

Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



Thank God!

Sometimes hard times help us appreciate
all the blessings we have. *Page 10*



ALL IS CALM ALL IS BRIGHT

This Christmas, look to the manger and find comfort in the newborn King so that all your nights may be calm and bright.

Counting to Christmas Family Advent Devotions and Calendar

by Gail Pawlitz

As families count down each day of Advent, *Counting to Christmas* keeps the hearts of children and parents alike focused on Jesus. This collection of 26 daily devotions includes Bible verses, activities, and prayers, all corresponding to the Advent calendar in the back of the book. *Counting to Christmas* provides a quick and simple way to keep you and your family in the Word throughout this Christmas season. Hardcover, 32 pages. **LU4601182, \$9.99**

New!

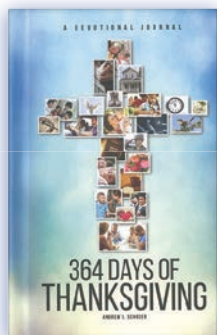
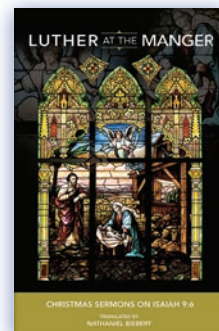


Luther at the Manger

Christmas Sermons on Isaiah 9:6

by Martin Luther, translated by Nathaniel Biebert

As Christmas approaches during this milestone Reformation anniversary year, it is natural to wonder: What does Luther say about the Nativity? In this one-of-a-kind English print edition of his Christmas sermons, Luther reinforces the miracle of Jesus' birth. Organized for reading during the Advent or Christmas seasons, these sermons will invite you to ponder the mystery and majesty of the Son of God who became man and find renewed awe and thanks for God's awesome plan for your salvation. Softcover, 123 pages. **LU0600744, \$11.99**



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by Andrew Schroer

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"We believe that a healthy congregation or healthy synod is simply one that is regularly asking itself 'What else can we do to help all people know Jesus?' "

*Rev. Jonathan Hein,
director of WELS Commission on
Congregational Counseling*

Planning *the* FUTURE



Part of WELS Congregational Services, the Commission on Congregational Counseling works to assist congregations to assess and evaluate current ministry and to develop and carry out plans to adjust or expand that ministry. Through the **Self-Assessment and Adjustment program**, counselors take congregations through a process that helps them examine their ministry and make decisions about where they want to go in the future. Other areas of Congregational Services then provide resources to congregations for help in worship, discipleship, youth ministry, evangelism, education, and special ministries.

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

WHAT'S INSIDE

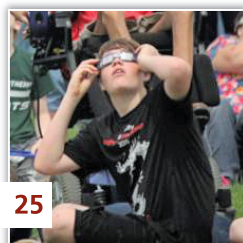
Let's face it—it's easy to thank God when things are going smoothly. Got that job promotion? Thank God! Test results came back negative? Thank God! The table is overflowing with food and surrounded by family? Thank God!

But what about those times when things don't go exactly the way we wanted? Then it's easy to blame God—or at least question him.

Several articles this month look at why we should thank God in all circumstances, even when we don't right away see much for which to be thankful. Check out "Thanks . . . for nothing" (p. 8), "Give thanks in all circumstances" (back page), and "Thank God!" (p. 10).

Thanking God with our words is one thing. But we can also thank God—for current blessings and for those to come—with our actions. In our "Salt of the earth" series, Pastor John Huebner explores how we can practice hospitality and help those in need (p. 26). Our editorial comment examines how God has placed people among us who need us and our witness (p. 32). Plus, see a real-life example of helping others in need as volunteers support those who were affected by this summer's hurricanes (p. 22).

Julie Wietzke



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MORE AFRICAN FACES

Great *Forward in Christ* article on the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) convention in Germany [Sept.]. Thanks.

I am a big fan of CELC. I attended in Sweden, Japan, and New Ulm/Mankato, representing our two synods in Nigeria. I also attended the first Africa Regional CELC conference in Zambia. My heart aches that so few Africans attend the international meets.

Pastor Koelpin discusses struggling Lutheran churches in the article: "Sometimes they think they are all alone. . . . It is so essential for them to know that they are part of something that is far bigger than their respective churches." So true.

Wishing for the next CELC group photo to show more African faces.

Doug Weiser
Star, Idaho

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

I very much enjoy the many inspiring stories in *Forward in Christ* magazine. Particularly inspiring to me are those of prior unbelievers who have come to faith. I see fewer stories demonstrating that faith in action, uplifting and comforting believers even in seemingly tragic situations.

Ted Reuschel
Lansing, Michigan

Through my Bible in 3 years

Read or listen online at wels.net/bible3.

NOVEMBER 2017

- | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Romans 9:14-29 | 11. Ro. 16:1-16 | 21. Ex. 32 |
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| 3. Ro. 11:1-10 | 13. Exodus 21:1-32 | 23. Ex. 34 |
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| 5. Ro. 11:25-36 | 15. Ex. 23:20-24:18 | 25. Ex. 36:8-37:9 |
| 6. Ro. 12 | 16. Ex. 25 | 26. Ex. 37:10-38:31 |
| 7. Ro. 13 | 17. Ex. 26-27 | 27. Ex. 39-40 |
| 8. Ro. 14 | 18. Ex. 28 | 28. 1 Corinthians 1:1-17 |
| 9. Ro. 15:1-13 | 19. Ex. 29 | 29. 1 Cor. 1:18-2:16 |
| 10. Ro. 15:14-33 | 20. Ex. 30-31 | 30. 1 Cor. 3-4 |

PRO-LIFE

I'd like to say thank you for the clear stand taken in Pastor Samelson's editorial comment "Not caring is not an option" [Sept.]. So often our synod is lumped in with other Lutheran church bodies that back the pro-choice movement.

Anonymous

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*.

CORRECTION:

The Bible translation used in "Salt of the earth" [Sept.] was incorrectly identified. It is the Evangelical Heritage Version, not the English Heritage Version. We apologize for the error.



KEEP CALM AND SHARE ON

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God's best is yours

**"Have no concern for your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours."
Genesis 45:20 (English Standard Version)**

Daniel J. Habben

"Have no concern for your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours."

These were Pharaoh's words to Joseph's brothers. After Joseph had revealed his identity to his brothers, Pharaoh instructed them to return to Canaan to fetch the rest of the family before returning to settle in Egypt. This was a generous offer! With a famine overshadowing the region, Pharaoh could have been reluctant to play host to more hungry mouths. But he not only invited Joseph's extended family to Egypt, he also told Joseph's brothers not to bother bringing their possessions. Everything they needed would be provided from the best of the land.

GOD'S RICHES

In the face of such an offer, it would have been extraordinarily rude and foolish of the brothers to dismiss Pharaoh's generosity—to insist on hauling to Egypt everything stored in their attics, garages, and junk drawers.

I don't need to cling to
my worldly concerns
as if to a life preserver.

In essence, the brothers would have been saying, "We don't believe you, Pharaoh. We don't think you will really give us what we need to live. And we don't think that what you are offering is better than what we already have."

Joseph's brothers weren't that rude or foolish. But that's often my shocking response to God's gracious promises. Sometimes I hold on to my worldly attitudes because I'm not entirely convinced that God will share his vast riches with me—even though he's



promised to do just that. Think of how the apostle Paul assured the Philippian Christians: "My God will meet *all* your needs according to the *riches* of his glory in Christ Jesus" (4:19, emphasis added). I've been offered the best! I don't need to cling to my worldly concerns as if to a life preserver.

OUR CONCERNS

What about you? What's in your grasp that makes it difficult to see and appreciate God's great blessings? Are you holding on to resentment? Let it go! God knows best how to handle the situation. He calls you to exercise patient forgiveness and leave the judging up to him. Do you see how this makes you rich? It's as if you have your own private investigator looking into the matter so that you don't have to worry about it.

Are you grasping for approval from nonchristian friends? They aren't going to speak up in your defense on judgment day. They can't bring a loved one back to life. They can't soothe your guilty conscience or prepare you for eternity. But your glorious and gracious friend Jesus can and will.

And what things are so important that they divert your attention from God's

riches? Are you stretching to the breaking point to snag that luxury vehicle with those awesome gadgets, or do you treasure that stylish patio furniture or some other thing? Their warranties won't outlast judgement day.

It's tempting to expend oodles of energy and concern over worldly goods and concerns, but they are only baubles and distractions compared to the riches of God's glory that are yours through faith in Christ. Such riches free us to live generous lives—to share our faith, our time, our abilities, and our income with an open hand.

So fix your eyes on Jesus, the king of the universe, who says to you, "Have no concern for your earthly goods, for the best of *heaven* is yours . . . forever."

Oh, what a promise! I don't need to weigh myself down with distractions and "stuff." The Lord gives me the worldly things I need, but they are unimportant. If I have Jesus, I have everything.

Contributing editor Daniel Habben is pastor at St. John's, St. John's, Antigua, West Indies.



Mark Schweden

Thank you, Lord,
that by giving me
nothing you are
blessing me in
many ways.

Thanks . . . for nothing

It's one of those expressions dripping with sarcasm.

You've been on hold for 30 minutes, trying to get an answer from your cable provider for the reason your cable signal keeps cutting out. Finally, a human voice on the other end of the line asks you the reason for your call. You explain, patiently at first, that every day for the past week, the picture on your television has disintegrated into an unwatchable blur of pixelated colors for hours on end. And today, not only has the picture departed, but so has the sound. The person at the other end of the line checks the signal to your house, and it checks out. He asks you to make sure that all your cables are still attached. You report that they are all in place. He then gives you instructions to reboot your system. You do that, and the problem remains. Finally, the person says, "I'm sorry, there doesn't seem to be anything I can do. If you still have the problem tomorrow, please call back."

And you think, and maybe actually say, "Thanks . . . for nothing."

During this season of Thanksgiving, there is no shortage of things for which we can be truly thankful—blessings spiritual and material that God has showered on us. Sometimes those blessings come as a response to fervent and specific prayers. More often, they come to us, as Luther would say, "even without our asking." God's blessings are often evident because of what he gives us. It's easy and natural for God's people to thank God for the blessings that he gives.

But aren't there also times when we can say to God, with no sarcasm but with complete sincerity, "Thanks, God, for nothing"?

There are times when we pray earnestly that God will do something or give us something, but in his love and wisdom, he answers our prayer with a fatherly

and loving *no*. We pray that God will improve our family's financial situation, but it only gets worse. We pray that God will keep our loved ones safe on the highway, only to learn that there has been a terrible accident. We pray that God will bless our nation with wise and honest leaders, only to read that another politician has been found guilty of bribery. When God's answer to sincere and fervent prayers is *no*, might we be tempted to mutter under our breath, "Thanks, God, for nothing"?

When God seems to be withholding the blessings or help we expect and desire, we should indeed say, "Thanks, God, for nothing," but not in a sarcastic and bitter way. We can and should say those words with all sincerity and gratitude. "Lord, I asked you for something, but you have lovingly answered *no* and given me nothing of what I asked. Thank you, Lord, for nothing. Thank you for knowing what is best for me and for giving me not what I want but what I need. Thank you, Lord, that by giving me nothing you are blessing me in many ways. You are keeping something from me that would not be good for me, even though I have asked for it. You are teaching me to be patient, to trust in you at all times, to demonstrate my faith in you by being thankful—even when my sinful human eyes look for blessings only in prayers answered by your yes to my requests."

It's the season of thanksgiving: a time to thank God for everything . . . and for nothing.

Light for our path

Could you explain the different levels in heaven? I was told that people who do the greatest works on earth will get the upper levels in heaven. I have a hard time with this because it sounds like work-righteousness.

James F. Pope

Your question provides the opportunity to marvel at the gracious love of God Christians enjoy in equal measure and in unique ways.

SALVATION: EQUALLY ENJOYED

You are correct in rejecting work-righteousness as a way to heaven. If we were to attempt to save ourselves, we would have to be perfect, keeping every part of God's law every second of our lives. We cannot do that. In addition, our attempts at personal holiness come to a crashing stop when we realize that we begin life with a sinful nature. We cannot be perfect on our own to enjoy salvation. Jesus was perfect for us. His holy life and substitutionary death are the reasons for our salvation. Our works do not contribute in any way to our salvation (Titus 3:5,6). The salvation we enjoy is God's doing.

