

Return to grace | Easter witnesses

# Forward in Christ

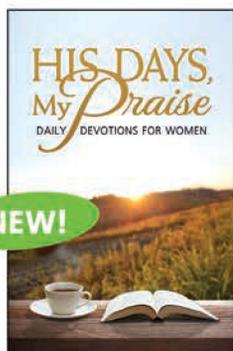
A LUTHERAN VOICE

## The empty tomb

Easter Sunday is our proof that  
Good Friday worked. *Page 10*

# Remain in CHRIST

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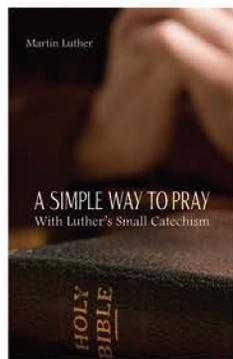
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*May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. —1 KINGS 8:57*

## WHAT'S INSIDE

There's probably nothing as glorious as reading about Easter—whether it's reviewing the historical details of that first Easter Sunday or examining more closely what that Sunday means for all past, present, and future believers. Easter changes our perspective and our witness—something our authors discuss this issue.

- Pastor Dan Leyrer shows us how the apostles used the empty tomb as the heart of their witness to the early Christian church—and how we can use it as we reach out today (p. 10).
- In our “Abiding truth” series, Prof. Paul Koelpin discusses Luther’s confident Easter faith, even when he faced the death of his loved ones (p. 12).
- In the light of a serious accident, a mother ponders how Jesus’ mother Mary felt after that first Holy Week and that first Easter Sunday (p. 30).
- Ever thought about how long 10,000 years is? And that’s just a start when we talk about spending eternity in heaven. But what does that mean for our life on earth now? Our back page article digs deeper into this eternal-life perspective—and how Easter fits in.

*Julie Wietzke*



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**A WOMAN OF FAITH**

Thank you for the article “Noble Christian” [Jan.]. Pastor Patterson did a marvelous job of capturing the personality of this Christian woman, Elaine Poldrack. When I was a young missionary’s wife, she reached out to me and made me feel welcome in a new and foreign place called Texas. I learned many things from Elaine, including the art of being a gracious hostess, but, most of all, she illustrated what a deep relationship with our Lord looks like. She was a woman of faith, and I look forward to a reunion with her in heaven.

*Bonnie Clark  
Peoria, Arizona*

**LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE**

The “Let your light shine” article [Jan.] is one of the best ever. What a wonderful way to point out that just by the way we live our lives, others may notice and reach out to us for more enlightenment. Thus it is important as Christians how we present ourselves to the world because we never know who is watching or listening.

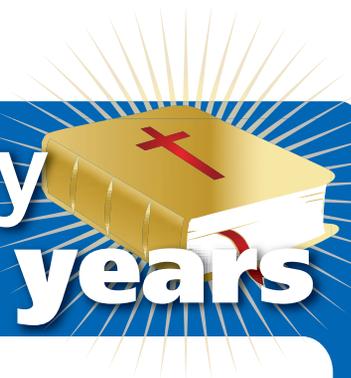
I have pointed out this article to many, including my grandchildren who have been blessed by attending parochial schools through high school and now even in college. At all ages the Holy Spirit can work through us. This article should be shared with young confirmands by pastors/teachers and shared by parents with their any-age children. Get those young minds to be watchful for such opportunities to come into their lives.

*Carol Gehrt  
Neenah, Wisconsin*

**BEWARE THE HEADLINES**

Right on, President Schroeder, for your article “Beware the headlines” [Feb.].

As one who has spent 80 years in that church and its predecessor bodies, I have seen it go from Bible believing to biblical irrelevancy. The ELCA has abandoned the faith of our fathers for cultural relativism. It is more interested in justice than in Jesus. It has received God’s “10 suggestions” only to amend them (and other parts of God’s Holy Word) by popular vote



# Through my Bible in 3 years

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APRIL 2017

- |                      |                     |                      |
|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Luke 17:1-19      | 11. Gen. 31:1–32:2  | 21. Gen. 42          |
| 2. Lk. 17:20-37      | 12. Gen. 32:3-32    | 22. Gen. 43          |
| 3. Lk. 18:1-17       | 13. Gen. 33         | 23. Gen. 44          |
| 4. Lk. 18:18-34      | 14. Gen. 34         | 24. Gen. 45          |
| 5. Lk. 18:35–19:10   | 15. Gen. 35         | 25. Gen. 46:1–47:12  |
| 6. Lk. 19:11-28      | 16. Gen. 36         | 26. Gen. 47:13–48:22 |
| 7. Genesis 27:1-45   | 17. Gen. 37         | 27. Gen. 49          |
| 8. Gen. 27:46–28:22  | 18. Gen. 38, 39     | 28. Gen. 50          |
| 9. Gen. 29:1-30      | 19. Gen. 40:1–41:13 | 29. Luke 19:29-46    |
| 10. Gen. 29:31–30:43 | 20. Gen. 41:14-57   | 30. Lk. 19:47–20:47  |

at the instigation of its leaders. It has abandoned the many faithful still on its rolls to the whims of more recent graduates of seminaries that seem to have no connection to the historic faith and mission of the church.

Thank you for your witness to the Truth, for the full proclamation of the gospel among us, and for all the “Luthers” of our day who will not recant what God has done and given to us.

*David Redman  
Fond du Lac, Wisconsin*

This is just the latest news headline over the last several years attributed to the Lutheran church that should have been specifically attributed to the ELCA.

It is clear that “fake news” is not confined to politics.

*Ed Mosshammer  
Thornton, Colorado*

**OUR WORSHIP SERVICES**

In recent issues of *Forward in Christ*, there have been articles and letters to the editor about our worship services. In this 500th anniversary year of the Reformation it would be appropriate to look at the liturgy and order of service that has come down to us from the Reformation and appreciate what we have. At the time of the Reformation, Martin Luther took the liturgy of his

day and removed all parts that were unscriptural. The liturgy we now have is very scriptural.

Let us be honest with ourselves. There is nothing better in all of Christendom today than what we have in our Lutheran worship services for the Holy Spirit to grow our faith and spark the faith in many others. . . . Let us treasure the rich blessings we have in our worship services! Let us see each other in our worship services and enjoy what has come down to us through the Reformation.

*LeRoy Lothert  
New Ulm, Minnesota*

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

**CORRECTION:**

In “Grace upon grace” [Feb.], the church that offered Jennifer support while she and her daughter were at Mayo Clinic was Ascension, Rochester, Minn., not Resurrection as was reported. Ascension offers a “Church away from home” program for those traveling to Rochester for treatment at Mayo Clinic. Learn more at [churchawayfromhome.org](http://churchawayfromhome.org).

# What happens in Vegas, stays with Jesus

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53:6

Daniel J. Habben

“What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas!”

Did a smirk cross your lips? Maybe you’ve had one of those weekends in “Sin City”—you know, where you let down your hair and drank too much or went to a show that you’d never want Mom to find out about. You excused your behavior with a wink because “what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas!”

## THE IMPACT OF SINFUL CHOICES

If only that were true. Your credit card company won’t forget what you did in Vegas. It’ll itemize your expenditures and remind you of them a month later. And while Mom may not find out what you really did in Vegas, your conscience knows. You can’t leave that behind in Vegas, can you?

Of course, Las Vegas isn’t the only “Sin City.” Pick any place where humans are gathered, and you’ll find enough sin to fill a city. The prophet Isaiah put it this way: “We *all*, like sheep, have gone astray” (emphasis added).

The idea of sheep wandering aimlessly on a hillside probably doesn’t raise the hair on the back of your neck. So let’s alter the illustration a bit. Picture a car that “wanders” over the centerline. A moment of inattention is all it takes. What if you were the driver of the wandering car? Imagine helplessly watching while paramedics try to revive the people you just struck. If your carelessness would cause their deaths, would you have the courage to attend their funerals? It won’t stay in Vegas, will it?

This Good Friday we’ll get to attend such a funeral. The victim, Jesus, died on a cross—and Isaiah says it was our sins that put him there. We went astray and crossed the centerline of God’s commands . . . and it was Jesus who



stood in the path of our sinful collision course. This was no fender-bender. Jesus took our sins head-on and paid with his life. So this Good Friday memorial service, we’ll come before the Father with hearts that recognize and regret the impact our sinful choices had on his innocent Son.

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What happened in Vegas—or last Friday or this morning, for that matter—was pinned to the cross with Jesus.

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## OUR VICTORY THROUGH JESUS

Though we are guilty, we also can attend this Good Friday funeral with deep relief, confident of our forgiveness. In our reading, Isaiah says that God laid our sins on Jesus so that we would have peace. So what happens

in Vegas doesn’t stay in Vegas—it stays with Jesus. We’re clean. We’re forgiven. No one can accuse any of us of being someone God could never love. He does love us. Good Friday is proof. What happened in Vegas—or last Friday or this morning, for that matter—was pinned to the cross with Jesus.

So what is our response? The events of Good Friday don’t give us an excuse to swerve toward “Sin City” and let loose because we know God will forgive us. His forgiveness snaps us to attention, the way a near-miss on the highway makes a driver sit up and refocus. Refocusing on God’s will is what we’ll want to do, because he’s given us something much better than Vegas. He’s given us victory through Jesus.

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



Mark Schwede

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We have a spiritual Gardener who does not neglect us and become distracted in his care for us.

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## God makes it grow

I may be rushing the season for those of us who live in the northern part of the country, but April is the month I begin to think about planting my garden. Those thoughts are not always filled with eager anticipation, however.

I always start out with the best intentions. Last year was probably the best example of my lack of gardening expertise. Like most years, it started out well. I rototilled the soil zealously. I planned where the beans, cucumbers, zucchini, peppers, and tomatoes would be planted. And on one of the first really warm days in May, I planted the seeds in straight rows and tidy mounds and carefully transplanted the pepper and tomato plants in just the right spots.

I decided that I wouldn't really need a fence to keep the rabbits away that year. Bad decision. A few weeks later, after the beans had pushed their way out of the soil to a height of about three inches, the neighborhood rabbits noticed that there was no fence. They chewed the beans to the ground in one night.

As the weeks wore on, my garden was victimized again. My garden vigilance, so robust in May with faithful weeding and watering, gave way to distraction by the middle of June. The weeds invaded and took over. The unwatered ground, so nicely soft and tilled in May, soon turned concrete hard and cracked in the summer heat. Later, in spite of my neglect, some of the vegetables actually matured and began to ripen. But there were days when some remained unpicked, only to fall to the ground as a reminder of my own lack of attention.

Once again, my garden was a failure. And it was my own fault.

As I think of my garden, I'm reminded of how my lack of zeal and my tendency to become distracted isn't limited to my gardening. It happens in my spiritual life too, and what's at stake

there is far more important than vegetables. I think I would be safe in saying the same is true of you.

Faith, planted in Baptism by the power of the gospel, springs up in our hearts. Nurtured by the Word of God, many times from infancy, it pushes up like a young plant from the dead and lifeless ground of our natural sinful hearts. Motivated by the love that God has shown us, we respond with joy and thanks and a desire to serve our Savior.

But how easy it is to neglect our faith. We let down the fences and fall prey to temptation. We become distracted by the weeds of worry and materialism, and we become attracted to the false promises we hear so often. We allow our hearts to become hardened to God's call to daily repentance, and we all too easily let the sweet news of the gospel fall on deaf and unappreciative ears.

Thank God that we have a spiritual Gardener who does not neglect us and become distracted in his care for us. In spite of our failures and unfaithfulness, our gracious God continues to fence us in and protect us with the power of his Word and the certainty of his promises. He even seeks to remove the attractions that would choke our faith and keep us from serving him. He continues to nourish our faith with the rain of his gospel, reminding us of what his Son did for us.

I'm thankful he's a better gardener than I am.

# Light for our path

## What can I do to help my Christian friends who consider worship services boring?

James F. Pope

It is wonderful that you want to help your friends view worship properly. I pray that my response will be beneficial to you, your friends, and all who read it.

### KNOW THE ENEMY

Effective military strategy means that military personnel “know the enemy.” That strategy translates into understanding the enemy’s strengths, weaknesses, weaponry, and tactics. “Knowing the enemy” also is important when it comes to our spiritual warfare as Christians. Satan certainly is the chief enemy of our faith, but unfortunately an ally of his resides in each one of us.

Every person is conceived and born with a sinful nature (Psalm 51:5). That nature is “hostile to God” (Romans 8:7). While Christians possess a new self through the converting work of the Holy Spirit, the sinful nature remains. That sinful nature wants nothing to do with God and his Word. While our new selves echo King David’s joy at the thought of worshiping the Lord in his house (Psalm 122:1), our old selves want nothing to do with any of that.

