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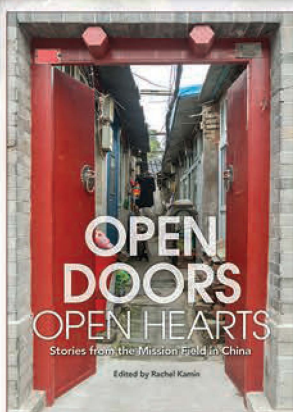
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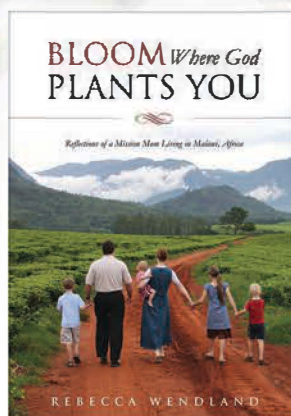


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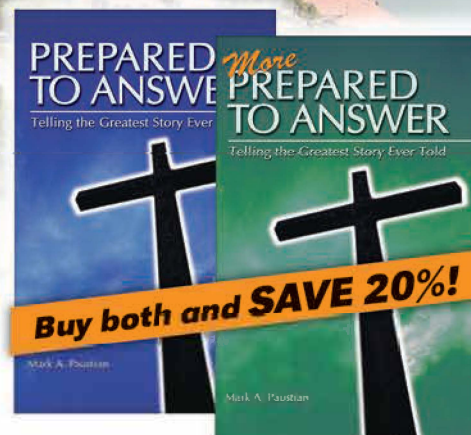


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*May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors;
may he never leave us nor forsake us.* — 1 KINGS 8:57

What's inside

After Pentecost, Luke described the church in Jerusalem as a remarkable gathering. They were concerned about the truth; they prayed; they even sold property and possessions to help those who had little.

Later, when the apostle Paul traveled from place to place, the same remarkable gatherings arose. And if you read the last portion of the book of Acts, you might be struck, as I was, at the joy the people had as they met Paul and other Christians and as they heard how the Holy Spirit was bringing others to faith.

So here we are two thousand years later. I hope these pages will bring you joy and encouragement. This special issue shares the stories of how the Holy Spirit is still adding to the church, just as he did at the beginning. New York City, Myrtle Beach, and Boise replace Ephesus, Corinth, and Berea. East Asia, Mexico, and Nepal replace Galatia, Italy, and Cyprus. The names attached to these stories replace Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

As we rejoice, we should also be encouraged. His kingdom continues to come as we pray so often. Among us, let us continue to pray not only for these missions but for called workers to send. Among us, let us work to reach out in our communities to every neighbor and every nation. Among us, let us renew our efforts to use our financial resources to bring the joy of the gospel to others.



John Braun
Forward in Christ
Executive editor



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Mark R. Schroeder

Dear Fellow Witnesses,

Having served as Home Missions administrator for more than five years, it has been extremely gratifying to see how God is blessing his Word through Home Missions efforts. God's Word is powerful and continues to change hearts. The proof is seen in the work of mission after mission.

In the spring of 2013, one of my sons was assigned to a new mission. During the first months, he made a lot of outreach calls and contacts. One contact was with a couple who had some life problems. Due to medical reasons, she was wheelchair-bound, and for many years, he had abused drugs. They began taking Bible classes and heard about the life-saving work of Jesus. Through the Spirit's work, they were led to faith in Christ and confessed him as Savior. About a month later, the gentleman had a heart attack and died. My son was able to share words of comfort and encouragement to the group who gathered for the memorial service. Praise God more people are hearing about the Savior through WELS Missions.

This year, the Missions team—Home Missions, World Missions, and the Joint Mission Council—is excited to introduce a new theme: “Every neighbor, every nation—WELS Missions and you.” In Home Missions, we so appreciate your Congregation Mission Offerings and the steady support of your special gifts, which allow us to reach souls with the gospel. Through your gifts, WELS is undergirding almost 80 home missions with financial support. So many active ministry partners are aiding mission congregations to share the one thing needful—the precious Word of Truth. Thank you, Lord, for these blessings.

But there are still so many souls to reach. Home Missions is discussing new ways to help mission congregations reach out to their neighbors, including

- covering the appropriate costs of worship space right from the start so mission members and pastors can focus more on outreach ministry,
- assisting with outreach campaigns that use the experience of others so the wheel doesn't need to be reinvented each time, and
- encouraging members in cross-cultural ministries to share the gospel with family and friends living in their countries of origin and financially supporting that as appropriate.

In addition to supporting existing missions, Home Missions and its district mission boards continue to explore new places to start missions. Since 2013, Home Missions has authorized 32 new mission fields, including 8 this year. In these missions—as in all our churches—the focus has been to tell more people that Jesus came to be their Savior from sin. People lost in sin are being made alive in Christ as God's people share and share and share again the Name that is above every name.

Not every witnessing opportunity will lead to new members, but more people now believe they are saved by faith in Jesus. No longer do they think it is up to them to earn their way to heaven. No longer are they doomed to everlasting destruction. They are heirs of heaven.

Until the Lord returns, may God continue to bless our efforts to tell every neighbor and every nation the praiseworthy deeds of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



Keith Free (right) and his son, Caleb, who was just installed as a home missionary in Lakewood Ranch, Fla.

Working together for him,

Pastor Keith Free

Keith Free
Home Missions administrator

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Dear Friends of Missions,

Greetings in the name of our Risen Savior! I am always thanking God for you and the amazing partnership we share in our Lord and his mission. These thoughts are often in my heart and prayers, but not only in mine. As I travel to any of our 23 world mission fields, there is one request I hear everywhere: “Please, greet our brothers and sisters in WELS and tell them how much we appreciate the gospel your missionaries carried and the ongoing work we share.” More than 200,000 people are growing in their faith and understanding through the efforts of WELS World Missions. No human plan could have foreseen the incredible ways God has used us in his kingdom.

And I know we are not done. God’s mission is still found in the billions of people throughout the world who do not yet know the Savior as we do. God’s Holy Spirit is still at work, and Jesus is coming soon. Our worldwide mission is still before us.

In many ways the far reaches of our planet are closer than ever. Immigrant groups from all over the world are now living in WELS neighborhoods in America. The Internet and social media communication allow instant contact through cell phones that are used almost everywhere. The expanding church bodies in our global fellowship are eager to reach other countries with the peace they now enjoy. The fracturing and decay of large European and North American church bodies that have set aside their Bible compass have left their former mission partners searching for someone who still believes the Bible is God’s Word. Opportunities that were hard to imagine a decade ago are a growing cry for help before us.

WELS Missions has been mobilizing to meet these needs. In the pages of this magazine, you will read about some of these new initiatives. A Global Ministry Committee is now in place to help immigrants who have become WELS members bring the gospel to their family and friends back home. *Academia Cristo* and other Multi-Language Publications efforts are reaching millions every day with gospel gems, and thousands are signing up online to learn more. Our missionaries work with the churches they serve to explore the potential of new contacts in neighboring countries who still live in darkness. WELS Missions has partnered with Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to form a three-man team to organize and deploy WELS teaching manpower and resources to give requested pastoral training to more than 300 men in places like Ethiopia, Nepal, Pakistan, Vietnam, Guatemala, Venezuela, Kenya, Liberia, East Asia, and more.

The Lord has thrown open these doors before us. We don’t need to imagine what God might use us to accomplish. Their pleas are right before us. Trusting in Jesus’ promise to be with us and the power of the gospel he has placed in our hands, we are ready.

Enjoy these mission stories. Pray for the people who need God’s peace. Ask God to use us to do even more.



Larry Schlomer with pastors from the Lutheran Church of Central Africa—Malawi. WELS began working in Malawi more than 50 years ago.

Your fellow missionary,

Larry Schlomer
World Missions administrator



NEW PARTNERSHIP TO BROADEN OUTREACH EFFORTS

Linda R. Buxa

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

MEETING EMERGING NEEDS FOR TRAINING GOD'S PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD

“We live in a world of rapid change, and this is true also in the area of theological education as the line between home and world missions disappears,” says Bradley Wordell, world mission seminary professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS), Mequon, Wis.

One of the changes in education comes because of circular immigration. As God brings refugees and immigrants to the United States, congregations reach out to them with support and the gospel. “Then they have the desire to learn more, to share the gospel with other immigrants, and to bring the gospel back to their home countries. They introduce to us candidates for gospel ministry,” says Wordell. This circular immigration gives us a complete partnership in the gospel.

The second group of people who are changing the education landscape are Christians throughout the world who have already gathered together in groups, churches, and communities. They want support, training, and connection to a church body that shares the good news that Jesus has done it all and that the Bible is true.

Until now, the seminary has handled these requests through two programs, the Pastoral Studies Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (PSI) and the world mission seminary program. The PSI helps non-traditional students through its preseminary and seminary training. PSI director E. Allen Sorum works with local pastors to help provide training for North American-based students. For the world mission seminary program, WLS professors travel throughout the

world teaching courses in seminaries that are part of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference. In 2015–16, 7 members of the seminary faculty administered 10 different courses in 9 countries to more than 100 students as well as 100 pastors and a few members.

Today, more than 300 potential students are contacting our church body looking for support and training in their journey toward becoming confessional Lutherans. With the abundance of people reaching out, the scope of requests is beyond that of missionaries to handle while serving their people and is more than the seminary faculty can undertake while maintaining a high level of education on the Mequon campus. To address this God-given opportunity, the Synodical Council approved a position of international recruitment director. Jon Bare, a 2008 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, began serving in this position in summer 2016.

“The creation of this team connects World Missions, Home Missions, and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in a new and exciting way,” says Bare. His task is to coordinate with the world mission seminary professor and the PSI director to implement a culturally informed vetting process for individuals as well as church bodies who wish to become part of our church body’s worldwide outreach. This team will administer a curriculum for men in America and abroad who want to serve as pastors in these church bodies. Bare will work closely with Sorum and Wordell to

also develop an appropriate assessment of skills and abilities in ministry and negotiate the appropriate degree or certificate that the student would receive upon the completion of his given level of training.

“The three of us each bring our unique gifts, strengths, and experiences to this new team. This partnership will serve to meet the emerging needs for training God’s people at home and around the world,” says Bare. “I am excited to see how God will continue to grow his kingdom and equip new workers.”

