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FORWARD IN CHRIST

A LUTHERAN VOICE

CELEBRATING
100 YEARS



FINDING PURPOSE
ON CAMPUS

p. 10

TWO ON THE
FRONT LINE

p. 18

CAN WE BE
HYPOCRITES?

p. 28

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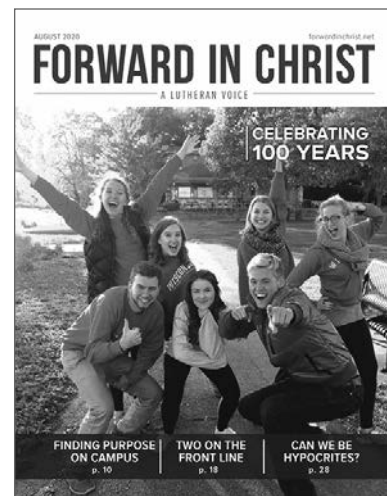


May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors;
may he never leave us nor forsake us. — 1 KINGS 8:57

WHAT'S INSIDE

The world is constantly changing. I don't know about you, but right when I think I have something figured out, it usually changes on me! What a blessing to know that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). His grace, mercy, and peace will always shine on us, no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in.

- God's grace certainly has been evident in WELS Campus Ministry for the past one hundred years. Celebrate with and learn more about campus ministry through photos (p. 4), testimonials (pp. 10-11), and an introduction to a campus Bible study leader at the University of Florida, Gainesville (p. 7).
- Even what we may call an "ordinary" life in this world, God's grace makes extraordinary. Read about how God's love for 104-year-old Vera Mueller made her life special (p. 12). Then remember that he has that same love for you.
- As Christians, we can let God's love for our changing world shine through our actions. In this issue, meet a husband and wife who both serve in the medical field and consider how their faith guides them in their vocation, especially during a pandemic (p. 18).



COVER PHOTO | Courtesy of Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, Madison, Wis.

Julie

Julie Wietzke

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pp. 7-9



pp. 12-13



p. 25

CONTENTS

4 THIS IS WELS

Photos from WELS members

5 DEVOTION

Clarity in life from closeness to death

Joel C. Seifert

6 PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Future unknown, future certain

Mark G. Schroeder

7 CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

An Army captain matures in his faith as he works to help other cadets grow in God's Word.

Gabriella Blauert

10 CELEBRATING 100 YEARS

The same Jesus proclaimed in Lutheran Campus Ministries one hundred years ago still receives the focus today.

Jonathan P. Bilitz

12 ONE ORDINARY LIFE

Christians often live quiet, humble lives, but their lives matter.

John A. Braun

14 Q&A

Does it really matter how God made the world?

David G. Scharf

15 BIBLE STUDY

God made the world

David G. Scharf

16 PARENT CONVERSATIONS

How should kids and parents prepare to go back to school?

Rachel Blum and Dan Nommensen

18 MY CHRISTIAN LIFE

A husband and wife's passion for serving leads them to the front lines of a pandemic.

Alicia A. Neumann

21 NEWS

What's happening in WELS

26 PLEASE EXPLAIN

How can I be a Christian when there are so many hypocrites in the church?

Caleb R. Bassett

28 THE VISIBLE CHURCH

At church we find believers because the Holy Spirit works through the gospel, but we also find hypocrites.

Peter L. Unnasch

30 A THOUGHT

Imperfect world, imperfect life

John A. Braun

31 BIBLE STUDY

The Book of James

Richard E. Lauersdorf

32 COMMUNITY

Notices and your opinions

34 EDITORIAL COMMENT

Friends are friends forever

Snowden G. Sims

36 BITTERSWEET

We come back to worship, but it's just not the same.

Andrew C. Schroer

ON THE COVER

The campus ministry at the University of Wisconsin–Madison is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. Campus ministry has changed dramatically in WELS since 1920, with hundreds of congregations now participating in campus ministry outreach across the United States and Canada. See how God has blessed this work on p. 10.



THIS IS WELS

WELS Campus Ministry is celebrating one hundred years of offering spiritual comfort, community, and encouragement to young adults.

1 | Fall outing for In Christ Alone: WELS Campus Ministry at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire

2 | Students from the University of Wisconsin–Madison attending the Lutheran Collegians' national convention in 1969

3 | Football party for the WELS Waukesha Campus Ministry at Carroll University, Waukesha, Wis.

4, 5 | Campus ministry group at the University of

Wisconsin–Whitewater in 1963—and today

6 | Back to school display for The Rock, WELS campus ministry at Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas

7 | Campus ministry meeting for the students of the University of Wisconsin–La Crosse, Western Technical College, and Viterbo University

SEE MORE AT forwardinchrist.net. Have a photo to share? Send it to ficsubmissions@wels.net or upload it at forwardinchrist.net/submit.



Clarity in life from closeness to death

“Show me, LORD, my life’s end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is” (Psalm 39:4).

Joel C. Seifert

“THIS JUST DOESN’T seem real.”

Have you heard people say that during the early months of the pandemic? It was odd for many people to watch the news in the early days of COVID-19. We saw the death toll rising, even if we didn’t know anyone who fell ill. We watched the job losses mount, but the people we knew could still work from home. We knew COVID-19 was out there, but maybe it didn’t feel real.

LOSING SIGHT OF DEATH

In some ways, for many people, that’s what is true of death itself. During the blessings of life, death can seem unreal.

We have the great blessings of nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and hospitals to care for our loved ones and us when illness strikes or death draws near. Most of us don’t know the difficult privilege of providing comfort and care for our loved ones on their death beds or caring for their bodies once they have gone. Death can seem far off. Unreal.

That’s a real danger because, of course, death is real. When we lose sight of that, it can be overwhelming when death eventually touches us. When death does not seem real, we lose sight of the truth that our lives are “fleeting” and “a mere handbreath” (v. 4,5), and we forget what our true priorities should be.

SEEING OUR REAL TREASURES

It seems King David wrote Psalm 39 in his latter years. He thought about his own coming death, and God inspired him to write this beautiful song about it. Psalm 39 was written to be sung in public worship and was preserved in Scripture to help us think about death too.

In this psalm, David shares how drawing near to death changed his perspective on life. His early focus on worldly wealth and success faded away. He saw that God’s forgiveness was his greatest treasure. He no longer valued temporary success but wanted to serve God in a way that would continue to bring blessings to those who came after him. “But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you. Save me from all my transgressions; do not make me the scorn of fools” (vv. 7,8).

In closeness to death, we too can see the real treasures in this life. That’s a blessing that God can give all of us at this time. Death seems to have drawn much closer to us than normal; it has dominated national news and



PHOTO | Lightstock

In closeness to death, we too can see the real treasures in this life.

private conversations. We could walk away from this time more committed to rejoicing in the passing stuff of this life. We could commit to catching up on the vacations we missed and refocusing our retirement funds. But instead, pray that God grants us a heart like David’s. See what truly matters in life. Use this as a reminder to share your faith with your friends. Call your wandering children and urge them to come to church with you. Use your time and treasures to build up strong congregations that can share God’s Word for generations to come. And above all, rejoice in your forgiveness. God has shown us his great mercy and will shower us with his love forever.

Isn’t that why God preserved this song for us? It’s so that we don’t have to wait for a brush with death. We can learn these lessons now and live knowing that it’s not just death that’s real. Our home in heaven is too.



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

Future unknown, future certain

Earlier this year, I was asked to make a presentation on the topic, “What will the Wisconsin Synod look like one hundred years from now?” It was a daunting assignment because the details of the future are hidden from us and known only to God.

As I considered the topic, I wondered, *What if Gustav Bergemann, the synod president in 1920, had been asked, “What will the synod look like in the year 2020?” How would he have answered?*

Only two years before 1920, the “war to end all wars” had ended. Could President Bergemann have predicted that less than 20 years later another devastating war would engulf the entire world, followed by wars in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan? President Bergemann was serving at the beginning of what was called the “Roaring Twenties,” a time of unprecedented wealth and prosperity. Could he have known that within a decade, markets would crash and the Great Depression would create hardship, poverty, and challenges for our synod and its congregations?

Could President Bergemann have dreamed of interstate highways, jet planes, or a man setting foot on the moon? What about the advances in medicine that would improve the nation’s health and prolong lifespans? Having just experienced the worldwide Spanish flu epidemic, could he have contemplated that one hundred years later another virus would change the world in only a few weeks? Could he have envisioned the baby boom, women’s liberation, gay marriage, abortion—and how all of those things would affect the ministry of the synod? Television, cell phones, computers, and the internet were not things he could have foreseen.

Could he have even dreamed that only four decades later his synod would sever fellowship with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod for doctrinal reasons? Could he have imagined that our Midwestern, primarily German, synod would expand to have congregations in nearly every state? How could he have known that, instead of having a single world mission field in Apacheland, WELS would be proclaiming the gospel in dozens of countries around the world?

As we look ahead to the next one hundred years, we have no way of knowing what events will affect the synod and its mission. But there are some things we can know about the future. We know that God’s church will struggle against the forces of evil in this dark world, with attacks coming from a hostile culture and even from erring teachers within the church. It may at times even appear as if Satan is winning. But we know that no matter what events shape the next century and impact our synod, God will preserve his church, and the gospel will be proclaimed until Jesus returns. Even though the details of the future remain hidden from us, those unbreakable promises of God fill us with a sure and certain hope.

So we head into the future with eyes focused not on unknown events but on God’s Word and promises. We hold firmly to the truths of Scripture. We trust in the power of the gospel. We stand where Luther stood on grace and faith alone. We commit ourselves to passing on God’s truth to the next generations. And we recommit ourselves—as individuals, as congregations, and as a synod—to the mission that God has called us to carry out, trusting that he will bless us in that work.



Mark G. Schroeder | WELS President



PHOTO | Mel Anne Designs

CONFESSIONS *of faith*

An Army captain matures in his faith as he works to help other cadets grow in their understanding of God's Word. | Gabriella Blauert

PHOTO | Lightstock

CAPTAIN KENT GAVIN opens his laptop to Zoom, the video chat application. It's 8:30 A.M., and the other members of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) Bible study he leads are smiling back at him. Just because the group can't meet in person at their usual hangout—Pascal's Coffeehouse on the University of Florida's campus—doesn't mean they can't still join in the Word together.

"This Bible study is an important outlet for these cadets to come together and grow stronger in Christ, no matter what is happening in life," Gavin says.

GROWING IN FAITH

The ROTC Bible study started in the fall of August 2018 when Gavin asked the group of cadets he teaches at the University of Florida if they wanted to start a small group.

This was an opportunity Gavin had long prayed about. He had witnessed his own faith grow through a Bible study when he attended the University of Mississippi. His mentor Mike Harlow, the recruiting officer of his school's ROTC program, showed him "the power Jesus can provide."



"I was living a lukewarm life before my senior year of college when Mike spoke to me about my faith," Gavin recalls. Gavin grew in his faith, and he hoped he could help others grow in Christ's love for them.

What started as a small group of four people grew to about a dozen individuals who consistently attended each week. It was the first organized Bible study for this ROTC group and attracted a variety of people with different backgrounds and perspectives.

Gavin himself grew up in a household that occasionally went to church but saw it more as an event to attend. His father was raised as a Catholic, but his mother was agnostic. As a child, Gavin and his family even attended a Lutheran church, but Gavin's faith in God was limited, "lukewarm" as he described it.

It wasn't until that transformational period in his senior year of college that his faith began to deepen and grow. Later that same year, he met his future wife, Allison, who became an integral part in his growth as a Christian.

As he launched this Bible study, Gavin was also becoming a member



The ROTC Bible study group from the University of Florida, Gainesville. Kent and Allison Gavin and their son, Reece.

at Zion, Gainesville, Fla. He and Allison discovered the congregation through Allison's aunt and uncle who attended Zion in the 1980s. After they attended a service at Zion, they immediately fell in love with the congregation.

