

Welcome home | From Carmelite nun to Lutheran

Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



The harvest is on!

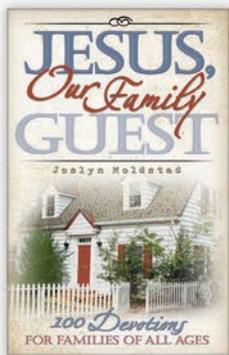
Pentecost celebrates the harvest of souls that has continued through the ages. *Page 10*

TOGETHER for the TRUTH

“Work together for the truth” — 3 John 1:8



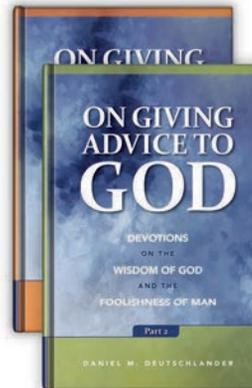
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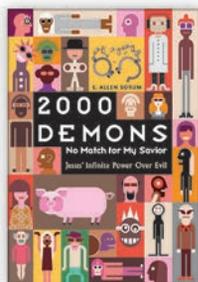
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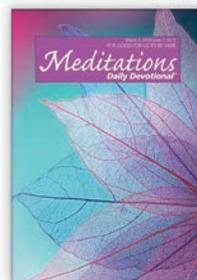
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Who haven't you seen at worship in a while?

Whatever the reason for their absence, and no matter how long it has been, it is time to welcome them home.

WELS churches are encouraged to host a *Welcome Home* Sunday on **October 20 or 27** with the goal of seeing every single one of their members in attendance. With our church families together again, we will remember the wonderful blessings of regularly connecting to the means of grace and actively participating in our Christian communities.

Resources to help you implement your *Welcome Home* Sunday will be available in June 2019 at welscongregationalervices.net.

**RESOURCES
COMING
SOON!**

***Welcome Home* resources will include:**

- **Video training for church elders**
- **Member attendance tracking tools**
- **Sermon outlines and Bible studies**
- **And more!**

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

As Prof. E. Allen Sorum reminds us, Pentecost “commemorates a harvest of precious human souls through the preaching of the gospel” (p. 10). This harvest includes

- Jennifer Nelson, a former Carmelite nun who discovers that her salvation isn't about what she does (p. 14);
- Jean, who heard the gospel at a home mission in Hendersonville, North Carolina (p. 20);
- Kyle Oppermann, who left WELS for a while but came back home, where he discovered acceptance, a sense of belonging, and Bible-based teachings he had been missing (p. 28);
- John Coulter and Sarah McKeag, an Irish couple married in 1848, whose Christian faith blossomed in new generations (p. 30); and
- you and me.

But the harvest isn't over. As Sorum reminds us, there is still work to be done and it is our mission to do it. It might be telling our neighbors about Jesus, even when they are antagonistic toward Christians. Our “Ambassadors: Let them see Jesus” article this month gives us some tips (p. 26). It might be inviting our friends from church to worship next Sunday because it's been a while since we've seen them. A special synod initiative emphasizes the importance of welcoming members back to church (pp. 8, 24). It might be supporting new mission opportunities as the gospel message spreads (p. 21).

Whatever it is, remember that the harvest is on!

Julie Wietzke



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A TEEN'S WITNESS

I was really impressed by this young person's witness to faith ["Teen talk," Apr.]. As we live in an age when so many young people stray from their faith after confirmation, it is great to hear such a clear and articulate statement of faith from one of our young people.

*Jim Schiller
West Bend, Wisconsin*

CORRECTION

In March's "Confessions of faith" article (p. 14), we incorrectly identified the women in the caption. Pat Ensing is actually fourth from the right, and Judy Clifton is right next to her (third from the right). We apologize for the error.



Through my Bible in 3 years



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2019 JUNE 2019

- | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Ezekiel 22 | 11. Ps. 77 | 21. Ps. 89:38-52 |
| 2. Eze. 23 | 12. Ps. 78:1-39 | 22. Eze. 33 |
| 3. Eze. 24 | 13. Ps. 78:40-72 | 23. Eze. 34 |
| 4. Eze. 25 & 26 | 14. Ps. 79 & 80 | 24. Eze. 35:1-36:15 |
| 5. Eze. 27 & 28 | 15. Ps. 81-83 | 25. Eze. 36:16-38 |
| 6. Eze. 29 & 30 | 16. Ps. 84 | 26. Eze. 37 |
| 7. Eze. 31 & 32 | 17. Ps. 85 | 27. Eze. 38 |
| 8. Psalm 73 | 18. Ps. 86 & 87 | 28. Eze. 39 |
| 9. Ps. 74 | 19. Ps. 88 | 29. Eze. 40:1-47 |
| 10. Ps. 75 & 76 | 20. Ps. 89:1-37 | 30. Eze. 40:48-41:26 |

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. Writers' views are not necessarily those of WELS or *Forward in Christ*.

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God's promised rest

Since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. Hebrews 4:1

Daniel J. Habben

Ah, summer. School is out. Holidays are in—that is, after we get through our vacation to-do list. Shop. Pack. Clean. Empty fridge. Service car. Cancel mail delivery. Find pet-sitter. Sometimes there is so much stress before a vacation that we're tempted to cancel our travel plans altogether and do a staycation instead! All the pre-trip hassle can't really be worth that seven-day trip to Disney, can it?

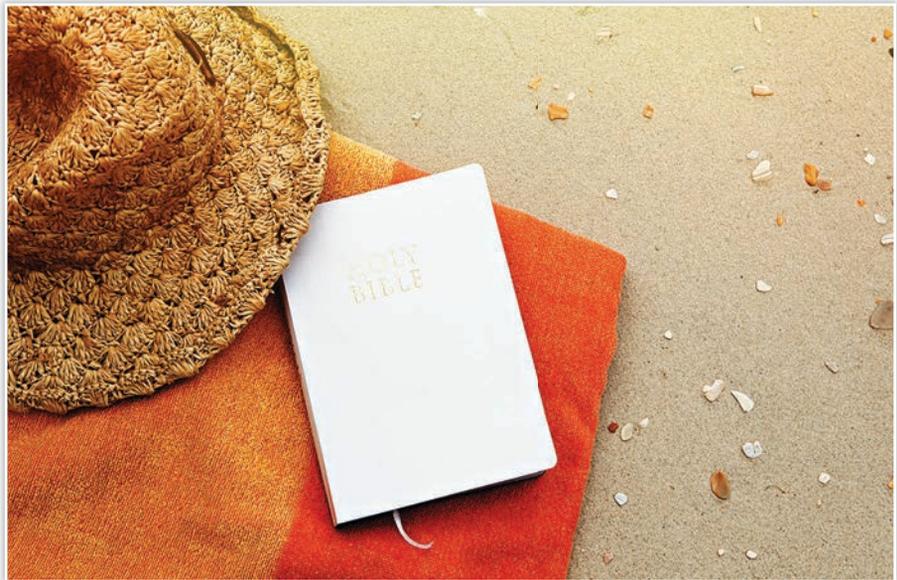
OUR JOURNEY ON EARTH

Maybe we sometimes view our journey to heaven in the same way. Striving to live as a Christian in a sin-filled world is stressful and demanding. Heaven can't possibly be worth the hassle, can it?

The writer to the Hebrews encourages us not to slack on our heavenly travel plans. Unlike any earthly vacation spot, heaven is a place of true and lasting rest. Heaven is not only worth the troubles we experience on earth, but its glories so far surpass those troubles that we one day will consider them "light and momentary" (2 Corinthians 4:17)!

Of course, one reason we may feel exhausted living a Christian life is because we haven't truly grasped the essence of Christianity. In a recent Bible class, a woman said, "I thought Christianity was like every other religion—just do your best to behave and God will give you heaven." Being a Christian, however, is not so much a matter of behaving but believing—believing in what Jesus has done for us.

But behavior does follow belief. Because I believe that Jesus gave his life to rescue me from sin, I want to treat my spouse with respect. I want to be patient with my children. I want to give my boss my best and not eat up company time checking Facebook. I want to do all this because I'm filled and fueled by gratitude for all that God has done for me through Jesus.



OUR JOURNEY TO HEAVEN

Christians have God's standing promise that we will enter heavenly rest. But, amazing grace, that rest already starts here on earth! Jesus has relieved us of our burden of sin the way a luggage porter relieves a weary traveler

Don't get so caught up in the concerns of this world that you relegate Jesus and his Word to the bottom of your to-do list.

of heavy luggage. The porter doesn't ask the traveler to help him carry the load. He simply takes it. Of course, the porter will expect payment in return for his services, but Jesus shouldered our sins at no cost to us. And where is our heavenly porter leading us? To heaven, on a one-way ticket. We will

never have to return to a life of broken relationships, loneliness, disappointment, or disease. Our rest will never end because sin will not intrude again.

Let's not allow that promised rest to slip from our hands. Heed the warning of the writer to the Hebrews: Be careful! Don't get so caught up in the concerns of this world that you relegate Jesus and his Word to the bottom of your to-do list. It's a warning we especially need to hear as summer begins.

As we anticipate a break from routine, let's not take a break from our worship and devotional life. So go ahead. Buy that vacation ticket; empty your fridge; lock your door. But bring Jesus and his Word along. Visit WELS congregations near your vacation destination. Download sermons and devotions to listen to as you barrel down the highway. Keep feeding your faith so you won't fall short of God's promised rest.

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



Mark Schwede

We have a ripe mission field right in our own congregations among family, friends, and neighbors who once worshiped with us but have now strayed.

An unexpected mission field

Every congregation has them. Every member in our congregations knows them. They may be out of sight, but in Christian congregations, they should never be out of mind.

“They” are members of our congregations who have slipped away from worship and active membership in our congregations. “They” are people we know—close friends, acquaintances, family members—who at one time worshiped regularly, communed often, and participated in the life and work of our congregation but who are now rarely, if ever, seen in church.

The reasons are many and varied. Some have disagreements with the pastor or other church members and simply stop coming to worship. Some become disillusioned with one or more of the teachings of the church and decide they will protest by their absence. Some become so busy with other activities that they no longer consider worship as a priority. Others, like plants that slowly die from lack of water and nourishment, let their faith wither and weaken to the point where they no longer see the need or value in hearing the Word. Still others have made lifestyle choices that they know are not compatible with what should characterize the life of a faithful, practicing Christian.

The reason for their absence is not as important as the reality. These are people who have drifted away from worship, away from Word and sacrament, and away from fellowship with their spiritual brothers and sisters.

The Scriptures have much to say about people who have drifted away. Jesus’ story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) acknowledges the reality that people stray and emphasizes God’s desire to forgive and welcome them back. Jesus’ parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-20) illustrates that, yes, some people are brought to faith but can leave their Sav-

ior because of a lack of spiritual nourishment or an abundance of other interests and cares. The parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin (Luke 15:1-10) highlight the searching love of a God who does not want to lose those who have wandered away. The apostle Paul, in one of his most emotion-filled letters, agonized over the fact that the Galatian Christians surrendered the truth and abandoned the gospel. He wrote not simply to condemn their unfaithfulness but also to bring them to repentance and win them back.

The God-given mission of the church is to seek the lost. Knowing that, we rightly dedicate much effort and resources to reaching the unchurched and those who have never known their Savior. But that same zeal for missions should lead us also to recognize that we have a ripe mission field right in our own congregations among family, friends, and neighbors who once worshiped with us but have now strayed.

Later this year, our synod will address this important need. Congregations will be encouraged to redouble their efforts to regain the straying. Special worship services will be held. Resources will be available. Sermon outlines and Bible classes will be provided. Our attention will be focused.

But this will not be an effort that belongs just to the pastor or to the board of elders. It will depend on all of us. It will depend on us going to those people we already know and letting them know that we have missed them in worship. Letting them know that we love them and are concerned about them. Letting them know that when they return, God’s people will welcome them back and God will bless them in more ways than they could ever imagine.

Learn more about *Welcome Home*, the synod’s initiative to welcome members back to church, on p. 24.

Light for our path

What is karma? How is it different from “reaping what you sow”? Is it okay to use the term in conversation?

James F. Pope

We do hear that word *karma* frequently today, don't we? From commercials to conversations, people speak of karma. Understanding the word better will guide our thoughts in using it.

KARMA EXAMINED

Karma is the Hindu and Buddhist belief that people's actions in this life determine what transpires in their next life, and the life after that, and every succeeding life. But the Bible does not teach reincarnation. The Bible, God's only written revelation to the world, states that “people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). Scripture teaches that once people have died and received judgment from God, that judgment is permanent (Luke 16:19-31).

Additionally, the Bible teaches that people cannot improve their standing with God by their works (Psalm 49:7,8; Ephesians 2:8,9; Titus 3:5-7). As Christians, we reject the concept of karma because it is intertwined with reincarnation and work-righteousness. Still, that concept might enter our conversations.

