

# Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE

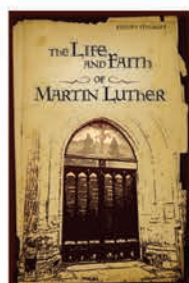


## Back to school

Grace, patience, and prayer are three school supplies we all need to tackle a new school year or any momentous event. *Page 16*

# Celebrating OUR HERITAGE

*This fall we're celebrating the 500th anniversary of the dawn of the Lutheran Reformation, when Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church. Celebrate this historic event, learn more about Luther and the Reformation movement, and give thanks for God's guiding hand in the church.*



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By Adolph F. Fehlauer

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## GOD'S PLAN FOR LUTHER & ME

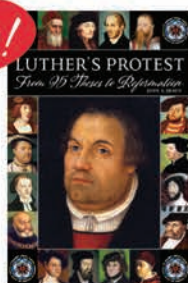
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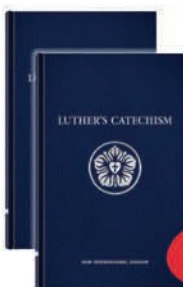
by John A. Braun

When he unrolled his parchment and swung his hammer in Wittenberg 500 years ago, Martin Luther sparked one of the most significant protests in history. This book illuminates Luther's role as the catalyst for the Reformation, as a leader throughout the movement, and as an impactful figure in the theology of his day and today. His passion and faith in God will inspire you to stand strong in the true Word. Includes full-color timelines, maps, and pictures of key Reformation figures. Softcover, 197 pages.

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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

As I read through this issue, showing Christian love is a theme that runs through the pages.

- The issue starts with reminding us how we are motivated to show love for God and our neighbors in our actions—through our faith in Christ (p. 10).
- Our “Heart to heart” column shares the importance of showing Christian love and patience as we and our children start a new school year (p. 16).
- Encouraging others in their Christian lives is another way we can show love. Jeremiah Wallander uses an example from camp to demonstrate the power of encouragement (p. 28). Then turn to p. 24 to learn more about WELS camps around the country that work to build up the faith of the synod’s youth.
- Next, we meet a couple from Wisconsin who shows Christ’s love through fostering special-needs babies—more than one hundred over the years (p. 30).
- Finally, Jeff Samelson tackles the sin of abortion and how easy it is for us to sidestep the problem, thinking there is nothing we can do (p. 32). He reminds us of the importance of showing love to Christ and our neighbor by standing up for what God’s Word teaches.

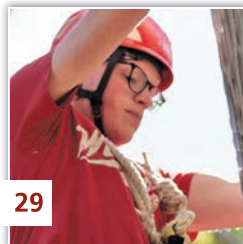
Julie Wietzke



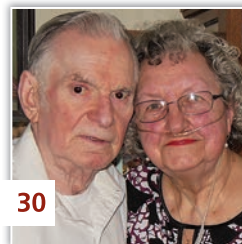
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## UNDERSTANDING PROVERBS

Re: "Train up a dad" [June]. Understanding Proverbs as general descriptions rather than promises is dangerous. . . .

Letting Scripture interpret Scripture, we can look at our perfect Father in heaven. After centuries of training his children of Israel, many still refused. Finally God's Son Jesus wept over Jerusalem and gave the reason: "You were not willing" (Matthew 23:37).

Were Judas' parents faithful with God's Word? We don't know. Did Judas listen to his parents? We don't know. But we do see the perfect Preacher and Teacher working to train Judas for three years and still reaching out to him on Maundy Thursday. Finally Judas refused Jesus and went "to his own place" (Acts 1:25).

Sometimes despite the best effort of God-fearing, conscientious parents, a child may not be willing. No fault to God's Word or the parents. God's promises are always faithful.

*Mark Cordes  
Huge, Minnesota*

## HEART TO HEART

I usually do not read the "Heart to Heart" segment because my children are all grown and most of the articles would not apply to me. However, I saw that Ann Jahns' article was about "empty nesting" [July]. Since my oldest child was seven years old when I had my 6th child (at age 27), I could-

How does that picture apply to my spiritual opportunities to train up my children?

Some days, when I suspect the lie that I'm too busy to pray for my children, I remember the "fruit of the Spirit"—love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). I pray about each child about the fruit that particular child seems to be growing from. Sometimes I even have time to plan a conversation—over McDonalds or while driving to camp—with a particular child about the fruit I've been praying they'd develop.

Some of my boys are too busy to buckle in and wear their seat belts. One is taller than I am. But they're still not too old to sit in the back seat. I'm a firm believer in the Lord, the Lord I am, in his great love for me and my children, so I try to get my boys to buckle up—when I'm praying for my kids, talking with them, and working with them to become more mature in the Spirit's fruit. I should probably and confidently expect that the Lord will keep that truth in their minds when I'm in heaven and they're old and gray. He won't let them "Reap from it."

Christopher Dunn is editor of Northwestern Publishing House. He is a member of St. James, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

# Through my Bible in 3 years

Read or listen online at [wels.net/bible3](http://wels.net/bible3).

SEPTEMBER 2017

- |                              |                      |                    |
|------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| 1. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:17 | 11. Jos. 13:1-15:12  | 21. Gal. 3:19-4:7  |
| 2. Joshua 1                  | 12. Jos. 15:13-17:18 | 22. Gal. 4:8-5:1   |
| 3. Jos. 2                    | 13. Jos. 18 & 19     | 23. Gal. 5:2-24    |
| 4. Jos. 3 & 4                | 14. Jos. 20 & 21     | 24. Gal. 5:25-6:18 |
| 5. Jos. 5 & 6                | 15. Jos. 22          | 25. Proverbs 1     |
| 6. Jos. 7                    | 16. Jos. 23          | 26. Pr. 2 & 3      |
| 7. Jos. 8                    | 17. Jos. 24          | 27. Pr. 4 & 5      |
| 8. Jos. 9                    | 18. Galatians 1      | 28. Pr. 6 & 7      |
| 9. Jos. 10                   | 19. Gal. 2           | 29. Pr. 8          |
| 10. Jos. 11 & 12             | 20. Gal. 3:1-18      | 30. Pr. 9          |

drelate to being young and having no experience with the first child. Of course, we learned as we went along, but we also would do some things differently had we known then what we know now. . . .

*Susan Sullivan  
Edgerton, Wisconsin*

## 60 IS THE NEW 40?

Perhaps the Omaha writer of the Feedback letter "Numerous retirements" [June] is a member of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. If so, your first pastor, Rev. Ardin D. Laper, who arrived in Omaha as a newly ordained and married pastor in 1944, did choose to delay his total retirement from the ministry until he reached age 92. . . .

Perhaps our WELS congregations might consider the phrase used today—"60 is the new 40"—and extend calls to pastors whose age is greater than 60 or beyond. It would provide opportunities for youth to bond with the older generation of pastors who are still young at heart and purpose.

*Trudy (Laper) Madetzke  
Marshall, Minnesota*

## IMPORTANCE OF OUR SCHOOLS

I was surprised how many grade schools we have. Also, I didn't know how many high schools. I would love to see articles

about each one. Our youth are important. I would love to know some history and interviews with parents, pupils, and teachers. This is where it starts before they get to our colleges and seminary or as Christians in all walks of life.

*Jan Krueger  
Willmar, Minnesota*

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

## Defining religion

**Angel:** a spirit being created by God during the week of creation (Exodus 20:11). Angels praise God (Isaiah 6:2,3), deliver his messages (Luke 1:28-38, 2:8-14), and serve him by helping and protecting his people (Daniel 6:22, Acts 5:18-20, Psalm 91:11,12). They are numerous (2 Kings 6:16,17, Matthew 26:53) and powerful (Psalm 103:20, Genesis 19:10,11).

# God's holy angels

**Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen. Martin Luther's Evening Prayer**

Joel C. Seifert

When you're little, there's something incredibly comforting about the angels' protection. That's power enough to keep you safe from the thing sleeping under your bed and the monster hiding in the dark closet. No wonder we teach our children to pray those words from Martin Luther's Evening Prayer.

Something seems to happen as we grow up. We look under the bed and realize that there wasn't a tentacle reaching out for us. It was just an old shirt that didn't make it into the hamper. Our lives get a little safer, more predictable.

## DANGER AWAITS

But sometimes life reminds us that danger still lurks around us. I like to think of Psalm 91. Whoever wrote it wasn't a kid, and he wasn't worried about things that went bump in the night. He talked about disease and plague, being out on the battlefield as your brothers-in-arms lost their lives; he wrote of arrows flying and wild animals prowling. It reminds us we need the angels' care.

It's because our world is at war. An angel of God, so beautiful and powerful that he could only be described as a bearer of light—a *Lucifer*, if you prefer the Latin—rebelled against God and brought other angels with him. He knows he can't defeat God, so he preys on his children. It has been war ever since.

What opens your eyes to that war? The phone rings, and someone you love is on the other end. Their doctor didn't use the words *deadly pestilence*, but saying *cancer* was really no different. We don't fight battles with arrows anymore, but the 22-year-old Marine knows that the Kevlar in his vest can only do so much good. The psalmist talked about the terror of night, and that seems far off until you're driving



down the highway with your family and the driver next to you swerves unexpectedly.

## GOD'S ANGELS PROTECT

But there's more to see: "If you say, 'The LORD is my refuge,' and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near

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**God promises for the sake of Jesus Christ to send his holy angels to serve those who will inherit salvation.**

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your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone" (Psalm 91:9-12). I think of the time my niece was on a hike deep in a state park and collapsed, unable to breathe. She was on the ground,

maybe 90 seconds from death, when a man in white showed up, put his hand on her chest, and her lungs opened up again—and then he was gone.

But we might also think of the dangers we don't experience: "No disaster will come near your tent." "Let your holy angel be with me" is a prayer for the mother standing over her son's bed because every time she lies down, she's worried his fever won't break. It's for the soldier on the battlefield and the family weathering the storm. It's for you, because God promises for the sake of Jesus Christ to send his holy angels to serve those who will inherit salvation.

And when troubles do arrive, those angels stand ready to carry us home, if that is God's will. And the wicked foe will have no power over you.

The Christian church celebrates the Festival of St. Michael and All Angels on Sept. 29. Consider reading Psalm 91 on that day and giving thanks to God for his angels' watchful care.

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



*Mark Schwede*

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The commitment to Christian education, both in the home and the church, has been and remains one of our synod's highest priorities.

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## Building on the foundation

Parenting is full of responsibilities. God entrusts parents to provide their children with food and clothing, a safe and loving home, and medical attention when sick. God expects parents to provide their children with guidance for their adult life.

But there is no more important responsibility for Christian parents than to bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord. From the time parents bring their children to Holy Baptism to the time when children finally leave their home and head out into the world as adults, God entrusts parents with teaching their children about their own sinfulness and God's gracious solution to their sin in their Savior.

Ever since its founding, our synod has recognized that the vital work that parents do can be helped and supplemented by the church. From the beginning, our congregations have established Sunday schools and Lutheran elementary schools. Somewhat later, groups of congregations created Lutheran high schools. The commitment to Christian education, both in the home and the church, has been and remains one of our synod's highest priorities.

There is good reason for that. It is not that public education is in itself a bad thing. Most of our public schools are blessed with many dedicated teachers and with state-of-the-art facilities. But as good as a public school might be, there are some things it simply cannot do. The public school is not a place where the instruction will build on a child's Christian faith, since it cannot provide instruction from God's Word.

Christian parents whose children attend public schools face the reality that the Christian foundation that is laid in the home and church will need to withstand cultural forces that, by their very nature, tend to undermine it. On the other hand, in Lutheran schools that foundation will be supplemented

and strengthened because of the Word of God taught there.

I have heard people say, with all good intentions, that it is actually preferable for Christian parents to send their children to a public school. Why? The reason given is that in the public school, their children will have more opportunities to witness and share Jesus with unbelievers. But parents who want their children to drive would not send them onto the road without driving instructions. Sending children into public schools for the purpose of witnessing may well be putting their faith in real danger before they are ready to handle the challenge. And let's not forget that children will have many opportunities to witness for their Savior in activities outside of the school day.

I thank God that all of my children were blessed to attend Lutheran elementary schools and high schools. In those places Christian teachers reinforced the biblical truths that they heard from their parents and in church on Sunday morning. There the Word of God was at the heart of all instruction in every class. Far from depriving them of the opportunity to witness for their Savior, I believe that the Christian education they received is what equipped them and motivated them to be the witnesses that God wants them to be as adults and as Christian parents themselves.