"I've never felt a connection to a church before like I do at Zion," Gavin says. Both found themselves growing in their faith through their worship at Zion.

SHARING INSIGHTS

In the spring of 2019, Gavin officially made his ROTC Bible study a part of the college ministry at Zion. Brian Wrobel, pastor at Zion, helped with the Bible study. He had previous experience with college ministry through Zion's other college Bible study—Zion U. "Pastor Wrobel has been an absolute example of servant leadership," says Gavin. "I can always go to him for more context or direction."

The Holy Spirit has worked through Zion's ROTC Bible study to strengthen and uplift everyone's faith in different ways.

Wrobel loves to sit in on the Bible study to learn more about the military perspective and to engage in new points of view. Each week provides what he calls "aha moments," where he listens to the insights that students find in the Word. "It's given me a new appreciation for being a Lutheran and being in God's Word," says Wrobel. "They're not afraid to ask hard questions. The students in these Bible studies are some of the most theologically sound people in our congregation."

Three of the Bible study attendees have now gone through Zion's Bible Information Class. One has joined the church as a member.

Fredrico Frech, a recent University of Florida graduate, has been a part of the group since its inception and has seen his life change in many ways through it. For him, the Bible study serves as a "restart every week" to get him focused on what's important.

"Being a part of the ROTC and being a college student, you get sidetracked and can often forget about your faith," Frech says. "But this Bible study puts things into perspective for me."

As for Gavin, he's seen his evangelism and outreach skills grow. "I've really grown in my ability to share my faith with others in the army," he says. "I'm definitely more cognizant of it now as I perform my day-to-day functions."

LEARN MORE

The campus ministry at the University of Florida, Gainesville, is one of hundreds of WELS campus ministries in the United States and Canada. WELS Campus Ministry is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. Learn more about WELS Campus Ministry, including how Zion is reaching out to college students in Gainesville, in this month's edition of *WELS Connection*.

You can also see and hear Brian Wrobel, Kent Gavin, and students at the University of Florida, Gainesville, discuss campus ministry in a recent Taste and See Missions' presentation at welstasteandsee.com/presentations.



Right now, the group is taking a topical approach to their Bible study, studying the core army leadership competencies and how Christians can bring their unique understanding to the topic. Frech has enjoyed the real-life applications of this recent study. “The military is all about leadership,” he says. “What better way is there to learn about leadership than through the best leaders in the world, the leaders in the Bible?”

One of the most recent themes in this study centered on resiliency. The topic resonates on multiple levels for those in the ROTC group. For example, how does the resiliency of someone serving their country in a foreign land compare to Paul ministering to those in different countries? Also what do we need as Christians to be resilient right now during the pandemic? We all need the steady hand of God’s care and love as we face all kinds of changes and adapt to them. The Lord has provided a way for the group to meet virtually and continue sharing their faith.

MINISTERING TO FUTURE CADETS

Change is coming in another way for this Bible study. Gavin will be moving on to his next level of education in the army in the upcoming months. So now he prays for the Bible study’s new leader and the future of this group. He knows that God will provide just what the small group needs to continue ministering to future cadets and prays that Zion and the ROTC group will be resilient in facing the changes.

“The army profession is more than a job,” Gavin says. “It’s part of your life. We spend a tremendous amount of time focusing on our soldiers. The struggle is to balance your Christian values with your army values. But I think this Bible study has helped us find how we can apply our Christian life to our profession.”

As these cadets continue to grow in their faith, Gavin prays for one more thing: “I continue to pray that God will bless this Bible study as an outlet for the cadets to share their faith.”



Gabriella Blauert is a member at Shepherd of Peace, Powell, Ohio.

HOSTING A *virtual* BIBLE STUDY

Today’s technology offers multiple opportunities for people to meet when they can’t gather together in person. Here are some tips for starting a virtual group:

- Pick a video chat platform to host the study on each week. Popular ones include Zoom, Google Hangouts, and Microsoft Teams.
- Make sure everyone is familiar with the technology beforehand, including yourself. Engage in practice sessions before your first Bible study if you are the leader to get acquainted with the video chat platform. Then send out access instructions to those who will be attending with the link or credentials they’ll need to access the chat. It’s also helpful to send out tutorials on webcam and microphone use.
- Begin your study with prayer, asking the Lord to help you focus on Jesus, the center of our Christian faith.
- “Break the ice” during the first session to get people used to talking virtually. Ask fun icebreaker questions and encourage people to engage.
- Utilize breakout rooms if they’re available on your platform of choice. Breakout rooms allow the host of the Bible study to send certain people into separate video chat rooms. This is a great opportunity for deeper discussion and allows others to get to know each other better separate from the big group.



Kent Gavin getting ready to host a virtual Bible study.

LEARN MORE AT ➤ welstech.wels.net/tag/bible-study
about hosting a virtual Bible study.



CELEBRATING 100 YEARS

The same Jesus proclaimed in Lutheran Campus Ministries one hundred years ago still receives the focus today. | Jonathan P. Bilitz

A PICTURE ON the TODAY Show or the local news. A letter from the President. A party thrown by friends and relatives. Celebrating a 100th birthday is a blessed event!

OUR CHANGING WORLD

Reaching the century mark is also a cause for reflection. Consider what has happened in our country in the last one hundred years.

In 1920, World War I was in the rear-view mirror. A person may have traveled more frequently by horse and buggy rather than automobile. Flying was still considered an indulgence rather than a necessity. Communication was by letter or telegram. Most homes did not have phones. Radios began to bring the world into living rooms. Very few homes had bathtubs.

Fast forward through the next century. Wars hit the country hard. World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Cold War, the War on Terror. The Great Depression replaced the Roaring Twenties. When prosperity returned, televisions became more common in homes. More families owned cars. Telephone communication increased. Microwave ovens made cooking quicker. Computer technology exploded. Mobile phones became cell phones became smart phones. These developments only scratch

the surface of all the changes that have happened since 1920.

Campus ministry is turning 100 this year. Can you imagine the changes that have occurred? Think back to what it must have been like in 1920. Meetings or Bible studies were not announced on social media. There were no copy machines to print material. The fountain pen was new. Girls wore dresses. The guys donned a suit coat (maybe with a top hat!). Wrapping our heads around all the changes is a daunting task!

OUR UNCHANGING JESUS

Have you noticed the word most frequently used so far in this article? **CHANGE!** So many changes have happened, including in Campus Ministry.

Standing in stark contrast to all the changes is the one thing that has remained the same: Jesus. The same Jesus proclaimed in Lutheran Campus Ministries one hundred years ago still receives the focus today. The writer to the Hebrews says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (13:8). Jesus has remained at the center of the message of Campus Ministry because he never changes. The promises found in God's Word give hope, strength, and purpose to college students today in the same way they did

one hundred years ago. Students still gather around the Word of God for comfort and peace as they encourage one another in the faith.

Because Jesus never changes, our message stays the same. Forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation are found in Jesus and in Jesus alone. Jesus' love for us is a past, present, and future reality that will never change, even when so much around us does. That message has resonated with thousands of college students in Lutheran Campus Ministry over the last century.

We have so much to be thankful for. Faithful pastors, youth leaders, and dedicated congregations have made serving students a priority. Students, past and present, have made and continue to make their faith life important during their college years. And God has blessed Campus Ministry with a changeless message through changing times.

We pray that God will continue to bless college students through Campus Ministry for another one hundred years (or more!), until Jesus comes to take us home.



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

We asked college students and alumni to share how their college experience is or was impacted by campus ministry. Here's what they had to say:



CHRISTIAN FAMILY

"My campus ministry helped me find my Christian family on campus. It is a safe place where I am always welcomed and loved."

—Avianna Holmes, junior at the University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point

"It helped me remember that I am not alone attending a public university as a young Christian."

—Emily Scharenbroch, 2020 graduate of the University of Wisconsin—La Crosse

"I know that through every tough obstacle in life, I have a group behind me that will pray and support me along the way, just as I will for each individual in campus ministry."

—Hailey Russ, sophomore at Carroll University, Waukesha, Wis.



FAITH ENCOURAGER

"Campus ministry will always be something I can be a part of. I will never be excluded; I will never be looked down upon because the center of campus ministry is Christ."

—David Burgess, junior at Carroll University, Waukesha, Wis.

"We are a community of people praising God and eating pizza together. I don't know what I would do without the people I've met through campus ministry. . . . it's the reason I was confirmed WELS last year. . . . Students are greeted with temptation every day in college, and campus ministry helps me not to give in to those temptations. I never had a reason to care about myself before I was saved. Thanks to campus ministry, I have completely changed my act."

—Anonymous

"It makes me feel confident and safe. No matter what my college experience throws my way, I have God on my side."

—Kirsten Storhoff, junior at the University of Wisconsin—Madison

"It helped me find and put God first in my life again!"

—Morgan Busack, senior at South Dakota State University, Brookings

"Regardless of the type of week I was having, spending time with campus ministry gave me the comforting reminder of God's plan and his love for me."

—Danielle Voss, 2019 graduate of the University of Wisconsin—Madison



SAFE HAVEN

"There are a lot of buildings in the city, but Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel was the only one where the stressors didn't really break through the walls. They didn't go away, but it was easier to deal with them because of the constant reminder of God's presence and power."

—Bradley Meyer, 2018 graduate of the University of Wisconsin—Madison

"It has become a second home and has taught me that church is not a place I just go to on Sunday."

—Elizabeth Somsen, senior at the University of Wisconsin—Madison



SERVICE ACTIVATOR

"My experience being a leader in the Lutheran Collegians on the UW-Milwaukee campus in the 1970s prepared me for leadership roles in my church as an adult. It broadened my view of the world and how to live as a Christian in it."

—Arlyss (Drews) Troge, 1975 graduate of the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee

"Campus ministry gave me opportunities to be involved. Whether it was cooking meals or leading a Bible study, I learned that I could serve and be involved even as a young college student. Now that I have graduated and moved to a new city, I want to be involved in my new congregation and use my abilities as an active congregation member."

—Danielle Voss, 2019 graduate of the University of Wisconsin—Madison

READ MORE > at forwardinchrist.net. Check out photos from WELS campus ministries on p. 4.



Christians often live quiet, humble lives,
but their lives matter. | John A. Braun

One ordinary life



HOW DO WE MEASURE the value and importance of a Christian life? We gravitate to those who have done great things. Sometimes we focus on unusual circumstances a Christian has overcome.

The noteworthy are not hard to find in the Scriptures. Peter, Paul, John, Mary, Lazarus, Martha, and Thomas come easily to mind. But there were three thousand unnamed souls welcomed into the kingdom of God on Pentecost. Stephen emerges from those souls and so do the seven deacons chosen by the growing church in Jerusalem (Acts 6:5). They are named, but so many ordinary believers remain unknown to us.

Even when we celebrate church or synod anniversaries, we find names that help us tell the story—pastors, presidents, professors, and others. The local and synodical histories punctuate the course of time with names that seem to stand out above others.

But history is made by the people who remain unnamed—the ordinary Christians who pray, attend worship, contribute to the preaching of the gospel, and participate in the work of the congregation and synod.

I want to tell the story of one of those ordinary Christians. She has a name—Vera Luella Mueller.

UNWANTED NOTORIETY

Vera came to my attention through a story in the Minneapolis newspaper. On March 23, she celebrated her 104th birthday in quarantine because of the virus.

Family members could wave, clap, and celebrate with flowers and balloons, but she was behind glass windows. Then COVID-19 entered her 104-year-old body. She was put on oxygen, and the outcome was in doubt. Her son, Bob, remembers watching through the window one evening, not sure she would make it another day. “I could see her lips moving, and I just knew she was saying her prayers,” he says. “She prays every day.”

