

OCTOBER 2020

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# FORWARD IN CHRIST

A LUTHERAN VOICE



**SERVING OTHERS  
OUT OF LOVE**

**BUILDING  
UNITY**  
p. 12

**CHOOSING A  
POLITICAL CANDIDATE**  
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**SEEING GOD  
IN ACTION**  
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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

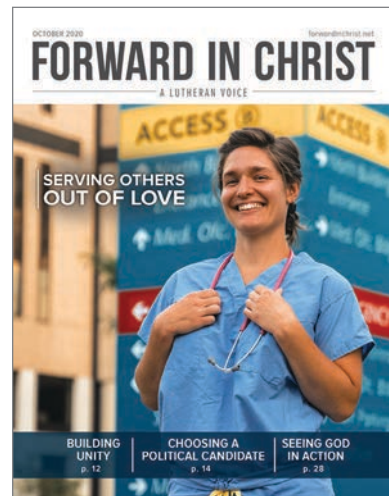
## WHAT'S INSIDE

Our cover photo this month highlights Allison Brown, a WELS member who lets her Christian love shine through her vocation as a nurse. (Read her story on p. 18.)

Many articles this month talk about Christian love—in our hearts, in our homes, in our communities, and in our church.

- Turn to the Bible study on James (p. 31) to read about the connection between faith and works so you can understand the motivation behind our acts of Christian love.
- Read this month's "Confessions of faith" (p. 7) to see the importance of building relationships in your community so you can talk about the most important relationship we all need—the one with our Savior.
- See Christian love in action in the news section (pp. 21-25) to understand how helping people with their physical needs can lead to opportunities to address their spiritual ones.
- Understand that showing Christian love is sometimes hardest within our own church family, especially when the world offers so many divisive distractions. Please don't miss "Make every effort" (p. 12), which highlights what can divide us in our church family as well as who can unite us—Jesus.

Julie Wietzke



COVER PHOTO | Jonah Jahns Visuals

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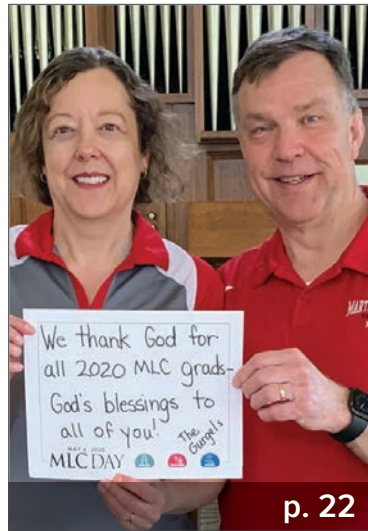
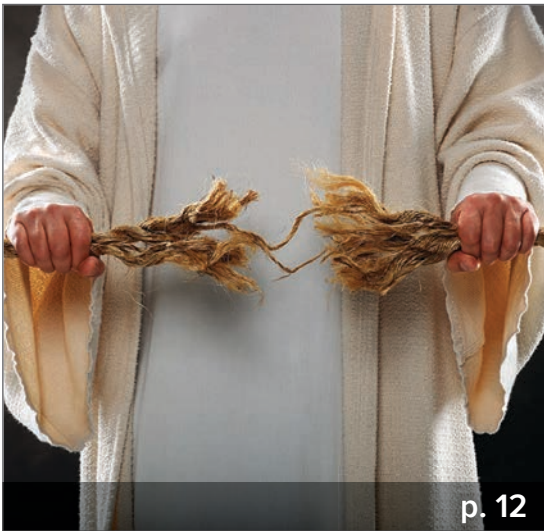
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### FEATURED ONLINE



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# THIS IS WELS

A slice of life around WELS during June, July, and August 2020.

- 1 | Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis. (teacher Wes Schmandt and his oldest daughter)  
 2 | Prince of Peace Lutheran School, Taylorsville, Utah  
 3 | May River, Bluffton, S.C. 4 | Faith, Excelsior, Minn.  
 5 | Camp Phillip, Wautoma, Wis. 6 | Prince of Peace Preschool, Martinez, Ga. 7 | West Lutheran High School, Plymouth, Minn. 8 | Our Savior, Birmingham, Ala.

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# The church sees color

**“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’ ” (Revelation 7:9,10).**

Joel C. Seifert

**“I BELIEVE GOD** created one race—the human race. The love of Christ calls us to be truly color blind.” This statement is often spoken in love and intended to be a Christian reaction to the sinful racism that continues to inflict wounds and put up barriers to the gospel. But God’s words and examples call us to something higher than color blindness.

## **GOD SEES OUR DIFFERENCES AND USES THEM**

When Christians call for color blindness, they often cite Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Yet God’s point is not that Christ erases those differences. Throughout the New Testament, God explicitly applies his Word in different ways to Jews and Gentiles (Galatians chapters 3 to 5), slaves and masters (Colossians chapters 3 and 4), and males and females (Ephesians chapter 5 and 1 Timothy chapter 2). The gospel doesn’t make us blind to those differences; it means that none of our differences make anyone more or less valuable in the sight of God.

The early church confronted cultural prejudices in its own charity system (Acts chapter 6). It shaped the church’s ministry as Paul considered the implications of bringing along Timothy, a son of a Jewish mother and Greek father (Acts chapter 16). It even helped pastors understand the particular sins that plagued the Cretans (Titus 1:12,13).

The church saw color because Christ did. Our race is *part* of the way God created us. Seeing that helps us find unique opportunities to apply God’s Word. Christ saw the pains and challenges that came with a Samaritan woman’s social and cultural background; he applied the gospel to those hurts and reached a sinner in need with the only message that cures (John chapter 4). Our missionaries working among the Ukrainians, the Sudanese, and the Chinese will tell you that seeing each cultural and ethnic difference helps when applying God’s Word to them. Our missionaries working among Black and Hispanic Americans in our nation will tell you the same. Don’t be blind to the differences that often accompany race. Learn about them and apply God’s Word to them.



PHOTO | iStock

**Our race is *part* of the way God created us. Seeing that helps us find unique opportunities to apply God’s Word.**

## **THE GOSPEL UNITES US ALL IN CHRIST**

After the apostle John labored with the gospel for decades and saw his fellow apostles martyred for their faith, Jesus gave him a vision of heaven. What a joy it must have been for John to see who was there! Even in the halls of heaven, he recognized them as coming from “every nation, tribe, people and language.” They weren’t rejoicing in heaven because their differences were gone. They were united because of Christ Jesus, the Lamb who sat on the throne and who had shed his perfect blood for all who were there.

The church wasn’t blind to those differences on earth either. It saw peoples’ unique experiences and hurts and considered how it might best minister to them. God blessed that work, and John had the privilege of seeing the results in heaven. May God help his church continue to see color and apply his Word to all people, until one day soon he unites us around his throne.



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

## More than dollars and numbers

Fall is the time of year when most congregations begin to discuss and plan their budgets for the coming year. Ministry plans are developed, and then those plans are prayerfully adopted in keeping with the financial resources that are anticipated.

The ministry of a congregation is not limited to what is done locally. Some congregations are members of federations that support Lutheran high schools; others cooperate with neighboring congregations to carry out important joint ministries. And, since our congregations are members of a synod, they also recognize that they join other congregations to carry out ministry together that individual congregations could not easily do alone.

The first congregation I served had a wonderful way of looking at those ministries that extended beyond the local congregation. The section of the budget that included the support for the area Lutheran high school and the synod was labeled “Wider Privileges.” That label was a constant reminder that the congregation’s work beyond local ministry was not an obligation, burden, or imposition.

Fall is also the time when synod administrators develop a ministry financial plan (budget) for the next two years. The Synodical Council and delegates at the synod convention next summer will review the plan. Like the budget in your congregation, the ministry financial plan is much more than a list of line items with dollar amounts attached. More accurate, it is a description of the synod’s plan for ministry with the resources needed to carry it out. Those resources include gifts from individuals, grants from foundations, bequests, and income from investments. But the most important source of financial support comes from congregations like yours through what we call Congregation Mission Offerings (CMO). All of those gifts serve to support the worldwide ministry of WELS.

Your mission offerings are used to operate our system of ministerial education, where young people are trained to serve as pastors, teachers, and staff ministers in congregations like yours. Your gifts to the synod train national pastors in our rapidly growing sister synods in Malawi, Zambia, Ethiopia, and Kenya. Your support enables us to share the gospel with hundreds of thousands of people in Latin America through modern communication tools and helps to operate orphanages in India where hundreds of children learn about their Savior. Your gifts of love and faith provide needed assistance to sister church bodies like the Ukrainian Lutheran Church as they face huge challenges. Your offerings enable WELS to establish and support home missions in places like Houston, Texas, and to aid campus ministries as they serve young people at many different universities. In addition, your generous gifts support the work of WELS Congregational Services, which provides resources and advice to congregations as they carry out their ministries. And, yes, you provide the financial means for the less exciting but necessary administration and structure that support all the ministry we do. These are only a few of the many ways in which your mission offerings are used.

As your congregation decides what its Congregation Mission Offering will be for 2021, don’t just think of the dollars. Think of the faces of the people around the world whose lives and eternities will be changed by the power of the saving gospel. Be a voice that advocates for generous support of this work in your congregation. And pray that God will continue to bless the work we do together in his name.



Mark G. Schroeder | WELS President



PHOTO | Mel Anne Designs



# CONFESSIONS *of faith*

**A family discovers a focus on Scripture, consistent messages, and a warm and welcoming atmosphere at their local WELS church.**

Alicia A. Neumann

PHOTO | Lightstock

**CONSISTENCY. STRUCTURE.** A focus on Scripture. These are just some of the things that Harry and Angie Corey say they appreciate about Peace, Aiken, S.C. The Coreys, who joined Peace in May, say that Lutheranism finally gave them the answers they were looking for.

## **THEIR SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS**

Although the Coreys had been Pentecostal most of their adult lives, they both had different religious backgrounds growing up. Harry started out in the Methodist Wesleyan Church. “I remember listening to the music and listening to the Word,” he says. “It really touched me. When I got home, I would go out into our old barn, and I’d just sing songs to the Lord.”

When he was 14, Harry began attending a Pentecostal church because it was closer to where he lived. “At first I was scared to death, seeing the things that went on in those services,” he says. “I had a lot of questions about when people would speak in tongues or when they would go running through church.” But Harry stayed in the Pentecostal church throughout his teens and during his first marriage.

Angie, on the other hand, was raised Baptist; she attended church until she was a teenager. “Then some things changed in my life, and I got pregnant at an early age,” she says. “I dropped out of church when I was 16 because of the shame and feeling embarrassed. I was out of church for a long time.”

Harry also fell away from church after his divorce. “The thing that bothered me was that when I was going through that difficult situation, no one from church said anything to me. They never asked if I was okay or checked to see if I needed help,” he says. “It made me bitter for a while.”

When Harry and Angie met, neither was attending church. But after they got married, both had a change of heart. Angie says her brother helped guide her back to church. “One day we prayed together, and I repented of my sins,” she says. When she shared the news with Harry, their religious life began to change.

They decided to join a Pentecostal church—something that was familiar to Harry. “After being out of church a few years, it was good to be back,” he says. “It was good serving and working alongside my wife. We worked in the nursery, sang in the choir, and volunteered for vacation Bible school. That aspect of church brought us such happiness.”

But he says he continued to have questions about the church’s teachings. “When Scripture was read during the service, the stories or teachings that followed wouldn’t match up in a clear way to point to the real meaning of Scripture,” says Harry. “I always wished I could go deeper into Scripture, but there were never any classes that could really teach me the Bible and what things meant.”

