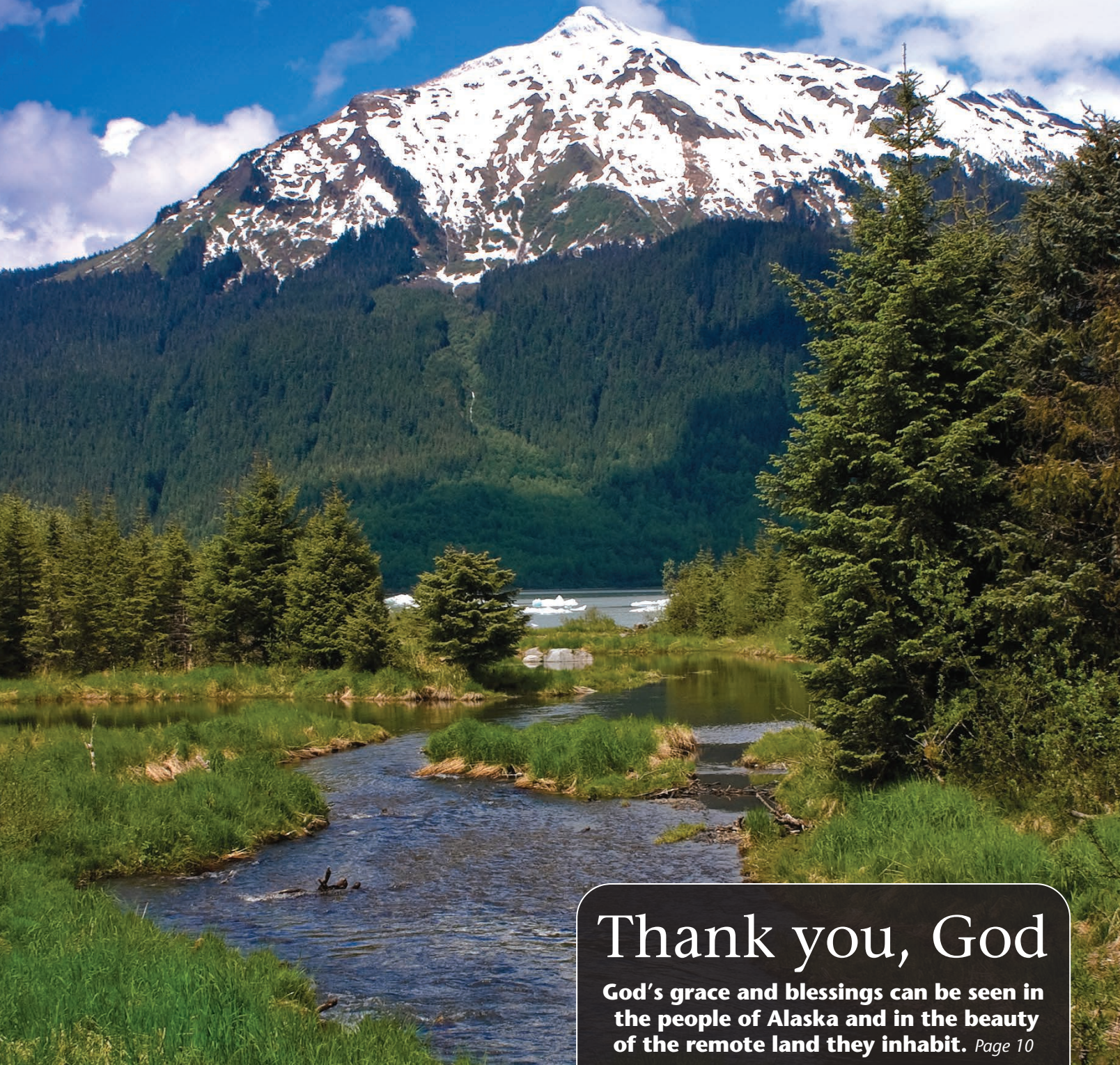


# Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



## Thank you, God

God's grace and blessings can be seen in the people of Alaska and in the beauty of the remote land they inhabit. *Page 10*



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## MOVING FORWARD IN MINISTRY

We invite you to participate in the special offering to eliminate the synod's \$4.7 million debt in order to better support:

- **Home Missions**—reaching out to 160 North American congregations, including multi-cultural and campus ministries
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- **Ministerial Education**—preparing pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and missionaries in our ministerial education system of two preparatory high schools, a college, and a seminary
- **Congregation and Ministry Support**—providing assistance and resources to strengthen congregational life and local ministry

**To learn more, give online, or receive assistance with a special gift, visit [www.wels.net/oneinchrist](http://www.wels.net/oneinchrist) or call WELS Ministry of Christian Giving at 800-827-5482.**

*Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body . . . grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Ephesians 4:15-16*



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

## WHAT'S INSIDE

Bravo Zulu, Jesus!

With this Navy and Coast Guard phrase that means a job well-done, Pastor Fred Voss shares a new way to thank God. In the cover article for our Thanksgiving issue, Pastor Voss says Bravo Zulu to Jesus for the blessings he sees in his work every day in the remote areas of Alaska (p. 10).

Wherever we live and whatever we do, we can all look at our lives and thank God for the blessings we see—whether big or small. We even can thank God for the troubles in our lives, as Pastor Joel Seifert reminds us (back page), because these troubles can bring us closer to our Savior. And the eternal blessings our Savior won for us can't be beaten. Prof. Tom Kock reminds us of that as he looks at the life of King Josiah in Jesus' family tree (p. 33).

Want a way to remind yourself to look for blessings every day? A new book is available from Northwestern Publishing House on Nov. 2 called *364 Days of Thanksgiving*. Using devotional thoughts and insights, it will lead you on a journey to record one blessing in your life each day of the year. Learn more about it on p. 24.

Bravo Zulu, Jesus! Thank you, God!

Julie Wietzke



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## IN CHRIST WE LIVE

Your September reference to Northwestern in Watertown ["Lives prepared for service"] and the story about a hummingbird moth in a school room ["Joy lives"] reminded me of 65 years ago when I started another year at NWC prep with a jar of tiger swallowtails at chrysalis stage in our dorm room. That winter I took a couple butterflies to a basketball game in our old gym, but they flew straight to the lights and disappeared.

I'm happy that Jane Schlenvogt-Dew could share her lesson on how life coming from what looks dead reminds us that in Jesus, our risen Savior, we have eternal life.

For me it's the greatest thing, that any butterfly or moth could start out as a summer-laid egg, advance through a larval form, reinvent itself as a chrysalis, and then morph again into something entirely different. If God could create such a "small" wonder under our sun, then I can certainly anticipate the "Sonshine" of eternal life with my Savior.

*Gerhold Lemke  
Cedar Rapids, Iowa*

## TOO MUCH WHINE?

"They have had too much whine" [Sept.] makes some important cautions against self-pity as we see our culture becoming increasingly anti-Christian. But the statement "As we see wickedness increase around us, Jesus does not tell us that it's time for Christians to rise up and reclaim their lost advantages" seems to suggest a more passive response than is called for.

With court decisions and "hate crime" legislation that increasingly threaten our ability to profess and live by scriptural truths, individually and together, where in Scripture are we told to just sit by and suffer the consequences? If there were no way to stem the tide, that could be our only option. But we can still speak up, individually and together. We can still contact, encourage, and support those who fight legal and legislative battles on our behalf. True, those actions do not directly spread the gospel, but they certainly are important actions that permit us to continue to do so ourselves! And we are certainly to pray, individually and together, for our Lord to preserve our increasingly threatened ability to bear faithful witness to his Word in its truth and purity.

We also need to pray for the strength of faith to avoid compromising God's Word as the world's pressure to do so increases. That is a very active fight, the opposite of a passive response. As "the salt of the earth" that Jesus tells us we are, we need to be prepared, fortified, engaged, resisting. We very much can "reclaim our lost advantages" without whining or self-pity. "The day of evil" in Ephesians 6 certainly seems to be arriving, so let's be sure to "stand our ground" and not wrongly extend our wrists for handcuffs!

*Jonathan Rupprecht  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

A heartfelt "thank you" to Pastor Jeffrey Samelson for his article "They have had too much whine" [Sept]. It couldn't be more timely.

As American Christians, we have been spiritually and/or materially blessed beyond the imagination of most of the people of the world. What do we have to whine about?

*Lora Liimatta  
Simpsonville, South Carolina*

## LUTHERAN HERITAGE

Bravo, kudos, and well-done to Pastor Earle Treptow from Denver for his article titled "How to make your church irresistible" [Aug.]. Of late, WELS seems to have taken a stance that bigger is better (read church growth), no matter what the cost to our Lutheran heritage and tradition. . . .

The Lutheran church stands for something or it stands for nothing.

*Adrian H. Luecke  
Spring, Texas*

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

Read or listen online at [wels.net/bible3](http://wels.net/bible3).

NOVEMBER 2015

- |                    |                      |                     |
|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. John 10:22-42   | 11. 2 Kgs. 6:8-7:20  | 21. 2 Kgs. 22, 23   |
| 2. Jn. 11:1-27     | 12. 2 Kgs. 8, 9      | 22. 2 Kgs. 24, 25   |
| 3. Jn. 11:28-44    | 13. 2 Kgs. 10        | 23. John 13:1-20    |
| 4. Jn. 11:45-12:19 | 14. 2 Kgs. 11, 12    | 24. Jn. 13:21-32    |
| 5. Jn. 12:20-36    | 15. 2 Kgs. 13, 14    | 25. Jn. 13:33-14:14 |
| 6. Jn. 12:37-50    | 16. 2 Kgs. 15, 16    | 26. Jn. 14:15-24    |
| 7. 2 Kings 1, 2    | 17. 2 Kgs. 17        | 27. Jn. 14:25-15:8  |
| 8. 2 Kgs. 3:1-4:7  | 18. 2 Kgs. 18:1-19:7 | 28. Jn. 15:9-25     |
| 9. 2 Kgs. 4:8-44   | 19. 2 Kgs. 19:8-37   | 29. Jn. 15:26-16:15 |
| 10. 2 Kgs. 5:1-6:7 | 20. 2 Kgs. 20, 21    | 30. Jn. 16:16-33    |



# Last judgment

**Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. Revelation 20:11,12.**

Michael A. Woldt

"I'm so excited! I can't wait to celebrate Last Judgment Sunday!"

When was the last time those words came out of your mouth? Never?

That doesn't come as a surprise. Last Judgment Sunday isn't high on anyone's list of favorite worship days. We welcome Christmas with its opportunity to reflect on the amazing grace of a God who loved the world so much that he gave his only Son. Easter brings shouts of victory: "Christ is risen!" Ascension directs our eyes to the exalted Christ as he sits at God's right hand and governs all things for the benefit of his church. Pentecost reveals the Spirit's power to change stubborn hearts as the gospel is proclaimed.

Christmas joy. Easter triumph. Ascension assurance. Pentecost power. What's not to love about the church year?

## DREAD OF THE LAST JUDGMENT

Then we come to the second Sunday of End Time: Last Judgment. What sort of thoughts flood your conscience as you consider the vision John records in Revelation? Can you picture the great white throne? Do you see yourself standing there, waiting for the books to be opened? Does the word *terror* come to mind?

That's exactly what the last judgment would mean for us if it weren't for the saving work of Jesus. Without Jesus, every word scribbled in the opened books would give the Judge another reason to condemn us to hell. Our failures would all be there for him to see. Our selfishness. Our greed. Our impure thoughts. Our reckless words. Our



inattentive worship. The unguarded moments of weakness that lie buried in places no one else can uncover. Not a single sin would be missing. Our sentence would have been inevitable. "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41).

## Listen carefully for the hope Last Judgment Sunday proclaims to you.

### HOPE FROM THE LAST JUDGMENT

Thanks be to God, we won't have to face the last judgment without Jesus! At our baptism the Holy Spirit connected us to Jesus and clothed us in his righteousness. Jesus lived a flawless life in our place. His perfect obedience has been credited to us. When Jesus died, he sealed our forgiveness with his holy, precious blood. That's why Paul wrote,

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). There is no condemnation for us because when the books are opened, the Judge will not see our sins! The Judge will see Jesus.

Through faith in Jesus, our view of the last judgment changes. Last Judgment Sunday becomes a day to celebrate! Judgment day will be our public and official welcome to heaven! "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance" (Matthew 25:34).

It's unlikely that Last Judgment Sunday will ever rival Christmas or Easter on the popularity scale. Yet, we can be thankful for its annual observance. We may be tempted to approach it with a sense of dread, but listen carefully for the hope Last Judgment Sunday proclaims to you, all because of Jesus!

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





*Mark Schweden*

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The decision to amalgamate was not an easy one. Passionate views were held on both sides of the issue.

