

Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE

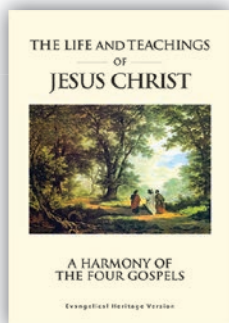


A step of faith

Choosing the public ministry is a step of faith for many young adults. *Page 10*


Gather Around YOUR SAVIOR

As you, your family, and your friends return from your summer activities to your homes, schools, and workplaces this fall, remember your Savior in all that you do. These NPH books and gifts will help you when you gather and grow together through the ageless message of his love.




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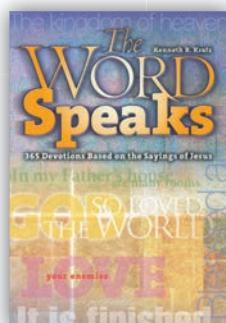
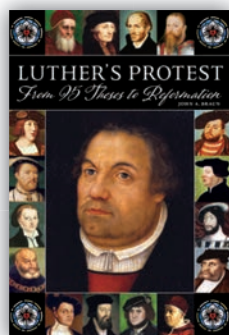
Each of the four gospels has something essential to contribute to our knowledge of Jesus. In *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*, you will experience these inspired histories from the New Testament carefully woven together into one narrative. No words have been added or changed

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By John A. Braun


When he defiantly posted his Ninety-Five Theses in Wittenberg over five hundred years ago, Martin Luther sparked one of the most significant protests in history. This book shows how this man was a catalyst and leader in the Reformation, gathering people around the truth of God's Word. His passion will inspire you to join your fellow believers and stand strong in your faith as you remember the Reformation's anniversary this fall. Includes full-color timelines, maps, and pictures of key Reformation figures. Softcover, 197 pages. **LU1500794, \$18.99** 



The Word Speaks 365 Devotions Based on the Sayings of Jesus


By Kenneth R. Kratz

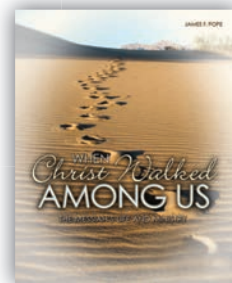
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by James F. Pope

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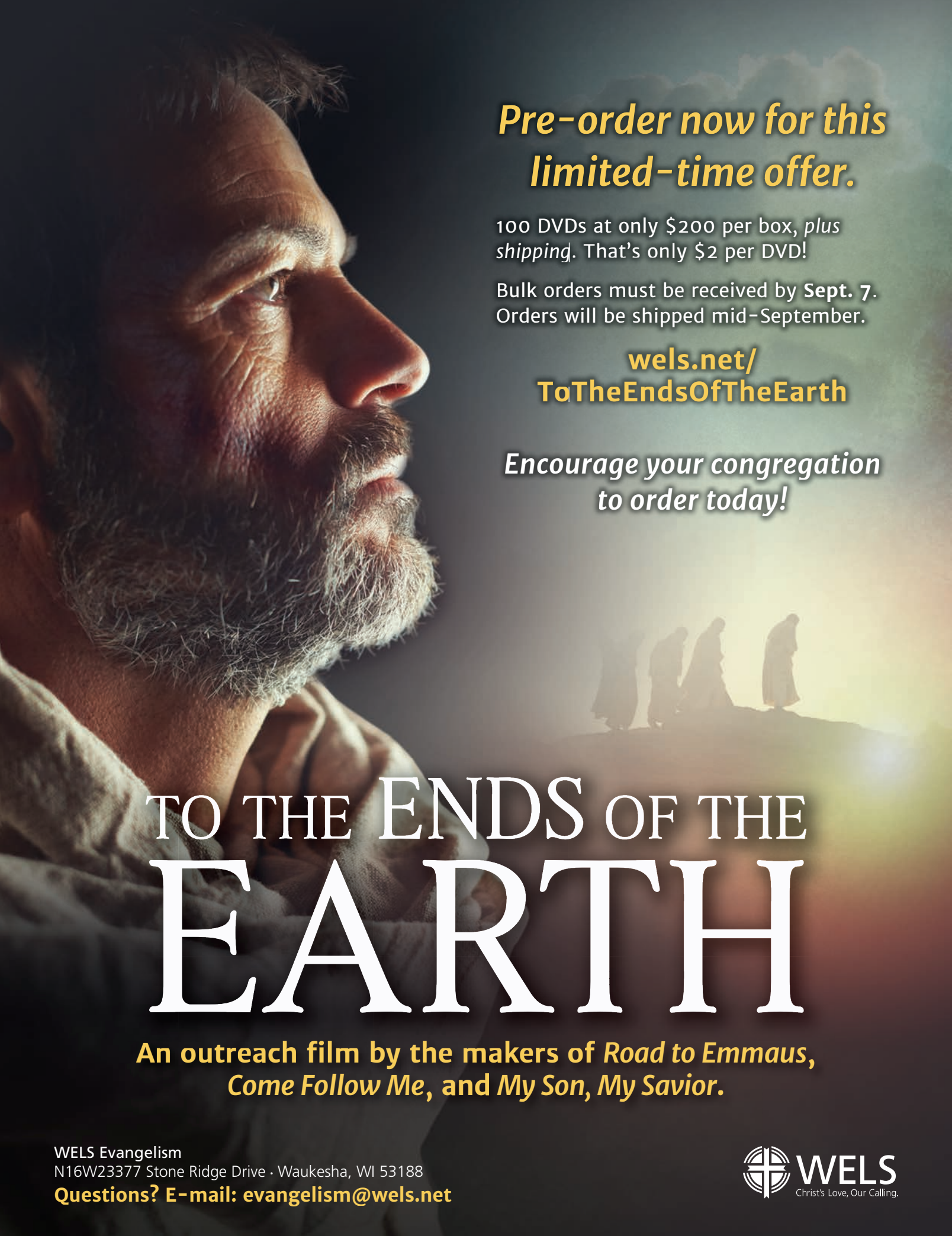
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Amazing grace

A teacher cherishes the opportunities to proclaim the message of God's forgiveness.

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Christ's Love, Our Calling.

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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

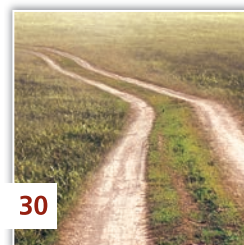
WHAT'S INSIDE

Shelves of pens, pencils, paper, notebooks, and glue take center stage. Jeans and jackets are displayed prominently while shorts and swimsuits are relegated to the sale rack. It can only mean one thing—the start of a new school year.

This month, *Forward in Christ* explores different aspects of going back to school:

- Our monthly parenting column shares tips for getting your kids ready for a successful school year (p. 16).
- Jon Bilitz, FIC's new "Campus Cornerstone" coordinator, makes a list of back-to-school must-haves for college students—one of the most important being their faith. Read more on p. 18.
- Young men and women are returning to our synod's ministerial education schools to train for the public ministry. See what motivates them to "aspire to this noble task" (1 Timothy 3:1) on p. 10.
- Many of these young adults will serve as teachers in WELS' school system, giving them daily opportunities to share the gospel with students and their families. With more and more nonmember families in our schools, this can make an eternal difference (pp. 23 and back cover). We pray for the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts through our teachers' witness.

Julie Wietzke



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WORD AND SACRAMENTS

"Heart to heart" [June], with its practical and solidly scriptural advice written by three individual fathers, was helpful and thought-provoking not only for fathers but for all Christian adults.

In our family, we also made a conscious effort to help our children understand the role that the Lord wants the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper to play in their lives. Specifically, we reminded them of how God used water and his Word to bring them into his kingdom of grace and how the promises he made to them on the day they were baptized would remain in effect every single day of their lives, providing daily comfort and strength for living lives dedicated to Christ. Likewise, even though they were not yet participating in the Lord's Supper, we spoke often of the priceless blessings the Lord places into that precious meal and how God wants them to make it a regular, integral, and highly anticipated part of their adult Christian lives.

Children are richly blessed when parents, grandparents and other fellow believers help them focus on the boundless, amazing grace that our Savior provides for his children through both his Word *and* his sacraments.

*Mark Grubbs
Oshkosh, Wisconsin*

UNSUNG HEROES

The articles on the Apache mission in Arizona [April–June] brought to mind so many unsung individuals who sacrificed so much to serve. I was born to a missionary family on the Fort Apache Indian reservation. My parents packed up three preschool children in a Ford sedan and drove nine days (winter weather and war-time rationing) to get from their home in southern Minnesota to East Fork Mission on the White Mountain Apache Reservation. They arrived in January 1944.

Dad was called to the mission to teach 12 native children in grades 1 through 8. Most of the Apaches lived in wickiups. My parents' first home on the mission was a converted chicken coop with little if any insulation. Heat for the house, heat for hot water for bathing, and heat for cooking all came from the wood-burning kitchen stove. The

school building was a lean-to behind the chapel. In addition to his role as full-time teacher and principal, Dad also got up early to start the diesel engine to run the generator for electricity on the mission. Then he would milk goats so the babies in the nursery and the boarding school children would have some milk. The evening chores were a carbon copy of the morning. On weekends he cut wood to heat the house and the girls' dorm.

My parents spent 31 years teaching at East Fork. When they left there were 250 students in grades 1 through 12, including both boarding school and day school students. Most of the Apaches lived in framed houses.

It's hard to describe the servant attitude my parents exhibited in the midst of hardship and sacrifice. They set an example for us in that they met the people where they were to bring the good news to them. Would that I follow their example and be an unsung hero of the faith in my own backyard.

*Robert Meier
Adrian, Michigan*

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*.



PICTURE THIS

The June issue of *Forward in Christ* was distributed at the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society convention in June. A Native American child was featured on the cover, and her grandmother was at the convention (pictured). More than 50 women from the Apache mission field attended the convention in Green Bay, Wisconsin, as WELS celebrates 125 years of blessings on the Apache mission field. Learn more about the LWMS convention on p. 20.

Through my Bible in 3 years

Read or listen online at wels.net/bible3.

SEPTEMBER 2018

- | | | |
|------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| 1. 2 Samuel 15:1–16:14 | 11. Ps. 55 | 21. Ps. 69 |
| 2. 2 Sa. 16:15–17:29 | 12. Ps. 56 & 57 | 22. Ps. 70 & 71 |
| 3. 2 Sa. 18:1–19:8 | 13. Ps. 58 & 59 | 23. Ps. 72 |
| 4. 2 Sa. 19:9–39 | 14. Ps. 60 | 24. 1 Kings 1 |
| 5. 2 Sa. 19:40–20:26 | 15. Ps. 61 & 62 | 25. 1 Ki. 2 |
| 6. 2 Sa. 21 | 16. Ps. 63 | 26. 1 Ki. 3 & 4 |
| 7. 2 Sa. 22 | 17. Ps. 64 & 65 | 27. 1 Ki. 5 |
| 8. 2 Sa. 23 | 18. Ps. 66 & 67 | 28. 1 Ki. 6:1–7:12 |
| 9. 2 Sa. 24 | 19. Ps. 68:1–18 | 29. 1 Ki. 7:13–8:11 |
| 10. Psalm 52–54 | 20. Ps. 68:19–75 | 30. 1 Ki. 8:12–66 |

Victory parade

Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.
2 Corinthians 2:14 (English Standard Version)

Daniel J. Habben

A few years ago, I studied 2 Corinthians 2:14 with the leaders of my congregation. We were happy to be reminded that as followers of Christ we are participating in a victory parade. We Christians need that reminder, because our walk to heaven doesn't always feel victorious. Instead, it often feels like we're a parade of clowns. The world has a good laugh at our beliefs, and our own human limitations trip us up like oversized clown shoes.

NOT ACCORDING TO PLAN

That's how our congregational leaders felt as we met to discuss a building project that had run into some difficulties. Didn't we know what we were doing? Not really, as it turns out. But in the end, the Lord worked everything out so that we were able to finish construction and present to the congregation a beautiful and functional building.

What are some difficulties *you* are facing? Have you spent the week submitting resumés in the hopes of securing a few interviews? Have you sent a child away to school for the first time and feel anxious about how he or she will cope? Are you trying to figure out how to care for aging parents while also looking after your spouse and children?

NARROW ROUTE

Notice how the apostle Paul never said that the parade route would be easy. We're not marching down a broad boulevard to heaven. Quite the contrary! Jesus warned that the way to heaven is a narrow road that few find (Matthew 7:13,14).

