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A LUTHERAN VOICE



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Go make disciples


We are all Jesus' disciples, sent out to
share the good news. *Page 10*

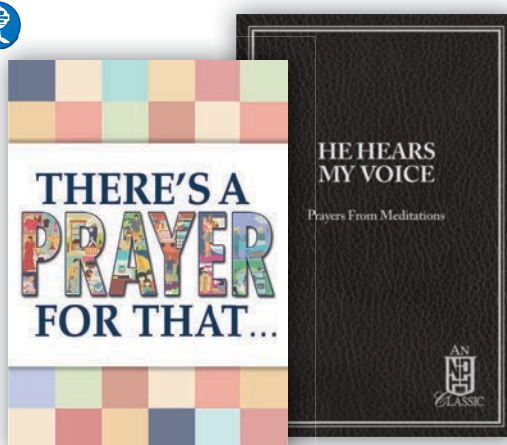
February 2019

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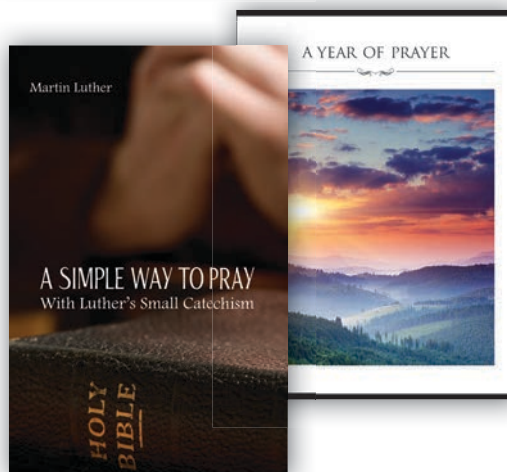
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FEATURES

- 10** | **Evangelism lessons from the Savior**
Pray dangerously.
Eric S. Roecker
- 12** | **Ambassadors: Help them see Jesus**
Ask questions before you confront.
Jeremiah J. Gumm
- 14** | **Confessions of faith**
A search ends when the gospel becomes clear and precious.
Keleen Carlson
- 16** | **Heart to heart: Parent conversations**
How can parents model healthy cell phone use?
- 26** | **Merging for mission**
Finding that they could be stronger together, two congregations decide to merge into one.
Julie K. Wietzke
- 28** | **Epiphany quiz**
John A. Braun
- 30** | **Enduring Word**
Fire destroyed a pastor's place to study God's Word, but God's Word still remains.
Eric J. Ziecker
- 36** | **Well pleased**
Through the sacrifice of God's Son, we are now God's children, with whom he is well pleased.
Luke C. Werre





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You can help Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary give future graduates the same strong beginning in ministry. For more information, visit wls.wels.net or call 262-242-8100.

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ON AUDIO

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

WHAT'S INSIDE

Jesus was constantly teaching his 12 disciples during his ministry. These lessons prepared them to spread the message of salvation through Jesus after their Teacher ascended into heaven.

Jesus' life and ministry continue to teach us, his modern-day disciples. Over the past six months, we learned from Jesus' interaction with the woman at the well how to turn conversations into opportunities, how to listen, and how to bring in the law and gospel. As we reflected on Jesus and the rich young man, we discovered that witnessing is sometimes a matter of timing and may not always end with immediate "success." (Find these articles online at wels.net/forwardinchrist, if you missed them.)

This month we look at another example from Jesus' ministry, maybe one that isn't as familiar—the sending of the 72 in Luke chapter 10. Eric Roecker, director of the WELS Commission on Evangelism, starts the series by reminding us that we all can share the good news about Jesus (p. 10). His story asks us to pray dangerously for opportunities—and then to be prepared when God answers our prayers.

Being in God's Word can help prepare us. A new Bible study starting this month—by a new contributing editor, Jeff Enderle—will be exploring ways to enrich your personal devotional life. Don't miss this month's article that gives tips from Luther about how to dive into Scripture (p. 33).

Julie Wietzke



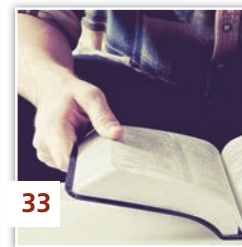
12



15



25



33

IN EVERY ISSUE

6

Feedback

Readers share their opinions

7

Devotion

Called to love, called to speak

8

From the president's desk

Not just an emotion

9

Light for our path

The white stone in Revelation

18

Teen ministry

Strength in sorrow

19

Bulletin board

Announcements from around the synod

20

News

What's happening in WELS

32

Editorial comment

An easy question?

33

Bible study

A gospel-filled life:
A simple way to pray

34

A thought

Where is God?

35

Interactive Bible study

The book of Revelation:
Comfort in the midst of conflict

THANKS!

Just a quick but heartfelt thank you for continuing to improve this publication to be relevant to/for/in our culture! How encouraging and applicable, how inspiring and comforting! Your authors, reporters, etc., do such a good job at meeting us where we are with the ever fresh Word of God!

I'm counting you as one of my millions of blessings!

Deborah Schoeneck

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

Through my Bible in 3 years



Read or listen online at wels.net/bible3.

FEBRUARY 2019

- | | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Matthew 4 | 11. Joel 2:18–3:21 | 21. Obadiah |
| 2. Mt. 5:1–16 | 12. Zephaniah 1 | 22. Matthew 8:1–22 |
| 3. Mt. 5:17–48 | 13. Zep. 2:1–3:7 | 23. Mt. 8:23–9:8 |
| 4. Mt. 6:1–18 | 14. Zep. 3:8–20 | 24. Mt. 9:9–34 |
| 5. Mt. 6:19–34 | 15. Nahum 1 | 25. Mt. 9:35–10:23 |
| 6. Mt. 7:1–12 | 16. Na. 2 & 3 | 26. Mt. 10:24–42 |
| 7. Mt. 7:13–29 | 17. Habakkuk 1:1–2:5 | 27. Mt. 11:1–24 |
| 8. Jonah 1 & 2 | 18. Hab. 2:6–20 | 28. Mt. 11:25–12:21 |
| 9. Jnh. 3 & 4 | 19. Hab. 3:1–15 | |
| 10. Joel 1:1–2:17 | 20. Hab. 3:16–19 | |

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

PLEASE COMPLETE OUR SURVEY

Let us know what you think about *Forward in Christ* magazine. Your answers in this survey will help us determine how *Forward in Christ* can best serve the needs of WELS members—now and in the future.

This survey should take less than 20 minutes. Your responses will be completely confidential. By participating, you will be entered into a drawing for a chance to receive the complete People's Bible set for both you and your church.

Thanks for your time and input.

TAKE OUR SURVEY AT WELSSURVEY.COM



EPIPHANY QUIZ ANSWERS

Answers for pp. 28,29: 1. c (Matthew 2:1–12); 2. c (Matthew 2:1–12); 3. a (Matthew 2:1–12); 4. a (Matthew 2:1–12); 5. d (Matthew 2:13–16); 6. d (Matthew 3:1–12 & John 1:29); 7. b (Matthew 3:13–17); 8. d (Matthew 3:13–17); 9. c (Mark 6:14–29); 10. c (Matthew 4:1–11); 11. a (John 2:1–11); 12. b (John 2:1–11); 13. d (Matthew 4:18–22 & Luke 6:12–16); 14. a (Matthew 4:18–22 & Luke 6:12–16); 15. b (Matthew 4:18–20); 16. b (Luke 4:14–30); 17. d (Mark 1:29–35); 18. d (Matthew 17:1–9); 19. c (Matthew 17:1–9); 20. b (Mark 6:30–44).

Called to love, called to speak

Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. 1 John 3:18

Joel C. Seifert

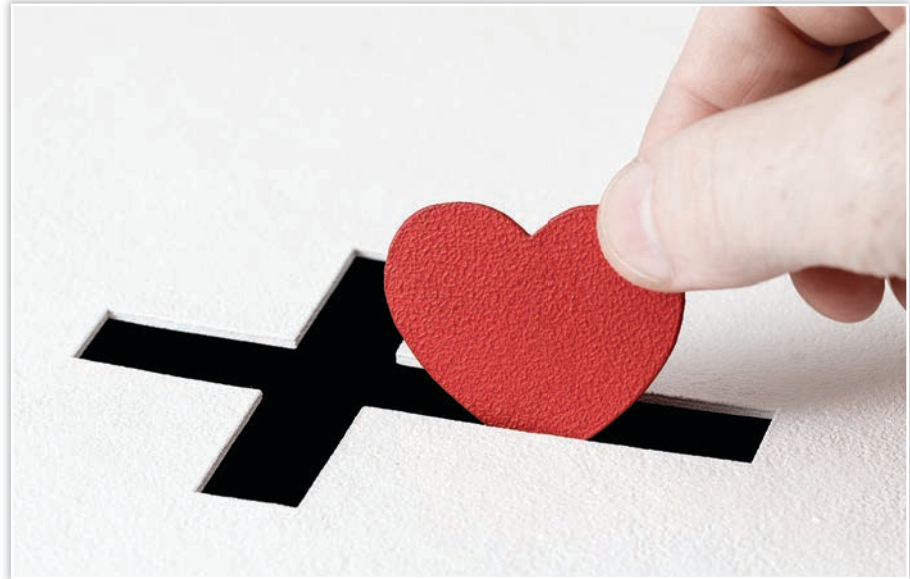
What does it look like when the church loves the world? It depends on what you mean by “the church.”

The “social gospel” movement began its influence on American Christianity a century ago. It taught that the mission Christ gave to the church is to love the world by feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, and providing for the needy. Increasingly today, there’s a call for churches to love the world by being involved in “social justice.” The United Nations has declared Feb. 20 “World Social Justice Day.”

REMEMBER THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

God calls the church to love the world. When it comes to our corporate activity as his church, he tells us what that means: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19,20). The church’s primary mission is to proclaim God’s Word in truth and to administer the sacraments. When our churches do this, they proclaim God’s love to the world.

When the church is called to take an active role in social justice movements, there’s much to be cautious about. We dare not lose our focus on the gospel. It’s easy to give the impression that the goal of the church is to reform society, not preach salvation for sinners. And at times, the modern social justice movement advocates for the recognition of immoral lifestyles or actions as legitimate and good. It’s good that a Christian doesn’t take part in such activities. But we dare not lose sight of our responsibility to love the world in other ways.



REMEMBER GOD’S CALL TO THE CHRISTIAN

Certainly, God calls the church to love the world by proclaiming the gospel. God calls the Christian to love the world in so many additional ways: We’re to provide for our families and be good citizens and good neighbors, to name a few. Consider also his command in Proverbs: “Speak up for those

Let that gospel message
continue to encourage
us to love our neighbor
in action and in truth.

who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy” (31:8,9).

God calls the Christian to love the world by caring about justice for all and by actively working for it. When individual believers do that, his “invisible church” loves the world.

What a unique gift Christians are to the world when we do that in our personal lives! Guided by God’s Word, instead of the shifting morals of this world, we can speak up to protect the unborn, because we know that those living souls are precious to God. We can sound a clear call for equal justice for people of all economic and ethnic backgrounds, knowing all of humankind is created and loved by God. We can listen to God’s call to defend the rights of the poor and needy, rejoicing in Jesus’ promise that when we do this, we do it for him.

February is a month when we love to talk about love. Let’s always encourage our churches to keep their focus on the proclamation of the gospel. And let that gospel message continue to encourage us to love our neighbor in action and in truth. God grant that he blesses this world as his people love others by speaking up for those who can’t speak for themselves.

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



Mark Schwede

Build your
marriage
relationship on
your growing
relationship
with your Savior.

Not just an emotion

It was their wedding day. The bride and groom stood in front of me, looks of excitement, nervousness, and happiness on their face. It was time for the wedding sermon.

I began by saying, “I have a question for you. Do you love each other?”

The bride’s eyes widened, and she nodded her head eagerly. The groom looked at me with a look that said, “Are you serious? Of course, we do!”

Then I said, “I would also like to ask you another question—one a little more difficult: How would you define the love that you have for each other? *What do you mean* when you say you love each other?”

Sadly, it’s a question that a lot of couples—both newlyweds and those celebrating decades of marriage—do not know how to answer correctly. Some would say, “I know I love him because he makes me feel happy when I’m with him and he makes me laugh and smile.” “I know I love her because I feel attracted to her, emotionally, romantically, even physically.”

Now those are good things. But those responses have one thing in common: They are all feelings, all emotions. And you know what happens to emotions. They always change. One day you’re happy; the next day you’re sad and depressed. One day you feel optimistic; the next day you feel like nothing will go well.

If love is just an emotion, then we shouldn’t be surprised that so many people wake up one day and realize that their love for their spouse is gone. Their feelings have changed, and when it comes to changing feelings and emotions, there’s not much you can do to stop it.

God, the creator of marriage, has given us a different definition of love in a marriage: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25).

Jesus’ love for us is not just a feeling, not an emotion. His love for us was a commitment to act, a commitment to give himself completely to us and for us—all the way to the cross. His love for us meant that he made us more important than himself and he made our happiness and welfare the most important thing to him. He was willing to do everything not for himself, but for us.

