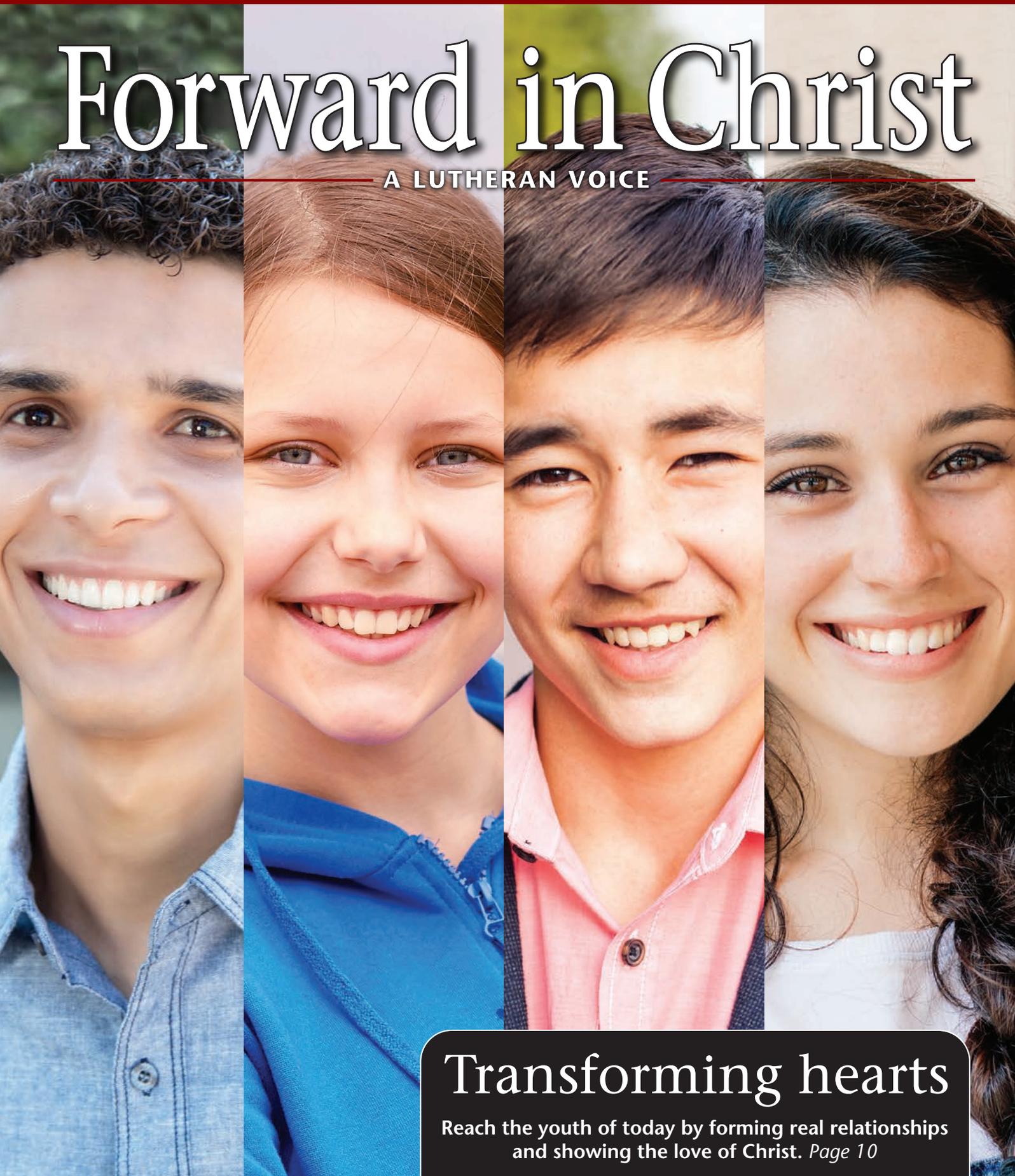


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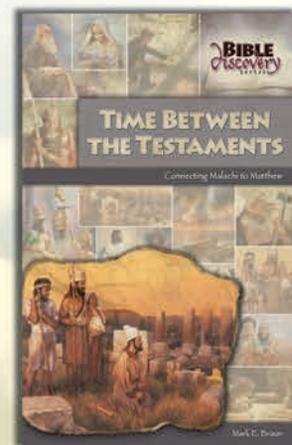
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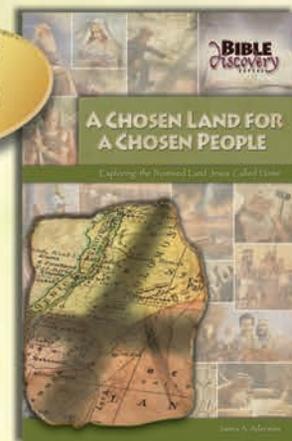
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May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. — 1 KINGS 8:57

WHAT'S INSIDE

Several themes run through this issue—mission outreach, youth ministry, and the use of our time and money resources. But when you think about it, they all fit together. God has called each one of us to spread the gospel to all nations—whether we are talking to our neighbors down the street or giving an extra gift to help a missionary thousands of miles away. Taking time to nurture and involve young people in our church body is another way we build the kingdom of God. Supporting ministries that publish and distribute the Word—whether printed or online—provides countless opportunities to reach people we've never even met.

So enjoy reading the issue this month and spend some time thinking about what you can do to spread the Word and show Christ's love.

One other note: Don't be surprised if you receive something a little extra in your mailbox in September. Forward in Christ has produced a special bonus issue that shows some new ways WELS Missions is working to reach every neighbor and every nation with the good news. We hope that you enjoy it and it spurs you on even more to consider how you can help tell others about Jesus.

Julie Wietzke



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BEING SURE OF THE RIGHT RELIGION

Regarding “Light for our path” [Aug.]. Thanks to Prof. Pope for his life-giving answer in God’s Word! It’s important to keep in mind that everyone’s a theologian. Those who want to lump all major religions into the same batch of dough do not understand God’s law and God’s gospel. Those people have become false teachers and have now entered into a new religion that won’t include you if you believe in one reality and one truth. So it’s actually more condescending to say that all religions are equal than it is to say that one faith alone is saving and true. We really need to get used to that kind of answer, since we love God’s warnings and encouragements of true unity and fellowship so dearly.

Many thanks for your magazine! Our prospects and members like to share positive things about their *Forward in Christ*.

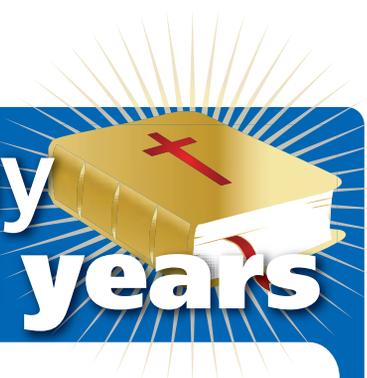
Seth Bode
Dardenne Prairie, Missouri

MULTI-MEDIA EFFORT

God certainly works through his people, and the staff at *Forward in Christ* is shining a powerful, multi-media light to his people through their work and efforts. I generally read the magazine cover to cover and am so thankful for your well-planned layout, timely articles, and sensitivity to God’s people.

Sharing the truth in love using so many formats and people is so meaningful! I just watched five videos on topics from bullying to lying [*Heart to heart: Parent conversations*, forwardinchrist.net/webcasts/]. Nicole Balza moderates in such a way that the speakers share such timely tips with compassion. Ann Jahns and Sarah Reik are such efficient, yet credible speakers who exude Christ’s love. To have mentors like these (and many others who go unnamed in this letter) is such a blessing from our Lord. They are humble but wise. . . .

Through my Bible in 3 years



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SEPTEMBER 2016

- | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. James 1:19-27 | 11. 1 Ch. 15:1-16:6 | 21. Psalms 107:1-32 |
| 2. Jas. 2:1-13 | 12. 1 Ch. 16:7-43 | 22. Ps. 107:33-43 |
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| 4. Jas. 3 | 14. 1 Ch. 18-20 | 24. Ps. 109 |
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| 6. Jas. 5 | 16. 1 Ch. 22:2-19 | 26. Ps. 111 & 112 |
| 7. 1 Chronicles 1-9 | 17. 1 Ch. 23 & 24 | 27. Ps. 113 & 114 |
| 8. 1 Ch. 10 & 11 | 18. 1 Ch. 25-27 | 28. Ps. 115 |
| 9. 1 Ch. 12 | 19. 1 Ch. 28 | 29. Ps. 116 |
| 10. 1 Ch. 13 & 14 | 20. 1 Ch. 29 | 30. Ps. 117 & 118 |

From the editorials to the Bible studies, this communication is wonderful and inspiring. I don’t take enough time to write these kinds of letters. Don’t assume that your work in Christ’s name goes unnoticed. Thank you for being clay pots that share God’s Word!

Cathy Wilk
Richfield, Wisconsin

RECYCLING FOR OUTREACH

Our church, St. John’s, Wood Lake, Minn., sends a copy of *Forward in Christ* to every household that belongs to our church, so we have become every-morning readers. After breakfast, my husband and I get out the Bible, our *Meditations* (which our church puts out a stack of large print and a stack of regular print), and *Forward in Christ*. So, I read the large-print *Meditations*, and he reads a page from *Forward in Christ* and several pages of the Bible.

After the month is over, we take our *Forward in Christ*, our *Meditations*, and other magazines we get and drop them off at our nursing home in Marshall, Minn. I am totally blind in one eye and partially blind in the other, so I don’t drive the car anymore, so it’s a

team effort to get them to the nursing home. But they always tell me how much all the reading materials are appreciated. They lay out all we bring, and they say it all disperses very quickly.

So we feel that instead of putting all the reading materials in the recycling bin, we are giving some cheer and activity to others in the nursing home, and hopefully, religion to some who never knew their Lord and Savior.

Lila Jeseritz
Marshall, Minnesota

Thanks, Lila, for sharing your story and for sharing your faith by donating your religious publications to the nursing home!—ed.

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

A work in progress

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Colossians 3:23,24

Steven J. Pagels

I have never met the man, but even though I don't know his name I feel like we have a connection. I pass his house every day on my short commute to and from church, and when I drive by he usually is working outside. Trimming trees. Pulling weeds. Moving dirt. Mowing grass. His yard is the kind of yard you would expect to see in a landscaping magazine.

As much as I enjoy looking at his perfectly pruned trees and manicured lawn, I have to confess that sometimes I experience a very different emotion when I see my friend at work: guilt. I feel guilty because all the work he does reminds me of the many chores I have left undone. On more than one occasion he has given me the nudge I needed to get out into my own yard.

THE REASONS PEOPLE WORK

This real-life example poses a larger question. Why do people work? Why are some willing to work long hours and late nights and maybe even weekends? What motivates them to do what they do? Some people genuinely love their jobs, and the time just seems to fly by. For many others, however, the clock ticks more slowly. Other factors compel them to stay on the job: I need to provide for my family, I want to advance my career, I have to have enough money to support my lifestyle, or I would like to retire early.

How about you? Why do you go to work? Why do you do chores around the house? Why do you volunteer at church?

You could come up with your own list of reasons, but as Christians, we have one reason. Followers of Christ



are always serving Christ, no matter what they do.

THE MASTER CHRISTIANS SERVE

Paul wanted the Christian slaves in Colosse to remember that. He warned them not to work only when other people were watching or only to get in their masters' good graces. We are not slaves, yet we need the reminder that we serve Christ always.

God's grace inspires
us to pour our hearts
and souls into
everything we do.

If our primary goal in life is to make ourselves successful or to make our lives comfortable or to make other people see us as respectable, then all of our labor will be in vain. Even worse, if we think that if we work

hard enough God will reward us, then we will lose out on our eternal reward. That reward is an inheritance, not a wage for services rendered. We can't earn it. We don't deserve it. Eternal life is a gift, earned for us by the sweat, tears, suffering, and death of our Savior. Jesus' work on earth destroyed the devil's work. His work, not ours, brings us forgiveness, life, and salvation. His effort alone brings salvation.

And even though our motives may not always be pure, even though on this side of heaven we will remain works in progress, God's grace inspires us to pour our hearts and souls into everything we do. We will serve with joy, with gratitude, and with purpose because at all times and in every task we are serving the Lord.

Contributing editor Steven Pagels is pastor at St. Matthew's, Oconomowoc, Wisconsin.



Mark Schwede

A Christian
husband and wife
know that love
is much more
than a feeling
or an emotion.

It all depends on the definition

The last time I had the privilege of presiding over a wedding service, I began the sermon with a question that caught the young couple by surprise. I said, “I have a question for you. Do you love each other?”

