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Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE

It is finished!

Jesus, God's Lamb and our Lion, sacrificed himself to pay for our sins. *Page 10*

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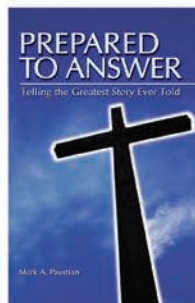
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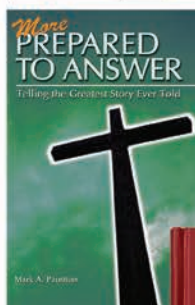


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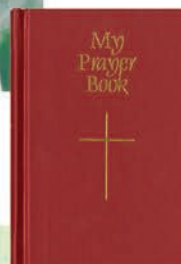
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Forward in Christ magazine
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POSTMASTER

Send address changes to Forward in Christ, c/o Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284.


Forward in Christ (ISSN 1541-8936) is published monthly through Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284. Periodical postage paid at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and additional mailing offices.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Print: USA—\$17.99; Canada—\$18.89; all other countries—air mail \$71.99. Digital: USA—\$15.99; Canada—\$16.79; all other countries—\$15.99. Premium: USA—\$18.99; Canada—\$19.94; all other countries—air mail \$72.99. Postage included, payable in advance to Northwestern Publishing House. Contact Northwestern Publishing House for multi-year, blanket, and bundle rates. Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284; 800-662-6093. Milwaukee area, 414-615-5785. www.nph.net/periodicals.

ON AUDIO

Mission for the Visually Impaired, 375 Bridgepoint Dr, South St. Paul, MN 55075; 651-291-1536.

 Indicates additional online content

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

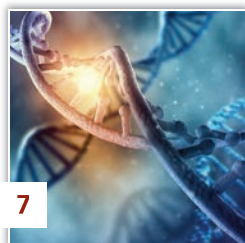
A crown of thorns. Taunting shouts. Thirst. And then, those three words, “It is finished!”

Lent is a somber time—even when we know what happens next. But it also may be one of the best times to reflect on the word *grace*. God’s undeserved love to us sinners perhaps cannot be more clearly seen than during that Holy Week—when God’s own Son laid down his life for the world.

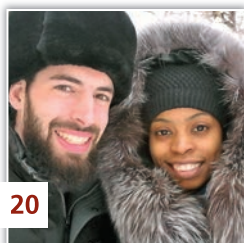
While our goal is to show God’s grace in every issue of the magazine, we emphasize it even more during Lent. This month several articles highlight that it is by grace alone that we are saved.

- Pastor Glenn Schwanke paints a picture of Jesus, God’s Lamb and our Lion, and his sacrificial love for all mankind (p. 10).
- Dr. Arthur Eggert reminds us that although God’s power, knowledge, and presence are awesome, his boundless love is what we sinners truly need (p. 12).
- Pastors James Kiecker and Richard Lauersdorf dig deeper into that *sola* of the Reformation, *sola gratia*, by grace alone (p. 28).
- Pastor Rolfe Westendorf looks more closely at the words, “It is finished,” and what they mean for all people (back page).

Julie Wietzke



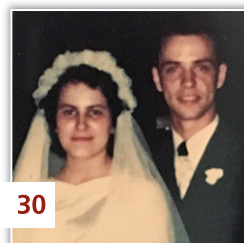
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What it means to be truly Lutheran: The means of grace

CHRISTMAS DAY WORSHIP

I have referred to FIC as my “good news magazine”; there is always reason to rejoice when reading the monthly articles. In addition, many articles are thought-provoking and stimulating and good topics for discussion.

Pastor Jeffrey Samelson’s article “Too much Christmas?” [Dec. 2016] stimulated me to express an opinion. The commercialization and personal obligations with Christmas can become overwhelming to the point where we can hear people exclaim, “Thank goodness, it is over!”



BEING LUTHERAN

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

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

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

My concern, however, is many congregations have eliminated worship services on not only Christmas Day but Thanksgiving Day as well. Worship services are planned on the eve. There are a variety of offered reasons—travel plans, expected small attendance, too many planned festivities on the day-of. There are too many excuses not to sing and worship on these special days that are set aside for that very reason. God never changes his schedule; he is always present in our lives. He provides, protects, guides, and hears our prayers.

When we begin our day on Thanksgiving or Christmas, our foremost thought should be worship.

*Duane Timm
Fort Lauderdale, Florida*

A JOYFUL CHRISTMAS

Often during my Bible reading, I must pause to read a page of an old *Meditations* booklet torn out and placed randomly in my treasured Book. There is only one page from a FIC so far, but a new one will be added. Thank you for Pastor Witte’s article “Shout for joy” [Dec. 2016]. What a remarkable reminder of the joy that is Christmas! Not the kind of joy that disavows tears, but the true joy that celebrates the One who came to wipe away the tears of his own dear children. May we continue in

that joy and, like Pastor Witte’s Nigerian Christians, be “blown away by God’s rescue” now in these last earthly days and then forever in God’s presence in paradise.

*Margie A. Dowling
Benton Harbor, Michigan*

THE NATURE OF GOD

Thank you for publishing Arthur Eggert’s excellent article “How big is your God?” [Jan.]. As creatures living within the bounds of space and time, it is impossible to fully comprehend how God can be everywhere and everywhen at once. Eggert’s presentation helps to extend our attempts to understand and shows how completely astonishing our God really is. The more we learn about God’s creation through scientific observation and research, the more we appreciate the sheer magnificence of his intellect and power. I’m looking forward to the future articles in this series.

*Timothy A. Johnson
Tucson, Arizona*

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*.

Through my Bible in 3 years



Read or listen online at wels.net/bible3.

MARCH 2017

- | | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Genesis 6 | 12. Gen. 21:22–22:24 | 23. Lk. 11:53–12:12 |
| 2. Gen. 7:1–8:19 | 13. Gen. 23 | 24. Lk. 12:13–34 |
| 3. Gen. 8:20–9:29 | 14. Gen. 24:1–60 | 25. Lk. 12:35–59 |
| 4. Gen. 10:1–11:9 | 15. Gen. 24:61–25:34 | 26. Lk. 13:1–17 |
| 5. Gen. 11:10–13:4 | 16. Gen. 26 | 27. Lk. 13:18–35 |
| 6. Gen. 13:5–14:24 | 17. Luke 9:57–10:12 | 28. Lk. 14:1–24 |
| 7. Gen. 15 | 18. Lk. 10:13–24 | 29. Lk. 14:25–35 |
| 8. Gen. 16, 17 | 19. Lk. 10:25–42 | 30. Lk. 15 |
| 9. Gen. 18 | 20. Lk. 11:1–13 | 31. Lk. 16:1–31 |
| 10. Gen. 19 | 21. Lk. 11:14–36 | |
| 11. Gen. 20:1–21:21 | 22. Lk. 11:37–52 | |

Inspecting our spiritual DNA

We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. 1 John 3:11,12,16

Daniel J. Habben

According to a 2003 study, 16 million men from mainland Asia and southern Siberia (8% of the male population) are descended from the once-feared Mongol ruler Genghis Khan. Wouldn't it be interesting to find out how many of Genghis Khan's traits were passed down through the generations?

You're probably not descended from Genghis Kahn, but Lent is an opportunity to inspect your *spiritual* DNA. What you find might surprise you. You may be more like Cain than you would like to admit! But you're also more like Christ than you may realize.

LIKE CAIN

Let's start with our similarity to Cain. He bludgeoned his brother to death. Oh, there may be no murder weapon buried in our closets, but consider how the Bible says, "Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer" (1 John 3:15). Hatred, like murder, wishes the other person didn't exist. That makes our workplace especially homicidal, doesn't it? Lazy coworkers. Inept managers. Ungrateful customers. They're all easy targets for our anger—an emotion that can easily boil over into hatred when not cooled down with daily repentance. Even when we repent of our hatred, we often allow ourselves to silently seethe. Yes, we're more like Cain than we'd like to admit!

Like Cain, we should rightly expect God to drive us from his presence. Instead, God delivers us into the arms of his Son. John wrote, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." Jesus' cry from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34), was like the shout of a hiker who distracts a charging grizzly away from others by making himself



the bear's target. God answered Jesus' cry by turning his righteous anger away from us and instead bringing down the full weight of his wrath on his Son. With Jesus' innocent death, God's wrath was spent. We sinners are spared.

Through Baptism
you've inherited
the spiritual
DNA of Christ.

LIKE CHRIST

Now with our new lease on eternal life, we who can still so easily hate like Cain are exhorted by the apostle John to love like Christ.

Love like Christ? Don't think it's possible? Well, let's inspect our spiritual DNA again. Jesus once said, "I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you" (John 14:20). We may be more like Cain than we'd like to admit,

but believers are also more like Christ than they may realize. Think of how an electric power bar goes from "dead" to "live" when it's plugged into an outlet. Through Baptism we have gone from dead to alive . . . in Christ. His love isn't just racing to us; it's also racing through us, the way electricity pulses through a power bar to give life to all the appliances plugged into it. With Jesus, we can show love to everyone—even the difficult people.

Yes, you share spiritual DNA with Cain. But through Baptism you've inherited the spiritual DNA of Christ. You have his forgiveness. And you also have his power to show love to others.

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



Mark Schwede

The year 2017
marks the 100th
anniversary of
the merger of
four midwestern
Lutheran synods
into what is now
the Wisconsin
Evangelical
Lutheran Synod.

The other 2017 anniversary

By now most people in our synod are aware that 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. A special committee has been planning to mark this milestone event with special publications, Bible study materials, and even a full-length film on the life and work of Martin Luther. And we Lutherans are not the only ones marking this event. The seismic upheaval that began in 1517 shook and reshaped the world in many ways: religiously, politically, and culturally. Even secular historians characterize the Lutheran Reformation as one of the most significant events in world history.

As important as the anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation is, there is another anniversary that should not pass without notice and celebration this year. The year 2017 marks the 100th anniversary of the merger of four midwestern Lutheran synods into what is now the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

In 1850, five Lutheran pastors in the Milwaukee area adopted the constitution of a new church body called the First German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin. Ten years later, Lutherans established synods in Minnesota and Michigan. For practical reasons, and because they were united in doctrine and practice, these three synods joined together into a loose federation in 1892, with each synod retaining its own identity and its own schools for training church workers.

By 1917, however, it became clear that the three synods, now joined by the recently established Nebraska Synod, could carry out important work more efficiently if they merged into a single, united synod. After 14 years of proposals and discussion, the merger took place in 1917. The Michigan, Minnesota, and Nebraska synods became districts, and the original Wisconsin Synod was divided into three districts. Within a few years, as the new synod grew rapidly, the Dakota-Montana and Pacific Northwest Districts were added.

The name chosen in 1917 was a little unwieldy (The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States), so it was later shortened. But many of the organizational structures and institutions put into place in that merger are still evident in our synod today:

- The new synod was formed to address common priorities—missions, worker training, and publications—still among the primary purposes of WELS.
- The new synod located worker training schools in Mequon, Wis.; Watertown, Wis.; New Ulm, Minn.; and Saginaw, Mich.—all of which still serve to prepare called workers for the synod today.
- The structure of districts remains, although the districts now number 12.
- The merged synod stressed the importance of Christian education and encouraged congregations to establish elementary and high schools. WELS continues to operate one of the largest parochial education systems in the nation.
- The new synod expressed a strong commitment to opening congregations here in the United States and to taking the gospel to other cultures and countries—a commitment that remains with us today.
- Congregations and individuals voluntarily provided financial support for the synod's work, just like today.

The observance of anniversaries can sometimes degenerate into self-congratulation or foster a sense of ungodly pride. It's my prayer that we use this anniversary as another occasion to thank God in all humility for his grace, for his guidance, and for the faithful predecessors he used to establish our beloved Wisconsin Synod on the foundation of his Word and for the sake of proclaiming the gospel.

