

JANUARY 2020

forwardinchrist.net

# FORWARD IN CHRIST

A LUTHERAN VOICE

## NEW BEGINNINGS

**LIFE AFTER  
AN ABORTION**

p. 12

**OUR UNIQUE  
TRIUNE GOD**

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**FIC AS YOUR  
PARTNER**

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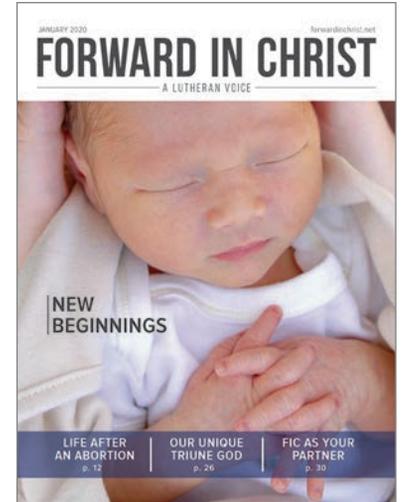
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May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors;  
may he never leave us nor forsake us. — 1 KINGS 8:57

## WHAT'S INSIDE

It's a new year filled with new beginnings. For us at *Forward in Christ*, we are debuting a new look for you, our readers. Taking into account answers and comments from our readers survey last year, we have added new columns, expanded old favorites, and freshened up our design. You'll see some new authors presenting the age-old saving message of Christ crucified. You'll meet WELS members from around the world who will share their stories of faith. Many articles this month will follow the theme "New beginnings," as we all start the new year with our Lord.



COVER PHOTO | Joe Cheng

Besides a redesigned magazine, we are also introducing a new website, **forwardinchrist.net**. There you will find more resources to grow in your faith as well as more opportunities to share photos and news from your congregations. You can also sign up for a free weekly e-newsletter for expanded articles and sneak peeks into future issues.

Please take time this month to explore what's new in the magazine and online. Then let us know what you think. E-mail us at [fic@wels.net](mailto:fic@wels.net) or catch us online at [forwardinchrist.net/submit](http://forwardinchrist.net/submit).

Julie Wietzke

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**FEATURED ONLINE** ➤ This Is WELS! See more photos of members from around the world at [forwardinchrist.net](http://forwardinchrist.net).



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# THIS IS WELS

Christians come together to celebrate Jesus' birth in so many different ways all across the United States, Canada, and around the world.

1 | Immanuel, Waukegan, Ill. 2 | Grace, Sugar Bush, Wis. 3 | Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church, Akademgorodok, Russia 4 | Sure Foundation, Woodside, N.Y. 5 | Saviour of the Nations, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada 6 | Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Chorus, Mequon, Wis. 7 | Hope, Toronto, Ontario, Canada 8 | Divine Savior, West Palm

Beach, Fla. 9 | Hope, Toronto, Ontario, Canada 10 | Apostles, San Jose, Calif., Forever Young Christmas lunch 11 | St. Matthew, Oconomowoc, Wis., Advent by candlelight 12 | Bethlehem, Germantown, Wis., two-year-old childcare

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# Resolutions of faith

**“For this very reason, after applying every effort, add moral excellence to your faith. To moral excellence, add knowledge. To knowledge, add self-control. To self-control, add patient endurance. To patient endurance, add godliness. To godliness, add brotherly affection. And to brotherly affection, add love. For if you have these qualities and they are increasing, they are going to keep you from being idle or unfruitful in regard to your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:5-8 Evangelical Heritage Version).**

Joel C. Seifert

## EAT BETTER. SAVE MONEY. EXERCISE MORE.

Those aren't bad resolutions. If you're one of the 8 percent of people who keep resolutions like that every year, you've probably found great blessings in them. But God offers us even more meaningful resolutions. He doesn't just encourage us to change how we take care of our bodies or spend our money. He talks about changing who we are.

## BEING WHO GOD MADE US TO BE

You are a forgiven child of God. That's the new identity God gives to you in your baptism. You are justified, declared not guilty because of the work of Christ. Now God calls us to live as the holy people he has declared us to be. The Bible calls this a life of sanctification.

It's serious work. A life of sanctification is a natural one for believers, but it doesn't come naturally. Peter lists seven Christian virtues to add to our faith: moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, patient endurance, godliness, brotherly affection, and love.

Which of them do you struggle with most? Do those around you recognize your high morals or is your life like the lives of those who don't know Jesus? Have the frustrations of life dissolved your patient endurance? Does your schedule rob you of time you might use to practice brotherly affection with fellow believers? You're not the first to struggle.

God says it calls for “every effort.” It's hard. And just as losing weight or changing your habits takes constant work, growing in Christian virtues is a daily challenge.

But it's not quite right to say it's changing who we are. It's becoming who God declared us to be. Peter begins his next paragraph addressing the believers as “brothers.” What a beautiful reminder! We don't live this way to become God's children. We are simply striving to live as the children of God he's made us to be.

## SETTING OUR EYES ON CHRIST

God attaches an incredible promise to an earnest life of sanctification. Second Peter continues, “If you do these things, you will never stumble. In fact, in this way you will be richly supplied with an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (vv. 10,11).



PHOTO | Naomi Green

## God calls us to live as the holy people he has declared us to be.

Taking your life of sanctification seriously doesn't earn you a place in heaven, but it does help you hold on to the gift God's given you. Consider these truths: God says that sinful desires “war against” our souls (1 Peter 2:11). Striving for moral excellence shields us from many of those attacks.

God has given us all we need for our Christian lives (2 Peter 1:3). As you grow in this Christian living—even imperfectly—you'll see God keeping his promise.

By adding knowledge and brotherly affection to your faith, that means you're committed to being in God's Word and around his people. As you do that, God will use the gospel to feed your faith and assure you of your forgiveness.

God bless you with another year of growing in his love!



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

## Safe in the power of God

It's easy to forget that gospel ministry—and even living as a confessing disciple of Jesus Christ—can be risky. Recent political unrest in Ethiopia caused some frightening moments for missionaries and pastors of WELS and our sister church bodies in Africa.

Last fall, two events were scheduled to take place in Ethiopia. Representatives of our sister churches in Africa had scheduled a regional conference in the city of Bishoftu, about two hours from the capital of Addis Ababa. In connection with that conference, the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia planned a special worship service to dedicate the new building that would house its theological training school. I was invited to attend.

As soon as I arrived in Addis Ababa, I received a phone call from Sean Young, WELS director of missions operations. He asked where I was, because violent political riots had broken out in Bishoftu. The US State Department was urging all American citizens to leave Ethiopia as soon as possible. He advised me not to leave the airport and to find a flight out of the country immediately.

Thankfully, a flight was available 14 hours later. While waiting for the flight, I learned that other WELS and African pastors already in Bishoftu had been surrounded in their vehicles several times by angry mobs. Thankfully, nothing more happened to them, and they were able to leave the country shortly after I did. The conference and dedication were canceled.

The advice to leave was not an overreaction or false alarm. The rioting spread quickly to other cities, including the capital. Nearly 70 people were killed in Addis Ababa; more than 200 were injured.

Even though none of us were harmed, the events of that day were a stark reminder that gospel ministry sometimes brings real dangers with it. That's easy to forget in the comfort and security of the United States. In many parts of the world, peaceful streets can turn dangerous.

As I waited for my flight, those events led me to think of the unrest taking place in Hong Kong, where our synod's Asia Lutheran Seminary trains pastors and church workers. Will the teachers and students be safe? I thought of India, where the government is openly hostile to Christianity and has forced WELS friendly counselors to leave the country. I thought of our fellow Christians in predominantly Muslim countries like Indonesia and Pakistan, where confessing Christ can literally result in imprisonment or even death.

When we think of the dangers and threats to God's faithful people around the world, we are compelled to pray fervently. We pray for God's protection. We pray that the Holy Spirit gives them—and all of us—boldness, courage, and faithfulness. And we pray that even if some doors are closed, God would continue to open new doors for his saving gospel. We pray with confidence, knowing that we can say with faithful Christian witnesses everywhere as the hymn so beautifully says, "No pow'r of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck me from his hand; till he returns or calls me home, here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand" (*Christian Worship: Supplement* 752:4).



Mark G. Schroeder | WELS President

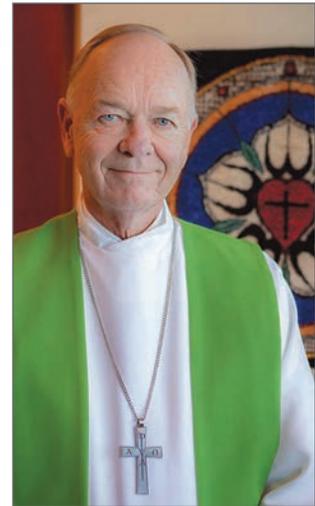
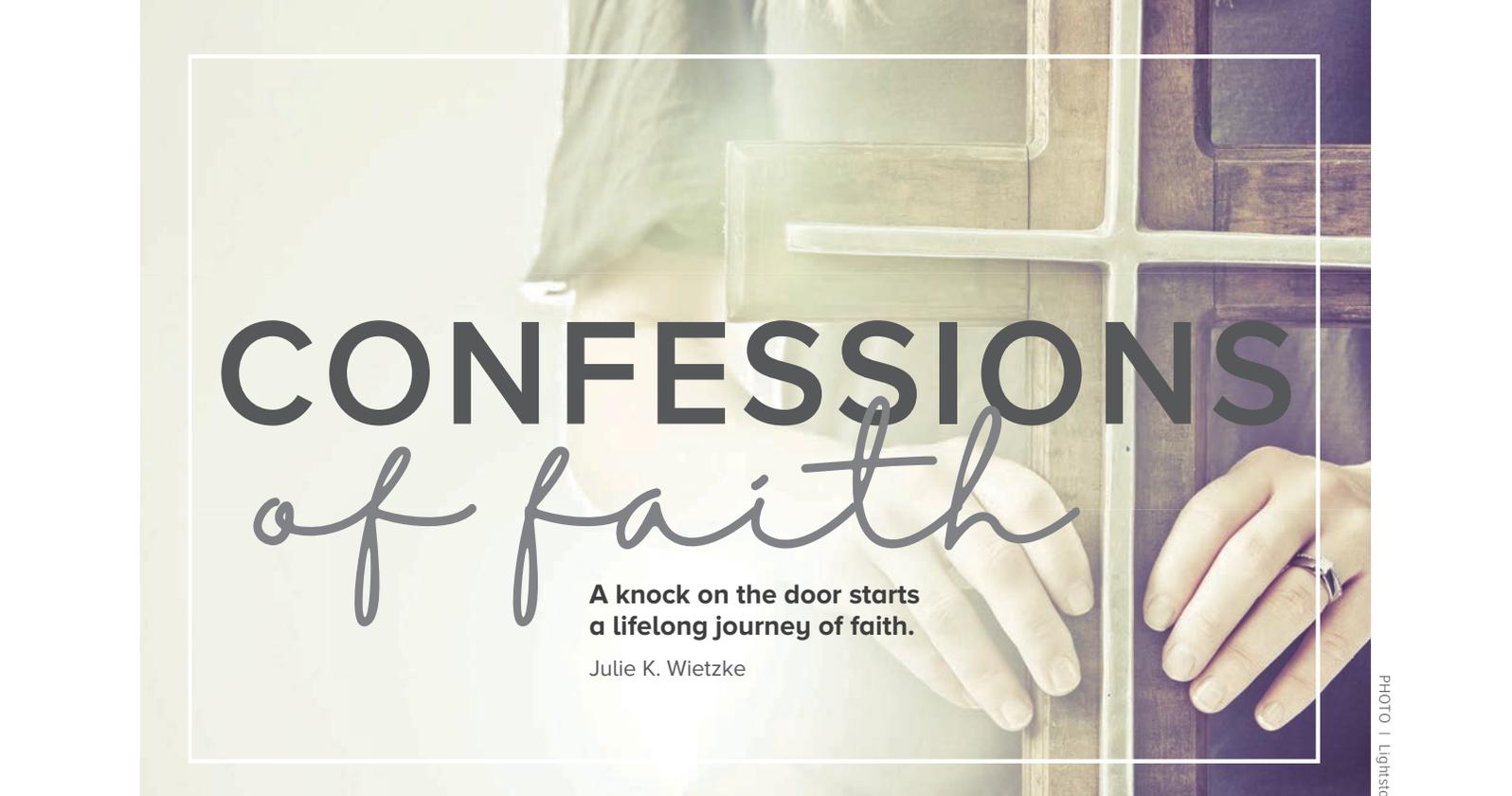


PHOTO | Mel Anne Designs

[READ MORE](#) about unrest in East Asia on p. 22.