Although our route is narrow and unpopular, that doesn't change the fact that we are indeed marching in a victory parade. High above us snaps the



banner of our Savior, a sharp retort to Satan, who says we don't belong in such a parade. Sure, we do. Ahead of us walks Jesus himself. He knows the way. He's been down this road before and has already unlocked the door to heaven—for us.

As followers of Christ we are participating in a victory parade.

Beside us are fellow Christians who encourage us in our journey, even as they receive encouragement from us. Angels guard our flanks. None of this escapes the notice of others. We Christians exude an aroma, says Paul—the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ.

OUR VICTORY PARADE

Granted, not everyone likes the scent. Many will continue to turn up their noses at us as we pass. Don't be surprised by this. Don't use it as an excuse to "tiptoe" past certain people, hoping

not to disturb them. We're in a victory parade! Make some noise!

Let others know of the confidence we have because of Jesus' forgiveness and his promise to keep caring for us. Explain to your friends why you're not worried about your job prospects or about your children who are now out on their own or about the added responsibilities you have as you care for your aging parents. We are in the Lord's care, and in the end, all our troubles will turn to joy.

But we won't march in step with our Lord if we're not regularly hearing his voice.

Now that summer is over, congregations are resuming Sunday school and Bible classes. Jump back into these spiritual growth opportunities. Be assured that we Christians aren't a parade of clowns, nor are we just biding our time until our Savior's return. We're marching with him in triumphal procession.

Contributing editor Daniel Habben is pastor at St. John, Saint John, Antigua.



Mark Schwede

When there
are divisions
in the church,
God's people will
seek to restore
unity brought about
by agreement in
the teachings
of the Scriptures.

True unity

"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1). Those words of King David remind us of the blessings that come when families are united in love and in a common purpose. They illustrate the joy that comes when individual Christians share a common faith and a common mission.

These words apply as well to Christian church bodies, when groups of Christians are united in their common stand on God's Word and in the doctrines that they proclaim. When such unity exists, there you find genuine, God-pleasing fellowship.

God's visible church on earth should always be striving for that kind of unity—not an outward unity that ignores or minimizes differences and disagreements, but a true unity built on God's truth. When God grants the blessings of true unity, that unity should be cherished and nourished and expressed. When there are divisions in the church, God's people will seek to restore unity brought about by agreement in the teachings of the Scriptures.

The Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) was formed in the late 1950s when some members and congregations of WELS and Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) members were convinced that WELS and the ELS were not acting in keeping with biblical fellowship principles in their dealing with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Since that time, citing doctrinal differences, the CLC has not been in fellowship with WELS or the ELS.

For the past several years, representatives of WELS, the ELS, and the CLC (three from each synod) have been meeting in formal doctrinal discussions to determine whether God-pleasing doctrinal unity exists between the three synods, which would make possible a reestablishment of fellowship. The first question addressed by these representatives was, When do churches in fellow-

ship with one another need to separate? Bible passages were thoroughly examined, and past doctrinal statements and convention resolutions of the three synods were reviewed to clarify current positions and remove any past misunderstandings.

As a result of these discussions, the "Joint Statement Regarding the Termination of Fellowship" was adopted by the nine-member group. It was viewed as a necessary starting point for further discussions on other matters of doctrine and practice. The "Joint Statement" was then adopted by the conventions of WELS and the ELS in 2017.

This past summer, the convention of the CLC considered the statement. The convention said, "We acknowledge with joy that the 'Joint Statement Regarding the Termination of Fellowship' is a scripturally sound presentation of doctrinal principles." But the convention did not formally accept the statement, saying that it "does NOT resolve all of the issues involving the doctrine of fellowship." (It should be noted that the statement was never intended to resolve all issues but was to serve as a necessary first step.) So, the CLC neither formally accepted nor rejected the statement but instead resolved to make a final decision on the statement at its 2020 convention. The convention expressed the hope that discussions could continue in the meantime.

WELS and ELS representatives will meet in October to discuss what the next steps in the process should be prior to the CLC's formal action on the statement in 2020. We pray that this process can continue in some way as we seek to determine whether agreement between the synods exists and whether full fellowship can be considered.

Light for our path

Why do some Christian families tend to suffer so much more than others? In a short time, my best friend has lost several family members to cancer and accidents. Does God make us suffer for our ancestors' sins?

James F. Pope

Since Adam and Eve's fall into sin, suffering has been a common human experience and, as you indicate, more familiar to some than to others. Scripture provides insight into the subject of suffering.

A GOD WHOSE WAYS CAN BE MYSTERIOUS

There is no question that God's ways can be mysterious to us (Isaiah 55:9; Romans 11:33,34). While God reveals all-important information about himself in the Bible, he does not explain his every move in our lives. Consequently, his action or inaction can puzzle us.

Consider Job, for example. In the course of one disastrous day, all his children were killed and his possessions stolen by raiders. Later, sores covered his body. To the casual observer, guided only by human reasoning and no biblical knowledge, Job must have done something wrong.

Yet nothing could be further from the truth—biblical truth. God described Job to Satan in a conversation one day: "There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil" (Job 1:8). The tragedies Job encountered were not divine punishments for his sins. They took place only because a wise and loving God allowed them. Christians today experience suffering for similar reasons. Guided by wisdom and love, God can allow some Christian families to experience more suffering than other families. When he does that, such troubles are not punishments for sin—theirs or their ancestors'.

A GOD WHO TREATS PEOPLE INDIVIDUALLY

The Bible verse you might have in mind with your question is Exodus 20:5. At Mount Sinai God described himself: "I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God,

punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation." If we stop right there in that verse, we can greatly misunderstand God and his ways. However, the verse ends, "... to the third and fourth generation of *those who hate me.*" That ending helps us come to an accurate understanding of suffering and sin.

Certainly, those who reject God will face eternal suffering and punishment for their sins (Mark 16:16). What God can do, if he so desires, is to mete out punishment already in the earthly lives of unbelievers. And, if there are successive generations of unbelief in a family, God can intensify those sufferings from one generation to the next, if he so desires.

How different it is with Christians. Followers of Jesus will not experience punishment for sin in this life or the next (Romans 8:1). That is because Jesus Christ was punished for all the sins of the world and Christians are beneficiaries of that saving work through Spirit-worked faith in him. The sins or unbelief of ancestors will not bring about divine judgments of punishment in the lives of Christians.

God so loved the world, yes. The human race is the object of God's forgiving love in Christ. God sends suffering into the lives of believers too, but not as punishment. He disciplines us as the writer to the Hebrews says (Hebrews 12). We cannot always know why God sends suffering to believers, but we should remember that his purpose for believers is always guided by love.

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



A step TOWARD FUTURE MINISTRY

Young adults choose to prepare for the public ministry of the gospel.

John A. Braun



"I decided I wanted to serve in public ministry," Will DeMarce says. His reason was one often repeated: "My pastor and teachers told me I had many gifts fit for ministry. The vicar was especially encouraging." So Will headed off to Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., to prepare himself for serving in the public ministry.

A STEP OF FAITH

Becoming a pastor, teacher, or staff minister is a step of faith. The Holy Spirit has created faith in the hearts of these young people just as he has in the hearts of many others. But the Spirit has led these young adults to desire to serve Jesus in a special way. They aspire to the noble task (see 1 Timothy 3:1). They want to serve Jesus and help others to know and appreciate the Savior's blessings by serving in the public ministry.

Brent Schmidt shares a personal story.



"My dad passed away suddenly during the summer between my sophomore and junior year of high school. [So many] helped me through those hard times. They are the reason I'm pursuing my education as a called worker. I hope someday I'll have the opportunity to share that same comforting news of grace and love from Christ to a student in need."



Paul Ritter took a little detour, but he also wanted to share the blessings the Holy Spirit led him to treasure. "After I graduated [from high school] I enlisted in the army. I learned much while I was away, and it forced me to grow up fast," he says. "I was going through things most adults would never experience. No matter how bad things seemed to get, I clung to the one thing that promised me solace. I held on to my faith in the Lord, and it brought me great comfort. When I

came back home, I wanted to share that feeling of comfort that is a lighthouse to those who are lost in this sinful world."



Elliott Butler says simply, "Ultimately, the deciding factor was that I want to serve God in the ministry and be able to influence young people like all my teachers did when I was growing up."

A VISION OF MINISTRY



Faith! Taking the step toward ministry flows from the faith the Holy Spirit has created within. That faith also provides a vision of how they might serve. Sarah Koelpin shares her vision: "Everyone always told me how wonderful a teacher I'd make." Then while at MLC, she learned how the Lord could use her. "I learned that being a teacher means telling jokes that aren't funny, throwing away the

lesson plan sometimes, and taking time to talk with your kids about life. . . . And most important, it means being the person who gets to tell them about Jesus every single day, not only in religion class but also in every situation that life throws at us.”



Life experiences sometimes provide that vision. Daniel Wessel comments, “A semester spent in Hong Kong as a sixth grader made me realize just how big the world is and just how much the world needs to hear the good news that we have been so blessed to know.”



Danielle Hall fell in love with the idea of being a teacher and is “excited and willing to share God’s Word with others.” Abbie Mleziva looks forward.



“I never had an epiphany moment when I suddenly knew I was meant to be a teacher. I was the first person in my family to pursue a career in the

public ministry,” she says. “I’m so thankful for the people and experiences God used to help me realize that I would enjoy being a teacher. Now I can’t wait to get my first call!”



Jeremiah Wallander adds, “I became interested in the public ministry when I saw how much pastors helped people. I do not consider myself one of

the smartest guys, but I am very passionate about helping others and showing them the greatness of our God.”

ENCOURAGEMENT FROM OTHERS

Students preparing for the ministry do not all follow the same path. Each student has a little different personal story. Their faith is the solid foundation for taking the step to enroll at Martin Luther College. They often acquire the vision to serve through the encouragement they receive.



For some, it’s finding a role model. “My Aunt Jenny has definitely been one of the most influential people in my life,” says Cassie

Doering. “She’s just an overall great role model, and seeing how much she loves teaching children about their Savior really solidified my desire to do the same.”



Rylee Weisensel was offered an athletic scholarship at another university, but she followed the example of her role model.

“I was homeschooled until high school. Being taught by my mom made me want to be a teacher. It was the way she taught. She let us discover things but was always there if we were stuck on something. My mom was my role model.”



Michaela Bessler offers a little different perspective. “My mom was a music teacher and worship coordinator for many years in Tucson.

I remember seeing her work late at night with a smile on her face. That ‘servant’s heart’ attitude opened my eyes to the ministry.”



Encouragement also comes in what others say. Michael Wu shares his story: “I come from a Buddhist family.” He was baptized and confirmed but

“public ministry wasn’t even a consideration until about four months before high school graduation. . . . While my decision was not well received by my family, I was certain. I owe it to the teachers and pastors who encouraged me all my life to consider the public ministry.”



Personal and specific encouragement came to Aaron Bush. “My parents weren’t WELS. They were looking for a church right before I

was born when a WELS pastor out canvassing knocked on their door,” he says. “I really didn’t know I could become a pastor. I didn’t think that was a thing I could do. Then my confirmation class went to visit the seminary, and my pastor pulled me aside and said he thought I could be a good pastor. He even visited my parents and talked to them about it.”

PRAY AND ENCOURAGE

The next generation of pastors and teachers are still out there, waiting to make important decisions about their future. Pray that the Holy Spirit will lead some of them into public ministry. Then encourage them as they consider this noble task. Make that encouragement as sincere and specific as you can.



Perhaps they will be like Kailyn Dabe who heard about the need for called workers at her church. “I was planning on going to

a university near my home. . . . Then at church my pastor’s sermon followed the theme of ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.’ After hearing his sermon, praying a lot, and talking with my family members and former teachers, I realized I wanted to be a teacher.”

Do you know someone who has the talent to be a pastor or teacher? Pray! Encourage! Repeat!

John A. Braun is the executive editor of Forward in Christ magazine and a former college recruiter.

Student quotes from this article originally appeared in *KnightWatch*, Martin Luther College’s recruitment magazine for high school students. Thanks to Laurie Gauger-Hested for gathering and providing the information. Learn more about MLC at mlc-wels.edu.

This is the first article in a two-part series on encouraging young men and women to consider the public ministry.



Sharing law and gospel

Donn G. Dobberstein

“If we wanted to join this church, what would we need to do?”

It was a question months in the making. Their reaction to what would be said next is a story worth sharing and a lesson worth learning.