God’s kind of love in a marriage is action—doing—for the welfare and benefit and happiness of the other person. God’s kind of love puts the other person’s needs first. God’s kind of love never asks, “What’s in this marriage for me?” but rather, “What can I do today for you?” With Jesus’ love as the model and motive, Christian spouses give themselves to each other fully and completely. When that is happening in a marriage, no one ever needs to worry about “my wants, my needs, and my welfare,” because the spouse is already taking care of those things.

How can you be sure that your love is the kind of love that God wants you to have, the kind of love that will guarantee a lifelong, joyful, and fulfilled marriage? Stay close to the Savior who demonstrated that love for you by dying on the cross for your sin. Build your marriage relationship on your growing relationship with your Savior as you worship him regularly, hear his Word, and live your lives for him. Then when you hear those words, “I love you,” you will both know that such love is not just an emotion, not just a feeling, but a commitment to put each other’s happiness first in everything.

Light for our path

What does the white stone in Revelation 2:17 mean?

James F. Pope

Answering your question involves bridging a “culture gap” in biblical interpretation and growing in our appreciation for the grace of God in Christ.

BRIDGING THE GAP

We encounter culture gaps in the Bible whenever we read about customs and practices that differ from our experiences today. To understand what the biblical customs and practices meant then and to derive accurate, appropriate meaning for our lives today, we need to bridge the culture gap. Revelation 2:17 contains one of those gaps.

Going back to the days of ancient Greece, jurors in court cases indicated the verdicts they reached by depositing pebbles or stones in receptacles. That practice continued into the days of ancient Rome. A dark stone reflected a “guilty” decision, while a white stone represented a “not guilty” or “acquittal” decision. Because jurors in our judicial system today forward the results of their deliberations to judges by other means of communication, the practice of the ancients has little meaning to us unless we bridge the culture gap.

ACQUITTING THE GUILTY

Revelation chapters 2 and 3 contain specific messages from the Lord to Christians in seven congregations in Asia Minor. Revelation 2:17 is part of a tailor-made message from the Lord that the apostle John relayed to Christians in the city of Pergamum. The Lord’s message to those Christians contained both rebuke and encouragement.

Their rebuke was appropriate because some of them were drifting away from biblical teaching and godly living. They were yielding to the influence of Satan, whom John describes as living in Pergamum and figuratively occupying a throne there (Revelation 2:13).

To the Christians who resisted Satan’s temptations, the Lord made the promise that he would give them a white stone. That was a picturesque way of describing

God’s declaration of those people as “not guilty” of sin and encouraging them; it was a symbolic means of speaking of their justification. By bridging the culture gap, we can see what message God intended for Christians then and now.

“Not guilty” or “acquittal” is the declaration of God that we Christians today also enjoy. From a worldly, judicial perspective, God’s verdict is surprising. Our natural sinful condition and our actual sins deserve a “guilty” verdict from the holy and just God. Yet, in the courtroom of God, the judge declared the guilty “innocent,” and he pronounced the innocent one “guilty” (Romans chapter 3). Through Spirit-worked faith in Jesus, Christians personally enjoy that declaration of acquittal.

RECASTING THE CONTENT

The answer to your question illustrates the truth that the book of Revelation very often recasts what the Bible teaches elsewhere in figurative and symbolic ways. It is comforting to know from the book of Romans, for example, that God declares us “not guilty” for Jesus’ sake. There is additional comfort in receiving that same message of forgiveness of sins through this vivid picture in the book of Revelation.

This repetition and reshaping of content definitely says something about God. He desires that we be convinced and confident that he has completely removed our sins. In pursuit of that goal, God speaks and restates his message of forgiveness in the Bible. He does that with unmistakable language and unforgettable imagery. He even does that with a little object like a stone, a white stone.

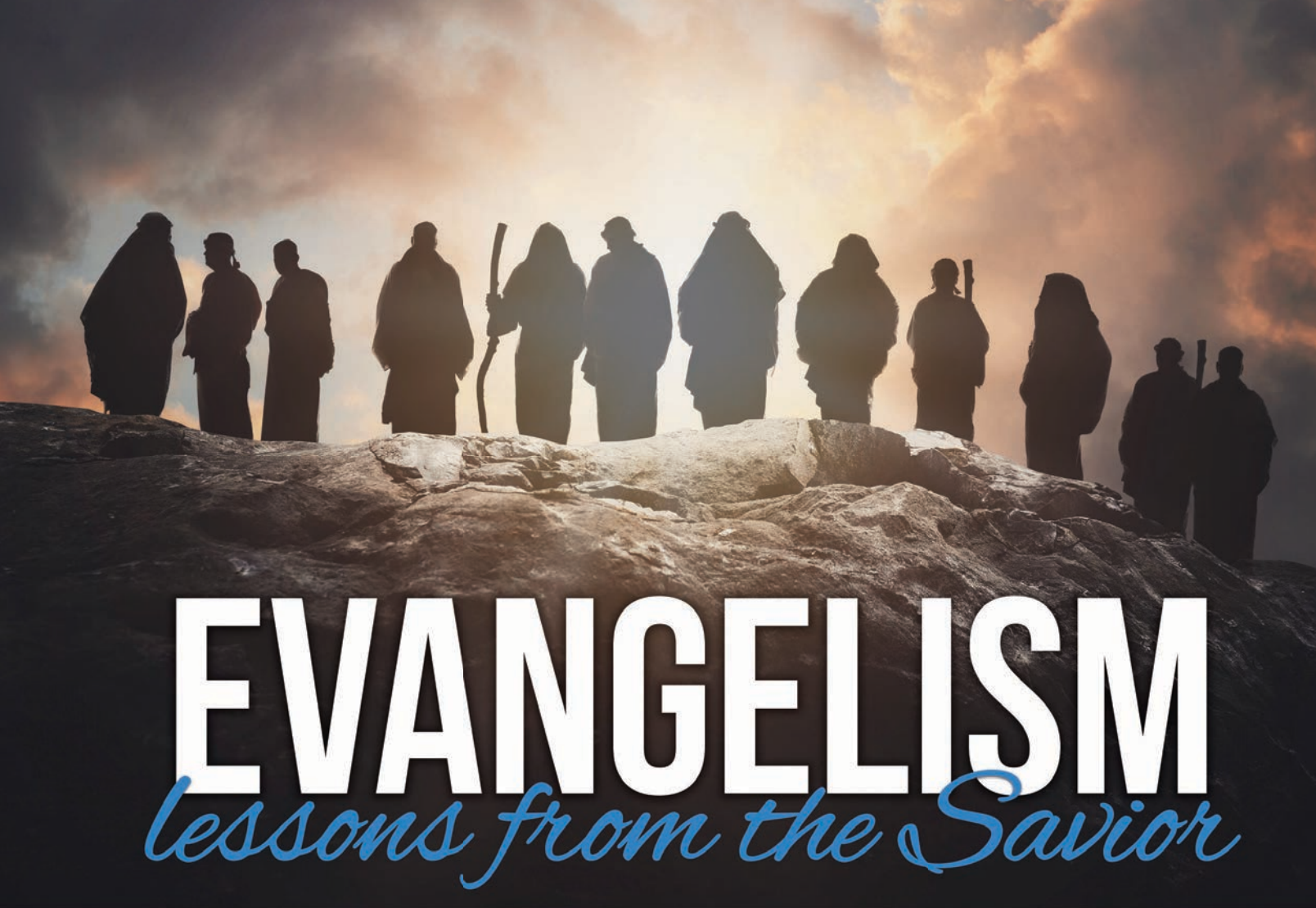
That stone says, “You are not guilty. God declares you acquitted.”

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



Pray dangerously.

Eric S. Roecker

I was sitting at the gate, waiting to board my flight, and I was excited. I was flying to Florida for a golf trip with my buddies. I had never been on a golf trip before, and the thought of spending a few days with nothing to do but play golf and enjoy the company of my friends was exhilarating. The fact that I had not seen some of these friends for years made the anticipation even greater.

As I sat thinking of warm, sunny days and lush, green fairways, for some reason I remembered something I had heard a pastor say a few months earlier. He encouraged people to pray dangerously when it came to personal evangelism. He explained that praying dangerously meant to ask the Lord to provide opportunities to tell other people about Jesus—and not just to provide those opportunities to pastors and missionaries but to provide those opportunities to you. It was dangerous, he explained, because God might very well say yes.

Hmm . . . I thought. I wonder what would happen if I tried that? What if I tried it right here, right now? Like the disciples Jesus sent out, I am his messenger, so I decided to

pray dangerously. “Lord Jesus,” I prayed silently, “if it is your will, provide me an opportunity to tell someone about you on this flight.”

This prayer was even more dangerous than you might imagine. You see, I do not chat with people on airplanes. It’s not that I’m not a people person. It’s just that I sometimes get motion sickness when flying. So my standard operating procedure is to take a Dramamine about an hour before takeoff, settle down in a window seat, place my head gently but firmly against the wall, and fall fast asleep. It has proven stunningly successful over the years. I am often out cold before we finish taxiing for takeoff and jerk awake as the wheels hammer the runway upon landing. It keeps me from feeling nauseous and makes flights fly by.

As I said, asking the Lord to put me next to a person who had never heard the good news about Jesus was dangerous. What if he said yes? What if I got airsick? What if I fell asleep or was so groggy I couldn’t carry on a conversation? Forty-five minutes later, I found myself more curious than usual as I walked down the aisle of the plane to locate my assigned seat. Who would be seated next to me? No one, I discovered. The seat next to mine was open.

Well, perhaps the Lord has not seen fit to say yes to my request, I thought with some small sense of relief. I shuffled into my seat, strapped the seatbelt around my waist, tilted my head until it rested on the wall to my right, closed my eyes, and looked forward to two hours of Dramamine-induced slumber. Aaah.

Then I felt a bump. Had someone sat down next to me? I peered through a slightly opened left eyelid. Sure enough, a young woman was just getting settled. I repositioned my eyelid to the closed position to continue my journey to dreamland.

Then I remembered my prayer. What if she was the answer? What if this young woman did not know her Savior and I slept away my opportunity to tell her about him?

With a bit of lazy reluctance still clinging to my heart, I opened my eyes, turned, and said, "Hello!"

"Hi!" She said with a bright smile.

"Are you heading home or vacationing in Florida?"

"I'm actually traveling to see my mother for a much-needed break."

"Oh! What do you do for a living?"

"I'm an actress in New York."

"What have you been working on?"

"I've spent the last year playing the lead in *The Lion King* on Broadway."

"Really!? Wow!"

"It's been an amazing experience. But it has also been exhausting. What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a Lutheran pastor."

"Really!? Wow! I don't think I've ever talked to a pastor before. We didn't really go to church when I was growing up."

"So, you don't know much about the Bible?"

"I don't know *anything* about the Bible."

I probably don't have to tell you that the hair on my neck stood up as straight as the bristles on a brand-new brush. Here was an answer to a prayer I had silently uttered less than an hour earlier.

I wonder how Jesus' seventy-two followers felt when he told them that he was sending them out to preach the good news (Luke 10:1-24). Jesus had just instructed

them to ask the Lord to send out workers into his harvest field. Then he proceeded to send *them*. They were the answer to their own prayer! Talk about praying dangerously!

The young actress and I spent the next two hours discussing who God is and how much he loves us and what he did to save us from the sins that separated us from him. She had many perfectly understandable and reasonable questions. She listened carefully and respectfully to the answers I shared from God's Word. It was wonderful.

I was even able to use *The Lion King* in our conversation. I mentioned that the theme of the musical was the circle of

life, that is, we should take comfort in the fact that dying is just a part of life. "Isn't it interesting, though," I concluded, "that at the end of the musical, the little lion's father who had died shows up in the sky and speaks to his son. Even a musical that claims death is just a part of life could not help but reunite the living with the dead. It's because we all have an inborn desire to live forever. That is what Jesus' resurrection gives us."

As we went our separate ways at the Orlando airport, I told her I would keep her in my prayers and gave her the name of the

WELS church in Queens, N.Y., encouraging her to visit.

I have no idea what has happened to her since. But I do know that she heard about her Savior that day. And I have our Lord's promise that his Word is powerful and effective. This gives me hope that the Holy Spirit found his way into her heart and that, one day, I might meet her again in heaven.

Are you a person of prayer? Do you regularly spend prayer time asking the Lord to send workers into his harvest field? Good. Those prayers are much needed and well received by our Lord. But, perhaps you might consider adding a new element to your prayer. You might consider praying a bit more dangerously and ask the Savior to send someone who still needs to learn about him *to you*. How he chooses to answer that prayer is, of course, up to him. It may not be as immediate and dramatic as it was for me that day. Then again, it might be.

Are you ready to pray dangerously?

Eric Roecker, director of the WELS Commission on Evangelism, is a member at Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin.

This is the first article in a three-part series on the story of Jesus sending out his disciples in Luke chapter 10.



AMBASSADORS

HELP THEM SEE JESUS



Ask questions before you confront.

Jeremiah J. Gumm

When Michael first walked through our doors, I wonder if he even knew what he believed. One thing was certain, his search for answers had left him with a confused “religious” worldview.

Growing up, his family had been Episcopalian, but in junior high, he became an atheist. A teacher in high school helped him return to the Episcopalian church. Eventually, he got fed up with the liberal teachings of his church. So he started dabbling in Islam. Michael was a security guard, and a couple of his coworkers were Muslims. He found Islam’s strict, morally conservative teachings to be attractive and fascinating. He considered converting but was not quite ready to take the plunge.

