

Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE

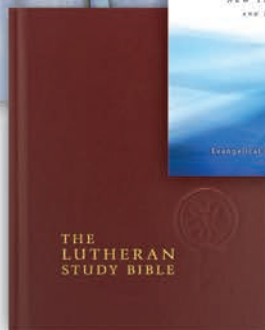
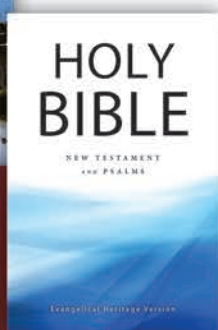
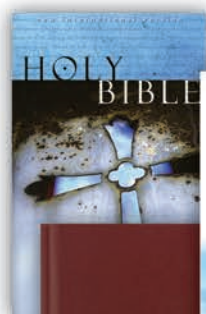


Nailed it!

We celebrate grace, faith, Scripture,
and Christ alone. Pages 24-27

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.



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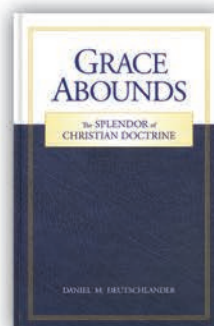
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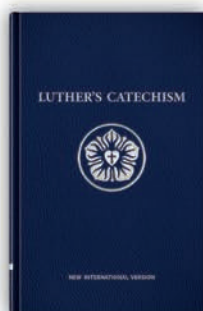
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by Daniel M. Deutschlander

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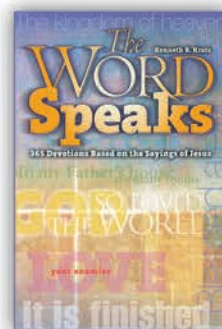
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MATTHEW 28:20

NEVER ALONE

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

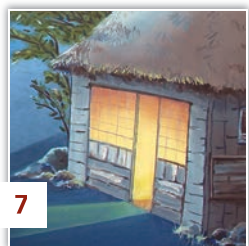
WHAT'S INSIDE

Grace. Faith. Scripture. Every month in *Forward in Christ* we strive to highlight these truths brought into focus by Martin Luther many years ago. The 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation last year really gave us an opportunity to dig deeper into what these truths mean for us today. Congregations, schools, missions, and sister churches also focused on these beliefs. This month we bring you photos from around the globe that highlight some of their special celebrations, ranging from artwork created by fingerprints (p. 3) to parades to districtwide assemblies (pp. 24-27). You can find more pictures at wels.net/forwardinchrist.

Unfortunately, many people today are not searching the Scriptures to find the truths Martin Luther discovered there. Instead they are looking into themselves or in other places to find their version of “truth.” This month we start a new series called “What is truth?” in which Dr. Arthur Eggert explores where the world finds truth and where we as Christians should look for religious truth (p. 10).

Finding the truth and keeping it for ourselves is not what our Savior commanded. He wants us to shine the light into all nations. Pastor Dan Schroeder explores more about Jesus our Light on our back page.

Julie Wietzke



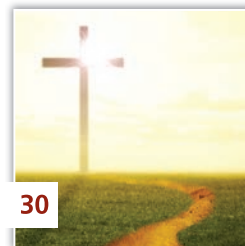
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Interactive Bible study

Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest:
Smells better than dinner



ONLINE QUESTION

Here's a question that came into the online Questions & Answers on the WELS website, wels.net.

My question concerns the Bible study "Public ministers of the gospel are called to serve" found on page 35 of the November 2017 issue of *Forward in Christ*. The phrase "truly Lutheran public ministers" is used repeatedly. Would dropping "truly Lutheran" from this phrase change the lesson learned from the Bible study? Thanks!

Prof. Joel Otto, the author of the Bible study, responds: "The intent of saying 'truly Lutheran' is to point out that some distinctly Lutheran doctrinal emphases make for a distinctly Lutheran public ministry that recognizes that public ministers of the gospel are divinely and properly called to serve God's people with the Word and sacraments. We believe, teach, and confess what the Bible says, that the Word and sacraments are the means by which the Spirit creates and nurtures faith in Christ. Most other Christian churches either do not believe this or do not emphasize this. That affects how they view the purpose of spiritual leaders in the church. To be a 'truly Lutheran' pastor is to understand that the focus of his ministry is to 'proclaim the Word faithfully and administer the sacraments rightly.' Dropping 'truly Lutheran' wouldn't necessarily change the lesson learned from

Through my Bible in 3 years

Read or listen online at wels.net/bible3.

JANUARY 2018

- | | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1. 2 Corinthians 6:11–7:16 | 12. Mic. 6:1–7:6 | 23. Tit. 3 |
| 2. 2 Cor. 8:1–15 | 13. Mic. 7:7–20 | 24. 2 Timothy 1 |
| 3. 2 Cor. 8:16–9:15 | 14. 1 Timothy 1 | 25. 2 Tim. 2 |
| 4. 2 Cor. 10 | 15. 1 Tim. 2 | 26. 2 Tim. 3 |
| 5. 2 Cor. 11:1–21a | 16. 1 Tim. 3:1–13 | 27. 2 Tim. 4 |
| 6. 2 Cor. 11:21b–12:10 | 17. 1 Tim. 3:14–4:5 | 28. Leviticus 1 |
| 7. 2 Cor. 12:11–21 | 18. 1 Tim. 4:6–16 | 29. Lev. 2 & 3 |
| 8. 2 Cor. 13 | 19. 1 Tim. 5:1–6:2 | 30. Lev. 4:1–6:7 |
| 9. Micah 1 & 2 | 20. 1 Tim. 6:3–21 | 31. Lev. 6:8–7:38 |
| 10. Mic. 3:1–4:7 | 21. Titus 1 | |
| 11. Mic. 4:8–5:15 | 22. Tit. 2 | |

the Bible study, but it wouldn't fit the overall theme of the series and it would miss the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the Lutheran public ministry."

DON'T KEEP YOUR MAGAZINE!

In the November issue you wanted to know how we share our copies of *Forward in Christ*. The church I used to go to ended up closing down due to lack of attendance. It was an Assembly of God Church. I belong to the Lutheran church, Rock of Ages in Madison, Tennessee, since May of this year. I always give my used copy of the magazine to an elderly friend of mine who attended the other church with me and has not yet found a church home. She is always asking when she can get another copy of the magazine: "Are you done with this month's copy yet?" LOL. So I thought I would share that. She said the articles are so rich with scriptural truth; she truly enjoys reading it!

Keleen Carlson
Hendersonville, Tennessee

FEELING NEEDED

I want to thank Pastor Treptow for his well-written article on feeling needed [Nov. 2017]. As a husband, father, church member, and case manager, I definitely know both the feelings of being needed and not needed. It's won-

derful when I feel useful and appreciated, but downright frustrating and depressing when I don't. That's why I especially enjoyed the part where Pastor Treptow spoke of being needed even by people who think they don't need you. Disengaging from these type of people and just sitting nicely in my own comfortable corner of the couch or office—as I am often tempted to do at times—is simply not the answer. Compassion is. It's not, though, focusing on my own feelings of compassion, which may or may not be there because of my sinful nature. Rather, as the love of most will grow colder in these last days, my eyes continually go straight to Christ and his compassion, mercy, and grace shown to me on the cross. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Todd Rausch
Waukesha, 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*.

Confident and persistent prayer

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. Luke 11:9

Daniel J. Habben

I think Jesus made a mistake.

It just doesn't seem that his promise in Luke 11:9 is true. I've asked, I've sought, I've pounded on the door to God's heavenly treasure room, but I haven't always received what I wanted.

GETTING WHAT WE NEED

How are we to understand this promise about prayer? In the short parable before the verse, Jesus describes a man who received an unexpected midnight visitor. He had no food to offer this visitor, so he went to his neighbor to beg for provisions.

Knowing that the neighbor represents God, how would you have written the ending to the parable? Would the neighbor in your version of the story have whipped up an omelette with all the fixings? Would he have insisted on personally hosting the unexpected visitor? Isn't that what we want God to do—to put to bed all our problems? Instead, the neighbor in the parable told his friend to go away! Are we supposed to think of our heavenly Father as a grumpy neighbor who won't help?

But Jesus doesn't make mistakes. The parable doesn't end there. One key to understanding this parable is to remember that Jesus never promised to give us whatever we ask for. He said that God would give us whatever we need. In the parable, the man boldly asked. As a result of the man's bold asking and knocking, Jesus said his neighbor gave him just as much as he needed.

DEALING WITH THE UNEXPECTED VISITOR

Unlike the grumpy neighbor's first response in the parable, God delights to hear us knocking at his door. And he loves to answer us in just the right way. But what if I've persistently prayed for financial stability only to have my car break down? That "unexpected visitor"



makes me realize just how ill-prepared I am to handle life's trials on my own. It sends me running to my loving Father, my heavenly neighbor who can supply all my needs. If I ever doubt his willingness to help me, I need only consider the cross. It is God's perfect answer to the problem of my sin: his son, Jesus.

God delights to hear us knocking at his door.

Jesus himself knows what it's like to deal with a "midnight visitor." Maybe it was around midnight when he was on his knees in the Garden of Gethsemane praying that God would remove the cup of suffering he was about to endure. Jesus was persistent in that prayer, asking three times for it to be removed. But each time he also added, "Not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Jesus was confident that his Father knew what was best. And his Father did provide what Jesus needed.

He gave Jesus the strength to finish his work of earning salvation for a world full of sinners.

God may not rescue you from your financial mess in quite the manner you prayed for, but he will give you the calm to handle the crisis. If your midnight visitor is a difficult coworker or your own grim diagnosis, God may not deliver you from those situations by making them suddenly disappear. But he will give you enough strength and patience and peace each day to handle your hardships.

So keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking. The door to God's heart is open to you. He'll always give you what you need.

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

Note: The artwork is a painting called "Midnight visitor." It features Luke 11:9 in Japanese: Motome. Sagase. Tatakae. (Ask. Seek. Knock.)



Mark Schweden

It's not demographics and statistics that should be our focus and interest. Our interest should be in the souls that have been bought by the blood of Christ.

Souls, not statistics

It's January, and that means WELS congregations have tabulated and submitted their statistics for 2017. Those statistics track membership, worship attendance, baptisms, confirmations, members joining and leaving, as well as congregational finances.

It is no secret that total membership in our synod, both baptized and confirmed, has been on a slow but steady decline for more than a decade. A good part of that decline can be attributed to simple demographics, particularly in terms of the number of infant baptisms. WELS mirrors the trend in our society in which young people are marrying at a later age and having fewer children.

Even though WELS membership has declined, our synod has not experienced the large percentage losses of other Christian denominations. We are thankful for that. But the fact that our losses are not as great as others does not remove the concern about the downward trend.

Pastor Jon Hein, director of WELS Commission on Congregational Counseling, has prepared a detailed study of WELS membership trends. In addition to demographic information, the study addresses the "graying" of our synod, the number of adult confirmations, and the reasons why some leave our synod. Last summer he presented at the synod convention and outlined plans to help our congregations address these challenges.

Congregations will be given guidance and resources in many areas as they carry out their work of proclaiming the saving gospel. The various commissions of WELS Congregational Services will be working with congregations to help them plan for the future in a way that will best serve God's kingdom.

