

# Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



## In God's hands

Even in hard times, God's love  
and his care shine. *Page 30*



# THE HOUR HAS ALREADY COME...

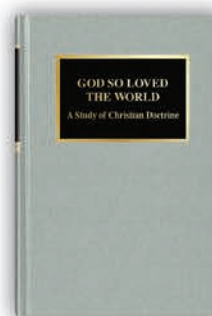
In Romans 13:11 Paul reminds you, "The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." How do you prepare for salvation? Do you truly understand your beliefs? Are you still slumbering? **Wake up to the brightness of the Word, and learn more about your faith.**



## Bibles From NPH

Return to the Bible, and see how God works through his Holy Word. NPH has numerous translations of the Bible available, including the new Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV), the New International Version (NIV), the English Standard Version (ESV), and the Christian Standard Bible (CSB). Find the translation that you prefer, and connect with the timeless, essential, saving Word of God.

**EHV New Testament and Psalms** | LU0105001, \$14.99   
**NIV Thinline Bible (burgundy, indexed)** | LU0104174, \$39.99  
**ESV Lutheran Study Bible** | LU012250, \$54.99  
**CSB Large Print Reference Bible** | LU0104162, \$19.99 (not pictured)



## God So Loved the World A Study of Christian Doctrine

by Lyle W. Lange

God's Word can appear simple and familiar on one page but complex and frightening on another. In *God So Loved the World*, author Lyle Lange thoroughly explores all that the Bible teaches, from the straightforward to the challenging. You will quickly discover how every

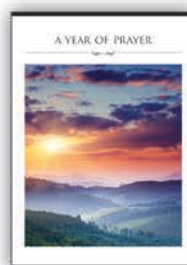
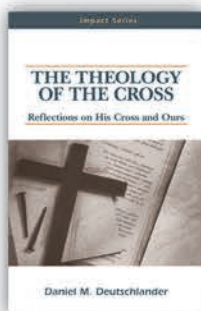
teaching connects to the saving truth of Jesus Christ. *God So Loved the World* is a comprehensive look at Christian doctrine that covers many topics, including the Trinity, the means of grace, church fellowship, and more. Hardcover, 793 pages.  
**LU150727, \$51.99**

## The Theology of the Cross Reflections on His Cross and Ours

by Daniel M. Deuschlander

In this popular book, Professor Daniel Deuschlander demonstrates that you will face trouble in life because of your faith in Jesus. But with Christ's cross as the source of your salvation, you will find comfort and joy as you daily take up your own cross—sometimes to the point of ridicule and persecution—and follow him. *The Theology of the Cross* shows how the path of self-denial, repentance, and struggle reveals the gospel's true glory. Softcover, 292 pages.

**LU150746, \$20.99**



## A Year of Prayer

God wants you to speak to him. He knows your needs, wants, worries, and frustrations, and he wants you to constantly come before him. *A Year of Prayer* contains more than 700 prayers to guide your morning and evening conversations with God every day. Taken from *Meditations Daily Devotional*, these prayers will give direction to your

thoughts and words. God hears and answers all prayers—not always in the way you hope for or expect but always for the good of your soul. Softcover, 232 pages.

**LU0600745, \$10.99**

Also available as an e-book from [www.amazon.com/kindle](http://www.amazon.com/kindle) or [www.barnesandnoble.com/nook](http://www.barnesandnoble.com/nook)!

**To order, call 800-662-6022 or visit [www.nph.net](http://www.nph.net).**

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

**NORTHWESTERN  
PUBLISHING HOUSE**



**NPH CHRISTIAN  
BOOKS & GIFTS STORE**

[www.nph.net](http://www.nph.net) 1250 N 113th Street • Milwaukee WI 53226 800-662-6022

**NPH  
EXTRA  
PROGRAM**

Find us on  
**Facebook**



## FEATURES

**10** | **What is truth?**  
Philosophical truth is unreliable because it comes from the corrupt human heart. But what about mathematics and logic?  
*Arthur A. Eggert*

**12** | **God's love: Our song forever**  
We look to new and old hymns to encourage us to sing God's truths.  
*Jonathan P. Bauer*

**14** | **Confessions of faith**  
A man who grew up in legalism and fear discovers the peace and love of Christ.  
*Julie K. Wietzke*

**16** | **Heart to heart: Parent conversations**  
How can we reflect God's love in our community?

**26** | **Salt of the earth**  
*Peace!* The last word of the Benediction sends us out into the world with the privilege of sharing his peace.  
*Glenn L. Schwanke*

**28** | **Nurturing our children's faith-life**  
We, as parents, need to stay involved in young adults' spiritual lives.  
*Noel Ledermann*

**30** | **He's got the whole world in his hands**  
A college student places her life into her Savior's hands.  
*Elisabeth Hahm*

**36** | **Just trust me**  
We are too afraid to trust, too fearful to respond to love.  
*Melissa Kreuser*







# *Reflecting* CHRIST'S LOVE

The mission of **WELS Christian Aid and Relief** is to reflect Christ's love and compassion to souls suffering from disasters and hardships. Through humanitarian aid projects around the world, WELS Christian Aid and Relief works with congregations and world mission fields to build bridges to proclaim the gospel.

Some projects include:

- Giving textbooks to students in South Asia.
- Providing weeklong health clinics at village churches in Thailand.
- Digging boreholes in Africa for fresh drinking water.
- Offering training in basic skills like drawing, knitting, and embroidery to women in South Asia.
- Providing welcome packages and aid to legal immigrants in Las Vegas and Toronto.



Learn more about these projects and how you can help at [wels.net/relief](http://wels.net/relief).

WELS Christian Aid and Relief • 262-334-7881  
N16W23377 Stone Ridge Drive • Waukesha, WI 53188-1108





EDITORIAL OFFICE

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

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

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

MANAGING EDITOR

Julie K. Wietzke  
julie.wietzke@wels.net

STAFF WRITER

Nicole R. Balza  
nicole.balza@wels.net

SEMINARY CONSULTANT

Prof. Bill Tackmier

ART DIRECTOR

Karen Knutson

DESIGNER

Carianne Ciriacks

COPYRIGHT

©2018 by Forward in Christ. Printed in the USA. Forward in Christ grants permission for any original article (not a reprint) to be photocopied for use in a WELS church, school, or organization, provided that copies are distributed free and indicate Forward in Christ as the source. Artwork may not be reproduced except in the context of its article. For other copyright questions, contact Kristine Laufer, 414-615-5706; lauferk@nph.wels.net.

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

POSTMASTER

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


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

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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

ON AUDIO

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

 Indicates additional online content

COVER IMAGE: iSTOCK

*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

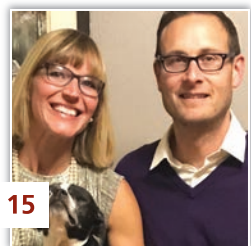
## WHAT'S INSIDE

In a month where many people celebrate love, it's fitting that we should look at the greatest love of all—that of our Savior, who gave up his life for sinful humans.

- Our back page article reminds us of how freely God gives us his love, even when we fail to acknowledge it.
- God's faithful love is easily seen in the Old Testament where God continually forgives and loves the children of Israel, who often shun him and worship other gods. The book of Hosea contains a wonderful picture of God's love, which Prof. Thomas Kock examines in the first article in his new Bible study on the minor prophets (p. 33).
- Our cover story (p. 30) and our Teen talk article (p. 18) use personal examples to show how God guides and protects us during hard times and how we can see his love even when he allows trials into our lives.

Because we will have trials. Evil is prevalent in the world, and Christians aren't immune. Both our devotion (p. 7) and our Question & Answer (p. 9) look at God's wisdom and power and love as he helps us deal with evil in our lives.

Julie Wietzke



15



21



24



28

## IN EVERY ISSUE

- |    |   |    |   |
|----|---|----|---|
| 6  | <b>Feedback</b><br>Readers share their opinions                           | 20 | <b>News</b><br>What's happening in WELS   |
| 7  | <b>Devotion</b><br>Deliver us from evil                                   | 32 | <b>Editorial comment</b><br>Men are pigs  |
| 8  | <b>From the president's desk</b><br>When brothers and sisters really care | 33 | <b>Bible study</b><br>Majoring on the minors: Hosea   |
| 9  | <b>Light for our path</b><br>God's power, wisdom, and love                | 34 | <b>A thought</b><br>Lead us not into temptation   |
| 18 | <b>Teen talk</b><br>Why all this trouble?                                 | 35 | <b>Interactive Bible study</b><br>Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest:<br>Saving the best for last |
| 19 | <b>Bulletin board</b><br>Announcements from around the synod              |    |   |



## SANTA CLAUS

I enjoyed Professor Pope's piece on Santa Claus and Saint Nicholas [Dec. 2017]. It brought back memories of my days as a Lutheran seminary student working at a convent. One of the sisters handed out treats on December 6, Saint Nicholas Day. I made the mistake of asking if it was from Santa. She lectured me on the difference.

It was probably lost on her that the convent's ceramic shop in the basement offered a complete collection of St. Nicholas figurines. The collection included various depictions of the American Santa Claus.

I would prefer the focus to be on the babe in Bethlehem, who came to save us all from the slavery of sin. Not with gold or silver, but with his own blood shed on Calvary.

*John L. Hoh Jr  
Beloit, Wisconsin*

## DURATION OF ADVENT

December's "From the President's desk" stated, "The Christian church has set aside the four weeks before Christmas as a time to look ahead to that day when we remember and thank God for the gift of his Son." To the exhaustion of many pastors, years like 2017 have the fourth Sunday in Advent occurring on Christmas Eve, making Advent only three weeks long. A better description of Advent might

read, "The Christian church has set aside the four Sundays before Christmas . . ." Of course, we remember God's gift on other days of the week also!

*Richard Rast  
Belen, New Mexico*

## MESSAGE AND TUNES

Aaron Christie makes a good point when he says that "tin whistle tunes" may distract from the message because they are fun to sing ["God's love: Our song forever," Jan.]. But there's more to the story (as usual). More difficult tunes may also distract from the message because the singer has to concentrate on the notes to keep up. And then there's the common weakness that it is always possible to ignore the meaning of the words we're singing.

A number of methods could be used to make singing more edifying:

- The pastor, knowing he has chosen a difficult tune, could announce, "If you find this hymn hard for you to sing, forget about singing. Concentrate on the words until this hymn becomes comfortable for you."
- A choir or a soloist could learn the tune to lead the congregation.
- The hymn could be offered as a responsive reading so that only the

message would be presented. No singing necessary.

- In spite of age-old tradition, new tunes could replace difficult melodies.
- In order to direct the congregation's attention to the message, the hymn stanzas could occasionally serve as a sermon text. There is a wealth of Bible truth in the three simple stanzas of "Silent Night."

*Rolfe Westendorf  
Dalton, Wisconsin*

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

# Through my Bible in 3 years

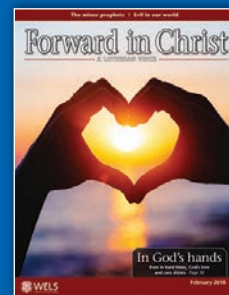


Read or listen online at [wels.net/bible3](http://wels.net/bible3).

FEBRUARY 2018

- |                     |                   |                    |
|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Leviticus 8      | 11. Lev. 21 & 22  | 21. Heb. 4:14–5:10 |
| 2. Lev. 9 & 10      | 12. Lev. 23       | 22. Heb. 5:11–6:8  |
| 3. Lev. 11          | 13. Lev. 24       | 23. Heb. 6:9–20    |
| 4. Lev. 12:1–13:46  | 14. Lev. 25       | 24. Heb. 7:1–14    |
| 5. Lev. 13:47–14:32 | 15. Lev. 26       | 25. Heb. 7:15–28   |
| 6. Lev. 14:33–15:33 | 16. Lev. 27       | 26. Heb. 8         |
| 7. Lev. 16          | 17. Hebrews 1     | 27. Heb. 9:1–15    |
| 8. Lev. 17          | 18. Heb. 2        | 28. Heb. 9:16–28   |
| 9. Lev. 18          | 19. Heb. 3:1–6    |                    |
| 10. Lev. 19 & 20    | 20. Heb. 3:7–4:13 |                    |

## Read it!



## Share it!



# Deliver us from evil

**"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." John 16:33**

Peter M. Prange

The question my wife's grandfather asked me was completely sincere and has been asked, or at least thought, by many others: "Didn't anyone who died on 9/11 ever pray, 'Deliver us from evil'? And if they did, did God simply ignore their prayer? Or was he unable to deliver them from evil?"