# CONFESSIONS

## *of faith*

**A knock on the door starts  
a lifelong journey of faith.**

Julie K. Wietzke

PHOTO | Lightstock

**IT WAS A NIGHT** Mark Hartman says he will never forget.

It was summer 1981 in Big Spring, Texas, and Mark was relaxing in his apartment. There was a knock on his door. Mark says he can't recall the face of the man who stood there, but he vividly remembers the question that the man asked:

"If you died tonight, would you go to heaven?"

Mark knows the answer now, but at the time he wasn't sure. But the Holy Spirit used that question and the law and gospel presentation that followed to begin Mark's journey of faith. "From that night on, I knew that I was going to heaven!" he says. "My only regret is that the evangelist doesn't know the joy that he began in me and for my family."

### **DISCOVERING THE TRUTH**

It wasn't that Mark didn't believe in God before that night. He was raised Catholic and remembers going to Mass every Sunday with his mom and his two sisters. "My dad would take us and find a place to park and read the paper until the service was over," says Mark. But even though Mark went to Sunday school and was confirmed, he never was encouraged to read the Bible. And he didn't know the true gospel message. "I would pray and be repentant of my sins, but I just did not have the confidence [of forgiveness], because I didn't know what Jesus had done."

He says his parents raised him to be gentle, responsible, and charitable. "That's how they were—they had big hearts. But they didn't know their Savior. They were spiritually lost." Mark stopped going to church around the age of 12.

Mark met his wife, Phyllis, his senior year of high school, and they started dating in college. Phyllis grew up in a strong Lutheran family, but Mark doesn't remember them talking much about faith or religion while they were dating.

**"The more you can share Jesus and what he has done, the more opportunities the Holy Spirit can use you to work."**

Until that summer night in Big Spring.

After he was asked the question, Mark says he remembers being caught off guard and hemming and hawing over the answer. "I said, 'I think I'm doing pretty good. I'm kind. I don't cheat. I don't steal. I believe in God.' He asked me if he could show me a few Scripture verses. I said sure. He then proceeded to show me several verses that clearly say that if I believe that Jesus came into this world to die for my sins, I would have eternal life. No



Mark Hartman and his family. His daughter Sarah (far left photo) and son-in-law Anar and their family are core members of a new mission in Houston. Mark and his wife, Phyllis, are also members of that mission.

strings attached, no special works, no measuring stick of how good I was.”

After the evangelist left, Mark immediately called Phyllis to see if this is what she believed. “She confirmed that this was the truth, and my walk of faith had begun!” says Mark.

That fall he started taking Bible information classes at Shepherd of the Plains, a WELS church in Lubbock, Texas. “I hadn’t read the Bible much, so actually reading it and trying to understand what it said was perfect for the engineer in me,” he says. “It is so logical. There are no contradictions. I just soaked it up.”

Mark and Phyllis got married that December, and after moving to Houston, they joined Christ the Lord in Houston.

### SHARING THE MESSAGE

But that isn’t the end of the story. “That night set off a series of events in my life for years to come,” says Mark.

It started with Mark and Phyllis raising their two children in the Lutheran faith, including sending them to a Lutheran elementary school.

Mark’s parents began coming to church to see the kids’ programs and special services. They got to know the principal and his family from the school. When the principal’s daughter developed a brain tumor, Mark kept his mom updated on what was happening. “The principal would send out updates on her status

and always shared a tremendous gospel message at the end of each update,” says Mark. “I would forward the e-mails to my mom since she knew them.”

He continues, “It was immediately after their daughter

## Links IN A CHAIN

Mark’s journey of faith began with a man whose name he doesn’t even know. The man stayed for less than an hour, but the impact he made lasted for a lifetime. It made an eternal difference in Mark’s life and in many other lives as Mark began sharing the peace that he discovered.

Mark says his pastor once told him it’s like links in a chain. You might be a link in someone else’s chain without even knowing it.

Who are the links in your chain? In what chains are you a link?

SHARE YOUR STORY AT [forwardinchrist.net/submit](https://forwardinchrist.net/submit).

died that my mom called me and asked me if I knew of any basic Bible classes that she could take. There is no doubt in my mind that the Holy Spirit was using [those messages] on her.”

That desire to share the gospel message continued through Mark and Phyllis’ daughter Sarah, who in high school had begun dating her now-husband Anar, a man from Azerbaijan who knew little about Christianity. “As their relationship grew, so did our daughter’s desire to have her boyfriend learn about Jesus,” says Mark. Anar took basic Bible classes and joined the church. Now he is the president of a new mission church that just started in Houston, of which Mark and Phyllis are part of the core group (see sidebar).

Mark’s dad still wasn’t interested, even though Mark, his mom, and especially Phyllis would present the law and gospel to him. But they continued to share the message, especially after he had a stroke that made him dependent on others for the last two years of his life. And the Holy Spirit worked through their witness. “On one of his last days, he confessed to my mom that he believed that Jesus was his Savior,” says Mark.

Mark currently serves as a layman on the Board for Home Missions. As a member of the Board for Home Missions, he gets to put his love for witnessing into action by helping make decisions on where to start new mission churches while being wise stewards of synod resources.

He shares the lifelong lesson he learned from the evangelist who knocked on his door that night: “This missionary back in 1981 cared enough about me; we should care about others in that same way. I think that’s what drives me. My message to others is to try to have as many conversations about Jesus as you can. The more you can share Jesus and what he has done, the more opportunities the Holy Spirit can use you to work. You won’t even know what God used you to do until you’re in heaven.”

Mark says he is looking forward to meeting that evangelist from his past in heaven someday. “For all he knows, our encounter was just another empty discussion. I hope that he comes up to me in heaven and says, ‘Hey, it was me!’ And I’ll just hug him.”



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

## Hope in THE HEIGHTS

Mark and Phyllis Hartman are part of a core group for a new mission in Houston, Texas, that was just approved for funding by the Board for Home Missions in spring 2019. The seven families that form the core group were from WELS churches in the area and have been meeting monthly for Bible study since 2015. The new mission is located in an urban neighborhood called The Heights that is seeing a resurgence in popularity as people strive to be closer to the city center of Houston. Andrew Nemmers, a 2019 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, was assigned to serve the group last May. Mark shares that the group is starting to reach out into the community as they prepare to launch weekly worship services in September 2020. The name of this new church? Hope Lutheran. “We’re here to offer hope in The Heights,” says Mark. Pictured are Mark and Phyllis with a group from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary who came to work with the core group last January.



A night sky with a starburst and silhouettes of three camels. The sky is a deep blue and purple, with a bright starburst in the upper right corner. The silhouettes of three camels are visible in the lower half of the image, walking from left to right. The text "I just had an epiphany!" is written in white, with "I just had an" in a sans-serif font and "epiphany!" in a cursive font.

# I just had an epiphany!

## Coming between Christmas and Lent, Epiphany has an important message for us.

Samuel C. Degner

In everyday English, an *epiphany* is a revelation or an insight. For example, a woman puzzles over a problem at work all day. Then, during her commute home, she has an epiphany: the answer suddenly materializes in her mind.

It's not exactly how we use the word in the church year, though there is a connection. *Epiphany* comes from a Greek word that means "appearance" or "manifestation." In the New Testament, forms of the word usually refer to Jesus' first or second coming. For example, Paul writes of the grace of God that "has now been revealed through the *appearing* of our Savior, Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:10, emphasis added). He also points ahead to

the Last Day, "the blessed hope—the *appearing* of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13, emphasis added).

Thus, the Epiphany season is a time to focus on God appearing on this earth in the person of Jesus—"God in man made manifest," as we sing in the hymn "Songs of Thankfulness and Praise" (*Christian Worship* 82)—and what the Scriptures reveal about him.

### THE SAVIOR OF ALL

The season begins with the festival of the Epiphany of Our Lord, observed in Western Christianity on Jan. 6. Traditionally it is a day to remember the coming of the wise men (Matthew 2:1-12). As we hear about Magi from a distant country visiting the Christ Child, we see Jesus appear as the Savior of all nations.

While this may seem obvious to us, it would have been a revelation to

many of the Jews of Jesus' day who had lost sight of the Messiah's mission to be a light for the Gentiles and to bring salvation to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 49:6). It took a while for this idea to sink in even with Jesus' disciples—even after Pentecost. When God sent Peter to preach to the gentile Cornelius, Peter said, "I *now realize* how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him" (Acts 10:34,35, emphasis added). And when the Gentiles believed his message and received the Holy Spirit, "The circumcised believers who had come with Peter *were astonished* that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles" (Acts 10:45, emphasis added).

Jesus is the Savior of all people. If you're not surprised by these truths, it's because you've already had your "aha" moment. It happened when

PHOTO | Lightstock

you came to faith—perhaps even when you were baptized as a baby. That was the day Jesus appeared to you. It's when you had your “epiphany.” But we need the reminder.

The man boarding the plane in front of you is wearing a turban. What comes to mind first—evangelism or terrorism? Five minutes into the service, a man slides into your pew, looking and smelling like he lives on the street. Is your first impulse to lean toward him and help him with the hymnal or to shrink back in the other direction? God's foremost thought regarding all these people is their salvation. That's not always the first thing that appears in our minds. Don't we know that Jesus is the Savior of all?

#### AN ALMIGHTY SAVIOR

Epiphany also reveals that Jesus is the all-powerful God. No one would have guessed it by looking at him, but he made the claim and backed it up with miracles. Nathanael doubted that the Messiah could come from Nazareth until Jesus told him he had seen him under a fig tree before they ever met. That was Nathanael's “aha” moment: “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel” (John 1:49). Shortly after that, Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding at Cana—“the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him” (John 2:11). Yet later we find those same disciples surprised by Jesus' power. When he calmed the storm, they said, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!” (Matthew 8:27).

So, perhaps the only thing surprising to you so far is how surprised Jesus' disciples could be. But his power is important for us to remember. Consider the stubborn problems in your life: The disease that knows no cure. The depression you can't shake. The temptation that won't leave you alone.

The relationship that never gets better. The kids who won't listen. Does it occur to you that Jesus is fully capable of fixing what's broken or helping you handle the brokenness? So often we agonize over our problems as if we've forgotten that Jesus is the almighty God.

### The Epiphany season is a time to focus on God appearing on this earth in the person of Jesus . . . and what the Scriptures reveal about him.

Like his disciples, we need to be reminded of these things, and the Epiphany season does just that. In fact, it reveals even more.

At the end of the Epiphany season, we get front-row seats to another “aha” moment for the disciples. At the top of a mountain, Jesus was transfigured, and Peter, James, and John got to see a little glimpse of who he really is. But the Father's voice from the cloud proclaimed more than Jesus' divinity: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matthew 17:5). God put his stamp of approval on everything Jesus did, said, and thought for 33 years. Just let that sink in! It matters because what Jesus did counts for you. Through faith in him, you are just as much God's child as Jesus himself, just as beloved and pleasing to your Father as he is.

Remember what John the Baptist reveals to us this Epiphany season when he says, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). He was looking back to the Old Testament lambs sacrificed for the people and ahead to Jesus' suffering and death. It wouldn't have been hard for those watching Jesus during Holy Week

to see how he was like a lamb, being led uncomplaining to the slaughter. What no one would have known, however, was that this sacrifice would take away the sin of the world. So John—and Jesus and his apostles—proclaimed it: God's Son appeared on this earth as the sacrifice that

removes our sins. Our slowness to believe and quickness to forget are forgiven by his blood.

These truths never would have dawned on us. But Jesus appeared as a light dawning on the land of the shadow of death (Matthew 4:16). He reveals himself to us through his gospel. That's the whole point of Epiphany.

And it happens all year long. Any time we remember our baptisms, we are reminded of our perfect standing in God's family. Whenever we take his Supper, Jesus is in, with, and under the bread and wine to forgive us. Every time we hear his Word, Jesus comes to us in grace, strengthening us as we look forward to his appearing in glory.

These are the little epiphanies we constantly need!



*Samuel Degner, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Christ Alone, Thiensville, Wisconsin.*

# God's *forgiveness*

**Guilt from an abortion consumed a woman until she began to believe and hold on to God's promise of forgiveness.**

Pamela K. Manske

A soft, gentle rain was falling that August morning. It was on my daily walk that I saw in the distance the figure of a woman sitting on a concrete step. She was huddled over with her arms clasping her knees and her head buried in her chest. As I drew nearer to her, I heard soft, muffled sobs. When she heard me approach, she got up suddenly to dart away, but she slowed when I called out to her: "Wait! I want to help you. Come and sit with me."

I asked her if sitting on the steps of the pregnancy care center had anything to do with her crying. She was silent. I told her that I was a volunteer there, along with many other women. I explained that we were there to assist any woman in need of anything. She dejectedly replied, "That wouldn't be me. I am beyond help."

