

# Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



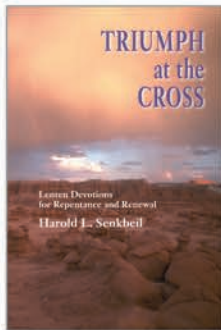
## Christian love

While celebrating love this  
Valentine's Day, remember the  
Spirit's gift of Christian love. *Page 10*



# Lent

## A Time for Repentance

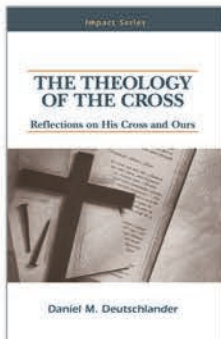


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by Harold L. Senkbeil

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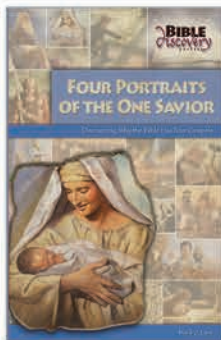


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MORE THAN  
**250**   
KOREAN NATIONALS

HAVE ATTENDED WELS  
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teachers and pastors. Some return to  
their homeland to share the gospel.

# A GROWING ASIAN MINISTRY

The culture, customs, and religions are different on the other side of the world, but the gospel message offers the same salvation for those at home and abroad. WELS World Missions is collaborating with other areas of ministry and expanding outreach in Asia to include Korea, Vietnam, and the Philippines.

*"Proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people" (Revelation 14:6).*



Learn more about Missions and cross-cultural ministries at [wels.net/missions](https://wels.net/missions).

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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

Even though each of us is part of a synod of almost 400,000 members, it can be easy to forget how reassuring and encouraging it is to be part of a larger group with shared beliefs. Instead we may focus on what separates us rather than what unites us. In a new four-part series based on his 2015 convention essay, Pastor James Huebner reminds us what it means to be *one in Christ*—one with God, one in faith, one in purpose, and one in service. Read his first article on p. 12.

If you do find yourself taking that fellowship for granted, remember many of our missions and other international church bodies—groups with only a few congregations and a handful of members scattered around the country. These churches truly appreciate being part of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, an organization of 29 member churches worldwide that provides a forum for confessional Lutherans in fellowship. Eighty church leaders from at least ten different countries in Asia gathered in South Korea in October to celebrate that fellowship and to learn from and encourage each other (p. 24). Keep them in your prayers and be assured that they are praying for each other and for you as we all continue to reach out with God's Word around the world.

Julie Wietzke



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# Through my Bible in 3 years



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

FEBRUARY 2016

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| 1. Matthew 4      | 11. Joel 2:18-3:21   | 21. Obadiah          |
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| 7. Matt. 7:13-29  | 17. Habakkuk 1:1-2:5 | 27. Matt. 11:1-19    |
| 8. Jonah 1, 2     | 18. Hab. 2:6-20      | 28. Matt. 11:20-30   |
| 9. Jon. 3, 4      | 19. Hab. 3:1-15      | 29. Matt. 12:1-21    |
| 10. Joel 1:1-2:17 | 20. Hab. 3:16-19     |                      |

## Defining religion



**Jehovah (Yahweh):** The proper name of the triune God, signifying his steadfast love (Exodus 34:5-7). This name was so sacred to the people of Israel that they would not pronounce it. Instead they substituted the LORD whenever they read it in the Old Testament. Our English translations also usually translate this Hebrew word as the LORD.

## ONE in Christ

We praise our generous Savior and thank everyone who has given a "One in Christ" offering to date, helping us toward the goal of eliminating WELS' \$4.7 million debt.

Meeting the goal by God's blessing will help us move forward in ministry to train workers and establish missions at home and abroad.

“I recently received the One in Christ letter. I will donate, but if you would provide a donation meter, I promise to donate more! I truly believe that people are far more motivated to donate when they can see the progress for the timeframe that has been set. I WANT TO SEE THIS OFFERING REACH ITS GOAL!”

—BETTY SPRINGEN

*Faith Lutheran Church, Anchorage, Alaska*



## MOVING FORWARD IN MINISTRY

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# Love's pain and promise

Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." Luke 2:34,35

Joel C. Seifert

Maybe this doesn't seem like the right time of year to say it, but it's a lot easier not to love. As soon as you love someone, you have something to lose.

We like to pretend that isn't true. Pay attention to the commercials and TV shows this month. More often than not, you'll see beautiful images of the joy and bliss that we experience from our relationships. We love *love*.

But love brings pain too. Consider the picture of pure love that St. Luke sets before our eyes: A new mother brings her baby to the temple in order to carry out the Lord's will. She loves her newborn. Prompted by God's Spirit, another worshiper approaches them and says, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

## LOVING GOD WILL BRING PAIN

Mary heard Simeon say that her deep love for her son will also hurt her. She'll learn it in practice many times after that. She'll feel the prick of sadness as his ministry takes him away from her. She'll feel little daggers of pain when she hears him mocked as a fool, when she sees the religious leaders grow more opposed to him, and when she observes some of his disciples leave him. And one day, as she stands at the foot of his cross, a sword of pain will pierce her heart as she watches her boy die, unable to even hold him in her own arms. She loves her son, her Savior, and that love will bring her pain.

Love brings us pain at times too. When we love God, we hurt when



others think he is unimportant. It stings us when we hear people mock him. It cuts us when people we love leave him. How many painful moments do we have when we read and watch stories of the persecution of those who love our God and Savior.

## GOD'S LOVE COMES WITH A PROMISE

That's why God gives us a promise. I don't know if Simeon understood all the details, but he was there in the temple courts that day because God had promised him that he would see the Savior who would restore God's people. When God makes a promise, he keeps it.

That's what sustained Simeon in his years of waiting. That's what would carry Mary through. No matter how much hurt they faced or how much they seemed to lose, God's love came with a promise. It would be worth it. A sword might pierce Mary's soul,

but there in her arms was the Savior who would redeem her soul. What could she really lose?

Many Christians set apart Feb. 2 as a day to remember when Mary brought Jesus to the temple courts. What a fitting way to begin a month that's so focused on love! You are a believer. Your love for God will lead you to honor God in your relationship with your boyfriend or girlfriend, husband or wife—in any and all of your earthly relationships. Speak his words to correct each other and to point each other back to our real hope. Sometimes that may bring pain. That's always a risk when you love Jesus. But you'll never really lose. After all, God's given you his promise.

*Contributing editor Joel Seifert is pastor at Shining Mountains, Bozeman, Montana.*

Learn more about FIC's new contributing editor Joel Seifert on p. 23.



*Mark Schweden*

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The fact that the synod's vacancy rate now and in the near future does not indicate a looming pastoral shortage is a real blessing from God.

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# Pastoral vacancies bring challenges and blessings

In my travels around the synod, some of the questions I often hear are, "What is the situation with pastoral vacancies? Do we have more vacancies than normal? With smaller class sizes at the seminary, will we be facing a pastoral shortage in the near future?"

As of the last meeting of the Conference of Presidents, there were 77 vacancies in positions requiring pastoral training. Since there are about 1,570 such positions, this represents a vacancy rate of about 5 percent. While somewhat higher than it has been in the last few years, the vacancy rate has not risen dramatically. The Conference of Presidents feels that any vacancy rate under 8 percent is manageable.

It's true that classes at the seminary now and in recent years have been smaller than in the past. While class sizes had been averaging near 40 for some time, some classes lately have been in the low 30s. So we can expect the vacancy rate to increase in the short term. It should be noted, however, that several classes now at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., are larger and much closer to the previous levels.

Several years ago, there were concerns that we would see a significant pastoral shortage when pastors born in the "baby boom" era began to retire. This shortage has not materialized for several reasons. More pastors are choosing to serve in a semi-retirement capacity in small congregations that may not need a full-time pastor. In addition to that, we are seeing an increase in the number of small congregations, especially in rural areas, joining together with a neighboring congregation as a dual parish that can be served by one pastor. Both of these developments have served to keep the vacancy rate from rising more than it has.

In general, our current vacancy rate is not a bad thing. Having a certain number of vacancies results in more pastors receiving and accepting calls, and periodic changes in ministry are often beneficial both for the congregation and called worker. It is always a good thing for a pastor to have the opportunity to receive a call and prayerfully to consider his current ministry and the needs of the other congregation. It's also beneficial and healthy for a congregation when its pastor receives a call. The members not only have an opportunity to reevaluate the work that the congregation is doing, but they also have the privilege of giving encouragement to their spiritual shepherd. It's also an opportunity for everyone to offer prayers of thanks for the way God has provided leadership; direction; and, most important, the regular proclamation of the gospel, God's power among us. And even though a vacancy provides some significant challenges for a congregation, it can be a good time to reassess thoroughly the needs of the congregation.

The fact that the synod's vacancy rate now and in the near future does not indicate a looming pastoral shortage is a real blessing from God. But that is not a reason for us to relax in our efforts to encourage young men to prepare for the pastoral ministry. The ninth grader who is beginning his pastoral education next fall will not be ordained as a pastor until the year 2028. We can't know what the needs of the church will be that many years into the future. What is certain, though, is that when we have a young man saying, "Here am I, send me!" we should be ready and committed to having a place for him to serve.



# Light for our path

**As a modern American I have trouble understanding how the Old Testament animal sacrifices were pleasing to God. Because of that, I do not understand why God would want or accept the sacrifice of his Son. Can you explain this?**

James F. Pope

I can appreciate your question because you and I are so far removed from the time and culture of the Old Testament sacrificial system. If we bridge those cultural gaps, we can come to appreciate the twofold message of the animal sacrifices.

## A VIVID MESSAGE OF GOD'S LAW

Euphemisms for sin abound today. People speak of “mistakes,” “indiscretions,” “poor choices,” and “errors in judgment.” Those alternate terms for sin are designed to lower the guilt level in a person’s conscience and boost self-esteem. Unfortunately, those terms mask the seriousness of sin and the need for a Savior from sin.

By contrast, the Old Testament sacrificial system indicted people as rebels who violated God’s will by their “sins,” “transgressions,” and “iniquities.” The killing of an animal broadcasted a powerful message to the people, and the message was that sin is serious. “The one who sins is the one who will die” (Ezekiel 18:20). Worshipers who witnessed the slaughter of a sacrificial animal had every reason to think, “My sins are serious. I rightly deserve punishment from God. I need forgiveness for my sins.”

## A BEAUTIFUL PICTURE OF GOD'S GOSPEL

And yet, in that same sacrificial system there was good news for the worshipers. While the sacrificing of an animal provided a graphic image of the seriousness of sin, it also painted a beautiful picture of the forgiving love of God. The sacrificing of an animal taught the worshiper to think, “I deserve to die and be punished for my sins, but God accepts a substitute and spares me.” Those animal substitutes pointed ahead to the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. The animals were to be perfect and without spot. The Messiah was

like them; he was without sin—a substitute for the sinners for whom he died.

Against the backdrop of countless animal sacrifices pointing to a hill outside Jerusalem, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement” (Romans 3:25). The sacrifice of the Son of God did what the animal sacrifices could only portray: It removed sin and guilt (Hebrews 10:1-18). And consider now what that sacrifice says about God.

## A WINDOW INTO GOD'S HEART

“Why would God want or accept the sacrifice of his Son?” you wonder. Because he desires the salvation of all people. God does not want “anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). God “wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). The plan of salvation that God set up and implemented involved the sacrifice of his own Son.

That Son once said, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). Imagine the love of someone who lays down his life, not for friends, but for sinners, a world of sinners (Romans 5:8)! God’s love for sinners moved him to institute the sacrificial system and then sacrifice his own Son.