KARMA COMPARED

Imagine you and a friend are driving down the interstate. Suddenly, a car whizzes by you and almost cuts you off. “What's with that driver?” your friend fumes. Five miles down the road you disengage your cruise control because of the flashing lights of a state trooper on the shoulder of the road. And the car directly ahead of the trooper's is the one that swerved around you just a few minutes earlier. “Karma!” your friend exclaims excitedly. “What?” you say. Your friend explains, “You reap what you sow. The Bible says that. You drive crazy; you get a ticket.”

Did you and your friend just witness a Christian version of karma? Not at all. The Bible does warn: “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps

what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life” (Galatians 6:7,8). But those verses do not describe an instant “gotcha” approach on God's part toward sinners. Those verses speak of the harvest people will reap on the Last Day. If people sowed “to please their flesh” by living only according to their sinful nature, they will reap destruction; they have ignored the one thing needful. If they sowed “to please the Spirit” as a follower of Jesus Christ, they will reap eternal life.

Jesus instructs us not to make connections between people's misfortunes in life and their relationship with God (Luke 13:1-5). Rather than trying to make such connections, Jesus directs us to look at our own lives: “Unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Luke 13:5). With repentant hearts, we confess our sins to God. As Christians, we thank God that he “does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities” (Psalm 103:10).

KARMA AVOIDED

Personally, I avoid the word *karma* because I do not want to be confused with people who believe in reincarnation and work-righteousness. I also avoid the term because I do not want to mislead people on what the Bible teaches about sin, repentance, faith, God's justice, and God's forgiveness. Your concern for these matters will show itself by the words you use in everyday conversation. “Let your conversation be always full of grace” (Colossians 4:6).

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

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

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

Psalm 119:105



The HARVEST is on!

Pentecost celebrates the harvest of souls that has continued through the ages.

E. Allen Sorum

Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to help his church testify about him, but he told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem. Ten days later, Jerusalem was packed with religious tourists who had gathered to celebrate the Festival of Weeks. This festival got its name because God directed his people to count off seven weeks after the first day after the Passover Sabbath and on the day after—50 days later—to gather for a “sacred assembly.” On this 50th day, the assembly presented grain offerings to praise God for the grain harvest. The story of Pentecost is the amazing outpouring of the Spirit upon Jesus’ disciples in Jerusalem.

God likes to illustrate his teachings to his people through familiar things. God’s Word uses yeast to help us appreciate some beautiful features of the Festival of Pentecost. We know that

yeast is the leavening agent in dough that causes it to rise. Because yeast makes a loaf of bread soft, fluffy, and delicious, it gives us glorious insight into the Day of Pentecost.

THE PASSOVER: WITHOUT YEAST

But first let’s step back to the Passover, the first sacred assembly in the Old Testament church. The Passover was the first day of the weeklong Festival of Unleavened Bread. This was bread *without* yeast—flat bread. For the entire week of this festival, God required his people to eat only unleavened bread. Additionally, God wanted every bit of yeast swept out of every Hebrew home! Eating crackers instead of bread for a week was probably not a severe sacrifice. Regardless, anyone caught eating a raised loaf of bread or ignoring the “no yeast” rule was cut off from the community!

Avoiding leaven for a week every year helped God’s people remember how God rescued them from slavery. The first Passover meal was eaten in haste because the tenth plague finally broke Pharaoh. The firstborn all died except

in those houses that had the blood of the lamb swabbed over the doorposts. Pharaoh let God's people go. It was a sudden reversal. God told his people to be ready to leave. They would have no time for bread to rise. Excited ex-slaves pushed bitter herbs into dough, pressed it onto a hot surface, and ate it with their bags packed and travel clothes on. The Passover without yeast reminded God's people of the urgency of escape and the hard journey ahead. Yes, it was a hard journey, but it also was a new beginning, a new freedom, and the anticipation of the new Promised Land.

But there was another lesson. Yeast permeates the dough. At the Passover, God wanted homes swept clean of yeast. This picture might make us think of Jesus' words to his disciples, "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees" (Mark 8:15). Paul described false teaching as yeast that "works through the whole batch of dough" (Galatians 5:9). Yeast is a picture of a strong, pervasive, and penetrating influence. The picture helped the Hebrew people see the true nature of sin, hypocrisy, and pride in human things. These sins were a threat to the assembly's unity with God and with one another. The worldly influence of Egypt was to be left behind. So God commanded *no* yeast.

PENTECOST: WITH YEAST

Pentecost was different. The people had been counting days: seven weeks and one day. During these weeks, they were preparing for the harvest. On the 50th day, all God's people from every place gathered in a "sacred assembly" (Leviticus 23:21) to praise God for the harvest. God commanded, "From wherever you live, bring two loaves made of two-tenths of an ephah of the finest flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of firstfruits to the LORD" (Leviticus 23:17). The prominent act of worship for this joyful gathering was to pick up two loaves of leavened bread—the fun, fluffy flavor—and wave them before the Lord. Waving the

bread before the Lord was a way to acknowledge God as the giver of the grain harvest used to make the bread. Then the Levites actually got to take the bread home to feed their families.

We are part of this leavened loaf that honors the power and generosity of God's grace in Jesus.

Note the two loaves. We might say it's a doubly generous gift offered to God for his doubly generous harvest. What an appropriate way to praise God for his sustaining gifts! And what a joyful community celebration, as all of God's people would share their common blessings and give testimony to their spiritual unity. They were all members of God's holy nation; a royal people; a people belonging to God; a people who, by virtue of this sacred assembly, declared God to the nations.

THE HARVEST IN JERUSALEM

Two thousand years ago, God chose this festival for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. From all over the Mediterranean world, God's people gathered in Jerusalem: "Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs" (Acts 2:9-11).

They had gathered to celebrate a harvest. But on this harvest festival, they became the harvest. The New Testament church on earth began, and it was given a mission. The Holy Spirit was poured out. The gospel of Jesus was proclaimed. Timid disciples became international evangelists. Thousands of spiritual loaves that made up the one loaf of Christ's church were brought

into a joyful unity with God and, in spite of their various origins and languages and differences, into a joyful unity with one another. This was an abundant harvest from a generous God through his powerful gospel.

OUR PENTECOST

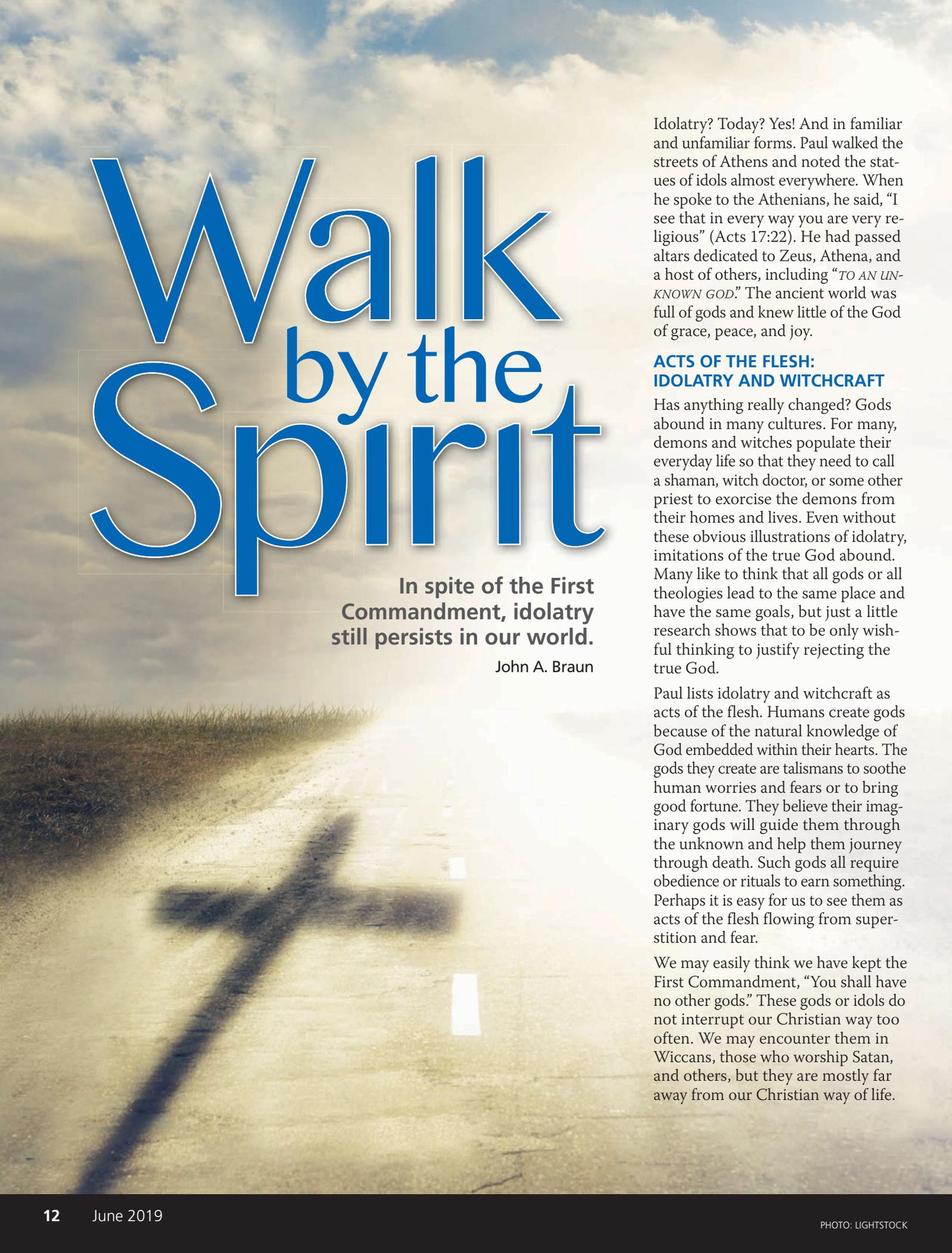
When we gather together in sacred assembly to celebrate Pentecost, we continue the celebration of God's gracious preservation and also God's harvesting of souls. Today this celebration commemorates a harvest of precious human souls through the preaching of the gospel. It is a celebration of a great harvest that "no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Revelation 7:9).

We are part of this leavened loaf that honors the power and generosity of God's grace in Jesus. By Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and by the shedding of his holy blood, he has saved us for himself. He has made us one with God in heaven. And he has made us one with all those who have been harvested before us, with us, and after us.

The harvesting continues. Wave a symbolic pair of delicious leavened loaves to God! Praise him because he has made us part of his people and has given us all a mission to share the gospel. Praise him for the witness of our congregations, Lutheran elementary schools, and early childhood centers. Praise him for our worker training schools that prepare harvesters for the harvest fields. Praise him for the harvesting of our 41 WELS missionaries overseas. Praise him for the witnessing of our Pastoral Studies Institute pastors who are leading our church body into brand-new outreach opportunities in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Kenya, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Laos, and more! God is generous. He is worthy of praise.

Pentecost is not over. The harvest is on!

E. Allen Sorum, director of the Pastoral Studies Institute at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Christ, Big Bend, Wisconsin.



Walk by the Spirit

In spite of the First
Commandment, idolatry
still persists in our world.

John A. Braun

Idolatry? Today? Yes! And in familiar and unfamiliar forms. Paul walked the streets of Athens and noted the statues of idols almost everywhere. When he spoke to the Athenians, he said, “I see that in every way you are very religious” (Acts 17:22). He had passed altars dedicated to Zeus, Athena, and a host of others, including “*TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.*” The ancient world was full of gods and knew little of the God of grace, peace, and joy.

ACTS OF THE FLESH: IDOLATRY AND WITCHCRAFT

Has anything really changed? Gods abound in many cultures. For many, demons and witches populate their everyday life so that they need to call a shaman, witch doctor, or some other priest to exorcise the demons from their homes and lives. Even without these obvious illustrations of idolatry, imitations of the true God abound. Many like to think that all gods or all theologies lead to the same place and have the same goals, but just a little research shows that to be only wishful thinking to justify rejecting the true God.

Paul lists idolatry and witchcraft as acts of the flesh. Humans create gods because of the natural knowledge of God embedded within their hearts. The gods they create are talismans to soothe human worries and fears or to bring good fortune. They believe their imaginary gods will guide them through the unknown and help them journey through death. Such gods all require obedience or rituals to earn something. Perhaps it is easy for us to see them as acts of the flesh flowing from superstition and fear.

We may easily think we have kept the First Commandment, “You shall have no other gods.” These gods or idols do not interrupt our Christian way too often. We may encounter them in Wiccans, those who worship Satan, and others, but they are mostly far away from our Christian way of life.

IDOLATRY

“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).

Yet see how Luther defines *god*: “Now, I say that whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in is truly your god” (Large Catechism I:3). With that definition the acts of the flesh come into focus, and we realize that the temptations to adopt a different god cross our path frequently.

