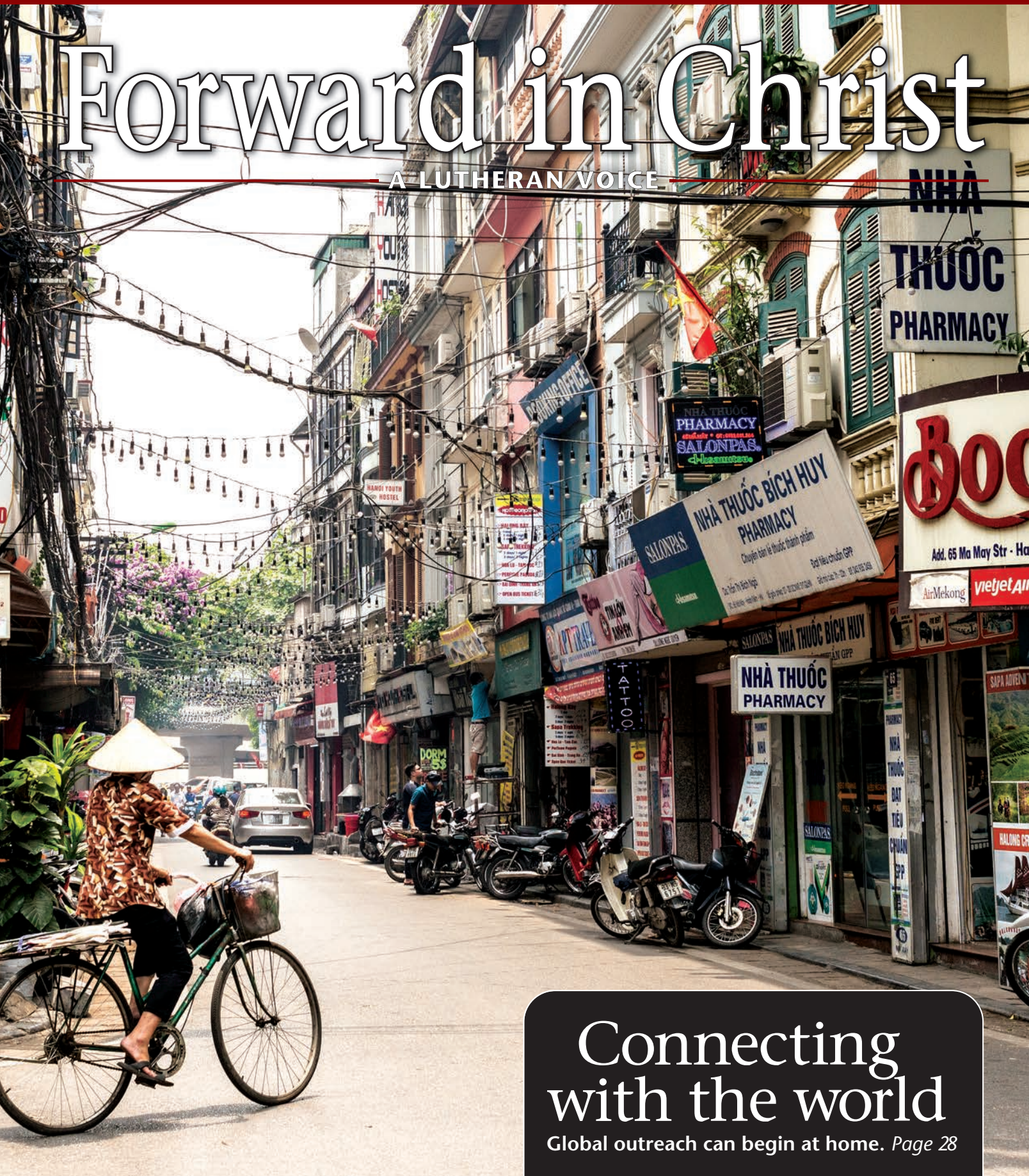


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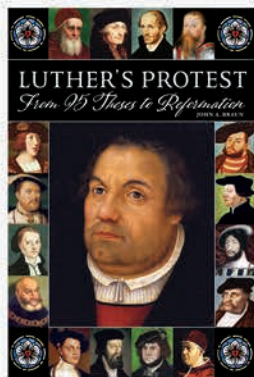


Connecting with the world

Global outreach can begin at home. *Page 28*

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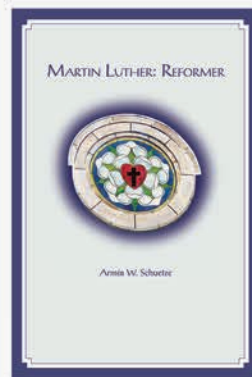
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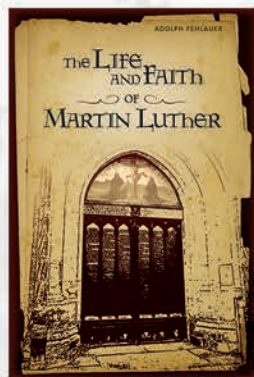
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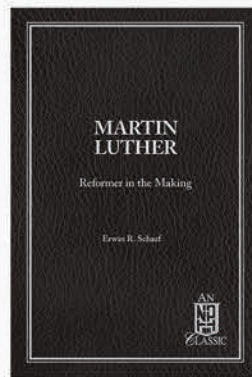
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FEATURES

10

Abiding truth

Luther identified the doctrine of justification as the doctrine by which the church stands or falls.

Daniel M. Deutschlander

12

How big is your God?

God is present everywhere and is unchanging. He is all-knowing and all-powerful.

Arthur A. Eggert

14

Confessions of faith

A woman discovers the Lord's guidance along an often difficult road.

Ann M. Ponath and Vanessa Woods

16

**Heart to heart:
Parent conversations**

How do we encourage positive role models for our children?

26

Open your catechism

Forgiveness is a daily need for all Christians, and God provides that necessary gift freely.

John A. Braun

28

**Reaching the Vietnamese
at home and abroad**

Rachel Hartman and Daniel Kramer

30

Grace upon grace

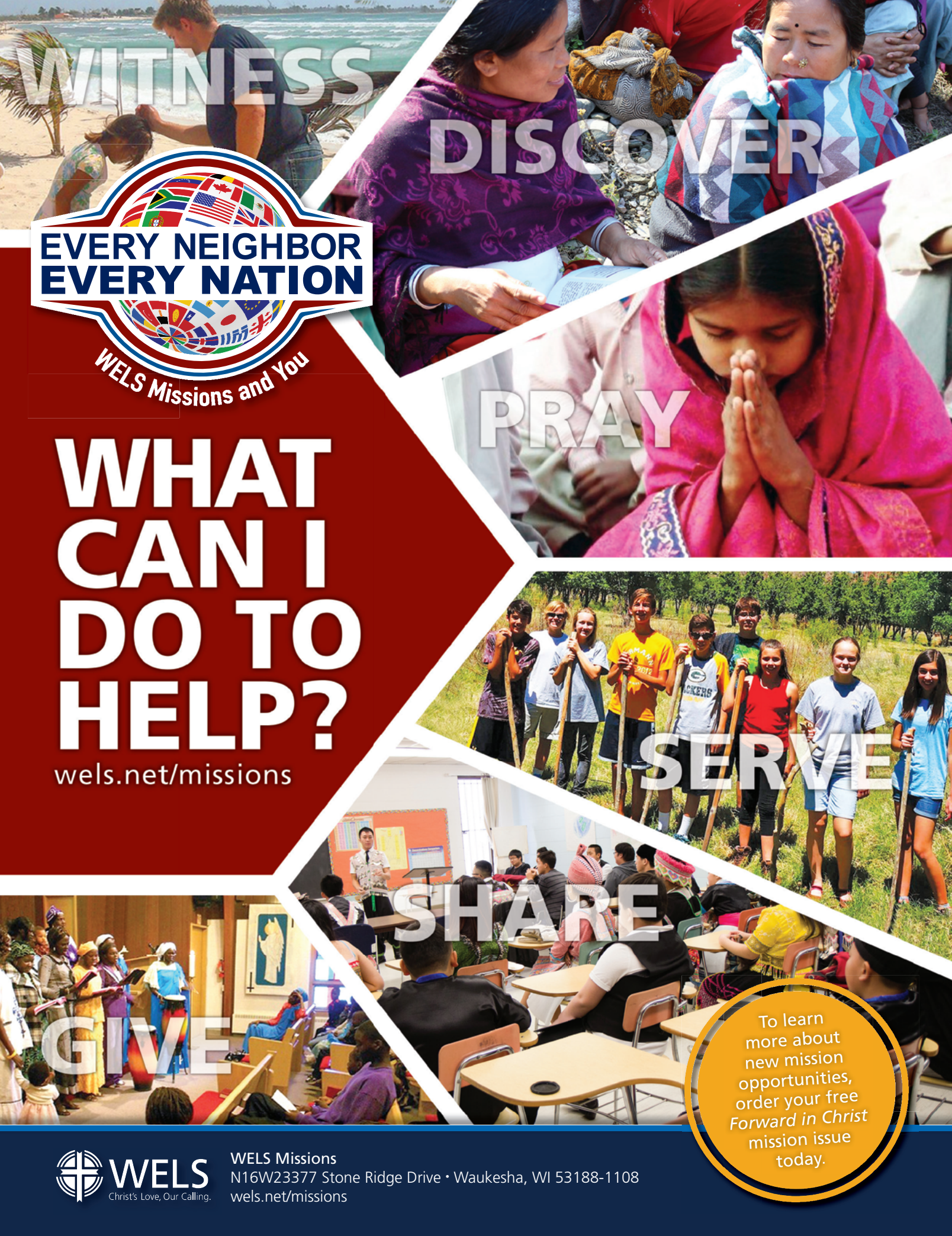
God's grace sees a family through the storms of life.

Julie K. Wietzke

36

"I'm sorry"

Even though we sin daily, God freely forgives us time after time.



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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

Our devotion (p. 7) and back-page article both refer to the same Bible passages: Romans 8:35,37. One shares about God's forever love to us, while the other gives a personal example to demonstrate God's love for sinners.

When looking through the entire issue, I realized that many articles relate to this familiar passage that states, "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

- Both "Confessions of faith" (p. 14) and "Grace upon grace" (p. 30) highlight that even on the most difficult paths, God is with us—and even carrying us—when the burden becomes too heavy.
- In his article, Dr. Arthur Eggert tells us more about God's omniscience and omnipotence, two qualities that put an exclamation mark on God's power in and plan for your life (p. 12).
- Finally, Executive Editor John Braun reminds us that even when we feel weary from life's troubles, we can sink ourselves into God's promises because God has said he will never desert us (p. 34).

One last note: Make sure to check out a new series that looks at cross-cultural ministry in the U.S. (p. 28). In future issues, we will be digging deeper into these wonderful opportunities at home, which are leading to amazing opportunities abroad.

Julie Wietzke



7



11



28



30

IN EVERY ISSUE

6

Feedback

Readers share their opinions

7

Devotion

Forever loved

8

From the president's desk

Beware the headlines

9

Light for our path

Examining yourself before Communion

18

Teen talk

Like a star shining in the night

19

Bulletin board

Announcements from around the synod

20

News

What's happening in WELS

32

Editorial comment

Exercise your freedom of speech

33

Bible study

The ripple effect: Simon the tanner

34

A thought

Weary and burned out

35

Interactive Bible study

What it means to be truly Lutheran: Faith alone

FREE FROM DEBT?

To be sure, we all join President Mark Schroeder in praising and thanking God for his wonderful blessing to be free of a synodical debt accumulated 20 years ago ["Free to proclaim Christ," Dec. 2016]. As President Schroeder said, God has given us "opportunities to share the gospel with people and in places that may have been unthinkable only a few years ago." It is "happy news" indeed to be free of an annual payment of \$1.6 million and therefore free to do other church work. But are we really free of debt?

For me, there would be more "happy news" if our synod would adopt a plan whereby those young men and women called by the Lord of the church "to preach Christ crucified—to as many people and in as many places as he gives the opportunity" would be free of much of the debt of student loans! . . .

*Ed Lindemann
Watertown, Wisconsin*

This is a good reminder for us to consider gifts of student financial aid for those who will one day proclaim the gospel to us and for us.—ed.

DOES XMAS TAKE OUT CHRIST?

Re: "Heart to heart: parent conversations" [Dec. 2016]. "Some people refer to Christmas as Xmas . . . they take Christ out completely."

It turns out "Xmas" is not a non-religious version of "Christmas." The first letter in the Greek word for *Christ* is *chi*, and the Greek letter *chi* is represented by a symbol similar to the letter *X* in the modern Roman alphabet. So "Xmas" and "Christmas" are equivalent in every way, except their lettering.

