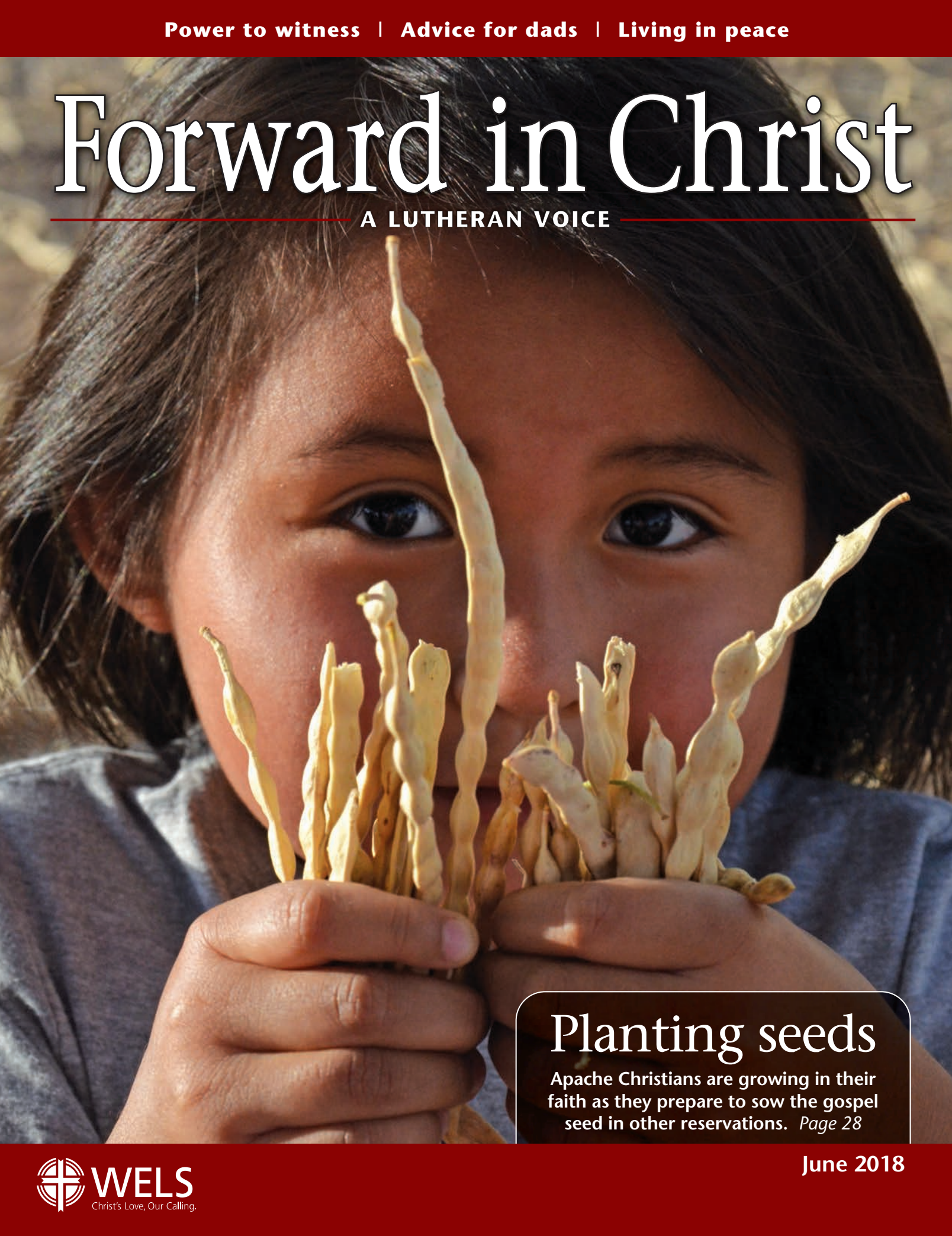


Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



Planting seeds

Apache Christians are growing in their faith as they prepare to sow the gospel seed in other reservations. *Page 28*

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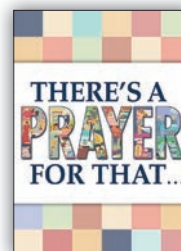
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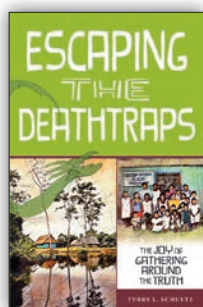
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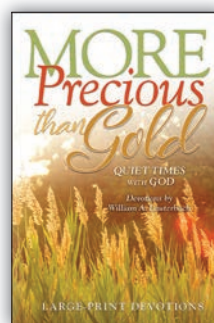
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A young boy with dark skin and short hair is shown from the side, wearing a blue and grey t-shirt and blue shorts. He is holding a red watering can and pouring water onto a plant in a garden. The background is a blurred green lawn and a chain-link fence.

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IN THE
DARKNESS

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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

Now is the time.

One hundred twenty-five years ago, missionaries traveled to Arizona to proclaim the gospel to the Apache tribes. The theme for this year's anniversary celebration is 2 Corinthians 6:2: "Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation." And the WELS Native American mission is taking the theme to heart—working hard to train Native missionaries to take the gospel to other reservations around the country (p. 28).

Sharing the gospel message is important because it has the power to change people. It has the power to create faith. Pastor Nate Buege shares a real-life example on p. 10.

Last month you read that a Christian's *raison d'être* is to be Jesus' witness. That can be scary. But just as God sent the Holy Spirit on Pentecost to equip the apostles, so also he gives you everything you need to be his light. Read more on p. 12.

WELS has developed two new programs to give you even more opportunities to share that powerful gospel message. C18 is a synodwide outreach program to reach one million people with the gospel this Christmas season (p. 20). WELS Mission Journeys coordinates short-term mission trips so WELS members can help with outreach events (p. 24). Both are meant to help you grow as you think about the people in your life who need to hear about Jesus.

So what are you waiting for? Now is the time.

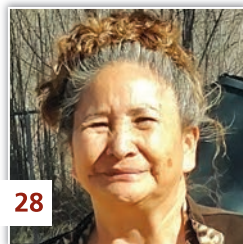
Julie Wietzke



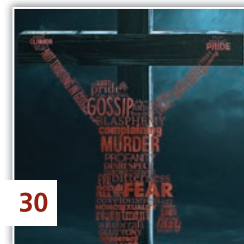
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The best is yet to come



CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

I love the entire FIC magazine, but I always turn to “Confessions of faith” first. I think WELS is really special, and these articles kind of reinforce that for me. I’m always delighted to read that people may have tried out all sorts of more “exciting” or mainstream churches but still choose our churches where the simple truth is told.

It gives me hope for the future of WELS!

Jayne Nitz

Please continue to keep “Confessions of faith” as a series. It is wonderful to read about people who questioned, searched, weren’t encouraged to read a Bible, etc., coming to faith. And they value what they learn, are very strong in their faith and become active members of the church. It makes me very thankful that my parents brought me up as a Christian. I remember believing as a young child and feel sadness that others were not as fortunate, but then I feel gladness that God still worked inside them and led them to the truth. It encourages us to continue to “go out into the world and preach,” for many are waiting to hear God’s Word.

“Confessions of faith” always reminds me to appreciate what I was given as an infant and to appreciate the ability to freely worship my Savior all these years of my life. Sometimes we can take

our lives as Christians for granted, but learning about the struggles of others and their perseverance makes me say a prayer of thanks.

Carol Gehrt

There are two articles that I turn to first when the new FIC arrives: “Teen talk” and “Confessions of faith.” I find it terribly interesting to read these stories about real faith in a real world. Being a Catholic convert, I am always interested to hear about how the Lord leads other people to faith through his Word. I have become a student of Scripture through weekly Bible classes, worship, daily meditations from the WELS *Meditations* book, and WELS Men seminars. I am hungry to learn and share my faith if possible. Your magazine came to me as a gift from a member at our church. I cherish it! Thank you for all you do to share God’s message of hope through Jesus.

Dean Ebert
Iron Ridge, Wisconsin

FOOLS

I found the article by Pastor Schroer interesting in how he related the term “fools” [April] to how Christians appear to the secular world.

The Bible relates the term to those who deny God, as Psalm 14:1 states:

“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” In the parable of the rich man, God called him a fool for only working for worldly goods.

As Pastor Schroer states, “One day God will reveal who the true fools really are.” In the meantime, we must not be tempted to call one a fool as Jesus warned in Matthew 5:22: “Anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.” In our sinful natures, we, at times, may feel the urge to call a person a fool, but as Pastor Schroer stated, this is to be left to God. After all, we, as Christians, will not see unbelievers converted by calling them fools. In the meantime, we can humbly wear the title of fools, as Paul says to the apostles in 1 Corinthians 4:10: “We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ!”

God be praised that what to the world is foolishness of the cross is salvation to us who are called his own.

Dave Dahlke
Port Orchard, Washington

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

Through my Bible in 3 years



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2018
JUNE 2018

- | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Judges 3:7-31 | 11. Jdg. 14 & 15 | 21. 1 Pe. 3:1-12 |
| 2. Jdg. 4 | 12. Jdg. 16 | 22. 1 Pe. 3:13-4:6 |
| 3. Jdg. 5 | 13. Jdg. 17 & 18 | 23. 1 Pe. 4:7-19 |
| 4. Jdg. 6 | 14. Jdg. 19 | 24. 1 Pe. 5 |
| 5. Jdg. 7:1-23 | 15. Jdg. 20 | 25. Ruth 1 & 2 |
| 6. Jdg. 7:24-8:35 | 16. Jdg. 21 | 26. Ru. 3 & 4 |
| 7. Jdg. 9:1-10:5 | 17. 1 Peter 1:1-12 | 27. 1 Samuel 1 |
| 8. Jdg. 10:6-11:28 | 18. 1 Pe. 1:13-2:3 | 28. 1 Sa. 2:1-11 |
| 9. Jdg. 11:29-12:15 | 19. 1 Pe. 2:4-17 | 29. 1 Sa. 2:12-36 |
| 10. Jdg. 13 | 20. 1 Pe. 2:18-25 | 30. 1 Sa. 3:1-41a |

Words that fight for peace

“Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven. Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” Matthew 10:32-34

Joel C. Seifert

They seem like fighting words. Jesus calls us to speak his truth faithfully, and he says when we do so, it'll bring a sword. Jesus doesn't hide what faithful witnessing brings. Those who speak his words will be imprisoned and punished. The words they speak will bring strife into their family life and hatred from the world.

This probably doesn't surprise you. The world Jesus sends us into so often sees God's will for our lives as out-of-date—or even threatening. Those who hold to a biblical worldview of creation are publicly mocked. So many even in the visible church oppose those who hold to the teachings of Scripture. We have a lot to fight against, don't we?

CHRISTIANS ARE FOR CHRIST

Christ sent the disciples out with a simple task: “Proclaim this message, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near’ ” (Matthew 10:7). They weren't sent out to eradicate sin or reform society. Jesus didn't call them to erase divisions in the visible church and drive out false teachers. The purpose of the church isn't to defeat those evils; they'll exist until the end of time.

God calls us to proclaim his kingdom. Matthew chapter 10 is a list of the challenges that will simply be there when we go about our work. But that doesn't mean we're on the defensive. We have a different strategy. We share the news of a Savior who doesn't promise an immediate fix for a sinful world but forgiveness and salvation for the sinners in it.

CHRIST IS FOR CHRISTIANS

But as we do that, Jesus says it will bring trouble, even in our families. It will bring a cross. Are we attacked? Is



our faith mocked? Our natural reaction is to respond with fear or anger, but we don't need to. Jesus has won the victory. Christ is for us.

**Christ is for you, so
follow him as you speak
the truth in love.**

Do you see the freedom those words bring? It's an easy temptation to see yourself as on the defensive—a victim in a culture war against Christian values. And that makes it all the more tempting to lash out in kind: to mock, to accuse, to insult. But dear Christian, Christ has won for you. So follow him. Proclaim his kingdom with kindness, love, and respect. Will you be attacked? Of course! The world attacked Jesus too. But Christ is for you, so follow him as you speak the truth in love.

At the end of June, the church remembers the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession. It's one of the foundational confessions of the Lutheran church. It was delivered by Lutheran princes and laymen to Emperor Charles V on June 25, 1530. Because they held to God's Word, they were condemned and threatened by their emperor with loss of land, wealth, and even life. Consider reading the Augsburg Confession this month. You'll find in its pages a wonderful confession of the truths of Scripture in the face of false teaching. And with that, you'll find something else beautiful: The entire confession is filled with humility; respect; and Christian love, even as its writers faced punishment or war. They weren't afraid; they knew Christ was for them. And they let their words and actions speak clearly: They were for Christ.

Contributing editor Joel Seifert is pastor at Beautiful Savior, Marietta, Georgia.



Mark Schwede

A church that
rejects the truth
that the Bible
is the inspired
and inerrant
Word of God
cannot remain
a church that
teaches the truth.

