

JULY 2020

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# FORWARD IN CHRIST

A LUTHERAN VOICE

A GRADUATION TO  
REMEMBER

TAKING THE  
MIDDLE ROAD

p. 10

A CHRISTIAN'S  
CROSS

p. 28

A BLUEPRINT FOR  
FAITHFUL LIVING

p. 31



**FORWARD IN CHRIST**  
forwardinchrist.net

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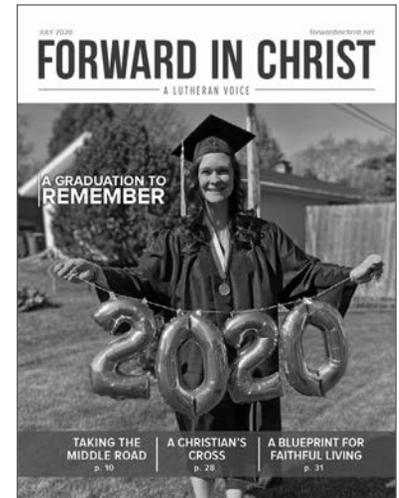
May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors;  
may he never leave us nor forsake us. — 1 KINGS 8:57

## WHAT'S INSIDE

Still joyful. Even though this year's graduations and confirmations may have lacked the big-party glow, there was still much to celebrate. See how WELS members observed these events this year (p. 4). Then rejoice with the men and women from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and Martin Luther College, who recently graduated and received assignments into gospel ministry (pp. 18-27). Finally, turn to the back page to read two graduates' reflections on their unique final semester.

Three authors this month remind us that we can still be joyful even as we are suffering (p. 12), carrying a cross (p. 28), or being tested by trials (p. 30). God will always be with us here on this earth and has something—actually, someplace—greater in store for us.

As we live our life here on this earth, we need to let our Christian joy show. Take, for example, Brian Urbanek, who wasn't afraid to let his faith shine with his new girlfriend, now wife (p. 7). Living out the joy of our faith is one of the themes in the book of James. In a new Bible study starting this month, Richard Lauersdorf shows us how James offers a blueprint for living out our lives of faith (p. 31).



COVER PHOTO | Courtesy of Lydia Thiesfeldt

Julie Wietzke

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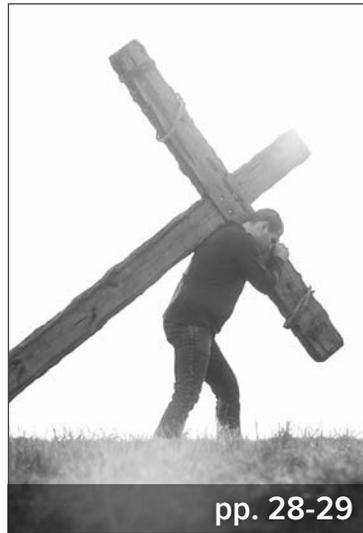
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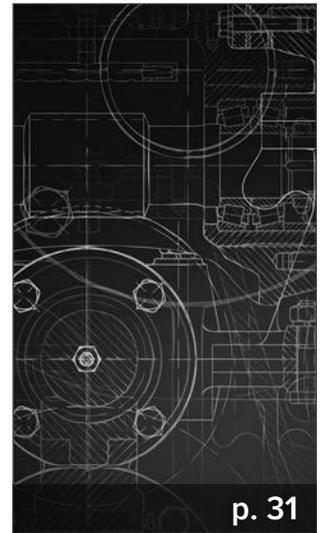
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### ON THE COVER

Pictured on the cover is Lydia Thiesfeldt, a 2020 graduate of Martin Luther College. Lydia was assigned to serve at CrossLife Christian Academy, Pflugerville, Texas. See more graduate photos on pp. 18-27.



# THIS IS WELS

Spring in WELS brings confirmations, graduations, and called worker assignments. Here's what that looked like in a COVID-19 world.

**1** | Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.—“President Zarlring” (aka Tom Kock) and graduate Adam Kock **2** | California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, Calif.—senior Zhenyu “Kevin” Xie wanted to be baptized before he graduated (pictured with Pastor Andrew Schroeder) **3** | Rocky Mountain Lutheran High School, Commerce City, Colo. **4** | Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.—vicar assignment **5** | Martin

Luther College—senior choir students with Prof. Adrian Smith during choir tour in early March **6** | Divine Savior Academy, Doral, Fla.—preschool graduation at home **7** | Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz. **8** | Martin Luther College—graduate student Peter Gumm receiving his diploma from his son during the virtual graduation service **9** | Zion, Columbus, Wis.—private confirmation for each student

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# Be like Jesus in forgiveness and love

**“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 4:32–5:2).**

Peter M. Prange

**PEOPLE SAY** imitation is the highest form of flattery. When little boys follow their older brothers around and want to do everything their brothers do, it’s because those little boys look up to their big brothers. While that usually serves as an acute source of irritation for those big brothers, they should realize how flattering it is to have someone imitating them, following closely in their footsteps. They ought to realize that imitation is the highest form of flattery.

## IMITATING JESUS

Our big Brother, Jesus, does not get frustrated when we imitate him. He delights in it. He wants us to follow closely in his footsteps, but not because he’s vain or conceited. No, he wants us to follow in his footsteps because he knows that he is “the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through [him]” (John 14:6). He wants us to imitate him because he knows that eternal life is ours only through trusting and following him in faith.

But Christians have another reason for imitating Jesus. We imitate our big Brother to flatter him, or as the Bible puts it, to bring him glory. St. Paul wrote, “Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). Our job description as Christians is to do things that imitate Jesus and bring him glory.

## PRACTICING LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

Some ways we do that are by “forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” and by “walk[ing] in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.”

Jesus’ forgiveness is amazing. He puts no conditions on his forgiveness, like we so often do. His forgiveness has no limits. He is the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Because of his perfect life, his innocent sufferings and death, and his resurrection from the dead, our heavenly Father has forgiven the sins of every person—no strings attached. He has declared the whole world innocent. Through faith in Jesus, believers receive the wonderful windfall that he has purchased for all: eternal life. What a wonderful, undeserved gift!

What wonderful privilege do we now have as the children of God and the siblings of Jesus? To imitate our big



PHOTO | iStock

**Our big Brother, Jesus, does not get frustrated when we imitate him. He delights in it.**

Brother by practicing unconditional love and forgiveness, even to people who repay us with evil.

Martin Luther once remarked, “Christians must not retreat and withdraw their hands, but continue and remain in love. It is to be a divine, voluntary, unceasing love, even a lost love among people, which pours forth good deeds in such a way that it does not say, as the world does: ‘I have given and done so much for you, and you repay me like a scoundrel and a villain!’” No, Luther counseled, instead we should answer such evil by responding, “I will not for that reason stop, no matter how evil and unthankful you should be. My love will be much too good for your malice.”

Who could love evil people like that? Jesus could. Yes, he loves you and me like that. “He devours and consumes all vice and malice through the fire of his love” (*Luther’s Works* 78:378-379).

Let’s imitate him!



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

## God's work does not stop

Last spring, the United States and countries around the world responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in unprecedented ways. In most states, many businesses were forced to cease operations, and schools were closed. The federal government mobilized industries to produce and distribute tests, treatments, medical equipment, and protective gear. Steps were taken to provide additional unemployment compensation to millions of workers. Congress approved several huge spending bills to assist businesses and individuals. And, of course, our own synod was affected, as congregations complied with government mandates to close their schools and to discontinue in-person public worship.

Throughout the challenges posed by the pandemic, the work of the church did not stop. Congregations found creative ways to serve people with the proclamation of the gospel. Christians joined in worship remotely. Bible classes were taught. Congregations and their members continued to share their faith with friends, neighbors, and communities. Christian love continued to be shown to those in need.

The work of the synod continued as well. In-person meetings were not held and major events were canceled or postponed, but online video conferencing enabled important business to be accomplished. And even though our synod's ministerial schools were forced to cancel in-person classes, students continued via online instruction to prepare for serving their Lord in the public ministry.

Now is the time of year when many of our congregations will be welcoming newly assigned teachers and staff ministers from Martin Luther College and newly assigned pastors and vicars from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Even though the Conference of Presidents could not meet in person, assignment meetings were held via video conferences. Graduates could not be on campus for their commencement ceremonies, but graduations still took place and assignments were announced. In other words, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic and the major adjustments that needed to be made, the Lord of the church continued to make it possible to prepare workers for ministry and to send them into his harvest field.

We can draw two important lessons from this entire experience.

First, we see God keeping his promise that nothing in this world will keep his Word from being proclaimed and his gospel message from doing its saving work—both among those who already know God by faith and among those who have yet to believe. God has promised that his Word will not return to him empty but will always accomplish its purpose (Isaiah 55:11).

Second, we are reminded that God continues to send workers into his harvest field, despite the challenges we face. This entire experience can lead us to appreciate even more the blessings that God brings to us and to our congregations through our called workers. Training pastors and teachers to bring God's saving gospel to future generations remains one of our synod's reasons to exist.

It's a time to thank God that he has enabled us, by his grace, to continue to carry out that important part of our mission. It's a time to say again with the apostle Paul, "I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation [including some terrible virus] will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38,39).



Mark G. Schroeder | WELS President



PHOTO | Mel Anne Designs

See photos of the 2020 graduates of Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and where they were assigned on pp. 18-27.

# CONFESSIONS *of faith*

**Technology offers opportunities to teach a woman from Peru more about God's grace.** | Ann L. Jahns

PHOTO | Lightstock

**HOW DOES A NATIVE** of Lima, Peru, become a confirmed member of a WELS church in Wisconsin? By the grace of God, through an unexpected relationship—and with a little bit of help from technology.

## **BRAND-NEW RELATIONSHIP**

Cristina Loayza grew up in Lima, a city of more than nine million people, the majority of whom are Catholic. Although she attended Catholic school for 11 years and her education included religion courses, she didn't know how to apply the Bible to her life. In fact, asking questions about the Bible was not encouraged. Cristina admits that she and her family gradually drifted away from church until a very pivotal event in her life: the death of her grandmother in 2016, when Cristina was 24.

"While my grandmother was dying," Cristina recalls, "she worried about purgatory. She was scared of dying." Cristina began asking deeper questions about faith, salvation, and life after death. Where did her grandmother's soul go when she died? To heaven or to purgatory? Cristina struggled to find the answers.

At about the same time, Brian Urbanek, a profes-

sional videographer and member of Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wis., traveled to Lima. He was there to do video work for WELS Latin American Missions. On one of his last evenings in Peru, Brian asked to be introduced to a native Peruvian, someone around his age who could show him the sights, sounds, and tastes of Peru. That someone was Cristina. Two days later, Brian returned to the United States, but he and Cristina didn't forget each other. Their relationship deepened as they started to communicate daily via text message. Over the next year, the two also made multiple trips to visit each other.

At Cristina's request, she and Brian began to read the Bible together via video chat. She started asking questions, particularly regarding life after death. She recalled the questions and fears that her grandmother had before she passed away. Brian shared the good news from God's Word that upon death, the soul of a believer goes directly to heaven. And then he shared the best news of all: Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, based solely on Jesus' sacrifice—not on anything we need to do or can do. Cristina remembers feeling a great sense of





Brian and Cristina Urbanek: dating (left), wedding (p. 7), and with their son, Santiago.

relief: “Wow! Our salvation is already granted. I wish I could have told that to my grandmother before she died.”