He could not imagine a greater evil than the one committed on that bright September day. Nor could he imagine that only unbelievers had perished in those murderous attacks. Surely, at least one among the dead had faithfully prayed, "Deliver us from evil"! So where was Jesus?

## USING EVIL FOR GOOD

The answer is both simple and complicated. Grandpa had misunderstood the meaning of the Seventh Petition of the Lord's Prayer. He was defining evil far too narrowly. We all do that. It's natural for us to define evil as those things that make our earthly lives uncomfortable and unsatisfying. If it hurts, if I don't like it, if I'd rather have it be a different way, or if it leads to death, it must be evil!

But God responds, "Not so fast!" Consider the example of Joseph. He suffered the worldly evil of his brothers selling him into slavery. It hurt. It wasn't enjoyable. He certainly prayed for it to be different. This was pure evil, right? Well, yes and no.

Through the Spirit's working, Joseph gradually learned and later proclaimed to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20). Joseph's brothers had done their best to inflict evil on him, and they had. But God delivered Joseph from evil. No, God didn't immediately change the outward circumstances. Joseph suffered evil. What God changed was Joseph's perspective on that evil, and in time



God transformed human evil into divine good. Joseph perceived God's gracious work—yes, even through evil!—and he was perfectly delivered.

**Jesus' far greater desire—  
his only mission—  
is to deliver us from  
the brand of evil  
that lasts forever.**

## FIGHTING ETERNAL EVIL

So if God uses evil for good, what is truly evil? The Scriptures teach us that true evil is being separated from God's eternal love. True evil is someone forfeiting the eternal blessings Jesus has won for all sinners. True evil involves us turning our ears away from God's saving Word and treasuring instead the things of this condemned world. That's the true and hidden evil to which we sinners are so naturally blind and vul-

nerable, an evil that daily surrounds us and lurks deep within us (Mark 7:21-23).

So we fervently pray, "Deliver us from evil," something only Jesus can do. And he does. Every time, in his own time, and at just the right time. And sometimes he uses the greatest evil to do his even greater saving work (Acts 2:22-24).

Our Savior never promises to spare us from every worldly evil. If anything, he promises that we will endure evil regularly, especially as his people, but for our ultimate good. Make no mistake about it. "In this world you will have trouble." And why is that? Because Jesus' far greater desire—his only mission—is to deliver us from the brand of evil that lasts forever.

So we live day by day in the confidence of knowing that Jesus hears our prayer, "Deliver us from evil," and answers as only he can: "Take heart! I have overcome the world." In Jesus alone we are truly delivered from evil forever.

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



*Mark Schwede*

---

As difficult as  
it might be  
at times, God calls  
on us to be our  
brother's keeper.

---

## When brothers and sisters really care

"Am I my brother's keeper?" Cain said after the Lord asked him where his brother Abel was (Genesis 4:9). Cain's question was not an honest one. It was a question that was meant to hide from the truth that he had killed his brother. It was also a question that was really a statement of his complete lack of regard for his brother—a selfishness and self-centeredness that had led him to do the unthinkable.

By God's grace, each of us would answer Cain's question by saying, "Yes, I am!" As people of God, we recognize that one of our main purposes and responsibilities in life is to act with love, concern, and compassion for those around us. That love goes beyond our immediate family. It extends to the spiritual family of faith of our congregation. It goes even farther, as our love for God is reflected in a desire to help and serve all with whom we interact in our daily lives.

Being our brother's keeper is not always easy. Sometimes those around us don't seem to deserve love and support. Sometimes they respond to our efforts with cold indifference or even resentment. Sometimes we become more intent on seeing to our own needs, with little time or desire to see to the needs of others. But as difficult as it might be at times, God calls on us to be our brother's keeper.

When it comes to helping others, there can be no greater way to help them than by sharing the Good News of Jesus. It's no wonder that the tasks of mission work and evangelism are stressed so often as an important privilege and responsibility that God has given us. We want to reach those who do not know Jesus and are not a part of the church.

But there are other brothers and sisters—inside the church and members of our congregations—who also need

our love and encouragement. Every year, roughly eight thousand members of our WELS congregations leave for various reasons. Some of them drift away and simply stop coming to church. Some find themselves away at college and begin to question and reject the biblical truths they learned from childhood. Some fall prey to the attraction of false teaching and join other churches. Still others, caught up in a sinful lifestyle, separate themselves from our congregations and from God's call to repentance. Should we not be just as concerned about retaining those members as we are about finding new ones?

Parents can do much to keep their teenage children in the church by setting a consistent example of the importance of weekly worship (see p. 28). Congregations can put in place ways to keep in contact with their young people who are away at college. If members of a congregation notice that someone they know has not been in church for some time or is becoming only a sporadic visitor to worship, they can be their brother's keeper with words of encouragement and invitation. If you know of someone who has been caught up in a sinful lifestyle, God has equipped you with the words to call that person to repentance and to assure him or her that a forgiving God, like the father of the prodigal son, is eager to welcome him or her back.

Being our brother's keeper is something for all of us to do. If we are faithful in doing that, and as we are filled with genuine care and concern for our brothers and sisters who are straying, God will use us to bring blessings to others that will last not just for this life but also for an eternity.



# Light for our path

**After the news of the church shooting in Texas last November, a friend asked, “A shooting in church? Twenty-seven killed? Women and children? It’s God’s house. Where was he?” How do you answer a question like this? I didn’t know what to say.**

James F. Pope

When a tragic event like that takes place, people can easily question God’s power and love. Others do more than question God; they blame him. Their words can make it seem like God is even more at fault than the perpetrator. You can respond to your friend’s questions by pointing to God’s power, wisdom, and love.

## UNLIMITED POWER

Could God have prevented that church shooting from taking place? Certainly. God can do anything. When Sarah laughed at the Lord’s promise that she would become a mother in her old age, the Lord said, “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” (Genesis 18:14). Years later, the prophet Jeremiah was on the receiving end of a similar question. “Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ‘I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?’” (Jeremiah 32:26,27). The biblical account of creation reveals God’s unlimited power. With powerful words, God called all things into existence. By his powerful word, the Lord sustains all things (Hebrews 1:3).

God could have prevented that shooting from taking place. Going back in time, God could have prevented the fall of Adam and Eve—the event to which all sins find their origin. If we back up to eternity, God could have prevented the fall of Satan and the other evil angels. God did not prevent those twin falls from taking place. God does not explain why he allowed those events to take place—nor does he have to.

## UNSEARCHABLE WISDOM

Could God have prevented that massacre from taking place? Certainly. But when God allows tragedies and disasters to occur, we need to bow in awe of God’s wisdom. God knows what he is doing, and in the Bible, God reminds us how his

wisdom far surpasses ours. He assures us: “‘My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8,9).

The apostle Paul leads us in a doxology of God’s wisdom in the book of Romans: “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?’” (Romans 11:33,34). You and I cannot pretend to know or understand completely God’s ways. What we are happy to know in faith is the love of God.

## UNPARALLELED LOVE

Years ago, I read about a man whose son died fighting in the Vietnam War. This man was angry at God and asked a pastor, “Where was God when my son died?” Among other responses, the pastor said, “The same place he was when his own Son died.” In other words, the death of a loved one does not mean that God has withdrawn his love. The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, displays a love that is unparalleled in human history (1 John 4:9,10).

While these thoughts may not answer every question of your friend, perhaps they can address some.

---

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

James Pope also answers questions online at **wels.net/questions**. Submit your questions there or to [fic@wels.net](mailto:fic@wels.net).

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

Psalm 119:105





# WHAT IS truth?

**Philosophical truth is unreliable because it comes from the corrupt human heart. But what about mathematics and logic? Are they reliable?** Arthur A. Eggert

During our lives, we have come to trust mathematics. We learned to count before we started elementary school, and soon thereafter, we were taught arithmetic. We found arithmetic to be reliable because there was only one correct answer for each equation or problem. Later we learned algebra, trigonometry, and perhaps calculus. With each of these, we could be certain there was a uniquely correct answer because all the terms and operators (e.g., addition, division) were precisely defined by mathematicians. This type of mathematics is called “numeric” and is an example of deductive reasoning. In such reasoning, one starts with known information,

manipulates it by known rules, and obtains a reliable and unique answer.

In high school we also encountered geometry, in which much of the material was quite different from the numeric manipulation to which we were accustomed. We frequently had to prove certain statements to be true where no numbers were involved. Instead we dealt with triangles and other figures for which we needed to show some relationship was true through a series of steps, each justified by some rule that was true for geometric figures. For example, we might have been asked to prove that the base angles of isosceles triangles are equal. Geometry intro-

duced us to a new kind of mathematics, one in which some truism about the object of interest was sought rather than a numeric value. This mathematics is called “non-numeric.” Like numeric mathematics, its results are reliable, being the same no matter who does the problem-solving. This occurs because everything used in solving non-numeric problems is precisely defined and not subject to varying interpretations by different people.

## USING FORMAL LOGIC

Long ago the Greek philosopher Aristotle concluded the same type of reasoning used in geometry could be used

# biblical? mathematical?



to evaluate other problems as well. He developed “syllogistic logic,” another form of deductive reasoning. This gave a way to reliably evaluate the validity of conclusions based on stated premises. Syllogistic reasoning involves a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. For centuries students have learned this: Major premise—“All men are mortal.” Minor premise—“Socrates was a man.” Conclusion—“Socrates was mortal.” Because the premises in this syllogism are true, the conclusion must be true. All syllogisms have a subject (e.g., Socrates), a predicate (e.g., mortal), and a middle term (e.g., man).

Aristotle quickly realized, however, that syllogistic reasoning had its limitations. If the two premises were “Some frogs are green” and “Plants are green,” then the conclusion would be “Some frogs are plants.” Clearly, this conclusion is not true even though both of the premises are true. To determine which of the many arrangements and types of subjects, predicates, and middle terms gave valid syllogisms, Aristotle developed five rules that guided this form of logic for two thousand years. Syllogisms were the beginning of “formal logic,” which manipulates phrases with the same reliability that arithmetic manipulates numbers.

Within the last century formal logic has been expanded far beyond syllogisms to methods such as truth-functional logic and predicate calculus. In the former, informational statements are coded into a matrix called a “truth table,” which allows all possible true and false values for each statement to be combined and evaluated. In the latter, the truth or falseness of any conclusion can be determined from any set of premises by a process that is similar to the proof used for a geometric axiom. By coding premises and conclusions into a symbolic representation, the emotional component so often present in philosophical reasoning is

removed. It does not matter how one feels about the merit of an argument; its validity depends only on whether the conclusion can be shown to follow logically (i.e., through rule-based manipulations) from the premises. Formal logic, therefore, always gives us valid answers just as numerical mathematics always gives us valid answers.

### IDENTIFYING FALSE PREMISES

Just as we saw with mathematical conclusions, however, formal logic can give valid conclusions that are not true (i.e. “sound”). For example, “All orange vegetables are poisonous.” “Carrots are orange vegetables.” Therefore, “Carrots are poisonous.” This is a valid conclusion, but the conclusion is not true because the first premise is false. Despite the validity of formal logic, it can be used to lead us astray if we are duped into accepting a false premise or assuming a premise is being used that was never actually stated. For example, if a product is labeled “reduced sodium” or “reduced fat,” we tend to assume as a premise that the reduction is significant, not just 1%. Our assumption may be wrong.

---

## The existence of God does not depend on our ability to logically prove it.

---

A real threat to our faith occurs when people state deceptive premises about religious issues and then use valid logic to draw us into false beliefs. For example, consider this argument commonly studied in philosophy classes. Premise: “If a god exists, then he is omnipotent.” Premise: “Anyone who is omnipotent can do anything.” Conclusion: “A god, therefore, can create a stone so heavy that he can’t lift it.” Contradiction: “But

if a god cannot lift the stone, he is not almighty. Therefore, the premise that there is a god must be false.” While this argument may sound convincing, it is the second premise, not the first, which is false. The correct premise is “If he is omnipotent, then he can do anything *consistent with his will*.” God’s attributes are perfectly unified and cannot conflict with each other. The existence of God does not depend on our ability to logically prove it.

