

Sacrificial giving | End time | God's plan for our lives

Forward in Christ

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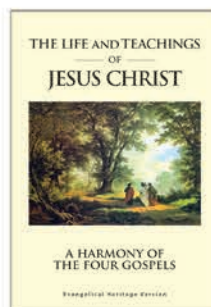
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May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. — 1 KINGS 8:57

WHAT'S INSIDE

Whether it's a story of a college freshman thanking God for his congenital heart disease or a seminary professor thanking God for his father's survival in World War II, this issue shows we have much for which to be grateful. Both stories (found on pp. 26 & 30) also highlight how God guides our lives according to his plan, a plan that ends with us being with him in heaven.

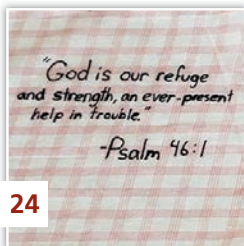
Looking ahead to the end of time is something we often do in November as part of the Christian church year. Eric Schroeder breaks down what the season of End Time entails and what each Sunday teaches us about our Savior and his return. Don't miss Schroeder's article on p. 10.

As we wait for our Savior's return, there is still much to be done. We can share the message of grace with our friends and neighbors (like new Christians Dave and Connie on p. 14) and give our time, talents, and treasures in thanksgiving to God (like the widow and her mite or Lucille on p. 12). We can encourage young people to consider the ministry (p. 22) and show our neighbors what Christian love looks like (p. 32). Whatever we do, we can be thankful for the greatest gift—our Savior!

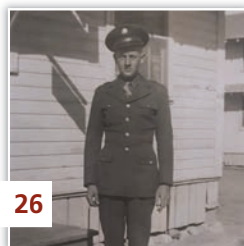
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PHOTOS



We need your help!

**We're looking for photos for a new FIC feature starting in 2020.
Please submit photos that fit the following themes:**

- Ways that Christians show love (could be in your church or in your community or in the world at large).
- Summer church camps (at the church or a campground).

Or do you have a photo that depicts ministry, outreach, worship, or faith? Send it in. We're always looking to feature unique photos from our congregations and members.

Photos are due Dec. 1. The higher the resolution the better. Please include a description of the photo and how it fits the theme as well as your contact information and home congregation. Make sure you receive permission from the people pictured to submit the photo. Photos may be used in the magazine or online.



wels.net/submit-your-story or e-mail fic@wels.net

Through my Bible in 3 years



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NOVEMBER 2019

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Grieving in hope

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 1 Thessalonians 4:13

Joel C. Seifert

Are we forgetting how to grieve? Maybe you've seen some subtle signs. Check your friends' social media accounts, and it seems like no one is touched by sorrow. More and more, instead of gathering to grieve at funerals, we meet for "celebrations of life."

Those things aren't wrong in and of themselves—it's good to share joys and celebrate the lives of those we love. But grief has an important role in our lives of faith too.

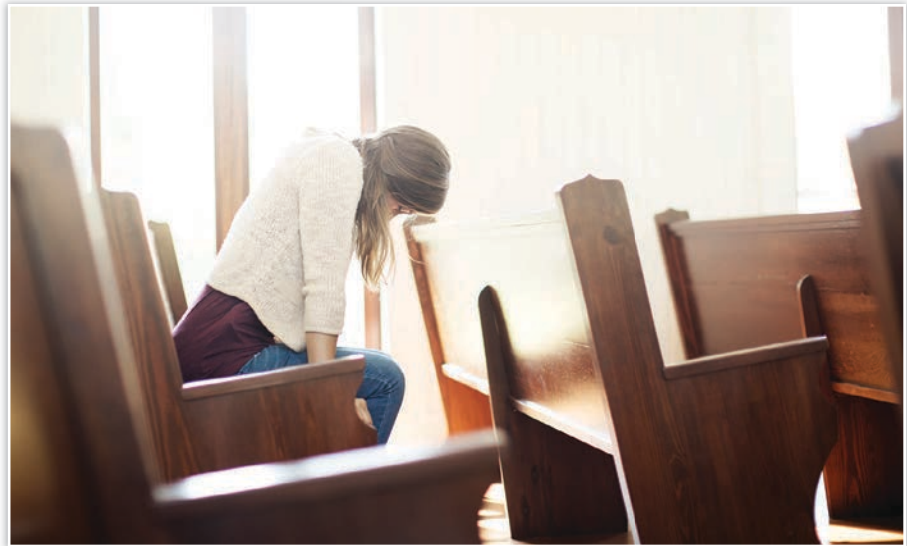
GRIEF REMINDS US THAT DEATH ISN'T NORMAL

Christians in Thessalonica were hurting. They knew that Jesus would return to take them home, but while they waited for that day, some of their believing loved ones died. They worried that perhaps these believers who died before Jesus' return would miss out on eternal life. They thought they might not see them again.

It's what Paul *doesn't* tell them that's so striking. He doesn't tell them, "Don't be sad!" Grief is a fitting reaction to suffering and death. The Bible tells us of believing men and women who mourned and wept when their loved ones left this life.

That's because true grief is an act of faith. It's a recognition that death isn't normal and that God didn't design this world so that children should bury their parents or, more heartbreaking yet, that parents should bury their children. In Eden, marriage didn't include, "'Til death do us part." Suffering and death were brought into this world through sin. When Christians grieve loss, it isn't a weakness in their faith; it's a faithful recognition that suffering and death are unnatural tragedies.

The gospel gives an answer to our grief. The Thessalonians didn't fully



understand the answer yet, so Paul told them. Jesus' victory over sin and death means the day is coming when he will take all believers—living and dead—home to be with him and one another in heaven.

Godly grief is a rich blessing! It doesn't just point us back to Jesus; it points us to one another too.

IN GRIEF, WE SHARE THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE GOSPEL

This doesn't mean we no longer grieve. It means we grieve *in hope*. We grieve, feeling the pain of someone missing from our lives but looking forward to the day we'll see him or her again in heaven.

Godly grief is a rich blessing! It doesn't just point us back to Jesus; it points us to one another too. Read Paul's answer to those grieving Christians (1 Thes-

salonians 4:13-18), and you'll notice one word that's repeated more than any other: *we*. We grieve. We believe in Jesus. We may live here without our loved ones for a while, but we will be caught up together in the air with Jesus one day. And we will be with the Lord forever. God wants us to share our grief and our hope with one another.

In November, many of our churches celebrate Saints Triumphant Sunday. On that Sunday, we can remember loved ones who've died in faith. Yes, celebrate their lives! Grieve their absence, but look forward to the day your grief will dissolve in the alleluias of heaven.

And as Christmas draws near, you'll still feel some grief. Don't hide it; don't grieve alone. You need not be ashamed of your sadness. Share your pain and hurt with a fellow believer so they can bear it with you, grieve with you, and comfort you as you look forward to heaven.

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



Mark Schwede

You will find the
perfect church
if you are looking
for the right thing:
a church where
the gospel is
proclaimed in
all its saving
truth and beauty.

Looking for perfection

How would you describe the perfect congregation?

Would the perfect congregation be one in which every sermon is clear, interesting, practical, and holds your attention for 20 minutes? Would it be a congregation whose pastor has a winsome personality that appeals to people of all ages and backgrounds?

Would the perfect congregation have members who are all friendly and welcoming to strangers? Would that congregation have Sunday worship that is consistently uplifting, edifying, and beautiful, with a style that appeals to all members? Would its pews be filled with dozens of young families whose children are perfectly behaved? Would it be a congregation that places outreach and support for missions as its highest priority? Would it be a congregation whose only problem is how to accommodate the new members who are constantly joining?

If you are looking for a perfect congregation, those things might well describe it. But you won't find such a congregation. It doesn't exist, and it won't exist this side of heaven.

How would you describe the perfect synod?

Would the perfect synod be one in which all members are perfectly united in what they believe and have a full understanding of every biblical doctrine? Would it be a synod in which all existing congregations are growing and mission congregations are being started in dozens of new communities? Would the perfect synod have ministerial education schools filled to capacity with young people willing to serve as pastors and teachers? Would it be a synod in which vacancies in the pulpit and classroom are virtually nonexistent?

Would the perfect synod be one in which all decisions made by its leaders prove to be exactly correct, always bringing about the hoped-for results?

Would the perfect synod be one in which no congregation or called worker or member ever strays from the truth and leaves?

If you are looking for a perfect synod, those things might well describe it. But you won't find such a synod. It doesn't exist, and it won't exist this side of heaven.

There is a good reason why we refer to the church on earth, whether congregations or synods, as the church militant. The church on earth comprises 100 percent sinners, and because it comprises imperfect people, it will never be perfect this side of heaven. Besides that, the church is under constant siege from Satan and his allies. This side of heaven, the church struggles with temptations from within and attacks from outside.

Yet, even with the church's faults and weaknesses, God can and does work to overcome both the attacks of Satan and the imperfections of his people. God does that through the life-giving power of the gospel. In Christ, through faith, God's people recognize that their weaknesses have been overcome by his gracious strength. Unity that was fractured by sinful attitudes and deeds is restored as God brings sinners into his family and keeps them there through Word and sacrament. Motivated by the love of God in Christ, God's people gather together into congregations and synods and, to the best of their ability, "declare the praises of him who called [them] out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Looking for the perfect church? Searching for the perfect synod? You will find the perfect church if you are looking for the right thing: a church where the gospel is proclaimed in all its saving truth and beauty. When we have that, we can view our congregations and our synod in a completely different light—as gatherings of flawed sinners who have been made perfect by the blood of the Lamb.

Light for our path

What kind of comfort can you give someone when a loved one who was supposedly a believer commits suicide?

James F. Pope

Your question addresses a very tragic situation. It is one that teaches us to be careful in our judgments and to exhibit loving concern for others.

SUICIDE IN PERSPECTIVE

There was a time when Christians concluded that all those who took their lives were eternally lost because they had lost all hope, including faith in God's care. With that thinking, there was an assumption that suicide automatically meant the person died in unbelief and the soul went to hell.

More recently, there has been an increase in understanding the intricate makeup of human beings. As a result, people have recognized that some Christians might have taken their lives without losing their faith. A person who professed Christ as Savior might have committed suicide because of psychological or other mental health issues. Another person might have committed suicide as the result of a rash act or in a moment of weakness, while still possessing Christian faith. Taking one's life is a sinful act, but there could be explanations for that action that do not presuppose the absence of faith.

Indeed, God alone knows what is in a person's heart at death. "The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). You and I need to remember that we cannot look into the heart of anyone who has died, let alone someone who has committed suicide. The Bible teaches that Christian faith saves and unbelief condemns (Mark 16:16). The Bible instructs that it is vitally important to have Christian faith in the heart when life on earth comes to an end (Revelation 2:10). We leave the judgment of hearts to God (Hebrews 9:27).

COMFORT IN GRIEF

So, does this mean that Christians cannot

pass along any comfort from God's Word to those impacted by suicide? Not at all. Consider the Bible's message: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God" (2 Corinthians 1:3,4). Christians have been comforted to comfort others.

We do want to offer genuine comfort and not false comfort. Because we are not aware of God's judgment, there may be instances when we need to scale back the comfort associated with the deceased's eternal welfare. Still, we can offer comfort to family and friends.

To the survivors of a loved one who has died in any way, we can give comfort from God's Word. We can assure them that, in spite of troubling and confusing circumstances in their lives, God remains their refuge and strength (Psalm 46). We can comfort them with the reminder of God's promise that he will never leave or forsake them (Hebrews 13:5). We can point them to God's pledge that he will provide strength for daily living (Isaiah 41:10).