Not all WELS parents have the opportunity to enroll their children in a Lutheran school. We pray that those parents will do all they can to lay a firm foundation of faith that will not be overwhelmed or undermined. For those who do have the opportunity, we rejoice that Christian education has been—and will continue to be—a blessing beyond value to them and to their children.

# Light for our path

**When the Bible talks about “vain repetitions,” what does that mean? Several times I have heard people say that the Lutheran liturgy is nothing but vain repetition.**

James F. Pope

Your question provides opportunity to distinguish between meaningless prayers and meaningful liturgies. There is a great difference.

## MEANINGLESS PRAYERS

“Vain repetitions” is part of the King James Version’s rendering of Matthew 6:7: “But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.” Another Bible translation says: “And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words” (NIV).

That instruction comes from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Prior to speaking the words that we know as the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus addressed two pitfalls for prayer. One is that people might try to impress others with a pretentious, ostentatious prayer life. Jesus explains that prayer is not for show but a sincere conversation with God. “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen” (Matthew 6:6). The other potential problem is that people might think they can impress God with their nonstop conversations with him. That is the reason Jesus instructed his followers not to “keep on babbling like pagans.”

The verb in Matthew 6:7 in Greek has the idea of “repeating the same thing over and over, to babble, to speak without thinking.” We see that kind of mindless praying in the example of the prophets of Baal (1 Kings chapter 18), who cried out to their god incessantly from morning until evening.

Is this the stuff of Lutheran liturgies? Not at all.

## MEANINGFUL LITURGIES

There is no question that there is some repetition, from week to week, in historic Lutheran liturgies. Each service contains some common items like a confession of

sins and absolution, prayers, hymns, Scripture readings, sermon, and a dialogue between the worship leader and the worshipers. But there are numerous places where the worship service offers variety and freshness. Common elements in historic liturgies provide continuity from week to week, and they help connect us to Christians from past centuries who treasured God’s promises and worshiped him.

While common elements in worship services include repetition of some kind, that commonality does not equate to “vain repetitions.” I think you would agree with me that “speaking without thinking” can take place in any worship service, even those that have no liturgy from week to week. The real concern is not the form of worship, but the heart of the worshiper. Consider how God rebuked his Old Testament people for their empty worship life, even when they were doing outwardly what he had commanded (Isaiah 1:10-15). With their sacrifices and celebrations of divinely-appointed festivals, the people’s outward actions lined up with God’s Word, but their heads and hearts were not involved; they were merely going through the motions.

Similarly, Lutheran worshipers can find their bodies engaged in the actions of worship with little involvement of their heads or hearts. The problem, again, is not the order of service. The problem is the worshiper. Whether the format for public worship is familiar or foreign to us, worship requires our ongoing effort and concentration.

So let’s continue to give God our best in worship—again and again and again.

*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](http://wels.net/questions). Submit your questions there or to [fic@wels.net](mailto:fic@wels.net).

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

Psalm 119:105

# ABIDING

## truth

**Good works do not earn God's love, but good works naturally flow from our faith in Christ.**

Brian K. Hennig

Luther staunchly maintained that a person is “justified by faith apart from the works of the law” (Romans 3:28). Nearly everything he wrote, preached, or taught defended or promoted this central teaching of Scripture.

Luther's opponents complained that his emphasis on justification by faith alone encouraged people to reject good works and to welcome lawlessness and immorality. To these critics, Luther replied, “We do not . . . reject good works; on the contrary, we cherish and teach them as much as possible” (*Luther's Works* [LW], Vol. 31, p. 363). Yes, Luther regularly taught the importance of good works, but he did not speak about them in the way the church of his day did. He maintained that they did not earn God's favor. Instead, they naturally and freely flowed from our faith in Christ.

First of all, Luther stressed that true good works follow God's will in his Word. Instead of urging Christians to follow an elaborate system of traditions, ceremonies, fasting, pilgrimages, or venerating saints, Luther directed them to follow God's law. God's law shows us how we are to love God above all else and then love our neighbor as ourselves (cf. Matthew 22:37-39). His Ten Commandments provide a wonderful summary and guide for demonstrating that love. Luther said it this way: “There are no good works except those works God has commanded, just as there is no sin except that which God has forbidden. Therefore, whoever wants to know what good works are . . . needs to know nothing more than God's commandments” (LW, Vol. 44, p. 23).

### **OUR SINS ARE COVERED BY CHRIST**

Yet Luther also understood that it is only through faith in Christ that a person's attempts at obeying God's commandments are acceptable before God. Luther said, “Apart from faith all works are dead, no matter how wonderful they look or what splendid names they have” (LW, Vol. 44, p. 113). By nature, all a sinner can do is sin. Even the good things we do “are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). Like a child tracking mud through the house while bringing flowers to his mother, even the good that we do is stained by sin.

Nevertheless, through faith in Christ's perfect life and innocent death, we possess his righteousness. By faith, his righteousness covers our sin so that even our imperfect works are “acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). Luther summed up this comforting truth when he wrote,

Although sin in the flesh has not yet been completely removed or become dead, yet [God] will not punish or remember it. Such faith, renewal, and forgiveness of sins are followed by good works. What is still sinful or imperfect in them will not be counted as sin or defect, for Christ's sake. The entire individual, both his person and his works, is declared to be righteous and holy from pure grace and mercy, shed upon us and spread over us in Christ. (Smalcald Articles, III, XIII:1,2)

We find great comfort in hearing that God accepts the good works of every believer in Christ! We may be tempted to think that the meager, everyday things we do for others do not really qualify as good works before God. We may also feel that the seemingly pious, impressive things that others do have more value in God's eyes. To those feeling inadequate about their

service to God and others, Luther wrote, “In this faith all works become equal, and one work is like the other. . . . For the works are acceptable not for their own sake but because of faith” (LW, Vol. 44, p. 26). All good works are acceptable to God through faith in Jesus (cf. 1 Peter 2:5).

### CHRIST IS THE MOTIVATION

Luther also underscored that Christians receive the ultimate strength and motivation for doing good works. They receive it through the message of God’s love for them in Christ. Through that message the Holy Spirit leads us to trust in Christ for salvation. From that faith in Christ flows a sincere love for God and others. The apostle John said, “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). When branches are connected to a tree or vine, they are able to bear fruit. In a similar way, we are able to produce the fruits of love because we are connected to Christ by faith (cf. John 15:5).

What wonderful motivation and strength for serving God and others! We do not need the hope of earning God’s favor to compel us to obey God’s Word. We do not need praise, recognition, or reward to motivate us to show love:

Although I am an unworthy and condemned man, my God has given me in Christ all the riches of righteousness and salvation without any merit on my part, out of pure, free mercy, so that from now on I need nothing except faith which believes that this is true. Why should I not therefore freely, joyfully, with all my heart, and with an eager will do all things which I know are pleasing and acceptable to such a Father who has overwhelmed me with his inestimable riches? (LW, Vol. 31, p. 367)

Luther properly understood that our faith in Christ, nourished by the gospel, ever seeks to demonstrate itself in love. He realized that “faith is truly active through love, that is, it finds expression in works of the freest service, cheerfully and lovingly done, with which a man willingly serves another without hope of reward” (LW, Vol. 31, p. 365).

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*Brian Hennig, a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. John, New Ulm.*

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

# LUTHER

## *still speaks*

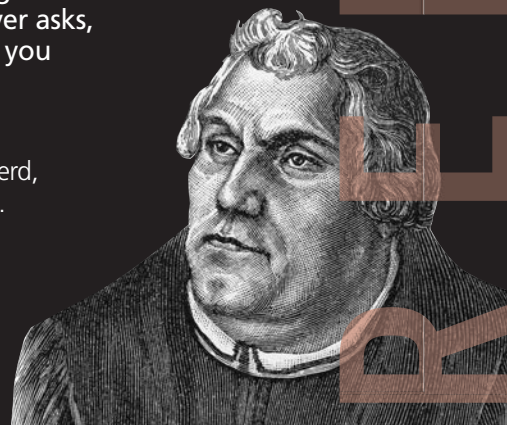
Luther correctly understood that good works are a result, not a cause, of our salvation. In a Christmas sermon on Titus 3:4-8 he preached, “My good man, you must have heaven and already be saved before you can do good works. Works do not merit heaven; but heaven, given out of pure grace, does the good works without any expectation of merit, simply for the benefit of our neighbor and for the glory of God” (*What Luther Says*, Vol. 3, #4911).

Luther preached and wrote often that good works do not help earn salvation. Along with St. Paul, he hammered home the thought that “a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law” (Romans 3:28). This is why he was hated by the Roman church, which insisted then—and still today—that works are necessary for salvation.

Such a teaching appeals to our old Adam. After all, we can’t be so bad that we can do nothing to save ourselves. But such a teaching robs God of the full glory for the salvation he has prepared for sinners. It steals from the sinner the confidence that he truly is saved by Christ’s work. It leaves those who are dying with the horrible uncertainty whether they have done enough to have heaven’s doors opened for them.

Luther, however, did not rule out good works in the life of a believer. For him the emphasis, as Scripture so plainly points out, was on the motive. Believers seek to serve God and their fellow man, not out of fear of punishment or desire for reward, but entirely out of love for Christ. In heartfelt gratitude for salvation the believer asks, “Lord, what would you have me do?”

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





# God's love: Our song forever

Hymns carry God's truths into our hearts so we can recall those truths for our strength and comfort.

Jonathan P. Bauer

I have a confession to make. I've stopped feeling guilty about the hymns I don't pick.

Let me explain. As a pastor who picks the hymns that the congregation sings, there have been plenty of times when I've heard comments about a hymn I *did* pick for a service. It's much less frequent, however, to hear a comment about a hymn I *didn't* pick. And yet, even though people rarely comment on the hymns left unsung, those are the ones I sometimes think about most.

If you've ever been involved in picking hymns, you know that for every hymn that finds a spot in the service there are a dozen you considered that didn't. It's not as if those dozen are clunkers. They are Christ-centered, gospel-proclaiming, Scripture-teaching hymns. And yet, they don't find their way into the service. They are the hymns of omission, if you will. And a while back, I stopped feeling guilty about them.

## PICKING PRACTICALLY VS. PASTORALLY

When I first started picking hymns, there were all kinds of factors I took into account. Some were textual. I would look for hymns that best captured the specific gospel truth found in the service's assigned readings. I might pick a hymn based on a single word or phrase that used language from the day's sermon text.

Other factors were musical. I would pick hymns that people would find easy and enjoyable to sing. I would consider the musical resources we

had available so that the hymn might involve a choir or instrumentalists.

More recently, however, my approach has changed. I've started taking more careful stock of the total number of hymns I pick and the frequency in which I choose them. I haven't stopped asking, "Which hymns work best in this specific service?" But I've started asking more frequently, "What hymns does the congregation know well?"

This subtle change in approach has been most noticeable in one specific way. I find myself intentionally picking fewer hymns and using them more frequently as opposed to more hymns less frequently.

## WHY SING FEWER HYMNS?

Why the change? More and more I see firsthand the profound effect that well-learned and well-loved hymns can have in the lives of God's people.

If you're one of the many young people in our congregations, it may seem as though your pastor struggles to communicate the gospel in a way that addresses the specific challenges you face. He'd love it if you remembered everything he ever told you in a children's sermon or a confirmation class. But even though that's unlikely, he's thrilled to know that you remember a hymn like "God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It."

If you're new to Christianity or Lutheranism, your pastor knows that you may still struggle with specific questions about the Bible. He would love to think that his Bible informa-

tion class will answer every single question. But even though that's unlikely, he's thrilled knowing that *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and *sola Scriptura* are planted deeper in your heart every time you sing a hymn like "Salvation unto Us Has Come."

If you're nearing the end of your earthly pilgrimage, your pastor would love to think that you will cling for comfort to something you heard in one of his sermons. But even though that's unlikely, he's thrilled to know that the words running through your head as you stand at the doorstep of glory are the words of a hymn like "Jesus, Your Blood and Righteousness."

Hymns have a unique ability to take precious gospel truths and smuggle them deep into the human mind and heart. Hymns can take those truths and accomplish two equally important and seemingly contradictory goals. They can lock those truths away in a secure, impenetrable vault. At the same time, they can make those truths readily available to be summoned forth when needed most. That is, of course, assuming we allow them to.