He then started checking out Lutheran churches. Liberal Lutheran churches failed to provide the answers he sought. Then, one Reformation Sunday, he showed up at our church for worship, full of questions and misguided views. He was searching for truth.

REALLY LISTEN TO OBJECTIONS

I have to admit that my initial conversations with Michael were rather frustrating. I had difficulty identifying

whether he was raising an actual objection or if he was simply playing devil’s advocate from the perspective of Islam; atheism; or a liberal, progressive Christianity. I would have been wise to remember what James wrote: “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak” (1:19). Unfortunately, I tended to be slow to listen and quick to speak, which caused our early conversations to circle round and round without actually getting at the heart of Michael’s objections and questions.

In time, though, the Lord taught me to listen to Michael’s objections and to ask questions to understand better what his objections actually were. For example, when Michael and I would discuss Christ’s death on the cross, he would often bring up an objection that likely came from his conversations with his Muslim coworkers—an objection he himself could not answer satisfactorily. “If Jesus is God’s Son and God the Father had Jesus die on a cross, then God would have to be an abusive father since he would be putting his son through so much suffering, torture, and pain.” By that logic, Jesus’ death on the cross would make God no better than an abusive father.

ASK QUESTIONS

How do you respond to that? Without taking the time to unpack that

objection with thoughtful questions to get further explanation, it would be very tempting to attack that objection with a vengeance. But what was at the heart of Michael’s objection? What questions could be asked “with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15)? What questions would help me understand the source of Michael’s objection and enable me to respond?

Michael’s objection started from the premise that God is a holy God of power and control who forces people to submit to his will. That is a commonly held view of Allah among Muslims. Tied to that initial premise is the question whether Jesus Christ is truly God or not—another Muslim objection to the Christian faith. Jesus is acknowledged to be a prophet, but he is not Allah. From that perspective, Michael’s objection makes sense. If Jesus is actually God’s Son, like all other humans, and if Jesus did actually suffer and die on the cross, then God must be forcing his Son to suffer and die, rightly earning him the charge of “abuser.”

Yet what was Michael missing? He was missing a complete picture of the God of the Bible—the God who is love—described in 1 John 4:9,10: “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.





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? What barriers did you have to overcome? How did asking questions help? 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.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." That is not the god of Islam. Michael needed to see the God whose love for sinners moved him to act on our behalf, to send what was most precious to him—his one and only Son—and to sacrifice him to reconcile us to himself. Michael needed to see that this God is not an abusive father forcing his Son to suffer but a God who loves us even when we were dead and hostile in our sins. Questions needed to be asked to help Michael see the God of love he was missing.

DISCOVER WHAT KNOWLEDGE IS MISSING

Yet Michael still had objections and questions—objections that required further investigation, further questions to sort through the confusion of his religious worldview. We had to discuss what he actually believed and what others tried to convince him to believe.

Related to the last objection, Michael would sometimes say, "If Jesus is God and if Jesus willingly died on the cross, then he is a suicidal God."

To that, I would often ask him, "What about the mom who pushes her child out of the way of an oncoming truck only to be struck herself and severely injured or killed? Was she 'suicidal' in

that moment? If not, then what would you call that? What of the soldier who falls on a hand grenade tossed into a mess tent full of soldiers? Was he 'suicidal' in that moment? If not, then what would you call that?"

While there was logic to Michael's argument, he was missing the element of love and concern for others. He again was missing the most important component when it comes to any discussion on the death of Christ—the love of God for undeserving sinners demonstrated in the death of Christ our Savior.

TAKE TIME TO UNDERSTAND

So what can you do when others object to Christianity? Many objections to Christianity actually do not make sense when you explore them further. So ask questions to help you understand. How does that person support his or her opinion? Does he have proof for his objection, or is this just his opinion? Why does she believe what she believes, or is she just parroting what she has heard from others? Much like trying to understand the context behind an objection, it is vitally important that we ask questions to understand the actual objection that is posed to us.

At the same time, we do so "with gentleness and respect." We do not rush to confront the one who poses the objection. Instead, we take time to

explore further, to better understand why that blood-bought soul before us has these objections to what God's Word has to say. We take time with people like Michael.

In the end, Michael eventually moved on. Yet after we had spent considerable time studying God's Word together and sorting through all his confusion, for the first time in his life he recognized that the alluring teachings of various "-isms" and Islam did not have what he sought. The Bible was the only reliable source for truth. The questions asked helped Michael to see that.

So, don't be afraid to ask questions if people object to your faith. The Lord may just give you an opportunity to help them see the truth for the first time in their lives.

Jeremiah Gumm is pastor at King of Kings, Maitland, Florida.

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



A search ends when the gospel becomes clear and precious.

Keleen Carlson

As of September 2017, I am a Lutheran!

Born in Texas in the late 1960s, I was raised a Christian, primarily in non-denominational churches, by my mother. I know the churches meant well, and there were some awesome people there whom I still consider to be friends. But when I became an adult, I began to be disillusioned about some of the teachings. There were things that began to make me doubt the teachings and why my mother raised me in that church. Besides the teachings, I noticed some things that were going on with the leadership of the church at the time. I also started being drawn to the liturgical style of worship, not realizing where God was taking me. In July of 2015, I stopped attending church altogether.

Back to the beginning: My father was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and was a confirmed Lutheran, but my mom and I were the only ones who attended church. My parents moved to Texas shortly before I was born. Mom was not raised Christian but decided to attend a nondenominational church when I was very young.

After mom died in 1991, I took care of my dad in his failing health for 12 years. My dad reaffirmed his Lutheran faith a few years before he passed away, but he was unable to attend church due to his health.

After my dad died, I moved to Nashville, Tennessee, with very close friends, who were my pastor's family at the time. I never had children, and their girls were like nieces to me. When the pastor decided to move to Tennessee, the family asked me to go with them. I had never even been to Tennessee, but I moved. After just four years, they moved back to Texas and even bought their old house back when they moved. But I stayed in Nashville.

TROUBLESOME TEACHINGS

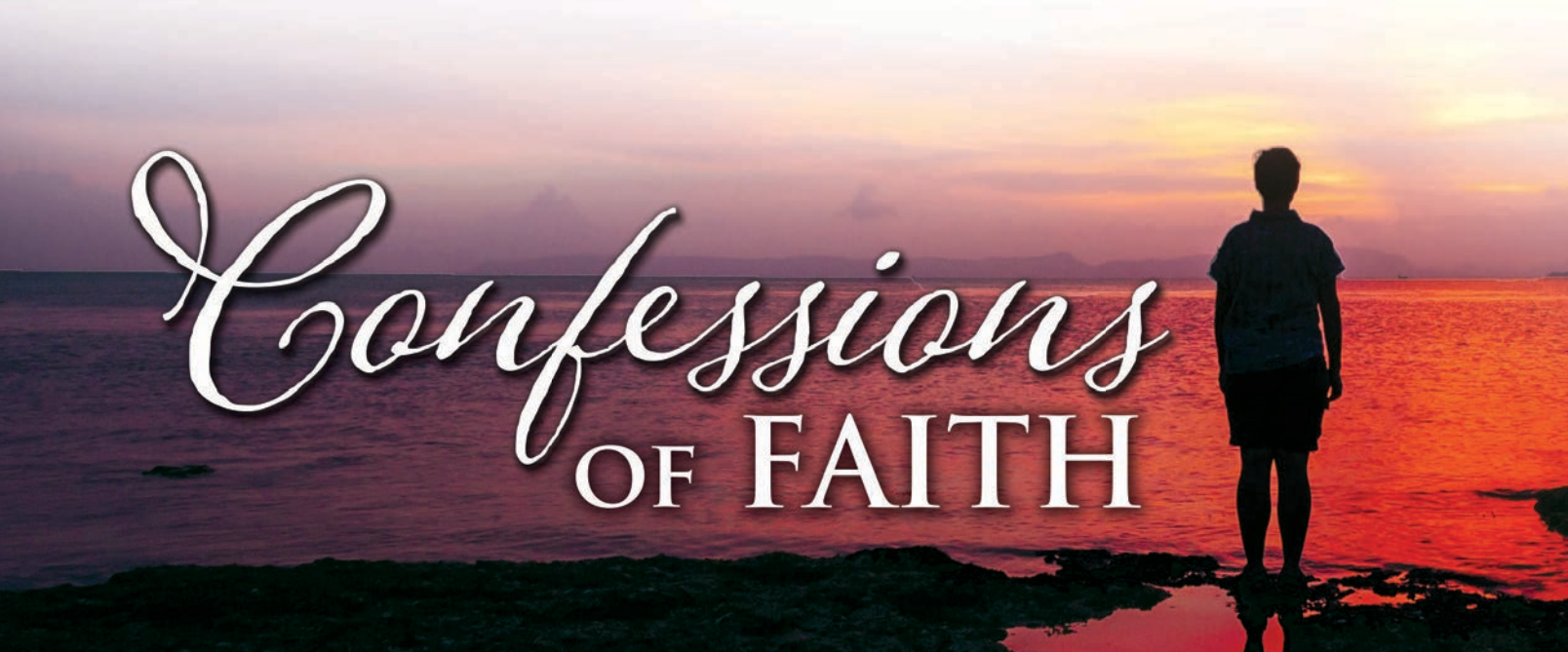
Things began to trouble me about what my church in Nashville was teaching. It spent so much time on the prosperity message and the topic of the end times, trying to predict the date of the rapture. It focused a lot on tithing, teaching that if you do not tithe, God will not bless you. Meanwhile, I was personally struggling even to maintain my Christian walk and was simply told that I should try to be holy. There wasn't much discipleship and teaching about the Bible and how to live as a Christian on a daily basis. My church taught that the

Lord's Supper was just a symbol, as was Baptism. We didn't really do anything special for Christmas. I never knew what Advent was until I became a Lutheran. Instead of increasing church services during that time, the church canceled them because of the holiday. I always felt that was odd; we didn't even celebrate the birthday of the Savior, except to sing a song or two close to Christmas and read the Christmas story from Luke's gospel.

The church also called things sin that are not, such as drinking alcohol in moderation. This frustrated me, especially after one pastor told me he does not see anything wrong with drinking in moderation but that the denomination does not allow its ministers to drink or they would be expelled. It made no sense to me that a minister would believe something different than what his church actually teaches. When the church was failing due to lack of funds, one of the ministers even prophesied that God would send four rich businessmen from the east, west, north, and south to support the church financially. That church closed a year later. I was so disillusioned!

LOOKING FOR A NEW CHURCH

After I stopped attending church altogether in 2015, I did try to find another church, but many were so contempo-



Confessions OF FAITH

rary and seemed unfriendly. I was disheartened. None seemed true to the Bible; they were always looking for new, fun, and fancy ways to attract people.

Then I began to research Lutheran churches to get back to my dad's original beliefs and to find a church with a liturgical style of worship. After a bit of research, I realized that the Lutheran churches I was finding were way too liberal for me. I knew that when my dad attended the Lutheran church it was not that way.

Then came WELS! I finally found Rock of Ages in Madison, Tennessee. I had never heard of WELS before, so I did some research and found its beliefs were based on the Bible. It was just what I had been looking for!

I attended the early service one Sunday in May 2017 and loved it. The pastor was very friendly and so were the people. They smiled and said hi, which was not my experience at some of the other churches I tried. There was such a reverent, holy feeling in church that morning.

I filled out the friendship register, and the pastor scheduled a time to meet with me at a local Starbucks. I explained everything about my background to him, and he was compassionate about my struggles to find a good church that really believed the Bible. He told

me how to become a member—by taking the Bible information class. Even though the class was not running at the time, he met with me personally each week at the church to teach me. That amazed me and almost brings me to tears even now because it was so personal and caring. He is a great pastor with a true heart for people and a great sense of humor. He's always available when I have questions.

FOUND: THE ONE THING NEEDFUL

The way my church focuses on Christ; his death, burial, resurrection; and him as our soon-coming King is so refreshing to me. Our teachings on Baptism and Holy Communion are also very dear to me. Jesus comes to us in Word and sacrament! Wow! We don't have to try and be good all the time and do good works to make it to heaven. Holy living and good works come from our love for Christ and what he has already done for us.

The celebration of the church year, with Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter, is also new to me and beautiful as we remember Christ's sacrifice for us. Advent is also a special time for me. The Advent wreath with the candles is so beautiful—a baby is on the way! It gives me so



Keelen Carlson

much expectation from Thanksgiving to Christmas when we light the final candle to show that the Light of the world has come!

I have some experience in writing and photography, and I am the media person for our church. I am glad I can use my talents to serve the kingdom of God. I always read *Forward in Christ* each month because it is so rich in biblical truth. Thanks to the pastor and the members of Rock of Ages for accepting me into their fellowship.

Keelen Carlson is a member at Rock of Ages, Madison, Tennessee.



heart to heart parent conversations

I am not an early adapter, so I did not jump right on the smart-phone wagon. Gradually, though, it crept into my life. First I wanted the camera. Then I liked the idea of being able to check my work e-mail when I was on the go since I do much of my work from home (or from my minivan). Somehow, my phone is now my lifeline. All my recipes live there as well as my music, videos, and to-do lists. I do most of my shopping on my phone. I stay in touch with family and friends via texting. Almost any question that is asked can be answered by checking my phone. Weather? Directions? Calendar? You get the picture.