Vera recovered and was cleared of the virus on April 6. At the time she was one of the oldest people in the country to recover from COVID-19.

Notoriety was an uncomfortable and unfamiliar dress for her to wear. She would rather wear a humbler, more ordinary one. Her pastor said there wasn’t anything special about her—no exceptional accomplishments or contributions to the world or her church. Her family agreed. “There’s no story here,” I heard everyone say. But I persisted for that very reason.

EVERYDAY BLESSINGS

Vera was born in 1916 in Plainview, Minnesota. She was baptized and later confirmed. Her best friend growing up was Dorothy Froehke, the daughter of the first pastor of St. Matthew, Winona, Minn.

Vera married Gerhard “Von” Mueller in 1940, four years after graduating from Winona Senior High School. The young couple made the church a living part of their everyday lives. Baptism, confirmation,

and marriage are ordinary for us all, but we ought not forget the everyday blessings God gives.

Vera and Von were in church every Sunday and were eventually joined by their three children—Jeanne, James, and Robert. There is a story here, but it is an ordinary one: Faithfully hearing God's Word and receiving his sacrament sustains us throughout life. The Holy Spirit continues to work through the gospel to sustain faith and to help God's people serve him as we face challenges and temptations at every stage of life.

We must be careful not to minimize God's power and work through Word and sacrament. It's not unimportant. Vera and Von wanted to be in God's house. "They

were always there and did not want to miss a service for anything," her son remembers.



Vera lived through the First World War. She was an infant during that war, but in the hands of God

as his child through baptism. He placed her in a loving family that cared for her. Why do we take all these things for granted? Perhaps we only notice them when they are missing or threatened. She also lived through the Depression, the Second World War, the Vietnam War, and Afghanistan. At every step the Lord sheltered her with his love and care. During those days she had health issues, but the Lord had plans for her.

Those plans were never grandiose. Family and church were the most important part of her plans—and God's. Von was the St. Matthew's school board chairman when the congregation started an elementary school. Vera sang in the choir and taught Sunday school. Vacation Bible school became part of Vera and Von's routine in the summer, getting snacks ready for the children and helping in whatever way they could.

Vera was active in the Ladies Aid and was president for many years. Her son especially remembers the ice cream socials. It would be easy to find her in Bible class or at Lutheran Women Missionary Society or WELS senior gatherings.

The Lord took Von home after 52 years of marriage. Vera remained confident in the Lord's promises for her husband and the Lord's care for her. She continued to

serve as part of the Sauer Health Care Auxiliary, pushing the cart down the hallways with snacks for the residents and making hundreds of rosette cookies at Christmas.

CONTINUED SERVICE

Eventually Vera became a resident at that facility. She couldn't attend church as she used to, but each day she read her Bible. She kept *Meditations*, *Forward in Christ*, and her Bible within reach. One night a nurse asked her what she was reading. She said she was reading her Bible. The nurse said, "I haven't opened it yet." Vera suggested that she should start reading it. On another occasion she shared Jesus with an older man at the facility. The next day he died. She thought it was as if God was using her to get him ready for meeting Jesus.

Her church was never far from her mind. She waited to see the church's services on Sundays on her television and read and reread the printed sermons sent every week. She wanted to continue to give her offerings,

We may not think there is much of a story here, but the ordinary life of each Christian is important.

and she found a way. Bingo was one of the activities at the care center. Winners would receive a dime, and she would collect her dimes and give them to the church.

She kept pictures of family and friends with their names written on the back. She was especially happy when family came to visit. She loved to hold her grandchildren and great-grandchildren on her lap. Her granddaughter gave her an iPad for her 100th birthday and taught her how to use it. She cherished the photos of her family that filled the tablet. It was hard not to notice how cheerful and confident her faith made her.

We may not think there is much of a story here, but the ordinary life of each Christian is important. It is a miracle that we believe in Jesus. Each day God gives grace, comfort, and strength through his Word quietly and faithfully just as he promised.

Yes, Vera recovered from COVID-19, but 12 days later the Lord called her home. She fell asleep in Jesus and has joined the countless voices of heaven, as she praises God for making her his dear child.

Even long after her name and the names of countless other Christians are forgotten, the Savior will not forget them. Their names are all written in his book of life.



John Braun is executive editor of *Forward in Christ*.



Q&A WITH DAVID SCHARF

I believe that the world came about by the process of evolution. However, I still consider myself a Christian. Does it really matter how God made the world?

CREATION MATTERS

It is wonderful to hear that you believe in Jesus. As Christians we treasure what Jesus did for us. As our substitute, he suffered the consequences of all human sin and evil. Then he rose from the dead, giving us the assurance of life and resurrection.

But we cannot keep those ideas separate from all other ideas the Scriptures tell us. If the creation account in God's Word is not true, then it will not be long before Satan whispers in your ear, "Can you really believe in Jesus?"

THE STORY OF EVOLUTION

The story of evolution is an explanation of the origins of the universe, our world, and humans without God. It is a mixture of fact and speculation that has a ring of truth. It's understandable that some would believe the story, including some Christians.

So let's do a little exploring. Some, like you, do not believe evolution excludes God. But the evolution story assumes that there is no need for a Creator God. For the ardent evolutionist, everything must be explained as naturally occurring processes. That is a fundamental concept of science, and it has given us great blessings in medicine and technology. It is important to all research, including research on the COVID-19 virus. One simply cannot do research depending on a miracle.

The story of evolution assumes that current observable processes never changed. We can't prove that, but evolutionists assume it is true. The changes necessary for the processes of nature to bring about life as we know it require long periods of time—another assumption. But when dealing with forces of nature billions of years ago, that stretches the scientific model beyond its capacity without these assumptions.

Evolution suggests that somewhere in the process things had to happen that would bring about life from what is not life. It is difficult to imagine that our human bodies came from inanimate elements. For example, the average heart will beat 2.5 billion times over the course of a lifetime. Our eyes have 130 million light receptors. Our bodies contain 100,000 miles of nerve fibers. The neurons in our brains send trillions of signals every day. All this came about, but for evolutionists God cannot be the explanation.

CREATOR OR PROCESSES OF NATURE?

If what God tells us in the Bible about creation must be rejected, then so many other ideas must also be rejected. No universal flood, as God describes it in Genesis, ever happened. The virgin birth defies the laws of nature. The miracles of Jesus were only embellishments of his disciples; they did not really occur. Did the resurrection of Jesus even happen?

So what do we believe? That life and its complexity came from a Creator or from the processes of nature? Scripture comes from God, who was there in the beginning. He knows. So "by faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (Hebrews 11:3).

Why? Consider everything else God tells us. The same God who created the world entered this world two thousand years ago to save it by living for you and dying on a cross to save you. One day soon, he will return to bring us a new heaven and a new earth. God, who made the world and saved the world, will one day come back to restore this world. I choose to believe what he says—all of it.

ASK A QUESTION AT forwardinchrist.net/submit.

God made the world

David G. Scharf

IF GOD DID NOT create the world, then humans become superior animals struggling to survive instead of the crown of God's creation. Survival or serving oneself instead of glorifying God is the reason for living. Death becomes a natural event in the long struggle rather than a judgment against sin.

Evolution suggests that we are getting better and better and don't need to face our desperate need for a Savior. But what about someone who says, "You believe in creation, I believe in evolution. We can agree to disagree. I still believe in Jesus! What does it matter how God created the world?" If one were to take this line of thinking to its logical conclusion, the veracity of all of Scripture could be in doubt.

THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT OF CREATION

Take a moment to read the creation account in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and note the phrases that repeat. Repeatedly, God says that he created everything "according to their kinds." Two hundred years ago, Christians may have wondered why God would repeat such an obvious point. Of course, dogs have dogs and cats have cats. But as a 21st-century Christian, I appreciate God saying that he made animals according to their kinds. The DNA of all these kinds is God's creation and intended to preserve order in the created world.

Consider how these other repeated phrases from Genesis 1 argue against evolution.

"There was evening, and there was morning—the . . . day."

"And God said . . . And God saw that it was good."

"God created mankind in his own image."

HOLDING ON TO OUR FAITH

Read the following passages and comment on what they say about whether it matters if God made the world as recorded in Genesis 1.

• 2 Timothy 3:16,17 _____

• John 17:17 _____

• Romans 1:20 _____

• Romans 8:19-23 _____

Read 2 Peter 3:3-13

What does this passage teach us about the importance of holding on to our faith in the almighty Creator of heaven and earth?

Read Psalm 19:1,2 and 2 Corinthians 4:6

In your own words describe a time when you praised God for his wonderful works of creation and salvation.

Contributing editor David Scharf, a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. Paul, New Ulm.

READ MORE about the topics of creation and evolution in the books *Elephants in the Room: Evolution Versus the Message of Scripture* and *Quick to Listen: Understand Viewpoints that Challenge Your Faith*. Available from Northwestern Publishing House, nph.net; 800-662-6022.

PARENT CONVERSATIONS

How should families prepare to go back to school? That's quite a question this year, isn't it? After all, education is likely to look different depending on what school you attend, so how can we even tackle this topic? I felt a little guilty even asking anyone to write on this topic, but I thought it was an important one. After the unprecedented end to school this past spring, many students and their parents are still reeling. Entering into that kind of uncertainty again is making many of us apprehensive about this new school year. Enter authors Rachel Blum and Dan Nommensen, who rose to the challenge and offer great thoughts to help prepare families for any "back to school" situation. Make sure to read both of their articles.

— Nicole Balza

HOW SHOULD FAMILIES PREPARE TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL?

THE COMMON PHRASE "back to school" has so many different thoughts and feelings attached to it this year beyond the usual feelings of excitement and nervousness. Since students, parents, and teachers cannot know exactly what to expect, how can we prepare ourselves to go back to school and to be successful when we do?

First and foremost, I recommend choosing a Bible passage for your family to study and memorize as you begin a school year that may look different than years past. This will help anchor you in God's Word and give your entire family God's peace in the midst of change. One such passage is Philippians 4:6,7, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

We know that kids (and adults) are going to have lots of questions, feelings, and worries as they transition to a new school year. **Parents and teachers need to plan on spending**

time with each child, giving them multiple opportunities to share their thoughts and feelings. Sharing God's Word with our kids while they share their feelings and thoughts with us will help them to develop courage and resilience in difficult situations. We can never spend too much time listening to those we love and teaching and modeling for our children how to go to God in prayer, trusting him with our concerns.

Sharing God's Word with our kids . . . will help them to develop courage and resilience.

Parents can also prepare kids for school by reading with them; re-introducing bedtimes and morning routines; and giving them opportunities to listen, be respectful, and be responsible at home. Teachers are already planning how to teach kids in the 2020–21 school year, knowing that the end of the previous year was not quite what we all would have liked it to be. If parents send kids to school well-rested and well-practiced at listening and following through with completing tasks at home, they will be ready to

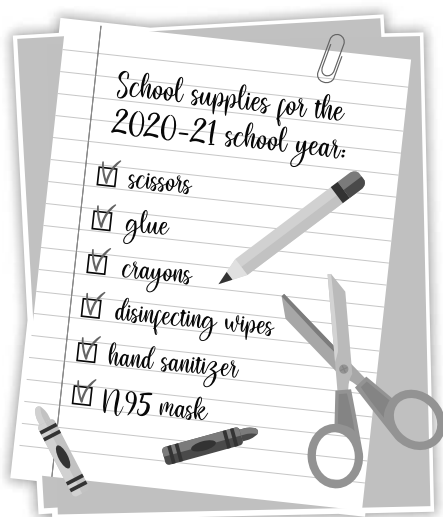
tackle academics and the changes they may face this school year.

