

Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



Christian mentoring

As we live our lives for Christ, God uses us to build up others. *Page 10*

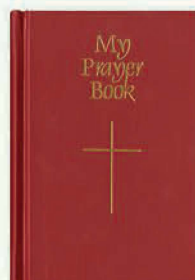
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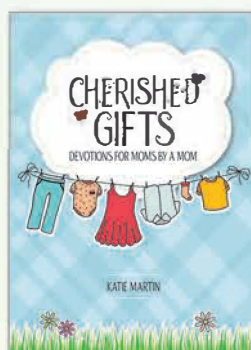


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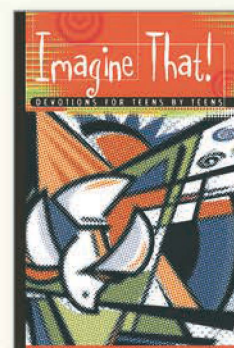
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May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. — 1 KINGS 8:57

WHAT'S INSIDE

Saying good-bye can be difficult. Whether you are graduating from college, moving across the country, or changing jobs, bidding farewell to those you are leaving behind seems so final and emphasizes the uncertainty of what lies ahead.

In a new series starting this month, Pastor John Vieths tells us about a good-bye that was difficult but also necessary (p. 26). The disciples had to say good-bye to their Lord and Savior, who was leaving them to ascend to his Father in heaven. The Lord's good-bye is a blessing—to the disciples and to Christians today.

The disciples and the early Christians didn't just sit around after Jesus ascended. They went into all the world to preach the good news. A new Bible study starting this month will look at lesser-known witnesses and their roles in spreading the gospel message (p. 33).

What's your role? Maybe you aren't knocking on doors every day but instead are providing encouragement and a Christian example to the people you touch. In our cover article, Dawn Schulz explores the importance of Christian mentors in her life and shares how we can all look for opportunities to support and build up others in their faith (p. 10).

Julie Wietzke



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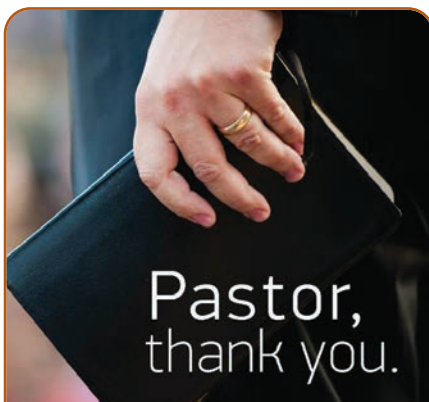
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Honoring your pastor

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 year-round for those “who spoke the word of God to you” (Hebrews 13:7). We want to hear from you and publish some of your stories and suggestions to encourage one another to appreciate how God uses pastors to teach, comfort, and strengthen us.

- What do you appreciate most about your pastor and his work? Please share a story that illustrates your point.
- How have you or your congregation supported your pastor?
- How have you celebrated Pastor Appreciation Month? Why do you feel this is important?
- Pastors, how has your congregation supported you? How does that help your ministry?

Send your comments and thoughts by June 15 to:

Forward in Christ, N16W23377 Stone Ridge Dr, Waukesha WI 53188; fic@wels.net.

Through my Bible in 3 years



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2016
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- | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Jeremiah 48 | 12. Php. 1:12-26 | 23. Eze. 9 & 10 |
| 2. Jer. 49:1-33 | 13. Php. 1:27-2:18 | 24. Eze. 11 |
| 3. Jer. 49:34-50:46 | 14. Php. 2:19-30 | 25. Eze. 12 & 13 |
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| 5. Jer. 51:59-52:34 | 16. Php. 3:12-21 | 27. Eze. 16 |
| 6. Lamentations 1 | 17. Php. 4 | 28. Eze. 17 |
| 7. La. 2 | 18. Ezekiel 1 | 29. Eze. 18 & 19 |
| 8. La. 3 | 19. Eze. 2:1-3:21 | 30. Eze. 20:1-44 |
| 9. La. 4 | 20. Eze. 3:22-5:17 | 31. Eze. 20:45-21:23 |
| 10. La. 5 | 21. Eze. 6 & 7 | |
| 11. Philippians 1:1-11 | 22. Eze. 8 | |



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Stop being a baby about Jesus' ascension!

He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe. Ephesians 4:10

Daniel J. Habben

Have you ever tried to play peekaboo with a newborn? Babies under four months haven't yet developed a sense of "object permanence." If you hide your face behind a blanket, a newborn will think you've disappeared. He won't reach for the blanket to uncover you. He won't stare at the blanket expectantly, waiting for you to pop out. As far as the baby is concerned, you are gone. His gaze will wander to other things.

OUR SAVIOR ISN'T GONE

Christians are often like newborns when it comes to Jesus' ascension. Because we can't see Jesus, we act as if he's gone. Our attention wanders away from our Savior. We drool over the things of the world. When challenges arise, we wail and flail around because we simply can't see Jesus in our trials. We wonder if he is really present, really in-the-know, really able to help. We think how much easier life would be if we could just see and touch our Savior.

So it might surprise you that when the disciples watched Jesus rise into the sky and disappear behind a cloud, they didn't slump home with tear-streaked faces, like kids who have just watched their grandparents drive away or like a baby whose parent was suddenly swallowed up by a blanket. Instead, the disciples returned to Jerusalem with "great joy" (Luke 24:52). Why joy? Because even though they couldn't see Jesus, they knew he was still with them. Jesus' ascension wasn't his retirement but his coronation.

We don't have to be babies about our Savior's ascension either. Our Savior may be concealed, but he's not gone! As the glorified God-man, Jesus fills



the universe—he is everywhere at once (Ephesians 4:10). He isn't sitting poolside in heaven while we slog it out on our lonesome down here. Rather, he is guiding and controlling world events so that they will work out for our eternal good.

Jesus' ascension
wasn't his retirement
but his coronation.

OUR SAVIOR STILL RULES

"But," you wonder, "how can I be sure that the ascended Jesus cares about me personally?" Look at the Ephesians passage again. There the apostle Paul reminds you that the one who ascended into heaven, first descended to this sin-filled world—for you. The Son of God loved you so much that he left his glorious throne in heaven and got on human hands and knees to look for you. His love is not just powerful, but it is also personal.

Knowing the sacrifice Jesus made for our souls, we needn't hesitate to put every concern into his hands. The ascended Jesus even rules over death. In fact, he overrules death! Although the doctor may announce that there is no hope for survival, King Jesus has already given us a second opinion. Through faith in him we will survive terminal cancer or a fatal car accident. We won't just survive, we'll thrive. Through death, we will enter heaven. We'll see Jesus in all of his glory. We will be glorified.

So let's stop being babies about Jesus' ascension. He may be concealed, but he's not gone. He's still with us—guiding our footsteps home to heaven.

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

Learn more about FIC's new contributing editor Daniel Habben on p. 22.



Mark Schweden

There is simply
no other church
body in the world
that is blessed
with a system for
training pastors
and teachers
exactly like ours.

Unique in every sense of the word

Unique is a word that is often over-used and misused. *Unique* does not mean very unusual. For something to be unique, it's not enough for it to be very rare. No, something that is unique is literally one of a kind.

As Assignment Day at Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS), Mequon, Wis., approaches, I wonder how often we stop to think about and give thanks for a truly unique blessing that we in the Wisconsin Synod enjoy. And when I say unique, I mean unique in the true sense of the word: not just something special or unusual or rare, but something that is truly one of a kind.

There is simply no other church body in the world that is blessed with a system for training pastors and teachers exactly like ours. In that system, nearly every person who will serve in the public ministry in our synod is trained at the same college. Most of the students at that college come from a system of two prep schools and nearly two dozen area Lutheran high schools. In this unique system nearly every pastor who will serve as a spiritual shepherd in our congregations is trained at the same seminary. In the eight years of high school and college that it takes to be trained as a teacher or staff minister, nearly every student has been taught by teachers and professors who all share the same faith and the same commitment to the Scriptures. The same can be said for those who spend 12 years preparing to be a pastor. In those years of education, students live in dormitories with fellow students who not only share the same faith but who also are thinking and praying about whether God might use them some day in the public ministry. Shared faith, shared goals, and a shared purpose make for something truly unique.

Then think of what happens on Assignment Day. At MLC, young men and women who have the talents and skills to succeed in every kind of career instead have dedicated their lives to serving as Lutheran teachers or staff ministers. At Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, young men who could have trained in nearly any field say with a sense of their own unworthiness, "Here am I, Lord, send me!" God has used this unique system not only to train young men and women in the skills they will need in their ministry but also to shape hearts, to strengthen faith, and to cause these students to marvel at the message they will proclaim.

And they are led to trust the Lord who is calling them. There they stand on Assignment Day, not having applied for a job, not having submitted a résumé to a prospective employer, not having interviewed for a position. Imagine this: They stand there on that day not knowing where they will serve, but they are ready to go anywhere they are sent. Think of the trust that takes in the heart of a young graduate. They trust their Lord because they know that the call they will receive will be from him. They know that no matter where they will go or who they will serve, the same Savior who is calling them will be with them and will bless their work in his name.

Sometimes we take blessings for granted. Our system for training called workers and the called workers produced by that system are blessings that should never be taken for granted. These blessings are from God, and they are truly unique.

Light for our path

As Christians, should we steer clear of “halal” meat, considering that part of the preparation of this meat includes invoking Allah?

James F. Pope

“Halal” is an Arabic word meaning “permissible.” Halal meat comes from animals that have been slaughtered in keeping with Islamic laws of the Qur’an. Included in the slaughtering process is a ritual with prayer to Allah or at least the mention of his name. As the Bible addressed a situation like this in the past, your question illustrates the truth of wise King Solomon’s words: “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

A BIBLICAL PARALLEL

The scene is Corinth, Greece. The date is A.D. 50. Two Christians are standing in the marketplace eyeing meat that is available for sale. The grade is good and the price is right, but there’s one potential catch: The meat was involved in idolatrous worship practices. One Christian says, “I could never buy or eat that meat considering it is associated with pagan practices. That would be wrong.” The other Christian responds, “As far as I’m concerned, there’s nothing unacceptable about that meat.” Two Christians with differing opinions about something the Bible neither commands nor forbids.

When I mentioned your question to a couple of friends, I received reactions similar to those two Christians in Corinth:

- “I could never buy or eat meat from animals that had been slaughtered as Allah’s name was being invoked.”
- “I don’t have any problem with buying or eating that meat.”

Who was right in Corinth? Who is right today?

IDENTICAL BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

The apostle Paul addressed the situation in Corinth by reminding those Christians that there is only one God—the God of the Bible, the triune God: “We know that ‘An idol is nothing at all in the world’ and that ‘There is no God but one’” (1 Corinthians 8:4). The food that had been sacrificed to

idols was perfectly fine because, as the apostle pointed out, idols do not exist.

“But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled” (1 Corinthians 8:7). If Corinthian Christians believed it was wrong for them to eat meat that had been associated with idolatrous worship practices, then it was wrong for them. Paul reminded the Christians in Rome of the same truth: “But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean” (Romans 14:14).

On the other hand, a Christian in Corinth who recognized the freedom to buy and eat meat associated with idolatrous worship practices could have consumed that product without sinning. At the same time, that Christian would have wanted to exercise that freedom with a loving eye toward fellow Christians whose consciences were guiding them in a different direction. This is where the apostle’s instruction came into play: “Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak” (1 Corinthians 8:9).

