

# Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



## A Christian father's impact

Our heavenly Father uses earthly dads to train his children and reflect his love. *Page 16*



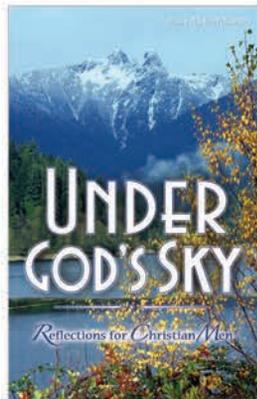
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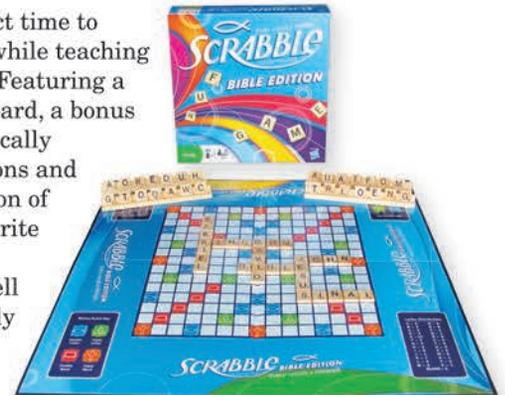
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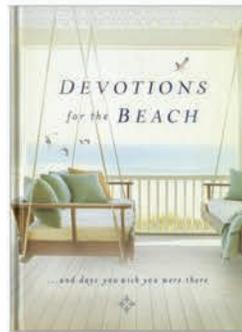
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*May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. — 1 KINGS 8:57*

## WHAT'S INSIDE

The month of June is a time to celebrate dads. Many of us can remember instances in our lives when our fathers gently guided us in the right direction or even used our missteps as a way to teach us valuable life lessons.

This month's *Heart to heart* column shares stories not from our contributing authors' memories, but from their kids'. These stories offer insights on the importance of Christian fathers and the impact they have in their children's lives—and include some great pictures to boot (p. 16)! On our back cover, Dan Nommensen, one of our *Heart to heart* contributing authors, does share a memory of his dad—one that involves a new lawn mower, a clothes pole, and a wonderful lesson about forgiveness.

Dan Nommensen reminds us that Christian fathers reflect the love of our heavenly Father. That heavenly Father showed how much he loves us in that he sent his own Son to save us from our sins. He also knit each of us together in a unique way for a unique purpose. In a new two-part series, David Scharf looks at how we can use our unique gifts to thank our Father for his love—whether at home, in church, or in our community (p. 12).

Julie Wietzke



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**A REMINDER OF GOD'S GRACE AND LOVE**

Our subscription just came today. It just keeps getting better and better! This Easter edition [April] was no exception. I use your "Through my Bible in three years." Your articles by Joel Seifert and Mark Schroeder were thought-provoking as was "I don't want a religion, I want a relationship" question. "Moments of reflection" was inspirational. James Huebner's article reminded me of our grace as did "Confessions of faith" by Julie Wietzke and "Teen Talk" by Krystal Taylor.

It's a pleasure to learn how our mission field is spreading his Word and that we are giving more to missions.

I enjoy the obituaries—because we never know when we will join our Lord.

It is delightful to learn of men's ministry.

Theodore Hartwig's series gives importance to women in our Bible and in our synod.

Christine Rindfleisch's article was especially meaningful at the point where I am in my life. Life is not fair! It's one of the first things we learn in life.

Andrew Schroer's "Time to think" is equally meaningful as is the editorial "You haven't changed a bit!" The series "Great stories of the Bible" has shown how we reach our young people. Steven Lange's "Hope in a cemetery" is filled with hope! That is why we have faith.

Your magazine reminds me of our grace and God's love. May he continue to bless you, your staff, and all those you love.

*Darlene Pinnow  
Winneconne, Wisconsin*

**SERVICE AND STUDYING**

This is in reaction to your article "Serving encourages studying" [Jan., p. 23].

You wrote that James Gieschen holds the record [for taking time out to serve between college and seminary].

# Through my Bible in 3 years



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

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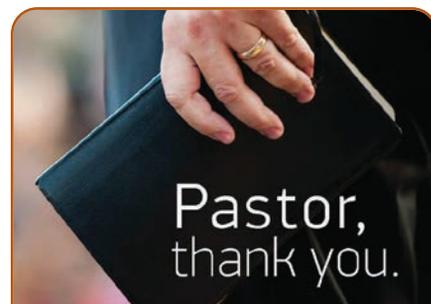
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|-----------------|------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Ezekiel 22   | 11. Ps. 77       | 21. Ps. 89:38-52     |
| 2. Eze. 23      | 12. Ps. 78:1-39  | 22. Eze. 33          |
| 3. Eze. 24      | 13. Ps. 78:40-72 | 23. Eze. 34          |
| 4. Eze. 25 & 26 | 14. Ps. 79 & 80  | 24. Eze. 35:1-36:15  |
| 5. Eze. 27 & 28 | 15. Ps. 81-83    | 25. Eze. 36:16-38    |
| 6. Eze. 29 & 30 | 16. Ps. 84       | 26. Eze. 37          |
| 7. Eze. 31 & 32 | 17. Ps. 85       | 27. Eze. 38          |
| 8. Psalm 73     | 18. Ps. 86 & 87  | 28. Eze. 39          |
| 9. Ps. 74       | 19. Ps. 88       | 29. Eze. 40:1-47     |
| 10. Ps. 75 & 76 | 20. Ps. 89:1-37  | 30. Eze. 40:48-41:26 |

Nine years is not the record. I know Lester Fritz was a '73 graduate of Northwestern College and an '86 graduate from the Sem. I was in the '70 class of Northwestern College. He had a call to Kewaunee, Wis., my hometown. A bigger record yet is Carl Lindemann's brother Earl. He was a '68 graduate of Northwestern College and a '99 graduate from the Sem. Earl farmed for 30 years maybe. I met Carl in North Dakota and at the Seminary in 1971. I had four years between high school and college. I was an Army Medic. Now I am 73 years old and still like to do some church work.

I had a small stroke last September, still going but slower, like my '90 Buick. I have been reading this magazine for more than 50 years. Keep up the good work.

God's blessings to all your work on the magazine. I still am a prayer partner for many of the items I read in the magazine.

*Gerhardt Struck  
Kenmare, North Dakota*



October is known as "Pastor Appreciation Month." In the October issue, *Forward in Christ* would like to share ways we can support and encourage pastors—as well as show our appreciation. We want to hear from you and publish some of your stories.

- What do you appreciate about your pastor?
- How have you or your congregation supported your pastor?
- How have you celebrated Pastor Appreciation Month?

**Send your comments and thoughts by June 15 to:**

*Forward in Christ*, N16W23377 Stone Ridge Dr, Waukesha WI 53188; [fic@wels.net](mailto:fic@wels.net).

# God's love is amazing

**You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. . . . God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:6,8**

Daniel J. Habben

On Nov. 7, 1907, a boxcar containing dynamite caught fire in the village of Nacozari in Sonora, Mexico. When the flames reached the dynamite, the blast was felt 10 miles away! The whole town of Nacozari should have been blown apart like dandelion seeds scattered by a single careless puff.

## ASTONISHING LOVE

But it wasn't—thanks to railroad engineer Jesús García. When Jesús noticed the flames in the boxcar, he quickly drove the train away from the town, where it exploded harmlessly. Well, harmlessly for the people of Nacozari, but not for Jesús. He gave his life to save the lives of many.

There is, of course, another “Jesús” who gave his life in a daring rescue. On Good Friday, Jesus of Nazareth hitched the world's sins to himself and hauled them to Golgotha. Atop that hill, God's fury exploded with a deafening silence.

Want to know why Jesus did it? Step close. Press your eye to the keyhole of the cross. Beyond that keyhole you'll see something more than a sense of duty. You'll see the vast room of God's astonishing love . . . a love that is for sinners.

## A LOVE FOR SINNERS

Jesús García is hailed as a hero because he saved a town of hardworking folks, of boys and girls, grandpas and grandmas. But what if he had driven the smoldering dynamite away from the mansion of a drug lord? Would newspaper headlines have read, “Jesús García demonstrates love by dying for drug lord”? More likely they would call him a fool for sacrificing his life for scum.

So consider what the apostle Paul writes about the rescue that Jesus of Nazareth pulled off: “Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). We may not live outside the law like a drug lord, but we routinely step outside of God's boundaries. God forbids stealing, but we download music we didn't buy. God tells us to speak the truth, but we'd rather blame our teacher for our failing grade than admit we didn't apply ourselves. God tells us

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Humanity was  
a smoking carload  
of dynamite,  
licked by the  
flames of our  
own sins, when  
God sent his  
Son to our rescue.

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to be slow to anger, but anger zips to the surface when we're face-to-face with obstinate kids, a red light, or a coworker's criticism. Are these nit-picky sins that God doesn't really care about?

Tell me, how big a flame does it take to ignite a stick of dynamite? Won't just a spark do? Every sin, no matter how small, is a spark that threatens to blow up our relationship with God. Humanity was a smoking carload of dynamite, licked by the flames of our own sins, when God sent his Son to our rescue . . . and to his death.



The citizens of Nacozari were so thankful to Jesús García for saving them that they renamed their town after him. Jerusalem was not renamed “Jesus-ville” in honor of the Savior's sacrifice on Good Friday. But you, dear reader, have been renamed. Once an enemy of God, now you are part of God's family and have peace. You really have a reason to rejoice. Why? Because God's astonishing love is for you.

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*Contributing editor Daniel Habben is pastor at St. Peter, St. Albert, Alberta, Canada.*



*Mark Schweder*

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“God’s outlaw”  
gave his life for  
the sake of the  
gospel and because  
of his desire to put  
the Word of God  
into the hands of  
ordinary people.

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## God’s outlaw

Every time we open an English Bible—regardless of what translation we may choose—we do so owing a debt of gratitude to a man who was known as “God’s outlaw.” As Luther did for German-speaking people, this man translated the Bible from the original Greek and Hebrew into English. And what is amazing is that most of us do not even know his name.

The man who would later become known as “God’s outlaw” was William Tyndale (1494–1536). Tyndale was a scholar and theologian who became one of the leading figures in the Reformation in England. At a time when the only English translations of the Bible were incomplete and based on the Latin Vulgate, Tyndale, like Luther, saw the need for the Bible to be available in the language of the people. He traveled from his home to London in 1523, hoping to secure permission to undertake his translation, but permission was denied.

The next year, Tyndale left England and headed for Germany. Arriving in Wittenberg, he enrolled at the University of Wittenberg and studied under Lutheran teachers and theologians. Only two years earlier, Luther had begun to translate the New Testament into German while at the Wartburg Castle, completing it in 1522. Inspired by Luther and following his example, Tyndale completed his translation of the New Testament in 1526.

Tyndale’s accomplishment, while easily overlooked, should never be forgotten. His translation became the basis for several other English translations that followed. Most notably, the 54 scholars who produced the King James Version in 1611 depended heavily on the work that Tyndale had done. Fully 80 percent of the King James New Testament books and 75 percent of the Old Testament books translated by Tyndale reproduced Tyndale’s words exactly.

Rather than being recognized as a hero or saint, Tyndale’s efforts earned him a very different reaction at the time. His translation was viewed as a challenge to the authority and power of the church. Copies of the translation were smuggled from Germany and Belgium into England. There Bishop Turnstall threatened booksellers with severe punishment for selling the Bibles, and piles of the Tyndale translation were publicly burned. Cardinal Wolsey declared Tyndale to be a heretic. In 1530, when Tyndale declared that King Henry VIII’s planned divorce was unscriptural, the king asked the Holy Roman Emperor to have Tyndale arrested and extradited to England.