Let's do a little math. If, in a given year, a congregation sings 260 differ-

ent hymns (only one-third of what's in our current hymnal and supplement), do you know how many times they'd sing each one? Assuming four hymns per service and 65 unique services a year, they'd sing each of those 260 hymns only once.

Is singing a hymn once a year enough? Will the three-year-old who can't read yet come to know any of them? Will any of their words pop into the teen's mind as he endures bullying at school? Will any of them occur to the husband

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## I see firsthand the profound effect that well-learned and well-loved hymns can have in the lives of God's people.

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who's being lured by the temptations of pornography? Will any of them be inaudibly mouthed by the 90-year-old with dementia in hospice care?

If I showed you the list of hymns we *don't* sing at my congregation, you

might be shocked. There are some good ones on that list. Some classics, even. But I've stopped feeling guilty about the hymns we don't sing. Rather, I rejoice in the unique blessings that come from the ones we do sing and the frequency with which we sing them.

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*Jonathan Bauer, chairman of the Communications Committee of the WELS Hymnal Project, is pastor at Good News, Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin.*

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

Look for a supplementary blog article on some practical ideas on singing hymns more frequently at [welshymnal.com](http://welshymnal.com).

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](http://welshymnal.com).

# RESPECTFULLY *making room*

Like *Christian Worship*, our church body's next hymnal will again put 600+ hymns in front of God's people. Those responsible for selecting those hymns will be the first to admit that not all hymns are created equal. Some have richer gospel imagery than others. Some have more doctrinal content than others. Some elicit more emotion than others.

Valid arguments will be made about why a specific hymn was excluded or why another was included. There will be some hymns that you will want sung at your funeral. There will be others that you prefer never to hear again. All 600+ hymns won't equally satisfy the specific standards you set for hymns. The point is that they don't need to.

Rather, we hope that the 600+ hymns offered in this hymnal provide an opportunity for every congregation to find a rich and full list that makes up its unique diet of hymns. We pray that those hymns—learned and loved well—will serve God's people with the precious gospel both in large, established congregations and new mission starts, both in the rural heartland and on the urban coasts, both in life's highs and life's lows, and from the early years of youth all the way to the dying breath.

## A couple who grew up in a mix of religions now knows the one true God.

Julie K. Wietzke

Deo and Juliet Singh found the church pretty easily—it was right by the hotel they were staying at until their house was built.

That short walk across the parking lot started their journey to understanding sin and grace and to finding everlasting hope through their Savior.

**The Singhs were not strangers to religion.** Religion was part of their lives. Yet they didn't really know or understand their Savior.

Deo and Juliet grew up living three miles apart in Guyana, South America, in the 1940s and 50s. At that time, Guyana was a British colony and, as Deo explains, had a mix of religions—mainly Hinduism and Christianity. The older people who migrated from India practiced Hinduism in a broken Hindi language, while the children grew up speaking English and attending Christians schools. At these schools, they sang hymns, prayed, and learned basic Christian principles.

Both Deo and Juliet grew up practicing both religions but not really un-

derstanding either one. They participated in the Hindu rituals with their parents but didn't understand Hinduism because they didn't know the language of their parents. "The Hindu priest would come to bless the house and do prayers, but we didn't understand unless he explained in English," says Deo. At the same time, they attended Christian schools, and Juliet remembers going to Sunday school and lighting candles at the weekly Catholic Mass. Their lives were a mix of both religions, and they weren't sure what was really true. "We only keep following what we see our parents do," says Deo. A Savior from sin and death was missing in their lives.

Juliet left school at the age of 11 to care for her ill mother. Deo attended secondary school through the age of 15 when he had to quit to find work. He worked several odd jobs and then got a job at a large company, where he slowly worked himself up the ranks.

The lives of Deo and Juliet came together when their families arranged for their marriage. "I was tending sheep and I say to my mother, 'Look, some guy is coming and he's well dressed.' She said, 'Leave the sheep and come get some clothes,'" Juliet remembers. "I went upstairs . . . and my aunt said, 'Look through that window. You see that guy; you're

going to get married to him.' And that was it!" They have been married for 55 years.

They left Guyana in 1985 for New York City, where Deo started working at a warehouse at John F. Kennedy airport. Juliet had several jobs—often working over 60 hours a week. They said there was no time for church. "My work week started on Sunday," says Juliet. "There was no time for nothing but work."

**That changed when Deo retired in 2008, and the Singhs decided to move with one of their daughters to Myrtle Beach, S.C.** Amazing Grace was located in a strip mall across the parking lot from the hotel Deo and Juliet were staying in while their new house was being constructed.

"We were anxious to start getting into prayers," says Deo. "So I was walking around [by the hotel] and saw the church."

Deo stopped to talk to Ben Zahn, pastor at Amazing Grace. "From the time we met one another, that was it," says Deo. "We fell in love with him." That meeting started the Singhs' journey to truly understanding what their Savior did for them.

Zahn began Bible information classes with the Singhs at their home. "I gave them a feast for their souls, and Juliet

# Confessions OF FAITH



always had a feast for me,” he says, chuckling.

The Holy Spirit began working through the feast of the gospel. Zahn says he remembers two specific instances when he saw the Word in action in the Singhs’ lives.

When they first met, Deo told Zahn that he was afraid to die because he was uncertain of what would happen next. Zahn says as the instruction classes continued, they were talking about sin and grace and were looking at Hebrews 2:14,15: “[Jesus] too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”

“I said that the devil’s power had been destroyed and we don’t have to be afraid,” says Zahn. “Deo stopped me right after I read the passage and said, ‘Pastor, I have to tell you something. . . . I’m no longer afraid to die.’ I asked him why not. He said, ‘Jesus is my Savior.’”

Prayer by the Singhs in Guyana had offered no comfort. “Juliet said that when she was growing up in Hinduism, she was frustrated about praying,” says Zahn.

“[In Hinduism,] we had so many gods to pray to—lots and lots,” says Juliet.

Deo agrees. “It was conflicting in so many ways with different deities responsible for the sun, the rain, and this and that.”

But when they talked about who the true God is and being able to pray to him in Jesus’ name, Zahn remembers that it was like a light suddenly going on for the Singhs.

Juliet says that after learning more about God and the Bible, she better understands prayer. “Now you pray, and the Lord answers prayers,” she says. “And it’s true. He does answer prayer.”

Deo and Juliet were baptized and confirmed in 2009 and are regular attenders at Amazing Grace. “We can’t wait to get to church on Sunday,” says Deo, who Zahn says is the congregation’s resident “church hugger.”

The sacraments hold special meaning for them. “One day we were looking for our Baptism certificates, and I couldn’t find them, and I got scared,” says Deo. But the fear disappeared in the reality of their Baptism. He continues, “When we take Communion, I always try to concentrate on Jesus sharing the blood on the cross, and it makes me feel good.”



Deo and Juliet Singh

Juliet says that now she understands more about the Bible teachings and it makes her happy. “I love the Bible, and I love Pastor reading on Sunday,” she says. “We feel different. We learn more about God; we learn more about the Bible; we learn about Jesus.”

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*Julie Wietzke is the managing editor of Forward in Christ.*



**heart to heart**  
parent conversations

The beginning of a new school year usually brings a mix of feelings—at least for my family. There's always that tinge of sadness that summer is over, the excitement of a fresh school year, and the nervousness about what this year holds in store for us as we adjust to new teachers, expectations, and schedules.

So, what are teachers thinking about as the new school year begins? What advice do they have for parents at this critical—and let's be honest, stressful—time? In our printed column we hear from an elementary school teacher and a high school teacher. Read perspectives from a college professor and a homeschooling mom/teacher as well as watch a webcast featuring a veteran teacher at [forwardinchrist.net](http://forwardinchrist.net).

*Nicole Balza*

**Join the  
conversation!**

Visit [wels.net/forwardinchrist](http://wels.net/forwardinchrist)  
and look for the  
*Heart to heart* link.

WHAT DO TEACHERS WANT PARENTS TO KNOW AS SCHOOL BEGINS?

**As an early** elementary school teacher, I was both nervous and eager to begin each school year. Every new school year held so much promise. Yet, beginning something new took such patience and hard work.

I always knew that by mid-October all of the hard work would start paying off as individual students became a classroom community, learning was evident throughout the day, and teachers and families were settled into their new routines and relationships. However, the first weeks can be tough, and how we all handle them sets the tone for the rest of the year.

**Parents, teachers, and students are very tired at the beginning of the school year. Be patient!** It is exhausting to implement and learn new routines, recognize new faces, and memorize new names while also focusing on academic learning and homework. Give each other time to get everything running smoothly, and try not to make quick judgments based on information gathered in the first couple weeks of the school year.

Choose a Bible verse, like Colossians 3:12, on which to focus as you interact with your children, other families, teachers, and administrators: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." Stressful times can give our sinful natures a foothold, but focusing on God's Word supports us as we build and grow relationships at the beginning of the school year. Posting an encouraging verse in your car, on the fridge, or on

**Is your oldest** getting ready to enter high school? It wasn't so long ago when that's where my wife, Joyce, and I were. The years go by so fast. It seems like just yesterday it was kindergarten graduation, the first recital, the first game, and now . . . high school.

Moving from eighth grade to high school can be a little daunting for kids. Last spring they felt like they were at the top and ruling the school, and now it's a whole different place with new challenges and opportunities.

If you thought the grade school years went fast, wait until your child gets to high school! Four years might sound like a long time, but that will fly by—and then you're praying about college choices, military service, employment, marriage, etc. There are times you will be so proud of your teen and times when you just wonder what he was thinking. **Treasure these days as gifts from God. And continue to be a parent.**

With the rush of high school life, it might be hard to keep up your traditions of family dinners and time to-

your mirror can be a gentle reminder throughout the day of how you would like to treat others in this time of change.

**Just when it seems like things are going smoothly and it's going to be a good year, a couple things often seem to set off a normally patient, kind, and gentle parent—homework and “mean” kids.**

- **Homework:** Often schools have homework philosophies, and teachers need to follow what is required of them. Teachers work hard to give homework that is not too hard, not too easy, beneficial for every student, and that fits every family situation, but . . . this is tremendously hard to accomplish. The only way for a teacher to know if the homework is or is not working for your family is if you discuss it with him or her. If the amount, type, or content of homework is not working for your child or family, please ask to speak to the teacher privately and then share how homework is going. Ask the teacher to help you problem solve so that your child can best benefit from the homework he or she is doing.
- **“Mean” kids:** At the beginning of the school year, students often have some kind of social growing pains. They may not have spent much time with friends in the summer, and they now have to learn or remember how to problem solve, work, and play in a group and navigate the recess scene successfully. All kids struggle with some aspect of social learning as they practice being part of a group that includes others and treats others with respect. It's important for parents to remember that other kids are not enemies—they are kids who are working on learning how to be kind friends and successful

learners just like your child. When talking with your child about these experiences, try to help your child remain calm and focused on how to help the situation be better the next day. It is hard to hear that your child is sad or upset, but learning how to problem solve and build relationships with others is a vital skill that your child needs time to learn.

Teachers want you to know that we see these relationship dynamics and are closely monitoring interactions between children. However, we will not always step in, as it is so important for kids to practice their problem solving skills and then ask adults for help if needed. If you are concerned about a situation or relationship that seems to be bothering your child, please talk with your child's teacher in a respectful way. Often, asking the teacher for his or her perspective on the situation sets you up for a conversation focused on helping your child, which works better than an attack on the teacher.

Whether you are frustrated about homework, worried about your child's friendships, or unsure about a teacher's decisions, remember the grace that God gives you every day and pass that grace along to others. Choosing to interact with people in a spirit of love, kindness, and patience will make all the difference as you strive to begin the school year with positivity and grace.

*Rachel Blum and her husband, Matt, have three young children and are members at St. Paul, Green Bay, Wisconsin.*



gether. If your house can be a welcoming place for your teen and his friends, that is a real plus. Having those teens at your house can be a comfort to you and a safe place for them. **The friends your teen makes are so influential.**

Speaking of friends, you've seen those video clips: “My mom . . . my dad, they're my best friends!” Does that describe your family? I think teens need parents more than best friends during the high school years. It's ultimately a process of preparing them to leave the home “nest.” **Pray for them; be there for them; help them with tough decisions; be role models.** These are all so important during the teen years.

