

SEPTEMBER 2020

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# FORWARD IN CHRIST

A LUTHERAN VOICE



THE JOY OF THE  
**GOSPEL**

**A TIME  
FOR TRUST**

p. 6

**THE GOSPEL  
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**FORWARD IN CHRIST**  
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**POSTMASTER**

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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

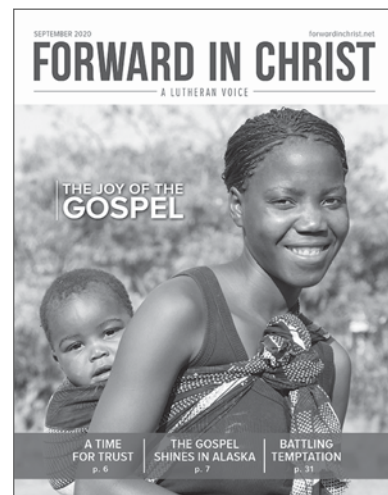
We at *Forward in Christ* pray that you see the joy of the gospel every month on our pages. In this issue, however, we decided to highlight it on our cover as well.

Why? Because at a time when you may not always feel joyful, it's good to remember the good news that God sent his Son to take away our sins so that we have a place in heaven with him. That message can bring us joy—it can make us smile—no matter what is happening on this earth.

This month, you'll find that gospel joy in Africa, where Paul Nitz shares the eureka of the gospel he saw in people's eyes after hearing the gospel for the first time (p. 10). You'll see the gospel light shine in Alaska, where a family from Guatemala discovers true peace through their Savior (p. 7). You'll rejoice with retiring teachers who embraced a ministry of telling children about Jesus and who reflected gospel joy in their daily lives (pp. 4 & 18).

You'll also be reminded that when hard times hit and joy may be hard to find, God will always care for you (pp. 14-15) and will keep his promises to you (p. 6).

Then you too will be smiling—inside and out.



COVER PHOTO | Courtesy of WELS Missions

*Julie*

Julie Wietzke

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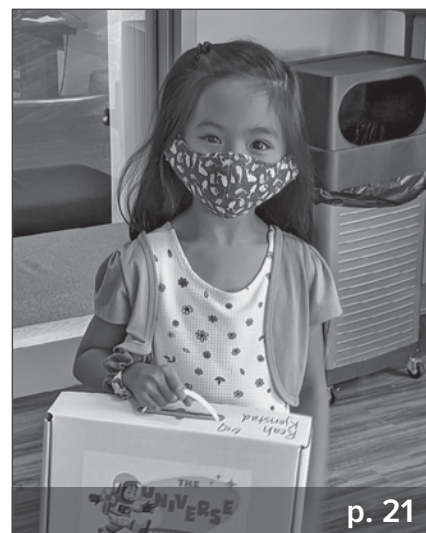
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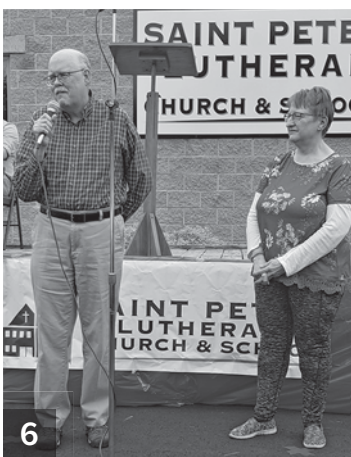
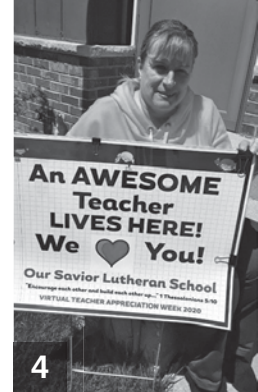
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### FEATURED ONLINE ➤



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# THIS IS WELS

More than 70 WELS teachers retired at the end of the 2019–20 school year. These dedicated teachers spent countless hours teaching their students reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic—not to mention more about their Redeemer. Here are photos of just a few of the new retirees. Thanks for your faithful service!

See more teachers' photos and their reflections on ministry (p. 18).

1 | Scott Uecker, St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis. 2 | Mark "Smiley" Leitzke, Grace, Portland, Ore. 3 | Ken Taylor, Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. 4 | Monica Dierker, Our Savior, Grafton, Wis. 5 | Joan Kulow, Good

Shepherd, West Bend, Wis. 6 | Jim and Debra Bakken, St. Peter, St. Peter, Minn. 7 | Nancy Szep, Shepherd of the Valley, Menasha, Wis. 8 | Denise Steffenhagen, St. John, Lake City, Minn. 9 | Beth Wrobel, St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis.

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# We believe, therefore we listen

**“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires” (James 1:19,20).**

Joel C. Seifert

IN JUNE, as George Floyd’s murder led to marches and protests and some protests became mixed with looting and riots, a dear Black brother in Christ told me, “Every one of my fellow Christians agrees that racism is sinful. What’s hard is when they disagree with me on my own experiences.”

My friend’s hurt was simple: When he would share what his experience as a Black man was like, his fellow Christians often didn’t listen. Instead, they were quick to tell him that his experiences were not any different than their own—even though the experiences he shared happened explicitly because of the color of his skin. They were slow to listen and quick to speak.

That didn’t just cause pain. They missed a chance to show love for a brother in Christ and to share God’s comfort.

## SPEAKING WELL REQUIRES LISTENING

God calls us to speak. He sends us with the good news of Christ that is the answer to the world’s evils. The Bible is filled with commands to proclaim the gospel. But James reminds us that, often, speaking isn’t the first step.

James wrote to Christians in the earliest days of the Christian church. He addressed issues that are still timely: economic prejudice within the church, hateful slander, and faith that doesn’t show itself in genuine acts of love. James warned believers against hypocrisy and guided them in Christian living. Here’s his point: “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”

The spirit of our age is much different! We are slow to listen—especially when people speak to us about real hurts or pains that might make us uncomfortable. We dismiss or ignore their stories. We talk too quickly and too much. If that was true of Christians in James’ day, how much more in the age of social media! James devotes his third chapter to the damage done by sinful speech, saying that our tongues can set entire lives on fire.

His words are an honest and serious call to believers of every age to reflect on our habit of quick speaking and slow listening and to repent. Praise God for the forgiveness he pours out in Christ Jesus!



PHOTO | iStock

**The Bible is filled with commands to proclaim the gospel. But James reminds us that, often, speaking isn’t the first step.**

## LISTENING WELL LEADS TO A RIGHTEOUS LIFE

God did not give those words through James simply to shame us. They are to guide us in our Christian living. What a blessing it is for my brother in Christ when believers listen to the racism he’s experienced and share God’s anger over it. What a blessing for the world when Christians listen carefully as an act of faith so that rather than giving in to human anger, we proclaim God’s anger and his forgiving love in Christ.

In James’ day, Christians in the world were few. What an urgent time to speak the gospel! The world was ready for that message. But James impressed on those believers that if the church wasn’t going to descend into hypocrisy, they needed to be quick to listen. Only then could they gain the credibility and integrity to live—and speak—in the righteous way God expects of his disciples. May God grant that among us!



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

## A time for trust

When do you find it easiest to place your trust in God and to remember his promises? Wouldn't you agree that it's easiest to place your trust in God's care and providence and to remember his gracious promises when things are going well? When your job, your family income, and your health are good? Then it is easy for us to trust in God and his promises.

