their parents, "Is your name Busy?"

Busyness is a blessing. God created us to be active. Work keeps us busy. Running a household and managing a family require tremendous energy. The complexities of living in the 21st century can be overwhelming, and we struggle to keep up. Busyness is a given. But busyness can also be a burden.

It isn't wrong to be busy. But busyness strains relationships, especially when busyness is self-centered and focused on advancing personal interests. Busyness is dangerous when we're too busy and give light attention to important

things. For example, checking your phone 150 times a day certainly keeps you busy, but is it necessary or important? Busyness is downright deadly when you're running on an empty spiritual fuel tank. Are you too busy to pray?

Martha kept busy, attending to her responsibilities and putting her spiritual gifts of hospitality and serving to good use (Luke 10:38-42). But she was distracted, worried, anxious, stressed, and frustrated that her sister, Mary, wasn't helping. Jesus didn't criticize Martha's busyness. He gently warned that serving without drawing strength and encouragement from the Lord can lead to an empty, even bitter, perspective. The "one thing . . . needed"—time in the Word and with Jesus—is vital. A life with no time to pray is no way to live.

## THE P WORD

Jesus prioritized prayer. Jesus was busy, but he made time with the Father a priority. Preaching, teaching, healing, driving out demons, and dealing with Satan dominated his days here on earth. Time with the Father in prayer and study was essential. In Mark chapter 6, in the midst of extreme ministry busyness and personal grief (when his relative John the Baptist had just been killed), Jesus said to his disciples, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" (v. 31). A few minutes of naptime in a recliner might have been included but certainly wasn't the priority. The priority for Jesus was time with the Father, and for the disciples, the priority was time with Jesus.

Luke tells us that "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (5:16). He spent time in prayer the night before he chose the 12 disciples (Luke 6:12). He sent his disciples ahead while he remained behind to pray (Matthew 14:23). He taught them—and us—to pray the prayer we call the Lord's Prayer. He prayed with unparalleled intensity in Gethsemane the night before his death. Jesus was extremely busy, but he found time to pray. So

important was his connection to the Father, he made prayer a priority.

But Jesus was never too busy to hear the prayers of his disciples either. At no time did Jesus ever say, "I'm sorry. I got so wrapped up in keeping the universe in balance and the planets perfectly aligned and overseeing the spiritual warfare between the angels and demons and working for the spread of the gospel throughout the world that I forgot to bring your requests to the Father. What was it you wanted again?"

## TOO BUSY NOT TO PRAY

Martin Luther, the author of powerful, concise morning and evening prayers, wrote in *A Simple Way to Pray*, "It is a good thing to let prayer be your first business in the morning and the last at night" (p. 18). Some claim that Luther,

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## A life with no time to pray is no way to live.

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a tireless worker and prolific author, said, "If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory through the day. I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer." He was too busy not to pray, believing that without prayer he would not have been able to accomplish all that he did.

Is there a certain amount of time that is appropriate for prayer? Five minutes? Must we pray for an hour or two or three? Do we even have time for that? Are quick five-second prayers acceptable? Debates about prayer time—minimum or maximum—dissolve when we come across passages like these:

- "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise" (Hebrews 13:15).
- "Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name

of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20).

- "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6).
- "Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" (Ephesians 6:18).
- "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Are you able to read, "Pray continually," without even a hint of guilt and shame? My knees aren't calloused from endless hours in prayerful supplication. I'm too busy. Does this mean I can't measure up to the giants of the faith?

A group of nuns in La Crosse, Wisconsin, have been praying nonstop since 1878—nearly 137 years of continual prayer. But even the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration are not able to literally and individually "pray continually." Two women pray at a time, in shifts of 30 or 60 minutes, depending on the time of day.

Continual prayer is more attitude than activity. As we make our way through the hours and events of each day, we are mindful of our Savior's constant presence and know we can immediately go to him in prayerful conversation. Whether asking for help or thanking him for blessings, children of God remain in constant communication with their heavenly Father.

We have time to check e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, and our smartphones. We have time for this most important privilege of prayer. At no time is there no time to pray. At no time are we too busy to pray. Rather, we realize that we are too busy *not* to pray. So we cry out, "O LORD, . . . give ear to my prayer" (Psalm 17:1).

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

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



## When going through a hard time, a man hears God's strong words about divorce, Jesus, and forgiveness.

Rachel Hartman

Casey Cummings was raised on a ranch near Martin, South Dakota. "My dad was Catholic, but he never really went to church very often," recalls Cummings.

As the middle child in a family with seven children, Cummings went through catechism classes and first communion. Later on, however, he wasn't too interested in attending church.

After finishing high school, Cummings worked on ranches in Nebraska for a time. He also traveled out to San Jose, California, to live with an uncle. The change was dramatic. At the time, there were more people living in San Jose than in the state of South Dakota. "After about two months, I was getting tired of the crowds and decided to come back home," he notes.

Cummings returned to Martin, a town of approximately 1,100 people in western South Dakota. He took on different jobs but still wasn't intrigued by the idea of church. While he tried out some options, including a Baptist church, he didn't remain in any. "It never seemed like all was right with those churches," he says.

## NOT FOLLOWING THE TEACHINGS OF A MAN

Life carried on with ups and downs for Cummings. He got married, and the couple had four children.

At one point, he was involved in construction work. While at this job, he worked for a man who was a member of the WELS church in town.

"At the time, I totally had a misunderstanding of what the Lutheran teachings were," recalls Cummings. The idea of a church based on the beliefs of a particular man, Martin Luther, was unappealing to him.

The WELS congregation in town was constructing a new church building, and the WELS member that Cummings worked for was involved in the project. "He asked if he could have me come into town and help him while he was helping to build the church," Cummings remembers.

One day when Cummings was working on the roof of the church, the pastor approached him. "He asked me if I considered ever becoming a member of the church," says Cummings. "I said, 'I don't want to be part of a church that is based on the teachings of a man.'"

The encounter occurred around 1990. Cummings didn't know that approximately eight years later, he would approach the same church.

## GOD'S TEACHINGS

In the late 1990s, Cummings found himself in a tough spot. His marriage

had unraveled, and he was going through a divorce.

It was a hard period. "I was just wandering around lost at the time," he recalls. He stopped in a Presbyterian church in town, which had a female pastor. "I asked her, 'What do you think about divorce?'"

The answer he received was not straightforward. "She said, 'Well, I guess sometimes things just don't really work out and aren't meant to be,'" he remembers.

Cummings went to a different church and received a similar answer. The advice didn't sink in, and he continued to feel lost. "A good friend of mine was a member of WELS, and he said, 'Maybe you should talk to my pastor,'" says Cummings.

Cummings took that advice. On a Wednesday afternoon during Lent, he approached the same church he had helped build. He asked the pastor the same question he had asked others about divorce. "He told me, 'I'm not going to tell you what I think about divorce. I'm going to tell you what God thinks about divorce,'" says Cummings.

Then the pastor opened up the Bible. After looking at Scripture, the two talked for bit. "He said, 'We have services on Wednesday evenings during Lent, and you're welcome to come to one,'" recalls Cummings. That same evening, Cummings took the pastor up on the offer and attended worship at the Lutheran church.



# Confessions OF FAITH

The evening service changed everything. “It was the first time I ever really heard the Word,” Cummings recalls.

After that first service, Cummings couldn’t get enough of hearing God’s Word. He started coming to more services. “Up until that point I was never really sure what Easter was about,” he notes. He found the account of Jesus’ resurrection and the assurance of our redemption to be an amazing message. “I couldn’t wait to start Bible information class.”

### **BELONGING TO A FAMILY**

When Cummings began Bible information classes, the setup consisted of one-on-one classes with the pastor. While the normal length of these classes was scheduled for one hour, Cummings often stayed much longer. “Most of the time ours would last two or three hours,” he says. “I was so full of questions, and the pastor was good at answering my questions from the Word.”

After completing the Bible information classes, Cummings became a member of the church. Unlike his experiences with other churches, this time he was ready to stay. “The simple fact that all the teachings were based on the Word of God and not on other things—that’s what really caught me,” he says.

During spring of the year Cummings began attending services, the WELS congregation decided to build a new parsonage. Cummings saw an opportunity to offer a hand.

“I started helping with building the parsonage and really got to know the members,” he says.

Cummings felt accepted right from the start. “Everyone made me feel welcome, even though for most of them I was a stranger. It’s such a wonderful church family.”

After he became a member, a member of the church asked Cummings if he would like to serve on the church council. “At the time, I told him, ‘I don’t think I’m suited,’” says Cummings.

The next year, however, when the time came again for the council elections, Cummings was asked again to consider the possibility. This time he agreed, and he served in that role for the next 15 years.

### **GROWING IN THE WORD**

Today Cummings lives on the same ranch where he was raised and has a few cattle. He works for another rancher in the area.

While he appreciates attending worship regularly, Lent continues to be a special time for Cummings. During that season, he always remembers the first time he walked through the doors of the WELS church and asked the pastor about divorce. The encounter initiated a whole new period in his life.

“Every time Lent comes around, I don’t want to miss the services because they take me back to where I started,” says Cummings. “I remem-



Casey Cummings

ber how refreshing it was to hear such a wonderful message.”

After Cummings became involved with the WELS church in Martin, several of his children grew interested in learning more about God’s Word. They went through instruction classes, and today, three of his children are also WELS members.

Through every point in life, Cummings finds himself turning again to the Word for comfort and counsel. “As long as I remember that only one thing is needful, it really helps me get through,” he says.

