

Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



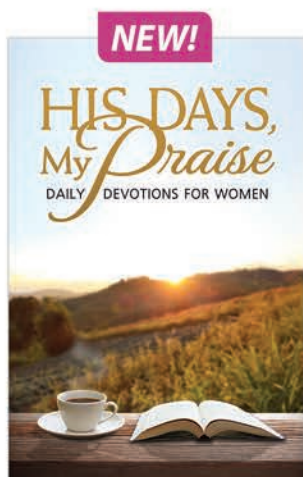
We are joyful
messenger

Jesus promises to be with us as we take the
good news to the ends of the earth. *Page 10*



Give Your Mom the *Best Gift!*

One of God's best gifts to us is our mom. An even greater blessing than a loving mother is being saved by Jesus and having a relationship with him! Encourage your mom to nurture that greatest bond and take time with her Savior each day through these Christ-centered books and gifts.



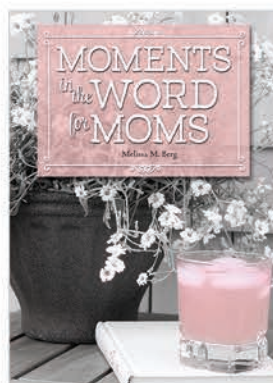
His Days, My Praise

by various authors

With insights from 12 Christian women and "My Praise" sections to collect her thoughts, this 365-day devotional will help Mom meditate on and apply God's Word in her life.

Softcover, 379 pages.

LU0600749, \$19.99



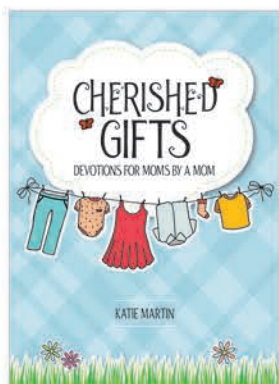
Moments in the Word for Moms

by Melissa M. Berg

Reminders of Christ's love are sure to rejuvenate any hardworking mom! These 39 easy-to-read devotions weave Scripture into common parenting experiences to offer her comfort.

Softcover, 117 pages.

LU0600747, \$12.99



Cherished Gifts

by Katie Martin

Taking care of kids can be a big challenge, but moms don't have to go it alone! This heartfelt devotional book will uplift her and remind her that God is there every step of the way.

Softcover, 156 pages.

LU0600746, \$13.99



Faith Growing Vine Tall Latte Mug

Featuring floral designs of green and cream, this 14 oz. mug will brighten her mornings with the words of Philippians 4:13: "I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

5 x 3.5 x 5.75 inches.

LU2303013, \$12.99

Also available as an e-book from www.amazon.com/kindle or www.barnesandnoble.com/nook.

To order, call 800-662-6022 or visit www.nph.net.

Availability and prices are subject to change without notice. All orders are subject to shipping and handling fees and sales tax where applicable.

**NORTHWESTERN
PUBLISHING HOUSE**



**NPH CHRISTIAN
BOOKS & GIFTS STORE**

www.nph.net 1250 N 113th Street • Milwaukee WI 53226 800-662-6022

**NPH
EXTRA
PROGRAM**

Find us on
Facebook



FEATURES

10 | **We are Jesus' witnesses**
Our salvation is complete and assured, and we have a job to do.
Troy R. Schreiner

12 | **Abiding truth**
Our confidence as we face life and death is not based on faith, but on God's promises.
James F. Korthals

14 | **Confessions of faith**
Living as a Christian in this world is a struggle.
Donald W. Patterson

16 | **Heart to heart: Parent conversations**
How do we keep our children safe online?

26 | **Speaking in love**
Our tongues can be difficult to control at times. We need God's help to speak the truth in love.
Victoria Rahn

28 | **Making a difference by volunteering**
John A. Braun

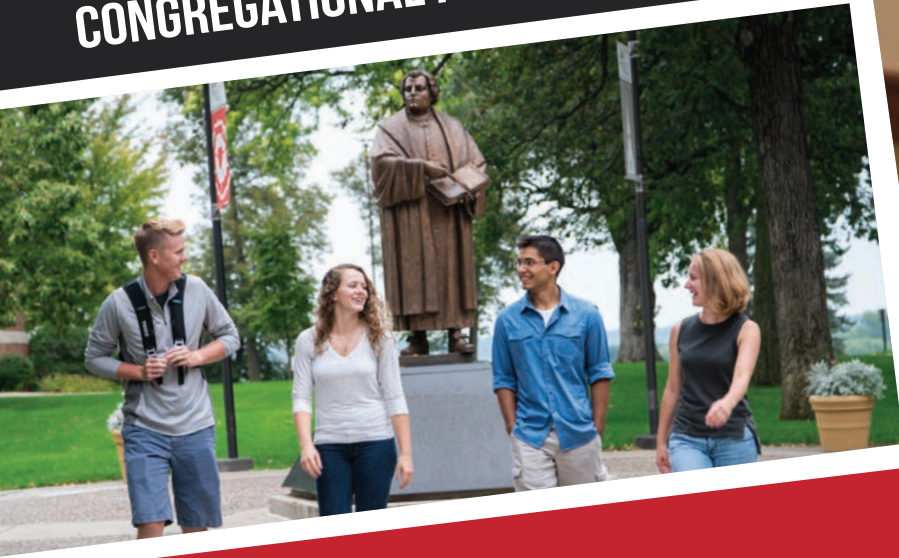
30 | **Reflections of a mother**
A card on Mother's Day brings memories of God's strength and care.
Beverly Fulmer

36 | **Life assurance**
God's most important blessing is his promise of heaven.
Jennifer N. Heins

Watch our social media for MLC Day on **May 3** to learn more about Martin Luther College and how you can support students.



CONGREGATIONAL PARTNER GRANT PROGRAM AT MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE



SUPPORTING STUDENTS ALONG THE PATH TO MINISTRY



The Congregational Partner Grant Program gives WELS congregations and members a new way to encourage and support young men and women preparing for the public ministry at Martin Luther College.

- Congregations can award grants to their members who are freshmen and sophomores in the 2017–18 school year; Martin Luther College will match that grant up to \$1,000 per student. Grant applications must be received by June 1, 2017.
- Congregations or individuals can also donate directly to the program to help the college match those congregational gifts.

LEARN MORE AT MLC-WELS.EDU/GO/CPGF.



Martin Luther College
1995 Luther Court · New Ulm, MN 56073
mlc-wels.edu · 507-354-8221 · facebook.com/mlcwels



EDITORIAL OFFICE

Forward in Christ magazine
WELS Communication Services
N16W23377 Stone Ridge Dr
Waukesha WI 53188-1108
Phone: 414-256-3210
E-mail: fic@wels.net
wels.net/forwardinchrist

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Rev. John A. Braun
braunj@nph.wels.net

MANAGING EDITOR

Julie K. Wietzke
julie.wietzke@wels.net

STAFF WRITER

Nicole R. Balza
nicole.balza@wels.net

SEMINARY CONSULTANT

Prof. Bill Tackmier

ART DIRECTOR

Karen Knutson

DESIGNER

Carianne Ciriacks

COPYRIGHT

©2017 by Forward in Christ. Printed in the USA. Forward in Christ grants permission for any original article (not a reprint) to be photocopied for use in a WELS church, school, or organization, provided that copies are distributed free and indicate Forward in Christ as the source. Artwork may not be reproduced except in the context of its article. For other copyright questions, contact Kristine Laufer, 414-615-5706; lauferk@nph.wels.net.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

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

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! This seems like it should be the introduction to last month's issue, doesn't it? But the message of Christ's resurrection is something we should be living and sharing every month of every year.

- Our newest contributing editor Pastor Peter Prange reminds us to shake off our daily fears and to live in Easter joy in his devotion "Called to proclaim" (p. 7).
- Pastor Troy Schreiner focuses on Christ's directive to his disciples at his ascension: Go and tell (p. 10). But the article also reminds us that we are not alone in our task; our Savior is always with us.
- Having our Savior by our sides is important as we live out our lives in an often cruel world. Our "Confessions of faith" article this month highlights the struggles—and the joys—of a Christian living under God's grace and sharing it with others (p. 14).

Finally, don't miss a new Bible study that starts this month (p. 33). We'll be examining Old Testaments monuments and what they still mean for us today.

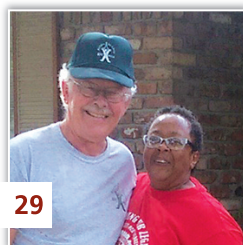
Julie Wietzke



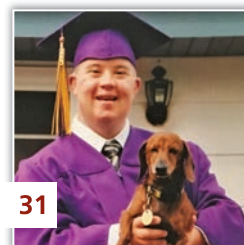
20



24



29



31

IN EVERY ISSUE

6

Feedback

Readers share their opinions

7

Devotion

Called to proclaim

8

From the president's desk

A tale of two kingdoms

9

Light for our path

Martin Luther

18

Campus cornerstone

Support in times of trouble

19

Bulletin board

Announcements from around the synod

20

News

What's happening in WELS

32

Editorial comment

A more beautiful world

33

Bible study

Monuments: Lasting memories

34

A thought

Christ crucified

35

Interactive Bible study

What it means to be truly Lutheran: Lord's Supper

JESUS' DESCENT INTO HELL

The topic of the article in "Light for our path" [March, p. 9] was "Where did Jesus go when he died?" I agree with the answer that was given, but I also believe a very necessary portion of the answer was missing. In addition to the soul of Jesus going to heaven, there was no mention of his descent into hell to proclaim his victory over sin, death, and hell. It is hard to ignore this fact when it is proclaimed by us almost every Sunday as we confess our faith in the Apostles' Creed.

*Dave Dahlke
Port Orchard, Washington*

In answering the question, "Where did Jesus go when he died?" you said that his soul went to heaven.

In the Apostles' Creed, we state: "I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven. . ."

In the article, there was no mention of Jesus descending into hell, only that when he died his soul went to heaven and his body was laid in a tomb.

Can you explain?

*Elaine Long
Monroe, North Carolina*

Prof. James Pope replies:

What I wrote in the Forward in Christ column and what we speak in the creed are not at odds. Let me explain.

Death is the separation of body and soul (Ecclesiastes 12:7). When Jesus died, his body remained on earth, while his soul went to heaven (Luke 23:46). The same was true for the penitent thief on the cross (Luke 23:43).

On Easter Sunday morning, Jesus' body and soul were reunited in Joseph's tomb. The Lord—body and soul—then descended into hell to declare his victory over Satan and his forces (1 Peter 3:18-20). After that, the risen Lord appeared to people here on earth.

The wording of the Apostles' Creed can make it seem like Jesus descended into hell before his body and soul were reunited. When the creed states that

Through my Bible in 3 years



Read or listen online at wels.net/bible3.

2017
MAY 2017

- | | | |
|--------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Luke 21:1-24 | 12. Lk. 24:13-35 | 23. Ac. 2:1-13 |
| 2. Lk. 21:25-38 | 13. Lk. 24:36-53 | 24. Ac. 2:14-36 |
| 3. Lk. 22:1-13 | 14. Psalm 1 & 2 | 25. Ac. 2:37-47 |
| 4. Lk. 22:14-30 | 15. Ps. 3 & 4 | 26. Ac. 3 |
| 5. Lk. 22:31-46 | 16. Ps. 5 | 27. Ac. 4:1-31 |
| 6. Lk. 22:47-62 | 17. Ps. 6 | 28. Ac. 4:32-5:16 |
| 7. Lk. 22:63-23:12 | 18. Ps. 7 & 8 | 29. Ac. 5:17-42 |
| 8. Lk. 23:13-25 | 19. Ps. 9 & 10 | 30. Ac. 6 |
| 9. Lk. 23:26-43 | 20. Ps. 11 & 12 | 31. Ac. 7:1-43 |
| 10. Lk. 23:44-56 | 21. Acts 1:1-11 | |
| 11. Lk. 24:1-12 | 22. Ac. 1:12-26 | |

Jesus "descended into hell," it is doing so on the basis that Jesus' body and soul had already been reunited in the tomb. When the creed states that Jesus "rose again from the dead," it is referring to Jesus' appearances to people on earth. When we speak the words of the Apostles' Creed, we do not mean to say that Jesus descended into hell immediately after his death and burial.

POST-ELECTION UNREST

Prof. Treptow's article ["Exercise your freedom of speech," Feb.] is particularly pertinent in this time of persistent post-election unrest. We must never forget the peerless power of prayer to our almighty God. However, we Christians must not become complacent nor forget to exercise the freedoms God has given us to respectfully voice our concerns to our representatives in government, lest those freedoms be curtailed. Who of us would suggest that there were not faithful Christians in Germany years ago, Christians who lifted their voices in fervent prayer but said little in public until it was too late?

*Les Fritz
Oshkosh, Wisconsin*

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*.

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.

Called to proclaim

Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” Mark 16:14,15

Peter M. Prange

What a fascinating portrait the evangelists paint for us in their accounts of Jesus’ resurrection and its aftermath. One would expect these narratives to be filled with reports of unfettered joy and celebration. “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!” Instead, Jesus’ resurrection was met with fear and doubts.