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## Difficult decisions, abundant blessings

This fall marks the 20th anniversary of one of the more controversial events in our synod's recent history. After several years of spirited—even heated—debate, the 1993 synod convention voted by a narrow margin to approve something called “the amalgamation.” In 1995 Northwestern College and Dr. Martin Luther College became Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota. And Martin Luther Preparatory School and Northwestern Preparatory School became Luther Preparatory School in Watertown, Wisconsin.

The decision to amalgamate was not an easy one. Passionate views were held on both sides of the issue. Those in favor of the amalgamation cited what they believed would be the benefits of combining the schools. There would be cost savings achieved by reducing the number of campuses in our synod's ministerial education system. Others in favor of the amalgamation felt that having our future pastors on the same campus with future teachers would benefit the relationship between future pastors and teachers.

But many were opposed to the proposal to combine the schools. Opponents of amalgamation were convinced that the system in place at the time was not broken and, therefore, should not be fixed. Others feared that the pastor track would lose its identity and focus in the combined school and that the unique course of study that had served so well could be lost. Still others also were concerned about the loss of one more prep school and with it a reliable source of pastor and teacher candidates for more than a century. Many also doubted that the cost savings would be significant enough to justify the risk of such a move.

We now have the perspective 20 years later to see the results of that difficult decision. While we can never know what would have happened if the sys-

tem had remained as it was, we can certainly see what that system looks like today. What we see are clear and undeserved blessings from God.

We have a college of ministry in New Ulm that continues its purpose to prepare young men and women for service in the church. Martin Luther College has demonstrated that it is faithfully continuing the work of training teachers and staff ministers. In many ways, that preparation has improved, with new programs of study for specific needs in the church (such as early childhood ministry and urban ministry). The school continues to supply teachers in the numbers that we need to staff our various educational programs. Martin Luther College also trains young men to enter the seminary. The biblical languages are still taught, and a balanced view is instilled in future pastors by a liberal arts education that includes history, religion, math, and science just as before. Martin Luther College is doing exactly what we prayed it would do.

The same can be said of Luther Preparatory School. The oldest Lutheran high school in the country continues to provide more candidates for ministry than any other school, with a large percentage of its graduates enrolling at Martin Luther College. For those who choose not to prepare for the ministry, Luther Prep gives a strong biblical foundation for lay leaders of the future. Our two prep schools, along with the area Lutheran high schools, provide the number and quality of students to help meet the needs of our synod.

November brings with it our celebration of Thanksgiving. Let's be sure to thank our gracious God for his blessings on the schools that provide our congregations with faithful and well-trained workers.

Read more about the synod's ministerial education system on p. 26.



# Light for our path

**If someone repeats the same sin often but goes to God with a sorry heart, is the person truly repentant and forgiven?**

James F. Pope

Since the fall in Eden, people are sinners from the moment life begins, and they commit sins until their life on earth comes to an end. What differs among people is how they view sin, repentance, forgiveness, and Christian living. Two case studies can illustrate those differences and, in turn, help answer your question.

## CASE STUDY ONE

Consider the case of a Christian we will call Jessica. She is single and a senior at a Christian college. By her own admission, though, her worship attendance is sporadic, and her Bible reading has come to a standstill. As a result, she has her own thoughts about sin, repentance, and Christian living. She has the idea that because she is a Christian, she can do pretty much whatever she wants and all she has to do is say she is sorry to God and all is well. Because of that faulty thinking, drunkenness and sexual activity are common occurrences in her life.

No human being can look into Jessica's heart, of course, but one has reason to wonder to what degree she understands Romans 6:1,2: "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" Or Romans 6:11: "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus." A person like Jessica could easily deceive herself into thinking that all is well with God when it is not.

## CASE STUDY TWO

Consider now the case of a Christian we will call Paul. We know him by that name in the Bible. In Romans chapter 7 Paul informs us about his struggles with temptation and sin. He confessed: "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. . . . For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. . . . Who will

rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:15,18,24,25).

Like Jessica, Paul sinned time and again, but Paul was bothered greatly by doing what God forbade and failing to do what God commanded. Paul understood the seriousness of sin and the great cost of his forgiveness, and he expressed a sincere desire to live according to God's will.

Where does this leave you with your question? You indicated that the individual in question responds to sin with a "sorry" heart; sorrow is expressed after doing wrong, but sin follows soon thereafter. There is repentance, a turning away from sin and trust in the forgiveness God promises, but there is also a daily struggle. What we do not want to do is unfairly or unlovingly equate repeated sin in a person's life with indifference or hypocrisy. The individual you reference might very well be fighting "the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12) but losing regular battles against sin. Or you might be describing an individual who seriously misunderstands repentance and Christian living. We leave the judgment of hearts to God in the hope that hearts are filled with sorrow over sin and with faith.

---

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

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

*Your word*

is a lamp  
for my feet,  
a light on  
my path.

Psalm 119:105





# Bravo Zulu, Jesus!

**A pastor shares what he is thankful for as he serves people scattered throughout the remote areas of Alaska.** Fred M. Voss

“Bravo Zulu” is a Navy and Coast Guard phrase that is used to denote a job well-done. It may be used following an especially harrowing rescue effort that involved the coordination of men and women employing C-130s, helicopters, ships, rescue swimmers, and other support personnel.

I can’t help but think of that phrase when I reflect on Jesus’ work in Alaska, the Great Land.\* Alaska provides some unique challenges to gospel ministry. It is over twice the size of Texas, and yet less than a million people inhabit this vast land of tundra, taiga, glaciers, mountains, fiords, and volcanoes. Travel is as modern as 737s to dogsleds, ferries to float planes, snow machines in the winter to skiffs in the summer. Alaska is a place where modern technology is being harnessed for the good of his kingdom.

Today as I ponder Thanksgiving, the slideshow of God’s love in Word and sacrament among his children brings these faces and places into focus.

## WORD AND SACRAMENTS

For many years the saints of Grace, Sitka, provided a lay-led Bible study that was heard over the phone lines by long-distance members in Ketchikan, Skag-

way, and even Kodiak, where members were known by voice but not necessarily by face. It was a weekly gathering to feast on the bounty of God’s Word and to enjoy the fellowship of those tied together by faith. Many would then join in worship together over the same phone lines, tying in to a church far to the north. Modern technology today in some areas allows for streaming of the worship services. Thank God for our IT person!

Click on the video of God’s grace in action. Watch the miracle of Baptism on the tide line of Kodiak Island in the vast Pacific Ocean. View with wonder as the simple salt water and the powerful Word of God washed away sin, planted faith, and started spiritual life. Thank Jesus for his promises attached to the “washing with water through the word” (Ephesians 5:26). This child now has forgiveness full and free, the peace that passes all understanding, and a new life here and one waiting in heaven.

Gaze at the tintype picture of an aged couple whose kitchen table was their family altar. Out the kitchen window, towering Sitka spruce trees and a raging storm, but inside a crackling fire. On the table, a worn communion set, a speaker phone, and the latest *Meditations* booklet. Gnarled hands are folded in prayer, then humbly accept the Sacrament of the Altar. Thankful and grateful hearts, privileged to receive his body and his blood poured out for the forgiveness of their sins. The couple knows that in



spite of the distances, they are not alone but tied together with other WELS members all over the world.

### STILL SIN AND GRACE

So much of Alaska is trackless wilderness. Believers are few and far between and so are the churches. These remote believers see God's hand daily. He provides the power, the food, and a daily show of his wonders. Here the supply line of life is signaled by the throbbing drone of a small plane or a barge that comes only twice a year if the river doesn't freeze up before it arrives.

But even here in paradise one still sees the effects of sin. There is sickness, the touch of cancer, the pain of unforgiveness, the temptations and sins of the big city, and most certainly the need to see God's unending love in Christ and feel his guiding, healing hand.

Stand here with me for a moment as I peer into the grieving faces of those whose loved one is being lowered into a dark grave on the windswept tundra; whose ashes are being scattered by a floatplane; or whose body is entombed under towering stands of spruce or birch, watered by gurgling streams, now hidden by stately snow-capped mountains and touched only by an occasional rainbow. Or it may be guarded by the silent, saluting, gleaming, headstones of our national cemeteries.

No matter, the promises of Jesus are still the same. The Almighty God who created this beautiful place will raise these bodies to eternal life in a paradise even more grand than Alaska! They stand on the same promises of our risen, living Lord Jesus who says, "Because I live, you also will live" (John 14:19). Give thanks with me that from birth, through spring, summer, fall, and even the winter of our life, he is with us. Bravo Zulu, Jesus!

### THE FACES OF ALASKA

St. Paul exclaimed, "I thank my God every time I remember you" (Philippians 1:3). I too thank God for the laypeople I am privileged to serve. They have opened their hearts and their homes. The question of "where can we worship?" often brings some very creative answers—maybe in their homes, on a boat, on a beach, or even an upper room at an electric company that was close to a fish processing plant. Close your eyes, and you just might be able to imagine that you were on the shore of the Sea of Galilee with Peter and the other disciples unloading a cargo of fresh fish. The aroma during the worship service could be that strong!

Thank God for distant members, children on the floor working on Sunday school lessons, Mom and Dad worshipping, and even a "Lutheran" dog who would sing with the pastor! I thank God for a member who loved to exclaim, "It's 'Take your pastor to work' tomorrow! Are you coming?" I remember the semi-retired seminary professor and his wife who unselfishly shared their lives. They cast the net of the gospel in Kodiak as they rubbed shoulders with the fishers, the crabbers, the fish processors, and the Coast Guard men and women. What a difference they made as they passed on hope, love, and the forgiveness of Jesus.

Thank God for our urban teachers, but especially thank God for those teachers who daily face the isolation and sometimes harsh life of the remote outposts in bush Alaska. For generations, rivers of water bring food. Rivers are a road in summer and winter, but in many cases the Water of Life,

Jesus, may not even be a trickle. These teachers bring the light of God's love in Jesus by their faith in word and actions.

Thank God for the protectors of our freedom, of the

peace, of our health and well-being. Twenty-four hours a day as we sleep and carry on our lives they are on duty, watching, waiting, running to emergencies, rescuing the lost whether they are near or far, responding at a moment's notice, and willingly submitting to the harsh environment of sea and land.

Thank God too for those whom you have specifically called to preach, teach, and be your shepherds to lead the flock and rescue the lost. They have left mother, father, and family and have found family and purpose here.

Close your eyes. Bow your head and thank God. Can you see them in your mind's eyes? Can you hear them? Can you feel the rhythm of God's creation in a land that so resembles the love of God, a love that is higher than the heavens above and deeper than the depths below?

Yes, rejoice with me. "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever" (Psalm 107:1).

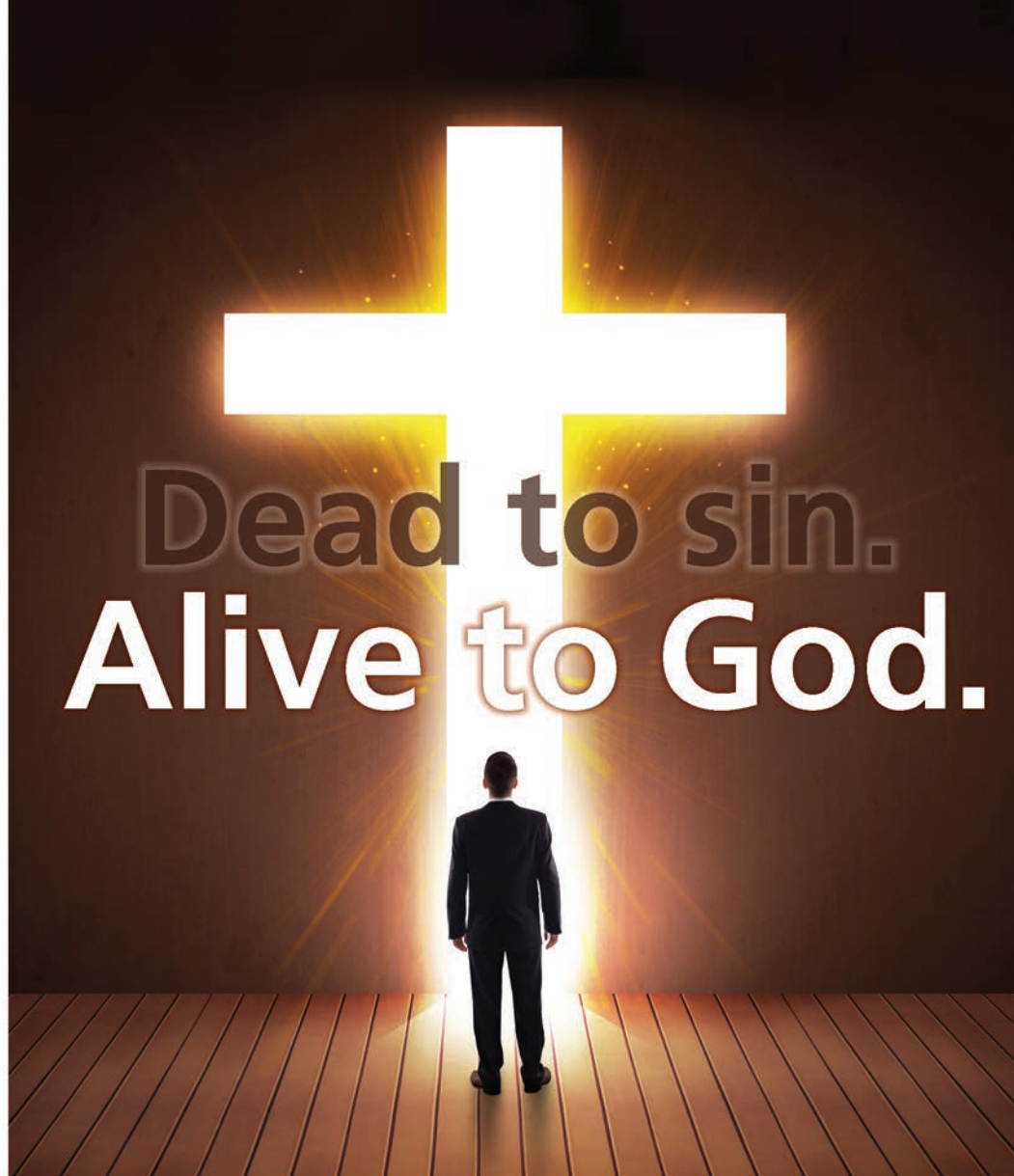
With thanksgiving, exclaim, "Bravo Zulu, Jesus!"