Harry and Angie also remember feeling like they didn’t quite measure up. They say they felt there was pressure to attend every single service and





Left: Angie, Sarah, Jacob, and Harry Corey. Right: Jacob Corey outside Peace, Aiken, S.C.

to pay tithes. If they didn't, they weren't considered to be "real" Christians. "We just always felt guilty," says Angie. Over the years, they also tried attending some nondenominational churches, but "always inside of me there was something that didn't quite gel, and I just couldn't figure it out," says Harry.

### FINDING ANSWERS

"Sometimes God uses different methods to open your eyes," says Angie. She thinks that was the case when she stumbled across a video series on YouTube from a Lutheran pastor. He was discussing false doctrines, including some that were taught in the Pentecostal church. "He went over topics like the manifestation gifts, the tongues—things that I believed in," she says. "It opened my eyes. I began to question things, and I got hungry to know more."

Angie began looking for sermons from other Lutheran pastors, including ones in her area. In that search, she found the website of Peace in Aiken. After watching one of the sermons of Peace's pastor, Jonathan Bourman, Angie kept going back for more. "I was like *Wow! These are so good!* I really got a lot out of the teachings," she says.

Angie decided to visit in person. She wanted to make it a surprise for Harry and their two children, Jacob (18) and Sarah (16). "I told my

family, 'Let's visit a new church on Sunday.' Everyone was on board, but I wouldn't tell them where we were going," she says. When they pulled up at Peace, Angie says her family was very surprised to see a Lutheran church, but any uncertainty melted away when they walked through the doors.

"Everyone was so friendly and so sweet," she says. "And Pastor just got right in there, shook our hands, and made us feel welcome."

The service wasn't anything like they'd experienced before—in a good way. "I guess our eyeballs were about the size of 50 cent pieces," says Angie. "But we loved it. It was wonderful, and we've been there ever since."

### BECOMING LUTHERAN

The Coreys went on to take Peace 101 Bible information classes. They remember that when Bourman was teaching, he had two Bibles—one in Greek and one in Hebrew. "And he could read them!" says Harry. "Then I found out he had gone to college for eight years. I thought to myself, *There's a guy who's serious about what he's doing.* That carried a lot of weight with me."

As they continued their instruction, one thing that stuck out for Angie was the consistency. "That's what we're finding out as we learn more about the Lutheran church," she says. "Everything is so consistent. Every-

## SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

The Coreys have been encouraging others in their lives to attend Peace. Angie's sister, Lynn Shepherd, moved to Aiken and was looking for a church in town. Even though she had been Methodist most of her life, Lynn ended up going with the Coreys to visit Peace. "That first Sunday she fell in love with it, and after that she didn't want to go anywhere else," says Angie.

The Coreys' daughter, Sarah, has also invited her boyfriend to services and to Peace 101 classes. Although COVID-19 has put a halt to this year's activities, Angie says the teens are excited to attend future WELS youth rallies and to connect with a neighboring WELS congregation's youth group.



Jacob Corey and his aunt Lynn Shepherd, who also became a member of Peace.





The Corey family with Pastor Bourman: (left to right) Sarah, Angie's sister Lynn Shepherd, Jacob, Pastor Jonathon Bourman, Harry, and Angie.

thing is from Scripture. And that's what's so good." She says she feels like they've almost had to start over and relearn everything from Baptism and Communion to the creeds and the law and gospel.

The Coreys also appreciate that the services have structure, which makes it easier to remember the lessons from week to week. "It's such a night-and-day difference," says Angie. "It feels like we are on a schedule with Scripture, rather than being all over the map. Being structured is something we didn't realize we needed—until now."

That structure has also helped Harry and Angie's kids adjust to the new church and liturgical style. "The kids love it," says Angie. "Sarah and Jacob have both said that they can remember more of the sermon now. Even in the middle of the week they are still thinking about what was taught on Sunday. The Scriptures are coming alive to us like never before."

Angie says this whole experience has been very humbling. "I know that God loves me, but this was his love in action. It's like God was saying, 'I love you so much that I want to put you here where you're taught my Word.'"

Harry agrees. "It really showed us that God hears us and answers prayers," he says. "I can honestly say that I think we've found not only the truth, but also the peace that the Bible talks about—the peace that passes all understanding."



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

## Building RELATIONSHIPS

One of the first people to greet the Coreys when they first attended Peace was the congregation's pastor, Jonathan Bourman. After they began attending regularly, Bourman came to their house on a weekly basis as part of the congregation's Peace 101 Bible information classes.

"We just can't get over the love that he has shown our family," says Angie. "We've never had a pastor be so available. He checks on us, and he's so hands-on." The Coreys say Bourman's efforts to connect with people on a personal level, together with the warm and welcoming atmosphere at Peace, is what helps draw new members in.

This home mission, which recently celebrated its fifth anniversary, began with just eight people meeting in someone's home. Today, there are more than 150 members, almost all of whom are either new Christians or new to Lutheranism.

"So many people have come to Peace from so many different spiritual places," says Bourman. Because of that, he focuses on reaching out and building relationships so he can minister to people in the way they need. "Love is what helps us navigate how we interact with people," he says. "I think this helps people feel safe coming back because they can tell we really care about them."

Although personal connections are important, Bourman says it's the gospel that helps congregations grow. "We do everything we can to get a hearing for the gospel with which Christ has entrusted us, and it has worked in people's hearts so they want to stay among us," he says. "We are so excited to see what the Lord will use us to do in reaching our city in the future."

about Bourman's ministry philosophy by watching his presentation "Connecting to your community" from this year's WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership. The video, along with other conference videos, is available at [lutheranleadership.com/resources](http://lutheranleadership.com/resources).



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# A TRANSLATION for the *people*

## **Luther made God's Word speak to people in their own language.**

James J. Westendorf

The Lutheran Reformation is important! Through it the Lord of the church restored many eternal spiritual truths to us that were either buried under human teachings or were lost altogether. We confess the most important of those truths in what we call the three *solas*—in Scripture alone, by grace alone, through faith alone.

Here we focus briefly on the first of these *solas*, “in Scripture alone,” and review Luther’s role in making those Scriptures available to the ordinary Christian.

### **IN SCRIPTURE ALONE**

Martin Luther certainly appreciated the fact that God’s saving truth was revealed in Scripture alone and not in what the church of his day taught or what human logic devised. Because he was firmly grounded in the Scriptures, he was able to stand up confidently at the Diet of Worms

and confess, “Show me from the Word of God that what I have written is wrong, and I will take it all back. Otherwise, here I stand” (paraphrased). It was because Luther placed his trust in the Holy Scriptures that he could confront the Swiss reformer Zwingli, who denied the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper, and say, “Our Savior said, ‘This is my body . . . this is my blood.’ ‘Is’ means ‘is.’” Scripture alone reveals the truth in spiritual matters.

## **We praise God for Luther’s translation work by using our English Bibles the way Luther intended his German Bible to be used.**

This certainty was not something Luther wanted to keep to himself. All God’s people should be able to dig into the Scriptures for their own edification, hence Luther’s great interest in Bible translation. Luther said that he wanted to make Jesus and his disciples speak German. At the time, that wasn’t the case. The Bibles used in services were in Latin. There were some German transla-

tions available, but they were simply translations of the Latin Vulgate. They were not written in the everyday German the people spoke, so they were not popular.

Luther’s opportunity to address the need for a new German translation of the Bible came shortly after his appearance at the Diet of Worms. Because of his refusal to recant what he had written and what he taught at the university in Wittenberg, Luther was condemned by the pope and the

emperor. For his own safety he was taken by his friends to Wartburg Castle where he lived incognito. During that time when his normal responsibilities did not weigh down on him, he saw the chance to work on a Bible translation.

### **FOR THE PEOPLE**

Since the Dutch scholar Erasmus had produced a new version of the



Greek New Testament, Luther could use that for his work on the German New Testament instead of relying on the Latin Vulgate. In order to make sure that his translation spoke in the language the people used every day, Luther made visits to the surrounding villages and listened to the way people expressed themselves.

Before his return to Wittenberg early in 1522, Luther's translation was complete, an amazing task done so well in such a short period of time. Six months later, in September 1522, his New Testament was published.

Luther's work was an instant success. Due to Gutenberg's invention of the movable-type printing press several decades earlier, printers now could make many copies of a book quickly. The new translation spread throughout Germany and beyond in a short time. Germans had a New Testament they could use in home, church, and school that spoke clearly to them. Many a church historian has called Luther's work at the Wartburg the greatest and most useful work of his entire life.

The work continued in the years that followed. By 1534 the Old Testament was added to Luther's earlier work. Although the Old Testament was a collaborative effort by Luther and many leaders in the Reformation like Phillip Melancthon, Luther's role was considerable. Like Luther's earlier efforts, the German translation returned to the original languages of the Old Testament, Hebrew and Aramaic. Again, the effort was made to produce a translation that used the language as spoken by everyday people, noble and peasant alike.

As groundbreaking as Luther's translation was, he never was satisfied to rest on his laurels. To his dying day Luther continued to edit his Bible, based on his own insights and the input of others.

The German that Luther used in his translation not only was a reflec-

tion of the way people spoke in his day but also became a part of the foundation on which modern-day German was developed. So influential was Luther's Bible that even today the German language reflects the German that Luther used.

Those guidelines, using original languages and trying to produce a translation in the language of the people, are probably the main rea-

sons why Luther's German translation was also influential in places like England. William Tyndale, an English theologian, wanted to produce an updated English Bible. Since translating the Bible into the vernacular was frowned upon in England, Tyndale went abroad where he possibly came into contact with Luther in Wittenberg. In 1526, four years after the appearance of Luther's New Testament in Germany, Tyndale published his complete English Bible based on the original languages and using the English spoken by the common person. Luther's influence, no matter how indirect, was present. Nearly a century later in 1611, the King James Version used much of Tyndale's language, which has influenced English to our present day.

### MORE THAN JUST READING

Luther, however, had greater hopes for his German Bible than just enabling people to read it for themselves. Reading whole chapters and books of the Bible was important, but reading for the sake of becoming familiar with different sections of the Scriptures was really just a first step in using the Scriptures. Luther also advocated that as people read, they stop to meditate on the meaning of a particular chapter or verse for their own faith, hope, or life. He wanted Christians to utter prayers of praise and thanksgiving for God's love and mercy in Christ or supplications and petitions based on their needs and concerns.

Certainly, we praise God for Luther's translation work by using our English Bibles the way Luther intended his German Bible to be used. Then Luther's work is indeed useful, and God is honored and glorified for his gifts to us.



*James Westendorf, a retired pastor and professor, is a member at St. Luke, Watertown, Wisconsin.*

## READ AND MEDITATE

**How do we use Scripture as Luther intended?**

**Take one of Luther's favorite books of the Bible, the Psalms. We can read just one psalm every day so we can meditate and pray on what that particular psalm says to us.**

- **If the psalm proclaims God's unfailing care for his people, even when times would indicate otherwise (e.g., Psalm 92 or Psalm 136), we can be strengthened in our trust.**
- **When God's forgiving mercy is revealed (e.g., Psalm 32 or Psalm 51), we can be led to repent of our daily sins and confidently place them on Christ as our Savior.**
- **If a psalm of David speaks of David's greater son, our Lord Jesus (e.g., Psalm 22 or Psalm 118), we can rejoice in God's amazing gift of his Son.**
- **If the psalm is a prayer (e.g., Psalm 54 or Psalm 102), we can make the psalmist's prayer our own. When we read, we aren't just watching the psalmist pray; we are joining him.**

**Try it in your daily readings.**



# Make every EFFORT

**As divisions threaten our Christian churches, God's Spirit unites us in Christ.**

Nathan C. Nass

**"HOW GOOD AND** pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1).

Doesn't that sound nice? In the ferocious divisions of our world, Christian churches are to be refuges of unity. Jesus himself put it like this: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). The world is to marvel at the Christlike love that unites Christians.