It gets a little tougher when things aren't going as well. Your employer informs you that your position at work has been eliminated due to a downturn in the economy. The doctor says to you, "I have some bad news." The stock market tanks, and suddenly your retirement nest egg is only a fraction of what it was. The world is changed overnight by a nasty virus, affecting how we live, where we go, and how we worship. We see our nation torn apart by ugly politics, unrest and violence in our streets, and a culture that seems to have abandoned every value that used to bind us together. It's during times like these that maintaining trust in God and his promises gets a little tougher.

But that's when trusting in God and his promises is most important.

Job discovered that. Satan asserted that Job was faithful to God only because things were going so well for him. He claimed that if Job were to experience suffering and loss, it would be a different story. If God were to allow Job to lose everything he had and everyone he loved, Satan argued, Job would curse God.

You know the story. Job did lose everything—his wealth, his family, his health. All that he had was gone. He struggled to understand why, even to the point of demanding an answer from God. But in the end, he confessed his faith and trust in God, saying, "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21 English Standard Version). Not only was Job's trust in God most important during those difficult times; it was those very trials and tragedies in Job's life that drove him to the Lord's great promises in his troubles.

The year 2020 has been one of the most chaotic years we can remember: presidential impeachment, COVID-19, lockdowns, and a robust economy stopped dead in its tracks. Soaring unemployment that rivaled the Great Depression, protests for racial justice, rioting, looting, and destruction. Even calls to defund or dismantle police departments have found their place during this year's events. This all took place in an election year, and it's only September.

As we find ourselves confronted by chaos and uncertainty, as we wonder when and how this will end and what our lives will be like in the future, we realize that it is especially in times like these that we are compelled and invited to look to our gracious God with a solid trust in him and in his gracious promises. These are times when faith and trust in our Savior cannot waver or give way to fear or despair. These are times when God promises to hold us in his gracious hands and to cause all things to work together for the good of those who love him. The deeper the trouble, the darker the days, the more important it is to trust.



Mark G. Schroeder | WELS President



PHOTO | Mel Anne Designs





# CONFESSIONS *of faith*

**A girl from Guatemala discovers the light of the gospel in Alaska.**

Christopher R. Ewings

PHOTO | Lightstock

AS THE MORNING mist mixed with the bright beams of the sun's first rays over Baja Verapaz, Guatemala, ten-year-old Hany Guzmán would stand out on her earthen porch to greet the day. With a mug of *atol de elote* in her hand, she watched the cool fog slowly dissipate and the shadows silently disperse as they gave way to the scorching heat and piercing light of a Sunday morning. The sweet, corn beverage brought warmth to her body and strength for the day as she helped get her family ready for church. Slipping through the front door, she would wake her three younger siblings with whom she shared a single bed. They would march off together to attend their local congregation's *misa*. Sometimes her parents would accompany them and other times they went alone, but Hany wouldn't miss a mass for the world.

They soon found their customary spot in the back of church and sat down. Although the sun still shone brightly through the stained-glass windows of the cathedral, it seemed as though an even denser fog settled in. Hany and her siblings heard the priest read the Bible and give short talks about how they were to pray to the right saints to find fame and fortune, but it just didn't seem to make sense. There was a spiritual haze that never seemed to lift, a darkness that just wouldn't disappear. Hany wondered to herself, *Is there any way I can go to heaven?*

## LIVING IN THE DARK

Many things about life in Guatemala were dark and dismal. Little hope lurked on the horizon. With political unrest in their home country exacerbating the already crippled economy, the Guzmán family found themselves looking for a new life. Some of their relatives had already made the move, pioneering a path to the North—all the way to Alaska, the Last Frontier.

To Hany, Alaska had been nothing more than a place on a map meriting little more than a passing mention in geography class. To her, it seemed like a fictional land shrouded by snow and ice and smattered with bears and other beasts. Never, not even in her wildest imaginations, had she ever considered that she would call it home.

A hot and muggy December day marked the occasion for a life-altering trip. Hany recalls waking up before the sun rose to get on a bus that would take her family to Aeropuerto Internacional la Aurora in Guatemala City. As she wiped the sweat off her brow before entering the air-conditioned plane, she wondered to herself what the future held. She stared out the window, watching her home country shrink until it was completely covered in clouds. She said a silent prayer, asking God to bless her new beginning in the United States.



Above: Hany (far left) at Camp Luther in Alaska. Top right: The Guzmán family. Bottom right: Hany and her siblings in Guatemala.



After a trip of more than 5,000 miles, the Guzmán family landed at Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport. Hany pulled her coat close around herself to brace herself against the arctic air and, in a way, to face the cold and bleak unknown of the frigid far north.

#### FINDING THE LIGHT

Although the plane touched down in darkness, a bright ray of hope was beaming. So much more awaited the Guzmán family than a robust economy, a safer environment to raise a family, and a better educational system. Soon the Light of the world would illuminate their path.

It wasn't all sunny skies for Hany, though. The time of transition necessitated bouncing from one place to the next as they looked for a place to live. It was hard to have any sense of stability with so much upheaval. Attending a new school is difficult enough for any child. Uprooting a kid from an entirely different culture, customs, and educational system is downright jarring. Mix in a new language and you've got the perfect recipe for frustration and failure.

A relative helped find the Guzmán family a place in an apartment complex. Oddly enough, perched on the side of the road in plain sight from their new apartment stood a burgundy sign with white letters that piqued their interest: *Iglesia Luterana de Fe en Cristo*. The family decided to stop by and see why their new neighbors had a sign written in Spanish.

On a bright and sunny summer evening in Anchorage, the seven o'clock sun still burned intensely on the hot parking lot as the Guzmán family—Rebecca, Hany, Brianna, David, and Alegría—dropped by Faith Lutheran Church. Hany had begun to acclimate to her new school setting, and reaching deep into the little English train-

ing she had in her Guatemalan schooling, she mustered the courage to knock on the door. It came as a relief when a pastor greeted them with a smile and, even more important, in Spanish. As the warmth of their relationship grew, the Holy Spirit used the light of the gospel to pierce through the gloom of shallow theology and bring true peace.

#### LIVING IN THE LIGHT

The entire Guzmán family quickly became involved in church life—especially Hany, who craved more and more of the truths she was learning from the catechism. In fact, she was personally responsible for seeing her church's catechism class grow from a dozen kids to over 30. With an influx of immigrants from Central America into the neighborhoods, Hany took the initiative to invite them to learn what she had. One friend at a time joined the class until a dozen immigrants from countries like Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras were coming to class.

## MINISTRY IN *Alaska*

**WELS has eight congregations in Alaska, including Faith's ministries in Anchorage. Baptized membership totals 1,060. Two of these congregations offer Christian education through a Lutheran elementary school and preschools.**

Statistics taken from the 2019 Statistical Report



Without a good grasp of English, these students needed a new class in their native language. At first, these ambitious students wanted to try their hand at attending catechism class in English. They held their own initially, but everyone soon admitted that a class in Spanish would be better. Pastors often wonder if adding another opportunity is worth the time and effort, but these eager souls made the answer to that question easy and obvious.

Five years later, a frigid December morning in Anchorage was grey and the sun would only creep along the horizon. A glance outside at the thermometer showed 25 degrees below zero as the first hints of daylight slowly revealed the silhouette of the mountains beneath a cloudless sky. It was Sunday morning, and it was still Hany's job to wake her younger siblings for church, but they could wait a while to brave the cold.

The short trip to church was less than a block. Hany started to make some hot chocolate as she waited for the sun to creep over the Chugach Mountains. In a few short hours, she and her siblings would be on their way to *Iglesia Luterana de Fe en Cristo*. She still wouldn't miss a service for the world. Although the sun barely skimmed the tops of the peaks outside, inside her church one thing was clear—the light of the gospel had changed her life. The same sun that warmed her face in Guatemala now shone through the stained-glass windows of her new church, but here the mystery of salvation was no longer unknown. Here she heard the unobscured gospel that brought clarity to her mind and comfort to her soul.

