

Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



Give thanks

Find joy and thanksgiving in the ordinary events of your day-to-day life. *Page 10*



PEACE ON EARTH

Celebrate the peace that Jesus Christ brought
with Christ-centered books and gifts,
perfect for your Christmas giving.

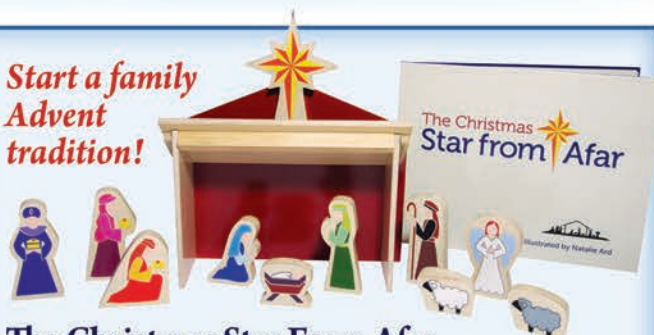
NEW! Tidings of Comfort and Joy

edited by Curtis A. Jahn

Find peace in the promise of your Savior! While the world focuses on prewar and other Christmas traditions, these inspiring devotions will point you to God's Old Testament promises of a coming Messiah. By reflecting on the importance of Jesus' birth foretold, you'll receive his comfort this Christmas season and beyond. Softcover, 129 pages. **LU0600753, \$12.99**



**Start a family
Advent
tradition!**



The Christmas Star From Afar

This popular 11-piece wooden nativity set includes a star for you to hide around the house. As your kids seek and find this hidden piece each day, you'll have an opportunity to remind them of the coming Christ Child: Jesus, the Light of the world. Includes a 29-page hardcover book. **LU4500186, \$34.95**

My Son, My Savior DVD

Get to know Jesus through the eyes of the woman privileged to call him son! From the producers of *Come Follow Me* and *Road to Emmaus*, this film presents the Messiah's life and ministry from Mary's unique perspective. As you experience Jesus' saving mission firsthand, you'll be reminded that he is truly your Savior too. Includes English and Spanish audio versions. **LU3303024, \$14.50**

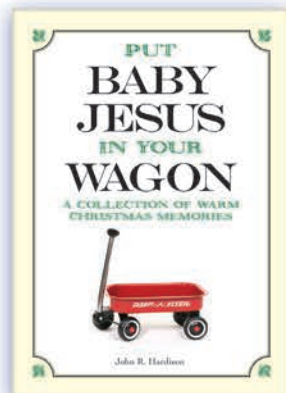


**Also available—
Devotional Thoughts on
My Son, My Savior**

Put Baby Jesus in Your Wagon

by John R. Hardison

Remember what Christmas was like as a child? The wonder of hearing the nativity story for the first time? Rediscover the innocence and majesty of Jesus' birth in this collection of warm Christmas memories. Each story features a nugget of gospel truth, making *Put Baby Jesus in Your Wagon* a present you'll want to open up again and again! Softcover, 111 pages. **LU1201794, \$12.99**



Prices are subject to change without notice. All orders are subject to shipping and handling fees and sales tax where applicable.

To order, call 1-800-662-6022 or visit www.nph.net.



**NORTHWESTERN
PUBLISHING HOUSE**



**NPH CHRISTIAN
BOOKS & GIFTS STORE**

www.nph.net 1250 N 113th Street • Milwaukee WI 53226 800-662-6022

**NPH
EXTRA
PROGRAM**

**f Find us on
Facebook**



FEATURES

- 10 Reaching your dreams is overrated**
Give thanks for your awesome blessings, but don't forget the ordinary ones.
Jared J. Oldenburg
- 12 Transforming youth ministry**
WELS youth workers share the importance of equipping teens to serve.
Alicia A. Neumann
- 14 Confessions of faith**
A man finds comfort in the answers the Bible provides to life's questions.
Rachel Hartman
- 16 Heart to heart: Parent conversations**
How can we help families who struggle with severe food allergies?
- 26 Open your catechism**
The lessons the Ten Commandments teach are timeless.
John A. Braun
- 28 Thousands of miles away**
Christians in Okinawa work to overcome the challenges of being isolated.
D.J. & Betsy Nash and Brian & Kim Page
- 30 Infertility: A test of faith**
Children are wonderful gifts from God, but he does not give everyone such gifts.
Karla M. Jaeger
- 36 The perfect match**
We all have a perfect match—not to save us from a terminal disease but to save us from the disease of sin.
Bruce A. McKenney



REMOVING OBSTACLES *for our* FUTURE PASTORS



Educational debt is a major challenge for many graduates today, which is one reason why WELS established a Ministerial Education Endowment Fund. Since 2007 the fund has distributed \$1.7 million to our ministerial education schools, including financial assistance for our next generation of pastors. This allows them to focus on their studies instead of their finances and, after graduation, to begin their ministry with as little debt as possible.

Consider a cash or planned gift to the WELS Ministerial Education Endowment Fund or to one of its sub-funds for each of our four ministerial education schools.

Learn more at wels.net/endowments.

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Forward in Christ magazine
WELS Communication Services
N16W23377 Stone Ridge Dr
Waukesha WI 53188-1108
Phone: 414-256-3210
E-mail: fic@wels.net
wels.net/forwardinchrist

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Rev. John A. Braun
braunj@nph.wels.net

MANAGING EDITOR

Julie K. Wietzke
julie.wietzke@wels.net

STAFF WRITER

Nicole R. Balza
nicole.balza@wels.net

SEMINARY CONSULTANT

Prof. Bill Tackmier

ART DIRECTOR

Karen Knutson

DESIGNER

Carianne Ciriacks

COPYRIGHT

©2016 by Forward in Christ. Printed in the USA. Forward in Christ grants permission for any original article (not a reprint) to be photocopied for use in a WELS church, school, or organization, provided that copies are distributed free and indicate Forward in Christ as the source. Artwork may not be reproduced except in the context of its article. For other copyright questions, contact Kristine Laufer, 414-615-5706; lauferk@nph.wels.net.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

POSTMASTER

Send address changes to Forward in Christ, c/o Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284.


Forward in Christ (ISSN 1541-8936) is published monthly through Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284. Periodical postage paid at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and additional mailing offices.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Print: USA—\$17; Canada—\$17.85; all other countries—air mail \$62.12. Digital: USA—\$15; Canada—\$15.75; all other countries—\$15. Premium: USA—\$18; Canada—\$18.90; all other countries—air mail \$63.12. Postage included, payable in advance to Northwestern Publishing House. Contact Northwestern Publishing House for multi-year, blanket, and bundle rates. Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284; 800-662-6093. Milwaukee area, 414-615-5785. www.nph.net/periodicals.

ON AUDIO

Mission for the Visually Impaired, 375 Bridgepoint Dr, South St. Paul, MN 55075; 651-291-1536.

 Indicates additional online content

*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

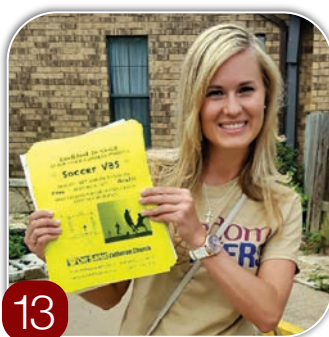
Oftentimes it's easy to forget to thank God for blessings we may consider "ordinary." Our cover story this month looks at the importance of remembering every blessing we receive from God—both the extraordinary and the commonplace (p. 10).

Perhaps one of those blessings we take for granted is the opportunity to worship every Sunday in church. In "Thousands of miles away," two families who are stationed in Okinawa share what it's like to be away from their church families in the States. As the article says, it's an event when the pastor visits every two to three months. Read more about the extraordinary blessing of fellowship on p. 28.

Another example of looking for the extraordinary in the ordinary is examining how the human body works. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, but it's easy to forget this until sickness or disease strikes. On the back page, Pastor Bruce McKenney shares the story of a young boy waiting for a healthy liver, reminding us that God not only can heal our bodies but also heals something much more important—our souls.

Finally, don't miss our devotion this month (p. 7), which focuses on another extraordinary blessing: how God takes the saints home to him in heaven—a blessing that will also one day be ours.

Julie Wietzke



13



15



31

IN EVERY ISSUE

6

Feedback

Readers share their opinions

7

Devotion

Thankful for the harvest

8

From the president's desk

A certain future in an uncertain world

9

Light for our path

Marrying an unbeliever

18

Campus ministry

Rest

19

Bulletin board

Announcements from around the synod

20

News

What's happening in WELS

32

Editorial comment

#ShoutYourSin

33

Bible study

The ripple effect: Epaphras

34

A thought

No longer captive

35

Interactive Bible study

What it means to be truly Lutheran: The distinction between law and gospel



TEEN DATING

We are writing to you concerning “Dancing with God” [Teen talk, Aug.]. God bless you, Katelyn. We are very encouraged by your views on dating and romance. Our 14-year-old son, who is a freshman in high school this year, is under a lot of peer pressure to have a girlfriend and to get a date for homecoming. He has only been in school for two weeks! What can our schools do to take the pressure off our youth? How can we connect other parents and teens across our synod who have similar views?

Concerned parents

VIOLENCE

I am writing about Executive Editor John Braun’s article “Violence” [Aug.]. Considering the world we live in today, this is a most interesting and thought-provoking article. I have reread it at least six times.

I do favor gun control; however, I agree with Rev. Braun: “Often we hear that the absence of guns will stop the violence, but I think that the violence stretches beyond guns.” Yes, violence began with Abel and will continue, even with no guns. Perhaps the mass shootings in Orlando and San Bernardino would not have resulted in as many deaths with more

strict controls on weapons, especially those used for mass murders.

We are a society that appears to enjoy violence! We see it on children’s devices, in video games, on TV, in the movies, and in the news media. Why are we so engrossed in watching and reading about such abhorrent behavior? Again, I agree with Rev. Braun; it is because we all have evil in our hearts.

We also have God in our hearts, and we must listen to God’s voice. We must be motivated to work toward “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” We must also continue with prayer.

I refer to FIC as my “good news” magazine; I can always find something to sing and rejoice about. Thank you also for the articles that cause us to stop and prayerfully think.

*Duane Timm
Fort Lauderdale, Florida*

MENTIONING THE RESURRECTION

I find it lacking when statements are made that refer to our Savior’s work

of earning for us the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life but his resurrection is left out of the statements. An example is in Pastor Pagels’ article where he states, “Eternal life is a gift, earned for us by the sweat, tears, suffering, and death of our Savior” [“A work in progress,” Sept.].

God put the stamp of approval and the promise of eternal life to all believers on Christ’s resurrection from the dead. I believe that this is not emphasized enough when speaking of the promise of eternal life won for us by our loving, crucified, and resurrected Savior.

*Dave Dahlke
Port Orchard, Washington*

Send your letters to **Feedback**, *Forward in Christ*, N16W23377 Stone Ridge Dr, Waukesha WI 53188; fic@wels.net. Letters between 100 and 200 words are preferred. Include full name and address. Letters are edited for clarity, conciseness, and relevance. Not all letters received can be acknowledged or used. Writers’ views are not necessarily those of WELS or *Forward in Christ*.

Through my Bible in 3 years



Read or listen online at wels.net/bible3.

NOVEMBER 2016

- | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. 2 Chronicles 25 | 12. Est. 5 & 6 | 23. SS 2:8–3:5 |
| 2. 2 Ch. 26–28 | 13. Est. 7 & 8 | 24. SS 3:6–5:1 |
| 3. 2 Ch. 29:1–31:1 | 14. Est. 9 & 10 | 25. SS 5:2–6:3 |
| 4. 2 Ch. 31:2–32:33 | 15. Ecclesiastes 1 & 2 | 26. SS 6:4–8:4 |
| 5. 2 Ch. 33 | 16. Ecc. 3:1–4:8 | 27. SS 8:5–14 |
| 6. 2 Ch. 34 & 35 | 17. Ecc. 4:9–6:12 | 28. 2 Peter 1:1–11 |
| 7. 2 Ch. 36 | 18. Ecc. 7 & 8 | 29. 2 Pet. 1:12–21 |
| 8. Esther 1 | 19. Ecc. 9:1–10:7 | 30. 2 Pet. 2 |
| 9. Est. 2:1–18 | 20. Ecc. 10:8–11:8 | |
| 10. Est. 2:19–3:15 | 21. Ecc. 11:9–12:14 | |
| 11. Est. 4 | 22. Song of Songs 1:1–2:7 | |

Thankful for the harvest

Yes, LORD, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts. My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you. Isaiah 26:8,9

Joel C. Seifert

Long before our nation started celebrating Thanksgiving feasts, the Christian church celebrated a very different feast. Two versions of it are common among us. Some churches celebrate the Sunday of Saints Triumphant (around the middle of November); others celebrate the more ancient All Saints' Day (Nov. 1). God makes us his holy, sinless people—his saints—through faith in Jesus. On those festival days, we celebrate the saints who have gone home to their heavenly rest.