### LONG-DISTANCE LEARNING

As Cristina’s questions about religion and the Bible became tougher, Brian began texting her questions to his pastor, Eric Roecker, at Pilgrim. As Roecker provided answers to Cristina’s questions, she wished that she could somehow participate in Pilgrim’s 10-session Bible information class, called Answers. But how could she be a part of that class from 4,000 miles away?

Brian and his pastor had an idea. What if Cristina could participate in the class via live, interactive video? Back in 2017, connecting this way was possible, but certainly not the norm. Would it work? They decided to give it a try.

For each Answers class, Roecker set up his laptop on a stool facing him as he taught from the front of the church. Using the video chat feature in Facebook Messenger, Cristina was able to see and hear not only the pastor teaching but also his interaction with other class members. In addition, she could ask her own questions.

The entire process was low-key, yet effective. “We didn’t have fancy equipment,” remembers Cristina. “We only had a computer on a stool.” But this unique process of connecting and learning about the Bible had a profound effect on her. “It made me value the experience of the class more than if I had even been there in person,” she says. “Going in person would be normal, but since this took extra effort, it was so special.”

Roecker agrees. “For the class, it was very special. It helped everyone appreciate that people have the same challenges and questions about God no matter where they live or what culture they are from,” he says. “They discovered that the Bible provides the same universal

# CRISTINA'S story

Brian Urbanek creates a monthly video newsletter called the *Pilgrim Connection* for his congregation to highlight news and events happening at the church. The February 2018 edition became personal to him because it highlighted Cristina’s faith story. Watch the video at [forwardinchrist.net/cristina-urbanek](http://forwardinchrist.net/cristina-urbanek).

answers to those questions, whether the person asking is living in Lima, Peru, or Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin.”

Not long after Cristina completed the Answers class, she came to Wisconsin and was confirmed into God’s family at Pilgrim with Brian by her side. Three days later, they were married in a civil ceremony in Wisconsin. Several months after that, the two were married in a religious ceremony in Peru, surrounded by family and friends. What made the day even more special was that the ceremony was presided over by their friend and shepherd, Pastor Roecker.

### CRYSTAL-CLEAR PLAN

In addition to sound biblical teaching, Cristina treasures belonging to a larger, supportive faith community. “Church isn’t just a building—it’s people. We celebrate God’s Word as we unite in faith,” she says. “In WELS, I have that. WELS gives the tools for people to become part of the church and a community in God’s Word.”

She continues, “I think I was led by God to meet Brian and through him to start to learn more about what is true in the Bible. Literally, it is written that you don’t have to do anything to earn your salvation. You are al-

ready saved. I was guided by the Holy Spirit throughout this process. And I'm so glad that I was."

Sometimes as Christians it may be hard to see God's plan for our lives. But for the Urbaneks, God's plan for Cristina's life has been crystal clear.

Looking back, Brian marvels that "so many little things lined up so perfectly. That shows me it is clearly the work of God. There is no way we could have met in this way—by mistake—in this world with billions of people."

The Urbaneks also praise God for his gift of technology, which made it possible for Cristina to take the Answers class. They are so grateful for Roecker's willingness to ensure that Cristina was supported and connected to God's Word and her new church family.

Roecker feels similarly blessed through the experience, "This was one of the most amazing experiences in my ministry," he says. "To be a part of God's plan to help Cristina get to know him better was such a privilege. That a young man like Brian would so quickly begin having spiritual conversations with his new girlfriend from Peru was inspiring, as was Cristina's interest in discovering what God has to say."

He continues, "I was especially thrilled when the Lord saw to it that Cristina made a trip to Wisconsin just after she completed the class so that she could be confirmed at Pilgrim. It was an earthly glimpse of John's vision in Revelation 7:9, where he saw 'a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.' Seeing Cristina standing before the altar at Pilgrim gave us just a glimpse of that greater vision that we will one day see. The members of Pilgrim were beaming as this young woman from Peru joined their congregation."

Both Cristina and Brian regard God's plan for their lives with a mixture of awe and thankfulness. They don't take his blessings for granted. And now they continue to joyfully share the love of God with Cristina's family and friends and with their new baby boy, Santiago. What a beautiful legacy of faith. What an inspiring testimony to the work of the Holy Spirit.



Ann Jahns is a member at Shepherd of the Hills, West Bend, Wisconsin.

# Sharing THE GOSPEL THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

One of the blessings of COVID-19 is the response of WELS churches in creating a wide variety of online spiritual resources. Those resources can be easily shared with anyone who could benefit from spiritual encouragement or especially with someone new to God's Word.

Here are some tips for sharing the gospel through technology:

- Send a link to your congregation's online worship services to someone who may be reluctant to walk into a church building. Watching online worship can be their first non-threatening step.
- Connect with others through video chat for devotions, Bible study, and prayer. This is especially beneficial in meeting with others no matter where they live.
- Invite a friend, relative, or coworker to your congregation's online Bible studies.
- Send a link to the variety of daily devotions for adults and families on the WELS website: [wels.net/devotions](http://wels.net/devotions).
- Send a link to the three-year Bible reading plan at [wels.net/bible3](http://wels.net/bible3). Offer to be an accountability and discussion partner with a friend or loved one as you read through the Bible together.
- Share links to *Forward in Christ* articles and other inspiring content at [forwardinchrist.net](http://forwardinchrist.net).
- Discover and share the downloadable spiritual resources from Northwestern Publishing House at [nph.net](http://nph.net).



Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wis., used live, interactive video to take Cristina through Bible information class.



**The coronavirus has us traveling the middle road of faith—confident in God to save and yet faithful to God in responsible service.**

Aaron M. Jensen

# ON THE middle ROAD



**IT HAPPENED SO FAST.** One day it was comfortably far away, the next day was complete lockdown. Such a novel way of life brought on us by the novel coronavirus—and so quickly. And it's made us think.

## **SEPARATING CHURCH AND STATE**

We've had to consider our relationship with the government as it told us to suspend gathering. Gathering together in God's house is the very rhythm of our faith-lives. In one way, this seemed like an unjust order we should rise up and defy. And yet under these strange circumstances, this was no persecution, no targeting of our faith. This was the government, God's servant to do us good, doing what it thought best for people's health. So, while not happy to give up worshipping together, we still happily comply—whether we personally think the government was making the right call or not.

Could complying right now and giving up assembling perhaps be used as precedent to try wrongly to close

our doors in the future? Certainly. But worries about tomorrow are no reason to break the Fourth Commandment today. Consider the patriarch Joseph. Joseph's shrewd actions preparing Egypt for the famine saved many lives, but they also centralized power under Pharaoh—perhaps the same power a later Pharaoh used to oppress God's people. God had Joseph do the right thing to save lives. We are asked to do the same thing now. And we can trust that God will take care of delivering his people from persecution in the future, just like he did in Egypt.

## **BALANCING PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL NEEDS**

When health concerns raise the question of canceling services, we feel physical and spiritual needs being pitted against each other. Knowing the spiritual is more important, we may feel that means we should meet, whatever the cost to physical life.

But the God who saves both soul and body does not pit soul and body

against each other. He loves both. We should love both too. Love for the other person as a whole person, soul and body, recognizes their greatest need might not be the first one for me to address. If someone is starving, I give them a sandwich before I give them God's Word. If someone is quite sick, I ask them to stay home from church that week. And if there's a very serious threat of spreading disease, I suspend gathering and, until we can meet again, look for other ways to serve people's greatest needs, the spiritual ones.

## **FINDING THE MIDDLE ROAD OF FAITH**

This situation has also had us trying to find where the middle road of faith is. In one ditch, a foolhardy caricature of confidence in God's providence wrongly tells us precautions are unnecessary. In the other ditch, panic or self-reliance wrongly tells us our times are in our own latex-gloved hands.

The middle road of faith recognizes it is God alone who protects

# RECOGNIZING *blessings*

This health crisis has been difficult on everyone. But, by God's perfect plan, bad things also bring us blessings:

**Necessity is the mother of invention.** It's forced us to look into the different opportunities that different technologies provide for sharing the gospel, many of which we can keep using to spread the gospel more often and to more people even after we're meeting in person again.

**Every home a church.** Parents have been reminded they cannot delegate their role of raising up children in God's Word only to professionals. Pastors and teachers may not always be able to be there and could never replace parents anyway. This has been an opportunity for families to reestablish the family altar, to show their children what's most important.

**Meaningless, meaningless.** Everything we thought was worth so much time was suddenly gone—a pointed reminder that, as nice as sports, clubs, recreation, vacations, businesses, and even schools might be, they mean little compared to what is truly meaningful. Perhaps once those other things come back, we can retain the unbusied way of life that leaves more time for what is most meaningful.

**Meaningless, meaningless.** What goes for the individual Christian also goes for the Christian congregation. Church calendars easily fill up with a flurry of activity—none of it bad but much of it not what is truly meaningful. And all of it poses the threat of having us redefine what we think “church” is and what its priorities are. Perhaps this isolation, as we temporarily gather around God's Word from our respective couches, will have us defining church by the marks that have always truly defined both the church itself and its priorities: people gathered around Word and sacrament.

**Small us, big God.** Technology, like a modern Tower of Babel, easily has us feeling superior and invincible. But now stripped away from our eyes is this illusion that we have advanced to the point of being in control. Even a microscopic virus can bring our bodies and our world to a halt. And by making us despair of ourselves, the coronavirus serves God's purpose by having us look to the one who is really in control.

us from danger. All our confidence for our health and safety lies in him, not ourselves. Yet at the same time this middle road of faith recognizes we have a Fifth-Commandment responsibility to do what we can to protect the bodies and lives of our neighbors and ourselves. When we do this, God cares for people through us, as though he were wearing us as masks—even as we wear literal masks on our faces!

This same middle road of faith—confident in God to save and yet faithful to God in responsible service—is needed in approaching the financial difficulties caused by the pandemic. There are some real question marks for both family and congregational budgets. And so, taking the middle road, we continue trusting God's providing care while at the same time looking carefully at our resources and doing what we can to take care of our families, neighbors, and congregations.

**When health concerns raise the question of canceling services, we feel physical and spiritual needs being pitted against each other.**

## REMEMBERING GOD'S PROMISES

Things change so rapidly. Due to the steps involved in printing a magazine, I wrote this article on April 12. By the time you read it this summer, what will have become of this health crisis? Will things be back to normal or will things be much worse? I have no idea. Supposedly we're at the pandemic's peak today. So has it all gone away, or are we still in crisis mode? So much changed so quickly when the virus arrived. So much could have changed in so many ways since I have written this.

But April 12 wasn't just the day I wrote this article. April 12 was also Easter. And whatever day it is for you now, Easter promises us that as much as other things might change, there's something that doesn't: Jesus still lives, still loves, still rules, still forgives, still protects, still provides. He's still Jesus.



Aaron Jensen is pastor at St. Stephen, Adrian, Michigan.



PHOTO | iStock

# PLEASE EXPLAIN

Why should I be a Christian when I have to suffer? | Bruce A. McKenney

**SHE WAS LYING IN** the hospital bed awaiting the test results. She was facing surgery and a long recuperation. As I stood by her bedside, she asked, “Why is God allowing me to suffer like this?”

That’s not an uncommon question for believers. Job struggled with it and so did the early Christians as they faced opposition and even persecution. We struggle with it as well. So, what’s the answer?

The answer is really the cross, the one on which Christ died to win our salvation and the crosses that God allows us to carry to keep us close to his cross.