So what about halal meat? Slaughtering animals in the name of a nonexistent Islamic god does not spiritually contaminate the meat. Buying or eating such meat is a matter of conscience. And, as was the case in Corinth, Christians will refrain from condemning those who have a different opinion.

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

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

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

Psalm 119:105



A letter to a mentor
helps us understand
the importance of
Christian encourage-
ment and example.

Dawn E. Schulz

Thanks for the GUIDANCE

Dear Christian Mentor,

I'm not exactly sure where to start. I have so much to say. The other day I came across the Bible you had given me, and a flood of memories has been swirling around my head ever since. I just can't let another day go by without saying "Thank you!" God has used you in so many ways to shape the Christian woman I am today. Words can never express how grateful I am to him for the gift of you.

I'm not sure if you remember this, but there was one day I left a note in your office saying "I am DONE!" Done with trying. Done with giving. Done with loving. Done with it all. I was hurt, frustrated, and felt very misunderstood. I should have known then how special you are to put up with my drama.

Do you remember what you did?

You found me in the halls of my dorm and gave me your One Year NIV Bible. You said I didn't need to quit. I needed to change my perspective. "Start with Romans 5:3,4," you said. "We glory in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to

shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.'"

And that was it. My bumper boat of emotions was placed right back in the middle of the path with God's Word to light the way.

That's just what you do. In difficulty and trial. In joy and celebration. In work and relaxing times. Whether intentional or unaware, you have always lovingly guided me back to Jesus through God's Word. Scripture has embedded itself in your heart, convinced you of who you are in Christ, and motivated your every action. And you have never missed an opportunity to share that biblical identity with me in the hopes that mine would be the same.

You aren't just one person. You are the many people God has used in my life. My mom, grandma, aunt, and sister. My teacher, my friend, my coworker, and even the lady I hardly know at church. Some of our relationships have lasted a lifetime, while others have been a brief season. Each of you has different backgrounds, talents, challenges, and strengths. But there is one thing all of you have in common. You have shown me

an example of what it is to be a Christian woman because you have followed the example of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:1).

Your mentoring hasn't always been as direct as handing me a Bible and telling me to read. Often a subtle glance or tap on the shoulder was all it took to remind me I was heading toward the cliff of slander or disrespect. You rarely told me what to do but rather helped to reveal pure motives or selfish intent through questions of genuine interest in my life. When you shared frustrations or disappointments from your own life you always ended with thanksgiving to God for his salvation, guidance, and answer to prayer. You never spoke as if you had all the answers. You didn't need to. God had them. And that was what mattered.

Even more than words, I observed your practices. If "actions speak louder than words," your life has been a megaphone. I've watched you make wise use of your time for the benefit of family, friends, and God's kingdom of believers. Often that meant sacrifices of sleep, resources, and personal comfort. But that didn't matter. You did it as if serving the Lord. I've witnessed you make tough decisions despite ridicule because they were in line with God's standards. I've observed you navigate the work world as a professional who never forgets she is God's child first. You've demonstrated limitless generosity that freely gives—even through hurt and rejection. You have shown me that sometimes a harsh word needs to be said, but there will always be forgiveness and reconciliation. ALWAYS. Your heart has been changed by the grace of Jesus Christ, and you live it every day. Everything you do is a way to honor him and say thank you.

You also knew the best way for me to learn would be to invite me into your life instead of watch as an outsider.

The thing is, I'm pretty sure you didn't even know you were doing this. You're probably horrified I'm making all this fuss. But Jesus said it would be like that on the Last Day, right? "Lord, when did we see you . . . ?" The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:37-40).

I'm taking the time to finally say thank you because I realize with great appreciation what a blessing a Christian mentor is. In my naïveté, I assumed everyone had you in their life. I thought every woman had a mentor to

nurture, encourage, and equip her according to God's Word. But that's not the case. I look around and see the selfish and inconsistent icons of our culture luring the unaware down confusing and destructive paths. The world today tells women their value and identity comes from what they do instead of who they are because of Jesus. The cheap alternatives of title, achievement, and appearance are promoted by society instead of the qualities of biblical womanhood like diligence, wisdom, generosity, and dignity found in Proverbs 31.

I often talk with women caught in the middle of these conflicting standards. They want the answers to life's questions about relationships, parenting, career choices, and womanhood. They are frustrated, confused, and about ready to be DONE!

And that's when I think of you and smile. I tell them they don't need to quit. They just need to change their perspective. And then we open the Bible to see the guidance God's Word has to give.

You've showed me that's what a mentor does. She lovingly shares her faith and life through relationships in order to build up believers and show Christ to unbelievers. Thank you for giving me a picture of what that looks like. And thank you for the encouragement to let me know I can do the same.

May God continue to bless the lives of those around you as you have blessed mine.

Love,
Dawn

Dawn Schulz is a member at Cross of Life, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada.



WELS Women's Ministry is sponsoring a conference on mentoring July 21–23 at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. The conference will feature biblical presentations on Christian mentoring, practical tools and resources, and opportunities for networking and brainstorming. For more information or to register, visit wels.net/wmconference. Learn more about WELS Women's Ministry in the May edition of *WELS Connection*.



So many issues can divide us, but the Word of truth unites us as we arm ourselves with God's armor.

James R. Huebner

The apostle Paul was unafraid to broach touchy subjects and to press the hot buttons of his day. Those buttons are still hot in our world, in our American culture, and in our synod. These subjects bring to light differences of opinions or differences in the way we approach issues, problems, and concerns. They can divide us. But they are also opportunities for us to demonstrate our common commitment to God's truth. In other words, every generation needs to recapture the truths and principles of Holy Scripture for itself in order to be one in service to God and to each other.

THREATS TO UNITY

Paul addresses a very real threat to the spiritual unity in the Ephesian congregation, namely, Satan's tool of sexual impurity. If you are unaware of the assault on biblical morals and

values created by the efforts of the LGBT crowd to shift homosexuality from a moral issue to a political issue in the minds of Americans, you better pinch yourself to see if you're still breathing. Has the availability of pornography through the Internet become a plague on our society and also affected our church members and called workers? Yes.

But people who fall prey to homosexual or heterosexual sin are not the enemy. They are victims of the enemy. They need to hear what God has to say about their sin and their Savior in an honest, compassionate, and winsome way. We help heal them and draw them to Christ and then their fellow believers as we speak the Word of truth in love. We do the same things in our discussions on the biblical principles of God-pleasing gender interaction and application of those principles.

When the apostle addressed the issue of parent-child relationships and as we observe the breakup of the family in our society, we value all the more the precious privilege of enhancing through Lutheran schools what children learn about Jesus in God-fearing homes. But how can we also

make every effort to shift the purpose for a congregation's early childhood center, preschool, and Lutheran elementary school from primarily "taking care of our own" to "reaching out to the lost"? How do we work together as one in Christ? We do that by speaking the truth in love.

How can we learn to care more about others than ourselves so that not only employers and employees interact in God-pleasing ways but we also ask everyone we know, "How are you doing today?" and mean it? We do that by speaking the truth in love.

In these areas, we may long for perfect unity and oneness, but that will not happen on this side of heaven. Yet, we can demonstrate oneness in service to God and one another in our approach, in our attitude, and in the way we interact with one another, submitting "to one another out of reverence for Christ" (5:21). So we put ourselves in a position to catch the blessings God wants to pour out to us, and we are "completely humble and gentle . . . patient, bearing with one another in love" (4:2). We do that by speaking the truth in love and waiting for the Lord's blessings on our efforts.

STAND FIRM. WEAR GOD'S ARMOR.

Can you see Paul, sitting at his writing desk, quill in hand, writing this letter? Out of the corner of his eye he sees the Roman soldier assigned to guard him that day, all fitted out and geared up for duty.

Ephesians, like all Christians, are locked in a battle with evil. Paul describes the armor God gives his warriors for the fight. "Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand" (6:13). There's the enemy. Here's the armory!

"Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist" (6:14). You can see that Roman soldier with his belt holding his tunic in place and housing his weapons. A faulty belt won't hold in place what it's supposed to hold. So it is with the belt of truth. Mix in some error, and you'll be in danger of having God's truth slip off your hips and roll away. Strap on the belt of God's truth.

Stand firm "with the breastplate of righteousness" (6:14). The Roman soldier's shining metal plate protected his chest and midsection. In a similar way, Jesus' rightness protects our spiritual heart and lungs. We are declared right by God even though Satan loves to accuse us. Put on Jesus' rightness as a breastplate.

Stand firm "with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace" (6:15). That Roman soldier

is ready to move forward and carry out his duty. The good news of peace with God through Jesus keeps us balanced and able to dodge temptations but also keeps us light on our feet, ready to take the first step in kindness for the needy, in comfort for the hurting, and in forgiveness for the guilty.

"Take up the shield of faith" (6:16). The Roman shield isn't just to display the emblem of the soldier's legion. He can maneuver it for protection. Your trust in Jesus does the same. Your faith shields you when the flaming arrows of temptation come sizzling in.

"Take the helmet of salvation" (6:17). Any head injury knocks you out of the fight. You must keep your wits about you. What better way to do that than to have the assurance of God's promise of salvation! We wrap our thoughts in his love so that we can make wise decisions when challenged by a fork in the road or the enemy before us.

Take "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (6:17).

Every Roman soldier needs an offensive weapon from the armory. It's the sword. The Word of God is yours. And it works. Use it. You can slice and dice the devil and send him running. Wield the Word of God.

But God is not done. He has one more weapon in the armory for you to use so that we can be one in Christ. "Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me" (6:18,19). Pray for your family. Pray for your pastors, teachers, and staff members. Pray for your district and synodical leaders. Pray for your synod. Pray for the lost, which means praying that God will unite us as individuals, as congregations, and as a synod in this glorious task to save lost souls.

No matter how old or young you are, no matter how tall or short you are, no matter what the amounts and distribution of melanin pigment in your skin, no matter where you live, we are one in service to God and one another. That's what it means to be one in Christ.

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

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

Our plans are actually God's plans, and he guides events to purify and strengthen our faith.

Barb Scott

My biggest aspiration in life lately is to “have the faith of a child.” It sounds so comforting . . . to believe and know, without question, that you are loved, cared for, and saved.

The child whose faith I strive to emulate isn't so young—she's almost 34 years old, as a matter of fact. She's my daughter. At the most needed and opportune times, she speaks words of comfort and wisdom that amaze and astound me.

I was raised Catholic—strict Catholic, strict Baltimore Catholic! I went to parochial grade and high school, taught CCD classes, and was a reader at Mass. I went to confession and communion regularly like any good Catholic would. I couldn't imagine anything else.

Then I met my would-be husband, who was not Catholic but Lutheran! (Insert gasp here if you are Catholic!) He was divorced. I remember finding out we could not get married in the Catholic Church unless we were willing to go through months of waiting for annulment proceedings. I informed my mother that I wasn't willing to do this.

I can still hear her plea for me to get married at the courthouse instead of a Lutheran church. She hoped we would reconsider (a.k.a. come to our senses!) eventually and be able to have our union blessed in the Catholic Church.

We did marry at the courthouse, and a few years later I became pregnant with our daughter. Funny how carrying a child encourages you to reevaluate a faith you thought you could put on hold indefinitely. Baptism and a church home were nonnegotiable for both of us, so we joined a Lutheran church. Mom had given up on her hope of us “coming around.” I think she had softened a bit and wanted her first grandchild to become a baptized child of God. She even said—albeit grudgingly—that it could occur in the Lutheran church.