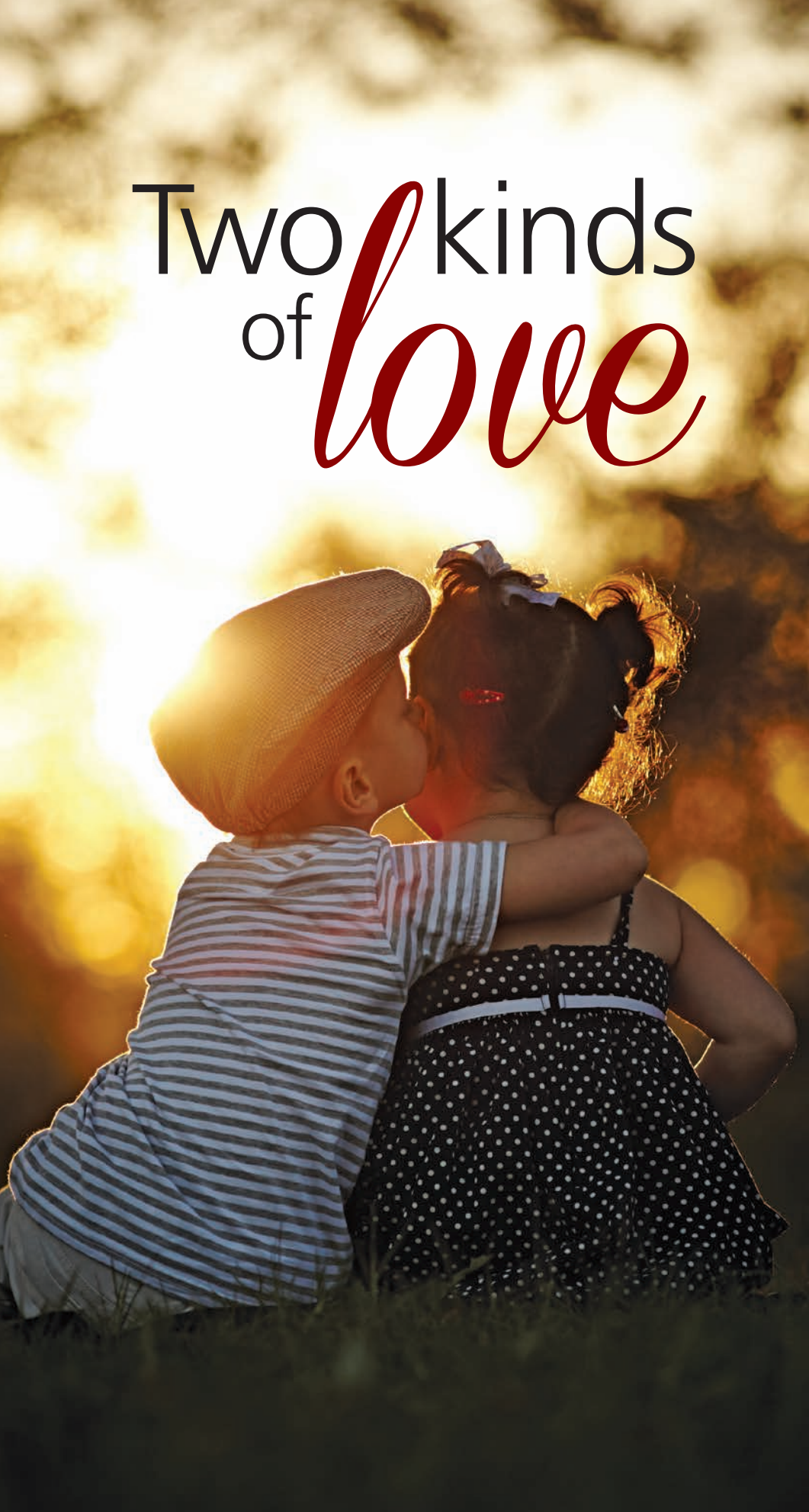
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James Pope also answers questions online at [wels.net/questions](http://wels.net/questions). Submit your questions there or to [fic@wels.net](mailto:fic@wels.net).

*Your word*  
is a lamp  
for my feet,  
a light on  
my path.

Psalms 119:105





# Two kinds of *love*

**God blesses our relationships with human affection and love, but he has a greater love to give to his people.**

Rolfe F. Westendorf

“I hold it true, whate’er befall; I feel it when I sorrow most. ‘Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all” (from “In Memoriam A.H.H.”).

Alfred Lord Tennyson penned these words while grieving over the loss of a dear friend. He’s right, of course. As we suffer the pain of our loss, it is logical that we wouldn’t feel the pain if the deceased had been a stranger. We might pity the one who died. We may sympathize with others who are grieving the loss of a loved one. But we would escape the pain if we hadn’t come to love the deceased person in the first place.

## **NATURAL LOVE**

But Tennyson realized that escaping the pain was too high a price to pay for the loss of the joy that comes from loving a person.

This joy is most clearly seen in the love that parents have for their newborn child. The tiny stranger doesn’t love them. He makes huge demands and gives nothing in return. Yet the parents love their baby with all their hearts and faithfully provide for the child to the best of their ability. And they enjoy doing it, at least most of the time.

Love provides similar benefits wherever it occurs between husband and wife, friends and companions. Love rewards us with benefits from having another person who means a lot to us. We discover value in ourselves that comes from our desire to benefit the one we love.

Of course, the loss of this benefit causes pain. We can no longer help a person after death. Careless spouses



can neglect and destroy the love that brought them together. Friends can betray each other and lose the love that made their friendship a joy. Death, neglect, and betrayal are all the results of the sinful nature that infects us all.

Yes, the loss of love causes pain. But as long as love lasts, it is a blessing in our lives. And the greater the blessing, the greater the pain of losing it. Yet, in spite of the pain, Tennyson was right: “’Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.”

### ANOTHER KIND OF LOVE

Of course, Tennyson was talking about the kind of love almost all people understand. It is one of the joys God has given us in our human journeys, and he provides it for believers and unbelievers alike, almost like allowing the rain to fall on the just and the unjust.

The Bible talks about this kind of natural love. It also talks about another kind of love that is similar yet significantly different. Tennyson’s love is based on relationships and doesn’t have to recognize God or his love. But the second kind of love has deep roots in the richness of God’s love for us. It is a love that is the result of the Spirit working through God’s Word (Galatians 5:22).

It is not natural for us to love God, and God clearly has no reason to love us. By nature he is holy and hates sin. By nature we are sinners and helpless to change that condition. But God chose to love us in spite of our nature and loved us so much that he sacrificed his Son for our salvation. As a result of this love of God, we were cleansed from our guilt and declared holy for heaven.

Many are unaware of God’s love. Some plainly reject it. But when God’s love is received through faith, it produces an unnatural effect upon the sinner’s heart. Paul simply says: “For

Christ’s love compels us” (2 Corinthians 5:14). Because of Christ’s love, we behave in a way that is unnatural for sinners. We love each other—even when the others do not deserve our love—because Jesus loved us. We pattern our love on his love. The Holy Spirit gives us such love; it is a spiritual gift from God.

This spiritual love produces unexpected results. When normal human love is abused, it fades away. People who once loved each other drift apart, so that they no longer love each other. But spiritual love remains. Jesus has not stopped loving us, so we continue to love each other.

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## Love based only on human standards can be destroyed, but spiritual love remains.

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The benefit of this spiritual love is demonstrated in a marriage that survives in spite of neglect and abuse. Love based only on human standards can be destroyed, but spiritual love remains. It may be abused, but it keeps loving, searching for a way to mend and help. Sometimes it is able to endure long enough so that people who have drifted apart begin to love each other naturally again.

### OUR LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

Spiritual love is not based on being loved in return. Even when there is no human reason for mutual attraction, the Spirit creates affection, even for people who happen to be strangers. Visitors to a Christian congregation are often impressed with the genuine friendliness they find there. And why not? When the Spirit plants spiritual love into the heart of a Christian, his or her welcome is not artificial. It is

the genuine love that the visitor appreciates and desires. Visitors who experience this Christian love will be interested in returning for more of the same. Spiritual love will not make Christians of them. Only Word and sacrament can do that. But if a Christian’s love has made them feel welcome, they are more likely to return. Then they can receive the means of grace, which can eventually create Christian faith and spiritual love in their hearts.

Natural human love cannot accomplish this. Natural love is based on mutual relationships, and there is no relationship with a stranger. Instead there is only the artificial friendliness of the salesman, which lasts as long as there is the prospect of a sale. Visitors may be impressed by artificial friendliness, but such friendliness does not produce lasting relationships.

I once thought I had a friend in the person who sold me my car. But once the sale was complete, I was no longer his friend. He moved his friendliness to the next customer. A good lesson, I think. Artificial friendliness may persuade a visitor to return. But if the friendliness is artificial, he will not return often. Christian love means that the visitor is welcomed as a friend as often as he returns, without the benefit of other positive experiences. And that is the love that our God desires.

His law says, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” even if that neighbor is your enemy. Natural human love cannot accomplish this. But the unnatural love created by the Spirit feels affection for those who would otherwise not be our friends.

Yes, natural love is good, but we are not satisfied with that. We also desire the gift of the Spirit—Christian love. It’s the greatest gift (1 Corinthians 13).

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*Rolfe Westendorf, a retired pastor, is a member at Grace, Dalton, Wisconsin.*



**In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he encourages them to treasure their unity in Christ. First, he reminds them how they became one with God.**

James R. Huebner

The apostle Paul was in Rome under house arrest, “a prisoner for the Lord.” While there, word came to him that the members of the church in Ephesus, a congregation he had founded and spent three years building, were at each other’s throats. So he wrote a letter urging oneness and unity.

How could oneness ever happen in Ephesus? The congregation was made up primarily of two culture groups. Some Christians in that congregation had come from an Israelite background. Others had come from a Greek or non-Israelite background. And they didn’t get along. The Greek Christians brought ham and bacon to the Easter

brunch, and the Jewish Christians became nauseous. The Jewish Christians were asking, “How can Greeks be in God’s family? They aren’t descendants of Abraham.” The Greek Christians were wondering, “Are we good enough to be members of God’s family?”

The same tensions exist among us. We come from different homes, different congregations, and different districts. We have different views on what areas of ministry should get priority, different opinions about which translation of the Bible to use, and different thoughts on how to carry out our worship. In light of those differences, some might think “one in Christ” is wishful thinking at best or a white-washing of reality at worst. Based on what Paul wrote to the Ephesians and us, I believe it is a statement of fact.

One in Christ means first that we are one with God.

#### **NATURALLY WE ARE NOT ONE WITH GOD**

What most people in our world don’t know—but need to know—is that we were born with a death notice hanging



over us. Spiritually, we were stillborn. That's the shocker the apostle dropped on the Ephesians: "We were dead in transgressions" (2:5).

It is normal and natural for people to believe that every newborn is innocent, that if your heart and lungs are functioning, you have a spark of good in you. But if you want to know the truth about what it takes to be one with God, then you have to come to grips with the fact that there is no such thing as an innocent baby. No human has potential to be as good as God demands. "All have turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Psalm 14:3). The sinful nature we have from birth is rightly classified as our biggest fault and the root of all our faults.

What we desperately need in order to be one with God is a miracle of forgiveness from God. Jesus made that happen! This is the best news anyone could ever hear. God works in

ways unexpected and undeserved primarily in raising people from spiritual death to spiritual life. Think about how God teaches us about grace. Israelites, what did you do to be cured and healed of venomous snake bites? "Nothing! God did it with his promise of healing." Nicodemus, what did you do to be born? "Nothing!" My friends, what did you or I do to be one with God? Nothing! The phrases are piled up, excluding all human activity. "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works" (Ephesians 2:8,9).

### **WE BECOME ONE WITH GOD THROUGH HIS GRACE**

If you wanted to write a letter encouraging people toward unity, how would you start? Pointing out their errors and weaknesses? Offering a step-by-step "how to"? Cajoling them? The apostle begins in a most unexpected way, with a hymn of praise! He starts, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). But he doesn't stop there. In fact, he bubbles over with so much excitement that verses three to ten of chapter one are one, long, run-on sentence. In Christ, everything we could ever hope for or imagine when it comes to our relationship with God is already ours.

That news fills our hearts with so much joy that we spring out of bed each day with a smile on our face, lift our eyes heavenward, and call out, "Thank you, Lord, for this wonderful day!" Right? Or would it be more accurate to say that more often than not, instead of having eyes lifted heavenward, our noses are earth-bound, buried in the drudgery and doldrums of dredging for daily bread?