Through all these changes, one thing that doesn’t change is the seminary’s mission. “We prepare pastors and we provide continuing education for pastors,” says Paul O. Wendland, seminary president. “At the same time, the ministry is adapting. The Mequon campus is more a base of operations than a single venue for theological and pastoral training. With more than 300 potential students from around the world asking for help, we have an incredible opportunity.”

Opportunities to reach every neighbor and every nation. The time is now.



PSI director E. Allen Sorum (far left) traveled with Peter Bur, a South Sudanese pastor, to Kenya in 2015 to meet with and train spiritual leaders for South Sudanese refugees as well as pastors in a Kenyan church body looking to establish fellowship.

ETHIOPIA

The Rev. Dr. Kebede Yigezu is the founder and president of the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia (LCE). With more than three hundred members, the LCE proclaims a solidly Lutheran confession to the people of Ethiopia. The LCE’s Maor Theological College serves as a strong anchor for this heritage.

Three years ago, Kebede contacted WELS to discuss fellowship possibilities. In 2014, Peter Bur and Prof. E. Allen Sorum met with this group of believers. In September 2015, Kenneth Cherney, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and a member of the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations, visited Ethiopia and participated in Maor Theological College’s first graduation ceremony.

“A huge amount of amazing things are already done. The LCE is on the way to being in fellowship with the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference. Through gifts of WELS people for Maor college and seminary program, the group is stabilizing its presence by purchasing land and building the first floor of a multi-floor facility,” says Sorum.

That building will provide more ways to support this growing church body. In addition, through the world mission



Rev. Dr. Kebede Yigezu (right) with students who are enrolled in the Maor Theological College in Ethiopia. WELS is working with Kebede to establish fellowship between the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia, of which he is the president, and the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference.

seminary program, a professor will visit the church in 2016 to teach a course.

“Rev. Dr. Kebede continues to meet other people in WELS, and every time he meets someone, it’s another person who is appreciative of his unconditional, confessional heart,” says Sorum.

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SOUTH SUDAN

When Peter Bur emigrated to the United States, no one could have anticipated how God's plan would unfold—and how a ministry would explode.

Peter Bur, originally from South Sudan, began worshiping at Good Shepherd, Omaha, Neb., in 2010. Already serving as a spiritual leader for Sudanese immigrants, he started taking classes with Michael Ewart, pastor at Good Shepherd, to deepen his training. Ewart then assisted Bur to become a student in Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI). The more Bur learned, the more he connected other South Sudanese people to WELS congregations all throughout North America.

In 2015, Bur graduated from the PSI and was called by the WELS Joint Mission Council to serve as the coordinator of South Sudanese ministry for WELS, overseeing the pastoral training of South Sudanese leaders in North America who are studying with their local pastor. Bur is also reaching out to pastors and spiritual leaders in Africa who are serving South Sudanese refugees.

In 2016, for the third year in a row, Bur and Sorum encouraged the men who are serving the ever-growing groups in refugee camps in neighboring countries of South Sudan. Bur taught a simplified version of the catechism, which he translated into Nuer, and also spoke on protection from demons.

They were accompanied by Terry Schultz, a member of the Multi-Language Publications team, who created the artwork for the catechism. "These are high quality materials in terms of both content and production," says Sorum. "After Peter Bur taught courses based on these materials, we left the materials with the spiritual leaders to teach others."



Peter Bur training South Sudanese spiritual leaders serving refugee camps in Ethiopia. These leaders are studying a simplified version of Luther's Small Catechism translated into Nuer, which Multi-Language Publications helped develop.

From the South Sudanese work, connections have been made in Kenya and Ethiopia, all because one Sudanese man sought out one American pastor and they worked together. From one neighbor to many nations.

ASIA

Each year, pastors originally from Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and Korea meet at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to discuss their plans for reaching out and expanding their ministry. These men are the spiritual leaders and drivers of outreach to Asian peoples in North America and overseas.

One of these pastors (name withheld for safety reasons) is from a country that is in the top 30 countries that persecute Christians. Those who reject ancestor worship, animism, or Buddhism are either removed from their villages or beaten.

This graduate of the Pastoral Studies Institute could safely stay in the United States and pastor the people he serves. Instead, he and his wife choose to spend their own money to travel back to their country of origin. There they risk their lives to tell people about the one true God.

"As I go into the country, they ask if I am going to talk about God," he says. (They hold his passport and threaten not to give it back if he does.) "I said, 'No,' but in my head I said 'Yes.'"

On his first trip, he spoke to a group about marriage. "The women were crying. I was teaching the husbands that God says to love their wives," he says. They had never heard that before, and it brought them to tears. They begged him to bring Bibles the next time he came.

So he did, even though it could put him in grave danger.

As he walked through security, he had Bibles in his backpack. "At the gate they searched all my luggage. Except my backpack. I went through and gave away all the Bibles," he says.

KENYA

After doctrinal issues caused many Kenyan Lutheran congregations to leave their previous church body, the churches were looking for support. One of the pastors, Mark Anariko Onunda, has spent the past year visiting all the pastors who left, encouraging them to galvanize and join in fellowship with the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference. More than 20 pastors and 50 congregations are looking forward to meetings with representatives of the PSI international team and with WELS Missions administrators in Africa to review the Augsburg Confession with them and encourage them in their journey. “These brothers and sisters are very eager to become part of our fellowship and will be good partners,” says Sorum. “We are doing everything we possibly can to encourage them in their path toward joining the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference.”



Pastor Mark Anariko Onunda in front of the piece of land where his congregation worships. He hopes to build a church here. Onunda is the chairman of the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ, which seeks fellowship with WELS and ultimately the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference.



Meet a medical assistant in Southeast Asia who travels from village to village on his motorbike to share his medical skills with his patients. He also shares the gospel.

This man, who became a Christian when he was a child, wants to learn more about his faith so he can share more with others. To do that, he takes classes through the seminary’s Pastoral Studies Institute via Skype. Twice a year, he travels to the United States to take classes.

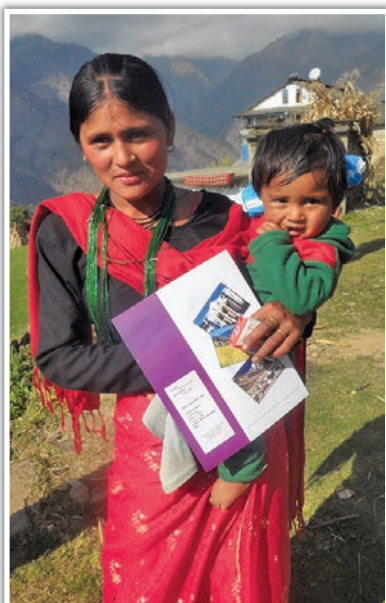
He isn’t quite sure where his studies might lead. “For now, his focus is on studying and reaching others,” his translator shares. The people he reaches are hungry for the gospel and are looking to WELS for even more support. “They are excited to hear from the national church body.”

NEPAL

Twenty-five years ago, a Hindu high school student (name withheld for safety reasons) kept hearing about Jesus from a classmate. Finally he agreed to read the Bible and studied the New Testament for one year. “I didn’t read to understand what is written; I read to find error,” he says. He didn’t find any. “I couldn’t criticize. I realized that there is someone who loved me most of all.”

Now he loves to share the gospel, and taking classes is one way he trains to do that. “It is important for me and my people in Nepal to teach them,” he says.

His people consist of 3,600 people in 40 congregations throughout Nepal. He has taken PSI classes at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and is now studying under the guidance of the WELS friendly counselor, who is overseeing the training of 12 other men. “It is most exciting for me to teach people to be pastors,” he says.



A Nepali woman holding a copy of *The Promise*, a booklet presenting a basic law/gospel message.

Gospel work in Nepal is not without safety concerns, however. On paper, it is against the law to convert people. “We need to be so careful when we share,” he says. “You could still go to jail for two years if people complain to the police.” Sources say a new law may go into effect this year that will raise the penalty to five years.

One way they share is through a humanitarian aid program, which provides medical care to 40,000 people. There the love of Christ is shared through word and deed.

“It is quite hard, but the Lord is helping us,” he says.

Linda Buxa is the communications coordinator at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS WITH EVERY NEIGHBOR

Nicole R. Balza

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

God is richly blessing the work of WELS Home Missions. Missionaries and their members are finding ways to share God's good news with friends, relatives, neighbors—and sometimes even strangers at local fast food restaurants. Here are some of their stories.

URBAN OUTREACH SERVES PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL NEEDS

"As I teach adults English as a Second Language (ESL), my favorite class is the one where we use simple sentences about Jesus as our Savior," says Eileen Zanto, a home missions staff minister at Christ, Denver, Colo. Zanto is pictured here with graduates of one of her ESL classes.

Zanto continues, "Because our mission has been located on a corner in a residential area for more than 15 years, people easily stop in at any time, some just wanting to say hi. Others come in with both their physical and spiritual needs. The neighborhood is changing, but the need for a Savior for each and every person will never change."



I arrived as Peace's first home missionary in July 2015. Around September, I came to church and found Louis standing outside our ministry center. Louis is 74 years old. I introduced myself and began talking with him. I told him that I was the pastor of the church right here, and he said to me, "Oh, you're the pastor? Wow! Do you think you could buy me a beer?" I told him that I wouldn't, but if he'd like to come in, I'd be happy to talk with him.



The Sunday after that conversation, Louis showed up at church. He can't drive, so he walked two miles to church. Ever since that day, I've been picking him up for church.

Louis' eyesight is so bad that he can't even read the large-print Bible. I finally tracked down a giant-print Bible and dropped it off at his house. When I gave it to him, he wrapped me in the biggest bear hug that I've ever received.

Louis has since stopped drinking, and he now knows and believes that Jesus loves him and has forgiven his sins.

From Steven Apt, home missionary at Peace, Liberty Hill, Texas



Matt Frey, home missionary at Living Word, Montrose, Colo., says, "We started a preschool four years ago for the purpose of outreach and do whatever we can to mine the prospects that come through our doors. In fact, I am taking a family through Bible information class right now and just baptized all five of them (pictured) in a private baptism. It was a great day for both the family and for me!"



