

Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



One thing needed

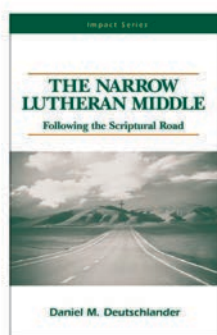
In lands dominated by Hindus and Muslims, the great truths of the Reformation are sorely needed. *Page 10*

OVERFLOWING

"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."


— Psalm 23:5

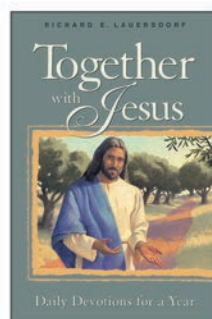
God loves without limits. Your life is not simply filled to the brim with his grace—each and every day overflows with it. This fall, **Northwestern Publishing House** shares with you best-selling books that will remind you of this awe-inspiring truth.



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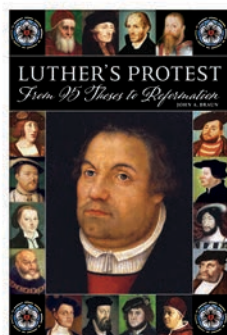
Days, weeks, months, and even years can pass right before your eyes! Slow down to appreciate the blessings of each day with *Together With Jesus*. Drawing from his own experiences, author Richard E. Lauersdorf shares 366 short devotions to ease and uplift you through God's Word each day of the year. Each one-page devotion includes Scripture text, a

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Martin Luther's actions were a powerful protest. Though there were no picket lines or megaphones, he still defiantly stood for what was right in the face of overwhelming wrong. This exciting book by Pastor John A. Braun sees Luther as the spark that lit the flame of the Reformation. With the help of full-color timelines, maps, and more helpful graphics, you will learn more about Luther's theological influence on the movement as well as his impact on Christian faith for the centuries to follow. Softcover, 197 pages.

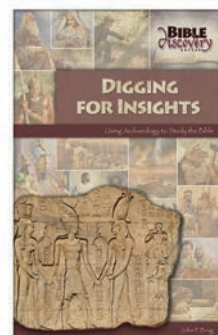
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The Bible provides not only the saving message of Jesus Christ but also many fascinating glimpses into societies across history. Have you ever wanted additional details about these cultural references? Drawing from his firsthand experience at archeological digs and his academic analysis of archeological findings, seminary professor John F.

Brug shows you what homes, lifestyles, traditions, and more were like during biblical times. Ultimately, *Digging For Insights* demonstrates both the limitations and blessings of this branch of science as it is used to study the truth of God's Word. Softcover, 205 pages. **LU150750, \$19.99** 



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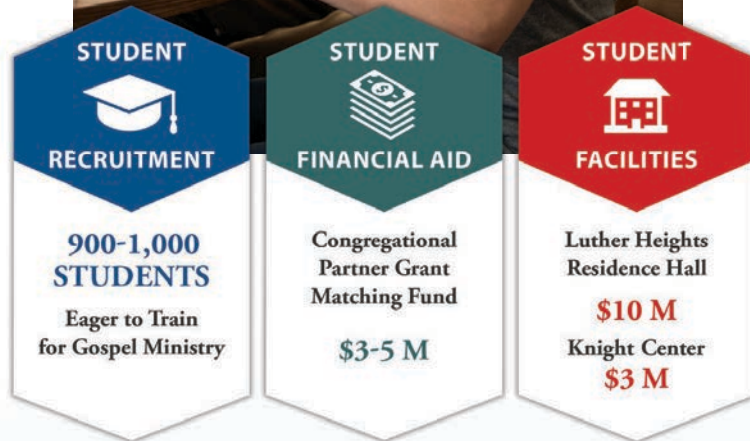
The Word gave Martin Luther the strength to take his stand.

Joshua E. Stahmann



A Silver Anniversary Campaign

With support from the WELS Conference of Presidents, this two-year capital campaign will celebrate the 2020 silver anniversary of MLC. The title, “Equipping Christian Witnesses,” reflects not only the mission of our institution—to train a corps of Christian witnesses to meet WELS ministry needs—but also the pillars of this campaign.



Pray boldly that we use this celebration to recruit with rigor countless Christian witnesses . . . to increase our financial support of our students . . . and to provide the necessary facilities to equip our students for their future ministries.

Please watch for details in the coming months.

Please also consider becoming a liaison for MLC in your congregation.

For more information, visit
mlc-wels.edu/mlc-campaign



EDITORIAL OFFICE

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

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

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

MANAGING EDITOR

Julie K. Wietzke
julie.wietzke@wels.net

STAFF WRITERS

Nicole R. Balza
Dayton Hamann

SEMINARY CONSULTANT

Prof. Samuel Degner

DESIGNER

Carianne Ciriacks

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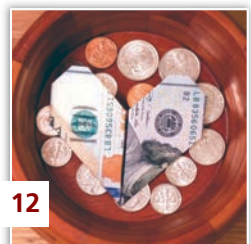
May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. — 1 KINGS 8:57

WHAT'S INSIDE

“What am I doing here?” This question could be asked and answered throughout this month's issue.

- One author asked this question as he traveled to far-off South Asia. His answer: To share the Reformation truths of grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone, in lands dominated by Hinduism and Islam—lands sorely in need of the message of God's grace (p. 10).
- Delegates to the synod convention in New Ulm, Minn., this summer may have wondered this. The answer is simple: To help set the course of direction for the synod for the next two years. Delegates also grew in their understanding of what the synod is and does. See and hear what went on (pp. 20-25).
- Maybe this is a question you have asked when witnessing. We pray the “Ambassadors—Help them find Jesus” series has provided you with wisdom and tips as you continue to share the reason for the hope that you have, even at times when you feel you have hit a dead end. Read the final article in the series on p. 28. Find all the articles online at wels.net/forwardinchrist.
- Sometimes we all wonder what we're doing here on Earth as we wait to be taken to our real home in heaven. Two different authors touch on this topic this month (pp. 18 & 32).

Julie Wietzke



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CLAPPING IN CHURCH

Re: Clapping in church ["Light for our path," Aug.]. If I may weigh in on this topic: As a professional musician, I have stood to receive applause countless times over the past 48 years. However, during a worship service where music is performed to the glory of God, I, for one, do not think that kind of thank you or acclaim is appropriate, or that anyone, except through strenuous re-education, would view the applause as directed to God. Isn't this in keeping with the spirit of Luke 17:7-10 and Matthew 6:5? I do understand, nevertheless, that this is a matter of Christian freedom.

*Michael Husby
Duluth, Minnesota*

HOW I SHARED JESUS

I travel a lot by plane, and what I do not leave home without are religious reading materials. They mostly consist of small publications that I can put in my purse. I find that *Meditations*, small gospels, and many times the People's Bibles are the correct size.

On a recent trip, as the airplane was touching down, the young man seated next to me awakened. I asked him if Chicago was home to him, and he replied that he still had 19 hours to go as he lived in Iran and was born there. I responded, "That is mostly a Muslim country. Am I correct?" He said it was and, noticing my cross, said, "And you

are a Christian. Am I correct?" He then said that he had gone to a Catholic school for the first and second grade, primarily to learn English, and always wondered who the statue of the woman holding a small baby was. Of course, that immediately gave me an opportunity to tell him all about Jesus! He was extremely interested and wanted to know more. I gave him a *Meditations* and *Gospel of John*. He was overwhelmed and kissed my hand and asked for my e-mail. I received a message from him that said, "Thank

you! Thank you!" Needless to say, that was the beginning, and now the Holy Spirit will take over, along with my prayers!

I was seated next to a young woman holding a small child. She wanted to talk. She also noticed I was reading *Meditations*. She asked about it and said that she was raised Lutheran but fell away. I asked if the child was baptized. I also had the latest issue of *Forward in Christ* in my handbag. Can you believe there was a great article about Baptism in it? She was extremely interested and expressed a desire to go back to church and also consider having her child baptized. The Lord seats me next to the people who need him.

I strongly believe that we must be bold for the gospel of Christ, as it is the only way to salvation. If you love someone, you talk about them, and I love my Lord and Savior!

*Marion Reinke
Crystal Lake, Illinois*



CORRECTION

Seminary graduate Timothy Prieue was incorrectly identified in a picture in the article "Pray for workers" [Aug.]. The picture actually showed Andrew Westra, one of his classmates, who was assigned this year to Luther Preparatory School, Wauwatosa, Wis. Prieue is pictured here (with his wife, Carissa) at his installation at Mount Olive, Appleton, Wis. We apologize for the misidentification.

Through my Bible in 3 years



Read or listen online at wels.net/bible3.

OCTOBER 2019

- | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Psalm 119:1-24 | 11. Ps. 127-129 | 22. 2 Chron. 7, 8 |
| 2. Ps. 119:25-48 | 12. Ps. 130, 131 | 23. 2 Chron. 9, 10 |
| 3. Ps. 119:49-80 | 13. Ps. 132 | 24. 2 Chron. 11, 12 |
| 4. Ps. 119:81-104 | 14. Ps. 133, 134 | 25. 2 Chron. 13, 14 |
| 5. Ps. 119:105-128 | 15. Ps. 135 | 26. 2 Chron. 15, 16 |
| 6. Ps. 119:129-152 | 16. Ps. 136 | 27. 2 Chron. 17, 18 |
| 7. Ps. 119:153-176 | 17. Ps. 137, 138 | 28. 2 Chron. 19, 20 |
| 8. Ps. 120, 121 | 18. 2 Chronicles 1, 2 | 29. 2 Chron. 21:1-22:9 |
| 9. Ps. 122, 123 | 19. 2 Chron. 3:1-5:1 | 30. 2 Chron. 22:10-23:21 |
| 10. Ps. 124-126 | 20. 2 Chron. 5:2-6:11 | 31. 2 Chron. 24 |
| | 21. 2 Chron. 6:12-42 | |

Personal reformation

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Ephesians 4:1,2

Peter M. Prange

What's a Christian's highest calling? In Martin Luther's day, Christians were taught that they could do no better than to live a life of self-denial. The most determined took monastic vows, like young Luther, or entered a nunnery. Others made long and grueling pilgrimages to see the relics of some long-dead saint. Once there, pilgrims offered devoted prayers to the honored saint for themselves and for others. Through difficult, self-chosen acts of personal sacrifice like these, medieval Christians believed they could achieve a personal reformation and gain confidence—but never certainty—of an eternal place in heaven.

REALIZING THAT HIGH MEANS LOW

Do we honestly believe any differently today? While the list of suggested, self-sacrificing acts may have changed—and become a bit easier!—don't we often presume that the best Christians are those who sacrifice lots of time at church, give the biggest offerings, get their names in the church bulletin most frequently, or dedicate themselves to full-time ministry? Aren't these people striving to meet a Christian's highest calling?

Don't get me wrong, many outward acts of Christian self-sacrifice are God-given blessings to the church. But in Ephesians 4, St. Paul gives us the best answer to what a Christian's highest calling is. He tells us to aim for humility and gentleness, patience and bearing with one another in love. Think about that. Our *highest* calling is to be *lowly* and *humble*. Our *highest* calling is to bear—to get underneath and carry—one another in love.

Since when does *high* mean *low*? Since Jesus became our perfect Savior, that's when!

Jesus preached to his disciples more than once about the radically different



Christians are to realize that their high calling ends with unmentioned humility.

view we Christians are to have in this world, as he graciously brings about a personal reformation in us through the gentle whisper of the gospel. He said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:25,26). While the people of this world will think that "high callings" result in power and prestige, honor and glory, Christians are to realize that their high calling ends with unmentioned humility. It displays undeserved gentleness, unlimited patience, and unnoticed bearing with one another in love. No showiness. No omissions. Just inward, personal reformation that doesn't get thanked in the after-service announcements.