Hany and her sisters and brother found their spots in the back pew. From her vantage point, Hany could see many people she had invited to church herself. Later in the service, the congregation would confess its faith together using the familiar words of the explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed: "All this he did that I should be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally."

There was no longer any doubt; the darkness dissipated, and the fog lifted. Wiping away a tear, Hany chimed in with confidence and conviction: "¡Esto es ciertamente la verdad!" This is most certainly true!



Christopher Ewings is pastor at Faith/Iglesia Luterana de Fe en Cristo, Anchorage, Alaska.

# FAITH'S MULTIFACETED *ministry*

In one building located at 5200 Lake Otis Parkway, three different groups of believers gather together each week to worship. With an English service in the morning, followed by a church service in Spanish and another in Hmong, the ministries of Faith, *Iglesia Luterana de Fe en Cristo*, and Faith Hmong Mission are uniquely vibrant—there is no other church quite like it in WELS, with groups meeting to worship in three different languages every week.

Most of the worship services throughout the year are conducted at different times, but three times each year all three groups come together for a trilingual worship service. It's a little piece of heaven on earth to see the diversity of believers and the unity of faith.

Anchorage is home to people who originally hail from nearly every nation under the sun; there are over one hundred different languages spoken in its homes. The 26 most diverse public schools in the nation are located just a few miles away from Faith. On the doorstep of this church is a population that is likewise known for its religious indifference. While Anchorage receives the same amount of light as any other place on the globe, spiritual darkness is on display in this northern city.

The Lord of the church continues to use this multifaceted ministry to illumine those who are walking in darkness.



*Iglesia Luterana de Fe en Cristo* at Christmastime.

# The joy of the G S P E L

After serving 27 years in Africa, a missionary reflects on how ministry changes but God's grace remains constant. Paul D. Nitz

GO IN WITHOUT EXPECTATIONS. That's a maxim I've found useful when I had to cross cultures.

**Many years ago, as a seminary graduate, I moved to Malawi to serve as a missionary.** After seminary graduation, we waited five long months for a visa so that we could move to Malawi. I suppose I should have studied up on Malawi, gotten a head start on learning the language, and talked to many people to get advice. I didn't. Someone had told me not to build up expectations in your mind before moving to a new place. They said that was a sure way to make the culture shock worse.

So I went in empty and uninformed. I learned what Malawians were like by talking to Malawians. I figured out what it took to live in the country by living in it. I learned the language by using it. That worked well for me.

But in spite of my best efforts to be entirely empty going in, there was

one expectation that I could not chase out of my mind. I had the picture in my mind that our WELS mission was huge in Malawi. What I found was that there were many, many large Christian churches already well established in Malawi. I was feeling disappointed and perhaps a little depressed. Did we need to be here?

But my attitude changed when I started learning the local language. I walked around the neighborhood and used what I knew, adding a new phrase or two every day. After a few months, I had gotten to the point of asking things much more complicated than, *Muli bwanji?* (How are you?). I was going around asking things like, "If King David in the Bible was a murderer, then how do you think he got to heaven?" Through thousands of conversations with Malawians, I became very happy that I had been sent as a missionary

to Malawi. I found that no one I talked to (even the churchgoers) had actually heard the gospel.

**I started to serve our Lutheran churches once I knew enough Chichewa,** and I found that so many people were hearing the gospel for the first time. During my ten years preaching in churches, not a week went by when I did not see that eureka of the gospel in an adult's eyes. A few times I literally saw tears of joyous amazement over the grace of God in Christ. And then there were over one thousand babies I brought the gospel to through Baptism.

After those ten years, I began teaching at the ministerial school. I've had the blessing of teaching dozens of men who are now pastors or will be pastors. They are now going out and seeing the eureka of the gospel, baptizing, preaching, teaching, and giving the comfort of the Lord's Supper.





# SUPPORTING MISSIONS WORLDWIDE

In the past four years, I've also been blessed to lead our team of Africa missionaries. Our focus is on building up the 125-plus African pastors in our sister synods in Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Cameroon, Malawi, and Zambia. We offer advanced classes and workshops, and we still support the training of new pastors. On top of this, we're finding new places to bring the gospel. Groups of pastors and their congregations have called us in to teach the Word in countries like Liberia, Rwanda, and Uganda.

**It's been a wonderful blessing to be a missionary in Africa.** It has exceeded expectations! And now we're moving. My new job will be to support all our world missions worldwide as a missionary advisor. We'll be living in the United States again. After 27 years away, that's almost a foreign country to us.

I'm already trying my best to go in empty, without expectations. I know the culture in the USA has changed hugely since 1993. My family has had a dozen long visits back to the States and seen some of it, but we haven't lived in it. It will be a big adjustment, but one we trust God will bless. We will try not to build up expectations about how people act, what traffic is like, or how great the pizza is. We'll wait and live it and learn it as it comes.

But we do have one big expectation. We expect we'll keep on being surprised by the grace in our own lives and by seeing how powerful and effective his Word is in the lives of others around the world.



Paul Nitz is the One Team counselor for WELS World Missions.



Paul Nitz started in his new position as One Team counselor at the Center for Mission and Ministry in August.

This position in the Missions Office was designed because of how quickly the number of world mission fields is expanding. WELS is currently maintaining contacts and relationships in 57 countries around the world—40 as mission partners and 17 as exploratory work. Just within the past seven years, WELS has grown in Africa from work in 4 countries to outreach possibilities in 13.

Nitz will be working with “One Teams” in World Missions’ seven different regions—Native America, Latin America, Africa, Europe, Asia, East Asia, and Multi-Language Productions. These One Teams consist of stateside administrative committees that work with the missionary teams to conduct gospel ministry in each area.

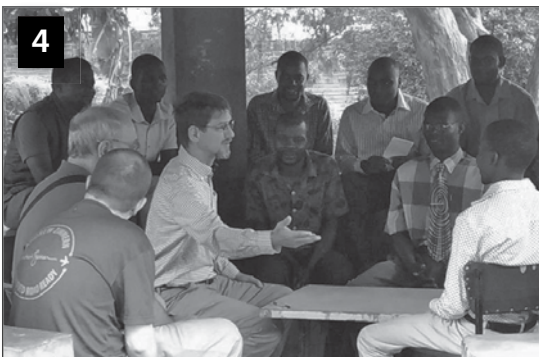
“[Paul’s] number one priority is to work with the One Team leaders to provide them what they need to keep the ongoing ministry going,” says Larry Schlomer, administrator

of WELS World Missions. According to Schlomer, this means helping the teams determine “how to use the resources at hand so they don’t drop any of the work they currently have going while being able to expand to meet the needs of new places.”

The new position will also free up time for Schlomer to meet with church leaders around the world to strengthen contacts for worldwide outreach.

Schlomer says Nitz is uniquely prepared for this role. “He really has lived the goal of a mission, starting with raising up churches to training the pastors to lead those churches to stepping into a team that is looking to do the same for other mission fields. All of these things make him a trusted counselor and a trusted mentor for other people who are leading the teams in our world fields.”

LEARN MORE > about WELS World Missions’ work at [wels.net/missions](http://wels.net/missions).