## PAUL’S CROSS

Perhaps, no better example of this is the apostle Paul himself. God had blessed Paul in many ways, both spiritually and physically. Paul was well educated and well traveled. He was called directly by Jesus to be the apostle to the Gentiles, and

God used him to write many of the books in the New Testament. On top of all those blessings, God allowed Paul to see heaven, a sight that was so spectacular he couldn’t put it into human words.

But that doesn’t mean Paul’s life was without hardship. In his gospel work he was often ridiculed, rejected, beaten, stoned, imprisoned, and run out of town. He suffered shipwreck, cold, and hunger. His was a hard ministry.

Then on top of all that, the Lord allowed Paul to suffer a thorn in the flesh that Satan used to pummel him. What that thorn was we don’t know. But what we do know was that Paul asked God three times to take away this suffering. And what was the Lord’s answer?

It was no.

Why would God say no? Didn’t Paul have enough struggles? Didn’t God love Paul anymore? Was God angry

with Paul? Should Paul have been running for cover rather than praying for help? No! The Lord was using that thorn to keep Paul from becoming conceited because of all the things that he was allowed to see and do. Paul himself explains:

To keep me from becoming arrogant due to the extraordinary nature of these revelations, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me, so that I would not become arrogant. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that he would take it away from me. And he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, because my power is made perfect in weakness.” . . . For whenever I am weak, then am I strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

In other words, God said no because he wanted Paul to remember that the power and success of his life and ministry as a Christian and his hope for heaven weren’t because of Paul.

It was God's way of helping Paul remember that he was only a jar of clay and that the treasure in and the power of such jars of clay was the message of the cross that God had given him to believe and to preach.

### OUR SUFFERING

In Paul's experiences with suffering, we can find some answers for our own suffering. When suffering comes into our lives, it's not because God doesn't love us. It's not because somehow we have lost God's favor. It's because God knows what's best for us.

Yes, there are times when God will remove hardships and difficulties from us when we ask because he knows that is what we need. But there will be those times when he will allow us to endure hardships, loss, and even a thorn in the flesh because he knows that is what's best for us. God knows exactly what each of us needs to keep us humbly relying on his power and his grace—in good times as well as bad. We may not understand and we may disagree, but through our crosses, God keeps us close to the Savior's cross.

That, dear friends, is the main point of it all. What Paul learned—and what we have to learn—is that if and when the day of suffering comes, we can trust that God has some-

thing better for us. God told Paul what that was:

"My grace is sufficient for you, because my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will be glad to boast all the more in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may shelter me. That is why I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For whenever I am weak, then am I strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9,10)

### Through our crosses, God keeps us close to the Savior's cross.

When Paul suffered insults, hardships, and persecutions for Christ and when he learned that his thorn in the flesh would not be taken away, where did he find the strength to endure? Paul's crosses brought him back to the Savior's cross. And when Paul relied on the Savior and his grace, then he was strong in his faith and in his patience to endure those sufferings.

That is true for us too. When it seems that God says no to our request to take some burden away, we know that he has something better for

us—his grace and power that will be sufficient to keep us.

### GOD'S GRACE

Think about one of the most difficult times in your life, a time when you thought you couldn't handle it anymore and yet somehow you did. What was it that ultimately carried you through? Wasn't it the power of God's grace in your life? You see, when you are at your weakest, that's when you are actually at your strongest. That was the time you turned to God in prayer and relied on his power. That was the time you cried out for mercy and turned to the powerful promises of God's Word. God uses your crosses, your suffering in life, to keep you close to the Savior's cross. Isn't that the best thing for you?

Remember how the greatest of God's blessings came to us all through God's answer to the prayer of our dear Lord Jesus himself? In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked if his heavenly Father would take away his cup of suffering. What was his Father's answer? It was no. Why would the Father say no to his own Son? Didn't he love his Son? Wasn't he pleased with his Son? God did not remove the suffering from Jesus because he wanted something better for us—eternal life in heaven.

So dear friends, when the day of suffering comes and God says no when you ask him to take it away, trust that he knows better. Trust that he has something better for you and for others. Then trust, as Paul did, in God's grace by which he saved you for heaven and through which he strengthens you on earth.



*Bruce McKenney is pastor at St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wisconsin.*

The Scripture references used in this article are from the Evangelical Heritage Version.

## DIG INTO THE WORD

**Pull out your Bible and read more about what God has to say about our crosses on this earth:**

**Matthew 10:38,39; Matthew 16:21-26; Luke 14:14-35:**

The cross is the mark of discipleship.

**Philippians 2:1-8:** On this side of the grave we can only imitate Jesus in his humility. The exaltation will be on the other side of the grave. First the cross, then the crown.

**Hebrews 12:1-12:** Suffering is a sign of God's loving discipline.

**1 Peter 1:3-9:** Through suffering, God refines our faith.

**2 Corinthians 1:3-7:** Because of our suffering, we can be a source of comfort to others.



# Q&A WITH DAVID SCHARF

**My neighbor is super kind and always treats others well. He wants God to do the same. Every time we speak about the Bible, he always asks, “How can you believe that a loving God would send people to hell?”**

## HELL IS HORRIBLE AND REAL

The logic goes, “If God is loving, then the concept of eternal suffering is incompatible with his character. That would make God a monstrous God.” It seems logical, but it’s not biblical . . . nor is it really logical.

I can understand why people would want to believe it. The Bible shows that hell is real and horrible. It uses a number of pictures to describe hell. The prophet Isaiah describes hell as fire when he says, “The fire that burns them will not be quenched” (Isaiah 66:24). Jesus ends the parable of the talents by saying, “Throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:30).

Hell is described as “fire” because when you get burned you instantly forget all the good things. I know how true that is just when my finger gets burned. Suddenly I forget my blessings and can only focus on the pain. Hell is described as “darkness” because you cannot see beauty. It is described as “outside” because you don’t belong there. Hell is horrible, and it is real.

## GOD IS LOVE, AND HE IS JUST

God is love, and he is just. “We know him who said, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ and again, ‘The Lord will judge his people’ ” (Hebrews 10:30). Sin must be punished. And that is logical.

God forbid this, but imagine someone was convicted of murdering your loved one. At the sentencing, the judge asks the convicted person, “Are you sorry?” And the murderer nods affirmatively. Then the judge continues, “Well, then you can go.” Would you say that was just? No!

You would scream, “That’s unfair! That’s unjust!” God is love and God is just. So how did he satisfy both?

To use a crude analogy, imagine a kingdom where the king made the law that no baked goods could be sold on Tuesdays or the perpetrator would be put in the stockades. On Monday night, the king’s mother made a really tasty batch of cookies and decided to sell them the next day. The guards caught her and dragged her before the king. If you were the king, what would you do? You love your mom and so you do not want her to be punished. But you are also just, and crimes must be punished! How would you satisfy both your love and your justice? You could go to the stockade in your mom’s place. Your justice is satisfied because the crime was punished, and your love was satisfied because your mother was free of punishment.

## GOD’S LOVE AND JUSTICE MEET AT THE CROSS

The Bible says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). This great exchange is what Jesus did for you at the cross. He saw that sin needed to be punished because of his justice, but he did not want you to suffer hell because of his love. So what did he do? He suffered hell in your place on the cross.

Hell is real, but because of Jesus suffering it in your place, so is heaven. God bless you as you witness to your neighbor that God’s love satisfied his own justice for him!

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

# A loving God saved people from hell

David G. Scharf

**UNIVERSALISM SAYS** that the biblical teaching of eternal damnation is incompatible with the concept of a loving God. Universalists believe that God will eventually destroy all sin and save all people. They would be very comfortable saying, "We all worship the same God by different names. We are all going to the same place! Hell as a place of eternal suffering does not exist."

**Read Exodus 34:6,7; John 14:6;  
Acts 4:12; and Galatians 5:4.**

What misunderstandings about the Christian faith do Universalists have?

## THE REASON FOR HELL

On the Last Day, Jesus will speak some of the most beautiful words in all of Scripture to his people: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

He also will say the most awful words recorded in Scripture to those who reject him: "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). Literally, one could translate Jesus' words, "Keep walking away from me."

Ultimately, God gives people what they are asking for in their lives. He has opened heaven to all who believe in what Jesus has done. It is a free gift for everyone, but some walk away from his gracious gift in spite of his gracious invitations and warnings. Finally, Jesus will say with a broken heart, "Have it your way. Keep walking."

**Read Revelation 14:10,11  
and Isaiah 61:8.**

How is the concept of "no hell and everyone goes to heaven" illogical and unfair?

Why don't people want to believe that God would send people to hell? Evaluate those reasons.

## HELL AS EVIDENCE OF GOD'S LOVE?

When I go on evangelism calls, sometimes a skeptical person will say, "I could never believe in a loving God who would send people to hell." I respond with something that sounds shocking, "I believe that hell is one of the greatest evidences of God's love." After seeing a look of confusion, I would add, "Hell is what Jesus suffered in my place and yours so that we would never have to suffer there."

Hell is horrible. It is real. And it is necessary. But it is avoidable because of what Jesus did in our place on the cross to forgive us.

Imagine that your pastor asked you to write a children's sermon on this topic. How would you explain to kindergartners the truth that a loving God can, does, and will send people to hell?

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

**READ MORE** ➤ in the book *Heaven and Hell: Eternal Life and Eternal Punishment*, available from Northwestern Publishing House, [nph.net](http://nph.net); 1-800-662-6022.

# PARENT CONVERSATIONS

Each phase of childhood comes with its own unique set of blessings and challenges, doesn't it? Teenagers get a bad rap, but as my daughter enters high school, I have had many wise friends tell me to savor these days—that the teen years are some of the best. As a rookie mom of a teen, I'm imagining that it's a lot like those first few months with an infant. You're so sleep-deprived that sometimes you want to rush your child on to the next phase, but once you get there, you think back to those days wistfully.

To help you enjoy the teen years rather than just endure them, read on for some insights into your teen's brain.

— Nicole Balza

## HOW DOES A TEEN'S BRAIN WORK?

**PARENTING TEENS** can be exhausting, frustrating, and seemingly impossible! As a parent of three adolescents, ages 14, 18, and 20, daily conversations in our home often start with *What were you thinking? Why would you do that? Didn't you know that would happen?*

### TEEN BRAINS ARE STILL UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Parental frustrations in dealing with teens/young adults (ages 13-25) often come about because of a lack of knowledge about the developing adolescent brain. In order to better understand the teenage brain, it is helpful to view it as "still under construction." Although physically the brain has reached its adult size during adolescence, its planning and judgment processing center is not fully developed until age 25.

What does this mean? It means that as adults, we are able to examine long-term consequences, think rationally about events, and use good judgment in our daily lives. Due to the ongoing refinement of neural circuitry in the frontal cortex of teen

brains, teens are more likely to act emotionally than rationally. Their behaviors are driven by feelings, not thought-out planning.

Another important characteristic of the still developing brain is that it is more susceptible to temptation and pleasure-seeking activities. In addition to planning and reasoning skills, the still maturing prefrontal cortex is also responsible for impulse control. This is where we see the biggest impact technology has on teen brains. Smartphones and apps are designed to hold the attention of the user with colorful icons and constant notifications. It's no wonder teens and young adults can't put them down. Research has demonstrated that getting a "like" or a "snap" or a notification causes a release of dopamine (a chemical messenger) in the brain. This "dopamine rush" provides an elevation in mood, attention, and/or motivation to do more of the same. Coupled with a lack of impulse control and an inability to evaluate long-term consequences, technology and the teen brain can be a recipe for disaster.