### MEET THE KING

In our worship services, there are exchanges of spoken words and sung responses. But when it comes to Christian worship, there’s more to it than just the liturgy. In Christian worship we meet our God as he comes to us through his Word and sacrament. Each time we gather for worship, the almighty and all-merciful God speaks to us through his Word. That audience with the King is worthy of our attendance, attention, reverence, and love. In the Lord’s Supper, our risen Savior comes to us in bread and wine to tell us in the most personal way possible that he has forgiven our sins. Through the gospel in Word and sacrament, God nurtures our faith and fortifies us for more faithful Christian living.

In the King’s court we also communicate with him through our prayers and hymns and praises. We confess our sins to him, we praise him for his forgiving love, and we petition him for blessings in our lives and the lives of others. As Christians, our new selves thrill to meet the King again and again.

### ENCOURAGE THE CITIZENS

So what encouragement can you pass along to your friends, citizens of God’s kingdom, who consider worship boring? Thoughts like these come to mind:

- Pray. Encourage your friends to pray before worship, asking that God bless their time with him and also thwart Satan’s efforts in stealing God’s Word from them (Matthew 13:4,19).
- Prepare. Show your friends the value of preparing for worship by looking at the Scripture readings for the day and discovering their connection.
- Participate. Explain to your friends how helpful it can be to examine the sermon text before worship and then follow along with a Bible as the pastor preaches the sermon. Perhaps your friends would benefit by taking notes.
- Ponder. Encourage your friends to find two or three takeaways from the sermon that they can think about during the week.
- Perceive. Help your friends see the mutual encouragement that takes place when Christians gather together for worship (Hebrews 10:25).

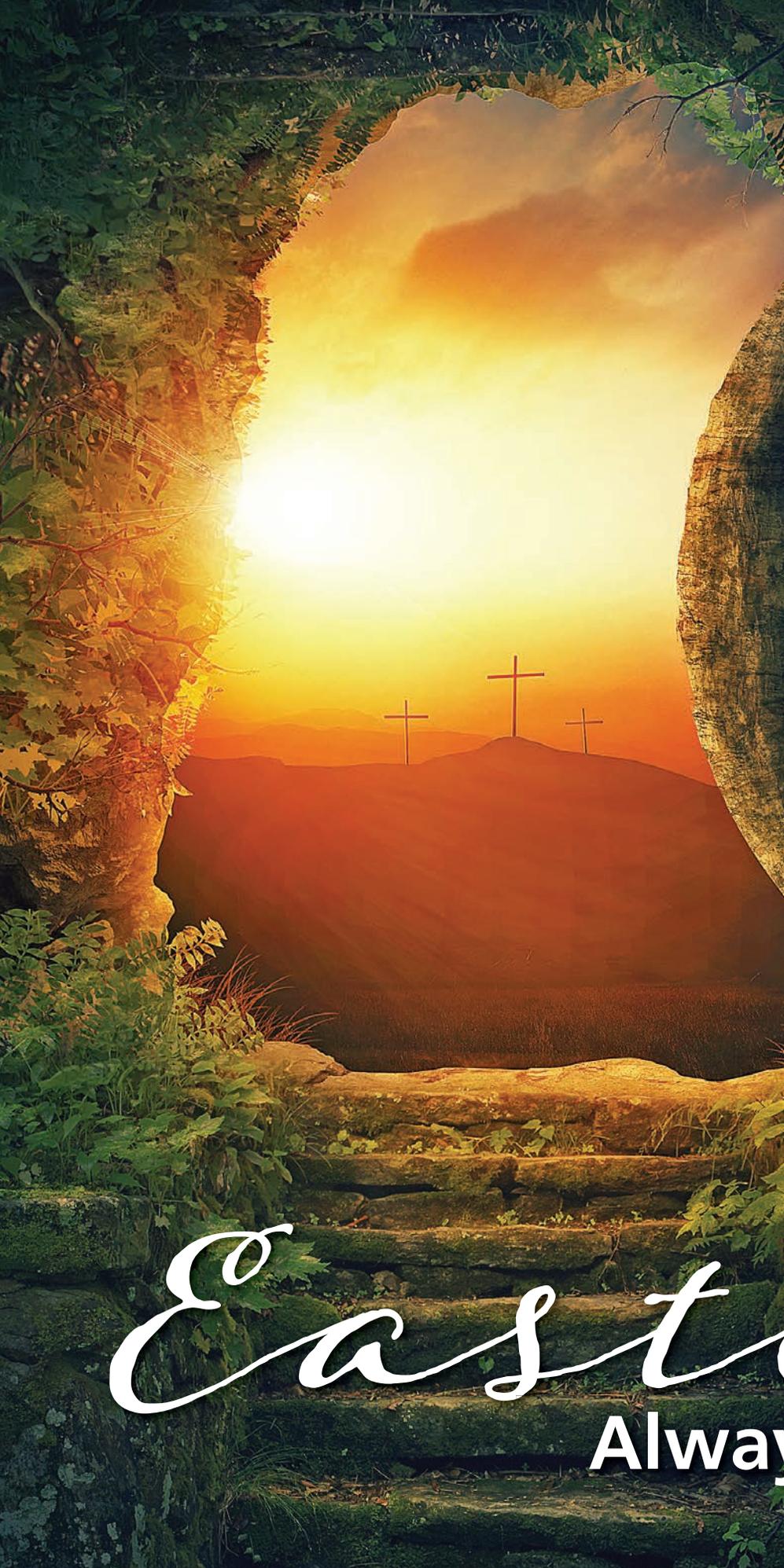
May the day of worship be the highlight of the week for all of us!

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

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

Psalm 119:105



**He is risen! The Lord's resurrection gives power and hope to our witness.**

Daniel P. Leyrer

Fred, the once-a-year churchgoer, addressed the pastor after the Easter Sunday service: "Hey Rev, you're in a rut! Every time I'm here, I hear the same thing—'He is risen.'"

Of course, even if Fred were to attend many more Sundays a year, it's likely he would find the preacher in the same "rut." And thank God for that! God's message to humankind hinges on the historical fact of Christ's resurrection from the dead. How earnestly the apostle writes: "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. . . . If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:14,17). So we proclaim, "He is risen!"

If we want to be witnesses to the meaning and power of Jesus in our lives, we will want to spend some time in Joseph of Arimathea's garden, gazing into the empty tomb.

**JESUS IS THE ONE**

Consider the message of the apostles. Where did they go in their sermons and testimonials to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was in fact the Messiah whom God had promised? Easter. Always Easter. As we journey through the acts of the apostles, we hear them return to that Sunday morning at every turn.

*Easter!*

**Always Easter!**

- Listen to Peter as he proclaims to the Pentecost crowd the risen Jesus as the fulfillment of Psalm 16 (Acts 2:31).
- Listen to the apostles defend their gospel preaching before the Sanhedrin by appealing to the resurrection (Acts 5:30-32).
- Sit in on Paul's meeting with the Athenian Areopagus and hear the clincher to his testimony to Jesus of Nazareth as true God. It's Easter! And whether that testimony was met with sneers, snickers, or suspicions, no matter, Christ's resurrection remained the heart of his witness (Acts 17:31,32).
- When his life was on the line before a Jewish king, Paul chose to defend his ministry by pointing to Easter as proof that Jesus was truly the Christ (Acts 26:23).

Easter, Easter, it was always Easter that filled the apostles' hearts and fell from their lips as God used their testimonies to build the church. The tomb is empty, they would say, and that's your assurance that Jesus is the One to follow in faith.

Wouldn't it be appropriate that Easter fill our testimonies to Jesus as God and Savior too? We are not inviting our unchurched friends and family members to consider worshiping a noble martyr. We are not asking them to trust a dynamic leader to change their lives. We are not confronting them with the latest, greatest philosophy to help them feel better about things. When we testify to Jesus among our friends, we are confronting them with God—the one true God. And Easter backs us up. Just like the apostle Peter we proclaim a God-man on whom “it was impossible for death to keep its hold” (Acts 2:24). Jesus is the One! Human beings need God to take care of their problem of sin. Unabashedly and without hesitation, we use the empty tomb as evidence that believing in Jesus is believing in God.

### JESUS REALLY WON

The apostles also took people by the

hand to the empty tomb in order to preach the forgiveness of sins. How do we know that the God-man actually accomplished our salvation? Took away our sins? Conquered death for us? Defeated the devil? It's Easter!

Paul's sermon in a Pisidian Antioch synagogue during his first missionary journey leaves no doubt. To testify to Christ's resurrection is to testify to God's forgiving of our sins. “We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors, he has fulfilled for

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## God's message to humankind hinges on the historical fact of Christ's resurrection from the dead.

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us, their children, by raising up Jesus. . . . Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses” (Acts 13:32,33,38,39). Consider the apostle's line of thought in this witness to Jesus. Do you want proof that the Christian gospel really is good news? Do you want proof that in Jesus there is forgiveness of your sins? Do you want proof that the verdict God pronounces upon you through Christ is “not guilty”? Look in his tomb! He is not there! He is risen!

Many years later, Paul would give the summation to his Easter testimony: “[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Romans 4:25).

Rightly, we bring our unchurched friends and family members to Calvary in our testimonies to what Jesus has done for us. They need to hear the suffering Savior say, “Father, forgive them.” They need to see God's Son being forsaken under the weight

of our sins so that we might become God's daughters and sons. There can be no gospel testimony, no evangelism, without traveling to the hill outside Jerusalem's city gates on that Friday so long ago.

But let's not linger there too long as we communicate Christ. How do I know that “it is finished!” was truly a victory cry and Jesus meant what he said? “He was raised to life for our justification,” that's how. Yes, the payment for sins was made and accepted. Yes, the battle with the devil was engaged and won. Yes, the One who gave his life on the cross is my only hope for a life after death. All this I know because Jesus rose from the grave. Easter Sunday is our proof that Good Friday worked. Our sins went into Jesus' tomb and stayed there, buried and forgiven, when he rose from the grave.

### EASTER CHANGES US

In Christ's resurrection we are changed.

A risen Lord changes our view of God. He is not a distant, angry deity; he is a loving God who sees us wrapped in the robe of Christ's holiness. Easter proves it.

A risen Lord changes our view of what happens when we die. We now know that journey to be one from which our Pioneer returned, giving us every confidence that his victory over death will result in our victorious life eternal. Easter proves it.

A risen Lord changes our testimony. There is no need to debate philosophies or argue maybes. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead empowers us to speak in the certainties and affirmations the people around us long for: “Jesus is the God you need to rescue you. Jesus has paid for every one of your sins. Easter proves it.”

We are Easter witnesses.

---

*Daniel Leyrer is pastor at St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.*

# ABIDING

## truth

**Luther held on to the hope we have in Christ, whether in life or in death.**

Paul S. Koelpin

In Luther's medieval world, art of all kinds—both literary and visual—often served as a reminder that in the midst of life we are surrounded by death. We might wonder whether people really needed a reminder. The average lifespan was short in the early 16th century—perhaps only 35 years—in large part because epidemic disease could easily ravage a German village. And infant mortality was high. Coping with death was no easy matter.

### FINDING VICTORY IN DEATH

It was even harder for a young man relentlessly troubled by his conscience. Martin Luther feared the moment of death. How could he face his end with any confidence? Spiritually sensitive and insecure, Luther retreated to the shelter of a monastery. The decision made perfect sense. It was not that monks lived longer, but monks observed a routine of patterned “holiness.” Such a life seemed to offer a ray of hope for his distressed soul. But try as he did—and he tried very hard—he could not find the peace for which he was longing. What lingered was the image of God as judge. Luther despaired of becoming righteous. How could he know he had done enough to be righteous in God's sight?

Luther began a quest for an answer. He found it in the words of Holy Scripture. There, particularly in St. Paul's exposition to the Romans, Luther discovered that God supplied the righteousness that sinners lacked. Paul wrote: “This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe” (Romans 3:22). A great exchange occurred on Calvary's

cross. Jesus bore the punishment for all sinners; sinners receive his righteousness. Christ's victory becomes ours by the gift of faith. Luther's Easter sermon of 1530 proclaimed both victory and peace. “This is why I do not worry,” he declared with confidence.

### FACING THE DEATH OF LOVED ONES

Just months after he preached that sermon, Luther learned of his father's death. When he received the news, he was a long way from where he wanted to be. He was staying at the Castle Coburg, on the southwestern edge of Saxony. Luther had wanted to be in Augsburg where supporters of the Lutheran cause had been summoned by the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, to present a confession of their beliefs.