Sometimes, we parents think we have to do it all for our teens. Just so you know—that is not possible. Newsflash—he isn't going to like or agree with everything you decide. He's growing up; he's looking for freedom—he doesn't see things the way you do. **Don't ignore “outside” help.** Teachers, coaches, counselors, pastors, family friends, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins can help when, for whatever reason, you just can't get through to your teen.

**As a Christian parent, don't lose sight of what the real goal is.** It's awesome if your teen finds success in high school—captain of the team, excellent student, award-winning musician, and so on. But not all kids will. For your dear child, it's much more important to continue to grow in faith, to stay close to the Lord, and to be in God's Word and at his house regularly. Teens can be especially good at pushing back and not always showing much appreciation, but they are watching us and learning from us, even if they won't admit it.

**Pray. Pray. Pray. Stay close to your child. Stay close to your Lord.** The Lord loves your dear child even more than you do. Be faithful and lean on his strength. He has a blessed future for your child in his plan . . . and he is the ultimate Father.

*Dave Payne and his wife, Joyce, have four adult children and two grandchildren. Dave serves at Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wisconsin, and is a member at Eternal Love, Appleton.*



# God reconciles us to himself

**God's love does not abandon us when we stumble. It persists in calling us to return to him.**

James D. Roecker

Sally is a Community Advisor, or CA, at UW–Stevens Point. Her responsibilities are numerous and specific. CAs are responsible for attending training; opening and closing the residence halls; serving as desk receptionist; programming student development and wellness needs of residents; advising floor government; providing information on campus and community resources; serving as a contact and referral source for student concerns; and providing hall security and student conduct observation, intervention, and reporting. Sally has these responsibilities in addition to managing her own set of courses for the semester.

**For the first few months of school, everything runs smoothly.** But then there is an incident. Sally smells a strong aroma, possibly from a banned substance, coming from her best friend Sharon's dorm room.

Sally has two options to weigh in her mind. Option one is to ignore the aroma entirely and act like it was never noticed. No confrontation would happen. No feelings would be hurt. No investigating of the aroma would be necessary. But, Sally would be neglecting her duties as CA. Option two is harder. It would involve confronting Sharon about the odd aroma. Things could get ugly rather quickly. Harsh words may be spoken. Their friendship might never be the same again.

Sally chooses option two. It's not so much that "rules are rules" as it is about warning Sharon about potentially dangerous behavior and keeping the rest of the residents safe from the same kind of behavior.

And so Sally confronts Sharon. Harsh words are said. A fine would be coming Sharon's way because of Sally. Their relationship is strained. There is no longer peace and harmony between them. The tension feels like a weight when they are in each other's presence. Sally longs for the day when Sharon will be open to changing her behavior and mending their broken relationship. But for the time being, Sharon is simply not interested in reconciling with Sally.

**God's prophet Hosea could relate to Sally's situation.**

Hosea proclaimed God's harsh message to God's people, the Israelites. Israel had turned away from God. Destruction and punishment would be coming their way because of their failure to follow the one, true God. As a result, there was no peaceful, harmonious relationship between God and the Israelites.

God had been faithful to his people. "It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords

of human kindness, with ties of love" (Hosea 11:3,4). But in spite of his love, they had turned away from him.

Hosea's task was to issue strong words of rebuke and warning to his people. He wrote, "Return, Israel, to the LORD your God. Your sins have been your downfall!" (14:1). God's goal was always to bring his people back to his love and forgiveness. If they did not repent, the dire warnings would come to pass. But the Lord still loved them. His warning was a call to turn away from their rebellion against him and to return to his faithful love.

God's warnings, harsh rebukes, and threats are intended to call us back to him, for us to return to his love. Sally's task is simply an illustration of God's call to repentance. God's love does not abandon us when we stumble. It persists in calling us to return to him, to repent, and to trust in Jesus for our forgiveness. That's a message for students everywhere. It's a message for all of us.

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



## CHANGES IN MINISTRY

## Pastors

**Bowe, Paul**, to Gethsemane, Oklahoma City, Okla.  
**Degner, Samuel**, to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.  
**Degner, Steven**, to retirement  
**Doebler, Brian**, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Gartner, Mark**, to St. John, Appleton, Wis.  
**Gieschen, Philip**, to Christian giving counselor, Ministry of Christian Giving  
**Heiderich, Paul**, to retirement  
**Kassulke, Peter**, to retirement  
**Nass, Timothy**, to St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wis.  
**Pasbrig, Robert**, to Peace, Hartford, Wis.  
**Schafer, Newlin**, to Good Shepherd, Jacksonville, Fla.  
**Schwertfeger, Mark**, to retirement  
**Swartz, Donald**, to retirement  
**Vertz, Tod**, to Salem, Sturgeon Bay, Wis.

## Teachers

**Avery, Christopher**, to St. John's, Burlington, Wis.  
**Babinec, Bethany**, to St. John, Watertown, Wis.  
**Blumer, Kathryn**, to Precious Lambs Early Childhood Learning Center, Downers Grove, Ill.  
**Bohlmann, Rebekah**, to Salem, Greenfield, Minn.  
**Degner, Linda**, to retirement  
**Ehlke, Marilyn**, to retirement  
**Faust, Lynda**, to retirement  
**Ferch, Nannette**, to retirement  
**Gehrke, Jessica**, to Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Glock, Virginia**, to retirement  
**Glodowski, Janelle**, to Divine Peace, Largo, Md.  
**Gramarossa, Dana**, to Mt. Calvary-Grace, La Crosse, Wis.  
**Grove, Gina**, to retirement  
**Hassler, Karl**, to retirement  
**Jahns, Todd**, to Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Johnson, Christina**, to First, La Crosse, Wis.  
**Kaiser, Mark**, to St. Croix Lutheran Academy, West Saint Paul, Minn.  
**Karnopp, Albert**, to St. John, Goodhue, Minn.  
**Kasten, Joann**, to Shepherd of the Valley, Menasha, Wis.  
**Koester, Brenda**, to St. Paul, Fort Atkinson, Wis.  
**Koester, Elizabeth**, to Good Shepherd, Omaha, Neb.  
**Kuschel, Ashley**, to Prairie, Gibbon, Minn.  
**Latterman, Ryan**, to Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Lehmann, Kristin**, to St. Croix Lutheran Grades 6-12, West Saint Paul, Minn.  
**Leibl, Benjamin**, to Grace, Oshkosh, Wis.

**Marohn, Chad**, to St. Paul, Howards Grove, Wis.  
**Mayer, Jonnica**, to Cross of Christ, Coon Rapids, Minn.  
**Miller, Natalie**, to retirement  
**Nell, Mary**, to retirement  
**Ostgaard, Emily**, to Bloomington, Bloomington, Minn.  
**Panzer, Carole**, to Growing in Grace Preschool, Spring Hill, Fla.  
**Parsons, Molly**, to Faith, Fond du Lac, Wis.  
**Polzin, Barbara**, to Christ, North Saint Paul, Minn.  
**Rehberger, Claire**, to St. Paul, Appleton, Wis.  
**Scharf, William**, to Salem, Stillwater, Minn.  
**Schauer, Tamatha**, to St. John, Watertown, Wis.  
**Schliewe, Michelle**, to St. Paul, Livonia, Mich.  
**Schmidt, Michelle**, to Faith, Fond du Lac, Wis.  
**Schmidt, Valerie**, to Bethlehem-North, Germantown, Wis.  
**Schoch, Calla**, to Salem, Stillwater, Minn.  
**Schultz, Jeffrey**, to Good Shepherd, Omaha, Neb.  
**Schultz, Jill**, to St. John's, Pardeeville, Wis.  
**Schultz, Stephen**, to Bethany, Kenosha, Wis.  
**Schwartz, Thomas**, to Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis.  
**Simpson, Amber**, to King of Grace, Golden Valley, Minn.  
**Snyder, Patricia**, to Faith Lutheran Preschool, Sussex, Wis.  
**Song, Na Bin**, to Immanuel, Waukegan, Ill.  
**Stubalt, Brandon**, to Apostles, San Jose, Calif.  
**Swanson, Janet**, to St. Peter, Helenville, Wis.  
**Vanderhoof, Tiffany**, to St. Stephen, Beaver Dam, Wis.  
**Vidrio, Sarah**, to Holy Cross, Madison, Wis.  
**Voss, Jenilee**, to Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Wakefield, Katherine**, to St. Bartholomew, Kawkawlin, Mich.  
**Waldek, Emily**, to St. Paul, Columbus, Ohio  
**Walz, Micah**, to Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis.  
**Wascher, Katrina**, to Mt. Olive, Delano, Minn.  
**Wooster, James**, to retirement  
**Zahn, Philip**, to retirement  
**Zolldan, Roger**, to Salem, Stillwater, Minn.

**Staff minister**  
**Poston, Kevin**, to Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.

## ANNIVERSARIES

**Elkton, Mich.**—Trinity (125). Sept. 10. Worship, 4 P.M.; dinner to follow. RSVP requested for meal. 989-375-2479.  
**Friesland, Wis.**—Trinity (100). Sept. 10.

Worship, 10 A.M. 920-348-5842.  
**Waterloo, Wis.**—St. John (150). Sept. 17. Worship, 8 & 10:30 A.M.; dinner to follow. RSVP requested. office@stjohnwaterloo.org.  
**Denmark, Wis.**—Christ (100). Sept. 24. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal to follow. 920-863-2090.  
**Modesto, Calif.**—St. Peter (40). Sept. 24. Worship, 9 A.M.; catered meal to follow. RSVP by Sept. 10. 619-852-2600.  
**Winner, S.D.**—Trinity (100). Sept. 24. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; catered meal to follow. RSVP requested. 605-842-1357; pastorwmharley@gmail.com.  
**Appleton, Wis.**—St. Paul (150). Sept. 30. Kick-off meal celebration. RSVP requested. 920-733-6701; office@stpaulappletonwi.com. Oct. 1. Worship, 8 & 10:30 A.M.; refreshments/displays in between services.  
**Eau Claire, Wis.**—St. Mark (50). Oct. 1. Worship, 8 & 10:30 A.M.; meal and program, 12:30 P.M. Website, stmark-wels.org.  
**Portage, Mich.**—St. James (50). Oct. 14. Lutheran Music Festival celebration event, Chenery Auditorium, Kalamazoo, Mich. Website, lutheranmusicfestival.com.  
**Wausau, Wis.**—Our Savior's (75). Oct. 15. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. 715-845-3253; pastor.edwards@oursaviorswausau.org.

## COMING EVENTS

**WELS North Atlantic District Labor Day retreat**—Sept. 2–4. Camp Danbee, Peru, Mass. Website, welslabordayretreat.org.  
**WELS Church Librarians' Organization fall conference**—Sept. 23. Theme: "Reformation." Hosts: Cross of Christ, Portage, Wis., and St. John's, Pardeeville, Wis. Website, welslibrarians.org. 608-742-5609.  
**Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors convention**—Oct. 9–12. Country Springs Hotel, Pewaukee, Wis. Website, wels.net/events.  
**MLC Ladies' Auxiliary annual meeting**—Oct. 14. 8 A.M., Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Website, mlc-wels.edu/ladies-auxiliary.  
**WELS National Choral Festival**—Nov. 10–12. 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. Website, welsfinearts.org.

## NAMES WANTED

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

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.

## International Lutheran convention

2017 is a special year for Lutherans around the world. Five hundred years ago Martin Luther posted his Ninety-five Theses in Wittenberg. As part of the celebration, the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC), which consists of confessional Lutheran churches from around the world, met in Grimma, Germany, for its convention. Each church attending was represented by two voting representatives. They came from Australia, Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, and North America.

Since its founding in 1993 (when it met in Oberwesel, Germany), the CELC has gathered every three years in countries such as Japan, Peru, and Sweden. Over those years, the conference has grown to 22 full member churches and 7 additional associate member churches, with a combined total of 450,000 members.

One of the highlights at this convention was three applications for associate membership. The convention welcomed these church bodies into the CELC: **A synod name removed for security concerns**, the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia, and Southeast Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission (Hong Kong).

Another highlight was the adoption of a confession entitled "Ninety-five Theses for the 21st Century." The Peru convention (2014) assigned a committee led by Prof. Tom Nass (WELS) and Pres. John Moldstad (Evangelical Lutheran Synod) to draft it. After the confession

was adopted at the conference, representatives of some of the churches read selected theses for a video presentation. This video, created by Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minn., will be available on Oct. 31, 2017. Portions were also shared with the WELS convention this year.

