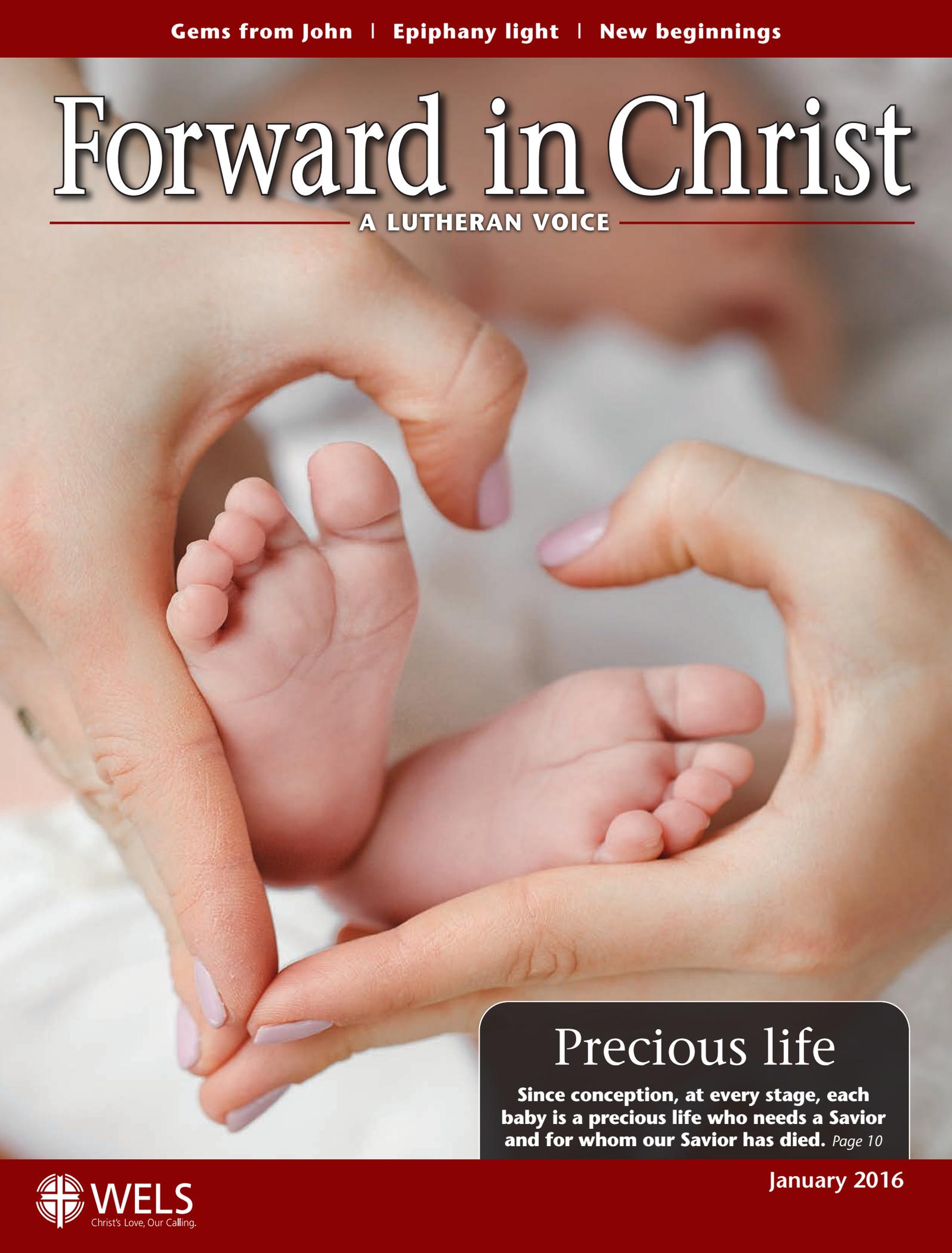


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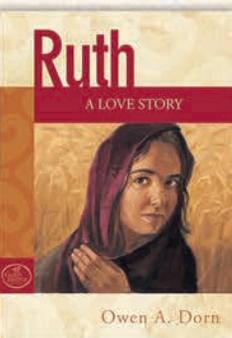
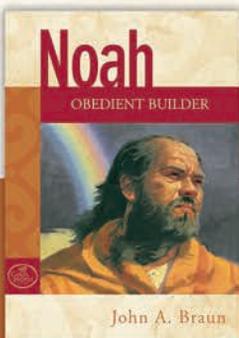
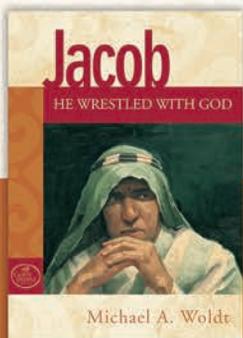
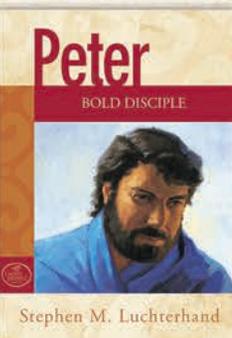
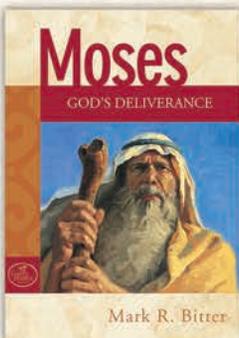
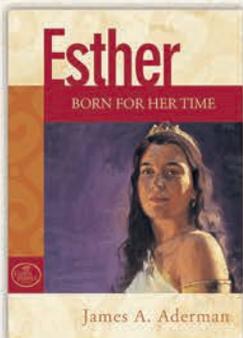
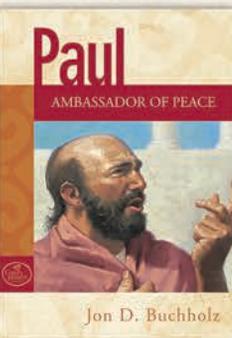
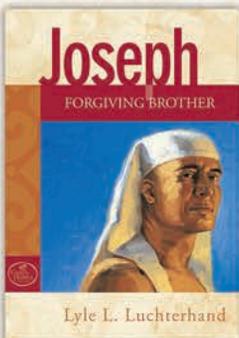
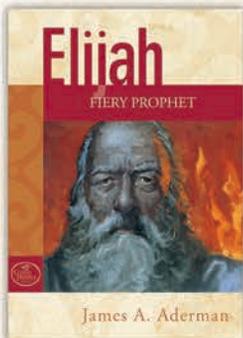
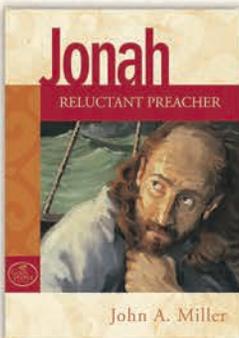
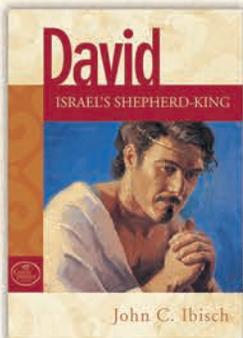
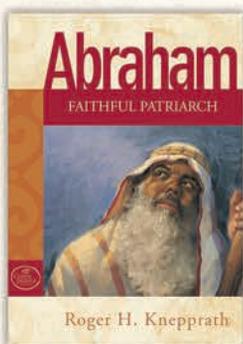


Precious life

Since conception, at every stage, each baby is a precious life who needs a Savior and for whom our Savior has died. *Page 10*



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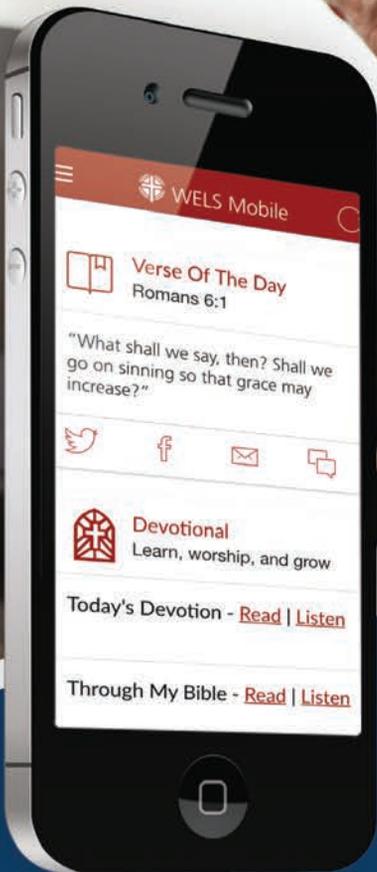
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May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. — 1 KINGS 8:57

WHAT'S INSIDE

How many times have you wanted to yell, “Do over!” after you messed something up or made a bad choice that wrecked your day? Maybe that’s why some people love January and the new year so much. They look at it as a new day, a new chance to get it right.

Several of our authors this month talk about new beginnings—not the kind you get with your New Year’s resolutions, but the kind God gives you every day through your baptism. Each article provides a different way to look at your new life through Jesus and how you daily can live that life for him.

The month of January reminds us of the importance of new life in another way. More than 40 years ago, abortion became legal in the United States. Since then, nearly 60 million have decided to end a new life through abortion. In our cover story this month, Pastor Robert Fleischmann reminds us of the value of every life—to us and to our Savior (p. 10).

The value of every life—and of every soul—is also demonstrated in January through the festival of the Epiphany, when Gentiles from the East first met their Savior. Read more about Epiphany on the back page as well as on page 26, where Prof. Ted Hartwig shares another epiphany to the woman at the well.

Julie Wietzke



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BRAVO ZULU!

Thank you for “Bravo Zulu, Jesus!” [Nov. 2015]. The article and photos brought back some beautiful memories. As a Coast Guard family, we were stationed on Kodiak Island and worshiped over a speaker phone. We eagerly awaited the times Pastor Voss would fly in and we could worship in person.

Pastor Voss deserves a Bravo Zulu too. He truly has a pastor’s heart for every person he serves—no matter how far they are scattered across the state. My husband talks about the way Fred recited psalms as they were hiking and hunting on Alaskan mountains. I still see him reading books and playing Play-Doh with our children. Though the distance and weather and ruggedness can leave you feeling iso-

lated, the Word of God and the love our church family shared brought us all close together.

*Linda Buxa
Oconomowoc, Wisconsin*

REJOICE IN LAST JUDGMENT SUNDAY

Thank you, Pastor Wolدت, for your stirring article on last judgment [Nov. 2015]. I rejoice in the last judgment as I rejoice in my risen Savior. This will be the culmination of what my Lord has done for me—the reason for Christmas, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost. He gave up his throne in heaven for me. He lived a perfect life for me, suffered and died on the cross for me, and rose in glory that I too may experience that resurrection. He did this all for me that I might finally be set free forever from all those sins that have plagued me throughout these many years. We must, as believers, listen carefully and confidently for the hope Last Judgment Sunday proclaims to us. All praise and glory to the Son who makes it a reality.

*George Perry
Phoenix, Arizona*

“STAND AND TAKE IT”

I respectfully disagree with Pastor Samelson that Christians should have a “stand and take it” attitude or be called whiners [Sept. 2015]. None of us look at Martin Luther as a whiner. Our brave founders of this country came here because of religious persecution. Because of their rebellion, we have enjoyed 200-plus years of freedom to believe in the true God, not only in this country, but also the freedom to spread that Word around the world as we have been commanded. We should be using that same freedom right now within the laws of the country to express our disagreement with laws that disagree with God’s Word while we still can.

*Brian Kolb
Prairie City, South Dakota*

Send your letters to **Feedback**, *Forward in Christ*, N16 W23377 Stone Ridge Dr, Waukesha WI 53188; fic@wels.net. Letters between 100 and 200 words are preferred. Include full name and address. Letters are edited for clarity, conciseness, and relevance. Not all letters received can be acknowledged or used. Writers’ views are not necessarily those of WELS or *Forward in Christ*.