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Luther began a quest for an answer. He found it in the words of Holy Scripture.

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But the Emperor had declared Luther to be an outlaw. He could live safely only in Saxony under the protection of the Elector of Saxony. Arrangements were made for Luther to be as close to the proceedings in Augsburg as he could get—the Coburg Castle, several days' journey away but still in Saxony.

The spring and summer of 1530 were tense and anxious days. According to a well-founded account, Luther scrawled the words of Psalm 118:17 in Latin on the wall of his castle chamber—*Non moriar sed vivam et narrabo opera Domini* (“I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done”)—still memorialized at Coburg today. These words were a confes-

# LUTHER

*still speaks*

sion of Luther's confident Easter faith. What the psalm writer trusted by promise, Luther knew by faith in Jesus Christ—a declaration that life in Christ is eternal and the days of life here have purpose.

All the same, dealing with the death of a loved one is never easy. After receiving the news of his father's passing, Luther wrote:

This death has certainly thrown me into sadness, thinking not only [of the bonds] of nature, but also of the very kind love [my father had for me]; for through him my Creator has given me all that I am and have. Even though it does comfort me that . . . [my father], strong in faith in Christ, had gently fallen asleep, yet the pity of heart and the memory of the most loving dealing[s] with him have shaken me in the innermost parts of my being, so that seldom if ever have I despised death as much as I do now. (*Luther's Works* [LW] 49:319)

Luther's reaction was both human and devout. He grieved; he believed. He understood well how the Christian is "buried with [Christ] in baptism" (Colossians 2:12) and must constantly "die to sins" (1 Peter 2:24). For Luther, the struggle with the sinful nature did not go away; it was merely transformed by the gospel from a life of failed and futile effort to a life of repentance and faith.

Twelve years later, in 1542, Luther's 13-year-old daughter, Magdalena, died in his arms—another untimely death. He admitted at the time that his grief was almost too much to bear. Yet he comforted mourners with these words: "You should be pleased! I've sent a saint to heaven—yes, a living saint" (LW 54:432-3).

One of Luther's biographers submitted that the faith of Luther turned the perception of his time on its head. Instead of a preoccupation with death, Christian faith allowed Luther to see that "in the midst of death we are surrounded by life."

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*Paul Koelpin, a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. John, New Ulm.*

As we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, this is the fourth article in a 12-part series on our Lutheran heritage.

Luther correctly understood the connection between Good Friday and Easter. In an Easter sermon in 1530, he proclaimed, "Know ye, then—sin, death, devil, and everything that assails me—that you are missing the mark. I am not one of those who are afraid of you. For Christ, my dear Lord, has presented to me that triumph and victory of his by which you were laid low. . . . My sin and death hung about his neck on Good Friday, but on the day of Easter they had completely disappeared. This victory he has bestowed on me. This is why I do not worry about you."

Wouldn't it be something if Luther were standing in our pulpit this Easter? In a sense he is. When our pastor preaches, it will be the same glorious message that God restored to the church through Luther: Good Friday, then victorious Easter. As the Reformer put it, "My sin and death hung about his neck on Good Friday, but on the day of Easter they had completely disappeared."

On Good Friday the Savior said of sin's payment, "It is finished." On Easter Sunday the Father added his exclamation point by raising his Son from the grave. So what do we have to fear? For us, death is now like a snarling dog that can't bite us because it has no teeth. For us, death is not a period at life's end, but a comma, signifying more is yet to come. This is the victory that our crucified and risen Savior bestows on us.

Luther won't be in our pulpit this Easter, but thank God the message he treasured from the Scriptures will be!

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



**God's arm is not too short to save. He can reach around the world to rescue sinners and make them part of his people.**

Souksamay K. Phetsanghane

Imagine someone born into a Buddhist family, in a communist country, where there were few Christians and fewer Lutherans. What would be the chances that person would come to faith in the Lord? Improbable? Impossible?

### **GOD WORKS IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS**

My parents were born in Laos in southeast Asia. Laos is almost exactly halfway around the world from Wisconsin. I was born in 1982 into a country that is two-thirds Buddhist. That religion shapes Laos' culture and landscape. Seven years before I was born, Laos fell to Communism. Christianity became more often persecuted than permitted. Today, Christians number approximately 150,000 of the 7 million people in Laos. But when I was born, no one had ever heard of Lutheranism and certainly no one had knowledge of WELS. What would be the chances I would ever hear the gospel? Slim to none, right?

But as in all our lives, our Lord stepped in to make my family and me his own.

In communist Laos, my parents knew that there was no future for their son and soon-to-be-born second son. So in 1984, they decided to flee to Thailand, a country separated from Laos only by the Mekong River. When crossing that river, my parents left Laos with only the clothes on their backs and the items they could carry. My mother was pregnant with my brother; I was two years old. They left behind all they knew and entered one of the many refugee camps in Thailand. Still, there was little chance of hearing the gospel.

But our Lord stepped in. In 1975, the United States had passed the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act. This helped families like ours immigrate to the United States. We spent one year in a Thai refugee camp. Then we spent another in the Philippines, awaiting approval for our U.S. immigration. Through this act, the United States only allowed a few thousand people to immigrate each year. In addition to approval, a refugee family also needed a US person or group to "sponsor" them. Refugee sponsors agreed to help the refugees acclimate to life in the States. Hearing the gospel became a little more realistic but still not much of a chance.

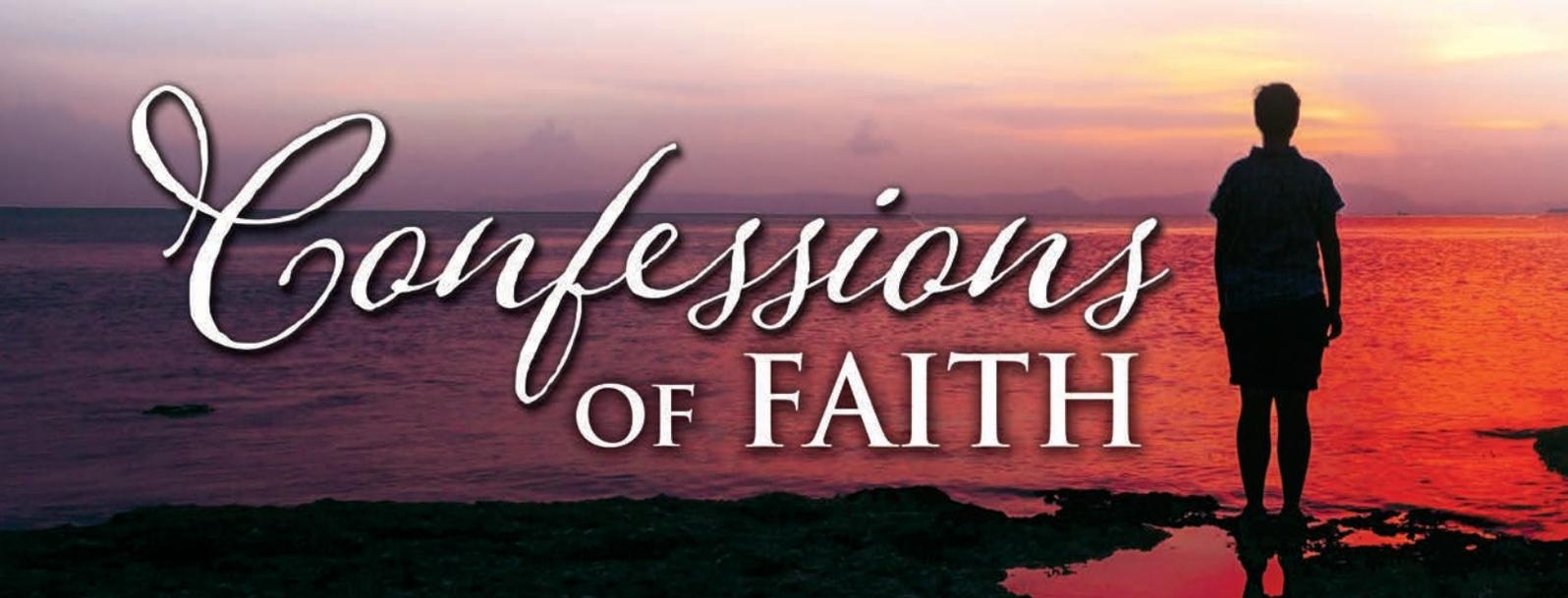
Our Lord stepped in again. Lutheran Social Services (LSS), an arm of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, helped my family find a sponsor. Our sponsor was a Lutheran Church—

Missouri Synod (LCMS) congregation in Springfield, Illinois. Finally, my parents, my two-year-old brother, and I (almost four years old now) were on our way to the United States. However, the LCMS congregation backed out, without warning or explanation. If there was no sponsor for my family, we would have to remain in the Philippines. Our hopes faded.

Our Lord stepped in one more time. The LSS ended up calling a WELS congregation, Peace, Granger, Ind. The LSS talked to Peace's pastor at the time, Michael Hintz. He had the impression that the LSS was just calling churches out of a phone book; the congregation had never previously sponsored a refugee family. After the call, Pastor Hintz discussed it with Peace's members. One member is remembered to have responded, "We can do something about this; we can help this family." In about an hour, Peace had decided to get into an unknown situation sponsoring an unknown family. The Lord changed the gap between the impossible and improbable to reality.

### **GOD WORKS THROUGH HIS PEOPLE**

On Nov. 13, 1986, at about 10:45 P.M., my family and I arrived at the little airport in South Bend, Indiana. Total strangers were there to meet us. People we met for the first time. People who would eventually become family



# Confessions OF FAITH

and even closer. Peace's members faithfully carried out their responsibilities as our refugee sponsors. They taught my parents where to go for doctor's appointments, where to buy groceries, how to drive a car, and a lot more.

Of the entire congregation that helped, two people stick out in my mind: Bob and June Koester. Here are some reasons why: I was a four-year-old who had never known snow. Now, I was in northern Indiana right before winter. So Bob and June Koester got me my first snowsuit—it was bright red. Red is still my favorite color. I remember them throwing me my first birthday party in America and introducing me to American food.

I also specifically remember them—and the entire Peace congregation—sharing their faith with us. Not just with words, but by the mere act of sponsoring a refugee family. Certainly, they shared with us how to live in America. Most important, they shared with us their Lord, the reason for all they did for us.

Pastor Hintz would spend the better part of two years taking my parents through a Bible Information Class. The length was due to the language barrier. I remember being baptized on Palm Sunday, March 27, 1988. The Koesters were my sponsors and godparents. I remember my parents getting confirmed on March 5, 1989. As June Koester recalled, "There was not a dry eye in the



Souksamay Phetsanghane  
and June Koester

congregation." I remember the examples of Christian love and service from Peace's members.

Fast-forward to the present, I now serve our Lord as a pastor in his kingdom. My family lives in Florida. My sister is named after June Koester. Peace Lutheran is still spreading the gospel. Bob and June Koester are now among the saints triumphant.

### **GOD WORKS OUT OF LOVE AND GRACE**

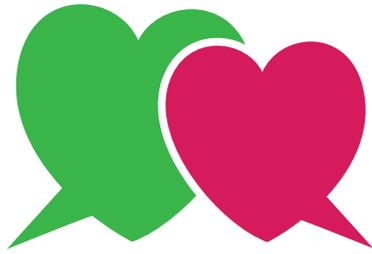
I am often asked: Was it difficult converting from Buddhism to Lutheranism? Conversion is all our Lord's work, so in that sense, it was easy. However, it was also easy in another sense. How I lived as a Buddhist is basically how I live as a Lutheran: "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31).

Between the two religions, the actions may look the same, but the motivation is vastly different. The motivation in Buddhism is to earn your way into Nirvana, the Buddhist version of heaven. If you do not do enough good deeds in this life, then you get reincarnated to try again in a new life. This cycle repeats until you have done enough good deeds to reach Nirvana. For us as Lutherans, we "do to others . . ." because of what our Lord has first done for us. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Our good deeds are our thanks for all our Lord has done.

So what happened, and why am I here? It's grace—God's undeserved love to me and my family. That is the sole reason why any of us are a part of God's family! Indeed, we all have an amazing account of our Lord's love and grace to us. It's always his grace that brings us into his family. God uses his faithful people who share the gospel to make it happen. It may not be as dramatic as my story, but it is just as amazing. We all thankfully remember, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" (John 15:16).