Or to say it simply: We're praising God for our loved ones who died.

Maybe that sounds like the last thing we'd look forward to celebrating. But consider the words of an ancient prophet: "Yes, LORD, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts. My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you."

GIVE THANKS FOR THE VICTORY OF THE SAINTS

I was just a boy when I prayed for my Grandpa Seifert not to die. I wanted nothing more than to have a few more years with my father's father.

I think Grandpa wanted more time with his wife, children, and grandchildren too. But there's something that our Christian hearts desire even more. My grandpa grew up being taught that a saint was a holier, better person than everyone else. Later in life, he learned about a God who gave his life to give us all the gift of holiness. A God who gives us such unbelievable love? Grandpa longed to see him face-to-face. He got to.

When Grandpa died, I wasn't able to give thanks for his victory—not right away. But I've learned to. Over the



**We pause and rejoice
in the greater harvest
of souls made ready for
heaven by our Redeemer.**

years, I've mixed together my tears of sadness and tears of joy at more gravesites than I can remember. The reason they're not here with us anymore is because they've finally received everything that their hearts of faith were longing for. I give thanks to God for their victory as I remember them.

THANKFUL FOR OUR LONGING

Of course, it's not only thankfulness. I'm not there with them in heaven yet. I'm not rejoicing in God's presence at their sides. I long to see them. I long to see God. And I give thanks for that longing. That longing reminds us that we have something to look forward to, just as farmers look forward to the harvest.

There's a reason why these festivals fall in November. It's harvest time.

Just as we bring in grain from the field and fruit from the orchards and rejoice in the blessings our Creator has given, we pause and rejoice in the greater harvest of souls made ready for heaven by our Redeemer. We think about them every Thanksgiving as we sing: "Even so, Lord, quickly come to your final harvest-home; gather all your people in, free from sorrow, free from sin" (*Christian Worship* 613:4).

So for now, we long. We still mix together our tears of sadness and our tears of joy. We gather around Thanksgiving feasts, giving thanks to God even though there may be an empty seat at the table. I'll sing harvest songs at church and think about the grandpa I didn't know long enough, the grandma who went home to heaven before I was born, and my babies whom I won't meet until I see them at Jesus' side, joining in the feast of the Lamb that will never end. We believe, we long, and we give thanks.

Come, you thankful people, come.

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



Mark Schwede

Our hope for the future is anchored to the promises God has made and is built on the promises he has kept.

A certain future in an uncertain world

In November, Americans will cast their votes for president and other elected officials. After two years of a presidential campaign that has been anything but normal, people on all ends of the political spectrum will look to the election results as an indication of where our country will head. Regardless of which candidate you support, and regardless of which candidate wins, I think we can safely say that no one can predict what awaits our country once the ballots are counted. One thing is certain: We can't be certain about the future no matter what the election results are.

Or can we? For Christians, there is no uncertainty whatsoever in the future. It's not that Christians can predict coming events or know the details of what will happen in the months and years to come. Those things are all hidden from us in the unsearchable wisdom and knowledge of God. Our certainty about the future rests in something else. Our certainty about the future is rooted in the promises that God has given to us as his people.

The Bible speaks of how we view the future as having *hope*. This is not the kind of hope that wishes things would go well, like hoping for good weather for our family picnic. Nor is it simply a desire that things will get better and that our wishes will come true if we wait long enough. Rather, our hope for the future is solid, unshakable confidence in the Word and the promises of God himself.

Our God is a God who has promised us that in all things he "works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Our God is a God who has assured us that the gates of hell itself will not overcome his church (Matthew 16:18). Our Savior is the

One who promised us that he would never leave us or forsake us, that he will be with us "to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20), and that he knows the very number of the hairs on our heads (Matthew 10:30). These promises come to us from a God who has kept all his promises throughout history. So our hope for the future is anchored to the promises God has made and is built on the promises he has kept.

It's not that our confident hope in God's promises is not challenged or threatened. We need only to look at what is happening in our own country today to see evidence of that. Cultural rot and decay seem to be taking place at an ever-increasing pace. Biblical truths and values are being cast aside and rejected—even by some who claim to be Christians. Racial tensions and divides are on the increase. Violence is becoming a way of life in some communities, and human life itself is no longer valued and protected. In addition to all of that, the government itself seems to be actively contributing to a wide variety of problems.

As the election approaches, I will cast my votes for the candidates who I believe will be best for our nation. I hope that every WELS member does the same. As we do that, regardless of the results of the election, we will look to the future with confidence and trust—not in candidates or political parties or policy positions, but with a full trust that our times and the times of our nation and the world rest in God's very capable and trustworthy hands.

Light for our path

Is marrying an unbeliever wrong? Or is it just foolish?

James F. Pope

Multiple choice questions regularly have more than two possible answers, so I am going to propose a third option and provide rationale for it.

WRONG?

There are some who say that, yes, it is wrong for a Christian to marry a non-Christian. They often cite 2 Corinthians 6:14, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers,” to support their position.

The context of that passage, however, is not one of marriage. In fact, when the Bible does address Christians married to non-Christians, there is no condemnation of such marriages. The apostle Peter encouraged Christian women who were married to unbelieving men to witness to their husbands by their way of life. “Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives” (1 Peter 3:1,2).

FOOLISH?

Foolish is defined as “having or showing a lack of good sense or judgment.” That word could be used to describe a particular marriage between a Christian and an unbeliever. It could also, depending on the circumstances, be used to describe a marriage between a Christian man and a Christian woman. Describing all marriages between a Christian and a non-Christian as “foolish” goes too far.

CHALLENGING!

Challenging is a word I would use to characterize a marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian. Potential problems will arise, including dedicating time to worshiping the Lord in church, determining how much of one’s income to give back to the Lord, and deciding how to raise children—just to list a few. A Christian who thinks of marrying a non-

Christian will need to realize that in that marriage he or she will be spiritually alone. Is he or she equipped spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically to be spiritually alone? Is the Christian entering that marriage with a noble goal of evangelizing the non-Christian spouse, with the hope and prayer that God will change another heart and life? Does the Christian fully realize what pressures can arise to compromise or abandon his or her Christian faith in order to accommodate the wishes of the non-Christian spouse?

To me, one of the greatest challenges for a Christian married to a non-Christian is knowing that unless God intervenes and changes the heart of the non-Christian, husband and wife will be spending eternity in different places. That knowledge has to inject great sadness into the Christian’s heart.

On the other hand, what blessings there can be when a man and a woman are “one” in marriage in the most important way: when they are fellow members of the family of God. Such a marriage is not exempt from problems, but that marriage has a wonderful foundation because it is built on the love of God in Christ.

“He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD” (Proverbs 18:22). How doubly true that is when the wife is a child of God through faith in Jesus. And how wonderful it is when a Christian woman can find a Christian man for a spouse. In those instances, it is possible to echo Joshua’s pledge: “As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15).

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.

Psalms 119:105



Reaching your dreams

IS OVERRATED

Give thanks for your awesome blessings, but don't forget the ordinary ones.

Jared J. Oldenburg

I am pretty ordinary. But that does not mean I wanted to be. As a kid I dreamed of changing the world. That is probably not quite how I would have phrased it back then. More likely, I simply wanted to do something awesome.

I am not alone. I am guessing that if you surveyed young kids older than preschool, there would be two popu-

lar answers for future occupations: professional gamer or professional athlete.

In the 1980s, the answers would have been similar, although it wasn't so much about the money. Back then, professional athlete salaries were substantial, but not nearly what players earn today. I can still remember news of the first \$1 million per year contract—Nolan Ryan, if you are wondering (actually, it still is Nolan Ryan even if you are not wondering).

Thirty years ago, becoming a professional gamer would have been on a number of kid's lists as well. This was the infancy of the future multi-billion

dollar video game business. Arcade games and personal gaming consoles—remember Donkey Kong, Pac-Man and Super Mario Brothers?—took off in the 80s.

However, tucked just behind professional athlete and professional gamer, a whole generation of boys and girls wanted to be astronauts. Maybe it was because of the Cold War or the popularity of *Star Wars* and other science fiction movies or simply because space is amazing. The 1980s marked a resurgence in our space program. Kids were crazy about space. There were space Legos, the Space Camp program, and countless space-genre

movies. What kid, or adult for that matter, didn't want to be in space?

Such a chance came in 1984 when President Ronald Reagan announced the "Teacher in Space Program." Ten thousand ordinary teachers sent their applications to NASA, hoping to do something extraordinary. One teacher was picked: first-grade teacher Christa McAuliffe. If you weren't alive then, it is hard to imagine what a big deal the launch of the Space Shuttle Challenger was.

Christa McAuliffe's launch was set for January of 1986. The country awaited. Countless school children, including me, watched the specially televised launch during school. I can still see it, a classroom of fourth graders with eyes glued to a tube television on one of those tall metal carts that somehow never tipped over. It wasn't just the kids; an estimated 17 percent of Americans tuned in to watch the launch. And within one hour, 85 percent of Americans had heard the result. That result? A failed O-ring caused what is now known as the Challenger disaster; the spacecraft broke apart 73 seconds into its flight. There were investigations, crying kids, and even a special address from the president.

This article is not really about the fate of Christa McAuliffe. All evidence indicates that Christa was a believer in Christ. She even taught Sunday school at her local parish. But, while I know it is heartbreaking, Christa got a chance to reach her dream. She got a chance to do something awesome.

REACHING YOUR DREAMS?

For a long time, I thought not reaching your dream was the worst of all fates. Boys and girls around the country dream of changing the world, but in the end, it's the world that more often than not changes us. We trade in baseball bats for laptops, space suits for khakis, and being awesome for being ordinary. What is worse than failing to reach your dream? Maybe, reaching it.

I recently went to a book signing for one of the most famous astronauts in history. I brought my son, thinking it would be a memory he could cherish forever. Instead, we listened to the ramblings of a brilliant man that I am 90 percent sure was intoxicated.

Bask in the joy of
reaching a dream. But
on the way up and the
way down, recognize
that there is more to
life than the highlights.

This will sound unloving, but I can't say I was totally surprised. How do you face reality when you have already reached your dream? Imagine being an astronaut. Of all the people in America, you are picked to go to space. You get to look down on earth from 238,900 miles away. You land back on earth, and you are an instant legend. There's a parade with you waving at the crowd. You are in your 30s, maybe younger, and you have just accomplished the most awesome thing a kid could imagine. Now what do you do? For many astronauts, the days and years that follow their trips to space are sadly laced with emotional difficulties and coping with drugs or alcohol. I am afraid that this man is not alone.

It is not much different for the professional athlete. The average time in the NFL is 40 months. That's 20-plus years of dreams over in just 3.3 years . . . if you make your dream at all. The post-NFL struggles of athletes are more familiar than the struggles of astronauts. Sadly, I think I have been pretty quick to judge them. I ask myself, "How can they throw away everything?" or "Why can't they just deal with it like the rest of us?" My guess? Every day looks ordinary when you have done something extraordinary.

FINDING JOY EVERY DAY

This is not an encouragement to push your dreaming kids or grandkids into ordinary things. Instead, it is an encouragement to find the extraordinary in the ordinary. It is easy to give thanks to God when you are at the birth of your children, you land a great job, or you nail a presentation. But then what do you do? It's frightening when only the "highlight reel" is worthy of thanks. You may not have gone to space, but you have your own great moments. Give thanks for these. Enjoy the tremendous blessings that God has poured out into your life. Bask in the joy of reaching a dream. But on the way up and the way down, recognize that there is more to life than the highlights.

A Thanksgiving tradition in my house when I was growing up was to choose one thing for which we could give thanks. The list most often included family, friends, faith, and health. That makes sense, but God calls us to "give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:18), not just once a year or for the highlights. We should give thanks to God for fulfilled dreams but also thank him for the ordinary—the joy of a summer breeze, the delight of your child's smile, the loving hand of your spouse, the greeting of your dog, eyes to see, a heart to love, beautiful flowers in your garden, water from a font poured on a head, the miracle of a sacrament, and a man who appeared so ordinary that "he had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2). But that ordinary-looking man brought the extraordinary—forgiveness in his name.