More than that, the salvation you and I enjoy is what all Christians possess. The book of Revelation illustrates that well. In one vision, the apostle John describes Christians who had been killed for their faith being given "a white robe" (6:11). The garment represents the robe of righteousness Jesus won and which people "wear" through faith in him. Each of those martyrs received a white robe. Some did not receive half a robe; others, two robes. All enjoyed salvation equally. Jesus' parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) also teaches that God's children equally enjoy his salvation.

While all Christians enjoy the same gift of salvation, Scripture speaks of God customizing his gracious blessings. That's the main part of your question.

DEGREES OF GLORY: INDIVIDUALLY BLESSED

Rather than speaking of levels of heaven (as the Mormons do), we understand

Bible passages like Daniel 12:3; Matthew 25:23,28,29; Luke 19:17,19; 1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 2 Corinthians 9:6; and Revelation 14:13 to address the subject of "degrees of glory." That expression describes the individual blessings God will graciously bestow on his followers in connection with their faithful earthly lives. We will have to wait to see what that specifically means.

What it means now is that we do not serve the Lord with the idea of getting something from him in the future. That is the mercenary attitude of which you spoke in your question. Such an attitude can easily plague Christians.

I once had a number of conversations with a person who was interested in joining the church I served. The person's profession of faith and our church's statement of belief matched until she brought up "once saved, always saved." In spite of my citing Bible passages that speak of people falling from faith (for example, Matthew 13:20,21; 1 Timothy 1:19), she regarded apostasy as an impossibility. Hypothetically conceding to her position, I asked what reason she had to attend worship services in church. Her answer made everything clear: "To get more jewels in my crown."

Now I got it. Her stated motive for doing God's will was to get something in return. That is an attitude we need to reject. Any way that God chooses to bless our Spirit-driven lives of love (Philippians 2:13) is grace. Pure grace.

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

"Thank God!"

Do you think Noah uttered those words when he finally walked off the ark and stepped foot on dry ground?

Put yourself in his shoes. Confined—locked—in the ark for over a year! We talk about being cooped up in our heated homes for three months during the winter with refrigerators, stoves, TVs, beds, and showers. For Noah, a look outside was difficult—he had no glass windows. And inside the ark, it was dark, damp, and musty. And what did Noah hear? The pelting of the rain on the roof, the pounding of the waves against the walls, the thumping of the water below. And don't forget the animals! The smell, the noise, the work—feeding them, cleaning up after them, day after day.

Could we live for an entire year confined to an area of 450 feet by 75 feet? And what about family? People on edge? People getting on each other's nerves? What about conversation? After day 225, honestly, what did they find to talk about? And what about food? What did they eat? The same food day after day? This was anything but a luxury cruise.

NOAH'S ALTAR

After a year of confinement—perhaps a year of battling claustrophobia and even a bit of depression—Noah sent out the raven and he waited. Then he sent out the dove and he waited. Then he sent out the dove again and he waited. He waited patiently for the Lord to open the door of the ark. When God finally did, do you think Noah let out a good, old-fashioned, "Thank God"?

We know he did. But his, "Thank God!" was not a sarcastic exclamation or a sigh of relief but, rather, it was said in grateful devotion. He uttered that thank you in stone, wood, and fire. Noah built an altar, took some of those clean animals that he had been keeping alive on the ark for the past year, and sacrificed them to God—a grateful expression of thanks.

Why? Because, quite simply, God had placed him on that ark! And God had personally seen to it that his ark had not been ripped apart by pounding water and crashing waves. In short, Noah could thank God that he was alive.

But it was more than that—so much more than that! Noah built the ark be-

cause of his faith in God's promises. God had brought him to faith in a coming Savior. God had blessed him with a righteousness that was not his own. God had forgiven him his sins. God had saved him from something far more destructive and far more threatening than a worldwide flood—God had saved him from eternal damnation in hell.

GOD'S ALTAR

Life may not always be what we want it to be. We may not always get what we want. Confined inside a dark, smelly boat for a year? It's hard to find the blessing in that unless we consider the alternative. And yet, Noah and his family had all they needed. As we look back in our own lives, we know that God has given us more than we need. And, yes, sometimes it takes hard times to help us see and appreciate those blessings. Sometimes it takes having less than what we're used to so that we can appreciate just how much we do have.

What do you have? God's protection? You are in the palm of his hand! He commands his angels to guard you! God's provision? You have clothing and



Thank God!

Noah was grateful for so many blessings so he gave thanks. We also give thanks for all God's gifts.

Stephen G. Helwig

shoes, food and drink, house and home family and friends. God's grace? You have a living faith in a living Savior in whom you are righteous and through whom you are forgiven—a living faith that is fed by the living water that wells up to eternal life.

Noah was grateful for even more. Yes, he was grateful for what God had done for him in the past but also because he trusted what God would do for him in the future. What would God do? Noah didn't have to be afraid to step out of that ark and wonder if a tidal wave was going to smack him in the face and wash him away. Noah didn't have to live each day in fear, wondering if he should get to work on another ark. Never again would God destroy the earth with a worldwide flood. Every rainbow Noah saw assured him of that. Noah trusted God when he said, "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease" (Genesis 8:22). Noah was thankful for his future and the future of the world.

But there's still more! Noah trusted that, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from child-

hood, God would still send the seed of the woman to crush the serpent's head. In fact, for that very reason—because every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood—God would keep this promise. That was the very purpose of the ark! Yes, God had protected Noah and his family, but God had also protected—and preserved—his promise to send the seed of the woman in spite of human sin and depravity. The time would fully come. And then, on an altar not of stone but on the altar of the cross, Jesus would offer himself—the Lamb without blemish or defect—as the perfect sacrifice for sin. Rushing flood waters could never wash sin off the face of the earth; Noah and his family still carried sin within. God knew that. But the rush of blood and water from the side of his Son could. The blood of a crucified and risen Jesus purifies us from all unrighteousness.

WHAT ALTAR WILL YOU BUILD?

And so, we trust. We trust what God will do for us in the future—exactly what he said he would do. He will continue to provide for us. "Seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and

winter, day and night will never cease." He will continue to take care of us—good care of us. But he will also, through his Word and sacraments, keep us in the faith until he returns to take us home to his Father's house.

In the meantime, dear Christian, what altar can you build? Granted, our altars will not be made out of stone with fire for the sacrifice of animals; our altars will never be set on fire.

But, in view of God's mercy, as Paul encouraged the Romans, "Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship" (12:1). Living sacrifices. Our bodies, our lives—living sacrifices, living altars—are dedicated to a gracious God; they are altars built knowing what he has done for us in the past and trusting what he will do for us in the future.

"Thank God!"

Stephen Helwig is pastor at Gethsemane, Omaha, Nebraska.



ABIDING

truth

Heaven is our home, and God promises we will rise glorious to live there forever in perfect joy.

Mark E. Braun

We are accustomed to seeing a jowly, rotund image of Martin Luther. But in his early life, he was often frail and sickly.

EARTHLY SICKNESS

A description of Luther in his mid-30s called him so “emaciated from care and study” that one “can almost count his bones through his skin.” He recalled that as a monk he nearly killed himself “by fasting, abstinence, and austerity” (*Luther’s Works* [LW], Vol. 8, p. 173). He suffered at times from rheumatic fever, upper respiratory infections, inflammation of his nasal cavity that led to a ruptured eardrum, an abscess in his leg, and various infectious diseases.

As he grew older, Luther was afflicted with kidney stones, digestive problems, and gout. The care he received from doctors sounds as dreadful as the diseases it was intended to cure. In one treatment, Luther complained that doctors gave him so much water to drink “as if I had been a big ox.” Doctors later prescribed a “tonic” of garlic and horse manure boiled together. Luther rarely suffered in silence, and his laments were blunt and earthy.

His final sickness was preceded by heart palpitations, shortness of breath, and pain down his left arm. He died of a heart attack three months after his 62nd birthday.

The root cause of all his illnesses, he knew, was not medical but theological. Luther remarked on the perfection Adam enjoyed before the fall:

For us today it is amazing that there could be a physical life without death and without all the incidentals of death, such as diseases, smallpox,

[and] stinking accumulations of fluids in the body. . . . In the state of innocence no part of the body was filthy. (LW, Vol. 1, p. 110)

Our first parents “lived among the creatures of God in peace, without fear of death, and without any fear of sickness” (LW, Vol. 1, p. 113). It was sin that caused “hideous lust, depravity, troubles, sicknesses, and other evils” (LW, Vol. 4, p. 5). From the story of Job “one can gather sure enough proof of what Satan is able to do and what he desires most.” Satan “sends enemies” and “even infects the body and covers it with boils” (LW, Vol. 3, p. 270).

Luther frequently called his own body a “sack of maggots” and a “decomposed rascal” (LW, Vol. 28, pp. 112, 110).

**Our assurance of
resurrection is grounded in
the resurrection of Christ.**

HEAVENLY JOY

But in a series of sermons on the great resurrection chapter 1 Corinthians 15, which he began in 1532 and extended into 1533, Luther celebrated God’s cure for sin’s corruption. Human reason, he knew, can only conclude that “the world has stood so long, that one person after another, remains dead, decomposes, and crumbles to dust in the grave” (LW, Vol. 28, p. 69). Yet our assurance of resurrection is grounded in the resurrection of Christ, “the chief article of the Christian doctrine” (LW, Vol. 28, p. 94).

In our resurrection, “everyone’s body will remain as it was created.” Yet for the resurrected man or woman “it will no longer be necessary to eat, to drink, to di-

gest, to sweep, to live with husband or with wife, to beget children, to cultivate the fields, to rule home or city” because “all that pertains to the essence of these temporal goods and is part of temporal life and works will cease to be” (LW, Vol. 28, pp. 171,172). The form of our resurrected body “will be a wholly different, more beautiful, and perfect existence, devoid of all infirmities and wants” (LW, Vol. 28, p. 172). Death itself will be undone. Death will say to us, “Stop eating, drinking, [and] digesting . . . and lie down and decompose so that you may acquire a new, more beautiful form, just as the grain does which sprouts anew from the soil” (LW, Vol. 28, p. 182).

The resurrected body “will sally forth into heaven” to “play with sun and moon and all other creatures” and will be “delighted by this.” It will be so satisfied and blessed that there will no longer be any thought of eating and drinking. “We will be illumined by [God] and know him, not only with regard to the soul, but our whole body will be pervaded. It will be as clear and light as the air,” and “yet we will have a true body” (LW, Vol. 28, pp. 189,190). All this will be true because “God did not create man that he should sin and die, but that he should live.” Since Christ has removed all the filthy, shameful effects of sin, “all will be pure, and nothing that is evil or loathsome will be felt any longer on earth.” This can only happen when we “first shed this old, evil garment through death” (LW, Vol. 28, p. 203).

Later in 1533, in a sermon on John 14:6, Luther summarized our great hope:

I am baptized in Christ, and believe that he is my Savior and the Way on which I am to come to heaven. Hence, though I do not know the duration of my sojourn here or how soon I will divest myself of this bag of worms, I do know that I will live with him eternally. Even though this mortal body closes its eyes and all its senses, and though it does not know what will become of it—this is immaterial. It should not know or perceive this, but permit itself to be carried to the cemetery, to be interred in the ground and reduced to dust until God raises it up again. And yet, God be praised, as a Christian I do know where I will go and abide; for I was assured of this in Baptism, and likewise in the Sacrament. (LW, Vol. 24, pp. 44,45)

Mark Braun, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is a member at Grace, Waukesha, Wisconsin.

As we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, this is the 11th article in a 12-part series on our Lutheran heritage.

LUTHER

still speaks

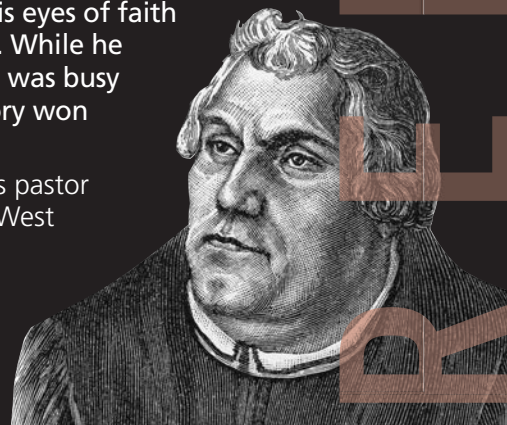
Busy as Luther was, his eyes of faith were focused on heaven. In a sermon on Titus 2:13, he urged believers, “We should learn to bring our eyes, our hearts, and souls to bear upon yonder life in heaven and in a lively hope await it with joy. For if we would be Christians, the ultimate objects of our quest should not be marrying, giving in marriage, buying, selling, planting, building—activities that Christ says (Matt. 24:37f.; Luke 17:26ff.) the wicked will be engaged in especially before the Last Day. To be sure, we, too, must use these things in order to satisfy the needs of the body. But our ultimate quest should be something better and higher: the blessed inheritance in heaven that does not pass away” (*What Luther Says*, Vol. 2, #1891).