*Susan Nelson
Glendale, Arizona*

WORSHIP STYLES

Re: "Removing obstacles for outreach" [Oct. 2016]. I've been a member of four WELS congregations. All have practiced traditional services; some had organized evangelism programs.

I spent a few weeks in Malawi worshiping at several congregations. Although

I am not inclined to raise my hands or dance, it was wonderful to experience the joy exhibited in their worship.

Having visited many WELS congregations from California to New York, I have sung praises with a band and a tape recorder, communed en masse and at a bench, thanking and praising our God. It was enlightening to experience the enthusiasm in the more contemporary congregations. Bible studies were very well attended and members, gracious.

I understand the concern regarding the traditional vs. contemporary worship style. The Great Commission has not changed, but our culture certainly has. . . .

We're about to celebrate the 500th anniversary [of the Lutheran Reformation]. Unless we can find scriptural fault with these fresher practices, let's value the freedom to say, "Come and see," in bringing God's grace to all.

Lois Meier

Worship styles are not the barrier to outreach we sometimes perceive them to be.—ed.

CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS EVE

Re: "Light for our path" [Dec. 2016]. I was surprised that in Professor Pope's

answer to why so much attention is placed on the night before Christmas (Christmas Eve), he didn't mention the obvious: that it is the eve of Christ's birth. We've set aside Christmas Day to celebrate the birth of our Savior, but on Christmas Eve we not only anxiously await the next day but also celebrate with the angels who made the announcement to the shepherds guarding their flocks *by night*: "I bring you good tidings of great joy." It is only natural for Christians to remember that night and the awe and wonder of the announcement by the angels of heaven. . . .

*Glenn M. Brunner
Kewaunee, Wisconsin*

COVER OPINIONS

Unattractive [cover, Oct. 2016]?

What better picture than this of well-worn Bibles? It warms my heart to know people have been reading the Word of God.

*Gail R. Hupalo
Belleview, Florida*

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

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- | | | |
|------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. Luke 1:1-25 | 11. Lk. 4:31-44 | 21. Lk. 8:22-39 |
| 2. Lk. 1:26-38 | 12. Lk. 5:1-11 | 22. Lk. 8:40-56 |
| 3. Lk. 1:39-56 | 13. Lk. 5:12-26 | 23. Lk. 9:1-17 |
| 4. Lk. 1:57-80 | 14. Lk. 5:27-6:11 | 24. Lk. 9:18-36 |
| 5. Lk. 2:1-20 | 15. Lk. 6:12-36 | 25. Lk. 9:37-56 |
| 6. Lk. 2:21-40 | 16. Lk. 6:37-49 | 26. Genesis 1, 2 |
| 7. Lk. 2:41-52 | 17. Lk. 7:1-17 | 27. Gen. 3 |
| 8. Lk. 3:1-22 | 18. Lk. 7:18-35 | 28. Gen. 4, 5 |
| 9. Lk. 3:23-4:13 | 19. Lk. 7:36-8:3 | |
| 10. Lk. 4:14-30 | 20. Lk. 8:4-21 | |

Forever loved

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Romans 8:35,37

Daniel J. Habben

Duct-taping a torn hiking boot is not a lasting solution. I know. I've tried. Resoling the boot with needle and thread would have been a better option, but, even then, the sole of the boot would have eventually detached again. There's no such thing as a permanent bond . . . is there?

GOD'S FOREVER LOVE

Actually there is: Christ's love for sinners. So says the apostle Paul in Romans chapter 8.

Picture Jesus' outstretched arms on the cross. In his death, Jesus flung out his arms to embrace a world of sinners with God's forgiveness. Paul wants you to know that nothing can come between you and Jesus' embrace. A cancer diagnosis can't pull you from his arms. Not even death can break his tender hold.

God's love for us in Jesus surrounds and protects us in death the way a submarine surrounds and protects the sailors inside. When a submarine disappears under the waves, onlookers don't panic. They know the sub will surface again and everyone inside it will be okay. That's also true of a Christian in his coffin. In time, he will surface again—alive and well!

GOD'S PROTECTING LOVE

No, nothing can separate us from God's love, but there are plenty of things that can distract us from it. When I spend more time poring over online product reviews than I do studying my Bible, for example, I may begin to think that my life would be better if only I had nicer patio furniture. When I fail to turn off my phone at devotion time, I'm tempted to check the latest text—as if my friend's inane comments are somehow more important than what the eternal God has to say to me.



Have I made you feel guilty for succumbing to these temptations? Then picture again those outstretched arms of Jesus on the cross. There is another way to regard that posture: like a police officer holding back a surging mob.

Nothing can
come between
you and Jesus'
embrace.

And that's exactly what Jesus was doing on the cross—holding back God's surging anger over the many ways we despise his love. Sinless Jesus was struck down by God's anger, but his fallen body became a shield behind which the world can hide. His resurrected body is proof his protection holds. Behind Jesus, God's anger will not touch us. Behind Jesus, sin need not control us; guilt need not consume us.

But if nothing can separate us from God's forever love, why is life sometimes so cruel? Sometimes you feel like a sheep being dragged to the slaughterhouse (Romans 8:36). Maybe you feel like a guinea pig in the care of your doctor as you undergo various treatments with no success. Maybe you can even relate to Wile E. Coyote from the old Looney Tunes cartoons, whose best laid plans always ended in disaster. Perhaps you are looking forward to life's end so you can be with Jesus and escape life's misery.

But you don't have to go to heaven to be with Jesus. Jesus is already with you. You are, even at this moment, surrounded by his love. And nothing and no one can take you away from that embrace.

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



Mark Schweder

True unity
among churches
is achieved when
there is unity
of teaching
based on the
Word of God.

Beware the headlines

Last fall, you may have seen a headline that caught your attention. Even though it was a story about religion, it appeared in many secular news publications. The headline blared, “U.S. Lutherans Approve Historic Agreement With Catholic Church” (*Huffington Post*, 8/17/2016). Only by reading the article would you have noticed this very important piece of information: “Nearly 500 years after Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the Castle Church door, the **largest Lutheran denomination** in the U.S. [emphasis added] has approved a declaration recognizing ‘there are no longer church-dividing issues’ on many points with the Roman Catholic Church.”

The Lutherans who approved the “historic agreement” with the Roman Catholic Church were in fact Lutherans belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). While the ELCA is for the moment the largest Lutheran church body in America, it has gone from a membership of 5.2 million in 1988 to 3.6 million today and has lost more than 1,500 congregations. It now represents less than half of the Lutherans in America. A more accurate headline would have been “One Lutheran Group Approves Historic Agreement With Catholic Church.” In other words, a majority of the Lutheran churches in the United States—WELS, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod included—has not reached any such agreement with the Catholic Church. Headlines can be deceiving, and this one is a perfect example of that.

The ELCA has worked very hard to reach this kind of agreement. From its formation in 1988, the ELCA has made it clear that holding to biblical teachings is not exactly one of its priorities. That’s not surprising for a church body that does not believe in the verbal inspiration and inerrancy

of the Scriptures. When a church body no longer believes that the Bible is the Word of God in its entirety, the teachings of God are soon replaced by the teachings of humans. With no scriptural foundation or moorings, a church like the ELCA will inevitably drift into false teaching and unbiblical practice, as the ELCA has done. It will ignore what God says about the sanctity of human life. It will ignore what God says about the roles of men and women in the church. It will align its views on marriage and sexuality with a corrupt culture. It will reduce the gospel to nothing more than a means to achieve social justice. And, as has happened with the agreement with the Roman Catholic Church, it will view scriptural doctrines and Lutheran teachings not as treasures to be held on to but as obstacles to unity among Christian churches. When biblical teaching no longer matters, agreements such as the one reached between the ELCA and the Catholic Church become possible.

There are still Lutheran church bodies that strive to hold on faithfully to the truths that God has revealed in his Word. By God’s grace alone, ours is one of those. Certainly, we would all agree that unity in the Christian church is a noble goal for which to strive. But that goal should never be sought by setting aside or moving away from the teachings of the Scriptures. True unity among churches is achieved when there is unity of teaching based on the Word of God.

It is sad that as the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation approaches, a church that has *Lutheran* in its name appears to have thoroughly rejected its Lutheran heritage—a heritage that should lead us to stand with Luther on Scripture alone. We pray that God will continue to move us to stand on that Word and to confess boldly, even when others no longer do.

Light for our path

I was raised and confirmed WELS. Recently I had sex before marriage, and I feel awful. I'm incredibly guilty and do not want to do this again. Should I take Communion?

James F. Pope

The type of question you asked could be answered yes or no. Let me explain why my answer to you is yes.

WHEN COULD THE ANSWER BE NO?

In 1 Corinthians 11:27, the apostle Paul explains that it is possible for people to receive the Lord's Supper to their harm and not their spiritual good: "Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord." Imagine that—a person appears to be on the receiving end of God's forgiveness by partaking of the Lord's Supper, but instead the individual is actually sinning! How can that be? By partaking of the Lord's Supper "in an unworthy manner."

In the case of the Christians in Corinth, their unworthy reception of the Lord's Supper consisted of abuses that took place in a meal preceding the celebration of the Supper (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:18–22). Unworthy reception of the Lord's Supper can go beyond those abuses to include a denial of the real presence of the Lord's body and blood, a denial of one's sin, or a denial of Jesus Christ as Savior. If you had informed me of your sin and then defended it with the mindset that "Hey, everyone else is doing that," I would have advised you to refrain from being a guest at the Lord's Supper until God changed your heart and you had the right attitude toward sin.

WHY IS THE ANSWER YES?

In your question and statements, I did not sense attitudes that would have resulted in unworthy reception of the Lord's Supper. Rather than seeing a denial of sin, I recognized a confession of sin. I saw in your words the cry of a child of God: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13).

God does not ignore a cry like that. The Bible says: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Through the Sacrament of Holy Communion, God offers and gives you the forgiveness of sins by giving you the very body and blood of your Savior in, with, and under the bread and wine. That forgiveness covers all sins.

You are bothered by your sin. What is important in preparing to receive the Lord's Supper is our attitude toward sin. With that in mind, let me remind you of a resource that you likely came across in your confirmation instruction. Luther's Small Catechism has a section titled "Christian Questions." It consists of a number of questions that Christians can ask themselves prior to receiving Holy Communion. There is also a condensed version of those questions on page 156 in *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*. Asking and answering those questions is a practical way of doing what Scripture says: "Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup" (1 Corinthians 11:28). Examining your heart will help you answer your question in the future.

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

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

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

Psalm 119:105

ABIDING

truth

Luther identified the doctrine of justification as the doctrine by which the church stands or falls. God attaches the same importance to the doctrine.

Daniel M. Deutschlander

Every doctrine in the Bible is important. We teach every doctrine in God's Word precisely because it comes from God's own heart and mouth in the Bible. But we also defend and teach every doctrine because to pervert any doctrine undermines *this* doctrine by which the church—and our faith—stands or falls. That's how important it is to get this doctrine right.

GOD'S DIAMOND

Justification is God's diamond in his golden bowl. First, let's marvel at that diamond's beauty. The holy writers in the Bible never tired of doing that. For example, St. Paul, among his most beautiful summary definitions of this doctrine, writes, "There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:22-24). It's so simple and so brief, so deep and so profound. Let's spend a few moments examining this jewel.

Jew or Gentile: Each one of us is one or the other. Together we are descendants from Adam and Eve. In them we were created to reflect the glory of God, his wisdom, his might, his goodness, his justice. We were created to receive him and all that he wants to give us of himself and of his heavenly and eternal kingdom. But we fell short, so short! Through the fall of Adam, we have become a total perversion of God's gracious intent. What is there for us then? What would you do with a vacuum cleaner that didn't fulfill its purpose?

Throw it in the trash to perish with other such rubbish! That's what reason would expect God to do with us.

But look! "All are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." To be justified means to be forgiven, to be acquitted in God's courtroom. He doesn't throw us into the trash heap of hell. Instead, out of grace, undeserved love, he declares us to be the opposite of what we are both by nature since Adam's fall and by our own thoughts, words, and deeds. He declares that he has redeemed the whole world, not by anything we have done or intended to do or tried to do. He has done it all by Christ, the one anointed by God to be our Savior. He did it all! He did it for all! He did it freely, not because he was forced to do it but because of his own measureless love for us. He did it freely, not because we would somehow earn or deserve or pay him for it but because he alone wanted the title of Savior; he would share that title and that work with no one, not a bit of it!

We would never believe the message of justification were it not that God has attached power to that message.

Luther captured the splendor and the simplicity, the beauty and the depth of this diamond doctrine with arguably the most beautiful words ever penned outside of the Bible itself. Of Jesus, he says in the Small Catechism's explanation to the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed: "He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being. He has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the

devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death.”

What Luther says applies to everyone. Were it not so, each of us would have reason to live and die in dread with the question: Does justification cover even me? But there is no such question to torment us! He justified all! He justified me! Christ came for me. By his death and resurrection, Jesus is my Savior too!