DOUBTING EASTER JOY

Thomas was the most infamous skeptic (John 20:24-29), but his reaction to the splendor of Easter was really not unique. Luke tells us that when the women came to Jesus’ disciples and announced what they had seen and heard, those men dismissed it as “non-sense.” Mark makes it clear that their refusal to believe the women’s Easter proclamation wasn’t a simple misunderstanding. It was a refusal to believe.

Jesus can’t find any better missionaries than those who struggle with the same fear and doubts that every sinful person experiences.

Are we really any different? Do we live our daily lives as God’s people in unfettered Easter joy and confidence, or are our lives instead regularly punctuated, interrupted, and thrown off balance by our fear and doubts? Do we regularly take St. Paul’s Easter-inspired hymn on our lips and proclaim to ourselves and to others that “neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything



else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38, 39)? Or do we instead allow the worries and cares of our day-to-day lives to load us down with burdens too heavy for us to bear by ourselves? Am I really confident that Christ is risen and that he who rules all things for the good of his people is indeed working all things for my eternal good?

We are naturally just as skeptical and cold-hearted as Thomas and his colleagues were. And our Savior responds to our doubts in exactly the same way he responded to theirs: He rebukes us for our lack of faith and our stubborn refusal to believe.

PROCLAIMING JESUS’ VICTORY

But what does he do next? Amazingly, he does not kick us to the curb. Instead, he calls us to proclaim with joy his eternal promises—to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” Jesus can’t find any better missionaries than those who struggle with the same fear and doubts that every sinful per-

son experiences. Who better to proclaim the profound comfort found in the gospel of Christ’s resurrection than those who have so desperately needed it for themselves?

Remember, it was only after King David had fallen into horrific sin and cold-hearted unbelief that he was prompted to pray, “Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you” (Psalm 51:12,13). And it was only after Jesus rescued a man long-possessed by a legion of demons that Jesus directed the man to go and “tell how much God has done for you” (Luke 8:39).

So we too are called from our cold-heartedness to proclaim the victory found for broken sinners in Jesus alone. Christ is risen indeed! Believe it and then proclaim it to others!

Contributing editor Peter Prange is pastor at Bethany, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

Learn more about FIC’s newest contributing editor on p. 22.



Mark Schwede

Luther returned to the Scriptures and emphasized that these two kingdoms, both established by God, have separate and distinct roles to play.

A tale of two kingdoms

Throughout 2017, we are celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. As Lutheran Christians, we recognize that the single greatest blessing God gave to his church through Martin Luther was the rediscovery of the central truth of the Bible: that sinners are justified by God's grace alone, through faith in Christ alone, which we know by Scripture alone. If that was the only truth that God gave back to his church through Luther, it would give us every reason to celebrate.

But God didn't stop there. Through Luther, God restored other biblical truths and teachings to his church that have been cherished not only by Lutherans but by many other Christians as well. Luther led the way to translating the Bible into the language of the people. He recognized the importance of congregational worship that focused on Christ and wrote Christ-centered hymns for worshipers to sing. He wrote catechisms to instruct the young and championed education for boys and girls. On the basis of the Scriptures, Luther emphasized how Christians can serve God faithfully in all vocations of life and reminded these Christians of the priesthood of all believers.

One other biblical doctrine that Martin Luther rediscovered was the doctrine of the "two kingdoms" or "two realms." It's a teaching that is particularly timely for us to know and to practice today.

In Luther's day, the church had become hopelessly politicized, with religious leaders inserting themselves into the role of government. From the other direction, government leaders sought to exert their influence over religious and spiritual affairs. Church and state had become so entwined with each other that confusion and abuse were common.

Luther returned to the Scriptures and emphasized that these two kingdoms, both established by God, have separate and distinct roles to play. The church's

role is to be spiritual, limited to proclaiming the message of the Scriptures and leading people to Christ. The government's role is to be God's agent to keep order in society, to protect its citizens from physical harm, and to punish wrongdoers. For either kingdom to assume the role of the other is a violation of God's divine arrangement. Since both are established by God, Christians have a responsibility to recognize and to support both kingdoms.

This teaching is particularly important for Christians to remember as the church finds itself surrounded by an increasingly godless culture. If secular government reflects the culture, it's not surprising that it will seek to defend—and even promote—behavior that runs completely counter to God's will and to natural law—and counter to the truths that the church proclaims.

In response, the church and its members need to do two things. First, the church and its members need to continue to proclaim God's truth boldly, even to the point of disobeying the government when ordered to violate God's will. Second, the church and its members need to avoid the temptation to insert the church into the secular realm of legislation and politics. Without doubt, the church will stand for the truth and proclaim it. But it will leave the lawmaking, lobbying, and policy setting to others.

As citizens of the secular kingdom as well as the spiritual, we should be salt and light in our world. We should be ready to use our political freedom to say what we believe and to promote good, wise, and just laws, but we will avoid confusing church and state.

Light for our path

Does our church body focus too much on Martin Luther?

James F. Pope

It is understandable that Martin Luther is receiving a great deal of attention this year since 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. Then again, there have been questions and accusations in the past that we focus too much on Martin Luther.

As we head toward the second half of this year, when the Reformation anniversary celebration will peak, your question provides a good opportunity to explain how WELS views Martin Luther.

A SINGLE FOUNDATION

Our church body believes and teaches that the Christian church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20). The Bible alone is the source of our faith. The writings of Martin Luther are not an additional source of faith for Lutherans. We do not believe anything simply because Martin Luther said so. Scripture alone—*sola Scriptura*—is the foundation of our faith.

A GIFTED REFORMER

Instead of viewing Luther as foundational to our faith, we regard him as a reformer of the faith. There were others who preceded him, pre-Reformers who spoke out against the errors of the church and paid for their testimony with their lives. While Luther voiced similar and other concerns as those men, he did not suffer their fate. He did live the last 25 years of his life with death threats hanging over his head, but he enjoyed God’s protecting hand.

With tireless energy and an abundance of God-given gifts, Luther threw himself headlong into preaching, teaching, writing, and reforming. We recognize Luther as a highly gifted man whom God used at a critical time in history to *restore* the truths of his word. *Restore* is the key word. Luther did not create doctrines; he rediscovered biblical truths.

A HUMAN NAME

So what is Martin Luther’s place in our church body? The writer to the Hebrews offers guidance: “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (13:7).

Does remembering Luther mean naming our church body after him? That was not Luther’s idea. The name *Lutheran* came from Luther’s opponents. Luther wrote about the use of his name: “I ask that men make no reference to my name and call themselves, not Lutherans but Christians. What is Luther? After all, the doctrine is not mine, nor have I been crucified for anyone. . . . How, then, should I, a poor evil-smelling maggot sack have men give to the children of Christ my worthless name? Not so, dear friends. Let us cast out party names and be called Christians after Him whose doctrine we have” (*What Luther Says*, Vol. II, p. 856).

In spite of Luther’s wishes, the label *Lutheran* remains. In and of itself, that is not objectionable. Denominational names can help provide a profile of a church body’s theological stance. But because there are different branches of Lutheranism, Lutheran church bodies need to articulate their beliefs and practices so people can see that a shared name does not necessarily mean a shared theology.

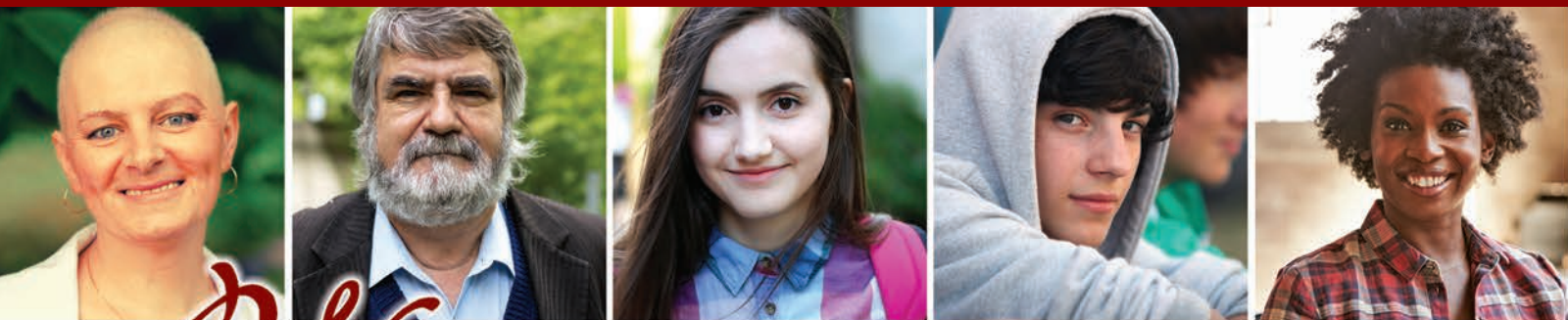
Do we focus too much on Martin Luther? No. When we give attention to a person through whom God worked his blessings, we ultimately give attention—and praise—to God. “To the only God our Savior be glory” (Jude 25).

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



We are JESUS' WITNESSES

Our salvation is complete and assured, and we have a job to do. But Jesus has not left us to carry on without him.

Troy R. Schreiner

In the summer of 2012, five Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary classmates and I went backpacking through Europe, from Sweden to Italy. Being seminarians, we hadn't really pre-booked any lodging. We simply would find a place to stay once we arrived in a city we liked. Amazingly, this usually worked.

However, when we stopped in a seaside Italian town called Levanto, everything in the city was booked except for one beautiful house at the top of a hill overlooking Levanto—only a three-mile hike away. But we had to hurry, because the man who would let us in was leaving soon.

So, we sprint-hiked up the mountain. When we were about halfway, a man drove up on a scooter, excitedly speaking Italian. We did not understand a word. He continued with exasperated gesturing. Finally, one of my friends hopped on the back of the scooter and, with a backwards glance and a “here goes nothing” expression, rode off with this stranger.

I remember thinking as the scooter drove away, “Will we ever see him again? What do we do now? Who's going to tell his mom?”

Don't worry. The driver dropped our friend off at the house and returned for each of us. But I'll never forget the fearful uncertainty of that moment.

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

I imagine Jesus' disciples had similar thoughts as Jesus was “taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight” (Acts 1:9). For the better part of three years, the disciples knew the blessing of being at Jesus' side as he taught, proclaimed himself as Savior, and performed miracles. They knew the guilt of fleeing from Jesus in fear as he was arrested, abandoning him as he innocently suffered and died on a cross. They knew the life-changing joy of Easter, as the risen Christ showed them the marks in his hands and side, shattering their grief over the thought of their Lord in the grave. For 40 days after Easter, Jesus continued appearing to his disciples, his visible presence giving them peace, comfort, and hope because they knew Jesus was still with them.

Then Jesus disappeared from their sight in the clouds. Straining their eyes, craning their necks, hoping to catch a glimpse of Jesus, did they wonder, “Will we ever see him again? What do we do now?”

A catechism student once asked me, “Why didn't Jesus just stay here so all the bad stuff in the world wouldn't happen?” She assumed that since Jesus disappeared at the Ascension, he's not with us anymore—that he ascended to a heavenly hammock with a good book and a lemonade and retired from caring for the world.

That's exactly what Satan wants us to think. He wants us to look at our lives and the world around us. As war continues, diseases attack bodies, and sin ravages relationships, the devil wants us to fearfully think, “Jesus isn't in control. He left us.”





FOUR REASSURANCES

If Jesus left us to fend for ourselves, we should be afraid because we'd have no hope! Fortunately, that's not what the Ascension means. Jesus' ascension gives us four joyful reassurances: Jesus is still with us. Jesus is in control. Jesus will come again. Jesus gave us an important task.

Jesus is no longer with us like he was with those first disciples. But Jesus assured his followers before he ascended, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). He did not say, "I'll try my hardest to always be here for you, but sometimes things happen," like a dad promising to attend his son's soccer game. When Jesus ascended, he once again made full use of his power as true God. Jesus could promise to be with us always, and we can trust that he will never fail to keep that promise. Jesus is with us now. We are not abandoned.

As we await Jesus' return, God
doesn't want us to spend our lives
staring aimlessly into the sky.

As Jesus was "taken up into heaven and . . . sat at the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19), he did not do so as an unobservant bystander. Jesus ascended to a position of authority and power over everything in the world. We know what his sitting at the Father's right hand means. It assures us that he is ruling over everything for the good of the church. So we can trust that even in and through troubling times, Christ is working for the good of us, his church. Jesus is in complete control.

The Ascension marks Jesus as our conquering hero, the one who perfectly completed the plan of salvation with his perfect life, the cross, and an empty tomb to give us eternal life. He returned to his heavenly home, not to leave us on our own, but because his work is complete. Therefore,

God's children by faith can look forward to rejoicing with our Savior in heaven for eternity.

As the disciples stared up into the sky, wondering if they'd ever see Jesus again, two angels appeared to reassure them that Jesus would come back, echoing Jesus' own promise: "I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:3).

