

Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



Equipped for ministry

Ministerial education graduates are ready
to share God's Word with you. *Page 20*

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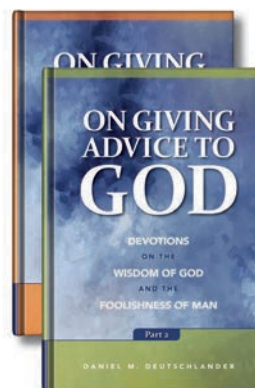
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May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. — 1 KINGS 8:57

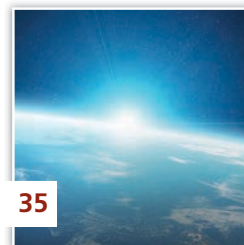
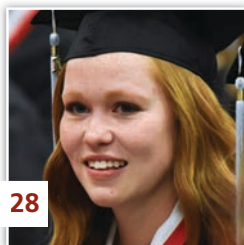
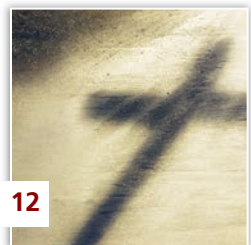
WHAT'S INSIDE

Every year, we run photos of the graduates of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) and Martin Luther College, people who have dedicated themselves to serving you and your children with God's Word. As you page through their pictures and look at where they are assigned (pp. 20-28), please stop and say a prayer of thanksgiving to God for providing workers for his harvest fields. Also pray for courage, resolve, and compassion for these young men and women as they face new challenges and new opportunities in our churches, schools, and mission fields. Finally think of students you know whose photos could appear in our pages 5, 10, or even 15 years from now . . . whom can you encourage to consider full-time gospel ministry?

This month, I had the privilege of interviewing a 2018 WLS graduate who is serving two congregations in Nebraska. His journey to become a pastor was anything but typical, and his love for his Savior plus his desire to share the message of Christ's undeserved love for sinners shine through. Read more on p. 14.

Finally, have you ever had questions about the public ministry and how God calls workers to serve? President Mark Schroeder will be spending several months exploring the divine call. Read his first article on p. 8.

Julie Wietzke



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GOD CAN USE YOU!

In “Success or failure?” [May], Pastor Mark Schewe shared an opportunity he had to witness to a missionary from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This was a great example of how God puts us in the right place according to his plan—often when we may least expect it.

Truth in Love Ministry has a witnessing Bible study (witnessinlove.org) as well as resources and personal mentors (pleaseopenthedoor.com) to prepare you to share your hope. Look forward to the next door God opens for you to share Jesus’ love with the lost!

*Jon Leach
Nampa, Idaho*

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

Through my Bible in 3 years



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2019
JULY 2019

- | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| 1. Ezekiel 42:1–43:12 | 12. Philemon | 23. Neh. 4 |
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| 3. Ezek. 45, 46 | 14. Ez. 3 | 25. Neh. 6 |
| 4. Ezek. 47:1–12 | 15. Ez. 4 | 26. Neh. 7 |
| 5. Ezek. 47:13–48:35 | 16. Ez. 5, 6 | 27. Neh. 8 |
| 6. Colossians 1:1–14 | 17. Ez. 7 | 28. Neh. 9:1–21 |
| 7. Col. 1:15–23 | 18. Ez. 8 | 29. Neh. 9:22–37 |
| 8. Col. 1:24–2:7 | 19. Ez. 9, 10 | 30. Neh. 9:38–10:39 |
| 9. Col. 2:8–23 | 20. Nehemiah 1 | 31. Neh. 11 |
| 10. Col. 3:1–17 | 21. Neh. 2 | |
| 11. Col. 3:18–4:18 | 22. Neh. 3 | |

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JULY 29–AUGUST 1, 2019

Photos and news will also be posted on WELS’ Facebook and Instagram pages.

Our shelter in God's shadow

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. Psalm 91:1

Daniel J. Habben

I wonder how many natural disasters will strike the world this summer. How many earthquakes? How many floods and fires? How many hurricanes will blow through our communities?

THE APPROACH OF JUDGMENT DAY

In 2016, Canada suffered its costliest disaster when a forest fire sped through Fort McMurray, Alberta, forcing the evacuation of every one of its 88,000 residents. I was living four hours south of Fort McMurray at the time, and many fire evacuees took shelter in and around my community. News about the Fort McMurray fire was front and center for months. It seemed to be the first thing that anyone talked about. We all knew people who had been directly affected.

Every forest fire, every earthquake, every flood, and every tornado is a not-so-distant rumbling that signals the approach of judgment day. When that day comes, how many will “evacuate” successfully? Will you be among those who escape God’s righteous anger over sin? Surely, the coming of judgment day should be in the forefront of our minds, just as the news of a local forest fire would be.

But is it?

I find that the heat of midsummer has a way of slowing me down. Projects and plans don’t seem quite as appealing as a little time on the porch with an ice-cold lemonade. Yes, summer often affords a break from the usual routine, an easing of the knot between our shoulders. But summer is not an excuse to let our guard down spiritually—to roll over on a Sunday morning and choose an hour of sleep over an hour in worship. The Word of God that is prepared for our con-

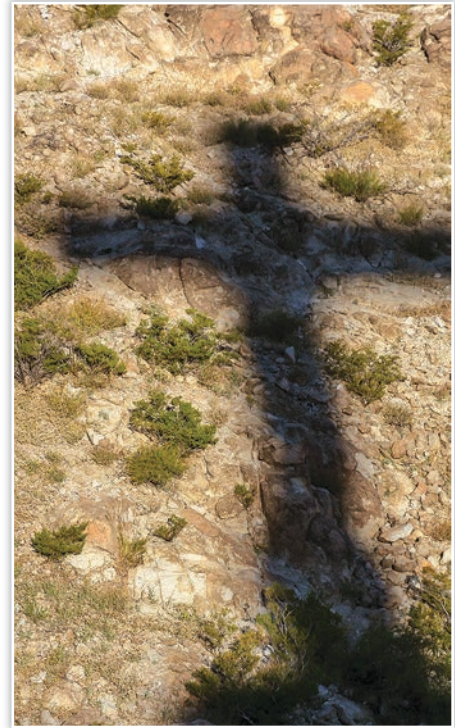
sumption during summer worship and Bible class is no less important than the Word we hear during the rest of the year. You and I need to be continually reminded that there is a fire-storm coming. The flames of judgment day won’t surrender to all the water bombers in the world any more than the flood of Noah’s day could have been held back as water burst from sky and earth.

When we continue to dwell in God’s shadow, we have nothing to fear.

THE REFUGE OF GOD’S SHADOW

So how can we escape God’s righteous anger over sin? The psalm verse above reminds us that when we continue to dwell in God’s shadow, we have nothing to fear. Those who stand in the shadow of the cross know that Jesus’ death protects them from eternal death and punishment. Time spent in Bible study and church is time spent in that sweet shade. As we find shelter in God’s shadow, we are also reminded that since Jesus has rescued us from the fiery consequence of our sin, his arm is not too short to sustain us in any other calamity that may upset our lives.

How can you encourage your family members and your fellow church members to keep standing in the shadow of the cross, even during the “lazy” summer months? Set the example by being regular in worship. Speak often about the truths you’re learning



in Bible class. Encourage your fellow members to stand in the shadow of the cross as zealously as a mother directs her children to put on a hat and sunscreen before they head outside.

This summer will no doubt bring another round of natural disasters. Lives will be disrupted. But believers can take refuge beneath a promise that cannot be burned or drowned or broken: “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”

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



Mark Schwede

God continues
to provide
workers for his
church and calls
them into the
public ministry
through believers.

A few words about the divine call

What does it mean when your pastor or teacher receives a call to serve somewhere else? How is it that they were chosen to receive a call? If a call is divine (from God), why do they get to choose whether to accept or return a call? How does someone decide? Answers to those questions and others help build confidence in the calling process and in the person whom God sends to serve us with his Word. But we must understand a few things first.

Every Christian has been given the task of sharing and proclaiming the message of salvation. Jesus commissioned every believer to “go into all the world and preach the gospel” (Mark 16:15). We do that in whatever situation God has placed us. All believers are to be ready to share the reason for the hope that they have in Christ. This is what we call personal ministry. These responsibilities and opportunities come from our Lord and Savior.

But God also has established something called the public ministry. That means someone uses God’s means of grace—the gospel in Word and sacrament—in the name of, on behalf of, and at the request of other Christians. The called worker proclaims God’s message not just on his own but as a representative of God and of other Christians.

Throughout the history of the church, God has called individuals to serve in the public ministry. In biblical times, that call came *directly* from God. He appeared to Moses in the burning bush and called him to lead his people. God also spoke directly to Elijah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and the other prophets. Jesus called his disciples to leave their previous lives and to follow him. The risen Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus and called him to be a messenger to the Gentiles.

In apostolic times, however, God began to call his messengers *indirectly* through his church. The church in Jerusalem, asking God for his Spirit’s guidance, chose Matthias as the replacement for Judas. The leaders of the church in Jerusalem chose the seven deacons to assist them in their growing ministry responsibilities.

Since that time, God continues to call men and women to serve in the public ministry through his church. The apostle Paul recognized that ministers of the gospel are called and provided by God: “Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:11,12).

The Lutheran Confessions clearly state that no one has the right to enter the public ministry by his own desire or decision. He or she does so only if properly called by God through his church (Augsburg Confession Article XIV). So today, God continues to provide workers for his church and calls them into the public ministry through believers.

While we believe the call to ministry is from God through the church, we also recognize that God has not established or mandated specific procedures in the Scriptures for calling someone to serve. So, in our freedom as Christians, we have adopted an orderly process for extending divine calls. The process we have agreed to is not a perfect process. Human weaknesses and flawed human judgment sometimes insert themselves. But the possible flaws in the process in no way diminish the divinity or validity of the call once it is received.

Next month, we’ll explore some of those questions and details about the divine call and the process for calling.

Light for our path

Can you please explain Matthew 5:20 in relation to the doctrine of salvation by faith alone? I have always understood the doctrine of faith alone to mean that someone is not saved by their own righteousness but through their faith in Jesus.

James F. Pope

Your understanding is correct. Examining Jesus' words in context will verify that.

GOOD

In Matthew 5:20, Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

To unsuspecting first-century Judean eyes, the Pharisees could have easily appeared to be paragons of virtue. They displayed a zealotry for God's laws—and their own rules as well. While most Jews fasted a handful of days throughout the year, Pharisees boasted of fasting twice a week (Luke 18:12). While certain items were exempt from God's commands to tithe, Pharisees made a point to tithe everything (Luke 11:42; 18:12). Casual observers quickly could have concluded that the Pharisees were good people and model citizens. They appeared to everyone to be righteous.

BETTER THAN GOOD

Jesus states that if people want to enter the kingdom of heaven, their righteousness needs to go beyond "that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law." On the surface, the Lord's words appear to be saying that if people are to have any hope of salvation, they need to do more and be better people than the Pharisees. If that is accurate, then the doctrine of salvation "by faith alone" would be in jeopardy. But digging deeper into Jesus' words enables us to arrive at an accurate interpretation.

Remember that Matthew 5:20 is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In that discourse, the Lord was not explaining what people needed to do to become his followers. The "congregation" listening to that sermon consisted of people whom the Holy Spirit had already brought to saving faith. He was teaching his disciples (Matthew 5:1,2). To these Christians, Jesus spoke of the need to have a righteousness that

surpassed the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Knowing what kind of righteousness those people possessed is critical to understanding Jesus' words.