Tyndale never made it back to England. He was arrested and imprisoned in Belgium in 1535. After a year in a dark dungeon, he was condemned as a heretic. He was tied to a stake and strangled; his lifeless body was then burned. “God’s outlaw” gave his life for the sake of the gospel and because of his desire to put the Word of God into the hands of ordinary people.

Before he died, Tyndale’s last words were a prayer: “Lord, open the king of England’s eyes!” God granted that prayer. Within four years, the king of England commissioned four new English translations, all of them based on Tyndale’s translation. And in 1611, the version authorized by King James would use Tyndale’s work as the basis of a translation that would be used for the next five centuries.

William Tyndale will probably never be a name that most English-speaking Christians will remember. But we should remember what he did. And we should thank God for this man who made the ultimate sacrifice to bring the Word of God to generations of people.

# Light for our path

**What do I say when a friend asks why some unbelievers seem to be more morally upright than many Christians she knows?**

James F. Pope

Your response to your friend includes understanding what the Bible teaches about good works and the dual nature of the Christian.

## SIMILARITY ON THE OUTSIDE

Picture two strangers walking down a street. One is a Christian, the other is an unbeliever. Can you tell who's who? That is not a fair question because no human being would be able to know the difference with 100 percent certainty. Why? What the Lord said to the prophet Samuel regarding the identification of Israel's second king is also true when it comes to people trying to distinguish a believer from an unbeliever: "People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). God alone can see faith or unbelief in the heart and sort out Christian from non-Christian. You and I have limited vision. That means we might not be able to differentiate between an unbeliever who does nice things in life and a Christian who seems to do fewer amounts of good works.

But, you wonder, why might the morally upright behavior of an unbeliever seem to be more abundant than the good works of a Christian? Shouldn't it be the other way around? An answer to those questions lies in recognizing the unique makeup of the Christian.

## A BATTLE ON THE INSIDE

In Romans chapter 7 the apostle Paul explained the struggles he experienced in living the Christian life. "For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing" (Romans 7:18,19). The apostle's struggles materialized when the Lord blinded him physically and opened his eyes spiritually on the road to Damascus. The new self cre-

ated by the Holy Spirit clashed with the sinful nature Paul had from birth. The result of that clash was that the apostle fell into sin again and again after he became a believer.

Christians today find common ground with the apostle. Christians may find themselves on the losing side of temptation all too often. It then can appear as if the unbeliever's behavior surpasses the good works of battle-weary Christians. But it's important to keep the distinction between outward goodness of an unbeliever that does not impress God and good works of a Christian that are pleasing to God because of Jesus his Son. The truth remains that only Christians can do good works (Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:13), while the entire life of the unbeliever is one of sin (Romans 14:23).

## JOY IN OUR INNER BEING

Picture again those two strangers walking down a street. One person just tries to do nice things—to be a good neighbor, a good citizen, and a good person. Another person tries to do good things because she shares the attitude of the apostle Paul and seeks to do what God says in his law as a way of thanking him for salvation. Does that mean such gratitude will express itself in greater measure than the morally upright behavior of unbelievers? Not necessarily. But Christians will strive to grow in their praise of God.

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

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

Psalm 119:105



# OUT OF SIGHT, BUT NOT OUT OF MIND

**After his ascension, we do not physically see Jesus.  
But he always sees us and never forgets us.**

John A. Vieths

“Out of sight, out of mind.” When college choices are going to separate them next year, this is what dating high school seniors fear. Their mothers may fear it too, as the high school graduates trade their childhood bedrooms for dorm rooms. Many newly independent young adults forget to call home once in a while.

Will people we care about deeply forget about us when we no longer see each other on a regular basis? We don’t want to drift apart and lose touch. On our Savior’s part, we can put to rest any fears that he has stopped thinking about us now that we can’t see him anymore. We occupy his thoughts constantly. In heaven, he talks about us with his Father every day.

## OUR ADVOCATE IN HEAVEN

We desperately need him to have those conversations. “My dear children,” the apostle John wrote in his first letter, “I write this to you so that you will not sin” (1 John 2:1). Life for us after the Lord’s ascension is a struggle against sin. No sermon, no Bible class, not even a letter written by one of Jesus’ own apostles ever succeeded in putting a permanent end to our sinning.

The apostle John knew this too. He wasn’t laboring under any delusions about how successful his letter was going to be, even a letter inspired by God. He inked the observation: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us”

(1:8). By faith God’s children fight not to sin, but we still lose plenty of contests. Honesty requires us to admit it.

This gives Jesus and his Father something to talk about. In fact, it demands they talk. Some of the terms and names with which we refer to Jesus are terms of endearment, full of love and warmth: Good Shepherd, Redeemer, Lamb of God, my Savior. On that list, “defense attorney” may not be the first thing that comes to mind. But this too is part of Jesus’ important work for us now that he has ascended. “If anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One” (2:1). He speaks to the Father in our defense. He is our defense attorney, our advocate, the

heavenly lawyer who argues our case in heaven's highest court.

Jesus never loses a case. His Father finds us innocent every time. Considering the facts of the case, that is a shocking truth. We know we sinned. Jesus knows we sinned. His Father knows it too. But we are found not guilty every time. Why? It is because of who defends us, how he defends us, and where he defends us.

Paul explained to the Romans, "Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (8:34). Our attorney is Christ Jesus, the judge's Son, the Son the judge loves. We can be sure his arguments are going to receive a sympathetic ear. Our defender pleads his own life and death for us. He served our sentence and paid our debt. His resurrection put an exclamation on the fact that all accounts are settled. And Jesus makes his case for us not from beneath the judge's bench, but from his right hand. Here in heaven's courtroom Jesus speaks with all the power and authority of heaven's rightful ruler. How could we lose?

### **A GIFT OF THE SPIRIT**

While Jesus pleads our case in heaven, he hasn't forgotten that we are still on earth. The danger of "out of sight, out of mind" was never really a danger for him. It is a danger for us. And so that we don't let him slip from our hearts, our minds, and our mission, he has given us his Holy Spirit.

Jesus' gift of the Holy Spirit is an important benefit of his death, resurrection, and ascension. "It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7). We Lutherans don't think about the Holy Spirit as much as some Christians, but that's okay.

The Holy Spirit isn't as interested in having the attention on himself as he is in directing our attention to Jesus. Christ reminded the disciples in the upper room: "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me" (John 15:26). Jesus promised, "He will glorify me" (John 16:14) and "will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I said to you" (John 14:26).

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## Jesus' gift of the Holy Spirit is an important benefit of his death, resurrection, and ascension.

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Don't we know Jesus and what he teaches well enough already? Is there really so much for the Spirit to teach us? What we lack may not be a list of lessons from our Savior's life. Certainly the Spirit helps us learn and remember his life and teaching too.

Our greater challenge, however, may be trusting and applying the things we do know about Jesus. If it weren't for the Holy Spirit, we could do neither. "The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness," Paul wrote the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 2:14). People who have never heard of Jesus or the Holy Spirit can still come to some good conclusions. But "the message of the cross is foolishness" (1 Corinthians 1:18) until the Spirit's power convinces us that it is "the wisdom of God" (verse 21).

Then we see Jesus and his cross not as one teaching among many in the Bible but as the lens through which all of reality becomes clear. The apostle Paul was not holding out on the Christians in Corinth when he told them, "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). He was giving them the key that unlocks the meaning to everything! Only with this key can we understand the meaning of our baptisms (Ephesians 5:25-27; Romans 6:1-11), Christ's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-26), our suffering (Romans 5:1-8; Romans 8:18-39; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10), our love and service (2 Corinthians 5:14,15; 1 John 4:7-11), our witness (Romans 10:5-17), our universe (Colossians 1:13-20), and our God (John 14:8-11).

So Jesus ascended, and he gave us the Spirit with his Word—the Spirit who makes our hearts his home, assures us of our place in God's family, blesses us with gifts for serving, leads us in godly living, makes us bold to tell others about our Savior, and gives power to the gospel we share. But the Spirit doesn't do this by making himself the star of the show. He does it by keeping our attention focused on Jesus, who may be out of sight but is never out of mind.

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*John Vieths is pastor at Grace, Norman, Oklahoma.*

This is the second article in a four-part series on Jesus' ascension and the work he continues to do for us.

# SERVING as God made me

God made you as an individual in a certain way to play  
a role in his body of believers. David G. Scharf

Maybe you've heard this one. What does a professional football game have in common with many churches? At a football game, there are 22 men on the field in desperate need of rest and thousands on the sidelines in desperate need of exercise. In the church, it often seems like there is a small group who need a break doing most of the work and a seemingly much larger number sitting on the sidelines.

There is a grain of truth in the illustration. However, I don't love it. It doesn't take into account that God has blessed us all with vocations or "callings." We all have them. Does a mother of six serve her Savior any less by tucking her kids into bed with a bedtime devotion and prayer rather than by participating in a church meeting? By no means! Both are ways to serve Jesus. The balance between "life service" and "church service" will be different depending on your vocations.

But the question still remains when it comes to service in the church:

## WHO'S GOING TO DO IT?

Perhaps we think, "Well, that's why we call our pastors and teachers!" There is a grain of truth in that sentiment. Pastors and teachers are so wonderfully equipped for service by the fantastic education

they receive in the Word of God through our synodical schools. However, what have they been equipped to do?

Listen to how the apostle Paul expresses it: "Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13). Pastors and teachers have been equipped to equip others for works of service. They equip by training us with the Word of God. They unite us around the truth of God's Word and the exciting mission God gives us. They encourage us to carry out works of

service both in the church and in our everyday lives.

What does that look like? A pastor preaches and teaches, and his members carry that message into their daily lives. A pastor builds the body of Christ by equipping and training his members to live as Christian husbands, wives, parents, citizens, and employees. He also encourages them to witness to others. Each member has a role to play in their families, their communities, and their church.

## WHO ME?

The apostle Paul calls us the "body of Christ." He goes on to explain: "From [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, *as each part does its work*" (Ephesians 4:16, emphasis added).



What a remarkable picture! When God worked faith in your heart, he built you into his body. He gave you gifts and a role to play in his body.

While every part of the body has a different role, every role is important! We tend to downplay our gifts and abilities. Maybe we like to think that we're the appendix in the body of Christ and serve no purpose, but God makes every part of the body important. Even the pinky toenail serves a valuable purpose. Can you imagine the pain if you didn't have that right now? Ouch!

The blessing of being part of the body of Christ doesn't stop there. You have gifts and abilities unique to you. There is no one else in this world with the same gift set as you. There is no one who has exactly the same personality as you. Even better, of the billions of people who have existed on this earth, there has never been anyone with exactly the same gift and personality match as you. Each one of us can say with the psalmist, "You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; . . . I know that full well" (Psalm 139:13,14). Every hand-knit sweater is unique. God does not mass produce us. He knits us individually.

And here's the mind-blowing part: God knit you together in that unique way for a purpose. Even better, he knit you and made you for his purpose. God made you as an individual in a certain way to play a role in his body of believers. Even better, he made you to play your role—the one he created just for you in his body.

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I want to live for  
[Christ] not because I  
have to, but because I've  
never experienced any  
love greater than his!

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So with your unique personality and gift blend, what does service in the body of Christ look like for you? We have many options with our time. Next month we're going to explore how our unique gift sets and personalities mesh together for service.

But for now, let's answer one more incredibly important question:

#### WHY ME?

Why will we want to look for all the ways that we can serve Jesus both in our everyday lives as well as in the

church? Let's listen to the apostle Paul again: "Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Corinthians 5:14,15).

Can you see the "why"? We're compelled, but not in a forced way. We're compelled in the sense that it's the only thing we feel like doing. By what are we compelled? Christ's love. I will respond in proportion to the love and sacrifice someone shows to me. If you buy me a cup of coffee, I will shake your hand. If you pay off the mortgage on my house, I will kiss your feet! (Well, that may be an exaggeration.) But if you suffer hell for me? Wow! There is nothing I wouldn't do for you. And that's what Jesus did—suffered hell for us. That's Christ's love. Isn't it compelling? I want to live for him not because I have to, but because I've never experienced any love greater than his!

