

Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



Building bridges

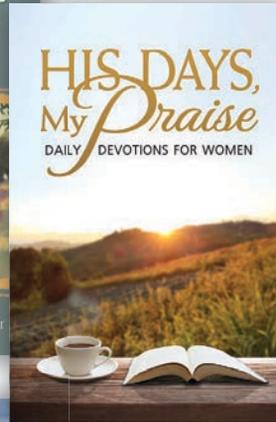
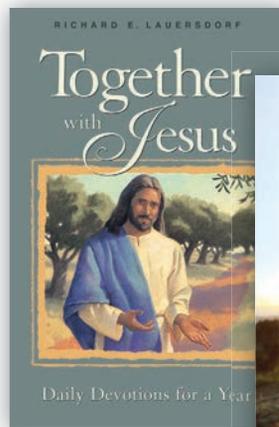
Getting to know a person's story can help you connect that person to Jesus. *Page 10*

GET CLOSER TO YOUR LORD

Every new year, every new day, every new chapter, and every new page are opportunities for your faith in your Lord to grow. This year, spend quality time with him in his Word with these 365-day devotionals from Northwestern Publishing House.

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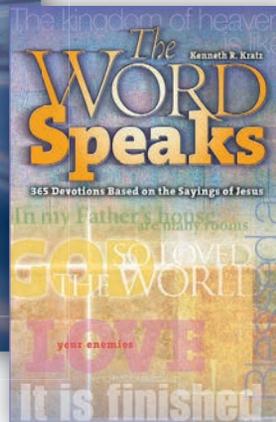
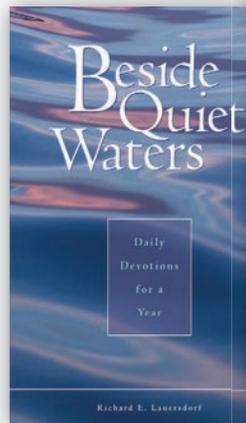


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FEATURES

- 10** | **Ambassadors:
Help them see Jesus**
When we share our faith,
every situation—and every
person—is different.
Jeremiah J. Gumm
- 12** | **Evangelism lessons
from our Savior**
A time and place for sad reflection
James F. Borgwardt
- 14** | **Confessions of faith**
A music camp helps a family
find its church home.
Alicia A. Neumann
- 16** | **Heart to heart:
Parent conversations**
How can we protect kids
without scaring them?
- 26** | **Merging for mission**
Two congregations' stories share
the blessings and challenges of
mergers and multi-site ministries.
Julie K. Wietzke
- 30** | **The gift of life**
Giving a kidney was a natural
way to show Christian love.
Linda R. Buxa
- 36** | **Archaeology
and the couch**
An old couch teaches
an important lesson.
Michael A. Thom

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

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

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

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

MANAGING EDITOR

Julie K. Wietzke
julie.wietzke@wels.net

STAFF WRITERS

Nicole R. Balza
Dayton Hamann

SEMINARY CONSULTANT

Prof. Samuel Degner

DESIGNER

Carianne Ciriacks

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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

One of my favorite parts of my job is getting to know peoples' stories. I love talking to people about their faith and how they live that faith in their lives. It's inspirational to me.

This issue I had the privilege of interviewing pastors and members of churches in Arizona and Wisconsin about congregations merging with a mission—to continue to serve communities with the saving gospel message. Check out the article on p. 26. It's longer than usual, and I could have written more! I thank everyone I talked to for being open and honest about their congregations' stories—the difficulties and the challenges, the blessings and the opportunities.

Getting to know someone's story can be the key to how you respond to objections or questions about God. In our "Ambassadors: Help them see Jesus" series, Pastor Jeremiah Gumm discusses the importance of building relationships so that you best know how to share the saving gospel message with each person you encounter (p. 10).

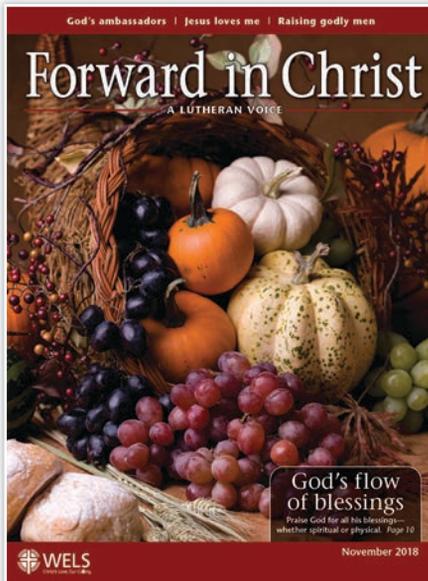
What's your story? We want to hear from you, our readers. What's your journey of faith? How had God helped you through a situation in your life? How have you shared the gospel with others? Let us know. E-mail fic@wels.net or submit your story online at wels.net/submit-your-story.

Julie Wietzke



IN EVERY ISSUE

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|---|
| 6 | Feedback
Readers share their opinions | 20 | News
What's happening in WELS |
| 7 | Devotion
Epiphanies change everything | 32 | Editorial comment
Drowning in a sea of bad news |
| 8 | From the president's desk
A very safe prediction for 2019 | 33 | Bible study
Majoring on the minors: Malachi |
| 9 | Light for our path
Upside-down cross | 34 | A thought
Turning pages |
| 18 | Campus cornerstone
A fresh start | 35 | Interactive Bible study
The book of Revelation:
Comfort in the midst of conflict |
| 19 | Bulletin board
Announcements from around the synod | | |



DON'T KEEP THIS MAGAZINE

When I do door-to-door evangelism for people who moved to the area around church, I take a bulletin, a business card, a magnet, and a *Forward in Christ*. I give the magazine to everyone whom I speak with.

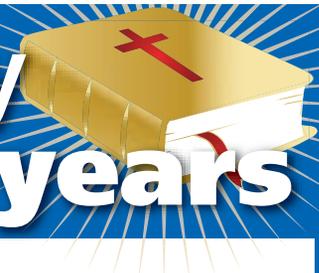
Additionally, to your suggestions of where to leave a magazine:

- Leave FIC on subways because many people are bored and have nothing to occupy themselves.
- Leave FIC at airports where people are waiting for a plane to board.
- Leave FIC on buses for passengers who have nothing to read.
- Leave FIC at a library where it may be read.
- Can even leave FIC in the magazine rack at a grocery store checkout line. Someone may be surprised that he does not have to pay for it.
- Have also left mine in a barber shop, and the employee thanked me for it.

Steven Green

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

Through my Bible in 3 years

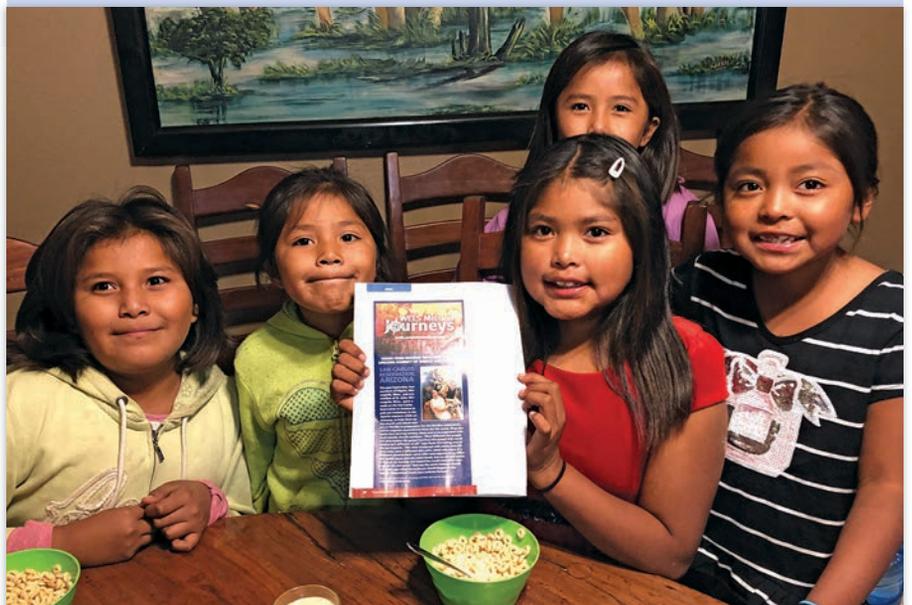


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JANUARY 2019

- | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. 1 John 1:1–2:2 | 12. Isa. 44:24–45:25 | 23. Isa. 59 |
| 2. 1 Jn. 2:3-27 | 13. Isa. 46 & 47 | 24. Isa. 60 |
| 3. 1 Jn. 2:28–3:10 | 14. Isa. 48 | 25. Isa. 61:1–63:6 |
| 4. 1 Jn. 3:11–4:6 | 15. Isa. 49:1–50:3 | 26. Isa. 63:7–64:12 |
| 5. 1 Jn. 4:7–5:3 | 16. Isa. 50:4–51:16 | 27. Isa. 65 |
| 6. 1 Jn. 5:4-21 | 17. Isa. 51:17–52:12 | 28. Isa. 66 |
| 7. 2 John & 3 John | 18. Isa. 52:13–53:12 | 29. Matthew 1 |
| 8. Isaiah 40 | 19. Isa. 54 | 30. Mt. 2 |
| 9. Isa. 41 | 20. Isa. 55 | 31. Mt. 3 |
| 10. Isa. 42:1–43:13 | 21. Isa. 56 & 57 | |
| 11. Isa. 43:14–44:23 | 22. Isa. 58 | |

CREATING CONNECTIONS



Neighborhood girls on the Apache reservation in Blyas, Ariz., were excited to open the November issue of *Forward in Christ* on a Sunday morning before church and see some familiar faces—those of the Mission Journeys team that had come to the reservation earlier that year. “The oldest girl (4th grade, Daisy) was elected to read to the others. They called friends, and more are coming over to read the magazine and attend church today!” writes Debbie Dietrich, Native American missions communication coordinator. Dietrich says Daisy went on to read the article “Jesus loves me” from the November issue as well. “They all sang ‘Jesus Loves Me’ and ‘I am Jesus’ Little Lamb’—and said, ‘This is a cool magazine. Can we show our parents?’ Of course, we sent a copy home with each family!”

Epiphanies change everything

Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. Acts 9:18-20.

Peter M. Prange

One of the most famous epiphanies in world history took place when a Greek mathematician named Archimedes jumped into his bathtub and noticed that the water level rose the further he submerged himself. This discovery allowed him to measure the volume of an irregular shape and unravel a conundrum he was asked to solve for his king. As the story goes, the naked Archimedes jumped out of his bathtub and ran through the streets of Syracuse, shouting "Eureka!" (Greek for "I found it!"). He had a grand epiphany. He wanted to share the good news.

It was as if a lightbulb had suddenly gone on. Archimedes had taken baths before, so the truth he now discovered had always been there. It had simply eluded him. Finally, he saw it. Eureka! What a change!

CELEBRATING PAUL'S EPIPHANY

The same can be said of the apostle Paul. It wasn't as if Jesus became the Son of God and the Savior of the world the day Paul first realized it. That had always been true of Jesus, even when Paul failed to see it and stubbornly worked to snuff out the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus was Paul's Savior, whether he believed it or not.

Paul openly acknowledged his former life in darkness under Judaism, how he "was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man" (1 Timothy 1:13) and how he had put many Christians in jail and voted for their execution (Acts 26:10). But then on the road to Damascus, something changed. Paul saw the light of Jesus, literally! He had an epiphany. He came to understand how backward his perspective had been, and it changed everything.



For many centuries Christians have celebrated Paul's grand epiphany and conversion on Jan. 25, during the season of Epiphany. His conversion and apostolic ministry are emblematic of the great mystery of God's saving will, how he shines light on utter darkness.

Jesus' love and forgiveness extend to every sinner, whether they know it or not, whether they believe it or not.

SHARING GOD'S TRUTH

One would think that Saul would be the last person on earth Jesus would be interested in saving. If anyone deserved to suffer forever for his resistance to the saving gospel, it was Paul. Who could possibly be a more unlikely candidate for conversion than someone who was openly attacking Christians, even seeking their extermination?

But Jesus does the unexpected, and Paul marveled at the irony. The apostle also understood the Savior's purpose. "I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:16). Paul's conversion proves many things, but it demonstrates one thing above all: Jesus' love and forgiveness extend to every sinner, whether they know it or not, whether they believe it or not. No situation is too hopeless. Epiphanies happen.

When Paul discovered the truth, he couldn't help but share it. His epiphany changed everything. We have the same privilege today. Our faith in Jesus as the world's Savior is not just an opinion or one saving truth among many. It's a singular, objective truth, whether people believe it or not.

It's our task to proclaim that truth. It's Jesus' job to turn on the light and provide the epiphanies.