Now consider a more common argument directed against hell. Premise: “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Premise: “Hell is a horrible place” (Matthew 13:42). Premise: “A loving being would not send someone to a horrible place.” Conclusion: “Therefore, God will not send anyone to hell.” In this case the first premise assumes an unclear definition of love. The third premise is false also because it claims that God being love overrides his other attributes, including his justice. It also contradicts his direct statement (Matthew 25:46).

Thus, while formal logic is a major advance over philosophical reasoning in the search for truth, it suffers from two limitations. First, stating the premises and conclusions correctly and developing proofs takes significant study and effort. Many people shy away from it because of bad memories involving word problems and geometry. Second, false premises can lead to false conclusions, even if the reasoning is correct. To avoid being deceived, one must be certain one’s premises are correct.

---

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

This is the second article in a four-part series on different ways the world finds truth and where we as Christians should look for truth.

philosophical? scientific?



# God's love: Our song forever

**We are a "singing church."  
We look to new and old  
hymns to encourage us  
to sing God's truths.**

Jonathan P. Bauer

"The people barely sing along." "The congregation sings poorly during the service." "The pastor complains of low participation by the congregation in singing."

Have statements like these ever been heard in your congregation? You might even assume that they come from the lips of 21st-century lifelong Lutherans who are saddened by the fact that congregational singing isn't what it used to be.

But these laments came out of church visitation programs conducted in Germany during the decades following the Reformation. Some of them describe congregational singing well over a century after the Reformation began.

Yes, Luther said, "Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise" (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 53, p. 323). His efforts to put the gospel back on the lips of the people is one of the reasons the Lutheran church is often referred to as "the singing church." But for the first hundred-plus years, the Lutheran church's journey to earning that title apparently got off to a pretty rough start.

## **SERVING NEW TREASURES**

From the beginning, Luther's efforts to restore congregational singing included the production of new hymns.

In a one-year span from 1523 to 1524, Luther wrote 24 hymns. Some of them found their way into the first Lutheran hymnals, which were published in 1524.

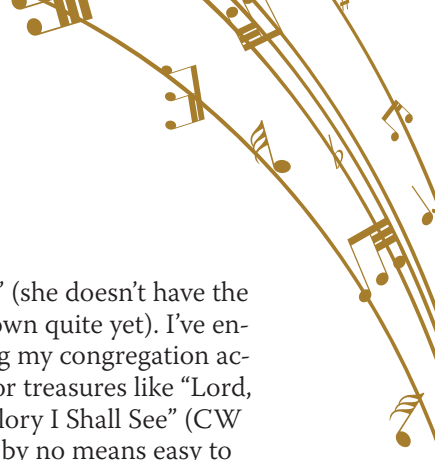
This sudden production of new hymns is understandable. Luther and the other reformers wanted the theology of Scripture to be implanted deeply into the hearts of the people. But it was not easy. One might wonder why they didn't stop since it was difficult to get people to sing these hymns.

We can be thankful that they didn't. Luther and the others continued to write new hymns. As a result, we celebrate the Reformation, singing, "A mighty fortress is our God, a trusty shield and weapon" (*Christian Worship* [CW] 200:1, written by Luther in 1528 or 1529).

New songs appeared even after Luther's death. As a result, we confront our own mortality, singing, "Lord, let at last your angels come; to Abram's bosom bear me home that I may die unfearing" (CW 434:3, written by Martin Schalling around 1567).

As the years went by, new songs helped Christians sing God's truth. We remember our Savior's passion, singing, "A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth, our guilt and evil bearing and, laden with the sins of earth, none else the burden sharing. Goes patient on, grows weak and faint, to slaughter led without complaint" (CW 100:1, written one hundred years after Luther by Paul Gerhardt and first published in 1648). In addition, we approach the Lord's Table for Holy Communion, singing, "He who craves a precious





treasure neither cost nor pain will measure, but the priceless gifts of heaven God to us has freely given" (CW 311:3, written by Johann Franck and first published in 1649).

And we have new songs to sing from our own time. We take up the task Jesus has given his church, singing, "Preach you the Word and plant it home to those who like or like it not, the Word that shall endure and stand when flow'rs and mortals are forgot" (CW 544:1, written by Martin Franzmann and first sung in 1973). We also exit God's house on Sunday, singing, "Go, my children, sins forgiven, at peace and pure. Here you learned how much I love you, what I can cure" (CW 332:2, written by Jaroslav Vajda in 1983).

Our Lutheran forebears put into practice what Jesus said to his disciples: "Every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old" (Matthew 13:52).

Hymns are one way to teach. We have old hymns that teach God's truths, and we have new melodies and words too. We will use the old hymns, but the Holy Spirit will continue to move God's people as he has always done to

create new hymns to praise God and teach his truth. The musical feast will have such variety.

### SERVING THEM WELL

If the early Lutherans encountered frustration for more than a century as they strove to promote congregational singing, we ought not expect things to be different today. Odds are every person reading this article has experienced the frustration of trying to use a new treasure brought out of the storeroom of Christian hymnody.

Let's assume that our synod's next hymnal has two hundred "new" hymns. Those new hymns don't need to all be served to God's people within the first year. Our church body's next hymnal presents us with the opportunity to bring out new treasures to God's people for an entire generation.

In the last few years I've experienced the joy of doing so. More than 20 years after *Christian Worship* was published, I've still been able to give people an opportunity to sing new treasures, not because the treasures themselves are new but because they are new to people. I've enjoyed listening to my youngest walk around the house singing, "A mighty fortress is

our God, a . . ." (she doesn't have the second line down quite yet). I've enjoyed watching my congregation acquire a taste for treasures like "Lord, When Your Glory I Shall See" (CW 219), which is by no means easy to sing the first time around.

Learning our next hymnal's new hymns isn't a race. It's a feast. Let's sit back, slow down, and savor every bite.

---

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

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

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

## RESPECTFULLY *making room*

What exactly does it mean that our next hymnal will have two hundred or more new hymns? "New" means a variety of different things. In some cases, it simply means that it's new to us. It might be a hymn that has been around for many years but is finding its way into our hymnody for the first time. It might be a hymn from previously-used resources like *The Lutheran Hymnal*.

In other cases, new will mean repackaged or repurposed. It might mean that the translation was altered or different stanzas selected. It might mean that the text was paired with a different tune.

In other cases, new will mean new. There will be recently written hymns from today's batch of talented hymnwriters whom God has raised up for his church.

A taste for some of these new hymns will come almost immediately. A taste for others will take time to acquire. In both cases, our prayer is that future generations will agree that a great many of them are treasures.

## A man who grew up in legalism and fear discovers the peace and love of Christ through the gospel.

Julie K. Wietzke

All Mike Indest was looking for was peace.

But after growing up steeped in legalism, afraid of the Rapture, and confused by conflicting beliefs, peace was hard to come by.

“Without being taught the idea of where faith really comes from—that it comes from God and it’s nothing we do at all—it’s just a terrifying way to live,” Indest says.

But Indest saw and experienced Christ’s love and the peace of the gospel at Crown of Life, New Orleans, La., and is sharing that message with others.

### FINDING NO PEACE

Indest spent his early childhood in a Catholic charismatic church, a mix between a Catholic and Pentecostal church, in New Orleans. “It was not a weird thing for me to hear priests speaking in tongues,” Indest says.

His family left that church when Indest was eight years old, mainly, he thinks,

because they recognized differences between Catholic theology and what the Bible taught.

Instead they joined a charismatic denomination, which brought its own list of doctrinal difficulties.

Indest says he struggled most with the idea of decision theology—Christians have to make a decision to follow Christ in order to be saved. “People would go to the altar to make a decision for Christ, but there was no assurance of salvation,” he says. “Salvation was based on your decision, but because it was something you did . . . then the problem is how do you know you did it with good intentions?”

He continues, “To me, even as a kid, it became like works because it was something you were doing—it was initiated by you.”

The church’s end times teachings—which were a literal view of the book of Revelation, including a Rapture of all believers—also incited fear, rather than hope.

“It was those two things combined—there was no peace of God there,” Indest says.

### DISCOVERING GOD’S LOVE

In high school, Indest became more vocal about his doubts on his church’s

teachings, to a point where he ended up attending L’abri, a Swiss religious study center for those with faith questions, for nine months immediately after high school. “At the time, that was what I needed,” he says. “I was taught to think there and not just to accept [what I was being taught].”

But when he returned to New Orleans, he couldn’t find a church to attend. “I asked way too many questions,” he says. “I visited every denomination, and there was no fit.”

A move to Nashville, Tennessee, didn’t help him find a church home. “I read a lot, I prayed a lot, I wrote a lot of songs,” he says. “I basically was a Lone Ranger Christian for many years.”

Indest’s beliefs continued to change as he read and learned more about doctrine and the Bible, though he says he struggled with what to believe about the sacraments. After moving back to New Orleans, he even began taking seminary courses online through several different denominations. But he still couldn’t find a church he wanted to attend.

Indest first met David Sternhagen, pastor at Crown of Life, New Orleans, and several Crown of Life members at the Christian radio station where he worked. Sternhagen had a weekly radio show there. “When I would en-

# Confessions OF FAITH





gineer the show, I would hear some theology,” says Indest.

Indest agreed with what he was hearing from Sternhagen—and also appreciated the manner in which Sternhagen shared the message. “He wasn’t combative. He was very nice,” says Indest. “There was a lot of grace and kindness there that I never experienced before. No legalism, just the love of Christ.”

It still took years before Indest set foot into Crown of Life. During that time, he watched Sternhagen and his members live their faith and talked to them about their beliefs. “The kindness of Christ was exhibited in a way I have never seen before,” he says.

He finally was ready to take the next step when he became serious with his girlfriend, Diana. “I thought it was time to start again in a church when I started my new life,” he says. He and Diana went through Bible information class, joined Crown of Life in 2011, and were married in 2012.

### **CONTINUALLY GROWING IN THE WORD**

Indest’s thirst for knowledge continued after he joined Crown of Life. He first decided to go through the Congregational Assistant Program offered by Martin Luther College, New Ulm,

Minn., with four other members of Crown of Life. “It really helped me solidify what we believe,” he says.

Then he enrolled in the Chaplain Certification program, which prepares pastors and laypeople to serve people in special circumstances, for example, those in prison, nursing homes, hospitals, or the military. He graduated in 2017. “I can’t tell you the amount of healing I got just going through the counseling classes,” he says, referring to difficulties he experienced following Hurricane Katrina.

Indest is putting his new knowledge to good use. He and his wife now run a youth outreach program at Crown of Life that serves neighborhood children.

The kids, ranging in age from 8 to 15, started showing up at Crown of Life a few years ago, looking for something to do. The church got them involved in Sunday school classes but knew there was a bigger opportunity to reach these youth. Soon the congregation began offering Sunday afternoon activities like basketball and crafts, also including a meal and devotion time. The program has now expanded to include homework help and a meal and devotion on Tuesday as well.

Indest says his chaplaincy training has given him a lot of confidence as he



Mike and Diana Indest

shares Christ’s love and peace with the youth—both in words and actions. “Last year, I clearly presented the gospel to at least 40 kids,” he says.

Those opportunities to plant the gospel message and show Christ’s love will continue to grow as Indest keeps looking for new ways to share the peace he discovered. “There’s grace and there’s forgiveness!”

---

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



If we allow ourselves to wallow in the news that is broadcast on our many devices throughout each day, it's easy to become depressed pretty quickly. A feeling of hopelessness can settle in too. That's why I think it's more important than ever that we reflect God's love to those around us. Our world needs that love—a love grounded in Jesus that has eternal benefits but comes with great benefits here on earth too. Forgiveness of sins, God's peace, hope in his promises—these are treasures that our neighbors need.

So how do we reflect God's love in our community? Jonathan Bourman and Liz Schroeder share their thoughts here. If you want to chime in with ways your family is reaching out with God's love, e-mail [fic@wels.net](mailto:fic@wels.net).