My uses feel legitimate—and they may be—but all that my kids know is that Mom is always on her phone. If you relate to any of this, read our articles this month—and join me in resolving to make a change.

Nicole Balza

Join the
conversation!

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

HOW CAN PARENTS MODEL HEALTHY CELL PHONE USE?

Let's have a show of hands. How many of you are struggling to determine what healthy cell phone use looks like?

VALUE

Struggling can be good because it helps us identify our values. I really love how God tells us in Deuteronomy to love him wholly—to *value* him above all things. He doesn't say *fleetingly* or *haphazardly* share his words and precepts. He says, "Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 6:7).

We value our God who saved us, and we value the children he's entrusted to us. And, since we are people using media devices who are raising children in the way of the Lord, how we use and model using devices *is* an important topic of our struggle . . . when we walk along the road (or drive to school), when we put our kids to bed (or sit in the family room)—really at any and all times.

EVALUATE

Remember the expression, "more is caught than taught." Our kids are watching us and listening—weighing what we say against what we do. Short of some cataclysmic dystopian accident, cell phones are not going away. Children can see if the device appears more interesting to us than the people around us do.

Our families are at war with technology and digital communication. At a time when information is more readily available than ever and we can connect with friends and loved ones in an instant, depression and anxiety among young adults and parents increase. Many report feeling disconnected from their families because of technology. So something that was designed with the intention to keep us connected actually makes us feel more lonely!

As beloved children of our heavenly Father, we were designed to be in relationships with one another. The very nature of our triune God points to the interconnectedness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our digital age has given us a false sense of interconnectedness by giving us so much information that we assume our relationships are more complete than they might actually be. Instead, we are lonely because we've

There is value in struggling with how to have and show healthy media habits. Notice when you choose to give attention to a device. While it's fine to view entertainment online and be connected to others, it's also good to evaluate: "Is my media time excessive or to the exclusion of those around me?" Evaluate whether you would allow or encourage those choices for your child.

VALUE IN STRUGGLE

Recently, I was sitting with my youngest daughter when she beelined to retrieve my beeping phone. I thanked her and told her to leave the phone in the other room because I was spending time with her. The phone could wait.

Herein lies a struggle. We will have times when we *need* to take phone calls and answer messages. We also don't want to give the impression that we value what's on the other side of the beep more than we value the people present.

The apostle Paul reminds us that just because we *can* do something doesn't mean it's constructive to do so. He writes, "I have the right to do anything, you say—but not everything is beneficial. 'I have the right to do anything'—but not everything is constructive" (1 Corinthians 10:23).

Evaluate how your personal habits appear to your child. Would your son notice that Dad stops what he's doing to check every notification or that Mom checks her social media in the middle of conversations? None of these situations are necessarily wrong, but each one begs us to

evaluate and struggle with: "Is this how I want *my child* to interact with those around him?" Where are the boundaries—or where would I want them to be?

There is no magic pattern to win the "best media boundaries parent award." Yet being aware and evaluating media choices makes a difference. Share your values and discuss what you are doing: "I'm putting the phone away because . . ."

You may show healthy boundaries by deliberately putting the phone out of reach more often. Explain why you don't want phones at meals or decide the family will all put them in the other room or turn them off during family time. Even declare the hour that it's absolutely okay for everyone to catch up on their favorite media platform.

Let your children have input—work through this together so your family can use these God-given tools in moderate, healthy ways. There will be some struggling, tweaking, and reevaluating, but sharing your values with your children is priceless.

Amy Vannieuwenhoven and her husband, Charlie, have four children ranging in age from a fourth-grader to a high school senior. Amy is a teacher at Northdale Lutheran School in Tampa, Florida, and the author of Look Up From Your Phone So I Can Love You from Northwestern Publishing House. See p. 20 for a review of this book.



stopped looking into each other's eyes, and we're anxious because we feel that we need to post or perform to receive attention.

This year, consider making a digital resolution to turn off the smartphone at dinner; forget the in-the-moment Facebook post; and talk face to face with family, friends, and especially your children. Your commitment to set a digital resolution in 2019 could include:

- Setting a specific time and place for technology use in your home.
- Having all family members agree on when to unplug, perhaps during family meal times and at the same time every night.
- Committing not to use technology before a specific time on weekends (Mom and Dad, this means you too!).

- Using the resources on your mobile device to set daily time limits for use for every member in your household. Most Apple and Android devices now include this type of software. Consider a tool like *mobicip* (mobicip.com), which helps parents set healthy limits on their children's digital experiences (as well as their own!).

When you set limits around your technology use, watch for the Lord to bless your efforts, including more conversation, more face to face time, and perhaps even more hugs.

Laura Reinke is a marriage and family therapist at Christian Family Solutions and the director of youth ministry at Trinity, Waukesha, Wisconsin.





teentalk

Strength in sorrow

Even when we don't understand all that happens in life, God gives us hope and peace.

Kelsie Bramstedt

I woke up to my alarm clock on Tuesday, thinking it was a normal day. I turned on my lamp and started reading through some texts from my friends, as any normal teen would. I noticed that I had received a text from my grandma. She normally messages me about her day and the things she has been up to, so I opened it excitedly. The words "Samantha is with her Lord now" were not the words I wanted to hear at 6:00 A.M. on a Tuesday morning.

Samantha was my 29-year-old cousin. She's married and a mother of two daughters. I remember when she and Eric, her husband, wanted me to stand up in their wedding as the flower girl. That was the first time I had my hair done all pretty, and I wore a white sparkly dress. I can't remember too much about that day, but I know it was windy and rainy. When we went outside to take pictures after the wedding, Samantha was still so happy and thankful, even though the weather didn't cooperate. I also remember the trouble she faced. It all started with back pain and surgery. The surgery was supposedly successful, but then more pain started to

occur. The doctors confirmed that it was cancer. That meant many chemo treatments in the next months. She had a second surgery to scrape her organs in hope of removing the cancer and then to give her organs a "chemo bath."

Soon afterward, we got news that the surgery was unsuccessful. The only option was for her to receive hospice at home, where she could be close to her family. She was only at home for less than two weeks before passing away. Cancer had controlled her life for about six months.

Samantha was a very strong person and never wanted to be the center of attention. The Lord blessed her life here on earth by giving her a strong faith and much time with her two little girls. She loved to take walks with her dog, Cooper.

Following her death, we all wondered, Why? Why would God do this to such a good person? How are her daughters going to grow up without a mom? The things that go through my mind are to rely and trust in God above all else. I know he has done this for a reason, and he will provide for her family in the ways that they need most.

We may not understand why God gives us struggles, but we can find peace in his great knowledge and tender mercies.

God has given us his Word so we can trust his plans. He says, "I know the plans I have for you, . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11). Those words give me comfort every day. When something just does not go my way, I can look to God and ask for his help.

Samantha never doubted her faith. She somehow found God's love in that dark time in her life. We, as Christians, can learn from her. Samantha was a great example of a strong faith and a loving person throughout her whole life. "Those who know your name trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you" (Psalm 9:10).

Kelsie Bramstedt, a junior at Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, is a member at St. John, Newtonburg, Wisconsin.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Christenson, Christian, to St. John, Cornell, Wis.

Doerr, Christopher, to Garden Homes, Milwaukee, Wis.

Eckert, David, to Trinity, Rollingstone, Minn.

Kluender, Joel, to St. Paul, Platteville, Wis.

Koehler, Jeremy, to St. Paul, Stevensville, Mich.

Meier II, Albert, to Peace, Milbank, S.D.

Minzlaff, Matthew, to Immanuel, South Lyon, Mich.

Schmidt, David, to St. John, Dowagiac, Mich.

Snyder, Bradley, to Cross of Christ, Boise, Idaho

Teachers

Buschkopf, Rachel, to Wisconsin Lutheran Elementary School, Racine, Wis.

Dobberpuhl, Helen, to retirement

Dorn, Allison, to St. Paul, Beverly Hills, Fla.

Fax, Kyle, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.

Frey, Adam, to St. Croix Lutheran Academy, West Saint Paul, Minn.

Gerlach, Kimberly, to Christ the Lord, Brookfield, Wis.

Groth, Matthew, to Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz.

Holper, Ryan, to Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis.

Hunt, Emily, to Holy Word, Pflugerville, Texas

Kasten, Brian, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.

Lemke, Kevin, to Grace, Saint Joseph, Mich.

Nickels, Jason, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.

Olson, Breanna, to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

Rick, Daniel, to Christ Alone, Thiensville, Wis.

Staff ministers

Walsh, Bethany, to Christ the Lord, Cottage Grove, Minn.

COMING EVENTS

Men of His Word conference—Feb. 9. Best Western Premier Waterfront Hotel and Convention Center, Oshkosh, Wis. Website, menofhisword.org.

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

• Mar. 1, 1:45 P.M., Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.; 7 P.M. Crown of Life, Hubertus, Wis.

- Mar. 2, 7 P.M., St. Paul, Green Bay, Wis.
- Mar. 3, 11:30 A.M., Salem, Escanaba, Mich.
- Mar. 4, 10 A.M., Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.; 7 P.M., Divine Grace, Lake Orion, Mich.
- Mar. 5, 10 A.M., Huron Valley Lutheran High School, Westland, Mich.; 7 P.M., Beautiful Savior, Grove City, Ohio
- Mar. 6, 7 P.M., Bethlehem, Carmel, Ind.
- Mar. 7, 1 P.M., Michigan Lutheran High School, St. Joseph, Mich.; 7 P.M., St. Paul, South Haven, Mich.
- Mar. 8, 10 A.M., Illinois Lutheran High School, Crete, Ill.; 7 P.M., Faith, Antioch, Ill.
- Mar. 9, 7 P.M., St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis.
- Mar. 10, 9:15, 11 A.M., St. Peter, Milwaukee, Wis.
- Mar. 21, 7:30 P.M., St. John, Caledonia, Minn.
- Mar. 22, 12:45 P.M., Northland Lutheran High School, Mosinee, Wis.; 7 P.M., St. Peter, Schofield, Wis.
- Mar. 23, 7 P.M., Good Shepherd, Burnsville, Minn.
- Mar. 24, 10 A.M., Living Hope, Shakopee, Minn.; 3 P.M., Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

Pathways to Christ women's retreat—Mar. 8–10. LaSure's Banquet Hall, Oshkosh, Wis. Website, pathwaystochrist.org.

The Prep Singers spring tour—Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. Website, lps.wels.net.

- Mar. 14, 7 P.M., Grace, Yorba Linda, Calif.
- Mar. 15, 7 P.M., Reformation, San Diego, Calif.
- Mar. 16, 5 P.M., Christ, Prescott Valley, Ariz.
- Mar. 17, 11 A.M., Cross of Christ, Kingman, Ariz.; 7 P.M., Beautiful Savior, Las Vegas, Nev.
- Mar. 18, 7 P.M., Shepherd of the Hills, Las Vegas, Nev.
- Mar. 19, 7 P.M., The Springs, Sparks, Nev.
- Mar. 20, 6:30 P.M., St. Peter, Modesto, Calif.
- Mar. 21, 7 P.M., St. Peter, Clovis, Calif.
- Mar. 22, 7 P.M., Christ the Vine, Temecula, Calif.
- Mar. 23, 7 P.M., St. Paul's First, North Hollywood, Calif.
- Mar. 24, 10 A.M., Gethsemane, Los Angeles, Calif.

Christian Woman Today retreat—Mar. 15–17. Sheraton Milwaukee Brookfield Hotel, Brookfield, Wis. Website, christianwomantoday.org.

Ironmen of God conference—Mar. 23. St. Paul, Ixonia, Wis. Website, ironmenofgodwi.org.

National staff ministers conference—April 25–27. St. Matthew, Niles, Ill. Website, wels.net/events.

WELS Nurses Association spring conference—April 26–27. Eastside, Madison, Wis. welsnurses@wels.net. Website, welsnurses.net.

SERVICE TIMES

Gulf Shores, Ala.—Risen Savior, Navarre, Fla., will hold church services with Holy Communion for Gulf Shores area WELS/ELS snowbirds at 4 P.M., Feb. 3 and 17 at St. Jude By the Sea Lutheran Church, 312 E 16 Ave, Gulf Shores. Bible class will follow. Evan Dobberpuhl, 715-573-0808; tpcevan@gmail.com.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

Teachers—East Fork Lutheran High School on the Apache mission near Whiteriver, Arizona, is looking for retired WELS educators to teach two or three courses to small classes of Apache high school students. It will provide a fully furnished one-bedroom apartment on campus plus utilities and a stipend of \$4,000 for each course taught. eastforkschool@gmail.com; 928-338-4455.

JOBS AVAILABLE

Operations director—for Camp Shiloh, the South Central district Lutheran retreat camp located near Pittsburg, Texas. Full-time, salaried position, with on-site housing provided as part of compensation. Website, campshilohretreat.org. Conal McDanel, 903-855-1800; director @campshilohretreat.org; or Tony Cuellar, 214-244-8010; tonycuellar77@gmail.com.