Some polls should be believed

A recent survey of religious beliefs should be more than a little shocking to us. Here are some of the results when members of a large Protestant church body were questioned about their views:

- Only 31 percent of those surveyed said that religion or biblical teaching is the source of guidance for what is right and wrong. The rest identified common sense, philosophy, or science, or stated that they simply didn't know.
- When asked if there is an absolute standard for right and wrong, 69 percent said that there is no such absolute standard; right and wrong depends on the situation or your own beliefs.
- Fifteen percent of those responding said that they do not believe in heaven; 41 percent stated that they do not believe in hell.
- Sixty-five percent answered that they believe that abortion should be legal in all or most cases.
- Nearly three-fourths (73 percent) of the members of that Christian denomination believe that homosexuality should be accepted; 65 percent approve of same-sex marriage.
- When asked about the origin of the universe and life, 78 percent expressed a belief in evolution.
- Fully 80 percent stated that the Bible is not necessarily the Word of God.

What is shocking about this poll is that those who answered belong to a church body with "Lutheran" in its name. (Hint: It's not the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, or the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.)

It is my firm conviction that WELS members' answers to these questions would be vastly different than the answers in this poll. But the point here is not for us to say with sinful pride that we thank God that we are not like oth-

ers who have departed from the truth. The point is this: The Lutheran church body to which these members belong was formed at a time when members held and proclaimed the truths taught in the Scriptures. It's a stark reminder that even faithful Lutheran church bodies and Lutheran Christians can—and do—stray sometimes very far from biblical truth.

The reason for poll results like this can be traced to the very last question listed above. If 80 percent of the members of a church (and probably a similar percentage of their pastors) no longer believe that the Bible is the Word of God, it's not at all surprising that they adopt beliefs that are based not on Scripture but on their own ideas and opinions.

Not every church that believes that the Bible is the Word of God remains a correct-teaching church. Even Bible-believing churches can—and do—distort the truth of God's Word, even as they claim to hold on to it. But one thing is certain: A church that rejects the truth that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God cannot remain a church that teaches the truth.

So what are the lessons to be learned from these poll results? First, this is a stark reminder to listen to God's loving warning that those who think that they are standing firm should be careful that they do not fall. Second, these results can lead us to be incredibly grateful that God has preserved his truth among us. Finally, this poll should lead us to encourage one another, pastors and members alike, to stand firmly on the Word of God as the unchanging truth that it is; to insist that our pastors preach and proclaim that truth boldly and without compromise; and to be filled with thanks and confidence that when our pastors say, "This is the Word of the Lord," that's exactly what we will hear.

Light for our path

Can you please explain *Sheol*? This came up in a recent Bible study, and I knew nothing about it. How does this differ from our thoughts that a believer dies and goes to heaven?

James F. Pope

Sheol is the transliteration of a Hebrew word into English. It is a word that can have different meanings based on context. While most Bible translations translate the Hebrew word, some translations simply render the Hebrew as *Sheol*. So let's take a look at a few Bible passages and see how context determines the shading of that word. I'll include different translations that help explain the meaning.

SHEOL—ALL PEOPLE

"In death there is no remembrance of you; in *Sheol* who will give you praise?" (Psalm 6:5 English Standard Version). The book of Psalms features Hebrew poetry, and the hallmark of that genre is parallelism. In some cases, the first half of a verse is restated in similar terms in the second half of a verse. In Psalm 6:5, *death* and *Sheol* are synonyms. In Scripture, *Sheol* often refers to the state or condition of being dead; a person is no longer physically alive on the earth. This meaning of *Sheol* does not take into account the eternal judgment occurring at death, which places a person's soul in heaven or hell. *Sheol* can simply refer to humanity's common experience of dying: "Among the dead no one proclaims your name. Who praises you from the grave?" (Psalm 6:5 NIV 2011)

SHEOL—BELIEVER

"I will go down to *Sheol* to my son, mourning" (Genesis 37:35 Christian Standard Bible). With but two exceptions (Enoch and Elijah), all human beings have experienced death. In Genesis chapter 37, we learn that some of Jacob's sons had convinced him that his favorite son, Joseph, was dead. Heartbroken, Jacob lamented that his grief would be lifelong—lasting until the time when he, like his son, died. *Sheol* can also refer to the believer's state or condition of being physically dead and

not alive on the earth. "I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave" (Genesis 37:35 NIV 2011).

SHEOL—HELL

"A fire is kindled in My anger, and burns to the lowest part of *Sheol*" (Deuteronomy 32:22 New American Standard Bible). In Deuteronomy chapter 32, Moses spoke to the people of Israel for one of the last times in his life. In his message, he spoke of God's fiery wrath for those who reject him. It is clear that *Sheol* can refer to hell, the place of eternal punishment. "A fire is kindled in My anger, and shall burn to the lowest hell" (Deuteronomy 32:22 New King James Version).

It is context that gives *Sheol* its various shadings. For the Christian, *Sheol* can mean only the grave or the condition of being physically dead. Unless the Lord returns visibly to this world during our lifetime, you and I will experience physical death, but that is just the beginning of a never-ending life with God in his presence.

HEAVEN

Old Testament writers who used the word *Sheol* also spoke of people enjoying God's eternal blessings through faith in the promised Messiah. The writers described heaven in different ways: being at God's right hand (Psalm 16:11), dwelling in the house of the Lord (Psalm 23:6), being with God in glory (Psalm 73:24), having joy (Isaiah 26:19), and enjoying everlasting life (Daniel 12:1-3). Rest assured: When Christians die, their souls go to heaven.

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

Our treasure: THE GOSPEL

THE GOSPEL CHANGES US

"Seven sticks and a circle saved my life." This story shows the gospel's life-changing power to create faith in Jesus.

Nathan C. Buege

In 1970, at the age of 18, Mike joined the military and spent three years in Vietnam, Thailand, and England. Each of those years included heavy drinking. When he got back to the States, he attended college for five years. And the partying continued. He married Linda, his college sweetheart. Together, they raised two handsome boys.

But God was never a part of the picture. The drinking from his military and college days had never stopped. And nearly 40 years later, in 2009, Mike found himself in a terrible place. He admitted his addiction to alcohol. He successfully quit drinking for about 18 months. But God still was not part of the picture.

Then he relapsed. During the next two years, Mike spiraled down to new depths. "After my 18-month sobriety, those next two years of drinking made my previous 30-some years of alcohol addiction seem like nothing," Mike recalled. And after those terrible two years, Linda finally had enough. She moved out. Divorce was all but certain. And Mike's first thought was, *Good. I don't care. Now I can drink without her complaining about it all the time.*

WANTING A CHANGE

But Mike couldn't sleep at night. He couldn't sleep in his lonely bed. He couldn't sleep on the couch by the TV. He couldn't sleep on the patio furniture outside by the pool. He tried drinking even more in order to make himself pass out, but he couldn't even do that. He struggled to care and considered suicide. He missed his wife, he missed his boys, and he realized he was about an inch away from losing everything. He pulled aside a Christian friend from work and spilled his soul. Mike expressed that he was desperate and needed help.

Mike also promised Linda he'd attend an addiction support group meeting. But he got totally lost in metro Houston on the way to the first meeting. He was turned around, stuck in traffic, and furious with himself . . . when he looked up and discovered that he was somehow in the right spot. "Jesus helped me get to that first meeting," Mike said.

For decades, Linda had begged Mike to attend church with her, but he never would. So Mike decided to make a change on Sunday mornings also. He began to attend a church within walking distance from his house—Victory of the Lamb, Katy, Texas. He purposely came late and left early, never leaving any contact information. He told himself he was just doing this for a little while to get Linda back. "Those first couple of Sundays, I must have checked my watch 50 times during the service," Mike recalls. "I really was just forcing myself to be there."

After his third Sunday, Mike was trying to sprint out the door, as usual. But this time, Hal Brazee, a longtime member of the congregation, was waiting for him. "I've seen you come the past three or four weeks," Hal said, "and I haven't been able to say hello yet. Why don't you try coming to our Bible 101 class? It starts next Wednesday. I'll go there with you." He gave Mike a Bible and said, "You're going to need this when you come to class."

Mike thought to himself, *You're just trying to get me to join this church.* But he started Bible 101 class anyway.

HEARING THE LIFE-CHANGING GOSPEL

At first, it was tough sledding. Mike had many questions: "How can Jesus be God and man? Would God really forgive wretched humans? Does this mean my fourth-grade teacher was a liar because she had taught me evolution?" Mike wasn't sure if any of the Bible was true.

Almost every week, I used a drawing of a stick person, a cross, and two arrows. It shows the gospel simply. One stick man is made from five sticks and a circle. Two more sticks depict the cross. Sins follow an arrow to the cross. The perfection of Jesus follows another arrow from the cross to the stick man. The gospel is the news that all our sins are transferred to Jesus and all his perfection is transferred back to us.

After five weeks or so, Mike stuck around after class to express his doubts to me. I listened carefully and then had a suggestion: "There are a lot of things in the Bible that are hard to believe, Mike. Why don't you try listening to the Bible as a child would? And then, in the end, either you believe it, or you don't."

Mike took me up on this suggestion. He simply listened to the Word as a child would listen. The drawing started to make sense. And gradually, without even trying, he noticed his attitude changing. Instead of listing all the reasons why the Bible probably wasn't true, Mike found himself simply saying, "This is true. I believe it. God loves me, yes, even me! God has forgiven me for everything in Jesus! My life has changed!" And that day after Bible 101 class, a grown man in his 60s skipped home, smiling as big and bright as the stars in the Texas sky.

LIVING AS A CHANGED MAN

In November 2013, Mike had a great question for me: "Pastor, I need your

help. Can you help me write a Thanksgiving prayer? This will be my first Thanksgiving dinner that I won't be drunk, and I'd like to lead my family in prayer before the meal." What a wonderful question for a man to be asking! It was a breakthrough Thanksgiving for the Young family.

A little over two years since Mike had forced himself to walk through the church doors for the first time, Mike and Linda were confirmed as members of Victory of the Lamb. And as they walked back to their seats after taking communion, Hal Brazee was waiting for Mike again. This time, it was with a huge bear hug. Through tears, all Mike could say was, "Thanks, buddy."

After worship on their confirmation day, the Youngs threw a party to celebrate all that God had done for them. Several of their new church friends were there, as well as some other friends who were instrumental in helping Mike fight alcoholism. Mike exclaimed, "You know how many parties I've had at my house where there was all kinds of drinking? Well, that party we had on the day we joined the church was the best party we've ever had!"

How is Mike doing now? "I can't even explain how much better my marriage with Linda has gotten—and it just keeps getting better and better. I enjoy serving as an usher because now Sunday is my favorite day! There's a kick in my step, and I can't wait to get to the church service. It's totally different than it was when I first walked through the church doors.

"And I also love talking about how seven sticks and a circle saved my life."

Nathan Buege is pastor at Victory of the Lamb, Katy, Texas.

This is the second article in a six-part series on the power of the gospel.

When Jesus said, “You are my witnesses,” he also promised to give us the power to be light.

Jonathan R. Hein

Many pastors wake up in a cold sweat from this bad dream: It is Sunday morning, but they have not prepared a sermon. Being unprepared to preach—that is the stuff of nightmares for a pastor.

It may not have been a dream for you. When your coworkers failed to show up for work, your boss unceremoniously dumped their responsibilities onto your desk. You had never been trained to do their job. You were just tossed into a sink-or-swim situation. If someone asks you to do something that they *know* you are unprepared to do, at the very least, that demonstrates foolish management. At worst, it is just plain cruel.

POWER FROM ON HIGH

Jesus is neither foolish nor cruel. When he asks people to do something, he always makes sure they are equipped to do what he asks. Jesus *empowers* us to do what he asks. You see it throughout the gospels.

In Matthew chapter 14, Peter walks on water. How is that possible? Jesus is almighty God. Peter was an ordinary sinful man. So how could he walk on water? Simple. Peter asked Jesus to call him, and Jesus said, “Come” (v. 29). Jesus enabled Peter to do what he commanded: “Come!” If Peter had just jumped out of the boat without Jesus’ command, he would need to start dog-paddling. Same thing if Jesus had asked Peter to come but had *not* given Peter the power to do so. Splash! Jesus is neither foolish nor cruel, so when he told Peter to come, he also gave Peter the ability to do just that. Peter did not start to sink until he lost faith in Christ’s promise.

In John chapter 11, a noxious corpse reanimated and walked out of the tomb. How does that happen? “Jesus called in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ ”

WE ARE LIGHT: EMPOWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT



(v. 43). Corpses are decidedly unqualified to walk. But Jesus' command gave Lazarus the very life he needed to obey.

Those are two examples where Jesus empowered individuals to "come." On Pentecost, Jesus empowered individuals to "go."

Not long before he ascended, Jesus told his disciples what their life's mission now was: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). However, Jesus is neither foolish nor cruel. He knew his disciples were not yet qualified or prepared. Thus, he also told them, "Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). He was going to give them the ability to do what he had asked of them.

What was the "power from on high" the disciples needed? "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:4). They needed the power of the Holy Spirit's indwelling. The Spirit enabled the disciples to speak in languages they had not studied.

However, the disciples needed more than supernatural linguistic skills. They required more ordinary spiritual gifts too. They needed courage to speak boldly in the very city where their leader had been tortured and killed not even two months prior. They needed confidence that their sins—including abandoning their friend Jesus in his time of need—did not disqualify them from serving in the kingdom. Scripture does not tell us everything the disciples needed to be bold witnesses on that day. It simply tells us that everything they needed, they received. Jesus is neither foolish nor cruel. When he asks someone to do something, he always gives them "power from on high" to do what he asks.

