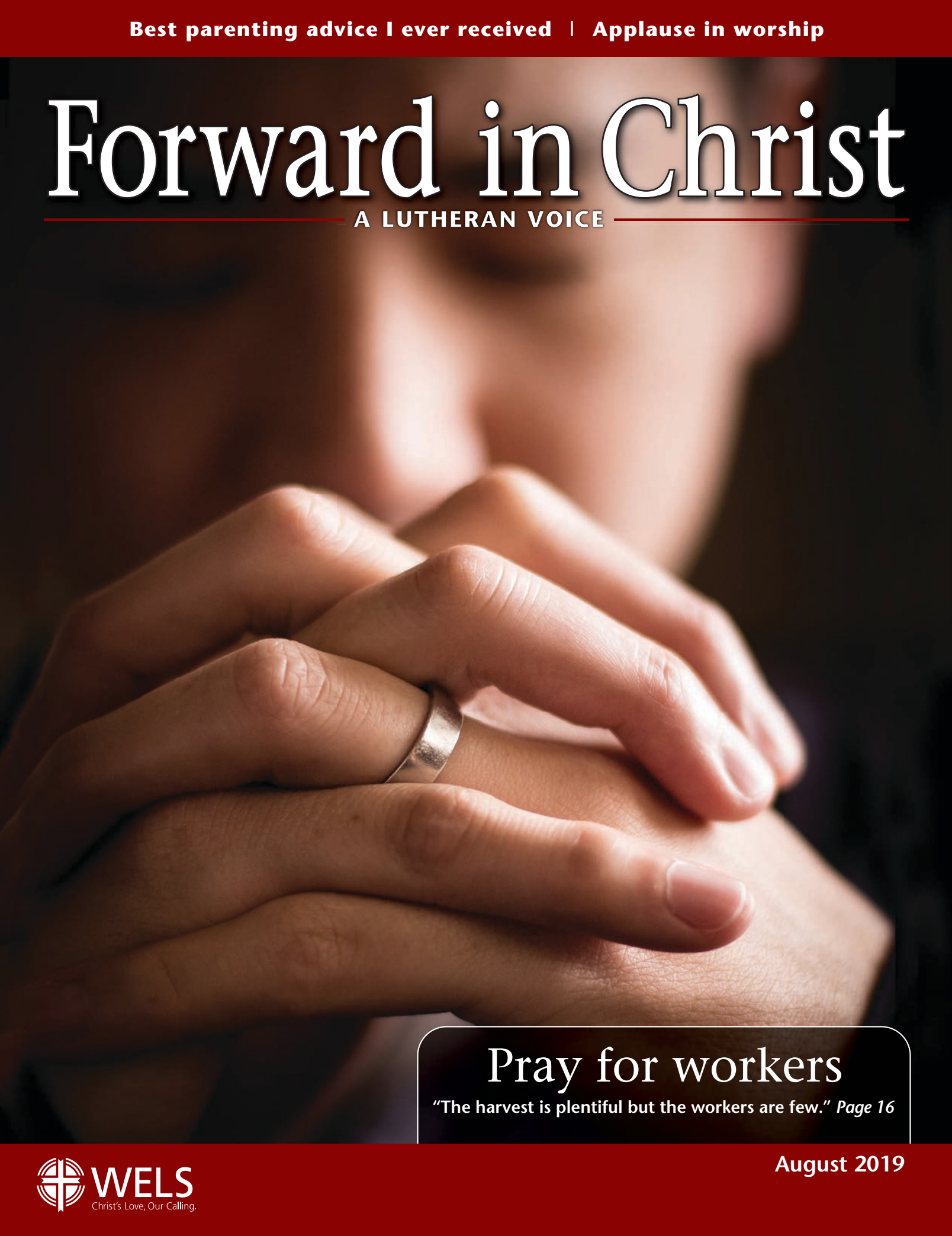


Best parenting advice I ever received | Applause in worship

Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



Pray for workers

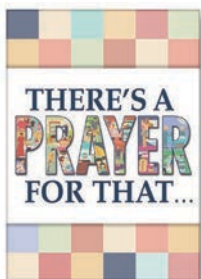
"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few." *Page 16*

TOGETHER for the TRUTH

"Work together for the truth" — 3 John 1:8



Look around at the people at your next worship service, Bible class, or church event. The truth of God's Word brings you together. This summer, these Scripture-focused books and resources from **Northwestern Publishing House** will constantly remind you of the loving community you have in Christ.



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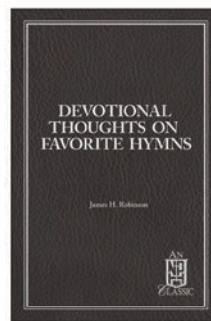
sincere and loving prayers of his children. Softcover, 173 pages.

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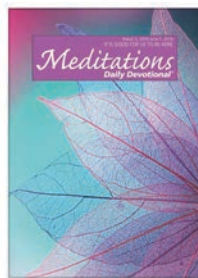


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LU060686, \$16.99 



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A young girl with blonde hair, wearing a white sleeveless dress, is running through a field of tall green grass and white daisies. She is holding a colorful pinwheel in her right hand. The background shows a line of green trees under a bright blue sky with some clouds.

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WELS Church Extension Fund

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod



WELS CEF grants and loans helped finance the new worship and ministry center of Ascension, Jacksonville, N.C.



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EDITORIAL OFFICE

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

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

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

MANAGING EDITOR

Julie K. Wietzke
julie.wietzke@wels.net

STAFF WRITERS

Nicole R. Balza
Dayton Hamann

SEMINARY CONSULTANT

Prof. Samuel Degner

DESIGNER

Carianne Ciriacks

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COVER IMAGE: LIGHTSTOCK

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

"Someday when I'm an old lady in my rocking chair, I will look back at how God has connected all the dots and think, *Wow!*"

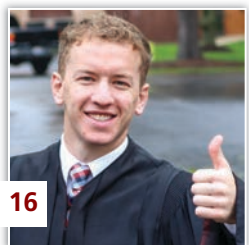
So says Gina Beasley, who grew up Mormon but now is part of a small mission church in Idaho. Her appreciation of how God led her to saving faith is evident (p. 14).

Sometimes wow is all you can say when you think of all that God has done to save us undeserving sinners. And then he continues to bless us even more:

- He provides men and women to preach and teach God's Word to us so that we grow in our faith (p. 16).
- He blesses us with so many material gifts, and when we try to give back to thank him, he gives us even more (p. 21).
- He offers new opportunities for us to reach out with his saving message, whether overseas (pp. 22–23) or right in our backyard (p. 24). We just have to be ready for them (p. 26).
- He strengthens and guides us even more when troubles strike (pp. 30 and 34).

Wow!

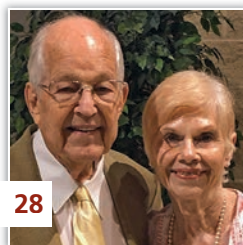
Julie Wietzke



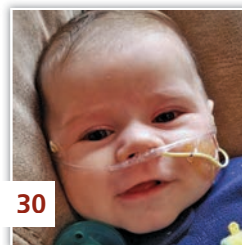
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CONVERSATIONAL WITNESSING

The response by Betty Pfeiffer in the article “How I shared Jesus” [May] is excellent. That is what I like to read: the actual words people use to share their faith. Betty’s waiting room opportunity was so very enlightening to me.

I also enjoyed the article by Pastor Schewe sharing his faith with the Mormon lady on an airplane ride home. I would’ve liked to know the Bible verses he used. That would be very helpful.

Please do more articles on this conversational witnessing. I love this magazine; always timely and informative. Thank you!

*Anonymous
New Berlin, Wisconsin*

We are planning on running more stories of how our readers are sharing their faith in the upcoming September issue. Have a story you want to share? E-mail us at fic@wels.net with the subject line: “How I shared Jesus.”—ed.

ON GRIEF AND GRIEVING

Thank you so much for Pastor Glenn Schwanke’s article “On grief and grieving: A Christian perspective” [June]. Having recently had my wife of 38 years also enter heaven, his words

could not have come at a more meaningful time for me. Reading about his own lifeline lessons, I found myself right there with him. As he found, and I am finding, those lessons are there because of our Father’s lifeline laid out in Scripture.

*Timothy Johnson
Tucson, Arizona*

Coming in 2020 . . .

We received almost 5,300 responses to our FIC surveys conducted this past spring. Thanks to all who participated for your openness and honesty.

We listened, and we’re planning some new and exciting features for your synod’s magazine. Keep your eyes open for updates in upcoming months.



Through my Bible in 3 years



Read or listen online at wels.net/bible3.

AUGUST 2019

- | | | |
|----------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Nehemiah 12 | 12. Ps. 103 | 23. Zech. 8 |
| 2. Neh. 13 | 13. Ps. 104 | 24. Zech. 9, 10 |
| 3. Psalm 90 | 14. Ps. 105 | 25. Zech. 11 |
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| 9. Ps. 99, 100 | 20. Zech. 3, 4 | 31. James 1:1-18 |
| 10. Ps. 101 | 21. Zech. 5, 6 | |
| 11. Ps. 102 | 22. Zech. 7 | |

TRUSTING FAITH

“The shiny penny” [June] by Holly Beckman was an excellent example of the trusting faith all Christians should have. It inspired the following poem:

In the Hands of Jesus

All my cares and worries,
Lessened every day;
All my trials and troubles,
Burdens I need not carry.
All my aging failings,
Made bearable each day;
All of these placed,
In the loving hands of Jesus.

*Lawrence Palubecki
Stanley, Wisconsin*

CORRECTION

The July ad (p. 4) stated that the current annual distribution from the Missions Endowment Fund was almost \$900,000. Actually the distribution was about \$480,000. The \$900,000 figure was the distribution from all WELS endowments. We apologize for the error.

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. Letters are edited for clarity, conciseness, and relevance. Writers’ views are not necessarily those of WELS or *Forward in Christ*.

God's actors

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:21

Peter M. Prange

God works in mysterious ways. We've probably all had opportunity to experience that reality. For instance, we may have the feeling at times that God has abandoned us in our time of need, only to have the problem we're facing resolve itself in a way we could have never imagined. With a smile, we conclude, "God works in mysterious ways."

HIS MYSTERIOUS WAYS

The Scriptures indeed tell us that God works in mysterious ways. He's acting behind the scenes, so to speak, hidden from our eyes. That's what a mystery is: a reality hidden from sight.

The Old Testament believer Joseph had a wonderful and heart-wrenching opportunity to suffer God's behind-the-scenes work in his life, only to have God's good purpose revealed to him much later on. He went from being a young prisoner sold into slavery by his jealous brothers to second-in-command over all Egypt and in a position to save his family and many others from starvation. "You intended to harm me," he reminded his brothers, "but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20).

The reality is that God is present with every person every moment of the day, acting in and through the people of this world, both believers and unbelievers. "In him we live and move and have our being," St. Paul taught the skeptical crowd at Athens about their "*UNKNOWN GOD*" (Acts 17:23,28). But our loving Father's acting in us and through us is hidden from our eyes and the eyes of the people around us. We don't normally see or understand it because God works in mysterious ways.

HIS ACTIONS THROUGH US

Have you ever considered yourself one of God's actors? That's what you are. Martin Luther described all people as



"masks of God" to illustrate how God is acting through us. Especially since you are someone who trusts in Jesus, God employs you and your spiritual gifts to bless the people and the world around you. He has sent his guiding

God has been acting
inside you and through
you in a mysterious
way, even if you
didn't realize it!

Holy Spirit into your heart to lead you gently in all your thoughts, words, and ways. "It is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (Philippians 2:13). Yes, God has been acting inside you and through you in a mysterious way, even if you didn't realize it!

And what's God's ultimate "good purpose" for your life? Simply put, he doesn't want you to "be overcome

by evil, but [to] overcome evil with good." God is good, and he can do nothing but good, even when we initially judge his work in our lives to be evil. In all circumstances, God has called us to be his actors in a spiritual war against evil: "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood [i.e., human beings]," Paul reminds us, "but . . . against the *spiritual* forces of evil" (Ephesians 6:12). We need to realize that our enemy, the devil, also works in mysterious ways, "looking for someone to devour." We need to be alert (1 Peter 5:8).