Administrative manager—for Costa Maya/Cruz de Cristo Ministry in Mahahual, Quintana Roo, Mexico. Key areas of work include managing the humanitarian aid ministry, office administration, and more. Full-time, paid position with housing provided. Spanish language fluency required. Website, costamayaministries.org; Martin Valleskey, pastormvalleskey@gmail.com.

NAMES WANTED

WELS/ELS counselors—WLCFS-Christian Family Solutions is seeking WELS/ELS in-training or licensed mental health professionals to provide services in nationwide outpatient counseling clinics or via secure video. Send names to hrinfo@wlcfs.org or call 888-685-9522.

Find additional community events and resources at welsrc.net. To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.

WELS news briefs

MINISTRY OF CHRISTIAN GIVING

1-800-827-5482; mcg@wels.net

This year's edition of *Your gifts, God's blessings—An annual report to our members* is now available. This year in the synod's annual report, you'll find stories of faith in action; photos of Christian brothers and sisters around the world; and updates on the ministry carried out by WELS Home and World Missions, Ministerial Education, Congregational Services, and other WELS committees and groups.



Order your free copy by contacting Northwestern Publishing House at 1-800-662-6022 or nph.net. Or view the report online at wels.net/annual report.



COMMUNICATION SERVICES,

414-256-3210; csc@wels.net

Save the date for the **sixth annual WELS night at Miller Park**, July 12. Join thousands of WELS members to watch

the Brewers take on the San Francisco Giants. Discount pricing will again be available. Tickets can be purchased online starting this spring at brewers.com/wels. Learn more at wels.net/events.

CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS

About 20 leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), and WELS met in Florida in November to **continue the informal discussions** begun in 2012. Participants updated each other on news from their respective synods. They also spent time discussing the doctrine of creation and its relation to science—a topic about which they found themselves in agreement on the key issues. “These intersynodical discussions, conducted outside of the framework of church fellowship, have been useful in clarifying our synodical positions and in sharing information on topics of mutual interest,” says WELS President Mark Schroeder. Looking ahead, participants debated whether or not it is proper to begin formal doctrinal discussions with a view to restoring fellowship between ELS/WELS and the LCMS. Schroeder reports that it was decided that such a move would be premature at this time. The group plans to meet again in December 2019 to discuss the doctrine of justification and to commit to writing some of the specific points of controversy between the synods.

Booknook

A look at books published by Northwestern Publishing House. For more information, visit nph.net or call 1-800-662-6022.



The back cover of *Look Up From Your Phone So I Can Love You* by Amy Vannieuwenhoven says that the book is “an interactive journal that helps parents communicate with their grade school and high school children about smartphone usage and genuine connection.” My 12-year-old daughter Julia and I worked through the journal, and we found it to be that and so much more.

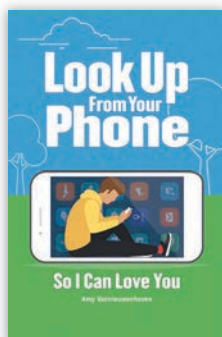
Although Julia doesn't have a smartphone yet, the journal was a great tool for her and me to learn more about each other. More than half of the book has nothing to do with smartphones, and the part that does can be easily translated to other electronic devices (for example, Julia has an iPad). Vannieuwenhoven has a relatable writing style—Julia loved her use of emojis and her sense of humor—and she's found a great format to help parents with a relevant topic.

Most children yearn to spend meaningful time with their parents—whether they're

willing to admit it or not. This book helps parents and children share important details of their life with one another in a safe space—the journal. It helps build a foundation for a solid relationship with one another. It also helps equip children to have the responsibility of using a smartphone.

Finally, Vannieuwenhoven weaves God's Word throughout the journal. She shares Scripture, statistics, and advice, all with a casual tone. I hope that many parents and their children work through this journal together and find it to be the blessing that Julia and I did.

Nicole Balza



PRICE: \$15.99

Vannieuwenhoven also shares her thoughts on how parents can model healthy cell phone use in this month's *Heart to heart* column. See p. 16 for her article.

Encouraging young people for ministry

Do you know a young person whom God has blessed with the talents to be a pastor or teacher? Perhaps it's the eighth-grader who patiently helps the preschoolers in Sunday school and vacation Bible school. Or the high school freshman who bravely stands up for a classmate being bullied.

Brad Gurgel, principal at St. Peter, St. Peter, Minn., decided to make your next step easy. He developed a card to give to young people whom you feel that God might be equipping for full-time ministry. The card (pictured) can be personalized for each situation.

"I strongly feel that if we strive to more regularly give out personal words and letters of encouragement about considering the public ministry to the young people in our lives, many more would be led to consider serving God in this way," says Gurgel. "With this in mind, I attempted to design a card that would make it quick and easy for anyone to let a young person know that they recognize gifts in them that could be used in the public ministry. Taking just a few minutes to fill this out for someone in your life might make all the difference in helping them to decide to move forward in pursuing the goal of becoming a pastor or teacher someday."

Gurgel knows from personal experience how much of an impact it has on young people to be encouraged to use their gifts to serve in the ministry. He notes, "When someone took the time to personally communicate this to me, it caused me to stop and reflect on the gifts and talents that I had and to think seriously about the possibility of the ministry. I know it gave me confidence and reassurance that, yes, I truly did have certain talents and gifts that I could use to serve God as a pastor or teacher. These little reassurances that I received were vital to me eventually choosing to become a Lutheran school teacher."

As WELS continues to experience a shortage of pastors and teachers, this

type of encouragement is an easy way for all members to help with recruitment. "When people present themselves at Martin Luther College to train for the ministry, almost all of them have a story about someone who encouraged them to do just that," says Paul Prange, administrator of

WELS Board for Ministerial Education. "A card or comment like this could make all the difference!"

Give out the card shown here or visit wels.net/forwardinchrist to download the pdf.

Could God Use You to Share the World's Greatest Treasure?

Dear _____,

Many people in this world do not yet have the peace and joy that comes from knowing Jesus as their Savior. With our synod currently facing a shortage of pastors and teachers, more workers are desperately needed in the Lord's harvest field. Pastors and teachers are needed to share the world's greatest treasure!

You are receiving this card because someone has noticed that God has blessed you with certain gifts and talents that could be useful in serving the Lord as a pastor or a teacher. The gifts and talents that you have include:

May you prayerfully consider if God can use you and your gifts to serve Him in the public ministry!

Your Fellow Brother or Sister in Christ,

Being a good Samaritan

Prayers are answered in many different ways. For ten years, a building sat empty on the property of St. Matthew, Appleton, Wis., after the church's school closed. There were numerous prayers and discussions on what this space could be used for. Through God's grace, it now serves as a resource center for the homeless population in the Fox Valley area, providing hope for many and a unique way to spread the gospel.

This endeavor began when Betsy Borns, a member at Immanuel, Greenville, Wis., started her fieldwork as manager of Project RUSH (Research to Understand and Solve Homelessness). Borns conducted research through an experiment where she lived as a homeless individual for three days.



St. Matthew, Appleton, Wis., is serving its community by using its empty school building as a resource center for the homeless.

During this time, she discovered what resources were available to this population and what was missing. She found that there was a large gap in the area for daytime housing.

"I saw that there were a few places that tolerate homeless people, but there wasn't anywhere that actually welcomes them," Borns says. "Learning these things firsthand helped me conceptualize a place where people would be welcomed to relax, get warm, and receive additional help."

While Borns was doing research, Jonathan Kuske, pastor at St. Matthew,

was ardently praying for an opportunity to use his congregation's empty building to serve the community. His prayer was answered when he met Borns.

"You often pray for guidance and don't know what form it'll take," Kuske says. "Creating a resource center wasn't what we were originally expecting to use the building for, but it's been a great way to introduce people to Christ and to show good Samaritan love."

This meeting between Borns and Kuske was the inception of the new Day Resource Center in Appleton, a place for community members to receive support both physically and spiritually.

A lot of work went into the building's opening in September 2018. Borns conducted extensive research on other communities' homeless shelters. Homeless Connections, now a part of the non-profit group Pillars, was brought on board to manage the project.

After serving the homeless for a few months, the resource center is already flourishing. "When I talk to the leaders in the shelters, they discuss all the time how people's spirits have lifted," Borns remarks. "We're giving people a little hope, and it makes us really proud."

The center provides counseling for mental health and addictions, as well as educational resources. But most important, it offers Bible studies and spiritual discussions with Kuske at the church next door. Four individuals have even attended church at St. Matthew.

"There is so much good being done for these people who are destitute," says Kuske. "At times, it can be a long road out of their current situations, but coming here gives them some encouragement that there's a light at the end of the tunnel."

Gabriella Moline

Want to learn more about this project? Borns is part of a panel discussion exploring how our churches can be good neighbors at the upcoming Christian Leadership Experience, March 15–16, in La Crosse, Wis. Learn more at christlead.com.

Serving those who serve

The Care Committee for Called Workers (CCCW), part of the WELS Commission on Special Ministries, exists to help congregations provide spiritual, physical, intellectual, and emotional care to their pastors, teachers, and staff ministers. This can take on many forms, depending on the needs of the workers and congregations, but one constant is that congregations with a CCCW place a high value on aiding and supporting those who serve them.

Kurt Holzhueter, an investment advisor and member at Christ Our Savior, Rockford, Mich., was asked to produce information on retirement planning for the CCCW a few years ago. He's now the chairman of the group. While retirement planning is his specialty and one of the latest efforts from the committee, Holzhueter says that other areas such as help when moving for a new call and acclimating to a new community, confidential spiritual care or counseling, and continuing education are also ways a congregation's care committee can help its called workers.

Lisa Schroeder and her husband, Bob, have been serving on the CCCW at Immanuel, Greenville, Wis., for about ten years. At Immanuel, Lisa explains, the committee is made up of couples, and while it doesn't need to be that way, it works out well as they try to support the called workers and their families. Each committee member has "designated" workers whom they follow up with and help as needed.

"The reason we got involved is because the called workers are so important to us and we want to make sure they have support and know that they're appreciated," says Schroeder. "We try to meet with them periodically, once to twice a year, to get together with them and see how things are going and if there's something we can do to be of service to them. We always mention if they have any concerns they'd like to bring to us anonymously or would like any assistance with, we'd be glad to help with that."



Supporting called workers and their families at Immanuel, Greenville, Wis., is the job of the congregation's Care Committee for Called Workers, including encouraging new teachers like Shawn Riesop (pictured with his family).

And, also we let them know we're praying for them and praying for their ministry."

One aspect that Schroeder coordinates is helping new workers move to Greenville, whether it's organizing a moving company, getting volunteers together to help unload boxes, or getting a meal together for the family on their first night in town.

"Our called workers are giving their lives to share the gospel and they need our support, and it's so good to get to know them on a level you might not otherwise," says Schroeder. "It's just been such a positive experience.

Holzhueter says that many congregations do not have an active CCCW but he would like to see more congregations do something, even if it's not a formal committee, to make sure its workers' needs are being met. "To get more participation from congregations, we're trying to make things simpler, easier to get started, and a little less formal," he says.

The CCCW has many resources available online, including a quick-start guide, to help a congregation get started.



Find Care Committee for Called Worker resources at wels.net/ccw. Also, in this month's edition of *WELS Connection*, learn about how congregations can help and support new pastors through a mentoring program.

Meet the editorial staff

Ever ask yourself, "Who are these people who write for Forward in Christ?" Through this series, you can find out.

This month, *Forward in Christ* welcomes Jeff Enderle to the editorial staff as the newest Bible study contributor.

The gospel is the focus of Enderle's Bible studies. He hopes to demonstrate how the message that Jesus lived, died, and rose again for us should be central to daily life.

"Sometimes we get so caught up in our responsibilities that we treat the good news as an afterthought rather than the main concern," he explains. "It gives us the power, strength, peace, and comfort to meet other challenges. If the gospel is the key part of our lives, it will come out in all the things that we do."

The gospel message was part of Enderle's daily activities from an early age. His father served as a pastor at Christ, Grand Island, Neb. Enderle recalls helping his father with basic Sunday worship preparations such as using a mimeograph machine to print out the weekly bulletins. Occasionally, he or one of his siblings would travel with his father to a mission site for a second Sunday worship service in the afternoon.

Seeing his father serve and developing a love for sharing God's Word, Enderle pursued the ministry himself. He attended Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb.; Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., graduating in 2002.

Enderle currently serves at Christ the Rock, Farmington, N.M. He was called to the congregation "to reach out to the cross-cultural communities of the Four Corners," including the Navajo nation and Hispanic groups.

"We're blessed that our church reflects the whole

of our community," he says. "We have a diverse congregation."

While cross-cultural ministry has its challenges, those challenges can bring about opportunities to share the gospel message.

"We had a funeral for a gentleman who was a member, but he hadn't been coming to church for a while," Enderle recalls. "After his funeral, we were able to reach out to his wife and her family, who are Navajo. She began to come back to church. I would visit her parents on the Navajo reservation in the same way I would conduct a regular shut-in visit."

Soon, a few members of this family began taking Bible information classes.

"It's a tragic, heartbreaking situation," Enderle continues. "But, because of it, we are blessed with an opportunity as they turn to their church, their pastor, and the gospel."