We had a comfortable church life, though not particularly regular or too involved. We met some new friends through boating, which was a big part of our social life at that time. Our daughter was almost ready for school, and we were struggling with where to send her. Our friends invited us to their WELS church, which had a school. It seemed like a fine church, but the deciding factor for us joining was that they had a bus that picked students up—a real perk as we both worked full time! So we joined the WELS church, signed her up for school, and were all set.

Then, a couple weeks before the first day of kindergarten, we were notified that the bus needed repairs. The church could not justify the expense and canceled the bussing. Since we had so little time before school started, we decided we would figure out transportation for that year and reevaluate as we went along.

Looking back it amazes me that I don't ever remember feeling the hand of God in my life then. Now I can't help but shake my head at the timing of numerous events. A new friend, a conversation, a carpool, the daughters of the principal who became babysitters and a second family to our little girl. Then I thought it was just luck; now I see it is crazy to think of something as precious as life happenings as “luck.”

One year at school turned to three, five, then confirmation and eighth-grade graduation. The nice people we met at church and school became friends, and then I learned what a church “family” really meant. I was comfortable in a way and depth I never knew growing up in the Catholic Church. We had never been encouraged to read the Bible. It needed to be taught lest we “misinterpret” what God wanted us to learn.

I remember being in a Bible class once. I rarely spoke because I felt ignorant compared to everyone else, most of

Confessions OF FAITH



whom were lifelong Lutherans. But this particular class I did speak . . . we were talking about differences in religions. I shared that I had been raised Catholic and that I was so appreciative of the WELS faith and the “black and whiteness” of it. For any question or concern I may have there was a concrete biblical answer, not a “maybe” or a gray one. It gave me comfort to know it never changed like so many aspects of the Catholic faith I’d known had changed. After class, a pastor from our congregation came up to me and thanked me for my comment and the beauty and simplicity of describing my faith. It meant a lot to me that day and still does.

I digress . . . our daughter grew up. She was outgoing, a trusted friend to many, and an unbelievably talented musician. I never have figured out where the genes came from for that. I guess the Lord just wanted to bless us with the joy of listening to her play her favorite hymns for hour upon hour on the piano; flute; and finally, organ.

Oh, I think I forgot to mention she ended up going to a WELS high school. We weren’t sure how we would swing it financially—it wouldn’t be easy—but we had also been seeing that we always seemed to have enough, somehow. Eventually, our daughter became a teacher . . . yes, a WELS teacher! She

had a special love of little ones, and when I visited her classroom I often heard her effortlessly talk to them of Jesus’ love for them. She shared with me incidents with parents that troubled her and conversations she had with them, always pointing them back to our Lord. She took her call very seriously. Some of her happiest times were calling her pastor to ask him to visit one of her unchurched families!

She has faced some pretty trying times for someone her age, and my heart ached for her during those rough patches as any mother does for a child. But she had faith in the Lord. When I was wondering where God was for her, she would share that she knew Jesus stood at her side! I became stronger through her witness.

She is married now with two beautiful boys. I love to hear my oldest grandson tell me some of the Bible stories he is learning. My heart could burst because I am so happy to see him growing in the faith his mother knows so well.

Today when I look back on my life I am awestruck at the many ways God has always cared for me. I used to think I was the ultimate planner—that if I planned enough I would be able to handle whatever came my way. I see now that the plans were never mine to



Barb Scott (right) and her daughter, Margie Bentz.

make, but his: “For I know the plans I have for you” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Yes, God has taken care of me. The child he planned for and allowed me to bring into this world has become my path to grow in my faith—the faith of a child.

Barb Scott is a member at Redeemer, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.



heart to heart
parent conversations

In honor of Mother's Day, we are focusing on moms this month. That doesn't mean everyone else should tune out though. As Laurie Gauger-Hested reminds us, we can all play a role in supporting the moms in our lives. After all, each mom is a gifted, precious soul that Jesus gave his life to save. As such, we should be kind to one another.

Often the moms I know are toughest on themselves. Wendy Heyn shares the familiar struggle of feeling as though she is not measuring up—to her own expectations or to those of her children and her God. Discover how she comes to peace when her focus changes—and how you can find that peace too.

Nicole Balza

Join the conversation!

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

HOW CAN WE BUILD MOMS UP?

It strikes me lately that we moms can be really hard on each other. We veteran moms can be the worst. My kids are almost grown up, and I know how easy it is to forget the infant and toddler years. I need to remind myself how excruciatingly long those days could be, how hard I tried to be the perfect mom, how guilty I felt when I failed, how tired I was, how overwhelmed, how bored.

Truth is, we veteran moms tend to romanticize and sanitize our memories so much that we forget all about our kids' tantrums at Target and the Cheerios that lived under the sofa cushions for years. *Years.*

We need to ask God to help us be kinder to ourselves and others, which brings me to that famous saying: "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle."

That woman whose kids are a little naughty? Her dad was far too quick with the paddle when she and her sisters were little, and she's trying very hard to break the pattern. She may be more permissive than you'd be, but considering where she comes from, she's doing *great*. So let's be kind.

That woman with the detached look on her face while her toddlers are rubbing mud all over her yoga pants? God made her an introvert, and if she doesn't get a few minutes of alone time soon, she's going to implode. So let's be kind.

I often feel like I don't measure up. I'm not as fun as all the moms on Pinterest who make creative projects with their kids. I feel bad that I don't have time in my schedule to volunteer for every field trip and to say "yes" whenever I am asked to help someone. I can be short-tempered and respond negatively to my children. I fall short every single day. When I feel that I have fallen short, I need to be careful to identify my measuring tool.

I'm not as fun as all the moms on Pinterest who make creative projects with their kids.

Comparison. When I compare, I always come up wanting. If I think of 50 other women and list one talent from each of those women, the list is 50 talents long! My list? How do I compare? Yet this is often the measuring tool that I use. False measuring tools like this leave me feeling defeated. Each mom is a complex creation to whom God gave special talents and abilities. God made me and chose me to be just the right mom for my children.

I feel bad that I don't have time in my schedule to volunteer for every field trip and to say "yes" whenever I am asked to help someone.

That woman who's always late? She's low in Vitamin D and can hardly walk down the steps in the morning. She feels emotionally and physically tapped out before she even starts the day. So let's be kind.

That woman who's gained so much weight? She's not lazy. She's not overeating. Cortisol is coursing through her veins because of stress at work, her gut bacteria are all out of whack, and the doc put her on a new med for her fibromyalgia—all of which led to extra pounds. So let's be kind.

That woman whose house is dirty? God put music in her, and every time she starts dusting, the dusting turns to dancing and melodies fill her head. She puts down the dust cloth, sits at the piano, and scribbles on staff paper. So, yeah, her house isn't the cleanest, but—know what?—when she sits at that piano, that's the moment she's also doing what God gifted her to do. So let's be kind.

We need to pivot.

What happens if we remind ourselves that just because we all have two X chromosomes doesn't mean we have the same gifts?

We have different levels of cooking, cleaning, and organization skills—and frankly, some of us don't care that much about the surfaces at all.

We have different levels of patience and empathy. Different ways of communicating love.

Some of us are naturals with babies, and some of us fumble around until the kids can clearly express their desire for peanut butter in English. Some of us love dealing with the drama of adolescence, and some of us enjoy kids best when they're adults. Honestly, some of us are uncomfortable at almost every stage of the parenting process.

What if we just stop analyzing and comparing? We're all human, and that means the calluses on our feet are not always buffed off, our bathrooms are not always swished and swiped, our e-mails are not always read, and our hot dishes are not always hot.

We lose our tempers. We're a little frayed at the edges. We cry when no one is looking.

And we're also amazingly gifted by God—every single one of us—some as administrators, some as teachers, some as healers, some as creators, some as communicators.

God made us, and he declares us gifted, precious souls through his Son, Jesus. That same Son forgives our failures and, being human himself, completely understands our weaknesses. He loves us and accepts us as we are.

Maybe we can try harder to do the same for each other.
Happy Mothers' Day

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



Unrealistic expectations. I often feel guilty that I cannot do everything and be everywhere. My children will even add to my guilt by saying things like, "Everyone else's moms came." Yet I am only one person who has 24 hours in each day. Measuring myself against unrealistic expectations—whether my own or those of others—only gives me false guilt and makes me second-guess my choices. It is wise to prayerfully consider how my time can best be used and then to set limits. There may be things that I would enjoy doing or even that I am gifted at doing but that my family life does not allow time for. My first responsibility is to care for my family, and I honor God by doing so. Saying "no" sometimes is part of being a good steward of my time.

I can be short-tempered and respond negatively to my children.

My own sinful behavior. Using God's Word as my guide, it is clear that I do not measure up. My shortcomings aren't a result of bad self-esteem. They are real. I don't meet God's mark. Thankfully that doesn't matter anymore. My Jesus does meet the mark. He lived a perfect life, died, and rose. Through faith, his perfection is mine.

When I want to shed my feelings of not measuring up, I know exactly where to look—God's Word. God changes hearts. He can help us be the moms that he wants us to be. He can help us to be moms who let go of our mistakes and bask in his forgiveness. God is the one in whom we boast.

Although time is often limited, time with God is time well spent. Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still, and know that I am God." When we make time and spend it quietly with God, our focus changes. We stop seeing our own weakness and focus on Christ's perfection. When God is first, our attitude about our family life will change. Pinterest, our own expectations, and the expectations of others will matter less—and the opinion of God will matter more.

Wendy Heyn and her husband, Juerg, have three young children.



Application is everything

The Bible is just as applicable to us as it was to those who heard it for the first time.

James D. Roecker

What's the big deal about the latest and greatest tech gadgets? Well, they're new, stylish, and user friendly. Upgraded models offer much more than previous models. Smartphones combine numerous devices into one machine. New apps provide countless hours of entertainment.

It wasn't always the case. Cell phone styles and capabilities were different ten years ago. Tech gadgets did not stay the same. Cell phones got bigger, not thinner. Then touch screens took over. GPS navigation was built in. Internet and e-mail now is a touch away. Smartphones do it all. Think of anything. There's probably an app for that. Apps can wake you up, show you where to shop, log your exercise and calorie intake, and keep your to-do list. Apps can even supply daily Bible reading plans.

But apps can't make you get up, control your spending, manage your diet, make you exercise, check things off your to-do list, or read your Bible daily. Apps can only serve as aids or reminders. It's what you do that makes a difference.

Some suggest applying the Bible is not a big deal. They say, "Shouldn't I just read it?" Others don't read it at all. They admit, "What I hear in worship is enough for the week." But what good does hearing and reading the Bible do if when you're done, you don't remember what God has said to you?

Applying the Bible is an ongoing challenge for every Christian, college students included. The schedules of our lives become cluttered with a never-ending to-do list. God's passages of comfort in his Word might not come to mind easily in the thick of daily temptations and troubles. The father of lies convinces us that God's Word doesn't apply to our situations. And if we don't apply it, the Bible becomes another book on the shelf, a collection of dated manuscripts that appear impractical. Satan wants nothing more than to separate us from God and to persuade us the Bible isn't useful.

But we know the Bible isn't just a normal book. The Bible is God's inspired Word. It's just as applicable to us as it was to those who heard it for the first time. That's why Saint Paul gave this encouragement: "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:9).