Like you, as a kid I dreamed of doing something awesome. It is true that if your goal in life is awesome, you just might reach it. But along the way, find joy in the ordinary too. With a thankful heart, you reach it every day.

Jared Oldenburg is pastor at Eternal Rock, Castle Rock, Colorado.



TRANSFORMING YOUTH MINISTRY

WELS youth workers share the importance of equipping teens to serve in their local congregations and giving them opportunities to live their faith.

Alicia A. Neumann

Bill Monday, associate pastor at St. Peter, Freedom, Wis., has been seeing a trend throughout his ministry: After youth members return from college, they aren't getting involved in their congregation. "In high school, teens have youth group—but they have never really connected to the adult life of church," he says. "Then when they come back after college, they aren't comfortable connecting with the other adults, whether it's through Bible study or serving on a committee. That's foreign to them; they haven't had that experience."

Monday says this is because the youth and adult experiences are very separate in many congregations. He likens it to the "kids' table" at holiday celebrations. "You go to Grandma's house for the holiday dinner and you see the beauti-

ful table with the cloth napkins, the china, and the turkey. But that's not for the kids. The kids sit at a card table in the corner with plastic silverware and folding chairs."

PREPARING THEM FOR SERVICE

He continues, "So how do we take those two different tables and learn to eat the feast of God's grace together, as soon as possible?"

One solution for bridging that gap and assimilating young adults into the adult life of the congregation is a "confirmation curriculum" that Monday recently developed. "It's a seven-year plan to introduce youth to the adult leaders of the church," he says. "Throughout those years, they begin to get to know the adult members and connect with working commit-

tees, so they can start using their gifts as soon as they're confirmed."

EQUIPPING THEM TO LIVE THEIR FAITH

Another way to equip youth and keep them engaged in the church is to help them learn by doing. "It's all about giving kids opportunities to live their faith and challenging them to have conversations," says Jon Enter, pastor at Hope, West Palm Beach, Fla., and youth coordinator for the South Atlantic District. "We want to get them in the 'simulator of life'—we want to put them in a safe environment and give them unique experiences to express their faith."

Enter says he uses three different kinds of experiences for his youth group: themed lock-ins, Christian camps, and mission trips. "For themed lock-ins, we

take a tough spiritual topic or social issue and turn it into a faith experience," he says. Whether it's taking teens to watch the filming of the local news and then having a Bible study or having teens volunteer at a local food pantry and then discussing how Jesus ministered to those less fortunate, "the Bible study hits home a lot more when they've had that shared experience together," says Enter.

Christian camps also provide opportunities for teens to grow in their faith. "The youth are away from their parents, and they feel very grown up," says Enter. "This leads to amazing opportunities for faith talks that they'd never get in their regular environments. I've really seen a magnificent difference in kids who have gone to camps."

And finally, there are the mission trips. "Their primary focus is serving others," says Enter. "You do so much for other people, but you get exponentially more in return."

Take Marisa Capobianco, Hayley Binder, and Tricia Mahnke, for example. All have participated in mission trips through Kingdom Workers. Although they are from different congregations and have participated in different mission trips in different parts of the United States, they all agree: Their experiences were life-changing.

Capobianco, a member at Mount Zion, Kenosha, Wis., has participated in two different mission trips: one in New Orleans, La., and the other in Peoria, Ariz. "Serving others in the capacity of mission trips is very different than I thought it would be," she says. "I was excited about serving people before each of the trips, but every time I came home, it always struck me that the people that I met on the trips served and taught me more than I could ever give them. Serving others is a wonderful opportunity that we have, not only to help with people's physical needs but also to be God's instruments in leading them toward Jesus—and that is the most powerful gift of all."



Tricia Mahnke teaching soccer to her campers on a mission trip in Arlington, Texas—an experience that made her feel "grateful, happy, and humble."

Binder, a member at Divine Peace, Garland, Tex., has also served on two trips: helping with vacation Bible school in New Orleans, La., and a camp in Sault Sainte Marie, Mich. "Serving others in this way was such a blessing to me!" she says. "They were easily some of the best experiences I have ever had. Answering all the questions that the kids had about Jesus and seeing their faces when I answered made me smile! It was also eye-opening because we got to hear all these great stories from the different members about the amazing things that God is doing in their lives and how they're using these blessings to serve the Lord. It really made me want to dedicate all my time and talents to God."

Mahnke, a member at St. John, Appleton, Wis., says mission trips are a great way not only to serve but also to gain a new perspective and outlook on life. "I helped with a soccer vacation Bible school in Arlington, Texas," she says. "Before I arrived, I anticipated setting up equipment, leading soccer drills, taking down equipment, reading Bible stories, and offering assistance anywhere I could. What I didn't expect was the deep strengthening of my own confidence in Christ. I'm prepared to share my faith with whomever God puts in my path."

Enter says that whether a congregation decides to organize a mission trip across the state or canvass in their local community, the important thing is just to get teens serving. "We want to get kids in 'life experience' mode," he says. "It's like any new job you've ever started. When someone tells you how to do something, you really don't know how to do it yet. But when you actually start doing it yourself, that's when you get good at it. You can put kids in the classroom setting and tell them what faith is, but these experiences help them live it. And when you serve others, you realize that we are all different but at the core we are all the same, and we all need Jesus."

Alicia Neumann is a member at Christ, Zumbrota, Minnesota.

This is the third article in a four-part series on the importance of youth ministry. Next month's article will focus on partnering with parents and marriage-building ministries.

Monday and Enter are both presenters for the new WELS School of Youth and Family called *Transformed: Equipping Youth Leaders*. For more information about this eight-part video series or to order, visit www.nph.net and search for "Transformed: Equipping Youth Leaders."

After being raised in the Baptist church, a man finds comfort in the answers the Bible provides to life's questions.

Rachel Hartman

Wayne Miller is familiar with churches: He spent nearly his entire career as a church musician in Baptist and Methodist congregations.

Today, however, he regularly attends just one: a Lutheran church. "I love being Lutheran," he notes. While he is familiar with other religions, especially the teachings of the Baptist church, he treasures where he is now in life.

GROWING UP

Miller was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, and grew up attending a Baptist church. "I came to know the Lord at nine years old during vacation Bible school," he explains. "I was baptized in that church, and I surrendered to the ministry when I was 16 years old. At the time, I felt a call from the Lord to be involved in the ministry."

When Miller was in junior high, his family moved to Texas. There they attended a small Baptist church in the area. Around that time, Miller became involved in church work. As a young teenager, "I started an adult choir at the congregation," he recalls.

Miller enrolled in Wayland Baptist University for his college years. There he majored in education. "As time progressed, I realized my calling was to be in full-time music," he notes.

After graduating with a bachelor's degree, Miller accepted an offer to teach at a high school in Plainview, Texas. He taught for two years, and during that time, he also attended a Baptist church every Sunday.

As he got ready for church on Sundays, he often listened to a Lutheran show on the radio. The sermons and theology intrigued him. "I got to thinking, 'If I wasn't Baptist, I would be a Lutheran.'"

After teaching for two years, Miller was offered a position as a full-time church musician in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He moved to Albuquerque, and he became involved with music education and youth ministry at the church.

As time went on, Miller moved to different places and held a variety of positions in churches. Most of these were Baptist churches. Miller also got married during that time, but his first wife passed away. Miller married again. The two continued to move from place to place as Miller worked in different churches.

A WHIRL OF CHANGE

"Being raised in the Baptist church, I knew nothing else—that was just the

thing to be," notes Miller. "When I surrendered into the ministry, I started questioning things. I asked those questions all through my adult life, even though I was working at the Baptist church."

One of the questions Miller asked time and again involved Communion. He says, "In some Baptist churches, there is open Communion," a practice in which anyone can receive Communion. "On the other end of the spectrum is closed Communion." In this method, only members of the congregation are able to participate in Communion.

In 2008, Miller received a master's degree in Christian ministry from Wayland Baptist University. "I studied theology as part of the master's program," he explains.

"The last church I had was a Methodist church in Cyprus, Texas," notes Miller. He stayed there for six and half years.

Then he went through a difficult family situation. He got divorced and resigned his position at the church. He decided to head back to Lubbock, Texas, where he had lived for a time and still had family members.

"On the same day I decided to leave and turned in my resignation, I got a phone call that my mother had died," he recalls. "Ten days later I had a heart attack." The attack was mild, and Miller recovered. As a result of his mother's death, he bought her

Confessions OF FAITH



estate and lived there for the next two years.

Her house was directly across the street from a Lutheran church. One day Miller was outside talking to a neighbor. He noticed Jeremy Cares, pastor at that church, walking by with his family. "I said, 'Hey, aren't you in the Lutheran church?'"

Cares invited Miller to an upcoming block party the congregation was going to hold. "He came to the block party and stayed there the whole time," recalls Cares.

Miller came to worship the following Sunday and continued to go every week. "I've been going there ever since," he notes.

SETTLING IN

Cares took Miller through a Christian Foundation course. "We did it one on one at my house," explains Miller. "I fixed breakfast every Monday, and we'd have breakfast and study."

Partially due to Miller's background, these study sessions often led into in-depth discussions on theology and church practices. When the subject of Holy Communion came up, Miller brought up the idea of the real presence of Jesus' body and blood. "I understood the real presence before we talked about being a Lutheran," notes Miller. "That is how I had understood it."



Debby and Wayne Miller are members at Shepherd of the Plains, Lubbock, Texas.

Cares explained the church's stance on close Communion, in which all those who share the same beliefs come to the Lord's Supper together.

Infant Baptism was another discussion. In the Baptist church, Miller had learned that in order to have faith, a person needed to understand what he or she believed. For this reason, Baptism was carried out later in a person's life, when that person could grasp and confess faith in Jesus. The Lutheran church teaches that Baptism is God's act of washing away sin. God's Word and promise give Baptism its power, not a person's faith or confession. Little children also can believe. At one point in the discussion, Cares pointed to the story of John the Baptist leaping in Elizabeth's womb. "[Wayne]

stuck his hands in the air and said 'Hallelujah,'" says Cares. Miller finally could see in Scripture that children can believe.

Miller became a member of the church and continues to study on a weekly basis with Cares. "I appreciate that when we have a biblical or theological question, the first place we turn to is the Bible," says Miller. "We look at the Word—that means more to me than anything."

While attending the Lutheran church, Miller met a member who had been married previously but had been through a divorce as well. The two got to know each other and started dating. Then they got engaged and married.

Miller is now retired, but he enjoys serving on the outreach committee and the fellowship committee at church. "I'm very happy where I am," he notes.

When the congregation in Lubbock reworked its mission statement, Miller helped craft the new one. It now reads, "A neighborhood church who worships, works for, and witnesses Jesus." "To me, if you confess the Lord as your Savior—that's the bottom line," says Miller. "That's the whole basis for Scripture: that you know the Lord as your Savior and you believe in the triune God."

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



heart to heart
parent conversations

Getting together with a friend? You're likely to meet for coffee or a meal. Throwing a birthday party? You're sure to serve cake. Celebrating a church anniversary? Enter the potluck meal. In our culture, food seems to equal happiness and good times—which isn't a bad thing. However, it makes life challenging for families who have food allergies.

So far my own family hasn't struggled with this—but I know others who do. I can't imagine the fear that grips a mother whose child's well-being hangs in the balance during these happy events. That's why I thought it'd be helpful to hear from two of these moms and get their perspectives on what life is like for families that live with severe food allergies.

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 HELP FAMILIES WHO STRUGGLE WITH SEVERE FOOD ALLERGIES?

Our life was going according to plan. My husband and I married a year out of college, purchased our first home, and two years later gave birth to our first child.

Then it happened. God took us on our first major detour together. Our infant son had colic, reflux, eczema, and hernias due to muscle strain during bowel movements. Doctors prescribed various medications and suspected his symptoms could be stemming from possible allergies. Since he was breast-fed exclusively, I altered my diet to try to ease his symptoms, but it was difficult to track what was helping or hindering the situation. Nothing brought complete relief.

Two years passed, and by this time I had given birth to our daughter, who had health issues of her own. She suffered from chronic respiratory infections, ear infections, and intermittent stomach cramping. We took shifts staying up at night, making sure she could breathe while she struggled to sleep.