Jesus warned us about one of them: “No one can serve two masters. . . . You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:24). Too many people in our world today set their hearts on money and put their trust in wealth. Jesus warned how difficult it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:24). If our focus is on what we possess and we have no time for the God who sent Jesus to save us, we have created an idol and yielded to the temptations of the flesh.

But it’s not just money. It is anything that we choose that eventually becomes more important than our loving God—pleasure, free time, friends, sleep, career, sports, even family. God gives us all these things to use and enjoy—money included—as long as they do not replace God and remove him from our lives.

Our sinful flesh has an arrogant pride that resists the true God. Our natural tendency is a desire to control our lives without interference or direction even from God himself. That sinful flesh wants to elevate our thoughts and ideas above God’s. How often that tendency crosses our paths. When God tells us one thing in his Word, our sinful flesh can find all kinds of explanations or opinions more appealing than what God wants. Sometimes those thoughts even make more sense to our way of thinking. But that’s *our* way of thinking, not God’s. When we abandon what

God reveals in the Scriptures, we make gods of ourselves. When we respect the opinions of others instead of God’s Word, we elevate their ideas above God.

Why the warning? Jesus reminds us that everything in this world is temporary. “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal” (Matthew 6:19). Building lives on the disappearing promises of this world—even when they are attractive and alluring—is like building our house on sand (Matthew 7:24-27). If we abandon God and choose the idols we create for ourselves, we do not heed the warning of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: JOY AND PEACE

When Jesus warned about the treasures we value on earth, he took one more step and said, “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matthew 6:20). The treasures Jesus spoke about were those that he himself gave. Paul identifies two of them as fruit of the Spirit—joy and peace. They are gifts to us by the grace of God through Jesus.

Paul reminded the Roman Christians of the peace we have: “Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand” (Romans 5:1,2). When we see our God on Mount Sinai in thunder and lightning, he strikes fear into our hearts. He demands perfect obedience, but we fail and deserve punishment. But the obedience we could not give him, he provides freely

for us. Jesus suffered the fierce punishment for the sins of all humanity and then rose again to provide victory over death. We are justified—declared acquitted of our sins—and have peace with God. In Jesus, he is not angry with us.

That peace with God because of Jesus fills us with joy. We rejoice because we have treasures in heaven waiting for us. Jesus has prepared a place for us and reminds us, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). As Christians we are on the way to heaven and choose not to be distracted from that goal.

With all this in mind, it is important to remember that any concept of God that excludes Jesus or minimizes what he has done is only the vain imagination of the human mind and an idol. Sadly, many live devoted to such gods and spread their notions aggressively. On our journey through life as Christians, we encounter them often. At times their concepts appeal to our sinful human nature. Many follow that path, as Jesus reminds us (Matthew 7:13).

But Christians are different and follow a different way. The Spirit has changed us so that we understand that without Jesus we lose the peace and joy he provided. Only Jesus has the words of eternal life (John 6:58), so we turn to him to reap the fruit of the Spirit.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him” (Romans 15:13).

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

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

“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).

PEACE

Unable to pay for her sins even as a nun, one woman finds the peace of the gospel.

Jennifer Nelson

I grew up as a Roman Catholic, but I confess that I did not regularly attend church until my late teens. After my father died unexpectedly when I was ten years old, I allowed my grief to turn into anger against God. I became angrier with God and the world around me as the years passed. I finally hit rock bottom around the age of 17.

A neighbor encouraged me to begin attending church. He also assured me that Jesus died on the cross and paid the ultimate price for all the sins of the world. There was nothing I had to do to earn God's grace. He invited me to attend church with his family. Instead I went to church with my mother, attending the familiar Catholic services. At first there was a feeling of relief that the pillars of the church did not come down as soon as I walked in!

BECOMING A NUN

I quickly became immersed in studying the Catholic faith. While taking an adult confirmation course at the age of 19, I had a deep sense that the Lord was calling me into the religious life as

a nun. My parish priest was so thrilled that he set up an appointment for me to speak with a religious sister. I spoke to her, but my excitement quickly turned into fear and doubt. I just could not make such a monumental decision at that moment in my life.

Ten years later, I was actively involved in the church, but I also lived a life outside of those walls of which I was ashamed. I hit rock bottom again. I was exhausted. I became so confused! I would be in the confessional on Saturday evening, feeling relieved that I was once again "good to go" for the next week, but I could not turn from my life of sin. I had no peace. I was certain that I would be doing serious time in purgatory in order to clean up the residue all my sins had left on my soul. I wondered if the religious life would help overcome my sins.

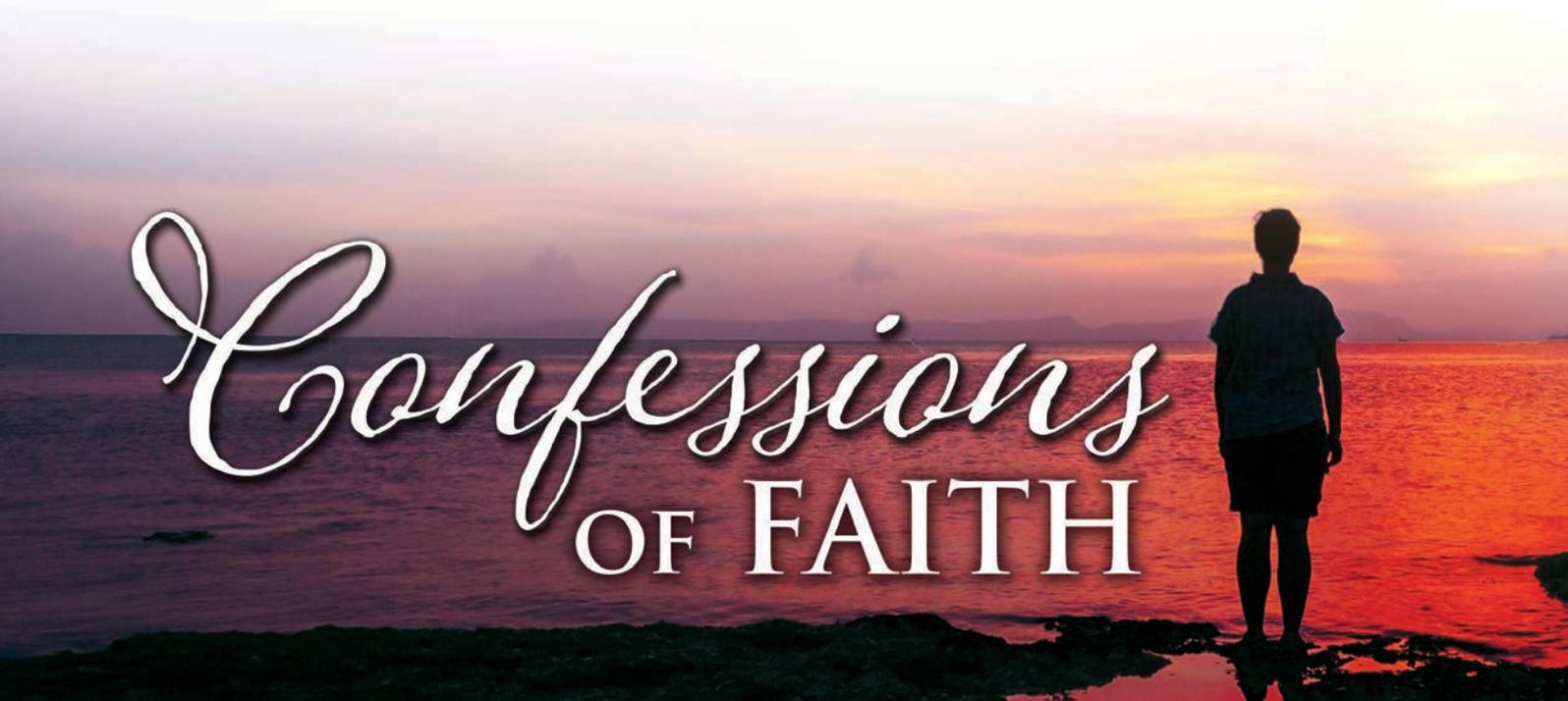
Two years later, at the age of 31, I entered a monastery to become a Carmelite nun. I would be "hidden from the world." The life of a cloistered Carmelite nun is a life of prayer, silence, penance, and sacrifice. I would awake every morning at 5:30 A.M. to gather for our first prayer of the day. We met six other times throughout the day. I had a bed, desk, rocking chair, and a cross hanging above my bed. It was not a crucifix because we were told that we had to wake every morning and put ourselves on the cross.

After a few months of living this life of "sacrifice," I was still feeling that I wasn't doing enough to erase the sins of my past. I felt that even if I lived to be two hundred years old, nothing I did would be enough. On top of this, I was having difficulty with the normal, everyday activities at the monastery. My novice mistress who oversaw me grew frustrated with me and reprimanded me a few times in front of the other nuns. I would go back to my cell and cry myself to sleep.

Then one day my novice mistress, still frustrated with me and angry, said, "Jennifer, do you even want to live this life?" I looked her in the eye and said, "No."

She avoided me for a couple days, and then she asked me why. I told her I could not make up for my sins or the sins of others. She reminded me that the Lord wanted me to offer up my life as a sacrifice for myself and others. A week after that incident, I decided to leave the monastery.

While it may seem that I had no joy after almost a year of being a nun, I had many joyful moments with the other nuns. Despite those friendships, I was forbidden to say good-bye to anyone. I had to leave discreetly. My mother came for me one day in secret, and I did not look back.



Confessions OF FAITH

A NEW LIFE

I felt too embarrassed to go back to my home church where people knew me. So I decided to move to New Mexico where my brother and sister and some other relatives were living.

After moving to New Mexico, I began working at a machine shop, and there I met my future husband, Rob. We were just friends for the first six months before we finally went out on a date. We were engaged four months later and married two months after that, exactly one year after we initially met.

Rob is a lifelong WELS Lutheran. At first, I had many questions for Rob that often turned into one-sided arguments because I was determined to get him to become a Catholic. But he always remained patient with me and never pressured me. I would go into our office and study Rob's Lutheran books and literature. This led to even more questions.

One day during a family dinner my mother-in-law asked me if I truly believed that if I died I would go to heaven. Tears welled in my eyes, and quickly I said, "No."

I told her that according to the Catholic Church, I was living in mortal sin and I would go to hell, not purgatory. She explained what I had heard once be-

fore—that all of the work has already been done by Jesus. I said that it just sounded too simple; it could not be that easy. I have to do something.

I continued to read Rob's books as well as *Forward in Christ*—especially the "Confessions of faith" articles. I read several stories about people who had once been Roman Catholic. Those stories really stuck with me. Then one day I asked Rob if we could attend church together. There I heard not just the condemning law but also the saving gospel. After the service, the pastor asked if I wanted him to come to our home and talk a little more. I happily agreed.

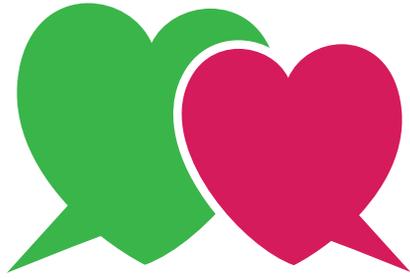
Slowly the weight I once carried began to disappear. Even though I had read the Bible before, it was like God's Word was all new to me. I admit it was hard to let go of the beliefs I had clung to for so long. I still had so many questions. But I also realized that for so many years I had depended on my own works and was not looking to Jesus and the cross. After six months of instruction, with much joy I became a WELS Lutheran.



Jennifer and Rob Nelson.

We now belong to Cross of Christ Lutheran Church, where I am surrounded by Christian people who have become my everyday family. And by God's grace, without fail, every Sunday I continue to hear law and gospel and the assurance that my sins are forgiven. I finally feel confident—not in myself and the good works I perform—but in what my Savior did for me so undeservedly.

Jennifer Nelson is a member at Cross of Christ, Las Cruces, New Mexico.



heart to heart parent conversations

When I was going into eighth grade, I went to band camp for a week during the summer. I had a blast, and the experience really gave me confidence in my own independence.

I want my children to have a similar camp experience. I'm excited because we live in an area where we can choose from a number of WELS camps for them to attend. They can have all the fun, surrounded by Christian friends and mentors. Bonus! Of course, that doesn't mean I don't have some qualms . . . which is where this month's articles come in. No matter what type of camp your child might be attending, both Dan and Jenni offer some great tips to help make the experience a success.

Wondering if you have a WELS camp near you? Visit wels.net/event/wels-camps for a listing that includes contact information and links to websites.

Nicole Balza

Join the
conversation!

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

HOW CAN WE PREPARE CHILDREN FOR SUMMER CAMP?

"It's time for camp!"