The God of peace is with us as we read his Word. The knowledge we glean from Scripture becomes the foundation for applying the Bible's principles for our lives. God's Word is solidified in our hearts by studying, memorizing, and meditating on what we have read. It's how we apply it. The psalmist reminds us that the man who meditates on God's Word is blessed.

But we are not alone in trying to understand and apply God's Word to our lives. God has given us his Holy Spirit to guide us in all truth. He moves us to take the words of James to heart: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22). Application of God's Word in our lives makes all the difference.

James Roecker, pastor at Divine Word, Plover, Wisconsin, does campus ministry work at UW–Stevens Point, Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

This is the first article in a six-part series on life apps the Bible has given Christians.



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Beck, John A., to Prince of Peace, Englewood, Fla.
Born, Craig T., to Risen Savior, Navarre, Fla.
Huebner, Philip J., to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.
Olson, Daniel S., to St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis.
Pederson, Benjy E., to Cross of Christ, Coon Rapids, Minn.
Rauh, Matthew C., to St. Paul's, Arlington, Minn.
Uhlhorn, Wayne R., to Beautiful Saviour, Carlsbad, Calif.

Teachers

Barczynski, Mary J., to Cross of Christ, Coon Rapids, Minn.
Danell, Emily A., to Bethany Lutheran Preschool, Saginaw, Mich.
Felsing, Deborah R., to Jerusalem, Morton Grove, Ill.
Foxen, Matthew B., to Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D.
Frey, Christel, to St. Paul, Cudahy, Wis.
Fuerstenau, William C., to Bethany, Hustisford, Wis.
Gould, Roseann L., to St. Paul, East Troy, Wis.
Guenther, Rebecca A., to Grace, Kenai, Alaska.
Horn, Hannah K., to Sienna Lutheran Academy, Missouri City, Texas
Kanzenbach, Paul R., to St. John, Milwaukee, Wis.
Kiedrowski, Alissa M., to Trinity, Brillion, Wis.
Klusmeyer, Ahnsharee B., to Peace, Green Lake, Wis.
Kurtzweg, Connie S., to Precious Lambs Preschool, Rochester, Minn.
Leckwee, Dennis D., to Trinity, West Bend, Wis.
Mikula, Katie A., to Building Blocks Christian Learning Center, Mequon, Wis.
Panning, Samuel F., to Divine Peace, Largo, Md.
Pfarr, Jarrod M., to St. Peter, Appleton, Wis.
Pluger, Christopher J., to Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D.
Raddatz, Kathrine E., to Our Savior, Grafton, Wis.
Radue, Lisa K., to St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wis.
Rautenberg, Sarah A., to Building Blocks Christian Academy, Los Angeles, Calif.
Schiewe, Neil A., to Huron Valley Lutheran High School, Westland, Mich.
Schuette, Kimberly E., to Good Shepherd, Midland, Mich.
Terry, Amber, to St. Matthew, Oconomowoc, Wis.
Wagner, Rebecca L., to Redeemer Learning Center, Tomahawk, Wis.

Willems, Andrew P., to Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis.

Staff minister

Vanissaveth, Saynounsone M., to Camp Phillip, Wautoma, Wis.

ANNIVERSARIES

St. Paul, Minn.—St. John (145). May 22. Worship, 9:30 A.M.; potluck to follow. 651-771-6406. Website, www.stjohnnev.net.
Lewiston, Minn.—St. John (150). July 3. Worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M.; meal to follow. 507-523-2280. Website, lewistonlutherans.org.
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.

WELS regional handbell festivals—

Website, www.welsbells.com.

- **Western Region festival**—Apr. 30–May 1. St. Croix Lutheran High School, West St. Paul, Minn.

Commencement events—

- **Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.**—May 13. Concert, 4 and 7:30 P.M. May 14. Graduation service, 10 A.M.; call day service and assignment of graduates, 2:30 P.M.
- **Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.**—May 17. Vicar assignment service, 7 P.M. May 19. Call day service and assignment of graduates, 10 A.M.; concert, 7 P.M. May 20. Graduation service, 10 A.M.
- **Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.**—May 20. Concert, 7 P.M. May 21. Graduation service, 10 A.M.
- **Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.**—May 27. Concert, 7 P.M. May 28. Graduation service, 10:30 A.M.

Tiny Steps, Big Hearts walk—June 11.

Hosted by New Beginnings—A home for mothers. Hart Park, Wauwatosa, Wis. Website, welsrc.net/event/tiny-steps-big-hearts-2-mile-walk/.

53rd annual Lutheran Women's Missionary Society convention—June 23–26.

Pheasant Run Resort, St. Charles, Ill. Theme: "Christ Alone, Our Cornerstone." Registration is open. 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.youthrally2016@wels.net.

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

WELS Night at Miller Park—July 29.

Miller Park, Milwaukee, Wis. Brewers vs. Pirates. 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.

Annual Christian Educators for Special Education 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 Nurses: A gathering of professionals—Oct. 22.

Fox Valley Area, Wis. Website, wels.net/events.

WELS national multi-site conference—Nov. 14–16.

Grace, Tucson, Ariz. Daron Lindemann, daron@holyword.net. More information to come.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Teachers—The newly reopened East Fork Lutheran High School on the Apache mission near Whiteriver, Arizona, is looking for retired WELS educators to teach one or two high school level courses to small class sizes for the 2016-17 school year. In return, it will provide a stipend of \$4,000 per course, a fully furnished apartment on the campus, and utilities. Contact beapache@outlook.com or 928-338-4455.

Handyman—East Fork Lutheran School on the Apache mission near Whiteriver, Arizona, is looking for a volunteer handyman/woman for the 2016-17 school year. A furnished apartment and utilities will be provided. A spouse could help in the school library and assist in other ways on the mission. More details available upon request. Contact eastforkschool@gmail.com or 928-338-4455.

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

Spanish websites connect more people to their Savior

Internet and smartphone usage is on the rise in Spanish-speaking countries; there were more than 70 million smartphone users in Mexico at the end of 2015. World Missions, through its One Latin America team (1LA) and Multi-Language Publications, is using these tools to reach out to Spanish speakers around the world, connecting them with each other and their Savior.

The 1LA team and Multi-Language Publications, with help from national Spanish-speaking church bodies, have developed a suite of websites that function—as Mike Hartman, field coordinator for Latin America, describes it—as a church does.

• A PLACE TO WORSHIP:

Iglesialuteranacrismo.com

(Christ Lutheran Church) enables people to participate in worship that is streamed live. Hartman shares that 95 percent of the people in Latin America never have experienced a Christ-centered church service. Now, through these services prepared especially for the online viewer, they can experience Christ-centered worship as well as download resources such as liturgies and hymns for their own use.

The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church in Colombia has taken the lead on this project, broadcasting the services from Most Holy Trinity in Medellín. Three different worship leaders—Henry Herrera (see p. 28) from Colombia, Juan Garcia from the United States, and Andrés San Martín from Chile—conduct the service, which includes a live chat window. Spanish-speakers from ten different countries have gone through instruction classes with Herrera and joined Most Holy Trinity.

• A PLACE TO LEARN:

Academiacrismo.com

(Christ Academy) was developed in 2015 to provide free Spanish video and audio resources that share the gospel and teach lessons on Christianity and the Bible. Two popular resources are Spanish versions of the WELS movies



The *Academia Cristo* Facebook page was used to promote the Spanish version of *My Son, My Savior*. In February, the page reached 7 million people. Two million watched the trailer on Facebook, which invited them to the *Academia Cristo* website to watch the entire movie and view other materials.

Come Follow Me and My Son, My Savior. Spanish-speaking national pastors and missionaries are online for live chats with those visiting the site. The site also directs them to *Iglesia Luterana Cristo* for online worship.

Leaders' guides are available for Bible studies so that local lay leaders can use the materials in their communities. "We want to empower people to start churches that faithfully teach Christ," says Hartman. "Our main focus is working with contacts who reach out to us." In April, the site began offering live weekly online classes to train leaders how to conduct Bible classes in their communities.

• A PLACE TO REACH OUT:

"One of our main goals in Latin America is to become a known entity," says Hartman. "In Mexico, there are more Buddhists than Lutherans. No one knows who a Lutheran is." The *Academia Cristo* Facebook page is used to get the name "Lutheran" out in Latin America as well as to promote

resources. With limited advertising, the site reaches an average of 300,000 people a day with Christ-centered messages and links to *Academia Cristo*.

• A PLACE FOR INFORMATION: **Cristopalabradevida.com**

(Christ Word of Life) serves as a digital newsletter for Spanish-speakers. Meant mainly for those already in our fellowship, the site contains daily audio devotions, Christian resources in Spanish, and news about confessional Lutheranism. This site replaces *El Mensajero Luterano* (Lutheran Messenger), a printed newsletter that was distributed to Spanish-speaking congregations for the past four decades.

While the Internet is being used to distribute information, Hartman is quick to point out that this doesn't replace face-to-face, personal communication. It's actually meant to promote it. "We are seeking to use online means of communication God has given us to empower more people to do on-the-ground ministry," he says. Several members of the 1LA team live in Mexico and work with contacts to start new churches. Another team member connects with Spanish-speaking members in the United States who want to reach out with the gospel to their families in Latin America. Connections made through *Academia Cristo* have opened up new opportunities for church planting in different areas in Colombia.

The sites also allow any WELS member to spread the gospel to their Spanish-speaking neighbors. "You don't have to know Spanish," says Hartman. "We're giving you the resources to help you share your faith with someone who prefers to speak Spanish."

Multi-Language Publications prepares the resources for these sites, while the 1LA team makes connections and follows up on contacts. According to Nate Seiltz, director of Multi-Language Publications, this model of using digital media may be used in other areas of the world in the future.

Outreach website gets a new look

WhatAboutJesus.com, developed by the Commission on Evangelism as an outreach website, has a brand new look, while maintaining all the gospel-oriented content that makes it popular.

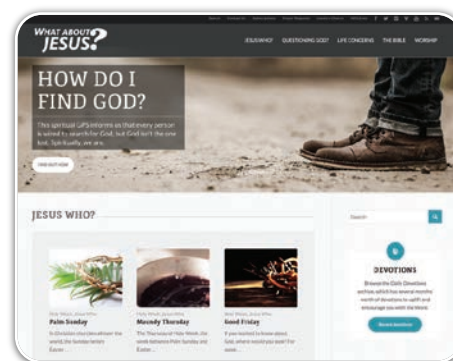
Mike Hintz, director of the Commission on Evangelism, says, "WhatAboutJesus.com exists to connect the world to Jesus Christ. Developed and maintained by the WELS Commission on Evangelism, the objectives are to proclaim the Christian faith to everyone and to promote personal evangelism of Christians by sharing the site's content with people they know."

The What About Jesus website launched about 15 years ago and has continued to grow. Today, between roughly 20,000 and 30,000 people visit the site each month.

The main sections of WhatAboutJesus.com are "Jesus Who?," "Questioning God?," "Life Concerns," "The Bible," and "Worship."

"Articles in the sections of 'Jesus Who?' and 'Questioning God?' address some of the questions that people have about the Christian faith. The articles, based on the truth of God's Word, point readers to the true identity of Jesus as the world's Savior and what God says about himself and us. 'Life Concerns' offers comfort and guidance from God's Word for people experiencing trying times. For people's spiritual growth, there are studies of biblical books and teachings in the section of 'The Bible,'" says Hintz. "And in 'Worship,' there are helps for worshipers to prepare for upcoming church services. An important feature in this section is the devotion that is offered every day. Verses from God's Word are explained and applied to our lives, leading us to a greater knowledge and appreciation for the love of God through Jesus Christ."