Through my Bible in 3 years



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JANUARY 2016

- | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. 1 John 1:1–2:2 | 12. Is. 44:24–45:25 | 23. Is. 59 |
| 2. 1 Jn. 2:3–27 | 13. Is. 46 & 47 | 24. Is. 60 |
| 3. 1 Jn. 2:28–3:10 | 14. Is. 48 | 25. Is. 61:1–63:6 |
| 4. 1 Jn. 3:11–4:6 | 15. Is. 49:1–50:3 | 26. Is. 63:7–64:12 |
| 5. 1 Jn. 4:7–5:3 | 16. Is. 50:4–51:16 | 27. Is. 65 |
| 6. 1 Jn. 5:4–21 | 17. Is. 51:17–52:12 | 28. Is. 66 |
| 7. 2 John & 3 John | 18. Is. 52:13–53:12 | 29. Matthew 1 |
| 8. Isaiah 40 | 19. Is. 54 | 30. Matt. 2 |
| 9. Is. 41 | 20. Is. 55 | 31. Matt. 3 |
| 10. Is. 42:1–43:13 | 21. Is. 56 & 57 | |
| 11. Is. 43:14–44:23 | 22. Is. 58 | |

Defining religion



EPIPHANY: a revelation or making known; the festival on which we celebrate the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world. Epiphany is commemorated on Jan. 6; the Epiphany season lasts for four to nine weeks depending on the date of Easter.

New beginning

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. Romans 6:1-4

Michael A. Woldt

Have you seen it? The image of a baby wearing a top hat. The sash across the baby's chest boldly announcing "2016." Happy New Year! Out with the old. In with the new.

Baby New Year represents hope for the future. But is that hope well-founded? Given the world's history, it's hard to understand why the flip of a calendar page evokes any optimism at all. Does anyone really think that 2016 will bring an end to war, crime, poverty, and disease? After the shouts of "Happy New Year" subside and the confetti is swept from Times Square, it's likely that the first days of 2016 will be quite similar to the last days of 2015.

BAPTISM CHANGED OUR FUTURE

Are you longing for real change and lasting hope? Then look no further than the day of your baptism. When we entered this world, our soft infant skin masked a terrible reality. We were born hostile to God. We were enslaved by Satan and trapped by the curse and power of sin. Jesus' words to Nicodemus expose our true condition: "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh" (John 3:5,6). The apostle Paul chimes in, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1).

Then we were baptized! Unlike New Year's celebrations, Baptism is more than a tradition or a ritual. Baptism changed our future in a profound way. The Holy Spirit used the water and Word of Baptism to connect us to



Jesus. We were buried with Christ. We died to sin. We were raised to live a new life! A life free from the curse of sin and its eternal consequences. A life liberated from slavery to sin. Baptism frees us to serve Jesus each new day.

Baptism means that we are not condemned to repeat the sins of 2015.

BAPTISM OFFERS HOPE

The month of January provides a special opportunity to remember the personal blessings we have received through Baptism. The gospel lesson assigned for the first Sunday after Epiphany is the account of Jesus' baptism. Jesus was baptized as part of his saving work for us. When we witness Jesus' baptism, we can recall what our

baptism means for each new day the Lord gives us in 2016. In words taken from Luther's Small Catechism: "Baptism means that the old Adam [sinful nature] in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever."

Baptism means that we are not condemned to repeat the sins of 2015. Through contrition and repentance we take the sins of the past to Jesus. The blood he shed on the cross washes them away. Fully. Completely. Through Baptism we are clothed with Christ and his perfection (Galatians 3:27).

What a great way to enter the New Year. What a great way to live each new day!

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



Mark Schwede

For God's people,
the new start in life
doesn't come once
a year. It comes
every day.

What's really new?

There is something about the “new-car smell” that appeals to just about everyone. Climb into a brand new vehicle, and you are greeted with the unique odor that unmistakably announces that this car has just come from the factory, in perfect condition, not yet spoiled by the Big Mac wrappers on the floor, the coffee stain, or the tennis shoes tucked behind the back seat.

There is something especially uplifting about moving into a newly built house. The appliances have never been used and work perfectly. There are no stains on the carpet from children's spills and no sign of previous canine or feline occupants. The walls are freshly painted, and the roof is perfectly waterproof.

Who doesn't appreciate a new set of clothes? Whether you have gained a little weight or just completed a successful diet, the new clothes fit perfectly. There are no wrinkles to remove, no holes to mend, no buttons missing. New clothes have no hint of the wear and tear of a previous owner and no fading from repeated laundering.

And what touches us more than a new baby? Helpless and seemingly innocent, the little new life brings smiles to strangers' faces and an indescribable sense of love and connection to the new parents. The very newness of that life points to the future, to a lifetime of experiences and potential and promise.

We like new things. We like new things because they have not yet been spoiled or ruined or broken. New things represent a fresh start, a new beginning, a break from the past.

Maybe that's why the start of a new year is such a big thing in the minds of many people. Certainly it is nothing more than the turning of a calendar page and one more sunrise than the day before. Yet the very thought

of the year being new leads many to believe that Jan. 1 is a fresh start, a new beginning, an opportunity to reset life and start over without the baggage of the past. The new year comes, and people think that this year things will be better. Their lives will be better. Their behavior will be better. At least, that's what they resolve.

For God's people, the new start in life doesn't come once a year. It comes every day.

Jeremiah reminds us, “[The LORD's] compassions never fail. They are new every morning” (Lamentations 3:22,23). In each day of our lives filled with sin and failure and open rebellion against God, his mercy comes to us without fail. His mercy pours down on us in Christ, and his grace lifts us up into his loving arms. So each day we begin as another new day, another day to know that God has brought us from death to a new life as his child.

And each new day is also another opportunity to live a new kind of life for him. Each day we return to the new life he first gave us in our baptism—the new life we have—and look forward to a new kind of life he enables us to live. Paul wrote to the Romans, “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Romans 6:4).

With that in mind, every day of this new year can begin anew. Given new life by his mercy and grace, we are set free to live a new life of joyful, thankful obedience in him.

Light for our path

My daughter's exposure to climate change ideas in college has led her to question whether it's responsible to have any children (who will each have a "carbon footprint"). I hate to think that we should refuse God's gift of children because of climate change fears. Can you shed any light on this?

James F. Pope

Responding to your question will take us in two different directions, but they both lead to God and the truths of his Word.

CARING FOR GOD'S CREATION

More than any other people in the world, Christians have reason to care for the environment. Why? Because we recognize that "the earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters" (Psalm 24:1,2). This planet we call home is not the result of some cosmological explosion or chance alignment of atoms. The world, the universe—all things—came into existence by the powerful word of the Lord (John 1:3). He then entrusted the management of this world to the crown of his creation (Genesis 1:28).

So we strive to care for God's creation as best we can, but we do so with the humble realization and confident trust that the Creator of the universe is also the preserver of the universe. That means that concerns—real or imagined—for the environment need to be balanced by the fact that people are not ultimately in control of this world. God is.

To take a short refresher course in God's control of his world, review Job chapters 8–41. With figurative language God speaks of the "storehouses" of the snow and hail (38:22) that he has at his disposal. In unmistakably clear language throughout that section of Job, God identifies himself as the one who oversees the environment to sustain life.

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S GIFT OF PROCREATION

In addition to sustaining life, God gives life, and he does that through people. With his directive for Adam and Eve to

fill the earth (Genesis 1:28), God blessed people with procreative powers. He enables people to be his agents in the life-giving process.

We view children as blessings from God (Psalm 127:3-5). Blessings. Not inconveniences on a lifestyle, not drains on personal income, not barriers to career goals. Blessings. God wants his blessings nurtured, cared for, loved, and brought up in the Christian faith. And because he is in control of life, God will grant those blessings according to his loving wisdom. Husbands and wives, then, can gladly receive God's blessings as he grants them.

Will God grant so many blessings that he threatens his own world through environmental change or inadequate food supplies? Not at all. The one who gives life is also the one who sustains life. When it comes to God meeting people's basic needs, the observation of the psalmist still rings true today: "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing" (Psalm 145:15,16).

On the basis of Scripture, then, your daughter can definitely move forward in life with the attitude that "it is responsible" to have children, should God so grant them. Her concerns about God's creation are not to negate what God has said about his gift of children and his promise to preserve the lives he has given. God can be trusted in whatever he says (Titus 1:2).

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

James Pope also answers questions online at wels.net/questions. Submit your questions there or to fic@wels.net.

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

Psalm 119:105



Precious LIFE

Since 1973, the decision to end a child's life through abortion has been made nearly 60 million times in the United States. But every life is important to our Savior.

Robert R. Fleischmann

In a *Salon* website article dated Jan. 23, 2014, Mary Elizabeth Williams made a shocking acknowledgment: “Here’s the complicated reality in which we live: All life is not equal.” With those words, Williams justified her support for abortion. In her judgment, the mother’s life is more important.

Abortion-rights activists acknowledged publicly in 1995 that in abortion a child dies. For the first 20 years, proponents of abortion rights dismissed the humanity of the unborn child. They argued the developing unborn child was nothing more than a parasitical blob of tissue, wholly dependent on the “host” (i.e., “mother”) for its existence.

It took time, but the biological facts emerged from the muddled mess of rhetoric. Life begins at fertilization. It is then that human life is conceived. From that point forward, it progresses through various “biological stages.” At every stage, however, it is a precious life needing a Savior (Psalm 51:5) and having that Savior die for it (Mark 10:45).

In the so-called “real world,” this plays out with immediate and long-term consequences.

“Brittany” is a 16-year-old honor student. Dating with intimacy was the norm for her peers and became the norm when she and “Lucas” became “a couple.” Her unplanned pregnancy came with practical problems. She aspired to go to college and earn a degree in business administration. She could

not imagine finishing high school and attending college as a single mom. While Lucas agreed to support her decision in the matter, she was not sure how he would feel five or ten years later. Therefore, Brittany made a decision. She reasoned that too much was at stake and too many hardships existed to permit the pregnancy to continue. The child must die.

“Aaron” and “Leah” were married just over four years. Their plan to wait to start a family seemed to work. They completed college. Aaron landed a great job, and Leah was able to get her master’s degree. She began a successful home Internet business, and the two decided to start a family. It took another two years before the pregnancy test finally registered positive.

Now began the regular checkups as the baby grew within her. Leah never smoked, and she gave up her evening glass of wine for the pregnancy. There were the exciting early ultrasound pictures, and, of course, the spare room went through a massive transformation to become the baby nursery.

Leah was about four and a half months along in her pregnancy when she underwent a “quad screen”—a blood test that uses four different measurements to identify potential defects in the developing child. The test results found a “significant chance” that her baby would be born with Down syndrome. While advancements have been made in improving the quality of life for those with Down syndrome, Leah feared for the kind of life her child would have with this condition.

Aaron and Leah were devastated by the test results. This new information changed everything and significantly complicated life. For Leah it was one thing to run an at-home business while raising a “healthy” child. She did not anticipate the complications of raising a child with any kind of disability.

Aaron and Leah very much love children, and they both recall the heartache of seeing how other kids would treat a child with Down syndrome. After a great deal of tears, they decided that the “loving” decision was to accept that this was not the right time to have a baby. It did not seem loving to them to bring this child into the world only to live life with Down syndrome. The child must die.

Since Jan. 22, 1973, when abortion became legal throughout the United States, the decision to end a child’s life through abortion has been made nearly 60 million times in this country. About one million American mothers each year decide to end the lives of their unborn children; 18 percent of those abortions occur on mothers 18 years of age and younger. Moreover, when a child in the womb is diagnosed with Down syndrome, the abortion rate skyrockets to between 75 and 90 percent, depending on the studies one reads.

Simplistically, we can shake a judgmental finger at the culture of death that has permeated our society. Without

a doubt, it is bad. For some, abortion is one more form of birth control (studies now show more than 50 percent of abortions each year are performed on women who have had one or more previous abortions). For most, however, abortion is the easiest (though definitely not easy) of all apparent options in a difficult circumstance.

Realistically, the problem is far more complex than just the abortion decision. The inability to set good priorities or to carry them out is rooted in relationship problems with God and his will. When the disciples proclaimed, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22), do we believe it and accept it as the reality of life? When we sing, “I’m but a stranger here, heaven is my home,” do our lifestyles testify to that conviction?

What is happening in our society mirrors what is happening in our homes—including the homes of many Christians. On the one hand we profess our allegiance to God and his will but then place exceptions on that allegiance. In the case of any pregnancy, our sinful nature expects it to come at the right time, and the baby must be in great health. Yet both of those standards are self-imposed without counsel from God. Sadly, the importance of life is measured not by its Creator but by the whims of the created.

God, however, is not silent about how to handle these unexpected twists and turns in life. He challenges us to demonstrate our allegiance to him by calling on us to think more of others than ourselves (Philippians 2:3,4) and to imitate the sacrificial love of Jesus (1 Peter 2:21).

How well do we communicate with our words and actions to the abortive mother the importance of her baby’s life *and* her own life? Are we quick only to point out error but offer no help? Have we offered assistance to families to raise a child afflicted with a debilitating condition or disease? Have we offered to share burdens, or do we only share judgments?