---

*Fred Voss is pastor at Shepherd of the Hills, Anchorage, Alaska, and Holy Trinity, Kodiak, Alaska.*

\*The word *Alaska* comes from the Aleut word *Alyeska*, which means "The Great Land."





Dead to sin.  
Alive to God.

**Put off bitterness. Put on forgiveness.**

James F. Borgwardt

Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables* is a tale of how an act of grace dramatically changed a man from a selfish criminal to a fine gentleman and a leader in society. The main character Jean Valjean had been imprisoned for 5 years for stealing bread and served another 13 years for failed attempts at escape. When he was finally freed, he carried the label of an ex-con and received help from no one.

Finally a bishop had mercy on him and gave him lodging. A hardened Valjean, however, left his host's home during the night and stole the man's silverware. Caught by police, he was brought before the man from whom

he had stolen. The ex-con expected a sharp rebuke and a return to prison.

The bishop rebuked his overnight guest, but not for stealing the silverware. He reproved him for forgetting to take the candlesticks too! He pressed no charges. He only told Valjean to use these gifts to make a good man of himself. The arresting officers were shocked but not as much as the ex-convict. Overwhelmed by this other man's gracious forgiveness, Valjean was changed. He began to live a very different life.

#### **FORGIVENESS AS GOOD SCIENCE**

Such a change is not news to Christians, of course. But it's fascinating to

notice how the power of forgiveness is being promoted in other circles.

One of the most prolific authors on forgiveness is Dr. Robert D. Enright, professor and president of the International Forgiveness Institute at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. He has been leading a dramatic increase in the study of forgiveness among social scientists over the past two decades. *Time* magazine has called him "the forgiveness trailblazer." I presume that means in scientific and academic circles. We know another forgiveness Trailblazer.

Reading any of Enright's many books on forgiveness can prove helpful for



people wanting to improve interpersonal relationships. In writing dozens of books and papers on forgiveness and its effects, he uses plenty of Christian references. It would be hard not to. But if he is a Christian, he doesn't present himself that way.

After careful study, he observes that forgiveness clearly brings many personal benefits. Physiologically, it lowers the forgiver's blood pressure. Emotionally, it releases the forgiver from anger and resentment. Socially, it improves the forgiver's other relationships. Forgiveness betters the lives of individuals and even communities.

Recognize, however, that non-Christians come to this conclusion from a different perspective than Christians do. Following a postmodern mindset, their reasoning is simple: If it makes my life better, I'll try it. Christians approach it the other way around: It's true, therefore it must work.

### HIS FORGIVENESS CHANGES US

It's wonderful that social scientists and psychologists have discovered the many personal benefits to being a forgiver. But Christians have a higher motivation to forgive others than serving themselves. We want to glorify God, follow the example of Jesus, and serve others in the way we live. Knowing Jesus has saved us through his life, death, and resurrection, we become willing conduits of his grace to others. A forgiven heart is a forgiving heart, and we pray, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

We've been considering the apostle Paul's guidance for Christian living from Ephesians chapter 4. He first directed us to draw on the power of our baptism and our new identity in Christ: "Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24).

He then tells us how putting off the old self and putting on the new self affects our behavior. This issue we consider putting off bitterness and putting on forgiveness: "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:31,32).

### WHAT DOES FORGIVENESS LOOK LIKE?

God's command for Christians to forgive is clear. Yet people don't always understand what forgiveness is. It may be most helpful to remember what forgiveness isn't. Forgiveness is not tolerating injustice. Christians can protect themselves from injustice, perhaps even press charges against a criminal. Sometimes justice comes. Sometimes it doesn't. Either way, we still forgive the wrong that was done.

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## A forgiven heart is a forgiving heart.

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Forgiveness is not excusing. The forgiver doesn't say, "No harm done." There was harm done. The other person is to blame. To forgive is to recognize that the offense cost something. If a child hits a baseball through the living room window, there's a real cost to replace the window. If the father forgives his son, he's saying that he'll absorb the cost. He'll assume the debt.

Forgiveness is not necessarily reconciliation. God commands we show active kindness to the other person, but that doesn't necessarily mean that the forgiver has to restore the relationship to what it was before. While God commands us to love and forgive, he doesn't command us to act as though nothing has happened. The sin is forgiven, but the relation-

ship may never be the same again. It can be restored, but sometimes only over time.

Forgiveness is also not forgetting. At least not in the way we typically think of forgetting—the erasing of something from our memory. When the Bible says that God "remembers [your] sin no more" (Jeremiah 31:34), it's not talking about him forgetting in the same way we do when we misplace our car keys. God is omniscient, after all. And when he remembers something, it doesn't mean that it had somehow slipped his mind for a time. When Exodus chapter 2 says that God remembered the promises he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob after their descendants spent four hundred years in Egypt, it means that he would now act upon his promises. In the same way, when the all-knowing God forgets something, he is simply choosing not to act upon it. So when he says, "[I] will remember their sins no more," what he's saying is, "I will act toward sinners as if they had never sinned."

When we imitate God by "forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you," we may still have the offense somewhere in our memory banks. But we've thrown away the tally sheet. Love "keeps no record of wrongs" (1 Corinthians 13:5).

The ultimate teacher of forgiveness is, of course, Jesus. The deeper we study his Word, soak up his grace, and contemplate the depth of our own forgiveness, the more we'll reflect his forgiving heart and live our lives for God.

In this way we'll carry out his will for Christian living, just as he prayed for us to his heavenly Father: "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17).

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

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



## After growing up with a vague sense of church, a man is encouraged by his wife to learn about God's steadfastness and forgiveness.

Rachel Hartman

Jim Bennington didn't grow up in a religious household. "Religion was present to a degree," he recalls. Bennington was born and spent his early years in the city of Pontiac, Michigan, about 30 miles north of Detroit.

The family relocated frequently. "Sometimes we moved two or three times in a school year," he says. The moves didn't take the family too far, however. "It was always around the county."

With so many changes, the family attended many different types of religious services, usually one that was close to where they were staying. And while they went to a variety of places, including a Catholic church and Spanish services, they never attended the same church on a consistent basis.

"You live the life your parents lead," says Bennington. "I had a lot of different exposures to religion. We got into a kind of religious roulette. I knew God was out there; I just didn't know how to make a connection."

### LEARNING MORE

As an adult, Bennington worked as a

radio DJ and moved around quite a bit with the job. Then he started working for an entertainment company. While there, he met another employee named Amy.

It was through her that Bennington grew to learn about WELS. Amy had been born and raised in a WELS church. What's more, her parents and grandparents also had attended Lutheran churches. Being in God's Word was important to Amy, and her commitment did not go unnoticed.

When the two began their courtship, Amy introduced Bennington to a WELS church. But Bennington didn't find the experience to be a smooth one. "I was always lost," he recalls. He tried to follow along with the bulletin and also the hymnal but found it difficult to sort out the hymn numbers from the different pages of worship in the book. At certain times, he wondered why others were talking while he tried to sing.

As he continued going to church on Sundays, however, Bennington found it easier to follow along with the order of service. He also began tuning in to the Scripture readings and the teachings addressed during worship.

With Amy's encouragement, Bennington took Bible information classes. He was baptized and confirmed after finishing the classes.

Gaining an understanding of Baptism left a solid impression on Bennington. "That's something you witness in

different formats in churches," he explains. He had seen it displayed as an act that simply happens.

But Bennington grasped a fuller concept of Baptism after learning about it in God's Word. Studying about the washing away of sins through Baptism was very meaningful for him. And he found getting ready for it to be effective. "Preparing for that moment in my life was very reflective," he remembers.

He also was drawn to the ease of communication he found when studying the Bible. You just ask questions and look for answers. "The dialogue of God's Word is easy to understand. You're welcome to ask questions and educate yourself further—it's not intimidating," he says.

And Bennington is glad to see that anyone can start studying God's Word, regardless of where they stand in the walk of life. "You don't have to be a theologian the first time you sit down in the pew," he says. "You can find opportunities to broaden your knowledge base. It's a good way to live your life."

### DIGGING DEEPER

Bennington and Amy got married and continued attending church services. Then their family moved from Michigan to Renton, Washington, for work-related reasons. Since then, they have attended a WELS church in this suburb of Seattle.



# Confessions OF FAITH



This summer, Bennington had the opportunity to attend the WELS synod convention as a delegate. Right from the start, the experience made a strong impression on him. "It was awe-inspiring to walk in and see all of these men and attendees committed to one effort," he says.

He appreciated the chance to learn how the synod operates. "I sit through board meetings on a professional side, and I can relate to that on the organization of the church," Bennington explains.

The presentations on mission efforts in various places throughout the world also caught Bennington's attention. He could relate to the strategies of finding opportunities for further mission work and then striving to support the on-going missions while maintaining an overall balance. "As a layman, that's a challenge I experience," he notes. He found the emphasis on practicing good stewardship to be a key component to church planning.

### **ON THE ROAD, COMMITTED TO GOD**

Bennington continues to work in the entertainment industry, designing and building arcades for a living. "It puts me in the heart of the real world and in a business that impacts people's lives," he explains.

His current job frequently takes him on the road. But when it comes to the beginning of the week, he says it's key

to enter the church doors. "It's the best way to begin your week," he says. "It starts with Sunday morning."

He also finds being in the Word to be a grounding experience. "You don't have to move backwards or be stuck in guilt or unfulfilled commitments," he explains. "You can start where you're at and move forward."

Bennington has three children; in addition, his niece, who currently lives with his family in Washington, is going through confirmation classes.

Attending church services on a regular basis has made it easy for the entire family to follow along during worship. On Sunday mornings, "I'm really proud that my 12-year-old sits down and instantly organizes his hymnal," says Bennington.

In the industry Bennington works in, there are often ups and downs, highs and lows, and swift changes. He recognizes the need for dedication when raising children to be centered in God's Word. "We pray for God's guidance," he says. "It's a burden we don't take lightly."

Amy leads the family's homeschooling efforts, and they often seek ways to provide education in a variety of life's settings. Sometimes the family travels with Bennington when he is on the road. During those trips, he often looks for time to take off of work to be with his family.



Jim and Amy Bennington and two of their children, Hanna and Jackson. Missing from the photo is their oldest son, Trey.

In everything he does, Bennington strives to keep a balance between his career and family, always keeping God as the focus. He credits this attitude to his wife, Amy. "I'm grateful for my wife's commitment to her faith and helping me build my commitment," says Bennington. "She's the person who started it all, and this is the place to be."

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





**heart to heart**  
parent conversations

Divorce isn't part of God's plan for marriage, but it's a sad fact of life in our fallen world. How do we explain divorce to our kids as they encounter friends and classmates whose parents are divorced? How can we equip them to help friends struggling with divorce? How can we reassure them that divorce isn't something that they need to worry about? How can we model a God-pleasing marriage? Here a Heart to heart parent and a professional Christian counselor weigh in.