Then it was my turn for complications. I had been losing weight and had large bruises appearing on my body without sustaining any injuries. At a doctor appointment, I heard the words no one ever wants to hear: "We should run some tests for leukemia." It was with great relief that I received negative results, but I still had no answers.

My 14-month-old feverishly scratched at his face. Huge white blisters exploded across his chubby baby cheeks. His lips swelled. He spit the food out of his mouth. He vomited. After a trip to the ER, we received the diagnosis—my baby had life-threatening peanut and tree nut allergies.

So began a new phase of our life—a constant campaign to keep our son alive. It's a campaign complicated by many people's lack of understanding.

Food allergies are on the rise. We all know someone who has them. So what can we do to help? Overall, the answer is simple—show God's love.

Be kind in your interactions with the parents and children dealing with food allergies. Families dealing with food allergies didn't ask for it, but they have to deal with it on a bite-to-bite basis. Put yourself into their shoes. Go one day thinking about every item you put in your mouth or on your body. That hand soap has almond oil in it. We can't use it. That popcorn is made in a factory with peanuts and tree nuts. We can't enjoy it. That dog across the street eats peanut butter as a treat. We can't pet him. This is the reality of many food allergy families.

With two sick children and my own failing health, I went on a quest for a diagnosis. Many doctor appointments later, along with two trips to the Mayo Clinic, we finally learned we had Celiac Disease—an autoimmune disorder that occurs in genetically predisposed people where the ingestion of gluten leads to damage in the small intestine.

Armed with this knowledge, we began the healing process. We changed our diet to strictly gluten and dairy free. Even this did not bring complete relief, so we started a specific diet developed to heal the lining of the intestines. It was very time consuming and involved fermenting our own foods; making our own broth; and eating all organic, homemade, raw (unprocessed) foods. Eventually, relief came, and we could reassess our life.

Our debt from medical bills and the new, expensive, lifelong diet strained us financially, so we decided to downsize our house to better manage our budget.

The hard part was over. We had survived the detour.

Whenever I am asked how we dealt with all these challenges, it is so inspiring not to have to search for answers once again. The answer is simple. When God's plans altered from ours, he held us close to him as we learned to let go and put all our trust in him. He never put us down as he taught us that hard times can bring blessings too.

Our Christian friends and family supported us, listening with compassionate ears and never tiring of doing good. We had babysitters for doctor appointments, help with tedious food preparations, and a monetary donation to help pay medical bills. We even inherited supportive new neighbors in the process. Accepting help was difficult at first, but through this trial, God taught us how to rely on the help he sends through fellow Christians.

When our children entered school, we again saw God's love in action. Parents called before parties, asking what they could bring that our children could eat. Some sent special non-food projects or toys. Instead of feeling left out, our children often felt special. Upon receiving a toy as a birthday treat, my daughter lamented, "I feel bad for the other kids in my class. They ate their treat, but I get to keep mine forever!"

So while life's detours are unexpected and often unsettling, go with God, because he's looking at the whole road map and leading you in the right direction. I have learned my life was, is, and always will be going according to plan . . . his plan.

Kristin Kutz and her husband, Joel, live in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, with their two children.



Here are a few practical ideas to show your Christian love and concern:

1. Keep kids with allergies from harm. Check and double-check ingredient labels. Even if the label stated nothing last time about a particular allergen, it may this time. Make sure things are washed up as much as possible if your church/school/family consumes the food allergen. That means door handles, tables, toys, kids' faces and hands, etc. And, if these families want to bring their own food, please don't be offended. Let them do so without guilt. Their first priority is the safety of their children. If they are comfortable with you, the ladies' guild, or the school lunch program making the food, save the food labels for them to double-check.
2. Don't leave kids, their siblings, and families out. Institute ways in your church, school, and home to serve safe foods—or to leave food out of the situation altogether. We have chosen to bring non-food toys/trinkets to school to celebrate our kids' birthdays. It has gone over so well that one of the teachers asked all of the families this year to only bring non-food items for birthdays—even though there aren't any food allergy kids in her room.

3. Ask a lot of questions. If a food allergy individual is coming to your home, church, or school, ask, "What is the specific allergy?" Some with egg allergies are fine with cooked eggs, but not raw eggs, so baked goods would be safe. Some with peanut allergies are perfectly fine with the walnuts in the brownies you made. Check with the families as to what is safe to eat and what is not.
4. Know the signs of an allergic reaction and what to do. Have the contact information of the parents and the local emergency line. Learn how to use an EpiPen and do so before emergency personnel get there. Food Allergy Research & Education (FARE) has some great resources for families, schools, and churches at foodallergy.org. Mylan (the EpiPen manufacturer) even gives free EpiPens to schools in case there are children who experience an unknown allergic reaction. Visit epipen4schools.com.

Be a blessing to these families. Little gestures let these kids and their families know you care about them no matter the setting.

Rachel Learman and her husband, Paul, have four children. They live in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.



Rest

When you need rest from this harried world, retreat to your Savior in his Word.

James D. Roecker

How much sleep do you need? The National Sleep Foundation recommends that most adults need between seven to nine hours of sleep per night to function at their best. For younger adults (ages 18-25), the recommended sleep range is also seven to nine hours per night. I wonder if their recommendation matches reality.

The reality is that not everyone gets enough sleep. We live in a culture that chronically overworks. We are a generation of exhausted people. And most of the time we realize this is bad for us. Yet we are always on the go, filling our schedules to the maximum. Our to-do lists seem endless. Rest eludes us.

Rest can also be elusive for college students. Often there is just not enough time for sleep. College schedules get busy rather quickly. The academic year can be rigorous all by itself. In addition, many students participate in intramural sports. Others play on collegiate-level athletic teams. Some are involved in two or more student organizations. Part-time jobs can be thrown into the mix as well. Study time is important too, but so is time for fun and socializing. All of a sudden, something fills every minute of every day. Exhausting! Coffee, really any caffeinated drink, becomes king. The National Sleep Foundation's recommended seven to nine hours of sleep is just that, a recommendation.

Eventually, the question needs to be asked: "Is this current pace sustainable?" Lack of sleep can lead to distress physically, mentally, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. Maybe sleep deprivation causes you to become a totally different person, a person you might not like as much as your normal, rested self.

But there's an app for that.

Jesus, as true human, was not immune to exhaustion or getting tired. He also recognized the benefits of withdrawing to solitary places to pray and recharge before returning to his redemptive mission. After some disciples reported John's beheading to Jesus, we are told this: "When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place" (Matthew 14:13). The crowd followed him. After landing the boat on shore, Jesus had compassion on the crowd, healed the sick that were there, and miraculously fed the large crowd. But then Jesus took time to rest. "After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone" (Matthew 14:23).

Our to-do lists are not going to say: "Be the Savior of the world." Jesus already accomplished our salvation through his work as Savior while he lived on this earth. He lived perfectly in our place, suffered the agony of the world's—including your and my—sins on the cross of Calvary, and rose victoriously from the dead.

So when you need rest from this harried world, retreat to your Savior in his Word. Be refreshed by the living and enduring Word of God. Sleep soundly and securely, knowing that your God will never abandon you and will wake you with the morning light if that is his will. Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). He keeps his promises and will give you spiritual rest in this life and in your eternal life in heaven.

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

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



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Balza, Robert O., to retirement
Bruss, Wesley G., to retirement
Hoff, Lance A., to retirement
Merten, Brent C., to Fount of Life, Colorado Springs, Colo.
Mueller, Aaron T., to St. Paul, Howards Grove, Wis.
Sahlstrom, Gregory L., to Beautiful Savior, West Des Moines, Iowa
Wiedmann, Lynn E., to retirement
Zehms, Roger R., to St. John, Lomira, Wis.

Teachers

Birner, Angela E., to Crown of Life Christian Academy, Fort Myers, Fla.
Bohl, Adam R., to Reformation, San Diego, Calif.
Bohme, Amy L., to Bethel Little Lamb Preschool, Galesville, Wis.
Jenswold, Madeline L., to Christ-St. Peter, Milwaukee, Wis.
Koelpin, Hillery F., to Salem, Milwaukee, Wis.
Kufahl, Theodore W., to Peace, Livonia, Mich.
Lauber, Nathan D., to St. Paul, Mount Calvary, Wis.
Luebke, Kathryn L., to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.
Luehring, Frederick M., to St. Philip, Milwaukee, Wis.
Mandeville, Garret, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.
Miller, Natalie M., to Shepherd, Albuquerque, N.M.
Noack, David W., to St. Paul, Cannon Falls, Minn.
Otto, Jennifer R., to Water of Life Preschool, Las Vegas, Nev.
Pratt, Theresa M., to Beautiful Savior, Cincinnati, Ohio
Russow Sr., Timothy A., to Holy Trinity, New Hope, Minn.
Sauer, Tina M., to St. Paul, Green Bay, Wis.
Schwartz, Nicole L., to Zion, Columbus, Wis.

Sonntag, Timothy P., to St. John, Burlington, Wis.

Thorson, Anne M., to St. Matthew's Preschool and Daycare, Benton Harbor, Mich.

Welke, Dawn M., to Scarville, Scarville, Iowa

Zabel, Susan K., to St. John, Goodhue, Minn.

SYNOD CONVENTION

The 64th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod will be held July 31–Aug. 3, 2017, at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown Wis. The convention delegate fee, paid by the calling body the delegate represents, is \$275. The deadline for submitting memorials to be printed in

the *Book of Reports and Memorials* is Jan. 15, 2017. Memorials submitted after Jan. 15 and approved for convention consideration will be posted on the convention website, wels.net/2017synodconvention, if they are received by June 15, 2017. Further directions can be found at wels.net/2017synodconvention. Send memorials to the President's Office, N16W23377 Stone Ridge Dr, Waukesha WI 53188; carla.martin@wels.net.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The synod Nominating Committee will meet in January 2017 to propose three candidates for each of the following positions to be elected at the 2017 synod convention:

- WELS Board of Appeals: three members (one pastor, one male teacher, one layman)
- Northwestern Publishing House Board of Directors: four members (one parish pastor, one male teacher, two laymen)
- Commission on Evangelism: chairman (pastor, male teacher, or layman)
- Commission on Lutheran Schools: chairman (pastor, male teacher, or layman)
- Board for Ministerial Education: chairman (parish pastor)
- Board for Ministerial Education: three members (one male teacher, two laymen)
- Governing Board of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary: chairman (parish pastor)
- Board for Home Missions: chairman (parish pastor)
- Board for World Missions: one member (layman)

All male called workers, congregations, and their male voting members through their congregations are authorized by the constitution to submit nominations by Nov. 30, 2016. Access position descriptions and the nomination form at wels.net/nomination-alert or submit a nomination by calling the president's office, 414-256-3202. The list of candidates will be posted online by May 15, 2017, at wels.net/nomination-alert. The delegates will elect one candidate for each position at the 2017 synod convention.

NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS AND PASTORS

We thank God for you and for your support of the ministry WELS carries out on behalf of all congregations. We ask that you continue to mail your Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) deposit and its processing coupon to our bank lockbox, which provides effective and efficient deposit processing for the synod. For your CMO payment to be included in reported receipts for the month, it must be received in the synod's bank lockbox on or before the last business day. An exception is made for December offerings. Gifts received by the bank lockbox up to and including Jan. 9, 2017, will be credited as 2016 CMO, if accompanied by a 2016 coupon. Thank you for your assistance.

ANNIVERSARIES

Watertown, Wis.—Trinity (100). Nov. 6. Worship, 9 A.M.; celebration dinner, 11:30 A.M. RSVP requested, 920-261-3511. Website, tinyurl.com/trinity100.

Oakfield, Wis.—Saint Luke (125). Nov. 6. Worship, 10:30 A.M. Website, stlukesoakfield.com.

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

San Antonio, Texas—Our Savior (50). Dec. 3. Outreach music festival, 2-6 P.M. Dec. 4. Celebration worship, 4:30 P.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested, 210-696-2716; llobeck@osl-sa.org. Website, osl-sa.org.

Houston, Texas—Christ the Lord (50). Dec. 25. Rite of rededication to ministry service. 281-778-3003. Website, facebook.com/CtL50thanniversary/.

COMING EVENTS

Celebration of Life—Nov. 5. Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis. Host, Christian Life Resources. Website, clevents.com/celebration-of-life-event.html

"Three Strands" couples retreat—Nov. 5. Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis. Website, threestrandsretreat.org/.