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*Souksamay Phetsanghane, a professor at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wisconsin, is a member at St. John, Watertown.*



**heart to heart**  
parent conversations

Balancing law and gospel is a main tenet of Christian parenting. I often wonder, though, what that actually looks like. So that was my challenge for these authors. Show me! Show me what it looks like to balance law and gospel with our children. I'm excited to share this column with you, because I think that Emily and Dan really delivered by sharing some great examples and practical ideas.

I'd love to hear what you think. Did these articles hit the mark for you? Were you able to apply one of their ideas to your parenting repertoire? Heart to heart is here to support you, so let us know how we're doing. Comment on the articles themselves at [forwardinchrist.net](http://forwardinchrist.net) or e-mail us at [fic@wels.net](mailto:fic@wels.net).

*Nicole Balza*

**Join the conversation!**

Visit [wels.net/forwardinchrist](http://wels.net/forwardinchrist) and look for the *Heart to heart* link.

HOW DO WE BALANCE LAW AND GOSPEL WITH OUR CHILDREN?

**No effort is more** worthwhile than raising our children to love and trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior. And there is no other parenting task that makes us realize how much we need Jesus. Children learn primarily by example, and they're always watching us. I never feel my sin so keenly as when I hear my ungracious words and sharp tone of voice mimicked from my children's mouths. That is not what I wanted to teach them, but that is what they learned from me.

**Showing children the right way to act is only half the battle. It's just as important that we show them unwavering Christlike love when they fail, just as God shows us.** To help our children understand this concept of law and gospel, we must be honest about our own sinfulness. One of the most meaningful examples of law and gospel we can show to our children is being willing to acknowledge our own faults when we sin against our children and ask them to forgive us.

**What a privilege** it is for us as parents to use God's law and gospel with our kids. It's a blessing that the Holy Spirit has called us to faith and given us the motivation to delight in God's law and look for ways to demonstrate our love and thanks. Law versus gospel . . . what a balance as we parent our children at any age!

I have to admit that my natural tendency is a more law-based parenting approach. I thought I'd never use the line, "Because I'm your father and I said so," but I have. Whenever I get to that point in a conversation with one of my kids, I stop and ask myself if what I am requiring is because of my own selfish desire to have things a certain way or if I am really providing a way for my kids to demonstrate their thankfulness for Christ.

**Here's an example: As a child, I grew up eating at the kitchen table with my family for every meal.**

When my kids wanted to eat in the family room together, I had a litany of responses.

"No. We eat at the kitchen table because that's where people eat."

"No, we'll spill and stain the carpet."

Then after these and other responses didn't seem to satisfy anyone, I pulled out, "Because I'm your father and I said so"—as if that response instantly created satisfaction. It was more like forced obedience.

Obedying parents is a great way for children to show their love for God. I have also found that too many moments like this can frustrate kids and their delight in the law can fade.

Let's face it. Eating at the kitchen table is really my own desire to do things the way I did in the past. Can we eat together in the family room? Yes, of course—and we now do. Sometimes we even eat outside on the patio. Where we eat is no longer the requirement, but my kids under-

But that hurts our pride. We don't want to admit to our children when we're wrong. We want them to think that we're strong and unflappable and that we don't make mistakes. But that's not true. We're sinners, just like they are. We need God's grace and forgiveness every day of our lives, just like they do. When we're authentic with our children about our sinfulness and weakness and our need for a Savior, we give them a powerful lesson about what it means to live as a Christian.

**Our children are sinners too, and we need to expect that they are going to sin—and often against us!** When they do, we must be careful not to make matters worse by adding our own sin to the mix with responses that

- take their sin personally (“How could you do this to ME?”),
- overreact (“You’re grounded for life!”),
- heap excessive guilt on them (“Do you realize just how badly you behaved?”), and
- shame them (“You’re so stupid! What’s wrong with you?”).

We simply show them their sin, encourage repentance, guide

them to better choices and actions, and assure them of their forgiveness. Younger children may not fully understand what's happening in this process and older children may not appreciate what the process involves, but the consistent example we set for them will be powerful.

**But above all, we LOVE them—not just when they're easy to love but especially when it's difficult.** Just as God loves us unconditionally, we reflect that same love to our children, not because they deserve it but because “he first loved us.” Our children are our youngest brothers and sisters in Christ, and we are walking together along the narrow path to heaven. We want our children to know not only how much we love them but also how much God loves them.

When we've taught them that, we've taught them what's most important.

*Emily Gresens Strey and her husband, Johnold, have four children ranging in age from 2 to 13.*



stand that what I appreciate is the time together. Being together is a way they can demonstrate their love for me and for God. The rule itself is gone, but their understanding of the motivation behind the rule is what brings me joy.

My natural law way-of-thinking can easily show itself in my parenting. Teaching responsibility quickly can become another selfish rule on my part and cloud the opportunity for gospel-motivated behavior.

**As a parent of two awesome kids, I rely on the example of how my parents balanced the law and gospel with me when I was a child.** You may recall a previous article in which I shared a story from my childhood about driving our new garden tractor into a clothes pole. The grace-filled reaction of my father was imprinted on me. I recently had the opportunity to pay that forward.

My 14-year-old daughter asked if she could pull our car into the garage. It was literally only 15 feet. What could go wrong in 15 feet?

After a complete lesson on driving safety and the rules of “right pedal is go; left pedal is stop,” she sat in the driver's seat and slowly moved the car forward. Just at the point where the pedal on the left should be used, the pedal on the right was selected instead. Thankfully, she only hit the gas slightly, and the car managed to stop after crushing our garbage cans against the front wall.

My first inclination was to get angry. I had just told her which pedal to use! However, I knew she was scared. I knew she felt bad. What she needed right then was not a healthy dose of the law and a stern reaction from her dad. It was a mistake; it was not intentional; she was sorry. My reaction was the same as my dad's reaction when I was her age—nothing but encouragement. The law part of my parenting was done already. Now it was time for the gospel.

**Are the muddy boot prints tracked along the kitchen floor an accidental act of a child on his or her way to**

**an emergency bathroom trip?** Or are they an intentional expression of disobedience that expresses an attitude that he or she doesn't care about the rules in the house? Each has its own opportunity for the parent to emphasize the law in one case or the gospel in another.

Here's my personal formula for balance:

1. Remember my natural tendency. I know I lean more heavily on the law, and I know I don't always put the best construction on an act. Because I know this about myself, I hit my STOP button so I don't get angry right away.
2. Communicate. After I pause, it's time to find the facts. It's time to communicate with my child and find out what happened.
3. Law. Is the particular situation in need of a more law-focused approach? Reinforce the rule? Time for a consequence? Do I need to emphasize the law to have a better appreciation of the next step?
4. Gospel. Is the particular situation prime for a grace response? Perhaps the child already knows she is wrong and already knows consequences will be coming, but she just needs to know you still love her and is forgiven because Christ forgave us.
5. Repent. The last step is to ask God for forgiveness when I skip one of the other steps above and blow it! When I miss the chance God gives me to demonstrate law and gospel in my parenting, I remember the undeserved act of love he showed me by sending his Son to satisfy the requirements of the law for me and by giving me the free and perfect gift of grace.

Let's delight in our opportunity as parents to demonstrate our love for God by using the law and gospel as we handle everyday situations in our home. We are helping our children understand the need for their Savior and bringing them the assurance of their salvation and the knowledge that they are loved by us and their heavenly Father.

*Dan Nommensen and his wife, Kelly, have a teenage daughter and a preteen son.*



# teentalk

## Do you believe this?

Christ, who lived and died and rose again so that we could be in heaven someday, helps us fight through the pain when a loved one dies.

Philip Treptow

“Do you believe this?”

Jesus asked Martha this question after Lazarus died and after he shared what is now a well-known Bible passage: “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die” (John 11:25,26). Her response is one of the best expressions of faith in the Bible. “‘Yes, Lord,’ she replied, ‘I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.’” (John 11:22). After this Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

**Don't we all wish that we could look Jesus in the face and say, “We do believe,” and then expect him to raise our loved one from the dead?** But it doesn't work like that. No matter how much we pray, no matter how much we beg, no matter what we do, they will still be dead. It takes a lot for us to think about our loved ones as being dead. We love them. We want them to still be here for us to give us their advice or just to talk with them once more. We can pray, but everything is not okay.

My mom died when I was in seventh grade. Why isn't my Mom here? Yes, I know that she is in heaven and that she was suffering on earth in her battle with cancer, but that still doesn't help change the fact that my mom is gone and no one can replace her.

Some people say it gets easier as you move on, but they are lying. It never gets easier; it is always a pain—a stumbling block—in your life. It hurts every time someone jokes about their mom or someone else's. Mother's Day is hard. One of the hardest things I have learned to do is to hide the facts that these things still hurt and that I do still think about her every day. You figure out pretty quickly that the pain never really goes away. You learn to mask the pain.

We think that by praying, everything will just magically be perfectly fine. That is not the case. But we still need to rely fully on Christ when we hurt, because he cares for us and he will help us through these times of troubles.

**When the doctors told my mom she had colon cancer, they told her she had six months to live.**

For the next seven years, she battled this disease. She fought for six and half more years than what the doctors gave her. This is the greatest blessing I have from my mom. I was able to enjoy that much more time with her.

Jesus compares death to sleep in the Bible. It is hard for us to comprehend the fact that we will fall asleep and when we wake up, we will be in heaven with Jesus.

After my mom died, it was very hard to go to school every day knowing that she wasn't coming back. But my family and I have stayed very faithful in our church attendance, and I truly do believe that this is the sole reason we all have been able to make it through this.

Prayer does help. It may not fix things, but it does help.

Yes, I do believe.

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*Philip Treptow, a sophomore at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wisconsin, is a member at St. Matthew, Janesville, Wisconsin.*

## CHANGES IN MINISTRY

### Pastors

**Bilitz, Jonathan P.**, to Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, Madison, Wis.  
**Dolan, Aaron J.**, to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.  
**Frey, Andrew K.**, to St. John, Appleton, Wis.  
**Guillaume, Nicholas J.**, to Grace, Casa Grande, Ariz.  
**Meyer, Ib V.**, to Grace, Grand Anse, Saint George, Grenada  
**Otto, Stephen J.**, to retirement  
**Reichel, Benjamin D.**, to Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.  
**Rogas Jr, Clint A.**, to Abiding Faith, Pinehurst, Texas.  
**Salinas, David J.**, to Sure Foundation, Woodside, N.Y.

### Teachers

**Anthony, Darnell J.**, to Siloah, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Backus, Rachel K.**, to Bay Pines, Seminole, Fla.  
**Byus Jr, John A.**, to Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis.  
**Ellermann, Elissa E.**, to Christ-St. Peter, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Grundmeier, Timothy D.**, to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.  
**Hagedorn, Jason T.**, to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.  
**Huebner, Katherine A.**, to West Lutheran High School, Plymouth, Minn.  
**Hussman, Samantha J.**, to Holy Trinity, Okauchee, Wis.  
**Kiecker, Gretel E.**, to St. John, Lomira, Wis.  
**Koestler, Michael L.**, to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.  
**Kroll, Amanda C.**, to Christ-St. Peter, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Laabs, Jonathan A.**, to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.  
**Merten, Jane M.**, to Shining Stars Learning Center, Colorado Springs, Colo.  
**Munson, Leah**, to St. James Preschool, Portage, Mich.  
**Neimann, Meghan**, to Garden Homes, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Nolte, Mark R.**, to Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.  
**Pastorek, Renee E.**, to St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis.  
**Polzin, Barbara H.**, to St. John, Saint Paul, Minn.  
**Raddatz, Benjamin J.**, to Shepherd, Albuquerque, N.M.  
**Schmal, Daniel E.**, to retirement  
**Trebesch, Nicholas K.**, to Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.  
**Unke, Jacob J.**, to Sienna Lutheran Academy, Missouri City, Texas  
**Zimmermann, Jacob N.**, to St. John, Fremont, Wis.