Is it our problem? Is it not? Our motivation to love is the love we know from Christ (1 John 4:19). He demonstrated love for us when we neither earned nor deserved it (Romans 5:8). The opportunity and means to demonstrate love to others challenge each of us to fight abortion not merely by calling it out as a sin but also by helping to care and do right henceforth.

The stories of Brittany and Aaron and Leah are true—although their names were changed. They represent just two of the one million decisions that occur annually to end the life of an unborn child. This plight of unborn children is our plight (Matthew 25:35). Their lives are so precious that Jesus died for them. It compels us to speak up and step up to imitate that sacrificial love.

Robert Fleischmann, national director of Christian Life Resources, Milwaukee, is pastor at St. Paul, Slinger, Wisconsin.

For resources and guidance on life and family issues, visit www.christianliferesources.com.



ORIGINS: TWO MODELS

We must teach no more and no less than what the Scriptures say.

Arthur A. Eggert

It's common to hear of people who are working to prove evolution is false and to validate the biblical account of creation. They have written a lot of literature, they run websites like Answers in Genesis, and they even have a Creation Museum. Their arguments can sound very convincing, just like the models of the evolutionists can sound very convincing. Before we accept their arguments, however, we need to evaluate how they fit with the Bible and scientific practice.

The fundamental assumption of science is that all phenomena we observe can be explained in terms of the natural properties of matter, energy, time, and space. This assumption precludes the existence of supernatural beings.

Because the Bible teaches that the Lord God (a supernatural being) exists, that he created the world, and that he actively manages it, Christians reject the fundamental assumption of science. Due to the Lord's active involvement with the universe, anything observed by scientists may be a result of natural processes, of miraculous acts by God, or of a combination of the two. This makes all evolutionary models or theories wholly unreliable and impossible to validate.

Alas, the same statement is equally true of all explanations developed by "creation scientists." For example, did the

Lord bring the Grand Canyon to its present state of existence through natural processes, supernatural acts, or both? Neither evolutionary science nor creation science can answer that question if the primary assumption of science is false. Moreover, the Bible does not give us the answer either.

While scientists must believe that nothing is a miracle (i.e., unexplainable), Christians must believe that everything is a miracle (i.e., we don't really know how God causes anything to happen). This profound truth is inherent in our belief in an almighty God who controls even the "laws of nature."

This truth is made very clear when the Lord challenged Job (Job chapters 38–41) to explain the hidden things of God. Job couldn't. Nobody can. At any one time humans can observe only the tiniest fraction of the universe and can know only what their senses and their instruments reveal to them. The Lord is not obligated to limit his activities to what humans can detect and model. He reveals the breadth of his power throughout Scripture. He has absolute control over all things, both large and small. He leads the stars out (Job 38:31,32). He guards little sparrows (Matthew 10:29). He numbers people's hairs (Matthew 10:30). He "clothes" lilies (Luke 12:27,28). He provides food for all (Psalm 145:15,16). He guards our safety (Psalm 91:11,12). He builds our structures (Psalm 127:1), and he establishes governments (Romans 13:1). The only way we know anything about God's

hidden actions is through revelation, not through science or other means of human investigation (Isaiah 8:20). Even perfect science can tell us nothing for certain.

Second, scientific models are not like religious tenets.

For example, we understand the meaning of such teachings as transubstantiation and double predestination because they have precise definitions. We can formulate scriptural arguments against them that will endure throughout the generations. Conversely, scientific models are the result of the scientific method, which cause them to undergo frequent refinement. For example, the constant that relates the height of an object to the length of its sun-caused shadow changes continually based on the time of day and time of year. Every scientific model/theory is hostage to the next observation, which may force it to be revised. If one develops a scientific argument against a model, that argument will become obsolete as soon as the model is refined. That's how science works. Scientists criticize each other's models continually to try to disprove them, and they are better than amateurs at finding the weaknesses in such models.

It is precisely in this regard that churches that try to argue scientifically against evolution often make themselves look foolish. To understand the implications of scientific models takes a substantial amount of training, usually in several fields of science. Scientific models are built on many assumptions, not all of which are usually expressed, because everyone working with them supposedly already knows these assumptions.

For example, it is seldom mentioned in elementary science courses that common laws of motion are only true for perfectly elastic uncharged point-masses at slow speeds in vacuums where there are no frictional or gravitational forces. Sound complex? It is, but one needs to understand such complexity to challenge scientific models. Most scientific models, even generally accepted ones (sometimes called "laws"), have boundary conditions that greatly limit when they can be applied. It is also common for models to contain conclusions that do not sit comfortably with human reason. For example, how can the lengths of objects decrease as they go faster? It is common for those who are not thoroughly trained in science, such as most pastors and teachers in the church, to make caricatures of the actual scientific models/theories and beat on them with arguments that are scientific nonsense. Such efforts

can diminish called workers' credibility and undermine their authority on spiritual matters.

Finally, the Christian church is not commissioned to reform the institutions of the world, neither through the social gospel nor through improving society's morals nor through creation science.

In this sinful world such efforts are like trying to empty an ocean with a teaspoon. The time and effort expended to perform them do nothing to fulfill the Great Commission. It is more important that we preach the gospel and teach the faith. It is even of little value to point out the irrationality of some of the claims of evolutionists because Christianity

itself is not based on logic but on revelation. The Holy Spirit works through the Word, not through our reasoning, to change hardened hearts with the saving message.

We must teach no more and no less than the Scriptures teach about how the Lord created and preserves the world. That means we accept six-day creation and the universal flood. We accept the miracles performed in both the Old and New Testaments. We

hold this position because "Thus says the Lord."

On the other hand, we do not try to peek behind the curtain of how the Lord brought the world to its current state. We admit that we do not know what changes he made when he cursed the ground in Genesis chapter 3, through the flood, or at any other time unless they are specifically mentioned in the Bible. We acknowledge the usefulness of science and the value of the scientific method in helping us to live more comfortably in the world God gave us. We insist, however, that scientific models/theories be accepted for what they really are—the results of the efforts of fallible human beings to explain the universe, efforts that are limited by what the Lord allows us to observe, and results that are worthless when they contradict the revelation the Lord has given us in the Scriptures. We dare not buttress our faith with any such human-devised models lest we slide off the rock of Scripture and into a ditch.

Dr. Arthur Eggert is a member at Peace, Sun Prairie, Wisconsin.

This is the final article in a two-part series on creation.

The Holy Spirit works through the Word, not through our reasoning, to change hardened hearts with the saving message.

A ticket to a “wayward pastor” by a game warden opened doors and hearts.

Joseph J. Fricke

Learning how to witness in the classroom can't prepare you for everything. Sometimes lessons are best learned by messing things up. Boy, did I ever get my chance on a sunny Saturday in late February.

THE SET-UP

“Hey, Blacky! Let's go fishin'.” I had no idea of the impact that invitation would have on my life and the lives of two people I was going to meet.

“Yeah! Let's go!” said Blacky, my brother-in-law.

We gathered our gear and left. Our only fishing option that day was the Snake River.

I called Bill Blatt, a gentleman from our congregation. He managed a restaurant and took care of some cabins for a sportsman's club that had exclusive rights to fish a short stretch of the Snake River. He assured me that we were welcome to come down and go fishing. He said he'd leave a permission card since he wouldn't be around, letting others know we had permission to go fishing as his guests. As we pulled out of the driveway, evangelism was the last thing on my mind.

We arrived at the river and started fishing. After a few hours we had

caught three trout and were ready to head home for supper. On the way back to our car, a gentleman stopped us and asked to see our “membership cards.” A little curious at the request, I said, “We're here fishing as guests of Mr. Blatt.”

“Then I need to see your driver's license,” the stranger replied. I obliged, and he wrote down my information. We headed home, and I didn't give it a second thought until the next day.

FIRST CHANCE

The following morning, I was out in the garage, when a tall, young man in a uniform approached me and asked for Joe Fricke. I replied, “I'm Pastor Fricke. How can I help you?”

Frank, the game warden, said, “I understand you were fishing without permission at Snake Falls yesterday . . . and you caught a few fish.”

You can imagine what Frank was thinking: “This guy's a pastor. He ought to be doing the right thing.” After all, it is important for people in positions of trust, especially pastors, to obey the laws of the land.

I explained that I had permission from the caretaker to fish as his guest. It had never been a problem before.

Frank replied, “The caretaker does not have authority to give you permission. You have to get permission from the sportsman's club. However, in my business one learns quickly how to spot a liar, and I can tell you aren't. I won't ticket you for taking the fish, but the

sportsman's club does want to press charges, so I have to give you and your brother-in-law a ticket.”

I was embarrassed, frustrated, and angry. The ticket was \$75! Worse yet, “Pastor Caught Fishing Without Permission!” is not the kind of headline you want to see in the local paper. Blacky had to pay the fine right then or go to jail. We chatted awhile as my sister-in-law went fishing in her purse for the cash to pay the ticket.

When Blacky's ticket was paid, Frank left. My gut was telling me, “Always be prepared . . .” Did I just miss a chance to witness? Yes, I missed a chance! “Lord, please give me a second chance!”

SECOND CHANCE

I called the caretaker right away and left a panicked message. He wasn't due home until later that night, so I did my best to forget about it and went about preparing for our Friendship Sunday the next day.

Later that night, as I was trying to relax in the living room, the doorbell rang. It was Frank! We invited him in. He told us he had called the president of the sportsman's club and explained what happened. They were dropping the charges. Phew! Ticket forgiveness is awesome!

Two prayers answered! No fine, and I got my second chance! The voice in my head was shouting, “Always be prepared to give an answer . . .” Frank was not leaving my house without an invitation this time.

Confessions OF FAITH



We chatted awhile, laughing about the situation. As Frank was about to leave, I invited him to our Friendship Sunday service the next morning. He thanked me and left.

Sunday came and church started, but no Frank. The invitation had been extended. However, more regret. “Always be prepared to give an answer . . . and don’t forget to get their contact information.” I didn’t want to have to go fishing without permission to get the chance to talk to Frank again.

THIRD CHANCE

Fast forward to Easter Sunday. God gave me a third chance. As I was greeting people at the door, who shows up? It was Frank and his fiancée Dana. An invitation extended and accepted weeks later! God is good. After church, I arranged a time to meet them. This time, I got their contact information and went to visit.

At that visit I learned that Frank and Dana had some church background but had strayed from church. When I asked how they were getting to heaven, they replied, “We’re not sure. We were just raised to believe we were going.”

God has an answer for that, and I was prepared! This time I got to offer forgiveness—total unconditional forgiveness with the Lord. I shared the gospel and invited them to Bible information class. On the Sunday after Christmas, Frank and Dana were confirmed.

Frank and Dana are still laughing about the day we met. “The chance encounter



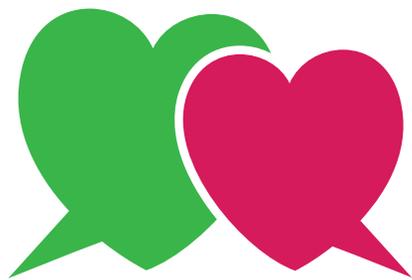
Left to right: Cody, Frank, Dana, Nathan, KayLynn and Casey Miller. Frank and Dana and their family are members at Zion, Valentine, Neb.

with the ‘wayward’ pastor from Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church brought us closer to God,” says Dana. “We were looking for a place to start our new lives together and a church that was focused on the truths of the Bible. Pastor Fricke’s invitation was the beginning of that journey. The forgiveness brought to Frank and me through Christ’s death on the cross has been such a gift, and having a church to reinforce those truths is wonderful. Having that steady rock to turn to in times of personal and professional challenges has made it feasible to continue to grow in our relationship with the Lord and together. We often reminisce about our chance encounter and how one simple act can impact your lives—and the lives of children who weren’t even born yet—for a lifetime.”

Total fish caught that February day? Five! Three trout, plus Frank and Dana. A few lessons were learned as well. “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15). You never know when the chance to tell someone about Jesus will present itself. If you blow it, pray for a second chance. God may give you one or three or more.

Finally, if you are ever in north central Nebraska, meet Frank and Dana in church. If you meet them while they are at work, they won’t hesitate to give you a ticket.

Joseph Fricke is pastor at St. Paul, Mauston/St. Paul, Adams, Wisconsin.



heart to heart parent conversations

Nothing gets past our kids, including our “little white lies.” Is all lying wrong, though? What about when we’re trying to be kind? Hear perspectives from three Christian parents—and from our heavenly Father.

Looking for more Christian parenting insights? Watch the monthly webcasts with Heart to heart authors available at forwardinchrist.net/webcasts.