*Nicole Balza*

**Join the  
conversation!**

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

## HOW CAN WE REFLECT GOD'S LOVE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

**I've learned** an awful lot from my daughter. The wonder and adventure of life with Jesus. The trust in him that is so simple and pure. The creativity that comes from looking at something from a relatively blank slate. The importance of really sinking into the perfect hug. She's taught me a lot. Especially about how to notice people. She waves from our busy corner lot to everyone who drives by. She pets every dog who walks by and greets all of their owners. She tries to engage every possible person like there is seriously nothing more important in all the world to do. She's taught me a lot about that.

And I have a lot to learn. Because I'm an adult, and I have an iPhone. And an inbox. And a busy job. And a busy mind. And—perhaps most troubling of all—a busy heart. Most adults do. It's what we've started calling "adulting," right?

What's this have to do with reflecting God's love in our community? Everything. Absolutely everything. **We're not going to be available to the people in our community with an open hand and a warm smile and a ready conversation unless our hearts are unbusy.** We'll be there, but not really there. I'm guessing you know exactly what I mean by that.

**As a mom of five,** I admit to times of spiritual and physical exhaustion when I barely reflect God's love to my own family, let alone my community. This seems like an overwhelming task, and the last thing you or I need is one more item on our to-do lists. The beautiful thing about Jesus is that when I get stressed out about the things I have to do, he reminds me of what he's already done. **In order to reflect God's love to your community, first reflect on God's love for you.**

As a parent, I see the best and worst parts of myself and my husband mirrored in our kids. They pick up on all of our sins—ones we've fought for years and new ugly sins that might have remained dormant had we not signed up for this lifetime tour of parenting. Can you relate? Has raising little sinner-saints unearthed any ugliness in your heart? One of my sweetest friends confided to me with wide eyes, "I had no idea I struggled with anger or fits of rage before I became a mom!" Bless her heart!

Mom, Dad, your parenting sins are *gone*. Empty-tomb gone. Drowned-in-the-baptismal-font gone. This promise of rebirth and renewal is crucial. We cannot hope to pour out to the people around us without first filling up on grace.

Just as our kids are always copying us, parents need a model to follow. Who better than the sinless Son of God?



**The only person I know of who can change that in me is Jesus.** He's the one who unburdens my heart. Who takes my heart from a tossing sea and turns it into water that softly ripples. He does that by paying attention to me. By giving me his very real, personal attention through his Word. And when he does, he tells me that he is the one who gave himself not only *to* my heart, but also *for* my heart. The one who came not only to forgive my turbulence but also to lessen it—to secure me with his promises so that I don't have to busy myself with . . . well . . . myself. I can be free—just plain free—to busy myself with the people I bump into along my path.

**It's actually quite the adventure—living that way, I mean. To see each person whom I run across as someone to be loved right then and right there.** To see that each intersection doesn't merely have to be transactional. My family and I went to the zoo the other day, and we talked to the guy with the corn snake and really got to know him. And we went trick-or-treating, and we hit up the neighbors sitting by their doors with a smile and a name and a handshake. We chatted up the hygienist at the dentist's office and wished the tired-looking cashier at Aldi a good day with a hearty thank-you and a sincere smile. We petted the dog who walked down the street and

talked about Goldendoodles with the owner. We even got into a conversation about Jesus at the Apple Store of all places and tacked on a very appropriate invite to our church. All because Jesus had made us emotionally and spiritually available as we were doing our callings in life.

I could write more about how we love our communities. Much more. Things about staffing soup kitchens or mowing lawns for the elderly or checking on neighbors who are sick. I'll let someone else do that, though. What I want to say here and now is that my heart sees a culture that's having a hard time looking up from a screen. And in a culture and community like that, perhaps the most important love my family can show in our grocery stores and doctors' offices and restaurants and wherever else we may be is a face that not only looks *up* but also looks *at* those around us with a heart and a mind that are spiritually and emotionally available. That's a powerful, powerful gift we all can give—a gift we've all personally received in spades from Jesus. He's the one who frees us to simply and truly be there in a moment for others.

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



**How did Jesus engage his community?** Before completing his redeeming work, the Bible tells us he wept, he showed compassion, and he retreated to quiet places.

**Jesus wept.** New tragedies come at us every week. Terror, bloodshed, self-worship, injustice, and disaster fill my newsfeed. It is tempting to squeeze my eyes shut and hide the horror from my kids. Instead, we open our eyes and weep. We talk through the news at a level their maturity can handle, and we pray through the pain.

**Jesus showed compassion.** The thing about living in a sin-darkened world is that it doesn't take much light to make a big difference. Consider the impact of scheduling buffer time for everyday errands like trips to Walmart and the gas station and asking God to send someone messy your way who needs the gospel. Messy people are everywhere, but we normally give them wide berth. A big reason for that is we have no margin in our schedules for interruptions.

How many miracles happened when Jesus was on his way to another town and he interrupted his journey to show compassion? I bet there was at least one disciple shaking his head and saying, "Jesus, we don't have time for this." I hear those voices too. But may this one be louder: "God, I don't want to miss your divine interruptions just so I can get my milk and bananas home faster!" Lending a hand

to messy people, listening to their stories, or sharing the message of Jesus takes a few minutes, but at the end of the day, don't you want your minutes to count for something with eternal impact?

**Finally, Jesus retreated to quiet places.** For those in the trenches of toddlerhood or teen angst, this is just a metaphor. There are no actual quiet places for you right now. Ha! But if you have a teammate in this parenting thing, you can create places of rest and quiet. Jesus promises rest to the weary; read his words and think of his love for you. Let that be your mountainside to pause. Help each other get there to recharge frequently.

Parenting articles are usually filled with tips and tricks, but **reflecting God's love to our community can't be boiled down to catchy quotes. It starts and ends with soaking in the grace that Jesus won for us.** We ask for God's eyes to see his hurting children. We lay the idol of our busyness on the altar. We recharge by the power of God's love in Christ. By God's grace, our kids will pick up on that too.

*Liz Schroeder and her husband, John, live in Phoenix, Arizona, with their five kids. They serve as lay leaders at CrossWalk Church.*





# teentalk

## Why all this trouble?

God puts troubles in our lives to call us to him.

Kayla Laures

"This is the worst day ever!" "I hate my life!" "If God loved me, he wouldn't let this happen!" Those common phrases are often heard, said, and used by people, including us Christians, to express our feelings about conflicts and troubles in our lives.

A lot of times we forget why God puts troubles in our lives. Instead of confiding in him, we blame him. But look at 1 Peter 5:7: "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." When we feel like no one understands how we feel, we can look to Jesus as he was tempted—just like us—when he was on earth. He took on flesh and became like one of us, masking his holy righteousness. He loves us *that* much. He does put challenges in our lives to call us closer to him and to remind us that he also has been through the same things.

### Being in a divorced family caused me many questions late at night.

It was a very unpredictable roller-coaster ride. Stability was a challenge. We had to adapt and trust that God knew what he was doing. The nights when family feuds filled the house and my sister needed to get away from it were the

nights we would ask God, "Why us? Why this situation?" We would pray to him and ask him to change it.

We kept confiding in him, and he listened. We just hadn't realized it. He answered by saying, "Wait." Then the most discernible issue was finally settled, and he gave us relief. Now we thank God for those experiences. Looking back, the struggles have helped us. They have also helped shape us into who we are now.

We can take the obstacles placed in our lives and learn from them. We can look at stories from the Bible also. The story most Christians would connect with incomprehensible sorrow and comforting relief is the story of Job. He endured unimaginable losses in his life, and yet, he remained strong in his faith. He trusted God to take care of him, and God did. God puts challenges in our lives to remind us that we do need him and that we don't have to do the hard things by ourselves.

**Just as Job latched onto God's promises, so do I.** I look to God's comforting words. God promises that he will be with us always (Matthew 28:20). He tells us that he takes care of

the birds (Matthew 6:26), so of course he will take care of us. He obviously showed it when he sent his one and only Son to take our places on the cross, which is another comfort we have.

But my two favorite and comforting passages that help me stay strong are Joshua 1:9 and Psalm 23:1-3. The Joshua passage reminds me that God is my rock, and he gives me the strength I need. The Psalm verses give me pure comfort.

So often there are many obstacles we have to overcome in this sinful world we live in, and we often forget about the One we can always rely on. God gave us his Scripture for a reason. It's not just a guideline on how to conduct ourselves, but it's also words of reassurance. There's always going to be pain, but after this life we gain so much more.

---

*Kayla Laures, a junior at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wisconsin, is a member of St. John, Jefferson, Wisconsin.*



## CHANGES IN MINISTRY

### Pastors

**Babinec, Daniel**, to St. John, Gladwin/Good Shepherd, Beaverton, Mich.

**Davissou, Caleb**, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.

**Kruschel, Peter**, to retirement

**Sellnow, Jasper**, to St. Paul, Adams, Wis.

**Thompson, Donald**, to The Point of Grace, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Weigand, Martin**, to St. Peter, Goodhue/Grace, Goodhue, Minn.

### Teachers

**Achey, Melanie**, to Salem Preschool, Woodbury, Minn.

**Danell, Justin**, to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

**DeNoyer, Jennifer**, to Crown of Life Christian Academy, Fort Atkinson, Wis.

**Drews, Jeremiah**, to St. John, Lewiston, Minn.

**Fischer, Wendy**, to St. John, Fremont, Wis.

**Hernandez, Micah**, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Kanzenbach, Matthew**, to St. Paul, Livonia, Mich.

**Klatt, Jessica**, to Salem, Stillwater, Minn.

**Klatt, Ryan**, to Salem, Stillwater, Minn.

**Krug, Nathan**, to Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.

**Martin, Christine**, to St. John's, Newburg, Wis.

**Mehlberg, Abby**, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.

**Roecker Jr., Darrell**, to Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fond du Lac, Wis.

**Stern, Katherine**, to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.

**Stern, Philip**, to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.

**Valus, Nolan**, to St. John, Saginaw, Mich.

**Ziel, Jacob**, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.

## ANNIVERSARY

**Apacheland, Ariz.**—Native American mission work (125). June 22. KI Convention Center, Green Bay, Wis. 6-9 P.M. Oct. 26-28. Peridot, Ariz. Oct. 26, reservation tours. Oct. 27, 11 A.M.-4 P.M., crafts, music history; 4 P.M., worship; 5 P.M., dinner. Oct. 28, anniversary worship throughout Apache reservation. Contact Debbie Dietrich, NativeChristians1@gmail.com. Website, nativechristians.org.

## COMING EVENTS

**Marriage enrichment weekends**—held around the country by WELS Adult Discipleship. Check for upcoming events in your area. Website, wels.net/events.

**Interactive Faith online Bible study**—Wednesdays from Jan. 10-Feb. 7. 6 P.M. and 8 P.M. CT. Theme: "Isaiah: God confronts and comforts his people." Leader: Rev. Daniel Habben. Website, wels.net/

interactivefaith.

**Association of WELS Chaplains conference**—Feb. 2. Schoenstatt Conference Center, Waukesha, Wis. Website, wels.net/events.

**Martin Luther College choir tours**—Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Website, mlc-wels.edu.

- Feb. 16, 1:45 P.M., Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.; 7 P.M., St. Paul, Fort Atkinson, Wis.
- Feb. 17, 7 P.M., First German, Manitowoc, Wis.
- Feb. 18, 10:30 A.M., St Peter, Appleton, Wis.
- Feb. 23, 7 P.M., Atonement, Baltimore, Md.
- Feb. 24, 7 P.M., Grace, Falls Church, Va.
- Feb. 25, 10 A.M., Divine Peace, Largo, Md.
- Feb. 26, 7 P.M., Resurrection, Chesapeake, Va.
- Feb. 27, 7:30 P.M., Peace, King of Prussia, Pa.
- Feb. 28, 7 P.M., Messiah, South Windsor, Conn.
- March 1, 7 P.M., King of Kings, Clifton Park, N.Y.
- March 2, 7 P.M., Our Savior's, East Brunswick, N.J.
- March 4, 9 A.M., St John's, Newark, Del.
- March 18, 3 P.M., Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.
- March 23, 2 P.M., West Lutheran High School, Plymouth, Minn.; 7 P.M., Cross of Christ, Coon Rapids, Minn.
- March 24, 7 P.M., Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis.
- March 25, 10:30 A.M., Ascension, Rochester, Minn.