The bride and groom were too polite to say it out loud, but their raised eyebrows showed what they probably were thinking: *Well, we are here to get married. We are promising ourselves to each other for the rest of our lives. Of course we love each other!*

Then I asked a question that was a little more difficult, whose answer was a little less obvious: “What do you mean when you say you love each other?”

Across this country today, thousands of other newlyweds will answer that question in different ways. “I know I love him because he makes me feel happy when I’m with him.” “I love her because she makes me laugh and smile.” “I know I love him because I feel attracted to him, emotionally, romantically, even physically.” “I know I love her because she is my soul mate; we think alike and enjoy common interests.”

All those definitions describe love in terms of feelings and emotions. But we know what happens to feelings and emotions—they always change. One day you’re happy; the next day you’re sad. One day you feel energetic; the next day you feel like you don’t want to get up in the morning. If love is just an emotion, then we shouldn’t be surprised that so many people wake up one day and realize that their love for their spouse has changed or disappeared. Like all emotions, that kind of love can go away, and there’s not much you can do to stop it.

A Christian husband and wife know that love is much more than a feeling

or an emotion. They know that God created marriage as a special gift and blessing to bring joy and happiness to a man and a woman. And as the one who created marriage, he’s also the one who defines what married love really should be. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul says, “Husbands, love your wives, just like Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (5:25). Jesus’ love for us was a commitment to give himself completely to us and for us. His love for us meant that he made our happiness and welfare the most important thing to him; he was willing to go all the way to the cross for us.

In other words, when a Christian husband says he loves his wife, he means, “For the rest of my life everything I do will be done for your happiness, your welfare, and your good.” A Christian wife who has Christlike love for her husband will see her marriage as a daily opportunity to give happiness, joy, and fulfillment to her husband. Their love for each other will be much more than feelings and emotions; it will be a readiness to do and to act for each other.

The understanding of the love God has designed for marriage is not just for newlyweds. It’s the kind of love that needs to be the foundation for every marriage. That kind of love, modeled after Christ’s love for his church, makes for strong and happy marriages, homes, and families that look to be guided and strengthened by the Word of the Savior who established them.

Light for our path

What are we to learn from the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke chapter 16?

James F. Pope

You are not the first to ask that question. Many people consider that parable to be one of the most challenging to understand. The key is grasping Jesus' instruction at the end of the parable (v. 9).

VIEWING MONEY SELFISHLY

In the parable of the shrewd manager, a man mismanaged his employer's possessions. When the employer learned what happened, he dismissed the servant. But fearing for his future, the servant embarked on a new level of mismanagement: He contacted people who were indebted to his employer and singlehandedly reduced their bills. It was not concern for other people's financial situation that prompted his actions. No, he cooked his boss' books because he wanted to create a network of potential friends who might help him out in the future. The man wrongly used someone else's possessions for his own earthly benefit.

One of the biggest surprises in the parable is the response of the employer. Rather than expressing outrage, he commended the dishonest manager! Even though he was a victim of someone else's incompetent and fraudulent actions, he acknowledged how shrewdly his former manager had operated. It takes a person with a skewed worldview to appreciate getting ripped off like that.

VIEWING MONEY UNSELFISHLY

In contrast to the example of the dishonest manager, Jesus instructed his disciples: "I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings" (Luke 16:9). Rather than looking upon money with a "What's in it for me right now?" attitude, Jesus leads us to view money with a "What's in it for them in the future?" attitude. Jesus teaches us to use the possessions he has entrusted to us for other people—to gain eternal friends.

How can we do that? We can gain eternal friends by sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with others and by supporting the spread of the gospel with our offerings so that more might come to faith and become fellow members of God's family. One of our hymns offers this encouragement. "May our zeal to help the heathen be increased from day to day, as we plead in true compassion and for their conversion pray. For the many faithful workers, for the gospel they proclaim, let us all be cheerful givers to the glory of your name" (*Christian Worship* 577:3).

Imagine someone in heaven walking up to you and thanking you for supporting the proclamation of the gospel that changed his or her life and eternity! Imagine that scene being multiplied countless times as your financial support of mission work brings the gospel into the lives of people throughout the world. Imagine all those "forever friends."

Jesus' parable of the shrewd manager holds contrasting attitudes before our eyes. One attitude sees money—no matter whose it is—as something to be used selfishly and only for this life. Another attitude sees money as a temporal blessing from God that is best used for the eternal welfare of other people. One attitude might be shrewd in the eyes of some people. The other is pleasing in the eyes of God. In this and every area of life, may God work in us what is pleasing to him (Hebrews 13:21).

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

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

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

Psalm 119:105



TRANSFORMING YOUTH MINISTRY

WELS youth ministers are recognizing the importance of Christian mentoring and working to create meaningful relationships with young adults.

Alicia A. Neumann

It all started two years ago at a conference at St. Croix Lutheran High School, West St. Paul, Minn. Approximately 40 WELS youth workers from around the country met to talk about their ministries. “We spent a weekend talking about what’s going on with our youth,” says Kory Henkel, member at Rock of Ages, Madison, Tenn., and one of the presenters for the new WELS School of Youth and Family (see p. 24). “We found out that regardless of where we are in the country, we are all having the same issues and the same challenges with youth ministry.”

REACHING THE YOUTH

Those challenges include youth members becoming disconnected with the church after they are confirmed, particularly in high school and college. “We’re

living in a post-truth society, and we see how all of this is impacting youth ministry as well,” says Henkel. “Faith priorities are made by the time you’re 18. If you’re not actively involved in a church, the chances of you becoming involved are very slim. It’s a very important, formative time. As a church, we have a great opportunity to reach people who are forming their opinions and their entire lives.”

According to Henkel, one of the biggest things kids are looking for is affinity. “With social media, we’ve never been more connected, but they’re not real relationships,” he says. “Relationships with their friends, classmates, and peers are oftentimes fragmented and shallow. So we have the amazing opportunity to show the youth of our congregations what real, genuine relationships look

like by showing them the love of their Savior Jesus—not just in Bible study, but in everyday life.”

He says the best youth ministry happens when adults grow in faith and live authentic lives with teenagers. “Do normal things; live your life with kids and show them Christ through that,” he says. “Mentor-based relationships are important, and they are missing in the lives of kids today. By equipping families, lay leaders, and pastors to mentor kids through their formative years, we can transform that head knowledge into heart knowledge.”

PRACTICING CHRISTIAN MENTORING

Tad Schubring, director of youth education at St. Mark, De Pere, Wis., is doing just that. Schubring has been

involved with Christian mentoring for the past five years. During that time, he has started a program to provide training and encouragement for other adults who want to start mentoring.

When he first started looking at Christian mentoring, Schubring went to a youth ministry conference that spent a lot of time explaining what it meant to be a mentor. "In Mark 3:14, it says that Jesus appointed 12 that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach," says Schubring. "Jesus could have had five thousand people with him all of the time, but he chose not to. He wanted to go deeper with a few. So Christian mentoring is modeled after that—spending quality time with youth and having an intentional relationship with them."

Schubring says that motivated him to get involved with mentoring, but he didn't know where to start. "I remember sitting down when I first heard about this, thinking, *How am I going to do this? Where do I start? I don't feel qualified. I don't have enough time in the day. How is this going to work?*" he says. "But thankfully the Holy Spirit doesn't give up."

He said a book called *The Be-With Factor* helped clarify some things for him. "I looked at all of the people God had already put in my life; I needed to be intentional with those people and share the gospel with my actions," says Schubring. "It's very clear in James and throughout the Bible that that's what you're supposed to do and that is how we love God—by obeying his commands, by being intentional and being held accountable to those people God has put in your life."

He talked to families in his congregation about the ministry and began looking for young people who were interested in being mentored. One of them was Macario Sierra. "I was up for it," says Sierra. "I thought that it would be good for me to be mentored by someone like Tad because I looked



Tad Schubring and Macario Sierra.

We have the amazing opportunity to show the youth of our congregations what real, genuine relationships look like by showing them the love of their Savior Jesus.

up to him and I saw how happy he was with his life. I wanted to be as happy as he was."

Schubring and Sierra met each week after school for several months. "We'd go out to grab a bite to eat or hang out around the church and discuss what was going on with my life," says Sierra. "Tad would often give me great advice on how to deal with things."

According to Sierra, that was one of the best parts about being mentored. "It was great having someone to talk to, someone who went through what I was kind of going through in high school, and also just having a friend," says Sierra. "Tad was able to lead me in the right directions in choices that I made. It gave me sort of an idea of what I wanted in life and what I should expect from myself."

Sierra says he would definitely recommend mentoring to others. "It's a great thing to be a part of, because it helps both people involved and it helps both of you grow," he says. "It offers a chance to better yourself and to better someone else, creates a new bond, and gives you a friend you can rely on. Same thing for adults who have the opportunity to be a mentor—give it a chance and take the opportunity to make a difference in someone's life."

Schubring says mentoring Sierra and others has made a big impact on him. "The biggest takeaway is remembering that mentoring is about being caught in the act of being a Christian," he says. "Be yourself, have fun, and share the gospel through your actions when you're with them."

Schubring says mentoring has also changed the way he looks at youth ministry. "Jesus gave us the Great Commission and reassures us that he'll be with us always," he says. "So knowing this, you look at things differently. When I started out doing youth ministry, the measure was the number of people. But now God has given me a new measuring stick. It's not about the numbers anymore; it's about depth with individuals. And what better way to create a deep, meaningful relationship than to be with them."

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

This is the first article in a four-part series on youth ministry. Next month's article will focus on games, mixers, activities and youth-driven Bible studies.

Learn more about transforming youth ministry on page 24.

LABOR —for what?

The alarm clock wakes us to another day of work and another paycheck. It's necessary, but our priority is not money.

Richard E. Lauersdorf

"What kind of work are you in?" That question is usually a good icebreaker. Do we realize that our Savior asks that same question of us? He asks not to stimulate conversation, but to remind us of something eternally important.

In this month when our country observes Labor Day, what's our answer to the question, "For what do I labor?" What holds top priority in our lives?

EARTHLY TREASURES THAT PASS AWAY?

With one short sentence, Jesus sweeps aside those things that so many spend their lives working for. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth," he warns (Matthew 6:19). Money and goods, honor and position, fun and pleasure are blessings, but they are not things to hold dear and expend life on. By themselves they are trash, not treasure.

Why? Jesus tells us. He says such treasures can so quickly be ripped from our grasp by moth and vermin and thieves (cf. 6:19). Ask senior citizens what the moth of financial uncertainty can do to savings deemed adequate ten years ago. Ask the residents of areas where raging forest fires have turned their homes, their vehicles, and their businesses into smoking ruins. Ask the police, and they will cite you statistics on the billions of dollars lost each year to thieves and robbers. But we don't really need to ask them. We need only

to listen to the words of Jesus. "Don't treasure such things," he says. "Don't spend your life on them. They can only pass away."

Christ's warning about earthly treasures shows how concerned he is about our hearts. Our hearts belong only and fully to him. He doesn't want any roommates to share our hearts with him. Listen to his warning, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21).

Traveling with my sons in southern France, we saw huge field after field of sunflowers. It was unique to see all those flowers each morning pointing east and each evening pointing west as they followed the sun. Just as those sunflowers turn in the direction of the sun, so our heart, sooner or later, will point to our treasure. How foolish and even fatal if our heart turns to earthly treasures that can only pass away.

Do we need this reminder? Aren't we church members? Don't we sing, "Jesus, Priceless Treasure" (*Christian Worship* 349)?

But sometimes the heavenly treasures seem so remote and so distant. All around us those earthly treasures beckon. They are so near and seem so real. All around us we see people striving for those earthly goods in any way possible as if nothing else really matters. Even more, all around us we see

people prospering because they chase those earthly treasures. We begin to wonder. Are they right and we wrong? Are we missing the boat and being left behind on the shore? Are we losing out?

At times it may seem that way, but looks are deceiving and Christ's words are always right. He knew what he was talking about when he urged, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal."

Let's not misunderstand Christ, though. He's not telling us to quit our jobs and throw away our checkbooks. He's not telling us we shouldn't save for the future, budget for a new car, or undertake those mortgage payments. These are necessary items for which we have a duty to work so we can provide for our families. But they are only things we use, not things that use us. We are not to live for them, but use them to live. We work because that is God's way of paying our bills. But to sweat and labor for things alone, to give top spot in our hearts to them, may that never be!

HEAVENLY TREASURES THAT LAST FOREVER?

Well then, for what should we be working? Jesus tells us, "Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Matthew 6:20). "Heavenly treasures, that's the thing," Jesus tells us. "That's the treasure to possess and hold dear."

In a later verse, Jesus spelled out that heavenly treasure in familiar words. He said, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" and then promised "all these things will be given to you as well" (v. 33).