Although we do not see him as the disciples did, Jesus promises that one day he will visibly return. At judgment day, every eye will see Jesus return. Believers staring into the sky as the disciples did at the Ascension will not fear or wonder, "What now?" They will shout with joy because the Savior has returned to take them to be with him forever, just as he promised. Jesus is coming back.

However, as we await Jesus' return, God doesn't want us to spend our lives staring aimlessly into the sky. Just as the angels snapped the disciples out of their cloud gazing, Jesus reveals the important task he has for us: "You will be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

We are Jesus' witnesses, joyful messengers with good news to share to the ends of the earth. As the disciples evangelized, "the Lord worked with them" (Mark 16:20). He wasn't physically at their side, but Jesus was with them. The work of the church is not just done for God, but also by God. As we carry out the work of evangelism, he goes with us too.

As we stand with the disciples this Ascension Day, we do so with comforted hearts. Our Savior is with us. He's in control. He's coming back. He's given us an important task, and he's with us as we carry it out. His presence gives us peace, comfort, hope, and reassurance because we know Jesus is still with us.

Troy Schreiner is pastor at Mount Olive, Appleton, Wisconsin.



ABIDING

truth

Our confidence as we face life and death is not based on faith, but on God's promises.

James F. Korthals

For years, Martin Luther lived in misery. He agonized over the uncertainty of his relationship with God. He viewed his Savior not as a loving God, but as an angry judge. To add to his spiritual turmoil, close encounters with death further deepened his despair. On one occasion, Luther suffered from a severe fever and witnessed a university friend die from the plague. He realized he could have been the one who died, but then what would happen? How could he come before God's judgement throne? Could he be saved?

WEIGHED DOWN BY HIS GUILT

After a close encounter with a lightning bolt, Luther's fear about eternity drove him to join the Augustinian Eremitic monastery in Erfurt. Upon his entry into this regimented existence, he was told his monastic vows would lift the load of guilt from his conscience. Monastic life would restore him to the status he had enjoyed immediately after his baptism. The record of his sins would be wiped clean, and he would be a new man.

Young Brother Martin dedicated himself to being a good monk. Yet peace with God continued to escape him. "Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God" (*Luther's Works* [LW], Vol. 34, p. 336,337).

Luther later commented, "If anyone could have earned heaven by the life of a monk, it was I" (*Luther The Reformer*, p. 53). Yet the harder he tried to please his

God, the more aware he became of his own sinfulness. Weighed down by his sins, Luther went without food for days and spent long hours in prayer. He thought he could beat the sin out of his life with a whip.

Johann von Staupitz, Luther's mentor and monastic superior, tried to direct him to God's mercy, but without success. Finally, Staupitz concluded that the young man needed more work to distract him from fixating on his sins. Staupitz ordered Luther to pursue an academic career. Ultimately, Staupitz wanted Luther to earn a doctorate in theology so he could teach at the new University of Wittenberg.

Luther no longer feared death but placed his faith—itsself a gift from God—in Christ who had won forgiveness for all his sins.

The Bible was not unknown to Brother Martin. The day Luther entered the monastery, he received a red leather-bound copy of the Vulgate, the Latin Bible. The demands of teaching forced Luther to study the Scriptures in depth. Yet what he found did not always comfort his troubled conscience. He heard the apostle Paul say, "In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Romans 1:17). When Luther read these words, his eyes were not drawn to the word *faith*, but to the word *righteous*. He thought, "Who could 'live by faith' but those who were already righteous?"

Luther remarked, "I hated that word 'righteousness of God,' which, according to the use and customs of all the teachers, I had been taught . . . [that] God is right-

eous and punishes the unrighteous sinner” (LW, Vol. 34, p. 336). Luther did not think he could live by faith because he knew he was not righteous.

FREED BY GOD’S GRACE

As Luther continued to study, he was led to see a way that overcame this dilemma. Years later, Luther wrote, “At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, . . . I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. . . . Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates” (LW, Vol. 34, p. 337).

Freed from the weight of his guilt and assured of divine love, Luther believed and taught that salvation is a gift of God’s grace. Faith trusts in God’s promise to forgive sins for the sake of Christ’s death on the cross. This forgiveness, Luther believed, was God’s work from beginning to end.

To Luther, the church was no longer an earthly institution headed by the pope; rather it was the community of all those to whom God had given faith. Luther knew the Bible said that there was no spark of goodness in us to seek God. Luther believed only “fools” built their theology on such a flimsy foundation. Humility was no longer a virtue that earned grace; it is a response to the gift of grace. Faith no longer consisted of following the church’s teachings, but consisted of trusting the promises of God.

Luther no longer feared death, but placed his faith—*itself a gift from God*—in Christ who had won forgiveness for all his sins.

In a 1527 sermon, Luther wrote confidently:

“When the hour of dying comes and death is before one’s eyes and frightens us with its glance of the devil’s cunning and God’s wrath, so that you think that you are certain to go under and you look around for a place to stay and to step . . . you must only look and direct all your senses to, and hear nothing other than, what God’s Word says. You should ignore what you feel or at least overcome it. Seize upon the Word and let nobody take it from you. Say to yourself, ‘Here I am in death’s distress and anxiety; but I know that I have been baptized and that God has promised me this and this.’ Put his Word above everything else, no matter how strongly death presses in!” (*Weimarer Ausgabe Schriften*, Vol. 24, p. 184).

James Korthals, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at David’s Star, Jackson, Wisconsin.

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

LUTHER

still speaks

Salvation is entirely by grace. Even the faith that lays hold on it is not of our doing, but through God’s gracious working in us. In his *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, written in 1520, Luther put it this way, “Do not think lightly of faith. It is a work that is of all works the most excellent and the most difficult. Through it alone you will be saved, even though you were obliged to do without all other works. For it is the work of God, not of man as Paul teaches (Eph. 1:19). The other works he performs with our cooperation and through us; this alone he works within us and without our cooperation.”

Today, some mistakenly insist that faith is something sinners must somehow produce in their hearts by their own efforts. Though Jesus died for the sins of the world, they teach that the sinner must also do his part. One must believe.

So we hear about people making their decision to believe. We hear theologians pointing to faith instead of to what faith believes. Luther correctly taught that faith is only the hand into which God pours his blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation. God must even break open the fist of unbelief by the power of the gospel to turn it into the receiving hand of faith.

All glory be to our gracious God who not only planned and prepared our salvation, but gave us the faith to believe it.

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



Believers in Christ have a deep peace, but living as a Christian in this world is a struggle.

Donald W. Patterson

When Paul and Barnabas passed back through Asia Minor where they had spread the gospel in their first missionary journey, they reminded the new Christians, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

Surely becoming a Christian is a great joy. For the first time in your life, you feel loved, forgiven, and right with God through the grace of your Savior. Nothing can compare with the freedom of faith! But the apostles were telling these new Christians that becoming a Christian in a world led by Satan puts us at war with him on several fronts.

When I think of this truth it reminds me of a dear Christian friend, Denise Hunt. She is a beautiful Jamaican woman whom the Lord moved to the neighborhood next to our church.

Denise is extremely extroverted, energetic, and downright charming. On the island of Jamaica, she is a celebrity. You can google her name and read all about

her. But before she visited our church, she did not have the peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding. For her, all faith—even the Christian faith—was a work of her own heart. She struggled; she wanted to be worthy. She had been taught a lot of good Christian moralism, but very little grace.

But she came to church, and she listened. She studied, prayed, and strained to understand. Hours of discussion with our pastoral team eventually paid off. One day, when she was praying, she realized deep in her soul that Jesus really did love her; that he alone died for her, and that there was nothing she could do to earn such love or deserve it. She trusted God’s promises in the gospel. It has changed her life for an eternity.


Now this ambassador of Jamaican fitness and entertainment is also an ambassador of the gospel. She wants everyone to know the peace of Christ right here and right now. She began to take territory from Satan as she shared Jesus with family and friends. That’s when life got a little tougher. Her struggle to believe morphed into a struggle to share the faith.

We’ve all been there. We live on the island of faith where Jesus feeds and waters our soul in his oasis of love and truth. And we see restless souls

passing our island like dark pirate ships filled with people trying to pilage the world for treasure that cannot satisfy the soul’s craving. So we beg them to come and taste the gospel with us. Not everyone takes us up on it. Instead, they even might argue with us, reject us, or insult our sincere trust in a God who both confronts and forgives at the same time.

Denise has religious friends who challenge her about the idea that Baptism saves or that Christ’s body and blood for forgiveness are really present in the Lord’s Supper. For her, Baptism seals her identity as a forgiven child of God. She knows all of her sins are washed away. She won’t let the devil guilt her. When she goes to the Lord’s Supper she knows she touches Jesus in a miraculous way. She attributes her overall wellness to the Lord’s Supper as much as to her exercise and diet. She has unbelieving friends who snicker at her vehement testimony about Christ and his sacraments. They are people she cares about, and it hurts that they reject the love of Christ. In addition, she faces the daily attraction to return to the world where she was very good at getting attention, praise, and admiration. Sound familiar? Her struggle is our struggle.

Recently, Denise joined us at the WELS South Central District Grow



Confessions OF FAITH

Conference, a conference that brings together pastors, teachers, and lay leaders to grow in God's Word and in their various roles within the church. There, she had more epiphanies. She gained new spiritual ammo to defend herself against the temptation to envy others and their lot in life. She still talks about how Jesus has custom-made her cross to bear for his name. As Denise will tell you, the cross every Christian has is unique. While our crosses are all different, they come from our faith in what Christ has done on his cross. By his sacrifice, we are freed from guilt and fear; we have forgiveness, life, and salvation. Trusting in his cross, we take up our own crosses and endure ridicule and hardship.

Denise is not just defending herself with the gospel. She is using it to claim territory that Satan once ruled. Through the Holy Spirit, her mother, Angela, and her sister Sasha have come to faith in Christ, trusting God's pure grace. It's fun to watch Jesus pluck people out of the devil's grasp and firmly establish them in his body.

Denise and her family are changing the congregation too. They are boldly different than our monocultural heritage. They challenge our thinking, awaken excitement in our Sunday



Denise Hunt

morning worship and Bible class, and push us to challenge all of our assumptions about people and culture. As a pastor, I am deeply refreshed and happily improved by their presence.

When Paul and Barnabas told those new Christians in Asia Minor that there would be struggles when entering the kingdom, the apostles weren't talking specifically about struggles in the church. But becoming part of a church that originated in a different

culture is a big struggle for Denise. She will often say, "I just don't get it! Uhhhhhh!" And she asks, "Why can't we do that?" or "Why does this church stand for this or that?" My old filters for discussing truth and practice are shattered as I struggle to see the world from her perspective and learn what she thinks, feels, and understands. It's a great adventure. God is using Denise and her family to change us just as he used us to change them. Jesus works that way. As members of the body of Christ hang in there with one another in durable love and grace, we morph into something new and better without giving up any truth. But it's a struggle. Jesus helps us with that too.

When I see Denise, I think of Paul's words in Philippians: "You will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life" (2:15,16). For years, Denise Hunt was just a star on the silver screen on the island of Jamaica. Now she is a star that shines on God's screen for the world to see.

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



heart to heart
parent conversations

I don't know about you, but the idea of my children surfing the Internet scares me. I'm unsure of how to protect them from the bad while letting them benefit from the good.

This month, Heart to heart is blessed to have articles from two moms who understand these fears; have lived through them themselves; and have a variety of helpful solutions so that the Internet can be a positive resource, rather than a scary one.

Nicole Balza

Discussing pornography WITH CHILDREN

Any child who is using the Internet can encounter pornography. Conquerors through Christ, a Special Ministries team that provides resources to help people avoid or stop using pornography, has compiled resources for parents to deal with this situation. *The First Word* is an e-book that provides advice for talking to a child about pornography. Other e-books include *Warning Kids About Pornography* and *Correcting Kids Who Use Pornography*. For more information, visit conquerorsthroughchrist.net, choose "resources," and then choose "eBooks."

HOW DO WE KEEP OUR CHILDREN SAFE ONLINE?

It seems like yesterday when the Lord blessed my husband and me with our three sons and we began the journey of parenthood in the digital age.

When our oldest was born in 1995, the Internet was brand-new to everyone. Being a bit geeky, my husband and I explored tools and techniques for creating websites, which led us to bridging the miles between us and our family and friends, sharing each of our boys' first-year baby milestones and photos via a website that we updated monthly.

Over time, as the boys grew, we continued to share monthly family news and photos using a "cutting-edge" blog platform to house our family website. Together with our sons, we've used the Internet to listen to family-friendly podcasts and free audio books, find geocaches and BreakoutEDU solutions, take care of our virtual pets, e-mail our favorite authors, learn to program, play games, create videos, design 3-D models, and so much more.

How many parents would take their two-year-olds to the pool for the first time and allow them to jump into the deep end? None, I hope! Being able to swim in the deep end is a process that requires lessons, practice, and experience, all guided by loving parents who want their children to enjoy swimming safely.