**Men of His Word men's conference**—Feb. 24. Oshkosh Convention Center, Oshkosh, Wis. Theme: "Get out of the boat." Website, menofhisword.org.

**Christian Women Today women's retreat**—March 9-11. Sheraton Brookfield Hotel, Brookfield, Wis. Theme: "Give thanks in all circumstances." 414-507-5341. Website, christianwomentoday.org.

**Pathways to Christ women's retreat**—March 9-11. Oshkosh, Wis. Theme: "Speak O Lord." 920-233-1069. Website, pathwaystochrist.org.

**Annual Butterfly Brunch**—March 10. Christian Women's Leadership Circle, Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. Website, wlc.edu.

**Ironmen of God men's conference**—March 24. St. Paul's, Ixonia, Wis. Website, ironmenofgodwi.org.

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

- March 28, 7 P.M., Holy Trinity, New Hope, Minn.
- March 29, 7 P.M., Redeemer, Mandan, N.D.
- March 30, 7:30 P.M., Shining Mountains, Bozeman, Mont.

- April 1, 9 A.M., St. Paul, Calgary, Alberta, Canada; 11:30 A.M., Mountain View, Calgary, Alberta, Canada
- April 2, 7 P.M., Living Savior, Missoula, Mont.
- April 3, 7 P.M., Apostles, Billings, Mont.
- April 4, 7 P.M., Abiding Love, Loveland, Colo.
- April 5, 7 P.M., Zion, Denver, Colo.
- April 6, 7 P.M., Good Shepherd, Kearney, Neb.
- April 7, 7:30 P.M., Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.
- April 8, 10:30 A.M., St. Paul, North Mankato, Minn.

**Lutheran Women's Missionary Society convention**—June 21-24. KI Convention Center, Green Bay, Wis. Theme: "Speak O Lord from the Valley to the World." Website, lwms.org.

**WELS International Youth Rally**—June 26-29. Bowling State University, Bowling Green, Ohio. Theme: "Never Alone." Registration opens March 1. Website, wels.net/2018youthrally.

## NAMES WANTED

**Apacheland, Arizona**—those interested in learning more about the upcoming 125th anniversary of mission work on the Apache Reservation. Debbie Dietrich, NativeChristians1@gmail.com, or join its Facebook page at facebook.com/NativeChristiansWELS.

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

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

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

## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

**Teachers**—East Fork Lutheran High School on the Apache mission near Whiteriver, Arizona, is looking for retired WELS educators to teach two or three high school level courses for the 2018-19 school year. In return, it will provide a stipend of \$4,000 per course, a fully furnished apartment on campus, and utilities. beapache@outlook.com; 928-338-4455.

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.



# Moments with MISSIONARIES

## ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Lucas F. Bitter



*In the spring of 2016, WELS Home Missions provided funding for a new mission start in downtown Atlanta. Lucas Bitter accepted the call to serve this new mission in 2017. Here he shares one of his early outreach experiences:*

### THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

In August 2017, my family and I moved to a neighborhood near the center of Atlanta. We were excited to reach out to this diverse mission field, and we couldn't wait to see what the Holy Spirit might accomplish here through the power of the gospel.

As it turned out, we didn't have long to wait! On the weekend of my installation, our core group of lay members set up a booth at a local festival, where they gathered information from nearly seven hundred people via a short survey. More than one hundred people asked to be included on our e-mail list, and several dozen indicated interest in a Bible Basics class. One of them was a woman we'll call "Rachel."

What made Rachel particularly intriguing was that in the "church background" box on her survey, she had written atheist. Why would an atheist be interested in a Bible class? I was about to find out.

I met Rachel in a local coffee shop for our first Bible Basics lesson. As we discussed the topic of sin, Rachel expressed a great deal of anger. Anger at God for setting an unreachable standard of perfection. Anger at Christians for insisting that their way to heaven was

the only way. Anger at her childhood church, which had bombarded her with rules and crushed her with guilt. However, as we moved on to the topic of God's unconditional love for sinners, Rachel's anger began to soften. She confessed, "I've never heard God described that way before. I understand what you're saying, . . . but I don't know that I can believe it."

The next few lessons took over a month, as Rachel bombarded me with one tough question after another: evolution, the origin of evil, non-Christian religions, the canonicity of Scripture, the end of the world, etc. I didn't have all the answers, but I did have the gospel. I explained, "Many Bible teachings are tough to understand, but we have to take this whole book seriously because it's the only place in the world where we get the gospel." This made sense to Rachel. She was beginning to see that Christians were not the narrow-minded, arrogant zealots she had once thought them to be—they were simply people who had found the gospel and wanted more of it.

We've since made it through additional lessons on the Old and New Testaments, the sacraments, and the Trinity, and Rachel's view of God has radically changed. She no longer thinks of God as a cruel dictator but rather as a patient, loving father. She no longer bombards me with skeptical questions but rather expresses the gospel in her own words and talks of sharing it with others. She looks forward to upcoming Bible study lessons, to our worship launch next summer, and to attending church for the first time in years. She even asked me to baptize her one-year-old son.

I don't know what Rachel's future holds or if she will end up joining our congregation. But I do know this: After only a few short weeks in the city, God has already used our ministry to add a new member to his invisible church. He has called a self-professed atheist out of the darkness and into his wonderful light.

*Lucas Bitter serves as a home missionary at Intown Lutheran Church, Atlanta, Georgia.*



Core group members of Intown Lutheran Church, Atlanta.



## Cleaning up after the storms

By now, everyone knows about the impactful hurricane season last fall. Countless people in Texas, Florida, and the Caribbean were affected. Some of these people were WELS members and their communities. That's where WELS Christian Aid and Relief stepped in to offer assistance via immediate financial support and long-term clean-up and repairs. Christian Aid and Relief has been coordinating volunteer efforts, enabling WELS members to help their Christian brothers and sisters affected by the storms.

In Florida, volunteers used Christian Aid and Relief trailers filled with supplies as they assisted with clean-up efforts in several affected communities. Local congregation members and school children helped with the efforts as well as canvassed the neighborhoods. Financial grants were also distributed to help families refurbish and repair their homes.

Financial assistance was provided to families from Barbuda who were displaced from their homes. Some are staying at members' homes from St. John's, St. John, Antigua.

Hard-hit Puerto Rico, home of WELS' sister church body the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church, was visited by WELS President Mark Schroeder; WELS liaison for the field, Tim Satorius; and World Mission representatives in January. One church there was completely destroyed, and several members' homes were damaged. Groceries were provided to families in need, and Christian Aid and Relief has been getting bids for repair projects. An immediate gift of \$5,000 through Direct Relief was made to assist those in need as well as \$5,000 to provide meals for people in the church and community.

Perhaps it was Texas' Hurricane Harvey that had the biggest impact on WELS members. Several members' homes were flooded, resulting in mold and rot issues. Christ Our Savior church and parsonage in Angleton, as well as Sienna Lutheran Academy in Missouri City, suffered considerable damage.

In the days following the hurricane, 40 WELS members from the greater Austin and Dallas/Fort Worth area traveled to the affected areas of Edna and Victoria to offer support and relief. Christian Aid and Relief provided two trailers filled with generators, chain saws, and other supplies and equipment to use for the clean-up of at least 50 homes.

In the weeks and months following the hurricane, after full assessments had been made, Christian Aid and Relief coordinated a steady stream of volunteers to help remove, repair, and replace damaged drywall, floors, trim and molding, and roofs of members' homes.

Marc VonDeylen, pastor at Lord of Life, Friendswood, and his wife, Monique, live in a neighborhood that experienced heavy flooding during Hurricane Harvey. The night the storm hit Marc had to sleep at the church because the waters were rising so fast that he couldn't make the short

drive home. Meanwhile, at their house, Monique hosted unexpected visitors . . . neighbors she didn't even know from down the street who couldn't make it the few blocks to their driveway. While the VonDeylen's home was spared from flooding, the area around them wasn't.

The day after the storm, the VonDeylens called their members and found out that eight or nine homes were flooded. They started getting everyone together to help one another. "We started seeing a great outpouring of love from our members at that point," said Marc. Congregation members went from house to house to remove damaged items. They even opened their homes to their fellow Christian brothers and sisters whose homes were being repaired.



More than one hundred WELS volunteers have been involved in hurricane relief efforts, including these volunteers who helped repair homes in the Houston area. People in the Houston area lost many of their personal belongings after their homes were flooded during Hurricane Harvey.

While the support from one another brought their congregation closer together, Monique says, "People wanted to get back in their homes, so we were so glad when we found out that Christian Aid and Relief was going to come down here and help us out."

Marc says, "God uses these things to give us opportunities to show our faith, practice our faith, and let others see the love of Christ."

WELS members have given more than \$1 million for hurricane relief. "We thank our WELS brothers and sisters for their prayers, their support, and their generous gifts," says Robert Hein, chairman of WELS Christian Aid and Relief. "What a privilege to serve as God's instruments to bring his blessings to those in need!"



If you would like to learn about how to volunteer for Christian Aid and Relief, go to [wels.net/relief](http://wels.net/relief). Watch the February *WELS Connection* to see how volunteers helped with clean-up in Florida.



# MLC GRADUATES

Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., held its midyear graduation on Dec. 14, 2017. Thirteen students graduated with their bachelor of science in education degree.



**Elizabeth M. Bergemann**  
Sussex, Wis.



**Angela K. Bode**  
Sleepy Eye, Minn.



**Allison E. Bovee**  
New Ulm, Minn.



**Abigail K. Braun**  
Crofton, Neb.



**Rachel L. Frost**  
Appleton, Wis.



**Alanna G. Habben**  
Waukesha, Wis.



**Elizabeth E. Henning**  
Kewaskum, Wis.



**Stephanie A. Johnson**  
Cleveland, Wis.



**Mary E. Meyer**  
New Ulm, Minn.



**Eric K. Uher**  
Waukesha, Wis.



**Hannah E. Uher**  
Milwaukee, Wis.



**Raine L. Vrable**  
Bay City, Mich.



**Jonathan D. Witte**  
Fond du Lac, Wis.

*Congratulations  
graduates!*

## Obituaries

### Erma J. Hamann 1941–2017

Erma Hamann was born Jan. 28, 1941. She died Sept. 11, 2017, in Sleepy Eye, Minn.

A 1963 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at St. Paul, Saint James, Minn.; Woodlawn, West Allis, Wis.; and Zion, South Milwaukee, Wis.

She is survived by three sisters and two brothers. She is preceded in death by one brother.

### Marvin A. Radtke 1924–2017

Marvin Radtke was born Jan. 28, 1924, in Milwaukee, Wis. He died Sept. 24, 2017, in Watertown, Wis.

A 1949 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Christ, Morristown, S.D.; Redeemer, Ann Arbor, Mich.; and Christ, Eagle River, Wis. He also served as a WELS mission counselor.

He is survived by his wife, Helen; 2 daughters; 1 son; 10 grandchildren; and 21 great-grandchildren. He is preceded in death by one brother and one sister.

### Robert A. Bock 1947–2017

Robert Bock was born Dec. 2, 1947, in Owosso, Mich. He died Sept. 26, 2017, in Watertown, Wis.

A 1970 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at Northwestern Lutheran Academy, Mobridge, S.D.; Trinity, Crete, Ill.; and Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Marilyn; one son; two daughters; six grandchildren; his father; and one sister. He is preceded in death by his mother.



### Marilyn R. Freese 1931–2017

Marilyn Freese (née Schroeder) was born Jan. 8, 1931, in Beatrice, Neb. She died Oct. 7, 2017, in Beatrice, Neb.

She taught at St. Paul, Plymouth, Neb.

She is survived by 3 sons, 2 daughters, 12 grandchildren, 9 great-grandchildren, and 3 brothers. She is preceded in death by her husband, Richard; one sister; and one grandchild.

### Vernon R. Roemhildt 1931–2017

Vernon Roemhildt was born Sept. 11, 1931, in St. Peter, Minn. He died Oct. 15, 2017, in Pemberton, Minn.

A 1954 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at St. John, Janesville, Minn.; Immanuel, Hutchinson, Minn.; St. John, Red Wing, Minn.; and Christ, Milwaukee, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Marlys; 2 daughters; 1 son; 14 grandchildren; and 8 great-grandchildren. He is preceded in death by one brother and one sister.