In simple language, Jesus urges us to make him and all that he means for sinners our real treasure. Jesus and his forgiveness for our sins, his help for our temptations, his comfort for our sorrows, his victory over death, his heaven for our future—these are the treasures that do *not* pass away. What treasure is ours when God in his grace brings us to the Savior! No Fort Knox can contain the gold found in our Savior's cross and empty tomb. The whole world packed into all the Brinks Armored trucks is not rich enough to stand beside the treasure of eternal life in heaven, a treasure so great it took God's own Son to prepare it.

What do we do with such a treasure? Gather just a bit? Be satisfied with just a handful? Ask the person coming out of surgery whether one drop of water will satisfy him or whether he would have the whole glass. God's children are not content with just a brief glimpse at and limited understanding of God's heavenly treasures. Instead they strive to use God's Word and sacraments regularly to learn more about them. They know that the Holy Spirit works through these powerful means to increase faith's hold on Christ and his heavenly and eternal treasure.

Jesus urges us to make him and all that he means for sinners our real treasure.

Some time ago I read a story of how a group of boys broke into a hardware store. They didn't steal or vandalize anything, but they did pull a prank. They mixed up the price tags on the merchandise. Nails, for example, were marked at \$159.99 each, lawnmowers at 15 cents a pound, hammers at 99 cents a dozen. Those pranksters were having some fun, malicious as it was.

Some people still mix up the price tags on things in life. They put the costliest labels on the nails and the cheapest prices on the lawnmowers. They sweat for earthly things hardly worth 15 cents a pound and barely bend a finger for the treasures that reach into eternity, treasures millions can't buy.

Some people do this. But the big question is: What do we do? For what are we really working? God help us give the right answer always.

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

A woman who felt empty most of her life finds a lasting peace and now is sharing it with others.

Rachel Hartman

Sylvia Falcon has traveled to India and Nepal to reach more lost souls with the gospel message. She is on a continual quest to share the peace she has found from studying the Bible. She wants others who feel empty to learn about God's full forgiveness and sure promise of heaven.

Before reading the Bible, Falcon spent years of her life searching for an answer to her spiritual questions. "I'd always known there was something; I just didn't know what it was or where it was," she explains.

THE SEARCH BEGINS

Falcon was born in El Paso, Texas, the fourth of six children. She spent the first ten years of her life, however, directly across the border in Juarez, Mexico.

Falcon grew up in a home that had some Catholic influence. While Falcon's mother had been a Catholic all her life, her father didn't share the same faith. "My father was a non-believing person but wanted us to grow up Catholic," recalls Falcon. "He felt that was the right way."

In addition, Falcon's grandmother was a devout Catholic. Along with attending church, her grandmother and mother held to many of the traditions that are tied to the Catholic Church in Latin America.

Even during her early years, Falcon found it difficult to find a sure peace through going to church. "I had a hard time believing in heaven and hell," she recalls. "I couldn't find anyone to explain it to me. If I asked the priests about it, they would say to read about it in the Bible."

When she brought up the idea of reading the Bible to others, such as her mother and grandmother, Falcon learned they felt reading the Bible was an activity only for those who were worthy enough, such as priests.

When she was ten years old, Falcon moved with her family back to El Paso. She joined the Air Force at the age of 20. She also married an atheist who at one time had been a Catholic. During her marriage, Falcon was discouraged from going to church.

The marriage ended, however, and Falcon started looking for a church. She tried going back to the Catholic Church but also spent time in the Mormon church, the Presbyterian church, a Nazarene church, and with a Seventh-day Adventist group. But she couldn't find anything that offered lasting peace.

"All the bishops and clergy were the same," she explains. "I had questions, and they didn't provide answers."

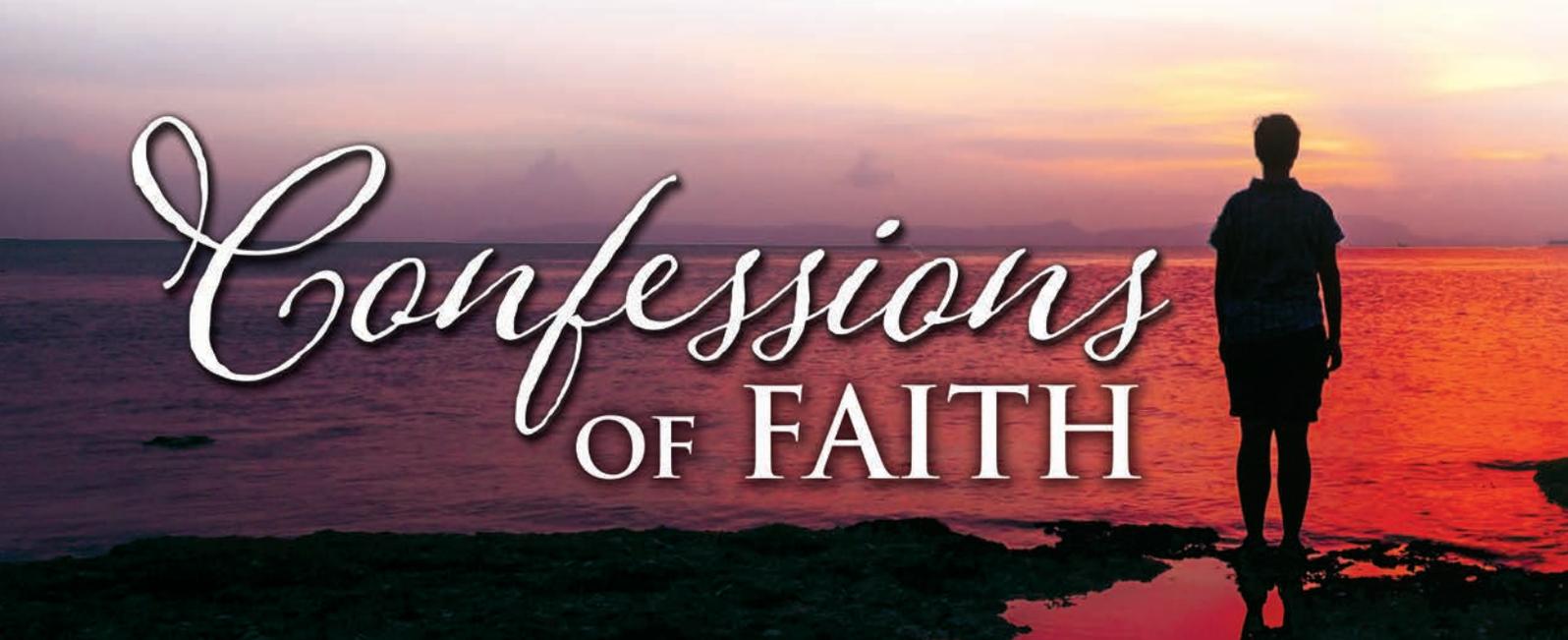
A TRIAL RUN

While she was in her 30s, Falcon worked at a VA clinic in El Paso. One day "a lady passed out in front of me," Falcon recalls. Falcon was so shocked at the sight that she didn't attempt to help. She watched doctors and nurses tend to the woman.

The incident stayed with Falcon, who felt that with her military background she should have helped. When she later came across the woman in the hallway of the clinic, Falcon approached her. "I wanted to apologize," says Falcon. "The woman said, 'If you want to make it up, come to church with me.'"

At the time, Falcon was discouraged at not being able to find answers in any church, so she passed on the invitation. But the woman continued to encourage Falcon to come. "Finally, after about six months, I said, 'Fine, if I go to church will you stop inviting me?'" The lady agreed, and the two set a date.

The woman was a member at Christ Our Redeemer in El Paso. The first time Falcon went to church with her, they attended an Easter service. "I remember the sermon was very peaceful," she notes. "It wasn't like the sermons I had heard before that focused on condemnation."



Confessions OF FAITH

But Falcon was ready to be finished with the bargain. The lady, who was now becoming a friend, asked her to come again to church. On the following weekends, Falcon wasn't in the area due to her military duties, but on the third Sunday after Easter, she came to the same church. Again, the sermon caught her attention. "It was a different kind of message," she says.

The third time she came to church, it was on her own accord. This time, she spoke to the pastor and agreed on a time to talk some more.

"The first time we sat down together, we talked for about two and a half hours," says Falcon. "I asked the same questions I had always asked. He had the answers and reached over to the Bible and showed me. He said, 'Here, read this.'"

Falcon was deeply moved, because she had never been able to find answers to her spiritual questions. Now someone was showing her what she had craved for so long. She still had questions, so she agreed to come and talk more. "I have a very scientific mind and like to have proof," explains Falcon.

At one point in their discussions, the pastor gave her a challenge. "He said, 'What if?'" recalls Falcon. "He challenged me to give it a chance, to see if it was the truth. I said I'd give the church a trial period, for six months to a year, as I had done with the other churches."

After about two years of going through more questions and digging into God's Word further, Falcon decided to take membership classes and was then confirmed.

SHARING WITH OTHERS

Thinking about the time before she learned of God's immense love and forgiveness, Falcon says. "I had so much darkness and sadness. It's hard to explain the emptiness I had."

Learning about Jesus' death and resurrection and the promise of heaven changed Falcon. "I went from being very angry and self-destructive to being a very happy and thankful person," she says.

After becoming a member at Christ Our Redeemer, Falcon was asked to join the team at WELS Multi-Language Publications, which produces materials with the gospel message for countries around the world. Thinking of the chance to help more people learn what she had discovered, Falcon agreed. "I was extremely lost most of my life, and it makes me wonder how many people out there are like me," she says.

Today, Falcon serves as the digital publications coordinator at Multi-Language Publications. She helps with the operations of AcademiaCristo.com, a site that offers free Christian resources in Spanish. She also works on other projects related to translating Christian materials into Spanish.

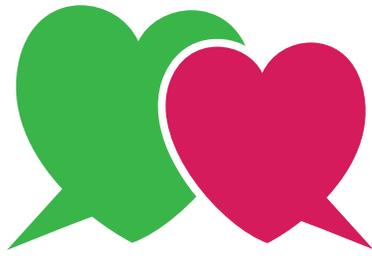


Sylvia Falcon manning the Multi-Language Publications display at the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society convention.

Knowing and remembering what it was like to feel so empty, dark, and negative inside drives Falcon to put every effort into her projects. "Many times it's after hours and I am still working," she notes. "If I can help reach more with the gospel, then I'll happily work the extra hours. Those lost souls are my motivation."

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

Read about a Multi-Language Publications translator on p. 28.



heart to heart
parent conversations

We're hurting, but that doesn't mean we can take a vacation from being parents. Often when a loved one dies, our children need us more than ever. They need us to comfort them, answer their questions, pray with them, reminisce, cry, and laugh. What are some ways we can handle this emotion-filled time? How do we answer the tough questions? This month three Heart to heart authors open their hearts and share their experiences.

Do you have a parenting question you'd like Heart to heart's authors to consider? Please send it our way! We're developing our 2017 calendar, and we'd love to have your input on what topics we should cover next year. E-mail fic@wels.net.

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.

WHAT DO WE TELL OUR CHILDREN WHEN A LOVED ONE DIES?

In 2013, my dad unexpectedly passed away from complications of pneumonia. I hadn't ever dealt with that level of extreme grief, and it hit me HARD.

Henry (18 months) had never met my dad but was old enough to notice that I was sad. Anna (5 years) knew my dad, and I dreaded telling her he was gone. To this day I am so thankful for the strong, comforting, supportive man I married. Andy took care of details I never would have thought of in my state of shock. He held my hand and did most of the talking when we told the kids.

We were honest and gave age-appropriate details. We told Anna that Grandpa Denny had died in the night. We wouldn't see him on earth again. We told her that we were sad because we would miss him and she would probably see me crying. And it was okay if she needed to cry too. Anna's first response was that it wasn't fair—

Talking to your child about the death of a loved one is never easy. Death is simply not natural. It's the result of sin. No sin—no death—and no need to talk about it.

Certainly the circumstances surrounding death can impact a child and family, but as parents, my wife and I have found that preparing for death is a natural part of our Christian life. Starting with baptism, we receive the forgiveness of sins and become heirs of eternal life. Death is defeated! As parents, we then have the opportunity to help our children grow in the Word so the Holy Spirit can nurture their faith in Christ and they can be confident of life in heaven. Talking to children about the death of a loved one then can bring us the opportunity to comfort one another and be reminded of the certainty of eternal life in heaven.

Nine years ago, my mother died after fighting cancer for

When my Grandma Pearl died, a cousin wrote a letter to the family that started like this: "Well, the fourth chair is once again filled. The pinochle cards have been shuffled and dealt, and Alvin has the manhattans already mixed."