These four words are the highlight of our family's year every summer. I have had the privilege of serving as a camp leader at Camp Bird in Crivitz, Wis., for many years. Camp Bird is a weeklong Christian youth camp for kids in fifth to eighth grade. This year my son Josh will be in his last year as a camper and my daughter Kayla will be in her third year as a camp counselor. For nearly 30 years my wife and I have been volunteering at Camp Bird. We have seen kids create memories and friendships that last a lifetime.

We are blessed to have a great network of Christian youth camps in our synod. As thousands of families prepare for their children's camp experiences, this question comes to mind: *How can parents help prepare their kids for a youth camp experience so their kids can have a terrific time?* Here are a few things I have noticed over the years as I have interacted with families and seen some excellent examples of encouragement:

- 1. Go with a friend**—This is perhaps one of the best ways to help kids feel comfortable with a new camp experience. Knowing just one other person can help them not feel alone and make it easier to meet others.
- 2. Know the camp**—It's easy to be afraid of what is unknown or unfamiliar. Review the camp website or printed materials with your child. Look at the pictures and videos. Check out the daily schedule. Review information on the staff. Find out what to pack, etc.
- 3. Talk to others**—Talk to parents and kids who have

I love camp! When I was a kid I went to soccer camp and basketball camp and Camp Phillip, a Christian camp in Wautoma, Wis. My love for Camp Phillip grew as I got older. I became part of the junior staff (high school volunteers) and then paid staff. It then moved into my full-time job when I graduated college. As a camp counselor, I saw hundreds of children get dropped off at camp—some for the first time and some who kept returning.

As familiar as I am with camp life, it was a crazy different perspective to be the one dropping off her child. As a mom, I have been dropping off my children at camp for the past ten years. Every year comes with excitement and anxiety. How do I prepare myself? How do I prepare my child? Here are a few thoughts:

- 1. Let him help pack.** Go through the list so you don't forget anything. And let him pack it so he knows where everything is.

been at the summer camp in the past to find out what their experience was like and what to expect.

4. Meet the staff—Before you leave the camp at drop-off time, introduce yourself and your child to some of the staff. This can not only help you feel more comfortable leaving your child with others, but it can also help the child know exactly who he can go to if he has questions.

5. Focus on the experiences your child can have—Talk about all the fun experiences the camp has to offer, including swimming, kayaking, basketball, hiking, ropes courses, campfires, archery, kickball, singing, crafts, and all the other activities.

6. “But what about . . .”—Acknowledge the things that may be concerns for your child and reassure him that you will find answers to the “what about” questions. Your child may be worried if he has special dietary needs, medications, or other concerns. It’s helpful to get specific answers so your child knows what to expect.

7. Communicate—It is helpful to have boundaries and expectations set regarding communication with your child while at camp. There may be limits on the ability to communicate with phones, but maybe cards, letters, or postcards can be used. Find out the recommended communication procedures and let your child know how you will use them.

8. Stuff—What’s one of the simplest ways to make sure your child has a great time? Make sure she packs the right things. Get a supply list from the camp and go through it

with your child. Packing itself can be a fun experience, but make sure she has the essentials like mosquito spray and sunblock.

9. Food—What’s top on the list of the best parts of a camp experience? The food! What’s on the menu at camp? I remember one child who came to camp worried about what he would make himself to eat! Not too many camps I know would ever expect a fifth grader to make his own meals! He was pretty excited to hear that the meals would be all prepared for him. But this was a concern that he never expressed to anyone until arrival.

Parents, these are just a few ways to help your children prepare for their summer camp experiences. Separation from our kids can not only be anxiety-provoking for our kids but also for us as well. Seeing them prepared and excited can help alleviate some of our anxiety. You also might want to ask the camp if there will be Facebook posts or other updates so you can see how things are going at the camp.

Take advantage of the opportunity to see your child enjoy a Christian summer youth camp. Consider using some of the techniques above to help her prepare for her time away as she expands her experiences with new activities and meets new friends. Use this time of preparation to communicate with your child and be understanding, encouraging, and reassuring.

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



2. Make writing to you easy. Pack paper and self-addressed, stamped envelopes. That way it is easy for her to write to you if she would like to. Also know that she might be having way too much fun to write, so give her permission not to write. After all, we want our children to focus on where they are and enjoy that!

3. Write a letter to him. I’ll be honest, I always think about this one too late. But maybe this can help you. Write him a letter and send it a day or two before camp starts. That way he gets a letter right away (see point #5 when writing).

4. DON’T LINGER! When you drop her off, introduce yourself and your child to the counselor. Help her get situated (make her bed, etc.), give her a hug, and go.

5. Leave your child with confidence. As a counselor I could pick out the kids who would probably be homesick. Why? Because their parents gave them permission to be

homesick by saying things like, “If you get sad, you can call me” or “I am going to miss you soooo much!” or “I can’t wait until I see you on Saturday!” Instead say, “You are going to have such a good time” or “I can’t wait to hear all about the fun you’re going to have this week.” Put the focus on why they are there instead of “missing” them, even though you are going to miss them. Cry after you are gone.

I truly believe in the camping ministry. It allows children to be who they are. It gives them the opportunity to see young adults model loving Jesus and loving others, including your child. It also gives your child a small piece of independence. After all, our goal as parents is to teach our children how to fly.

Jenni Schubring and her husband, Tad, currently have six children in their clan ranging in age from 10 to 18 as well as their crazy dog.



teentalk

We pray

Time with Grandpa brought lessons about praying to our heavenly Father.

Joshua Van Sluytman

When I was little, I enjoyed spending time with my grandpa on the farm. My favorite time was riding with him on the tractor while he did various tasks around the farm.

My grandpa is a very religious man.

He grew up as a Lutheran and is still very active at church. He is a former elder and goes to church every Sunday. While riding on the tractor, we have had many heart-to-heart conversations. Even if the conversations were serious, they usually were about everyday things. It was like sitting in a small, enclosed classroom, one-on-one with the best teacher you could ask for. He used to be a public school teacher until he became a farmer.

I would tell him about fun and exciting things in my life, but I also would tell him about the bad things. I believe that has helped me. My grandpa taught me how to deal with difficult situations or people. He told me to act calmly and in a way that they would listen or respond positively to me. This has helped me as a Christian because every solution he gave me to my problems always revolved around his Christian attitude.

Sometimes there was no solution. Then Grandpa sympathized with me

but also told me that it was in God's hands. I just needed to trust in God.

The talks with my grandpa always remind me of the way I think Christians pray to God.

It's kind of like sitting in an enclosed room with just you and God. You can lay before him all of life's troubles and woes. God is there to offer a helping hand and a solution to your problems. Sometimes God provides the direct solution you have been looking for, but he may also simply say, "Trust in me and lean not on your own understanding" (cf. Proverbs 3:5). Whatever the answer may be, God will always answer your prayers, and the answer is what God sees as best for you.

Prayer is also like the talks with my grandpa because you can share with God the good things in your life. You get to praise God for every blessing and good thing he has put into your life. You can praise him by going to church and singing hymns of praise and by praying and expressing your thankfulness for the many blessings he has showered upon you.

Although these days I am busier because I am in high school, I still enjoy spending as much time as I can helping Grandpa on the farm.

I value the time and still learn new things every time I am with him.

Praying to God helps us remember to read his Word so we can learn new things spiritually and grow more mature in our walk of faith. At times we may be mad with God and his solutions, but as we see his solutions work out, we can see how God chose the right path for us.

As Christians, we need to remember to pray to God in every trouble. We should also pray to God in the good times and thank him for all the blessings he has given us—including the greatest blessing of all, sending his Son to die on the cross to free us from our slavery to sin and to make us slaves to righteousness.

Joshua Van Sluytman, a senior at Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, is a member at St. John, Maribel, Wisconsin.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Fischer, Wayne, to retirement
 Gates, Lawrence, to retirement
 Green, M, to retirement
 Kujath, Timothy, to retirement
 Porinsky, Mark, to retirement
 Reich, Terry, to retirement
 Schultz, Anthony, to retirement
 Tuttle, Richard, to Zion, Mount Pleasant, Mich.
 Wilke, Robert, to retirement
 Wilsmann, Thomas, to retirement

Teachers

Aker, Carol, to retirement
 Allerheiligen, David, to retirement
 Allerheiligen, Rita, to retirement
 Anderson, Robert, to retirement
 Barenz, Dawn, to retirement
 Baumann, Kathleen, to retirement
 Benrud, Jonathan, to retirement
 Berg, Stephen, to retirement
 Borck, Sara, to Good Shepherd, Omaha, Neb.
 Buschkopf Jr, Robert, to retirement
 Casmer, Susan, to retirement
 Danner, Rachele, to retirement
 Dowling, Margie, to retirement
 Fischer, Robert, to retirement
 Green, Lorybeth, to Abiding Love Preschool, Cape Coral, Fla.
 Hansen, Thomas, to retirement
 Heins, Mary, to retirement
 Hemling, Sandra, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
 Hosbach, Daniel, to retirement
 Kehl, Karen, to retirement
 King, Donna, to retirement
 Klessig, Susan, to retirement
 Lotito, Lawrence, to retirement
 Maass, Julie, to retirement
 MacDonald, Tammy, to retirement
 Mateske, Gail, to retirement
 Minzlaff, Melissa, to Peace, Livonia, Mich.
 Monke, Jennifer, to retirement
 Nass, Paula, to retirement
 Natzke, Joyce, to retirement
 Nedow, Kristin, to retirement
 Pleuss, Bradley, to retirement
 Polley, Jane, to retirement
 Prost, Matthew, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
 Richie, Zach, to Little Lambs Learning Center, Duluth, Minn.
 Rockhoff, Cindy, to retirement
 Russow, Timothy, to retirement
 Schmiede, Elise, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.
 Schwall, Jay, to retirement
 Schwall, Lynn, to retirement
 Seeger, Patricia, to retirement
 Seelhoff, Wendy, to retirement
 Siegler, Susan, to retirement

Sievert, James, to retirement
 Spiess, Lenette, to retirement
 Steinmetz, Virginia, to retirement
 Stellick, Karin, to retirement
 Stone, Janice, to retirement
 Treder, Christine, to retirement
 Treder, Deborah, to retirement
 Voigt, Timothy, to Christ-St. John's School, West Salem, Wis.
 Voss, David, to retirement
 Weisheim, Carlton, to retirement
 Wendt, Marcia, to retirement
 Wesenberg, John, to retirement
 Winkel, Jonathan, to retirement
 Wright, Susan, to retirement
 Zander, Nancy, to retirement

Staff minister

Kjenstad, Mark, to St. Andrew, Middleton, Wis.

ANNIVERSARIES

Spearfish, S.D.—Hope (50). June 2. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal and fellowship to follow. 605-722-3857. Website, hopelutheran.us.
Prairie du Chien, Wis.—Grace (40). June 9. Worship, 9 A.M.; meal and fellowship to follow. 608-326-4899. Website, gracepc.net.
Warren, Mich.—Crown of Life School (40). June 9. Worship, 3 P.M.; meal to follow. Heather, header@hotmail.com.
Birmingham, Ala.—Our Savior (50). June 23. Worship, 4 P.M.; catered meal to follow. 205-677-8642; pastor@oursaviorbirmingham.com. Website, oursaviorbirmingham.com.
Henry, S.D.—St. Paul's (125). June 30. Worship, 10 A.M.; catered meal, noon; program and socializing to follow. RSVP requested. Cindy, cindyfrederick18806@gmail.com; Terry, terry@datatruck.com.
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.
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

WELS camps—held around the country throughout the year. Dates and locations available at wels.net/events.

Retirement service—June 2. For Pastor Thomas Wilsmann. St. John, Waterloo, Wis. Worship, 9 A.M.; awards and potluck to follow. gwbllking@frontier.com.

Ministry celebration—June 9. For Teacher Jan Stone's 50 years of service. St. Paul's First, North Hollywood, Calif. Worship, 9 A.M.; catered lunch to follow. RSVP requested. 818-761-1846; principal@stpaulsfirst.org.

Apologetics course—June 10–14. Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis. "Practical Apologetics: The Defense of the Faith" is a one-week course ideal for teachers, evangelists, administrators, students, and motivated laypeople. The course can be taken for undergraduate or graduate credit and can be audited. On-campus housing is available. Website, wlc.edu/apologetics.

Golf outing—June 15. Christian Life Resources, Inc. Brookfield Hills Golf Course, Brookfield, Wis. Website, welsrc.net/events/.

Retirement service—June 23. For Pastor Karl Gurgel. St. Matthew, Winona, Minn. Worship, 9 A.M.; brunch and short program to follow. RSVP by June 2. robbiebrown@hotmail.com; 507-454-3083.

WELS EdTechLead Summit 2019—June 25–27. Kalahari Resort, Wisconsin Dells, Wis. Registration open. Website, welsedtechlead.com.

Lutheran Women's Missionary Society convention—June 27–30. Des Moines, Iowa. Website, lwms.org.