1 | Paul Nitz and his wife, Susan, with their son Henry when they moved to Malawi in 1993. Paul had just graduated from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. 2 | The Nitz family 27 years later as they prepared to return to the United States: (Left to right): Frances, Susan, Paul, and Joel. Missing from this photo are Paul and Susan’s four other children—Henry, Erin, Reuben, and James—who already are living in the United States. 3 | Paul Nitz meeting with African pastors in 2002. 4 | Prof. Paul Nitz teaching ancient Greek as a conversational language to students at the Lutheran Bible Institute in Lilongwe, Malawi, in 2017. 5 | A farewell gift of a batik map showing the places the Nitz family lived in Malawi. 6 | The Nitz family at the church at Rumphi, Malawi, in 1995.



PHOTO | Lightstock

# PLEASE EXPLAIN

Does Jesus build his church on Peter and his successors? | Mark S. Voss

**IT HAD BEEN** another busy stretch for Jesus. With his disciples in tow, he had been traveling all around Galilee preaching, teaching, healing, and amazing large crowds of people. He had just fed the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish. Later that night he walked on water. One after another, people came to Jesus with their burdens. Many brought loved ones who were sick, begging for the chance to just reach out and touch the edge of his cloak. All who touched him were healed (Matthew 14:36). Nothing is impossible for the Son of God. Imagine the Twelve watching, marveling, and praising God as Jesus brought healing from heaven both for body and for soul.

## BUILDING THE CHURCH

Next, Jesus and his disciples made their way to Caesarea Philippi. When they arrived, Jesus gave them a pop quiz: “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13). What’s the

word on the street about me? Jesus didn’t ask for his own benefit, of course. He knows all things. But this would be a teachable moment for the Twelve.

They said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets” (Matthew 16:14). For any other traveling rabbi, those answers probably would have brought a warm blush. Not bad, ranking up there with the most prolific prophets ever to have lived. Jesus, though, wasn’t flattered. All of those responses fell short of the truth of who he really was and is.

So Jesus made it personal. He looked at his disciples and asked them point blank, “But you, who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15). This time Jesus wasn’t asking about the word on the street; he was asking about the conviction in their hearts. Peter, courtesy of knowledge granted him from his heavenly Father, piped up

for the rest of the group and gave an answer that hit it out of the park: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). You, Jesus, are not just some terrific teacher. You are far more than just an engaging speaker or even a showstopping miracle worker. You are the Christ, the Anointed One, the promised Messiah sent from heaven. You are the Son of God made flesh to be the world’s Savior.

Jesus’ response to Peter’s statement has been debated for much of the last two thousand years. “Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overpower it’ ” (Matthew 16:17,18).

What is this “rock” that Jesus was referring to? Was it Peter? Was Jesus here appointing Peter to be the first



pope and assuring him that the church would be built on Peter and a line of his successors? Or was it Peter's confession of faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God? Was Jesus saying that the church of all ages would be built upon the substance of Peter's grand confession of faith?

### NOT ON MAN

To answer that question, we go back to the words of Jesus and give them careful consideration. What we find is that Jesus is using a play on words. Peter's name in Greek is *petros*. It's a masculine noun. A *petros* is a loose rock, a boulder. But after identifying Peter as a *petros*, a rock, Jesus went on to say that he would build his church on this *petra*. In Greek, a *petra* is a rocky cliff or ledge, the kind of rock that Jesus said the wise man built his house upon in Matthew 7:25, the kind of rock in which they would hew a tomb (Matthew 27:60). The word *petra* is a feminine noun. It's not referring to Peter, but to the content of the confession that Peter had just spoken. If Jesus had meant that his church would be built upon Peter himself, then he could have said, "on you" or "on you, Peter" (on you, *Petros*, not, as Jesus said, on this *petra*). Jesus spoke of building his church not on a person but on the truth that he is the Christ, the Son of God, the promised Savior from sin.

In the very next verse, still part of his response to Peter's confession of faith, Jesus went on to say, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19). The key that unlocks heaven to sinners is the gospel. Later Jesus gave the ministry of the keys not only to Simon Peter but to all of

the apostles when he appeared to them on Easter evening (John 20:23). Jesus gave the keys to his church on earth, to forgive the sins of penitent sinners but to refuse forgiveness to the impenitent as long as they do not repent, as Luther's Small Catechism teaches us.

Furthermore, just two chapters later we find the disciples asking Jesus, "Who then is the greatest in

apostle knew himself well. He was, like all of us, a sinner who did not deserve to be in the presence of the perfect Savior (Luke 5:8). He was, like all of us, a man with weaknesses and failures. The church of the living God could never be built on Peter or on any sinful mortal for that matter. Nor does it ever need to be. It is built on Christ Jesus, the cornerstone, the Son of the living

**The church of the living God could never be built on Peter or on any sinful mortal for that matter. Nor does it ever need to be. It is built on Christ Jesus.**

the kingdom of heaven?" (Matthew 18:1). Why would they have asked that question if they already had heard Jesus saying that he would build his church on Peter and his successors? If that were the case, they would have known that Peter clearly was the greatest.

### BUT ON CHRIST

The church is built on Christ alone. In 1 Corinthians 3:11, Paul writes, "In fact, no one can lay any other foundation than the one that has been laid, which is Jesus Christ." Ephesians 2:20 teaches us that God's people are built "on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the Cornerstone." The firm foundation of the Christian church is the doctrine that Christ has given through the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles, written for our learning on the pages of the Bible, the very Scriptures that testify about Christ (John 5:39).

Unarguably, the Lord graciously accomplished some great things through Simon Peter. But still, the brash, outspoken disciple-turned-

God, the very one who lived and died and rose again to win our forgiveness so that we could build our every hope for time and for eternity on him.

That's the truth that God, by grace, has enabled us to confess right along with Simon Peter. Keep building on Jesus. He is the most solid foundation that ever was and ever will be. "On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand" (*Christian Worship* 382).



Mark Voss is pastor at Divine Grace, Lake Orion, Michigan.

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

# Q&A WITH DAVID SCHARF



## Does God really care? Look at the trouble we see. Why does he seem so distant and disinterested?

### GOD HAS A HIGHER GOAL FOR US

Deism is the belief that says God created the world but then removed himself from its operation, like a clockmaker who creates the clock but then lets it run on its own. In other words, he is not directly involved in this world.

But it is not just deists who think this way. Sometimes even Christians believe that God is distant or disinterested about the evil and suffering that exists in this world.

The Bible explains why it seems that God is not interested in the evil that takes place in the world. Simply put, it is because a perfect life in this world is not the goal! That would be impossible because of sin in this world. Romans 8:19 says, “The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed” on the Last Day. A perfect life in this world is not the goal.

Then why doesn’t God just end the world right now? Peter explains, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). God wants to bring many more to repentant faith!

### THREE POINTS OF PROVIDENCE

Though God has a higher goal for us than this world, he still does care for us while we are in the world. This is called God’s providence.

First, God preserves his creation. Preservation refers to God’s daily care and sustenance of creation. The psalmist recognized this when he wrote, “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time” (Psalm 145:15).

Second, God concurs or cooperates with creation. God enables creation to function by estab-

lishing the “laws of nature.” The psalmist wrote, “He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills” (Psalm 147:8). The apostle Paul said, “In [Jesus] all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17).

Finally, God governs, that is, he directs the affairs of creation to accomplish his will. Jeremiah wrote, “LORD, I know that people’s lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). And remember what God’s will is. He wants “all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

### JESUS IS PROOF GOD CARES

In the Nicene Creed, we confess, “For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and became fully human.” Why? God did that for me, for us and for our salvation!

Traditionally (and still today in some Christian churches), fittingly, there is a pause in the service at these words to give people time to kneel or bow their heads in awe of God’s action of becoming man for us. “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (John 3:16). Never gloss over that profound statement! If I had ten sons, I would not give one of them up for anyone! But God did. Jesus suffered for our sins on the cross and rose from the dead.