Sharon attended an Easter Sunday service after receiving a postcard invitation at her home in a nearby subdivision. She said she’d be back next Sunday with someone. Sure enough, 52-year-old Jim was with her. I immediately liked them both. Who isn’t attracted to smiley, positive personalities? Shortly after, I visited them in their home. I learned they’d been together six years. They opened up about their experiences of previous relationships that ended horribly. Separation. Divorce. Jim was busy raising three chil-

dren and working hard at a prosperous career. It had been decades since he last did the “church thing.”

I noticed two things: There were no wedding bands and there was no mistaking the shining in their eyes when they talked about going to church together—especially in Jim’s. He talked and talked like a man who hadn’t been allowed to speak about God for 20 years. “I’ve got so many questions to ask you that I don’t even know where to begin,” he said.

A couple weeks later, I walked in and immediately knew something was wrong. Jim was distraught. Sharon was crying. Between the tears I pieced the story together. A swelling on Jim’s throat. A check-up. Lymphoma—the really bad kind. Jim had not slept in days. The thought of death was mind-numbing.

In the coming weeks, our time together became more devotional than instruc-

tional. Jim kept asking questions. But now they were the kind only a man facing mortality asks.

Jim could have swapped places with the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4. Both felt severe loss and loneliness for a long time. When Jesus offered, “Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (v. 14), Jim was right there alongside her: “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water” (v. 15). He guzzled huge quantities of the gospel as if drinking from a fire hose. He knew he was a man dying of thirst and what he was drinking was eternally vital.

Jesus knew perfectly what the soul of the Samaritan woman needed most. She needed good news for her bad living and grace greater than her sin.

She needed law and gospel. But which ought to come first, and in what size measuring cup should it be served?

“If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water” (v. 10). Remarkably, Jesus flooded her with the gospel invitation, promising a wealth of blessings for her soul. He gave her the gospel first, but not at the expense of the law or ignoring her sin. A few verses later, John writes: “He told her, ‘Go, call your husband and come back.’

“ ‘I have no husband,’ she replied.

“Jesus said to her, ‘You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband’ ” (vv. 16-18).

Ouch. I could never have gotten away with that brutal honesty in the opening minutes of my conversation with Jim and Sharon. Then again, this is Jesus. He distinguishes between hostility and hurt in a heartbeat. He understands core spiritual conditions before a word is even spoken. Jesus addressed her disobedience, but in such a natural way that it didn’t come across as rude or hinder her kindling faith. It was quite the opposite: His divine knowing of her personal life inspired her to further pursuit of personally knowing God.

What the Savior models perfectly in John chapter 4 can be incredibly challenging when you and I engage in conversation to share the Savior.

- How do we share God’s core truths—law and gospel—in a winsome way that doesn’t turn someone off or impede their further hearing of the gospel?
- How do we do that without ignoring or soft-pedaling God’s law?
- When is the right time to do it? How do I avoid speaking the truth

unlovingly? How do I speak lovingly without avoiding the truth?

Fear and uncertainty are such paralyzing forces.

If Jesus tailored his conversation with the Samaritan woman according to the needs of her soul, that just might be the lesson to learn. Ask yourself:

- Do I have a clear understanding of the spiritual needs of the person with whom I am engaging in conversation?

Jesus knew perfectly what the soul of a Samaritan woman needed most. She needed good news for her bad living and grace greater than her sin.

- Do I have a clear understanding of God’s role to convert the soul and my role to love my neighbor, love God’s truth, and bring that love of both together in what I’m about to say to them?
- Do I trust God’s promise that his Word will not return empty?
- Do I pray, “Lord, give me the right moment to speak and guide the right words to say”?

Jim wrestled with a restless conscience and his own mortality. He believed God’s plan for his personal salvation. His question came a week after we actually discussed God’s plan for a committed man and woman together. Not a word needed to be said about their relationship. I knew they knew.

The answer to Jim’s question, “If we wanted to join this church, what would we need to do?” was this:

“Jim, you trust God’s plan for your eternal life because you know he loves you, right?”

“Yes,” he answered.

“Then you know you can trust his direction for your relationship with Sharon. When it aligns with his will, you will be totally right with his church too.”

After a couple seconds, he said, “Thank you. Sharon and I will talk.”

They weren’t in church the following Sunday. My heart sank. It took all my strength not to pick up the phone like an overly anxious parent and check up on them.

But there they were in the church gathering area the next Sunday. Something was different. They were glowing. They held up matching hands with wedding rings to show the reason why. That Sunday, as they received their Savior’s body and blood for the first time together, they were holding hands with quiet tears in their eyes. For the next 14 months, I’ve never seen a happier, more devoted couple until God called Jim to eternal glory.

Their tender love story is the story of the Savior’s love for them just as it was for the Samaritan woman. It’s your love story too. So show it and share it! Be a witness to God’s grace using his great truths of law and gospel.

Donn Dobberstein, director of discipleship for WELS, is a member at Trinity, Waukesha, Wisconsin.

This is the third article in a four-part series on evangelism lessons from the account of the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4.

When attending a worship service with a high school girlfriend, Carter Nielsen was challenged to have a more active relationship with Christ.

Dayton Hamann

Carter Nielsen adores the mountains. As an environmental consultant in Buffalo, Wyoming, Nielsen shows oil companies, gas companies, and other natural resource businesses how to interact with the land safely. When out working in those peaks and valleys, he keeps his heavenly Father at the front of his mind.

"Sometimes, I'd rather be in the mountains thinking about God than in church thinking about the mountains," Nielsen says, chuckling.

Currently a member at Living Shepherd, Laramie, Wyo., Nielsen and his fiancée are leading a project to establish a secondary site for Living Shepherd in Buffalo.

Nielsen's commitment to Christ stems from the lessons of his childhood and the events of his senior year in high school.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Nielsen estimates he attended worship four times before he turned 18. He usually made these visits with friends, though his parents occasionally attended church for major holiday

services. He was neither appalled nor captivated by the ideas of church and faith.

"It was something to do," he recalls. "It was never pushed on me during those times. I didn't think about it too much."

Nielsen's mother wasn't raised religiously, but his father—a hunting guide—was. Though they attended church infrequently, Nielsen's father planted and nurtured the idea that the world was a created place worth revering.

"As a hunting guide, my father instilled in me a deep sense of respect and understanding for 'God's country' and all living things in it," Nielsen says. Though his knowledge of God's Word was limited, Nielsen began to see his heavenly Father's fingerprints in the fields, forests, and mountains that he loved so much.

He explains his childhood and first years of faith by saying, "I always knew God was up there, but I didn't yet know what he had done for me. It is surprising how much I missed."

NEW RELATIONSHIPS

During his senior year of high school, Nielsen was invited by his then girlfriend's family to the Easter Sunday church service. Nielsen acknowledges that he had some hesitations. "I was selfish. I liked Sundays to myself. I was a bit scared I wouldn't have time to go to the mountains anymore or otherwise enjoy my weekends."

But, having no qualms with the church beyond his potential scheduling conflicts, he ultimately agreed to attend. Recalling the worship service, Nielsen pinpoints a moment of intense clarity: "The pastor bluntly said, 'If you only attend church on Easter Sunday and Christmas, you may have to examine your faith.'"

Though Nielsen's relationship with this girl eventually came to a close, the Holy Spirit had inspired him to give more focused and more intentional thought to his relationship with Christ. That same year, Nielsen's parents divorced. Though he was understandably distressed, his newfound belief supported him. He recalls feeling empowered, more confident he would persevere this change in his family.

This faith-forged courage stayed with him as he began college at the University of Wyoming in Laramie in 2012. A few weeks into his first semester, the mother of Nielsen's former girlfriend mentioned to him that they knew a pastor in Laramie: Pete Zaferos of Living Shepherd. During that same week, Nielsen was eating lunch with his neighbor from the college dormitory. This classmate also knew Zaferos. He told Nielsen that Zaferos had asked about him. God was giving Nielsen a clear opportunity.

"I went to Living Shepherd that weekend," Nielsen explains. "And from there, I was hooked. Pastor and all the welcoming members made me feel part

Confessions OF FAITH



of the group.” As a younger minister, Zaferos connected with Nielsen. They formed a friendship, occasionally hunting and ice fishing together.

Nielsen attended Living Shepherd regularly throughout the rest of 2012 and 2013. After completing basic Bible instruction courses, he was confirmed into the church on Dec. 8, 2013.

Around this time, Nielsen also reconnected with a girl named Emily. They had been acquaintances for a few years, running into one another at statewide FFA events during high school and then at the Wyoming State Fair in 2009. There, they had bonded over Nielsen’s show pig.

“My pig would always lie down and roll over if you scratched her belly,” Nielsen explains. “Emily—being the animal lover that she is—did just that, and then proceeded to lie with her in the grass and talk to me. I had always had a crush on Emily, and I knew from that moment she would be important to me.”

After the fair they had lost touch, but they reconnected again over social media and began to see one another. Soon, they also began to attend church together.

BUILDING A FAMILY OF BELIEVERS

Nielsen and Emily are now engaged. Though it is about a four-hour trip from Buffalo, where they currently reside, they still attend Living Shepherd in Laramie as often as possible.

Still, because of this long drive to

Laramie, Nielsen and Emily are developing an alternative. With the help of Zaferos, they are starting a new site for Living Shepherd. This site will join two other locations—one in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, and one in Rock Springs, Wyoming. All sites are connected, with Zaferos coming in person for some worship services or serving via worship streamed live online.

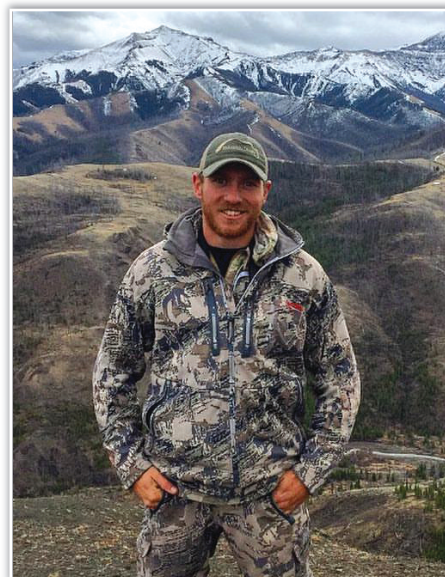
Nielsen and Emily first watched the livestream of the Living Shepherd service at Nielsen’s home on Sundays. A friend or two would join them occasionally.

But they began to think bigger. Emily’s brother owns a small brewery in Buffalo with a large pub space perfectly suited for group gatherings. Nielsen and Emily plan to set out chairs and watch the worship service on a large screen via a projector there. Nielsen says they also hope to add a speaker system and then advertise the worship schedule across the city.

Nielsen hopes to draw in local young people like him and his fiancée. “If we can get even five more people to join us, that would be fantastic. We need the people, and the rest will come from there,” Nielsen says.

“A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER”

Nielsen notes how his perception of other believers has changed over the years: “When I was a kid, I thought they were a whole different tier of person. I didn’t understand what it



Carter Nielsen

meant to be Christian. Now I see that Christians are humble and they want to help you. I hope I am turning into a person like that.”

Those who have seen Nielsen’s devotion to spreading God’s Word would assure him of that hope, but he remains modest, saying, “After 18 years, I just made a change for the better.”

Dayton Hamann, a staff writer for Forward in Christ magazine, is a member at St. Matthew, Marathon, Wisconsin.

To stay up-to-date on the progress of Living Shepherd’s new sites—including the one in Buffalo—and to watch its livestreamed worship services, visit livingshepherd.com.



heart to heart parent conversations

Routine. My family abandons it for the summer, but I think there's a part of all of us that welcomes its return during the school year. It's hard just to throw ourselves back into our school routine, though, after weeks of freedom. And each new school year brings new routines for each kid. New expectations. New responsibilities. Adjusting can be a lot for all of us.

That's why I welcomed the advice from this month's authors. Any tips that can help the transition into the new school year are much appreciated in my house. Let us know if you try any or if you have any of your own to share. God's blessings on the coming year!

Nicole Balza

**Join the
conversation!**

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

HOW CAN WE SET THE STAGE FOR A SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL YEAR?

Are you ready for school to start? Some parents love the freedom and fun of the summer schedule. Some are like my husband and have a countdown on the calendar with a smiley face on the first day of school. No matter how you feel about it, the school year is beginning. Here are some ideas to help the transition go more smoothly.