Women's retreat—Nov. 12. David's Star, Jackson, Wis. Website, davidstar.org.

Women's retreat—Nov. 12. St. Mark, Watertown, Wis.; 8:30 A.M.-3:15 P.M. Susan Lueneburg, susanannmusic@gmail.com. Website, welsrc.net/event/womens-retreat-lueneburg/.

WELS national multi-site conference—Nov. 14–16. Grace, Tucson, Ariz. Daron Lindemann, daron@holyword.net. Website, wels.net/events.

Lutheran Chorale of Milwaukee concert—Nov. 27. 2 & 4:30 P.M. Abiding Word, Milwaukee, Wis. Mary Prange, 414-861-7092.

WELS ministerial education school Christmas concerts—

- Dec. 3, 7:30 P.M.; Dec. 4, 4 P.M. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 507-354-8221.
- Dec. 11, 3 and 7 P.M. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. 262-242-8100.
- Dec. 11, 3 P.M.; Dec. 15, 10 A.M. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. 920-261-4352.
- Dec. 16, 7 P.M. Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich. 989-793-1041.

Mid-term graduation—Dec. 15, 10 A.M. Chapel of the Christ, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 507-354-8221.

Christian Leadership Experience—Jan. 6–8, 2017. Orlando, Fla. Registration open. Website, christlead.com.

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

Moments with MISSIONARIES

CALEDONIA, MICHIGAN

Allen Kirschbaum



MICHIGAN

When I heard the announcement last year that I would be assigned to serve as pastor at Spirit of Life, Caledonia, Mich., the last thing I thought was that it would be a mission church. I didn't know where Caledonia, Michigan, was. I didn't know anything about the people there. I assumed that it was a small farm town.

As I sat down with my wife, Karrie, and examined the call packet, we realized that Spirit of Life really was a mission congregation. What an amazing thing to be at the ground floor of something so special! What was even more exciting is that Spirit of Life recently had built its new facility in a perfect location on a busy highway corner.

If I asked you what kind of mission work you would expect from a Midwestern congregation, I suspect that you would think of the church having an awesome vacation Bible school program, Easter for Kids, or Mommy and me program. If you thought that, you would be correct—we have all of those ministries and more.

But the first day I sat down in my office, I received a call from an unlikely place to do mission work. One of the adult care homes in the community reached out to the congregation, seeking a pastor to come visit. They wanted their residents to be active in the community. This opportunity led to an every-week service at the home.



I expected the regular nursing home experience. However, once again, mission work in an unlikely place blessed Spirit of Life with so much more.

The residents and caretakers began to join us for worship every Sunday. Our members love to walk out to the cars and guide them into our sanctuary. Each month we have activities for those residents, such as making decorations for our Christmas trees and a Christmas play.

Their faith is a massive encouragement to a young mission congregation. But as much as the residents encourage us—the story of one of their caretakers has touched our hearts even more.

Each week, a caretaker named Florence Bish comes to our congregation. She is from the Congo and came to the United States ten years ago. She feels welcomed by our congregation, and we are blessed by her. The thing is—Florence can't keep up with how fast I speak in my sermons. Her native language is French. Again, here's mission work in an unlikely place. God led Spirit of Life to reach out to a female refugee from the Congo who speaks French and works at a small-town adult care facility. Now each week, we translate my sermons into French so Florence can understand them better.

In Missions, we work hard to find new ways to share the gospel. But often God gives us new opportunities that we weren't even looking for—mission work in unexpected places.

Allen Kirschbaum serves as a home missionary at Spirit of Life, Caledonia, Michigan.

Learn more about WELS missions at wels.net/missions.

Staying rooted

The unfortunate statistics about millennials and church attendance are no secret. According to a 2014 Religious Landscape Study conducted by the Pew Research Center, about four in ten millennials (adults born between 1981 and 1996) consider religion to be very important in their lives (compared to each other demographic, which is over 50 percent), and only 28 percent attend religious services at least once a week.

Young Christians need to feel a sense of belonging in their congregations. But many are not making church a priority, and those that go to services tend to find themselves without many in their age group. Church events are often targeted toward families or older members of the congregation.

Groups like Rooted Colorado: WELS Young Adults are making an effort to encourage young Lutherans in their faith through fellowship and God's Word.

Rooted was created in 2011 by several young people from neighboring WELS churches in Colorado. While it might be difficult for a single church to bolster its young people activities, the idea was made easier by combining the churches in the greater Front Range

area. "When the young adult group at St. Peter, Fort Collins, heard of a young adult group forming in Zion, Denver, we decided to get together after the area Reformation service and invite young adults from the surrounding congregations to join us as well," says Dan Kleist, a member at St. Peter, Fort Collins. "We've been meeting ever since!"

The first gathering was just food and games, but these Coloradans were looking to enjoy the great outdoors as well. Now Rooted meets once a month, with a different Colorado congregation serving as host each time. They start with a Bible study, followed by a special activity, ranging from disc golf and beach volleyball to bowling and movies. Interspersed between these regular monthly gatherings are big events like concerts, camping trips, or ski weekends.

A special emphasis is placed on studying God's Word. Bible studies are usually conducted by the host congregation's pastor, covering topics like evangelizing, homosexuality, atheism, judgment, and marriage. "[A benefit has been] having 20+ people take serious time out of their lives to meet and then having them voluntarily express afterward that they really appreciated the Bible study," says James Free, a member at St. Peter.

Rooted not only creates a community of young Colorado Christians, but it also welcomes new faces to the area. Many transplants (myself included) knew no one when they first came to Colorado. The welcoming atmosphere of Rooted not only provided new friendly roots in a new state but also strengthened roots in Christ and his Word.

The success of the group continues even after people leave the area. The Colorado group now has a sister group in the Phoenix area. "We've had a couple vicars who have been involved in the past take interest in offering something similar in the area they've been called to serve," says Kleist. Plus, Rooted is not the only group in WELS targeted toward this demographic. Several groups have started in the Midwest as well.

What are the long-term goals for Rooted? Says Amy Maurer, a member at Christ Our Redeemer, Aurora, Colo., "Hopefully we will be able to establish a solid organizational structure so Rooted can be enjoyed throughout WELS for generations to come and grow in their faith."

Claire Natsis

For more information, check out facebook.com/groups/rooted.wels.



Young adults from WELS congregations in Colorado enjoy mountain scenery during a gathering of the Rooted Colorado: WELS Young Adults group. This group meets monthly for a Bible study and activity.



Booknook

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

I'm not sure what I expected when I offered to review Wendy Heyn's book, *Show Me Your Mighty Hand*. I knew it was a compilation of stories by mothers with children who have special needs, but that's about all.

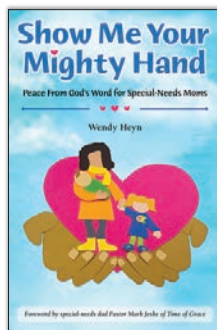
I didn't expect that I wouldn't be able to put it down once I started. And I didn't expect to relate to the mothers either. I don't have a child labeled "special needs," but the questions these moms ask are questions common to all believers in times of struggle. Why was this person, who already has so many problems, the one victimized? Where is God when I don't see him answering my prayers? Why did God allow this? And why did he withhold healing when it's in his power to heal?

Every mother knows the ache of her child being overlooked. Anyone who's

been a parent for any significant time has watched a child suffer. As I read through this book, I often found myself nodding my agreement or cringing as tears ran down my face.

The mothers in these stories hold nothing back. Their honest and raw emotions will meet your honest and raw emotions, and their scars will resonate with your own. Their honesty doesn't leave us without answers, though. Story after story reminds us that while God doesn't always answer our prayers the way we hoped he would, he doesn't abandon us either.

The mothers who wrote these stories are ladies to whom I'd be drawn. They've experienced God's peace despite the circumstances and found that hope of a better future is realized in heavenly gain.



Price: \$14.99

Amber Albee Swenson

Reprinted with permission of holyyhenhouse.com

Encouraging future called workers

To help encourage young people to consider the public ministry, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) created a part-time position in 2015 for a seminary senior—student recruiter.

"Who better to communicate the joys of ministerial education than someone who has recently been through it? Who better to encourage young men to consider pastoral ministry than someone on the verge of becoming a pastor?" says Matthew Rothe, last year's student recruiter.

The student recruiter travels to area grade schools and high schools and meets with the students to discuss serving in the public ministry. "I hope to get them to see themselves as pastors or teachers for the few minutes I am presenting," says Paul Spaude, WLS senior and this year's student recruiter. He also organizes a special grade school chapel service at the

seminary in the fall and a 5K run in the spring to get people on campus.

Besides encouraging students, Spaude also has the opportunity to speak with parents and teachers. "I stress that I can only be a recruiter for a few hours, but they can be recruiters in children's lives for years," he says.

Spaude recognizes from personal experience the importance of that continued encouragement. He says that in his early high school years, being a called worker was the last thing on his list of careers. But his attitude changed. "My parents never pushed me to go to Martin Luther College or the seminary but allowed me to discover that the ministry is a wonderful job by the service opportunities they put in front of me," he says.

Now he has the chance to encourage others: "In some small way, God will use the work I do as seminary student



Paul Spaude, the WLS student recruiter, meets with students at St. Stephen, Beaver Dam, Wis., to encourage the children to consider the public ministry.

recruiter to encourage some for the ministry, and those future ministers will win hearts for Christ."



Do you know a student you want to encourage to consider the ministry? Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary offers promotional items for individual or congregational use. Contact wls@wls.wels.net for these materials. This year's special grade school chapel service is on Dec. 9. Contact Prof. Bill Tackmier, 262-242-8169, for more information. Learn more about the importance of recruiting pastors and teachers in this month's edition of *WELS Connection*.

Redefining home

WELS missionaries are sent around the world and asked to acclimate and integrate themselves into a foreign culture. They learn the language, customs, culture, social practices—they truly become part of the country as they work to share the gospel.

In August, a group of former WELS missionaries, some retired and some returning to the United States for new calls, met for a two-day repatriation retreat.

“The retreat is a recognition that people, once they live overseas for an extended period of time, really change in their worldview,” says Larry Schlomer, Board for World Missions administrator. “When they come back to the United States, they’re actually not coming back to their home country, because they know their home country from 7, 10, 20 years ago. Things will have changed drastically in that time.”

Two speakers came to offer counseling, insight, and expertise to the former missionaries and their wives.

Schlomer says, “The retreat is to get several people who have gone through this experience together so they learn from each other and realize there are some common themes they will be facing.”

These themes include seemingly routine things like trying to decipher what products are a good value at the grocery store, ordering at a fast food restaurant, and navigating retirement benefits.

On top of day-to-day tasks that are now foreign, they have left people, friends, a home, and a ministry that they loved. “You get to where you don’t know how to do things in the States anymore, and you feel like an outsider. Nobody is really like you, and people don’t understand you,” says Andrea Wordell, wife of former missionary Brad Wordell, who spend 17 years in Japan.

For Adam Gawel and his wife, Sherri, the roles are reversing. Adam met Sherri while serving in East Asia. The Gawels and their three children moved to Chicago after Adam accepted a new call. This time, it is Sherri moving to a foreign country.

After serving seven years in East Asia, Adam has noticed how ministry work is different. “Being a foreigner in East Asia, it was easy to talk to people,” he says. “They’re willing to engage with you in conversation, even religious conversation. But here in the U.S., people are a little more hesitant to talk about religion and maybe more suspicious if you approach them.”

When Stephen and Lori Lawrenz left for Africa 30 years ago with two small children and one on the way, they treated the experience like an adventure. Stephen says, “Now I look at America like a foreign country, and I have to figure it out too.” They say they know to put their trust in God as they face each new chapter.

MISSIONARY CHILDREN

Missionaries aren’t the only ones having to deal with change when returning from a foreign field. It affects their children too. Here’s what Anna Sherod, whose father served in Japan for 11 years, has to say:

“I moved to the States from the Japan mission field when I was 13. The first few years were privately difficult as I tried to fake my way past my reality: ignoring 11 years of growing up speaking Japanese, eating rice, commuting on trains, and having my family life defined by the sharing of the gospel. I was successful enough, but I struggled with depression and a sense of drifting through life.

“In 2011, I attended a retreat for adult (former) missionary kids sponsored by the WELS Board for World Missions. The purpose was to offer ongoing support. There I met the very first people outside my immediate family who understood my story. They had all grown up on mission fields too. The lives of their families were also defined by big moves, cross-cultural stories, and sharing God’s love.