And you have all you need to live for him. God equips you by his Word through the called workers he has given. God has knit you together in the perfect way for his service and made you part of his body. God compels you to use those gifts, not by force but by his infinite love. Through all of that God turns our questions of "Who's going to do it?" or "Who me?" or "Why me?" into a statement: "Here am I. Send me!"

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*David Scharf is a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota.*

This is the first article in a two-part series on serving Christ and his church.



## An accident that nearly killed a man ended up saving his life.

Pamela Holz

Theirs was a love story out of a movie. Two kids from New York who met in Virginia Beach while on vacation. She was mortified about the smell of the new perm she had just gotten and refused to make eye contact with anyone. He saw her and was determined he was going to see her again.

Later that week, they were both at a popular Virginia Beach destination. The crowd parted, and their eyes met . . . and it was like the rest of the world melted away. They spent the rest of the evening walking along the beach and talking, and when she got home from the vacation, there were flowers waiting for her. By August they were dating, and by Christmas, they were engaged. A big Catholic wedding came the following August, and their fairy tale romance was complete.

Then the practicalities of life set in. Ed was determined to take good care of this amazing woman JoAnn, who was now his wife. He was working hard as a New York City police officer. JoAnn was working for Gulf Industries. Every Sunday, JoAnn attended Mass, as she had done her entire life. Ed kept working. Raised with the per-

spective that one only had to go to church until one was confirmed, Ed had a skewed view of the church and of God. On the job, he saw so many things that made him question God. Church was fine for JoAnn, but Ed had no need for it.

Time passed, and their perfect family grew by first one and then a second little girl. Ed worked harder than ever to make sure that his girls lacked for nothing. He would stop in between jobs to change a shirt and grab lunch. JoAnn and the girls continued attending the Catholic Church. Ed kept working, switching to a Long Island police department.

**Ironically, it was a Sunday morning when Ed and JoAnn's life would change forever.** Ed was on the side of the road, assisting a motorist whose car had broken down, when he was hit by a Volkswagen that strayed off onto the shoulder. Ed crashed into the windshield of the VW and then was thrown 30 feet from the car. He slid another 30 feet before crumpling on the ground. While he remembers nothing of the incident, eyewitnesses told of the horrific sight as the emergency crews hurried to save one of their own.

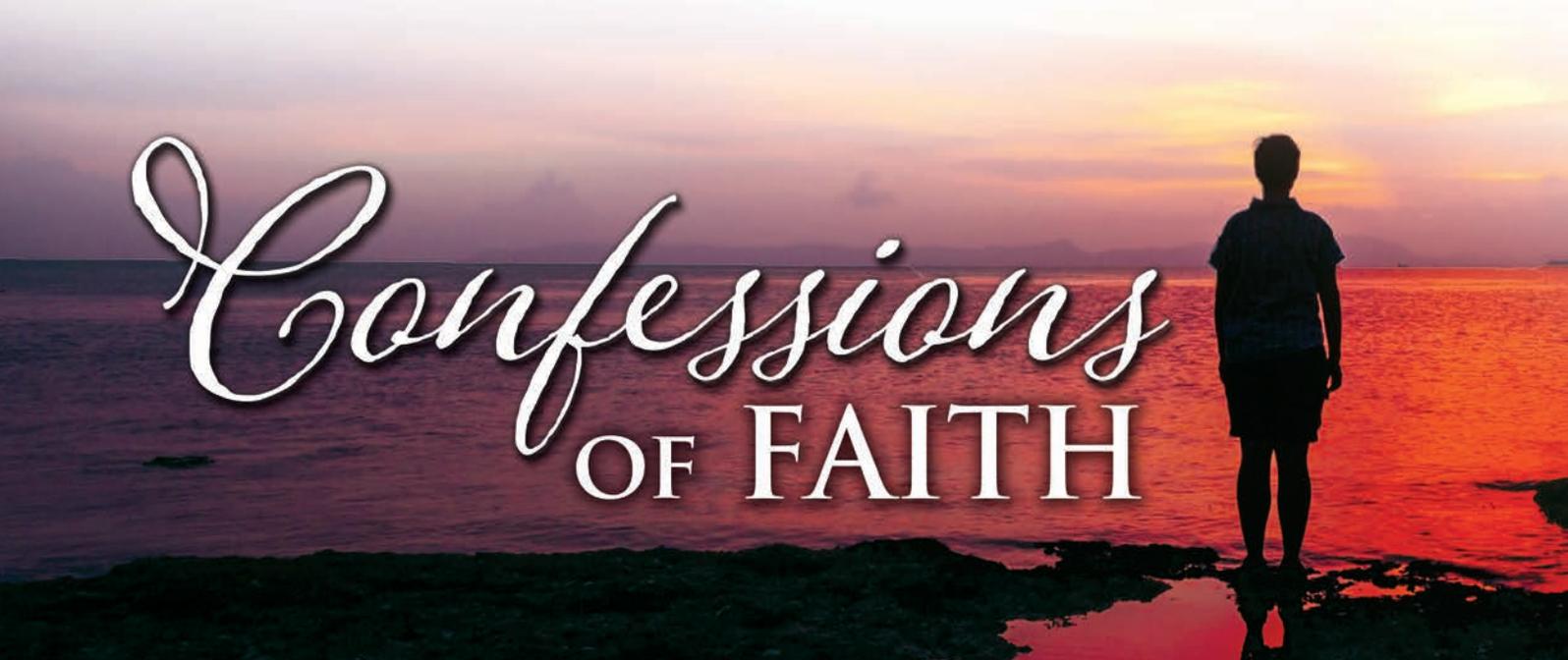
Blissfully unaware of the situation, JoAnn was enjoying lunch out with a friend. Frantic to find her—these were the days before everyone had a cell

phone—another friend called every restaurant in the area to locate her. Moments after finding her, a police officer met JoAnn at the restaurant and hurried her to his vehicle. Despite her many questions, he remained silent as they sped to the hospital.

JoAnn arrived to find Ed alive, but broken. His left leg was crushed right below the knee; his right knee was dislocated to the point that it was dangling by a thread. His shoulder blade was broken, and he had suffered a T-10 vertebrae fracture in his spinal column. Monday's surgery was able to repair the damage to the right knee but put Ed in a full, to-the-hip cast. His right shoulder was restricted to a sling and would be completely non-weightbearing for the next four months.

One of the first things that Ed asked was to see a priest. He remembers thinking that if God had allowed him to live through such a death-defying ordeal, there must be a reason for it. He had a strong sense that he needed to talk about God.

Over the course of the next year and a half, JoAnn struggled with the intense task of in-home care for her husband. A petite woman, JoAnn somehow managed to take care of Ed on a day-to-day basis, tending to his every need in addition to continuing to raise their two girls, now ages 6 and 3.



# Confessions OF FAITH

**As he began to get out, Ed started attending the Catholic Church with JoAnn and the girls** but found himself frustrated with the message he was hearing. He knew he needed to find something else, but he wasn't sure what that was.

In the midst of his search, their daughter, Jennifer, became quite ill. A neighbor came over and prayed with JoAnn, telling her words from the Bible to comfort her. JoAnn was amazed and dismayed to learn that after all of her years attending Catholic school and faithfully attending Catholic Church, she didn't have any idea of what the Bible taught. The neighbor invited the family to attend her church, but Ed and JoAnn were not comfortable with the tambourines and dancing. They knew they needed to keep looking.

Invited to attend a Lutheran church, Ed and JoAnn found themselves in a setting that was more comfortable. They attended the adult orientation class. The more JoAnn learned, the angrier she became. She was angry that she didn't know any of the things she was being taught from the Bible. She was angry with herself for never questioning how she was raised. The pastor comforted her by telling her that she had a childlike faith, and those words gave JoAnn a sense of peace.

Ed, meanwhile, found himself wanting to know *why* about everything. It

wasn't until he read a Bible verse that spoke of man's inability to understand the ways of God that he finally found peace.

**They continued at this Lutheran church for two years, until they decided to move to Tennessee.** They knew no one there, but every door that needed to open happened at just the right time. Trusting that this was the right place for them, they confidently moved away from their families and all that was familiar.

They found a Lutheran church nearby. Eager to continue their walk in a Bible-teaching church, Ed and JoAnn got involved. As time went on, Ed grew increasingly uncomfortable. The church was making decisions on which parts of Scripture to follow and which ones not to follow. Ed questioned that decision. He wondered how error-filled men knew which parts to keep and which parts to discard.

Feeling that they were not yet in the best place for their family, Ed and JoAnn moved to Clarksville, Tennessee. But another Lutheran church also made them uncomfortable. They looked again and found Beautiful Savior.

At once they knew they had finally found their home. They heard God's Word preached from the pulpit and spoken throughout the service. They became active in Bible study, and it



Ed and JoAnn Scarano

was in a Bible class one evening that Ed, that tough New York City police officer who kept his feelings close to the vest, opened up and shared his story. Laughing sheepishly, he said, "Who would have thought that God would use a VW to get my attention? I am so glad that he did, because that accident saved my life."

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*Pamela Holz is a member at Beautiful Savior, Clarksville, Tennessee.*



**heart to heart**  
parent conversations

In a world that spends so much time making fun of dads and telling them that they are unnecessary, I thought this month would be a great time to remind ourselves of the impact that a Christian father can have on his children. I asked some of the children of our contributing authors to tell us about their dads. Their reflections remind me of many special moments with my own dad.

Do you have a story to share about your father or a dad you know? Send it to [fic@wels.net](mailto:fic@wels.net).

*Nicole Balza*

## Join the conversation!

Visit [wels.net/forwardinchrist](http://wels.net/forwardinchrist) and look for the *Heart to heart* link. Read uncut versions of the articles, learn more about the authors, and give us your thoughts and reactions.

WHAT KIND OF IMPACT CAN A CHRISTIAN FATHER HAVE ON HIS CHILDREN?

### A lesson from my dad

*Rachel Learman writes about one of the life lessons she learned from her dad, Jim Aderman.*

He listened quietly and patiently while I poured out my frustrations concerning the new place I was living. Out tumbled discontent with my job, the church, the choir, the location, and more. When I finished my long string of aggravations, there was a brief pause. Then, "Well, I am sorry to hear all of that. Life isn't always easy, nor what you had hoped. But God does have a plan and purpose for your life there. Grow where you are planted, Rachel."

As we hung up the phone, I have to admit I was far from satisfied with Dad's answers. I don't really know what I was hoping for, but "grow where you're planted" was not it. At least that is what I thought in that moment.

### All about Daddy and me

*Elliana Bourman, age 3, answers questions from her mom, Melanie, about her dad, Jonathan Bourman.*

**Melanie:** Does your daddy love you?

**Elliana:** Yup!

**Melanie:** How do you know?

**Elliana:** Because he tells me.

**Melanie:** What is your daddy's job?

**Elliana:** I don't remember.

**Melanie:** Daddy is a pastor, remember?

**Elliana:** Oh, yeah. He's a pastor.

**Melanie:** What does Daddy do as a pastor?

**Elliana:** He stands on top and talks a lot.

**Melanie:** What does Daddy teach you about Jesus?

**Elliana:** That he washed my sins all gone.

**Melanie:** What is your favorite Bible story that Daddy has read to you?

**Elliana:** I like the big storm [Jesus calms the storm] and baby Jesus away in a manger.



Elliana (age 3) and Jonathan Bourman

But as I considered what he said, I realized it was what Dad had been teaching me all along—through new family houses, financial hardships, the anxiety of his pastoral calls, different schools, moving hours away for college and law school, breakups, and job loss. It was, in fact, even an intrinsic part of my confirmation verse that he, as my pastor, had chosen: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9). The context for this Bible passage was the Lord finally allowing the Israelites to enter the Promised Land of Canaan. God gave them the Promised Land but didn’t promise them a perfect life in that land.