The news of another person's death—no matter how it took place—is a clarion call for Christian vigilance. "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). That verse answers the call.

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

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

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

Psalms 119:105



LOOKING FORWARD

The Scripture readings for the last Sundays of our church year help us look to the end of time.

Eric D. Schroeder

It's the one appointment we all share—same place, same time—but it isn't on any of our calendars. None of us are exempt, and no commitment or excuse will allow a single one of us to be anywhere else. We will all be present and accounted for, along with everyone we have ever met as well as all those we haven't. We will all be there on the Last Day, when Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead, just as we have confessed in our creeds so many times. When is it? None of us knows.

At the same time, Last Judgment is on my calendar. Your congregation also may

have a thematic worship plan on Sunday, Nov. 10, that will focus on the Last Judgment. It's part of the season of End Time. The readings of the lectionary at the end of the church year remind us of the promises God has made for all of us. Beginning with Reformation, the season ends with reminders of Christ's rule of his church as

King of all and includes one Sunday set aside as Last Judgment Sunday.

THE WISDOM OF THE CHURCH YEAR

Our New Testament worship schedule isn't nearly so clearly defined as the one God gave his Old Testament people, a calendar they were to keep from the time of Moses until the coming of the Savior. Back then God gave his people the days, times, and rituals they were to observe—not as a way of gaining favor with him but as a powerful annual reminder of his plans for his people. Their church calendar told the same story every year—a story of sin and grace, of forgiveness through substitutionary sacrifice. It gave God's people a reason to rejoice in victory now and forever as those who were graciously chosen and eternally saved through faith in the promised Messiah.

Now that Jesus has come as the fulfillment of every prophecy and has made the sin-cleansing sacrifice as the Lamb of God, many of our reminders throughout the church year look back on what our Savior has done for us. We find our Sabbath rest in the accomplished work of Jesus' victory over sin, death, and hell. We are no longer bound to the same festivals and rites of those who waited for Immanuel. Instead we rejoice to see God's plan more fully than Abraham, Moses, David, or Isaiah ever did.

Even in our Christian freedom, many churches choose to retain the structure of a church year. Just as God's Old Testament people had their harvest festivals that overflowed with the symbolism of salvation, we too find value in repeating the salvation story. Just as God's watchful people celebrated a Festival of Trumpets, a great Day of Atonement, and a Festival of Tabernacles, so we still center our harvesttime worship on what is yet to come.

THE SUNDAYS OF END TIME

For us, the operative word is *freedom*. End Time is not a mandatory observance. Still, it is good for us to consider intently the plans that God has yet to fulfill but that are no less certain than the promises he already kept. Here's how *Christian Worship* lays out the Sundays of End Time.

The first Sunday is to celebrate the Reformation. It might seem odd that before we look ahead, we look back five hundred years. On the other hand, what better way to prepare for the end than to find peace in knowing that God has been working throughout history to see that the gospel message will not be silenced? How are we ready to stand before God? Only by grace alone, through faith alone—truths based on Scripture alone, which points us to Christ alone.

The second Sunday concentrates on the Last Judgment, that appointment we all share. My sinful nature still gets awfully nervous at the thought of being judged finally and eternally. Yet the One who will decide our fates has already determined them. Through his shed blood and his empty grave, the Good Shepherd will proclaim before the nations that we are his beloved sheep. Not a single one of us will be lost. We will not hesitate to bow on our knees and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The lectionary readings throughout End Time urge us to look up longingly as we await our Savior's return. . . . Still, we ought to take away a practical encouragement to use the time that we have left.

Saints Triumphant, the next Sunday, points us to believers in heaven. If you are like me, the older we get, the more we look forward to living in glory. We peek into heaven through God's Word and see Christian loved ones who have already been transferred from the church militant to the church triumphant. As much as we might miss them now, our hearts leap at the reminder that one day we will join them, because their Savior is our Savior too.

Christ the King, the last Sunday of the church year, ends the church year on a high note as we delight in the reminder that our Lord and King, the Alpha and the Omega, reigns now and forever. In our world, it's easy to be distracted from the truths that all things are under his

control, his plans for us are eternally wise, and he is ruling all things for the good of his church.

FROM LOOKING AHEAD TO LOOKING AROUND

To be sure, the lectionary readings throughout End Time urge us to look up longingly as we await our Savior's return. Then he will bring about the new heaven and the new earth. Still, we ought to take away a practical encouragement to use the time that we have left. As we look at every list of signs of the end time that Jesus gave his disciples, we can't help but realize that we are indeed living in the last times. I believe that one of the main reasons Jesus gave those signs was so that we would see them and get to work.

We don't know how much time we have. As long as we remain in the faith that his Spirit has worked in us, our eternity is secure. But now look around. We all have people in our lives who do not have the same confidence. Some of them were raised in the church but have since wandered. Others feel like the here and now is enough. Still others never had a friend or family member who cared enough to share the hope that is ours.

That's where we come in. When is the last time you had a real conversation with an unbeliever? When is the last time you invited an acquaintance or coworker to join you in church? When is the last time you reached out with a gentle nudge of biblical encouragement to a family member whose worship life has become lax or inconsistent?

The season of End Time, as much as any other, reminds us to use each day to pray for mission work and participate in it! God gathers his saints through the work of the church. That's us! The end is near. We need to get busy.

Eric Schroeder is pastor at St. John's, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.



GOD'S GIFTS, OUR *giving*

Is my giving any of Jesus' business?

Aaron L. Christie

When my great-aunt passed away several years ago, the family was surprised by the presence of a 70-year-old man at the funeral—a man that none of us knew existed. My aunt, who suffered from paralysis from polio since age 4, had had a child out of wedlock when she was 16. The baby boy was quickly and quietly put up for adoption. Over the next 70 years, the older generation took this secret to their graves. The family simply didn't talk about such things. . . .

I remember my dear grandma gently scolding me when as a boy I asked her how much money she made as a clerk in the local Kresge's store. She told me that it wasn't polite to ask questions about people's money. "That is their business."

Whether it was the family secret from the 1930s or the bottom line on Grandma's paycheck in the 1970s, I was taught to mind my own business. Many people would like to apply my grandmother's counsel to their pastors in the pulpit: my money—my business.

"My money is my business"—except that it isn't. It's God's business. And we forget that significant fact far too often.

DO WE TRUST GOD?

In Mark 12:41-44, we see Jesus do something that we would consider socially unacceptable in our day. He is not minding his own business. With the clock of Holy Week ticking, Jesus carved out precious time to take a seat in the temple courts. He picked a spot that gave him a line of sight so that he could watch the people as they gave their gifts! His eyes scanned the rich as they gave their significant sums. His attention shifted and then centered on a poor widow as she dropped in her two tiny coins, the sum total of all she

had to live on. Jesus made money and giving his business.

If we were there, sitting in Jesus' seat and watching the widow give her offering, what would we have told her? "No, dearie! God's knows your heart. He knows you don't have two dimes to rub together. He knows you'll give it someday—if you've got it." In all likelihood, we would have done our best to talk her out of giving her offering. Could it be that we've become far too eager at making pious-sounding excuses NOT to give rather than encouraging one another in acts of joyful generosity?

Now go stand next to the widow as she makes her gift. What example does she give to us? When is the last time that we gave sacrificially, I mean, gave as if we really trusted in God and staked our future on his promises?

Why is it so easy to send thousands of dollars to Fidelity, Vanguard, or Charles Schwab every year? Because we trust that these companies will make our money grow. But have you noticed that they make no promises to us? The prospectus reads, "Past performance is no guarantee of future results." God, on the other hand, is eager to make a promise: "You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God" (2 Corinthians 9:11). Why then are we so tempted to trust Fidelity more than our heavenly Father, to take comfort in our investments but to fear giving as a net loss? Simply put: Do we trust God or don't we?

GOD GAVE HIS ALL

So how do you think the widow's story ended? St. Mark doesn't tell us. But knowing what you know about the faithfulness of the Father and the sacrifice of the Son, do you think that Jesus commended the widow for her gift and then let her go home and starve to death? Do you get the

impression that after taking the time to watch her giving, Jesus then chose to remain blissfully ignorant of what she needed? The widow gave her all, trusting in the God who gave his all, his everything, his Son for her.

And God gave his all, his everything, his Son for us. He didn't offer two coins for our salvation. He offered the double treasure of Jesus' perfect life lived for us and his innocent death suffered for us!

Jesus is still watching his people's wealth. What will he see?

Jesus knows all about coins! When Satan tempted him with the wealth of the world, he told Satan to go and pound sand. Jesus never once thought a greedy thought, but human greed for 30 silver coins led directly to his crucifixion. And on that cross, Jesus bled and died to forgive the very hearts that cherished copper more than Christ, silver more than the Savior, gold more than God. And to this day, he opens his crucified hands and fills our desires with good things.

In Christ, we have the forgiveness we crave and the motivation we need to open our hands and give in a way that glorifies God and cares for our neighbors as we rest our confidence, and even our futures, in the promises of our giving God!

Jesus is still watching his people's wealth. What will he see? Take these truths to your heart's bank. Be amazed as you watch the gift of giving grow!

Aaron Christie is pastor at Trinity, Waukesha, Wisconsin.

This is the final article in a three-part series on giving. This series follows the outline of the congregational stewardship program 10 for 10.

A SACRIFICE OF thanksgiving

Her name was Lucille, and she was easily the most sacrificially giving saint I have personally met in my 27 years of ministry.

Lucille was 60 years old with advanced stages of rheumatoid arthritis when I was assigned as her pastor in Austin, Texas. She served as the church and school secretary for free. Her disability payments covered her expenses, so she donated her time to the church to advance the gospel and make it more affordable to do ministry. She worked with a pencil clutched tightly in a gnarled hand. Day after day, she served through pain and discomfort as she created all the worship folders for Sunday, kept school records, answered the phone, and made calls to volunteers. It took her two hours every morning to get ready and drive herself to church.

Once when the congregation included her in the Christmas gifts, I was selected to beg her to take it. There I stood with her check, asking her to accept it with grace. With tears welling up in her eyes, she said, "No, you will only rob me of the joy of serving if you make me take that!" I backed down and gave it back just as she demanded.

Lucille served like this for over 25 years. We tallied up what we think the church saved in wages and benefits. It came to over \$500,000. What a sacrifice!

Actually, it was a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Some people think that sacrificial giving is giving until it hurts. Sacrificial giving is giving because Christ hurt for us. It's what Paul talked about in Romans 12:1: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."

Thanks to Lucille, I have a vivid image of what that looks like in my world. Will you be the vivid image for your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Don Patterson, president of the South Central District, is pastor at Holy Word, Austin, Texas.

A man shares how Jesus changed his life forever.

Steven H. Prah

I first met Dave and Connie Kalbach when they walked in the doors for our Christmas Eve service. I introduced myself and welcomed them. Dave replied, “I don’t really go to church; I’m just here with them,” as he pointed to his family.

That’s how my relationship with Dave and Connie started. I didn’t know what to expect, but Jesus knew that this was part of a life-changing experience for them.

CHRISTIAN INFLUENCES

Dave would tell you that he always had a sense of a “higher power.” That really started when his father took his own life when Dave was 14 years old. Dave had gone to find out why his dad wasn’t coming in from the car. Because the car doors were locked, Dave went back into the house, grabbed a flashlight, confirmed it worked, and went back into the night. But when he got to the car, the flashlight didn’t work. Today, Dave is convinced that God was looking out for him, protecting him from seeing his father’s body.