Beautiful Savior, Moncks Corner, S.C., dedicated its first church in May. "Our partnership with the WELS Board for Home Missions and WELS Church Extension Fund has provided us with a wonderful facility, built to God's glory," says Jonathan Quinn, home missionary at Beautiful Savior. "We are already starting to see the fruit of the gospel proclamation we have been able to do in our new church building. We held our vacation Bible school here this summer, and registrations are coming in for preschool in the fall—just two more opportunities to connect with the community and connect those souls to Jesus through the gospel!"



Michele is a member of Beautiful Savior. She stopped at McDonald's one night and happened to have on her T-shirt from our soccer camp the year before. As she was eating, she heard some children debating whether the imprint on the shirt was, in fact, a soccer ball. Michele seized the opportunity to tell them that it was a soccer ball. She then told them about Beautiful Savior's soccer camp and gave them our website so that they could register and participate. And they did. They attended and proudly wore their own shirts imprinted with a soccer ball logo on the front and the 2016 theme on the back: "I press on toward the goal in Christ Jesus."—Philippians 3:14.

From Kevin Boushek, home missionary at Beautiful Savior, La Porte, Ind.



Residents and caretakers of a local adult care home join members at Spirit of Life, Caledonia, Mich., for worship every Sunday. As Allen Kirschbaum, home missionary at Spirit of Life, reports, "Our members love to walk out to the cars and guide the residents into our sanctuary. Each month we have activities for those residents, such as making decorations for our Christmas trees and a Christmas play. Their faith is a massive encouragement to a young mission congregation."



Pictured is the choir of Peace in Jesus, Boise, Idaho. Dan Kramer, home missionary to Peace in Jesus, says, "As the ministry and opportunities our congregation is given continue to become broader and more global, we keep clear and primary our call to reach out to the Vietnamese souls in the greater Treasure Valley (Boise, Idaho, area) with the true treasure, which is Christ and his gospel."

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Gunnar, the son of a member family, goes to a university about an hour-and-a-half away. While away, Gunnar began dating Holly. When Gunnar would come home, he came to church. Holly came too. After the first couple of visits, I noticed that Holly was really attentive during the sermons. Since Gunnar would usually stay for Bible class, she would too.

After a while, she approached me and asked what it would take to get baptized. So I told her, "Let's begin a Bible basics class. We'll go through a few lessons and see if you still want to be baptized and then finish it and you can take communion."

She would come with Gunnar almost twice a week to study Bible basics. She would ask insightful questions like, "Why do some teach this when Scripture obviously says this?"

So we got to celebrate an adult baptism—one more 20-something the Lord added to our small group. As a congregation, we were ecstatic.

I know that the "nones" (those who say their religion affiliation is "none") are on a rise, but I have evidence in our small congregation that the Word of God is still powerful enough to change people. We are a congregation meeting in a conference center with digital music and with a small group of people. Who would want to come? On paper, it doesn't make sense. But it doesn't have to, because our message is the power of God for salvation.

From Aaron Goetzinger, home missionary at Redemption, Watertown, N.Y.



A HOME MISSIONARY REMEMBERS: GOD HAS A PLAN

When I was assigned to Crown of Life as a home missionary, I knew that a major part of my job would entail sharing the gospel with the unchurched. But after my first nine months and no one interested in Bible information class, I was pretty down on myself and on the work.

But the Lord had a plan.

On the day my daughter was baptized, a young couple visited our church. They were expecting twins and looking for a church home. After the service, I talked to the couple and invited them to our potluck. They talked to more people and decided to enroll in Bible information class.

Four months later, I confirmed the parents (my first confirmands) and baptized the twins in the same service. Three years later, they are faithful in worship and Bible class. This fall, they will be part of our inaugural preschool-aged weekly Bible camp.

From Jeff Sonntag, home missionary at Crown of Life, Cadillac, Mich.



ABIDING SAVIOR'S GOAL: MEET MORE PEOPLE



Abiding Savior, Killeen, Texas, sets up an outreach booth once each month at an area farmers' market. Steve Dorn, home missionary at Abiding Savior, says, "Our number-one goal is simply to meet more people. The second step is to make sure that the people we meet know what the Bible says about how to get to heaven. The third step is to invite people to come worship Christ with us." In addition to talking with community members, Abiding Savior's volunteers come prepared with a variety of literature to hand out, including summaries of Bible basics, biblical answers to commonly asked questions, and invitations to worship.

FOSTERING PERSONAL EVANGELISM EXCITEMENT

Dan Johnston arrived in Blair, Neb., in July 2015 to open a new WELS home mission congregation, Living Savior. The congregation's first services began taking place this summer. Johnston says, "Living Savior is trying to create an environment—both individually and corporately—that fosters personal evangelism excitement. There is a coffee bar in our leased space that is open to the public during office hours. The members are also being instructed in reaching out to people in their personal lives. Friendship evangelism and forming real connections are where the rubber hits the road for us."



Twice a year, Illumine holds a free yard sale. We prepare food and coffee for all who visit. Hundreds of people stop by, some in great need, all encouraged by the thought that churches can still be generous.

During our first sale, a young family who had worshiped with us a couple of times came to peruse the goods. They had a one-year-old boy and another child on the way. During the sale, the mother asked me what she needed to do to get her little boy baptized.

My answer was simple, "You just need to ask! When should we do it?"

The family was eager—they wanted to have the baptism right then and there. We gathered up everyone who was shopping and volunteering, brought them all into the sanctuary, and laughed and applauded as this little boy was washed clean of his sins through the precious gift of baptismal grace. It was a great day to be a mission church!

From Kent Reeder, home missionary at Illumine, Rock Hill, S.C.



BRINGING THE GOSPEL HOME

Santo Tomas, Phoenix, Ariz., has been reaching out with the gospel since 1997. Every week Jorge and his wife, Gaby, along with their daughter visit homes throughout the west valley of Phoenix. They lead adult and children's Bible classes and activities, all with the goal of bringing Jesus and his love into their lives. Jorge is a volunteer evangelist for Santo Tomas and serves on its church council.

As Tom Zimdars, home missionary to Santo Tomas, explains, "These home group classes break down the barriers and fears that some may have about attending a church at first. It is an informal setting as they gather in living rooms and at kitchen tables growing and learning about their Savior."



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COMMUNITY OUTREACH THROUGH MORNINGS WITH MOMMY

The Mornings with Mommy program, developed by WELS member Jessica Panitzke, is used in many home mission congregations. The community program offers classes with age-appropriate activities for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. As Panitzke notes, “Each class is a little different because each one has its own theme, but the basic structure is consistent. We begin with language and literacy activities. Then the instructor explains the different stations set up in the room, which the children can explore at their own pace. At the end of the hour, a snack is served.”

Congregations like Amazing Grace, Myrtle Beach, S.C., appreciate the well-organized curriculum that Panitzke has developed because it opens the door



to a pre-evangelism opportunity to their neighbors. As Ben Zahn, pastor at Amazing Grace, explains, “Mornings with Mommy (pictured) exists to welcome the members of our community into our building, to build relationships with members of our church family, and to build a bridge with those who may be

looking for a church home. Anywhere from 7 to 16 moms (as many as 23 kids) attend our twice-a-month sessions. We’ve been blessed to have five families join the congregation since we began offering this program six years ago.”



Learn more about Mornings with Mommy and how it can be used as an outreach tool at wels.net/missions.

Nicole Balza, a staff writer for Forward in Christ magazine, is a member at Bethlehem, Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin.

David and Kris Hart and their kids became members at Amazing Grace, Myrtle Beach, S.C., in January 2015. Across the cul-de-sac from their home, Nick and Angel Santangelo lived with their son, Gavin. David and Kris’ son, Ryan (pictured with his family front left below), played frequently with Gavin and invited Gavin to come to church with him.

As Angel Santangelo explains, she and her husband felt it was important to raise their son in the Christian faith but wanted to look beyond the Catholic and Baptist churches in which they’d been raised. Ryan helped them take the next step with his invitation to visit Amazing Grace.

“Gavin wanted to attend on Easter 2015,” says Angel. “However, we had family in town and ended up going to the Catholic Church. Gavin took it upon himself to tell the Harts that he would go with them the following Sunday. Since we had been looking for a church, Nick and I decided that we needed to go as a family. We immediately felt welcome and knew that Sunday that we had finally found our church.”

Ben Zahn, home missionary at Amazing Grace, followed up with the Santangelos the next week. They asked about Baptism since Gavin had never been baptized. After digging into the Scriptures and talking about Baptism, the Santangelos asked Zahn to baptize Gavin the next Sunday (pictured below). Soon Nick and Angel attended Amazing Grace’s Starting Point class, where they learned more about God’s Word and how to apply it to their lives.

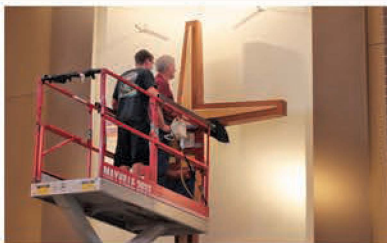
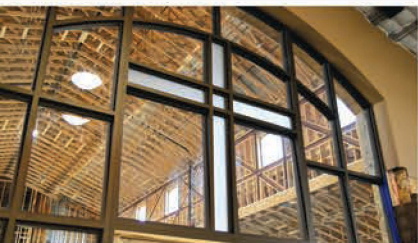
Angel notes, “Once we started attending [Amazing Grace], Jesus became the center of a lot of our daily conversations. We began to see our family grow in Christ’s love, and we have become stronger as Christians and as a family.”

Zahn says, “Nick and Angel have been active participants in the ministry at Amazing Grace. Their story is a testament that children are sometimes the best evangelists.”





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Moments with MISSIONARIES

CASTRIES, ST. LUCIA

Thomas C. Spiegelberg II

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

ST. LUCIA

As pastors, we feel confident that we have the one thing needful at our disposal—the Word of God. It will not return to the Lord empty but will carry out the purpose for which he has sent it.

Maybe what we are most ill-prepared for is the particular context to which God has called us—a new culture. Most home missionaries don't have to learn a new language, but we sometimes need to empty ourselves of what we know and enjoy so we can share Jesus with a different culture. Sometimes we push back like Jonah. More often we swim in a mixture of the unknown, the intimidating, and the exciting world that we call home missions.