FOLLOWING JESUS' HIGH CALLING

It's hard because it usually means silently putting up with one another and recognizing that sometimes your Christian brothers and sisters are going to do things that annoy you, irritate you, frustrate you, and even anger you. How much easier it is to do things at church that get us noticed by others and that end with a gratifying, self-satisfying pat on the back!

But then Christians recall the gentle patience Jesus has for us and the lonely sacrifice he made for all sinners. Don't you think we annoy, irritate, frustrate, and anger Jesus with our sins, mistakes, and foibles too? Of course! But Jesus bears with us quietly. He gently corrects, warmly encourages, and lovingly forgives. He serves without need for recognition.

It was his calling to which he has called us (1 Peter 2:21).

What a high and difficult calling it is, but Christians accept it to the glory of Jesus, which is the most fitting outcome to our personal reformation.

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



Mark Schweden

Some things have
not changed.
God's grace
still amazes.
God's wisdom
and power still
overwhelm.

Bringing back memories

Twelve years ago, I was first given the privilege of serving as your synod president. And now, after serving three terms, you have given me that privilege again.

I thought it would be interesting to dig out the first article that I wrote for *Forward in Christ* in October 2007 and share it with you:

Remember how you felt on your first day of high school? Excited. Nervous. Self-conscious. Mildly confused. There was a thrilling sense that you had entered a new chapter in your life. . . .

At our synod's convention in August, you were led by God to call me as your synod president. It's been a humbling and almost overwhelming experience. In many ways I feel like that kid starting high school. Thrilled and excited at the opportunity to serve God and you in this office. . . .

I am deeply grateful to you for the confidence that you have placed in me. I want to thank the thousands of people who sent expressions of encouragement and promises of continued prayer. . . . I know that it is God's grace, God's power, and God's unbreakable promises that will enable us all to serve him.

This is the first time I have served in a calling where I will need to get to know the people I serve from a distance. So here are just a few things I would like you to know about me and my family.

My parents were originally from a little town in southeastern Minnesota (Eitzen). My father was the first in his family of farmers to become a pastor. He spent most of his ministry as a professor of Latin and as the librarian at Northwestern College. My mother, still living in her own home at the age of 90, made our house a home. They had eight children (six boys and two

girls). I'm the youngest of those eight, and when I received my first call into the pastoral ministry, I became the eighth of those eight to enter the pastoral or teaching ministry.

I married Andrea Kuester, my high school sweetheart, in 1977. Thirty years later we've been blessed with four children and one grandchild. I can't say enough about the blessings God has given me through my supportive wife and children.

I began my ministry at Faith, Fond du Lac, Wis. After six years there, I served at King of Kings, Maitland, Fla. In 1989 I was called to serve as president of Northwestern Prep and, since the amalgamation in 1995, of Luther Preparatory School, one of our synod's two preparatory high schools.

And now the Lord, through you, has given me a new task. While I don't know the details . . . I do know this: The future is firmly in the hands of our gracious God. He has adopted us as his children in Christ. He has given us the gift of eternal life. . . .

Without any doubt, God himself will guide us with his Word and will bless us with his grace.

Some things have changed since then. One grandchild has become six. My mother and one brother have joined their Savior in heaven. My marriage to that high school sweetheart has now been a blessing for 42 years. My hair is thinner, my face has a few more wrinkles, and I now know a little of what the work of synod president entails.

But some things have not changed. God's grace still amazes. God's wisdom and power still overwhelm. I still marvel at the privilege of continuing to serve as your synod president. And, as I did in 2007, I ask again for your continued prayers for me and for our beloved synod.

Light for our path

What does a submissive wife in a Christian marriage look like?

James F. Pope

While Scripture provides the definitive answer, I also will be passing along excerpts from wives who gave me real-world insights. These wives had ties to courses I taught last summer.

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

"I don't really think of myself as 'submissive' because today's society puts a bad spin on being submissive. I like to think of myself as a 'suitable helper.' I need to support my husband as the Christian leader of our family."

To many people today, "submissive" means "a willingness to be controlled by other people" (*The Cambridge Dictionary*). Many view any form of submissiveness in a strictly negative sense that pits one person in authority against another who merely yields to the authoritarian.

That is not the Bible's meaning of submissiveness. When the Bible instructs Christian women to "submit yourselves to your own husbands" (Ephesians 5:22), there is a context that removes anything that might be demeaning, degrading, or insulting to women. That instruction follows this command that God gave to Christian men and women: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). Also, Christian women are to "submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything" (Ephesians 5:22, 24). How the Christian church submits to Christ is the pattern for Christian women interacting with their husbands.

PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVES

Christian wives explained what that pattern looks like in their marriages:

- "Look for ways to encourage your husband, in private and in public, and build him up."
- "A submissive wife in a Christian marriage is a supportive wife. You work together with your spouse, and respect and support him in your marriage."

- "Within a Christian marriage, a wife freely expresses her thoughts, trusting her husband's response will lovingly support her and look out after her best interests."
- "A Christian wife happily submits to her Christian husband because she knows every decision he makes will be done selflessly for her happiness and the good of their marriage."

FINAL PERSPECTIVES

To provide balance, I also asked husbands for their responses to your question:

- "She serves the Lord before she serves me."
- "Because people are different, that submission on the part of wives will look different from one marriage to another."
- "First Corinthians 13 describes the kind of love husbands are to have for their wives."

That last comment puts the instruction of wives submitting to their husbands in the proper context. While wives are to submit to their husbands "as the church submits to Christ" (Ephesians 5:24), husbands are to love their wives "just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). Just as Christ is the pattern for a wife's relationship to her husband, so Christ is the pattern for the husband's relationship with his wife. Husbands are to love their wives with self-sacrificial love. It is to a loving leader (Ephesians 5:33) that a Christian wife submits.

One wife said, "Although my sinful pride can get in the way at times, it is not hard to agree with the authority of my husband as he demonstrates love for me in everyday life." That wife describes Christian submission and Christian love well.

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

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

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

Psalms 119:105



Grace, faith, Scripture

A friendly counselor shares what the message of the Reformation means to him and to those he serves in South Asia.

As soon as they opened the door of my plane, I could tell the air was different and that I was in a place I had never been. At 1 A.M. it was as warm and as humid as the hottest day of the summer back home. Hundreds of people—awake in the middle of the night—begged to carry my suitcases to a taxi. On the darkened streets I saw people sleeping on the sidewalks with their heads only a couple feet from the wheels of our car. Cows rummaged through garbage. At 3 A.M. in my hotel room, I wondered, *What am I doing here?*

I could not drink the water. I had to close my eyes when I took a shower. The food tasted different. The lights worked only some of the time. The toilets were . . . well, that's another story. Yes, *what am I doing here?*

Everything was different, except for one thing: "*Sola gratia, sola fide, sola Scriptura*." "Grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone." These are the great truths of the Reformation. I saw them for the first time in my life on the cornerstone of our seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin, as I prepared to change my field of study from a doctor to a pastor. As I looked at those words, I thought, *This is something I can dedicate my life to.*

From that time on, I have appreciated those words. But they came to mean more to me during my years of service in foreign lands. I serve two countries in South Asia—one is a Hindu

nation, and the other a Muslim nation. The circumstances of these two countries are infinitely different from those of the world in which Luther lived more than five hundred years ago. But the message of "grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone" is the one thing the people of these countries need most of all.

GOD'S TRUTH FOR ALL NATIONS

Hinduism believes in reincarnation. According to Hinduism, you must be reincarnated 8.4 million times before you can escape the cycle of life. You return to earth because you have not suffered enough for your sins in your past life.

How different—how comforting—is the message of the Lutheran Reformation! Only Jesus' suffering will pay for your sins. He took the full punishment for your sins when he died on the cross. "There is now no condemnation [punishment] for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Not 8.4 million lives but one life—the life of Jesus—will give you peace with God.

In Islam there is no certainty of salvation—unless one is a martyr for jihad. Young Muslims are sometimes told, "Abraham gave up what was most dear to him, his only son. If you truly love God, you will give up what is most dear to you." When they explain what is most dear to them—a family member or their own life—they sometimes will be asked to



sacrifice that person. Some young men have gone home and killed their mothers in order to show their loyalty to Allah. Others will strap on a suicide vest and detonate it in a crowd of innocent people. By dying for their faith, they believe they will enter paradise where they will have 72 virgins.

Again, how different is the message of Christianity, the message of the Reformation! It is not our sacrifice that gives us peace with God. It is Christ's sacrifice for us. He was sacrificed once for all to take away all our sins (Hebrews 9:28). In him we are made perfect (Hebrews 10:14).

A Hindu Brahmin told me how a traditional wedding ceremony begins in the evening and then goes through the night and into the next day. When I asked him why, he said, "We want to invoke as many gods as possible to provide protection for the young couple." Hinduism believes in three hundred million gods (or in one god who manifests himself in three hundred million ways).

The Lutheran Reformation shows that we do not gain God's favor even by speaking endless words in prayer. God's favor is a gift of his undeserved love. Jesus said, "When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matthew 6:7,8).

Hinduism believes in karma, which most define as "good for good and bad for bad." Do good, get good. Do bad, get bad. In South Asia those who are rich are sometimes told, "You were good in your past life, so you are being rewarded." If you are poor—and the Hindu nation I serve is filled with people who are indescribably poor—you are told, "You were wicked in your past life. You deserve to suffer." Karma is completely work-righteousness.

Now think of the message of the Reformation. God does not give us what we deserve. He gives us what we do not deserve—the gift of salvation in his Son. Whether you are rich or poor, high caste or low caste, male or female, through faith in Jesus you are God's dear child. And when you die,

you will not come back to this world with its suffering, you will be with God in glory.

The name of God in Islam is "Allah," which means "master." The name "Muslim" means "one who submits," that is, a servant or a slave. The relationship between God and the sinner in Islam is that of a master and a servant or slave. Some teachers of Islam claim it is blasphemous for a Muslim to claim to have a personal relationship with Allah. Allah is too great, too holy, too distant, for a sinner to have a personal relationship with him.

In Christianity we are not simply servants; we are God's dearly loved children. We dare to call him Father, yes, we are invited to call him Father (Romans 8:15).

SHARING GOD'S TRUTH

In seminary classes in these countries we teach the Lutheran Confessions. At first it might seem that this will be dull and have little or nothing to do with the world of Hinduism or Islam. But the students often remark how the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church in Luther's day are surprisingly similar to some of the teachings of Hinduism and Islam today. The Lutheran Reformation restored the truth of God's Word. The Confessions give maximum comfort to the sinner and maximum glory to God.

The people in South Asia hunger for these truths. They will travel for days by foot and by bus to attend a sem-inar, where they will sit on the floor from 8 A.M. until 4:30 P.M. to learn the truths of the Reformation.

"What am I doing here?" They know the answer, and I do too: To know his love and to make his love known so that others will be brought out of darkness into his wonderful light. Even with the threat of imprisonment or death, they happily proclaim these truths: "Grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone."

The author's name is withheld to protect him and his work of sharing God's truths.



GOD'S GIFTS, OUR *giving*

With what shall I come before the Lord?

Aaron L. Christie

Regardless of one's political persuasion—or lack thereof—it seems that the American economy is booming. Unemployment is at a lifetime low. The stock market has had some hiccups, but it is still positive in the long run. Wages are up, but paradoxically something is down: personal giving to religious charities.