Join the conversation!

Visit 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.

IS ALL LYING WRONG?

“It’s just a little white lie. No one was hurt.” An internal argument raged. “But it’s still a lie. You didn’t tell the truth.”

It started over a blob of tangled crayon lines.

“Awesome picture of a tree,” I told my grandson. But I lied. It didn’t look anything like a tree. Or anything I could identify.

I cleared a place on the refrigerator to mount his masterpiece. “Taa daa!” I trumpeted, bowing toward his picture with a grand hand gesture.

I could have truthfully said, “This is the best tree drawing you’ve ever done.” Instead I said, “This is the best tree drawing ever.”

Christians easily recognize the harm in lies that misrepresent God and misinterpret his Word. Deception that takes advantage of others is also obvious sin. But other liberties with the truth can seem not quite wrong. Sometimes justifiable. For instance:

When I was expecting our first child, a friend gave me some advice: Be honest with your kids. You can’t expect them to be honest with you if you’re not honest with them.

I’ve endeavored to stick to that principle, both because I want to model good habits for them and because I think they deserve honesty from me.

But what about honesty with other people? Do my kids understand when a “little white lie” might be acceptable? *Is a little white lie ever acceptable?*

One afternoon I ventured to Target with both young kids in tow. We only needed three things so I didn’t bother with a cart—living on the edge! With full arms, I was trying to wrangle both kids into our car when a man pulled his car up behind mine, blocking me in,

I’m sure you’ve had a moment when you have “caught” your son or daughter twisting the truth of a story to avoid a consequence, especially regarding school and homework. I had one of those opportunities the other night when I needed to remind my kids about the importance of telling the truth about their homework deadlines. As soon as I finished talking with them, the phone rang.

It was a friend of mine whom I hadn’t heard from in probably three years. After a great conversation, he asked if we could get together the next weekend. Can you see where this is going? Yes, in front of my daughter, I gave him an answer that was perhaps not completely accurate—one of those “We are busy this weekend” responses.

As soon as I hung up the phone, I heard, “Dad, what are we doing this weekend?”

I blew it! My heart moved up into my throat. Should I try to twist the weekend story so I don’t look like a complete

- Hypocritical lies that allow us to escape from the consequences of our convictions. (Have you pretended that living together outside of marriage is acceptable in order to escape ridicule?)
- Convenient lies that rescue us from situations we find distasteful. (“I’d love to go shopping, Honey, but my foot is killing me. I should just sit here and watch football.”)
- Fairy tale lies that lead children to believe in Santa, the tooth fairy, and other implausible fables.
- Protecting lies that are meant to shelter others from life’s hard truths. (“Your father doesn’t have a drinking problem. He’s just under a lot of stress.”)
- Privacy lies that save us from sharing what we want to keep to ourselves. (“Missing that party doesn’t bother me a bit.”)
- Caring lies, like the one I told my grandson, that are intended to avoid hurting others.

Our Father, the God of Truth, makes it clear in his Word of Truth that his grateful children are to be people of truth. “Do not lie to each other,” he says, “since you have . . . put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (Colossians 3:9,10).

God’s grace calls on us to be tactful and careful in the way we use truth. But, before all else, the truth of God’s grace compels us to be truthful.

Truth-telling is a life lesson our children and grandchildren need to see lived out in us. And when we fail, they need to hear us admit it, claim our cross-won forgiveness, and pledge to do better.

Little white lies are still lies. God’s children gently tell the truth—even about trees grandchildren draw.

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



and asked me for gas money. I felt cornered and unsafe (whether those were his intentions or not). I told him that sorry, no, I had no cash.

As I was trying frantically to get my kids into their seats and get out of there, Anna asked, “Is that true, Mom? Do you really not have any money?”

It wasn’t true. I had five dollars floating around in my purse. But I wasn’t about to admit that to a strange man while cornered in a parking lot with my kids. I had to tell Anna that it wasn’t true. I had lied to that man. (And then we had a long talk about listening to your gut when a situation feels unsafe and where to go to find help in public.)

The words that come out of our mouths are important. The words that *don’t* come out of our mouths are equally important. I’m trying to teach my kids that honesty matters, but

so do kindness and showing love to others. We don’t need to be 100 percent brutally honest with people. There are ways to be truthful without being hurtful.

I answered honestly when Anna asked if I was really the tooth fairy. I gave an age-appropriate, honest answer to the, “How is that baby comin’ outta there?” question that every mom dreads (in public, no less!). I teach the kids to practice phrases like, “That’s not my favorite,” when asked if they like something that they don’t. And we talk a lot about forgiveness and trying again when we inevitably make mistakes.

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



failure as a parent? Should I try to walk away and pretend I didn’t hear her? Could I quickly get my wife to help me create a cover story? What to do!

Surely my “little white lie” is not on the level of Abraham passing off his wife as his sister. And what about Peter—denying he even knew Christ, three times! My weekend excuse can’t be that bad, right?

Who am I kidding? It’s a lie. Clear failure on my part to keep God’s law perfectly. It was intentional deception just like Abraham and Peter. It was a failure with my friend and a failure with my daughter. No excuses.

It’s the same thing that we all complain about in our society. Who is telling us the truth? Have you watched any political debates recently? You know what I mean. It makes me wonder if Pontius Pilate’s question to Jesus, “What is truth?” might have been an exasperated response to the politics of his time. Was he exasperated with the lies, betrayals, and inconsistent stories?

We want so desperately for our children to be different. We want them to reflect the love of God by speaking truthfully. We want them to be trusted, successful, and honest. We don’t want them to grow up to live dishonest lives—existing by adding one lie on top of another.

Yes, my weekend story to my friend was a failure, but it gave me the opportunity to demonstrate confession and admit that I made a mistake. It also gave me the opportunity to talk about Christ and the reason we have and need his forgiveness—something I did not emphasize earlier when I was lecturing my kids.

We are forgiven! God’s grace abounded in my family’s failures that evening. It won’t be the last time, either.

Dan Nommensen and his wife, Kelly, have a daughter and a son.



Many hands make light work!

Students involved in campus ministry are eager to serve.

Glenn L. Schwanke

“Viele Hände machen bald ein Ende!” The words come gushing out from the bottom of my heart. Well, it might be more precise to say they flow from my lower back, which is even more excited that this job is finished. And what job would that be? Mid-winter roof snowshoveling in the Copper Country.

Roof snowshoveling? Yes, we live in an area where 200 to 250 inches of snow per winter are the norm. Though that snow comes down all white and fluffy, it piles up. On roofs too. And the weight of three to four feet of compacted snow on a roof can rival parking a pick-up truck up there. (I don't advise it.) If the snow isn't removed, roofs collapse. That's why Yoopers shovel off their roofs every winter—maybe more than once.

I remember absolutely no mention of roof snowshoveling in the call documentation I received when I moved here from Indiana. However, I vividly remember my state of shock when that first roof shoveling workday was scheduled. The volunteers were to start at 9:30 A.M. on a Saturday. I walked over to the chapel before 8:30. I didn't want anyone to see my first timid steps up onto the corner of our chapel's roof—covered in three feet of snow. Below the snow there was ice. Somewhere lost under that were the shingles. I slipped and shuffled until I collapsed into the snow, looked up to heaven, and said, “This I can't do, Lord!” But with a little practice, by the end of that workday, I started to get my “snow-roof” legs. It wasn't so bad after all.

Since then, however, the project has been getting far, far easier! Why? Our campus ministry group is growing. Ten to 15 eager college students, combined with members from our congregation, make short work of shoveling off our chapel's roof. When the chapel's finished, they head over to the parsonage. In less than an hour, that's done too. All the while the pastor remains on terra firma, snowblowing a path to the doors so we can still get inside the buildings. As the workers finish and climb back down the ladder, then comes the victory shout, *“Viele Hände machen bald ein Ende!”* It's time for chili and hot chocolate.

Why share the story? To make a very simple point.

Students involved in campus ministry are eager to serve. Give them an opportunity! The inspired writer observed, “Two are better than one. . . . If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!” (Ecclesiastes 4:9,10 HCSB).

Maybe you don't need a roof shoveled, but are there older folks in the congregation who could use some help with painting, cleaning, splitting wood, or raking leaves? Are there shut-ins whose day would be brightened by students who drop by with some fresh-baked cookies? Could students help with babysitting or tutoring grade school children or mentoring high school youth? What about ushering or playing organ or piano for worship? Singing a solo or in the choir? Teaching in Sunday school, helping with vacation Bible school, or coordinating a soccer camp for community outreach?

I suspect most of our churches have a “round-to-it” list that could use some volunteers. You'll find campus ministry students are eager to help. They take our Lord's Word seriously. “Based on the gift each one has received, use it to serve others, as good managers of the varied grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10 HCSB).

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



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

- Gehl, Michael L.**, to St. John, Wrightstown, Wis.
Hanneman, Bruce W., to St. John, Hancock, Minn.
Heffner, James J., to St. John, Two Rivers/St. John, Mishicot, Wis.
Saatkamp, James D., to St. James, North Branch, Mich.
Treptow, Earle D., to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.
Wilde, Philip P., to Emmanuel, Stratford, Wis.

NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS AND PASTORS

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

ANNIVERSARIES

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

COMING EVENTS

- “Men of His Word” conference**—Feb. 20. Best Western, Oshkosh, Wis. Theme: “Stand Firm.” Website, www.menofhisword.org.
Marriage enrichment weekend retreat—Feb. 26–28. Dimond Center Hotel, Anchorage, Alaska. Theme: “Distracted Marriage.” Website, wels.net/events.
Pathways to Christ retreat—Mar. 11–13. Oshkosh, Wis. 920-233-1069. Website, 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.
Martin Luther College choir tour—Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Website, 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.

Ironmen of God men's conference—Mar. 19; 9 A.M.–2 P.M. St. Paul's Lutheran School, Ixonia, Wis. Website, www.ironmenofgod.wi.org.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Chorus

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

- 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.

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.

WELS International Youth Rally—June 28–July 1. Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colo. Theme: “Our God Reigns.” youthrally2016@wels.net. Website, wels.net/events.

Women's Ministry Conference—July 21–23. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Theme: “Mentors.” Website, 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>.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

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

NAMES WANTED

Visual artists—to participate in Art-A-Whirl 2016 from May 20–22 at St. John, Minneapolis, Minn. Art-A-Whirl is the nation's largest open studio tour. St. John is currently recruiting WELS/ELS artists as it participates in Art-A-Whirl by turning the church location into an artist's studio for that weekend. Registration deadline: Feb. 1. Contact Kai Grohs with electronic samples of work at kisakg@gmail.com; 612-270-1619.

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

Northwest Arkansas—people visiting or moving to the area. Neil Hansen, Beautiful Savior, 479-876-2155. Website, www.beautifulsaviorwels.org.

HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS WANTED

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

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

New website helps, heals victims

A new website has been developed by the Committee on Mental Health, part of WELS Commission on Special Ministries. The site, **www.freedomforcaptives.com**, was created to reach out to and help heal abuse victims, while also offering resources for pastors and called workers that guide counseling of abuse victims.

Victor Vieth, a member at St. John, Lewiston, Minn., is spearheading the project. Vieth, a nationally recognized expert on the issue of child abuse, has been instrumental in developing training materials for people who work in fields where they need to recognize and address abuse, such as social workers, teachers, and medical professionals. He and the committee now are developing Lutheran resources to address child abuse.

The website's purpose is "to empower the Christian community to respond with excellence to the sin of child abuse and provide resources to pastors, teachers, and lay Christians that will deepen their understanding of child abuse and improve the Christian response to the physical, emotional, and spiritual impact of maltreatment."

Vieth says, "Any pastor, teacher, lay

person, or survivor in the church can go to the website and just about whatever question they have about child maltreatment, they'll be able to find the very best, most cutting edge resources—and information how to select a counselor. Pastors have all sorts of resources on the website if they want to develop child protection policies. If they want to teach the students in their WELS school about personal safety, there are resources on the website to help them do that."

The need for these resources is huge, according to Vieth. He quotes the Center for Disease Control, saying one out of every four girls and one out every six boys are sexually abused and about 28 percent of children in the U.S. are physically abused to the point of causing injury. In addition to physical abuse, a significant number of children are neglected, emotionally or psychologically abused, or witness violence in the home.

Many times, a history of abuse causes survivors to stay away from the church, especially when religion was erroneously used by the abuser as a reason for the abuse. Vieth says, "Freedom for the Captives was designed to convey to children and adults alike who have



been impacted by this sin that the church is on their side and has something to offer."