GOD’S GOLDEN BOWL

How does this verdict from God’s high court come to us? It is in a golden bowl. It comes to us and we receive all of the benefits of this redemption in the golden bowl, that is, the gospel message of the Word. Yes, the Bible is precious simply because it is God’s Word. But it is precious beyond measure because it is the vessel that holds this diamond from God’s own heart, this decree of justification. Even more important, we would never believe the message of justification were it not that God has attached power to that message. That power in the gospel proclamation of justification overcomes our inborn unbelief and hostility to God. It brings us to trust his Word, to breathe a sigh of relief at the message: *Christ redeemed all! Christ redeemed me too!*

Again, Luther has captured it so well for us in the Small Catechism. What was Jesus’ goal in redeeming us? “He has done all this in order that I may belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally.”

And how does it all become my own? Luther points to the golden bowl in the explanation to the Third Article: “By my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my LORD or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith.”

Oh, may we never tarnish the golden bowl through false doctrine, lest we darken the radiance streaming from the heart of God in this diamond of justification! Instead, give thanks, worship, and adore the Savior for this diamond in God’s golden bowl.

Dan Deutschlander, a retired professor, is a member at St. Mark, Watertown, Wisconsin.

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

Small Catechism quotes are from *The Book of Concord*.

LUTHER

still speaks

For Luther there was no more important teaching in Scripture than *justification*. Writing to a friend in 1530, he stated, “This doctrine is the head and the cornerstone. It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour” (*What Luther Says*, Vol. 2, #2195).

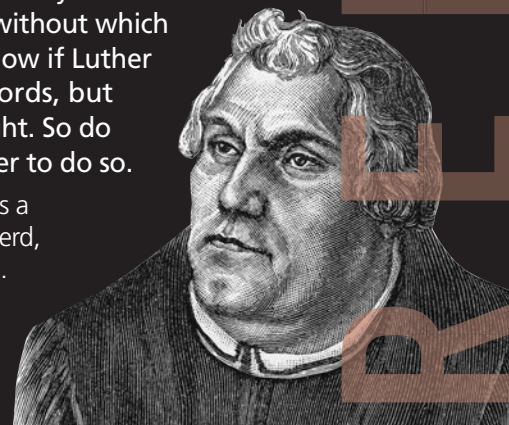
Simply put, in the courtroom of heaven, God the holy Judge declared the whole world of sinners not guilty. He did this not because he ignores sin, but because his Son Jesus paid the penalty for all sinners. When the Holy Spirit brings the sinner to faith, Jesus’ payment becomes the sinner’s very own. God signed the check of forgiveness for the world. The Holy Spirit writes our name on the recipient line when he brings us to faith.

In Luther’s time, this precious truth was buried deep under the debris of man-made teaching and tradition. Thank God he used his servant Martin Luther to blow the dust off and restore it.

Without the doctrine of justification we would never be sure of our salvation. If we were serious about reaching heaven, it would be by pounding the rungs of our own works on the ladder and never being sure it was tall enough. When we would sin daily, there would be only dread of punishment instead of the comfort of heavenly forgiveness. When we would close our eyes for the last time, it would be without the assurance that we would open them in heaven.

The doctrine of justification has rightly been called the article by which the church stands and without which it falls. We don’t know if Luther ever used those words, but that’s what he taught. So do we. God help us ever to do so.

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



HOW BIG IS

God is present everywhere and is unchanging. He is all-knowing and all-powerful.

Arthur A. Eggert

If an observant individual is present at a particular place at a particular time, one would expect that person would know what is happening there. In the same way, because the Lord is present at every place in the universe at every time, he must know everything about the universe. Hebrews 4:13 says that nothing is hidden from him. David testified that the Lord knew everything about him (Psalm 139). The Lord spoke to Job (Job chapters 38–41) and claimed a thorough knowledge of the forces of nature. Jesus pointed out to his disciples that not a sparrow dies without the Lord knowing it and that the very hairs on people's heads are numbered (Matthew 10:29,30). The Bible therefore teaches that the Lord is omniscient or all-knowing.

GOD IS ALL-KNOWING

The implications of the Lord's total knowledge of the universe are overwhelming. For example, because the Lord is everywhere throughout all time, it is impossible for him to be caught by surprise. He knows where every particle of the universe has been during every moment of its existence and where those particles have been going during every instance of time. There is nothing for him to learn because everything is always right in front of him. This includes the attitudes of our hearts. He knows exactly how people will react to a situation, even if they never experience that situation. The Lord's words to Isaiah sum it up: " 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts' " (Isaiah 55:8,9).

The omniscience of the Lord frightens many people. Some would like to hide from him—an impossible feat. Others would like to believe that they can "educate" their god to their way of thinking. They would like to fool such a god by offering him deals that they never expect to keep. That the Lord's knowledge of the future is exact because he is already there leaves them helpless to finesse him. They, therefore, reject what the Bible says and try to reengineer the Lord into a smaller god. Such blasphemy of the Lord is grave folly. It is like claiming Niagara Falls is only five feet high and expecting it to be that way.

GOD IS ALL-POWERFUL

Not only does the Lord completely understand the universe, but he also has the ability to completely control it. The Bible contains numerous examples of the extent of the Lord's control of nature. For example, he confused the languages at the tower at Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), sent plagues on the Egyptians in order to rescue his people (Exodus 7:19–12:32), and parted the Sea of Reeds (Red Sea) (Exodus 14:21-28). He affected the earth's rotation (Joshua 10:12-15), made an iron axe head float (2 Kings 6:5-7), and struck an entire army with blindness (2 Kings 6:18). In the New Testament there was the virgin birth (Luke 1:26-38), the curing of many diseases and disabilities, the calming of the lake (Matthew 8:23-27), the feeding of large crowds (Matthew 14:13-21; Matthew 15:35-38), and the raising of the dead (Luke 7:11-15; Mark 5:35-43; John 11:1-44). The number of miracles that Jesus did was so large that it was clear even to his opponents that he was not a normal man limited by the processes of nature (John 11:47,48). Together these miracles show a God whose power is absolutely limitless (Isaiah 43:13).

Here the powerful presence of the Lord at every point in space and time is essential, because without the persistence of his creating word, the universe would

YOUR GOD?

instantly dissolve into nothingness (Psalm 104:27-29). The Lord is truly *omnipotent*, that is, all-powerful, and the source of all power, with his power only being limited by his own will, certainly not ours.

But how does the Lord control the universe? For the most part he does so, to the best of our feeble human ability to discern, by decreeing a set of interactions among instances of matter and energy, time and space, which scientists call natural laws. Many of these laws are first presented to students in simplified form, which is good enough for most usages. However, when these

Not only does the Lord completely understand the universe, but he also has the ability to completely control it.

laws are expanded to cover all observations and potential interactions, they can challenge the best minds. Yet these natural laws have no validity of their own. The Lord controls every aspect of every event with his full attention because he is at each point in space-time. No electron changes its orbit except at his command, and no star goes supernova without his detailed plan for the track that each particle involved will follow. He amazes us with miracles when he chooses, but he can also, without the ability of our best instruments to detect, make millions of exceptions to the submicroscopic workings of nature to cause events to happen so as to help his elect. That's what being omnipotent means.

The Lord can truly do anything he pleases (Psalm 135:5,6). He can do more than we think or imagine. We find courage and strength here because the Lord

listens to our prayers for his aid. It is a miracle that the Lord accommodates our requests at all and answers our prayers. The Lord does not always do exactly as we ask but always does what is best for us and others (Romans 8:28). He has sacrificed his own Son for us lowly creatures and given us a role to play as "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession" (1 Peter 2:9). He loves us and all humanity (John 3:16) in spite of the way we often misuse his power to sustain us and the world in which we live.

Importantly, the Lord's almighty power is not limited to physical events. Knowing everything people will do if given an opportunity, he can arrange events so that people and even the demons trying to fulfill their own purposes will in the process accomplish his. For example, the Lord drew the king of Assyria from Judah with a rumor (Isaiah 37:7). He saved Jacob's family by arranging for one of his sons to be sold into slavery (Genesis 50:20). He even led a high priest to prophesy against his own scheme (John 11:49-52).

To the Christian, the omniscience and the omnipotence of the Lord should be a great comfort. He knows us thoroughly and knows precisely what we need, as Martin Luther writes in the explanation of the First Article of the Apostles' Creed. He has the power to manipulate the entire universe to give us what is for our good, and he promises to do so. Nothing is too hard for him (Matthew 19:26). Knowing this should greatly encourage us to praise him and pray to him for his aid.

Dr. Arthur Eggert is a member at Peace, Sun Prairie, Wisconsin.

This is the second article in a three-part series on the nature of God.

A woman discovers the Lord's guidance along an often difficult road.

Ann M. Ponath and Vanessa Woods

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul."

Vanessa Woods' favorite section of Scripture is Psalm 23. As she considers her life's journey, the words of verse 3 are especially meaningful: "He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." As Woods puts it, her life has been "a long road behind."

FOLLOWING OTHER PATHS

Woods was born in Santa Rosa, California, and raised in the San Francisco Bay area until she was six. Her family eventually settled in Redding, California, where her parents continue to live. Woods was a baptized and confirmed member of the Church of Christ. The church only allowed unaccompanied singing in their services. Woods plays guitar and a little piano but was not allowed to play during services.

Fast forward several years. Woods married. Her husband was also a Church of Christ member, and "things were fine until, after many years of physical and mental abuse, I had to leave him," says Woods.

Woods took a job as a live-in nanny with a man who had custody of his developmentally disabled daughter but worked full time. The church told Woods that this was a sinful situation and "ordered me to go back to my abusive husband or face excommunication." Woods refused and was banned from the church. "I vowed never to go to church again and for years questioned the existence of God at all," says Woods. "I followed other paths."

One of these paths was called Red Path. Woods is Native American of Chockta and Cherokee descent. Woods says Red Path is "Native American spiritualism, a very nature-based belief system that is based on a great spirit who made and owns everything. It allowed me to see God in everything and to be closer to God than I had ever felt." Woods was part of Red Path for 15 years. "I felt satisfied in the presence of God. I began to believe he was real again, without the confines of church-based rules and ceremonies," she says. But she was still missing something.

SEEING GOD'S CARE

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

Things got very difficult. Woods moved to Oregon and says she lost connection

with those of Native American descent and floundered, although she kept praying. "As things unfolded in my life, it got hard," she says. She was plagued with arthritis and bursitis in hips and shoulders, and depression, among other things. She had remarried, and her new husband took care of household expenses, but Woods was a smoker. She tried quitting "but to no avail." They had no money to spend on her habit, so she decided to collect cans to make money, but because of her disabilities, she could not physically do the collecting. "I got a little cart, put a sign on it that read: 'Clean out your cars. Give me your cans and bottles,' and sat in a small shopping center," says Woods.

It was a hard time, but Woods started reading the Bible again while sitting by her cart for hours. Daily she prayed. Every day she made enough to get the things she needed. Woods says, "I realized God was listening to me, knew what I needed, and made sure it was there. I quit worrying about my day-to-day existence. . . . I may have forgotten about God for a time, but the Father did not forget me."

FINDING A CHURCH

"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."

After three years, Woods was able to stop collecting cans. "I had made a

Confessions OF FAITH



promise to God that when things got better, I would go in search of a place of worship,” she says. “Problem was, I was picky. Finding a church that was Bible-based was difficult.”

Woods’ youngest brother was actually married for a time. Woods and her former sister-in-law, Laura, remained friends. For years, Laura had been asking Woods to go to church, and, finally, around Christmas, Woods attended Mount Calvary, Redding, Calif., with Laura. “The message was full of hope, not the gloom and doom that I had always encountered before,” says Woods. “Here was a place that followed what the Bible taught and focused on Christ’s love and forgiveness for all.”

After the service, Woods was “so impressed with the message” that she asked the pastor if there was a WELS church near her home in Oregon. He gave her the address. She began regularly attending Trinity in Eugene, Oregon; took Bible information classes; and, less than a year later, became a confirmed member. “I am happy in my new home. God is a central part of my life, and I keep seeing his influence,” says Woods. “Even though I had no church, he watched over me, taught me, comforted me all along the way. I have been blessed.”

ENCOURAGING OTHERS

Woods’ long road has also been a



Vanessa Woods

blessing to others. Even during her tough years in the shopping center, Woods says she got to know many homeless people and grew to understand them. “Just because someone is dressed shabby and dirty—they have souls too,” she says. “I met some very intelligent people and made friends with many of them. I started preaching God to them too.”