A GIVING SNAPSHOT

If statistics can be trusted, it seems that Christians gave less than 2 percent of their income to churches last year. But what about WELS members? We are not much different from the rest of the Christians in America. Here is a giving snapshot for the large church that I serve in the WELS heartland:

- 3 percent gave 30 percent of all offerings
- 10 percent gave 32 percent of all offerings
- 20 percent gave 26 percent of all offerings
- 67 percent gave 12 percent of all offerings

Interestingly, the giving levels of my previous parish in metro Chicago lined up exactly with the giving levels of my current parish! My hunch is that your church's giving analysis might look much the same.

But what do those numbers really mean? Those numbers mean that two-thirds of our members gave less to the Creator of the human body than they did to the local gym to keep that body in shape. They also mean that 87 percent of our members give more to talk/text on cell phones than they give to the One who has spoken to us, once for all, by his Son.

So how much faith does it take to pay for a gym membership or a cell phone bill?

Answer: God knows. And we do too.

Yet many Christians become animated when they hear preaching about money.

We are guilty of a major words/deeds inconsistency! We say that we believe that God created—and therefore owns—the world and everything in it. Yet we tip our server 15 percent and tip the Creator of food 2 percent? We need to repent of our self-centered greed, which is idolatry!

PROPORTIONATE GIVING

Last month's article discussed the matter of giving firstfruits. When we give first to the Lord, it helps us clarify our priorities—placing him first in our lives—not in theory, but in reality. Giving firstfruits takes aim at the attitude enclosed in our hearts rather than the amount enclosed in our envelopes. This month the biblical practice of *proportionate* giving begins the conversation of what “first and best” means for each of us as we decide in our hearts what to give. Proportionate giving means giving in proportion to how God has blessed us. It entails giving a fixed percentage of our incomes (1 Corinthians 16:2). Experience teaches and statistics show that giving amounts are not directly tied to tax brackets and bottom lines but to the depth of our faith in the promises of our God.

The Scriptures give us several examples of proportionate giving that provide us with an opportunity to ponder the percentage of our own gifts.

- After victory on the field of battle, Abraham gave 10 percent of all his possessions to Melchizedek, the kingly priest of Jerusalem (Genesis 14:20). He gave a tithe of his significant riches to thank God for the riches of his grace. God would direct his people to give various tithes later in the Law of Moses.
- Thousands of years later, Zacchaeus would give 50 percent of his significant wealth to the poor (Luke 19:1-10). He gave away half of his possessions because he was wholly possessed by gratitude for the salvation that Jesus brought to his house!
- We even hear of two women who gave 100 percent of their income to the Lord: The widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:7-16) gave her last meal

to the prophet, and the widow at the temple (Luke 21:1-4) gave her last two small coins.

All of these gifts were given out of gratitude, not under compulsion.

These examples from Scripture lead us to consider proportionate giving from another angle: Proportionate giving is not so much about how much we give but how much is left over to live on. Abraham offered the Lord a tithe but had 90 percent of a significant amount to live on. Zacchaeus offered 50 percent but had significant resources left over. The two widows gave 100 percent of their incomes to the Lord. All they had to live on was faith in the promises of a loving Father. And having those promises, they had everything. So how much of God's gifts do we really need to live on? May God bless that ongoing, prayerful conversation with him!

Give in such a way that demonstrates faith in the power of God's promises.

Like Abraham of old, many Christians find joy in giving 10 percent of their income still today. They do so with a heart that is 100 percent free in Christ and not because they feel they must. For some in our congregations, giving 10 percent is a goal to which they aspire. For others, richly blessed, giving 10 percent may be just a starting point.

No matter what percentage we choose, the encouragement is the same: Give in such a way that demonstrates faith in the power of God's promises. Take God at his Word. Stretch yourself. Give as a reflection of God's gracious gifts to you in Christ!

And then tell the devil to go and pinch his pennies!

Aaron Christie is pastor at Trinity, Waukesha, Wisconsin.

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

THINKING *proportionally*

Not long ago the Lord provided St. Paul in Green Bay, Wis., a golden opportunity to consider the matter of proportionate giving. After the funeral of one of our lifelong members, we were surprised to learn that St. Paul would receive about \$1 million from her estate.

As our church family gave thanks to the Lord, we began to feel the weight of responsibility. Now what? Our member did not designate how we should use the gift; she simply wanted the money to go to the Lord's work. She trusted her congregation to make good decisions. We needed to figure some things out. How much of this gift should we save? How much should we spend?

We established a committee to study short- and long-range ministry goals in light of this gift and to bring a proposal to the congregation. Soon the committee wrestled with another question: Should we give a portion of this gift away? There is always plenty of work for our congregation to do close to home, but the riches of God's love in Christ and the selfless gift of our sister in the faith helped us to remember the Lord's work around the world. We eventually chose to give a portion of the gift to WELS, trusting that our leaders would use the money wherever it was most needed.

But how much should we give? We wanted to think proportionately, to give in keeping with what we'd been given. In Christian freedom, we decided to use the Old Testament tithe as our example. So we gave WELS 10 percent of what we had received, a gift in the amount of \$100,000.

It wasn't easy to agree on what to do with that much money. Yet we gave in proportion to what we were given because of the Holy Spirit's work in our hearts through the gospel, the same Spirit who worked in the heart of our sister in the faith. To God alone be the glory!

Jon Zabell is pastor at St. Paul, Green Bay, Wisconsin.

The message of Jesus finally starts to grow after years of neglect.

John A. Braun

"My family was not religious. We rarely, if ever, attended church," Richard Bush remembers. Sundays meant something other than going to church. Yet Richard's friend Harry was the exception. He and his family regularly attended a Baptist church. They invited Richard to come to church with them and provided regular transportation. "It was something to do," Richard says. The Sundays in church with his friend's family was a beginning. He was even baptized there with Harry.

It was like the sower in the parable casting the seed on the ground (Matthew 13:1-23). As he looks back, Richard says, "It was like a seed on the shelf."

SITTING DORMANT

Growth became difficult because Richard's family moved to Louisiana. They rarely attended church, so the seed did not sprout and certainly did not mature. He confesses, "The seed just sat there and did not grow."

Those early lessons about Jesus grew distant and seemed to disappear as the years went by. Military service, marriage, and family took turns occupying

Richard's time and energy. The seed remained on the shelf. He and Shelly, his wife, had two children and were married for many years before they moved to Katy, Texas.

Richard has a structured and organized mind. He is also a friendly spirit and makes friends easily. His focus in school was science, and he had a lot of questions about religion. The idea that God is triune and that he created the world didn't make sense to Richard. But his skills helped him do well as a plant manager over the years.

Soon difficulties intruded into their happy life. Shelly eventually died from cancer, but even in that tragedy the seed remained dormant. Richard says, "I didn't point a finger at God and complain. I didn't hate God. Shelly's death was tough, but at that time I thought that dying was just what happened. You had to go on. God works in mysterious ways." He and his children moved on with their lives. But God had not given up on Richard. God had not forgotten him and the little seed that still lay dormant.

Moving on was not easy. After a time, a friend thought that Richard should begin to socialize. Richard didn't know if he was ready to take that step, but his friend set up a blind date disguised as a birthday party. Richard reluctantly

went. When he discovered it was a blind date, he did his social obligation for dinner and concluded he was not ready yet. He left the date with no desire for another. Yet he went home from the "party" with a telephone number for Janet, the woman he met. It sat unused.

Then six months later, he was ready and called her. They discovered mutual interests and began a friendship. Little did he know at the time that the friendship would blossom into marriage.

TAKING ROOT

But another development would also be coming to pass. The seed on the shelf would finally begin to grow. Janet was a Lutheran and a member at a WELS church in Katy, Texas. She eventually asked, "Would you like to go to church?"

Richard was a little apprehensive. He says he had a "bazillion questions." One of the biggest was still, "How could God be triune, three in one?" But he went to church, and he liked what he heard. He says he went "again and again and again." The seed began to stir.

Slowly his question about the Trinity did not cause so much trouble for him. He began to think that millions



Confessions OF FAITH

of people believe it, so there must be something to it. He was hearing the gospel, and the Holy Spirit was at work. He brought his question about the Trinity and the other questions he had to the Bible 101 class. When he asked questions, the pastor answered each one. The seed on the shelf had sprouted and began to take root. The idea of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—one God but three persons—began to make sense to his new faith. Richard says, “Faith in Christ isn’t something that you just turn on. It takes time.”

The answers for Richard’s questions all came from the Bible. The pastor explained that it is important to read the Bible for what it means. He warned that you shouldn’t bring your own ideas to what the Bible means, but you should let the Bible speak for itself. In the past, Richard had listened to other pastors give their own versions of what the Bible said, but now he heard what the Bible really said.

What impresses Richard is how well WELS pastors are trained. They know the Bible and can share its teaching clearly. He lists six WELS pastors he has come to know and gives them all high marks for their teaching and spirit. He feels that they are the key to his spiritual growth and to the spiritual growth of others.

Janet felt the need to be with her aging parents and care for them in Temple, Texas, about 150 miles northwest of Katy. The Temple congregation made them both feel welcome. There the seed that had sprouted in Katy continued to grow. Richard’s questions continued, but “it gets better and better as you sort things out, learn, and grow.”

GROWING TALL

As he looks back over the course of his life, Richard marvels at the way God took the seed from the shelf and caused it to grow after so many years. Even when it seemed to him and to others that God had forgotten him, now he sees that God had a plan all along.

Yet there’s a sad note that Jesus was left out of his life all those years. Those days have all gone by. They cannot be redone, and Richard regrets that he did not help his children to learn about Jesus. Yet he is happy now knowing Jesus and his blessings. He is active in his church and served as a delegate to the 2019 WELS convention.

When they moved to Temple, Richard bought a sailboat to sail on nearby Belton Lake. Janet was surprised by his impulsive purchase. Sailing on the large reservoir gives him time to think. In the quiet of the wind and the water,



Richard Bush served as a delegate to the synod convention this summer.

he thinks about the blessings God has given him—including the beautiful creation he has given us all.

Richard’s story comes with a lesson. He says it this way: “When you have a chance to witness, remember you are throwing seed on the ground. It may take 50 years for the seed to grow. Don’t give up. God always has plans that sometimes we don’t see or understand. There’s no limitation on when you can come to Christ.”

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



heart to heart
parent conversations

I dread my daughter's homework more than she does. From the time she was little, it's always been a struggle. She seems to sail through school with a great attitude, but by the time she gets home, all her patience and concentration have been used up. And honestly, by that time of day, mine have too. I'd be lying if I didn't acknowledge that my attitude about homework is just as bad as hers.

Yet I'm continually trying to improve the process. So I'm going to take to heart some of the ideas shared by this month's authors and try to incorporate them into my family's homework routine.

Do you have some tried and true homework tips? Please share them! Send your tips to fic@wels.net.

Nicole Balza

**Join the
conversation!**

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

HOW INVOLVED SHOULD PARENTS BE IN A CHILD'S HOMEWORK?

Homework can be a source of conflict between parents, children, and teachers if expectations and philosophies aren't clear. Each teacher and each school has a homework philosophy; therefore, how much they want parents to participate in completing homework may be different from school to school or teacher to teacher. However, I have found that many educators feel that you should help in developmentally appropriate ways through the years and adjust the way you help your child as he or she grows.

Children from 3K to first grade will need parent support if they have homework to complete. They will often need their parents to read directions for them, listen to them read, or do the homework with them. As soon as students can write, they are expected to write any answers by themselves but with parent support.

When students in grades 2-4 have homework, they are able to do most of it without any assistance. They may need parents to check in with them and to problem solve if they don't know what to do, and they may need parent reminders to do their homework and complete assignments on time.

As students move into grades 5-8, they are now learning how to keep their assignment books on their own, how to plan to complete homework assignments, and how to study for tests and quizzes. Parents do not need to help very much with the homework itself but may need to help their child schedule his or her time, study for a test, or make sure that their child is asking his or her teacher for help when confused on a homework assignment.