My calling is to an island that in and of itself is a unique place. The Denver Broncos is a household name in only one household—mine. Beef is a luxury. People here dance—and it is not the chicken dance. I have as much rhythm as a jellyfish. Every day I wake up and convince myself that I know nothing but Christ crucified and this is my calling to share.

Bringing the gospel to others comes at a personal cost—giving up your own familiar culture to understand and bridge the gap to what is unfamiliar. My challenge is the families whose circumstances and lives are different. Eighty-three percent of St. Lucian children born in 2010 were born into a single-family home. This speaks volumes on the family dynamic.

Ricky (pictured in the green hat) lives up the street from Trinity Lutheran Church.

He lives in a small house made of two-by-fours and plywood. His family makes less than \$5,000 a year.

Ricky is like most 12-year-old boys. He loves sports, especially soccer. He hates school and has fallen behind. The after-school programs at Trinity provide the educational help his family can't afford elsewhere. He has few male role models, except for one of Trin-

ity's pastors, Bramdeo Ramgolam, who has a way of connecting with kids like Ricky. Ricky is nominally Catholic, which means he was baptized and goes to Christmas Eve Mass.

Typical to St. Lucia, he has a one-in-five chance of graduating high school with passing marks. He is back and forth between his mother's house and his father's house. His mother's current boyfriend has been accused of molesting Ricky's older sister. One afternoon, Ricky hid in church to avoid the domestic violence in his house. Such conflict is the rule rather than the exception.

Statistically speaking, Ricky will be unemployed until at least 24. He will not have enough academic background to hold a middle-class job. He will be related to someone who is murdered. He will know what a church is but not who Jesus is. He will father children but struggle at being a father.

That's according to statistics.

We have a greater power than culture or statistics: Christ crucified and him alone.

What does a day in the life of a home missionary look like? Simply put, it means emptying yourself of everything you know except Christ crucified. It means figuring out how to bring the gospel to a kid like Ricky.

My job is personally challenging. I feel equipped with the Word but grossly inadequate in personal traits. My job is exciting, exotic, frustrating, challenging, and sad on any given day.

But my calling is filled with joy: "Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation" (Psalm 95:1).

My calling in Christ is confident: "The righteous are as bold as a lion" (Proverbs 28:1).

I love being a home missionary.

Tom Spiegelberg serves as a home missionary at Trinity, Castries, St. Lucia.



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USING CULTURAL CONNECTIONS TO FURTHER OUTREACH

Julie K. Wietzke

COMBINING HOME AND WORLD MISSION OUTREACH EFFORTS

“Around 15 million Hmong are living in darkness. They are oppressed, not only by the power of the devil but also by the power of men,” says Bounkeo Lor, a native Hmong man trained as a pastor through the Pastoral Studies Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

Lor has a passion for reaching out to his Hmong brothers and sisters. With a foot in outreach in both the United States (pastor at Grace Hmong, Kansas City, Kan.) and abroad (teaching leadership workshops in Vietnam), he is a natural pick as one of two Hmong pastors serving on the WELS Global Hmong Committee, a group that oversees Hmong ministry around the world.

Started as a pilot project in 2015 by the Joint Mission Council, this four-person committee allows the Hmong to have a greater input and responsibility for outreach to their people group. This includes weighing outreach opportunities—both domestic and international—and determining where funds should be spent. “It’s not a bunch of white guys making a decision of what’s best for Hmong ministry, but it’s

guys on the front lines who know the culture,” says Robert Raasch, World Missions representative on the Global Hmong Committee. “You get the best of both worlds: men with a strong theological foundation and a passion for outreach—and it’s their culture.”

Worldwide in WELS, 25 Hmong pastors serve 8 ministries in the United States and 15 congregations and preaching stations in Thailand and the surrounding area. In addition, there are new opportunities for further Hmong outreach in Vietnam and East Asia and potential for new ministries in the United States.

Lor shares that family, or clan, connections are strong in the Hmong culture, tying these world and home mission fields together. This, he says, makes a joint committee all that more important. “We need each other for the growth of the Hmong ministry,” he says.

He continues, “Sometimes the gap of doing ministry across cultures is so wide that without Hmong representatives, we may lack insight into the best way to do Hmong ministry.”

Both he and Pheng Moua, the other Hmong pastor on the committee, are thankful to be part of a group that is working to further Hmong outreach around the world.

“It is an honor to serve the Lord in this capacity and to touch the lives of the Hmong in different locations and walks of life spiritually,” says Moua. “I serve them to the best of my ability as a bridge builder, to connect and to share their concerns and to walk alongside them. It is not my intention to enforce programs and plans for the mission field; it is my intention to let them grow and take ownership of the mission and ministry.”

He continues, “Hmong outreach is a part of the Great Commission inside the Lord’s church. We will do as much as we can to reach out to them so that their souls will be saved.”



In January, the Global Hmong Committee met with Hmong national pastors and lay leaders in Thailand to share ministry developments and to discuss further opportunities for working together.

HMONG OUTREACH AROUND THE WORLD



The Hmong congregation at Village 9. Started in the early 1990s, this is the first WELS Hmong mission in Thailand. Today the congregation numbers around 130 members.

THAILAND

For more than 20 years, WELS has been reaching out to the Hmong in Thailand and neighboring countries, all stemming from US Hmong immigrants wanting to share the gospel message with their families in their native countries. Now 16 Hmong pastors serve 15 congregations and preaching stations as part of WELS mission work in Thailand.

Although they have had seminary training, Hmong pastors in Thailand have little practical experience in being a pastor. Most support themselves through farming and need guidance as they work to share the gospel in their villages. The Global Hmong Committee is looking to call a full-time US Hmong pastor to serve as a missionary in Thailand and mentor these new pastors. As time allows, he can also explore new opportunities for outreach in Asia.

Meet Tswvsyoo Lauj, a pastor from Vietnam.

Lauj became Christian at a young age. Before his family became Christian, he became sick and his parents, steeped in Hmong tradition, vowed to the devil or dead ancestors to pay a cow if his health would be restored. But even after they vowed to repay the devil with a cow, his health did not improve. His parents decided to take him to a pastor to pray for him. "A miracle happened!" says Bounkeo Lor, who interviewed Lauj while in Vietnam. "He was cured from his illness." The family heard about the love of God in Jesus Christ and became Christians.



Besides being a farmer, Lauj became a pastor and has more than one thousand members in his church. He also serves as a circuit pastor to seven more congregations.

He has attended all the training sessions Lor has offered, often having to borrow money from relatives in order to go. He repays the loans over time by selling crops. His wife now does most of the farming. "He noted that he is skinny because he works so hard," says Lor.

When asked what WELS should pray for in connection with his church body, Lauj said to pray that the training would continue and that the Hmong Fellowship Church receive more Lutheran materials, because they are convinced that the materials contain the correct teachings.

VIETNAM

For the past eight years, Bounkeo Lor has been traveling to Vietnam to bring the pure gospel message to the Hmong Fellowship Church. This 70,000-member church body contacted him for training after seeing sermons he had posted online.

Lor started by visiting the rural areas. For the past few years, he has been training the leaders in Hanoi. The 324 pastors had received informal training through a Reformed church, but the training was steeped in legalism and decision theology.

The leaders wanted to learn more about Lutheran doctrine. "Some of the leaders cried and praised the Lord when they first heard me share the Word, law and gospel," says Lor. "They praised the Lord for bringing them the true Word of God."

And they are sharing that message with their members. One attendee told Lor that he brings every single training back to his members as well as to the ten congrega-



Bounkeo Lor (second from right) conducted a training session in Vietnam this past May. Leaders attended to hear the pure gospel message and then shared it with their congregations.

tions he serves as circuit pastor. When he called his church elders together to explain the doctrine of infant baptism, the group decided to baptize all the children—more than 50 in one service.

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“You could see the joy in his face as he said, ‘Thank you so much for bringing us the truth of Scripture and Baptism,’” says Lor.

Since Lor has been training the leaders, more than 34 congregations have been added to the Hmong Fellowship Church. “The Holy Spirit has opened the eyes of many people to believe in Christ Jesus as their Savior,” he says.

In November, Jon Bare, the international recruitment director, and E. Allen Sorum, the Pastoral Studies Institute director, will accompany Lor on a training trip to Vietnam to teach and evaluate the leaders and to help determine the next steps. (See more on Bare and Sorum on p. 6.)



Image and text removed for security concerns.

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

With 230 members, Immanuel Hmong, St. Paul, Minn., is the largest US WELS Hmong congregation. But it's not only concentrating on spreading the gospel message in Minnesota. Since fall 2015, Immanuel Hmong has been livestreaming its worship services to broaden the spread of the gospel to Hmong people around the world. “This will help us to share the gospel to places where we are not able to go or where our people do not have a church,” says Pheng Moua, pastor at Immanuel Hmong. WELS Hmong members also can tell their loved ones around the world about this opportunity for weekly worship. About 50 people watch every week from places such as Thailand, Vietnam, France, Australia, East Asia, Laos, and the United States.

Immanuel Hmong also was the site of the recent WELS Hmong National Conference (pictured), in which Hmong pastors and laymembers from around the world strengthened their faith through worship and Bible study and learned more about each other's ministries.

More than 165 people came from Hmong congregations such as

- Grace Hmong, a home mission in Kansas City, Kan., that recently obtained its own worship facility through a special grant and loan from WELS Church Extension Fund.
- Faith Hmong, Anchorage, Alaska, which shares a building with Faith Anglo, a congregation reaching out to Spanish-speakers.
- Mount Calvary Hmong, a congregation supported by La Crosse, Wis., area WELS churches.



- Trinity Hmong, Manitowoc, Wis., a congregation that grew out of a 30-year mission of First German to reach an immigrant community in Manitowoc.
- Christ's Gospel Hmong, Clovis, and Faith Hmong, Fresno, two newer California congregations reaching out to family and clan members in the area.

One pastor and his wife from Thailand also attended.

“The encouraging moment is when I see members who live in places where we do not have a church or the church is very small come and see that we have many people worshipping and praising the Lord,” says Moua, who helped plan the conference. “The gathering is uplifting to the members and will encourage their walk with Jesus Christ.”

Julie Wietzke is managing editor of Forward in Christ magazine.