God cares! Jesus invites us to come to him with our burdens and troubles. He wants us all to leave behind this imperfect world. He has opened the door to a perfect life in heaven.

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

READ MORE > about God’s providence in *God’s Providence—He Cares for You* from the People’s Bible Teaching series. Available at [nph.net](http://nph.net); 1-800-662-6022.



# God *cares*

David G. Scharf

**DOES GOD REALLY CARE?** Not only does God care for this world, but he is also genuinely interested in each one of us.

The Bible is full of beautiful passages that illustrate God's great concern for what happens in the world and your life.

- "He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name" (Psalm 147:4). Wow! Some estimate that there are 70 sextillion stars in the universe. That's ten times the number of grains of sand on the earth. And God calls each by name!
- Jesus said, "The very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Luke 12:7). I don't notice when a few of my hairs make their way to the shower drain, but God does! He doesn't just care about the big stuff but thinks about everything, down to the smallest detail.

Take a minute to brainstorm one or two other passages or truths from the Bible that show God is interested in what happens in the world. \_\_\_\_\_

## IT'S IMPORTANT TO SEE THE BIG PICTURE

Job is an excellent example of the importance of seeing the big picture when talking about this topic. Job suffered greatly, but the conclusions he and his "friends" came to were flawed because of their lack of perspective. God said to Job, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?" (Job 38:4) and then went on to illustrate how Job (or we for that matter!) could not possibly comprehend all that God does every day for us.

We need to see the big picture. This world will pass away. In love, Jesus gives us the

signs of the end of the world in Matthew chapter 24 and explains what he wants suffering to produce at times in Luke chapter 13.

## Read Matthew 24:3-14 and Luke 13:1-9.

Explain how knowing these things helps us to deal with suffering in the world and our lives. \_\_\_\_\_

## BE READY WITH THE REASON FOR THE HOPE YOU HAVE

1 Peter 3:15 says, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." God carefully created Adam and Eve. He continues to knit us together in our mothers' wombs. God promised a Savior and carefully governed all of world history to bring Jesus into this world at exactly the right time to die for our sins. After the flood, God promised never again to destroy the world with a flood but instead promised that seasons and day and night would never cease. Does this sound like a God who is not interested in our lives? No!

## Read Matthew 6:25-34; John 14:1,2; Romans 5:3-5; Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 4:15; and Revelation 21:4.

A coworker says, "God seems like he's a million miles away right now. He doesn't care about what I'm going through!"

How would you respond? \_\_\_\_\_

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

# PARENT CONVERSATIONS

My kids and I have spent almost no time apart since mid-March. With school starting soon, I'm a little nervous about how my youngest, who is six, is going to handle the separation. Are you running into this issue with your kids? If so, you will find great tips from this month's authors, including ideas on how to help alleviate any type of anxiety. Try them out and let me know what works best for your family.

— Nicole Balza

## HOW SHOULD I HANDLE A CHILD'S SEPARATION ANXIETY?

WHEN I FIRST was asked to write about separation anxiety, I immediately thought of my three-year-old, whom I refer to as my barnacle. She clings to me at all times. In fact, if I close the bathroom door for some privacy she usually sits outside and cries or repeatedly asks how long I will be in there.

Our family has been around each other a lot more lately due to the present global pandemic. My girls are with me as we attempt home-schooling, and my husband has been doing a majority of his work from home. Through all this, my barnacle has started to latch on to me even more than normal, to the point that she won't even go to her father at times. So I thought, *Easy peasy, I've got this article down. It's every day of my life with my three-year-old.*

### UNEXPECTED ANXIETY

My husband is a social worker who works with homeless veterans, so there is a point each week when he has to leave his garage office to check in on his clients. There is usually a cheerful good-bye from my daughters and me because we know he will only be gone for two to three hours. My barnacle is content that she can continue to cling to me, and my six-

### SEPARATION ANXIETY TOOLBOX

1. Practice separations from primary caregivers.
2. Remind the child that you will come back.
3. Be specific about your return so a child can understand: "I'll be back after your nap."
4. Give the child your full attention when saying good-bye.
5. Have a short, simple, consistent good-bye routine.
  - Yes: "I'll see you later."
  - No: "I'll miss you so much!"
6. When left with a child missing a caregiver:
  - Redirect with questions that look forward.
  - Allow the child to write a letter or draw a picture for the individual they are missing.
  - Find things that are familiar in a new environment.
  - If the child is physically upset, encourage deep breaths, stretching, or self squeezes.

year-old knows there is definitely more screen time and junk food when her father is gone.

One morning recently, though, my six-year-old daughter was angry and cranky when he left. She continued to take out her frustration on her sister and me. After a few back-and-forth exchanges, I finally snapped at her and asked, "Why are you so cranky?"

She simply responded, "I don't want Daddy to leave."

Confused, I looked at her and said, "Why? He's just going to work like usual."

She burst into tears and said, "I don't want him to leave the house because they are hurting Black men like him right now."

I burst into tears with her.

### GOD'S COMFORT

This was not the regular separation anxiety I faced daily with my barnacle. For my daughter, this was real fear and anxiety that she would never see her dad again. We did all the normal things that I would do when separation anxiety creeps up. We took deep breaths, we did some stretches, and we wrote Daddy a note and drew him a picture to tell him how much



we love him. She needed more, so we dove into Scripture. I typed “anxiety” into my Bible app and came up with Philippians 4:6,7: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

I read this to myself, then read it to her. I said, “I think we should pray.” I started a simple prayer, and my daughter soon took over, sharing her worries and fears with Jesus. I can’t tell you exactly what she said because I was so busy watching her body language as her body started to relax. You could see the anxiety and the fear dissipate. In that moment we could have tried all of my calming techniques for anxiety, but what she needed to do was cast her anxieties on Jesus and have the reassurance that he was watching over her—and her daddy too.



Meg Clemons-Smith and her husband, Paul Smith, are raising two young daughters in Los Angeles, California. After receiving her MA in psychology and human behavior, Meg decided to take a break from behavioral therapy to be a full-time mom.

**TOM AND CARRIE** were exasperated. It was Monday morning, and once again, their eight-year-old daughter, Emily, was crying and begging to stay home from school because she felt sick. No amount of talking, coaxing, or reassuring helped. In desperation, they scheduled an appointment with Emily’s pediatrician. After a thorough examination, the doctor explained that Emily was experiencing Separation Anxiety Disorder and referred her to a counselor.

**Separation Anxiety Disorder may involve symptoms that are persistent, excessive, and intense.** These

symptoms often lead to major distress in family relationships, friendships, and school attendance.

Some of the potential symptoms of Separation Anxiety Disorder include

- high anxiety, even misery, when separating from a major caregiver;
- worry about losing a caregiver;
- whining, crying, begging, or tantrums when facing separation;
- being afraid to sleep alone or without the caregiver; and
- frequent complaints about headaches, stomachaches, nausea when separated or when separation is anticipated.

Separation Anxiety Disorder often develops after a stressful life event. However, sometimes there is no identifiable trigger. Genetics also appears to play a role, as anxiety tends to run in families. Parents who are overly protective may unintentionally contribute to their child’s worry and fear.

About 4 to 5 percent of American children ages 7 to 11 experience Separation Anxiety Disorder, as well as approximately 1 percent of teens. Boys and girls are equally impacted.

As is true with so many issues, early intervention can help to alleviate problems before they become bigger issues. Without treatment, children are at greater risk of depression, anxiety disorders, school avoidance, academic underachievement, low self-esteem, and strained relationships with family and peers.