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





## heart to heart parent conversations

**Bullying. It's a part of parent-hood that we all hope we can avoid. If our child is being bullied or is bullying others, tough times are sure to follow. What can we do to help? Hear firsthand accounts of bullying from author Laurie Gauger-Hested and learn about the growing problem of cyberbullying from licensed counselor Sarah Reik.**

**Has your family been affected by bullying? Send your story to [fic@wels.net](mailto:fic@wels.net) or Forward in Christ, N16W23377 Stone Ridge Dr, Waukesha, WI 53188.**



## 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.

## HOW DO WE HANDLE BULLYING?

### I have stories. True stories.

Seven girls cherry-pick an eighth and assail her with text messages prominently featuring the *b* word. Sophomore boys taunt a classmate with a little jingle about his dental issues. An entire third grade channels a boy's lisp into a nickname that echoes into his adulthood. Cheerleaders criticize the awkward girl on the squad so relentlessly that her mother shows up at practice, calling out their cruelty, questioning their Christianity, crying herself through it all.

I sympathize with that mother—watching helplessly as her daughter shrinks before her very eyes, wondering whether she really is stupid and ugly.

I have no easy answers for bullying. Pray? Of course. Turn the other cheek? Unfortunately, it usually invites more abuse. Reason with the bully—or her parents? They're not renowned for their conciliatory spirits. Fight back? A Christian psychologist told a boy to punch his bully in self-defense, and—voila!—the sinful behavior stopped. Is that the answer?

Some throw in the towel from the get-go: "Kids will be kids. Sensitive kids just have to toughen up." Sadly, there's truth there. We can't make people behave. We can only decide how to respond.

**This is where we parents come in.** If our kids are being mistreated, we can shore up their battered psyches: "God made you amazing! Those boys cannot tell you what to do. Those girls cannot decide who you will be. Let's pray—that the bully will stop, yes, but that no matter what happens, you'll find ways to rise above this. And while we're at it, let's pray for the bully too."

We can also discuss what drives the bad behavior: "Bullies don't know they're bullies. They're scared—scared they won't get the acceptance and applause they feel they deserve. So they fight for it—with fists, with words, with manipulation so subtle even we adults sometimes can't see it."

And more: "That bully can't keep up with you on the court or in the classroom, so she has to reclaim her power position by tormenting you." Or: "That bully's father has a short temper, so he's just paying it forward."

By exploring bullies' motivations, we cultivate our kids' empathetic imaginations—a quality bullies lack, incidentally. And perhaps our kids can find a chink in the bully's armor—a sliver of vulnerability, a speck of human decency, maybe even a way to the tormenter's tormented heart.

**There's also a flip side: "Is my kid a bully?"** This one takes some humility and maturity to consider.

Are they obsessed with popularity? Quick to mock and sneer? Belligerent or physically aggressive? Frustrated when they don't get their way? Pouty when they don't get attention? Do they blame others for their lack of success? Roll their eyes at authority figures?

Have they never mentioned any bullying? Then maybe they're the bully.

If we're inadvertently raising little tyrants, we need to make some changes, don't we? Otherwise they become

grown-up tyrants—browbeating their spouses, frightening their children, manipulating their colleagues.

We can start by taking away the little bullies' insecurities. We help them feel safe, loved, and valuable. Borrowing from psychologist Abraham Maslow a bit, I'd suggest . . .

1. We make sure we're dependable parents. We provide hot food, clean jeans, on-time rides to practice and lessons, and general tranquility at home. We keep them safe.
2. We show we love them—just as they are. We have time for them. We listen. We allow them to ask questions and disagree with us. We take them seriously. They belong in this family, and they always will.
3. We remind them they're loved by someone even larger. Their heavenly Father formed them in the womb. Jesus demonstrated his deep love by shedding his blood and dying for them. He understands their pains, weaknesses, and strengths. They're very special in his eyes, and—this is important—so is everyone else.
4. We nurture their empathetic imaginations by calling attention to others' needs: "Did you notice Owen sitting by himself again? What would it feel like to always be picked last, like Amber is?" And going in another direction: "Seems like Emma's good at everything—do you think her life is easy in every respect? Nick is always cracking jokes—why is that?" We can nudge our kids out of their egocentricity and open their eyes to see the hearts of their fellow human beings.
5. We teach them common courtesy. Unless everyone is invited to the party, handing out invitations at school is unacceptable. Though they'll have special friends, being unkind is sinful. Social media is great, but being nasty online is unacceptable.
6. We supervise them without apology. This is our job. We won't tolerate criticizing, marginalizing, or hurting others—including their siblings. We check their texts and all their online accounts. It's not an invasion of privacy—it's parenting. When they sin, we dole out consequences.
7. We teach them resilience. When things don't go their way, when they fail, we remind them they can't blame others. They're not victims. They can dust themselves off, make different choices, harness the gifts God gave them, and try again.
8. Maybe most of all, we model kindness—the kind of kindness Jesus showed to us. Our kids need to see us not being bullies—not mocking or criticizing people, not marginalizing those who aren't as together as we think we are, not losing our tempers at the drop of a hat, not manipulating people to gain sympathy or power.

**Kids will be kids? I'd add, "Parents need to be parents."** God help us be wise ones, whether our kids are the victims of bullies or are the bullies themselves.

*Laurie Gauger-Hested and her husband, Michael, have a blended family that includes her two 20-somethings and his preteen son.*



# CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is a modern and dangerous form of bullying that takes place using electronic technology, such as cell phones, computers, or tablets. Over half of young people report being cyberbullied.

## Examples of cyberbullying

- Sending hurtful or threatening texts or e-mails
- Starting rumors on social media sites
- Spreading embarrassing photos or videos
- Creating a fake profile to torment or humiliate

## Signs your child might be a victim

- Distress when using electronic devices
- Secrecy regarding online use
- Unexplained anger
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Changes in eating or sleeping, drop in grades
- Uneasiness about spending time with peers

## Signs your child might be a cyberbully

- Switches screens or closes the phone or computer whenever you are near
- Laughs at something online but won't tell you what it is
- Avoids conversations about online activity
- Uses multiple online accounts
- Uses electronic device at all hours of the night and gets very upset if it's taken away
- Starts spending time with the "wrong crowd"

## What can children do if they're being cyberbullied?

- Never post or share personal information.
- Never share Internet passwords with anyone, except your parents.
- Talk to your parents about what you do online.
- Block communication with the cyberbully.
- Delete messages without reading them.
- Talk to a friend or trusted adult about the bullying.
- Report the problem to an Internet service provider or website moderator.
- Refuse to pass along cyberbullying messages—forwarding or "liking" a message is bullying too!

## What can parents do?

- Keep your home computer in a busy area of your house.
- Know your children's screen names and passwords.
- Regularly go over their "friends" lists with them. Ask who each person is and how your children know them.
- Bring up the topic of cyberbullying and ask your children directly if they have ever experienced it or seen it happen to someone.
- Assure your children that you will not blame or punish them for being cyberbullied. Most children do not tell their parents when they are cyberbullied because they are afraid they will lose their cell phone or computer privileges.

*Sarah Reik is a licensed professional counselor with WLCFS-Christian Family Solutions.*







# teentalk

## The truth about lies

Rumors can hurt, but Jesus is always there to help.

So you're walking down the hallway at school. Just another normal day, right? That's what you think until you see the quiet stares from people looking at you like you're from another planet. And they're whispering. You think, *Is there something on my shirt? Is my hair messed up?* You duck into the bathroom to check the mirror, but nothing looks out of place. You start to head out the door when your best friend pulls you aside and tells you that someone started a nasty rumor about you. Your stomach drops. What do you do?

**High school can be nasty—really nasty.** I don't care if you go to public school or private school, because there's always sin around every corner. Private schools are not by any means perfect just because they are "Jesus schools." The rumors at my private school can be nasty, and I definitely wouldn't want to be the object of one.

Sadly enough, however, I did become involved in one, and it stunk. Someone pulled me aside and told me that my boyfriend had cheated on me with a girl I considered to be my friend. I felt betrayed, hurt, and, most of all, disappointed. I didn't know what to do. I couldn't talk to my boyfriend who was 500 miles away at college, and I

didn't know if I could trust my so-called "friend." People left and right were telling me things about my own life I didn't even know, so how in the world would I know whom to trust?

Of course I had talked to my close friends about it. But the thing that helped me most was the religion class I had the period after I found out about the rumor. Sitting there in class, I was reminded to pray.

**When the topic of rumors comes up, the "first grade" answer is that you ask Jesus for help.** Well, I'm going to be honest with you: That's not always the first thing that comes to mind. Most likely, you're a typical teenage kid and you panic. I've been there. You want to know who started it, and you probably want to confront them. Or maybe you're a person who just wants to hide out in the bathroom for the rest of your life. Whatever kind of person you are, there's one thing you should do before you go hunt anyone down or change your name and attempt to leave the country. That one thing is to pray.

When I felt like everyone was against me and lying to my face, I went to the one person I knew who would tell me the truth when no one else

would—Jesus. All I wanted that day was the truth, and by praying for help, Jesus led me to it. He helped me to stay calm and handle the situation. I realized that it doesn't matter what other people say.

So, finally, I talked with the people who would know whether the rumor was true or not. And with Jesus' help, I decided that the rumor was exactly that: a rumor.

I don't know why people start rumors, and I probably never will understand it fully. I know sometimes high school can seem like an endless circle of gossip, but don't go hunt anyone down and please don't change your name and move to another country. You may feel like you're physically or emotionally at your weakest, but with God you're always at full strength.

Pray, because when rumors and lies hurt, Jesus can help.