Three areas to be addressed seem to stand out:

- First, demographic changes have brought challenges to many of our rural congregations in the upper Midwest. Added to the fact that there are few young people to begin with, a growing number of young adults in

rural congregations are leaving for education and work elsewhere. With decreasing membership, those congregations are finding it increasingly challenging to maintain their ministry.

- Second, the matter of members leaving congregations for various reasons will be addressed. WELS has always experienced this to some degree. Our examination of membership trends leads us to recommit ourselves to addressing this problem. It has always been the case that the greatest number of membership losses occurs with young adults in the years after confirmation. We are convinced that there are many things that congregations and parents can do to keep their young adults connected to and involved with congregational life.

Other "backdoor losses" occur when church members stray from regular worship and reception of the Lord's Supper or when they are attracted to other churches outside of our fellowship. Congregations will be encouraged to take steps to address these losses.

- Finally, congregations will be encouraged to mobilize their members to become even more active in bringing the unchurched to their congregations to hear the saving gospel. Only with the blessing of God can we reverse our membership decline. Currently, it takes about 80 WELS members to produce one adult confirmand. If that could be improved to having one confirmand produced by 40, the downward trend in our synod membership would be reversed.

In the end, it's not demographics and statistics that should be our focus and interest. Our interest should be in the souls that have been bought by the blood of Christ and in remaining faithful to holding onto and proclaiming the message of the gospel. As we address the challenges together, we look to God for the blessings that only he can give.

Learn more about Pastor Jon Hein's study at wels.net/ccs.

Light for our path

Since Jesus has crushed Satan's head (Genesis 3:15), doesn't that mean Satan has been rendered powerless?

James F. Pope

Your question leads us back to the Garden of Eden where God prophesied the defeat of Satan. The answer to your question takes us on a journey to Holy Week and the Last Day.

CRUSHED BY THE RISEN CHRIST

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, the Creator did not remain silent. He disclosed sin's consequences, but then he revealed himself as their Savior-God. What is fascinating is that God promised a Savior to Adam and Eve while addressing Satan. God uttered the words of Genesis 3:15 to Satan, but he delivered them especially for the benefit of Adam and Eve and all their descendants.

God announced that from that moment on there would be animosity between his followers and those who are on the side of Satan. God then declared that one of Eve's offspring, the promised Messiah, would crush Satan's head. Keep in mind that Satan is a spirit being, a fallen angel, having no body of flesh and bones. Because Satan does not have a physical head capable of being crushed, God's promise pointed to a crushing blow to the power of Satan, symbolized by his head. Jesus delivered such a blow when he died on the cross and proclaimed, "It is finished" (John 19:30). He confirmed the devil's defeat when he rose triumphantly from the dead and then descended into hell to demonstrate to Satan who had won the battle between them (1 Peter 3:18-20).

Does this mean that Satan has been rendered powerless? No, but the day is coming when that will be the case.

BANISHED BY THE POWERFUL JUDGE

What we can say from Scripture is that Satan is presently a defeated enemy of God.

While he cannot do whatever he wants (Revelation 20:3), he retains the ability to tempt people. His goal is to prevent peo-

ple from coming to saving faith in Jesus and to rob Christians of their faith. Satan goes about his work with a sense of urgency because "he knows that his time is short" (Revelation 12:12). Only God knows when the Last Day will take place, but Satan is keenly aware that the time is approaching when he will lose all influence. So, until that time, he is on a mission of spiritual destruction.

On the Last Day, all his activity will cease. Jesus Christ, the King of kings and judge of all people (Matthew 25:31-46), will banish Satan and his minions to hell forever (Revelation 20:10). Never again will Satan be able to bother Christians.

As you and I await that glorious day, we recognize that Satan remains a dangerous enemy. Scripture does not portray Satan as a harmless kitten but as a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8). On our own, we are no match for Satan (Ephesians 6:12), but with God on our side, Satan is outmatched.

While the historic Reformation anniversary has come and gone, the truths that the Reformation restored and emphasized remain. "Scripture alone" is the source and foundation of our faith, and Scripture is our powerful weapon against Satan. "This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none. He's judged; the deed is done! One little word can fell him" (*Christian Worship* 200:3). While we wait for Satan to be rendered completely powerless on the Last Day, we daily use God's Word to send him reeling in defeat.

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

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

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

Psalm 119:105



WHAT IS truth?

One way to seek truth is to think through human experience and knowledge and use our reason to find it. Arthur A. Eggert

Pilate was not looking for a reply when he asked Jesus, “What is truth?” (John 18:38). He was scoffing at the idea that this lowly Galilean might actually have the correct view of the world. Pilate could consult numerous schools of philosophy about the definition of truth, and he had plenty who appeared before him who were willing to twist any situation to gain his favor. Pilate had heard it all, and he was cynical. We can deride him for his attitude, but his question still deserves an answer for our sakes, if not for his.

THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

If we think about it, however, formulating a satisfactory definition of truth is not easy. A former United States

Supreme Court justice said, “I can’t define pornography, but I sure know it when I see it.” Many people feel the same way about truth; they think they can recognize it when they encounter it, but its precise definition eludes them. For example, many courts require people to swear “to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” Unfortunately, if one does not have a reliable definition of truth, one cannot avoid being deceived by false statements that only have the appearance of truth.

We can perhaps understand the issue better if we consider a few examples. A major Russian newspaper is called *Pravda*, which means “truth.” Most people would not agree that everything printed in *Pravda* is true. In fact, it has

often been used as a propaganda tool to distort the truth. In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote that “we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are . . .” Many Americans are willing to believe Jefferson’s words, even though his standard of truth was murky at best. Jefferson was not a Christian and believed that truth was formed directly in the human mind. Because the Bible did not meet his standard of truth, he edited it with a scissors, producing what is called the Jefferson Bible.

In searching for the truth, we engage in a process called reasoning. There are two components to reasoning: what we start with and what we get as the product of our reasoning. We call what we

biblical? mathematical?

start with “assumptions,” “premises,” or “propositions.” We call what we end up with “conclusions” or “consequents.” In order to get truth from the reasoning process, the process must be “sound,” that is, the assumptions or premises must be true (well-grounded) and the path of argument between premises and conclusion must be free of inconsistencies (valid). But we cannot take it for granted that what is offered up as “truth” these days is either well-grounded or the result of valid reasoning.

Politicians, editorialists, humanists, religious gurus, and others whom we see and hear in the media are, in effect, philosophers, and their statements are often inaccurate abstractions or overstatements of what is known. These speakers are not so much interested in convincing us with evidence as they are hoping to strike an emotional chord that will cause us to respond in the way they desire. This is called “philosophical reasoning” because the speaker is trying to get us to accept his philosophy and, therefore, the truthfulness, even without presenting well-grounded evidence or valid reasoning.

WELL-KNOWN PHILOSOPHERS’ VERSIONS OF TRUTH

Philosophical reasoning is particularly dangerous when applied to religious and moral matters.

Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism, claimed that emotions result in errors of judgment. The path to happiness for humans is, therefore, not to allow oneself to be controlled by desires for pleasure or fears of pain.

Epicurus, the founder of Epicureanism, taught that the happy life results from living in peace with one’s neighbors and avoiding fear and pain through a self-sufficient and self-indulgent life surrounded by friends.

Thomas Aquinas tried to prove the existence of God based on reason and the ordinary experiences of nature. He argued that everything that moves has a mover, so the first mover had to be God.

René Descartes said, “I think, therefore I am.” He then argued that the existence of God can be demonstrated philosophically, an assertion that most philosophers even at his time rejected.

John Locke claimed human nature is characterized by reason and tolerance. Believing that Christianity represented the highest form of religion, he tried to ground it in reason as presented in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*.

Voltaire argued that God existed and created the universe but that he does not meddle in its operation. This con-

The Christian must
reject rather than
be taken in by the
“cleverly devised stories”
(2 Peter 1:16) that such
philosophers spin.

cept of deism became popular among the leaders of the American Revolution but led to Voltaire’s condemnation by the Roman Catholic Church.

David Hume said, “Reason is and ought only to be the slave of passions.” He rejected the idea of abstract moral principles given to man from a divine being.

Immanuel Kant argued that all our knowledge, including that of God, comes from experience, but we must be active reasoners to grasp the truth because it would not come to us in a passive manner.

Karl Marx proclaimed that religion is a form of false consciousness through which people delude themselves into accepting less than what they deserve from society. He maintained that religion effectively drugs people.

Friedrich Nietzsche wrote that religion had its roots in weakness and sickness

and serves as a means to keep power away from the strong and healthy. He believed that God is not the source of morality.

UNCERTAIN VS. CERTAIN TRUTH

While numerous other philosophers could be cited, it is clear that philosophical ideas of truth always come from within the philosophers themselves, from their hearts, which the Lord describes in Jeremiah as “deceitful above all things and beyond cure” (17:9). It is therefore not surprising that the ideas of various philosophers do not agree with one another, for they are built on egocentric foundations. The Christian must reject rather than be taken in by the “cleverly devised stories” (2 Peter 1:16) that such philosophers spin.

Sadly, despite its inherent lack of soundness, philosophical reasoning is widely used in searching for the truth by most people today because it gives them a feeling of power to proclaim their own ideas of truth without having to support it with verifiable evidence.

But if all of the above searchers for truth fail to find truth with their use of philosophical reasoning, how and where should we look for truth with the certainty of finding it? The Bible uses the word *truth* in different ways. Consider three statements of Jesus in John’s gospel. In 8:32, the word *truth* is used to designate knowledge: “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” In 17:17, it includes the whole revelation of God: “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” In 14:6, Jesus equates himself to truth: “I am the way and the truth and the life.” We will return to the biblical concepts of truth later in this series.

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

This is the first 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 want our tunes to carry Christ-centered texts. They need to touch not only our emotions but also our minds.

Aaron L. Christie

It was the season for high school musicals. The long months of winter rehearsals were finally at an end. The curtains cracked open for a packed house to a production of *The King and I*. After three hours of sights and sounds, the senses were most certainly satiated—or saturated!

One of the songs that always received thunderous applause was “I Whistle a Happy Tune.” Governess Leonowens whistled her happy tune to her son Louis when they arrived in Siam fearful of their future in a new home in an exotic country. The lyrics aren’t exactly Shakespeare, but the tune certainly is sunny.

Thirty years later, I can still hear the whistling.

MORE THAN A TIN-WHISTLE HYMNODY


When it comes to the tunes and harmonic settings of the hymns in *Christian Worship* (CW), people haven’t always whistled for joy. As it turns out, one person’s “whistler” is another person’s “groaner.” The Hymnal Committee has received significant feedback on the musical elements of the project.

Some comments come from trained musicians with significant experience. Other comments come from brothers and sisters without musical training. Their comments often involve the difficulty of some hymn tunes.

On the other hand, even if the thought is rarely stated, each comment also comes with a personal preference attached. There are 375,000 WELS members who know what they like and like what they know. And here we face a musical temptation. We need to be wary of stopping with what we like and know. Worse yet, we need to be careful of projecting our preferences on a denomination of people.