Rachel Learman and her dad, Jim Aderman

Dad has shown me this throughout my life.

God puts us in certain places and situations for a reason. We can either follow God’s command not to be afraid and discouraged, living our lives to reflect his love and being joyful in our circumstances, or wallow in self-pity and push away our loving God who has plans beyond measure for us.

Life has changed significantly since that phone call. I have since married; become a mom of four children; moved two more times to two different states, two different churches, and three different companies, yet I continue to apply Dad’s advice.

## A favorite memory of my dad

*Kayla Nommensen, now 14-years-old, reminisces about a special time with her dad, Dan Nommensen.*

When I was about seven or eight, my dad took me up north a couple times to a cottage that my great uncle used to live in. On our four-hour drive up to the cottage, we had a great time singing camp songs, talking, and telling stories and jokes.

When we got up there, it was usually dark. Being the great dad he is, he let me trudge in while he took everything in out of the cold. He lit the fire, and we watched the temperature slowly rise, degree by degree. Then, after about an hour and a half of sorting, putting things in the fridge, and setting up heaters, he would finally get



Kayla (age 8) and Dan Nommensen

the bed ready and we would hop in. We sometimes watched a movie on the small screen of the portable movie player. Then we’d go to bed after saying prayers.

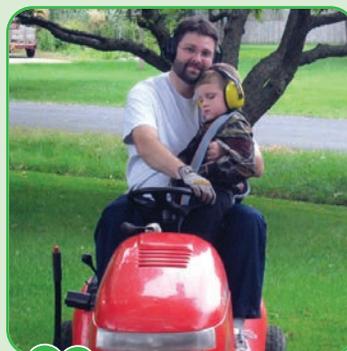
In the morning I got up to a nice, warm, homemade meal. He already had everything set up and ready for us to eat and go. We then put our fishing things on and walked down to the lake just as the sun was rising. We got into the rocky boat with cobwebs and all and floated off. Dad rowed while we searched for the perfect place to cast our lures. When I finally threw a lure out with as much strength as I could, it would go off course or cross Dad’s line. But he always said, “That was a good one,” and helped me do it correctly.

I loved those times with my dad. I love my dad and am thankful that I have such a loving Christian father to always watch over me.

## My dad is special

*Josh Nommensen, age 11, shares some thoughts about his dad, Dan Nommensen.*

At night when my dad tucks me in, we pray five special prayers, including one in German and the English meaning that he learned from his dad. My dad learned two prayers from his mom that we also pray.



Josh (age 5) and Dan Nommensen

Then Luther’s Evening Prayer. This is special to me because my dad is passing them on to me from his parents, my grandparents, that I didn’t get to know. He plays basketball with me, and he plays Wii with me. He is very patient with me. My dad is special because he helps me get through tough times, and I love him very much.

# teentalk

## Are you being bullied? Turn to God.

God is with you through everything, even bullying.

Kaylee Elen Neupert

As we move farther and farther into the future, sin becomes even more prevalent in our everyday lives. There are wars, crimes, and what's beginning to be more and more common in our high schools: bullying.

**Some of the synonyms of bullying are persecute, oppress, tyrannize, browbeat, harass, torment, intimidate, strong-arm, and dominate.** I don't know what you think, but this isn't sounding like something that should be happening in our Christian grade schools, high schools, and homes . . . and yet, it is.

Bullying happens every day, whether it's through obvious ways such as violence toward an individual, or through telling people they're too fat, too thin, ugly, or stupid. Either way can be extremely devastating and can lead to bad things like self-harm, suicidal thoughts, and possibly suicide itself.

One of the hardest things to do when you're being bullied is to speak out. You think that people may call you a tattletale or that nobody will believe you. Another reason you might not speak out is that you're scared.

The thing that's wrong with that statement, though, is that you're never alone. God promises, "I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous" (Joshua 1:5,6).

Think about Jesus. He was mocked and scorned. Sometimes we forget that although Jesus is perfect, his life wasn't. They called him names, told him he was a blasphemer, spit on him, and beat him. Jesus knows exactly what we're going through, and he's always with us.

### Here's some advice:

To those who are being or have been bullied: Turn to God. Being bullied can make you feel miserable, like you're not worth it. But you are. There will be trials in your life, but God will overcome them. Jesus reminds us, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

To those who know people who are being bullied: If your friend tells you he or she is being bullied or you see it happening, you need to tell someone. Your friend may ask you not to tell an

adult, but you need to. This can be incredibly hard to do sometimes, but that's what best for the bullied person.

I know that choosing to speak out can be one of the most difficult decisions you'll make, but it's worth it. Trust me, I know this firsthand. If you don't tell someone about this, it may never stop. Depending on the type of bullying, it can leave permanent scars. If you don't take care of it before it gets to be a big problem, it can cause you to distrust all the people you talk to, make you antisocial, and take away all of your self-confidence.

In conclusion, bullying is a terrible sin that affects the lives of many teenagers. It can be stopped, though, if the bullied and the witnesses go and tell a teacher or trusted adult about it. Speaking out about getting bullied is a hard thing to do, but God always will be with you.

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*Kaylee Neupert, a junior at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wisconsin, is a member at St. John Newville, Waterloo, Wisconsin.*

## CHANGES IN MINISTRY

### Pastors

**Aden, Darin D.**, to St. John St. James, Reedsville, Wis.  
**Douglas, James E.**, to Grace, Charlotte, N.C.  
**Ertl, Jordan P.**, to Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Klein, Carl M.**, to retirement.  
**Ruege Jr., John A.**, to St. Paul's, Marquette, Mich.  
**Schwartz, Timothy M.**, to Zion, Columbus, Wis.  
**Weigand, Martin R.**, to Grace, Goodhue, Minn.

### Teachers

**Bauer, Sara E.**, to Garden Homes, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Beyersdorf, Scott D.**, to David's Star, Jackson, Wis.  
**Boling, Devan**, to Risen Savior, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Clark, Leah L.**, to Redeemer, Tucson, Ariz.  
**Dittbenner, Clark D.**, to St. John's, Two Rivers, Wis.  
**Getka, Naomi S.**, to Faith, Tacoma, Wash.  
**Hansen, Justin D.**, to Good Shepherd, Burnsville, Minn.  
**Hochmuth, Keturah E.**, to Bethany, Manitowoc, Wis.  
**Hutchinson, Ethan S.**, to Our Savior, Wausau, Wis.  
**Jaeger, Kate**, to Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Jaeger, Laura M.**, to St. John's, Two Rivers, Wis.  
**Janke, Christina M.**, to First German, Manitowoc, Wis.  
**Johnson, Dawn R.**, to St. Paul, Howards Grove, Wis.  
**Kasten, Kirsten J.**, to Huron Valley Lutheran High School, Westland, Mich.  
**Klug, Kevin L.**, to Holy Trinity, Okauchee, Wis.  
**Kruck, William H.**, to Michigan Lutheran High School, Saint Joseph, Mich.  
**Manning, Alicia**, to Resurrection Lutheran Preschool, Verona, Wis.  
**Manske, Rachel**, to St. Paul, Franklin, Wis.  
**Natsis, Claire E.**, to St. Paul, Stevensville, Mich.  
**Obsuszt, Karen**, to St Paul, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis.  
**Randall, Ryan L.**, to Salem, Greenfield, Minn.  
**Satorius, Lorna J.**, to Grace, Falls Church, Va.  
**Stuedemann, Molly A.**, to Grow with Us Child Center, Black Creek, Wis.  
**Wendt, Rachel**, to Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Staff minister**  
**Fink, Robert L.**, to Grace, Manitowoc, Wis.

## ANNIVERSARIES

**Houston, Tex.**—Christ the Lord (50). June 5. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal to follow. Sept. 4. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal and program to follow. 281-778-3003. Website, facebook.com/CtL50thanniversary/.

**Lake Cypress Springs, Texas**—Grace (25). June 12. Worship, 4:30 P.M.; meal to follow. 903-860-3749. Website, www.gracenearthelake.com.

**Frontenac, Minn.**—St. John (150). June 19. Worship, 10 A.M.; special confirmation class reunion and meal to follow. RSVP requested by June 1. Oct. 9. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested by Sept. 15. 651-345-2757.

**Shawano, Wis.**—Divine Savior (50). June 26. Worship, 9 A.M.; meal to follow, 11:30 A.M.; program, 12:30 P.M.; afternoon service, 1:30 P.M. 715-526-6880. Website, www.divinesaviorshawano.org.

**Lewiston, Minn.**—St. John (150). July 3. Worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M.; meal to follow. 507-523-2280. Website, lewistonlutherans.org.

**Wilson, Minn.**—Trinity (150). Aug. 14. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal and special "Voices of the Past" walk to follow. 507-452-3764.

**Mosinee, Wis.**—Grace (100). Sept. 18. Worship, 11 A.M.; meal to follow. 715-457-4727.

**New Orleans, La.**—recovery of Crown of Life following Hurricane Katrina (10). Oct. 30. Rededication service. Special invitation to those who helped with the recovery. Website, crownoflifefenola.com.

**Davenport, Iowa**—Gethsemane (50). Nov. 13. Worship, 10:15 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. 563-359-0144.

## COMING EVENTS

**Marriage enrichment weekends**—Throughout the year, WELS Adult Discipleship holds marriage enrichment weekends around the country. Information on registration, along with descriptions of the focus topics for the various enrichment weekends, can be found at wels.net/events.

**Tiny Steps, Big Hearts walk**—June 11. Hosted by New Beginnings—A home for mothers. Hart Park, Wauwatosa, Wis. Website, welsrc.net/events.

**Northwestern Publishing House New Music Reading Workshops**—More details and registration online. Website, www.nph.net/music/workshop.

- June 18 at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.
- July 9 at Trinity, Waukesha, Wis.
- July 16 at Mount Olive, Appleton, Wis.
- July 30 at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.
- Aug. 20 at Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, 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." Registration is open. Website, wels.net/events.

**Women's Ministry Conference**—July 21–23. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Theme: "Mentors." Registration is open. Website, wels.net/wmconference.

**Return to Wittenberg conference**—July 26–29. Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. Theme: "What Does This Mean?" Website, www.returntowittenberg.org.

**WELS Night at Miller Park**—July 29. Miller Park, Milwaukee, Wis. Brewers vs. Pirates. Order tickets at reduced rates at www.brewers.com/wels. Website, wels.net/events.

**WELS Retired Called Worker reunion**—Aug. 4. Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis. RSVP requested by July 25. Robert Fischer, rfischer@fvlhs.org, 920-560-5107.

**Bus tour**—Aug. 5. Explore historic Lutheran churches in the Milwaukee area. Sponsored by the WELS Historical Institute. Dr. Joel Pless, 414-443-8930; 262-677-2109; joel.pless@wlc.edu.

**Annual Christian Educators for Special Education Summer conference**—Aug. 10. Country Springs Conference Center, Waukesha, Wis. Lois McKenney, loismckenney@gmail.com.

**WELS National Physical Education conference**—Sept. 22–23. La Crosse Center, La Crosse, Wis. Theme: "Built to Move." Website, mlc-wels.edu/continuing-education/2016-wels-pe-conference.

**Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors convention**—Oct. 11–13. Ramada Plaza Hotel and Convention Center, Omaha, Neb. Theme: "Enlarging the Harvest." Website, wels.net/events.

**MLC Ladies' Auxiliary annual meeting**—Oct. 15. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Website, mlc-wels.edu/ladies-auxiliary/.