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*The author asked to be kept anonymous.*

## CHANGES IN MINISTRY

## Pastors

**Berg, Nathan H.**, to Eastside, Madison, Wis.  
**Bolwerk, Jeffery G.**, to St. Matthew, Benton Harbor, Mich.  
**Burow, Clint A.**, to Amazing Grace, South Beloit, Ill.  
**Falck, Daniel R.**, to retirement  
**Nuss, Stephen R.**, to retirement  
**Wietzke, Bruce V.**, to Christus, Delavan, Wis.  
**Zehms, Roger R.**, to Beautiful Savior, West Des Moines, Iowa

## Teachers

**Albrecht, Joann B.**, to retirement  
**Arndt, Judy A.**, to retirement  
**Bahn, Michael D.**, to retirement  
**Balge, Rebecca L.**, to Divine Savior, Doral, Fla.  
**Bentz, Beverly J.**, to Illinois Elementary School, Crete, Ill.  
**Bernarde Zimmerman, Glenda**, to retirement  
**Biedenbender, David K.**, to Christ the Lord, Missouri City, Tex.  
**Boehme, Gretchen I.**, to retirement  
**Boehme, Mark C.**, to retirement  
**Boehm, Julaine L.**, to retirement  
**Braun, Beverly A.**, to retirement  
**Braun, Jeanne M.**, to retirement  
**Braun, Susan E.**, to retirement  
**Buege, Charles H.**, to retirement  
**Cole, Stanley R.**, to retirement  
**Dahmes, Dee A.**, to retirement  
**Dausel, Lindsey**, to Christ-St. Peter, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Deibert, David K.**, to retirement  
**Dirksen, Amy G.**, to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.  
**Eberhardt, Jane E.**, to retirement  
**Engel, Raenell**, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Enter, Douglas A.**, to retirement  
**Enter, Sandra L.**, to retirement  
**Enter, Steven H.**, to retirement  
**Finkbeiner, Ryan B.**, to Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Gosse, Mary K.**, to retirement  
**Gumm, Anneliese M.**, to St. Paul's, Norfolk, Neb.  
**Gut, Justin G.**, to Trinity, Waukesha, Wis.  
**Haakenson, Cary J.**, to retirement  
**Haar, Susan G.**, to retirement  
**Hahn, Gerald L.**, to retirement  
**Harley, Jonathan K.**, to retirement  
**Hartwig, Carol S.**, to retirement  
**Hartwig, Joan**, to retirement  
**Hermanson, Jon M.**, to Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minn.

**Heyn, Meredith C.**, to Immanuel, Greenville, Wis.  
**Holtz, Carol M.**, to Trinity, Minocqua, Wis.  
**Igl, Adam T.**, to St. John's, Newburg, Wis.  
**Kelley, Alyssa A.**, to Holy Trinity, Des Moines, Wash.  
**Kilchenmann, Karen B.**, to retirement  
**Klockziem, Roger C.**, to retirement  
**Krug, Lenore D.**, to retirement  
**Lauber, Judith L.**, to retirement  
**Lindloff, Jennifer S.**, to Peace, Sun Prairie, Wis.  
**Madson, Karen E.**, to retirement  
**Marten, John A.**, to retirement  
**Martens, James E.**, to retirement  
**Meier, Nancy L.**, to retirement  
**Mellon, Thomas R.**, to retirement  
**Nommensen, Dyann R.**, to Word of Life, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Pertzsch, Doris R.**, to retirement  
**Povich, George J.**, to retirement  
**Radue, Joel D.**, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Retzlaff, Cheryl C.**, to retirement  
**Schabo, Pat L.**, to retirement  
**Schmal, Mary L.**, to retirement  
**Schroeder, Laura L.**, to St. Peter, Plymouth, Mich.  
**Schwartz, Thomas R.**, to retirement  
**Sonnenburg, Charles G.**, to retirement  
**Sperle, Deneal M.**, to Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minn.  
**Springborn, Steven A.**, to Nebraska Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb.  
**Toth, Dawn M.**, to retirement  
**Treder, Alan C.**, to retirement  
**Vasold, Terrance R.**, to retirement  
**Vlieger, Michael T.**, to Risen Savior, Mankato, Minn.  
**Walz, Kathleen A.**, to retirement  
**Wiegman, Robert J.**, to retirement  
**Wierer, Rhonda M.**, to retirement  
**Zellmer, Steven W.**, to retirement

## ANNIVERSARIES

**Brillion, Wis.**—Trinity School (100). June 7. Worship, 8 and 10 A.M.; open house to follow; program at Cobblestone Creek, 1 P.M. RSVP requested. 920-756-3738. Website, [www.trinitybrillion.org](http://www.trinitybrillion.org).  
**Aurora, Colo.**—Christ Our Redeemer (50). June 14. Worship, 4 P.M.; meal to follow. Website, [www.corchurch.com](http://www.corchurch.com).  
**Citrus Heights, Calif.**—St. Mark's (50). June 14. Worship, 4 P.M.; meal to follow. Website, [www.stmarkslutheran.com](http://www.stmarkslutheran.com).  
**Moorhead, Minn.**—Ascension (50). June 14. Worship, 9 A.M.; meal to follow at Dilworth Community Center, Dilworth, Minn. Trish Dominguez, [wxgrl18@gmail.com](mailto:wxgrl18@gmail.com).

**Hendricks, Minn.**—Trinity (125). June 21. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal to follow. Bruce Mueller, [bruceamueller@yahoo.com](mailto:bruceamueller@yahoo.com).  
**Mission, S.D.**—Zion (100). June 21. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal to follow. 605-856-4943.  
**Twin Lakes, Mich.**—Camp Lor-Ray (50). July 4 weekend. Mike Brenner, [campplorray@gmail.com](mailto:campplorray@gmail.com). Website, [www.campplor-ray.org](http://www.campplor-ray.org).  
**Savanna, Ill.**—St. Peter (125). July 12. Regular worship, 9 A.M.; brunch, 11 A.M.; special anniversary service, 2 P.M. RSVP requested. 815-273-2816; [stpetersavanna@yahoo.com](mailto: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](http://www.emmanuelredeemer.org).  
**Eagle River, Wis.**—Christ (125). July 19. Worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M.; meal to follow. 715-479-8307. Website, [www.christeagle-river.org](http://www.christeagle-river.org).  
**Whitefish Bay, Wis.**—Divinity-Divine Charity. July 19. Worship, 9:30 A.M.; ice cream social to follow. Website, [www.ddclutheran.org](http://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](http://www.immanuel-lutherankewaunee.org).

## COMING EVENTS

**WELS National School Leadership conference**—June 15–18. Hosted by WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools. Country Springs Hotel, Waukesha, Wis. Website, [www.wels.net/events](http://www.wels.net/events).  
**52nd annual Lutheran Women's Missionary Society convention**—June 25–28. Rushmore Plaza Civic Center, Rapid City, S.D. Hosted by the Black Hills and Central Dakota Circuits. Website, [www.lwms.org](http://www.lwms.org).  
**WELSTech conference**—July 9–11. Hosted by WELS Technology office. Country Springs Hotel, Waukesha, Wis. Website, [www.wels.net/welstechconf](http://www.wels.net/welstechconf).  
**Regional youth rally**—July 13–16. Villanova University, Philadelphia, Pa. Hosted by the North Atlantic and Michigan Districts. For teens entering grades 9–12. [youthrallyfreedom513@gmail.com](mailto:youthrallyfreedom513@gmail.com). Website, [www.welsyouth.net](http://www.welsyouth.net).  
**63rd biennial WELS convention**—July 27–30. Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich. Website, [www.wels.net/2015synodconvention](http://www.wels.net/2015synodconvention).

To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; [bulletinboard@wels.net](mailto:bulletinboard@wels.net). Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.



## Seminary graduation in Nigeria

Nine men graduated from Christ the King Lutheran Seminary near Abak, Nigeria, on March 14. The men were from WELS' two sister synods in Nigeria—seven from All Saints Lutheran Church of Nigeria and two from Christ the King Lutheran Church of Nigeria. Joel Jaeger, a visiting professor; John Holtz, a missionary from Malawi; and Douglas Weiser, missionary to Nigeria, participated in the service.

This is the fourth graduating class from Christ the King Lutheran Seminary; the last class graduated in 2008.

The new pastors completed five years of formal studies—two in the preseminary and three in the seminary—as well as several years of service in congregations. “Men from both Nigerian synods study together in both preseminary and seminary,” says Weiser. “For the All Saints students, that means living far from home and leaving their families behind for months at a time.” Nigerian pastors

and professional school teachers teach courses for the preseminary years, while Weiser, 2 Christ the King pastors, and 16 volunteer WELS pastors lead the seminary courses.

Jaeger, pastor at Christ, Milwaukee, Wis., has taught seminary courses in Nigeria four different times, most recently from Feb. 19–March 16. “I never would have imagined that I would be involved in training pastors, but I think this system works really well,” says Jaeger. “Their parish ministry is so different in so many ways, and yet it’s exactly the same because it’s preaching law and gospel, it’s applying God’s Word to souls that are hurting, and it’s helping people see the joy in Christ’s salvation. To be part of that process, to have the Holy Spirit use us to get [students] to that point, is really special.”

Weiser says that the next round of students will begin preseminary classes in July 2016. For the first time, All Saints Lutheran Church of Nigeria will run its

own preseminary, allowing All Saints students to be closer to home for the first two years of their training. A grant from WELS World Missions allowed All Saints to construct a building to use for these classes as well as for an administrative office for the synod. All the students then will complete their studies at Christ the King Lutheran Seminary. “By joining theological students for seminary training, the two synods enhance their fellowship in God’s Word and a sense of unity among their pastors,” says Weiser.

