

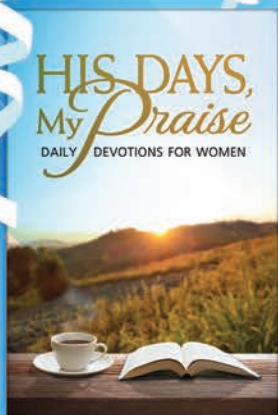
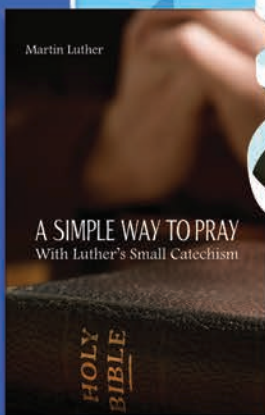
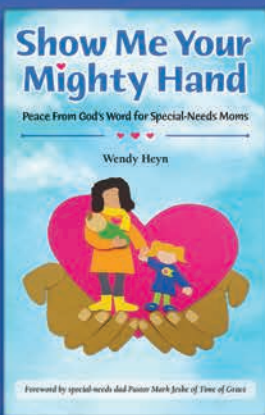
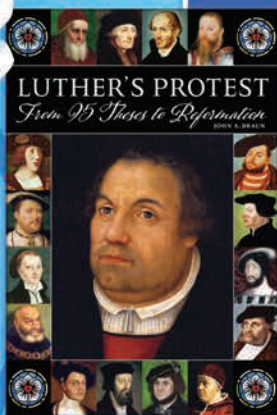
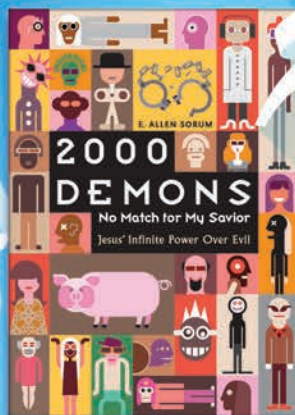
Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



How big is our God?

Our Lord envelops all time and space. *Page 10*



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YOUR GIFTS, GOD'S BLESSINGS

an annual report to our members

God uses the gifts that you give to WELS to bless people here and abroad. Learn more about the amazing blessings that God is bestowing on the work that WELS is carrying out on your behalf.



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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

It's a new year . . . a time when we may have a new outlook on life, making plans for the future and resolutions to better our lives. Yet often, things don't go as we planned, and we don't always follow through on our promises to ourselves and to others.

How comforting to know that we're not in this alone. God is always with us; he always has a plan for our lives and he never breaks his promises. A new series starting this month looks deeper into the attributes of our powerful, yet merciful God—a God who is everywhere and “everywhen” (p. 10).

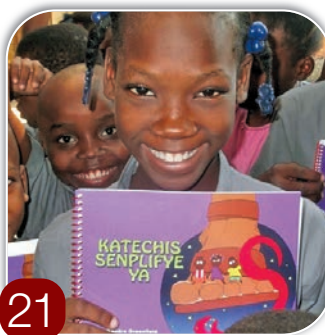
Throughout history, God also had a plan to preserve his Word and keep it pure. The reformer Martin Luther was a part of that plan. As we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, we'll examine our rich Lutheran history, looking especially at biblical teachings Luther emphasized—teachings that still ring true today. Check out the interactive Bible study (p. 35) and a new series starting this month, “Abiding truth” (p. 12).

Finally, during this time of change in the United States government, remember that God is in control. Several articles this month discuss how to honor the leaders God has placed over us, even when we don't always agree with them (pp. 9 and 32).

Julie Wietzke



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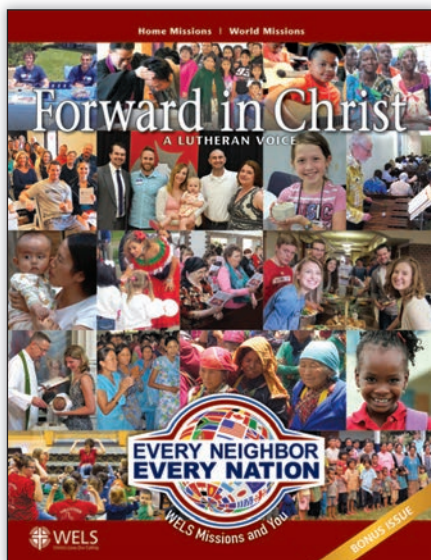
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EVERY NEIGHBOR, EVERY NATION

I want to thank you for the recent publication of the FIC mission issue. How wonderful it is to read about our mission work in the world. I am amazed and humbled by what God has done for our small synod.

Please continue to publish this type of information. It reminds us of all the wonderful things we can do with our combined contributions.

*Jayne Lenhardt
West Allis, Wisconsin*

Thank you for the wonderful supplement to *Forward in Christ*! I was truly moved by the many articles about the work being done on WELS members' behalf. I truly wondered as I read, "How can WELS do all this!?" God be praised. That's the answer.

Lois Tackebury

CALLED WORKER RETIREMENTS

The October issue contained 55 retirements listed under "Changes in ministry" ["Bulletin board," p. 19]. If each worker averaged just 30 years of service, that is almost 1,700 years of service to our Lord in the preaching and teaching ministries of these former workers in the kingdom. We commend these people and thank

God for their years of dedicated service. We hope that their positions have been filled so that the work may go on. With that many retirements, it again reminds us of the necessity for our parents, pastors, and teachers to be planting the seeds and encouraging our young people to consider a life of service to the Lord. As the Scriptures remind us, the harvest is plenty, but the workers are few!

*Alan Ross
Manitowoc, Wisconsin*

REVERSED ARTWORK

Take a close look at the illustration accompanying Rev. Oldenburg's article on page 10 [Nov.]. I wonder how many of your readers will realize that the image is *reversed* left and right. To view it correctly, observe it in a mirror or hold up page nine to a bright light and observe the page ten image through the paper. (The Americas and Africa are reversed, the Big Dipper is reversed, and the boy's shirt fly is reversed.)

Yes, I remember Jan. 28, 1986, both as a WELS teacher with a room full of fourth graders and as an (unsuccessful) applicant for the Teacher in Space program.

Through my Bible in 3 years

Read or listen online at wels.net/bible3.

JANUARY 2017

- | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Revelation 3:1-6 | 12. Rev. 11:15-19 | 23. Rev. 18:1-20 |
| 2. Rev. 3:7-13 | 13. Rev. 12:1-9 | 24. Rev. 18:21-19:10 |
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| 6. Rev. 6 | 17. Rev. 14:1-5 | 28. Rev. 21:1-8 |
| 7. Rev. 7 | 18. Rev. 14:6-13 | 29. Rev. 21:9-21 |
| 8. Rev. 8 | 19. Rev. 14:14-20 | 30. Rev. 21:22-22:5 |
| 9. Rev. 9 | 20. Rev. 15 | 31. Rev. 22:6-21 |
| 10. Rev. 10 | 21. Rev. 16 | |
| 11. Rev. 11:1-14 | 22. Rev. 17 | |

I enjoy your magazine and read it cover to cover. Keep up the good work.

*Gary Cox
Neenah, Wisconsin*

Oops! Great catch!—ed.

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*.

Defining religion

INFALLIBILITY: The teaching that what the Bible says cannot fail but must come to pass. Since the Bible is God's Word, all of its prophecies and promises are certain and sure (Psalm 145:13; 2 Corinthians 1:20; Matthew 24:34,35).

Always new

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. 1 Timothy 1:15

Joel C. Seifert

There's a bright, shining moment that starts off every week. In 2017, it starts off our entire year. The words of the absolution ring out: "God, our heavenly Father, has forgiven all your sins. By the perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus Christ, he has removed your guilt forever." Those words sum up one of the greatest truths of Scripture. When God forgives our sins, he does what no resolution or turn of a calendar page could ever do: He makes us new.

OUR FORGIVENESS IN CHRIST MAKES US NEW

The apostle Paul wrote, "Follow my example" (1 Corinthians 11:1). What kind of example for renewal do you see in Paul?

You see someone who was earnest and worked hard. Someone who read his Bible and went to church. Someone who tried to be a better follower of God every day. But you also see a hate-filled, violence-spewing murderer, lost in his own self-righteousness.

That says so much about where our renewal is found. Apart from God's mercy in Christ, we are hopelessly lost. Even when we try to leave behind our sins and work to turn our lives around, if Jesus and his cross aren't the heart of it, we'll only end up worse than before.

Paul's renewal happened with a flash of light. Read his story in Acts chapter 9. Yours likely seemed much more ordinary: a message received in faith, a splash of water in the name of the triune God. But the same thing took place. God took an enemy and made him his child. God took someone in the age-old slavery of sin and made him new. "God, our heavenly Father,

has forgiven all your sins. You are his own dear child."

OUR RENEWAL IS ONGOING

But Paul's "example" has more to teach us. He didn't say that Christ came to save sinners, "of whom I *was* the worst." He wrote, "of whom I *am* the worst." Paul the preacher, Paul the spiritual father to so many, Paul the missionary looked at himself and said, "I *am* the worst of sinners."

Don't be afraid to say that too. God calls us his holy children in Christ Jesus, but daily we still fall into our same old sins. God made us new when

God saved us in a brilliant once-for-all act of his grace, and he's also there every day to . . . wrap us in Jesus' righteousness to make us new again.

he brought us to faith, but he's there to give us constant renewal every day. Every day as you read his promises in the Bible, every day as you remember your baptism, every time you go back to his Supper, he takes those sins on



your mind and the guilt in your heart and buries them at the foot of Christ's cross. When you cry out, "I am the worst of sinners," he's there to say, "You are my own dear child."

Remember the example Paul set, and you'll always know how a Christian life works. God saved us in a brilliant once-for-all act of his grace, and he's also there every day to pick us up, dust us off, and wrap us in Jesus' righteousness to make us new again.

What a wonderful way to start the year. "You are forgiven. You are his own dear child. May God give you strength to live according to his will. Amen."

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



Mark Schwede

More and more,
new opportunities
are coming to us,
not as a result of
careful planning
and analysis, but
because God
himself is placing
them before us.

New opportunities, new strategies

On his second missionary journey, the apostle Paul, together with Silas, Timothy, and Luke, was in the city of Troas. It was there, during the night, that God gave Paul a vision that would usher in a whole new chapter in the spread of the gospel. A man from Macedonia (just across the Aegean Sea in Greece) pleaded with Paul, "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9). Paul recognized this as a call from God himself. Immediately, he and his companions sailed to Macedonia. It was the first time that the gospel would be preached in Europe.

Our synod has been blessed with opportunities to spread the gospel around the world. We are working to spread the gospel and plant confessional Lutheran churches in 23 countries, and our Board for World Missions continually is planning to expand the work to other countries.

Traditionally, WELS has worked to develop new mission fields by sending WELS missionaries to places where they proclaimed the gospel and established Lutheran congregations and, eventually, sister Lutheran church bodies. But more and more, new opportunities are coming to us, not as a result of careful planning and analysis, but because God himself is placing them before us.

With increasing frequency, we are hearing the requests of people and groups who, like the man from Macedonia, are asking us to "come over and help!" These groups are not looking for financial support nor are they asking WELS to send missionaries. They are looking to us to help them train faithful Lutheran pastors to serve their people with the pure message of the gospel.

In some cases, these are Lutheran groups that have recognized that they need to separate from the liberal Lutheran churches with whom they have been associated. That is the case with Rev. Dr. Kebede Yigezu, the founder and

president of the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia. To meet the needs of his growing church body, he has established a theological school where WELS can assist in the training of future pastors. In Kenya, a group of 20 pastors and 50 congregations have left their previous church body and are looking to establish fellowship with WELS. In Ethiopia and other countries that border South Sudan, South Sudanese refugees are requesting our help in training pastors to serve people in the refugee camps. One of the most amazing opportunities is taking place in, of all locations, Vietnam. There, surviving for years without trained pastors, a Hmong church body of 70,000 members has asked our synod to teach them Lutheran doctrine.