**WELS multi-site conference**—Nov. 14–16. Grace, Tucson, Ariz. Website, wels.net/events.

## NAMES WANTED

**Hot Springs Village, Arkansas**—people living in the area, retired or visitors. Living Water, Hot Springs Village, Ark. Website, www.livingwater@hsv.com.

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

## New program helps congregations create ministry action plans

The congregation knows what it wants to do. The leaders have spent a lot of time outlining goals and completing a ministry plan. But now comes the hard part—how exactly are they going to do it? That’s where the Commission on Congregational Counseling (CCC) comes in. Through its new Ministry Organization and Staffing Evaluation (MOSE) program, the commission helps congregations assess and evaluate their ministry plans and provides recommendations for carrying them out.

“A lot of congregations have a ministry plan and goals for the year, but most don’t break those goals down into steps and have people assigned to tasks with due dates,” says Jon Hein, CCC director. “We help congregations think through their ministry in terms of human resources and how much time it will take.”

Hein says this is a helpful process since one of the biggest barriers facing congregations is time—both understanding how it’s currently being utilized and being realistic about how much is needed. So Hein starts by giving the pastor a sheet to track the time he spends on current ministry. “It’s good for the pastor and the congregation to see how much time everything really takes,” he says.

The results can be eye-opening. For example, one congregation learned that its pastor was logging nearly 90 hours per week. “I interviewed the lay leaders, and they knew he was getting burned out,” Hein says. “They told me, ‘We need our pastor to let go of some things, but we don’t know where, or how, or if he’s comfortable with it.’ So that’s my job—to give them some options.” After learning that the pastor was doing all of the shut-in, hospital, and evangelism calls, Hein recommended training congregation members to help with some of those visits. “The congregation was all on board; they got it,” he says. “They just



Jon Hein, director of the Commission on Congregational Counseling, observes a congregational meeting in which leaders discuss strategic planning and future initiatives.

needed to go through this process to crystallize things in their head.”

After a congregation’s current activities are analyzed, the next step is to look at its ministry plans. If a congregation finds it doesn’t have enough time to carry out its plans, Hein provides recommendations about how to fill that gap—either by scaling back the plans or increasing manpower. Not surprisingly, many congregations want to fill the gap by mobilizing volunteers. Hein says one of the best ways to do that is by creating detailed job descriptions for each role.

“If you tell people exactly what you expect of them and how much time it will take, and if they can see the purpose and the vision, they’ll consider getting involved,” says Hein. He also recommends actively recruiting people for service, instead of posting sign-up sheets for volunteers. “Don’t just have an open call for ministry,” he says. “Be aggressive. If your congregation uses a spiritual gifts inventory, you can look at that and find out which people to talk to. Then ask them face-to-face.”

Once the MOSE program is complete, each congregation receives a report with detailed recommendations, and

then the congregation works to implement them.

Hein says he hopes this program will not only help congregations expand their ministry but also encourage more members to use their spiritual gifts. “People can serve God just as well in their personal lives, by being good parents, neighbors, or employees,” he says. “So if they are going to give additional time to the church, they want to know it’s time well spent. And that requires planning.”

*Alicia Neumann*



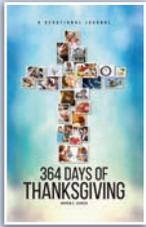
The Commission on Congregational Counseling also provides counseling for congregations in the early stages of ministry planning—either through the Self-Assessment and Adjustment program or School of Strategic Planning events. For more information or to view a video on the program, visit [wels.net/ccs](http://wels.net/ccs).

Read more about using your spiritual gifts on p. 12.

## Thankful response to God's gifts

The 2016 stewardship emphasis determined by the Conference of Presidents—*364 Days of Thanksgiving*—focuses on how we can be thankful every day for the blessings God gives us.

The three-week emphasis builds on the popular Northwestern Publishing House book written by Andrew Schroer, pastor at Redeemer, Edna, Texas.



“Using the unique devotional—part book, part journal—will help our families ‘live a life of thankfulness to God every day,’” says Kurt Lueneburg, director of the Ministry of Christian Giving. “In addition to the 26 uplifting devotions, we’ll be encouraged to write down one thing we are grateful for each day of the year. In doing so, we will begin to recognize God’s blessings in our lives and can flip back to them whenever we need a reminder. Such a review will also provide encouragement as we generously respond to God’s love for us in Jesus.”

The stewardship emphasis—whether used by itself or as an introduction to the continued use of the devotional book—will include three sermons on thankfulness, worship helps, and a related Bible study. It can be used any time of the year but may fit nicely leading into Thanksgiving or at the start of a new year. Pastors can order a kit through Northwestern Publishing House that includes the sermons, Bible study materials, and one copy of the book. Bulk discounts are available for congregations that want to order multiple copies of the book for their members.

“It has more application than just for a brief stewardship emphasis,” says Lueneburg. “I would use it as a way to encourage daily devotional time—to get people to regularly reflect on God’s gracious, abundant blessings to them and how they may live confident, joyful, generous lives in grateful reaction to those blessings.”

Learn more at [wels.net/christian-giving](http://wels.net/christian-giving).

## Latin American Lutherans meet

Twenty-three men from eight different countries attended the first Latin America regional conference of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) in Medellín, Colombia, in April.

While at the conference, attendees were able to grow together through essays on “The church under the cross.” They also learned about mission work in Spanish-speaking countries and in other areas around the world and encouraged one another in that gospel ministry.

The conference highlighted *Academia Cristo*, an online teaching and training tool for Spanish speakers developed by WELS in 2015. Mike Hartman, field coordinator for Latin America, talked about what is available now as well as discussed future video-based leadership courses. Attendees were then asked to provide feedback on upcoming potential courses.

“We want to get input on how it is going, how we can use this better, and how we can use this to reach more people and plant more churches in Latin America,” says Nate Seiltz, director of Multi-Language Publications and conference attendee. “It has to be driven by the nationals.”

Attendees—as well as members from Most Holy Trinity, the local congregation sponsoring the conference—also practiced singing new culturally-appropriate Spanish songs and parts of liturgy that are being developed to add as resources through a live-streamed, Christ-centered worship site, [Iglesialuteranacristo.com](http://Iglesialuteranacristo.com).

While attendees were mostly leaders of missions and national church bodies in Latin America that are in fellowship with WELS and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, two attendees—one from Argentina and one from Colombia—were contacts made through *Academia Cristo* and online worship.

“What was really encouraging to me was [the attendees’] excitement to work together using *Academia Cristo* to share the gospel wherever they are,” says Seiltz, “and to see them talking with each other . . . about challenges. It’s hard to get that anyplace else than at a conference like this. And then their realization: ‘We’re not alone. We have other people whom we can connect with, and we can encourage each other.’”

Learn more about our Latin American missions at [wels.net/missions](http://wels.net/missions).

The website [Academicristo.com](http://Academicristo.com) was highlighted and discussed extensively at the Latin America regional CELC conference. Conference attendees are connected in different ways to this online teaching and training tool for Spanish speakers:

Fernéy (far left), who lives in Ibagué, Colombia, is an early contact made via *Academia Cristo*. He studied online with Henry Herrera, pastor at Most Holy Trinity, Medellín, Colombia; became a member at that church; and recently began a Bible study in his own home.

Manuel (middle) is from Moca, Dominican Republic. A lay leader at a church that has no pastor, Manuel is one of the newest people *Academia Cristo* is working to train.

Jairo (right), a taxi driver, is a longtime member at Most Holy Trinity. Jairo serves as one of the administrators on the *Academia Cristo* Facebook page. His primary responsibility is to monitor and respond to comments, something he does in between taxi fares.



[Academicristo.com](http://Academicristo.com)

## An app to let your light shine

When Paul Bourman first arrived at Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., he opted to take Spanish courses in addition to biblical-related languages. With eyes set on being a pastor, “I wanted to pick the language that would be most useful in a future ministry,” he explains.

Bourman, who is heading to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary this fall, came across a unique way to combine his Spanish training and ministry. He participates in Whatsapp, a phone messaging app that facilitates group texting. The feature is widely used in WELS Latin America outreach initiatives, and students such as Bourman are using it to help spread God’s Word to Spanish speakers on a regular basis.

Whatsapp is one of the main ways individuals in Latin America communicate. This free app allows users to create groups and then send messages that group members can easily see. From sports activities to school classes and social groups, Whatsapp provides a space in which everyone can stay connected. “Keeping everyone involved goes along with Latin American culture,” notes Mike Hartman, field coordinator for Latin America.

Whatsapp is used in connection with *Academicristo.com*, which provides free Spanish video and audio resources that share the gospel and teach lessons on Christianity and the Bible. When visitors to the site sign up to access these free resources, they are invited to join a Whatsapp group. Participants in each group then receive a daily devotion.

During the last year, 4,500 individuals have signed up for *Academicristo.com*, explains Hartman. Of these, 400 people have joined a Whatsapp group as well.

“If people visit your website and leave, they might forget about it,” says Hartman. “But if you can get them to join a Whatsapp group, you can share God’s Word with them every day and you be-

come known as an organization that is serious about sharing what God says.”

To facilitate discussion, Whatsapp groups are limited to 25 participants. When a person asks to join a Whatsapp group, Bourman assigns the individual to a group. He also helps oversee a Whatsapp group. Nearly every day, “I post a devotion and then people react to it,” he says. “Sometimes people post a video or share things they’re struggling with.”

He continues, “A lot of times the devotions will bring up questions. Once, for instance, we had a really great discussion about baptism.”

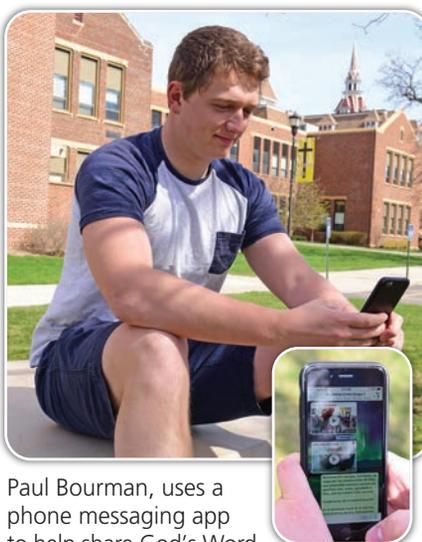
Each Whatsapp group has an overseeing pastor as well. The main goal is to share the gospel, stay connected with individuals using *Academicristo.com*, and encourage those interested to study and learn more about the Bible.

In addition, “It’s a chance for MLC students to gain experience in letting their light shine in the world,” notes Hartman.

*Rachel Hartman*

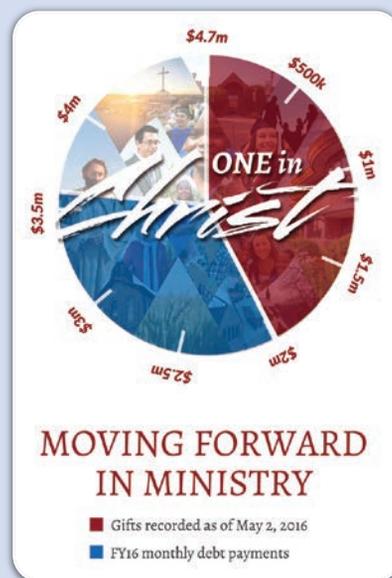


Thirty MLC students are involved with Whatsapp groups connected to our Latin America outreach. Learn more about outreach in Latin America in the June *WELS Connection*.



Paul Bourman, uses a phone messaging app to help share God’s Word with Spanish speakers around the world.

## One in Christ —UPDATE—



The 2015 synod convention launched the “One in Christ” debt elimination offering through June 2016 to eliminate the remaining \$4.7 million synod debt. If successful by God’s gracious blessing, the “One in Christ” campaign will put our synod in a better financial position to continue the ministry of training workers and establishing missions at home and abroad.