Resources include original articles written to address the issue from a Christian perspective, links to national organizations for abuse victims, frequently asked questions, and Bible verses.

Vieth explained that Jesus was the original child advocate in time when children were not valued by society. He says he wants this website and initiative to harken back to the earliest Christians who strived to follow Christ's example regarding their attitude to children.

Visit the site to discover all the resources at **www.freedomforcaptives.com**.

Obituaries

Michael R. Rohrick 1959–2015

Michael Rohrick was born Dec. 29, 1959, in Milwaukee, Wis. He died Oct. 15, 2015, in Two Rivers, Wis.

A 1983 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he served St. John's, Two Rivers, Wis.

He was preceded in death by his parents. He is survived by his wife, Sandy; one daughter; and one brother.

Roland W. Welch 1927–2015

Roland Welch was born Mar. 2, 1927, in Racine, Wis. He died Oct. 21, 2015, in Otsego, Mich.

He served as pastor at St. Paul, Hopkins, Mich.; Mt. Olive, Bay City, Mich.; Emanuel, Flint, Mich.; and Christ Our Savior, Angleton, Tex.

He was preceded in death by seven brothers and sisters and a grandson. He is survived by his wife, Barbara; 5 sons; 3 daughters; 23 grandchildren; 35 great-grandchildren; and 1 sister.

Donald F. Johnson 1931–2015

Donald Johnson was born July 17, 1931, in Viroqua, Wis. He died Oct. 24, 2015, in Redgranite, Wis.

A 1958 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Trinity, Redgranite, Wis., and St. Paul, Berlin, Wis.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Betty, and one daughter. He is survived by one daughter, one son, five grandchildren, four great-grandchildren, two brothers, and two sisters.

New director for WELS CEF

Scott Page has been named president and executive director of WELS Church Extension Fund (CEF). Page joined CEF a year and a half ago to assist temporarily with policy and procedure writing. He then took a full-time position in loan servicing and in October 2015 was named president and executive director.

Prior to joining CEF, Page worked for JPMorgan Chase in loan servicing quality assurance management as a retail mortgage risk director as well as a host of other credit and loan management positions.

Page says he was drawn to this position because of the purpose behind the work. “You know the purpose; you know the reason why. It’s not just for making money and bringing wealth to shareholders, but to actually see God’s Word spread.

For congregations all across the country and the Caribbean and Canada to have their worship homes, it’s really fulfilling,” he says.

“The reason WELS CEF exists is to help mission congregations with loans for facilities, land purchases—and to get those congregations off the ground, out of rented space, and into permanent worship facilities. That’s kind of cool work if you ask me,” says Page. “And a lot of times, these are loans that no other financial institution would make

Page, a member of St. Matthew’s, Oconomowoc, Wis., has been married for 35 years and has two adult daughters.

To learn more about WELS CEF, visit wels.net/cef.



Scott Page is the new president and executive director of WELS Church Extension Fund.

A new mission in the Philippines

Pastor Alvien De Guzman was not looking to start a new church. Instead he was looking to be faithful to God’s Word and the Lutheran Confessions. When the congregation to which he was called in metro Manila began practicing open communion and allowing women to serve as preachers, he and his family faced a difficult choice. In his words, “It never crossed our mind, not even in our wildest imaginations, that a day would come when we would have to leave this visible fellowship of believers with which we have spent precious years of our earthly lives. But the day did come. With a heavy heart, we made a painful decision: our loyalty to this visible fellowship ends where our loyalty to the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions begins!”

But what would De Guzman do now that he was without a congregation? Where in the world would he find a church body that holds the truth of God’s Word? He found his answer on the WELS website. In an e-mail to WELS World Missions, he inquired, “What’s the probability that WELS will consider doing mission work here in the Philippines?” Little did he know that God was going to use him to open the door for WELS to enter a country of 100 million people.

In early 2015, representatives from the WELS Asia-Pacific Rim Administrative Committee conducted a colloquy with

De Guzman and determined that he was in doctrinal fellowship with WELS. It became clear that this man and the nucleus of believers who meet in his home are committed to reaching out into their community of Novaliches (Quezon City), outside of Manila.

De Guzman requested copies of *The Promise* and *Road to Emmaus* to bring the message of God’s grace in Christ to a largely Catholic population. He began translating these materials in the local language of Tagalog for WELS Multi-Language Publications. He organized a door-to-door canvass, conducted a vacation Bible school, and implemented an evangelism program called *Each One, Reach One*.

Through the encouragement and (minimal) financial support of WELS, De Guzman is once again proclaiming the truth of the Scriptures in his new church home, Law and Gospel Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Robert Raasch, WELS Asia-Pacific Rim Administrative Committee member

WELS is continuing to support De Guzman and Law and Gospel Evangelical Lutheran Church with monthly contact and some financial aid. De Guzman is continuing his work translating Multi-Language Publications’ materials into Tagalog. He plans to attend Multi-Language Publications’ translating seminar in January, which is taking place in Hong Kong.



WELS representatives met with Alvien De Guzman (second from left) to help him as he establishes a confessional Lutheran church body in Novaliches in the Philippines.

Meet the editorial staff

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

If you ask Andrew Schroer what he is thankful for, he has a long list. After God’s full and free forgiveness and his family, Schroer notes, “I am thankful for Texas winters, a church family who supports me, Netflix, Uno games, and trips to the park.”

In fact, he recently penned a book on gratitude. Titled *364 Days of Thanksgiving*, this devotional journal focuses on finding happiness in God’s blessings.



Andrew Schroer and his family: (left to right) Andrew, Clariza, Isabel, and Andrew.

Schroer, *Forward in Christ’s* newest editorial comment writer, resides in Edna, Texas, where he serves Redeemer Lutheran Church. He also writes a weekly column for the local newspaper. “It’s a free space to share God’s Word,” he notes. The column is syndicated and is published in a number of newspapers in Texas. Schroer’s writing also appears on his blog, 364daysofthanksgiving.com, which he updates twice a week.

Prior to graduating from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1999, Schroer spent his vicar year serving in Monter-

rey, Mexico. There he met Clariza, a member of the Lutheran congregation in Monterrey who became his wife.

After graduating, Schroer was assigned to help with mission efforts in Miami, Fla. He first went to Mexico City for a year, where he served on a mission team and processed the paperwork needed for Clariza to come and live in the United States.

Once in Florida, Schroer participated in outreach work related to what is now Divine Savior. In 2003 he took a call to serve Redeemer in Edna.

During his time at Redeemer, Schroer has helped develop a Spanish-speaking ministry in the area. Since 2009, the church has held Spanish services on a regular basis.

In addition to his writing and congregational ministry, Schroer helps out with editing and translating work for Multi-Language Publications, which publishes biblical material in foreign languages. He and Clariza often work together on Spanish-related projects.

While his various roles keep Schroer’s schedule full, he carves out downtime to spend with loved ones. “Free time is for the family,” he explains. He and Clariza have been blessed with two children.

Their daughter, age 11, is involved in ballet and piano, and their son, age seven, enjoys piano and sports.

In the upcoming year, Schroer plans to focus his writing efforts for *Forward in Christ* on current events. “I want to look at what’s happening in our world today, both in general and especially in entertainment and social media,” he notes. “I want to look at these happenings and explain what the Bible says about them.”

Rachel Hartman

Read Schroer’s first article on p. 32.

Let your light shine

In the spirit of Matthew 5:16, we’re sharing examples of people who live their faith.

Computers for Christ

When Carl Kloehn started working with computers 25 years ago, he never dreamed it would lead to a mission opportunity. But when he retired from his work in electrical and electronics maintenance in 2004, that is exactly where the Lord led him.

Known as “Computer Carl,” Kloehn receives used computers from friends and acquaintances who are upgrading. He cleans and evaluates them and reinstalls an operating system and drivers. He runs the computers for a few hours to ensure their dependability. Then the computers are donated.

To find new homes for these rebuilt computers, “word of mouth is the driving force,” says Kloehn. Nearby Riverview Lutheran School and Fox Valley Lutheran High School (FVL), both in Appleton, Wis., have been the recipients of his work. “Teachers in Nebraska know me and asked for help when the need arose. A pastor filling a temporary vacancy in Kentucky informed me that the church office needed a computer,” he says.

One of Kloehn’s biggest projects came from a unique connection between FVL and East Fork Lutheran School, Whiteriver, Arizona.

In February 2015, Kloehn and his wife, Jere, were vacationing in Arizona. Baby blankets and quilts for East Fork Lutheran School from St. Matthew, Appleton, Wis., the Kloehns’ home congregation, were packed for the trip. In addition, Kloehn prepared and transported some FVL computers to East Fork.

A few months later, Kloehn learned FVL had an entire computer lab—42 computers—that were set for replacement. “The thought of them going into electronics recycle was too much!” says Kloehn. He talked to East Fork’s principal, who sug-



Carl and Jere Kloehn standing next to the truck used to transport the computers and accessories to Arizona.

gested checking with Benjamin Pagel, principal at Peridot-Our Savior Lutheran School. “To my surprise, he informed me that he could use 25,” says Kloehn. Kloehn not only refurbished the computers, but hand-delivered them last fall.

Pagel is enthusiastic about the generous gift. “We needed to get the students more computer ready for high school,” he says. “The cost and lack of good Internet were handicapping us. Now, with a large hurdle gone, we have already been making plans to give our students more computer education. The students were thrilled. They use the computers every morning and were very happy to get the chance to see Carl and his wife in person to tell them thank you.”

“Being a young 72-year-old,” Kloehn says, “I would like to find more needs around the country and attempt to fill them. The other thing that would be nice would be to be made aware of schools that are upgrading their computers and getting the old ones to donate where they are needed.”

Kloehn continues, “Throughout my life I have been the kind of person that did not like seeing anything discarded that someone else could use. Repurposing the computers and finding a home for them has been quite satisfying for me. The fact that in this situation it serves our Lord is a big plus. When I observe how appreciative the recipients are it is a heart-warming feeling.”

Ann Ponath

If you or your organization has a donation of five or more matching computers or a need for a refurbished computer, contact Kloehn at c-kloehn@sbcglobal.net.

Serving encourages studying

Many Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary students take a traditional path—four years of study at Martin Luther College, (MLC) New Ulm, Minn., then directly to Mequon, Wis.

Not all do, however. Last year, almost one-third of the junior class (first-year students) had taken some time out of their studies to serve abroad. This year, a number of incoming students also have a wide-range of service experiences.

Michael Hollmann graduated from Carroll University and spent one year in the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps. From August 2012 to June 2013, he served in a special disaster relief corps partnered with the Federal Emergency Management Agency. He was stationed in Vicksburg, Miss., for Hurricane Isaac and New York for Hurricane Sandy; then he worked on a long-term community relations project in New Orleans, La., as part of Hurricane Katrina recovery.

“The soul is eternal; homes and possessions are not,” he said. “Serving disaster survivors moved me to serve people in the most important way: a spiritual, Christ-centered way.”

After serving with AmeriCorps, he spent two years at MLC to receive his seminary certification.

Samuel Jeske spent two years abroad working and sharing his faith. “It was a tremendous blessing and has shaped and molded me so, so much! My life has forever been changed by God, by seeing his hand at work in the world. His Word truly does not return empty, and I’m so humbled he used me to carry out some of that work,” he says. “God is doing awesome things all over the world, and I’m stoked so many seminarians have experienced that prior to their call!”

James Gieschen holds the record. “How about nine gap years?” he asks. After graduating from MLC, he served with Kingdom Workers in Southeast Asia. He delivered sermons, organized



Michael Hollmann is pictured with President Barack Obama during disaster relief work on Staten Island in New York City after Hurricane Sandy.

liturgy, and taught Bible information class. He met his wife, who is from Japan, at class at a local university.

“I was blessed to witness the gospel to her,” he says. “She was baptized and now holds the same confidence as a child of God and an heir to eternal life. God be praised!”

While still abroad, Gieschen jumped back into studying Greek and Hebrew, using WLS’ Pastoral Studies Institute’s videos online. “My view of ministry has been affected greatly by this experience, which has convinced me of the importance of a servant’s humble heart, of the great need for called workers, and of the solemn undertaking to which we aspire,” he says.

Paul Wendland, WLS president, notes, “It is so valuable for a seminary student to have a wide range of experiences because it helps him transfer what is in his head and heart to his feet, his hands, and his mouth. These students make a rich contribution to our campus—and ultimately to our churches.”

Linda Buxa



For more news about Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and other WELS ministries, see the 2015 WELS Annual Report at wels.net/annualreport. Watch the January *WELS Connection* for a year-in-review story.