How do we win this spiritual war against our unseen, evil enemy? By putting on the "full armor of God" (Ephesians 6:10-18), which will protect us when the day of evil comes. Then the devil won't get the best of us. Instead, God's Word will lead us in victory over Satan's evil schemes, as we allow our loving God to reveal the good he desires to produce in us and through us as his actors.

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



Mark Schweden

Only two questions
will bring him to
a God-pleasing
decision: “Where
can my talents and
abilities best be used
in God’s church?
Where will my
weaknesses and
limitations do
the least harm?”

More about the divine call

The news usually comes in an announcement after worship. Your pastor or one of the teachers in your school has received a divine call to serve in another place. That announcement comes as the result of a process that began with the vacancy in the other church, and it signals the start of another process as your called worker now prayerfully considers and decides where he or she will serve in the future.

Although calls for staff ministers and teachers are similar, for simplicity’s sake, let’s use the example of a pastoral vacancy. When a congregation has a vacancy in the office of pastor, the leaders of the congregation typically take time to discuss and determine the ministerial needs and ministry plans of the congregation. Often the district president takes part in that discussion, providing advice on the factors that the congregation should consider and listening carefully to the needs of the congregation. Relying on that information, the district president compiles a list of pastors who, in his judgment, would fit the needs of the congregation. He shares that list, which includes biographical information and a brief summary of the skills and previous experience of the pastors, with the congregation.

For the sake of good order and out of consideration for congregations and pastors, district presidents follow several guidelines. One guideline is that pastors should serve in a congregation for four years before receiving another call. In addition, a pastor should receive a call no more than every six months and should receive only one call at a time. Sometimes, however, circumstances indicate that exceptions to these guidelines should be made, and, despite efforts to avoid it, a pastor may receive two calls at the same time.

Once the district president presents the list of candidates to the congregation’s voters’ assembly, they pray for the Holy

Spirit’s guidance, discuss each candidate, and conduct an election. When one person receives the majority of the votes, a motion is made to make the election unanimous. This emphasizes that all members are expressing their full support of the new pastor if he accepts the call.

The pastor is informed that he has been called to the new congregation. Now begins his prayerful consideration of where he will serve. If the pastor is serving in his current congregation by a call from God, why does he decide where he will serve? The answer is that he now has *two* calls, both of which are from God.

How does a pastor decide between those two calls? He considers many things. He talks to the leaders of both congregations. He consults with co-workers. He discusses it with his wife and family. And, most important, he prays for God’s guidance.

A pastor will think about several factors. He might naturally consider the health and welfare of his family and the availability of Christian education for his children. But these alone will not determine his final decision. In the end, only two questions will bring him to a God-pleasing decision: “Where can my talents and abilities best be used in God’s church? Where will my weaknesses and limitations do the least harm?” Those are questions that require a pastor to take a careful and honest look at himself and how he will best serve God’s people.

The answers to those questions will determine his decision. And when those questions are sincerely asked and honestly answered—regardless of what the answer is—the pastor has his decision. In that decision, both congregations and the pastor himself are blessed.

Light for our path

Recently, our congregation has begun applauding the singing groups in our worship services. This offends some people. If we discouraged applauding, others would be offended. What advice can you give?

James F. Pope

It is not likely that I can resolve this tension, but I hope I can give both groups spiritual food for thought.

APPLAUSE IN SOCIETY

History is replete with examples of applause in the politics and theater of ancient civilizations. Regardless of the venue or the objects of applause, people have long seen clapping as “a pat on the back from a distance,” in the words of sociobiologist Desmond Morris. With applause in society, people are stamping their “secular Amen” on the efforts of others.

Informal worship styles and cultural differences among Christians worldwide are among the factors that explain the presence of applause in worship services. As your question illustrates, that can create tensions in congregations.

FREEDOM IN CHURCH

Christians will want to recognize that the Bible does not address the topic of applause in worship services. Certainly, Scripture states, “Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy” (Psalm 47:1). Those instructions of clapping and shouting, framed in the language of Hebrew poetry, guide children of God in their overall praise of the Lord. Yet Scripture is silent on applause—for songs or sermons—in worship services; that practice is one that God neither condemns nor forbids. That means there is Christian freedom in this area of worship.

Christian freedom is definitely a topic the Bible addresses. First Corinthians chapter 8 and Romans chapter 14 instruct Christians to exercise their God-given freedoms with an eye toward others. While the sinful nature in us likes to assert our freedoms “because we can,” the new self in us is very willing to pull back on those freedoms for the same reason: “because we can.” Christian freedom is also the right not to do something out of consideration for others.

Christian thoughtfulness and selflessness can go a long way in resolving differences of opinions and personal preferences.

GRATITUDE TO GOD

If applause in worship services remains a practice in your congregation, perhaps there is a way for those who are bothered by it to adjust their thinking. Rather than seeing the singers as the objects of applause, perhaps they can view the acclamation as being directed to God.

In one of my congregations, volunteer help for church cleaning and lawn maintenance was essential. To recognize efforts and express appreciation, the Sunday worship folder listed the names of the volunteers under a heading of “We thank our volunteers.” One family that volunteered regularly did not want any public expression of thanks. If I had honored that request, one could have wrongly concluded that our volunteerism was suffering or that church maintenance happened on its own. So I asked the family what they thought of having their names listed under a new heading: “We thank the Lord for our volunteers.” They were okay with that, and a new custom started.

That custom was not new to the apostle Paul. He informed the Christians in Thessalonica: “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing” (2 Thessalonians 1:3). The faithful lives of Christians moved Paul to thank God for them. Likewise, the singing efforts of others can move us to thank God—perhaps even in audible ways.

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



Walk by the Spirit

Solomon wrote, “A gentle answer turns away wrath” (Proverbs 15:1). Yet sadly those on the Christian way easily turn down the road to jealousy and anger.

John A. Braun

Road rage is a relatively new term. One expert said that it was coined in 1988. Today the local news frequently carries stories about two drivers enraged and creating danger not only for themselves but also for other drivers.

The apostle Paul never drove a car or truck down a freeway, but he listed “fits of rage” in his list of acts of the flesh. Two additional attitudes—jealousy and selfish ambition—help us see what lies within us all. Paul also knew the fruits of the Spirit—kindness and goodness—that were different and part of the Christian way of life.

ACTS OF THE FLESH: JEALOUSY, FITS OF RAGE, SELFISH AMBITION

All three of these acts of the flesh—jealousy, fits of rage, and selfish ambition—flow from the natural sinful tendency within us. Sometimes they lie hidden behind a face of respectability. At other times they erupt into acts that are destructive and sometimes violent.

For example, a driver cuts another driver off, almost or actually creating an accident. Most of us have been in that situation. We feel the sudden surge of anger. We may control the impulse and drive on, still seething. But the urge doesn’t disappear all at once. At times it explodes like a volcano, sending sparks and hot angry retaliation. We don’t even think. We just react as our blood pressure spikes and our sinful natures take over.

We easily see the trouble with road rage. It’s explosive and dangerous. Yet fits of rage also show up in marriages. Ask any police officer about domestic abuse calls. Bruises, broken bones, even gunshot wounds are familiar to police who must calm a fit of domestic rage. Shelters for abused women and children exist because of such fits of rage. Some of those angry outbursts hide behind closed doors and never rise to the level that requires a police report.

There are victims. Children are abused, starved, beaten—not just by fathers

RAGE

“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, **jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition**, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like” (Galatians 5:19-21).

and boyfriends but also by mothers. Sadly, children sometimes are in the middle of a family dispute and are hurt in the crossfire of words, fists, and whatever else is handy to throw. These acts of the flesh are obvious as Paul says (Galatians 5:19), and they are destructive at so many levels. Even if we have escaped the worst of the consequences, we all have felt the anger and rage within. Sometimes we have painfully learned how destructive rage can be.

Jealousy and selfish ambition may hide from public view, but they also lurk in the sinful human heart. They quietly take over, sometimes with just a slight bump of discontent. Shakespeare described jealousy as a green-eyed monster in the *Merchant of Venice*. His story tells how jealousy can destroy love, distort words, imagine the worst, and bring destruction. Jealousy sours marriages, families, and friendships. It removes contentment not only from the vocabulary but also from the heart. All the while it hides behind that face of respectability while consuming us from within.

Is selfish ambition any different? Maybe a little, but it's related to jealousy. Perhaps it does not hide as cleverly as jealousy. We should remember that there is nothing wrong with ambition and a desire to achieve. But *selfish* ambition drives people to action in order to seek an advantage over someone else at all costs. A person's desire to move ahead can leave wounded and bruised people who have been sacrificed for advancement. The wounded know they have been run over or used, but they are in the rearview mirror of selfish ambition and no longer count. The greatest casualty of selfish ambition is love and concern for others. The same casualty

comes in the wake of rage and jealousy. Personal agendas and desires trump love for others.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: KINDNESS AND GOODNESS

The counterweights to rage, jealousy, and selfish ambition are kindness and goodness. These are created within us by the Holy Spirit. We remain sinners, forgiven but still retaining our sinful flesh. So the works of the flesh show up in our lives, and at the same time so do the fruits of the Spirit. We are both saints and sinners.

Others, even those who do not know Jesus, are often gentle and good. We should rejoice and give thanks for those qualities no matter where we find them. They contribute to the welfare of our neighborhoods and society. At times they put Christians to shame. Yet our kindness and goodness on the way to heaven have a distinctively Christian characteristic.

What lies behind Christian kindness and goodness? Two things. First, our faith in Jesus has changed us. We know the love Jesus has for us unworthy, angry, jealous, and selfish sinners. We are deeply loved and forgiven. That warms our hearts and changes our attitudes. We see things differently. Second, our attitude has changed so we want to do as Jesus directed. When Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment, he said, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart. . . .’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (Mark 12:30,31). We are familiar with his two commandments and also know his example. We understand his compassion for us and for those who suffer in this world. We know that he did not show rage, jeal-

ousy, or selfish ambition while he lived here. We are his disciples here and now and want to be like him. We want our lives to show our compassion, our generosity, and our willingness to do what is right and good for others.

So the Christian way is a path of kindness and goodness. It is also a way of repentance. We all find it difficult at times to wrestle with and control the acts of the flesh when we feel the strong urge to be angry, jealous, or selfish. Again and again we must repent of our failings, turn toward the mercy of our loving Savior, and resolve to be better disciples.

The works of the flesh erupt so quickly in our marriages, families, and daily lives. It's no wonder that we learned “the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (Luther's Small Catechism, Baptism, The Meaning of Baptism for Our Daily Life). Note the word “daily.”

We are to be lights in this world and let our good deeds—including our kindness and goodness—be seen so others can give glory not to us but to our heavenly Father (Matthew 5:16). When our light is dimmed by our rage, jealousy, or enmity toward others, Jesus beckons us to embrace the forgiveness we need, to turn away from those acts of the flesh, and to repent so that we can reignite the light of kindness and goodness on the way to heaven.

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

This is the fourth article in a six-part series on acts of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit.

KINDNESS

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, **kindness, goodness**, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:22-24).



Years before I became a mother, I wrote a news article for Forward in Christ in which I interviewed a dad who described his nightly ritual of blessing his young daughter before she went to sleep. He noted, "Blessing your child is not hocus pocus. When I bless Kayla, I am asking the Lord to keep my daughter in the faith forever. It's another tool that I can use to demonstrate my love for Christ and for my child, based on the love that Christ showed for me."

That idea resonated with me, and after my daughter was born, I began blessing her each night. I've continued the ritual with my sons as well.

Do you have a piece of parenting advice that has stuck with you through the years? If so, please share it with us! We want to compile feedback from our readers to share in the November issue. Send your advice to fic@wels.net.

And that dad I interviewed? When I started compiling authors for this column, I knew I wanted him to be a part of it. So you can find his advice on the next page. He's contributing author Dan Nommensen.

Nicole Balza

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

WHAT'S THE BEST PARENTING ADVICE YOU RECEIVED?