POWER TO BE LIGHT

Jesus' will for believers has not changed: "Go and make disciples." Take that next-

door neighbor who does not know Jesus well. Why do you think God made them *your* neighbor? So that you might go! Think about that sibling who has drifted away from church. What are you waiting for? If you don't talk to him, then who will? Go! How about that friend who has toyed with Christianity but never taken it seriously? That is low-hanging fruit, friends. Go!

Rejoice that the risen and ascended Lord lets you play a part in his saving work.

You might object: "I'm not qualified." Do you think Jesus is foolish? Do you think Jesus is so incompetent that he would set you up to fail? Nonsense! On that first Pentecost, God let tongues of fire kiss the heads of those first disciples. On your personal Pentecost, God kissed your head and heart with water and the Word. The results are the same. You are "filled with the Holy Spirit" and "clothed with power from on high." When you are presented with an opportunity to witness, Christ promises you, "Do not worry about . . . what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say" (Luke 12:11,12).

You might respond, "But I'm scared." Do you think Jesus is cruel? He knows full well how the gospel can often be met with resistance. Thus he promises you that when you witness, you do not do so alone. "Surely I am with you always," he guarantees (Matthew 28:20).

Jesus is neither foolish nor cruel. He asks us to be zealous in our daily evangelism efforts. He also gives us the ability to do that which he has asked. Therefore, when our evangel-

ism efforts bear fruit, Christ gets all the glory. When Peter walked on water, the disciples were astounded at Jesus' power, not Peter's. When Lazarus rose, people praised Jesus, not Lazarus. Likewise, when believers proclaim the gospel and that witness raises the spiritually dead to faith-life, Jesus gets all the credit. He empowered us to do exactly what he asked.

Jesus would not ask you to do something for which you were unqualified. The proof? He did not ask you to try and win your salvation by obeying the law. He knew that would be impossible for you. Instead, he placed himself under the law and kept it all for you. Nor did Jesus ask you to pay for your sins. Jesus knew that if he did, there would be no end to your payment. So, Jesus did that for you too. Because it was Christ's holy, precious, divine blood that was shed, it did not take forever to pay for sins. Jesus could say, "It is finished." Jesus did not and would not ask you to do something for which you were unqualified. Jesus is neither foolish nor cruel.

Thus when Jesus *does* ask you to do something—to go and make disciples—you can be completely confident that he will give you absolutely everything you need to do just that: the opportunity to witness, the courage, and the powerful words of the gospel. And as you share the gospel with others, you can be confident that Christ will give them the ability to believe.

Jesus will get all the glory, but you will rejoice that the risen and ascended Lord let you play a part in his saving work.

Jonathan Hein, director of WELS Congregational Counseling, is a member at Trinity, Waukesha, Wisconsin.

This is the final article in a two-part series on the necessity of Christian witnessing.

Read about a synodwide outreach effort and how you can be involved on p. 20.

A family finds faith, forgiveness, and their church home.

Julie K. Wietzke

They hadn't lost their faith, but the light of the gospel had grown dim in their hearts.

"We were just stumbling along," says Tracy Heerema, of her and her husband, Daniel.

But they regained their footing—and the light burned brighter—when they started attending a small church right in their neighborhood that has a big heart and a big message of Christ's love and forgiveness for all sinners.

"It just felt like home," says Tracy about Prince of Peace, Flower Mound, Texas.

And it became their home.

SHOPPING FOR CHURCHES

Lutheran teachings were nothing new to Tracy; she was raised in the Lutheran church until the age of 11. But then her parents switched religions to Mormonism, and Tracy says she stopped going to church after her father died when she was 15 years old.

"I don't think I ever truly didn't believe in my heart that Christ was my

Savior," she says, "but I wasn't interested in organized religion."

When she and her husband got married and started having children, they realized that the spiritual part of their marriage was missing. "We felt like church was important," she says, "so we bounced around from church to church to church."

But something was always lacking in the churches they visited. "I just never felt like I belonged," says Tracy. "When they say that everything is bigger in Texas, they're not lying. Most of the churches are huge and overwhelming; to me it felt like it was all about money and show as compared to real community."

Daniel had grown up jumping from church to church while his parents searched for a congregation they liked. He didn't want that for his family, especially when their church searching wasn't going well.

So they stopped looking. "We were burnt out," says Tracy. "We just didn't make it a huge priority." For the most part, religion was reduced to a mention of Jesus at Easter and Christmas.

MAKING A CONNECTION

When their oldest child was 7, Tracy noticed that Prince of Peace, a church she walked by frequently in her

neighborhood, was offering vacation Bible school for the community. "I remembered how much fun I used to have at VBS during the summer when I was growing up," says Tracy. She and Daniel decided to send their son. "That was when I was first introduced to Prince of Peace," she remembers.

A short time later she met Brad Taylor, pastor at Prince of Peace, and his wife, Molly, socially at the school their children all attended. Tracy had just had her second child, and Molly invited her to attend Mornings with Mommy, an outreach program that offers activities for young children to do with their parents, at the church. Tracy started attending the program.

After she had her third child, Prince of Peace began offering Power Hour as well. This program focused more on sharing God's Word with parents and their children through Bible studies and activities. Parents were also invited to a parenting class offered by Pastor Taylor. Tracy naturally transitioned into attending Power Hour with her children along with the Mornings with Mommy sessions.

"During Power 4 Parenting, the 30-minute Bible class that Pastor has, his message and the way he presented everything was so a-ha, so natural,"



Confessions OF FAITH

says Tracy. “It wasn’t like anything else I had heard in any of the other churches my husband and I had tried.”

Tracy says that during that time she and Daniel were struggling with some marital problems. The messages she was hearing at the parenting class really began to resonate with her.

“One day, I just said, ‘I am going to try Sunday services,’ ” says Tracy.

She continues, “When I got to Prince of Peace and started hearing the message, it was like a light bulb went off. I thought, *Hey, I know this. I remember this.* That was what was missing going to all those other churches—the message didn’t resonate. It was too watered down, too taken out of context. I didn’t feel like it was right.”

Tracy says that after she and the kids attended services at Prince of Peace for a couple of weeks, her husband noticed a change in her—a change that sparked his interest. He decided to go too.

“Once he heard Pastor’s sermons, that was it,” says Tracy. “It was just so true; there was no crazy fluff. It felt like home. It was not a big, huge megachurch. It was traditional hymns and the reading of the Scriptures. . . . It didn’t need any of the pomp and circumstance

because it was just the truth. My husband had the same reaction to it. He couldn’t wait for the next Sunday.”

The Heeremas started Foundations of Faith classes and were confirmed in May 2017. Now they are volunteering at the same community events that first introduced them to Prince of Peace.

FINDING FORGIVENESS

Tracy says she has noticed many positive changes since their family started attending Prince of Peace. Their marriage is getting stronger, and the family now talks about their Savior on a regular basis. “With the kids, we can definitely help them to understand what it means to be a child of God,” she says.

She continues, “This has been a huge blessing to our marriage for the two of us to go through this journey together. We both know we’re going to stumble; we’re going to fall. But as long as we continue to remember that Jesus died for all our sins, we can wake up tomorrow and try a little harder.”

Having that message of forgiveness—a message she had learned long ago in her youth—back in the forefront is something that Tracy cherishes. “I just remember feeling a great sense of comfort knowing that I was flawed and that it is okay to be flawed because



Tracy and Daniel Heerema and their children (left to right) Ollie, Sera, and Corbin.

Jesus died to wash away all my sins.

“It’s been a blessing. It made me feel like everything has come full circle.”

They found their home.

Julie Wietzke is managing editor of Forward in Christ.



One of the purposes of this column is to support Christian parents. This month we're focusing on new dads. Check the May column for advice aimed at new moms. (You can search for the articles at forwardinchrist.net using the phrase "May 2018.")

I think the dads who wrote this month hit it out of the ballpark with their articles. Each article on its own is filled with practical wisdom for any parent (not just new dads). Combined? A tour de force! Please read each article and then share them with the dads (and moms) in your life.

Nicole Balza

Join the conversation!

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

WHAT DO NEW DADS TRULY NEED TO KNOW?

If the 2018 version of Jim Aderman could advise the late-1970s Jim Aderman about parenting, the first thing I'd tell that whippersnapper is, "**Kids spell love T-I-M-E.** Spend time with your kids, Jim. Quality time. Focused time. Time free of ringing phones and buzzing text messages. Time divorced from nagging work projects.

"Will using time for your kids threaten your career goals? Yup. But your children are extraordinary gifts from your Father to you and your wife (Psalm 127:3). They are meant to have a higher value than your career. Even a pastor's career. Forty years from now you won't wish you could go back in time to get more done at work.

"Jim, my second piece of advice is, **demonstrate how much you love your kids by loving your wife first.** Children feel most secure when they see that Mom and Dad are 'I-love-you-to-the-moon-and-back' committed to each other. Assure them that your marriage is solid be-

Take a deep breath and see how long you can hold it. Ready . . . set . . . go!

Sixty-five seconds. That's all I got. Can you beat my time? In 2012, German freediver Tom Sietas held his breath underwater for 22 minutes and 22 seconds! That's a long time without taking a breath! Now try making it a day without confessing your sin and hearing the wonderful assurance that your sins are forgiven. Actually . . . don't.

Dads, here's my advice on how to be a better dad: Breathe. Just as you exhale the carbon dioxide from your lungs and inhale the fresh oxygen you need to live, so Christians need the daily life-breath of confession and absolution for their souls to live.

Dads, one thing I've learned in being a dad is that we all mess up. We are selfish sinners. So we will grow impatient, speak harshly, and criticize unfairly. Our selfishness will conflict with the selfishness of our wives and our kids. This is unavoidable this side of heaven.

Math word problems were never my "thing." But math was my dad's forte. As a paper scientist, he loved its logic and precision. I would struggle for what seemed like hours with "One train starts from Chicago at 10 A.M. . . ."—then go to Dad. He would look at my scratchings, smile, and say, "Okay, let's start fresh—a clean piece of paper is a clear mind!" Then off we would go as he explained how to solve it in a way my young mind could grasp.

Dad is gone now. But his lessons live on. What legacy will we leave for our children and grandchildren? Dad supported my dream of teaching, and, after nearly 40 years in a Christian classroom, I've gleaned a few "dad" lessons.

Enjoy the adventure! From the time our little ones arrive to the day they leave home is a precious window. It's easy to get caught in the everyday grind. Before we know it, they're gone and we wonder, "What happened?" The diaper days, toddler years, school days, and adolescence—

cause God's commitment to you in Jesus prompts you to prize their mother above everything else. Even when—no, especially when—she is hard to love. And, by the way, when you love your wife like Christ loved the church, your wife will find it easier to love you and your kids too.

"And that reminds me about something else. Jim, **your children need to know that you love them because of God's cross-guaranteed love for you.** Rejoice over your kids when they excel in school, when they score in soccer, and when they live their faith. But tell them—every day—that you love them not because they please you, but because of Jesus' love for you. Tell them that, since God's grace is constant and measureless, your love for them will never change or fade. Never. Regardless of their grades, their athletic prowess, or their moral standards.

"Now, you won't be able to parent your kids like this driven by your own gumption. **If you are going to love your**

wife and kids like Christ loves you, you need to fill your heart and mind and life with Christ. Immerse yourself in his Word. Read it. Think it through. Study it with others. Share it at your family altar. Celebrate its assurances at worship. Talk with Jesus about it.

"By the way, Jim, I asked your future granddaughter to review this post. She suggests I should also tell you that you won't ever be a perfect father. **Be sure you apply Easter's forgiveness to yourself.** Then live in its power."

Of course, 1977-Jim-Aderman will never hear this advice. But, perhaps, it will help you, young father. Why don't you let me know how it works?

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



But I've also learned that when you mess up, it's best to 'fess up. Admit it when you're wrong. Admit it to God and ask for his forgiveness. Admit it to your family and ask for theirs. In this way you will exhale the carbon dioxide of sin, guilt, and shame that would otherwise poison your soul.

But don't stop there. If you only exhaled and nothing more, you would still die. Inhale too. **After you've exhaled your sin in open, honest confession, then inhale the life-giving oxygen of the gospel.** Breathe in the wonderful, joyous, blissful truth that your sins are forgiven by Jesus. He's paid for all of your sin, guilt, and shame. And he's taken it all away. Take a deep breath and feel the life, peace, and energy that absolution gives.

Sound too easy? God promises it! "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). As God breathed life into Adam's lungs, he breathes spiritual life into our hearts by his forgiving grace.

And as we dads model the daily breath of the Christian through confessing our sins and trusting in the absolution Christ gives, we'll help our kids breathe a little easier too. They will be able to confess their sins to us, knowing that, even while we enforce consequences, we will also be quick to forgive and to assure them of God's forgiveness.

One day soon, unless Jesus returns first, each of us will take our last breath in this world. But with confession and absolution a part of our daily routine, as common as breathing, we will stay ready for that day and help our kids to be ready too. So let's continue to exhale our sins in confession and inhale the life-giving Word of forgiveness that's ours in Jesus. It's the only way to live.

Rob Guenther and his wife, Becky, have four sons ages 5 -14. Rob serves as pastor at Grace, Kenai, Alaska.



they all pose challenges. Do your best to treasure those times. Make the most of your hours with your sons and daughters. The Lord promises "a time for everything" (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

Play "show and tell"—be involved and supportive. Dads need to intentionally "be there" for their children, building relationships and making memories. "Teaching them the way they should go" (cf. Proverbs 22:6) means talking, asking questions, and hanging out together. Know your children's dreams and be their cheerleader. Most important—tell them that you love them. Dads can have a hard time sharing those words their children long to hear. Remember to "show and tell" them they are loved.