**Join the conversation!**

Visit [wels.net/forwardinchrist](http://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 TALK ABOUT DIVORCE WITH OUR KIDS?

**You've been friends** for years. You and your passel of kids sit together at church potlucks; carpool to school; go camping; and share all the requisite happinesses and sadnesses, from diapers and discipline to report cards and prom dates.

Then your friends make an unbelievable announcement: They're getting divorced.

The ground shifts, and you have no words for awhile—until you and your spouse look at each other and say together: “What are we going to tell the kids?”

The answer depends on the ages of your children, but I think every kid needs to hear these three points in some age-appropriate form:

- “The breaking of the marriage vow is a sin. God intends marriage to be for life.”
- “We're still friends with all of them. We still love them.”
- “Don't worry—your mom and I are not going to get divorced.”

That won't be a one-time conversation. It will come up again and again, and you'll continue to find the words your kids need to hear.

But some children will want more. They'll want details. Do you tell them? If they're young, no. More knowledge will only be a burden. These are adult issues. Kids don't need to carry them.

But if they're older and the story already is going public, then maybe it's better they hear it from you. Keep it simple, and be ready to answer any questions they have as honestly as you can.

**When the issue** of divorce arises in another family, a child or teenager may wonder if they should be concerned about their own parents getting a divorce. This can present an opportunity for parents to talk with their children and adolescents in age-appropriate ways about steps that Dad and Mom are taking to strengthen their marriage in an effort to avoid divorce.

This can be a great time to talk about—and demonstrate—the importance of:

- Nurturing a marriage with things like date nights, cards, flowers, hugs and kisses on the cheek, plus kind acts. Your children will observe your actions, which can help to calm any anxiety on their part. You will be providing a beneficial template for their own future marriages.
- Communicating well, which starts with actively listening to the other spouse's message without prejudging it, then using appropriate eye contact, body language, and tone of voice to respond in a respectful manner. These actions will reassure your children of your love and care for their other parent and give them a great example to follow in their lives.



You might start like this: “Here’s what I know. This is heart-breaking, but Mary broke her marriage vow. She had an affair. Now John has filed for divorce. Mary has repented of her sin, but the divorce is still going forward. John and Mary are both still our friends, but, honestly, we don’t know what our friendship will look like now.”

It becomes more difficult when the reason for the divorce has not been made public. Maybe there’s an addiction or some abusive behavior that’s been hidden behind closed doors for years. Maybe the person filing for divorce is trying hard not to expose the sin of the spouse who broke the marriage vow. Then you might say something like this: “I’m not sure why they’re getting divorced. But we’re going to be kind to both of them, and we’re not going to gossip or speculate.”

In my experience, older children often feel a need to sort it out in their own heads—to find a black-and-white explanation they can be comfortable with. Maybe there is an obvious explanation: an affair, physical beatings, or an addiction to drugs or alcohol that’s led to emotional desertion.

But other times the matter is too nuanced for children to understand, especially if it involves emotional abuse or some kind of online addiction, which can lead to emotional desertion. Truthfully, these psychological tangles are too nuanced for most adults to fathom. Then you can just say, “I don’t understand what happened.” It’s honest.

Your kids may also wonder what to say to the children of the divorcing couple—their friends. What an excellent opportunity for you to massage your children’s hearts, nurturing their empathy and compassion.

- Ask your kids to dig down and think about what they might like to say to their friends.

- Urge them to take their cues from the friends. If the friends want to talk, listen. If they want to go swimming and forget about it awhile, go with them.
- Tell them what you think their friends might ask about: whether they’re partly to blame (no!), whether they could somehow have prevented the divorce (no!), whether they’ll lose their parents’ time or love (no, no, no!).
- Remind your kids that they and their friends are allowed to feel all the feelings: sadness, anger, confusion, worry, relief, happiness. Feelings aren’t wrong, and kids especially need to express them, not keep them in.

When divorce arises in your circle and your kids are looking at you with wide eyes, you know you’re on. You want to clearly express God’s will and also show compassion. You want to be truthful but not encumber your kids with too much information. You want to express your own sorrow but not scare them.

Mostly you want to hug them and reassure them that although this event is rocking their world, some things will never shift: Their mom and dad will always be there for them, and God their heavenly Father loves them more than they know.

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



- Resolving conflicts positively using strategies like fair fighting, compromise, negotiation, and maybe even sacrifice. Teach children that conflict is part of life and part of marriage and that it can be managed well to enhance relationships.
- Apologizing and making amends if mistakes are made. How powerful for a young person to see a parent take responsibility and repent for a sinful choice, followed by forgiveness and reconciliation. This is an opportunity for children to see the forgiveness we learn from Jesus in action.
- Celebrating anniversaries, as these are a blessing from God. Give thanks to him for the gift of marriage by marking anniversaries with some fun tradition or meaningful gift.
- Worshiping together. We are surrounded by temptations to turn away from God’s design for marriage. Regularly hearing of God’s love in Christ and receiving Holy Communion gives us the strength to live Christian lives.
- Teaching children and teens about God’s design for marriage. Emphasize that Dad is to be the loving head of the household and Mom is to be his respectful supporter. Talk about how Christians should be equally yoked with a Christian spouse. Reinforce that God’s plan is for marriage to be between one man and one woman.

For teens, parents may also want to broach the topic of sexual fidelity, noting that this too is a gift from God designed to enhance the intimacy between husband and wife. Use this opportunity to reinforce that sex outside of marriage is not part of God’s good plans for us and such sin only leads to heartache.

This may also be a time to reevaluate your marriage. How well are you doing the things listed above? What might you change or improve to strengthen your marriage? What might you want to request of your spouse?

Let’s teach our kids about having strong, God-pleasing marriages through our words and actions grounded in his holy Word. Remember that one of the greatest gifts a parent can give to a child is to love the other parent as God loves them.

*Sheryl Cowling is a licensed clinical social worker who is also board certified as a professional Christian counselor and expert in traumatic stress. She provides counseling services at Christian Family Counseling, a ministry of WLCFS—Christian Family Solutions.*





# Are we a welcoming church?

**If we want to be a welcoming church, we dare not ignore or try to explain away sin but instead answer tough questions with gentleness and respect.**

Glenn L. Schwanke

I stood at the table Michigan Tech had assigned us for the Community Expo, an event held at the start of the school year so that local businesses, services, churches, and student organizations could make contact with the students. Some students approached our table with a bag, just in case we were giving away something good. Others stepped forward cautiously, with questions written all over their faces. One young lady, however, approached with clipboard in hand as if on a mission.

"Rita" (not her real name) spent a few seconds sizing up our table banner that identified us as "Peace Ev. Lutheran Church, Wisconsin Synod." She glanced at the "Lutheran Collegian" materials on the table. She noticed the stack of Bibles. Then she looked at me, with her pen poised over her clipboard, as she asked, "Is your church a welcoming church?"

I responded, "I'd like to think we are! Our doors are open to everyone. When you visit us for worship, you will be greeted warmly at the door. Members or students in our Campus Ministry will be happy to help you follow along with the worship. And after every worship service, we have fellowship with snacks and beverages. That gives us more of a chance to get to know you."

"But," I added, "I'm guessing that's not how you are using the word *welcoming*. Would you please tell me how you are using the term?"

Rita responded, "I represent the Michigan Tech Center for Diversity and Inclusion. And I'm doing a survey to find out which churches in our area are welcoming to the LGBT (Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender) community."

"So you're asking me where our church stands on homosexuality? Do we view it as a sin? Ultimately, this isn't about our individual views or opinions. But," as I pointed to the stack of Bibles, "our teaching and practice are guided solely by God's Word. And God's Word is plain on the matter. Homosexuality is called a sin by the One who made us."

"Still, our doors are wide open to the LGBT community, just as our doors are wide open to any sinner who crosses the threshold, no matter the sin. When Jesus died, he died and paid for all sins."

In light of this summer's Supreme Court ruling on same-sex marriage, I anticipate more questions and possibly even confrontations over our church's stance on homosexuality. When that happens, will we be ready? "Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a

reason for the hope that is in you. However, do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15,16 HCSB). Will we be careful to be the kind of "welcoming" church our Savior wants? You see, Christ's enemies once leveled this charge against him: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them!" (Luke 15:2 HCSB). But even as he welcomed them, Jesus didn't try to explain away their sin. Rather he said, "The healthy don't need a doctor, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31,32 HCSB).

If we want to be a welcoming church, we dare not ignore or try to explain away sin, for then there is no need for repentance or for the forgiveness our Savior so graciously gives. At the same time, our challenge will be to answer tough questions with "gentleness and respect."

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





## CHANGES IN MINISTRY

### Pastors

**Bitter, Gregg H.**, to St. Paul, Ridgeland/St. John, Colfax, Wis.

**Bodden, Joshua M.**, to Mt. Calvary, Waukesha, Wis.

**Enderle, Jeffrey D.**, to Christ the Rock, Farmington, N.M.

**Kock, Norval L.**, to Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis.

**Olson, Joshua S.**, to Shepherd of the Bay, Lusby, Md.

**Schmidt, Daniel T.**, to Faith, Tyler, Tex.

**Schmitzer, Silas J.**, to St. Matthew, Stoddard, Wis.

**Schuler, Paul T.**, to Salem, Loretto, Minn.

**Sutton, Joel T.**, to Latin American Mission Team

**Valleskey, Martin E.**, to Costa Maya, Mexico

**Yahnke, Dustin B.**, to Trinity, Watertown, Wis.

### Teachers

**Kaiser, Ruth**, to retirement

**Steinbrenner, Dennis**, to Immanuel, Manitowoc, Wis.

### Staff minister

**Enter, David R.**, to Living Water, Oshkosh, Wis.

## NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS AND PASTORS

We thank God for you and for your support of the ministry WELS carries out on behalf of all congregations. We ask that you continue to mail your Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) deposit and its processing coupon to our bank lock box, which provides effective and efficient deposit processing for the synod. The last business day of each month is the reporting cutoff date for the CMO deposit. For the deposit to be included in reported receipts for the month, CMO must be received in the synod's bank lock box on or before the last business day. An exception is made for December offerings. Gifts received by the bank lock box up to and including Jan. 8, 2016, will be credited as 2015 CMO, if accompanied by a 2015 coupon. Thank you for your assistance.

## ANNIVERSARIES

**San Jose, Calif.**—Apostles (50). Nov. 1. Worship, 8:45 A.M. & 11:15 A.M.; bratfest follows. Website, [www.apostles-lutheran.net/50yearsofgrace](http://www.apostles-lutheran.net/50yearsofgrace). 408-225-0107.

**Marshfield, Wis.**—St. Peter (135). Nov. 8. Worship, 9 A.M.

**Phoenix, Ariz.**—St. Thomas (50). Nov. 8. Worship, 4 P.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. Mary, 623-933-4666.

**Watertown, Wis.**—Luther Preparatory School (150). Nov. 15. Worship, 3 P.M. Choirs from the four ministerial education schools will participate. The event will be livestreamed. Website, [www.lps.wels.net](http://www.lps.wels.net).

**Coral Springs**—Pompano (50). Nov. 22. Worship, 10 A.M.; lunch follows. La Quinta Inn. [revsmueller@gmail.com](mailto:revsmueller@gmail.com).

**Zilwaukee, Mich.**—St. John (150). Dec. 6. Worship, 4 P.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. 989-392-8701.

## COMING EVENTS

**Christian Life Resources national convention**—Nov. 7. St. Paul, Slinger, Wis. Theme: "Hope abounds." Website, [www.CLREvents.com](http://www.CLREvents.com).

**"Three Strands" couples retreat**—Nov. 7. Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis. Website, [www.threestrandsretreat.org](http://www.threestrandsretreat.org)

**Women's retreat**—Nov. 14. David's Star, Jackson, Wis. Theme, "With a thankful heart for God's direction in our lives." 262-677-2412 x302. Website, [www.davidssstar.org](http://www.davidssstar.org).

**Lutheran Chorale of Milwaukee concert**—Nov. 29. 2 & 4:30 P.M. Abiding Word, Milwaukee, Wis. Mary Prange, 414-861-7092.

**Living nativity**—Dec. 4–5, 6–8 P.M. Christ, Eagle River, Wis. Presentations run every 20 minutes. 715-479-8307.

**Living nativity**—Dec. 4–5, 6–9 P.M.; Dec. 6, 4–7 P.M. St. Paul, Howards Grove, Wis. Presentations run every 20 minutes. Website, [www.stpaulshowardsgrove.org](http://www.stpaulshowardsgrove.org). 920-565-3780.

**Living nativity**—Dec. 4–5, 5–8 P.M. Trinity, Marinette, Wis. Presentations run every 20 minutes. Website, [www.trinitymarinette.com](http://www.trinitymarinette.com). 715-732-9868.