Pastor Daniel Koelpin, outgoing CELC president, spoke of the importance of the CELC: "Lutheran churches are struggling around the world to keep their confession. Sometimes they think they are all alone in this struggle, and it is so essential for them to know that they are part of something that is far bigger than their respective churches. They leave their own country and meet with others who are going through the same struggles. They always go back edified and strengthened in their own struggles."

The focus of the essays this year was our shared Reformation heritage as confessional Lutherans and its importance for us in the 21st century. This year's essays were supplemented by a showing of the Luther film, *A Return to Grace: Luther's Life and Legacy*. Delegates also had time to visit Wittenberg for a day and spend an after-



## AN INTERNATIONAL CONNECTION

The women of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa decided to celebrate the Reformation by making chitenges (skirts) with a Reformation logo. Pastor Davison Mutenami from the Lutheran Church of

Central Africa-Zambia arrived early to the CELC convention in Germany for preliminary meetings. He stayed with Pastor Andreas Drechsler and his family and brought Hanna Drechsler the Reformation 500 chitenge from Zambia, which she wore on the excursion to the Grimma convent ruins.

noon where Katie von Bora was a nun before marrying Martin Luther.

The conference elected Prof. Gaylin Schmeling (ELS) as its new president. The next convention is scheduled for Seoul, Korea, in 2020. With gratitude, delegates enjoyed the hospitality of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Germany and look forward to the next convention.

*John Braun*

Learn more about the CELC at [celc.info](http://celc.info).

Image removed for security concerns.

# Celebrating the Reformation

WELS congregations are using the 500th anniversary of the Reformation as an opportunity to educate their members about Martin Luther and his teachings, as well as to reach out into their communities to share God's gospel message. Here are just a few examples. Learn more about synodwide Reformation events at [wels.net/reformation500](http://wels.net/reformation500).



## ALMA, MICHIGAN

It started out as a “small Luther display that we could use to adorn the building for the Reformation celebration,” says John Eich, pastor at Good Shepherd, Alma, Mich. It ended up including a life-sized Martin Luther nailing the Ninety-five Theses to the Castle Church door; several vignettes, including the Diet of Worms and Luther's study in the Wartburg Castle; and a mini-golf course depicting the places Luther lived and worked.



(Left to right): Pastor John Eich, Heidi McDaid, and Sandy Sheldon created this display of Martin Luther and the Castle Church as part of the congregation's Reformation 500 celebration. They also built a mini-golf course where kids learn about Luther's life.

Members Heidi McDaid and Sandy Sheldon, along with Eich, spent hundreds of hours researching the Reformation and Luther's life and creating the displays. “We started this project with 4 appliance boxes, 19 sheets of cardboard, 10 sheets of foam, Gorilla tape, a gallon of paint, and an endless amount of glue sticks,” says McDaid. Other unique building materials include disposable oil pans, pool noodles, hula hoops, and wind chimes.

Written narratives by each display further educate members about Luther's life and teachings, and activi-

ties such as a working printing press in Gutenberg's printshop bring the Reformation era to life.

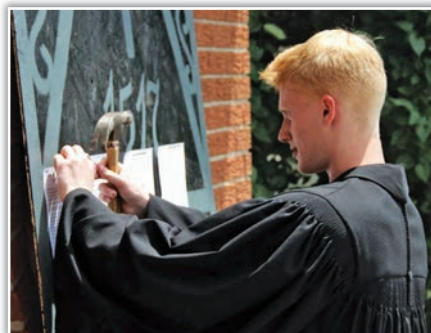
“On Sunday morning, the congregation is always looking for the latest addition to ‘Lutherland’ and as they gather around it, the conversations start, the fingers are pointing, and parents are explaining Martin Luther's life to their children,” says McDaid. “When you see this, you know it was all worth it!”

But the displays are not only for the congregation. Good Shepherd held an open house for the community and a weekend vacation Bible school, complete with lessons and games for the children and an adult Bible class. Area WELS congregations were invited to the concluding event—a German potluck and a presentation on Martin Luther's homeland.

Eich says the anniversary of the Reformation is a wonderful opportunity to share our heritage as confessional Lutherans with others. “We can let the community know that there is something different about being Lutheran—we're not just another Christian denomination. What a blessing this could be if we really promote that in the community, and people begin, by God's grace, to understand just how special it is to have grace alone, faith alone, and Scripture alone.”

## NEPEAN, ONTARIO, CANADA

Divine Word, Nepean, Ontario, Canada added a special outreach event to the end of its summer vacation Bible school. Building on its theme “Mighty Fortress,” the event included a bouncy castle and jousting, a petting zoo and pony rides, and a barbecue. But the main part of the event was the Reformation walk. Every hour, tour groups visited different stations that explained more about the Reformation, including the nailing of the Ninety-five Theses, John Tetzel and



The nailing of the Ninety-five Theses was one station of Divine Word's Reformation walk.

indulgences, the Wartburg Castle, law/gospel and means of grace.

“We had the community walking off the street to see what was going on,” says Rachel Halldorson, member at Divine Word. “The bouncy castle and zoo animals may have drawn them in, but it was the Reformation walk that shared the truth of God's Word and taught them about history and how God used Luther to rediscover the gospel truth.”

## TEMPE, ARIZONA

The fifth- through eighth-grade art class at Emmanuel, Tempe, Ariz., made two recycled bottle cap murals of the Luther seal to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Congregation members donated hundreds of bottle caps for the project. “What a neat way for the students to express their artistic abilities and remember what the Luther Seal means to us and our heritage,” says Amber Bode, congregation member.



## Project Titus looks at local outreach

Rachel Goddard has had a busy summer. Besides graduating from Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS), Saginaw, Mich., in May, she participated in two outreach opportunities through MLS' Project Titus, a program in which students do cross-cultural outreach and mission work in the U.S. and abroad.

First, she went to Colombia, South America. Then she went across town.

Goddard was participating in one of the newer Project Titus opportunities—Project Titus-Local. “MLS has been doing a fantastic job with our Project Titus efforts both domestic and foreign,” says Terry Vasold, professor at Michigan Lutheran Seminary. “We started asking ourselves whether there is something we could be doing in our own backyard.”

MLS started looking for local Saginaw opportunities for students to get involved. Some students volunteered



Rachel Goddard (wearing white sunglasses) helped teach preschool children soccer skills at the Bible soccer camp at Bethany, Saginaw, this summer.

at the WELS Pregnancy Care Center. Last school year about 35 students helped at the local chapter of the Special Olympics. And 11, including Goddard, got involved in a Bible soccer camp this summer at Bethany, Saginaw.

Bethany's soccer camp is no small affair. Held annually since 2012, the camp offers soccer skill training, as well as Bible story teaching, to up to 175 children ages 3-12, the majority of whom are from non-member families. Eighty volunteers are needed to make sure the camp runs smoothly. That's a tall order for a congregation of 188 communicants. “This could

not be happening without the MLS kids,” says Mike Nitz, pastor at Bethany.

Nitz says it was natural to get MLS students involved when he and MLS Dean David Koehler started the camp. “Getting the teenagers to help really bridges the gap between a camper who is maybe 11 years old and the [older] coach teaching the skill,” says Nitz.

Having teenagers involved also is an encouragement to the community. With Saginaw being hit hard when the automotive industry declined, area residents are used to seeing young people leave. “For attendees to see the MLS teens helping us out sends a message that our ministry is connecting with today's youth and has a bright future,” says Nitz.

Nitz says that the congregation's free soccer camp has put Bethany on the map. Each year's soccer camp has brought in new members and prospects, as well as students for the congregation's early childhood ministry. “We frequently are complimented on how organized and efficient our camp is,” says Nitz. “And we pass this on to the MLS students—you are the light of the Lord, a living Bible, and maybe the only Bible someone will read and the Lord will use to lead to learning the gospel.”

“My favorite part was teaching the kids,” says Goddard, who has been helping with the camp for the past three summers. “And I like hearing when new people come into the church.”

Goddard, who is a freshman at Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., this year, says she appreciates all the ways MLS provides to get a taste of ministry. “It helped me see that I wanted to be a teacher,” she says.

“Project Titus-Local has given our students another opportunity to do ministry,” says Vasold. “Whether they go on to MLC or not, it will give them valuable experience for the next time they are called on to serve.”

Learn more about Michigan Lutheran Seminary at [mlsem.org](http://mlsem.org) and in this month's edition of *WELS Connection*.

## Q & A with Nixon Vivar

*In May 2017, Nixon Vivar graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI). He was ordained and installed as one of two pastors at Christ, an Anglo-Hispanic congregation on Milwaukee's south side. Here he shares his journey from Ecuador to the United States, from Roman Catholic to Lutheran pastor.*

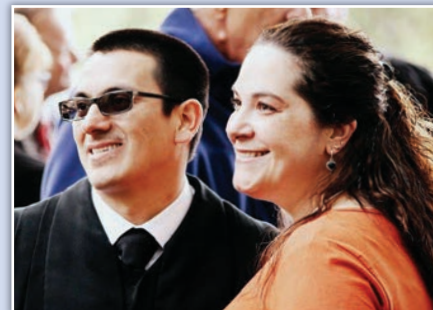
### Q: HOW DID YOU COME TO THE U.S.?

In 1991, when I was 21, I left Ecuador and joined my brother and cousin in Milwaukee because the economy of Ecuador had gotten very bad. Many young people were moving to countries like Italy, Germany, and the U.S. in search of jobs.

### Q: HOW DID YOU FIND WELS?

I went to St. Anthony, and the priest there said he could help me become a priest. But I wanted to have a family, and I also had lots of questions about the Bible. When I was attending [school] to learn English, I met Andres, a member of St. Peter's Church, Milwaukee, who was also studying English. He is from Colombia, which has similar customs to those in Ecuador, and he was also alone. We became close friends. Andres said, “Ask my pastor your questions.” Soon I was studying on my days off with Pastor Matt Krenke.

On Jan. 12, 2001, God revealed to me that I could do nothing to add to Christ's saving work. It was all God's grace. This was a huge relief. I was able to rejoice in the truth of the power of God's grace. Pastor Matt also intro-



Nixon and Carla Vivar at Nixon's graduation from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

duced me to a new program of the seminary, the PSI. Right away I knew I wanted to become a pastor. I prayed that I could bring this same joy and hope to other hearts.

### Q: HOW LONG DID IT TAKE YOU TO COMPLETE YOUR STUDIES?

It took a lot longer than I imagined—15 years. But by God's grace I was able to take each course in turn. And I met my wife Carla, who has been a great encourager, especially during the bad times. She would remind me that for God nothing is impossible.

### Q: WHAT WERE THE BAD TIMES?

In 2010 and 2011 we experienced some personal losses—Carla's father was seriously injured in an accident; my mother, whom I hadn't seen in 12 years, died; and my in-laws lost their home where we were also living. Also, my residency documents were denied, and it appeared I might have to leave the U.S. Things were very uncertain.

### Q: BUT GOD GAVE YOU GREAT JOYS TOO?

Yes! In 2015 I opened the letter that said, "Welcome to the U.S." That was one of my happiest moments! Then I began my final year of studies at Christ Church, working under Pastor Chad Walta. And finally, my ordination and installation, where I was honored to have 14 pastors, including my first teacher, PSI instructors, and the district president, participate. They had seen something in me—that I could serve the Lord.

### Q: WHAT PLANS ARE THERE FOR THIS CONGREGATION?

[Chad Walta] I see our chief, prayerful goal to be making one "Christ Lutheran" congregation. Language and cultural divisions can quickly turn into spiritual divisions, but this is overcome through Christ.

[Vivar] Yes, but it will take time. It started as two distinct halves because few people were bilingual. Over the years, new believers have developed maturity, both in faith and in being involved in the life of the congregation. With Christ at the center, we feel each other's pain; we work together.

*Karla Jaeger*

## Same mission, new services

Across from West Allis Central High School just outside of Milwaukee, Wis., is a building with a small sign that says Associated Pregnancy Services. On the window is the phrase "You Have Options" with a phone number to call for assistance. What makes this organization so different from other pregnancy centers isn't evident right away, but this organization's ultimate goal is to witness for Christ and to save souls.

Associated Pregnancy Services, operated under WELS Lutherans for Life, has a mission to protect a child's right to live and be loved, with the ultimate goal of teaching others about Christ. The center opened in 1982 to provide women with options other than abortion and resources to guide them through pregnancy and motherhood. Whether in person or over the phone, women can talk to advocates about their situation and any doubts or problems they are facing.