“We shared stories of grief and loss, guided by a trained facilitator. When we worshiped together at the end of the retreat, the sermon was preached on the Beatitudes: ‘Blessed are those who mourn.’ I began to understand that the many ‘good-byes’ in my life had



Anna Sherod as a child in Japan.

been used for God’s kingdom and could continue to be used.

“I started embracing my identity—as a Christian, as a missionary kid, and as someone whose formative years were spent in Japan. Since then, I have volunteered in Japan after a tsunami and earthquake struck, navigated living in Germany and Romania, and now work for Kingdom Workers on an Apache reservation. I know that the way I grew up shaped me—to love languages, to embrace listening to other cultures, and to be fearless about proclaiming Christ’s love. I needed to meet people who had something in common with me, to embrace being ‘different’ in my day-to-day life.”

Anna is on a volunteer team putting together the next adult WELS missionary kid conference on April 21–23, 2017, in Minneapolis, Minn. Learn more at facebook.com/WELSMKs or e-mail her at asherod@kingdomworkers.com.

WELS visitor center now open

"We are thrilled to be establishing a visitor center and archives in the lower level of the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry," says Lee Hitter, WELS communications director.

Hitter explains that this new center will "allow us to introduce visitors to our synod's history and to educate our visitors on the important work that the Lord allows WELS to accomplish by his grace."

The visitor center includes a visual timeline of WELS' history as well as informational kiosks on areas of ministry. Materials from the archives will also be on display. Guests will be shown a video highlighting WELS ministry and receive a tour of the

Center for Mission and Ministry.

Mark Schroeder, WELS president, notes, "We chose the name of this building with much thought. It is not the Center OF Mission and Ministry, which would give the impression that this is where the work of the synod is done. It is the Center FOR Mission and Ministry because what is done here supports the work that all of us do together as a synod—in congregations, in schools, and in mission fields. Visitors will be shown what we do together and reminded that each member of the synod is a part of that work."

To schedule your visit to the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, contact cmmtours@wels.net; 414-256-3888.



Update on the WELS archives

Susan Willems, WELS archivist, began her work in July. During her first few months on the job she has worked with six volunteers sorting and organizing materials to be moved from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to the new archives area at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry.

"We are planning on moving 20 to 25 percent of the archival material from the seminary to the Center for Mission and Ministry at the end of October," says Willems. "The rest of the material will be moved in late spring of 2017."

Once all the materials are in place at the Center for Mission and Ministry, Willems will move to the next phase of her work, which will focus on cataloging the materials and promoting the types of materials the archives will collect.

WELS news briefs

Board for Ministerial Education
414-256-3236; bme@wels.net

On Sept. 18, Luther Preparatory School (LPS), Watertown, Wis., dedicated its renovated chapel and refurbished organ. WELS members gave almost \$700,000 as part of LPS' 150th anniversary celebration in 2015, of



which \$350,000 was dedicated to the chapel renovation. The results of this gifts include new flooring, new pews, a new baptistry, and new chancel furnishings. The chancel was enlarged, and the stained-glass windows also were refurbished. The school's 50-year-old organ also needed extensive repairs plus it needed to be refurbished to fit the chapel space better. Funds to complete the organ refurbishment were provided by special gifts given for that purpose. Learn more about LPS at lps.wels.net.

On Sept. 23, Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS), Saginaw, Mich., dedicated a new statue of Martin Luther on its campus, placed at the entrance of the



school. Pictured is the MLS governing board with the new statue. Now all four ministerial education schools have a Martin Luther statue on campus. Donations from MLS alumni, friends, and families funded the project. Learn more about MLS at mlsem.org.

Communication Services

414-256-3210; csc@wels.net

The Milwaukee Bucks are inviting all WELS members and their friends to the inaugural WELS Day with the Bucks at 4 P.M., Saturday, Dec. 3, at the BMO Harris Bradley Center in downtown Milwaukee. The Milwaukee Bucks will be hosting the Brooklyn Nets. Special fan experiences are being planned. The Bucks are offering WELS members up to 45 percent off the price of tickets. All WELS members will be seated together in three seating levels. The deadline to purchase tickets is Nov. 11. Go to wels.net/events for more information.

World Missions

414-256-3234; bwm@wels.net

Twelve men from the Lutheran Church of Cameroon started a five-year worker training program in September—the first active called worker training program in Cameroon since 1999. The men will study for two years in a less intense Bible Institute, followed by three years of seminary training. They



stay in modest dormitories in Kumba from September through mid-May, joined for one week per quarter by their wives. Mesue Israel (back row, second from right), the church's only second-generation pastor, is serving as the mission's first full-time Cameroonian teacher and dean of students, working closely with Dan Kroll, missionary in Cameroon. Currently 10 pastors serve 32 congregations in Cameroon. Learn more about WELS Missions at wels.net/missions.

District news

SOUTH ATLANTIC



More than 60 people attended the South Atlantic District Labor Day Retreat in Spencer, Tenn. Highlights included hiking to waterfalls, a concert by Chris Driesbach, campfire sing-a-longs, a talent show, worship services, and Bible studies.

NORTHERN WISCONSIN



In January, St. Paul, Green Bay, Wis., began to offer worship in Spanish on Saturday nights. This gave members a service to invite attendees of the congregation's English-as-a-second-language classes. A small group began worshipping regularly. On Sept. 11, the Spanish-speaking service moved to Sunday and included three adult confirmations. Two of the confirmands were part of the Gutierrez family (pictured). The Lord's Supper was also celebrated for the first time at that service.

SOUTH ATLANTIC

On Aug. 14, **Christ the King, Palm Coast, Fla.**, held a grand opening event for community members to tour its new 14,000-square-foot childcare center and preschool. Christ the King also operates a grade school.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

AZ-CA—On Sept. 25, **Shepherd, Albuquerque, N.M.**, celebrated its 50th anniversary along with the service anniversaries of Pastor **George Swanson** (40 years) and Principal **Paul Schultz** (40 years).

NW—Emmanuel, rural Montello, Wis., celebrated its 150th anniversary on Sept. 18.

MN—Zion, Winthrop, Minn., celebrated the 25th year in the pastoral ministry of **Paul Tessmer** on Sept. 25.

The district reporters for this month are: **AZ-CA**—Michael Schroeder; **MN**—Jeffrey Bovee; **NW**—Dennis Kleist; **SA**—Jonathan Kuske.

Do we still need the Ten Commandments? Some suggest we don't and remove them from public places, but the lessons they teach are timeless.

John A. Braun

The Ten Commandments are first in the Small Catechism. No mystery shrouds these commandments or where they came from. Deuteronomy 4:13 clearly tells us, “He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets.”

The commandments themselves are recorded in two places: Exodus chapter 20 and Deuteronomy chapter 5. While these passages give us the Ten Commandments, they do not number them. Christian churches today number them differently. Most Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches adopt the way the ancient church numbered them, including two commandments on coveting. Most Reformed churches adopt a different numbering, including the commandment on images as a separate command and then having only one commandment on coveting. But there are ten in both approaches

THE BENEFITS OF THE COMMANDMENTS

For centuries, most have agreed that the commandments provide important benefits. They are the basis for a peaceful life on earth, and they help us live with one another. Whether one is a Christian or not, the commandments teach us about parental and government authority (Fourth Commandment), protecting human life (Fifth Commandment), the importance of marriage (Sixth Commandment), and proper respect for the property (Seventh Commandment) and good name (Eighth Commandment) of our neighbors. The Ninth and Tenth Commandments remind us about our attitude toward what belongs to others. Neighbors, of course, are all people.

The first three commandments direct our attitudes, words, and actions toward God. Luther makes the First Commandment the most important commandment. First, he reminds us that anyone who sets his heart on anything other than the true God creates an idol or false god: “I say that whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in is truly your god” (Large Catechism [LC] I 3). And the benefits? “We are to trust in God alone and look to Him and expect from Him nothing but good, as from one who gives us body, life, food, drink, nourishment, health, protection, peace, and all necessities of both temporal and eternal things. He also preserves us from misfortune. And if any evil befall us, He delivers and rescues us. So it is God alone . . . from whom we receive all good and by whom we are delivered from all evil” (LC I 24).

This First Commandment is of chief importance because if we observe it correctly all the other commandments follow. If we fear and love God, as Luther reminds us, then we will want to obey the other commandments. Remember the meaning of all the commandments you learned? They all begin, “We should fear and love God that we . . .”

So often we think of the commandments as a list of things we should not do. We should not murder, commit adultery, steal, and so forth, but Luther reminds us that God directs us to do positive things. For example, we should love and honor those in authority, help and befriend our neighbors, lead chaste and decent lives, defend our neighbors, and speak well of them.

We don't need to look beyond God's commandments for more to do. If we focus on these commandments, we have more than enough to do. “So apart from the Ten Commandments no work or thing can be good or pleasing to God, no matter how great or precious it is in the world's eyes” (LC I 311). Obedience to the Ten Commandments is still pleasing to God.



Open your
CATECHISM

FOR ALL GENERATIONS

Obedience will continue to be pleasing to God, even for the next generation. Luther was concerned about the future generations too. In the Large Catechism he wrote, “For if we wish to have excellent and able persons both for civil and Church leadership, we must spare no diligence, time, or cost in teaching and educating our children, so that they may serve God and the world” (LC I 172).

To make the point clear, Luther begins each of the chief parts of his catechism with these words: “As the head of the family should teach them in the simplest way to those in his household.” Each Christian household was responsible for teaching obedience and love for others as outlined in the commandments. The head of the household had a special responsibility to teach not only the commandments but also all the other parts of the catechism.

GUIDE, CURB, MIRROR

Luther’s treatment of the law is different from that of many others. Some view the commandments as a standard of behavior (a guide) and nothing more. But if we only think of the commandments as a guide for our lives, we become Pharisees, proud of our obedience while looking down on those who we think are the disobedient. Others think the commandments were given to check the worst sins (a curb) in society in order to protect people from violence, disrespect, disorder, and chaos. The commandments then become important only for others. But the commandments are more than just a guide and a curb.

The list of dos and don’ts is intimidating. As we think of the benefits of obedience and consider all that God tells us to do, we should examine ourselves. The Ten Commandments are God’s law. God means what he says. He threatens punishment for “all who transgress.” When we are honest with ourselves, we will conclude with Luther, “No person can go far enough to keep one of the Ten Commandments as it should

be kept” (LC I 316). If there is any doubt in any heart, God gave two commandments forbidding us to covet. The Ninth and Tenth Commandments are directed against envy and greed, internal attitudes that plague every human. All of us stand before God guilty of disobedience.

So Luther put the Ten Commandments first in his catechism. Other churches do too. The Ten Commandments are first because God intended them to accomplish so much for the benefit of people—believers and unbelievers. But for Luther and Lutherans today, they are first for a more important reason. They reveal our sin (a mirror). They drive out self-righteous, moral contentment. We cannot do as God demands. We fail, and the law shows us we are “lost and condemned [creatures],” unable to save ourselves by any effort because none of our efforts are good enough.

One of the most memorable sermons I heard was based on the Fourth Commandment. My pastor at the time spent a great deal of time explaining all the commandment meant. He convicted me and everyone there that Sunday morning. I was squirming. But he did not leave me in my discomfort and agony. He had prepared me to hear the best news any sinner can ever hear: “Jesus has removed your sin.” The gospel was comforting and refreshing.

We need both the law and the gospel. I needed them that Sunday long ago, and I still need them both every day. I still need the commandments because without them I grow proud of my efforts and don’t see the depth of my need for Jesus. Then I need the gospel because I long for the comfort of forgiveness in Jesus.

Assignment: Read the Ten Commandments and think about how they apply to you.

John Braun, chairman of the Reformation 500 Committee, is the executive editor of Forward in Christ.

This is the second article in a six-part series on Luther’s Small Catechism.



Okinawa? Yes, that's what the orders said. "We were surprised and upset about orders to Okinawa. We had been planning to retire in two years and had just sent our oldest to his freshman year at Luther Prep in Wisconsin so that he would be able to spend his high school days in one place. It was the hardest on him when we told him that we were bringing him with us and he would have to change high schools after all," says Kim Page. "Being in full charge of our children's spiritual growth and our family's worship is a big deal."