Moments with MISSIONARIES

NEPAL

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

Nepal has been called one of the least Christian countries in the world. Only one percent of the population is Christian. Until 60 years ago, the Hindu monarchy killed, imprisoned, or expelled anyone who brought the message of Jesus into the country. It is one of the darkest corners of the world; but the light of the gospel is shining. The church in Nepal has 3,600 Christian brothers and sisters in 40 churches. Here the synod's friendly counselor for Nepal shares another way that light is shining, as told to him by one of our contacts in Nepal:

I heard the screaming every time I walked by the house. I knew she was possessed by demons. I encountered this many times in my trips to remote parts of Nepal. I knew Jesus could help her. One day I knocked on the door of the house and told the family, "I know who can help your daughter."

Later that day her oldest brother came to my home. He was in the highest levels of the Nepali government. He was indignant and deeply offended.

He said, "We will never bring our sister to you. You are lower than the lowest caste in Nepal—and you think you can help us?"

I told him, "I cannot help your sister. I can do nothing for her; only Jesus can."

He left in anger and with the promise, "Never will we bring her to you. You are nothing."

Later this brother took his sister into his home; but he and his wife were helpless and overwhelmed. His sister, who had been afflicted for more than ten years, cried out night and day—and often tried to injure or kill herself. After a few weeks the brother gave up and brought his sister back to the home of their father.

A few days later I heard a knock on my door. Outside was the father of this woman. He and his family carried his adult daughter on a cot. Then the father took off his hat, knelt down to the ground, and touched his hat to my feet. He pleaded: "Please help my daughter." My eyes welled with tears as I asked him to stand.

My wife and I took his daughter into our home. We prayed for her every day. No theatrics. No drama. No high emotion. Only prayers in the name of Jesus.

After four weeks the demons left. That day she became a completely different person. She did not remember her actions of the past.

Her family converted to Christianity—everyone except the oldest brother. Now the family has moved to Kathmandu. Each year on her birthday she calls us and thanks our family. I tell her, "Jesus is the one who saved you."

Hindus and Buddhists often tell people who are afflicted by demons to go to the Christians. They say, "Only the Christian God has power over demons." Still the government is passing a law to punish those who "involve or encourage conversion of religion" with five years of imprisonment and a penalty of fifty thousand rupees (about \$500). Pray that God keeps the door to the gospel open in Nepal.



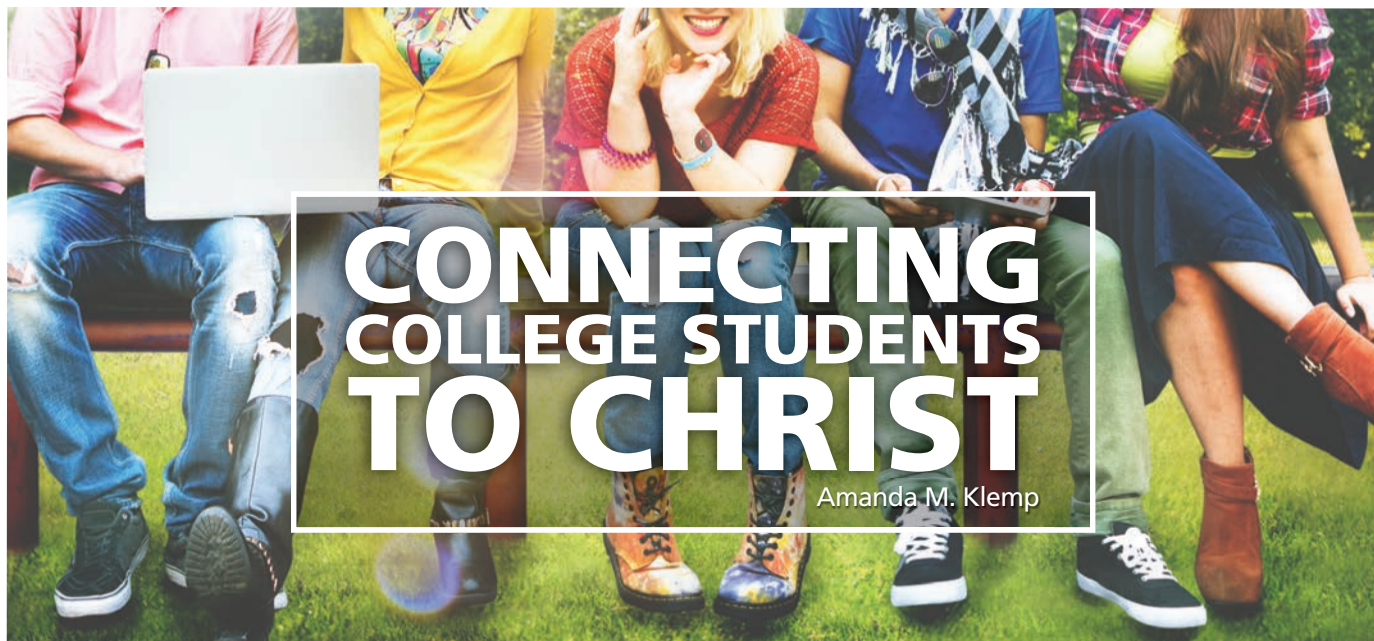


PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

BRINGING LIGHT TO THE GOSPEL

The campus ministry in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, calls itself “Illumine.” The name, which has served them to “bring light from the Scriptures,” reflects how the group studies the Bible.

“When I met with a few university students after I first got here and asked them what they wanted out of campus ministry, they said, ‘If you’re going to do a fluffy Bible study, we’re not particularly interested,’” says Luke Thompson, campus pastor. That ambitious attitude from the students set the tone for the growing, three-year-old campus ministry.

Thompson focuses on two aspects to the ministry. The first is weekly socials, where the students get “the best meal they’ve had that week” followed by an in-depth Bible study.

“We go all out on the dinners and have things like ribs, Mexican, or Indian food,” says Thompson.

St. Paul congregation sets aside part of its budget for the meals, which are held in Thompson’s home. Thompson says a key component to building a relationship with the students is letting them know they have a “home,” a go-to where they can be comfortable.

The socials usually draw about 20 people. About one-third to one-half of the participants come from a Lutheran background. The others either have no background with Christianity or come from nominally Catholic homes. They are hungry to dive into Scripture.

“We basically have two types of students who show up. One is your WELS member looking for a community to find like-minded people and other conservative Christians. But the other half, the friends they invite, have no Christian background or very little Christian background, and they’ve never been exposed to apologetics, deep doctrine, or treating the Bible historically,” explains Thompson.

He continues, “Our Bible studies are very rigorous. We spend a lot of time on the historicity of the New Testament—looking at things like the transmission of the New Testament documents and texts, the reliability of them, the formation of the canon, the historical backgrounds of the gospels, and the historicity of the resurrection. This is the first time many of the students are exposed to this, and they get kind of addicted to it.” Several of the Bible study participants continue studying at the church’s Bible information class not necessarily to become a member but to get a strong, formal introduction to Christianity.

Many of the weekly Bible study attendees started by attending an Illumine Talk, the second main aspect of the campus ministry. These presentations look at elements of pop culture with a view toward literary criticism and Christian apologetics. Once each semester, Thompson will take a topic—ranging from zombies and contemporary fantasy to the modern anti-hero—and use it to examine human nature and how it reflects truths from Scripture. Then he shares the gospel. About 50 students attend, most of whom are not involved in campus ministry or a church at all. Thompson’s goal is to offer the most non-confrontational way possible for students to invite friends to an event that shares God’s Word.

In a multicultural college community that is overwhelmingly non-Christian, one of Thompson’s big goals is to equip the students to talk about the Bible like a New Testament apostle. He wants to remove the commonly defensive statement, “I believe,” from their faith vocabulary, particularly relative to opposing beliefs. He explains, “When you read the New Testament, they talk in a very different way. It’s not about ‘what I believe’ or something abstract, but they’re talking about real, historical, concrete events that took place.” He wants his students to share the gospel in the same way—sharing that it’s real and why it’s real.

FINDING A NEW CHURCH HOME

“Legitimately, I stumbled in, and they were really warm and welcoming.”

It was Alexis M.’s second day in Ottawa as she began school at Carleton University, and she wanted to worship that Sunday morning. This biomedical and electrical engineering student saw St. Paul was open and holding services, so she went in and sat down. That is how she came to learn about Lutheran doctrine and to start the next chapter in her faith life.

After her first chance visit there, Alexis continued to attend every Sunday and joined Illumine, the church’s campus ministry group.

“One thing I really like is, when talking to Pastor Thompson, everything is referenced to the Bible,” she says.

Alexis grew up in a Catholic home and attended Catholic schools. Getting into the Bible has opened her eyes to the message of salvation through Christ alone. “For me, someone who is trying to grow in their faith and spend more time with God and spend time trying to



Luke Thompson holds weekly dinners and Bible studies in his home for the campus ministry in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.



The campus ministry in Ottawa is called “Illumine” to show how it brings light from the Scriptures.

understand the Bible, being able to see where the verses correlate with each other, where things come into place in the Bible, is so very important,” she says.

Her parents, active Catholics, are supportive of her scriptural and faith pursuits through Illumine. While she hasn’t been confirmed yet, she has taken classes and considers St. Paul her church home.

The Illumine group, she explains, is supportive and encouraging. “I highly recommend that any Lutheran church that can have this program should have it, because it gives students a place to go and feel welcome and know that just because they’re Christian does not mean they can’t have fun or can’t interact with others. They can spend time learning about the Word of God,” says Alexis.

She continues, “It gave me a break from school. It gave me time in my week, no matter what, to go and get to spend time with God.”

KEEPING CHRISTIAN STUDENTS STEADFAST

Adele Kapellusch learned about the campus ministry program at the University of Arizona in Tucson her senior year of high school. An Arizona Lutheran Academy choir stop at Grace, Tucson, cemented her decision to attend that college. She graduated from the university in December 2015 with degrees in neuroscience and physiology and

credits the campus ministry program with helping her stay connected to Christ.

“U of A has a great science program, but it was really important to me that I had a church. Grace was across the street from the university, so I had a church that was really close to my dorm, and I knew I would have the opportunity to go to Bible studies and church,” Kapellusch says.

While it was a great way to hang out with like-minded friends, she says that being connected to a Christian community also kept her strong as she faced nonbiblical ideas in her science classes. “Being in science and going to a public university, I was surrounded by people always telling me that because I was a Christian I was ignorant or I would eventually find out that I was wrong and God doesn’t exist,” she says. “But being able to talk with everyone at campus ministry, they all had those experiences, the same persecutions and struggles. It was good to be able to talk to them about it.”