### Nora M. Zimmermann 1925–2017

Nora Zimmermann (née Seefeld) was born May 16, 1925, in Fond du Lac, Wis. She died Oct. 15, 2017, in Blue Earth, Minn.

A 1946 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at St. John-St. James, Reedsville, Wis.

She is survived by one daughter, two grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. She is preceded in death by her husband, Albert; one brother; and one grandchild.

## Church in Hong Kong celebrates 40th anniversary

On Dec. 3, 2017, Southeast Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission (SALEM) celebrated 40 years of bringing the peace of the gospel to the people of Hong Kong. The theme for this anniversary year was “Strong in the grace of Jesus.” Six hundred members from SALEM’s ten churches, along with a number of special guests, gathered for a joint worship service. In the evening, four hundred attended a traditional Cantonese banquet.

Special guests included Carol Schroeder, wife of SALEM’s first WELS missionary, Gary Schroeder. The Schroeders came to Hong Kong in 1975. Carol shared that they felt it was extremely important to take time to do two things—learn the local Cantonese language and spend time with people developing a relationship so that they could share the gospel.

Another guest was Mark Sprengeler, who began his service as a WELS missionary in Hong Kong in 1984. He learned Cantonese and helped start three congregations. Now retired,

Sprengeler, in still fluent Cantonese, shared his experiences. He recalled teaching dozens of English classes a week, looking for opportunities to share the gospel. God was faithful, and many students became Christians.

Dr. John Lawrenz of Asia Lutheran Seminary in Hong Kong also encouraged those present. Asia Lutheran Seminary has been a key ministry to assist SALEM in training pastors and helping dedicated laypeople grow spiritually.

In 2017, SALEM deepened its ties with sister churches around the world as it became a member of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference and declared official fellowship with WELS.

With solid theological roots, a strong outreach program, and Asia Lutheran Seminary increasingly staffed by local pastors and teachers, SALEM can look forward with hope to the next 40 years.

*Rob Siirila  
WELS missionary to Hong Kong*



Members of the Southeast Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission celebrated the church body's 40th anniversary on Dec. 3, 2017.

## Early childhood program unleashes the gospel's power

She started out looking for a place to meet other moms and spend quality time with her young daughter.

She ended up finding a church home and a new understanding of grace and forgiveness.

"Pastor changed [my] way of thinking," says Amanda Hall, a new member at Prince of Peace, Flower Mound, Texas. "Here I am 36 years old, and I had the direction in which the arrow of grace flows completely wrong. God first gave to me, therefore I give."

What was the impetus behind this? A congregation looking to reach out to its family-focused community.

"Even at the youngest ages, parents are looking for something to do socially for their kids," says Amy David, one of the early childhood program directors at Prince of Peace. "Early childhood ministries are such an amazing way to connect to the community."

Prince of Peace started with a Mornings With Mommy program in 2014, an outreach program that offers age-appropriate activities for young children to do with their parents. The program thrived, and the congregation decided it wanted to take its ministry a step further. "We wanted to directly share the gospel with these families," says Amanda Singh, another early childhood program director.

To do this, the congregation started a new program in 2016—Power Hour. Singh explains, "The focus of every session is on a Bible story and sharing God's Word. We're always bringing it all back to Jesus."

This preschool program, developed by Bethany Lutheran Church, an Evangelical Lutheran Synod church in Port Orchard, Wash., offers four academic learning centers (i.e., math, literacy, writing, and science or social studies) featuring hands-on learning for children two to five years old and their parents. Each session is based on a Bible story,



Top: Amanda Hall and her daughter Ainsley at Power Hour. Bottom: Amanda Singh interacts with a mom and her daughter at Power Hour.

with a theme pulled out from the story for each learning center.

"It fits into our ministry model—we're focused on the whole family unit," says Singh. "That's what makes Power Hour so impactful—you have the parents come and learn about Jesus too."

Besides spending time with their children at Power Hour, parents also are invited to Power for Parenting, a parenting class offered by the congregation's pastor, Brad Taylor.

"As parents, we are bombarded with parenting advice from so many places," Taylor says. "Trying to navigate all the information and expectations thrown

at parents creates a heavy burden. Consciences are weighed down with guilt, shame, and sin. So with each class I have the opportunity to declare to them that Jesus has not just washed away all their children's sins. He died for their sins too!"

That gospel message hits home. "It's difficult to put into words how precious that 35 minutes was with him and the other moms," says Hall. "Then I'd go to Power Hour afterward and hear my daughter sing praises to God and recite Scripture, and my day would be complete. My cup was full, and I could handle what the day threw at me. It would all be okay because I had Jesus in my heart, on my mind, and in my actions."

After a Power for Parenting session on Baptism, Hall felt a sense of urgency to baptize her children, and she went home to her husband, ready to take the next step. After taking classes, they became members in 2017. She says, "Every chance we have to learn more about Jesus at our church, our family is there. Sundays are our favorite day of the entire week."

Since 2014, at least 450 people have had some contact with the church through its Mornings with Mommy program, and many of these families continued on with Power Hour. By the end of the first year of Power Hour, three families had joined the church, and five baptisms were conducted. "That just speaks to the power of God's Word," says David. "Once you get them into Power Hour and you start sharing the gospel—it's the most powerful tool we have."

This 150-member congregation is looking to expand its offerings, including starting to plan for a new building to better meet the needs of the congregation and its community.



Learn more about Power Hour at the church's website, [princeofpeacenow.com](http://princeofpeacenow.com) or e-mail [kids@princeofpeacenow.com](mailto:kids@princeofpeacenow.com).



## District news

### DAKOTA-MONTANA

**Living Savior, Missoula, Mont.,** dedicated its new church building on Dec. 10, 2017.

### NORTHERN WISCONSIN

On Dec. 10, 2017, **St. John-St. James, Brillion, Wis.,** dedicated its new building, which connects its church and school.

**Grace, Crivitz, Wis.,** participated in its community's annual Christmas in the Village on Nov. 25, 2017. Grace's middle school children re-enacted the birth of Christ, beginning with the prophecies of Isaiah. Grace also offered cookie decorating and crafts for kids and put together a float that proclaimed the message of Christ's birth for the community parade.

### SOUTH CENTRAL

**Christ the King, Tulsa, Okla.,** dedicated its new sanctuary and fellowship hall on Dec. 10, 2017.

The district reporters for this month are: AZ-CA—Michael Schroeder; D-M—Andrew Hussmann; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NW—Dennis Kleist; SC—Andrew Retberg.

### ARIZONA-CALIFORNIA



Many WELS churches offer a live nativity presentation to their communities during Advent, including Lamb of God, Ahwatukee, Ariz., which presented its live nativity for the 13th year on Dec. 2, 2017 (pictured). Lamb of God's church is set at the base of a cliff in an area that was once a rock quarry. It uses its natural surroundings to create a special setting for its live nativity performance, which includes projecting images on the rocks surrounding the church and using sets created by a professional set designer.

### NORTHERN WISCONSIN



(From left) Brianna Bakri and Rachel Sweeney, students at Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fond du Lac, Wis., each take a "selfie for Jesus." In a chapel message delivered on Dec. 21, 2017, Don Forss encouraged the student body to take selfies of themselves with manger scenes and send them to all their contacts with the message, "The Savior is born! Merry Christmas!"

### MINNESOTA



Christ Alone, Dardenne Prairie, Mo., held a ribbon cutting ceremony on Dec. 8, 2017. Christ Alone formed when Good Shepherd, St. Peters, Mo., and Apostles, Dardenne Prairie, Mo., merged to better serve the greater St. Louis community by working together.



# SALT

— of the —

# EARTH

**Peace! The last word of the Benediction sends us into the world with the privilege of sharing his peace.** Glenn L. Schwanke

The service is almost over. In a moment, your pastor will raise his hands for the Benediction. The words he will speak are the same as those the Lord first instructed the high priest Aaron and his sons to use as a blessing for the Israelites some 3,500 years ago! Well not exactly. Back then, those words were spoken in Hebrew, but they carry just as much meaning and power when we hear them in English today.

“The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with favor and + give you peace” (*Christian Worship*, p. 37).

Think of it! We’re sent out those church doors and back into our everyday lives with the threefold blessing of the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

## **A POWERFUL REMINDER**

But maybe we haven’t thought much about the Benediction lately. Maybe, because we’ve heard these words so many times over the years, we’ve allowed them to become little more than the obligatory “Amen” that signals the end of our worship. And if the service is running a smidgeon long—because of the pastor’s seven-part sermon—maybe we even sneak a peek at our watch as we worry, “I hope I can still make the all-you-can-eat Sunday brunch buffet at Bubba’s, because it only goes ‘til 1 P.M.”

Well, maybe Bubba’s will keep the buffet open a little late for us. And if our pastor actually did preach a seven-part sermon, I pray every word was anchored firmly in God’s Word and seasoned liberally with God’s grace. Because then our pastor’s message—as well as the Scripture readings for the day, the prayers, the hymns, the choral anthems, and the liturgical responses—have all prepared us for this mountaintop moment—the Aaronic Benediction!

That Benediction is so much more than an “Amen” that punctuates our worship. It’s so much more than having the Lord, like a kindly grandpa, wave farewell from the porch of heaven as we wave back, jump in our car, and head home. Our God explained exactly what was important about this blessing: “So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them” (Numbers 6:27 English Standard Version [ESV]).

What? The Benediction is a powerful reminder of the new names we first received when, through water and the Word, God’s Spirit washed away the filth of our sin and instead gave us pure, clean clothes as we “put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27 ESV). Then “in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13 ESV). Then we were declared “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19 ESV).



Through Baptism, our Lord adopted us as his own.

The Benediction reminds us of that miracle of grace. It reassures us that we leave God's house with the promise our Lord once shared through his prophet Isaiah. "But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine'" (Isaiah 43:1 ESV). We don't need to face Monday alone, empty, and afraid. We don't need to be consumed with worry over whether the next mass shooting will be in our town, or God forbid, even our church. For with the Benediction, our Lord has served notice to the devil himself: "This one is mine! Marked with the blood of Christ. Hands off!"

This is the lasting comfort that is ours, when our pastor raises his hands for the Benediction and, once again, our Lord puts his name on us!

#### A SOLEMN PRIVILEGE

But it's not just for our comfort, is it? The Benediction also brings with it a solemn privilege. After all, we're carrying God's name out into the world. But will we act like it? Will we be the "salt" that Jesus called us to be in his Sermon on the Mount? (Matthew 5:13)

To help us remember the name we bear and the salting we've received, in some of our worship services, just before the pastor raises his hands in blessing, he speaks the following words: "Brothers and sisters, go in peace." That sentence is nothing but the sweetest gospel. For you and I have true, lasting peace. It is the peace that surpasses all understanding, the peace that no one in this world can earn and no amount of money can buy. It's peace with God!

Then, "serve the LORD with gladness." Those words from Psalm 100 remind us why our Lord has given us a pulse for yet another day in this world. We do not live for ourselves but for the one who bought and paid for us (cf. Romans 12:1; Romans 14:8).

But wait a minute! Didn't we skip something? "Live in harmony with one another." That's the niggling sentence that sometimes catches us and trips us up.

Did you know that's a Bible verse too? It's Romans 12:16. It was Paul who gave us this inspired command.

But what exactly does it mean? Is "harmony" to be understood the way our society currently defines it? "Your spiritual truth works for you. My spiritual truth works for me. I'll accept your truth, but you'll also need to accept mine, because there is no absolute truth." That can hardly be what our Lord had in mind, because he also moved Paul to write, "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5 ESV).

"Live in harmony with one another." Does that mean if your sister or brother in the faith is walking down a dangerous path of sin that you won't get involved? That you'll let sleeping dogs lie? If that's what these words mean, then why did Jesus bother to give us the guidance of Matthew chapter 18?

Perhaps if we take a closer look at the rest of this verse, we'll understand the words "live in harmony" better. Paul continues, "Do not be arrogant, but associate with the humble. Do not think too highly of yourselves" (Romans 12:16 Evangelical Heritage Version).