### Staff ministers

**Gostchock, Scott A.**, to Grace in Action, Minneapolis, Minn.  
**Kramer, John E.**, to 1 Latin America Team

### ANNIVERSARIES

**Janesville, Wis.**—St. Matthew (75). April 23. Worship, 8 A.M.; refreshments to follow; worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal, noon. RSVP requested. 608-752-1304; chirsch2017@aol.com.  
**Waterloo, Wis.**—St. John (150). May 14. Worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M. July 23. Worship, 9 A.M. Sept. 17. Worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M.; celebration dinner to follow. RSVP requested. office@stjohnwaterloo.org.  
**Hartland, Wis.**—Zion (150). May 21. Worship, 3 P.M.; refreshments to follow. 262-367-3617.  
**Brookings, S.D.**—Our Savior (50). June 11. Worship, 10 A.M., catered meal and program to follow. RSVP requested by June 1. oslcsec@hotmail.com  
**Rapid City, S.D.**—St. Paul (75). Aug. 12. Picnic, 11:30 A.M. Aug. 13. Worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M.; meal, noon; worship, 4 P.M.; meal, 5:30 P.M. RSVP requested. dkarau@goldenwest.net

### COMING EVENTS

**Adult WELS missionary kids retreat**—Apr. 21–23. Bloomington, Minn. Website, welsmks.com. E-mail, asherod@kingdomworkers.com.  
**The Lutheran Chorale of Milwaukee spring concert**—Apr. 23. 2 P.M., St. Lucas, Milwaukee; 6 P.M., Christ, Pewaukee, Wis. Mary Prange, 414-861-7092.  
**WELS national handbell festival**—April 29–30. Concert, 2 P.M., April 30. Lincoln High School, 1801 16th St S, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis. Hosted by St. Paul's, Wisconsin Rapids. mmfoley@solarus.net. Website, welsbells.com.  
**Commencement events**—Website, wels.net/events.

- **Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.**—May 12. Concert, 4 and 7:30 P.M. May 13. Graduation service, 10 A.M.; call day and assignment of graduates, 2:30 P.M.
- **Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.**—May 16. Vicar assignment service, 7 P.M. May 18. Call day service and assignment of graduates, 10 A.M.; concert, 7 P.M. May 19. Graduation service, 10 A.M.
- **Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.**—May 19. Concert, 7 P.M. May 20. Graduation service, 10 A.M.
- **Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.**—May 26. Concert, 7 P.M. May 27. Graduation service, 10:30 A.M.

**The National Conference on Worship Music and the Arts**—June 13–16. Carthage College, Kenosha, Wis. Re-

gional conference, June 27–30. Irvine, California. Register now. cw@wels.net. Web site, wels.net/worshipconference.  
**International student conference**—June 15–16. St. Paul, Minn. For K-12 schools serving international students. Website, stcroixusa.org/internationalconference.  
**54th annual Lutheran Women's Missionary Society convention**—June 22–25. Hyatt Regency Orlando Hotel, Orlando, Fla. Website, lwms.org.  
**64th biennial WELS convention**—July 31–Aug. 3. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown Wis. Website, wels.net/2017synodconvention.

### NAMES WANTED

**Coeur d'Alene, Idaho**—people living in the area of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Kevin Schultz, The Vine Lutheran Church. 208-449-2080; pastor@thevineidaho.org. Website, thevineidaho.org.  
**Professors**—Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis., invites applications for faculty positions in its Mathematics Department, School of Professional Communication, and School of Business. Website, wlc.edu/human-resources.  
**Peoria, Ariz.**—people living in the area of North Peoria and the Vistancia planned community. John Ehlers, Cross of Glory Lutheran Church, Jomax and Vistancia campuses. 602-904-3501; john.ehlers@crossofglory.org. Website, crossofglory.org.

### PREACHING OPPORTUNITY

**East Brunswick, N.J.**—WELS or ELS pastors can stay in a New Jersey parsonage June 9–22 in exchange for preaching at Our Savior's. Mark Johnston, 732-254-1207; pastormjohnston@gmail.com.

### JOB OPPORTUNITY

**Nurse-in-charge**—The Central Africa Medical Mission is accepting applications for the nurse-in-charge position for the Lutheran Mobile Clinic in Malawi. Applicants for this three-year term of service must be an RN with clinic or hospital experience. The term begins in November 2017. cammcontact@charter.net.

### VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

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

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

# Moments with MISSIONARIES



Article and images removed for security concerns.

## Worker training opportunities around the world

WELS has 41 missionaries serving around the world. But, according to Larry Schlomer, administrator of WELS World Missions, that number doesn't tell the whole story.

"The pastors and leaders those missionaries train are the heart of WELS world missions," he says. "A growing

army of over four hundred men are now serving as national pastors in countries all around the globe. One hundred seventy more are currently in training, and we have requests to train nearly three hundred more. Praise God for the answered prayers as these workers prepare for service in his harvest field."

That's why an important part of WELS World Mission work is training national leaders. Here WELS missionaries and friendly counselors share photos and information about several worker training programs around the world as well as insights on the importance of training these national leaders:



**INDIA:** The Lutheran Seminary in India currently has 36 students, 20 in their first year and 16 graduating in May. One friendly counselor shares the following about the worker-training program: "Incoming students speak either Telugu or Hindi as their primary language, with some limited English as well. We use national pastors as translators (interpreters) in the classroom. They not only translate from English to the local languages, but they are also able to help us better understand local customs and ways of doing ministry here."

Image removed for security concerns.

**SOUTH ASIA:** Currently 14 men are studying to be national pastors in a country in South Asia (pictured with the friendly counselor and national leader). Christian Leaders' Workshops are also held for the 42 leaders of the 42 congregations in the area.

Friendly counselor Mike Duncan says these national leaders are key to outreach in the area. "Local leaders are 'the engine that drives the train.' The apostle Paul said to the pastor, Timothy, 'The things you heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will

also be qualified to teach others' (2 Timothy 2:2). Notice the numbers of the book, chapter, and verse—two, two, and two. One person teaches another (two people) and that person teaches another (two people) and that person teaches another (two people). We multiply leaders in our worker training—two becomes four, four becomes eight, eight becomes sixteen. This means more outreach, more evangelism, more expansion of the church into new districts and countries."

**BULGARIA:** Pictured is Bulgarian pastor Iliyan Itsov (left), who leads the WELS Outreach to Roma project, teaching Anastas, the leader of a group of 20 in the gypsy village of Zlataritsa. Itsov provides sermons for Anastas to lead services while he prepares for possible service as a pastor in the future.



Outreach to Roma is an effort to share the gospel with the western world's most mistreated ethnic group, a group numbering about 10 million people who are scattered across Europe. "The fact that I am a Roma makes me uniquely suited because I know the psychology of the gypsies," says Itsov. "I think it will be easier for them to listen to me than to a nongypsy."



Learn more about worker training programs in Hong Kong and Cameroon in the April edition of *WELS Connection*. Also find out more about worker training in Indonesia on p. 20.

### ACADEMIA CRISTO

In Latin America, education is done through the website *Academia Cristo*, which offers free Spanish video and audio resources for those new to the faith, Bible studies and materials for local lay leaders to use in their communities, and live online training. Most Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Medellin, part of WELS' sister synod in Colombia, started house churches in four different cities in 2016 from contacts made through *Academia Cristo*. Check out the site at [academiacrsto.com](http://academiacrsto.com).

## Marching for God through Lutheran Vanguard

Lutheran Vanguard of Wisconsin (LVW) is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year. Originally the Fox River Valley Lutheran Youth Band, LVW was established in 1978 to “provide a musical marching experience for the students for three Lutheran high schools located in Wisconsin” ([www.lutheranvanguard.org](http://www.lutheranvanguard.org)). Currently, an average of 60 students from nine Lutheran high schools participate. But LVW is much more than just a summer marching band; it’s a way for students “to let their light shine before men” (Matthew 5:16)—a verse that is part of LVW’s mission statement.

Over the years, Vanguard has marched all over the United States and Canada, providing its members an opportunity to compete, develop their musicality, and grow in their faith. Former members now serve as directors, raising up a new generation of student musicians and leaders. “LVW is unique in that it combines the physical, mental, and artistic disciplines in a very intense and competitive activity that brings kids together,” says Charles Ungemach, a current LVW director and 2010 LVW graduate. “Being able to take a group of teenagers and mold them into a cohesive unit is not only an efficient way to build a core of young Christian leaders, but also to raise and train the

next generation of Christian parents, pastors, teachers, lay workers, church musicians, and saints.”

James Neujahr, the current LVW executive director, marched with the band during its first three years of existence and has been on staff since 1987. He remembers the first large band tour in 1980 to Wyoming, Colorado, and South Dakota. “Many of the friends I met are still my friends today,” he says. As a director, he recalls “the numerous parade championships we have won from Massachusetts to Maine to Georgia to St. Louis to Traverse City, but my real favorite memories involve seeing the band grow and mature each year.”

He continues, “Many of our LVW members have gone into the teaching ministry. But I think that the lessons learned—work ethic, perseverance, team work, goal-setting, striving for perfection, and ‘letting our light shine’—have been beneficial no matter what vocation they went into.”

Current Vanguard members agree. “Apart from making lifelong friends, I now have a greater appreciation and love for music,” says Jennifer Prillwitz, a junior at Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis. “Vanguard has also taught me to work hard and to push myself to be my best in anything I participate in. We march for God, and I know that everything I do is for the glory of God.”

LVW will celebrate 40 years sporting new uniforms in a busy summer schedule of parades and field shows in Wisconsin and Michigan. An alumni band also will be part of the Appleton Flag Day parade in June.

And at the end of each event, the group will close with the common doxology. “This song of praise embodies the mission and ministry of

LVW—to praise God through our music and our actions,” says Joel Ungemach, a current director and 1985 LVW graduate. “It’s incredible to witness the dedication of the staff and students to this mission. What an honor to wear that LVW cross on our uniforms and to perform to his glory!”

*Ann Ponath*

For more information and this summer’s schedule, visit [lutheranvanguard.org](http://lutheranvanguard.org).



## BEING LUTHERAN

Every month in our “Confessions of faith” column, we share stories of newer WELS members. Many readers turn to that column first when the magazine comes each month. The stories are uplifting, and it is a joy to read about their journeys of faith and what it means to them to be Lutheran.

As we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we want our readers—whether new or lifelong WELS members—to contribute their comments about being a Lutheran. What does it mean to you to be Lutheran? What do you appreciate most about your Lutheran heritage?

You can fill out our online form at [wels.net/lutheran-heritage](http://wels.net/lutheran-heritage). Or send in your thoughts to *Forward in Christ*, N16W23377 Stone Ridge Dr, Waukesha WI 53188; [fic@wels.net](mailto:fic@wels.net). Please include your contact information and home church. Some of your answers may be used in special materials prepared by WELS or the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.



Lutheran Vanguard at a Fourth of July parade in Massachusetts.

## Planting the seed of God's Word with international students

"We had grown accustomed to teaching a high school religion class where all the students could open their Bibles and turn to book, chapter, and verse in no time," says Matt Herbst, principal of Michigan Lutheran High School, St. Joseph, Mich. "They understood God's plan of salvation and could recite enormous amounts of God's Word. Now, we have a growing population of students who really don't have a prerequisite to start ninth grade Religion."



Johnson, the first Chinese student to attend Michigan Lutheran High School.

offering home-cooked meals, good discussion, and an example of Christian living.

"This has been embraced by a number of our families," says Herbst. "Great relationships have been built, great discussions about God have happened, and wonderful memories are being made."

In addition, baptisms are taking place. In fact, the first Chinese student to attend Michigan Lutheran High School asked to be baptized at the end of his first year there. Almost half the student body attended the worship service during which he was baptized.

This "growing population" that Herbst is referring to is the school's international students, primarily made up of students from Korea and China. The school began hosting international students for the 2013–14 school year.

To meet their needs, Michigan Lutheran High School began offering a Bible basics class to introduce international students to Christianity. Families in local WELS congregations also pick up the international students who live in dorms and bring them to church. Some families host these students over the weekend,

"It was evident right at the beginning of this program that our student body wanted to take hold of this new and exciting portion of our ministry," says Herbst.

Many students at Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis., feel the same way. Each international student at Shoreland is assigned an American student to help him acclimate and integrate. Noah Marquardt, an American student in his junior year, participates as a "Shoreland Light."

**DID YOU KNOW?** During the 2016–17 school year, 435 international students are attending WELS high schools.

He says, "Being a Shoreland Light is an incredible experience. . . . I have created unique bonds with several of these students. In addition to knowing their American names, I am now learning their Korean and Chinese names so that I may call them by both. For me, this is a good bridge to create specific relationships with each of them, so they know that I care about them individually. . . . Whether they are from America, China, Korea, or anywhere else, we are all under the beautiful umbrella of God's saving grace and unconditional love, and everyone deserves that love to be shared with them."

Paul Scriver, principal at Shoreland, says that the school opened its doors to international students because it is "a wonderful way to share the gospel with young people that don't typically get to hear it. It has been a tremendous blessing for these young people and for our school."

As Heidi Plocher, international student coordinator for Michigan Lutheran High School, notes, "Some of our students may never outwardly confess their faith before they leave, but our prayer is always that they know the One whom they can call on in that hour of darkness, repent, and believe because of the seed that was planted while they were here with us."