Dr. Martin Franzmann pokes this tendency in the eye: “Another argument might be called the ‘tin whistle’ argument. Its essence is something like this: ‘After all, a man can make music on a tin whistle to the glory of God, and God will be pleased to hear it.’ True, true, true—if God has given him nothing but a tin whistle; but God has given us so infinitely much more. When He has given us all the instruments under heaven with which to sing His praises, then the tin whistle is no longer humility but a perverse sort of pride” (*Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets*, p. 92). What is true about tin whistles and trumpets is also true about the notes that those instruments play.

God has given WELS much more than a tin-whistle hymnody. He’s given us



two thousand years of singing the Savior's story! What does Christian music sound like? It sounds like Gregorian chant ("Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel," CW 23, the most sung hymn in WELS according to surveys!), the folk music of Europe (CW 369) and America (CW 379), the cathedrals of England (CW 594), and the mission chapels of Africa (*Christian Worship: Supplement* 719). It sounds like the chorales of Luther (CW 200). Our music is as old as the psalms and as recent as tunes and settings composed this year. In short, the Holy Spirit does not create Christian monotones!

MUSIC TO BRING CHRIST-CENTERED TEXTS

Unlike Governess Leonowens, it is not enough for confessional Lutherans to whistle happy tunes to convince themselves that they aren't afraid. Instead, we want our tunes to carry Christ-centered texts that drive out fear. Our tunes need to touch not only our emotions but also our minds. Lutheran tunes are often less, so that hymn texts may be more.

This ministerial view of music is at least as old as the ancient church father St. Augustine: "Without committing myself to an irrevocable opinion, I am inclined to approve the custom of singing in church, in order that by indulging the ears weaker spirits may be inspired with feelings of devotion. Yet when I find the singing itself more moving than the truth which it conveys, I confess that this is a grievous sin, and at those times I would prefer not to hear the singer" (*Evening in the Palace of Reason: Bach Meets Frederick the Great in the Age of the Enlightenment*, p. 49).

In other words, is this a piece of music that carries the gospel to my heart and thereby leads me to the heart of Jesus, or does it lead me to the music? Both are emotional experiences. Only one, however, is a Christian worship expe-

rience. Music must be content to remain the text's servant, never the text's master.

TUNES THAT TOUCH THE HEART

Our tunes are also meant to serve hymn singers. This does not mean that every tune will be immediately accessible. Why? Because music that is immediately accessible often makes for music that is quickly expendable. No one had to teach children born in the '60s and '70s the theme song of *Gilligan's Island*. Its music is immediately accessible. We had to work a bit, however, to learn the melody of the national anthem. Thirty years from now, the national anthem will still be taught and sung. The theme song of *Gilligan's Island* will remain a childhood curiosity and most likely be forgotten.

Our tunes also serve singers by giving sound to the entire panoply of human emotions. We grieve over our sins (CW 305) and rejoice in God's forgiveness in Christ (CW 390). We struggle with the ever-present difficulties in life (CW 444) and rejoice that in Christ we have the ultimate victory (CW 428). There are times in life when we are called on to stand up for Jesus (CW 474) and fight the good fight of faith (CW 457). There are other times where it is best to be still and know that our Lord is God (CW 415). Some tunes are happy, others sad; some tunes lead to grieving, others to rejoicing. Why? Because all of these emotions—and many more—are felt by the family of believers this side of heaven. Tunes that are only and always light and happy can lead to a Leonowens-esque view of the Christian life—all happy, all the time. The book of Psalms puts the whole spectrum of human emotions on our hearts and lips.

Thank God that Lutheran music is never an exercise in "whistling past the graveyard." Instead, we sing the gospel of the One who conquered the graveyard. Our music is never an ef-

fort in happy-sounding self-deception; instead, it serves as a vehicle for the gospel. God has blessed us with so many wonderful sounds through the centuries. Our century and our new hymnal will be no exception!

Aaron Christie, chairman of the Hymnody Committee of the WELS Hymnal Project, is pastor at Trinity, Waukesha, Wisconsin.

This is the seventh 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.

Through questions and the Word, one man finds his final church home.

Gabriella Moline

September 11 is a somber day for many people in the United States. But September 11, 2016, gave Greg Porter something to celebrate. He describes this date as one of the happiest days of his life. On that day Porter officially became a member of Abiding Grace in Covington, Ga., the place where he finally ended his search for peace and truth.

ASKING QUESTIONS

For the first 45 years of his life, Porter was a member of the Baptist church. He grew up in a house with strong Christian ideals and actively participated in his congregation. But after studying certain passages in the Bible, Porter saw some issues with the doctrine being taught in the Baptist church.

One of its central teachings is that if a person was baptized as a baby or was not fully submerged during his or her baptism, then the person must be re-baptized. That troubled Porter. He turned to the Bible for answers. When he read Ephesians 4:5, he discovered that Paul says there is only “one baptism.” Then looking at Matthew 28:19,

he found that Jesus said that we should baptize all nations. That includes babies.

In addition to the teachings on Baptism, Porter also found issues with the Baptist teaching on Holy Communion. For the Baptist church, the bread and wine are only symbols of the body and blood of Christ. They are not truly the body and blood of Christ.

Porter wanted to find a church that addressed his questions and taught what the Bible taught. He looked at Lutheran churches, but he was not sure about the theological differences between the many different denominations. At first he avoided Lutheran churches. But he saw that Catholicism only had one branch. There were no different denominations, so Porter started attending a Catholic Church.

He said it “started off well,” but over time he developed new questions about some of the Roman Catholic teachings. These included the Catholic Church’s stance on divorce, as well as certain rules on Holy Communion. Porter attended the church for eight years but could not reconcile these issues. In addition, he felt uneasy that the Catholic Church made salvation so difficult. Instead of saying that Jesus paid for all sins on the cross, Catholics still had to do things to undo their sins and failings.

FINDING ANSWERS

Over the years, Porter received cards in the mail from Abiding Grace Lutheran Church, inviting him and his family to attend its Fall Festival, an annual event featuring lunch, games, and a worship concert. In 2015, he finally decided to attend the event.

“I always thought, *These look like nice people*,” Porter says. “So I thought I would go and check it out. There would be other people there, so they wouldn’t know I was visiting.”

During the worship portion, Porter filled out the church’s friendship register, where he checked off that he would *not* be interested in a visit from the pastor.

“He didn’t listen,” Porter shares with a laugh. “He came to the house to visit anyway.”

But Porter is glad that Jonathan Scharf, pastor at Abiding Grace, ignored the card. This visit began Porter’s journey in the Lutheran faith. He soon began attending weekly Bible information classes with Scharf to learn more about Lutheran doctrine. Porter found that there was not enough time in the classes for all his questions. He wanted to speak more with Scharf, so he asked to meet with him outside of class.

“I wanted to make sure that when I

Confessions OF FAITH



made this change that it would be the last change that I ever made,” he says.

So Porter met with Scharf before class each week at the Waffle House for breakfast to discuss privately more about the Bible. Porter had a hunger to learn, reading about the congregation and its teachings on its website. Scharf answered any of his questions that came up, giving him more materials and passages to read. Their discussions ranged from creation versus evolution to Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

“He had a lot of questions, realizing that a lot of the different teachings he had heard in his previous churches weren’t lining up with Scripture,” Scharf says.

Porter says Scharf was extremely patient in answering all his questions. “He has a way of explaining the Bible in a way that no one else has been able to.”

During one of their breakfast sessions, Scharf loaned Porter his *Lutheran Confessions*, a collection of confessions written by Martin Luther and others during the time of the Reformation. The collection is not a small pamphlet, but a large heavy textbook. Within the week, Porter had read the entire book and had passages picked out that he wanted to talk about. Scharf was

amazed at Porter’s passion and devotion for God’s Word, even while balancing a full-time job and a family.

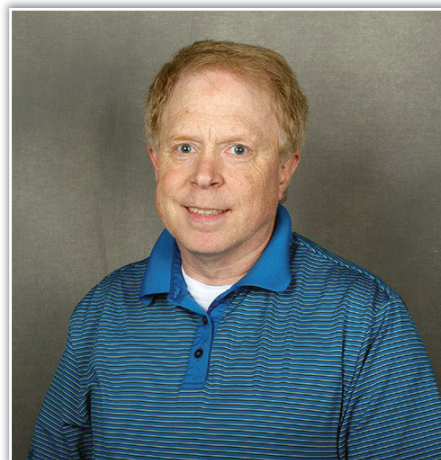
“He has this insatiable desire to keep learning and is excited to have an opportunity to learn and grow in God’s Word,” says Scharf.

Before joining Abiding Grace, Porter took several months to think and pray about becoming an official member. He had a lot to consider. He had to think through his early Baptist background and his current Roman Catholic membership. Was he sure he wanted to turn his life in a new direction? When September 11 finally came, Porter was ready to make his final change and become a Lutheran.

STILL LEARNING TODAY

Today, Porter still has his enthusiastic drive to learn more about the Bible. In addition to attending church on Sundays, he also listens to sermons from other WELS pastors and reads *Meditations* and *Time of Grace* devotions.

Scharf and Porter still meet regularly, never running out of new topics to discuss. They also attended the National Worship Conference in Kenosha, Wis., together this past summer. Porter is heavily involved in Abiding Grace, volunteering to help whenever he can and participating in Bible studies and choir.



Greg Porter

“He has really jumped in anywhere there has been a request or opportunity,” Scharf says.

Porter reflects that becoming a Lutheran and finding answers through the Bible has been a great comfort in his life. He knows that the Bible is the final authority, providing clarity to all of life’s questions.

“It gives me a type of freedom knowing that you don’t have to jump through any hoops,” he says. “You’re free in the truth that Jesus gave us.”

Gabriella Moline is a member at Zion, Crete, Illinois.



heart to heart
parent conversations

I always feel like a loser when New Year's rolls around. Friends and family are busy making resolutions, and I just don't. When asked what my resolutions are for the new year, I usually mumble a feeble, "I don't have any."

It's not that I'm anti-resolution. I think I'm just anti-failure—and most New Year's resolutions seem ready-made for failure. The parents writing Heart to heart's column this month really get at the heart of where I'm coming from. They put into words the way I've felt for years but could never express. So, read through their articles and resolve away! Or, perhaps even better, sit down with your family and create some realistic goals that you can work on achieving with support from one another.

Nicole Balza

**Join the
conversation!**

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

SHOULD WE ENCOURAGE OUR KIDS TO MAKE RESOLUTIONS?

It's a running joke every January at the fitness club I attend. One of the "regulars" looks around the packed club and grouses, "Why are there so many people here?" Someone else inevitably replies, "Just wait until February."

It's so true. If you search online for the "top ten broken New Year's resolutions," losing weight and getting fit is number one. Another online statistic reports that about only eight percent of people who make New Year's resolutions keep them. Ouch. I'm no scientist, but attempting something repeatedly with such low probability of success seems a little futile.

So why do we even bother to make New Year's resolutions? Maybe it's human nature to want a fresh start in a new year. Maybe it's in response to eating way too many Christmas cookies and not wanting to buy bigger pants. Whatever it is, it's also a part of human nature to try—and sometimes fail—at making lasting, positive changes in our lives.