Be yourself—not your kid! Guard against forcing your own "agenda" of unmet needs on your children.

Discipline in love. Children make lots of mistakes. They sin often. We sin often. A life of forgiveness is what we

need to model. We have been forgiven much. Avoid disciplining in anger and shaming your children. God reminds dads to never "exasperate" their children (Ephesians 6:4).

Live your faith and be honest. Children are God's gift to us. Being a Christian dad isn't easy. Sometimes it's messy; often we'll fail. That's the nature of our Christian walk. Our heavenly Father knows that. His Word is our guide. He offers full and free forgiveness. We need that forgiveness from our children as well. Being authentic and honest in our faith walk will leave a lasting legacy for our families.

And just for the record—I jotted these thoughts on a clean sheet of paper.

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





teentalk

Jump!

Our heavenly Father is there to catch us whenever we are frightened.

Johanna Leu

Did you ever go on adventures when you were little?

My brother and I always had adventures in our backyard. There was a hill that led down to a valley with a small creek. Near the creek was a place we liked to call “The Kingdom.” It was just a bunch of trees, crushed by one giant, fallen tree, making a long, sheltered area. But it always gave us an adventure.

I have so many memories in that spot. We would spend many hours going outside to manage our “kingdom.” We had a lookout tree to watch for intruders, even a bridge entering into the kingdom, which was really just a fallen tree log. We also found a small curved tree to sit on that had low, small branches that you could wave like a fan at yourself. Of course, since our kingdom was made out of trees, we always were climbing them.

While we were busy adventuring in the trees, my dad would always be near the area, watching to make sure we didn’t fall or get hurt. He wouldn’t intervene, just did other tasks around the area while we played.

I remember once I climbed too high on one of the trees. I was so high I was

scared to come down. In my mind, there was no way I was getting down from there.

I yelled to my brother for help. He answered my call from another tree and told me just to climb down. I told him I couldn’t. He tried to walk me through it, but I didn’t trust that I could do it.

I then saw my dad and called out to him to help. He came near the tree and told me to slowly try to reach the branch below me with my feet. I remember him saying, “Try to get to the lower branch. I know you can do it. Trust me, if you fall, I will catch you.”

After some more prodding, I finally started inching down toward the lower branch, but I couldn’t reach it and was too scared of falling. There were no other branches around it to grab.

My dad then opened his arms and told me to jump to him. That was an even farther distance away than the branch. “Don’t worry, I’ll catch you,” he said. After a few more moments of hesitation, I jumped.

Doesn’t this sound somewhat like our relationship toward God?

We tend to wander off, doing our own things. We get so wrapped up in what

we are doing that we don’t realize he’s always there with us, watching us. We only start to look for God when we face troubles.

And even when we face troubles, God isn’t the first one we turn to for help. We ignore the blatantly obvious help that’s always there and try to seek our own way or follow another’s way out.

But, when push comes to shove and all other options are gone, our heavenly Father is there. He patiently waits for us to come to him. He lays different options out before us to try. And then finally, when all seems lost, he opens up his arms to us so that we can get out of our troubles safely and be enveloped by his grace.

All we have to do is jump.

Johanna Leu, a senior at Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, is a member at St. John (Newtonburg), Newton, Wisconsin.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Becker, James, to retirement
Belter, Jeremy, to Shepherd of the Valley, Westminster, Colo.
Bishop, Joshua, to Grace, Saint Joseph, Mich.
Bode, Seth, to Bethlehem, Carmel, Ind.
Ferch, George, to retirement
Kempfert, Benjamin, to Immanuel, Waupaca, Wis.
Kenagy, Darryl, to retirement
Knickelbein, Thomas, to retirement
Krieger, Philip, to retirement
Mattek, Jeremy, to Immanuel, Greenville, Wis.
Schulz, Jason, to St. John, Stanton, Neb.
Zastrow, Nathan, to Grace, Yakima, Wash.

Teachers

Baer, Marilyn, to retirement
Bauer, James, to retirement
Becker, Denise, to retirement
Berg, Darrell, to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.
Boettcher, Mary, to retirement
Bohme, Amy, to St. Matthew's, Winona, Minn.
Brace, Kim, to retirement
Burmester, Anne, to retirement
Carran, Patrick, to Good Shepherd Lutheran Academy, Deltona, Fla.
Cison, Julianne, to retirement
Cordes, JoAnn, to retirement
Festerling, John, to retirement
Festerling, Julie, to retirement
Fillner, Eric, to Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis.
Fischer, Trudy, to retirement
Frederickson, Rachel, to Risen Savior, Milwaukee, Wis.
Free, Sarah, to St. John, Milwaukee, Wis.
Goede, Ned, to retirement
Gutzke, Ann, to retirement
Hansen, Lauren, to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.
Hansen, Rachel, to Good Shepherd, Burnsville, Minn.
Heinze, Keith, to retirement
Hoffmann, Geoffrey, to retirement
Johnson, Lance, to retirement
Johnson, Sandra, to retirement
Kempky, Jessie, to St. Paul, Moline, Ill.
Kohler, Joanne, to retirement
Kren, Marcie, to Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.
Krentz, Ann, to retirement
Krieger, Christine, to retirement
Leifer, Pamela, to retirement
Leverence, Megan, to St. John's, Wauwatosa, Wis.
Maertz, Shirleen, to retirement
Marose, Susan, to retirement
Marquardt, Elizabeth, to Water of Life, Las Vegas, Nev.

Mattek, Grace, to retirement
Mellon, Kathleen, to retirement
Menges, Bonnie, to retirement
Musser, Janis, to retirement
Peterson, Kenric, to retirement
Pingel, Michael, to Mt. Calvary, Waukesha, Wis.
Randazzo, Marlene, to retirement
Ratzburg, Susan, to retirement
Roecker, Elizabeth, to St. Paul, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis.
Ross, Leanne, to retirement
Rowe, Jodi, to Cross of Christ, Coon Rapids, Minn.
Rupprecht, James, to retirement
Schramm, Deborah, to retirement
Schwall, Jay, to retirement
Sonntag, Matthew, to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.
Stevenson, Ellen, to Pilgrim, Mesa, Ariz.
Strieter, Sue, to retirement
Szczepaniak, Katherine, to St. Philip, Milwaukee, Wis.
Troge, Eric, to retirement
Truss, Abby, to Risen Savior, Milwaukee, Wis.
Voss, Lorraine, to retirement
Wagner, Julie, to retirement
Washburn, Eunice, to retirement
Weihrauch, Carl, to retirement
Wels, Ronald, to retirement
Wendt, Marcia, to retirement
Zellmer, Nona, to retirement
Zellmer, Steven, to retirement

Staff minister

Fry, Jason, to Shepherd of the Hills, West Bend, Wis.

ANNIVERSARIES

Tacoma, Wash.—Evergreen Lutheran High School (40). June 9. Video presentation prior to graduation service. June 23. All-school-alumni-association picnic. RSVP for picnic, 253-946-4488; email@elhs.org. Aug. 19. Special observation during opening service, 4 P.M. Website, elhs.org.
Nicollet, Minn.—Trinity Lutheran School (150). June 17. Worship, 9 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. 507-232-3938; office@trinitynicollet.org.
Rib Falls, Wis.—St. John's (140). St. John's building (100). June 17. Worship, 3 P.M.; dinner to follow. RSVP requested. 715-443-2119; treich77@yahoo.com.
Apacheland, Ariz.—Native American mission work (125). June 22. KI Convention Center, Green Bay, Wis. 6-9 P.M.. Debbie Dietrich, NativeChristians1@gmail.com. Website, nativechristians.org.
Sauk Rapids, Minn.—Petra (50). June 24. Festival service, 10 A.M.; dinner and concert to follow. Website, petralutheran.com.

Anchorage, Alaska—Faith (50). Aug. 5. Anniversary worship, 10:30 A.M.; potluck and program to follow. Website, faithalaska.com. 907-563-3499.

Kaukauna, Wis.—St. John (150). Aug. 12. Website, stjohnkaukauna.com.

Hutchinson, Minn.—Immanuel Lutheran School (100). Aug. 25–26. Aug. 25. Afternoon activities and food truck picnic; evening concert with The Divers. Aug. 26. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; catered meal to follow. Tickets are \$10 adult, \$5 ten and under. 320-587-6138; pastor@immanuelhutch.com.

COMING EVENTS

WELS camps—held around the country throughout the year. Dates and locations available at wels.net/events.

District conventions—held throughout June. Dates and locations available at wels.net/events.

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

WELS International Youth Rally—June 26–29. Bowling State University, Bowling Green, Ohio. Theme: "Never Alone." Website, wels.net/2018youthrally.

WELS Night at Miller Park—Aug. 3. Miller Park, Milwaukee, Wis. Brewers vs. Rockies. Order tickets at reduced rates at brewers.com/wels.

Christian Educators for Special Education annual conference—Aug. 7. Country Springs, Pewaukee, Wis. Website, wels.net/events.

Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors convention—Oct. 10–12. Osthoff Resort, Elkhart Lake, Wis. Website, wels.net/events.

WELS National Multi-Site conference—Nov. 12–14. Ingleside Hotel and Conference Center, Pewaukee, Wis. Website, wels.net/multi-site-2018/.

Tour—"In the Footsteps of Paul" study tour to Greece and Italy. Jan. 4–16, 2019. Hosted by Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Asia Lutheran Seminary, and Wisconsin Lutheran College. steve.geiger@wls.wels.net or joel.pless@wlc.edu.

WELS ONLINE BULLETIN BOARD

Needed and available items as well as volunteer and job opportunities are updated regularly on the online WELS bulletin board. Website, welsrc.net/bulletinboard/.

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.

Reaching one million souls with the gospel

It's not too early to be thinking about Christmas.

But I'm not talking about sales shopping. I'm talking about considering whom to invite to hear about Jesus, the Light in the darkness.

Jonathan Hein, coordinator of WELS Congregational Services, says Christmas Eve is the #1 worship service that unchurched and dechurched people are willing to attend. "The Christmas season is actually a pressure point for a lot of people. The suicide rates go up over the holiday season, and depression spikes," he says. "The world is a dark place; it's been that way since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden. What can pierce that darkness? Only Christ—he is the Light in the darkness."

A new synodwide outreach campaign called C18 is now available from WELS Congregational Services to help congregations and individuals with this outreach opportunity. The theme, "A Light

in the darkness," is based on Isaiah 9:2: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light." The overarching goal of the program? To reach one million people with the gospel message during the Christmas season.

Every commission from Congregational Services will provide royalty-free resources that congregations and members can use in this effort:

- The Commission on Worship is providing worship resources, including worship plans, sermon helps, worship folders, and newly commissioned music for Advent and Christmas.
- The Commission on Evangelism is developing promotional materials such as postcards, banners, and Facebook posts for congregations to use. A Bible study related to the new outreach movie *To the Ends of the Earth* (coming out this fall) will discuss how to witness and share your faith to help prepare members to invite their un-



churched friends, relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors to Christmas Eve services.

- The Commission on Discipleship is producing family Advent devotions, with a special emphasis on training and encouraging families to reach out to the unchurched during the holiday season.
- The Commission on Lutheran Schools is providing WELS schools with evangelism training materials for children and teens.
- The Commission on Special Ministries is developing a Jesus Cares simplified Christmas service with the same theme as C18, so congregations can share the Christmas message

NEW ONLINE RESOURCE CENTER

C18 is just one way WELS Congregational Services is working to help congregations. As part of its five-year strategic plan, Congregational Services is providing multiple resources to assist congregations as they attempt to reach new prospects while simultaneously work to retain current members.

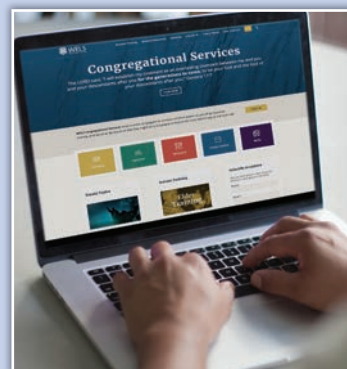
These materials will be available on a new online resource center, welscongregationalservices.net, which is launching this month.

While Congregational Services has provided helps in the past, many of those programs were available through conferences and workshops. This includes the popular School of Outreach and School of Worship Enrichment. While Jonathan Hein, coordinator of WELS Congregational Services, says this type of in-person help is ideal, it also can be cost-prohibitive and may mean congregations have to wait months or even years for a program to come to their area. "Our thought is to provide resources and training online, where it can be asynchronous, immediate, and free," says Hein. "There will always be a need for face-to-face contact, but if we can better utilize technology to help more congregations quickly and at less cost, that just makes a lot of sense."

Much of this training will be conducted through high-quality videos and supporting materials. The site will include a wide variety of modules that deal with specific ministry needs like training volunteers, starting a small-group ministry, working with delinquents, and developing a strategic plan. The site will also provide training materials for lay leaders as they serve in different positions in their congregation.

New resources will be added every six months. Hein says that while many resources are already in the works, Congregational Services will also be looking for grassroots input at the district conventions this month to discover what kind of help congregations need most.