There have been a number of people in life who have either demonstrated or shared this important piece of parenting advice that I have kept on my heart. In our confessional Lutheran understanding of Scripture, we treasure a right understanding of the importance of God's law and gospel. Yet I must admit that my tendency is to lean on the law side of my parenting approach. The encouragement that I have received, and try to pass on to others, is not to neglect the importance of the gospel. The pure understanding that I am forgiven, a saint, a new creation through the work of Christ is what sets my heart looking for ways to demonstrate my love for God—not because I have to, should, or must, but because I can't help but look for opportunities to be thankful. This is our treasure! Don't leave it to a chance understanding for your kids. **Live in joy with your children and be intentional in sharing the gospel with them so they too can be motivated by Christ's love.**

Dan Nommensen and his wife, Kelly, have a teenage daughter and son.



Here's mine. I got it from a priest named Zechariah (Luke 1).

Take your child in your arms every night and speak into their heart the truth. Don't

be afraid to tell them what this world is really like. It's dark and deadly outside, Zechariah said (cf. Luke 1:79). Then show them God's Son who has come to dispel the darkness. His love arises for us like the sun each day, bright and warm. Say something like, "Tomorrow, my child, you will awaken to a bright new day in God's love." Let it be the lullaby of their life that wraps them up secure each night no matter what the darkness.

I'm borrowing metaphors and images from Zechariah's great canticle and imagining the scene there where he sings by the Spirit, saying, "You, my child" (Luke 1:76). Luke marks it in Scripture as a truly Spirit-led parenting moment.

Jonathan Bourman and his wife, Melanie, have a six-year-old daughter.



Sam and I have given this some real thought. Independent of each other, we both wrote down the same parenting advice my father gave us early in our parenting journey: **"Don't sweat the small stuff, and pretty much everything is small stuff."** Such a seemingly simple saying and yet so full of wisdom!

Mary Clemons and her husband, Sam, have three children and seven grandchildren.

WHAT PARENTING ADVICE DO YOU GIVE?



I have two pieces of advice.

First, I encourage young parents to **cultivate a spirit of empathy and service** in their children.

Start early by finding a cause that your family is passionate about and volunteer for that cause regularly. Help kids to understand the motivation behind serving others (1 John 4:19) and the joy it brings to all involved. Send a clear message that serving others doesn't need to come with compensation or reward—we do it out of love for those around us and for the God who created us. In serving, we also come to appreciate all the blessings that God has showered upon us!

Second, I encourage parents to **teach children the value of work and how to work, starting at a very young age.** As soon as they are able, give children age-appropriate chores, then add responsibility as they get older. Teach them that all members of a family need to contribute to keep a household running smoothly. Once they are old enough, encourage them to secure a job outside the home to help them learn the value of work and responsibility with finances. After all, one of our main jobs as parents is to raise our children to be productive members of society!

Ann Jahns and her husband, Thad, have three 20-something sons.



My favorite advice: **"Say yes first."**

My toddler wants ice cream right before dinner? "Yes! That sounds yummy. Let's eat supper as fast as we can so we can have ice cream!"

My over-stretched middle schooler wants to take on a paper route? "Yes! That sounds great. What are some factors to think through before you sign on? Can you foresee anything you wouldn't like about it? And you do know I won't be getting up to help you, right?"

My high schooler is thinking about studying art or music at a pricey college? "Yes! How could we make it work? And what will you do with your art or music degree?"

When we say yes first to our kids, we're shifting the responsibility to them. They have to weigh the ramifications. And if they choose unwisely, they have to live with the consequences. That's what growing up is all about.

And the best benefit? Saying yes means they'll keep coming to us with all their schemes and dreams. They know we're not the dream crusher. We're the cheerleader! We're excited to watch them decide how they're going to take a big bite out of life and make a mark on the world.

Laurie Gauger-Hested and her husband, Michael, have a blended family that includes her adult daughter and son and his teenage son.

A woman finds true peace after learning about God's full forgiveness and grace.

Alicia A. Neumann

"Never have I felt so loved, valued, and taught correctly in my life." Those are the words of Gina Beasley, member at The Vine, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Gina was raised Mormon in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) and never thought that she'd be part of a small, Lutheran mission church.

GROWING UP MORMON

Gina was the youngest of eight kids and went to church every Sunday with her family. She says she always grew up having faith in God and Jesus, but "there were a lot of morals and standards to live by," Gina remembers. "I didn't want to disappoint my parents or do anything bad or wrong." Based on what she was taught, Gina says that God's love seemed conditional. "It was, 'Do this or you won't live with your family in heaven,'" she says. "And that's a tough one to swallow when you make mistakes."

After high school, Gina moved to Utah to get a job. She met a man who converted to Mormonism, and they got married in the Mormon Temple. However, after three years, they divorced. Around that time, Gina started withdrawing from the Mormon church. "I wanted to go out with my friends on

the weekends. I wanted to participate and have a drink. But I felt guilty because drinking was against the LDS Word of Wisdom. It was against their standards," she says.

Eventually, she met Jason, who was Catholic. After they started dating, they talked about religion. "I wanted to see if our religious philosophies matched up; that was critical," says Gina. So Jason read the Book of Mormon twice and visited Temple Square in Salt Lake City, but he wasn't sure he wanted to join. "He said he didn't feel quite right about it," Gina says.

FINDING WELS

A few years went by and Jason and Gina hadn't made any substantial decisions about religion. "We were working a lot, and honestly we wanted to sleep in on the weekends," says Gina.

It was around that time that Jason's longtime boss, a WELS member, invited them to St. Matthew's in Spokane, Wash.

"Ron was kind of like a father figure to Jason," says Gina. "We had a really nice relationship with him and his wife, Margot." Gina says she really appreciated how Ron and Margot invited them to church in a way that didn't make them feel pressured, so the Beasleys decided to give it a try. "We would go with them every once in a while," says Gina. "I felt really good in my heart about the messages I was hearing in the sermons. Finally, we decided we

should just start going to Ron and Margot's church. It just felt like it was where we needed to be, spiritually."

Eventually they started taking a Bible Information Class at St. Matthew's, which was about an hour drive for the Beasleys. "I loved how the messages we were learning were straight up from the Bible," says Gina. "Even though I had heard them before, I had never fully grasped and understood them."

One of the lessons was especially eye-opening for her. "We were talking about God's grace. Pastor said it's like an umbrella; you just step under it, and you're protected from the rain." Gina says this was so different from what she'd been taught growing up—that you have to "do" something to receive God's full grace and be able to go to heaven. She says she had always felt guilty and worried as a result. "But in that moment, I felt truly forgiven; it took off the huge backpack of rocks I felt like I was carrying. The guilt and shame were gone, and I felt peace," she says. "I am so grateful every day that we decided to go to that class."

Gina has been trying to share that same peace with her family members, who are all still part of the Mormon church. "I see them once a year, and I try to put my little words of love in there if we are talking about religion," she says. "In the past when we've talked about grace, they've said, 'Gina you are right,' but they aren't living that. They are living



Confessions OF FAITH

good works. I think deep down they know what's right, but they are still on that hamster wheel of trying to get to heaven."

Gina hopes that someday her family realizes that they don't have to be perfect and that God's grace is not conditional. "I'm trying to help them understand and accept God's grace and get the ultimate peace," she says.

THRIVING AT THE VINE

A few years after the Beasleys got married, St. Matthew's began a new ministry—a mission church called The Vine in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, which was only 20 minutes away from them. "It's been great being part of a small, mission-style church," says Gina. She still struggles with Mormon teachings from time to time, and she appreciates being able to talk to her pastor anytime and ask him questions. "I also get to sing with the worship band and really utilize my talents. It makes me feel fulfilled," Gina says.

In addition to participating in the church's outreach activities, the Beasleys now host a Bible study twice a month. "I invite people I've established a relationship with," says Gina. "If you earn people's trust first, they are more apt to come." She says some people are afraid to come to a class if they feel like they are committing to something, so the Beasleys use a curriculum from their pastor that makes it easy for people to join in when they can.



Gina and Jason Beasley and their sons Waylon (now 5) and Huck (now 2).

Gina also has had opportunities to share her journey of faith through connections she made with other moms at the local preschool her son attended. "A couple of new friends from the preschool have met me and asked if I am Mormon because they used to be Mormon too. It's been kind of interesting discussing my upbringing with them," she says.

Gina says her upbringing has made a big impact on how she's raising her own kids. "When I grew up, I would hear people 'give their testimony' at church. And as kids, they would teach us the exact words to say," remembers Gina. She says it would have been much more helpful to learn why it's important to pray and how to pray from the heart. "So I really try to be open with my chil-

dren and talk to them about the reasons we believe what we do and provide them with factual structure," she says.

Gina says it's been really amazing to see what God has done for her and her family. "I am just so grateful for how God has orchestrated it all," she says. "Someday, when I'm an old lady in my rocking chair, I will look back at how God has connected all the dots and think, *Wow!*"

Alicia Neumann is a member at Christ, Zumbrota, Minnesota.



Learn more about the home mission The Vine, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, in this month's edition of *WELS Connection*.



Pray for workers

Jesus reminds us to pray for more workers in his harvest of souls. John A. Braun

Northwestern Publishing House hosts a luncheon every spring honoring graduates of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. I sat with six men who would be assigned to begin their service as pastors.

Earlier I had just heard a report that we have 121 full-time parish pastor vacancies and 26 seminary graduates. I know that interpreting those numbers depends on a number of factors. As it turned out, 30 men were assigned. Added to these graduates were four from previous classes. I remembered the Lord's words, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few" (Matthew 9:37). Those words flowed from his compassion for the crowds who were "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (v. 36). He saw the need and, it seemed clear to me, that the need has not disappeared.

I decided to spend a few minutes with these six men to explore what motivated them to begin training for the pastoral ministry. So I asked them. I only said that they could not take the easy way out of my question. They could not say that the Holy Spirit led

them to become pastors. Not only is that an easy pat answer, but it is also true for all of them, all who are serving today, and all who are still preparing to serve.

*Did you know . . .
A ninth-grader
who begins his
pastoral education
this fall will not
be ordained as a
pastor until 2031.*

My goal was simple. I wanted to share their stories in the hope that others would pause and think about serving as pastors.

The first to respond was Aaron Platzer. He began, "I attended public school." Then I asked what led him to want to

be a pastor. His simple answer was, "My pastor!" In many ways, the pastors who serve our congregations now are key to finding more workers for the harvest. Aaron went on, "He confirmed me and encouraged me. I didn't think much about it in high school. But he kept encouraging me and then when I was thinking about college, he thought I should give Martin Luther College (MLC) a try. So I did."

Tristan Paustian graduated from Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis. He, like some of the others I talked to that day, has a family filled with called workers. But he said, "I didn't want to be a pastor. I wanted to do something else with my life. I thought I could serve God in another way." His family understood. He ended up going to MLC in order to be a teacher. But in his second year, he decided to shift from the teacher track to the pastor track. The pastors in his family were the quiet and persistent models he chose to follow.

Nathanael Jensen had an easy answer, "I remember that from kindergarten I always wanted to be a pastor. My father was my role model. I never wanted to

Where they serve

do anything else.” His father is a pastor in Watertown, Wis. Nathanael quite naturally attended Luther Preparatory School (LPS) in Watertown and then went on to MLC and the seminary. I know that some young men echo Nathanael’s words. Some see their fathers as role models, but others have found role models in the pastors who confirmed them. In all of these six cases, their families encouraged them along the way.

Hans Thomford attended Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS) in Saginaw for high school. He said that he saw himself as a vet, farmer, or engineer. At MLS he received support to think about pursuing the pastoral ministry. “I got encouragement from the teachers and especially the tutors. I had so many experiences that led me to head to MLC and try it for a year,” he said. “After I had one year in at MLC, I knew this was something I wanted to do full-time in my life and for the Lord. I don’t think you get that kind of encouragement anywhere else.” His father, a pastor, was a great influence in encouraging him to pursue serving the Lord as a pastor.