Some students will continue to need these parent supports in high school, while others take on full responsibility for their homework once in high school. This gradual release of responsibility looks slightly different for each child and should be adjusted to meet his or her needs. Our goal is always to help each child grow and learn more responsibility each year, while still supporting the child with his or her unique learning needs.

God's Word does not give advice on doing homework specifically; however, it does tell us how we should conduct ourselves in all situations. "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). This passage reminds us that as parents we have an important responsibility and opportunity to model for our children the perspective and attitude we should all have when completing tasks and working hard. Homework is no different . . . do it all for the glory of God!

*Rachel Blum and her husband, Matt,
are raising their three children in
the country in Bonduel, Wisconsin.
Rachel currently teaches at
St. Paul, Green Bay, Wisconsin.*



Are you familiar with the old song: “Homework! Oh, homework! I hate you. You stink! I wish I could wash you away in the sink”?

Somehow I can imagine my own kids turning to me and saying, “Dad, if you hate homework so much, stop assigning it!” Seriously, though, I remember my kids singing this little ditty when they were in school. Homework is probably nobody’s favorite. Nonetheless, homework is a reality for many families.

I asked a pair of veteran teachers for their advice on how parents can best assist their children with the homework challenge. Here are some tips:

- 1. Establish a positive attitude about the value of school and homework.** Create a family routine and an expectation that this is important and needs to be done to be prepared for the next day. Nothing is more anxiety-creating than not being prepared and wondering how teachers and classmates will react.
- 2. Pray with your children about school and school work.** God cares about it all. As anxiety and depression rates for children have increased to astounding rates, reinforcing that they have an almighty, loving heavenly Father is ultra-important. He cares . . . even about short quizzes or big tests.
- 3. Find a comfortable, inviting place for children to do homework** where parents can oversee progress. Kids’ rooms today offer many distractions that can get in the way of the efficient use of homework time.
- 4. Understand teacher expectations** and communicate with your child’s teacher(s). Take advantage of home visits or entrance conferences to talk about homework expectations. Teachers will be happy to share strategies they prefer or tools that can be used at home. Today’s digital age gives parents and students amazing tools—e-mail, websites, online videos. Many curriculums include online videos and tips. This can help alleviate arguments about how to do tasks like multiplication and division correctly.
- 5. Don’t give up on the old tried-and-true methods.** They have worked for generations and will continue to work. Strategies like making note cards, using flash cards for math facts, practicing spelling words, quizzing students on their reading assignment, listening to memory work—these all still are great ways to help your students to find success. Help your child to find ways that complement their learning style.
- 6. For upper-grade students, consider becoming a kind of “accountability partner.”** At this level, sometimes the subject matter is getting difficult for parents . . . even well-educated ones. The homework belongs to the students. In a time when digital contacts are growing, having parents help face-to-face needs to

MOVING BEYOND “HOW WAS SCHOOL TODAY?”

What is the first question you ask when your child gets home from school? Most parents ask, “How was your day today?” Most children give a short or even one-word answer. Here are some questions you may want to ask to expand the answer.

- “What was one thing you learned that was new?”
- “Did you make your teacher smile today?”
- “Did you help anyone today? How did you help?”
- “What challenged you today?”
- “Did someone do something nice for you?”
- “How would you rate your day on a scale of 1 to 10? Why?”

This is reprinted by permission from christianfamylsolutions.org. The original article, “Strategies for a successful school year,” was written by Julie Educate, a licensed professional counselor with Christian Family Solutions.

be encouraged. Parents can be a big help by encouraging the student to transition into a self-advocate role.

- 7. Realize the change that has taken place.** Teachers and parents are not so much the purveyors of knowledge but the guides to unlocking and applying it. The information is more accessible than ever; parents can inspire their children’s curiosity on topics they aren’t naturally curious about.

Maybe it’s time for a new tune: “Homework! Oh, homework! You can be a pain. But at least you’re a way to exercise my brain!”

Dave Payne and his wife, Joyce, have four adult children and two grandchildren. Dave serves as communications director at Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wisconsin, and is a member at Eternal Love, Appleton.





teentalk

Jesus is our home

No matter how we feel about our home on this earth, we have an eternal home in heaven waiting for us.

Lydia Buxa

When I was younger, my dad was in the Coast Guard, so we moved around a lot. Every three years, he would be re-stationed to a different state, usually across the country. I lived in four different states and moved three times before fifth grade.

One summer, my dad retired and, wanting to be closer to family, we moved from California to Wisconsin. It was our final cross-country move. But I found myself missing my old home, which was over 2,000 miles away.

It took me a long time to accept my new house and school. For a while, I didn't feel I belonged here. Every time I thought of going home, I thought of a completely different house. Some days I still find myself wanting to go back to California.

Yet I have grown to love my new house. It is my retreat. To me, it's the most comforting place on earth. During school, what gets me through some days is the fact that I get to go home later. Sometimes trying to wait until the end of the day so I can leave is an excruciating wait.

On earth, Christians stand out because of our faith, which leads us to

act differently and can make us feel out of place. That's when we feel a different kind of homesickness. It's not for a house in a state thousands of miles away. It's a homesickness for a place where we feel we really belong. We want to go to the perfect retreat that Jesus prepared for us. "We know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven" (2 Corinthians 5:1).

No matter how often or rarely our earthly home changes, we look forward to going to heaven, the place that is our eternal home. That's where we will meet Jesus. In him, and him alone, we find complete rest. It's the one place where we'll never have to say good-bye again. We will be eternal residents. "Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who . . . will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Philippians 3:20,21).

Even though heaven is waiting for us, there are still tough days to get through. We miss just being home, and it's an excruciating wait to get there. Jesus is with us and helps us get through these days. "The LORD

himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged" (Deuteronomy 31:8).

So if you, like me, really miss your home or feel out of place, remember our real home is with Jesus. No matter how far away we live from the place we call home, Jesus is always right beside us, guiding and protecting us. And when Jesus takes us to heaven, we will confidently say, "I'm home." I personally can't wait to go.

The words of the famous hymn perfectly capture this:

What though the tempest rage,
Heav'n is my home.
Short is my pilgrimage;
Heav'n is my home.
And time's wild, wintry blast
Soon shall be overpast;
I shall reach home at last;
Heav'n is my home.
(*Christian Worship* 417:2)

Lydia Buxa, a junior at Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wisconsin, is a member at Immanuel, Farmington, Wisconsin.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Andrus, Eugene, to St. Peter's Balaton/Immanuel, Tyler, Minn.
Cook, John, to St. Paul, West Bend, Wis.
Edwards, Robert, to retirement
Jaeger, Joel, to Good Shepherd, Beaver Dam, Wis.
Jansen, Paul, to Salem, Ann Arbor, Mich.
King, William, to Good Shepherd, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
Koelpin, David, to new mission, Folsom, Calif.
Krahn II, Richard, to Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis.
Krause, Shane, to St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis.
Krueger, Paul, to Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis.
Loersch, Nathan, to Illumine, Rock Hill, S.C.
Pasch, Kenneth, to retirement
Rieke, Mark, to First, La Crescent, Minn.
Salinas, David, to Christ the Lord, Houston, Texas
Wilke, Robert, to St. John, Wrightstown, Wis.
Zuberbier, Benjamin, to Zion, Columbus, Wis.

Teachers

Acosta-Ware, Jessica, to Grace, Portland, Ore.
Beckendorf, Nicole, to St. Matthew, Stoddard, Wis.
Boyle, Bonnie, to Resurrection, Chesapeake, Va.
Felten, Maria, to St. John, Caledonia, Minn.
Gronholz, John, to retirement
Grunwald, James, to retirement
Krause, Nicole, First, La Crosse, Wis.
Mattes, Joanne, Northdale, Tampa, Fla.
Minzlaff, Melissa, to Huron Valley Lutheran High School, Westland, Mich.
Neujahr, David, to retirement
Olson, Kathryn, to St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis.
Steinke, Terry, to Peace, Granger, Ind.
Wendland, Heidi, to Salem Preschool, Woodbury, Minn.
Wolfe, Jessica, to Little Lambs Learning Center, Mandan, N.D.

ANNIVERSARIES

Lowell, Wis.—Salem (150). Oct. 13. Service, 9:30 A.M.; freewill offering meal to follow. RSVP by Oct. 5. 920-927-5450.
Houghton, Mich.—Lutheran Collegians MTU at Peace Ev. Lutheran Church (50). Oct. 27. Worship, 10:15 A.M.; cookout, potluck, and music to follow. RSVP requested by Oct. 13. 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.

Appleton, Wis.—Riverview (75). Nov. 3. Worship, 8 & 10:30 A.M.; Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Chorus singing. Nov. 17. Concert by Martin Luther College Choir, 7 P.M. Jan. 5, 2020. Worship, 8 & 10:30 A.M. 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. RSVP by Oct. 20. 507-245-3330; pastor@stjohnswels.com.
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.



Photos needed

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

COMING EVENTS

Friends of the Seminary day—Oct. 5. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Website, wls.wels.net/friends/auxiliary.
MLC Ladies' Auxiliary annual meeting—Oct. 5. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Website, mlc-wels.edu/ladies-auxiliary.
Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors convention—Oct. 6–9. Eagle Ridge Resort, Galena, Ill. For all seniors, ages 55 and older. Website, wels.net/events.
Christian Life Resources national convention—Oct. 19. Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis. Theme: "Engage." Website, christianliferesources.com.
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.

NAMES WANTED

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.
College students—Register college students with WELS Campus Ministry for free helpful materials, including *Forward in Christ* magazine and *Meditations*. Website, wels.net/campus-ministry.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

House parents—to assist dorm supervisors for the Titan Center at Michigan Lutheran High School, St. Joseph, Mich. Access full position description at michiganlutheran.org/jobs. Matt Herbst, principal@michiganlutheran.org.
Christian counselor—Living Hope Christian Counseling, LLC, located at St. Mark, De Pere, Wis., is seeking Christian counselors who are licensed by the State of Wisconsin. Send resumes to the attention of Kiley Martin, 2066 Lawrence Dr, De Pere, WI 54115.

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.

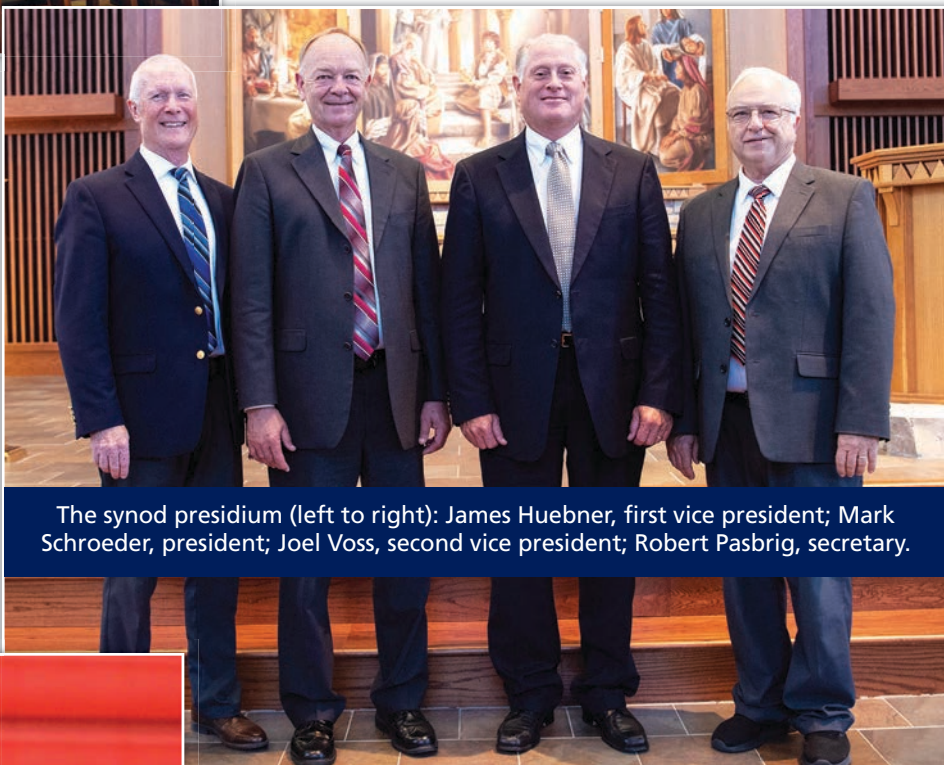
FOR THE GENERATIONS TO COME

SYNOD CONVENTION 2019

WELS' 65th biennial convention was held at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., July 29–Aug. 1, under the theme "For the Generations to Come."