Gently encouraging her to let me try, I told her that I knew I could offer hope for her. She looked at me distrustingly. I waited. And I waited some more. Finally, through her sobs, her story slowly unfolded.

**Amy' told me that on this date in 1994, her then-boyfriend deposited her with cab fare at a nearby abortion clinic.** He instructed her to "just get it over with." After that, she never heard from him again. But soon her nightmare of the past eight weeks would be over . . . or so she thought. She confided in no one. No one else knew what she was about to do. She was 19.

Amy entered the clinic hesitantly, telling herself that this was the best way to



deal with this unplanned pregnancy. She saw no way out of her situation. She did as she was instructed by the abortion clinic personnel and had little recollection of what happened that morning until she realized in her groggy state that she was in the recovery room. This is where she saw an image that would haunt her in the days and years ahead.

Afterward, sleep eluded her. She would close her eyes, only to envision that recovery room where she saw a bundle of pink sheets on a surgical tray. In her dreamlike state, she saw herself pick up the bundle, walk about, and sing to it softly. Suddenly, without provocation, she threw the bundle into a blazing fire. Awakened with fright at the thought of the horrific thing she had done, she tried once again to erase the image from her mind. Soon the flashback would begin again. She interpreted this dream to mean that it was a baby girl whose life she had terminated. This dream continued for the next 20-some years.

Many triggers took Amy back to that day. Her grief never seemed to end, and it was magnified whenever she encountered things such as baby showers, newborns, strollers . . . and yes, the color pink. She couldn't shake the feeling that the hundreds of days of sadness she experienced were the punishment she deserved. She saw no way out of her guilt and grief. She was overwhelmed with feelings of shame and regret.

Her personal relationships were hampered by the walls she had built around her heart. In her insecurity, she was unable to trust anyone, let alone herself. Though she was able to hide her choice from everyone, she was unable to escape the guilt. She eventually married, but her grief tore at the fabric of the marriage. Being repulsed by human touch, the intimacy of marriage was unat-

tainable. She was paralyzed in her emotions, and she found herself unable to shower affection on the son that she bore. No one was able to provide the compassion she needed and craved. Wrapped in her guilt, Amy felt hopeless.

**Our encounter that morning led to many more morning walks.** I used God's Word to point Amy to the hope of God's healing forgiveness for her, using such verses as Psalm 103:12 to remind her that "as

far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." She slowly peeled away the layers of shame, sadness, and regret. In time she began to see how much she needed Jesus. In time she began to know that the Lord was near to her in her brokenness and would never leave her. With a heart filled by the Holy Spirit, Amy began to believe and hold on to God's promise of forgiveness. It was not until she realized that God lavishes all of us, sinners all alike, with his sacrificial, unconditional love that she was finally able to forgive herself. Finally, no longer crushed in spirit, she could truly rejoice as a redeemed child of God.

No longer consumed by her memories, new joy has entered Amy's life. By coming to know God's truth and his grace and love, she is free to forgive herself and others. She is free to love and be loved. Her heart is at rest, and she feels restored. No longer does she feel the need to turn inward, shutting out the world as she wraps her arms about her knees. Instead, she eagerly wraps herself in Jesus' arms of love and mercy.

She can now fully rejoice with her son and his wife as they eagerly await the birth of their daughter, a granddaughter who surely will learn of Jesus at Grandma's knee. Lord willing, Amy will now be able to cuddle that baby girl in a soft, warm blanket . . . and yes, it will be pink!

*Help after*  
**AN ABORTION**

**An estimated 60+ million babies have been aborted in the United States since the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision to legalize abortion. More than 4 in 10 women who have had an abortion were churchgoers when they ended a pregnancy.<sup>2</sup> Pamela shares advice of how you can help a friend or fellow church member face the pain caused by an abortion:**

- **Talk less, and listen with your heart. She will feel that you are helping her shoulder the burden with true compassion.**
- **Require nothing from her. Don't try to fix her pain, but let it surface. It is a necessary part of healing.**
- **Encourage her to think of her child as a person. She could name the baby or write a letter to her child.**
- **Offer Bible passages showing her God's forgiveness.**
- **Pray with her, pray for her, and pray that God would help you to show her Christ's love.**

LEARN MORE AT **▶ apsmke.com** if you or someone you know needs help.



*Pamela Manske, the volunteer nurse manager at WELS Lutherans for Life, West Allis, Wisconsin, is a member at St. Jacobi, Greenfield, Wisconsin.*

READ MORE AT **▶ alife2.com** about WELS Lutherans for Life.

<sup>1</sup>name has been changed

<sup>2</sup>care-net.org/churches-blog/church-abortion-survey



# Q&A

WITH DAVID SCHARF

## If God wants what is best for me, wouldn't he want me to be happy?

### CLARIFYING THE QUESTION

Many people think, "God just wants me to be happy." In one way, the phrase seems almost irrefutable. To say the opposite seems cruel: "God does not want me to be happy."

Many times, people say, "God just wants me to be happy," when they want to continue to do something contrary to God's will. But if "happiness" involves hurting others, hurting yourself, or living outside of God's plan for your life as he lays it out for you in the Bible, then, no, God does not want you to be happy.

In addition, happiness is fleeting. Happiness rises and falls with the happenings of life. Since we live in a sinful world, there can never be perfect happiness. The devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh will always frustrate happiness in life.

Instead, God wants something so much more for you, and he does want what is best for you.

### WHAT GOD WANTS FOR US

Jesus says, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves . . ." (Mark 8:34). Pause there. Do you see what Jesus is asking? It is the hardest thing in the world. If he would have asked us to take a pilgrimage to the ends of the earth or walk on burning coals, it would have been easier! But Jesus tells us we must deny ourselves. That task is so hard because it involves saying, "Your way is best, Jesus, not my way."

Jesus continues, "[They] must deny themselves and take up their . . ." Retirement home? No. Their 401k? No. His preferences and opinions? No. "[They] must . . . take up their cross and follow me." Carrying a cross is difficult. Wait. That's an understatement! In fact, our word *excruciating* comes from the word *cross*. However, Jesus knows

that giving us a cross to bear means we will keep looking to his cross. Therefore, carrying a cross is not optional. Remember God's goal for you.

### GOD'S GOAL FOR US

God says, "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3,4). Did you catch what Jesus wants? It is not that God wants you to be unhappy. However, happiness also is not his goal for your life. God has a greater goal for you. God wants you to be in heaven with him.

If you want proof, just look at your Savior hanging on the cross. He denied himself so that he could welcome you into heaven. God does not necessarily want you to be happy; he wants you to be in heaven. And he is willing to do whatever it takes to get you there.

### OUR APPROACH TO LIFE

So if God does not necessarily want you to be happy, should you mope around all day like Eeyore? No! As you serve God, thank him for those glimpses of happiness in the happenings of this life. These are a gift he gives you! King Solomon says in Ecclesiastes, "A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?" (2:24,25).

The Christian will not expect this life to be heaven on earth. Instead, God promises the opposite: "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

But remember, since entering heaven is his goal for you, you can even thank God for the hardships.

ASK A QUESTION AT ► [forwardinchrist.net/submit](http://forwardinchrist.net/submit).

# God wants me in heaven

David G. Scharf

**THERE ARE MANY** versions of the phrase “God wants me to be happy.”

- “God wants me to be rich.”
- “God wouldn’t want me to rush into marriage, so I’ll live with my significant other.”
- “God wouldn’t want me to deny these feelings I have for someone of the same sex.”

The list can go on and on. Usually the person saying this phrase is trying to justify a sin that God condemns. It sounds cruel to say, “God doesn’t want me to be happy!”

But then what does God want for me?

## THE REALITY

**Read Genesis 3:15-19.**

In these verses, God outlines the effects of sin and speaks the first promise of a Savior. What does God promise according to Genesis 3? He promises pain in childbirth, sweat and thorns in work, and the dust of the grave at the end of our lives. Consider what the result would be if he had not promised suffering. Only in suffering and pain would Adam and Eve yearn for God’s grace. Only in death would they long for heaven. The same is true for you and me!

## WHAT GOD WANTS FOR US

**Read Mark 8:31-37.**

God wants us . . . **to have a cross.**

In this section, the apostle Peter thought that neither he nor Jesus should have a cross in life. Peter wanted Jesus to be crowned king, garner the love and praise of all, and visibly rule. In addition, of course, Peter would be his right-hand man! We should not be too hard on Peter. We want ease in our lives too!

Instead, Jesus promises a cross as we do

the most difficult thing he could ask of us: deny self. This is what makes following God’s will a cross as we struggle against our own natural will. The cross in a Christian’s life is not just suffering, but it is suffering that comes as a result of being a Christian. Jesus uses the cross in life to keep us focused on his cross.

**Read Romans 7:14-25.**

God wants us . . . **to struggle against our sinful flesh.**

Think of Luther’s explanation to the First Commandment: “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” What makes that so difficult for a Christian? The sinful flesh is at work most when you are focused on God. How is your sinful flesh at work when you are praying, listening to God’s Word, or even giving an offering?

**Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.**

God wants us . . . **to depend on him.**

The apostle Paul wanted God to take away his thorn in the flesh, but God responds, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Each one of us could write our own autobiography with this verse as the title. What are some ways that God has used the crosses of life to drive you back to his own?

**Read 1 Timothy 2:3,4.**

God wants us . . . **to be in heaven.**

Did you notice the words “all people”? You are part of all people. God does not necessarily want you to be happy. He wants you to be in heaven with him, and he is willing to do whatever it takes to get you there.

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

**READ MORE** > about David Scharf as one of our new contributing editors on p. 20.

# PARENT CONVERSATIONS

From day-to-day stressors like homework and whom to sit next to at lunch to larger stressors like changing schools or facing a family medical issue, our children are not immune to stress. Teaching them healthy ways to deal with stress from an early age can help set them up for success as they grow and deal with new stressors—paying bills and calming a colicky baby come to mind.

This month, two Christian parents who are also licensed professional counselors from WLCFS—Christian Family Solutions share their thoughts on how to help our kids deal with stress.

— Nicole Balza

## HOW CAN WE HELP A STRESSED-OUT KID?

**My nine-year-old son doesn't like it when I'm away,** and my husband and I are going to be away for a week in another country for a wedding in a couple months. Needless to say, he's pretty stressed.

You may not be leaving the country, but if you have children, you will deal with a stressed-out child at some point. Here are some strategies to consider.

### IDENTIFY THE SOURCES OF STRESS

Is your child stressed by a situation (external) or by a thought (internal)? Identifying the source of stress helps in knowing how to deal with it in a productive way. For example, is your child stressed by the amount of homework and the time it takes, or is he or she stressed by the fear of getting a poor grade or not being "smart enough"? We were able to find out that my son isn't stressed as much by the fact that we'll be gone as he is by the fear that something bad will happen to us and we won't come back.

### PROBLEM-SOLVE EXTERNAL STRESSORS

If the stress is due to a situation, brainstorm possible solutions as a family. Is your child involved in too many activities? Decide together what to limit, and help your child with time management. Is your child stressed because of friends? Role-play appropriate social skills, or suggest a playdate to foster friendships. My son gets the most stressed at night, so he will have his siblings and dogs sleep with him while we're gone and FaceTime with us to say good night.

### ATTACK AND CORRECT INTERNAL STRESSORS

One of our favorite books describes an internal stressor as a "worry bully" that sits on your shoulder and talks to you. The book suggests you "talk back to it . . . flick it off your shoulder and . . . squash it with your foot."

We can help our children to see and to say the truth back to those lies in their head that stress them out. Does

your daughter think she's not pretty enough? Remind her that she is "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). Teach her to talk back to her fear. Does your son think he's not good at anything? Read Ephesians 2:10 that says he is "God's handiwork," created to do great things God has prepared for him. We talked with my son about the statistics that say flying is the safest way to travel, and he picked out his favorite Bible passage to comfort him when he gets stressed—1 Peter 5:7.

### PRACTICE REGULAR STRESS RELIEF

Finally, help your children find activities that help them release their stress—take deep breaths, write in a journal, go for a walk, or play a sport outside. Use a song, book, or TV show as a distraction. Draw. Talk to God. Talk to a family member or friend. Think about a good memory. Play a game.

When he is feeling stressed, my son finds his "crazy sister" who always makes him laugh. He also talks to

one of my colleagues once in a while and loves the tools he has learned in counseling.

Stress is inevitable for all of us. When we see it in our children, it's an opportunity for us to speak the truth and comfort that God's Word offers to them in difficult situations and to teach them healthy coping skills they can use for the rest of their lives.



Sarah Reik and her husband, Dan, have four grade-school-aged children.

.....