Weiser serves part-time as a non-resident missionary to WELS’ two sister synods in Nigeria. He works closely with 26 national pastors who serve 56 congregations/preaching stations and 5,203 members.

Meet Michael Egar, one of the Nigerian graduates, on p. 28.



The 2015 graduates of Christ the King Lutheran Seminary in Nigeria with Missionary Doug Weiser (far left), Missionary John Holtz (middle), and Pastor Joel Jaeger (far right).

## Proclaiming the good news

Nigeria is one of several WELS world mission fields that is using a tool called the Proclaimer to spread the gospel message.

A digital player powered by a built-in solar panel and hand crank, the Proclaimer is preloaded with an audio Bible recording (usually the New Testament) and is available in hundreds of languages and dialects.

Most national pastors in Nigeria have a Proclaimer for use in their congregations and for outreach. Pastor Mathias Odey, former president of All Saints Lutheran Church of Nigeria, is excited to use this tool—even in his retirement. “I am pleased to get this Proclaimer. I will use it to teach my people to know Jesus Christ who came to die for our sins,” he says. “I will use my natural Yala to explain the Scriptures to them so they will understand about the salvation Christ has earned for them. So it’s a really

good thing to start with. I’m thinking of going back to my village in a couple months when I retire. Then I will be sitting around with my people. They will be happy to hear such messages, especially when I can explain the English they hear in their vernacular. Once they hear and want to hear more, they can go to some of the churches. They can worship God and fellowship with others.”

Ten other mission fields—including places in Asia, Africa, and South America—use Proclaimers in their ministry.

“It is hard for most of us to imagine the impact that a little radio can have. Much of our lives are filled with speakers cranking out background sound,” says Larry Schlomer, administrator of WELS World Missions. “But in a place where electricity is seldom available, what this box can do is impressive. A couple of



Pastor Mathias Odey from All Saints Lutheran Church of Nigeria and his Proclaimer.

cranks or some time in the sun, and this little box can fill a room of three hundred people with the precious message of the gospel in their own heart language. The sound is impressive and grabs attention. The gospel that is proclaimed fills hearts with the peace that only Jesus brings.”

## Booknook

A look at books published by Northwestern Publishing House. For more information, visit [www.nph.net](http://www.nph.net) or call 1-800-662-6022.

Where are you in your “mom journey”?

Daily devotions are a hard habit to form, no matter in what stage of parenthood you find yourself. You may have small children attached to you most of the day or you’re barely treading water, immersed in your family’s hectic schedule. Something has to give! *Cherished Gifts*, a new devotional by Katie Martin, can help you make sure that time spent in God’s Word doesn’t become one of those somethings.

Katie knows what it’s like to be in the trenches of parenthood, and the Holy Spirit led her to write about the most important things for moms to remember: Jesus loves us and our children. We can’t be perfect parents. God is with us every moment. The troubles of this world are temporary. Heaven is eternal.

Each devotion, short but filled with personal anecdotes from life with children, contains law and gospel and is overflowing with spiritual encouragement in the form of Bible passages and hymn verses. Each devotion is a daily dose of spiritual rejuvenation—just what weary moms need.



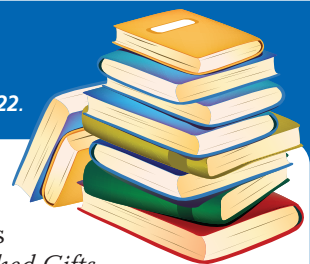
**Price: \$12.99.**  
Available as an e-book at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

No devotion book should replace actual time spent in the pages of Scripture, so *Cherished Gifts* points you back to your Bible every day with a section titled “Strength from God’s Word.” Additional Bible references and thoughtful questions will help you dig deeper into the subject, read God’s encouragement for yourself, and apply it to your life.

Although written for moms, couples could use this devotional as well. The meat of the book, though written from a mom’s perspective, is so gospel-focused and spiritually sound that it will greatly benefit moms *and* dads. It would also be a good opener for a moms’ group Bible study or play date!

The world will tell you that you need to “find your happy place” or “schedule some me time.” Martin argues that time spent in Scripture is the one thing needful, and her book is a fine companion to do just that.

*Amy Balza, Germantown, Wisconsin*





# WHERE are they now?

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

In July 1996, we shared a story about New Beginnings—A Home for Mothers, a ministry sponsored by Christian Life Resources.

## HERE'S A RECAP:

Begun in 1993, New Beginnings was a WELS home for unwed mothers and their babies in the Denver, Colorado, area. Houseparents provided mothers and mothers-to-be with a family-like setting where residents learned about their Savior and how to care for themselves and their children.

## SO, WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

In summer 2014, New Beginnings relocated to Milwaukee and now rents a building from Wisconsin Lutheran College (WLC) as its new home for mothers. Up to four mothers and their babies can live there in fully-furnished apartments; currently one mother-to-be is in the program.

New Beginnings, which targets single mothers living in generational poverty, saw a need for its home in Milwaukee. "We want to bring individuals out of their current environment and give them a safe place to stay," says Brianne Kluge, home manager of New Beginnings. With being close to Wisconsin Lutheran College, several local hospitals, and multiple WELS churches and organizations, New Beginnings also has plenty of support as it works to provide a loving and supportive place for single mothers to start a new life.

While the goal of New Beginnings has stayed the same, Kluge says that there have been some changes in the program. The full-time staff members no longer live on site, but resident assistants from WLC provide 24-hour aid. While in Denver, residents had to work or go to school. In Milwaukee, they are required only to continue their education. "We want to give them the skills they need in order to propel forward in a job that will allow them to be self-sufficient," says Kluge. "Education in poverty is highly revered and it's valued, but it's looked at as not realistic. We want them to realize that self-sufficiency can happen. It's not easy, but it's possible, and we can help you get there." To help make this happen, residents can stay in the program for up to six years.



Resident Suenora (right) learns how to make cupcakes at the Thursday night group session. Community members come in weekly to teach new skills on topics such as cooking, health, and parenting.

The program not only helps residents gain self-sufficiency but also works to help them grow spiritually through nightly devotions, weekly one-on-one instruction classes, and Sunday church attendance.

Resident Suenora appreciates the safe and structured environment, something she hasn't had up to this time. "This home provides me with shelter, support, and most of all spiritual growth," she says. "I hope to gain more knowledge on parenting and also to be closer to the Lord." She especially enjoys when the staff and residents attend church together the first Sunday of the month. "It gives us a chance to all worship together as a family."

That family atmosphere is what the staff at New Beginnings strives for. "Their whole lives [residents] have been told you're not worth it," says Kluge. "Here we are telling our residents that you're appreciated. You're needed. You're wanted. God loves you, and we love you. . . . Just hearing that and being part of this family—if you were to give the residents just that, I think it makes huge changes."

Learn more at [www.homeformothers.com](http://www.homeformothers.com).

## Planning a 2017 Reformation celebration

Luther touched off the events that became the Reformation when he posted his Ninety-five Theses on Oct. 31, 1517. WELS is looking forward to celebrating the 500th anniversary of that event in 2017.

WELS President Mark Schroeder appointed a committee to plan the celebration. As the committee began planning, members set several goals:

- 1) No funds were to be used that would take money away from the ongoing ministry of the synod; projects would have to be funded in other ways.
- 2) The celebration of the Reformation was to be an opportunity to educate WELS and others on the truths the Reformation brought to light.
- 3) The anniversary should provide an opportunity for congregations to reach out to their communities and share the gospel.

The committee partnered with Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) to prepare materials for the celebration. NPH already has taken steps to prepare new books and materials for the anniversary so they will be ready by 2017. Projects include

- a commemorative book of essays on the value of the Reformation today,
  - a Lenten kit with sermons based on a Reformation theme,
  - a Christmas kit,
  - three series of bulletin inserts,
  - a translation of some of Luther's Christmas sermons that can be used for devotional purposes,
  - a new Reformation history,
  - a translation by John Montgomery of a French work entitled *In Defense of the Lutheran Faith*,
  - an interactive, digital presentation for school classrooms called *Luther Then—Lutherans Now*, and
  - a new version of the exposition to Martin Luther's Catechism.
- The committee also has begun work on
- a video to tell the story of the Reformation,
  - a series of short video vignettes (three to six minutes in length) that can be posted on congregational websites or used for presentations in churches and schools,
  - several Bible studies that will make use of the video and the vignettes,
  - plans for materials with a consistent professional look and message for three large events in 2017—the synod convention, the worship conference, and the CELC convention,
  - plans to expand the worship conference to additional sites outside the Midwest,
  - a press kit to help congregations share the gospel in newspapers and on radio and television, and



- special articles in *Forward in Christ* that focus on the Lutheran Reformation.

Additional opportunities to mark this important event are being planned in some of the districts. One opportunity being explored is a gathering for all WELS pastors, teachers, and laypeople in Milwaukee on Oct. 31, 2017.

The committee developed a logo (pictured) as a visual identity for the celebration. It is available to congregations, conferences, and districts for publications or for events and celebrations. Contact committee chairman John Braun at [braunj@nph.wels.net](mailto:braunj@nph.wels.net) for digital versions of the logo.

## Relief after Nepal earthquake

On April 25, Nepal suffered a 7.8 magnitude earthquake centered in Kathmandu and the Gorkha district, about 50 miles from where our World Mission contact is located in Dhangadhi. Our contact has reported that he is safe, although he did feel the quake even from that distance. Various news sources are reporting that more than five thousand people have been killed by the earthquake and its aftermath and thousands more are in the hospital (as of May 1).

Our World Mission contact reports, "There are numbers of rural areas where the government has no access. Most of the relief agencies starting to pour in at the capital city. We want to reach areas in the Dhading, Gorkha, Chitwan and Rasuwa districts with some supplies—medicine, food items, and clothes."