Luther was no stranger to death. It had invaded his parsonage and carried off two daughters, one 8 months old and the other 14 years. But the Reformer found his comfort in what the Scriptures said and what he therefore preached. Since Christ had paid fully for sin, death could no longer be punishment for the believer. Instead, it was the necessary step from earth to heaven.

See how important is the message of the gospel that God restored to the church through his servant Luther. Without the assurance that sin’s punishment has been paid, death would still be sin’s horrible wage. Hell would still be the sinner’s painful destination. For eternity, the sinner—both body and soul—would be locked behind hell’s dismal prison doors.

Luther lived with his eyes of faith focused on heaven. While he waited, though, he was busy preaching the victory won fully by the Savior.

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



A couple travels down different paths to discover the truth.

Julie K. Wietzke

David and Meredith Moseley came from different ends of the religious spectrum—she from a strict Roman Catholic upbringing and he from the charismatic Assemblies of God. She grew up with the rosary, praying to the saints, and being “all about Mary.” His church emphasized the gifts of the Spirit, the laying on of hands, millennialism, and speaking in tongues.

Both denominations lacked the distinctly Lutheran message: Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone, in Christ alone.

“Although [our religious upbringings] might be different on the outside, in the end it’s the same bag of tricks,” says Meredith. “It’s all in the end a works-based religion.”

David and Meredith traveled down different paths to discover the truth: Salvation is God’s gift to us through his Son.

Meredith’s journey to Lutheranism didn’t start until she went to college.

She grew up in a devout Catholic family, attended Catholic high school, and served as a cantor for the weekly mass at church.

It wasn’t until she met a friend at UW-La Crosse that she stepped back to

look at what she really believed. “My friend was an evangelical, born-again believer type, and she was really outspoken about her faith,” says Meredith. “It made me think about myself and where I was in my beliefs.”

She says her friend encouraged her to read the Bible—something she hadn’t done much in the past. So Meredith started casually reading the Bible, and the Holy Spirit began his work.

After finding a book about the virgin Mary at home and reading it, Meredith began questioning her upbringing even more. “The book was saying the secret to heaven is to become a slave of Mary,” she says. “I had the weirdest feeling that this isn’t right; this isn’t what the Bible is telling me.”

This was a turning point for her. “I realized I always just accepted what the Catholic church said as true, but if they’re accepting these teachings that aren’t right, it had me questioning everything they teach,” she says.

She began visiting other churches and more regularly attending an Evangelical Free church, although she wasn’t always comfortable with the more contemporary worship. A WELS friend invited her to his church, and she decided to take the Bible information class to learn more about Lutheranism. “It was a good representation of what the Bible teaches,” she says. Being a musician, she also appreciated the historical liturgy and reading the music

directly from the hymnal. She joined Immanuel, La Crosse, Wis., in 2009.

Now came the hard part—telling her parents. She wrote them a letter and gave it to them when she was home for Christmas vacation. “I put all the Scripture verses and reasons why I chose not to be Catholic anymore,” she says. “I felt like [my parents] were put off by the Scriptures; I guess the Word is offensive to people.”

But for Meredith, the Word brought the true meaning of grace—not by works, but through faith in her Savior from sin.

David grew up in an Assembly of God church. The largest Pentecostal denomination in the United States, the Assemblies of God emphasize speaking in tongues, the laying on of hands for healing, millennialism, and the need to accept Jesus as your Savior.

Being moved by the Spirit was common in worship services David attended in Tomah, Wis., while growing up. He says that often someone spoke in tongues during worship and people were “slain by the Spirit,” in which they would fall to the ground after the laying on of hands for healing. “The whole emphasis on worship is to let the Spirit move so the emotions of people were affected,” he says. David says he was zealous for the faith as a teen, even being part of the worship team.

But the congregation had internal problems, and his father, a former Lutheran,

Confessions OF FAITH



began to question the charismatic gifts emphasized at the church.

The Lord also placed other influences in David's religious life. His dad's parents were WELS, and his grandmother introduced him to a WELS pastor's wife who gave him piano lessons. This gave David a chance to know someone who was Lutheran besides his grandparents. "She was very vocal about her faith," he says.

David joined the army in 2006 and before leaving for basic training, he decided he wanted to attend a service at St. Paul, Tomah, with his grandparents. "I was getting curious," he says. He attended a Christmas Eve candle-light service when he returned after basic training and Ash Wednesday church when he was back on leave.

Then, while serving at Fort Eustis in Virginia, getting to an Assembly of God church for worship was difficult, so he began attending the chapel at the fort. "I discovered you don't have to be Assembly of God," he says. "There were wonderful believers here at the chapel." He also began listening to a confessional online Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod radio program, which helped him understand how Lutherans viewed the sacraments. "It took care of a lot of issues for me because it pointed me back to Scripture," he says. He began reading and learning more.

When David returned to Tomah in 2010 after completing his active duty,

he started visiting St. Paul more regularly. But he also still kept attending the Assembly of God church—partly because his parents were still members and he was living at home and partly because "I was not ready to say that it was heretical," he says.

In 2011 he met his wife, Meredith, who then was a member at another WELS church in town. She and David began attending St. Paul's together and she decided to become a member there. They got engaged, and David started taking Bible information class.

The class further clarified his understanding of the Lutheran faith, including the definitions of words like *faith* and *grace*. "Most American evangelicals view faith as something we drum up in our hearts instead of being the gift of the Holy Spirit to us," David says. "It's about having to look inside me and I can make the decision—I can believe in Jesus—vs. it's the Holy Spirit through the Word that causes us to believe."

In June 2013, David was finally ready to make a complete break from the church of his childhood and join St. Paul. It wasn't easy—David says his mom, though she accepted it, never really got over it.

David and Meredith continue to be faithful members of St. Paul and participate in the music ministry of the congregation. David also served as a delegate to this summer's synod



David and Meredith Moseley

convention. With raising one daughter and another child on the way, they say that sometimes it is difficult not to have a close family heritage with the confessional Lutheran church and its teachings. But, according to Meredith, their broader understanding of what other denominations teach helps them appreciate all the more the distinct Lutheran truths of Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone, in Christ alone.

Says David, "We have our salvation—it's all God's gift to us. . . . Just go back to the Word of God—that's all you need."

Julie Wietzke is managing editor of Forward in Christ magazine.



heart to heart
parent conversations

There are days when we all long for some silence as parents—during those long, colicky twilight hours; the “why” stage of toddlerdom; the early grade school years when we’re treated to an unending litany of made-up knock-knock jokes; and the “you’re so uncool, why can’t I...” rants, stomping, and door slamming of preteens and teens. Yet, there are also times when we get concerned once that silence materializes. Our authors this month give us some options for how to deal with that kind of silence. So far, none of them are willing to offer ways to achieve silence during those other stages.... 🤔

Nicole Balza

**Join the
conversation!**

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

WHAT SHOULD WE DO WHEN OUR CHILDREN GROW SILENT?

It seems that we live in fear of quietness. Not only do we as a culture shy away from it, but we don’t particularly like it when our children grow quiet.

I would encourage you to embrace the quietness.

One of the benefits to homeschooling for six years was that I easily was able to incorporate quiet time with God into our day. Now that most of them are in brick-and-mortar schools, it is a little more difficult, but my children have learned the benefits of taking quiet time.

Jesus modeled quiet time on a regular basis. Whenever his disciples couldn’t find him, it was usually because Jesus took time out to be in solitude with his Father.

What a gift to model to our own children. When we are frustrated, scared, confused, or even full of joy, how often

Sometimes I think that half the battle of parenting is not to take anything too personally. When your teenage boy goes quiet, for instance, it’s usually not about you.

It can be a hard adjustment, though, because wasn’t it just last week when he was sitting in the kitchen, going on and on while you were browning the ground beef? I once listed everything my 11-year-old son talked about in a 20-minute stream-of-consciousness deluge, at which my only requirement was to nod and grunt. His oration included palindromes, peristalsis (which is why you can drink milk upside down), how his arms were getting stronger (so adorable), and the middle name of Harry Truman. (It’s “S,” by the way. I know this because he told me.)

But then the chatterbox morphs into the one grunting, and you panic a little: Why doesn’t he talk to me anymore? Is he in trouble? Does he hate me?

What I learned is this:

- A bit of silence is normal. Teens are supposed to grow up and separate from their parents. Part of that is talking to you less.

One of the greatest skills of parenting is communicating with our children—truly hearing them, reflecting their words, giving them an understanding that their thoughts and feelings are heard and acknowledged. What a wonderful demonstration of love to be fully present with another person in close communication.

As children grow and develop and experience a multitude of new things, there is a lot to process and understand. What if we get the sense that our child doesn’t want to talk about it? Here are a few things to keep in mind:

Parents of young children: Now is the time to set the stage for a lifetime of proper communication.

Get them used to talking about their day. Consider making it a bedtime ritual. Share one great part of your day and one not-so-great part—both child *and* parent. Then spend time in prayer, thanking God for the highs and asking for his help regarding the lows.

do we find solitude to hang out with Jesus? When my children are angry or overwhelmed, they can learn to take the time to break away from the chaos (or even the perceived chaos) and lean on the true Comforter.

What about when our children grow quiet to isolate themselves in an unhealthy way? Tad and I work hard to create space. Safe space. Space to feel disappointed, hurt, overwhelmed. Let them share without judgment or the need to fix (this is a constant struggle for me). Listen. Really listen. Without reacting.

Sometimes our kids just don't want to talk to us. I truly believe that is okay. Tad and I have prayerfully asked for guidance to find Christian mentors for each of our children. We found people who foster relationships with our children so they can go to them when they don't feel like they are ready to talk

to us. We intentionally ask people who we know will provide the spiritual guidance that will bring our children closer to Jesus.

One last thing I would like to add is to pray. Pray for your children. Not only in the quiet of your bedroom at night, but also out loud in front of them. Maybe pray outside their closed door. Maybe pray in the car while they are strapped . . . I mean, buckled . . . in. Maybe even put your hands on them and literally pray over them. Let them hear the words you share with your heavenly Father on their behalf. Maybe pray in their room when they aren't in there. Whatever it looks like in your home, keep praying.

Jenni Schubring and her husband, Tad, have five children ranging in age from 8 to 16. They are also licensed foster parents.



- Asking a million questions does not work. Even though you just want him to know you're interested in his life, it can come off as prying and controlling.
- It sometimes works to ask about a friend: "So why isn't Ed going out for choir this year?" That can lead to an actual conversation—about other friends, Ed's pool party three weeks ago, and maybe even the girl he's had his eye on. (Mission accomplished.)
- Respect his privacy. Don't share the news about that girl he has his eye on with your book club.
- Don't make everything a teachable moment. If he tells you he's going to skip college and take his garage band on the road, just say, "Okay!" Chances are, he'll figure out how dumb that is all on his own. But if you shut him down right away, the next time he has a big dream or crazy idea, he won't bring it to you.
- Have adult conversations about adult topics at the dinner table—the latest political question, a home budget issue, something you saw at the store that made you uncomfortable. Let everybody weigh in. Treat all responses, even the immature ones, with equal respect.

Now it's possible that a teenager's silence is a warning sign. If he's hiding in his room all the time or is exceptionally

surly, he may be struggling with something bigger than he can handle—a traumatic breakup, guilt over a sin, an Instagram situation that exploded, some kind of violence, even depression or substance abuse.

In this case, although he's silent, he's actually crying out for help, and you need to be the parent. Search his room. Check his social media. Ask another adult he trusts—an uncle or teacher—if something's going on that you should know about. If the situation warrants, talk to a counselor with him.

But that's the exception. Usually a little silence is just part of your teenager's individuation—growing up and separating himself from you. (This is the goal, remember? We don't want to be doing their laundry when they're 23.)