Another person blessed by Woods’ faith is her young pastor. Ben Zuber-bier was installed as Trinity’s pastor just weeks after Woods’ confirmation. He says, “It’s a blessing to have Vanessa in our Sunday morning Bible study. She has a good working knowledge of the Word. Not only is she well-versed in the pages of Scripture, but through

these God has worked a faith in her Savior that has carried her through many difficult times. As a young pastor who’s been out of the seminary less than two years, I’ve learned what sections of Scripture you can use to comfort people who are facing different types of adversity. When I talk to Vanessa, she shares exactly how those sections of Scripture have given her comfort and hope through the years. What an encouragement that is to me and the members of Trinity! It regularly reminds us that the Word God gives us is living and active, powerful and efficacious. It gives new life and new hope. Praise God that he has promised to preserve it for us into eternity.”

Woods encourages all Christians when she says, “Never give up. Learn something new about the Lord every day, and be glad that someday we will all meet in heaven.”

The psalmist puts it this way: “*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*”

Ann Ponath is a member at Christ, North Saint Paul, Minnesota. Vanessa Woods is a member at Trinity, Eugene, Oregon.

*Verses from Psalm 23 are using the English Standard Version translation.



heart to heart
parent conversations

It's easy to identify bad role models, but how do parents go about identifying positive role models? And then, how do we convince our kids that these are the people they should be learning from and emulating? Read this month's Heart to heart articles for three perspectives.

Did you know that Heart to heart offers a monthly webcast/podcast? These short pieces provide a quick shot in the arm as you go about your parenting journey. The October 2016 topic—helping children build their self-esteem based on Christ's love—resonated with many parents. Interested? You can find a full list of all the episodes under the "Webcasts" and "Podcasts" tabs at forwardinchrist.net.

Nicole Balza

Join the conversation!

Visit wels.net/forwardinchrist and look for the *Heart to heart* link.

HOW DO WE ENCOURAGE POSITIVE ROLE MODELS FOR OUR CHILDREN?

As parents, I think we can all agree with the important teaching of Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it" (ESV). The question is, "How do we train?"

This has been what I have most appreciated about the *Heart to heart* series. Parents are sharing their unique experiences on how they have trained their children in the Lord. When I read Proverbs, the word *train* initially brings a picture in my mind of sitting down with my son or daughter and studying Scripture or reading a devotion—perhaps more of an academic experience. I'm also quite certain that modeling the application of our knowledge of Scripture is important for my kids and included in the idea of training from Proverbs.

By default, parents are natural role models for their children, but we can also rely on other positive role models

When I was a kid, I adored Olivia Newton-John's character Sandy from the movie *Grease*. I wanted to be her. That perfectly flipped hair. That golden voice. That sweet, upright disposition. Then it all changed in the last scene of the movie. Gone were the sweater sets and pearls and out came the too-tight leather pants and garish makeup. She changed who she was—just to win the favor of *some guy*. I was crushed! How could I still look up to her?

It's tough to find good role models, especially for our kids. The "role models" that our society produces—reality TV stars, Hollywood celebs, professional athletes—can have a broken moral compass. Here are a few things to remember as we help our kids find role models they can look up to.

Look for role models outside the norm. Role models can come from all sorts of places: the quiet World War II veteran who lives next door and fought for his country

Helping our kids develop discernment about the people they emulate is not a one-and-done conversation. The lessons we parents teach our kids about role models is more caught than taught throughout their childhoods.

Like thousands of stone chips in a mosaic, numerous mini conversations about role models create a portrait for our children of the kind of people we Christians pattern our lives after. With every two-minute reflection about Special Agent Gibbs on *NCIS*, a tile is placed in the mosaic. Comparing the leadership characteristics of Aaron Rodgers, Tom Brady, and Eli Manning adds another tile. Gently discussing your daughter's musical idols lays several more. Of course, parents ensure these tiles are colored with the blood-red tones of God's grace.

Multiple mini conversations about role models remove much of the pressure parents can feel about influencing their children's choice of heroes. It means parents don't have to convince their children each time they tackle this

to reinforce that training in the Lord. I want my kids to see how God's Word comes to life in what we do and say. I'd like them to see how others bring to life the fruits of the spirit: "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22).

But who are these people who can be role models, and where do we find them? There seem to be many role models out there in sports, movies, television, or YouTube, but are these the people who consistently bring us confidence in their demonstrations of love for God?

As I wrote this article, I couldn't help but wonder who my kids would identify as their role models. So I asked them, "Besides Mom and Dad, who would you say are your favorite role models—the people you really look up to?" I asked them each separately, and both of them had the same top pick. They chose their Aunt Lori because "she is so loving and patient and kind to everyone."

on the beaches of Normandy. The doctor who sets aside her six-figure salary and instead chooses to volunteer in a third-world country. The teacher who has spent over half his life faithfully mentoring kids in and out of the classroom. We can help our kids find these role models.

Look for role models in your child's interest areas. Does your child love science? Encourage her to study the life of someone who made a groundbreaking discovery despite the odds. Does your child love writing? Help him find an author who endured rejection after rejection yet persisted. Kids need role models who can inspire them and show them what's possible.

Help your kids understand that even the best role models are flawed, and we can learn from that. David—"a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14)—had an affair with another man's wife, and when he found out she was carrying his child, he set in motion a series of tragic events that led to the

topic. It encourages parents to listen to their children's opinions. It builds confidence in children that they can make the best role model choices.

These conversations work best with some guidelines. I suggest four that are built around the acronym TACT.

T: Testify about your role models. Identify for your children why you have chosen the role models you have. Talk about how, because of them, your life is different and how your walk with Jesus has improved. This is essential: Let your children see you are striving to be the person your role model already is.

A: Ask about their role models. The same questions you want to answer for your kids about your role models are questions you can ask your kids about their role model choices. Ask: Why do you look up to that person? What are the most valuable things you are learning from that person? How has this person helped you more fully appreciate God's grace?

C: Confirm their role models' positives. Point out the most positive traits of your children's heroes and friends. For example,

Yes! I couldn't have picked a better role model, and personally I was relieved that the top pick was not a famous YouTuber or sports hero! Another pick was one of their grade school teachers, Miss Bauman, who has devoted her life to the teaching ministry for more than 40 years.

I'd like to think my wife and I intentionally arranged our kids' role models to be family members or called workers. However, it's interesting that our kids picked the same people that my wife and I would consider our own role models. Maybe the secret to encouraging positive role models for our children is to be sure we have our own first. Thanks be to God that he provides faithful, Christian people in our lives who we can look to as examples. Let our kids see us cherishing them as well.

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



death of her husband and had ramifications on David's family for years to come. Discuss with your kids why God included flawed heroes in his story: to remind us repeatedly of our desperate need for forgiveness and the power of his grace and also to remind us that God uses us, flawed as we are, for his purposes.

In the end, we need more than worldly role models. We need a Savior. While we can look to Jesus as a role model, we must first see him as our Redeemer. He was perfectly kind, perfectly loving, perfectly forgiving. He prayed constantly, studied the Scriptures, and obeyed his Father in a way we never could. Praise God that when we inevitably fall short of his perfect standards, we can look to the one who lovingly kept those standards perfectly!

Ann Jahns and her husband, Thad, have three sons and a recently emptied nest.



"I'm glad you hang around with Ethan. He's always polite." This gains more ground than stumbling through what you don't like. When you identify favorable traits, you confirm for your children that they are making good choices, and you help them define whom they want to influence their lives.

T: Talk about their role models' negatives. Talking about the less desirable traits of the people your kids admire is important but tricky. When we put anyone on the defensive, barriers go up. Approach this topic as a conversation rather than a lecture. Questions usually work best: "Justin Bieber said, 'A lot of people who are religious, I think they get lost.' What do you think he meant? How much do you agree? How much do you think that's true in our family?"

Begin the conversations early. Continue them often. Build the mosaic. Use TACT.

James Aderman and his wife, Sharon, raised three daughters and are now enjoying their eight grandchildren.





teentalk

Like a star shining in the night

Sometimes fear makes us forget that we can come to God anytime.

Holly Backus

Fear, confusion, and loneliness. Sometimes these can be things that run through your head after a nightmare. All you want to do is forget the scary things that woke you up and go back to sleep.

It's natural to be afraid when you're alone, especially when it's dark and you can't see anything. When I was younger and I awoke from a nightmare, I would have a routine. I would sit up, turn on a light, and read for a while so I could fall back to sleep. I read so I could forget all the things that popped into my head.

One night, after waking up from a nightmare, I sat up like usual. I looked around my dark room and started to head toward my light. But before I got there, my eyes caught a glimpse of something else. My window was open, and a slight breeze came through. I looked out and saw the stars and moon in the dark night sky. All of a sudden I didn't feel so alone. I felt comforted. I continued to look outside until I thought of something better. I folded my hands and prayed. That night I fell back asleep quickly and happily.

Sometimes when we're afraid, we forget that God is there watching over us.

This even happened to Jesus' disciples. They forgot Jesus was watching over them when a storm threatened their boat (Matthew 8:23-27). They had forgotten about trusting Jesus. They became afraid. When they finally woke Jesus, he scolded them for not trusting him. Then he calmed the storm. Even when the disciples were with Jesus and had seen what he could do, fear still got in the way of their faith.

We can be forgetful like the disciples sometimes. We all believe God is there, but fear can make that faith blurry and unclear. We can be foolish and forget that Jesus, who died for our sins, is and always will be there for us.

God will always be there like a star in the night sky.

"God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5,6).

We can be confident that God will always be there for us. Like a star, he guides us out of the grip of fear and darkness. God shines through the clouds and lights up the night sky. God is there for us and always will be.

Now every time I wake up in fear or loneliness, I can look outside and remember to pray to my Lord. I know he's there and always will be there for me like a star shining in the night. So now when I sleep, "In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety" (Psalm 4:8).

Holly Backus, a sophomore at Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, is a member at St. John, Newtonburg, Wisconsin.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Babler, James H., to retirement
Dietrich, Joseph M., to Our Savior, Bylas, Ariz.
Furno, David J., to St. John, Lake Benton, Minn.
Gumm, Alan W., to Bethany, North Fort Myers/Christ the King, Port Charlotte, Fla.
Koelpin, Joseph D., to Resurrection, Rochester, Minn.
Meier, Dennis W., to Good Shepherd, Beaver Dam, Wis.
Timmermann, Nathaniel T., to Peace, Otsego, Mich.
Tullberg, Keith C., to Our Savior, Two Rivers, Wis.
Walters, Daniel J., to Good Shepherd, Burnsville, Minn.

Teachers

Al-Eisa, Mishaal K., to Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz.
Belott, Cheryl, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.
Hochmuth, Nathan J., to Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis.
Jiles, Emily, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.
Lindenberg, Rebecca J., to Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis.
Loberger, Scott D., to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
McEachern, Timothy J., to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.
Nolte, Carl S., to retirement
Nolte, Daniel C., to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.
Rathje, Ryan J., to St. Croix Lutheran, West Saint Paul, Minn.
Wascher, Alyssa M., to Risen Savior, Milwaukee, Wis.
Zimmermann, Seth, to Riverview, Appleton, Wis.

COMING EVENTS

Worldview conference—Feb. 10–11. Faith (ELS), San Antonio, Texas. Website, wels.net/event/worldview-conference/.
Men of His Word conference—Feb. 11. Best Western Premier Waterfront Convention Center, Oshkosh, Wis. Theme: “Be strong and courageous.” Website, menofhisword.org.
WELS Historical Institute presentation—Feb. 22. 7 P.M. livestreaming event celebrating the 100th anniversary of the 1917 merger. Theme: “From federation to final amalgamation: The birth of the Wisconsin Synod as we know it today.” Presenter: Prof. John Brenner. Website, livestream.com/welslive.

Martin Luther College Choir tour—Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Website, mlc-wels.edu.

- Feb. 24, 7 P.M., Calvary, Dallas, Texas
- Feb. 25, 7 P.M., Victory of the Lamb, Katy, Texas
- Feb. 26, 10 A.M., Christ the Lord, Sienna Plantation, Texas; 7 P.M., Abiding Word, Houston, Texas
- Feb. 27, 7 P.M., Redeemer, Edna, Texas
- Feb. 28, 7 P.M., Our Savior, San Antonio, Texas
- Mar. 1, 7 P.M., Holy Word, Austin, Texas
- Mar. 2, 7 P.M., Immanuel, Fort Worth, Texas
- Mar. 3, 7 P.M., Shepherd of the Plains, Lubbock, Texas
- Mar. 4, 6:30 P.M., Shepherd, Albuquerque, N.M.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Chorus tour—Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Website, wls.wels.net

- Mar. 1, 6:30 P.M., Faith, Black River Falls, Wis.
- Mar. 2, 1 P.M., Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis.; 7 P.M., Cross of Christ, Coon Rapids, Minn.
- Mar. 3, 9:38 A.M., St. Croix Lutheran High School, West St. Paul, Minn.; 2 P.M., West Lutheran High School, Plymouth, Minn.
- Mar. 4, 7 P.M., Salem, Woodbury, Minn.
- Mar. 5, 8 & 10:30 A.M., St. Paul, Menomonie, Wis.