**Effective treatments are available that can help to bring relief, often in a short period of time.**

These treatments may include a combination of

- individual counseling, which helps the child to modify fearful thoughts and face fears;
- professional Christian counseling and/or pastoral counseling that incorporates reflection on Scripture passages about worry, anxiety, peace, and trusting God;

## TIPS for parents of anxious children

1. Pray with your child about any concerns or fears.
2. Share Scripture passages that offer encouragement regarding anxiety and worry.
3. Listen to your child without judgment.
4. Role model being calm.
5. Talk with your child about how you deal with anxiety.
6. Communicate with your school, pediatrician, and pastor about your child’s anxiety.
7. Facilitate connections with classmates to reinforce peer support.
8. Practice being apart. Begin with small periods of time and gradually increase the amount of separation.
9. Teach anxiety management and relaxation skills, such as slow breathing, counting to ten, meditating on Scripture, praying, or thinking about a happy memory.
10. Meet new teachers/staff and tour new classrooms before returning to school.

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- family therapy that includes parent education;
- consultation with the school; and
- medication for moderate to severe cases.

**After a few counseling sessions, Emily was feeling far less anxious and was going to school regularly.**

She learned strategies to calm her mind and body. Her favorites were deep breathing and meditating on Philippians 4:13, “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”



Sheryl Cowling is a licensed clinical social worker who is also board certified as a professional Christian counselor, expert in traumatic stress, and tele-mental health provider.

She provides counseling services through Christian Family Solutions.



A teacher retires full of memories—including monarch butterflies, baby chicks, and Jesus—after 43 years. | Ann M. Ponath

# MY CHRISTIAN *life*

**DO YOU HAVE** a favorite teacher? One who really understood or motivated you? One who made learning fun? One who shared Jesus with you? This spring 72 WELS teachers retired from ministry in our schools. More than a few retired with 40 or more years of service, concluding their classroom days with the unexpected challenge of virtual teaching in a pandemic.

One of these faithful servants is retiree Betty Bilitz. She shared 43 years of ministry blessings and her cheery smile with me in an interview using her newly acquired Zoom expertise.

## BORN TO BE A TEACHER

Betty's life began in Burlington, Wis., with her parents and two brothers. Betty remembers she "loved her first-grade teacher."

But her love for teaching really began when her family moved to New Ulm, Minn., where her father was the food service director at Dr. Martin Luther College (DMLC), our synod's teacher training school. Not only did many DMLC students visit Betty's home, but her family

also ate dinner with the students nearly every night. Betty remembers, "I was the little kid running around the cafeteria."

Betty completed second, third, and fourth grade, at St. Paul's in New Ulm. At the college, Professor Erich Sievert allowed Betty to play in his curriculum room as long as she picked up the flannelgraph pieces and erased the chalkboard.

**"You can mess up the math lesson or the reading lesson, but if you tell them how to get to heaven, you've done your job."**

Then Betty's family transferred to Kalamazoo, Mich., and Betty attended public school. After just two years, she was back to Lutheran elementary and high school when her father became food service manager at Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS). Teacher Doug Stindt at St. Paul's, Saginaw, made an impression on her. He "had a way with

kids and made [teaching] look fun," recalls Betty.

Betty returned to New Ulm to attend DMLC for college. She entered the classroom for the first time as a student teacher at St. Paul, Appleton, Wis. It was her first interaction with real students, and Betty found the experience overwhelming. She says, "I felt like maybe I couldn't be a teacher."

Nevertheless, she returned to DMLC and finished her coursework. At graduation she received her first assignment to St. Andrew, Chicago, Ill., as the first and second grade teacher, assistant organist, girls' sports coach, youth group leader, and vacation Bible school teacher! It was a difficult assignment at a "racially tense time . . . a huge test of faith for being a teacher," says Betty. She lived in a converted garage with bars on the windows. For the next three years she met many people and enjoyed teaching and exploring the city.

In 1980, Betty took a call to teach first, second, and third grade as well as coach and play organ at Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis. At that



time, Star of Bethlehem was three years old with 60 students, and the new school building was “a hole in the ground.” Over the years the school grew, and it now serves 300 students. Betty was blessed to serve within a “very mission-minded congregation” with Mike Wiechmann, a “very positive, encouraging principal” for almost 30 years. For the last 15 years of her ministry in New Berlin, Betty focused on first grade.

Betty shared her knowledge by becoming a supervising teacher and mentoring more than 20 student teachers. Although Betty says it was hard to let go of her class, she says, “I loved having student teachers! I learned more than they did—always learned something from them. Always!”

#### REFLECTING ON THE YEARS

Some favorite teaching memories through the years include seeing a first grader at a Chicago store who “couldn’t believe I was a regular person who shopped.” She chuckles about the time a student tied two other unsuspecting students’ shoelaces together when they were sitting on the classroom carpet. When everyone got up, the two students

fell over. “I couldn’t laugh, but it was hilarious,” she says. Remembering April Fools’ Day jokes like moving a teacher’s desk outside or hiding an entire class from the principal brings a smile. Betty also recalls wonderful moments like playing King of the Hill and building forts in the woods with students.

Other memories she cherishes show how her students grew in their faith and Christian love. She loved hearing parents say that their child mentioned a Bible passage or reminded the family to pray. She also enjoyed “watching the leadership and love the eighth graders showed to the little ones during weekly Color Team activities” at Star of Bethlehem. She always raised monarch butterflies and chicks with her first graders. One student made the connection—“without me telling him”—between the butterfly emerging from its chrysalis and Jesus’ resurrection!

Betty never tired of “watching the kids experience new things,” and over the years she has had her own new experiences as well. She began teaching with filmstrips and mimeographs and ended with the internet. Children’s literature has exploded

*Seventy-two WELS teachers retired at the end of the 2019–20 school year. Here several share thoughts about their ministry:*

“From rotary dial phones to cell phones, from blackboards to Chromebooks, from encyclopedias to Wikipedia, things have changed and challenged learning. But those same changes and challenges open doors to greater opportunities to explore, expand, and share. Through it all, the core of Christ-centered education remains unchanged: ‘Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever’ (Hebrews 13:8).” — Paul Wichmann



Paul Wichmann and his wife, Elizabeth, who also retired from teaching this year. Paul served the last 24 years as principal at Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis.

“To be a WELS teacher is a wonderful gift and career. In what other job do you have a designated time every day to study God’s Word surrounded by other believers?” — Karen Wilsmann



Karen Wilsmann never thought she would have to learn how to teach online, but then came COVID-19. “As much as I was afraid of it, I learned that even if you are retirement age, you can still learn new ways of teaching.”



Betty Bilitz and the first grade class at Star of Bethlehem, New Berlin, Wis., in 2012.

**“If you live within traveling distance to a WELS preschool, Lutheran elementary school, area Lutheran high school, or one of our prep schools, I would encourage all parents to strongly consider this education for their children. The love and support that you will find at our WELS schools will have your children daily growing closer to their Savior.” — Richard Huebner**




**Richard Huebner and his wife, Cheryl, both retired from teaching this year. Richard spent the last 41 years as principal at Immanuel, Greenville, Wis. He says that as administrative duties increased, he stayed in touch with students through coaching and greeting them each morning at the school's front door.**

**“I never had a day of drudgery or regret, and teaching was always fun for me. The joy of seeing students ‘get it’ was reward enough for me. It has been an honor to serve and teach in many settings, and I thank God for the privilege. To all of my former students, keep the faith, use your God-given talents, and serve the Lord with gladness.” — Martin Moldenhauer**



**Martin Moldenhauer says some of his best memories are the happy smiles of students that he has taken to Europe for study abroad classes. Here he is showing his Wisconsin Lutheran College students documents from the British National Archives of Dove Cottage in England.**

READ MORE  about these faithful servants at [forwardinchrist.net](http://forwardinchrist.net).