Finally, teachers and parents are not going to have all the answers this fall. Even when we make decisions, we will not all agree. It will be an opportunity to work on our communication skills and to dialogue honestly about our feelings and thoughts. **As we teach our children to turn to God in all things, we will want to practice this habit as well and remain**

grounded in his Word so that we can love and support those around us. John reminds us of this in 1 John 4:16, "We know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them." Let us share the love of Christ with our kids, their teachers, and other families as we embark on this school year together!



Rachel Blum and her husband, Matt, are raising three children in Bonduel, Wisconsin. Rachel also serves as a teacher at St. Paul, Green Bay, Wisconsin.



DO YOU NOTICE a few additions to the school supply list this year? Hand sanitizer? Mask? Some of you might just be thrilled to receive a supply list because it means your kids might actually return to school! In fact, there might not be much on that list that you would not buy so your child can return to school.

STRONG EMOTIONS ARE NORMAL

Of course, none of us knows how this school year will go. Some schools may start this fall at home. Others may offer a combination of home and school learning. And that could change at any point throughout the school year.

Doesn't it seem hard to make decisions these days as everyone tries to draw information from various sources to help balance public health and our regular way of life? In the beginning of the pandemic, it seemed decisions made one day changed the next day. How could we have ever imagined schools across the country moving to an entirely off-site format within a matter of weeks?

It was a transition for kids and parents—some moving through that transition smoothly, some needing more time to make that adjustment. For many parents, the idea of returning to anything that resembles that time brings some strong emotions

that we can identify with such as being trapped, scared, frantic, anxious, uncontrolled, vulnerable, frustrated, or confused.

I get it. When it comes to the safety and welfare of our children, we all have very strong emotions. Parents, as you and your kids return to school this fall, in whatever way that looks like, I would like to encourage you with an account from Scripture in Matthew 14:22-33, Jesus walking on water.

After seeing Jesus walking on the water toward their boat, Peter believed Jesus would protect him, got out of the boat, and began walking

on the water toward Jesus. Then Peter saw that wind and began to sink. Imagine the emotions that Peter experienced that moment, moving from the exhilaration of walking on water toward his Savior to turning his focus on the wind and fearing death.

Your Savior's hand is reaching out to you and your family through these upcoming changes in the school year.

MAKE SURE TO COMMUNICATE

What Peter did next is a great example for us: "But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!' " (v. 30).

Peter is often noticed for his doubt in that moment, but we also see that Peter "cried out." He did not forget to ask Jesus for help. He did not try to figure out how to do a back float and save himself. He did not keep his request quiet because he did not want to bother Jesus or look weak in front of the other disciples. Instead, he communicated with his Savior and cried out to him.

Parents, as you feel your emotions building—communicate. Commu-

ACCEPT HELP FROM YOUR SAVIOR

"Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him" (v. 31).

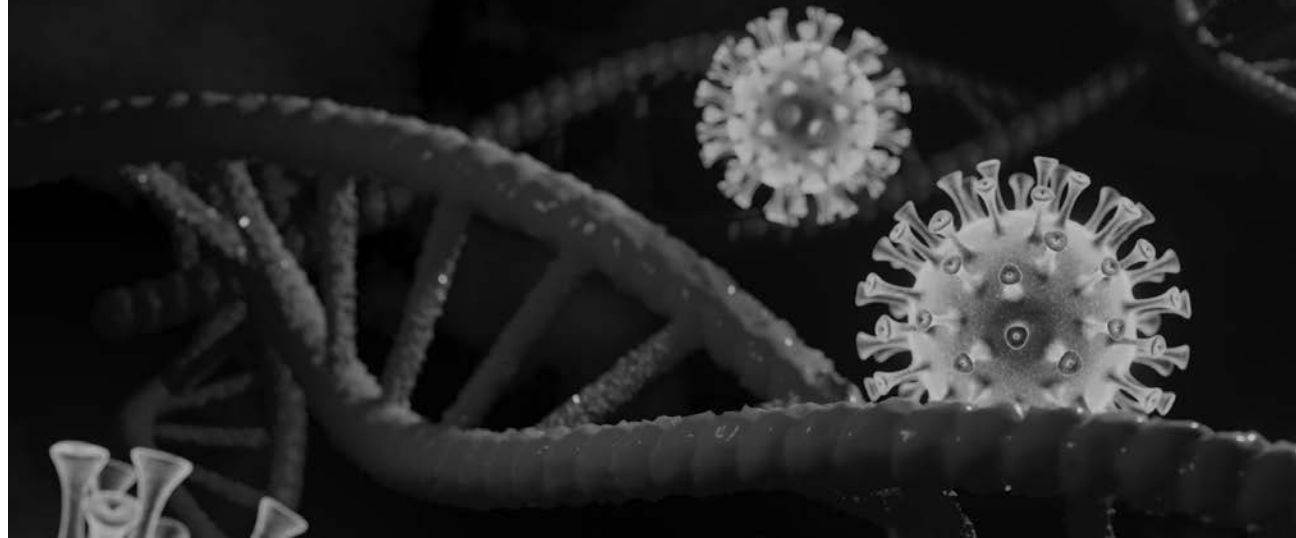
We will struggle with doubt through these times. We will have those times when we see the winds in our

life like Peter and begin to fall. But know that your Savior is not here to punish you for that doubt. He already took our punishment on the cross. Jesus did not let Peter sink ten feet under the water to teach him a really good lesson. "Immediately Jesus reached out his hand." Your Savior's hand is reaching out to you and your family through these upcoming changes in the school year, through a job loss, through sickness, or through any other moment of distress or challenge.

Parents, as we get our children ready to head back to school, remember to communicate through the transitions. Communicate with your school, others in your support network, and your Lord.



Dan Nommensen and his wife, Kelly, have a daughter who is beginning college and a son in high school. Their family lives in Mequon, Wisconsin. Dan serves as the member assistance program director at Christian Family Solutions.



A husband and wife's passion for serving leads them to the front lines of a pandemic. | Alicia A. Neumann

MYC

life

IT WAS A QUIET Saturday afternoon in May. Jon and Paige Fricke were sitting in their living room as their 7-month-old daughter, Margo, napped in the other room. As they sipped their coffee, they took some time to reflect on how COVID-19 has changed their lives over the past few months—and why they both chose careers in health care.

FINDING THEIR CALLING

The Frickes met in high school at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. “We thought we were going to save the world,” says Jon. “We thought we’d move to Africa or Latin America as missionaries.”

After they graduated, however, both pursued degrees in health care. Paige says her decision came from watching her parents; her father is a pastor and her mother is a piano teacher. “They both teach people to love God, love one another, and serve the world,” she says. “This inspired me to pursue a career in medicine because it allows me to do that in my own way.”

Jon says he felt the pull toward medicine after seeing his father, who is

all of his life. He attended Wisconsin Lutheran College (WLC), Milwaukee. “They showed me that Christians can simultaneously prioritize their faith and pursue academic excellence in scientific careers,” he says.

“Paige and I knew going into this that we could end up in the hospital or die from this. So, we wrote our wills.”

While pursuing his undergraduate degree at WLC, Jon connected with Gethsemane, a WELS church on the south side of Milwaukee, and taught English classes to immigrants. That experience helped him realize that there were many underserved populations right here in the United States that needed help.

The Frickes eventually ended up in North Carolina, where both now work in family medicine. Jon is a

sought out clinics where we are working with people who are vulnerable and marginalized,” says Jon. “Many of our patients aren’t from the United States originally or don’t have health insurance. It’s challenging work and brings a sense of purpose to what we’re doing.”

A NEW CHALLENGE

The Frickes never anticipated that their passion for serving would put them on the front lines of the fight against a new, deadly virus. In the first few months of 2020, healthcare organizations scrambled to respond to the COVID-19 cases that were spreading quickly throughout the country. North Carolina was not immune. Jon says his hospital was hit hard because of an outbreak at a nearby meatpacking facility.

“When it started affecting people here, there were a lot of things that went through my mind in anticipation,” says Jon. “But when it came down to it, the people in this com-

munity are the people whom I've been called to serve. I know this is what I'm here for, what I've committed to do, and what I'm supposed to do."

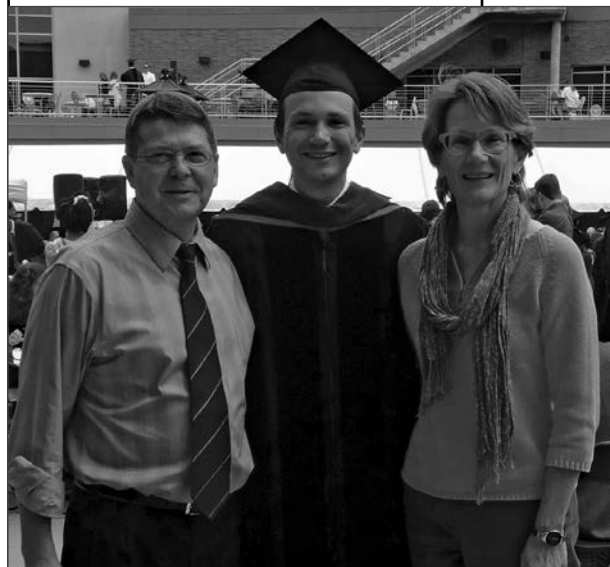
Paige has been able to continue providing care for her patients through virtual visits. Jon, however, is working directly with COVID-19 patients at the hospital. "It's a new challenge, and I want to step up to the challenge—but I also don't want to bring something home. I get nervous every time I go to work," he says. "When I first started out [in medicine] I was thinking about what my faith will do to other people. I never thought I'd be relying on my faith to show up to work."

Paige says she's also relying on her faith to get her through these uncertain times. "In my daily work, I make decisions based on research and expert guidance," she says. "Since COVID-19 is a new disease, we don't have clear answers yet. It's a reminder that God is in control. He is so much wiser than anything we can imagine. Ultimately this is in his hands. It's humbling."

FAITHFUL SERVICE

Jon says it's been hard treating this new, unknown disease that causes so much fear and isolation. He has stories of having to pronounce a patient dead while her family watched silently from outside the hospital window. Or the patient with COVID-19 who was crying because he was isolated in the hospital away from his young children. "I wanted to be able to go over and put my hand on his shoulder to console him, but I had already taken off my gown and gloves and didn't have anything to protect myself," he says. "All I could do was stand off on the side of the room, listening to him from a distance, and offer muffled words of comfort from behind an N95 mask and a face shield."

But there have also been some uplifting moments. His first day taking care of COVID-19 patients, Jon had to tell a patient she tested positive. "She told me she was scared," says Jon. "I took her hand, looked her in the eye, and admitted for the first time ever to a patient that I too was scared." During the con-



OFFERING *comfort*

Jon Fricke shares more about how his dad inspired him to be a doctor:

Growing up, I remember my dad going to visit parishioners who were sick or dying. I saw how meaningful it was for him to give comfort to people facing their own mortality. In hindsight, it's a large part of what I pictured myself doing when I chose to go into medicine. Caring for someone at the end of life is always challenging, but my faith helps end-of-life care to be one of the most fulfilling parts of my work as well. My job is to help people live long, healthy lives, but as a Christian I also know that death isn't failure. When [God] is calling someone home to his arms, my job isn't to pry that person out of his arms, but to preserve their dignity and comfort on their way home.

Above photo: Jon with his parents, Thomas and Jeanne Fricke, at Jon's graduation from medical school.



The Frickes: Jon, Paige, and Margo.



version the patient mentioned her faith and said her son was a minister. "My dad is a pastor, and it's a large part of the reason I chose to go into medicine," says Jon. "As I shared that with her, the fear and apprehension began to fade away. We were able to support each other as family in Christ."