The site has been updated to meet current online design trends and to make it easier to share content. WELS



Creative Services Coordinator Briana Lambrecht, who redesigned the site, says, "The new responsive design and site architecture allows for a more user-friendly experience that makes consuming and sharing the site much easier. Our hope is that the new interactive site encourages others to share its Christ-centered content via social media spaces. It's a great tool to share Jesus with friends, coworkers, and family in an ever-increasing social media-based world."

Visit the site at **WhatAboutJesus.com**.



Booknook

A look at books published by Northwestern Publishing House. For more information, visit www.nph.net or call 1-800-662-6022.

MOMENTS IN THE WORD

Prioritizing my time: It's most of what I do as a mother. "Just a moment" is a phrase my kids hear from me far too often. If I'm honest, it's a phrase God hears from me too often as well. Between the physical and emotional needs of my kids and all the running around I do during the day, setting aside quiet time for personal Bible study gets put on the back burner.

Moments in the Word for Moms by Melissa M. Berg offers excuse-proof devotion time, perfect to start or end the day in God's Word. Each devotion takes between 5 and 15 minutes to read. It truly takes "just a moment" to get my day started off filled with the Holy Spirit and focused on God's Word.

Broken into three sections applicable to moms of all ages and stages of parenting,

each devotion consists of an opening Bible verse, a short relatable story of motherhood, thoughts for the day, and a closing prayer. I enjoyed journaling my thoughts for the day and used that time to delve deeper into the Word as time allowed. I found the prayers to be powerful and wound up sharing many of them with my family.

Moments in the Word for Moms offers women at any stage of motherhood the opportunity to connect with and reflect on God's Word. The short but powerful devotions give encouragement and direction for the important job we have of raising our children to know their Savior.

Kerry Ognenoff
Milwaukee, Wisconsin



Price: \$11.99

Meet the editorial staff

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

When Daniel Habben, pastor at St. Peter, St. Albert, Alberta, Canada, was asked to write for *Forward in Christ* magazine, “I thought they got the wrong Habben,” he said, laughing. “My wife is the writer of the family.” After being assured that he was, indeed, the right Habben, he graciously accepted the invitation to be a new writer for the “Thought for today” devotions.

His series, which begins this month, focuses on the depth of God’s love for us and our responses to it. He says the idea for his devotions came from a variety of experiences, including growing up in Japan and serving a congregation in Canada for more than a decade.

He was born and raised in Japan while his father served as a missionary there. Habben says the cultural differences between Japan and North America are “as wide as the Pacific Ocean,” and that includes religion. In rural areas, people are very superstitious, and some still participate in ancestor worship. Habben remembers his father talking about the mission work being hard and slow because many people don’t know anything about the Bible. So his family spent a lot of time making personal connections, building relationships, and inviting people to Bible study.

Habben came back to the United States to train for the ministry, and after he graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, he was assigned to St. Peter. He has been serving the small congregation for the past 16 years. Although St. Peter has hosted large outreach events that attracted several hundred community members, few have showed up in church afterward. “Sometimes it takes years to get new people in the door,” he says.

Habben thinks this is partly because of multiculturalism, which is prevalent throughout the Canadian culture. “That idea, that your culture is just as good as mine, spills over into their philosophy and religion,” he says. “Mission work can be difficult, because people think it’s okay to be Christian—as long as you’re not serious about it. In that respect, I think we’re a generation ahead of where the United States is heading.”

He hopes to touch on that idea in his devotion series. “As Christians, we need to be serious,” says Habben. “Let’s not be Sunday Christians. It’s not just part of your life. It is your life. I’ll be looking at how we sin and take things for granted. But God grants us forgiveness and gives us the power to live our lives the way he wants us to. I just really want to look at the depth of God’s love for us and marvel at that.”

Alicia Neumann

Check out Habben’s first devotion on p. 7.



The Habbens (l to r): Jolie, Jemimah, Maureen, Maya, Sarah, and Daniel.

One in Christ —UPDATE—

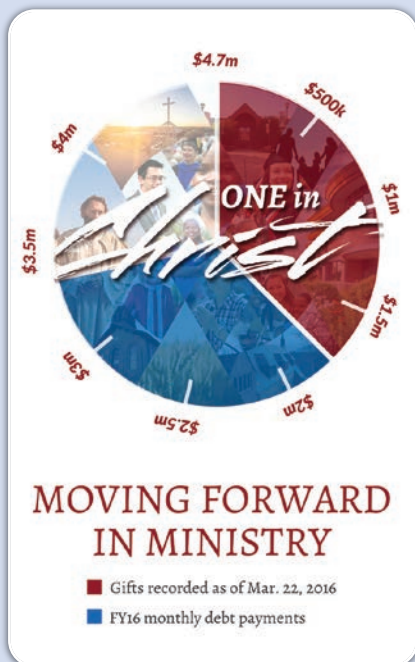
The 2015 synod convention launched the “One in Christ” debt elimination offering through June 2016 to eliminate the remaining \$4.7 million synod debt. As the offering reaches its final months, Kurt Lueneburg, director of the Ministry of Christian Giving, shares how “One in Christ” participation has been so far.

Q: How have congregations and individuals responded to the debt elimination offering?

A: The Lord has moved his people to generously participate so far! Almost two thousand families, representing 462 congregations, have sent “One in Christ” offerings directly to WELS—some of them have given offerings multiple times. Many other individuals have given “One in Christ” offerings through the 388 congregations that have remitted gifts. To God’s glory, a total of \$1.8 million has been generously presented to Jesus for “One in Christ” from July 1, 2015, through March 22, 2016! In addition, our church body is making monthly principal and interest payments this fiscal year that will total \$1.6 million. That leaves our remaining debt at approximately \$1.4 million, which we hope will be eliminated by additional offerings. We thank all those who have participated in “One in Christ” so far!

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

A: Eliminating our debt this year enables us to deploy the resources we receive from God through his people on our present and future kingdom endeavors. As we gratefully reflect on how the Lord allowed us to fully fund our past capital projects and internal borrowing to maintain ministry, we can humbly and confidently move forward in the blessed work of sharing Christ’s good news of eternal life with a growing number of people in North America and around the world.



Q: What if we don't meet our goal?

A: If offerings and planned payments this fiscal year total less than \$4.7 million, we'll gratefully rejoice in the blessings we received from God! Then our leaders will decide how to pay off the remaining balance. Our ministry plan has no budgeted payments after June 30, 2016.

Q: Is there still time for congregations and individuals to make a gift?

A: Absolutely! It's our hope that every WELS member and congregation will prayerfully consider generously participating and/or giving additional offerings in this opportunity to move forward in ministry through the "One in Christ" debt elimination. Since the outcome of this endeavor, as with all we do, is in our Savior's gracious hands, we believe that he will enable us to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine to the praise of his name and the salvation of blood-bought souls!

Learn more about how you can help at wels.net/oneinchrist.

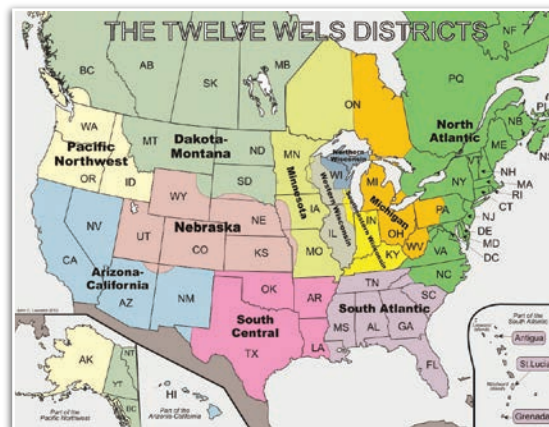
WELS 2016 district conventions

Each of the 12 districts holds a convention each biennium, generally in the even-numbered years. (The synod convention is held on odd-numbered years.) Every pastor, professor, and male teacher of the district plus a lay delegate representing each congregation attends the convention as a voting delegate. Other members of the district are welcome to attend as guests.

District conventions are held for the following purposes:

- To meet as a group to carry out the legislative responsibilities of the district.
- To celebrate God's blessings.
- To nurture faith.

The election of the district president is an important moment at each convention. This year at least four districts will elect new district presidents. Three district presidents—John Guse, South Atlantic District; David Rutschow, South-eastern Wisconsin District; and Herb Prahl, Western Wisconsin District—have announced that they will not seek reelection as they begin to consider retiring from the full-time ministry. The Nebraska District must also elect a new president to replace Earle Treptow, who accepted a call to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.



In addition, this summer's conventions will focus on the new ministry that WELS can support thanks to the "One in Christ" special offering, present the synod's proposal of a long-range plan beginning in 2018, share the recommendations of the Synodical Council's Compensation Review Committee, and preview WELS' upcoming celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

Here is a schedule of the 2016 district conventions:

Arizona-California—June 13–15. Chaparral Suites, Scottsdale, Ariz.

Dakota-Montana—June 14–16. Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D.

Michigan—June 6–8. Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

Minnesota—June 14–16. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

Nebraska—June 6–8. Nebraska Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb.

North Atlantic—June 7–8. Resurrection, Chesapeake, Va.

Northern Wisconsin—June 14–15. Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.

Pacific Northwest—June 14–15. Evergreen Lutheran High School, Des Moines, Wash.

South Atlantic—June 7–9. Innisbrook Golf Resort, Palm Harbor, Fla.

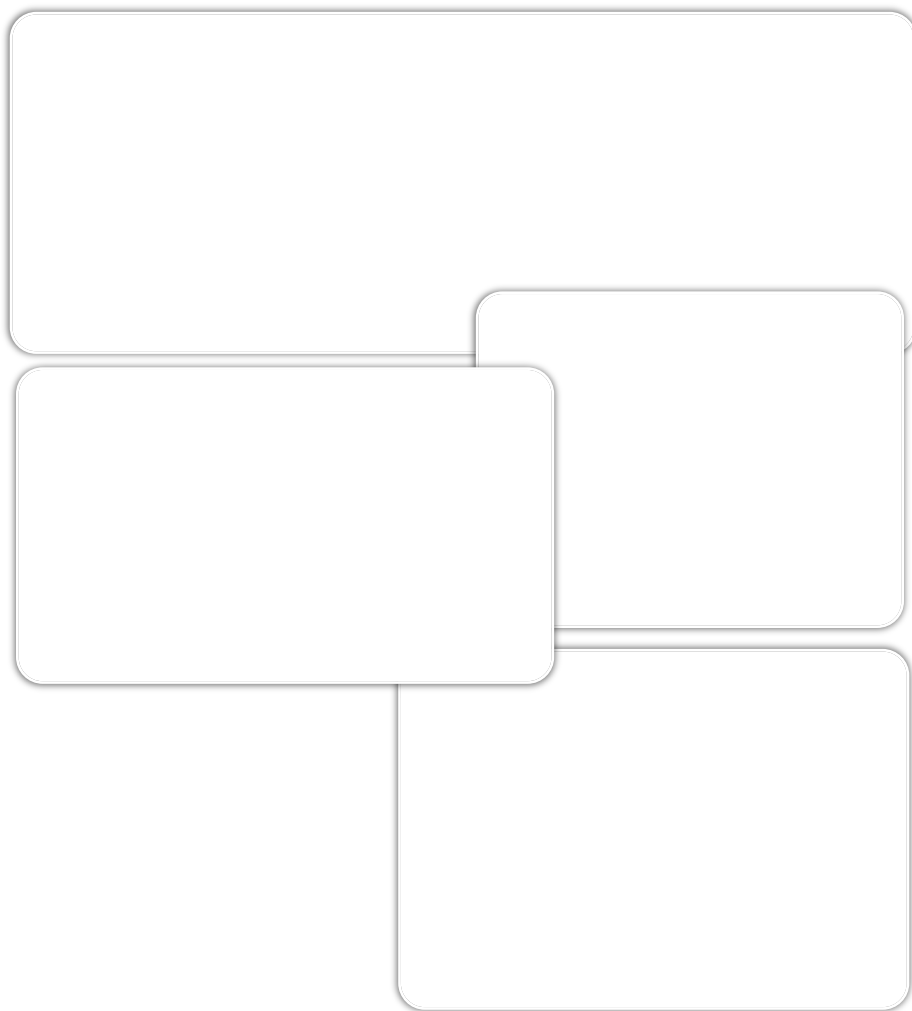
South Central—June 13–14. Calvary, Dallas, Tex.