D.J. Nash agrees, remembering that he was filled with fear on how his family's spiritual life would change. The challenge of moving to the other side of the world is not just a matter of culture and distance. The familiar patterns to remain in faith and grow in faith change dramatically. Regular worship in a church disappears. "The synod's website informed us there were no established WELS churches or schools in Okinawa," D.J. says. The Nashes had been active in their home congregation and at California Lutheran High School. They were saddened by the thought of no longer being involved in those areas. Two of their sons were not yet confirmed and at the ages when they should receive instruction.

ONWARD!

The Pages did not retire to avoid the transfer, and the Nashes started packing

too. The Nashes took one more step to prepare. They contacted Paul Ziemer, the WELS national civilian chaplain and liaison to the military. He helped them get in touch with those already stationed in Okinawa. Facebook was an important link at the time. They even discovered old friends with children the same ages already there. Their fears were calmed, and excitement for a new chapter in their lives began to build.

But that didn't mean that everything would be as it was. "There are ups and downs in maintaining a strong spiritual life being so isolated from other WELS Christians," says D.J.

The Nashes and the Pages found ways to connect with congregations back home. They gather in the homes of the people in Okinawa to attend services via DVD and the Internet. "We are thankful to all the WELS congregations that record sermons, Bible studies, podcasts, and messages online. Our group is always a click away from a Bible study, sermon, or complete service as our time and space allow," says D.J. Congregations from the States also sent hymnals. Members of the group encourage one another to connect with their home churches and home pastors through Facebook and e-mails. Kim and Betsy teach Sunday school, using materials that were left to them or were brought with them.

But it isn't the same.

"It was a culture shock at first to attend a DVD service: watching a pastor on a video, listening to a one-year-old sermon, and singing a cappella without 'all the fixings' that a developed church provides," D.J. remembers.

But they do see a pastor from time to time. With help from the WELS Military Services Committee and the Lutheran Military Support Group, they fund visits from a pastor once every 90 days or so for a weekend retreat. "Imagine having a 'live' service with a pastor and Communion only every two or three months! When we have a pastor visit, it is an EVENT!" says Kim. "We have meals, multiple Bible studies, and fellowship outings. We appreciate the things we took for granted back in the States. We look forward to meeting together, and it is such a blessing to look at all the opportunities we have experienced here in Okinawa." It was a time to remember the Lord's promise, "Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20).

And confirmation? Charles Gumm, pastor at Community, Honolulu, Hawaii, is one of the pastors who visits. He instructed Alex Nash online

THOUSANDS of miles away

For most Christians, meeting together with fellow Christians is quite easy. But when you are thousands of miles away, you have to overcome a few challenges.

D.J. & Betsy Nash and Brian & Kim Page



and confirmed him on May 22, 2016. That's a confirmation Gumm may never forget. Neither will the others.

BLESSINGS

In spite of all the challenges, they find blessings. Kim explains, "We were forced to step up and take over roles. Brian has helped with preparing Bible studies and videos. I have helped with Sunday school and music, and the kids have all been put to work in some way or another. In fact, these challenges led to one of the biggest blessings: service. Being able to work as a group and serve others has kept our faith active and alive. We have always felt like part of a true congregation here, one that is made up of friends who quickly became family."

They encourage and are encouraged by one another. D.J. notes, "One of the positive experiences is seeing young single adult WELS members connect and grow a strong spiritual life being so isolated from other WELS Christians. We became extended family during our tour."

THE LESSON

The lesson is not to give up meeting together. In Okinawa and in other places around the world, there is joy, strength, and comfort in meeting with fellow Christians. Kim reminds us all about that joy, "Serving others and connecting in person with a small group of like-minded individuals who share the bond of faith is something to be sought and treasured. God has plans for you in every situation in your life. He will use you to bless others and others to bless you."

Those separated and isolated are grateful for the resources congregations provide online: for the DVDs and online services they make available for those separated by so many miles, for the prayers, and for the weekly military devotion e-mails. The group in Okinawa is grateful for the letters of encouragement too.

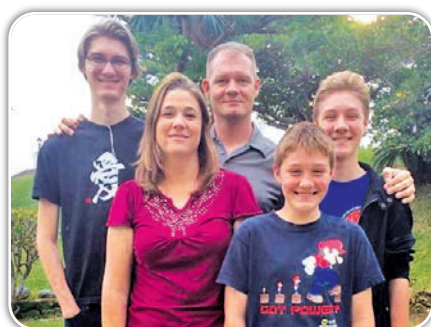
Kim returned to the States on vacation and met some of the women from a



The WELS group in Okinawa at Christmas. Pastor Charles Gumm visited for several days for worship and fellowship opportunities.



The Page family: (left to right) David, Paul, Brian, Kim, and Katelyn.



The Nash family: (back row left to right) Joseph, D.J., Alex; (front row) Betsy, Nathan.

congregation that puts services and Bible studies online. She says, "I hugged them and told them that they are 'one of our churches' while we are stationed overseas. We are blessed. Keep up the good work."

D.J. & Betsy Nash and Brian & Kim Page currently live with their families in Okinawa.

SPIRITUAL SUPPORT

The WELS Military Services Committee provides spiritual services to WELS members and others who serve in the United States Armed Forces, including those in the National Guard and the Reserves. The committee carries out its mission through a ministry-by-mail program, a full-time civilian chaplain in Europe, and a national civilian chaplain and liaison to the military. One hundred twenty-two WELS pastors who live near military installations in the continental U.S. and select nations overseas stand ready to serve as part-time WELS civilian chaplains to military personnel and their families. Learn more at wels.net/military.

Do you or someone you know serve in the Armed Forces? Military personnel can receive devotions and other spiritual help materials in the mail or by e-mail. Complete the online referral form at wels.net/refer.

If you can't make it to church for weekly worship, find a list of online worship sites at welstechwiki.gapps.wels.net/church/online-worship.

INFERTILITY:

A test of faith

Children are wonderful gifts from God, but he does not give everyone such gifts.

Karla M. Jaeger

“Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him” (Psalm 127:3).

“Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. May you live to see your children’s children” (Psalm 128:3,6).

These verses are a delightful picture of what my parents’ family was like. Even after we grew up and left the nest, we returned for vacations and holidays. Oh, what a joy to look up to God-fearing Mom and Dad, to know that they eagerly looked forward to the birth of each of their eight living children and the one buried in the hills of southern India!

Our home was a positive place for us all. “Better a little with the fear of the LORD than great wealth with turmoil” (Proverbs 15:16) is a good description of my recollections of family life. Not that we didn’t squabble, scrap, and sin just like everyone else! Oh my, no! But we always knew we had friends right among our siblings and loving parents who cared about our well-being in body, mind, and soul. We knew we

were loved and forgiven by God. What fun, laughter, adventures, silliness, and serious situations we all shared with one another and still do!

A DIFFICULT REALITY

So, when I finally married at the age of almost 30, I took it for granted that my husband and I would have a large family as soon as the Lord knew it was right. But months and years passed, and the only pregnancies we had were ectopic and resulted in surgeries and the end of each tiny little life. This was devastating, inexplicable, *unacceptable* to me!

I longed to know the amazement of the awareness of a new life—a whole new little person—growing inside me, a part of both me and my husband, physical evidence of our oneness in God’s eyes! Oh, to hold that tiny body, feel its skin, smell its unique fragrance, look into eyes that looked at me and focused on my face, even as its little mouth sought sustenance from my very body!

How could God deny me this blessing? How could he withhold from me this

gift, so often scorned and hated by women who aborted, abandoned, or abused the children God had given them? I wouldn’t harm a child! I would value and love and care for it, making sure it became God’s child through Baptism and instruction in his Word! Month after month I berated God, even as I took myself to task for my sin of discontent: “God has given you so many blessings, Karla! What makes you think you should have this one too?”

My husband, though equally dismayed and saddened by our troubles, was more trusting of God’s will and wisdom, reminding me that if God wanted us to have children, he would give them to us. We contemplated medically assisted pregnancy, but rejected it for reasons of cost and, more important, for the possibility that lives would be created outside of my body that would never be given the chance to grow and thrive. That clearly was something we could not agree to do.

Adoption, of course, was recommended by all, and eventually we began the process—only to move

overseas when my husband accepted a call to a different ministry. That was the end of that!

Then the reality hit me. Eventually, even though I still, month by month, prayed for the nearly impossible, I was forced to accept that what I'd longed for was not to be. Instead of mother and father of a large family, grandparents of even more, it was to be just the two of us.

For many years, the usual talk of pregnancies—sometimes complaints that they came too close together, delivery woes, sleepless nights, the struggle to lose “baby fat,” whether to nurse or not, and on and on and on—was so hard to listen to. And the patronizing response when asked how many children I had and I said none: “Oh, there's still time!” I knew there wasn't—how that galled me! How I struggled!

GOD'S PERFECT PLAN

But ours is a gracious, loving God! Little did I know—little did I *trust*—that he had a plan for our lives, a perfect plan: “Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11). His plan brought us countless unimagined adventures, people from many walks of life and many cultures, untold opportunities to build up believers with his Word and to open the eyes of the spiritually blind with the good news of Jesus. And, yes, it even brought scores of children to us, some right into our home in their time of need.

No, it's not the same to minister to children or to provide a temporary home for some as it is to bring your own offspring into the world, but our experiences were a challenge and a blessing that I would not give back for anything! To think that we were able to share and exemplify, even if imperfectly, the undeserved love of God to young ones who were lost or spiritually at risk and to share Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life—this truly is something I treasure. We do not have the children and grandchildren that most of our family and



friends do, but we do have the joy of knowing that God used and is using us to share his love with children who might not otherwise have learned of it. We now even see the fruits of God's work through us in the lives of children who are now grown and entering into the ministry to pass on the good news to others!

Yes, children are a blessing from the Lord! But he does not promise to give each of us all of his blessings. That would be a bit greedy, wouldn't it? Instead of focusing on what we do not have, we do well to follow Paul's advice from the Holy Spirit: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

(Philippians 4:4). Note that it is “in the Lord” that we find true joy, not in the things of this world, not even in our own children.

Trust the Lord and his plan for your life. Rejoice in his perfect will and live each day to his glory, content in the knowledge that he is in control of your life both in this world and for eternity.

Karla Jaeger is a member at Christ, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Photos: Although they didn't have any biological children, Joel and Karla Jaeger ministered to many children and young adults in St. Lucia.

#ShoutYourSin

Earle D. Treptow

There's only
one solution for
an accusing
conscience,
and it's one we
natural-born
sinners never
could have
imagined.

In the fall of 2015, a few women decided to mount an offensive against the pro-life movement. Turning to social media, they settled on a provocative hashtag still in use a year later: #ShoutYourAbortion. "The era of compulsory silence is ending," says their website. "Abortion is normal. Our stories are ours to tell. This is not a debate."

Shocking, right? Disobeying God's clear command is one thing; shouting it out for all the world to hear is entirely another. To declare it courageous for a woman to end an unwanted child's life is to rebel against the law God has written on human hearts.

Why do they speak so brazenly about their sin? It's not that they want to get into a debate about the propriety of their actions. Nor does their brazenness arise primarily from a desire to help the unenlightened see the need for abortion. The issue is far more personal than that. Stated or not, realized or not, they're trying to evade their consciences. Desperately. Like a child yelling, "I'm not listening! I'm not listening!" they shout: "Abortion is normal. Abortion is necessary. Abortion is courageous." Shouting out their sin solves the vexing problem of conscience. Their consciences can't be heard over the racket, and they can continue on a path away from God's grace.

Pro-abortion advocates aren't the only ones seeking to evade their consciences. Like dogs instinctively shaking off water after a bath, we sinners desperately want to shake off shame and guilt. Some try to convince themselves that since their actions make them happy, and since God wants them to be happy, their consciences must be mistaken.

Others deal with an accusing conscience by burying their sin out of conscience's sight. In shame, they go silent. They refuse to talk to anyone about their sin, not even a Christian friend, because they know that Christian friend would look at

them differently. They try to wipe what they've done from their memory as if, magician-like, they could snap their fingers and make sin and guilt disappear.

We think we're so clever, devising ways to deal with accusing consciences. But they don't actually work. There's only one solution for an accusing conscience, and it's one we natural-born sinners never could have imagined. The Lord invites you to #ShoutYourSin. Not in defiance or rebellion, standing up for your right to sin. He bids you to #ShoutYourSin to him in confession, even though your conscience will suggest that you'd be a fool to do so. Your conscience, however, doesn't know God. Not as he truly is. The apostle John tells us what happens when we confess our sins to the holy God: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

So #ShoutYourSin to him, as counterintuitive as that may be. That's the God-approved way of dealing with an accusing conscience. Get used to the fact that you are a real sinner and then rejoice that you have a real Savior. In Jesus' blood, the Lord takes away your guilt and, in so doing, cleanses your conscience. In peace and joy, you are then free to #ShoutYourSavior for all the world to hear!