Although he continues to care for COVID-19 patients, Jon says he has not been pushed to the limit or forced to confront his own mortality in the same way that many ICU

When their governor ordered residents to stay home, the Frickes watched Gethsemane's church services online and participated in a virtual Bible study each week. "Those first few weeks when there was so much waiting and isolation, it was refreshing to talk to our friends," says Jon. "And after I had a few extremely challenging weeks at work, it was great to be able to talk with the Bible study group and hear about other peoples' lives too. It gave us that sense of normalcy."

and Joshua 1:9, "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

The Frickes feel comforted knowing many people are praying for them. "It's hard to put into words how much it means when patients say, 'Take care of your wife and baby. We are praying for you. Stay safe,'" says Jon. "At a time when people are scared, challenged, and would rationally be praying for their own safety or economic livelihood, they are praying for the protection of others. To me that illustrates who we are as a family of Christians."

He continues, "We are one small part of the greater work of the kingdom. During coronavirus, millions of Christians have had their lives turned upside down and faced life-changing moments and tragedy. Millions of Christians have also pitched in to help those who are suffering. We are just two of those people."

A few Bible passages have really helped . . . including Joshua 1:9, "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

or emergency physicians, nurses, or respiratory therapists have had to do. "That being said, this is life-changing for any clinician who puts on an N95 mask," he says. "Paige and I knew going into this that we could end up in the hospital or die from this. So, we wrote our wills."

FINDING STRENGTH

During these difficult times, Jon and Paige say that staying connected to their church family at Gethsemane, Raleigh, N.C., has really helped them.

Jon and Paige have also been intentional about spending time together in the Word. "We have special baby devotions, we pray together, and we sing Christian songs to Margo at bedtime, like 'I am Jesus' Little Lamb,'" says Paige.

A few Bible passages have really helped Jon during this time, including Galatians 6:10, "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers,"



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

Four brothers, one mission

“Every time I hang out with one of my brothers, I gain nuggets of wisdom that stick with me,” says Paul Bourman, who graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., in May.

Bourman is the youngest of seven. His three brothers also serve as WELS pastors.

Nathanael is the firstborn. He serves at Mount Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis. Twins Timothy and Jonathan serve at Sure Foundation, Queens, N.Y., and Peace, Aiken, S.C., respectively.

“As a family, we have chased the mission,” says Nathanael, “and it’s a ride that has been exciting.”

“Our family has always been a part of ministry,” says Jonathan. “Dad and Mom deeply love the gospel and love Jesus. They poured Jesus and his teachings into us, and that’s been beautiful.”

Their dad, James, is also a pastor. The brothers don’t remember a time when their lives did not involve service to their Savior. Growing up, they immersed themselves into the cultures of those their church was serving. Jonathan recalls visiting Hmong shamans as a family in St. Paul, Minn.

As a child, Paul went along on many home visits to Vietnamese members

in Houston, Texas. He notes, “Sunday afternoons in Texas I hung out at church for four or five hours, and I loved it. I don’t remember a time when I didn’t want to be a pastor.”

Paul also recalls that after his brothers became pastors, his parents wanted him to have the opportunity to gain experience in their places of service as well. The first sermon he ever preached outside of the seminary was at Nathanael’s church in Fort Worth, Texas.

“I was really, really nervous,” admits Paul, “but Nate told me to find my voice, and that stuck with me.”

Paul also traveled to New York and listened to Timothy preach in Spanish. “I was just sitting there, and all of a sudden I decided I needed to do that,” says Paul. “I was a freshman at Martin Luther College, and I was studying German and Latin. I came back and switched to Spanish. My parents made sure I could pursue that, and I studied Spanish in South America for six months.”

Five years ago as Jonathan was beginning his work as a home missionary in Aiken, S.C., Paul came and helped him launch the new mission. Paul designed and distributed flyers, went along on meetings with prospects, and designed

PowerPoint presentations for worship services. In particular, Paul remembers Jonathan reviewing his PowerPoint slides and noting the mistakes that he’d made: “Jonathan told me, ‘You have to raise your standards; this is the gospel we’re talking about.’ That stuck with me.”

On July 11, Paul was commissioned as WELS’ newest home missionary. On the seminary’s assignment day, he was called to serve a mission in southwest Portland, Ore.

“Before call day, I told him, ‘The Lord has a good plan for you. You can trust it,’” recalls Timothy.

As Paul embarks on the Lord’s plan for him, he takes with him the sign that he and his wife, Charis, use as the focus for their lives. The sign asks the question, “Who can we serve today?” It’s a question that he and his brothers live out in their ministries in communities across the United States. Although they may be separated by distance, they are never separated in mission.

SEE MORE > about Paul’s commissioning service at welstasteandsee.com. While there, watch Jonathan and Timothy’s Moments with Missionaries video updates as well.



1 | (From left) Timothy, James, and Paul Bourman at a pastor’s conference during Paul’s vicar year serving at Grace, Falls Church, Va.
2 | Tim (sitting, far right) and Paul Bourman (next to Tim) playing the guitar for Easter worship at Sure Foundation, Queens, N.Y. 3 | Paul Bourman (right) gained experience in starting a home mission congregation when visiting his brother, Jonathan, in Aiken, S.C. Also pictured is Jonathan’s daughter, Elliana.

Demonstrating Christ's love

It might not originally have been on his list to do that day, but when Mark Luetzow, a member at Christ, Saginaw, Mich., heard that people needed help cleaning up their homes after floodwaters swept through nearby Midland, Mich., he decided to take his sons and volunteer.

"There is biblical encouragement to help our brothers when they are in need, and it certainly was a time where we could live that out in our lives," says Luetzow, who serves as president of Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw. "Part of my motivation was to demonstrate that principle to my boys and also have them get a firsthand experience of what disaster looks like."

Luetzow and his sons were part of the 120 local volunteers who came to help after floodwaters from heavy rains and two failed dams flowed through Midland in May, causing an estimated \$175 million in damage. These volunteers cleaned out and sanitized the homes of 15 families as well as Holy Scripture Lutheran Church, an Evangelical Lutheran Synod church that was filled waist deep with water.

Luetzow shares that as they were driving into the city to volunteer for the day, they noticed belongings stacked five feet high at the curb. "You could see that what people invested their lives in was now in the garbage. It was sobering to see how quickly life can change," he says. "It's important to be involved in people's lives when they have disasters like that. The least we can do is demonstrate Christ's love."

Working closely with WELS Christian Aid and Relief, Mike Krueger, a member at Good Shepherd, Midland, Mich., served as the local coordinator for the work. He contacted members in the area that was flooded to determine what work needed to be done for them and their neighbors, enlisted help from area churches, and then coordinated the work of those volunteers. The work lasted 11 days, with



(Above) Holy Scripture, Midland, Mich., an Evangelical Lutheran Synod church, suffered extensive damage to its building and furnishings from the flooding. (Right) Nathanael Jensen, a tutor at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich., was one of 120 local volunteers who helped families in Midland clean up after the flood.

volunteers spending from a few hours to multiples days helping with the cleanup. "The most we had were 50 volunteers in one day," says Krueger. "We were there to help people in whatever way they needed help."

This mostly included hauling stuff from the flooded homes outside, cleaning and disinfecting what was salvageable, drying out living areas, and helping with demolition such as removing flooring and drywall.

"People were really appreciative," says Krueger. "The people who did the volunteering will never forget it, and the people they helped will never forget it either."

This wasn't Krueger's first time helping after a disaster. He and his wife volunteered through WELS Christian Aid and Relief to help Amazing Grace, Panama City, Fla., rebuild after Hurricane Michael hit in 2018. Although the work was different, it helped prepare Krueger to take on a leadership role when disaster hit his hometown.

"People were overwhelmed, and it is going to be years before the dams are rebuilt," he says. "It's important you're there to follow up with them afterward—to say, 'How are you doing?' and invite them to church."

Having local, trained district response teams ready to oversee disaster relief is one of the future goals of WELS Christian Aid and Relief, according to Dan Sims, director of the organization. While Christian Aid and Relief will continue to offer guidance, training, funding, and volunteers (when necessary), local congregations will then be able to provide aid in their own communities.

Says Sims, "It's exactly what we want to see. When there's a disaster, local people—grassroots—step up and help their neighbors who are in need."

LEARN MORE AT wels.net/relief about WELS Christian Aid and Relief.



Starting a church during a pandemic

Folsom is in northern California, between Sacramento and the Sierra Nevada mountains. It's an exciting place to start a church. I arrived in Folsom in the fall of 2019, with an energetic family ready to meet a fantastic core group. We had a year before we were scheduled to launch public worship. The next 12 months would be spent doing the important foundational work of starting a church.

The first phase would focus primarily on building strength and trust within the core group. The second phase was to unleash the group on the community. Invitations, canvassing, service projects, etc., would all lead up to a grand worship launch with many new faces from the community.

Things were moving right along. We met regularly to plan. A logo was chosen, and we ordered all kinds of swag. The website was coming along, and God provided a great place of worship to rent for our launch. We even had several prospects in Bible information class. Momentum was building. We were all set for phase 2.

And then it happened . . . COVID-19.

How do you canvass when you can't leave the house? Can you publish a launch date when your rented worship facility is indefinitely closed? How do you volunteer at community events when they've all been canceled? Questions were mounting. Frustration was building. Discouragement was a daily companion. How do you start a church during a pandemic?

Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah who was to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. The work was going great at first, and then there were obstacles. Zerubbabel was no doubt frustrated.

Here's what God had to say to his frustrated servant, " 'Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty" (Zechariah 4:6). Zerubbabel's task would not get done by inner courage or fortitude, nor would it get done by the power of a huge army or a well-coordinated core group. No, to do the Lord's work, human strength and wisdom alone would fail. God

says, "My Spirit must do it; my Spirit is able to overcome all hurdles no matter how large they loom. By my Spirit's power, any obstacle will become an opportunity." And of course, that's exactly what happened. God's Spirit, molding and moving human hearts, got the work done.

There was the answer to my question. The Lord will get his work done no matter what the obstacle. His Spirit works through the Word read in e-mailed devotions just as well as spoken in person. His Spirit builds the church through Zoom Bible studies just like he does in a classroom. Words of comfort carry the same Spirit over the phone as they do spoken face-to-face. The Spirit can get work done through "shares" and "likes" on Facebook just as well as knocking on doors. Serving our community with the love of Christ from six feet away is still serving our community with the love of Christ. God's Spirit molds and moves human hearts, and he'll get the work done.

How do you start a church during a pandemic? The same way you start a church when there isn't one. "Not by power, not by might, but by my Spirit."

David Koelpin is a home missionary at Foundation, Folsom, California.

SEE MORE ➤ examples of the Spirit's work through WELS' home missions. Watch Taste and See missionary video updates at welstasteandsee.com.



A look at Foundation's ministry before COVID-19.

Meet the editorial staff

Ever ask yourself, “Who are these people who write for Forward in Christ?” Through this series, you can find out.

This month, *Forward in Christ* welcomes Richard Lauersdorf to the staff as the newest contributing editor. Longtime readers may be familiar with Lauersdorf, particularly those who recall when *Forward in Christ* was titled *Northwestern Lutheran*. Lauersdorf served as a contributing editor of *Northwestern Lutheran* for 24 years, penning the devotional page twice per month.

Upon graduation from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1960, Lauersdorf and his wife, Charlene, served a mission congregation in Ontario, Canada. Lauersdorf later shepherded congregations in Wisconsin for 33 years, and from 1997–2001, served as the WELS vice president of mission and ministry. In addition, he was an integral part of the Board for World Missions for 30 years.

An avid reader, Lauersdorf has also “kept his pen busy” by authoring the *Hebrews People’s Bible*, numerous other books and various essays, and two Lenten sermon series. He especially enjoys writing for laypeople, encouraging them in their spiritual needs through all conditions of life. “It makes you humble when you know how much power God’s Word has. You appreciate the opportunities God gives you to use that Word in special ways with people,” he says.