Southeastern Wisconsin—June 14–15. Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis.

Western Wisconsin—June 6–7. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

Questions about a specific district convention may be directed to the president or secretary of that district.

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District news

WESTERN WISCONSIN

On April 10, **St. Paul, Menomonie, Wis.**, dedicated its renovated church. The renovation project included a restoration of the congregation's 90-year-old pipe organ, an elevator and easily accessible restrooms, and enlarged gathering space.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

SEW—In April, **Lighthouse Youth Center, Milwaukee, Wis.**, celebrated 10 years of ministry.

NW—On March 6, Bethlehem, Hortonville, Wis., celebrated the teaching ministry anniversaries of **Susan Rischette** (40 years), **Linda Montonati** (25 years), and **Maxine Haewisch** (25 years).

The district reporters for this month are: NW—Dennis Kleist; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Brett Brauer.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

Image and caption removed for security concerns.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



On March 13, 18 people were baptized at Mount Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis.

Obituaries

Lois A. Hellermann, 1930–2015

Lois Hellermann was born Feb. 5, 1930, in Douglas, Neb. She died Feb. 28, 2015, in Gretna, Neb.

She served at Zion, Rhinelander, Wis.; Trinity, Neenah, Wis.; Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.; St. Croix, West Saint Paul, Minn.; and Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.

She is preceded in death by one brother. She is survived by one brother and one sister.

Marlene A. Hopmann, 1946–2016

Marlene Hopmann was born June 16, 1946, in Watseka, Ill. She died Jan. 8, 2016, in Johnson Creek, Wis.

A 1969 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she served St. Paul, Stevensville, Mich.; Christ, Milwaukee, Wis.; and St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn.

She is survived by one sister and one brother.

Ethel E. Mech, 1928–2016

Ethel Mech (née Runge) was born Jan. 31, 1928, in Shawano, Wis. She died Jan. 9, 2016, in Kenosha, Wis.

She taught at Bethany, Kenosha, Wis.

She was preceded in death by one son, one daughter, and one brother. She is survived by her husband, Robert; two sons; two daughters; four grandchildren; two great-grandchildren; and one brother.

Carolyn L. Zeiger, 1948–2016

Carolyn Zeiger (née Roenneburg) was born July 19, 1948, in Fort Knox, Ky. She died Jan. 23, 2016, in Saginaw, Mich.

A 1970 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at Friedens, Kenosha, Wis.

She is survived by her husband, William; her parents; one daughter; one grandchild; and one sister.

Werner J. Roekle, 1931–2016

Werner Roekle was born June 28, 1931, in Allegan, Wis. He died Jan. 23, 2016, in Sun City West, Ariz.

A 1952 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at Trinity, Manitowoc, Wis.; Immanuel, Kewaunee, Wis.; and St. Paul, Saginaw, Mich.

He was preceded in death by one son, five brothers, and three sisters. He is survived by his wife, Marilyn; two sons; two daughters; six grandchildren; one great-grandchild; and one brother.



THE GOOD-BYE

THAT'S GOOD FOR YOU

**Jesus ascended and left his disciples behind.
That was—and is—a good thing for all believers.**

John A. Vieths

“Seems we just get started and before you know it, the time comes we have to say, ‘So long.’”

You understand the sentiment. Inevitably, the time must come to say good-bye. Looking back from that good-bye, it all seems so quickly gone. The holidays are over, and the visit must come to an end. After four years of school together, we have arrived at graduation day, and classmates will be headed in different directions. Junior is all grown up now. He has his first job, and it is time for him to start living on his own. After 45 or 50 years in the workforce, you are ready to hang up your spurs and start drawing on your retirement savings.

THE UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Some farewells are sad. Others can be scary. Jesus’ disciples seemed to feel a mixture of both emotions when he announced his farewell to them at the Last Supper. “Lord, why can’t I follow you now?” Peter asked (John 13:37). “Lord, we don’t know where you are going,” Thomas noted (John 14:5).

Jesus picked up on their concerns. “If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). But they were not glad. “You are filled with grief because I have said these things” (John 16:6). After three short years together, Jesus’ handpicked leadership team was not eager to

move on without Jesus visibly at the head.

Their grief was not pure sentimentalism. Humanly speaking, fear seemed reasonable based on Jesus’ own warnings. “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. . . . If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (John 15:18,20). Jesus did not sugarcoat the future they faced after he left. He prepared them for it by telling it the way it was. After he left, following him was going to be hard.

It still is. Does Jesus’ decision to leave seem wise? Sometimes my heart tells me no. Too often keeping our relationship going feels like maintaining a

long-distance relationship. More than one affectionate couple has called it quits at the prospect of months or years of nothing but words printed on a page, a phone call from a thousand miles away, or gifts sent as tokens of affection. This takes patience and work.

It's not wrong that we long to see Jesus face to face. Paul did: "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" (Philippians 1:23). That, however, does not mean we can just dismiss the printed words he has left behind. Jesus himself lives in those words in a way no romantic word-smith ever managed to inhabit his script. The signs of his affection Jesus left for us don't sparkle like gold rings or jeweled bracelets. But baptismal waters cleanse our hearts, and bread and wine pregnant with Christ's own body and blood nourish our souls. They don't merely accessorize our exteriors.

Questioning Jesus' good-bye and his return home isn't just longing for him. Sometimes our heads think that we have a reasonable case for him to stay. Look at the mess the people he has left behind have made of his church. Look at the gains the purveyors of perversions have won. Look at the defections to atheism and agnosticism so many members of a new generation seem to be making. Look at the mission fields in which the crop seems to be rotting because no one sends and no one goes. "If Jesus were here," we reason, "he would make this right. If Jesus were here, people would listen."

Would they? Did they? When he walked among us and fed the masses, they still concluded, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" (John 6:60). And many of his "disciples" turned back and didn't follow him anymore.

THE COMPLETED MISSION

Here is the surprising truth about his departure that Jesus shared in the upper room: "Very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away" (John 16:7). Jesus' ascension isn't a disappointment for us to get over or a problem for us to deal with. It is a blessing he intends for our good.

One blessing of Jesus' ascension is the exclamation mark it places on his completed work. It takes his dying gasp from the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30), and amplifies its truth for our assurance. If he hadn't accomplished all he was sent to do, he would still be here tying up the loose ends. But there are no loose ends. He fulfilled his mission in every way. That is truly good news.

One blessing of Jesus' ascension is the exclamation mark it places on his completed work.

Since his work is complete, we know that we have a real righteousness, a spotless life of love we can claim as our own. For more than 30 years, Jesus led a perfect life of love and obedience, without a single slip. The writer of Hebrews observed that he "has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin" (4:15).

That's more than a neat trick or a unique talent. There are countless people who can do things that I can't. I know artists who can draw or paint with nearly photographic accuracy. I've met musicians who can reproduce any composition they have ever

heard and not miss a single note. I can't do those things. Here's the difference between those supremely gifted people and our supremely obedient Savior: Jesus has given his gift away to us all. Our lives haven't actually become uninterrupted, unspoiled love and obedience—yet. But already we can stand before our Lord with no shame as though love and obedience is all we do, because Jesus' perfection counts as ours. "Through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19). And Jesus' ascension leaves no doubt that our borrowed obedience is complete and perfect.

Similarly, Jesus' ascension leaves us with no questions about the status of his payment for the sins we have committed. "When this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God." The result? "By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy" (Hebrews 10:12, 14). Here too there is nothing left for Jesus to do, no unfinished business to which he must attend.

This planet is not the only place from which Jesus serves us. It is not the only place where he could work on our behalf. It is the location of a chapter in the story of his saving mission now complete. Now that he has ascended, there are more chapters in this story for us to explore.

John Vieths is pastor at Grace, Norman, Oklahoma.

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

Preaching saving grace in Latin America

Rachel Hartman

If you're looking for Pastor Henry Herrera, you might find him in the city where he spends most of his time: Medellín, Colombia. On Sundays, you could spot him online, delivering a sermon over the Internet. And some days, you'll see him winding through Colombian highways on his motorcycle, occasionally traveling up to ten hours to reach congregations throughout the country.

His widespread presence is motivated by a specific reason, and it begins on a personal note. "I am saved by the grace of God," says Herrera, who first heard the saving message of Jesus' redemption as an adult. It is this mindset that compels him to strive, every day, toward his goals: to bring the gospel message to every city in Colombia and to continue improving online worship to reach the global Spanish-speaking audience.

LEARNING ABOUT MARY

"Every city in Colombia has a specific virgin Mary," explains Herrera, who, like the majority of Colombians, was raised in the Roman Catholic Church. He attended worship regularly and even grew to hold leadership positions. "I was a catechism teacher," he recalls. He faithfully revered the Mary figure in Medellín, where he was born. He even spent time at a Roman Catholic seminary, studying to be a priest. After two years of learning Catholic theology, however, he left the seminary.

At that time, Herrera got married and took a job working at a textile factory in the city, which has a population of more than 3 million people. At the company, Herrera learned the details of the trade and eventually became a mechanic for machinery. He also took on a leadership role, becoming a plant supervisor.

Then in 1999, Herrera took classes at the SENA (*Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje*), a government organization that offers training programs for Colombian workers. While there, he met a Lutheran

pastor named Tony Quintero. The two were in the same group at the SENA.

"He began to talk to me and talk about church," recalls Herrera. Quintero invited Herrera to the Lutheran church, and Herrera decided to give it a try. "Holy Week of 1999 was the first time I went to church."

Soon Herrera and his wife, Eliana, began attending regularly. They brought along their new son, Sebastian, to church.

Herrera became a member of the Lutheran church and, as he dug deeper into the Scriptures, recognized a growing list of blessings in his life. In addition to learning of God's salvation through Jesus, he gained a further understanding of Mary and her role in Jesus' life. "Mary is my sister in the faith, and I will see her in heaven," notes Herrera.

BECOMING A PASTOR

In 2004, a need arose for a pastor to serve a group of Lutherans in Medellín. The group called Herrera to serve in that position. That same year, while continuing to work at his factory job and to help the congregation, he began to study with WELS missionaries who formed part of the Latin American Traveling Theological Team. The missionaries visited Colombia periodically and studied with Herrera. This continued until 2012, when Herrera completed his studies.