These are just a few examples. Our synod has received requests from spiritual leaders around the world to provide more than 300 men with the theological training that will enable them to proclaim God's truth to the people they serve.

To meet this growing opportunity, the Joint Mission Council and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary have partnered to establish the Pastoral Studies Institute Team. The team will coordinate and oversee the training of pastors where they live through a flexible program of theological instruction. We can be thankful for the rapid way in which our mission boards have responded to the increasing opportunities God is giving us to share the gospel with more and more people. He has promised us that his Word will not return to him empty but will accomplish the purpose for which he sent it (Isaiah 55:11). We are seeing that promise being kept in ways and in locations that we could not have imagined only a few years ago.

Keep these efforts and the people we are serving in your prayers.

Learn more about these mission opportunities at wels.net/missions.

Light for our path

These days it seems like people, particularly professional athletes, disrespect the anthem, the American flag, and our military to “protest.” I’m worried this mentality is going to trickle down to our children. What can we tell our children about what God says about respecting government and authority, even when we don’t agree with something that is happening in our country?

James F. Pope

It is no secret that young people have long been susceptible to following trends established by those seen as role models. Let’s see what scriptural principles can address your question and concern.

RESPECT GOD’S AUTHORITIES—THEN

God’s will for people to respect his authorities in government is clear. One apostle, Paul, wrote: “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves” (Romans 13:1,2). Another apostle, Peter, urged: “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors. . . . honor the emperor” (1 Peter 2:13,14,17).

When those apostles wrote, Nero reigned as Roman emperor. He was definitely no friend of Christians; his atrocities against them are well documented. Yet, the directives of “be subject” and “honor” applied even to him—not because his life or actions generated respect, but because he filled a seat of authority God had established. Certainly, if Christians were caught in the crossfire of conflicting commands from God and government, it was important for them to implement the principle of Acts 5:29: “We must obey God rather than human beings!” Otherwise, they were to obey and respect the governing authorities.

RESPECT GOD’S AUTHORITIES—NOW

So what does this mean for Christian youth in 21st-century America? The Fourth Commandment still applies. God still has repre-

sentatives in the government. God still looks for Christians to respect his representatives and submit to governing authorities.

What can Christian youth do when they do not agree with what is happening in our country? They can work toward positive change. They can contact people who are in a position to bring about such change. They can be positive examples of impartial love and respect in their daily lives. Can they follow the example of some professional athletes by kneeling during the national anthem? There is no law forbidding that. But one wonders if their actions will generate more support for their cause or ill will.

The use of a national anthem and any customs related to it is certainly an adiaphoron: something God has neither commanded nor forbidden. In that and every area of Christian freedom, God’s people will seek to benefit others. One wonders what the greater benefit might be for kneeling during the national anthem—especially when the song is introduced by the announcement: “Ladies and gentlemen, to honor America . . .” When people ignore that announcement, it follows logically that they are dishonoring America.

Kneeling during a song will not change hearts; kneeling in prayer can. So, let’s continue to teach our Christian youth to pray “for all people—for kings and all those in authority” (1 Timothy 2:1,2). When God changes hearts through his Word, then there are blessings—for people personally and for the land in which they live. “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD” (Psalm 33:12).

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

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

Psalm 119:105

HOW BIG IS

Some people shrink their god to fit their concepts. But our God is so big that he envelops all time and space.

Arthur A. Eggert

Most people believe in a god, that is, in a supernatural being or presence of some sort. In fact, they usually capitalize “god” as if the word was the name of a supernatural being. But do the descriptions of the “god” in whom various people believe match each other? Is there really a “god” in whom all people believe? Or do they just believe in the concept of a god, the description of whom they fill in to suit their fancy? If one actually asks people to describe their god(s), one would soon realize there is little agreement about the nature of “God.”

It is sinful human nature for people to shrink their god(s) to a size that they can deal with. If they want something from their god, then their god must be big enough to provide it. If they want to feel good about themselves, then their god must be big enough to comfort them. If, however, they want to act immorally, then their god must be small enough to be incapable of judging them. In short, they want a god whom they can put into a closet or on a shelf and only bring out when necessary. Such a god is a crutch and not a real god.

The Lord, the God of the Bible, is not such a god. He does not let himself be recreated in a style that pleases the sinful humans dwelling in his universe. He is the Lord God Almighty. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. That’s incredible and has important implications for our lives.

THE LORD AND SPACE

Let us start with God and space. The Lord has no physical dimensions because he is a spirit (John 4:24). In the Old Testament, God sometimes took on human form for special purposes (e.g., Genesis 18, Joshua 5:13-15, Judges 6). Yet human form is not an essential property of the Lord. When the Bible describes him in human terms by talking about his eyes (2 Samuel 15:25), his ears (Psalm 34:15) and his arms (Deuteronomy 26:8), it is using picture language to help people relate to a God who far exceeds their understanding.

If the Lord is a spirit, how does he interact with our physical, three-dimensional world? The inspired psalmist gives us the answer when he writes, “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast” (Psalm 139:7-10). The prophets Jeremiah (23:23,24) and Amos (9:1-6) agree that the Lord is everywhere. This attribute of the Lord is called *omnipresence*. Yet the Lord is not spread thinly across the universe; his essence is completely present everywhere. King Solomon wrote, “The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good” (Proverbs 15:3). He is not a God who is in any sense far off.

But how can the whole essence of the Lord be present at every point at the same time? We cannot fully understand or explain it, but we can try. When the Lord created the universe, he created it outside his being, that is, he is not part of his creation. Every physical thing in the universe can be described by a set of space coordinates. This is not true of the Lord,

YOUR GOD?

because he is not physical. From his position outside of his creation he has projected his whole being equally to every point within that creation. Mathematicians call such a process “mapping.” It is used in computing to permit one point to be associated with many other points, even an infinitely large number of points. Because the Lord projects himself to all points in the universe, he is therefore effectively standing by us wherever we are, watching what we do, and being ready to answer our prayers. We cannot hide from him, nor does he ever forget about us. He is completely with us, not just some diffused part of him that might not give us his full attention.

THE LORD AND TIME

Now let’s consider God and time. We establish hours, days, and years by our relationship with the sun. Scientists struggle to give us an understandable definition of time: It is a nonspatial dimension, a continuum, directional like a stream in which one cannot go backward. Yesterday is out of our reach, and we cannot do anything yet during tomorrow. We can place all the events of human history in sequence on a timeline. Continual change occurs as time passes.

The Bible tells us that the Lord does not have the same relationship to time as we do. Psalm 102 says that the earth will wear out, but that the Lord is always the same (immutable) and will never cease to exist (eternal). Malachi agrees that the Lord does not change (3:6). Peter (2 Peter 3:8) quotes Moses that “with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day” (God is timeless). As we look at these and other verses, we are forced to conclude that the Lord is not affected by time but rather fills all time the same way he fills all space. The Lord effectively sees our timeline of the universe

end-on, that is, as a single point. All history is effectively simultaneous to the Lord.

So just as the Lord has mapped himself to every spatial point in the present universe, he also maps himself to every space-time coordinate that has ever existed. He is not only everywhere, but also “everywhen.” He exists in an “eternal now” relative to the human view of time. This is important to us because it means that the Lord can never fail to do what he has promised. When he is making a promise at one point in human history, he is fulfilling it at some later point (Numbers

[The Lord] is not only everywhere, but also “everywhen.”

23:19). It is the same action to him because, from his viewpoint, he is simultaneously at both places and times and must be consistent with himself (2 Timothy 2:13). He is not “slow” to fulfill his promises as people reckon slowness (2 Peter 3:9), but he has placed the fulfillments of his promises at the times in human history that make his plan work as he intends (Galatians 4:4,5).

How big is our God? He is so big that he envelops all time and space. His unchanging being is ever by our side, extending both before and after us in all directions.

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

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

ABIDING

truth

Scripture alone is the authority for all Christian teachings.

John A. Braun

Martin Luther stood before those assembled at the Diet of Worms and proclaimed, “Here I stand.” His bold confession of faith hardened the opposition to him. Emperor Charles V wondered why he had put up with Luther for so long. After his confession, Luther remained in Worms a short time and then began the journey back to Wittenberg under the protection of the Emperor’s promise of safe conduct.

He did not make it to Wittenberg. On May 4, 1521, Luther was abducted along the way. With crossbow and sword, horsemen forced Luther out of the wagon with only his New Testament and Hebrew Bible. He ran next to the horses for a short distance and then mounted and rode off. At 11:00 that night, they arrived at the Wartburg Castle. His kidnapping had been arranged for his own safety, and for the next months, Luther became Knight George behind the walls of the castle.

In the meantime, the Emperor and those remaining in Worms issued the Edict of Worms. Luther officially became guilty of high treason because he would not revoke his teaching.

GOD’S WORD IN THE HANDS OF THE PEOPLE

Safe at the Wartburg, Luther kept busy. His friends in Wittenberg communicated with him by letter, delivered books to him so he could study and write, and kept him informed. Some thought Luther was dead, but soon his new writings began to appear.

In one of his letters, dated Dec. 18, 1521, and addressed to his friend John Lang, Luther set a remarkable goal for his remaining time in the castle: “I shall be hiding here until Easter. In the meantime I shall . . . translate the New Testament into German, an undertaking our friends request. I hear you are also work-

ing on this. Continue as you have begun. I wish every town would have its interpreter, and that this book alone, in all languages, would live in the hands, eyes, ears, and hearts of all people” (*Luther’s Works* 48:356).

So Luther set to work, no doubt, using the recent Greek edition Erasmus had published in 1516. He did not translate from the Latin Vulgate, the only authorized Bible at the time. This work, like much of his other work, defied the accepted teachings of his day. Translating the Bible into the common language of the people was considered a desecration of the sacred text of the Bible. But Luther’s goal was to put God’s Word into the hands of people in a way that they could understand it for themselves.

In the quiet, uninterrupted time Luther had at the castle, he made great progress. On March 1, 1522, he returned to Wittenberg with a rough draft of the New Testament. In just under three months, Luther had done what most considered impossible. His colleagues in Wittenberg considered it astounding.

In Wittenberg, Luther recruited Philip Melancthon and George Spalatin, among others, to help perfect the translation. Melancthon was the eminent Greek scholar on the faculty of the University of Wittenberg, and they asked Spalatin to help with some of the German.

The work that came from their efforts went to the printer, Melchior Lotther, in July and kept three presses busy. Workers were not allowed to take any of the completed pages out of the workshop for fear they might pass them on to another printer.

The printing was done in late September. Their efforts became known as the September Testament or September Bible. It was a huge success; estimates suggest that 5,000 copies were sold in two months. The approximate cost was between \$15 and \$25. A December Testament followed, correcting some of the typos

and other errors. The translation of the Old Testament began at once, but it was not completed until 1534—12 years later. In those 12 years, one estimate is that 200,000 New Testaments were sold.

What a great blessing we have as Christians five hundred years after Luther! We have the Bible in our own language. If we can't read Greek, Hebrew, or even German, we can read God's Word in English. Today anyone can walk into almost any bookstore and buy the version they prefer. Technology even gives us the choice of a wide range of translations on our mobile devices. Luther helped usher in that freedom. The Bible is in the hands of the people, just as Luther planned.