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



Mark Schwede

Whether we
experience days
of happiness or
days of sorrow, . . .
we know that in
all these things
our gracious God
will be working
to bless us.

A very safe prediction for 2019

My wife and children absolutely hate it when I make predictions. That's because my predictions more often than not are wrong.

They cringe when I predict a win for our favorite football or baseball team, because that prediction usually guarantees a loss. They moan when I predict good weather for a family event and immediately start preparing to hold the festivities indoors. When they ask who I think will win an election, they don't have to wait for the results to learn the winner; they just assume the person I predicted to win will be on the losing end of the vote count.

We are at the beginning of another new year. It's not only a time for resolutions; it's also a time for predictions. So I will make a prediction for 2019. But this prediction will be different from others that I make, so often based only on wishful thinking or an irrational denial of reality. This prediction will be different because it is guaranteed to be correct.

Here is my prediction: For each one of us, the coming year will bring days of happiness and days of sorrow. There will be the celebration of happy family events like graduations, weddings, births, and anniversaries. But there will also be days of sadness and mourning, when families gather to say good-bye to loved ones, when parents agonize over their children's unwise choices, when the doctor's diagnosis jolts us with the worst possible news.

There will be times of success and achievement at work, with rewards of promotion and pay raises. But there will be times of frustration and disappointment when our efforts fall short, our boss reprimands us, or the layoff notice appears in our final pay envelope.

In our congregations and in our synod, there will be times when it seems like

the Lord is blessing our efforts with great and visible success and growth. But there will also be times when we feel like the Christians in the days of the apostles, undergoing hardship and persecution, under attack from false teachers, wondering if Satan is in fact succeeding in his efforts to destroy God's church.

I can predict with absolute certainty that 2019 will bring both joy and sorrow, not because I have any special insight to the future, but because God himself and our own experiences tell us that is exactly what life is like for God's people living in a fallen world.

And there is one more prediction that can safely be made about the coming year.

Whether we experience days of happiness or days of sorrow, whether our plans are crowned with success or end in frustration and failure, whether we leap for joy or stumble under the burden of our crosses, we know that in all these things our gracious God will be working to bless us, to strengthen our faith, and to accomplish his saving purpose in our lives. We will learn to see God's hand of blessing both in the outwardly happy events in our lives as well as in the difficulties and sorrows he allows. We will be filled with hope and confidence, not because we believe things will always go well but because we know that in days both happy and sad the God who sacrificed his Son to make us his own will never leave us, never forsake us, and never stop working to turn all things to our eternal good.

Light for our path

I see a lot of upside-down crosses these days in tattoos, posts on social media, and drawings on kids' notebooks. I know its origin is biblical, but it doesn't seem like people are using it that way. Is the symbol now anti-Christian?

James F. Pope

The meaning people inject into symbols and images can vary, and that is certainly the case with what you are seeing.

CHRISTIAN CROSS

Centuries ago, Christians developed symbols to depict the lives and ministries of Jesus' apostles. One of the symbols associated with the apostle Peter is an upside-down cross.

After the risen Lord instructed Peter to feed his lambs and sheep, Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go" (John 21:18). While Jesus spoke of the future need for Peter to receive assistance in life, some people understood Jesus' words about Peter stretching out his hands to mean that someday his hands would be stretched out on a cross.

Then, some traditions speak of Peter's desire to be crucified in a manner that differed from Jesus' crucifixion—presumably because he did not consider himself worthy to die as Jesus did.

For unsubstantiated reasons like these, an upside-down cross became a symbol for Peter.

SATANIC SYMBOL

Not surprisingly, Satan hates the cross and anything connected to Jesus Christ and his redeeming work. The fact that Satan's followers blaspheme the cross of Christ by inverting it should not catch Christians by surprise either. The apostle Paul offers this reminder: "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (1 Corinthians 1:18). To Satan's followers, it is not just the message of the cross that is foolishness, but it is also the Christian symbol of the cross that is

foolishness. The devil's disciples have expressed that attitude of foolishness by turning the cross upside down.

The Church of Satan explains on its website that its members are free to use the upside-down cross as an indication of their rejection of Jesus Christ. They make it clear, however, that the inverted cross is not their official symbol.

TRENDY TIMES

Finally, there is a third group of people who might use an upside-down cross in everyday life. Those are people who do not put any significance into using that symbol—it's just a trendy thing. College students I talked to confirmed this prevalent attitude today.

Whether it is the clothing they wear, the tattoos they sport, or the genre of music to which they listen, young people might get caught up in the latest trends without intending to make any kind of statement. Those same students also reminded me that Christians might have a tattoo of a cross on their arms that is right side up to them but upside down to others.

So, where does all this leave us? It means that when you see someone with an upside-down cross, you may not know what the intended message is until, and unless, you ask that person.

When it comes to Christians, there is no mistaking our use of the cross: "Lift high the cross; the love of Christ proclaim till all the world adore his sacred name" (*Christian Worship* 579; © 1974 Hope Publishing Co.).

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.

Psalms 119:105



AMBASSADORS

HELP THEM SEE JESUS



When we share our faith, every situation—and every person—is different.

Jeremiah J. Gumm

“If your God is so almighty, why is there poverty in Africa?”

I was a new pastor fresh out of the seminary. I had just walked into George’s living room for an every-member visit. George’s wife was a longtime member of our congregation, but George? At the time, he had little use for God or the church. When I walked into his living room, George was sitting on the couch watching television. A commercial for a charity helping children in Africa appeared on the screen. George turned to me and fired off his challenge before I could even introduce myself as the new pastor.

So how did I respond? I would love to tell you that I responded in a way that reached George in that moment in his life. But looking back, I’m not sure how I answered. I know that I made some quick, fumbling attempt to address his question rather than taking the time to get to know George better and to understand his story.

Why was George so quick to question God’s ability to provide for his world?

Why did George seem so angry, so bitter, so hardened toward God and his Word?

NO SILVER BULLET

Trying to answer George’s challenge with a silver-bullet answer from the Bible—and a poorly fired one at that—failed to get at the heart of George’s objections to God and his Word. In time, I got to know George and the story of his difficult life. He had lost his parents at a young age, dealt with the hardships of living in Nazi-controlled Europe as a young man, and then started a new life from the ground up in America. As I listened, the Lord provided opportunities for me to give the reason for the hope that we have. In time, the Lord worked through his patiently shared Word.

To help people find Jesus, it helps to build a relationship with them.

Wouldn’t it be nice if there was a silver-bullet response to fire at every objection that comes your way? “How can there be a good God in such an evil

world?” Zing! “Doesn’t science discredit religion?” Zing! “Why should I believe in the Bible? It’s so ancient and outdated!” Zing! “There are many paths to God.” Zing! Wouldn’t it be nice to simply turn a page of your Bible and drop another silver bullet in the chamber ready to cut down the next objection that comes your way? It sure would.

While such an approach may win an apologetic argument and give you another notch in your belt, it rarely wins the war for that person’s soul. Rarely does it convince someone of the importance of the gospel, of sins forgiven and heaven opened wide through the blood of Christ. Rarely do such responses work if you do not take the time to get to know the person and his or her story.

BUILDING THE BRIDGE

To help people find Jesus, it helps to build a relationship with them. Spend time getting to know them and give them the opportunity to get to know you. Spend time learning their story—their background, their life experience, their personality. Ask questions and then actively listen to their answers.

Why? You have the most precious treasure of all in the gospel. You want that person to enjoy that treasure for all eternity.





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 you build a bridge and get to know someone's story? 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.

Think of it this way. If you had to carry a priceless artifact across a deep and dangerous ravine, would you want to cross that ravine on a rickety jungle bridge with planks breaking beneath your feet? Or would you prefer to cross that ravine on a strong bridge made of steel and concrete that can bear the weight of even the heaviest trucks? Unless you are Indiana Jones, you want to carry that priceless treasure across the bridge of concrete and steel. So too your sharing of the gospel. Patiently building a connection—no matter what the objections—enables you to convey the gospel in such a way that is personal, respectful, and understanding.

Building that bridge to that person who objects to our God and his Word is so very important because every person is different. While the gospel is the same, how you respond to questions and opportunities to share it will likely be very different, depending on the person.

Responding to George was very different from responding to an agnostic former scientist whom I once met in a hospital waiting room. The man had retired from the Canadian Ministry of Science. Growing up, he had attended church. He had learned about the Bible. At one time, he had even

believed what the Bible said. Yet for much of his adult life, this man had been a proponent of evolutionary theory. He had accepted the argument of evolution that dismissed the Bible as legend and myth. He understood the science and agreed with what the Ministry of Science put forward as fact. Yet something bothered him as he got older. "I know the science, but I hope that what I learned as a child is true," he said. That was all the confidence he had as he got older and the possibility of dying became more of a reality. There was a sadness about the man. At that moment, I knew exactly what he needed to hear, but sadly, he was not willing to listen. I did not have another opportunity to speak with him.

How do you reach people where they are? How do you convey the gospel to those who reject or misunderstand God's Word? You get to know them. You learn their story. You seek to dig beneath their objections. What life experiences made them so bitter toward the church? What happened that made them so angry at God? Why do they reject God's Word so sharply? How did they get to this point? What is their story?

To learn someone's story takes God-given patience and compassion. It

means keeping that silver bullet response in the chamber to let Christ-like love for that person's soul keep the bridge open. It means recognizing that no matter how frustrated you are, you need to be patient and keep that bridge of communication open for the next opportunity the Lord might present. It means going out on a limb and asking tough questions that peel back what is really the story behind a particular objection. It means taking advantage of even the slightest opening or opportunity that the Lord presents. It takes gentleness and respect for each person. It takes understanding of that person's situation. Ultimately, it takes love for his or her soul to connect that person to the Savior.

To share Christ's story, learn their story!

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

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





EVANGELISM

lessons from the Savior

A time and place for sad reflection

James F. Borgwardt

Jedidiah Davidson lived an extraordinary life. He was an acclaimed scholar and songwriter, statesman and orator, a king of international commerce. He lectured expertly on so many topics that people traveled from great distances just to hear him speak.

Yet, at the end of his life, the successes that astounded others no longer satisfied him. His world-renowned achievements had become hollow trinkets of a restless life apart from God.

I sat down to listen to him the other day. He introduced himself simply as Teacher. This was King David's son Jedidiah, better known as Solomon. Reading his contemplative book of Ecclesiastes didn't take long. His hard-won wisdom was no memoir. His message is unsettling, even jarring: Life under the sun—apart from God—is ultimately meaningless.

Why would Solomon devote 12 chapters of Scripture in order to make his readers uncomfortable? Because he wanted people to contemplate the serious reality of life here without God.

In our love for others' souls, we sometimes need to help them ponder the same reality. That will make them uncomfortable.

Solomon did so through writing wisdom literature. Jesus did so in conversations.

"ONE GREATER THAN SOLOMON IS HERE"

What Solomon did in 12 chapters, Jesus masterfully accomplished in a few verses.

The young man entered the conversation with Jesus, expecting the Teacher to point him to the one piece missing from his carefully constructed life. Jesus intended to blow it up. Lovingly.

"Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, 'Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?'

" 'Why do you ask me about what is good?' Jesus replied. 'There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments' " (Matthew 19:16,17).

The young man's opening question exposed two fallacies in his thinking. He underestimated who Jesus was in merely calling him "Teacher," and he overestimated himself in assuming he was one special work away from making his good life complete.

Jesus wanted him to do some deep thinking and question his assumptions. Then he answered the question with the

Ten Commandments. The man clearly needed the affliction of the law rather than the comfort of the gospel.

But notice a second purpose for Jesus' answer: Jesus first found common ground on Mt. Sinai with this Jewish man. The commandments drew the man deeper into a genuine conversation.

"Which ones?" he inquired.

"Jesus replied, 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself'" (vv 18,19).

The man wanted specifics. Jesus chose to list the love-your-neighbor commandments because they are easy to keep in a superficial way.

They were probably the man's favorites. More common ground. Many people today genuinely feel the same way. "I'm a faithful spouse. I put in an honest day's work. I'm not a gossip-monger." Check. Check. Check.

"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

"Jesus answered, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me'" (vv. 20,21).

The man was betting his eternity on superficial keeping of the commandments! Jesus challenged him: If he truly loved his neighbor as he claimed, he would use his wealth to help them in their need. And if he loved God more than wealth, he'd be willing to part with all of it.

The One who is good did a good thing for this man. Jesus dropped both tablets of the Law on him to break the hold that money had on his heart.

"When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth" (v. 22).

We hope the man soon came to the same conclusion as Solomon: "Whoever loves money never has enough; . . . As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owners except to feast their eyes on them?" (Ecclesiastes 5:10,11).