Huh? Is that what you see in your congregation? Sadly, I often don't. There have always been lots of things that cause divisions among God's people. This fall, however, we've been hit by a tsunami of a never-ending pandemic in the middle of a hotly charged presidential election all happening against the backdrop of anger surrounding social justice.

The result? Divisions over non-biblical matters are threatening our congregations. You know it. You've felt it. The devil loves it! If he can't succeed with false teaching, he'll use masks and politics to drive Christians apart.

## **HUMAN OPINIONS CAN DIVIDE**

It hit home for me earlier this summer. I was scrolling through my Facebook feed when I noticed a thoughtful post from a church member. What caught my attention, however, was a comment by another member: "Very sincere thank you for being one of a very small number of people from our church that has shared a post that has made me feel something other than attacked and alienated. I find it devastating that I have to say that, but there you go. Thank you."

"Attacked" and "alienated" by her brothers and sisters in Christ? Do you think she's the only one?

Here's the worst news: I'm part of it. I have very firm opinions too, and I assume most people think like me. Know what? They don't! You don't. In fact, people have very different opinions about almost everything.

To make matters worse, each one of us is incredibly confident that our opinions are right. We too often say things that unintentionally hurt each other.

Unity at church? This is hard! It makes me think of a quote I read: "It's a lot easier to love the whole world than to love your neighbor."

How do we love fellow Christians when different opinions divide us? We need to go back to God's Word.



When God's Word isn't a regular part of our lives, we lose the ability to discern what comes from God and what comes from us. That's bad! Eventually, we begin to assume that our thoughts must be God's thoughts. Why wouldn't God agree with me? Except, he doesn't! "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isaiah 55:8). We forget the frailty of every human opinion. We start to mesh Bible verses with our favorite news channel, with what our friends say, and . . . Then we defend our personal preferences as if they came from the Bible, because sadly we can't tell the difference.

Can you see the problem?

### GOD'S WORD TEACHES US

So, let's put down our thoughts and hear God's: "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43-45). Think of what Jesus did: He left heaven to be a servant, a slave. He did not come to be served, but to serve. He died the death that we deserve for our sins. There's a word for that: love.

There is something so incredibly different about our Savior. When God says that his thoughts are so much higher than ours, he is the greatest example. On our own, we never could have come up with the idea that we're saved by Jesus' death on the cross and that the forgiveness of sins is free. Those have to be God's thoughts, because they don't come from us! "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:10,11).

Even in our divided world, "there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:4-6). Look what unites you with every brother and sister in your congregation: one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father. So much! How can different people with different opinions live together in unity in the same church? Jesus. We're forgiven, redeemed, and children of God. That's what unites us!

## How can different people with different opinions live together in unity in the same church? Jesus.

### THE HOLY SPIRIT UNITES US

So, "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:3). Christian unity takes effort—a lot of effort! It doesn't come naturally. My sinful nature always wants to make it all about me. It's not! True unity is only possible through the Holy Spirit. He changes us from the inside out using God's Word. Words like: "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." (James 1:19).

When we close our mouths and open our ears to God and others, we hear:

- "In humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others" (Philippians 2:3,4). Wow. That's countercultural, isn't it?
- "Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself

a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible" (1 Corinthians 9:19).

- "Let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister" (Romans 14:13).
- "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (Romans 14:19).

See a theme? "Make every effort!" With Jesus' forgiveness filling your heart, with the Spirit's words running through your mind, make every effort to build unity in your congregation. Make every effort to keep the focus on Jesus. Make every effort to patiently listen to others, especially when they disagree with you. Make every effort to put others' interests above your own. Make every effort to stop passing judgment on people's personal preferences. Make every effort to forgive as God forgives you. Make every effort to win as many as possible for Jesus.

Because that's the goal, isn't it? The goal of a Christian congregation is the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Remember how Christians point the world to Jesus? "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). As divisions threaten, may God's Spirit unite us in Christ!



*Nathan Nass is pastor at St. Paul, Green Bay, Wisconsin.*

This is the first article in a two-part series on dealing with fellow Christians in love.



# Q&A WITH DAVID SCHARF

## Can a Christian vote for a political candidate who supports abortion?

### CITIZENS OF TWO KINGDOMS

Christians are citizens of two kingdoms: the church (i.e. the kingdom of God) and the state (i.e. civil government).

The kingdom of God is the ruling activity of Christ in the hearts of believers (Luke 17:21). Our citizenship in this kingdom began when the Holy Spirit worked faith in our hearts through the gospel in Word and sacrament.

Most of us became citizens of the state when we were born. The state uses the tool of reason to maintain order and protect its citizens.

Though our membership in the church is far more important, we have a responsibility to submit to the governing authorities since they are established by God (Romans 13:1). What a blessing that in our government, we have a voice to determine who we want setting policies for us! Certainly our Christian faith will guide us in our choice.

### IS THERE A CHRISTIAN PARTY?

God is not a Republican. God is also not a Democrat. Correctly understood, he is independent of any political leaning. Those are terms that pertain to our citizenship in the state, not the church. We need to be careful that we do not give the impression that there is only one political party for a Christian. No party is perfect. Rather, as citizens of the state, Christians will be guided by God's Word and seek the good of their neighbors (Galatians 6:10), even with the choice of candidate for public office.

Two Christians can disagree on which candidate will best serve their neighbors. No candidate is perfect, and so Christians must use reason guided by the Word to make a choice.

Take for example, abortion. Abortion is murder. Therefore, one Christian may decide that oppos-

ing abortion is the most important consideration and cast a vote for a candidate who opposes abortion despite that person's failings in other areas of policy. I know dear Christians who vote this way. Another Christian may reason differently. This person may support a pro-choice candidate because this Christian decides that the government will not change the laws about abortion in the terms of either candidate, but the pro-choice candidate will do a better job of improving the health-care, education, and welfare support of those in the greatest need. That may result in cutting down on the number of abortions performed. I know dear Christians who vote this way as well.

Which is right? Since there is no perfect choice, both can be right as they seek to give God glory (1 Corinthians 10:31) and serve their neighbor.

### REMEMBER WHAT CHANGES HEARTS

Laws that protect all of the state's citizens are important. But remember that we can make all the laws in the world, but if people's hearts and minds are unconvinced to follow them, laws do no good. To change hearts, you must convince them at their core. Laws do not change hearts; the gospel does (Romans 1:16).

A few years ago, Brazil's government tightened restrictions on legal abortions. Did the law change peoples' attitudes? No. Mothers carrying their apparently unwanted children were still outside picketing for abortion rights.

What is the one thing that can change hearts? The truth of God's Word. Not picket signs, not legislation, not the right people in office. It is you and me, holding out God's loving hand of truth and proclaiming what he's done for us. Then the Holy Spirit can change some hearts.

God be with you as you decide for whom you should vote.



# Citizens of two kingdoms

David G. Scharf

**JESUS CONTROLS** everything. Ephesians 1:22 says, "God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church." What a comfort to know that our Savior rules everything.

However, Jesus himself said that his kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). Instead, Jesus rules in the hearts of his people by his Word. We are citizens of the kingdom of God through faith, but we are also citizens of the state. Jesus rules by placing earthly authorities over us (Romans 13:1). These authorities are not perfect, so there will always be a tension between our two citizenships.

What are the possible conflicts that can arise for a Christian as a citizen of both kingdoms? \_\_\_\_\_

## CITIZENS OF THE STATE

God established all authority. Therefore, to rebel against the government is rebellion against God.

### Read Romans 13:1-7.

What are the state's responsibilities to us? \_\_\_\_\_

### Read Luke 20:22-25; 1 Peter 2:13-17; and 1 Timothy 2:1-4.

What are our responsibilities to the state? \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 20:22-25. Remember Jesus says this in the context of a government that used some tax dollars to support violent treatment of people. Also remember, it was this government that ordered the slaughter of infants in Matthew 2:16-18. \_\_\_\_\_

1 Peter 2:13-17. How do the words "for the Lord's sake" (v. 13) help in carrying out our responsibilities? \_\_\_\_\_

1 Timothy 2:1-4 \_\_\_\_\_

## CITIZENS OF THE CHURCH

Every believer in Jesus is a member of the holy Christian church. It is called *holy* because each member is cleansed by the blood of Jesus (Ephesians 5:27). It is called *Christian* because it is built on Jesus as our cornerstone (1 Peter 2:4-7). It is called *church* (meaning "to be called out") because we have been called out of darkness and into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9). This church is invisible because Jesus rules in hearts. The church carries out its mission to make disciples by proclaiming the gospel (Matthew 28:18-20).

### Read Ephesians 4:1-17.

What are our responsibilities in the church? \_\_\_\_\_

What does God do for his church? \_\_\_\_\_

The church uses the gospel as its tool to carry out its mission to make disciples of all nations. The church is governed by God's Word. The state uses the sword (i.e. punishment) as its tool to accomplish its mission of maintaining order and protecting its citizenry. The state is governed by reason.

For what reasons do you think the separation of church and state is wise? \_\_\_\_\_

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

**READ MORE** > about the relationship between church and state in *Civil Government: God's Other Kingdom*. A new small group Bible study based on the book is also available. Northwestern Publishing House, [nph.net](http://nph.net); 800-662-6022.

# PARENT CONVERSATIONS

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In my opinion, this is the toughest part of being a Christian parent—letting the gospel shine in how I deal with my kids. It just seems to come naturally to me to be law-oriented. You sin. You experience a consequence. So logical. What isn't logical is how God deals with us as his children. It's all about grace—his grace that I should now reflect to my children. Is this a struggle for you too? Read on to see how two Christian parents approach this challenging aspect of parenthood.

— Nicole Balza

## HOW CAN I LET THE GOSPEL SHINE AS I PARENT?

**YOU AND YOUR SPOUSE** sit on the plane as newlyweds with arms crossed and annoyed gazes. Three rows back, a baby fills the entire cabin with ear-piercing screams. You whisper to your spouse, "If that were our child, we would not let that happen." The same words are uttered under your breath as the scenario plays out on a grocery store floor during the epic meltdown of a toddler.

Fast forward. The doctor shouts, "It's a boy!" As tears flow, you hold your firstborn. Your life has forever changed. King David reminds us that under this panda bear onesie lies a sinner (Psalm 51:5). As he grows, so do his sins, as do the smiles of your parents

**When disciplining, if you see repentance, be quick with the gospel to comfort the child.**

and teachers recalling you at that age. Apparently taking a ballpoint pen and writing on the bedsheets and bedroom walls seems logical to the six-year-old as does having a meltdown in the grocery store over fruit snacks to the four-year-old. Boom! You have become those parents. Are you ready? Are you prepared?