WELS news briefs

CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS

414-256-3201; mark.schoeder@wels.net

At its October meeting, the Conference of Presidents endorsed a statement developed by The Lutheran Home Association (TLHA) affirming **WELS' position against physician-assisted suicide**. The position statement includes biblical support for its position as well as historical support in the form of the Hippocratic Oath. TLHA's statement notes, "We strongly oppose physician-assisted suicide for people in each and every circumstance because God's Word clearly guides us in this matter. We urge the alternative, which is true compassion and care through better education on end-of-life issues; the use of pain management, hospice and palliative care; and delivery of proper and dignified human medical care as defined by the classical version of the Hippocratic Oath." As states introduce bills legalizing physician-assisted suicide, congregations and members can use this statement to clarify their position on this issue. Find the complete statement at www.tlha.org/about-us/PAS-position. For more information or a presentation on the topic of physician-assisted suicide, e-mail jpgaertner@tlha.org.

COMMISSION ON ADULT DISCIPLESHIP

cad@wels.net

Gary Pufahl, pastor at Christ, Big Bend, Wis., will lead the **next Interactive Faith Bible study**, streamed online live each Wednesday, Jan. 13 through Feb. 3, at 6 P.M. and 8 P.M. CST. His four-week study will focus on the theme: "Who is your God, for whom you live?" Adult Discipleship sponsors the Interactive Faith Bible online study twice a year. Learn more and watch archived Bible studies at wels.net/interactivesfaith.

Extra funding provides opportunities

The Board for Home Missions has granted close to \$150,000 since August 2015 to help support special projects in WELS mission churches.

"With our mission congregations diligently working to reduce their subsidy, sometimes it stretches a congregation financially," says Keith Free, administrator of Home Missions. "When there's a special gift, it can really lift the spirits of a congregation because they are able to do something extra to enhance their outreach ministry, which they wouldn't have been able to do without that gift."

These special project funds, largely supported through gifts from the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society (LWMS), provide money for various types of projects common to mission congregations including first public worship services, tools for outreach, children's ministry, and facility or music equipment.

Peace, Aiken, S.C., a mission congregation that held its first worship service in December 2014, received a \$3,000 grant to help the 50-member congregation promote the grand opening of its new worship location in downtown Aiken. "Peace's biggest opportunity and challenge is simply to let our city and community know not only that we exist but also that we have an incredible gospel to share," says Jonathan Bourman, pastor at Peace. "We are going to use this grant to get out that message as powerfully as we can in our community. In the past, mailers have proven to be an effective way to reach folks."

Bourman says having those extra dollars really means the world to congregations like his. "They're investments. They help churches like ours get rooted and established so that we can grow and prosper. Then with God's help we can become not only a financially independent church, but also one which quickly and powerfully joins the party other established churches get to have when they support churches like ours."

Good News, Mount Horeb, Wis., asked for help in starting a Mornings with Mommy program in fall 2015 to reach out in its community of young families. The program, developed by a pastor's wife from Knoxville, Tenn., offers themed educational playdates for parents and their children. "It's a great



Special project funding from Home Missions helped Good News, Mount Horeb, Wis., start a Mornings with Mommy program.

way for neighborhood families to get to meet us, to get to know some of our families, and to see our facilities," says Jonathan Bauer, pastor at Good News. He says it also provides him with face-to-face time not only with the kids but also the parents.

While the congregation already had plans to start the program before it received the grant, the extra money helped members buy the materials they needed to start the ministry, freeing up congregation funds for promotion. Most of the 20 families who have been attending the sessions do not belong to the church; one family has since attended.

Other congregations have used the grants for buying chairs for worship services, providing welcome packets, and starting a preschool program.

Special project grants are given throughout the year to requesting congregations, but Home Missions was able to provide even more funding after receiving more than \$140,000 in 2015 from LWMS through its fall and spring rallies, its national convention offering, and through the organization's kids C.A.R.E. program. "Home Missions is blessed with many active partners who help to support the proclamation of the gospel," says Free. "We say thanks ever so much to LWMS for the generous and continued support of WELS Missions."

Learn more about WELS Missions at wels.net/missions. Learn more about the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society at www.lwms.org.

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.

MICHIGAN

On Nov. 9, 2015, a fire broke out in the boiler room at the school of **Zion, Toledo, Ohio**. No one was injured, but the boiler room is destroyed, and the school has extensive water and smoke damage. School will be held in temporary classrooms until the building can be repaired. WELS Christian Aid and Relief is in contact with church leaders and plans to provide assistance when the damage assessment has been completed.

NORTH ATLANTIC

On Oct. 16 and 17, 2015, the **WELS-Canada Annual General Meeting** was held at **Abiding Word, Orleans, Ontario**. This meeting lay the groundwork for WELS-Canada's future mission work.

SOUTH ATLANTIC

More than 40 people attended the second annual **Caribbean Conference** for called workers, which was hosted by **St. John, Antigua**, from Oct. 19-21, 2015.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis., hosted the

2015 WELS National Choral Festival Nov. 13-15, 2015.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

MI—On Nov. 1, 2015, **Beautiful Savior, Cincinnati, Ohio**, celebrated its 45th anniversary.

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

NA—On Nov. 22, 2015, members of **Cross of Christ, Liverpool, N.Y.**, celebrated the congregation's 40th anniversary and the dedication of the church's new sanctuary.

Peace, King of Prussia, Penn., celebrated its 50th anniversary on Nov. 14, 2015. As the third WELS congregation established on the East Coast, Peace has served people living in Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey.

NW—Eternal Love, Appleton, Wis., celebrated the 40th anniversary in the pastoral ministry of **Robert Balza** on Nov. 22, 2015.

SA—Rock of Ages, Madison, Tenn., celebrated the 50th anniversary in the pastoral ministry of **Keith Kruck** on Oct. 25, 2015.

SEW—On Oct. 25, 2015, **Crossroads, Chicago, Ill.**, celebrated its 10th anniversary.

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

SOUTH ATLANTIC



In 2007, Lois Roper, a woman from the island of St. Thomas, moved to Orlando, Fla., and visited Crown of Glory. She decided to make it her home church. Since then, Roper has brought 30 people from St. Thomas to worship, resulting in confirmations and baptisms. On Sept. 27, 2015, five more children were baptized at Crown of Glory through this "St. Thomas connection." In St. Thomas, it's traditional for everyone, including family and friends, to dress in white for baptisms.

WESTERN WISCONSIN



On Nov. 15, 2015, Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., celebrated 150 years of ministerial education taking place on the Watertown campus. The anniversary service included choirs from all four ministerial education schools—Luther Preparatory School; Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.; Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. The presidents of all four ministerial education schools also participated.

ARIZONA-CALIFORNIA



Our Shepherd, Cornville, Ariz., was a satellite congregation of Christ, Prescott Valley, for approximately one-and-a-half years. On Oct. 15, 2015, Our Shepherd celebrated its charter Sunday. During the service a new family was welcomed, and a baptism took place.

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a white ceramic cup. In the background, an open Bible is visible, with text on the pages. The title 'Unexpected Love' is overlaid on the image in a white, cursive font.

Unexpected Love

Now [Jesus] had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)
—John 4:4-9

Jesus reached out to a Samaritan woman.

Theodore J. Hartwig

When reading stories from the life of Jesus in the gospels, we often find Jesus sparring with the Pharisees. The purist Pharisees accused him of flaunting Jewish rules and traditions. Among their charges, they faulted Jesus for welcoming tax collectors and sinners and even eating with them. In their own minds, they thanked God that they were not like these other people.

Not only did Jesus welcome tax collectors and sinners, but, even worse, he disregarded Jewish conventions about associating with women. He freely spoke with them, praised them, and defended them against their detractors.

In John's gospel, there are four notable examples of the free and easy

way in which Jesus associated with women. We might call them the four gems from John.

JESUS HAD TO GO THROUGH SAMARIA

At the end of his gospel, John writes that Jesus did many other additional things that are not recorded in his gospel. Given limitations of room on his writing material of papyrus, John had to be selective in his choice of stories and the space he devoted to them. About 80 percent of this fourth chapter records Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. It is one of the most beautiful accounts of mission work in the New Testament. Knowing this heightens one's attention to several words and expressions in the story.

It begins with the notice that Jesus *had to* go through Samaria. The “had to” becomes meaningful when we know that in their trips between Galilee in the north and Jerusalem in the south, the Jews normally took the longer route around Samaria by way of the Jordan River to the east. Today, it would be like traveling from Nebraska to North Dakota by way of Iowa and Minnesota.

As John notes, Jews took the round-about route because they did not associate with Samaritans. So we might guess that John used the compelling “had to” because, at the time, Jesus insisted that he and the other disciples return to Galilee by way of Samaria. Jesus knew, as they did not, what beautiful gospel fruits would result from this journey. For us, this little insight weaves a golden circle around the “had to.”

JESUS TALKS TO THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

The next significant expression in the story is “tired as he was.” To catch its flavor in John’s original text, the words could be rendered in a free translation stating that Jesus was “all tuckered out” or “totally bushed.” These words are another testimony that Jesus, though without sin, was a genuine human being in the full sense of the word. He was so tired that he remained alone at the well and sent his disciples into the nearby town of Sychar to buy food.

What happened next is noteworthy and significant. Jesus was alone at the well with the Samaritan woman. Contrary to Jewish behavior, Jesus initiated a discussion with the woman. This conversation with a woman would have been far less abnormal if one or more of his disciples had been present. Even more to the woman’s surprise, his request was directed not merely to a Samaritan but to a Samaritan woman.

Farther on, John adds a significant detail. John identifies the time of the day as the sixth hour (ESV) or noon. Normally, the women in the village

would draw water at the well on the outskirts of town in the late afternoon when the day was cooler and when they could enjoy sharing the latest news with one another. But this woman came at noon when she knew she would be alone. The other women were not at the well. Her timing hints at her sordid reputation in the town and that she wanted to avoid conversation with the other women.

The Lord’s short, unusual request of a Samaritan woman for a drink of water led to an amazing result.

When Jesus eventually talks with her about this reputation, he speaks in a more kindly way than others might have chosen. He is not cruel and condescending. He does not tell her that she has had five affairs with men and is now living with a man who might become number six. He softens his probe into her past.

Astounded by his words, the woman responds with a concern about the right place to worship. Perhaps, in her embarrassment, she tries to change the subject. But there may be more to the question. Is she now a different woman? Jesus had spoken to her of the living water he gives. Did this man—by his outward appearance, by the tone of his voice, by his willingness to speak with her and do it so kindly—as well as his sweet gospel message of living water turn her into a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)?

JESUS REVEALS THAT HE IS THE CHRIST

Now she may have grown eager to know where she can be healed of her sinful past, whether in Samaria or in Jerusalem. She expresses confidence

that when Christ comes, he will explain everything. In his one and only self-revelation recorded in the gospels, Jesus now tells the woman that he is the Christ.

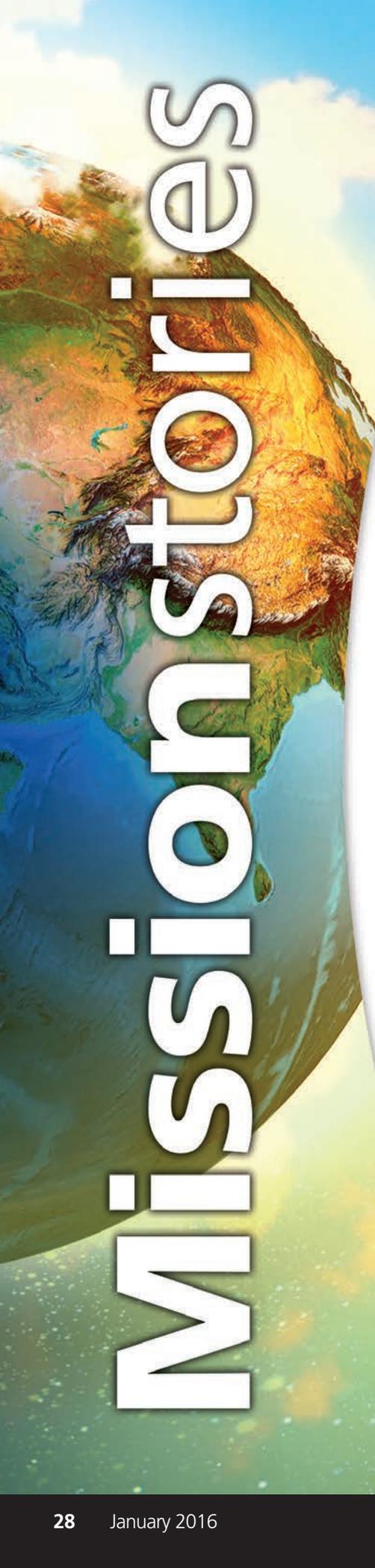
At all other places where the disciples speak of Jesus as the Christ, he tells them not to reveal his identity until he is risen from the dead. Why did he make this exception with the woman? A simple gospel-centered solution may be that her expectation of Christ differed radically from those of the general public, including the disciples. They all expected a political Christ who would restore the kingdom of Israel to the glory it had during David’s time. She was not trapped by that expectation. Did she understand that Christ would bring spiritual restoration? The Pharisees, the Jews in general, and perhaps even the disciples at times, were wrong. Was she ready to receive Jesus’ self-revelation the right way?