It's been said that your world will wobble when it orbits the wrong sun. That's true for any unbeliever. But coming to that realization may take some time for serious reflection.

Our work as evangelists includes leading people to wrestle with views of the world that are wrong. They need to recognize the futile end to their faulty reasoning.

Solomon says this is a good thing: "Frustration is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart" (Ecclesi-

astes 7:3). Sadness wasn't the end goal for Solomon or Jesus, of course. Bringing people to contrition prepares them for the gospel. As Solomon's father wrote, "A broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise" (Psalm 51:17).

How do we do this? When we don't have the wisdom of either Solomon or Jesus, how can we possibly go about the same task that they did so well?

A TIME FOR EVERYTHING

In an age of instant this and that, we need to remember that witnessing is sometimes a matter of timing. Here too we can take a page from both Jesus and Solomon. Ecclesiastes chapter 3 begins, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens . . ."

- "A time to tear down and a time to build" (v. 3). The worldview of unbelievers must be torn down before their lives can be built on the foundation of grace in Christ. Allow them to do most of the demolition themselves. But you can get the project started by asking a good clarification question, such as, "How did you come to that conclusion?"
- "A time to be silent and a time to speak" (v. 7). Though we love to tell the story of God's grace in Christ, you may hold it back for a season. Let them wrestle with themselves rather than with you. Jesus didn't run after the sad young man. And Solomon leaves the reader with an unsettled feeling.
- "[God] has also set eternity in the human heart" (v. 11). God has set a conscience in there too. All people have an innate understanding that there is more than this life under the sun, but they may need to think on it more deeply. That sleeping conscience might just need a little nudge from you.

But unless the situation calls for it, don't feel the need to drop both tablets of the Law on their heads. One Christian apologist said, It's enough to put a stone in their shoe. Plant a thought that challenges their worldview. Then pray for them as they go on their restless way, searching for truth and satisfaction. There is "a time to search and a time to give up" (v. 6).

And when they give up, they'll hear Jesus calling them: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, . . . and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28,29).

James Borgwardt is pastor at Redeemer, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

This is the final article in a three-part series on evangelism lessons from the account of the rich young man in Matthew chapter 19.

Witnessing is sometimes a matter of timing.

A music camp helps a family find its church home.

Alicia A. Neumann

It's been nearly a decade since Lanah Harry and her children walked through the doors of Hope in Toronto, Ontario. Lanah had heard about Hope's music camp for kids and decided to give it a try; little did she know that it would end her search for a church home.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Lanah's two oldest girls attended the music camp that summer, and while they were learning about instruments and doing crafts, they also heard about Hope's Sunday school. "The girls did not like the Sunday school at the Pentecostal church I was attending, so I gave in and said, 'Okay, yeah, you can try it,'" Lanah says.

The girls loved it, but Lanah continued going to her own services at the Pentecostal church. Eventually, though, she decided to make a change. "I asked myself, 'Why am I doing this?' Because the girls were really getting connected at Hope, and I felt as though they need to be connected somewhere. So I decided, all right, I will make the switch for them."

The first time she attended Hope, Lanah says the congregation was very

welcoming. "The first Sunday I tried it, I really enjoyed the people. They were very warm," she says. "Then I went the next week and realized, 'Wow, these people don't change! Everybody is loving. They are caring.' That meant a lot for me. In the Bible Jesus says you will know his disciples from the love they have among themselves. That love is what stood out to me. I didn't have that before."

LOOKING FOR A CONNECTION

Lanah says feeling connected to her church and its members has always been important to her. She grew up in the Pentecostal church but didn't have that sense of belonging. "I just went to Sunday services. There was no connection; I just walked in and walked out," she says.

When she was a teenager, her mother became a Jehovah's Witness. "I went there for a few years too, but there were some things I didn't agree with," says Lanah. "So I didn't pursue that at all."

Then there was a period when she didn't attend church. Eventually, she was invited to the International Church of Christ. She said there was a small group of people who studied the Bible together, and she enjoyed the close-knit group. But after a while, some of them began pressuring her to come to Bible study every night of the week,

with no exceptions. She tried her best, but with her busy schedule she got burned out and started getting sick. "That's when I called it quits," she says.

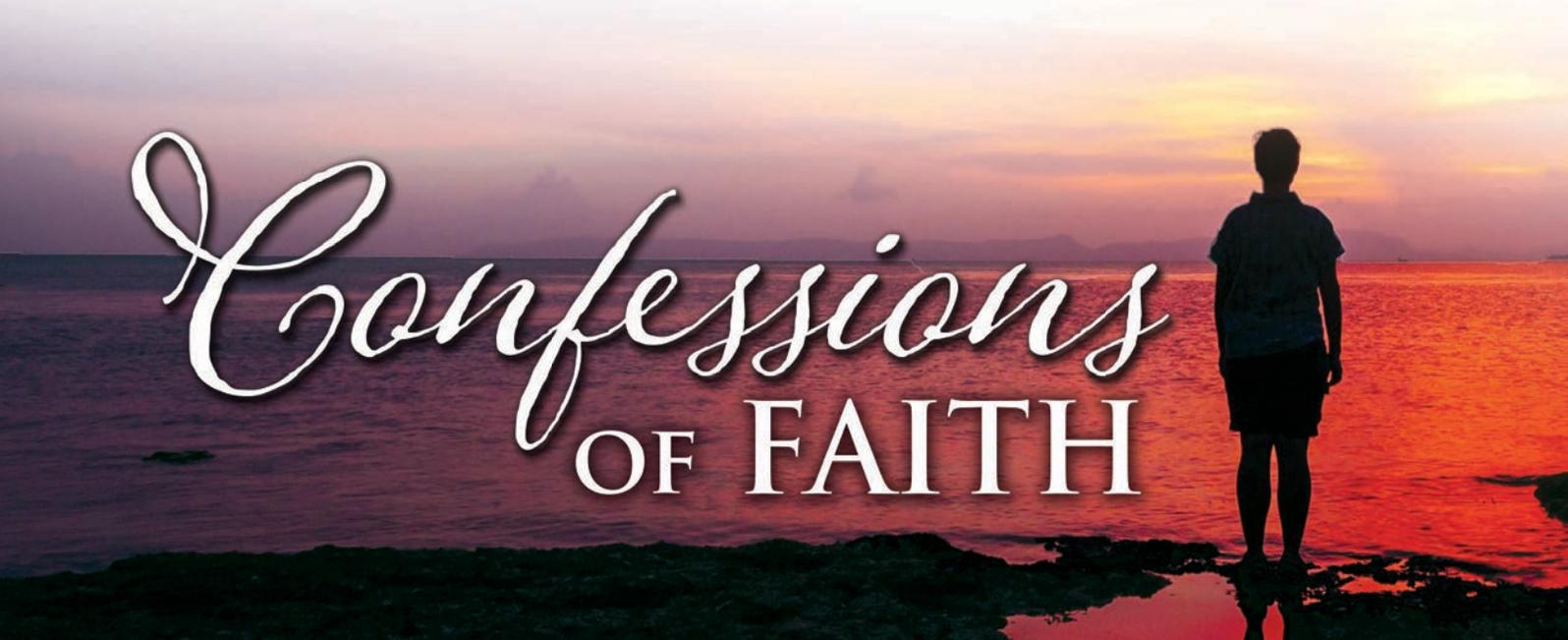
After she left the International Church of Christ, Lanah said she knew she had to get plugged in somewhere, so she went back to the Pentecostal church.

THE DIFFERENCE AT HOPE

When Lanah finally ended up at Hope, she noticed some differences right away. "At my previous church it was fire and brimstone. You always felt you had to live at a particular standard," she says. "But now I am free from that."

Lanah says she is also amazed by the sermons at Hope. "I really appreciate how our pastor takes the time to prepare his message. His foundation is always the Bible, and he goes back to the Greek and Hebrew," she says. "He is able to bring the teaching to life, and the message really stays with you! I am always grateful for the opportunity to sit and listen to that message. I feel as though I can't miss church. . . . I go because I'm being fed, and I feel as though I'm coming away with something. If I don't go, I really miss it!"

And she loves having fellow believers that feel like family. "From the time you walk through these doors, you feel very comfortable," Lanah says. "I



Confessions OF FAITH

haven't seen a person who doesn't feel that love and warmth of the members here."

GETTING INVOLVED

Lanah and her children are now members at Hope. They attend Sunday school and Bible study, and her children play instruments for worship and sing in the choir. They are also involved in the church's summer music camp, which is still going strong. "My older daughters volunteer," says Lanah. "They help teach the kids about the different instruments and do crafts, singing, and Bible stories. They have a blast!"

Lanah and her children also enjoy giving back to the church. "One way we like to do that is on our birthdays," she says. "Every week we have fellowship after church, and on our birthdays we all pitch in and serve. The kids always look forward to that, and they make sure we don't forget about it. It's fantastic!"

She says it's such a blessing to see her kids getting involved and growing in the Word. "My four-year-old comes home every Sunday and tells me the kids' message for that day. He pretends he is the pastor and puts on my shoes and sits there and rehearses the whole message," she says. "I see them learning, and I see them growing."



Lanah and her daughters Ariel and Adara on their confirmation day.

Lanah says she's growing in her faith too. "When you come to church, you look for people to connect with and grow in your faith with from day to day," she says. "It's wonderful to have all these brothers and sisters to help me along that path—and not only at my home church, but also an entire church body! Knowing that we all believe in the same thing, I'm thrilled about that. It makes a huge difference."

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

SHARING MUSIC AND THE GOSPEL WITH THE COMMUNITY

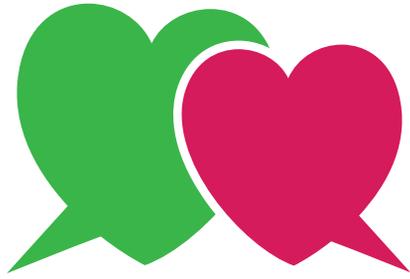
In 2010, members at Hope, Toronto, Ontario, began reaching out to their community—which includes a large population of first-generation immigrants from many different countries—with a summer music camp for kids.

"We asked, 'How can we get to know our neighborhood better? And how can we help our neighbors to know who Jesus is?' " says Mark Henrich, pastor at Hope, a congregation whose members come from more than 20 countries. "Our church is blessed with a variety of musical talent, including a full steel pan orchestra, so it was decided that we would try a summer music camp."

Since then, hundreds of kids have attended the weeklong camp, which includes instruction in steel pans, keyboard, guitar, djembe drum, and singing. Every day also includes Bible study. The camp routinely fills all 140 spots and even has a waiting list. More than 60 members from Hope and other congregations volunteer for the camp, which continues to grow thanks to word of mouth.

"What a blessing it has been!" says Henrich. "Every year we have opportunity to share the Word with the children of our neighborhood, so many of whom did not know Jesus."

Five of the seven youth who were confirmed at Hope last year were first introduced to the church through the music camp. "They kept coming back and, in time, found a home at Hope," says Henrich. "Three of their mothers also joined Hope, and we all continue to grow in Jesus together. To God be the glory!"



heart to heart parent conversations

When I was a child, McGruff the crime dog taught us about “stranger danger,” and “Mr. Yuk” stickers alerted us to the phone number for poison control. Boom. My parents’ job was done. We kids knew how to handle dangerous situations.

That’s probably an exaggeration, but it’s how I remember my childhood. Today as a parent I feel like the dangers have multiplied. School shootings. Child trafficking. Cyber stalking. These are the new fears that prey on parents’ minds—and that are splashed on media outlets each day for our kids to hear about and see images of.

So how do we alert our kids to the dangers around us without scaring them? Dan Nommensen and Sarah Reik offer practical solutions that we can start incorporating into our lives today.

Nicole Balza

**Join the
conversation!**

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

HOW CAN WE PROTECT KIDS WITHOUT SCARING THEM?

How can we protect our kids without scaring them?

I think it’s possible to look at this question and focus on at least two different aspects. The first is the practical reality of communicating issues of safety in an age-appropriate way with our kids (for help with that, see Sarah Reik’s article). But the second part of this question involves my own reaction to living in a sinful world with all its potential dangers, pitfalls, and challenges for my kids. As I look at this question with that in mind, I have to say, “Moms and Dads, I’m scared! I really am!”

In so many ways, we can now get instant access to every newsfeed, channel, blog, app, and site that inconveniently keeps us up-to-date on all the stories of our broken and sinful world. Then, after all that, it’s time to send our kids to the first day of kindergarten or high school or worse—college!