Here's my humble advice—not Scripture, but it has worked for our family:

1. **Have a plan.** I know it sounds odd, but in the pre-marriage, lovey-dovey stages, have the tough conversation of your joint plan to discipline your children. Perhaps your spouse's family's and your family's thoughts on effective discipline differ. How will the two of you handle the scenarios above?
2. **Communicate.** If that doesn't work, communicate even more—with each other and with your child. The child will try to pit parents against each other. My wife and I have found (after whatever discipline we've agreed upon from #1 above) that having the child explain back to us why he was being disciplined has helped him to see the error of his ways. Constant communication with your spouse helps the two of you work as a team. Communication with the child helps him to see his sin and more times effectively curbs that attitude.
3. **Let the gospel predominate.** Newsflash: We are sinful. We will make mistakes, but each mistake is forgiven (that includes parenting mistakes). When disciplining, if you see repentance, be quick with the gospel to comfort the child. Proud parent moment: Sitting next to my son during one of his time-outs and hearing, "You hate me, daddy." I said, "No, son, I do not hate you. What you did was wrong, but like God, I love you and forgive you!"

Being a father has made me more empathetic to what God must feel when I continuously do boneheaded



things. God comes to us in his Word and sacrament, and what is unfathomable is that he took his Son and punished him in our place. This is love. This is what is to be evident in parenting. Discipline—yes, but Jesus took our disobedience and now stands in love at the forefront of our parenting. And yes, that includes everywhere from the airplane to the grocery store floor and beyond.



Clark Schultz and his wife, Kristin, are raising three young boys. He serves as pastor at Shepherd of the Hills, West Bend, Wisconsin.



**AS CHRISTIAN PARENTS** we know the importance of the law and the gospel. The law teaches that we need a Savior. The gospel is the good news that we have one.

We all are born with a conscience. I grew up with a healthy conscience. I often felt like I didn't get to do "fun" things because I would feel so guilty if I did. Or I would make sure to do the right thing so I could avoid that horrible feeling of guilt. I remember hoping that my children would have the same conscience I did so that they would keep out of trouble.

**I did the right thing in order to avoid guilt. I do not want the same for my children.**

I don't wish that anymore. Don't get me wrong. I hope they have a good sense of what is right and wrong based on God's laws, but not for the same reasoning I had. I did the right thing in order to avoid guilt. I do not want the same for my children. Guilt motivation is full of shame and fear. I realized this in my 40s and had to take a hard look at my parenting. See, guilt motivation is effective in changing behavior. But as my kids get older, I don't want to focus on their behavior. I want to focus on their hearts.

Focusing on their hearts is difficult. It takes time and hard conversations. It isn't just addressing the behavior; it's looking at the root of the behavior. And in those

## APPLYING LAW & GOSPEL

"To properly distinguish between law and gospel is an awesome responsibility, both in application to oneself and to others," writes Leroy Dobberstein, author of *Law and Gospel: Bad News—Good News* from The People's Bible Teachings series. "I am a sinner who needs to hear both messages. I live in a sinful world where both need to be heard. In either case, the law and gospel must be applied in the way God intended them to be used. . . . No task is more delicate than the care of souls and the spiritual well-being of sinners. The Christian will always strive to become increasingly clear in understanding law and gospel and be faithful in their application."

**LEARN MORE** about the faithful application of law and gospel in Dobberstein's book, available from Northwestern Publishing House, [nph.net](http://nph.net); 800-662-6022.

deep, hard places, there *has* to be grace. I want them to be motivated by love.

It wasn't too long ago one of our kids came to my husband and me with regret over a sin. It hurt this momma's heart because his behavior wasn't what I wanted for him and, if I'm being honest, my ego wanted him to behave a certain way and he didn't (the whole "my kid would never do that" pride).

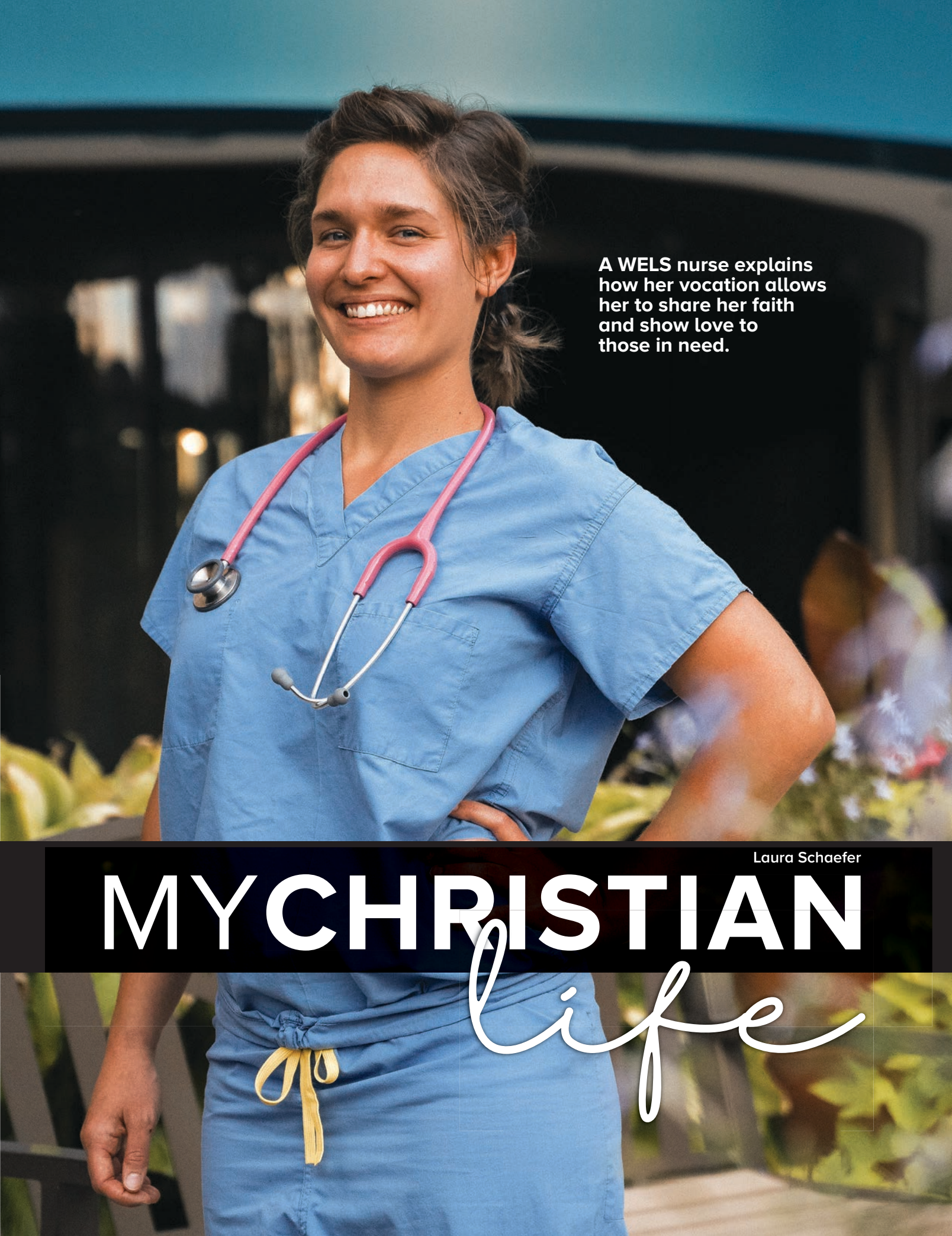
As he came to us, we chose grace. Our son already had enough shame and guilt over what he did. My husband and I needed to remember that the Spirit lives in him. God already convicted him through the law to recognize he needed forgiveness. He didn't need the law from us. He needed forgiveness. He needed grace. He needed freedom.

Living in freedom is what our Creator, our Father, wants for us: to do the right thing because we get to do it and to choose to walk away from the wrong thing because Jesus has so much more for us. So, more living motivated by love and not to avoid guilt. That's what I want for my kids. That's what I want for me. That's what I want for all of my brothers and sisters in Christ.



Jenni Schubring and her husband, Tad, are licensed foster parents and currently have 5 children in their clan ranging in age from 11 to 19.





A WELS nurse explains  
how her vocation allows  
her to share her faith  
and show love to  
those in need.

Laura Schaefer

# MY CHRISTIAN *life*



**JESUS CALLS US** to follow his example by living lives of service and putting others' needs before our own just as he did. As God's people, we live out this calling in many different vocations. While their work is often behind-the-scenes, nurses provide physical, emotional, and spiritual care to patients. They play a role in both preventing and easing the suffering of the people God so dearly loves.

Allison Brown, a member at Atone-ment, Milwaukee, decided she wanted to become a nurse when she was in eighth grade. "My faith played a very important role in my decision to become a nurse," she shares. Brown thought often about the sheep and the goats Jesus talked about. He tells his people who faithfully served their neighbors, "I was sick and you looked after me. . . Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:36,40).

Brown studied nursing at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, and received her degree in 2017. She says that one of the most shaping experiences of her college career was going to Lusaka, Zambia, with her nursing class. "We spent over two weeks observing medical practices and procedures in clinics and hospitals, learning the culture, and providing health education in schools and villages," says Brown. "It made me so thankful for things that we take for granted: hospital linens, IV fluid, pain medications, privacy for patients, ease of access to healthcare, clean water, electricity, advanced medicine. The blessings are endless."

#### **LETTING HER LIGHT SHINE**

After graduation Brown started her career at Children's Hospital of



Allison Brown in Lusaka, Zambia. She traveled there with her nursing class from Wisconsin Lutheran College.

### **"Nursing comes with physical and emotional sacrifices, but how humbling to know that God blesses others through our work!"**

Wisconsin. She moved on to work in the Cardiovascular Operating Room (CVOR) at Aurora St. Luke's Medical Center in Milwaukee.

Each of Brown's days looks a little different when working in the operating room. She works closely with patients, surgeons, and anesthesiologists during various heart and lung surgeries. "One of the roles I play in my department is in our holding area for patients before they are taken into the operating room. They can be in our holding area anywhere from ten minutes up to a couple of hours," says Brown. "I love working there because it gives me time to connect with the patients and have great conversations."

According to Brown, Christian nurses are often presented with unique opportunities to show God's love to patients who are suffering through some of the darkest

days of their lives. "Facing heart and lung surgeries puts life into perspective for a lot of patients, and I have been able to witness in discussions about faith and share passages from the Bible," she says.

Nurses also can share their faith with coworkers who may not have the peace of God's love to help them cope with what they see on a daily basis. "I feel that having a positive, cheerful, and willing attitude sets Christian nurses apart and makes us look different to our coworkers," Brown reflects. "And I think that our words and actions as Christians open the door for conversations about why we are different." As believers in Jesus, nurses and godly workers across all vocations can "let [their] light shine before others, that they may see [their] good deeds and glorify [their] Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

# CHRISTIAN SERVICE DURING THE PANDEMIC

During her time at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Allison Brown walked past the statue of Jesus washing Peter's feet every day. That always reminded her of the importance of being a Christian servant leader, which has never been clearer in her life than right now. "In the past few months, we have seen a lot of change," Brown reflects. "We have seen how times of uncertainty and fear can bring out the worst or the best in people. We have been given time to reprioritize our lives and to focus on what is most important."

In the middle of March, many hospitals had to make staffing changes due to COVID-19. Some surgeries in the operating room had to be canceled or put on hold if they were not emergent. Because of this, many nurses were sent home or cross-trained to other areas. "I volunteered to help staff an Emergency Department overflow tent for COVID-suspected patients," Brown says. "I chose to volunteer so that my coworkers who are older or who have spouses and children at home did not have to be in the

position of bringing home germs to their loved ones."

Volunteering to staff the triage tent was Brown's way of putting others before herself and loving others just as God loves her. "There are Christian nurses all around the world serving others out of love even when times are uncertain," Brown reflects. "They are holding the hand of a scared patient, spending extra time listening to a patient who has been home in isolation and needs someone to talk to, caring for the sick and the dying, and offering to work in unnerving situations so that others can go home and hug their families. Most important, they are offering the best comfort that, even while we have trouble and hardships in this life, we have true peace because Jesus has overcome this world!"