Telling the Next Generation is one example of materials that will be available on the new resource center. Learn more about this program in this month's *WELS Connection*.



with individuals who have intellectual and developmental disabilities.

- The Commission on Congregational Counseling is providing materials to help congregations coordinate this outreach effort as well as helps for following up on contacts after the holiday season.

“It all boils down to WELS members growing closer to Jesus so we have a heart that beats with a love and passion for the lost and so we are willing to step outside our comfort zone to do whatever we can to share the gospel,” says Hein. “Every commission is thinking about this overall goal of gospel ministry and how they can serve it.”

Hein says that this needs to be a synod-wide effort and that congregations and their members need to work together as a church body. “Our job is to simply share the gospel as zealously as we can. We leave the results up to the Holy Spirit,” he says. “However, if together we would achieve the goal of reaching one million souls, and if the Holy Spirit would bless that effort at a similar rate he has for past programs, it would mean about 1,500 people and their families would join a WELS congregation as a result of the C18 program.”

The Christmas campaign will not be the only synodwide outreach effort. Plans are being discussed for programs for a fall festival in 2019 and Easter in 2020. Says Hein, “We want this to become a part of WELS culture—that we work together to reach out to the unchurched in our neighborhoods.”

He continues, “The best evangelism is done by individuals looking to share their faith. The second this launches in June, I want pastors and laypeople to start thinking about whom they are going to start talking to and spend time developing a relationship with so that they can invite them to attend a Christmas Eve service to hear about the Light in the darkness.”

Promotional and planning materials for C18 will be available on the Congregational Services resource center (see sidebar) in June. Learn more about C18 at wels.net/c18.

Let your light shine

In the spirit of Matthew 5:16, we're sharing examples of people who live their faith.

Every weekend, members of Lincoln Heights Evangelical Lutheran Church gather to assemble and distribute meals to the homeless community of downtown Des Moines, Iowa. They are led by Paul “Panera Paul” Menzel.

This homeless ministry began in 2010 when a new location for the bakery and café chain Panera Bread opened in downtown Des Moines. Menzel had heard that the chain often would donate leftover bread and baked goods, so he asked for some on behalf of the church to feed the homeless in the area. The management agreed, and the work began.

Menzel recalls one of the first loaves he gave away to a homeless man: “I passed him this enormous loaf of bread. It may have still been warm, because he zipped it into his shirt.”

Before long, other members of Lincoln Heights asked to assist Menzel, assembling the bread into sandwiches. With the addition of a bag of chips and a bottle of water, they were soon handing out entire bagged meals. They also included a small card with a message of encouragement from God’s Word.

Menzel was welcomed by those he served, earning him the nickname “Panera Paul.” The homeless community now looks forward to his weekly visits. They occasionally ask to pray with him or request one of his signature Scripture cards.

The ministry takes what Menzel calls a “soft sell” approach.

Matt Pfeifer, pastor at Lincoln Heights, echoes Menzel, saying, “The attitude we have is that if we can provide a meal and they learn that they are cared for by at least one person—by Christ—then we are doing good.”

Menzel estimates that since 2010 Lincoln Heights’ homeless ministry has given away over 53,000 pounds—nearly 27 tons—of bread and other baked goods. And they show no signs of stopping. “We’ve done it in snow at 20 degrees below zero and in the summer when it was higher than 80,” Menzel explains.

Whether there is sun, rain, or sleet, he and the other volunteers can be found spending their weekends sharing the kindness of the Savior with the less fortunate through the simple gift of a meal.



Members of Lincoln Heights take time between Sunday morning services to assemble bagged lunches for the homeless.



Paul “Panera Paul” Menzel distributes bagged lunches and words of hope to the homeless camping in downtown Des Moines, Iowa.

Dayton Hamann

Staff ministry training program turns 25

This year, the staff ministry training program at Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., celebrates its 25th anniversary.

Launched in 1993, the staff ministry training program prepares its students to serve as specialized workers at WELS churches, schools, and parasynodicals. Upon graduation, staff ministers can be called to assist with youth and family ministry, evangelism, homebound and hospital ministry, Sunday school and Bible studies, music and worship, administration, and more.

"We are sort of 'Jacks of all ministries,'" says Rod Bollinger, staff minister at St. John's, Oak Creek, Wis. Bollinger fulfills many roles, including family counselor, Sunday school superintendent and teacher, confirmation and Bible class teacher, prison minister, and others.

In the four-year program, MLC's staff ministry students are given a background in theology and trained in skills like counseling and leadership. In a five-year version of the program, students can earn a second major in elementary education or parish music. Students are also required to intern under an active called worker to gain field experience in staff ministry.

Jim Boggs, youth and family minister at St. John, Lannon, Wis., believes staff ministry gave him the opportunity he was looking for. He notes, "As someone who wanted to be in the full-time ministry but didn't have the pull to be a pastor or teacher, I was very grateful for this option."

Sarah Enstad graduated from the program with a second major in elementary education and now teaches at Crown of Life, Hubertus, Wis. She is passionate about MLC's staff ministry curriculum, saying, "The essential skill from my training I use on a daily basis is building and nurturing relationships. This concept was at the core of nearly every class I took."

Kristen Koepsell, coordinator of music, elementary education, and fellowship

at Cross of Christ, Boise, Idaho, also treasures the bonds staff ministers can create. She describes a memorable moment with one of her students, illustrating how God can work through staff ministers to make connections and provide comfort: "A student grabbed me around the waist and said quietly, 'I love you.' I don't think it was really me. It was the Holy Spirit showing him that church was a safe place where people cared about him."



As a youth and family minister, Jim Boggs (back row, third from left) attended the WELS International Youth Rally in 2016 in Fort Collins, Colo., with the teens from St. John, Lannon, Wis.

Looking ahead, Dr. Lawrence Olson, director of the staff ministry program at MLC, says the program will continue to grow in service to the people of WELS: "The scope of training offered in the program is unique to WELS," he says. "We will maintain that thoroughness as we move forward, and we will adapt according to our congregations' needs."

Dayton Hamann

To learn more about MLC's staff ministry training program, visit mlc-wels.edu. Also, watch the March 27, 2018, "Together" video update at wels.net/together for an interview with Levi Nagel, minister of music and worship at St. John, Milwaukee, Wis.

Obituaries

Mary L. Mieding, 1946–2018

Mary Mieding was born Apr. 30, 1946, in Milwaukee, Wis. She died Jan. 8, 2018, in Wausau, Wis.

A 1981 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at St. Peter, Schofield, Wis.

Rita G. Piepenbrink, 1945–2018

Rita Piepenbrink (née Garrett) was born Oct. 19, 1945, in South Milwaukee, Wis. She died Jan. 13, 2018, in Crete, Ill.

A 1968 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at East Fork, Whiteriver, Ariz., and Zion, Crete, Ill.

She is survived by her husband, Victor; two daughters; two brothers; and four sisters. She is preceded in death by one son and one sister.

Janet L. Seiltz, 1941–2018

Janet Seiltz (née Griebing) was born July 12, 1941, in Milwaukee, Wis. She died Jan. 16, 2018, in Jackson, Wis.

A 1963 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; Zion, Egg Harbor, Wis.; and St. Peter's, Sturgeon Bay, Wis.

She is survived by her husband, Paul; two sons; one daughter; ten grandchildren; and one sister. She is preceded in death by a grandchild.

Wernor E. Wagner, 1925–2018

Wernor Wagner was born Nov. 23, 1925, in Sebewaing, Mich. He died Jan. 22, 2018, in Elkhorn, Wis.

A 1951 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Grace, Crivitz, Wis.; Immanuel, Findlay, Ohio; Redeemer, Tucson, Ariz.; St. Luke, Saginaw, Mich.; St. Matthew, Janesville, Wis.; Shepherd of the Hills, La Mesa, Calif.; Emmanuel, Owatonna, Minn.; and St. John, Milton, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Delores; two sons; two daughters; eight grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by two brothers and two sisters.

Home Missions approves new mission starts

This April, the Board for Home Missions approved support for seven new mission congregations as well as support to enhance mission-minded ministry at seven other congregations.

“Being a part of the process that determines which new starts and enhancements to support is challenging but rewarding,” says Wayne Uhlhorn, chairman of the Board for Home Missions. “Our Home Missions Executive Committee takes a thorough look at each request to prayerfully determine which requests give us the best opportunity to reach more souls with the saving gospel of Jesus. We also try to determine which requests are ready and which ones might need a few more months of preparation. That is the challenging part. The rewarding part of the process is when we leave our meeting and know we’ve been blessed to start 14 new ministries that give us ways to spread God’s life-giving Word.”

The ministries receiving financial support for a new mission include:

- Reno, Nev.—Two area congregations are partnering to start this congregation in the Northern Valleys area of greater Reno. On March 25, the first worship service was held; 63 people attended.
- Phoenix, Ariz.—Crosswalk, Phoenix, is opening a second site to reach out into downtown Phoenix.
- Joplin, Mo.—A strong core of WELS and Evangelical Lutheran Synod

members from the two nearest churches are helping support this mission.

- Brandon, S.D.—Near Sioux Falls, this new congregation includes core members from two WELS churches and an Evangelical Lutheran Synod congregation.
- Milwaukee, Wis.—Grace in downtown Milwaukee, one of WELS’ original congregations, is establishing a new location in an area known as the Third Ward.

Two new multi-site starts are being subsidized by their original congregations. Home Missions will provide assistance through its district mission boards, mission counselors, and syn-



Grace, Milwaukee, Wis., held its first service at its second site in Milwaukee’s Third Ward on April 8. Services are currently being held each Sunday on the second floor of the Broadway Theatre Center.

odical support staff but not provide direct funding. These include:

- Hobart, Wis.—Mount Olive, Suamico, Wis., is starting a second site in Hobart. The congregation is calling a second pastor to begin this new ministry.
- Horicon, Wis.—Members of St. John’s, Juneau, Wis., see an opportunity to reach out in nearby Horicon, where 90 members of St. John’s live. Saturday worship services are scheduled to begin in Horicon in June.

Home Missions is also financially supporting mission-minded enhancements to these existing congregations:

- Crown of Life, Corona, Calif.;
- Faith, Anchorage, Alaska;
- Grace, Seattle, Wash.;
- Ascension, Harrisburg, Penn.;
- Shepherd of the Hills, Knoxville, Tenn.;
- Trinity, Waukesha, Wis.; and
- Epiphany and First, Racine, Wis.

“It is our prayer that through these new starts and enhancements more souls will be reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ and be brought to faith in Jesus as their Savior from sin,” says Keith Free, administrator of WELS Home Missions.

Free reports that Home Missions currently supports 99 subsidized and 33 unsubsidized missions.

For more information on WELS Missions, visit wels.net/missions.



Home Missions is providing three years of subsidy for Trinity, Waukesha, Wis., to further develop its Hispanic ministry. Pictured are members of a Bible information class that Trinity held for its Hispanic neighbors who wanted to learn more about their Savior.



A strong core group in Joplin, Mo., is working hard to establish a new congregation in this area. Now that the group has received status as a subsidized home mission congregation, funding is available to support a home missionary to help the group reach out in Joplin.

A new way to start your mission journey

A new program called WELS Mission Journeys is coordinating short-term trips for WELS congregations and their members to help home mission churches, world mission fields, and existing congregations with outreach events.

Shannon Bohme, coordinator of the Mission Journeys program, says that there is a huge gap between congregations and WELS members who were looking for short-term mission experiences and available options for taking trips like these. With the creation of this new program, WELS Missions will offer opportunities for laypeople to get involved in outreach as well as to experience work in the mission field firsthand. “You will get the joys and the sorrows,” says Bohme, who has had 17 years of international mission experience. “You may invite someone to come to church and they don’t come; that’s real-life mission work. But you may also get the chance to tell someone about their Savior for the first time.”



Through WELS Mission Journeys, members of St. Martin’s, Watertown, S.D., traveled to East Asia to help with outreach.

But the trip will be just the start of each person’s mission journey.

“We’re looking at a way we can grow together in the Great Commission,” says Bohme. “We want everyone to take that excitement from the mission experience, bring it home, and start looking at their neighbors in a different way—to start inviting them to learn about the most important thing in the world, their Savior.”

For the program, members age 13 and up from a congregation or school will sign up for the trip as a group. Training, which includes team building and culture awareness, then will be provided. After the trip, the team and its supporting organization will be encouraged to conduct an outreach event in its own community.

Bohme says the plan is to offer 40 one- to two-week trips in the first year of the program, with 200 trips completed after three years. About three-quarters of these trips will be domestic, with the remaining going to world mission fields. Events on these trips could range from canvassing to helping run vacation Bible schools or soccer camps. “It

all depends on what the field needs,” says Bohme. Congregations will fund the trips on their own, with WELS Missions providing the training and coordination needed to make the trips happen.

Three congregations participated in the pilot program: St. Matthew’s, Oconomowoc, Wis., and Goodview Trinity, Goodview, Minn., both sent teams to Ecuador, and St. Martin’s, Watertown, S.D., sent members to East Asia.

The group from St. Martin’s spent eight days in East Asia to conduct an Easter outreach event and meet new contacts. Jeff, a member of the group, says they told the Easter story to 51 people who had never heard it before. “They kept thanking us over and over for sharing the message of Jesus with them. The look in their eyes is unforgettable,” he says.