### PARENTS CAN HELP NURTURE TEEN BRAINS

As Christian parents, we are reminded that we should "be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is" (Ephesians 5:15-17). In the 21st century, it is still the Lord's will for parents to "train" their children in the way of the Lord (Proverbs 22:6 NIV 84), not of the world. Here are some first steps parents can use today to make wise, godly parenting decisions and help nurture the teenage brain:

**Listen to your children.** Oftentimes they just need a place to vent their emotions. They do not want your advice or solutions; they need to blow off steam. Creating a safe environment for your teens to do this makes it more likely that they will come to you in the future with their concerns.

 For more information on understanding your teen, visit [centerforparentingeducation.org](http://centerforparentingeducation.org) for informative articles on adolescent development and what parents of teens need to know.

Discuss the possible outcomes of certain behaviors with your teen. This helps the teen brain establish the link between cause and effect.

**i+** For more information, review the following TED Talks with your teen: *Sarah-Jayne Blakemore: The mysterious workings of the adolescent brain* and *Insight Into the Teenage Brain: Adriana Galván* (available on youtube.com).

**Model good digital habits** by putting your smartphone away when you talk to your teen and during important family time. Face-to-face communication helps your teen feel valued and important.

**i+** Go to [humanetech.com](http://humanetech.com) for more information about managing technology. Videos and downloadable resources are available for parents and students regarding managing your time and technology more efficiently.

**Encourage healthy eating** and sleeping habits. Teens should get between 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night. Lack of sleep negatively affects problem solving and increases emotional reactivity.

**i+** For more information on healthy habits for teens, go to [healthychildren.org](http://healthychildren.org) and search “adolescents” or “teens” for varied articles on parenting, depression, nutrition, and more.

**Watch for warning signs.** Due to hormonal changes, poor impulse

## Being informed about how the teen brain functions can help parents be more understanding and more intentional in providing what teens need most.

control, and an emotionally-reactive brain, adolescence is a period when many mental health conditions become more prevalent. Watch for any or all of the following as they are signs your teen needs professional help: significant change in grades, increased/decreased need for sleep, significant changes in appetite, loss of interest in favorite activities, social isolation, talk (or joking) of suicide or “not being around,” and/or use of alcohol/drugs.

**i+** Visit Christian Family Solutions, [christianfamilysolutions.org](http://christianfamilysolutions.org), to talk with a professional counselor. Web-based video counseling is available.

### DEVELOP A PARTNERSHIP WITH YOUR TEEN

Adolescence is a tumultuous time for teens and parents alike. Being informed about how the teen brain functions can help parents be more understanding and more intentional in providing what teens need most. Parenting teens is not easy, but there is hope. Chemically, scientists have

proven the brain’s plasticity, or ability to modify and change based on experience. Therefore, parents and teens can continually work to communicate more openly and modify habits to promote healthy brain changes.

Finally, and most important, as Christians we rely on God’s promises. His words in John 16:33 reassure all parents of teens and young adults: “I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”



Laura Reinke, a marriage and family therapist at Christian Family Solutions, lives in Waukesha, Wisconsin, with her husband, Matt, and their three children, ages 20, 18, and 14. She serves as director of youth ministry at Trinity, Waukesha, and as an adjunct professor of psychology at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee.

# FAST BRAIN FACTS

- The brain continues to grow in size until about age 18 (weighing about 3 pounds or equal to 2 percent of an individual’s total body weight).
- The brain continues to develop its capabilities until about age 25. The last part of the brain to mature is the frontal cortex.
- The brain’s neuroplasticity allows it to continually rewire itself throughout our lifespan.
- The brain feels no pain—although it’s the body’s mechanism for detecting pain.
- The neurons in our brains produce enough electricity to light a small light bulb.

PARIETAL

FRONTAL

OCCIPITAL

TEMPORAL

CEREBELLUM

BRAIN STEM



# WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY GRADUATES

At the graduation service on May 21, 25 graduates received diplomas for successfully completing their seminary studies.



Ethan S. Boese  
Milwaukee, Wis.



Paul W. Bourman  
New York, N.Y.



Jacob C. Brohn  
Hudson, Wis.



Charles I. Crass  
Rock Island, Ill.



Simon Duoth\*  
Auburn, Wash.



Matthew D.  
Hatzung  
Maplewood, Minn.



James D.  
Hemmelman  
Winona, Minn.



Nicolas J.  
Jenswold  
DeForest, Wis.



Alexander J.  
Kirchenwitz  
Weston, Wis.



Caleb M. Klatt  
New Hope, Minn.



Micah J. Koelpin  
Dallas, Texas



Jacob W. C. Limpert  
Rochester, Minn.



Jonathan P.  
Neumann  
Sturgis, S.D.



Thomas A.  
Nicholson  
Portage, Wis.



Nicholas A.  
Quinnett  
Colwich, Kan.



Joshua J. Rathje  
Mount Pleasant,  
Mich.



Chester C.  
Reinemann  
St. Paul, Minn.



Kenneth D.  
Reschke  
De Pere, Wis.



Thomas J.  
Rockhoff  
Wichita, Kan.



Christopher J.  
Royce  
Green Bay, Wis.

\*A graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary through the training program under the auspices of the Pastoral Studies Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in partnership with WELS Joint Missions.



**Daniel L. Schmidt**  
Bittern Lake,  
Alberta, Canada



**Tyler D. Swiderski**  
Minneapolis, Minn.



**Jordan D. Uhlhorn**  
Scottsdale, Ariz.



**Zachary A. VonDeylen**  
Friendswood, Texas



**Qiang Wang\***  
Coquitlam, British  
Columbia, Canada

28

Men who received new assignments into the pastoral ministry, 3 from previous years.

59

Requests made for a pastor, 31 of which went unfilled.

87

Synodwide vacancies for pastor-trained men after assignments, down from 104 in 2019.

#### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

The synod's current vacancy rate for pastors is 7 percent. Its vacancy rate peaked in 2018 at 9 percent. With classes increasing in size at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and Martin Luther College, that rate should continue to go down. "Five to six percent is a good vacancy rate to keep pastors moving around," says Paul Prange, administrator for the Board for Ministerial Education. "It's healthy for the church to have people regularly considering calls but not so frequently that it's disruptive to the congregation. You work to get that healthy amount." Several of the men receiving assignments filled positions that had been vacant for a year and a half.

## ASSIGNMENTS

- Boese, Ethan S.**, to Zion, Sanborn, Minn.
- Bourman, Paul W.**, to mission restart, Gethsemane, Tigard, Ore.
- Brohn, Jacob C.**, to Bethany, Gibsonia, Pa.
- Crass, Charles T.**, to Holy Cross, Daggett/St. Mark, Wallace, Mich.
- Duoth, Simon**, to South Sudanese Outreach
- Hatzung, Matthew D.**, to Trinity, Bay City, Mich.
- Hemmelman, James D.**, to associate for the Dakota-Montana District president, St. Paul, Rapid City, S.D.
- Hering, Joel D.**, to associate for the South Central District president, Holy Word, Austin, Texas
- Jenswold, Nicolas J.**, to Good Shepherd, Kearney, Neb.
- Kirchenwitz, Alex J.**, to Divine Peace, Largo, Md.
- Klatt, Caleb M.**, to Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.
- Koelpin, Micah J.**, to Good Shepherd, Beloit, Wis.
- Koester, Paul M.**, to Bethlehem, Menomonee Falls/Germantown, Wis.
- Limpert, Jacob W. C.**, to St. Paul, Wonewoc, Wis.
- Neumann, Jonathan P.**, to Prince of Peace, Martinez, Ga.
- Nicholson, Thomas A.**, to Resurrection, Aurora, Ill.
- Plocher, Micah J.**, to Trinity, Nicollet, Minn.
- Quinnett, Nicholas A.**, to St. John, Watertown, Wis.
- Rathje, Joshua J.**, to Shepherd, Albuquerque, N.M.
- Reinemann, Chester C.**, to St. Paul, Calgary, Alberta, Canada
- Reschke, Kenneth D.**, to Trinity, Sturgis, S.D.
- Rockhoff, Thomas J.**, to Prince of Peace, Yankton, S.D.
- Royce, Christopher J.**, to Messiah, Olympia, Wash.
- Schmidt, Daniel L.**, to Trinity, Mountain Home, Ark.
- Swiderski, Tyler D.**, to St. Peter, Brodhead, Wis.
- Uhlhorn, Jordan D.**, to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.
- VonDeylen, Zachary A.**, to Good Shepherd/Resurrection, Phoenix, Ariz.
- Wang, Qiang**, to Abiding Love, Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada

# MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE GRADUATES

One hundred seventy-one people graduated from Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., on May 16.



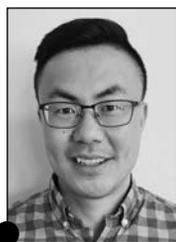
Wesley R. Aguilar  
Wildomar, Calif.



Brayxton T. Alexander  
Virginia Beach, Va.



Cassandra M. Anklam  
Saginaw, Mich.



Xingwei Ao  
Chongqing, China



Duane S. Backhaus  
Tomah, Wis.



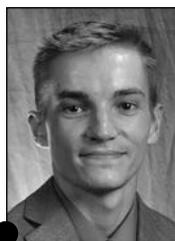
Martha L. Balge  
New Ulm, Minn.



Elizabeth J. Bartz  
Eau Claire, Mich.



Brett J. Bengel  
Citrus Heights, Calif.



Christopher D. Biebert  
Neillsville, Wis.



Micah J. Biesterfeld  
New Ulm, Minn.



Adam J. Bilitz  
Cottage Grove, Wis.



Sophia J. Birner  
Lusaka, Zambia



Hannah M. Black  
Gibbon, Minn.



Nicholas J. Blank  
West Bend, Wis.



Allison J. Boggs  
Royal Palm Beach, Fla.



Jacob T. Bohlmann  
Crete, Ill.



Zachary R. Bork  
San Jose, Calif.



Noelle K. Boucher  
Henderson, Colo.



Keith R. Brassow  
Osceola, Wis.



Craig R. Breikreutz  
Twin Lakes, Wis.



Hannah E. Brohn  
Hudson, Wis.



Jamie M. Bruckschen  
Beaver Dam, Wis.



Noah J. Bruckschen  
Mishicot, Wis.



Hannah M. Bush  
Summerville, S.C.

● Bachelor of Arts | ● Seminary Certification Program | ● Bachelor of Science in Education | ● Bachelor of Science  
● Staff ministry certification | ● Master of Science | ● Master of Science in Educational Administration

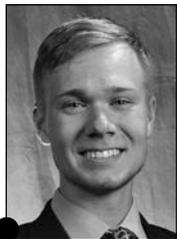
## Musical tributes

Graduation and assignment services at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) and Martin Luther College (MLC) were held virtually this year. Both services featured choral pieces, sung virtually by school choirs, to commemorate the service of retiring professors.

The Seminary Chorus sang “Lord, When Your Glory I Shall See” for the final time under the direction of Prof. James Tiefel. Tiefel commissioned the arrangement of this piece in 1995 in honor of the ministry of Pastor Kurt Eggert, who wrote the original tune. This arrangement has been sung at the conclusion of every WLS concert since. To recognize and thank Tiefel, who retired at the end of the 2019–20 school year, the choir members put together a virtual choir and sang the hymn, using a video of Tiefel directing the piece from the 2019 Christmas concert. “In a way, the choir was able to sing together one last time, and you were able to have one final downbeat,” says Caleb Klatt, choir president, in his tribute to Tiefel.