ROUTINE

Set clear goals right from the start regarding home and school responsibilities. What does the morning routine look like? What gets done the night before to prepare for the next day? (Hint: as much as possible!) What chores does your child have and when do they need to be done? At our house, chores like unloading the dishwasher are done in the morning. Responsibilities like practicing piano can be done after school.

Establish with your children when they are going to do homework and where. Having a specific time and a comfortable place set aside prioritizes homework and provides a structure for study. If homework has been a struggle in

The school year is upon us. This brings newness to the air. New teachers, new schedules, new goals, and new expectations. So how do we, as parents, help set the stage for a successful school year?

My husband, Tad, and I are a part of a parent coaching group where we learned about family summits. Basically, a family summit is a family meeting. In this meeting we sit down and create space for each child to share a few basic, but important, things. Here is the agenda for our meeting:

- 1. Prayer**—We intentionally invite the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be present and active in our summit.
- 2. Ground rules**—We explain that this is a time to share and listen. When you aren't sharing, you are listening without judgment and without interrupting.
- 3. Defining success**—Give time for each child to think about and write down what a successful school year means to him or her.

I personally believe setting the stage for a successful school year starts in summer.

My wife and I try to get our children on a typical, healthy routine a few weeks prior to the school year.

That includes trying to get them to settle in to sleep at a reasonable time and helping them adapt to any other changes in routine (including less screen time) so they have a chance to have healthy habits entering the school year and so we do not have the added stress of those changes when school begins. Of course, we do not always accomplish this goal due to the busyness of life and the need for flexibility.

I also believe it is important to speak positively about school and encourage your children to see school as a healthy and important venture and to model that positivity to them about responsibilities in your life. Telling them that your work is important, that God gave us talents and

the past, consider hiring an after-school helper to provide a different perspective and take the tension out of the parent-child relationship.

Along with setting clearly defined routines, it's important to practice them. Use the week before school starts to begin getting up at the right time, going through the morning routine, and sitting down to read during the scheduled study time.

REST

Apparently, fifth grade at our school is when every activity possible becomes available for students. Last year, our son decided he wanted to be in cross country, soccer, flag football, band, and chimes—all at the same time. It sounds so well-rounded, doesn't it? It turned out to be a recipe for anxiety for our son and led to significant physical and emotional issues for the first part of the school year. Kids need down time. (So do adults!) Choose with your child one or two activities to participate in during the school year, and limit everything else.

Along with rest from activities, children need physical rest. It is recommended that children ages 6 to 13 get 9 to 11 hours

of sleep. Consistent lack of sleep can negatively impact learning, weaken the immune system, and result in behavioral issues. Encourage good sleep by limiting electronics before bed, keeping lighting low and the temperature cool in your child's bedroom, and having a healthy snack before bedtime. Routines such as a warm bath or cuddling also help.

REMEMBER WHAT'S IMPORTANT

Finally, as the school year approaches, remember this important truth: Our children belong to God, and he has given us the responsibility of teaching them about his love. Maybe you set aside time for family Bible study. Maybe you sing Christian songs on your way to soccer. We have a devotion and share what we're thankful for before bed. What your children learn about Jesus and what he's done for them will be the most important lesson they learn all school year.

Sarah Reik and her husband have four children ages 6 to 11 heading back to school this fall.



4. Share time—Share with the family. It's amazing how different this can look for each child.

5. Self expectations—Give time for each child to think about and write down his expectations for himself.

6. Share time—Share with the family. It works so much better when the expectations are theirs and not just yours.

7. Family expectations—Give time for each child to think about her expectations for your family. In our home our children didn't always realize the kinds of expectations they have for each other.

8. Share time—Again, share with the family. This is also a time to talk about what are realistic expectations of themselves and of each other.

9. Mom and Dad time—Tad and I share our ideas of success and our expectations. These include their answers.

10. Blessing—Close with a blessing on your school year.

Often we assume that our children's ideas are the same as our own. Doing these summits has been eye opening. God is uniquely equipping our children to do the work he is putting in front of them. I am humbled when their ideas come out because oftentimes they see it more clearly than I do.

Having these conversations has been invaluable in our home. It gives us insight into their hearts. It gives us direction when we are called upon to encourage and discipline our children. It keeps our desires for our children in check and helps us keep looking to our heavenly Father for guidance as we guide our children.

May God bless you and your families this year and always.

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



abilities to apply in this life, and that we aim to approach work and school with a thankful attitude can go a long way.

One part I have struggled with is watching my children go through the transition to school with fear and worry. I find myself saying, "How will they do with their friends?" "Will they like their teacher?" "What about their academics?" When I catch myself falling into that line of thinking, **I remind myself that it is important to trust God** (He helped you through it all, didn't he?) and to trust your children and the people God has placed around them.

When school finally begins, my wife and I typically try to keep the above routines on track in addition to establishing routines for homework and study time.

I also think it is important to try to keep things simple for a few weeks. Managing the back-to-school transition is an exciting time with all kinds of adjustments. It can also be a

time when soccer, cross country, and other commitments come together, and all of that can be overwhelming depending on how your child manages stress. In our house, we try our best to keep things simple in the fall so we are not over-committed (notice the word *try*) and to allow the children adequate time in the evening and weekends to do things that help them relax, to connect with each other and us, to get homework done, to eat, and to play.

Finally, we pray for patience, and trust that over time, the routines will settle in, the children will adjust, and we will be thinking about our plans for the following summer. Moreover, we remember that this time is temporary and we may as well enjoy this time of grace.

Casey Holtz and his wife, Amanda, have three young children ages 2 to 8.



Put it on the list!

The list for back-to-school must-haves for college students includes Jesus.

Jonathan P. Bilitz

Do you remember the excitement of back-to-school shopping when you were in elementary school? The supply list meant a trip to the store. There were some tough decisions: Do I get the big glue stick or three smaller ones? What is the difference between wide-ruled and college-ruled paper? Even though the list says a 24-pack of crayons is enough, can I get the 128-pack? (There is nothing quite like using a crayon for the first time, is there?) Maybe you recall the sense of accomplishment when you found and checked everything off your list. Then it was time to wait for back-to-school night or the first day when you could fill your desk with all your new supplies.

The college back-to-school list is a bit different, isn't it? Instead of crayons, you are picking out bedding. Glue sticks are out, but desk lamps, a coffee maker, and dorm décor are in. Instead of filling your desk with your new supplies, you are filling your car to move all your stuff to your dorm or apartment. You may ask yourself, "How am I ever going to fit all this stuff in my car?"

There's one more thing you shouldn't forget on your off-to-college list: Staying connected to Jesus. Pack your Bible, find some devotional material, locate the nearest church, or connect with the campus ministry at your college.

Why? Because the Lord knows the challenges ahead of you. He knows your excitement and your fear. He knows how to pick you up when you stumble and lift you up when you are down.

When you feel lonely, God is right there with you: "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). When pressures and worries mount, give them to your Lord: "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). When sleep escapes you, hear Jesus' invitation for spiritual rest: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Find your "go-to" promise in God's Word and keep it in your heart.

Connecting to God's promises will bring you comfort and peace. That will only be enhanced by locating and becoming a part of a community of believers. Maybe a local church will fill that bucket for you. Introduce yourself as a college student. Ask about any activities they might have to get you involved. Other Christians, as a family away from home, can provide encouragement—and sometimes food!

Another great option is a WELS campus ministry. Becoming active in the local campus ministry provides an oppor-

tunity to network with other students. Encouragement and strength come when you recognize you are not alone in your faith. Lifelong friendships often form through college groups. Most of all, you have the opportunity to grow in faith as you connect with God's Word. We know that "faith comes from hearing the message" (Romans 10:17).

If you haven't finished your off-to-college shopping—or even if you have—it's not too late to put one last thing on the list: prepare to cultivate your faith in Jesus. Connect with him personally and consider getting plugged in with others who will encourage you and whom you can encourage on your walk with Jesus. That's much more important than bath towels or a shower caddy.

Jonathan Bilitz is pastor at Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, Madison, Wisconsin.

WELS conducts more than 550 campus ministries across the United States and Canada. Find the campus ministry in your area plus register with the national WELS Campus Ministry Committee at wels.net/campus-ministry.



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Degner, Charles, to retirement
Gefaller, Mark, to St. Paul, North Platte, Neb.
Koester, Robert, to retirement
Manthey, Marcus, to retirement
Roecker, Eric, to WELS director of evangelism
Schlawin, Joseph, to retirement
Schulz, Jeremy, to Good Shepherd, The Woodlands, Texas
Smith, Stephen, to retirement
Stern, Jonathan, to retirement
Thompson, Donald, to St. John, Mukwonago, Wis.
Wiesnauer, Stephen, to East Asia
Wong, Gary, to retirement

Teachers

Becker, Marie, to Zion, Columbus, Wis.
Berg, Rebecca, to Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minn.
Biebert, Zachary, to St. Mark, Green Bay, Wis.
Bourman, Hope, to retirement
Brandt, James, to North Shore Christian Academy, Milwaukee, Wis.
Breitkreutz, Craig, to Faith, Antioch, Ill.
Buege, Peter, to First German, Manitowoc, Wis.
Clemons, Karyn, to Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minn.
Crowe, Rebecca, to Green Valley Lutheran Preschool & Kindergarten, Henderson, Nev.
Ernest, Lori, to St. Paul, Fort Atkinson, Wis.
Falck, Karena, to Illinois Lutheran Elementary School, Crete, Ill.
Foley, Matthew, to Huron Valley Lutheran High School, Westland, Mich.
Frey, Angela, to Mt. Olive, Overland Park, Kan.
Frey, Kimberly, to St. Paul, Appleton, Wis.
Gosch, Amy, to Salem, Stillwater, Minn.
Grams, Brenda, to Cross of Glory Lutheran Preschool, Peoria, Ariz.
Gumm, Angela, to Trinity Lutheran Preschool, Caledonia, Wis.
Habeck, Nicole, to Faith, Tacoma, Wash.
Hagedorn, Elizabeth, to Trinity, West Bend, Wis.
Hall, Mallory, to Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis.
Harms, Cody, to Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.
Hauf, Beth, to Bethlehem, Germantown, Wis.
Heller, Jeanine, to St. Paul, Columbus, Ohio
Henning, Kelly, to St. Paul, Muskego, Wis.
Hilgendorf, Bethany, to St. Bartholomew, Kawkawlin, Mich.
Holzhueter, Cheryl, to retirement
Humann, Vicki, to St. Paul, Rapid City, S.D.

Jensen, MyKayla, to St. John, Redwood Falls, Minn.
Johnson, Amy, to Resurrection, Aurora, Ill.
Karow, Eileen, to Peace, Sun Prairie, Wis.
Kramp, Roger, to retirement
Learman, Jamie, to St. John, Lomira, Wis.
Lepke, Joshua, to St. Paul, Muskego, Wis.
Luepke, Scott, to Resurrection, Rochester, Minn.
Makinen, Sara, to St. John, Libertyville, Ill.
Melso, Carole, to St. Paul, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis.
Melso, John, to St. Paul, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis.
Mueller, Sarah, to St. Paul, Howards Grove, Wis.
Nelson, Kristin, to St. Paul, Green Bay, Wis.
Nemmers, Emilee, to St. Matthew's, Oconomowoc, Wis.
Noack, Linda, to Grace for Kids Lutheran Preschool, Osceola, Wis.
Nocella, Stephanie, to Redeemer Learning Center, Tomahawk, Wis.
Pasch, Julia, to St. John, Watertown, Wis.
Paschke, Timothy, to retirement
Paustian, Robin, to St. John, Redwood Falls, Minn.
Porth, Naomi, to Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wis.
Powers, Danielle, to St. Paul, Green Bay, Wis.
Proeber, Kenneth, to Christ the Lord, Brookfield, Wis.
Pucci, Meredith, to Westside Christian School, Middleton, Wis.
Raddatz, Mikaela, to Trinity, Brillion, Wis.
Remmele, Steven, to retirement
Ring, Nancy, to Trinity, Waco, Neb.
Roper, Nicole, to Cross of Christ, Coon Rapids, Minn.
Rydecki, Krista, to Peace, Hartford, Wis.
Schneider, Angela, to St. Paul, Muskego, Wis.
Schwanke, Marilyn, to retirement
Sternaman, Roxanne, to Emmanuel, Tempe, Ariz.
Sternhagen, Kristin, to Rocky Mountain Lutheran High School, Commerce City, Colo.
Strassburg, Julie, to Trinity, Caledonia, Wis.
Strutz, Randall, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.
Swogger, Kyle, to St. Mark, Lincoln, Neb.
Thiesfeldt, Gregory, to St. Mark, Citrus Heights, Calif.
Tietz, Trudy, to Faith, Fond du Lac, Wis.
Treder, Stephanie, to St. John's, Jefferson, Wis.
Vanderhoof, Emily, to Trinity-St. Luke, Watertown, Wis.
Vanderhoof, Justin, to Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis.
Vertz, Beth, to Zion, Egg Harbor, Wis.
Voss, Heather, to Garden Homes, Milwaukee, Wis.