BOUND BY THE SCRIPTURES

At Worms Luther had declared, "I am bound by the Scriptures." He said clearly that both church councils and popes could make mistakes and that they often contradicted each other. The only authority he could trust was the Scriptures. Even before the Diet of Worms he had rejected the decrees of the Roman church on indulgences, claiming that all human words and authority are "not above, but under the Word of God" (*Luther's Works* 31:266-7). The message of the Bible was important; Luther understood Christian faith as "nothing else than believing what God promises and reveals" (*Luther's Works* 31:270-1).

We too are bound by the Scriptures. All human ideas change; God's Word does not. "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Romans 4:3). The apostles also believed the word of the same God and were credited with righteousness. Luther believed the Scriptures and received the same righteousness, forgiveness, and life. We are also declared righteous by God for the sake of Jesus by our faith in God's promises revealed in the Bible.

Being bound by the Scriptures means we do not say more than the Scriptures, but we do not say less than the Scriptures either. When the Bible doesn't clarify things, we have a choice about what to believe. It is neither commanded nor forbidden.

It also means that even if all our friends and the entire world believe something different from what God says, we hold to what God says in his Word. No higher authority exists. We treasure one Christ for salvation, one source of truth, and one comfort for eternity. Here we stand. God help us.

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

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

LUTHER

still speaks

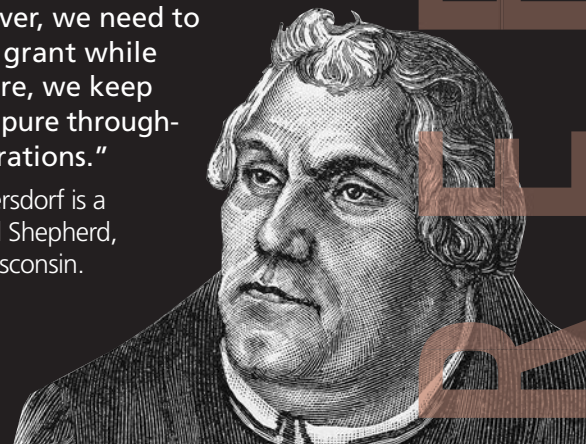
"*Sola Scriptura*," Luther correctly preached. Nothing more and nothing less than what Scripture said was to be taught. In a Lenten sermon he declared, "Everyone should flee, as from the devil himself, the sects and enthusiasts who lead us away from the Word and Scripture to human ideas. . . . For this is leading from a rock into quicksand. The more you try to gain a footing there, the deeper you sink, and it is impossible to avoid finally going down. God's Word alone is the true, abiding rock on which a person can depend with certainty" (*What Luther Says*, Vol. 3, #4740).

There's a lot of quicksand around us today. We see church bodies that once stood on the rock of God's Word sinking into the quicksand of human teaching. For them, "thus saith the Lord" has become "yea, hath the Lord said?" as they twist or even ignore God's clear Word to suit their own purposes.

Others in increasing numbers treat God's Word as irrelevant. In sinful pride the creature ignores its Creator's voice, marching instead to the beat of its own drummer. Reason's prideful voice, materialism's selfish refrain, universalism's acceptance of anything as truth drown out the Word and leave man in smug indifference to the eternal truths of God's Word.

And we? We pride ourselves on being a church body that holds to the Word. We love to sing, "God's Word Is Our Great Heritage." But let's remember how that is possible. With Luther we still stand on the rock of the Word because the Lord has kept us there. Today, perhaps more than ever, we need to pray, "Lord, grant while worlds endure, we keep its teachings pure throughout all generations."

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



A church's child care center offers the opportunity to reach out to not only its students but also to its workers.

Ann M. Ponath

On April 20, 2014, Deb Burgess posted the following message on her Facebook page: *Today, a very special child of God became a member of St. Peter. Congratulations, Katie! Welcome to our church family! I look forward to worshiping, praising, and serving our God together!*

What an exciting post, but who is this Katie? Who is Deb? And how did they meet? There's more to this story than a simple Facebook friendship, and it all, strangely, begins in a child care center.

AN OPPORTUNITY

Katie Erb, now 23, was a student at Northcentral Technical College (NTC) in the early childhood education program. In the fall of 2012, NTC assigned Erb to Key to Life Childcare Center, a ministry of St. Peter, Schofield, Wis., for her practicum experience. Erb had had only brief encounters with Christianity and had stopped attending church due to the busyness of school work and her waitressing job. But while fulfilling

her 108 hours of observation, Erb overheard the director saying more help was needed in the school-age room, and Erb jumped at the opportunity. Soon she was working part time and then full time at Key to Life in the toddler room and fitting college in on-line, at night, and on the weekends.

Erb's first impressions of Key to Life were positive. "The teachers were really nice," she says. She found Bible time, her first exposure to some of these stories, to be interesting. "I was intrigued," she says.

Deb Burgess, meanwhile, began working part time at the center. She and Erb worked together periodically in different classrooms. Erb and Burgess both agree that they immediately "hit it off" and worked well together. "We talked A LOT. We talked in the classroom, on the playground, on long walks with the children," says Burgess. "Katie is especially bubbly and outgoing, and we got to know one another very well. Katie began to see that Christ and our church played a major role in my life, and I learned that neither Katie nor her family was attending a church and hadn't for a long time. I also learned that Katie had experienced many struggles growing up. I kept Katie in my prayers and knew that I had to share the hope of Christ with her."

AN INVITATION

Erb remembers Burgess' invitations to join her and her family for Sunday worship. For three months, Erb's response was "No, thanks." However, according to Erb, Burgess was "very persistent, but she never judged me, just loved me for who I was."

Burgess recalls worrying that she would offend Erb. "I felt I just had to take the risk," she says, "because I cared too deeply about Katie not to try to expose her to what she was missing by not having Christ in her life. I recall questioning some of her behavior and later learning I was the only one who stepped forward and that she was glad I cared enough to take that risk. I couldn't give up. I felt God was calling me to be there for Katie."

Finally, Erb said she would join Burgess' family at church. Burgess says, "I had tears as I showed her where we were in the service. I tried to quietly explain what was going on." In subsequent weeks, Burgess continued to encourage Erb to join her family at church, saying, "You always have a spot in the pew with us."

Erb enjoyed the services. She says, "They focused on a relationship with God." She also speaks highly of the friendly members and the pastor who



Confessions OF FAITH

always shook her hand. “It was somewhere that could be my home,” she says.

After about a month of attending services and many conversations with her friend, Erb still had lots of questions. “Sometimes I didn’t really even know how to answer,” says Burgess. She recommended that Erb attend Bible information class. It turns out that the pastor also had invited Erb to the classes. “I could tell the Holy Spirit was working on her heart in a big way!” says Jeff Mahnke, pastor at St. Peter.

With the Holy Spirit’s working, the pastor’s instruction, and Burgess’ encouragements, Erb faithfully completed the class and was welcomed as a member on Easter Sunday. “How fitting!” says Burgess. “Our church was celebrating that Christ died for our sins and had risen from the dead and Katie was confessing this to be true. To God be the glory!”

A REMINDER

Once Erb became a member, Burgess continued to encourage and invite her to attend Bible class and consider other opportunities to get involved. Currently, Erb teaches Sunday school and vacation Bible school and assists with the youth group, even chaperoning at this summer’s youth rally in



Deb Burgess and Katie Erb.

Colorado. “She’s on fire for her Savior, and it’s so awesome to see that!” says Mahnke.

Burgess says, “[Katie is] now often my encourager. I never thought I would still be working at Key to Life for almost three years, but it’s become one of the most rewarding jobs I have ever held. I can’t thank God enough for bringing me here and for bringing Katie and me together.”

Burgess and Erb no longer work in the same classroom, but Burgess says she’s observed “renewed hope and confidence in Katie since she’s come to know Jesus as her Savior. She lets

her Christian light shine. . . . She often refers to me as her second mom, and she will always hold a special spot in my heart.”

Kate Shambeau, Key to Life’s director, was also instrumental in inviting Erb to church activities and speaks highly of her: “Katie is a perfect example of the outreach opportunities present in our child care center not only with the families we serve but with our staff as well. She is a constant reminder that it is solely by the grace of God that we have faith. Over the past couple of years, it has been a pleasure to see Katie become more and more involved at church. She truly is an inspiration to me and those around her!”

Mahnke agrees, “It’s amazing how . . . God opened the door for us for sharing the gospel with one of our staff members. How cool is that!”

Erb is forever grateful for all the people at Key to Life and St. Peter’s. “God was shining his light through them,” she says. “[It’s] all about having faith. Jesus died on the cross. The rest of life is just details.”

Ann Ponath is a member at Christ, North Saint Paul, Minnesota.



heart to heart
parent conversations

Church can be a struggle for parents with children of all ages. I'll admit, there have been times when my husband or I stayed home with a little one because we knew we'd spend the whole service in the narthex. We know, though, that taking children to church is important. So, the next week we'd head back to church with baby in tow. Eventually, we were able to spend small chunks of the service in the sanctuary. And then one day we realized we made it through the whole service in our pew.

Along the way, it can feel like we're just trying to survive. What I wonder, though, is if survival might be easier if we found ways to engage our children in the service. How can we include our children—of all ages—in worship at church? Two Heart to heart contributors give us their thoughts.

Nicole Balza

Join the conversation!

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

HOW CAN WE INCLUDE OUR CHILDREN IN WORSHIP AT CHURCH?

Twenty years ago I wrote a column for this magazine titled "Children belong in church." My kids were two and four, and though I believed what I wrote, it hadn't stopped me from taking those two kiddos out of church. Multiple times. At least once, I remember hoicking one up under each arm—like basketballs, but louder and chubbier—walking right out the door and driving home.

I never found the secret to perfect church behavior. Sometimes crayons and Cheerios—let's call them worship tools—were enough. Sometimes sterner looks and firmer hands were needed.

It's hard. Too permissive, and our ruckus ruins the service for others. Too rigid, and the kids start dreading church.

Okay, here's the sad truth. When three-year-old Phil trained himself to lean against my arm and sleep through the sermon, God forgive me but I considered it a blessing. Phil's pretty sure he slept through sermons until about third grade, and I'm pretty sure I relished it. That's some less-than-stellar parenting right there.

I love having kids in church, both as a dad and a pastor. I love it when kids recite the Creed, putting emphasis on different words than I do. It helps me think about what I'm saying. I love it when they smile back at me during the Aaronic blessing. It shows me how they're receiving it in faith.

There is so much in worship both for kids and for adults through kids in worship. Here are three suggestions to help everybody in the family make the most of worshiping together.

1. Sit with or near others who are close to your kids. Even though my parents had seven of us, they never handed us off to others. We always sat with my parents. They wanted us to see them worship, but not only them. They made sure I saw Grandpa worship. I remember that one Sunday still today. I looked down the



As kids get older, it's the church after church—the liturgy you hold in your car on the way to the bakery—that's almost as important as the service itself.

Confession

Mom: "Today when we confessed our sins, I thought of how crabby I was this morning. I'm sorry. I need to be more patient."

Kids: "We understand. You were mad 'cuz we were late again."

Scripture

Dad: "That's one of my favorite psalms. How does that verse go again? 'I am fearfully and wonderfully . . .'"

Kids: "Made!"

Sermon

Mom: "What was your favorite part of the sermon?"

Kids: "The story about that little boy who thought Jesus couldn't love him." (Spoiler: It's always the story—for all of us.)

Dad: "Did I hear Pastor say . . .?"

Kids: "No! What he said was . . ."

In the church after church, families review, discuss, apply, even question. Sometimes we get downright Berean.

The temptation, though, is to let the discussion devolve into snarkiness: "I hate that contemporary music. . . . The prayers were *so* long. . . . That sermon had nothing to do with my life. . . . Did you see Mrs. Jones' purple hat?" And of course: "That crying baby! I wish people would keep their kids quiet in church."