Dan Rodewald attended LPS. He also received encouragement from his family and especially from the tutors in the dormitory and the teachers in the classroom. “I really appreciated all the emphasis on ministry I got at LPS from everyone there,” he says. But he still was not sure, even though he went on to MLC. He still had doubts at the seminary. Then he was assigned as a vicar, where he worked under the supervision of a pastor in his congregation. Dan said, “I remember talking with one man and sharing the comfort of the gospel with him. He died a few hours later. I was the last person to talk with him. I knew then that I was sure I wanted to be a pastor.”

Continued on next page



Hans J. Thomford at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.



Timothy T. Prieue (left) at Mount Olive, Appleton, Wis.



Aaron J. Platzter at Peace, Loves Park, Ill.



Nathanael J. Jensen at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.



Daniel L. Rodewald at Paradise Valley, Phoenix, Ariz.



Tristan D. Paustian (left) at Bethlehem, Hortonville, Wis.

Read the complete assignment list at wls.wels.net/about-wls/assignment-list.

Did you know?

Pastoral candidates can receive a variety of assignments, from serving at self-supporting congregations to starting new home or world mission fields. Each year, several graduates also are temporarily assigned to Martin Luther College and WELS’ two preparatory high schools, Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., and Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich. They will teach, coach, supervise, mentor, and encourage young adults as they prepare for the gospel ministry. Some graduates become associates to district presidents, allowing the district presidents the time they need to travel and serve in their districts, as well as fulfill their role as members of the Conference of Presidents.



A prayer for more workers

Lord of the harvest, give your church men and women who are eager to prepare for service in your kingdom. Help me to encourage not only my own pastors and teachers but also young men and women I think have the gifts to train for ministry.

In your name,
Amen.

Only one of these young graduates was left, Tim Priewe. He went to Wisconsin Lutheran High School (WLHS) in Milwaukee but had no inclination or plans to be a pastor because he was always on the quieter side. Unlike the others, there was no pastor in his family, but he grew up with the example of the dedicated service of his parents in their church. When he came to WLHS, he decided to take Latin because his brother had taken it. When his first year was over, he chose a second year of Latin. His sister, who already was at MLC, convinced him to stick it out for the third and finally a fourth year. He also began meeting with MLC recruiters. At graduation he applied to only one college, MLC, and enrolled in the pastor track. I decided to ask them all one more question, "What do you tell people who want to know why you want to be a pastor?"

Dan answered by returning to the story from his vicar year. "I tell them that I

want to share the message of the gospel. That's the bottom line. I like to use that question to tell people law and gospel and share." The others all agreed.

Aaron added, "When some of my high school friends and family ask why I want to be a pastor, they see the eight years of study and then the salary and wonder why you spent all that time to be a pastor. But it's like Dan said, it's sharing the gospel that's most important."

Now I think of the congregations and the people they will serve. I look beyond those congregations to see the crowds like Jesus did. I see a world in need of what we all treasure—Jesus and his gifts of forgiveness and eternal life. And I pray, "Lord, send workers into the harvest."

What can I do?

- Pray for more workers
- Identify young people you know who might make a good pastor, teacher, or staff minister. Encourage them to consider the ministry.
- Submit names of possible candidates to Martin Luther College at mlc-wels.edu/go/recommend. MLC will ask permission to send the students information so they can consider ministerial training for their future.
- Support current ministerial education students from your congregation. Pray for them. Send them cards and care packages. Ask them about their classes when you see them.

Then I also begin to look for students who have the ability and the inclination to serve as pastors or teachers. The harvest remains plentiful, and we all need to pray for workers and then actively encourage those we know to pursue training for the public ministry.

John Braun is executive editor of Forward in Christ magazine.



By the numbers

30 Men who received assignments into the pastoral ministry this year, including the six seniors interviewed in the article.

6 Pastor assignments made to U.S. home mission fields

60 Requests made by congregations, schools, and other ministries for a pastor, 30 of which went unfilled.

47 Men who graduated from MLC's preseminary program in 2019.



Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Class of 2019

104 Synodwide vacancies for pastor-trained men after assignments.

124 Anticipated enrollment at WLS for the upcoming 2019–20 school year, up from 110 for the 2018–19 school year.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Ahlers, Bruce, to retirement
Cole, Daniel, to Immanuel, Taylor, Ariz.
Dietsche, Rodney, to retirement
Finn, William, to Grace, Tecumseh, Mich.
Henning, Philip, to Grace, Burke, S.D.
Herrmann, William, to retirement
Hoyer, Philip, to retirement
Kehl, David, to Amazing Grace, Panama City, Fla.
Mittelstaedt, John, to retirement
Prahl, Herbert, to retirement
Schreiner, Troy, to Victory, Jacksonville, Fla.
Schultz, Clark, to Shepherd of the Hills, West Bend, Wis.
Wilcox, Patrick, to Faith, Tacoma, Wash.

Teachers

Asmus, Gretchen, to St. John, Waterloo, Wis.
Balfour, Alysa, to Mount Calvary, Waukesha, Wis.
Behm, Bethany, to Trinity, Aberdeen, S.D.
Berger, Rebecca, to Christ, Pewaukee, Wis.
Boll, Jennifer, to St. Stephen, Beaver Dam, Wis.
Carter, Cecilia, to retirement
Davis, Emily, to St. Paul, Muskego, Wis.
Dobberpuhl, Darrell, to retirement
Doletzky, Deborah, to Grace, Saint Joseph, Mich.
Ebeling, Nancy, to retirement
Fry, Kayla, to St. Peter, Helenville, Wis.
Griest, Heather, to Green Valley Lutheran Preschool and Kindergarten, Henderson, Nev.
Haakenson, Monica, to Immanuel, Waukegan, Ill.
Hardinger, Michelle, to Bloomington, Bloomington, Minn.
Hayes, Aubrey, to St. Peter, Appleton, Wis.
Hochtritt, Elizabeth, to Mount Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis.
Hoffmann, Susan, to retirement
Horneber, Angela, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.
Humann, Vicki, to St. John's, Sparta, Wis.
Hurley, Karilyn, to Grace Christian Academy, Falls Church, Va.
Kamin, Rachel, to Westside Christian School, Middleton, Wis.
Kjenstad, Jessica, to Westside Christian School, Middleton, Wis.
Kolander, Laura, to Green Valley Lutheran Preschool and Kindergarten, Henderson, Nev.
Kriese, Brett, to St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis.
Lauber, Nathan, to Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.
Liepert, Stephanie, to St. Paul, North Fond du Lac, Wis.
Loroff, Patrick, to St. Lucas, Kewaskum, Wis.
Maas, Alexandria, to Grace Lutheran Child Learning Center, Sahuarita, Ariz.
Martens, Scott, to Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis.

Martin, Katherine, to St. John's, Jefferson, Wis.
Mateske, Tiffany, to Resurrection, Rochester, Minn.
Melott, Benjamin, to Divine Savior Academy—Sienna Plantation, Missouri City, Texas
Melott, Elizabeth, to Divine Savior Academy—Sienna Plantation, Missouri City, Texas
Mercier, Elaina, to Bethlehem, Hortonville, Wis.
Murphy, Janet, to retirement
Nofftz, Jesse, to Rocky Mountain Lutheran High School, Commerce City, Colo.
Noldan, Edna, to retirement
Olson, Stephanie, to Mount Olive, Appleton, Wis.
Page, Kim, to Trinity, Marinette, Wis.
Paustian, Jordan, to Lord of Life, Friendswood, Texas
Peterson, Deborah, to Risen Savior Christian Academy, Pooler, Ga.
Phetsanghane, Liesel, to St. Mark's, Watertown, Wis.
Plocher, Megan, to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.
Ploetz, Michelle, to Green Valley Lutheran Preschool and Kindergarten, Henderson, Nev.
Prahl, Charlotte, to retirement
Reinhard, Adam, to Little Lambs Learning Center, Duluth, Minn.
Rosenthal, Ryan, to Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D.
Schilling, Ronald, to retirement
Schultz, Monica, to Bethlehem, Germantown, Wis.
Schulz, Michael, to St. Paul, Appleton, Wis.
Schwartz, Bethany, to Northdale, Tampa, Fla.
Smith, Vicki, to Grace Lutheran Child Learning Center, Sahuarita, Ariz.
Strusz, Michael, to Kingdom Prep Lutheran High School, Wauwatosa, Wis.
Stueber, Kristi, to St. Paul, Mount Calvary, Wis.
Unke, Jacqueline, to Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Preschool, Las Vegas, Nev.
Wagner, Wayne, to retirement
Weigand, Deborah, to Resurrection, Rochester, Minn.
Willis, Brenda, to Redeemer, Tucson, Ariz.
Zeitler, Bethany, to Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis.

Staff minister

Schultz, Matthew, to The Watertown Recreation and Outreach Center for Youth, Watertown, Wis.

Teacher assignments

Boyd, Brittany M., to St. Paul, Columbus, Ohio
Frey, Margaret E., to Holy Trinity, Des Moines, Wash.

Gartner, Anna C., to Bethlehem, Menomonee Falls, Wis.
McTrusty, Megan L., to Shepherd of the Valley, Menasha, Wis.
Neumann, Matthew R., to Trinity, Neenah, Wis.
Proeber, Sarah E., to Little Lambs of Peace Preschool, Eagle River, Alaska
Schaewe, Miriam D., to Abiding Peace Academy, Simpsonville, S.C.
Steinke, Laura A., to Trinity, Waukesha, Wis.
Unke, Zachary D., to Bloomington, Bloomington, Minn.

ANNIVERSARIES

Hillsboro, Wis.—St. Paul (125). Aug. 18. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; catered meal to follow. 608-489-2189; stpaulhills@comantenna.com.
Benton Harbor, Mich.—St. Matthew church building (100). Aug. 25. Worship, 3 P.M.; refreshments and fellowship to follow. Website, stmatthewsbh.org.
Baxter, Minn.—Christ (50). Sept. 8. Worship, 9 A.M.; program and meal to follow. RSVP requested by Aug. 11. 218-829-4105; office@christbaxter.com.
Ann Arbor, Mich.—St. John's (150). Sept. 15. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal, noon; worship, 2:30 P.M. RSVP requested by Aug. 15. 734-761-1740; stjohsnorthfield2015@gmail.com.
Centuria, Wis.—St. John's (125). Sept. 29. Worship, 10:45 A.M.; program and dinner to follow. RSVP requested. 715-483-3401; redeemerstjohns@outlook.com.
Houston, Texas—Abiding Word (50). Sept. 29. Worship, 4 P.M.; meal and fellowship to follow. RSVP requested by Sept. 8. 281-444-5894; sandy.leopard@awlcs.org. Website, abidingwordtx.org.
Cedarburg, Wis.—Redeemer (50). Nov. 17. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal to follow. 262-685-8519; redeemercedarburg@gmail.com. Website, redeemercedarburg.com.

COMING EVENTS

Christian Educators for Special Education annual conference—Aug. 6. Ingleside Hotel, Pewaukee, Wis. Topic: "Teaching children who have experienced trauma." Website, cesewels.org.
Annual golf outing—Sept. 6. Christian Life Resources. Ironwood Golf Course, Sussex, Wis. Website, christianliferesources.com/golf-outing.

NAMES WANTED

Prescott, Ariz.—names and addresses of college students attending school in the Prescott area. rothet@cableone.net; 928-445-2807.

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.

Treptow now serving as seminary president

On Oct. 1, 2018, Earle Treptow accepted the call to succeed Paul Wendland as president of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Treptow joined the faculty in 2016 to teach systematic theology and Old Testament and will be installed as president on Aug. 26 at the seminary's opening service.

"President Treptow brings a wealth of solid Lutheran parish experience to the work," says Paul Prange, administrator of the WELS Board for Ministerial Education. "His ability to see both small details and the big picture is remarkable, and his keen insight allows him to preach and teach the gospel in ways that should positively influence both students and colleagues."

Read on to learn more about Treptow.

FIG: How would you define the role and the responsibilities of the seminary president?

Treptow: Officially, in constitution-speak, the seminary president is the chief executive officer of the school.