Even though he is now retired, it’s not a surprise that Lauersdorf remains actively engaged in ministry. He faithfully leads a weekly in-person Bible class of up to 150 attendees at Good Shepherd, West Bend, Wis., where he also preaches every five weeks. He quickly adapted to the recent restrictions on in-person gatherings by having a video recording of his Bible class lecture placed online each week—a true blessing for participants.

Lauersdorf’s involvement with *Northwestern Lutheran* and *Forward in Christ* has now come full circle. He recalls that his inaugural writing assignment for *Northwestern Lutheran* all those years ago was on the book of James—which also happens to be the topic of the Bible study series that he is currently writing for *Forward in Christ*.

So why was Lauersdorf compelled to write on the book of James then—and now? “I never got to study it at the seminary, so I wanted to expand my own knowledge,” he explains. He also treasures the book of James for the way it compels Christians to “walk the talk” of their faith: “James reinforces the teaching that once we are sure of heaven, we will live like it here on this earth,” he says. “Instead of Christianity being a surface thing, it is something that powers your whole life.”

READ MORE ➤ about the book of James in Lauersdorf’s Bible study (p. 31).



Richard Lauersdorf and his four children (from left): Mark, Beth, Anne, and Jim.

A planted mission field

Chaplains in Schools, a WELS-affiliated organization, is set to reach nearly 3,000 students in seven different Christian voucher schools in the Milwaukee area with the gospel this school year.

Because they have a WELS history and connection, these schools want their students and families to know Christ and be connected to a WELS pastor and church. While the traditional model is that a congregation starts a school and then reaches out to the community through the school, this is the opposite. These schools were started as Christian schools and have now invited Chaplains in Schools to serve the spiritual needs of this planted mission field.

Led by Pastor Paul Steinberg, Chaplains in Schools serves as the spiritual resource at the schools. Steinberg teaches students about Jesus, helps families through tough times, leads chapel services at the schools, teaches Bible information classes to parents, and even instructs the teachers on the Bible lessons they then teach in the classroom.

The work of Chaplains in Schools has grown rapidly since it started in 2016. Starting this school year, there will be four full-time chaplains, including Steinberg, at seven different schools. Steinberg attributes the growth partly to the coronavirus pandemic. “It was COVID-19 that helped us get into these additional schools. The schools, when they couldn’t meet in person, had to figure out how to do ministry. I was able to record chapel services and Bible lessons that I sent to the other schools,” says Steinberg. After expanding the reach of ministry digitally, Chaplains in Schools was invited to serve the additional schools in person.

The increased use of technology to conduct ministry due to COVID-19 has prompted another initiative, still in its very early stages. Chaplains in Schools is looking to develop an



As part of his role as a chaplain, Paul Steinberg spends time in the classroom teaching students about Jesus

app- or web-based platform to conduct Bible classes with families. Steinberg explains that the families he serves often face obstacles with work schedules, transportation, and childcare to attend in-person classes. By offering instruction that can be accessed from a phone, Chaplains in Schools will be able to reach people where they are.

The families are receptive to hearing about Jesus. "They chose a Christian school on purpose. No one has ever gotten upset with me for calling them," says Steinberg. He's conducted about 270 baptisms at just the first campus he served since the organization started. Last fall, he also started leading weekly worship with a core group in one of the schools.

"They built and opened up their mission field to [Chaplains in Schools]," says Steinberg. "We planted a church, and we're doing WELS outreach. We are reaching out in the community, but our core audience is the more than 500 students who come in every day to each school and their families. We get to see them every day."

Steinberg is working to train parents to eventually become leaders in the ministry. He says, "If we build a congregation of families that understand the community, they will be the natural bridge to continue and grow the ministry."

LEARN MORE AT chaplainsinschools.org about how Chaplains in Schools is reaching out to students and families.

District news

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

AZ-CA—Cross of Christ, Kingman, Ariz., celebrated its 50th anniversary on March 22.

D-M—Lloyd Lemke celebrated his 45th anniversary in the pastoral ministry in June. Lemke serves Shepherd of the Hills, Custer, S.D.

NW—This summer Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis., celebrated the service anniversaries of teachers **Matt Koepsell**, 25 years; **Joel Kramer**, 25 years; **Isaiah Degner**, 15 years; **Matthew Foxen**, 15 years; **John Giddings**, 15 years; **Kristin Black**, 10 years; and **Ryan Lemke**, 5 years.

NE—In July, **Redeemer, Hastings, Neb.,** celebrated its 75th anniversary.

SEW—Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis., celebrated the teaching anniversaries of **David Bartelt** and **Paul Snamiska**, 40 years; and **Sheila Krause**, 25 years.

The district reporters for this month are: AZ-CA—Michael Schroeder; D-M—Andrew Hussman; NE—Timothy Kemnitz; NW—Dennis Kleist; SA—Jonathan Kuske; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.



SOUTH ATLANTIC

Members of St. John, St. John's, Antigua, created and delivered COVID-19 care packages to their neighbors, particularly those who work in the hotel service industry and the elderly.



PHOTO | iStock

How can I be a Christian when there are so many hypocrites in the church? | Caleb R. Bassett

JESUS DESCRIBES the kingdom of God like a field in which weeds grow together with the wheat. The suggestion to pull up the weeds would also mean to uproot the wheat. So the farmer in the parable decides to let the weeds and the wheat grow side by side until they are separated at the harvest (Matthew 13:24-30).

Jesus also described the kingdom of God like a net that catches good and bad fish alike. Because fishermen don't have the luxury of preselecting what they haul up from the waters, they instead must sort out the keepers only after they bring up the net with the day's catch (Matthew 13:47-51).

A DISTRESSING REALITY

There's no escaping the clear point of these parables: The kingdom of God on earth is a remarkably messy affair. What is true and noble and right will exist side by side with what is false and coarse and wrong.

God's Word requires that we face the distressing reality that God's church is full of sinful people, including some who have little interest in living by the commands of Jesus Christ. We are among those sinful people, plagued with a sinful flesh and a new self. Few of us inside the church have gone for long without enduring painful harm from the people with whom we share the Lord's Table. And those outside the church, including those we hope to evangelize, commonly see unsavory conduct in the church and even among its leaders.

A natural question among those inside and those outside becomes, "How can I become or remain a Christian when there are so many hypocrites in the church?"

A NEEDED REBUKE

At this point Christians must resist the well-intentioned instinct to mount too vigorous a defense. A

series of tortured arguments beginning with the phrase, "Yeah, but . . .," will likely do more harm than good. We earn no credibility by defending the indefensible and excusing the inexcusable. People fail to live as God directs.

We are wise to admit quickly to the sadly obvious mismatch between the moral rigor of Christian teaching and the frequent rate at which Christians fail to live a life in keeping with the commands of God. It is not our job to ride to the rescue of the church—that's the vocation of our Lord Jesus. Our calling is not to save but to be saved, not to redeem but to repent—and we all surely have great need to repent.

But we do need to oppose sin. Sinful conduct left unchecked and undisciplined by negligent church leaders has caused tremendous harm in far too many Christian lives. The Lord will hold accountable those who

harm the flock. To make matters worse, believers often cultivate arbitrary boundary markers between themselves and others, like who serves more, who gives more, who is more traditional, who is more progressive, and so on. Christians who wage civil wars should hardly be surprised when such religion provokes rebellion against it. It is worth considering the possibility that those who raise questions about Christian hypocrisy may be seeing genuine hypocrisy in the church.

To be sure, many outside the church who complain of Christian hypocrisy are simply looking for a way to avoid the exclusive claim of Jesus Christ over their lives. But some see the real problems of Christians doing what is unchristian. We need to handle these problems as Christians—with repentance. Then we increase the likelihood that such questions become gracious opportunities to testify to the difference the gospel makes.

A GRACIOUS OPPORTUNITY

If the law of God were the only force at work in the church, then hypocrisy would, in fact, be a deal-breaker. Few people continue to patronize businesses that do not follow through on their core promises. This is the danger that law-saturated preaching and teaching poses to the church. If the message the community receives is primarily, “Clean up your life—and here’s how Jesus helps you do it,” then they will naturally react with revulsion when they discover how little has been cleaned up—even “with God’s help.”

Thankfully, the gospel of God is also at work in the church. Indeed, the gospel is the primary work of God in the church. The gospel

alone is the power of God for the redemption and restoration of all people. God took on human flesh and offered his life to release mankind from its slavery to sin. We are free from the impossible obligation of somehow saving ourselves because God has done the work for us. We are also changed to do better even when we have stumbled and failed.

When we live as those who have received the righteousness of God as a gift, we have the resources it takes to reform our conduct.

In the light of God’s grace, it becomes safe to admit our sin because we know our standing does not depend on our moral performance. On the contrary, our eternity is staked on whether the shed blood of Jesus Christ saves sinners. And this is a sure bet because the resurrection of Jesus is the tangible first-fruit of the resurrection that God will one day deliver to all who believe. He now lives, which means his death, in fact, did the trick. What a difference this makes for life now!

In Jesus Christ we have relinquished what the apostle Paul called “a righteousness of my own that comes from the law,” that is, a righteousness that we achieve by living in a certain way. Instead, we have what the apostle called “a righteousness . . . which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith” (Philippians 3:9). In this new economy we don’t live a certain way to earn God’s approval; we have already received God’s approval in Christ, so we live a certain way as a result.

This truth is directly relevant to the matter of hypocrisy. When we come face-to-face with the ugliness of sin

in the church we are tempted to conclude, “If I could just get away from this church of hypocrites, then everything would be fine.” But those who have relinquished self-righteousness recognize this as a critical mistake. In fact, such a perspective assumes that the problem of sin is in *others* and not in me. But if I leave one church for another—or leave the church entirely—I take myself

with me. The core problem has been relocated but remains, and I have cleverly avoided the need for genuine rebuke, repentance, and reform.

But when we live as those who have received the righteousness of God as a gift, we have the resources it takes to reform our conduct in keeping with God’s Word. When we are guilty of hypocrisy, we repent and make amends. When we are harmed by hypocrisy, we flee to Christ and not ourselves. When we renew our reliance on the gospel and leave the final sorting to Jesus, we find that the same Jesus who holds the universe together at every moment is more than able to hold us together as well.



Caleb Bassett is pastor at Redeemer, Fallbrook, California.



The Visible CHURCH

At church we find believers because the Holy Spirit works through the gospel, but we also find hypocrites.

Peter L. Unnasch

It's Sunday morning at Midtown Evangelical Lutheran Church. The late service begins in ten minutes.

Larry is at the door. Larry is in his mid-60s, recently retired. He's on the usher crew today. Larry has been an usher at Midtown since he was 14. In fact, over the years, Larry has served on almost every board and committee and action group that Midtown has had.

At the moment, Larry is in a pleasant conversation with a couple of visitors. When he learns that they attend a sister congregation a few states over, Larry throws out a few names they might know. They do. They smile and nod. "Small synod!" Larry says. Then they all laugh together.

And no one knows that Larry's soul is in grave danger. Not even Larry.

WHAT A CHURCH IS

Time to take in the bigger picture. Leave Larry at the door, walk out-

side, and look up. This spot is a perfect place to stand and discuss what theologians call "the visible church." Before you is a beautiful, old church building. It's been part of the community for generations. Now look to the front. There's a sign that says, "Midtown Evangelical Lutheran Church." But there's a wrinkle. The sign does not intend to be deceptive, and yet it is. The sign encourages you to presume that Midtown Lutheran is the building. But it isn't. And it never was.