Jeff had never been on a mission trip like this before. “I didn’t really have any expectations, just that we would hopefully have many opportunities to share the Easter message. I didn’t look at it that I would gain anything, but, wow, was I wrong,” he says. “It will definitely change your life for the better. Your outlook on different cultures, the friendships you will make or strengthen, the memories you’ll make, and your attitude about serving others will all be better than you can imagine.”

While he says he will go again on a trip like this “in a heartbeat,” he also learned lessons he can use anywhere. “Just keep looking for opportunities to share Jesus with more and more people, wherever you are. God will give you plenty of opportunities if you are looking for them. He will also give you the words to say—you just need to be willing.”

Matt, who has had previous experience in East Asia, served as the group’s leader. “My favorite part of the trip was seeing the excitement in my team as they had many new experiences. It was really fun to see the spiritual growth in each of my teammates.”

But he also discovered lessons of his own: “I learned that culture doesn’t matter; people are still people. Everyone has hopes and dreams. They also have pains and sorrows. They also have a natural knowledge of God. And because of sin, everyone needs a Savior. It is such a humbling experience knowing that God has used me to share this message with others halfway around the world!”

Matt says the team is working with the congregation to potentially start a local campus ministry to reach out to students at a nearby tech school.

Want to get involved in WELS Mission Journeys? Talk to your pastor about getting a group together from your congregation. Learn more at wels.net/missions or by contacting missionjourneys@wels.net.

District news

ARIZONA-CALIFORNIA

Light of the Valleys, Reno, Nev., held its first worship service on Palm Sunday. This new home mission is a partnership between two neighboring congregations—Shepherd of the Mountains, Reno, and The Springs, Sparks, Nev.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

Palos, Palos Heights, Ill., dedicated its new sanctuary on April 29.

SOUTH ATLANTIC

Risen Savior, Bradenton, Fla., began in February 2001 with in-home Bible studies. In 2009, Risen Savior completed one-third of its planned church building. The fellowship hall served for worship services, community gatherings, Bible studies, and other needs. On March 25, 2018, Risen Savior celebrated the completion of its building, holding worship in its new sanctuary and Bible study classes in a new wing that serves as space for classrooms and offices. The congregation is exploring how to use the new space to serve its community and tell more people about Jesus.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

SEW—Bethany, Manitowoc, Wis., is celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2018.

On April 13, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., celebrated the 25th anniversary in the pastoral ministries of **Thomas Kock** and **Bradley Wordell**.

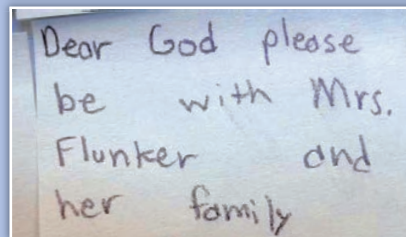
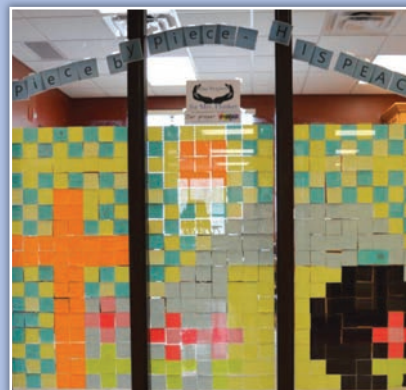
NW—On May 6, St. Paul, Berlin, Wis., celebrated the 60 years that **Adeline Abel** has served as the congregation's organist.

MN—Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., celebrated the teaching ministry anniversaries of **Larry Lotito** (25 years), **Ron Ohm** (40 years), and **Cindy Whaley** (40 years) on April 29.

The Lutheran Home Association, Belle Plaine, Minn., is celebrating its 120th anniversary this year.

The district reporters for this month are: AZ-CA—Michael Schroeder; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NW—Dennis Kleist; PNW—David Birsching; SC—Andrew Retberg; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

MINNESOTA



After second-grade teacher Sandi Flunker was diagnosed with cancer in March, her students at Risen Savior, Mankato, Minn., designed a Post-it mosaic for her. Students wrote prayers on the notes and then arranged them to reveal an Easter scene of the empty tomb. Above the scene were the words, "Piece by piece, His peace."

PACIFIC NORTHWEST



On March 5, the Anchorage Fire Department presented Fred Voss (center) with the Fire Chief's Commendation Award for his work among them as a chaplain. Voss, who serves as pastor at Shepherd of the Hills, Anchorage, Alaska, helps manage stress and ministers to the emotional health of police, fire, and EMS personnel. Voss is pictured here with Anchorage's fire chief and mayor.

SOUTH CENTRAL



From April 18–20, Grow in Grace, the institute for pastoral growth at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, hosted more than 200 people for the seventh annual Celebration of Ministry retreats. Held in San Antonio, Texas, four retreats ran simultaneously for pastors and their wives who were celebrating 3, 10, 25, and for the first time 35 years since graduating from the seminary. Pictured are several couples from the 35th anniversary class. These retreats build relationships with ministry peers and offer encouragement through worship, Bible studies, workshops, and presentations.



SALT — of the — EARTH

Since we have the peace that flows from God's love in Christ, we desire peace with others and for others. Aaron H. Goetzinger

The scene was horrific, but I can only try to imagine it since I heard about it secondhand. What I struggle to understand is the agony parents would feel when they saw their son's blood watering the ground. Would any parent ever dream it? What started as a sibling rivalry ended in death and, more than that, murder. Cain envied Abel, and that envy grew into anger, which then grew into hatred. Conflict was crouching at Cain's door. It desired Cain, and he did not resist.

It's difficult for many of us to see ourselves in this account. If we identify with either of the two brothers, we most likely identify with Abel. He was the good guy. He happily gave an offering to God, and God accepted it. We like to see ourselves in that kind of positive light. But the lesson is that after the fall into sin, when people live together, conflict results.

Though I have not murdered my brother, the lesson of Genesis chapter 4 has proven itself to be true right up to today. The lesson applies to all of us. We all innately desire to live in community with one another, yet the problem is that our communities are made up of sinful people. Conflict crouches at each one of our doors.

"Fine!" a wife shouts. "Fine!" a husband screams as he slams the door behind him.

A father retorts, "You need to do your job and give my daughter more playing time!"—all while wagging his finger in the coach's face.

"IF YOU'RE ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE, YOU'RE THE PROBLEM!" With this line, the woman puts the icing on her vitriolic Facebook post and sends it.

We are heirs of the same problems that have plagued human culture and community since the days of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel. Even in a group of like-minded individuals, strife and conflict will rise. This is precisely why the apostle Paul needed to give this reminder to Christians: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18).

PEACE DOES NOT TAKE SIDES

Conflict is a question of sides. Are you a millennial or not? Did you vote for President Trump or not? Are you on the side of right, or are you on the side of wrong? Are you *us* or are you *them*? However, contrasted against such a binary view of life, Paul calls on us to live at peace. He does not take sides. Rather, peace looks for common ground and defuses conflict.

Paul takes a wide sweeping view of peace because the peace that Christians have been granted takes no sides. When Paul opened his letter to the Romans, he said "To *all* in Rome who are

loved by God . . . Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:7). At the end of Romans, he gave this blessing, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him” (Romans 15:13). Then he closed by saying, “The peace of God be with you all. Amen.” (Romans 15:33).

Christians in Rome all had the peace that flows from God’s love in Christ. Our entire relationship with God has changed. A relationship that was once marked by animosity and hostility is now marked by a declaration of peace (Romans 5:1). Our minds, since they are no longer controlled by sin and death, are filled with life and peace (Romans 8:6). Just as the peace of God takes no sides, it also ushers in wide-sweeping change in each of us. We desire peace with others, even in difficult relationships.

PEACE IS NOT WEAKNESS

Some may wonder if we become push-overs or if there is a certain weakness in peace making. The cynic may snarl, “Well, if you want peace, prepare for war”—as if we become losers when we seek to keep the peace. This is a very worldly view of peace and conflict.

When the disciples were worried about Jesus’ future, he assured them, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives” (John 14:27). Similarly, Jesus assured them that though they may experience strife and trouble, the peace that he provides between sinners and the Father transcends and overcomes this world (John 16:33).

Jesus says these things because the peace we enjoy with God can never be taken from us. The peace we have with God is sealed in his blood. Though what your spouse says or does may hurt you deeply, those words cannot impact the peace you have with God. Though someone from a different generation annoys you, they cannot influence the everlasting peace Jesus gives to you. Though you disagree with someone from the opposite side of the aisle, their political statements do not change your standing with God.

Paul understands fully the kind of world in which we live. Christians live in a tense relationship with the world. In Romans chapter 3, Paul says one piece of evidence of sin in the lives of sinners is their lack of understanding of real peace. Later in chapter 12, Paul acknowledges that Christians will be faced with persecution and evil. This is why he says in verse 18 that we are to live in peace “if it is possible.”

At the same time Paul is not letting us off the hook. He says, “As far as it depends on you.” Though we live in an evil world that fails to understand real peace, we are to bless persecutors and not repay evil with evil. We are to live peaceful lives and seek to negotiate peace as much as we are able. Part of that task means we are to share the peace we have because of our Savior with those still trapped in a world of hostility and conflict.

As Christians we are in this world, but we are not of this world. We are salt. We are different from the world. We have peace within. This eternal peace is carried with us in our everyday lives. When Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9), he is encouraging us to “live at peace with everyone.” We are always Christians and peacemakers before we are defined by our own generation, politics, or nationality.

We have the peace that changes our relationship with our God. We have the peace that now fills us and changes us. We have the peace that helps us to see other people less as a threat and more as those who need peace. We have the peace that causes us to understand that the peace of God is not one of sides, but is for all people.

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

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

AS FAR
AS IT
depends
ON YOU,
LIVE AT
peace
WITH
EVERYONE.

ROMANS 12:18

Reaching Native Christians

The Native American mission is training Native Christian leaders as it continues moving forward with the message of salvation.

Daniel J. Rautenberg and Debbie K. Dietrich

“Even if you’re on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there.”

I can still see that inspirational quote from Will Rogers stuck to the painted cinderblock walls of my seventh- and eighth-grade classroom. Decades later, it crosses my mind as I share with you a vision for the future of WELS Native American missions.

We are still on the right track, the track that leads to heaven. That track is narrow and winding. It is also treacherous, as the traditional Apache medicine man lurks behind a bush, waiting to attack unsuspecting Christian travelers. But for 125 years, Native Christians in Apacheland have been walking the track with Jesus to heaven. By the grace of God, that has not changed.

And yet, danger is all around us. Apathy, dependency, and even comfort threaten to run us over. We need to recapture the mission spirit, renew our love for the lost, and take our rightful place in the long line of Christians who are dedicated to passing on the good news.

“Now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

If Christ’s love is the engine that moves us forward, the Apache Christian Training School (ACTS) is the vehicle that will carry our native Christians into the future. Nearly 20 years ago, the missionaries and congregational leaders serving nine congregations and three schools on the Apache reservations realized something important. They were working faithfully, but they weren’t moving forward. In fact, at times it seemed as if the mission field was slowly losing ground. It was too easy to be comfortable telling the great stories of our past, rejoicing in the generous support of their brothers and sisters in WELS, and thanking God that the communities continued to receive the gospel from faithful servants. To move forward, they resolved to train Apache Lutherans for service in God’s kingdom through the ACTS program.

God has blessed this work, with many Apache leaders taking classes today. Now our congregations are stronger.

Ministry programs are being led by Apaches. Twenty-five percent of our called workers are Apache and more are in training.

And God is giving us opportunities. Five hundred more reservations need God’s Word! By most estimates, up to 95 percent of the people living on those reservations are not Christian. There will never be an easy time for us to reach out with the gospel. Satan will fight hard against us. But there has never been a better time than now to start.

We have the educational resources. We have connections all over the country. We have 125 years of experience and perspective from teaching the Word to Native people. And we are training new Native missionaries to serve.

Now it is time for us to go into the unknown with the same courage, confidence, and faith of the missionaries 125 years ago. It is time to take risks, to leave comfort behind us, and to experience the joys and heartbreaks that



Samantha Thompson



Wade Robertson



Brenda Lee



Margaret Dona

come with sharing the gospel. It is time for Natives to reach beyond the borders of the two Apache reservations.

We're starting by sending digital scouts. Our first Native American missions website, nativechristians.org, is up and running, and our Bible classes will soon be going beyond the Apache reservations. Within three years, our goal is to have Native missionaries from the ACTS program on the ground sharing the gospel in at least two new places.

Meet some of our Native Christians who are excited to be on the right track and moving forward with the gospel:

Samantha Thompson: "I love working at the Peridot School and coming to Sunday worship. That's where people encourage me to stay true to our triune God in the Bible. That is where I am surrounded by my church family so I can serve God well."

Wade Robertson: "I enjoy serving as president of my congregation. I didn't think I was ready for such a job at such a young age, but my pastor did! Now I also serve on the Peridot-Our Savior's school board, where we have many challenging decisions to make. I really want to see more Apache become full-time and part-time called workers. I'm trying to do whatever it takes to see my people rise up as leaders in our awesome Lutheran church."

Brenda Lee: "I love serving in my church. My sisters and I have all taken lots of ACTS classes to grow in our faith—you can't get enough of those classes and after them you just want to serve in your church and community! I am honored to get to help Debbie bring many Apache ladies to the LWMS rally. We are going to love learning all about the WELS missions and to come back strong in faith and eager to serve in our own communities!"