**Living nativity**—Dec. 5, 4–7 P.M. Martin Luther, Oshkosh, Wis. Live nativity presented in "drive-through" fashion. Website, [www.mloskosh.org/live-nativity](http://www.mloskosh.org/live-nativity).

### WELS ministerial education school Christmas concerts—

- Dec. 5, 7:30 P.M.; Dec. 6, 4 P.M. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 507-354-8221
- Dec. 13, 3 and 7 P.M. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. 262-242-8100
- Dec. 13, 3 P.M.; Dec. 17, 10 A.M. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. 920-261-4352
- Dec. 18, 7 P.M. Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich. 989-793-1041

**Mid-term graduation**—Dec. 17, 10 A.M. Chapel of the Christ, Martin Luther

College, New Ulm, Minn. 507-354-8221  
**Pathways to Christ retreat**—Mar. 11–13, 2016. Oshkosh, Wis. 920-233-1069. Website, [www.pathways.martinlutheroshkosh.com](http://www.pathways.martinlutheroshkosh.com)

**Christian Woman Today retreat**—Mar. 11–13, 2016. Sheraton, Brookfield, Wis. Theme: "Christ lives in me (Galatians 2:20b)." Maureen, 262-784-0412.

## JOB OPPORTUNITIES

**Clinic administrator**—The Central Africa Medical Mission is accepting applications for a clinic administrator for the Lutheran Mobile Clinic (Malawi) for a three-year term of service beginning November 2016. The clinic administrator can be a nurse, but teachers, people with business backgrounds, or anyone with a strong desire to serve in a business position is encouraged to apply. Preferred applicants are single females, due to living arrangements. Contact [camcontact@charter.net](mailto:camcontact@charter.net) or call 262-677-3844 for information.

**Development director**—for Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minn., starting Jan. 1, 2016. Contact Principal Tim Plath for a job description and application at 507-354-6851 or [tplath@mvlhs.org](mailto:tplath@mvlhs.org).

## NAMES WANTED

**Military**—congregations members, family, or friends, who serve in the Armed Forces and desire spiritual services. Complete an online referral form at [wels.net/military-services](http://wels.net/military-services). Include as much information as possible; e-mail addresses are especially important. Special Ministries, 414-256-3241; [csn@wels.net](mailto:csn@wels.net).

## HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS WANTED

In an effort to reclaim storage space, church leaders often discard documents, not realizing that they tell the story of God's grace in the congregations and the synod. If you have items related to the history of your congregation, even bulletins from special services, forward them to the synod archives, which are housed on the seminary campus. Send documents to WELS Archives, 11831 N Seminary Dr, Mequon WI 53092.

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



## Q&A: Pastor Kurt Lueneburg, director of WELS Christian Giving

*The 2015 synod convention launched the “One in Christ” special offering to eliminate the synod’s \$4.7 million debt by June 2016—two years ahead of schedule. Many congregations will be conducting their “One in Christ” offering this month. Pastor Kurt Lueneburg, director of WELS Christian Giving, tells more about the background and goals of the campaign.*

### Q: How did we accumulate this debt?

**A:** The debt reached \$22.4 million in the early 2000s as a result of capital projects and amalgamations at our ministerial education schools as well as internal borrowing.

### Q: What caused the internal borrowing?

**A:** Some might recall that, unfortunately, in the 2001–03 biennium there was miscommunication between the synod’s financial planners and areas of ministry about the role that special funds would have in funding the proposed plan. This resulted in the ministry special funds being spent twice. Internal borrowing was needed to cover the double spending that resulted from the miscommunication so that we could maintain, instead of reduce, our planned ministry.

### Q: What was the effect of the 2008–09 Year of Jubilee offering on the debt?

**A:** The amount of debt totaled \$22.4 million before the Year of Jubilee. We praise God that the Year of Jubilee campaign saw \$4.1 million in special offerings through 2008–09. Since 2009, donors have contributed almost another \$1 million which, along with regular synod payments on the debt, have reduced the remaining debt to \$4.7 million.

### Q: What if we don’t meet the goal?

**A:** We will continue to make payments on the remaining debt until it is eliminated. Of course, having to make these payments would prevent these funds from being used for other ministry.

### Q: What if offerings exceed the \$4.7 million goal?

**A:** The 2015 synod convention resolved that the first \$100,000 received beyond the goal would be used to provide funds for the Publications Coordination Commission. This commission prioritizes various publishing projects needed by the synod. Beyond that, the Synodical Council would be responsible for recommending the designation of extra funds in the best interest of synodical stewardship.

### Q: Will our synod ever go back into debt? How will we handle future debt?

**A:** While it’s our synod’s goal to avoid going back into debt, there could come a time when it may be beneficial to assume some debt with future planned projects.

That being said, a string of recent synodical capital projects (the purchase of a new synod administration building, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary’s chapel renovation and road repairs, Martin Luther College’s Chapel of the Christ—initial construction and basement renovation—and Early Childhood Learning Center, and Luther Preparatory School’s chapel renovation) have been or are being accomplished with existing funds and gifts, without any loans. In addition, the recently formed Capital Projects Committee is working to ensure future capital projects are identified well in advance of their need.

### Q: How does eliminating this debt affect our synod’s future?

**A:** The unknown factor is the strength of regular congregational offerings, the main source of funding for WELS ministry. In recent years those offerings have been steady, although they have not kept pace with the costs of maintaining ministry. Eliminating the debt will help us to continue the ministry that God has so richly blessed for us:

- The training of our pastors, teachers, and staff ministers for proclaiming the unchanging gospel to an ever-changing world.
- Proclaiming the gospel in 23 countries in addition to our own, and making the most of every opportunity God puts before us.
- Providing resources and assistance to our churches and schools as they aim to glorify God in all they do.

If regular and special offerings come in stronger than expected, we can do even more! I encourage all of us to prayerfully and generously participate in this special offering, trusting in God “who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20).

Find resources for conducting a “One in Christ” offering at your congregation or make a donation at [wels.net/oneinchrist](http://wels.net/oneinchrist).



Kurt Lueneburg (right) is overseeing the “One in Christ” special offering to eliminate the synod’s debt.





## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION BOOMING IN FLORIDA

*Donn Dobberstein, pastor at Our Savior's, Port Orange, Fla., shared the following:*

It was January 2014 at our pastor circuit meeting. The guys were going around the table telling what's going on in their local ministries. A remarkable outcome—six of the ten congregations were either planning for, at the cusp of, or already in the process of building for Lutheran education.

- **Risen Savior, Orlando**—The congregation is putting the finishing touches on initial classroom expansion to open a new Lutheran elementary school in fall 2015.
- **New Hope, W. Melbourne**—Walls are going up on a four-classroom expansion for a growing Lutheran elementary school.
- **Our Savior's, Port Orange**—The congregation is adding four classrooms to expand the childcare and preschool.
- **Good Shepherd, Deltona**—With 200 enrolled in childcare, preschool, and a recently-started Lutheran elementary school, the congregation is making plans for a building expansion within a year that would allow them to double their enrollment.
- **Christ the King, Palm Coast**—With an enrollment of 250, the congregation is on the cusp of a nine-classroom/early childhood center addition.
- **Crown of Glory, Orlando**—A new early childhood education building is being planned for 2016 to serve this childcare/preschool ministry. The long-range plan is to add grades K-2 on a second campus.

Ten years ago, only two of the above had fledgling preschools. In the coming five years, the gospel is projected to touch the hearts of one thousand children through the above schools.

## Small steps, big opportunities

"Lutheran schools/preschools are the front door our central Florida communities are using as welcome mats for the gospel," says Donn Dobberstein, pastor at Our Savior's, Port Orange, Fla.

Dobberstein says that even as there have been concerns about decreasing enrollment in WELS elementary schools, enrollment in WELS childcare and preschool ministries is growing in his area. Our Savior's is a great example of this.

To better connect with the community, Our Savior's began a Moms Morning Out in 2001. When the group began to number 15 to 20 kids, mothers began asking, "What else do you have for us?"

Our Savior's worked with a WELS Forward with Lutheran Schools consultant team to conduct a feasibility study in 2002. In fall 2004, the congregation opened Small Steps Academy with 27 three- and four-year-olds. Enrollment grew into the 40s and 50s, and Small Steps Academy added a two-year-old program in 2012. Enrollment grew into the 60s, so in 2014 the congregation began a one-year-old program.

Present enrollment is 105 children with a staff of 17. Of those approximately 100 families, Dobberstein notes that 44 indicated that they do not have a church home, 19 indicated that they do, and 38 left the answer blank on their registration form. Only those with a church home have bap-

tized their children, so Dobberstein estimates that sixty to seventy percent of the children are unbaptized.

"The ministry needs are great," says Dobberstein. "We are working hard at developing an intentional harvest strategy."

Part of the harvest strategy is creating "connect" points with school families. For example, the school hosts family events after school and on weekends so that families connect with church members, other school families, teachers, and the pastor. These connections help build relationships. In particular, Dobberstein is able to minister to these families as they encounter difficult times. It also offers him the opportunity to invite families to his "Fresh start" Bible study that covers key truths of the Bible.

God has blessed Our Savior's hard work. Since 2004, Small Steps Academy has served 450 preschoolers and baptized more than 50 children. Twenty-five families have joined the church. Our Savior's is now making plans to open an elementary school by 2020.

As Dobberstein notes, "The rise in Christian education is creating a path for the next generation of families to learn more than ABCs and 123s. These families are real people who really hurt just like you and me. It is such a privilege for this pastor, our teachers, and our congregation to love them."



Children with yellow plastic hardhats and beach shovels turned the dirt as part of a groundbreaking ceremony on March 22 at Our Savior's, Port Orange, Fla. The 4,500 sq. ft. expansion increased space for the congregation's early childhood ministry, Small Steps Academy.



## Japanese congregation celebrates 50 years

For 50 years, the members of Aganai Lutheran Church in Japan have been sharing the message that their name proclaims—redemption through Jesus—in a country where it is estimated that only one percent are Christian.

As holy people living for God's glory, Aganai members work hard to reach out in their neighborhood as well as to help further the spread of the gospel in Japan. "The community does not know very much about Christianity," says Brad Wordell, world mission seminary professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., and former pastor at Aganai. "The congregation seeks to provide 'safe events' (non-worship, non-Bible-study events) to help people feel comfortable coming to the church."

Kaori Egawa, a member of the congregation, says that includes inviting members' friends and families to the congregation's café for coffee and snacks as well as offering special children's events, parenting classes, and lunch parties. The congregation also has Bible classes, Sunday school, and worship in English on Saturday nights and in Japanese on Sundays.

"The appearance of our church building has served as a good tool of outreach," Egawa adds. "When someone is looking for healing and hope and wanting to know who Jesus Christ is, seeing the church's pointed roof and the cross becomes an encouragement for them to knock on our doors."

The people of Japan need the hope of God's message of salvation. Many

follow Japan's traditional religion. "Japanese people are bound to obey their elders and their dead ancestors," says Wordell. "Ancestor worship and taking care of the family grave are very important." There are also many misconceptions about Christianity and a general acceptance of all religions.

To help introduce the Japanese to Christianity, the congregation created a website, [www.aganai.com](http://www.aganai.com), that shares more about the church and its teachings. Volunteers from the congregation also work with Multi-Language Publications to publish and distribute good Lutheran materials in Japanese.

Aganai is one of six congregations in the Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church (LECC) in Japan. The 110-member congregation mostly has been served by WELS missionaries but now has a resident Japanese pastor.

"We are so grateful for everything that WELS has done for Japan," says Egawa. "The missionaries and their families showed us love beyond our imagination. They planted the seed of the gospel inside our hearts with such passion, helped to build our church, and encouraged us to always hold on to the gospel. We are praying that the Lord will continue to guide and strengthen Aganai as we work together with the other LECC churches to continue proclaiming his holy name in Japan."

Meet a member of Aganai Lutheran Church on p. 28.



Members at Aganai Lutheran Church in Tokyo, Japan.

## Workers for the harvest field

An important part of World Mission work is to train workers from within a culture to do gospel ministry among their people. "They know the people. They know the language. God makes them ready for the challenge," says Larry Schlomer, administrator of WELS World Missions.

This summer, new pastors from Europe, Asia, and Africa joined the 174 national pastors serving in fields around the world.

Iliyan Boykov Itsov was ordained as the sixth pastor of the Bulgarian Lutheran Church (BLC) in September. The Board for World Missions Europe Committee called him to be the coordinator for outreach to Romani, also known as "gypsies." Itsov, himself a Romani, will work with WELS Multi-Language Publications to prepare literature as well as seek to establish congregations when the Lord opens doors, not only in Bulgaria but also across Europe. Several European sister churches have already expressed interest and given support to this new ministry.