Staying safe on the Internet is not much different. If we want our teens to know how to enjoy using it safely, we must start the process early. This can be done in the light of God's Word and his commands.

Internet safety is a wide net, but most parents identify several areas in which they wish to keep their children safe online.

- They are concerned with the addictive potential of games.
- They share concern over their children stumbling upon offensive sites, such as pornography. This is often connected with the idea of sexting, which occurs as early as middle school.
- Finally, parents fear the online social sites that encourage kids to talk with others, whether on gaming sites or social media sites that encourage kids to follow and be followed by others. These sites raise the concern of meeting strangers online who may not be who they portray, as well as the opportunity for online bullying.

Unfortunately, many of us ignore these things until a problem arises. Being proactive in approaching these subjects really helps. Start early.

As parents, if we treat technology as a gift of God while training children to be aware of the dark side on the Internet, we can pray that they develop their Christian faith to assist them in making good and responsible choices. One way we can do that is by talking freely about the evil that is in the world that is now

Now our boys are reaching adulthood, and we are fast approaching the empty-nest stage. As I reflect on the years of their childhood, I remember the joys and challenges we encountered along the way in relation to technology. In this sinful world, it is impossible to keep our children 100 percent safe from the dangers the Internet invites into our homes. Here are some of the steps we took to guard their safety:

- **Engage with them**—Before allowing our boys to visit a website, we tried it out ourselves or sought the opinions of others regarding it. (A great site for reviews of all types of children's media is commonsensedia.org.) As our boys used websites, we used them too, guiding our boys along the way and explaining any areas of concern that came up.
- **Help them create**—We used the tools available on the Internet to excite our sons to use the Internet for good and noble purposes. As they learned how to code video games, we encouraged them to expand the program's capabilities. When their interest was piqued by podcasts, we started a

weekly family podcast. Over the years, we used our family blog to share the boys' creative writing, stop-motion movies, and Haiku poetry.

- **Block inappropriate content**—Many software solutions for filtering inappropriate Internet content in the home are available. Something we've used for many years is OpenDNS, opendns.com/home-internet-security. The free Family Shield and Home plans include parental controls that protect every device in the home.

My husband and I did all of these things with an end goal in mind—giving our sons discerning hearts. All too quickly, they have grown up and ventured out into the world alone. Now they must rely on their own judgement regarding the appropriateness of Internet content. Our prayer is that the lessons learned in their early years will stay with them.

Sallie Draper and her husband, Kevin, have three sons and live in New Ulm, Minnesota.



manifested online and can be found one click away. We can discuss this during devotions and in conversations with our children from the time they are in grade school and beyond.

The old model of keeping the desktop computer in an area of the home where Mom and Dad are walking through and can be aware of computer activity may seem outdated since we now deal with smartphones, tablets, Chromebooks, and laptops. I think it is still reasonable to expect grade school and middle school kids to use their technology in a common area of the home. It is legitimate for a parent to be made aware of musical playlists so that when headphones are used, parents know what is being consumed. As kids grow and schoolwork requires technology, a quiet place may be desirable, but it should still be understood that when homework is being done on the computer, that is all that is happening and parents may come by to see how it is going. Parents need to be vigilant.

At a time determined by parents, all mobile technology can be unplugged and kept in a specified spot. For example, maybe all family devices get plugged in at a common location for the night. Enforce the rules as you talk about why they are good for the family.

Parents can also make rules regarding time limits for game playing and can talk openly about gaming choices and their possible effects on those who play them. Conversations about learning to discern should be ongoing. Social gaming sites, perhaps, should not be allowed until a parent feels the child can make competent choices in this regard. Parents will need to model good online behavior and set the tone for what is acceptable in the home. It should be a family effort.

The creation of the Internet brings many good things to us, but the reality is that it has created another level of parenting. Parents must include applications regarding the misuse of the Internet as they teach their children to discern right from wrong in all facets of life. For example, what

is learned in the home as far as how to treat one another in God-pleasing ways can help children be aware of the inappropriateness of bullying online. It is an extension of bullying face-to-face. The idea of sexting as a practice can be addressed as veering outside of what God has commanded us regarding how to keep our bodies chaste. This is an extension of pre-Internet conversations with children that now need to be brought into the scope of what sins are possible through technology. We ask God to keep us from temptation in all we do, including in our use of technology.

Parents have always taught their children about “stranger danger.” This same conversation now must be expanded to teach children about the very real dangers of social media sites with followers. Talking on those sites or on online chat areas should be discouraged. The news often shares stories of online predators and the attempt to catch them, and you can discuss these news items at family gathering times to drive this point home.

We are blessed to have God's Word as our handbook for parenting, and it is up to us as parents to continue to nurture our children in that Word as we make applications from the technology that is so ubiquitous in our culture today. May he bless our prayerful efforts!

For a comprehensive list of websites to help parents keep their children safe online, visit forwardinchrist.net/online-safety-resources.

Gail Potratz and her husband, Phil, have three adult children and eight grandchildren. Gail has served as a teacher and technology coordinator for more than 30 years.



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

Support in times of trouble

Depression and anxiety were unexpected, but healthcare, faith, and Christian friends were blessings.

Andi Franklin

Starting college, there were many things that I expected to experience. Some of these included late nights studying, making new friends, and gaining independence.

I also had experiences that were different from those of a typical college student. I didn't leave my bed for over 36 hours on multiple weekends. I lied to my professors that I overslept when I couldn't bring myself to attend classes. If I thought about answering a question in class, I would start to shake. I wondered why I was struggling so much while all of my peers seemed to eat, sleep, and attend class with no problem. Five months ago, I learned I was struggling with mental illness and was later diagnosed with anxiety and depression.

When I was first told about this, I was in denial. I was a straight A, highly involved student. How could I have a mental illness if I was defined as successful by society? I later came to accept that mental illness doesn't discriminate.

But I also learned that many individuals do not understand how debilitating mental illness truly is. Depression is like having weights tied to your limbs and around your neck. At first, they don't seem very heavy. Eventually, the weights become heavier, and you struggle to stay upright. You can feel yourself hunching over, but you need to keep walking.

Struggling with mental illness as a college student can lead you to ask many questions: What if I can't finish my degree? Will my professors understand when I can't come to class or finish my assignments? Will my friends be supportive when I tell them I can't handle going out tonight? Thankfully, my friends and professors have been very understanding of my mental illness.

Mental illness will never be easy as a full-time student, but being a Christian has led me to ask more difficult questions about dealing with a mental illness.

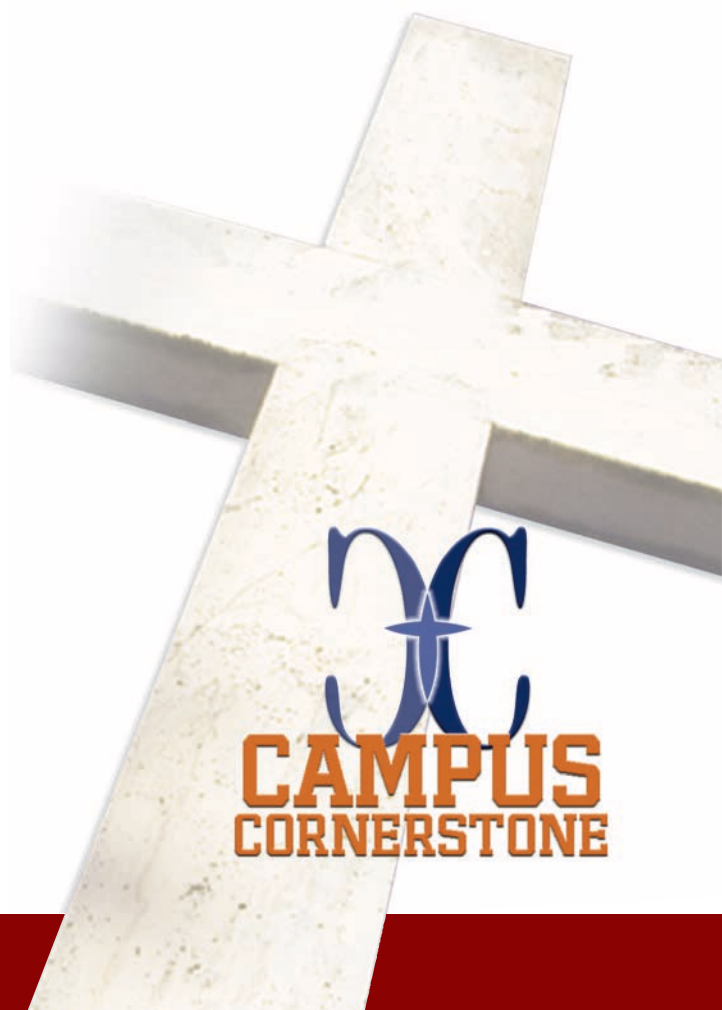
Growing up, I learned that God doesn't make mistakes and has a plan for everything. I was told to pray in times of trouble because God would answer me. But when I was questioning the point of my existence, hearing "just pray" discouraged me. I felt guilty going to church and ended up not going altogether. I wondered why God would create me to have a mental illness. I thought that if I reached out for help, others would look down on me for not trusting in God.

What I forgot is that God gives us many blessings, even in times of trouble.

God has given two large blessings to support me as I struggle with mental illness: healthcare providers and the church. It has been five months since I started seeing a counselor and three since I started taking medication for my depression and anxiety. After suffering quietly for almost ten years, I am so thankful to have a support system that consists of people who constantly encourage me in my studies and my faith. You don't have to be an expert on mental illness to help someone. Asking how you can help is more than enough.

Prayer is powerful, but sometimes you can't just pray away illnesses. We need to support our friends and neighbors in times of trouble. They have supported me. "Encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Andi Franklin, a junior at University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, Stevens Point, Wisconsin, is a member at St. Paul, North Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Bater, Noah M., to Prince of Peace, Thousand Oaks, Calif.

Gensmer, John R., to Abiding Love, Cape Coral, Fla.

Italiano, Luke D., to Amazing Grace, Florence, Ky.

Luchterhand, Stephen M., to Trinity, Minocqua, Wis.

Mohlke, Howard O., to Apache Christian Training School, Whiteriver, Ariz.

Ruddat, David M., to Immanuel, De Pere, Wis.

Schmeichel, Duane C., to Lamb of God, Madison, Ala.

Schulz, Thomas A., to retirement

Warmuth, John E., to retirement

Teachers

Brown, Melissa R., to Riverview, Appleton, Wis.

Fetcenko, Michael J., to St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis.

Gurgel, Bradley P., to St. Peter, Saint Peter, Minn.

Hagedorn, Jill M., to Bethany, Kenosha, Wis.

Heyn, Matthew J., to Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz.

Huebner, Jonathan P., to St. Croix Lutheran Grades 6-12, West Saint Paul, Minn.

Kasten, Kirsten J., to Huron Valley Lutheran High School, Westland, Mich.

Kolander, Alison J., to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.

Mensching, Erin L., to St. Jacobi, Greenfield, Wis.

Plocher, Joel T., to Holy Trinity, Des Moines, Wash.

Plocher, Kelli L., to Holy Trinity, Des Moines, Wash.

Pufahl, Casey D., to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.

Ross, Jessica R., to Shepherd of the Hills, La Mesa, Calif.

Schulz, Candace R., to St. Paul Lutheran Early Childhood Center, Appleton, Wis.

Seeger, Jeremy F., to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.

Sorn, Lacey L., to Evergreen Lutheran High School, Tacoma, Wash.

Springer, Michelle L., to St. Paul, Ixonia, Wis.

Vasold, Steven T., to Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

White, Steven K., to St. Paul, South Haven, Mich.

Staff minister

Scharf, Angela R., to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

ANNIVERSARIES

Waterloo, Wis.—St. John (150). May 14. Worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M. July 23. Worship, 9 A.M. office@stjohnwaterloo.org.

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

262-367-3617.

Brookings, S.D.—Our Savior (50). June 11. Worship, 10 A.M.; catered meal and program to follow. RSVP requested by June 1. oslcsec@hotmail.com.

Sturgis, Mich.—St. John's (150). June 11. Worship, 9:30 A.M.; dinner to follow. RSVP requested for meal. 269-651-5308; stjohssturgismi@gmail.com.

Chaseburg, Wis.—St. Peter's Hamburg (150). June 18. Worship, 1:30 P.M.; refreshments to follow. RSVP requested. 608-689-2341; genoachristy@yahoo.com.

Mankato, Minn.—St. Mark (75). June 25. Worship, 10 A.M. and 2 P.M.; meal, noon. RSVP requested for meal. Michele, 507-720-4187. Website, stmarksmankato.com.

COMING EVENTS

Commencement events—Website, wels.net/events.

- **Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.**—May 12. Concert, 4 and 7:30 P.M. May 13. Graduation service, 10 A.M.; call day and assignment of graduates, 2:30 P.M.

- **Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.**—May 16. Vicar assignment service, 7 P.M. May 18. Call day service and assignment of graduates, 10 A.M.; concert, 7 P.M. May 19. Graduation service, 10 A.M.