Steve Smith, pastor at Immanuel, Buffalo, Minn., requested more “One in Christ” offering brochures on behalf of the members, but, he said, it was his congregation’s idea to do the second offering collection: “The Lord opens hearts. The idea came from the congregation, and I certainly approve.”

Kurt Lueneburg, director of the Ministry of Christian Giving, says, “We glorify our gracious God for this marvelous blessing and thank all who have participated to date. We also encourage those still planning to participate to consider an effort during the Pentecost season. What a special time for thanksgiving and an offering that, in the end, will benefit our sharing the message of the Resurrection and the Life by the Spirit’s power!”

Learn more about how you can help at [wels.net/oneinchrist](http://wels.net/oneinchrist).

## Congregation raises awareness of child abuse

Two years ago, Benjamin Sadler, pastor at Goodview Trinity, Goodview, Minn., attended a seminar on child abuse. Victor Vieth, WELS member and nationally recognized expert on the issue of child abuse, was presenting and shared some sobering statistics—such as 1 in 4 people is the victim of some kind of abuse and that victims tend to have a higher propensity toward issues like drug use and promiscuity. “I walked away from that seminar knowing I had to do something,” says Sadler.

He began by addressing the issue of child abuse in his sermons and Bible studies. Soon, members were opening up about their own experiences with the topic. “The reality is that everybody’s broken,” Sadler says. “Everyone’s got a past, and everyone’s got issues. We want this to be a place where people can be honest about that.”

As Sadler brought more attention to the issue, the congregation decided to put a child protection policy in

place, which requires background checks for staff and volunteers who will be working with children. “Perpetrators look at churches because they are easy targets; people are accepting,” says Sadler. “This policy lets them know we are serious. We want this to be a safe place for everybody.”

They are also taking this issue into the community. Sadler is part of the Child Abuse Council, a community task force that aims to raise awareness of this issue, and the congregation participates in a program called “Care in Action,” which provides help to families with children in need.

“It’s really good for our members to realize that we’re here to serve people,” he says. “It’s a hard thing for our sinful nature to help people without expecting anything in return. But there are many people who are giving toward this, and when we have a need we always fill it.”

Sadler says there’s still more work to do—and he hopes other congregations



will consider addressing issues like this. “We all have baggage and fear and shame and sadness,” he says. “When you address these issues, it turns your church from a museum for saints into a hospital for sinners. You become a safe place for broken people to come and hear the good news.”

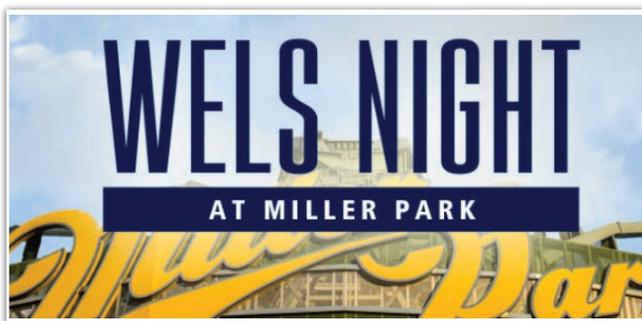
*Alicia Neumann*

For more information, visit [www.freedomforcaptives.com](http://www.freedomforcaptives.com), a website developed by WELS Commission on Special Ministries. The site is geared toward abuse survivors and also offers counseling resources for called workers.

## WELS news briefs

### COMMUNICATION SERVICES

414-256-3210; [csc@wels.net](mailto:csc@wels.net)



The date for the **third annual WELS Night at Miller Park** is July 29. Mark your calendars and plan to attend the Milwaukee Brewers’ game against the Pittsburgh Pirates. Last year more than 3,500 members enjoyed the evening and fellowship together. The Brewers are again offering WELS members 50 percent off the price of tickets. Seating will be in a block for WELS members. The pricing is Field Outfield Box for \$21/ticket, Loge Outfield

Box for \$17/ticket, or Terrace Reserved for \$9/ticket. Visit [www.brewers.com/wels](http://www.brewers.com/wels) to learn more and to purchase tickets. The deadline to purchase tickets is July 22.

### WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

262-242-8181; [gurgelr@wls.wels.net](mailto:gurgelr@wls.wels.net)

**GROW IN GRACE**  
PARTNERING WITH PASTORS

More than 150 pastors and their wives celebrated ministry anniversaries through retreats in San Antonio, Texas, March 30–April 1. These retreats—organized by Grow in Grace, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary’s institute for pastoral growth—build relationships with ministry peers and offer encouragement through worship, Bible studies, and workshops. Three retreats were held simultaneously for pastors completing 3, 10, and 25 years of ministry. This was the first year for the retreat for those completing three years of service; almost 80 percent of the class of 2013 attended. Learn more about Grow in Grace at [www.wls.wels.net/grow-in-grace/](http://www.wls.wels.net/grow-in-grace/).

## Eight new home missions approved

The Board for Home Missions authorized eight new mission starts, three ministry enhancements, and one relocation during a meeting on April 15. New ministry support will total almost \$1 million during the next fiscal year.

“Planting eight new churches is a tremendous blessing,” says Keith Free, administrator of the Board for Home Missions. “These are eight new locations where the gospel will be proclaimed.”

Free is thankful for the generous gifts to Home Missions that helped the board be more aggressive in its planning.

The new ministries that will now be supported include new starts in Lehi, Utah; Coeur d’Alene, Idaho; Rockwall, Texas; Fredericksburg, Va.; Atlanta, Ga.; Victoria, Texas; Meridian, Idaho; and Stevens Point, Wis. Five of these ministries will be second sites for established congregations. The development of multi-site ministries is becoming a more common mission strategy for WELS churches.

Home Missions will also support ministry enhancement at three congregations—Centennial, Milwaukee, Wis.; Abiding Grace, Henry-Newton

County, Ga.; and Risen Savior, Lakewood Ranch, Fla. These existing congregations will receive funds from Home Missions to support projects that will allow the congregations to reach more people with the gospel. For example, Centennial is using its support from Home Missions to partially fund the calling of a full-time pastor to minister to the many Spanish-speaking people in its neighborhood.

In addition, Home Missions will help Peace, Holiday, Fla., with some transition costs as it moves to Trinity, Fla. This established congregation is already seeing God’s blessing on the new location. Twenty-five adults have been confirmed at Peace during the past 18 months. Members are excited about the opportunity to serve more souls.

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



The WELS Board for Home Missions approved support for Cross of Christ, Boise, Idaho, to reach out with the gospel through a second site in the neighboring community of Meridian. Pictured here is Cross of Christ’s Easter for Kids outreach program that took place in March. Attendees learned that “our God is so strong and so mighty!”

## WELS’ MULTI-SITE MOVEMENT

Five of the eight new mission congregations approved by the Board for Home Missions at its spring meeting are multi-site congregations. This means that an established WELS congregation is reaching out at a second site.

As Nathan Strutz, a leader in the WELS multi-site movement and pastor at Resurrection, Verona, Wis., explains, “The multi-site movement is all about reaching more people and bringing mission work to more congregations by helping to start new churches in new locations. The potential for this relatively new strategy among WELS churches is tremendous. Multi-site churches have many practical benefits such as shared resources,

efficient organization, cost-effective programs, and more, but the greatest blessing is that God is using it to reach more people with the gospel.”

Strutz is a member of a committee of the Board for Home Missions that is helping organize a national multi-site conference for WELS churches. The conference is designed both for those already doing multi-site ministry and those considering it. The conference will take place at Grace, Tucson, Ariz.—a multi-site congregation with four locations—from Nov. 14–16.

To learn more, visit [wels.net/events/multi-site](http://wels.net/events/multi-site).

## District news

### SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

On Oct. 11, 2015, **Bethlehem, Carmel, Ind.**, dedicated a 6,000-square-foot worship center. Bethlehem's older building was remodeled and is now being used for fellowship space and as additional classrooms.

### HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

NW—**St. Peters, Sturgeon Bay, Wis.**, is celebrating its 125th anniversary with special services and events throughout this year.

**WELS Hmong Ministry of Greater La Crosse** celebrated 10 years of ministry on April 10 with a worship service at Mount Calvary, La Crosse, Wis. Daniel Lor, the Hmong pastor who serves this ministry, was honored at a reception following the service.

On May 15, **Eternal Love, Appleton, Wis.**, celebrated its 25th anniversary. Begun as an outreach to the community by the Northern Wisconsin District Mission Board, Eternal Love now numbers 334 souls and 275 communicants.

MN—With the theme “Proclaiming Christ for 150 years,” **St. John, Frontenac, Minn.**, is celebrating its sesquicentennial in 2016.

The district reporters for this month are: MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NW—Dennis Kleist; SC—Andrew Retberg; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

### SOUTH CENTRAL



On March 10, the area chamber of commerce held a ribbon cutting ceremony at the worship facility of Peace, Liberty Hill, Texas, a WELS home mission opened in 2015.

## Obituaries

### Glenn C. Pahnke, 1933–2016

Glenn C. Pahnke (née Luhmann) was born Aug. 31, 1933, in Stockton, Minn. She died Feb. 19, 2016, in Menomonie, Wis.

She taught at Salem, Milwaukee, Wis.; Zion, Columbus, Wis.; St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis.; St. Matthew, Winona, Minn.; and St. Paul, Menomonie, Wis.

She is survived by three sons, eight grandchildren, and two sisters. She is preceded in death by her husband, Kenneth, and five brothers.

### Marie A. Sprengeler, 1934–2016

Marie Sprengeler (née Anderson) was born April 26, 1934, in Sleepy Eye, Minn. She died Feb. 20, 2016, in West Bend, Wis.

She taught at East Fork, Whiteriver, Ariz.; Redeemer, Tucson, Ariz.; St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.; Centennial, Milwaukee, Wis.; and Salem, Milwaukee, Wis.

She is survived by her husband, Norbert; two daughters; one son; five grandchildren; one great-grandchild; and three brothers. She is preceded in death by one sister.

### John A. Henderson, 1966–2016

John Henderson was born Oct. 5, 1966, in Charles City, Iowa. He died March 9, 2016, in Mesa, Ariz.

He taught at St. John's, Dowagiac, Mich.; St. John, Saginaw, Mich.; Bethany/St. John, Saginaw, Mich.; and Emmanuel, Tempe, Ariz.

He is survived by his wife, Ronda; his parents; two daughters; one son; and three sisters.

### Gerhard W. Franzmann, 1918–2016

Gerhard Franzmann was born Aug. 21, 1918, in Lake City, Minn. He died March 12, 2016, in Watertown, Wis.

A 1944 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Emanuel, New London, Wis.; St. Paul, Dale, Wis.; Bethany, Fort Atkinson, Wis.; Grace, Seattle, Wash.; and Northwestern College, Watertown, Wis.

He is survived by many stepchildren. He is preceded in death by his first wife, Marion; his second wife, Bernetta; his third wife, Eleonore; five brothers; and three sisters.



# Finding my destination

**Along life's winding road, only Jesus has the directions that will bring us to our final destination.**

Eric S. Hartzell

My friend called her "Samantha." She was the "lady" who lived in his new GPS unit off to one side on the windshield of his car.

## **THE GPS GIVES US DIRECTIONS**

Samantha was incredible all afternoon. As we approached every intersection on our three-hour journey, she would say in her nonchalant voice, "In 150 yards you will be turning left onto Highway 71." We both heard her. And it was so! You could even see on the screen the approaching intersection. Big roads, little roads. Right turns, left turns. It didn't matter. Samantha knew the way! Samantha even knew the names of the roads and streets. And if we didn't listen to her and missed a turn, Samantha planned immediately to get us back on the right road to our destination. Finally, three hours later when we arrived, she said in the same nonchalant voice, "You have now reached your destination."