Martin Luther College commissioned a new choral piece called “The God of Peace” in thanksgiving to God for Pres. Mark Zarling’s service to Martin Luther College and his full-time gospel ministry to the church. Zarling retired at the end of the 2019–20 school year, after serving 40 years in the ministry, the last 13 as MLC president. John Behnke, the composer, named the new tune he wrote for the piece “Zarling.” The 65 members of MLC’s College Choir individually recorded themselves at their homes singing their part along with a provided accompaniment; files were then compiled to get a complete four-part recording of the hymn, which was debuted at the close of the graduation service.

Listen to both recordings at [forwardinchrist.net/2020-graduations](http://forwardinchrist.net/2020-graduations).



**Aaron M. Butkovich**  
Hollandtown, Wis.



**Emily D. Byhardt**  
Germantown, Wis.



**Crystal J. Carmichael**  
Shakopee, Minn.



**Andrew W. Carter**  
Brownsville, Wis.



**Peter W. Christie**  
Waukesha, Wis.



**Caleb J. Christopher**  
Sharpsburg, Ga.



**Laura A. Cole**  
Saginaw, Mich.



**Hannah M. Compton**  
Pearland, Texas



**Grace E. Cook**  
West Salem, Wis.



**Melissa L. Cox**  
Oconomowoc, Wis.



**Katherine H. Curtis**  
Palmetto, Ga.



**Sarah K. Dewey**  
Onalaska, Wis.



**Michelle K. Dobberstein**  
Manawa, Wis.



**Chloe L. Doble**  
Ortonville, Mich.



**Cassandra M. Doering**  
Lake Mills, Wis.



**Rebecca L. Doering**  
Lake Mills, Wis.



**Silas P. Dose**  
Fairfax, Minn.



**Isaiah D. Duff**  
Saint Paul, Minn.



**Josiah Y. Eaker**  
Watertown, Wis.



**Richard W. Eckmann**  
Trimont, Minn.

## ASSIGNMENTS

### Teachers

**Adickes, Jennifer A.**, to St. Peter, Saint Peter, Minn.  
**Aguilar, Wesley R.**, to St. John, Peshtigo, Wis.  
**Anklam, Cassandra M.**, to Ascension, Sarasota, Fla.  
**Balge, Martha L.**, to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.  
**Bartz, Elizabeth J.**, to Grace, Grand Anse, Grenada  
**Biebert, Christopher D.**, to St. Mark, Eau Claire, Wis.  
**Biesterfeld, Micah J.**, to St. John, Baraboo, Wis.  
**Bilitz, Adam J.**, to St. Paul, Columbus, Ohio  
**Birner, Sophia J.**, to Morrison Zion, Greenleaf, Wis.  
**Black, Hannah M.**, to Little Lambs Learning Center, Duluth, Minn.  
**Boggs, Allison J.**, to St. Paul, Tomah, Wis.  
**Bohlmann, Jacob T.**, to St. Stephen, Beaver Dam, Wis.  
**Bork, Zachary R.**, to Our Savior, Zion, Ill.  
**Boucher, Noelle K.**, to Jesus Loves Me Learning Center, North Mankato, Minn.  
**Brohn, Hannah E.**, to St. Paul, Columbus, Ohio  
**Byhardt, Emily D.**, to Trinity, Kaukauna, Wis.  
**Carmichael, Crystal J.**, to St. Croix Lutheran Academy, West Saint Paul, Minn.

**Cody, Sydney M.**, to Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Cole, Laura A.**, to Abiding Peace Academy, Simpsonville, S.C.  
**Compton, Hannah M.**, to New Hope Lutheran Academy, West Melbourne, Fla.  
**Cook, Grace E.**, to St. John, Westland, Mich.  
**Curtis, Katherine H.**, to St. Mark, Green Bay, Wis.  
**Dewey, Sarah K.**, to Little Lambs Preschool, Valentine, Neb.  
**Doble, Chloe L.**, to Samuel, Marshall, Minn.  
**Doering, Cassandra M.**, to Little Town of Bethlehem Preschool, Carmel, Ind.  
**Doering, Rebecca L.**, to Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D.  
**Eckmann, Richard W.**, to St. John, Dakota, Minn.  
**Eggers, Andrew B.**, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.  
**Ellingboe, Claire E.**, to Grace Lutheran Child Care, Charlotte, N.C.  
**Falck, Mary R.**, to Divine Savior Academy—Sienna Plantation, Sienna Plantation, Texas  
**Garvin, Megan A.**, to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.  
**Goldschmidt, Sarah E.**, to Zion, Egg Harbor, Wis.

*Continued on p. 27*



**Andrew B. Eggers**  
West Bend, Wis.



**Claire E. Ellingboe**  
Wrightstown, Wis.



**Abby M. Enstad**  
New Ulm, Minn.



**Mary R. Falck**  
Germantown, Wis.



**Timothy P. Fischer**  
Appleton, Wis.



**Jeremy N. Fluegge**  
Onalaska, Wis.



**Winter M. Fredrick**  
Oconomowoc, Wis.



**Carissa M. Friebe**  
Green Bay, Wis.



**Jessica E. Friebe**  
Green Bay, Wis.



**Clayton J. Fury**  
Houston, Texas



**Nathan R. Gartner**  
Appleton, Wis.



**Megan A. Garvin**  
Wildomar, Calif.



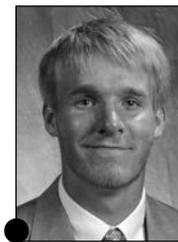
**Daniel R. Gensmer**  
Cape Coral, Fla.



**Sarah E. Goldschmidt**  
Milwaukee, Wis.



**Kurt D. Gosdeck**  
Green Bay, Wis.



**Joseph C. Graumann**  
Fort Atkinson, Wis.



**Rachel A. Gresock**  
Linden, Mich.



**James S. Groth**  
Burlington, Wis.

● Bachelor of Arts | ● Seminary Certification Program | ● Bachelor of Science in Education | ● Bachelor of Science  
 ● Staff ministry certification | ● Master of Science | ● Master of Science in Educational Administration



**Peter A. Gumm**  
Racine, Wis.



**Ryan R. Gurgel**  
Mequon, Wis.



**Caleb P. Gustafson**  
West Bend, Wis.



**Philip M. Gustafson**  
Eau Claire, Wis.



**Justin G. Gut**  
Milwaukee, Wis.



**Kathryn S. Gut**  
Westminster, Colo.



**Moriah F. Hackbarth**  
Lake Mills, Wis.



**Haley A. Hadler**  
Marathon, Wis.



**Philip A. Haefner**  
Bay City, Mich.



**Elisabeth R. Hahm**  
Hilton, N.Y.



**Noah J. Hartmann**  
Germantown, Wis.



**Anna S. Hemmelman**  
Winona, Minn.



**Ryan E. Henning**  
New Ulm, Minn.



**Ella I. Hirsch**  
Manhattan, Kan.



**Laurel B. Hirschmann**  
New Ulm, Minn.



**Mikayla R. Hodkiewicz**  
DeForest, Wis.



**Rachel E. Hoffmann**  
Buffalo, Minn.



**Nathan S. Holz**  
Clarksville, Tenn.



**Micah R. Jarvis**  
St. John's, Antigua  
and Barbuda



**Lynn M. Jungen**  
Manitowoc, Wis.



**Sarah N. Kjenstad**  
Aberdeen, S.D.



**Markus P. Klingenschmitt**  
Rosemount, Minn.



**Adam M. Kock**  
Mequon, Wis.



**Caleb P. Koelpin**  
Dallas, Texas



**Samuel J. Koepsell**  
New Ulm, Minn.



**Race N. Kohl**  
Redwood Falls,  
Minn.



**Evan J. Kolander**  
Menomonee Falls,  
Wis.



**Elsie M. Koutia**  
Glendale, Ariz.



**Sora Lee**  
Daejeon, South  
Korea



**Brandon P. Leiterman**  
Greenleaf, Wis.



**Nathan J. Lemke**  
Jefferson, Wis.



**Yiling Leng**  
Hangzhou, China



**Alison J. Lindemann**  
Lewiston, Minn.



**Lisa K. Lindemann**  
Valders, Wis.



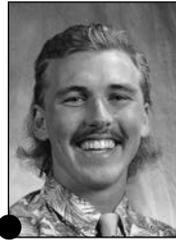
**Jiacheng Liu**  
Shanghai, China



**Emily E. Loberger**  
Manitowoc, Wis.



**Joseph D. Loescher**  
Jackson, Wis.



**Andrew J. Lucht**  
Raleigh, N.C.



**Rebecca C. Marley**  
Midlothian, Va.



**Chantel A. McGill**  
Saint Charles, Mich.



**Zachary J. Meier**  
Richfield, Wis.



**Jacob M. Melso**  
Port Edwards, Wis.



**Karen A. Mendoza**  
Milwaukee, Wis.



**Sierra D. Mielke**  
Sarasota, Fla.



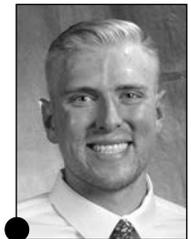
**Karissa J. Nolte**  
Circleville, Ohio



**Emily J. Orvis**  
Fond du Lac, Wis.



**Tristan J. Pankow**  
Bay City, Mich.



**Noah J. Panzer**  
Marshfield, Wis.



**Corey W. Paske**  
Arlington, Wis.



**Ian R. Paulsen**  
Ashippun, Wis.



**Ida G. Paulsen**  
Manhattan, Kan.



**Tessa A. Petersen**  
Watertown, S.D.



**Jason R. Petoskey**  
Wyoming, Mich.



**Joel T. Plocher**  
Des Moines, Wash.



**Jonathan M. Plocher**  
Garden Grove, Calif.



**Veronica B. Pratt**  
Merrill, Mich.



**Olivia A. Prost**  
Watertown, Wis.



**Rebecca M. Pruss**  
Fond du Lac, Wis.



**Joseph H. Quandt**  
Ridgeland, Wis.



**Caleb J. Raasch**  
Stillwater, Minn.

● Bachelor of Arts | ● Seminary Certification Program | ● Bachelor of Science in Education | ● Bachelor of Science  
● Staff ministry certification | ● Master of Science | ● Master of Science in Educational Administration



Katelyn A. Raddatz  
Sparta, Wis.



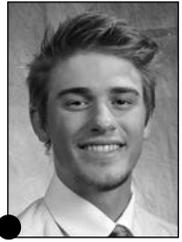
Connor B. Ragner  
Shiocton, Wis.



Robert R. Read  
Richardson, Texas



Molly A. Ring  
Lake City, Minn.



Tyler D. Roecker  
Campbellsport, Wis.



Kayla N. Rosenbaum  
Saint Joseph, Mich.



Morgan A. Routhieaux  
Sturgeon Bay, Wis.



Hannah H. Ruehrdanz  
Glenview, Ill.



Hannah J. Rundgren  
Citrus Springs, Fla.



Jason R. Rupnow  
Mankato, Minn.



Arianna Sanchez  
Milwaukee, Wis.



Jazzmin A. Sanchez  
Milwaukee, Wis.



Adrianna K. Sayles  
Grand Blanc, Mich.



Jonah R. Schlomer  
Rome, Wis.



Brent A. Schmidt III  
Casa Grande, Ariz.