Watch a video of a presentation on the merger at livestream.com/welslive.

Light for our path

Where did Jesus go when he died? I am having a discussion with a friend who is a Jehovah's Witness, and his ideas do not sound biblical.

James F. Pope

The gospel writers record seven sayings of Jesus Christ from the cross. Two of those sayings help answer your question. To the repentant thief at his side, Jesus graciously bestowed this promise: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). At death, Jesus directed words in a different direction: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Jesus' words contain simple, meaningful truth. Sadly, the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses reject that truth.

THE FALSE TEACHINGS OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Jehovah's Witnesses deny that people have an immortal soul. They maintain that the soul and body form a person's entire being and that when death takes place, a person ceases to exist. They insist that was the case when Jesus died on Good Friday. You can find the following on their website: "Do you know what happened to Jesus' body? God caused it to disappear. God did not raise Jesus to life in the fleshly body in which he died. He gave Jesus a new spirit body, as the angels in heaven have."

What about Jesus' promise to the repentant thief that he would begin enjoying heaven the very day he died? Jehovah's Witnesses play a grammatical game with their Bible (New World Translation). Their Bible renders Luke 23:43 as, "And he said to him: 'Truly I tell you today, you will be with me in Paradise.'" Notice the comma. Inspired writers of Bible books like the evangelist Luke did not use punctuation devices like commas. We insert them in our translations according to the rules of our grammar. There is no basis whatsoever to place a comma *after* the word *today*. Jesus was certainly speaking those words "today" and not "yesterday" or "tomorrow." The New World Translation places a comma

after the word *today* because Jehovah's Witnesses believe in a paradise on earth at some point in the future.

THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF THE BIBLE

Scripture clearly and consistently teaches that each human being has a body and a soul (Genesis 2:7; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Matthew 10:28; Matthew 16:26; Luke 16:19-31; 2 Corinthians 5:6-9; Revelation 6:9; and Revelation 20:4). That applies also to Jesus Christ since the time he took on human flesh (John 1:14).

Scripture's teaching is also that a person's body and soul separate at death (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Not long after Jesus spoke of committing his soul into the hands of his heavenly Father (Luke 23:46), his soul and body were separated.

So "where did Jesus go when he died?" His soul went to heaven, while a pair of faithful followers (John 19:38-42) laid his body in a tomb. While in the tomb, the Lord's body did not experience any decay (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:31). "On the third day" he appeared to his disciples with his same, but glorified, body (Luke 24:36-39).

That is what resurrection is all about: the reuniting of body and soul. For Jesus, that happened at exactly the time he had prophesied (Matthew 16:21; 17:23). For the repentant thief and everyone else who undergoes death, that will take place on the Last Day (John 5:28,29).

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

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

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

Psalm 119:105



In like a *lamb*

A familiar proverb points us to God's Lamb and our salvation.

Glenn L. Schwanke

Each year when March 1 rolls around, I remember how my parents became meteorologists—at least for the day. The dinner table discussion usually revolved around the old adage, “In like a lion, out like a lamb.” That’s how my parents sagely predicted the weather as the snow swirled outside. Our hope was that March’s early storms would be winter’s last hurrah and warmer temperatures would soon speed spring on its way. But what if March was unusually mild and we were enjoying a thaw? Then the old adage was reversed, “In like a lamb, out like a lion.”

I always wondered why adults could be so pessimistic about such matters. And then, many years later, I found out. I moved to Houghton, Michigan. Here in the month of March, winter is usually just getting its second wind. We have already shoveled, plowed, pushed, and “panked down” some 200 or more inches of snow. But March, April, and even early May can see us plowing right through the 300-inch mark of the white, fluffy stuff.

Here in the Copper Country, when we look out our windows on March 1, we usually can’t see much outside. That’s because the deep snow on our roof has been shoveled off once or twice and the snowbanks next to our buildings block our view. And yet this year, on March 1, I want to shout, “In like a lamb, out like a lion!” Not because I’m craving another back-breaking, two-hour bonding experience with my snowblower, but because Lent starts on March 1. And, dear friends, Lent always comes in like a lamb but goes out like a lion!

IN LIKE A LAMB

It’s a special lamb, and certainly not

the thousands upon thousands of sacrificial lambs that were killed morning and evening as part of the daily sacrifices at the tabernacle and later at the temple in Jerusalem (Exodus 29:38-42). Lent is not about all those Passover lambs that were sacrificed century after century—lambs that helped God’s people remember how the Lord had freed them from bondage in Egypt and how the Lord’s death angel had passed over those houses where the lamb’s blood was painted on the doorframe of the home (Exodus 12:11-13).

Those Good Friday miracles prove that the Lamb who died for us is also the Lion prophesied by Jacob.

Rather, Lent is all about the Lamb that all those Old Testament sacrifices foreshadowed! Lent is all about Jesus, God’s Son, to whom John the Baptist could point and say, “Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

But how? How could Jesus take away the world’s sin? Every murder. Every rape. Every robbery. Every atrocity committed in war. Every terrorist attack. Every word we blurt out in anger and later regret. Every doubt. Every anxious moment. Every fear. Every playground prank. How could Jesus wash it all away?

Only by being God’s Lamb. Only by being our sinless substitute under God’s law. The prophet Isaiah explained, “We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and the LORD has punished Him

out like a *lion*

for the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers, He did not open His mouth" (Isaiah 53:6,7).

In Lent, we pause and take a long, hard look at God's Lamb. We watch, with a sigh, as his captors spit on him, hit him, beat him, and flogged him. Roman soldiers mocked him by placing a reed in his hand, by draping a purple robe over his shoulders, and by jamming a crown of thorns on his head.

On Good Friday, at the end of Lent, we gather in our churches once more. The altar is stripped bare. The lights are turned down. The hymns we struggle to sing are somber. And the Scripture we hear? "Therefore they took Jesus away. Carrying His own cross, He went out to what is called Skull Place, which in Hebrew is called *Golgotha*. There they crucified Him and two others with Him, one on either side, with Jesus in the middle" (John 19:16-18).

OUT LIKE A LION

In like a lamb. To pay for all sins. To suffer hell itself. And then the Lamb died.

But not before he "shouted again with a loud voice" (Matthew 27:50). "He said, 'It is finished!' Then bowing His head, He gave up His spirit" (John 19:30). As God's Lamb breathed his last, "the curtain of the sanctuary was split in two from top to bottom; the earth quaked and the rocks were split. The tombs were also opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. . . . When the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they were terrified and said, 'This man really was God's Son!' " (Matthew 27:51-54).

Out like a lion! That's what Lent is all about too! Those Good Friday miracles prove that the Lamb who died for us is also the Lion prophesied by Jacob: "Judah is a young lion—my son, you return from the kill. He crouches; he lies down like a lion or a lioness—who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah or the staff from between his feet until He whose right it is comes" (Genesis 49:9,10).

Out like a lion! It was the Lion of the tribe of Judah who summoned death on Good Friday and met it head-on. Then three days later, on Easter morning, God's Lion roared again! And "death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54).

Out like a lion! Some six decades later, an aged apostle John was in exile on the island of Patmos. It was the Lord's day, a Sunday, when John was "in the Spirit" and allowed to glimpse heaven's throne room. And what did John see? Our Savior! But how did our Lord appear? John saw "the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David," and "One like a slaughtered lamb standing between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders" (Revelation 5:5,6).

"In like a lamb, out like a lion." One day, with our own eyes, we believers will see the one who is our Lamb and our Lion. And we will fill heaven with his praise! "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slaughtered, and You redeemed people for God by Your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9).

Glenn Schwanke, pastor at Peace, Houghton, Michigan, serves as campus pastor at Michigan Technological University.

All Bible verses are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible.



HOW BIG IS

God's power, knowledge, and presence in our world are awesome, but we especially need his great love for sinners.

Arthur A. Eggert

The Lord declares that he is unique. Unlike other gods, which are the creation of the human mind, he exists independently of time and space, energy and matter. He, therefore, demands the first and dominant place in the lives of those who call him their God.

OUR LORD'S AWESOME ATTRIBUTES

He told this to the Israelites in dramatic fashion at Mount Sinai: "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Exodus 20:3-6). In other words, he is intolerant of disloyalty and infidelity because such things contradict his very essence (Deuteronomy 4:24). People are to credit neither themselves, luck, randomness, nor some other supernatural being for what happens, lest they deceive themselves.

The Lord claims the right to such loyalty because he can do what others cannot. He is holy (Leviticus 19:1,2), that is, his actions are completely separated from anything evil and are dedicated to his purpose. His purpose is his will. Being omnipotent, his will

always prevails. If he wills to dispose of the unrepentant, it happens (1 Samuel 2:25). When he wills to save humankind, his plan is carried out (Isaiah 53:10). We can trust the Lord to be faithful (2 Timothy 2:13) to his will because he is always the same at every point in time. He cannot change.

One might think that such revelations are not particularly comforting. Yet they are, because the Lord is not arbitrary. He judges everything by his will, without partiality, and therefore he is just (Revelation 15:3). Because he needs nothing, he cannot be bribed or influenced by his creatures. In fact, if we were perfect, we could go about our lives in full confidence that the Lord would vindicate our causes and reward us for our exemplary behavior.

But here is the problem: We are not perfect. If we are honest with ourselves, the perfect justice of the almighty Lord should destroy us for our failure to conform to his will as he demands. The Lord's awesome attributes, therefore, seem to imply our eternal doom. Who can rescue us out of his hand? We indeed seem to be without hope. Our God is too big, too vast, too awesome for us to hope he will give us any consideration except his displeasure.

OUR LORD'S BOUNDLESS LOVE

There is, however, more to the story. There is also the Lord's boundless love for humankind; in fact, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). We are not talking here of romantic love, puppy love, sexual love, tough love, parental love, platonic love, or love of blueberry ripple ice cream. As revealed in the Scriptures, this love is a selfless love that has only the welfare of its recipient as its purpose (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). It is the incredible size of this love in comparison to the decrepit human creature that makes it so incredible. Why would the Lord love something in the vast universe so apparently in-

YOUR GOD?

significant as humankind? We have no rational answer, so we are left to marvel.

We are saved because the Lord puts his love into action through his mercy. He reaches out to those who have violated his will and rebelled against his rule and therefore have no reason to expect anything from him but punishment (Psalm 145:9). He has compassion on us as a father has compassion on his children (Psalm 103:13). Because he is merciful, the Lord devised a plan of salvation for vile sinners whom, according to his justice, he should have immediately annihilated or consigned to eternal punishment. When sinners seek forgiveness, they flee to the Lord as a God who is absolutely merciful (Ephesians 2:4,5).

It is precisely in his mercy that we see the true bigness of God.

It is precisely in his mercy that we see the true bigness of God. To save us, he, the all-everything Being, sent his Son to set aside his power as God almighty and take on the nature of a man. He did that so the Son could take our place under God's absolute justice and earn for us the salvation that humanity had lost in Adam's fall. The incarnation, perfect life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ transcend what we can imagine or reconcile with human logic. If we do not contemplate the enormity of the Lord, then we do not see the seriousness of sins and the magnitude of his actions for our salvation.

His love is much bigger than we can imagine. The bigness of God, as described in the Bible, is difficult for sinful people to handle. If they truly consider it, they

will fear for their eternal future, as Martin Luther did when he chose to become a monk in order to appease God. They will see no way to deal with God on their own terms, and they will follow one of two courses: Either, like Luther, they will search the Scriptures that reveal the Lord's mercy, or they will reduce God to a god that is a size they can handle. Since they cannot deal with God on his own terms, they will shrink him so they can deal with God on their terms. In the latter case, they will limit all the attributes of their god and seek to establish a *quid pro quo* (something for something) relationship. They will offer penance, self-improvement, or rigid obedience to rules—all acts which they themselves devise and hope will placate their god. Sadly, many will call their god "the Lord" in the hope that he will accept their phony worship as a payment for the gift of salvation that he gives freely.