Wade, Jane, to retirement
Warnke, Alyssa, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
Wessel, Mary, to retirement
Wiechmann, Adam, to Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz.
Youngerberg, Kimberly, to Jesus Loves Me Learning Center, North Mankato, Minn.

Staff ministers

Berger, Paul, to Chaplains in Schools, Inc.
Blauert, Mark, to Wisconsin, Racine, Wis.
Pankow, Stephen, to Little Lambs Learning Center, Danube, Minn.

ANNIVERSARIES

Prior Lake, Minn.—Faith (50). Sept. 9. Worship, 3 P.M.; catered dinner, 4:30 P.M. RSVP requested. pastorschmiel@gmail.com.

St. Croix Falls, Wis.—Redeemer (75). Sept. 9. Concert, 2:30 P.M.; worship, 3 P.M.; program and dinner, 4 P.M. 715-483-3401; reddeemerstjohns@outlook.com.

New London, Wis.—Emanuel (125). Sept. 15–16. Sept. 15. Worship, 5:15 P.M. Sept. 16. Worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M.; anniversary dinner, 12:30 P.M. Dale Krause, dmkrause77@gmail.com.

Andover, Minn.—Hope (25). Oct. 7. Worship, 10 A.M. and 4 P.M.; meal follows afternoon service. 763-421-8434; dprussow@gmail.com.

Lake Mills, Wis.—St. Paul (125). Reunion weekend, Oct. 12–14. Oct. 12. Worship, 6:30 P.M. Oct. 13. Worship, 8 and 10:30 A.M.; Oct. 14. Worship, 6:30 P.M. A light reception will follow each service. All past confirmands and called workers are invited to attend. 920-648-2235.

Beaverton, Mich.—Good Shepherd (40). Oct. 14. Worship, 4 P.M.; fish fry dinner and program to follow. RSVP, d.babinec@yahoo.com.

COMING EVENTS

Church Librarians' Organization fall conference—Sept. 22. Trinity, Manitowoc, Wis. Website, welslibrarians.org.

Women's Ministry retreat—Oct. 6. Theme, "Grace." Peace, Loves Park, Ill. Website, peacelp.com/womens-retreat.

Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors convention—Oct. 10–12. Osthoff Resort, Elkhart Lake, Wis. For all seniors, age 55 and older. Website, wels.net/events.

Christian Life Resources' Celebration of Life event—Oct. 20. Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis. Website, clrevents.com.

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.

WELS women gather to support missions

From June 21–24, 1,450 women attended the 55th annual Lutheran Women's Missionary Society (LWMS) convention held in Green Bay, Wis. Special guests included members from WELS' mission field on the Apache reservation and members of South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission, WELS' sister church body in Hong Kong.

The LWMS serves Jesus “by increasing awareness of, interest in, and support of the mission outreach of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.” The convention features WELS



Kirk Massey Jr. welcomes LWMS attendees to the open house held during the convention to celebrate the 125th anniversary of WELS' mission to the Apache. Massey graduated from the Pastoral Studies Institute in 2015 and now serves on the Apache mission field. To learn more about how WELS is celebrating the 125th anniversary of its Apache mission work, visit nativechristians.org.

missionaries sharing stories from their mission fields, worship services and devotions, and displays that offer more information about WELS missions and the organizations that support them.

One highlight of this year's convention was the keynote presentation by Kirk Massey Jr. and Gary Lupe, Apache pastors who told attendees about the 125 years of God's grace that WELS has been sharing God's Word on the Apache reservation. As Massey presented the history of the mission field, Lupe entertained the audience with stories from his life and ministry.

Wendy Wright, a WELS member from Joplin, Mo., shared her story of how she was inspired by a presentation at the 2017 LWMS convention to pursue opening a home mission in her community. As she noted, “On April 12, [our core group] heard that we were selected as a new WELS mission! Only 10 months after God provided the seed at the last convention, he prepared the soil and watered it . . . and we are now rejoicing in seeing a home mission sprout up in Joplin, Mo.!” Wright encouraged attendees to consider how the Lord may be speaking to them at the convention.

Laura Lemke, a convention attendee and member of Trinity, Sturgis, S.D., echoed her sentiment. Lemke says, “The most essential part of attending a convention is the strong desire I take with me to be a missionary right where I have already been planted, even when the ways feel small or insignificant. The Holy Spirit can truly work through any of us.”

Every year, local LWMS circuits collect offerings for one Home Missions and one World Missions project. At the 2018 convention, the LWMS presented these offerings to WELS Missions. Over the course of 2017–18, the LWMS raised \$37,985 each for Cameroon projects and the Caribbean Scholarship Fund. The LWMS also raised \$49,443.57 through its kids c.a.r.e program for feeding Jesus' lambs in Nepal.



Missionary wives led a workshop about the ministries in which they serve. Attendees marveled at the ways that God is using these women.

“We thank the women of the LWMS for this generous support,” says Keith Free, administrator of WELS Home Missions. “The LWMS is an active partner with both Home and World Missions.”



For information on the 2018–19 mission projects and to learn more about the 2019 LWMS convention being held in Des Moines, Iowa, June 27–30, visit lwms.org. To view recorded sessions from this year's convention, go to livestream.com/welslive. Learn more about WELS Missions at wels.net/missions.

Let your light shine

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

Shepherd of the Hills, Custer, S.D., recently faced an unexpected ministry opportunity.

On March 19, a young man was driving toward Custer with his girlfriend when he spotted a South Dakota highway patrol car. Though the officer did not pursue them, the man sped away. Losing control, he swerved into a ditch. The car flew into the air and landed on Shepherd of the Hills' sign and cross. The driver was taken to the Custer hospital while his passenger was rushed to Rapid City in critical condition.

Those at the scene commented that the two were literally "saved by the cross." Had the car not hit the cross, it would have rolled, and because the passengers were not wearing seatbelts, they likely would have been killed.

Local media picked up "Saved by the cross" as a headline for their reports.

While the sign was salvaged for repairs, the cross remained, standing at an odd angle but standing nonetheless.

The congregation discovered that the young woman faced life-threatening injuries, and they sent her cards and prayers.

When the time was right, the congregation asked the young woman and her family if they were open to a pastoral visit. Sure enough, they welcomed the Shepherd of the Hills pastor to the hospital and happily listened to the gospel message.

One day later, the young woman was transferred to a rehabilitation facility in Sioux Falls. Shepherd of the Hills immediately contacted nearby WELS churches to provide her with continued spiritual care.



The young woman has since recovered and remains in contact with a member of Shepherd of the Hills. The man's prison sentence was suspended under the conditions that he finds a stable job and makes monthly restitution payments to Shepherd of the Hills.

The congregation continues to pray that this couple comes to understand what it truly means to be "saved by the cross."

Evangelical Lutheran Synod celebrates one hundred years

This past June, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) observed the centennial of its organization during its annual synod convention held at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minn.

The ELS was first organized in 1853 as the Norwegian Synod and has been in fellowship with WELS since the formation of the Synodical Conference in 1872. In 1917, the Norwegian Synod merged with other Norwegian Lutheran church bodies. A small group of pastors and congregations refused to enter into this new synod because of false teachings, so they reorganized the synod that is now called the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1918.

WELS President Mark Schroeder addressed the ELS convention, saying, "One hundred years ago a very small number of faithful pastors and laymen stood firmly on God's Word and made a very bold and courageous decision. . . . We are so thankful today to have you as partners in the gospel, to be joined and united with you in a common faith



On June 17, 450 people attended a "Synod Sunday Service" that opened the ELS convention and celebrated the synod's 100th anniversary.

and a common mission, and to recognize that as we carry out that work together, it all depends on one thing—on one person really—on our gracious God in his Word."

Since its small beginnings, the ELS has grown to 131 congregations in 18 states with 17,000 members. It conducts mission work in seven foreign fields, including 50 years of outreach

in Peru. It, along with WELS and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Germany, was pivotal in starting the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, a group of 32 member churches worldwide united by a common faith and confession.

Learn more about the Evangelical Lutheran Synod at els.org.

2018 youth rally brings teens together

From June 26–29, Bowling Green State University (BGSU) in Bowling Green, Ohio, hosted the 2018 WELS International Youth Rally. Approximately 2,100 WELS teens and youth leaders gathered for praise, learning, and fellowship under the theme “Never Alone.” This theme was based on the message of Matthew 28:20: “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Attendees were assured that God is ever-present in their lives and that they are not isolated in their belief.

Teens and leaders alike were encouraged and entertained by the events of the rally, which was organized by the WELS Commission on Discipleship. Attendees took part in daily worship, devotional sessions, keynote presentations, educational workshops, networking opportunities, and fun activities across the BGSU campus.

“It’s been really incredible. I’ve never been with so many people who share the same faith,” says Sophia Busse, a member at Trinity, Waukesha, Wis. This was Busse’s first time attending the rally, and she called it a “really cool experience.”

Tabitha Vannieuwenhoven, Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., enjoyed discussing topics of faith with new people at the rally. “I loved all the workshops and hearing everybody else’s point of view on stuff that my friends and I talk about.”

Young adults weren’t the only ones to grow from this experience. David Denninger, a youth leader at Redeemer, Maple Grove, Minn., gathered a great deal of knowledge from other leaders to take back to his home congregation: “It’s eye-opening, and you know you’re not alone. There are resources out there, and they’re plentiful. People are giving you ideas about what you can do, and you can do it in your church no matter what the size.”

Donn Dobberstein was installed as the director of discipleship for WELS’ Congregational Services on the final

day of the rally. Affirming the mission of the event, he shared a story he heard from a Florida pastor about his group of teens: “One of them was a teen girl who had just been baptized six months ago. To be able to see this event through her eyes—the eyes of someone who is new to the faith—and then to experience it on a large scale with youth from all over the nation . . . to me, that is what the event means: To let the kids know, like the rally theme says, ‘You are never alone.’”

John Boggs, a member of the rally planning committee and chairman for the WELS Commission on Discipleship, hopes that the event has a lasting impact on the attitudes of all the WELS teens who attended. “It’s to give them—even if it’s just for a few days—an opportunity to celebrate the fact that their God knows who they are, their God deeply loves them, and he has put people in their lives who want to build them up instead of tear them down,” says Boggs, pastor at Divine Savior, West Palm Beach, Fla. “That’s hopefully something they’ll take with them throughout their lives.”

The next WELS International Youth Rally will be held in 2020.

Watch keynote addresses and a wrap-up video at wels.net/2018youthrally.

#WELSYOUTHALLY2018

We encouraged rally attendees to tag their photos with #welsyouthrally2018 to share their experiences online. Here is one of our favorites:



Faith Belt, a member at Living Word, Johnson City, Tenn., took this shot of her twin sister, Christin, and her friend, Peter Garst, at the youth rally. They were three of 13 teens in attendance from Living Word. “The rally was especially edifying and truly a great experience!” says Faith. “I feel I am prepared to live and share my faith, particularly in a college setting, because of all the great resources and workshops at the rally.” Faith will be attending the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, this fall.



Christian worship band Koiné penned the song “Never Alone” for this year’s rally. On the final day, the band was joined by one of the largest youth rally choirs WELS has ever seen to perform the tune at BGSU’s Stroh Center.

for the Generations to come

ENCOURAGING AND EQUIPPING YOUR CONGREGATION FOR GOSPEL MINISTRY

When the doors to Apostles Lutheran Preschool in Billings, Montana, open this fall, the staff hopes that parents and their families won't only see the bigger reception area complete with refreshments, a library filled with parenting materials, and a ready smile from the teachers and pastor. They pray that the parents also will see Jesus.

"We developed a guarantee in our [church] leadership team," says Jay Bickelhaupt, pastor at Apostles. "The guarantee is that if someone comes on our campus they will experience the love of Christ."

This guarantee isn't just the responsibility of the staff; it's a direction for every volunteer at every event that preschool families attend.