He was talking about four Christians—his parents and my grandparents—who'd been friends for decades, bound by blood, marriage, and serious card playing. Pearl had been the last of the four to go to heaven, so he imagined them reuniting at the card table.

Are we all scandalized? I hope not. The letter writer is a pastor, and he was doing exactly what Jesus did—using the finer things of earth to help us see the unseeable and imagine the unimaginable.

We can help our children understand heaven in the same way—especially those plagued by fears and questions. I have one child like that. This child worried that angels

Henry hadn't even gotten to meet him! Then she asked if she could watch TV.

Later she needed to cry and had some questions. We hugged and cried together. We talked about good memories of my dad. I told her that even though we have the joy of knowing heaven is waiting for us, it's okay for us to miss people who aren't here on earth anymore.

We still talk about my dad often. Henry, who is now four, has grown up hearing stories about my dad, knowing he died and that I still miss him and feel sad sometimes. His favorite story is about my dad living on his sailboat—after all, pirates live on sailboats!

He asks me what would happen if Andy and I died. Who would take care of him? What if Anna died too? I think the knowledge that loved ones can die raises many scary questions for little ones. I try to address these concerns when they arise. Usually a simple answer is all it takes (we will always

make sure you are taken care of; you would be very sad, but you will see her/us again in heaven), and then he moves on.

Sometimes we still cry. And I always tell them that it's okay to do that.

We held a memorial service for my dad about a month after he passed away. We invited friends and family to share memories of him. A few people came up to speak. At last call to the microphone, Anna unexpectedly walked to the front of the room. I grabbed Andy's hand, not knowing what she planned to say but admiring her bravery. Her speech left all of us reaching for tissues.

"My name is Anna. Denny was my grandpa, and I love him very much. I will miss him, but I know I'll see him again in heaven."

Kerry Ognenoff and her husband, Andy, have a daughter in second grade and a son in preschool.



18 months. My daughter Kayla was five years old. We lived nearby and had many opportunities to see "Humma," as Kayla liked to call her.

Eighteen months of cancer treatments and a slow decline of health gave us all time to prepare. We would specifically plan "Kayla and Humma" days where just the two of them could spend time together. Kayla was always excited to see Humma, and the door to Mom's house would always open before we could even knock. Imagine the big smile and hug of a grandmother as she swoops up her granddaughter in her arms. That time was not only important for Kayla, but it also gave my mom a sense of peace knowing that she had the opportunity to have a loving relationship with all of her 14 grandchildren.

The only thing that troubled Mom was that she would not be present at Kayla's confirmation some day. So I pulled out the video recorder, and we recorded a message that could be

played on Kayla's confirmation day. This last May, Kayla was confirmed, and she had the opportunity to have one last Kayla and Humma moment.

The day did finally come when the Lord took Humma to heaven. How do you tell your five-year-old that Grandma died? The nurtured faith of a child is simply outstanding. It was hard for me to tell Kayla that her grandmother died but easy for her to remind me that my mom was in heaven. That response can only come from someone who heard the Word that has been shared at school, at church, and at home from family—including from a very special Humma.

Dan Nommensen and his wife, Kelly, have a teenage daughter and a pre-teen son.



would be scary, that the daily routine would be dull, that if she got to heaven first she wouldn't know where to go.

Realizing it's impossible to capture the infinite bliss of heaven in finite earthly terms, I tried anyway, saying things like:

- You won't be alone in heaven. Even if you die today, you'll blink your eyes once and we'll all be there together—because in heaven there's no such thing as time.
- Heaven isn't boring. You won't float on a cloud, playing the harp. What's the most fun you've ever had? Were you swimming or laughing so hard milk came out of your nose? Multiply that by a million, and that's what heaven will be like.
- In heaven you'll still be you. You won't walk around in a trance, chanting to other identical floaty beings. You'll be yourself—but the best version of yourself! No sickness. No sins.
- Best of all, Jesus is in heaven. And Jesus is all love all the time. He'll call you by name, and you'll run into his arms, and it'll feel as if he's known you forever—which he has.

Death is still horrible. Contrary to Disney's "Circle of Life," death isn't a natural part of the life cycle. It's an intruder in God's perfect plan. So when someone dies, it's good to cry. Jesus himself cried at his friend Lazarus' funeral, even though he knew he'd be raising him from the dead in about ten minutes.

Death is hard. But heaven? Heaven is amazing.

My cousin finished his letter like this: "At this very moment, Pearl is more alive than any of us. . . . Pearl has already seen the Master's welcome smile, his outstretched arms, and has heard him say, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Your sojourn on this earth has proved a blessing to many. Welcome to the joy that has been prepared for you from eternity.'"

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



Application is everything

Confession is good for the soul, but not enough. Applying forgiveness to our souls is trusting Jesus has paid the penalty we deserve.

James D. Roecker

Sally comes to church every Sunday. She arrives early to save her favorite spot. She participates in worship, confesses her sins, and pays close attention to the pastor's message.

Yet Sally always leaves church feeling bad about herself. Sally takes this bad feeling back into her daily life. Through this routine, Sally feels close to God. Feeling bad seems like a good thing for her. The closeness to God she experiences by feeling bad about her sins seems to satisfy her and ultimately makes her feel superior to her friends who do not go to church.

Confession is more involved than just feeling bad about sin. To some, penance quickly comes to mind when discussing confession. Penance involves confessing sins and then doing some act to repair the damage caused by sin. Feeling bad about your sins can be viewed as that "something" we do to overcome sin. Emptying the overflowing sin bucket in confession to God can be a satisfying experience, but it never applies Christ's forgiveness.

If we view confession as a guilt reliever or a conscience cleanser, all the emphasis is on us. It's like saying that God and I had a private conversation about sin, so we are good. Sally might come to God and say, "God, I'm sorry I hate Mary. She rubs me the wrong way. I'm sorry, but I've confessed this sin to you, God, so we're good, right? When I tell you my sins, that counts, doesn't it?" So then, sadly, Sally goes off to class and the dorm thinking that feeling bad makes up for sin.

But it doesn't. For Sally, the law left her feeling bad about herself. The law does make us feel bad because it shows us just how far we have fallen, just how short we have come to God's standard of perfection. We confess that we are sinners who deserve God's punishment.

Confession is the first part. The second part is applying the full and complete forgiveness of sins. Jesus' blood, not our remorse, cleanses us from sin. None of our efforts, including our effort to amend our sinful life, removes sin. Only God's grace in Jesus forgives us. Then that forgiveness gives us the power to gladly and freely turn from the sin and live differently because our sins are fully and freely cleansed. The problem may be that we don't change as dramatically as we think we should. We fail again and again, sometimes falling into the same pet sins.

So we come to church each week not only to confess our sins and feel bad about them but also to rejoice that our sins are forgiven. There is full forgiveness for our sins in Christ. As we live out our Spirit-worked faith, we'll strive to turn completely away from sin and toward our Savior. "I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.' And you forgave the guilt of my sin" (Psalm 32:5). We then live each day as a forgiven child of our heavenly Father.

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

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



CHANGES IN MINISTRY**Pastors**

Bauer, Timothy W., to retirement.

Bourman, James C., to Grace, Le Sueur, Minn.

Concha, Rodrigo S., to Centennial, Milwaukee, Wis.

Teachers

Ambroso, Alyssa, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.

Bailes, Brennan, to Reformation, San Diego, Calif.

Brooks, Molly F., to Lambs of Christ Learning Center, Pewaukee, Wis.

Buss, Robert J., to St. Paul, Menomonie, Wis.

Carlson, Amanda L., to West Lutheran High School, Plymouth, Minn.

Diehm, Rachel B., to Immanuel, La Crosse, Wis.

Diener, Michele R., to St. Peter's, Sturgeon Bay, Wis.

Eckstrand, Mallory L., to Children of Grace Preschool, Hutchinson, Minn.

Gracing Jr., Michael A., to Good Shepherd's, West Allis, Wis.

Hoerres, Jayda, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.

Hogan, Suzanne, to Lord and Savior, Crystal Lake, Ill.

King, Nathan, to Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis.

Kolander, Laura, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.

Langbartels, Peter A., to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.

List, Samantha J., to St. John, Peshtigo, Wis.

Miller, Kathy M., to St. John, Dakota, Minn.

Picchiottino, Juliana R., to Jesus' Lambs of Grace, Manitowoc, Wis.

Rieck, Matthew L., to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.

Romberg, Melissa M., to Riverview, Appleton, Wis.

Rosenberg, Rachel, to St. Lucas, Milwaukee, Wis.

Schleusener, Aaron J., to Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D.

Schmidt, Rebekah A., to Shepherd of the Valley, Menasha, Wis.

Seeger, Rebecca A., to Abiding Peace Academy, Simpsonville, S.C.

Selle, Jay T., to Wisconsin, Racine, Wis.

Smith, Shawna, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.

Warnecke, Philip, to King of Kings, Maitland, Fla.

Weigand, Deborah G., to St. John, Goodhue, Minn.

Zabel, David J., to St. John, Lake City, Minn.

ANNIVERSARIES

Houston, Tex.—Christ the Lord (50).

Sept. 4. Worship, 4 P.M.; meal and program to follow. 281-778-3003. Website, facebook.com/CtL50thanniversary/.

Prairie du Sac, Wis.—St. James (50).

Sept. 11. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. Brenda Hutter, bhutter@stjamespds.org.

Franklin, Wis.—St. Paul's (150). Sept. 18. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. 414-421-1178, office@stpaulsfranklin.org.

Grass Lake, Mich.—St. Jacob (175). Sept. 18. Worship, 10:15 A.M. and 3:30 P.M.; meal to follow, 5:30 P.M. Oct. 23. Worship, 10:15 A.M.; Oktoberfest meal to follow. Website, stjacobgrasslake.org/.

Mosinee, Wis.—Grace (100). Sept. 18. Worship, 11 A.M.; meal to follow. 715-457-2427, gracelutheranmosinee@gmail.com.

Readfield, Wis.—Zion (150). Sept. 18. Worship, 9 A.M.; refreshments to follow. Sept. 25. Worship, 9 A.M.; refreshments to follow; dedication of new addition, 1 P.M.; meal to follow. 920-667-4368. Website, zionlutheranreadfield.org.

Albuquerque, NM—Shepherd (50). Sept. 25. Open house, 3 P.M.; worship, 4 P.M.; meal to follow. 505-292-6622. Website, shepherdlutheran.org.

Little Chute, Wis.—St. Luke (50). Sept. 25. Worship, 9 A.M.; social hour, displays, and presentations, 10:30 A.M.; catered meal, 11:30 A.M. RSVP required. 920-788-4408. Website, anniversary@stlukeslittlechute.com.

Sioux Falls, S.D.—Bethel (75). Sept. 25. Worship, 8 & 10:30 A.M.; meal & short program to follow. 605-362-8231; Website, bethelwels.com.

Waukegan, Ill.—Immanuel (125). Sept. 25. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal to follow. 847-249-2723.

Waupun, Wis.—Grace (50). Sept. 25. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal to follow at noon. RSVP requested. 920-324-9591, hejnmartin@charter.net.

Waukesha, Wis.—Mt. Calvary (75). Oct. 2. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal and presentation to follow. RSVP appreciated. 262-547-6720, church@mountcalvarywaukesha.org. Website, mountcalvarywaukesha.org.

Frontenac, Minn.—St. John's (150). Oct. 9. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. 651-345-2757.

Spooner, Wis.—Beautiful Savior (25). Oct. 9. Worship, 9:30 A.M.; presentation, 11 A.M.; meal to follow, noon. Website, www.bsclspooner.com.

New London, Wis.—Grace (100). Oct. 23. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. 715-752-4285, gracesugarbush@gmail.com.

New Orleans, La.—recovery of Crown of Life following Hurricane Katrina (10). Oct. 30. Website, crownoflifeflora.com.

COMING EVENTS

Symposium—Sept. 19–20. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Theme: "Hermeneutics." Website and registration, wels.net/events.

Interactive Faith Bible study—Sept. 21–Oct. 26. Online Bible study offered Wednesdays at 6 and 8 P.M. (central). Topic: "What does this mean? The continuing importance of Luther's Small Catechism." Presenter: John Braun, Northwestern Publishing House. Website, wels.net/interactivefaith.

WELS national physical education conference—Sept. 22–23. La Crosse Center, La Crosse, Wis. Website, mlc-wels.edu/continuing-education/2016-wels-pe-conference.

Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors convention—Oct. 11–13. Ramada Plaza Hotel and Convention Center, Omaha, Neb. Website, wels.net/events.

MLC Ladies' Auxiliary annual meeting—Oct. 15. 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 P.M. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Website, mlc-wels.edu/ladies-auxiliary/.

WELS Nurses: A gathering of professionals—Oct. 22. St. Peter's, Fond du Lac, Wis. Website, wels.net/events.