WELS Night at Miller Park—July 12. Brewers vs. Giants. Miller Park, Milwaukee, Wis. Website, wels.net/event/brewers2019.

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. Registration open. Website, wels.net/wmconference.

Reunion—July 19–20. For Martin Luther Academy class of '74. Dubuque, Iowa. Larry Schultz, lrschultz@comcast.net.

WELS 65th Biennial Synod Convention—July 29–Aug. 1. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 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.

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.

Moments with MISSIONARIES

HENDERSONVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

Paul E. Zell

NORTH CAROLINA

I was practicing my sermon on a recent Sunday morning when I got a phone call. Doris* wanted to confirm what time the service was. “I can’t come to church today, Pastor. I’ve got a family commitment. But I’ll be there next Sunday for sure.” I vaguely recalled meeting Doris when my member Ron and I were out canvassing. She and I had talked in her driveway for so long that Ron was wondering what had happened to me. But how long ago had that conversation taken place? I had to scroll back a bit through my calendar . . . ten weeks!

It takes a while.

Keith* and his wife, Shawn*, brought their eight-year-old son, Bryce*, to our soccer camp in June. Each sweltering afternoon they would find refuge under a shade tree, keeping an eye on Bryce and chatting with the church members who were prepping snacks and handing out water. The three of them came to our worship service at the end of the week. We never saw them again. Not until the first Sunday in January, when they came to worship a second time—six-and-a-half months later!

Few folks seem to be in a hurry to get connected to a church.

I stopped at Jean’s front door three days after she attended a worship service with her niece Terrie. The conversation was pleasant and brief. I gave her a “welcome gift” and was on my way. That seemingly



Jean (right) and her niece Terrie on Jean’s confirmation day, Palm Sunday 2019.

was the end of Jean’s interest in what we have to offer. Until there she was, sitting next to her niece and worshipping with us on Christmas Eve—ten months later!

What is it that keeps individuals from responding more quickly to our invitations? I suppose I could spin all sorts of theories. Experts have offered their own well-researched explanations as well. But it’s hard to get beyond the unholy trinity so often referenced by Luther. People are slow to respond to our visits and encouragements because they are constantly being delayed by the devil, the world, and their own sinful flesh.

I don’t want to respond to this phenomenon with cynicism or become callous to it or even accept it as inevitable. I would rather commit myself and my members to a more aggressive follow-up schedule. In addition, Jesus invites me to pray frequently on behalf of these blood-bought souls. Mostly, however, I want to be mindful that even the Son of God himself found his most frequent listeners to be “slow to believe” (Luke 24:25). If Jesus’ ministry is the model for outreach, then why should I ever be discouraged when people take their time responding to my church’s outreach ministry?

I’m pleased to announce that after her ten-week delay, Doris actually did worship with us the following Sunday. And starting that first Sunday in January, Keith, Shawn, and Bryce haven’t missed a Sunday. They’re already signed up for the next “Foundations” class. And Jean was confirmed on Palm Sunday and is now a communicant member at our church.

What do you think? Someday should I ask each of them why it took them so long? Nah! I’d rather keep telling them how grateful I am that our church can serve them with the gospel of our merciful, patient, long-suffering Savior and of the timeless life he’s won for them and for me.

Paul Zell is a home missionary at Living Savior, Asheville/Hendersonville, North Carolina.

*Names have been changed.

WELS World Missions updates

VIETNAM

In April, WELS leaders, including Mark Schroeder, WELS president; Larry Schlomer, World Missions administrator; Sean Young, director of Missions Operations; and Bounkeo Lor, Hmong Asia ministry coordinator, traveled to Vietnam to finalize the needed steps to purchase property in Hanoi on which to build a theological education center for pastors and leaders in the Hmong Fellowship Church.

A memorandum of understanding was signed with the Vietnamese Fellowship Church, who will be facilitating the legal steps to make this happen. Once the land is purchased, building will begin. If the Lord allows, by the end of this year WELS will have an educational facility in Hanoi that can train Hmong pastors and regional leaders.

“Leaders of the Hmong churches in Vietnam are one step closer to a dream they thought might never happen,” says Schlomer. “This is a huge milestone. Careful negotiations with church and government leaders have been blessed by our Lord. There we were, in Vietnam, standing on property the government is allowing us to use for a purpose that in the recent past seemed impossible. God is reminding us all that this is in his hands. It is time for prayers of thanks as we continue to ask God to bless this unprecedented opportunity.”

WELS members have given more than \$1 million in support of this ministry. This is half of what is needed for the building project and the ministry training costs for a two-year period. Learn more about this opportunity and how you can be involved at wels.net/vietnamhmongoutreach.



WELS leaders along with leaders from the Vietnamese Fellowship Church and the Hmong Fellowship Church on the land WELS is purchasing on which to build a theological education center for Hmong pastors and leaders. They signed a memorandum of understanding on this trip to facilitate the legal steps needed to move forward.

LATIN AMERICA

The Latin America mission team continues to grow and expand *Academia Cristo*, academiacristo.com, since its start in 2015. The team's goal is to use technology to reach Spanish-speakers with the gospel, train them through online classes, and help them plant and lead churches that faithfully proclaim God's Word. Current statistics include:

- 1.3 million followers and a reach of 2 million people on *Academia Cristo*'s Facebook page.
- An average of 40,000 visitors per week to *Academia Cristo* websites for self-study classes and opportunities to sign up for live classes.
- More than 8,000 people signing up for live classes and further training.
- 18 current or potential church planters in Latin America with whom missionaries are working.

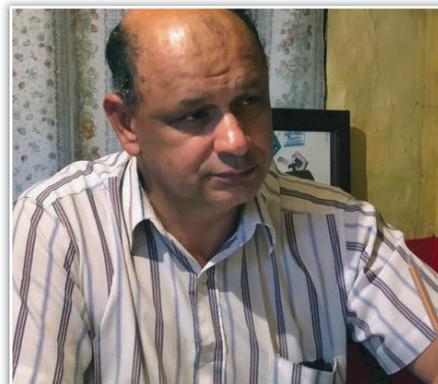
The team is currently updating its website and working with WELS

Multi-Language Publications to develop a mobile app.

Since the beginning of 2018, the Latin America mission team and Spanish-speaking national pastors have visited countries like Ecuador, Paraguay, Argentina, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Venezuela to meet with *Academia Cristo* students and explore potential church planting opportunities. New opportunities are also popping up in existing fields like Colombia and Mexico.

In order to respond to these new opportunities, the Latin American mission team is calling a new missionary and deploying another to Asuncion, Paraguay. Two other missionaries moved to Quito, Ecuador, in 2018. The remaining two live in Miami, Florida, and work with Spanish-speakers in U.S. congregations who want to reach back to their home countries.

Learn more about this work at wels.net/latin-america.



Carlos from Argentina has been taking classes through *Academia Cristo* and is looking to plant churches firmly built on God's Word. Missionary Michael Hartman (pictured bottom, right) is visiting him as well as *Academia Cristo* students in Paraguay this summer to meet and work with them face to face.

New location for Northwestern Publishing House

Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) has moved. In May, it packed up its offices and relocated to its new home, the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, the synod's headquarters in Waukesha, Wis.

"We strive to be the best stewards of the funds we have available. With that in mind, it makes the most sense to make use of the space in the synod office and sell our current building," says Bill Ziche, NPH president. "We will continue to publish all the same materials we have in the past. We have now, God willing, put ourselves on a financial path to be able to do this."

NPH's past location in a 46,000-square-foot building off of Watertown Plank Road in Milwaukee used to house a retail store, warehouse, and office space. With NPH closing its retail store last fall and transitioning its warehousing

and distribution to an outside fulfillment partner, it no longer needs as much space. Its new location in the newly built-out lower level of the Center for Mission and Ministry will allow it to consolidate as well as to work more closely with different synod areas of ministry, including WELS Congregational Services. "The move offers great opportunities for us to collaborate more closely with them and support them with our experience in developing content, printing, and distribution," says Ziche.

NPH has moved before when publishing needs and trends have changed. "This is another one of those adjustments to changing circumstances," says WELS President Mark Schroeder. "But in many ways, we believe this will be a positive change that will enable NPH to continue to take care of the publishing needs of our synod well into the future. We are happy to have NPH join us at our headquarters."

A WELS subsidiary and non-profit organization, NPH has served customers for more than 125 years with Christ-centered resources. NPH is continually adding Christian books, music, gifts, and church supplies to its offerings, which can be ordered online at nph.net or by calling 800-662-6022. Churches in Southeastern Wisconsin can even pick up music and church supplies like communion wafers and cups from NPH's new location.

NPH is producing new Christian resources as well, adding titles such as *Look Up From Your Phone So I Can Love You* and *My 180: Loving God More* in the last year. It is continuing its work on the new hymnal and its accompanying resources, which are scheduled to be available by Advent 2021.

WELS members are welcome to visit NPH's new location and learn more about the synod's publishing house. Call 414-615-5727 to schedule a tour.

NORTHWESTERN PUBLISHING HOUSE IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS



NEW ADDRESS:

N16W23377 Stone Ridge Dr,
Ste 100, Waukesha WI 53188

SAME phone number:

800-662-6022

SAME website:

nph.net

Obituaries

Rhoda M. Winder, 1942–2019

Rhoda Winder (née Falck) was born Feb. 26, 1942, in Green Bay, Wis. She died Jan. 1, 2019, in Appleton, Wis.

A 1968 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at St. Peter, Appleton, Wis.; St. Matthew, Appleton, Wis.; Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.; Bethany, Saginaw, Mich.; and Riverview, Appleton, Wis.

She is survived by her husband, Craig; four children; five grandchildren; two brothers; and one sister.

John M. Denninger, 1930–2019

John Denninger was born May 20, 1930, in St. Paul, Minn. He died Jan. 23, 2019, in Beloit, Wis.

A 1957 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he taught at Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.; Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.; Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis.; Martin Luther Academy, New Ulm, Minn.; and Martin Luther Prep School, Prairie du Chien, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Winnie; 4 daughters; 4 sons; 23 grandchildren; 19 great-grandchildren; and 1 sister. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Rose, and one daughter.

Robert W. Kock, 1928–2019

Robert Kock was born Jan. 6, 1928, in Hastings, Minn. He died Jan. 24, 2019, in Red Wing, Minn.

A 1956 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at First German, Manitowoc, Wis.; Trinity, Manitowoc, Wis.; St. Peter (Collins), Chilton, Wis.; Immanuel, Hutchinson, Minn.; Bethlehem, Hortonville, Wis.; St. Mark's, Watertown, Wis.; Trinity, Jenera, Ohio; St. John, Red Wing, Minn.; and Emanuel, Tawas City, Mich.

He is survived by 4 daughters, 1 son, 11 grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren, and 1 brother. He was preceded in death by his wife, Eunice, and four brothers.

Max F. Schram, 1951–2019

Max Schram was born Oct. 30, 1951, in Detroit, Mich. He died Jan. 30, 2019, in Douglasville, Ga.

A 1975 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at St. John, Lannon, Wis.; Grace, Saint Joseph, Mich.; Christ the Lord, Clearwater, Fla.; Peace, Holiday, Fla.; Friedens, Kenosha, Wis.; and St. Lucas, Milwaukee, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Margaret; one daughter; one son; two grandchildren; and one brother. He was preceded in death by his parents and one brother.

Patricia A. Nurnberger, 1946–2019

Patricia Nurnberger (née Johnson) was born Sept. 15, 1946, in Pittsburgh, Pa. She died Feb. 10, 2019, in Haslett, Mich.

She taught at Emanuel First, Lansing, Mich.

She is survived by her husband, William; one son; two daughters; one grandchild; and two brothers.

Steven L. Korth, 1951–2019

Steven Korth was born Apr. 26, 1951, in Beaver Dam, Wis. He died Feb. 11, 2019, in Bay City, Mich.

A 1977 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Peace, Vancouver, Wash., and Mount Olive, Bay City, Mich.

He is survived by four daughters, one son, six grandchildren, and four brothers. He was preceded in death by his parents and one sister.

John F. Murphy, 1934–2019

John Murphy was born Aug. 28, 1934, in Chicago, Ill. He died Feb. 11, 2019, in Appleton, Wis.

A 1960 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Immanuel, Elgin, N.D.; St. John, Mukwonago, Wis.; and Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.

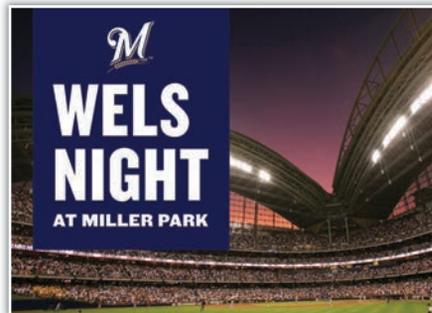
He is survived by his wife, Rita; two daughters; three sons; six grandchildren; one sister; and one brother. He was preceded in death by one brother.