And then what? We complain. Has complaining become a national pastime? We complain about the weather. It's either too hot or too cold, too humid or too dry. If not the weather, then it's our health: the allergies, the arthritis, the feet, the back. If not health, then it's the government. If not the government, then it's the sermon, the ushers, the organist, or the noisy kids. We always seem to find some reason to complain.

How can we break the pattern of grumbling and complaining? That happens when we are absolutely clear on how we became one with God. Paul points to the reason in his opening hymn of praise. We are God's children

because of his glorious grace (1:6). Even before God set the moon and stars and planets in their places, God looked down through the corridors of time and singled us out to be his own. "He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in

his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will" (Ephesians 1:4,5).

What prompted God to single us out to be his children? It is his love "in Christ." That phrase "in Christ" (or "in him" or "through Jesus Christ") occurs 150 times in Ephesians and 10 times in the opening 14 verses. God did not choose us in the way that children choose players when they pick sides for a ball game. The captains try to pick the best players first. But when God chose us, it was not because of some potential in us but only because of Jesus.

Do you want joy and hope in a world that can drag you down? Then lift your eyes to the cross of Jesus and see the price paid for your oneness with God. In a world of confusion where things do not always add up, Christ Jesus makes sense of it all. Life is no mystery when God has revealed to us the mystery of his mercy. "[God] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ . . . to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ" (Ephesians 1:9,10).

No matter how different we all are, we are one with God because of what Jesus did. No disagreements or dividers here. That's what it means to be one in Christ.

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*James Huebner, pastor at Grace, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is the first vice president of WELS.*

This is the first article in a four-part series based on the 2015 synod convention essay entitled "One in Christ."

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No matter how different we  
all are, we are one with God  
because of what Jesus did.

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## A passage from God's Word brought some sobering thoughts and started a dramatic change.

Alicia A. Neumann

Charles and Jamie Thibodeaux, members at St. Paul's, Menomonie, Wis., regularly attend church. They have family devotions. Their son attends Lutheran elementary school.

But it wasn't always this way; in fact, Charles says, "If you would have said to me five years ago that I'd eventually become a member of a church, especially a Lutheran church, I would've said no way." At that time, he and Jamie weren't attending church at all—and, as a result, they say their marriage started to suffer.

Then God's Word entered their lives, and everything changed.

### MEETING EACH OTHER

Charles and Jamie started dating while they were attending college in Kansas. They were both far from home on sports scholarships: Charles, originally from Alabama, was there to play football. Jamie, originally from Wisconsin, was playing softball.

After college they moved in together, then they got engaged. Looking back,

Jamie said she never felt good about their living situation. "I lied to my parents about moving in with Charles; I just never felt right about it," says Jamie, who was raised WELS. Charles, on the other hand, says at that time he didn't think it was a big deal to live together. "I was baptized Catholic and had some exposure to church—mostly Pentecostal churches—but I wasn't active at all," he says. "I didn't have any background or biblical teaching in my family to tell me that living together is not right and that's not how a man should act. But we weren't living right, and things weren't working out."

### CHALLENGES IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP

They started having fights, so Jamie moved back to Wisconsin for a while. Charles moved to Wisconsin too, and they decided to get married. Although Charles was opposed to organized religion, he consented to having the wedding at the WELS church Jamie grew up in. He even went through premarital counseling—but after they were married, Jamie says he rarely attended church. "Charles really was just not into the organized religion thing," she says. "He didn't like it. He would go to appease me, but we weren't praying together or doing devotions together in our marriage." They had two children, Jaylyn and Layla, and both were baptized—but Charles said at

that point he still was just going through the motions. "I believed in God, but I had no idea what baptism or any of that stuff meant," he says.

Soon they were having marital issues. "We were starting to talk about divorce," says Charles. "I wanted to go back to Alabama. I just didn't want to be here anymore." Jamie and Charles went to talk to the pastor who married them, and he recommended they do a special five-week class with another pastor in their area. "He said I at least need to know where Jamie is coming from with her faith and what she believes," says Charles. "So I agreed to that, reluctantly."

### FINDING DIRECTION FROM GOD'S WORD

"All the pastor did is started preaching the Word of God to us," says Charles. "He told us what a marriage looks like and what men and women are supposed to be doing. There were even some things Jamie didn't know or realize, even though she went to a Lutheran school when she was little."

During that Bible lesson, Charles says something clicked for him. "I remember the exact moment: Pastor was talking about the Bible passage where husbands should instruct their children in the way of the Lord. At that moment, I realized that I had not been doing my job as a father and a husband."



# Confessions OF FAITH



He says it became clear that what he said and did—especially his decisions about attending church or studying God's Word—directly impacted his kids and their spiritual well-being. "It was such a scary and humbling situation; it changed my life," says Charles. "I knew it was God talking through the pastor, saying, 'You need to get yourself together. Your children are going to grow up and they won't go to church and won't be Christians because you're not doing your job. And your wife is suffering because you're not doing the job I gave you.' Literally, that one passage changed my outlook."

Soon the Thibodeauxs were going to church at St. Paul's every Sunday, and Charles took confirmation classes. "Jamie went to the classes with me, and there were a lot of things she had forgotten!" says Charles. "We learned so much. We became members of St. Paul's and haven't looked back since."

### SEEING THE IMPACT OF GOD'S WORD

Charles says he's still amazed by the huge switch in their lives. "God's Word is just so powerful," he says. "He tells you what you need to be doing and to get your head on straight. I was never planning on going to Bible classes or being a member. But after that day, it was completely

clear to me. The direction of our marriage started going better. I'm not going to say our marriage is perfect; there are always struggles. But we keep going back to the question: 'Is this Christ-pleasing?' That's the blueprint we follow."

Studying God's Word is also helping them as a family. Jamie says they work hard to do devotions every day. "You have to continually go back to the Word," she says. "When we do devotions together, we're a better, stronger family." Charles agrees: "We're a young family with young kids, and we're trying to listen to what God wants us to do. I know we fail, but thankfully we have got God's grace and forgiveness along the way."

When their son was old enough to start school, Charles and Jamie were originally considering sending him to public school—but then their pastor started talking to them about St. Paul's School. Charles says, "I think that was God's way of saying, 'Hey, you should put him in that school. I'll make sure you find a way to pay for it. Put him in that school and let him learn about the Word of God.'"

The Thibodeauxs say these changes in their lives wouldn't have been possible without God's intervention. "It had nothing to do with us," says Charles. "God moved us. He opened up his arms and said, 'Yes, I still want you.'"



Charles and Jamie Thibodeaux and their children Jaylyn and Layla

Looking back, Jamie says it's easy to see God working in their lives, as they went from not attending church at all to actively studying the Word together. "Before, I would catch Charles playing video games and now I catch him reading the Bible," she says. "Where we are now as a family—it's only because of Christ."

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



## heart to heart parent conversations

I often feel like I spend most of my days trying to instill respectfulness in my kids. In a society that increasingly seems to mock respect, it can seem to be an uphill battle. Let's go back to basics. What does God's Word say about respect? How can we model that for our kids? Read these articles and be reminded that respect hasn't gone out of style for God and his people.

Do you have something to say? There's a reason we called this column Heart to heart: Parent conversations. We want to hear from you! Tell us about your parenting struggles and successes.



## 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 TEACH OUR CHILDREN TO BE RESPECTFUL?

**Sometimes I feel** like that old comedian who after every joke tugged at his collar and whined, "I tell ya, I get no respect."

My boys don't always show respect. And that's a problem—not just with me, but with God who commands, "Honor your father and your mother . . ." (Exodus 20:12) and "Each of you must respect your mother and father" (Leviticus 19:3).

So if I'm going to be a faithful and loving parent, I'm going to have to teach my kids to show me respect. But that's hard, because my sinful anger gets in the way whenever I feel disrespected. So before I consider my relationship with my kids, I need to consider my relationship to God. How well do I respect him?

If I'm honest, I have to admit that I disrespect God every time I sin—even when that sin is prompted by my boys'

**People want respect**, and yet it looks different for different people. We think we deserve respect, and yet Jesus, who truly deserves our respect, never demanded respect from anyone. I am realizing that I use the word *respect* often without much thought to what it really means.

Some very wise women in my circle of friends describe respect this way:

"I believe that respect is attached to value. If you can understand that someone is valuable, whether you agree with them or not, you hold them in high enough regard to allow them to be who they are."

"Fearless submission. Honoring others above one's self. Knowing you do not have to protect and defend your 'self' but rather live outrageously free in your relationship

**"Each of you** must respect your mother and father" (Leviticus 19:3). This is a direct command from God. The explanation to the Fourth Commandment says, "We should fear and love God that we do not dishonor or anger our parents and others in authority but honor, serve, and obey them and give them love and respect." Unfortunately, we are born into the world with a sinful nature, and showing respect does not come naturally. As parents, this means that we have to learn respect and then teach our children how to show respect.

We don't have to look far to find examples of disrespect. How often are grade school gyms filled with parents and coaches who show disrespect for authority by disagreeing with every call made by the official? And what about political campaigns? Respect is replaced with mudslinging, lies, and rudeness.

How easy it is to think that we have the right to talk poorly about coworkers, second-guess our bosses, lash



disrespect. In essence I say to God what my boys say to me, “What I want is more important than what you want. I choose to make myself the authority instead of you.”

How does God handle it? He doesn’t allow me to talk back to him without consequences. He teaches me in love that it’s not okay to do things my way instead of his way. “The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son” (Hebrews 12:6).

So too I won’t allow my boys to talk back to me without consequences. I will discipline them (with a struggle for great patience and careful instruction) when they are disrespectful.

But that’s not all God does. He doesn’t just discipline me with his law. He also earns my respect and—even more—my love by his gospel. He sent his own Son to face the disrespect and torture of sinful men, to be crucified on a cross for me. And now I am completely forgiven for my disrespectful attitude

and for every sin that has resulted from it. This moves me to love and respect God and to want to live for him.

So too I will try to earn my boys’ respect—and their love—by showing my love for them. I will try to motivate my boys to show respect by showing them how much God loves them in Christ. And with his help, using his law and his gospel, I will better learn to respect God, and my boys will better learn to respect me—all out of love for God.

To read an expanded version of this article, visit [forwardinchrist.net/get-no-respect](http://forwardinchrist.net/get-no-respect).

*Rob Guenther and his wife, Becky, have four sons ages 11 and under.*



with others because God is on his throne. Respect is not trying to control the outcome but rather letting it unfold.”

“Respect is love in plain clothes.”

“Recognizing the value God placed on another person because of his Son’s life and sacrifice (Jesus *died* for that person) and deferring to them because of their value to God.”

“I think respect grows from the seed of humility that you plant in his light and care for lovingly.”

Pretty profound if you ask me.

So how do we teach these concepts to our children? Follow Jesus’ example. Model giving respect to others. Jesus showed respect to those he encountered—from the woman at the well to doubting Thomas.

Paul tells us, “Submit to one another out of reverence for

Christ” (Ephesians 5:21). What does submitting have to do with respect? Reread the answers my lovely friends shared about what respect means. It is submitting. It is putting others ahead of ourselves. It is not demanding. It is loving.

Show your children what respect is by respecting them, by respecting your spouse, by respecting your leaders, by respecting the referees at your children’s games. Showing your children how to respect others melds into showing them how to love—even the unlovable, even our enemies, even if we think it’s not deserved, even people with whom we disagree, and even those who disagree with us. Respect can and does go a long way.

*Jenni Schubring and her husband, Tad, have three sons and a daughter.*



out at a nearby driver, be short-tempered with the waitress who isn’t meeting our expectations, put devices before a child or spouse, or speak rudely to that person who just can’t see things from our perspective. Unfortunately, these examples all came to mind because at one time or another, I was guilty of them myself.

The reality is that our children are watching. I was stopped dead in my tracks one night at our family campfire. While making s’mores, the inevitable happened. My five-year-old son dropped his marshmallow into the fire. With great disgust he shouted, “C’mon! You’ve *got to be kidding* me!” My wife’s jaw dropped. Sadly, this didn’t sound odd to me. I had shouted the exact same words with the exact same emotion at the TV while watching a college game about an hour earlier.