Founded by WELS Missions in 1994, the Bulgarian Lutheran Church has six pastors serving four congregations and 355 baptized souls.

Also in September, 12 men graduated from the seminary program of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries (CELM) in India. Another 40 men are currently studying while serving congregations on a part-time basis.

Two friendly counselors help train these national pastors as well as work with existing congregations and national pastors. Forty-five national pastors serve 5,500 souls in 120 congregations. In addition, CELM operates seven children's homes and Gentle Shepherd Lutheran School.

Earlier this summer, Peter Bur, a South Sudanese man who immigrated to the United States years ago, graduated from the Pastoral Studies Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. He was ordained and installed as the coordinator of South Sudanese Ministry at his home congregation of Good Shepherd, Omaha,



Iliyan Boykov Itsov, the new Romani pastor for the Bulgarian Lutheran Church, and his family.



The 2015 graduating class of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries in India.



Peter Bur and his wife, Martha, at Peter's installation as the new coordinator of South Sudanese Ministry.

Neb. Two hundred WELS South Sudanese members from Nebraska; Iowa; Minnesota; Washington; and Calgary, Canada, attended the four-hour service.

Bur is coordinating the pastoral training of South Sudanese leaders in North America and also in refugee camps in Africa.

"Every graduation in these places is an answer to what Jesus asked us to pray, 'Lord, send out workers into your harvest field,'" says Schlomer.

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

## Supporting the military and their families

"Shoulder to shoulder in service."

This phrase describes the Lutheran Military Support Group (LMSG), a new organization that is working closely with WELS Military Services and local congregations to strengthen the church's ministry to the military.

"We are a national level organization designed to have national reach, but local impact," says Philip Mowry, LMSG president. "We are designed to be both an auxiliary to WELS Military Services in their support of active duty service members as well as an independent organization supporting the needs of our military veterans and families of both active duty members and veterans."

Run by a board of WELS and Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) veterans from across the country, the Lutheran Military Support Group is focusing on several national priorities:

- Providing logistical, financial, and educational support to WELS Military Services as it ministers to active duty military members. "As current and former military people, we bring a host of skills, relationships, and perspectives not generally found among civilian church leadership," says Mowry, a member at Living Savior, Valrico, Fla., who served during the Gulf War.
- Helping address post-traumatic stress disorder in veterans. (See more on p. 30.)
- Supporting military families. "Not only are veteran family members supporting those who have served, but in a real and tangible way, military family members have also served, sacrificed, and suffered in their own right," says Mowry. The group is looking to start an annual synodwide recognition day for those families as well as to help active military families in remote locations stay connected through, for example, catechism and Bible classes.

The LSMG is also working to create awareness and activity in local con-



**LUTHERAN MILITARY  
SUPPORT GROUP**  
*Shoulder to Shoulder in Service*

gregations. Its goal is to have a liaison—either an active military person, a veteran, or a military family member—in every WELS and ELS congregation to educate and encourage members. "We want our congregations through their liaisons to open their eyes and look around their congregations and community and say, 'This is a mission opportunity we haven't thought of before,'" says Mowry. "We're driving awareness, which will stimulate individual congregational activity." He notes that veterans and military families in the community may also notice this focus, which presents new outreach opportunities.

On a personal level, Mowry says this new organization has given him an opportunity to reconnect with his "military focus" since leaving the Air Force in 1999. "I'm loving the fact that after many years I'm re-engaging with it, and it is giving me a unique opportunity to help and be active in the church," he says.

This group, he says, may also offer that same encouragement to other veterans. "Our new organization and its programs provide an opportunity to engage veterans, to reconnect them to their passion for serving others, which was developed through their military experience," says Mowry. "And serving your Lord is as good as it gets."

Discover more about the Lutheran Military Support Group, how to get involved, and tips on ministering to military members in your community at the group's website, [www.lutheranmilitary.org](http://www.lutheranmilitary.org). Learn more about WELS Military Services, a part of WELS Special Ministries, at [wels.net/military-services](http://wels.net/military-services).







# 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.

## 364 DAYS OF THANKSGIVING: A DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL

Occasionally, I come across a single book to satisfy everyone on my gift list. Pastor Andrew Schroer's *364 Days of Thanksgiving, A Devotional Journal* is such a treasure.

More than a journal, *364 Days of Thanksgiving* is a journey from a place of discontent to a life of gratitude and joy. How can a humble journal be so powerful? Pastor Schroer's writing motivates us to gaze with new eyes at life—the vacant seat at the table, the frightening diagnoses, the empty pockets—and to say "I'm so *very* blessed."

Pastor Schroer never once shakes his literary fist shouting, "You must be grateful!" Rather, he nudges us to daily search the storms of life to find and record a single blessing. That's it—one blessing a day.

By year's end we can look back at 364 different gifts and be amazed by God's hand in our lives and overwhelmingly grateful for his blessings. The 365th day is a full day of giving thanks, which we observe on

Thanksgiving Day. The goal is to cultivate an eye for hidden blessings, develop the habit of gratefulness, and nurture a heart of joy and generosity.

Pastor Schroer challenges us and all Christians to realize how indescribably rich we are, to be overwhelmingly grateful for that richness, and to reach out to others with the overwhelming generosity of a heart that witnesses the daily blessings of an all-loving God.

I can't think of anyone who wouldn't benefit from the challenge of *364 Days of Thanksgiving*, both the book and the action. We all need to hear, "You are loved! You are rich! Be thankful." The book is a gratitude-inducing reminder that our negatives are God's positives designed as blessings—that's a life-changing gift worth sharing.

*Christy Bagasao, Las Vegas, Nevada*



Price: \$12.99. Available Nov. 2. A Bible study for congregations is also available at [www.nph.net](http://www.nph.net).

## My Son, My Savior now available

WELS' newest outreach movie, *My Son, My Savior*, is now available. *My Son, My Savior* runs 42 minutes and portrays Mary experiencing and pondering the miracle of Jesus' coming and then humbly growing in her understanding that her son is also her Savior. The main message for viewers is that Jesus is their Savior too, which makes it an ideal Advent outreach tool.

WELS has created a number of resources to complement the movie, including an Advent by candlelight program titled *A Mother Remembers*, a small group study resource, and a four-session Bible study. Dave Kehl, author of the Bible study, explains that the study follows the story line of the movie.

"Angels appearing to the least likely people, babies born in miraculous ways, lambs led to the slaughter—what does it all mean?" Kehl asks.

"This Bible study will help participants unfold the many deeper themes of the movie and help them apply it to their lives."

The study can be used in large or small groups for congregational spiritual growth or outreach. It can also be used as a personal study tool. In addition, the DVD includes a Spanish-language track.

Plans are already set for some WELS churches to host community-wide showings of the movie. Our Savior, Grafton, Wis., has rented an area theatre on Dec. 13 so that it can host two free showings of the movie. Other congregations are planning to distribute free copies of the DVD to neighbors with an invitation to attend Advent and Christmas services or to hand out DVDs to all members and visitors.

*My Son, My Savior* is the third in a



series of four outreach movies that are planned as a collaboration between WELS Commissions on Evangelism and Adult Discipleship, Northwestern Publishing House, WELS Multi-Language Publications, and Boettcher+Trinklein Television, Inc. The first two movies, *Road to Emmaus* and *Come Follow Me*, have been distributed worldwide and received critical acclaim from a number of Christian film groups.

Visit [wels.net/mysonmysavior](http://wels.net/mysonmysavior) to find links to purchase the movie and to see the available resources.

## District news

### NORTHERN WISCONSIN

On Sept. 20, **Trinity, Kaukauna, Wis.**, celebrated the dedication of its new facility, which houses its early childhood ministry.

### WESTERN WISCONSIN

On Aug. 26, the historic bell was removed from the steeple of the old church of **Zion, Columbus, Wis.** It will be placed in the bell tower of the newly built church after being refurbished. The bell was cast from the metal of a French cannon presented to the congregation by Kaiser Wilhelm I of Germany.

### HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

**SEW—St. Matthew, Milwaukee,**

**Wis.**, celebrated its 150th anniversary on Sept. 20.

On Sept. 20, Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis., celebrated the service anniversaries of three teachers—**Timothy Kuehl**, 25 years; **Wesley Schmandt**, 25 years; and **Darwin Schramm**, 40 years.

**MI—**On Sept. 13, St. Luke, Vassar, Mich., celebrated the 25th anniversary in the teaching ministry of **Cynthia Lange**.

The district reporters for this month are: **MI—**John Eich; **NW—**Dennis Kleist; **SA—**Jonathan Kuske; **SC—**Andrew Retberg; **SEW—**Scott Oelhafen; **WW—**Brett Brauer.

### SOUTH CENTRAL



A Mighty Fortress, Fulshear, Texas, a new congregation supported by WELS Home Missions, celebrated a rope cutting ceremony on Sept. 11. Pictured cutting the rope is A Mighty Fortress's pastor, Ben Reichel. The mission congregation's launch service was held Sept. 13.

### SOUTH ATLANTIC



On Aug. 11, Divine Savior Academy, Doral, Fla., celebrated the grand opening of its new high school building and athletic facilities with a ribbon cutting ceremony and reception for the Doral community. On Aug. 9, a dedication service was held. The new facility more than doubles the size of Divine Savior's current campus, which serves more than seven hundred students from PreK to 12th grade. Pastor Carl Leyrer, founder of Divine Savior Academy, is shown cutting the ribbon. WELS Church Extension Fund helped Divine Savior with the financing to make this project possible.

## Obituaries

### Margaret D. Scheunemann 1916–2015

Margaret Scheunemann (née Koehler) was born Sept. 8, 1916, in Iron Ridge, Wis. She died Aug. 11, 2015, in Burlington, Wis.

A graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at Friedens, Kenosha, Wis., and St. John's, Burlington, Wis.

She is preceded in death by her husband, Horace; one son; two brothers; and two sisters. She is survived by two grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

### Norbert R. Meier 1931–2015

Norbert Meier was born Oct. 10, 1931, in Watertown, S.D. He died Aug. 21, 2015, in Circle Pines, Minn.

A 1957 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Apostles, Billings, Mont.; the Japan mission; Light of the World, Fairbanks, Alaska; Trinity, Saint Paul, Minn.; and the Cameroon mission.

He is survived by his wife, Margaret; 3 daughters; 1 son; 12 grandchildren, 1 great-grandchild; 1 brother; and 1 sister.

### Leroy A. Dobberstein 1933–2015

Leroy Dobberstein was born June 27, 1933, in New London, Wis. He died Aug. 24, 2015, in Rapid City, S.D.

A 1959 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.; St. John, Watertown, S.D.; St. Paul, Rapid City, S.D.; St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn.; St. Paul, Algoma, Wis.; and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.

He is preceded in death by three sisters, a brother, and a great-granddaughter. He is survived by his wife, Betty; one daughter; two sons; seven grandchildren; six great-grandchildren; two brothers; and two sisters.





## LIVES PREPARED FOR SERVICE

1865

2015

### **We pray for blessings on the future of our synod's ministerial education system as it continues to train workers for the harvest field.**

Matthew A. Crass

Anniversaries of any occasion give us the opportunity to praise God for his abundant blessings of the past. Yet, we don't live in the past; we live for the future. Our eternal future is secure in the Living One who was dead but now is alive forever and ever (Revelation 1:18). We live to serve our Savior today and for all the tomorrows he will give us, confident that the same grace he gave us in the past will continue in the future.

The Lord has blessed our church body for the past 150 years with a ministerial education system that had its beginnings in Watertown, Wisconsin. For the past 20 years Luther Preparatory School (LPS) continues the long history. A sesquicentennial anniversary gives reason for a celebration of gratitude to our triune God.

### **THE CHALLENGE: THE HARVEST**

The Good Shepherd told his 12 disciples, "The harvest is plentiful" (Matthew 9:37). Perhaps as many as 300 million people inhabited the earth in A.D. 30 when Jesus spoke those words. Today that number has increased more than twentyfold. Two thousand years later the seven billion still need the "one thing needful"—Jesus!

For the past few years, and for at least the next seven years, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) will be averaging approximately 30 graduates who will present themselves to the church for calls into the pastoral ministry. They will be "replacing" the seminary classes of the late '70s and early '80s, which graduated more than 50 young men each year. Those statistics do present a challenge.

The challenge is great; the harvest calls us all. The Lord has blessed us with more open doors in Africa, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere. Requests also have risen for Martin Luther College (MLC) graduates to serve as teachers overseas. More preschools have opened and continue to bloom in congregations across the country. Home Missions planted several new missions in recent years

and plans carefully to follow the same course for the coming years. Seven billion souls and the thousands of opportunities before us accentuate even more the urgency of our prayers for more workers in Christ's harvest field.