Pathways to Christ women's retreat—Mar. 10–12. LaSure's Hall, Oshkosh, Wis. Theme: “A heart at peace.” Website, pathwaystochrist.org.

Prep Singers spring tour—Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. Website, lps.wels.net.

- Mar. 16, 7 P.M., St. Mark, Eau Claire, Wis.
- Mar. 17, 7 P.M., St. Mark, Normal, Ill.
- Mar. 18, 7 P.M., Faith, Carthage, Mo.
- Mar. 19, 9 A.M., Zion, Springfield, Mo.; 7 P.M., Gloria Dei, Memphis, Tenn.
- Mar. 20, 7 P.M., Faith, Sharpsburg, Ga.
- Mar. 21, 7 P.M., Mighty Fortress, Hiram, Ga.
- Mar. 22, 7 P.M., Christ Our Savior, Columbia, Tenn.
- Mar. 23, 7 P.M., Hope, Louisville, Ky.
- Mar. 24, 7 P.M., Beautiful Savior, Cincinnati, Ohio
- Mar. 25, 7 P.M., Peace, Kokomo, Ind.
- Mar. 26, 10:30 A.M., Lamb of God, Lafayette, Ind.; 7 P.M., St. Paul, Wonewoc, Wis.
- Mar. 27, 7 P.M., St. John, Watertown, Wis.

Christian Woman Today retreat—Mar. 17–19. Sheraton Brookfield Hotel, Brookfield, Wis. Theme: “Do not fear, for I am with you.” Website, christianwomantoday.org. 414-507-5341.

Adult WELS missionary kids retreat—Apr. 21–23. Twin Cities, Minn. Website, facebook.com/WELSMKs. E-mail, asherod@kingdomworkers.com.

The National Conference on Worship Music and the Arts—June 13–16. Carthage College, Kenosha, Wis. Regional conference, June 27–30. Irvine, California. Registration begins in February. Online application forms are available for those interested in singing in the Festival Choir, Honors Choir, or Children's Choir. cw@wels.net. Website, wels.net/worshipconference.

International student conference—June 15–16. St. Paul, Minn. For K-12 schools serving international students. Register before March 31. Website, stcroixusa.org/internationalconference.

54th annual Lutheran Women's Missionary Society convention—June 22–25. Hyatt Regency Orlando Hotel, Orlando, Fla. Theme: “Around the world with missions” (Mark 16:15). Website, lwms.org.

64th biennial WELS convention—July 31–Aug. 3. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. Website, wels.net/2017synodconvention.

NAMES WANTED

Huntersville, N.C.—Grace, Charlotte, N.C., has started mission work in Huntersville and is meeting there Sunday afternoons for Bible study and worship. Send names to James Douglas, pastor@grace-charlotte.org; 704-365-6828. Website, grace-charlotte.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.

WELS musicians—names of WELS musicians with advanced training in organ, piano, voice, conducting, composing, or instrumental music. Complete an application form at wels.net/worshipconference.

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. camcontact@charter.net

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

Obituaries

Frederic Keith Berger 1948–2016

Frederic Berger was born July 22, 1948, in Bay City, Mich. He died Sept. 27, 2016, in Waupaca, Wis.

A 1974 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Our Savior, Hart, Mich.; Redeemer, Council Bluffs, Iowa; and Grace, New London, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Ilene; three daughters; one son; nine grandchildren; and two sisters. He is preceded in death by two brothers.

Harold Alvin Essmann 1930–2016

Harold Essmann was born Sept. 20, 1930, in St. Charles, Minn. He died Oct. 10, 2016, in Appleton, Wis.

He served as a missionary in Zambia and as pastor at St. Michael's, Fountain City, Wis., and St. John, Waterloo, Wis. After his retirement, he founded the Multi-Language Publications program of the Board for World Missions and served as its first coordinator.

He is survived by his wife, Ruth; two daughters; seven grandchildren; five great-grandchildren; three step-great-grandchildren; and one brother. He is preceded in death by one son, one brother, and one sister.

Marie L. Ruddy 1929–2016

Marie Ruddy (nee Dinkel) was born June 27, 1929. She died Oct. 7, 2016, in Milwaukee, Wis.

She served Trinity, Neenah, Wis.; St. Peter, Fond du Lac, Wis.; Gloria Dei-Bethesda, Milwaukee, Wis.; St. Lucas, Milwaukee, Wis.; and St. Matthew, Milwaukee, Wis.

She is survived by one son, one daughter, five grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren. She is preceded in death by her husband, Kenneth, and one sister.

David L. Umnus 1938–2016

David Umnus was born May 25, 1938, in Watertown, Wis. He died Oct. 11, 2016, in Marinette, Wis.

He served Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis., and Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Barbara; two sons; one daughter; four grandchildren; and one sister.

Mildred B. Behnke 1926–2016

Mildred Behnke was born Nov. 13, 1926, in Brillion, Wisconsin. She died Oct. 16, 2016, in Cottage Grove, Minnesota.

She attended Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. She served Emanuel, New London, Wis.; St. John, Lake City, Minn.; Zion, Columbus, Wis.; St. John, Caledonia, Minn.; First German, Manitowoc, Wis.; St. Paul, Appleton, Wis.; and Trinity, Brillion, Wis.

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

David John Beckman 1949–2016

David Beckman was born Oct. 27, 1949, in New London, Wis. He died Oct. 18, 2016, in Milwaukee, Wis.

A 1976 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served St. John, St. John's, Antigua; Saving Grace, Mobile, Ala.; Bay Pines, Seminole, Fla.; St. Peter, Sturgeon Bay, Wis.; Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis.; and as a friendly counselor to India.

He is survived by his wife, Holly; one son; one daughter; five grandchildren; and two brothers.

MLC GRADUATES

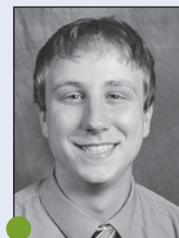
Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., held its midyear graduation on Dec. 15, 2016.



Lillian E. Busch
Woodbridge, Va.



Travis J. Kretsch
New Ulm, Minn.



Joshua W. Lindner
Oak Creek, Wis.



Abigail R. Petermann
Mendota Heights, Minn.



James H. Phelps
Stoughton, Wis.



Daniel T. Roemhildt
North Mankato, Minn.



James A. Schlieper
Fort Atkinson, Wis.



Richard J. Schmidt
Fond du Lac, Wis.



Rachel M. Trimmer
Parkville, Md.

● Bachelor of Science
in Education

● Bachelor of Science

Let your light shine

In the spirit of Matthew 5:16, we're sharing examples of people who live their faith.

Elle Paveglio, a senior at Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fond du Lac, Wis., saw a need in her community and felt inspired to do something about it.

When Paveglio worked at the Fond du Lac Boys & Girls Club over the summer of 2016, she noticed that some of the children carried white bags home on Fridays. She found out from a coworker that the bags contained food from the Fondy Food Pantry so the kids could eat over the weekend. This experience drove 17-year-old Paveglio to conduct a fundraiser called Tackle School Hunger for the community's underfed children.

Paveglio set up food drives at four area high schools during their homecoming games. If people brought five food items or \$5 to the game, they were entered into a raffle



Elle Paveglio helped coordinate food drives at local high schools to help underfed children.

for prizes. Four major donors contributed \$1,000 each to the raffle drawings.

In the end, Paveglio was able to drop off more than one thousand food items and \$2,000 to the Fondy Food Pantry.

"It was overwhelming how successful the drives were," she says.

Fondy's food drive coordinator Lynn Jenkins worked with Paveglio and says she was very organized and ambitious. "You can tell she has a big heart, especially for children," adds Jenkins.

Paveglio will be attending Northern Illinois University next year, but she hopes to pass on the food drive responsibility to another student.

She says, "Knowing now that I helped more than a thousand people with my food drive, I realize what an amazing opportunity I had."

Gabriella Moline

New Luther movie explores confessional Lutheran truths

When the Reformation 500 Committee was formed in 2009 to prepare for the upcoming celebration in October 2017, it had two goals: To teach congregations the importance of the gospel truths the Reformation brought back into focus and to share those truths with others.

A new film, *A Return to Grace: Luther's Life and Legacy*, will help fulfill both goals. "If this anniversary is only a special service to commemorate the history we treasure, we have missed a golden moment in history to share our faith," says John Braun, chairman of the committee. "The film does not just celebrate our heritage, but it provides an opportunity to share the gospel in the powerful medium of film."

Produced by Boettcher+Trinklein Television Inc., this full-length film explores the life of Martin Luther and his quest for truth, bringing to life the 16th-century events of the Reformation. Commentary from WELS scholars and other experts provides context to the unfolding drama of Luther's story.

Much of the movie was filmed in the castles, monasteries, and cobblestone streets of eastern Europe. According to producers Steve Boettcher and Mike Trinklein, Luther scholars were on location to ensure historical accuracy, and every sentence Luther speaks in the film is taken from his actual writings, talks, and sermons.

"It is based on the best historical evidence on the Refor-

mation available today, but it is not just a history," says Braun, who developed and wrote a new biography called *Luther's Protest* to help direct and encourage the film. "It explores the truths of the Reformation: Christ at the center of our faith, the importance of God's undeserved grace, and the value of Scripture as the authority for all teaching in the Christian church."

Starting in March, congregations can host a viewing of the movie at their local theaters for their members, prospects, and the community through easy-to-use resources available at wels.net/reformation500.

"We hope the film will give all our congregations an opportunity to confess their faith as Martin Luther did," says Braun. "Here we stand, confessional Lutheran Christians, willing to be counted as disciples of Christ in our world at this time."

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





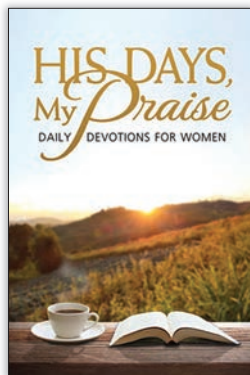
Booknook

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

I see this plea almost daily on social media. “Where can I find a good women’s devotional that is Christ-centered and interactive? Possibly one that is a quick read? Oh, and if possible, one that helps me read through the Bible in a year.”

Rarely do many cooks in the kitchen produce a delicious meal, but *His Days, My Praise* uses several different flavors to compile just the right meal for any reader. Twelve different women with different careers and backgrounds take turns writing on different portions of the Bible. Because of the variety of authors, this book is appealing to any woman who yearns to have a deeper relationship with her heavenly Father.

This 365-day study, though not dated or meant to be read in a set amount of time, has Scripture readings that enable the reader to make it through the entire



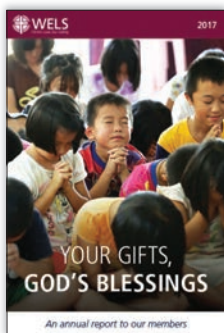
Price: \$19.99

Bible over the course of a year. Every day follows the same structure: A verse of joy, reminding readers who their God is; a section of Scripture on which to meditate; the verse chosen by the author on which to focus; the author’s reflection on the verse; and part of a page where reader may journal their own thoughts—though there are days where I could have used more room.

As a busy woman, I appreciate the format of this book. It allows me to spend time in the Word but gives me the opportunity to dictate just how much. I can finish a reading in a day or meditate on a passage for an entire week. I can read thoughts from a particular author I enjoy or skip around for a different taste. Whatever way you prefer to read *His Days, My Praise*, it achieves the common goal we all desire: staying close to our unwavering Lord by being in the Word.

Hannah Laitinen, Round Rock, Texas

WELS news briefs



Communication Services,
414-256-3210; csc@wels.net

Communication Services in cooperation with the Ministry of Christian Giving released *Your gifts, God’s blessings—An annual report to our members* in January. Through photos, stories of faith, ministry updates, and financial information, this booklet shares more about the blessings that God is bestowing on

the work that WELS is carrying out through its members’ gifts. Copies of the report were mailed to all congregations as well as to members who made a direct gift to WELS in 2016. Order free additional copies from Northwestern Publishing House at nph.net. View the report and corresponding videos online at wels.net/annualreport.

Commission on Adult Discipleship, cad@wels.net

Randy Hunter, pastor at St. Andrew, Middleton, Wis., will

lead the **next Interactive Faith Bible study**, streamed online live each Wednesday, Feb. 1–22 at 6 P.M. and 8 P.M. CST. Intended for couples, Hunter’s four-week study, entitled “Mysterious Marriage,” will examine how the gospel gives you the power to be married and how marriage gives you a way to show the gospel. Adult Discipleship sponsors the Interactive Faith Bible online study twice a year. Learn more and watch archived Bible studies at wels.net/interactivefaith.