Roberta Belvado: "I didn't think I could be useful, and now I'm serving as a weekly Sunday school teacher. The children are our next generation of leaders. I see that in them. I want them to be strong in faith."

Leonard Fall: "I served on the Tribal Police and Bureau of Indian Affairs for 25 years, but serving as an evangelist is the best work ever. It's so rewarding to share the Scriptures I have known since I was young, studied in depth through ACTS Bible classes, and even more intensely when going through the evangelist program at our ACTS Bible Institute. I understand my people. My favorite part of being an evangelist is to preach in Apache, our language. The brotherhood of my fellow called workers is also a great joy. We study together, and I'm still learning more about God from our sermon studies."

Bernard Dale: "I'm an assault survivor, former alcoholic, and former drug addict. I'm grateful to be alive by the grace of God. I'm soaking in God's Word at ACTS classes and applying it to my life. I suffered a lot of trauma, and, in a way, it made me hard. But the Holy Spirit turned my heart back, and it proves that God is real. I was made new to serve the Lord, and one day, hopefully, that means in some official way by graduating from many ACTS Bible classes. I already have the honor to serve in music ministries and on our McNary church council, to teach Sunday school, and to help in our recovery ministry. I have a hunger. I want to hear more of Jesus. It never gets old."

Daniel Rautenberg is the Native American mission field coordinator. Debbie Dietrich is the Native American mission communication coordinator.

This is the final article in a three-part series on WELS mission work on the Apache reservations in Arizona. Read another Apache leader's story on p. 30.

Don't miss a special 125th anniversary celebration of Apache mission work on June 22 at the KI Convention Center in Green Bay, Wis. Learn more at nativechristians.org.



Pastor Gary Lupe



Roberta Belvado



Leonard Fall



Bernard Dale

Saved and healed

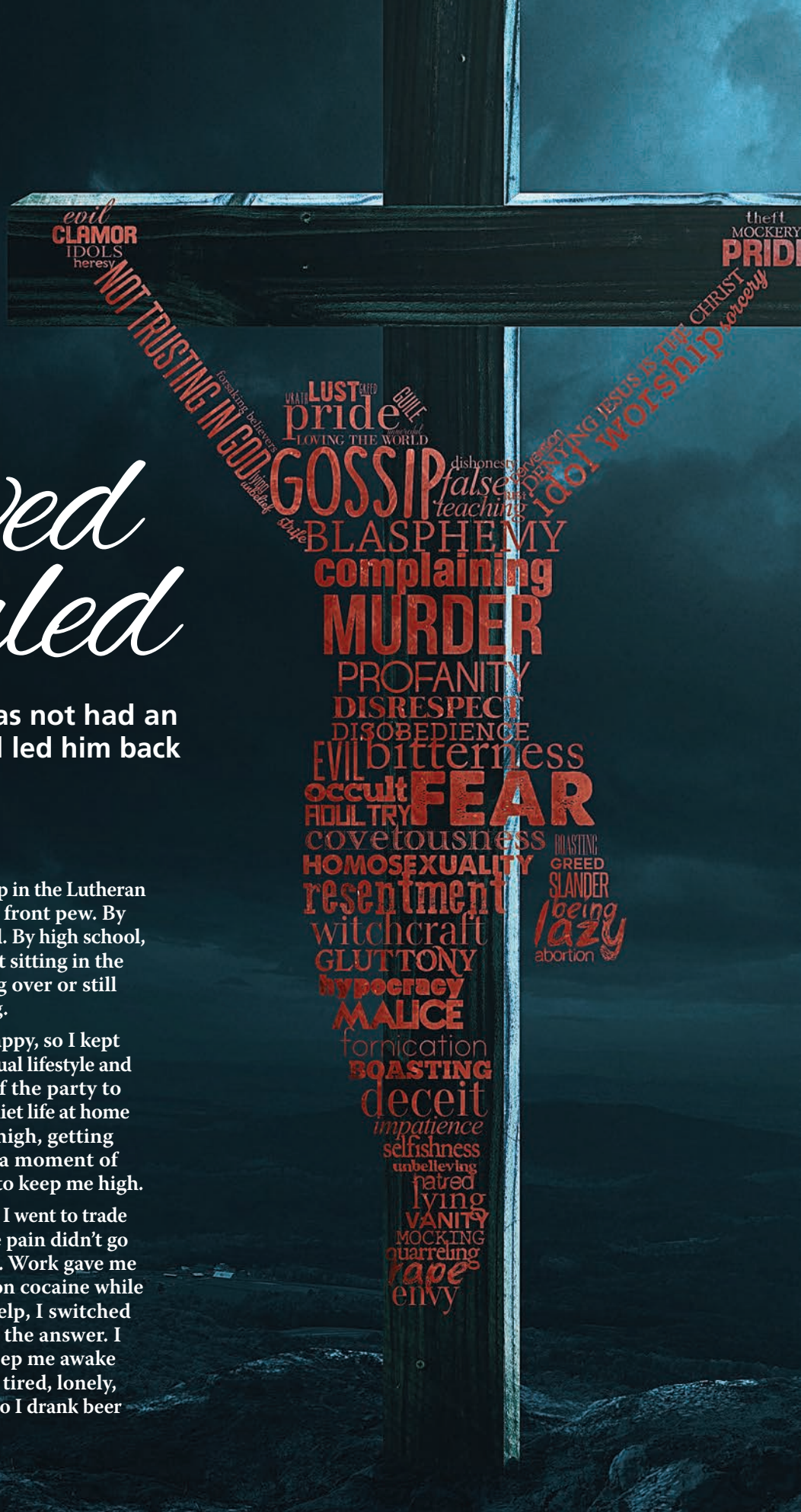
Jimmy Cassadore has not had an easy road, but God led him back to a life of service.

Debbie K. Dietrich, as told to her by Jimmy Cassadore

My grandfather brought me up in the Lutheran church. I sat with him in the front pew. By eighth grade, I was confirmed. By high school, I was still going to church but sitting in the back pew, half the time hung over or still high from a night of partying.

After high school, I wasn't happy, so I kept drinking. I tried the homosexual lifestyle and learned to become the life of the party to hide my pain. I lived a sad, quiet life at home when not partying, getting high, getting drunk, or selling myself for a moment of pleasure and a bit of money to keep me high.

Finally, in a moment of clarity, I went to trade school to be a mason. But the pain didn't go away. Work wasn't the answer. Work gave me money, and I lived life high on cocaine while at work. When that didn't help, I switched to meth. I thought I'd found the answer. I stayed high using meth to keep me awake at work and came home sad, tired, lonely, and in deep emotional pain. So I drank beer until I fell asleep.



evil
CLAMOR
IDOLS
heresy

NOT TRUSTING IN GOD

LUST
pride
LOVING THE WORLD

GOSSIP
BLASPHEMY
complaining

MURDER
PROFANITY
DISRESPECT
DISOBEDIENCE

EVIL
bitterness
occult
FEAR

covetousness
HOMOSEXUALITY
resentment

witchcraft
GLUTTONY
hypocrisy
MALICE

BOASTING
deceit

impatience
selfishness
unbelieving
hated
lying

VANITY
MOCKING
quarreling
rape
envy

BOASTING
GREED
SLANDER
being
lazy
abortion

thrift
MOCKERY
PRIDE

denying JESUS IS THE CHRIST
Idol worship
worry

This routine kept me going for almost six years. My pain just grew worse. I worked at my job only to stay high and when that wasn't enough, I sold myself to men and women and finally started selling drugs myself. I lied. I cheated. I stole. I had gone from the back pew of church to out the back door.

THE ROAD BACK HOME

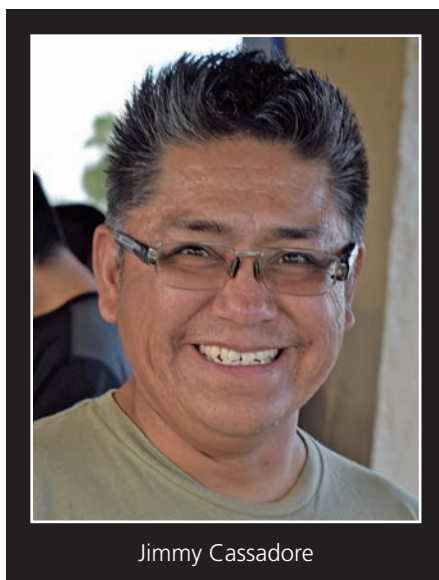
Soon it happened. I got arrested and taken to jail—for one day! After I was released, I tried to hitchhike a couple hours to my home. It was cold, raining, and no one was around, so I walked. Along the way, I yelled and argued with God. I thought, *He doesn't even care about me*. So I laid down in the middle of the road on the side where most of the cars were coming. I was just waiting to get run over, but no cars or trucks came!

I got up and started walking and really screamed at God, because now cars and trucks kept going by. I laid down again in the middle of the road and waited to die, thinking that would end my pain. Nothing. No cars. No trucks again. Just cold, rain, and lots of pain.

Finally, I got up again, yelling at God until I was exhausted and fell to my knees crying in pain. "God, I'm sorry, please forgive me and show me the way to go from here just like you showed Moses." And then I fell asleep in the cold rain on the side of the road.

When I woke up, it was pitch black, and I just prayed God would get me home. A trucker stopped and picked me up. I told him I'd just been praying for a ride home and then he appeared. We talked, and he listened and let me use his phone to call my mom to pick me up. She said she had no car, but she'd work on it.

When the trucker let me off where my mom might come to get me, he would not leave me alone. He stayed for 30 minutes. Finally, my mom came, and I was still so angry at everything. I had planned to yell at her for letting me hitchhike. But when she opened the car door, I fell down weeping like a small child and crying to her that I was so sorry. She welcomed me home where



Jimmy Cassadore

blankets and food, hot drinks, and my grandma all waited. We all hugged and cried together.

The phone rang, and it was the truck driver asking if I'd made it home and praising God that I had! Sometimes I wonder if he was an angel or God himself. Whatever it was, it was God saving me and getting me home.

A few weeks later, one Sunday, I woke up my mom. When she asked, "Where are you going now?" I told her, "To church with you."

I quit all those drugs and alcohol and the homosexual lifestyle. It wasn't easy at all. For two solid years I dreamed of doing all those sinful things and often felt afraid. People hated the person I had been, but they hated me now too. Yet I kept clean and dry and also kept going to church. A friend told me about a Lutheran recovery program, so I went to check it out. It was awesome. I met people just like me. We shared our hurts and habits and encouraged each other with God's Word. I was getting help. I was thankful to God that for some reason unknown to me, he must have a purpose for me on this earth.

A ROAD FORWARD

When someone at church suggested I take Apache Christian Training School (ACTS) Bible classes, I said, "No way. I already go to church. You don't know

what's good for me." But he said I'd get a lot out of deep Bible study, so I tried it. I was hooked! We studied the Word deeply and then discussed how it applied to our lives. I've learned to share the messages from the Bible at work and also discussed them with my mom, relatives, and friends. I was on fire for the Lord, and I couldn't get enough of studying and sharing the good news about Jesus! I still feel that way.

Then the pastor who was teaching asked me if I would become a leader for our Lutheran Recovery Ministry.

"ME?" I said "No, I don't think so. I'm not worthy. I've been into drugs, a homosexual, a dealer, and put many people in danger. I'm just a mason. Pastor, go find someone with credentials!"

Pastor said, "We just did, Jeep! (That's what they call me here.) You can use your past experience and your love and deep knowledge of the Scriptures to be a Christian leader, helping those who've been where you've been and want out. We need you here in the Lutheran Recovery Ministry."

Now I've been eight years sober and clean and four years with the ACTS Bible program. The classes have opened my eyes to exactly what God tells us in the Bible, and I can clearly see how our Lutheran churches do not add or subtract anything from the Bible. It's not about race, culture, age, or our past. We're a family who is always there to hold each other up as we serve in our families and communities, at work, and in our churches.

Life is still hard. I've been beaten, bruised, and raped, and that hurts. But now I'm saved, healed, redeemed, and serving as a Christian leader. I have never been happier. God did have a plan for me. He brought me back to serve him. Hang in there; God has a plan for you too.

Debbie Dietrich is the Native American mission communication coordinator. Jimmy Cassadore is a member at Open Bible, Whiteriver, Arizona.

Read more stories about Apache Christian leaders on p. 28.

“I do.” “He did.”

Glenn L. Schwanke

Jesus did
what no sinner,
no husband,
no wife,
can ever do.

Statisticians inform us that 2.3 million couples wed each year in the United States. That works out to some 6,301 weddings per day. June is the most popular month for weddings. About \$72 billion is spent on weddings each year. The average number of guests invited to a wedding is 178. The average wedding cost is \$20,000.

That last piece of information brings a tear to my eye. Why? Lord willing, our daughter is getting married this summer.

The date the wedding is scheduled is June 9, thirty-nine years to the day after my wife and I exchanged our wedding vows on June 9, 1979, at St. John's, Clinton Avenue, Milwaukee. (The congregation is now called Loving Shepherd.)

I wish I could tell you what the pastor's wedding address was about all those years ago. But I was far too nervous to take it in. Nervous because of the vows that my wife, Teresa, and I sealed with the simple promise, “I do.”