I guess that takes us back where we started. Sometimes, Moms and Dads, we do need to take the kids out. But mostly we do our utmost to help them stay. Help them sit, stand, bow, sing, pray, listen.

Help them simply be present as the Spirit works his holy osmosis, passing the promises of Christ into the bloodstream of their souls . . . forming their faith, their character, their habits . . . cultivating in them that deep sense of belonging to something larger than themselves—something eternal.

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



pew and saw my grandpa praying the Lord's Prayer. I remember the sincerity on his face as he said the words that were obviously so familiar to him. And I remember getting back to praying like I've never gotten back to it before.

2. Strategically teach your kids the liturgy. There is nothing I love better than watching my four-year-old speak the response to the words, "This is the gospel of our Lord." I love seeing that she knows what it is and better yet knows why it is. We taught her as a 3-year-old, "Elliana, Jesus taught us everything we need to know and he saved us so when we hear from him we get all excited." Pick some low-hanging liturgical fruit like that for your younger ones. If you have an infant son, help him fold his little hands during the Prayer of the Day. If you have a 5-year-old, help her nail the creeds. If you have a 12-year-old, show him some profound theological connections. For example, ask him to think about why we sing about the Lamb of God right before the Lord's Supper.

3. Receive the Word in faith in front of your kids. Most weeks the pastor is going to say, "I forgive you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Receive that in faith and joy as the best news you've heard all week. Even consider leaning over on occasion to whisper into your teenage daughter's ear, "I really needed that today." And she'll get it. She'll remember your apology for being too hard on her earlier in the week and see how you received Christ then and there for it. Dust off the sermon too on the ride home. Tell the kids why it mattered to you so much. Then ask them what mattered in it to them. If it's crickets, help them remember. You might just see your kids' ears perk up a bit more next Sunday.

Jonathan Bourman is a pastor at Peace, Aiken, South Carolina. He and his wife, Melanie, have a four-year-old daughter.



What is worship?

The WELS Commission on Worship says, "Worship is the heart of all parish life, the time when the greatest number of members gathers to proclaim the gospel and receive God's life-giving power in Word and sacrament."

Want to read about more ways to involve your children in worship? Visit forwardinchrist.net for Brian Heinitz's practical suggestions. Heinitz is a former member of the WELS Commission on Worship and has four children of his own. He wrote a special, online-only article with his philosophy on involving children in worship, and it includes some perspectives you may not have considered as well as tips to try with your children.



The trust app

What takes years to build, seconds to break, and a miracle to repair? Trust.

James D. Roecker

Imagine a child slowly creeping to the side of a pool. That child's father is in the pool waiting with open arms and calling for his child to jump. But the little guy is scared of the unknown. He does not know for sure what will happen if he jumps. Father and son make eye contact. The father says, "Trust me." His son tightly closes his eyes, trusts his father, and jumps into his open arms. After that the child knows for sure that he can trust his father to catch him every time he jumps into the pool. Uncertainty at the edge of the pool was erased since his father came through and caught him.

Throughout our lives there are numerous scenarios when we feel like that child at the edge of the pool. We can be consumed with worry and fear of the unknown. We can become paralyzed to the point of inaction because we are scared we might pick the wrong path through life.

One of these life scenarios is taking the plunge into the pool called college. The process of selecting the right college can fill anyone's heart with fear—and that is before you consider where your friends are planning on attending college. Worry winds its way into your mind and heart. "What if I can't make new friends? Do I really want to take the college plunge by myself?"

It can be easy to focus inward—to focus on how we will handle life's challenging decisions—and forget the Lord. The book of Proverbs gives us all this inspired reminder: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). Leaning on the Lord and trusting in him eases the burden of challenging decisions, since he already knows the plan for each of our lives.

The Lord knows each collegian's path through the rigors of college. He knows the friendships that will be forged. In some cases, those friendships made in college will endure for entire lifetimes.

However, those relationships are not without sin.

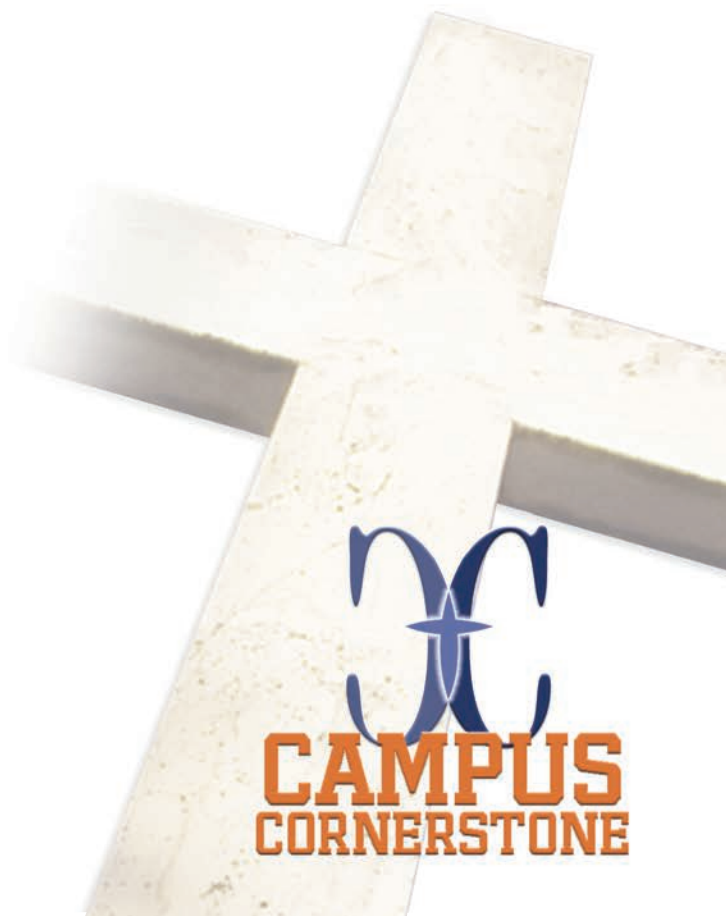
Trust among friends can take seconds to break. The psalmist David reflected: "Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me" (Psalm 41:9). Friends can fail us. They can fail to follow through on what they said they would do. At times, our expectations of them do not match what we experience, and trust begins to evaporate. We may have to confront our friends from time to time regarding their failures.

That's tough, especially since we ourselves are not always trustworthy. We are capable of all kinds of sin by nature. On our own we cannot repair the damage done to our relationship with God.

But God knew what remedy was needed to restore us to himself. God sent his only Son to repair the relationship. Through Jesus' death on the cross of Calvary, God himself has become our salvation. Jesus has restored peace, trust, and joy. We trust in God only because of Jesus. We are not afraid. God's plan is the right plan. Trust him.

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

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



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Brown, Patrick L., to Bethany, Appleton, Wis.
Geiger, Michael G., to Cross and Crown, Georgetown, Texas

Heiderich, Daniel F., to mission explorer, Lehi, Utah

Krieger, Joshua M., to St. Paul, Livonia, Mich.

Kuznicki, Randall L., to retirement

Langebartels, James L., to St. John, Rib Lake, Wis.

Loescher, Jonathan P., to Bethany, Hustisford, Wis.

Neuman, Steven W., to St. John's, Pigeon, Mich.

Putz, David M., to Trinity, Lincoln, Mich.

Roebke, John D., to Malawi, Africa.

Russow, Richard S., to Zion, Stetsonville, Wis.

Rutschow, David N., to Good Shepherd, Downers Grove, Ill.

Scharrer, Paul A., to Immanuel, Marshall, Wis.

Schmidt, Jeffrey J., to Emanuel, Flint, Mich.

Schmiege, Glen F., to retirement

Schoell, Matthew D., to St. Matthew, Winona, Minn.

Unnasch, John F., to Zion, Hokah/Immanuel, La Crescent, Minn.

Winkel, Nathaniel J., to Mountain Valley, Eagle, Colo.

Zittlow, Paul R., to retirement

Teachers

Friske, Mel J., to retirement

Staff ministers

Johnson, John C., to retirement

Krause, Daniel E., to St. Mark, De Pere, Wis.

SYNOD CONVENTION

The 64th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod will be held July 31–Aug. 3, at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown Wis. The convention delegate fee, paid by the calling body the delegate represents, is \$275. The deadline for submitting memorials to be printed in the *Book of Reports and Memorials* is Jan. 15. Memorials submitted after Jan. 15 and approved for convention consideration will be posted on the convention website, wels.net/2017synodconvention, if they are received by June 15. Further directions can be found at wels.net/2017synodconvention. Send memorials to the President's Office, N16W23377 Stone Ridge Dr., Waukesha WI 53188; carla.martin@wels.net.

NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS AND PASTORS

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

COMING EVENTS

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

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, wels.net/event/100th-anniversary-of-the-merger/.

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.

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

The 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.

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.

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.

Mathematics professor—The Mathematics Department at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis., invites applications for a faculty position beginning Fall 2017. Teaching responsibilities include a wide range of mathematics courses from statistics and calculus through upper-level courses in a four-year undergraduate curriculum. An M.S. or a Ph.D. in mathematics, applied mathematics, or statistics is required; candidates with a Ph.D. are preferred. Candidates must be an active member of WELS, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, or another confessional Lutheran denomination in fellowship with WELS. Full details, including how to apply, are available at wlc.edu/human-resources.

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

Moments with MISSIONARIES

MINOT, NORTH DAKOTA

Nate Walther



NORTH DAKOTA

A funeral. It's not an uncommon sight in a church. In fact—and I don't mean this in a negative way—it's something you just take for granted. If the unthinkable happens and a loved one dies, you know your pastor and your church will be there for you.

Now, imagine that situation without a church home. It was a shadow that Debbie's family lived with for years. Debbie and her husband had left their WELS church behind a decade ago when they moved to Minot, North Dakota. And while Debbie's faith remained, it slowly weakened until she reached a breaking point. Three years ago Debbie had a stroke. It changed everything. Complications from the stroke prevented her from continuing in the work she loved. She soon wrestled with depression. Over the next year her life took an ugly turn for the worst.

As God would have it, this was exactly when Grace Lutheran was established as a mission church in Minot. Debbie, along with her husband and daughter, were among our first new members. It was exactly what Debbie needed. Amid her newfound struggles, Debbie loved coming back to church. The message of her Savior Jesus kept her going.

One day will always especially stand out to me. We were sitting together at Panera Bread. I listened as Debbie shared some of her inner demons. I remember thinking that I didn't know what to say. How could I possibly help with such deep pain?



Yet, there was one thing I could say. "Debbie, this is why we believe what we believe . . . Jesus is the only answer! This is all going to go away someday. When you rise, he will wipe these tears from your eyes."

There was a pause.

"I know that, Pastor." And she did. "It's just so hard." Of course it is.

I had no idea this was the last time that I would see her alive on earth. On July 4, 2016, Debbie suddenly passed away at the age of 63. Even with her medical struggles, nobody saw it coming.

The next week was very difficult for Debbie's family. There were many unanswered questions. But we didn't have to ask one question: we knew where Debbie was. I gladly attested to her faith in Christ, which I had heard myself!

After the funeral, a former mission pastor told me that it doesn't quite feel like a church until you have a funeral. That is when it all becomes real and when you realize how much this all matters. This thought magnified what one of Debbie's daughters told me, "I can't imagine what we would have done if Grace wasn't in Minot!"

What if God hadn't put Grace here? What if Debbie's faith had continued to crumble? What if she had no place to hear the sweet gospel? These are questions we never had to ask. It reminds me of what was once said about our Savior: "A smoldering wick he will not snuff out" (Isaiah 42:3). I marvel at how Christ kept his promise to Debbie through my feeble hands.