The next nearest WELS church to Christ the Rock is about three hours away. Knowing this, Enderle is thankful for the connection he and the members have to the synod, which will hopefully be enriched even further through his Bible studies in *Forward in Christ*.

"Our people really appreciate the strong bond of faith and prayer we have with WELS," says Enderle.

You can connect with Enderle and the gospel message in his first Bible study (p. 33).



Jeff Enderle with his wife, Angela, and their four children. The Enderle family enjoys exploring the mountainous outdoors of the region where they live, especially the national parks.



MLC GRADUATES

Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., held its midyear graduation on Dec. 13, 2018. One student graduated with a bachelor of science degree. Twelve students graduated with a bachelor of science in education degree, and one student received staff ministry certification.



Hannah M. Arrowsmith
Fort Atkinson, Wis.



Christopher R. Beagle
Winona, Minn.



Cassandra J. Davis
Stacy, Minn.



Rachel E. Hartwig
South Saint Paul, Minn.



Joseph W. Keller
McLean, Va.



Elissa M. Koch
Summerville, S.C.



Hannah H. Koss
Rochester, Minn.



Peter J. Nass
Manitowoc, Wis.



Rudy D. Nelson
Robbinsdale, Minn.



Matthew R. Neumann
Fond du Lac, Wis.



Malaika D. Robinson
Madison, Wis.



Holle N. Rodriguez
Sacramento, Calif.



Bethany A. Walsh
Onalaska, Wis.



Katherine R. Zietlow
Montello, Wis.

ASSIGNMENTS

Arrowsmith, Hannah M., to Salem, Milwaukee, Wis.

Broring, Elizabeth M., to Trinity, Marinette, Wis.

Davis, Cassandra J., to Samuel, Marshall, Minn.

Keller, Joseph W., to Grace, Grand Anse, Grenada

Koss, Hannah H., to Loving Arms Child Care Center, Wichita, Kan.

Obituaries

Robert E. Neumann, 1929–2018

Robert Neumann was born Oct. 31, 1929, in Chicago, Ill. He died Aug. 29, 2018, in Lubbock, Texas.

He served at Calvary, Dallas, Texas; Grace, Casa Grande, Ariz.; Messiah, North Hollywood, Calif.; Good Shepherd, Midland, Texas; Lone Star, Tyler, Texas; Divine Word, Midwest City, Okla.; and Mount Zion, Hillsboro, Texas.

He is survived by one daughter, one son, and four grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his wife, Dorothy.

Paul H. Wilde, 1928–2018

Paul Wilde was born Apr. 10, 1928, in Manitowoc, Wis. He died Sept. 19, 2018, in Menomonee Falls, Wis.

A 1952 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Trinity, Jenera, Ohio; Bethany, Saginaw, Mich.; St. John, Hancock, Minn.; St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wis.; Northwestern Lutheran Academy, Mobridge, S.D.; and Salem, Escanaba, Mich.

He is survived by his wife, Cynthia; one daughter; two sons; and seven grandchildren. He was preceded in death by one sister.

Donald L. Habeck, 1946–2018

Donald Habeck was born Mar. 7, 1946. He died Sept. 24, 2018, in Fond du Lac, Wis.

A 1968 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at St. James, Milwaukee, Wis., and St. Matthew, Benton Harbor, Mich.

He is survived by three sisters.

David A. Fischer, 1939–2018

David Fischer was born Aug. 30, 1939, in Appleton, Wis. He died Sept. 30, 2018.

A 1965 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Grace, Geneva, Neb.; St. John, Lewiston, Minn.; and Jehovah, Altura, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Marcie; 2 sons; 1 daughter; 11 grandchildren; 2 brothers; and 1 sister. He was preceded in death by one brother.

● Staff ministry certification | ● Bachelor of Science in Education | ● Bachelor of Science

District news

ARIZONA-CALIFORNIA

St. John, Vacaville, Calif., began a Jesus Cares Ministry on Travis Air Force Base on Dec. 15, 2018. Up to one thousand individuals on base draw from Special Needs help, so the congregation wants to use this opportunity to reach out to them with the love of Jesus.

MICHIGAN

On Dec. 4, 2018, students from **St. John, Westland; St. Paul, Livonia; Peace, Livonia; and St. Paul, Belleville**, all in Michigan, worked together to pack items for veterans in Detroit. Since the program launched 12 years ago, it has assisted more than 5,800 veterans and active-duty military personnel.

MINNESOTA

In December 2018, students from **St.**

Paul, New Ulm, Minn., assembled 150 Blessing Bags with items for senior citizens who cannot easily leave their homes. Students delivered the bags in person in partnership with the local Meals on Wheels program.

PACIFIC NORTHWEST

The Alaska Police and Fire Chaplains Association named **Fred Voss**, pastor at Shepherd of the Hills, Anchorage, Alaska, its 2018 chaplain of the year.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

On Dec. 1, 2018, more than 60 students from six different WELS grade school band programs came together at Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis., for the second annual **WELS Middle School Honors Band Festival**. Students from the band programs of

Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.; Illinois Lutheran High School, Crete, Ill.; Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis.; Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis.; Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.; and Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School worked with a guest clinician and gave a performance to showcase their accomplishments.

On Dec. 16, 2018, 25 children and adults were baptized at **Mount Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis.**

SOUTH CENTRAL

In October 2018, more than a year after their church sustained severe fire damage, members of **Peace, Rio Rancho, N.M.**, began worshipping in their chapel again.

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

MINNESOTA



The Early Childhood Learning Center of Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., celebrated its fifth anniversary in November 2018 with a special service.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



Members of New Life, Lake Zurich, Ill., invited a group of U.S. naval recruits for a special Thanksgiving dinner and entertainment.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



Four boys and two adult volunteers from Good Shepherd, West Bend, Wis., made a buddy bench for Good Shepherd's playground. A buddy bench is a place for a child to sit if he feels sad or lonely. When another student sees someone sitting on the bench, he sits with him and invites him to play.



MERGING

for mission

**Finding that they could be stronger together,
two congregations decide to merge into one.** Julie K. Wietzke

Steve Waldschmidt describes a recent church merger between Good Shepherd, St. Peter, Mo., and Apostles, Dardenne Prairie, Mo., as a simple math problem: “You have twice the weekly offerings, twice the pastoral staff, twice the volunteer base, and twice the members. Then you cut the debt in half.”

What does it equal? New opportunities for ministry within the congregation and for mission outreach out in the community.

The merged congregation’s new name, Christ Alone, completes the rest of the equation: “The name Christ Alone serves as a reminder to ourselves of why we’re here and why we’re doing this—to serve Christ alone,” says Tim Raster, president of Christ Alone, now a one-year-old congregation.

GRASPING THE SITUATIONS

Good Shepherd and Apostles were both located in St. Charles County. Situated about five miles apart, these congregations worked to reach out in this suburban area about 30 miles from St. Louis across the Missouri River.

Started in the 1980s, Good Shepherd decided to add on to its facility in the early 2000s to open a preschool to serve the community. The school ran for about ten years before the congregation decided to close it in spring 2016.

The school’s closure opened up questions for the 150-member congregation. What would be the ministry focus moving forward? How would members pay the building loan? How should the congregation use its building now that it no longer had a school?

While a task force considered options like leasing out part of the building or even moving into a storefront, the congregation reached out to its neighboring 120-member congregation Apostles to find out its plans for the future. Apostles started as a mission church in 1999 when growth in that area was booming.

Good Shepherd discovered that while their ministry situations were different, Apostles was having similar difficulties: a lot of debt, tired volunteers, and reduced programming due to lack of funds. Getting the congregations’ names out was also difficult in an area so close to the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s headquarters.

“The devil was working on both of our churches,” says Seth Bode, then pastor at Apostles.

ANALYZING THE OPTIONS

Apostles and Good Shepherd were already working together in certain areas, like combining some education classes and preaching at one another's congregations. As the pastors began talking, they wondered if they should collaborate even more.

After attending a WELS multi-site conference in Arizona, Bode and Waldschmidt discussed some options with their congregations. "We could become a multi-site where we had the same name and same branding, or we could combine our efforts where we are still stand-alone congregations but doing more ministry together, or we could do a full merger into one building," says Waldschmidt.

After both congregations agreed that the topic should be explored further, a joint task force made of members from both congregations began studying the situation in earnest.

The group began by mapping out where members from both congregations lived. The maps dramatically overlapped. "We're looking at two physical properties serving the same area," says Raster.

The discussions then revolved around opportunities. "We really were laying it all out on the table and starting with what do we want to do rather than what resources do we have," says Bode. "Then we matched those goals with a vision of what things could look like, always knowing God could determine the steps far better than we could."

This led to looking at the options open to the congregations: two buildings, two pastors; one building, two pastors; two buildings, one pastor. "We talked about every angle," says Raster. "Some of them were uncomfortable topics. As a group we had to be very sensitive. There's logic; there's emotion; there's spiritual; and there's God's Word. Trying to balance that together and make good decisions was challenging."

The group decided that merging into one church with two pastors at the

Dardenne Prairie site was the best direction. Both congregations overwhelmingly agreed, and Christ Alone, the new congregation that emerged, held its dedication Oct. 15, 2017.

MAXIMIZING THE MISSION

Christ Alone celebrated its one-year anniversary in October 2018 and is going strong. The congregation now has 305 members and had five youth confirmations this past year. Waldschmidt reports that members are excited to volunteer and have been meeting a lot of new people from the neighborhood through community events held at the church.

The congregation also sold its other church building and now has more money for ministry. "Before, everything was about cost," says Raster. "Now we need to stop thinking about ways NOT to spend money, and we actually need to think of ways to put our money to good use. This is a new challenge!"

It isn't their only challenge. Waldschmidt now is the only pastor at Christ Alone, after Bode took a call last summer. Members also have to learn to work together to develop the congregation's culture and determine ministry methods. "What we need to focus on is how Christ Alone is going to do this, not how did Good Shepherd do this or how did Apostles do this," says Waldschmidt. "We have to keep it mission-driven rather than me-driven."

Being mission-driven is the lesson that Waldschmidt says he took away from this merger experience. "Mindset really is everything. You can't do this in a way that is survival-driven or you're not going to make it. You have to do it in a way that is mission-driven."

Being mission-driven also means that the work doesn't stop once the merger is complete. "If you're going to maximize the mission and escalate your efforts in the community, it works best if everyone works just as hard as when you started," says Bode. "The danger is that you think because there are more people, you can help out half

STRONGER TOGETHER

Congregational Services is working on a program that will help clusters of congregations that are considering merging into a single site or operating as multi-sites. Jon Hein, coordinator of Congregational Services, says the plan is to help congregations work through all the options and considerations that are part of a merger process similar to the one Christ Alone experienced. "The goal is to have congregations thinking about mergers and multi-sites proactively, not just as a desperate Hail Mary pass," says Hein. "There are legitimate reasons for churches that are doing well to consider merging or going multi-site, simply so they can be even stronger together." Look for more on this program in summer 2019.

as much. But that defeats the purpose of the whole idea."

Working together to carry out the Lord's mission is key when discussing a merger—whether it is expanding as a multi-site or, as in this case, narrowing to a single site. "That's what makes it different than just trying to cobble two congregations together," says Peter Kruschel, who served as a home mission counselor for ten years, including working with Christ Alone through the merger process. "It takes people who are willing to work together to carry out their mission."

He continues, "It was critical that [Apostles and Good Shepherd] joined forces. It could have taken so many forms, but they needed to work together because neither one was strong enough to carry out the mission of the church effectively alone. They can do so much more together."

Julie Wietzke is the managing editor of Forward in Christ.

This is the second article in a three-part series on church closings, mergers, and multi-sites.

HOW MUCH *do you know?*

John A. Braun

How much do you remember about the gospel readings for the Epiphany season? We observe the festival of Epiphany on Jan. 6 every year, and the Gospel reading for the day recounts the coming of the Magi to worship Jesus. The Sundays of Epiphany bring us to Lent and

Ash Wednesday. The readings for the season remind us that Jesus is true God sent by his Father to redeem us. We thought you might appreciate remembering the events of the Epiphany Sundays with this little quiz.

1) The Magi . . .

- a. Consulted their astrology books to learn where Jesus was born.
- b. Came to Bethlehem directly from Babylonia.
- c. Came to Jerusalem to ask where the king of the Jews was born.
- d. Asked Pontius Pilate where to find Jesus.

2) They found Jesus . . .

- a. In a stable in Jerusalem.
- b. In a stable in Bethlehem.
- c. In a house in Bethlehem.
- d. Just where Pilate told them he would be.

3) What gift(s) did the Magi offer to Jesus?

- a. Gold.
- b. Silver and myrrh.
- c. Emeralds.
- d. None of the above.

4) The Magi returned to their own country . . .

- a. By another route in order to avoid Herod.
- b. Because they were disappointed in what they found.
- c. Because they rejected a Jewish king.
- d. By another route in order to shorten the trip back.

5) Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Egypt . . .

- a. To escape the harsh weather in southern Judea.
- b. So he could learn how to be a better carpenter.
- c. To avoid the crowds that wanted to see Jesus.
- d. To escape the wrath of Herod.

6) John the Baptist said:

- a. "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"
- b. "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance."
- c. "Look, the Lamb of God!"
- d. All of the above.