Brown returned to her job in the operating room in August. Her takeaway from her experience in the triage tent? "Never underestimate how God will use me. He has plans for all of us that will work for the good of his people, no matter how small our part may seem to us."

## KEEPING AN ATTITUDE OF JOY

There are days, Brown admits, when it is very difficult to keep a positive attitude and show love to others. "It can be challenging to be a Christian nurse in a volatile field that can sometimes feel suffocating and even toxic," she reflects. "No matter what our vocation, all of us face problems in the workplace, whether it is with coworkers, superiors, customers, patients, or all of the above. We deal with unkind words, harsh judgments, and even loneliness being in a secular workplace." While this is true, God tells us this is to be expected. He doesn't promise his people an easy life.

During these times Brown likes to remember 1 Peter 2:20,21: "If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." Brown thinks that, for her, the best way to witness in these difficult situations is "to be the light of Christ by having an attitude of joy and love, to show compassion to everyone I encounter, and to care for the needs of others without a second thought."

"Without a second thought." Nurses often face long hours in draining conditions, but they do it with this attitude. "What nurses may consider a minor task—a short conversation, the squeeze of a hand—can make a huge difference in a patient's life," Brown says. "It is difficult to watch people suffer, and that can end up taking an emotional toll. Nursing comes with physical and emotional sacrifices, but how humbling to know that God blesses others through our work!"



Laura Schaefer is a member at Christ the Lord, Brookfield, Wisconsin.



## Showing you care through parish nursing

At some point in our lives, every one of us has been blessed through the actions of a skilled and caring nurse.

Each day in the U.S., millions of nurses provide compassionate physical and emotional care. Through the WELS Parish Nursing program, WELS nurses can also provide a third facet of care to members of their congregations and communities: spiritual encouragement as they share the love of Christ with those who are hurting.

The WELS Parish Nursing program, a component of the WELS Nurses Association (WELSNA), was established to “educate and support parish nurse ministries within our congregations as our nurses serve the Lord with their God-given nursing skills.”

Multiple WELS congregations throughout the country are blessed through the services of caring parish nurses. For these nurses, being able to combine their passion for nursing with serving their fellow church members out of love for their Savior is incredibly fulfilling. Allison Spaude, communications coordinator for WELSNA,

says, “I have heard from many parish nurses that parish nursing is the most rewarding nursing position they have held.”

One of those WELS parish nurses is Carrie Feil, a registered nurse and member at Abiding Faith, Smyrna, Tenn. Several years ago, Feil approached Keith Schleis, pastor at Abiding Faith, and the church’s leadership to ask about starting a parish nursing program at the congregation. “Carrie always wanted to serve in this way, and we use the program for outreach,” says Schleis.

Although the program may seem more like “inreach” on the surface, Abiding Faith promotes the program to the community using a digital app. Says Schleis, “So many people research your digital and social presence before coming in the church door, and having a smiling parish nurse along with our other community connections communicates our love for our neighbor. They remember us because they see we care.”

Feil was thrilled to get started. “I really wanted to be able to serve my congregation in some way,” she recalls, “and parish nursing sounded like a wonderful opportunity.”

So what form does Feil’s service take at Abiding Faith? As a health educator, she teaches and arranges educational programs, like CPR classes. As a health counselor, Feil meets with members to listen to their con-

cerns and provide resources and referrals. For example, if a member is unsure of what type of physician to go to for a particular health concern, she can guide them to the targeted care they need.

In addition, Feil also serves as a community liaison. Since she is familiar with the various health and social agencies in the Smyrna area, she can refer the members of Abiding Faith to community resources that meet their needs, both physical and emotional.

But the opportunity to reflect God’s love in her parish nursing role is key for Feil. “It is so rewarding to feel like I can make a difference in someone’s life,” she says. “I can help someone feel just a little bit better or provide resources for them to take a step in the right direction while sharing my faith and love of Jesus.”

She continues, “In this world with so much turmoil, I want to share a little kindness. I consider the members of Abiding Faith my family, and I will do whatever I can to help my family. I look forward to serving Abiding Faith for many years to come.”

Some of our larger WELS congregations are blessed with parish nursing programs served by multiple nurses. But Abiding Faith in Tennessee is proof that even a single nurse with a heart for serving God’s people can make a lasting physical, emotional, and spiritual impact.

## LEARN MORE

If you are an RN and interested in starting a parish nursing program in your congregation, the WELS Nurses Association has resources to help you get started, including articles about how nurses can benefit your congregation, a Parish Nursing Guidelines booklet, helpful forms, policies and guidelines, and health education class ideas. In addition, Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis., offers an online parish nursing course every several years.

LEARN MORE ➤ at [welsnurses.net](http://welsnurses.net) or by contacting [welsnurses@wels.net](mailto:welsnurses@wels.net).



RN Carrie Feil leads a CPR class for members of Abiding Faith and the community.



## New president starts at Martin Luther College

Richard Gurgel started in his new role as president of Martin Luther College (MLC), New Ulm, Minn., in July.



With the COVID-19 pandemic still in place, Gurgel is starting his MLC presidency at a unique time. One of his first responsibilities was working with a team to finalize a return-to-school plan. "Our top priority is providing the highest level of safety and confidence in our campus learning environment, while adhering to the spiritual and educational standards WELS expects from its college of ministry," says Gurgel. But in a recent video message to students, he shares that he doesn't want to be known for rules and regulations. "Rules are not the core of my being. What I hope you discover is that at the core of my being, by the power of the Spirit, is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus." (Watch the video online at [forwardinchrist.net/news](http://forwardinchrist.net/news).)



Gurgel taught for 21 years at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.; he became the first director of continuing education at the seminary in 2010. Before that he served as pastor at two congregations, Gethsemane, Oklahoma City, Okla., and David's Star, Jackson, Wis. "Over the course of four decades of watching God at work where I have served, I have begun to grasp more just how much God's gospel is accomplishing even when we seem to think that little is happening," says Gurgel. "At the same time, I am learning to realize that too often we expect far too little from our God's promises to bless the work of his gospel. He assures us that he can do immeasurably more than we can even think or imagine."



Richard and his wife, Sue, are no strangers to MLC. All five of their sons attended the college, the youngest graduating in 2020. "That provides my wife and me with a unique perspective of 17 years as MLC parents, making tuition and room and board payments to MLC and watching how our sons were blessed as they grew in Christian maturity on this campus. That viewpoint of almost two decades as an MLC parent provides a wonderful perspective for me to draw on as I begin my time as president," says Gurgel.



Gurgel is excited to support and encourage the 181 faculty and staff serving at MLC. "A wise former MLC administrator advised me as I deliberated the call that the president of MLC is not the engine that makes MLC work. Under God's blessing, that engine is made up of all the many gifted men and women serving at our college. The president, he said, is the oil that helps keep all the many parts of that engine running well," says Gurgel. "In supporting and encouraging the many parts of the engine of MLC, I pray I can be just that God-given oil!"

**LEARN MORE** > about MLC and its mission in this month's edition of *WELS Connection*.



Mark Zarling retired at the end of the 2019–20 school year after serving 13 years as MLC president.

WELS President Mark Schroeder shares this thought about Zarling: "President Mark Zarling leaves an impression. He is a scholar. He is a gifted writer. He is a powerful preacher. He loves people and shows an interest in every individual. But most striking and memorable for anyone who has ever met him, worked with him, or sat in his classroom, is his heartfelt love for his Savior and his desire to share the good news of Jesus."

*Reprinted from MLC's 2020 Year in Review InFocus magazine*

 **WELS Connections**



## Where are they now?

In July 2013, *Forward in Christ* reported on ALHS Online, a collaborative effort of the WELS Association of Lutheran High Schools (ALHS) to offer high quality online courses to expand the course offerings of WELS high schools. During the 2012–13 school year, 72 different students from 11 WELS high schools enrolled.

### SO WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Recently accredited by the Middle States Association as a learning service provider, ALHS Online entered its tenth year of offering online classes at the start of the 2020–21 school year. About 340 students take courses each semester, including students from 23 WELS high schools as well as from home schools and public schools. Course offerings have increased from five courses the first year to 38 this school year.

These courses provide supplemental educational opportunities for students, especially from WELS' smaller high schools. Micayla Bork, a sophomore at Wisconsin Lutheran College, took several courses through ALHS Online that were not offered at her high school, Apostles Lutheran High School, San Jose, Calif. "What I appreciated most about these courses is the important life skills they taught me," she says. "Not only did I learn the

material, but I learned how to be successful in an online class. Overall, they really prepared me for college."

Since its inception, ALHS Online also has added math and foreign language courses for seventh and eighth grade students (students from 32 Lutheran elementary schools are taking courses this year) and a four-year high school religion curriculum.

Scott Schultz, pastor at Cross of Christ, Portage, Wis., and his wife signed their children up for religion courses this school year. "We really wanted our children to attend an area Lutheran high school, however the nearest one is over an hour away and it is not easy to get to in winter," he says. "We decided to send them to our public high school knowing they could get their religion classes through ALHS Online."

Currently ALHS Online offers credits through the students' high schools, but Dr. James Grunwald, superintendent of ALHS Online, says there is a growing desire for the program to expand its offerings and offer a high school diploma. "People from outlying areas with no area Lutheran high school nearby like the Christ-centered education," he says.

LEARN MORE > at [alhs.org](http://alhs.org).

## HOW ONE HIGH SCHOOL USES ALHS ONLINE

With between 40 and 50 students a semester taking online courses through ALHS Online, Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School (MVL), New Ulm, Minn., is the largest yearly user of the program. "The teachers from ALHS Online really go above and beyond to try to meet the needs of the kids," says Tim Plath, MVL principal and also one of the founding members of ALHS Online.

Besides paying for the classes for its students, MVL provides time during the school day for online learning. Plath says students take a variety of the courses offered, with AP Psychology and AP US History being especially popular.

Plath says he was excited about the group's recent accreditation—recognition by an outside organization for a quality educational program. "That's what we're all about—improving the quality of the Christian education that we provide for our kids."

## Compassion at work

WELS Christian Aid and Relief and Good Shepherd, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, partnered to organize cleanup after storms blew through the Midwest in August.

The line of storms, called a derecho, had sustained winds of more than 100 miles per hour. Good Shepherd suffered major roof damage and felled trees; most members also had extensive cleanup to do on their properties.



Volunteers cleared trees and picked up debris in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

More than one hundred volunteers helped clean up the church property as well as yards in the community.

"I was working alongside of members who hadn't touched their own yards yet," says Dan Sims, director of WELS Christian Aid and Relief and a volunteer. "They had trees down too, but they were out helping other people. It was heartwarming to see. When servants of Jesus go out and help those in need—it really makes an impression."

This compassionate spirit is what Sims wants to see as he works with each district to equip relief coordinators to oversee local disaster response. "If [the neighborhood residents] can see WELS congregations and people as caring and active in helping with physical needs, then we gain more opportunities to talk with them about their spiritual needs and their Savior."

LEARN MORE > at [wels.net/relief](http://wels.net/relief).

## High school students live out school's vision

The vision of Kingdom Prep Lutheran High School, in Wauwatosa, Wis., says it all: "Where young men develop their God-given gifts to lead in the home, serve in the church, engage in meaningful work, and transform the community."