Emily E. Schmidt  
Richfield, Wis.



Jacob W. Schmidt  
Ixonia, Wis.



Joshua M. Schroeder  
Modesto, Calif.



Aaron K. Schultz  
Elkhorn, Wis.



Nathan L. Schultz  
Hartford, Wis.

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GRADUATES FROM  
MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE,  
NEW ULM, MINN.

106

Teacher track

39

Preseminary program

1

Staff ministry track

1

Seminary certification

1

Staff ministry  
certification

23

Master's degrees

Number of graduates  
assigned from  
MLC

150

Teachers who could go  
anywhere (64 from the  
2020 class and 55  
from past years)

119

Teachers who were geo-  
graphically limited due  
to marriage plans  
or living in a spe-  
cific location

30

1

Staff minister



**Caleb D. Schulz**  
Manitowoc, Wis.



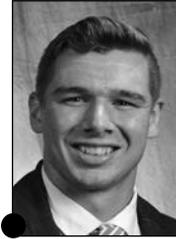
**Faith A. Schulz**  
York, Neb.



**Kyle A. Seim**  
Wayne, Mich.



**Kaitlyn G. Solofra**  
Laveen, Ariz.



**Dillon H. Solomon**  
Troy, Mich.



**Jade D. St. Germaine**  
Watertown, Wis.



**Hannah L. Stegman**  
New Hope, Minn.



**Gabrielle A. Steidl**  
New Berlin, Wis.



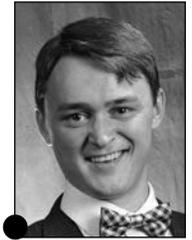
**Nathaniel B. Stein**  
Poyette, Wis.



**Eli E. Steinbrenner**  
Hartford, Wis.



**Lailah A. Thabatah**  
Lansing, Mich.



**Jonathan I. Thede**  
Watertown, Wis.



**Lydia C. Thiesfeldt**  
Fond du Lac, Wis.



**Maria C. Tomassetti**  
Sussex, Wis.



**Joshua A. Tomlin**  
Lannon, Wis.



**Grace A. Ungemach**  
Lexington, S.C.



**Caleb A. VonDeylen**  
Friendswood, Texas



**Kasandra B. Wagner**  
Sioux Falls, S.D.



**Kristian K. Walta**  
Fond du Lac, Wis.



**Katherine A. Warner**  
Farmington Hills, Mich.



**Daniel L. Waterstradt**  
Penryn, Calif.



**Erin L. Wenzel**  
Appleton, Wis.



**Adam C. Westra**  
Columbia, Tenn.



**Steven K. White**  
South Haven, Mich.



**Evan K. Willick**  
Elm Grove, Wis.



**Tara L. Winecke**  
Altoona, Iowa



**Megan M. Winghart**  
Brookings, S.D.



**Justin D. Wintrone**  
Onalaska, Wis.



**Zachary D. Zuberbier**  
Milwaukee, Wis.

● Bachelor of Arts | ● Seminary Certification Program | ● Bachelor of Science in Education | ● Bachelor of Science  
● Staff ministry certification | ● Master of Science | ● Master of Science in Educational Administration



## ASSIGNMENTS CONTINUED

**Hackbarth, Moriah F.**, to Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb.

**Hahm, Elisabeth R.**, to Risen Savior Christian Academy, Pooler, Ga.

**Hemmelman, Anna S.**, to Gethsemane, Omaha, Neb.

**Hirsch, Ella I.**, to Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

**Hirschmann, Laurel B.**, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Hodkiewicz, Mikayla R.**, to St. John's, Pardeeville, Wis.

**Hoffmann, Rachel E.**, to Word of Life, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Hofland, Allison K.**, to St. John, Lake City, Minn.

**Jarvis, Micah R.**, to St. John, St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda

**Keller, Joseph W.**, to Illinois Lutheran Elementary School, Crete, Ill.

**Kjenstad, Sarah N.**, to Small Steps Christian Learning Center, Port Orange, Fla.

**Koch, Elissa M.**, to Lord of Life, Friendswood, Texas

**Koepsell, Samuel J.**, to Trinity, Jenera, Ohio

**Kolander, Evan J.**, to East Fork Lutheran High School, Whiteriver, Ariz.

**Koutia, Elsie M.**, to Good Shepherd Lutheran Academy, Deltona, Fla.

**Krueger, Sarah M.**, to Trinity, West Bend, Wis. (ELS)

**Lee, Sora**, to West Lutheran High School, Plymouth, Minn.

**Lemke, Nathan J.**, to Our Savior, Wausau, Wis.

**Leng, Yiling**, to Prince of Peace, Salt Lake City, Utah

**Lindemann, Alison J.**, to Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

**Lindemann, Lisa K.**, to St. Paul, Norfolk, Neb.

**Lindloff, Nathanael P.**, to St. Paul, Tomah, Wis.

**Liu, Jiacheng**, to Divine Savior Academy—Doral, Doral, Fla.

**Loberger, Emily E.**, to Risen Savior—East Campus, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Loescher, Abby M.**, to St. Paul, North Fond du Lac, Wis.

**Loescher, Joseph D.**, to St. Paul, North Fond du Lac, Wis.

**Markgraf, Aaron J.**, to St. Paul, Norfolk, Neb.

**Marquardt, Grace E.**, to St. Philip, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Marquardt, Holly R.**, to Westside Christian School, Middleton, Wis.

**McGill, Chantel A.**, to East Fork, Whiteriver, Ariz.

**Miller, Elizabeth D.**, to Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis.

**Miller, Hayden W.**, to First, Lake Geneva, Wis.

**Muir, Emily A.**, to Evergreen Lutheran High School, Tacoma, Wash.

**Neumann, Matthew R.**, to St. John, Fox Lake, Wis.

**Nommensen, Josiah S.**, to King of Kings, Maitland, Fla.

**Orvis, Emily J.**, to St. Bartholomew, Kawkawlin, Mich.

**Osterman, Sarah E.**, to Emanuel, New London, Wis.

**Paske, Corey W.**, to St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis.

**Paulsen, Ian R.**, to St. John, Bay City, Mich.

**Paulsen, Ida G.**, to Trinity, Bay City, Mich.

**Pruss, Rebecca M.**, to Lord of Life, Thornton, Colo.

**Raddatz, Katelyn A.**, to Risen Savior—East Campus, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Ragner, Connor B.**, to St. Mark, Green Bay, Wis.

**Roecker, Tyler D.**, to Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

**Rosenbaum, Kayla N.**, to Divine Savior Academy—Doral, Doral, Fla.

**Routhieaux, Morgan A.**, to Immanuel, Medford, Wis.

**Rundgren, Hannah J.**, to Divine Savior Academy—Doral, Doral, Fla.

**Sanchez, Arianna**, to Christ-St. Peter—West Campus, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Sayles, Adrianna K.**, to Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb.

**Schibbelhut, Emma K.**, to Crown of Life, West Saint Paul, Minn.

**Schmidt, Emily E.**, to St. Paul, Tomah, Wis.

**Schoenfeld, Michael E.**, to Friedens, Kenosha, Wis.

**Schoenfeld, Sarah M.**, to Friedens, Kenosha, Wis.

**Schultz, Emma E.**, to First German, Manitowoc, Wis.

**Schulz, Caleb D.**, to St. Paul, Moline, Ill.

**Shevey, Morgan E.**, to Risen Savior—East Campus, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Solomon, Dillon H.**, to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

**Sonntag, Joel R.**, to St. Matthew, Stoddard, Wis.

**St. Germaine, Jade D.**, to Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Ariz.

**Stegman, Hannah L.**, to St. Mark, Citrus Heights, Calif.

**Steidl, Gabrielle A.**, to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.

**Steinfeldt, Brittany M.**, to Risen Savior—East Campus, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Stevens, Tiffany M.**, to Beautiful Savior, Grove City, Ohio

**Thabatah, Lailah A.**, to Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich.

**Thiesfeldt, Lydia C.**, to CrossLife Christian Academy, Pflugerville, Texas

**Thooft, Lucas K.**, to St. John's, Sparta, Wis.

**Tindall, Katelyn A.**, to St. John, Montello, Wis.

**Tomassetti, Maria C.**, to Abiding Word, Houston, Texas

**Tomlin, Joshua A.**, to Apostles, San Jose, Calif.

**Ungemach, Grace A.**, to Salem, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Van Alstine, Katherine L.**, to Illinois Lutheran High School, Crete, Ill.

**VonDeylen, Joshua M.**, to Good Shepherd Lutheran Academy, Deltona, Fla.

**Wagner, Kasandra B.**, to Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Warner, Katherine A.**, to Divine Savior Academy—Sienna Plantation, Sienna Plantation, Texas

**Wenzel, Erin L.**, to Christ-St. John's, West Salem, Wis.

**Winecke, Tara L.**, to St. John, Waterloo, Wis.

**Wintrone, Justin D.**, to St. John, Libertyville, Ill.

Staff minister

**Petoskey, Jason R.**, to Salem, Ann Arbor, Mich.

SEE MORE > calls/assignments made after May 16 at [mlc-wels.edu/assignments](http://mlc-wels.edu/assignments).

# cross

**Jesus warns us we will face opposition and suffering as his followers, but he also promises us a place in his Father's house.**

Steven L. Lange

Asia Bibi is a Pakistani Christian who spent eight years on death row, unjustly convicted of blasphemy against Mohammad. In spite of violent protests calling for her death, Pakistan's highest court overturned her death sentence in October 2018. Eventually, she was able to escape to Canada, where she has lived with her family for the past year. The threats against her life, however, continue.

Youcef Nadarkhani is an Iranian pastor who became a Christian when he was 19. In October 2009, Iranian officials arrested him and accused him of the crimes of apostasy and evangelism. In the fall of 2010, he was sentenced to death and spent the next two years on death row until his death sentence was overturned in 2012. He currently is serving a ten-year sentence in Iran's

notorious Evin prison, convicted of "acting against national security."

Leah Sharibu is a Christian teenager who lives in Nigeria. In February 2018, she was kidnapped along with 109 of her classmates by a faction of the Islamist group Boko Haram. A month later, the militants released all her classmates because they confessed they were Muslim. To this day, however, Leah remains in captivity because she refuses to renounce her Christian faith.

**All our sufferings are nothing compared to what Jesus has waiting for us in heaven.**

Those of us who live in areas of the world where being a Christian does not put our lives or freedom in jeopardy are rightly appalled. Yet, if we take seriously what Jesus says, these sufferings are not surprising. In fact, they are exactly what we would expect. Jesus clearly told us, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny

themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

## **THE CROSS WE BEAR**

Our cross is the suffering we experience simply because we are followers of Jesus. For Asia Bibi, Youcef Nadarkhani, Leah Sharibu, and countless other Christians throughout the world, the cross takes the form of beatings, imprisonment, and even death. For most of us the cross will take different forms. It can be the scorn that the world heaps on us because we believe that faith in Jesus is the only way to heaven. It can be the disdain we experience because we are confident that the first two chapters of Genesis accurately describe how all things came into existence. It can be the insults we endure because we maintain that God instituted marriage as the lifelong union of one biological man and one biological woman. Any time we suffer because of our faith in Jesus, we are carrying the cross that Jesus himself has laid on us.

The Christian's cross also includes the daily struggle between our old

sinful self that remains with us and the new self that the Holy Spirit created in us. The person without saving faith feels no such struggle since that person only has the old sinful self.