7) The baptism of Jesus occurred . . .

- a. On the shores of the Sea of Galilee.
- b. In the Jordan River.
- c. At the Mediterranean Sea.
- d. On the shore of the Dead Sea in the wilderness.

8) At the baptism of Jesus . . .

- a. There was a rumble from heaven that sounded like thunder.
- b. Tongues of fire appeared on the head of Jesus.
- c. The face of Jesus became dazzlingly white.
- d. A voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

9) John the Baptist . . .

- a. Was crucified by Herod with Pilate's consent.
- b. Led a rebellion against the Romans and died.
- c. Was beheaded by Herod.
- d. None of the above.

10) When Jesus was tempted by Satan, . . .

- a. He had fasted for 40 days and nights.
- b. He overcame each temptation by quoting a Bible verse.
- c. Both.
- d. Neither.

11) The first miracle of Jesus was . . .

- a. At a wedding in Cana of Galilee.
- b. Feeding the five thousand.
- c. Healing the man with the withered hand.
- d. Raising Lazarus.

12) At Cana, Jesus . . .

- a. Warned against the yeast of the Pharisees.
- b. Turned water into wine.
- c. Raised a little girl to life.
- d. Healed a man born blind.

13) Jesus gathered 12 disciples. Among them were . . .

- a. Two sets of brothers.
- b. Two men named Judas.
- c. Simon the Zealot.
- d. All of the above.

14) Who was not a disciple of Jesus?

- a. Caiaphas.
- b. Simon Peter.
- c. Judas Iscariot.
- d. Bartholomew.

15) Jesus promised his disciples that . . .

- a. He would give them wealth and glory.
- b. He would make them fishers of people.
- c. He would give them 12 virgins after they died for him.
- d. He would lead them to fight against his enemies.

16) Jesus lived his early life in Nazareth. When he returned to the synagogue there, . . .

- a. He hosted a party for his family and friends.
- b. The people remembered him, but they did not believe his message.
- c. He was reunited with his childhood friend Zacchaeus.
- d. None of the above.

17) Jesus also went to Capernaum. There . . .

- a. He healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law.
- b. At dusk, he healed all who came to Simon's house.
- c. In the morning he went out to a deserted place to pray.
- d. All of the above.

18) At the Mount of Transfiguration . . .

- a. Peter did not want to leave the mountaintop.
- b. Moses and Abraham joined Jesus and his disciples.
- c. A voice proclaimed, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"
- d. Only a and c.

19) On the Mount of Transfiguration . . .

- a. Moses and Elijah walked up to the mountaintop with Jesus.
- b. Peter was ready to take up his sword for Jesus.
- c. Peter, James, and John were with Jesus.
- d. Jesus told the disciples to tell everyone immediately what they saw.

20) The crowds grew, and Jesus . . .

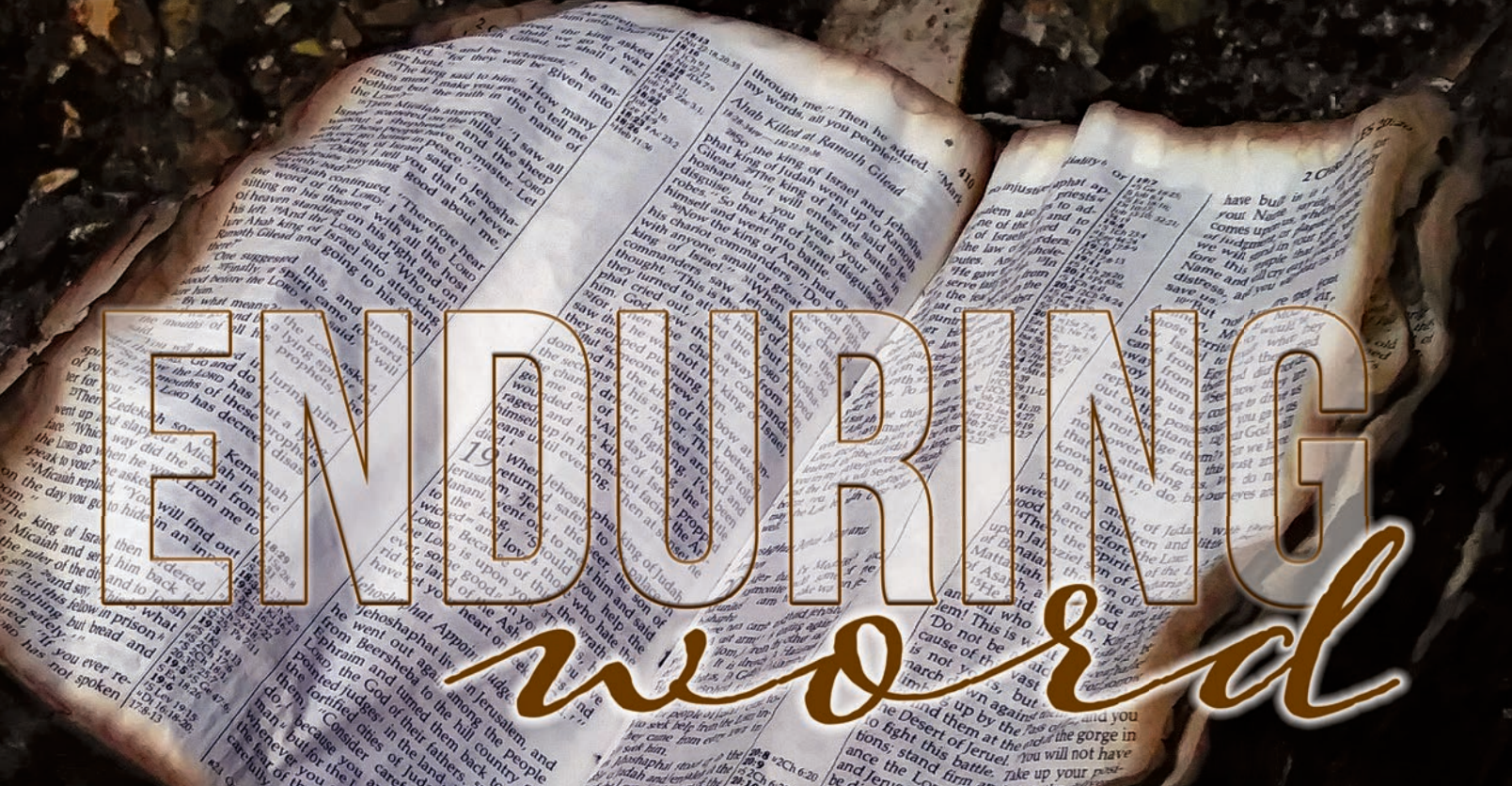
- a. Sent them home to eat.
- b. Fed the crowd with fish and bread.
- c. Walked away from them with his disciples.
- d. Asked Herod to use his treasury to feed the crowd.

How did you do? The answers and Bible references are on p. 6.

John Braun is the executive editor of Forward in Christ.

You have checked out the details of the Epiphany season, but what did you learn? In about 25 words, tell us what lesson you learned from the Epiphany events recorded in the gospels. E-mail us at fic@wels.net. We will print a selection of your responses.





Fire destroyed a pastor's place to study God's Word—his cave—but God's Word still remains. Eric J. Ziecker

Long before the availability of digital materials, seminary professors encouraged students to build up a library of theological books. Public libraries don't often provide enough Lutheran resources.

I listened.

So over the course of 25 years of public ministry I accumulated more than 250 books, not including digital resources. While a few became expensive, oversized paperweights, the majority of them were not decorations. I used many of them daily. I knew the books well and had them loosely classified by topic on my bookshelves. Many were used for reference, but others were beloved devotionals and used much more regularly.

THE CAVE

I put my books in a small triangular

study right off of our church's chancel area. This little room was part "man cave" and part "pastor cave" because it contained mostly bookcases and books. My desk filled most of the remaining space. No matter how small the room, the sight of books covering an entire wall was any bibliophile's dream!

There were some personal touches. The room included a Mexican hand-carved wooden head of Christ, a paper dragon that my daughter made for Chinese New Year, a pectoral cross from Ethiopia, and a resin facsimile of the 12th-century ivory carving of the 12 apostles.

Many pastors would agree that their personal study is a special place. Through reflection and the study of God's Word, the Lord fortifies us personally and equips us to feed and guide those under our spiritual care.

A pastor's anxieties may be voiced in that study. Prayers for the world, our nation, our church body and congregation, and our foreign missionaries often arise from there.

In my cozy little pastor cave, I prepared most of my preaching and teaching materials. Although there was nothing holy about the room itself, it was like hallowed ground to me because I studied the Lord's Word there more than in any other place. The Bible is enough to make us wise for salvation in Christ Jesus, and yet lexicons, hymnals, commentaries, and devotionals helped me to mine the Scriptures and apply them for Christ's flock. My pastor cave contained a theological treasure trove of timeless, divine wisdom. All of it lay at an arm's length and was accessible to me any day of the week at any time of day or night.

I don't think that pastors are the only people who have a special place to study God's Word. I think many have a special place—perhaps a cave—where they regularly read and meditate on the Word of God and other Christian materials.

RUBBLE & ASH

It took only minutes to watch the room—my pastor cave—and all of its contents reduced to ash.

The phone rang shortly after 5:00 A.M. on a Monday morning. Groggily, I wondered if I heard the dispatcher correctly when she said, “You have a structure fire at your church.” I rushed to the church.

As I watched, my silent prayers for the firefighters walking on our roof and those dangling off of ladders rose alongside the thick smoke. The smoke eventually cleared. The rising sun made it easier to see only empty space through the open side door of the church. My pastor cave was gone. Now only burnt, water-soaked rubble remained. I was nauseated and depressed.

Good reason to keep all your books in the cloud, you might think. Yes, but at times I still enjoy a book to hold and contemplate, especially during my personal, quiet devotion time. Long before I crank up the computer for the day and start web surfing, tweeting, answering e-mails, taking phone calls, and scheduling meetings and appointments, I've come to enjoy the routine of having a physical book open on my desk and a cup of coffee at my elbow.

But the fire changed that.

SATAN'S FIREBOMB

The likelihood of you suffering similar consequences due to an arson fire may be statistically slim. But we are all in Satan's crosshairs. He would like nothing better than to sever your connection to Christ. He will seek to hit you wherever and whenever you commune with God.

If he cannot destroy the physical place where you read and study God's Word, he'll seek to firebomb your resolve to commune regularly with your Savior. He'll disturb the peace of those sacred times spent listening to your Shepherd's voice. Satan knows that if we are not hearing our Shepherd, we cannot follow him.

Along with all people, we have an urgent need for peace with God. We have disturbed our peace with him—perhaps by placing material things above the spiritual or by enjoying the created more than the Creator or by loving and trusting the gifts more than the Giver. We must admit to frittering away many opportunities that we have had to become better servants of Jesus through greater personal study and prayer. Bemoan, lament, and bewail your sinfulness. A broken and contrite heart he will not despise.

In place of those
destructive flames,
the Spirit will kindle
in you again his
own purifying and
unquenchable fire.

But Jesus' invitation still stands. “Whoever comes to me I will never drive away” (John 6:37). Rejoice again in the peace restored between you and God, the full forgiveness achieved by Christ's innocent, righteous life, and his willing sacrifice for your sins. Only at the cross is God's full justice for your sins satisfied and his eternal grace poured out for all. At the cross your self-centeredness becomes Christ's; his self-sacrifice becomes yours. Your untamed tongue becomes his; his peace-bestowing tongue becomes yours. Your rebellion becomes his; his obedience becomes yours. Your

mind, set on earthly things, becomes his; his mind, set on heavenly things, becomes yours. We confessional Lutheran Christians rejoice that he delivers these benefits to us personally through his Word and the sacraments.

UNQUENCHABLE FIRE

The Messiah's person and work were explicitly foretold and detailed in prophecy. Once achieved in time, he declared from the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:30). Jesus' redeeming work and his resurrection are now complete and firmly rooted in history. Although Satan can never undo Jesus' work or reverse his victory in our behalf, he seeks to silence our gospel proclamation so that no one hears it. He desires to incinerate our personal faith and make charcoal of our communion with God. He wants us to take God's treasures and blessings for granted and let them slip through our fingers like ash.

In place of those destructive flames, the Spirit will kindle in you again his own purifying and unquenchable fire. Within your own cave—with the resource of God's Word open in front of you—the Spirit reignites gratitude in you like a spark on dry tinder. May he fan that spark into an ever-increasing, unquenchable inferno. Not even the loss of place, not even the loss of earthly life, not even the loss of all that is created, can destroy God's love for you in Christ.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

Eric Ziecker is pastor at Peace, Rio Rancho, New Mexico.

Note: Peace, Rio Rancho, N.M., observed a rededication and open house of its rebuilt church in December 2018, 16 months after the fire had been set. Damages totaled more than \$700,000.

Sin has
corrupted
us all, so
God's clear
and beautiful
design seems
unclear.

An easy question?

Earle D. Treptow

The same question may be easy or complex, depending on the person you ask. For example: What are the factors of $2xy - 10x^2y + 4x^2y^2$? A sixth-grade student would consider that complex. Even some who have completed college may find it difficult. For the mathematician, however, the question is easy. In the end, you'd hope, if you found the question complex, that those who considered it simple wouldn't look down on you because you couldn't answer correctly and quickly.