Diane Williams has worked with WELS Lutheran for Life for more than 20 years. She currently serves as its accountant, but she previously took calls from the crisis hotline.

One call in particular left a lasting impact on Williams. A woman called the hotline, not looking to talk to a counselor but seeking a friend to listen to her, which was exactly what Williams did. The woman explained how she was a student in college who unexpectedly became pregnant and was feeling embarrassed and ashamed. Williams listened to the woman's story and her fears, encouraging her throughout the call. At the end of the conversation, the woman said that if she had a girl, she would name her Diane.

"I know I touched her heart in a way," says Williams. "She just needed someone to talk to."

The organization has grown and evolved during the past 35 years to fit the needs of the community and serve more people. It currently offers diaper supplies to women, as well as parent-



WELS Lutherans for Life in West Allis, Wis., now offers ultrasounds to its clients. A member of the center's Loving Moms program volunteered to have an ultrasound taken so that staff and volunteers could train on the new equipment.

ing classes and a small baby boutique for new parents to find clothes and toys for their children.

The largest addition this year was a new ultrasound machine, which was donated to the center. Executive Director Peter Georgson said having an ultrasound suite available will bring in more women as well as provide the opportunity to save more babies' lives.

"They say that statistically, after seeing an ultrasound, more than 80 percent of abortion-minded women will choose life," says Georgson.

A medical team, under the direction and supervision of Dr. Susan Hill, will oversee the operation of the ultrasound suite and perform medical tests. Volunteer nurse manager Pam Maske recently retired from her career when she started volunteering with WELS Lutherans for Life. She has helped the team this past year prepare for the opening of the ultrasound suite and will perform ultrasounds when it opens.

"God called me to help these women, and who I am to say no?" asks Maske. "Ultrasounds are a tangible way for these women to see the lives they're carrying. I'm really excited for the suite to open."

*Gabriella Moline*

For more information, visit [alife2.com](http://alife2.com).



## What's so special about WELS camps?

*Each summer WELS youth gather in camps across the country. Many attendees describe their time at WELS camps as life changing. Here is camper Anne Ortmeier's story and then photos and information from some of the WELS camps that took place this summer. To see a full listing of WELS camps, go to [wels.net/events](http://wels.net/events).*

Since the age of five I have attended, volunteered, or worked at three WELS sleep-away camps, a YMCA sleep-away camp, two summer day camps (one WELS and one YMCA), and a YMCA outdoor environmental education program. That's more than 142 weeks of my life spent at one camp or another. Why subject myself to bug bites, sunburn, and infrequent showers? Why go back year after year to share a cabin with nine young girls or walk through the woods at night to the bathrooms?

*Because of the Holy Spirit.* Because I have seen faith blossom over songs sung at campfire and during quiet nighttime conversations. I have seen children lend a helping hand or an encouraging word to a friend in need. I have seen Jesus Cares campers singing praises to God with their whole heart. And I have felt

my own faith grow throughout the years as well. Each camp opportunity I had was placed before me by a God who knew exactly what I needed to develop into the person I am today.

*Because of the things I have learned.* Camp Phillip taught me about servant leadership and having to be available to my campers 23 hours a day for 6 days a week. (We got one hour off every day.) Camp Bird taught me that family is more than being related by blood. The staff I work with there has been my "camp family" for 30 years. And even in the secular camps that I have worked at, I have learned that when proclaiming my faith publicly is not an option, I can still witness through my actions and attitudes.

*Because of the kids and the stories.*

Oh, the stories! To see the face of an inner-city student from Detroit go for her first horseback ride. To share in the elation of a camper who masters a high ropes course element (see p. 30). To be the lifeguard who encourages the boy taking his swim test that, "Yes! You can make it this year." What an honor to serve my God as he works through me to touch the lives of these young people.



Anne Ortmeier (left) and her fellow lifeguards at Camp Bird, Crivitz, Wis.



### CAMP LOR-RAY, MUSKEGON, MICH.

Answer a question in Bible study, soak a counselor! Bible leaders at Camp Lor-Ray engage campers during daily Bible study sessions.



### CAMP BIRD, CRIVITZ, WIS.

This past July more than 420 WELS youth attended Camp Bird. "Camp Bird for Lutherans is, and has been, my second home since I was 12 years old," notes one camper turned counselor. "Camp Bird is an amazing place to come and empty ourselves of the burdens of daily life and let God fill us with his Holy Spirit."



### URBAN EXPLORERS, WAUTOMA, WIS.

Urban Explorers brings children from Milwaukee to experience Christian camping in a rural setting. Pictured are the 32 campers and some of the staff from the June 21–24 camp.



### TRAINING CAMP, INGLESIDE, ILL.

"Just like football players go to training camps to prepare for the football season, we invite the children to Training Camp to prepare for their lives as Christians," says Michael Zarling, camp director and pastor at Epiphany, Racine, Wis.

## WELS news briefs

**WELS COMMUNICATION SERVICES** | 414-256-3210; csc@wels.net

*Martin Luther: The Idea that Changed the World*, a version of the popular film *A Return to Grace: Luther's Life and Legacy*, will air on PBS at 7 P.M. CT, Sept. 12. "We're excited about this opportunity to share more about Luther's story to a broadly-targeted demographic," says Mike Trinklein, writer and co-producer of the film. "This version's script was carefully written to be accessible to people who are not familiar with church language. The overall goal is to let Luther's theology flow naturally from the story." This is just one way congregations can see the film. Many congregations are still booking screenings at their local theaters. Since February, at least one thousand WELS churches and others around the country have hosted screenings, making *A Return to Grace* the #1 movie distributed by Tugg in 2017. Learn how you can book a screening at [wels.net/reformation500](http://wels.net/reformation500).

**WELS COMMISSION ON WORSHIP** | 414-256-3226; cw@wels.net

The WELS Commission on Worship hosted the 2017 National Conference on Worship Music and the Arts June 13–16 at Carthage College in Kenosha, Wis. More than one thousand people attended the conference, which included a focus on Martin Luther's contributions to worship as part of the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The conference also included:

- more than 50 breakout sessions;
- morning and evening worship services;
- a plenary address by Michael Schultz, the director of the Hymnal Project;
- a children's choir and high school honor choir;
- a collaborative art project that was displayed at the closing service; and
- a juried art exhibit.



Photo credit: Fresh Frame Photography  
[www.freshframephotography.com](http://www.freshframephotography.com)

**WELS MISSIONS** | 414-256-3234; missions-esg@wels.net

More than five hundred people attended the annual Lutheran Women's Missionary Society (LWMS) convention, which was held in Orlando, Fla., from June 22–25. Attendees heard missionary presentations from Daniel Sargent—Zambia; Kent Reeder—Illumine, Rock Hill, S.C.; Jonathan Bourman—Peace, Aiken, S.C.; Thomas Spiegelberg—Trinity, St. Lucia, West Indies; and Friends of East Asia. Attendees could "travel" to world missions via the convention photo booth (pictured). Between convention worship service offerings, mission projects offerings, the kids c.a.r.e. program, and the endowments funds, LWMS presented more than \$150,000 to WELS Missions at the convention this year. The 2018 convention is scheduled for June 21–24 in Green Bay, Wis.



### CAMP 4 STAR, OLYMPIA, WASH.

The four stars in Camp 4 Star's name represent the four Pacific Northwest churches that brought the camp to life in the summer of 1959. Camp 4 Star now serves WELS/ELS members from the greater Seattle area.



### ROCKY MOUNTAIN CHRISTIAN CAMP, LEADVILLE, COLO.

"Build something out of paper!" counselors challenged campers. Rocky Mountain Christian Camp began in 1969 to serve WELS congregations in the Colorado area.





# SALT

— of the —

# EARTH

**After making several communion calls, a pastor is encouraged by his members' faith, hope, and patience.**

Glenn L. Schwanke

The door is partially open, so I step into the room at the Omega House. There sits one of our shut-ins, picking with a fork at some late breakfast. I pause and call out, "Diane, it's Pastor!" It takes a second or two for her to register who I am, but then her eyes sparkle and a warm smile covers her face.

## **BE JOYFUL IN HOPE**

"May I visit with you and share the Lord's Supper with you?" I ask.

"Of course!" she responds.

"Diane," I continue, "my heart breaks over what you and your family have gone through in the past few weeks. First, your husband dies. And then less than a week after his funeral, your house burns down! Now here you are in extended care at the Omega House. How are you holding up?"

Still smiling, she responds, "Jesus has always taken care of me. Every day, no matter what. I know he will take care of me now too."

I struggle to hold back a tear at such simple, childlike trust. After a moment, I respond, "I want to reassure you that Jesus has made a promise to you, guaranteed in blood. He will be with you always."

"Oh, I know he is! He talks to me through his Word, and I talk to him—all the time. Every day!"

Another tear fights at the corner of my eye. Then I open my communion kit and prepare the Lord's Supper. We celebrate the Supper using the words Diane has heard countless times before. However, age strips away the inhibitions of her youth, so Diane adds commentary along the way. But I don't mind.

"Take eat, this is my body." "I know it is! I know he loves me."

"Take drink, this is my blood." "Oh, he died on the cross for me!"

"For the forgiveness of all your sins." "I know he paid for my sins. He loves me! He has always been with me. He always will."

After the Supper is finished, we visit a bit more. Then I pack up my communion kit and leave Diane. I leave a richer man, for I have been with a child of God who is living what the apostle Paul encouraged: "Be joyful in hope."

## **ENDURE TRIALS PATIENTLY**

It's Sunday evening, and I've been puttering in the shop. I glance at the clock and notice it's almost 7 P.M. It's time to make a communion call. As I pass through my home office, I grab my communion kit, agenda, and Bible. But I don't go out to the garage and jump into the car. Instead, I walk to the living room and sit down in one of the recliners. The communicant, my

wife, Teresa, is already seated in the other recliner. She's been patiently waiting for me.

We begin with the "short sermon" I promise all the sick and shut-ins I visit. It's far less structured than the message I shared that same morning in church. With my wife, it's even more so. Our devotion is more like a dialogue based on Scripture, as we discuss God's plan for our lives and the reason he allows affliction to come into our lives.

As our devotion continues, it's impossible for me to rigidly control my emotions. Tears start to trickle down my cheeks, while tears stream down my wife's. But Jesus' words help dry those tears. "In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that you may also be where I am" (John 14:2,3). We know heaven waits. Our mansions have already been bought and paid for in full.

But what about the road ahead on this side of the grave? How many U-turns will it hold? How much longer will we be pressed down by the pain? Our Savior's gentle whispers help dry the tears. "And surely I am with you always until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

"God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your ability, but when he tests you, he will also bring about the outcome that you are able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Then I add, "Jesus knows all about what is going on in our lives. The cancer, the treatments, the pain, the setbacks. And he knows all about our weaknesses, our fears, our worries, all our sins. That's why he came, lived, and died. And that's why he has made us another promise, guaranteed in his blood. 'If you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it' (John 14:14)."

"I know," my wife responds. "I am praying all the time. Every day."

Then it's time for the Supper, a final prayer, and the benediction. I get up from my chair a humbler man, because I've been with a child of God who is living what the apostle Paul encouraged: "Endure trials patiently."

### **PERSIST IN PRAYER**

"I talk to him—all the time. Every day!"

"I am praying all the time. Every day."

It strikes me that both my shut-in and my wife have taken Paul's admonition to heart: "Persist in prayer." Sometimes—first thing in the morning or late at night—our prayers may stretch to an hour or more, as we petition our Father on behalf of friends, neighbors, family, coworkers, and classmates. At other times, our prayers last longer because we're wrestling with our Father during a personal crisis—whether it be work, health, family, or faith. Then there are times when our prayers are little more than a sentence or two or even nothing but a sigh or a groan (Romans 8:26).

Concerning our prayer life, Dr. Martin Luther once wrote, "A Christian is always praying, whether he is sleeping or waking; for his heart is always praying, and even a little sigh is a great and mighty prayer. For so God says: 'For the sighing of the needy now will I arise, saith the Lord' (Psalm 12:5)" (*What Luther Says*, Vol. 2, #3471).

We keep praying to our "Abba, Father," trusting that he answers every prayer in just the right way and at just the right time. We keep praying because we know prayer is a healthy exercise for our Christian faith.

And a healthy, active faith? That will be salt for those around us, just like my shut-in's and my wife's faith have been for me.

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

At the author's request, all Bible verses are from the English Heritage Version.