WELS Historical Institute annual meeting—Oct. 23. 3 P.M. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. 414-443-8930.

Celebration of Life—Nov. 5. Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis. Host, Christian Life Resources. Website, clrevents.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.

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

NAMES WANTED

WELS musicians—names of WELS musicians with advanced training in organ, piano, voice, conducting, composing, or instrumental music. Submit names with a short resume to WELS Commission on Worship, cw@wels.net.

Celebration event and tour information—Planning a special event or tour to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017? Communication Services is gathering information about these public events. Send details to csc@wels.net. Website, wels.net/reformation500.

JOB OPPORTUNITY

Director of mission advancement—Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis. Full-time position. Development, sales, or public relations experience preferred. Web site, www.lutherhigh.org.

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

District conventions 2016

Each of WELS' 12 districts met in convention this June, considering local ministry topics along with issues that apply to the entire synod.

Lay delegate Paul Giovinazzo, a member of Good Shepherd, South Attleboro, Mass., summed up his North Atlantic District convention experience by saying, "When you come from a congregation that is isolated from other like-minded believers, you often feel like you are on an island all by yourself. It is so nice to be reminded that you are part of

something bigger, that there are other Christians who share your faith and an appreciation for the truths found in God's Word."

Each district held elections for district officers. Four new district presidents were elected—Philip Hirsch, Nebraska District; Charles Westra, South Atlantic District; David Kolander, Southeastern Wisconsin District; and Michael Jensen, Western Wisconsin District.

In addition to elections, worship, Bible study, and presentations, delegates

considered information reported by the areas of ministry in the *Report to the Twelve Districts*.

Delegates also had a sneak peek of the new Luther movie being developed by Boettcher+Trinklein Television, Inc., through the support of Thrivent Financial, to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in October 2017. The movie will be shown on PBS. To view the trailer, visit wels.net/reformation500.

Four new district presidents elected

As Mark Schroeder, synod president, notes, "A turnover of one-third of the district presidents is rare."

Yet in 2016, four new district presidents were elected. This took place because three district presidents—John Guse, South Atlantic District; David Rutschow, Southeastern Wisconsin District; and Herb Prahl, Western Wisconsin District—announced before the conventions that they would not seek re-election as they were considering retiring from the full-time ministry and because Nebraska District President Earle Treptow accepted a call to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

The president of each district plays an important role in the ministry of the synod. His responsibilities include

- overseeing the doctrine and practice in his district's congregations;
- providing congregations with call lists to fill vacancies;
- encouraging the called workers in his district and providing them with individual counsel; and
- serving on the Conference of Presidents (see sidebar).

Meet the men who were newly elected in June to serve as district presidents.

PHILIP HIRSCH, NEBRASKA DISTRICT



Currently serves: Hope, Manhattan, Kan.

Family: He and his wife, Kristi, have seven children

What do you view as your most important job as district president? To help the brothers proclaim the unconditional gospel of Jesus Christ at a time when it is so easy

to take one's eye off the ball and do some other nice or even churchy thing—something other than proclaim the unconditional gospel of Jesus Christ to the sinner-saints.

What are some ways that God has blessed the Nebraska District? The Nebraska District is 89 congregations spread all around mid-America and the Rocky Mountain West, gathering in the name of the Lord of the church and trusting in his presence. We're blessed with older brothers and sisters who have seen the trends come and go and yet are pleased and thankful for the gospel, above all. We're blessed to serve dyed-in-the-wool confessional Lutherans who know what that means. And we're blessed to serve many new converts to the faith who are simply overjoyed to know the peace of God in Christ Jesus. We're blessed with Lutheran school principals and teachers who recognize the privilege of serving the gospel. We're blessed with two district mission boards that take seriously the business of planting churches in the world's third largest mission field—the United States of America.

MICHAEL JENSEN, WESTERN WISCONSIN DISTRICT



Currently serves: St. Mark's, Watertown, Wis.

Family: He and his wife, Jane, have seven children and three grandchildren

What do you view as your most important job as district president? Being a servant/pastor of Christ to the called workers, congregations, schools, and people of our district.

How has God prepared you to serve as district president? As I look back on my life and the people Christ has placed in my life, I see the gracious hand of my Savior in every aspect of my life. I'll also add my voice to the apostle Paul's: "Our competency comes from Christ" (2 Corinthians 3:4-6).

What are some ways that God has blessed the Western Wisconsin District? The Western Wisconsin District includes

- 172 congregations filled with faithful people and faith-

- ful pastors listening to and proclaiming Christ's gospel;
- 104 Lutheran elementary schools and preschools, three area Lutheran high schools, and a synod preparatory school, all filled with hundreds of faithful gospel teachers serving and children hearing of their Savior every day; and
 - countless opportunities for outreach even in an established district.

Any other thoughts? I'm just another sinner-saint, claimed and kept by God's undeserved love in Christ, "pressing on toward the goal for which Christ took hold of me" (Philippians 3:12).

DAVID KOLANDER, SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN DISTRICT



Currently serves: Christ the Lord, Brookfield, Wis.

Family: He and his wife, Lu, have three children.

What do you view as your most important job as district president? To seek to apply God's Word to people and situa-

tions in a Christ-centered, evangelical manner. In that connection it is also important for the district president to encourage the called workers of his district to "watch their life and their doctrine closely," as the apostle Paul encouraged Timothy. As called workers, we want to say what God wants us to say, and we want to live in a way that is consistent with God's wonderful message of forgiveness.

What are some ways that God has blessed the Southeastern Wisconsin District? The Southeastern Wisconsin District is blessed to have such a high concentration of WELS members, congregations, and schools. One thing this allows us to do is to provide extra opportunities to worship, fellowship, and serve. Our challenge is to not take these many opportunities for granted but to be grateful to God for the extra chances we have to be built up and edified in our Christian faith and life. It is a joy to see so many people in one area look at God's Word in the same way with humble love, gratitude, and respect.

Any other thoughts? Please pray for all of us who serve you in this way, that God might give us joy, patience, wisdom, firmness, and love.

CHARLES WESTRA, SOUTH ATLANTIC DISTRICT



Currently serves: Christ Our Savior, Columbia, Tenn.

Family: He and his wife, Deb, have four children

What do you view as your most important job as district president? I have been called to serve as pastor to the called

workers and congregations of our district. That is an immense privilege and tremendous responsibility. That pastoral responsibility could bring many different challenges

and duties. I am comforted by the simple fact that it is all "means of grace" ministry and that the Lord of the church remains in control of his church.

How has God prepared you to serve as district president? He declared that I am innocent through the work of his Son. He claimed me as his own in baptism. He continues to nourish me through his life-giving Word and sacrament. Over the years of representative ministry he has also given me opportunities for experience in our congregation and in working with many other congregations in our district and beyond.

What are some ways that God has blessed the South Atlantic District? God has blessed the South Atlantic District with a faithful and evangelical district president for more than three decades. We are thankful to God for Pastor John Guse and his leadership among us. Through Pastor Guse, God has given an example of mission spirit and faithful ministry.

MEMBERS OF THE CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS

Mark Schroeder, synod president

James Huebner, first vice president

Joel Voss, second vice president

Jon Buchholz, Arizona-California District president

Charles Degner, Minnesota District president

Douglas Free, Dakota-Montana District president

Philip Hirsch, Nebraska District president

Michael Jensen, Western Wisconsin District president

David Kolander, Southeastern Wisconsin District president

Donald Patterson, South Central District president

John Seifert, Michigan District president

John Steinbrenner, Pacific Northwest District president

Donald Tollefson, North Atlantic District president

Charles Westra, South Atlantic District president

Joel Zank, Northern Wisconsin District president

Robert Pasbrig, synod secretary (advisory member)

Called worker compensation changes discussed

In 2015, the Compensation Review Committee of the Synodical Council began a comprehensive examination of the synod's compensation guidelines at the request of the 2015 synod in convention. The goal was to simplify the guidelines if possible, to address the question of whether the guidelines can or should do more to provide increased compensation for increased responsibilities, and to analyze whether the current way that years of experience are compensated is functioning as it should.

Earle Treptow, chairman of the Compensation Review Committee, says, "The committee, after about four months of work, came to the realization that many of the concerns about the present compensation guidelines were actually addressed in the current guidelines adopted in 2003. The problem has been that calling bodies haven't consistently applied the guidelines' recommendations. The Compensation Review Committee decided to focus on a repackaging of the guidelines, with some revisions, rather than a radical reworking of them."

The committee presented preliminary thoughts in the 2016 *Report to the Twelve Districts* and sought comments and input from district convention delegates. District convention delegates had a wide range of opinions.

One area that Treptow says the districts unanimously supported was the production of a user-friendly, web-based tool to assist calling bodies in determining appropriate compensation. The committee is now working with WELS Technology to prepare an online form to help calling bodies with this important work.

A proposal that most districts rejected was the suggestion of reducing the salary matrix from 32 years to 22 years. The committee's intention in offering that proposal was to have compensation based more on duties and responsibilities than simply on the number of years someone has been serving in the public ministry. Treptow notes that the Compensation Review Committee was not suggesting that workers with more than 22 years of service ought to have their salaries frozen for the remainder of their service, but that was a concern of district convention delegates.

"Our intention was to encourage calling bodies to be more mindful in their approach to compensation," says Treptow, "spending a little more time reflecting on what they are asking of their called workers—instead of merely pulling a number from a matrix—and that the result would be a greater appreciation for the time and effort those workers are expending with compensation re-

flecting that. The districts that rejected the proposal thought it would fly in the face of our goal to have compensation that shows double honor to public ministers of the gospel. From their perspective, the proposal was a bit naïve or at least idealistic."

Treptow notes that this suggestion was removed from the committee's considerations at its July meeting when the committee began to consider the districts' feedback.

The Compensation Review Committee will meet face-to-face and via teleconference in the coming months so that it can bring its final recommendations to the Synodical Council for its February 2017 meeting. The revised compensation guidelines will be presented to the 2017 synod convention for approval.



The presidium of the Minnesota District is installed (from left)—Charles Degner, president; Dennis Klatt, first vice president; Jon Bitter, second vice president; Michael Hatzung, secretary.



(From left) Jonathan Bergemann and Fred Goldberg both serve as pastors in the North Atlantic District.



The Pacific Northwest District met at Evergreen Lutheran High School, Tacoma, Wash.



Youth rally impacts teens

More than 2,500 WELS teens and their adult leaders from across the country gathered at Colorado State University–Fort Collins, Colo., June 28–July 1 to worship, study, have fun, and celebrate the One who washed away every sin.

The 2016 WELS International Youth Rally, organized by WELS Commission on Youth and Family Ministry, featured worship, two keynote speakers and several educational workshops focused around the theme “Our God Reigns,” based on Isaiah 52.

“The whole rally experience is designed to meet the kids where they are at today,” says John Boggs, chairman of the Commission on Youth and Family Ministry. “It is designed for them to have fun, to be edified, and to understand and cherish the truth that they are not alone, that they have brothers and sisters throughout this country who are involved in the struggle with them, who know Jesus, and who share the truth and joy that they have in him.”

The rally’s mission is to provide teens and adult youth leaders with Bible-focused worship, education, and fellowship opportunities that deepen their commitment to Christ and the church. Here is what some rally-goers said about their experiences . . .

Duke Backhaus, 18, from St. Paul’s, Tomah, Wis., was impressed by the presentations offered. “The workshops were amazing; I really loved them. They all pointed me toward Christ and taught me a lot. I know now I’m going to be a pastor.”

Emily Gage, 18, from Good Shepherd, Woodlands, Tex., explains what it is like to worship daily with more than 2,500 other teens: “It was awesome to praise God with so many fellow Christians my age and to know that everyone is here for the same reason.”

Grant Kloosterman, 16, from Living Word, Gray, Tenn., sums up his thoughts on his first rally: “WELS really is like a big family. It seems everyone knows someone and nobody here at the rally feels like a stranger. We all love each other. It was great to end each day with evening reflection time. It was a time to relax, discuss, learn, and listen with your youth leaders and friends on the incredible day we all experienced.”

Boggs says, “The young people of our synod are not just the future of our synod; they are the here and now of our synod. They need to be in worship and Bible study, and they need our prayers, support and attention now.”

We asked rally attendees to upload photos on social media for a chance at being published in *Forward in Christ*. One of the most popular pictures from the more than one thousand photos posted was from Madison Dula, a member at Illumine, Rock Hill, S.C., who just graduated from high school. “The rally was an amazing experience, and I felt closer to God during those days,” says Dula. “Hiking up to Arthur’s Rock and the wonderful view let me see how beautiful the Lord’s creation is!” View more photos at wels.net/youth-family.