WELS news briefs

COMMUNICATION SERVICES

414-256-3210; csc@wels.net

Tickets are still available for the sixth annual **WELS Night at Miller Park** on July 12. Join thousands of WELS members for the Milwaukee Brewers' game against the San Francisco Giants. Game time is 7:10 P.M. WELS members



get up to 50 percent off the price of tickets. Seating will be in a block for WELS members in three seating areas. Ticket ordering deadline is June 14; the discounted rate will not be available after that date. To learn more, including how to order WELS Night T-shirts, go to wels.net/events.

MINISTERIAL EDUCATION

414-256-3236; bme@wels.net

From April 24–26, Grow in Grace, the institute for pastoral growth at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., hosted almost two hundred people for the **eighth annual Celebration of Ministry retreats**. Held in San An-

GROW IN GRACE
PARTNERING WITH PASTORS

tonio, Texas, four retreats ran simultaneously for pastors and their wives who are celebrating 3, 10, 25, and 35 years since graduating from the seminary. These retreats build relationships with ministry peers and offer en-

couragement through worship, Bible studies, workshops, and presentations. Learn more about Grow in Grace at wls.wels.net/grow-in-grace.

SPECIAL MINISTRIES

414-256-3241; specialministries@wels.net

Freedom for the Captives, a part of the Mental Health Needs Committee of WELS Special Ministries, focuses on protecting and aiding abuse victims. This group has produced an **abuse prevention video training course** called "Standing up for Children: A Christian Response to Child Abuse and Neglect," which consists of four videos that review dealing with physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse and provide a theological basis for the importance of protecting children. The course also highlights how to create and enforce a child protection policy for a church, school, or organization. Access the course at welscongregationalservices.net, under the Compassion Ministry module.



WORLD MISSIONS

414-256-3237; missionspromotions@wels.net

Asia Lutheran Seminary in Hong Kong celebrated the 40th anniversaries in the pastoral ministry of **David Kehl** and **Rob Siirila** on April 7. Siirila has served 35 of those 40 years in East Asia. Kehl has been based in Hong Kong for the last four years for his ministry as Asian publications coordinator for Multi-Language Publications. He recently took a call back to the U.S. as pastor at Amazing Grace, Panama City, Fla.



Congregational Services launches *Welcome Home*

“Welcome home.” It’s what one says to a spouse who’s been gone on a business trip or to a child who’s been away at school. With a new program from WELS Congregational Services, it’s what WELS members will be saying to their Christian family when they see one another at church.

There are approximately 155,000 WELS individuals who attend worship three or fewer times a year. Many of those have not set foot in church in multiple years. These are members of our Christian family who are at risk of further drifting away.

WELS Congregational Services has developed a new initiative called *Welcome Home* to aid congregations in reminding members that church is their home where they worship, receive the means of grace, and enjoy fellowship with their brothers and sisters in Christ. It’s where they can go to find Christian love, and, most important, it’s where they hear about God’s grace.

Donn Dobberstein, director of WELS Discipleship, explains, “Our churches want to welcome all our members home to the blessings Jesus wants to give them—the gospel, the means of grace, worship, and the fellowship of believers.”

The name for the program, *Welcome Home*, was chosen because the word *home* invokes the idea of *family*. As Dobberstein explains, when someone goes missing from family, the concern for his or her welfare and whereabouts is immediate and immense.

With the *Welcome Home* initiative, Congregational Services is introducing a series of resources, including worship helps, aimed at “welcoming home” all members. Congregations are asked to pack the church—with the goal of 100 percent attendance—at a special service to be held either Oct. 20 or Oct. 27. Additional resources will look to strengthen the sense of community, or family, within



WELS congregations so that all members feel like they’re coming home when they come to worship. A video-based elder training series is also being developed for pastors and church leaders who want to better prepare themselves for this spiritual task.

In today’s increasingly post-Christian society, it’s becoming more imperative that people understand the importance of worship and the means of grace. Dobberstein outlines five main reasons that people fail to prioritize attending church.

1. **Failure to appreciate the means of grace.** It’s possible to grow up in church your entire life and yet not totally appreciate the means of grace that God has given believers. This is often exasperated by the self-absorbed culture we live in.
2. **Bad prioritization.** Society has made it too easy to not make worship a priority. The world offers many alternatives and distractions to a regular worship life and, slowly but surely, church gets pushed lower and lower on the priority list.
3. **Conflict with the pastor or members.** Perhaps the pastor said something someone didn’t like, or another member does or says something “unchristian.” All people, even church members, are imperfect, which is why Christ set the perfect example of what grace and forgiveness look like.
4. **Guilt over sins.** Guilt is a major reason for people drifting away.

Maybe it’s something they did or said, or maybe it’s a self-awareness that they haven’t been to church in a while. Guilt can be paralyzing, but it is also why sinners need to hear about God’s grace.

5. **Conflict between doctrine and what society says.** In a culture where everything is polarizing yet permissible, the messages that are heard from the world can easily permeate and create doubt about what God’s Word really says.

Dobberstein says the *Welcome Home* initiative draws a lot of parallels to the parable of the lost son (Luke 15:11-32). The younger brother goes away because he doesn’t want anyone telling him what to do. Tempted by the devil and the world, the younger brother strays and finds himself in need, hurting. He wonders whether he will be welcomed back. However, as Dobberstein explains, there’s also a lesson to learn from the older brother who refused to welcome him back.

“We want to better equip the members of our congregations to reach out to their fellow members with the extravagant love of the heavenly Father,” says Dobberstein. “‘Come on back, no questions asked.’”

He continues, “*Welcome Home* gives the members of our congregations the opportunity to put on display the kind of loving heart and caring attitude Jesus put on display to those who needed it most.”



Welcome Home resources will be available at welscongregationservices.net in June. Learn more about this initiative in this month’s edition of *WELS Connection*. Read a personal story about coming back to a WELS church on p. 28.

District news

NORTHERN WISCONSIN

Immanuel, Medford, Wis., hosted the Northeastern Regional WELS Handbell Festival. Ten choirs with a total of almost 150 ringers attended the festival and performed in the festival concert on April 7 at Medford Area Elementary School.

NORTH ATLANTIC

The Way, Fredericksburg, Va., a WELS home mission, celebrated Easter with a live tomb event. Church members recreated the scene of Jesus' tomb on Good Friday and Easter, posting guards throughout the day on Saturday. The guards invited passersby to The Way's Easter Sunday worship service in downtown Market Square.

MICHIGAN

On March 30 and 31, handbell ringers came together at **Grace, St. Joseph, Mich.**, for the Southeastern Regional WELS Handbell Festival.

WESTERN WISCONSIN

Our Redeemer, Madison, Wis., dedicated its new pipe organ on March 31.

PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Six people were baptized at **Faith Hmong, Anchorage, Alaska**, on Easter Sunday.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

MN—Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., celebrated the teaching ministry anniversaries of **Larry Czer**

(40 years), **Darrell Berg** (25 years), and **Jon Roux** (25 years) and the pastoral ministry anniversaries of **Michael Otterstatter** (25 years) and **Brian Hennig** (25 years) on April 28.

SEW—**Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.**, celebrated its 115th anniversary during the 2018–19 school year.

On April 28, Trinity, Caledonia, Wis., celebrated the 40th anniversary in the teaching ministry of **Jeffrey Inniger**.

The district reporters for this month are: MI—John Eich; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NA—Ian Headrick; NW—Dennis Kleist; PNW—David Birsching; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Brett Brauer.

MINNESOTA



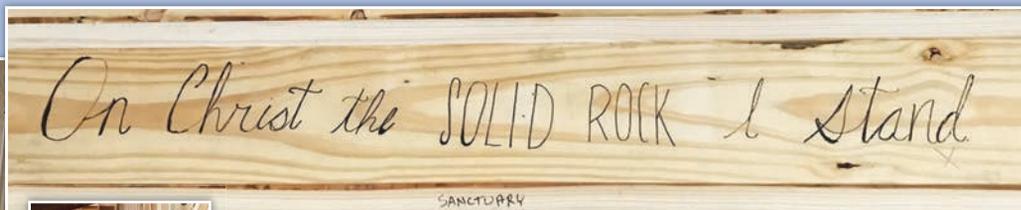
Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., hosted the Western Regional WELS Handbell Festival on April 6 and 7.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



On April 7, two students from Lighthouse Youth Center and Garden Homes, Milwaukee, Wis., were baptized.

NORTH ATLANTIC



Ascension, Jacksonville, N.C., held a "Sharpie Party" in February in which members wrote prayers and passages on the 2x4s of Ascension's new worship and ministry center before sheet rock went in. Ascension hopes to complete its center this summer. It is receiving assistance from WELS Church Extension Fund, who provided land and building loans as well as matching land and facility grants.



AMBASSADORS

LET THEM SEE JESUS



Quiz the intimidator

Thomas H. Trapp

In my early years as a full-time campus pastor, I attended a gathering of diverse university religious clergy. Intriguingly, they invited a Christ-centered scholar to speak to a group of mostly skeptical theologians. During the question-and-answer period, one of them quizzed the scholar: “So, what is your view of salvation?”

I thought to myself, *That’s an easy answer. The only name under the sky that will bring salvation from God’s just and holy judgment is Jesus. Faith in Jesus saves!* (cf. Acts 4:12).

Then I realized the person sitting across from me firmly rejected Jesus as God and Savior. How was the speaker going to respond without being accused as a hater of non-Christians and an unloving, narrow-minded bigot? The speaker knew he was being set up to be chopped down.

If you were that speaker, how would you respond? You may want to do what Jesus often did: He answered a question with a question.

JESUS ASKED QUESTIONS

Jesus knew that questions force antagonists to rethink their positions. Religious leaders once asked Jesus

why his disciples didn’t follow their religious traditions and wash their hands before eating. Jesus responded with a question: “Why are your man-made traditions more important to you than God’s commands?” (paraphrased from Matthew 15:3). With that question, he was calling them to repentance. What were they doing wrong before God? Instead of using their money to take care of their parents (the Fourth Commandment), the Pharisees bragged that they gave their finances for God’s work. It was a “religious” excuse to break one command of God in order to obey another—and “look good.” Have you ever experienced being more spiritual than others and hoped others noticed it? I can hear Jesus ask, “Why does your obedience make you arrogant?”

During the week before Jesus was crucified, the hate-filled, resentful religious leaders heard children in the temple area singing to Jesus: “Hosanna to the Son of David.” They asked Jesus, “Do you hear what these children are saying?” Jesus’ response? A question: “Yes . . . have you never read [in Psalm 8:2], ‘From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise?’” (Matthew 21:16). Of course, they knew Psalm 8. They were scholars of the Scriptures! It’s a passage about the coming God-man

Messiah (Hebrews 2). Jesus was sending them a clear message: I am that Messiah of Psalm 8. Follow me! “Haven’t your read . . . ?” was a question of love, even though these religious leaders did not love him. Jesus wanted his enemies to rethink the words he spoke to them and the miracles he showed them and join the children in singing his praise.

“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” a wealthy man asked Jesus (Luke 18:18). The man of means felt he was living a holy life and on his way to heaven. Jesus answered again with a question: “Why do you call me good? . . . No one is good—except God alone” (Luke 18:19). Jesus was redirecting the man’s false reasoning: If you think I’m “good/God,” then give all your riches to the poor and follow me. The man loved money and walked away—but Jesus’ penetrating question gave him something to think about. Interestingly, some think this rich man was Joseph of Arimathea, who eventually committed his life to Jesus and buried the Lord in his personal tomb. Who knows?

Jesus faced many challenging and attacking questions, even from his own disciples. One dark night the disciples were on the Sea of Galilee when a furious storm came up and made the waves start flooding their vessel (Mark 4:35-41). It’s hard to imagine, but Jesus





WHAT'S YOUR STORY

How have you shared Jesus? Every encounter is different, and we want to hear from you. To whom in your life did you reach out? What questions did you ask to get someone to re-think his or her position? 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.

was sleeping in the back of the rocking boat. The disciples woke him up with an accusatory question: "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" Jesus answered: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" Faith in what? In him! They just saw him perform divine powers of healing and casting out demons. Why wouldn't he also have power over the wind and the waves? Have you ever asked Jesus, "Don't you care about me and all the troubles in this world?" Jesus asks us, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" King David was once terrified of getting killed. When he turned to God's promises, he wrote: "I lie down and sleep; I awake again, because the LORD sustains me" (Psalm 3:5). It's not good fortune or luck that keeps us alive. It's the Lord. He alone will also determine when we go to heaven. Do you believe this?

THE GOAL OF QUESTIONS

Questions make us rethink our doubts and unbelief. Questions also help people who don't know God to rethink God. A number of years ago during a television interview, a movie star challenged a Christian theologian: "I understand that you think Jesus is God. Well, that's your opinion!" His response: "Do you really think that's my opinion?" Then he paused before saying, "It's not my opinion. Either Jesus is or isn't."