So how big is your God? If he is really the Lord, he is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, filling all time, absolutely just, absolutely merciful and forgiving for Jesus' sake, and incredibly patient with sinful fools. He is far beyond awesome and amazing.

On our own, we could not serve such a God: "You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God" (Joshua 24:19). But God's plan included a way for us to honor, serve, and obey him. Yes, our sin-soaked reason would run from him or deny the nature of his being. Yet, through the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, our hearts have been changed from sinful self-centeredness, so we have become children of and believers in this God of unlimited bigness.

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

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

An Iranian woman who was raised Muslim discovers Jesus and the Word.

Linda R. Buxa

Shahin Porter was born and raised in Iran. Though they were a Muslim family, they weren't particularly religious. "My parents did the daily prayers and fasted on the special month," Shahin says. However, they didn't force Shahin, her two sisters, and one brother to participate. Instead, they emphasized moral values: "not to lie, cheat, be envious of others' good fortune; be grateful always; be kind and generous; and remember God is in charge," she says.

A GROWING FAITH

A few years after graduating from Tehran University with a degree in political science, Shahin moved to Turkey and worked in public relations for the Central Treaty Organization in Ankara. At the time, five nations—United Kingdom, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and the United States—made up CENTO, an organization designed to protect Middle East oil-producing regions from communist expansion.

While living in Turkey, she was invited to a ball at the Iranian Embassy given for the Shah's birthday. That's when she met a captain in the US Army, an aide to a two-star general.

"We were married 10 months later," she says. Ten months after the wedding, he was sent to Vietnam, and she remained in Ankara until his tour was over and they moved to the United States.

After they had two daughters, she began to consider the role religion would play in their lives. "When our girls were young, I wanted them to know about God and taught them to be good human beings," she says. They started attending a military chapel, where she first heard the gospel. "The more I came to know Christ," she says, "the more I came to believe in him and love him."

The change wasn't necessarily an easy one. "At first I had a lot of conflicts, not knowing if I was being sinful for loving Jesus, being born and raised a Moslem," she explains. "So, I prayed night and day. I was obsessed with praying at all times, asking God to show me some sort of sign."

For months, she was so consumed by praying that she "asked God to forgive me for being such a pest." But over time, "I was filled with a sense of peace, contentment, and freedom to love Jesus completely and absolutely—without any reservation," she says.

While her faith was growing, the army took the family to Georgia, Kansas, North Carolina, and Ohio. They lived

in Virginia for a few years before she and her husband divorced. Shahin, who was working for Lancôme at the time, decided to remain in Virginia to raise her daughters.

In the mid-1980s, while on a trip to visit her sister in Germany, mutual friends introduced Shahin to Ron Porter. Though Ron had one year left on his tour with the Defense Department, he moved back early so they could start dating. Because she didn't want to travel too far away from her daughters, she told him, "If you want to see me, you have to meet me." For the next two years, Ron drove almost 50 miles in bumper-to-bumper traffic a couple of times a week to meet at a restaurant about a mile from her house. After they were married in September 1988, Ron joked, "I married for better, for worse, but also for mileage!"

A GROWING UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL

Though she lived in Virginia for almost 34 years, it wasn't until the last few years there that she began going back to church. "Prior to that, for many years, I was Christian in my heart. I always prayed to Jesus, but in private," she says.

When she and Ron moved to Asheville, N.C., in 2014, worshiping at a church was important to her, and she found a Baptist church about a mile from their home. "I went there about three times,



Confessions OF FAITH

however, I did not think that they were following the gospel,” she says. “So, I drove less than a quarter of a mile and saw the sign for Living Savior.”

After visiting Living Savior, she filled out the connection card with only their address. That same afternoon, Caleb Kurbis, pastor at Living Savior, knocked on their door and stayed for over an hour, though he had just been planning on a quick visit. After Kurbis left, Ron, who grew up Protestant but didn't have any active religion after his teen years, agreed to go to church with Shahin.

They still had questions about how we can know that Jesus Christ is the true Son of God and that there is no other God besides the God of the Bible. “That’s understandable coming from someone with her experience with Islam and Christianity in other parts of the world and the United States,” says Kurbis. “She also had a lot of questions about faith, how we know that we belong to our Father in heaven. Another topic was prayer, because from early on she knew prayer was important. However, now that she sees that Jesus is what makes her prayers heard and faith is what connects her to God, prayer has become all the more profound.”

To help the Porters find their answers, Kurbis responded with the Word, knowing that God brought the Porters



Pastor Caleb Kurbis (left) with Shahin and Ron Porter.

to this church at just the right time. “As with every other person whom God brought to our church, he did it. It’s God demonstrating that he is the Lord of the church and he brings blessings we don’t deserve. Every single one,” he says.

Shahin and Ron were confirmed Oct. 4, 2015, and now attend Bible studies faithfully and read the Bible regularly. “I never read the Bible before coming to Living Savior,” Shahin explains.

The Porters participate in outreach, canvassing and inviting the community to the congregation’s events and helping with efforts to provide food for needy families at Christmastime. But it’s not their actions that necessarily make the

biggest impact. “They have the gift of encouragement as they seek out various members,” says Kurbis. “They are examples of how kindness and encouragement can impact people in such a wonderful way. Several times I have seen them introduce themselves to others and then seek those people out at the next fellowship opportunity. They understand and practice the simplicity of the Great Commission.”

Telling others about Jesus includes reaching out to fellow Iranians. “Shahin recently met a group of other Iranian women. She called, texted, and even visited on a couple occasions. It seemed as though her effort was being dismissed. But she didn’t stop. She visited their home, maybe even twice, simply because she wanted to invite them to learn about God’s Word,” says Kurbis. In addition, Shahin’s sister knows about her faith and is happy for her. However, Shahin can no longer travel to Iran because she only has a US passport.

That is fine with her, though, because she believes they are exactly where God wants them. “I believe deep in my heart that God brought us to Living Savior so that we can spend the last years of our lives on earth being close to Jesus and the Word,” she says.

Linda Buxa is a member at Hope, Oconomowoc, Wisconsin.



Nagging. It's as much a part of parenting as juice boxes and crayons. Of course, our nagging always has a purpose. Coats and shoes need to be put on so that we can run our errands. The milk needs to be put back in the refrigerator so that it doesn't spoil. The dog needs to be fed . . . well, you get it.

That takes us to this month's topic. I tell myself that I'd nag less if my children were more responsible. So, how can we get there? Reading our two authors' articles this month gave me some great places to start—and some new perspectives on this topic.

Nicole Balza

Join the conversation!

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

HOW CAN WE SHAPE RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOR IN OUR CHILDREN?

Shaping responsible, Christlike behavior in children takes time.

Somehow my father added several hours to his already busy day to drive me around to selected classmates' homes. The trips were made so I could render apologies to them and their parents. I had shared something inappropriate with several students and been caught. I was forgiven, but I had to learn that what I did hurt others. My dad gave up his valuable time to make sure I followed through on my lesson of responsibility. Later that night I gave the eighth-grade valedictory speech at my grade school. I'm pretty sure I had a red face as I shared "the value of a Christian education."

This is only one example of how my parents were tasked with trying to raise children who would behave responsibly. There were five of us, but I'm pretty sure I gave them the most practice.

No matter how hectic the pace of their daily lives, they not only addressed irresponsible behavior but gave us opportunities to foster responsibility.

There was an assumption that we were competent beyond our own expectations—and most of the time we lived up to it.

"The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message" (Acts 16:14).

My mom will laugh when she sees that I'm writing an article on parenting responsible kids. I don't think a single school day went by when I could find both of my shoes before Mom was in the car backing out of the driveway. I wasn't known as a very responsible kid in the traditional sense of the word. She used to joke that if my head wasn't attached, I would probably lose it. And she was probably right.

But I once heard that being responsible really means that one is able to respond. You might think of it as being spelled response-able. I like this definition. This is, after all, what I really want for my kids. I don't just want them to know where their shoes are and, someday, where their keys and wallets are (though it would be nice if they were more responsible than I was . . . okay . . . am). What I really want for them is to be able to respond in a God-pleasing way to situations they find themselves in throughout their lives.

Take three city buses to get to school? You can do it! And we did.

Go to college and pay for it yourself? Sure, why not?

Travel abroad on your own dime and come home in one piece? Piece of cake!

Shaping responsible behavior takes the kind of faith that realizes our children are just on loan to us from their true Father. My own children were tasked with daily chores that were part of their preparation for real life. Self-esteem starts with knowing you are a child of God, and conquering skills is an important addition.

Responsible behavior grows when responsibility is given to a child. In my years in the classroom I observed well-meaning parents cripple their children's growth by assuming responsibilities that could have been given to their children. I was reminded of this myself when I was about to pick up my grandchild's breakfast dish. My son said kindly, "Never do for a toddler what a toddler can do for herself."

Follow-through on responsibilities is important. Very early on our children knew that bringing needed books home from school was their responsibility. The first time our daughter forgot a book, she knew that even though we lived next

door and had a key to the school, we weren't going to go and get that book for her. It was a hard pill for all of us to swallow but one that would help achieve the desired effect.

At one of the Lutheran schools in which I taught, a very basic lunch was provided for children who forgot theirs. We knew something about the parents when we saw a child pick up that unglamorous lunch without a request to call home. And we saw the growth in responsible behavior as that same child remembered to bring his own lunch in the future.

The motivation for this never-ending job of raising responsible children is simple, powerful, and comes with a promise. Children in our care are a gift from God, and they actually come with instructions: "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Mary Clemons lives in Los Angeles, California, with her husband, Sam. They have three grown children and six grandchildren.



I want my kids to be able to respond to God's law and own up to their sin and their mistakes when the mirror of the law exposes them for the sinners that they are.

I want them to be able to respond with genuine contrition and repentance. And I think that ability is fostered the more they come to know and believe and appreciate the gospel. They can own up to their sin, knowing that Jesus will forgive it and erase it every time. It also gives them motivation when faced with similar temptations.

I want my kids to be able to respond to the consequences of their actions. I want them to know that God isn't punishing them for their sin—he already punished Jesus in their place. But I want them to know that God (and sometimes their mom and I) allows or sends such consequences to teach them to make better choices the next time they are faced with similar temptations.

But, most of all, I want my kids to be able to respond to the gospel as they rejoice in the full and free forgiveness that is theirs through Christ. He offered his life for them and then rose up again in victory for them and for the world. I want them to be able to respond to that gospel vic-

tory by letting it fill their hearts and minds with peace as they put their trust in Jesus more and more. No matter the situation in which they find themselves, I want them to be able to respond by living lives that are pleasing to him in their attitudes and actions, in the way they treat others, and in the way they look to serve those around them.

To me, this is the kind of responsibility I really want for my kids—even if they can't find their shoes or leave their backpacks at school or leave a coat out in the rain. This kind of responsibility will last—not just for a lifetime but for eternity.

What can I do to foster such responsibility in my kids? I can model it and be responsible myself as I respond to the law and gospel in the way God desires. I'll make both a part of my life every day and strive to be more responsible to God's Word. Finally, I'll pray that God works this responsibility in me and in my kids, because it can't happen without him. With his help and blessing, our family will be responsible in all that we do.

Rob Guenther and his wife, Becky, have four young sons.



The encouragement app

When faced with doubt, there's an app for that. The Lord is with us.

James D. Roecker

Conversations are a part of life. Conversations might be good, great, awkward, terrible, emotional, or routine. We have had them with our inner circle of friends and family, with the people who live in our neighborhood, or with those who live down the hall in the college dorm.