Special Ministries, 414-256-3241; csn@wels.net

A new civilian chaplain, Don Stuppy, arrived in Germany in early January to serve active military and civilians living in Europe. He and his wife, Marge, will be working with 200 WELS members who live in Germany, England, Italy, Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, and elsewhere. Stuppy is replacing Josh Martin, who had served as chaplain for nine years before taking a call back to the U.S. The civilian chaplaincy is part of the work of WELS Military Services Committee, which also coordinates a ministry-by-mail program to the military and supports a national civilian chaplain and liaison to the military. Learn more at wels.net/military.

Home mission connections lead to world mission opportunities

"The Lord is opening some pretty big doors around the world," says Keith Free, administrator of Home Missions.

Why is the home mission administrator talking about world mission opportunities? Because the two areas are coming together in an exciting way. "When leaders in the late 1980s and 1990s began working with cross-cultural ministries, little did they know that what we would do in the United States would have impact and ramifications around the world," says Free.

When men like Peter Bur, a South Sudanese refugee who settled in Omaha, Neb., and Bounkeo Lor, a Hmong pastor in Kansas City, Kan., hear and learn confessional Lutheran teachings, they want to share it—and not just with their neighbors next door. "What drives us so much overseas are Pastoral Studies Institute graduates who want to go back home," says E. Allen Sorum, director of the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI).

In the fall of 2016, PSI team members, who work to train, mentor, and equip confessional Lutherans around the world, visited Africa and Asia to further explore new mission opportunities and how best to serve the people in these areas.



E. Allen Sorum presenting at a remote village in Liberia. He and Missionary Robert Wendland from Malawi traveled to Liberia to explore opportunities for working with the Confessional Lutheran Church of Liberia.

LIBERIA

Sorum traveled to Liberia with Robert Wendland, a missionary in Malawi, to see what the opportunities were for ongoing training and for working with the Confessional Lutheran Church of Liberia. Connections had been made through PSI Bible Institute graduate Isaac David and Pastor Matthew Vogt of Las Vegas, Nev., and WELS pastors had already traveled to Liberia to start training congregational leaders.

"In one village they said I was the first American to set foot in their church. It was one of the most intensely foreign feelings I ever had," says Sorum. "But they are a warm and friendly people, who are anxious and eager to become more Lutheran."

KENYA

Bur and Sorum have made multiple trips to Ethiopia and Kenya to train South Sudanese pastors and spiritual leaders who are serving South Sudanese refugees. In 2015, they distributed copies of Bur's translation of a simplified

version of the Small Catechism, complete with artwork by Terry Schultz, a member of the WELS Multi-Language Publications team.

This fall, Sorum, Bur, and Schultz spent three weeks in Nairobi, Kenya, furthering the training of men living in refugee camps in Kakuma, Kenya. They learned that leaders who had received copies of the simplified Small Catechism had not only worn out their copies but also taught what they learned to hundreds of others. "These people are starving not only literally but also spiritually for a lack of resources," says Sorum. "They come to us for materials and training and then they go home and do incredible things with them in the most difficult of circumstances."

VIETNAM

In November, Jon Bare, international recruitment director, and Sorum traveled to Vietnam with Bounkeo Lor and Hue Thao to meet with 60 leaders of the Hmong Christian Fellowship, a church body with 600 pastors and more than 70,000 members. These men were contacts made through Lor, who has been traveling to Vietnam for the past three years to lead similar workshops. Besides conducting training classes in Hanoi, they traveled to several village churches in the mountains.



Jon Bare, while visiting village churches in the mountains of Vietnam. Bare, who has visited Vietnam on vacation, says, "You look at it in a completely different way than just seeing it as a tourist. They want our training, and their lives have been changed by the gospel message of Jesus. It's just a beautiful thing to be able to experience that."

The church has grown since the leaders have been teaching the law and gospel lessons they learned from Lor, adding 2,400 members and 40 churches in the last six months.

Says Free, "Who would have thought a step Home Missions took many years ago to reach more cultures in the U.S. would lead to the opportunities we have today? These blessings are just another encouragement that we need to remain faithful in sowing the seed and then watch in amazement as God blesses the sharing of the gospel where and when he wills."



Learn more at wels.net/missions.

New Christian Standard Bible benefits from input of WELS Bible scholars

A revised version of the Holman Christian Standard Bible is now available and has been influenced by input from WELS pastors. The new version, known simply as the Christian Standard Bible, was released electronically in January and will be available in print in March.

The Holman Christian Standard Bible is one of three translations that WELS considered adopting as its official translation for use in publishing in 2013. The other two are the New International Version and the English Standard Version.

After a thorough review of the three translations, the 2013 synod in convention chose not to adopt a single translation for WELS publications. Instead, writers were encouraged to use the best translation for each context. Simultaneously, the convention created the Translation Liaison Committee to evaluate major Bible translations, communicate with Bible translation editors and publishers, and offer suggestions to improve Bible translations.

The Translation Liaison Committee began its work in November 2013. Shortly thereafter, the committee discovered that the Holman Christian Standard Bible was in the process of being revised and that the publishers would welcome input from WELS Bible scholars. The committee put together and submitted 56 pages of “global recommendations” dealing with issues not limited to one passage or context and 1,031 recommendations on individual passages. In May 2014, three members of the Translation Liaison Committee met with the publishers of the Holman Christian Standard Bible for five hours to discuss the suggested recommendations.

Thomas Nass, chairman of the Translation Liaison Committee and a Martin Luther College professor, received

an advance copy of the new Christian Standard Bible (CSB) and notes, “It is fair to say that all of the ‘global recommendations’ of the Translation Liaison Committee have been incorporated into the revised text as well as a high percentage of the recommendations on individual passages.”

In accordance with a 2015 synod convention resolution, the Conference of Presidents appointed a committee to review the CSB that includes Pastors Samuel Degner, Adam Mueller, Raymond Schumacher, John Vieths, and Mark Voss. That group is planning a comprehensive review of the revised text that will involve a large number of WELS pastors.

“We hope to have a substantial report ready for the synod convention this summer,” says John Vieths, chairman of the Christian Standard Bible Review Committee and pastor at Grace, Norman, Okla.

According to publishers of the CSB, about five percent of the text has been changed in this revision. Vieths reports that key changes involve going back to the use of the word *LORD* for *Yahweh*; going back to the word *servant* in many places rather than *slave*; dropping the capitalization of pronouns that refer to God; and a wider use of the phrase “brothers and sisters” or the word *person* where the words *brothers* or *man* could refer to groups containing both men and women.

Nass notes that the Plan of Salvation page also has been removed in the Christian Standard Bible. This page concerned many WELS pastors who reviewed the Holman Christian Standard Bible for the 2013 convention because it is not in accord with WELS’ beliefs about God’s plan for salvation.

When the print version is released in March, Northwestern Publishing House will begin offering the CSB.



UPDATE ON THE EVANGELICAL HERITAGE VERSION

A group of Lutheran pastors and professors began working together after the 2013 synod convention to produce a new translation of the Bible, the Evangelical Heritage Version™. This translation comes from an independent parasynodical organization, the Wartburg Project, which is in fellowship with WELS and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

In March 2015, the Wartburg Project chose Northwestern Publishing House to publish the Evangelical Heritage Version. The New Testament and Psalms will be available in paperback this summer. Translation is continuing on the Old Testament, and a final publication date for the full version will be determined soon, according to Bill Ziche, president of Northwestern Publishing House. When the full version is available, the translation will be studied by a group of WELS reviewers.

To learn more, visit wartburgproject.org.

District news

WESTERN WISCONSIN

Students from **Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis.**, helped members at **Good News, Mount Horeb/Resurrection, Verona, Wis.**, hand out cookies and invitations to Christmas worship services.

The district reporters for this month are: SC—Andrew Retberg; SA—Jonathan Kuske; WW—Brett Brauer.

WESTERN WISCONSIN



Members of the Jesus Cares Bible class at St. Paul, Tomah, Wis., performed their annual silent nativity on Dec. 11, 2016.

SOUTH CENTRAL



On Dec. 4, 2016, Divine Peace, Rockwall, Tex., held its grand opening worship service. This mission congregation is part of the multi-site ministry of Divine Peace, Garland, Tex.

SOUTH ATLANTIC



The youth group of Trinity, Castries, St. Lucia, hosted a Christmas vacation Bible school from Dec. 19–21, 2016. Students from Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., volunteered as part of the school's Project Timothy outreach program.

Historic merger leads to formation of present-day synod

The year 2017 is receiving much attention for being the 500th anniversary of the Reformation—and rightly so. A lesser-known, but not unimportant, anniversary is also approaching—the 100th anniversary of the amalgamation of the Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Nebraska Synods. In 1917, these four separate church bodies merged to form the Wisconsin Synod.

John Brenner, professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., is presenting on this important

time in the synod's history on Feb. 22 at 7 p.m. Tune in to this online presentation titled "From Federation to Final Amalgamation: The Birth of the Wisconsin Synod as We Know It Today" at livestream.com/welslive.

"The merger of Lutheran denominations in 1917 laid the framework for our synod and firmly connected our strong confessional Lutheran approach back to the roots of the Lutheran Reformation," says Dan Nommensen, vice president of the WELS Historical Institute. "Prof. Brenner brings to life

our celebration of God's grace in our synod as he reflects on the history of the merger in 1917."

Brenner is also presenting on the same topic at the annual meeting of the WELS Historical Institute, which will be held Oct. 22 at 3 p.m. at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, Waukesha, Wis.

The Historical Institute exists to preserve and present WELS history. It works closely with WELS' full-time archivist, Susan Willems.

Forgiveness is a daily need for all Christians, and God provides that necessary gift freely.

John A. Braun

In the morning, we prepare for the day ahead. We usually have a regular routine that might include taking a shower, brushing our teeth, and putting on clean clothes for the day's activities. The routine is different for everyone, but we all understand the process, and we have trained ourselves to do what we need to do each morning. We know that we get dirty every day. Some days are worse than others. So we clean up and go on.

Our spiritual life each day follows a similar pattern. Oh, yes, we do some things that our Savior might commend with the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." But we also know the failures and sins that drive us to hide from the face of God like Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden.

Those sins and failures soil us. Sometimes they burden us, but, as children of God, we do not cringe and hide. We know God's love. He has made us his children and washed away our sins—cleansed us in the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7). So we come to him penitently asking, "Lord, have mercy!" He responds, "Friend, your sins are forgiven" (Luke 5:20). Our hearts and souls are washed, and we go on. It's a pattern we know. It's like cleaning up and getting ready for the next day—only spiritually.

GOD CLEANSSES US

God knows we need the cleansing of his forgiveness, and he richly provides it. By faith in Jesus we are living stones in his church. And we are not alone. We all have the same need every day: the cleansing of forgiveness. Luther captured

that idea in his Large Catechism: "Everything, therefore, in the Christian church is ordered toward this goal: we shall daily receive in the Church nothing but the forgiveness of sin through the Word and signs, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here" (LC 2:55).

How does God do that? He continues to give forgiveness to us through the means of grace: the gospel in Word and sacrament. Washed by that forgiveness, we are ready to live as children of God. Luther again observed, "So, until the Last Day, the Holy Spirit abides with the holy congregation or Christendom. Through this congregation He brings us to Christ and He teaches and preaches to us the Word. By the Word He works and promotes sanctification, causing this congregation daily to grow and to become strong in the faith and its fruit, which He produces" (LC 2:53).

BAPTISM

You learned about the means of grace—perhaps long ago—so let's review the lesson. For most of us, the gospel came first in Baptism.

Baptism is not simple water only. It is water connected with God's Word. Once that combination occurs, Baptism gives forgiveness, life, and salvation. That's God's promise (Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21). "In Baptism there is freely brought to everyone's door such a treasure and medicine that it utterly destroys death and preserves all people alive" (LC 4:43). Baptism does not depend on us. We are not baptized because we believe and decide to love Jesus. God forgives first and works to give us faith by our baptism.

While apparently simple—water and God's Word—Baptism is a profound means of grace. The wonder is that God does not withdraw the forgiveness he so freely offers. Each of us was baptized with the words, "I baptize you (your name: John, Jenny, Joe, or Kathy), in the name of the Father, and of



Open your
CATECHISM

the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Once you are baptized, God’s forgiveness is there with your name on it. He does not withdraw it even if you wander as a prodigal and abandon his forgiveness. It’s always there for you to take in faith—to return to if you fall away.

You can use your baptism daily to receive the forgiveness God has placed at your door. When troubled by sin, you can return to your baptism—repenting of your sins; asking God, “Have mercy on me;” and then remembering that God has washed your sins away. He has not abandoned you but gives you forgiveness. “So a truly Christian life is nothing other than a daily Baptism, once begun and ever to be continued” (LC 4:65).

THE KEYS AND CONFESSION

We are part of Christ’s church and come together regularly for cleansing so we can go on to live for Christ. When we come together for worship, God assures us of forgiveness. We come together as believers soiled by our sins. Together we confess our sins. We stand before God seeking his forgiveness, and he freely gives it to us when the pastor turns and says, “As a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins.”