For complete coverage—including videos, stories, photos, and official documents—visit wels.net/2019synodconvention.





The synod presidium (left to right): James Huebner, first vice president; Mark Schroeder, president; Joel Voss, second vice president; Robert Pasbrig, secretary.



Convention

Elections

The following individuals were elected at the 2019 synod convention to serve on various boards and commissions.

President

Rev. Mark Schroeder

Second vice president

Rev. Joel Voss

Board for World Missions

Pastor, Rev. Glen Hieb;
Teacher, Mr. Chris Pluger;
Layman, Mr. Mark Schulz

Board for Ministerial Education

Teacher or staff minister,
Mr. Daniel Markgraf;
Layman, Mr. Brian Scheele

Michigan Lutheran Seminary Governing Board

Chairman, Rev. Gregory Gibbons

Luther Preparatory School Governing Board

Chairman, Rev. Timothy Spaude

Commission on Congregational Counseling

Chairman, Rev. David Scharf

Commission on Worship

Chairman, Rev. Jon Zabell

Commission on Special Ministries

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FOR THE GENERATIONS TO COME

SYNOD CONVENTION 2019

CONVENTION PARTICIPANTS



371 VOTING DELEGATES

106
PASTORS

3
WORLD
MISSIONARIES

77
TEACHERS

4
STAFF
MINISTERS

181
LAY
DELEGATES

53 ADVISORY DELEGATES | 7 SPECIAL GUESTS | 30 PRESENTERS

FUN FACTS

63

63 flags of the countries where WELS is actively partnering in gospel outreach were presented by the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society.

35

35 faculty and staff volunteers from Martin Luther College helped at the convention.

65

65 singers and 13 instrumentalists performed music from the new WELS hymnal coming out in 2021 at the convention's opening service.

CONVENTION BUSINESS



167

Pages in the *Book of Reports and Memorials*, which summarizes the business that comes before the synod in convention



35

Resolutions approved by the convention



\$76 MILLION

Approved amount of annual synod ministry financial plan for the next two fiscal years



22

Newly elected commission and board members



\$16-18 MILLION

Goal for a new synodwide capital campaign for Martin Luther College called "Equipping Christian Witnesses"

Heard at convention

"My son is a sophomore at MLC, and I thought I'd never get a chance to come here, but to come here as a delegate to represent my district and my congregation is something that I'll never forget. It's encouraging. It's uplifting. It makes you want to do more."



—Marston Zaye, a lay delegate from Our Savior, Bylas, Ariz., when asked what it was like being a convention delegate

"It is truly humbling that you have placed this trust in me again, and I can assure you that it is a privilege that I thank God for every day that I get to serve you as your synod president. Please continue to keep me in your prayers and God's church in your prayers."



—Mark Schroeder, as he accepted the call to serve as synod president. This will be his fourth four-year term.

"We are happy to be united with WELS in faith. WELS is like a mother to us."

—Peter Chen, a pastor in the Christian Lutheran Evangelical Church (CLEC) in Taiwan, after the convention voted to declare fellowship with the CLEC.



"We will help our members see the face of Christ in their neighbor. We will encourage them to build authentic friendships with those currently outside the church. Hospitality will be a core value among us. We will do whatever is necessary to knit our members into something more than acquaintances. They will have a family. We will zealously, almost recklessly, pursue the straying..."

"If we are doing all we can with the gospel, the numbers do not matter. Only the gospel can create faith, but we need to do a better job of creating an audience for the gospel."



—Jon Hein, who serves as coordinator for WELS Congregational Services, in the convention essay. The theme of the essay was "For the Generations to Come."

"The first thing we learn from Paul's words is what we pray from. In other words, what resources are we drawing on? . . . When my kids run up to me at the football game asking for money for the concession stand, their request depends on two things. How much does Dad actually have in his pockets and how willing is he to give it? What are we praying from?"



"As we think about the work we do together and the resources we have to do it, it's easy to think, 'What can we get done with 370,000 people? How far can \$20 million of CMO in each of the next two years be stretched? What kind of opportunities do our mission fields present?' Paul pictures something far bigger. As he offers his prayer, he asks that God would grant it **'out of his glorious riches.'** Those are the same glorious riches that earlier in the letter Paul said caused God to send his Son Jesus Christ. So the same Father who possesses all the wealth in the world has something in his pocket more valuable than it all. And not only does he have it. We know he's willing to give it. Willing to give it in spite of how little we deserve it. If God has already reached into his pockets and pulled out his Son, it's safe to say that everything else in those pockets is also free game."

—Jonathan Bauer, who preached the opening worship service sermon, based on Ephesians 3:14-21.

New partners in Christ

Representatives from church bodies in Kenya and Taiwan traveled a long way to be at the synod convention in Minnesota this summer—and not just in miles.

Their journeys were very different but their destination the same—to work hand in hand with WELS in spreading the Word to their homelands. Delegates welcomed these two church bodies into confessional Lutheran fellowship at the convention.

TAIWAN

Pastor Peter Chen and Mr. Michael Lin attended the convention to represent the Christian Lutheran Evangelical Church (CLEC) in Taiwan. The CLEC started as a mission of WELS, with missionaries serving there from 1979 through 2013. Now it is an independent church body.



Pres. Mark Schroeder greets the representatives from Taiwan and Kenya. Left to right: Peter Chen, Michael Lin, and Mark Onunda.

Chen notes that church members were unsure about what would happen to their church when the missionaries left. “When I go back, I can let my members know WELS hasn’t left us!” he says. “Now they declare we are in fellowship with each other so even if there are no missionaries in Taiwan, it doesn’t make a difference. We are one.”

Chen was impressed by the theme of the convention. He is training Lin to be a leader in the CLEC. Lin will finish his training this year. “This is a good chance to pass on the whole idea of who we are and who we belong to for the next generation,” he says.

This was Lin’s first trip to the United States. He was amazed by the opening worship service. “I will go back [to my congregation] with lots of pictures and stories. I can tell them this is the way our mother church is,” he says.

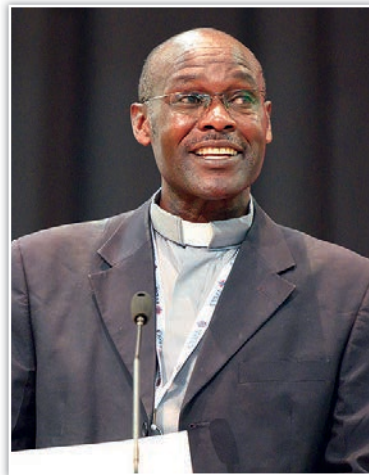
The CLEC has four congregations, one pastor (Chen), and about 100 members. Three men, including Lin, are training to serve congregations as tent ministers. It is reaching out in a country of 23 million people, of which 5 percent are Christian. “Please pray for us,” says Chen.

KENYA

“My wife and I have traveled far to be with you these few days,” said Mark Anariko Onunda, pastor and chairman of the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ—Kenya (LCMC), when addressing the delegates. “Our short time together will secure a lifelong partnership to advance our positions in many fields of battle.”

The LCMC—Kenya, a church body of 25 pastors, 46 congregations, and between 3,000 and 5,000 members, is relatively young. Registered as an independent church body in Kenya in 2013, it formed after several of its pastors and churches broke away from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kenya because of false teachings. This fledgling church body immediately began searching for like-minded confessional Lutherans. After they made contact with WELS World Missions in 2014, Prof. E. Allen Sorum, director of the Pastoral Studies Institute, visited Onunda for the first time in Kenya in 2015. The Lutheran Church of Central Africa—Zambia, WELS’ sister synod, declared fellowship with the LCMC—Kenya last September.

“We are like you. That is why we are coming to you—so we can work together,” says Onunda. “With our blessed partnership in place, your brothers and sisters in Kenya can now attend to our most pressing challenges.”



Mark Onunda addresses the convention delegates.

Onunda’s first goal is to work to restore confessional Lutheranism in Kenya through better and continued education of pastors and leaders. The LCMC—Kenya also wants to be aggressive in its outreach within Kenya. This includes providing physical and spiritual aid to South Sudanese refugees living in Kakuma, Kenya, in collaboration with the Joint Mission Council’s outreach to the Nuer through Peter Bur.

But Onunda isn’t content with just focusing on Kenya. “Our partnership is going to give birth to more churches outside Kenya,” he says. He mentions Rwanda and Uganda and South Sudan—all areas WELS and the Lutheran Church of Central Africa, WELS’ sister synods in Africa, are working to reach.

“This man will become our partner in expansion throughout the entire continent of Africa, so we’re gathering up church bodies and our team becomes larger and stronger,” says Sorum.

Lutheran Leadership Conference to kick off 2020

WELS Congregational Services will host the first WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership at the Sheraton Grand in Chicago, Ill., Jan. 21–23. WELS Congregational Services works under the Conference of Presidents to help congregations assess, plan, and carry out gospel ministry.

The conference will have five keynote presentations that deal with major cultural challenges before every WELS congregation. Twenty-five breakout sessions will deal with issues specific to certain congregations, including overcoming a consumer mentality in church, Christian apologetics, increasing volunteerism, retaining and gaining young members, fully utilizing the gifts of women in ministry, equipping people for personal evangelism, having a “high-expectations” church, strategic planning, using social media for outreach, operating a financially sustainable elementary school, and more.

“I hope individuals walk away from this conference with three things,” says Jonathan Hein, coordinator of Congregational Services. “First, I hope they are motivated to throw themselves into gospel ministry in every way: feeding the faithful, reaching the lost, and pursuing the straying. Second, I hope attendees better understand the massive

challenges before our congregations but also realize that God will help us meet those challenges. Finally, I hope that they can take home some practical resources from the breakout sessions that they can immediately implement in their mission efforts.”



The National Conference on Lutheran Leadership is open to all called workers and lay volunteers, men and women, lifelong Lutherans and new congregants.

Congregations are encouraged to send multiple participants to the conference.

“A church gets the most out of a conference like this when there is a critical mass of members attending,” Hein says. “They can divide up and hit every relevant breakout. They can present a united, excited voice when they go back to their congregation.”

Travel rebates are available for congregations that send three or more individuals to the event.

Registration is now open, with an early registration discount through Oct. 31. Register online at lutheranleadership.com. There you can also find free promotional materials—including a video, posters, social media graphics, and other digital images—to help build interest.

Obituaries

Richard R. Brei, 1945–2019

Richard Brei was born Feb. 22, 1945, in Norfolk, Neb. He died April 11, 2019, in West Bend, Wis.

A 1967 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at Good Shepherd, Omaha, Neb.; Trinity, Aberdeen, S.D.; St. Paul, Saint James, Minn.; and Trinity, West Bend, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Janelle; three sons; four grandchildren; and four sisters. He was preceded in death by one sister and one son.

Loren A. Schaller, 1922–2019

Loren Schaller was born July 14, 1922, in Renville, Minn. He died April 11, 2019.