We not only hear all the detailed ways people’s lives are hurt, but we also have our own life experiences and the hardships we have had to face. Unlike our kids and their developing brains, we are better able to appreciate consequences, dangers, and even our own mortality. Yep—not gonna lie. I get scared for my kids. At times I think, *How could I possibly do enough to keep them safe?*

AN EXAMPLE TO CONSIDER

Have you ever read the account in Exodus chapter 2 when Moses’ mother hid Moses from the king of Egypt for

When my oldest child was very young, we were at our pediatrician’s office for his yearly physical. As she was checking him all over, she reminded him that only doctors and moms and dads can look at private parts of his body. She said that if anyone else ever does, he should say, “No,” and then tell Mom or Dad what happened.

I remember having a mixture of emotions at that time—fear that something so horrible might ever happen to my son, guilt that I hadn’t thought to have that conversation with him before the doctor did, and sadness that it’s a necessary conversation at all. I was also struck by how matter-of-fact she was as she said those things and how my son seemed unaffected while my own emotions were churning.

How do we talk to our children about staying safe without scaring them unnecessarily? It is an important part of our responsibility as parents to equip our children with tools to keep them safe, and in order to do that, we need to be realistic about dangerous situations they might face. At the same time, I have talked with adults who continue to struggle with fear and anxiety placed on them at an early age from well-meaning parents who were trying to be protective. So how do we achieve a healthy balance in our conversations?

I believe there are two important concepts to keep in mind.

TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT WHAT THEY CAN CONTROL.

We know as Christians that there has always been sin and evil in the world and that there will be until Christ returns. We can’t change that. When we focus on stories of bad

three months when he sent out a decree to kill all the baby boys? Moses' mother did all she could do to keep Moses safe from this danger for the first three months of his life but then came to appreciate the reality that she simply couldn't guarantee he wouldn't be discovered and be put to death. So she made a basket and sent him adrift down the Nile River. By faith and trusting that God would protect her baby, she watched that basket float away. We know how the Lord protected Moses when he was discovered by the Pharaoh's daughter, who saved him from all that could have happened.

This example of a parent's trust in God has given me such relief from my own fear. It has reminded me that *God* is truly in control—not me. As much as I like to think that I have built an impenetrable fortress of safety around my kids, that fortress is nothing compared to the everlasting and immeasurable love God has for my kids.

A GOD TO RELY ON

The reality of living in a broken and sinful world means that my kids won't be living in a protected bubble here on earth. The absence of all evil and danger will come in heaven. Until then, all the dangers of evil will be present in the lives of my children. Let's remember this—God loves my kids even more than I am capable of loving them. Remember, he not only provides his protection, but he also sent his own Son to die for us *and* our children. When my

kids feel the effect of their brokenness and face the results of sin, his love and forgiveness are still there.

“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

God is there when they start school or work or even their own family. God is there in the midst of all the joys. God is there at the school parties, on the dates, on the bus, in the subway, on the trip to study abroad. God is there to give strength to resist temptations. God is there when the bad choices are made and consequences come. What a privilege that we have been given to foster faith in our children so they (and we) can always see the Lord's presence.

It seems to me that protecting our kids and talking with them about the scary things in life starts with our own recognition of fear and the opportunity we have to trust our Lord. Let the conversations and teachable moments with our kids flow from a parent's heart of confident trust in God.

Dan Nommensen and his wife, Kelly, have a teenage daughter and a preteen son. Dan is also a licensed professional counselor and the coordinator of the Member Assistance Program for WLCFS—Christian Family Solutions.



things in this fallen world that are out of our children's control, that breeds worry. Let's talk to them instead about what they *can* control.

Instead of asking, “What are the dangers?” ask, “What are safe choices?” Avoid the phrase “stranger danger,” and focus on “stranger awareness.” Discuss how to talk to strangers and how to get help from safe strangers. (Statistics tell us that most children are victimized by people they know, so strangers aren't the issue.)

Role-play with your children what they can do if they are in a potentially dangerous situation so that they have a chance to practice and feel confident. Make it fun. (I'm always a fan of role-playing with stuffed animals. They're cute, and then they serve a purpose other than cluttering my house.) Teach confident body language like smiling and eye contact. Teach assertiveness skills. “No, I don't keep secrets from Mom and Dad.” “That's not okay, and I'm going to tell someone.”

Here are a few clear safety guidelines we can share with our children from early on:

- Know your name, address, and phone number.
- Other than doctors or parents, don't let anyone touch your private parts or tell you to touch theirs.
- Tell a trusted adult if something or someone makes you uncomfortable. Keeping secrets is never safe.
- If you get lost, freeze and wait for the adult you were with to come back and find you.
- Don't share personal information online.

- Respect dangerous items like matches and weapons. By teaching our children what they can say and do, we empower them instead of scare them.

CONTROL YOUR OWN FEAR.

I am scared of heights. I am proud to say that my children are not. The few times I've been brave enough to go on a Ferris wheel with my children, I've taken deep, silent breaths and smiled and gushed about how beautiful it is to be up so high.

When we talk to our children about staying safe, it is important first to be calm ourselves regarding the issue we are discussing. If you find it is difficult to keep your own anxiety at bay, either because you struggle with anxiety in general or because you were the victim of something yourself as a child, seek help from a trusted friend or professional so that you do not pass along your fears.

I can equip my children to help them stay safe, but I cannot protect them perfectly. It always comforts me to remember that my children are God's first. He claimed them by Baptism, forgave them, and made them his own. He has given them guardian angels, and he is working even harder than I am to protect them. Rest securely in that truth, and share it with your children.

Sarah Reik and her husband have four grade school-aged children. Sarah is also a licensed professional counselor with WLCFS—Christian Family Solutions.



A fresh start

With our God, the past has truly passed.

Jonathan P. Bilitz

So how did your first semester go? GPA is exactly where you want it to be, right? You sailed through the semester without a worry in the world—no stress, no anxiety, no late-night study sessions.

If that was your experience, what a blessing from God! Most likely, your semester provided challenges to face on a weekly or even daily basis. What a relief when the semester ends. You made it! The tests are taken, the projects completed, the papers written. Semester break provides a welcome respite from the daily grind a college student faces.

The opportunity for a fresh start ranks among the biggest blessings of a semester break. When the next semester begins, everything starts new—a new opportunity to study harder, manage time better, get more sleep, and pray more frequently for God's strength. What happened in the past is in the past. Picture the panorama of new possibilities on the horizon!

A new calendar year affords similar benefits. Millions of people make New Year's resolutions—promises made to themselves to do better. Many appreciate turning the page on the calendar to turn the page to a better life. The past has passed. "This time I will get it right!" is the mantra of a new year.

You know how many of those resolutions turn out. Disappointment is a frequent visitor to our lives. We are disappointed by our circumstances, by the people around us, and also by ourselves. The best intentions to change are genuine, but inevitably we struggle to live up to those expectations.

As a new semester and a new year start, making plans and striving for change is admirable. But a dose of reality is also wise. We live in a fallen world and battle a sinful nature in which nothing good lives. The good we want to do we can't always do. Faithfulness to our promises and resolutions escapes us.

We need someone who changes that, and God provided that change through Jesus. The author of Lamentations describes his confidence in God with these words: "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (3:22,23). God's compassion, his deep love, and his mercy always triumph. Our unfaithfulness is covered by the faithfulness of our God.

Were you grabbed by the phrase, "They are new every morning"? Talk about a fresh start! God doesn't wait until

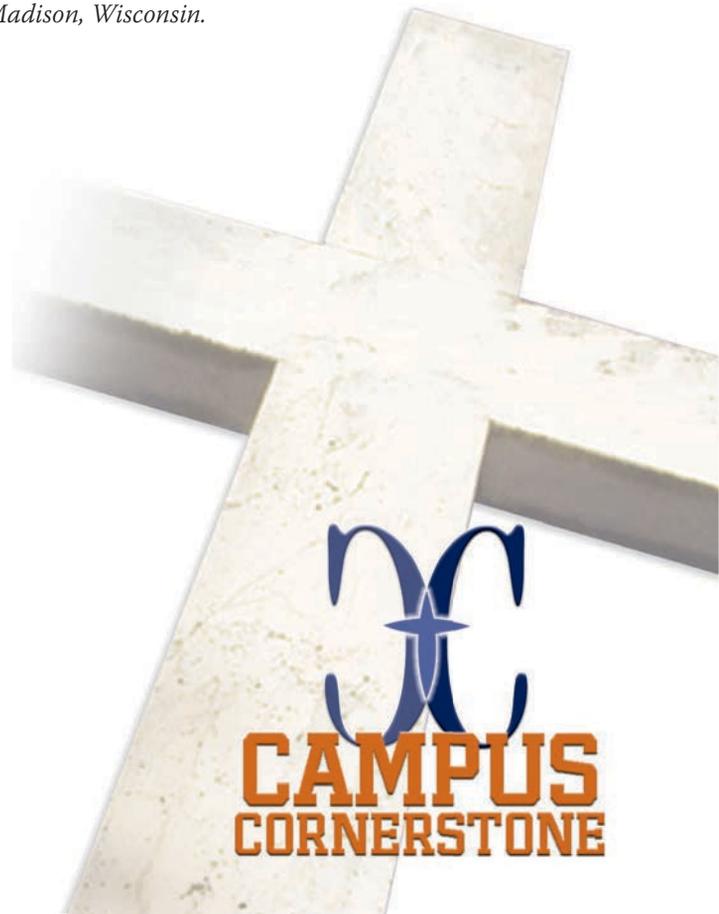
a new year or a new semester. His mercies present themselves every day, every hour, every minute! With our God, the past has truly passed. He forgives our failures and remembers our sins no more. Jesus faithfully lived for us, willingly died for us, and victoriously rose to secure God's blessings.

Each night, we can confess our failures and sleep well, trusting we are forgiven through Jesus. Each morning, we can awake refreshed, asking for God's strength to live for him, knowing his mercies cover us. When we don't measure up, God invites us to come right back to the cross of Jesus to find a fresh start.

Enjoy the new semester and the new year. Appreciate the fresh start they promise. Relish the fresh start that the mercy of God gives you in Jesus not just at the start of a semester but each and every day of your life.

Like the writer of Lamentations concludes: "I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion; therefore, I will wait for him'" (3:24).

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



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Bushaw, Robert, to Pilgrim, Mesa, Ariz.
Korthals, James, to St. John, Hillpoint, Wis.
Kurtzahn, Stephen, to retirement
Mielke, Thomas, to Christian giving counselor, Northern Wisconsin District
Naumann, Brett, to Trinity, Kiel, Wis.
Neumann, Marcus, to retirement
Reeder, Kent, to Grace, Seattle, Wash.
Sargent, Daniel, to St. John, Peshtigo, Wis.
Schmiege, Paul, to King of Kings, Willoughby, Ohio

Steenbock, Benjamin, to Zion, Hartland, Wis.

Voigt, Daniel, to Calvary, Sheboygan, Wis.

Wagner, Timothy, to Riverview, Appleton, Wis.

Welch, Clayton, to Bethlehem, Manassas, Va.

Wosje, Jeremy, to Salem, Milwaukee, Wis.

Teachers

Brandt, James, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.

Kuske, Lynn, to Immanuel, Greenville, Wis.

Moldenhauer, Erin, to Immanuel, Greenville, Wis.

Staff ministers

Sebald, John, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.

SYNOD CONVENTION

The 65th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod will be held July 29–Aug. 1, 2019, at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. The convention delegate fee, paid by the calling body the delegate represents, is \$275. The deadline for submitting memorials to be printed in the *Book of Reports and Memorials* is Jan. 15, 2019. Memorials submitted after Jan. 15 and approved for convention consideration will be posted on the convention website, wels.net/2019synod convention, if they are received by June 15, 2019. Further directions can be found at wels.net/2019synodconvention. Send memorials to the President's Office, N16 W23377 Stone Ridge Dr, Waukesha WI 53188; carla.martin@wels.net.

NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS AND PASTORS

We thank God for you and for your support of the ministry WELS carries out on behalf of all congregations. We ask that you continue to mail your Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) deposit and its processing coupon to our bank lockbox, which provides effective and efficient deposit processing for the synod. For your CMO payment to be included in reported receipts for the month, it must be received in the synod's bank lock-

box on or before the last business day. An exception is made for December offerings. Gifts received by the bank lockbox up to and including Jan. 8, 2019, will be credited as 2018 CMO, if accompanied by a 2018 coupon. Thank you for your assistance.

ANNIVERSARIES

Janesville, Wis.—Peace (60). Jan. 13. Worship, 9 A.M.; banquet to follow. RSVP requested. rwlehmman@sbcglobal.net, 608-752-0258.

COMING EVENTS

Young adult conference—Awake and Alive. Jan. 4–5. Best Western Plus Milwaukee Airport Hotel & Conference Center, Milwaukee, Wis. Website, awakealive.com.

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

Martin Luther College choir tours—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.