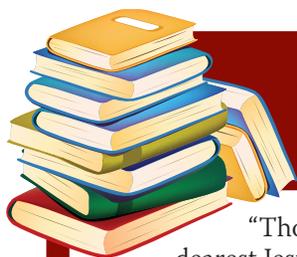


### WATCHING GOD'S WORD TAKE ROOT

Chinese student Bill Wang began studying at Shoreland Lutheran High School in August 2015. In his letter of introduction to his host family, he wrote: "I don't believe in God or that God created the universe or human, but I definitely believe that there are forces beyond human and if I do good things, good things will come back at me. Although I'll be glad if someone can really convince me to believe in God, but please don't be pushy on it."

In February 2016, Wang was baptized (see photo). He will be confirmed in May. After he graduates from Shoreland this spring he plans to attend Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., because he wants to be a teacher and coach so he can tell his students about Jesus, their Savior.





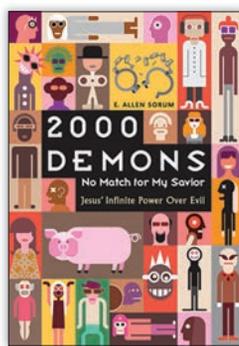
# Booknook

A look at books published by Northwestern Publishing House. For more information, visit [www.nph.net](http://www.nph.net) or call 1-800-662-6022.

“Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, dearest Jesus, unto thee” (*Christian Worship* 114) is the hymn refrain that was resonating in my heart and mind after reading E. Allen Sorum’s *2000 Demons: No Match for My Savior*.

Early in the book, Sorum provides an eye-opening dose of reality when he introduces the book’s core theme: “If not for the constant protection Jesus of Nazareth has given us up to this very moment, the demons would likely have us all naked, screaming, bleeding and living in burial caves.”

What is your perspective on demons? Does the very thought of evil spirits leave you feeling anxious? Or skeptical about whether or not demons could actually have any bearing on your life? Four different composite characters are used in the book to bring to life four different modern-day perspectives on evil spirits. But the best perspective is gained as the book affords the reader a comprehensive look at one single day in the life of Jesus—all through the eyes of each of the characters



\$13.99 for paperback, Kindle, Nook edition.  
\$14.95 for audiobook.

detailed in the gospel writer Mark’s account. It’s a day that included the account of Jesus exercising his supreme authority by permitting Legion to be sent from the tomb-dwelling, demon-possessed man into a herd of pigs numbering about two thousand.

Included at the end of each chapter are practical study questions, which are sure to foster discussion in a group study setting. Also laced throughout each chapter are thought-provoking questions that kept me engaged and caused me to continually self-apply what I was digesting. And what I digested was a book void of theological jargon, but packed with relevant anecdotes; a book that did in fact change my perspective on demons and my Savior by leading me to a greater understanding and appreciation for the work that Jesus continues to do to protect his believers from the constant attacks of Satan and his demon associates. “Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, dearest Jesus, unto thee!”

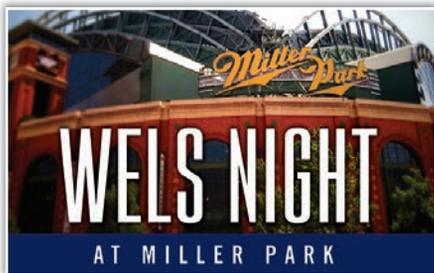
*Adam Sipe, Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

## WELS news briefs

### COMMUNICATION SERVICES

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

The date for the **fourth annual WELS Night at Miller Park** has been set for Thurs., Aug. 10. Join thousands of



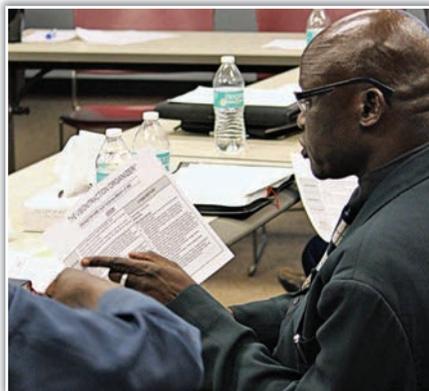
WELS members for the Milwaukee Brewers’ game against the Minnesota Twins. Game time is 7:10 P.M. The Brewers are again offering WELS members 50 percent off the price of tickets. Seating will be in a block for

WELS members. To purchase tickets, visit [brewers.com/wels](http://brewers.com/wels).

### PASTORAL STUDIES INSTITUTE

[psi@wls.wels.net](mailto:psi@wls.wels.net)

The Pastoral Studies Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary hosted the **South Sudanese Mission Planning**



**Conference** in February. Sudanese spiritual leaders and their Anglo ministry partners met to develop training materials and to discuss ministry plans in North America and in Africa.

### WELS HOME MISSIONS

414-256-3234; [bhm@wels.net](mailto:bhm@wels.net)

In January, **Grace, Grand Anse, Grenada, received status as a WELS home mission.** Grace has been operating as an independent congregation in fellowship with WELS. As a WELS home mission, the South Atlantic District Mission Board will help Grace with ministry planning and administrative needs. Steve Gabb, chairman of the South Atlantic District Mission Board, is excited about the mission opportunities that God is placing before this congregation.

## Obituaries

### Larry I. Zessin, 1940–2016

Larry Zessin was born Oct. 24, 1940, in Chicago, Ill. He died Nov. 25, 2016.

A 1965 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Goodview Trinity, Goodview, Minn.; First, Minnesota City, Minn.; St. Paul, Menomonie, Wis.; St. John, St. John's, Antigua; Grace, Oshkosh, Wis.; St. Peter, Sturgeon Bay, Wis.; and Emanuel, Forestville, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Dolores; two daughters; one son; and seven grandchildren. He is preceded in death by one brother.

### Lois E. Schroeder, 1929–2016

Lois Schroeder (née Sagehorn) was born May 31, 1929, in Tilden, Neb. She died Nov. 26, 2016, in North Mankato, Minn.

She served at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

She is survived by 3 sons, 1 daughter, 12 grandchildren, and 1 great-grandchild. She is preceded in death by her husband, Martin, and one daughter.

### Lyle W. Lange, 1942–2016

Lyle Lange was born Dec. 7, 1942, in Hendricks, Minn. He died Dec. 1, 2016, in Louisville, Ken.

A 1969 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served as pastor at Ascension, Escon-

dido, Calif., and as a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Carol; 4 sons; 3 daughters; 23 grandchildren; and 1 sister. He is preceded in death by one son.

### Sharon P. Kemnitz, 1948–2016

Sharon Kemnitz (née Fiebiger) was born Feb. 7, 1948, in Sleepy Eye, Minn. She died Dec. 5, 2016, in Eldorado, Wis.

A 1970 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she served at St. Paul, Van Dyne, Wis.; St. Peter, Fond du Lac, Wis.; St. Peter, Eldorado, Wis.; and Jesus' Little Lambs Child Care Center, Fond du Lac, Wis.

She is survived by her husband, Dan; one son; two daughters; and four grandchildren. She is preceded in death by her parents, one son, and two sisters.

### Clare L. Reiter, 1920–2016

Clare Reiter was born Oct. 5, 1920, in Henry, S.D. He died Dec. 9, 2016, in Elkhart Lake, Wis.

A 1955 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Trinity, Hendricks, Minn.; St. Paul, Argo Township, S.D.; Redeemer, Fond du Lac, Wis.; Trinity, Kiel, Wis.; Immanuel, Willmar, Minn.; and Calvary, Glenwood, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Alvina; 3 sons; 3 daughters; 21 grandchildren; 41

great-grandchildren; and 2 great-great-grandchildren. He is preceded in death by four brothers, one sister, two grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

### Harry N. Wiedmann, 1923–2016

Harry Wiedmann was born Jan. 7, 1923, in Dallas, S.D. He died Dec. 13, 2016.

A 1947 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Good Shepherd, Wolf Point, Mont.; Salem, Circle, Mont.; Faith, Billings, Mont.; St. John, Burlington, Wis.; St. Peter, Helenville, Wis.; and Mt. Calvary, Waukesha, Wis.

He is survived by 3 sons, 4 daughters, 15 grandchildren, and 16 great-grandchildren. He is preceded in death by his wife, Rola, and one brother.

### Walter F. Beckmann, 1932–2016

Walter Beckmann was born Dec. 24, 1932, in La Crosse, Wis. He died Dec. 14, 2016, in Annandale, Va.

A 1958 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served St. John, Battle Creek, Mich., and Grace, Falls Church, Va. He also served as the first president of the North Atlantic District.

He is survived by his wife, Marilyn; one son; one daughter; three grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren. He is preceded in death by one daughter and his sister.

## District news

### ARIZONA-CALIFORNIA

On Feb. 26, the East Fork Youth Garden held a kick-off party at **East Fork Lutheran School, Whiteriver, Ariz.** Families came to compost and plan for the 2017 garden.

### NORTH ATLANTIC

On Dec. 11, 2016, **Redemption, Watertown, N.Y.**, moved into its

own ministry center. WELS Board for Home Missions and WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc., helped fund the new facility for this home mission congregation in northern New York.

### HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

**WW**—**Lisa Carmichael**, a teacher at St. Matthew, Stoddard, Wis., is celebrating 35 years of ministry. On Feb.

18, Carmichael was recognized with the American Legion Teacher of the Year Award for her school district.

On Feb. 19, **St. John, Waterloo, Wis.**, celebrated 150 years of Christian education at its school.

The district reporters for this month are: AZ-CA—Michael Schroeder; NA—Philip Gurgel; WW—Brett Brauer.

## Movie *A Return to Grace* premieres

On Feb. 15, almost 800 people attended the premiere of *A Return to Grace: Luther's Life and Legacy*, a new feature-length film that explores the life of Martin Luther and his quest for truth.

Three congregations—Mount Olive, Appleton, Wis.; Holy Word, Austin, Tex.; and Peace, Mankato, Minn. (an Evangelical Lutheran Synod congregation)—served as pilot locations, hosting screenings in local movie theaters for their congregation and community.

“Our congregation is looking at this year and next year as a way to key in on what it means to be a Lutheran,” says Jasper Sellnow, pastor at Mount

Olive. “This movie is a good way to start this conversation.”

The movie also provides opportunities for local community outreach. “It gave a lot of our members something to invite their friends to that was less intimidating than inviting them to church,” says Don Patterson, pastor at Holy Word. “The presentation is so clear that anyone who comes finds that it’s all about Jesus and his grace.”

Funding from Thrivent Financial made it possible to produce the movie.

Learn more about the film and hosting a screening at [wels.net/reformation500](http://wels.net/reformation500).

### LESSER-KNOWN FACTS ABOUT THE MAN MARTIN LUTHER

He suffered from depression.

He first studied law at the University of Erfurt to please his father.

He and his wife, Katie, had six children, two of whom died at young ages.

He advocated for training girls as well as boys, bringing reform in education.

He was a prolific writer. A large percentage of materials printed on the new printing presses were his writings, making Luther an international celebrity.



Peace, Mankato, Minn., showed the new Luther movie to a full theater on Feb. 15.

## 5 TAKEAWAYS FROM THE MOVIE

“Every Lutheran should see this film to understand where we came from and to see how one man was willing to stand up for what he believed in.”

—Leslie Granberg, teacher at Immanuel, Greenville, Wis.

“It was a real pleasure to see our own WELS pastors sharing our history and God’s grace for us on the screen. It reminded me that God’s Word really is our great heritage and made me proud to be part of a church that clings to it.”

—Adam Gould, member at Holy Word

“I like how this movie re-centered my focus on things above—it’s not my words or actions exactly, but what I can do to spread God’s truth in my little reaches of the world. I may not be breaking away from a national religion or translating the Bible into a different language, but God has me in my life where I need to be to reach who he wants me to reach!”

—Ashley Crane, member at Holy Word

“The film features so many things about Luther you don’t get in books—his bout with depression and the way in which he aged, the way his father’s death impacted him. It was very insightful.”

—Joel Zank, pastor at Mount Olive

“It was fantastic . . . really well done. One of the things I really appreciated was my daughter is ex-Catholic and after she watched the film I had the chance to talk to her about all the things Luther taught us.”

—Brian Zuberbier, member of Mount Olive

# 5

## SIMPLE STEPS to host a screening of the new Luther movie in your community



1  
START

**Go to [wels.newluthermovie.com](http://wels.newluthermovie.com) and pick a theater, date, and time for your screening.** Indicate if you'd like to incorporate special features like an introduction by your pastor or a post-film discussion.

tugg

2

**Tugg will handle the logistics with your chosen theater.**

Once the theater approves the request, you can begin selling tickets for your screening on a personalized online event page set up by Tugg.