He continued to explain that because the earthquake occurred during worship time and the church buildings are small, many of our members were saved. He plans to travel to the rural villages that aid agencies can't reach to bring medicine, tents, blankets, and food.

Beyond the immediate relief needs, he says, it is the beginning of the school year and many schools and children lost textbooks and supplies. He foresees the opportunity for ongoing support from the mission field in that area.

WELS Christian Aid and Relief is assessing the situation and is prepared to provide relief.

Learn more at [www.wels.net/missions](http://www.wels.net/missions).



## Six new home missions authorized

At its April meeting, the Board for Home Missions authorized the establishment of six new home missions throughout the United States, totaling \$563,000 in funding. The new mission openings are located in Blair, Neb.; Colorado Springs, Colo.; Fenton, Mich.; Las Vegas, Nev. (cross-cultural); Liberty Hill, Texas; and Tyler, Texas.

"As a church body, it is a huge blessing when Home Missions through district mission boards can partner with active congregations looking to have a hand in starting the next mission," says Keith Free, administrator of the Board for Home Missions.

Many of these new starts already have a core group of WELS members from established churches in the area. Says Free, "Some of these Home Mission starts already have 50 committed members willing to offer their time, talents, and offerings to help support the new congregation. In most of these locations, initial outreach has already started by active core groups supported

by the existing congregations near these six communities."

One of these places is in Blair, Neb., a city 20 miles north of Omaha. The vicar at Gethsemane, Omaha, this year has been working with a core group of 15 to 20 members in the Blair community. "It's been great to have a vicar come in with such enthusiasm to canvass a new area and lead Bible classes for our core group," says Stephen Helwig, pastor at Gethsemane. "It's about sharing our Savior with a new community outside the Gethsemane church neighborhood."

Helwig says that it is a huge opportunity for an established congregation like Gethsemane to assist in the start of a mission, but it will also require the prayers and support of the synod. "It isn't every day a home mission congregation gets started, so it is very important for the community to understand that we are establishing a church that is in it for the long haul and wants to become part of their community," he adds.

Home Missions has been provided increased synod support, which was made possible by Congregation Mission Offerings and a WELS Church Extension Fund (CEF) grant. The grant is made possible because CEF recently adopted an unrestricted net assets policy that provides annual special grants to Home Missions over and above CEF's matching grant programs. "The new CEF policy is allowing us to open two new home mission starts," says Free. Add in direct gifts to Home Missions from WELS members, and enough funding was available for the new mission starts.

"One of the neat things is the cooperation of each district mission board in determining the feasibility of these six sites," says Free. "We had many excellent proposals presented, and if we had the extra funds, we had at least three more missions that we would have been willing to authorize."

Learn more about the work of Home Missions at [www.wels.net/missions](http://www.wels.net/missions).

## WELS news briefs

### COMMISSION ON LUTHERAN SCHOOLS

414-256-3223; [lutheranschools@wels.net](mailto:lutheranschools@wels.net)

The Commission on Lutheran Schools has **updated and revised *Building Blocks***, a handbook to help congregations begin, expand, or revitalize an early childhood ministry. "One way that congregations can serve and support parents in their God-given role is through a Christ-centered early childhood ministry," says Cindi Holman, national coordinator for early childhood ministry. "This ministry also can be an effective way for a congregation to reach out with the gospel in its community." The 113-page



handbook covers topics ranging from developing a purpose and mission statement to calling a director to choosing a curriculum to creating a safe environment. The handbook is now available as a PDF for \$25; all congregations need to do is contact the Commission on Lutheran Schools and request a copy. Support and follow-up is available for congregations

as they use the handbook. Currently more than four hundred WELS early childhood ministries serve more than ten thousand children and their families.

### MINISTRY OF CHRISTIAN GIVING

800-527-5482; [mccg@wels.net](mailto:mccg@wels.net)

**The 2014 WELS Statistical Report was released** in April. The report provides membership, ministry, education, and offerings data on congregations as well as reports on institutional ministry, ordinations and installations of pastors and teachers, and world mission statistics. This year's report shows that total baptized membership fell slightly from 376,177 to 373,022, a decline of 0.8%. Communicant membership also dropped slightly from 298,899 to 296,080, a decline of 0.9%. There were slightly fewer infant baptisms (5,980 in 2014 compared to 6,074 in 2013), but there was a small increase in adult baptisms, adult confirmations, and members received by profession of faith. Access the complete 2014 WELS Statistical Report online at <http://connect.wels.net/aom/mccg>. Printed copies can be ordered through Northwestern Publishing House, [www.nph.net](http://www.nph.net).

## District news

### NORTH ATLANTIC

On May 31, members of **Cross of Life, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada**, celebrated the dedication of the congregation's new ministry center.

### NORTHERN WISCONSIN

**St. Peter, Appleton, Wis.**, dedicated an addition of more than 34,000 square

feet on Oct. 12, 2014. The project was built adjacent to the congregation's existing school facility and places nearly all of the congregation's ministry functions under one roof. St. Peter's mission to "Love God, love one another, and share God's love with the whole world" will be aided by the new facilities, which include a 500-seat worship

space. WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc., provided financing for the project.

*Christian leaders are servant leaders* was the focus of the **Lutheran Heritage Seminar** hosted by Eternal Love, Appleton, Wis., on Feb. 28. Using Scripture and biblical examples, Paul Kelm coached 60 men and women in becoming better leaders both in their congregations and at their workplaces.

On April 19, **Paul J. Lidtke**, pastor at Bethlehem, Oshkosh, Wis., received eight letters of recognition from Wisconsin leaders and government officials for his work as a victim advocate and with offender rehabilitation.

### SOUTH ATLANTIC

On March 28, **Victory, Jacksonville, Fla.**, held its annual Easter festival, featuring games, face painting, pony rides, and more. More than 500 people attended the event, including more than 125 children who participated in the egg hunt. At least ten of the festival guests attended Victory's Easter services, and two are already attending Bible information class.

On May 31, **Gretchen and Mark Boehme** were honored at Bay Pines, Seminole, Fla., for 42 years of continuous service as teachers.

### HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

**MN—Ascension, Moorhead, Minn.**, celebrated its 50th anniversary on June 14.

On April 26, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., recognized milestones of faithful service for four faculty members at a special anniversary service—Pastors **John Boeder** and **James Danell**, 25 years; Teacher **Tom Hunter**, 40 years; and Teacher **Roger Klockziem**, 50 years.

The district reporters for this month are: MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NA—Harland Goetzinger; NW—Dennis Kleist; SA—Jonathan Kuske; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

### SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



Grow in Grace, the institute for continuing education at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., hosted two celebrations of ministry retreats for pastors and their wives from April 7–9 in San Antonio, Tex. The retreats were for pastors completing 10 and 25 years of service. Pictured are some of those from the 10-year anniversary group. Celebrations of ministry retreats help pastors grow spiritually, share joys and struggles, and maintain their brotherly support network.

### SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



On April 12, a special concert titled "Mass of the Children" was held at Trinity, Waukesha, Wis. Participating were the Martin Luther College Choir and children's choirs from Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.; Our Redeemer, Madison, Wis.; and Trinity, Waukesha, as well as soloists and an orchestra. More than eight hundred people attended the concert.



## Christ is the center of our faith, and we want our worship to center on him.

Jonathan P. Bauer

Responses to recent surveys of the WELS Hymnal Project indicate that those who come to worship strongly desire that their worship be Christ-centered.

One of the ways in which the desire for Christ-centered worship is seen most clearly is in the widespread use of the *Christian Worship* and *Christian Worship: Supplement* lectionaries, readings assigned for each Sunday of the church year.

Certainly Christ-centered worship is possible without following the lectionary. At the same time, these lectionaries have long proven to be valuable resources for the church's annual proclamation of Christ. Their widespread use among our churches reflects a desire for the life and teachings of Christ to continue to serve as the focus for our worship.

Worship planners, choir directors, and musicians have also expressed the importance of worship being clearly Christ-centered. They have indicated that the most important factor when selecting music is that it has a specific connection to the gospel-centered focus of the day. One resource already available, *Planning Christian Worship*, provides summaries of each week's

lesson along with a list of hymn suggestions. Pastors and worship planners commonly use that resource.

Finally, one of the requests most frequently made through our website's comment form is for the inclusion of Scripture references with the hymns. In one survey, nearly half of those who responded (49 percent) indicated that they would benefit greatly from these references.

It is encouraging to see how concerned people are that our worship richly and clearly proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### TRADITIONAL OR CONTEMPORARY

Perhaps the area of sharpest disagreement is over whether our worship should be more "traditional" or more "contemporary." This disagreement certainly isn't new and doesn't come as much of a surprise. We've seen that those terms are used in different ways by different people and often aren't helpful in discussions about worship.

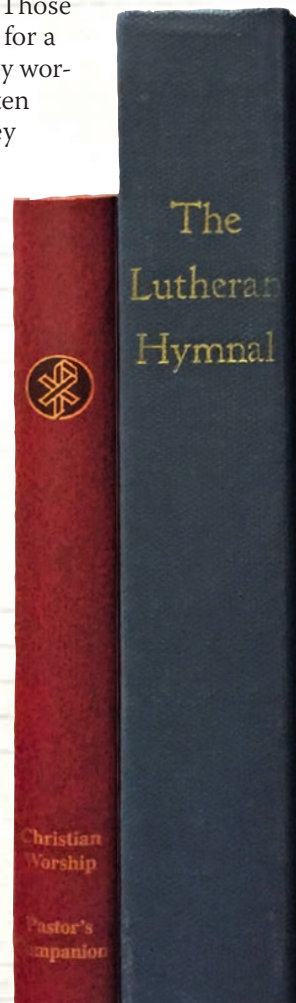
One survey sought opinions on various styles of hymns. Every style of hymn listed in the survey is currently in either the hymnal or supplement with one exception: Christian contemporary music. Even though none of the artists listed as examples of that style are currently represented in our hymnal or supplement, 20 percent of respondents still indicate that there is "too much" of that style in those resources. On the other hand,

40 percent indicate that there is "not enough." Some people pleaded for more Luther, Bach, and Gregorian chant. But just as many pleaded for more contemporary music, gospel music, and Christian rock.