Our goal is the Lord's goal: It's not to win an argument but to win a soul . . . with truth and love. Intimidators of believers may have no love for us or interest in what we say, so to get their attention, we need to make them question their questions.

A young Christian woman who came to our campus ministry at UW-Madison lived in the dorm with an atheist. The atheist was nice and friendly, but she loved to challenge Christians. One day she confronted her Lutheran roommate with this question: "As a Christian, you must believe that I'm going to hell, right?" Our student sat quietly for a moment and then responded, "Yes, I do believe you're going to hell as Scripture says." Then she asked a question that eventually changed her atheist roommate's life: "Did you know that my family really loves you and is praying that you might come to know the love of Jesus and go to heaven?" Her unbelieving roommate was stunned. She never heard any Christian give such a blunt answer and follow up with such a caring question. The entire family was praying for her?

Out of curiosity, she came to our campus ministry and started to ask me many, many questions. As we searched the Bible together, the Holy Spirit even-

tually touched her heart. She told me she fought the Spirit-filled words of Scripture for a long time, but one day she woke up believing in Jesus as her Lord and Savior. Then she asked to be baptized. The Chapel celebrated that day along with all the angels in heaven!

When people want to belittle our faith or attack it, develop a penetrating question from their question. Make them think. Then be ready to give them answers from God's Word, with loving "gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).

Now here's a closing question for you: If antagonists ever quizzed you, asking, "So what's your view of salvation?"—what question would you ask them?

Thomas Trapp served as campus pastor at Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel at the University of Wisconsin-Madison for 38 years. The Lord called him home in March. We are saddened he is gone from us but rejoice he has found complete joy in his Savior's presence.

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





WELCOME *Home*

A man finds a sense of belonging after returning to a WELS church.

Rachel Hartman

After growing up in a WELS congregation in Wisconsin, Kyle Oppermann left to join other church bodies as an adult. Two years ago, he again stepped through the doors of a WELS church. Now he can't imagine going anywhere else. "This is what I was taught, and this is what it's all about," he says.

HEADING AWAY

During his early years, Oppermann's family took him regularly to church. "I was born and baptized in a Wisconsin Lutheran Synod church," he says. "I went through Sunday school and confirmation class."

But after getting confirmed, Oppermann started being pulled in other directions. "Once you get out of school, you kind of drift away from church," he says. "During that time, I floated around."

Oppermann got married, and his wife attended a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod congregation. Oppermann went with her to that church. Then the two got divorced, and Oppermann started looking for a different congregation.

When he remarried, his new wife attended a Congregational church, and he went there with her. "That church went against everything I was accustomed to," says Oppermann. "I went through the motions with that church, but I wasn't connected."

During his time in the Congregational setting, Oppermann noticed teachings that were different from those he had been taught at WELS. "I remember one Sunday there was a lesbian couple that had a baby together, and it was time to baptize the child. I was ushering the service. I would take head count, and I remember a couple of people coming out of the sanctuary and saying, 'I can't do this, I can't do this.'"

The incident caused Oppermann to remember the Bible's words on Bap-

tism and that the child would be a child of God. He also recalled what he had been taught regarding marriage—that the Bible explains marriage is between a man and a woman.

Twenty years later the couple divorced, and Oppermann found himself again looking for a church. “I floated around again and went to the ELCA [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America],” he says. He got to know the minister of the ELCA congregation and asked him how to join. “I told him I had been baptized and confirmed in WELS, and he said, ‘Oh, you’re one of those people.’ He was the first person to hit me with that.” After that, Oppermann found others responded the same way when they learned of his background. “It carries that stigma that we’re fire and brimstone,” he notes.

RETURNING TO WELS

Around the same time, one of Oppermann’s friends asked him about WELS. “He said to me, ‘Didn’t you used to go to a WELS church? Why don’t you come back to WELS?’ ”

Oppermann decided to give it a try. His first time back to a WELS church was on a Sunday. He walked through the doors and was greeted right away. “The pastor wanted me to go through the new membership class again just to make sure we were all on the same page,” says Oppermann, who was eager and willing to take the class to refresh what he had learned. He joined a class that ran during the autumn of 2017.

The pastor who taught the class comments, “Kyle was the last one out, and he just said, ‘This is so good.’ ” With a big handshake the pastor replied, “Welcome home, Kyle. You are home.”

In addition to the class, Oppermann was excited to hear the Bible read and taught again in church. “From day one when I went in, the stuff we were talking about rang a bell because I was born and raised in a WELS setting,” he says. “It felt like coming home.”

He noticed a difference between the WELS congregation and the other churches he had attended. As each

week went by, he read the Bible more and reviewed its teachings. He recognized that WELS instructs its members according to what the Bible says and bases its beliefs on Scripture. When questions came up, the answers came from the Bible. “Some of these other churches take bits and pieces of the Bible and interpret them in a way that fits with what they want the Bible to mean,” says Oppermann.

Oppermann discovered a sense of belonging after coming back to WELS. He found the teachings of his youth to be applicable and meaningful for his current life. He realized that the instructions haven’t changed; they are still based on the Bible. “It feels like I’ve been a member here for a hundred years,” he says.

BRINGING IN OTHERS

Oppermann isn’t deterred by any stigma that being a Christian or being a WELS member can sometimes bring. He says, “People think you’re a stuffed shirt. But I tell them, ‘You can read the Bible and see what we’re all about.’ ”

He has also come across ideas that some have regarding how Christians view themselves and the world. “People think we’re better than everybody else, but we’re no different than anyone else,” he says. “It goes back to interpreting the Bible. You need to sit down and go over it to really know what it means.”

Rather than focusing on what others might think of him attending a WELS church regularly again, Oppermann has looked for ways to help others with their spiritual lives. When his father, a WELS member, moved into a nursing home near Oppermann’s church, Oppermann called his pastors and asked them to visit his dad. “All four of the pastors saw my dad,” Oppermann says. “He was spiritually well taken care of when he passed.”

Reflecting on his past years, Oppermann concludes he is in a better spot now than before. “My divorce was just finalizing around the time I came back, and I was looking for something else



Kyle Oppermann is a member at St. Mark, Watertown, Wisconsin.

and praying about it.” Now Oppermann finds himself in a more stable position. “My life is better now. I have a good job and am able to do things. I feel better about myself because I’ve come back.”

His favorite part of the week coincides with the worship times. “I’m like a little kid at the end of the week. I look forward to going to church.” He appreciates hearing the message that no one is perfect, but rather we all have sinned and have forgiveness through Jesus because he has paid the penalty for us all.

He also is thankful for the open arms that have received him in WELS. “I feel blessed to have a church like this accept me back in,” he says. “In other places I felt like they didn’t listen to me and were just looking for more numbers to fill the pew. Here they listen and really care.”

To anyone who is considering coming back to WELS, Oppermann says the return is invaluable. “Just come back and leave all your worries and cares at the door. For me, it was an eye-opener as far as how good this feels.”

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

This is the first article in a three-part series on welcoming members back to church. Learn more about this synod initiative on p. 24.

CHRISTIAN roots

Old photos lead to a special golden wedding anniversary moment.

John A. Braun

The journey started early in their marriage with a box of old family photos in the attic—a big box, a “good load” as Harvey explained. Karen found out that some of the photos of Harvey’s family went back 150 years. She thought Harvey should go through them and explore his family roots.

So Harvey started, but he needed a little help. He remembered his father, mother, and siblings, of course. But his grandmother died when his father was 21, and his grandfather died when Harvey was 6. That meant Harvey’s personal knowledge had spaces that could only be filled in with memories of others. Also, some of the certificates they uncovered were in German. The pictures of cousins, aunts, uncles, and extended family were covered in dust, and their stories hidden in the fog of memory.

Help came from his Aunt Altine, the second youngest of his father’s siblings. She identified many from the photos and told a few stories from her memories. Grandparents and great-grandparents began to emerge out of the dust and fog. Each picture became more than an old photo. It revealed another piece of the family’s history.

THE STORIES EMERGE

Grandpa Philip Weigand had married Jane Coulter. She was Irish, and with a name like Weigand, he was, of course, German. Philip was a carpenter at the time and worked on the street cars in Milwaukee, carving the decorations for the cars. Jane was a seamstress. Exactly how they met remains a part of the mystery, but their families lived close to each other north of Milwaukee. They were married on May 2, 1882. Harvey notes that it was God’s hand that brought them together.

Jane grew up in an Irish Protestant family. Most likely she spoke Gaelic. Philip’s family was Lutheran. After they were married, Jane went to school to learn German, studied Luther’s Catechism, and was confirmed. The members of the congregation admired her for her willingness to learn German.

She and Philip had six children and lived on a farm near Theresa, Wisconsin. Jane cared for the children. The cousins remembered their grandmother for her needlework and her role as taskmaster in the house. She was never idle. One story illustrates her spirit. While she was doing some needlework and one of the children was mopping the floor, she exclaimed, “You missed a spot.” It had to be done right.

Taking another step back meant looking for connections with his grandmother’s family. Two of the pictures in the box

were of Harvey’s great-grandparents, John Coulter and Sarah McKeag. They were married in a Presbyterian church in Carrowdore, Ireland, on May 13, 1848.

It was a difficult time in Ireland because of the Great Hunger, as they called the Potato Famine. John and Sarah immigrated to the United States, settling for a time in New York. They welcomed a daughter on Sept. 10, 1849. Sadly, that child died as a toddler before they left New York.

Early in the 1850s the Coulter family made its way to join others from the family who had immigrated and settled north of Milwaukee in the town of Wayne, near Theresa. Harvey’s grandmother, Jane, was born there in 1857.

The Christian ties that bound their family together were especially important to Harvey and Karen. The family wasn’t all Lutheran or German. One part of the family was very active in a Protestant church that was comfortable for Irish immigrants. The other side was active in the Lutheran church where they were comfortable with their German roots. Jane, Harvey’s grandmother, made the switch to learn German and become Lutheran. Christianity was important to both sides of the family.

A TRIP TO IRELAND

As Karen and Harvey were approaching their 50th wedding anniversary,

Karen said, "It would be fun to learn more of their stories." They wanted to take another step in their own history that would help them explore those stories. They decided to go to Ireland to celebrate their anniversary. They booked a tour, which included a collection of WELS members also interested in Ireland.

Karen's research gave the trip a curious wrinkle about Harvey's family roots in Ireland. She googled the Carrowdore Presbyterian Church and discovered it was only about 30 miles from Belfast, a place they were visiting on the tour. So at the beginning of the tour, they asked if they could rent a car and travel to the little Irish town while the rest of the group was in Belfast. They also wanted to find Irish wedding rings, claddaghs, for each other and asked for help. The tour director, Scott Monroe, and tour guide, John Hogan, said they would keep them in mind. At the Blarney Castle, Harvey was surprised when John mentioned that they could purchase claddagh rings there.

When the tour left Belfast, they had another surprise: Scott and John changed the itinerary. The tour was scheduled to go to Dublin the next day, but instead of traveling the busy highway to their destination, they adjusted the journey to go through the Irish countryside with a stop in Carrowdore, where Harvey's great-grandparents were married.

Harvey and Jane were concerned that the rest of people on the tour would not appreciate the detour just to satisfy their personal curiosity, but the countryside was more scenic than the main highway.

When they arrived in Carrowdore, the church was still there. The bus emptied, and everyone entered the church.

Harvey had copies of his great-grandparents' pictures and explained the significance of the location. When the tour group heard why they had come to this church, they were elated. It was a special moment for all to participate in Harvey and Karen's golden wedding event.

That day, the church was busy with children in a day care, and one woman took time to greet this busload of tourists. She even called the pastor of the church. He found a picture of the pastor who had married John and Sarah and shared it with the group.

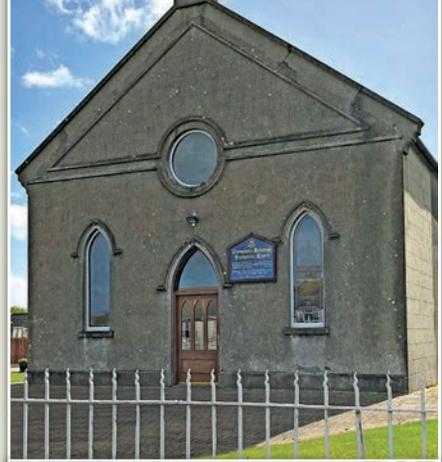
The church wasn't a cathedral like so many others the group had seen, but it was a simple, everyday church for ordinary people. The church had the same arrangement it did 150 years ago. Harvey and Karen stood in the same place where John and Sarah exchanged vows in 1848.