- **Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.**—May 19. Concert, 7 P.M. May 20. Graduation service, 10 A.M.

- **Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.**—May 26. Concert, 7 P.M. May 27. Graduation service, 10:30 A.M.

Martin Luther College Wind Symphony tour—Website, mlc-wels.edu.

- May 14, 10:30 A.M., St. John's, Nodine, Minn.; 7 P.M., Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.

- May 15, 8:30 A.M., Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.; 7 P.M., Michigan Lutheran High School, St. Joseph, Mich.

- May 16, 8:45 A.M., Michigan Lutheran High School, St. Joseph, Mich.; 7 P.M., Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

- May 17, 9:30 A.M., Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.; 7 P.M., Huron Valley Lutheran High School, Westland, Mich.

- May 18, 9 A.M., Huron Valley Lutheran High School, Westland, Mich.

- May 19, 7 P.M., St. Paul, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

- May 21, 11 A.M., Hope, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

WELS support staff conference—June 5.

Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis. Website, kmlhs.org/ssconference.

Final service—June 11. Zum Kripplein Christi, Iron Ridge, Wis. 11 A.M., celebration service; picnic to follow. RSVP requested.

Daniel Babinec, d.babinec@yahoo.com.

The National Conference on Worship Music and the Arts—June 13–16.

Carthage College, Kenosha, Wis. Regional conference, June 27–30. Irvine, California. Register now. cw@wels.net. Website, wels.net/worshipconference.

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

54th annual Lutheran Women's Missionary Society convention—June 22–25.

Hyatt Regency Orlando Hotel, Orlando, Fla. Theme: "Around the world with missions" (Mark 16:15). Website, lwms.org.

Ice cream social—July 16. 10:30 A.M. to 1 P.M. St. Mark's Lutheran School, Watertown, Wis. Hosted by Alpha Life Resource Center. Website, alphalifecenter.org.

Bus tour—Aug. 4. Daylong tour of historic WELS churches in Milwaukee area. Host, WELS Historical Institute. Register by July 1. Website, welsrc.net/event/wels-historical-institute-bus-tour/; Lois, lois.artlip@icloud.com or 414-525-5564.

WELS family campout—Aug. 4–6. Silent Valley Club, Banning, Calif. Host, King of Kings, Garden Grove, Calif. Steve, s_r_bruce@roadrunner.com.

NAMES WANTED

Chattanooga, Tenn., or north Georgia—WELS members, people living in the area, retired or visitors. Mary, packer fan67@hotmail.com, 414-690-0569.

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

Lehi, Utah—WELS members, people living in the area, retired or visitors. New mission, Lehi, Utah. Daniel Heiderich, dheiderich@gmail.com, 801-889-7942.

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.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

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

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

Moments with MISSIONARIES

MALAWI, AFRICA

John E. Holtz



AFRICA

The scar is a daily reminder of a fight gone wrong. Horribly wrong.

The flash of a knife. The violent stab. The trip to the hospital.

It happened in 1966, but Chitanzane Kantokoma Mapulanga recalls that day as if it were yesterday: “I was a wild person. I was fond of fighting other people.”

Just looking at Chitanzane’s stature—short and thin—you wouldn’t guess that he used to be a fighter.

Except for the scar.

He remembers when he took on six thugs at once, and when the dust settled, he was the only one standing. He was a scrappy guy who did his talking with his fists.

As he reflects upon his former way of life and the “sins of his youth,” he admits that at that time, he didn’t even feel sorrow over the wrong things he did. He marvels today that his wife, Emily, hadn’t left him years ago. “I purposefully was doing things contrary to the Word of God, but I was not even feeling guilty about it,” he says. “I was just a person with a hard heart.”

A “Pharaoh of Egypt” of sorts.

Then God once again sent a “Moses.” His name was Charles Kabadula. He was an evangelist in the Lutheran Church of Central Africa—Malawi. Their paths crossed, and that was the turning point for Chitanzane. He fondly remembers the late Evangelist Kabadula as the one

person God used to dramatically impact his life.

Moses said to Pharaoh: “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Let my people go’ ” (Exodus 5:1).

Charles said to Chitanzane: “This is what the Lord says: ‘Let go of this kind of life!’ ”



On his own, Chitanzane couldn’t. He’d always go back to fighting. But the Holy Spirit stepped into the ring and did his work. God gave Chitanzane both the motivation and the power to break free from sin’s mastery and chains. The Lord used Charles to share the Word of God with Chitanzane to show him the One who willingly fought for him: Jesus.

If you ever wonder if the gospel has the power to soften hearts of stone and hands of hatred, look at Chitanzane. The gloves and the chains came off. Grace and forgiveness unclenched Chitanzane’s angry fists; instead of using them for fighting, he began to use them to hold the Bible.

He is still doing so!

Like Charles, his spiritual father and mentor, Chitanzane Kantokoma Mapulanga eventually went on to become an evangelist in the Lutheran Church of Central Africa in Malawi. He’s been in and out of retirement, but at 74 years old, he is still picking up the Scriptures in trembling hands! He currently serves three congregations in the villages of Fisi, Liwinga, and Kachere. Weekly, he stands before a congregation preaching and teaching the Word of God.

That’s his passion and purpose for living. “The gospel touched my life. Through faith in Christ I know that I’m going to heaven!” he says.

When the Lord does finally call Chitanzane home to heaven, I wonder, will he and Jesus compare their scars? I can imagine the exchange already:

Chitanzane: “Look, Lord,” he says as he runs a finger across the slash mark on his face, “the day I got this I almost died.”

Jesus: “Look, Chitanzane,” as he shows him his hands and feet and side, “the day I got these . . . I did.”

Scarred for life. For our eternal life!

John Holtz is a missionary in Malawi, Africa.

Learn more about mission work at wels.net/missions.

A new way to support MLC students

A new program is allowing congregations to further support sons and daughters of the congregation who are studying at Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., to be WELS' future called workers.

The Congregational Partner Grant Program started as a pilot project during the 2016–17 school year. Through the program, congregations could give grants up to \$1,000 to freshmen at MLC; MLC then matched the grant,

doubling the assistance given to students. More than 78 congregations participated, supporting 108 incoming first-year students—more than half of the freshmen class.

St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis., already had a scholarship program set up to provide help for ministerial education students from the congregation. The grant program allowed money for the four freshmen from the congregation to be doubled. Norris Baumann, one of the pastors at St. Paul, says it also gave the pastors an opportunity to remind the congregation about supporting these students. “Communicating with the congregation about these students and praying for them is important,” he says. “[We need] to highlight these special future servants—make the congregation aware of these gifts, because these students are gifts!”

Jeremy Fluegge, a member at St. Paul's who is at MLC studying to be a pastor, appreciates the congregation's support—both monetarily and spiritually. “The pastors and members of St. Paul's are always inquisitive concerning my studies at MLC. They genuinely are excited for my progress and continued success,” he says. “It's truly difficult to put into words what it means to hear that my fellow members of the holy Christian church have my back as I prepare to bring the gospel to all nations.”

Making that personal connection to students is an important reason the grant program was started, according to Mike Otterstatter, vice president of mission advancement at MLC. “It's one thing to give to worker training; it's a whole other thing to give to worker training and have it connected to a face and a name of a kid whom maybe you saw baptized as an infant and grow up over the past 18 years. It just makes it so personal.”

Otterstatter says he still feels that personal connection to the congregation in which he grew up—Christ, Eagle



Jeremy Fluegge, a first-year student at Martin Luther College, appreciates the support he gets from his home congregation, St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis. “It's helpful to know that other Christians are praying for you and hoping for the best for you,” he says.

River, Wis.—whether it was through money the church sent to help him with his school payments or the support he received when preaching his first sermon there or the continued shared memories when he visits while on vacation. “I have fond memories of that support from my brothers and sisters in the faith—those people who treated me like theirs for all those years. That's the love and connection and the beauty of our little WELS world.”

For the 2017–18 school year, the Congregational Partner Grant Program will also include sophomores. The hope is that eventually it will be open for all students—just another way to help reduce their debt upon graduation.



Learn more about the Congregational Partner Grant Program by watching this month's episode of *WELS Connection* or by visiting mlc-wels.edu/go/cpgf.

ENCOURAGING FUTURE CALLED WORKERS

With a large Lutheran elementary school connected to the church and an area Lutheran high school close by, St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis., has many opportunities to encourage its young people to consider the ministry. Next school year, 14 members will be attending Martin Luther College, and 1 will be attending Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. “We are a blessed congregation,” says Norris Baumann, pastor at St. Paul, “and we felt we needed a program to support these students.”

The congregation set up a scholarship fund seven years ago to help these students with college tuition. It also sends gift cards for gas, food, and other expenses at Christmas-time for that mid-year boost.

But these aren't the only ways the congregation supports these future called workers. The congregation offers the students ways to get involved when they come home—whether it's through playing music in church on the weekends, participating in early field experience at St. Paul's Lutheran School, or reading the Scriptures during Sunday services. Baumann says these activities not only help train the students but also make them visible in the congregation. “They're the future shepherds, teachers, and staff ministers of our church body. We need to support them.”

Meet the editorial staff—uncut

Ever ask yourself, “Who are these people who write for Forward in Christ?” Through this series you can find out.

Turn to page 7. Simply titled “Devotion,” every issue of *Forward in Christ* includes a meditation on a Scripture passage penned by a contributing editor. The newest writer for this series is Peter Prange, pastor at Bethany, Kenosha, Wis.

Prange was born in Janesville, Wis., on April 18, 1972, to Pastor Victor and Ana Prange. He became God’s child through Baptism on April 30. He spent his grade school years in local public schools and attended Northwestern Preparatory School and Northwestern College in Watertown, Wis. He completed his training for the public ministry at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. His vicar year was spent at three New Orleans area congregations. In May 1998, he graduated and was assigned to Good Shepherd, Jacksonville, Fla. In addition to his time in Florida, Prange also served at Jerusalem Lutheran Church and School, Morton Grove, Ill., and Living Word, Johnson City, Tenn.



Peter and Tarren Prange

Why did he become a pastor? Prange comes from a long line of pastors on both sides of his family. “It’s kind of in the blood, though I was never pushed into pastoral ministry,” he says. “Good models, good teachers, and, most of all, a gracious Savior led me to pastoral ministry. Any competency I have comes from him alone (2 Corinthians 3:5).”

Prange met his wife, Tarren, when he was in Florida, and the couple was married in December 2003. Tarren works in the Infant Special Care Unit at the Evanston Hospital in Illinois. She is currently pursuing her license to become a nurse practitioner. The Pranges are blessed with two children, Lucas, 12, and Grace, 10.

Prange uses his free time for “family, theological reading, listening to various kinds of music, and cheering for his family’s beloved Chicago Cubs.” Special interests are family and church history. He’s not new to writing either, co-authoring *Jars of Clay: A History of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (1863-2013)* for the seminary’s 150th anniversary. He also was a member of the committee that produced *Christian Worship: Supplement*.

Prange currently serves on the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations, which represents the synod in doctrinal discussions with US and worldwide Lutheran church bodies. “In recent years there has also been increasing coordination with the WELS Board for World Missions and Board for Ministerial Education as we work together to encourage and, when appropriate, carefully shepherd burgeoning confessional Lutheran churches and communities around the world, especially in second and third world countries,” he says.

Prange’s devotions will appear several times throughout the year. “My prayer is that these devotions will highlight the profound gift of grace our Savior so freely gives to broken people like us and that his grace is a dramatic reflection of the fact that his thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are our ways his ways.”

He closes, “Simply, . . . I’m privileged to serve our Savior and his people.”

Ann Ponath

Read Prange’s first devotion on p. 7.

Funding for new and enhanced mission work

In late March 2017, the Board for Home Missions approved funding for four new Home Mission starts and three ministry enhancements for existing congregations.

Every winter, the board reviews proposals for funding and, based on how much money is available, determines where these gifts to ministry can best serve the Lord’s church. The \$554,000 of new project funding for fiscal year 2017–18 is possible through a portion of Congregation Mission Offerings, an endowment payout from the WELS Church Extension Fund, and gifts to the “Every Neighbor, Every Nation” mission campaign.

Shepherd of the Valley, Westminster, Colo., received funding to call a second pastor to start a second campus in the new growing community of Candelas. The multi-site concept, a growing model for congregations around the synod, allows a church to expand its ministry footprint but keep both sites under one financial budget and one leadership team.

Phil Kieselhorst, pastor at Shepherd of the Valley, says, “The second-site campus pastor will focus on organizing and leading consistent outreach efforts, training and coordinating the core group, following up on prospects, teaching and preaching, and providing pastoral assistance to new members.” Current Shepherd of the Valley members already have been canvassing and reaching out to new residents for two years. The congregation is positioned to be one of the first neighborhood churches in this growing area.

At Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis., new funding will help with calling a second pastor, allowing Aaron Bublitz, the congregation’s current

pastor, to focus on the pastoral needs of Mt. Lebanon's elementary school students and their families. The school is part of Milwaukee's School Choice program, and many of the students come from unchurched families in the neighborhood. Since 2011, 128 people have been baptized through the school, including students and their family members.

"Up until now we have been trying to serve a congregation of 400 souls and a school of 220 (many of whom are unchurched) and, at the same time, aggressively reaching out to our neighborhood with one pastor and one part-time staff minister. The Lord has blessed us with a vibrant ministry and a ripe mission field, but it has been difficult to take advantage of all the opportunities God has placed before us because of resources," says Bublitz. "This support from the Board for Home Missions will allow us to double our pastoral staff to share the means of grace and equip our congregation to serve, allowing us to reach more people with the life-saving and changing gospel."

Three additional new mission starts will be funded in Hendersonville, N.C.; Huntersville, N.C.; and Chattanooga, Tenn. In multicultural ministry, Immanuel, Waukegan, Ill., will receive funds to assist with a growing Hispanic ministry. King of Kings, Little Rock, Ark., also received funding to call a full-time pastor.

"Home Missions is about reaching as many of our neighbors as possible with the gospel," says Keith Free, administrator for Home Missions. "This can be through starting new churches, expanding multicultural outreach, or reaching more families through enhancing existing ministries. This year, Home Missions has been blessed to be able to support different types of ministry work that all have the same goal—sharing God's Word with our neighbors."

To learn more about WELS mission work, visit wels.net/missions.

Making connections with sisters in Christ

"We are ordinary Christian ladies," says Rebecca Wendland, "committed to serving Christ as a priority, supporting our husbands in their ministries, living in faith, daily trusting that our God will provide and follow through on his promises and give us what is needed to cope with whatever may come our way."

Wendland, who has spent 14 years in Malawi, Africa, with her husband, Robert, was one of 24 world missionary wives who gathered together in Athens, Greece, from Feb. 23–27. This conference, the first of its kind, was funded by the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society.

As Julia Wagenknecht, a member of the conference planning committee who has spent time on many different world mission fields, explains, "The theme for our precious four days together was '(En) Courage in Christ,' and that theme wove into areas of family life, ministry, and cross-cultural experiences. Many hugs were exchanged along with stories of blessings and challenges from those recently new to a mission field to some who have spent 30-plus years in world mission service."

Throughout the weekend the women had opportunities to tour the sites of Athens and learn the history of Greece while making historical connections to biblical stories through the Bible study on the book of Acts led by Andrea Wordell, who served with her husband, Brad, in Asia for many years.

"Having a devotion 'on location' of certain Scripture references was profound as it deepened my understanding of the meaning in context," says Wendland. "Studying the Word with the other American WELS women was so precious because we don't have those opportunities very often."

In addition to sightseeing and Bible study, the conference included worship, breakout sessions, and time for the women to get to know one another.

Susan Nitz, who serves alongside her husband, Paul, in Malawi, says, "By the end of the conference, it seemed as if we were all close friends instead of strangers, and it was evident that the goal of our conference had been met—to make connections with sisters in Christ serving in distant places and form relationships that will continue after our brief four days together."

Wendland notes that the group has been keeping in touch since the conference ended through an instant messaging smartphone app. She says, "I am so encouraged by the ladies as we all pray for each other. It is wonderful to get to know the women and their varied ministries. Some have sent updates and pictures from their latest programs. Some are sharing photos and updates of daily ministry and living. It brings a sense of togetherness in our united world mission work that we have never known before."



World missionary wives met in Athens, Greece, in February. They toured famous sites such as the Parthenon (pictured), joined in worship and Bible study, and cherished time together with women who understand the unique blessings and challenges of world mission work.

Stones remind members of Baptism

There are small ways that Christians can remember their baptisms, such as looking at photos or talking to their sponsors about the day. The members of St. Peter, St. Albert, Alberta, Canada, now have a physical reminder of their baptisms in their baptismal font. The font, located at the entrance of the church, holds baptismal stones with a name and baptismal date inscribed on each stone.

The idea for the font came as St. Peter's was refurbishing the church. The design team incorporated the natural fountain look seen in the yards of nearby houses with the rock-solid structure symbolizing God's truth. A river made of stones leads from the font to the front of the church. From the river came the idea for the baptismal stones to remind members of their connection to St. Peter's, as well as to remind them of their baptisms.

On Jan. 8, Baptism Sunday, the church held a special service where the engraved stones were laid out on a table,



St. Peter, St. Albert, Alberta, Canada, incorporated a rock fountain into its entryway and filled it with baptismal stones inscribed with the names and dates of baptized members.

corresponding to each baptized member from the past ten years. Members, old and young, helped each other find their stones and place them in the water of the font.

"It was probably one of the highlights of my ministry here," says Dan Habben, St. Peter's pastor. "It was a very Christian, caring moment—the kind of picture that the church should always be."

Habben says he hopes to continue the service each year on Baptism Sunday. Anyone who was baptized in the last year would receive a stone at that service to put into the water.

"You don't really foresee how something like this can touch someone, but a lot of times it does," notes Habben.

Gabriella Moline

A new Bible study starting this month will examine Old Testament monuments like these stones and how they serve as reminders to believers then and now. Check out the first article on p. 33.

Obituaries

Dorma J. Reinke, 1941–2017

Dorma Reinke (née Witt) was born July 19, 1941, in Mauston, Wis. She died Jan. 1, 2017, in Big Bend, Wis.

A 1962 graduate of Doctor Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she served Timothy, Saint Louis Park, Minn.; St. John, Maribel, Wis.; Christ, Big Bend, Wis.; and Redeemer, Tucson, Ariz.

She is survived by her husband, Ronald; two daughters; one son; and eight grandchildren.

Susan A. Lemke, 1941–2017

Susan Lemke (née Reichart) was born Jan. 23, 1941, in Milwaukee, Wis. She died Jan. 21, 2017, in Brillion, Wis.

She served Trinity, Brillion, Wis.; Illinois Lutheran Elementary School, Crete, Ill.; Our Shepherd Child Care Center, Appleton, Wis.; St. Peter, Appleton, Wis.; and Bethany, Appleton, Wis.

She is survived by two sons, six grandchildren, and one sister.

Donald A. Seifert, 1937–2017

Donald Seifert was born May 10, 1937, in Redwood Falls, Minn. He died Jan. 22, 2017, in Valencia, Calif.

A 1963 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served as pastor at Good Shepherd, Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Christ, Marshall, Minn.; Gethsemane, Los Angeles, Calif.; and Calvary, Canyon Country, Calif.

He is survived by his wife, Rosalie; four sons; nine grandchildren; two sisters; and one brother.

Leslie L. Kehl, 1923–2017

Leslie Kehl was born May 16, 1923, in Columbus, Wis. He died Feb. 5, 2017, in Marinette, Wis.

He served at St. Stephen, Adrian, Mich.; St. Paul, Menomonee, Wis.; St. Paul, Ixonia, Wis.; St. Paul, Livonia, Mich.; David's Star, Jackson, Wis.; Trinity, Manitowoc, Wis.; and St. Peter, Weyauwega, Wis.

He is survived by five sons, nine grandchildren, and nine great-grandchildren. He is preceded in death by his wife, Mabel, and two brothers.

WELS districts plan Reformation 500 celebrations

Lutherans around the world are celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation this year. Several WELS districts are planning their own celebrations.

“This 500th celebration is a great opportunity to teach everyone, but especially our children, about the blessings that came out of the Reformation,” says Kerry Kronebusch.

Kronebusch is coordinating a Reformation Day for the Nebraska District on Oct. 21 at Nebraska Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb. The centerpiece of the day will be a Reformation Walk, which will include stations where visitors will learn about the Reformation.

The Nebraska District is also holding a Reformation 500 worship service on Oct. 29 in Lincoln, Neb.

The Western Wisconsin District is hosting a “sacred commemorative event at the Dane County Coliseum in Madison, Wis., on Oct. 29,” says

Richard Lehmann, co-chairman of this Reformation 500 celebration. “This will include a festival worship service with a district mass choir, a teen choir, and a children’s choir. We really want it to be a district celebration with district members performing and district members uplifted in the audiences.”

Following the festival service, a hymn-sing will be led by the Christian band Koiné.

The Dakota-Montana District is holding a worship service for those in the eastern part of the district on Oct. 25 in Watertown, S.D., and in the western part of the district on Nov. 4 in Roscoe, S.D. The Great Plains Lutheran High School choir will sing at both services.

On Oct. 28, the Northern Wisconsin District is hosting a Reformation celebration at the Performing Arts Center in Appleton, Wis. The Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Choir will partici-

pate during the worship service.

The Arizona-California District is planning a Reformation celebration at its joint pastor and teacher conference on Nov. 2 and 3. Some activities, such as the festival worship service on Nov. 2, will be open to the public.

The Michigan District is hosting a worship service at St. Paul, Columbus, Ohio, on Nov. 4, and at the Dow Event Center in Saginaw, Mich., on Nov. 5. Huron Valley Lutheran High School, Westland, Mich., is serving as the site for Luther Fest 500, an Octoberfest celebration, on Oct. 28.

For more details about these events and to find other Reformation 500 celebrations, visit wels.net/reformation500/reformation-events.



District news

ARIZONA-CALIFORNIA

On Jan. 29, **Our Shepherd, Cornville, Ariz.**, moved into the renovated building on its property. This includes a house that was converted into a welcome center and an attached garage that is serving as the worship center. On March 19, Our Shepherd dedicated this new facility, which WELS Church Extension Fund helped finance.

NORTH ATLANTIC

On Feb. 25, **Living Savior, Asheville, N.C.**, held its first service in its new Hendersonville location.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

On March 12, **First, Racine, Wis.**, dedicated its new pipe organ.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

SEW—On March 12, **Zion, Hartland, Wis.**, celebrated its 150th anniversary.

MN—St. John, Redwood Falls, Minn., celebrated the 25th anniversary in the teaching ministry of **Dave Gartner** on March 19.

The district reporters for this month are: AZ-CA—Michael Schroeder; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NA—Philip Gurgel; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

WELS news briefs

MINISTERIAL EDUCATION

414-256-3236; paul.prange@wels.net

Commencement events at the ministerial education schools will be streamed live in May. You can access the livestream from the WELS website, wels.net/events. Here is a list of dates and times for the live-streamed events:



Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

May 12—Concert, 4 and 7:30 P.M. CDT

May 13—Graduation service, 10 A.M.; call day service and assignment of graduates, 2:30 P.M. CDT

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.

May 16—Vicar assignment service, 7 P.M. CDT

May 18—Call day service and assignment of graduates, 10 A.M.; concert, 7 P.M. CDT

May 19—Graduation service, 10 A.M. CDT

Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

May 19—Commencement concert, 7 P.M. CDT

May 20—Graduation service, 10 A.M. CDT

Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

May 26—Commencement concert, 7 P.M. EDT

May 27—Graduation service, 10:30 A.M. EDT



Our tongues can be difficult to control at times. We need God's help to speak the truth in love.

Victoria Rahn

We live in contentious times. Blistering politics, social ills, political upheavals, racism, terrorism, all kinds of violence, and anger surround us on every side.

In the middle of all the arguing, we find the often awkward idea of “political correctness.” A very general definition could be “behavior aimed at not offending others, usually verbally.” Depending on who you ask, political correctness is just common courtesy, necessary to maintain respect in public discourse, a way to punish people who don’t conform, the method by which politicians get reelected or other famous people keep up a good public image, an out-and-out lie, or some variation of those definitions.

Most people would agree that it’s impossible never to offend anyone. But like many impossible things, that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t try.

THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK

Whether applying the concept of political correctness to politicians and other celebrities or using it in our daily conversations with friends, coworkers, and passing acquaintances, it’s good to remember that people say things without thinking. At one time or another, we’ve all been offended by something someone said. Words spoken in haste can come out poorly no matter who is speaking, but that doesn’t mean the person meant to offend. As my mom would say, we owe others the benefit of the doubt, taking their words in the best possible way. In that way, we treat others as we ourselves would want to be treated.

Our sinful nature moves us to speak carelessly and without considering that the words might do real damage, to lash out because someone else hurt us, and to express opinions just to

impress or accomplish one's own ends instead of trying to help others. The speaker is only thinking of him or herself and not about what God wants. Reluctantly, I have to admit that this is a common sin with me. Whether I'm just trying to make sure people know where I stand on an issue or I wrongly assume my listener will agree, I speak without thinking and end up making things worse, rather than better. It's not easy to stop. When I do, then I wonder if I'm just trying to get along by swallowing my words and being dishonest about what I think and believe.

The term *viral* is amazingly on the nose when it comes to mean and insulting words. Words really do hurt, no matter how much we try to ignore them. They may not cause physical harm, but they often affect us emotionally, mentally, and even spiritually. They sometimes inflict injuries we aren't even aware of until it's too late. Words can dig into people's minds like a virus and never truly go away.