PERFECT IN JESUS

The "righteousness" of the Pharisees was their moral, outwardly righteous behavior. They were not righteous in God's eyes (John 15:5; Hebrews 11:6). So what would surpass their righteousness? The righteousness that comes from Jesus.

Just a few sentences earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17). Jesus came into the world to fulfill all the commandments of God perfectly. And he did.

He is "the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1). His righteousness is credited to people who are joined to him in faith (Romans 4:22-25). God considers Christians righteous in his sight. Our righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law—because we have the righteousness of Jesus by faith. So this verse harmonizes well with the doctrine of salvation through faith alone.

Martin Luther described well the righteousness Christians enjoy through faith in Jesus: "Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, I am your sin. You took on you what was mine; yet set on me what was yours. You became what you were not, that I might become what I was not."

Because of Jesus' righteousness, we have entered the kingdom of heaven.

Contributing editor James Pope, professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. John, New Ulm.

James Pope also answers questions online at wels.net/questions. Submit your questions there or to fic@wels.net.

Your word
is a lamp
for my feet,
a light on
my path.

Psalms 119:105



AMBASSADORS

LET THEM SEE JESUS



Responding to the know-it-all

Jonathan R. Hein

The poet Stanislaw Jerzy Lec once wrote, “The only fool bigger than the person who knows it all is the person who argues with him.” That aphorism contains two truths.

Truth #1: Confrontation is a poor tactic when dealing with know-it-alls.

Psychologists explain that know-it-alls fall into two categories. Some have a sense of superiority, genuinely believing they know more than others. They will not listen to any argument because they assume they already have all the pertinent information. Other know-it-alls have an underlying insecurity. If you confront them, they will perceive that as an attack upon their self-worth and dig in their heels. Arguing with either type is going to be ineffective.

Truth #2: When encountering know-it-alls, you want to argue. Perhaps it is because you find their smugness annoying. More likely it’s because you believe know-it-alls are sharing dangerous falsehoods as truth. Perhaps it is a college professor who claims that anyone who questions evolution has been misled by religious zealots into anti-scientific superstition. Perhaps it is a neighbor who, after reading a few books that question the historicity of

Jesus, now explains how pointless church and prayer are. We want to quarrel with them because we love our Savior and his Word. Yet quarreling with them is ineffective.

So how do you deal with the know-it-all? Here are some suggestions:

LOVE THE KNOW-IT-ALL DEEPLY

It is easy to view the know-it-all as an enemy to be vanquished. Ask the Spirit to help you see the person as a soul to be won.

We think, “But that know-it-all is such a jerk.” Look at him or her in a different way. When we came into this world, all of us were dead in our transgressions and sins—spiritual corpses (Ephesians 2:1). But without asking or deserving it, the God of grace intervened. He “made us alive with Christ” (Ephesians 2:5). Were it not for the Spirit’s effort, you would be every bit as opposed to Christianity as the know-it-all. But God used someone to enable you to see the light. That person loved you enough to bring you to the font, to witness to you, to teach you Scripture. It is your turn to show love. “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). Being that light begins with loving the lost. The know-it-all is desperately lost and in need of love.

PROBE WHY THE KNOW-IT-ALL BELIEVES WHAT HE DOES

Some have compared an argument to

a house. In this metaphor, *what* one believes is the roof. To be held up, that roof needs strong walls. In other words, one must have sound reasons *why* he believes or eventually *what* he believes crumbles. So, ask the know-it-all questions about *why* he believes what he believes.

Take that neighbor who read the book that questions whether Jesus was a historical figure. She says, “It is very scholarly. The guy who wrote it has his PhD!” You might respond, “Okay. But most history scholars say there is plenty of evidence that Jesus existed. Why do you value the opinion of this author more than other scholars?”

The true goal is to get the know-it-all to examine if the rationale for his or her beliefs is rooted in objective fact or personal desire. If Jesus is who he claimed to be, then the know-it-all is under Christ’s lordship. Therefore, she is inclined to accept that author’s claims because she *doesn’t want* Jesus to exist. A follow-up question for your neighbor might be, “Do you think you are being completely unbiased? Might there be a reason you don’t want Jesus to be a real person?”

SHOW THE KNOW-IT-ALL THAT CHRISTIANS ARE REASONABLE

Some believe that being Christian means setting aside human reason. That is a gross misrepresentation. For Christians,





WHAT'S YOUR STORY

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

Scripture is supreme. When Scripture says something that conflicts with reason, we acknowledge that we cannot grasp all of God's works and ways. However, Christians still use reason.

Take Jesus' resurrection. We believe it is true because through the gospel the Holy Spirit has created faith within us. In creating that faith, the Spirit addresses our God-given intellect. For example, in 1 Corinthians 15:6, St. Paul writes, "[Jesus] appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living." Paul challenges those skeptical of Christ's resurrection to consider the eyewitnesses. Ask the know-it-all, "Isn't eyewitness testimony still something reasonable people value?"

Or take one's approach to science. I believe there are laws of nature. I also believe that God wrote those laws and is above them. Therefore, I am open to the *supernatural*. When scientific inquiry suggests that the universe is so orderly that it appears as though it were engineered, the unbeliever must find a natural explanation. So, he theorizes that there was time—billions of years—for the universe to come to exist only through *natural* means. When I look at the same evidence, I'm open to the existence of an all-knowing, all-powerful Designer who created everything supernaturally. I am not anti-intellectual or close-minded. The unbeliever assumes

everything came to be without God. I assume God created it. Both of us have assumptions about how to explain things. I'm willing to accept a supernatural explanation, but the unbeliever rejects that explanation. I'm actually more open-minded than the unbeliever. But we aren't blind. We see everything the unbeliever does. We just interpret what we see differently. At death, the unbeliever sees a corpse. I see a sleeping Christian. The Spirit's power is why I believe that. But the testimony of more than five hundred eyewitnesses tells me it is also *reasonable* to believe that.

TELL THE KNOW-IT-ALL WHAT HE DOES NOT KNOW

You may have softened the know-it-all with your love. You have tried to help him understand that the way he views things is not entirely objective but flows from some personal assumptions. And your questions show that you aren't some mindless zombie. You also think deeply about things. All these things give you the opportunity for conversation with the know-it-all, maybe even more than one.

But none of this will win the know-it-all for Christ. Only the gospel is the power of God for salvation. So show the know-it-all Jesus.

The know-it-all thinks he knows what God would be like, if there were such a being. He believes that God would be

judgmental and controlling and that if you were to fail him, there would be dire consequences. Like all of us, the know-it-all has a conscience. Failing God is a terrifying thought!

As Christ's ambassador, you get to tell the know-it-all, "Friend, you do not know God at all!" You get to tell this person of a God who had no interest in exacting a pound of flesh but instead took on flesh so that he might also take our guilt, paying for it with divine blood. You get to tell this person of a Creator who gave this ordered universe to all humans to enjoy and care for. You get to tell this person that God's Word is there not to control us but to set us free. Sharing this good news . . . that is the only hope for the know-it-all.

Only a fool argues with the know-it-all. So don't argue. Love. Question. But, ultimately, proclaim the wonders our God has done.

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

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





Walk by the Spirit

**Quarrels and hatred
come so naturally from
our sinful nature. Yet
our patience comes
from Jesus.**

John A. Braun

On our Christian journey to heaven, signs often point us to paths that lead away from our destination. Paul identifies one of those signs as hatred and discord. We don't even need this sign to beckon us to these acts of the flesh. They arise quickly within our sinful hearts and burst from our mouths with bitter venom. Without much coaxing, so often we cause heartache and cripple positive action even among our fellow believers in Christ.

ACTS OF THE FLESH: HATRED AND DISCORD

Arguments arise at all levels and in all kinds of ways. Sometimes those arguments are over silly and unimportant issues. The neighbor's dog leaves a deposit on your lawn, and you step in it when you're mowing. You get angry, and the words that tumble out of your mouth make your neighbor angry. It doesn't take long for you to be on the road to discord and quarreling. Husband and wife easily turn down the road, and so do parents and children.

It happens in neighborhoods. It happens in families. We are frustrated or hurt by what someone says or does. A little further down the road something else happens to fuel the tension. Soon we have turned down the road where hatred awaits. Hostility and enmity characterize conversation and action. A couple more steps and we are off the Christian way and building a hate wall.

Sometimes the turn from the Christian way seems so natural. Our prejudices and thinking contribute to building the wall. We know we are not "one of them." It's so easy to call different groups by offensive or demeaning names, and it's so easy for them to label us as well. The road of discord and hatred includes waysides where like-minded people stop and feed on their hatred for others.

This hatred has a twin—ideological hatred. Both are born from a human

HATRED

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

heart that has turned away from the Christian way. We hate Democrats. We hate Republicans. We hate this politician and the supporters of the policy or personality we detest. Yes, we can disagree about differences on any subject, but the human heart is a perverse thing. Actions of the flesh all too often play out in destructive rhetoric that destroys peace and hardens the discord—even turning it into hate. If there is any doubt, surf social media and read the vicious attacks on all sides of almost any issue.

Name calling and disruptive actions that flow from hatred of others are not part of the Christian way, and they destroy neighborhoods, families, friendships, and society in general. Jesus suggests, “Anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. . . . Anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell” (Matthew 5:22).

We should not be surprised that hatred, enmity, discord, and antagonism are so easy to find in our own hearts. We know the Christian way, but we also still have our sinful flesh. We know better, but we quarrel, and words hurt. Paul knew his own sinful heart and ours: “I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out” (Romans 7:18). It’s a short trip from disagreement to enmity, hatred, and malice. It happens in the congregations of Christians too. Arguments create a stew that can bubble and boil over to set members against members. Paul reminded the Galatians “If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other” (Galatians 5:15).

In this discussion, we should remember that God allows us to hate only one thing—whatever opposes his grace and

mercy in Christ. We hate such evil with God’s blessing, but we do not have his approval to inflict harm on others who do not share our beliefs. We are reminded to turn the other cheek and speak the truth in love. Peter advises, “Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing.” He continues by reminding us that we are to share our faith with “gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:9,15).

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: PATIENCE

One sign calls us back to the Christian way. In large letters it says, “Patience.” Yet in the heat of arguments and disagreements, the sign is difficult to see. Our first reaction to verbal attacks is to raise our voice and retaliate. We forget that we are children of God who know his love. Because we are redeemed and forgiven by a Savior who has shed his blood for us, we can stop, remember our Savior, repent, and be patient with others. It is not easy, but the love of God for us wayward and rebellious sinners can soften our attitude toward others.

We are told to stop, drop, and roll when our clothes are on fire. Good advice! It’s good advice also when we are on fire with hatred and discord. Stop! Drop to your knees, and roll yourself in the forgiveness and love of Jesus. Then stand up as a child of God and be patient.

The word Paul used for this fruit of the Spirit could also be translated as “forbearance” or “long-suffering.” Those two words are helpful. In the malice and anger that are directed at us, we can find the strength in Jesus to hold back, forbear, and be patient in spite of provocation. Long-suffering is similar. Endure whatever personal attack you experience—suffer the insult quietly, and do not be quick to retaliate.

How can we do this? Remember Jesus who has endured our sins and paid the penalty for our anger, harsh words, and malice. In spite of our sins, he went to the cross to claim us as his children. Think of what that means. His perfect example of patience in the face of discord has achieved the good our sinful flesh lacks. He did what we could not do. His righteousness covers our unrighteousness.