A 1948 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at St. John, Tappen, N.D.; Trinity, Osceola,

Wis.; St. Peter, Monticello, Minn.; Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.; Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis.; Northwestern Publishing House; and an exploratory mission in Tucson, Ariz.

He is survived by his wife, Ruth; two daughters; three sons; many grandchildren and great-grandchildren; and one sister. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Gretchen; three brothers; one sister; and one son.

John H. Schibbelhut, 1934–2019

John Schibbelhut was born Feb. 4, 1934, in Lamar, Colo. He died May 1, 2019, in La Crosse, Wis.

A 1957 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., and a 1981 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he taught at Trinity, Crete, Ill.; Winnebago Lutheran

Academy, Fond du Lac, Wis.; and Dr. Martin Luther College/Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Lydia; 3 daughters; 3 sons; 18 grandchildren; 5 great-grandchildren; and 1 sister. He was preceded in death by two grandchildren.

John P. Meyer, 1932–2019

John Meyer was born July 9, 1932, in Bay City, Mich. He died May 8, 2019, in Argyle, Wis.

A 1958 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served at Trinity, Friesland, Wis.; Grace, Dalton, Wis.; St. John, Rib Lake, Wis.; and Zion, Ogema, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Barbara; 4 daughters; 2 sons; and 12 grandchildren. He was preceded in death by one brother.



Walk by the Spirit

God warns us about being
drunk and encourages us
to practice self-control.

John A. Braun

Some say the Bible is ancient, out of touch, and old-fashioned, but they have not read Paul's two lists in Galatians. Read the section again (Galatians 5:19-23), and you will see just how contemporary it is. Paul includes drunkenness as one of the acts of the flesh. Drunk drivers, shootings outside bars at 2 A.M., or even loud arguments after a few beers testify that the Bible is not as old-fashioned as some want to believe.

At the same time, Paul's list of fruits of the Spirit are just as contemporary. The virtues listed are as important today as they were in Paul's day: joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness. As a concluding fruit of the Spirit, Paul lists self-control. What could be more contemporary in a world given to excesses?

ACTS OF THE FLESH: DRUNKENNESS AND ORGIES

Scotch, bourbon, gin, wine, beer. Do you have a favorite? Almost a century ago it was all illegal. In 1920, the Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution made it illegal to produce, import, transport, or sell alcoholic beverages. Prohibition attempted to eliminate the problems that come in the wake of alcohol abuse. But instead bootleggers, organized crime, and speakeasies created more trouble for society and police. The amendment was repealed in 1933.

Perhaps the Christian temperance movement of the 1920s took Paul's inclusion of drunkenness in his list of acts of the flesh as justification for its efforts to remove alcohol from our society. No one would disagree that drunkenness belongs on the list, at least no one who pays any attention to the news today. For example, drunk drivers are a plague on our roads. They cause almost half of the accidents. DUI (Driving Under the Influence) and OWI (Operating While Intoxicated) appear in many tragic stories of drivers killing

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

children, mothers, friends, and police officers because they could not control themselves or their vehicles. Speeding, running red lights, failing to yield, and reckless and inattentive driving all mask the problem of drunk drivers.

And there's more. College-age students pass out from drinking too much. Some wander away from the bar and stumble into the cold to die of exposure or ramble off and drown in nearby rivers and lakes. Alcohol abuse defies age, race, and all social classifications. Persistent alcohol abuse traps many in an addiction that is difficult to escape and destroys lives, families, and futures.

Paul combines drunkenness with another companion act of the flesh: orgies or carousing, as some translate the Greek word. The two go together, and in our world today carousing might simply be called drunken parties. Too much alcohol often leads to the loss of inhibitions. The contemporary version of this dangerous combination comes disguised as just having fun. All too often “having fun” gets out of control, leading to abuse, addiction, brutality, or sexual exploitation and leaving behind black eyes, bruised bodies, and arrests for disorderly conduct or worse.

Excess is the problem, not parties or responsible drinking. The sign at the edge of our Christian path beckons us to have fun and enjoy a few laughs. There is nothing wrong with that. But all too many follow the path; lose control; and bring trouble, pain, and disgrace to themselves and the Christian way. Sadly, some are also lost to those vices because they often breed other vices. That's why Paul warns against these acts of the flesh.

Paul is not alone. Solomon also warns, “Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1).

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: SELF-CONTROL

God's Word suggests an alternative: self-control. Loss of control is the engine that pulls freight marked hatred, rage, jealousy, envy, and drunkenness. It sets aside the freight of the fruits of the Spirit: patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness. Self-control through the power of Christ pulls those virtues, and it seems like an easy prescription for our Christian path at every crossroad. It could be a billboard with the words of Solomon: “Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control” (Proverbs 25:28).

Like others in this world, self-control eludes Christians at times. Satan prowls, looking for opportunities to bring misery into our lives (1 Peter 5:8), and at times we are willing accomplices. The failure to control ourselves in various situations is listed on the resume of more Christians than we want to admit. Perhaps it's even on the record of our own personal behavior.

What of those who see our lapses? At times our failure to live as disciples of Jesus may keep others away from our Savior. How often have we heard that we are hypocrites who carouse and drink to excess on Saturday night and then show up in church with a hangover on Sunday? Those who see such behavior wonder because we have polluted the Christian confession of our lips with the confession of our actions. We place a barrier for non-Christians to overcome before they are ready to listen to the gospel and our witness.

And there's more. What we do affects those close to us: our families, our coworkers, and our fellow believers. And always, with every sin, we do not follow the will of our Savior. With each step we take along the path of sins of

the flesh, we abandon the Christian way and chart a path away from Jesus. Yet as part of his family—his children by faith—we turn to him with shame and regret to beg for forgiveness: “Lord, have mercy.”

The Christian way is a way of repentance. We are children of God through Jesus, and yet we still are troubled by our sinful nature along our journey to heaven. So we find it necessary to repent often. We turn away from our failures and beg for forgiveness. In his love for us, Jesus forgives. With that forgiveness, he gives us the will and ability to do his good pleasure (cf. Philippians 2:13).

The Christian way is a way of repentance, but it is also a way of choices. Once we are free in Christ, we have a new spirit that wants to choose the fruits of the Spirit. Then three factors become important. First, we clarify what Jesus wants from us; his commands are always intended for our own good. Second, we think what our choices will mean for us personally, considering the consequences we may face because of our disobedience. Third, we think what our behavior also will mean to others—our spouses, our children, our fellow believers in Christ, and those who do not yet know Jesus. Then, by God's gracious power, we choose the fruits of the Spirit and stay on the narrow way that leads us home.

We are different in this world. We walk in the Spirit and turn away from the vices of the sinful nature. Jesus himself encourages us, “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

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

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

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



AMBASSADORS

LET THEM SEE JESUS



Providing a witnessing support system

Mark J. Cares

After a day of witnessing, we heard comments like these: “My favorite part of the week was the nightly debrief. Not only did we hear some neat stories, we also discussed how to respond in various situations.” And, “I was dragging by the end of the day because I didn’t get into many in-depth conversations. But it was so refreshing to hear some of the wonderful experiences others had.” Gathering together to debrief provided everyone with encouragement, support, and advice. These sessions were great ways to cap off each day.

“I don’t know if I could have done it without your ongoing support and advice. Honestly, I doubt if I would have even tried.” We hear such comments regularly from people who participate in our program of witnessing to Mormon missionaries called “Please Open the Door.” Participants can request a mentor who communicates with them regularly to review their previous visit and plan the next visit.

Our ministry, Truth in Love Ministry, is dedicated to reaching out to Mormons. A large part of what we do is supporting Christians around the world who are sharing their faith with Mormons. This ongoing support is one of the keys to

our having helped thousands of Christians get excited about witnessing—and not just to Mormons either.

Unfortunately, such support systems for those sharing their faith are missing in many congregations. Members are encouraged to witness. Classes are taught on how to witness. But far too often it ends there. Many times, people are left to put their training into practice all on their own.

In most important endeavors, receiving feedback and support is critical to success. Witnessing is no exception. Not only did Jesus send out his disciples two by two, but when they returned, he also gathered them together to talk about their experiences.

WITNESSING FEEDBACK AND SUPPORT

The two ways our ministry furnishes support could easily be adapted to a congregational setting.

Each year Truth in Love Ministry sponsors a mission trip for people to participate in door-to-door outreach to Mormons. Every night there is a debrief session of the day’s witnessing opportunities. This session could be duplicated in a congregation by forming an ongoing witnessing support group. Such a group works best if each attendee is presently witnessing or is intending to begin witnessing in the near future. It also works best if the

group meets at least twice a month.

Meetings can look something like this: Begin with a half-hour Bible study about witnessing. Then have each person report on his or her witnessing activity over the past couple of weeks. People can share ideas that worked or ask for suggestions on how to do something differently.

Before moving on to the next person, take time to pray for both the witness and the people to whom he or she is witnessing. Talk about creating intimacy and giving support! Those prayers often aren’t just onetime occurrences. Frequently people will continue to pray for every person in the coming week. I have seen more than one person leave such a meeting with a notebook filled with prayer requests.

Of course, there will be times when some people fail to witness at all. That won’t be a problem if a climate of loving accountability exists. Instead of feeling guilty, they will leave encouraged to witness in the next week. In fact, when someone fails, isn’t loving accountability the secret to success for many support groups?

Over a period of time, as group members study the Bible from an outreach perspective and discuss various scenarios and individuals, they become increasingly confident and excited to share their faith.





WHAT'S YOUR STORY

How have you shared Jesus? Every encounter is different, and we want to hear from you. E-mail responses to fic@wels.net with the subject line: "How I shared Jesus." Include your name, congregation, and contact information. Questions? Call 414-256-3231.

And their excitement is infectious. Some congregations have started with one small group, only to have it multiply. Eventually, the entire congregation becomes much more outreach focused.

MENTORING

Another way to provide witnessing support is to offer a mentoring system. One key is having mentors with some experience in witnessing. They surely don't have to be experts, but they need to have some practical experience.

The other key is supplying sufficient resources. In our case, we created an entire website with resources dedicated to witnessing to Mormon missionaries. Many resources would work in a congregational setting.

You can imagine that many people are pretty nervous as they begin witnessing to Mormon missionaries. This is especially true because we tell people not to wait until the missionaries knock on their door. Instead, we have them contact the Mormon church and request a visit by the missionaries. This means a mentor frequently needs to do a lot of encouraging just to have people take that first step of requesting a visit.

In addition, most people, in the beginning, need detailed instructions. What to expect when the missionaries come, what to talk about, and how to begin establishing a relationship with them

are all things people question. So the second thing a mentor does is remove many of the unknowns. The mentor explains what points the missionaries most likely will make and how people can respond. We even go so far as to talk about such things as where you want the missionaries to sit, what Bible translation to use, how to address them, etc. The more specific the instructions, the more a person's nerves are calmed.

After the first visit, the mentor continues to talk with the witnesses. The mentor asks them to send a written summary of the meeting. This is a tremendous help when they chat again by phone or video-conference. The mentor can ask questions for clarification and discuss any questions they might have. After they have reviewed the previous meeting, they then plan the witness for the next meeting. Often the mentor can point witnesses to a specific article on the website detailing how to use a specific passage and approach. The mentor ends the call with a prayer for both the mentee and the missionaries.

It's not difficult to see how this can work in a congregation—and how mentors will face many of the same obstacles. Mentors may first have to encourage people to witness and then give them detailed instructions on how to witness—especially in the beginning of the process. But it's also easy

to see how momentum and excitement can quickly spread throughout the congregation.

Why does God leave people on earth after he brings them to faith? The Bible is pretty clear. Christians are the light of the world and the salt of the earth. We are his ambassadors, proclaiming the tremendous news that eternal life is his gift to us through Jesus Christ. God keeps us on earth so we can go and make disciples of all nations.