If you give him respect and love and space, he'll know he can come talk to you whenever he wants to. You'll be browning the ground beef some evening, and suddenly he'll feel the need to tell you—*everything*. Whether he's 11 or 17 or 30, just nod and let the boy talk.

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



Another thing to keep in mind is our children's temperaments. By nature, don't some kids seem to think out loud and others internalize? Some kids want/need to be verbal. Others, not so much. We parents have these same natural preferences.

Here's a recent example in my family. I picked up Kayla from an after-school practice and said, "Hi." I got a hi back, and then I settled into a comfortable silence. After a few seconds, Kayla said, "Ask me something about high school."

Boy, do I have it made in the communication parenting skill area with her! Not only did my extroverted daughter tell me about her day, but she even interjected questions to herself for me! "Let's see, what else happened today?"

Now my seventh-grade son, Josh, is a bit different. I picked him up and made the mistake of asking him a close-ended question: "How was your day, buddy?" He replied with, "Good." Insert silence.

I have come to understand that Josh prefers to process his

thoughts internally and needs to be drawn out with more questions such as, "What was your favorite thing today?" "How come?" "What did everyone play at recess?" Reflecting some of his thoughts and feelings keeps the communication going. But there are times when an introvert simply needs to spend time in thought in order to process effectively. Silence is important.

Is it a problem when our kids are silent? Maybe for some. If Kayla grew silent, I'd be quite concerned. I would check on her for sure. Josh's silence can be harder to decipher. Is it his natural tendency or could he be troubled? Whichever the case, my wife, Kelly, and I make it our goal to watch for those opportunities to check in and give both kids the understanding that we are here and willing to talk if or when they need to. It is our way of demonstrating our love for God in their lives.

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



teentalk

Count your blessings

Realize that what you have comes from God, and thank God every day for what you have.

Isabella Eckert

Count your blessings.

I was always told to count my blessings when I was having a hard time or feeling bad for myself or trying to fall asleep. When I think of counting my blessings, I think of my faith, my family, a Christian home, nutrition, my health, and those close to me. Those are all immediate things that pop into my mind. I am always thankful for those things, but I just do not find myself thinking about them that often or thanking God enough for them.

I strongly believe that God puts people in your life to change the way you look at your own life.

I have had several people in my life who have strengthened my faith in many ways.

But one person I met really changed the way that I look at my own life. She was super friendly the instant we met—very talkative and energized! She was not shy about talking to a girl that she had just met. As we asked each other a few questions about ourselves, I soon found out that she had it rough. Growing up, she was constantly bullied at school for being different. She even

told me some very scary stories about being bullied. It made me tear up. I couldn't even imagine the things that she went through.

I looked again at all the blessings that I had and still have in my life. I grew up in Christian schools; she went to big public schools, where she was made fun of every day for just being herself. I have always had a healthy life; she grew up with unhealthy parents and family. She also had many difficulties with her own health. Thinking about what she had to go through made me really appreciate what I have.

During our conversations, she mentioned that she was a Christian. It really hit me when she said that. She had to go through health issues, family problems, death of a family member, and bullying; yet she had faith through it all. I knew that even if I would never see her again, I would see her one day in heaven.

Count your blessings. Now I try to count my blessings every day because I *really* appreciate what God has given me. He continues to bless me every day. Even when I do not notice his blessings, he continues to provide.

God sometimes places people in your life to appreciate what you have. He definitely showed me my blessings—very clearly.

Recognize the blessings that have been given to you. Before you go to sleep at night, count your blessings. When you get up in the morning, count your blessings. Count your blessings in the middle of the day! Thank God that you have faith and pray that it grows every day. Thank God for the people in your life. Do not forget to pray for their faith too.

“Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed” (Psalm 103:2-6).

Isabella Eckert, a senior at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wisconsin, is a member at Christ Alone, Thiensville, Wisconsin.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Bittorf, Kenneth, to St. Peter, Rib Lake, Wis.
Caauwe, Johann, to St. John's, Wood Lake, Minn.

Cordes, Nathan, to St. John, Lake City, Minn.
Dobberstein, Donn, to director of discipleship, WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, Waukesha, Wis.

Foley, Michael, to Star of Bethlehem, Santa Maria, Calif.

Freeman, Leonard, to retirement

Headrick, Ian, to Our Redeemer, Yorktown, Va.

Headrick, Noah, to Christ, Eagle River, Wis.

Hildebrant, John, to Grace, Dalton, Wis.

Humann, James, to retirement

Ibisch, Paul, to St. Peter's, Larsen, Wis.

Learman, Charles, to retirement

Luetke, Joel, to retirement

Schultz, Roger, to retirement

Sweet, David, to retirement

Wenzel, Glenn, to retirement

Willitz, Luke, to Immanuel, Mosinee, Wis.

Zell, Paul, to Living Savior, Asheville, N.C.

Teachers

Bohlmann, Katherine, to Trusting Hearts Preschool & Kindergarten, Palos Heights, Ill.
Buege, Charles, to Risen Savior Christian Academy, Pooler, Ga.

Endorf, Amanda, to St. Paul, Tomah, Wis.

Ewings, Maria, to St. Luke, Watertown, Wis.

Folsom, Laura, to Pilgrim, Mesa, Ariz.

Free, Cathryn, to St. Paul, Ixonia, Wis.

Hagglund, Rebecca, to Christ, North Saint Paul, Minn.

Henning, Brenda, to Holy Trinity, Des Moines, Wash.

Johnson, Gregory, to St. Paul, Howards Grove, Wis.

Kamps, Beth, to Trinity, Marinette, Wis.

Karnopp, Sandy, to St. John, Goodhue, Minn.

Krueger, Terry, to Peace, Green Lake, Wis.

Kuchenbecker, James, to Christ, Eagle River, Wis.

Lambrecht, Ginny, to Christ, Eagle River, Wis.

Martin, Gregory, to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.

Moldenhauer, Jeanne, to retirement

Phelps, Molly, to Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis.

Phillips, Lisa, to St. Paul Lutheran Child Center, Winneconne, Wis.

Roloff, Jeffrey, to St. Jacobi, Greenfield, Wis.

Tonn, Sarah, to St. John, Milwaukee, Wis.

Staff minister

Arnold, Mark, to Christian giving counselor, Ministry of Christian Giving

NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS AND PASTORS

We thank God for you and for your support of the ministry WELS carries out on behalf of all congregations. We ask that you continue to mail your Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) deposit and its processing coupon to our bank lockbox, which provides effective and efficient deposit processing for the synod. For your CMO payment to be included in reported receipts for the month, it must be received in the synod's bank lockbox on or before the last business day. An exception is made for December offerings. Gifts received by the bank lockbox up to and including Jan. 8, 2018, will be credited as 2017 CMO, if accompanied by a 2017 coupon. Thank you for your assistance

ANNIVERSARIES

St. Louis, Mo.—Martin Luther (50). Nov. 4. Celebration carnival and lunch, 10 A.M.—4 P.M. Nov. 5. 50-500 celebration service and meal, 10 A.M.—1 P.M. Website, mluther.org.

Geneva, Neb.—Grace (90). Nov. 12. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; dinner to follow. 402-759-3732; kruschels@gmail.com.

COMING EVENTS

Reformation 500 celebrations—Many districts are holding area Reformation 500 worship services. Check out dates, times, and locations at wels.net/reformation500.

Online conference—Oct. 23–Nov. 13. Gospel Outreach with Media online conference. Host: Christ in Media Institute, Bethany College. Website, gowm.org.

Celebration of Life—Nov. 4. Host: Christian Life Resources. Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis. Theme, "Our Legacy of Life." Register at clrevents.com.

WELS National Choral Festival—Nov. 10–12. 50th anniversary. Host: Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis. Pops concert, Nov. 10, 7 P.M. Sacred concert, Nov. 12, 2 P.M. La Crosse Center Main Arena, 300 Harborview Plaza, La Crosse, Wis. Website, welsfinearts.org.

Women's retreat—Nov. 11. David's Star, Jackson, Wis. Website, davidstar.org.

Concert—Nov. 26. 2 & 4:30 P.M. The Lutheran Chorale of Milwaukee. Abiding Word, Milwaukee, Wis. Theme, "Prelude to Christmas." Mary Prange, 414-861-7092.

Live nativity—Dec. 1–2. 6–8 P.M. Christ, Eagle River, Wis. Presentations run every 20 minutes. 715-479-8307.

Bethlehem Express—Dec. 2. St. Paul's, Arlington, Minn. 11 A.M.—2:30 P.M. Website, stpaularlington.com.

Live nativity—Dec. 3. 4–7 P.M. Martin Luther, Oshkosh, Wis. Presented in "drive-through" fashion. Website, martinlutheroshkosh.com/events/live-nativity.

WELS ministerial education school Christmas concerts—

- Dec. 2, 7:30 P.M.; Dec. 3, 4 P.M. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 507-354-8221.
- Dec. 10, 3 and 7 P.M. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. 262-242-8100.
- Dec. 17, 3 P.M.; Dec. 21, 10 A.M. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. 920-261-4352.
- Dec. 22, 7 P.M. Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich. 989-793-1041.

Mid-term graduation—Dec. 14. 10 A.M. Chapel of the Christ, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 507-354-8221.

WELS Day at Ford Field—Dec. 16. 4:30 P.M. Ford Field, Detroit, Mich. Detroit Lions vs. Chicago Bears. Lucas Schroeder, 313-262-2164; lucas.schroeder@lions.nfl.net. Tickets, detroitlions.com/wels.

NAMES WANTED

Boston, Mass.—WELS members or people living in the area. New outreach. David Meyer, revdmeyer@gmail.com; 508-761-5051.

Monroe, Wis.—WELS members or people living in the area. Nathan Strutz, torstrutz@rlcverona.com; 608-515-4334.

College students—Register college students with WELS Campus Ministry for free helpful materials, including *Forward in Christ* magazine and *Meditations*. Website, wels.net/campus-ministry.

Military/inmates/individuals with special needs—Special Ministries supplies devotions, resources, and other spiritual help and teaching tools to members of the Armed Forces, inmates, and individuals with special needs. Complete an online referral form at wels.net/refer. Special Ministries, 414-256-3241; csn@wels.net.

WELS ARCHIVES

The synod archives is looking for the following materials: church histories; bulletins (from anniversary, installations, dedications, and other special events); church constitutions, bylaws, and other charter documents; Book of Sacred Acts; photographs, scrapbooks, and other visuals of your congregation's history; and more. For more information about materials to donate, call 414-256-3203. Website, wels.net/archives. To schedule a tour of the WELS archives and visitors center, contact CMMtours@wels.net, 414-256-3888. Tours are available Monday through Friday during normal business hours.

Find additional community events and resources at welsrc.net. To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.

Choral Festival offers lifelong blessings

“Joyful. Amazing. A taste of heaven.” These are just some of the words used to describe the WELS National Choral Festival, which celebrates its 50th anniversary Nov. 10-12, in La Crosse, Wisconsin—the place where it all began.

“Choral Fest allowed my choir family to grow along with my faith. . . . We all stood together as one in faith and in song.”—Shelby Cary, student at Luther High School

Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis., has a tradition of musical excellence. Frank J. Italiano directed the popular Luther High School band for years. “Of the 60 kids in the school, 59 were in band,” recalls Dave Adickes, who inherited the Luther choral program early in his ministry.

Italiano held the first Lutheran band festival at Luther in 1960, and Adickes thought, *We should do the same!* He dreamt big, calling it the *National Lutheran Choral Festival* and inviting eight WELS prep and high schools to sing in the first festival in 1967. Nearly 100 students gathered to “celebrate God’s gift of music” and get a “sneak peek of heaven,” as well as gain exposure to a variety of directors and techniques, according to Adickes. (D)MLC’s head of choral music, Prof. Martin Albrecht, directed the mass choir, which fulfilled another objective—getting students to love DMLC. From the start, Friday night’s concert was a secular concert performed by the individual choirs. Saturday was rehearsal, culminating with Sunday’s mass sacred concert. The location changed as various WELS high schools hosted the event.

As time went on, regional and national festivals were held in alternate years, with up to 21 high schools participating. In 1982, the 25th anniversary of Choral Fest, Luther High School again hosted the gathering. This was the first time a special piece was commissioned for the festival, a tradition that has continued throughout the years. “It’s great to see how [Choral Fest] has grown . . . and how much the quality of the music has improved,” says Adickes.