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 Leadership Experience conference—March 15–16. La Crosse Center, La Crosse, Wis. Hosted by the Antioch Foundation. Theme: "Faith Forward!" Website, christlead.com.

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

SERVICE TIMES

Gulf Shores, Ala.—Risen Savior, Navarre, Fla., will hold church services for WELS/ELS snowbirds at 4 p.m., Jan. 6 and 20 and Feb. 3 and 17 at St. Jude By the Sea Lutheran Church, 312 E 16 Ave, Gulf Shores. Bible class will follow. Evan Dobberfuhl, 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 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.

NAMES WANTED

Mathematics professor—Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis., is seeking candidates for a faculty position beginning in fall 2019 in the mathematics department. Responsibilities include teaching mathematics courses in statistics and calculus with the opportunity for teaching upper level classes in a specialty area. An M.S. or Ph.D. in mathematics, applied mathematics, or statistics is required. Candidates must be an active member of a WELS or an Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) congregation. Website, wlc.edu/human-resources.

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.

One in Jesus in Asia-Oceania

In early November, 60 Asian national church delegates and guests attended the second meeting of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) Asia-Oceania conference. The CELC comprises 32 member churches worldwide (including WELS), all of which are united by a common faith and confession.

Sponsored by South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission (SALEM) in Hong Kong, the conference brought together people from CELC church bodies in Japan, Indonesia, India, South Korea, East Asia, and Hong Kong as well as from future member churches in Taiwan and the Philippines. Mission partners from WELS and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod also attended.

The conference theme “One in Jesus” was reflected throughout the meeting, including in the papers presented on the historical practice and current practice of the Lord’s Supper and on evangelism. Group discussion after each

paper enabled workers to learn from one another’s experiences.

One participant noted, “I appreciated the opportunity to talk with missionaries and local workers in other fields and know their struggles and pressures. I really care about what is happening in other countries near mine.”

A number of churches shared that there is increasing pressure to suppress Christianity in Asia, but our churches are undeterred. One participant remarked that even though “they try to mow the grass, the grass keeps coming back.”

The first Asian regional conference was held in Seoul, South Korea, three years ago. Another Asian regional conference is being planned for 2021. Other regional CELC conferences



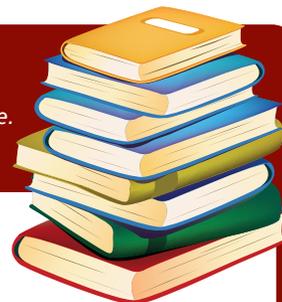
Top: **Removed for security concerns.** Bottom: Alex Wong, pastor at SALEM Koinonia Lutheran Church, welcomes CELC visitors to Hong Kong.

held in 2018 include a European regional meeting in Plzen, Czech Republic. The next worldwide meeting of the CELC will be held in Seoul, South Korea, in 2020.

To learn more about the CELC, visit celc.info.

Booknook

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



Do you ever wonder if you are loving God enough? Do you feel as if your relationship with him is on autopilot?

In her book *My 180—Loving God More*, Angie Molkenin takes us along on her six-month journey to take her time with God off of autopilot and into intentional time together in prayer and study of the Bible—all to love him more.

Molkenin is very open and honest with us, her readers, throughout her journey as we learn about her struggles (Rebellion, Reluctance, Repentance) and the people she met along the way who kept her going. She includes Bible stories and their references. She encourages readers on their own journeys to keep a Bible close at hand. “Rebellion is a dangerous guest, and conversing with her without God’s presence in his Word brings disastrous consequences” (p. 19).

My 180—Loving God More is also written in a way to help guide others who want to plan their own journeys. At the end of each section,

Molkenin includes questions for the reader under the heading “Your Turn.” Scattered throughout the book are “travel tips” to help the reader plan a journey of their own.

As I read Molkenin’s 180 journey, I found myself identifying with her more and more. I think this book would appeal to anyone who is looking for a way to make his or her time with God intentional—to make it a specific part of the day. Molkenin gives us the plan but assures us that her way is not the only way. One of her last pieces of advice for planning your own journey: “Keep it simple” (p. 117).

We all need encouragement from other Christians as we journey to put God first in our lives and to love him more. *My 180—Loving God More* can be that encouragement.



PRICE: \$15.99

Amy Weseloh
Pflugerville, Texas

Apache mission celebrates 125th anniversary

More than 1,200 people attended the Apache 125th anniversary celebration at Peridot Lutheran Church and School, Peridot, Ariz., Oct. 26–28. The event commemorated the 125th anniversary of WELS World Missions' work in the Apache reservations of Arizona.

For more photos and information from the event, visit wels.net/apache. Read Eric Hartzell's reflections on the celebration at wels.net/because-I-love-you.



1) A WELS Mission Journeys team from St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wis., served as volunteers for the weekend, assisting with set-up, working the event, and cleaning up. Pictured (left to right): Jill Doering, Alana Enger, Steven Gartner, and Shannon Bohme (Mission Journeys program coordinator). St. Paul was also celebrating its 125th anniversary in 2018. "What a joy to celebrate 125 years of God's truth being shared in Lake Mills and then celebrating the same with my Apache brothers and sisters in Arizona," says Doering. "I couldn't help but think of the picture of heaven God shares with us in Revelation: 'a multitude of every people, tribe, nation and language.'" **2)** Visitors in Peridot enjoyed traditional Apache food, crafts, a camp dress show (pictured), and more. Dr. William Kessel

and Eric Hartzell gave two historical presentations, and photos and artifacts from the mission's 125-year history were displayed along with information about future outreach plans for Native Christians. Visit nativechristians.org/125th-historical-presentations to read Hartzell's and Kessel's presentations. **3)** On Sunday, all of the reservations' congregations joined together to hold seven "Rally Day" worship services. Pictured is a fellowship meal after East Fork and Canyon Day Lutheran Churches' joint rally day services. **4)** Mary Lou Belknap holds a photo of her grandfather, Clarence Bullis, featured on the cover of an old *Apache Lutheran* magazine. Clarence was an interpreter and taught at Peridot Lutheran School. Generations of Mary's family have been served by Peridot Lutheran Church, the first WELS mission on the Apache reservations. Peridot is one of nine congregations on the reservations. **5)** A special anniversary worship service was held Saturday night. Choirs from the reservations' churches and schools (pictured) led the visitors in worship, and WELS President Mark Schroeder gave the service's closing lesson.

WELS news briefs

CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS

mark.schroeder@wels.net

A translation evaluation and **review of the Christian Standard Bible (CSB)** is now available from the Translation Review Committee. The committee's report concluded, "To the degree a translation that is the product of imperfect humans can reproduce the faithful and true words of God, the translators of the CSB have been successful in their mission. We believe that we can recommend the Christian Standard Bible for reading, preaching, and teaching in our church."

The CSB is a major revision of the translation formerly known as the Holman Christian Standard Bible. The Conference of Presidents appointed five pastors to the review committee in late 2016 to evaluate the CSB for its faithfulness to the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures and for the quality of its English style, and in this way to help advise the synod about the usefulness of this translation for its publications. The committee engaged the participation of 102 WELS pastors, professors, and administrators to complete the review. Read the full report at <https://bibletranslation.welsrc.net/>.

A similar review of the Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV) is underway.

MINISTRY OF CHRISTIAN GIVING

800-827-5482; mcg@wels.net

WELS launched a **special synodwide offering in December 2018 to support Hmong outreach in Vietnam**. The goal of the "Grace—Hmong outreach in Vietnam" offering is to receive gifts totaling \$2 million by June 30, 2019, to fund the land purchase, building construction, and the first two years of operational costs for a theological training facility in Hanoi. This offering will help share the message of grace with hundreds of church leaders in the Hmong Fellowship Church (HFC) and, in turn, the more than 100,000 members who make up their synod. Information about the offering was sent to all congregations. Learn more at wels.net/vietnamhmongoutreach.

Let your light shine

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

My seventeenth year was such a struggle.

Here's my (dripping with sarcasm) recap of that year: I had a job at Chuck E. Cheese's that expected me to work on Fridays *and* Saturdays. My parents made me use my own money to put gas in the car they bought me. I had acne. My hair wasn't as nice as so-and-so's. My clothes weren't cool. I was failing math.

In 1991, those things were so real to me. And then this happened.

Mr. Voss, vice principal at Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis., came up to me in the hall and asked me to follow him. I was thinking to myself, *This is probably, like, really bad. My parents are gonna kill me.*

Once in his office, he asked me to sit down, and he gave me a booklet. I'll never forget his words: "Things are kinda rough right now, huh? I'm sorry you're in such pain. Read this and realize how special you are in God's eyes. A lot of people here think you're special too. Once you're ready, head back to class. Keep the booklet." Then he left.

Other than my name being on the booklet, there was nothing special about it. Blue. Card stock. Stapled and folded. The pages inside were photocopied. Cut to fit inside the book. Nothing special at all. It reminded me of . . . me.

Then I opened it. The title was *Letters to My Child, From Your Heavenly Father*. It included 13 letters. Each one seemed chosen for my 17-year-old self. Each one, 27 years later, still speaks to me.

I honestly don't remember what happened after I left Mr. Voss's office. I probably went back into my teen funk and continued my pity party.

But here's why this story is so important: I'm not that way today! Today I'm a wife, mom, teacher, friend, and a child of God who has good days and bad days and is completely secure in her relationship with her heavenly Father.

Of course, many people and experiences along the way helped form who I am, but truly, Mr. Voss giving me this booklet planted a seed of value in my mind. Through the years, that seed has grown into belief that I am a valued daughter of the King, handcrafted by a heavenly Father who knew where and when I would be needed in this world.

I've been in the ministry now for 20 years. Each year I share this story. Each year at least one student comes to me and asks for a copy. Sometimes we read the letters together; sometimes I give them their booklet and leave the room.

And every time that happens, I thank the Lord for Mr. Voss and his act of love to 17-year-old me.

Anne Adickes



Conference digs into developing multi-site congregations

More than one hundred pastors, teachers, staff ministers, laypeople, and other ministry leaders from across the country gathered in Pewaukee, Wis., in November for the 2018 WELS National Multi-Site Conference. Attendees met to engage in discussions and activities about developing multi-site churches throughout WELS.



More than one hundred people gathered to learn more about multi-site ministries at the 2018 National Multi-Site Conference.

Multi-site churches preach, teach, and carry out other ministry work from more than one physical location. These additional sites can help the congregation share the gospel message with new people and underserved communities. In many cases, they can also gather and use resources with increased efficiency.

Ron Koehler, pastor at Grace, a multi-site church in Tucson/Sahuarita/Benson/Vail, Ariz., led the conference's first keynote presentation. He highlighted key reasons why a congregation may launch a multi-site effort. Jon Hein, director of the Commission on Congregational Counseling, then spoke about the potential of multi-sites to expand ministry work beyond their current reach. Nathan Strutz, conference planning committee chairman and pastor of a multi-site con-

gregation, Resurrection, Verona/Monroe, Wis., closed the conference with a final keynote presentation reviewing what multi-site strategies are and can be for WELS.

Four sessions of workshops gave attendees opportunities to hear about experiences with multi-site development directly from project leaders. Pastors, church elders, and lay leaders spoke about reaching specific audiences, managing multi-site finances, uniting under one mission, and more.

Brad Snyder, Mt. Olive, Suamico, Wis., appreciated the fellowship among attendees at the conference: "We get together, enjoy and encourage each other, and stay minded on the mission." Mt. Olive has called a second pastor to serve at a site it is developing in Hobart, Wis.

Paul Schupmann and David Brandt serve at St. John's, Juneau, Wis., which is officially expanding to Horicon, Wis., in June 2019. They look forward to implementing what they learned from the conference at this new multi-site.

"The key concept is to grow the kingdom and continue to enable our people to share Jesus," Schupmann explains.

"We all struggle with limited time and resources, but I see multi-site as a way to do more with what we've got," Brandt continues. "I'm excited for the possibilities."

Jeffrey Mahnke, St. Peter, Schofield, Wis., led a workshop at the conference to share what he is learning from an ongoing merger with Salem, Wausau, Wis. For any WELS church leaders considering undertaking multi-site initiatives with their congregation, he suggests, "Think big. Start talking about what could be done for the kingdom of Christ."

The conference was partially sponsored by an Antioch II grant.

For more information about multi-site churches and other home mission work, visit wels.net/missions. Read more about two multi-site congregations on p. 26.

Obituaries

Joyce E. Dallmann, 1934–2018

Joyce Dallmann (née Wiechmann) was born Aug. 8, 1934, in Forman, N.D. She died Aug. 9, 2018.

She taught at Mount Calvary, Waukesha, Wis.; St. Matthew's, Winona, Minn.; Grace, Yakima, Wash.; Our Savior, Pomona, Calif.; Emmaus, Phoenix, Ariz.; and Reformation, San Diego, Calif.