In 1991, Dave and Connie’s youngest son, Sean, met a family at the camp-

ground where he worked. This Lutheran pastor and his wife had five daughters, including Tanya, who two years later would become Sean’s wife. While dating Tanya, Sean attended a Bible information class at the church and became a member. As the years went by, Dave and Connie would visit their kids and grandkids every few months. On most of those visits, they would go to church with them, although Dave could not understand why they drove past other churches to go to the WELS church.

Tanya had a big impact on her in-laws. She and Connie began reading through the Bible together, discussing what they had read over the phone. Dave, though, wasn’t very interested, even admitting that he would hold those Bible studies against Connie when they would argue. But through the years, Dave says he and Tanya “would have conversations about the Bible, church, God, and heaven.” He continues, “During one of these conversations, I told Tanya that one of us was in for a big surprise, since I felt that the fact that I led an honorable life meant that I would go to heaven. Tanya stood by her conviction that I could not get to heaven like that.”

Dave was right that one of them was in for a big surprise—and by

God’s grace it was before Dave stood before God.

AN “AHA” MOMENT

As Dave tells it: “In 2017, Sean, Tanya, and their entire family decided to visit Colorado for Christmas. This would be the first time in many years we all would be together for Christmas. Tanya told us she wanted to go to Christmas Eve services. Sean and Tanya had been married at a WELS church in Colorado Springs, and it was the only WELS church I knew of, but it was on the other side of town from us. I thought, *Just what I want to do on Christmas Eve—drive across town for church.* This is where it gets interesting. A week or so before Christmas, a card for a Lutheran church had arrived in our mailbox. The church was named Foundation, and it met in the elementary school three miles from our home. Christmas Eve came, and we all attended church [at Foundation]. Connie and I enjoyed the service and were made to feel welcome by the congregation.”

Two weeks after that December 24 introduction, Dave and Connie came walking through the church’s doors on Sunday. Dave informed me, “In 51 years of marriage, we have never gone to church just the two of us, without our kids.” Dave knew that



Confessions OF FAITH

Connie was interested in going to church, but he had never seen a reason to attend. He thought he was just fine with God on his own. But because of something he heard on Christmas Eve and because he loved his wife, he asked her to go to church with him. Dave says, “You could have knocked Connie over with a feather.”

Dave and Connie started attending worship regularly and decided to go through our *FaithBuilders* classes. “It was during the section on works that I had an ‘aha!’ moment,” says Dave. “It became clear to me that I could not get to heaven by works. Tanya had been right all along. On that day I realized that the only way to heaven was through Jesus Christ.” Dave admits that this was eye-opening. It was both comforting and scary at the same time—comforting because Jesus had done it all for him and scary because what he had relied on and thought he knew didn’t matter for his salvation.

On May 6, 2018, Dave and Connie were baptized into the Christian faith and became members of Foundation. It was a special day for everyone there as we saw Dave and Connie’s joy as they were washed in the water of Baptism. It was especially exciting for Sean and Tanya, who flew to Colorado for the long-awaited occasion.

As Dave says, “A random postcard; Tanya, a true Christian who never gave up; an ‘aha!’ moment; and Jesus Christ changed my life forever. I have lots to learn, but I am ready for the trip.”

INFECTIOUS WITNESS

Since becoming members of Foundation, Dave and Connie regularly help set up chairs and equipment before worship at the school we rent. They hosted one of our Bible study groups this summer. They drop off guest bags to people who have visited our church, because they know what it is like to be on the other side of that door. They aren’t shy about sharing that they are new to the church and that they are excited to be here!

Their joy of knowing their Savior is infectious. This summer, they helped with our soccer Bible camp; Dave even did all the drills with the little kids. On the last day of camp, Dave was talking with one of the moms and invited her to church. He told her that he had always thought that he was fine with God and didn’t really need to go to church but now he learned what God had done for him. Her response: “I didn’t know other people felt like that too.” So Dave invited her to meet “the friendliest group of people” and learn about what Jesus has done for her too.



Dave and Connie Kalbach

It hasn’t all been easy. Dave had a health scare, and some of their family has pushed them away because they are now Christians. But Dave and Connie continue to cling to the peace that Jesus gives and to hold on to the hope that if it wasn’t too late for them to come to faith in Jesus, it isn’t too late for their family members either.

And it’s all because of “a random postcard; Tanya, a true Christian who never gave up; an ‘aha!’ moment; and Jesus Christ.”

Two lives changed, and two souls saved forever.

Steven Pahl is pastor at Foundation, Peyton, Colorado.



heart to heart parent conversations

In August, some of Heart to heart's contributing authors shared their best parenting advice. (If you missed it, visit forwardinchrist.net to read their thoughts.) Then I turned the tables and asked you to submit your best parenting advice. I'm happy to share a few great tidbits with you here. We named this column Heart to heart: Parent conversations because we want to hear from you. Please keep sending your parenting thoughts to fic@wels.net.

In addition, this month I'm sharing a snippet from John Juern's book, *Patient Parenting: Raising Your Kids in the Shadow of the Cross*. In this excerpt, Juern goes to the heart of Christian parenting, and it's a reminder that I need every day. May it bless your family as well.

Nicole Balza

**Join the
conversation!**

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

WHAT'S YOUR BEST PARENTING ADVICE?

Advice from a Christian psychologist

For the Christian child, obedience to parents flows out of a love for Jesus. All of us as Christians—adults or children—do what we do because it's our way of showing our gratitude for all that the Lord has done for us, beginning with his gracious gift of salvation. The Bible says it this way: "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

This is a fundamental principle: We obey God by living according to the Ten Commandments, and we live that Christian life out of love for him. So the essence of all Christian discipline is serving the Lord with our lives.

Loving the Lord doesn't happen on its own. The Holy Spirit plants the seed for such an obedient life at the moment of Baptism. And God is with Christian parents every day as they teach children that misbehavior and disobedience are sins. It's really quite simple: Christian parents teach their children that wrong is wrong because it ignores God's Ten Commandments.

**Yes, a child will sin again. . . .
But each time, there is forgive-
ness and joy and a renewed
commitment to do God's will.**

But along with teaching children right from wrong, parents need to tell their children about the wonderful gift of forgiveness that is theirs through faith in Christ Jesus. Their sins are forgiven. That forgiveness brings joy. And the joy is expressed in the children's obedience. It's that message of forgiveness that motivates them.

Yes, a child will sin again. And probably again and again. But each time, there is forgiveness and joy and a renewed commitment to do God's will.

Parents don't need to go through this explanation every time their child does something wrong. The key is to remain consistent with God's will in setting rules and expectations for children; let the Ten Commandments set the standard.

There is still an appropriate time and place for time-outs, grounding, and other types of punishment. Sin has consequences. Star charts posted on the refrigerator door and surprise hugs can still reinforce good behavior. But these things in and of themselves do not bring about compliant behavior. Christian children obey their parents because they love their Savior.

Reprinted from *Patient Parenting: Raising Your Kids in the Shadow of the Cross* by John Juern. Available from Northwestern Publishing House at nph.net or by calling 800-662-6022.

What parenting advice do you give?



Don't hold yourself to the high standards you form in your mind from social media posts and memes!

Sarah Mayer



There is no one perfect way to parent. Soak in the advice given but trust your gut and your God to know what's best for you and your kiddos.

Mary Hansen



I was part of a small group Bible study for dads at my church where a fellow dad shared books that studied why youth will often eventually leave the church and what we can do about it. (Since then I've read other articles and a book affirming the information he shared.) Kids will many times leave the church if they don't see faith play out in their parents' lives.

It can be easy to take our children to worship and Sunday school and send them to Lutheran schools and think we're set (and we certainly thank God for using these church leaders to nurture our kids' faith!). However, children so look up to their parents that what happens at home has a major impact.

We parents should be in the Word at home personally and with our families. We will joyfully attend church and Bible studies. We will show love to others and be intentional about evangel-

ism. We can address life problems from a spiritual perspective and teach our kids that prayer to God is not a last resort but the primary place we should turn. Especially as kids get older we can address challenges against Christianity so that they learn to turn to the Word to "always be prepared" (1 Peter 3:15). We emphasize God's grace, apologizing and forgiveness, fresh starts.

Just as we help our kids grow in the academic, athletic, and social aspects of life, we guide them in their growth in understanding and practice of their Christian faith.

Adam Goede



Be respectful of, be honest with [your children]. Think of "discipline" as positive proactive motivations to guide and develop favored behaviors rather than punitive means of correction to humiliate.

Ann Hubbard Waltz



Take nothing for granted. Appreciate your kids no matter what. Be firm, show discipline, but educate them why you are doing it.

Ryan Thomas



Read to those littles!

Sallie Draper

What's the best parenting advice you've received?



Well, my Mami isn't a person who gives me [much] advice, but she gives me the best example as a godly woman. I remember clearly—and with tears in my face—her last advice before [I headed] to the USA from my country, El Salvador, when I was 18 years old. She said to me: "Love of my life, take care of yourself. Don't eat many carbohydrates and eat lots of fruits and veggies. And the most important thing in this life for you is this: Stick

to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and never consider to change to another doctrine. Always be a Lutheran girl, attached to the Bible. I pray to the Holy Spirit for this." I wasn't very obedient with her food advice, but the Holy Spirit never let me change my faith in my Savior. I'm still a Lutheran girl. Thank you, Jesus, for that!

Dali Campos

Going home

We long for the comfort and peace that a home provides.

Samantha J. Huebner

Doesn't it feel like you just started college a week ago? You moved into a new dorm room at a new school with new people. It was probably a whirlwind couple of weeks as you adjusted to your new lifestyle as a college student. New classes and new routines. That's the life of a college student, isn't it?

Crazy to think that it's already November and that the end of the semester is soon approaching. Where did the time go? A semester seems to pass by in the blink of an eye.

For some, it might feel like you just got started and are finally hitting your stride. You're figuring things out—maybe for the first time! For others, it might feel as if this semester is taking forever and you just can't wait for it to be over!

No matter which one you relate to more, I think both sides can agree that Thanksgiving break is a much needed time to recharge mentally, physically, and spiritually. It's a break from papers, projects, and presentations. It's a chance to finally go home.

When I first started college, I couldn't wait to go home. I was terribly homesick and missed everything about home: my bed, my personal space, my parents, my routine. It was the normalcy of home and the comfort that it brought me that I missed.

What is it about this comfort that we long for? We crave to be liked and welcomed by others, to find somewhere where we can feel safe and secure, to find comfort in a certain place, and to be surrounded by like-minded people. But it doesn't always happen right away, does it? Sometimes it takes an entire semester or more to find that second home. We have to wait to find comfort.