Not only has musicianship grown, but the festival has also “helped unite the schools and bring the congregations together,” says Adickes.

“My kids love Choral Fest. They make new friends, they are exposed to the directing styles of different directors, and they always express the deep joy they experience from singing beautiful music to God’s glory with fellow Christians. As a teacher and director, what more could I want for them?”—Ned Goede, teacher at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.

As Choral Fest celebrates its 50th anniversary, Luther High School will again serve as host, this time under the direction of Dave Adickes’ son, Paul, a former Choral Fest attendee, director, and clinician.

This year’s festival will include music from the past five decades, an alumni choir, and commissioned works by WELS teachers Sarah Siegler and Dale Witte—including the final piece, an arrangement of “God’s Word Is Our Great Heritage,” which also serves as this year’s theme. The image of the Mississippi River Bridge—an iconic feature in La Crosse—adorns the poster, symbolizing how “Choral Festival 2017 will bridge the music of the past, present, and future with the timeless heritage and hope that we have in the living and enduring Word of God,” says Paul.

“Choral Fest honestly played a huge part in inspiring me to become a music teacher. I knew that someday I wanted to be able to lead students to praise God and witness together just like my grandfather and father have.”—Jennifer Adickes, student at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

Paul continues, “Choral Festival has endured for so many reasons beyond its musical value. . . . The friendships created, the bonds of faith that are reinforced, and the words of faith proclaimed in song resonate in the hearts of our students long after the concerts. Choral Festival gives them an experience that is a lifelong blessing.”

Ann Ponath

Go to welsfinearts.org to view a livestream of the Choral Fest concerts. Visit wels.net/forwardinchrist for more interviews with past and present Choral Festival directors and participants.



(Bottom) Nearly 100 students participated in the first WELS National Choral Festival at Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis., in 1967. (Top) About 500 singers were in the last national festival held at Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis., in 2015.



Working together to support congregations

WELS Congregational Services has put together a five-year plan to direct its work. The plan addresses current demographic challenges facing many WELS congregations. Plans include

- creating a present-day mission emphasis;
- better capitalizing on WELS' historic strengths;
- focusing on closing the “back door”;
- striving to strengthen the family;
- helping aging, rural congregations prayerfully work through their options; and
- assisting congregations with self-assessment and planning.

Each area of WELS Congregational Services is working on different aspects of the plan, but many times the groups are working together to develop resources to face these challenges. For example, the Commissions on Evangelism and Lutheran Schools teamed up to develop a tool that helps congregations with outreach and allows them to capitalize on one of WELS' historic strengths—its schools.

WELS maintains one of the largest private schools systems in the United States. The greatest growth in WELS' school system over the past 20 years

has been in early childhood ministries. Many congregations have started early childhood ministries to reach into their communities to share the gospel with nonmember families and create a gateway for new members to join the church. Research has shown, though, that while these ministries are doing a wonderful job sharing God's Word with their young students, most are not reaching their students' families. To help congregations create a harvest strategy that might better share God's Word with these families, the Commissions on Evangelism and Lutheran Schools created *Telling the Next Generation: Utilizing our Schools for Outreach*.

Telling the Next Generation is a day-long workshop that helps congregation and school leaders focus on their joint mission, build relationships within the church and with school families, and develop an organized program to connect school families with the Word. Since the program began in April 2016, 17 workshops have been held in 11 of WELS' 12 districts. Almost 800 hundred people from 109 congregations have participated.

“The *Telling the Next Generation* workshop has had an incredible impact on

the early childhood ministry of Apostles,” says Jay Bickelhaupt, pastor at Apostles, Billings, Mont. “We walked away with a detailed ministry plan and a refreshed focus to boldly proclaim the good news of Jesus to children and their families. Our meetings and future planning have become more streamlined as we go forward with our agreed upon outreach and evangelism goals.”

Bickelhaupt also reports that within two weeks of the workshop, God blessed Apostles with two preschool families in the congregation's Bible basics class. As he notes, “*Telling the Next Generation* has empowered our ministry team spiritually with the gospel and has provided the practical lessons we needed to position our early childhood ministry as an outreach arm to our community.”

WELS Congregational Services will continue to work on other aspects of its five-year plan and release new tools and resources as they are developed.



Learn more about Congregational Services at wels.net/congregational-services. Discover more about the current demographic challenges facing WELS in the November edition of *WELS Connection*.

New director of discipleship joins Congregational Services

“Encouraging and equipping congregations for faithful and fruitful gospel ministry.”

That's how Donn Dobberstein describes his new position as the director of discipleship for WELS Congregational Services. In this new role, Dobberstein will serve the WELS Commissions on Adult Discipleship and Youth and Family Ministry.

Dobberstein is not a stranger to Congregational Services, having served as the chairman of the Commission on Evangelism for the past 10 years. He also says, “Twenty-two years in parish mission settings have given me ministry experiences showing the importance of and the connection between ‘making

disciples’ and ‘continuing to disciple.’ Evangelism and nurture are not at odds with each other but are complementary.”

Dobberstein and his wife, Beth, are moving from their current home in Port



Donn Dobberstein, the new WELS director of discipleship, served as pastor at Our Savior's, Port Orange, Fla., for the past 17 years.

Orange, Fla., to the Milwaukee, Wis., area as Donn begins his work at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry. They have four children, two of whom still live at home.

Dobberstein feels a sense of urgency for this ministry. He notes, “After years of the position being ‘dormant,’ clarifying a sense of direction and vision will be a priority. Evaluating and prioritizing resources needed for WELS congregations will help us set goals for the next five years. My intention is to listen and learn, support and serve my fellow coworkers and God's people. I believe God has given us a unique moment in his kingdom that can be seized that, God-willing, can lead to ministry activity.”

Hurricanes offer opportunity to show Christian love

With three major hurricanes affecting the United States this summer, there were many opportunities for WELS members to show Christian love and service to the affected congregations and their communities. WELS Christian Aid and Relief has distributed more than \$100,000 in relief aid so far to help those affected by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria.

In addition, several groups already have traveled to the affected areas to show Christian love by helping with immediate cleanup.

FLORIDA

Five men from Salem, Stillwater, Minn., brought a Christian Aid and Relief trailer outfitted with tools and supplies to West Melbourne, Fla., in late September, to help members of New Hope, West Melbourne, and Redeemer, Merritt Island, with cleanup following Hurricane Irma.



WELS President Mark Schroeder (far right) traveled to Florida in September to support congregations and their members who were affected by Hurricane Irma. He pitched in to help with clean-up at members' and nonmembers' homes in West Melbourne and Merritt Island. "It was heartwarming to meet the men who came from Minnesota, took vacation time, and worked tirelessly in the hot Florida sun—all because they wanted to show love and concern for others in need," says Schroeder. "And the gratitude of those who were helped let them know that their efforts were appreciated."

It was a homecoming for Jeff Ross, who was stationed in Florida for his military service. "I got laid off from my job, which was not a bad thing, so, I had a little time on my hands," he says. "God just gave me this opportunity to come down here and help some Floridians out. I know what it's like to go through a hurricane. So it's great to get back and help."

The group took down trees and cleaned up debris at about 25 homes—both of WELS members and also nonmembers in the community. New Hope Christian Academy school children helped with cleanup as well as distributed fliers that shared information about the congregations.

"It's a great opportunity to live our faith but also to share our faith through our actions and through the conversations we are able to have," says Ted Petersen, a member of New Hope who helped coordinate local relief efforts.

With many retirees in the congregations who find it difficult to do the physical labor, Petersen says it was wonderful to have volunteers come and work on the church's behalf. "Hurricanes are brutal things. . . . Just to see people come down who say, 'We're going to help you out. We care about you and what you've been through and we're going to do what we can to get you back on your feet'—that means a lot to us," he says.

It also is rewarding for the volunteers. Bob Wells, one of the volunteers from Minnesota, says, "It's been nice



A group of WELS volunteers from Texas helped clean up the yard of 82-year-old Emmett Gloyna and his wife, Deborah, who rode out Hurricane Harvey in their Victoria, Texas, home. While their home didn't get flooded, the wind and possibly a tornado took out seven trees in their yard. "We've only been members for a few months and for them to make a special effort was pretty great," says Emmett. "We really appreciate assistance like that—the thoughtfulness that went along with it and the love of the members for one another."

to go together and work as a group, to know that the congregation and the synod are here to help. And [to see] the people just crying tears of joy after we showed up and got the work done.”

TEXAS

About 50 WELS members from the greater Austin, Dallas/Fort Worth, and Houston area traveled to Edna and Victoria, Texas, in early September to offer support and relief to those communities that were affected by Hurricane Harvey.

These volunteers partnered with members of Redeemer, a multi-site ministry with worship in both Edna and Victoria, to address the critical needs of the congregation’s members, their friends and family, and also the community. “We hit roughly 60 families, doing work anywhere from tarping roofs to cutting down trees to cleaning up yards,” says Andrew Schroer, pastor at Redeemer, Edna.

Aaron Glaeske, pastor at Redeemer, Victoria, had only arrived in Victoria a couple of months before the hurricane. He just recently started worship services at the Victoria site and is preparing for a grand opening on Dec. 3. “Our dear Lord gave us an opportunity with Harvey to introduce ourselves to the community in a different way,” he says. “Every opportunity you have to reach into the community to show that you’re interested in them—not just to get people into pews but because you’re really interested in them as people—that speaks volumes about the kind of love that Jesus has shown us.”



Christian Aid and Relief is still evaluating long-term recovery needs, especially in Houston, Texas, which had massive flooding after some areas received more than 50 inches of rain, and Puerto Rico, which was devastated by Hurricane Maria. Learn more at wels.net/hurricaneupdates.

Classes offered for chaplaincy program

From police officers to those who are incarcerated, the Chaplain Certification Program is about helping people in special circumstances with special ministry needs. Training is open to all WELS members, both lay members and called workers, with a heart for meeting the spiritual needs of people in circumstances that require particular spiritual care. Specific areas of ministry include those in prison, hospitals, and nursing homes; the military and their families; and public servants, such as police officers and firemen and women.

The Commission on Special Ministries established this program because many healthcare facilities, jails, prisons, and military bases are tightening their requirements for ministry in their facilities, especially if the pastor or layperson wants to reach out to nonmembers.

Chaplain Certification Program courses can be taken online through Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. There are four required courses—Communicating Forgiveness, A Scriptural Approach to Addiction Counseling, Your Chaplaincy and Ethical Issues, and Chaplaincy Seminar—and four electives with emphases on prison ministry, ministry to the military, and ministry to the aging.

DiAnn Krigbaum, a retired police officer, was not only served by a chaplain during her time on the police force, but she also got her certification to serve as a chaplain after she retired. She tells her story in the latest issues of *His Hands*, the WELS Commission on Special Ministries newsletter.

When her own family experienced a crisis and she didn’t know whom to call, she found help through a chaplain. She writes:

“As the situation escalated, the social worker told me to call 911. I couldn’t. I froze. *I was* the police! I was supposed to help solve and fix problems. My

mind was racing. What would my coworkers and supervisors think of me? The enormous shame and pain from loss and failure left me unable to move.

“The collateral damage severely wounded every member of my family. I nearly lost my job. Had God abandoned us?

“But God did not forget about me and my family. He appeared ‘undercover’ in the form of a chaplain. My pastor at the time was also a volunteer police chaplain. He came to my rescue by repeatedly reminding me that God was not trying to harm me but to give me hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

“By God’s grace, I survived in my career until age 50, when I retired with a police pension and sufficient means to take care of my family as a single mother.

“That’s when my pastor asked me to take chaplain courses with him through Martin Luther College. He suggested it would help my faith grow and allow others to learn from my experiences.

“In an online forum with other pastors and lay students, I was able to share my experiences as a police officer and spiritually wounded WELS member. This provided healing, learning, spiritual growth, and friendships with many Christian friends and called workers. In 2014 I received my Chaplain Certificate from Martin Luther College.”



Learn more about becoming a chaplain at wels.net/chaplains. The next online class, “The Spiritual Side of PTSD,” taught by Paul Ziemer, WELS national civilian chaplain to the military, will begin in January 2018. A limited amount of financial aid is available from the Lutheran Military Support Group for WELS military contact pastors to take chaplain certification courses. Read the rest of Krigbaum’s story at wels.net/special-ministries.