So what does this mean? It indicates that when people hear the word *contemporary*, they often have a strong and immediate reaction that is either very positive or very negative. The same is probably true when people hear the word *traditional*. In love for the entire body of Christ, we owe it to our brothers and sisters to be aware of these different viewpoints and to seek to understand them. It is so easy to surround ourselves with those who think like we do and to refuse to listen to and understand those who don't.

Those who have pleaded for a more traditional worship style have often explained that they are concerned about doctrinal purity and clear gospel proclamation. Those who have pleaded for a more contemporary worship style have often explained that they are concerned about active and joyful participation. Even if people come to different conclusions about the best hymns for worship, everyone would

# Christ in our WORSHIP





advocate clear gospel proclamation and active, heartfelt participation as key characteristics of worship.

### TIMELESS WORSHIP

Whether they realize it or not, those whose opinions are sharply divided have one important thing in common. Neither wants a hymn to be excluded from worship simply on the basis of when it was written. One person thinks a hymn should not be excluded simply because it's old. Another thinks a hymn should not be excluded simply because it's new.

There's a flip side to that. If a hymn should not be excluded from worship simply on the basis of when it was written, neither should

it be included in worship simply on the basis of when it was written. It would not be wise to base our decisions about music selection on a single factor.

In other words, what we suggest everyone seems to be pleading for is *timeless* worship.

We rightly show tremendous appreciation for the blessings that God has given his church in the past. The fact that a hymn has remained in use for centuries is a pretty good indication of its quality and its ability to bring comfort and joy to worshipers over the years.

At the same time, it would be foolish to assume that the same God who has blessed the church with so many gifts for so many years would suddenly

stop. In fact, one of the important reasons for continuing to produce new worship resources is that it gives these newer songs an opportunity to go through the same test of time that older songs have gone through and passed. We look for new hymns that bring the same comfort and joy to worshipers today.

The original intent was that this hymnal would be released around the 500th anniversary of the year Lutherans first started publishing hymnals: 1524. One of those first Lutheran hymnals contained just eight songs. Four of them were written by Martin Luther, but the one for which he's best known—"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"—wouldn't be published for another five years. The great

Lutheran hymn writer Paul Gerhardt wouldn't write a single hymn for another century. We can certainly thank God that early Lutherans were wise enough to continue to allow new gifts from God for worship. We certainly ask him for the same judicious wisdom he gave to them.

### PEOPLE DESIRE TO GROW IN WORSHIP

Finally, it has been encouraging to see how much people care about their personal and public worship. Most have expressed a high interest in continuing to learn more about the biblical principles for worship and the rich heritage of worship that has been handed down to us. They've also responded positively to possible resources that would aid them in the use of worship resources at church and at home. In other words, it seems as though very few would say, "My worship life is exactly what it should be. Nothing needs to change or improve."

As we continue to live under sin's curse and in the shadow of our Savior's cross, we fully realize that worship on this side of heaven will always be a work in progress. Since a hymnal project is a natural opportunity to think more and talk about worship, the members of the Hymnal Project look forward to working together with the people of our church body to continue to achieve the growth in worship that we all desire. As we do so, we thank you for giving us the opportunity to listen. We want you to know that our ears are still open. We ask for your prayers as we carry out this important work.

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*Jonathan Bauer, who serves on the WELS Hymnal Project's communications committee, is pastor at Good News, Mount Horeb, Wisconsin.*

This is the final article in a two-part series on the work of the WELS Hymnal Project.





## We are not afraid Douglas P. Weiser

*WELS works closely with two sister church bodies in Nigeria—All Saints Lutheran Church of Nigeria and Christ the King Lutheran Church of Nigeria. Here meet two of your African brothers and learn more about the challenges and blessings of outreach in Nigeria.*

### MICHAEL NLENG EGAR

Michael Nleng Eggar has a poignant family story. His mother went away and had children with other men. His father had children with other women. As a boy he did not “enjoy any maternal love.” It made him sad when other students’ parents visited them at school. “I have never seen my father one-on-one. I begged God to help me get a family,” he says. “God heard my prayers and gave me my wife, Anthonia. We have three children: two sons, Anthony, 14, and Wisdom, 10, and our daughter, Precious, 5. When I joined All Saints Lutheran, I met Pastor Mathias Odey. He acted as my father, spiritually and physically. I love him so much.”

Egar’s spiritual life also involved a sort of rebirth. He had been born and baptized Roman Catholic. He always thought that he could be saved only by his own works. He had never really understood God’s grace. The examples he saw of living one’s faith in life were negative. “I saw men who jumped from one woman to the next. I knew many who were spiritists (animists).”

But in 2005 he found a Lutheran friend. “He told me about the grace of God. He told me everything God has done for us. It was such wonderful news! I followed my friend into a Lutheran church.” In addition, Egar eagerly witnessed his new friend’s faith in action. “He was so faithful to his wife. Both he and his wife were faithful to God.”

By 2006 Egar was confirmed a Lutheran in All Saints Lutheran Church of Nigeria in the Ishibori (Ogoja) congregation. There his faith continued to mature. “By the grace of God I was accepted into the preseminary in 2008,” he says.

Before deciding to become a pastor, Egar did whatever it took to make a living—driving *okada*, a commercial motorbike; working as a paid driver; farming; and fish farming. His wife, Anthonia, once taught school. But when Egar had to move far from home to live on the seminary campus, Anthonia cared for the children and worked on the farm in Ogoja. “She can do anything on our farm, producing *garri* (cassava) and the rest,” says Egar. “She’s a very fine help to me. Of course, I worked the fields too, when I was home on breaks.”

After preseminary, Egar served as an evangelist at the Ishibori congregation, working at Pastor Odey’s side. He then spent three years at Christ the King Lutheran Seminary. Along with six classmates from All Saints and two from Christ the King, Egar graduated from the seminary on March 14, 2015 (read more on p. 20). This graduation was a celebration of student blessings and achievements and yet a sad memorial for the deaths of three classmates—Happiness Eko, Samuel Eyo, and Saviour Udo—within the last two years.

A beloved instructor, Pastor Eme Umoessien, also died in a motorbike accident in January. Egar offered a prayer as the seminary students and Pastor Umoessien’s widow crowded into the mortuary. He praised the Lord and thanked him for this opportunity to honor a man they loved and to declare to the world that they are not afraid. They are not afraid because God is in charge.

Why would Egar confess that the students, the instructors, and the people of both synods in Nigeria aren’t afraid? Because adversity and death, so easy to suffer in Nigeria, are feared. People fear death because it tempts them to believe that God is not in charge. They revert to the old ways, thinking that someone has cursed the seminary or the living spirit of a dead person has decided to plague the seminary. In defiance of the animistic views of cause and effect, our fellow Christians tell themselves and the whole world, “We are not afraid.” They know that Jesus lives and has conquered death.

Egar was ordained into the ministry on March 21. All Saints President Simon Orem handed out sealed envelopes at the service. These



told all existing pastors and the seven new pastors where they were assigned to serve. It meant moves for the six existing pastors. All were expected to get to their new stations by April 1. Egar was assigned to Bitiah Irruan, the easternmost and the largest congregation of All Saints.

Before the ordination service, the new pastors for All Saints were videotaped as they gowned up in the shade of the north church wall. Egar said, "This is a wonderful day! Today is the day we are put into the house of God as shepherds."

### FRIDAY JOHN

Friday John is a lifelong member of Christ the King Lutheran Church of Nigeria. Recently he was the recipient of a personal disaster grant from WELS Christian Aid and Relief.

What happened?

One February day in 2014, Friday John was picking up his two sons on his motorbike—a common enough practice in that area. A car hit them. John's two sons died, and John's right leg was badly mangled. "The doctors told me to cut it or I would die," says John. They amputated the leg below the knee.

## CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH OF NIGERIA AND ALL SAINTS LUTHERAN CHURCH OF NIGERIA

**Baptized members: 5,203**

**Congregations/preaching  
stations: 56**

**Missionaries: 0.5**

**National pastors: 26**

**Unique fact: In Nigeria more  
than 50 trained laypreach-  
ers, almost one for every  
congregation, fill in for the  
pastors whenever they are  
busy elsewhere with devo-  
tions and classes.**

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

Massive hospital bills and unpaid rent would have cost him his business—a car paint store. The Christ the King Welfare Committee asked WELS Christian Aid and Relief for a personal disaster grant. The grant paid John's hospital debt, caught him up with rent, and restored the operation of his shop. John said, "I was very happy for the gift from WELS Christian Aid. I thank them well, well. They did fine for me. Christ the King Lutheran Church also helped. The throne of God helped me. Without that I would not have survived."

Ofonmbuk Okon, Christ the King's welfare chairman, wrote, "The recipient and his wife sang a song of joy, praising God and thanking WELS for their benevolence." In fact, John "danced" his joy, pumping his arms to bounce in his wheelchair.

Now John's nephew runs the store. John hopes to earn or find enough cash for an artificial leg.