### **THE CHALLENGE: MORE WORKERS**

The Good Shepherd said the harvest was plentiful, and he continued, "but the workers are few." That was true two millennia ago, is true today, and will remain true until the Lord of the harvest returns to take his harvest home. Jesus concluded, "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (v. 38).

The Lord does not choose to feed us in the same miraculous way as he did with the Israelites when he provided manna and quail directly from heaven. He works through people: farmers, manufacturers of machinery, transporters, processors, packagers, grocers, etc.

Neither does the Lord choose to bring people to faith by speaking directly to them as he did with the persecutor of the church, Saul, calling him to be his ambassador. He works through means—his gospel in Word and sacrament. He hasn't entrusted his life-giving Word to



angels, but to human beings. In doing so God has ordained the public ministry. In writing to the Ephesians Paul reminds us that the ascended Christ, “gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers” (4:11). The people of our synod have always placed a high value on the training of their called workers and the blessings those called workers bring to the congregations through their gospel work.

### OUR TASK: ENCOURAGING FUTURE WORKERS

The work of the gospel is blessed when parents offer their sons and daughters for consideration and preparation for full-time ministry. A few decades ago a study was done asking young pastors what or who was their greatest encouragement toward ministry. “My mother” was the top answer.

Pastors, teachers, and staff ministers modeling ministry for the young in their care and following it up with an encouraging word to them about someday serving in ministry goes a long way. “You will be such a fine pastor/teacher.” Simple sentences like that from congregational members to their “sons and daughters” often reach deep into a young person’s heart.

In 1529 Martin Luther said this regarding giving a servant to the full-time ministry of the gospel: “If you bring up a child in such a way that he is able to become a keeper of souls, you do not give a coat or endow a monastery or church; you are indeed doing something greater; you are giving a servant of God who is able to help many souls.”

What type of child, grade school student, or high school student is Jesus looking for to serve him in the full-time

ministry? Many of us have perhaps spoken of young people who have “gifts for ministry.” Such talk can unintentionally limit the pool of candidates for ministry. How do I know what gifts a 12-year-old will have 12 years from now? Could it very well be that Jesus has in mind that this congregation will need the very gifts of this present-day 12-year-old, who at this time in his life doesn’t appear to have any of those gifts?

Let’s also look at Scripture’s examples. Was the ineloquent, slow-of-speech Moses gifted? How about skittish Jonah? persecutor Saul? doubting Thomas? spineless Peter? other disciples who would serve in Christ’s harvest field? The Bible has the answer as Paul speaks of ministry: “Not that we are competent in ourselves . . . but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers” (2 Corinthians 3:5,6).

### OUR TASK: TRAINING FUTURE WORKERS

Do you know a young boy or girl whom you would like to encourage to be a pastor, teacher, or staff minister? Luther Prep is a blessed place for high school students to begin their preparation. Everything that happens at Luther Prep is done with an eye toward ministry. The current of Luther Prep’s river flows toward MLC and WLS. Historically more than half of Luther Prep’s graduates continue at Martin Luther College for ministry. Certainly parents who send their children to Luther Prep make many sacrifices along the way, but God gives lasting blessings.

LPS isn’t the only source of students. WELS has another synod prep school—Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.—and 24 area Lutheran high schools. Plus there are hundreds of

public high schools. We walk and work together to encourage students from every corner of WELS-world to consider working in Christ’s harvest fields.

For a century and a half the synod’s Watertown campus has been enrolling young people willing to consider and be encouraged toward ministry. We pray that will be true for as many more years, decades, or centuries God gives to Luther Prep. We confess with our confessions: “The chief worship of God is to preach the gospel” (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XV). Where the gospel is taught and preached, the Holy Spirit will continue to gather his church for time and eternity. With such assurance, we look confidently toward a blessed future.

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*Matthew Crass, president of Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wisconsin, is a member at St. Luke, Watertown, Wisconsin.*

This is the final article in a three-part series discussing 150 years of ministerial education on the synod’s Watertown campus.

A sesquicentennial celebration of praise to God will be held at the Luther Prep gymnasium at 3 P.M. CST, Nov. 15. The synod’s four ministerial education school choirs will participate. The event will be livestreamed. Learn more at [www.lps.wels.net](http://www.lps.wels.net).





# Mission Stories

## Blessed Bradley D. Wordell

I have enjoyed studying the Bible and worshiping with Reika for almost ten years. But when she started coming to our congregation in Tokyo, my “American thinking” almost caused big trouble.

At that point she had been worshiping with us for weeks, but this was her first potluck meal in our church basement. Reika was born and raised in Taiwan but had moved to Japan as a young adult. That day she had brought some Chinese food to share with everyone. While I was waiting in line, she loaded a plate with various foods from the table and brought it to me. “Pastor, this is for you.” Noticing that my choices would have been a little different, I responded, “Thank you, Reika-san, but please eat what you have chosen. I will go through the line myself.” She offered it to me one more time, but my mind was set.

I had sent the signal to Reika that I did not appreciate her kind gesture. When I realized my blunder later that week, we talked about it. We both came to understand better what the other was thinking during that incident. I apologized. She forgave me. The problem was resolved.

This story is a good illustration of Reika’s life: Reika is a foreigner in Japan, holding out a plate to others. That plate is heaping with the Bread of Life. At first people are not interested. But through her witnessing, many people have come to know, as she does, how blessed the Lord’s people are.

Verses from Psalm 1 help share more of Reika’s story.

### NOT IN THE SEAT OF MOCKERS

In this world, we encounter sin every day. Sadly, we sometimes “walk in step with the wicked.” Our sinful flesh wants us to keep company with certain sins; we “stand in the way that sinners take.” How horrible it is when the hardened hearts of people have them living in the camp that is opposed to the Lord. All people are born into that camp, “[sitting] in the company of mockers.” Some people remain there all their lives.

The Lord rescued Reika out of the idolatry of two Asian nations. She remembers as a child the burning of “ghost money” and pretend items, with the purpose of sending help to dead ancestors. Her family also offered real food and drinks to keep those ancestors happy. Angry ancestors might cause problems for their descendants living on earth. Religion in Taiwan taught Reika about good works, religious ceremonies, respect for elders and ancestors, good and bad spirits, the enlightenment of Buddha, and detachment from the world.

As a young adult, Reika moved to Japan and later married a Japanese man. They were blessed with one daughter, Commy, who is now a college student. The religions of Japan, with their millions of gods and countless festivals, did not offer Reika any more hope. In Japan, “one-god-religions” are considered narrow-minded and dangerous—the main reason for hatred and war in the world.

In the seat of mockers, some people are defiant against the Lord; others just don’t know what they are doing. Reika is blessed not to be in that seat any longer.

### WHOSE DELIGHT IS IN THE LAW OF THE LORD

The Lord led Reika to a Christian church in Japan. As she heard the good news about Jesus, the Holy Spirit opened the eyes of her heart to see the glory of the Savior. She and her daughter were baptized. Later they moved to our neighborhood and visited our church. Through English worship on Saturday nights, Japanese worship on Sunday mornings, and a weekday study of Luther’s Small Catechism in her home, Reika grew in the grace and knowledge of her Savior. She became a member through adult confirmation.

The family decided that Commy would benefit from Christian education in the States. She attended St. Croix Lutheran High School in Minnesota and was supported by her host family, her local congregation, and the faculty and students. With the use of modern technology Reika and Commy were able to read and discuss the weekly sermons—mostly in English and Japanese, but sometimes in Chinese. Commy was confirmed in the States.

Reika’s Bible, catechism, and sermon copies are full of handwritten notes—a testimony to her love of God’s Word. She is like a tree



planted by a stream, drinking in the water of God's Word. She is blessed!

### WHATEVER THEY DO PROSPERS

Reika has her own business; she runs an aesthetic salon. Reika's clients are women who come to her salon for beauty treatments. Through her study of God's Word, Reika has come to appreciate that everything she has is a gift from her Father in heaven. She wants her business to give glory to God. Every week she gives a portion of her income to support her congregation. In her contact with clients, she is always looking for opportunities to share the hope that she has. Clients can see Bible pamphlets in her salon. When people tell her their problems, she is quick to talk about the solution to all life's problems. She will ask, "May I say a prayer for you?"

The weekday Bible study in her home (one floor above her salon) is often attended by clients she has invited. She invites and brings them to weekend worship too. She speaks the Word of God to them, telling them what she knows. Of the people baptized at Aganai

Lutheran Church in Tokyo in the last ten years, Reika can say, "Eleven of them, though they were served in many other ways as well, attended Bible classes with the pastors in my home." Reika considers it a privilege to be one of God's instruments, working with the other members of her church family to reach the lost.

Included in the people she has reached are her sister-in-law, her sister-in-law's daughters, and her own father, who came from Taiwan to visit her. He was made a child of God through baptism in April of 2015 at the age of 81.

The Lord has blessed Reika and prospered her work in his kingdom.

### THE LORD WATCHES OVER THE WAY OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Reika has many favorite Bible passages, but she would put Psalm 1 at the top of her list. She knows that she is one of the "righteous" because she has a Savior—a redeemer who has paid for her sins. She says, "I have learned that God loves me even though I am not perfect. I know my sins and how important it is to repent and believe the good news. The most important thing in my life now is my Savior, Jesus. I want to proclaim God's Word all my life."

*Brad Wordell is the world mission seminary professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin. He served as pastor/missionary at Aganai Lutheran Church in Tokyo from 1999 until 2015*

Missionary Brad and Andrea Wordell (back row left), Reika Oguni (middle row, second from right), her father (middle row second from left), and other family members at the baptism of Reika's father this past April; Aganai Lutheran Church, at which Reika is a member, is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year (see p. 22); Reika and her daughter Commy at Aganai Lutheran Church in Tokyo, Japan.

## LUTHERAN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN JAPAN

**Year mission work began: 1957**

**Baptized members: 378**

**Congregations: 6**

**Preaching stations: 2**

**National pastors: 4**

**Unique fact:** The LECC is a founding member church of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, a group of 29 member churches worldwide that provides a forum for confessional Lutherans who are in fellowship.

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





# CHASED BY DEMONS



**Many men and women in our congregations have served our country and communities with honor and distinction. Yet some suffer.**

John A. Braun

All governments, ours included, call upon men and women to protect us from our enemies. The job they do often brings hidden pain.

## **A SOLDIER'S DUTY**

For Erhard Opsahl, it started after graduating from Northwestern College in 1965. He enlisted in the army. His nephew was a conscientious objector and served as a medic but never carried a rifle. But Opsahl became a soldier and at first struggled with the Fifth Commandment. The catechism said, "Thou shalt not kill," but training taught him to do just that and how to do it effectively. He was a soldier trained to do a soldier's job—kill the enemy.

Can a Christian be a soldier? Opsahl read Luther and Augustine. Both provided the same answer. Murder is forbidden. Individuals may not take a life. But God entrusts the government with the sword (Romans 13:4), and the sword is not just for show. It is a weapon that brings death—a weapon for killing, if necessary.

In service to the government and obeying the Fourth Commandment—to

submit to the higher authority that God has instituted—Christians can use the sword. Police officers have the same responsibility.

Soldiers and police officers use the sword—the weapon for killing—for the greater good. Luther wrote almost five hundred years ago, "What men write about war, saying that it is a great plague, is all true. But they should also consider how great the plague is that war prevents" (*Luther's Works* AE 46:96). Opsahl says, "It's my pet peeve that so many don't understand the difference between murder—forbidden by God's commandment—and killing by soldiers and police officers."

## **A SOLDIER'S HEARTACHES**

Conscience eased and trained as a soldier, Opsahl was sent to do his duty on the battlefield. He spent nine months as a mechanized infantry and scout platoon leader in Vietnam, where the demons arose that would later pursue him. "In combat, not only does one's own life depend on one's own actions, but so do the lives of one's buddies," he says. That bond is difficult to comprehend for anyone who has not experienced it. "One is willing to act in ways that are potentially hazardous to one's own safety if the deed will help save a buddy's or subordinate's life," says Opsahl. "I don't know of a stronger bond. . . . In wartime, a buddy protecting a buddy from harm—even to the extent of giving his own life—happens frequently."

The demons arise when those buddies are killed. Opsahl admitted it was "gut wrenching" when a buddy took a bullet in the heart. When another died, he says, "Part of my insides were savagely eaten away." Heartache was no less severe when another was killed when a truck rolled over him two weeks before he was due to come home. Add to that the reality that Opsahl survived—sometimes by inches—while others around him died.

At the time the soldier has to move on, remembering that God must have a plan for the survivors, even in the carnage. It's almost like the demons are locked away in the mind after the ambushes, firefights, and mines. They have little opportunity to escape and cause harm when your buddies still depend on you and you have your duty to perform.