Obituaries

Janice M. Braun, 1937–2017

Janice Braun (née Schmidt) was born Feb. 10, 1937, in Wood Lake, Minn. She died Apr. 22, 2017, in Fond du Lac, Wis.

A 1976 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she served St. John, Montello, Wis., and St. Paul, Fort Atkinson, Wis.

She is survived by her husband, Jerome; two daughters; two sons; seven grandchildren; and four sisters. She is preceded in death by one brother.

Ardin D. Laper, 1919–2017

Ardin Laper was born July 1, 1919, in Markesan, Wis. He died Apr. 26, 2017, in Sun Prairie, Wis.

A 1944 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Good Shepherd, Omaha, Neb.; Peace, Wautoma, Wis.; and Peace, Sun Prairie, Wis.

He is survived by 6 daughters, 1 son, 15 grandchildren, and 13 great-grandchildren. He is preceded in death by his wife, Lily; one daughter; one brother; and one sister.

Richard F. Hennig, 1939–2017

Richard Hennig was born Dec. 16, 1939, in Chicago, Ill. He died May 2, 2017, in Kalamazoo, Mich.

A 1969 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Trinity, El Paso, Texas; Memorial, Williamston, Mich.; Good Shepherd, Jacksonville, Fla.; Calvary, South Milwaukee, Wis.; and St. Matthew, Benton Harbor, Mich.

He is survived by his wife, Anita; his mother; two daughters; four sons; 13 grandchildren; one brother; and two sisters. He is preceded in death by his father and brother.

Martin L. Schwartz, 1945–2017

Martin Schwartz was born July 3, 1945, in Green Bay, Wis. He died May 5, 2017, in Saint Paul Park, Minn.

A 1971 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served St. Paul, Montrose, Minn.; Trinity, Buffalo, Minn.; and St. Andrew's, Saint Paul Park, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Helen; 3 children; and 11 grandchildren.

Donald W. Meier, 1925–2017

Donald Meier was born July 24, 1925, in Alberdeen, S.D. He died May 29, 2017, in Watertown, Wis.

He served Our Savior, Wausau, Wis.; First, Lake Geneva, Wis.; Emanuel, Saint Paul, Minn.; Mt. Olive, Saint Paul

Minn.; the Ministry of Christian Giving; Shepherd of the Hills, Duluth, Minn.; and Open Bible, Oxford, Fla.

He is survived by his wife, Lois; 3 daughters; 4 sons; 25 grandchildren; 53 great-grandchildren; and 1 sister. He is preceded in death by one brother and one great-grandchild.

Jeannette E. Wichmann, 1926–2017

Jeannette Wichmann (née Westerhaus) was born Dec. 2, 1926, in Watertown, Wis. She died May 20, 2017, in Watertown, Wis.

She served Immanuel, Gibbon, Minn.; Zion, Monroe, Mich.; St. John, Princeton, Wis.; Peace, Green Lake, Wis.; St. Mark's, Watertown, Wis.; and St. John, Waterloo, Wis.

She is survived by three sons, five grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. She is preceded in death by her husband, Walter; one grandchild; and three brothers.

Lois M. Eckley, 1932–2017

Lois Eckley (née Meissner) was born Sept. 1, 1932, in Mishicot, Wis. She died May 22, 2017, in Two Rivers, Wis.

She taught at St. Peter, Eldorado, Wis.; Trinity, Brillion, Wis.; and St. John's, Two Rivers, Wis.

She is survived by 2 sons, 4 daughters, 12 grandchildren, 7 great-grandchildren, and 1 brother. She is preceded in death by her husband, F. Peter.

John E. Oldfield Jr., 1939–2017

John Oldfield Jr. was born Feb. 23, 1939, in Neshkoro, Wis. He died June 6, 2017, in West Saint Paul, Minn.

He taught at St. Croix Lutheran Academy, West Saint Paul, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Elizabeth; 4 daughters; 11 grandchildren; and 2 sisters. He is preceded in death by one brother.

Melvin C. Schwartz, 1928–2017

Melvin Schwartz was born Jan. 6, 1928, in Kenosha, Wis. He died June 7, 2017, in West Bend, Wis.

He taught at Salem, Milwaukee, Wis.; Jerusalem, Morton Grove, Ill.; St. Peter, Weyauwega, Wis.; Faith, Antioch, Ill.; and St. Matthew's, Niles, Ill.

He is survived by one brother. He is preceded in death by one brother and one sister.

District news

NORTH ATLANTIC

St. Paul, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, and its campus ministry, **Illumine**, gave away hundreds of pieces of furniture and household items to university students at its annual “University Unsale.” Volunteers even loaded and drove the free items to students’ residences.

MICHIGAN/NORTH ATLANTIC



The Michigan and North Atlantic Districts held a joint youth rally in Cincinnati, Ohio, from July 17–20.

The Way, Fredericksburg, Va., held its opening worship service on Sept. 10. This home mission congregation is currently worshipping at the local cinema.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

Friedens, Kenosha, Wis., opened an outreach center to let its neighbors know that it cares about them. Volunteers at the center offer free clothes, bags of food, and conversation for those who might be lonely. Bibles are also available.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

AZ-CA—On Sept. 17, **Grace, Safford, Ariz.,** celebrated its 75th anniversary.

St. Peter, Modesto, Calif., celebrated its 40th anniversary on Sept. 24.

D-M—St. Paul, Rapid City, S.D., celebrated its 75th anniversary in August.

On June 18, Good Shepherd, Sioux Falls, S.D., celebrated the 40th anniversary in the pastoral ministry of **Norman Seeger**.

MN—On June 25, **St. Mark, Mankato, Minn.,** celebrated its 75th anniversary

and dedicated the congregation’s new altar, baptismal font, and ambo in the newly renovated chancel area.

On Aug. 27, **First, La Crescent, Minn.,** celebrated its 75th anniversary.

St. John, Northeast Minneapolis, Minn., celebrated its 150th anniversary on Oct. 15.

NW—St. John, Town of Grover (rural Peshtigo), Wis., celebrated the 125th anniversary of the dedication of its church facility on Oct. 1.

SEW—Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis., celebrated the 40th anniversary of its school and the 50th

anniversary of its church in August.

WW—On July 30, Bethel, Galesville/Arcadia, Wis., celebrated the 25th anniversary in the pastoral ministry of **Jon Cox**.

On Sept. 10, **Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis.,** celebrated its 90th anniversary.

St. John, Waterloo, Wis., celebrated its 150th anniversary on Sept. 17.

The district reporters for this month are: AZ-CA—Michael Schroeder; D-M—Andrew Hussman; MI—John Eich; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NA—Philip Gurgel; NE—Timothy Kemnitz; NW—Dennis Kleist; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Brett Brauer.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



On Sept. 15, the WELS Board for Home Missions held a service of thanksgiving for its four home mission counselors and their service in the pastoral ministry. From left: Timothy Flunker, 25 years; Mark Birkholz, 35 years; Peter Kruschel, 42 years; and Edward Schuppe, 41 years.

NEBRASKA



Nebraska Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb., was in the path of totality for the Aug. 21 solar eclipse. The school celebrated with a solar eclipse bash that included a presentation about the eclipse and its importance, a picnic lunch, and games.



SALT

— of the —

EARTH

**The poor and needy are opportunities
to help and be hospitable.**

John P. Huebner

"I thought he was going to kidnap me!" said my 11-year old grandson after I had given a few dollars to the man in the Home Depot parking lot who was asking for rent help.

I've read the articles about enabling addicts and homeless people and teaching a person to fish versus giving him a fish. And I, probably just like you, try to avert my eyes when I'm at the stoplight with someone two feet away from my car window with a hand-printed cardboard sign asking for money—the sign that often also says, "God bless you."

But Jesus says I should help needy people. Who and how are questions for which each of us needs to find answers.

WHO?

In the same Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus taught the large crowd about being "the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13), he also said, "But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret" (6:3,4). You notice that he *expects* God's people to give to the needy. He didn't say, "If." He didn't break the needy down into classes—"a bit needy," "a lot needy," or "most needy." He just said, "Needy."

St. Paul explains that this is especially true when God's salty people show loving concern toward one another: "Share

with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" (Romans 12:13). Practicing hospitality literally means "striving or aspiring to be one who loves the stranger as a friend." It has something to do with providing a welcoming, safe place, as Abraham and Sarah did for three strangers when they entertained angels and the Lord without knowing it (Genesis 18).

Katie Luther and her husband, Martin, who had six children of their own, also accommodated nieces, nephews, tutors, monks, nuns, indigent pastors, students, and others at their home. They even took in a fugitive pastor on their wedding night and sick people during the plague! Their home was definitely a hospitable place.

In his *Treatise on Good Works* (Luther's Works, Vol. 44, pp. 17-114), Luther told the world why Christians care for those in need. "For because a man trusts God, he is generous and does not doubt that he will always have enough; on the other hand, a man is covetous and worries because he does not trust God." Our trust in God warms our hearts to be hospitable and care for the needy.

Being hospitable involves our attitude toward those in need. Jesus said, "The poor you will always have with you" (Matthew 26:11). Moses said the same thing (Deuteronomy 15:11). I've sometimes wondered why the street corner

beggar isn't working or why the Section 8 housing occupant doesn't take better care of the place being provided. But Jesus never addressed the social/economic reasons behind poverty. He simply said to help.

HOW?

We want to exercise good judgment. We feed a starving person food for the body but also provide God's food for the soul—without being or appearing manipulative.

Good judgment also requires caution. We can't, nor should we, give to every person, charity, or cause that comes along. Our own WELS Christian Aid and Relief is charged with the dual role of providing disaster relief and building bridges to the gospel through humanitarian aid projects. This is the best place to start when sharing our wealth outside of our local area.

The early Christians knew the value and dignity of work, but it appears they didn't ask the poor why they were poor. Rather, they sold their own things so they could give to anyone who was in need. And they did more than send a check to a charity or drop a dollar in a hat. They invited fellow believers into their homes and "ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people" (Acts 2:46,47).

Notice how hospitable they were! They realized the importance of creating relationships with one another, rich or poor, so they could joyfully share the gospel. I'm guessing you have also discovered that personal faith conversations seem to go deeper with someone you have come to know than with a stranger.

Not long ago, some of us from our church were asked to help a single mother whose older home badly needed a new roof. As we spoke with one another, realizing the importance of our work together to repair and replace that roof, Jesus was in those conversations and blessed them. Acquaintances in Christ became friends in Christ.

As a congregation, we continue to work at being hospitable and creating a welcoming environment for all who enter our doors. There is food and coffee to

gather around. We've been trained to look for the guest and help them experience Christ's love. We have a man in our congregation who recently brought a friend to church and then invited him and about 25 of us to a restaurant after worship so that we could get to know him better. A number of members provide \$25 gift cards to grocery stores and gas stations so that our pastor might help some who request aid.

My wife works hard at creating a hospitable home. We still laugh when we remember the time some seminary students called us one evening on spring break because the house they had thought was available turned out to be occupied. They ended up camping in our backyard, and my wife made sure there were towels, food, and showers available for them. Countless missionaries and WELS school choir members have found shelter here as well.

It was Jesus who showed us what perfect hospitality is and looks like. He left the place of perfect peace in order to provide eternal peace for us. We see him giving his time and attention to little children, grieving widows, the sick, the poor, and those disabled. Anyone could come to him for help. He personally fed two crowds of thousands. He had no home while ministering on this earth but has made it possible for the entire world to have a heavenly home forever!

By the grace of God, we believe in him and long to see him. While we are waiting, there is a growing desire in our hearts to be hospitable to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, and all others in need. It's not because we're going to earn a place in heaven—Jesus has already provided that precious gift. Rather, we just want to hear Jesus say, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

John Huebner, a retired pastor, is a member at Victory, Jacksonville, Florida.

This is the sixth article in a 12-part series about Christian love in action and how we can be salt in this world.

Read how WELS members are helping those in need following this summer's hurricanes (p. 22).

Share WITH THE Lord's PEOPLE WHO ARE IN NEED. Practice HOSPITALITY.

ROMANS 12:13



God's love: Our song forever

The church is made up of people from many different backgrounds. Our worship should reflect our unity.

Jonathan P. Bauer

A man walked into a Target store demanding to speak with the manager. The man wasn't happy. In his hand, he clutched an ad that had recently arrived at his mailbox. It was full of pictures of smiling babies and included coupons for maternity clothes, cribs, and newborn onesies. "My daughter got this in the mail!" he said. "She's still in high school! Are you trying to encourage her to get pregnant?"