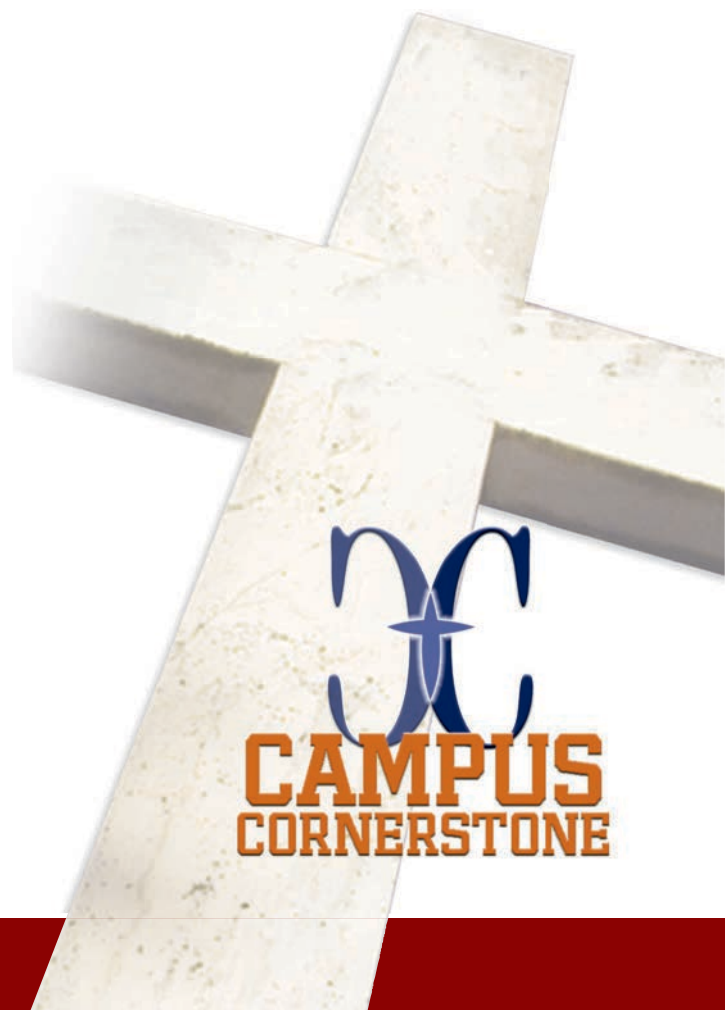
We as Christians long to find that comfort and peace. We long for a home. We long for a place where we can stand together as one church and one people united around one truth, one purpose. Jesus promises us, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going" (John 14:1-4).

Jesus promises us an eternal home full of comfort and peace. He gives us a hope that keeps us looking forward

to what is ours. The apostle Paul writes, "Now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). In this world, we wait for the eternal home promised to us. Jesus promises that it is so much grander than our homes here on earth, no matter what comfort they bring us in the here and now.

So with Thanksgiving break and the anticipation of home looming right around the corner, be thankful for a place where you can find comfort and peace. And then find comfort and peace in the fact that you have a Savior who has prepared an eternal home just for you.

Samantha Huebner, a 2019 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is a member at Peace, Sun Prairie, Wisconsin.



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Bourman, James, to retirement

Cook, Kendall, to Trinity, Crete, Ill.

Haasch, Nickolas, to Peace, Green Lake, Wis.

Johnson, Christopher, to CrossWalk Lutheran Ministries, Laveen, Ariz.

Kapler, David, to Beautiful Savior, Topeka, Kan.

Schultz, Karl, to Zion, Rhinelander, Wis.

Teachers

Buch, Aaron, to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.

NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS AND PASTORS

We thank God for you and for your support of the ministry WELS carries out on behalf of all congregations. We ask that you continue to mail your Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) deposit and its processing coupon to our bank lockbox, which provides effective and efficient deposit processing for the synod. For your CMO payment to be included in reported receipts for the month, it must be received in the synod's bank lockbox on or before the last business day of the month. An exception is made for December offerings. Gifts received by the bank lockbox up to and including Jan. 8, 2020, will be credited as 2019 CMO, if accompanied by a 2019 coupon. Thank you for your assistance.

ANNIVERSARIES

Appleton, Wis.—Riverview (75). Nov. 3. Worship, 8 & 10:30 A.M.; Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Choir singing. Nov. 17. Concert by Martin Luther College choir, 7 P.M. Jan. 5, 2020. Worship, 8 & 10:30 A.M. March 8, 2020. Worship, 8 & 10:30 A.M. June 7, 2020. Worship, 8 & 10 A.M.; dinner, 1 P.M. at Liberty Hall. For dinner reservation, call 920-733-3728. Website, riverviewlutheran.org.

St. Clair, Minn.—St. John (150). Nov. 3. Worship, 9:30 A.M.; meal, 11:30 A.M.; worship, 3 P.M. 507-245-3330; pastor@stjohnswels.com.

Weyauwega, Wis.—St. Peter School (125). Nov. 3. Worship, 8 & 10:30 A.M.; time capsule opening, 9:15 A.M.; potluck meal after last service. Website, splwega.net. 920-867-3169.

Fort Wayne, Ind.—Beautiful Savior (50). Nov. 10. Worship, 10:15 A.M.; meal to

follow. RSVP by Nov. 1. 260-637-3475; secretary@beautifulsaviorfw.org.

Cedarburg, Wis.—Redeemer (50). Nov. 17. Worship, 10 A.M.; meal to follow. 262-685-8519; redeemercedarburg@gmail.com. Website, redeemercedarburg.com.

Houghton, Mich.—Lutheran Collegians MTU at Peace Ev. Lutheran Church (50). Feb. 9, 2020. Worship, 10:15 A.M.; meal to follow. RSVP requested by Jan. 26, 2020. 906-482-1602; pastor@peacehoughton.org; lrnitz@mtu.edu. Website, lutherancollegians.org.

COMING EVENTS

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

- Nov. 16, 7 P.M., First, Lake Geneva, Wis.
- Nov. 17, 10 A.M., First, Racine, Wis.; 7 P.M., Riverview, Appleton, Wis.
- Nov. 18, 10 A.M., Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.

Concert—Dec. 1, 2 & 4:30 P.M. The Lutheran Chorale of Milwaukee. Trinity, Waukesha, Wis. Theme, "Prelude to Christmas." Website, lutheranchorale.org.

Live nativity—Dec. 6–7, 6–9 P.M.; Dec. 8, 4–7 P.M. St. Paul's, Howards Grove, Wis. Website, stpaulshowardsgrove.org. 920-565-3780.

Live nativity—Dec. 6–7, 6–8 P.M. Christ, Eagle River, Wis. Hosted by Christ, Eagle River, and St. John, Phelps, Wis. Presentations run every 20 minutes. 715-479-8307.

WELS ministerial education school Christmas concerts—

- Dec. 7, 7:30 P.M.; Dec. 8, 4 P.M. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 507-354-8221.
- Dec. 8, 3 and 7 P.M. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. 262-242-8100.
- Dec. 15, 3 P.M.; Dec. 19, 10 A.M. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. 920-261-4352.
- Dec. 20, 7 P.M. Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich. 989-793-1041.

Mid-term graduation—Dec. 19. 10 A.M. Chapel of the Christ, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 507-354-8221.

WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership—Jan. 21–23, 2020. Sheraton Grand, Chicago, Ill. Website, lutheranleadership.com.

Lutheran Recovery Ministries recovery retreat—Feb. 20–23, 2020. Our Lady of

Guadalupe Monastery, Phoenix, Ariz. Theme, "Three days of hope." Website, lutheranrecoveryministries.com.

Pathways to Christ Retreat—Mar. 13–15, 2020. Oshkosh, Wis. Theme, "A friend loves at all times." 920-233-1069. Website, pathwaystochrist.org.

WELS 2020 International Youth Rally—June 23–26, 2020. University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tenn. Theme, "2020 Vision." Website, wels.net/youthrally.

SERVICE TIMES

Gulf Shores, Ala.—Risen Savior, Navarre, Fla., will hold church services with Holy Communion for Gulf Shores area WELS/ELS snowbirds at 4 P.M., Jan. 5 and 19 and Feb. 2 and 16 at St. Jude By the Sea Lutheran Church, 312 E 16 Ave, Gulf Shores. Bible class will follow worship. Evan Dobberfuhl, tpcevan@gmail.com; 715-573-0808.

NAMES WANTED

Lawton/Fort Sill, Okla.—names and contact information of WELS members and other prospects in this military community interested in joining monthly in-home worship services conducted by Rev. Strackbein, pastor at Holy Cross, Oklahoma City, Okla. Teri Fuentez, barryandteri@earthlink.net.

Madison, S.D.—names and contact information of WELS members and other prospects in the Madison, S.D., area as well as contact information for WELS students attending Dakota State University. Our Savior, Brookings, S.D., is holding worship twice a month in the area. Ken Brokmeier, 605-692-6989; osavior@brookings.net.

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

WELS ONLINE BULLETIN BOARD

Needed and available items as well as volunteer and job opportunities are updated regularly on the online WELS bulletin board. Website, welsrc.net/bulletinboard.

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.

Gospel outreach opportunities in Africa

Opportunities for gospel connections are flourishing across Africa. Christian groups in Uganda, Liberia, Mozambique, and more are learning about WELS and Lutheran doctrine and reaching out for fellowship. One of these church bodies, Lutheran Congregations in Ministry for Christ in Kenya, reached out to WELS and was welcomed into fellowship at this summer's synod convention. Other scattered church bodies that hold true to confessional Lutheran doctrine are working toward that same possibility.

The One Africa Team, working under WELS World Missions, assesses the teachings and validity of these groups and how WELS may help. They work closely on this process with the Lutheran Church of Central Africa (LCCA) in

Zambia and Malawi, which started as WELS world missions decades ago and are now independent church bodies.

"The One Africa Team appreciates the cultural insights that our brothers in the LCCA have," says Missionary John Hartmann, member of the One Africa Team. "Coming from the United States, we may not so easily pick up on some nuance, or understanding, or misunderstanding, which comes naturally to them. When we are visiting new places and new groups of people, we appreciate taking a pastor from one of our established church bodies in Africa along so that we can more adequately assess the situation. To be honest, not all groups come because they want God's Word; some are only interested

in social programs and money. African Christians help see through what is being said to help assess true motives. And in teaching, they might be able to share an African story that helps illustrate a point."

The genesis of these church bodies and their initial contact with WELS differs, but mostly they are seeking a larger organization with which to partner to share in the truth of God's Word and to gain insight beyond the training they have access to locally.

"I am sure there are a combination of factors that God is using to build his church," says Hartmann. "One thing is the Internet, which makes communication so much easier than ever before. More interested people know about WELS and its insistence on holding onto the Bible as God's Word as the basis for our faith and lives. There are so many 'Christian' churches out there that do not offer the comfort and certainty of God's love and forgiveness as we have in the Lutheran church. These groups [that are contacting WELS] are looking for the truth and appreciate finding and fellowshiping with a like-minded church body that holds onto something sure and stable."

He continues, "Along with that, many of these groups are new to good biblical teaching and want training for their pastors in the firm Bible foundation that we have and have had for so many years."



The Obadiah Lutheran Synod in Uganda has more than 700 baptized members in 11 churches, including these members of Nairika Lutheran Church.

CENTRAL AFRICA MEDICAL MISSION UPDATE

The Central Africa Medical Mission (CAMM) has been operating a clinic in Mwembezhi, Zambia, for almost 60 years. Part of its mission is to turn much of the operations over to Zambians. CAMM recently hired Alisad Banda (pictured here with his family) as clinic administrator, an important step in nationalizing the clinic.

Banda first came to the clinic in 2005 in conjunction with work he did in health & development. He was impressed by how the clinic worked so closely with the Lutheran church and enjoys knowing that Christians are showing compassion, care, charity, and integrity in a

hospital and clinic setting. His parents were Lutherans and instructed Alisad in the teachings of the Lutheran church. Alisad lives in Lusaka with his wife, Cecilla, and their two children.