The pastor also shares the gospel of forgiveness in other ways in our worship. We call him to do that in the Absolution, in the liturgy, and in his sermon. Through the gospel, the pastor announces that God places forgiveness before us, within reach of the faith he has created in our hearts. Sometimes our sins still make us feel dirty even after we hear the words of absolution. Then we have the option to come privately to the pastor or another Christian for forgiveness of those sins that trouble us.

In our daily life we have the same treasure of forgiveness to give to others. To our children when they sin and are

troubled by disobedience. To our spouses we sometimes hurt and who also hurt us. To others who have sinned against us. Forgiveness announced in these situations is forgiveness from God.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

The Lord’s Supper is a special treasure. We receive Christ’s body in, with, and under the bread and Christ’s blood in, with, and under the wine. We remember what his body and blood accomplished: our forgiveness. We receive what was “given” and “poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.”

Luther makes a comment similar to his words about Baptism, “The treasure, indeed, is open and placed at everyone’s door, yes, upon his table. But it is necessary that you also claim it and confidently view it as the words tell you. This is the entire Christian preparation for receiving this Sacrament worthily” (LC 5:35,36).

In many ways, God abundantly gives us what we need the most: forgiveness, and with it life and salvation. He has set up, instituted, and founded the ways the gospel brings us the blessings of his grace. In the Sacrament of the Altar our faith reaches out and grasps what washes away sin and removes its guilt so that we can go on and live as forgiven children of God—washed and ready for each day’s challenges.

Assignment: Read through Luther’s exposition of Baptism, the Ministry of the Keys and Confession, and Holy Communion. When you attend worship, note how many times you are assured of God’s love and forgiveness for you.

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

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





REACHING THE VIETNAMESE AT HOME AND ABROAD

Rachel Hartman and Daniel Kramer

TRULY VALUABLE

Mrs. Quý Thi Nguyen has always been a strong woman. Shortly after beginning a Bible Basics course in their family home, I found out that I basically got kicked out because Mrs. Quý (her name means “valuable”) did not approve. She explained to me how she believed in Buddha, the Four Noble Truths, and the Eight-Fold Path. I thanked her for sharing and continued to find opportunities to witness to her.

Mrs. Valuable’s husband was the first adult confirmand of our congregation. He also was the first Christian funeral. His last words were: “I regret that I was unable to live to see my adult children emigrate from Vietnam. My desire is for my children to follow my faith. I am at peace.”



Dan Kramer baptizes Mrs. Valuable.

In the months following the funeral, Mrs. Valuable allowed me to come and visit, even resuming the Bible course in her home. One day, Mrs. Valuable was quite talkative—I couldn’t get a crowbar in the conversation. She spoke of how bad things were when she was living in Vietnam waiting to come to the U.S. She talked of how difficult things were in Vietnam once again. I was praying the whole time she was telling me her stories. Finally, I said, “Mrs. Valuable, I regret to hear

of your difficult past. I am thankful for your present. But I am worried about your future.” And for the first time that I had ever seen, Mrs. Valuable began to cry. The walls she had put up began to come down.

Now in a new house and with her adult children emigrated from Vietnam, I concluded the Bible course around their kitchen table. As I was packing up, one of the adult daughters inquired, “Baptism, Pastor?” We are careful not to pressure people to be baptized and often use a mediator to discuss Baptism and church membership. However, when the daughter asked, I was glad to offer this tremendous blessing. The family passed the calendar around, and we settled on a date. Even Mrs. Valuable nodded her head.

When the day came, seven individuals from the family, including Mrs. Valuable herself, stood before God’s altar with wetted brow, all to God’s glory. Now Mrs. Valuable is faithful in worship and even participates in our new senior choir.

During a Christmas season, Mrs. Valuable came to see me. She said, “Pastor, I can’t remember things. I’ll go into a room and not remember why I went in there. I am forgetful. But the prayers in this book . . .” (she held up a copy of Luther’s Small Catechism in the Vietnamese language, which we had introduced during a recent sermon series on prayer) “. . . I can memorize these prayers having read through them just a few times!”

And with that, Mrs. Valuable began reciting Luther’s Morning Prayer in Vietnamese by heart. I must have said and heard that prayer a thousand times, but it had never been more beautifully spoken. Valuable, indeed.

Daniel Kramer is pastor at Peace in Jesus, Boise, Idaho.

THE CHURCH THAT HELPS PEOPLE

“A lot of people that don’t know English—they come to our church for help,” notes Trung Le, president of Peace in Jesus, Boise, Idaho.

Once they enter the building’s doors, these individuals receive a warm welcome and various offers for assistance. “We like to show them the love of God,” adds Le.

After receiving aid in the form of language classes, translating services, counseling or citizenship classes, many stay to learn more. Congregation members invite visitors to come on Sundays for worship or attend classes that teach about the Bible.

STARTING OUT

Peace in Jesus first formed in 1998, when it began as an exploratory congregation aided by other groups in the area. During the following years, it carried out efforts to reach the Vietnamese community in the Boise region. The pastor of the congregation, Daniel Kramer, learned Vietnamese to connect with those who knew little or no English.

This focus on language caught the attention of many, including Le and his wife. When they moved to Boise in 2006, Le’s wife was a Christian and wanted to attend a Vietnamese-speaking service. “Some of my friends at work told me that at Peace in Jesus the pastor spoke Vietnamese,” recalls Le. His wife wanted to worship there, so he took her.

Le wasn’t a Christian at the time, however, so he didn’t usually go to church with his wife. Then one Sunday in 2008 he decided to come to church with her. “I said, ‘How come this white guy is trying to speak our language?’” Le remembers. “It touched me.”

A few days later, Le met with the pastor and asked to be baptized. After becoming a member, Le decided to continue studying. He is currently in a training program to become a pastor and involved in various forms of outreach and ministry.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

“The Vietnamese community is growing every year,” notes Le. He estimates the current Vietnamese population to be close to three thousand, with more coming as relatives and friends of residents move to the area.

To reach this group, the congregation offers English classes regularly and helps with translating services. “Sometimes someone comes in and has a doctor’s appointment coming up but doesn’t know much English, so we go along and act as an interpreter,” explains Le.

From its facility, the congregation also offers U.S. citizenship classes, which are open to anyone who needs help. “We have had individuals from various Southeast Asian countries come,” notes Le.

Members of the community can also attend classes that have biblical themes. Vietnamese proverbs and pictures



Worship at Peace in Jesus, Boise, Idaho.

are often incorporated into lessons to help communicate principles. One course, for instance, is entitled “Sau Con Mua, Troi Lai Sáng,” which means “After the Rain, the Sun Shines Again.” Its theme centers on the impact of sin as well as the bright future Jesus provides.

REACHING OUT GLOBALLY

As Peace in Jesus has gained a reputation in its community as a church that helps people, its members have continually sought ways to provide further assistance. That desire stretches to an international level, as many have connections with family and friends currently living in Vietnam.

Due to this, an independent entity called “Friends of Vietnam” has formed to reach souls on a global level. “Our goals are to send individuals to Vietnam and bring students from Vietnam to study in schools of our fellowship,” explains Kramer.


Those traveling over to Vietnam will work as teachers in schools there and look for ways to bring the gospel message to those in the country. Students coming from Vietnam to the United States will attend Lutheran schools, where they can learn about the Bible and enjoy spending time with other Christians.

Looking to the future, Le points to God’s guiding hand. “We’ve seen how God works in our congregation,” he explains. “He can make things happen out of nothing. Now it’s our chance to work hard as a way to say ‘thank you’ to him for everything.”

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



This is the first article in a series about cross-cultural outreach in the U.S. Check out “Home mission connections lead to world mission opportunities” (p. 23) to learn how contacts made in the U.S. are leading to mission work around the world. Learn more about Peace in Jesus in this month’s edition of *WELS Connection*.



GRACE —UPON— GRACE

God's grace sees a family through the storms of life.

Julie K. Wietzke

"People say, 'God never gives you more than you can handle,'" says Jennifer Bugenhagen, a member at Christ, Big Bend, Wis. "I'm like, 'Yeah, but the devil sure likes to prove him otherwise.'"

The last five years for the Bugenhagen family have been, as Jennifer describes it, like being in a tornado. "Something hits you and you think, *What was that?* And you don't even have time to look because the next thing is hitting you."

With two daughters with complex medical issues and three close family members—a grandmother, father, and uncle—dying within several months of each other, Jennifer says that sometimes it was hard getting out of bed in the morning. "You wake up and immediately think, *Is someone going to be dead? . . . Is someone going to be sick? What's going to happen today?*"

But faith in God and his promises have kept the family going—and that's a message Jennifer wants everyone going through hard times to remember. "You have to keep going back to God's promises. I don't know where we would be without them," she says.

FACING CHALLENGES

The storm started about five years ago. Katie, the Bugenhagen's third daughter who had been ill on and off for most of her life, started getting sicker, complaining of headaches, joint pain, and mouth sores. "Whenever we talked to her, she would say, 'I just don't feel good,' and she would be in tears," says Jennifer.

Multiple doctors' appointments later, they discovered that Katie had Celiac disease, an autoimmune disorder in which eating gluten causes damage to the small intestine. But even after the family overhauled her diet and completely redid how they cooked and ate, Katie wasn't getting better, missing about a month of her freshman year of high school. "We were seeing nine different specialists at our worst point," says Jennifer.

Doctors discovered a thyroid disorder and then also began treating Katie for migraine headaches. She missed 60 days of school as a sophomore, and "we stopped counting at 70 during her junior year," says Jennifer.

"It was really hard," she continues. "Every morning you wake up and think, *Okay, is today going to be a good day or a bad day?* I leave for work knowing there's nothing I can do for her."

When Katie started getting dizzy as well, doctors decided to do autonomic testing, looking at body functions like blood pressure, heart rate, and breath-

ing rate. They discovered she had Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome or POTS, in which the heart rate increases significantly when moving from a seated to a standing position. While it isn't a rare condition—an estimated 1 to 3 million Americans suffer from it—it is difficult to diagnose.

Meanwhile, the Bugenhagen's second daughter, Rachel, was having health issues of her own. Doctors misdiagnosed her as being depressed and put her on anti-depressants. She was hospitalized several times and then developed a severe case of mono, where, according to Jennifer, she went from "healthy to almost on life support in two days." A fifth hospitalization finally led to the discovery that she also had a thyroid condition. Later tests showed she had POTS as well.

LEARNING LESSONS

While it took its toll on the family to be dealing with sickness and emergencies daily, Jennifer says that they learned some important lessons along the way.

Stay rooted in the Word. Jennifer says that she read a devotion every morning and every night. "I can't tell you how many times the devotion for that day just happened to fit exactly what I was going through or feeling," she says. "God meant it to be that way."

She mentions that she kept going back over and over to one devotion called "Grace upon grace," which asked the question, "What if God's only blessing to his people—the only thing he actually gave us—was eternal life? . . . Would it be enough?" "Of course it would," she says, noting that God has given us so many more blessings—grace upon grace—even though we often take them for granted.

Remember God's promises. "The Bible is full of them," Jennifer says. "He's never going to leave us. He's never going to forsake us. He is never going to give us more than we can handle. There are days, yeah, that you question that. Who wouldn't? But then he puts people and events in your life as those reminders—I'm still here. You're not alone."

Some of those people include members at Resurrection, Rochester, Minn., who offered support when Jennifer took Katie to a month-long pain rehabilitation program at Mayo Clinic last fall. Members donated a guest house for them to use for free, gas money, a clinic parking pass, and help in shopping and paying for Katie's food for her specialized diet. "They literally took care of every single need we had," says Jennifer. "They just took this huge burden off me and carried it for me so that I was free to focus on my daughter."

Give it to God because he's got it. "When we try to control everything and try to fix things, it's really not giving the control to him, and then we kind of screw things up," says Jennifer. At one point, when dealing with a serious turn in Rachel's health, "I just gave up,



and I gave her to God," Jennifer says, even if that meant God would take Rachel from this life to heaven. Rachel pulled through, and Jennifer discovered later that her husband was praying for the same thing. "It gives you a whole different understanding about when [God] says, 'My grace is made perfect in weakness,'" she says.

Pray. Jennifer says another piece of letting go and letting God is going to the Father and asking for what you want. "If the answer is no, then you ask that God change your heart. That's an acceptance thing, and that's a prayer he answers yes to every single time," she says. Now she is praying that God will use their family and their experiences to help others.

WEATHERING THE STORM

The storm has quieted for now for the Bugenhagen family. Both Katie and Rachel are doing much better, though they will be dealing with their conditions for their entire lives. Rachel graduated from college and is looking for a job. She also will be going through the pain rehabilitation program at Mayo in 2017. Katie, through the program at Mayo, is learning how to deal with pain and manage her life with POTS as she completes her senior year in high school.