God's people have always carried a cross. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah faithfully proclaimed God's Word to the people of Israel in the days leading up to the Babylonian exile. Yet, he himself described the treatment he received: "I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. . . . So, the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long" (Jeremiah 20:7,8).

Likewise, the apostle Paul devoted his life to proclaiming the good news of Jesus. Yet he writes, "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones" (2 Corinthians 11:24,25). Paul also bore the cross of struggling daily against his sinful nature. He wrote, "I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing" (Romans 7:18,19).

### A SOURCE OF JOY

Why would Jesus want his people to carry this cross and endure its pain? Doesn't he love us? Of course, he loves us. Actually, it is precisely because he loves us and wants to bless us that our Savior lays the cross on us. Paul tells us, "We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts" (Romans 5:3-5).

In fact, as strange as it may sound, carrying the cross for us Christians is a source of great joy. See how Jesus' apostles reacted after they were flogged for telling people about Jesus: "The apostles left the Sanhe-

drin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name" (Acts 5:41). Rejoicing because they had been beaten? Yes, rejoicing because they were beaten as followers of Jesus. Later in his life, Peter encouraged us to have the same joy in our sufferings when he wrote, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (1 Peter 4:12,13).

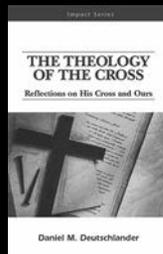
It is that glory—the glory of Christ that he soon will reveal to us and share with us eternally—that enables us to carry the cross with joy.

Paul confesses, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). Think again of all the horrible things that Paul suffered simply because he was a follower of Jesus. Think of how he was beaten, how he was stoned and left for dead, how he was repeatedly driven out of town or thrown into prison. As Paul considered all of that, he still considered that it was not even worth comparing with the glory that awaited him in heaven.

And he was right. It doesn't matter how heavy our cross is here on earth. It doesn't matter how intensely we must suffer for being a follower of Jesus. Even if our sufferings reach the point of losing our freedom—or even our lives—because of our faith in Jesus, even then all our sufferings are nothing compared to what Jesus has waiting for us in heaven. For we are confident, even as Paul was, that God will strengthen us "with all power according to his glorious might so that [we] may have great endurance and patience . . . giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified [us] to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light" (Colossians 1:11,12)

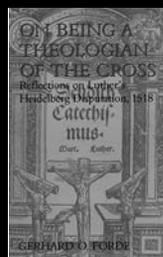
So, fellow followers of Jesus, take up your cross. Carry it with joy, knowing that it is nothing compared to the glory that awaits you in heaven. Endure its pain, knowing that through it, God will bless you. Be confident that same Jesus who laid this cross on you will also give you the strength to bear it. And know that your Savior, who carried his cross for you, has by his cross made you his for all eternity.

## FOR FURTHER *Study*



### *The Theology of the Cross: Reflections of His Cross and Ours* Daniel Deuschlander

Available from Northwestern Publishing House, [nph.net](http://nph.net), 800-662-6022.



### *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* Gerhard O. Forde

Available from [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)



Steven Lange is pastor at Hope, Louisville, Kentucky.



## Joy and peace today and everyday

It's been a test for us all. It included self-quarantine and social distancing. All the while businesses were closed, and contacts with friends and family became digital. Churches stood empty while God's people sat on their couches or at their kitchen tables to maintain the vital connection to their Savior over the Internet.

My test was minor compared to some who lost jobs and closed their shops. That brought empty pockets with no cash coming in. Bankruptcies, even for major retail chains, have followed, and it's fair to assume that many more will come.

Even after we open businesses, the test will continue. Our lives will change. The economic downturn has eroded the financial resources of almost everyone. Retirement portfolios are worth less—perhaps much less—than they were three months ago with no assurance that they will return to their original value soon.

**No matter what history brings, Jesus has forgiven us, and we are children of God, dearly loved.**

I've taken to reading to pass the time. One book took place in the 1930s. It included the collapse of the stock market in 1929 with its serious hardships that we have not yet encountered. A test then? Certainly. Loss of homes, jobs, and money created migrations of people who left everything behind. But looking for a better life sometimes brought only a shack of discarded boards and tarpaper. Those shacks multiplied into villages filled with hungry and desperate families.

So my test is minor, and most of the misery today does not reach the level of others before us. Yet the tests persist. Perhaps we like to think only about our own challenges, living oblivious to what others endured. Life here always comes with tests; it's only their severity and changing nature that are different.

We all want to endure them and wait for better days. They come. But after better days come, we find another unwelcome test just around the corner. Look at the grimy faces and other images in the history books of those who have been tested before us. How did they calm their hearts and spirits? What joy could they find?

For all the criticism of Christianity, our Christian faith is important and has been important through all the severe, moderate, and light tests of history. That includes the current one. Where and when our current test will end, I can't predict. It may grow to something more severe.

Only one thing does not change. The message of God's love has endured, not just through the tests of the last century but also through all the wars, famines, diseases, and turmoil of all history. We have the peace that calms our hearts and lives. No matter what history brings, Jesus has forgiven us, and we are children of God, dearly loved. God's love in Jesus is our firm rock, even when God is challenging us to abandon our earthly comforts and concentrate on the greater blessings we have in Christ.

And joy? It's not an ecstatic, hand-raising, shouting joy. We have a deep joy in knowing God's love remains steady in our severest tests. We know that his tests are always for our good and designed to purify our vision. We are his, and nothing can take us from him. Christians before us knew what we know from the Scriptures.

So we have peace and joy in God's love in all our trials and tests. We may lose some things here, but God cannot change. His love stands firm, and therefore our joy and peace also stand firm. With that we can confidently face whatever test lies ahead.

  
John A. Braun | FIC Editor

# James

Stock

**WHAT'S A BOOK** like James doing in the New Testament anyway? Quickly reading through its 108 verses, we find no direct mention of the Christmas manger, the Good Friday cross, or the Easter garden. Some even think James chips away at the central doctrine of justification by faith and therefore avoid his letter.

Yet as we read through this letter more carefully, we soon discover that it belongs. Other New Testament books outline the great themes of the Christian faith; James writes about living that faith. Other books teach Christian doctrine; James seeks to stimulate Christian life. Other books encourage hearing the gospel of salvation; James urges showing in our daily life that we have heard it and believe it. In short, James gives us a blueprint for Christian living.

## WHO IS JAMES?

We don't know as much as we would like about James. All we are told are his name and that he was a "servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). Perhaps he was a man that his readers would know and didn't need any more details. Many scholars have adopted this view and identified James as the half-brother of the Lord. This James had not been one of the 12 disciples. It appears he did not believe in Jesus until after the resurrection. Then he became a pillar

in the early church, having great influence among Jewish believers.

Our lack of knowledge about James does not affect the words he wrote. When we take our doctor's prescription to the pharmacy, it matters little what the pharmacist's name is. The important point is that he fills the prescription just as the doctor ordered. It's the same with this book. Who James was is not nearly as important as the words the Holy Spirit inspired him to write.

## WHY DID HE WRITE?

"The twelve tribes scattered among the nations" (1:1) was the technical term for the Jews who were scattered throughout the Roman world of the first century. James was not writing to all Jews, only to Jewish Christians. Life wasn't easy for them. They struggled under the pressure of persecution from without and the problem of personal sin from within. So, James wrote against their worldliness, to provide comfort in their sorrows and to give counsel for their lives. His words are painfully practical, urging his readers to match profession with performance and creed with conduct. "High talk and low walk" were no more in place among the Christians of his day than today.

We dare not misunderstand James. He's not promoting Christian living as a means of earning heaven. That Jesus Christ has done once for all.

What James is saying is that those who are filled with and fueled by Christ's great love will live like Christians. Though James seldom mentions the Savior by name, we soon see his bright light shining on every page and his love moving behind every admonition.

Each generation likes to think that its questions and problems are new. Our study of James will show again that though problems may vary in shape and size, little more than the calendar separates 21st-century Christians from those who first read James' letter. His blueprint for Christian living is still important for Christians today.

## DIGGING DEEPER

1. What can we learn about James from Matthew 13:55; Galatians 1:19; Acts 15:13-21; and Acts 21:18?
2. What does Ephesians 2:8-10 tell us about the relationship between faith and works?



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

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

LEARN MORE AT [forwardinchrist.net](http://forwardinchrist.net), including potential answers.

# COMMUNITY

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## THINGS TO NOTE

### CHANGES IN MINISTRY

#### Pastors

**Bivens, David**, to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.

**Gieschen, Mark**, to retirement

**Gunn, Dean**, to retirement

**Henke, Mark**, to retirement

**Hilgendorf, Wayne**, to retirement

**Meitner, Paul**, to Zion, Winthrop, Minn.

**Parsons, Mark**, to Truth in Love Ministry, Nampa, Idaho

**Schmitzer III, Alois**, to retirement

**Stellick, Kevin**, to Faith, Rising City, Neb.

**Stuppy, Donald**, to retirement

**Tiefel, James**, to retirement

**Vannieuwenhoven, Charles**, to Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis.

**Voss, Mark**, to retirement

#### Teachers

**Adickes, Penny**, to St. Paul, Bangor, Wis.

**Backer, Catherine**, to Faith, Antioch, Ill.

**Bartels, Julie**, to St. Martin's, Watertown, S.D.

**Baxmann, Wayne**, to Redeemer, Tucson, Ariz.

**Bivens, Brandi**, to Salem, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Brohn, Hannah**, to St. Paul, Columbus, Ohio