And when soldiers come home, for some it is still moving forward. Opsahl became a career soldier. He attended the National War College, was promoted to the rank of colonel, and served with many distinguished Americans in Washington. He remains amazed at what God has done in his life.

## **A SOLDIER'S DEMONS**

Returning to civilian life means returning to a world where killing and violence are not almost daily routines. The memories of conflict and bloodshed lie hidden under layers of





family, jobs, and adjustments, but they do not disappear.

Unfortunately, every hour of every day vets commit suicide. The average age of these vets is 57, years after their battlefield experiences. Sometimes vets even without battlefield experiences are chased by their own demons. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a real problem—one that Opsahl also experiences. Remembering or retelling is like “going to the dreaded place created by the loss of my men, a hole in my heart never to be filled again,” and it “is too threatening to my psyche.”

Symptoms of the disorder cause significant problems in social and work situations as well as in relationships. According to the Mayo Clinic, the problems include intrusive memories, flashbacks, disturbing dreams, and emotional distress when something reminds the former soldier of those events. Additional symptoms include avoidance of thinking about the events or places that bring memories back, hopelessness, memory problems, irritability, aggressive outbursts, guilt, and alcohol and drug abuse. It’s a long list. Symptoms vary from individual to individual and in intensity.

When vets return to civilian life, they return to families and to our churches too. Often they receive no recognition or thanks for their sacrifice. Sometimes they face protests and rejection. After Vietnam, Opsahl crossed picket lines of protesters as he pursued his graduate studies. “We were hassled every day,” he says. In most cases those who have carried the sword of governmental authority—veterans

and police officers—find little understanding of the burdens they carry.

Opsahl regularly attends a support group. It provides an opportunity to talk with other vets. He says, “Sharing one’s thoughts with other PTSD military members has the soothing effect of knowing one is not alone. It lowers, a bit, the walls one builds to protect one’s fragile ego from those who know nothing or little of the indescribable steep slope to depression.”

So what can we do as Christians? God has placed us here to love one another. It might seem a bit glib, but you can “love a vet.” Don’t forget the police officers you know—not just the vets and officers in your congregation but all those in your community. For those in our congregations, we have a special opportunity to show empathy, support, and love. Pastors, church councils, and members need to be aware of what these men and women have gone through. The full and complete forgiveness of Christ is an important antidote to the demons that lie hidden just below the surface. Don’t forget to pray for the retired and active servants of our government who carried or still carry the sword.

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*John Braun is the executive editor of Forward in Christ.*

Many congregations are not large enough to provide a support group for veterans, but Opsahl and other vets in WELS and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod are forming an organization to help—the Lutheran Military Support Group. Its purpose is to share the gospel with vets and provide a network for Christian fellowship and support. Find additional information on p. 23.





# Living in the “mission trip era”

Earle D. Treptow

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Serving the  
people around  
you day after day  
has God's stamp  
of approval.

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Mission work used to be limited to a select few. That's no longer so. Thanks to the proliferation of Christian mission organizations, hundreds of thousands participate in mission work each year in places around the world.

These mission organizations arrange both short-term mission trips, lasting from a week to a month for those who will use vacation time to participate, and long-term mission trips for those who do not have obligations tying them to their home. Some of the mission trips focus on demonstrating Christ's love by helping people in need. Other mission trips center specifically on proclaiming Christ's love to those who don't yet know him as their Savior.

Ask those who have participated in mission trips about their experiences and you better pull up a chair, because they will have much to share. They will talk about the privilege of serving the Savior as they carried out important work, whether that was drilling a borehole to provide water for residents of a third-world country or having Bible studies in a country in which Christianity is illegal. Though they will grant that the days were long and the travel difficult, most wouldn't trade their mission experience for anything.

Thank the Lord for providing opportunities to serve him in places across the world, to participate in important work, and to have an impact on others!

The challenge of living in this “mission trip era” is that we may unwittingly begin to believe that the best service to offer the Lord is to travel to some distant locale to proclaim the gospel there and assist people in desperate need. Other service, while useful, pales in comparison. That's not at all how the Lord views it. The Savior doesn't set up grades and ranks of service, from spectacular to adequate. Instead, he gives us opportuni-

ties every day to thank him for his mercy and to make a positive impact on others. In fact, he wants us to consider everything we do as part of our service to him: “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17).

In his Small Catechism, Dr. Luther includes a Table of Duties. He applies passages of Scripture to the different positions in which the Lord places people, providing instruction about serving the Lord in those various offices. If you haven't recently reflected on the Table of Duties, pick up the catechism and read that section through prayerfully. The Lord has important work for you to carry out in each of the callings he has given you: employee (or employer), citizen, congregational member, child, parent, or spouse. The Lord intends to make an impact on others through you. He will do so in the midst of what may feel to you like the humdrum monotony of day-to-day life. You may not recognize the impact of your service, but God promises to bless others through you. Serving the people around you day after day has God's stamp of approval. He delights in your service, because he delights in you.

Does that say something about how the Lord would have you view your life? As a child of God, your whole life is about serving your Savior and making an impact on others. Day after day, in ordinary life, you have opportunities to demonstrate Christ's love and to proclaim Christ's love. Your whole life is a mission trip!

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








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By the grace of  
God we heard the  
invitation of Jesus to  
come, lay aside our  
heavy burdens,  
and receive the  
rest he gives.

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## Thanks for rest

Augustine of Hippo died in A.D. 430—too long ago for most of us to care. Many years ago I read his *Confessions* with college students, some who were headed off to the seminary. Several passages from his work still linger in my memory. Among them is a sentence perhaps familiar to many who may never have read the full text.

Augustine's paragraph begins, "Great are you, O Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise; your power is immense, and your wisdom beyond reckoning." It concludes with his famous sentence, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." As believers, we long to praise God because we have found our rest in him.

I am not ashamed to stand with Augustine 1,600 years later and offer my own thanks and praise to God. He also has led me to his rest. I am but one believer among the believers God has called by his grace. The ages are filled with them. Luther found special value in Augustine and also praised God for his grace. I'm not an Augustine or a Luther, but I know the same grace of God in Jesus.

I invite you to join me in praise and thanks to God, who has brought us all to his deep and satisfying rest. Consider the contrast. Those who run away from God looking for solace find none. They want their own way contrary to God's grace, and that often means contrary to God's principles. Anguish, turmoil, worry, dread, frustration, endless struggle, chasing after what never satisfies—all are captured in the word *restless*.

But we are at rest. By the grace of God we heard the invitation of Jesus to come, lay aside our heavy burdens, and receive the rest he gives. That grace in Jesus has shaped and molded us in ways we often don't think about. Who we are is written in the language

of God's grace and the red ink of Christ's blood.

We are different. The full, thorough forgiveness of Jesus gives us peace the world does not understand. As a matter of fact, the world, in seeking its own version of peace, remains a troubling and boiling pot of unrest. We praise God, who gives us peace that transcends the world's perceptions and moves us to love and help others. Grace has made us loved children of God and salt in our families, communities, and nation. Grace makes us different.

Augustine was no dreamy-eyed, ivory tower Christian. He experienced his own unrest without God. He knew sin and the bondage of the human heart to what is contrary to God's will. His praise flowed from the changes God's grace had made in him. Luther discovered the same grace of God, and it changed him as well. They both exalted in their praise of his grace.

Take your place with them and with me. We know and confess that we are "altogether sinful from birth," but with hungry and eager hearts we long for the reassurance of God's grace and the rest it gives. Grace has changed us too. Praise God that he has given us such rest. It allows us to close our eyes in death and consider it only a sleep. He will awaken us in glory.

Knowing his wonderful rest, we can count the many other blessings God has given us: family, friends, food, and all the things for which we are thankful. But, most important, we thank and praise God for his grace. He has made us his children and given us the confidence to trust he will care for us no matter what happens.

## "We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come."

Joel D. Otto

In the early centuries of the Christian church, it was common for Christians to gather regularly where their dead were entombed. The purpose was to remember those fellow Christians who had died in the Lord—especially martyrs who died for their faith—and rejoice in the hope of the resurrection. In fact, during one severe bout of persecution, Christians were banned from visiting their cemeteries. The hope of the resurrection was very real for the early church.

Our 21st-century world does its best to put off death. It's obsessed with diet and exercise, medication, surgery, and therapy. All of this can serve to mask the reality of death. Death is unnatural. It is ugly and nasty. It is what sinful humanity has earned and deserves (Romans 5:12; 6:23). No amount of embalming, make-up, or well-manicured cemetery lawns can change that fact. Everyone faces the death of loved ones. Everyone will face his or her own death. Death is an emotionally-charged subject, even if most people don't want to think or talk about its reality. No one escapes it.

As Christians, we have to face death's harshness. We also do our best to prolong our lives. Many Christians strive to care for the bodies God has given them by eating healthy, exercising regularly, and making use of the blessings of medicines. Yet we recognize the ultimate futility of these measures. No matter what we might do to live longer, we will all eventually face death—unless Jesus returns first. And our journey will also include dealing with the loss of loved ones.

But we react differently. The death of a Christian, while a sad time because we lose the companionship of a loved one, becomes a victory celebration. Our own death, while scary and unpleasant because of possible pain and an uncertain process, is the way God brings us to the

heaven he was won for us and prepared for us (John 14:1-3). He gave his Son into death that "whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Jesus is "the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in [him] will live, even though they die" (John 11:25). Jesus "has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10).

That is why we "do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). We are confident that when we Christians die and are buried, our bodies will be raised and glorified when Jesus returns in glory (1 Corinthians 15:51-54; Philippians 3:20,21). Because our Redeemer lives, we will enjoy a new eternal, heavenly home where we see God face to face and enjoy life without suffering or sadness (Job 19:25-27; Revelation 21:1-4). With Christians down through the centuries, "we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come."

### EXPLORING THE WORD

1. How might the promise of the resurrection give you comfort as you face difficulties in life?
2. Explain how you would find comfort in the promise of the resurrection as you face the death of Christian loved ones.
3. Explain how you can comfort a friend at the loss of a loved one.

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

We  
believe  
as all  
believers  
have



# God's love IS REAL

Can I make a confession? There's a little part of me that smiles when my children cry.

I never felt that way until we adopted our son. At his first doctor's appointment, the nurse tried to draw blood. She missed the vein and tried again. Many more pricks followed. Throughout the process, our nine-month-old son didn't shed a tear. In his orphanage, he'd already learned that there was no point in crying out. No one would answer.

## EVERY HURT PROVIDES A CHANCE FOR HEALING

Adoption literature talks a lot about *connectedness*. The connections that truly bind parent to child don't appear in a flash the moment they first lock eyes. They're more like well-worn wheel ruts, dug deep as you travel the same path again and again. A hurt is felt, a cry is made, a loving response is given. The connection forms.

I think about that now every time I read Luke's account of the ten lepers. Ten men suffering from leprosy cry out to Jesus. He hears them and sends them to the priests. On their way, they're healed. One comes back, giving thanks to God (Luke 17:11-19).

What do you think he was so thankful for? I'm sure he was filled with thanksgiving that his leprosy was gone. Did he understand everything about why Jesus came? I don't know. But he understood that no matter how much he had hurt, no matter how alone he'd felt, God heard him. God's own Son healed him and loved him.

It always makes me wonder if he thanked God for his leprosy. Without it, he never would have known how



**Give thanks for the  
troubles in your life.  
Through them, you can  
see God's healing and  
his saving love.**

Joel C. Seifert

much God loved him. Without it, he never would have found his Savior from sin. A hurt, a cry, a response. And he knew he was loved.

## THANKFULNESS IN ALL THINGS

God doesn't smile because his children cry. But he does rejoice to help us. He wants us to know that he hears us and loves us. Every act of "healing" is there to point us to his love in sending his Son to forgive our sins.

It's wonderful to give thanks for our houses, our jobs, our newborn babies, and our faithful friends. But maybe we have still more reasons to give thanks:

- The lean times when we didn't think we'd make it, but God gave daily bread.
- The challenges in our marriages. They drove us to God's Word, and God gave healing we never could have imagined.
- Our sicknesses which opened our eyes to God's great compassion.
- The crushing guilt of our sins which drives us to know what the forgiveness of Jesus really feels like.
- The lingering pain or hurt that turns us to Jesus and his promises that he is with us every day.

A hurt, a cry, a response. We know we're loved.

After a few more jabs with the needle, my son finally started to cry. Many more tears will come over the years! I don't really smile at his pain, but I give thanks for a chance to show him my love is real. The well-worn wheel ruts keep getting deeper. When our Father in heaven does the same, we have every reason to give thanks. "We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:3-5).

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