Besides the clinic in Zambia, CAMM operates a mobile clinic in Malawi. Medical services include preventive health care for children and expectant women, as well as treatment of patients with illnesses such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, parasitic infections, and tuberculosis. The clinics in Zambia and Malawi serve more than 80,000 patients a year.

Learn more about CAMM at wels.net/camm.



Representatives from the One Africa Team and the Pastoral Studies Institute met with leaders from the two church bodies in Liberia earlier this year to offer training and to discuss how to combine the two church bodies into one group for training in the future.

From Uganda, Pastor Makisimu Musa of the Obadiah Lutheran Synod first contacted WELS via the Internet in December 2017. WELS and LCCA representatives have visited twice, following e-mail and phone correspondence. They are planning a third visit this year. Obadiah Lutheran Synod is composed of more than 700 baptized members, 7 pastors, and 11 churches.

Mozambique has an entirely different story. Over the years, pastors of the LCCA–Malawi and LCCA–Zambia started mission churches across the border into Mozambique. However, since the start of these missions, the Mozambique government has demanded official registration for churches, and the mission work has been suspended until registration is completed. The One Africa Team is working with the LCCA–Malawi to register as a church body in Mozambique so work can continue.

Liberia also has its own unique beginning. Two men from Liberia immigrated to the United States almost 15 years ago. Over the years they joined WELS churches and then studied under the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI), a program of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., to become pastors serving fellow immigrants in their local

areas. In time, they were summoned by their own people in Liberia to bring God's message back home. Since then, two Lutheran church bodies have been registered in Liberia, and numerous trips have been made in the past few years for training. About 5,000 Liberian Lutherans worship in these two church bodies.

Hartmann says that the One Africa Team and LCCA leaders hope to have three face-to-face visits a year with these emerging Lutheran groups if funding is available for travel.



Learn more about outreach work in Africa in this month's edition of *WELS Connection* and at wels.net/missions.



WORKING WITH REFUGEES

WELS has declared fellowship with two new African church bodies in the last two years: the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia in 2017 and the Lutheran Congregations in Ministry for Christ—Kenya in 2019.

These connections are offering new opportunities to work with members of the Nuer tribe from South Sudan who live in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya. Five Nuer men from Gambella, Ethiopia, are studying with Dr. Kebede at Maor Theological Seminary in Bishoftu, Ethiopia, and Pastor Mark Onunda from LCMC–Kenya is assisting with visiting and training refugees living in Kakuma, Kenya. This ministry is being coordinated with the work being done by Pastor Peter Bur, a Pastoral Studies Institute graduate who serves as the South Sudanese ministry coordinator for the Joint Mission Council.

Onunda and Bur were able to meet to talk about ministry plans at the 2019 synod convention in New Ulm this summer. Pictured (left to right): Grace and Mark Onunda and Martha and Peter Bur.

Question and answer about “Equipping Christian Witnesses”

In celebration of its 25th anniversary in 2020, Martin Luther College (MLC), with the approval of the Conference of Presidents, has begun a two-year capital campaign called “Equipping Christian Witnesses.” The synod is looking to raise \$16 to \$18 million through the campaign. We asked Mark Zarling, MLC president, to share more.

WHY THE NAME “EQUIPPING CHRISTIAN WITNESSES”?



The name for the campaign is taken from MLC’s mission statement. It states: “The mission of Martin Luther College is to train a corps of Christian witnesses who are qualified

to meet the ministry needs of WELS and who are competent to proclaim the Word of God faithfully and in accord with the Lutheran Confessions in the Book of Concord.” The statement then goes on to highlight how MLC, as the WELS College of Ministry, equips students for various tracks of ministry.

The mission statement emphasizes training a “corps of Christian witnesses” so that students are reminded of who they are through their baptism. They are salt and light and part of the priesthood of all believers. They will always keep their identity as baptized children of God, no matter what vocation they choose. They remain a “corps of Christian witnesses.” Even as the campaign is emphasizing recruitment for public ministry it also underscores the truth that every recruit, every student, will be equipped as a Christian witness even if they don’t continue or finish at MLC.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN GOALS OF THE CAMPAIGN?

The campaign has three “pillars” to support the mission and ministry of Martin Luther College.

The first pillar is recruitment. It is our prayer that the Lord uses the campaign to raise up many more candidates who will prayerfully consider serving in the

public gospel ministry. We want everyone to pray what Jesus said: “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Luke 10:2).

The second and third pillars support the first goal of more students. The second pillar is to provide increased financial aid for our students, and the third pillar provides enhancements in campus facilities. Both of those pillars aid in the recruitment and retention of students.



CALLED WORKER ENCOURAGEMENT

Raquel Freese, a fifth-year senior at Martin Luther College, provides encouragement to potential future called workers: “While my decision to go to MLC was very easy, I know that for many others, the decision is much more difficult. It’s okay to be unsure of your future. Rest assured that the Almighty God already knows and holds you in the safety of his guiding hands. Listen to the advice of family and friends. If those closest to you believe you have the gifts to be a pastor, staff minister, or teacher, then you should strongly consider MLC.”



WHY IS RECRUITMENT A PART OF THIS CAMPAIGN?

You may already be aware of the vacancies in pulpits and classrooms in our church body. After assignment days last May, significant vacancies remained—more than 100 pastoral vacancies in our pulpits and over 80 classrooms not yet filled. There is also an urgency to recruit more gospel workers because of the large classes of “baby boomers” who are reaching retirement age.

It is important to note, however, that the strategic plan of MLC is to recruit students with a fields-are-ripe mentality and not with a fill-the-vacancy mindset. Our gracious Savior God is pouring out abundant opportunities around the world and here at home to send workers out with the message of Jesus, our Savior and Substitute. May the Spirit fill our hearts with a burning passion to see the billions around the world who have yet to hear the Savior’s loving voice in the saving gospel.

HOW CAN WELS MEMBERS HELP WITH RECRUITMENT?

No doubt you can think of daughters and sons in your own congregation who exhibit God-given gifts for ministry. Encourage them. Tell them, “You’re a magnet for little children. Ever think about being a Christian preschool teacher?” Or, “God has given you a gift for (music, athletics, speaking, etc.). I can see you using that gift in serving Jesus as a (teacher, staff minister, pastor).” Perhaps, “God has given you a heart for Jesus and a heart for people. Have you thought about being a pastor?”

Also pray! Pray without ceasing!

Submit names to MLC of possible ministerial candidates at mlc-wels.edu/go/recommend. Learn more about “Equipping Christian Witnesses” at mlc-wels.edu/mlc-campaign.

Obituaries

James A. Thrams, 1928–2019

James Thrams was born Sept. 24, 1928, in Watertown, Wis. He died May 9, 2019, in Watertown, Wis.

A 1953 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Grace, Muskegon, Mich.; St. Matthew, Janesville, Wis.; and Northwestern Preparatory School/Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

He is survived by 3 sons, 2 daughters, 12 grandchildren, and 22 great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his wife, Lucille.

Venita R. Schrupp, 1942–2019

Venita Schrupp was born July 29, 1942, in Granite Falls, Minn. She died May 11, 2019, in Minneapolis, Minn.

A 1964 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at Timothy, St. Louis Park, Minn.; Christ Our Redeemer, Aurora, Colo.; Apostles, Billings, Mont.; Gethsemane, Omaha, Neb.; St. John, Fairfax, Minn.; and Prairie, Gibbon, Minn.

She is survived by one brother. She was preceded in death by one sister.

Frederick W. Blauert, 1933–2019

Frederick Blauert was born Dec. 10, 1933, in Morrison, Wis. He died May 14, 2019, in Sleepy Eye, Minn.

A 1956 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at St. Peter (Collins), Chilton, Wis.; Zion, Rhinelander, Wis.; Morrison Zion, Greenleaf, Wis.; and St. Paul's, New Ulm, Minn.

He is survived by four sisters. He was preceded in death by seven brothers and three sisters.

Edward H. Meyer, 1936–2019

Edward Meyer was born Dec. 14, 1936, in New Prague, Minn. He died May 16, 2019, in Stillwater, Minn.

A 1958 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught

at Beautiful Savior, Milwaukee, Wis.; St. John's, Jefferson, Wis.; and Dr./Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. He served as a staff minister at Salem, Woodbury, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Patricia; 2 sons; 2 daughters; and 14 grandchildren. He was preceded in death by one sister.

Kyle P. Gut, 1977–2019

Kyle Gut was born July 12, 1977, in Wausau, Wis. He died May 21, 2019, in Pulaski, Wis.

A 2000 graduate of Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D.; Zion, Monroe, Mich.; Good Shepherd's, West Allis, Wis.; and St. Mark, Green Bay, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Katie; one daughter; his parents; one brother; and one sister.

Peggy E. Otto, 1957–2019

Peggy Otto (née Mercurio) was born March 25, 1957. She died June 4, 2019, in Wayland, Mich.

She taught at St. Paul's, Hopkins, Mich.

She is survived by her husband, Stephen; two sons; three grandchildren; her father; one sister; and three brothers. She was preceded in death by her mother.

Andrea R. Dunsmoor, 1950–2019

Andrea Dunsmoor was born Jan. 26, 1950, in Minneapolis, Minn. She died June 12, 2019, in Fort Atkinson, Wis.

A 1972 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at Gethsemane, Cibecue, Ariz.; St. Paul, Bangor, Wis.; St. Mark, Eau Claire, Wis.; and St. John, Lannon, Wis.

She is survived by four sisters and two brothers. She was preceded in death by her parents.

Judith A. Gurgel, 1946–2019

Judith Gurgel (née Lindholm) was born Oct. 12, 1946, in Watertown, Minn. She died June 14, 2019, in Appleton, Wis.

A 1968 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at St. Matthew's, Oconomowoc, Wis.; Jordan, West Allis, Wis.; and Martin Luther, Neenah, Wis.

She is survived by her husband, Don; 4 daughters; 1 son; 10 grandchildren; and 2 brothers. She was preceded in death by one child.

Herbert A. Jaster, 1929–2019

Herbert Jaster was born July 4, 1929, in Montello, Wis. He died June 21, 2019, in Holmen, Wis.

A 1955 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fond du Lac, Wis.; First, La Crosse, Wis.; Martin Luther Academy, New Ulm, Minn.; and Martin Luther Prep School, Prairie Du Chien, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Helen.

Linda K. Martens, 1955–2019

Linda Martens was born Aug. 15, 1955, in Hazel Crest, Ill. She died July 2, 2019, in Grant Park, Ill.

A 1977 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at Good Shepherd's, West Allis, Wis.; Immanuel, Greenville, Wis.; Zion, Mobridge, S.D.; Immanuel, Waupaca, Wis.; St. John's, Dowagiac, Mich.; Faith, Antioch, Ill.; and St. Paul, Muskego, Wis.

She is survived by two sisters.

Wrapped in God's comfort

At the end of a long day, many enjoy burrowing beneath their blankets to receive rest and comfort. For some, a blanket or quilt can mean more than just physical relaxation; it can also encompass emotional and spiritual rest. Comforter Ministry, started by Susanne (Su) Hanson, fulfills a unique opportunity to bring peace to women with cancer through quilts and the message of God's Word.

Hanson began the Comforter Ministry in 2005 after her own experience with ovarian cancer. She still vividly remembers the emotions she felt after receiving a quilt of her own as a gift.

"I remember being wrapped in the comforter and feeling God's love in a tangible way," she says. "His love was physically wrapped around me."