On a more practical level, I think of the president as having the responsibility of keeping the main thing the main thing. The seminary's main thing is having pastors train men to be pastors. Clearly there are academic requirements in the program—men who will serve as pastors need to know the Scriptures and how to apply the Word to people in preaching, teaching, and counseling. But there is more to being a pastor than mastering a set of facts and skills; it's about knowing himself as a beggar in desperate need of God's grace, who revels in the Lord's goodness and wants to bring others to the one who takes away all shame and fear and guilt. The president's job is to do whatever needs to be done so that there is a faculty of pastors training men to be pastors in skill, attitude, and approach.

FIG: As you assume the role of seminary president, how will your day-to-day work change?

Treptow: The most obvious change will be in the amount



Earle Treptow (right) completed the coursework for a Master's in Sacred Theology prior to joining the seminary faculty. Here Paul Wendland (left) presents him that degree in May 2016 during Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's graduation service.

of time I spend in the classroom. The reality is that I will only be a part-time teacher. I accepted the call to the seminary in large part because I love to teach. I will miss being a full-time teacher, just as my predecessor Paul Wendland did, but I trust that the Lord will provide other opportunities for service in this role that I might never have anticipated. One of the great privileges of being at the seminary is to be around the future pastors of our church body.

FIG: How do you view the role of the seminary in the work of the synod?

Treptow: The synod, very early on, recognized the importance of establishing a seminary. Our church body continues to believe that we need to have a good seminary, as demonstrated by the support provided to operate it. So I'm not just speaking from the perspective of a seminary president

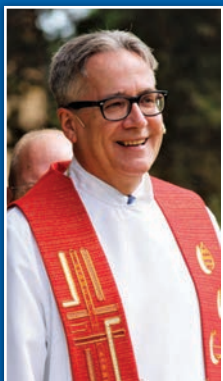
when I say that the seminary plays a vital role in the work that we do together as a synod. If a congregation is going to have only one called servant of the gospel, it will be a pastor who has graduated from the seminary. . . .

A synod thrives when its seminary is faithfully carrying out its task of preparing pastors who are committed to sound doctrine and are eager to see that message proclaimed to the community and the world.

For more information about Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, visit wls.wels.net.

WENDLAND TRANSITIONS BACK TO FULL-TIME TEACHING

Paul Wendland, who joined the faculty of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 2001 and has been serving as president since 2004, will remain at the seminary and has transitioned back to serving as a full-time professor.



"Teaching is my first love," says Wendland. "It's what energizes me."

Earle Treptow, who is succeeding Wendland as seminary president, notes, "The combination of Paul Wendland's love for the gospel, his intellect, his passion, and his zeal for missions has been a great blessing for the seminary and our synod."

Visit wels.net/forwardinchrist to watch a video where Wendland shares more about his time as president.



for the **Generations** *to come*

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION ABOUT MONEY

Money might not be a pastor's favorite topic to discuss with his members. But stewardship of our earthly goods is an important part of the sanctified life of a Christian—and a topic that is not ignored in the Bible.

"Money and worldly possessions come up over 2,300 times on the pages of Scripture," says Aaron Christie, pastor at Trinity, Waukesha, Wis. "Physical and earthly possessions are talked about two times more often than the topics of faith and prayer combined."

Discussing what the Bible says about giving is part of WELS Congregational Services' new stewardship emphasis, *10 for 10*. Pastors preach and teach on giving for three weeks and then ask members to consider enhancing their giving to the Lord for ten straight weeks.

"Jesus talked often about money because he knew the vicelike grip it can have on our hearts as it seeks to replace him as our greatest treasure," says Donn Dobberstein, director of WELS Discipleship. "When it came to money, Jesus was blunt. He was bold. *10 for 10* strives to mirror Jesus' biblical boldness."

Trinity recently served as the pilot congregation for this emphasis, which highlights three aspects of giving—firstfruits, proportionate, and sacrificial—through sermons and special liturgies as well as in-service Bible studies. "We're hoping to bring that message home to each and every heart that's active in our congregation," says Christie, who also helped write and develop the materials.

After the three weeks of preaching and teaching, members are asked to submit

an enhanced giving plan for the next ten weeks, which is returned to them unopened after the emphasis concludes. "This is not between them and the church. It is a plan we want them to prayerfully make with their Lord in mind," says Christie. Short videos and bulletin inserts over that ten-week period cement the concepts and remind members about how giving to the Lord fits into their everyday lives.

"I think initially people thought they were coming after us for more money," says Deb Pries, a member at Trinity and part of the stewardship committee. "But the more it was taught through the sermons and the Bible classes and the handouts, it was all biblically based. And I believe people did—like I and my husband did—soul searching. It became a very positive thing for Trinity."

She continues, "I learned to be more fruitful with my tithing and giving back to God, who's provided me with everything that I have, and also be more thoughtful on how to do that."

Christie himself saw the Lord's blessings as his family considered how they could enhance their own giving. He received an unexpected honorarium for accompanying a worship service, and it was the exact amount he had written on his enhanced giving plan. "That was a wow moment for me. We gave ourselves a stretch [in giving], and the Lord met that stretch within a week," he says.

The congregation also was blessed. When Trinity started the emphasis, it was \$45,000 behind in its budget. At the end of the ten-week period, it was

10 FOR 10 MATERIALS

WELS Congregational Services is providing *10 for 10* materials—including a step-by-step timeline—for free at welscongregational-services.net/10-for-10. While *10 for 10* can be held at any time, congregations are encouraged to begin planning this summer and to implement the emphasis this fall.



\$19,000 ahead—a \$64,000 turnaround. The congregation's special Christmas offering almost doubled, and the congregation was ahead on its annual budget at the end of its fiscal year—six months after *10 for 10* concluded. "The conversation about money changed in our congregation," says Christie. "Worry about money had become a significant part of our church's culture. How refreshing it was to plan a new budget that centered on ministry conversations rather than last year's red ink. We're putting God's resources to use to get the biggest bang for the gospel buck."

But while improvement in congregational giving is important, Christie is quick to note that it's not the main focus for the emphasis. "It's not about church budgets; it's not about synodical programs. It is about me giving as a thankful response to the grace of God in Christ Jesus. That's something I need to take seriously."

WELS news briefs

WELS MISSIONS

414-256-3237; missionspromotions@wels.net

Progress continues on the development of a **theological education center for pastors and leaders in the Hmong Fellowship Church (HFC) in Vietnam**. Land has been purchased and cleared, and bids are being gathered for the construction project. WELS leaders traveled to Hanoi in June to work through building details as well as to con-



tinue the education of 60 Hmong leaders. Pictured are WELS leaders and HFC leaders visiting the land where the future center will be built. WELS members have given \$1.33 million (as of June 28) of the \$2 million needed for the building projects and the ministry training costs for a two-year period. Learn more about this opportunity at wels.net/vietnamhmongoutreach.

National pastors from WELS' sister churches around Europe gathered in Durres, Albania, in May for a **Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) regional meeting**. Nate Seiltz (director of WELS Multi-Language Publications) and Gary Thoma (member of the Europe Administrative Committee) attended from WELS. Other countries represented include Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Norway,



Portugal, Russia, Sweden, and Ukraine. Leaders from several of these churches also participated in the laying on of hands for a new pastor for the Albanian Lutheran Church (pictured). Newly ordained pastor Niko Bishka joins Agron Mece and Mikel Bishka to serve this 66-member sister church. The CELC comprises 32 member churches worldwide (including WELS), all of which are united by a common faith and confession. The next triennial convention will be held in Seoul, South Korea, in 2020. Learn more at celc.info.

WELS Campus Ministry hosted the **2019 Campus Ministry Staff Conference** in Pewaukee, Wis., in May. More than 50 called workers and other ministry leaders from dozens of colleges came together under the theme of "Defending the Faith." Presentations included looking at apologetics within the context of campus ministry and exploring ways to work together with other WELS ministries. WELS Campus Ministry, a ministry of WELS Home Missions, provides resources, support, and encouragement to approximately 30 ministries on college campuses and many congregations near college campuses in the United States and Canada as they work to connect college students with Jesus. Learn more at wels.net/campus-ministry.

SPECIAL MINISTRIES

414-256-3241; specialministries@wels.net

WELS and Evangelical Lutheran Synod pastors serving military families met in May for the **Military Contact Pastors Retreat**. Risen Savior, Chula Vista, Calif., near Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, hosted the retreat under the theme "Serving Those Who Serve Our Country." Presentations provided insights into the unique challenges of the military lifestyle during and after deployment



and how to reach military members and their families with the gospel. Attendees also visited Camp Pendleton and met with a military chaplain. Learn more about WELS Military Services, a part of WELS Special Ministries, at wels.net/military. Refer a military member at wels.net/refer.

MINISTERIAL EDUCATION

414-256-3236; paul.prange@wels.net

With support from the Conference of Presidents, Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., is starting a **two-year capital campaign called "Equipping Christian Witnesses"** to



celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2020. The three pillars of the campaign are student recruitment, student financial aid, and student facilities. Learn more about the campaign in upcoming issues or visit MLC's website, mlc-wels.edu.

LUTHERAN SCHOOLS

507-217-1574; grunwajr@mlc-wels.edu

More than 350 students enrolled in online courses offered by the **Association of Lutheran High Schools Online** for the 2018–2019 school year. This includes more than 50 seventh- and eighth-grade students from 20 WELS elementary schools taking courses in algebra, geometry, or Spanish. The Association of Lutheran High Schools Online develops and offers online courses taught from a scriptural perspective, which empower WELS schools to better serve their students through expanded curricular offerings. Forty different courses are being offered for the 2019–20 school year. Learn more, including how to register, at alhso.org.

New seminary in Indonesia

Groundbreaking for a new seminary facility for *Gereja Lutheran Indonesia* (GLI), WELS' sister church in Indonesia, took place in May. This will replace the current seminary, which is on the island of Java.

"It is one of many steps in the process of indigenization and coming of age as a daughter denomination of WELS and a member church of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference," says Gregory Bey, professor at *Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Lutheran*, GLI's seminary. "It gives GLI a sense of stability and permanence."

The new location will offer other advantages, including space for the students and professors to live on campus. Currently students commute back and forth from the dorm to the seminary classrooms, and the dosens (professors) rent places to live. "A new campus will allow for one location with all the facilities in one place," says Bey. The local community and its government officials also have approved this new building project.

Bey says that they pray construction will be completed in the next two years.

The new campus will be located close to one of GLI's oldest congregations, which started nearly 30 years ago. "Initially the small band of believers

met as a 'house church' as in the days of the apostles," says Bey. "Eventually, nearby land was purchased, then a worship facility was erected, and finally a small 'pastori' or parsonage was added." One of the sons of the congregation even served the church as its called worker. Having this congregation nearby will allow students to have a place for worship while they are away from home and a support group of like-minded Christians. It also will give them opportunities to gain practical ministry experience.

WELS first established a seminary to train Indonesian called workers in the mid-1980s. Classes were temporarily suspended in the mid-1990s for various reasons, but the seminary was reopened in 1998. Now almost all the classes are taught by national pastors, with Bey being the only full-time foreign professor. Currently seven students are enrolled, and three new students will potentially start in August.

WELS declared fellowship with the GLI in 2003. Twenty-five national pastors serve 1,239 people in 6 congregations and 23 preaching stations. This includes four pastors who teach full-time in the seminary.

Learn more about the work in Indonesia at wels.net/missions.



Rev. Mikael, chairman of GLI's seminary, places a ceremonial stone in the foundation of the new seminary for the church in Indonesia.

Home Missions approves new projects, including mission in Houston

The Executive Committee of the WELS Board for Home Missions met in May and authorized financial support for one new mission congregation and one ministry enhancement.

“Even though there was limited funding this spring, we are excited about the new mission start in Houston, Texas,” says Wayne Uhlhorn, chairman of the Board for Home Missions. “The work the core group has already done and the demographics have us feeling this is the right place and the right time.”

A dedicated group of core members from WELS churches in the area has been meeting monthly for Bible study since 2015. Keith Free, administrator of WELS Home Missions, credits these meetings as a strength of this mission.

“They have put in the time so that now as friends in Christ they are ‘all in’ to start a mission,” says Free.

The new mission will be located in an urban neighborhood that is seeing a

resurgence in popularity as people strive to be closer to the city center. Sixty-five percent of those living in the target area are not involved in a religious congregation or community.