Her faith and testimony at the close of this story seem to confirm that insight. She hurries into Sychar, does not shrink any longer to speak openly to the assembled townspeople, and becomes an instrument to a bountiful harvest of believers.

John, the author, had good reason to write at length about this episode from the life of Jesus. The Lord’s short, unusual request of a Samaritan woman for a drink of water led to an amazing result. His conversation at the well with a woman is truly one of the four gems from John in this genre of Jesus’ uninhibited association with women.

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

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



Missionaries

The gospel message in Bolivia Julie K. Wietzke

Pedro Abel Beltrán Callejas did not know much about Jesus while growing up in Bolivia; he was, he admits, a nominal Catholic at best. But he's discovered in the past three years that it's really all about Jesus—and for that he is grateful.

FINDING THE GOSPEL

Abel, an English teacher at a local school, was first introduced to the Lutheran church about 11 years ago. He and his now wife, Maria, were looking for a church in which to get married in La Paz, Bolivia, the country's third most populous city with a population of 2 million. They discovered Redeemer, where they met Julio Ascarrunz, the congregation's pastor. After some classes, the couple got married in the church and became members.

But after two years, they decided to leave because they observed congregational issues they didn't like. "We went to different churches, but we were not glad with those churches," says Abel. "We felt sad because we didn't know where to go. We were like orphans."

One day, Maria went home to discover that their home had been broken into. Their doors were destroyed, and they didn't know what to do. Abel went to see their former pastor, Ascarrunz. "We decided to try [the church] again," says Abel. "This was the only place where we heard what the Bible says."

After they rejoined Redeemer, Abel met Missionary Lawrence Retberg, who was offering classes to Redeemer's church leaders. "The congregation had heard about WELS and asked that a WELS missionary come and help them with doctrine and other matters," says Missionary Philip Strackbein, now serving in La Paz. Retberg traveled to Bolivia two to three times a year to offer classes.

After Retberg had taken church leaders through a doctrine course, conditional fellowship was set up with this group of five or six churches, of which Redeemer was the largest. But some members were still struggling with the doctrine and correctly putting it into practice. Strackbein and

his wife arrived in 2011 to work more closely with the congregation and its leaders.

"One of those leaders was me," says Abel. "I invited him to meet at our apartment. The story starts there. Thanks to God, I learned many things. I really understood what God wants to say in the Bible."

That was a big step for Abel, who says he never really knew anything about doctrine. "Everything I knew was superficial, and I occasionally repeated what others had said," he says. "However, I strongly felt the curiosity of learning all about God but couldn't because I didn't know where, when, or how to start."

Unfortunately, while Abel was learning more about Jesus and salvation, others in the church were struggling with the correct Lutheran doctrine—even disagreeing and rebelling against their pastor for preaching the truth.

In April of 2012, Strackbein and Ascarrunz, along with several other congregation members, stepped away from Redeemer to start a new congregation and synod, the *Iglesia Cristiana Evangélica Luterana Confesional* (the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Christian Church or ICELC). Beltran and his wife soon followed.

"It was totally different—different in the sense of no more problems, no more gossiping. When I was in this church Redeemer, I hated the word *Lutheran*," says Abel. "When we opened the [new] church and I attended, we learned many things—beautiful things—so this idea disappeared."

He continues, "I know now the kind of person I am—a miserable sinner who really needs a Savior. I am conscious that the words of God may touch and hurt deep inside our souls, but I also know that there is a super-great consolation as well—the gospel!"

SHARING THE GOSPEL

While the church is small—there are only 17 baptized members—the members' hearts and their dedication are huge. "Every one of them has been trained in evangelism, and they all practice it," says Strackbein.

That's not easy in a land where free salvation through Jesus is scorned. "The society has been so steeped in the idea that man has to obey that when they hear something different—even though the end result is so won-

derful, that we truly have a free salvation—it's just something all the churches leaders reject and go against the people who proclaim it," says Strackbein.

"When I am with people who go to different churches in La Paz, I always feel like I'm talking with people who have been slapping God," says Abel. "I want to teach, but I can't because I know I am going to be rejected."

That rejection doesn't stop the members of ICELC, however. Members practice witnessing to each other through role playing so they are prepared to defend scriptural doctrine. Then they take the message to the people of Bolivia. Sometimes it's through public presentations at the hotel where the congregation worships. Sometimes it's through conversations members have with people they meet in their daily lives.

IGLESIA CRISTIANA EVANGÉLICA LUTERANA CONFESIONAL

Baptized members: 17

Congregations: 1

National pastors: 1

National evangelists: 5

Preaching stations: 1

**National Bible Institute
students: 4**

**National seminary
students: 1**

Visiting instructors: 1

Unique fact: Missionary Philip Strackbein's main focus in Bolivia is training members for service. The congregation's pastor and five other congregational leaders conduct the ministry, including preaching, teaching, visiting the sick, and outreach. Strackbein also serves as the theological education contact for the 1LA team.

Take Alfredo Jara, for example. He travels throughout Bolivia for his job and shares the gospel message wherever he goes. At one small town, Unión Tunari, he discovered a church with no denomination or doctrine to speak of. Strackbein, Ascarrunz, and Jara have since traveled back to present the basic law/gospel teaching and other doctrinal courses, though it is often difficult to get there because of impassible roads.

Or Rolando Mena, who plays violin during the congregation's worship services. He studies at the university and is always talking about the message of God with his colleagues.

And Abel? He is sharing the message of free salvation with his parents. "Last time, [my father] said, 'When are we going to meet again? I want to know more,'" says Abel. "I would like to open a church [where he lives]."

Abel continues, "I am really glad to be part of this ministry since I have learned many things about what God did for me and what he wants me to do, to be, and to say. Thus, with profound gratitude, I try to do my best in every single activity."

Those church activities include conducting the liturgy during worship, leading Bible studies, and training members in evangelism. Strackbein also continues to train Abel so he grows in his knowledge and understanding. "It is kind of difficult to say which class I appreciate the most," says Abel. "I think all subjects I have learned up to now with Missionary Strackbein are attached branches belonging to a main idea—Jesus. And that's what I really appreciate the most."

Julie Wietzke is managing editor of Forward in Christ.

ICELC-La Paz on the congregation's third anniversary in April 2015; Abel sharing the gospel at a presentation at a local hotel; Pedro Abel Beltrán Callejas and his wife, María, overlooking La Paz, Bolivia; Alfredo Jara (second from right) speaking to prospects at Unión Tunari, a small town in which ICELC is witnessing.





Run. TO GET THE prize

These excerpts come from Lisa's blog during her last years on this earth. They are her words. She is now with the Lord in her heavenly home.

Lisa Rittierodt

I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer six years ago. I was only 39 at the time. I'm still fighting this disease. On my three-year anniversary, I decided that I wanted to start a blog to show others how it has been possible to walk with cancer all this time. It is because God is walking with me.

MY RACE IS ALMOST RUN

Running has never been a favorite pastime of mine. I remember having to run a mile every day in my grade school. Even during basketball season I could never run the entire mile without stopping. The distance was always too long. Now it seems that a lengthy earthly race will also be too long for me.

My oncologist confirmed what Paul and I have been suspecting for the last week. I am out of options. They said it was up to me to keep trying different treatments that would be toxic in hopes to extend my life or do something else that would give me a better quality of life. Either way there is no guarantee in anything.

As far as a time line, they really can't give one. Just like with my mom, all of a sudden things will shut down, and then they can say weeks. I asked about my family reunion in July, and both my doctor and my nurse said that it's unlikely that I will be able to travel then. They did say that it could be different in two to three months when they see how things are going. We will cross that bridge with the rest of the family when we come to it.

We told the kids on Monday. It's not easy hearing that your mom will be going home to heaven before you are even close to being an adult. They all reacted differently but how we expected them to.

As I have been pondering the past few days, the verse my daughter Melanie chose as her confirmation verse kept running through my mind: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:24).

Like I said before, I've never liked running. My thought of this verse reminded

me of the hard, pounding running people need to do to train. And honestly, that is part of our spiritual running, isn't it? We have to pound away, constantly learning, constantly training to keep God's Word so embedded in our hearts that nothing can penetrate it.

The last part of this race won't be easy, but the reward will be amazing.

But now, I'm looking at the verse like the painting Melanie's first-grade teacher, Rachel Tacke, made for her confirmation. It's based on 1 Corinthians 9:24. I love this because it's a child. A child just keeps running because that's what children do. That childlike faith knows they are going to get to the goal and the goal will be wonderful. There is no hardship, but there is urgency. There is no wondering, yet there is expectation. There is no angst, just moving forward.

So as I finish my race, I am going to be running with that childlike faith. I know I am running to an amazing place. The last part of this race won't be easy, but the reward will be amazing.

AT THE END OF THE RACE

It's hard to believe that six years ago today I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Six years ago we were filled with hope that God would cure me of this disease. Six years ago we had no idea what kind of roller coaster we would be on fighting the cancer. Six years ago we were still looking forward to a long life with our family.

Now we are no longer hoping for a cure. Instead of a roller coaster of fighting a disease, we are on a roller coaster of my final days. Instead of a future as a family, I am now looking toward a future in eternity. What a difference six years can make.

I would guess that most of us would want to die peacefully in our sleep, just like the prayer:

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

I can't begin to tell you how many times I've prayed this prayer over the past few months. There have been times I've even begged the Lord to let me fall asleep and wake up in his arms. I think we understand that there will be physical pain before we go home, but we have no idea the other things we will have to face in our last days.

We don't know how many days we have left. The agony of waiting is heart-wrenching. The mourning that has to happen can be physically exhausting. I never knew how much mourning I would have to go through. I mourn every time I say a last good-bye to someone. I mourn when I remember that good-bye. I mourn when I think about all the things my family will have to experience not only in my death but also in all the things that they will experience, both good and bad, without me.

I know firsthand how painful it is to be without a mom at events from confirmations to picnics in the park. It's no wonder at times I pray, "Please let me die before I wake."

But I think the hardest part is walking through the valley of the shadow of death. For me it has not been a short road. There have been so many ups and downs and twists and turns that it's hard to know what to think sometimes. And let me tell you, the devil works harder in those last days than I ever thought possible. It's his last chance to take me away from my Savior, and he is going to find every weakness I have ever felt or thought about my Savior and try to use it against me.

Yet the one thing I've never doubted is where I am going, and it is only by God's mercy and grace that I have been freed from that doubt.



The Rittierodt family.

Through every temptation the devil has put in my way, my Shepherd has come to protect me. He has always been with me, and he will get me to my eternal home when his time is right. It might mean many more hard days ahead for me. But that won't stop him, because nothing, not even death, can stop him from getting me home to him and in his everlasting arms.

So it's my sixth anniversary of cancer. Honestly just a few weeks ago I didn't think I'd make it this far. To have six years with my friends and family I am extremely grateful. Now I look forward to my heaven day, where I will have the best day of my life. I can't wait to see you all there.

See you soon,

Lisa

Lisa Rittierodt died in July 2015. Her husband, Paul, and their three children are members at Light of Life, Covington, Washington.



What would you have done?

Andrew C. Schroer

Take a moment
to consider what
you do as you
face the more
mundane tests
God places
in your life
every day.

I have played the various scenarios over and over again in my head. We do that, don't we? When we hear about tragic events like the shootings that occurred at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon, last October, we imagine what we would have done had we been there.

Would I have run and hid? Or would I have responded like Chris Mintz, the U.S. Army veteran who rushed into the building and tried to block the shooter from moving into Classroom 15 where he eventually killed nine people? Chris was shot three times while standing and another four while on the floor. By God's power and grace he survived.

What would I have done had I been in Classroom 15? Witnesses report that the shooter, Christopher Harper-Mercer, asked his victims if they were Christians. According to witnesses, if the person said he or she was a Christian, Harper-Mercer shot that person in the head. If they said they weren't or if they didn't respond, they were shot in the leg.