**My wife and I now have the privilege of having both of our children in high school!** A new page has turned on our parenting journey, and we have recognized the need for a change in our parenting approaches.

A wise mentor once told me, "The best way to get someone NOT to do something is to tell them to do it." When the kids were younger, we had this amazing parental power that, for the most part, produced the desired effects. A request to my then 9-year-old son, "Put your coat on before you go outside so you don't catch a cold," actually resulted in him putting on his coat. A request to my now 14-year-old son to do the same might result in a reply of, "It's fine, Dad." This new development of independence represents a host of small and major decisions that face our kids in their teen years.

Time for a change, my wife and I realized. We can easily see how easy it is for teens to be exhausted, stressed, or overwhelmed. Think about balancing a part-time job, classes, extracurricular activities, and keeping up on numerous social media outlets—all while developing into an independent Christian adult. Wow!

Knowing that these stressors exist and the best way to get our kids NOT to do something showed us that it was time to listen to each other, to our kids, and to the Lord.

#### LISTENING TO EACH OTHER

My wife and I determined that we needed to stay on the same page during this teen parenting time. More than a few times my wife has provided gentle reminders to me that my old ways of parenting aren't working like they used to. And there are some decisions, like a curfew, that need to be enforced consistently by both of us. We have decided that it is important for us to communicate regularly not only to be consistent on major decisions but also to acknowledge our own fears, concerns, hopes, frustrations, and joys that are involved in parenting at this time.

#### LISTENING TO OUR KIDS

A host of ideas, skills, and approaches can help reduce stress in teens. We

can all recite the importance of exercise, proper sleep, and nutrition. There are many other practical ways teens can learn to be resilient, but perhaps one of the most important is being heard. Actively listening to your teen as she shares her feelings, weighs the pros and cons of a decision, or just shares the facts of a day, helps to maintain an essential bond with her.

Don't we all long for someone to talk to who won't tell us what to do all the time but rather will join us in an understanding of how we feel? The seemingly busy lives of teens can also be quite lonely. Quiet time with Mom and/or Dad, whose hearts are open to reflecting their love for God by being present and actively listening, is an essential gift to our teens' repertoire of resiliency factors.

#### LISTENING TO THE LORD

The family's connectedness flows best when it is fueled by the Word. Look for opportunities to hear the gospel message and to reflect on the blessing of knowing that we are his! No time for family devotions any longer? Text a daily passage and family prayer. Remind your teen that the Lord does not abandon us when we make decisions that seem . . . not the most well-informed. He loves us unconditionally—always forgiving, always present, and always comforting.

Parents of teens, let's continue to reflect on the blessings of our children through any stressors or challenges they may face and consider the opportunity we have to reflect our love for Christ by listening to each other, listening to our teens, and listening to our Lord.



## RESOURCES for helping YOUR CHILD

Sarah Reik recommends these resources, both available at amazon.com:

*What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety* by Dawn Huebner, Ph.D.

*The 3 Minute Gratitude Journal for Kids* by Modern Kid Press



Dan Nommensen and his wife, Kelly, are raising two teenagers in Mequon, Wisconsin.



Adopting two children from Haiti brought blessings beyond what anyone expected.

# MY CHRISTIAN

Paul S. Steinberg

*life*

I'VE ALWAYS WANTED a large family. I joked with my friends that I hoped to have one child for each letter of the alphabet. My attitude flowed from my wonderful parents and from meeting families larger than mine . . . including my wife's.

My wife and I met in the summer of 1989. We were both part of the Fox River Valley Lutheran Youth Band. We were engaged that fall. By the time I was a pastor in Mauston, Wisconsin, we were on our way to having four sons. But the birth of that fourth son brought the news that more natural children were not in God's plan for our family.

While my wife was still in the hospital, I searched the internet to learn all about adoption. After I was convinced it would be a good way to expand our family and share the love of Jesus, I went to her hospital room, sat next to her, and asked boldly, "So, what do you think about adopting a child?" To my happiness, her reply was, "As long as we adopt at least two."

That led us to decide to adopt from Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

## ADOPTION UPS AND DOWNS

We chose our first international adoption agency because we could connect with the owner face-to-face in a nearby town. But difficulties arose. The lady we worked with suddenly closed her business and kept everyone's money. Since all of our paperwork was in French, we quickly were able to find a local adoption agency in Haiti called New Life Link.

By that time, our sons were 8, 7, 5, and 3, so we requested two boys younger than 3. Translation difficulties garbled our request, and we were given twins—a brother and sister, Mackenson and Mackencia. We planned to travel to Haiti in October 2004.

At the time Haiti was in economic and political turmoil. Some adopting families had experienced delays of weeks waiting for the American Consulate to reopen. Leaving our four sons with friends, we traveled to Haiti and prayed for the Lord to be with us. We managed to complete the adoption but were hurried home because there were threats of Americans being beheaded.

But our trip was not in vain. Even in the face of those threats, we were

blessed that the family of our twins walked and took a tap-tap (Haitian taxi) for hours to meet us. They had brought their children to the orphanage months before and had not seen them since. Their 6-year-old twins received medical care and regular meals but were still only 30 pounds.

The New Life Link orphanage promised the parents that only Christians were allowed to adopt. I was not surprised to learn their father was an evangelist. The parents laid their hands on their children and blessed them as they placed them in our arms. We ate lunch with our new twins, their birth parents, a 22-year-old sister, and an aunt. We learned the twins had five other living siblings. I promised we would send pictures and would bring them back to visit when they were adults.

## SEPARATION AND REUNION

We sent pictures to the orphanage after the first year, hoping their aunt would deliver them to the parents. We heard nothing. We prayed for Mama and Papa Samedi every night and hung their picture on the wall. My twins often watched the video

recording of them being blessed and placed in our arms. It felt as if Papa Samedi was my brother who was placing his children in my family because he knew he could not provide for them.

Several years later, a terrible earthquake hit Haiti and left hundreds of thousands dead. We prayed for the Samedi family but heard nothing. The orphanage was destroyed. Still, we were determined to reconnect our twins with their Haitian family.

## My twins often watched the video recording of them being blessed and placed in our arms.

In 2017, my Haitian children entered college. We still had no way of knowing if their family was alive or how to contact them. We prayed, determined to keep our promise.

On Feb. 27, 2018, we traveled to Haiti. Our driver knew the head of our orphanage and told us that the orphanage had been rebuilt. He was able to find a phone number. I asked the head of the orphanage if he could locate my twins' family. The next day he called. He had located them! They were coming to the orphanage. We could meet them there!

It was dark when we arrived. We were not sure what to expect. As my twins entered the room, Mama Samedi grabbed them both and waved her hands. In Creole, she declared, "Thanks be to God!" Soon Papa Samedi had them in his arms, and everyone was hugging, kissing, and crying.

Enite, the sister we met 13 years earlier, grabbed my face and said in English, "You kept your promise!" Papa Samedi raised his arms and began singing, "How Great Thou Art!" All the family members did the same. It was the best picture of heaven I have ever experienced.

Over the next two days, my twins met all their siblings and their extended family. To our surprise, almost all of them had smartphones. Most could speak some English.

Then it was time to go home. With tearful good-byes, my children hugged their relatives. We left, promising to stay in touch.

Almost two years have passed since that first reunion. My twins' siblings have communicated on a regular basis with us via WhatsApp and social

media. The twins traveled back to Haiti over their spring break and visited their family without us. They wanted to go back for their brother's wedding, but their family advised them not to travel for safety concerns. They hope to return again this spring.

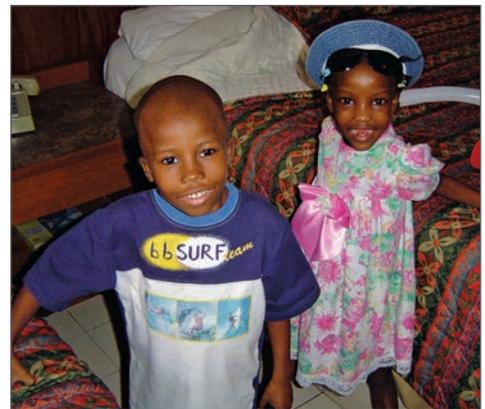
Currently, I am trying to help other Haitian families digitally connect with the children they entrusted to adoption. I am also working with the siblings of my twins to see if they can come to America for their education.

The Lord exceeded what I prayed for and has blessed my family beyond what we could have ever imagined! Since the adoption, many have commented to my wife and me that we are doing such a wonderful thing. By God's grace, we have received much more than we have ever given.

We encourage all who are able to consider adoption and to trust the Lord to bless it.



*Dr. Paul Steinberg, executive director of Chaplains in Schools, Inc., is a member at St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.*



## Meet the editorial staff

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

**David Scharf**, professor at Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., has assumed the role of the “Question and Answer” contributing editor with this edition of *Forward in Christ* (FIC). Each month, he will answer readers’ questions about doctrine and Christian life.

“I have always enjoyed this aspect of ministry,” he says. “I love when people ask questions and I get to dig into God’s Word to learn about whatever their asking and give them a good biblical response, saying what we know is true and being careful not to delve into theological speculation.”

An opportunity to study abroad in Germany while going to MLC is what sparked his interest in addressing theological and doctrinal questions. Many of the friends he made while there did not come from Christian backgrounds, and he would regularly have conversations with them about faith and God’s Word.

“That was a good encouragement for me to continue on in pastoral ministry training,” he says. “Interaction with that



David Scharf and his family. Scharf is serving as FIC’s new Q&A writer.

group of friends made me realize what better thing could I do with my life than to read and share God’s Word for a living.”

Scharf currently teaches a Bible History and Literature course and the systematic theological courses at MLC, where he has served since 2016. Prior to teaching at MLC, he served Immanuel, Greenville, Wis., where he was assigned after graduating from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., in 2005.

Scharf grew up in the Milwaukee area where his dad was a pastor at Good Shepherd, West Allis, Wis. He was the seventh of 14 children. Scharf and his wife, Beth, walked down the aisle the first time in seventh grade when his older sister married her older brother, and they stood up in the wedding. They reconnected in college and officially walked down the same aisle in the same church in 2001, exactly ten years after their older siblings’ wedding.

He and his wife have six children, ranging from a first grader to a high school junior. Scharf jokes that his father calls six a good start.

Outside of teaching, he enjoys spending time with his family, traveling, playing basketball and golf, and reading everything from classic to theological literature.

**READ MORE** ▶ in Scharf’s first article on p. 14. Check out his corresponding Bible study on p. 15.

“I am incredibly fascinated by people and how their experiences—positive or negative—have shaped who they are,” says **Greg Lyon**, *Forward in Christ*’s newest Bible study writer. “I love listening to people’s stories and then helping them put the pieces together of how God is working in their lives.”

Lyon spends much of each day doing just that. As a campus pastor at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis., his primary role is to be a pastoral shepherd for the college’s students. He notes, “My calendar usually fills up with one-on-one Bible studies, counseling, meet and greets, opportunities to build relationships, things like that. I also field a fair amount of theological questions. Many of our students who are lifelong Christians might have questions that they’ve had for a long time but have always been afraid to ask. I enjoy getting into those discus-

sions. Many college students are also getting to the point where they are asking themselves, ‘What do I believe?’ It is a blessing for these students to have a place where they can explore these questions surrounded by biblical truth.”

Lyon will use these experiences as he presents his first Bible study series for

*Forward in Christ*, which will use biblical narratives to dive deeper into common struggles among Christians, including anxiety, depression, guilt, grief, and trauma.

**READ MORE** ▶ about this new series, titled “A Bible story just for me,” on p. 31.



Greg Lyon and his wife, Amy, have been married 13 years and have three children (from left: Eliana, Addison, and Samuel).