The store manager apologized profusely. A few days later, he called the man to apologize again. This time, however, the man owed the manager the apology. "I had a talk with my daughter," he said. "It turns out she's due in August."

How did Target know that the young girl was pregnant before her dad did? For that matter, why is the ad delivered to your mailbox different from the one delivered to your neighbor's? It's simple. Data from every purchase a person makes at Target is added to his or her customer profile. Age and potential needs are part of the profile Target uses to predict what the customer is most likely to purchase, not just in the present but even in the future. Target then tailors its advertising to that customer accordingly.

This little story is just one of many examples of targeted marketing. Companies don't just advertise to customers in general. They advertise specific things to specific people. When you think

about it, it makes perfect sense. Companies don't need every customer to buy *the same thing*. They just want every customer to buy *something*.

Compare your relationship with a big box retailer to your relationship to Christ's church. When it comes to the church, you are not the customer of a company. Rather, you are a member of a body (see Romans chapter 12, 1 Corinthians chapter 12, and Ephesians chapter 4, for example). Christians have an important relationship not only to Christ but also to other Christians. In the church, men and women, young and old, rich and poor, are joined as one.

CELEBRATING UNITY IN OUR WORSHIP

One of the primary places where this wonderful unity can be seen is in public worship. *Christian Worship: Manual* puts it this way: "At public worship believers of all ages, shapes and sizes join to offer God their mutual response of faith" (p. 10).

In the church in Corinth, we find a New Testament example of public worship dividing the body of Christ rather than uniting it. In response, Paul wrote, "When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up" (1 Corinthians 14:26).

The church is a body. Public worship celebrates that. And yet, consumerism is the air we breathe. As a result, the same kind of targeted marketing practiced by Target can easily drive our decisions about worship. It might sound something like this: “In order to (*insert any number of noble goals*), we need more (*insert any number of different types of hymns*).”

The noble goals being pursued could include: articulation of the truth, preservation of Lutheran heritage, retention of youth, or connection with the lost. The types of hymns we think will help us accomplish those goals could include: new hymns or old hymns; hymns with fresh, upbeat tunes or hymns with sturdy, time-tested tunes; hymns that come out of our primarily western European roots or hymns that come from cultures around the globe; hymns that have distinctly Lutheran origins or hymns from broader Christianity; hymns that are full of doctrine or hymns that are full of emotion.

The Hymnody Committee’s top priority is to publish hymns that are “centered in Christ” and “in harmony with the scriptural faith as confessed in the Lutheran Book of Concord” (from the adopted list of criteria for hymns). If the church really is a body of members

that span centuries, continents, and cultures, then an appropriate corresponding variety in our hymnody should take care of itself.

CAPITALIZING ON UNITY IN OUR MISSION

But what about those noble goals mentioned above? One can certainly argue that specific types of hymns can help or hinder a specific facet of our mission as churches. However, none of those noble goals can be accomplished by hymnody alone. Every facet of our mission as Christians takes diligent, ongoing work. A specific type of hymn is not the silver bullet for any of them.

And so, whatever might be gained by the predominant use of a specific type of hymn in service to a specific goal, we must also consider what stands to be lost. If different demographic groups in the church have a body of hymnody tailored specifically to whatever characteristics define them, we lose the characteristics that define others and we sacrifice the unity that is so important to the body of Christ.

Unity is one of the things that makes the Christian church distinct and identifies it to the world as something divine. On the night before he died, Jesus prayed to his Father that all believers

“may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:22,23).

A proper approach to variety in our hymnody will assuredly mean that none of us has only a set of hymns that is exactly what suits us best always. Instead, it means that all of us will have something far better.

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This is the fifth article in a nine-part series on hymns and their use in our churches.

The WELS Hymnal Project wants your feedback as it works on finalizing which of the more than 700 hymns from *Christian Worship* and *Christian Worship: Supplement* will be included in the new hymnal. Every month the WELS Hymnal Project will post a selection of hymns online, indicating which hymns are slated to be kept and which are slated to be cut. You can view the monthly list and, if you want, choose up to 10 hymns from the cut list that you would like to see kept in the new hymnal. To review this month’s list of hymns and take part in the process, visit welshymnal.com.

RESPECTFULLY *making room*

Pastor Kurt Eggert, the project director for *Christian Worship*, wrote, “The Lutheran church is ecumenical in its selection of hymns and other worship materials. Whatever is scripturally sound and true, poetically and musically worthy, and edifying for the faith of worshipers may be drawn on for use in our hymnal. For this principle, we can thank Luther himself.”

So how much variety is there in our current body of hymnody? *Christian Worship* contains 340 hymns from various English sources and 283 translations: German, 208; Latin, 36; Danish, 18; Norwegian, 8;

Swedish, 5; Greek, 2; Italian, 2; French, Czech, Bohemian, and Welsh, 1 each. Anyone familiar with *Christian Worship: Supplement* knows that it intentionally expanded that variety even more.

How our synod’s next hymnal will compare remains to be seen. But the goal of providing a body of hymnody that serves the whole body of Christ remains the same.

A Vietnam vet shares Luther's perspectives on soldiers and the "sword" and tells his own personal story of discovery about what God says about war.

Erhard P. Opsahl

Many people today find war odious and are offended by anyone who is or has been in the military. This hatred was witnessed firsthand by most of us who returned from Vietnam to jeers and spit. And many today coming back to civilian life from stints in our Armed Forces are experiencing isolation and disrespect, even in some congregations. Why?

Well, warfare is disgusting behavior. Soldiers participate in the awful barbarity of purposely destroying homes and cities while also taking the lives of others, including noncombatants. That is unthinkable, especially for many Christians.

CHRISTIAN ADVICE

It may be surprising to know that St. Augustine addressed the question of Christians and serving in the military during the Roman Empire in his book *The City of God*. Augustine affirms that two kingdoms simultaneously exist—an earthly, visible kingdom (secular government) and a believing, invisible realm. One is temporal; the other spiritual. Both answer to God.

Maybe more unexpected is that five hundred years ago, the Reformer Martin Luther was pressured to write something on *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved*, also translated as *Christians Can Be Soldiers* (Luther's Works [LW], Vol. 46, pp. 89-137).

A key character in the story behind Luther's book is Assa von Kram (or Asche von Cramm,



DOES HATING THE WAR MEAN HATING THE WARRIOR?

Aschwin IV, Ascanius von Cramm). Born about 1490, Assa was a heralded cavalryman from Lower Saxony who made his name on June 28, 1519, at the Battle of Soltau, a “nobles’ feud.” He led a 400-knight regiment on the battlefield in the victory of Henry the Middle over Henry the Younger. Martin Luther was a good friend of Assa.

During the summer of 1525, Assa happened to be visiting Luther in Wittenberg and convinced Luther to commit to answer questions people had been asking Luther to address for five years. Apparently, interest was piqued by the fact that the Turks seemed determined in trying again to extend their Islamic sultanate/caliphate into Christian Western Europe. Another factor may have been the growing desire of some to exterminate the Lutheran heresy by force. Misunderstandings of Luther’s writing during the Peasants’ War were still being argued. Luther had voiced opposition to the peasants when they resorted to force and rebelled against the nobles.

Luther wrote that the “sword” of an earthly kingdom/nation/state has been instituted to punish evil, protect the good, and preserve public order (Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 2:13,14). He stated that going to war is to bring about peace and obedience.

“Killing” can be a “work of love.” For example, says Luther, a good physician cuts off an infected arm to save a person from dying. He wrote, “What men write about war, saying that it is a great plague, is all true. But they should also consider how great the plague is that war prevents” (LW, Vol. 46, p. 96). War can seem like an unchristian work completely contrary to Christian love. But he reminds us that “if the sword were not on guard to preserve peace, everything in the world would be ruined because of lack of peace” (LW, Vol. 46, p. 96).

Accordingly, the work of being a soldier, in itself, is right and godly. Luther holds that God can tolerate a soldier who goes to war and kills, as one does to enemies by military law and in time of war. But, he also warns of the abuse of this power and again cites the example of physicians who would “needlessly amputate a healthy hand just because they wanted to.”

Luther cites John the Baptist (Luke 3:1-18) as praising the profession of arms when Roman soldiers came to him for counseling. At the same time, Saint John rejected any abuse of their positions of power. Luther noted that Old Testament heroes who participated in war (e.g., Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and David) were not condemned by God.

Readers of Luther’s book on the likelihood that soldiers could be saved also are referred to another of his writings: *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed* (LW, Vol. 45, pp. 75-129).

Luther makes two points to remember:

- 1) Christians live under a spiritual government and are subject only to God.
- 2) As far as body and property are concerned, Christians are answerable to their rulers here on earth and owe them obedience. Luther contends that “if worldly leaders call on [their people] to fight, then they ought to and must fight, and be obedient, not as Christians, but as members of the state” (LW, Vol. 46, p. 99). Worldly leaders are also subject to God, Luther adds.

A PERSONAL REFLECTION

My awareness of history in the 1940s, ‘50s, and ‘60s centered on the specter of Communism taking over the world. There was Eastern Europe and the Iron Curtain, then Korea, then the Cuban Missile Crisis, and then Vietnam. The United States seemed to be playing “whack-a-commie-mole” around the globe.

A charismatic young president was persuasive in urging Americans: “Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country.” I enlisted in the Army right out of college.

All of a sudden, some things seemed to change. The news media and academia led the movement of questioning the validity of the Vietnam War. Was it a “just” war? Were our soldiers out of control? Everyone agreed that the massacre at My Lai was a terrible tragedy. The battlefield was on TV every night at home.

Four men under my command died

during the year I spent in a mechanized infantry battalion. Little did I know that almost 40 years would pass before I recognized symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Studies circulated that 22 veterans a day were committing suicide; the average age was 55. I was shocked into action.

Getting involved with veterans’ organizations helped me see sources of much of the pain. Current and former military people are not always certain about their acceptance by the general population. All too often, vets are being shut out of “civilian life.” Most non-veterans don’t seem interested in finding out about the sacrifices our military members and their families made—and continue to make—in order to preserve America’s precious democracy.

So what do we do? Where do we go?

For me, the words of the Bible, St. Augustine, and Martin Luther are helping soothe the guilt that society imposed and still imposes on me and my comrades. Finally realizing that most Christians do not believe that all killing that soldiers do is murder opened my eyes even more. I am getting a picture that I should have seen much more clearly some five decades ago.

The recently published Small Catechism confirms the proposition unambiguously and concisely: “God alone has the right to end a person’s life, but he delegates that right also to his representatives in government. A person serving under the authority of the government as God’s representative—a government official, a soldier, or a police officer—may carry out capital punishment, take life in a war, or take life to protect the lives of others” (Luther’s Catechism 2017, p. 77).

Coming to a better understanding of this troubling issue helps me fight my doubts, distress, and depression each and every day.

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Learn more about the Lutheran Military Support Group at lutheranmilitary.org.

Needed

Earle D. Treptow

The people
God has placed
around you need
you and the
unconditional
love you have
experienced
in Christ.
Desperately.

I'm needed.

Maybe that sounds a bit arrogant, but I have it on good authority. The American Red Cross regularly tells me so—by personalized e-mail. I know what you're thinking: "I hate to burst your bubble, but all the Red Cross really needs is your blood." True enough. However, since they need something *from* me, they still need me. I'm needed.

You are too—and not merely by the Red Cross.

Even if no one has expressed that thought to you directly, it's true. People all around you need you—and that's exactly the way God designed it to be. In each of the callings the Lord has chosen specifically for you, be that as friend, neighbor, congregation member, sibling, employee, spouse, parent, or child, he has surrounded you with needs. The needs vary dramatically. Your employer needs an honest day's work. Your child needs a ride to her piano lesson and your insistence that she practice. Your grieving friend needs your support and a sympathetic ear. Each of those needs is a God-given opportunity to glorify him and bless others. While God doesn't need your good works—"[God] is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything" (Acts 17:25)—your neighbor definitely does.

Sometimes the needs of others overwhelm us because the opportunities far outstrip our time and abilities. We want to be needed, but on a more modest scale, with needs that are more easily met. We desire opportunities to serve, but would prefer to schedule them at more convenient times. As the needs of others pile up around us, the sinful flesh proposes the logical solution. "Withdraw," the sinful nature suggests. "Let others deal with those needs."