And yet there is more. He wants us to be like him here in this life and has given us a perfect example to follow. Think of Jesus responding to the Pharisees who claimed that he had supernatural power from the devil (Luke 11:14-28). Think of Jesus before the high priest and before the crowds that called for his death. Think of Jesus standing before Pilate. He quietly endured and is a perfect example of long-suffering, forbearance, and patience. Like him we are to be peacemakers and not agents of hatred in this world of discord, quarrels, and enmity.

When we walk along his way, Jesus knows that our steps will not be steady and resolute. We stumble and fall. It’s an ongoing struggle to avoid the quarrels that come so naturally from our sinful nature. Yet he calls us back, encouraging us to repent and to turn once again to the way that leads to the eternal home he has prepared for us. He seeks to renew our hearts and attitudes with his forgiveness and his example.

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

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

PATIENCE

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

A man's "before and after" spur him on to become a pastor and share the message of salvation.

Julie K. Wietzke

Nick Mount, a new pastor serving in Nebraska, loves to tell people about Jesus.

Maybe that doesn't surprise you. I mean, what pastor doesn't love to share the good news of salvation?

But Nick has a unique perspective: He didn't always have faith.

"Members say, 'He's so enthusiastic,'" says Diana Mount, Nick's wife. "I say, 'Of course he is. It's because he has a before and an after.'"

Nick adds, "I know what it's like to be without faith, and I know how scary that can be."

But he also knows the peace and joy that came from learning about God's undeserved love for sinners. And that is a message he wants to share with everyone.

"SOMETHING MISSING"

Although he was baptized as a baby in the Lutheran church, Nick didn't grow up going to church. His parents divorced when he was eight months old, and he lived with his mother. "My mom's side of the family was Catholic,

and there was no emphasis on going to church," he says.

Although his dad would take him and his brothers to worship and Sunday school when they visited, for the most part Nick grew up in a household where God's Word wasn't present. "My mother's side of the family had a bigger influence on me because I lived with my mom," he says.

When Nick graduated from high school, he joined the military. After serving for five years, including two tours of duty overseas, he returned to Wisconsin where he grew up.

Nick decided to live with his father and go back to college, but it was a struggle for him to acclimate to civilian life. "I remember feeling lonely and disconnected from the community. I was nearing depression," he says. "The whole time there was always something missing."

His father continued to share God's Word with him over the next two years, but Nick wasn't quite ready to believe it. "Going to church wasn't something that I was hostile to, but it wasn't something I did," he says. "Things were starting to make sense, but I didn't know what to do with my life. I didn't know what to do with my sin. I kept thinking, *I'm a mess. What am I going to do about this?*"

Finally, not knowing what else to do, he started praying.

"A CAPTIVE AUDIENCE"

A few weeks later, Nick was out celebrating the end of the school year with his friends. As they were driving to a party, he was having an intense conversation with the driver about the existence of God. "Just as I was saying, 'No, there has to be a God,' right at that moment, we were hit by a drunk driver—a head-on collision," he says.

Nick woke up in the emergency room, not knowing what had happened. He had broken his tibia and fibula and had hit his head on the windshield. His dad nursed him back to health, the whole time sharing God's Word with him. "I was a captive audience," Nick jokes.

God worked through the Word, and Nick started going to church and Bible instruction class.

"I had to be thrust back into the kingdom," he says. "Ever since the car accident, my life just went in a completely different trajectory. I can't completely express what happened."

He continues, "You look back at the terrible things that happen in life and you realize that they can be the greatest blessings, because my life completely changed at that point."

Besides going to church, he started getting involved at the Point of Grace, a WELS campus ministry for Milwaukee-area college students. There he met

Confessions OF FAITH



other believers—including his wife, Diana. “I look back and see how faithful God is,” he says. “The people I hung out with prior to the accident for the most part weren’t believers at all. But God just kept bringing people into my life who were believers, so I was being nurtured.”

“GOD’S GRACE”

At that time, Nick still wasn’t sure what he wanted to do with his life. After he and Diana married in 2006, he even mentioned going to Martin Luther College to study for the ministry. But the couple dismissed the idea, and Nick finally decided to become a speech therapist. He began pursuing his master’s degree at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee.

But that path left him dissatisfied—especially in light of his newfound faith. “I wanted to help people [as a speech therapist], but [I felt] if I can’t tell them about Jesus, am I really helping them?” he says. He began witnessing to people he met at St. Joseph’s Hospital, where he worked as a security guard in the evenings. “Nick would look for every opportunity to share Jesus,” says Diana. “He would spend his shifts witnessing to people. I think that was his training ground.”

Finally in 2012, Nick dropped out of his master’s program and again began talking about becoming a pastor. Things fell into place, and the couple decided

to take a leap of faith and move their young family first to New Ulm and then to Milwaukee so Nick could study for the ministry. “We knew if we didn’t do this now, we would never do it,” says Diana. “Those six years were hard, but the Lord supplied all our needs.” Nick graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 2018.

The Mounts are quick to thank all those who helped them along the way. “We would not have been able to do this if we would not have had support from countless Christians, countless WELS members, people we met along the way, and people we never knew,” says Diana. “We didn’t have to ask for anything; it’s just God using people to provide for us.” That support came through prayers, encouragement, and monetary gifts.

Nick noticed that same community years ago when he first was coming to faith. “It wasn’t just one person; it was a patchwork of people helping me and sharing God’s Word with me,” he says.

He says that support—and also his varied life experiences—helped prepare him for the ministry. “I’ve been prepared from so many different places in my life,” says Nick. “The military gives you a lot of confidence to face the battle, but it doesn’t prepare you to deal with somebody as a loved child of God. I developed that compassion when working in the hospital.”



Nick and Diana Mount and their family. Nick is pastor at Grace, Geneva/Trinity, Grafton, Neb.

His firsthand knowledge of what it’s like living without faith also spurs him on to share God’s mercy and love with those who are struggling, including veterans. “These guys are coming out of the military with questions like, ‘Did I do the right thing?’ Or the guys in combat who think, *Did I just murder somebody?* . . . It’s so important to be there with God’s grace.”

That grace made an eternal difference in Nick’s life—a difference he is all too happy to share.

Julie Wietzke is the managing editor of Forward in Christ magazine.



heart to heart parent conversations

I think that parenting is often like an ice cream sundae bar. No two people make exactly the same choices as they go through the line. But that doesn't mean that one person will criticize the choices of the other. One sundae is not right and the other wrong. People simply made different choices.

Of course, this analogy breaks down when a parent knowingly disobeys God's will, but in general, I believe that most Christian parents are trying to be the best parents they can be. God gives us some general guidelines for how to raise our children so they walk in his path, but much of what we do is a judgment call. We pray for guidance and that God will bless our decisions. Being criticized for those decisions can hurt. Our authors this month offer three viewpoints on how we can handle it when people undermine, question, or criticize our parenting decisions.

Nicole Balza

Join the conversation!

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

HOW SHOULD WE HANDLE IT WHEN PEOPLE UNDERMINE OUR PARENTING DECISIONS?

You've decided not to give your children any sugar until age three. Your friends get it, but your parents—not so much: “Is this a *millennial* thing? You ate sugar when you were little, and you turned out all right.”

When you leave little Garrett with his grands one afternoon, you remind them, “No sugar, remember?”

Still, Grandma gave Garrett a sucker. Sugar on a stick. The telltale artificial coloring is still on his lips when you get back. Now what?

You could blow up on the spot: “What did you do?”

You could go all passive-aggressive: Say nothing and never ask the grands to babysit again.

Or you could wait a couple days and then have a little talk, having the spouse whose parents did the deed take the lead. Here's one way this conversation could go:

Set the scene: “Mom, Dad, can we talk about something a little difficult?” (This preemption gives your parents the chance to be noble, to be big. It also sounds serious—*Do*

“You sure make parenting hard!”

That's the statement I heard from another parent as I finished explaining to my young child that we were running to the grocery store. My child didn't want to stop playing, but we needed to go. My friend insisted that a child should not have to do something he doesn't want to do if it isn't fun for him. I calmly replied that a run for milk was just one of those things we sometimes do as part of a family. No surprise that as we were walking to the car, my son screamed, “You're not a fun mommy!” Wow. Pop that aspiration!

This was not the first time, nor the last, that my parenting was undermined. While the circumstances were not terribly important, the principles were. I have seen firsthand that sticking to principles in the early years has payoffs in the later years. So I needed to teach my son some important lessons.

My mother hardly spoke of it. But when she did, even in old age, hurt haunted its telling.

On a Sunday morning, right after worship, Mom took my brothers and me to visit her parents. I was in second grade. One brother was in kindergarten, and the other was three.

Our grandparents' farm was our Disney World. It thrilled us with live acts starring chickens, dogs, pigs, and cows. Its mud and muck, ladders and lattices were playgrounds. Adventures always awaited in the barn, haymow, machine shed, and an assortment of outbuildings.

But not on this day. Mom warned, “Do not leave the house. Do not get your good clothes dirty.”

My kindergarten-age brother and I chafed under being tortured in my grandparents' living room by adult conversation. When we realized that Mom was fully engaged with her parents, we tiptoed toward the door and eased into the backyard.

We were escapees for only a few minutes. Transformation to ragamuffins didn't require longer. Our shoes were caked with mud. Our pants glowed with grass stains. Mom's

you have cancer? Were you fired?—which makes the real topic almost a relief.)

Say what happened: “Garrett ate a sucker at your house.” (A little gentler than “You gave Garrett a sucker.”)

Explain how it made you feel: “That disappointed us so much. This sugar thing is important to us. It’s not the end of the world that he had a sucker. We’re not mad. But we want to go back to our no-sugar policy.”

Make a request: “Can you back us up on this, even if you don’t really agree with it?”

Notice what’s *not* happening in this conversation:

- You’re not attacking them: “How could you do this? You just don’t respect us.”
- You’re not patronizing them: “We realize you don’t know as much about sugar as we do.”
- You’re not arguing the policy: “We’re right about this. Sugar is bad.”

You don’t need to convert them. It doesn’t matter whether

they agree with your no-sugar rule or not. The real point is this: You’re the parents. God gave Garrett to you to train up in the way he should go (cf. Proverbs 22). While you’ll always honor your father and mother (Exodus 20:12) and be open to suggestions—my parents gave me tons of excellent parenting advice, and so will yours—you’re allowed to determine your own parenting procedures.

Chances are that at the end of your 30-second speech, they’ll agree to respect your wishes. Then you can quickly smooth the rough edges by offering a face-saver: “On another topic, do you think we have to be worried about Garrett’s rash?” Or maybe even wrap it up with a little comedy: “Glad that’s settled. Let’s all have some cake!”

Laurie Gauger-Hested and her husband, Michael, have a blended family that includes her two 20-somethings and his teenage son.



Have you had a similar experience? How did you handle it? Please share your thoughts at forwardinchrist.net.

He needed to know that how other people’s families run was not his concern. He did not need to hear his mother pass judgment on someone else’s parenting. Whatever I may have thought privately was not the business of children. As a classroom teacher, it was often evident when children heard gossip from their parents’ lips. What my children needed to know were the rules for our family. Other kids’ parents were quite often more fun and less strict. Entering a parenting popularity contest ensures somebody is going to win at the cost of somebody else losing.

Dealing with contrary forces outside our home was at times difficult as well. Many times we found no need to address the undermining with our children because our stance was clear and consistent. Our children were smart enough not to waste their breath. Sometimes we did need to affirm our rules to other adults. We tried to point out what we did without be-

coming defensive or critical. Again, our concern was with our own family, not theirs. On occasion, it was made clear that the house rules of another family were in direct conflict with ours. This sometimes resulted in limiting exposure to these homes or children. It meant opening our home to our children’s friends. This had the unintended reward of getting to know and love our children’s community.