It's all part of Apostles' harvest strategy—a detailed outreach plan to connect non-member families to the means of grace. The ultimate goal of Apostles' strategy? "To have 100% of our families hear about the good news of Jesus' salvation through a worship service, preschool event, or law and gospel presentation."

A large part of that plan is building relationships, whether at events held on campus or through a friendly greeting every morning. "From start to finish, from the beginning to the end of the day, we are trying to focus around this harvest strategy," says Melissa Bickelhaupt, the preschool's director. "We are looking for any opportunity we can have to be a part of their lives."

While serving as an outreach arm for the congregation has been the mission for this preschool since it began in 2005, Bickelhaupt says a WELS workshop the staff attended in 2017 called "Telling the Next Generation" helped them develop this laser-like focus on evangelism strate-

gies, including developing their written plan of goals, philosophies, and intentional outreach experiences.

"On the [six-hour] drive home we used that opportunity to talk about our take-aways and to give ourselves goals," says Melissa. "Then we discussed how to hold ourselves accountable to implement them."

Part of holding themselves accountable was developing the actual written plan. "The harvest strategy gave us a shot in the arm," says Jay. "It was awesome to have this written down so we could go and reflect and see where we are at." He is happy to say that they accomplished their goal of sharing the gospel with all of their non-member families last school year.

WELS Commissions on Evangelism and Lutheran Schools piloted "Telling the Next Generation" workshops in April 2016 to provide help to congregations implementing outreach strategies through their Lutheran elementary schools and/or early childhood ministries. Since then 174 congregations have attended a workshop.

"More of our schools are welcoming community families into their schools. As we open our doors to communities, we're opening our doors to opportunities to connect people with the means of grace," says Cindi Holman, WELS coordinator of early childhood ministries. "The goal of 'Telling the Next Generation' is to help congregations have an intentional plan so that we won't miss any opportunity to connect people with that message of grace."

More workshops are scheduled for this fall. WELS Lutheran Schools is also working to make the materials available online. Learn more at wels.net/tellingthenextgeneration.



This past year, Apostles invited its preschool families to the congregations' annual Christmas decorating event. More than one hundred people—a mix of members and preschool families—attended, offering many opportunities for interaction.

OPPORTUNITY

Another great opportunity WELS schools have for reaching families is students taking the message of Jesus home to their parents. As Jay Bickelhaupt, pastor at Apostles, Billings, Mont., puts it, "We're training 32 little evangelists."

As the synod prepares for C18 and the opportunity to reach 1 million people with the gospel message this Christmas, WELS Lutheran Schools is preparing materials to help teachers train their students how to live and share their faith.

"The children in our Lutheran schools are greatly blessed to have friends who are fellow Christians. However, most also have friends who do not have a church home—kids from the soccer league, kids from dance classes, or simply the next-door neighbor kids. Let's teach our children when they're young how to be what Jesus wants them to be—witnesses," says Jon Hein, coordinator of WELS Congregational Services. "Children who are trained to witness in simple, basic ways become adults who are bold ambassadors for Christ."

Learn more about C18 at wels.net/c18.



SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIPS THAT INSPIRE A LIFELONG JOURNEY OF SERVICE AND OUTREACH.



QUITO, ECUADOR

Six members of St. Matthew's, Oconomowoc, Wis., traveled to Ecuador in May to help one of the new WELS missionaries in Quito invite locals to attend a Bible study workshop as well as promote a future new Bible training center in the downtown area. St. Matthew's member Greta Pagels (pictured), a junior at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., says, "I was really excited to see what we could do in a week, but I was also worried that any impact we would make would be minimal due to the fact that we only had one week and none of us spoke Spanish. We basically just walked up to people in parks and tried to spark a conversation with them, show them a video, hand them a flyer, and invite them to our event. It was very difficult for me at first, but it gradually got easier—having in the back of my mind exactly why we were doing it. It makes you a lot less scared to walk up to someone and talk to them when you think about how your conversation with them could ultimately lead to them hearing the gospel for the very first time. That's what really pushed me to step out of my comfort zone."

Obituaries

William F. Bernhardt, 1941–2018

William Bernhardt was born June 21, 1941, in Kenosha, Wis. He died April 14, 2018, in Waukesha, Wis.

A 1968 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Immanuel, Salem, Ore., and Divine Peace, Milwaukee, Wis.

He is survived by two daughters, five grandchildren, three sisters, and one brother. He is preceded in death by his wife, Patricia.

Frederick W. Casmer, 1954–2018

Frederick Casmer was born May 15, 1954, in Wayne, Mich. He died April 19, 2018, in Phoenix, Ariz.

A 1980 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served St. John, Gladwin, Mich.; Good Shepherd, Beaverton, Mich.; and Paradise Valley, Phoenix, Ariz.

He is survived by his wife, Susan; three sons; five grandchildren; his mother; one sister; and one brother. He is preceded in death by his father.

Alan M. Spurgin, 1949–2018

Alan Spurgin was born Feb. 4, 1949, in Medford, Wis. He died April 24, 2018, in Madelia, Minn.

He taught at St. John, Watertown, Wis.; Good Shepherd's, West Allis, Wis.; St. Peter, Balaton, Minn.; St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn.; and Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

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

Dolores J. Adams, 1938–2018

Dolores Adams (née Hohenstein) was born July 13, 1938, in Mantorville, Minn. She died April 24, 2018.

She taught at Waucousta, Campbellsport, Wis.

She is survived by two daughters and four grandchildren. She is preceded in death by her husband, Walter, and one brother.

District news

SOUTH CENTRAL

Divine Savior Academy celebrated the grand opening of its campus in Sienna Plantation, Texas, on July 14. Divine Savior Academy operates a network of schools that serves students in preschool, elementary, middle, and high school on its four campuses in South Florida and Texas. The Sienna Plantation campus will serve students in preschool through eighth grade. Previously, the school operated as Sienna Lutheran Academy.

NEBRASKA

In July, Hmong Lutherans from around the United States gathered at Grace Hmong Lutheran Church in Kansas City, Kan., for the **WELS Hmong National Conference**. One hundred twenty-three people attended the conference to learn more about how they can reach out to Hmong loved ones who do not yet know their Savior.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

MI—Faith, Dexter, Mich., celebrated the 40th anniversary in the pastoral ministry of **Mark Porinsky** in June. Porinsky has served at Faith his entire ministry.

NE—On July 14, Immanuel, Woodville, Wis., celebrated the 40th anniversary in the pastoral ministry of **Wayne Hilgendorf**.

NW—Trinity, Kiel, Wis., celebrated the 40th anniversary in the pastoral ministry of **David Laabs** on July 15.

WW—St. Paul, Wonewoc, Wis., celebrated the 40th anniversary in the teaching ministry of **Valerie Hagemann** on June 24.

On June 24, **Ervine Vomhof** celebrated his 60th anniversary in the pastoral ministry. Vomhoff serves part time as visitation pastor at St. John, Baraboo, Wis.

Immanuel, Marshall, Wis., celebrated the 40th anniversary in the pastoral ministry of **Paul Scharrer** on July 8.

WELS news briefs

CHRISTIAN AID AND RELIEF

262-334-7881

WELS Christian Aid and Relief has approved \$317,403 for humanitarian aid work in fiscal year 2018–19. Eighteen mission fields, both home and world, will be receiving humani-



tarian aid funding. Projects range from providing school supplies, outfitting medical supplies, drilling drinking water wells, and offering literacy and skills classes. These are projects developed by WELS home and world missionaries to reflect Christ's love to the people of their community and open doors to share the gospel. For example, in places such as Pakistan, humanitarian aid projects such as providing medical care and disaster relief promote good will in the community, allowing gospel outreach programs like Sunday schools (pictured) to happen. Learn more at wels.net/relief.

WESTERN WISCONSIN



On July 22, St. John's, Juneau, Wis., held the grand opening worship service and celebration of its new campus in Horicon, Wis. More than one hundred people attended. The Horicon location was approved as an unsubsidized home mission in April 2018.

MINNESOTA



The Martin Luther College Alumni Tour traveled to Europe in two groups this summer. The groups, which totaled 96 people, met in Austria at one point (pictured).

On July 15, **Good News, Mt. Horeb, Wis.**, a WELS home mission, celebrated five years of ministry.

The district reporters for this month are: MI—John Eich; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NE—Timothy Kemnitz; NW—Dennis Kleist; SC—Andrew Retberg; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Brett Brauer.

COMMISSION ON DISCIPLESHIP

discipleship@wels.net

Kids Connection, a video news magazine for kids, is entering its 24th season. Join the video's teenage hosts as they explore interesting and spiritually uplifting stories about people, places, and programs around WELS and continue to encourage viewers to "stay connected to Jesus." Nine episodes are made each year, one for each month of the school year. Subscribe for your congregation, school, or Sunday school at nph.net/kidsconnection.

Our treasure: THE GOSPEL

THIS TREASURE CALLS US BACK TO JESUS

Some wander away from God's love—a few far away—but our heavenly Father never gives up on us.

Jonathan E. Scharf

"The voices don't mess with me anymore."

That's what Grady told me. He had taken a detour in our conversation to let me know how much better things were. Grady had mentioned the voices once before—the first time we had talked. He doesn't mention them often because he doesn't want people to think he's crazy. He just wanted me to know they weren't a problem anymore. "Things are different now. The last couple months of our meetings and Bible information class and weekly worship and my reading routine . . . things are different now."

The doctor told him those voices are called "auditory hallucinations." According to the doctor, they are likely a side effect from past drug use. Grady just likes to call them "the voices." And they played a part in his story.

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL

Grady's dad had been a Baptist preacher, so Grady was in church every time the doors were open. But his dad quit and became a truck driver when Grady was 13. That was it. Grady hadn't been back to church since, except for funerals.

He's 36 now.

In the meantime, Grady confesses, "I'm pretty sure I have done every immoral

thing you could possibly do.” And it had taken its toll. His body was suffering from addiction. His marriage was suffering. His family was a wreck.

The day he was planning to walk away from his wife and the two boys that mattered most to him, he got in the car and drove. Then something inside him told him to pray. Maybe it was a memory of the faith of his childhood or the influence of his dad. Maybe it was the prayers of his mom. But when he pulled over in Abiding Grace’s parking lot and stopped the car to pray, something happened. Grady says his steering wheel stopped working. The car’s wheels wouldn’t turn. So, he got out, pushed his car forward toward the parking stall, and started walking. He walked five miles to where he was staying, leaving his car diagonally covering a couple spots, a clear testimony that something wasn’t right. Whatever was going on, it prevented him from filing for divorce that day.

As Grady tells it, this was just the beginning of what God was doing. When he finally got around to coming back for the car with a trailer, the car started right up. The steering wheel worked fine as he drove the car onto the trailer. There was nothing wrong with it.

FROM PARKING LOT TO PEW

Grady was raised not to even think about looking for help at church if you weren’t tithing. So when he came that day, he made sure he had some money. He brought \$50 to give to the church as an “offering,” to thank us for not having his car towed. But the vicar wouldn’t take it. Grady tried to give it several times. He finally had to beg the vicar to get him to take it. “Vicar has no idea how important he is to me,” says Grady. “He has no idea what he did for me that day.”

Neither did Grady at the time. He left and drove away with his car, never really intending to be back. But, Grady says, “God wasn’t nearly done.” A couple days later, as the voices intensified, Grady tried to run away from them and instead ran into a pole. He remembers seeing himself laying in the back seat and then he opened his eyes on

the helicopter. The next time he opened his eyes, he was in the hospital with a broken shoulder blade, a lacerated liver, several broken ribs, and more. Grady knew something had to change. His upbringing told him what.

So, there on that hospital bed, Grady promised God he’d go to church. And since he had just found one, he came to Abiding Grace. He wanted to go where they didn’t just want his money. This time, he parked in just one spot.

And his wife, Tiffany, came with him. She wanted to support his efforts, so even though she never had done “the church thing,” even though she says she didn’t know anything about the Bible, she came too. They heard about forgiveness and rebirth. They heard about God’s grace that’s not deserved. They heard the treasure of the gospel.

If not for divine intervention, we’d all be dead. But “the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

After church, Tiffany asked if I did any marriage counseling. She knew they needed something, and she liked the hope in the message they heard that day. I told them I’d be happy to talk about what God’s Word says about marriage, love, and communication. There was one requirement, though: They had to come to church while we were meeting. They needed to be regularly reminded of God’s love in order to show it to each other. They told me they had already been planning on that.