More important than pointing out examples of disrespectful behavior, we can joyfully model for our children how to respect others. A great way to begin teaching the lifelong habit of respect is to teach proper manners. We can also teach our

children how to respect our country and those who make it great. We should also expect our children to respect their pastors and teachers. We can help foster this by praying for them, speaking well of them, never questioning them in front of our children, and expecting that our children listen to them the first time.

Learning respect will not happen without a few bumps in the road. When a child shows disrespect, it is our opportunity to show love to them by holding them accountable.

Be sure to spend time with your children in God’s Word. Remind them of his love for all people. One of our family’s favorite songs states, “Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world!” When we show respect to all of God’s creation, we show honor to him.

*Aaron Bauer and his wife, Sarah, have three sons and a daughter.*





# teentalk

## From falling to soaring

Getting closer to her heavenly Father helps a teen through hard times.

Elisabeth Hahm

Is your life messed up? Mine is. I don't have a real reason to be stressed. My Christian parents are married and plan to be forever. Although we aren't rich, we are comfortable. I'm not bullied at school, and I am active in my church. I even read my Bible every night before bed. I don't have any reason to be unhappy, do I?

I am, though. I can be so unhappy and depressed. Sometimes I am just a weepy mess. I curl up in a ball and sob. I feel like I'm falling into a dark hole. I feel alone, angry, worried, embarrassed by the past, and scared of the future. Sometimes I don't even know what I feel.

**One day a friend showed me a nightly devotion she did.** She would read a chapter of the Bible, then pick a favorite verse from the chapter. I thought it was neat, but I was already doing my own Bible readings and did not feel like I needed it. Then later, when I was going through a particularly stressful time, I decided to give it a try.

I started reading 1 Samuel. At first I just read the chapter, picked a favorite

verse, and wrote it down in a journal. It wasn't difficult. I found some good verses, such as 1 Samuel 2:2: "There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God."

But then it got harder. How was I supposed to pick a verse from chapter 4, which tells of the ark of the Lord's covenant being captured by the Philistines, or chapter 8, which tells how the Israelites wanted a king? I had to pick unusual verses.

These verses sounded even more unusual written in my journal out of context. To clear things up, I wrote a few sentences about why I chose the verse. Before long, these explanations had turned into page-and-a-half Bible studies.

I always wrote as if I was explaining the passage to someone else, even though I was the only one who ever touched my journal. But I began to see the explanations were really helping me. Explaining the verses forced me to dig into the Bible. Sometimes, after I was done with my devotion, I realized that I had just resolved the

very issue that was making me upset that day. The message I got out of the verse hit home and was exactly what I needed.

**I have kept up with these nightly Bible studies.** It can be tempting to just go to bed after a tiring day, but I know how calming and comforting reading the Bible can be. Even on the good days, I still feel much better after my devotion than I did before it.

I only recently found my way. It was getting closer to God, studying his Word, and learning that he really is my friend and my heavenly Father who loves me. I encourage you to do the same. Get close to God.

Your life won't be perfect. Mine certainly isn't. Just remember: "Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

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*Betsy Hahm, a senior homeschooled in Hilton, New York, is a member at Prince of Peace, Fairport, New York.*



## CHANGES IN MINISTRY

### Pastors

**Eisenbeis, Christian H.**, to First Trinity (ELS), Marinette, Wis.  
**Feldhus, Patrick G.**, to Our Redeemer, Ladysmith/St. John, Cornell, Wis.  
**Hundley, Kevin D.**, to Christian giving counselor, WELS Ministry of Christian Giving, Waukesha, Wis.  
**Johnston, Andrew M.**, to 1LA in Mexico  
**Kronebusch, Kerry F.**, to Hope, Manhattan, Kan.  
**Otto, Timothy M.**, to Mt. Olive, Las Vegas, Nev.  
**Parsons, David L.**, to Holy Cross, Tucson, Ariz.  
**Phetsanghane, Souksamay K.**, to Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.  
**Ruege, John A.**, to retirement  
**Schewe, Mark H.**, to St. Peter, Clovis, Calif.  
**Schneider, Thomas C.**, to Christ, Grand Island, Neb.  
**Sievert, Dustin D.**, to St. Croix Lutheran High School, West Saint Paul, Minn.  
**Sims, Daniel R.**, to Immanuel, Manitowoc, Wis.  
**Walta, Chad G.**, to Christ, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Wilkens, Steven E.**, to Our Shepherd, Cornville, Ariz.

### Teachers

**Borck, Sara N.**, to St. John, Montello, Wis.  
**Chandonnet, Emily K.**, to Christ the King, Palm Coast, Fla.  
**Grayckowski, Hannah M.**, to St. John, Libertyville, Ill.  
**Hahnke, Seth M.**, to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.  
**Jannusch-Holmes, Amber J.**, to Loving Arms Child Care Center, Wichita, Kan.  
**Kressin, Heather M.**, to Martin Luther College Early Childhood Learning Center, New Ulm, Minn.  
**Livingston, James C.**, to Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.  
**Maciejczak, Kurt E.**, to Salem, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Radtke, Miranda**, to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.  
**Shrum, Stacy L.**, to Salem, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Strassburg, Jeremiah S.**, to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.  
**Treder, Amanda C.**, to St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis.  
**Wilson, David G.**, to Immanuel, Manitowoc, Wis.  
**Wisniewski, Michael C.**, to Trinity, Marshfield, Wis.  
**Yotter, Michelle M.**, to St. Peter, Saint Peter, Minn.

### Staff ministers

**Hansen, Joel D.**, to Bloomington, Bloomington, Minn.  
**Worden, Gerald W.**, to Northland Lutheran High School, Mosinee, Wis.

### ANNIVERSARIES

**Little Chute, Wis.**—St. Luke (50). Apr. 17. Worship, 9 A.M.; Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary concert, 2 P.M. Website, [www.stlukeslittlechute.com](http://www.stlukeslittlechute.com).

### COMING EVENTS

**Marriage enrichment weekend retreat**—Feb. 12–14. Crowne Plaza Lansing West, Lansing, Mich. Theme: “Distracted Marriage.” Website, [wels.net/events](http://wels.net/events).

**“Men of His Word” conference**—Feb. 20. Best Western, Oshkosh, Wis. Theme: “Stand Firm.” Website, [www.menofhisword.org](http://www.menofhisword.org).

**Marriage enrichment weekend retreat**—Feb. 26–28. Dimond Center Hotel, Anchorage, Alaska. Theme: “Distracted Marriage.” Website, [wels.net/events](http://wels.net/events).

**Pathways to Christ retreat**—Mar. 11–13. Oshkosh, Wis. 920-233-1069. Website, [www.pathwaystochrist.org](http://www.pathwaystochrist.org)

**Christian Woman Today retreat**—Mar. 11–13. Sheraton, Brookfield, Wis. Theme: “Christ lives in me (Galatians 2:20b).” Maureen, 262-784-0412. Website, [www.christianwomantoday.org](http://www.christianwomantoday.org).

**Martin Luther College choir tour**—Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Website, [www.mlc-wels.edu](http://www.mlc-wels.edu).

- Mar. 11, 7 P.M., Pilgrim, Mesa, Ariz.
- Mar. 12, 6:30 P.M. East Fork Lutheran Elementary School, Whiteriver, Ariz.
- Mar. 13, 10 A.M. Grace, San Carlos, Ariz.; 7 P.M. Shepherd of the Hills, Tucson, Ariz.
- Mar. 14, 7 P.M., Cross of Glory, Peoria, Ariz.
- Mar. 15, 9:15 A.M., Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz.; 7 P.M., Water of Life, Las Vegas, Nev.
- Mar. 16, 7 P.M., Shepherd of the Hills, La Mesa, Calif.
- Mar. 17, 7 P.M., Christ the Vine, Temecula, Calif.
- Mar. 18, 10:15 A.M., California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, Calif.; 7 P.M., St. Paul First, North Hollywood, Calif.
- Mar. 19, 6:30 P.M., St. Mark, Citrus Heights, Calif.
- Mar. 20, 10:30 A.M., Hope, Penryn, Calif.; 7 P.M., Mt. Calvary, Redding, Calif.

### Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Chorus

**Spring tour**—Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Website, [www.wls.wels.net](http://www.wls.wels.net).

- Mar. 16, 7 P.M., Grace, Milwaukee, Wis.
- Mar. 23, 7:30 P.M., Trinity, Crete, Ill.

- Mar. 24, 7 P.M., Christ Our Savior, Columbia, Tenn.
  - Mar. 25, 7:30 P.M., Risen Savior, Pooler, Ga.
  - Mar. 26, 6:30 P.M., St. Paul, Beverly Hills, Fla.
  - Mar. 27, 10:30 A.M., Ascension, Sarasota, Fla.; 7 P.M., Crown of Glory, Orlando, Fla.
  - Mar. 28, 7 P.M., Hope, West Palm Beach, Fla.
  - Mar. 29, 7 P.M., Our Savior, Port Orange, Fla.
  - Mar. 30, 7 P.M., Christ the King, Palm Coast, Fla.
  - Mar. 31, 1 P.M., Open Bible, Oxford, Fla.; 7 P.M., Victory, Jacksonville, Fla.
  - Apr. 1, 7 P.M., Living Savior, Asheville, N.C.
  - Apr. 2, 7 P.M., Bethlehem, Carmel, Ind.
  - Apr. 3, 10:30 A.M., Lamb of God, Lafayette, Ind.; 6:30 P.M., Friedens, Kenosha, Wis.
- Ironmen of God men's conference**—Mar. 19; 9 A.M.-2 P.M. St. Paul's Lutheran School, Ixonia, Wis. Website, [www.ironmenofgodwi.org](http://www.ironmenofgodwi.org).

**53rd annual Lutheran Women's Missionary Society convention**—June 23–26. Pheasant Run Resort, St. Charles, Ill. Theme: “Christ Alone, Our Cornerstone.” Website, [www.lwms.org](http://www.lwms.org).

**WELS International Youth Rally**—June 28–July 1. Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colo. Theme: “Our God Reigns.” Registration opens in March. [youthrally2016@wels.net](mailto:youthrally2016@wels.net). Website, [wels.net/events](http://wels.net/events).

**Women's Ministry Conference**—July 21–23. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Theme: “Mentors.” Registration is open. Website, [wels.net/wmconference](http://wels.net/wmconference).

**Tour to Colorado**—July 22–Aug. 3. Join the Martin Luther College Alumni Association's 2016 tour to Colorado. Steve Balza, 507-217-1731. Website, <http://mlcalumni.wix.com/tours>.

### NAMES WANTED

**College students**—Register college students with WELS Campus Ministry so they receive helpful college materials, including *Forward in Christ* magazine and *Meditations*. Website, [wels.net/campus-ministry](http://wels.net/campus-ministry).

**Northwest Arkansas**—people visiting or moving to the area. Neil Hansen, Beautiful Savior, 479-876-2155. Website, [www.beautifulsaviorwels.org](http://www.beautifulsaviorwels.org).

**Palm Springs, California**—people living in the area as well as winter visitors. Crown of Life, Corona, Calif. Steve Koelpin, 909-810-1045; [pastorsteve@crownoflifechurch.net](mailto:pastorsteve@crownoflifechurch.net).

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



# MLC GRADUATES

Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., held its midyear graduation on Dec. 17, 2015.



**Caleb A. Birsching**  
Tacoma, Wash.



**Shane R. Bunde**  
Westland, Mich.



**Benjamin T. Hansen**  
Watertown, S.D.



**Carrie L. Hengeveld**  
Lomira, Wis.



**Samuel S. Johnson**  
Saint Peter, Minn.



**Daniel T. Kock**  
Mequon, Wis.



**Nicholas R. Kressin**  
Greenfield, Wis.



**Morgan R. Kumbier**  
Watertown, Wis.



**Jeremy M. Maas**  
New Ulm, Minn.



**Katelyn L. Malley**  
Two Rivers, Wis.



**Eric B. Mielke**  
Muskego, Wis.



**Jennifer J. Milewski**  
Freeland, Mich.



**Rachel E. Miller**  
Rewey, Wis.



**Ju Yeon Moon**  
Seoul, South Korea



**Ruth L. Nottling**  
Fox Lake, Wis.



**Michael D. Schlottman**  
New Ulm, Minn.



**Joseph A. Schmudlach**  
New Ulm, Minn.



**Arianna J. Siegler**  
Okabena, Minn.



**Tarah J. Steinbrenner**  
Boise, Idaho



**Thomas W. Stob**  
Star Prairie, Wis.



**Taylor R. Swanson**  
Vancouver, Wash.

● Bachelor of Science in Education

● Bachelor of Science

## ASSIGNMENTS

### Teachers

**Maas, Jeremy M.**, to St Marcus Lutheran School, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Malley, Katelyn L.**, to Peace Lutheran School (ELS), Kissimmee, Fla.