People are more receptive with your parenting choices when you show love, especially to their children.

When we were asked why our children got along or why they were respectful, the door was open for a joyful testimony to the goodness of God’s love and forgiveness.

Mary Clemons lives in Los Angeles, California, with her husband, Sam. They have three children and seven grandchildren.



voice shattered Adventureland. “James Allan! David Dean! Get in here this instant.”

Punishment should have been swift and painful. But Grandpa stepped between Mom and us. “Fran,” he said, “you should have realized this would happen. If you didn’t want them to get their clothes dirty, you should have had them change.”

An instant later we were on our way home. Grandpa saved us from the hurt of a spanking, but Mom experienced the hurt of feeling disrespected and shamed by her father.

Mom’s story urges me to evaluate how well I show respect for my daughters’ parenting. My daughters are great parents. I admire their wisdom, commitment, and sacrifice. However, from time to time, I do feel I have advice to offer. Then I struggle with choosing counsel over silence. I know my Savior’s advice about “speaking the truth in love” and saying “what is helpful for building others up” (Ephesians 4:15,29). Gratitude for his grace prompts me to honor his words, but applying his advice is challenging.

Several questions help with that challenge:

- Is there a risk of significant harm? (By the way, I’ve never answered that question with yes.)
- Is this the right time and the right situation for sharing my “wisdom”?
- How can I give advice in a gentle way that shows love and respect?
- Have I put the best construction on the situation? Do I understand the backstory?
- Have I asked, “Is there a way I can help?”
- Is this a difference in parenting styles or is this a parenting problem?
- Have I taken my emotional pulse?
- Have I asked Jesus for advice? Have I talked this over with my wife?

Now it’s your turn. Parents and grandparents, have a conversation.

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



Accepted

College applications require good grades, good test scores, and more. Heaven is different.

Leah M. Kuchenbecker

When I hear the words *college applications*, I automatically think of all the stress and worry that comes along with them.

As I was entering high school as a freshman, I was already thinking about getting into college and what I needed to do to be successful throughout my high school career. I was already worrying about keeping my GPA high enough to get into a good college.

I took the ACT my junior year of high school. This test brought even more stress as I studied to get a good score and waited to see the score of my test, hoping that it would be as high as I wanted it to be. Sometimes I wished someone else would just do it all for me.

Now it is my senior year, and I am applying to colleges and hoping that all of my work has paid off. I am writing essays, trying to keep track of deadlines, and filling out resumes. I am also beginning to think about how I am going to pay to go to college. I need to apply for scholarships and loans. While doing all of this, I need to continue to keep my grades up, because even if I get accepted into a college, I still will need to send them my final transcript of grades.

All of this work and stress is sometimes really overwhelming. Sometimes I just want to give up and not go to college. As I wait for an acceptance or rejection letter, I wonder if I have done enough to make it into college. I wonder if I will be accepted.

Aren't you glad that God doesn't run heaven like a college?

We are full of sin, and by ourselves we can't do anything to get into heaven. God wouldn't even consider us for heaven if we had to get there on our own. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Thankfully, Jesus did it all for us. Jesus came to earth as a humble, lowly child to live perfectly since we can't. He died on the cross, covered in our sins, so that we are perfect in God's sight. Finally, Jesus rose from the dead to give us a completely free entrance into heaven. "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). We don't have to be perfect or make up for our sins because Jesus did it all.

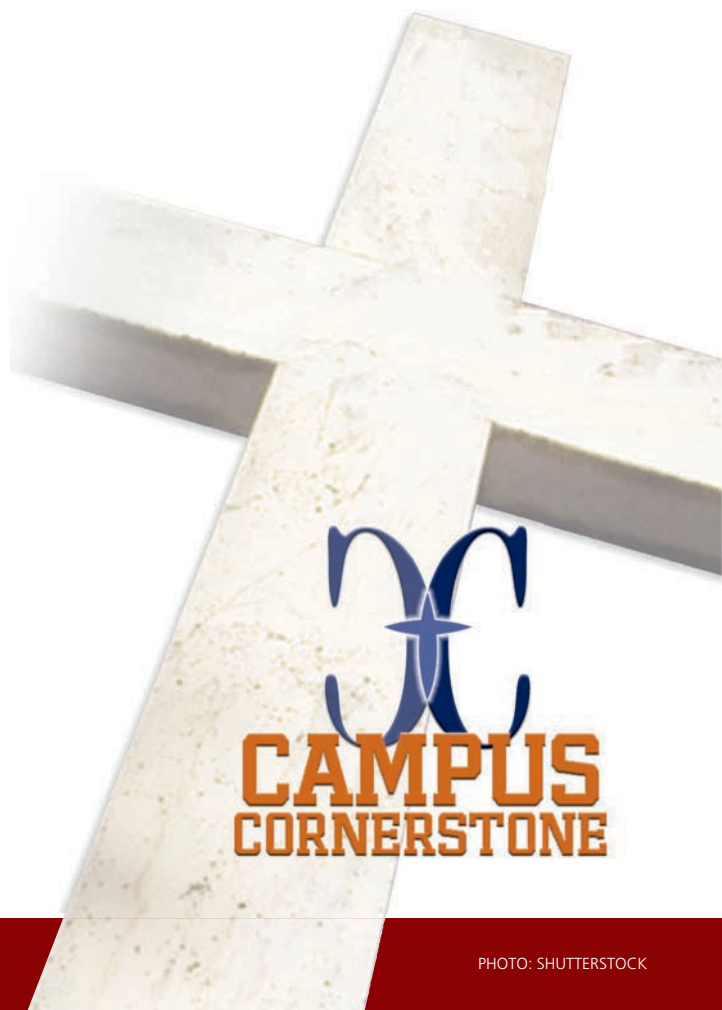
We don't need an application to enter heaven. There are no fees to pay, essays to write, or deadlines to meet. There is

absolutely no worry or stress involved in our path to heaven because Jesus did it all.

We don't have to worry about how to pay for heaven either. We don't need good works to earn our place or money to pay our way in. Heaven is a completely free gift given to us purely through God's unmatched grace. We can't be rejected from heaven, and God won't change his mind on us either. We will be with God forever in heaven at no cost to us.

College applications may be stressful and hard work, but our application to heaven isn't. Thanks to Jesus, we don't need to apply. We are already accepted!

Leah Kuchenbecker, a member at Morrison Zion, Greenleaf, Wisconsin, recently graduated from Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wisconsin. She will be attending Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, in the fall.



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Behm, Neal, to Christ, Merrill, Wis.
Bergene, Dustin, to Zion, Bristol, Wis.
Rubnitz, Aaron, to Heritage, Gilbert, Ariz.
Esmay, Christopher, to St. John, Waterloo, Wis.
Guenther, Jon, to retirement
Hartmann, Jon, to New Hope, West Melbourne, Fla.
Koepke, Michael, to Lamb of God, Phoenix, Ariz.
Oehlke, Christopher, to Immanuel, Buffalo, Minn.
Olson, David, to St. Matthew, Appleton, Wis.
Runkle, William, to retirement
Schultz, Terry, to WELS Multi-Language Publications
Schumacher, Raymond, to Trinity, Waukesha, Wis.
Tews, Steven, to Peace, Wautoma, Wis.
Thomford, Joel, to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.
Wright, Bradley, to Risen Savior, Mansfield, Ohio

Teachers

Anderson, Annette, to St. John, Milwaukee, Wis.
Baird, Andrea, to Christ-St. Peter, Milwaukee, Wis.
Braun, Jeremy, to Kingdom Prep Lutheran High School, Wauwatosa, Wis.
DeRuiter, Melissa, to St. Philip, Milwaukee, Wis.
DeRuiter, Michael, to St. John, Lannon, Wis.
Esmay, Kerri, to St. John, Waterloo, Wis.
Ewerdt, Hannah, to New Hope Lutheran Academy, West Melbourne, Fla.
Farquhar, Lauren, to King of Grace, Golden Valley, Minn.
Fischer, Fonda, to retirement
Fischer, Heidi, to Our Savior, Grafton, Wis.
Gartner, David, to West Lutheran High School, Plymouth, Minn.
Gates, Vicky, to Mt. Calvary-Grace, La Crosse, Wis.
Granberg, Stephen, to Grace in Action, New Ulm, Minn.
Haag, Steven, to New Hope Lutheran Academy, West Melbourne, Fla.
Heckendorf, Mark, to Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fond du Lac, Wis.
Hering, Joseph, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
Hering, Kelly, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
Hubert, Daniel, to Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis.
Igl, Jillian, to Peace, Hartford, Wis.
Jahns, Todd, to Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis.
Jensen, Elizabeth, to Mt. Olive, Delano, Minn.

Kanter, Nancy, to Zion, Rhinelander, Wis.
Keller, Jennifer, to Shepherd, Albuquerque, New Mexico
Kjenstad, Aaron, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.
Kock, Beth, to Atonement Early Childhood Center, Milwaukee, Wis.
Kogler, Katherine, to Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz.
Kromschroder, Shelley, to Salem, Loretto, Minn.
Lecker, Penny, to Martin Luther, Oshkosh, Wis.
Livingston, Nathan, to Christ-St. John's, West Salem, Wis.
Lund, Perry, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
Makinen, Sara, to Wisconsin Lutheran Elementary School, Racine, Wis.
Moore, Alex, to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.
Nottling, Ruth, to Mount Olive, Appleton, Wis.
Oppermann, Andrea, to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.
Ozminkowski, Laura, to St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wis.
Pasillas, Stephanie, to Holy Trinity, Okauchee, Wis.
Petersen, Amanda, to Mount Olive, Overland Park, Kan.
Raddatz, Laura, to St. Lucas, Milwaukee, Wis.
Rathje, Katelyn, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.
Schaser, Sarah, to St. John's, Newburg, Wis.
Schreiber, Matthew, to Crown of Life Christian Academy, Fort Atkinson, Wis.
Schultz, Annette, to St. John, Redwood Falls, Minn.
Sellnow, Larry, to St. John, Montello, Wis.
Sellnow, Lynn, to St. John, Montello, Wis.
Snodie, Jason, to Trinity, Waukesha, Wis.
Strutz, Christel, to St. Paul, Muskego, Wis.
Thies, Janine, to St. Peter, Appleton, Wis.
Tiedemann, Elizabeth, to Resurrection, Rochester, Minn.
Tomczak, Kristen, to Bethel, Sioux Falls, S.D.
Voss, Malissa, to Calvary, Dallas, Texas
Weiland, James, to Friedens, Kenosha, Wis.
Wolf, Eric, to Bloomington, Bloomington, Minn.
Wolf, Jill, to Bloomington, Bloomington, Minn.
Wolfgramm, Peter, to Grace in Action, New Ulm, Minn.
Wordell, Rachel, to Mount Olive, Appleton, Wis.

ANNIVERSARIES

Martinez, Ga.—Prince of Peace (40). July 14. Worship, 10 A.M. Website, princeofpeacemartinez.com.