Like every other example of the visible church, Midtown Lutheran is people. When the apostle Paul, for instance, wrote letters to churches, he did not write to buildings or addresses. He wrote to people (Romans 1:1-7; 1 Corinthians 1:1,2).

This next thought is crucial, however. Even a gathering of people calling itself Midtown Lutheran does not make it an example of the visible church. What marks Midtown Lutheran as a visible gathering of Christians comes down to what God the Holy Spirit uses to create and strengthen Christians. The tools that the Holy Spirit uses to create and strengthen faith in Christ are

what we call the means of grace, the gospel in Word and sacraments (Romans 1:16). Where there is faithful proclamation and administration of the means of grace, there are Christians. We know this because the Lord has promised that his gospel does not return empty (Isaiah 55:10-13).

BIG DIFFERENCE

But now for a distinction. There's a big difference between what the Apostles' Creed describes as "the holy Christian church" and an example of the visible church, like Midtown Lutheran. The holy Christian church contains only those souls who belong to God's family through faith in Jesus. And because only the Lord can look in someone's heart (1 Samuel 16:7), only the Lord knows who all the believers are. For this reason, the holy Christian church sometimes goes by the name "the invisible church."

On the other hand, Midtown Lutheran is a congregation of people gathered around the means of grace. While there certainly are Christians present, we always have to grant the possibility that some congregational

members are not Christians. The Lord knows, of course, because he can look in each heart. We cannot. This reality is what Jesus describes when he tells the parable of the weeds (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43). An owner of a wheat field discovers that an enemy has sown weeds among the wheat. It's likely that the weed Jesus mentions is a variety called "bearded darnel." Bearded darnel looks very similar to wheat and is difficult to distinguish from wheat while it's growing in the field. For this reason, the owner allows the wheat and the weeds to live side by side with each other. When the harvest arrives, however, everything changes. The harvesters separate the wheat from the weeds. They gather the wheat into the barn. The weeds go into the fire. And so will it be when Jesus returns.

A TELLING WORD

The word *hypocrite* is a word that goes back to the ancient days of Greek theater. At that time, if you were walking home from enjoying a good play, you might say to a family member, "The man in the lead role was magnificent. What a superb hypocrite he is!" The word, of course, means "actor." In the New Testament and today, the word retains much of its original flavor, but with a twist. In a visible Christian church, the word describes someone who, for whatever reason, is caught up in acting the part of a Christian. In the heart of that person, however, there is no faith in Jesus at all.

Which brings us back to Larry, lifelong member of Midtown Evangelical Lutheran Church. His soul is in grave danger. His soul is in grave danger not because he has been a lifelong member and not because he has been so active—these things can be beautiful fruits of genuine faith in Christ. The perilous problem is that slowly, gradually, Larry has been displacing faith in Jesus with faith in his church and his ac-

tivity in it. No one sees it. Not even Larry. Nevertheless, the devil, patient master of deception, has been at work.

There's a warning here for each of us. I can look at my family tree and conclude I come from good Christian stock. I can savor warm childhood memories from Sunday school and the children's Christ-

the years. But if that is what fills my heart instead of faith in Jesus Christ as my Savior from sin, I am a weed. I am an actor.

ALWAYS, MERCIES NEW

But here's the beauty. Every Sunday at Midtown Lutheran, everyone present has another appointment with Jesus Christ. Every Sunday,

Where there is faithful proclamation and administration of the means of grace, there are Christians.

mas Eve service. I can name-drop the names of pastors and teachers and synod officials with the best of them. I can swap war stories and tales of high comedy with other members about all the church work I helped carry forward over

he proclaims his good news that, through faith in his perfect life and death and resurrection, forgiveness is ours, full and free. The waters of Holy Baptism are there to bring another soul into the kingdom. In Holy Communion, the body and blood are there as Jesus tells each communicant soul, "You are loved. You are forgiven. You are mine."

There is profound power in all of this. Profound power the Holy Spirit uses to refresh, recreate, restore. It's true for Larry. It's true for you and me.

And so, where do you find yourself at this moment in your life? Have you been going through the motions for far too long? Have you been away from gathering with your congregational family for far too long? Perhaps you've not had much opportunity to learn much about Jesus at all, ever.

It comes down to this. Jesus has an appointment with you. It's where you will find his gospel. And in his gospel, he has something wonderful for you.

MORE ON THE *power of* THE MEANS *of grace*

"Where the heart stands idle and the Word is not heard, the devil breaks in and does his damage before we realize it. On the other hand, when we seriously ponder the Word, hear it, and put it to use, such is its power that it never departs without fruit" (Large Catechism, I, par. 100,101).

"The external marks, whereby one may perceive where this [holy Christian church] is on earth, are Baptism, the Sacrament of the Altar, and the Gospel. . . . For wherever Baptism and the Gospel are, no one is to doubt the presence of saints" (What Luther Says, p. 262).



Peter Unnasch is pastor at St. Lucas, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.



Imperfect world, imperfect life

This is my third or fourth try at this thought. The past months have brought all kinds of things to mind: first, COVID-19, then the protests, the violence, and the political wrangling for votes already at this point. Again and again I wanted to respond.

So I started writing, just to get some of the thoughts out of my head and on the computer. But every time I started, I ended up rambling. Thankfully the computer is patient and doesn't hold any grudges, but I wasn't so sure about those who might read what I wrote. Another advantage of the computer is that I can hit "Delete" and no one will see any of it.

I do want to say something, however. I continue to live in this world of turmoil, conflict, and danger. I live here as a Christian and belong to the One who has redeemed me and made me his child by his undeserved love and forgiveness.

I don't have to look far to find what is imperfect. It resides within me and within everyone else too.

The reality that strikes me so often, perhaps even more recently, is that I live in an imperfect world with imperfect people at all levels. I don't say that with any superiority. I'm one of those people. Within me, I feel anger, rage, and frustration build. My own thoughtless rush to judgment shames me. I sense that selfish motives and an absence of love for others live within me. I find my sinful flesh eager to suffocate efforts to listen to others with kindness and respect. With Paul, I confess, "I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature" (Romans 7:18).

So I don't have to look far to find what is imperfect. It resides within me and within everyone else too as Paul also reminds

us: "There is no one righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10).

But that's not the bleak end of it all. Paul tells me, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). What a treasure that is! I am loved and touched by his undeserved and boundless love.

That changes me. It changes every Christian. It can change every human. By his forgiveness and love, I find the power to overcome all the evil within and do the good he desires. It's not a one-time fix. It's an ongoing construction project. Each board of the new me is nailed in place with a view of his cross. Those boards may get torn down again as the evil within asserts itself, but his love helps me rebuild in an ongoing renovation.

The project will continue as long as I live here in this imperfect world with an imperfect nature within me. This is not where I belong. God has built a better place for me and all humans. It's a place where we leave all these imperfections behind. Jesus is the way there. No one gets there except by him (John 14:6), but the door is not barred to anyone who trusts him.

But for now I live here and strive to overcome my faults, my anger, my prejudices, my weaknesses. Like other believers, in the effort to overcome our own faults and live like his disciples, we all can shine like stars in the sky in a dark and crooked world (Philippians 2:15).

Trouble will persist. Yet I know Jesus rules all things for my good and the good of other believers. I shake my head when I see and hear the latest news, and I console myself by trusting his care and direction.


John A. Braun | FIC Editor

James

DID YOU EVER HEAR anything so strange? “Consider it pure joy,” James said, “whenever you face trials of many kinds” (1:2). To some that sounds about as sensible as stepping in front of a speeding Amtrak train. Is James being serious? Is he being realistic when he commands us to rejoice in trials?

You’ll notice James is not telling us to go looking for trials. But he is being very honest. He wants Christians to realize that they have no special inoculation that keeps all trials away. In fact, besides sharing in the sorrows and sufferings common to all people, Christians must often endure additional trials because they are connected with Christ. That’s how it was with Christians of James’ day—and still is today. With interest, therefore, we listen as James speaks to us about how faith acts when facing trials.

WHAT TRIALS DO FOR US

James encourages us “to consider it pure joy” not because trials come, but because of what they can develop. Trials can produce “perseverance” (1:3). You might even call it “Christian staying power,” the ability to hold up under life’s bitterest blows. Such staying power is not ours by birth. It needs to be developed in the crucible of life’s crises and fired in the furnace of everyday living

When troubles come, our reaction is all-important. We dare not let trials become wedges to split us loose from our gracious God. What trials do *for us* is the important point, not what they do *to us*. In the stormy waters Christians develop their “sea legs.” When the waves of trouble crash over us, we learn that Jesus is both present and precious. When we learn to view our trials as tools used by God to mature our faith, we can find joy even in them.

WHAT OUR SAVIOR PROVIDES DURING TRIALS

Do you feel like saying, “I don’t have what it takes to view trials in this way”? You’re right. We need to go to someone who does, to our God “who gives generously to all without finding fault” (1:5). Our open-handed God gives wisdom to all who approach him in faith. On his part, there will be no “finding fault,” no scolding about our lack of wisdom or childish requests. On our part, there will be no wavering in doubt, no wondering, *Will he or won’t he help?* We will just have simple confidence that he who has given us our Savior will also give us wisdom to understand our trials in life. “Ask God . . . and it will be given to you” (1:5), James assures us, echoing the words of our Lord himself (Matthew 7:7).

When trials smash in the front doors and sneak through the back doors of life, we need to deepen our prayers. Sometimes in answer God will show us the why for a particular trial. Usually, though, there’s another answer he gives: the wisdom to trust him in the dark until the light of eternity reveals all. Such wisdom God puts within our reach in his Holy Word. On its pages we find wisdom. From its words we get answers also for the trials of life.

DIGGING DEEPER

1. What does Romans 5:3-5 tell us about the benefits of trials?
2. What do 1 Corinthians 13:12 and 1 John 3:2,3 tell us about understanding the trials in our lives?
3. What confidence do Mark 11:24; John 16:23; and Matthew 7:7,8 offer when we ask for patience in trials?



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

This is the second article in a series on the book of James.

LEARN MORE AT forwardinchrist.net, including potential answers. Read more about our newest contributing editor on p. 24.

COMMUNITY

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THINGS TO NOTE

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Davidson, Walter, to retirement

Doebler, Brian, to King of Kings, Garden Grove, Calif.

Klusmeyer, Thomas, to retirement

Kolander, Paul, to The Springs, Sparks, Nev.

Schlomer, Lloyd, to retirement

Straseske, Anthony, to Friedens, Randolph, Wis.

Weinkauff, Brian, to Redeemer, Hastings, Neb.

Westendorf, Thomas, to Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minn.

Ziemer, Paul, to St. John, Stillwater, Minn.

Teachers

Balluch, Carly, to St. Mark Little Lions Preschool, Salina, Kan.

Boden-Benner, Maria, to St. Paul's, Moline, Ill.

Bondow, Anna, to Zion, Denver, Colo.

Cook, Laura, to Illinois Lutheran Elementary School, Crete, Ill.

Evans, Samantha, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.

Gronholz, Amanda, to Our Savior, Grafton, Wis.

Grunke, Allison, to Building Blocks for Life, Cambridge, Minn.

Hagedorn, Elizabeth, to Christ-St. John's, West Salem, Wis.

Hahn, Jonathan, to Our Savior, Grafton, Wis.

Jaeger, Ethan, to Northdale Christian Academy, Tampa, Fla.

Manske, Carl, to St. Peter's, Fond du Lac, Wis.

McBryde, Thomas, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.

Murphy, Jack, to Westside Christian School, Middleton, Wis.

Naumann, Rachel, to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.

Olson, Lynette, to Christ, North Saint Paul, Minn.

Preston, Amy, to Trinity Lutheran Preschool, Caledonia, Wis.

Rockwell, Cindy, to Redeemer, Tucson, Ariz.