We were impressed. All afternoon—every second of it—Samantha knew where we were. She knew which road we were on. She knew which road was the right one for us and which one was wrong. She knew where our destination was. She knew everything about our travels. She even knew about our missed turns and set about immediately to fix them and get us back onto the right track. I suppose she did this so well because she understood where our final destination was. Even incredible cyber-Samantha couldn't help us if she didn't know our destination.

There is a God in heaven who wants to be the GPS for our souls and our bodies as we travel our ways in this world. If a manmade GPS unit you can suction to your car's windshield or an app you have on your phone can have such a wonderful grasp of where you are and where you are going, what must the almighty God be able to do? And if we trust in a GPS unit, why wouldn't we trust in the Lord God, who is the Creator and maintainer of all things?

He is the only true God. He wants to tell us where we are. He wants to tell us where he is. He wants to tell us where we will be if we follow his directions and if we believe him. He wants to tell us where he wants our destination to be. "Fixing our eyes on Jesus," he says (Hebrews 12:2). "My Father's house has many rooms," our Savior says (John 14:2). "Those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires" (Romans 8:5). Those who travel with a GPS must know what this Trinity—Jesus, Father, Spirit—means when they talk about our spiritual travel in these ways.

### THE GPS HAS TO BE RIGHT

If even once your GPS fails and takes you in the absolutely wrong direction and gets you lost, you would not be able to trust it again. This bit of knowledge doesn't matter with our God. His ways are always right, and sometimes, as the prophet Isaiah says, they are higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9). We might wonder about

the road we're on, but his ways are the right ways, and when we follow him, we know we're on the right track.

Some think life is all about the journey. It is not. Life is all about the destination and getting to where we are going. No matter the scenery. No matter the accommodations along the way or the comfort of the ride. No matter if the accommodations and means of travel are good. What matters is getting there. What matters is that we fight the fight and finish the race. What matters is hearing that voice say to us one day, "You have reached your destination."

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Our final destination is heaven. The pathway to that destination sometimes takes us through some dark forests and some difficult highways.

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We did catch Samantha in some wrong directions on our afternoon of travel with her. She didn't know the brand-new roads. When we got on a road she didn't know, she got quiet. Her screen went blank. It was almost an embarrassed silence. There also were several times when we overruled her advice. We were actually smarter than she was on some shortcuts.

You won't catch Jesus in this embarrassment. There won't be any new roads he doesn't already know. He wouldn't be routing us that way anyway. It is the old road that he counsels us to travel. It isn't under construction. It's already finished. It's maintained by God himself. The short ways may not be the best ways—often they are not. But God knows all this . . . if we just trust him and follow him.

### JESUS IS THE WAY

Jesus not only knows the way for you and your life—he is that way. For peo-

ple who consult all sorts of roadmaps through life and remain puzzled and uncertain about which to follow, we overhear the following conversation: "Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'" (John 14:5,6).

My friend and I never supposed that Samantha loved us. We didn't even suppose that she liked us. She was just programmed to say what she said. She kept her distance. She stayed in her box. The One who counsels our spiritual travel does love us. He loves us so much he can't stand the thought of our going anywhere without him. He can't stand the thought of our getting lost or being lost. He said one time that he came for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He as our Good Shepherd even comes looking for his "other" sheep when they are lost. He doesn't want us reaching out and turning him off. He doesn't want us relying on our own wits and travel savvy. He doesn't want us to be people who won't ask him for directions even when they know they are on the wrong road.

### JESUS ASKS US TO FOLLOW HIM

People with a GPS are people who implicitly follow directions. They do this even when it seems counterintuitive to do it. They trust the device. They hang on its every word.

Our final destination is heaven. The pathway to that destination sometimes takes us through some dark forests and some difficult highways. Jesus promises to get us there. Trust his directions.

And when we get there, the angels will announce our arrival, finally and forever!

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*Eric Hartzell is pastor at Cross and Crown, Georgetown, Texas.*



# Mission stories

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# REJOICE, PRAY, and give thanks

## A father and daughter journey on similar roads from trouble to recovery.

Rachel A. Hartman

On March 15, 2015, Rebekah Wahl went to visit her father, Roger Wahl, pastor at Zion, Cambria, Wis. He was in a room at the UW Hospital in Madison, Wis., and was staying there while receiving chemotherapy. Earlier that month he had been diagnosed with leukemia. They both enjoyed the time together.

Perhaps the most remarkable part of the visit was that Rebekah didn't have to travel far to see her father. In fact, she was staying in the same hospital, recovering from brain surgery. Her trip to her dad's room marked the first time she had left the intensive care unit in nearly four weeks.

Rebekah had been diagnosed in February with a cancerous brain tumor. Just a month after her diagnosis, her dad faced his battle with leukemia. They ended up in the same hospital, where the two of them started down a long road to recovery. It's been a journey with a few twists and turns for both of them.

### CHANGING TIMES

Roger and his wife, Vicki, first met in Kenton, Ohio, where they both attended Grace Lutheran Church. Their paths went in different directions only to converge again in Milwaukee. He was carrying out his vicar year, and she was student teaching. They were married in 1977 and blessed with six children.

Rebekah was their third child and chose to study at Martin Luther College to be a teacher. After graduating,

she was assigned to Trinity Lutheran School in Hoskins, Nebraska.

After almost a decade of teaching, she began to feel sick. In spite of many doctor visits, the tests she underwent didn't reveal a cause. She started the 2014–15 school year but continued to lose weight. By Christmas she had lost 40 pounds and found it difficult to eat or drink anything without feeling nauseous. After another month the congregation gave her a medical leave of absence to concentrate on her health. She came home to stay with her parents in Cambria.

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“We recognize that we have been blessed.”

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While there, Rebekah visited a local doctor who knew her. He recommended an MRI of the brain. The results showed a brain tumor. The next month, Rebekah underwent a long surgery to remove the tumor, which was cancerous.

“At first they thought it would be three to five days in intensive care,” recalls Vicki. “She was so thin and malnourished that there were many complications.” At her lowest, Rebekah weighed just 76 pounds.

A couple of days after the surgery, Rebekah was no longer able to breathe on her own, so doctors inserted a breathing tube into her throat. She also received a feeding tube for nourishment. But complications continued to create difficulties. Five more surgeries followed. Recovery was complicated by unexplained fevers and

infections. In all, Rebekah remained in intensive care for two full months.

### FURTHER ILLNESS

A month after Rebekah entered the hospital, Roger felt sick. Concerned about passing any sort of infection to his daughter, he visited a doctor and, after several tests, was diagnosed with leukemia. It was his turn to enter the hospital for two rounds of chemotherapy.

At the same hospital, the two shared several visits. When Roger's chemotherapy ended, he returned home to recover. Rebekah moved too. She was transferred to a rehab hospital in Milwaukee.

While recovering at home, Roger recalls, “We learned that unless something was done for me, the leukemia would almost certainly return with a vengeance.” After looking through the available options, the family decided he would go through a bone marrow transplant to reduce the risk of the leukemia coming back.

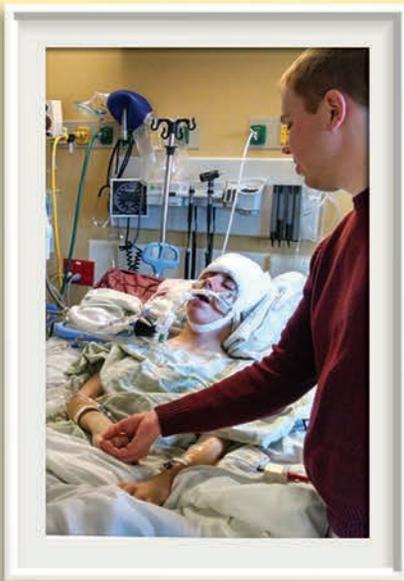
Roger's sister, Margaret Dietrich, turned out to be a perfect match. “I returned to the hospital for a bone marrow transplant,” he explained. “That went well, with mainly just minor side effects from the chemotherapy.” It was another step on the journey that finally brought him home to recover again.

Rebekah's journey moved forward too. She made progress at the rehab hospital and needed less hospital care. She was transferred to a brain injury center that was a 40-minute drive from the family's home in Cambria.

### A TIME TO HEAL

Their journey brought them both a time to heal. Roger's health remained stable, and he continued to move

(Clockwise) Rebekah in intensive care. Giant get-well card from Nebraska. Roger and his sister who donated bone marrow. Members of the Wahl family. Rebekah is in the front row, second from the left. Members of the Wahl family at Christmas.



toward recovery, but with some complications. Among them he experienced trouble with blurry vision, making it impossible for him to drive at night.

Rebekah continued to recover through the fall, making slow progress. She went from not being able to talk, sit up, or eat on her own to gaining enough strength to speak, move again, and, eventually, eat on her own as well.

But the year of trials was not over yet. Rebekah learned the cancer had started to regrow. Radiation was able to remove the cancer again. She continued to make improvements, including starting to use a walker. She even visited classrooms at a nearby WELS elementary school to read books to the children there.

### GIVING THANKS

During the family's health struggles, Tim, Roger's son and Rebekah's brother, maintained a Caring Bridge site for both his sister and father. On the sites, he posted updates to keep family and friends informed along with Bible passages and words of comfort.

Vicki notes, "We have had so many WELS members we have never met leave comments. These fellow Christians have been so supportive, sharing Bible passages, kind words, and prayers."

The family has received encouragement in many other ways as well. "I'm thankful to God for the gifts of love, like shopping cards, a benefit for Rebekah in Hoskins, and one for our family from Trinity in Friesland and Zion, Cambria, congregations," notes Roger.

He continues, "The experience for my family and me, while full of earthly woe, has also had a tremendous positive side. It has had an impact on our prayer life. By that, I mean my personal prayer life, my family's prayer life, our congregation's prayer life, and the prayer life of Rebekah and our many friends."

Roger initially took a leave of absence when diagnosed with leukemia. The road to recovery meant that he has been able to carry out some Bible studies and preaching duties. He is thankful that his congregation has provided his family a place to live during his health issues as well as support for himself and a vacancy pastor.

While Roger and his family don't know what the future holds, they are confident that God will provide for them in the days ahead as he has in the past. "We recognize that we have been blessed," he notes. He and his family are thankful for the gifts of life, both earthly and eternal. They are also grateful for the gift of faith that continues to sustain them as well as for opportunities for that faith to grow.

"We have learned to look to God more often for strength, hope, and comfort," Roger adds. "Today I can say, 'Thank you, God, for everything.'"

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

# Enemies, allies, and agendas

Jeffrey L. Samelson

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Many people  
will try to get  
us to sign on  
to their agendas,  
but our ultimate  
agenda has to  
be the Lord's.

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The 2016 American presidential campaign has revealed a challenge. You find yourself defending a particular party or candidates merely because they have been attacked by someone whose views or policies you oppose, or you end up attacking some others merely because they appear to be aligned with someone you oppose. You end up wondering, “How did I get here?” when you realize that you are now supporting someone you really don't agree with or arguing against someone who thinks as you do.

There are two old sayings: “The enemy of my enemy is my friend” and “The enemy of my friend is my enemy.” Those may offer useful guidance on the battlefield or help resolve some major conflict for the short term, but as Christians whose first loyalty is always to our Lord, they can be problematic in politics, in our personal lives, and in the church.

We are often encouraged to form alliances based on false dilemmas, as in, “Candidate X is for this good thing; if you don't support him or her, then you're opposed to the good things he or she stands for.” In fact, Candidate X may also be for bad things we cannot support. In reality, other candidates may be worthier of our support. We may find the same thing happening in the workplace, in some groups we belong to, or even in our families as sides or factions are formed around some issue or personality. Tragically, we see it also in the church, when “for” or “against” on some single issue—finances, furnishings, or something else—is used to divide everyone into “us” and “them.”