John's story emphasizes how risky motorbike travel is in Nigerian traffic. That's why WELS dedicates the motorbikes provided for the graduating pastors. The prayers ask God to bless the pastors' use of these machines, keeping them safe in their daily travels and blessing the gospel message they carry with them. All things are in God's hands, and the prayers of these believers ask God to protect his messengers so that Friday John's story remains unique.

*Doug Weiser is a part-time nonresident missionary for our two sister synods in Nigeria.*

(Top) Michael Egar and his family: wife, Anthonia; sons Anthony, 14, and Wisdom, 10; and daughter, Precious, 5. (Middle) Friday John at worship. (Bottom) Michael Egar (left) and All Saints President Simon Orem at the new borehole at the All Saints presemenary. Dedicated in July 2014, the new presemenary building will allow All Saints students to be closer to their homes during their first two years of training.







# Now I lay me down to sleep

**"Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray, dear Lord,  
my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake,  
I pray, dear Lord, my soul to take. Amen."**

Thomas C. Schneider

My parents taught me this bedtime prayer when I was a small child. I have prayed it regularly my entire life. I must confess that often the words of this prayer roll off my lips without me really thinking about the meaning and beauty of this prayer. All too often I want to bring other prayers and requests to God that seem more important. However, a recent event in my life has brought me a better understanding and appreciation of this simple prayer.

It began shortly after Christmas. **"Now I lay me down to sleep. . ."** I thought about Christmas and

prayed, "Lord, thank you for blessing me as I enjoyed spending Christmas with my family. However, Lord, I have noticed that I have not been feeling right. I have never been this tired while going for a walk or climbing a flight of stairs. Am I just getting old? Please guide me to what I should do."

My prayer continued days later. **"Now I lay me down to sleep. . ."** Thank you, Lord, for encouraging me to call my cardiologist and make an appointment. I feel better now. Thank you also for reminding me to tell my wife. I think she has noticed that something is wrong. Now, Lord,

keep me at peace and well rested for the next week until I have my appointment."

But before the appointment came, I prayed, "**Now I lay me down to sleep. . . .** Lord, something is not right. I began having pain in my chest a few minutes ago. I am going to get up and take an aspirin. Please, Lord, make the pain go away." The pain did not go away. One hour later I asked my wife to drive me to the hospital.

After two hours of tests and observations, the doctor said, "You did not have a heart attack, but there seems to be a problem with your heart. We are going to admit you, and I am scheduling you for an angiogram this afternoon."

How can one lie quietly waiting in the hospital? I prayed, "**Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray, dear Lord, my soul to keep. . . .** Lord, it has been a long night, but I am ready for some sleep. Thank you for taking care of me. Give me peace and some rest and prepare me for whatever lies ahead in the next few hours because this is all beginning to sound scary. My times are in your hands."

Shortly before the angiogram I met the doctor who would do the procedure. He said, "If we find any blockages, we will see if they can be removed. If they can, you will be able to go home tomorrow and back to work on Monday. If not, you will be a candidate for bypass surgery."

So I waited again and prayed, "**Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray, dear Lord, my soul to keep. . . .** Lord, bless the doctors and nurses who are doing this procedure with knowledge and skill. Grant success to their work so that I can go home soon."

I was wheeled away for my angiogram. When I woke up, I learned that I had three blockages that could not be opened. At 5:30 P.M., the surgeon came into my room and informed me

that I was being scheduled to have heart bypass surgery at noon the next day. I transitioned from someone who was recovering from an angiogram to someone who was being prepped for bypass surgery.

It had been a long day, and it was filled with uncertainty that did not go away. By 10 P.M., I was exhausted. "**Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray, dear Lord, my soul to keep. . . .** Lord, thank you for watching over me today. Things are happening pretty fast. Give me a good night's sleep and the courage to face tomorrow, knowing you will be with me."

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Still, every night  
I put my head on  
my pillow and  
humbly and  
confidently pray.

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The next morning the gurney arrived to take me to the operating room for surgery. In a small, crowded room, several people began prepping me. They stopped long enough for me to kiss my wife and tell her that I loved her. Then they continued in earnest. I did too: "**Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray, dear Lord, my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray, dear Lord, my soul to take. . . .** Lord, if I should die, . . . I don't want to die. Not my will but your will be done. Amen." It had not dawned on me until this minute that I could have died before I arrived at the hospital. I could have died during the angiogram. I could die today. Yet I was comforted by this prayer, and anesthesia brought sleep to me quickly.

When I woke up, tubes were connected to numerous parts of my body. A nurse informed me that the surgery

was successful and everything was looking good. Then she added, "Try to get some rest."

"**Now I lay me down to sleep. . . .** Lord, thank you for being with me. "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?" Lord, I do not know why, but that is the only Bible passage I can remember. Thank you for being my light and my salvation. Amen." It was a strange sensation to want to praise and thank God for everything but not be able to find the thoughts or words besides one Bible passage to do so.

In the days after the surgery, my recovery progressed in every way but one. I could not sleep well. Numerous times a day I found myself praying, "**Now I lay me down to sleep. . . .** Lord, thank you for easing my pain and discomfort. Please grant me several hours of sleep." Even though sleep did not always come, more and more Bible verses came back to me, which gave me peace and rest.

Now that time has passed, I am sleeping better, getting stronger, and my life seems to be returning to normal.

Whenever I think back to everything that happened, I am in awe of the fact that the Lord, who could have taken my soul to heaven, has chosen to keep my soul here for a while longer. How much longer? According to my cardiologist, my heart is good for many years to come. Still, every night I put my head on my pillow and humbly and confidently pray, "**Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray, dear Lord, my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray, dear Lord, my soul to take. Amen.**"

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*Thomas Schneider, campus pastor at Michigan Lutheran High School, Saint Joseph, Michigan, is a member at St. Paul, Stevensville, Michigan.*



# We don't want them to be faithful

Jeffrey L. Samelson

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Faithfulness to  
what is false  
or foul is no  
virtue, even  
when violence  
is not in view.

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We want to be faithful to our Savior and to the Scriptures. We recognize the important role of the Scriptures in creating, sustaining, and guiding our faith in Jesus. It is important to work and to pray for our churches, pastors, and all other Christians to be as faithful to the Word as we are—in belief, preaching, and practice.

In our relationships we expect faithfulness from our friends, but not necessarily faithfulness to Jesus and the Scriptures. Some of our friends do not share our beliefs, but we expect them to be true friends, faithful to the bond that ties us together. We expect our spouses to be faithful. Even in our business dealings we want faithfulness to sound business principles. In government as well we expect fair and faithful treatment under the law and the constitution. We highly value the rule of law and the principles of equality and justice for all.

But what happens when someone is absolutely faithful to principles or standards that will not bring them peace and joy or will threaten our own lives and the lives of those we care about? Then we find ourselves in an awkward situation by encouraging them to be faithful.

Imagine Jesus telling his disciples that although the Pharisees were sons of the devil (John 8:42-47) and serpents (Matthew 23:33), it was wonderful that they were faithful to their principles. What if Paul told the crowds that his message was the truth, but if they were faithful to Zeus or Diana, that was a good alternative? And what about Elijah after the Lord sent fire from heaven in the contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18)? Do we imagine that he would have applauded them for their commitment and devotion to their god?

It seems ridiculous. Yet, countless Christians speak that way of Islam and other religious beliefs. They say, "We believe what we believe, they believe what they believe, and religion is a good thing; let's encourage them to be faithful to their god and consistent in their beliefs!" Granted, many of those who express such thoughts do so from ignorance—and from a comfortable position far from danger. But it's not hard to know what faithfulness to Islam looks like: the beheadings of ISIS, the kidnappings of Boko Haram, the abuse of women, the horror and injustice of Sharia law. It's these things that are consistent with their scriptures and the founding of their faith. The principles are not peaceful coexistence, freedom of belief, equality, or justice.

Faithfulness to what is false or foul is no virtue, even when violence is not in view. If the peaceful, patriotic Mormon coming down the street follows his faith, he is committed to leading others away from Christ. The Christian who consistently holds to false teachings may miss out on the joys of the gospel, confuse others, or even lose her faith.

So instead of encouraging others' false and dangerous beliefs and ideologies, we must do what Christians do: Stand firm on God's Word, speak the truth in love, and pray for and love both our fellow Christians and the enemies of the gospel. Those who think and believe differently are sinners in need of Christ's salvation. Whoever they are and wherever we find them, we want them to be unfaithful to their false gods, wrong religions, and erring ideologies because we want—and pray and work—for them to be faithful to Jesus Christ, our Savior and theirs too.

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*Contributing editor Jeff Samelson is pastor at Christ, Clarksville, Maryland.*

# JESUS

## PRAYED FOR US



### Jesus prayed so we would be heard.

Samuel C. Degner

One of Jesus' prayers in Scripture is utterly different from all the rest.

Blood drips. Soldiers mock. Enemies taunt. Passersby shake their heads. The sun stops shining. The Son of God hangs on a tree, dying. Suddenly he raises his voice and shouts.

#### **"ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?"**

The Holy Spirit saw to it that the gospel writers noted the very Aramaic words that came from Jesus' parched tongue (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). The Holy Spirit wants us to pay close attention to this prayer. Truly there is no other like it in all of Scripture.

Well, actually, there is one exactly like it. The same Spirit inspired King David to put these words into the Messiah's mouth one thousand years before they were spoken (Psalm 22:1). Yet only when Jesus gave voice to them from the cross could we truly plumb their depths.