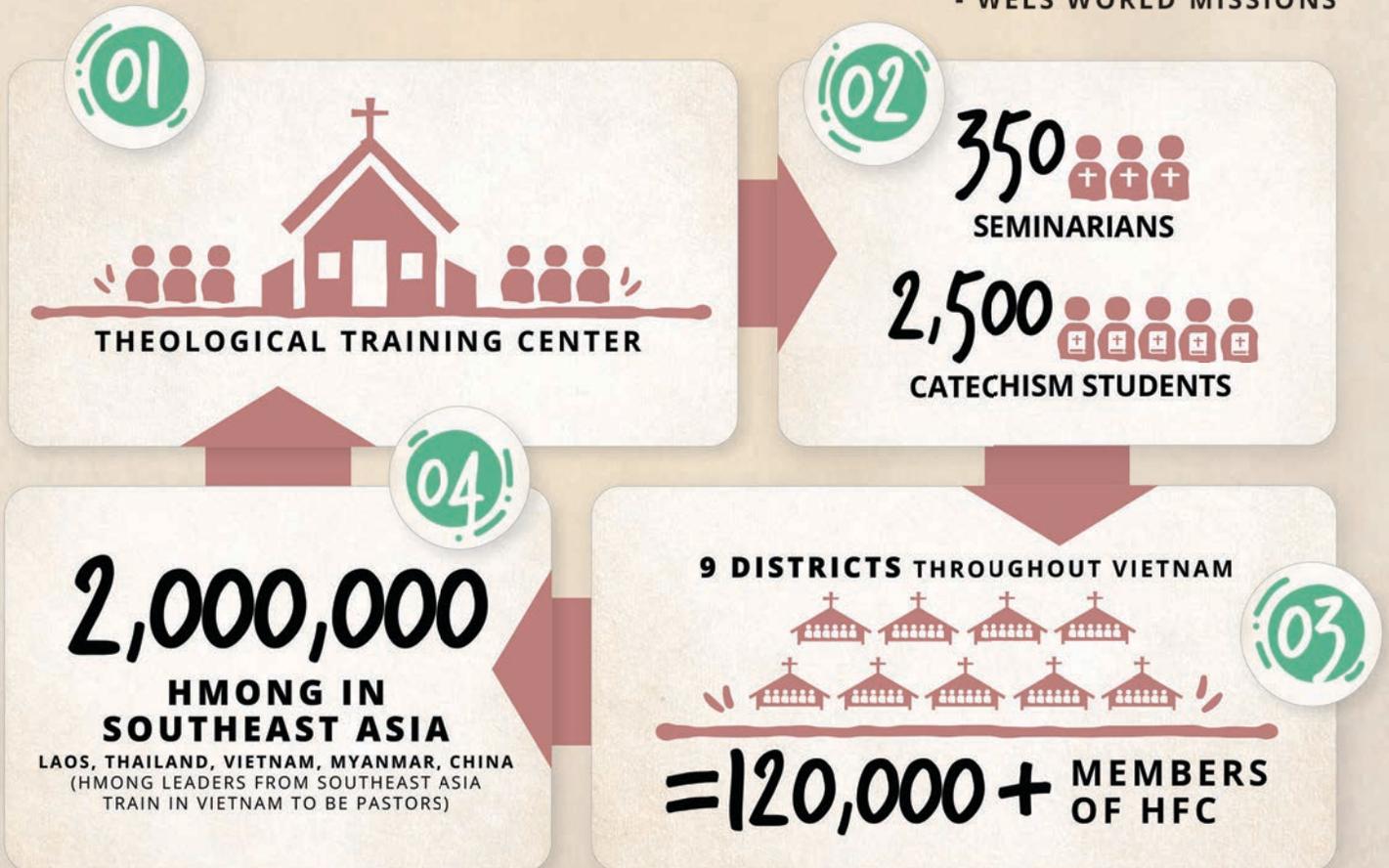
# THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT!

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN THE FAITH,

In 2018, God's grace opened the door to an unprecedented mission opportunity for our synod. The communist Vietnamese government invited WELS to build a theological education facility in the capital city of Hanoi. WELS members and congregations quickly responded with their prayers and financial gifts. God blessed this opportunity and moved hearts to contribute more than \$2 million to cover the land purchase, construction expenses, and two years of operational costs.

**And this is just the beginning.** There are more than 120,000 members of the Hmong Fellowship Church and 2 million Hmong people throughout Southeast Asia. Imagine what the Holy Spirit can accomplish through the 2,800+ pastors and leaders who will be equipped to share the truth of God's grace with their Hmong brothers and sisters. Rejoice with us as we watch the Holy Spirit change earthly lives and open the door to eternal life for our Hmong brothers and sisters on the other side of the world!

- WELS WORLD MISSIONS



FOLLOW ALONG ON THE CONTINUED JOURNEY AT [WELS.NET/VIETNAMHMONGOUTREACH](http://WELS.NET/VIETNAMHMONGOUTREACH).

## WELS Connections

### 2020 REPORT HIGHLIGHTS GOD'S BLESSINGS

"Your gifts, God's blessings: An annual report to our members" is available online in January. The 2020 report highlights the blessings that God has showered on WELS through the gifts of its members. It includes photos of Christian brothers and sisters around the world, stories of faith, and updates on WELS' ministry.

"As church bodies go, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod is not among the largest or most visible," says WELS President Mark Schroeder, in the report. "Yet, despite our relatively small size, God continues to allow our synod, our churches, and you to carry out his work in a wide variety of ways."

Here are just a few examples:

- Training hundreds of young people for gospel ministry.
- Inviting members back to church in Welcome Home services around the country.
- Sending missionaries to places like Vietnam and Paraguay to train workers and preach the gospel.



Print versions of the report will be sent to every WELS congregation and to synod donors. See more highlights from 2019 in this month's edition of *WELS Connection*.

READ MORE AT [wels.net/annualreport](https://wels.net/annualreport). The new report will be online in January.

## Changes in East Asia mission field

The Board for World Missions has decided to pull the East Asia Team missionaries and families out of their focus country because of security concerns.

The East Asia missionaries and their families are being relocated to a nearby country from which they hope to continue their work through online teaching, through distance mentoring and coaching, and through regularly monthly visits to the focus country.

The Board for World Missions and the East Asia Administrative Committee have been monitoring this situation for the last few years and had been preparing for this contingency for months, making it possible to safely evacuate the missionaries when it became necessary to do so.

Leaders are also continuing to closely monitor the political situation in Hong Kong where Asia Lutheran Seminary is located.

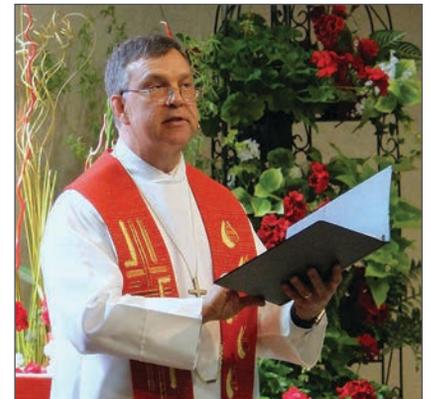
"Please keep this situation in your prayers," says Larry Schlomer, administrator of WELS World Missions. "Pray that our heavenly Father would protect the brothers and sisters of the focus country and give them courage to continue to stand upon the gospel and share it. Pray that our missionaries and families would be encouraged in this time of upheaval. Pray that the Lord would continue to keep the professors, staff, and families of Asia Lutheran Seminary safe."

## New president at Martin Luther College

Richard Gurgel has accepted the call to serve as president of WELS' college of ministry, Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn. He will begin his new call on July 1.

Gurgel brings years of parish and teaching experience to his new ministry. Since 1999, he has served as a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., teaching homiletics, systematics, and Christian education. He also directs the continuing education arm of the seminary, the Grow in Grace Institute.

Gurgel will replace retiring president Mark Zarlring, who has served as MLC president since 2007. "May God give me a double portion of the servant-hearted, gospel-filled spirit with which President Zarlring has so faithfully served," says Gurgel. "God has used and continues to use what happens on MLC's campus to prepare one generation after another of Christian witnesses to proclaim the gospel of his kingdom in classrooms and congregations and communities around the world. Truly a city set on a hill cannot be hidden!"



Richard Gurgel will be the next president of Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

Zarlring is grateful that such a faithful shepherd will soon assume the leadership mantle. "Prof. Gurgel is a shepherd gifted with many abilities and with a heart that beats with the gospel of Jesus Christ," he says. "I am thrilled that he has accepted and am confident that Jesus will use him mightily for the good of this important ministry."

LEARN MORE AT [mlc-wels.edu](https://mlc-wels.edu).

## Question and answer about “Equipping Christian Witnesses”



*In celebration of its 25th anniversary in 2020, Martin Luther College (MLC), with the approval of the Conference of Presidents, has begun a two-year capital campaign called “Equipping Christian Witnesses.” The synod is looking to raise \$16 to \$18 million through the campaign. Part of that money will go toward two new campus facilities: a new residence hall called Luther Heights and a new turf recreation facility called the Knight Center. We talked to Scott Schmudlach, MLC vice president of administration, to learn more.*

### WHY ARE THESE NEW FACILITIES NECESSARY?

Admissions counselors report that the campus visit is the most important factor in the prospective student’s college decision-making process. Generally, our visitors love the Christ-centered culture of

MLC, the beautiful chapel, the well-tended grounds, the welcoming faculty, and the friendly and dedicated students. Our campus facilities, however, are in need of an update! As these visiting prospects walk around campus, the amenities provided in a college residence hall like Luther Heights can make a big impact.

With one of the emphases of this campaign being recruitment, Luther Heights also will provide the rooms needed for the expanding enrollment we are anticipating.

Athletics and physical education are an important part of the MLC experience as well. For many years, however, we have not had adequate athletic space for our student body, our teams, or visiting teams. The Knight Center will expand the physical education curriculum to year-round, allow all spring sports to practice regularly, provide additional locker rooms, and multiply opportunities for health and wellness.

### HOW IMPORTANT ARE THESE FACILITIES TO CURRENT STUDENTS?

In a 2015 survey, MLC students listed a new residence hall and student gathering spaces as the top needs on campus. Residence halls like Luther Heights are the places where living and learning together occurs. They’re the places of Bible studies and collaborative ministry projects, of personal growth and lifelong friendships.

Hundreds of students use our fitness facilities every day. Hundreds play intramurals. Athletics are an important part of the college experience for many students. And for those students who are studying to be coaches and physical education teachers in WELS schools, athletics and physical education are ministry training.

### WHAT ABOUT TO FUTURE STUDENTS?

Martin Luther College exists in a competitive marketplace. It might be nice if all 18-year-olds looking at MLC were certain they wanted to be pastors or teachers, but many—even most—are not sure. They will choose a college that will help them continue to discover and develop their gifts while they

decide their future. We’d like that college to be MLC. We want to show them that we care about the full development of all their God-given gifts, and we will supply the facilities that support that development.

### WHAT ARE MLC’S FUTURE FACILITY PLANS?

With the assistance of Credo, a consulting firm, we developed a master site plan that encapsulates our vision for this campus, even beyond the addition of Luther Heights and the Knight Center. Plans are in place to finish the chapel basement, which will primarily provide additional practice spaces for the music department. A sports complex/fieldhouse in addition to the Knight Center is also identified in our master site plan.

LEARN MORE AT [mlc-wels.edu/mlc-campaign](https://mlc-wels.edu/mlc-campaign).

## Christian FRIENDSHIP

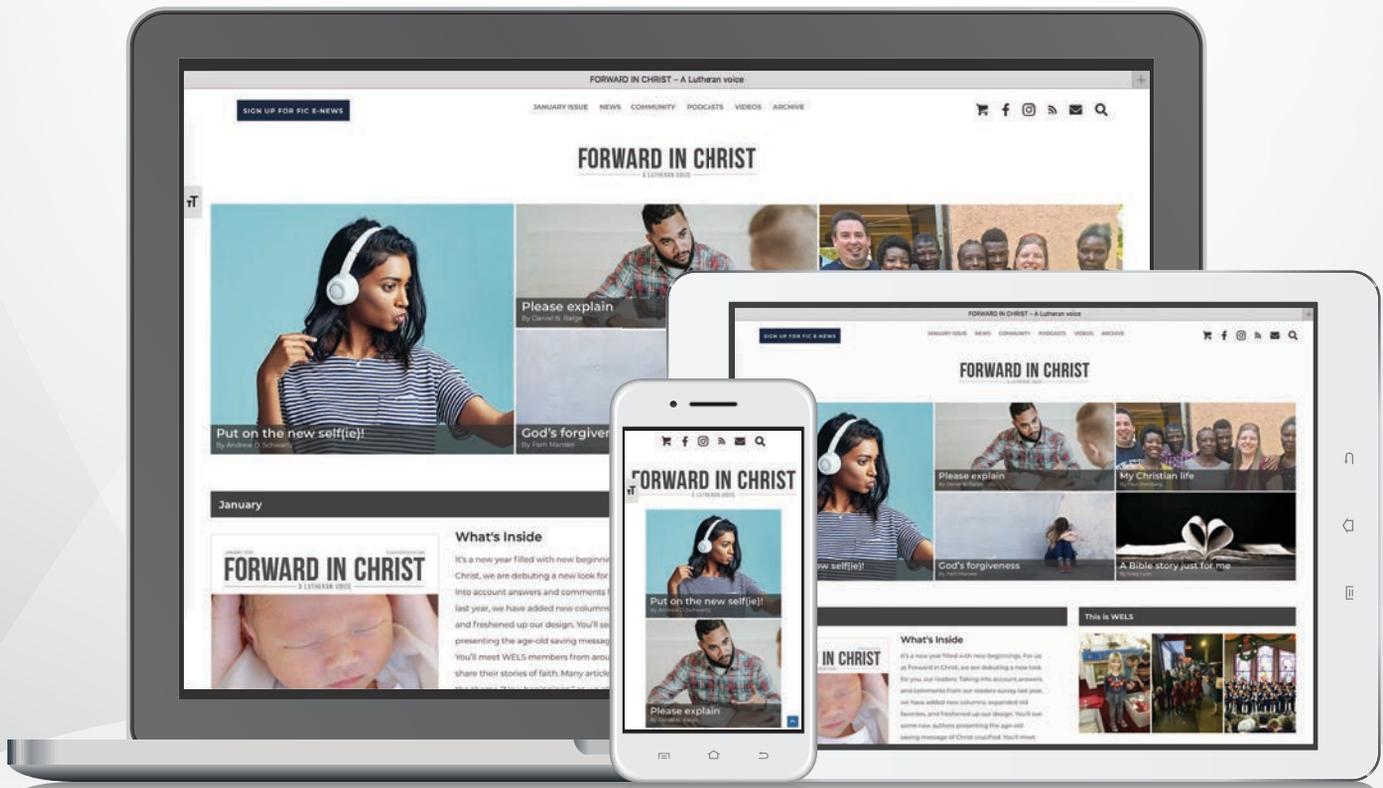
Jared Lindemann, a 2019 graduate of Martin Luther College, served on the Luther Heights Building Committee. He shares how he, as a student, viewed the idea of a new residence hall: “Luther Heights will be great for recruitment because it will be an attractive new building of brick and glass, a comfortable place for recruits to envision themselves living. A huge blessing of being at MLC is the faith all the students and faculty share. One of our professors recently said in chapel that Jesus brings us not only perfect peace with God, but also a degree of peace with fellow believers. Friendship between believers is a great blessing. Luther Heights seems like a place that will promote that Christian friendship and will prepare MLC for more students.”