Students at the University of Arizona in Tucson meet regularly through their WELS campus ministry to study the Bible and build one another up in faith.

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Nathan Kassulke, pastor at Grace and leader of the campus ministry in Tucson for the past 11 years, says, “There are so many temptations, opportunities, and options competing for students’ time and attention. And statistically speaking, that’s an opportunity for students to drift away and not stay connected to God’s Word.”

He says that what they hear about evolution, morality, and even religion itself can be a danger to their faith. “To have somebody to talk to and to ask questions, to be built up in faith and maintain that connection to God’s Word and sacraments will help students grow in faith as they face those things.”

The mission of WELS Campus Ministry Committee is to help WELS college students grow in their faith so that they can reach out to other college students with the gospel. Learn more and share contact information for college students at wels.net/campus-ministry.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

Meet Eric Liu, a 2012 and 2014 University of Wisconsin–Madison graduate currently pursuing his PhD in Southeast Asia. “My journey to Jesus started by reading on the Internet Bible verses in my language. I kept thinking about these verses. One night, there was a voice saying, ‘You should take a look at Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel where you had Triple Dollar Dinner three years ago.’ The next day, I went to Chapel and nervously asked the girl at the front desk how I could know more about Jesus and Christianity. I was introduced to Pastor Bill and began studying the Bible with him. I was so blessed to be baptized at Chapel in August of 2014. Without my Savior, I would still be in darkness.”



BUDDING OUTREACH EFFORTS

Brian Wrobel started a campus ministry at Zion, Gainesville, Fla., during the 2014–15 school year after being assigned as Zion’s pastor in summer 2014. Between the University of Florida and Santa Fe College, there are enough students to populate a small city. The outreach opportunities are huge, and the church is located between the two campuses.

In the last two years, Wrobel has assembled a small, dedicated core group of campus ministry members who are working to grow the program and extend outreach efforts



WELS campus ministry students in Gainesville, Fla., are looking for ways to reach out to the unchurched on college campuses and in the community.

on campus. Wrobel says, “The last few meetings this year have been to intentionalize and plan ahead for outreach and sustainability moving forward.”

The first step will be to become a recognized student organization, enabling the group to get in front of students easier. After that, the group is planning activities like a cookout and ultimate Frisbee to garner interest and participation.

“We are a young, cultural, progressive city,” says Wrobel, and the group seeks to reach out to this large multicultural population as well as to the unchurched on the campuses and in the community.

“These are such formative years for these students, where there’s so much getting thrown at them and challenges to their faith that they maybe have never heard or seen before,” says Wrobel. He prays his students will “never stop growing in the knowledge of Jesus.”

Amanda Klemp, WELS editorial projects manager, is a member at Living Word, Waukesha, Wisconsin.

Moments with MISSIONARIES

QUEENS, NEW YORK

Timothy C. Bourman

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

“Never forget.” That is the slogan that you can find scrawled all over our city. Usually the names of those lost in the 9/11 attacks are written right next to the call to remember.

Earlier this year it dawned on me for the first time that young people don’t know much about Sept. 11, 2001. They never experienced it. We are already almost 15 years removed from the event itself. In other words, most teenagers will know about 9/11, but they know about 9/11 sort of like I know that JFK was assassinated. There is knowledge of the event itself but none of the emotion.

Michael O’Leary, a tough Irishman who spent most of his life working for the *Daily News*, can remember that day like it was yesterday.

He can remember watching the towers fall. He can remember returning to the site as a volunteer day after day after day after day

to “clean up” the area,

which entailed some very graphic scenes.

He didn’t know—in fact, nobody knew—how toxic the fumes were. He didn’t know that every day, every hour spent at the site was wrecking his

lungs and that the sights and sounds would leave him suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

You can probably already guess it: 9/11 for him isn’t over—not by a long shot. Every

few months he is forced to remember 9/11 because he ends up in the emergency room short of breath. They tell him that his lungs are destroyed.

I met Mike for the first time years ago on the street in front of our church. He was living in a total dump of a house in a tiny little room. It took my breath away when I saw where he was living. He was trying to hold it all together, but—he would openly admit—he wasn’t. He was drinking too much and struggling to pull his life together. I tried working with him to bring him the gospel, but it wasn’t God’s time.

Three years passed, and I saw him on the street again with the No. 7 train pounding over our heads. He was doing everything he could to get sober, and Alcoholics Anonymous was there for him, but he still needed to know about this “higher power” that they always talked about.

I told him that I would tell him all about Jesus. That day on the street I invited him to church. The gospel won his heart. Now he only misses church when he can’t breathe.

Mike understands that there was a bigger event in history that means more to him than 9/11. He knows that on Good Friday Jesus died to pay for all sin. He knows that Easter Sunday promises brand-new lungs. Mike has found a growing body of believers at Sure Foundation that will support him through it all. In his words, “I’ve got good people all around me.”

This is why we are here in New York City. We’re here so that our city will “never forget” all that Jesus has won.

Tim Bourman serves as a home missionary at Sure Foundation, Queens, New York.





PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

ONLINE RESOURCES PRESENT NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Latin America is expected to have approximately 246 million smartphone users by 2019, compared to 182 million in 2016.*

This growth has led to new opportunities for outreach and training in Latin America. “We are using online means of communication God has given us to empower more people to do on-the-ground ministry,” notes Mike Hartman, field coordinator for Latin America.

Three main online resources reach out to Spanish speakers:

Academiacrsto.com (Christ Academy) offers free Spanish video and audio resources. The WELS movies *Come Follow Me* and *My Son, My Savior* are the most popular downloads.

Visitors can ask questions and chat online with national pastors and missionaries. Local lay leaders can access guides for Bible studies and materials to use in their own communities.

“We want to help people start churches that faithfully teach Christ,” explains Hartman. “Our main focus is working with contacts who reach out to us.”

Academia Cristo also has a Facebook page, which is used to help spread awareness about Lutherans in Latin America. It reaches an average of 400,000 people a day with Christ-centered messages and links to the *Academia Cristo* website.

Iglesialuteranacrsto.com (Christ Lutheran Church) hosts weekly livestreamed Christ-centered worship. Based out of the Lutheran church Most Holy Trinity in Medellín, Colombia, services are broadcast each Sunday by pastors and leaders in Latin America.

In addition to viewing the services, visitors can download the liturgy and hymns for their own use. The service also includes a live chat window so online viewers can interact.

Cristopalabradevida.com (Christ Word of Life) serves as a digital newsletter for Spanish speakers. The site, which is geared toward Lutherans in our fellowship, contains daily audio devotions, Christian resources in Spanish, and news about confessional Lutheranism.

*www.emarketer.com/Article/Latin-America-Home-1559-Million-Smartphone-Users/1012794



Christ-centered resources from *Academia Cristo* are reaching Spanish speakers around the world. In 2016, an average of 480 videos a day are being downloaded, with a total of more than 320,000 views.

ONLINE RESOURCES LEAD TO ON-THE-GROUND MISSION WORK

Once a week, nine individuals gather in Ferney Santofimio's apartment. They come to study God's Word and learn more about the Bible, and they are thankful for the opportunity: there is no Lutheran church in their city of Ibagué, Colombia.

For the study, Santofimio uses resources he has gathered through his time studying through academiacrismo.com, which offers free Christian materials for Spanish speakers everywhere.

"*Academia Cristo* is great for both new and experienced Christians that don't have a nearby church," explains Santofimio.

In addition to opening his home once a week, Santofimio attends weekly online worship through the website iglesialuteranacrismo.com.

Santofimio first learned of these resources when he was going through a difficult time in his life and was searching for a source of truth. In 2014, Santofimio, who has a wife and three children, left his government job after a number of disagreements. "At first, this brought on an economic crisis in my life, as well as family and emotional issues," he recalls. "Due to this, I decided to look for a place or website that taught the Word of God."

He diligently searched online and also visited different churches in Ibagué, a city of about 500,000. "Many of these preached God's grace and salvation by faith, but they also emphasized things we had to do, such as fast and tithe," he says. "They said in order to have God listen to us and offer his help, we had to obey certain things. I didn't understand this."

Then he saw a Facebook message that had just two words: "*Academia Cristo*." It caught his attention, and after looking at the site, Santofimio signed up to learn more. About a week later, Henry Herrera, a Lutheran pastor serving

eight hours away in Medellín, Colombia, called Santofimio to talk more. Then Herrera visited Santofimio to give him some materials to study.



Ferney Santofimio (left) attended a conference for Lutheran pastors and leaders in Latin America in spring 2016. Attendees met and studied the Word and discussed ways to reach out to Spanish speakers.

After the visit, Santofimio started studying once a week with Herrera and became a member of the church. "I am so blessed to have found people who encourage me to read and study the Bible in its truth," says Santofimio. "This was one of my goals, and in the past, it was frustrating for me to not find a place that taught the Bible as it is."

Today, Santofimio, who has a degree in education, teaches at a number of schools in his area. He also looks for ways to share the message of salvation with others. "I have been able to recognize God's immense mercy in my life," he notes. "And I have the chance to share God's love and mercy as well."

FROM HOME, REACHING THOUSANDS

After serving as a Lutheran pastor in Mexico for 10 years—a role he treasured—Carlos Cajas retired.

Before stepping away from the ministry, Cajas' health wavered and then faltered. He was diagnosed with heart troubles and diabetes. "Sometimes I had to sit down while preaching a sermon," he recalls.

The future for Cajas in his retirement looked as bleak as his health conditions. Over time, however, he saw God still had a plan for his life and, better yet, he saw an opportunity to reach thousands with the gospel message from his own home.

Cajas had always had a strong desire to share God's Word with others. After working in a factory in Mexico for 15 years, he decided to leave his position as supervisor behind to be a pastor.

He completed his seminary training and went on to serve in various places in Mexico City and Puebla, about 60 miles southeast of Mexico City.

As his years of service drew to a close, Cajas faced a debilitating heart condition and also open heart surgery. Then diabetes struck his eyesight, leaving him legally blind.

Today, he can see a little on some days; other days, nothing at all. "When my sight darkens—these are the worst days for me," he explains. "I am, as they say in Mexico, 'on the knife's edge.' At any time, I could have a heart attack due to my artery problems."