It's quickly become one of my favorite things about being a mission pastor. What an incredible blessing when a mission church sees growth and new people come to faith! Yet, it's no less a blessing to serve those saints with battle scars who would otherwise have no church.

Nate Walther serves as a home missionary at Grace, Minot, North Dakota. He was assigned from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., in 2014 to serve as Grace's first pastor.

Learn more about home mission opportunities at wels.net/missions.

Let your light shine

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

The Lord works in mysterious ways. For Jared Stuebs, his witnessing for Christ began with him singing in the shower.

Stuebs started his basic combat training for the Wisconsin National Guard in March 2015. While he showered, he would sing hymns, such as "Were You There." His fellow soldiers heard his frequent praises, saw his faith in action, and gained a curiosity about Christ.

Stuebs began Bible studies in the evenings for all who wanted to join him. This started after Stuebs' dad sent him the book *A Ready Defense* by Josh McDowell. A member of his platoon was interested in what he was reading and would come to Stuebs' bunk almost every other night to learn more. Before long, other men be-

came fascinated as well, so Stuebs began introducing them to the book of Galatians. As the group grew, Stuebs asked his parents to send him Bibles. On a good night, Stuebs would have as many as 13 to 20 people in his Bible study.

One day, Stuebs' drill sergeant called him over to speak with him. The sergeant proceeded to shake Stuebs' hand and thank him for having the Bible studies because it boosted the group's morale.

"I've always been one to not be afraid to share my faith," Stuebs says. "I know it's not me doing it. It's the Holy Spirit working through me."

Stuebs is currently a member of the military police in the Wisconsin National Guard and attends Mount Olive, Appleton, Wis.



Jared Stuebs

Gabriella Moline

Catechisms to Haiti

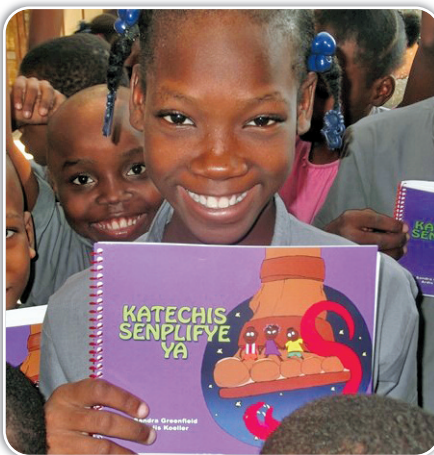
What's the connection between Luther's catechism, small airplanes, and 23,000 Haitian children? Layman John Kramer, a member at Crown of Life, New Orleans, La., and retired airline pilot, shares the story:

Raphael is the regional director of education for much of northern Haiti. He is also a Christian. He knows the value of learning to read and is particularly concerned that the 23,000 school children in his district learn how to read the Bible. Through our native Haitian missionary, Rona Abraham, Raphael has asked WELS Multi-Language Publications to supply 23,000 copies of Luther's Catechism translated into Creole for his voluntary after-school programs throughout his district. What an opportunity to share God's Word!

Now how do we get the materials there? In Haiti, transporting and importing humanitarian items is difficult. Those that import by shipping container or boat experience issues at the docks when customs officials and workers demand exorbitant fees.

However, in the northern part of the island, at a place called Cap Haitien, customs allows eight bags of whatever size to be imported free of importation charges as long as they arrive by air.

In September 2016, in two trips by air, WELS Multi-Language Publications delivered the first 3,000 copies



Children in Haiti are learning about God's Word in voluntary after-school programs, where Luther's catechism translated into Creole is being distributed.

of Luther's Catechism to Cap Haitien through *Alas Para Los Niños*, translated "wings for children." This non-profit organization was organized for the purpose of moving catechisms and other humanitarian items to Haiti for the furthering of God's kingdom. It has an aircraft, a pilot, and motivated helpers who receive shipments in Port St. Lucie, Florida, and store them until an upcoming flight. Missionary Terry Schultz and I made the first two flights before Hurricane Matthew ravaged the island in September. Each shipment of 1,500 books weighed 645 pounds, fit in eight duffle bags, and passed through customs without additional fees. We added about 150 pounds of clothing with each trip, tucked around the books in the duffle bags.

This marked the first delivery of the 23,000 catechisms that Raphael has requested for his school kids. We anticipate more flights early in 2017. What a blessing to be helping God's kingdom by putting Luther's catechism right in the hands of Haitian children!

Where are they now?

In Forward in Christ, we report the news but aren't always able to follow up. Where are they now? is our way of giving you the rest of the story.

HERE'S A RECAP:

WELS members came together to support their brothers and sisters at Crown of Life, New Orleans, La., following August 2005's Hurricane Katrina, whose aftermath led to 80 percent of New Orleans and its surrounding area being flooded for weeks.

David Sternhagen served as pastor of Crown of Life at that time. He notes, "Most of Crown of Life's members lived in that area. We lost most of our possessions, and most people lost their jobs. There was no electricity for four months, and no water for three months. Most of our members were living in Houston, Dallas, Atlanta, and across the country. Homes couldn't be repaired because there was no one in the area to repair them—their homes were in the same shape. Our church, fellowship hall, and the parsonage all were likewise affected. That is why the Builders For Christ, Kingdom Workers, and Christian Aid and Relief volunteers were so important. They came in and gutted houses and rebuilt the church, fellowship hall, and parsonage along with about 25 houses of members and non-members."

Thousands of WELS members also contributed to the effort by praying for those affected and donating for relief efforts.

SO WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

"With the love of God shown through so many of our brothers and sisters in Christ and with the help of Christian Aid and Relief, not only have buildings been restored, but they are more beautiful and capable than before," says Jonathan Kehl, Crown of Life's current pastor. "Our congregation, able to return quickly after the storm—albeit in smaller numbers for a time, has been able to show that same love to those who come to worship with us."

"We had an opportunity to be a witness that we probably wouldn't have had otherwise," adds Sternhagen.

New families in the community have joined Crown of Life and are inviting their neighbors and friends. In particular, the development of a community garden by Crown of Life has become a bridge for spreading the gospel to the church's neighbors.

In July 2016, five members of Crown of Life completed WELS' Congregational Assistant Program. As Kehl notes, these men and women have received in-depth training, preparing and equipping them to go and make disciples.

"The Lord has really given them excitement for carrying out ministry here in New Orleans," says Kehl. "I'm excited to see the opportunities the Lord lays before us in the near future."



(From left) Chris Driesbach joined member Arva Moore, volunteer Gail Baker, and member Beth Phelps at the 10th anniversary rededication service of Crown of Life, New Orleans, on Oct. 30. Driesbach, a Christian singer and songwriter, was a member at Crown of Life when Hurricane Katrina hit. He performed a concert on Saturday night for those who gathered for the rededication.



This jazz band, led by Crown of Life member Richwell Ison, played during the celebration meal following the congregation's rededication service.

On Oct. 30, 2016, Crown of Life celebrated the 10th anniversary of the rededication of its church. More than 40 visitors, many of whom volunteered in the rebuilding efforts, worshiped with Crown of Life's members that day.

"What a blessing to be able to return to New Orleans for the rededication service," says Beth Zambo, who spent many days in New Orleans documenting the Katrina volunteer efforts for WELS Christian Aid and Relief. "The choir sang many of the beautiful hymns that I remember joining in, praising God at a time when God's Word was the food that fed the people perseverance and hope for the future."

"There were so many people who put a lot of work into Crown of Life to get us to the point where we are now," says Kehl. "The rededication service let us thank God for how he has preserved and continued his ministry in New Orleans, and how he has done it through our Christian family."

Obituaries

Paul T. Wilde, 1961–2016

Paul Wilde was born May 8, 1961, in New London, Wis. He died March 3, 2016, in Weyauwega, Wis.

A 1983 graduate of Doctor Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he served Pilgrim, Mesa, Ariz.

He is survived by his parents, two brothers, and one sister.

William E. Staab, 1935–2016

William Staab was born Oct. 17, 1935, in Gary, Ind. He died Aug. 27, 2016.

He served St. Croix, West Saint Paul, Minn.; The Lutheran Home, Belle Plaine, Minn.; Good Shepherd, Burnsville, Minn.; Salem, Stillwater, Minn.; Grace, Osceola, Wis.; and Holy Cross Lutheran School, Saint Croix Falls, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Idella; 4 sons; 2 daughters; 15 grandchildren; 4 brothers; and 2 sisters. He is preceded in death by his first wife, Kathryn.

Ralph A. Goede, 1921–2016

Ralph Goede was born June 6, 1921, in Milwaukee, Wis. He died Sept. 2, 2016, in Rochester, Minn.

A 1945 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Our Redeemer, Wabasha, Minn.; Calvary, Thiensville, Wis.; Nathanael, Milwaukee, Wis.; and St. John, Lake City, Minn.

He is survived by two daughters, one brother, and one sister. He is preceded in death by his wife, Dorothy, and one sister.

Carol B. Strasburg, 1941–2016

Carol Strasburg (née Arians) was born May 30, 1941, in Algoma, Wis. She died Sept. 9, 2016, in Fort Atkinson, Wis.

She served St. John's, Sparta; St. John's, Two Rivers; St. Paul, Lake Mills; and St. Paul, Fort Atkinson, all in Wisconsin.

She is survived by her husband, Eugene; 2 sons; 3 daughters; 14 grandchildren; 12 great-grandchildren; two brothers; and two sisters. She is preceded in death by her first husband, John Jira, and three infant siblings.

Conference highlights multi-site strategy

A recent conference highlighted a rising strategy for expanding mission work—multi-site ministry, in which a congregation carries out gospel ministry at more than one physical location.

“More and more congregations as they’re looking to find new places and reach more people with the gospel are considering a multi-site ministry as a viable option,” says Wayne Uhlhorn, chairman of the Board for Home Missions. “It allows them to establish a new spot and reach new communities that otherwise they wouldn’t think of doing.”

A growing number of WELS congregations are using this approach to expand their gospel outreach, and five of the eight new mission starts authorized by Home Missions in 2016 are multi-site ministries.

Divine Peace in Garland, Texas, was one of those congregations that received funding. John Hering, pastor at Divine Peace, says that three years ago the congregation noticed a community across the lake (about 20 minutes away) growing by 160 new families a month. Six families in the congregation already lived in that area. “We saw the opportunity,” says Hering. “We started dreaming and thinking, but we really didn’t know what it would look like.”

When the 180-member congregation applied for funding to call a second pastor, it was just learning about multi-site ministries. Gunnar Ledermann, a 2016 graduate from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., was assigned to serve as Divine Peace’s second pastor and help establish its second site.

Right away Ledermann noticed the benefits of having one congregation with multiple sites, including built-in congregational leadership, structure, volunteers, and shared resources. “It allowed me to come in and not have to worry about these things because they were already taken care of,” he says. “It has freed me up to meet people . . . and allowed both of us to do more evangelism work at both locations

because we are one congregation.”

Yet Divine Peace still had questions. “We had a ministry plan in place and we have been laying groundwork, but it was the multi-site conference that helped us connect all the dots,” says Hering. Ten people from that congregation attended the WELS Multi-Site Conference, held Nov. 14–16 at Grace, a multi-site congregation with four locations in Benson, Sahuarita, Tucson, and Vail, Arizona. The conference was made possible by an Antioch II grant.

Conference workshop topics focused on key multi-site components including communication, staffing, volunteers, budget and finances, merging two or more congregations, and organizational structure. Attendees also had a chance to hear firsthand from others at all different stages in multi-site ministry. “We didn’t want information to come from a book,” says Daron Lindemann, chairman of the conference planning committee and pastor at Holy Word, a multi-site church in Austin and Pflugerville, Texas. “[Attendees] had a chance to rub elbows with about 50 churches represented by 144 people and hear the stories of multi-site churches.”