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## District news

### PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Messiah, Olympia, Wash., rededicated its church building on Aug. 4, 2019, after a fire destroyed the building in 2017.

### MINNESOTA

A semi-trailer truck crashed into Christ, North St. Paul, Minn., on Nov. 6, 2019. The driver misjudged the height of the portico. No one was injured.

### NORTHERN WISCONSIN

The 2019 WELS National Choralfest was held Nov. 8-10, 2019, at Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fond du Lac, Wis. It included a pops concert and a sacred concert with the theme "Christ we proclaim!" Students from 21 WELS high schools attended.

Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis., hosted the third annual WELS Middle School Honors Band Festival on Nov. 16, 2019. Students from ten WELS high schools attended.

### HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

MN—Immanuel Hmong, St. Paul, Minn., celebrated the 20th anniversary in the pastoral ministry of Pheng Moua.

The district reporters for this month are: AZ-CA—Michael Schroeder; MN—James Panning; NE—Timothy Kemnitz; NW—Dennis Kleist; PNW—David Birsching.



ARIZONA-CALIFORNIA

Beautiful Saviour, Carlsbad, Calif., celebrated its 50th anniversary on Sept. 29, 2019. Pictured from left: Silas Krueger (previous pastor), Jon Mahnke (first resident pastor), Wayne Uhlhorn (current pastor), and David Valleskey (current semi-retired pastor).



NEBRASKA

Shepherd of the Valley, Candelas, Colo., held its official launch service on Oct. 6, 2019. Jeremy Belter, home missionary for Shepherd of the Valley, reports: "Every seat was filled. We counted 140 people in attendance and nearly 70 first-time guests! I was also privileged to baptize three little children that day from the same family. That family is currently taking class for membership. We have contact info from ten families for follow up and lots of positive conversations. Several people commented, 'We're looking for a church with a more traditional structure and solid sermon from the Bible. We want a church that is true to the Bible.' . . . The launch team is excited to continue working as missionaries, inviting and welcoming people to hear the message of Christ crucified!"



PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Cross of Christ, North Nampa, Idaho, launched its first worship service in a local restaurant on Nov. 25, 2019. Cross of Christ is a multi-site congregation that is supported through WELS Home Missions. After 25 years of God's blessings at the church in Boise, Cross of Christ branched out into North Nampa to reach more people with the saving message of Jesus.



# PLEASE EXPLAIN

WHAT MAKES OUR CHRISTIAN GOD DIFFERENT FROM OTHER GODS? | Daniel N. Balge

**SOMETIMES A QUESTION** does not really need an answer. Sometimes a question is actually making a statement and nothing more needs to be said. A psalmist named Ethan the Ezrahite asked such a question and made a statement in the one hymn of his that survives: “Who is like you, LORD God Almighty?” (Psalm 89:8). Ethan never answers the question; he doesn’t have to. Instead he spends 50-some verses describing who the Lord God is and what he did, does, and will do. It’s a list like none other. But then Ethan’s God—our God—is like none other.

Some wonder how we dare to make such a claim. What about all those sincere people who believe that their god is the one above all others? To such people—loved by the true God though they don’t know it—we can reply with respect, remembering that we’ll never argue someone into faith in the true God. All we can do—and it is a great thing—is set forth who the true God is and what he has done for us and for all humanity.

## OTHER GODS ARE SIMILAR

But first let’s try to see things through unbelievers’ eyes. How do the deeds and creeds of their god(s) compare to Ethan’s Lord God Almighty? Creation?

Not unique, they say, to the Christians’ God. Stories—sometimes, recognizably, the garbled transmission of the truth that Genesis records—abound in false religions. Morality? Every culture owns some sense of God and his law and has a code of right and wrong, however imperfect, that it lives by. Unbelievers understand reward and punishment. The Bible is not the only place one reads of heaven and hell. And what about the Bible? Don’t others count their religious texts—the Qur’an, the Book of Mormon, Hinduism’s Vedas (books of knowledge), Gautama Buddha’s Sutras—as sacred too?

We can grasp their point without taking it. They’re answering Ethan’s question with a quick equivalence: The true God is just one among many gods. All gods are pretty much the same. Maybe they even all point to one strong, moral, profound, supernatural being that we ought to listen to and obey. Unbelievers peer at the true God through the lens of their man-made god. So, it’s not surprising that they see only those features that human reason can perceive—power and justice—and that they misunderstand those things too. They can’t see what sets Ethan’s Lord God Almighty apart. In other words, unbelievers don’t see Jesus.

Even when they have Jesus in view, they still don’t see the difference. Many other religions acknowledge Jesus as someone important. The Qur’an depicts him as a human prophet of special distinction, as shown by the miracles embedded across his life’s story. Early Jewish perspectives counted Jesus as a rogue rabbi, but over the years his image has swung to the positive, that of an excellent Jewish teacher who was a good influence in his time and on succeeding history. Faiths as old as Hinduism and Buddhism and as young as Baha’i and Scientology claim Jesus in their traditions as a person significant in their quest for truth. And, of course, many people who hold other beliefs or who even claim no belief in God at all tally Jesus among the great moral examples of all time, probably the best advocate for good behavior there ever has been, one who truly walked his talk. But unbelievers’ vision is partial and blurry. They perceive Jesus only dimly, and in real spiritual terms unbelievers are blind.

## OUR GOD IS DIFFERENT

Here’s what they’re missing: Jesus is God, God’s Son, and is with the Father and Holy Spirit one of the three persons of the one true God. As the apos-

tle John wrote in his gospel, “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known” (1:18). John was

Truly a man, Jesus lived sinlessly under the law, not as the ultimate role model which we could mimic as our way into heaven, but as our substitute, actively doing what we could never do. Then

those gods can offer is a to-do list to complete in order to earn a god’s affection. Behind whatever facade of fancy ritual or noble effort their followers construct, there always lurks their god’s nagging question, “Have you done enough for me?”

## Jesus represents, reflects, and reveals who the true God is, what he wants for all, and what he promised and did to save us.

there when Jesus told his disciples, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (14:9). To know Jesus is to know the true God.

Jesus clearly revealed God by fulfilling in every detail what God had promised to the newly fallen human race as Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden. What God there vowed, and what prophets then echoed for centuries, was that a descendant of Eve—the Messiah, the Christ—would remove the curse of sin that Adam and Eve had inflicted upon themselves and their children. Sin had left us helpless, dead, with no strength to serve God and live in his favor. But God promised a rescue.

So God’s Son became a human being in a virgin’s womb. From his earthly life’s first spark to his cruel death’s last gasp, Jesus carried out what was planned.

he willingly died for us, tortured to death on a cross, paying a price only he could pay for every soul. He rose again from his grave to declare it all true. As John wrote, “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:9,10). Jesus reveals fully and clearly who God is: holy and just, serious about his law; loving and merciful, serious to save. Jesus represents, reflects, and reveals who the true God is, what he wants for all, and what he promised and did to save us.

“Who is like you, LORD God Almighty?” No one. Absolutely no one! All the other so-called gods are as small as the minds who created them. All

The true God wants only that you have what Jesus has done for you. Jesus lived, died, and rose to rescue us. God’s Son, our Brother, fulfilled the promise his Father made not long after time began. God’s Spirit uses that record of promise made and promise kept to create faith in Jesus. On those facts we rest our faith. In those facts we find peace of mind and peace with God. From those facts we draw comfort and strength for life’s journey. Because of those facts we will stand in heaven before the God who saved us and say with King David, “How great you are, Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you” (2 Samuel 7:22).



Daniel Balge, a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. Paul, New Ulm.

## WHO IS JESUS? According to a Barna\* survey, Americans today have varied beliefs on who Jesus is.

JESUS CHRIST WAS A REAL PERSON WHO ACTUALLY LIVED.

8

NOT SURE

92

TRUE

### I BELIEVE JESUS WAS . . .

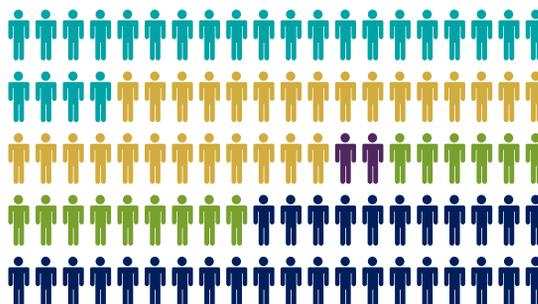
56 GOD

26 SPIRITUAL LEADER

18 NOT SURE

\*barna.com/research/what-do-americans-believe-about-jesus-5-popular-beliefs/

### WHEN HE LIVED ON EARTH, JESUS CHRIST WAS HUMAN AND COMMITTED SINS LIKE OTHER PEOPLE.



Agree strongly - 24

Agree somewhat - 28

Don't know - 2

Disagree somewhat - 15

Disagree strongly - 31



# THE DIVINE *family*

**The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are united in planning and carrying out our salvation.**

Joel J. Gawrisch

Marriage requires commitment and unity. Once husband and wife begin their life together, one critical decision must be made: Will they have children? Both have to be all in on that decision. Of course, there are often “surprises” when children come, but even then, husband and wife must be all in as they become father and mother. Children create changes, and unity is required to handle the blessings and challenges of parenting.

Perhaps we don’t often think of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as a family, but the idea of Father and Son clearly suggests a family. Certainly, the idea that they are all in when it comes to our salvation is clear from the Scriptures.

## **FOCUS ON THE TRINITY**

For many, the idea that God is three persons and yet only one God is as clear as mud. People often derisively question, “How can I believe in a God

that I can’t understand?” In response, volumes have been written over the centuries to explain the Holy Trinity and to combat heresy. Many of the passages used in these works to support the teaching of the Holy Trinity can be found in the lectionary readings for these early weeks between Christmas and Easter. Most strikingly, in the accounts of Jesus’ baptism (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21,22), God reveals the mystery of his persons and being even as he identifies his mission of eternal salvation for those lost in the darkness of sin.

But it is important to note that neither in the account of Jesus’ baptism, nor in any of the other readings for Epiphany in January, nor in any of the proof passages cited by theologians in a myriad of treatises over the centuries is there an attempt by God to explain how the Trinity works. In fact, much to the consternation of the defenders of the trinitarian doctrine, the word *Trinity* is never used anywhere in all of Scripture. Nowhere does our triune God explain or expect us to understand the Trinity. Rather, the Trinity acts on our be-

half regardless of our understanding and invites us to receive him by grace through faith, a gift in and of itself from him.

At the baptism of Jesus, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit were all present, not to prove the Trinity or explain it but to display the Trinity’s whole family and its all-in commitment to the Son’s mission to save our human race. The Father spoke, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” The Spirit descended like a dove and alighted on Jesus.