(Top) A bird’s eye view during one of the evening’s entertainment of the more than 2,500 teens and youth leaders who attended the 2016 International Youth Rally in Colorado. (Bottom) Jared Oldenburg, pastor at Eternal Rock, Castle Rock, Colo., presented one of the keynote addresses at the rally. Topics covered during the breakout sessions included giving teens the spiritual tools to address the LGBT culture and looking at bullying in a social media-drive culture.

The next WELS International Youth Rally will be held in 2018.



To watch video presentations from the rally, go to wels.net/youth-family.



Helping youth workers transform their ministries

“About two-thirds of the young people who are confirmed in WELS churches are still attending church as often as once a month by the time they are 19 years old.” That is one of the findings of a study WELS conducted in the early 2000s about youth membership in our churches. It was also estimated that less than 20% of WELS young people are retained in the church from the time of their baptism until age 30.

More recent studies by independent research groups have shown similar trends with youth in other denominations. For example, a 2013 Barna Group survey found that nearly 60% of Millennials with a Christian background have, at some point, dropped out of going to church after having gone regularly.

“Research shows that youth are falling away from big megachurches just as much as our churches,” says Jon Enter, pastor at Hope, West Palm Beach, Fla., and youth coordinator for the South Atlantic District. “We need to do something about this, but many congregations don’t know where to start.”

That was the impetus for creating the new School of Youth and Family called Transformed: Equipping Youth Leaders, an eight-part video series that includes presentations by youth workers from around the synod and shares ideas and resources to help congregations transform their youth ministries.

“It all boils down to the spiritual aspect of our kids,” says Enter, who is leading this effort. “If they continue to grow in their faith and they have ownership in our churches, then they stay engaged.” That’s why the videos—which include topics like Christian mentoring, games and activities, youth-driven Bible studies, and faith experiences—focus on helping youth create meaningful relationships with each other, with their churches, and with God’s Word.



“We have done a great job of training our kids in school and in confirmation class,” says Enter. “They have a very informed faith. But they struggle with sharing it and using it. So instead of just a cerebral thing, we want this to be a heart-and-soul thing. We want to completely connect kids into the DNA of their local church and to get them to actively serve. We want them to feel like this is *my* church.”

Along with the downloadable videos, which focus on the importance of the different aspects of youth ministry, congregations can also access a collection of Bible studies, recommended reading, and “how-to” resources for their youth ministries.

“I pray congregations will be excited after watching the videos and, Lord-willing, implement a lot of these things into their ministries,” says Enter. He says that even making small changes or refocusing some time and energy can have a big impact. “We’re not trying to drastically change what we’re doing. We are just looking at things a little differently and then asking God to bless them.”

Alicia Neumann

Read more about youth mentoring on p. 10. For more information about the program, watch Enter’s presentation at the 2016 International Youth Rally at <https://vimeo.com/174532181>. To order the video series and accompanying resources, visit www.nph.net and search for “transformed equipping youth leaders.” Special pre-sale pricing ends Oct. 31.

Obituaries

Elisabeth A. Bauer 1924–2016

Elisabeth Bauer (née Johannes) was born Apr. 5, 1924, in Two Rivers, Wis. She died May 25, 2016, in Jefferson, Wis.

She taught at Immanuel, Kewaunee, Wis., and St. John, Two Rivers, Wis.

She is survived by 5 sons, 2 daughters, 25 grandchildren, 39 great-grandchildren, and two brothers. She is preceded in death by her husband, H. Paul.

Larry L. Pautz 1939–2016

Larry Pautz was born Jan. 30, 1939, near Manitowoc, Wis. He died June 4, 2016, in Wind Lake, Wis.

A 1964 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Trinity, Morenci, Mich.; St. John, White-water, Wis.; Good Shepherd, West Bend, Wis.; Bethany, Concord, Calif.; and Living Water, Wind Lake, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Karen; one son; one daughter; four grandchildren; three brothers; and two sisters. He is preceded in death by one sister.

Walter H. Sievert 1927–2016

Walter Sievert was born Dec. 23, 1927, in Watertown, S.D. He died June 19, 2016, in Manitowoc, Wis.

A 1964 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at First German, Manitowoc, Wis.

He is survived by three sons, one daughter, ten grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren, and one brother. He is preceded in death by his wife, Patricia; two brothers; one sister; and one granddaughter.

Myron L. Schwanke 1942–2016

Myron Schwanke was born Sept. 6, 1942, in Lincoln, Neb. He died June 24, 2016, in Kenosha, Wis.

A 1968 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Peridot, Peridot, Ariz.; St. John, Milton, Wis.; and St. John, Baraboo, Wis.

He is survived by two sons, one daughter, one grandson, his mother, and two sisters. He is preceded in death by his wife, Rita.



Booknook

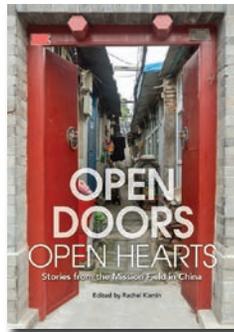
A look at books published by Northwestern Publishing House. For more information, visit www.nph.net or call 1-800-662-6022.

Open Doors Open Hearts is a collection of stories from across the sea, stories of ping-pong matches and stolen restaurant booths, of a Backstreet Boys ballad and a doctor named Luke, of overcrowded apartments and the Communist Party, of golden Buddhas and alienation from family. It's stories of secret studies and baptisms, of house churches and people "learning God," and possibly one of the most amazing stories of a pupil taking "pastor courses" to become a preacher. It's showing how accounts of silly, shallow questions like, "Can you really use chopsticks?" and "Can't you speak any Mandarin?" develop into far more important questions like, "You are a Christian?" and "How could God kill all the Egyptian firstborn males?"

This anthology tells of the work being done in the Far East, where native English speakers are valued for their experience and Christians are valued for their honesty and reliability. Because of this,

the government has opened its doors to English-speaking Christians in order that they may teach. On paper they're teachers; at heart they are missionaries. These are accounts written by people of all ages and from all backgrounds, who gave up modern American conveniences to become "fishers of men" in some of the world's largest cities—all because hearts are opening all over East Asia!

Read about your brothers and sisters in Christ overseas. Read letters they wrote and questions they asked. Read in awe of the overwhelming power of your God, who uses helpless humans (who literally cannot order their own dinner) to plant the seeds of faith across his kingdom. Then praise the same God who brought you into his family as he tends his flock and brings these precious souls from across the world into his fold as well.



Price: \$12.99

Joanna Saatkamp
Menomonie Falls, Wisconsin

WELS news briefs

COMMUNICATION SERVICES

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Nearly 2,700 WELS members gathered at Miller Park in Milwaukee July 29 for the third annual **WELS night at the Brewers**. Dr. Daniel Johnson, president of Wisconsin Lutheran College, threw out the ceremonial first pitch, and Brian Davison, member of Koiné, sang the National Anthem. WELS President Mark Schroeder, along with representatives from the WELS Center for



Mission and Ministry; Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; Wisconsin Lutheran College; and Northwestern Publishing House, welcomed WELS members from congregations throughout the Midwest before the game.

WELS CHRISTIAN AID AND RELIEF

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WELS Christian Aid and Relief has approved **humanitarian aid grants** worth almost \$300,000 for home and world mission fields for fiscal year 2016–17. Projects include providing fresh water wells, medical equipment and supplies for health clinics, home-based care for the sick and dying, and midwife training in mission fields around the world. Local U.S. and Canada efforts focus on community outreach, especially helping legal immigrants get settled. Christian Aid and Relief works closely with WELS

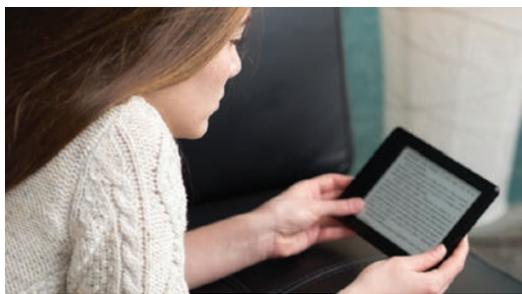
Missions and sister congregations in the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference in determining these grants. Read more at wels.net/relief.

ADULT DISCIPLESHIP

cad@wels.net

John Braun, vice president of publishing services at Northwestern Publishing House and *Forward in Christ's* executive editor, will lead the next **Interactive Faith Bible study**, streamed lived each Wednesday, Sept. 21 through Oct. 26 at 6 P.M. and 8 P.M. CDT. His six-week study will focus on the theme "What does this mean? The continuing importance of Luther's Small Catechism." Adult Discipleship sponsors the Interactive Faith online Bible study twice a year. Learn more and watch archived Bible studies at wels.net/interactivefaith.

1891-2016



1 2 5 Y E A R S A N D C O U N T I N G

Beyond paper and ink

Northwestern Publishing House looks ahead to the digital world.

Raymond W. Schumacher

From the time of its incorporation in August 1891, Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) has served the publishing needs of the Wisconsin Synod. For much of its 125-year history, the work involved paper and ink. Books, Bible studies, brochures, music, curriculum, bulletin covers, tracts, certificates, and more—all were print resources.

Advances in technology have made it possible to communicate the message of Christ in different ways. It has also made it necessary for the synod's publisher to adjust its vision and adapt to the changing ways people access the written word. So NPH looks to the future, aware that God's people will want and need to receive Christ-centered resources in different ways.

DIFFERENT WAYS TO COMMUNICATE THE GOSPEL

The difference is illustrated by the means God has used to reach souls with the message of Christ in two separate mission fields.

A Christian doctor in a predominately Muslim country understood how the printed Word could be the vehicle to strengthen the faith of believers and to introduce unbelievers to Jesus. Patients

at his clinic sat in a waiting room that would seem humble to those accustomed to American clinic standards. Yet, it was well stocked with reading material. As they waited for the doctor to attend to their needs, patients could read a little booklet that, in clear and simple language, explained the message of sin and of God's grace for us in Christ. Or they might have picked up one of several self-study Bible pamphlets and grown in their knowledge of Christ and in their faith. The Holy Spirit worked through the message of Christ the patients were reading. Many, who once bowed before false gods, became soldiers of the cross.

In a neighboring country, an ambitious Christian packed a solar-powered projector into a backpack and hiked into the mountains. He visited villages that aren't served with electricity, where there is limited access to printed material, and where few people are able to read. Using a sheet as a screen, he would show the villagers a video presentation that told of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Many who heard about Jesus for the first time came to believe.

You can probably think of examples in your own family or your own church that illustrate the same point. Perhaps you know of a recent retiree who bought a complete set of the People's Bible—all 41 volumes—and made it his goal to read them all. He wants to

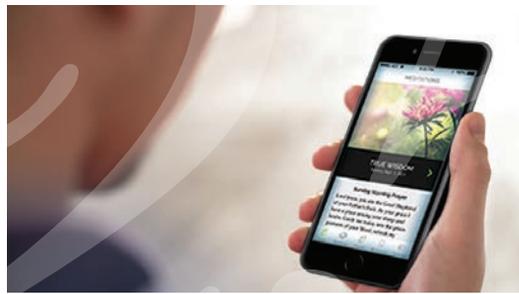
grow in his understanding of the Bible so he can be a better mentor to the young leaders in his congregation. Though he is adept at using a computer and a smartphone, he prefers a printed book for his study of Scripture.

Perhaps you have a relative whose tastes are different. Living and working in one of our nation's largest cities, she is thankful that she can access biblical resources digitally. Her long commute to work inserts a ready-made time slot into each day. At her seat in the commuter train she can read the Bible, a devotion, and prayers, all on the screen of her phone. And one evening each week she meets onscreen with her pastor and several other members of her church who are scattered around the large metropolitan area, and they study the Bible together.

Those situations all reveal that the work of the synod's publisher is broader than it once was. Although a large segment of the population prefers to have a book in hand and to read words that are printed with ink on paper, others enjoy the convenience of being able to grab guidance and strength from God's Word whenever they want, wherever they are, and with whatever device they happen to have on hand.

MEETING PEOPLE WHEREVER THEY ARE

Even as NPH adjusts its focus beyond printed pages stored on pallets and



distributed from a central warehouse, God is already blessing the effort. More than 160 titles are already available in e-book format through Amazon and Barnes & Noble. We can only wonder about the ways God may be building people up through resources that faithfully proclaim God's Word.

A casualty of extreme and severe suffering may be searching for understanding and strength. Still smarting from the pain of losing a loved one, a person who doesn't know Christ may be looking for clues to the meaning of life. A young father may be reaching out for help as he seeks to lay a firm spiritual foundation for the family the Lord has given him. A lifelong learner may just be curious about what the Bible says about angels. Bewildered students, overwhelmed by all the confusing and contradictory messages that swirl around them each day, may be looking for help to sort out the truth. A Christian psychologist may be searching for the proper Christian perspective on mental illness. A sinner, who has carried a burden of guilt for a lifetime, may be desperately looking for rescue. All can find resources that hold up the cross of Christ as they answer questions, offer hope, and point to the Savior whose forgiveness is unconditional and complete.