Now do we get it? By grace, we're all members of God's family, but the Lord definitely doesn't want us to act like squabbling siblings who can't stand one another. He doesn't want cliques in the church. He doesn't want us to look down our aquiline noses at fellow Christians who don't participate as much as we do or give as much as we do. Such snobbery is little more than stealth self-righteousness. It will undercut our witness. It will dilute our saltiness.

But when we "live in harmony with one another," then we're carrying God's name in a way that brings him glory. And that is what it means to be salt.

---

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

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

# Live IN harmony WITH ONE another.

## ROMANS 12:16

# NURTURING



## OUR CHILDREN'S FAITH-LIFE

**In the years following confirmation or high school graduation, our kids sometimes stop coming to church. We, as parents, need to stay involved in these young adults' spiritual lives.**

Noel Ledermann

I currently serve as a teacher for the teen class at our church, and for a dozen years I've served as a senior counselor at a WELS summer Bible camp. I'm disheartened by how many kids over just a few quick years stop coming to church.

The Bible teaches us to bring our children up in the training and instruction of the Lord. It also says that we shouldn't exasperate or frustrate our children. Those are wonderful scriptural directives! As parents, how wonderful to get that help from God in raising kids. Our kids are blessings from God. Solomon writes, "Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him" (Psalm 127:3). A heritage—or legacy—and a reward!

### PARENTS ARE IMPORTANT

One thing I've learned is that kids' parents have so much influence on the lives of their children.

We often live through our kids when it comes to sports and all that they entail (though it's a little scary at times). We are right there when our kids are making financial decisions about buying a first car. Oh, and dating. Whether our kids are in their late teens or in their 20s, we are there whether they want us to be or not—full of advice, direction, and input. We have no issue with inserting ourselves into our kids' lives when it comes to choosing a university or college or another path they may take after high school. And let's not forget jobs! We make them get a "first job" and then offer advice on



the best jobs or careers we think they should pursue. We may even introduce them to our own contacts to help them out. Been there, done that, right? And, all of that is good—if done in a loving, balanced way.

But then there's church. Oh, *that*. We too easily dismiss that by saying, "They're old enough now to make their own decision." Or maybe we think, *You know, I've done the best I can*. Or, *I just can't get them up on Sunday morning*. Sometimes we shirk responsibility altogether. Or maybe we're afraid we'll push them away, and it just isn't worth the potential conflict. We hope and pray that over time they'll "come back." Yet we sometimes have that little sense of guilt that perhaps it is our role as parents to keep them in church.

### PARENT ACTION PLAN

Our Lord Jesus is a loving Savior. We often see his love for all of his children in the Bible, even for the little children. Remember in Mark 10:14, Jesus was lovingly clear: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."

There's an action plan. Those of us who have been blessed with children will, at some point in our parental lives, make a point that they are "always" going to be our kids. We are always there for them and continue to give our advice and support. So what may seem difficult is really not overly difficult and certainly not anything new for parents who have nurtured and encouraged a church life for their younger kids. We can continue that encouragement into their teens, 20s, and beyond.

We can start by attending church and Bible study consistently and expect the same for the teens living in our houses. They hear and see what we do and how we do it.

As they grow older and move out, we can continue to encourage them to find a church. If they live close by, we

can invite them to church—often and always with love. We shouldn't assume they will automatically go to church. We invite them to go shopping, or attend a concert, sports event, and family gatherings. Why not church? Show them there's as much to experience and talk about in church as it relates to our everyday lives as other social engagements. If we make it a priority and set a positive example, maybe they will respond. Remember we are always a conduit for the Holy Spirit.

---

In times of trouble,  
direct your children, no  
matter what their age,  
to seek the strength and  
comfort of their Savior.

---

For new confirmands—that step is not an end for them or for parents. It is simply a step toward being an active, Christian young adult. And high school graduation certainly isn't a reason for young people to stop their church life. They'll need the benefits of a church life and church family during this important transition in their lives—likely more than ever.

But as our teens become young adults, our relationship with them will change and grow, and so can our spiritual encouragement. There are many web-based and printed daily devotions that get us into the Word, even if only for a few minutes a day. Take the time to research and share those with your young adult children. As we do in so many aspects of our grown children's lives, we can do much by continuing to encourage and nurture them.

We don't end our education after confirmation or high school. We continue to grow and learn. Our children will have many more lessons to learn—some of them difficult. We have learned to turn to our Savior in those times of trial and

learning. Jesus tells us, "I am the true vine. . . . Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:1,4). The point is obvious. In times of trouble, direct your children, no matter what their age, to seek the strength and comfort of their Savior.

### FURTHER ENCOURAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Let's also intentionally encourage each other—whether we are parents or not—to continue to be in young adults' spiritual lives.

As parents, pray about it. Pray about it often. Pray for strength, wisdom, patience, and peace—just to name a few. We are called to stay involved, to love, and to encourage our kids for as long as they remain our children, especially when it comes to their faith and being part of a church family.

And for all who aren't parents, you also can encourage these young people in so many situations. Stop them in the lobby or outside church and talk with them. Compliment young ushers. Invite teens or young adults to join the Saturday morning work crew. Teach teen class. Host a teen outing. Offer to be a mentor. Let the young people of your congregation know that you appreciate seeing them each Sunday. Make them feel like family in *their* church family.

Our Lord Jesus is always there for us with his strength and support! "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Our kids—what a wonderful God-given privilege, heritage, and blessing!

---

Noel Ledermann is a member at St. Mark, Citrus Heights, California.

# *He's got the* **whole world** *in his hands*



**Although God's plans for her are still unknown, a college student places her life into her Savior's hands.** Elisabeth Hahm

"I don't know what's wrong," he said. "I see no reason why an 18-year-old girl's hands don't work. This should be the peak of your health."

The hand surgeon was apologetic, but he remained detached and businesslike as he continued, "Unfortunately, I don't know where to go from here. I'm sorry, but you've hit a dead end."

**It was Christmas break of my freshman year of college.** I had experienced a rough first semester. My hands, which had always gotten sore and weak after playing too much piano, suddenly stopped working. They would grow cold and stiff, the circulation became poor, and they simply didn't function. I could hardly type or write. I stopped playing my beloved piano, and I had to drop the organ class I was taking. Living the life of a college student became a daily struggle and required concessions from my professors.

By the time I visited the hand surgeon, I had already seen my family's doctor, a therapist, and a neurologist. I had undergone numerous tests: blood drawn, X-rays taken, and shocks sent up and down my arms to check the nerves. No one had a solution. This hand surgeon was our last hope. But he didn't have answers either.



Driving home from that appointment, it was all I could do to hold back bitter, sorrowful tears, but I knew if I started crying, my mom would start too. We were desperate and discouraged. My mind was restless as I pondered the same questions over and over again. I wondered why my hands didn't work like everyone else's. I wondered if I would ever play piano again or learn how to play organ. I wondered if I could complete the music minor I had hoped for. I wondered why the doctors couldn't help me.

That evening my dad set up a speech-to-text program on my computer. As I tried to make sense of my life, my thoughts tumbled out of my mind and onto the screen, and I spoke the first draft of this very article.

**Some days life is just rough, but God is with me.** He gives me the strength to go on, and he also gave me loving family and friends to support me. I am immensely blessed. Still, sometimes my tears fall, rolling silently down my cheeks when I'm on the phone or storming in a violent downpour when I'm alone.

But it's okay.

I have realized that nobody's life is perfect; everyone has trials. Life is a rocky road that dips and falls. The gravel is loose, and the way is treacherous. Sometimes we may get a flat tire. Sometimes we may be stranded on the edge of the road and look up at the sky and say, "Why God? Why are we here? Why can't we go where you promised?"

The Bible reminds us, "In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps" (Proverbs 16:9). It's hard to give up control. I had grand plans, and I thought I knew exactly which path my life should take. But that wasn't what God wanted for me. Maybe he wants that for me in the future, and right now he's telling me to wait. Or perhaps he's saying, "No, I have something different in mind for you." I can plan, but I don't have the final say. God has control.

In my human heart, I want to be in charge, but it is actually a beautiful gift that God is presiding over all. Sinful humans deserve only hell. There is absolutely nothing that can be done to climb out of the dark hole of sin; there is no way to earn heaven. But God loved this sinful world, and he sent Jesus. Jesus lived a perfect life. Then, he stretched out his arms, and nails were pounded through his hands. He hung on the cross. Jesus died and rose again so that we can one day live in perfect bliss where there is no pain or suffering. There my hands will work again, and God will dry every single tear that falls from my eyes—and yours too.

---

I want my hands to  
be normal and healthy,  
but even without  
them . . . God can  
work through me.

---

So what about the time I live on this imperfect, painful earth? Well, it is my prayer that God uses me. I want my hands to be normal and healthy, but even without them—even if I never play piano again—God can work through me. I can still speak, teach, and show love.

I know that "[God] wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). I can tell people, "I know you're hurting. I know life is hard and stressful and sometimes it doesn't make any sense. But let me help you. I know about a God who loves you more than the most loving father ever. He saved you. I know peace, and I know about heaven."

**Today, I am a sophomore in college.** Though it has been almost a year since my hand problems became severe, we have not found answers. Last summer consisted of various doctors' visits, even a cardiovascular specialist. No diagnosis.

My hand problem continues, but I am learning to survive. I am learning to write fewer notes during class and to take tests using speech-to-text. I am learning to be joyful for others, even when they are experiencing blessings I can't have because of my hands. Though my hands haven't changed, I am more comfortable in my situation this year than last.

Every step of the way, Jesus provides for me. I will always remember the professor who took me under her wing one day when I was broken. She held up her hand; it only had four fingers on it. She lost a finger in a car accident. This professor is a role model for her teaching ability, her kindness, and her Christian walk, but at that moment I only remember a feeling of peace and relief. I knew she understood.

When I grow weary, I am always given peace through comfort from a friend, one-on-one time with God, or a hymn like this one:

"Precious Lord, take my hand,  
Lead me on, let me stand;  
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.  
Through the storm, through the night,  
Lead me on to the light.  
Take my hand, precious Lord;  
Lead me home." (*Christian Worship* 451:1)

Sometimes my heart is so heavy I can't sing the words, but I send them silently as a prayer to my Savior. Someday I will be home with him, but while I am here, God can use my frail hands. As I live in this world, I have strength because God gives me this comfort: "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).

Even when my hands fail me, my all-powerful God holds me safe in his righteous right hand.

---

*Elisabeth Hahm, a sophomore at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at Prince of Peace, Fairport, New York.*

# Men are pigs

Earle D. Treptow

---

There's only  
one thing for  
us men to  
do when we  
recognize our  
depravity and  
complicity:  
repent.

---

One big name after another showed up in the headlines accused of sexual impropriety, from harassment and groping to assault and rape. Included on the list were famous comedians, actors, and film producers, as well as leading politicians and journalists—men who took advantage of their positions and exploited others.

The first story of a famous man abusing his authority and assaulting a woman might not have registered for many. It was the second, seventh, and tenth stories, following hard on the heels of the first, that sounded the alarm. Those who took the time to reflect on what had been alleged—and sometimes confessed—experienced a range of emotions, from anger toward the men who had perpetrated such crimes, to frustration with a society that enables abuse with its celebrity worship, to disappointment with a sex-crazed culture that suggests a woman's body exists for the gratification of men. Exploit women and you show yourself to be despicable. Some men are pigs. Unfortunate, but true.

The stories reported on national news emboldened other women to speak about the sexual abuse they had experienced at the hands of men from all different walks of life, many of whom had no fame or wealth to speak of. There's one obvious link between the famous men and the rank-and-file men who have acted inappropriately toward women: They're men. It's not just *some* men who are pigs, but many.

I'd rather not say that, of course, but I'm comfortable with it. I'm comfortable saying that many men are pigs, because it allows me to establish a safe distance between the pigs and me. The argument seems foolproof: Because I haven't done what they've done, or haven't been publicly accused of it, I'm different from the pigs. And better.

Maybe I haven't sinned in the same way other men have, but I do have something in common with the many pigs out there. I'm a man too. Worse, I'm a sinful man. I have the same sinful nature, capable of all

sorts of disgusting thoughts and behaviors, even if I've been spared from committing the sins that make headlines.