**Moon, Ju Yeon**, to Beautiful Savior Lutheran School, Grove City, Ohio

**Steinbrenner, Tarah J.**, to Peridot-Our Savior Lutheran School, Peridot, Ariz.

### Staff minister

**Kock, Daniel T.**, to St. Marcus Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, Wis.



## Update on partnerships in East Africa

*In recent years WELS has developed contacts with Christians in South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya. WELS leaders took trips to these areas in the fall of 2015 and report here on their meetings with these Christians.*

E. Allen Sorum, director of the Pastoral Studies Institute at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, visited Gambella, Ethiopia, from Aug. 28–Sept. 3, with Peter Bur, a South Sudanese refugee who emigrated to the United States and graduated from the seminary's Pastoral Studies Institute in May 2015. Bur was assigned to be the coordinator of South Sudanese ministry for WELS. He is coordinating the pastoral training of South Sudanese leaders in North America and also in refugee camps in Africa.

As Sorum notes, “The first thing that Peter and I noticed when we arrived in Gambella was that it had grown exponentially in the year that had passed since our last visit. Gambella went from a city of 50,000 to a refugee community of 600,000 or 700,000. It continues to grow.

“After the essential special church services and choir numbers to celebrate the gracious God who brought USA guests to Gambella, we immediately got to the task of teaching Peter’s translation of a simplified Luther’s Small Catechism. The quality of the production and the exciting artwork made this little book a treasure. With special thanks to God, we commend the hard work of the Multi-Language Publications team who made this piece happen almost overnight. There is absolutely no way to correctly (over)state the contribution that this booklet and Peter’s explanation of it made to South Sudanese spirituality in austere refugee camps in at least three countries.

“Every day throughout the day, Peter taught the catechism to his brothers. . . . Teaching the catechism was a tremendous step forward in terms of what these men know, believe, and teach.

The information they received was new. The long hours were no burden for them. They devoured this instruction.

“After Peter taught the entire catechism, we handed out the 80 copies of the catechism that we had lugged around East Africa. It was like we were distributing bundles of fresh food and laundry. The men were absolutely delighted with these ministry tools.



Peter Bur and E. Allen Sorum traveled to East Africa in August and September 2015 to share a new translation of Luther’s Small Catechism with refugees from South Sudan.

“Peter discussed at length with these men the requirements of getting organized and making connections with WELS and the Lutheran Church of Central Africa. They also discussed vision and various aspects of a strategic plan for South Sudanese Nuer in view of the potential for a viable peace in South Sudan. These men long to go home and to rebuild their country and their church body. Peter and I encouraged them in their longing and in their journey. It is an inexpressible privilege to know men as courageous and resilient as these are. Their love and appreciation for their guests from North America know no bounds.”

From Sept. 4–10, Sorum and Bur spent time in Nairobi, Kenya, with

South Sudanese men who live in a refugee camp in Kakuma, Kenya.

Sorum writes: “Once again, Peter and the South Sudanese adhered to an extremely aggressive schedule in order to get through the entire catechism along with the components on using law and gospel and Bible-storying to present the truths of the catechism. Again, Peter and I stressed the importance of thinking through a ministry that featured all of the blessings of the gospel in Word and sacrament. God bless this ministry to the refugees.”

Also in September, Ken Cherney, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and a member of the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations, visited Bishoftu, Ethiopia, to meet with Rev. Dr. Kebede Getachew Yigezu. Kebede started a confessional Lutheran church in Ethiopia as well as Maor Theological College. Missionary Paul Nitz from Malawi and Davison Mutentami, a national pastor from the Lutheran Church of Central Africa–Zambia, went with Cherney.

In 2013, Kebede contacted WELS to discuss fellowship possibilities. Sorum visited Kebede in 2014 to learn more about the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia. Cherney’s visit in 2015 coincided with the first graduating class of Maor Theological College receiving their diplomas, and Cherney participated in the graduation ceremony.

Cherney notes: “We were received very warmly by our hosts and spent a lot of time getting to know Dr. Kebede and his family. They speak in glowing terms of Allen Sorum’s visit and all their experiences so far with WELS. Dr. Kebede is an aggressive promoter of confessional Lutheranism.”

To learn more about WELS’ partnership with the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia, watch the Feb. 9 *WELS Together News Update* at [wels.net/together](http://wels.net/together).

## Oklahoma mission shares God's grace

In a growing community where about half the residents claim no religious affiliation, a new mission is working to share a message of God's undeserved love.

Grace, Norman, Okla., started as a daughter congregation of Holy Cross, Oklahoma City, a congregation about 20 minutes away. After several years of Holy Cross' pastor conducting worship and Bible classes in the area, the Board for Home Missions funded a full-time pastor in the fall of 2013 so Grace could expand its ministry.

Norman is unique in Oklahoma in that it has been growing by two to three percent each year for the past decade. A university town, Norman also is home to many University of Oklahoma graduates, who return to start their own businesses. And even though it technically is part of the Bible Belt, it is largely unchurched. "And we're not talking about whether they go to church or not," says John Vieths, pastor at Grace. "Less than 50 percent would say they were any religion of any sort."

Yet the congregation is working to make inroads into this community with the Word. When Vieths arrived in August 2014, he and the congregation concentrated on door-to-door canvassing in the newer neighborhoods on the northeast side. "Even the atheists at the door are usually pretty friendly and will engage in conversation," says Vieths. The congregation received a Home Missions' special project grant in 2015 to start a New Movers program in which members mail a "Welcome to the area" package to new residents that includes information about the congregation.

They also found a new full-time location for the congregation's ministry in a visible strip mall on a busy street in Norman.

Besides targeting new residents, the congregation is trying to fill a need in the community. Christian Eisenbeis, a pastor who had been working

part time at Grace since 2012, discovered that Norman didn't offer many programs for parents of autistic children. In 2014, he and his wife started a support group called The Thorn Bush. While providing love and emotional support to families in Norman, The Thorn Bush also is a connector to the church and God's love. "Ninety percent of families with children with autism are unchurched," says Vieths. "They don't feel welcomed at worship . . . and find themselves out on an island spiritually." Vieths says about six people attend the semi-monthly support group; most have worshiped at Grace as well. To further serve Thorn Bush families and others in the community, Grace has started monthly Worship at the Cross services, simplified worship put together by Jesus Cares Ministries.

Planning for the future, Grace is considering other outreach opportunities, including sponsoring a community book drive or diaper drive to help low-income families, expanding the campus ministry program, and potentially partnering with WELS Christian Aid and Relief to help after disasters strike (storm and tornado damage is common in this part of Oklahoma).

With all these plans and about 25 people in attendance each week, "it's a fairly small labor pool," says Vieths. But "the members of the congregation are dedicated to spreading the gospel in Norman." The 40-member congregation celebrated its first adult baptism in September 2014 and confirmed three adults in February 2015. And with 250 names on Grace's prospect list, there are many more opportunities to share God's saving message.

"By God's grace we pray that Grace Lutheran will become a thriving and independent congregation in the years to come," says Vieths.

Learn more about The Thorn Bush in "Moments with Missionaries," a video series that shares stories about WELS mission fields. Find the video at [wels.net/missions](http://wels.net/missions).

## Conference opportunities

Three conferences this summer will allow WELS members the chance to grow in their faith, to be encouraged in their Christian lives, and to learn more about the work we do together as a synod.

### Lutheran Women's Missionary Society annual convention



June 23–26 at  
Pheasant Run  
Resort, St. Charles,  
Illinois

Under the theme "Christ Alone, Our Cornerstone," the 53rd annual convention of the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society (LWMS) will include motivational presentations by both home and world missionaries, hailing from places such as Hong Kong, India, Russia, Antigua, Utah, and Wisconsin. Attendees can also participate in several workshops including a Bible study that encourages us to put Jesus first.

"Attendees of an LWMS convention experience firsthand the influence we all have on the Great Commission with our prayers for, encouragement of, education about, and financial support of all types of WELS mission endeavors. Unique to this convention is the extent to which we connect around one focus-mission opportunity," says Karen Fischer, LWMS president. "Among my personal favorite moments is the unscripted singing of the doxology following the giving and receiving of the mission offerings collected throughout the year. It's a great moment of warmth, fellowship, and joy—and explains why Kleenex are always in the registration bag!"

Go to [www.lwms.org](http://www.lwms.org) to register.

### WELS International Youth Rally



June 28–July 1 at  
Colorado State  
University, Fort  
Collins, Colorado

As the largest gathering of WELS teens, the WELS International Youth Rally offers attendees an opportunity to grow in their faith, to connect with fellow WELS teens from around the country, and to worship their Savior. Under the theme "Our God Reigns!" the 2016 rally features two keynotes



and 14 workshops on topics such as relationships, bullying, making the Bible practical, and battling pornography. There will also be daily worship, youth leader presentations, recreation, and optional excursions.

More than 1,800 people attended the 2014 youth rally in Tennessee. Rally planners hope to hit 2,000 for the rally this summer.

Registration booklets have been mailed to congregations. Pre-registration begins March 1. Go to [wels.net/events](http://wels.net/events) to download the registration booklet.

### Women's Ministry Conference



July 21–23 at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin

This triennial Women's Ministry Conference will focus on mentoring—how a Christian woman can share her faith and life with others. “There is a growing hostility toward Christianity, toward biblical values, toward biblical womanhood,” says Dawn Schulz, member of the planning committee and conference presenter. “The intention of this conference is to help women see how valuable they are and to encourage them as they point to Jesus Christ in the Scriptures in the way that they live their lives and how they go about showing other women how to do the same thing.”

Schulz says the conference will be practical, “taking God's Word and applying it to where women are today—in the home, in their congregational involvement, and in the work world.” Workshops, networking opportunities, sharing of mentoring experiences, and brainstorming sessions will be included.

Opening worship and a presentation on the universal priesthood by Richard Gurgel, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, will kick off the conference. All—both men and women—are invited to attend this opening session.

Go to [wels.net/wmconference](http://wels.net/wmconference) to register. Gift certificates are available.

## Meet the editorial board—uncut

*Ever ask yourself, “Who are these people who write for Forward in Christ?” Through this series you can find out.*

When it comes to writing his devotions, FIC's newest contributing editor, Joel Seifert, just wants to get out of the way.

“I want to make sure I study a section of God's Word and see what wonderful things there are for us to think about and to find comfort in, and then I want to see how I can best get out of the way and let the Word that brought all the comfort and strength to me do the same for someone else,” he says.

Growing up in a called worker's family—his dad is the president of the Michigan District and his mom is a Lutheran elementary school teacher—Seifert decided early on to become a pastor. He says that he was bolstered in that decision after his first year at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, when he emergency taught for a year at Arizona Lutheran Academy in Phoenix. “I received a wider view of the world and came into contact with more people than I ever had before who didn't grow up with the gospel and who did not grow up knowing what God says or what he's done,” says Seifert. “Seeing that need and seeing their reaction to hearing the gospel was a big encouragement.”

After his graduation in 2005, Seifert served for five years at Calvary, Thiensville, Wis., a large congregation near the seminary. In 2010, he took a call to Shining Mountains, a congregation of 110 people in Bozeman, Mont.

The contrast between the two ministries was noticeable. “But that was part of the reason to go out there,” says Seifert. “Here's a little group of Christians who don't have the big infrastructure or all the material blessings, but they have the same Word and the same love for it. . . . Sometimes you miss the wealth of resources and the large number of people and the huge ministry team, and sometimes it just makes you

cherish all the more sitting around a table with three or four people to plan ministry and then coming together with the congregation to talk about how we can proclaim God's Word and help take God's kingdom forward.”