So should we even try? And should we encourage our children to set New Year's resolutions? **I think that everyone needs some achievable, tangible goals, even if they**

I've never liked the term *resolution*. It has an ugly connotation in my mind of failed attempts at weight loss and unsustainable, temporary life changes. **For several years now, my husband and I have spent New Year's Eve setting goals rather than resolutions for the coming year.** We record them on one of our phones and keep each other in check on achieving those goals. This process is meant to be fun more than anything—a chance to learn a new skill or shave a few minutes off a race time, but they can also be geared toward strengthening our faith life, both personally and as a family.

Our kids are often a part of this process, more our daughter than our young son (who would rather just snitch leftover

"Hudson, my man! Let's talk about the club we're starting."

Hudson is my eight-year-old grandson. This month, Hudson and I are founding a photography club.

"I have ideas about how to make sure our club doesn't fizzle out," I say. "Want to hear them?"

"Sure."

I show him the note app on my phone. "I have seven suggestions. Tell me what you think. **The first is that we promise each other to keep our club going.** Can we shake on that?"

Hudson slaps his hand into mine. We shake hands like we are making a million-dollar deal.

"The second thing is to tell others about our club. It will be harder to quit if others know we're doing this. Better yet, we can give permission to one or two people to encourage us. I'm going to tell Nana. Whom will you tell?"

aren't written in red pen on January 1 on our calendars. But here are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Resolutions should be realistic, measurable, and tackled in manageable chunks.** Instead of vowing, "I am going to lose 50 pounds this year!" perhaps start with: "I am going to commit to walking for 30 minutes, three times per week." And who doesn't want to commit to spending more time in God's Word? So, if "I am going to read through my entire Bible this year" seems too daunting, try: "I am going to find a manageable Bible reading plan and read my Bible for 10 minutes each day."
- **Accountability can help us make positive changes in our lives.** There are times my husband has had to pull me, groaning and griping, off the couch to get me to exercise. There are times I've done the same for him. Families are great accountability groups. Parents, try sitting down with your kids and asking them for three realistic, measurable goals for the new year. Ask: What steps do you need to take to achieve these? How can I help you stick to these goals? Then, parents, you do the same. Set goals for your-

selves, share them with your kids, and ask them to keep you accountable. Pray as a family for God to bless your efforts and give you strength to achieve your goals. And don't forget to celebrate every little victory along the way.

- **Ask God's forgiveness—and forgive yourself—when you stumble.** We're human. We fail every day. What a comfort it is having a loving God who forgives our failures through the blood of his Son, Jesus!

Ultimately, remember that even the best resolutions can fail. We can plan and try, but some things are beyond our control. Stuff happens. Remember, "In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps" (Proverbs 16:9). Some things we want just aren't in God's plan for our lives, and that's okay. Knowing that our loving God already has the entirety of our lives mapped out in his perfect plan is a huge comfort to us—and to our kids.

Ann Jahns and her husband, Thad, have three sons and a recently emptied nest.



Christmas cookies while the grown-ups are distracted!). We encourage Anna to set goals for herself as well. Anything from learning a new skill to reading the Bible daily to training for a race.

When I think of goals versus resolutions, one thing stands out to me. Resolutions tend to be an immediate, often dramatic change in behavior, while goals are achievable, eventual changes that can be measured. Teaching our kids to work toward goals will be a huge help to them as they grow in their personal and professional lives, and we're (hopefully) showing them that it's not a scary process to tackle.

Setting goals for personal change can be a good thing, if we don't allow it to become an idol for ourselves.

I believe involving our kids in our tradition allows them to see their parents working toward—and often achieving—fun and reasonable accomplishments. It also allows them to see us struggle or fail occasionally. We can pray about our progress together. We can work together on spiritual goals like family devotion time or family service projects. Working toward and achieving goals as a family and supporting each other in our personal goals has been a wonderful bonding experience for our family—something we all look forward to each year.

Kerry Ognenoff and her husband, Andy, have two young children—nine-year-old Anna and five-year-old Henry.



His face squinches in thought. "Mom and Dad."

"Good choice. They'll want to help."

"Here's the third thing. **We can tell Jesus we're doing this and ask for his help.** Would you be willing to pray about our club?"

Hudson nods his commitment.

"The next thing we can do is schedule our club meetings. If I don't put a meeting on my calendar, I probably won't have time for it. Would the second Saturday of each month work for you?" Hudson looks uncertain. "Let's ask your parents if that would be okay."

"Number five: we need a sign to remind us. Something for my office. Something for your room. Would you make us each a sign? Maybe it could say, 'Remember the photography club.'"

"I could do that, I guess," he answers. "I could draw with a bunch of colors so we won't miss seeing it."

"That sounds great. Thank you."

"Number six is that we reward ourselves for sticking to our commitment. What if we go to Culvers for a frozen custard cone in July?"

"Yes. That would be cool!"

"Okay. I have one more idea to help us keep our New Year's resolution. **Let's decide we will do our photography club first of all to thank Jesus for loving us.** Does that make sense?"

Hudson ponders for a moment. "Yes, it does," he says.

"Papa, I can't wait to start our club. It's going to be fun."

"It will, Hudson. Let's hug on it."

James Aderman and his wife, Sharon, raised three daughters and are now enjoying their eight grandchildren.



Our heavenly homecoming

We long for the glory of heaven, though we live as sinners in a sinful world.

James D. Roecker

Homecoming is a big deal for college campuses across the country. There is usually a theme associated with a weeklong celebration of school pride. Parades and football games are hallmarks. Alumni are welcomed back to their college campus with open arms. Homecoming can be the perfect opportunity to reconnect to the alma mater and reflect on the good old days.

This past year, UW–Stevens Point celebrated homecoming under the theme “Blast Through the Past.” Stevens Point residents were invited to travel through the decades with the Pointer community. Some of the student activities for the week included a 1950s photo scavenger hunt and a trivia night focused on the 1990s. Each weekday event provided the opportunity to reflect on a specific decade of the past along with all its cultural impact and influence.

As one year ends and a new year begins, the church will do some reflecting of its own. Many churches have the tradition in New Year’s Eve services of reading the names of those congregation members who in the past year have departed this life to be with Jesus. Family members may continue to mourn such a loss, yet they have comfort because Jesus has triumphed over death and sin.

John, in Revelation, describes heaven this way: “‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:4). The homecoming celebration of heaven that he has won for you and me will be majestic and marvelous. Believers across the ages will be united in the glory of God’s heaven. What an amazing thing to look forward to! What comfort comes to Christians who fix their eyes heavenward toward their heavenly home!

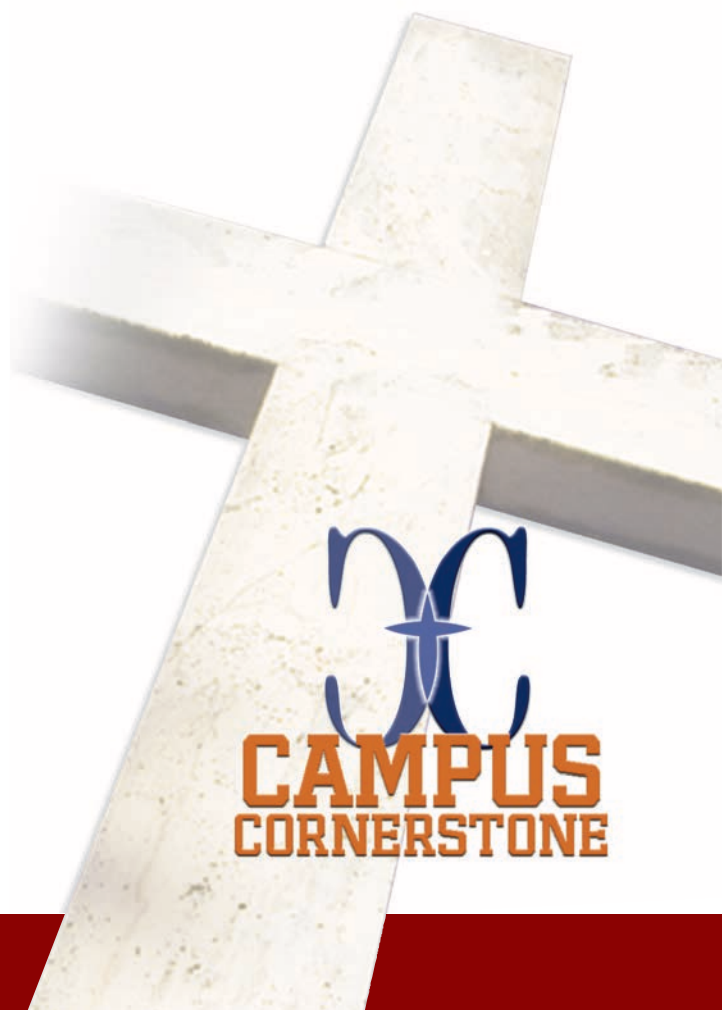
But we have trouble holding on to that vision. So much in this world distracts us: anxiety, grief, loss, and trials. The college experience brings its own distinct challenges and struggles. Really, each season of life is unique and brings different struggles and temptations that lead to fixing our eyes on things or solutions other than God. We find ourselves enslaved by our sin.

None of us can stand confidently before a righteous and holy God with the corruption of sin we have at our core. Because of it, God threatens to bar us from his heavenly home. In humble repentance we fall on our knees at the cross of Christ. The Holy Spirit’s work of faith in our hearts clings to that cross, a source of comfort and confidence. In Christ we have freedom from sin.

Paul encouraged the Christians in Galatia this way: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1). God, through his Son, has lavished his grace and love on the world. Through faith we receive God’s blessings: forgiveness and new life. Each of us has a line in God’s book of life with our name on it.

Our life’s journey continues so long as God sees fit. We long for the glory of heaven though we live as sinners in a sinful world. Our feelings and frustrations will fluctuate and change with each new day of grace God gives us. We can rejoice in our Redeemer who never changes. We can be confident Christ will go all out for our heavenly homecoming celebration.

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



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Duquaine, Jeffrey, to Ascension, Escondido, Calif.
Herold, Daniel, to Glory to God, Tinley Park/Our Redeemer, Grant Park, Ill.
Heuer, Dean Preston, to First, Elkhorn, Wis.
Kruschel, Jonathan, to Good Shepherd, Holmen, Wis.
Petermann, Joel, to Zion, Torrance, Calif.
Schwerin, Richard, to St. John, Stillwater, Minn.
Seifert, Joel, to Beautiful Savior, Marietta, Ga.
Strobel, Nathan, to St. Paul, Muskego, Wis.
Stuebs, Joel, to St. Peter, Mishicot, Wis.
Thompson, Donald, to retirement
Wall, Steven, to St. John-St. Peter, Cleveland, Wis.
Weinrich, Stanley, to retirement
Wilke, Nathan, to Immanuel, Neillsville, Wis.

Teachers

Braun, William, to retirement
Kuchta, Jessica, to Crown of Life Christian Academy, Fort Atkinson, Wis.
Schmiege, Andrew, to Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis.

NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS AND PASTORS

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

COMING EVENTS

Young adult conference—Alive and Awake. Jan. 5–6. Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. Website, awakealive.com.
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, christianwomantoday.org.

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

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

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.