Yet his ministry was just beginning. Today, Herrera serves as a full-time pastor and no longer works at the factory. In addition to serving in Medellín, he travels to the city of Manizales to help serve a congregation there.

His current role also involves building up and training leaders and pastors in Colombia and beyond. "I help brothers in the faith in other countries, such as Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Chile," explains Herrera.

Herrera has met many of these leaders through academiacrismo.com, an online outreach and training tool for Latin America. He also uses Skype to stay in touch with them and to teach a law and gospel course, a class on the book of Exodus to 30 students, a Luther's Catechism class, and a dogmatics class.

TO THE CORNERS OF THE WORLD

In 2006, Herrera heard from Pastor Gonzalo Delgadillo, who was working at Multi-Language Publications at the time. Delgadillo was in the process of starting a virtual church, which would operate through Skype. He asked Herrera to help with it, and thus weekly services began. In 2008, it was decided that the Skype church should be tied with a local congregation, and the church in Medellín was chosen as the base.

Over the years, this setup has developed into what is known as *Iglesia Luterana Cristo*, and a live video service appears online each week. The service is taped in Medellín, and eight of the young people in the church Herrera serves help with the production. “Two volunteer each week,” notes Herrera. “One handles the camera, and the other oversees the music.”

CONFESSIONAL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH (COLOMBIA)

Members: 320

Congregations: 5

Preaching stations: 6

National pastors: 6

National student pastors: 1

Seminary students: 1

National evangelists: 6

Visting instructors: 2

**Total enrolled in Bible
information classes: 310**

Unique fact: Most Holy Trinity in Medellín has members in ten countries around the world through its online ministry. Those countries include England, Spain, France, USA, Chile, Colombia, Argentina, Peru, and Venezuela.

Herrera is also involved with WhatsApp groups, a form of texting that is widely popular in Latin America. He helps oversee the sharing of devotions and Bible studies using the People's Bible. Students from Martin Luther College help as well, overseeing different groups and working with Herrera and other pastors to offer more information.

As he works with a wide range of people in many locations, Herrera finds one of the greatest blessings to be the chance to watch individuals grow spiritually. When first encountering others with different religious backgrounds, he notes, there is often a good deal of discussion. “Sometimes I just spend two or three sessions listening to them,” he explains. Then, using God's Word as a guide, he goes through their questions to see what the Bible says to each of them.

In addition to serving souls throughout Latin America, Herrera relishes the chance to share God's Word with his family. He enjoys watching his son Sebastian, now 17, as well as his 11-year-old son Julian, grow in their faith. “We are going to see a new generation in Colombia with young people like my sons,” he says. “This will be different from our group because these individuals have been raised their whole lives knowing the gospel.”

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

Learn more about *Iglesia Luterana Cristo* on p. 20.

Most Holy Trinity, the church in Medellín that Henry Herrera serves. This congregation has daughtered two congregations in Colombia. Those daughter congregations have in turn daughtered two more congregations of their own; (left) Pastor Tony Quintero and Herrera use Skype to encourage and train leaders and pastors in Colombia and other Latin American countries; Herrera (right) and Quintero. Quintero invited Herrera and his wife to church after meeting Herrera at a local training program; Henry Herrera and his wife, Eliana.



My grace is **SUFFICIENT**

Our plans seem to lead to a smooth and carefree future, but God sometimes has different plans for us. Yet he promises never to desert us.

Andrew Liebig

Many of us are aware that the apostle Paul suffered from an unknown affliction that plagued him until his death. As he describes in his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul pleaded with God to take away the thorn in his flesh. He repeated his prayer three times. However, rather than healing Paul, God answered his request in an unexpected way. He simply reminded Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (12:9).

“My grace is sufficient.” What more could we ever ask for in this earthly life than God’s undeserved love? Yet, it’s not uncommon for us to read through Scripture without giving such powerful words a second thought. If you’re easily distracted like me, you’re also quick to succumb to one of Satan’s many schemes to deter us from God’s Word and focus on our own problems.



THE THORN IN MY FLESH

Twenty-five years ago, I lacked spiritual maturity and depth. Then, I believe, Paul's invaluable message would've fallen on my deaf ears. Although I was raised and confirmed WELS and knew Jesus as my Savior, I was a rebellious and wayward teenager who became blinded by the ways of the world. I believed that I had it all figured out and nothing was going to get in my way. By age 25, I finished college, completed four years of active duty military service, and was a newly commissioned officer on the threshold of a promising career as a military aviator. My future was all laid out, and I had a picture-perfect snapshot of what the rest of my life would look like. And believe me, it looked exceptional!

Several years ago I read that if you want to make God laugh, tell him what your plans are. What were God's plans for me? I thought they were the same as mine. But as I sat there in my flight suit at Pensacola Naval Air Station feeling bulletproof, God was with me when the flight doctor told me that several lab tests revealed the intermittent blind spot in my left eye was the early onset of a progressive neurodegenerative condition. Needless to say, this blind spot abruptly ended my flying career. Over the course of several years, it also resulted in an early retirement from the military. My perfect plan was unraveling!

Now as I hover over my laptop computer to share this story, I'm dictating with voice recognition software because my hands no longer have the dexterity to type. Additionally, I'm sitting in a wheelchair, because I'm no longer able to walk. At only 43 years old, I need assistance with almost every aspect of daily living. As for those plans I envisioned for myself almost 20 years ago? God had other plans for me.

Regardless of how hard I try to figure out why God allowed this thorn in my flesh, his words through the prophet Isaiah resonate in my head: "For my

thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts' " (55:8,9). These words reassure me that God's perfect plan for me, you, and everyone else on this earth far surpasses anything we could ever comprehend, even when things don't seem to go our way.

God's perfect plan for me, you, and everyone else on this earth far surpasses anything we could ever comprehend.

GOD'S DIVINE PLAN

Fortunately, my story doesn't end with wheelchair ramps, roll-in showers, and help cutting my food. My story is about God's unfailing love; his presence in every situation; his strength to persevere; and above all, a constant reminder that I'm one of his redeemed children through the precious blood of Jesus. While I'm unable to identify the specific reason God has allowed this relentless thorn in my flesh, I know, without a doubt, that he has a specific purpose. It may be to serve as one of Christ's ambassadors in the midst of a storm or to simply nurture my faith and keep me close to his saving grace. After all, if my plan from 20 years ago had come to fruition, perhaps my faith would have withered, and I wouldn't have a reason to include God in my life. I certainly wouldn't have this opportunity to share my story with you.

I used to ask God, "Why me?" The answer hasn't always been so obvious—and there are days when I still question God—but it's now more evident to me than ever before. Clearly, the Lord is using me as a key player in his divine plan. Coupled with keeping me close to him and strengthening my faith, I

truly believe that God has allowed this trial in my life so that his works might be displayed in me. What a privilege it is! This is the faith from the Holy Spirit that enables me to persevere.

Through this trial, I've had countless opportunities to share my faith and tell others about God's grace. Since my physical struggle has become more evident over the last several years, I've noticed friends and acquaintances are quick to confide in me when dealing with their own trials. Some of these trials have included illness, depression, marital strife, financial trouble, and the list goes on. When opening up to me, they typically begin with "My problem is nothing compared to yours" or something like that. I'm always quick to dismiss their comparison and remind them that we all have struggles and the Lord will never allow us to endure more than we can handle. While I may be able to handle my physical limitations with God's help, I don't know how well I'd be able to handle the trials some of my friends have confronted. I certainly wouldn't be quick to trade places with them. We should avoid comparing our trials, because Paul has an important message for all of us about such comparisons: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

What trials are you facing in this earthly life? What are the thorns in your flesh that torment you? The specific details of Paul's affliction are not revealed in the Bible. Perhaps this is God's way of letting us know the intricacies of Paul's struggle are irrelevant, because otherwise we might fall into Satan's snare of comparing our trials with Paul's. Rather, God is likely reassuring us that regardless of whatever types of thorns torment us, his grace is sufficient!

Andrew Liebig is a member at Peace, Eagle River, Alaska

Safety in numbers

Earle D. Treptow

Our certainty
doesn't come
from the number
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Does it bother you that many consider sexual relations outside of marriage natural and appropriate? You're not alone. There are people around the world convinced that sexual promiscuity does irreparable harm to family and society. Does your blood begin to boil when television commercials portray a homosexual family as normal? You're not the only one. Others agree that marriage has always been, and always should be, the union of one man and one woman. Do you find yourself disturbed by the cavalier way people speak about a child in the womb as "only a fetus" and nothing more? You're far from alone. Others share your perspective, contending that abortion is legalized murder.

When the media equates an idea you espouse with the once-firmly-held belief that the world is flat, you may feel all alone. You may feel like you've been cast in Elijah's role in the 21st century—"I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too" (1 Kings 19:10). But the fact of the matter is that you're not alone in what you believe about marriage and the sanctity of life.

You're not alone. Call it "safety in numbers." In fact, one could say that the Lord gave us brothers and sisters in Christian faith for that very purpose. Through them he encourages us to continue to believe what he says in his Word, even if "everybody" supposedly thinks otherwise. The writer to the Hebrews directs us to gather regularly with our fellow believers, not only to be fed with Word and sacrament but also for the sake of encouraging one another to cling to what we believe on the basis of Scripture: "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24,25).

There is safety in numbers

The devil knows that maxim too. He understands how much human beings value the safety found in numbers. That's why he commissions opinion polls and incites people to favor what God clearly rejects. The enemy of human beings campaigns untiringly for positions contrary to the truths of Scripture. He cloaks lies with respect and liars with the appearance of wisdom so that the world can find safety in numbers: "There are others who think what I think; I'm not alone."

We need to be careful about where we find safety and security. Don't look for safety in numbers, in the millions of people who agree with you. Our certainty doesn't come from the number of people who believe what we do, but from the One who chose to become obedient unto death for us sinners. We find our security in the One who delights to call us brothers and sisters and gladly speaks to the Father in our defense. Our safety comes exclusively from the One who speaks to us through his holy Word. He's the One who does not, and cannot, lie. What he says is true, even if 65 percent of those surveyed believe the opposite. What he says is spirit and life, even if 84 percent scoff at it.

Find your safety in the One who has taken his seat at the right hand of the Father. He's the only One that matters!

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The RIPPLE EFFECT ARISTARCHUS



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

Daniel N. Balge

There has never been a ripple effect like the one that began just after Jesus ascended into heaven. His final words to his 11 apostles were, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Ten days later they received the Holy Spirit's power at Pentecost. Then for decades the apostles proclaimed the gospel of Jesus across the known world.

The good news did not return empty. People were brought to faith in Jesus. Some were Jews. They found a Savior who fulfilled all those prophecies. Others were Jews who, sadly, trusted their own efforts and ancestry to please the Lord. Still others were Gentiles, their souls mired in their culture's sludge of myth, philosophy, superstition, and a vague and shifting morality. They believed and also witnessed.

And the Holy Spirit used their testimony to create more witnesses and from these came more witnesses and so on. In widening ripples God's church spread in Asia, Africa, and Europe.

We are familiar with the big names of these early days—people like Peter, Paul, John, and James. It is worth our time to track these giants across the New Testament. But it is just as worthwhile to delve into the details of gospel witnesses whose profiles are lower. In a series that begins here, we will look at these witnesses God used to build his church, some familiar and others less well-known, all of them in one way or another "witnesses to the ends of the earth."