I must ask myself some questions that make me squirm: What have I done to contribute to the situation in which we find ourselves today? Where have I lived selfishly and self-centeredly, seeing women as existing for my benefit and purposes? How have I failed to be the salt of the earth Jesus designed me to be, to slow the decay in the world around me? When have I been silent when I should have spoken up about the continuing debt men owe to women, to love and serve and protect them?

As it turns out, I'm part of those harassment stories, though my name hasn't appeared in the articles.

There's only one thing for us men to do when we recognize our depravity and complicity: repent. We humble ourselves before the Lord each day, confessing that we are unclean pigs, thoroughly sinful by nature. And then we listen anew, with astounded hearts, to his word of full forgiveness in Christ. He absolves us of our failures and declares us righteous in his sight.

Rejoicing in his steadfast love and continual forgiveness, we commit ourselves to being real men, men as God designed us to be. We take up with joy the task the Lord has assigned to us and for which he will equip us—to respect women and serve them, considering them better than ourselves.

---

*Contributing editor Earle Treptow, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Christ Alone, Mequon.*



# MAJORING ON THE MINORS

Thomas D. Kock

## HOSEA: I'D LIKE YOU TO MARRY. . .

The final 12 books of the Old Testament are called “the minor prophets”—minor because of their *length*, not because of their *importance*. These minor books are full of major truths. In this series, we will major on the minors! Let's start with Hosea.

### OUR UNFAITHFULNESS

I never, ever thought about praying for what we're about to discuss.

My wife and I have been blessed with four children. Knowing that a spouse has a major impact on a person's life, I began praying when my kids were young for their future spouses. I prayed that God would guide and guard them. I prayed that God would work strong faith in their hearts. I prayed that their parents would stay married, that they might have a good role model for marriage.

But I never, ever thought about praying like this: “The LORD said to [Hosea], ‘Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife’ ” (Hosea 1:2).

Can you imagine Hosea's reaction? “You want me to do . . . what?!” Yes, God wanted him to marry an adulterous wife. I never, ever prayed for something like that for my children! Why would God do this?

At God's command, Hosea married Gomer, and they had three children. But there was big trouble! We read: “The LORD said to me, ‘Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.’ So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley” (Hosea 3:1,2).

Can you imagine? He had to *buy* his wife back! Had she married another man? Perhaps so.

### GOD'S FAITHFUL LOVE

But did you hear the key point? “Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites.” God often describes his relationship to his people as a marriage—God is the husband; the church is the bride. Whenever the church fails to love God with all her heart, whenever the church gives her love to other “gods” (money, fame, work, recreation, etc.), the church is committing spiritual adultery. In Hosea's day, many of the Israelites were giving their love to other gods. And so God decided to work through Hosea to paint this concrete picture of what God's love is all about. Although Gomer was unfaithful, Hosea was to love her faithfully, just as God would continue to love his people.

February is the month of love because of Valentine's Day. Do you look forward to this month or dread it? Unfortunately, too many people have experienced faithless love and have been hurt by those who ought to show them love. But far more terrible, each of us has shown lack of faithfulness—lack of love—to the One who is love itself.

Yet God continues to love us faithfully, no matter how often we have failed to love him. And he always will.

*Contributing editor Thomas Kock, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Atonement, Milwaukee.*

This is the first article in a 12-part series on the minor prophets.

## HOSEA

**Background:** Hosea, the son of Beeri, was a prophet during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Jehoash, king of Israel, c. 755-720 B.C.

**His family:** Hosea married Gomer, daughter of Diblaim. They had three children: Jezreel, whose means “the LORD plants and sows”; Lo-Ruhamah, whose name means “no pity”; and Lo-Ammi, whose name means “not my people.”

**The book's major truth:** God's faithful love.

**Interesting fact:** The New Testament quotes Hosea 30 times! Of the prophets, only Isaiah is quoted more!

JOEL  
JONAH  
AMOS  
OBADIAH  
MICAH  
NAHUM  
HABAKKUK  
ZEPHANIAH  
HAGGAI  
ZECHARIAH  
MALACHI




---

As we face the  
ups and downs  
of life, we pray  
that our heavenly  
Father would  
preserve our  
faith in Jesus.

---

## Lead us not into temptation

Christian life in this world is difficult. We live as disciples of Jesus in a complex world that operates on a different frequency than we do. Our world has no forgiving God who promises not only forgiveness but also eternal life. It owes nothing to Jesus and therefore thinks only how to get the most out of life: love, happiness, fame, comfort, and family—good things.

That all sounds so familiar to us too. We want the same things, but our vision and thinking include a loving Savior and his promises. We think differently. We treasure the one thing needed while we experience what life deals out to all—whether blessings or trials.

God places us here in this world to be his witnesses. We are to be salt and light where both are in short supply. But being disciples in this world is not so easy. Agur, in the book of Proverbs, observed the problem. He wrote, “Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God” (30:8,9).

In this life we are often distracted from the grace of God in Christ, but not always for the same reason. Sometimes the distractions are wealth, as Agur notes, and sometimes they are poverty.

You and I have seen and heard some who are tempted by wealth to abandon the Lord. But not everyone who is wealthy abandons the Lord. On the other hand, we have also seen and heard some who are tempted by their poverty to turn away from the Lord, either blaming him for their hardship or abandoning him because life is a difficult struggle. But here too not everyone who is poor turns away from the Lord.

No matter what challenges we face, the potential exists to find a reason to turn away from the Lord’s grace. It might be riches, poverty, fame, obscurity, disaster, safety, health, sickness, happiness, or sorrow. You can add to the list from your own experiences.

It gets even more complicated. We are surrounded by so many ideas that contradict the Scriptures and our faith. We see the ungodly prosper and God’s truth mocked or disregarded. In all this too Satan prowls, always looking for an opportunity to rob us of our faith. He is a master of using the temptations posed by the world around us. Remember, he came to Jesus promising all the world’s wealth, and he also made use of the need for daily bread, hoping Jesus would turn stones into something to satisfy his hunger after a 40-day fast.

It’s no surprise that the Lord Jesus asks us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” As we face the ups and downs of life, we pray that our heavenly Father would preserve our faith in Jesus. Nothing could be worse than having our lamps empty when the Lord calls us home (Matthew 25:1-13).

Our Father hasn’t left us alone to face these challenges. He promises always to strengthen and help us. He sends his angels to protect us. He also reminds us that the hardships and difficulties we must face are his discipline sent for our good to refine our faith (Hebrews 12 and 1 Peter 1).

Temptation surrounds us all in many different forms. So this petition is for all of us. “Heavenly Father, lead us not into temptation.” Keep us secure in our faith as your children here on earth.





# COME Lord Jesus BE OUR GUEST

## NOURISHED BY MEALS WITH THE MESSIAH

Joel S. Heckendorf

### SAVING THE BEST FOR LAST (JOHN 2:1-12)

When Mary tapped Jesus on the shoulder at a wedding in Cana, informing him of the soon-to-be-discovered *faux pas*, she got a, “Not yet,” from her son (John 2:4). Didn’t he get it? Didn’t he know how embarrassing it would be for their friends to run out of wine at their own wedding? An array of thoughts might have filled Mary’s mind as she walked away from that conversation with her patience likely tested by Jesus’ “not yet.”

What thoughts fill your mind when you tap Jesus on the shoulder with your prayers and get a simple, “Not yet”? “Jesus, I’m a little short this month on my bills. Is that new job going to happen?” “Not yet.” “Jesus, I’m running dry here. Can you at least pour me a drip of hope? A drop of joy? A dribble of peace?” With every “not yet,” Jesus seems to fill our *whine* glasses with disappointment, anger, frustration, and many other blends that test our patience.

But before you completely lose your patience, pause. Hold Jesus’ “not yet” up to the light and examine it a little closer. Give it a swirl and a second sniff. What do you notice? “Not yet” does not mean no. “Not yet” may test your patience, but it also holds out promise.

To Mary’s credit, she got that. That’s why she cued the servants, “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5). She realized that the impending problem maybe wouldn’t get solved in her way or on her timetable. But it would get solved.

And did it ever. Jesus miraculously turned 180 gallons of foot-washing water into 908 bottles of top-shelf wine. Just like that, Jesus’ “not yet” turned into the best yet. Jesus promises the same to you. In his wisdom, he may not always fill your glasses with whatever you want. He may test your patience with one “not yet” after another. But he also promises that his divine solution will be the best yet.

That’s so evident as we begin another season of Lent. At first glance, Valentine’s Day and Ash Wednesday are an odd combination for Feb. 14. But they beautifully go hand-in-hand. On the surface, Valentine’s Day is all about our present wants: chocolates, courtship, and the like. Ash Wednesday kicks off our Savior’s journey to the cross. After Jesus said, “My time has not yet come,” on numerous occasions, the time finally did come for him to offer his life as payment for our sins. The season of Lent doesn’t paint a pretty picture with its strokes of suffering, shame, and sacrifice. But they were all part of God’s saving plan. They were necessary for what fol-

lowed. First came the cross. Then came the crown.

Because of his Easter victory, be assured that he’s saving the best for last. Therefore, like that wedding couple in Cana, may we invite, “Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest.” Then, with eager anticipation, even in ways unknown to us, watch how *his* gifts to us will be blessed.

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. What significance is there in knowing that Jesus was an invited guest to a wedding?
2. Recall a time when God’s “not yet” turned out being a blessing in your life.
3. Why did Jesus ask Mary, “Woman, why do you involve me?” (John 2:4)?
4. Besides meeting the immediate need of the host, what purpose did Jesus’ miracle serve?

*Contributing editor Joel Heckendorf is pastor at Immanuel, Greenville, Wisconsin.*



This is the third article in a 12-part series that looks at Jesus as a mealtime guest and how he blessed his fellow diners—and us—with his living presence. Find the article and answers online after Feb. 5 at [wels.net/forwardinchrist](http://wels.net/forwardinchrist).

**I**t was an interesting two weeks in our house. After our second dog died, we planned to make it through the winter. We wanted to save a little money.

That's what we had planned.

But the void left by the loss of our dog was too great a hole to fill. I combed every animal shelter and rescue in a 100-mile radius. We loaded up multiple times to meet a possible next member of the family, only to have our hopes dashed. Too hyper. Too big. Too yippy.

**And then we found her.** Originally rescued when she was just weeks old, this girl had already seen a lot. We met her in an incredibly cramped shelter, and she looked at us with such fear in her eyes, her small body quivering. But she let our kids pet her, and when we held her, she put her head down and rested in both my husband's and my arms.

That was enough for me.

Upon entering our home, she immediately found refuge in our back hall. But she was tucked away from the chaos of our family of six, terrified. We tried everything: squeaky toys, mouth-watering treats, soft voices, and slow movements. I just kept thinking: *C'mon, pup. We just want to love you. Your life will be so great.* Yet in my heart I knew: There's a reason they call these dogs "rescues."

But our family of animal lovers was desperate to love her—to welcome her with open arms, empty laps, and table scraps passed under the table. If she only knew.

Sitting there one night across the kitchen floor, treat in hand and desperation in my face, I whispered, "Just trust me to love you."

**And that's when I remembered his voice in my own:**  
*Just trust me, my child. I will meet your every need. I already love you with an everlasting, unconditional love and am just waiting for you to let me show you.*



---

Is my lack of trust in the love and provision of God really that much different than this pup and me?

---

Is my lack of trust in the love and provision of God really that much different than this pup and me?

Why the resistance to a God who just wants to love me?

The first five months of this dog's life had been filled with change and uncertainty. It was all she knew. Similarly, all we know here on earth is the human kind of love—the kind that disappoints and fails us.

But with our heavenly Father it's different.

"I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3).

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).

God's love is not dependent on anything we do or don't do. He gives it freely, needing nothing from us in return.

But our human minds have a difficult time understanding this perfect love, a love that fulfills every need and expectation.

He's standing there.

Waiting. Arms outstretched, asking us to trust him. And unlike any earthly relationship, he will not disappoint. His love never fails.

So go. Run to him. His love is waiting to fill you with joy.

---

*Melissa Kreuser is a member at Bethlehem, Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin.*

This article is adapted and reprinted with permission from **holyyhenhouse.com**.

**JUST**  
*trust me*

Sometimes we think the best thing we can do is hide. We are too afraid to trust, too fearful to respond to love. Melissa Kreuser