NAMES WANTED

Monroe, Wis.—WELS members or people living in the area. Nathan Strutz, pastorstrutz@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; csn@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

WELS ARCHIVES

The synod archives is looking for the following materials for donation: church histories; bulletins (from anniversary, installations, dedications, and other special events); church constitutions, bylaws, and other charter documents; Book of Sacred Acts; photographs, scrapbooks, and other visuals of your congregation's history; and more. For more information about materials to donate, call 414-256-3203. Website, wels.net/archives.

To schedule a tour of the WELS archives and visitors center, contact CMMtours@wels.net, 414-256-3200. Tours are available Monday through Friday during normal business hours.

MONTHLY MINISTRY MEDIA KIT

Each month WELS Communication Services provides images, PowerPoint slides, and reprintable bulletin blurbs to help share information about WELS ministry work with your congregation or school. Access information at cs.welsrc.net/ministry-media-kit.

FREE SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscribe to one or all of WELS newsletters and join more than 13,000 subscribers receiving free encouragements and news updates directly to their inbox. Subscriptions are also available for daily devotions and worship helps. Subscribe now at wels.net/subscribe.

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.

New movie focuses on outreach

Filming starts in January for the final movie in a series of four outreach movies that are a collaboration between WELS Commission on Evangelism, Northwestern Publishing House, WELS Multi-Language Publications, and Boettcher+Trinklein Television, Inc.

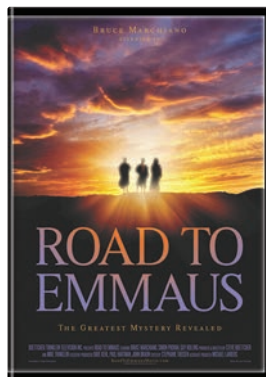
Mike Hintz, who recently retired as director of WELS Evangelism, says that while the first three movies—*Road to Emmaus*, *Come Follow Me*, and *My Son, My Savior*—focused on the life and ministry of Jesus, the final movie will follow the apostle Paul and his work in Philippi. “Our goal for this movie is to show in a dramatic way how the gospel is spread into the world following the command of Jesus and to show how it impacted people’s lives,” says Hintz, who continues to serve as a member of the movie production team.

The movie’s title, *To the Ends of the Earth*, is taken directly from Jesus’ command to his disciples at his Ascension: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The goal is to complete the movie by the end of summer 2018 in time for congregations to use the film and accompanying materials in the fall for a special mission emphasis Sunday.

Hintz says the movie would not be possible except for funding help from Church Mutual Insurance Company Foundation; WELS Foundation’s Shared Blessings donor advised fund; Multi-Language Publications; and gifts from groups, congregations, and individuals.

“In the end, the movie is to help us see that it continues to be a wonderful privilege for us to continue this work of sharing the Word so that many more can come to faith,” say Hintz.



DID YOU KNOW?

Road to Emmaus (2009), *Come Follow Me* (2013), and *My Son, My Savior* (2015), the first three movies in the outreach series, have . . .

- Had more than a million viewers through TV, DVDs, and online media.
- Had more than half a million DVDs distributed.
- Received critical acclaim from a number of Christian film groups.
- Been translated into a dozen different languages, including Spanish, French, Mandarin, and Nepali, and shown in at least 24 countries.
- Been downloaded more than 115,000 times in Spanish from academiacrismo.com.

All three movies are still available from Northwestern Publishing House, nph.net. Learn more about these movies at wels.net/evangelism.

Obituaries

Donald E. Gosdeck 1945–2017

Donald Gosdeck was born July 24, 1945, in Appleton, Wis. He died Aug. 10, 2017, in Findlay, Ohio.

A 1967 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he served at Trinity, Brillion, Wis.; Eastside, Madison, Wis.; and St. Stephen, Adrian, Mich.

He is survived by his wife, Kathy; 3 daughters; 1 stepdaughter; 1 stepson; 13 grandchildren; and 1 brother. He is preceded in death by his first wife, Geraldine, and one brother.

Janice I. Raasch 1927–2017

Janice Raasch (nee Kuester) was born Sept. 26, 1927. She died Sept. 6, 2017, in La Crosse, Wis.

A 1948 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at St. John, Neillsville, Wis.; Immanuel, Hadar, Neb.; First, La Crosse, Wis.; and Mt. Calvary, La Crosse, Wis.

She is survived by one son, one daughter, seven grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren. She is preceded in death by her husband, Raymond; one brother; one sister; two foster sons; and one foster grandchild.

Theodore J. Hartwig 1921–2017

Theodore Hartwig was born July 17, 1921, in Red Wing, Minn. He died Sept. 8, 2017, in New Ulm, Minn.

A 1947 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served St. Paul, Mound City, S.D.; Riverview, Appleton, Wis.; and (Dr.) Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

He is survived by 2 sons, 3 daughters, 23 grandchildren, and 43 great-grandchildren. He is preceded in

death by his wife, Lois; one daughter; one brother; and one sister.

Robert A. Bitter 1942–2017

Robert Bitter was born Nov. 21, 1942, in Millersville, Wis. He died Aug. 23, 2017, in Fond du Lac, Wis.

A 1968 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Immanuel, Neillsville, Wis.; St. Paul, Moline, Ill.; St. John, Saginaw, Mich.; St. Luke, Oakfield, Wis.; and Redeemer, Fond du Lac, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Janeth; 4 sons; 1 daughter; and 22 grandchildren.

Jan C. Eggert 1954–2017

Jan Eggert was born Aug. 23, 1954, in Manitowoc, Wis. He died Sept. 3, 2017.

A 1981 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served St. Paul, Appleton, Wis.; Immanuel, Oshkosh, Wis.; Christ the King, Tulsa, Okla.; Immanuel, De Pere, Wis.; and St. Paul, Greenleaf, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Sandra; two sons; two daughters; four grandchildren; one brother; and two sisters. He is preceded in death by his parents and one brother.

Patricia M. Tauscher 1951–2017

Patricia Tauscher (née Bauman) was born Aug. 24, 1951, in Leavenworth, Kan. She died Sept. 3, 2017, in Loveland, Colo.

A 1973 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at Garden Homes, Milwaukee, Wis.

She is survived by her husband, James; three daughters; two sons; ten grandchildren; one sister; one step-sister; and two brothers. She is preceded in death by her parents.

The MLS family reaches around the globe

For more than 30 years, Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS), Saginaw, Mich., has welcomed international students to its campus. This year, 16 international students are part of MLS's family, representing South Korea, China, Hong Kong, Germany, and Canada. These students come to MLS for a variety of reasons, but a few of them leave with more than they expected.

It's not uncommon for students in other countries to want to attend high school in the United States. It's an opportunity for these students to improve their English-language skills and experience a different culture. MLS, though, provides something more. All classes are taught in the light of God's Word; daily chapel services focus on Scripture; and students, faculty, staff, and host families reflect God's Word in their lives. The result? Many international students ask to be baptized or work through confirmation classes with Saginaw-area pastors. Some even find themselves called to serve in the public ministry and attend Martin Luther College to become full-time pastors and teachers.

Santiago Botero is one such student. Botero attended MLS in 2012. As a member of WELS' sister church in Colombia, Botero planned to become a doctor and wanted an international experience before he began his training.

Joanne Kohler, one of Botero's professors at MLS, says, "He progressed from a student who wanted to improve his English and experience the life of a student at a Lutheran high school in the US to a young man who wanted to serve his Lord in the public ministry."

After his graduation from MLS, Botero went on to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., and is now a teacher at Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D. His story is not unique. Several international students from MLS are now

serving as pastors and teachers, and others are currently studying at Martin Luther College. Many of those who do not pursue the public ministry return to their home countries to be leaders in their congregations there.

The benefits of MLS's international program are not one-sided. "Traditional students learn to accept others who are different from themselves,"



The Michigan Lutheran Seminary family includes international students from around the world. Pictured (from left): Jerry Yang (China), Peter Kim (South Korea), and Melody Wong (Hong Kong).

says Kohler. "In my experience, MLS students welcome students from all backgrounds, which may be why people talk about the 'MLS family.' What is more important, they learn that there is a world of people that needs to hear the gospel message."

Kelly Schoch, a piano instructor at MLS, agrees. Schoch has hosted 10 international students from MLS during the past 11 years. She notes, "The diversity of students at MLS helps our students understand ministry in the world. Our cultures make us unique, but our faith in our Savior makes us all one."

Opportunities to educate, reflect, and celebrate

The 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation offered many opportunities for educating people about Luther and his teachings, worshiping our Savior, and reaching out with the Word. Besides special worship services (pp. 24-27), here are just a few more ways churches, schools, and missions commemorated the anniversary:



St. Mark's Lutheran School, Watertown, Wis., held a celebration for its 255 students. Ten stations, each with a different focus on the Reformation, were set up for the students, interspersed with three separate group devotions in church. Students also received Reformation 500 T-shirts to wear.



On Oct. 1, 2017, the Seminary Chorus, Wisconsin Lutheran College Choir, and Lutheran Chorale of Milwaukee joined together to sing for a hymn festival at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., that featured many of the hymns Martin Luther wrote, composed, and edited.



With funding from Multi-Language Publications, churches in both Malawi and Zambia were able to print and distribute thousands of copies of the brochure "Martin Luther: Man of Faith" at rallies across the countries. Pictured is Riphath Matope, the Lutheran Church of Central Africa-Malawi Synod president, handing out brochures.



Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., held three campus competitions—an art contest (winner Kyla Schroeder pictured), a hymn writing contest, and a T-shirt design contest—on Reformation themes. The campus's Art in Ministry group also designed and organized a wall mural of the Luther seal, created with the fingerprints of MLC students, faculty, and staff (see photo on p. 3).



At a fall 2017 leadership workshop in South Asia, 75 men and women learned about the Lutheran Reformation. WELS' field coordinator says, "Many of the people coloring pictures have never held a crayon in their hands. I thought this was a way to 'cement' the meaning of Luther's seal into their minds."

District news

ARIZONA-CALIFORNIA

River of Life, Goodyear, Ariz., combined its fall festival with a grand opening service on Oct. 29, 2017. River of Life is a ministry of WELS Home Missions that is worshiping in a rented facility. More than 50 first-time guests worshiped at River of Life in 2017.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

NW—On Nov. 5, 2017, **Martin Luther, Oshkosh, Wis.**, celebrated its 100th anniversary. In the congregation's 100 years, it has recorded 1,852 baptisms, 1,573 confirmations, 887 marriages, and 827 burials.

SEW—On Nov. 6, 2017, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., celebrated the 40th anniversary in the pastoral ministry of **Prof. John Brenner**.

ARIZONA-CALIFORNIA



On Nov. 25, 2017, Santo Tomas, Phoenix, Ariz., celebrated its 20th anniversary with a bilingual service. The church began in 1997 when St. Thomas, Phoenix, the congregation's English counterpart, decided to prioritize reaching out to the Hispanic community.