For decades, the *Meditations* devotions have served as a tool for spiritual strengthening. Today, in addition to 90,000 print copies, *Meditations* is available as an app for iPhones and iPads. About 41,000 individuals have downloaded devotions through the

app; 1,500 have signed up for an annual subscription. What is perhaps most remarkable is that people from 150 different countries have downloaded the app—from such unlikely places as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the Philippines. *Forward in Christ* has also taken a step into the world of digital distribution. Each issue is available in print and digitally.

Advances in technology have made it possible to communicate the message of Christ in different ways.

Changes in technology are also changing the way church workers carry out their ministries and the kinds of resources they need. Teachers work in an environment that relies more and more on computers, interactive whiteboards, projectors, and tablets. They benefit from materials that offer more visual and dynamic tools as they teach God's Word to students who learn with a variety of learning styles.

Choir directors have long relied on NPH to provide quality music that offers more than just catchy tunes to make you feel good for a time, but music that proclaims a message of peace and hope for eternity. With

the ability to download and print just the number of copies they need, choir directors are saving financial resources that can be directed for other ministry work.

Pastors have access to 115 books that are integrated with the Logos Bible Software, helping them as they study the original biblical languages and the Lutheran Confessions.

In our rapidly changing world, the methods and tools used by the synod's publisher will also change. But printed books, e-books, apps, digital files—or whatever else might come in the future—have real value only if they faithfully proclaim the message of Christ. Thank God that for 125 years NPH has maintained that focus. We pray that it will always be so.

Ray Schumacher, an editor at Northwestern Publishing House, is a member at St. Peter, Helenville, Wisconsin.

This is the final article in a two-part series on Northwestern Publishing House and the printed word.

Learn more about Northwestern Publishing House at www.nph.net.



Missionaries

Small gifts, large impacts

David A. Kehl

It is hard to imagine the impact a small book could have or how a seemingly chance connection will change a life forever—unless it is part of your story.

Vivian and I were sitting at a café after watching dragon boat races. I had remembered some of Vivian's story from previous conversations but was curious about the rest. She was here in Hong Kong that week as a student in Dr. Ernst Wendland's translation course. She was working on an Associate of Arts in Theology and Translation degree at Asia Lutheran Seminary here in Hong Kong.

It was quite a journey to get here, and I'm not referring to the train ride from inside East Asia and the MTR subways in Hong Kong. Vivian grew up like the rest of the children in East Asia with no time to play. Weeks were filled with schoolwork and weekends with music and other lessons. Like all the rest, she was also taught that there is no god, the country's official teaching. "I still had the impression that God existed and was afraid of hell after I die," Vivian remembers.

A little unexpected gift started changing that for her.

Vivian's father loved music. He would leave home for several months at a time to play trumpet on the ferry cruises in an area popular with tourists because of its spectacular scenery. "On one trip down the river," Vivian recalls, "a Singapore couple gave my father a Bible devotional book. My father then wrapped it up and gave it to me as a birthday present when I was about 12 years old."

For years she eagerly read the stories and came to realize

there is a beautiful place called heaven. The Bible verses gave her comfort and answers to many questions she had. Sometime later, her aunt, who had recently become a Christian, shared the gospel more clearly with her.

But it was when her mother, a non-Christian, told her about a Christmas party where she could meet other young people, that things really started to come together for her. Her mother found out about the party from an old school friend whose son was going. There Vivian met some WELS teachers who put on a play about Jesus. "It wasn't like parties I was used to seeing," Vivian told me. "This one was full of Bible verses and Bible stories."

She also met Jonathan, the son of her mother's school friend. He invited her to come to worship at an apartment where they met as a group. It was just what she had been praying for, since she longed to know more about Jesus.

After the first Sunday, they took her through the basic parts of a Bible information course. The next Sunday she asked to be baptized. Soon she found herself playing piano for their gatherings. Each of these connections drew her deeper and deeper into what it meant to know the love of Jesus and be among the fellowship of his followers. She is now a part of a growing network of people in house churches in East Asia who gather to express and grow in faith.

Vivian is also now part of a network of WELS Multi-Language Publications (MLP) translators that spans Asia in countries such as Nepal, Japan, Indonesia, and Korea. It had been her dream since primary school to study languages. At the urging of her new Christian friends, she started translating English Bible story material into her native language for their Bible study groups.

In 2015, Vivian quit her job to devote herself to translating. She attended the first translation course in June 2015 and the subsequent modules, all cosponsored by WELS Multi-Language Publications and Asia Lutheran Seminary. In order to grow in theological depth, she also regularly spends a week each month traveling to satellite courses of Asia Lutheran Seminary to learn theology together with the seminary students. Today she helps MLP translate resources that can end up in the hands of others and hopefully start or continue them on their journey of faith too.

The gospel is a power that often works in its own quiet way, just like it did for Vivian. What God gave us appears to some to be a small gift—but it has an unlimited impact. He gave us his Son who came into this world to cover our faults with his perfect obedience and serve as our substitute in

suffering the judgment of divine justice for the sins of the whole world. His resurrection gives us new life and is a story that we all can tell. It is our story.

It is the intention of Multi-Language Publications to make sure there are print and online resources that can connect millions more with *the* story that will change *their* story forever.

Don't forget the resources in your hands and the connections you have that can lead others to know Christ. In his own quiet way, God too can use you so that he may become a part of someone else's story.

Dave Kehl is the Asia regional coordinator for Multi-Language Publications.

For more stories about MLP translators and their work, see blogs.wels.net/missions. Learn more about Multi-Language Publications at wels.net/mlp.

Attendees at a recent translation course in Hong Kong. Multi-Language Publications and Asia Lutheran Seminary cosponsor courses to prepare students for the translation of English theological writings into their native language; Dave Kehl introduces a course for translators held at Asia Lutheran Seminary in Hong Kong; Vivian first learned about Jesus from a small Bible devotional book. Now she is translating materials into her native language so others also can read about their Savior; children at a WELS-established church in Taiwan receiving Sunday school books from MLP in Hong Kong.

MULTI-LANGUAGE PUBLICATIONS

Year began: 1996

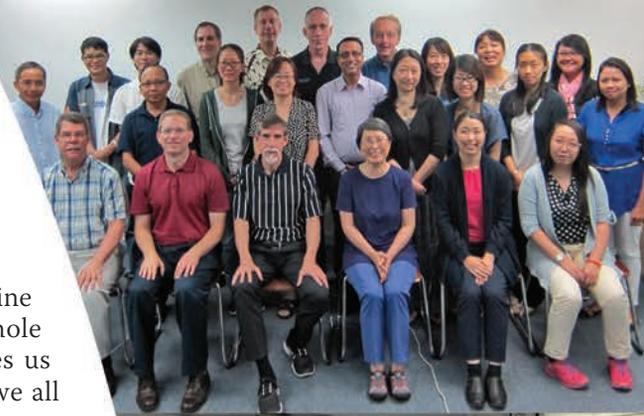
Purpose: Promotes, supports, and coordinates the development of confessional Lutheran materials for outreach in many languages.

Number of publications: 700

Number of languages: 47

Number of printed items: more than 2.9 million

Unique fact: MLP's goal is to reach 100 million people with the gospel in the next ten years.



Put your heads DOWN!



An airplane malfunction offers a college student a new perspective on change and the power of prayer. Rachel Holtz

“Put your heads down! Put your heads down!”

This is what the crew shouted at the passengers aboard the South African Airways aircraft, flight 204, going from New York to Johannesburg, South Africa. Sophia Weisensel, my roommate and good friend, and I were among those passengers.

A SCARY SITUATION

We were on our way to my home in Lilongwe, Malawi. I was so excited—indescribably excited. I hadn’t seen my family for my entire first school year at Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minnesota.

But just as the plane was about to take off, we were told to put our heads down and assume the brace position.

At first we didn’t know what was going on. There were lots of questions running through my mind. *What happened? Why are we stopping? Will we make our connection? How will I let my parents know what’s going on?*

It turned out there was a malfunction in one of the engines, and we had to abort the takeoff. We sat on the plane for an extra two hours waiting for the problem to be solved. Eventually it was, but the delay caused us to miss our connecting flight from Johannesburg to Lilongwe. Sophia and I spent two nights at the airport hotel in Johannesburg, waiting for the next SAA flight to Lilongwe.

I was so close, yet so far away.

Fast forward the two days of wandering around the airport, watching movies in the hotel room, and eating at the same restaurant with food coupons.

My indescribable excitement had been put on pause because of the two-day delay, but we finally boarded the flight to Lilongwe. Then my excitement grew as we flew that last leg of the journey.

Finally, FINALLY, we landed and got through customs and sorted out the luggage.

A SOMBER REALIZATION

What was it like to be home?

When I saw my dad; mom; and sister, Heather, the anticipation and happiness that built up inside of me let itself out through a burst of tears. I hugged them all as I cried.

My initial excitement lessened to a more normal level during my first few

days at home. I was happy to be back. It felt *so* good. Yet . . . something also felt weird.

Something was different, but I couldn’t put my finger on it. I felt a slight sadness after coming home that I didn’t expect. Talking to another good friend about it helped me understand what was troubling me. It was a certain undefinable change.

I had been apart from my family for about nine months. I changed during that time. They changed during that time. But we didn’t change together as a family unit. We had grown apart a little.

There was no specific big change that I could point out, but it was there. And it made me sad. I longed for how it used to be.

More questions were running through my mind. *God, what do I do? How do I make it feel like it used to? Can it be like before I left?*

A NECESSARY REMINDER

Thankfully, it only troubled me for a little while. All I had to do was remember to be grateful and remind myself of God’s promises.

I need to be grateful for God’s presence in my past and be assured of his presence in my future. There’s no point in wishing for what once was. God gives



us what we need at the proper time, and everything that happens to us is for our eternal good. God also promises that he will never leave us nor forsake us. Though I'm still comparably young, I can see how God has always been with me.

And looking back on my freshman year at Bethany, I don't understand how I managed it. How did I make it through all those changes—being away from my family, and adjusting to an American culture, a different school system, and a Minnesota winter, just to name a few?

Well, obviously, it was my plenteous determination, cultural adaptability skills, and superior intellect, right?

Not so much.

God was with me, and he gave me strength when I needed it. Sometimes I didn't even ask for it. Sometimes I did not even realize he was giving it to me.

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE

This fall, my family and I again will be experiencing more big changes: I'm going to leave Malawi again to start my sophomore year of college, my sister will be going to Wisconsin Lutheran College for her freshman year, and my parents will be alone at home for the first time. Now our family will be sep-

arated and stuck in three different directions of change. When we reunite, it might feel more different than ever.

I know I don't have to worry about tomorrow, next week, or next year, but I'm sinful, and I worry anyway. I know that God will carry me through anything, but I'm sinful, and I rely on my own abilities. I know that God has plans and purposes for me, but I'm sinful, and I think I know what's best for me. The only thing I can do is continually run to God and his promises.

Going back to one of my dad's favorite hymns always gives me comfort.

Be still, my soul; the Lord
is on your side;

Bear patiently the cross of
grief or pain;

Leave to your God to order
and provide;

In every change he faithful
will remain.

Be still, my soul; your best,
your heav'nly friend

Through thorny ways leads
to a joyful end. (*Christian
Worship* 415:1)

When the crew aboard flight SAA 204 told us to put our heads down, at the time I only grasped the physical meaning. I only thought to put my head down to assume the brace posi-

tion, but I should have also put my head down in prayer.

Of course, we shouldn't only pray in the case of airplane emergencies. We should pray always. As Paul says in 1 Thessalonians, "Pray continually" (5:17).

And we can pray with the assurance that God will answer us with what we need, with what he knows is best.

Change can be especially hard, but God has a plan. Pray for strength, patience, courage, and guidance. God will give you what you need, even if you forget to ask for it.

So, *tiyeni*. Let's go.

Let's follow the SAA 204 crew's advice. Let's put our heads down . . . in prayer.

Rachel Holtz, the daughter of Missionary John and Mindy Holtz in Malawi, Africa, is a sophomore at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota.

Photo captions: (Left to right) Rachel, Mindy, John, and Heather Holtz; Rachel Holtz and her friends enjoying the snow in Minnesota. Rachel, who grew up in Africa, is attending Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minn.; Rachel with children at a church in Malawi.

Organs or guitars?

Jeffrey L. Samelson

Worship is just too important to the life of the church and to the faith of the Christian for any of us to be comfortable with ignorance and insistence on one's personal opinion.