The conference also gave attendees time to process what they’ve learned and start making plans about how to incorporate it into their ministries.

According to Uhlhorn, while establishing multi-site ministries is popular right now, it is not replacing the traditional new starts authorized by Home Missions. He does, however, see the advantages of this strategy. “It’s a new mission, but it’s also got some real live partners that are working every day together to spread the gospel in new places.”

For more information about multi-site ministry, contact conference planning committee members, Nathan Strutz, pastorstrutz@rlcverona.com, or Peter Kruschel, peter.kruschel@wels.net.

Graduation at Asia Lutheran Seminary

Six men from East Asia were among 27 students who received a degree or certificate in October from Asia Lutheran Seminary (ALS), Hong Kong, at the school's seventh graduation since it was established in 2005.

According to Dr. Steven Witte, ALS president, this is the first ALS graduation that includes pastors who do not live in Hong Kong. "These six students planted eight groups and five local churches during their student years," he says. "Now they are no longer full-time workers and full-time students—just full-time workers. So things should pick up in terms of planting additional groups in East Asia."

Ten men—including the six men from East Asia—received Master of Divinity degrees (which means that they are fully trained to serve as pastors); eight received Bachelor of Theology degrees. Others received degrees in Christian Studies as well as certificates for Greek and Hebrew.

Special guests at the graduation included Larry Schlomer, Board for World Missions administrator, as well as members of the East Asia Administrative Committee. "Being a part of the gathering of former mission leaders, national church members, our current mission team, and the friends and families of the students was unforgettable," says Schlomer. "The prayers and efforts of so many people were blessed in a truly remarkable way. These young graduates will be carrying on the gospel ministry in so many places we cannot go for decades."

According to Witte, ALS graduates serve in various ways. Some are full-time workers in the nine established congregations in South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission (SALEM), WELS' sister synod in Hong Kong; others are starting groups that will eventually turn into local congregations. Many are laypeople who are looking for a deeper understanding of confessional Lutheranism as they serve in leadership roles in their local congregations.



Image removed for security concerns.

Schlomer says training national workers is a top priority in WELS mission work. "We don't know how long governments, finances, or persecution will let our missionaries be present. Entrusting this work to reliable men fits the instructions our Lord has given to his church on earth and allows the gospel to be carried on in languages and cultures beyond our own."

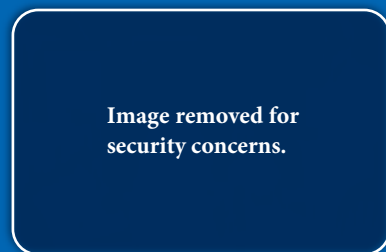
Currently, 53 students are attending Asia Lutheran Seminary, most part time or for single subjects. Another 11 full-time and 24 part-time students are taking courses through a satellite seminary in East Asia. ALS also works closely with Multi-Language Publications to provide theological courses to equip current and future translators of Christian literature. It has also developed an online course in Chinese called "Bible background" that has reached more than 20,000 people in East Asia.

WELS PRESIDENT VISITS ALS

WELS President Mark Schroeder traveled to Asia Lutheran Seminary the week before graduation to visit with the students and staff and meet with SALEM leaders. "It meant a lot for the students to see Pres. Schroeder at ALS," says Witte. "It helped them know that WELS values ALS and the work they are doing as students—and especially the work they are doing in the kingdom. We tell the students that there are many

in America who know about them, pray for them, and support them, but seeing Pres. Schroeder really helped put weight to those words."

Schroeder says he was greatly encouraged by the graduation of fully-trained pastors from East Asia and by the work ALS is doing to train future workers. "It is especially encouraging for me to see the work that is being done through the faithful and



generous support of WELS members, who through their gifts are taking the gospel to places they will never visit and to people they will never meet until they gather with them around the throne of the Lamb."

District news

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



Many of the WELS high schools held special Veterans Day celebrations on Nov. 11, 2016, including Wisconsin Lutheran High School in Milwaukee. Students there held a special breakfast and program to honor about four hundred area veterans.

NEBRASKA

Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb., hosted the Western Regional Choral Festival on Nov. 11–13, 2016. Students performed a pops concert and a sacred concert. “Here I Am, Send Me” was the festival concert theme.

NORTH ATLANTIC

Grace, South Charlotte, N.C., has begun mission work in Huntersville, N.C. On average, more than 20 people meet for Bible study and worship each week.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

On Oct. 30, 2016, the three churches holding Spanish worship services in Milwaukee—**San Pedro, Risen Savior, and Cristo**—gathered at San Pedro for a joint Reformation festival worship service. Almost one hundred Hispanics worshiped together for this service.

NORTHERN WISCONSIN

Every fall for the past 10 years, the entire student body of **St. Mark, Green Bay, Wis.**, has helped its neighbors through the school’s Bake, Rake, and Take event. Students at-

tach handmade cards to loaves of home-baked bread. Third and fourth graders then go door to door handing out the treats to neighbors and offering free raking by seventh- and eighth-grade students. In 2016,

students baked and distributed 160 loaves of bread.

The district reporters for this month are: NA—Philip Gurgel; NE—Timothy Kemnitz; NW—Dennis Kleist; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Brett Brauer.

NORTHERN WISCONSIN



Quilters at St. Paul, Algoma, Wis., invited third and fourth graders from St. Paul’s school to help tie their quilts off on Oct. 20, 2016. St. Paul has sent more than 130 quilts to Baton Rouge, La., to help those affected by the devastating flooding in August.

WESTERN WISCONSIN



On Nov. 11–13, 2016, Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., hosted the Eastern Regional Choral Festival.

The Lord's Prayer comes from the lips of Jesus as he teaches his disciples how to pray. His prayer still carries our deepest needs to our heavenly Father.

John A. Braun

The Ten Commandments convict us of sin every time we read them. Perhaps that's why we don't like to read them. And when we do, we sometimes try to escape their accusing finger just like children squirming to avoid responsibility for disobedience. We ignore the accusation. We make excuses. We compare our behavior with others who appear to be worse than we are. Avoidance has a thousand coats.

Yet, God has changed us. He shares the gospel with us, and through the gospel the Holy Spirit has made us new creatures. We still are not perfect as God demands, but we are forgiven believers who value the treasure of God's love in Jesus. Luther said we are "only half pure and holy" while we live here. The good we want to do sometimes doesn't get done, and the evil we do not want to do tumbles out of our mouths and pops up in our actions and behavior.

The change does, however, leave us with a different outlook. We are forgiven, and we see the world and our lives differently. We know there is a heavenly Father who loves us, but we also see that the world is opposed to our loving God. We are different from the world as well.

WE PRAY!

Living in an imperfect world and faced with our own failings, Jesus invites us to turn to our heavenly Father in prayer. Even though he was perfect, he often prayed to his heavenly Father. The disciples were well aware of his prayer life as

Jesus often went off alone to pray. So they asked Jesus to teach them to pray (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4). His answer to their request was the prayer we say so often that it sometimes becomes just a stream of words. But the Lord's Prayer carries the real needs of Christians living in an imperfect world to God.

First, a note about prayer. That note is tied to the first words of the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father in heaven." Luther captures the attitude we should have as we pray "boldly and confidently as dear children ask their dear father." I'll admit that in our world today not everyone has a "dear father." But God is that dear Father some do not have in this imperfect world. So we pray because he promises to listen when we do.

OUR REQUESTS

We come to him asking, "Hallowed be your name." In this imperfect world we see so many occasions when God's name is dishonored. We see people living without any thought to morality and decency. Even Christians tarnish God's name by what they teach and by what they do. So we ask God to keep us from falling into these patterns and to help us bring honor and glory to his name.

"Your kingdom come" is another request that flows from what we see going on around us. Again and again we see believers in Christ belittled, ridiculed, and even persecuted. We note the terrorists trying to kill those who confess Jesus. We are told by the world that the church is for fools and the superstitious. This all frustrates and concerns us. Yet God continues to add believers to his church through the gospel. His kingdom does come in spite of the opposition. We pray it will continue.

"Your will be done." When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane he concluded his heartfelt prayer with the



Open your
CATECHISM

words, “Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). So as we live in this imperfect world, we must trust that all will happen according to his will. That’s the way it happens in heaven. Here we often wonder how he is doing things, but we are asked to trust God as he guards and protects us and defends us as he decides. Even when we don’t understand, we trust that it is all in his hands. He promises that all will work out for the good of his people even if we must suffer.

Daily bread? In the middle of the prayer, Jesus adds a request for our daily needs. It’s a reminder that “the eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time” (Psalm 145:15). As long as God leaves us in this imperfect world, we require all the necessities of life to continue to live as his children. So we boldly ask our heavenly Father for what we need to live so we might let our light shine in this troubled world.

Of course, we need more than food to be God’s children. We need regular doses of forgiveness. The Lord’s Prayer asks God for the vital spiritual food we need to keep faith alive—forgiveness in Jesus. We are then prepared to live as lights in this world. Once we are forgiven, we can find the strength to forgive others. Often that is a difficult task, even for Christians. But our example is Jesus. He was spit upon and ridiculed, but he forgave those who hurt him. He forgave us, unworthy though we are. Forgive us, Lord, and help us forgive others.

“Lead us not into temptation.” We are surrounded by ideas and attitudes that are different from what God expects. At times we might feel like the psalmist: “I envied

the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong” (Psalm 73:3,4). We can so easily be tempted to abandon our faith in Jesus and simply join the other side.

It’s appropriate to ask God to keep us faithful in the midst of all the temptations we face.

Finally, we ask God to “deliver us from evil.” Our goal as Christians is to finish our race and receive the crown of righteousness. The road may be difficult at times, but we know what awaits us at

the end of our journey. How often we have sung “Heaven is My Home” or remembered God’s promise, “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10 ESV). So we pray that along life’s journey God would give us the strength, protection, endurance, and patience to arrive in his glorious presence.

So we pray the short little prayer Jesus taught us. He’s listening. He promised he would. He always answers, so “his will be done” here for us and for other believers. Amen. Amen!

Assignment: Read through Luther’s exposition of the Lord’s Prayer. Use each petition to create a prayer list and then pray for the things on your list.

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

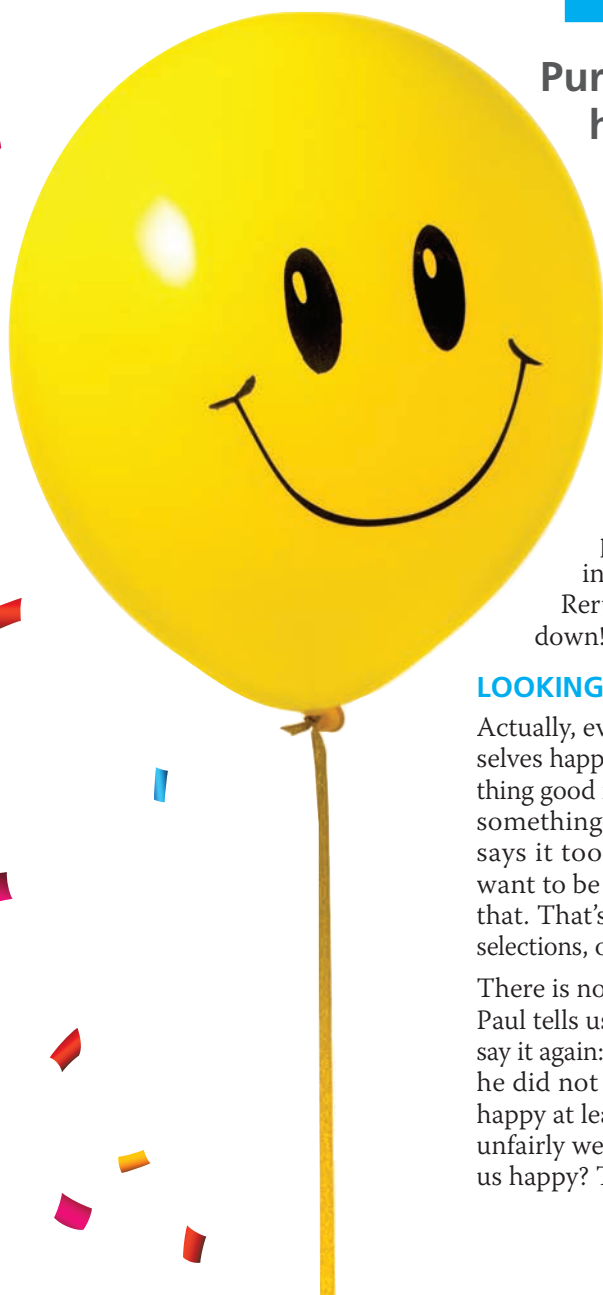
This is the fourth article in a six-part series on Luther’s Small Catechism.