Andrew Nemmers was assigned to serve this new mission in Houston at the seminary’s call service in May.

Mark Hartman, a member of the core group in Houston, notes that everyone in the group was excited to hear the news of Nemmers’ assignment. “After four years of monthly Bible studies, we are going to have a full-time pastor to lead our outreach efforts!” says Hartman. “We are really looking forward to sharing the gospel with our community.”

Besides the new mission in Houston, Home Missions is supporting a ministry enhancement to the campus ministry at the University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh. For more than 35 years, Martin Luther, Oshkosh, Wis., and other local congregations have supported a campus ministry at this university alongside WELS Campus Ministry. Known as Rising Son



(Top) Students from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary worked with the core group in Houston, Texas, in January. (Left) Andrew Nemmers and his wife, Emilee, arrived in Houston, Texas, in July to begin their work for WELS’ newest subsidized home mission.

SERVING WELS HOME MISSIONS

Six graduates of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary’s class of 2019 were assigned to serve WELS home missions in May:

Jordan Bence, Joplin, Mo.

Benjamin Berger, Harrisburg, Pa.

Benjamin Birner, Cross of Christ, Liverpool, N.Y.

Adam Lambrecht, Living Shepherd, Laramie, Wyo.

Andrew Nemmers, Houston, Texas

Craig Wilke, Brandon, S.D.

Learn more about this year’s seminary graduates on p. 16.

Ministry Center, this campus ministry has a house just a couple blocks off campus that is used for fellowship, Bible study, and worship. Currently, though, activities are only taking place one night per week because there isn’t a dedicated staff member to oversee the ministry.

The financial support from Home Missions will allow Martin Luther to call a pastor whose job will be to serve half-time at Martin Luther and half-time at Rising Son Ministry Center.

The board also approved two other new starts whose financial support is coming from outside the budget of WELS Home Missions for the next two fiscal years. These unsubsidized missions are opening in Folsom, Calif., and Wesley Chapel, Fla. The board also changed the status of the mission in Killeen, Texas, from “subsidized” to “unsubsidized” since it is now receiving financial support outside Home Missions’ budget. Home Missions provides assistance to unsubsidized mission congregations through its district missions boards, mission counselors, and synodical support staff.

To learn more about WELS Home Missions, visit wels.net/missions.

Obituaries

John A. Henderson 1940–2019

John Henderson was born May 9, 1940, in Durand, Mich. He died Feb. 15, 2019.

A 1966 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Cross, Charles City, Iowa, and Our Shepherd, Warren, Mich.

He is survived by his wife, Sharon.

Jeanne E. Moldenhauer 1949–2019

Jeanne Moldenhauer was born Dec. 19, 1949, in Chicago Heights, Ill. She died Feb. 24, 2019, in Menomonee Falls, Wis.

A 1971 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at Good Shepherd, Omaha, Neb., and Bethlehem, Menomonee Falls/Germantown, Wis.

She is survived by two sisters and one brother.

Burton E. Stensberg 1930–2019

Burton Stensberg was born July 8, 1930, in Wisconsin Rapids, Wis. He died Feb. 27, 2019, in Appleton, Wis.

A 1961 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served St. John, Saint Paul, Minn.; St. Peter, Schofield, Wis.; St. Paul, Hamburg, Wis.; and Mt. Olive, Appleton, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Lucille; one son; one daughter; five grandchildren; and one sister. He was preceded in death by four brothers.

Michael A. Hein 1947–2019

Michael Hein was born July 20, 1947, in Milwaukee, Wis. He died Mar. 10, 2019, in Saginaw, Mich.

A 1969 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at First, La Crosse, Wis.; Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wis.; Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.; and St. Paul's, Saginaw, Mich.

He is survived by his wife, Cynthia; two daughters; two sons; eight grandchildren; and one brother. He was preceded in death by one brother.

District news

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

On May 13, 11 students at **Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.**, were baptized in a special chapel service.

The junior choir of **Trinity, Caledonia, Wis.**, sang the national anthem at the Milwaukee Brewers game on June 8.

NORTHERN WISCONSIN

On May 16, **The CORE, Appleton, Wis.**, held a special service to honor a police officer who was killed in the line of duty near the church the night before. Mike Novotny, pastor at The CORE, notes that the congregation wanted to encourage the community with God's promises.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

AZ-CA—At its graduation service

on May 25, California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, Calif., celebrated the 25th anniversary in the teaching ministry of **Vickie Faust**.

MI—Salem, Owosso, Mich., is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year.

MN—On May 5, **Trinity, Belle Plaine, Minn.**, celebrated the 75th anniversary of its school.

Trinity, Nicollet, Minn., is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year.

SA—On July 14, **Prince of Peace, Martinez, Ga.**, celebrated its 40th anniversary.

The district reporters for this month are:
AZ-CA—Michael Schroeder; **MI**—John Eich;
MN—Jeffrey Bovee; **NE**—Timothy Kemnitz;
NW—Dennis Kleist; **SA**—Newlin Schafer;
SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

NEBRASKA



On Feb. 9, Dave Stuht (left), a member of Shepherd of the Valley, Westminster, Colo., received the Di Holmes Honorary Award from the Denver Police Department for dedication to his community and selfless acts of service. He also received the President's Volunteer Service award, which was signed by President Donald Trump. Stuht serves as a chaplain for the Denver Police Department. He has participated in the chaplaincy certification program overseen by WELS Special Ministries.



AMBASSADORS

LET THEM SEE JESUS



Be careful of the facts!

Samuel C. Degner

I was lingering in the plumbing aisle when an employee noticed me. “Can I help you find something?” he asked. I explained what I needed. He picked up a part and told me it would do the trick. I had put in a few hours of work that morning and had made two trips to other stores. I had learned enough to know that he was wrong. So I politely thanked him and kept looking. He had lost my confidence. It’s not that I thought he was deceiving me to make a sale. But his error led me to question his ability to help me.

Can we, as ambassadors of Christ, have the same effect on people?

Our conversations with the unchurched of this world can be far-ranging. Our goal is to proclaim the gospel, but witnessing opportunities often arise in the context of back-and-forth discussions. People ask tough questions. They are skeptical—or even hostile—toward what the Bible says. In those kinds of situations, we may want to reach for outside facts that can help us defend biblical truth.

MAKE SURE OF THE FACTS

While I think it’s rare for Christian witnesses to be purposely deceptive, it’s probably not as uncommon for us

to be careless with the facts we present. That fact that you read, the one that supports your biblical point of view—what’s the source? Where did you hear that statistic? The internet is notoriously fraught with misinformation. That something comes from a Christian source doesn’t necessarily mean it’s true, no matter how much we want to believe it. A person may have a PhD, but that doesn’t make him an expert in everything. It may not even mean he is respected in his own field.

This isn’t about biblical truths that can only be accepted by faith, like a six-day creation or life after death. This is about facts that have to do with observation and reason. Ask yourself: Is this information reliable and respectable? You might even go a step further and ask whether non-Christians will find it persuasive—or at least worthy of consideration. If not, that doesn’t necessarily make it untrue; it just might not be useful in your witnessing.

Last summer I took my family to the Ark Encounter in Kentucky. This full-scale model of Noah’s ark was built to persuade skeptics of the plausibility of the Bible’s flood account. The interior is outfitted to demonstrate how the eight passengers could have lived and taken care of the animals on board. Displays describe how the biblical flood could have caused the geologi-

cal and fossil records we see on earth today. The experience helped us appreciate how big the boat was. It was heartening to see fellow Christians unabashedly proclaiming the Bible’s truth—including the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Nonetheless, as I walked through the ark, I found myself wondering what a scientist or skeptical layperson would think—not about the biblical message, but about the science they use to support it. I had the sneaking feeling they might shake their heads at some of the theories presented. And while these were offered only as possible explanations of what happened in Genesis, I wondered how many Christians would go home and repeat them as facts in future evangelistic conversations. That might not seem to be a problem. But what if the person they’re speaking with finds valid holes in those “facts”? What if those particular models are refuted by solid science? It wouldn’t make the flood untrue, but it would make the ones who shared those theories look untrustworthy.

This is just one example. Consider others, like the statistics Christians sometimes present on the effects of divorce, homosexuality, or abortion on people and society. Think of archaeological evidence that speaks to biblical accounts. Certainly, it’s refreshing to hear a Chris-





WHAT'S YOUR STORY

How have you shared Jesus? Every encounter is different, and we want to hear from you. To whom in your life did you reach out? How did you respond to a know-it-all? E-mail responses to fic@wels.net with the subject line: "How I shared Jesus." Include your name, congregation, and contact information. Questions? Call 414-256-3231.

tian perspective in fields like science and history—especially for our young people in secular schools who are constantly bombarded with anti-biblical points of view. It can be gratifying to see God's wisdom for human thriving confirmed by secular studies. It's good for people to hear legitimate interpretations of data that are compatible with Scripture. Still, caution is in order.

In our day, many consider truth to be malleable (like the presidential counselor who coined the phrase "alternative facts"). This is one result of post-modernism's creep into every crevice of our society. But that doesn't make it okay to play fast and loose with facts—especially for us who follow the one who calls himself the Truth. It doesn't excuse laziness in vetting information before passing it along. In fact, it means we ought to be more careful than ever. People are wary of the spin. They know they're constantly being marketed to. If we're careless with the facts we present, people may see us as untrustworthy and be less likely to listen to the gospel we want to share.

USE THE ONE FACT WE KNOW

Yes, we need to be careful about the facts . . . but not so cautious that we avoid conversations for fear of saying the wrong thing. Remember, the sacrifice of the Savior who never once spoke

falsely atones for all the times we have done so, even if unintentionally. His resurrection guarantees forgiveness for our imagined need to prop up his gospel with feeble facts. Moreover, that same Savior gives us his Word of Truth, with which we can navigate this whole issue of facts without fear. Trusting in that Word, we can look for—even patiently wait for—opportunities to unleash its power.

God's truth stands on its own.

We have an objective standard like none other. We have a Scripture that "cannot be broken" (John 10:35 CSB). This means that we can compare anything we hear to what God has already said. If it contradicts his truth in any way, we know we need not be influenced by it, no matter what "authority" decrees it. If what we hear is not in conflict with Scripture, we can consider it. We're cautious, of course. We use our God-given reason and resources to evaluate it. But we need not be afraid of it nor enthralled by it. Furthermore, our Spirit-worked confidence in the inspired Word frees us from the need to latch onto any extra-biblical facts that seem to support our

message. We don't have to search for science that backs up our belief in a six-day creation or a global flood. We aren't waiting for the latest archaeological finds to confirm that what God said happened or for studies that show God's commandments are good. These kinds of facts can be valuable for starting or prolonging conversations with skeptics. But our witness in no way depends on them. God's truth stands on its own. The gospel is God's power to change hearts. Jesus died and rose for us—you can never go wrong with that fact!

Unlike me in the hardware store, many people in this world don't know what they're really looking for. We have it—eternal salvation in Jesus—and want to help them find it. That desire to share the truth heightens our concern for truth in everything we say.

Samuel Degner, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Christ Alone, Thiensville, Wisconsin.

This is the tenth article in a 12-part series on sharing your faith.





WELCOME *Home*

A church elder appreciates the opportunity to encourage other members to stay close to Christ. Rachel Hartman

After first hearing of Jesus as a child, Jim Plumlee was baptized as an adult. He now serves as chairman of the board of elders at Calvary, Dallas, Texas. He has learned many lessons. “The spiritual wisdom and strength that come from the Word and volunteering time and talent to God’s church is priceless,” Plumlee says.

MOVING AROUND

Plumlee was born in Dallas but moved to Alabama when he was one year old. Then he moved to North Carolina. “Dad was in a retail tire business and traveled the East Coast,” he says. His grandmother lived with the family and helped care for him and his siblings.

After the family had settled, World War II broke out. As a result, tires were rationed, and the family moved back to Dallas. Plumlee’s parents took jobs at North American Aviation and helped build the B17, B-25, and P-51 Mustang airplanes. Both worked night shifts.