It's not just a pretty saying to etch in the entryway of the school and to paste on the school's website. Living out this vision is central to how Kingdom Prep operates. For example, one period each day is known as "Nehemiah hour." Students identify a problem and ask the Lord how they are gifted to help in solving that problem. This becomes a self-directed project that can take many forms. For more than a year, some Kingdom Prep students have been spending Nehemiah hour—and many hours outside of school—helping Kingdom Prep's neighbor Laura build a new garage.

Laura's husband, Matthew, passed away from cancer two years ago. Before his death, Matthew rebuilt their home. He did not have time to also rebuild the garage. Seeing a neighbor in need, Kingdom Prep stepped in.

As Kevin Festerling, principal of Kingdom Prep, explains, "The Garage Project has introduced about 50 of our boys (9th and 10th graders) into a personal journey of demolition, design,

local ordinances, building construction, gritty perseverance, community partnerships, and most important, empathy for those who are suffering and discovery of their ability to help."

Along the way, Kingdom Prep has received support from neighbors and community businesses. In July, Kingdom Workers Construction joined the project.

"Kingdom Workers swooped in like Superman to help us," says Festerling. "Their volunteers' knowledge and skill have been so valuable. They also brought a really positive spiritual focus to our work this summer. Each morning we prayed and had a devotion before we began. Then during lunchtime, we did the same."

Jeff Ulman, director of Kingdom Workers Construction, says that these moments when the volunteers and students can share fellowship are the best parts of the project. "It's a blessing to listen in on the conversations and hear the talks on life that include challenges, encouragement, and gospel sharing."

He also appreciates the sense of accomplishment that he sees after showing a student how to use a new tool. "You can just see their confidence grow and that they now have the sense that they can do this."



Students from Kingdom Prep Lutheran High School helped in the demolition of this garage as well as the design and construction of the new garage. Pictured with the students is local pastor and school board member Christian Winkel.

The project, which began in August 2019, is nearing completion. Festerling looks back and is grateful for this opportunity. "The Garage Project fits so well with our work at Kingdom Prep. It gave faculty and students a common experience where we could work together to solve a problem. We often say, 'Let's work together to see how we can bless each other.' Being able to also bless our neighbor made this a really cool project."

LEARN MORE ► about Kingdom Prep at [kplhs.org](http://kplhs.org).

## BUILD UP



PHOTO | Meghan Brondos

Kingdom Workers Construction volunteer Jim Bublitz shows Kingdom Prep Lutheran High School student Carmello Jones how to use a compound miter saw.

Kingdom Workers, an affiliated ministry of WELS, is launching a new partnership with high schools and other youth development organizations titled "Build up: Mentoring teens in trades." Skilled construction volunteers train urban teens in basic, highly useful construction skills while mentoring them and sharing the love of Jesus with them.

SEE MORE ► at [kingdomworkers.com](http://kingdomworkers.com).



## District news

### NORTHERN WISCONSIN

**Grace, Oshkosh, Wis.**, dedicated its new school addition on Aug. 22.

### HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

**WW—Paul E. Kante** celebrated 50 years in the pastoral ministry on July 26. Kante currently serves St. John, De Soto, Wis., as a retirement pastor.

The district reporters for this month are: AZ-CA—Michael Schroeder; MN—James Panning; NW—Dennis Kleist; WW—Brett Brauer.



On Aug. 9, St. Peter, Clovis, Calif., dedicated its new early childhood ministry center, Precious Lambs Learning Academy.



St. John, Redwood Falls, Minn., created its own mini youth rally after the WELS International Youth Rally in Knoxville, Tenn., was canceled. Thirty teens and five youth leaders attended the event, which used the original rally theme “2020 vision: Seeing Christ clearly. Proclaiming Christ boldly.”

## 2020 district conventions

“COVID-19 affected so much this spring and summer,” notes Brad Taylor, secretary of the South Central District. “District conventions were no different.”

WELS’ 12 districts canceled their in-person conventions that were scheduled to take place this summer. Instead, districts held digital elections for their officers while district presidents reappointed representatives to most other district positions. Some districts held short virtual conventions to hear reports from district committees.

“In a district that extends from North Carolina to New England and into Ontario, Canada, the gathering of delegates for our biennial convention is a highlight for congregations, called workers, and lay delegates,” says Donald Tollefson, president of the North Atlantic District. “The opportunity to learn from one another, to be encouraged by one another, to be built up in the faith by the grace of God was sorely missed in June 2020. We look forward to gathering together at our next convention with greater appreciation for the unity we share.”

### DISTRICT PRESIDENTS REELECTED

All 12 districts presidents were re-elected via digital election. Each of the district presidents is a parish pastor who is responsible for supervision of doctrine and practice within his district. District presidents serve as members of the Conference of Presidents, which also includes the president and the first and second vice presidents of the synod.

### CURRENT DISTRICT PRESIDENTS

**Arizona-California:** Jon Buchholz

**Dakota-Montana:** Douglas Free

**Michigan:** Snowden (Gene) Sims

**Minnesota:** Dennis Klatt

**Nebraska:** Philip Hirsch

**North Atlantic:** Donald Tollefson

**Northern Wisconsin:** Joel Zank

**Pacific Northwest:** John Steinbrenner

**South Atlantic:** Charles Westra

**South Central:** Donald Patterson

**Southeastern Wisconsin:**

David Kolander

**Western Wisconsin:** Michael Jensen



The current Conference of Presidents (photo taken in 2018). Back row, from left: Donald Patterson, Snowden (Gene) Sims, Jon Buchholz, Charles Westra, John Steinbrenner, Dennis Klatt, Philip Hirsch, David Kolander, Michael Jensen. Front row, from left: Douglas Free, Robert Pasbrig (synod secretary, advisory member of the Conference of Presidents), James Huebner (synod first vice president), Mark Schroeder (synod president), Joel Voss (synod second vice president), Donald Tollefson, Joel Zank.



PHOTO | Lightstock

## Why did Jesus use parables to teach? | Souksamay K. Phetsanghane

**AESOP'S FABLES**, a good sermon illustration, an analogy—these are all ways to communicate complex concepts in a way that is easier to understand. Similarly, Jesus used parables (Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 15) to communicate truths in an easy to understand way.

But what is a parable? Perhaps you learned that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. That familiar, simple definition will lead us to some deeper reasons why Jesus used parables to teach.

### RELATABLE

Parables are earthly stories, that is, they used common scenes from everyday life. Audiences can easily relate to them. Maybe someone in the audience lost a sheep or built a house. The audience could not only relate to but also easily understand things from daily life—like bread making or traveling. That keeps the audience engaged, for

they are actually experiencing the parable as they listen. They are in the parable, so to speak.

For example, in the parable of the two sons (Matthew 21:28-32), both the sons say one thing but do something else. Can most parents relate to that? Of course! So one reason for the use of parables is that they are relatable.

### Parables are truly a timeless trove of treasured truths.

### MEMORABLE

I would guess that many of us remember many parables. Why is that? Since parables are earthly, relatable stories, that makes them memorable.

In a parable, there is also a hook—a memorable moment that catches your attention. “The kingdom of

heaven is like . . .” (Matthew 22:2). Jesus is about to talk about heaven. You think, *I’m in!* This hook not only makes the parable unforgettable for you but also easier for you to tell to others later.

For the same reason, Jesus’ parables typically follow a basic, familiar storyline. There is a beginning, a challenge/problem, and a resolution. All of that makes parables memorable.

### SURPRISING

“No, I am your father.” That is one of the biggest surprises from *The Empire Strikes Back*. A good plot twist or surprise makes any movie or media memorable.

Now, think about the parables. There are also plot twists or surprises that typically highlight our Lord’s surprising grace. Remember these surprises? The father welcomes back the prodigal son literally with open arms, and the



# A CLOSER LOOK AT TWO PARABLES

## THE PARABLE OF THE TENANTS (Matthew 21:33-43)

**RELATABLE:** Farming was very common in Jesus' time. Even today, most people understand the basics of farming. Sometimes people rented farmland, and the payment was a portion of the crop. That is like renting a plot of land in a community garden. So, the circumstances in this parable are rather familiar and relatable.

**MEMORABLE:** Even the heavenly truth is straightforward: If you reject God's message, you will incur God's wrath, and God will reach out to others with his saving message.

**SURPRISING:** One surprise is that the tenants think, "If we kill the owner's son, the vineyard will be ours." Another surprise is the patience of the landowner. He sends multiple messengers and even his own son.

**USEFUL:** Some useful questions for us are "What is my relationship to the kingdom of God? Am I producing its fruit? Am I honoring God who gives me all my blessings?"

## THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER (Matthew 13:1-23)

**RELATABLE:** Farmers in Israel would immediately relate to sowing seed and that it can land on many different kinds of soil.

**MEMORABLE:** The heavenly meaning is again straightforward: When the Word of God is spread, there will be a variety of results.

**SURPRISING:** A big surprise is a crop a hundred times what was sown. That is an extremely high return even for farmers today.

**USEFUL:** Some useful questions for us are "Which seed am I right now, last year, ten years ago? How might I become like the seed along the path, on rocky places, or among thorns? How do I avoid that?"

older brother is upset about it (Luke 15:11-32). The landowner generously gives the same wages to the workers who worked one hour and to those "who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day" (Matthew 20:12). Surprising? Yes!

### USEFUL

Parables also have a heavenly meaning. By using earthly stories—relatable, memorable, and surprising—Jesus was able to share these heavenly meanings in a way that could immediately connect with his audience.

Maybe another way to understand *heavenly meaning* is this: a treasured truth. It is something that Jesus brought down from heaven for us to understand and use. There is something in the story for our faith and life. In the parables, Jesus hits the most important issues in this life now and beyond: our value to God, human relationships, the kingdom of God, heaven. Just read the last verse in the parable of the wedding banquet: "Many are invited, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). How important—and useful—that is for living our lives!

### TIMELESS

From the time that Jesus first told his parables, there have been new discoveries in farming and travel. Computers and the internet have transformed our lives. Yet Jesus' parables live on for there is a timelessness to them.

That timelessness lends itself to what you still do with the parables. You still learn from them. You can come back to these same parables again and again, and you will see more heavenly truths and the layers built into them. No, the parable has

not changed. What has changed since you and the parable last met? Your circumstances have changed, and so have you. "What does this parable have to teach me this time?" The truths in each parable will hit you differently because you are different. Parables are truly a timeless trove of treasured truths.

### A REFLECTION OF GOD'S HEART

See the many different reasons for using parables? Are there more? Yes! Parables were common at Jesus' time. Jesus gave another reason why he used parables in Matthew 13:10-13. But, for now, let's add just one more reason to give thanks for parables. Paul writes in Romans 11:34, "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" These parables help us know not only the mind of God but also the heart of God. In truth, we see only a reflection, indirectly as in a mirror. Like an analogy, sermon illustration, or Aesop's fables, the picture isn't always perfect and exact. But even as a reflection, these parables let us see God's love for you and me, at least as much as we can grasp this side of heaven.

One day, however, we shall see him as he is; we shall see him face-to-face. One day we shall know fully these treasured truths, even as we are fully known by our heavenly Father. "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33).



*Souksamay Phetsanghane, a professor at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wisconsin, is a member at St. Paul, Ixonia, Wisconsin.*



# THE kingdom OF HEAVEN:

## GOD IN ACTION

### Three parables teach us what God is like and how he treats us.

Evan S. Chartrand

If you had one week to live, what would you discuss with your loved ones? Would you talk about the weather? Sports? Upcoming local elections? Probably not. With one week to live, those things don't matter. You would talk about something important and worthwhile, something they need to know.

The gospel readings appointed for this month all take place near the time of Jesus' death, two of them after Palm Sunday. It's not hard to see what Jesus talked about when he only had a little time left on this earth. His topic of choice? The kingdom of heaven.