DO SOMETHING THAT MAKES YOU ^{SOMEONE ELSE} HAPPY

Pursuing happiness for ourselves means helping someone else find happiness.

Eric S. Hartzell



I see the sign every time I leave the weekly worship service area at the care center. The sign was no doubt put there by one of the staff. Someone thought they were giving sage advice when they climbed up on a ladder and tacked that sign close to the ceiling over the doorway. It reminds everyone who leaves, “At least once a day do something that makes you happy.”

But few of the people who have to be in the care center are looking up that high when they come or go. Most of the people in our worship service don’t really have many options in their day to find something that would make them happy. Reruns of *The Price Is Right* with Bob Barker’s happy “Come on down!” don’t hold much prospect of happiness.

LOOKING FOR HAPPINESS

Actually, everyone already knows that they would like to make themselves happy at least once a day. We hear the comment, “I need to do something good for myself. I need to be happy.” We maybe have even mumbled something along those lines ourselves. The United States Constitution says it too: “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” We all just want to be happy, and we’ll do whatever we have to in order to achieve that. That’s pretty much what drives our use of our free time, our hobby selections, our attendance at parties, and the luxuries we pursue.

There is nothing wrong with being happy. From a prison cell the apostle Paul tells us and the people of Philippi, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4). But when the apostle says to rejoice, he did not have many options to do something that would make him happy at least once a day. Wouldn’t we all agree that if we were locked up unfairly we would have a hard time finding something that would make us happy? The point is not that it is wrong to do something that makes

you happy; the point is that when you only think about doing things that make you happy, you aren't happy.

REWRITING THE SIGN

But what if we take the sign down and rewrite it? What if we change the sign to read: "At least once a day do something that makes someone else happy." That would effectively be advice that could make you happy, even in an unfair jail cell.

That is what the apostle Paul did from prison. In that otherwise unhappy place, he told the whole prison guard about Jesus. He wrote to the Philip-
pians and told them to rejoice. He did things for others that he knew would make them eternally happy and give them a way of dealing with the sad certainties of this life. What is happier than to have the means and ability to deal with this world's sadness?

The Bible tells us what Jesus did to find true happiness in life. He came into our world as a human being to give true happiness:

"For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). This was the way the man of sorrows found happiness. Do we think that when John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world . . .," that God did it with his teeth clenched and his jaw tight? No! He loved us so much that he gave his gift. It made him happy to do this for those he loved, and he loved us all! He loved the world! When he did what he did, it made him incredibly happy because that is what happens when you do something to make someone else happy and blessed. It makes *you* happy.

Listen to Jesus talk to the thief from his cross. You can't make a dying wretch like this criminal happier than by telling him truthfully that he is forgiven and that he will be in paradise before the day is out! What happier thing is there? Heaven is a happy and joyful place. For the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross!

MAKING SOMEONE ELSE HAPPY

When you consider someone else's happiness first, you end up making yourself happy. You truly do! At least once a day do something that

makes someone else happy, and you will make yourself happy in the process.

A care center for struggling people would not be the first place you would think of to find happiness, but you can find it there. Happiness is helping someone find the hymn in the hymnbook. Happiness is when you put the hymnbook with the proper page on the lap of someone you know is going to drop the book before the service is over. They know too that they are going to drop the book, but they smile when you put the book there. It makes you happy to lead them in singing "Jesus Loves Me This I Know" and see them retrieve those dear words from aging and hurt minds that have trouble remembering and recalling much else.

We agree that happiness is good, but let us also agree on what it is we do to get it. Isn't Scripture coaching us on a proper understanding of getting happiness when it says, "Value others above yourselves" (Philippians 2:3)? Couldn't that mean, "Consider others' happiness more important than your own"?

A very happy way to translate the Bible's Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5 is to say, "Happy are the meek for they will inherit the earth. . . . Happy are the merciful for they will be shown mercy. . . . Happy are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Some translations even rightfully use the word *happy*. The very definition of a meek person is some-

one who doesn't wield sharp elbows to be first in line but lets others be first. The definition of someone who is merciful is someone who says, "I'll forgive your faults and treat you with kindness." The definition of a peacemaker is someone who allows someone else to win. Good and happy things often happen to the meek, the merciful, and the peacemakers when they make someone else's day instead of focusing on their own happiness.

Every person you come in contact with all day long presents a chance for you to be happy. Like Jesus, be meek, merciful, and peace loving. And share your happiness in Jesus with others.

Eric Hartzell is pastor at St. Peter, Globe, Arizona.

When you
consider
someone else's
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yourself happy.



NOBLE

Christian

The life of a believer gives us an example of noble Christian character.

Donald Patterson

I love the little verse of 1 Corinthians 1:26: “Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.” Paul was bringing the Corinthians down a notch because they were becoming conceited in their newfound faith in Christ.

But I like the verse for a different reason. It makes me think of the “not many” Christians I have met who actually are noble and wise in God’s eyes, even though they aren’t in the eyes of the world. Elaine Poldrack is one of those “not many noble” Christians.

Elaine grew up in a modest Texas town called Taylor, just a short distance northeast of Austin. Her family had enough means to hire household help—think of the movie *The Help*. Elaine married early, and God blessed her with a wonderful marriage to a church leader, Nelson, for 60-plus years. She taught high school biology for many years. She and Nelson reared two wonderful children. Elaine had a rich, beautiful Southern accent. She was the first person to answer the phone when I was assigned as her pastor 25 years ago. What a breath of fresh air for my Southern ears!

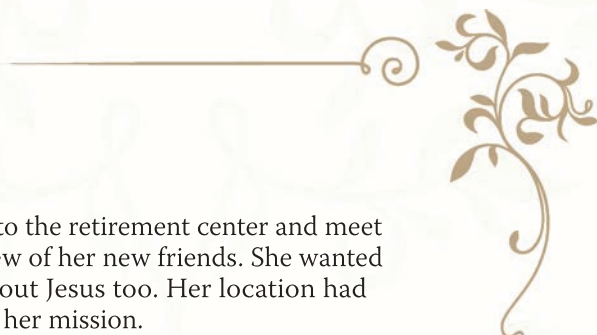
But frankly, it wasn’t really any of those blessings, great as they are, that makes me classify Elaine as one of the “not many noble” Christians about whom Paul was talking. Three things make me see Elaine as a noble Christian.

First, she treated every person she met as an aristocrat worthy of her utmost respect, even those people cut from roughhewn lumber. Anyone who interacted with Elaine felt their own worth increase just by the gentle and respectful way she treated them.

Second, Elaine made Christ the center of her heart and life. She prayerfully attended worship and Bible class and made thoughtful comments about the Word of God she was hearing. She had a personal devotional life.

When I had my first call to another congregation, Elaine called me and carefully told me how Jesus had used me to bless her life. Then she prayed with me over the phone, asking God to give me wisdom and freedom to make the right choice. Later, when we moved out of our old sanctuary, Elaine humbly asked if she could have one of the old hymn boards. She proudly hung it in her kitchen. She would put signs in the slots to match the seasons of the church year. This way she preached Christ to family and guests. At Easter, the words “He is risen!” graced the hymn board. Every Valentine’s Day she would handwrite about 25 to 30 greeting cards with Jesus’ love or words laced into her messages and send them to friends.

Elaine deeply respected our church leadership; she wanted to help the men of our church as they led



the flock. In the last five years of her life she sent all the elders a weekly e-mail that told them which church members were ailing or needing visits. She reminded them of members' birthdays and anniversaries. She even bought the elders cards so they could send them to members.

In my 25 years as her pastor, Elaine took on two other big projects at church. She wrote a history of the congregation for both the 25th and 40th anniversaries, and she also wrote a manual for people to use when making arrangements for their own funeral. She was constantly busy making encouraging phone calls and sending e-mails and handwritten notes. I can't remember how many times I would find an interesting religious article lying on my desk that Elaine had cut from the paper. What a noble Christian!

However, the final and most telling reason Elaine is among the "not many noble" Christians, in my mind, has to do with the way she handled a major cross in her life. For more than 44 years, she suffered from crippling rheumatoid arthritis. All of that ministry I described above sprang from a heart healed by Jesus and a body left to suffer terrible pain. All those handwritten letters and notes were etched in beautiful script by hands that ached and burned. The hours sitting and listening to the Word of God were accompanied by terrible back pain. Pain was her constant chaperone, but Jesus was her constant help.

As the years passed, her hands, feet, legs, and back gave in to the pain. She could have flooded our lives with litanies about her trials. But, instead, she chose to focus on us and not herself. In her mind, God was always good because he had given his Son for her, and she wanted others to know him. Near the end, I timidly asked her if she doubted God's love because of her suffering. In a respectful but low, serious voice, she said, "Never."

Elaine was able to stay in her home with her family until the very last few months of her life. But even while she was in the retirement home, she found a way to proclaim Christ. She helped arrange for a small Bible study group from our church. They were

invited to come to the retirement center and meet with her and a few of her new friends. She wanted them to hear about Jesus too. Her location had changed but not her mission.

At the end, her skin was paper thin. Just being moved from bed to chair inflicted terrible flesh wounds that had to be dressed daily. On one of my last visits, I sat with her as her wound specialist gently dressed her arms and legs. As he was working, she kept pulling us together in conversation because she was worried about his soul. Previously, he had confessed to her that he had fallen out of faith in Christ. Each day that he came she dressed his heart while he dressed her body. "Not many noble!"

Elaine is now one of the great cloud of witnesses talked about in Hebrews: "Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles" (12:1). When I think of her, I picture Elaine sitting in the grandstands watching the rest of us run the race. I think of her endurance, her respect for others, and her faith in our Savior who has given her a place in those stands.

Just thinking of her, I want to respect others more completely, encourage friends and family more purely, and ignore my troubles more bravely. I want to throw off the sin that so easily entangles me and run my race in honor of our Creator and Redeemer, just as she did.

I will never see myself as one of the "not many noble" Christians. But thanks to Elaine, I know what one looks like, and I will aspire to be like her to the glory of God and the good of his church. I think others she touched will too!

Donald Patterson, pastor at Holy Word, Austin, Texas, is president of the South Central District.



God bless Donald Trump

Andrew C. Schroer

God wants
you to pray for
President Trump.
And he wants
you to mean it.

On Jan. 20, Donald John Trump will be sworn in as the 45th president of the United States of America. After a long, contentious, circus-like presidential election, the eccentric real estate tycoon came out on top. The American electorate has spoken.

So I say, “God bless Donald Trump!” though my prayer for President Trump has nothing to do with my political preferences.

I pray for President Trump because my Savior God wants me to pray for my leaders. Paul wrote, “I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” (1 Timothy 2:1,2).