West Allis, Wis.—Woodlawn (90). July 21. Worship, 10 A.M.; program and meal to follow. RSVP requested by July 8 for meal. 414-321-2126, woodlawnlutheran@gmail.com.
Aberdeen, S.D.—Trinity (65). July 27. Branches Band concert, 7 P.M.; July 28. Worship, 9 A.M.; program and meal to follow. Website, trinityaberdeen.org.
Grant Park, Ill.—St. Paul (150). July 28. Worship, 4 P.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested. 815-466-0093; pastor@stpaulgrantpark.net.
Baxter, Minn.—Christ (50). Sept. 8. Worship, 9 A.M.; program and meal to follow. RSVP requested by Aug. 11. 218-829-4105; office@christbaxter.com.
Ann Arbor, Mich.—St. John's (150). Sept. 15. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal, noon; worship, 2:30 P.M. RSVP requested by Aug. 15. 734-761-1740; stjohnsnorthfield2015@gmail.com.

COMING EVENTS

Taste of Missions—July 13. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Hosted by WELS Missions. Noon to 5 P.M. Learn about home and world missions and sample ethnic cuisine; worship at 4 P.M. Register at wels.net/tasteofmissions2019.
WELS Women's Ministry conference—July 18–20. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. Theme: "Living stones, positioned to thrive." Registration open. Website, wels.net/wmconference.
Reunion—July 19, 20. For Martin Luther Academy class of 1974. Dubuque, Iowa. Larry Schultz, lrschultz@comcast.net.
WELS 65th Biennial Synod Convention—July 29–Aug. 1. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Theme: "For the generations to come." Website, wels.net/2019synodconvention.
Christian Educators for Special Education annual conference—Aug. 6. Ingleside Hotel, Pewaukee, Wis. Topic: "Teaching children who have experienced trauma." Website, cesewels.org.
Annual golf outing—Sept. 6. Christian Life Resources. Ironwood Golf Course, Sussex, Wis. Website, christianliferesources.com/golf-outing.
NAMES WANTED
Military/inmates/individuals with special needs—Special Ministries supplies devotions, resources, and other spiritual help and teaching tools to members of the Armed Forces, inmates, and individuals with special needs. Complete an online referral form at wels.net/refer. Special Ministries, 414-256-3241; csn@wels.net.

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.

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY GRADUATES

At the graduation service on May 24, 26 graduates received diplomas for successfully completing their seminary studies.



Jordan P. Bence
Oconomowoc, Wis.



Benjamin J. Berger
Milwaukee, Wis.



Benjamin J. Birner
Lusaka, Zambia



Michael H. Cherney
Mequon, Wis.



Michael D. Hollmann
Hustisford, Wis.



Isaiah W. Horn
Mazeppa, Minn.



Nathanael J. Jensen
Ixonia, Wis.



Samuel M. Jeske
Milwaukee, Wis.



Jesse L. Knox
Manitowoc, Wis.



Adam D. Lambrecht
Fond du Lac, Wis.



Nathan R. Laska
Winona, Minn.



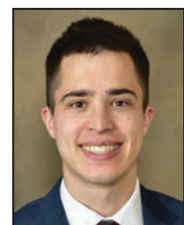
Luke A. Miller
Indianapolis, Ind.



Jared W. Natsis
Saline, Mich.



Andrew M. Nemmers
Allen, Texas



Tristan D. Paustian
Racine, Wis.

Assignments

At the Call Day service held at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., on May 23, 30 men received new assignments (listed below). From the class of 2019, all 26 students received assignments. Four candidates from previous years received new calls. Three were reassigned to their present fields of labor; three had their current calls made permanent



Aaron J. Platzer
Olivet, Mich.



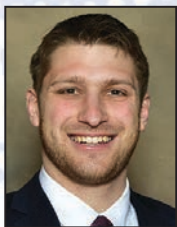
Timothy T. Prieue
Milwaukee, Wis.



Matthew A. Proeber
Janesville, Wis.



Jacob M. Reich
Lake City, Minn.



Daniel L. Rodewald
Simpsonville, S.C.



Steven J. Saatkamp
Milwaukee, Wis.



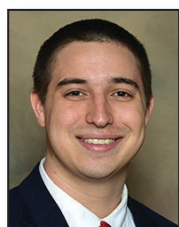
David N. Spaude
Antigo, Wis.



S. Zachary Steinke
South Bend, Ind.



Hans J. Thomford
Chesaning, Mich.



Andrew P. Westra
Columbia, Tenn.



Craig T. Wilke
Fort Atkinson, Wis.

Bence, Jordan P., to mission start, Joplin, Mo.

Berger, Benjamin J., to mission restart, Harrisburg, Penn.

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

Chartrand, Ross S., to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

Cherney, Michael H., to Trinity, El Paso, Texas

Crass, Samuel R., to St. Paul, Naper, Neb./Zion, Bonesteel, S.D.

Hollmann, Michael D., to St. Mark, Eau Claire, Wis.

Horn, Isaiah W., to Zion, Olivia, Minn.

Jensen, Joshua J., to Grace, Oshkosh, Wis.

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

Jeske, Samuel M., to Our Shepherd, Crown Point, Ind.

Knox, Jesse L., to St. Paul, Stevensville, Mich.

Lambrecht, Adam D., to Living Shepherd, Laramie, Wyo.

Laska, Nathan R., to Immanuel, Elgin/Trinity, Carson/St. John, Paradise, N.D.

Miller, Luke A., to Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

Natsis, Jared W., to Rock of Ages, Madison, Tenn.

Nemmers, Andrew M., to mission start, Houston, Texas

Paustian, Tristan D., to Bethlehem, Hortonville, Wis.

Platzer, Aaron J., to Peace, Loves Park, Ill.

Prieue, Timothy T., to associate for the Northern Wisconsin District president, Mount Olive, Appleton, Wis.

Proeber, Matthew A., to Peace, Eagle River, Alaska

Reich, Jacob M., to St. John, Bay City, Mich.

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

Saatkamp, Steven J., to Emmanuel, Hudson, Wis.

Spaude, David N., to Faith, River Falls, Wis.

Spaude, Paul L., to St. Matthew's, Niles, Ill.

Steinke, S. Zachary, to Mt. Olive, Bay City, Mich.

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

Westra, Andrew P., to Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

Wilke, Craig T., to mission start, Brandon, S.D.



GRADUATES

One hundred seventy-six people graduated from Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., on May 18. One hundred one were in the teacher track, and two were in the staff ministry track. Forty-five completed the preseminary program, and two received seminary certification. Twenty-six received master's degrees.



Jennifer A. Adickes
La Crosse, Wis.



Joshua R. Arndt
Rosemount, Minn.



Christian J. Arnold
Oconto Falls, Wis.



Seth W. Arps
Greenville, Wis.



Josephine J. Avery
Burlington, Wis.



Timothy J. Babinec
Onalaska, Wis.



Anna C. Barkholtz
Hortonville, Wis.



Katarina A. Baur
DeFuniak Springs, Fla.



Robert P. Beaver
Oconomowoc, Wis.



Kyle M. Bender
Beverly Hills, Fla.



***Brea A. Biebert**
Inver Grove Heights, Minn.



Benjamin D. Bitter
Milwaukee, Wis.



Claire M. Boeder
New Ulm, Minn.



Brittany M. Boyd
Chesaning, Mich.



Brittany K. Brassow
Fond du Lac, Wis.



Holly N. Breeden
Saginaw, Mich.



Matthew J. Brohn
Hudson, Wis.



Elizabeth M. Broring
Rochester, Minn.



Alex R. Brown
Watertown, S.D.



Aaron T. Bush
New Berlin, Wis.



Hannah M. Carter
Eau Claire, Wis.



Karl A. Christie
Waukesha, Wis.



Sydney M. Cody
Juneau, Wis.



Grey J. Davis
Lake Mills, Wis.



Justin D. Digman
Fond du Lac, Wis.



Caleb M. Dobberstein
New Ulm, Minn.



Jeffrey D. Dolan
Manitowoc, Wis.



Abigail H. Elowski
Oconomowoc, Wis.



Joshua L. Enstad
New Ulm, Minn.



Benjamin F. Feddersen
Great Mills, Md.



Erin A. Feddersen
Great Mills, Md.



Joshua J. Frailing
Appleton, Wis.



Grant D. Freese
Plymouth, Neb.



Kari R. Freiberg
Fond du Lac, Wis.



Margaret E. Frey
Newburg, Wis.



Haley E. Fricke
Mauston, Wis.



Nicolas R. Gartner
Redwood Falls, Minn.



Karis E. Gast
Manitowoc, Wis.



Mitchell A. Giovannettone
Watertown, S.D.



Nathanael T. Goelzer
Deland, Fla.



Erica B. Gorseger
Garden City, Mich.



Laura S. Gottschalk
Merrill, Wis.



Ross A. Gottschalk
Nashotah, Wis.



Daniel S. Granberg
Appleton, Wis.



Nathan J. Graumann
Fort Atkinson, Wis.



Emily R. Grunwald
Rochester, Minn.



Kati L. Guenterberg
Appleton, Wis.



Steven C. Haag
Elkhorn, Wis.



Kiernan K. Handy
La Crosse, Wis.



Kathryn N. Hansen
Watertown, S.D.



Angela J. Hanson
Lodi, Calif.



Rachel A. Hartmann
Germantown, Wis.



Alisha M. Harwood
Neenah, Wis.



Jenna E. Herlich
Eagan, Minn.



Hannah K. Heyer
Greenville, Wis.



Angela F. Hinsch
Goodhue, Minn.



Nathan W. Hinz
Steger, Ill.



Joel J. Hopper
Waukesha, Wis.



Mariah M. Jahns
Rosendale, Wis.



Taylor J. James
Escondido, Calif.



Spencer C. Jensen
Juneau, Wis.



Nathan J. Jenswold
Hortonville, Wis.



Daniel R. Johnson
Milwaukee, Wis.



Hailey D. Johnson
Greenleaf, Wis.



John Jordan
Sahiwal, Punjab,
Pakistan



Timothy C. Keller
Thiensville, Wis.



Max J. Kerr
Winston-Salem, N.C.



Benjamin A. Kieta
Detroit, Mich.



Zachary J. Kluball
Tomah, Wis.



Joshua J. Koelpin
New Ulm, Minn.



Samantha P. Koepsell
Appleton, Wis.



Megan A. Koester
Fort Atkinson, Wis.



Alexandra J. Kohlstedt
Sun Prairie, Wis.



Heidi I. Kostrzewa
Wauwatosa, Wis.



Rachael M. Koteck
Bangor, Wis.



Harmon L. Krause
Melbourne, Fla.



Nicole M. Krause
Overland Park, Kan.



Elijah D. Kroll
Kumba, Cameroon



Jonah L. Kroll
Kumba, Cameroon



Andrew P. Krueger
Findlay, Ohio



Caleb M. Kuether
Crete, Ill.



Christian M. Kuether
New Ulm, Minn.



Hannah E. Lange
Bowling Green, Ohio



Tyler A. Larson
Waukee, Iowa



Abby M. Lash
Racine, Wis.



Sara L. Lehne
Burnsville, Minn.



Benjamin H. Leibl
Omro, Wis.



Paul R. Leifer
Tacoma, Wash.



Jared W. Lindemann
Egg Harbor, Wis.



Heidi R. Lindner
Minneapolis, Minn.



Hope R. Loersch
Watertown, Wis.



Erik P. Lund
Spanaway, Wash.



Perry K. Lund
Spanaway, Wash.



Coleman L. Lupee
Platteville, Wis.



John P. Marquardt
Racine, Wis.



Jared T. Matthies
Watertown, Wis.



Patrick W. McKay
Juda, Wis.



Justus J. McKenzie
Neenah, Wis.



Megan L. McTrusty
Oshkosh, Wis.



Hayden W. Miller
Essexville, Mich.



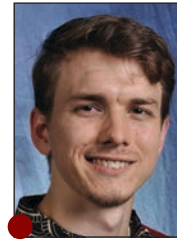
Jenna L. Miller
Combined Locks, Wis.