So, what exactly is the kingdom of heaven? Let's start with what the kingdom of heaven is not. It's not a location you can point to on a map.

It's not a group of people or the subjects of a king. It's not like kingdoms or nations we know. After all, Jesus told us, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

The kingdom of heaven Jesus talks about is not a location, a people, or a reference to life in heaven. Instead, it's an action, an activity. Simply put, the kingdom of heaven is God's ruling activity in the hearts of his people.

That activity follows a simple pattern: Word, faith, fruits. God speaks to people through his *Word*. That Word creates saving *faith* in Jesus. Saving faith always leads to outward signs of faith, often called *fruits* of faith. This pattern is God's ruling activity in the hearts of his people. That is the kingdom of heaven.

Why is the kingdom of heaven so important that Jesus discusses it at length in his final days? Because the kingdom of heaven tells us what God is like and how he treats us.

### THE KINGDOM AND THE VINEYARD

Jesus tells a parable about a vineyard owner who hired day laborers (Matthew 20:1-16). He hired workers at 6 A.M., 9 A.M., noon, 3 P.M., and 5 P.M., agreeing to pay each group of workers whatever is right. When quitting time came at 6 P.M., he paid all the workers a full day's wage. Whether they worked for 1 hour or 12 hours, everyone was paid the same. Understandably, those who worked 12 hours weren't happy. They thought they deserved more than the one-hour workers, even though they received a fair price for their work. The vineyard owner responded by saying, "I'm not being unfair to you. I'm being generous to them."

You might hear that parable and cry, "Unfair! Those late-arriving workers don't deserve what they got." It does seem unfair. And that's the point. God, represented by the vineyard owner, is unfair in how he deals with his people. He doesn't give us what



we deserve. Our sins deserve hell, and our wrongdoings warrant punishment. But God gives us what we don't deserve—forgiveness of sins through Jesus and eternal life in heaven. Is God unfair? You bet he is! And that's a good thing! We call God's unfairness by many names: mercy, grace, and forgiveness.

Full of mercy, grace, and forgiveness. That's what God is like.

### THE KINGDOM AND THE TENANTS

Jesus told another parable (Matthew 21:33-43). A landowner planted a magnificent vineyard, rented it to some farmers (tenants), and went on a trip. At harvesttime, he sent some servants to collect the rent, which was a share of the vineyard's crop. The tenants beat, stoned, and killed his servants. The owner sent more servants, but the tenants treated them the same. Finally, the owner sent his son. The evil tenants didn't hesitate and killed him. Jesus then asks, "What will [the owner] do to those tenants?" The answer is undeniable: "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end."

You probably agree that those tenants deserve punishment, but didn't they deserve to be punished much sooner? They defied the owner not once, not twice, but three times!

"Three strikes and you're out" might work for baseball, but keep in mind that Jesus is telling this parable to the unbelieving Jewish leaders. They were the tenants in the parable, and God was the owner. Defying God once deserves punishment, yet God gave them three chances to fall in line. This description of the kingdom of heaven leaves us with one inescapable conclusion: God is extremely patient.

Look no further than your own life for proof of that. How many times have you committed the same sin

over and over and over? That certainly deserves punishment. And yet, God still reaches out in his Word and calls you to repentance. What more could God do for sinners like us? He shows us mercy and grace beyond measure. He offers forgiveness before we even ask for it. He shows unfathomable patience as he calls us back to him time after time.

## When dealing with a sin most unreasonable, God responds with patience most incomprehensible. That's what God is like.

When dealing with a sin most unreasonable, God responds with patience most incomprehensible. That's what God is like.

### THE KINGDOM AND THE WEDDING BANQUET

One more lesson teaches us about God. In this parable, a king held a wedding banquet for his son (Matthew 22:1-14). He invited his guests to come, but they refused. He invited them again, but they did not show. Finally, the king's servants pulled people off the street to fill the wedding hall.

Later, when the king greeted his guests, he noticed a man not wearing appropriate wedding clothes. The king ordered his attendants, "Tie him up and throw him out into the darkness." Harsh? Not really. All the guests from the street must have been given wedding clothes to wear, since they had none themselves. But this man refused the gift from the king, and so he didn't belong.

The lesson of this parable is simple. To people who don't belong at the wedding feast of God, our Lord offers a perfect garment and makes them welcome. He gives us the robe of Jesus' righteousness. He supplies what we are lacking and fits us for heaven. He does that for the simplest

of reasons. He loves us. He loves us all completely.

He loves eternally. That's what God is like.

With a short time to live, Jesus focuses on the kingdom of heaven. Why? Because he's really telling us what God is like. He tells us God is mercifully unfair and gives us what

we don't deserve. He tells us God is extremely patient and gives us countless chances to repent and turn to him. He tells us God is extraordinarily loving and fits us for heaven by covering us in Jesus' righteousness.

A God that unfair, that patient, that loving—can it be true? Look ahead in the life of Jesus and see for yourself. See your Savior dying on the cross. See the living and dying proof of what God is like. See his merciful unfairness, his extreme patience, and his extraordinary love. See it and realize that's how God treats you.



*Evan Chartrand, recruitment director at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wisconsin, is a member at St. Mark, Watertown.*

**LEARN MORE** ▶ about how Jesus uses parables in his ministry on p. 26.



## Our Father

“Our Father in heaven.” So Jesus taught us his prayer. It’s actually our prayer. It begins, “Our Father.” Yet we say it so often it might have become only words in the space where we worship.

Perhaps our minds drift to some distraction, or our quiet time for prayer evaporates in the boiling thoughts in our heads. The boiling stew of troubles and uncertainty about tomorrow fogs our vision. We assume we are helpless in the face of all these things. Prayers are forgotten.

But I’m not helpless, and neither is any Christian who has a Father in heaven. I confess that I have neglected my conversation with my heavenly Father in these days. Perhaps you have too. It’s easy to do when life gets complicated. But I realized as I listened to the latest turmoil that I am not helpless and started praying our prayer again.

### Father, keep us focused on your grace and love.

**Hallowed be your name.** Where is my heavenly Father’s name respected and honored in this world? The answer is dark and awful if we pay attention to current events. But among his people, God’s name is honored. We praise him and seek to share his love and grace with others. So help us, Father, to honor you in this world.

**Your kingdom come.** God founded his kingdom on the grace and mercy of our Savior Jesus. Nothing can change that. The kingdom of this world creeps at the edge of his kingdom and rises up to destroy it. But God laughs at its efforts and promises that even hell will not overcome his kingdom (Psalm 2:4; Matthew 16:18).

**Your will be done.** We hear so much of the will of the people and the assertion of their will. On the other hand, God’s will is that all may come to know Jesus and

remain faithful until all the shouting, shooting, and anguish are over for good. He will guide even the trials and disasters for the benefit of his faithful. We seek strength from the gospel to let our light shine even through we anguish over the future and pray that his will be done.

**Give us our daily bread.** Our heavenly Father has graciously given many blessings to me and all people. Teach me, dear Father, to be content with your blessings lest I complain and grumble about what I don’t have.

**Forgive us.** Yes, forgive us for the vicious words we speak about others and the harm we inflict or even wish to inflict on those who are different. God’s Son went to the cross hearing the sounds of hatred and ridicule. He forgave them and me. May I learn to forgive others as he did.

**Lead us not into temptation.** Are we tempted to think we and our politics are so much better than others? Is this a temptation to arrogance and intolerance? What other temptations lurk even in high-sounding rhetoric? Father, keep us focused on your grace and love.

**Deliver us from evil.** The greatest evil is to lose focus on God’s grace and abandon our Father’s Son, Jesus. When we hold his grace by faith, we rest in peace and joy even in the darkest days and the most frustrating challenges. Preserve our faith in these evil days and those yet to come.

**Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory.** Heavenly Father, I confess you are almighty. In my weakness, I might doubt that. Remind me that I am a humble citizen in your kingdom under your powerful care. So are we all.

**Amen.** So shall it be. Amen.

John A. Braun | FIC Editor



# the book of James

## A BLUEPRINT FOR LIVING OUT OUR LIFE OF FAITH

Richard E. Lauersdorf

PHOTO | iStock

PAUL IS DESCRIBED as “the apostle of faith,” John as “the apostle of love,” Peter as “the apostle of hope,” and James as “the apostle of works.”

For James, as for the others, there is only one way to heaven: through faith in the Savior’s sure salvation. When James writes about works, he stresses that a workless faith is a worthless faith, that living faith is powered by and performs for the Savior. In his blueprint for Christian living, James reminds us that true faith is active in good works.

### FAITH PRODUCES WORKS

Before we speak of faith and works, we must speak of grace. God’s grace planned our salvation in eternity, prepared it on Calvary, and presents it to us through Word and sacraments. We obtain the benefits of this salvation through faith, but even our faith is a gift of God’s grace. Such faith binds our hearts to Christ and also binds our lives to his service.

With this emphasis, James does not contradict Paul, who wrote, “A person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law” (Romans 3:28). Paul describes the way of justification; James, the life of the justified. Paul warns against “law works” that the self-righteous sinner does to earn his salvation. James encourages “gospel works” that flow from the believer’s heart thankful for salva-

tion in Jesus. Paul and James are complementary, not contradictory. Like colors at opposite ends of the spectrum, both are needed to show the full rainbow of Christianity.

“What good is it . . . if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?” James asks (2:14). James does not ask whether faith can save, only whether faith that does not show itself in works can save. Such fruitless faith is dead (2:17). Even worse, such counterfeit faith is like the faith of the demons in hell. They know all about theological truth and yet only tremble in fear (2:19). Their correct knowledge dries up in the mind, never reaching their heart.

### WORKS PROVE FAITH

James continues with an example. If a Christian, lacking food and clothing, receives only the words “Good-bye, and good luck” from his neighbor, they are empty words and show the absence of faith (2:15-17). James repeats this thought with an imagined dialogue. One person says, “You can have faith without works. Why this stress on works?” The other answers correctly, “It is impossible to show faith without works. The only way you can tell that something has happened in my heart is by looking at my life” (2:18).

“Christians do not belong to a do-nothing party,” someone once said. James says the same thing. Works are never a cause of salvation, but ever a result. No more than a rose can refuse to release its fragrance or a fire to radiate its heat can faith fail to produce works. We are saved by faith alone, but true faith will never remain alone.

### DIGGING DEEPER

1. Read John 15:5 and Matthew 25:34-40. What does Jesus himself say about good works being the visible evidence of invisible faith?
2. Read Hebrews chapter 11—the “Hall of Faith” chapter with portraits of some 16 Old Testament believers. What does 11:33 point out about their deeds?



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

This is the fourth 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

**Alford, Garrett**, to Goodview Trinity, Goodview, Minn.

**Baumann, John**, to retirement

**Enderle, Jeffrey**, to St. John's, Saint Clair, Minn.

**Fricke, Joseph**, to Immanuel, Johnson Creek, Wis.

**Garbow, Daniel**, to retirement

**Hefti, Roy**, to retirement

**Kruschel, Jonathan M.**, to retirement

**Luetke, Joel**, to St. John's, Juneau, Wis.

**Meyer, David**, to St. John's, Oak Creek, Wis.

**Oblender, Wayne**, to St. Peter, Marshfield, Wis.

**Priebe, David**, to retirement

**Pufahl, Greg**, to Faith, Fond du Lac, Wis.

**Voss, Thomas**, to Martin Luther, Oshkosh, Wis.

**Werner, John**, to Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis. (in addition to current call)

**Westra, Kevin**, to Bethlehem, Hortonville, Wis.

**Zimpelmann, Matthew**, to Immanuel, Manitowoc, Wis.

#### Teachers

**Baker-Griffiths, Debbie**, to retirement

**Ehlke, Lori**, to St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis.

**Haley, Karla**, to St. John, Waterloo, Wis.

**Kapler, Patricia**, to Beautiful Savior Lutheran Early Learning Center, Topeka, Kan.

**Vannieuwenhoven, Amy**, to St. Matthew's, Oconomowoc, Wis.

#### Staff ministers

**Schuessler, Michael**, to retirement

**Schultz, Timothy**, to St. John, Redwood Falls, Minn.

SEE MORE ➤ summer 2020 teacher and staff minister assignments at [mlc-wels.edu/assignments](http://mlc-wels.edu/assignments).