"We are trying to find our new normal," says Jennifer.

That normal includes trusting in God to lead them through any other storms that life will bring. "God has a plan, and sometimes you don't know what it is," Jennifer says. "But it is absolutely evident that he is carrying you through when you can't do it yourself."

Julie Wietzke is managing editor of Forward in Christ.

Author's note: The Bugenhagens will have another storm to weather in 2017. Just before this story went to print, Jennifer discovered she has Hodgkin lymphoma. She writes, "We will just keep taking one day at a time and keep praying. . . . Only God's grace will see us through." Please keep the family in your prayers.

*dysautonomiainternational.org

Exercise your freedom of speech

Earle D. Treptow

Those who have been sanctified by the Holy Spirit have a freedom of speech far surpassing the freedom protected by the First Amendment.

In the days following November's presidential election, people across the United States exercised their First Amendment right to freedom of speech. Some expressed their disappointment through derogatory Facebook posts and scathing tweets or took to the streets in protest. Others celebrated the results.

According to the First Amendment, Americans are free to speak what's on their minds. With some limitations, we have the right to voice our opinions about elected leaders. That's not, however, the way God would have his people think about freedom of speech.

Those who have been sanctified by the Holy Spirit have a freedom of speech far surpassing the freedom protected by the First Amendment. We are free, first, to speak to God directly in prayer. Though our sin makes us unworthy of that privilege, "in [Jesus] and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (Ephesians 3:12). We have the right to bring our concerns to the One who spoke this world into existence, knowing that he is "able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20).

If you're concerned about the future of the country in which you live, exercise that freedom of speech. Speak to the One who rules over everything everywhere for the benefit of his church. Ask him to grant wisdom to those who serve in the government so that they recognize their solemn responsibility as his representatives. Pray that the Lord would lead the citizens of this country to live in accord with the law he wrote on their hearts.

Because the sinful nature clings to us in this life, we sometimes use our words to tear people down, including those God has placed over us in the state. We put others down to elevate ourselves, to assure ourselves that, while we may not be perfect, we are at least better than "those

people." Sadly, we're often more interested in what we feel about ourselves than what God himself has said about us in Christ. He has declared us innocent and the delight of his heart. Since we have perfect security in Christ, we need not seek it in tearing others down.

Secure in God's declaration of us, we are free to speak about others in a respectful way. The apostle Paul encourages us, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Ephesians 4:29). We who have experienced grace in what God says about us are free to show grace to others in what we say about them.

Exercise your freedom of speech! Speak about others with respect, including those whom God has placed over you in the government, whether you feel they've earned it or not.

We have one more freedom of speech in Christ: We are free to speak the good news of Jesus to everyone. The Lord has commissioned us to be a blessing to others as we testify to God's love for all. Real change happens when the Spirit of God changes hearts, and he does that through the message of Christ. So, speak up. Proclaim the extraordinary grace of God in Christ.

Exercise your freedom of speech as a Christian. Speak, in prayer, to the One who rules over all for the benefit of his church. Speak respectfully about God's representatives in the government. And speak the Word of Christ, by which the Lord changes hearts and lives.

God will bless your speaking.

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

The RIPPLE EFFECT SIMON THE TANNER



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

Daniel N. Balge

It was just an address where the apostle Peter was staying. In fact, it was less of an address than a description. An angel shared it with a God-fearing Gentile from Caesarea. The angel told Cornelius, a Roman centurion, "Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea" (Acts 10:5,6).

AN UNUSUAL ADDRESS

Joppa was a port city in Judea, about 40 miles south of Caesarea. People looking for Peter in Joppa would look for the house on the coast, but they might have been able to find Simon's house by its smell. Tanneries were notorious for their stink. That odor hints at what made Simon the tanner's address significant to gospel outreach.

From Simon's name we gather that he was Jewish. From his hospitality to Peter we conclude that he was also a Christian. At first glance, Peter's stay with Simon may appear no different from Paul's staying with Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:15) or with Aquila

and Priscilla in Corinth (Acts 18:3)—simply an apostle finding necessary and practical support in the work from fellow Christians.

But Peter at Simon's house was unusual. People avoided tanners. Ancient zoning laws often put tanneries at the edge of town or beyond, at a site dictated by the prevailing winds. A tanner treated animal hides with foul mixtures of animal or human waste or with harsh chemicals. Sometimes what flesh remained on a hide was allowed to rot. It was a hands-on trade, and the stench would permeate the clothes, skin, and house of the tanner.

Jews ordinarily shunned tanners. Tanning was not forbidden in the Old Testament. Leather was used for clothing, packs, saddles, sandals, and tents—including the Tabernacle, for centuries the hub of Israel's worship life. But dead animals and other features of the work left a tanner dirty, smelly, and often ceremonially unclean. By custom, tanners came to be treated as outcasts from polite society and were pushed to the fringes of Jewish religious life.

A SIGNIFICANT STAY

So Peter's stay with Simon the tanner ran against the norm. Peter was obviously not out for personal gain or comfort. Maybe his room had a view of the sea, but it surely had a whiff of

the tannery. Peter had found a way to let Simon the tanner, despite his status, help spread the gospel. Most important, Peter's choice of accommodations helped signal that the gospel is meant for all.

God made that clear. A delegation of Gentiles came to fetch Peter. They arrived just after the Lord by a vision had directed Peter that it was no longer necessary to keep Jewish dietary laws. God's Spirit then told him to go back to Caesarea with the delegation from Cornelius. There Peter preached the facts of eternal life to the centurion's household and baptized them. Jewish Christians, who had come with Peter from Joppa, marveled at the evidence of faith among Cornelius' household.

Then Peter the Jew stayed a few days at Cornelius the Gentile's house, another address with something important to say about the good news of Jesus.

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

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



The Lord has
given us all we
need to come to
a place for rest.

Weary and burned out

Spiritual life can seem like a wasteland sometimes. We might imagine that we're standing on the edge of a vast landscape of sand dunes with no clear path to follow. The longer we stand there and ponder what to do, the worse it gets.

I've been there, and I find company there. The people who come are weary and tired. Some have labored long and hard at life's challenges and living as Christians. They're burned out. I even find Elijah there, who wondered if he was the only one who was still faithful (1 Kings chapter 19), and Jeremiah with his Lamentations.

We all come here from time to time. A parent confronted with challenges posed by a child's dangerous choices becomes weary and drained by the effort to do what is right. A spouse sits helpless as life and vitality creep away from a beloved partner. We all have our own journeys and stories of how we came to the edge of the wasteland.

Exhausted by our struggles, we seem to have lost our enthusiasm for Christ and our energy for the next challenge. We anguish over what we sense is a drop in our intensity and a sign of weakness. The dents in our armor are difficult to repair sometimes. After the struggle, it seems like we will never be able to attain the same level of commitment, strength, and vitality.

But let's be careful as we join the company of those other weary believers. What we are experiencing is not so much a wasteland but a sign of spiritual maturity. We've come through troubles. The Lord has given us all we need to come to a place for rest. We have endured. The maturity comes in recognizing that the Lord has trained and molded us in the exertion—even given us a time to reflect.

We should remember that all our trials and challenges do not leave us the

same as we were before. Even if we don't realize it, we have grown to a new level of spiritual maturity, that is, if we have turned to the Lord's Word for strength, comfort, and encouragement. He has led us to deeper prayer as well. Even if God seems to be silent after our repeated cries for help, he sharpens our vision of his will and leads us away from our will. Wait. Trust. Hope. That's part of spiritual maturity.

At those moments of spiritual weariness, we may be tempted to do something to breathe vitality back into our spiritual life. I know some have sought a solution in another church or even another church body, hoping to recapture some of what appears lost. Temptations await us in these places. But our spiritual health does not depend as much on our efforts as it depends on God's power in the gospel. Don't be too quick to find a path away from his grace and love.

Instead, take the time to rest, reflect, and return to God's rich promises. The path ahead becomes clear as we listen to God's instruction in his Word. The gospel assures us of God's love in Christ and promises he will never desert us. Perhaps his new role for us is to stand quietly as one of God's guideposts for others to follow. Mature and sure of his love, we point to Scripture and the cross it reveals. For those troubled by their journey, our spiritual depth assures them in their own spiritual weariness.

There's more to do, and God may open new pathways for any of us to follow. In the meantime, wait for the Lord and sink yourselves into his promises.

Faith alone

Joel D. Otto

How does a person have a right to stand before God and obtain eternal life? The Bible presents two answers. Perfect obedience of all the commandments is one answer. Jesus once gave that answer to an expert in the law (Luke 10:25-37). But no one can do this. The other answer is faith, belief, and trust in Jesus. We read it in the most well-known passage in Scripture (John 3:16). Paul also expressed it clearly: "We maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law" (Romans 3:28).

This teaching that we are justified by faith alone has been obscured, even in the church. At the time of Paul, some tried to say that faith was not enough. You also had to obey certain Jewish customs to be a good Christian. Paul had an answer: "[We] know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified" (Galatians 2:16).

By Martin Luther's day, the church was teaching a similar combination of faith and works. Faith had to be completed by works. But whenever works are added, you cannot be certain that heaven is secure. How do you know if you've done enough works or the right works?

Luther was led to rediscover what the Scriptures had always taught. Only by faith in Jesus do we receive the blessings Jesus won for us through his life, death, and resurrection. The Augsburg Confession states concisely, "It is taught that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God through our merit, work, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ's sake through faith when we believe that Christ has suf-

fered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness in his sight, as St. Paul says in Romans 3[:21-26] and 4[:5]" (*The Book of Concord*, IV, pp. 38,40).

True Lutherans believe that we have a right standing before God through Christ alone by faith alone in Jesus. True Lutherans understand that it is all by grace and that faith is not a decision we make or the one work we must do but simply the hand that receives the gifts God gives through the gospel.

To be truly Lutheran means to have the confident certainty of eternal life because faith holds on to Jesus alone.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Read Romans 4:4-8 and Ephesians 2:8,9. How do these passages help answer the idea that faith is the one work we must do?
2. Luther emphasized that we are saved by faith alone, but he also frequently said that faith is never alone. Read Romans 3:28 and James 2:20-24. How do these passages seem to contradict each other? Describe how they do not contradict each other.
3. Which is more important and why: the act of believing or what we believe?

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



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



WHAT IT MEANS TO BE TRULY LUTHERAN



I'M SORRY

Even though we sin daily, God freely forgives us time after time, and he gives us the strength to live for him again.

"I'm so sorry. I won't do it again. I promise."

For the teenage daughter of an alcoholic father, these words have come to mean little to nothing. It's been a long ten-year journey for my entire family. Through it all, God was there, holding me up when I could not stand and sheltering me with his love as I walked through the trials he had given me.

ADDICTED TO SIN

When thinking about the words I so frequently heard coming from my father's mouth, I realized that I had been guilty of doing the exact same thing. No, I have never had to apologize for drinking. Rather, we believers apologize in this way to God for our sins. We are to God, in a sense, alcoholics that he loves dearly. But instead of being addicted to alcohol, we are hopelessly addicted to sin.

Every time we tell God we are sorry and promise we will never do "something like that" again. Each time we go back on our promises. We fail. We fail miserably and frequently. We may be sincere about our resolve to avoid sin, but, like addicts, we fail to do as we want. And just like the alcoholic's false

promises hurt those to whom they are made, so also do my false promises and failed attempts at holy living cause my heavenly Father sadness.

FORGIVEN AND STRENGTHENED BY OUR FATHER

From my mouth, I often forgave my father. But unlike the imperfect human forgiveness that I offered him, God offers all people his free, perfect, and complete forgiveness. God freely forgives us time after time, and he gives us the strength to live for him again. "The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love" (Psalm 103:8).

How do we cure ourselves from our addiction to sin? We can't. Only God can do that. An alcoholic cannot quit by himself; he needs support to change his life. We too need support and can find unwavering encouragement in God's Word.

We do need to understand ourselves. The first thing they tell you in alcoholic recovery is that you will always be an alcoholic, but you can strive to be a recovering alcoholic. In the same way, we will always have a sinful craving for what is evil as long as we breathe. In

this world, we will always be sin addicts. Listening to God's Word—hearing the message of Jesus and his forgiveness—can help us defeat our cravings more often and heal from our past mistakes.

My father may have failed in keeping his promises, and we may continue to fail in keeping our promises to God and to others. But God will always keep his promises. What a joy! What a shelter! What security we find in him. "Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23).

Thank God for his limitless grace, free forgiveness, and sure promise of heaven. Only through him and his strength was I able to get through some of the darkest years of my life. To anyone struggling right now: Have faith. Trust him. Pray, because he is always listening.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:35,37).

Due to the personal nature of this article, the author's name has been withheld.