In this series we have looked at many different aspects of the wonderful mission Christ has entrusted to us. Each aspect is important. But don't short-change the importance of building a support system for witnessing. It is well worth it to take the time and make the effort to give adequate support to one another as we share the good news.

May God richly bless you as you serve as his ambassadors.

Mark Cares, president of Truth in Love Ministry, is a member at Messiah, Nampa, Idaho.

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

Learn more about Truth in Love Ministry at tilm.org.





For the Lord's GLORY

The new WELS hymnal is moving into production.

Michael D. Schultz

Something had been going on in Israel. It was no small thing.

A NOBLE CAUSE

King David established a huge endowment fund with his own money to build it. Why? Why did he invite the citizens of his kingdom to make their own generous donations to this temple construction fund? Why did he painstakingly make all the arrangements for a massive construction project he would never use? Why did David's son Solomon dive into the task of constructing the temple—an undertaking so expansive that 150,000 foreigners living in Israel were enlisted to do manual labor, while 3,600 more foreigners served as their foremen? Why did he devote seven years to raising this magnificent edifice that would come to be regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world? Why did he see to it that there were tons and tons of gold for the unimaginably lavish overlays?

He overlaid the inside with pure gold. He paneled the main hall with juniper and covered it with fine gold and decorated it with palm tree and chain designs. . . . He overlaid the ceiling beams,

doorframes, walls and doors of the temple with gold, and he carved cherubim on the walls. He built the Most Holy Place, its length corresponding to the width of the temple—twenty cubits long and twenty cubits wide. He overlaid the inside with six hundred talents [about 21 tons] of fine gold. The gold nails weighed fifty shekels. He also overlaid the upper parts with gold. (2 Chronicles 3:4-9)

What accounts for such great devotion to such a noble cause? It's commonly called Solomon's temple, but it wasn't really Solomon's. From the earth beneath it to its highest pinnacle along with everything in between, the temple was the Lord's. The eternal God made himself known there as the God who would not only dwell with his people but who would deliver them from the curse of sin and the horror of hell. The temple was all for God—all about God. And God allowed his people to come there to learn about him, to be forgiven, to receive his blessing, and to honor and thank him with songs and psalms and prayers.

THE CAUSE CONTINUES

Something has been going on in our church body. It is no small thing.

Though the new hymnal project will never approach the scale of the temple project, there are similarities. For a total of seven years now, roughly a dozen committees of men and women have devoted themselves to a noble cause. They have worked to bring together texts, music, psalms, songs, rites, readings, commentaries, manuals, and technology, all aimed at one thing—directing our eyes of faith to the Lord of the church, Jesus Christ our Savior.

We're at the point where the majority of the research has been concluded. Hymns and psalms and rites are being laid out and so is the accompaniment music. A digital service builder program, capable of outputting high-quality service folders in minutes rather than hours, is being populated. Final chapters of manuals and commentaries are

being written. For the next couple years, the Hymnal Project committees will go back and forth with Northwestern Publishing House. No effort will be spared to make sure that proper nouns are capitalized, book titles italicized, and copyright holders recognized; to make sure that hymn number 430 is in fact followed by hymn number 431; to make sure that each note and syllable in the pew edition matches perfectly with its corresponding counterpart in the accompaniment edition.

CLOSER THAN EVER

I have a confession to make. I already have a few new favorites, a few new psalms, hymns, and ritual songs that I really like. Will they be your favorites? Maybe. Maybe not. But as I continue to see materials come together and turn pages one after the other, I often pause and think, "Hmm, that's going to be really nice."

What has been difficult is not being able to share any of those items quite yet. This has not been due to lack of requests. It has been wonderful to hear from pastors who would like to sample new liturgical materials at their conference worship services. It has been encouraging to hear from directors who would like to take their choirs through new psalms or hymns. It has been tremendous to hear from organists and keyboardists who are asking if they can get early copies of accompaniment materials so they can learn the new music and be ready to hit the ground running when the new hymnal and all its auxiliary resources launch, God-willing, in Advent of 2021. But the materials are not quite ready for prime time. All of that proofreading and final formatting has yet to be done. All of the important copyright contracts and permissions have yet to be completed.

We are now, however, closer than ever to the time when talking about a new hymnal will turn into holding a new hymnal. Additionally, there are no less than 17 actual books being produced, along with 3 digital products. I am excited about all of these items.

THE TRUE GLORY OF THIS PROJECT

But just as the temple was certainly not Solomon's, so the hymnal is certainly neither mine nor any committee's. The image that will grace the cover of all those books and all the digital resources is one that points eyes of faith to the Lord of the church, Jesus Christ our Savior.

It was tempting to drop a few hymn titles into this article and to talk about a few of those new, personal favorites. That day will come. For now, though, as the compilation of resources concludes and the production of resources commences, it's time to be grateful for the team effort that has brought us to this point. It's time to start letting congregations know the specifics of how they can plan for new worship materials. (Publication of a preview in early 2020 will help with that.) More than anything else, though, it's time to remember what it's all about.

The glory of the new temple in Jerusalem came from our glorious Father in heaven, who met his people there and blessed them through the promise that his Son would bear their punishment and seat them on thrones in his eternal kingdom. New hymnal materials are not being produced so that we can get more songs out there that people will really like or that will somehow make church more enjoyable. Jesus never spoke very highly of expending effort or energy just to please people. He did speak very highly of directing all honor to God and of proclaiming God's good news of forgiveness and life everlasting to all who will hear it.

For new hymnal materials to do that would be truly golden. I am excited to know that they will.

Michael Schultz, director of the WELS Hymnal Project, is a member at Trinity, Waukesha, Wisconsin.

This is the first article in a three-part series on the new hymnal. Look for the next article on hymns in December.

Learn more about the WELS Hymnal Project at welshymnal.com.

Our lives here
on earth are our
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Get busy living

Andrew C. Schroer

In the 1994 movie *The Shawshank Redemption*, Tim Robbins played Andy Dufresne, a quiet banker wrongfully accused and convicted of killing his wife. After 20 years in Shawshank Prison, Dufresne had enough. In one of the most dramatic scenes of the movie, he turns to his friend Red and in exasperation says, “I guess it comes down to a simple choice, really—get busy living or get busy dying.”

Those words often echo in my head and heart as I teach weekly Bible studies in our local nursing homes. Sadly, when many people move into the nursing home, they get busy dying. They give up. They feel like they have nothing left to give or contribute, so they sit sadly in their wheelchairs and rooms, waiting to die.

Again and again, I find myself taking them back to one particular verse from the Bible: “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

The apostle Paul wrote those words as he sat in the city of Rome, chained to a Roman soldier, awaiting his trial before the Roman Emperor. At the time, Paul didn’t know if he would be set free or put to death. Yet Paul writes it was actually a win/win situation. If he was set free, he would be able to share the good news of God’s love with more people. If they put him to death, even better. He would go to the heaven Jesus had won for him.

For Paul, to live was Christ and to die was gain. He couldn’t lose.

Usually as a preacher, I focus on the second part of that verse—that “to die is gain.” For those who believe in Jesus, we know that when we die, God will give us a home in heaven that is way better than anything we could ever experience here on earth.

But when I am at the nursing home, many of the people tell me they don’t want to be here anymore. They want to go to heaven, but God just won’t take them. That’s when

I have to remind them of the first part of the verse—that “to live is Christ.” In other words, if we are here, it means God still has things for us to do.

Our lives here on earth are our opportunities to live for Christ, who lived and died for us. Every life has a purpose and a meaning. The problem is that when we can’t do the things we used to be able to do—when we can’t do the things we want to do—the devil tries to convince us that we can’t do anything, or at least anything worthwhile.

The truth is that even when we can’t do what we used to be able to do, even when we are living in a nursing home, confined to a wheelchair, or bedridden, life still has purpose and meaning. God still has things for us to do.

We can be an example of faith and love to those around us. We can tell other people of God’s love. And if we can do nothing else, we can pray. That seems so insignificant, and yet prayer can move mountains, as Jesus promised. It shouldn’t take long to think of someone who needs our prayers.

Then one day, we will die. When we do, through faith in Jesus, we will receive a home in the happiness of heaven. That is better by far.

But we aren’t dead yet. So get busy living.

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



A GOSPEL-FILLED LIFE

Devotional development

Jeffrey D. Enderle

A slight sadness seeps into my psyche every autumn. For some reason, I can't help looking ahead and grieving the loss of the magnificent scenery and pleasant temperatures. While I should be content with evening walks requiring only a light jacket, my mind automatically begins to wander. Soon it will be cold. Soon after, it will grow colder still. Stormy and unpredictable seasons loom in the distance. Almost an entire year will pass before comfortable conditions make another migration, making the outdoors hospitable again.

Some healthy habits develop over years of hard work and attention. We fall into some negative attitudes, on the other hand, without any intentional efforts.

DISPELLING NEGATIVE TENDENCIES

In his short letter giving simple instructions on prayer to his friend Peter the Barber, Martin Luther acknowledged there were times when his life became "cool and joyless." On those occasions, he grabbed his book of Psalms or recalled familiar sections of Scripture and spent quiet time alone in meditation and prayer. Negative tendencies didn't evaporate on their own. God's powerful Word was required to address and combat doubts and disillusionment.

Work turns monotonous. Family members fling constant conflict and crisis our way. Hobbies and leisure lose their satisfaction. Religious routines feel robotic in their repetitions. Life's less-than-perfect circumstances make life less joyful. Plans of future greatness get grounded in ordinary turbulence. Things of this life won't provide the sense of contentment we think they should. They can't. They aren't designed to do what only God can do.

Augustine was an early Christian theologian who had a profound influence on Martin Luther. In prayer, Augustine acknowledged the soul's need for the peace that only God can give: "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you" (*Confessions* 1.1.1). Augustine's insight suggests that we might develop habits that reflect the necessity of our resting in God himself.

Try reading through Psalms 111–118 regularly. Praise in these psalms can profoundly impact believers. Praise to God isn't just based on emotions welling up inside believers but primarily flows from a reflection of God's acts of rescue for his people. Praise doesn't just depend on what we think about God but expresses our joy in God's grace at work in our lives.

DEVELOPING HEALTHY HABITS

Let's see how this could benefit be-

lievers. Martin Luther advocated devotional habits that turned to God's Word regularly and let "prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night" (*A Simple Way to Pray*). When we turn to God soon after waking, we can begin our day remembering we are baptized children of God. Before we face stresses and responsibilities, we can find peace in God's work claiming us as his own. As we retire for the night, we can unburden the fear of our failures with confidence in his grace. We can rest, recognizing his blessings to us throughout the day.

It takes time and effort to develop healthy habits. Following natural instincts in our physical lives is rarely the best policy. God's people have a more refreshing motivation to develop routines revolving around God's Word rather than the return of autumnal glories. With each morsel of God's Word, God grows in us a dawning awareness of the greatness of our Savior. By Scripture and thankful response in prayer, the Holy Spirit develops in us an awe for God's grace at work in our lives.

Contributing editor Jeffrey Enderle is pastor at Christ the Rock, Farmington, New Mexico.

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



I'm glad I can
leave the theater
praising the One
who has really
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and darkness.
With him, I can
face life's trials.

The Avengers and two lions

Captain America; Thor; Iron Man; and of course, Thanos. Along with a host of other comic book heroes and villains, they have helped Marvel create one of the most successful and lucrative series of films. This year's film, *Avengers: Endgame*, with a production budget of \$356 million, has taken in over \$900 million. How many saw it is just a guess. When I finally went to see it, I paid \$7—I get a senior discount—and there were only three of us in the theater.