The congregation is growing. Currently meeting in a school cafeteria, the congregation is in the midst of a building project and prays it will be in its new church by the spring of 2016.



Joel and Carly Seifert and their two children, Ella and Benjamin.

Besides his congregational work, Seifert is the editor of a new monthly electronic newsletter that is coming out this fall for the continuing education of pastors. He also has written two books for Northwestern Publishing House.

Seifert and his wife, Carly, have two children: Ella, 7, and Benjamin, almost 4. “I'm blessed with a family that reminds me to stand back and remember how many good things the Lord surrounds us with,” Seifert says. “There are so many things that we find ourselves blessed with every day!”

Read Seifert's first devotion on p. 7.

## Asian church bodies encouraged

Leaders from WELS and Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) missions as well as from national church bodies from Japan to Indonesia gathered in Seoul, South Korea, Oct. 28–30, 2015, for the first Asia-Oceania regional conference of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC). These participants were able to learn from each other and grow in the fellowship they share in Jesus Christ. Representatives from the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Australia, Kingdom Workers and WELS Multi-Language Publications also were able to attend.

The overall teaching focus of the conference centered on the sacrament of Baptism, with essays written and delivered by Pastor Takeshi Nidaira of the Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church of Japan and by a pastor from Gereja Lutheran Indonesia.

Of vital importance to all participants was the opportunity for fellowship with their brothers and sisters in the faith. Many of the leaders were from small church bodies and new mission fields where there is little, if any, contact with fellow believers. Many also live in areas of the world in which Christianity is almost non-existent or even illegal. They were able to talk and share with one another, for the first time, their joys and struggles as they carry out the work the Lord has given to them.

On the final day of the conference, Seoul Lutheran Church, the conference host, provided a tour of various historical sites around the city.

On the Sunday following the conference, Seoul Lutheran Church, a mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, held a service celebrating its tenth anniversary. This congregation, served by Pastor Young Ha Kim, has worked closely with many WELS high schools to bring Korean students to the United States for their high school education. This unofficial partnership has provided countless blessings to the congregation. The students have been able to not only receive a solid education but also one that is grounded in the Christian faith. The high schools and their other students have also benefited from learning about Korean culture from these young Lutherans.

These few days of learning and celebration ended much too soon for many of the participants. All expressed a desire for this regional conference to be held on a regular basis.

*Pastor Paul Fries  
ELS communication director*



The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference provides a forum for confessional Lutherans who are in fellowship. Learn more at [www.celc.info](http://www.celc.info).

## OUTREACH IN ASIA

“God has blessed our partnerships in Asia with such passionate leaders and seminary students who see the joy and eternal value of getting the gospel message out to Asia where more than half the world’s population lives,” says David Kehl, Asia coordinator for Multi-Language Publications.

Kehl shares a few examples he heard at the conference:

- “I couldn’t help but think of the apostle Paul as the stories were told of our contact taking the gospel to the mountains of Nepal under the threats of local religions and governments. Yet over 30,000 are studying the Bible Teaching Series produced by our WELS Multi-Language Publications.”
- “It was thrilling to observe the openness in sharing the gospel—like Pastor Kim engaging our Buddhist tour bus guide in conversations about Jesus and then inviting her to church.”
- “Pastor Nidaira from Japan shared his joy in how after many years of witnessing he was able to baptize his mother and father. A man from Thailand was thrilled to share how he was able to baptize his mother before she died and how his sister came to faith as a result. The gospel is truly a powerful magnet to draw people to God in Asia.”

Image removed for security concerns.

Eighty church leaders from at least ten different countries met in Seoul, South Korea, for the first ever Asia-Oceania regional conference in October 2015. Besides studying the Word, participants encouraged each other in ministry. “One of my favorite moments from the conference was overhearing the young men from East Asia saying to our delegates from Japan: ‘Evangelism in Japan is hard work and the fruits appear small, but don’t be discouraged; we will go back to our church, and we will pray for you,’ ” says Brad Wordell, World Mission Seminary professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.



## District news

### ARIZONA-CALIFORNIA

**The Way, Rancho San Diego, Calif.**, an outreach effort of Shepherd of the Hills, La Mesa, celebrated a milestone on Nov. 1, 2015, when the congregation's first three adult confirmands were received into membership.

### NORTHERN WISCONSIN

For more than 10 years, **Christ, Eagle River, Wis.**, has put on a living nativity with people and live animals recreating scenes from the birth of Jesus. Joshua Odell, pastor at Christ, says, "Not only can we share the good news of Christmas with the community, but it also gets the whole church working together." The living nativity takes place every year on the first Friday and Saturday in December.

### HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

**MI**—On Dec. 6, 2015, **St. John, Zilwaukee, Mich.**, celebrated its 150th anniversary.

**SEW**—On Oct. 18, 2015, Trinity, Crete, Ill., honored four called workers with service anniversaries—staff minister **Mark Blauert**, 25 years; teacher **Matthew Heyn**, 20 years; teacher **Nathan Hinz**, 20 years; and teacher **Sandy Knoblock**, 20 years.

### NORTHERN WISCONSIN



The Fox Folk Marionette Troupe, composed of students from Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis., is one of the few surviving marionette performance teams in the Midwest. This year the troupe performed a special Christmas show titled "The Search for the King."

**Crossroads, Chicago, Ill.**, celebrated its 10th anniversary during the week-end of Oct. 24 and 25, 2015.

The district reporters for this month are: AZ-CA—Michael Schroeder; MI—John Eich; NW—Dennis Kleist; SA—Jonathan Kuske; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

### SOUTH ATLANTIC



More than 250 women attended Divine Savior Lutheran Church's annual Advent by candlelight service in December 2015. This event is a yearly outreach effort to the families of Divine Savior Academy in Doral, Fla.

## Obituaries

### David Albert Witte 1937–2015

David Witte was born July 9, 1937, in Fort Atkinson, Wis. He died Nov. 18, 2015, in Fond du Lac, Wis.

A 1963 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Immanuel, Neillsville, Wis.; St. John, Neillsville, Wis.; St. Paul, East Troy, Wis.; Abiding Peace, Streamwood, Ill.; St. Andrew, Elgin, Ill.; Abiding Peace, Elgin, Ill.; and Bethlehem, Oshkosh, Wis.

He was preceded in death by one brother and one grandchild. He is survived by his wife, Dorothy; 2 sons; 1 daughter; 11 grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

### Edmund O. Schulz 1922–2015

Edmund Schulz was born Jan. 16, 1922, in Freeland, Mich. He died Nov. 29, 2015, in Apple Valley, Minn.

A 1947 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Zion, Rainier, Wash.; Salem, Mountlake Terrace (Seattle), Wash.; St. Paul, Hazelton, N.D.; St. John, Redwood Falls, Minn.; and Grace, Hutchinson, Minn.

He was preceded in death by one brother and one sister. He is survived by his wife, Ruby; two sons; one daughter; six grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren.

### Vicky K. Falk 1951–2015

Vicky Falk (née Johnson) was born Sept. 11, 1951, in Moline, Ill. She died Dec. 3, 2015, in Bay City, Mich.

She served St. Bartholomew, Kawkawlin, Mich., and St. John, Bay City, Mich.

She was preceded in death by one brother and one sister. She is survived by her husband, Michael; three sons; three daughters; nine grandchildren; and two brothers.



# Unexpected Love

## Jesus talks to the woman caught in adultery.

Theodore J. Hartwig

The account of the woman taken in adultery was commonly inserted as part of John's gospel already by the fifth century. English and German translations included it as part of John's gospel. Scholars through the ages commented on it and considered it an authentic account of our Savior's life. God's people over the centuries found much to learn from this account.

In recent translations, the account of this woman is included, but with a note that it was not included in the earliest manuscripts of John's gospel. Yet, most agree that it is an authentic and important account from the Savior's ministry. In this incident, Jesus makes one of his most precious gospel proclamations. We simply take our place among the believers over the centuries and learn from this account

At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

—John 8:2-11



of the Savior's love for sinners. Whatever its history, we may rest assured that the incident of the woman taken in adultery happened and that it is among the most precious proclamations of the gospel in Jesus' ministry.

### A TEST FOR JESUS

The account from the Savior's ministry introduces three major actors. A fourth person is conspicuous by his absence. Bear in mind that the woman was caught openly in the act of adultery. The man sharing in the act with the woman is missing. He may have escaped. He may have been allowed to escape. He may not have been useful for the charge brought against the woman by the teachers of the law and Pharisees. In their minds, perhaps, her sin was more grievous than the man's. Whatever happened, these purists were intent on using her to test Jesus.

Jesus' immediate response is interesting: He bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. We might wonder why. A possible guess is that he wanted to fill the highly charged silence with activity and bide his time. Then, at the accusers' insistence that Jesus respond to their question, he aimed his dart directly at their consciences. He knew exactly what to say in these circumstances: "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

His words must have struck their consciences like a thunderbolt. It would have struck us with as much force as it struck them. All of them felt their own consciences squeeze dry their indignation at the sin of the woman and their resolve to seek her punishment. Both disappeared. Jesus

turned their intended trap against them. It became an accusation of their own self-righteousness—a trap they could not escape. Without another word, the accusers began to peel off one by one, beginning with the most senior and therefore most qualified candidate to set the tone for everyone else to follow.

### JESUS' DIRECTIVE TO THE WOMAN

Now comes the most eloquent part of the story. Jesus asks a question of the woman: "Has no one condemned you?" "No one," she responds. She does not offer counter accusations, point her finger at her one-time accusers, or shake her fist at them as they slink away. Her answer suggests that she was repentant.

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Forgiveness so  
freely given is never  
a license to live  
as one pleases.

---

Another thunderbolt from Jesus, "Neither do I condemn you." Forgiveness was freely given to an undeserving sinner. In the minds of the purists, however, Jesus may have seemed much too lenient. But his words are a persuasive testimony to the height, width, and depth of the gospel. And with their inherent power these words engendered in the woman a new life.

Jesus' follow-up directive thus offers the woman an opportunity to turn from the destructive relationship that brought her before him. It is a beautiful example of gospel-motivated law

preaching. In the strength of her forgiveness, Jesus tells the woman that she should leave her life of sin. Forgiveness so freely given is never a license to live as one pleases.

Luther expounded gospel-motivated law obedience beautifully in his explanation to the Ten Commandments in the Small Catechism. He introduced each commandment with its necessary preamble, "We should fear and love God so that we . . ." Obedience flows from forgiveness and is given selflessly from inner compulsion, and therefore it is pleasing to God.

Thus this story of the woman caught openly in adultery is one of the most beautiful testimonies to both the gospel and the gospel's fruit of obedience. It also shimmers as one of the four gems included in John's gospel in this genre of Jesus' uninhibited association with women.

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

This is the second article in a four-part series on the gems of John.



# Mission stories

## A Korean connection Paul T. Prange

The story began about a decade ago in South Korea. Mr. and Mrs. Song were doing well. The Korean economic boom had allowed Mr. Song to obtain a good job in computer technology. His wife was doing well as a middle school history teacher. They had a daughter in middle school and a son in primary grades.

**The Songs wanted the best for their children.** As they spoke to other Korean parents, they determined what the best was. In a 2008 survey by South Korea's National Statistical Office, 48.3 percent of South Korean parents said they wanted to send their children abroad for high school to develop global perspectives, avoid the rigid domestic school system, and learn English. More than 12 percent wanted it for their children as early as elementary school.

The Songs were normal parents. They were apprehensive about sending their children halfway around the world to live in a culture they did not completely understand, but everyone else in their social group was doing it. As they researched the possibilities, they were delighted to hear of a Korean pastor, Pastor Young Ha Kim, who had personal acquaintance with a safe high school in the United States.

When the Song family approached him, Pastor Kim explained that the American high school was Lutheran, and that it wanted the whole family instructed in Lutheran doctrine before the child went to the United States. That high school was a WELS preparatory school, Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS) in Saginaw.