Eleanor R. Mutterer, 1928–2018

Eleanor Mutterer (née Hookstead) was born Apr. 9, 1928, in Whitewa-

ter, Wis. She died Aug. 20, 2018, in Waupaca, Wis.

She taught at Trinity, Waukesha, Wis.; St. Andrew's, Saint Paul Park, Minn.; St. Stephen, Beaver Dam, Wis.; St. John, Fox Lake, Wis.; St. Matthew's, Winona, Minn.; Buffalo, Cochrane, Wis.; and Immanuel, Waupaca, Wis.

She is survived by her husband, Frederick; two sons; one daughter; eight grandchildren; five great-grandchildren; and one brother. She was preceded in death by one sister.

David T. Sweet, 1958–2018

David Sweet was born Feb. 6, 1958, in Lansing, Mich. He died Aug. 23, 2018, in Tucson, Ariz.

A 1985 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Grace, La Crosse, Wis.; Rock of Ages, Payson, Ariz.; and Trinity, Winslow, Ariz.

He is survived by his wife, Emmalee; two sons; two daughters; four grandchildren; two brothers; and one sister. He was preceded in death by one brother.

A mission opportunity through schools

What is a mission field? Many think of far-flung lands or remote, underserved areas of the U.S. But Home Missions is looking at harvest fields closer to home by supporting outreach efforts of WELS churches with large school enrollments of unchurched students and families.

Several Wisconsin congregations received Home Missions funding in the past two years to call additional workers to focus on the growing outreach opportunities in their schools. Staff Minister Mark Blauert joined Wisconsin Lutheran School, Racine, Wis., this school year. He serves as the school's chaplain and outreach coordinator as well as leads evangelism efforts at the two Racine congregations that support the school, Epiphany and First. Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis., called a second pastor so that its other pastor, Aaron Bublitz, could focus his ministry work on school families.



In the last three years, 19 current students at Mt. Lebanon Lutheran School, Milwaukee, became church members as their parents were confirmed. One student is Miracle, who is pictured with her dad, Vincent, and her sister Ashley on their confirmation day. Learn more about their story at wels.net/the-fields-are-ripe-for-harvest/.

Wisconsin Lutheran School and Mt. Lebanon have a couple of things in common—both schools are highly ranked for academics and learning environment and both are Private School Choice schools. These two factors mean that many of the students are from the community and are not necessarily members of the associated congregations. At Wisconsin Lutheran School, nearly 50 percent of the school families do not belong to a WELS church; at Mt. Lebanon more than half of the 243 students come from unchurched families.

“In recent years, we’ve seen so many blessings come through the school choice programs in Wisconsin and other states, but we don’t necessarily see as much success in getting the families to go from the school to the church,” says Blauert. “When you look at mission work, missionaries work so hard

to get to know people in their area and build bridges with unbelievers and the unchurched. Here at our Choice schools, we have hundreds, if not thousands, of unchurched people coming to our campuses and schools; it’s such a ripe mission field with a close proximity to our churches.”

Blauert and Bublitz agree that the first priority in their roles is to build relationships with the unchurched families in their schools. “We’re here to connect the entire family to Christ and the blessings that he gives us,” says Bublitz. “That’s where the outreach comes in—to try to connect the families and show them all God’s Word has to offer the entire family.”

Bublitz says there are four primary areas to his ministry work. The first is spending time with students—teaching them God’s Word, providing spiritual counseling, and trying to interact with them as much as possible. The second is connecting with parents and doing home visits—figuring out how to connect the means of grace with families and inviting them to worship. The third area is supporting faculty spiritually as they mentor unchurched families. And the fourth is engaging the congregation in outreach to the school by holding events, getting to know families, and mentoring students.

Blauert’s days look very similar as he is getting to know the students and their families in his first year at the school. He says it’s an all-encompassing strategy of working with teachers to reach families, finding ways to invite unchurched families to services, and building relationships with students and parents.

“It’s important to remember what our priorities are,” says Blauert. “Our schools are not just about teaching academics and preparing students for high school and college; our schools are for sharing the gospel, connecting [students] to Jesus, instilling lifelong worship habits on Sunday morning, and connecting them with church, so when they leave the hallways of our school, they’re connected to church and our Savior.”

The Holy Spirit is working through our WELS schools and the men and women who serve them. Bublitz said about half of Mt. Lebanon’s new members are families that connected through the school. The most effective tool? It’s the students themselves, who go home and share their excitement for learning about Jesus and his saving Word.

RESOURCE Want to learn more about how to connect with school families? Check out *Telling the Next Generation*, a program that helps congregations with planning, assistance, and resources for implementing outreach and harvest strategies using their Lutheran elementary school and/or early childhood ministry. Learn more at wels.net/tellingthenextgeneration.

District news

MICHIGAN

Huron Valley Lutheran High School, Westland, Mich., hosted the East Regional Choral Festival from Nov. 9–11. Students from 10 WELS high schools attended.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wis., coordinated an effort to replace the hymnals that

Amazing Grace, Panama City, Fla., lost due to Hurricane Michael. Donations were received for 150 new hymnals as well as additional funds to help the congregation and its members replace Bibles, catechisms, and other Christian materials.

MINNESOTA

From Nov. 9–11, **Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minn.**, hosted the West Regional

Choral Festival for students from 11 WELS high schools.

WESTERN WISCONSIN

Students from **St. Paul, Fort Atkinson, Wis.**, helped make a total of 74 baby blankets to be given to newborns at a local hospital.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

SA—On Sept. 16, 2018, **Good Shepherd, Jacksonville, Fla.**, celebrated its 40th anniversary.

SC—**Trinity, Mountain Home, Ark.**, celebrated its 35th anniversary on Oct. 14, 2018.

The district reporters for this month are: MI—John Eich; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; SA—Newlin Schafer; SC—Andrew Retberg; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Brett Brauer.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

Three students from Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis., collected more than \$4,000 in supplies for hurricane victims and delivered the supplies to Florida during their fall break. As Josh Murphy (pictured, right) wrote, "My heart is nothing but full. Today we had the opportunity to drop off the hurricane relief supplies at Risen Savior Lutheran in Navarre, Fla. Over the next week, the supplies will be delivered to those in Panama City, Fla., based upon what they need. . . . The support and encouragement we received from many people were amazing. I cannot say thank you enough to everyone who donated time, money, and supplies to make this trip possible."



MINNESOTA



A group of 10 students from Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., volunteered with WELS Christian Aid and Relief in October to help clean up and rebuild Amazing Grace, Panama City, Fla., following Hurricane Michael. "These students had so much energy and enthusiasm," says Elizabeth Zambo of Christian Aid and Relief. "They gutted the church and parsonage that had been flooded, ripping out drywall and insulation. It was messy work, but they never complained."

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



Seventeen children and three adults were baptized at St. Philip, Milwaukee, Wis., on Oct. 21. As the church noted, the line of people waiting to be baptized extended almost all the way down the aisle.



MERGING

for mission

Two case studies reveal the blessings and challenges of mergers and multi-site ministries. Julie K. Wietzke

If you talk to Nathan Strutz, pastor at Resurrection, Verona/Monroe, Wisconsin, about the recent merger between Resurrection, Verona, and Mount Olive, Monroe, he will be quick to point out it wasn't about keeping the doors open on the beautiful church building in Monroe. "It is all about keeping the doors of heaven open to lost souls," he says.

It was about finding a way to continue to share the gospel.

CASE STUDY: WISCONSIN

Things didn't look that way at first. Mount Olive, Monroe, started in 1945. Membership grew, and members secured land and bought a former schoolhouse in 1949. After renovation, it

became its first church building. Then in 1981, the congregation bought an existing church building in town. The beautiful church seemed to promise a bright future.

But then the congregation began to struggle, and over several decades it slowly lost members—some due to deaths in an aging congregation and some due to families leaving because they wanted a more active children's ministry. By 2016, membership had dwindled to 80, with about 20 people worshipping each Sunday.

When their pastor announced his upcoming retirement, members knew something had to be done. Calling a

new pastor would be extremely challenging. They had to face the reality that it would be difficult to afford their own pastor. Talks with another small parish about forming a dual parish did not work out. They even tried putting their church up for sale so they could downsize.

Members weren't sure what to do next. "We were on an island. We didn't know what direction to turn to without disbanding," says Richard Meske, long-time member and church president. "We didn't have many options. As president, I tried to assure members that we were not going to close our doors; one way or another we would attempt to keep it open."

Some members from Mount Olive began attending Resurrection, Verona. Together with Resurrection members who had ties to the Monroe community, they started talking to Strutz about Mount Olive's situation. Resurrection had been discussing its long-range plan, which included looking into starting a new site. The congregation had already daughtered a church, Good News in Mount Horeb, Wisconsin, in 2013, and was ready for its next opportunity.

The conversation brought about a meeting in November 2016 for both congregations to discuss possibilities. One option was Resurrection offering Mount Olive some financial assistance so the congregation could afford to call a pastor and keep its doors open.

But that option wasn't appealing to the members at Resurrection. They saw the outreach potential. "We were not going to continue talking just for the survival of a church in Monroe—just to do hospice care before a church died," says Strutz. "This was going to be about expanding the kingdom of God—reaching the lost in Monroe and, God-willing, establishing a growing, thriving congregation." Monroe was a community of 10,000, and their vision included the opportunity to bring back former members of the congregation who still lived in the neighborhood.

Strutz continues, "We wanted to convey to both locations that we are all-in on this. This is a long-term thing. This is not going into a temporary survival mode until things get better." It was about keeping the door of heaven open in Monroe as well as in Verona.

MERGING FOR MISSION

Merging for mission is key when congregations begin discussing working together to create a multi-site ministry by merging into one congregation. "For a multi-site to work well, there has to be a servant mentality," says Jon Hein, director of the Commission on Congregational Counseling. "It has to be about Christ and his gospel and his mission."

Maintaining that mission mind-set can be difficult, especially when you're talking about "closing" a struggling congregation as a new multi-site emerges. But the outcomes can be inspiring.

"It doesn't have to be a loss. It's totally a win for the kingdom of God," says Strutz. "God be praised for that."

ANOTHER CASE STUDY: ARIZONA

Financial burdens also played a role for two more struggling churches—this time outside of Tucson, Arizona.

Both Peace, Sahuarita, and Bethlehem, Benson, with memberships of 39 and 10 respectively, had their own land and church buildings, but neither congregation could afford a pastor. They became a dual parish in 2012. When the congregations became vacant in 2013, ministry was difficult at both churches. "While we were under the vacancy as Peace, there was literally no opportunity to do outreach," says Bob Breiler, church president at Peace at the time. "It was just a struggle to keep the doors open." The congregations began working together to call a pastor so both congregations could remain open.

Six months and several calls later, Breiler approached Ron Koehler, pastor at Grace, Tucson, to ask him for help in getting weekly preachers. Bethlehem made a similar request. Koehler suggested to both congregations that instead of just helping them out occasionally with preaching, that perhaps they should consider a longer-term option: becoming new sites of Grace.

Grace already was a multi-site congregation; in 2011, it opened its second site in Vail, 20 miles southeast, to celebrate the congregation's 100th anniversary. It already was seeing the benefits that one congregation with multiple locations could offer.

"These were brothers and sisters in Christ who needed help, and we felt we had the ability to offer that help," says Koehler. "We also felt that they deserved more than just a Sunday preacher."

In addition, Grace saw the outreach opportunities this merger could provide. Sahuarita is a growing community of young families and professionals who commute daily to Tucson. The adjacent town, Green Valley, is a retirement community that explodes in numbers during the winter. "We felt that this was a viable mission field," says Koehler. "So not only would we be helping our brothers and sisters in Christ, but we also would be poised to reach this growing community with the gospel."

As for the rural community of Benson, "if that [congregation] goes away, the district mission board probably won't go back. But if we can save that location, we can do ministry there and be poised for any future growth in that area, if that would happen," says Koehler. Since the merger, Koehler has begun reading stories about future growth in the Benson area.

GAINS AND LOSSES

As both Resurrection and Mount Olive in Wisconsin and the three congregations in Arizona began seriously discussing merging and becoming multi-site congregations, mind-sets and views of identity had to be adjusted, especially for the struggling congregations.

"The spiritual preparation to engage in a multi-site or a merger is infinitely more important than the logistical preparation," says Hein. "It's getting people to that point of selflessness and self-sacrifice. It's getting people to have a mission mind-set—what serves Christ first."

Feeling like you are "losing" your church can be quite emotional. "Our children went through Sunday school [at Mount Olive] and got confirmed there," says Meske. "It means a great deal because we didn't want our local church to leave."