"It was emotional for me," says Harvey. "It was important to see the small children in day care there in Ireland. My great-grandparents stood at the front of the church and made their vows. They were Christian." One of Harvey's Christian roots goes back to that Presbyterian church in Ireland.

It was a special event no one will forget. Harvey and Karen found the experience uplifting, and so did everyone else. It is a lesson that all things are under the guiding hand of God.

Harvey confesses that his journey through the photos in the box and the stop at Carrowdore were important: "I learned that Christ endures over the generations."

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



When I
pour out my
heartache
in prayer,
my Father
hears every
groan.

On grief and grieving: A Christian perspective

Glenn L. Schwanke

In 1969 Elisabeth Kübler-Ross published her groundbreaking book *On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy and Their Own Families*. The book identified five stages of emotional turmoil experienced by the terminally ill: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Decades later, David Kessler joined Kübler-Ross to write *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss*, which applied the five-stage model to those who were suffering from the loss of a loved one.

Through the years, I have often referred to Kübler-Ross's work when shepherding the terminally ill or when ministering to their family after a death. But for the past year, I have been breaking my own ground through Kübler-Ross's work. How so? My dear wife, Terry, went home to heaven on May 14, 2018, after a lengthy bout with cancer. Since then, I've been trudging through those five stages of grief, but not in a way you can neatly diagram on a straight line. Rather, I often feel as if I'm at sea in a murky swirl of emotions that can be triggered by the slightest thing.

Depression? If I'm watching a television program that we used to watch together, suddenly sobs I didn't even realize I had come welling up from a place deep down inside.

Isolation? Some days I fight to find the energy to go to the grocery store or make congregational visits.

Anger? If I'm struggling with a pan of burned bacon, suddenly I'm shouting, "Lord, I was married to the best cook in the world. Why did you take her?"

Bargaining? Well, some have termed guilt "the wingman of bargaining," and guilt I have felt. "I wish I had been a better husband. . . . If only I had urged her to go to the doctor sooner."

Why share any of this? Because others are struggling through the same five

stages of loss. If you're one of those people, permit me to throw you my lifeline over the last year.

When I feel as if I'm wading through waist-deep mud, my Father lifts me gently with his guarantee, "My flesh and my heart fail, but God is the rock of my heart and my portion forever." (Psalm 73:26)

When I pour out my heartache in prayer, my Father hears every groan: "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted. He saves those whose spirits have been crushed" (Psalm 34:18).

When I think, *I wish Terry were still here*, my caring Father lets me peek at what she already has: "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain, because the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

When I'm crushed by guilt, sometimes even by the storm of emotions inside, my Father points me to his Son's cross and whispers, "Finished!" (John 19:30).

And when I'm lonely, my Father blesses me with Christian family, friends, and neighbors to help in these days and, I pray, in the days to come.

Acceptance is finally settling into the nooks and crannies of my heart and head. But I prefer to call it "trust." Trust in the One who promised, "As Jerusalem is surrounded by mountains, so the LORD surrounds his people from now to eternity" (Psalm 125:2).

Our Father's lifeline is there for you too. Take hold.

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

All Scripture references are from the Evangelical Heritage Version.



A GOSPEL-FILLED LIFE

Pray to know God better

Jeffrey D. Enderle

Someone was bound to invent an easy button. One office supply company has already used an “easy button” to advertise solutions to office headaches. But we could use simple solutions for all kinds of issues.

Enter prayer. It’s a tremendous comfort to know that God wants us to come to him (Matthew 11:28). When we are faced with problems outside of our ability to handle, it’s a relief to entrust them to the One who has limitless ability to effect real change in our chaotic world (Philippians 4:6). God wants to know what’s on our hearts and has the power to handle the burdens we are facing in life (1 Peter 5:7).

NOT JUST AN EASY BUTTON

Yet it is healthy for us to pause and consider why we are praying. What are we hoping to get out of prayer? Our reasons for turning to God in prayer might be different than some of God’s reasons for inviting us to pray. Essentially, are we asking God to be our easy button for every problem area in life? While God invites us to come to him in prayer, God may desire something more personally beneficial and durable from prayer for his children than what we’re after.

Consider Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Even as our Savior engaged in prayer, he expressed his

own personal desires. He unloaded the deepest concerns troubling his heart. Yet in childlike humility, Jesus resolved to submit to his Father’s will (Matthew 26:39,42). Scripture was clear: “It was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer” and finally make “his life an offering for sin.” The same Scripture promised “the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand” (Isaiah 53:10). Jesus accepted his cup of suffering and turned to the promise of his Father for strength.

That pattern reflects the way Paul often prays for fellow believers. He repeatedly prays that they grow to know God better (Ephesians 1:15-21; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-12; Philemon 6). Didn’t they have serious doctrinal issues in need of correction? Of course, they did. Weren’t there precarious situations around them threatening their spiritual and physical safety? Undeniably so. Weren’t there pressing practical matters to be resolved among fellow Christians? Absolutely. Could he have gotten right to the point of the urgent needs they faced? Certainly.

All of those issues were important, and their prayers were no doubt filled with requests for solutions. But Paul had told the new believers that they would have many hardships (Acts 14:22). He prays that God would send them the Spirit “so that you may know him better” (Ephesians 1:17).

A WAY TO KNOW GOD

Knowing God better isn’t simply

about gaining information so you are the champion of Bible trivia. It’s about gaining a personal appreciation for who your Savior is and what he has done and still does for his children. Above all else, God desires the salvation of sinners (1 Timothy 2:4). Internal uncertainty swirls around our hearts. He has given us great promises that stand as monuments to divine truth (e.g. Romans 8:28).

The Spirit works through God’s promises. Knowing God through his revealed Word produces growth in faith. Prayer produced as a byproduct of Scripture study might not immediately change your circumstances or eliminate obstacles in your life. All your problems might not be resolved instantaneously by means of some divine easy button. Realigning yourself to God’s will and rediscovering God’s truth will fill you with the joy of the hope you have in Christ. Knowing God will allow you to become more confident in God’s actions being carried out in our world. Knowing God better will build appreciation of the blessings you already have in Christ.

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



Pentecost is a
reminder that
we are to let our
light shine so the
Holy Spirit can
enlighten darkened
hearts and minds.

Light in the darkness

The longest day of this year will be June 21—the day of the summer solstice. In the United States, we will have about 15 hours of light. The sad realization is that from June 21 onward, each day will get shorter. The winter solstice is Dec. 21, the shortest day of the year, with 9 hours of daylight. Darkness creeps into the daylight, which loses its intensity as the sun drops in the sky and heads closer to the horizon.

This year Pentecost occurs on June 9, and we celebrate the rise of the gospel light and the birth of the Christian church. Jesus told his disciples that the Counselor would come and they should wait in Jerusalem (John 15:26,27; Acts 1:1-11). Of course, the Holy Spirit called people out of the darkness into the light of God's grace long before Pentecost. But on that day, the Holy Spirit demonstrated his work with tongues of fire and the miracle of languages. When Peter proclaimed the gospel, the Holy Spirit called three thousand people out of the darkness and into the light.

The light of the gospel does not rise and set like the light of the sun each day. And since both the light of the gospel and the opposite darkness are spiritual, neither the light nor the darkness is evident to everyone.

Many who came to Jerusalem for the Jewish festival had no idea that they were in the dark. They did not know Jesus. Peter and the other apostles let their light shine to chase the darkness from the hearts of the three thousand. Pentecost is a reminder that we are to let our light shine so the Holy Spirit can enlighten darkened hearts and minds.

As believers in Christ, we will always live surrounded by darkness. Those still in the darkness do not recognize it as darkness, but we who live in the light become aware of the darkness when we see murder, child abuse, domestic abuse, theft, robberies, anger, and discord. Others see these things too but do not understand the source of them all.

Jesus said they all flow out of the darkened sinful heart (Matthew 15:19)—a concept those in the dark resist.

The darkness within the human heart rebels against God and resists the truth that Jesus came to rescue humanity from itself—the sin within and the result of sin, death. Alternative ideas about God and spiritual issues arise in the darkness. Those ideas have no foundation except the optimistic imagination and opinions of humans. Those opinions refuse to accept the reality of sin. They flatter the human spirit by minimizing the sin within and suggesting that anyone can earn heaven if only they do enough good.

But the devastating darkness becomes profound when death comes and those who greet its icy stare have nothing but their human ideas and dreams. A final desperate alternative is to believe that in the end there is no heaven or hell. Those in the darkness have chosen to resist the light of Jesus' victory over death and his promise: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die" (John 11:25).

We are to share the light of Jesus into the darkness that surrounds us. The hearts bound by the darkness and imprisoned by its false hopes and dreams need the light we possess by faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). We share the gospel, knowing he has the power to awaken and enlighten others.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

COMFORT IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT: REVELATION 14

Timothy J. Westendorf

We've seen the first three of the seven "visions"—the dragon and his two beastly allies. Chapter 14 reveals the next three.

THE 144,000 AND THE LAMB

Contemplating the frightening enemies of Christ and his church can fill human hearts with fear. The next vision, seen by John and revealed to us, helps us overcome the fear.

God shows us the church triumphant, symbolized by 144,000 people—12x12 (the representative of believers from Old and New Testament eras) multiplied by 1,000 (the number for completeness, 10 cubed). They are with Jesus, the Lamb, and have his name and that of his Father on their heads. They have been redeemed by the Lamb's precious sacrifice, completely cleansed and purified through the waters of Baptism and the work of the Spirit in the gospel. Their song is a Spirit-taught song of praise and thanks to the Lamb, and their purity comes from the robes of his righteousness that they wear. They are safe from the fearful visions.

THE THREE ANGELS

Rather abruptly, the glimpse of heaven fades, and in the fifth vision the scene shifts back to the earth. After receiving reassurance of the church's final victory, John is reminded of the Savior's promise that his gospel will be preached until the end of time.

As long as this world endures, the church has work to do. There is good news to proclaim to the inhabitants of this world that they too might be brought from darkness to light, from unbelief to faith.

The urgency of the work is underscored by what John sees and hears next. The second and third angels clearly announce a warning about the result of rejecting the gospel. Those who oppose Christ and his church will ultimately be destroyed. The enemies of God's people are Babylon. Those who stubbornly hold to the beastly, unchristian message and philosophies multiplied by Satan and his allies will be left to face God in his holiness and justice on their own. The faithful believers are blessed and find rest from their labors.

THE HARVEST

Throughout the Bible the day of judgment is pictured as a harvesttime. The sixth vision takes up the picture. One "like a son of man," Jesus himself, comes on the clouds. As we regularly confess in the Apostles' Creed, he "has risen from death and lives and rules eternally." He comes to judge the living and the dead.

The world as we know it and in which we now live won't last forever. It will come to an end. Throughout the Bible and in Revelation too, we are encouraged to see in that end a new and glorious beginning, our final redemption carried out by the

Savior who loves us. Until that day, the church, consisting of each believer in Christ, is encouraged to take up the announcement of the first flying angel, calling young and old, near and far, to find their comfort and rest, now and forever, in the good news of our triumphant Savior and King.

REFLECT ON REVELATION CHAPTER 14

1. Why do you think that Revelation 14:6,7 is sometimes read on Reformation Sunday in Lutheran churches?
2. How might this chapter help sharpen our focus on the purpose of our lives and the mission of our churches?

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

The shiny PENNY

A three-year-old puts his shiny penny in the hands of Jesus.

Holly J. Beckman

It was time to leave for church. My three-year-old grandson had a weekly ritual. He would gather all his little treasures and stuff them in his pockets. Those treasures made his pockets bulge. He wouldn't leave home without them.

One special treasure was his penny. It was different from all the other loose change he had. It was new and shiny. He took special care of it, and that Sunday he decided to bring it to church with him. But he did not stuff it into his pockets. Instead, he walked out the door with his pockets full, holding his prized, shiny penny in a clear plastic cup.

We all smiled as he got in his car seat. He moved slowly so he would not drop the cup. Normally he loved to comment about everything he saw as he rode in the car. But that day he looked out the window in silence. He wasn't very talkative. He kept glancing down, admiring his shiny penny and making sure it didn't drop on the floor.

I asked him if he was going to give his shiny penny as an offering. His reply? "No, it's my penny!" He seemed very determined to keep that penny for himself. He didn't want to give it up.

But later when the offering basket came past, with no prodding and a big smile on his face, he threw in his shiny penny.

Before church, a lady had seen him with his penny and asked him about it. After church, she noticed it was gone. She asked him where the penny was. Did he lose it?

His reply? "I put it in the hands of Jesus."

What an amazing lesson from a three-year-old! I couldn't help but hug him and tell him that I thought it was wonderful that he gave his prized, shiny penny to Jesus. Again, God teaches an adult from the words of a little child.

What's your shiny penny? I have my own list. We all have shiny pennies we want to hold on to because they belong to us. Are you ready to put them in the hands of Jesus? "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7)!

Holly Beckman is a member at St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