### ANNIVERSARIES

**Glenham, S.D.**—St. Jacobi (100). Oct. 4. Worship, 10 A.M.; lunch, 11 A.M. to 1 P.M.; special anniversary service, 1:30 P.M.; anniversary reception, 2:30 P.M. RSVP for lunch. Bryant Laude, [budlaude@gmail.com](mailto:budlaude@gmail.com).

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

### NAMES WANTED

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

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

## PREMIUM HOLIDAY

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

Questions? Contact Benefit Plans, [bpo@wels.net](mailto:bpo@wels.net); 414-256-3299.

Ministries, 414-256-3241; [csn@wels.net](mailto:csn@wels.net).  
**WELS musicians**—The WELS Commission on Worship is asking for names of WELS musicians with advanced training in organ, piano, voice, conducting, composing, or instrumental music for the next worship conference, planned for Aug. 3–6, 2021. An application form is available at [wels.net/worshipconference](http://wels.net/worshipconference). Plans for the conference are contingent on the pandemic status in the coming year.

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).

## CALLED TO *eternal glory*

A reporting of deaths of called workers as noted in the call report. Visit [forwardinchrist.net/obituaries](http://forwardinchrist.net/obituaries).

### PASTORS

**BUNDE, GILBERT C.**  
June 10, 1927–July 22, 2020

**ENDERLE, GEORGE A.**  
Dec. 20, 1931–Aug. 13, 2020

**PONATH, DAVID M.**  
Feb. 24, 1936–July 25, 2020

### TEACHERS & STAFF MINISTERS

**STEINBRECHER  
(NÉE HELMKE), JEANNE C.**  
Aug. 16, 1950–Aug. 7, 2020

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

— Matthew 5:4



# THROUGH MY Bible IN 3 YEARS

- |                        |                       |                   |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Proverbs 10:1–11:13 | 12. Prov. 26:13–27:27 | 23. Rom. 4:16–25  |
| 2. Prov. 11:14–12:28   | 13. Prov. 28, 29      | 24. Rom. 5:1–11   |
| 3. Prov. 13:1–14:21    | 14. Prov. 30          | 25. Rom. 5:12–21  |
| 4. Prov. 14:22–15:23   | 15. Prov. 31          | 26. Rom. 6:1–14   |
| 5. Prov. 15:24–16:33   | 16. Romans 1:1–17     | 27. Rom. 6:15–7:6 |
| 6. Prov. 17, 18        | 17. Rom. 1:18–32      | 28. Rom. 7:7–25   |
| 7. Prov. 19:1–20:13    | 18. Rom. 2:1–16       | 29. Rom. 8:1–17   |
| 8. Prov. 20:14–22:16   | 19. Rom. 2:17–29      | 30. Rom. 8:18–39  |
| 9. Prov. 22:17–23:35   | 20. Rom. 3:1–20       | 31. Rom. 9:1–13   |
| 10. Prov. 24           | 21. Rom. 3:21–31      |                   |
| 11. Prov. 25:1–26:12   | 22. Rom. 4:1–15       |                   |

OCTOBER 2020

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



## WHEN I SHALL DIE

There was an elderly pastor in Texas who told his visitors one evening about his little daughter. She was sickly. She had been that way from birth. This pastor loved his little daughter and prayed with her every night before she went to sleep . . . and he listened to her as she prayed her prayer. It was the same prayer Pastor Hoeppner spoke about in *Forward in Christ* [Sept., back page].

The pastor said that one night his little daughter prayed, “Now I lay me down to sleep; I pray the Lord my soul to keep. When I shall die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.” The father gently and kindly said to his sickly daughter, “You shouldn’t say, ‘When I shall die’ but ‘If I should die.’”

The little girl said, “No, Father, when I shall die.”

The little daughter of the elderly pastor died that night.

How close are we to the eventuality that we will die? It isn’t a premonition for us, but a certainty. It is coming. One night—quite possibly soon—we will be able to say what the little sickly girl said.

Finally, each of us has his day . . . or his night. Jesus will say to each of us what he said to the dying thief, “Today, you will be with me in Paradise.” And in the face of the coming happening, I pray that the Lord will take my soul. And you pray that too. And he will!

Eric Hartzell  
Globe, Arizona

**The Greatest Gift**

**HOPE HAS ARRIVED**

**This Christmas, share with your friends and neighbors the greatest gift ever given—their Savior, Jesus Christ.**

Congregational resources are available now for this year’s synodwide Christmas outreach program.

- Christmas Eve worship materials
- Promotional tools
- Resources for additional outreach

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## A Sabbath from social media

After a long week of work and worry, the weekend always feels good. From the time I was little, I loved Saturdays. You get to sleep in. You get to watch cartoons. You get to rest.

God bless Saturday.

Actually, he did. After an intense week of creating everything that exists, God rested on the seventh day. He sat back and admired all he had made. He saw that it was good. “God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done” (Genesis 2:3).

Saturday became known as the “Sabbath,” a word in Hebrew that means “rest.” God commanded his people of the Old Testament to rest on Saturday and not to work. They were to get away from their busy lives—away from their work and worry—and simply sit back and admire all that God had done for them. The Sabbath was a day to relax, a day for family, a day to study God’s Word and worship him.

**Taking a Sabbath is good for us. It recharges our batteries. It strengthens our faith. It focuses us on what is really important.**

Saturdays weren’t the only Sabbaths the people were to take. God set up numerous Sabbaths throughout the year, holidays on which they were to rest, worship him, and admire all he had done for them.

In the New Testament, God gives us the freedom to choose when we take those Sabbaths (Colossians 2:16,17). Some Christians do it on Sunday mornings; others on Saturday nights; still others on Wednesday evenings. God does not command us when we have to worship, but he does want us to take time every week to get away from our work and worry and focus on worship and his Word.

Taking a Sabbath is good for us. It recharges our batteries. It strengthens our faith. It focuses us on what is really important.

I would like to encourage you today to take a Sabbath from social media. In fact, I encourage you to take a regular break from all media.

The year 2020 has been like no other: pandemic, social distancing, recession, killer hornets, hurricanes, racial inequality, and a tumultuous presidential election. We find ourselves asking incredulously, “What next?”

With everything that is happening, we find ourselves glued to our phones and our televisions, watching, wondering, and worrying. Our Facebook feeds are full of people wringing their hands and shouting into the wind about the problems of our world.

Now more than ever, we need to take Sabbaths. We need to turn off the television and put our phone down. We need to sit back and admire all that God has given us: our homes, our families, and our lives. We need to turn our eyes to the promises of his Word and to heaven. God’s Word puts our problems into perspective.

Yes, what is happening in our world is important and we need to be aware, but we can become so consumed by current events that we fail to live our lives. We get overwhelmed by worry. We lose sight of God’s providence and protection.

So take a Sabbath. Turn off your phone. Turn off the television. Pick up your Bible. Go to church.

Take the time to sit back and admire all that God has done for you, and you will find rest for your soul.



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



# GOD WILL *provide*


—PSALM 145:16

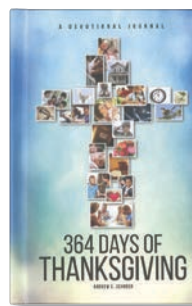
From age to age, God's endless generosity toward his people remains the same. This fall, enjoy brand-new books and uplifting resources from Northwestern Publishing House that will remind you of the ways God has blessed you both physically and spiritually.

## **NEW! Civil Government Small Group Study**

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Thomas Kock, will guide you through every chapter of Deutschlander's book. Filled with thought-provoking insights and discussion questions, *Civil Government Small Group Study* will help you define your role as a Christian and earthly citizen during this election year. Softcover, 63 pages. **LU2201199, \$4.99** 



## **364 Days of Thanksgiving A Devotional Journal**

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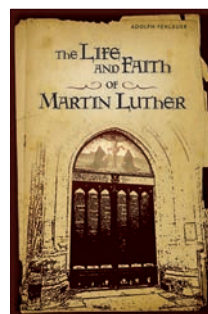
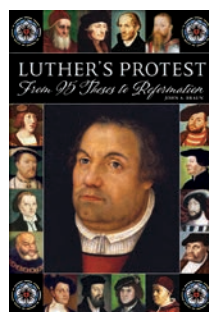
26 uplifting reflections and writing space to record one blessing each day of the year. Whenever you need a reminder, you can flip back through to see what God has done for you! Hardcover, 150 pages.

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As you celebrate the Reformation this month, expand your knowledge of its events and aftermath in vivid detail! *Luther's Protest* examines Martin Luther's efforts to return the church to God's Word and the lasting effects of his actions. This book features full-color time lines, maps, and pictures of key figures to give you a visual tour of Reformation history and the denominations that grew from the movement.

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# DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Helping friends see that God's way is best may be challenging. | Hannah M. White

ONE OF THE HARDEST THINGS that we can deal with as Christians is seeing our friends and loved ones make choices we know will bring trouble, grief, or both. We are often put in an awkward position when we see people doing things they know they shouldn't. We may feel like it isn't our place to say anything. I understand that, but I think talking with people about their sins is something we should be able to do more.

**When talking with people about their sins, we have to come to them from a place of love.** If we don't, we have no reason for bringing anything up. Then it can be seen as if we are just trying to make ourselves look better by pointing out what they are doing wrong. Consider Matthew 7:3, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" We cannot use other people's sins to make our sins look smaller. While talking with other about their sins, it is important to recognize that we too are sinners who are in no way near perfect.

When I have talked with people, I find a misconception that Christians' lives have been perfect or that they haven't really gone through trouble or difficulty. People in general don't tend to talk about their personal struggles. But when it comes to talking to people about their struggles, we can have a more honest conversation once we open up about our own sins and trials.

When it comes to having hard conversations with friends or family, we have to come from a place of real love. I think, though, that we don't always know what love really means. It's not the warm, fuzzy feeling; it's care and concern for other people. We want what is best for them and aren't going to let them put themselves into bad situations.

That concept of love is distorted when the person says, "If you love me, you'll let me do what I want." It's different. Because you love someone, you want to help that person avoid danger and trouble. You want what's best for him or her.

**When it comes to having hard conversations with friends or family, we have to come from a place of real love.**

**We also have to bring in God's Word because we are not the authority. God is.** If we come with only love, we are telling people what we think is best for them. But when we talk with them about their sins, it's God's authority, not ours. It's not our personal feelings alone that lead us to talk with them but God's Word as well. So it is not just our love; it's God's love. God doesn't put his commands in place to punish us but to bless us.

Having difficult conversations with those we love isn't the most comfortable thing. But when we address those situations with the law and gospel, it will make those conversations easier. Of course, the conversations may not go the way we want, and we may need to have more than one conversation. Yet, with gentleness and respect, we can help people see that we care about them and want what is best for them.



Hannah White is a member at Loving Shepherd, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.