I recently heard someone remark, "The bravest person in the world is the second person who said she was a Christian."

What would I have done? I like to think I would have said without fear or equivocation, "I am a Christian." But I don't know. Would my thoughts have turned to my wife and children? In the end, would it have been a denial of faith to lie to this madman?

What would you have done?

Whatever your answer, I think we can all agree that those who died have given the world a wonderful witness of the courage Christ gives. Their faith was severely tested, and it passed the test.

I'll be honest, though. I think many, if not most, Christians would have passed that test. Though it is impossible to say for sure until you are in that situation, I think with the help of the Holy Spirit I would not deny my Savior.

A number of years ago, my father fell on the ice. He banged his head. His brain began to bleed. When the bleeding was finally discovered, the doctors told him if it had gone undetected any longer, he would have died.

As he dealt with his life-threatening injuries, my father told me he was at peace. He knew the heaven Jesus won for him. But then he poignantly pointed out something I had never really thought about. "As Christians," he told me, "we usually do pretty well with the big tests. It's the little tests we struggle with."

I once had a doctor basically tell me I was dying. Thankfully, further tests showed I wasn't, but I remember reacting to the diagnosis with the peace that only Jesus can give. Ironically, though, I often find myself getting sick to my stomach stressing about our family finances.

As Christians, we often face the trials of death and persecution with courage and then worry and fret over credit card bills.

God's profound promises of forgiveness and heaven, of providence and his presence in our lives, give us the courage to face the bullets of a madman. Those same promises give us the peace and courage to face marital stress, a demeaning boss, or financial downturns.

So as you wonder what you would do if you had been in Classroom 15, take a moment to consider what you do as you face the more mundane tests God places in your life every day.

Then turn to the promises of his Word. They will give you the peace and courage you need to face whatever test God may send.

Contributing editor Andrew Schroer is pastor at Redeemer, Edna, Texas.

Learn more about FIC's new contributing editor Andrew Schroer on p. 22.

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

In Jesus, we have a fresh start every day.

A fresh start. Wouldn't that be great?! Perhaps the turn of the year is a time when having a fresh start might be particularly on our mind. Whether 2015 was a great year or a rough year for you, as the new year turns, it is, in a sense, a fresh start.

RAHAB'S FRESH START

Perhaps Rahab would have appreciated the concept of a "fresh start" as well as any of us. Rahab lived in Jericho at the time when the Israelites entered the Promised Land. Joshua sent spies to Jericho on a reconnaissance mission; they stayed at Rahab's house.

From a strategic point of view, it made sense for them to stay there. You see, Rahab was a prostitute. So seeing strange men coming and going wouldn't have raised much suspicion.

But life was about to change for Rahab. She said to those spies: "I know that the LORD has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you.

We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt. . . . When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below" (Joshua 2:9-11). That is remarkable! The Red Sea event had taken place 40 years earlier! Yet, it was remembered.

Next comes the plea for the opportunity to have a fresh start: "Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have

shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them—and that you will save us from death" (Joshua 2:12,13).

The spies gave their word; she was to hang a scarlet cord in the window of her dwelling. She did, and all in her dwelling were spared (see Joshua chapter 6).

And then? Then Rahab married into the Israelite family—and not just any Israelite family. She married into the family that carried the line of the Savior. Talk about a fresh start! The former prostitute became an ancestor of the Savior!

OUR FRESH START

Why in the world would God want someone like that in the line of the Savior? Just as valid a question would be, "Why in the world would God want someone like you or me in his family?" Yes, Rahab's sins were damning; your sins and mine are just as damning. And yet Jesus, in wonderful grace, has forgiven Rahab as well as you and me. He has adopted us into his family. As Rahab was given a fresh start, so are we.

Day-by-day we get a fresh start as we remember our baptisms and as we hear God's words of peace. Our sins are forgiven, washed away. At the altar we get a fresh start as Jesus gives us himself, his true body and blood. Each day, each year, a new start—a renewed me—because of God's grace.

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

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



REALPEOPLE REALSAVIOR

Thomas D. Kock



John O'Brien

God may turn
tears and pain into
an opportunity to
share the reason for
the hope we have.

Death, terror, justice

The tragedy that erupts at the end of a pistol or Kalashnikov stains us all with blood and sorrow. These things ought not to be, but they are. Bouquets of flowers, makeshift memorials, and notes of sympathy grow in Paris, New York, Boston, and many other cities. They sprout where blood stains the place of sudden death.

We have not yet seen the end of such scenes. They will be repeated, because we are all human and live in a world flawed by human depravity. We are all infected by a virus that tilts us toward evil. Brutality and violence flow from that virus. We see it not only in the attacks of terrorists. We also see it in domestic violence, bullying, destruction of property, and a wanton disregard for anything or anyone else. In other words, we may point a finger at the worst outbreaks of the virus, but we are also infected.

One of the greatest tragedies is to inflict pain and misery in the name of God on those who do not share our beliefs. We might ask, "Is our concept of God so bankrupt that we believe that he needs our bullets to enforce his will?" Other questions also come to mind: Do we have such a small capacity to love others and see value in them? Do we have a too large and arrogant opinion of ourselves that we can inflict death, pain, and misery on others? Do we value human life only when it belongs to those who think as we do?

We pause at the memorials that suddenly appear at scenes of tragedy. We pause. We shed tears for the victims. But we mourn for more than the victims. Our tears concede that some have a profound lack of consideration, respect—yes, a lack of love. In our tears we mourn for those who have lost faith in a loving God and disregard his will. Through our blurry eyes we catch a glimpse of the flawed world in which we live. Perhaps when our vision clears, we long to see the perfect

world our Savior has promised after we leave tears and sorrow behind.

To shed a tear at another's loss is not a hopeless desperation, a resignation to the victory of that human virus. The tears demonstrate compassion for others, whether or not they agree with our convictions and orientation. I hope they help us see our purpose here. Compassion. To hold the hand of another sobbing human in silent support makes us God's instruments. Compassion for another human in pain is not an exclusive Christian virtue. Others have it too. It is human. Such kindness is an end in itself. It helps another. It should have no ulterior motive but to show respect, love, and concern for another.

Yet as children of God we sense another purpose. God may turn tears and pain into an opportunity to share the reason for the hope we have. Then, humbly, we may also speak with gentleness and respect about our Savior (1 Peter 3:15).

When we raise our eyes from the sorrow, dry our tears, and look forward, we sense a need for justice. But we should not take vengeance on our own no matter how deep the pain. God grants the sword of justice to governmental power to protect those remaining after tragedy and to make it difficult for brutal slaughter to reoccur. Such justice here on earth curbs the worst outbreaks of the virus within. But it will not eliminate every sorrow. That remains for God to administer when he brings absolute and perfect justice to all. Then believers will have no tears.

GREAT STORIES OF THE BIBLE

THE BATTLE OF JERICHO Joel S. Heckendorf

First came the familiar trumpet prelude. Then the stadium roared, “CHARGE!” as the slugger stepped to the plate.

The boys were ready. They shouted, “Da-da-da-dah-da-dah! CHARGE!” Running forward, they raided their fellow neighbors’ snow fort.

If only ballfield and backyard “battles” were our only worries.

Joshua knew significant battles awaited God’s people as they approached the Promised Land. What was Joshua thinking as he peered at the mighty walls of Jericho? Perhaps he was drawing up battle plans. Perhaps he was dreaming up his “da-da-da-dah-da-dah” speech to inspire the soldiers to charge. Joshua’s thoughts were soon halted as the real “commander of the army of the Lord” stood before him.

Joshua initiated the conversation, “Are you for us or for our enemies?”

“Neither.”

At first, this seems to be an unsettling answer. But as the battle of Jericho plays out, the commander’s answer provides a tremendous lesson for any battle we face.

Read Joshua 5:13–6:27.

REMEMBER WHO’S IN CHARGE

In his mercy, God has tremendously blessed us with gifts and abilities. He encourages us to utilize those gifts as we plan for the future. Our plans are influenced by God’s Word and the wisdom of Christian advisors. We often ask God to bless our plans. But in the midst of these God-pleasing actions, it’s easy to forget that our plans are just that—*our* plans.

Which is why God’s reminder to Joshua is so timely. Joshua was a faithful follower of the Lord. Four decades earlier, he was confident that God would give them victory in the land of the giants (Numbers chapter 14). That was as a spy; now he’s the leader. Even though his position was God-appointed, he could have felt the pressure: It’s up to you, Joshua, to lead the people to victory! No, it wasn’t. God was in charge, not Joshua.

As we face “battles” or new endeavors, the question is not, “God, are you with us? God, will you bless our plans?”

The real question comes from God: “Are you with me?” God’s in charge. By nature that is not an easy thing to say. But it’s the truth, and it brings us so much comfort.

REMEMBER GOD’S VICTORY IS ASSURED

Before outlining the strategy for Joshua, before Joshua relayed the strategy to the soldiers, before the soldiers laced up their sandals or the priests readied their trumpets, the Lord said, “See, I have given Jericho into your hands, with its king and its fighting men” (Joshua 6:2). Not “will give,” but “have given.” God speaks. His action follows. God declared victory, and the walls fell. Singlehandedly, the Lord achieved victory. Joshua and his troops simply received victory.

God’s victories aren’t limited to Joshua. He also won a battle for you. On the cross, Jesus cried out, “It is finished.” Not “will be” but “is.” With his last breath, the strife was over, and the battle was won. Singlehandedly, the Lord achieved victory, and the just judge of heaven and earth declared us “not guilty.” Because of Jesus, the wall of sin that separated us from eternal life with him came tumbling down.

As a result, when that last trumpet sounds, “Da-da-da-dah-da-dah,” we can joyously shout, “CHARGE!” as we enter into our Promised Land.

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. Give other examples of “God speaks. His action follows.” What comfort does this provide?
4. Explain what it means to say we fight from victory instead of for victory.

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



This is the second 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 Jan. 5 at wels.net/forwardinchrist.

EPIPHANY LIGHT

This Epiphany it's time to bask in the sunshine of God's love and to shine that light on others.

Richard E. Lauersdorf

It was dark inside our tent. We had set up in a primitive campground in a national park. The evening sky was overcast as we crawled into our sleeping bags. Wouldn't you know it—in the night one of the kids had to go to the bathroom. Good thing we had a large flashlight to light the way to the outdoor facilities. Light in the darkness is what we needed and had.

SHINE ON ME

The Epiphany festival speaks also of light in the darkness. Only this darkness is more dense and this light more brilliant than in our campground that night. When Isaiah wrote in 60:2 that “darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples,” he wasn't referring to an overcast sky or midnight's lack of light. He had in mind the sin that enveloped the world like some toxic cloud and the fatal spiritual condition of the human heart. When he spoke of the “light [that] has come,” he was referring to the glory of God's love, the light that shines in full radiance around the cross of Christ.

Some seven hundred years before Bethlehem and Calvary, Isaiah was writing as if he were hearing the Savior proclaim, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). When Isaiah prophesied “nations will come to your light” (Isaiah 60:3), it was as if he were in the temple that day when Simeon described the Christ Child as “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32).

Just as sin's darkness envelops all, so God's light of salvation in Christ is also for all,

Jew and Gentile alike. That's the message of the Epiphany festival. It began with wise men from the East. Later it was the woman at the well of Samaria; the centurion whose servant needed healing; the Greeks who came looking for Jesus; the countless others over the centuries from every land and language, color, and culture. And me!

This Epiphany it's time for me to bask in the sunshine of God's love. Perhaps I've been there so long that I take it for granted. Perhaps sin's darkness doesn't look so dense and my salvation so brilliant that I don't appreciate the light of God's love as fully as I might. Epiphany is a good reminder to pray, “Lord, thank you for Jesus, my Light and my Salvation. Lord, let your light shine brightly on me.”

SHINE FROM ME

When Isaiah urges us to “arise, shine,” he's reminding us that God wants us to shine with that light to those around us. Like using the flashlight that night in the campground, we are to shed clear light on the pathway to heaven for others. Where better to start than in my home? What better gift could I desire for my loved ones? Or for my neighbors, fellow church members, friends, and acquaintances? And what about the millions across my country and my world? With my prayers and offerings I can help send others to tell them about my Jesus, the light of the world. Like some solar panel I can soak up the Sonshine and help pass it on to others.

At my age I no longer use that camping flashlight, and I surely don't miss sleeping on the ground in some darkened tent. But I still need the brilliant light of salvation shining on me through God's Word. And as long as the Lord leaves me here, may he use me to shine with that light to others.

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