Contributing editor Earle Treptow, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Calvary, Thiensville, Wisconsin.

The RIPPLE EFFECT

EPAPHRAS



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

Daniel N. Balge

It is a blessing of sharing the gospel that—by the Holy Spirit's power—the work produces more workers. What other human endeavor can claim that? Sharing the gospel adds miles and years to the ripple effect that Pentecost set in motion.

The apostle Paul's work produced many more workers, among them Epaphras of Colossae. We don't know much about him. The Bible mentions him only three times. But from those few words, we get the impression he was a man of action.

A SLAVE FOR THE GOSPEL

Under God and as Paul's representative and colleague, Epaphras founded the Christian congregation in his hometown (Colossians 1:7). We don't know how this Gentile first heard the gospel, but reasonable speculation puts him in Ephesus (more than 100 miles east of Colossae) during the time of Paul's residence in that major trade center. Paul spent the better part of three years there. At the very least, Epaphras and his work in Colossae underscore what

Luke meant when he wrote that during Paul's time in Ephesus "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia [the western third of present-day Turkey] heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10). Paul couldn't get everywhere, but Ephesus was well connected by land and sea to just about everywhere.

Epaphras toiled in a tri-city area—in Colossae of course, but also in Laodicea, 10 miles to the west, and Hierapolis, 13 miles to the northwest (Colossians 4:13). The Greek word summing up his ministry there implies hard work and mighty labor. Epaphras prayed the same way. Paul reported to Epaphras' Colossian congregation that "he is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured" (4:12). For Epaphras, these prayers for his congregations meant exertion and strain. It's no surprise then that when Paul calls Epaphras a "fellow servant" (1:7) and a "servant of Christ Jesus" (4:12), the words are strong and emphatic. The Greek means "slave." Epaphras worked like a slave for the gospel, like Paul himself (Romans 1:1).

AN ENCOURAGER IN FAITH

Epaphras spared no effort for his triparish. He traveled some 1,200 miles—a bit less if he made part of his journey by ship—from Colossae to Rome to

visit Paul. The apostle was under house arrest, and Epaphras' visit encouraged him (Colossians 1:8). But that was not the main reason Epaphras had come. He was there for advice and instruction on how to deal with false teachings that threatened his congregations.

Paul's letter to the Colossians addresses those problems, though without labeling the heresies. It's from Paul's answers that we deduce the questions disturbing the faith of these fairly new Christians. The issues were mostly familiar, local recipes of doctrinal poison that had hurt other young congregations: confusion of law and gospel, misunderstanding about who Jesus is, and claims of a better knowledge than the foolishness of the pure good news. Paul also needed to condemn the worship of angels (2:18).

Paul's letter went back to Colossae ahead of Epaphras. Epaphras sent greetings with it (4:12) and lingered for a time as Paul's "fellow prisoner" (Philemon 23). Apparently there was work for him in Rome too.

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

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



God has sent his
Spirit to bring us
understanding beyond
anything we will
know on our own.

No longer captive

Our human minds are wonderful and fascinating organs. Creative thought lives in even the most humble of humans. Great works of art, medical breakthroughs, and computer technologies cause us to marvel. They are not the products of common, ordinary humans. But I can marvel at the way my neighbor, after careful thought and planning, landscapes his yard or the way a family manages its finances to squeeze out enough for vacation or education.

As fascinating as it is, there is a ceiling to all human effort and creativity. We are captive to the here and now. Well, it might be better to say that we are captive to the horizontal. That doesn't mean we can't explore the heavens above and the universe that surrounds us. It only means that we are bound by what we see, know, and understand.

We can add to our knowledge as we explore, imagine, and experiment, and we can come to new understandings and thinking. But like those who explored centuries ago, we go off in a ship or vessel designed and made by a human mind. We still venture out into the unknown as horizontally limited humans. We want to poke holes in the ceiling to know God, heaven, and what is beyond human horizontal thinking, but we are limited by the way we think.

I know some will object to my suggestion that we are captives of our own human thoughts, and I can understand the objection. I'm not saying we cannot expand our horizons. We absolutely should explore, experiment, and imagine, but it will only be an expansion of our horizons, not a vertical breakthrough. By our own efforts, no matter how creative and interesting, we cannot know God, who exists beyond human horizons.

God himself must reveal what we cannot possibly know. And he's given us a peek, even through our horizontal

world. Paul says it this way, "Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (Romans 1:20).

Yet when we speculate about God, even as we see his majesty in the sunset, the oceans, or the mountains, we cannot conceive anything beyond what we have seen, heard, or observed. We are captives in the ship we sail—horizontally limited. We watch the sky but are unable to penetrate the heavens and know fully about the God who made us.

God's wisdom concerning the horizontally limited is a mystery—but it's not unknowable. Paul reminds us, "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived—the things God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:9,10).

While we cannot penetrate the ceiling from below, God himself has penetrated the ceiling from above by the revelation of Jesus Christ. God has sent his Spirit to bring us understanding beyond anything we will know on our own. Paul again reminds us that the Spirit is from God, "so that we may understand what God has freely given us" (v. 12). How did God do that? We are not taught by human wisdom, "but in words taught by the Spirit" (v. 13). We understand God's gifts of love, joy, peace, grace, forgiveness, and eternity only in Christ because God has opened our minds by his revelation—the Scriptures—to see and understand what human thinking can never imagine.

Let's not forget to take his Word along with us on our journey. We are no longer vertically challenged.

The distinction between law and gospel

Joel D. Otto

A question asked in almost every Lutheran catechism class is: “What are the two main teachings of the Bible?” Sometimes a student might be confused and say, “The Old and New Testaments.”

The correct answer is the law and the gospel. One of the unique emphases of being truly Lutheran is the understanding of the distinctive content and functions of these two main teachings of the Bible.

In a sermon, Martin Luther noted the different content of the law and the gospel. “Everything that proclaims something about our sin and God’s wrath is the proclamation of the law, however and whenever it may take place. On the other hand, the gospel is the kind of proclamation that points to and bestows nothing else than grace and forgiveness in Christ” (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration V:12). These contrasting messages are evident throughout the Bible. For example, numerous psalms preach law and gospel in the same psalm (Psalm 32, 51). Paul’s letters often place law and gospel side by side (see, for example, Romans 3:23,24).

God has a grand purpose for these distinctive teachings of his Word. In the same sermon, Luther preached, “[The apostles] begin by proclaiming the law to those who still do not recognize their sins and feel no terror in the face of God’s wrath. . . . The gospel and Christ are established and given not to terrify or to condemn, but rather to comfort and console those who have felt its terror and are fainthearted” (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration V:12). The law and gospel have distinctive functions. God uses the law to bring people to see and believe the depth of their sins and helplessness. God uses the gospel to bring people to see and believe the heights of his love and power to forgive.

Law and gospel can be easily confused. Our natural sinful condition wants to turn the law into something that saves us. “Tell me the things I need to do so God will love me and give me heaven.” Or it makes the unconditional gospel conditional. “Jesus died and rose again. If you only turn your life over to Jesus, then you’ll be one of his blessed children.” Being truly Lutheran means that we do not give the impression that God’s love can be earned by our obedience to the law. Being truly Lutheran means that we do not undercut the good news of God’s love by adding conditions. Instead, we let the law thunder its commands and drive people to see their need for God’s mercy. It also means that we let the gospel be the good news of Jesus to comfort sinners with the love and forgiveness of our gracious God.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. List at least five verbs that describe what the law does. List at least five verbs that describe what the gospel does.
2. Compare Jesus’ use of law and gospel in helping the paralyzed man in Luke 5:17-26 with how Jesus addressed the expert of the law in Luke 10:25-37.
3. How do these incidents and the lists of verbs help us understand the distinctive messages of law and gospel and their functions in the lives of people?

Contributing editor Joel Otto, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Salem, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.



This is the second article in a 14-part series on key doctrinal emphases that Luther brought back to light through his Reformation. Find this article and answers online after Nov. 5 at wels.net/forwardinchrist.

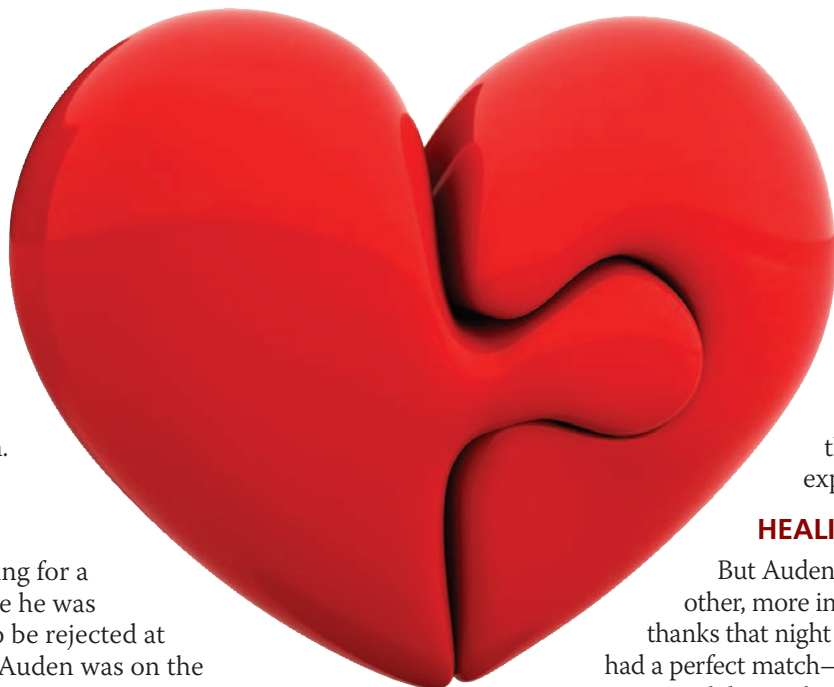


WHAT IT MEANS TO BE TRULY LUTHERAN

The perfect match

We all have a perfect match—not to save us from a terminal disease
but to save us from the disease of sin and the dust of death.

Bruce A. McKenney



There was no lack of thanksgiving that November evening when I walked into Auden's hospital room.

HEALING OF THE BODY

Auden had been waiting for a healthy liver ever since he was born. One liver had to be rejected at the last minute while Auden was on the operating table waiting for it. But another had been found. It was his mother's.

After undergoing many tests and even corrective surgery, the day had come for the transplant operation. Part of Mom's liver would be given to her son, Auden. On the night before the surgery, just days before Thanksgiving, the Lord brought an unexpected blessing. Another liver had been found right in the same hospital. It was a perfect match! Mom didn't need to put her life at risk to save her son. The Lord had answered prayers for a healing that was no less of a miracle than the healing of those ten lepers in the Thanksgiving Day gospel lesson:

As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well" (Luke 17:12-19).

There were tears of joy and relief. There were hugs and kisses. There were prayers of thanksgiving for this unexpected gift!

HEALING OF THE SOUL

But Auden and his parents had other, more important reasons to give thanks that night before surgery. They all had a perfect match—not to save them from some terminal disease but to save them from the disease of sin and the dust of death. In order to be the perfect match, this person not only had to share the same human flesh and blood, but he also had to be divine so that he could offer up the perfect life and perfect sacrifice sinners needed. There is such a perfect match: Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Man! While he walked this earth, he not only had the power to save people from deadly diseases, but he also had the power to save sinners for heaven! He did that by donating his entire body and soul on the cross.

Auden knows and believes in Jesus as his Savior. He confessed that he would go to heaven if a new liver couldn't be found. His faith is evidence that God had already performed a more miraculous organ transplant in him long before his liver transplant. At Auden's baptism, God the Holy Spirit took away Auden's heart of stone and gave him a heart of flesh by which he knows who his Perfect Match really is (Ezekiel 36:26,27). By that faith, Jesus has made him well for eternity!

Auden still has his ups and downs since the surgery, but he now is well enough to come to school this fall and to church this Thanksgiving to give thanks to God for his healing of body and soul. We all have reason to do the same!

Bruce McKenney is pastor at St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wisconsin.