**At no cost to your church, your congregation can sponsor a screening of *A Return to Grace: Luther's Life and Legacy* at a local theater.**

Find more details and all the tools and resources you need at [wels.net/reformation500](http://wels.net/reformation500).

3

**Encourage your members and friends to buy tickets and attend the special event.**

Helpful tools and resources, including posters, bulletin inserts, a two-minute trailer, and social media posts, will help you with your promotion. Consider ordering some tickets in bulk for those who may not want to purchase tickets online.



4

**When the threshold of advance tickets is reached, the screening is confirmed.**

Contact the theater a day ahead of the screening to finalize last-minute details.



5

**Enjoy your night at the movie theater with Martin Luther!**

END

# CONNECTING CHINESE PEOPLE WITH THE GOSPEL

Rachel Hartman and Timothy Bourman

## A WORLDWIDE EFFORT

Sometimes I don't think we get this, but so much of our mission work is a truly synodical, worldwide effort. Jennifer Yao was a college student in her home country in Asia. She was befriended by WELS contacts and baptized in Asia. As she looked into graduate programs in finance, she was accepted by St. John's University in Queens, N.Y. She made the move halfway across the world. Our contacts in Asia sent me a message saying, "We have a friend moving to your area. Can you reach out to her?"

The rest is history. She took our Bible information class at Sure Foundation, became a member, and now teaches Sunday school. Jennifer is just one story of already more than one hundred people confirmed as adults at Sure Foundation in the last eight years.

In fact, we take great pride in what God is doing through our synod all over the world. Our Sunday school teachers are a great example of what God is doing through his powerful gospel all over the world. Our team hails from Peru, Mexico, Wisconsin, Ukraine, California, and Asia. The

## MANY WAYS TO SHARE THE SAME MESSAGE

At the beginning of 2017, Chinese women of Saviour of the Nations in Vancouver, Canada, planned a Chinese New Year celebration.

"It's a big deal," explains Geoff Cortright, pastor of the congregation. "For them, it's the biggest holiday of the year. It's a little like Christmas, Thanksgiving, and the New Year rolled into one."

During the initial planning, a question came up regarding what to do with the red envelopes. Traditionally, red envelopes containing money are given as gifts, especially to children, during the New Year celebration. They are considered a way to wish recipients good luck for the future.



The Sunday school teachers at Sure Foundation, Queens, N.Y., are a diverse group from several different countries.

team teaches a growing group of children from places just as diverse and just as beautiful. Through our synod and our congregation in New York City, God truly is working to make disciples of all nations.

---

*Timothy Bourman is pastor at Sure Foundation, Queens, New York.*

After discussing it, the group decided to fill the envelopes with Bible passages instead of coins. "We incorporate their culture into Christianity without compromising our faith," notes Cortright.

## OPPORTUNITIES IN NEIGHBORHOODS

Vancouver has one of the highest concentrations of Chinese people in North America, per the 2016 World Population Review\*.

Many come to the area in search of a top education for their child, explains Cortright. While there, they frequently look for ways to learn English and are often intrigued by Christianity.

Ottawa, Canada, is another destination for Chinese immigrants. Outreach efforts there began when Wayne Halldorson, who serves as pastor at Divine Word, saw an advertisement at the public library. The ad listed information for the Chinese Cultural Centre of Ottawa.

Halldorson got in touch with the organization and connected with individuals through it. "It gave us an opportunity to meet with people and share what we are all about," he mentions. The Chinese outreach efforts have developed over time. "They have come to know that we're the place to learn biblical doctrine," he says.

While some neighborhoods have a long-established Chinese population, others are shifting and presenting new chances to share the gospel. Such is the case for the area surrounding St. Andrew in Chicago. The blocks around the church were at one time filled predominantly with German and Polish residents. They then transitioned to Hispanic families and now are trending more toward Chinese families, explains Adam Gawel, who serves at the congregation. "The Chinese could be a majority in the next several years."

Still other places are finding ways to connect to Chinese people, even if they didn't grow up in the area surrounding the church. Joshua Yu of St. John's in Wauwatosa, Wis., helps coordinate efforts to bring Chinese international students into the area. While there, they participate in a program known as a "bridge class," in which they attend eighth grade at a Lutheran school to prepare for a potential transition to a public or Lutheran high school.

Currently, 67 WELS congregations report they have Chinese members. Furthermore, nearly every area Lutheran high school has Chinese students.

## REACHING OUT IN VARIOUS WAYS

In New York, Chinese students at nearby universities frequently visit Sure Foundation. Many of them first heard of Christianity and were baptized while living in Asia and come to Sure Foundation on referral from those they met back in their home areas.

"The majority of immigrants are Chinese people coming into the city. Typically they've been baptized but not instructed. We then instruct them, and they become members," notes Tim Bourman. The congregation has bilingual

Bibles, such as an English and Mandarin Bible, available for them to use. Some opt to study just in English.

Saviour of the Nations in Vancouver offers English classes to reach out to the community. One student named Annie initially came to Vancouver with her son for his education. After beginning in English classes, she began to study the Bible as well. "I teach instruction classes in English, and the questions and Bible are in Chinese," says Cortright. He gave Annie a Bible in the spring of 2016 and months later, it was filled with notes. Annie was baptized on Christmas Day in 2016.

For Divine Word in Ottawa, networking is the biggest 'in' to the community. "We want to have the reputation of being the best place to learn about the Bible. We offer Bible instruction classes in English and Chinese," says Halldorson.

He explains that teaching just the Bible is a strength in our fellowship. "We are very into teaching and understanding and have zero tolerance for false teaching. I find that in the Chinese mindset they have a hunger for that. They like that it's logical and cohesive; it's objective and concrete and clear."

Divine Word has held open houses and potlucks to reach out to more Chinese as well.

"Especially in newer urban areas of global cities, if you can open that door and make one or two contacts, you're in a fabulous position," adds Halldorson.

St. John's in Wauwatosa holds a regular service in Mandarin for those transitioning into a new culture. First-generation Chinese Americans often attend the Mandarin worship, while second-generation Chinese Americans tend to prefer an English service.

And while many Chinese only attend St. John's for an average of two years, they leave the place equipped with the gospel message to share with others, regardless of where they go.

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

This is the second article in a series about cross-cultural outreach in the U.S. Learn more about how our area Lutheran high schools are reaching out to their Chinese students on p. 23.

\*<http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/vancouver-population/>



(Left) Annie was baptized Christmas Day 2016. She came to English classes at Saviour of the Nations in Vancouver but ended up learning about her Savior. (Center) Members and friends of Saviour of the Nations prepare for Chinese New Year. (Right) A baptism at Divine Word, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Halldorson says that the congregation has had 20 adult baptisms over the last 10 years.



# Be still & know that I am *God*

**A mother and a daughter, a Son and Savior. This story shows the love of Jesus and how precious life is.**

Marilyn Sievert

Early that Monday morning, I awoke to the beeps and whirrs of machines, muffled voices, and muted lights. My clothes were binding me as I rolled over in a bed crackling with the sound of plastic underneath my body. I stole a glance at the bed next to me to assure myself that she was still there. Exhausted as I was, I managed to breathe a prayer: “Yes, Lord, I know. She’s alive. I thank you for this gift to her and to us.”

### **A MOTHER AND HER DAUGHTER**

I thought back to less than 24 hours before. Everything had been within our normal routine for a warm Sunday in May: church, lunch and a few moments of rest before a trip back to church for the afternoon confirmation service.

Then the phone rang. My husband answered and immediately walked to the bedroom as he often does for important phone calls. I heard him asking a few pointed questions, which I could not fully hear. Then he was standing in front of me. What he said next changed my perspective on life forever: Our daughter Shelly was in a Flight For Life helicopter on her way to the hospital.

Reeling with disbelief, I numbly followed my spouse to the car, hopped in, and asked what had happened. The car lurched onto the road before he was able to speak.

He choked out the fact that our daughter had been involved in a freak motorcycle accident during the training that she was attending. Her bike had gone out of control and launched

her off the machine and face-first into a tree. Classmates and her instructor had found her unresponsive. They gave her CPR. After just minutes and a flurry of activity, she was on the helicopter.

All this was going through my mind that Monday morning, as I lay there trying to figure out if this was a bad dream or had truly happened. The dread in the pit of my stomach told me the truth; this was anything but a dream.

### ANOTHER MOTHER AND CHILD

What do you suppose was going through Mary's mind on the Monday after the Sunday we now call Easter? As a mother of a child who was severely injured, recovered, and lived, I find it incredible to think of what Mary witnessed and endured during the first Holy Week. Jesus had his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper, the trial before Pontius Pilate, his crucifixion, and his burial. The words of aged Simeon, "And a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Luke 2:35), must have reverberated loudly in her ears.

And then the fantastic news came early Sunday: the empty tomb, the confusion of John and Peter, the claims of Mary Magdalene, and the joy-filled message of the disciples of Emmaus. Was Mary there in the upper room when the Lord appeared? What did her heart feel while her head was trying to make sense of it all?

And now it was Monday—a day like no other. I imagine Mary and all the disciples rushing somewhere to be together to share their experiences with all the others who were hearing the rumors and wondering if the impossible stories were true. As she gathered a new chapter in the life of her marvelous, amazing Savior-Son, I wonder if the words of the angel Gabriel came back to Mary: "For nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37 ESV).

Perhaps Psalm 46 came to her mind over and over again. It definitely en-

tered my brain during the tough time with our child. "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

### A MONDAY LIKE NO OTHER

How is it possible to be still and let God do his thing when your child is hurting or someone else is causing him or her pain? For me, standing in the emergency room with our daughter and watching all that was going on around us was surreal. Like her, I may have been in shock, but no one and nothing could have taken me away from her during her time of need. Feeling helpless, I tried to pray, but prayers of the Holy Spirit were the only ones I could formulate.

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When you are still  
because there's  
nothing else you  
can do, the Lord  
will comfort you.

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One thing I do know is this: When you are still because there's nothing else you can do, the Lord will comfort you. He will send one Scripture verse after another into your mind to share with your loved one or to calm your own soul. He will put just the right people in the right place at the right time so that even though you are not thinking of your own needs at all, they are being met.

I watched the doctor put in every one of the few hundred or so stitches that reconstructed her face—God giving me the courage to do so. After she was taken to recovery and I was told, "No, now she rests," some kind man came out of nowhere to ask if I needed a hug. I had a good cry and uttered my mantra again, "Yes, Lord, I know. She's alive. I thank you for this gift to her and to us."

Since the first Easter, every Monday will be a Monday like no other. What

a glorious day it is! What a wonderful day every day is! Because of what Jesus did for us by dying on the cross and rising again, we can get through any trial, temptation, horror, and worst nightmare. God *does* have our back. He is God. We can be still. He has given us the power to trust him. We can marvel at his plan of salvation, and we can tell everyone else we meet about our Savior. Most of all, we can say with certainty and joy, "Yes, Lord, I know. You're alive!"

The resurrection changed my perspective on life forever. How about yours?

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*Marilyn Sievert is a member at Good Shepherd, West Bend, Wisconsin.*

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**Editor's note:** Marilyn shared the following update about Shelly: For those of you who are wondering how God has used this incident, here is a recent Facebook post from Shelly (with her permission): "It is hard to believe how fast time flies. It has been almost five years since my motorcycle accident. It's still the best thing that ever happened to me—it made me realize how precious life is, how quickly it can change (or leave you), and not to hold back in telling people how you feel about them." Shelly can often be heard saying, "After you believe in Jesus, the rest of life, the good and the bad, is gravy. No matter what happens, I know I am safe in the Savior's arms." Shelly serves on the Central Africa Medical Mission board and traveled to Africa in 2015. As for her family, Flight For Life helicopters going overhead are reminders to pray for the ones inside, for their families, and for the brave men and women who fly them. We are beyond grateful to God for restoring our daughter!

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When a church,  
pastor, or  
individual  
Christian chal-  
lenges behavior  
contrary to  
God's will,  
that doesn't  
make them  
homophobic  
or any other  
"phobic."

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# Homophobic?

Andrew C. Schroer

"You keep using that word. I don't think it means what you think it means" (Inigo Montoya from the movie *The Princess Bride*).

It happened again recently. Another Christian celebrity was accused by the media of making "homophobic" remarks. We hear that adjective tossed around regularly in our world today. Any negative comment or sentiment expressed toward the LGBT community or about homosexuality is labeled "homophobic."

The term *homophobia* was coined by psychologist George Weinberg in the 1960s to describe "a fear of homosexuals which seemed to be associated with a fear of contagion, a fear of reducing the things one fought for—home and family."