The one who masquerades as an angel of light chimes in: "You need to step back from the needs of others and focus on your relationship with God. Those stressful interactions demand energy that

really should be spent on prayer and meditation." The devil is oh so sneaky, offering what appears to be a pious reason to disengage from the needs of the people around us. But the devil is an inveterate liar.

While God invites us to spend time with him in his Word each day so that he might bless us with his love, he never describes it as an "either-or" proposition. Absolutely allow God to serve you through his Word, just as Mary did while sitting at Jesus' feet. But then, because you have been served by the One who loves unconditionally, you are eminently qualified to demonstrate that unconditional love to others. The people God has placed around you need you and the unconditional love you have experienced in Christ. Desperately.

You are needed even by people who think they don't need you; they may have told you so in no uncertain terms. You're needed by the coworker who belittles Christianity because he had a bad experience with the church in the past. He needs your patient, persistent love. The friend who stridently speaks against the Bible's "outdated teaching on morality" to justify his sin needs you. He needs your gentle instruction in the Word of the God who loves him in Christ. The neighbor who insists that Christianity provides nothing more valuable than any other religion needs you and your positive witness to Christ her Savior, who died that she might live.

Disengaging from people in their need, even when they plead with us to do so, is simply not an option. Christ stopped to serve us in our need, though by nature we wanted nothing of the sort. We who bear Christ's name can't help but do the same for others.

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MONUMENTS

Lasting Memories

As you look ahead, remember the Israelites' monument at the Jordan that shows how God keeps his past promises and continues to fulfill his promises for the future.

Samuel C. Degner

The people of Israel gazed out across the Jordan Valley. There it was, right in front of them: the land flowing with milk and honey, the one they had dreamed of for generations. Exhilaration must have filled their hearts as they pictured the places where they would put up their houses—*houses*, not tents!

A PROMISE KEPT

But then again . . . they had been here before. Forty years earlier, their forebears had looked at the same landscape and concluded they could never take it from its occupants. Now, those Canaanites were still there. Moses, on the other hand, was not; the one who had led them to this point now lay buried somewhere in Moab. Then there was that river at flood stage . . . perhaps the people hadn't noticed its distant roar at first. Was it excitement or fear that made their hearts beat faster?

That mix of anticipation and uncertainty is timeless. Brides and grooms feel it as they prepare to enter marriage, expecting both joys and challenges. So do graduates as they step into a wide open future, full of both opportunity and danger, without those who had guided them to that point. Retirees may wonder whether the coming years will be as golden as they imagine. Christians nearing death see paradise lying before them as well as the pain they may have to traverse to get there.

As you survey your future, consider the Israelites at the Jordan (Joshua chapter 3). By God's power, they walked across the dry riverbed into a land that would no longer be promised but simply theirs.

A FUTURE GUARANTEED

This was more than the fulfillment of a centuries-old promise. God showed himself to be a "living God," always present with his people and fully capable of giving them the Canaanites' land. He wanted Israel to know that they could confidently follow Joshua just as they had followed Moses, who had once led them across a different body of water. In other words, God was fulfilling his words from the past and guaranteeing his words about the future.

To help his people remember this lesson through the coming years of conquest and for generations to come, the Lord commanded one man from each tribe to take a stone from the middle of the riverbed and place it at the Israelites' camp (Joshua chapter 4). What a powerful monument: rocks, worn and wet from years under a river, now stacked on dry land! A memorial to a promise kept—and a promise of more of the same.

Somewhere in that same river, some 1,400 years later, stood a living monument with the same message. As Jesus stepped out of those descending waters, another miracle took place: A dove appeared and a voice from heaven, said, "This is my Son" (Matthew 3:17). It marked a promise kept: The Savior, who was the reason God brought Israel to that land in the first place, had come. It was also a sign of good things on the horizon: Jesus' perfect life on earth earned us a perfect life in heaven.

As you make your way toward that promised land, you can trust the same living God's presence and power to bring you safely through the obstacles in your path. The future that lies before you may both fill your daydreams and keep you up at night. But the Lord goes ahead to defend and bless you. It's his promise.

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This is the seventh article in a nine-part series on Old Testament monuments and what they mean to us today.



God always knows
what he is doing,
even if we don't know
and wonder why.
We are still in his
hands and under
his loving care.

Your will be done on earth as in heaven

Our heavenly Father's will does not change. He is not willing that any should perish, but he wants everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). He has a special concern for his believers. He always works everything out for the good of the people he has called to faith in Jesus (Romans 8:28).

In heaven, God's will is done without opposition and without question. That means what he decides is accomplished, and the entire host of the angels and saints in heaven rejoice and praise him freely and without complaint.

Those in heaven know that God wants nothing but the best for his people. The believers there see that he has brought them safely through their struggles on earth. The angels witnessed God's justice and love in expelling the rebel angels and confirming those who remained faithful. In heaven all is well; God's will is unchallenged and perfect.

But on earth, the devil prowls among the living, seeking to devour souls (1 Peter 5:8). He has been at his tasks for a long time—ever since he was expelled from heaven. He knows how to thwart God's will, how to pervert his Word, and how to distract the living with every imaginable temptation. The believers in heaven are safe, but those living on earth are still under attack. And it's not just the devil that God's people must contend with here on earth. The world and our sinful flesh also have become our enemies.

The church on earth often seems to be singled out for special attention from the devil. If he can rob the church of the gospel, so many souls will go into eternity without the grace of God. If he can use the world to intimidate the church or in other ways lead the church to proclaim false teaching, he also achieves his goal. It should not surprise us that Jesus

asks us to pray that our heavenly Father's will be done on earth as in heaven.

But Jesus not only gave us this prayer; he also prayed, "Not my will, but yours be done," in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42). With that prayer on his lips, he shows us how to face the anguish and turmoil on earth. In his challenges, he wanted the assurance that his Father's will would be done. He willingly submitted to the will of his heavenly Father.

So we have a clear lesson from Jesus. Our heavenly Father's will is sure and certain. But we doubt and often are confused by what we face. When life doesn't make sense to us, we wonder. When death and pain afflict us, our loved ones, and other Christians here, how is God's will done? When persecution and disaster strike, we are confused about how this is God's good and gracious will to protect his own and bring them home to heaven. When, like Jesus, we face difficult days or the church faces serious challenges, decisions, or hardship, we crave the assurance that our heavenly Father's will be done.

It is at such times that we should pray, "Your will be done on earth as in heaven." We don't always understand God's will while we are here on earth. We are tempted to abandon God when he allows so much trouble on earth. But God always knows what he is doing, even if we don't know and wonder why. We are still in his hands and under his loving care. And in heaven, when we join the saints and angels, we will not wonder.

But for now on earth, we pray, "Your will be done."

Public ministers of the gospel are called to serve

Joel D. Otto

Priests in the Middle Ages had two primary tasks: Correctly perform the sacraments of the church to earn God's grace on behalf of the people and listen to confession. The people were required to confess all their sins to the priest at least once a year. Priests had to learn how to cajole people into remembering all their sins. They also had to investigate and probe the circumstances and motives of those sins to know what earthly punishments the person needed to perform. The priests had to be spiritual detectives. And they knew everyone's secrets.

This wasn't the only problem among clergy at the time of Luther. Some of the more radical reform movements had self-proclaimed, self-appointed preachers. They took on the duties of spiritual leadership without being properly called to do so.

Truly Lutheran public ministers of the gospel are called to serve God's people with the gospel. First, they are properly called to do this work. Individually, every Christian has the right and privilege to "declare God's praises" (1 Peter 2:9,10) and every Christian can forgive sins (John 20:19-23). But when Christians gather together around the Word and sacraments, someone who is gifted and trained needs to be called to serve the group with the Word and sacraments. Otherwise, disorder could result (1 Corinthians 14:33,40). The Augsburg Confession stated the point succinctly and clearly. "It is taught that no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments without a proper [public] call" (Article XIV). The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is calling public ministers of the gospel through the church's call (Acts 20:28).

Second, truly Lutheran public ministers are called to proclaim the Word faithfully and administer the sacraments rightly. Pastors and other public ministers of the gospel are not spiritual detectives, entertainers, or corporate executives. They are not to act as dictators in the church

(1 Peter 5:1-3). They are simply servants of Christ, whose name they proclaim, and servants of Christ's people for whom Christ's blood purchased them as his people. That's why the qualifications Paul listed for public spiritual leadership emphasize a Christian character that won't be an obstacle to the gospel. He wrote that a spiritual leader should "be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable . . . not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money" (1 Timothy 3:2,3). These qualified public ministers are called to use the Word and sacraments for the spiritual benefit of those whom they are called to serve. So they also need to be "able to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2).

Truly Lutheran public ministers of the gospel need to know the Word and know how to communicate the Word. That's why Luther encouraged, "Pray diligently, as Christ Himself commands us to pray (Matt. 9:38), that God may grant us faithful laborers and pastors who are sincere and adhere to the Word" (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 28, p. 62).

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Read 1 Peter 2:9,10. Explain how this passage relates to the public ministry.
2. Describe how the teaching of the divine call is comforting to both called workers and congregation members.
3. How does the Lutheran view of the public ministry affect the way that we educate future called workers (especially pastors)?

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This is the last 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 Nov. 5 at wels.net/forwardinchrist.



WHAT IT MEANS TO BE TRULY LUTHERAN





Give thanks in all circumstances

In the midst of strife and conflict, we need a spirit of thanksgiving.

Jonathan P. Hackbarth

You are undoubtedly familiar with the childhood poem “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” Lesser known is the author of that poem: an American writer named Sarah Hale. Even lesser known is the influence she had on the holiday we today call Thanksgiving.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL HOLIDAY

When it comes to the history of Thanksgiving, most Americans will point to the first Pilgrim celebration or perhaps President Lincoln. However, were it not for Sarah Hale, Thanksgiving may not be celebrated in the United States as it is today.

Most of us learned that the first Thanksgiving Day was celebrated by the Pilgrims in 1621 to give thanks for the harvest after a terrible first winter in the New World. In 1789, President George Washington issued a Thanksgiving Day Proclamation to commemorate the first Pilgrim celebration. But Thomas Jefferson, the third U.S. president, discontinued it, calling Thanksgiving “a kingly practice.”

Then, in the early 1800s, Sarah Hale began campaigning for the restoration of Thanksgiving as a national holiday. She wrote letters and sought appointments with national leaders through the course of five presidencies. Time after time she was politely rebuffed, sometimes being told her suggestion was impossible or impractical.

Finally, in 1863—in the midst of the Civil War—President Lincoln listened seriously to her plea that North and South “lay aside enmities and strife on [Thanksgiving] Day.” Lincoln proclaimed the fourth Thursday in November as the official “National Thanksgiving Day.” This day was finally ratified by the U.S. Congress in 1941.

THE NEED FOR A SPIRIT OF GRATITUDE

Perhaps we need a “Thanksgiving lady” like Sarah Hale to campaign for a spirit of Thanksgiving today—not for a national holiday because we already have that,

but for a spirit of gratitude within our hearts. And consider when she lobbied for Thanksgiving. The nation was divided, families were split apart by ideological differences, and strife and armed conflict created cemeteries for the dead. While it’s not in the midst of a civil war, much the same could be said about our nation today!

What is the current conflict that scrolls across the headlines? Is it the ever-increasing violence in our world, both near and far? Is it the seeming downward spiral of decency and decorum among so many talking heads and influential voices in our nation? Is it conflict in your family? In your marriage? Is it a nagging discontent with your lot in life?

In the midst of all this, hear Scripture’s call for a spirit of thankfulness, “Give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Christ has ended the eternal conflict caused by our sin. Conflict and strife will remain part of this world’s headlines. But we are at rest; we are at peace. Jesus is our rest and peace, and heaven is our home. So no matter what the circumstances, we can live with a spirit of gratitude through Jesus.

On this 500th anniversary of the Reformation, consider the words of Martin Luther:

I take the risk of placing my confidence only in the one, invisible, inscrutable, and only God, who created heaven and earth and alone is superior to all creation. Again, I am not terrified by all the wickedness. . . . If he is Creator of heaven and earth and Lord over everything, who, then, could deprive me of anything, or work me harm? Yes, how can it be otherwise than all things work for good for me if the God, whom all creation obeys and depends upon, is well intentioned toward me? (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 43, pp. 25,26)

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