## **SCRIPTURE TEACHES US THE TRINITY**

As we make our way through these weeks of Christmas and Epiphany, we are blessed with the glimpses of our Savior’s mission to redeem us. In the months ahead, we will hear of the specific details of his death and resurrection. The readings take us from the manger, to the cross, and then to the empty tomb. Listen carefully. His mission and its fulfillment are told to us through the prophecies of Isaiah, the narratives of the gospels,

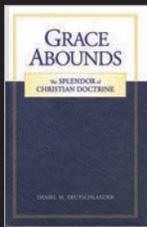
## FOR FURTHER *study*

The Athanasian Creed, written to defend the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, was named for Athanasius of Alexandria, a fourth-century defender of the Christian faith in general and of the full deity of Jesus in particular. A portion of the creed reads:

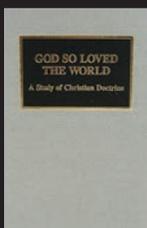
We worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God, without mixing the persons or dividing the divine being. . . . The Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Holy Spirit is almighty; yet they are not three who are almighty, but there is one who is almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God; yet they are not three Gods, but one God.

Take time to read the entire creed. Find it on p. 132 of *Christian Worship*.

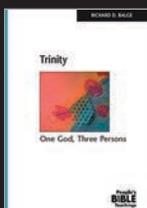
Learn more about the Trinity:



*Grace Abounds*,  
D. Deutschlander,  
pp. 95-124



*God So Loved the World*,  
L. Lange,  
pp. 121-145



*People's Bible Teachings: Trinity*,  
R. Balge

These books are available from Northwestern Publishing House, [nph.net](http://nph.net), 800-662-6022.

and the words of the apostles. But also woven into the fabric of these Scriptures is the all-in commitment of the divine family, the Holy Trinity. The persons of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are distinctly supportive of God the Son in his mission and yet are, at the same time, one in being throughout, working in complete divine unity to redeem the world.

This is what this January's worship is about. The readings assure us that God is not just somewhat okay with the mission of Jesus. More than sending the Son on an errand and wait-

### The Trinity acts on our behalf regardless of our understanding.

ing for few-and-far-between updates, Father and Spirit are both active as the Son shines the light of salvation into a sin-darkened world, welcoming those lost in darkness into the light of the Trinity's family of grace. God is all in. He loves humanity completely and fully, and his plan to save us is certain in the mind and action of the almighty God—the Trinity.

The Scriptures assert the certainty of God's plan. The Old Testament readings announce the light of the gospel. They prophesy what God intended from the beginning: saving sinful humanity. Even before Jesus was born of the virgin to redeem us, God was all in on his plan to save us. Then when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, God also made sure that we knew that this Son of God came to carry out the plan. And God supported his Son not only with words at his baptism but also by showing that through his miracles he had a mission of importance for all—a mission backed by the power of God. The Son has God's approval. He was not sent here on his own mission but for the mission of the Trinity.

Explaining the Trinity is beyond us. All we can do is learn what God tells us in the Scriptures. When we are confronted with doubts and questions, listen to what God says and “lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). The bottom line is that God loves us. He loves us completely, and he has loved us from eternity.

This is what makes Christianity unique among the world's religions: the Holy Trinity, the divine family, all in, all for you. For “salvation,” Islam demands adherence to the Five Pillars. Hinduism requires enough good

karma. Buddhism necessitates the Eightfold Path. Even Judaism has denied reliance on the promised Messiah for reliance on personal atonement through moral rectitude. None of these religions leads to salvation; in our imperfection, they can only lead to failure and despair. They are man-made religions that sound good to human reason but can only result in death, both temporal and eternal.

The “Trinity in unity” and the “unity in Trinity” demand perfection, yet God the Father provides it, God the Son's innocent life and sacrificial death pay for it, and God the Holy Spirit empowers a life of faith striving for it.

This is the Holy Trinity at work, the divine family all in, all for you. God with us. God for us. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



Joel Gawrisch is pastor at New Life, Shoreview, Minnesota.



## Partners

I admit that sometimes when I read the epistles of the New Testament, I easily skip over the first couple of verses. In those verses, Paul, who wrote most of the epistles, addresses the believers in various parts of the Roman world. For example, he writes, “To God’s holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 1:1,2).

As we launch this redesigned *Forward in Christ* (FIC), I think about the destination of the words and images we send out to our readers. I assure you that we think of you as “God’s holy people” in various parts of our country and the world. Together we call God “our Father” and Jesus our “Lord.” Authors of those letters to God’s people always considered the readers brothers and sisters in Christ.

### I do care about the faith of all our readers.

Didn’t their readers already have pastors and leaders? So why write to them? Because the epistle writers cared about their faith and desired to strengthen, comfort, and direct those believers gathered in various locations. While those believers had the means of grace regularly and worshiped together on the first day of the week, the letters were to build a bond—a kind of partnership—between the authors and the congregations. The letters were even shared with believers in other congregations.

I don’t claim to be equal to any apostle nor do I think that whatever we write for this magazine has the authority equal to any apostolic message. But I do care about the faith of all our readers. I desire to provide you with strength, comfort, and direction

from God’s Word. I certainly don’t want to interfere with what your pastor says or what any congregation does, but I want to partner with the readers, the pastors, and the congregations.

When we thought about the redesign and the purpose of FIC, we thought that our purpose was to contribute to the spiritual growth of our readers but with a little twist. We thought we had a role in providing insight and encouragement in addition to what our readers receive in their local congregations. We want to partner with local ministries in the way the apostles partnered with congregations through their letters.

The congregations who first received those apostolic letters discovered they were not alone. They belonged to something bigger than the local congregation. We want to do the same. We want to broaden the horizons of our readers and congregations so that we all see that the church is larger than our local addresses. The church is “God’s holy people” everywhere. Our goal is to complement what is going on in our churches

The letters of the New Testament often reveal a joy and thankfulness for the members of those original congregations. Paul wrote, “I always thank my God for you” (1 Corinthians 1:4), and, “I thank my God every time I remember you” (Philippians 1:3).

So we thank God for holy people in our congregations. We want to help all remain faithful to his truth and grow in faith together. Even though Paul had not yet seen and talked with the believers in Rome, he wanted his letter to “impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong” (Romans 1:11).

So do we—in this issue and all of them. Grace and peace to you.

John A. Braun | FIC Editor

# A BIBLE STORY

*just for me*

Gregory C. Lyon



PHOTO: I. Lightstock

## USING BIBLE STORIES TO EXAMINE CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD THAT WE NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT, CHARACTERISTICS THAT APPLY TO WHAT WE'RE FACING RIGHT NOW.

**TAKE A FEW MOMENTS** to read through Luke 4:31-37. Think about these questions as you read: What if you were sitting in that congregation on that day with all the challenges that you are facing right now? Consider your current circumstances in life and then ask yourself: What characteristic about Jesus sticks out?

Is there an obvious answer? Perhaps. One is given in the text. Jesus is powerful. But what else?

### SUZY'S STORY

A pastor sat with Suzy a few weeks after a major mental breakdown as part of her ongoing support team. She was not in a good place. Where does he start? He started with a story. He opened his Bible to Luke 4 and asked Suzy, "What characteristics of Jesus do you see on display here?"

Without hesitation, Suzy said, "He's brave." (Is that a characteristic that you had considered?)

"Why brave?" the pastor asked.

She replied, "He's not afraid to confront the demon that confronted him. He was confident."

Suzy knew that she wasn't brave because she could not confront her own demons. She began to understand that

Jesus was what she could not be for herself. She began to see Jesus not just as someone who did amazing things for some people but as a gracious God who was FOR HER! She continued in her professional counseling and was able to confront some of those difficult things she thought she would never be able to face. She knew that Jesus was brave for her and that he had already conquered all her enemies. None of those "demons" had power over her.

### YOUR STORY

Sometimes reading a biblical narrative can lead you to ask, "Who cares?" A blind man receives sight. A little girl is raised from the dead. Jesus shows mercy to a guilty prostitute. Great for them, but what about me?

But what happens if you read biblical narratives like I suggested at the beginning? What if you put yourself in the story? With your current circumstances right in front of you, might you notice something that you had not noticed before?

Biblical narratives provide powerful lessons in the grace, mercy, and power of God for individuals, including you and me. Biblical narratives can also show us characteristics of God that we may never have thought about,

characteristics that apply to what we are facing now. You might see a Savior who is brave for you, strong for you, confident for you. And the next time you read that story, you might notice something else as your experiences change.

Over the next five issues, we are going to dive into a few biblical narratives with an eye toward common struggles among Christians: anxiety, depression, guilt, grief, and trauma. We will look at various biblical narratives and place ourselves in the story as a bystander. We will explore through personal applications what we see and hear, while also identifying characteristics that are on display. Perhaps we will learn more about ourselves and God's amazing love for us, a love that is always there right when we need it, in the specific way that we need it. 3



Contributing editor Gregory Lyon, campus pastor at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is a member at Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin.

**READ MORE** ▶ about FIC's newest Bible study writer on p. 20.

This is the first article in a six-part series on applying biblical narratives to our lives.

# COMMUNITY

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## THINGS TO NOTE

### CHANGES IN MINISTRY

#### Pastors

Bey, Gregory, to retirement

Fors, Don, to retirement

Koschnitzke, Christopher, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.

Plocher, James, to St. John's, Pardeeville, Wis.

#### Teachers

Baganz, Christine, to St. John's, New Ulm, Minn.

Carlovsky, Benjamin, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.

Gines, Maria, to Risen Savior, Lakewood Ranch, Fla.

Gustafson, Philip, to Trinity-St. Luke, Watertown, Wis.

Gut, Cynthia, to Trinity, Waukesha, Wis.

Janke, Joseph, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.

Keese, Erin, to MLC Early Childhood Learning Center, New Ulm, Minn.

Mass, Lindsay, to Risen Savior, Milwaukee, Wis.

Nemmers, Emilee, to Abiding Word, Houston, Texas

Plitzuweit, Thomas, to St. Matthew's, Oconomowoc, Wis.

Rathje, Jared, to Trinity, Caledonia, Wis.

Santos, Martin, to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

Welch, Thomas, to Winnebago Lutheran High School, Fond du Lac, Wis.

#### Staff ministers

Holzhueter, Galen, to Camp Croix, Danbury, Wis.

Kummerow, Ryan, to St. John's, Juneau, Wis.

### NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS AND PASTORS

We thank God for you and for your support of the ministry WELS carries out on behalf of all congregations. We ask that you continue to mail your Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) deposit and its processing coupon to our bank lockbox, which provides effective and efficient deposit processing for the synod. For your CMO payment to be included in re-

ported receipts for the month, it must be received in the synod's bank lockbox on or before the last business day of the month. An exception is made for December offerings. Gifts received by the bank lockbox up to and including Jan. 8, 2020, will be credited as 2019 CMO, if accompanied by a 2019 coupon. Thank you for your assistance.

### ANNIVERSARIES

Appleton, Wis.—Riverview (75). Jan. 5. Worship, 8 & 10:30 A.M. March 8. Worship, 8 & 10:30 A.M. June 7. Worship, 8 & 10 A.M.; dinner, 1 P.M. at Liberty Hall. For dinner reservation, call 920-733-3728. Website, riverviewlutheran.org.

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

San Jose, Calif.—Apostles Lutheran School (50). April 25–26. April 25. Evening gala to include catered dinner, dance, raffle, and fellowship. April 26. Worship, 8:45 A.M. RSVP, schooladm@apostlessj.org.

### COMING EVENTS

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

Women's retreat—Feb. 22. St. Lucas, Kewaskum, Wis. Theme, "New beginnings." Website, stlucaswels.org (under the Bible study section).

Lutheran Recovery Ministries recovery retreat—Feb. 20–23. Our Lady of Guadalupe Monastery, Phoenix, Ariz. Theme, "Three days of hope." Website, lutheranrecoveryministries.com.

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

## CALLED TO *eternal glory*

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

READ MORE AT [forwardinchrist.net/obituaries](http://forwardinchrist.net/obituaries).