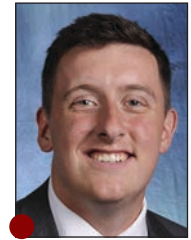
Abigail R. Mleziva
Manitowoc, Wis.



Michelle M. Most
Yakima, Wash.



Reuben C. Nitz
Lilongwe, Malawi



Stephen S. Oelhafen
Waukesha, Wis.



Micah L. Otto
Baraboo, Wis.



Martin R. Pagel
Watertown, Wis.



Molly A. Paggi
Onalaska, Wis.



Isaac W. Pappenfuss
New Ulm, Minn.



Paul E. Pappenfuss
Beaver Dam, Wis.



Hannah J. Paustian
New Ulm, Minn.



Sheryl V. Persaud
St. John's, Antigua
and Barbuda



Shelby A. Pitt
Chippewa Falls, Wis.



Janet M. Putz
Fond du Lac, Wis.



Sarah J. Quinn
Wisconsin Dells, Wis.



Sarah M. Radtke
Watertown, S.D.



Nicholas R. Raith
Baroda, Mich.



Brooke M. Rhoden
New London, Wis.



Lucinda J. Richardson
Wildomar, Calif.



Jesse R. Rider
Gibbon, Minn.



Sarah S. Rigge
Belview, Minn.



Paul C. Ritter
Rockford, Ill.



Joshua C. Robertson
Bangor, Wis.



Joseph J. Rodewald
Greenville, S.C.



Jacob M. Roecker
Waukesha, Wis.



Joshua M. Roth
Salem, Ore.



Anne E. Russell
Holt, Mich.



Anna R. Scarfo
Orlando, Fla.



Zachary A. Scharlemann
New Ulm, Minn.



Joshua T. Schmidt
Beaver Dam, Wis.



Maggie M. Schudlach
New Ulm, Minn.



Faith E. Schroeder
Novi, Mich.



Grace M. Schultz
Elkhorn, Wis.



Samuel R. Schulz
DeForest, Wis.



Elizabeth J. Schwartz
Greendale, Wis.



Jeremy F. Seeger
Doral, Fla.



Rachel R. Severeid
Manitowoc, Wis.



Morgan E. Shevey
Muskego, Wis.



Michael K. Sievert
Kenosha, Wis.



Samantha L. Sievert
Steger, Ill.



Alexander M. Smothers
Waverly, Minn.



Daniel J. Spaude
Antigo, Wis.



Jamie L. Spaude
Greenfield, Wis.



Adam M. Stevens
Larsen, Wis.



Elena F. Stingle
Black Creek, Wis.



Andrew J. Stoner
Shenandoah, Va.



Tiffany M. Tellock
Freedom, Wis.



Jason T. Teteak
Middleton, Wis.



Danielle K. Tews
Boise, Idaho



Jessica E. Thierfelder
West Palm Beach, Fla.



Lucas K. Thooft
Marshall, Minn.



Audrey C. Timm
Sparta, Wis.



Katlynn A. Tindall
Waukesha, Wis.



Henry D. Tomhave
Lake Mills, Wis.



Hugo A. Ugalde-Bemer
Cedar Rapids, Iowa



Mishayna L. Uhlenbrauck
Appleton, Wis.



Jacob D. Ungemach
Manitowoc, Wis.



Tyler J. Wahl
Holmen, Wis.



Jeremiah M. Wallander
Menasha, Wis.



Taylor W. Weber
Germantown, Wis.



Timothy J. Weddle
Bothell, Wash.

● Bachelor of Arts | ● Seminary Certification Program | ● Bachelor of Science in Education | ● Bachelor of Science | ● Master of Science

Assignments

On May 18, the Conference of Presidents assigned 142 new and previous teacher and staff minister candidates. Eight May 2019 graduates deferred assignment, choosing to pursue further education or other areas of service (some electing international service opportunities). Due to marriage plans or living in specific locations, 53 new and previous candidates were available for regional assignments. Thirty of those candidates were assigned on May 18 with the remaining candidates available for calls from congregations through their district presidents. Additional calls/assignments will be posted at mlc-wels.edu/events/commencement.

Teachers

Adickes, Jennifer A., to Faith, Tacoma, Wash.

Arndt, Joshua R., to Martin Luther, Oshkosh, Wis.

Arps, Seth W., to St. Martin's, Watertown, S.D.

Avery, Josephine J., to St. Paul, Wisconsin Rapids, Wis.

Babinec, Timothy J., to St. Philip, Milwaukee, Wis.

Beagle, Christopher R., to Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb.

Boeder, Claire M., to Trinity, Belle Plaine, Minn.

Buch, Garrett M., to St. Paul, Stevensville, Mich.

Caldwell-Boeder, Allan L., to St. John, Waterloo, Wis.

Carter, Hannah M., to Zion, Valentine, Neb.

Cody, Sydney M., to Peridot-Our Savior's, Peridot, Ariz.

Crass, Christa M., to Christ-St. Peter, Milwaukee, Wis.

Dobberstein, Sara C., to The Shepherd's Lambs Child Care Center, New Hope, Minn.

Duff, Elizabeth D., to First, Lake Geneva, Wis.

Eggers, Shannon E., to Michigan Lutheran High School, Saint Joseph, Mich.

Elowski, Abigail H., to St. John's, Sparta, Wis.

Enstad, Joshua L., to Evergreen Lutheran High School, Tacoma, Wash.

Feddersen, Erin A., to Immanuel, La Crosse, Wis.

Freiberg, Kari R., to Abiding Word, Houston, Texas

Fricke, Haley E., to Divine Peace, Largo, Md.

Gast, Karis E., to St. Paul, Franklin, Wis.

Giovannettone, Mitchell A., to St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wis.

Granberg, Daniel S., to Abiding Peace Academy, Simpsonville, S.C.

Guhl, Nathan L., to Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb.

Handy, Kiernan K., to Peace, Sun Prairie, Wis.

Hansen, Katheryn N., to Little Lambs Preschool, Mandan, N.D.

Hartmann, Rachel A., to Garden Homes, Milwaukee, Wis.

Harwood, Alisha M., to First, La Crosse, Wis.

Hemmelman, Abigail R., to Risen Savior, Milwaukee, Wis.

Henning, Elizabeth E., to St. Paul, Rapid City, S.D.

Heyer, Hannah K., to Apostles, San Jose, Calif.

Hinsch, Angela F., to St. Paul, Rapid City, S.D.

Jahns, Mariah M., to St. Peter, Appleton, Wis.

James, Taylor J., to Grace Lutheran Child Learning Center, Sahuarita, Ariz.

Jensen, Spencer C., to Christ, Big Bend, Wis.

Jenswold, Emily R., to Loving Shepherd, Milwaukee, Wis.

Jeske, Elizabeth H., to Christ the King, Palm Coast, Fla.

Johnson, Hailey D., to Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minn.

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

Koester, Megan A., to Illinois Lutheran Elementary School, Crete, Ill.

Kohlstedt, Alexandra J., to St. John's, Sparta, Wis.

Kotek, Rachael M., to Mt. Calvary-Grace, La Crosse, Wis.

Kretsch, Travis J., to Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fond du Lac, Wis.

Kroll, Elijah D., to Grace, Kenai, Alaska

Assignments continued on p. 28



Seth R. Weide
New Berlin, Wis.



Haleigh M. Weiers
Belle Plaine, Minn.



Rylee K. Weisensel
New Ulm, Minn.



John J. Wenzel
Coleman, Wis.



Daniel C. Wessel
New Ulm, Minn.



Joel W. Westenberg
Marshfield, Wis.



Samuel P. Westra
Grove City, Ohio



Justin T. Wiechmann
Oconomowoc, Wis.



Holly N. Wildeman
Gaylord, Mich.



Grace E. Williams
Cypress, Texas



Christian A. Willick
Elm Grove, Wis.



Andrea M. Witzel
Hubertus, Wis.



Matthew J. Zeng
Roseville, Minn.



Anna E. Ziel
Ixonia, Wis.



Eric W. Ziel
Ixonia, Wis.

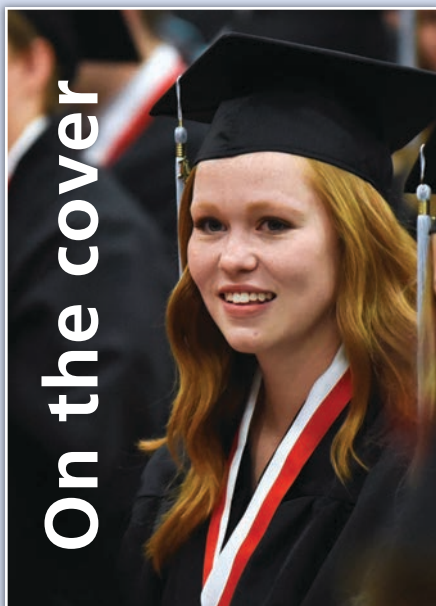
*Following the precedent of Northwestern College, women interested in the classical and/or biblical languages can also complete a Bachelor of Arts degree. This is the first such degree conferred by Martin Luther College.

Assignments, continued from p. 27

Kuether, Christian M., to Michigan Lutheran High School, Saint Joseph, Mich.
Lange, Hannah E., to St. Paul, Stevensville, Mich.
Loersch, Hope R., to St. Paul, Menomonie, Wis.
Madson, Caroline G., to East Fork, Whiteriver, Ariz.
Maertz, Alyssa K., to Holy Trinity, Des Moines, Wash.
Marquardt, John P., to St. Philip, Milwaukee, Wis.
Miller, Hayden W., to Emanuel, New London, Wis.
Miller, Jenna L., to St. John, St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda
Mose, Joshua J., to St. John, Jefferson, Wis.
Mose, Sarah G., to St. Paul, Ixonia, Wis.
Nommensen, Josiah S., to Grace, Grand Anse, Grenada
Paggi, Molly A., to St. Paul, Howards Grove, Wis.
Paustian, Hannah J., to Zion, Columbus, Wis.
Persaud, Sheryl V., to St. John, St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda
Pitt, Shelby A., to St. Paul, Saginaw, Mich.
Putz, Janet M., to Christ, Eagle River, Wis.
Quinn, Sarah J., to St. John, St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda
Rhoden, Brooke M., to St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wis.
Richardson, Lucinda J., to St. Lucas, Milwaukee, Wis.
Rigge, Sarah S., to St. Croix Lutheran Academy, West Saint Paul, Minn.

Robertson, Joshua C., to King of Kings, Garden Grove, Calif.
Rockhoff, Stephanie N., to Faith, Anchorage, Alaska
Rodewald, Joseph J., to Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.
Rodriguez, Holle N., to St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn.
Rosenbaum, Elise M., to Good Shepherd, Downers Grove, Ill.
Santos, Martin, to California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, Calif.
Scarfo, Anna R., to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.
Scharlemann, Zachary A., to Divine Savior Academy, Doral, Fla.
Schlieper, James A., to East Fork, Whiteriver, Ariz.
Schmudlach, Maggie M., to Trinity, West Bend, Wis.
Schoch, Megan S., to St. Paul, Columbus, Ohio
Schroeder, Faith E., to Mt. Lebanon-Omega Campus, Milwaukee, Wis.
Schultz, Grace M., to Emmanuel, Tempe, Ariz.
Schultz, Kyla M., to Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.
Severeid, Joshua M., to Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz.
Shevey, Morgan E., to Bethlehem, Hortonville, Wis.
Shiery, Marissa A., to St. John, Bay City, Mich.
Sievert, Michael K., to Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.
Sievert, Samantha L., to Precious Lambs Early Learning Center, Raleigh, N.C.