The district reporters for this month are: AZ-CA—Michael Schroeder; NE—Timothy Kemnitz; NW—Dennis Kleist; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

NEBRASKA



When the members of Zion, Denver, Colo., were updating their landscaping, they wanted to install something that would proudly proclaim them as a Lutheran church that teaches salvation through grace alone. So members created and planted this Lutheran seal, which is 44 feet in diameter. Pictured are students at Zion's school by the seal.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



Trinity, Caledonia, Wis., covered its yard with 2,500 pink and blue flags to celebrate God's gift of life. The flags represent the 2,500 boys and girls who are lost to abortion each day in the United States. The congregation focused on life issues during the week leading up to its Life Sunday Celebration on Nov. 12, 2017.

WELS news briefs

Ministry of Christian Giving

800-827-5482; mcg@wels.net

In March 2017, Nick Krueger, a member at St. Mark's, Watertown, Wis., and staff member of Representative Terry Katsma of the Wisconsin State Assembly, invited fellow St. Mark's member, WELS director of Christian Giving Kurt Lueneburg, to testify in front of a legislative committee on a proposed bill that would apply the federal government's treatment of **qualified charitable distributions from an IRA** to Wisconsin's tax code (pictured). That bill was adopted into Wisconsin's budget law as of 2018, meaning Wisconsin residents 70.5 or older can make charitable distributions of up to \$100,000 from their IRAs tax-free at the federal and state levels. Lueneburg shares, "Since 2007, members of our church body who live in Wisconsin have made over \$1.8 million in qualified charitable distributions to support our church body's gospel ministry. Year over year giving since 2007 shows a trend of growing interest. We've heard donors mention it would be nice if Wisconsin allowed tax-free distributions as well. Thus, this bill has the potential to increase donor satisfaction and the positive impact on Christ's work." Learn more about the qualified charitable distribution (QCD) giving opportunity at wels.net/qcd.



Celebrating the Reformation at home

In October and November 2017, congregations, circuits, and districts around the synod gathered to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. From smaller gatherings to districtwide assemblies of close to five thousand people, these services focused on the truths brought into focus through Martin Luther: grace alone, faith alone, and Scripture alone, all through Christ alone.

Soli Deo gloria!





Milwaukee, Wisconsin



Saginaw, Michigan



Lincoln, Nebraska



King of Prussia, Pennsylvania



Tucson, Arizona



Radcliff, Kentucky



New Ulm, Minnesota



Liverpool, New York

Celebrating the Reformation abroad

ASIA

HONG KONG A group of future Asia Lutheran Seminary seminarians put together a display of five key locations and times in the life of Luther in the parking lot of Grace Church, Hong Kong. This "Luther Walk" included activities such as "nailing" the 95 theses to a church door, translating the Greek Bible, and trying on clothing Luther wore as a monk. More than one hundred members from all ten congregations of South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission attended evening worship.



India



Hong Kong

INDIA Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries (CELM) seminary had a special service to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Some CELM congregations, including this one in West Godavari (pictured), also held local celebrations.

JAPAN About 60 people attended a special Reformation 500 outreach event at Aganai Lutheran Church, Tokyo. Congregational leader Kouichi (pictured) explained a series of Reformation events that was depicted on all the walls of the church to give everyone a deeper appreciation for what God had done through Martin Luther.



Japan



Vietnam

VIETNAM A Reformation 500 anniversary celebration was held at the leadership training in Vietnam in November. More than three thousand copies of a Reformation brochure were distributed to the leaders of Hmong Fellowship Church to share with their churches.



Peru



Peru

SOUTH AMERICA

PERU The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Peru held a three-day celebration of the Reformation. The first day was a pastor's conference. The second day was a festival that featured sporting events, choir performances, and artistic presentations from its two schools and various congregations. The third day included a worship service and lunch.

COLOMBIA A special service was held at Most Holy Trinity, Medellin.



Colombia



EUROPE

GERMANY St. Johanneskirche in Zwickau-Planitz hosted a special synodwide worship service on Reformation Day for the 16 congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church as well as the local community. A special brass choir played outside the church before the service. Some of the new Ninety-Five Theses put together by the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference were read at the service.

FINLAND The Lutheran Confessional Church in Finland (Finnish speaking) and St. John Evangelical Lutheran congregation (Swedish speaking) celebrated Reformation 500 together. The weekend began in Lepplax Village Church near Jakobstad with lectures and a banquet. On Sunday, 33 people attended a special worship service in Vaasa. Pictured is the choir from St. John Lutheran congregation in Lepplax.



AFRICA

CAMEROON Seven congregations met in Ntambu for a joint Reformation service. Jeff Heitsch, missionary in Cameroon, and his wife drove three-and-a-half hours over dirt and rocky roads for the service. Stephanie Heitsch, Jeff's wife, writes, "Some of the Christians from this church had already started out to make the walk to the church. . . . As we were driving we would pick them up. . . . By the time we had picked up everyone that was walking, we had about ten standing in the back of the pickup, two in the front with Jeff, and two more in the back seat."

ETHIOPIA At a celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation—as well as the fifth anniversary of the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia—Rev. Dr. Kebede Yigezu (far right), president of the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia, invited Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Professor E. Allen Sorum (far left) up as the oldest confessional Lutheran in the house. Sorum joined the youngest (just baptized) and a few in between to light a special candle.

MALAWI Congregations throughout Malawi held special services to celebrate the Reformation. The Lutheran Church of Central Africa created a special Reformation 500 cloth that was made into shirts and chitenjes (skirts) worn by the members.

ZAMBIA Eleven congregations from the Chipata District gathered for a two-day Reformation rally at Bethany, Chipata. On Saturday, a P.A. system in a vehicle announced the rally and a Luther film to be shone that evening. On Sunday, the group marched through town with a band before holding worship at the church.

View more Reformation 500 celebration photos at wels.net/forwardinchrist.





SALT

— of the —

EARTH

Because of everything Christ did, you have been given the perfect perspective on mourning and rejoicing.

Aaron H. Goetzinger

Joe was a young officer assigned to the US Army's 10th Mountain Division at Fort Drum in northern New York. Joe's move there turned his world upside down. He understood that his orders could change suddenly. He knew he faced the possibility of deployment. But life at his previous duty station had been really good. He had gained some success as a young officer. He got along with his superiors, and his subordinates respected him. He also was becoming more serious with his girlfriend.

But Fort Drum changed all of that. He was *ordered* to go to Fort Drum. It was not on his short list. In fact, it wasn't even close to being on the short list. He knew no one within hundreds of miles. The area has long winters and shorter summers. He liked having access to shows and live music, but northern New York is not a hotbed for culture. When he arrived at his new unit, it was not what he expected. To compound matters, his superiors had a hard time understanding his perspective. And to make matters worse, his girlfriend dumped him.

When Joe put on his uniform in the morning, he also put on a good face. But once he got home and the uniform came off, he mourned. As a result of his mourning, he started to become skeptical of authority. He could only

see what was wrong with his unit. He convinced himself he had been dealt a bad hand. He even began to shut himself off to anyone who could possibly help. He wasn't fun to be around; matter-of-fact, it was downright difficult to be around him.

OUR SINFUL NATURE OBJECTS

How willing would you be to be around Joe and mourn with him? Or if you were Joe, how willing would you be to rejoice in the success of someone else?

On the surface, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn" is a nice passage. To borrow words from Solomon, we probably agree that there is "a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance" (Ecclesiastes 3:4). We all have those times. Yet Paul challenges us to consider someone else's rejoicing and mourning.

Our sinful nature objects: "Sure, rejoicing and mourning have their proper time . . . as long as each is within my time." We know how difficult it is to rejoice when we don't feel like it and to mourn when we want to rejoice.

Ever encounter someone who is down in the dumps when you are high on life? It can be hard to relate, can't it? Why would a person who is loving life and rejoicing in its blessings want to get down into a pit of mourning? Not many

of us want to because we're so focused on the happiness and joy we feel. We don't want anyone to bring us down.

Consider the opposite, rejoicing when it seems you can only mourn. Ever encounter someone who, in your estimation, is unrealistically chipper when all you want to do is wallow? It can be hard not to see that kind of joy and optimism as grating. When the darkness of life comes creeping in, it's easy to see darkness as your only reality and the light of rejoicing too far away to be realistic.

Both mourners and rejoicers have their excuses. The rejoicer might say, "The mourner just needs to suck it up and get on with his life," whereas the mourner might say, "Why does the rejoicer get all the happiness?"

GOD'S MERCY MOVES US

But the apostle encourages us to see things differently. He simply says, "Rejoice! Mourn!" If we struggle with mourning and rejoicing along with others when it doesn't fit within our time frame, then all we can say is that we fail at it because considering the needs of other people in addition to ourselves is so foreign to us.

Earlier in Romans chapter 12, Paul focuses his readers' attention on God's mercy. That's what moves God's people to action: "In view of God's mercy" (v. 1). Those words point to the source of our Christian life. In his mercy God not only consoles us, but he also gets down into the pit of life with us.

In mercy God saw our sin-filled situation, wept with us, and then entered into our world. He thought of us. In mercy he sent Jesus, who took on our selfishness and our tears and went to a cross with them. In mercy he gave us his righteousness so that we may rejoice in the heights of heaven. Jesus came to mourn and rejoice with us in order to save us. He came to turn our tears to joy, to take our broken hearts and fill them with his love, to remove our sorrow and give us eternal happiness, and to one day permanently change our mourning to rejoicing.

Because of everything Christ did, you have been given the perfect perspective

on mourning and rejoicing. Because of Christ's mercy, you can see a person as a soul loved by God, and then you are enabled to either mourn or rejoice with them. You can help them see life's highs and lows for what they are: opportunities to help, to share, to witness. The sooner your eyes focus on God's mercy for you, the sooner you will make yourself available to others and be present in their lives.

When the Spirit breathed spiritual life into us, one result is that we become compelled to live for others. In 1 Corinthians, Paul reminded Christians that each of us, with our unique gifts and abilities, serve as irreplaceable parts within the church. He wrote, "Its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (12: 25,26). Any one of us can provide this kind concern for others.

And notice when Paul said, "Mourn and rejoice," he said simply that. It doesn't mean that you have to solve the situation. It doesn't mean that you have to fix the person. Just mourn. Just be with them. Likewise, rejoicing doesn't mean that you have to be the emcee at the party. It doesn't mean you have to be the lead cheerleader. Just rejoice. Just support them.

Because Christ's mercy is so rich, deep, high, and free, we look for opportunities to rejoice and mourn not only with people in our congregations but also with everyone in our lives. Rejoicing and mourning with others, then, always have their proper time. Each and every time is a proper time to show someone the love and mercy that is theirs in Christ. We can be salt in this world and provide help, compassion, love, and a Christian witness to others who need what we possess—Christ.

Aaron Goetzinger is pastor at Redemption, Watertown, New York.