Pretty soon, they were both in Bible information class and meeting to study God’s Word on marriage. Their boys were in Sunday school. They started devotions and prayers at home. One thing led to another, and soon Grady was sitting in my office telling his story

because he wanted everyone to know that God never gives up on you.

I asked him about using an alias for the story, but he wouldn’t have it. He told me that as soon as I had called him to ask if I could use his story, he had called everyone involved and asked if they were okay with him telling it. “It’s an honor for me that you want to hear my story,” he said. “And hopefully my honesty will help someone else, because that’s the whole point of everything—to help others and pass it on. If not for divine intervention, I’d be dead already.”

A FATHER’S LOVE

He’s right. If not for divine intervention, we’d all be dead. But “the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Jesus is the searching shepherd that leaves the 99 in the open country and goes after the lost sheep until he finds it (Luke 15:3-7). He joyfully puts that lost one on his shoulders and carries it home. He is the woman who sweeps her whole house looking for that lost coin and rejoices with her friends and neighbors when she finds it (Luke 15:8-10).

Or consider the prodigal son in the story Jesus told in that same chapter (Luke 15:11-32). How quickly the son disposed of the wealth he had demanded from his father. Then consider all the little things, the “coincidences,” that brought the son back to his father: the famine God sent, the irony of a Jew feeding pigs, the hunger, the memories. One memory pulled him home—his father’s love. Then, in that great undeserved love, his father forgave him and welcomed him as a son again.

Sounds a little like Grady’s story.

Sounds a little like mine.

Jonathan Scharf is pastor at Abiding Grace, Covington, Georgia.

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



The love of Christ compels us in everything we do. That's also true in the way we use our financial resources.

John A. Braun

Their five children are on their own. Brett and Karen Voigt are empty nesters. Their children carry the faith in Jesus into their own lives. "It is important to us that we see them get their lives off to a good start," says Brett. The children all had the benefit of Christian education. During their high school and college years they attended a number of different schools—St. Croix Lutheran High School, Luther Preparatory School, Martin Luther College, and Bethany Lutheran College.

At a time when Christian faith is sometimes challenged and ridiculed, all of their children had their faith strengthened at these Christian schools. As parents, Brett and Karen paid the bills for their children's high school education and were grateful for the influence that helped mold them. The financial aid they received from the schools was also important. They wished they could have done more than pay the educational expenses for their own children. When requests came for special offerings, they just weren't in a position to help.

Grow in the GRACE OF GIVING

CHANGES

Their financial position changed when Brett's father passed away. He had paid the cost of Brett's education to be a pastor and then left the Voigts with a substantial inheritance. As a bricklayer, he had taken care of his financial resources. Brett says, "I came to realize how carefully he had everything taken care of."

There was another change—an unwelcome one. Brett was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. It has posed a series of challenges to his work as a pastor. "I can only stand for a certain amount of time; I use a stool when I preach and a walker when I conduct the liturgy," says Brett. He has had to transition to part-time ministry. The congregation and his associate at St. Paul, Menomonie, Wis., have adjusted to the challenges "better than I could have expected," he says.

It hasn't been easy for him. "I'm seeing my limitations," he says. "I think I'm stronger than I actually am. It's hard for me to think I can't do what I used to do." He makes hospital calls using a walker now. Karen has found that she must remind him that he needs to slow down.

GIFTS

With all these life changes, it was time to look at their financial situation. The time had come for them to review their will. The children were on their own, and their financial situation was different. Naturally, the inheritance had to be part of that review.

After meeting with a Christian giving counselor, they chose to give back to WELS and the schools that had nurtured their children.

"Why now? Didn't you need the resources for your own situation?" I ask.

Brett calmly says, "I have the resources now, and I don't know what lies ahead for me or for anyone else."

That's an expression of faith in the Lord's care. I think of the words of Jesus, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father

feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Matthew 6:26).

"It was a way to say thanks to the schools for the great blessings our children received when they went to those schools. Their faith was strengthened." Brett clarifies, "These gifts will be used to help other students get a Christian education and give them a solid faith. I have been blessed to see my children receive Christian training, and I hope others will be blessed to see their own children receive it too. We want to help others so their children will also grow up to be active Christians and leaders

"Our prayer is that our gifts will go to help make leaders in the church."

in their own congregations. Not everyone can be a pastor or teacher. None of our children have chosen to be pastors or teachers. I have an eye to laypeople. I don't come from a pastor's family. The kingdom of God takes more than pastors. Our prayer is that our gifts will go to help make leaders in the church."

Karen adds, "We also want to help provide for the next generation of pastors and teachers, so some of our gift is directed to those who want to pursue public ministry. We need them too. For us, it is important that the church has dedicated Christians and lay leaders as well as pastors and teachers."

Both have grown in the grace of giving. They understand the resources they have are gifts of God's grace. They also know and love their Savior who gave his life to redeem them and grant them eternal life. No matter what circumstances they encounter in the future, the Lord's care will not cease. Their Savior has provided for their future beyond this life. For them, the grace of giving means the blessing and joy to help others. They want to give back in a way that helps others benefit from a Christian education just as they have been blessed.

LEARN MORE

Want to explore further how you can use your financial resources to support your congregation, WELS schools, or the synod in sharing the gospel throughout the country and the world? Learn more at wels.net/christian-giving or by contacting the Ministry of Christian Giving at mcg@wels.net; 1-800-827-5482.

LESSONS

What lesson should we ponder from this story? Brett puts it in the form of a series of questions: "Why did God put me in this place at this time? It is not a question asking 'Why me? Why do I have these troubles?' Instead it's a question meant for us to consider our opportunities. Why did God put me here? Why do I have these gifts and these troubles? How can I encourage, build up, and strengthen others?"

The Voigts found an answer that was good for them. Not everyone will answer the questions in the same way. All of us can find our own opportunities to encourage the next generation and be supportive of others. The Lord has placed different opportunities before us all. It may be supporting our own families. It also may be broader than our own circumstances. It may be an opportunity to support our own congregations and schools. The Lord may also open doors for us to support mission work in our synod.

Brett reminds us all, "Rejoice in the blessings God has provided to you. Ponder the goals the Lord has for you to use those blessings."

Karen agrees. "We all have ways to encourage the next generation and support others."

John Braun is the executive editor of Forward in Christ magazine.

The Lord provided strength and courage on our journey with ALS. Lynette Hopp

“You have ALS and, most likely, two to five years to live.” My husband’s diagnosis was final.

Our journey had begun when Leon noticed weakness in his left hand and then had trouble with buttons. The doctors were certain. Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), or Lou Gehrig’s Disease, is a degenerative disease that affects the central nervous system. Leon would gradually lose control of his muscles, ending with total paralysis.

Our worst fears became a reality. When the doctor stepped out of the room, we embraced in tears. We returned home to make some difficult but necessary decisions. Our prayer became, “Help us, Lord! If you can use us through this disease to reach out to others, we are your instruments.”

MAKING ADJUSTMENTS

Leon took the lead in determining that he could no longer farm—something that he’d done with his dad and brother all his life. The brothers had become partners when their dad died. He had always farmed, except when he served as a loadmaster in the Air Force for four years. The changes Leon’s diagnosis brought were not easy on his brother. Their mother was still living at age 94 and supported what needed to be done for everyone’s sake. (She is still living, doing well at 99.)

We also realized that we could no longer stay in our split-level farmhouse without costly major adaptations. ALS would eventually rob Leon of all muscle function but would leave him with his sight, hearing, and mind. He would be able to think but would gradually lose his ability to walk, talk, eat, and use his hands. We decided we needed to move to a patio home in town where he could navigate on his own for as long as possible.

God led us through unusual circumstances to a home that was perfect for us. We set a moving date and began to sort through 40 years of stuff. Then we moved off our farm and into town. We continued to pray for strength and peace from our Lord and knew that he would be with us wherever the next phase of the disease would take us.



I KNOW
WHERE
I AM
GOING

LIVING IN PEACE

As we settled into our new home, we hung the Christ-centered pictures and plaques that we'd brought from our farmhouse and stacked our devotional books in different rooms. I put meaningful Bible verses on the refrigerator and in my kitchen work area. I had worked at a Christian bookstore for 17 years and purchased so many pictures, Bibles, books, and Christian CDs that Leon always laughed and said that I spent more than I made. I'm certain that he was right!

We hung one of my favorite pictures over the fireplace, which is the center focus of the townhome. It is a picture of Jesus and the frightened disciples in the storm on the sea. Jesus is standing and rebuking the wind and the sea. The words on the frame are from Mark 4:39: "And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, PEACE, BE STILL. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." "Peace, be still" is all in caps. After the diagnosis and initial shock, I don't remember a time when we didn't have peace—the peace that only God can give.

My dear Leon never lost his smile until near the end of our journey when his facial muscles would not allow it. When asked by aides and nurses how he could be so positive and cheerful while living with such an awful disease, he would simply reply, when he could still talk, "I know where I am going." His faith never wavered, and even though I had times of great sadness and tears, I knew that the Lord was with us.

From the diagnosis to my Leon's entrance into heaven was about three and a half years. I cared for him at our home with the help of dedicated aides, nurses, and doctors. We had cherished times together, including numerous trips to a park and falls area near our home and many visits by our family and friends. He had a motorized wheelchair that he was able to navigate by himself until the last few months when he trusted me to run it. That was a total leap of faith on his part!

Even after he could no longer com-



Leon and his family in April 2016. He was called home to the Lord in September 2016.

municate verbally, we used a spelling chart that I held, and he would spell words by looking at one letter at a time. Before losing the use of his hands, he was able to run the computer using Bluetooth and the driving handle of his motorized wheelchair. With that he connected with many old and new friends and relatives who sent prayers and support.

FINDING COMFORT

We did not walk this journey alone. God had placed in our life the blessing of wonderful caring family and friends, pastors, neighbors, and a local Christian radio station. The outpouring of love was amazing. Our three children and their families were great blessings. One grandson was born after the diagnosis. Leon was able to see this little guy grow and start to walk. Little Kyler was fascinated with Leon's motorized wheelchair and would crawl over to it, pull himself up, and stand looking at his grandpa.

The love and support continues even now and is such a blessing. Now I panic if I can't get the radio station. It's the only station I listen to because it remains an encouragement and comfort.

I tried to send a mass e-mail about every three to four months to give updates on our journey. Toward the end of our journey, we hit a few days when I became exhausted. Our nurses encouraged us to take advantage of respite care—an overnight stay for

Leon in a nearby hospital so I could get some rest.

After leaving him there, I drove home in tears. When I arrived home, I was moved to write an update, because I felt particularly vulnerable at the time:

I have learned that God reaches out in love when I dissolve in tears of sadness. He reaches out in forgiveness when I question why he is taking my beloved before I'm ready. He reaches out with peace when I worry about the "What ifs." He reaches out with strength after I've had a hectic day or an exhausting night. He is always by my side . . . even when I forget to talk to him. How can I question his love and faithfulness?! Even on my worst days, I know that God loves me and has a plan. Our lives are in his hands. There is no better place to be!

My dear husband and friend died at home with his family four months later. I have not changed much in the house since Leon has died. I draw so much comfort from all those special pictures, including photos of him and me at places we visited over the years. I still have the Bible verses by my sink. All I know is that the Lord has blessed me, and I am constantly reminded that I'm in his care.

Lynette Hopp is a member at Trinity, Nicollet, Minnesota.

There's a change in the seasons

Glenn L. Schwanke

Our heavenly
Father guides
all our
“appointed”
times: the
seasons of
the year and
the seasons
of our life.

There's a change in the seasons. You can feel it in the crispness of the morning air and see it in your breath. Fall is almost here. That's why intrepid “Yooper” gardeners like me are scrambling to stretch the growing season by using sheets to cover some of our prized vegetables before a cold night. We lavish special care on our most precious plants: the tomatoes. The goal of a “master” gardener in the Keweenaw Peninsula is to harvest at least one red, ripe tomato before the first frost! I think this year, I may actually do that.

But I wouldn't have even had the chance for a ripe tomato if I hadn't planted a garden. This year, many wondered if I would. Why? On May 14, my wife, Terry, was carried safely home to heaven after a long struggle with the devil's concoction, cancer. In the weeks following her memorial service, I kept getting asked, “Pastor, will you plant your garden this year?” “Certainly!” I said. Then I added, “Remember Dr. Luther? Some claim that he once said, ‘Even if I knew that the world would end tomorrow, I'd still plant an apple tree today.’”