Spaude, Jamie L., to Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.
Stevens, Adam M., to Beautiful Savior, Grove City, Ohio
Tellock, Tiffany M., to St. Paul, Columbus, Ohio
Tindall, Katlynn A., to Zion, Toledo, Ohio
Vrable, Raine L., to St. John, Milwaukee, Wis.
Wahl, Tyler J., to Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D.
Walkley, Bryan J., to Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb.
Weddle, Timothy J., to California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, Calif.
Weiers, Haleigh M., to Good Shepherd Lutheran Academy, Deltona, Fla.
Weisensel, Rylee K., to Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb.
Westenberg, Joel W., to St. John, Redwood Falls, Minn.
Wildeman, Holly N., to Immanuel, Salem, Ore.
Williams, Grace E., to Siloah, Milwaukee, Wis.
Witzel, Andrea M., to St. Paul, Tomah, Wis.
Zabel, Hannah M., to Bloomington, Bloomington, Minn.
Ziel, Anna E., to Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D.
Zweifel, Jason A., to Christ the King, Palm Coast, Fla.
Staff ministers
Enter, Alexander M., to Zion, Peshtigo, Wis.
Graumann, Nathan J., to Apostles, San Jose, Calif.



Hannah Paustian, a 2019 graduate of Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., was one of 142 teachers and staff ministers who received calls at Assignment Day this year. Paustian was assigned to Zion, Columbus, Wis., to teach first and second grade.

As part of her preparation, Paustian student taught at Divine Savior Academy, Doral, Fla. The cover shows her with some of her first-graders. "It was one of the first times I could actually picture myself having my own classroom," she says. "We have other [teaching] experiences, but being in the same classroom every single day for ten weeks and getting the responsibility of being an actual teacher is when I finally felt

that one, I could do it, and two, I wanted to do it."

Besides getting ready to start her new call, Paustian is getting married this summer—to fellow MLC graduate Joe Rodewald, who was assigned to serve as a tutor at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. "There was no guarantee that we would both get a call," she says, "so we were extra excited that both of us received an assignment that day."

She continues, "I'm super grateful for my time at MLC. . . . With the continuous support and prayers from the professors and from your peers, it's just really motivating to continue on after MLC when you know that you're prepared and ready to go out and be in the ministry."

FOR THE GENERATIONS TO COME

SYNOD CONVENTION 2019

MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE, NEW ULM, MINN., JULY 29–AUG. 1

The synod convention provides the opportunity for grassroots input and decision-making about the work that we do together as a synod. Delegates—including pastors, male teachers, male staff ministers, and laymen—representing congregations across the synod come together to adopt a ministry financial plan, which describes how we will use the financial resources God provides to carry out his work. The convention helps set the priorities and chart the direction of the synod's areas of ministry in the coming years.

This year, delegates will also elect a synod president and second vice president as well as chairmen and members for synod committees and boards.

Follow the convention from home by visiting wels.net/2019synodconvention. Here's a calendar of some of the highlights of the convention, some of which are being live-streamed. All times are in Central Standard Time, are approximate, and may be changed by the Steering Committee.

JULY
29

MONDAY

6:30 P.M. — Opening worship service.



JULY
30

TUESDAY

8:00 A.M. — Lutheran Women's Missionary Society presentation of the flags of WELS Missions.

9:15 A.M. — Larry Schlomer, administrator for WELS World Missions, shares progress on WELS' opportunity in Vietnam.

10:45 A.M. — WELS President Mark Schroeder gives his President's Report.

1:45 P.M. — Jonathan Hein, director of WELS Commission on Congregational Counseling, gives the convention essay, "For the Generations to Come."

7:00 P.M. — WELS world missionaries share updates from their mission fields.



JULY
31

WEDNESDAY

8:20 A.M. — Potential declaration of fellowship with two overseas church bodies.



9:20 A.M. — Presentations by WELS World Missions, Home Missions, Ministerial Education, and Congregational Services.

3:00 P.M. — Floor committee reports and resolutions (tentative).

6:30 P.M. — Martin Luther College launches its "Equipping Christian Witnesses" campaign.



AUGUST
1

THURSDAY

8:20 A.M. — Final floor committee reports and resolutions.

1:00 P.M. — Closing service, including the installation of the synod president and the second vice president.



To learn about the ministries and topics being discussed at the convention, read the *Book of Reports and Memorials* at wels.net/2019synodconvention, located under "Key convention documents."



A WELS member loves listening to the gospel regularly after coming back to church.

Rachel Hartman

Kristin Young grew up in Wisconsin and learned about Jesus at an early age. “I was in a WELS church since I was a baby,” she says.

HEARING THE OLD STORY

In the mid-1990s, Kristin and her son Matthew joined St. Mark’s, Watertown, Wis. Her son was confirmed there, and the two attended worship regularly for several years. As he grew older, however, Matthew stopped coming to church as consistently. “Like some young people, he fell away from the church,” notes Kristin. “He went through some rough times. I was still going to church and encouraging him to go as much as possible.” Despite her efforts, Kristin’s son didn’t return to the Lutheran church.

As a young adult, Matthew began working at a restaurant in Watertown. While there, he became friends with a coworker who was associated with a Baptist church in the area. The friend invited Matthew to visit a Baptist service and see what it was like. Matthew accepted the invitation and soon after started attending services at the congregation. After getting to know the church, Matthew decided to join the Baptist congregation and asked Kristin to go there with him.

“I started going to church with my son and discontinued going to St. Mark’s,” Kristin says. She didn’t always attend services at the Baptist church, as she worked night shifts as a nursing assistant at a nursing home in the area. “I would go to church when I could,” she says. “I never knew if that was the right decision in my heart.”

A TRAGEDY STRIKES

During the next years, Matthew grew more involved with the local Baptist congregation. Kristin continued to go to church with her son when she could

and watched him take on leadership roles. “He became very strong in the Baptist church and very strong religiously,” she says. “He went preaching in prisons in this area to the inmates.”

In addition to taking on more duties at the Baptist church, Matthew continued working at a restaurant. At the age of 27, he appeared to be a healthy, active adult. During January 2014, he grew ill and suspected he had the flu or a cold. “It was more life threatening than he and I both thought,” Kristin says.

Several days after developing flu-like symptoms, Matthew passed away. “He had a blood clot in his left lung that entered his heart, and he died from that,” says Kristin. “The autopsy revealed where the clot developed and how it developed.” Grief-stricken and heartbroken, Kristin decided not to pinpoint the exact cause of the blood clot. “I just left the death in God’s hands. This helped as I tried to find peace and acceptance with everything that happened.”

A CHANGE OF DIRECTION

“After my son passed away, it wasn’t the same for me,” Kristin says of the Baptist congregation. She stopped attending. She then looked for a place where she could continue to learn and grow on a spiritual level. After time and thought, she decided to return to St. Mark’s. “I felt more comfortable in the WELS congregation setting, and I felt a strong need to come back to St. Mark’s. I was longing to get back—I felt like a lost soul.”

On her first Sunday back at St. Mark’s, the pastors welcomed her warmly. “Different members came up and said, ‘Hi.’ The congregation had changed a little since I had been there, and there were some people whom I didn’t know. The ones I knew were happy that I came back to church,” she says.

Once she made the initial return to the Lutheran congregation, Kristin was satisfied with her direction. The pastors of the congregation asked her to take a Bible information class. “We met every Tuesday and went through different parts of the Bible,” Kristin says. “If

you’ve been a member of the church for a while, it’s like a refresher course.”

Kristin appreciated going through the different highlights of the Bible and reviewing the story of Jesus. She enjoyed taking another look at Jesus’ death on the cross and how his resurrection brings victory for us over our sins. She started attending weekly worship as often as her work schedule would allow. The Bible information class ended, and she was reinstated as a member. After that, she started coming to a different Bible study during the week.

GAINING PEACE AT HEART

Reflecting on her start at the Lutheran church, her shift to a different congregation, and her eventual return to WELS, Kristin is content with her path. “I feel in my heart that I made the right move to come back,” she says. “I think it was God’s will and God’s direction. I have peace of mind knowing that I made the right decision.”

Young had long sensed a spiritual need, which she traces back to her childhood. “I’ve always felt a strong desire to be near God. I’ve always had a strong spiritual side since I was a little girl, especially in the past few years. Losing my son—the only thing I can say that has helped me gain the acceptance of the death and go on through my life is the strength that God has given me through the Holy Spirit. For household decisions and life decisions, I always lean on God.”

Even though the congregation has around three thousand members, Kristin has made personal connections during her time there and feels a sense of community. “It’s a very close-knit group,” she says. “It’s nice to know that I truly belong.”

She also notes the spiritual concern the ministers show for the people they serve. “I’ve known some of the pastors here for a long time, and they care about their members,” she says. “Even though there are many people, they all know how to address the needs of the congregation and how to address everyone’s individual needs.”



Kristin Young and her son Matthew at Matthew’s confirmation in 2000.

Kristin continues to look forward to the Bible-based teachings, which focus on Jesus’ forgiveness and promise of eternal life in heaven with God. She often will send an e-mail or note to the pastors, referencing a message in a sermon that was especially meaningful to her or expressing her appreciation for the preaching of the gospel.

To those who attended a WELS church at one time but no longer come, Kristin says that it’s worth taking the time to attend a service at a Lutheran congregation in your area. “If you’re uncertain, just talk to one of the pastors and say you’re thinking about coming back,” she notes. “I’m so glad I made the switch.”

And if you know someone who was once regularly present in a Lutheran congregation but now is not, consider reaching out to them. “Never tire of inviting back your family and friends who wander,” says Karl Walther, pastor at St. Mark’s. “You might catch them at the right time.”

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

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

Everything
we have is
because God
in his love
has provided
it for us.

Not just the capital of Rhode Island

Andrew C. Schroer

In December of 1630, Roger Williams, a Puritan pastor from England, boarded a ship called the *Lyon* and sailed to the New World. He and his wife, Mary, hoped to find peace from the persecution they had suffered as Puritans. They settled in the Massachusetts colony and began serving a Puritan congregation in the town of Salem.

Williams, however, was soon expelled from the congregation due to his radical views. You see, Williams believed that church and state should be completely separate—that the government shouldn't get involved with or regulate churches. To our modern sensibilities, such an idea is far from radical. In fact, it's one of the founding principles of our country—in large part due to Roger Williams.

In the 17th century, however, the separation of church and state was considered fanatical and subversive. So Williams looked for a place where his family could live and believe what they wanted without government interference. He took a boat to a tiny island called Rhode Island, which at the time was inhabited almost entirely by Native Americans. There Williams founded his own settlement. Williams was so thankful God had provided him and others a refuge where they could believe and worship as they wished; he called the place "Providence."

But Providence isn't just the capital of Rhode Island.

It's what God does for you and me every day: He provides for us. Just look around at all that you have—homes, cars, phones, beds, clothes, and TVs. We have so much food that we periodically have to clean out our refrigerators because it goes bad. We have so much stuff that our biggest frustration with our homes is that the closets are too small. Sit down one day and try to make a list of everything you

own—everything you have. Just look at all the good things God has provided for you.

Yet, at times, we have the gall to consider ourselves poor, or at least not rich. We look at the "rich" people down the road. We don't have what they have, so we think we must be poor. We fail to see that the poorest of us are richer than 90 percent of the world.