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

Rejoice

WITH THOSE

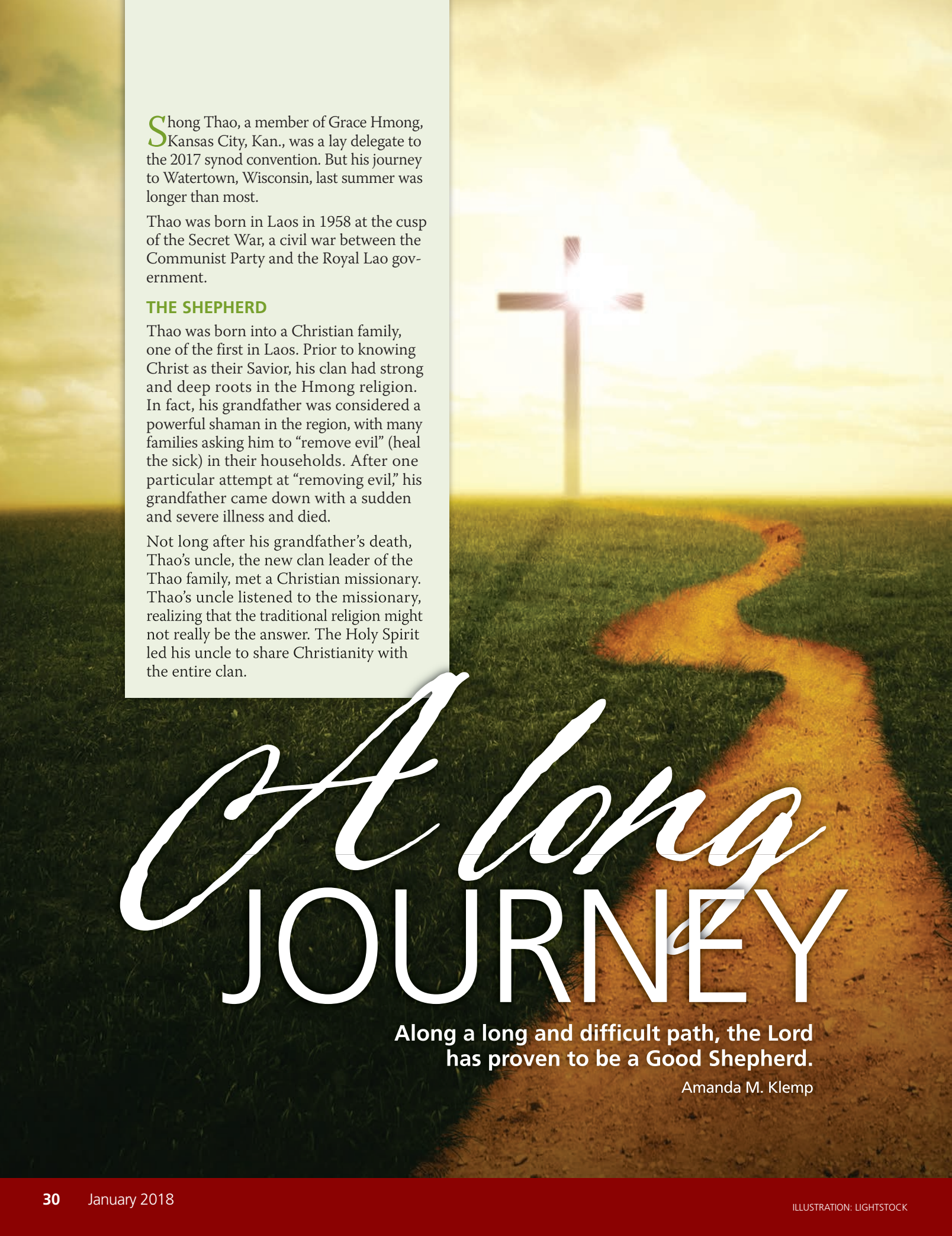
WHO REJOICE;

mourn

WITH THOSE

WHO MOURN.

ROMANS 12:15



Shong Thao, a member of Grace Hmong, Kansas City, Kan., was a lay delegate to the 2017 synod convention. But his journey to Watertown, Wisconsin, last summer was longer than most.

Thao was born in Laos in 1958 at the cusp of the Secret War, a civil war between the Communist Party and the Royal Lao government.

THE SHEPHERD

Thao was born into a Christian family, one of the first in Laos. Prior to knowing Christ as their Savior, his clan had strong and deep roots in the Hmong religion. In fact, his grandfather was considered a powerful shaman in the region, with many families asking him to “remove evil” (heal the sick) in their households. After one particular attempt at “removing evil,” his grandfather came down with a sudden and severe illness and died.

Not long after his grandfather’s death, Thao’s uncle, the new clan leader of the Thao family, met a Christian missionary. Thao’s uncle listened to the missionary, realizing that the traditional religion might not really be the answer. The Holy Spirit led his uncle to share Christianity with the entire clan.

A Long JOURNEY

Along a long and difficult path, the Lord has proven to be a Good Shepherd.

Amanda M. Klemp

Christianity was an entirely new concept to the Thao clan, but the missionary spoke Laotian and could teach the faith to the family. It's a faith that would help Thao and his family along their decades-long journey of danger and uncertainty.

THROUGH THE VALLEY

Thao was the smallest of eight children. He said that he was born small and didn't grow because of poor nutrition in his early years. His father worked on a farm to support the family, but by 1960 the political tensions reached his village and signs of conflict appeared in the form of helicopters and a military presence. The family moved from village to village to stay safe.

Thao's older sister, at 16 years old, married a military captain. His mom saw this as an opportunity to keep Thao safe and ensure he received an education. So Thao went to live with his sister and stayed there for three years without seeing his parents. He says he remembers crying and wanting to be with his mom, but his sister reassured him that she would care for him.

After three years with his sister, he moved again to live with one of his brothers in a different city, but fighting broke out in the region and they had to move again. His family trekked through the jungle for a week to reach a safer city. Thao, now about 10 years old, was finally back with his parents, but soon his mom died.

Despite the war and the constant moving, Thao continued attending school and graduated from the Laotian school system when he was 15 years old. The war had been raging for more than a decade, and it seemed no end was in site. After graduation, he wanted to go into the military with his cousin and become an officer.

The United States was heavily involved in the Secret War. The policy at the time called for the CIA to coordinate the Hmong people to form an army and defend the country. At 15 years old, Thao got his first job working for the CIA as a mechanic.

Through all of this—the hunger, separation from his parents, treacherous journeys through the jungle, constantly moving, and the raging battles of war—Thao knew that the Lord is his Good Shepherd who guides him and keeps him safe.

GREEN PASTURES

The war finally ended, but because of his work with the CIA, Thao's life was in danger in Laos after the Communist Party took over the country. After six months in a refugee camp, he was granted refugee status, and at 17 years old he arrived in Wausau, Wisconsin.

Despite finishing his education in Laos and already working for the US military—experiences unlike anything US teenagers would have endured—his next big battle would be enrolling in an American high school to study English. He said that he felt like a “dummy.” When the school year ended, the church that sponsored him as a refugee offered him a job as a summer custodian at the school.

When fall came, he didn't go back to high school but rather attended a technical school and began working full time. He eventually enrolled at the University of Wisconsin—Oshkosh to study social work.

Between working and going to school, he met his wife, who joined the church and was baptized after meeting him. By 1980, the first of his eight children was born. In a few short years, as a young man, Thao was making a life for himself in the United States. He finished his degree in social work and ended up working to help other immigrants as they settled in the US.

But the demands of work and education while in the early days of starting a family, as well as the harrowing events and images he couldn't shake from his youth, took their toll. He suffered depression for many years and, at one time, was even hospitalized for it. Thao, who readily attests to the power of prayer, says he prayed to God for peace the whole time he was in the hospital. He credits his Good Shepherd with providing comfort in

his darkest hours. While the memories and images of war have never left him, he says he knows God is always with him, guiding him and taking care of him.

Thao and his family didn't stay in Wisconsin, and he didn't spend his whole career in social work. He says he liked to experience different types of jobs, and they moved around the country a few times, each time finding a new church to join.

DWELLING IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

It wasn't until they moved to Kansas City three years ago that they joined their first WELS church. Grace is a predominantly Hmong congregation, and Thao says he felt drawn to it because he wanted to see it grow. Attending the synod convention in summer 2017 reinvigorated him and helped him grow in his conviction that Lutherans teach the true Word of God. He says he wants more Hmong people to know Christ as their Savior.

In the last few years he has experienced some significant health problems, including more than one heart attack and bypass surgery. Although it was scary and painful, he says he knows it was another thing that God guided him through. He knows he's here because God has a purpose for him.

Now his children are all adults and living on their own, each attending church regularly. He also has seven grandchildren. With the perspective he has from his life experiences, he says the number one thing he wants for his children is to “love their Christian family and love each other.” He teaches them never to have to depend on anyone but God and, at the same time, always to be willing to help someone else.

Through his trials, he sees all the times God has protected him, blessed him, and put people in his life to help him. Now his goal is to be able to help others.

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

The heart of the issue

Andrew C. Schroer

Don't assume
the worst.
You cannot
read minds.
Only God
can do that.

For nearly three years now, I have had the privilege of serving on the ethics board of one of our local newspapers. The ethics board consists of various personnel from the newspaper, including the publisher and editors, together with three at-large members of our community. We meet monthly to discuss controversial articles, concerns readers have voiced, and the overall ethics of journalism.

Recently the newspaper published an exposé on a local politician who is now embroiled in controversy. Almost immediately people began accusing the newspaper of having a political agenda that was clearly biased. The complaints were that the editors were getting revenge for previous wrongs or just didn't like the politician.

Having been allowed to peek behind the curtain and listen to the discussions beforehand, I am fascinated by how painstakingly the editors sought to be objective and evaluated the ethical ramifications of what they printed.

Are they always perfectly objective? No. Do personal feelings at times affect decisions? I'm sure they do. But overall, I've learned that they truly do seek to be honest and objective.

The comments I read from various sources this last week remind me of something God once said to the prophet Samuel. "People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

Only God knows what thoughts and feelings fill our hearts and minds.

Yet, so often, we fall into the delusion that we are God. We fancy ourselves mind readers. We presume to know other people's reasons and motivations.

When your husband suddenly doesn't answer you, he must be mad at you because of what you said to him in the morning. When your coworker doesn't respond right away to your text, she must be ignoring you because she is a jerk. When the newspaper runs an

article that says something negative about a certain politician, it must have a political agenda and is therefore biased.

That could be true. Or maybe your husband simply didn't hear you. Maybe he was distracted. Maybe your coworker's phone died. Maybe the newspaper is simply trying to report the facts its journalists found in their investigations.

One of my favorite phrases from Martin Luther comes from his explanation to the Eighth Commandment. As he expounded what it means to not give false testimony against our neighbor, Luther encourages us to "take [their] words and actions in the kindest possible way."

In other words, don't assume the worst. You cannot read minds. Only God can do that. You don't know why they did what they did or said what they said unless they tell you.

Remember that, especially when you and your spouse are having an argument. You can't say, "You said this or did that because . . ." You can't see into your spouse's heart. Don't assume you know why. Talk about the behavior. Ask why. Tell your spouse the impression it gives you, but don't assume you know. Only God can see into people's hearts.

Are people, politicians, and news organizations at times driven by selfish and nefarious motives? Of course. In this sinful world, all of us at times are moved by misguided motivations. But be careful. As sinful human beings, we tend to assume the worst about people—particularly those who have hurt us or with whom we disagree, and especially in our politically charged world.

May God forgive us our sinful assumptions and give us generous hearts that take other people's words and actions in the kindest possible way.

Contributing editor Andrew Schroer is pastor at Redeemer, Edna, Texas.