Cajas lives with his family in Puebla, where his wife, two grown children, and other relatives help oversee his medications, doctor visits, and daily activities.

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Not long ago, his son gave him a tablet. Cajas found that by holding the tablet inches from his face and using a magnifying glass, he could read the words on the screen.

Cajas saw this gift as a tool to share God's Word. He started posting Bible verses and images on his own Facebook page. "Today there are lots of Facebook addicts," he explains. "Everybody has a smartphone."

His efforts coincided with those of *Academia Cristo*, a site that offers free Christ-centered resources to Spanish speakers around the world. Those involved with *Academia Cristo*'s Facebook page spotted Cajas' efforts and asked him to participate.

Today, Cajas volunteers as an administrator of this page, which shares God's Word every day and has more than 285,000 followers. "The little that I can see is enough to create posts with texts and images about appropriate topics," says Cajas. "It is a wonderful opportunity to share the message of salvation with thousands of people."

Cajas' messages uplift and inspire those who follow *Academia Cristo*'s page. At the same time, the chance to serve encourages Cajas and reminds him of his purpose. "I am a disciple of Christ," he says. "And God has given me certain abilities—he hasn't taken them all away."



Carlos Cajas found a new way to serve even in his declining health—by posting Christ-centered messages on *Academia Cristo*'s Facebook page.

Instead of feeling anxious about the coming days and health issues he may face, Cajas finds confidence in his new role. "God hasn't retired us," he says. "God wants us to serve him until the end of our days, and to serve him with joy. We already have this wonderful gift—eternal life in paradise—waiting for us after our time here."



Meet Dalila Campos, originally from El Salvador, now living in Houston. She attends Christ the Lord in Houston and appreciates the resources from *Academia Cristo*, as seen in her Facebook post: "Thank you, *Academia Cristo*, for your faithful work in preaching the gospel to all people. Having you has been a big blessing for me. As I meditate on your publications, I renew my faith in Christ my Savior, but I also review things I learned as a girl and thought I knew but am now remembering. In this way I am ready, every day, for the work of spreading the gospel to others through this fresh and simple method, which is easy to understand. May God continue blessing you. I truly love you in the love of Christ our Lord."

SERVING BOTH SIDES OF THE BORDER

Many Hispanics in the United States have close ties to other areas in Latin America. For Hispanic Lutherans, the desire to share Christian resources with relatives and friends in other areas is often strong. Occasionally, Hispanic members are even looking for a new church home as they head back to Central or South America.

In the past, sharing gospel resources with those south of the border was frequently a challenge. Congregations are spread out, and travel distances between them are often great, making it difficult for those interested in attending worship.

Today, through online resources such as *academiacrismo.com*, which offers free Christian materials to Spanish speakers everywhere, that is changing.

"We have such a diverse congregation," notes Abe Degner, pastor at Christ the Lord, Houston, Texas, which serves a Spanish-speaking population in the area.

With members from more than ten different Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America, when it comes to the opportunity to use sites like *Academia Cristo*, "there's a lot of potential," he explains.

Twice when members moved back to areas south of the border where there were no nearby Lutheran churches, Degner directed them to these online resources.

Two women involved at Christ the Lord lived in El Salvador during their early years. Now in Houston, they have used *Academia Cristo* as a way to share the gospel with family members back home.

Not long ago, one of the ladies pulled Degner aside and asked how to do a baptism if there wasn't a Lutheran church. "I talked her through it," notes Degner. "That's an example of where those resources can be so useful."

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



Moments with MISSIONARIES

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

Below are brief messages from three of your brothers in East Asia. They worked with our called workers for the past several years to start churches. These men have graduated from the seminary program WELS provided through Asia Lutheran Seminary and will be ordained and installed as pastors. With their churches, they stand beside us to proclaim the name of the Lord!

Image and names removed for security concerns.

“In our work as a church, through your gifts and sending workers, we have received help and leading. Through classes and relationships, you have caused us to mature and made us able to teach our brothers and sisters to shepherd and reach the lost.

Of course, all of this is God’s work. God chose to bring us to this point; God used us; God caused us to mature; God has increased and expanded our experiences through all sorts of challenges and disappointments. Through and alongside you, God has made us able to experience his amazing joy. Thank you!”

“With your help, I have grown up from being a spiritual baby, gradually growing up and maturing. You helped me to know my Savior. Your teaching has helped me greatly in how to be a Christian in the world, how to be a husband at home, how to be an evangelist in the church. Let me put it this way: Without the past years,

I wouldn’t be here today, and my service to God and the church wouldn’t have the results it does today. So I am very thankful to the seminary, the missionaries, and all of you brothers and sisters who helped in the background.”

“Though I was raised as a Christian—my whole family was Christian—from small I always wondered why I was living. I never had peace. I never understood God’s love and his grace and mercy. After college, I found myself alone. One night, I stood on a bridge and tried to jump, but I couldn’t. I had a knife, but for some reason, God kept me from killing myself. Then I met some of the evangelists and missionaries you sent. They used God’s Word to answer the doubts in my heart. Because of your love, I understand now why I was living. I understand the purpose of my life. I thank God for leading me in this way, for loving me in this way.

“What I would like to say is this: God continually prepared many individuals in my life who all played different roles. Looking back, I can see how each of these people was a large help and useful for my spiritual growth. I trust that no matter what the circumstances, no matter what the difficulties I may face, I won’t be afraid any more, because I know that God didn’t desert me in the past. He won’t desert me now, and he won’t in the future. No matter what, I trust that he will always love me and help me. This is the message that I can now share with you and everyone that I meet.”



Adam M. Goede

THE CROWN JEWEL OF WORLD MISSIONS

"I like to call Multi-Language Publications the crown jewel of World Missions and also one of the best kept secrets," says Phil Koelpin, former chairman of the Board for World Missions.

Multi-Language Publications (MLP) produces confessional Christian literature and other mass media in different languages for the purpose of mission work. Its history goes back to 1975 when the synod began producing Spanish materials for work in Latin America. MLP was started in 1996 with the vision of working in many languages worldwide.

God's hand has been evident in the expansion of MLP's efforts. In 2002, nationals from Pakistan and Nepal—two countries hostile to Christianity—reached out to WELS for help within months of each other. Working with these contacts, MLP distributed biblical literature that has reached thousands of people. "We virtually established fields without ever having personnel there," says Koelpin. "That was pretty significant, especially at a time with declining resources."

Other steps forward have included utilizing the popularity of the Internet in Latin America to offer resources, training, and worship through a website called *Academia Cristo* (see

p. 26) and calling regional coordinators for Spanish and Asian publications, which provides the benefit of working more closely with target audiences.

Currently MLP has 700 publications in 47 different languages. It has printed more than 2.9 million items. Its goal is to reach 100 million people with the gospel in the next ten years.

Future efforts will expand on what has worked well, like providing more digital materials through the successful *Academia Cristo* model. Nathan Seiltz, MLP director, says, "It is great to see how much success it has had. We want to duplicate the idea in other cultures."

He also would like to see more work with nationals as was done in Nepal and Pakistan. "Overall, this is an economical way to do missions because there is no missionary on the ground there," he says. "It also encourages the nationals to take ownership in the mission and figure out how to spread the gospel where they are." He hopes that online connections lead to relationships with potential workers.

National workers are also helping MLP develop a new frontier in their publications—worship materials. "Church planting is what triggered the idea," says Seiltz. "Worship resources are part of the gathering of the group around the Word and sacraments." MLP's focus is developing music and hymns for different people groups. "It's going to match their culture a lot better," says Seiltz. "They can have something that appeals to them, applies to them."

Koelpin summarizes how God has richly blessed MLP: "The Lord has just kept opening doors and blessed everything we have done, so the work keeps multiplying." He just hopes that WELS can keep up with God's pace. "My biggest concern is that we need more resources if we're going to get done all the challenges that God has put before us. We're only limited by our resources."



In years past, MLP reached out to Spanish-speaking people through the Spanish Correspondence Program, in which Spanish self-study books were distributed in places like Colombia, South America. Now MLP has moved from sending physical books to developing online video courses on the *Academia Cristo* website.

HOW MULTI-LANGUAGE PUBLICATIONS IMPACTS A FIELD

Our contact in Pakistan (name withheld for safety reasons) provides a look at the impact MLP has had in his country.

Although he was raised Christian, our contact shares, “I lost my identity in Christianity because all around me were Muslim people and I was not happy to be a Christian. I started reading and reciting the Quran. . . . In the morning I would go to the mosque.

“My life changed when I was a teenager. I went to a rally, just like the rallies here, and there I started knowing about Jesus and why I have been Christian. After that I never thought a second opinion to become a Muslim. I started preaching from the very beginning. I started small groups, youth groups, when I was in the medical college.”



A house church in Pakistan that uses the catechism for worship on Friday evenings. The catechism, produced in Urdu by Multi-Language Publications, is a big part of the ministry in this highly Muslim country.

He says a major help in his faith was Christian literature. He had a small book of Bible studies that he read more than a hundred times. “I would read it a lot because it had stories there, and it fascinated me.”

His church body, the Church of Pakistan, didn’t provide much theological depth or much Christian literature, so he contacted WELS World Missions and began working with MLP. “We provided materials like the Bible Teaching Series, and his wife started to translate them into Urdu,” says Nathan Seiltz, MLP director. “That expanded to the

Small Catechism, leadership training manuals, etc. We then paid for the printing of these books in the country and still do on a monthly basis so that more and more people can learn about their Savior.”

Our contact in Pakistan began distributing these publications at the hospital he owns. He shares how one of his workers read a Bible Teachings book while she was on break, then hid it in a bathroom. Another woman found it, started reading and sharing it, and the gospel soon spread to her community.

“You cannot preach the Word of God outside—people will kill you,” he says. “But in the hospital, the Taliban likes this literature very much. Many Taliban are the real radical Muslims. Their life has been changed there when they come to the hospital, and they start reading the Word of God. Sometimes we have more than 800 literature books gone. And there is a small, invisible church there in the hearts of the Muslims. I see Muslims in the Bible correspondence school where we have reached more than 50,000 people to give them the literature—not one book, many books! I ask them, ‘Why do you study this Word of God?’ They say, ‘We like it.’”