**Caira, Alexandria**, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.

**Collins, Elizabeth**, to Cross of Glory, Peoria, Ariz.

**Eberhardt, David**, to retirement

**Filthaut, Amy**, to West Lutheran High School, Plymouth, Minn.

**Freudenwald, Kathryn**, to St. Paul, Cudahy, Wis.

**Gumm, Peter**, to Beautiful Savior, Cincinnati, Ohio

**Haasch, Leah**, to Peace, Green Lake, Wis.

**Harle, Brenda**, to First, La Crosse, Wis.

**Hegman, Maura**, to Our Shepherd Child Care Center, Appleton, Wis.

**Herbst, Jamie**, to St. Paul's, Slinger, Wis.

**Irving, Lynne**, to retirement

**Jahns, Josiah**, to St. Paul, Beverly Hills, Fla.

**Kassulke, Kara**, to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.

**Kehren, Virginia**, to Jerusalem, Morton Grove, Ill.

**Kulow, Joan**, to retirement

**Markgraf, Carol**, to St. John's, Newburg, Wis.

**Most, Michelle**, to St. Matthew, Spokane, Wash.

**Nommensen, Dyann**, to Holy Cross, Madison, Wis.

**Ohm, Carlotta**, to retirement

**Paulsen, Michael**, to Prince of Peace, Taylorsville, Utah

**Perushek, Tammy**, to St. Peter, Appleton, Wis.

**Petoskey, Jane**, to St. Stephen, Adrian, Mich.

**Pingel, Timothy**, to Sola Fide Academy, Lawrenceville, Ga.

**Reis, Katrina**, to St. Paul, South Haven, Mich.

**Ring, Nancy**, to Wisconsin-Middle School, Racine, Wis.

**Roekle, Stephen**, to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.

**Schmidt, Shannon**, to Northland Lutheran High School, Mosinee, Wis.

**Schoch, Calla**, to Beautiful Savior, Grove City, Ohio

**Schroeder, Carol**, to First Steps Early Learning Center, La Crescent, Minn.

**Schuetze, Jessica**, to Christ, Big Bend, Wis.

**Schultz, Suzanne**, to Zion, Valentine, Neb.

**Stoering, Emily**, to St. Paul's, New Ulm, Minn.

**Stoltz, Janae'**, to Peace, Green Lake, Wis.

**Thiesfeldt, Gregory**, to retirement

**Trexler, Jessica**, to St. Paul's, Ixonia, Wis.

## CALLED TO *eternal glory*

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

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

### PASTORS

**HENNING, THOMAS C.**  
March 26, 1932—April 26, 2020

**OELHAFEN, WALTER J.**  
Oct. 5, 1939—April 24, 2020

**ZENKER, ALLEN P.**  
March 4, 1931—May 13, 2020

### TEACHERS & STAFF MINISTERS

**KIRK, DANIEL B.**  
June 8, 1936—April 28, 2020

**POPERT (NEE KLEIN), ELSA I.**  
March 21, 1928—April 25, 2020

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

— Matthew 5:4

# THROUGH MY *Bible* IN 3 YEARS

- |                    |                      |                   |
|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Acts 15:1-12    | 12. Acts 20:1-16     | 23. Acts 26:1-18  |
| 2. Acts 15:13-34   | 13. Acts 20:17-38    | 24. Acts 26:19-32 |
| 3. Acts 15:35-16:5 | 14. Acts 21:1-16     | 25. Acts 27:1-20  |
| 4. Acts 16:6-15    | 15. Acts 21:17-36    | 26. Acts 27:21-44 |
| 5. Acts 16:16-40   | 16. Acts 21:37-22:16 | 27. Acts 28:1-16  |
| 6. Acts 17:1-15    | 17. Acts 22:17-29    | 28. Acts 28:17-31 |
| 7. Acts 17:16-34   | 18. Acts 22:30-23:10 | 29. Amos 1, 2     |
| 8. Acts 18:1-17    | 19. Acts 23:11-35    | 30. Amos 3, 4     |
| 9. Acts 18:18-28   | 20. Acts 24:1-21     | 31. Amos 5, 6     |
| 10. Acts 19:1-20   | 21. Acts 24:22-25:12 |                   |
| 11. Acts 19:21-41  | 22. Acts 25:13-27    |                   |

JULY 2020 READ MORE AT [wels.net/bible3](http://wels.net/bible3)

**Willems, Sara**, to Friedens, Kenosha, Wis.  
**Wolfrath, Kathryn**, to Immanuel, Greenville, Wis.

**Zimmerman, Suzanne**, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.

Staff ministers

**Cochran, Randy**, to Open Bible, Oxford, Fla.

**Dretske, James**, to St. John's, New Ulm, Minn.

**Schoeffel, Daniel**, to retirement

**Suedmeier, Emily**, to Bethany-Parkway Campus, Appleton, Wis.

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

## ANNIVERSARIES

**Kenosha, Wis.—Mt. Zion (75).** Sept. 20. Worship, 8 and 10:45 A.M.; luncheon to follow. RSVP by Aug. 15., to Char Vansant, [cvansant@wi.rr.com](mailto:cvansant@wi.rr.com). Place in subject line, "75th Anniversary Celebration."

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

## COMING EVENTS

**Taste and See—June 27–July 11.** Hosted by WELS Missions and the Lutheran

Women's Missionary Society. Free online event to learn about and support gospel outreach in WELS. Consume-on-your-own content throughout event. Livestreamed events include:

- June 27. Opening worship, 11 A.M. CST; followed by the LWMS flag presentation.
- July 1. Home Missions question-and-answer panel, 7 P.M. CST.
- July 8. World Missions question-and-answer panel, 7 P.M. CST.
- July 11. Closing commissioning service, 6 P.M. CST; followed by a question-and-answer panel with newly commissioned missionaries.

Participate at [welstasteandsee.com](http://welstasteandsee.com).

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

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).

## MENTAL ILLNESS

*Christa Holland's article on dealing with mental illness [May, p. 18] received many positive and encouraging comments on FIC's website and Facebook pages, including this note from Sharon Renner, a member at Resurrection/Life, Rochester, Minn.:*

I praise God for giving you the daily measure of strength you need to get through each day, each hour, each moment, and for the extra strength to share this with so many who need to hear it, whether because they suffer too or because they could never imagine such suffering and now have a window into that world. Those who struggle with their mental health will see the hope that you have in God and be encouraged. Those who do not will see the hope that you have in God and be compassionate. I pray this moves all who read it and struggle in any way—mentally, spiritually, or physically—to cling more tightly to the Lord who loves them and cares for them as he knows best.

*Christa Holland replied to those who commented: Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! The shares, encouragements, and other expressions of Christian love have been incredible. I actually sobbed the first*



*night after reading through the comments. For 25 years, I have been careful to keep up a façade of "normalcy" and not allow any indication that I was anything other to emerge, so having a part of that wall come down was strange. Growing up, I felt that many people had a "Who sinned? The boy or his parents that he was born blind," attitude toward mental illness and was relieved with the outpouring of compassion given me as feedback to my article. . . . I am in awe of our gracious God and how he works!*

## CORRECTION:

The Tiefels, featured on the cover of the June issue, are members at Morning Star, Jackson, Wis., not David's Star. We apologize for the error.

# As we come and go

Andrew C. Schroer

I am overflowing with excitement. As I write these words, we are making our final preparations to celebrate our first public worship services as a church in over two months. The state of Texas where I live is one of the first to begin reopening businesses and churches after weeks of extreme social distancing.

People are slowly beginning to come and go. I can only imagine that by the time you read these words, most of the country will be coming and going a bit more freely. People are going back to work. Our children will soon be going back to school. You can finally get a haircut.

## **The all-powerful Lord of the universe promises to be by our side every step of the way.**

The truth is, however, that COVID-19 has not suddenly disappeared.

People are still getting sick. The virus is still spreading. The death toll continues to rise.

Not a few people are concerned about everybody coming and going again, which got me thinking about a verse from Psalms. King David wrote, “The LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore” (Psalm 121:8).

As Christians, we can come and go with confidence. The all-powerful Lord of the universe promises to be by our side every step of the way. He promises to protect and to provide. He promises to watch over us every moment of every day.

Now, that doesn’t mean we won’t get sick or suffer pains or problems. God promises to protect us from everything that can truly harm us. Sometimes what is best for us is to go through times of trials. Through them, God helps us grow and bring us closer to him.

But in the end, not even death can truly harm us. Because Jesus lived, died, and rose again as our Savior, our final going will be to heaven. God truly will watch over our coming and going both now and forevermore.

Please understand, however, that one of the ways in which God watches over us is by giving us common sense and wisdom. God gives us doctors and scientists to teach us and guide us. He places the government over us to protect us. Part of the way God watches over us is by giving us the means to protect ourselves.

For example, even though we trust that God is watching over us, we still wear our seat belts in the car. We still take the medications our doctors prescribe. We still lock our doors at night. Oftentimes it is through such things that God protects us and provides for us.

For that reason, as we begin to gather again at our churches, we should take the proper precautions. We should listen to the doctors and governing authorities. We should continue to socially distance ourselves, wash our hands, and wear masks as long as the experts recommend it. Through such precautions, God is protecting us and others.

But as you come and go over the next few days, weeks, and months, do so without fear. The all-powerful King of creation is watching over you every step of the way. He will make everything in your life work out for your good. Then, one day, as you go from this life, he will take you by the hand and lead you to the home Jesus won for you. Nothing can truly harm you.

You can come and go with confidence.



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

# F R E E D O M

## Called to Be Free - Galatians 5:13

What a blessing that we live in a country where we have the right to express our spiritual freedom in Christ. As election season approaches, take the time to pray for our nation with this helpful book from NPH.



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

Though the outcome of any election is uncertain to us, God is always in control. Based on this truth, *God Bless Our Native Land* helps believers express their hopes and concerns about the political process to their heavenly Father. This small book contains 26 specific prayers about balanced media coverage, integrity in the political process, honesty at the ballot box, and other related topics.

Imagine thousands of Christians across the country united in prayer! With a copy of *God Bless Our Native Land*, you can pray with them. NPH offers **quantity discounts** so you can encourage friends and family to join you in praying for our nation. Softcover, 32 pages. **LU060734, \$0.75** 

To see the great selection of NPH's books and resources for this election year, visit [nph.net/patriotic](http://nph.net/patriotic).

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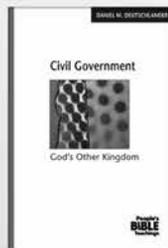
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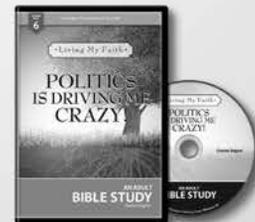


### **Civil Government**

From the "People's Bible Teachings" series, by Daniel M. Deutschlander

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### **Politics Is Driving Me Crazy**

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# Still Joyful

Ministerial education graduates reflect on their unique final semester.



AS I CONSIDER the impact that COVID-19 made on the WLS class of 2020, I recognize that the losses we experienced are relatively small compared to the suffering that the pandemic has inflicted upon many in our country and across the world. Missing out on our last few months of in-person classes and our graduation ceremony is disappointing, but it does not compare to the pain and worry experienced by those who lost income or watched loved ones suffer or die.

But there is disappointment. For years, my classmates and I had the spring of 2020 on our radar. It would be a time of thanksgiving and joyful praise to God! We would encourage each other during the final weeks of our formal education. We would enjoy the friendship that we had formed over the previous eight years. We would celebrate with one another as we received calls into the public ministry.

But instead of enjoying these blessings face-to-face, our final weeks together have consisted of interactions via laptop or cell phone. While technology allows us to stay connected, it is no substitute for being with each other in person.

Despite the disappointment, we continue to trust that God is working all things for our good. We are confident that he will strengthen our faith as he has always done and even use these experiences to prepare us for our future work. God is equipping our class to bring the message of Christ's love into a world that is desperate for good news. Because of this, the spring of 2020 is still a time of thanksgiving and joyful praise to God!

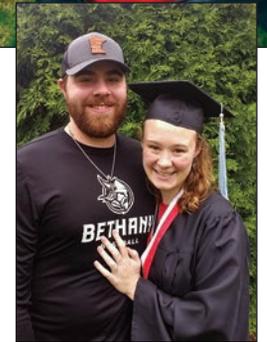


James Hemmelman, WLS class of 2020, is a member at Risen Savior, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He was assigned to serve as the associate for the Dakota-Montana District president, St. Paul, Rapid City, South Dakota.

THIS IS NOT how I envisioned my senior year at Martin Luther College. I had all these great plans to spend the final semester with friends, take my finals in person, and study for them with my roommates. At commencement, I imagined hearing my name called, walking across the stage to get my diploma, and then receiving my call. But God had other plans.

This makes me think of Abraham and God's plan for his life. God told Abraham to get up and go to a land that he would show him. I don't think this was part of Abraham's plan for his own life. This is similar to what I, and many other seniors, are feeling. We don't know what God has in mind for us, but we do know that no matter where God sends us, he will always be with us. As he reminds us in Hebrews: " 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?' " (13:5,6).

Thank you, MLC, for giving me a truly wonderful experience filled with memories and friendships to last me a lifetime. I love and miss you all.



Hannah Stegman, MLC class of 2020, is a member at Holy Trinity, New Hope, Minnesota. She was assigned to teach grades 3 to 5 at St. Mark, Citrus Heights, California.