SPEAK ONLY WITH LOVE

In Galatians, Paul states that our sinful nature gives into "hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy" (5:20,21). Besides this laundry list of sins, our sinful nature also causes us to ignore our faults and see the faults in others first. We try to justify our behavior by focusing on how others behave worse than we do. So many people speak without caring about my feelings, why should I watch myself so carefully when they don't? Won't they see me as weak and try to take advantage? What if they don't understand me if I don't use the same strong language they use?

It's a human response, but not what God wants. God asks us to keep our tongues from evil speech no matter the reason. Paul writes, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for

building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:29-32).

We should make the aim of our speech to help others, not to harm them.

God wants us to forgive each other when we speak thoughtlessly or in anger, but he also wants us to avoid speaking thoughtlessly or in anger, period. He wants us to live in harmony with each other, to love each other, to be an example of God's love. As a Christian, I sometimes take forgiveness for granted if I verbally step over the line. I was taught to forgive others when they offend me. But not everyone out there has been taught the same thing. I should be showing them a good example, not expecting them to forgive my bad one. Many small insults develop into large injuries, and just because God wants people to forgive doesn't mean I get to say whatever I want. Forgiveness is not a license to say or do whatever I want. It changes me to live as God wants.

Paul says, "Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. . . . May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one an-

other, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:2-7). We should make the aim of our speech to help others, not to harm them—and not just with Christian friends, but with all people, whether they agree with us or not. As Jesus taught in the parable of the Good Samaritan, our neighbors are more than just those who live next to us or believe the same as us. Our neighbors include even those we may see as enemies or political rivals.

Thinking before we speak and speaking only with love are not easy. But God will give us the strength and the encouragement to keep trying. We must continually ask, "Set a guard over my mouth, LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3). When we accidentally step over the line, we shouldn't be afraid to apologize. And when someone offends us, we should forgive, rather than retaliate, and turn the other cheek, rather than hold a grudge. It's what God wants from us. "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:10,11).

Praise the Lord for the love he has shown us! May we continually strive to show it to others.

Victoria Rahn is a member at Good Shepherd, Holmen, Wisconsin.





MAKING A DIFFERENCE BY VOLUNTEERING

John A. Braun

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Six years is a long time. On May 22, 2011, a tornado swept through Joplin, Missouri, and left a wide path of rubble. One hundred and fifty-eight people died as a direct result of the storm. Over a thousand were injured, and damages totaled \$2.8 billion. It was the costliest single tornado in US history.

The next day, cars and trucks were filled with the curious driving by to see the damage from the storm. But a more important event took place that same day. Volunteers came, ready to provide help and aid to the victims.

WHY VOLUNTEER?

Tiffani and Andy Zeller were among those volunteers who wanted to help after the storm. They had two small children at the time and lived about ten minutes from the path of the tornado. Tiffani says, "The greatest commandment is to love our neighbor. If you love people and see them struggling, you do whatever you can." That's just what volunteers do when faced with opportunities to serve.

Both of the Zellers have a great attitude about Christian volunteers. Andy says, "Volunteering is a command; God commands us to go out and help. We

do it not because we feel guilty, but to show our appreciation for what God has done for us. He gave us a Savior. You do it to return thanks to him."

Tiffani prayed for a way to help more. Pregnant and with two small children, she felt limited. The Lord answered her prayer. WELS Christian Aid and Relief organized volunteers from around the country to come to Joplin to help. The Zellers had room to house them while they were there. Those volunteers left in the morning, worked all day, returned to the Zellers' home, talked about their work, had a devotion, and slept on the floor to be ready for the next day.

What the Zellers found was that volunteering "turns the love in on you," says Andy. "It was definitely rewarding. Sometimes God does amazing things with allowing you to connect with people and allowing them to connect with you. You just don't know how he is going to use the situation that he has put in front of you." After two weeks, the volunteers returned home with memories of the people they had touched.

It was an opportunity to let their light shine and show compassion. They had an opportunity to show love to others. They had an opportunity to witness.

They had an opportunity to listen to the stories of the people who lost so much. Even if you don't see the benefit, God is at work and there will be some benefit. If you are a first-time volunteer, you may feel a bit apprehensive, but the experience will be rewarding and definitely will help others.

WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES?

Christian Aid and Relief has created volunteer disaster relief teams to help in times of trouble. Their efforts have assisted victims of the 9/11 attacks in New York City; hurricanes in Florida, Louisiana, the Caribbean, and New York; tornados in Wisconsin, Oklahoma, and Nebraska; and flooding in Colorado, just to name a few. The list never ends with a period; unlike a sentence, their work continues.

But you don't need to wait for a tornado or a disaster to volunteer. And you don't have to be handy with a chainsaw or hammer. Tiffani reminds all volunteers, "There are always ways to help. God hasn't blessed us with the same gifts. We just use the gifts he gave."

This article is about more than the volunteers who reach out when difficulties and hardships hit the headlines. It's also

about looking more carefully at where God has placed you. What opportunities does God put in your path? How can you reach out in compassion and concern for others?

The challenge is to open our eyes to see the possibilities. We can organize to show our compassion, as we do through WELS Christian Aid and Relief. Christian Aid and Relief brings Christ's compassion to places in our country where it is needed and also reaches out to help with international crises. If you cannot go yourself, you can contribute gifts so others can go or so that aid can get to places that need it. Learn more about these opportunities at wels.net/relief.

Open your eyes to see what opportunities God has placed before you in your own local area. Is your congregation able to show compassion to the poor, hungry, thirsty, or homeless? What about those in prison or in need of clothing? What can you do? Jesus commends his people for their compassion (Matthew 25). Open your eyes to see the possibilities.

Your congregation needs volunteers for other things too. Cutting the grass, shoveling snow, serving on a committee, and teaching Sunday school or vacation Bible school are just a few of the possibilities. Congregations depend on volunteers. What gifts has the Lord given you? What opportunities has the Lord placed before you to serve him and others?

Look also at the people around you: the friend who needs a word of encouragement or comfort or the neighbor who needs help with the grass or snow. Everyone needs help at some point in some way. Identify the people in your life and in your congregation who need help. Be the Samaritan. Open your eyes to see the possibilities and do whatever you can.

Don't forget your voluntary gifts! You won't get a robot call from our organizations, our churches, or our synod asking for your donations. We give because our love for Jesus motivates us to give. We always have opportunity

to give when we hear there's a need. When it's not possible to volunteer to do the work ourselves, it is possible to volunteer a gift to help the work of sharing Jesus and showing compassion through our works of charity.

WHAT IS YOUR STORY?

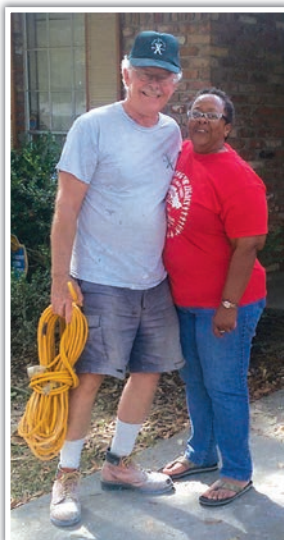
The Zellers found a way to volunteer and help. That's their story. What's your story? As you think about volunteering, take it to the Lord in prayer. Maybe it's a prayer for you to see the possibilities before you. Maybe you already see the possibilities and need the Lord's strength and direction to

help. If you find an opportunity or a challenge, maybe you can talk to someone about it, and they can join you or help you find a solution.

The experience of the Zellers is that the Lord rewarded them in ways they did not expect. Their encouragement is simple, "Just go out and do it. The Lord will bless you."

So what will your story be?

John Braun is executive editor of Forward in Christ.



(Top photos) Christian Aid and Relief offers many volunteer opportunities. In August 2016, Baton Rouge, La., received torrential downpours that resulted in flooding that left almost 150,000 homes damaged and thousands of families displaced. WELS Christian Aid and Relief put together a plan to rebuild eight homes, only one of which was a home of a WELS member. The other homes are owned by friends of members, like Gloria Ray (pictured here with volunteer Dennis Tennier). Twenty-six volunteers helped by hanging drywall, taping, and finishing the spaces. (Bottom photos) Your local congregation also offers chances for volunteering. Volunteers of all ages helped at a clean up day at Carbon Valley Lutheran's new property in Firestone, Colo. Volunteers also help with set up and take down each Sunday at the mission church's rented facility.

Reflections OF A MOTHER



A card on Mother's Day brings memories of God's strength and care.

Beverly Fulmer



Today is another Mother's Day. I am looking forward to seeing the card Brian has picked out for me this year. He picks out the best cards. Sometimes it's a funny card, and we both share a laugh. Sometimes it is a serious card that brings tears to my eyes, and we share a hug. Either way, he will make the day special for me.



In the quiet hours of this morning, my mind travels back to the time our journey began more than 33 years ago.

Brian was an unexpected pregnancy. Our firstborn was just six months old when we found out we were having another baby.

Two weeks before my due date, I went into labor in the middle of the night. When we arrived at the hospital, we were told this would be an emergency C-section. This was so different for Jim and me than the birth of our first child and not what we had planned.

Jim's first view of Brian was in an incubator with an oxygen mask on his face. There was mention of something being wrong. The doctor told Jim he suspected the baby might have Down syndrome. Then it was time to tell me. The doctor asked Jim to tell me, and Jim said, "You're coming with me. You need to tell her."

As the doctor told me he thought Brian might have Down syndrome, he looked so sad. I felt I needed to com-

fort him. He explained they would take a blood test to confirm the diagnosis.

My first view of Brian was in the incubator, and I could only touch his hand through the opening. That first night, I cried the entire time. I felt confused by my emotions. I wanted to feel happy to have a baby like the other moms, but I felt like a death had happened. Having a child with a disability was not what I had planned.

Seven long days later, test results did confirm what the doctor had suspected. Most of our friends and relatives didn't know what to do or say. Jim and I felt isolated. A woman that worked at the hospital who also had a son with Down syndrome visited me. Her words of empathy and encouragement helped. She gave us the name of a learning center to take Brian for therapy. Jim immediately visited the center and met the staff while Brian and I were still in the hospital. They were excited to meet us! Jim and I felt some hope.

It was time to take our baby home. I'm glad our firstborn Brad was so young (14 months old) because he loved Brian the minute he saw him. I cried more and told my mom I didn't think I knew how to be Brian's mom.

For weeks, I carried a lot of sadness, fear, and guilt that I had done something to cause this terrible thing. Some well-meaning relatives and friends tried to comfort and encourage us by saying, "God only gives these children to special people." No, that didn't make sense to me. My God doesn't sit in heaven pointing out who gets the deaf child or the blind child or the cogni-



tively-impaired child. And I sure didn't feel special!

At about six weeks, Brian began attending programs at the learning center. Our family was welcomed with open arms, and the staff gushed over our newborn. We felt completely accepted, and our healing began. I don't think the therapists realized that as they worked on strengthening Brian's muscles, Jim and I were also being emotionally strengthened. We were learning how to help Brian. We felt less isolated as we met other families with children with special needs. I was crying less and laughing more, enjoying this gift from God. When Brian smiled at me for the first time, I felt like he was telling me, "We'll be okay, Mom. We can do this."

I finally realized I didn't have to have all the answers. God didn't want Brian to have Down syndrome any more than I did. Brian was his child, and God would not abandon him. We live in an imperfect world where things go wrong. But God promised to be with me, and he would guide me in what to do for Brian.

So while we listened to what the "experts" suggested for Brian, we didn't always follow what they expected us to do but allowed God to lead us down other paths, trusting in his guidance as he led us to people who supported Brian's independence. Brian participated in Sunday school. He attended our church's school for four years without special education services. He was completely integrated in all classes and activities during those years. I watched one teacher mentor the next to take on this challenge for which they had not been trained. Brian played on the boys' basketball team. A kind-hearted coach developed the "Brian play" to give Brian the best chance to make a basket. When he did, both sides cheered. I assisted the pastor with confirmation instruction, and Brian was confirmed.

As I look back over the past 33 years, I see God's hand in everything. God brought people into our lives just when we needed them. He gave us answers to our questions. I came to expect and even demand God's help. And help was there even when I didn't ask for it.

Brian now works at the local YMCA, so proud to have his own cleaning cart and walkie-talkie. He lives independently with support. He is an active member at our church as an usher and contributes in other ways.

Jim and I often say how blessed we are because of Brian, how much we have learned from this unexpected journey. I believe God blessed Brian with a personality that draws people to him, and thereby he receives the help and support he needs. I also believe God has used Brian to move people's hearts and change society's mind, one person at a time, so that they see him and all children with special needs as people first—God's children whose lives have purpose and a plan.

The sound of a door closing brings me back to the present. It's Brian, holding an envelope. He has walked the few blocks that separate his apartment from our home. "Hi, Mom," he greets me. "Happy Mother's Day."

"Oh, hi, Brian. Thank you. How are you?" I ask, as we hug.

"Awesome," he replies.

Yes, you are. My eyes fill with tears, but these are tears of pride in the man he has grown to be and of gratefulness to an awesome God for his love, protection, and guidance.

Beverly Fulmer is a member at St. Matthew, Oconomowoc, Wisconsin.