As we think about all those conversations, would we say the majority of our comments could be considered encouragement or criticism? The natural tendency is to remember all the times we have been critical in conversation. The positive and encouraging conversations we have had with people are forgotten. The devil is quick to remind us how terrible we have been to family members, friends, and people we just met at the gas station. His next step is to get us thinking that God will never show us any kindness because of how deep into sin we have gotten ourselves. We doubt God could ever forgive us. All of a sudden the certainty of salvation we have through faith in Jesus and what he has accomplished on the cross is an uncertain thing in our minds.

Satan's assaults against us cannot stand because of Christ's conquering victory over the evil one, sin, and death. We have the certainty of a new life of faith through the waters of our baptism. We are encouraged and strengthened by the Word of our God. The psalmist writes, "You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry" (Psalm 10:17). The Lord encourages us by promising to hear us when we call to him in prayer. The Lord encourages us by promising eternal peace in heaven.

But we are not in heaven yet. We have life ahead, and we don't know what the future may hold. It is frustrating at times not knowing the future—what might come next in life, good or bad. As the troubles and struggles roll in, we might ask ourselves: "Do I have what it takes?"

There may be collegians who struggle with school, who are unsure of their currently declared major. Similar questions arise: "Do I have what it takes to complete a degree in fisheries and water resources, health promotion/wellness, or dietetics?" Lack of focus and motivation could be the culprit behind such feelings. Uncertainty could come because of tough courses or challenging professors. Doubting one's abilities may stem from trying to balance school, work, and social time. Thinking about the future, about what it means to be an adult with a full-time job

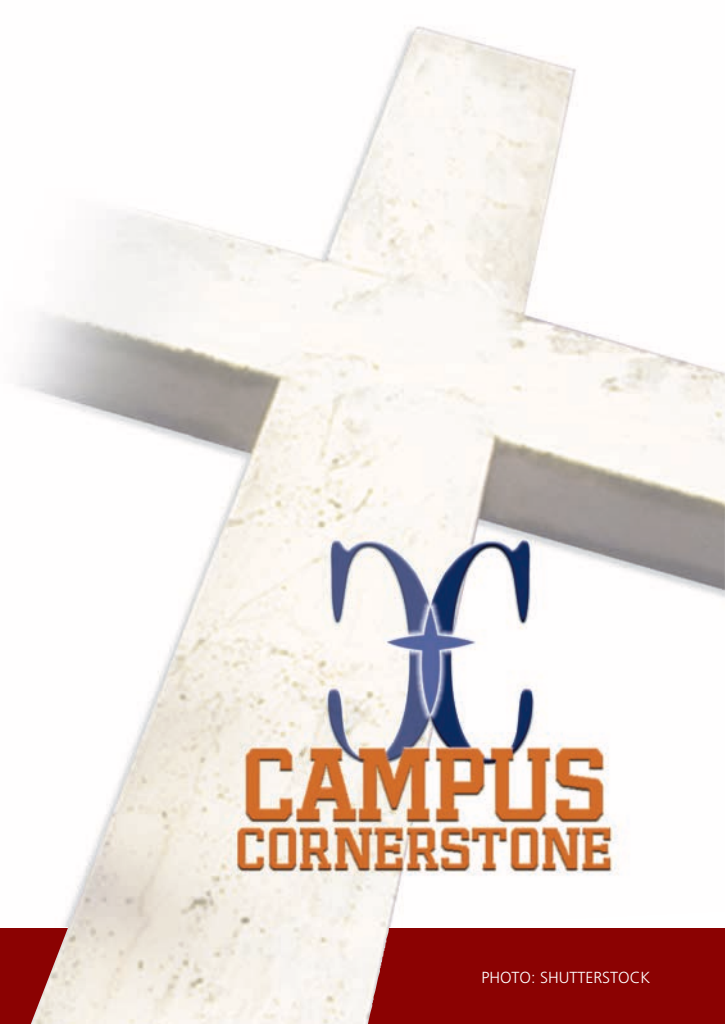
after college, can bring some hesitation. The worst critic is most often inside. We question if we have what it takes to get through life on our own.

But encouragement comes from God and his Word: " 'I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future' " (Jeremiah 29:11).

We receive all the encouragement we will ever need from our perfect Lord who reigns over all things for our good. He is with us every step of this life, encouraging us as we live in view of our heavenly home.

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

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



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Bauer, Steven F., to Faith, Excelsior, Minn.
Biebert, Nathaniel J., to Risen Savior, Austin, Texas
Bostedt, David P., to East Fork, Whiteriver, Ariz.
Hartman, Paul J., to retirement
Janke, Philip E., to Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fond du Lac, Wis.
Kolterjahn, Darrick P., to Beautiful Savior, Green Bay, Wis.
Kuske, Jonathan A., to St. Matthew, Appleton, Wis.
Rockhoff, David A., to St. Peter, Dorr, Mich.
Seelman, John E., to Immanuel, Oshkosh, Wis.
Stelter, John M., to St. John, Princeton, Wis.

Teachers

Baumann, Linda A., to Trinity, Jenera, Ohio
Bekemeyer, Beckie L., to St. Paul, Plymouth, Neb.
Biedenbender, Catherine J., to MLC Early Childhood Learning Center, New Ulm, Minn.
Bohl, Jessica, to Reformation, San Diego, Calif.
Cantwell, Emily, to Mt. Olive, Overland Park, Kan.
Fischer, Timothy P., to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.
Fredrich Rachel R., to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.
Gibson, Anne L., to Precious Lambs Early Learning Center, Raleigh, N.C.
Greefkes, Joseph R., to Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.
Hankemeier, Amy P., to St. Luke, Oakfield, Wis.
Kramp, Beth A., to Redeemer, Fond du Lac, Wis.
Krauklis, Jennifer, to Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis.
Mathwig, Peter A., to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
Muente, Kari A., to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.
Schauland, Kirk D., to Emanuel, New London, Wis.
Schmidt, Joshua T., to St. Stephen, Beaver Dam, Wis.
Siegler Justin J., to St. Paul, Beverly Hills, Fla.
Unke, Jacob, to Lord & Savior, Crystal Lake, Ill.
Zarnstorff, Tyson J., to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

ASSIGNMENTS

Teachers

Alge, Desiree, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.

Christensen Jr, James F., to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.

Rockhoff, Kristin E., to Crown of Life, Hubertus, Wis.

ANNIVERSARIES

Janesville, Wis.—St. Matthew (75). April 23. Worship, 8 A.M.; refreshments to follow; worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal, noon. RSVP requested. 608-752-1304; chirsch2017@aol.com.

Waterloo, Wis.—St. John (150). May 14. Worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M. July 23. Worship, 9 A.M. Sept. 17. Worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M.; celebration dinner to follow. RSVP requested. office@stjohnwaterloo.org.

Hartland, Wis.—Zion (150). May 21. Worship, 3 P.M.; refreshments to follow. 262-367-3617.

COMING EVENTS

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

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

Pathways to Christ women's retreat—Mar. 10–12. LaSure's Hall, Oshkosh, Wis. Website, pathwaystochrist.org.

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

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

Christian Woman Today retreat—Mar. 17–19. Sheraton Brookfield Hotel, Brookfield, Wis. Website, christianwomantoday.org. 414-507-5341.

Adult WELS missionary kids retreat—Apr. 21–23. Bloomington, Minn. Web-

site, welsmks.com. E-mail, asherod@kingdomworkers.com.

The Lutheran Chorale of Milwaukee spring concert—Apr. 23. 2 P.M., St. Lucas, Milwaukee; 6 P.M., Christ, Pewaukee, Wis. Mary Prange, 414-861-7092.

The National Conference on Worship Music and the Arts—June 13–16. Carthage College, Kenosha, Wis. Regional conference, June 27–30. Irvine, California. Registration begins March 1. Online application forms are available for WELS musicians with advanced training and for those interested in singing in the Festival Choir, Honors Choir, or Children's Choir. cw@wels.net. Website, wels.net/worshipconference.

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

54th annual Lutheran Women's Missionary Society convention—June 22–25. Hyatt Regency Orlando Hotel, Orlando, Fla. Website, lwms.org.

NAMES WANTED

Coeur d'Alene, Idaho—people living in the area of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Kevin Schultz, The Vine Lutheran Church. 208-449-2080; pastor@thevineidaho.org. Website, thevineidaho.org.

Peoria, Ariz.—people living in the area of North Peoria and the Vistancia planned community. John Ehlers, Cross of Glory Lutheran Church, Jomax and Vistancia campuses. 602-904-3501; john.ehlers@crossofglory.org. Website, crossofglory.org.

PREACHING OPPORTUNITY

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

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Faculty—Bethany Lutheran College (Evangelical Lutheran Synod), Mankato, Minn., invites applications for a full-time, nine-month faculty position in the bachelor of science in nursing program. Website, blc.edu/jobs.

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

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

Moments with MISSIONARIES

TOMSK, RUSSIA

Tabitha and Karl Mueller-St. Cyr



Hello! We are Tabitha and Karl Mueller-St. Cyr, and we volunteer in the Daylight Mission in Russia. Coming from Miami, Florida, our warm home didn't deter us from volunteering to serve as English teachers in the frigid city of Tomsk in central Siberia! As a couple we desired to volunteer in a foreign mission field, but we were uncertain if there was a place right for us. Naturally, in Florida we didn't know much about Russia, yet after talking to the Russian missionaries we found ourselves eager to learn more about this unique culture and these people God was reaching. After much thoughtful prayer, and perhaps some family hesitations, we finally agreed to the experience of a lifetime in Tomsk!

Our position in Tomsk is mostly conducting English Clubs, with a twofold purpose of teaching English while studying the Bible. Through this unique outreach, we can provide Russian learners exposure to the Lutheran church and the truths of the Bible. Culturally, Russians can be leery of foreigners, so our outreach is primarily focused on connecting with people through different activities in the community. This is essential to advertise and promote the presence of the Lutheran church, and we have been blessed to see our attendance almost triple in our time here.

Volunteering has been a blessing to us because there is no greater joy than to share Christ with people. We see that God is intricately working when his Holy Spirit is able to reach places we cannot, such as when students ask to take catechisms or Bibles home or inquire about our church. One woman named Marina, who grew up atheist, has consistently attended our Bible lessons and even visited

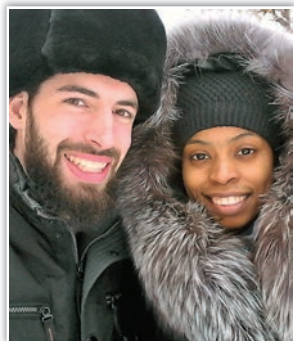
the church a couple times. Although she has not yet fully committed to joining the church, her understanding of the Bible and who Jesus is has grown tremendously. The life application of Jesus' words always profoundly challenges her spiritual preconceived notions. Like Marina reading the Bible for the very first time, Russians are struck by the impactful truth of God's Word in their often difficult lives. We hope and pray to continue to be a witness to Marina for the gospel. Nothing has deepened our faith like seeing God work in these amazing ways!

Of course, we are also blessed to have fellowship with Russian believers in the Tomsk church. It is uplifting for our faithful Russian brothers and sisters to welcome volunteers from the United States who are willing to serve in their congregation and provide likeminded fellowship. In addition, we feel our presence is a blessing to the Tomsk believers because it publicizes the Lutheran church in a place where there are few Lutherans. We hope and pray they are encouraged by us as we are mutually encouraged by them and their faith!

Whether engaged in fellowship or outreach, we are so thankful we chose to volunteer in Tomsk. Though Tomsk has a climate far different than Florida, the generous hospitality and enduring kindness of Russians continually warm our hearts, and we consider ourselves privileged to serve people here as we point the way to Jesus. Please continue to keep this vital mission in your prayers!