During that time, Plumlee’s grandmother again helped care for the children. In addition to cooking and cleaning, she looked after their spiritual needs. On Sundays, “Grandmother had us children walk the 2.5 miles to a Methodist church,” Plumlee says. “There I was taught about Jesus. . . . Sunday fried chicken dinners and fruit cobbler were a reward,” he says.

When Plumlee attended high school, he continued to look for ways to learn about Christ. He went to meetings run by an organization called Young Life and purchased his first King James Bible. At graduation, a neighbor gave him a small book of Proverbs. “These two books made a difference to me,” Plumlee says.

Then Plumlee went to Texas A&M University. He kept attending Young Life meetings and went to a Methodist church when he could get a ride into town. He listened to preachers on the radio and looked for ways to learn more about God and help others. “Texas A&M was an all-male military college back then, and as a senior I was appointed Assistant Corps Chaplain on Corps Staff,” he says.

WELS

ELDER PROGRAM

There are approximately 155,000 WELS individuals who attend worship three or fewer times a year. Having a strong elder program in place can help a congregation as they encourage those who are not attending worship regularly. WELS Congregational Services has produced an online video elder training program as well as resources to help congregations track member attendance. Find the materials at welscongregationalservices.net.

TAKING ON NEW ROLES

Plumlee got married and went into the manufacturing industry after college and military service. He spent 32 years helping build a family company, serving as CEO the last nine years. The family sold the business in 1982, and he purchased a ranch near Athens, Texas. After some time and a move back to Dallas, Plumlee's wife, Joyce, wanted to operate a bed-and-breakfast. The couple decided on a location in East Texas. While Plumlee and his wife were overseeing their bed-and-breakfast, a friend invited them to attend Grace, Scroggins, Texas. The couple went and were happy with the experience. "It was awesome," Plumlee says. They began attending as often as they could, and Plumlee got baptized there. "The congregation was kind and loving, and the pastor inspired me to a faith in God through Jesus so real, which had been absent in my life for so many years."

After seven years in the business, the couple moved back to Dallas and transferred their membership to Calvary. They attended regularly and continued to grow in the Word. When the pastor encouraged Plumlee to consider leadership roles, he took on the duty of congregation secretary. He also began serving as an elder. For the past four years, he has been the chairman of the board of elders.

ENCOURAGING OTHERS

The elder program at the congregation is set up as three groups, designed to help care for the spiritual well-being of members. The first group consists

of eight core elders who oversee administrative tasks and meet once every two months. Another group of eight duty elders rotate duties for worship services. Sixteen visiting elders, made up of the core elders and eight additional elders, visit members.

As an elder, Plumlee is familiar with the system the congregation uses to identify members and record their attendance. During worship, attendees fill out a sheet in a book on the pews. They note the date, their family name, and visitor or membership status. "From these pages from each service, a spreadsheet format is used to enter the attendance information for that family as it accumulates each month," Plumlee says.

The spreadsheet shows how many worship services were available during a month and the number of services each member family attended during that time. This information is compiled into a report every two months and is also listed as a running total for the calendar year. The ratio of the number of services attended compared to the number of services available is converted to a percentage for each family member. "This is an extremely valuable tool for our visiting elders," Plumlee says. "They can see at a glance from their group of families who they need to contact either by phone, text, e-mail, or in person."

Elders first undergo training from the pastor to gain insight and direction. They then reach out to members who rarely attend or don't attend at all. They ask for the reason the family is not able to worship more consistently and then ask them to aim to attend more services. "The family needs to be in the shelter of God and within the arms of Jesus Christ," Plumlee says. "All joy and peace come from it."

Each elder oversees between 7 and 15 members, who are divided up by geographical location. If a family's attendance level declines or drops to zero, the congregation takes notice. "This is one of our church's concerns and has high priority," Plumlee says. "Finding Christians who are attending worship just a little bit or not at all has the at-



Jim and Joyce Plumlee

tention of leaders because it generally is a soul, or family, who is hurting. And Christ and the Word are the answer."

GROWING SPIRITUALLY

Helping others stay close to the Word has helped Plumlee place a priority on his own spiritual well-being. "By being more active in the needs of our church, the efforts become the nutrients of growth, spiritually and health-wise," he says. He views the journey of faith as one that needs a continual connection to the Word. "If you plant corn without water, good soil, and sun, it will stunt or die. Faith is like that." God's Word and the sacraments are the water that is needed, and church is where people can get "watered."

During his time as an elder, Plumlee has also had the opportunity to see younger members take on new roles in the congregation. "It is a blessing to me that we are experiencing a younger generation of active worshippers," he says. "I encourage young people to choose to volunteer time to benefit their church." Even if a member is only able to help in a small way, that initial start is worth the effort.

Plumlee adds. "They can grow from that as time passes."

Rachel Hartman is a member at Divine Savior, Doral, Florida.

This is the final article in a three-part series on welcoming members back to church.



AN EMOTIONAL *roller coaster* RIDE

A family endures the ups and downs of life, always trusting the providence of God.

Ann M. Ponath

Tuesday, May 29, 2018. The day a truck arrived to move all the Sonntags' earthly goods from Cadillac, Michigan, to Bozeman, Montana. Pastor Jeff Sonntag had taken a call to serve Shining Mountains in Bozeman.

Tuesday, May 29, 2018. The day they heard that their unborn 21-week-old baby had a hole in his diaphragm and other health challenges.

Tuesday, May 29, 2018. The same day they learned no medical facility in Montana could handle these challenges.

Trusting in God's providence, Jeff and Anne; their two children, Ellie and Micah; and the unborn baby proceeded with their move to Montana.

CONTINUED BLESSINGS

Life went on. The Sonntags spent the summer getting to know members at Shining Mountains and settling into their new home. Extra prenatal doctor appointments kept them busy. Their Michigan specialist, who by God's design just happened to visit Montana

periodically, was only three hours away. Ellie started kindergarten in the local public school.

In mid-September, when Anne was 36 weeks pregnant, the president of the congregation loaned the Sonntags a van to drive across the mountains to Seattle where medical facilities were equipped for special deliveries. Just as the Sonntags crossed the border into Idaho, they received word that a room at the Ronald McDonald House just a few blocks from the hospital had opened up—another real blessing!

After getting Anne and the two children settled in Seattle, Jeff flew back to Bozeman. As the waiting and doctors' appointments dragged on, the family made an important connection with Calvary, Bellevue, Washington. Ellie continued in kindergarten there, and it gave the displaced family a routine and Christian friends, friends who would prove a definite blessing later on.

A CHALLENGING BEGINNING

Finally, on Oct. 5, Caleb Jonathan Sonntag was born via C-section. The doctors had prepared the Sonntags for the worst. Everyone was surprised when 9 lb., 9 oz., Caleb burst into a lusty cry. The words, "He shouldn't be able to breathe on his own!" were heard! After a few minutes of being

held, a baptism in the room right next to the operating room, and a quick kiss from Mom, Caleb was whisked to the children's hospital where the staff quipped, "What is this big, chunky baby doing in the NICU?"

Three days later, newborn Caleb underwent surgery to repair his diaphragm and give his left lung room to fully develop. Although the procedure "felt like forever" to his parents, it was completely successful. Just a few days after surgery, Caleb was moved out of the NICU. Recovery took six and half weeks—a little longer than expected—as a high flow respirator aided breathing and inflated the underdeveloped lung to help it grow. Caleb was also kept on a 24/7 feeding tube for just enough nutrition, but not enough to overfill his tiny stomach and affect his breathing.

God provided for them during this time, including help from fellow Christians. Anne recalls, "Our story about our stay in Seattle is not complete without mentioning the outpouring of love and support from fellow brothers and sisters in Christ at Calvary in Bellevue. When our stay extended beyond the point that our family could be there, I knew I had to ask for help, even if asking for help was hard. I asked some of the ladies if they would come lend a hand at the hospital snuggling Caleb so

I could focus on the older two for that time. Our new friends were so helpful, making it fit in their schedules and braving downtown traffic to help us not only in the afternoons but also some evenings that week. The prayers, the food, the support—it meant the world to me and was such a beautiful reflection of God’s love working in their hearts.”

GOD’S PROTECTING HAND

Finally, Caleb was given the okay to return to Montana Thanksgiving week. But the excitement was not over yet. On day two of their journey, coming down Lookout Pass on the border of Idaho and Montana, the van hit an icy stretch. “I didn’t have control,” Jeff remembers, as the van slid, then rolled two or three times, and finally landed on its right side in a field. But God provided again, sending his angels to protect them. Anne had a bump on her head; Jeff, a cut and broken finger; Ellie and Micah, not a scratch; and Caleb slept through the whole thing.

“It’s amazing how the Lord took care of us!” says Jeff. Five accidents—one of which included a fatality—took place in the same location that same day.

The family stayed overnight in a local hotel until the next morning when the church president brought a new car to take them safely back to Bozeman just in time for the Thanksgiving Eve service. They attended the service and shared the account of God’s protecting hand on their journey home. There were “lots of tears.”

REPEATED PRAYERS

Six months later, Caleb is off oxygen and the feeding tube and “looks like an average seven-month-old baby.”

Looking back on this experience, Anne says, “It was definitely a roller coaster. First, the excitement of Caleb being born stable enough to be able to hold him right away—something we usually take for granted—to then being separated and spending the next 36 hours recovering sans new baby on the maternity floor with all the other moms with their babies. Then making great

progress in the NICU and thinking our hospital time was almost up to a step backward the next day with his oxygen level that meant our stay was increased by at least a couple of weeks. There were lots of tears, lots of ‘why’ questions floating around my head.”

She continues, “One of the Bible passages that really stayed with me and became a repeated prayer were the words of Psalm 51:10,12, ‘Renew a steadfast spirit within me. . . . Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.’ ”

For Jeff, Caleb’s experience has solidified that “the Lord knows what he’s doing. He’ll take care of us. . . . His care, love, and protection will work for our good.” Jeff says he is so thankful for “so many messages of people praying for us. The congregation was amazing with prayers and support.”

As for Caleb’s name, that has a story too. Anne remembers, “Part of our prenatal care included a three-hour specialized heart ultrasound to make sure every last part of the heart was in its proper place. After an extra 45 minutes solely trying to get a picture of the elusive aortic arch, his heart was cleared. Shortly thereafter, we were discussing names and looking up the meanings. When we found out Caleb meant ‘whole-hearted,’ it seemed a perfect fit.”

Ann Ponath is a member at Christ, North St. Paul, Minnesota.

UPDATE: On May 18, 2019, a day of vomiting and severe stomach pain took Caleb back to the Bozeman hospital. A chest x-ray revealed a re-herniated diaphragm and a bowel blockage. Anne and Caleb flew via medical transport to Seattle. Successful surgery followed. Caleb was “sore, worn out, and once again connected to lots of cords,” says Anne. But nine days later, he and his family were home. “Caleb is back to his happy self and we are happy to be home,” reports Jeff. Another example of God’s amazing love and providence!



Our desperate need

Earle D. Treptow

We don't just
need to listen
to our Savior.
We *desperately*
need to sit at
Jesus' feet and
hang on his
words, for they
alone give and
sustain life.

A recent college graduate, with what appeared to be a bright future, tried to end her life. Her boyfriend of three months, who she thought was “the one,” had broken off their relationship. Without him, she could see no reason to live. No one loved her, and no one ever would. Or so she felt.

A young man, for whom his teachers and mentors had harbored high hopes, moved from one crime to the next, from petty theft to grand larceny to armed robbery. Only when he had money in his pocket could he experience joy in living. Or so he felt.

To hear such stories—and stories like that multiply—is to come face-to-face with an identical issue, though revealed in different outward manifestations. People regularly look in the wrong places for joy, meaning, and purpose in life. They've been misled by their sinful flesh and deceived by the Liar. The recent college graduate and the young man, as it turns out, have the same need. They both need to hear God's Word. That should be said more strongly: They desperately need to hear what God has to say, both about their sinfulness and about his gracious solution to the problem they cannot solve on their own. You can probably identify a few people who rise to your top ten list of “people in our life who desperately need to hear God's Word.”