The ministry began with just three volunteers and has since grown to include 124 quilters in 20 different states. Comforter Ministry accepts quilts as well as monetary donations to help offset costs from sending women their boxes.

One of Comforter Ministry's recent donations came from Huron Valley Lutheran High School, Westland, Mich. What started as an opportunity to give back through a "Pink Out" volleyball game in 2018 turned into an impactful experience for an entire community.

Brian Kasten, Huron Valley Lutheran High School's athletic director at the time, found Comforter Ministry after searching for WELS charities that helped cancer patients.

"Brian told me he ran across our page and that he wanted our ministry to be the recipient of the Pink Out Night's proceeds," Hanson explains. "Then after the event he contacted me to tell me the proceeds of the game were more than expected. I was so overjoyed because each donation is so important. This is how God moves hearts."

Hanson also found out that this incredible gift went a step further when Gwynn, a passionate supporter of Huron Valley, got involved with the project. After reading about the Pink

Out Night, Gwynn approached the school's staff about creating a quilt of their own to donate. The girls on the volleyball team were thrilled to help.

"These girls have hearts of gold," Gwynn said. "They're always willing to help and will take any idea you have and just run with it. It's a joy to be around them."

To start, she gave the girls pink patches. They filled the small squares with encouraging Bible verses and intricate drawings. When Gwynn received the patches back, she was overwhelmed with the beautiful messages that the girls wrote. And even more incredible—there were enough patches to create two quilts!



The girls volleyball team at Huron Valley Lutheran High School, Westland, Mich., helped create two quilts to support women with cancer.

Gwynn recruited three women to help her assemble the quilts. When they were finished, one quilt went to Comforter Ministry and the other went to the mother of a young woman who recently graduated from Huron Valley. After receiving her quilt box, this mother simply hugged the box in her arms, knowing what was inside.

"This event affected a lot of people, more than we even realized," Kasten says. "The fact that we could show God's love and his comfort in this way is truly incredible."

Gabriella Blauert

Learn more about the Comforter Ministry at comforterministry.com.

Insights into Lutheran leadership

WELS Congregational Services will host the WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership at the Sheraton Grand in Chicago on Jan. 21–23.

Two of the presenters at that conference, Adam Mueller, pastor at Redeemer, Tucson, Ariz., and Luke Thompson, pastor at St. Paul, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, took time to share what leadership means to them.

In his presentation "Crucifying Consumer Mentality," Mueller will discuss the danger of allowing the personal preferences of either the community or congregational members to dictate the direction of ministry. Ministry activity, Mueller says, must be directed by Christ's mission. "Unless Lutheran leaders continually focus on Christ, the means of grace, and his mission to proclaim the gospel, we'll fail as leaders not only because we're neglecting God's will but because we've replaced it with our own will or the world's will."

Mueller stresses that the job of leadership is to communicate Christ's mission clearly and repeatedly and to use the gospel and personal example to motivate members to zealously pursue that mission. "The term 'leadership' suggests two things. First, that the leader knows where he's going, and, second, that there are those who are following him," Mueller says.

Mueller has served on various district and synod boards as well as helped train vicars and new pastors. Mueller explains that his time in these various roles showed him that the Lord can encourage anyone to lead. "God's kingdom is large enough for leaders of all kinds of diverse talents and experiences to lead people from earth to heaven."

Thompson's presentation "Growing Young: Steps Toward Touching the Hearts and Minds of Millennials and Generation Z" focuses on the role leaders play in retaining and gaining members from younger generations.



Adam Mueller



Luke Thompson

Besides serving as pastor at St. Paul, Thompson is the campus pastor to students at the University of Ottawa and Carleton University. Through Bible studies, counseling, and mentorships, Thompson has served hundreds of young people.

What does Thompson see as the key to reaching these younger generations? “The best tool God has given Lutheran leaders

is a clear understanding of law and gospel,” Thompson says. “All that’s left is generating the courage to use it and the patience to let law and gospel be what the discussion is about. And this all happens best in the context of a committed friendship.”

Thompson’s presentation illustrates the goal Congregational Services had in holding this conference—addressing common concerns among our congregations. Jonathan Hein, coordinator of Congregational Services, says, “Almost every church we consult with says how it is getting harder and harder to retain or gain younger members. This presentation will share some strategies that the Lord seems to be blessing.”

Thompson says he is eager both to teach and to learn at the WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership. “God gives us the exact mentors and tools we need for our vocations, and leadership conferences like this will be one of the places you find those.”

Want to hear more? Register to attend the conference at lutheranleadership.com.

District news

NORTH ATLANTIC

On Sept. 15, **Ascension, Jacksonville, N.C.**, dedicated its new worship facility and ministry center. WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc., provided land and building loans as well as matching land and facility grants.

The Michigan and North Atlantic Districts held a **combined youth rally in Shepherdstown, W.V.**, from July 15–18. The 99 teens and youth leaders focused on the theme “Profess the promise,” based on Hebrews 10:23-25.

NORTHERN WISCONSIN

Immanuel, Greenville, Wis., celebrated the dedication of its facility expansion and enhancement on Sept. 5, 7, and 8.

SOUTH ATLANTIC

Intown Lutheran, Atlanta, Ga., hosted a grand reopening worship service on Sept. 8. This WELS home mission congregation launched its first public worship service in the fall of 2018 and recently moved to a new ministry space.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

MI—On Aug. 25, **St. Matthew, Benton Harbor, Mich.**, celebrated the 100th anniversary of the laying of its church cornerstone.

WW—The **Ladies Aid of Immanuel, Neillsville, Wis.**, celebrated its 100th anniversary on Aug. 11.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



Eugene Schulz, a member at Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis., received the prestigious Legion of Honor, the highest French order of merit for military and civil merits, for his service during World War II and his part in helping liberate the city of Chartres, France, from the Nazis when he served with the U.S. Army. Here Madame la Préfète Sophie Brocas pins the Medal of Chevalier on Schulz at the ceremony held in September in Chartres.

Salem, Owosso, Mich., celebrated its 150th anniversary on Sept. 8.

MN—On Aug. 13, The Lutheran Home Association, Belle Plaine, Minn., celebrated the ministry anniversaries of three of its chaplains—**Roger Woller** (50 years), **Ed Fredrich** (45 years), and **Curt Seefeldt** (40 years).

The district reporters for this month are: **MI**—John Eich; **MN**—James Panning; **NA**—Ian Headrick; **NW**—Dennis Kleist; **SA**—Newlin Schafer; **SEW**—Scott Oelhafen; **WW**—Brett Brauer.

ARIZONA-CALIFORNIA



Pastors, teachers, and spouses from the Golden Gate Circuit gathered for fellowship over the Labor Day weekend at the Board & Brush Creative Studio in Modesto, Calif.



DESTINIES

Our lives are in the hands of our God, who will cause everything to work out for our good.

Bill J. Tackmier

The year 1945 was pivotal for our country and for my family.

MY FAMILY'S HISTORY

That was the year my dad, Vernon Tackmier, was drafted into the US Army. Dad was 21 years old at the time. He was the typical Depression-era kid. When he graduated from grade school at the age of 12, he had to stay home and help on his parents' farm instead of going to high school. When the attack on Pearl Harbor happened in 1941, he worked on many of his neighbors' farms to help produce food for the war effort. But in 1945, his turn came to help overseas.

Earlier in that pivotal year, his grandfather had died. His grandpa, August Polzin, had come to America from Germany in 1881 at the age of 20. I

don't know what prompted him to come, but many young German men of his generation came to America to avoid service in the German army. He had grown up in the far eastern part of the German Empire in Pomerania. He came to America as an apprenticed shoemaker with his brother, Franz. (Franz died on Christmas Eve their first year in America.) When August arrived in the "land of opportunity," he bought a farm in northern Wisconsin, got married, and raised a large family. After becoming a citizen in 1906, he watched the news with horror as World War I broke out and turned into a deadly stalemate. Trench warfare devastated the armies on both sides. New weapons of war destroyed his homeland and large sections of Europe. At the end of the war, the dead numbered nearly 20 million people.

The 1930s Depression and a humiliating treaty for Germany after World War I contributed to events that turned into an even more desperate world conflict—World War II. My

great-grandpa August must have had many moments when he thanked God for leading him to a place where his family had been able to plow, harvest, and grow in peace. But at the end of his life, he probably was not aware of what was happening in his homeland or the mounting death toll of American soldiers or even the signs of a coming victory in Europe and the Pacific.

MY FAMILY'S DESTINY

August died at the advanced age of 84 in May of 1945, less than a month after Hitler committed suicide and a matter of days after the Germans surrendered to the Allies. In the winter and spring of 1945, the Russian army had swept through his home state of Pomerania on their way to capturing Berlin. Millions of Germans fled in front of the advancing Soviet army. Contemporary accounts describe how the country roads of Pomerania and Mecklenburg were jammed all day every day with traffic the likes of which today's big cities experience at rush hour—cars, trucks, and mostly

horse-drawn wagons filled with families and possessions. The people were fleeing to the east in front of the advancing Soviet army, which was rumored to steal anything that was of value, to rape any women who were left behind, and to murder indiscriminately.

Little did my father and his family suspect the fate they would have experienced if his grandfather had not immigrated to America in 1881. If Dad's Grandpa August and his other grandparents and great-grandparents had not immigrated to America, my father would no doubt have grown up under Nazism. He likely would have been drafted into the German army and become a casualty of Hitler's desire for a Third German Reich. His family would have been displaced at the end of World War II. And I—if I had even been born—would most likely have grown up under communism in post-war East Germany.

But God did not only spare us this.

In October 1945, Dad was drafted into the Army and stationed on the island of Okinawa in the Pacific. The island, just south of Japan, had been secured by the US armed forces that summer at the cost of 12,500 American lives. Plans for the invasion of Japan estimated tragic death tolls for Americans. In August of 1945, President Truman decided to drop two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. At the time, it was felt that it was the only way to keep the Japanese from continuing the war in the Pacific. Estimates for an amphibious assault and invasion of Japan would have cost the lives of one million American soldiers—in addition to an untold number of Japanese lives—if the atomic bombs had not been implemented. My father's life would probably have been one of those casualties of war.

The year 1945 was pivotal.

GOD'S HAND IN OUR LIVES

When we look back on history, it often takes our breath away. We see

in hindsight how things could have turned out. It raises questions in our minds: Why are we the ones who are left alive after all the violence that sinful people have brought upon our world? Highly developed nations like Germany, Japan, and America with all their education, technology, and industrialization did not prevent getting into world conflicts that brought death to millions of their citizens.

The economic, educational, and social advances of modern nations have often complicated the lives of children of God. So often these advances have inflicted more harm than the good they have promised. But amidst it all, God makes these developments work out for good—to accomplish his purposes.

It's humbling to think that an all-knowing God guided the destinies of individual people and families to survive the atrocities that were perpetrated in the 20th century. It's disturbing to consider how human greed for power produced leaders who were so blind to the well-being of their own people that they were willing to sacrifice their young, promising next generation. As we look back, the most

amazing thing of all is how God guides and directs the paths of individuals to maneuver through such dangerous historical events. While we mourn the dead, we know they too fit into God's plans to change the world.

How comforting to know that we have a personal God who knows each of us by name, a God who has promised to work all things out for good for those who love him. This God speaks to us through his Word and says to us so intimately, "I know the plans I have for you, . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11). The God who guided his Son through the plotting of sinful human beings and their most evil purposes guides events so that all works out for our eternal good.