Tabitha and Karl Mueller-St. Cyr arrived in Russia in March of 2015 and will continue serving there until the fall of 2017.

One missionary, four national pastors, three deaconesses, and five Daylight teachers serve five congregations and one preaching station in Russia. Learn more about the Russia mission and other WELS 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.

Philip Spaude, a WELS Christian giving counselor, shares the following story:

In my travels, I get to hear colorful stories of what people are doing in their private lives to spread the gospel of Christ alone. One retired gentleman I visit makes crosses out of wood. He creates small dark cedar crosses contrasted on light maple, supported by an ash base. In his retirement, for the last 10 to 12 years, he has made thousands of these small keepsake crosses each year—all to pass on the love of Jesus to all age groups!

But after one week, after he has spent much of the past seven days making up to 100 crosses, what does he do with them? Well, I took him to lunch and



found out. A waitress he knew well picked up a shoebox of his small crosses. Going from table to table, she asked how many each table wanted. When they asked her who made them, she pointed in our direction.

Eventually, three groups approached our table as I sat on edge. They all thanked him warmly. Then these total strangers told us intimate stories about their lives, giving credit to the Lord for getting them through tough times. One new friend was a Lutheran Sun-

day school teacher helping start a new church nearby. One was a trucking executive who was just diagnosed with Alzheimer's and forced to take early retirement. One was in town from Omaha on business and clearly impressed. My friend volunteered to give them more crosses, so they gave us their contact information.

What a fearless witness for Christ! A keepsake cross changed hands and led to multiple in-depth conversations with total strangers. This simple act of boldly sharing eternal hope in Christ made their day and mine.

He told me this is the message he wants to share: "Be productive. Be thankful for what you can do. It's a blessing to be able to work. The cross is the whole message of our teaching. Every time I make a cross, I see the Lord."

WELS debt eliminated

In late December 2016, the final payment was made on the synod's capital debt. The retirement of the debt took place nearly a year and a half ahead of schedule.

Efforts to repay the debt, which had reached \$22.4 million in the early 2000s as a result of capital projects and amalgamations at the ministerial education schools as well as internal borrowing, began in 2009 with an initial synodwide special offering called the "Year of Jubilee." Through that offering and in the years that followed, WELS members brought gifts for debt retirement totaling approximately \$5 million. The plan was put in place to amortize the remaining debt by the end of 2018 by budgeting for annual payments of \$1.6 million.

With the desire to retire the debt ahead of schedule, the Conference of Presidents recommended a second special offering to the 2013 synod convention, which resolved to launch that offering starting at the 2015 synod convention.

Congregations and individuals in the synod responded to the "One in Christ" offering with gifts of \$3.1 million. Those additional gifts and regular debt payments made it possible for the Synodical Council to make the final payment on the debt in December 2016.

Dollars previously set aside for debt payment can now be used to support current ministry and new initiatives.



"Eliminating the debt will help us to continue the ministry that Jesus has so richly blessed, including the training of pastors, teachers, and staff ministers; proclaiming the gospel in 23 countries in addition to our own; and providing resources and assistance to our churches and schools," says Kurt Lueneburg, director of the Ministry of Christian Giving.

"This remarkable achievement, accomplished during a period of economic uncertainty, is truly a blessing for which we can be thankful to God," says WELS President Mark Schroeder. "We humbly acknowledge that it happened only by God's grace and by the power of the gospel working in the hearts of his people. Thanks to all who gave their gifts of love for this effort, and thanks to our gracious God for making it happen!"



A special debt retirement celebration is being planned for the 2017 synod convention. A prayer of thanksgiving is also available at wels.net/oneinchrist.

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.

In April 2004, we told you about the ROC, a youth recreation and outreach center in Watertown, Wis.

HERE'S A RECAP:

The ROC opened in December 2003 as a partnership between the four WELS churches in Watertown. The congregations saw the need in their community for a gathering place for teens. Students in grades 7 through 12 would visit the ROC to hang out, do homework, and play games. Pastor Tim Mueller, the center's director, also offered Bible talks and optional Bible study sessions and spent time interacting with the teens and counseling them as necessary.



On Tuesday through Saturday evenings, the teen Recreation and Outreach Center (ROC) is open in Watertown, Wis. Tim Mueller (pictured, bottom) says that three to four teens from the past stop by the ROC each day to visit with him. Many credit the nightly Bible/Talk Time for what guided them during their teen years. Best of all, notes Mueller, "many express great appreciation for their Savior, whom they didn't know and trust before the ROC."

SO WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

"What has stayed the same and will always be the same at the ROC is that Christ, our Savior, is the foundation," says Mueller, who still serves as the ROC's director.

Today 40 to 50 teens attend the ROC each of the five nights each week that it's open. As Mueller notes, "When is it ever possible to share forgiveness through Christ with so many unchurched teenagers at one time?"

One teenager with whom Mueller shared God's Word was Brandon Simmons. Simmons has many physical challenges, and Mueller says that prior to attending the ROC, Simmons had been so severely bullied that he was contemplating suicide.

Simmons notes, "After a few months of going to the ROC as a teen, I actually felt normal. I say this because I am not normal on the outside because of my physical disabilities, but through the ROC and Jesus' Word, I am normal."

"The first time Brandon came to the ROC in 2007, he stepped in and then immediately stepped out due to fear," says Mueller, "but I followed him and encouraged him to come in. As time went along, Brandon attended our nightly Bible/Talk Time and came to know and believe in his Savior. He began to attend church at St. Mark and then brought his parents with him. When asked how he is forgiven by God or how he will get to heaven, he always uses his pointing finger to point up to Christ, his Savior."

Simmons eventually became a junior volunteer and now is an adult volunteer at the center. He is one of approximately 75 teens who have been baptized during their time at the ROC.

Todd Morris has volunteered at the ROC for 13 years. He notes, "When a teen asks to be baptized and states, 'I want to go to heaven . . . , and you realize that this teen didn't know what God or heaven was about before attending the ROC . . . what more can you ask for?'"

Enriching worship

Registration opens March 1 for the eighth triennial National Conference on Worship Music & the Arts June 13–16 at Carthage College, Kenosha, Wis.

Thousands of WELS members have attended worship conferences in the past to be enriched by presentations about worship music, liturgy, and liturgical art; to experience daily worship with WELS members from around the country; to participate in choirs and musical ensembles; and to be inspired with ideas for their local congregations.

Betty Klammer, a member at Hope, Louisville, Ken., attended for the first time in 2005 after a fellow church member encouraged her. "When I came home from my first worship conference I could not stop talking about it and convinced my husband, Tom, he should join me for the next one. We have attended the past three worship conferences together," she says.

As head of the altar guild, she appreciates the presentations on liturgical art. "I remember contacting one of the presenters from the last conference to ask where I could find how he made the star used in the Epiphany service," she says. "Over the years, I have taken ideas from presentations on the meaning of symbols and the use of art and incorporated them in our worship services."

She continues, "There are so many presentations to choose from that will help you understand worship from the moment you walk in the church door, through the services, and how you can take worship to your own home."

Bryan Gerlach, chair of the conference planning committee and director of the Commission on Worship, says the planning committee works to offer presentations for everyone. "To see the value of topics for laypeople who aren't musicians," he says, "look for presentations on worship and outreach, church renova-



tion, strategic planning and worship enrichment, and communicating Christ in the 21st century.”

This year, in celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, the conference also will include special presentations examining Lutheran history and will feature five Reformation-themed services that showcase newly commissioned texts and music from 15 composers and poets.

A special Reformation 500 grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans is making it possible to offer a second regional worship conference at Concordia University, Irvine, Calif., June 27–30. This conference will include many of the same presentations and worship services as the Kenosha conference, though it will be on a slightly smaller scale.

“This is a great opportunity for those who perhaps have found distance to be a factor in not attending past conferences,” says Mark Schewe, pastor at St. Peter, Clovis, Calif., and worship coordinator for the Arizona-California District. “I think it’s good for all of us to understand our deep Lutheran roots and also the Christian freedom that we have to worship the Lord in many forms.” Only 117 registered adults from outlying districts along the coasts and in the south attended the 2014 conference.

The regional conference also will allow more teens and children to be involved, with an honor choir and a children’s choir being planned for each site.

“We’re excited for the opportunity to take the conference ‘on the road,’” says Gerlach. “We pray it will offer more people a chance to be personally inspired and then to take ideas back home to enrich worship in their own churches.”



Registration for both conferences opens March 1. Singers (adults, teens, and children) and instrumentalists also can sign up to participate in choirs and worship. Learn more at wels.net/worshipconference.

Luther movie screening opportunities

Starting in March, WELS congregations can host local theater screenings of the new Martin Luther film, *A Return to Grace: Luther’s Life and Legacy*, in celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. Produced by Boettcher+Trinklein Television Inc., this full-length film explores the life of Martin Luther and his quest for truth, bringing to life the 16th-century events of the Reformation. Funding from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans made it possible to produce the movie.

“Hosting a screening is a great way for your congregation to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation—simultaneously edifying your members and creating a memorable impression in the broader community,” says Lee Hitter, WELS director of communication. “Plus, a movie screening is the perfect outreach opportunity—a chance to invite friends and neighbors to a fun event that also communicates Luther’s message.”

WELS has partnered with a company called Tugg that will work with local theaters to secure screening times and ensure the movie is ready to play

on congregations’ chosen dates. Congregations then just need to promote the special event to members and friends; tickets can be purchased through a personalized event page for that specific screening. As “hosts” of a screening, the pastor or a congregation member also will have the opportunity to welcome guests, introduce the movie, and have a question-and-answer period at the end of the screening.

“The process is simple, and there are tools available to guide you through it and help you promote the event in your congregation and community,” says Hitter.

Northwestern Publishing House is producing resources based on the movie that will help congregations and schools dig deeper into their Lutheran heritage, as well as reach out into their communities.

- *A Return to Grace* four-week Bible study. This resource will use film segments to help viewers explore the life, times, and importance of Martin Luther. Available early summer.
- “Reformation: Grace, Faith, Scripture” film vignettes and Bible study resources. The 12 three- to four-minute vignettes will highlight the important truths of the Reformation. Both a five-minute and a full-length Bible study will be available to use with these vignettes. Available early summer.
- A children’s version of *A Return to Grace*, as well as a curriculum of classroom activities to go with the film. Available in fall.



Learn more about hosting a movie screening at wels.net/reformation500/luther-film/host-a-screening/. Discover other Reformation 500 products available at Northwestern Publishing House at wels.net/reformation500.



COMMUNITY OUTREACH EVENTS

The Commission on Evangelism and the Board for Home Missions are preparing materials for four Reformation 500 outreach events for congregations. The goal is for congregations to invite their prospects and neighbors to visit a worship service and learn the importance of the Bible’s teachings.

The suggested dates and emphases are Nov. 5: Scripture Alone; Nov. 26: Christ Alone; Dec. 17: Grace Alone; and Jan. 7, 2018: Faith Alone.

Special worship resources as well as promotional and follow-up materials will be available early summer.

Winterim offers expanded studies

In January, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., holds Winterim, a two-week period that offers students and pastors the opportunity to take for-credit courses that are not normally part of the seminary curriculum. In ad-

dition to the courses, students may also participate in research projects or practical experiences.

This year, courses included topics such as radical Reformation, 1 Peter, and

cultism in America. In addition to classroom learning, 3 students participated in a Spanish-immersion program in Mexico, 11 took part in an outreach effort in Texas, 11 traveled to Israel, and 7 completed independent research.