So consider Aristarchus. We meet him in the middle of a riot. Acts chapter 19 records that in Ephesus silversmiths and other craftsmen had realized that Paul's preaching in their city was costing them customers for the local specialty: silver shrines to the goddess Artemis. The gospel was bad for their business. Their leader Demetrius had stirred the artisans to such a frenzy that they seized Aristarchus and another Macedonian Christian, Gaius, and rushed them to the Ephesian amphitheater. There they held the two, while a great mob shouted for two hours, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" Only after a city official talked sense to the crowd did the rioters disperse and release the two followers of Jesus.

That experience did not discourage Aristarchus. On the contrary, he with

others then went on with Paul to Macedonia (Acts chapter 20), accompanying Paul on much of the rest of his third missionary journey, probably all the way to Jerusalem. We know that he boarded ship with Paul, when the apostle traveled to Rome for his hearing before Emperor Nero. So it's likely that Aristarchus was shipwrecked when Paul was. Aristarchus did reach Rome. Paul refers (Colossians 4:10) to him later as his fellow prisoner under Roman house arrest and coworker (Philemon 24).

Yet Scripture does not quote a word that this witness spoke. We have only greetings that Paul relayed in two of his epistles from Aristarchus to fellow believers. But what we know of the man gives us reason to give thanks for his courage, his faithful companionship, and his honest labor in the Lord.

Aristarchus stood, walked, sailed—even swam, risked, and endured—with Paul. As he did, he bore witness to God's grace to him in Jesus. And he still does.

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



Jesus is with us
as he promised—
a presence of spirit
and power not
confined by
space and time.

His presence

It started already on Easter Sunday. Jesus was not with the disciples as they were huddled in a room behind locked doors. He had been absent from them on a few occasions before. But this was different. This time Jesus had been crucified.

Then suddenly that night behind closed doors in the midst of their fear, doubt, and confusion, Jesus stood among them. “Peace” he said. After the shock, they knew it was Jesus. He wasn’t really gone. He had left Joseph’s new tomb empty. But he did not stay with them that night in the upper room.

The disciples who were there tried to convince Thomas, but he would not believe. A week later Jesus appeared again. Thomas believed, and another lesson began to dawn on the disciples. Not only was Jesus alive, but he had heard their conversation with Thomas even when he was not present.

For 40 more days, Jesus taught that lesson. The disciples needed to get used to the idea that Jesus was there even if they couldn’t see him. They had grown familiar with his touch, his words, his face. The presence of Jesus would be different now. It would no longer be a presence of flesh and blood in space and time. Now it would be a presence of spirit and power beyond space and time. Physics can’t explain that, but the disciples learned the lesson over those 40 days.

When Jesus ascended, he made sure they knew the lesson: “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). They began a new chapter without being able to see Jesus with their eyes as they had for the past three years.

But how would they know what to do and what to say? Jesus also helped them understand this new chapter. He promised to send them aid: “When the Advocate comes . . . the Spirit of truth . . . he will testify about me . . . Because I

am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer . . . he will guide you into all the truth” (John 15:26; 16:10-13). The Spirit would help them be accurate witnesses of what they had heard and seen.

So here we are almost two thousand years later. We have not seen Jesus and can only imagine what he looked like, the tone of his voice, and his physical touch. But we see him through the eyes of those who saw him—the eyewitnesses. While Paul was not in the upper room with these 11 men, Jesus also appeared to him.

All of them are eyewitnesses, with Christ’s stamp of approval and the Spirit’s assurance of authenticity. Peter reminds his readers, “We were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16). Luke also assures us that he checked with the eyewitnesses and had “carefully investigated everything from the beginning” (1:3).

For us, what better place to be! The chapter that records the events of God’s people after his Ascension is still being written. We do not know how many pages are left in the chapter. We know that our stories are being written. We do not see Jesus, but we have the reliable and inspired words of the eyewitnesses to guide us. We cling to those words, because Jesus also warned about distortions, additions, and subtractions to their record.

We might like to see how the chapter ends, but we have to trust that Jesus is with us as he promised—a presence of spirit and power not confined by space and time. We might not know exactly when this chapter ends, but Jesus has given us a peek at the next chapter: “I will come again.”

GREAT STORIES OF THE BIBLE

RUTH

Joel S. Heckendorf

It's fun to dream about the future. Where will you live ten years from now? Where will your kids live? Will you be a grandparent?

Perhaps Naomi's dreams reflected the meaning of her name—"pleasant." She'd fall in love. Get married. Have sons to take care of her in her old age. Her sons would find some nice Jewish spouses. She'd be a grandma, and they'd live happily ever after.

What was reality? The book of Ruth tells us. Naomi falls in love and marries. She's blessed with two sons. But then famine forces the family to move to a foreign land. Her husband dies. Her sons marry foreign women. Tragedy strikes again. Both sons die. Naomi is stuck in a foreign country with no husband, no legal heirs, and two daughters-in-law who are not bound to her. She laments, "Don't call me 'Pleasant' anymore. Call me 'Bitter'" (cf. Ruth 1:20).

Fast-forward and you soon learn that our God is not a God of percentages. Against all odds, Naomi's daughter-in-law Ruth accompanies her to Bethlehem and becomes a believer in the true God. Against all odds, a God-fearing Israelite, Boaz, buys Naomi's land for a generous price. Against all odds, Boaz marries Ruth, and they have a son who would be the legal heir of Naomi's late husband, assuring that she'd be taken care of in her old age.

When the local ladies saw Naomi bouncing her grandbaby on her lap, they preached a wonderful sermon, "Praise the Lord, Naomi. The Lord has not left you" (cf. Ruth 4:14). When famine drove Naomi to a foreign land, God didn't say, "I stop at the border." When Naomi's husband and sons died, God did not forget her.

That boy on Naomi's lap was God's testimony that the Lord never stopped working. That boy would also be God's promise that he wouldn't stop working in the

future. Twenty-eight generations later, that boy would have a descendant named Jesus.

Naomi's life is not unique. Look back on your life. We've had our famines and our funerals. But God was working, wasn't he? He worked to help you trust his promises in every setback and tragedy. You may even remember how God seemingly miraculously provided you with a month's mortgage or next month's tuition.

So where will you live ten years from now? Where will your kids live? Will you be a grandparent? Whether the picture you imagine ever fully develops, I can't tell you. But this I can say with certainty, "The Lord never stops working."

EXPLORING THE WORD

1. Tell the story in your own words. Then read the account. Which details did you omit or mistakenly add?
2. Why do you think this story is one of the most popular stories included in children's Bibles?
3. Work through the mental exercise described in the article. Think of situations where God never stopped working and turned you from "bitter" to "blessed."
4. List as many passages as you can that demonstrate how God continues to work in our lives.

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This is the sixth 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 May 5 at wels.net/forwardinchrist.

Looking to *belong*

Five years ago we pulled into a small town in our rattly red sedan, not knowing a single person.

CRAVING COMPANIONSHIP

I spent that first year living long days in our blue carpeted rental, desperately trying to feel at home. To find my people. To reach out. To be known and understood. To build relationships and connect. To love and be loved.

My heart ached to have face-to-face conversations that went beyond the polite, “How are you?” I would push the shopping cart through the aisles and hope to lock eyes with a familiar face. Library story time was spent scanning the room for a kind smile. I longed for an invitation for a cup of coffee—and I don’t even drink the stuff.

All I wanted was to belong.

Not belonging is hard. Lonely. Overwhelming.

And it’s humbling. Especially for a girl who had spent her entire life surrounded by dear friends. Never the new girl, never the outsider. Now I was the outsider.

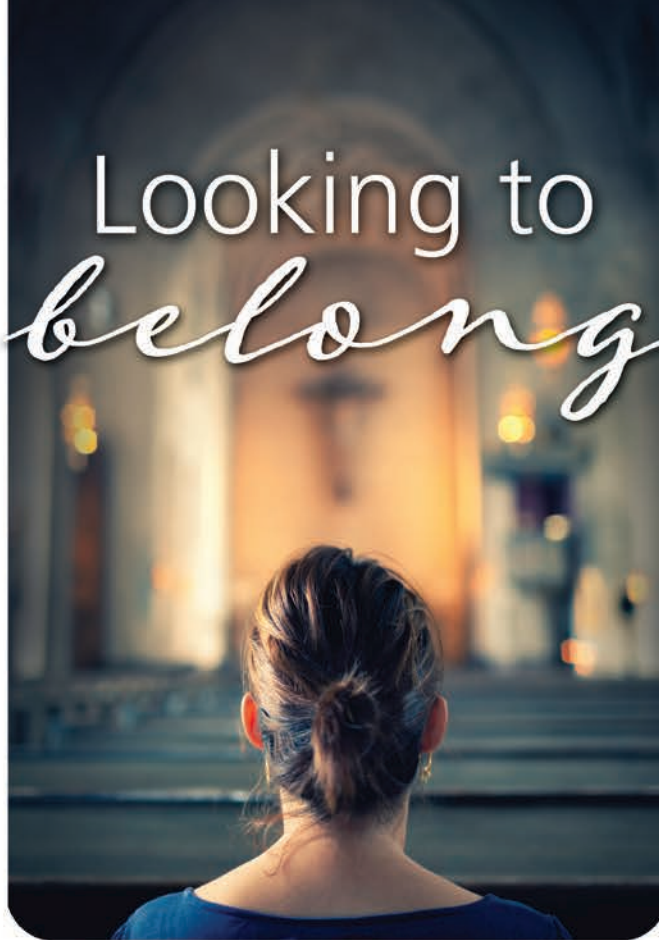
Until I wasn’t.

I’m ever grateful for the way the Lord drew me to himself during that time of loneliness. I’m thankful for the way he brought the women into my life who invited me along. The ones who called and e-mailed, the ones who said “I’ll meet you there!” and “Come with! It will be fun.” The people who love me and my family. The ladies who offered up their friendship with open arms and the dearest hearts. This outsider now feels like she belongs.

WELCOMING OUTSIDERS

Now I’m the one reaching out to others.

On a bit of a whim a few years ago, I started a weekly moms’ group at our church. I wondered if anyone would



We all need companionship in our journey through life. How can we open our hearts and lives to others who are looking to belong?

Rachel Olson

show up or if it would be me, all alone, twiddling my thumbs. It turned out to be a mixed bag of sorts—some weeks there would be a large group and other weeks it would be me and one other mom. Either way, on Thursday mornings, the doors were always wide open with possibility.

One morning brought a gal with long blonde hair and kind eyes. She was new to the group and new to town. We chatted and laughed and swapped stories for two hours while our kiddos played at our feet. When she left, she thanked me again and again for hosting the group. “I’ve been searching for something like this. You made my day,”

she said. I knew exactly what she meant.

With my little guy in elementary school now, I’ve uncovered new ways to include and befriend. But for years I kept showing up for the moms’ group and reaching out. Because someone might have come. And it might’ve just been their ticket to belonging.

What now? I encourage you to take that first step. Pray for God to show you your part in building friendships and including others. Share your smile freely. Shine your light. Seek someone out and wave that new face over to sit with you. Compliment her pretty scarf. Ask questions and listen. Meet for coffee or a coke and then linger as you lean into the story she shares. Link arms with her and smile knowing you are both loved something fierce by the One who was generous enough to shed blood for you both and create friendship and community.

There is always someone looking to belong.

And there is room enough for everyone.

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