Tess, Paul, to retirement

Tietz, Josh, to Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.

Wade Jr., James, to East Fork, Whiteriver, Ariz.

Staff ministers

Bakken, James, to retirement

Metzger, Kristine, to retirement

SEE MORE ➤ summer 2020 teacher and staff minister assignments at mlc-wels.edu/assignments.

UPCOMING EVENTS MAY BE POSTPONED OR CANCELED DUE TO COVID-19. Please check the event organizer's website or contact the event organizer directly for the most up-to-date information.

ANNIVERSARIES

Abita Springs, La.—Trinity (115). Oct. 25. Worship, 10 A.M.; community meal to follow. Contact freesepts@gmail.com.

COMING EVENTS

Special education virtual conference—Aug. 4. 10 A.M. to 3:30 P.M. Hosted by Christian Educators for Special Education. Speaker: Dr. Rhoda Wolle on social and emotional development. Website, cesewels.org.

NAMES WANTED

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.

To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210 or e-mail ficsubmissions@wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.

SEE MORE AT ➤ welsrc.net/bulletinboard.

CALLED TO eternal glory

A reporting of deaths of called workers as noted in the call report.

READ MORE AT ➤ forwardinchrist.net/obituaries.

PASTORS

KLEIN, CARL M.

Jan. 26, 1933–June 1, 2020

SCHUETZE, ARMIN W.

April 25, 1917–May 27, 2020

VAN NORSTRAND, ROBERT C.

Nov. 3, 1922–May 23, 2020

TEACHERS & STAFF MINISTERS

ANDERSON, DUANE D.

Dec. 14, 1938–May 26, 2020

EHLKE, ROGER W.

July 1, 1943–June 8, 2020

SEBALD (NEE PRIOUR), NATALIE

Feb. 1, 1959–June 13, 2020

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN, FOR THEY WILL BE COMFORTED.

— Matthew 5:4

THROUGH MY *Bible* IN 3 YEARS

- | | | |
|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Amos 6 | 12. Ps. 15, 16 | 23. Ps. 27 |
| 2. Amos 7:1–8:3 | 13. Ps. 17 | 24. Ps. 28, 29 |
| 3. Amos 8:4–9:15 | 14. Ps. 18:1-30 | 25. 1 Thessalonians 1 |
| 4. Hosea 1, 2 | 15. Ps. 18:31-50 | 26. 1 Thess. 2 |
| 5. Hos. 3 | 16. Ps. 19 | 27. 1 Thess. 3 |
| 6. Hos. 4:1–5:14 | 17. Ps. 20, 21 | 28. 1 Thess. 4 |
| 7. Hos. 5:15–8:14 | 18. Ps. 22:1-21 | 29. 1 Thess. 5 |
| 8. Hos. 9, 10 | 19. Ps. 22:22-31 | 30. 2 Thessalonians 1 |
| 9. Hos. 11, 12 | 20. Ps. 23, 24 | 31. 2 Thess. 2:1-12 |
| 10. Hos. 13, 14 | 21. Ps. 25 | |
| 11. Psalms 13, 14 | 22. Ps. 26 | |

AUGUST 2020

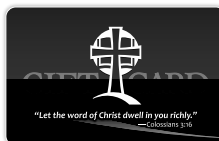
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PREMIUM HOLIDAYS

The WELS VEBA Commission is offering a one-month premium holiday for the WELS VEBA Group Health Care Plan ("WELS VEBA"). No premiums will be due for WELS VEBA medical benefits for the month of August 2020. Premiums for voluntary benefits, such as dental, life, and optional long-term disability, will still be due and payable for the month of August 2020, as will any premiums due for WELS VEBA coverage prior to August 2020.

The WELS Retirement Program Commission is also offering a one-quarter contribution holiday for the WELS Pension Plan (the "Plan"). No Plan contributions will be due for the October-December 2020 quarter. Active workers will continue to earn Plan benefits for eligible service performed during the October-December 2020 quarter, and Plan benefits will continue to be paid to retired workers and surviving spouses.

Questions? Contact Benefit Plans, bpo@wels.net; 414-256-3299.

PHOTOS NEEDED

Forward in Christ is looking for photos featuring art or music in your church, school, or home and how you use it to glorify God. Be creative and share the story behind your photo.

Photos are due Aug. 20. The higher the resolution the better. Make sure you receive permission from the people pictured to submit the photo. Photos may be used in future "This is WELS" collages in the magazine or online.

Submit photos at
forwardinchrist.net/submit or
e-mail ficsubmissions@wels.net.

Friends are friends forever

Snowden G. Sims

This article's title comes from a Michael W. Smith song from the late 1980s. The lyrics say, "Friends are friends forever if the Lord's the lord of them." Smith's point is that when our earthly friends are friends in Christ, our relationship does not end, even when we are separated by time and distance.

We start to learn about friendship from childhood. For me, it was in the Head Start program in Lima, Ohio. My friend's name was Peanut. I initially thought "Peanut" was a neighborhood nickname, until everyone—including his mom—called him Peanut. Peanut and I worked in the same pod. We ate lunch together. We played together. After school, we would hang out at each other's homes. Understand, back in the 1960s, young children spent time outside, running up and down the dirt roads and playing in the weeds with no fear. Most people were related or had lived on the same plot of land for generations.

Friendship is more than hanging out and staying in touch.

Peanut was my best friend for a short time. My family moved to Milwaukee two years after Head Start, and I never saw Peanut again. But I had the opportunity to make new friends. My brother, Greg, and I got to know the neighborhood children. We played together, but the friendships were only on a surface level.

After two years in a public elementary school, the Lord provided the blessing of a Christian education in a Lutheran elementary school. There, I found a new friend, Rodney (aka ROC). He was a year behind me in school, but Rodney became my best friend. We did all the same things Peanut and I had done: went to school together, ran and played basketball together, spent the night at each other's homes, and enjoyed each other's company.

But this relationship was on another level. We went to church together. Later we went to the same Lutheran high school. We ran track together over the summer after our high school years. Later we shared an apartment. We were in each other's weddings. Even after we moved to different states, the friendship remained.

Friendship is more than hanging out and staying in touch. Scripture tells us: "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity" (Proverbs 17:17). The true value of a Christian friend is that you can talk openly and honestly about your sins and God's forgiveness, your weaknesses and Christ's strength. He or she will not just tell you what they think; a friend that is forever will lead you to and through God's Word for your direction, correction, and solution.

As I have matured, I have recognized the need for those brothers—friends—in the pastoral ministry to whom I can go with my tough questions, situations, or challenges. I am surrounded by such friends in my ministry. We have grown to know one another's strengths and weaknesses. We share heartaches and joys, and on those painfully rough days we share the soothing balm of Jesus' promises. Studying God's Word is a privilege we enjoy. Praying for one another's health, families, and vocations is natural. We confess our sins to one another and receive absolution from one another. We have a special friendship that is connected in Jesus.

Friends who have Jesus at the center of their relationship truly are friends forever. May the Lord bless you with such a friend in Jesus!



Contributing editor Snowden Sims, president of the Michigan District, is pastor at St. Paul's, Columbus, Ohio.

F R E E D O M


Called to Be Free – Galatians 5:13

Freedom in Christ allows you to fully enjoy all of God's blessings, from praying for our nation to wedding celebrations. These Christ-centered books and resources from NPH will always remind you that in both good and troubling times, you are called to be free. Spread joy this summer by sharing them with your loved ones!



God Bless Our Native Land **Prayers for an Election Year**

Our nation and its leaders constantly need God's wisdom and guidance. Imagine what would happen if every Christian in America prayed for our country! The 26 prayers in *God Bless Our Native Land* invite you to

bring specific hopes and concerns to your heavenly Father, including objective and balanced media coverage, honesty at the ballot box, and compassionate leadership. Encourage friends and family to pray with you using NPH's quantity discounts. Softcover, 32 pages. **LU060734, \$0.75** 

To see the great selection of NPH's books and resources for this election year, visit nph.net/patriotic.




Magnificent Christian Hymns

What better way to praise God than with music? This majestic album of trumpet and organ music features well-known anthems such as "America the Beautiful" and "My

Country 'Tis of Thee" along with Christian favorites like "Abide with Me" and "On Eagle's Wings" to lift your spirit as you enjoy your freedom in Christ! 30 tracks. **LU344979, \$12.00**



Christian Service Members' Handbook

The *Christian Service Members' Handbook* is designed to aid Christian military members in battle or dangerous situations where they may not have access to a pastor or support from fellow believers. Developed by NPH, WELS Special Ministries, and the Lutheran Military Support Group, the pocket-sized book features a wide variety of essential spiritual resources, including morning and evening devotional orders, prayers for specific battle situations, Bible passages, hymns, and portions of Luther's Small Catechism. Softcover, 184 pages. **LU0600766, \$6.99** 



Gold Cross on Wood with Wedding Rings

As you celebrate weddings and anniversaries with loved ones this summer, give the special couples in your life a beautiful reminder to honor God in their marriage vows. Intertwining wedding rings on a cross provide an elegant, yet bold visual statement, making this keepsake a wonderful wedding and anniversary gift. Measures 8 inches long.

LU2300118, \$24.99

LU2300119, \$24.99, also available in silver (not pictured)



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Bittersweet

We come back to worship, but it's just not the same.

Andrew C. Schroer

I WAS GIDDY with anticipation.

After two months of exile, we were finally going to gather again to worship in church.

Initially I had envisioned our first service back to be a welcome home celebration. The church would be full. The music would be glorious. People would be hugging each other. Not a few tears of joy would be shed.

Life at church would go back to the way it used to be.

THE REALITY

The reality of our first service back was quite different. Since we are having multiple services to allow for social distancing, the church was only a quarter full. We couldn't socialize before or afterward. No hugs or handshakes were shared. People were forced to sit apart.

Don't get me wrong. The service was still a celebration. We thanked God for his grace. We talked about never again taking for granted the privilege of worshiping together. We said and sang the words of Psalm 122, "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD.'" Tears were shed.

But as I gazed on the masked faces in worship and saw the tears swell, I wondered if they were tears of joy or tears of sorrow. We were happy to be back, but it just wasn't the same.

ANOTHER HOMECOMING

Two thousand six hundred years ago, the children of Israel found themselves in a markedly longer and less luxurious exile. They were conquered by the Babylonians. The temple and the city of Jerusalem were destroyed. They were carried off into exile for 70 years.

Our lives are a bitter-sweet mix of emotions. Yet through it all, God's promises hold true.

At the end of those 70 years, God brought his people back. They began to rebuild the city, their homes, and the temple. When the foundation of the temple was finished, the people came together to dedicate it.

They had been waiting for this day for 70 years. They were finally going to be able to worship God again in his temple. The people cried out in joy as they sang their praises. Mixed in the crowd were also those who as children had seen the original temple in all its glory. They wept aloud when they saw the foundation, knowing the new temple was going to be nothing compared to Solomon's original. Ezra, the priest, tells us that "no one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping because the people made so much noise" (Ezra 3:13).

A NEW NORMAL

Like the Jews return to Jerusalem, our return to worship was bittersweet. It was so wonderful to be back and able to worship God again, but it just was not quite the same.

If the experts are right, things will probably never be quite the same again. We will soon have to adjust to a new normal. Such is life in a sin-filled world. Though God gives us times of joy and celebration, there are also times of sorrow and sickness. Our lives are a bittersweet mix of emotions. Yet through it all, God's promises hold true.

God will be with us every step of the way. He will make everything work for our good. Most important, Jesus lived, died, and rose again so that one day we will be able to stand in God's house of heaven and sing our praises with unrestrained joy. In heaven, we won't worship with mixed emotions.

Right now, our return to worship at our churches may be bittersweet, but it's there where we find God's promise of heaven.

And that is just plain sweet.



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