While a merger could preserve the church location, Meske says the initial discussions about the merger were met by apprehension at Mount Olive. "The word *merger* means 'absorption from another,' the way I interpret it."

continued on next page



Bottom left photo: Women from both locations of Resurrection Lutheran Church meet in Monroe for fun and fellowship—and cooking classes. Ivy Ewings, wife of Andrew Ewings, one of the pastors at Resurrection, is teaching the women how to cook Chinese food. “It’s exciting to see both sites sponsor activities,” says member Richard Meske. Between 15-20 women are attending the classes. Top photos: One of the benefits of having multiple sites is having more members to help with outreach opportunities. Members from all four locations of Grace in Arizona helped man a booth and spread the word about Grace at the annual Vail-Fest in Vail, Ariz.

That can mean a new identity, new ministry goals, and different ministry plans.

“We wanted to instill positive DNA,” says Strutz. “People wouldn’t go back if it was the same old Mount Olive.”

He continues, “You have to be up front and say it’s the start of something better. For the good of the kingdom, this has to mean the end of Mount Olive as you know it.”

Koehler agrees about the importance of having a new ministry outlook. “The benefit of the merger is that difficult issues the congregation had to deal with before won’t cloud the ministry anymore,” he says. “Merging with another congregation means a new identity, a new start, a new philosophy of ministry, and a broader base of support.”

It takes a lot of trust for both congregations involved. Members from the healthy congregation may worry that they are losing too much of their pastor’s time as he works in another location or that their resources may be stretched too thin. For the struggling congregation, concern focuses on the things it will have to give up: its identity, its “say” in what happens, and probably even its name.

“We have to trust each other enough to say we’re going to do what’s good for the entire congregation and, more important, what’s good for God’s kingdom,” says Strutz.

Besides trusting each other, the congregations had to trust God. “It was a combination of doing our homework and trusting that God would make it successful or would use it for his purposes. That was how we approached it,” says Bryan Guenther, then president at Grace, Tucson.

ARIZONA MERGER

The congregations held numerous discussions and member feedback meetings as they worked on a plan of how the multi-site merger would work. After those meetings, Grace presented a proposal for the congregations at Benson and Sahuarita to review.

“I was worried to ask our congregation for an official vote,” says Breiler, Peace, Sahuarita’s, church president. “When the time came and everyone was behind it, it was a huge weight lifted off my shoulders. I didn’t want to see the church have to fold up and close its doors.”

The Benson congregation followed suit. After more legal work, both congrega-

tions merged with Grace in late 2014, making it a four-site congregation with the name Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Arizona.

And now the real work could begin.

With one congregation and four sites, communication and coordination are key. “It’s hard to overcommunicate when you have four sites in four cities over two counties, with a half hour between each site,” says Koehler. Grace’s plan is to have a site pastor for each location but to have one council to make decisions, with representation from each site. Logistics can be tricky for seemingly simple things like how and where to hold all-site meetings. Leaders and site representatives need to be trusted. Calendars and events have to be coordinated.

Members of all the sites also had to get used to the idea of being one congregation and analyzing important ministry plan decisions through that lens. Breiler says that at the beginning, people were asking, “What about our congregation?” when decisions were being made. “It was about getting into the habit of remembering we’re one congregation—we just have four sites,” he says. “We’re all the same; we’re all just in different places.”

As time went on, that togetherness became more obvious—as well as the blessings. “Instead of struggling to get by, the congregations have this energy and this hope to expand God’s kingdom. This opens the door for them to do the things that they want to do,” says Koehler. He stresses the blessings of a new extended church family, ministry planning, people power to help with ministry, and financial resources to support God’s work. “For outreach, it is also a great blessing,” he continues. “You’re more accessible to people. With two locations—and now four locations—no matter where you’re living, our church is available to you.”

Currently, Grace is building a new church and child learning center in Sahuarita to serve the growing community. All sites had to be on board with this direction, even the Vail site, which currently rents space for worship. “You’re committing all four sites to the one project, so you really have to think it through,” says Guenther. “Does this mean we can’t do other things at other sites? Perhaps. But this is the commitment. This is the biggest opportunity right now.”

MERGER IN WISCONSIN

The conversations in Wisconsin resulted in a merger too. Resurrection and Mount Olive voted to merge as a multi-site, officially becoming Resurrection, Verona/Monroe, in September 2017.

The name change proved difficult for some, including one longtime member at Mount Olive. “He said [to me], ‘I lost my church,’” says Meske. “I said, ‘No, you didn’t lose your church. We changed the name, but the Word and sacraments are still the same as they have always been.’”

David Plenge, then a member at Resurrection, Verona, Wis., but now church liaison for the Monroe site, highlights the larger significance of the change: “It’s not Mount Olive’s church; it’s God’s church. Don’t think of the name change that you lost something—you’re gaining something.” Those gains include more

people and more financial support to conduct ministry in the Monroe community.

The new name also can signify a new start. “From an evangelism standpoint, it almost made it easier,” says Plenge. “We could go out and promote that there’s a new direction, a new life.”

And that’s just what the members did. People from both sites began visiting former members of Mount Olive who had left the church for some reason. They canvassed door-to-door, using new move-in lists to discover people who may be looking for a church home. They also started participating in local events to make connections in the community.

And people started coming. Some former members returned to church, and new people visited for the first time. Sunday worship attendance more than doubled, including some families with small children. The Sunday school restarted. Seeing the excitement and the new faces, people began inviting their friends to worship as well.

“God just had a lot of things lined up for us,” says Strutz. “We haven’t done anything. God has done everything.”

With a new seminary graduate assigned to the congregation in May 2018, Resurrection, Verona/Monroe, is still navigating the challenges of being a multi-site, whether in communication, coordination, or joint decision making. “It’s not always rainbow and unicorns and cotton candy,” says Strutz. “But any of the issues so far pale in comparison to the growth.”

And the congregation is already looking ahead. Its ten-year plan calls for it to be in four sites. Says Strutz, “Being part of this merger has raised the sights of our members to say, ‘God can do this again.’”

Julie Wietzke is managing editor of Forward in Christ magazine.

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

“I’m really not sure if I chose the church or if the church chose me.”

Terri Keegan moved across the street from Resurrection (then Mount Olive), Monroe, Wis., in 2014. At that time, she was watching sermons on TV and felt that was enough for her. “I believed in God,” she says. “Did I really need to join a church?” The church across the street was just . . . a church across the street.

In late 2017, she started feeling differently. “I would look out my window and I would see the cross and the lights of the church,” she says. “That’s when I started noticing how beautiful it was, and it was pulling me toward it.”

She also noticed acquaintances of hers walking into the church on Sunday. She contacted them and asked if she could come too. They welcomed her with open arms.

Once she started attending, she never stopped. She began taking Bible information classes and started reading the Bible—a book she had never read before. “When I started learning about God, I just felt like a different person—it was the church for me,” she says. “I feel like I am at peace.” She became a member in April 2018.

Terri’s daughters have seen the difference in her and are visiting Resurrection as well.

“Terri wouldn’t have had a church to go to if we wouldn’t have merged,” says Nathan Strutz, pastor at Resurrection, Verona/Monroe, Wis. “This is why we have a church. It’s about saving souls.”



Resurrection, Monroe, Wis.



THE GIFT

OF

Life

Giving a kidney was a natural way to show Christian love.

Linda R. Buxa

"I joked several times that when Jesus said, 'If you have two cloaks, give one to someone who doesn't have one,' that this relates to kidneys as well," says Rebecca Steinberg. "I had two and Ken needed one, so it was obvious what I was supposed to do."

THE NEED

It all began in 2017 when Ken Daniels walked into choir rehearsal. Daniels and Steinberg sang together in a gospel praise band called "Forgiven" for the afternoon service at St. Marcus, Milwaukee. Daniels, who had been diagnosed with kidney disease in 2009, was being put on the waiting list for a kidney. He asked the choir members if they would be willing to see if they were a match for him. "If he didn't have a personal donor, he might have waited years to get one. This would mean dialysis and being too weak at times to go to work," says Steinberg.

Daniels, a high school choir director, also had a family. "He has three young boys that need their father around. Here he's a father figure too. We need more men in Milwaukee who are father figures. It was important. We needed him to stay here," says Steinberg, who had elected to be an organ donor on her driver's license but had not considered a living donation before.

The decision wasn't hard for her to make. "I always had in the back of my head that Jesus gave his all for me so I could give something for him, in order to give him glory," she says.

Her family was completely supportive. "[My husband] Paul and I have six kids, and they were all in college or high school, so they weren't really needing me. The only impact it had was I asked them to get me things from the kitchen more often than usual," she says. In addition, "my parents were living in the house as well, and my mom loves to cook. I didn't even need to worry about meals."

St. Marcus, where Steinberg is a music and art teacher, was supportive as well.

She had planned to take unpaid leave for the donation, but the congregation insisted on paying her. The students were curious. "They had a lot of questions about how the body works and wanted to know how long I'd be gone from school," she says.

THE GIFT

After agreeing to be a donor, there was a glitch. It turned out that Steinberg wasn't a match for Daniels—she has two arteries in her kidney and he only had one. But that didn't stop the donation from proceeding. Instead, it began a donation chain. "The head nurse, Jeff, put our info into a national donor website for doctors. He found someone whose doctor could use my kidney," says Steinberg. "That person had a donor that fit someone else, who had a donor that would work for Ken."

So on Sept. 14, 2017, three people in three different areas of the country donated a kidney. Those three kidneys were flown around the country and transplanted in the afternoon. "I don't know who has benefited from my kidney, and Ken doesn't know who gave



Kenneth Daniels and Rebecca Steinberg. When Daniels needed a kidney, Steinberg agreed to donate hers, which started a transplant chain.

him his kidney,” Steinberg says. “There is a protocol in place to keep identities safe for at least a year. I believe this is in case someone tried to get a reward for having given a kidney.”

Donors do not receive any financial benefit for the gift of life, “except that if we have a kidney problem and need to be put on the list for kidneys, we get put on the top,” says Steinberg.

She sees another benefit, however. While at the hospital, “I was able to witness to several doctors and nurses that Jesus died for me and for Ken and I was happy to be able to show thanks to him through this action,” says Steinberg, who went home the day after surgery. “There were no side effects for me. I have a high pain tolerance, so I wasn’t taking any of the pain meds they sent home with me.”

She went back to work four weeks later. One week after that, Daniels posted on Facebook, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Today marks the fifth week since God blessed me with a new kidney. I can’t remember the last time I felt this good! It’s

amazing what healthy kidneys do. I am so grateful to my donor and to the doctors and nurses that took great care of me at St. Luke’s Hospital. I had to dress up today even though I had nowhere to go; just wanted to celebrate my victory in Jesus.”

He returned to teaching in December. “Rebecca laid down her life for me,” Daniels says. “With everything in me, I’m going to spread Jesus’ message of love, and hopefully that message of love will cause others to give.”

CONTINUED OFFERINGS

Steinberg continues to give generously in other ways. St. Marcus supports two schools in Lusaka, Zambia, that are a part of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa (LCCA). The students in the U.S. raise money that allows students in Zambia to attend a Lutheran school. In summer 2018 Steinberg led a group to see the schools and raise awareness of the needs of God’s people there. This was her third trip.

While there, the group held the second-ever LCCA Teacher Conference for the teachers in Lusaka. “The teachers

from the two schools don’t get to see each other often because of the distance between them and the financial hardships that make public transportation difficult,” Steinberg says. Each teacher received a new catechism. “They were excited to have this new book and to be shown how to use it for answers to their questions about the Bible,” she shares.

Teachers were also instructed how to handle children with the AIDS virus and keep people safe in biohazard situations. “Many of the children at these schools are considered at risk because of AIDS or being orphaned,” says Steinberg, who plans to go to Africa every three years.

Her husband, Paul, isn’t surprised by any of the ways that Steinberg serves and loves others. He says, “My wife, besides Jesus, is the best person in the history of the world.”

Linda Buxa is a member at Immanuel, Farmington, Wisconsin.

Portions of this story were provided by Fox6 Milwaukee.

Drowning in a sea of bad news

Andrew C. Schroer

Take your eyes
off the storm
for a while and
take a long
look at your
Savior-God.

The news can be overwhelming. It doesn't matter whether you watch CNN, Fox, or MSNBC. I don't see a difference whether you catch the local news on TV, glean it off the Internet, or read the newspaper. The sheer volume of news can be overwhelming, especially when it's bad news.

Terrorists. Crime. Hurricanes. Earthquakes. Politics. Protests.

It seems that the more time we spend watching the news, the more it feels like the world is falling apart around us. The more we watch the news, the more helpless we feel.