Do you struggle to say those words—“God bless Donald Trump”? Maybe you didn’t vote for him. Maybe you consider him insincere or misogynistic. Maybe you differ with him ideologically over foreign policy or the economy. I hope and pray you disagree with the crude and rude way he sometimes speaks of other people.

Yet God wants you to pray for him—to pray that God blesses our new president, to pray that our Lord will help him to govern wisely, to pray that his time in office be a blessing to us and others. God wants you to pray for President Trump.

And he wants you to mean it.

God wants you to love Donald Trump as you love yourself (Matthew 22:39). He wants you to honor and obey him as the person he has placed in authority over you (Romans 13:1,2).

That doesn’t mean you have to agree with everything he says and does. That doesn’t mean you should sit idly by if you believe he is leading our country poorly or immorally. God has given us the unique privilege of living in a coun-

try where we are free to speak out with our voice and vote.

But do so respectfully. Do so out of love for God who has redeemed you and given you a role as a citizen in this country. Sadly, our modern world has lost the ability to disagree respectfully.

After such a contentious election, filled with vitriol and venom, you may still be angry with our new president. Just look at how you speak about him in private conversations or on Facebook. Do you find yourself referring to him as “Trump” with disdain? Do you add a derogatory adjective before his name? As Christians, we do not refer to our leaders in such a way. Even when we disagree with him—even if he does something of which God does not approve—he is still President Trump, the authority which God has established.

God does not hate President Trump, nor should you. Forgive him, respect him, pray for him, just as Jesus forgives and intercedes for you. Accept God’s will that President Trump be our president.

Yes, the American voters chose him, but it was God who made him our president. God placed President Trump over us for our good (Romans 13:4). So trust God. Trust that he has a plan for us and our country. Trust that he is working all things for our good.

Trust that no matter who sits in the Oval Office, our God still reigns supreme.

That is why I will continue to pray for President Trump. That is why you should as well.

God bless President Donald Trump, and God bless America.

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

The RIPPLE EFFECT SILAS



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

Daniel N. Balge

The leaders of the early Christian church must have thought highly of Silas. They kept choosing him for important work.

We first meet Silas just after the council in Jerusalem settled an important issue for the early church: Must a Christian keep the Old Testament ceremonial law? Some said yes. Jewish Christians had gone from Judea to Antioch with the argument that circumcision was required for Christian males. They said it this starkly, "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1).

It's hardly a stretch to suppose that other Old Testament regulations were being imposed as well. But Antioch's pastors, Barnabas and Paul, argued sharply against such teaching. Souls were at stake. To decide the matter, the Antioch community sent a delegation—Paul, Barnabas, and others to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

What followed was as important to

the church as anything that happened after Pentecost. In the assembly of leaders and other believers, Christians who were Pharisees by background argued, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses" (15:5). Discussion followed, until Peter spoke against adding the ceremonial law to the gospel. He said, "We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that [Jews] are saved, just as [Gentiles] are" (15:11). Barnabas and Paul told of the miracles God had done through them among the Gentiles. James, "the brother of the Lord" and a prominent leader, quoted the prophet Amos as further proof that God intended Gentiles—without the trappings of Old Testament law—to be part of the church. So both Jews and Gentiles were part of the church by faith with or without the Old Testament ceremonies.

As "leaders among the believers" in Jerusalem, Silas and Judas Barsabbas were picked to go back to Antioch and "confirm by word of mouth" (15:27) the written decision of the Jerusalem council. In Antioch, Judas and Silas as "prophets"—spokesmen for God—encouraged their fellow believers and then returned to Jerusalem.

WITH PAUL AND THEN PETER

Silas' next assignment, as recorded in Acts chapters 16–18, was as Paul's

coworker. After Paul and Barnabas disagreed over personnel for Paul's second missionary journey, they decided to work separately in different regions. Paul chose Silas to travel with him on the second journey. They shared the routine and the risks of that trip. Early at Lystra they added Timothy to their team. For a time, Silas and Timothy worked independently and distant from Paul, as need and danger dictated. Silas evidently had the knack of knowing both how to lead and how to follow.

Silas did not travel again with Paul once this journey reached its end. Yet his service to God's church was not over. We find him next at the side of another giant, Peter, serving somewhat like a proofreader for Peter's first epistle. It seems that Peter used him—and God had provided him—to polish Peter's Spirit-inspired Greek prose. Peter makes clear (1 Peter 5:12) that he had written the letter "with the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother."

As had Paul. As do we.

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

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



Change

When we are comfortable and everything is smooth and happy, we don't want anything to change. Decisions, our actions or failures, and painful events many times must precede the calm and peace that follow. But once we arrive at that spot of tranquility, we don't want it to change. But it does.

Forgetting the past is part of our resistance to change, but we also do not want to face the challenges and discomfort of adjusting to a new path and a new direction. But the road we travel is most often an exploration that changes from day to day and not a wayside for us to stay.

Each mile requires something a little different from us. Without thinking about it, we make the necessary adjustments and follow the path that seems so clear before us. Many of the changes don't alter our paths dramatically. Yet every day brings new challenges, and we adjust.

Some changes we initiate in the hope of preserving our spot of tranquility or improving it. An example is relocation and all the changes that brings. Or marriage. Children. A new job. Education. Our personal daily lives illustrate that change is good, at least if the changes only alter our course slightly or they improve our pathway.

Other changes are uncomfortable and unwanted. They lead us down dark, unexpected, or painful paths. They come from many sources: politics, health, relationships, family. We resist those changes when they come from things we cannot control or prevent. That may be the key to understanding our resistance to change. We resist because we have no control. We must travel the dark valley from time to time. And we don't like it.

As believers in Christ, we have learned to turn to the Lord and trust his direction though we "walk through the darkest valley" (Psalm 23:4). The painful

losses we experience—spouse, child, parent, financial security, health—have taught us that the Lord gives strength, comfort, and courage to move forward. We lean on his staff for support to step into the unknown and unwelcome. In addition, we know that the darkest valley is temporary. The end of our journey is the absence of tears, sorrow, pain, and misery in the eternal home Jesus has prepared for us.

Perhaps in the small changes of life, we forget such comfort. Certainly the Lord hasn't disappeared or abandoned us. We just don't think about his constant love for us. That thought struck me recently as I was driving to work at sunrise. The traffic was backed up and there was a pause—perhaps a little frustration within. Then I looked at the horizon and noted the golden sun kissing the tops of the low clouds.

I've seen sunrises and sunsets many times before. I can't even count how many I've noticed. But every one was different. Every day the sun greets a changed sky. And at night again it sets and sends its diminishing light through a different set of clouds. We see change every day, actually every morning and every night. Yet the sun remains constant. You know the lesson: God remains beautiful and glorious no matter what the changes may be.

As we face the days ahead, we are easily filled with anguish over what changes await us. But remember: God still sends the sun to shine every day. He is in control. We cannot alter that and would only mess it up if we could. His love is undeserved and deep. He has given us his only Son. He will continue to love and care for us through all the changes ahead.

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Grace alone

Joel D. Otto

Grace is one of those big, beautiful Bible words. As with all big, beautiful Bible words, while it is an immensely comforting concept, it has also been misunderstood and misapplied throughout history. Roman Catholicism has traditionally taught that grace is a quality that God injects into people so that they can obey his will and earn his blessings. Others try to limit the power of grace, teaching that grace can only get a person so far; we have to apply ourselves to doing acts of love or making the right decision for Jesus to finish the job.

Grace, however, is a quality in God. In fact, it defines who the true God is and what he does. Throughout the Old Testament, when God's characteristics are listed, grace is usually near the top of the list. For example, when God revealed himself to Moses on Mount Sinai, he declared, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6). The standard catechism definition of grace is "God's undeserved love." Yet grace is deeper than that. It is the love that moves God to act for those who cannot act for themselves and need his loving action. God acts in grace simply because God wants to act in grace. That is who God is and what God does. Martin Luther defined grace this way: "Grace means the favor by which God accepts us, forgiving sins and justifying freely through Christ" (*Luther's Works* Vol. 12, p. 376).

True Lutherans confess that it is by grace alone that we have been rescued from the curse and condemnation of sin (Romans 3:23,24). It is by grace alone that we have been given new life as one of God's children (Ephesians 2:4,5). It is by grace alone that we have been given the gift of eternal life (John 3:16). The Formula of Concord states this clearly and precisely. "We unanimously believe, teach, and confess the following about the righteousness of

faith before God. . . . A poor sinful person is justified before God, that is, absolved and declared free and exempt from all his sins and from the sentence of well-deserved condemnation, and is adopted into sonship and inheritance of eternal life, without any merit or worth of his own. This happens without any preceding, present, or subsequent works, out of pure grace, because of the sole merit, complete obedience, bitter suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord Christ alone" (III:9).

This is what makes *grace* such a big, beautiful, comforting Bible word. Our forgiveness, our right standing before God, and our eternal home in heaven are certain and secure entirely "out of pure grace." That pure grace is centered in Jesus' completed work for us. Grace alone means that our salvation, from beginning to end, is accomplished. True Lutherans understand this, proclaim it, confess it, and find comfort and confidence in grace alone.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Read Roman 11:6 and Galatians 2:19-21. How do these passages help us understand the true definition of *grace*?
2. Read Ephesians 2:1-10. Using these verses, describe the need for God's grace and how God's grace is the cause of our salvation.
3. List at least five ways God's grace is evident in your life.

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This is the fourth 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 Jan. 5 at wels.net/forwardinchrist.



WHAT IT MEANS TO BE TRULY LUTHERAN

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW

A change in weather and a missing child remind a mother that God is in control.

Sarah Hahm

My three-and-a-half-year-old son had been complaining about the snow. Only a few days before Easter, after what had seemed an early and warm spring, the cold rain had turned to ice and then snow. “Turn it back! Turn it back to rain!” my son yelled.

“Perhaps God will,” I said, “if you ask him.”

I thought of explaining to him how God once held the sun still in the sky for a whole day in response to one man’s prayer, but, given his ongoing fit, I didn’t think it was a teachable moment.

What happened next happened so fast! After putting on his coat and boots so we could go pick up his brother and sister from school, I let him out the door while I finished putting on my boots and putting some wash in the dryer. Now it was time to buckle him into his car seat, but he was gone. He wasn’t in the front yard, the backyard, the fort, anywhere in the house, or even in the van waiting to go. And I was terrified.

Then I saw them. Footprints in the snow.

I followed them. Down the hill in the backyard, onto the back path which runs behind our house, all the way up to where the path runs along the railroad tracks, and then onto the railroad tracks. There he was in the distance, walking right down the middle of the railroad tracks heading to where the tracks crossed one of the major roads in the village.

Few times in my life have I been so scared.

After I yelled three times for him to stop, he finally did, and I was able to catch up with him. I grabbed him in

my arms and carried him the whole way home, while he told me about his wonderful adventure of walking on the tracks. I sternly told him how dangerous what he just did was.

A day later, when my husband returned from his business trip, he remarked, “Imagine, dear, if that rain had not turned to snow. There never would have been any footprints to follow.”

The rain turned to snow about an hour before I found my son on the railroad tracks. When my son ventured outside, about one to two inches of snow covered the ground. A half hour after I found my son, the rain returned and melted the snow.

“On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel, ‘Sun, stand still over Gibeon.’ . . . The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day” (Joshua 10:12,13).

I did not pray for it to snow that day. And I am glad that God did not heed my son’s prayer to stop the snow. But I am convinced that God sent the snow that day and at that very time—at least in part—because he knew my son needed to leave footprints in the snow for me to follow.

God knows the plans he has for us (Jeremiah 29:11). He knows our going out and is familiar with all our ways (Psalm 139:3). And “we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

Including the weather.

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