My take on the movie is a bit different from most. I was intrigued by the Thanos character. His name, Thanos, might be a shortened version of the Greek word for “death,” *thanatos*. That fits him since he plans to destroy enough humans to create a more reasonable, sustainable world.

The Avengers oppose him and use their power to keep him from destroying so many people. After their defeat in *Infinity War*, the Avengers create a new strategy to overcome Thanos, the dispenser of death. Spoiler alert: One of the Avengers, Iron Man, succeeds in destroying death itself but in the process must die. *Avengers: Endgame* concludes with his funeral.

It isn't hard to see where I'm going. Almost all those who saw the movie have a yearning for a happy ending where all things lead to the hope of a better world and a brighter future. They also know the real world and see that it is in need of some kind of correction. But this movie is entertainment and not the real world. Once we leave the screen behind and come out of the theater, we step back into the world that hasn't changed and still brings pain, misery, and heartache.

We need these diversions. I know I do. The Avengers movies are only the latest versions that give us an escape from

the pressing burden of our own life's challenges and difficulties. We watch the news and are acutely aware of the surrounding uncertainty of politics, finances, and conflict around the world. With entertainment, we can forget about life for a while.

What struck me about this particular distraction was the mythology it created. Death is defeated, but only digitally—not really. Ah, most viewers sigh, if it were only true. But I know that death actually has been defeated. Unfortunately, so many of those who left the theaters haven't read about the real victory over death. They are left with only the illusion of victory and triumph.

It is difficult for Christians to get an audience for the message of Christ's victory over sin, death, and the forces of darkness. Most people do not have time for the gospel or simply dismiss it as irrelevant for their busy lives. C. S. Lewis tried to get an audience when he created Aslan, a fictional lion, who died and rose again in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* from The Chronicles of Narnia series. Aslan is the king of beasts, a lion of great power and wisdom. Lewis patterned his lion, in some ways, after the Lion of Judah (Revelation 5:5).

This Lion of Judah, we know, is the Root of David, King of kings, and our Savior. He has triumphed over all that oppresses God's people. In the new song that the choirs of heaven sing, they acclaim him worthy “for [he was] slain, and by [his] blood [he] ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (5:9, English Standard Version).

I'm glad I can leave the theater praising the One who has really overcome death and darkness. With him, I can face life's trials. I wish more knew of him and could also praise him.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

COMFORT IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT: REVELATION 21 TO 22:5

Timothy J. Westendorf

Blessed with milk and honey. A sight that refreshes. Full of unknown joy. Radiant in glory. Bliss beyond compare. Jubilant with song. Bright with angels. Serene daylight. Rich, green pasture.

Wow! That sounds wonderful, doesn't it? Those are some of the words and phrases used by 12th-century monk Bernard of Cluny in his hymn "Jerusalem the Golden" to describe the eternal home of rest that awaits God's redeemed children. His words are extremely comforting and encouraging for the church militant, which is so often weary and oppressed in this world. The words seem to be drawn, at least in part, from Revelation 21–22:5.

NEW HEAVEN AND EARTH

After writing of the final judgment of Satan and the world, John witnesses a breathtaking and glorious scene. He sees a new heaven and a new earth in place of the familiar ones.

We are not given details about how this will happen and what, exactly, this new heaven and earth will look like. However, there are some important things to note. God himself is there, dwelling with his people in the most complete and permanent way. Sin and its effects are gone. Sighing, crying, and dying are things of the past and not found there.

This new home with all the peace and plenty is a free gift, given as an inheritance by the Lord to his believing and victorious children in Christ.

NEW JERUSALEM

John sees something else (v. 2). It is "the Holy City, the new Jerusalem."

What or, more to the point, who is the new Jerusalem? While it is quite natural to equate Jerusalem with a place where the saints dwell, a careful reading of this chapter (and Galatians 4:21–31) indicates that the new Jerusalem is a name for the saints themselves. It's personal.

This is especially evident when that Holy City is referred to as the Lamb's beautifully dressed bride in several places. Wedding and marriage imagery are used to describe the Lord's covenant people in both the Old and New Testaments. The repeated use of the number 12 (symbolizing all believers in Christ) and its multiples is another indication that here John sees the church triumphant. Her sparkling and stunning beauty is given to her by God himself through her relationship with Jesus. The Lord is fully and constantly present with his people there. They have no need for a special place of worship (temple) or any outside sources of light (sun, moon, lamps). His special and intimate presence in the city makes the whole

place one of worship and light. Those who dwell there are completely safe and secure. No enemies can ever enter.

The vision continues into the next chapter with a scene that reminds us of the Garden of Eden. Paradise is fully and wonderfully restored. God is the fountain of life and source of light for his people. They are able to see him clearly and serve him fully. They live and reign with him forevermore. It's the way it's supposed to be—the way it will one day be.

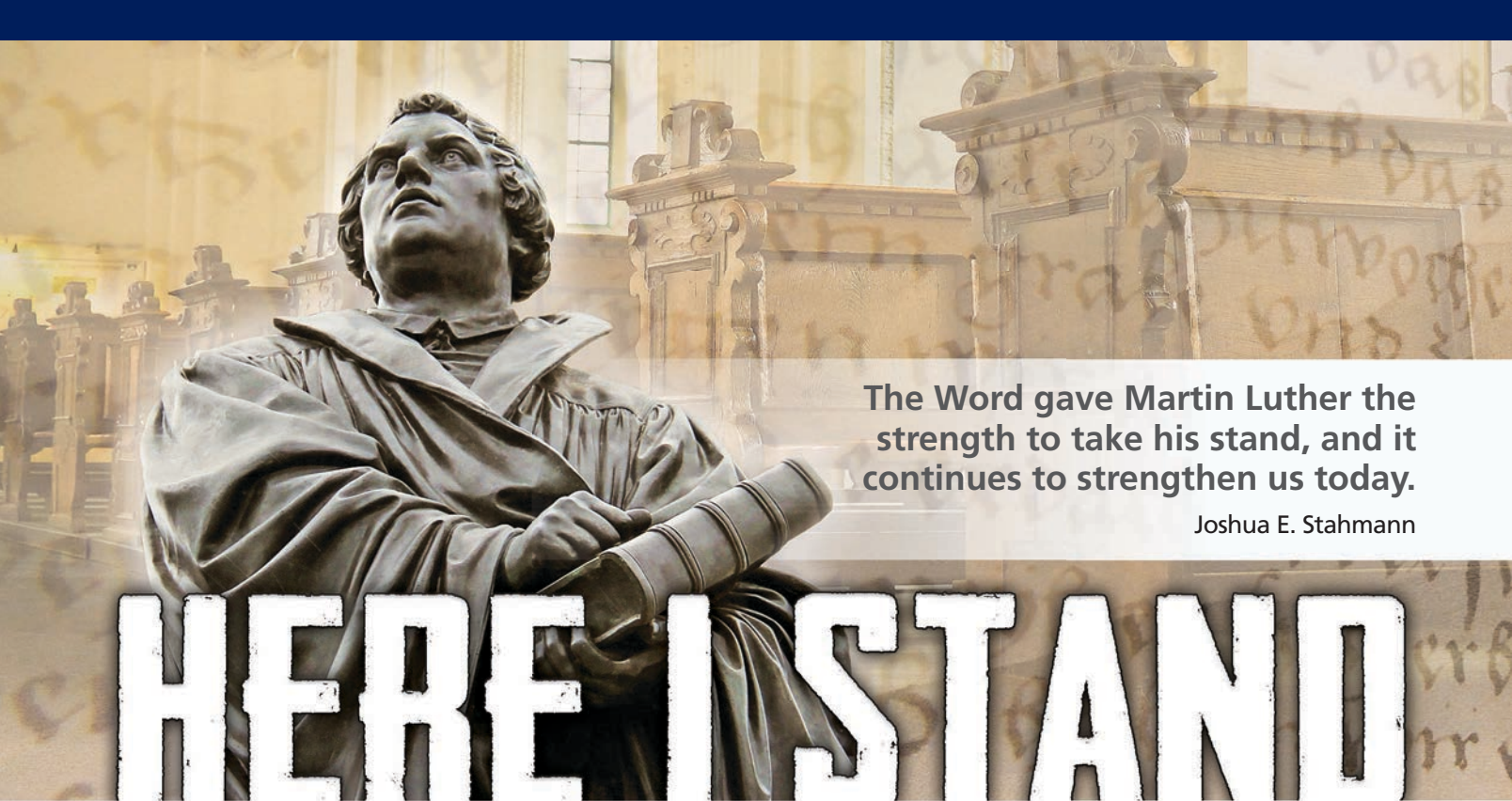
REFLECT ON REVELATION CHAPTERS 21–22:5

1. How might you use this section to encourage a Christian friend who is struggling in the fight of faith?
2. How will focusing on your identity in Christ (his beautiful bride, the new Jerusalem, the Holy City) help in your daily Christian living?

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



This is the 11th article in a 12-part series on the book of Revelation. Find the article and answers online after Oct. 5 at wels.net/forwardinchrist.



The Word gave Martin Luther the strength to take his stand, and it continues to strengthen us today.

Joshua E. Stahmann

HERE I STAND

“Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.”

My first memory of these rousing words from Martin Luther comes from a Reformation skit performed at church long ago. The Sunday school children acted out this famous scene of Luther standing up to Emperor Charles V. I was privileged to play Dr. Luther himself. I memorized and declared Luther’s words in front of the crowd as if I were the real Reformer (even though he probably didn’t actually dress in a brown bathrobe, like my costume). Though I was barely a teenager, the power of Luther’s conviction was obvious to me. He was willing to risk disgrace and death to stand up for God’s Word and its truth.

FILLED WITH SELF-DOUBT

That’s the image we usually have of Luther, isn’t it? Confident and articulate, fiery and full of conviction—as if Luther was born being certain of the truth of the gospel and ready to proclaim it. However, Luther’s confidence in God’s Word didn’t just happen overnight. A brief survey of Luther’s own descriptions of the early days of the Reformation shows a man who was wrestling with self-doubt and who might just have been willing to negotiate an end to his career as a reformer before it even started.

Luther states that in 1519 he actually had agreed to remain silent, as long as his opponents would also be silent. Two years later, he admits that he wondered how he alone could be right and all of the church leaders of his day be wrong. Had Luther backed down, he might be just a minor footnote in church history and the Reformation an unaccomplished dream.

It was not Luther who was strong. It was the Word itself.

STRENGTHENED BY THE WORD

What is it that strengthened and steeled Luther to take his stand? In his own words to the emperor, Luther said, “I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted. My conscience is captive to the Word of God.” It was the testimony of God that Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for all sins (1 John 2:2) that convinced Luther. It was the truth of Scripture that we are justified by God’s grace through the redeeming work of Christ Jesus (Romans 3:24) that galvanized him. And it was the declaration of God that there is no condemnation for anyone who is in Christ (Romans 8:1) that took Luther

captive, making him willing to die rather than deny God’s revealed truth.

As I recited Luther’s words decades ago, I think it’s fair to say that I wanted to be like him—strong, confident, and secure. However, what I realize now—better than I did then—is that such conviction of faith does not come from the strength of my own character or the power of my own effort. No, it is truly as God declares: “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17, Evangelical Heritage Version). It was not Luther who was strong. It was the Word itself, which strengthened him and strengthens me.

In that way, each of us is more like Luther than we might realize. We might be plagued by self-doubt, wishing that we were stronger in faith and frustrated that we’d rather shrink away from those who challenge us instead of declaring, “Here I stand.” At these times, remember that it is the Word that strengthens us and makes us stand. God’s clear and trustworthy promises of forgiveness and eternal life in Christ provided the backbone for Luther and the Reformation, and they do the same for us today.

Joshua Stahmann is pastor at Salem, Scottsdale, Arizona.