INDEPENDENT RESEARCH



Jacob Jenswold, Doug VanSice, and Ross Chartrand traveled to Falcon, Colo. (northeast Colorado Springs). There they served at Foundation Lu-

theran Church, a mission congregation led by Pastor Steve Prahl. Foundation has been worshipping weekly since early October 2016 in a rented school gymnasium. Besides experiencing how a new mission church worships, the students helped plan several four- to six-week themed worship series complete with graphics for worship folders, social media promotion, and music that fits Foundation's worship philosophy and musicianship level.

ISRAEL



Asia Lutheran Seminary, Wisconsin Lutheran College, and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary hosted a 10-day trip to Israel. Eleven seminary students joined two professors, Steve Geiger and Tom Kock, to see historical and biblical sites from the Sea of Galilee to Bethlehem, from Nazareth to Jerusalem, from Jericho to Capernaum.

"What an adventure it was to go to Israel, the place where salvation history unfolded! I took nearly a thousand photos a day," says seminary student Sam Jeske. "On and around this massive lake—the Sea of Galilee—Jesus preached sermons, drove out demons, fished with his disciples, and displayed his mighty power over the wind and waves. Our God isn't just mighty to save from the sea and storms, but from sin and death."

TEXAS



Eleven students traveled to Texas and learned what WELS does when determining if areas are suitable to begin a home mission. The students learned about two suburbs on the east side of Austin that are growing rapidly. They interviewed community leaders, participated in a food drive, and talked to residents to see how a new church could meet their needs.

"We don't know what God has in store for Elgin and Manor or for us in our future ministries, but we're thankful for this trip because it has given us experience, taught us new ways to intentionalize our evangelism efforts, and encouraged all of us to seek the lost and share the good news of Christ," says Nathanael Jensen. "Because no matter where we serve, whether in an established congregation or a new mission, whether here in Mequon or halfway across the world, we are called to go and make disciples."

MEXICO

Paul Bourman, Jordan Uhlhorn, and James Hemmelman traveled to Mexico for the annual SPICE trip. This Spanish Immersion Cultural Experience is designed to improve students' Spanish language skills and to offer real-life experience with Mexican culture. This year, in addition to language classes at the Spanish Institute of Puebla, the students participated in a pastors' conference with the Mexican church.



"The trip helped me learn about Mexican culture. There are many Mexican immigrants in the United States today, and to be able to serve them in our churches we need to understand their background—their beliefs, their concerns, their worldview. Going on this trip made me much more aware of these things," says Hemmelman.

District news

NORTHERN WISCONSIN

Second Impressions, a new thrift shop to benefit Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fond du Lac, Wis., opened in late January.

WESTERN WISCONSIN

On Jan. 29, **The Word, Stevens Point, Wis.**, held its opening worship service. The Word is a ministry of Divine Word, Plover, Wis., and supported by WELS Home Missions. The new church is located near the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, and includes areas for students to study, watch TV, do their laundry, and enjoy coffee or food.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

WW—St. John, Waterloo, Wis., is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year.

SEW—On Jan. 11, Epiphany, Racine, Wis., celebrated its 90th anniversary.

The district reporters for this month are: NW—Dennis Kleist; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Brett Brauer.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



On Jan. 20, ten students at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis., were baptized during the school's chapel service.

Obituaries

Johannes S. Hering, 1929–2016

Johannes Hering was born June 1, 1929, in Geruenhain Sachsen, Germany. He died Oct. 15, 2016, in Florence, Wis.

He served Our Savior, Bylas, Ariz.; St. John St. James, Reedsville, Wis.; Mt. Olive, Iron Mountain, Mich.; and St. John, Florence, Wis.

He is survived by one son, one daughter, one grandchild, two brothers, and one sister. He is preceded in death by his wife, Jacqueline; one brother; and two sisters.

Warren R. Steffenhagen, 1927–2016

Warren Steffenhagen was born Feb. 9, 1927, in Hastings, Minn. He died Oct. 24, 2016, in Oconto Falls, Wis.

A 1952 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served St. Paul, Moline, Ill.; Trinity, Friesland, Wis.; Grace, Dalton, Wis.; Holy Cross, Withrow, Wash.; St. Matthew, Spokane, Wash.; First, Gary, S.D.; St. Paul, Oconto Falls, Wis.; Our Savior, Lena, Wis.; and St. Mark, Spruce, Wis.

He is survived by one son, three daughters, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. He is preceded in death by his wife, Mavis; one sister; and four brothers.

Charles L. Tessmer, 1933–2016

Charles Tessmer was born June 25, 1933, in Burke, S.D. He died Oct. 27, 2016, in Menomonee Falls, Wis.

A 1960 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Redeemer, Yakima, Wash.; St. Stephen, Fall River, Wis.; St. John, Doylestown, Wis.; and St. John, Mukwonago, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Delores; one son; two daughters; seven grandchildren; and two sisters.

David E. Niederstadt, 1948–2016

David Niederstadt was born Dec. 15, 1948, in Saginaw, Mich. He died Nov. 8, 2016, in Louisville, Ken.

A 1998 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he served as a staff minister at Cross, Rockford, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Vicky; three sons; and two grandchildren.

Reginald F. Pope, 1926–2016

Reginald Pope was born Dec. 23, 1926, in Rock Springs, Wis. He died Nov. 15, 2016, in Green Bay, Wis.

A 1952 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Redeemer, Mandan, N.D.; Pompano, Coral Springs, Fla.; St. John, Mequon, Wis.; and Ascension, Mitchell, S.D. He also served as district president of the Dakota-Montana District.

He is survived by his wife, Pat; two sons; two daughters; four grandchildren; and one great-grandchild. He is preceded in death by one brother.

Luther's Small Catechism has fortified Christians throughout the centuries. As a short summary of Christian truth, it remains a lifelong companion.

John A. Braun

I learned a lesson many years ago from one of the older members of my congregation. I was visiting shut-ins for the first time after I was installed. One was a cheerful white-haired woman in an assisted-living facility. When I found her room and walked in, I realized that I was interrupting her. She was reading her catechism. It was a regular practice for her.

The lesson that day was simple: The catechism is not only for grade-school children.

A BOOK FOR ALL AGES

If you need further encouragement to use the catechism regularly, consider Luther himself. He wrote, "I am also a doctor and preacher. . . . Yet I act as a child who is being taught the catechism. Every morning—and whenever I have time—I read and say, word for word, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Psalms, and such. I must still read and study them daily. . . . I must remain a child and pupil of the catechism, and am glad to remain so" (LC Longer Preface: 7,8).

So much of Christian life gives us reason to use the catechism, but we face so many temptations to leave the little book on the shelf. We think we can do without it because we have learned it so well—the memory work, the regular classes, confirmation itself. "We're done," we say.

Then comes life. High school, college, marriage, children, work, mortgage payments, and other bills keep us busy. New York Life lists five major changes that add stress to our lives:

marriage, the birth of a child, starting a new job, the death of a spouse or parent, and retirement. We all could add to the list. And we have learned to survive those events and others, perhaps without consulting our catechism once.

But we may have lost something in the forward movement of life without Luther's Small Catechism. It is a wonderful short summary of what we believe. That's why we learned it when we were much younger, before all the distractions of life. Because it is such a short summary, we can easily use it when our lives are filled with so many other responsibilities. It's short; it's simple; it's easy to use. We haven't outgrown the truths it presents.

A BOOK FOR LIFE'S JOURNEY

Consider the challenges we face in life. We are faced with decisions at every turn. When we wonder what to do, God reminds us that he loves us. The Apostles' Creed reminds us of God's great love; the Ten Commandments guide our steps along his path; and the Lord's Prayer directs our concerns, worries, and fears to our heavenly Father. One can find specific parts of Luther's catechism that apply to each of the stressors on New York Life's list.

When our faith is challenged, the catechism can also help. The student faced with ideas contrary to God's will might consult the catechism for help and direction. I've heard of more than one university student using the catechism to find answers to questions and challenges posed by professors, friends, and detractors of their Christian faith.

But others also face questions and challenges. The catechism is the quick reference tool for Christian faith. Consider the distortions we all face in our world today about marriage, abortion, human life issues, gender confusion, disrespect for authority, creation, and all Christian truth. What shall we do when we are sometimes confused by all the religious jargon and opinions? Will it help to go back to



Open your
CATECHISM

the catechism to reinforce what God placed into our hearts from our instruction? It's a great place to start; it will give us direction for digging deeper into the Scriptures and the passages we learned. The catechism is our first line of defense as well as a good start for our personal study.

Perhaps one might wonder why Luther read and studied his catechism "daily," as he said. But we should not wonder for too long. The life of a Christian is a struggle between the sin that still lives within us even after Baptism and the new spiritual life we have because of Baptism. The apostle Paul is clear about that struggle. He wrote, "Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me" (Romans 7:21).

At times we minimize our sins, and at other times we fret over our guilt. When we compare our behavior with the Ten Commandments, we are convicted of our sins. Then it's hard to dismiss them. But when we look at the creed and the sacraments, we are assured of God's steadfast love for us as sinners. Our guilt is swallowed by Christ's sacrifice for our sins.

Luther wrote, "I lament my sin and desire comfort and refreshment for my soul" (LC Confession: 15). The refreshment comes from the gospel, which is God's means to bring grace to sinners. The gospel also strengthens our faith so that we can resist the inclination to do evil and live better Christian lives. We are used to calling it the means of grace. The catechism delivers both law and gospel.

A BOOK FOR OUTREACH

Often we consider the Small Catechism a Lutheran book, and it certainly is—written by Luther and used in Lutheran churches for almost five hundred years. But the content of the little book is a summary of Christian and scriptural doctrine. Think of the Ten Commandments, Apostles' Creed, and Lord's Prayer. These are not only Lutheran truths; they belong to the entire assembly of believers. Baptism and the

Lord's Supper have a distinctively Lutheran and biblical foundation that is different from other Christian churches, but they are clearly Christian and not exclusively Lutheran.

Don't be afraid to use Luther's Small Catechism as a tool for outreach. Don't be afraid to point to the truths you learned in your pastor's confirmation class when talking to others. The brief summary Luther gave us might be a valuable first step to bringing the unchurched or mischurched to understand God's law and gospel.

The catechism is the quick reference tool for Christian faith.

The Small Catechism is based on Scripture, but it will never take the place of Scripture in our church. Nor should it take the place of reading the Bible in your own spiritual life. Yet it can be a valuable resource. The woman I met reading her catechism used it regularly. When I came to give her private Communion in the following months, it was on the table next to her chair. I think she used it to prepare herself for receiving the Lord's Supper. Another lesson for us all.

Assignment: Read through a section of your catechism every day. Simply read Luther's words or read the longer explanations of the catechism. When you are finished reading the entire book, go on with something else, but then start reading the catechism again on your next birthday or on the anniversary of your confirmation.

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

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



ABIDING

truth

How are you saved? Lutherans in our circles find that an easy question to answer: By grace alone.

James G. Kiecker

It's easy for us to say now, "I'm saved by grace alone," but it wasn't always so easy. When Martin Luther came on the scene five hundred years ago, theologians and scholars had been debating about this for at least a thousand years. They all believed that grace was necessary for salvation, but at the same time, it was assumed that a person's efforts to do good were also needed.

The question became, how much grace from God does a person have to add? Some said God contributed a lot of grace and humans only did a little. Others said that salvation was mostly by human effort with God adding only the finishing touch. One prominent theologian in the 1400s stated boldly: "To those who do what they can, God does not deny grace." Most theologians settled somewhere in the middle, saying both grace and good works were necessary.

Between 1515 and 1518, Luther studied the Scriptures and learned that grace alone, not good works, saves. Armed with the Bible's answer, Luther wrote a number of books criticizing many of the abuses in the church. First, he wrote to the German nobles and said that since the church wasn't reforming itself, it was the duty of the rulers to do the reforming. Luther's list of what needed correcting was long.