But wait a minute, you may be thinking. *God didn't provide this. I did. I worked my rear end off to pay for all this stuff.* Yes, but who gave you the opportunity to work? Who gave you the ability to work? Who gave you your body and mind?

Everything we have is because God in his love has provided it for us. In fact, he has provided us with the things we need the most—forgiveness and heaven. Those are gifts we don't deserve. You and I have fallen and failed so many times. We have thought, said, and done so many bad things in our lives. The only things we deserve are God's anger and punishment in hell.

But in his great love, God provided a Savior, Jesus, who suffered our punishment in our place. Through Jesus, God provides the forgiveness we so desperately need. Through faith in Jesus, he provides you a forever home in the riches and happiness of heaven.

Look at all that God has done for you. Recognize what he has provided for you. Thank him every day.

Because Providence isn't just the capital of Rhode Island.

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



A GOSPEL-FILLED LIFE

Meditating on God's Word

Jeffrey D. Enderle

I'm a list person. I have to write things down or else I'll completely forget about them. So I make checklists. Whatever has to get done goes on the list. And then there's a sense of satisfaction in accomplishing important things.

CHECKING IT OFF THE LIST

Christians understand the value of God's Word. If there is one to-do most of us have in common, it's to spend more time in God's Word.

Here's the problem with putting personal Bible study and prayer on a list. It develops into something I am supposed to do, but might not. Something I should do, but probably won't. It can even become something I feel like I have to do.

And what happens once I've checked off my devotion time? Move on to the next task? Progress to the next project?

That's a very different sense than what's expressed in Psalm 1. Instead of obligation to be in God's Word, we hear eagerness. Instead of getting through God's Word and then moving on, the psalmist encourages us to spend time in God's Word. To savor it. To enjoy it.

So much depends on our attitude toward the things we do every day.

Your morning cup of coffee can be something you slug down to fuel your day. Or it can be something you sip and savor as you take time out from the chaos of your day. Your favorite novel or TV show can be something you consume and blast through to get to the end. Or you can relax and enjoy your escape as a good story transports you to a different time and place. You can wolf down that last slice of chocolate cake to make sure it doesn't disappear. Or you can relish every bite, making sure not a crumb gets wasted.

SAVORING EVERY WORD

God gives you his Word to enjoy. The psalmist describes this attitude: "Instead, his delight is in the LORD's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night" (Psalm 1:2 Christian Standard Bible). Every bite-sized verse. Every chapter-length slice.

You can savor it by asking yourself a series of questions from a section of Scripture, just as you would when breaking news gets broadcast across your screen. What does it say? What does it mean? How does it affect me? What difference does it make in my world? How can I celebrate this good news? You can relish it by holding on to a simple verse or phrase from Scripture as you would a carefully crafted piece of art. You can turn it around

and gaze at its beauty. You can enjoy it as you repeat the section of Scripture, rephrase it in your own words, or commit it to memory the way you would a catchy new song.

Psalm 1 tells us God's Word benefits our faith. God's Word provides spiritual nutrients for souls withering and wilting under doubts and confusion. It changes us. God's Word gives life when feelings of inadequacy crush us. It gives the refreshment of forgiveness when past sins resurface to torment us. God's Word takes us back to the hope we have in Jesus.

Before you check off devotion time, take time to enjoy your time in God's Word and prayer. Let your mind marinate in God's truth. Let it flavor and add seasoning to your life. Give opportunity for the Holy Spirit to get it into your heart so it affects how you feel about yourself, your relationships, and your world. Get into God's Word and get satisfaction from the blessings God is giving you and the fruit he brings into your life.

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



I have come
into God's house
just to hear this
news again:
My sins are
forgiven because
of Jesus.

Lord, have mercy!

On most Sundays—after we are reminded that we begin worship in the name of the almighty, holy, and majestic triune God—we confess our sins. Together we begin, “Holy and merciful Father, I confess that I am by nature sinful and that I have disobeyed you . . .”

I admit to having a variety of thoughts when speaking those words. Sometimes I recite them without thinking much at all. They are routine words that tumble from my lips in the same way the Lord's Prayer sometimes becomes a series of words spoken so often I don't think about them. Another sin to add to my list.

My list of “thoughts, words, and actions” also comes to mind. I can't recall all things that I have done wrong. There simply are too many of them. They are all lumped together and confessed as the sins I have done and the good I have left undone. For them I pray, “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Another series of thoughts comes when I say that I am “by nature sinful.” I remember David's confession, “Surely I was sinful at birth” (Psalm 51:5). I think of Isaiah who stood in the presence of God and said, “I am a man of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5), or the words from the book of Job describing a human being as “only a worm” (Job 25:6). I confess that I am worse than the enumeration of wrongs I have committed against God and others. I am thoroughly corrupt by nature.

I think, perhaps, there should be another series of thoughts because I stand with others who say the same words. I don't know their thoughts, but we all stand before God as we are—sinners with our imperfections, acknowledging that we are flawed and defective—not at all as God created our first parents. We come knowing that we have no business standing before a righteous, almighty God.

I wonder if this last thought is important for another reason. We invite visitors to worship with us. When we confess our sins publicly, are we telling these visitors that we aren't better than others, as so many imagine? We come before God with our faults, sins, fears, doubts, trials, troubles, mistakes, guilt, and fears. We challenge visitors to see us that way and invite them to join us with their lists and the simple prayer, “Have mercy on me, a sinner.” No pretenses, no pride, just recognizing we are all sinners in this condition together.

But then. Then we hear the answer to our humble prayer. We hear that “God . . . has given his only Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” I have come into God's house just to hear this news again: My sins are forgiven because of Jesus. I remember that Jesus was like me—and all of us—except without sin. In prophecy he even claimed to be like us. David has the Messiah say, “I am a worm and not a man. . . . All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads” (Psalm 22:6,7). He took our place. His blood cleanses us (cf. 1 John 1:7). I hear Jesus say to me the words he spoke to the paralytic, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven” (Matthew 9:2).

Why do these thoughts come to my mind now? I have been reading some authors who do not share the treasure we all possess. They believe they can keep the commandments, be holy, and earn an audience with God. I choose simply to pray, “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner,” and receive the undeserved gift of forgiveness.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

COMFORT IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT: REVELATION 15 AND 16

Timothy J. Westendorf

Often in Revelation the seventh in a series serves as a springboard into a new series. After the seven seals, we read about the angels with seven trumpets (8:1,2), and the seven trumpets bring us to the seven last plagues (15:1).

SEVEN ANGELS IN HEAVEN

Chapter 15 brings John and his readers to a familiar place. It is God's throne room. While the place is the same as we saw in chapters 4 and 5, the mood is decidedly different. The Lord still reigns. The sea is still glassy. The faithful believers are still victorious. The redeemed are still singing praises. But seven of God's pure and holy angels are carrying the "last plagues." They are then given "seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God" (15:7) by one of the four living creatures—a high-ranking angel.

God's judgment is not an easy topic to talk about, even for believers. But God speaks about it plainly and often as a reminder and a warning. All those who cling by faith to Christ and his righteousness are spared from the wrath of God. By faith we hold on to God's amazing gospel truth, that his justice was already satisfied by this world's perfect Savior from sin! Those who fall under God's judgment have only themselves to blame for stubbornly refusing the saving truth of the gospel. By faith, we are free from

God's wrath, but we also trust that his judgments are just and true for those who reject him.

SEVEN BOWLS ON THE EARTH

A loud and commanding voice introduces chapter 16 with instructions to the seven angels to pour out their bowls on the earth. There is a striking similarity between the visions of the seven bowls and the seven trumpets (chapters 8 to 11). If you lay them alongside each other, it is difficult to miss the parallel thoughts and themes. The latter seems to be a repetition and intensification of the earlier vision's message.

Recall that the trumpets point to the damage done to human hearts by the presence and preaching of false doctrine. Holding to such false teachings results in the further darkening of minds and obscuring of God's truth, his law and gospel. Satan and his allies work tirelessly to darken the counsel of God, depriving humankind of the one thing needful. Finally, God, in judgment, allows people to have more and more of what they show they want—something other than the gospel.

As this world draws to a close, we'll expect to see God's truth neglected and rejected. It will seem like the dragon and the two beasts are in total control. They'll be allowed to inspire and orchestrate the

gathering of evil forces to attempt a complete obliteration of God's church. But the day of their choosing turns out to be the Lord's day. And then the end comes, and the world is judged.

Let fearful and anxious hearts find true comfort and calm in none other than Christ Jesus, who redeemed us and rules over all things for the good of his church!

REFLECT ON REVELATION CHAPTERS 15 AND 16

1. Read Matthew 24:22-25 and 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12. To whom does God send delusions? Explain why.
2. Read 2 Timothy 4:1-4.
 - a. Create a list of things you can do to carry out Paul's charge in verse 2.
 - b. What kinds of false doctrine appeal to "itching ears"? List three.

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



A most blessed freedom

Of all the freedoms we have, religious liberty is the one we cherish the most.

Richard E. Lauersdorf

She was crying. As she stood there in the row of communicants, Grandma Rebase was crying.

A FREEDOM TO CHERISH

The Russians, when their tanks had rumbled into Estonia, closed most of the churches. Even if Grandma Rebase had been able to attend one, her life would have been in danger. She was a high school teacher and as such was not allowed to pollute minds with religion.

When she reached the age of 65 in 1961, the authorities allowed her to emigrate to Canada to join her daughter. She also joined our little mission congregation in Sault Ste. Marie. There at Our Saviour's she was privileged to receive the Lord's body and blood again after so many years. She didn't miss a Communion service after that unless she was ill. To say that her newfound Christian freedom was precious to her would be an understatement.

A MOST IMPORTANT FREEDOM

We can travel from sea to shining sea without once stopping at a checkpoint or showing a passport. We can work at whatever occupation we desire and use our paycheck, at least some of it, for our own desires. We can live in whatever part of the country we like—whether hot, cold, or in-between—and move if we change our minds. We can speak our minds freely, even at times in criticism of our government, though always respectfully. And we can believe and worship whom, what, where, and how we desire.

Of all those blessed freedoms, isn't that last one—that freedom of religion—the one we cherish the most?

The founders of the United States and of Canada wisely recognized how important the freedom of religion is. In the U.S., when they added the Bill of Rights to the Constitution, their very First Amendment stated, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This important amendment forbids the government from establishing,

preferring, prohibiting, or funding religion of any kind. It also protects citizens and institutions from governmental interference with the exercise of their religious beliefs.

HOW TO CHERISH THIS FREEDOM

The experts who do the counting tell us that Christians are oppressed in at least 60 countries. And the demon from hell is not leaving our nations alone. The black clouds of atheism, skepticism, and intolerance are hovering over our land and trying their best to flood away our freedom.

What's the answer? Isn't it to cherish the religious liberty we have?

"LORD, I love the house where you live," declared the psalmist (26:8). Is that also our reaction? Do we look forward to slipping into our familiar church bench on the weekend to have our soul refreshed and our strength renewed?

"Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly," Paul urged (Colossians 3:16). We don't have to sneak away to some remote corner of our basement or hide our Bibles and devotional books.

"Bring [your children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord," Paul commanded (Ephesians 6:4). Gladly, sacrificially, freely we seek to use any means we can to bring and keep our children in the Savior's arms.

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation," the Savior commissioned us (Mark 16:15). Lifting high the cross, we reach for sinners among us, around us, and far away from us.

No one had to tell Grandma Rebase to cherish and use the religious liberty she had in her new home. How about us? Do we need to be reminded?

Richard Lauersdorf is pastor at Good Shepherd, West Bend, Wisconsin.