Betty Bilitz now and when she started teaching at St. Andrew, Chicago, Ill., in 1977.

over the years, and everything from discipline (spanking was allowed at first!) to family involvement (“everyone’s so busy”) to a “push-down curriculum” (kindergartners learning at a first-grade level) has also changed. But, Betty says, “kids are the same, parents want the best for their kids, and first graders still get excited about everything!”

### COUNTING HER BLESSINGS

Betty is a hands-on teacher. When the pandemic hit and in-person learning came to a halt, she says she felt like a floundering first-year teacher all over again. “I could not fathom how I was going to do this. It was a humbling experience, not how I wanted to go out.”

Recalling the message of her favorite Bible passage—that God will work everything out for our good (Romans 8:28)—Betty learned Zoom and Google Meet, constructed packets, and wrote e-mail messages. She had her first graders sign up for 20 minutes with her and the newly hatched chicks. When she celebrated her birthday during the pandemic, she was blessed with a surprise birthday parade from her students. Ironically, the news of the parade connected Betty through social media to her own first grade teacher, Sharon Mallow Melcher.

Betty says some of the “coolest blessings” are her “grandstudents” (three in her last class) and when former students become pastors or teachers. This year her teacher’s aide was a former student!

But she is quick to point out that “any blessing isn’t my doing. God works through us and in spite of us.” She encourages fellow Christians to consider becoming a teacher. “It’s very difficult, but very rewarding, although you might not see it before heaven.”

In retirement, Betty plans to stay in New Berlin, play organ, and give piano lessons at Star of Bethlehem. She also will continue to mentor new teachers. She looks forward to “reading for fun, organizing, and visiting people whenever I want.”

Each day, Betty excused her students with “I love you, and Jesus loves you!” Every last day of school she promised, “See you in heaven!” Says Betty, “You can mess up the math lesson or the reading lesson, but if you tell them how to get to heaven, you’ve done your job.”



*Ann Ponath is a member—and teacher—at Christ, North Saint Paul/Hugo, Minnesota.*



## “God sometimes changes our plans”

“It just wasn’t going to work to host an in-person soccer camp this year because of health concerns with the coronavirus,” explains Kurt Wetzel, pastor at Cross of Christ, Boise/Nampa, Idaho. “We had a fantastic group of teens, though, who still wanted to do something to reach out in our community and bring soccer camp to their homes. So, we did a virtual soccer camp.”

“We sat down to brainstorm how we’d pull it off,” continues Wetzel, “who we were trying to reach, how we’d pull it together and promote it. Then we started video recording. It was a full week, but the teens did a fantastic job! It was a great opportunity to ask foundational questions about how to reach people and being gospel-intentional.”

Congregations across WELS had to ask themselves similar questions as they wrestled with how to reach out to their communities this summer. Many came to the same conclusion as Cross of Christ and held virtual Bible camps and Bible schools.

The team at Resurrection, Maumee (Toledo), Ohio, rallied together to put its five-day vacation Bible school (VBS) program online.

The director of Resurrection’s VBS, Julie Sipes, notes, “Resurrection has always had a VBS program. Before we had an indoor space to house

everyone, we rented a giant tent and would hold VBS outside. For me personally, I love the in-person connection we have with each child and parent. But this year we decided to plow ahead and see what would happen. While our overall numbers were a bit less than in the past, the few comments we received were of gratitude for our willingness to still organize something the kids could do at home. We haven’t missed a year yet, and our purpose of spreading the gospel is still going strong!”

Hope, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, has a legacy in its community of holding a music camp each summer. As Mark Henrich, pastor at Hope, explains, “Hope Music Camp is one of our main outreach events. The majority of our campers are not from Hope, and many do not have a church home. In fact, we always have students who have no idea who Jesus is. This year we had some amazing leaders and tech people who said, ‘We need to do this.’ So they put together a free daily program of 30- to 45-minutes of an online music camp for a week.”

Teresa Johnson, a new member at Hope whose daughters attended the camp, says, “This was a great opportunity for them to learn new skills and fellowship with those in the church community. Music is a powerful form of expression and worship. A bonus

to having the music camp virtually was that the kids could tune in at any time—and I was able to take part as well.”

St. Andrew, Middleton, Wis., saw similar benefits to its virtual science camp. “I talked with two good family friends who do not have church homes . . . and we invited their boys to do science camp with us,” says St. Andrew member Renee Roloff. “As it turns out,



St. Andrew, Middleton, Wis., held a virtual science camp with the theme “The universe,” which included a take-home kit.

we did a lot of talking about Bible stories from the Old Testament they didn’t know—starting with Abraham’s promise. It was so cool. We opened up a children’s Bible, and the kids took turns reading. And they loved the treats and science experiments that came in the science kits we took home.”

Circling back to the soccer camp at Cross of Christ, Wetzel concludes, “Moving this event online helped us with our outreach as a multi-site ministry. Rather than having to confine ourselves to one location for a week, this is something we could share and promote with prospects at both locations. The whole time, our motto was, ‘God sometimes changes our plans. Let’s try something else and see how it goes. No matter what, we’ll proclaim the gospel and let God take it from there!’ ”

SEE MORE ➤ at [forwardinchrist.net/virtual-summer-camps](https://forwardinchrist.net/virtual-summer-camps), including videos from the camps featured.



Virtual vacation Bible school at Resurrection, Maumee, Ohio, included a backpack that parents picked up the week before the online portion began, which had items such as daily crafts, snacks, family activities, and Bible story leaflets.

## New school year brings difficult decisions

WELS schools around the country were faced with the difficult job this summer of determining what school is going to look like in the fall, after the 2019–20 school year ended with online classes because of shutdowns due to the pandemic.

With 436 WELS schools serving over 42,000 students in 33 states—some with minimal numbers of COVID-19 cases and some considered “hot spots”—plans will differ across the country. But one thing is sure: “Sept. 1, 2020, is going to look different than Sept. 1, 2019, in every single one of our schools,” says James Rademan, director of the Commission on Lutheran Schools.

While each plan will look different—with schools talking about in-person vs. virtual learning (or a combination of the two), face coverings, size of classes, social distancing, extracurriculars, disinfecting stations, and additional cleaning—Rademan says that the mindset he has seen from WELS schools as they determine how to proceed is remarkably similar: “Each one of the schools is really concerned about the safety of their students and their staff while trying to balance what is going to be best overall for the development of the children.”

Most WELS schools—including Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School (KML),

Jackson, Wis. and Arizona Lutheran Academy (ALA), Phoenix, Ariz.—are planning to start the year meeting face-to-face at school. “Christian education is way more than just teaching in the classrooms,” says Jamie Luehring, principal at Kettle Moraine. “It’s the interactions the teachers have with the students, the mentorships, the friendships, the support. You cannot do that as well virtually no matter how hard you try.”

That decision to start with in-person classes was not made in a vacuum. For both schools, it meant sending out a survey to parents and meeting with teachers during the summer to get opinions on the best options moving forward. “We believe parents need to be in the driver’s seat,” says Luehring. “We want to work with them to come up with the best solutions for their kids.”

But the collaboration went even further. Kurt Rosenbaum, principal at ALA, said that when their school’s task force began meeting in June, they looked closely at recommendations for reopening sent out by the Arizona Department of Education. He is in constant contact with the local health department to keep up with the latest health regulations. Representatives from all 26 WELS area Lutheran high schools and the two synod prep

schools also met virtually multiple times this summer to offer ideas, support, encouragement, and prayers for one another as they determined the best plans for their schools.