With that in mind, we trust he will continue to guide us through the tortuous twists and turns of this life and then bring us to the home of the Son he loves.

Bill Tackmier, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Christ Alone, Thiensville, Wisconsin.



(Left) Vernon Tackmier. (Above) August Polzin (seated) and his family. The author's grandmother is second from the right in the back row.



Walk by the Spirit

**We are children of God and part
of his kingdom, yet we still
call this world home.**

John A. Braun

We got off the plane and headed to the baggage carousel to pick up our luggage. The sun was shining through the windows after the long transatlantic flight, and we were ready to travel. But we were not free to travel yet. Our passports had to be checked before we could enter the country. The process is familiar to anyone who has traveled across an international border.

As I stood in line waiting to be admitted to another country, I remembered Jesus' words to Nicodemus, "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). He explained, "Flesh gives birth to flesh" (verse 6). My parents gave me flesh and blood. Flesh gives birth to flesh. I couldn't change my birth. I didn't do anything to gain citizenship in the United States. I didn't pass a test. I didn't pick my parents, my ethnic origin, my language, or the culture or history that surrounded me. *I had a passport*, I thought, as I stood in line and waited.

I thought a little more about what Jesus told Nicodemus. I am born a human. That's a good thing—I am happy to be alive and to enjoy life—but there's a downside as well. Just because I was born doesn't mean I can enter the kingdom of God. None of us can. On our own we'd stand in line outside the kingdom of God forever. God requires more than one birth certificate. Born again, Jesus said. There's a checkpoint we must pass before we can enter into the kingdom of God.

Why? Birth here only allows us life and breath. The downside means that human birth pits every human against God. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, "The flesh desires what is

“The flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want” (Galatians 5:17).

contrary to the Spirit.” He also described us as “dead in [our] transgressions and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). Something must change. Jesus says it clearly. We must be “born of water and the Spirit.”

By the gospel in Word and sacrament, we are forgiven and changed. God makes us his children and citizens of his kingdom. I didn’t do anything more for that status than I did for my natural birth. Born again, baptized, and now a citizen of God’s kingdom, I have a second passport. This one is emblazoned with the cross of Christ and “kingdom of God” stamped on its cover. Jesus has secured our status as his children. Paul wrote about that too: “In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:26,27).

MORE THAN A CHANGE IN STATUS

Jesus was crucified once and for all. When the Holy Spirit brought us to faith, we were changed. All that kept us out of the kingdom was nailed to the cross. We are children of God and citizens of God’s kingdom because Christ’s blood cleanses us of all sins and gives us eternal life.

We become drop-jawed sinners, awed by God’s love in rescuing us from our addiction to the sins of the flesh and the death that comes because of them. We hold the passport to his current kingdom now and to the one to come. But it’s not just a status change. It’s the privilege of turning away from the passions and desires that come from our natural birth. We are no longer trapped by them or slaves to them.

Within those who are citizens of God’s kingdom lives a desire to please the One who has rescued them and destined them for eternal life.

Like others before us, we leave sin behind and move forward to eternity with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—the fruits of the Spirit—showing the change in our lives. Now we live as foreigners, aliens, and exiles in the world in which we were born (1 Peter 2:11). We know we don’t belong here, so we turn away from sinful desires and act as citizens of heaven. Sins forgiven, we will walk through the gate clothed in the righteousness of our Savior.

CHANGED BUT STILL NOT PERFECT

That’s not a new thought to anyone who is a Christian, but here too there is a problem. While we have a new passport as citizens of God’s kingdom, we can’t shake the kingdom of the flesh as long as we remain here. We know that the passport to the sinful world leads away from life and eventually will be stamped by Satan. He will greet those he welcomes to hell with a satisfied grin. We also know that the passport to the kingdom of God entitles us to forgiveness and life. Jesus will welcome us with open arms into his heavenly and eternal mansions.

While we are here, we have not surrendered the passport of the flesh. We are both sinners and saints. When we look back on the acts of the flesh, we discover a longing desire to return to their attractions. We are not alone in that pull backward. Lot’s wife had it, and so did the apostle Paul. He wrote, “What I want to do I do not do, but

what I hate I do” (Romans 7:15). Like Paul, we sometimes stuff the passport of the kingdom of God out of sight and do what we know comes from our sinful flesh.

You may have hidden your kingdom passport, but by God’s grace you can pull it out again and return to being a child of God. It’s called repentance, and it happens in all of our lives. Our longing to return to the pleasure of sin is in constant conflict with our desire to live in gratitude for all Jesus has given us.

The apostle says it so clearly in Galatians 5:24,25. We belong to Christ. By faith we are connected to him who was crucified for all our sinful passions and desires. That happened once just outside of Jerusalem, and it was for all people. All sins were buried with him. Our record is wiped clean. We are heavenbound, but we are not there yet. In this life, conflict remains because we are still tied to our sinful flesh by nature.

That’s why Paul and the entire Bible continue to encourage us to avoid sin and live as children of God. “Let us keep in step with the Spirit,” Paul urges. The temptations along the way beckon us, so we need the reminders to stay on course. We dare not surrender our kingdom passport and be denied at the gate.

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

This is the concluding article in a series on acts of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit.

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:24,25).



My heart rests on Jesus

A heart transplant did not stop a heart full of faith in Jesus.

Jack G. Radandt

I was born with a congenital heart disease called hypoplastic left heart syndrome. This disease meant that the main pumping chamber of my heart, the left ventricle, was completely useless. By the age of 3, I had had three open heart surgeries—my Norwood, Glenn, and Fontan—at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin in Milwaukee.

After my Fontan surgery, I led a fairly normal life. I was able to go to school, play sports, and generally keep up with the other kids my age.

A FAILING HEART

This all changed at the age of 11. I realized something was different. I was getting increasingly tired with every

passing day. I was retaining fluid, and I could not keep up with the other kids. It was clear to everyone that I no longer was able to do all the things I used to do. After an impromptu appointment at Children's Hospital, I was diagnosed with end-stage heart failure and was admitted into the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit.

In the hospital, my heart quickly failed, and I needed to be placed on the heart transplant list. Needing a heart transplant at 11 years old was not something I had thought about before. Deteriorating in the hospital was a turning point in my life. I was not sure if I would live to see the next day.

That thought brought me closer to the grace of God. I began to appreciate how important life is. He gave me my life, and I really appreciated the eternal life he also will give me. I had taken that life for granted before my heart failure, but soon I realized how blessed

I am to have faith in him. I knew that if I did die, I would see him in heaven.

The doctors and nurses decided that I probably would not survive until I could receive a heart transplant. If I did survive, they thought that I probably would be too sick to receive a heart anyway. They only had one option to keep me alive. They decided to place a HeartWare ventricular assist device (HVAD) in my heart to pump my heart for me. I was the first single ventricle child in the United States to receive this device and the second in the world. I received my HVAD on Dec. 23, 2012.

A HEARTBREAKING EXPERIENCE

Not long after I received this lifesaving device, I struggled with the largest trial I've had to face in my life.

Late on Jan. 1, 2013, my favorite doctor came into my room to tell me some exciting news. She told me that there was a heart for me, and I would prob-

ably have a heart transplant around 3 A.M. the following day. I could hardly contain my excitement.

Then 3 A.M. came and went, and no one came in to say I was ready to go. I began to get worried, and my suspicions were correct. After further examination of my antibodies after the HVAD surgery, the doctors realized that the heart they originally thought would work for me was no longer eligible for my body.

As you can imagine, this was a heart-breaking experience. I could not understand why God did not just give me that heart, why I had to suffer longer, and why I was still stuck in a hospital room away from home and my prior life.

I was in the hospital another month and a half before I was sent home on the HVAD. This made me the first child on earth to go home on this device.

I know Christ is in
control of all things
and that all of our
lives are in his hands.

Home presented issues of its own. Losing the safety of the hospital, doctors, and monitors gave me massive anxiety. I was afraid that my machine would stop in the middle of the night and no one would hear it. I was afraid that without monitors I would die. There would be no one to save me.

But none of this happened, and the longer I was on the HVAD, the more the Lord allowed my life to return to normal. I was able to leave my home and was even able to go to school part time. Changing batteries and watching my driveline just became part of my daily routine. Life on my HVAD became normal to me.

Even so, my anxiety did not leave me, and I constantly needed to remind myself that my life was not in my own

hands or even in any doctor's hands. My life was solely in the hands of God. He would ultimately choose whether I would live or be called home. This trust in the Lord allowed me to find comfort even in my most troubling and sickest times. I knew that whatever happened to me, I would remain in the Lord and one day would be with him.

A HEART TRANSPLANT

On May 20, 2013, my life was drastically altered once again. My parents received a call from Children's Hospital saying there was a heart for me. My whole family quickly rushed down to Milwaukee. When I got there, the process of getting me prepared for surgery only took about an hour. I was sent into the operating room and finally received my negative crossmatch—a perfect heart. After my transplant, I was in the hospital only 11 days until I was sent home. My journey with end-stage heart failure was finally complete.

But I will never be cured, and the trials with my heart are far from over. Now it is six years later, and through these years I have had many complications. However, in each one of them I looked to God. All my experiences in the hospital have brought me closer to him and have allowed me to grow in my faith.

I am not upset for having to go through my difficulties of heart failure. I am grateful.

I thank God for giving me a congenital heart disease, and I thank him for allowing me to still be here. I know Christ is in control of all things and that all of our lives are in his hands.

All of my experiences have taught me to look to him for help and comfort in any trial I may face and to trust that the Lord has his plans, plans that give me—and all of us—hope and a future.

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Accept the challenge

Earle D. Treptow

When people
see selfless love
in action and
sense that love
indeed compels
us, they will be
more likely to
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God's truth.

The title of the CNN online article caught my attention: "The God of love had a really bad week." In the article, Diana Butler Bass expresses profound disappointment with the direction of American Christianity. She contends that many who sang, "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world," in Sunday school have abdicated their responsibility to love all the people Jesus loves. In particular, she grieves over the many conservative Christians who have opted for a God "who exercises judgment against all who refuse to bend the knee, a kind of Emperor-God, enthroned in glory" rather than the compassionate, welcoming God she reads about in the Bible. "For whatever reason," she laments, "western Christianity has a hard time sticking with a God of love."

How would you respond? Would you suggest that her charge is more than a little overdone and fails to see that God can be both perfectly loving and perfectly just at the same time? Or would you remain silent rather than speaking and being portrayed as unloving? There's something appealing about each of those options, but both fall short.

Each Christian has a responsibility to explain, gently and patiently, that encouraging a morality in line with what God has revealed in his Word is an act of love. For example, as Christians speak out against abortion, they do well to emphasize that they speak not only out of love for God and his Word but also out of love for the people for whom Jesus died, including the unborn children who are victims of abortion. These Christians are genuinely seeking the best interest of everyone involved—the unborn child, the pregnant woman, and the greater community.

Unfortunately, our best attempts at patient instruction sometimes meet rejection. As soon as people do what we expect them to do—reject the Scriptures' teachings—we often quickly drop our patience and go on the attack to make our point. And just like that, the people we presumably wanted to

help can say, "It's obviously pride that compels them to say what they do, not love."

We could argue, to the great delight of those who think like we do, that people who say that are being judgmental. We could complain about the blatant double standard. Arguing and complaining, however, won't help the people God wants us to reach with his Word.

It would be far better if we were simply to accept the challenge to live in a way that demonstrates our love for all. If we wish to be heard when we speak the truth and to have people believe that love—and love alone—compels us to speak, then we must consistently give of ourselves to others.