We have no control over most of the events we read about and see on the news. I have little influence over what the president does. I can't stop hurricanes or earthquakes. I can't stop the shootings, and I couldn't even stop our local Walmart from closing. The more informed I become, the more painfully obvious it becomes that I can do little about the chaotic events happening in the world around me.

Thankfully, God can.

Just look at the history behind the Bible. Great empires—the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans—rose and fell as God's hand worked all of history to bring his Son, Jesus, into the world. Floods, earthquakes, and famines raged as God's loving plans and purposes came about through them.

Sometimes we are like Peter when he was walking on the water toward Jesus in the middle of the storm (Matthew 14:22-36). He was doing fine until he started staring at the storm raging around him. He saw the whitecaps and waves. He looked down at his feet and thought, *I can't do this*.

And he was right.

On his own, Peter couldn't walk on water. He couldn't stand in the middle of the storm. He began to sink. Thank-

fully, Jesus lovingly and powerfully reached down his hand and pulled Peter up.

When we focus all our attention on the bad news cycling across the screen, we can easily become overwhelmed. We are forced to face our own impotence. We begin to feel like we are drowning in a sea of chaos, violence, and tragedy.

There comes a point when we need to turn it off.

Don't get me wrong. I am not saying you should completely stop watching the news.

A Christian should be well-informed of what is happening in our world. We need to know what is going on so we can do our best to influence, help, and heal the ills of our world.

But there comes a point when we need to turn the news off. If you find yourself obsessing and stressing about the state of affairs in our country or the world, if you are constantly worried about our president or the border or the Middle East or any of the countless other news stories flashing across the screen, it's probably time to take a break.

Take your eyes off the storm for a while and take a long look at your Savior-God.

Open up your Bible and read the good news of his promises. He is in control. He is working all of time and history for our good. Even if this world goes to hell in a handbasket, you are going to heaven in the care of his angels because Jesus lived and died as your Savior.

When you feel like you are drowning in a sea of bad news, the good news of God's promises will keep you afloat.

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

MAJORING ON THE MINORS

Thomas D. Kock

MALACHI: "THE SON-RISE"

It was about a 20-hour trip to reach our summer vacation destination. Since the kids were young, it made more sense to drive through the night while they slept.

I listened to tapes, slurped down coffee (but not too much so I wouldn't have to stop), and munched on sunflower seeds. Sometimes I'd slap myself to drive away the sleepiness, or I sat up straight in the driver's seat. My eyes were often bleary.

But then would come the sunrise. As its warming rays streaked the sky, the countryside was more and more revealed. Energy crept back into me. Somehow, it didn't matter that I'd been driving all night. The sun was shining!

THE WOUNDING DARKNESS OF SIN

There's something about a sunrise, isn't there? Maybe you've experienced an all-nighter and the refreshing rise of the sun. Maybe you're an early morning riser and see the sun rise regularly. Either way, for many of us it's energizing and encouraging. Perhaps that's why God chose to use that imagery near the end of the book of Malachi: "But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings" (Malachi 4:2). That "sun of righteousness" is Jesus, the Son. And what does Jesus bring? He brings healing!

And isn't that what I need as I enter a new year? I have so many wounds from the year past. Some of those wounds came from others as I struggled with health issues or job losses or relationship struggles. Unfortunately, way too many of those wounds were self-inflicted, the results of my own sinful thoughts, words, and deeds.

Oh, how I struggle! Oh, how I make a mess out of so much!

And it hurts! Sin can bring horrible results, either for me or for those around me—or both. Sometimes it hurts more, sometimes less, but it always hurts. It always wounds.

Thank God it does! If it didn't hurt, we'd be even more tempted to live in rebellion against God, walking down the road to hell. Thank God that sin wounds us!

But even as I thank God for the wounds, they're still wounds. And the wounds drain energy from me, similar to how the all-night drive through darkness drained my energy.

THE HEALING LIGHT OF FORGIVENESS

Take heart, brothers and sisters; it's sunrise time again! We've just celebrated Jesus' birth; he came to this world because sinners needed forgiveness. And he won that forgiveness for sinners like you and me.

With that forgiveness comes healing. Jesus' death and resurrection assure us that forgiveness for ALL sin has been won. Those sins that were committed last year? They're forgiven. Jesus won that forgiveness. And the sins that were committed last month? They're forgiven too! What about the sins that were committed last week? Yesterday? An hour ago? They're all forgiven. God still loves us! He always will.

Hearing that is, oh, so healing! Kind of like feeling the warm, bright rays of the sun as it rises after a long, cold, dark night.

May the Son shine brightly upon you in 2019! And may he bring wonderful healing in his wings.

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

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

HOSEA

JOEL

JONAH

AMOS

OBADIAH

MICAH

NAHUM

HABAKKUK

ZEPHANIAH

HAGGAI

ZECHARIAH

MALACHI

Lineage: "Malachi" means "my messenger."

Date of writing: c. 450 B.C.

Unique feature: Written in a dialogue—or disputation—format: a question is posed, and then God answers it.

Key verse: Malachi 3:6: "I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed."



John O'Brien

The cross of
Jesus assures us
of his boundless
love no matter
what we must
enter on the pages
of our lives.

Turning pages

Our lives are a succession of pages filled with many events and people. At the beginning of each year we turn to a blank page and stare at it, wondering what might fill in the space when it's time to turn once more to a new blank page.

We also look at the page that is filled with yesterdays. A review of our photos can help us remember happy events with family and friends. The smiles on their faces bring a smile to our own faces as we remember. Yet pausing to linger over a few of those photos can bring back heartaches too.

Looking back is easy but perhaps not always pleasant. Life's joys are on those past pages—births, weddings, the hugs, and happy times—but so are the dark times. Depression and weariness cloud some of those joys. Tears that ran silently down our cheeks are not in the photos but are in our memories. The dark, sleepless worries are there too. And it's not only that the worries kept us awake in the dark, but they sometimes didn't sleep or go away even in the sunshine.

Tracing a finger down the events of the past, we may pause at the long winter, the summer storms, and the fall leaves announcing the return of winter. Hurricanes, fires, and floods may not have visited nearby, but we still can see the troubles and hardships they brought for others far away. We have recorded personal trials on the page at odd angles because they did not come neatly according to our plans. Instead, they unexpectedly interrupted routines and charted oblique changes of direction for our lives.

Some can touch the outline of a trial by running a hand over the scar left behind. But for others the scar is much deeper and hides inside where no one but they can still sense what it left behind. We hope turning the page will be successful at sending the unfriendly events into hiding. We anticipate that

as a new page opens, new pleasant events will fill the empty page, leaving no room for the unpleasant.

There is one thing we should not miss on the old, messy page. Somewhere you should see a promise. I'll describe it as a little boat in the corner of the page. The boat appears, almost overcome by a storm, and a single figure stands in it. He has his arms outstretched, and he says, "Quiet! Be still!" (Mark 4:39). Christians have included many of his promises on the pages of their lives. Those promises matter because they come from the One who loved us enough to suffer and die so we could be his children. He promises to care for us when we are weary and when we are joyful.

I think sometimes we can't see the promises so clearly. The storms—and the joys and accomplishments too—distract us. We may even miss them when we review past events. But the promises are there. We sometimes ignore them and just turn them into fine print on the page.

A new page awaits. We have all added a few lines to the page already. I suggest we add a promise at the top: "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10). You may prefer another promise. There are so many. The cross of Jesus assures us of his boundless love no matter what we must enter on the pages of our lives.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

COMFORT IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT: REVELATION 2 AND 3

Timothy J. Westendorf

INTRODUCTION

Revelation is symbolic.

Symbolic numbers play a big role. The number 7 is the most common. It is used multiple times in the first chapter. The entire revelation can be conveniently divided into seven parts, or visions, with the number 7 appearing throughout.

Revelation isn't the first time God uses that number. In the Old Testament the number is also used. While God does not reveal why he chose 7, its association with his covenant seems rather clear. A comforting suggestion could be this: 3 is the number for God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit); 4 is the number of the world (four directions); and the sum of these numbers (3+4=7) shows the reconciliation of God and humans through Jesus.

Keep that thought in mind as we move forward. The first vision contains a command from Jesus for John to write letters to seven churches.

CONFLICT

What can we learn from these letters? Some see only prophecy of future events, even seven different and distinct eras of the church's history. Context, however, leads us more naturally to conclude that Jesus is speaking about "what is now" (1:19).

These were real, historic cities in Asia Minor with real, historic Christian

congregations. Real, historic people were members of those churches. God's redeemed children, living with their weaknesses and in enemy territory, were dealing with conflicts from within and without. It was messy. It was tough. False teaching. Flagging love. Ungodly living. Persecution. Poverty. Indifference. Weariness.

Sound familiar? It was no different for those churches than it is for ours today. And so, we hear Jesus' words to ancient congregations as his words to Christian congregations in every age and place. They might apply differently at different stages in the history of individuals, congregations, and church bodies. But they are meant for us, the church militant, struggling in this world. "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (written multiple times in Revelation chapters 2 and 3).

COMFORT

Go ahead and read the letters. Do you feel comforted? Maybe not. Perhaps you feel convicted. Is your own natural heart exposed by Jesus' words? Do these letters paint an uncomfortably accurate picture of your congregation or synod?

Jesus isn't bashful about pointing out our shortcomings. But he does so in love. He knows the danger posed by unrepented sin and the damage caused by false teaching and ungodly living. And so he lovingly calls on his people to repent of

sin that so easily traps them. He always does this so he can comfort us with his words of redemption and restoration. So be convicted, but also be comforted by his forgiving grace.

What about when you are persecuted and feeling weak? Hear the voice of Jesus tell you that he knows you and what you are experiencing, just as he knew these ancient believers. Hear him invite you to find comfort in his promises. Victory over every enemy is yours alone in him. The gracious prize of heaven itself awaits those who faithfully cling by faith alone to him. Hide yourself in him, and find your peace and strength and hope in him.

REFLECT ON REVELATION 2 AND 3

1. With which of the seven churches do you most relate? Why?
2. What prayers (for yourself, your congregation, your synod) do these letters prompt?
3. Which description and/or promise of the Savior do you find most comforting? How will you remind yourself of that comforting truth this week?

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



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

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE COUCH

An old couch teaches an important lesson. Michael A. Thom

It was a momentous day at our house. We had bought a new couch. Our old couch was 20 years old and should have been replaced five years before. The springs were shot. The fabric was holey. How bad was it? It was so bad that even the garbage man didn't want it.

What do you do with a couch that bad? Well, if you have three sons old enough to attack and destroy, that's what you do. You drag it out to the garage, get out the chain, mace, and dagger (or whatever your kids might call implements of destruction), and let them have at it.

Two hours later, nothing was left but the carnage. After stuffing the last large chunks into the garbage bin, I started sweeping the floor and noticing all the interesting things that had fallen out of the couch.

You know, I thought, a person could use this stuff to teach his kids something about archaeology. So I gathered up a few artifacts and went back into the house.

FORGOTTEN ITEMS

I went into the room where my daughter and two sons were playing computer games.

"You can really learn something about archaeology from the stuff in that couch," I began. "Look at this. Archae-

ology is a dirty business, isn't it?" Everything was covered with dust balls.

"Archaeologists have a really hard job. First they find things that belonged to someone who lived many years ago. Then they try to figure out what those objects were used for or what they meant in those people's lives."

I held up one of the items I had discovered. "Can you guess what this is and what it was used for?"

I was holding a small, round, yellow, plastic disk with a hole in the middle. None of the younger children could guess what it was, but our oldest daughter knew.

"That's the thing you put in the middle of a record," she said

"They had records when you were little?" Our youngest son was amazed at the longevity of his eldest sister. Isn't that interesting? Our daughter was less than 20 years old, but in that short time the concept of "records" was already beginning to fade into the past.

Several other items were easily recognized: a letter from 1991, a rubber dart from a dart gun, a popsicle stick.

"If someone discovers this popsicle stick a hundred years from now, do you think they will know what it is and what it was used for?" I asked.

"Sure," my daughter said. "They will always have popsicles."

"I'm not so sure," I replied.

AN ENDURING MESSAGE

Then I showed them one last artifact. It was a green and yellow embroidered bookmark in the shape of a cross.

"Do you think that people will know what this is in a hundred years?" I asked.

This time there was no doubt about the answer. The answer was yes. No matter how many years pass, no matter how many inventions come into use and then become obsolete, there is one thing that will not become a forgotten remnant of the past: the cross!

God wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. He wants everyone to know that Jesus is the Savior whose life, death, and resurrection mean eternal life for all who believe in him. It is his will that the message of the cross of Christ endure forever. And so it will.

In the cross of Christ I glory,
Tow'ring o'er the wrecks of time.
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.
(*Christian Worship* 345:1)

Michael Thom is a member at St. John, New Ulm, Minnesota.