And this June 9? I will be nervous again, but not because I haven't performed weddings before. I've had that privilege countless times over the years. Yet this marriage will be unique in my ministry. It's for our only child.

I've had folks ask, “Does a pastor walk his own daughter down the aisle?” My response, “I plan to.” When we reach the front of the church, I'll lift her veil, give her a hug and a kiss, hand her to her fiancé, and give him a firm handshake. Then I'll step up to the altar, turn, and begin the service in my role as pastor.

“Will you get emotional? Will you cry?” “More than likely, but I trust God's Spirit will help me get through the service.”

Don't miss the point. The service revolves around a man and a woman standing before their families and friends in God's house. There they publicly declare their commitment to each other with the solemn pledge, “In the presence of God

and these witnesses, I take you to be my wife/husband. I promise to be faithful to you, as long as we both shall live.” The service is about the simple promise, “I do.”

Yet the wedding ceremony is about far more than that! Think of all the family and friends who come to the wedding. Some of them rarely, if ever, go to church otherwise. Maybe they've never cracked open a Bible. What do they need to hear on the wedding day? What do we all need to hear? “He did.”

Jesus did what no sinner, no husband, no wife, can ever do. As Paul explains, “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy. . . . He did this so that he could present her to himself as a glorious church, having no stain or wrinkle or any such thing, but so that she would be holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:25-27 Evangelical Heritage Version). Because of what Jesus did, our Lord will shower his grace on our hearts and homes in this life and then wrap his arms around us in the life to come in heaven above! Knowing this, I'll make sure all the worshippers at this wedding hear, “He did.”

And for the bride and groom? I'll print copies of the address, just in case they're too nervous to listen closely during the ceremony.

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

MAJORING ON THE MINORS

Thomas D. Kock

OBADIAH: DID GOD SAY THAT???

Did God say that???

The question is reasonable, and Obadiah likely raises that question.

A MESSAGE OF PUNISHMENT

The one-chapter book of Obadiah is unusual. It's addressed to a specific nation: Edom. Edom was located to the east and south of the Dead Sea and was a perpetual enemy of the Israelites. That is tragic, for the Edomites were the descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother. (Read the account of Jacob and Esau, starting at Genesis 25:19.) So Edom was a cousin nation to Israel.

But the relationship between Edom and Israel was awful. Psalm 137:7 tells us that on the day Jerusalem was destroyed (586 B.C.), some Edomites were there, crying out, "Tear it down . . . tear it down to its foundations!" Wow!

So perhaps we're not surprised to hear God say, "But how Esau will be ransacked, his hidden treasures pillaged!" (v. 6), and "everyone in Esau's mountains will be cut down in the slaughter" (v. 9), and "you will be destroyed forever" (v. 10).

Edom was Israel's enemy. Edom deserved this. And yet, it's quite reasonable to ask, "Why would God say *that*? It sounds so cruel! So harsh!"

In a sense, it is cruel; it is harsh. But it's a message that I need to hear. Why?

It reminds me that there is a God who rules this universe and to stand against him is a horrible decision. Indeed, the only ultimate result of obstinately standing opposed to God (as Edom did) is to suffer an eternity in hell.

That's a message I need to hear because my sinful self too often takes sin so lightly.

Every sin is rebellion against God. As I hear God's strong words to Edom, I'm reminded that I too deserve what Edom received: "As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head" (v. 15). Just as Edom deserved punishment, I deserve punishment. I need to hear that!

A MESSAGE OF DELIVERANCE

Thankfully, Obadiah continues. "But on Mount Zion will be deliverance" (v. 17). Jesus came to win deliverance for *all* sinners. He won forgiveness for the Edomites—and for me. It happened on Mount Zion, the "mountain" on which Jerusalem was located. No, Mount Zion isn't as impressive as some of the mountains of Edom, but what happened there was oh-so-impressive. There Jesus earned deliverance for all—by dying and rising. Obadiah reminds me of that; I need to hear that.

Obadiah ends, "And the kingdom will be the LORD's" (v. 21). Obadiah reminds me that God is in charge. He really does rule all things! Even when nations are in overt rebellion, God remains in charge. Even when I'm struggling mightily, God remains in charge. Even when I'm soaring high, God remains in charge. I need to hear that!

So in Obadiah I'm reminded that I'm a sinner who deserves God's judgment. In Obadiah I'm reminded that God has earned salvation for all, for me. In Obadiah I'm reminded that God is in charge, always.

Did God say *that*??? Thank God, he did!

Contributing editor Thomas Kock, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Atone-ment, Milwaukee.

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

HOSEA

JOEL

JONAH

AMOS

OBADIAH

Name meaning: "Obadiah" means "servant of the Lord."

What is Obadiah?: Is "Obadiah" a person? Or a title? We don't know.

Background: Obadiah prophesied sometime after 586 B.C., when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed.

Key concept: God rules all things. Mock him at your own risk!

Key verse: "Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down" (v. 4).

MICAH

NAHUM

HABAKKUK

ZEPHANIAH

HAGGAI

ZECHARIAH

MALACHI



The Holy Spirit
has smashed the
ceiling of limited
human thought
and allowed me to
think beyond such
physical evidence.

Bondage and freedom

“Prove that there is a God!” We all have heard the challenge. After all the data measured by the first Soviet satellites, some boasted that the satellites discovered no evidence of God. Since then, we have sent men to the moon and probes all over our solar system—still no proof of God in all that data.

So some claim such probing is clear evidence that there is no God. Richard Dawkins and other atheists build their concepts without God and aggressively proclaim that all who believe in God are weak; superstitious; and, to put it mildly, stupid. Stephen Hawking* may have been a little more tolerant of those who believe in God, but he also said, “The laws [of science] may have been decreed by God, but God does not intervene to break the laws.”

I thought about this as I listened to the sermon on Easter Sunday. It struck me that the scientists who abandon God are bound and confined by their own self-imposed principles. They are slaves of scientific thinking that can only observe the world and understand it based on the evidence that human senses can provide. I understand that and accept the value of science and the advances made in all the sciences. I even await new advances. Yet all these advances are based on observation, experimentation, and evidence measured and verified by instruments.

That thinking not only does not see anything beyond the physical world, but it also refuses to assume that something more exists. It will not allow the idea that something exists that cannot be measured or observed. In their view, belief in God is a foolish crutch without any scientific evidence or proof. That’s true if you only accept proofs verified by the scientific method. Yet scientists who abandon God are in bondage, and they fail to see their own bondage. They are limited to the one vision of life without anything more or beyond the horizon of human observa-

tion. Their worldview has a hard ceiling that science cannot penetrate because they refuse to entertain any ideas beyond their own.

While listening to the Easter sermon, I heard again that Jesus has defied the natural laws. He arose from the dead, and he even predicted that resurrection before it happened. I have no scientific evidence of these events. But the Holy Spirit has smashed the ceiling of limited human thought and allowed me to think beyond such physical evidence. God is above this physical world, and he is superior to all human thinking and speculation. He has revealed his love for me through Jesus (Hebrews 1:2). He intervened to break not only the ceiling of my thinking, but he also allowed me to think beyond the natural laws that govern earthly life and death.

But we must be careful here. I can’t simply imagine anything and claim it is true. The only reliable guidebook I can depend on is the Scriptures.

With that guidebook, I soar to explore God’s grace. I circle around it as I read the Scriptures, and by its words I marvel at the majesty of his love and his limitless power. The Holy Spirit has given me wings. I glide on those wings and depend on his power in dark and difficult days, as he promises in the Scriptures. Like an eagle, I have a clear vision of Christ crucified and risen again. That vision provides hope for another life in a world no one can yet see except on the pages of God’s Word. I am free because in Christ I can see beyond death and beyond this physical world.

*Stephen Hawking died on March 14, 2018.



COME Lord Jesus BE OUR GUEST

NOURISHED BY MEALS WITH THE MESSIAH

Joel S. Heckendorf

THE BEST IS YET TO COME (LUKE 24:36-49; ACTS 1:7,8)

Over 20 years ago, Robert William Thomas wrote the “Keep Your Fork” story. It’s often quoted in magazines or at funerals, and if you haven’t ever heard this short story, I’d encourage you to look it up. The essence of the story is, in the author’s words, “Keep your fork, because the best is yet to come.”

Long before Robert Thomas published his story, Jesus instructed his disciples “that the best was yet to come.” At first glance, that might seem hard to believe. How can anything get better than having the Son of God and Son of Man as a regular dining partner? What can possibly be better than having Jesus begin with “Moses and all the Prophets” and explain how things had to play out the way they did (Luke 24:13-35)? What can possibly be better than having a bit of fish with a living Savior, proving his defeat of death (Luke 24:42)? Yet, after dining with them off and on for 40 days, he promises something better: “Stay in the city until you are empowered from on high” (Luke 24:49 Christian Standard Bible [CSB]). Basically, Jesus tells his disciples, “Keep your fork.”

We don’t always know what sweet thing is coming from the kitchen, so the disciples likely had no idea what a tremendous blessing Jesus had in store for them just

ten days after he ascended into heaven. But as promised, things got better. No longer just satiated with their Savior but “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4), the disciples became confident witnesses (Acts 1:8). As the sweet gospel went out from their lips, the blessings kept pouring in. About three thousand people were added to their number on Pentecost (Acts 2:41). Thousands were baptized.

But don’t stop with the day of Pentecost. Look what happens next: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles” (Acts 2:42,43 CSB).

As we are about to embark on the non-festival half of the church year, there may be a tendency to push away from the table because we feel spiritually full. Over the past six months, we’ve been fed the beautiful truth of “God with us” as Jesus became one of us. We’ve “tasted and seen” that the Lord is good as we watched him give body and blood for our forgiveness. We feasted over the great celebration of Jesus’ victory over death. Yet, the same Holy Spirit that was promised to the disciples is promised to us every time we gather around Word and sacrament. Like the early Christian church in the days after Pentecost, may we continue to be

devoted to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Through these things, the Lord assures us that the best is yet to come.

Therefore, we pray, “Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest, and let *this* gift—the gift of the Holy Spirit—to us be blessed. Amen.”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. Why is Pentecost often the least celebrated holiday?
2. List three practical ways that you can keep “being devoted to the apostles’ teaching” during the summer months when people are often tempted to push away from the table because they think they are spiritually full?
3. Why did Jesus tell his disciples to “wait” for the gift of the Holy Spirit instead of sending this gift right away?

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



This is the seventh 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 June 5 at wels.net/forwardinchrist.



OOPS, I DID IT. *again!*

Though we constantly fall, Jesus forgives us and leads us on the path to heaven. Deborah Koestler-Kuck

People that know me well have learned how accident-prone I can be.

THE PAIN OF FALLING

There was the notorious “360 on a high heel” in the church parking lot. I got a 10 for that one! In June, I decided to carefully walk around a puddle at work. I was oh-so-careful. One step, though, and whoosh, boom, I was down on my knees. Only a few weeks ago, my sandal bottom stuck on the new carpet in my office, and I went flying into the door. My favorite coffee cup was in shards. Thankfully, it was empty. Whew. I’ve tripped up steps and fallen down them. I’ve slipped on nothing. I’ve broken plates, vases, and wine glasses.

Then there was the camera. Somehow or other, I managed to crack the lens on my friend’s GoPro while it sat charging in the bathroom. We’d been enjoying a fabulous weekend. I don’t even know how I did it. The question was simple, “Did you break it?” What? As I thought about it, yes, I moved something sitting on the counter so it didn’t get wet. Long story short, my friend thought I knew what I had done and kept quiet. I apologized. I had done it again. Klutzy me.

As I ponder on these examples, they were all accidents and unintentional.

They all had rather costly consequences though. I ruined my nylons and broke my heel in the church parking lot. Both falls at work caused some serious knee pain and bruising, which lasted for a few months. Worst, though, was the camera incident. It caused tension.

Even if we trip
and stumble, [Jesus]
catches us and puts
it all right again.

THE PAIN OF SIN

Now let’s compare all this to sin in our lives. I would never fall or break something on purpose, but we do sin on purpose. We sin without realizing it, or by accident too. Do we sometimes offend without thinking about it? Does our behavior cause someone to go against what they feel is acceptable? Do we hurt others by silly jokes or teasing? There are so many ways each day that we absentmindedly go about our sinful ways without even thinking about it. What’s worse, though, is that our sinful behavior has serious consequences. Our sin may cause loss of possessions.

Our sins may cause pain or injury to our physical bodies or others. But worst of all, it causes separation between us and a dear friend. That friend is Jesus.

But he is always true, kind, and loving. He not only forgives our clumsy, klutzy ways, but when we follow him, he shows us a better way. He takes our hands so we don’t fall. He leads us safely. And even if we trip and stumble, he catches us and puts it all right again. If we break his rules, he forgives us over and over. Then he directs us away from our sins. He died for the mistakes, whether intentional or not, that you and I make every day. And one day, we will leave this imperfect world to join him and all saints in glorious, accident-free, heavenly glory.

Knowing my two left feet, I will undoubtedly take a few more tumbles and break a few things along my road to heaven. I’ll be saying, “Oops!” until my dying day. But thanks to a loving Savior, when this life is over, one day I’ll stroll into undeserved glory with all the beauty, elegance, and grace I’ve always hoped for.

Deborah Koestler-Kuck is a member at St. Paul, New Ullm, Minnesota.