People around
us need Christ
and his love,
not our handy
labels or
our disdain.

A more beautiful world

Earle D. Treptow

For the tidy sum of \$5 million, Airbnb purchased 30 seconds of airtime during the Super Bowl. In the commercial, the founders of Airbnb concisely stated their position: “We believe no matter who you are, where you’re from, who you love, or who you worship, we all belong. The world is more beautiful the more you accept.”

I considered it a thinly-veiled accusation: “If you speak up for marriage as God designed it or confess that Jesus Christ is the world’s only Savior, you make this an ugly world.” The commercial struck me as a not-so-subtle request to shut my Christian mouth. I quickly dismissed the commercial as anti-Christian. I don’t need to listen to people like that.

But I thought of my own bias and the way I treat others. About two minutes into an honest examination, I could identify a host of unaccepting words, unloving attitudes, and unkind actions. I realized that we regularly operate with a double standard. We forgive our own foibles readily, yet quickly give demerits to others.

Practiced in this skill, we have no problem rushing to judge strangers, especially those who show themselves strange and different to our way of thinking. In effect, we claim ourselves superior. We declare them unworthy of our respect and underserving of the hard work involved in seeking to understand or serve them.

Jesus could have played the superior card with everyone he met. And he could have done so successfully! But Jesus didn’t distance himself from those whose lives and thinking were a mess. Instead, he had compassion on them. He spent time with them and listened to them. And then he was judged: “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2). He welcomed sinners eagerly, wanting to serve them in love. Love moved him to speak to them privately about their sin, not to show himself superior, but to call them to

repentance. He invited them to confess their sin, to find in him their righteousness, and to change the direction of their lives.

Let’s not bother playing the superior card. The people around us don’t need our “I would never do such a thing” arrogance. They don’t benefit in the least when we speak dismissively about the way they think or live. Neither do we, for that matter! People around us need Christ and his love, not our handy labels or our disdain. If you insist on labeling people, then use this one instead: an individual for whom Jesus shed his blood.

Jesus offered himself as the atoning sacrifice for those whose lives are a mess and whose thinking doesn’t line up with what God teaches in his Word. That means he died for individuals actively engaging in homosexual relationships, for people who mock Christians as out-of-touch, and for those who dismiss the idea of Christ being the only way to eternal life. That means he died even for, of all people, us.

It turns out that we’re no better than anyone else. We’re beggars who live only by the righteousness of another. We humbly speak God’s Word to others. We do so, not primarily to make this world more beautiful, but so that many might enjoy life in the far more beautiful world God has prepared for all who trust in Christ.

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



MONUMENTS

Lasting Memories

Noah built an altar as he stepped off the ark to show his gratitude because God kept his promises.

Samuel C. Degner

For a little more than a year, Noah and his family lived on a boat. People who spend a week on a cruise ship sometimes say they feel cramped. Noah and his family spent much more time on a vessel half that size! All that time, they were confined to that space—together with the animals. Finally, the Lord gave the green light to disembark.

NOAH'S GRATITUDE

What would be the first thing you would do if you were Noah? Roll around on the ground just to feel some earth on your skin? Run as fast and as far as you could to stretch your legs and fill your lungs with fresh air?

Noah stooped over and started picking up stones.

Picture him there on the slopes of Ararat. The world must have looked so different since he had seen it last. The force of God's watery wrath had changed things.

But there stood Noah, safe and dry, surrounded by his family and the beginnings of new life. God had protected them from the waters that engulfed everything and everyone else. He had rescued them from a godless world that had threatened to swallow up their souls. Most important, he had preserved his promise to send a Savior.

So, Noah gathered some dry stones and stacked them into the first recorded altar (Genesis 8:20). Perhaps he laid some driftwood on top. Then he sacrificed some of the clean animals he had brought with him on the ark. It was an act of dedication that sprang from a grateful heart as eagerly as Noah must have jumped off the ark.

OUR THANKFULNESS

Gratitude doesn't come naturally. What was true before the flood is true after it: "Every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood" (Genesis 8:21). Our tendency is to be quicker to enjoy the good things in front of us than to praise God for them. We step out of bed and hit the ground running, without thinking to dedicate the new day to the Lord. We sprint past our morning devotion into the day ahead. We dive into a delicious meal without giving thanks. We spend the paycheck before we can offer any of it to God.

Stop and look around you. You see signs of destruction everywhere—not past but future. You see an ungodly world reserved for judgment, not by water but by fire (2 Peter 3:7). But not you. The Lord lifted you up and out of harm's way by the waters of your baptism. For Jesus' sake, he rescued you from a fate far worse than drowning in a deluge. You're safe!

Now in your new heart rises a thankfulness that won't be contained. So before getting on with the new life that lies before you, spend a few moments picking up stones. Gratefully offer this day, this life, to the God who saved you—then run out and enjoy it.

Oh, do you need a reminder from time to time? Noah's physical monument on the mountain has been lost to history, but God gave us a lasting memorial: his rainbow (Genesis 9:13). Whenever he sees it, he remembers his promise not to destroy the earth in a flood again. Whenever you see it, remember to thank him for keeping all his promises.

Contributing editor Samuel Degner is pastor at Bethel, Menasha, Wisconsin.

This is the first article in a nine-part series on Old Testament monuments and what they mean to us today. Read how a congregation uses stones as a modern-day remembrance on p. 24.



John O'Brien

The gospel
nourishes my
faith and
strengthens
my desire to
do as the Lord
wills in joy and
in gratitude
for his love.

Christ crucified

I need to hear the gospel—Christ crucified for me—regularly. It's why I go to church on Sunday. It's not that I've never heard the gospel before. I simply need the reminder. Three reasons to hear the gospel often loom in my life and, I think, in the life of every Christian.

The first is the unwelcome guest that lives within my heart. It's my old self, the sinful nature, that persists even after I know the love of Jesus. Because the gospel is the power of God, it works within me. Then the gospel nourishes my faith and strengthens my desire to do as the Lord wills in joy and in gratitude for his love.

But I don't lose my sinful nature in the joy of Christ's love. No. His love creates a struggle. The good that I want to do, often I do not do (Romans 7). Then comes guilt when I fail. I try to change, but failure comes so often. I need to hear that Jesus loves me and forgives me. I need the gospel often.

The second reason is more subtle. Sometimes my sinful nature is so sneaky that it will turn the gospel into something about me. That's a common fault of human nature. All too often it becomes all about me. I begin losing sight of Jesus, and I say how proud I am to be a Christian. I stop thinking like the poor publican. Instead, I focus on all I've done; I only wish others would notice more often. I become the Pharisee!

Making Christianity all about me instead of about Christ is a temptation that infects so many Christian churches. The message of Christ and his forgiveness shrinks in importance. In its place, the message of Christ changes. It is no longer about Christ crucified for me, but Jesus becomes an example for moral behavior. Hope, joy, satisfaction, and comfort rest not on Christ but on how well one lives as a Chris-

tian. That old sinful nature shifts the focus on me and away from Christ who was crucified for me, an unworthy sinner.

In addition, the shift away from Christ to me comes with the temptation to take a small step toward thinking I'm a better Christian than others and that others are missing something. That's a virus that infected the Galatians. They were taken in by those who thought they needed Christ and works. Paul chided them, "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?" (3:1). In our age, there is a dominant focus on the obedience of a Christian to the law of love. Sounds good, but where is Christ crucified? All too often he must take a back seat to me, my obedience, and my effort. It becomes Christ and works, not Christ alone.

That's the third reason I need to hear the gospel of Christ crucified. First, I need to hear the gospel for my own comfort. Second, I need the gospel to shift my thinking away from what I do to what Christ alone has done. And third? The gospel steels me against the imitations I hear so often. It's the antidote to the temptation to satisfy my itching ears by listening to a message my sinful nature wants to hear—a message that is different from Christ crucified for me.

A friend recently said, "If you think you are someone special, put your hand in a bucket of water and pull it out. How much of an impression have you left?" My sinful nature recoils at that reality, but my spirit rejoices that God loved such a good-for-nothing. Christ was crucified for me and for all other sinners. May God nourish our spirits with the message of Christ crucified.

Lord's Supper

Joel D. Otto

Teachings about the Lord's Supper separate most of the various branches of Christianity. When true Lutherans accept the scriptural teaching of the Lord's Supper, they stand apart from other Christians.

Roman Catholicism confesses that the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ when the priest speaks the words of institution. This becomes an unbloody sacrifice which the priest offers to earn "grace" from God. This "grace" is then distributed to the people to help them live more God-pleasing lives. Catholicism turns the Sacrament from gospel into law. The unbloody sacrifice performed by the priest becomes a human work offered to God for sin.

Most other non-Lutheran churches deny that Christ's body and blood are really present with the bread and wine. They might speak about a spiritual presence of Christ, but the bread and wine merely represent Christ's body and blood. They do not believe that God gives any blessings in the Lord's Supper. Rather, Christians observe the Lord's Supper as an act of obedience to remember Christ and his death. This rejects the words of Jesus and turns the Sacrament from gospel into law, from God's gift into a human work of obedience.

True Lutherans teach what Jesus clearly said on the night he was betrayed. "This is my body. . . . This is my blood of the covenant" (Matthew 26:26,28). We do not deny what Jesus said. We do not try to explain how Jesus can be present with his body and blood under bread and wine. Martin Luther wrote, "Why do we not put aside such curiosity and cling simply to the words of Christ, willing to remain in ignorance of what takes place here and content that the real body of Christ is present by virtue of the words?" (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 36, p. 33).

We believe that Jesus' body and blood are really and truly present in the Lord's Supper. And we believe that Jesus is giving real and true spiritual gifts to us through this eating and drinking: forgiveness, life, and salvation. It is pure gospel for our comfort and spiritual strength. We simply hold to Jesus' words. This is what true Lutherans do, as Luther emphasized in the Large Catechism. "We speak about the bread and wine that is Christ's body and blood and has the words attached to it. That, we say, is truly the treasure—and nothing else—through which such forgiveness is gained. Now the only way this treasure is passed along and made our very own is in the words 'Given . . . and shed for you.' For in the words you have both truths, that it is Christ's body and blood, and that it is yours as a treasure and gift."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Read 1 Corinthians 10:16. Explain how this passage helps us come to a proper understanding of Jesus' words of institution.
2. List at least five doctrines that are interconnected with the doctrine of the Lord's Supper.
3. How does the real presence of Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper help provide comfort to you when you receive the Sacrament?

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



This is the eighth 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 May 5 at wels.net/forwardinchrist.



WHAT IT MEANS TO BE TRULY LUTHERAN

A close-up photograph of a man's hand holding a black leather-bound Bible. The Bible has "HOLY BIBLE" embossed in gold lettering. The man is wearing a dark suit jacket and a patterned tie. The background is blurred.

Life ASSURANCE

God gives us physical blessings, but his most important blessing is his promise of heaven. Jennifer N. Heins

He seemed to be just your average insurance salesman. He was good looking enough to hold your attention. His friendly small talk and knowledge of his company's products could convince you to purchase additional coverage. He was just another successful agent, working long hours to keep his family well-housed and put his kids through college.

A LIFE ON EARTH

Gordon Graham was tall and handsome, with a smile that made you think he won the lottery. He had this way of listening and caring and telling you what his company could do for you. Gordy worked tirelessly for the family he adored, purchasing a home on the edge of a lake and helping his three children complete their educations. But he was anything but your average insurance guy.

Last month, my faith was strengthened by attending the funeral of this "not so average" salesman. Friends and family shared stories of his commitment to Christ. Their stories told of a man who had his priorities straight.

Those who shared their stories remembered that Gordy started his morning with his Bible and his Lord. He would then greet his wife of 40 years with a hug. His son shared how time for his children came before the job to sell life insurance products. Yes, he was passionate about doing his job well, but family was more important. This insurance agent knew not what, but who, was the most important in his life, and it was obvious in how he lived his life.

A LIFE IN HEAVEN

The church was packed with those who knew and loved Gordon Graham. But not everyone knew Gordy's first love. They knew his smile, his ease with people—the friendly insurance

salesman. But he had one last comment to make to those who came to pay their respects. He selected some words of our ever-loving God, words to be read by the pastor leading the worship service. "This is what the LORD says—he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior' " (Isaiah 43:1-3).

He sold term life to my husband and to many others. He often convinced businesses of the need to protect their employees. But at the service that marked his death and entrance into his heavenly home, he shared the greatest truth. Life insurance is something you buy; life assurance is something that was bought by Christ. That life assurance brought comfort and direction to his life here. It was an assurance bought with Jesus' blood and verified with his resurrection.

While Gordy lives in peace with his Savior, we remain on this earth, dedicated to telling others of this greatest of gifts—Jesus' redemption of us. We want to be with Gordy and all the saints who rest from their labor (Revelation 14:13). By God's grace our assurance is clear: "Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered" (Romans 4:7).

Now that's the kind of coverage we all need!

Jennifer Heins is a member at St. Paul, North Mankato, Minnesota.