### PASTORS

**FROHMADER, RICHARD E.**  
Apr. 10, 1929—Oct. 30, 2019

**KRAUS, THOMAS G.**  
Jan. 30, 1931—Nov. 17, 2019

**MICHEL, ROBERT H.**  
July 13, 1936—Oct. 20, 2019

### TEACHERS AND STAFF MINISTERS

**BRAUN, MARY L.**  
July 2, 1941—Oct. 12, 2019

**GERBER (NÉE CHRISTENSEN),  
JOYCE M.**

June 22, 1929—Sept. 17, 2019

**GULRUD, BRIAN L.**  
Sept. 9, 1956—June 15, 2019

**KOLANDER, LUTHER D.**  
Aug. 7, 1923—Oct. 23, 2019

**MULINIX (NÉE CUNNINGHAM),  
BEVERLY M.**  
Sept. 19, 1931—Oct. 20, 2019

**SCHNEIDER, TIMOTHY D.**  
Oct. 15, 1948—Sept. 10, 2019

**CORRECTION:** Richard Schwerin's name was misspelled in the December obituaries. We apologize for the error.

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

— Matthew 5:4

# THROUGH MY *Bible* IN 3 YEARS

- |                     |                     |                      |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Revelation 3:1-6 | 12. Rev. 11:15-19   | 23. Rev. 18:1-20     |
| 2. Rev. 3:7-13      | 13. Rev. 12:1-9     | 24. Rev. 18:21-19:10 |
| 3. Rev. 3:14-22     | 14. Rev. 12:10-13:1 | 25. Rev. 19:11-21    |
| 4. Rev. 4           | 15. Rev. 13:2-10    | 26. Rev. 20:1-10     |
| 5. Rev. 5           | 16. Rev. 13:11-18   | 27. Rev. 20:11-15    |
| 6. Rev. 6           | 17. Rev. 14:1-5     | 28. Rev. 21:1-8      |
| 7. Rev. 7           | 18. Rev. 14:6-13    | 29. Rev. 21:9-21     |
| 8. Rev. 8           | 19. Rev. 14:14-20   | 30. Rev. 21:22-22:5  |
| 9. Rev. 9           | 20. Rev. 15         | 31. Rev. 22:6-21     |
| 10. Rev. 10         | 21. Rev. 16         |                      |
| 11. Rev. 11:1-14    | 22. Rev. 17         |                      |

JANUARY 2020

READ MORE AT [wels.net/bible3](http://wels.net/bible3)

- Feb. 27, 7 P.M., Rock of Ages, Madison, Tenn.
- Feb. 28, 7 P.M., Lamb of God, Madison, Ala.
- Feb. 29, 7 P.M., Faith, Sharpsburg, Ga.
- Mar. 1, 10:30 A.M., Sola Fide, Lawrenceville, Ga.; 6:30 P.M., Abiding Peace, Simpsonville, S.C.
- Mar. 2, 7 P.M., Risen Savior, Pooler, Ga.
- Mar. 3, 7 P.M., King of Kings, Maitland, Fla.
- Mar. 4, 7 P.M., Divine Savior, West Palm Beach, Fla.
- Mar. 5, 10:30 A.M., Divine Savior Academy, Doral, Fla.
- Mar. 6, 7 P.M., Crown of Life, Ft. Myers, Fla.
- Mar. 7, 7 P.M., St. Paul, Beverly Hills, Fla.
- Mar. 8, 9:30 A.M., Open Bible, Oxford, Fla.
- Mar. 22, 3 P.M., Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

**Pathways to Christ retreat**—Mar. 13-15. Oshkosh, Wis. Theme, “A friend loves at all times.” Website, [pathwaystochrist.org](http://pathwaystochrist.org). 920-233-1069.

**WELS women writers conference**—April 24-25. Trinity, Waukesha, Wis. To encourage and equip women who have been gifted to serve the Lord through writing. Hosted by WELS Women’s Ministry and Northwestern Publishing House. Website, [wm.welsrc.net/wels-women-writers-conference](http://wm.welsrc.net/wels-women-writers-conference).

**WELS 2020 International Youth Rally**—June 23-26. University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tenn. Theme, “2020 Vision.” Website, [wels.net/youthrally](http://wels.net/youthrally).

**Lutheran Women’s Missionary Society 57th annual convention**—June 25-28. The Classic Center, Athens, Ga. Theme, “Vision for Missions.” Website, [lwms.org](http://lwms.org).

**Taste of Missions 2020**—July 11. Hosted by WELS Missions. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Website, [wels.net/tasteofmissions2020](http://wels.net/tasteofmissions2020).

## NAMES WANTED

**Military/inmates/individuals with special needs**—Special Ministries supplies devotions, resources, and other spiritual help and teaching tools to members of the Armed Forces, inmates, and individuals with special needs. Complete an online referral form at [wels.net/refer](http://wels.net/refer). Special Ministries, 414-256-3241; [csm@wels.net](mailto:csm@wels.net).

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

## SERVICE TIMES

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

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

**SEE MORE AT** [welsrc.net/bulletinboard](http://welsrc.net/bulletinboard). Needed and available items as well as volunteer and job opportunities are updated regularly on the online WELS bulletin board.

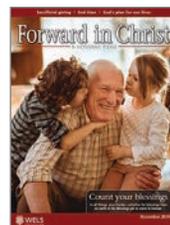
## GRIEVING IN HOPE

I so enjoyed reading the article “Grieving in hope” [Nov. 2019]. Our 11-year-old daughter went to heaven over 20 years ago. The pain of losing her is still real today. Tears come at the most unexpected times: her favorite hymns, a story she liked to hear, hearing about another sick child, and the list goes on.

She is missed so much by our family, but the greatest comfort is knowing we’ll be in heaven together someday. We thank our Lord and Savior for giving us this hope and comfort.

*Sherry Mau*

## THANKS!



Regarding the November issue. To all of you who work on this wonderful magazine, thank you! All the articles are beneficial and encouraging in our walk with Jesus! I was particularly happy to see the one on suicide.

I’ve come to our president of MLC’s article [about recruitment]. Excellent. May I suggest gatherings of public high school kids to inform and encourage them to study at MLC? God be praised for his finding these [students] also to serve. It happens!

*Lois Tackebury*

## WALK BY THE SPIRIT

I am asking for clarification on a series of articles under the title “Walk by the Spirit.” When I began collecting this series (which originated with the May issue), I understood it would be for six installments. However, there was another installment in November 2019, which was cited as a “concluding article.” This series is outstanding and very inspiring! If there will be future articles under the original title, that would be great. Professor Braun is a gifted person, and I always enjoy his writing. I look forward to future issues.

*Allen Gaines*

*Good catch! We did add one extra article to the series. We’re glad you enjoyed them.—ed.*

Send your letters to *Forward in Christ*, N16W23377 Stone Ridge Dr, Waukesha WI 53188; [ficsubmissions@wels.net](mailto:ficsubmissions@wels.net). Letters are edited for clarity, conciseness, and relevance. Writers’ views are not necessarily those of WELS or *Forward in Christ*.

## A life like Mr. Panza's

Andrew C. Schroer

Mr. Panza is 97 years old. He lives in the nursing home down the road from my house. Over the last year, he and I have become good friends. A few weeks ago, he told me his story.

Mr. Panza's parents met when his father fought in France during World War I. A farmer from Le Mans, France, offered his farm to the Americans to set up their operations. There the farmer's daughter met and fell in love with Mr. Panza's father, a strapping young Italian-American GI.

After the war, his parents married and moved to his home in Chicago. From the beginning, Mr. Panza's mother struggled with life in the United States, especially the rough streets of Chicago. She was miserable and begged her husband to move back to France.

**Every life, every soul, every person on this planet is important to God.**

But soon after arriving in Chicago, they had a son. When she became pregnant again, Mr. Panza's mother decided she couldn't take it anymore. She would have an abortion, leave her husband, and return to France. The abortion procedure failed. The baby refused to die. By that point, she couldn't bring herself to try another abortion. That was 97 years ago.

My friend, Mr. Panza, was a failed abortion. Soon after his birth, his mother took the boys to vacation in France but then informed her husband she would not return.

After a difficult custody battle, Mr. Panza's father returned to Chicago with the two boys. They lost touch with their mother and would not find her again until they were adults. It was only before she died that she finally confessed to her son her failed attempt to abort him. She begged him to forgive her. Mr. Panza did.

God has blessed Mr. Panza with a full and abundant life. His father remarried, this time

to a Mexican-American woman. Mr. Panza was raised speaking Italian, Spanish, and French. He himself fought in World War II. For years, he owned and operated a small factory in California that made jackets for JCPenney®. He married, had two sons of his own, and now has numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

None of them would be here today if the abortion hadn't failed. Even today, it is impossible to speak with Mr. Panza without being moved by his infectious kindness and *joie de vivre*. His life has touched hundreds, if not thousands, of people.

Since the United States Supreme Court legalized abortion with its *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973, an estimated 60 million babies have been aborted in the United States. To put that into perspective, that is ten times the amount of people killed in the Holocaust. Sixty million babies. Sixty million souls. Sixty million lives un-lived.

Though one can understand a woman's desire to have autonomy over her own body, does the baby have the right to live, to breathe, to survive? Just because a pregnancy is unwanted or unplanned does not mean the baby's life is any less precious or important.

Every life, every soul, every person on this planet is important to God. If you are struggling with an unwanted pregnancy like Mr. Panza's mother, understand there are other options. Yes, it is more difficult to have the baby and then give him or her up for adoption, but it means you save a life. In addition, you are saving yourself the burden of a lifetime of guilt and regret. You are allowing a life to be lived.

A life like Mr. Panza's.



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

# ALL FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

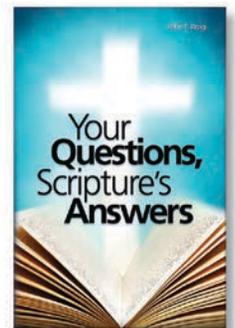
May you be encouraged to dedicate all that you do in this new year to the Savior. To support your efforts, enjoy a few treasured titles from Northwestern Publishing House's most popular authors. These enlightening and uplifting resources will point you to Jesus as you work toward your goals and overcome your obstacles this year.



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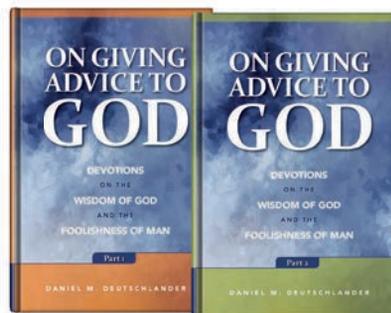
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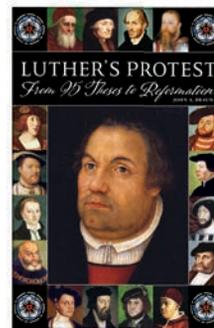
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# PUT ON THE NEW *selfie!*

PHOTO | Lightstock

## **We can all live in peace knowing how God sees us.**

Andrew D. Schwartz

Ahh, the selfie. I wonder how many of them were taken over the Christmas and New Year holidays. You see them all over the place: people fake kissing the screen or taking one of the crew that got together again. The list goes on and on. Sure, some may take selfies because they struggle with a little bit of narcissism, but there are many more who simply want to remember a special occasion and that they were actually there to experience it themselves.

Have you ever witnessed people who take a selfie and then look at it, shake their head, and take another one? They repeat that process a few more times before finally smiling and posting it to share it with others. Too many are just not happy with what they see in themselves at first, so they keep on taking more and more selfies until they finally think they're good to go to share it with others.

### **WE SEE THE OLD SELF(IE)**

Sadly, that kind of thinking affects us all. And it ends up being way more serious than just how we view our poses. Many times looking at ourselves goes deep down to our very soul.

We often don't like what we see. I'm sure a lot of things we did this past year led us to shake our heads at who we were. They may have been surface-level things—like the way we mistreated our bodies or our minds. But there may have been some things far deeper than that—like the guilt we felt for the party that got out of control or the words we spoke in anger to our wife or our kids or our friends. The list goes on and on.

As we sin, our self-worth, our self-esteem, our self-everything takes a dive, and well it should! Actually, it should keep going down to the very gates of hell. That's what our old self(ie) deserves!

### **GOD SEES THE NEW SELF(IE)**

But then comes the gentle, loving tap on the shoulder. It's not someone asking you to take your picture with them; it's the tap that comes when we hear God's Word. The tap that comes from the Holy Spirit.

The Word tells you something sweet and comforting beyond the old self. It tells you about Christ. It tells you about a new self that has been made holy and righteous, perfect in his sight, through Christ. "Take off the old self, which is corrupted by its deceitful desires . . . put on the new self, which

has been created to be like God in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:22,24 Evangelical Heritage Version). It tells you how God sees you—your new selfie. You are with Jesus, but he is not standing next to you. He's in front of you—blocking out all of your sin and guilt and shame, no matter what size! That Word tells us every day that Jesus took your place on the cross of Calvary to pay the price for every single sin and that he rose triumphant on that holy Easter Day. By grace through faith—his free gift to us by water and the Word—we can trust every word that we have learned from Scripture.

So, put on the new self—and take some new selfies! Live in peace knowing how God sees you. Stop shaking your head and thinking that every picture of yourself needs to be retaken until you're happy. Instead, may God fill you with his joy. You are his dearly loved, perfect-in-Christ child.

Blessed new year! Blessed new selfie!



Andrew Schwartz is pastor at Christ the King, Bremerton, Washington.