Another book criticized the way Holy Communion was celebrated. It was called a sacrament, but it had been turned into a sacrifice performed by the priest—an offering the church gave to God, hoping to receive God's grace. The people were left hoping that God would be gracious to them because of their efforts and the priest's sacrifice.

Still another book dealt directly with good works. By Luther's emphasis on grace, some people got the idea that good works shouldn't be done. Wrong. When it came to salvation, good works were worthless. Works did not earn heaven, but they were done willingly, out of gratitude for God's gift of grace in Christ.

ERASMUS CHALLENGES LUTHER

Church officials wanted someone to silence Luther. The choice fell to a scholar whom many considered the greatest in Europe: Erasmus of Rotterdam. Though a priest, he was not a theologian. He had devoted his life to studying ancient Greek and Roman literature. His interest in Greek led him to publish a Greek New Testament, which Luther used when he translated the New Testament into German in 1521.

Humans have to rely solely on God's grace, which is received by the faith the Holy Spirit gives us.

Erasmus had been highly critical of abuses in the church. He condemned monks for their laziness and drunkenness. He criticized priests for leading impure sexual lives. He disapproved of priests laying burdensome penalties on people for their sins, which would have to be "purged away" in purgatory. He even considered selling indulgences, those "permission slips" to get out of purgatory, to be a money-raising scheme. His criticisms of church abuse were in line with many of Luther's.

At the same time, he was pressured by clergy and scholars to denounce Luther once and for all. And they had some leverage. Erasmus had always depended on the support of patrons for his living expenses. But Erasmus wanted to remain neutral, so he hesitated to write.

But finally he wrote. He directed his attack against what Luther stated about the human will and choice. Erasmus couched his assault in the form of a discussion about God's grace alone on the one hand and, on the other, humanity's ability to freely choose to do good and aid in their salvation. He wrote that he had "no fixed conviction" about the issue, but added, "I think there to be a certain power of free choice" (*Library of Christian Classics* [LCC] XVII, p. 37). He also said that the "contribution of free choice [to salvation] is exceedingly small" and "a man owes all his salvation to divine grace, since the power of free choice is exceedingly trivial" (LCC XVII, pp. 89,90). Erasmus concluded his book by writing, "I prefer the view of those who attribute much to free choice, but most to grace" (LCC XVII, p. 96).

But even the "small" and the "trivial" contributions of free choice were too much for Luther. If anyone can contribute even a tiny little something to gain heaven, grace alone is defeated and the death of our Savior to pay for our sins is compromised. It's no longer Christ alone but Christ and works. Luther believed what Paul wrote, "No one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law" (Romans 3:20).

LUTHER RESPONDS

Luther responded to Erasmus with his own book, a blistering attack in which he made clear that no human is free to choose God or do his will but is in bondage to sin and the devil. Humans have to rely solely on God's grace, which is received by the faith the Holy Spirit gives us. Choice passages abound: "It follows that free choice without the grace of God is not free at all, but the captive and slave of evil" (*Luther's Works* [LW] 33:67). He left Erasmus and even those today who depend the least bit on good works with a haunting question: If good works are necessary, "what is left here to grace and the Holy Spirit" (LW 33:107)? Answer: Nothing.

Luther trusted solely and completely in Christ. And that is the way things were left. Erasmus followed the track of the Roman Catholic Church. His approach was the same as most Protestant church bodies today and the average person on the street.

But we Lutherans have stood with Luther and St. Paul: "By grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:8). That's it. When asked, "How are you saved?" we answer gladly, "We're saved by grace alone."

James Kiecker, a retired pastor, is a member at Holy Cross, Daggett/St. Mark, Wallace, Michigan.

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

LUTHER

still speaks

Luther never tired of preaching and singing about grace. In a sermon on John 1:17, he declared, "A good song may well be sung often. Grace consists in this, that God is merciful to us, shows Himself gracious for the sake of the Lord Christ, forgives all sins, and will not impute them unto us for eternal death. This is grace: the forgiveness of sins for the sake of the Lord Christ, the covering up of all sins" (*What Luther Says*, Vol. 2, #1839).

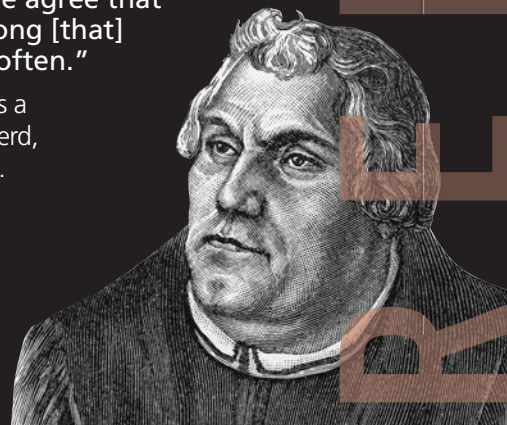
The devil can't deny the salvation won by Christ, so he seeks to pollute it. One of his best attempts is to tell the sinner that he can do something to earn his salvation. And the sinner's pride gladly bites into this poisoned fruit.

In Luther's day this perverted teaching prevailed. It deeply affected and infected Luther. In the monastery he fasted religiously. He prayed countless hours on his knees on the cold chapel floor. He even beat himself for his sins. And when all was said and done, he cried out in despair, "My sins, oh, my sins."

Then God through the Scriptures opened his eyes to the concept of grace. Grace teaches that salvation is not won by what the sinner does, but by what Christ has done. Grace emphasizes that salvation is not to be earned, but to be received as a free gift from God. That's what grace means—something completely undeserved given to people who are totally undeserving.

Someone described grace as "God's Righteousness At Christ's Expense." We might use different words to define this precious Bible truth. But with Luther, we agree that grace is a "good song [that] may well be sung often."

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



I'LL NEVER MARRY A PREACHER

“Sh-h-h, here comes the preacher!” I made the warning a pledge never to marry a preacher.

Barbara J. Welch

Back in 1947, my father took on a new job at the Springfield Seminary as an engineer of the boiler room. At that time, I was just 17 years old and devoted to my church. I taught Sunday school, sang in the choir, held office in the youth league, and never missed a worship service.

Dad wasn't satisfied to spend only his working hours at the seminary. Evenings found him with his whole family—me included—attending the basketball games, cheering as loudly as the students. He often even invited two, three, or more seminarians to have Sunday dinner with us after church. Soon the teasing and ribbing began. Everyone was sure I would become a pastor's wife someday. Everyone, that is, but me.

I made the loud and bold statement

over and over again, “I'll never marry a preacher.” Then I'd smile and mutter under my breath, “Me, a preacher's wife? That'd be the day.”

A CHANGE OF PLANS

Even as a youngster, I loved to listen to the seminary chorus concerts. There was a mixed group too that included women's voices from various Lutheran churches in the area. How I dreamed that one day I might be talented enough to sing with that choir. Finally, the day I'd dreamed of came. Marilyn, a classmate, was also accepted, and we became fast friends. There was only one thing we didn't agree on: I didn't want to become involved with the students and she did. In fact, she would take advantage of every opportunity to be where some of the boys were.

One night during rehearsal, Marilyn asked if I would do her a favor: “See that fellow over there? I just *have* to meet him. Do you think you could go over and strike up a conversation with him and when I come over you can introduce me?” It took more nerve

then I usually had, but I did just that. Almost every week after, the three of us were together during our break.

Then it happened. One afternoon while at work, I received a phone call from this fellow, asking me to go with him to the basketball game. I still wonder what led me to accept. After all he *was* a preacher-to-be. And in order to accept his date, it was necessary to break a date with a non-seminarian. I tried to convince myself that it was just that I hated to miss the seminary games.

The next time he called I found myself saying yes again, and soon we were dating often. The more dates I had with him, the deeper I felt toward him. Then all of a sudden I came to my senses long enough to realize I was becoming dangerously close to the vocation at the very bottom of my list—a preacher's wife.

However, as I began to reason with myself, I could no longer remember what my objections were. After all, wasn't he warm and human? Wasn't he a fine, Christian young man?



Wasn't he everything I pictured in the husband I'd someday marry? He always had time to play with my little sister, which convinced me he liked children. He was very neat, so polite and well-mannered, and was always so concerned about the other person.

Yes, I was slipping. My determination was withering. Where my daily prayers used to include thoughts such as *Don't let it be one of them, Lord*, now I was actually praying he would ask for my hand in marriage.

Then it happened, and a few months later I proudly walked down the aisle with the "preacher I'd never marry."

ANOTHER CHAPTER

This sounds like my story should end here and now with "and we lived happily ever after." We did. But I feel you should know that I didn't surrender to defeat. I made another bold prediction: "Well, at least I promise that I won't raise any PKs." Preacher's Kids have a nice way of granting themselves that title. To me they all seemed wild and undisciplined.

But it seems that all my predictions were wrong. I have a confession to make. Here I am a preacher's wife and the mother of not one, but seven PKs. How do I know they are PKs? I remember attending a school service and watching all the school children file in and take their seats in the front pews. During the sermon, I noticed some commotion in the sixth row. Still being the stern disciplinarian I set out to be, I couldn't help thinking, *Where's that child's training? If he were mine, I would* . . . Well, it was my ten-year-old son.

Then there's the two-year-old who is always singing when the organ stops or making the sounds of a motor as he drives his little rubber tractor over the shoulders of the lady sitting in front of us. What's the tractor doing in church in the first place?

Did you ever sit through a service with seven to attend to without the help of their father? I need never worry about having a stiff neck because my neck

gets plenty of exercise—first checking on the ones seated to my right and then those on my left. It seems inevitable that while I am turned to the right, something else happens on the left.

Can anyone tell me what is so intriguing about a mother's purse? It seems every child goes through that "examining mama's purse" stage. I wonder how many times I've bent over and picked up my lipstick, all the children's photos, and my billfold and all its contents from the floor.

In a parsonage there are times of happiness, times of sadness, and times that are very serious. Our faith is strengthened as well as our hearts saddened when our pastor-daddy calls on a young mother of five who lays dying of cancer in a local hospital. As he tells of how he comforts her and prepares her for death and her eternal rest that will end all misery and pain, we cannot help but question our own preparedness for the end.

How could I have ever thought of choosing another occupation? What could be more rewarding than the role of a pastor's wife, the mother of a large family, and the helpmeet of one who is doing the work of the Lord? And as I sit here with the washer and dryer going; two children home from school, one with the thermometer in her mouth; and a stack of mending on the sewing machine, I ask you, where could one find more variety? Where else in this hard world could I be needed more?

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Editor's note: This article was excerpted from a story Barbara wrote in the 1960s. Barbara and Roland had been married 15 years. Roland graduated from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) seminary in Springfield in 1953. After WELS and the LCMS split, he became a WELS pastor by colloquy. The Welches had seven children, adopted another son, and provided a home for 35 to 40 foster children through the years. Roland died in 2015, a few months after celebrating their 65th wedding anniversary.

It's not hate but love

Jeffrey L. Samelson

To refuse to
call sinners to
repentance is
unloving because
it leaves them
condemned to
an eternity
in hell.

"I'm confused," we might say. "You accuse me of being hateful, unloving, and unworthy of the name 'Christian' when I say God has much to say about sexual relationships. But at the same time you say you are not hateful or unloving when you say with strong language that I am wrong. What principle are you following? Have you actually thought any of this through, or are you just more comfortable accusing me of hate than actually considering what God has to say and that you might, in fact, be wrong?"

If you are at all like me, saying something like that is the way you would like to bring many a conversation or confrontation to a conclusion—or, perhaps, it is what you would like to add to the beginning of an actually productive exchange of ideas. It's a sad fact of life that many in our culture have decided both that any criticism of others' values and behaviors (theirs in particular) is hateful and that their own criticism of Christian standards and teachings cannot possibly be hateful.