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

*Be joyful*

**IN HOPE.**

*Endure*

**TRIALS**

*patiently.*

**PERSIST IN**

*prayer.*

**ROMANS 12:12**

The background image shows a person's hands, wearing a bright yellow long-sleeved shirt, firmly gripping a thick, weathered wooden pole. The pole has a rough, textured surface with visible grain and some knots. The person's hands are positioned on either side of the pole, with fingers spread against the wood. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting with foliage.

# The POWER of ENCOURAGEMENT

A lesson from camp teaches  
us all the importance of  
encouraging others.

Jeremiah Wallander

"There is nothing to worry about. This is the safest thing we have here. In fact, it is even safer than playing a game of volleyball."

Those are my words to about 20 twelve-year-olds as they look up in fear at the 35-foot-high telephone poles they will be challenged to climb. I'm not lying to them; it actually is completely safe. But there are always those kids whose knees knock violently at the thought of being three and a half stories in the air.

**I serve as a counselor at Camp Phillip in the summer.** This Lutheran treasure is tucked in the backwoods of Wautoma, Wisconsin. I've worked with thousands of children from ages 7 to 17, all with different interests, hobbies, and backgrounds. Of course, all of them have their own fears that they find hardest to talk about. Some kids are still trying to figure out who they are, which is normal, but the idea of not knowing where they are going in life frightens them. Some kids have no problem being away from Mom and Dad for six days, but others cry every night because they miss their parents. And while some kids have no problem climbing up a utility pole and taking the "leap of faith," there definitely are kids who would rather have 17 cavities in their mouth than go anywhere near a high ropes course.

Calvin was one of those kids. He was 12 years old, short for his age, quiet, and got along with all the other kids. He was definitely not the sort who would try to spur on a rebellion against the camp staff. In fact, when I first met him I immediately was thankful to have him in my cabin. He listened well, liked to have fun, was a team player, and really got into all the camp activities. Well, all of them, but one.

We give campers thorough safety instructions at the ropes course before proceeding. Often when campers are nervous while climbing, all they need is for you to say, "I believe in you. Just give me one more step!" And before you know it, they've finished the course—exhilarated—and are begging to do it again.

**But one day, I noticed a lonely harness lying in the grass.** It was as if its wearer had been raptured right there on the course. I began to scan around the children, checking who was wearing a harness and who was not.

It was Calvin. I started guessing what his reasoning was for abandoning it. Perhaps he wasn't feeling well. Maybe he needed some water. Maybe the harness was uncomfortable, and he just didn't want to wear it until he climbed. So I asked. But his answer was not what I expected. "I don't like heights. I'm not doing this."



Jeremiah Wallander (pictured) serves as a summer counselor at Camp Phillip, Wautoma, Wis., where campers participate in different activities, including a high ropes course.

I reminded him how safe it was and encouraged him to see how many other kids were having fun climbing. I wanted him to experience the same fun they were having. He didn't budge. I talked to him more about different fears I had growing up—things like deep water and bicycles. But Calvin still would not dare to wear the harness.

I went over to my buddy Ross, a fellow camp counselor. We brainstormed strategies that might lead Calvin to give it a try. Ross got down to his level and talked to him about his own fears. No luck. We even offered Calvin extra dessert at supper that night if he'd just give it a try. I'm sure his neck started to strain from how often he was shaking his head no.

Finally, Ross and I regrouped and folded our hands and did what we should've done in the first place. We prayed: "Dear Lord, please give Calvin the strength to face his fear and know that he is completely safe and that you are the ultimate protector of everything."

Before we were done praying, the other campers started to take notice. "Calvin, you gotta give it a shot. It was so much fun!" "Seriously, dude! Best experience of my life!" "It was TOTALLY WICKED!" You know how sixth graders talk to each other. Twenty campers were chanting Calvin's name, patting him on the back, and cheering for him to face his fear and give it a shot.

How can anyone say no to such healthy peer pressure? Harness secured. Shoes

tied. Helmet tight. Ropes set. Good to go. Two steps in, Calvin panicked, regretting his decision, but an uproar of cheering and encouragement arose from the campers. It got louder and louder, and it never stopped.

As Calvin climbed to the top, the cheering only grew louder and even more positive. Calvin overcame his fear and reached the end. He even kissed the final utility pole before we let him down. The grin on his face as he came down was priceless. Some of us refer to this moment as the "miracle on ropes." Against all odds, a shy kid conquered what seemed in his mind to be unconquerable.

### **But that was not the biggest thing that got me.**

It is a lesson for us all. The whole situation leads me to think of 1 Thessalonians 5:11: "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up." Putting this encouragement into practice is a powerful thing. Calvin's success is impressive to me, but the encouragement he received from his fellow campers is incredible!

Let me take one more step. Encouragement may not always be the cool thing to do. Oftentimes harsh teasing comes easier than encouraging, especially in a group of preteens, teens, and young adults. I've seen kids bully each other to the point of tears over the simplest things, exactly contrary to what God commands us to do. But what I witnessed at the ropes course

that afternoon was a prime example of Christian love and encouragement. Who knew that a bunch of teens could teach me so much about love, friendship, support, and encouragement in just one session at camp?

Building one another up—as Christians, we can struggle with this. We become selfish, lazy, rude, and much more that can keep encouragement out of our conversations. Yet God calls us to care for one another, to encourage each other. God calls us to love. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). By sending Jesus to save us from hopelessness and death, God gave us the ultimate encouragement. God's encouragement assures us that we do not need to save ourselves. His plan is perfect, and we are constantly loved. Though the world may scare us and knock us to our knees, God is always there to lift us back up, dust off our shoulders, and say, "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20).

Thank God that our Savior is with us wherever we go—watching over our comings and goings and encouraging us to walk in his truth every step of the way. With thankful hearts, we'll encourage one another to face every challenge that arises before us—even the challenges that are as tall as telephone poles.

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*Jeremiah Wallander, a junior at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at Eternal Love, Appleton, Wisconsin.*

Read more about WELS camps on p. 24.



# TIMES A HUNDRED

A couple shows Christ's love through fostering special-needs infants.

Amanda M. Klemp

Describing Shirley and Bob Polinske is easy. Faith is not merely a part of who they are; it is how they live. They had love to share and made it their life's mission to show that love in their own way.

## LOVE IN THEIR HEARTS

The short version of their story is this: The Polinskes got married in 1956 and started a family. Shirley gave birth to seven children, two of whom died in infancy. After their babies went home to heaven, Shirley and Bob started fostering infants . . . more than one hundred over the years (they lost count along the way), many of whom had severe medical or cognitive conditions. The Polinskes loved them, nursed them to health, and then said good-bye as the babies went to adoptive families. More than a hundred times, they made a child their own and said good-bye, just to do it again.

The Polinskes started fostering babies in 1969. After having two infants die, one from sudden infant death syndrome and one from hydrocephaly, they realized they had a place in their hearts to care for babies who needed a loving home.

"Because we couldn't have any more children of our own and we always said we were going to have 25—it's kind of goofy—we just wanted to give our love to other children who needed it," says Shirley.

The first few babies they took in were healthy babies who, because of adoption procedures, needed a temporary home before going to their permanent families. Then they started getting placements of infants with special needs.

"Once we started taking special-needs babies, that's what we got from then on, because it's harder to find people to take care of those babies," says Shirley. "We had some babies who had tubes in their stomachs to get fed and tubes in their noses. It's all stuff that the doctors were even shocked with. Every time we went to the doctor with a new baby, it was something worse."

As Shirley poignantly says, "They were babies whom no one else wanted."

She continues, "We fixed them up, and they got adopted. I say 'fixed them up,' they weren't cured, but they were happy and they got parents."

Shirley says caring for their son who had hydrocephaly trained them to care for all these other babies who needed that kind of special love, attention, and medical care. "We figured we might as well make use of that training," she says.

It wasn't easy. The Polinske family experienced the heartbreak of saying good-bye to a new family member over and over again. Having children leave the home, even when you know

they are going to loving parents, "feels like a death in the family."

"We used to say, 'Oh, we can't do this anymore,' but then the phone would ring and we'd say yes right away. We just had a love in our heart, and God trained us how to do it, so we had to keep doing what God taught us to do," says Shirley. "The easiest part was you always get a new child in to give your love to, and when you see them make progress and smile, that smile just eats your heart out. You love it."

## LOVE IN THEIR HOME

Among all the infants in and out of their home, two stayed long-term. John was one of the first special-needs infants they took in. He had cerebral palsy and severe cognitive limitations. He couldn't do anything physically when he moved into the Polinskes' home. As he got older, he became strong enough to be able to sit up and be in a wheelchair. Shirley jokes that he was a "temporary" placement.

It was just a few years ago, when John was in his late forties, that Shirley and Bob had to make the tough decision to move him to a group home. As they got older, their own health started to limit their ability to care for John. They still visit him every week. "He's got so much love in him; his eyes just glow

when we come to see him in the group home,” says Shirley. Even though John was never legally adopted, John is considered part of the Polinske family.

Michael, another young boy who came to live with the Polinskes, was legally blind and couldn’t walk. As he progressed, he was able to move around and eventually walk. It took years to get through the system, but

eventually, the Polinskes adopted Michael when he was eight years old. “Our most precious moment was when we got to adopt our own foster child, Michael,” says Shirley.

The physical limitations haven’t held Michael back. Though legally blind, he still has some peripheral vision and now works as a computer programmer for a large financial company.

## MORE LOVE TO SHARE

With so many babies cared for and so many miracles witnessed, according to Shirley, the formula is quite simple: “Give them a lot of love, and they’ll respond. Love and attention and make sure you raise them in God’s name, that they know God.”

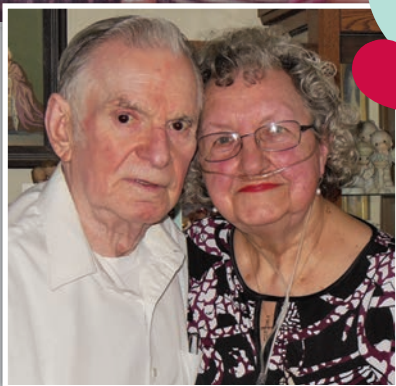
But how did they continue taking in children, knowing the challenges and good-byes ahead? “God’s always there. He gives you the strength to carry on no matter what happens. Whatever he sends, it’s a blessing because someday we’ll meet him up in heaven and that will be our glorious ending,” says Shirley. “We learned that we’re capable of loving each other and putting our faith in God to carry us through when we felt like we couldn’t do it anymore.”

After caring for more than one hundred infants, Shirley says she still wants to hold babies any chance she can, but now, she’s happy to hand them back to their parents when they start crying. The Polinskes had to retire from caring for infants, but Shirley’s penchant for hugs shows when she attends her church, Redemption, Milwaukee. Both Bob and Shirley still have love to share. Shirley says even grown-ups need hugs, and her arms are open.

Most people would consider what the Polinskes have done in their life together to be extraordinary and extraordinarily difficult. When they speak about it, they don’t sugarcoat the hardships and blessings, but it is engrained in who they are. For them, the extraordinary was just an ordinary demonstration of Christ’s love.

Staying up all night with sick children, watching them in pain, being with them at the hospital through surgeries and treatments, giving them hugs and cuddles, and then saying good-bye . . . what kind of faith is needed to do that? The type of love-filled faith that Shirley and Bob have.

*Amanda Klemp is a member at Gethsemane, Davenport, Iowa.*



Top: The Polinskes with all their children. Bottom right: Bob and Shirley with John (center) and Michael (left). Bottom left: Bob and Shirley on their 61st wedding anniversary this past June.



**“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:4).**

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What breaks  
God's heart  
should break  
the hearts of  
his people.

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# Not caring is not an option

Jeffrey L. Samelson

Imagine that in the news today you hear newly released numbers of casualties from a civil war being fought in a foreign nation. You are shocked to learn that more than 900,000 people were killed in just the last year—almost one out of every five people. Since the war began, almost 60 million lost their lives. How would you respond?

With a “little war” killing only hundreds or thousands, you might easily say, “Well, that’s their business, not ours.” But with numbers like these—even if it were only about 100,000 in the last year—you would likely say, “Something must be done! This can’t continue!” You and other citizens might pressure your government to intervene—to do whatever it takes—and to do it quickly to stop the senseless deaths. As a Christian, you would pray earnestly for an end to the killing, recognizing that God’s heart is broken by that evil even more than yours. You would seek other ways that you could help. You might even get your church involved, sharing God’s love and concern together as his family.