Organs or guitars?

Actually, it's not about the instruments. Maybe it was for Great Aunt Tilly, way back, the first time someone played a guitar in church and all she could say was, "I just don't like it!"

Or maybe you want it to be about the instruments, because that makes the arguments easier. But that's not what it's about.

Perhaps you have escaped the discussions and disputations so far, but for years now there's been a lot of talk—some of it heated—about how we worship in WELS. Too often it's summed up as something like: "Those people like organ music" and "Those other people like drums and guitars." That's a mischaracterization because it places the disagreement in the category of personal preference, when in fact the differences go much deeper—into questions of theology and our identity as Lutheran Christians.

Just what is "Lutheran"? The limited changes in the church that Martin Luther and his true followers advocated for made the Reformation conservative. Our Lutheran forefathers were not radical reformers as some of their contemporaries were. Their goal was to remove false doctrine and unscriptural practices from the church, but they were careful not to change anything that didn't need changing. Much that had been passed down through the centuries was worth preserving for their own and future generations.

A big part of that heritage was the liturgy and other traditions connected with worship, like observing the church seasons and festivals. Luther and the others re-centered the service on the gospel and gave back to the laity what had been restricted to the clergy. Along with these corrections, they developed a theology of worship that informed their decisions, instructed the church at large, and inspired

generations to follow. Think of the magnificent music of Johann Sebastian Bach or the deep devotional hymns of Paul Gerhardt!

As the centuries passed, however, it became easy for Lutherans to neglect the theology of their worship and just stick with what was comfortable and familiar for them. It all became a matter of personal preference. That meant that when suddenly new worship "styles," practices, and, yes, instruments were being introduced, many were unprepared to explain why these new things were theologically good, bad, or indifferent, and how exactly what belonged to our Lutheran heritage was better and wiser or worn and outdated.

We've learned since then. Worship is just too important to the life of the church and to the faith of the Christian for any of us to be comfortable with ignorance and insistence on one's personal opinion. It's not by any means a neutral thing whether we have a praise band up front playing the latest Christian hits or a robed minister presiding over an ordered liturgy of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. If we argue for one or the other based on what we like, we can't assume that the person arguing the opposite has a different set of likes. Confessional Lutherans take these matters seriously because the gospel itself is at stake—for us and future generations. These are not just matters of practicality or personal preference.

Oh, now you want to know what exactly a confessional Lutheran theology of worship is and what it means for you and your congregation? Good. That's exactly the conversation we need to be having.

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

The RIPPLE EFFECT

MANAEN

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

Daniel N. Balge

Antioch in Syria felt the ripple effect of Pentecost. Christians fled the persecution in Jerusalem, came to Antioch, and shared the good news of Jesus. Soon a church was prospering.

THE COMMISSIONING OF WORKERS

The growing congregation sent Paul (Saul) and Barnabas as missionaries to the Gentiles. At that commissioning service, leaders of the Antioch church laid hands of blessing on them. These leaders included a man named Manaen (Greek for the Hebrew Menachem).

It was fitting that Manaen participated. Luke tells us, "In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off" (Acts 13:1-3).

Aspects of Paul and Barnabas' commissioning are still part of the installation of a teacher, staff minister, or pastor, and the commissioning of a missionary. Prayer, blessing, and the laying on of hands mark the occasion then and now.

AN UNLIKELY CHURCH LEADER

Manaen was part of the service. What's startling is his connection to Herod the tetrarch. The phrase "brought up with" reflects the essential meaning of Luke's Greek word describing Manaen's role in Herod's life. The word implies that Manaen had been from boyhood nurtured and educated alongside the tetrarch, who was known also as Herod Antipas. The word suggests "childhood friend" and even "foster-brother," someone bonded to Herod by early shared experiences, though by this time Herod was dead or in exile.

Herod the tetrarch (literally, "quarter-ruler") had governed only a fourth of his father Herod the Great's kingdom—just Galilee and Perea. In that role he ordered the beheading of John the Baptist to keep a careless promise (Mark 6:14-29). While on a Passover visit to Jerusalem, Manaen's old friend had briefly held custody of Jesus, a Galilean, on Good Friday. When Jesus refused to perform tricks for him or even speak to him, the tetrarch made fun of Jesus and sent him back to Pontius Pilate (Luke

23:6-12). Herod the tetrarch kept up a family tradition of gross wickedness. Lurid stains of intrigue, incest, murder, and general viciousness splash across the story of several generations of the Herodian family.

If ever there was a man in a position to live up to Jesus' instruction to his disciples to "be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16), it was Manaen. Amid the Herods, he likely gained the benefit of a first-class education, found deep insight into how the Roman world worked, and lost all illusions about the evil of the human heart. His Hebrew name hints at a familiarity, perhaps a strong one, with the Old Testament. And he had come to faith in Jesus as his Savior from sin. Then all else in his background combined to serve the gospel and make him a respected leader among the Christians in Antioch.

Amazing, isn't it, the people God uses in his church? People like Manaen. People like us.

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

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



What makes
Christian people
so important? . . .

They quietly
serve others.

Achievement

How many medals did we win? Which athletes won? It is exciting to watch the struggle and triumph of the Olympic Games. Victorious athletes might crow that they knew if they worked hard in training and kept at it, they'd win. But I know that for every single gold medal, thousands of hopefuls have also trained hard and kept at it. They have no medal to polish and display.

Sometimes we measure value by championships, medals, and public acclaim. In one sense, we need goals to motivate us, whether in politics, athletics, business, finance, the arts, or life in general. But as in the Olympics, thousands do not achieve great status and acclaim. Measuring greatness or even value is often harder than receiving acclaim, awards, or even notice.

Perhaps I should add one more category to the list of areas in our lives—the church. One of the recurring arguments among the disciples was which of them was the greatest. The discussion followed them to the upper room on Thursday of Holy Week. How shall we measure greatness? Jesus on more than one occasion corrected them. Great meant taking the lowly position of a child (Matthew 18:4); great meant being the servant of all (Mark 9:35); the one who was least among them was the greatest (Luke 9:48). And in that upper room, though he was Lord and Master, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples (John chapter 13). Humility and service are the traits of true greatness.

Both often are in short supply in all areas of life, even in the church, where we measure value and importance by completely different standards. Yet God does say that those who “direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (1 Timothy 5:17). He also warns about pride and encourages humility.

As Lutheran Christians we have abandoned the idea that clergy—whether pastors or teachers in our context—are a step closer to heaven or better than the people in the pew. Before God, we are all equal in grace and value to the Lord. Leaders in the church are worthy of double honor not because they are better but because of their service: They bring the gospel to God's people. Paul quoted Isaiah when he wrote, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news” (Romans 10:15).

But I want to turn to the value of every Christian. What makes Christian people so important? They often do not have any medals nor do they get a moment in the spotlight. Instead, they quietly serve others. They fulfill the second most important commandment of the Lord: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). And much of the time they do it without even recognizing their own value.

Is this not a great disciple? A believer who quietly cares for her family. Another who works to supply food, clothing, and shelter for his family. One who takes time to show a son or daughter how to do math or encourages them to read. Another who puts food on the table to nourish the family for the next day's challenges. All who teach respect for others and instill a desire to help. Those who teach the young how to manage their money or work faithfully at a job. Those who help with prayers and share God's love in Christ. These may seem like little things, but they are so important and valuable. What is God doing with these works but holding our world together.

Maybe we should remember that God is polishing their medals.

GREAT STORIES OF THE BIBLE

THE FLOOD Joel S. Heckendorf

Many estimate it took more than 50 years to build the 450 x 75 x 45 ft. box we know as the ark. I wonder if Noah ever thought, *God, did you forget about me?* When his neighbors had Friday night fires, do you think it got old for Noah to hear them ask again and again, “Hey Noah, got any firewood?” Each jab may have caused him to think God had forgotten him.

How about when Noah was in the ark? The Bible says, “The LORD shut him in” (Genesis 7:16). No excursions. No escapes. Just 370 days shut in with 7 other humans, 2 rhinoceroses, 2 zebras, 2 elephants, 2 pigs, and perhaps around 2,000 other animals and birds. The noise and the smell would have led me to ask, “God, have you forgotten about me?”

Noah could have and might have asked that. “But God remembered Noah” (Genesis 8:1). Highlight that verse in your Bible. The same powerful God who could focus his power to exercise universal wrath on a world of people who had so blatantly turned their backs on him—that same powerful God—remembered Noah.

But does God remember me? I’m no Noah. I doubt I would have the patience to swing a hammer for 50-plus years to build a boat so far from the water. I get it that God remembers his people, but how do I know that includes me? Does God remember me?

Simple answer: yes. Not because you’re as good or blameless or righteous as Noah. God remembers his people because God remembers his promises.

Jump ahead to the end of the flood account. With the smell of Noah’s burnt offerings in the air, God promised, “Never again. Even though every inclination of a man’s heart will continue to be evil from childhood, never again will I destroy all living creatures. Whenever the rainbow appears in the sky, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth” (see Genesis chapters 8 and 9). God has remembered that promise.

That isn’t the only covenant God has ever made with you. With the scent of his Son’s sacrifice—his sweat and drying blood—God promises forgiveness, life, and salvation. God remembers his promises. Yes, God remembers you.

The flood is the most popular children’s story. But don’t let it just be about a boat and some animals or universal destruction. See the deliverance. Because God in his grace saved Noah, he preserved the line of the One who would save the universe. Even though God destroyed every living thing, he also preserved the path for life everlasting. He remembered a blessing and a promise for you. That’s the ultimate comfort of this popular story.

EXPLORING THE WORD

1. Tell the story in your own words. Then read the account. Which details did you omit or mistakenly add?
2. Why do you think this story is the most popular story included in children’s Bibles?
3. Look up the following passages—Genesis 19:29, Genesis 30:22, Exodus 2:24, Leviticus 26:42, 1 Samuel 1:19, Judges 16:28, Luke 23:42. What comfort does each provide?
4. List other “covenants” that God made with people. What is your takeaway?

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



This is the last article in a ten-part series on the top ten stories included in children’s Bibles and how they apply to our lives today. Find answers online after Sept. 5 at wels.net/forwardinchrist.



43 DAYS IN EUROPE

An impending cross-continent move serves as a reminder of the blessings we often fail to notice.

Katherine L. Martin

A moving date had been set and the daunting to-do list threatened to overwhelm me. In an attempt to organize the chaos, I printed out two calendar months, circled the moving date in red, and counted backwards. The number 43 stared back at me from the box containing today's date. Forty-three days left in Europe. In 43 days, we would be leaving our lives and friends in Europe behind. My family and I vowed to make them count.

When I first arrived in Germany eight years ago, I can recall the excitement of discovering my new surroundings.

I was in love with the picturesque half-timbered medieval villages, beautiful cathedrals, and the nuances of a culture different from my own.

But then reality set in. Life got busy. Instead of soaking up all of Europe's beauty, I spent car and plane rides with my face buried in a book and almost resorted to a "seen one castle, seen them all" mentality. It took the prospect

of leaving to make me appreciate the beauty God had put right in front of me.

How often is that a reoccurring theme in all our earthly lives? So often, we don't appreciate what we have until we don't have it anymore. We live in the indescribable beauty of God's grace, yet, too often, our schedules become so busy that we scarcely notice it.

The psalmist reminds us to glorify God for the bounty of his blessings: "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows" (Psalm 23:5). God has prepared a buffet of blessings that is always set before us, even when we fail to notice it. Even when confronted by the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh, God's table is prepared for us. His table is set with the boundless grace, peace, and forgiveness that we have in Jesus. Even better than the peace and forgiveness we feast on in this life is the promise of eternal life. When our short walk on this earth is over, we will live with Jesus forever.

In addition to the distraction of busy schedules, the devil tries another trick to remove us from God's table.

He fools us into believing that we will always have more time. We'll do that Bible study or worship regularly when

the kids get older, when the sports' season is over, or when the chaos at work calms down. We act as if there will always be tomorrow, pushing away God's goodness for the pursuits of this life and neglecting our spiritual lives altogether.

As Christians, however, we strive to live as if each day were our last, longing for the day when we will see our Savior. Luke writes: "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning" (12:35). We keep our lamps burning for Christ by staying connected to him in his Word. Each day is an opportunity to grow in grace and serve others with no guarantee of tomorrow.

Our 43 days in Europe have since come and gone. Even though our good German wurst and schnitzel have been replaced with American hot dogs and burgers, one thing has not changed. No matter what transition or hardship we may face, God's blessings remain before us for the taking.

God is good, his grace and mercy never fail.

Katie Martin is a member at St. John, Jefferson, Wisconsin. She and her husband, Josh, just returned from Germany where Josh served as civilian chaplain.