MLS has hosted international students from 25 different countries since 1985, but the arrangement with Pastor Kim and his congregation was special. Whenever a Korean student contacted MLS, the administration referred that family to the pastor in Korea, who would begin Lutheran catechism

instruction with them. It was an arrangement that God would bless.

The whole family began to attend worship and catechism instruction. They were baptized, and the adults were confirmed. The daughter applied to MLS. She was willing to consider being a Lutheran teacher. She spent extra hours after school and during vacations studying English. Her Korean name is Na Bin, but like most Korean students, she chose an English name as well. It was Lisa.

Meanwhile, in the United States, MLS found a host family for Lisa. Even though it has a dormitory, MLS is careful to place each international student with a host family for week-ends and vacations. It is important for international students to have family care while they are in the States and to see what life in a Lutheran family is like in America.

The host family, the MLS faculty, and Lisa's classmates all encouraged Lisa to consider being a Lutheran teacher, and when it came time to graduate from MLS, Lisa applied and was accepted to attend Martin Luther College (MLC) in New Ulm, Minnesota, the WELS college of ministry.

**When it was time for Lisa's brother to go to the United States, the Song family decided to send him for eighth grade** already so that he could go through his adjustment period to English before his grades counted for college. The brother's Korean name is Sang Ho, and he chose the English name David. He went through a regular Lutheran catechism course and was confirmed before he came to the United States for eighth grade.

The Songs wanted David to attend MLS and looked for an elementary school near Saginaw that could accept international students, but none of the Lutheran elementary schools in that area of Michigan had applied to receive that status from the federal government. Instead, the Song family heard about St. John's School in Burlington, Wisconsin, which had been certified by the federal government to enroll international students.

There was an MLS connection to St. John's. Mrs. Leanne Prange was a kindergarten teacher there, and her husband, Paul Prange, knew the Song family from the time Paul had been the



president of MLS. The Pranges volunteered to host David in their home, since St. John's does not have a dormitory.

The Pranges felt good about the decision. They knew that the Song family would want a safe place for their son to stay, and they did not worry about having an eighth grade boy in the home, since their own son, Joel, had just graduated from the eighth grade and was enrolling at MLS.

David arrived in the U.S. in August. His voice was just beginning to change, and his command of English was limited. He was a normal eighth grade boy, and he thrived at St. John's. He applied and was accepted to MLS. At present he is a junior there. He wants to visit the Korean WELS congregation in Las Vegas, Nevada, to see what it would be like to serve as a called worker in the United States. Lisa is a senior at MLC, in the fourth year of a five-year program. She is willing to present herself to the WELS Assignment Committee for service anywhere in the world.

The Pranges feel blessed by the opportunity to host David and other international students.

"We learn a little bit about each culture," says Leanne, "but finally they are just normal children, and we enjoy getting to know them personally. It is interesting to see how the Lord will use them in the future."

As WELS ministries become aware of international students graduating from MLC and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, they can take another look at reaching out to immigrant groups in their communities, or working with the families of our fellowship in the students' countries of origin. At present there is only one congregation of our fellowship in all of Korea, and only a handful of places in the United States where congregations are reaching out to the Korean immigrants in their community. The Lord is providing us with thoroughly trained Korean Lutheran students who love Jesus, know the Scriptures, and are able to work in both cultures. It is exciting to think about how God may bless these fruits of the gospel.

*Paul Prange, administrator for WELS Ministerial Education, is a member at St. John, Burlington, Wisconsin.*

Watch the February *WELS Connection* to meet an MLC graduate from South Korea who now teaches at Huron Valley Lutheran High School in Westland, Mich. Learn more about the Korean church talked about in this article on p. 24.

Paul Prange (second from right) attended a baseball game when visiting the Song family in South Korea. David (far right) lived with the Pranges for a year while attending St. John, Burlington, Wis.; the Song family in South Korea; Lisa and David Song both are attending WELS schools in the United States; Pastor Young Ha Kim and his wife, Margaret, facilitate the enrollment of Korean students to WELS schools around the United States so they can have a Christian education. Young Ha Kim is pastor at Seoul Lutheran Church, a mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

## MORE ABOUT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT WELS SCHOOLS

**Korean students sent to WELS schools by Pastor Kim over the last 10 years: 250**

**WELS high schools with international students: 19 out of 25**

**International students currently attending WELS high schools: 283**

**Countries represented at WELS high schools: at least 28**

**International students who have graduated from MLC: 34 since 2002**



# OUTSIDE *of your* COMFORT ZONE

Amanda Oswalt is getting what she prayed for: an experience outside of her comfort zone.

Amanda stepped out of the sparkling and sanitized hallways of St. Luke's Hospital in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, one day and into the handmade brick-and-mortar, dark and dusty clinics in rural Malawi the next.

Could there be a more stark contrast in health care and facilities? Not from Amanda's perspective: "It was such juxtaposition from where I came from and into what the medical reality is here."

Just what are the medical realities in Malawi? Limited medications, long lines, little to no electricity, outdated equipment, insufficient funds, staffing shortages, cramped quarters, overcrowded rooms, and minimal pain management, just to name a few.

**With such circumstances, just what is Amanda, the nurse-in-charge, to do?** Lots, actually.

Since the Lutheran Clinic is mobile, the nurse-in-charge also needs to be! That means you often won't catch Amanda at home. If you'd like to "shadow" her, you better have a good pair of walking shoes! Each clinic day Amanda opens up the pharmacy and helps ready the supplies: medications, scales, test kits, and vaccines. Because water is not available at some of the clinics, Amanda also prepares several 20-liter containers to take for clinic use.

Amanda wasn't loading medical supplies into 4x4 trucks in Milwaukee, but she is in Malawi! When the am-

balance is packed up, they hit the road. Crammed like sardines in the Land Cruiser, Amanda and the national staff head off to work. No matter what time or how early they might arrive at the clinic site, scores of people will already be there waiting for them.

What do all these people—60,000 patients every year—expect from the Lutheran Mobile Clinic? They are looking for medical services, including family planning, under-five well-child checkups, HIV/AIDS testing, malaria testing, an out-patient department, and a pharmacy.

Amanda goes to the clinic on most days that it is open and makes sure that everything is running smoothly. While there, she often works in the pharmacy. The clinic closes after the last person is seen, but that's not when Amanda's work ends for the day. She and the staff head back home to Lilongwe, where they fill orders for medications and supplies needed for the next day.

**What about the days that Amanda does not go to the clinic?** One responsibility she has is medication procurement. She coordinates with the Malawian government to obtain med-

**A nurse discovers what it's like to go from a state-of-the-art hospital in the United States to a rural clinic in Africa.**

John E. Holtz

ications.

If they aren't available through

the government, Amanda

purchases them from local pharmacies. Because many pharmacies have low or no supplies, that means a lot of running around the city in search of the much needed medications.

What about keeping records of all these people, meds, and treatments? That too is on Amanda's plate. She reports back pertinent statistical data from the Lutheran Clinic to both the Malawian government (which gets the lion's share of the data) and the Central Africa Medical Mission Committee in the United States.

The nurse-in-charge is counting pills, filling orders, packing supplies, solving personnel problems, buying meds, and writing reports. She doesn't deliver babies in mud huts in the dark with just a flashlight clenched between her teeth. Nor does she perform C-sections with a Swiss Army knife, suturing splayed skin with Acacia tree thorns as needles. And Amanda is not out in the bush cutting out gangrene with no anesthetic or extracting imbedded worms and fly eggs from people's flesh with a homemade tweezers.



Neither Amanda nor the national staff is doing such things. These are not the everyday situations in which they find themselves.

Patients mostly come to our Lutheran Clinic because they have coughs and colds, fevers and flu, aches in the head, and irritations on the skin. They suffer from rashes, burns, and cuts. Some women come because their bodies are getting worn out from bearing too many children. Others are faint with malaria. On any given day these people need a bandage, a pill, or an antibiotic. They may need some ointment, a shot, or simple advice. Sometimes they need a referral to a hospital.

And they come to the Lutheran Mobile Clinic. Why? Because they know they will find a clinic that is run with care. They respect the staff because it is trained. They know they can get available medications.

What these same people may not realize is that there is a capable nurse-in-charge. She is fulfilling the responsibilities that are helping to make the clinic a success story of doing “good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers!” (Galatians 6:10).

**Amanda admits that living and working in a country such as Malawi does not come without its tough days.** But it's not crocs and elephants that give the nurse-in-charge her challenges. Instead, it's a steady array of other things: prickly personalities, closed offices, clever thieves, intermittent electric power, and cultural differences.

Do such things cause Amanda to want to run? Yes, but not away from the clinic or the country. She runs to something else: the Lord and his promises! She treasures her “go-to” Bible verse that she's kept close to her heart since she was young: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5,6).

“These verses were my confirmation passage, and whenever I'm having a rough day or moment I tend to meditate on this passage,” says Amanda. “It always reminds me that he has the plan and I need to let go of my attempt of control and just trust.”

Ah, yes . . . trust. Blessed is the one who trusts, not in faith itself but in the object of our faith, our Lord Jesus Christ! We are weak but he is strong—strong enough to lean on whenever and wherever.

- **Whenever** the meds run low, the water runs dry, the patience runs thin, or one's own sinful nature runs amok.
- **Wherever** you are, whether in a hospital in Milwaukee, a clinic in Malawi, a truck on the road, or a plane in the air.

The Lord is there with his love, his forgiveness, his peace—strong enough to lean on whenever and wherever.

Even when you are outside your comfort zone.

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*John Holtz, a missionary in Malawi, Africa, also serves as missionary-in-charge of the Lutheran Mobile Clinic.*

## The Lutheran Mobile Clinic

The Lutheran Mobile Clinic began in Malawi in 1970. Nurses travel to four designated bush areas to set up a clinic for the day and then return to their home in Lilongwe by night. Permanent structures built to serve as clinics during the week are used as churches on Sunday. A nurse and an administrator from the United States serve alongside Malawian nationals in running the clinic. Malawi pastors and lay leaders from the Lutheran Church of Central Africa also have the opportunity to share spiritual hope with the patients. This clinic is part of the work of the Central Africa Medical Mission, which also runs a permanent clinic in Zambia. Learn more about this work at [centralafricamedicalmission.info/](http://centralafricamedicalmission.info/)

(Right) Amanda Oswalt serves as the nurse-in-charge of the Lutheran Mobile Clinic. (Below) People line up as they wait to be seen at one of the clinic sites.



# Statistical contemplation

Earle D. Treptow

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God doesn't  
call his people  
to specific  
results when  
they proclaim  
his Word.

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During January, WELS congregations participate in an annual census. Through their pastors and elected leaders, congregations submit statistics for inclusion in the WELS Statistical Report. The report includes items like baptized and communicant membership, average worship attendance, and number of confirmations (both children and adult) during the year.

The WELS Statistical Report will never climb to the top of the *New York Times'* best sellers list; no one will turn its pages as if it were a novel filled with interesting characters and compelling plot twists. Yet statistical reports are worth reading. More important, the statistics are worth contemplating.

The Lord had contemplation in mind when he directed Moses to prepare a statistical report of the people of Israel after they left Egypt. Specifically, the Lord wanted Moses and the leaders of Israel to count the men 20 or older who were fit for military service (Numbers chapter 1). They identified 603,550 men fitting that bill, suggesting an overall population in the neighborhood of 2 million.

As they contemplated the statistics, the people of Israel couldn't help but draw some conclusions. First, God had richly blessed them. Only a small group of 70 had moved with Jacob to Egypt 430 years earlier. In spite of the Egyptians' brutal oppression, the people of Israel had multiplied. Second, God always keeps his promises, even when it seems impossible. He had, as promised, made childless Abram into a great nation.

That's the way to contemplate congregational statistics. We note with thanksgiving the blessings God grants in the year past, giving him all the credit. We do so even if the blessings aren't the specific ones we wanted to see. We thank God for those he led to be in worship each week and for the people he added to our number. We give him thanks for keeping his promise to strengthen his people in faith through Word and sacrament.