What is even more tragic is that such thinking is not limited to those outside our churches. Many Christians seem to operate as though they have been personally authorized (by what or whom is unclear) to redefine and redirect the teachings of Christ's church to make them more acceptable to our culture—simultaneously labeling the faithful as "backward" and "unloving." They see no contradictions or irony in affirming, on the one hand, that they love Jesus and believe that the Bible is God's Word, but, on the other hand, claiming that Scripture's condemnations of presently popular sins and calls for repentance are "not what Jesus would say" or "things real Christians don't believe anymore."

Our first instinct in responding might be anger or resentment at the idea that holding faithfully to God's own definitions of what is loving and Christian makes us unloving and unchristian. We

might also want to complain about the hypocrisy of those who sanctimoniously judge us as evil for making judgments. Yet such reactions will do little to correct the underlying error of these accusations and judgments.

With non-spiritual criticisms, we seek to restore a foundation of logic and mutual respect in our discussions of hot-button issues that put us at odds with the culture's prevailing worldview. Gently pointing out their contradictions and appealing to fairness might open the door to explaining that our criticisms are not, as they suppose, about lifting ourselves up over others as righteous judges but about pointing others to truths they need and will be blessed to understand.

With misguided Christians, we must stress that when we say what God himself says about sin, we are not only speaking the truth but we also are speaking it in love. To refuse to call sinners to repentance is unloving because it leaves them condemned to an eternity in hell. Christlike love desires sinners to repent of their sins and to find salvation in Jesus. There is no other way to heaven.

These are not mere academic or abstract disputes; real lives and real relationships hang in the balance—not just with "those people" but with friends and family members. We cannot let our own discomfort or fear stand in the way of what needs to be believed and spoken. It is not only possible to love someone dearly and still call him or her "wrong," but where sin is concerned, it's also absolutely necessary.

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

The RIPPLE EFFECT

LYDIA



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

Daniel N. Balge

It was a vision of a man from Macedonia that prompted Paul to carry the gospel for the first time into Europe (Acts 16:6-10). But it was women who first heard the good news at the apostle's initial stop of Philippi.

A WOMAN'S SAVING FAITH

Paul's habit in a new city was to begin his outreach in the local synagogue (14:1; 17:2). The synagogue offered a logical point of contact. Paul and his companions met Jews who knew the Old Testament and to whom they could show Jesus was the Messiah God promised. But Philippi apparently didn't have a synagogue. Ten Jewish men were needed to form a synagogue, and Luke mentions only women (16:13) gathered at a "place of prayer" at the Krenides River, probably outdoors. Paul began with them.

Among them was a businesswoman who dealt in purple cloth. She came from Thyatira. History's record, though likely incomplete, offers an impressive list of goods manufactured there: pottery, leather products, clothing, woollens, linens, and bronzeware. Thyatirans

traded in these things as well as in slaves. The region also produced purple dye, using a labor-intensive process that made anything tinted purple expensive. It was high-end cloth that the businesswoman sold in Philippi.

The businesswoman's name was Lydia. Luke describes her as "a worshiper of God" (16:14), in other words, a devout convert to Judaism. Lydia was a Gentile who had come to faith in the prophecies of a Messiah. Though not obligated to follow all of the Old Testament ceremonial law, Lydia believed in a promised Savior. Paul and his coworkers told her all about him.

"The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message" (16:14). Hearing the gospel, Lydia's faith refocused on the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises—Jesus. She and members of her household were baptized.

A WOMAN'S GENEROUS OFFER

Out of thanks to Jesus, Lydia extended an invitation to Paul and company: "If you consider me a believer in the Lord, . . . come and stay at my house" (16:15). That invite hints at her success in the purple cloth trade. First, she had a businesswoman's cordial assertiveness, and here it met success ("she persuaded us"). Second, she owned a house that could indefinitely accommodate four men as guests, besides the members of her household. Her

home became a base of operations for outreach in Philippi.

The Holy Spirit blessed this gospel effort. Acts 16:16-40 records the exciting story of the conversion of the warden of Philippi's jail along with his household. A broader sense of the Spirit's success one gleans from references Paul makes in his letter to the Philippians. Writing about a decade later from prison in Rome, Paul does not once chide or correct the Philippians for error. Moreover, Paul addresses "all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons" (Philippians 1:1). That sounds like a good-sized group. And he thanks them for a gift of money and for the encouragement of Epaphroditus, the Philippian who had brought it (2:25-30).

That gift was characteristic. The Philippians, alone among the congregations Paul had served, frequently shared their money to help Paul proclaim the gospel (4:15,16). Not a surprise from a congregation whose first member had thankfully insisted, "Come and stay at my house."

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

This is the 11th article in a 12-part series on lesser-known New Testament witnesses.



Who would have
ever imagined that
God would send
his Son to endure
crucifixion for those
who could not even
grasp his greatness?

The fool

Psalm 14 begins, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” The atheist is a fool? God thinks so. The evaluation is repeated in Psalm 53.

Such judgmental pronouncements, however, are not welcome in our world. And from the perspective of atheists, of course, it’s not true. They would think of Christians as fools. For the atheist, nothing exists but what can be proven, observed, and documented. Science is the standard of what is and what is not. Believing in God and especially trusting in a crucified and resurrected Savior make Christians fools. The message of the cross is just so much foolishness to the world’s wise and intelligent (1 Corinthians 1:23).

If you do any reading of atheistic thought, it doesn’t take very long to hear the utter disdain for religious people who accept the concept of God. Their view of God may be that he is a cruel jerk who promises a boring existence in heaven. I’ve read that assessment by one atheist. He discards all ideas of such a god. But the god he rejects was created according to his own intellectual assumptions. Of course, he would object to my critique. To his way of thinking, I am a fool and accept foolish things.

Reading some of their literature means reading claims of their superior intellect and a belittling of anyone who thinks differently. Those who accept the concept of God are naïve, superstitious, and deluded. Some have even concluded that the “religious” are social misfits who need a crutch to get through life. It’s a kind of arrogance and superiority that borders on intellectual bullying. In effect it comes across as, “You are not as smart as I am because I don’t believe in God.”

What makes this so frustrating is that the human mind is an amazing organ. The contributions of great minds over the course of human history are ex-

tensive and impressive. Beginning with the simple wheel down to the latest discoveries in all scientific fields, the list is nothing short of amazing. Who knows how much more there is yet to come? I confess to meeting and talking with men and women who surpass my intellectual gifts.

I marvel at all those accomplishments; they have made our lives so much better. In spite of them all, the human mind is still limited, and knowledge is changeable. Why would anyone boldly assert that God does not exist based on such thinking and knowledge? One silent and relentless witness to the limitations of human thinking is that every one of us grows old and deteriorates. Atheists too. Intelligent. Poor. Cognitively limited. I wonder if that’s one of the reasons “the One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them” (Psalm 2:4).

“Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (1 Corinthians 1:20). God’s thoughts and God’s ways are higher than mine or any of the greatest minds the world has ever seen or will ever see. Our human standards are too small to judge him, our human thoughts too limited to contain his thoughts. Profound humility in the face of God is an appropriate response and cancels any arrogant bravado.

Who would have ever imagined that God would send his Son to endure crucifixion for those who could not even grasp his greatness? That’s foolish to atheists and most of the intellectual world around us. But “the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength” (1 Corinthians 1:25).

Lent beckons us again. Be bold in trusting God’s foolishness in Christ crucified. Remember God’s critique of those without God: “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

The means of grace

Joel D. Otto

As Martin Luther carried out his reformation, there were other reform movements at work throughout Europe (Anabaptists, Zwinglians, Calvinists). He was often critical of these other movements. He opposed them for their lack of trust in the power of the Word and sacraments to give and sustain faith. He used a term to describe them: *Schwärmer*. Literally, the word means “one who buzzes about.” In English, the word is usually translated as *enthusiast*. These were people and groups who “buzzed around” looking for the Spirit in their own feelings or thinking. They denied the power of the gospel, especially in the sacraments.

Luther recognized that God is very clear how he works to create and strengthen faith in the hearts of people. Faith comes from hearing the good news about Jesus (Romans 10:17). This gospel gives salvation by bringing people to believe in Jesus (Romans 1:16). The gospel message is in the form of both the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15,16) and the sacraments (Ephesians 5:26). Through these tools, the Holy Spirit gives the gift of faith in Jesus (2 Thessalonians 2:13,14; Titus 3:4-7). The gospel is the means through which the Spirit pours out God’s grace on individuals.

Luther trusted that the means of grace has the power to work the needed change in people’s hearts. He once preached, “I simply taught, preached, and wrote God’s Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything” (*Luther’s Works* Vol. 51, p. 77).

True Lutherans continue to trust in the power of the means of grace. We don’t look for the Spirit to somehow zap faith into people’s hearts without the gospel. We don’t try to force people into “de-

ciding for Christ” or attempt to argue people into heaven. We trust that the Holy Spirit “calls me by the gospel” (Small Catechism). The Augsburg Confession states: “To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ’s merit, when we so believe” (Article V).

For true Lutherans, the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments are at the heart of the Christian’s life and the church’s work because the means of grace is how the Spirit changes hearts.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. List at least five examples from Bible history that demonstrate the power of the means of grace to give faith or strengthen faith.
2. Since true Lutherans believe that the Spirit works through the gospel in Word and sacraments, how will this affect the following areas?
 - a. Worship
 - b. Christian education
 - c. Mission work/evangelism
 - d. A Christian’s daily life
3. Read Isaiah 55:10,11 and John 3:8. How do these passages give us confidence as we carry out the mission of the church to proclaim the gospel of Jesus?

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



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



WHAT IT MEANS TO BE TRULY LUTHERAN





IT IS FINISHED

**Because Jesus completed the work of our salvation,
we can have peace.** Rolfe F. Westendorf

“It is finished” (John 19:30).

With that triumphant cry, Jesus declared the work of salvation complete. He had done everything necessary to pay for the sins of the world. All those sins, from the least to the greatest, had become his sins because “the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). And because his sins were paid for, he could enter his Father’s presence.

There is a world of comfort for us in those three words, “It is finished.” Because the work of salvation is finished, we don’t have to do anything to complete that work. Our good works contribute nothing to our salvation.

Rather, our good works are the result of the faith that the Spirit has given us. We love others because Jesus loved us. We are helpful, considerate, kind, and gentle. But all we do cannot make us more holy, more worthy, than Jesus has already made us.

Now it is safe for us to die. Thanks to Jesus we are good enough for heaven! Jesus showed us that confidence when he commended his spirit into his heavenly Father’s hands. He also reminded the thief next to him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

But, of course, Jesus was not speaking English when he said, “It is finished.” The message is conveyed to us through the Greek language of the New Testament. But Jesus was not speaking

Greek either. The common language in Jesus’ time was a version of Hebrew called Aramaic.

How do you say “it is finished” in Aramaic? It is impossible to know with certainty the exact syllables that Jesus spoke. But a reasonable guess would be the word *SHELIM*. This is the passive form of the word *SHALOM*, which means “peace.” Roughly translated, *SHELIM* means “peace has been accomplished.” That adds another dimension of meaning to the words of Jesus: “It is finished.”

When a task remains unfinished, there is a certain tension that remains until the job is complete. One may work at the harvest and hurry to finish. But if the harvest is interrupted by a storm, the work remains, even if delayed. Making dinner is not complete until the food is all on the table and the guests arrive. When the task is finished, there is relief from the tension, which is replaced by peace.

Jesus was under tension to complete the payment for our sins. When that job was finished, he had peace . . . and so do we. By finding peace for himself, Jesus found peace for us.

Yes, “it is finished”! *SHELIM*! We will have eternal life with the Savior who won peace for us by finishing the task of our salvation.

It is finished, and we have peace! Amen!

Rolfe Westendorf, a retired pastor, is a member at Grace, Dalton, Wisconsin.