Whether Luther actually said that or not is hotly debated. It really makes no difference. I agree with the sentiment. It's a biblical principle written by the wisest man who ever lived. King Solomon wrote, “For everything there is an appointed time. There is an appropriate time for every activity under heaven: a time to give birth and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot plants” (Ecclesiastes 3:1,2). As Solomon observed, our heavenly Father guides all our “appointed” times: the seasons of the year and the seasons of our life. Planting the garden in spring, then harvesting and pulling it out in fall. Giving birth and dying.

As I ponder Solomon's words, I sometimes think of the inspired words of his father, King David. “As for man, his days

are like grass. Like a wildflower he blossoms. Then the wind blows over it, and it is gone, and its place recognizes it no more” (Psalm 103:15,16). Life flies by so quickly. Death comes to us all. Yet we don't despair, because we know the second of our death is an “appointed” time planned by the One to whom David could confess, “My times are in your hand” (Psalm 31:15).

Yes, I miss my wife. But we were blessed to have almost 39 years together as husband and wife. And now she is forever safe, wrapped in the loving arms of our heavenly Father who “appointed” the time for her to die at just the right second! There is comfort and profound peace in knowing that.

So I planted a garden this year as a confession of faith. Spring, summer, fall, winter, seedtime and harvest: All will continue till the end of time as ordained by the Lord's unwavering guarantee.

So also, our life: spring, summer, fall, winter. If I were to judge by the calendar, I'm in the fall of my life. But I'm at peace with that, because my Lord is guiding every turn of my life, just as he guided my wife, Terry, safely through the last season of her life into the changelessness of eternity.

May you find this same peace in Jesus.

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

All Bible verses are from the Evangelical Heritage Version.

MAJORING ON THE MINORS

Thomas D. Kock

HABAKKUK: YOU'RE GOING TO DO ... WHAT?!

"You're going to do ... what?!" Perhaps we expect that surprised question from the parents of teenagers who announce their latest "plans." But we wouldn't expect it to come from a prophet addressing God, would we? Yet Habakkuk directed that sort of question to God himself.

GOD HAS A PLAN

Here's how it happened. Habakkuk was discouraged. He saw evil; he failed to see good. He laments: "Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted" (1:4).

And, to Habakkuk, it seemed as if God was doing nothing about it (cf. 1:2,3).

Oh, but God had a plan! He tells Habakkuk, "I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own. They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honor. . . . They fly like an eagle swooping to devour; they all come intent on violence (1:6-9)

At that point Habakkuk basically says, "You're going to do ... what?!" This "solution" sounded worse than the problem! Destruction and judgment would come.

God responds to Habakkuk, "But the righteous will live by his faith" (2:4 NIV84). To Habakkuk, all looked disjointed, random, even crazy. To God, the plan was crystal clear. And then God adds, "The Babylonians will be punished eventually too."

In short, God is saying, "Trust me, Habakkuk; I've got this." He will bring judgment, but salvation was the best part of his plan.

GOD'S PLAN ASSURES OUR SALVATION

In Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11,12,

God quotes Habakkuk 2:4 to emphatically make the point that salvation is *his* work and his work *alone*. So "the righteous will live by his faith." Or to put it colloquially, as God said to Habakkuk, so God says to us: "Trust me; I've got this."

Perhaps we're tempted to say, "You're going to do ... what?! You're going to do all the work of salvation?" After all, as we look at our own lives we see the same problems Habakkuk did: violence, injustice, strife, and wickedness. When we hear that God will send judgment, we understand that we are guilty and deserve judgment. We can't understand how we could possibly hope to stand "right" in God's sight, since we've failed so much! But God will do what we cannot do. He will save us.

Why would he want to do that?!

God's answer? "Trust me; I've got this."

The salvation plan may not make human sense, but it makes perfect sense to God.

Habakkuk may not have totally understood the plan, but he was assured that God did. He therefore concluded his book with a psalm, including these moving verses: "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior" (3:17,18).

"Trust me," God says. "I've got this." That's true, no matter what.

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

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

HOSEA

JOEL

JONAH

AMOS

OBADIAH

MICAH

NAHUM

HABAKKUK

Hometown/lineage: Unknown

Dates: Not long before 605 B.C. (c. 610? 620?).

Unique fact: Two of the three chapters are dialogue between one human and God.

Key verse: 2:4 "The righteous will live by his faith."

ZEPHANIAH

HAGGAI

ZECHARIAH

MALACHI



Believers have
heard the calm,
soothing whisper
of God's promises
on our troubled
journeys. We have
forgiveness and
eternal life.

Pain

Christians often confront this question: How can a God of love allow so much pain in this world? It's a natural question in the face of violence and shootings as well as the repetition of earthquakes, storms, personal trials, and health problems.

Pain is a reality, and so is death. Some say that God is powerless to do anything about either. Their conclusion is that we don't need God. We simply need to make the best of our lives, and that's all anyone can do.

From the perspective of all we see in this world, pain is persistent and death is not preventable. Some of death's causes may be preventable, but worldwide, about two people die every second from accident, heart trouble, cancer, stroke, gun violence, or some other cause. We might lengthen our lives, but that does not change the inevitability of death.

Some pain can be prevented, eased, cured, and even eliminated. We recover after surgery or an accident—sometimes pain free. At other times we have chronic enduring pain. Sometimes pain is only the first paragraph of a story that ends with death. It's the tragedies that cause us to ask, "God, can't you take away the pain? The anguish, the hardships, the tragic losses seem so out of place with your story of love."

So what do we say as Christians to the indictment of God's helplessness to prevent pain and death? In each issue of *Forward in Christ*, I find some answers in the stories of Christians who have encountered both death and pain. They are stories of trust in God's promises. Even when pain was the harbinger of death, God's promises gave comfort, strength, and hope. Jesus has risen and promises that we too will overcome death (John 11:25,26). In this issue, consider the articles by Glenn Schwanke (p. 32), Donn Dobberstein (p. 12), and Lynette Hopp (p. 30).

My heart goes out to all those whose journey through life includes pain. Compassion for others is one of the reasons God allows pain. He provides opportunities for us to help others endure pain and offer prayers for their relief and endurance. I commend the doctors, nurses, caregivers, and researchers who seek to ease pain. We should not be absent from those who offer prayers, comfort, and compassion.

God gives relief in his own time and in his own way, whether or not we understand. But we must not mistake the relief he gives for the peace and joy of our final destination. God grants relief along the way to assure us of his care. If he grants no relief, he supplies the power to endure. And then after this life's troubles and toils, we have something much better in store for us.

Believers have heard the calm, soothing whisper of God's promises on our troubled journeys. We have forgiveness and eternal life. Some have not listened and even refused or opposed his promises, but God has not written them off. Everyone knows something is wrong when it hurts. God leaves pain and disaster here to underline that reality. With pain, he turns the volume of his message up. God shouts, "This life with all its troubles is not what I want for any of you."

If they miss this message embedded in pain and misery, God leaves one more invitation. Death inevitably stands at the end of all journeys through life. Remember, two people die every second. Our Lord stands at death's door, ready to accept those who turn to him like the thief on the cross. He longs to say at life's end, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).



COME Lord Jesus BE OUR GUEST

Joel S. Heckendorf

NOURISHED BY MEALS WITH THE MESSIAH

DINNER FOR ONE? (MARK 2:13-17)

It's a common movie scene: A lonely middle schooler sits by himself at a table in the cafeteria. "Cool" kids walk by and roll their eyes. "Mean" kids point and laugh. The "bully" comes and takes his dessert. But then, one day it all changes. The prettiest girl or the star quarterback sits with the dork, and his life is changed forever.

Cafeterias aren't just scary places for acne-ridden middle schoolers. Hungry college students, fearful of eating alone, roam the dorm halls before heading out, asking, "Anybody want to go eat?" As adults, it can be embarrassing to tell the hostess, "Dinner for one." Once in a while we'll sneak a seat close to someone in a pub or restaurant, but as the "Piano Man" aptly sings, we're simply "sharing a drink called loneliness."

That's what life was like for Levi. As a tax collector, he was surrounded by crowds, but he was used to saying, "Dinner for one." An outcast to society. The black sheep of the family. A disgrace even to the little guy inside of him named "Conscience." Levi had plenty of acquaintances but not many, if any, friends.

Then one day, it all changed. Someone better than the star quarterback visited his booth. Not to make fun of

him. Not to scold him. But to invite him. "Follow me."

"Follow me." Were there any sweeter words to Levi's ears? Every other time he heard those words, they were likely preceded by a "Don't." But not this time. Jesus, the miracle worker, the preacher, the doctor, invited him: "Follow me."

No longer having to say, "Dinner for one," Levi couldn't wait to throw a dinner party for this One. After inviting all the other lonely, guilt-ridden sinners to his table, it no longer fazed Levi when the "cool" teachers of the law walked by with their sneers and snarky remarks. Better yet, it didn't faze Jesus. When the spiritual leaders mocked, "Why are you sitting with them?" Jesus didn't move. He knew the bad company needed his company. He knew the sick needed a doctor. He knew the sinners needed a Savior.

And he knows you need him. So he invites, "Follow me."

No matter what's in your past, no matter how many times your RSVP was no to Jesus, no matter how many times you've set your chair in your modern-day tax booth instead of at his feet, know this: Just like Jesus saw Levi, Jesus sees you. And he doesn't roll his eyes. He invites, "Follow me."

Having received Jesus' invite through his Word, be like Levi and return the favor. "Come, Lord Jesus, be my guest." Put out a spread and celebrate him and see how you are blessed by his gifts when you have a dinner for One.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. The call of Levi (also called Matthew) appears three times in the gospels (Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32). Compare the readings. What details do you appreciate from each account?
2. How have you acted like the "teachers of the law" in this account?
3. How has Jesus invited you to follow him?

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



This is the tenth 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 Sept. 5 at wels.net/forwardinchrist.

Amazing Grace

A teacher cherishes the opportunities to proclaim the message of God's forgiveness to her students.

Cindi L. Holman

One of the things I appreciated most when serving as a teacher were the opportunities to share the precious gospel with children and their families. What a joy to be able to attend the baptism of a student or see a young family express their faith as they are confirmed.

SHARING GOD'S AMAZING GRACE

I particularly remember one story when I taught at St. Marcus, Milwaukee:

Josiah and Jemoni* were twins. Their mother had left them, and they lived with their grandmother and great aunt. The boys had faced abandonment and heartbreaking tragedies in their young lives. During their kindergarten year, their uncle was shot and killed in the alley just a short distance from their home.

Josiah especially struggled with anger and sometimes rage, even at such a young age. In our early childhood center, rest time each afternoon was a peaceful time for him. He would find his mat and blanket and lay quietly, humming softly. Most often, you could hear him humming his favorite song, "Amazing Grace."

But one day, Josiah had a particularly difficult episode. I took him out of the room to help him calm down. Slowly his rage turned to exhausted tears. We talked about what happened, how he reacted, the results of his reaction, and what might work better next time. We talked about strategies that could help him when he became upset and

how we could work together in the future.

When I asked him if he wanted to say anything else, he shared a tearful apology. I told

him that it was easy to forgive him because Jesus forgives me over and over even when I make the same mistake again and again.

Then I asked Josiah if he knew what grace was. He quietly shook his head no. I shared that grace was how God forgives us when we don't deserve it. I told him that God loves us so much that he gave us Jesus to take away the guilt of all the sins that we do each day. He watched and listened intently.

I said, "Isn't that amazing? It's amazing grace, just like your song." His eyes widened, and a gentle smile came to his tear-stained face.

TRUSTING GOD'S AMAZING GRACE

We all love a happy ending. We love a success story. Even more, we love when the Lord allows us to see the fruits of the work of the Holy Spirit. However, we don't always get to see that happy ending, at least not this side of heaven.

The next fall, we visited Josiah and Jemoni's home at the beginning of the school year. We were told that the boys had been enrolled in another school. It was an abrupt and unpleasant visit, with no opportunity to say good-bye to the boys.

Although we don't know where they are right now, we do know that both Josiah and Jemoni heard about Jesus their Savior every day while they were with us. One of the highlights of the year was the day when they were both baptized. We know that Baptism gave them the promise of God's forgiveness for their sins (Acts 2:38).

And so we trust God's promises in Isaiah 55:11: "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." What a comfort and what an encouragement. We know and trust the power of the Holy Spirit, and we pray that the Lord holds them close to him. Our trust—and theirs—is always in God's amazing grace.

Cindi Holman, WELS' national coordinator of early childhood ministries, is a member at Grace, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

*Names have been changed.