About a year and a half ago, our contact and his wife had to leave Pakistan when their lives were threatened and his brother-in-law was kidnapped (later released). Our contact is now studying at the Pastoral Studies Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Meanwhile he dedicates time each day to coordinating ministry in Pakistan.

In addition to the distribution of literature—which has already made its way into the neighboring country of Afghanistan—other ministry efforts include a website and a TV broadcast that reaches 1.5 million people. He and fellow Christians in Pakistan are translating favorite Lutheran hymns and producing Christian dramas that appeal to a younger generation. He is also looking to reach out in the United States.

In all this, he is grateful to WELS and MLP: “MLP has been a great help. We never had a problem getting support from them. They really do it with a great passion.”

Adam Goede, supervisor for the Ministry of Christian Giving, is a member at St. John, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.



Gulreena, a woman in Pakistan, is learning about her Savior through reading and taking quizzes in Bible Teaching Series books: “I was richly blessed after reading this book. I was away from God, but now my relationship with God is very strong. I did not pray, but now I daily pray and study the Bible. Jesus took all my sins, and through his holy blood he saved me.”

Moments with MISSIONARIES

SPARKS, NEVADA

Steven M. Hillmer

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

Growing up in the mid-1960s, Greg said his mom would drop him off at church on Sunday, but she did not attend. Greg learned about Jesus in a general way, but inconsistencies made it difficult for him to connect with Jesus in a personal way.

Things changed when he was 14. The offering was taken, and the plates were brought forward. The pastor received them and announced, “You can do better,” so he passed them back to the ushers for a second round. That was the last time Greg attended church.

Fast-forward 42 years. Greg’s wife, Joloyce, began attending The Springs, a WELS home mission in Sparks, Nevada. At first Greg did not attend. He drove her to church but stayed in the car to read. Eventually Greg joined her for worship and attended congregational meals.

About six months passed. It was time to invite Greg to join the new Bible information class, but Greg wasn’t feeling well. He was diagnosed with stage four stomach cancer.

But while cancer was doing its thing, the Holy Spirit was at work doing what he does. At the services Greg attended, he heard the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit created faith in his heart. Greg now warmly welcomed visits and devotions. He discovered the love of other believers, expressed through their phone calls, cards, and compassion.

On Pentecost Sunday, Greg was too weak to come to worship, so an afternoon visit was in order. I began by reading the Pentecost account. We talked about how

Peter didn’t sugarcoat his message. When I asked Greg if he knew how many people were baptized that day, he instantly replied, “Three thousand! We just read this in our morning devotion.”

Then Greg said, “I want to get my house in order. I want to be baptized.”



We filled a bowl with water and rejoiced. With God’s Word, the water became a wonderful water of life. The Holy Spirit bestowed upon Greg the blessings of Baptism—forgiveness of sins, salvation, and the assurance of eternal life. It was an incredible moment.

Greg’s health declined rapidly. One morning, we stood by Greg’s bed reading Scriptures, praying, and singing hymns. Then we sat around the kitchen table. A few minutes later, Joloyce walked back to Greg, and his labored breathing had ended. His eyes were closed. Greg was home with Jesus.

I stayed with Joloyce into the afternoon. We closed with a devotion on Psalm 130, “I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope” (v. 5). Greg’s waiting was over. Now Greg’s new day had dawned. No more cancer. No more pain. Just Jesus and the joy he promises.

I left with several bags of pennies. A few weeks earlier, Greg had mentioned that he wanted his coins to be put in our congregation’s building fund. My sons counted the rolls—9,650 pennies, or \$96.50. The next day, Joloyce said that they found the rest of Greg’s coins. This time it wasn’t just pennies, but nickels, dimes, and quarters too. The total rose to \$516!

The following Sunday’s Gospel lesson was the story of the sinful woman who poured oil on Jesus’ feet. She knew she had been forgiven much, and she wanted to express her love. Near the end of the sermon, I shared Greg’s story and placed his envelope in the offering plate. Greg had been forgiven much. Greg loved much, and he wanted to share what he had to help others know of Jesus’ love.

This is why we plant missions and share the gospel. Some might say this happened just in the nick of time for Greg, but it was all in God’s timetable. We at The Springs were privileged to be God’s instruments, sharing his love and grace.

Steven Hillmer serves as a home missionary at The Springs, Sparks, Nevada.

MISSION UPDATES

PHILIPPINES: Pastor Alvien De Guzman, a native Philippine missionary, serves a small flock of faithful believers in a suburb of Manila (pictured). They are using videos and printed materials from Multi-Language Publications to reach out to the unchurched in their community and are looking to begin ministering to prospects in outlying areas. WELS supports De Guzman and Law and Gospel Evangelical Lutheran Church with monthly contact and additional resources.



ROMANI: Iliyan Itsov, a pastor in the Bulgarian Lutheran Church, has a new mission project in Europe: outreach to Roma (gypsies). A Roma himself, Itsov has a unique understanding about how to share the gospel with the western world's most mistreated ethnic group, a group numbering about 10 million people. He ministers to the Romani in five villages in Bulgaria, including training leaders in each village to conduct worship. Pictured is a new group in Zlataritsa, Bulgaria, where a core group of 17 Roma worships weekly using sermons Itsov provides. Itsov is also working with WELS sister churches in Europe to gather groups of Roma workers and immigrants whom these sister churches will then serve.



LIBERIA: Liberian spiritual leader Isaac David is reaching out to legal immigrants in Las Vegas, Nev., as well as working to establish the Confessional Lutheran Church in Liberia. He opened a church in Las Vegas—the Chapel of Improvement Christian Fellowship—and is working closely with Water of Life in Las Vegas. He also is studying with local WELS pastors. David and several WELS pastors traveled to Liberia in April 2016 to train leaders and members (pictured) and to attend the church body's first convention.



UNITED STATES: The Board for Home Missions authorized eight new mission starts in 2016, five of which are second sites for established congregations. The new ministries include:

- **Rockwall, Texas:** Connected with Divine Peace in Garland, Texas, this multi-site mission will have two locations for worship, but one leadership team and budget. More than 20 members from Divine Peace are living in the target area.
- **Victoria, Texas:** A second pastor will be needed to serve this new multi-site mission outreach by Redeemer, Edna, Texas, as the pastor at Redeemer offers both English and Spanish worship each Sunday.
- **Stevens Point, Wis.:** In 2015, Divine Word, Plover, Wis., called a second pastor to focus on campus ministry at UW–Stevens Point as well as reach out in the community. Recently, Divine Word purchased a building for a campus center and second worship site.
- **Meridian, Idaho:** Cross of Christ, Boise, Idaho, is starting this multi-site mission to serve families living in the neighboring city of Meridian.
- **Coeur d'Alene, Idaho:** Members of St. Matthew, Spokane, Wash., will support this new mission, located about 35 miles away. More than 25 adult members will make up the launch team that will work with the mission pastor.
- **Lehi, Utah:** Prince of Peace, Salt Lake City, is starting this mission south of Salt Lake City in an area that has a strong Mormon presence.
- **Fredericksburg, Va.:** Members from Trinity, Woodbridge, Va., are eager to start a mission in this growing community about 40 miles away.
- **Atlanta, Ga.:** The city of Atlanta is ringed by seven WELS churches. Over the past two years, WELS members have been holding Bible studies in the city, and a core group has been established.

THANKS, LWMS!

For 53 years, the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society (LWMS) has been increasing awareness of, interest in, and support of WELS mission outreach. More than 1,100 women met at the recent 2016 national convention in St. Charles, Ill. (pictured), to learn more about missions and to show their support. About \$53,000 was gathered during the convention for mission projects, and more than \$143,000 was received throughout the year.



A TIME FOR THANKS

Normally, when we do something to help or benefit someone else, our motivation is not to receive thanks. Our motivation is to show Christian love and to do something for someone with no hope of receiving anything in return.

But no one would deny that we do welcome it when people thank us for our kindness and acts of love. It assures us that what we did really means something and is appreciated.

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to visit several of our sister churches in Africa. While I was there, I was able to attend the very first meeting of representatives from our five sister church bodies in Africa. All five African synods were either begun as a result of WELS mission efforts or have been supported by WELS World Missions. For three days, pastors and several lay representatives from Zambia, Malawi, Nigeria, and Cameroon met together to share ministry challenges, to discuss biblical doctrine, and to encourage one another in their mission of proclaiming the saving gospel.

Near the end of the conference, one of the lay members in attendance asked the chairman if

he could address the group—especially his American brothers. He was an older man, and he made his way slowly to the center aisle of the chapel. When he got to the aisle, he knelt down on both knees. I will never forget what he said.

He began to speak in a firm voice. “I know that when you see me kneeling, you are probably assuming that I am going to ask you for something. You are probably assuming that I will be asking for more help for your African brothers and sisters. But that is not why I am kneeling. I am kneeling first of all to thank God for his grace. But I am also kneeling to express our thanks to our brothers and sisters in the Wisconsin Synod. It is because of your love and generosity that today, here in Zambia, we have the pure Word of God. It is because of your work and your gifts that today we know the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. So, on behalf of all of us here, I want to thank you for all you have done. And I ask that you convey those thanks to all of the members of the Wisconsin Synod.”

We do not work to carry out the mission God has given us to receive thanks. The very fact that God has given us the privilege of doing this work is something for which we can and should be thankful. But even though we do not do this work to be thanked, it is a special blessing to hear words of appreciation from people who recognize the special treasure that God has given to them, a treasure that we have been privileged to share.

As we work together on the mission God has given us, we know that the gospel is being shared with people whom we may never meet this side of heaven—both here at home in the United States and also around the world. We should never forget the impact that this work has on people—an eternal impact—for which they are truly grateful to God and to us.

I join our African brother in thanking you for your support of our mission efforts through your prayers and through your offerings. I know that you don’t do it for the thanks, but you should know that your work in the Lord is not in vain and that it is truly much appreciated.

Let us continue to work so that every neighbor and every nation hears the gospel message about the One who saves.



Mark Schroeder and members of the rural church, Trinity, Sinda, Zambia.



Mark Schroeder installs Jonathan Bauer as the pastor at a mission congregation in Mount Horeb, Wis.

Mark Schroeder

Mark Schroeder
WELS president



REACHING A *CHANGING WORLD* WITH GOD'S *UNCHANGING WORD*

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