It is the only recorded prayer Jesus addressed in a manner other than "Father." In this case, more distance was required. The Son of God was speaking to his Father as God, the Almighty, the one who punishes and curses and condemns. He had to because, in that moment, he was suffering our punishment, he was under our curse, he was experiencing our condemnation. The only innocent one was being treated as the guiltiest of them all. He carried the guilt of all.

#### **"MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?"**

These are the words of a man shouting at the back of a God who is turned away from him. They resound from the depths and reverberate off of a hardened heaven.

It is a prayer without an answer because God is responding to Jesus as he ought to respond to anyone carrying guilt: with silence. It's the chilling truth about sin: "Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2). In this case, *our* sins separated Jesus from his God.

Thus, when he cries out from the cross, Jesus prays as our substitute, just as he always did. The rest of his prayers show him actively fulfilling the Father's will in our place, praying and obeying perfectly as we ought. But these excruciating words show our Savior suffering the depths of

the punishment we deserve for all of our failures to pray and to live as God's children. Jesus endured God's wrath and satisfied God when we could not. These words assure us that Jesus indeed suffered the Father's full fury for every sin of every sinner.

They prove that the ceiling

of guilt has been shattered so that nothing can stop our prayers from rising to the ears of our Father in heaven.

In other words, this is one prayer of Jesus you will never have to speak! These words can be on our lips instead: My God, my God, I know you have forgiven me!

In our moments of anguish, when we cry out to God but can't seem to hear an answer, we need not think for a moment that God has abandoned us. He cannot leave us, because we plead the merits of the One who was forsaken in our place. Because Jesus spent those agonizing hours apart from God, we will spend an eternity in his presence. And we can be sure that we will never find a deaf ear in heaven.

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

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

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When he cries out from  
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substitute, just as he always did.

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All the forces  
against Christians  
are unable to prevail  
against the church  
founded on Christ.

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# The Christian church

I anguish often over the plight of Christians. Some of them I know. They are friends, family members, and neighbors facing challenges. Some of those challenges are difficult. But I also anguish over other Christians I do not know personally. That group includes people far away who tell stories of faith, perseverance, toil, and even persecution. What catches my eye is their confession of faith in Jesus.

These Christians are not always WELS and some of them don't wear the label Lutheran, but they are a cause of some of my prayers for the larger invisible church of Christ. They are also a source of encouragement. They have bravely faced what I have not and have confessed their faith in Christ.

I anguish over the Christians killed by terrorists or others and pray God will keep all his faithful in his strong hand. He will; it's what he has promised. My prayers hold God to his promise. I wonder whether widespread persecution of the church by enemies of Christ will disrupt the relative peace we have here as believers. Yes, we still are ridiculed and persecuted in many ways, but we don't have to face the barrel of a loaded AK-47 in the hand of someone intent on using it. I leave that in the Lord's hands to solve according to his will.

Reading the headlines carrying such news sometimes clouds my thoughts with worry and dread. Then I have the privilege of preparing *Forward in Christ* each month. It brings me into contact with the thoughts of believers who trust the Lord of the church as I do. I worship with them and share the work of the Lord with them. It's a joy to be tied together with them in our beliefs in Christ.

Each month I read their confessions and encouragement as we prepare an-

other issue. At times I am moved by their words long before any of you read them. I praise God for what he has done in their hearts, and that boosts my spirit.

What we publish may represent one small voice in a world that despises the gospel and believers. So many Christians will never read any of the articles in which our writers describe their Christian faith. But each article is a witness and a confession. We trust that the Holy Spirit will use our pages to bring comfort, strength, and courage to some.

On another level, our confession that we are saved by God's grace in Christ through faith is a defiant message hurled against the gates of hades. All the forces against Christians are unable to prevail against the church founded on Christ. But Satan takes no notice of us, thinking it only a little scratch in his vicious onslaught against Christ's church. But rage as Satan has and will, in Christ we have victory. Satan may win battles and all may appear to be lost for us believers here on earth, but we need to stand tall and confess our faith in our powerful Lord.

The great truth is that the power of the gospel sustains us because the Holy Spirit works through it. The writers who share their faith in the words you read are assurances that he has not withdrawn his presence or failed to work on human hearts through the gospel.

Read on. Take a deep breath of God's grace. Count your wonderful blessings. Pray for Christians around the world. And let that prayer include not just those in our own missions but all the other Christians the Holy Spirit has called, gathered, and enlightened in the whole Christian church on earth.

## "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead."

Joel D. Otto

When will Jesus come again? What will happen when he comes again? There is a long history of false teachings that have attempted to answer those questions. Some of these ideas have their roots in Jewish thinking from centuries before Christ when the Jews were anticipating an earthly Messiah who would establish a new kingdom of Israel. While there is a great deal of variation in these false teachings (broadly termed *millennialism*), most of them state that Jesus will come again to establish an earthly kingdom of peace lasting a thousand years. Then he will leave for a while before returning again to judge all people.

The Nicene Creed confesses clearly what most Christians throughout history have believed on the basis of the clear teaching of Scripture. Since the day he ascended into heaven, Jesus has been living and reigning over all things for the good of his church (Ephesians 1:22,23). Since the day of his ascension, all of history has been moving toward the day when Jesus will return visibly (Acts 1:11; Revelation 1:7).

Jesus will not return in secret so that only some will be "raptured" into heaven. Jesus' return will be in spectacular glory (Matthew 25:31). Few witnessed Jesus' first coming in lowliness and quietness. No one will miss Jesus' second coming in glory with the sound of angelic trumpets (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

And his glorious return will have a purpose—a final judgment of all people who have ever lived (Matthew 25:32). This will be a solemn and serious occasion (Daniel 7:9,10). It will be scary for many. The Bible speaks clearly about condemnation and eternal punishment in hell for those who do not believe in Jesus (Matthew 25:41). But the Father has entrusted the final judgment to his beloved Son (John 5:22,27). The same Jesus who was born for us in a manger and lived for us perfectly and died on

the cross for us is our judge. He won forgiveness, redemption, and eternal life for us. He sent his Spirit to bring us to believe in God's grace. On the Last Day, he will give to his believers the blessings of his saving work fully and forever (Romans 5:9-11).

God wisely has chosen not to reveal to us the exact day of Jesus' return (Matthew 24:36). He has, however, given us signs in the world around us and in the church that serve as reminders that Jesus is still coming (Matthew 24:4-14). Every generation since Jesus' ascension has the expectation of Jesus' imminent return. The signs are all around us. So we believe as all believers have that Jesus will come soon in glory. We believe the words of Jesus, "Behold, I am coming soon!" (Revelation 22:12). In confident response, we join the prayer of John and the church throughout history, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

### EXPLORING THE WORD

1. What are some of the dangers of millennialism?
2. Why is God wise in not permitting us to know the exact date of Jesus' return?
3. How does a Christian remain ready for Jesus' return in glory?
4. Compare Jesus' words in John 3:16-18 with his words in John 5:28,29 and Matthew 25:34-46. What is the basis for Jesus' judgment?
5. Why can Christians face judgment day without fear?

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



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

We  
believe  
as all  
believers  
have



## While sleep may be a thing of the past for new parents, our Lord constantly watches over and sustains us, his children.

She was supposed to be the sleeper.

The fourth baby, immersed in constant chaos, was supposed to sleep blissfully anytime, anywhere. To date, she has not complied with our unrealistic expectations. Instead, we affectionately call her the “notorious nonnapper.” She has no desire to sleep through the ruckus; she wants to be a part of it. While we thank God for this precious blessing, we realize sleep has become a thing of the past.

Fatigue and the problems it creates are common to most people, not just new parents. Without adequate sleep, our concentration suffers, our patience becomes nonexistent, and our emotions erupt with little notice. Not even coffee can combat the mental fog that envelops us. As we struggle to complete our daily tasks in spite of the fatigue, it is comforting to remember that our almighty God does not sleep or slumber. “He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep” (Psalm 121:3,4).

### OUR FATHER SUSTAINS US

Although we may be unable to keep a watchful eye on our toddler’s tornado of destruction 24/7, our almighty God can and does. Our nonnapping Lord is alert and watchful, hearing our prayers and constantly working out all things for our good.

Sometimes fatigue is brought on by trials such as grief, illness, or unrest in our relationships. It’s an emotional exhaustion that sleep cannot remedy.

Here, battle-weary Christians take comfort from our Lord’s promise. “Listen to me . . . you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since your birth. Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you” (Isaiah 46:3,4).

*Strengthen, support, comfort, encourage, and carry* are just a few synonyms for the word *sustain*. These words evoke a beautiful picture of what God does for each and every one of his children. From the moment of our conception to our old age, in our darkest moments of weakness and utter exhaustion, God sustains us. He carries us in the palm of his almighty hand.

### OUR FATHER RESCUES US

Although the word *sustain* paints a beautiful picture of God’s care, the

word *rescue* creates an even greater one. This rescue is God’s single most incredible act on our behalf. While we were lost in sin, our merciful Lord sent his Son to live the life we could not and die the death we deserved. Through faith in Christ, we now await the ultimate fulfillment of this promised rescue. One day, the Lord will call our name, and we will be rescued from this world of sin to live with him forever.

So as I shuffle to my daughter’s room in the wee hours of the night, longing for my nice, warm bed, I realize that uninterrupted sleep will probably elude me for the next 20 years or so. Well, that might be an exaggeration. Yet the sleep I crave will only sustain my body for a day at most, and then I will need to repeat the process. In Jesus, I await an eternal rest in which burdens, sorrows, exhaustion, and weariness will be a thing of the past.

“Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. . . . They will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

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Read a review of Martin’s recently released book, *Cherished Gifts*, on p. 21.

# The notorious nonnapper

Katie Martin