Contemplation of congregational statistics also can be helpful when it leads people to assess the ministry being carried out. Please don't misunderstand. Statistics are only statistics. God doesn't call his people to specific results when they proclaim his Word. He doesn't insist, for example, that they must increase congregational membership or Bible study attendance by 10 percent or face his judgment. The Lord does, however, call for faithfulness. He desires activity. He asks for effort. He wants his people to offer their very best. Sometimes statistics move leaders to ask important questions about activity: "What are we doing to reach the people in our community without a church home? What are we doing to serve those on the membership rolls who have wandered away?"

Ask those questions seriously and there will likely be reason to repent. We may need to confess laziness, because we've done only the bare minimum. We may have to acknowledge to God and our fellow believers that we filled our schedules with busywork instead of focusing on the important work of reaching people with the good news. We may have to admit that we haven't given much thought to improving the ways we serve people with God's Word.

Our value does not rise or fall on the basis of our accomplishments or our shortcomings. Thank God! God has declared us valuable because of what he has done for us in Christ, not because of what we have done for him. Knowing the Lord's unconditional love for us and his unbreakable promise to bless our labors in his name, we can make aggressive ministry plans, focused on activity and improvement. We can use his gifts faithfully and then watch him do what he always does—bless!

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*Contributing editor Earle Treptow is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.*



## Matthew chapter 1 lists the ancestors of Jesus. You will learn more about your Savior as we trace through segments of his family tree.

### Because of Jesus, we, along with King David, get to wear the crown of life.

Not too long ago we crowned the college football champions. A Super Bowl champion is about to be crowned. Soon after that we'll crown an NCAA basketball champ. It's crowning time!

#### DAVID WORE A CROWN

David is the first person in Jesus' line who wore a crown. That may be why Matthew lists him as "King David" in chapter 1. He's the only person in the list who's called "king," even though more than ten other kings are listed.

So, what would be the "jewels" in David's crown? Perhaps one jewel is that he's the shepherd boy who became king, the classic underdog who became great. A more likely jewel is that he's the giant-slayer who, trusting in God, took on and defeated Goliath. Or perhaps we'd point to when he honored the kingship—and more important, honored God—by refusing to kill King Saul when given a chance. Awesome work, David! Those are shining jewels in that crown!

Oh, but there was the affair with Bathsheba and the attempted cover-up. Then David arranged the murder of Uriah, Bathsheba's husband. Not exactly what we think of as jewels in the crown. But those are key events in the life of David, the king. Even these chunks of asphalt or pieces of gravel are "jewels" in his crown.

#### WE ALSO HAVE BEEN CROWNED

In amazing grace, God counts you and me to be kings and queens. Yes, in the eyes of God you and I are royalty, and we will be forever, as

God will give us the crown of life (cf. Revelation 2:10). That's amazing! God has put a "crown" on our heads, and you and I will wear a crown forever.

So let's consider the jewels in our crowns. Surely there are times when we serve God well. There are times when we practice hospitality, when we show unselfish love, and when we willingly and freely help our neighbor. Yes, those are wonderful jewels in our crowns!

But then there are those other times when we're selfish, refuse to love, and serve ourselves rather than serving God or others. Perhaps, like David, we've committed what the world would call "big" sins—murder or adultery. Unfortunately, those ugly big or little chunks of asphalt are in our crowns too. It sounds like we're a lot like David. It sounds like we're kings and queens whose crowns are incredibly flawed.

And so we rejoice that David, the king, is one link in the chain leading us to Jesus, the King. Jesus, the King of all, has a perfect crown glittering with flawless jewels as ruler of the universe. He exchanged that crown for David's flawed crown—and for ours—when he wore a crown of thorns. He was willing to lay aside his crown to take our punishment.

And now? Now you and I get to be kings and queens!

Because the King laid aside his crown,  
he places eternal crowns on the heads  
of sinners like you and me.

And that's why David was really  
a king.

*Contributing editor Thomas Kock, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Atonement, Milwaukee.*

This is the seventh article in a nine-part series on people in Jesus' family tree.



Thomas D. Kock

# REALPEOPLE REALSAVIOR




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[God's] love for us  
is communicated  
in the gospel  
that proclaims  
Christ crucified.

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## God's language of love

Gary Chapman wrote about the five love languages. His insight came from careful study and counseling experiences. Many couples benefited from his insights and improved their relationships. Perhaps you have benefited as well.

Another love deserves our attention—God's love. His love for us is communicated in the gospel that proclaims Christ crucified. That is his language of love. We don't understand and appreciate his love on our own. It is foolishness and weakness. The Holy Spirit must bring us to see that it is wiser than human thought and stronger than any human power (see 1 Corinthians chapters 1 and 2).

I'd like to use five adjectives to help us appreciate God's love. God's love is perceptive, sacrificial, personal, powerful, and persistent.

When I say that God's love is *perceptive*, I think of the way God viewed the helpless lot of his fallen creatures. By nature humans are locked in a prison of guilt, shame, rage, jealousy, and arrogance. The prison has only one door—death. That's what God perceives of our human existence.

God's love took one more step. God found no human who could change what he saw (Isaiah 59:16). He knew he was the only one who could change things. He chose to act in love, and his love was *sacrificial*. He entered human history and became a human for no other reason than that there was no other way. Jesus came and sacrificed himself to pay for all human faults, sins, and errors. While we were powerless and enemies of God, he demonstrated his love for us. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

His love was *personal* because he knew every sinner and included all sinners in his sacrifice. God knows us so well that he has an accurate

count of the hairs on our head and knows where we are and what we experience each day. In love he knew us long before we were even born.

This is all a mystery to our natural human thinking. We would not know any of this unless God revealed it to us and gave us power to believe it. So God's love is *powerful*. It has changed us in two ways.

The proclamation of God's love in the gospel is the power of God, as Paul reminds us (Romans 1:16). The Holy Spirit uses the gospel to change our hearts from stubborn unbelief to faith in Jesus. That is the first way God's love shows its power. We don't call Jesus Lord except by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3).

God's love is powerful in another way too. The gospel continues to shape and mold us as children of God. We are compelled by God's love not only to love him but also to serve him. We are different from those who do not understand God's great love. That love motivates us to praise, worship, and obey him and to love others as he loved us.

The love of God operates through the gospel in Word and sacrament—the means of grace. As we take steps in our earthly journey, we recognize that his love is *persistent*. It does not change or waver. It remains constant; it does not give up on us. When we falter, God does not abandon us. When we grow weary, his powerful love persists in giving us strength.

I can do no better than pray, with the apostle Paul, that "you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge" (Ephesians 3:17-19).



# GREAT STORIES OF THE BIBLE

## THE BIRTH OF JESUS Joel S. Heckendorf

Crystal-like snowflakes gently cascading over a world filled with celebrations and camaraderie. A snow-globe world where everything stays in place as the music gently plays. Our view of the world at Christmas is often fantasized. Even now, you can remember the smell of the chestnuts roasting and the notes of yuletide carols.

### JESUS' LOVE

The details of Luke chapter 2 remind us that Jesus came to a real world. "In those days, Caesar Augustus . . ." "Those days" were peppered with political scandals, assassination plots, war schemes, military drafts, taxation, and more. Would you want to come to a world like that?

Our real world isn't much better. Jockeying for position in politics, family, or business. Misguided spirituality. Pride. Anger. Living in the past. Taxes. War. Money. All of these make for a messy world. But if all we concluded this past Christmas is that Jesus came to a messy world and our world is messy, we missed the full beauty of Christmas.

It's not just the world that is "messed up." It's us. I don't mean that generically, as if to say, "We're all sinners." I mean it personally. I admit that pride, anger, greed, jealousy, and envy mess me up—and you too. Even when we do something nice like signing and sending a thoughtful card or paying it forward at Starbucks, what was going on in our minds? "That was nice of me." How quickly we get self-absorbed.

And yet, as messed up as the world is and as messed up as we are, God came. Why? There's only one answer: love. That's what blows me away about Christmas. Not the angels. Not the shepherds. Not the virgin birth. That Jesus came to this world shows us his incomparable, inexhaustible love.

It doesn't have to be December 25 to marvel at that expression of love. Write on your mirror, "God came to earth for me." Corrupt-hearted me. When we see how desperate we are, we see what a Deliverer he is. That Jesus came to this world shows us his love.

### JESUS' COMMITMENT

"While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born" (Luke 2:6). I've yet to hear a mascot cheer, "We're the mighty, mighty Infants!" But that's how God came—as an infant. The God who holds the world in his hands had to be held by a teenage girl. What kind of weak God is this? Soon you'll marvel at the strength and determination of Jesus as you watch him walk to Calvary. Those steps were only possible because God came into our world as a baby. God said, "I'm all in." There was no turning back. How God came to this world shows his commitment.

That commitment doesn't stop. That Jesus had human hands shows he is committed to always hold yours. That he had human hair shows he's committed to care for you, right down to the hairs on your head. His human feet show he's committed to walk with you wherever you go. That God came as a lowly human and was laid in a manger in our world shows just how committed he is to take you to his mansions where he made room for you.

### EXPLORING THE WORD

1. Tell the story in your own words. Then read the account. Which details did you omit or mistakenly add?
2. Why do you think this story is one of the most popular stories included in children's Bibles?
3. "When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son" (Galatians 4:4). Why was this a "good" time for Jesus to enter the world?
4. God came to earth in other ways. List them. Why is this one different?

*Contributing editor Joel Heckendorf is pastor at Immanuel, Greenville, Wisconsin.*



This is the third article in a 10-part series on the top ten stories included in children's Bibles and how they apply to our lives today. Find answers online after Feb. 5 at [wels.net/forwardinchrist](http://wels.net/forwardinchrist).



Claire E. Natsis

# SHAPING GOD'S TREES

Rooted in God's Word, we must train children in the way they should go.

As a teacher, I was out at recess with the kids. The playground is next to a busy street. One vehicle passed by which made me chuckle. It was a large truck for a tree-trimming business with a slogan sprawled on the side: "God made 'em, We shape 'em!"

I laughed and shared the chuckle about the truck with the other teacher outside. She smiled and said, "That fits with us and our students too!"

How true! God has created each little life in our lives, and whether we are parents or teachers, we have the responsibility to shape them like trees.

## GUIDING CHRISTIANS OF THE FUTURE

The most important part of our shaping is to introduce them to the Word. We might send children to a school or Sunday school that teaches God's Word as truth. At home we have daily devotions. We sing Christian songs or listen to Christian music. Any exposure to God's Word is a chance for children to see the wonderful gifts that God has given us.

But it doesn't stop there. We are an example for them to follow as they grow. In the car, at a restaurant, or on the street, we show children how to act in our daily lives. We don't talk negatively about others. We don't curse or swear or say inappropriate things. We keep things in order as best we can. When children see how adults should act, they will be more inclined to act that way as well.



Little saplings need discipline. It's no secret that we are all sinners in this world. Children make mistakes. Discipline means more than punishment; it is a way to direct children to grow straight and strong. Talking to children about bad behavior helps them to understand why we don't do it and how we can use other methods to solve the problem. Knowing the forgiveness of Jesus helps them move in positive directions.

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God has created each little life in our lives, and . . . we have the responsibility to shape them like trees.

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## KEEPING OURSELVES READY FOR THE TASK

As much time as we spend shaping the little trees God gives us, we understand that we are God's tools. And we can break. We are not perfect. Some-

times we just have to get that gossip off our lips. The bad example also shapes the tree when we curse as that car swerves into our lane or we decide to skip church on a Sunday morning. We all are susceptible to temptations.

When we as God's tools become dull or broken, the only thing that can repair us is God's Word. We need to regularly stay in his Word—not just to set an example for the children but also to keep our lives rooted in the great love of God in Jesus. Just like a tree needs to be watered regularly, tools need to be sharpened regularly. When God stays at the center of our lives, our lives change for the better.

God made 'em; we shape 'em. That's what God asks of us: "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6). It is our responsibility not only to train but to keep ourselves ready to train.

The trees in your life may come in many different sizes—small little sprouts, thin stalks, even strong and more mature trees. All of them require maintenance, and it is our job—with God's guiding help—to shape them into the Christians of the future.

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*Claire Natsis is a teacher at Christ Our Redeemer Lutheran School, Aurora, Colorado.*