Christians, however, don't let common enmities or agreeable alliances stand in for faithfulness to God and his will. Sometimes that requires abandoning what is convenient or comfortable for careful consideration and hard choices. This goes with the “deny yourself” part of Christ's call to “take up [your] cross

and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). We learn to discern (Philippians 1:9-11).

So we do well to remember that there are deep ditches on either side of the narrow, scriptural, Lutheran middle road. “At least it's not Catholic” doesn't excuse aligning yourself with a Protestant church full of its own errors. Saying “We're on the same side on this important social issue” does not condone ignoring false doctrine. You may properly disapprove of Aunt Agnes' lifestyle, but that doesn't mean she's wrong about Grandma's health care. Pastor Smith may truly have handled yesterday's discipline case poorly, but that's no reason to oppose him today or avoid his Bible class.

Many people will try to get us to sign on to their agendas, but our ultimate agenda has to be the Lord's, and that means asking hard questions: What witness to Christ am I giving with my support? Will this opposition burn bridges for the gospel? By being loyal to my friend, am I being disloyal to my Savior?

Sometimes God's will coincides clearly with some person, party, or politics we favor, and then we can confidently give our full support. But this doesn't happen as often as we want. Too often, going “all in” means compromising Christ. So we study his Word, pray for wisdom, act in love, and seek his will in all things, rejoicing in the alliance God made with us by sending his Son to be our Savior.

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

# The RIPPLE EFFECT

## BARNABAS



**After Jesus' ascension, believers spread the gospel around the world in widening ripples.**

Daniel N. Balge

"What's in a name?" Shakespeare's Juliet asked her Romeo. A name doesn't matter much, she said.

What's in a nickname? Actually, quite a bit. A nickname can tell you a lot, maybe more than a name. A nickname tends to stick because it often picks out a distinctive feature or dwells on a prominent aspect of personality.

Consider a nickname Jesus' apostles gave a man named Joseph, a Jewish Levite from Cyprus. The apostles nicknamed him "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36). We might have said, "Mr. Encouragement" or with a nod to his given name: "Joe Encouragement." We know Joseph's nickname better in Aramaic: "Barnabas." It stuck. We remember Barnabas better than Joseph as Paul's companion on his first missionary journey.

We first meet Barnabas as encouragement in action. He sold a field and gave the proceeds for the work of the church (Acts 4:37). Later the leaders of the church in Jerusalem thought so

much of Barnabas that they sent him alone to Syrian Antioch (Acts 11:19-24), one of the Roman Empire's great cities. So many had come to faith there, but they lacked a called leader. Luke, the inspired author of Acts, sums up the impact Barnabas made: "When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord" (Acts 11:23,24). Barnabas reacted well to his call to go to Antioch.

In that we see the Holy Spirit's work in him. What the apostles had spotted in "son of encouragement" was amplified by the Spirit's power. Yes, Barnabas brought good gifts, but what made him effective was the faith God gave him. Barnabas was "a good man," a comment less on his God-given competence for the ministry entrusted to him. God's Spirit had equipped him for this work, called him to it, and blessed it.

Soon Barnabas saw work enough for two in Antioch and went to Tarsus to fetch the former persecutor Saul—soon to be Paul. Barnabas had previously been Saul's sponsor in a meeting in Jerusalem with Peter and James (Acts

9:26,27; Galatians 1:18,19). After that Saul had spent perhaps eight years in his native city, Tarsus, not, as far as we know, in formal called service, but awaiting God's direction.

Now, in effect, Barnabas activated the ministry God had foretold for Saul (Acts 9:15) by bringing him the Holy Spirit's call to Antioch. Together, apparently with "son of encouragement" as leader, Barnabas and Saul spent a year in Antioch, preaching and teaching Christ to "great numbers of people" (Acts 11:26). Soon Antioch believers were gathering an offering for famine relief in Jerusalem. Eventually the city became the jump-off point for Paul's three missionary journeys. Barnabas joined Paul on that first journey.

Antioch was also the first place where believers were called Christians (Acts 11:26), in essence a nickname that tells you a lot about them—and about their pastors. And this nickname, God be praised, has stuck.

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*Contributing editor Daniel Balge, a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. Paul, New Ulm.*

This is the second article in a 12-part series on lesser-known New Testament witnesses.



*John O. Brann*

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Avoid getting dragged into a discussion of doctrine and what we are against. All the doctrines we treasure are for us and for all other people.

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## For people

Confessional Lutherans are principle and concept people. They talk in language that reflects their perspectives—and think in that way too. I confess to be one of them. I have learned the language through my training, and I also have learned to treasure its precision and value.

I can discuss concepts of law and gospel and treasured concepts with others who share the same beliefs and the same language. But that discussion does not connect with those who do not share my confessional Lutheran vocabulary. Words like *incarnation*, *justification*, *conversion*, *real presence*, *close communion*, *good works*, and *redemption* require a glossary or dictionary for many. Almost the entire list of confessional Lutheran concepts doesn't resonate with people who haven't learned the language and the concepts.

Sometimes I wonder if we are guilty of only speaking to the choir when we try to share our faith. Of course, on issues of doctrine we want to be right and precise. It is important for us to adhere to the truths God has revealed to us and we have grown to treasure. But when we share those truths with others outside of confessional Lutheranism, there's a danger that, as they listen, their eyes will take on a distant glaze of disinterest. We want to talk doctrine, but they have absolutely no interest in the concepts, distinctions, and what they consider the "fine print."

So how do we make connections with those outside the sphere of our language of comfort and familiarity? I'd suggest two principles that I think are important. The first is that we live our faith and show what Christianity means to us. Jesus suggested this approach when he said, "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

But we don't always live as we should, and neither do other Christians. That too is an opportunity to show forgiveness, support, and understanding. On some occasions, the temptation is to become quite self-righteous—a definite turnoff to others! Peter suggests that gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:16) can temper the temptation. And a little humility goes a long way.

The second way is to avoid getting dragged into a discussion of doctrine and what we are against. All the doctrines we treasure are for us and for all other people. A discussion of Christ's incarnation may bring up proof passages, what our church teaches, and what's wrong with the teaching of others. But there may be an opportunity to focus on the importance of that doctrine for people—like you, me, and all others. Jesus became flesh, that is, he was incarnated, to take our place. He loved us enough to come here to rescue us from our own failures and sins.

Talking about justification also provides an opportunity to do more than repeat the Lutheran language of grace and faith. Simply direct your attention to what it means to people like you and those who know you. Then justification becomes clear to others. It is simply shorthand for saying that we cannot be good enough for God by our own efforts. Yet God sent Jesus to overcome sin and death and declare us right and good in his eyes. Faith accepts God's undeserved gift.

The entire body of doctrine has Jesus at its core and the people of this world as the target audience. It's hard work finding the spot to apply Jesus to the wounds and pain of another person, but he is the healing balm for all people. We will stumble, but the Holy Spirit promises to use our awkward, sometimes stumbling, efforts to share Jesus with people.

# GREAT STORIES OF THE BIBLE

## CREATION

Joel S. Heckendorf

I'm not looking to gain a Twitter following from *Forward in Christ* readers with this next statement: I don't care for the hymn "How Great Thou Art." Ever since my eight-year-old ears heard it played with too much vibrato on my grandmother's in-home Hammond organ, I've not cared for it. When a grieving family requests it for a funeral, I say, "Wonderful," and my face smiles, but my ears cringe.

But maybe the problem is not with the hymn. Maybe it's me. We get so comfortable with our surroundings that unless God bedazzles the sky with some magnificent sunset, we easily take creation for granted. We don't always see the depth of God's wisdom, love, power, and care in creation or in the creation account of Genesis chapter 1.

The Bible clearly says its focal point is Jesus. "These [words] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31 ESV). Absolutely true. Our comfort in God's love, power, and care is wrapped up in Jesus. But there would be no words written to believe in Jesus if there wasn't an "in the beginning." Genesis may not clearly portray the power, of the cross or the comfort of any empty tomb, but it's the beginning of a love story . . . a relationship between God and people . . . a relationship between God and me.

On six consecutive, 24-hour days, God said and it was so. That gives us certainty concerning other things God said.

- Because God said, "Let there be light," and there was, I can trust Jesus when he says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness" (John 8:12).
- Because God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters," and there was, I can trust God when he says that Christ made us holy by "the washing with water through the word" (Ephesians 5:26).

- Because God said, "Let there be stars in the sky," and it was so, I can trust God when he says you will shine like stars forever and ever (Daniel 12:3).
- Because God said, "Let birds fly above the earth," and it was so, I can trust God when he says he will renew our strength and we will soar on wings like eagles (Isaiah 40:31).
- Because God said, "Let us make mankind in our image," and it was so, I can trust God when I stand in front of a coffin knowing that God said about my loved one, "You are mine" (Isaiah 43:1).

"Then sings my soul, my Savior-God to thee, 'How great thou art! How great thou art!'" (*Christian Worship* 256).

### EXPLORING THE WORD

1. Tell the story of creation in your own words. Then read the account (Genesis chapters 1–2). 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. Which day of creation amazes you the most and why?
4. List as many things as possible that we learn about humankind in Genesis chapters 1–2.

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



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



# A father's example of grace

**A clothes pole and a new lawn mower set the scene for a lesson on forgiveness and love.**

Dan Nommensen

It's Father's Day! It's that time of year when men everywhere get new ties and gift cards to their favorite local hardware store! Along with the time spent with family and the special gifts, on Father's Day I can't help but remember my own father who has now been in heaven for nearly 20 years.

## **AN ACCIDENT REVISITED**

My father was a busy pastor of a large congregation in Milwaukee. As busy as he was, he always seemed to find time to take me fishing or watch my baseball games, and we always enjoyed cutting the lawn together. Each of us had a push mower, and we'd go back and forth for what felt like hours.

Then one day we got a riding lawn mower! When it arrived, my dad looked at me and said, "Well, Dan, go ahead." I was the first to ride it! Me!

This was the greatest moment of my life up to that point. Off I went! Sure, Dad told me to start off in a low gear, but I was 11 years old! I had ridden go-karts at full speed. I could handle higher speeds. There was nothing but open grass all around me . . . and one clothes pole.

I literally moved that lawn mower 50 feet before hitting that clothes pole. I managed to avoid all the open grass and hit it straight on. The front end of

the mower was cracked, the headlight was broken, and part of the metal cover was bent. I felt absolutely, positively horrible. I prepared myself for the biggest punishment I would ever see. What was Dad going to do?

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The unconditional forgiveness my dad showed me that day flowed from a heart that loved the Lord.

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## **GOD'S LOVE REFLECTED**

Well, here's what happened. He ran over and helped me turn off the tractor because it was still in gear and hitting the pole again and again. Then he said . . . nothing. Before I could even say a word, he knew that I felt absolutely horrible. He knew that what I didn't need at that moment was a huge dose of the law with scolding and a permanent restriction from ever riding the lawn mower again.

I got off the tractor and announced my own punishment: "I'll never ride this again—EVER! I promise."

He responded, "That's okay. We'll just take the clothes pole down when we cut next time." The damage to the mower was never repaired. My dad never mentioned it again.

I used that mower for nearly 25 years. The damage to the front served as a reminder to me about the use of the law and gospel. The unconditional forgiveness my dad showed me that day flowed from a heart that loved the Lord. It was a demonstration of the love shown by our heavenly Father through the sacrifice of his Son Jesus. When I felt I needed to dole out my own punishment, Dad helped me see something different. He helped me realize mercy, grace, and forgiveness. I knew Dad's love and forgiveness for me came from his heart as a reflection of God's love for him.

I can recall this and other moments that help me recognize the opportunities I have to make a lasting impression in the lives of my own children. Because Jesus loves me, I want to make every day an opportunity to demonstrate that love in the lives of my children and others.

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