Day after day, we must actively seek the best interest of those around us. That includes loving and serving the people down the street who live in a way that conflicts with God's design for life. When people see selfless love in action and sense that love indeed compels us, they will be more likely to listen when we must speak God's truth.

There's no guarantee, of course, that demonstrating love will result in people recognizing that we are speaking in love when we proclaim portions of God's Word that the world considers unloving. But let's make it difficult for people to call us unloving. Let's give them powerful evidence to the contrary.

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A GOSPEL-FILLED LIFE

Putting it all together

Jeffrey D. Enderle

Getting there. That's the tricky part. Sitting in your aunt's cozy home with delicious smells wafting past the expanded table, that's the good part. Carving up turkey and dishing up stuffing, that's the payoff. Sinking deeper into couch cushions after eating one too many slices of pie while football blares in the background and nieces giggle in the next room, that's the sweet spot. All the effort just to get to that moment and be in that Thanksgiving environment, that's the hard part.

USING GOD'S WORD AND PRAYER ALONG THE WAY

Christians live in this constant tension between where we are and where we want to go. There is tremendous terrain over which we travel in this Christian life. When life feels like we are cruising along at 70 miles per hour without obstacles, we don't want to leave God's Word behind. When the bumpy turbulence of life's trials sends us into the ditch, we want to turn to God in prayer as our immediate response instead of our last resort. Getting there can be a challenge.

For Martin Luther, time in God's Word and time spent in prayer were responses to the struggles he faced. Those perpet-

ual and persistent attacks caused inner turmoil. The devil's ploys drove him to deploy the weapons that God provides to his people.

Luther's experience shows us how to respond wisely to our own personal struggles. Dive into Scripture. Pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance. Concentrate on the Bible as God's living and active Word (Hebrews 4:12). Apply God's Word in light of the trials and temptations we face. Pray in response to what we read in Scripture, bringing these truths before God's throne and into our hearts.

At the conclusion of catechism instruction, I ask middle schoolers to come up with a spiritual growth plan. Often their plans involve reading through the entire Bible in the year after they are confirmed. Ambitious plans. As brash as a couch potato planning to run a marathon after buying a new pair of shoes.

God's people can formulate bold plans for spiritual growth. But we are wise to be realistic. Start small. Consider your starting place. Determine the first steps to get you going in the right direction. Stretch out for a few minutes on a few verses from the Bible. Factor in other helpful habits. Schedule a time and pick a place. Mornings with a cup of coffee? Midday on a lunch break? Maybe at the

end of a long day in a comfortable chair? Pray. Study. Meditate. Pray again.

SEEING GOD'S PRESENCE ON OUR JOURNEY

For Christians, we don't have to wonder about who we are. Through Christ we are holy in the sight of our God. We don't have to struggle to become something we aren't. The sacrifice of Jesus tells us everything is completed for our salvation. Our entire lives take place in the assurance of our righteous status because of Jesus. And still God's people recognize we haven't yet arrived at our ultimate destination.

We can't control the events in the world any more than we can command the weather. But God's people recognize the means of grace at our disposal. God has given us the gift of prayer and Bible study. God invites us to come to him in his Word. He promises his Spirit will work powerfully through his Word. We have God's promise to deliver us from our struggles (Romans 8:32). God guarantees getting us to the destination and going along on the journey.

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



Our Christian
hope rests on
the great promises
of our Savior.

Hope

The presence of Thanksgiving at the end of every November helps us to pause and count our blessings. That exercise will be repeated this year as we sit around the table with family and enjoy another Thanksgiving feast.

Some will sit alone. Yet the thoughtful will give thanks in the quiet and solitary places even when they are isolated from friends and family. We have many blessings. The quiet contemplation of them all is a healthy exercise.

There is a contrast! The loud and crowded shopping malls are also a kind of giving thanks. Their door-buster prices and the crowds willing to stream through the stores are a testament to the blessings we have. It might be a good idea to remember that we should be thankful for the money we have to buy something new. By comparison with other parts of the world, our actions mark us as blessed with so much.

Whether we are laughing with family and friends, sitting quietly alone, or elbowing our way through a crowd, our lists of things to be thankful for should be long. Of course, they should include the blessings of forgiveness and eternal life we have in Christ. Because we have those blessings, our lives are filled with hope—another blessing to add to our lists.

Some Thanksgiving celebrations will have a sad note, perhaps seen in the empty chair at the table. The loved one may be separated by miles and life changes—military, new family, work, or other things that keep his or her usual place empty. But hope remains. It's there in a couple of ways. We hope for their safe return. We hope our Lord will guide and protect them while they are away. We know they are in the hands of our gracious God and that inspires us to hope.

The empty chair may reveal more than a temporary absence. A husband, a wife, a child, another relative, or a

friend is quietly asleep in death. We feel the emptiness, but we also feel hope. We know that the absent believer is with the Lord in heaven. That hope is based on the promise of Jesus, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die" (John 11:25). We also hope for a happy reunion in the presence of Jesus. That too is his promise, and we long for it in a hope based on his promises. Another hope sustains us. We hope the Lord will guide, comfort, and strengthen us not only in our sorrow over our absent loved one but also as we move forward with life.

Our dining room tables and living rooms are limited spaces. They cannot accommodate the larger circle of our family and friends. Some in our larger circle suffer. While they may be with their own families and friends, we still envelop them with our prayers as they face hardship, health issues, anxiety, or the wounds of life. Hope for them springs from the promises of Jesus too. We may not know their future or ours in this life, but we trust his promise that all will work out for the good for those who love Jesus. So we pray in hope. Even a permanently empty chair marks one who has fallen asleep in Jesus and has entered the glories of heaven.

Hope! That blessing won't need to be replaced with next year's model or because of the wear of everyday life. It remains bright and clear with every new day. It's not just wishful thinking. Our Christian hope rests on the great promises of our Savior. Count hope among your blessings.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

COMFORT IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT: REVELATION 21 AND 22

Timothy J. Westendorf

It's been 1,900 years since John recorded the words of Jesus in Revelation 22: "I am coming soon!" (vv. 7,12,20). Soon? Really? How are we to react to those words and this last chapter of the Bible?

I AM COMING SOON

"I am coming soon!" If texted by the neighborhood bully, those words bring fear for the little kids. If written by a collections agency, they arouse panic and dread in the heart of the man buried in debt. But if those words are emailed by a loving husband and father who has been deployed for a year, they bring hope to a longing family. If promised on speaker phone by Grandma, they awaken excitement and anticipation in the grandkids. If yelled by a first responder at the scene of an accident, they bring a sense of relief to the driver trapped in the wreckage. Our relationship to the speaker makes all the difference in how we react to those words.

So what should we think when Jesus says, "I am coming soon"? If we think of who we are on our own and who Jesus truly is, we would have reason to be anxious, terrified, and full of dread. We are sinful mortals. We know the darkness of our own hearts and how far short we fall from God's glory. This is the mighty and majestic King of kings! This is the holy and righteous Lord God! He is coming soon? Gulp.

If those are our thoughts when we think of Jesus' promise, we won't want to entertain them in our minds too often or for too much time.

AMEN. COME, LORD JESUS

That's not how Jesus wants us to hear his promise! It's not the way John heard those words of promise. He responded by saying, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (v. 20).

How? It wasn't that John was any less aware of Jesus' holiness and his own sinfulness. But he heard these words as a beautiful promise from his loving and gracious Savior. Jesus would have us hear them that way too.

The One who promises to return is the One who came once as a tiny infant to be our brother in the flesh. He is the One who took our place under the burden of God's holy law to complete it fully on our behalf. He took all human sin and sinfulness on himself and suffered its curse, once for all. He has assured

us in his Word and comforts us in Holy Communion with the promise that all is forgiven and completely forgotten in God's eyes. His coming for his loved ones means only deliverance from this world of sadness and death.

So when we hear him say he's coming for us, we have every reason to feel hope, excitement, anticipation, and relief. In faith we can join our hearts with John and say, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." And we trust that "soon" really is soon in his time.

And as we patiently wait, we hold to his words of promise.

REFLECT ON REVELATION CHAPTERS 21 AND 22

1. Read 2 Peter chapter 3. What insight do you gain into Jesus' promise that he is coming soon?
2. What does the return of Jesus mean for you? Why can you always say, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus"?

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

Want to continue your study of the book of Revelation? Check out *The People's Bible on Revelation* by Wayne Mueller or *Behold, I Am Coming Soon!*, Advent devotions based on the book of Revelation. Both are available at nph.net or by calling 800-662-6022.



Putting the thanks back in Thanksgiving

How a classic kids movie helped me adjust my holiday attitude.

Alicia A. Neumann

“What have I got to be thankful for?” That’s the quote that stuck in my head after I watched *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* the other day. I’ve seen it countless times, but this time it struck me differently. I realized that instead of giving thanks, lately I’ve been acting like the Peanuts gang did in that classic special.

FOCUSING ON SELF-INDUCED DRAMA

It starts with Charlie Brown’s sister, Sally, complaining. “Why should I give thanks on Thanksgiving?” she says. “What have I got to be thankful for? All it does is make more work for us.”

It’s true, holidays are a lot of work—even more so now that my husband and I have four kids under the age of 8. There are travel logistics (sometimes we have three family gatherings to attend on the same day!), food preparations, and the always exhausting process of getting the kids ready and out the door. Sometimes I’d rather sit at home and sulk like Sally!

Next, there’s Charlie Brown’s friend Peppermint Patty, who has very unrealistic expectations. When Charlie Brown serves her popcorn and toast for Thanksgiving dinner, she fumes: “Where’s the turkey, Chuck? Where’s the mashed potatoes? Where’s the

cranberry sauce? Where’s the pumpkin pie?”

It’s pretty comical to think a young kid could cook a meal like that, right? Yet my expectations are just as ridiculous. Like when we attend holiday parties, I want my kids to play independently while I relax and have meaningful conversations with other adults. In reality, the kids need me to exact some sort of justice or fix an “owie” or listen to their dramatic stories. I’m usually lucky if I get to exchange a few hurried words with the people I meet on the way to the bathroom with the kids (again!)

Finally, there’s good ol’ Charlie Brown, who’s constantly worried. His friends have invited themselves to his house for a Thanksgiving party, even though he won’t be home. Will they be mad if he cancels their plans? Will everyone have a good time?

I can totally relate to that poor, frazzled boy. After social events, I find myself fretting. Sometimes the precious moments I got to spend with my favorite people are marred by my constant analyzing and ruminating about what happened. Good grief!

SEEING OUR GOD-GIVEN GIFTS

So how can I ditch these bad habits? Thankfully, God, in his infinite wisdom,

has placed some great examples right in front of me. My children have no problem thanking God in their prayers for the things in their lives, both big and small: “Dear God, thank you for letting me find my whistle. Thank you for giving me a mommy and daddy. Thank you for making pumpkins. Thank you for helping me learn to tie my shoes. Amen.”

Their simple, innocent prayers remind me to quit focusing on my self-induced drama and instead to fix my eyes on what God has given me: four amazing, healthy kids and a wonderful husband; plenty of delicious food to cook; and many opportunities to celebrate with loved ones. And the list goes on . . .

But the most important thing God has given me is full forgiveness of all my sins. Because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, I am guaranteed a spot forever in heaven.

Thanks be to God! Keeping that amazing grace front and center this holiday season is the only thing that will stop my sinful grumbling and replace it with contentment, happiness, and peace.

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