Homophobia is an irrational fear or hatred of homosexuals based on the fear that you or someone you love might somehow be infected by their homosexuality or that others may think you are homosexual if you associate with them. That fear often manifests itself in cruelty or violence toward homosexuals.

Homophobia is real. Men especially are susceptible to such feelings of anger or hatred as they deal with their own insecurities. Many homosexuals around the world have suffered discrimination, abuse, and even violence due to homophobia.

But I am not homophobic. My church is not homophobic. My God is not homophobic.

The fact that the Bible calls homosexuality a sin does not make the Bible homophobic. The fact that my church rightly teaches it is a sin and the fact that I openly espouse the teaching does not make us homophobic. Neither God, my church, nor I have an irrational fear or hatred toward homosexuals.

We love them. We want them to be with us forever in heaven. Just because I say something is wrong or sinful does not mean I hate the person who commits the sin.

When I, for example, confront my young son with his stubbornness, I am not being "obstinaphobic." I am not acting out of an irrational fear or hatred of my son's stubbornness. I love him. I know God does not want him to act that way. I know his sin, like every sin, deserves God's punishment in hell. I know my son needs to repent and find forgiveness in his Savior Jesus. So I openly confront him with his stubbornness.

God calls us as Christians to lovingly and firmly confront others with their sins so that they repent and find in Jesus the forgiveness they so desperately need. He gave us the Ten Commandments to help us identify what sin is. When a church, pastor, or individual Christian challenges behavior contrary to God's will, that doesn't make them homophobic or any other "phobic" we might imagine.

Do some Christians fall into the trap of homophobia and act out of irrational fear and hatred? Of course. Such behavior is just as sinful in God's eyes as the sin of homosexuality, and whoever is guilty of it needs to be called to repentance. As Christians we need to be careful not to let fear or hatred taint our conversations about homosexuality.

If you are not a Christian, however, or do not agree with what God says in the Bible about homosexuality, the one thing I ask is that you be fair. Stop accusing all those who disagree with you of being hateful, ignorant, or irrational.

And please, stop calling us homophobic. I don't think that word means what you think it means.

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*Contributing editor Andrew Schroer is pastor at Redeemer, Edna, Texas.*

# The RIPPLE EFFECT ERASTUS

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

Daniel N. Balge

Modern pavement often bears the name of the finisher who poured and smoothed the concrete. Before the concrete hardens, a stamp presses a logo and sometimes a date into the still-soft surface. Once hardened, the pavement records a bit of history.

## HISTORICAL RECORDS

An old paving stone in Corinth bears a similar mark. In 1929, archaeologist T. L. Shear found a long limestone block into which had been chiseled seven-inch-tall letters. They spell out in abbreviated Latin, "Erastus, for his office of city manager, laid this pavement at his own expense." The inscription sparked a conversation that continues to this day.

That stone is worth talking about. Among the apostle Paul's fellow Christians in Corinth was a man named Erastus. In his letter to the Romans, Paul included him among those sending greetings to the believers in Rome. He identifies him as "Erastus, who is the city's director of public works" (16:23).

Archaeologists agree that the inscription dates from the first century, but

that doesn't settle the question as to whether the Erastus who proudly paid for pavement in Corinth is the Erastus Paul mentioned. And that is a fair question. *Erastus* ("Beloved") was a common Greek name in the Roman world. There might have been more than one public official in first-century Corinth named Erastus.

Moreover, the Greek word Paul uses to describe Erastus' job does not match precisely the corresponding Latin word carved in Corinthian pavement. The essence of the Greek word is "manager" and involves especially money management. We might call Erastus a "treasurer"; many English translations do. The Latin word implies a higher office with oversight of public buildings and projects. Scholars debate whether the words refer to the same office. It might also mean that Erastus had different offices in his governmental career.

So, should we claim that the man whose name is etched in municipal stone is the same man Paul mentions in Romans? Let our answer settle thoughtfully somewhere close to "possibly." We can't prove it; we can't rule it out.

## GOD'S RECORDS

And in the end, it doesn't matter. Our confidence in the Bible does not rest on archaeological discoveries. Are these discoveries interesting? Yes. But our faith is not strengthened. Only

the gospel can do that. We stand on what we know. For our learning, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to mention a man of status and responsibility who believed in Jesus. He apparently fell outside Paul's earlier description of the Corinthian Christians, "Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth" (1 Corinthians 1:26).

This Erastus might be the one whose inscription in stone has endured for two thousand years. More significant—and of greater honor—is that his name is inscribed in the Word that will stand forever. But even more important is what we glean about him. Despite worldly success, civic honor, and material wealth, Erastus became a baptized child of God. God's Spirit had brought another camel through the eye of the needle (cf. Matthew 19:24).

And that brings us to the most important inscription of all. "Written in the Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:27) with his Savior's blood is the name "Erastus."

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

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



*John O'Brien*

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Easter is our sure  
hope on the  
battleground  
of life.

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## Ricochet

The bullets always ricocheted off the boulders protecting the hero. When he popped up his head and raised his gun to shoot at the bad guy, he rarely missed. I grew up with that firmly in my mind as I watched the Westerns of my day. Sound effects and that puff of debris from where the bullet hit the rock made it all the more believable.

Most people do not remember the television shows I watched years ago, but they still see the same thing happening in the movies today. In some movies the bullets still fly, but in others it's the flash of light from the lasers or blasters. Either way the bad guys still miss more often than they hit the hero. The special effects and the surprising escapes still keep our attention. The hero survives to achieve his mission and save the day, the world, his friend, or the nation.

I sometimes wonder if my idea of rescue and protection is shaped by what I saw on TV or in the movies. Do I consider my prayers answered when I escape danger or disease? Then the threat only ricochets away harmlessly. I'm safe and so is the one I prayed for. Yes, my prayers are answered, and I thank God for his protection and, in some cases, his modern miracles. The bullets have missed.

But sometimes the bullets don't miss. Our heroes get wounded and suffer. At times they also die in the face of disease or accident. They are not just our heroes; they are also our friends, loved ones, and colleagues. Then there is the temptation to think that God has not answered our prayers. We need to hunker down and rethink things.

God always has in mind what is best for us and all his people. He does what is best, just as he promised. But he does not simply preserve our life as it is and keep us going ahead without trouble. He will challenge us to remember that heroes (read friends, loved

ones, and colleagues) don't always live as they have or live to fight another day. He strategically changes our lives in many ways for our good.

Before we go too far, we need to be a bit introspective about our own situation. We like to think about those other heroes we know but in the comfort and security that we are personally safe and the bullets of disaster have whizzed over our heads. We breathe a sigh of relief, but we ought never ignore the reality that our journey through this life follows a narrow path to heaven. That path has hardships, pain, and misery for us too.

Like soldiers in the midst of battle, casualties and death are realities we cannot prevent. Sometimes they do just miss us. But whether we are counted among them or not, whether we have escaped difficulties or been stopped in our tracks by them, we have a hope from a God who loves us. He, at times, will challenge us by turning our world upside down, but he does not desert us.

That hope grows large as we remember the empty tomb in Joseph's garden. The Lord Jesus is alive. Death could not hold him. It can't hold any of his disciples either. Easter is our sure hope on the battleground of life.

The bullet with our name on it is out there somewhere, but Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25,26 ESV).

# Baptism

Joel D. Otto

Most American Protestant Christians have views of Baptism different from Lutherans. Some see Baptism as little more than a dedication ceremony where the parents are promising to raise their child as a Christian. They don't think Baptism has the power to do anything. Others think infants should not be baptized. Still others believe that Baptism is something believers do to show their commitment to God. They turn Baptism from gospel into law.

That is not how true Lutherans view Baptism because that's not what the Bible teaches. In his Small Catechism, Martin Luther wrote that "Baptism works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this." He could say this because the Bible says that in Baptism God forgives our sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16) and saves us (1 Peter 3:20,21; Mark 16:16). Luther wrote that Baptism is "a gracious water of life and a washing of rebirth by the Holy Spirit." He could say that because the Bible says that the Holy Spirit is given in Baptism (Acts 2:38) and that through Baptism the Spirit works rebirth and renewal (Titus 3:5).

Baptism seems so simple—a splash of water and a few words. Those who deny the power of Baptism often claim that it is just an outward ceremony. In the Small Catechism, Luther rightly points out that "it is certainly not the water that does such things, but God's Word which is in and with the water and faith which trust this Word used with the water." God's Word is powerful. It was powerful enough to call the universe into existence. It is powerful enough to give the spiritual and eternal blessings God promises through Baptism (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Following Luther's example, true Lutherans find great comfort in Baptism because Baptism is God's work for us. Paul wrote that we are clothed

with Christ through Baptism and made children of our heavenly Father (Galatians 3:26,27). We are connected to Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6:3,4). Everything Christ won through his perfect life, death, and resurrection is given to me—personally, individually—through my baptism.

In a sermon, Luther explained, "Holy baptism was purchased for us through this same blood, which [Christ] shed for us and with which he paid for sin. This blood and its merit and power he put into baptism, in order that in baptism we might receive it. For whenever a person receives baptism in faith this is the same as if he were visibly washed and cleansed of sin with the blood of Christ. For we do not attain the forgiveness of sins through our work, but rather through the death and the shedding of the blood of the Son of God. But he takes this forgiveness of sin and tucks it into baptism" (*Luther's Works* 51:325).

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What Bible passages would you use to defend the biblical teaching and practice of infant baptism? Explain how you might use those passages.
2. When Luther was battling temptations to doubt his salvation, he would remember, "I *am* baptized." Why is this better than saying, "I *was* baptized"? How can this truth strengthen you in times of doubt?

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This is the seventh article in a 14-part series on key doctrinal emphases that Luther brought back to light through the Reformation. Find this article and answers online after April 5 at [wels.net/forwardinchrist](http://wels.net/forwardinchrist).



**WHAT IT MEANS  
TO BE TRULY  
LUTHERAN**



# AN ETERNAL-LIFE PERSPECTIVE

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

**Easter changes the way we look at our time here on earth.** Jonathan R. Hein

Picture a timeline ten feet long, perhaps drawn on a large whiteboard. On one end is a zero. On the other end is the number 10,000. The timeline represents 10,000 years. Now imagine shading the first 80 years of that timeline red. That's the length of a normal human lifespan. Do you know how long that shaded portion is? Not even a full inch.

Now, let's consider what our lifespan means if the 10,000 years is 24 hours. If our life span represents less than an inch of the 10,000-year timeline, how long is our lifespan on the new scale of 24 hours? It's a scant 11.5 minutes.

## **A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON TIME**

So what? Well, imagine you got up one morning and for the first 11.5 minutes, everything went wrong. You stubbed your toe getting out of bed. You ran out of shampoo. You burnt your toast. It's a bad start. But for the next 23 hours, 48.5 minutes, everything in your day went perfectly. Obviously, you have had a *very* good day!

Now go back to the timeline and replace the 24 hours with 10,000 years, so that the red-shaded portion once again represents 80 years. Imagine everything in the first 80 years is pain and heartbreak from the moment you are born until the day you die. However, the next 9,920 years are perfectly blissful, nothing but joy. You must agree that, overall, the first 10,000 years of your existence have been extremely good!

Now remember the last verse of "Amazing Grace." It goes, "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun" (*Christian Worship* 379:4).

This is what Jesus has promised. "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though

they die" (John 11:25). Christ's resurrection from the dead proves not only that he has delivered you from your sin but also that he holds the keys to the grave. You are going to rise to everlasting life. "The trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable" (1 Corinthians 15:52). *Imperishable*. The first 10,000 years of your existence is just the start!

## **A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON LIFE**

When that promise sinks in, it gives us an eternal-life perspective. That perspective changes everything.

When we focus just on this life, problems look huge. If you fight cancer for five years, that's a big portion of your earthly life. But if you have an eternal-life perspective, your problems start to look tiny, precisely because you realize that they consist of an infinitesimal portion of your entire existence. Five years is nothing compared to 10,000 years.

When we focus just on this life, we tend to hoard resources. We feel that we can't volunteer too much time or give too much money to church. But if you have an eternal-life perspective, you joyfully can give generous amounts of time and money in service of your Savior. You know that Easter means that the riches of heaven are yours and that time is something you have in infinite supply. Here, on earth, is the time to work hard to share the gospel. The time to rest is coming later, and it shall never end.

Easter means you are eternal, friends. Let that truth shape your priorities for the very brief part of your existence that you spend in this world.

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*Jon Hein, pastor at Beautiful Savior, Summerville, South Carolina, is also the director of the Commission on Congregational Counseling.*