MONUMENTS

Lasting Memories

Milestone moments and unexpected crises are the perfect opportunities for heartfelt repentance. Then we note God's deliverance.

Samuel C. Degner

Milestones have a way of making us stop and think. Birthdays, graduations, weddings, anniversaries, retirements—all are natural times to pause and reflect on the path we've traveled so far and the future that lies before us. Other occasions have the same effect: a health scare, an unexpected move, the death of a loved one, or the loss of a job.

SOUL-SEARCHING MOMENTS

The people of Israel were at one of these soul-searching moments. Idols were everywhere. The tabernacle had been destroyed, and the ark of God sat in storage. The people knew something was wrong. "Then the whole house of Israel longed for the LORD" (1 Samuel 7:2 Christian Standard Bible [CSB]).

The prophet Samuel knew the people were turning in the right direction. He encouraged them to show their repentance by getting rid of their idols. They did just that; then they gathered together as a nation at Mizpah to confess their sins to the Lord. As we look back at our past, it's good to confess the sins committed there. It's always a good time to turn to the Lord.

While Israel was gathered together at Mizpah, the Philistines decided it was a good time to attack. When Israel heard of their attack, they turned to the right place. They said to Samuel, "Don't stop crying out to the LORD our God for us, so that he will save us from the Philistines" (1 Samuel 7:8 CSB). Samuel offered a lamb on behalf of the people. The Lord heard their cry. He sent thunder so loud that the Philistines were thrown into a panic and were routed by the Israelites.

God never leaves his people helpless. When we turn to him in repentance, we trust that we have a perfect Priest, Jesus Christ, mediating for us. He offered himself, the spotless Lamb, on our behalf. He never stops crying out to the Lord our God for us: "Father, remember the sacrifice I made. Forgive their sins. Help them in their trouble!" The Father always hears his cries and helps us in just the right way and at just the right time, just as he helped the Israelites.

STONES OF HELP

After the battle, Samuel set up a stone and named it Ebenezer ("stone of help"), saying, "The LORD has helped us to this point" (1 Samuel 7:12 CSB). It was a monument to God's help that day—and all the days before it. More than that, it was an encouragement for the future. If the Lord had helped them to that point, surely he would help them the rest of the way.

As you look back at your life, consider how the Lord brought you through each crisis. See how he moved you to repentance and forgave your sins. Marvel at how he blessed you at each stage. Those big moments in life weren't milestones after all; they were Ebenezers. Look back on the road you've traveled and see stone after stone, each one set a little farther than the next, each one reminding you that the Lord helped you that far.

Then look toward the horizon of your future with confidence. The Lord will be there to help you until the next stone is set in place, and the next one and the next—until the last one is set on heavenly ground.

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



God's forgiveness
is freely given
before we can
think, say, or do
anything good.

Forgive us our sins

Forgiveness! Jesus wanted us to pray for the forgiveness we need in our daily lives. How often we stray from God's will. Our words, our thoughts, and our actions always seem to define what it means to miss the mark. So, in the middle of the Lord's Prayer, we pray for forgiveness.

Possessing God's forgiveness by faith is one of our core needs. In this prayer, it comes after we ask for "daily bread." We understand our need for daily bread to live in this life and serve God and others. But an even greater need is the forgiveness that Jesus has accomplished for us all. We need that forgiveness if we are going to stand before him when we no longer need daily bread.

So, humbly, with each repetition of this prayer, we come for the forgiveness Jesus has achieved by his pain and blood. At those times when we lose the comfort and confidence in the gospel of forgiveness, the words of this petition turn our attention away from what is inside our hearts to what is inside God's heart—unconditional love in Christ and forgiveness. We need the consolation that we are indeed forgiven children of God.

The forgiveness we possess by faith transforms us and empowers us. It awakens in us a desire to thank God. It moves us to desire to please our God for the forgiveness Christ has paid for so dearly. A part of that transformation is the willingness to forgive as we have been forgiven.

This petition does not limit the forgiveness of our sins to only when we will forgive others. That would only drive us all to despair. No, God's forgiveness is freely given before we can think, say, or do anything good—yes, before we can forgive. It's by grace; there is no condition on God's forgiveness. And it transforms us, bending our attitudes to forgive others rather than hold a grudge or seek revenge.

I think this prayer is an essential part of our lives together as believers in his church. How often do family feuds divide the work of the church? How often do the real and imagined insults and slights color our attitudes and sour our work together? How often do decisions of the council, committee, or the pastor create not just differences of opinion but real animosity and bitterness? The apostle Paul warns, "If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other" (Galatians 5:15). He advised earlier, "Serve one another humbly in love" (v. 13). Forgiving each other is as important in the church as it is in marriage. When personalities, opinions, and visions of what is best clash, forgiveness is required.

The wonder of it all is that we are all forgiven by a gracious God. Jesus provides not only the motivation but also a pure example for us to follow. Jesus endured pain and suffering at the hands of sinful humans. We may not have been there, but our sins caused the scourging, the insults, and the mockery. But Jesus did not retaliate. He forgave. He said, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). When we grasp what Jesus endured to forgive us, then how can we refuse to forgive others—especially other believers in his church?

When you are tempted to hold a grudge and withhold forgiveness, think of Jesus. Who has inflicted as much harm and misery on you as we have all inflicted on Jesus? So we pray, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us."



COME Lord Jesus BE OUR GUEST

Joel S. Heckendorf

NOURISHED BY MEALS WITH THE MESSIAH

SMELLS BETTER THAN DINNER (MARK 14:1-9)

Fresh baked bread. Chocolate chip cookies. Simmering cinnamon sticks. French roast coffee. Go ahead . . . take a whiff. Did you crack a little smile? It's hard not to.

When Simon the Leper invited Jesus to be his dinner guest, I'm sure Jesus did not miss all the smells. Baked bread with dipping oils on the side. Freshly cut oranges. The catch of the day. And a crowded room of perfumed, curious people.

Then, cutting through the smells, Jesus got a whiff of something that brought a smile to his face. It was a "beautiful thing" (Mark 14:6) as Mary, the one who chose the one thing needed (Luke 10:42), needed to pour out her love before the One who loved her. When she saw Jesus, the One who changed her life, her appreciation and love welled up and overflowed. With no concern of a shard that may have cut her hand, she broke the neck of that expensive alabaster jar and poured the whole amount over his head until it dripped and dribbled down to his feet.

PROUD-PAPALIKE APPROVAL

This dinner at Simon's table tells us much about Mary. But it also tells us much about our Savior. Look at his response. More than just acknowledging her gift, he called it "beautiful." Wow! The God who crowns the sky with seven-layered rainbows and paints the sky at sunrise

and sunset—the God who dresses the fields with sprays of flowers and invented 33 million times more scents than Bath & Body Works—that God, that creative, full-of-beauty God, called her act of faith "beautiful." Ours too.

Why? One reason: he loves us. And love affects our perspective and our actions. Just like a proud dad thinks his kindergartner's art is so beautiful that he displays it at work for all to see, God values our fruits of faith. They may not measure up to the world's standards for beauty, but they are beautiful to him.

MAMA-BEARLIKE DEFENSE

Moreover, his love leads him to defend us in the same way he defended his dear friend Mary. When the crowd questioned her, Jesus roared back like a protective mama bear, "Leave her alone" (Mark 14:6).

Usually when we pray that the Lord would defend us, we are looking to his mighty power for help. But it's not just his might that comforts us. It's *why* he wants to defend us that gives us his reassuring strength. He holds us in his protective embrace for one reason alone—because he loves us.

PROMISE-KEEPING SAVIOR

It didn't stop there. Having captured the attention of the crowd with his signature "Truly I tell you," Jesus went on to promise this: "What she has done will also be

told, in memory of her" (Mark 14:9). The fact that I'm writing—and you're reading—about it today is convincing evidence that Jesus keeps his promises.

A proud-papalike approval, a mama-bearlike defense, and a promise-keeping Savior. What gifts Jesus put on display as a mealtime guest! Gifts that lead us to pray, "And let these gifts to us be blessed. Amen."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. Evaluate this statement: Love is not love if it neatly calculates the cost.
2. A Christian man donates \$10,000 for a mural in his church, even though the congregation has an outstanding debt of \$1.2 million. Apply this biblical account to the situation.
3. Read the three accounts of Jesus being anointed (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:1-9; John 12:1-8). Which details do you appreciate the most?

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This is the second 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 Jan. 5 at wels.net/forwardinchrist.



Light it up!

God lit up sin-darkened Magi hearts with Jesus the Light. Jesus is our Light too, a Light we need to share!

Daniel M. Schroeder

The spotlight lights up the face of the actor on the stage. The light draws your attention. It shines on the important.

In January, you will hear the word *epiphany*. The word *epiphany* means to reveal or make known. The Greek origin of the word has the picture of shining a light upon something, lighting it up. For over 1,800 years Christians have celebrated the second oldest festival of Christendom—the Epiphany of Our Lord—on January 6.

At the time of Jesus, if a king or emperor made an official visit to one of his cities, it was called an epiphany. When heavenly King Jesus made his

appearance as a baby in his village of Bethlehem, the King of kings had officially arrived for his subjects. God was revealing to the world—lighting it up—that the King was making an official visit: an epiphany.

Magi from the East, well acquainted with stars and prophecy, arrived in Jerusalem to find the promised King whose star they had seen. Although Israel awaited the Messiah and knew Bethlehem as the Messiah's birth-town, not one of them went with the Magi to find the King. No interest. You can sense a darkness.

Thick, spiritual darkness covered Judea, Galilee, Persia, and the rest of the world. It was a darkness that blacked out all hope of life with God. And then God sent his Son, Jesus, the radiant Light, to destroy sin's darkness. The Spirit had the prophet Isaiah put it this way: "Arise, shine, for your light has come. . . . The LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will

be your glory" (Isaiah 60:1,19). The Savior is the Light who never stops shining to defeat the darkness of sin, death, and Satan.

God lit up sin-darkened Magi hearts with Jesus the Light. The Spirit lit up the Magi's faith to see that Jesus is the darkness-defeater, not just for the Jews but also for the world.

Jesus is our Light too. Don't keep the Light only for family, friends, or familiar faces that look like us. Also send the Light across oceans to continents where Satan continues to rule darkened hearts blinded in unbelief.

For the last 1,400 years, Epiphany worshipers have prayed, "Lord God, by the leading of a star you once *made known to the nations* your one and only Son . . ." Resolve this Epiphany season to be part of making Jesus the Light known to the nations.

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Putting Epiphany into practice

Here are some ways for you to help reveal the Light:

- Pray for and send an offering to a mission effort in a country from which your ancestors originated.
- Write a letter of encouragement and, with help from some friends, send a care package to a missionary and his family.
- Select a mission field in a country you know little about. Find out more about that country. Pray for the gospel workers there and the unique challenges they face. Send an offering to support that mission work.
- Arrange for a mission dinner at your church. Serve dishes native to a world mission (include kid-friendly food as an option). Use it as an outreach event to invite and connect others to your church.
- Along with a mission dinner, use Skype, Facetime, Google Hangouts, or another application to "bring" a missionary to your church.

Your pastor or the WELS World Mission office at 414-256-3234 or bwm@wels.net can help you connect with a world mission field.