Here's another question that one person may find easy, another complex: What is your gender? You may think of that as the easiest question. Some, on the other hand, consider the two possibilities most often presented as inadequate. Neither "male" nor "female" accurately capture the way they view themselves, so they look for some other word to communicate their gender.

When it comes to math, we expect that those in the know will be patient with those who have not been taught or who struggle to grasp the concept. Above all, we expect that they will not regard with contempt those who can't give the proper answer. Do those same expectations apply when it comes to questions of gender identity? Do we expect it of ourselves as we interact with those who struggle with an issue that is so clear to us?

Christians know the answer because God has taught us in his Word. In the opening pages of Scripture, he says, "God created mankind in his own image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). The Lord formed human beings as male and female. That was his perfect design in his perfect world. Adam and Eve accepted God's design as a gift of God's goodness.

When our first parents decided that God had unfairly forbidden them to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, things changed for the worse. Adam and Eve experienced serious confusion.

They were so confused that they tried the impossible—to hide from the Lord in the garden. Their confusion led them to doubt God's mercy, so they deemed it necessary to blame God and others for their sin. The Lord, by his promise of a Savior, cleared up their confusion about his mercy, but their sinfulness meant that confusion would regularly persist. Unfortunately, Adam and Eve passed along their sin to their descendants and, in so doing, passed along their confusion too.

We ought not be surprised, then, that people are confused about gender identity. Sin has corrupted us all, so God's clear and beautiful design seems unclear. Don't we know that from painful personal experience? Must I not say about each sin I commit that it's a rebellion against God's design? Every sin arises from the confused idea that God's design doesn't fit our current circumstance or our view of how things ought to operate.

God graciously calls us to repentance day after day and then patiently teaches us the truth yet again. He invites us to deal in the same way with others who do not grasp his clear design. With the strength the Lord provides, we don't dismiss people who are confused about gender issues as hopelessly in rebellion against God. Instead, we serve them, as one wretched sinner to another. In humility, we proclaim God's love for them in Christ.

We teach God's design. And then we pray that the Holy Spirit would enlighten confused hearts and minds, just as he has done with all us undeserving sinners.

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



A GOSPEL-FILLED LIFE

A simple way to pray

Jeffrey D. Enderle

Learning to swim can be traumatic enough. But in the captivating memoir *The Glass Castle*, Jeanette Walls tells of her father's no-nonsense way of getting her to swim. He simply tossed her in the pool. If the desire to live was strong enough, he thought she would figure out a way to keep her head above water and eventually learn to swim.

DEVOTIONAL ENCOURAGEMENT

God's people sometimes feel similar sensations after repeated encouragements to read the Bible and do devotions. At times we just want to tiptoe around the edge of the pool. We stare apprehensively into the water and stay perched safely on the outside.

Thankfully, God promises to work through his Word: "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10,11).

We also have practical encouragement to jump into our devotions on God's Word. Five hundred years ago, Peter the Barber was an average Christian who took seriously the encouragement

to make devotional practices an essential part of his daily routines. A personal friend to Martin Luther, he was frustrated by attempts to engage in this unfamiliar task, and so he appealed to Luther for guidance. Luther wrote the little booklet *A Simple Way to Pray* to help his friend.

DEVOTIONAL INSTRUCTIONS

Unsurprisingly, Luther encouraged devotional habits that make prayer a priority. He instructed his friend to make devotions his first activity every day. He also suggested that finding a private, quiet place would be beneficial.

But what should one do during that study? Start with something simple and familiar, such as the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, any part of the catechism, or even any part of Scripture, as a basis for your devotions.

Luther's suggestions came from his own personal experiences. He suggested that you fashion "a garland of four strands" based on your topic for the day. Those four strands mean you think of the Scripture passage or portion of the catechism in four ways:

1. Consider what your reading teaches you.
2. Discover what in your reading makes you thankful.
3. Think about what leads you to repent and to seek God's forgiveness.
4. Respond to the Lord with a prayer on what you have learned.

This is the time of year when children feel cooped up. Parents look for appropriate ways to allow their children to burn off energy. Swimming lessons provide a great opportunity to play and learn at the same time. Toddlers can jump into the shallow end with certified swim instructors within arm's reach. More advanced swimmers can work to improve their skills.

Devotions don't have to be complicated or intimidating. Jump in. Start with Scripture. It can be something simple and familiar. Using Luther's four strands can help you get going:

1. See what God is teaching you in Scripture.
2. Respond to God in thanksgiving.
3. Confess your shortcomings.
4. Offer requests to God based on Scripture.

Whether we tiptoe into the shallow end or dive into the deep end, God promises to work powerfully in the lives of his children through his Word.

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This is the first article in a ten-part series on ways to enrich your personal devotional life. Read about our newest contributing editor on p. 23.

Want to read Martin Luther's booklet, *A Simple Way to Pray*? It's available at Northwestern Publishing House, nph.net; 1-800-662-6022.



Where is God
when hushed
conversations reveal
pain and misery?
He's there as a
quiet listener,
just as he promised.
He's there also as
a powerful ally.

Where is God?

We were at a restaurant for breakfast with family after church. As we talked and waited for our food, I noticed two women in a booth nearby. I couldn't hear what they were saying, but their conversation appeared intense. From their gestures, low voices, and facial expressions, I concluded that they were discussing some problem, family conflict, or heartache.

Of course, I may have misread the entire situation, and they might have been sharing some secret, but joyful, personal news. They were too far away, and I was too busy with family to be sure.

But I thought of them afterward. It's not unusual to sense the personal problems and personal joys of others. They surround us. They are behind the awkward smiles of the strangers we meet or in the conversations that are just out of earshot.

Remembering the two women, I thought more of the woes we all carry than the joys. Perhaps that's because I sense we all carry woes behind the everyday facade. But I also wondered if these women had been in church that morning to hear of God's love. Then I wondered how that love could make a difference if their conversation was about personal unhappiness, loneliness, or pain.

People are quick to complain about God when they carry heavy burdens. He's powerless to help, they conclude. And he doesn't seem to care because they hurt so much. "Where is God when you need him?" is a question asked so often that it's no surprise to hear it even from Christians.

So, where is God when hushed conversations reveal pain and misery? He's there as a quiet listener, just as he promised. He's there also as a powerful ally to give strength, comfort, healing, and solutions that will serve for our good.

But to some that seems to be only so much wishful thinking. We often cannot make the problems disappear, and God doesn't always make the problems disappear either. Whether we are Christian or not, we all have private conversations about the troubles we bear. That's what life here is. The days of our lives—no matter how short or long—are trouble and sorrow and then we fly away (cf. Psalm 90:10).

Well, if that's your answer, they say, then what good is God? I have an answer. God saw and still sees all the pain and misery of all people here. He knows the evil, the heartache, the loneliness, and the tears. He's known it long before any conversation in a restaurant booth. He did not want things to be that way, and he took steps to change it all.

He planned our rescue. He sent his Son to earth to change our future. The people Jesus knew while he was here faced problems, woes, and pain just as we do—but without smartphones and television. He healed some and had compassion on all. He showed himself to be God, come to earth to do what none of us could do. He gives eternal life—but not an eternal life filled with the same kind of troubles we face every day. Instead, we have the hope of a life free of all that.

That has practical everyday benefits. Because of Jesus we have peace with God—a peace that transforms us and gives us hope. The pledge that God cares for us is assured by the blood he shed to change our futures. If he so loved us, whatever woes we experience are not devastating dead ends. His love gives us the strength and hope to rise from our hushed and painful conversations to endure and grow (Romans 5:1-5).

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

COMFORT IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT: REVELATION 4 AND 5

Timothy J. Westendorf

Jesus' letters to the seven churches remind us of an important truth: The Christian church in this world is always the church militant. Believers are always under attack from "the powers of this dark world and . . . the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). The true church stands secure only as it builds on Christ, his Word, and his forgiving grace. All believers find strength "in the Lord and in his mighty power," clothing themselves with the "full armor of God" (Ephesians 6: 10,11).

As Christians fight this good fight of faith, they are comforted and strengthened by the reminder that the Lord God Almighty is on the throne, very much in control of the events of this world. From time to time throughout Revelation, John sees glimpses of this glorious truth. Chapters 4 and 5 record one such instance and serve as the introduction to the second vision seen by John.

THE THRONE IN HEAVEN

John was an exile on the island of Patmos. Did he wonder? Was his isolation and loneliness representative of the reality for those who placed their hope in Jesus? Was God really in charge? Or was it just some cruel hoax?

What an experience it must have been for John as he was allowed to see the throne room of God! Brilliant and ma-

jestic. Thunder claps and lightning flashes. The Spirit's presence and serene peace. Four rather strange-looking, high-ranking angels that remind us of the Lord's promise to watch over and care for his people. Twenty-four elders, righteous in Christ and ruling with Christ, calling to mind twelve tribes and twelve apostles as representatives of all believers in Jesus. A continuous chorus of praise, reminiscent of the seraphim's song of Isaiah's day (Isaiah 6:3). A glory-giving response offered by the crown-casting elders. Wow!

THE SCROLL AND THE LAMB

But then a temporary "problem." God's right hand held an important but sealed scroll. It contained information about the future. Yet it was sealed up, and nobody was found worthy or able to open it. John was moved to tears, weeping, until the appearance of the mysterious and paradoxical center of the story.

He is the true and triumphant Lion King of the tribe of Judah from the line of David. But his worthiness to open the seals comes from something different than his ancestry. He is the self-sacrificing Lamb who was slain. With his precious blood he paid the redemption price for a world of lost souls. By his grace he grants the status of royal priests or priestly kings to those who place their trust in his worthy works and words.

"He is worthy!" say the four creatures and twenty-four elders. "He is worthy!" say the thunderous voices of the countless angel army. "He is worthy!" say all other creatures in heaven and earth, including, by God's grace, you and me.

REFLECT ON REVELATION CHAPTERS 4 AND 5

1. Can you think of hymns or parts of worship that are drawn from these chapters (for example, *Christian Worship* 195 or *Christian Worship* p. 34)?
2. How might reflection on the scene of God's throne room enrich your personal worship as you sing and say these words?
3. What comfort do you draw from remembering that Jesus is worthy to open the seals of the scroll (see and reveal the future) because of his sacrifice for sin as the Lamb of God?

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



WELL PLEASED

Through the sacrifice of God's Son, we are now God's children,
with whom he is well pleased. Luke C. Werre

The Transfiguration of our Lord is an event filled with mysteries. To me, one of the greatest mysteries is the heavenly Father's declaration: "This is my Son whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 17:5).

GOD'S PLEASURE IN HIS SON

Well pleased? Pleased that his Son would be descending the mountain in order to go to Jerusalem, to a people who would reject him? Pleased that he would be headed to the cross and suffering? Pleased that his perfectly obedient Son would sacrifice himself for ignorant and unappreciative recipients of his largesse?

I have two sons who are precious to me. Jesus and his Father have had a relationship of perfect love from eternity. There has been nothing but perfect unity of purpose, mind, and will between them. As much as I love my sons, it cannot compare with the heavenly Father's infinite love for his Son. No matter how much pride, satisfaction, and joy I have in my sons, my heavenly Father's infinite joy and satisfaction in his Son is infinitely deeper. The Father, the Almighty, is well pleased with everything his Son did.

By total contrast, I am the son with whom God should not be well pleased. Often enough he gives me a peek into

caverns of my heart where total depravity still lurks deeply like so many years of layered bat dung. A little suffering or a little adversity quickly reveals the muck of pride, impatience, hatred, hostility, resentment, faithlessness, despair, and self-absorbed concern. I don't like myself very much for such things. I'm thankful that God doesn't allow me to dwell on the totality of my sinfulness. I'm sure I could not bear it. I feel like it would destroy me. But I can perceive just enough of it to assess myself as the hymn writer did: a worm. "Alas! and did my Savior bleed, and did my Sov'reign die? Would he devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?" (*The Lutheran Hymnal* 154:1).

GOD'S PLEASURE IN WHAT HIS SON DID

The wonder of it, the grand mystery of it, is that the heavenly Father was not merely announcing his pleasure with who Jesus is, but also with what Jesus came to do—that he would devote that sacred head for such a worm as I. The apostle Paul framed this truth in another way: "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

The Father was well pleased with his Son because the Son would do his Fa-

ther's will. Jesus descended the Mount of Transfiguration, marched on to Jerusalem, and sacrificed himself on the cross for sinners like you and me! And God the Father was pleased!

Do you see that, because the Son obeyed, your heavenly Father has no ill will toward you? You and I would be appalled to see our sons suffer to make someone else's circumstance better. But your heavenly Father does not hold back his Son. There is no hesitation on his part to make the greatest possible sacrifice for you as he sends his Son to agony and death in order to atone for your sinfulness. No longer are we regarded as worms because he "redeems [our lives] from the pit and crowns [us] with love and compassion" (Psalm 103:4).

No longer a worm. A child of God with whom God is well pleased—that's the new status for each of us as we trust in Jesus. By his death our sins have been forgiven. God finds no fault with us. He is pleased not to find fault with us!

Is this not a mystery? Is this not grace?

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