But then the devil sees an opportunity. He seeks to convince us that we are slightly different. Yes, we need to listen to God's Word, but we are not like those who desperately need to hear it. The difference between “need” and “desperately need” is subtle but significant. While we still recognize our need to hear the Savior speak to us, we consider it far more critical for those who do not know God's love to hear the Word of God.

In heart and mind, we begin to think that our need for God's Word is like our need for exercise. All would readily acknowledge the importance of exercise and its

value for a person's physical and emotional health. But, as some of us have proven, one can continue to live even without vigorous exercise four days a week. Some of us have skipped exercise—or at least skimped on it—when life is busy, and we have lived to tell about it. We may need exercise, but apparently, we don't *desperately* need exercise.

But is that our relationship with the Word of God? One might compare it instead to our relationship with oxygen. We desperately need oxygen; without it we die. We don't just *need* to listen to our Savior. We *desperately need* to sit at Jesus' feet and hang on his words, for they alone give and sustain life. The devil loves it when we think that it's others who desperately need the Word and we don't.

Think of what Jesus said to Martha when she was frustrated with her sister. Martha thought Mary should have been helping her serve the Savior and support him in his ministry to those who desperately needed to hear his Word. She felt that there would be other times for Mary to listen to Jesus teach. The Lord's words to Martha were clear and powerful: “Only one thing is needed” (Luke 10:42 NIV 1984). Mary recognized that she didn't just need to listen to her Savior; she desperately needed to do so.

So do we.

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



A GOSPEL-FILLED LIFE

Heart transformation

Jeffrey D. Enderle

Fall sports seasons are preparing to reboot. The starting quarterback reports to camp in excellent shape. Over the summer he has been training vigorously. Intense workouts got his body ready for peak performance. Hundreds of times each day he repeated the same movements to improve arm strength and accuracy. He's ready.

But the first time he goes under center and delivers a pass to an open receiver, the coach immediately halts practice. Something is amiss. The long, hard hours the quarterback spent over the summer getting into better shape and improving his skills were flawed. Improper mechanics had been repeated over and over. Poor form had been ingrained. The coach has no choice. He has to strip down the entire throwing process and start all over.

GOING BACK TO THE BASICS

Christians know that God's Word is good for us. We spend time in prayer, Bible study, and meditation with the best of intentions. We know God will bring us personal benefits. Occasionally though, it's good to take a step back and remember our natural need for the work God does through his Word.

Galatians 5:17 tells us about a real and persistent competition for dominance

in our hearts: "The flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh." God points his people to the heart transformation worked by the Holy Spirit when we take advantage of time in his Word.

As we embark on our journeys into God's Word, Luther's first of the Ninety-five Theses gives a good reminder: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' [Matthew 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." As we pray in Jesus' name, we recall the benefits of his life and work. As we grow to know God better, we have confidence in the forgiveness he freely offers. Repeated repentance becomes a crucial component to our spiritual growth.

Devotions for Christians aren't just about developing habits or gathering information. Even as we grow in the Christian faith, we still need to strip it down to the basics. Repentance and forgiveness are key to seeing the fruits of the Spirit in our lives.

REAPING THE HARVEST

As we watch athletes appear on fields and take their places on courts, we are reminded of another seasonal reality. Soon summer heat will transition to fall chills in many parts of our country. Minor weather alterations remind us harvesttime is near. In my state, freshly picked chiles roasting outside grocery

stores will send pungent aromas into the air. Trucks filled with Colorado peaches will soon rumble into town, loaded down with their sweet goodness.

God's people can expect a different kind of harvest from the Word planted in our hearts. The Holy Spirit plants the seed of faith in our hearts and causes it to grow. Repeated use of God's Word pushes out the weeds of anger, anxiety, discouragement, and relational strife. His rays of sunlight warm what he has planted until sprouts of kindness, goodness, and faithfulness break into view. Faith flowers into joy, love, and peace in the soil of believing hearts. God benefits our lives and the lives of those around us with a harvest of gentleness, forbearance, and self-control.

Our prayers, Bible study, and meditation take various forms. But through that focus on God's Word, we reap a necessary harvest. God breaks it down to basics and transforms human hearts by the power of his Holy Spirit.

Contributing editor Jeffrey Enderle is pastor at Christ the Rock, Farmington, New Mexico.

This is the seventh article in a ten-part series on ways to enrich your personal devotional life.



The Lord's
policy of love
doesn't mean a
trouble-free
life here.

God's policy of love

The song "Jesus Loves Me" has come from the voices of little children for as long as I can remember. Their voices move us to smile and to appreciate the lesson they are beginning to learn: Jesus loves them and all of us. So says the Bible, as the children remind us.

A few years later, we learned of his love as children too: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God's love is sacrificial and gives the best gift—his one and only Son—for the world.

"Jesus Loves Me" is a worthy theme. Love is God's guiding principle. We notice his love for all humanity in so many ways. God gives us life and breath. He sends rain and sunshine—and not just for those who believe in him (Matthew 5:45). Other regular blessings also flow from his love. People marry; have children; work to support their families; and enjoy food, clothing, and shelter.

When little children grow older, they sometimes wonder about God's love. Moses wrote that no matter how old we become life is still filled with "trouble and sorrow" (Psalm 90:10). As children we may have been sheltered from some of those troubles, but later we often question God's love. Job had questions. So did Jeremiah, and troubling questions have also burst into our thoughts.

The Lord's policy of love doesn't mean a trouble-free life here. He sends troubles. Yet we confess that his love endures forever (Psalm 118:1-4). He helps us when we have questions.

- First, he promises never to forsake us. We all have favorite passages to cling to in our difficulties.
- Second, he has also revealed that he will guide all things for our good (Roman 8:28).

- Third, he is our loving Father who at times uses difficulties not to punish us but to discipline us (Hebrews 12:7).
- Fourth, he reminds us that this life and all we experience here are temporary: "Here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come" (Hebrews 13:14). Our coming deaths and the deaths of those we love point us to the salvation his Son has accomplished for us. We are reminded, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:31,32). Eternal peace and joy await all believers.

God in love wants all to be with him (1 Timothy 2:4). He will dry our tears and soothe our pain. But God does not enable unbelief. And for those who do not know Jesus, God exercises a tough love. He challenges them with the sorrows and troubles of life so they might realize that this life is often filled with difficulties. In those trials, he lovingly invites them, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

When we suffer, we find one more reason why God in his love sends such troubles. As we suffer and live with others who suffer, we have opportunity to share the hope we have in Christ—to witness and to show compassion and to point others to the glory that awaits all those who trust in Christ. The troubles of life often open doors that in other times remain closed.

Yes, Jesus loves me, this I know—even in difficult times.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

COMFORT IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT: REVELATION 17 TO 19

Timothy J. Westendorf

The vision of the seven bowls (worsening spiritual plagues from the proliferation of false teaching) leads to another vision. The connection between the two, reminding us that we're still dealing with similar subject matter, is that one of the bowl-carrying angels speaks to John and takes him to see "the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits by many waters" (17:1). That is the focus of the next three chapters.

BABYLON, THE PROSTITUTE

In chapter 17 John is carried in spirit by the angel to "a wilderness" where he sees "a woman." We've encountered this imagery before (cf. chapter 12). There we see the woman (the church), pursued by the dragon (Satan), fleeing into the wilderness (this world). She is attacked and harassed by the dragon and his two allies, the beast from the sea (ungodly government) and the beast from the earth (ungodly religion).

The surprising thing is that the woman is described very differently here. She is no longer running for her life. She is now sitting on the beast from the sea and even taking on its characteristics! The name written on the woman's forehead is significant. It is called "a mystery," something that would remain hidden to human understanding if not revealed by God himself. The woman is described as a prostitute named "Babylon" (a representative title for the enemies of God's people).

To understand what John is seeing, contemplate his reaction. He is greatly astonished. Something is terribly wrong with the picture. The bride has forsaken her relationship with the Bridegroom and has committed adultery with the powers of the world! This picture is all too familiar to those who know the history of Old Testament Israel. When that special nation turned from faithfulness to the Lord and his Word, running instead after other gods, he called her an unfaithful and adulterous wife (cf. Jeremiah 3:20). An unsettling reality is shown to John: The same thing would happen in the New Testament era. The unfaithful ("apostate") church would turn from trust in the Savior's Word of grace and forgiveness, adopting the world's religion of self-righteousness. By her words and actions she would promote spiritual drunkenness, causing people to become confused and befuddled about God's truth and a Savior from sin. She would become wealthy and prestigious. She would even wage war against the faithful bride of Christ, who refused to join her ranks!

While there are details that deserve further study and explanation, suffice it to say for this brief overview that church and world history, with far too many examples to mention here, have borne out the truth and accuracy of this revelation. And until this present age comes to an end we can expect to see more of the same.

BABYLON, THE FALL

This vision is as troubling to Christ's true and faithful church today as it was for John so many years ago, but chapters 18 and 19 bring comfort to conflicted souls. Jesus is still faithful and true. Jesus still sees what is happening in this world. Jesus is still the King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus still lives and rules all things for his believers, the church.

The unfaithful church will have her day, but it will come to a fateful end. Until that time, when all believers will rest and rejoice at the wedding supper of the Lamb, Jesus calls us to listen to his Shepherd voice and place our confidence in his promises. He is trustworthy.

REFLECT ON REVELATION CHAPTERS 17 TO 19

1. Give three reasons why the woman would become a prostitute on the beast.
2. Think of ways you might incorporate the thoughts of this section into your personal prayers this week.

Contributing editor Timothy Westendorf is pastor at Abiding Word, Highlands Ranch, Colorado.



This is the ninth article in a 12-part series on the book of Revelation. Find the article and answers online after Aug. 5 at wels.net/forwardinchrist.



You are
perfect in
God's eyes

PERCEPTION

Beauty really does lie beneath the surface. Olivia Odrich

Have you ever rolled out of bed, looked in the mirror, and just thought, *Why do I have to look like this? For once I wish I could be beautiful.*

GOD'S DEFINITION OF BEAUTY

Have you heard the phrase "Nothing is as it seems"? That girl in the hallway has her hair in a messy bun and wears baggy sweatpants and an oversized shirt. She hides her beauty under oversized clothes because she thinks she can never be "beautiful." But thin doesn't mean healthy. Big doesn't mean unhealthy. Nice clothes do not automatically make someone rich. Scruffy clothes do not mean the person wearing them is poor. A cheerful smile doesn't mean a person is particularly happy, nor does a frown mean someone is down.

God's definition of being "beautiful" or "attractive" is utterly different than society's definition. "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight" (1 Peter 3:3,4).

So you tell yourself, "Do not care what others think." You say, "God loves you,

and you are perfect in his eyes, so you should look at yourself in the same light," or, "It isn't looks that you should care about but rather your inward appearance." But it isn't that easy. You still look in the mirror and wonder. When you see others, you compare.

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." God's and society's view of who and who isn't "good-looking" are polar opposites. We don't always see others and ourselves the way God sees us. That is why no one should label others as this or that. What matters is how God sees you. He created your body and your face so you can praise him in the best way possible. You are perfect in someone's eyes. That someone is God. He sees your true beauty.

OUR PERCEPTION OF OTHERS

But why does our appearance matter so much in our world? Why does it have to mean so much if someone is shorter or taller, has blue eyes or green eyes, or whatever? We still have sinful thoughts and automatically judge people based on appearance. Take a moment and think about the people you saw today. What did they look like? Did you judge them because of it? Did your judgment stop you from talking to them or maybe even helping them?

Don't go around and whisper to your friend, "Why is he wearing those shoes; they look stupid on him," or, "What is wrong with her makeup?" Instead, compliment one another and show Christ's love. "Encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Perception is a scary thing. God's perception is important. You are special in his eyes. He created you in the best way to complete tasks that glorify him. He loves you more than you imagine. He sent Jesus to redeem you and make you his child. You might not understand sometimes or appreciate what he has done for you. But remember that God gives everyone different strengths and weaknesses for different tasks. Your eyes, face, and body just happen to be part of his handiwork. You are special. You are unique. Rejoice, for God is good. "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well" (Psalm 139:14).

Olivia Odrich, a junior at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wisconsin, is a member at Our Redeemer, Madison, Wisconsin.