Another option might be just to say, “Hey, that’s just life and death in this messed-up world. I’ve got plenty on my mind as it is, and I’m sure that if God cares, he doesn’t need me telling him what to do.”

What if those deaths were all happening in your own country?

They are! About 900,000 innocent human lives were snuffed out by abortion in the United States last year—roughly one out of every five pregnancies. And yet many leaders within the Christian church treat it as something that “just is”—a reality to which we simply have to adjust. Some suggest that there is nothing more we can do, and the deaths continue to mount.

Perhaps you too simply conclude there is nothing you can do. Maybe the reason is that you don’t know anyone who’s ever had an abortion, so it’s not really worth

your attention. Or perhaps you do know someone close to you who has had an abortion, and so you don’t feel comfortable being “judgy” about it. Or maybe you just don’t want to think about abortion.

Yet, what breaks God’s heart should break the hearts of his people. We, as Lutherans, strongly affirm that infants need Baptism because they are sinners. We should understand the tragedy of abortion as well as anyone: It is taking the life of another person. That murder also eliminates that child’s opportunity to gain salvation through Baptism or hearing the gospel. Thank God, then, that Jesus won for us forgiveness on the cross—forgiveness for those who get, perform, or just encourage abortions as well as for those who have become complacent about the mass murder going on around them every day.

With the remission of those sins in Christ and the reminder of what abortion really is, we, as God’s people, find that not caring is not an option. You can get active politically or just speak up among friends. What you choose to do as a citizen is up to you. As Christians, though, we are all compelled to pray and to give witness to the truth with our teaching. We also can take some additional steps. We can volunteer at pregnancy centers, help unwed mothers, and do many other things to try to influence others and to stop the killing. We are God’s salt and light in a sin-darkened world.

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Christian Life Resources is a WELS-related ministry devoted to educating and mobilizing Christians on beginning- and end-of-life issues according to God’s Word. Learn more at [christianliferesources.net](http://christianliferesources.net). Read about the ministry of a WELS pregnancy center in the Milwaukee area on p. 23.



# MONUMENTS

## *Lasting Memories*

**Alone and guilty, we need the assurance of God's love in Christ.**

Samuel C. Degner

Have you ever felt so alone that even God seemed far away?

### LOOMING LONELINESS

Jacob was a long way from his home in Beersheba, far from his mother and father. He was on his way to his uncle's house in Harran. When the sun set, he had to stop right there on the road, somewhere near a place called Luz. There, all alone, he lay down for the night (see Genesis 28:10-22).

Making matters worse was the reason for his solitude. Jacob had stolen his father's blessing from his twin brother, Esau. Now Esau, the hunter, had his sights set on Jacob. Jacob chose to run from Esau.

Imagine the loneliness that settled on him along with the darkness as he laid down his head on a stone. He had deceived his father and enraged his brother. He had failed to trust God's promises. Had he alienated his God too?

Loneliness is bad enough, but guilt adds to the pain like a stone under the head. We have all been there. Your sibling won't talk to you because of an argument you started. Your friends stop calling because you let them down. Sometimes it can even feel like you've driven God away.

### CONSTANT CONNECTION

In those rock-bottom moments, look up!

Look up with Jacob as he dreams. See a stairway resting on the earth and reaching into heaven. Watch the angels ascending and descending. Jacob was not alone! God's messengers attended to him. God himself spoke—and not a word of condemnation. To the homeless one, he promised the land on which he lay. To the one who fled his family,

he promised descendants like the dust. To the one traveling alone, he promised his presence and protection. He even promised to use someone from this guilty one's line to bring blessing to the whole world. God assured Jacob of his forgiving love—the same love he promised to his grandfather, Abraham, and his father, Isaac.

Just what Jacob needed to hear!

Just what we needed too. When we were lying in guilty solitude, God sent that descendant of Jacob to us. Though he was one with the Father and never wandered from him, Jesus lay his head down on a piece of wood and felt what it was like to be truly estranged from God. He suffered that loneliness so that we never would.

Jesus once told Nathanael, "You will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man" (John 1:51). Jesus is that stairway, our bridge between earth and heaven. He is our constant connection to God. Because of him, our cries of loneliness rise to heaven and God sends down his comfort: He will not break his relationship with us.

When Jacob woke up, he seemed surprised. "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it" (Genesis 28:16). He took the stone on which he slept, set it upright, and anointed it. He renamed the place Bethel, "house of God." He still had many miles to go and many years before he would see his family again. But he knew that, wherever he was, God would be with him.

Let his simple monument be a lasting reminder to you too. No matter how isolated you may feel, you're never alone. Your God is always with you.

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*Contributing editor Samuel Degner is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.*

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




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The kingdom of  
God continues to  
claim new believers  
and to sustain  
all those who  
trust in him.

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## Your kingdom come

Believers have always longed for the Lord's kingdom to come. The Old Testament believers, like Abraham, were "looking for the city that is to come" (Hebrews 13:14). We also pray for its coming the way John ends Revelation. When the Lord promises, "Yes, I am coming soon," believers respond, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

Our prayer is a longing for the perfect kingdom Jesus promised, a place where there is no more death, sorrow, pain, or crying. It springs from hearts that daily endure the harsh realities of life in the trenches of unrest, anger, immorality, addiction, and all that comes with them. Here we have nothing perfect. We anticipate something much better because Jesus, our King, has promised it will come.

But Jesus reminded his disciples that the kingdom of his Father is more than a distant hope. It already exists (Luke 17:21). All those who listen to the gospel and believe become citizens, even though they must wait for its glorious coming. The glory waits, but not the love and care of God.

Our Father placed all things under the power and authority of Jesus (Ephesians 1:22). Now Jesus rules his kingdom so that all things work for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28). That's the kingdom we pray will continue to advance.

Perhaps we need to remember that our King came here and lived with us as a poor, humble servant. He stood, accused of treason and bound before Pilate. In his interview with the Roman official, Jesus maintained that he was a king but his kingdom was not of this world. It was different.

When we remember Jesus before Pilate, we begin to understand how different the kingdom of God is. It is not a kingdom of power, borders, armies, decrees, or legislative action. It is a kingdom of God's action on behalf

of his people—quietly, relentlessly, efficiently carried out by an unseen and unnoticed almighty God who loves his own.

Our great King now rules, even in the presence of his enemies. Today, the headlines announce how often the enemies of Christ seek to destroy his kingdom and belittle or even persecute his people. They almost always seem to be more powerful, more successful, and more important than Christ's kingdom. But Jesus reminds us that even hell itself cannot overcome his kingdom (Matthew 16:18).

The gospel of Jesus has called, gathered, and enlightened sinful humans like us. We are his kingdom waiting for the glory to come. When we pray, "Your kingdom come," we recognize that we are citizens of his kingdom and pray that he will keep us as his subjects.

We could say that Christ's kingdom is a kingdom of words because his power is in the words of the gospel of forgiveness. That power not only sustains us as his own but also brings others to treasure the grace of God. In spite of attempts to wipe Christians from the face of the earth, the kingdom of God continues to claim new believers and to sustain all those who trust in him. Your kingdom come, Lord.

Sometimes we need to remember that the kingdom is his, not ours. This is a prayer to "our Father in heaven," and we pray, "*Your* kingdom come"—not mine or ours. We are challenged to see that we do indeed contribute to the rule of Christ our King, but we serve him. We pray that God would keep us focused on his kingdom and our humble service to him while we are here waiting for his glorious kingdom to come.

## God's different work in two kingdoms

Joel D. Otto

There has always been tension between the church and government. At various times and places in history, the government has tried to wipe out the church. At other times, the government has tried to use the church for its purposes. Eventually, the church started carrying out a governmental role and even tried to bend the government to its will, attempting to use the government to carry out the church's work. Popes and bishops ruled territory and led armies. Conflicts arose creating confusion between the church's and the government's work.

Martin Luther and his fellow reformers went back to the Scriptures to sort out this confusion. The answer of Scripture is that God carries out his work for the benefit of his believers and for the good of his whole creation in two different kingdoms or realms.

On the one hand, he has established his church, and through the church's work he cares for our souls (Matthew 16:17-19; Hebrews 13:7,17; Acts 20:28). He brings people to faith through the Word and sacrament (Romans 1:16; Romans 10:17; 1 Peter 1:23; Titus 3:5; Ephesians 5:25-27).

On the other hand, he has established the government, and through the government's work he cares for our bodies (1 Peter 2:13,14; Romans 13:1,2). He established the government to maintain peace and order in society (Romans 13:3-7).

True Lutherans have historically tried to avoid using governmental force to further the cause of the gospel, while also recognizing that Christians may serve in the government and be served by the government. True Lutherans have also strived to avoid confusing the two kingdoms. The church and the government each have their distinct mission and different ways to carry out that mission. As God's children, we live in both kingdoms and strive to be obedient servants in the church and to the government.

The Augsburg Confession stated it well: Now inasmuch as the power of the church. . . bestows eternal benefits

and is used and exercised only through the office of preaching, it does not interfere at all with public order and secular authority. For secular authority deals with matters altogether different from the gospel. Secular power does not protect the soul but, using the sword and physical penalties, it protects the body and goods against external violence.

That is why one should not mix or confuse the two authorities, the spiritual and the secular. For spiritual power has its command to preach the gospel and to administer the sacraments. . . . It should not annul or disrupt secular law and obedience to political authority. It should not make or prescribe laws for the secular power concerning secular affairs. . . .

In this way our people distinguish the offices of the two authorities and powers and direct that both be honored as the highest gifts of God on earth. (XXVIII:10-13,18)

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. List at least five blessings we receive from God through the church's work and through the government's work. Identify which blessings come from the church and which ones come from the government.
2. Explain and apply Jesus' words in Matthew 22:15-22.
3. Read Acts 5:17-42. What circumstances demand Christians disobey the government? What should such disobedience look like?

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



This is the 12th 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 Sept. 5 at [wels.net/forwardinchrist](http://wels.net/forwardinchrist).



## WHAT IT MEANS TO BE TRULY LUTHERAN



# Back to school: Life's little milestones

**Going off to school is just one milestone. But whatever the milestone, our God has plans for us.**

Heather Bode

What does this new school year mean for you? Is your first child off to kindergarten? Maybe your last child is entering college. Maybe you are launching back into school for a career change. Maybe you have reached retirement. We tend to look at school years as part of life's little milestones.

**This past May, my family passed a true milestone, something that may be a first . . . and a last.** On May 19, the students at Luther Preparatory School (LPS) took their last exams of the school year, and my father, LPS professor Roger Kobleske, *ended* his preaching and teaching career after serving 46 years in the public ministry. On the same day, he watched his younger brother, Larry, graduate from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, officially *entering* the public ministry.

Dad took a traditional path to ministry. After prep school and college, he entered the seminary. Uncle Larry took a different path. He graduated from Milwaukee School of Engineering, retired after 36 years, and then entered the seminary.

Two lives, two paths, one common result. Could that have been predicted? No. We never know what each new year of our lives will hold. How will your kindergartener navigate a new school? How will your college student adjust to dorm life? And what about you? School years aren't just about the students. Milestones mean change for all of us.

**And so we begin another school year with words often heard at graduations and confirmations:** " 'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm

you, plans to give you hope and a future' " (Jeremiah 29:11).

My dad says he still remembers the words a pastor spoke at his ordination in 1971: "If you do anything good, give God the glory. If anything bad, you take the blame." Some burden, huh? But it was good advice then, and it's good advice now. We plan, but God is in control and deserves the credit. Kids off to school? Retirement? There are many changes and many plans. *We* change as we pass life's milestones. God remains faithful.

Like Uncle Larry, what makes someone who has crossed the milestone of retirement want to start over? To go back to school? Uncle Larry says it all comes down to service. He jokes that the word *retirement* is never found in the Bible, but both of his careers, past and present, focus on service. Isn't that what we, as Christians, aim to do? Serve in whatever way God intends, no matter where or how. We plan and depend on God's blessings.

Being a servant of Christ, in whatever milestone of life, is never easy. David understood the pressure: "Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken" (Psalm 62:5,6).

As students return to classrooms, as the newest called workers join the field of the public ministry, as retirees adjust to a new way of life, and as others move forward with career changes, they all do so with the support of their earthly families and with congregations cheering them on. But let's not forget that these moments of life are given to us. These milestones are gifts from our gracious, loving, and unchanging God. His plans for us are always good.

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