For both ALA and KML, the majority of the parents supported in-person classes, “but we knew that there would be some families who would want to start slowly,” says Rosenbaum. To support those students and families, both schools are offering online classes as well. “We’re trying to be all things for all people,” says Luehring. “We understand everyone is in a different situation and we don’t want to lose those kids for the sake of the gospel.” Online classes will also offer an option for international students who may not be able to get back to campuses for the start of the school year.

“There are so many people with differing opinions; there needs to be a loving response to one another,” says Luehring. “As a loving Christian family, we are going to try to work through this together.”

In the end, “flexibility” may be the key word. “Most schools are developing two or three plans and are recognizing the need to be able to pivot based on the circumstances,” says Rademan. The Commission on Lutheran Schools is offering support, encouragement, and direction to WELS schools, while not prescribing any one direction. “We are encouraging them to follow CDC and local health department guidelines and to work with the resources in their community and the schools that are close to them,” says Rademan.

Some schools in “hot spot” locations—such as southern California—may have no choice but to start virtually. “You can plan and plan and plan, but you don’t know what will happen three days before school starts,” says Rademan. “It’s a time to use the gifts the Lord has given us and trust in the Lord. The path is going to be the path he’s seeking for us to take at this time.”



Arizona Lutheran Academy was able to offer an outdoor, socially distanced graduation for its seniors at the end of the 2019–20 school year. It is planning to start this school year with in-person classes. Its theme? “He Loves Us to the End.” “It’s a perfect application that through thick and thin, Jesus’ love never wavers,” says Kurt Rosenbaum, principal.



## New faces at the Center for Mission and Ministry

Two new men joined the staff at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry (CMM), Waukesha, Wis., in July.

Paul Patterson is serving as the associate director of the Commission on Lutheran Schools, replacing Tom Plitzuweit who took a call to St. Matthew, Oconomowoc, Wis.

Patterson will be responsible for overseeing the WELS School Accreditation (WELSSA) program. He came to the CMM from Wisconsin Lutheran School, Racine, Wis., where he served as principal for eight years. Prior to serving at Wisconsin Lutheran School, he served as a principal and teacher at Peace, Sun Prairie, Wis., and Christ, Zumbrota, Minn.

While he says he's going to miss being around kids, he's looking forward to the opportunity to serve in a new role. "One of the passions I have is developing professional learning communities and tapping into the strengths our educators already have and using those strengths to maximize the benefit to the school," says Patterson. "I'm looking forward to working with schools that are interested in improvement and leveraging the resources of so many smart people in our synod to make those connections."

Jim Rademan, director of the Commission on Lutheran Schools, says, "Paul brings a vision for excellence in education and a passion for meeting the needs of both children and families being served through our schools."

Kyle Egan started as chief financial officer (CFO), following the retirement of Todd Poppe, who served as CFO for the past 16 years.

"We feel blessed Kyle has made the prayerful decision to join the leadership team at the WELS CMM and look forward to working with him," says WELS President Mark Schroeder.

Egan will be responsible for overseeing the synod's finances. He has more than 15 years of finance experience, most recently as the assistant treasurer and director of investor relations for Quad/Graphics in Sussex, Wis.

Egan is looking forward to using his professional expertise to further the ministry work of WELS. "I've had a pulling at my heart over the last several years that had me searching for an opportunity to use my abilities in a way that would help forward a mission or ministry, to do something that would align my faith closer to my professional background and the skill set that God has given me," says Egan. "There has been so much good work done at WELS, and I want to make sure I carry that forward in a good way."

In his retirement, Poppe has volunteered to work with Egan for the next few months as Egan familiarizes himself with his new role.

"I can't say enough about how God has blessed our synod (and me) through Todd's years of dedicated service," says Schroeder. "He provided strong leadership for WELS Financial Services and implemented numerous fiscal improvements to further WELS ministry. In addition, Todd went beyond what was expected of him by filling whatever role he was asked to do. We will miss him."



Kyle Egan and his wife, Janet, with their three children. They are members at Bethlehem, Germantown, Wis.



Paul Patterson and his wife, Lara, and their four children. They are members at Epiphany, Racine, Wis.

## Annual LWMS convention goes virtual

From its inaugural 1964 convention in Winona, Minn., to its 2019 convention in Des Moines, Iowa, the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society (LWMS) has faithfully hosted annual conventions for the past 56 years. Each year, the event draws attendees from throughout the country and worldwide who gather to joyfully praise God and support WELS mission work.

The year 2020 was to be no exception. Plans were well underway for the 57th annual convention in Athens, Ga., in June. The theme "2020 Vision for Missions" was chosen, and hours of planning and preparation were already complete.

Then the coronavirus pandemic swept the globe, and for the first time in 57 years, LWMS made the difficult but necessary decision to cancel its in-person convention.

"The decision to cancel was agonizing," recalls Cynthia Natsis, LWMS president. "But by the end of April, it became obvious that travel and staying in hotels would be dangerous to our members."

Despite its deep disappointment, the LWMS team adapted to carry out its mission of supporting WELS mission efforts, but in a bold new way—virtually. If people couldn't come to the convention, LWMS would bring

the convention to them by way of technology.

Through a partnership with WELS Missions, the LWMS convention was combined with WELS Taste of Missions—another in-person event that was canceled due to the pandemic. "Taste and See," the combined virtual event, was born. LWMS committee members and WELS Missions staff met weekly for months to determine how to offer key elements of both events in an engaging and interactive online format.

On June 27, the Taste and See virtual event launched. For two weeks, thousands of WELS members worldwide tuned in to view the opening and closing worship services, "Moments with Missionaries" videos, recipe tutorials from around the globe, the commissioning of new missionaries, and the LWMS flag presentation. Viewers even hosted "watch parties" for the opening and closing services.

"It became such a blessing to all involved, and due to the new format, we were able to reach so many more people than if we had held it in person," says Natsis.

Sean Young, director of WELS Missions operations, was thrilled with the unexpected number of website visitors, totaling over 9,300. "I thought we'd get a few thousand views," he says. "But from the opening service to the final day, God again demonstrated that we can't pray audaciously enough!"

Young is grateful for LWMS' dedication to WELS Missions and its flexibility in a challenging time: "LWMS is a passionate ministry partner that works diligently to share what's happening in WELS Missions. Its leadership should be commended for their willingness to embrace a brand-new model for the event."

Even during a pandemic, God continues to advance his kingdom. Through Taste and See, God moved the hearts of his people to contribute the largest service offering to date for an LWMS convention: \$72,925—all to support WELS mission work.

"I am blown away at the generosity of my fellow believers and their love for spreading the good news about Jesus," says Natsis. "Thank you for making this time of uncertainty about the virus a time of rejoicing instead. God is good!"

SEE MORE ➤ videos and additional resources at [welstasteandsee.com](http://welstasteandsee.com).



Three missionaries were commissioned at the closing service for WELS Taste and See: (left to right) Paul Bourman to a mission restart in Tigard, Ore.; Joel Nitz to Southeast Asia; and Howard Mohlke to Africa. A Q&A with these missionaries is on the Taste and See website.

### TASTE AND SEE BY THE NUMBERS

- 1,767 registered attendees
- 9,303 Taste and See website visitors from 41 countries and all 50 states
- 82 videos posted
- \$72,925 in offerings donated to support WELS missions



Psalm 34:8



Several congregations, including Rock of Ages, Nashville, Tenn., held "watch parties" for the opening and closing services.





# Focused living in Christ

**Joel Russow has written a new four-part Bible study for teens based on Colossians 3:12-15. Here he introduces the four parts, with several WELS teens sharing experiences that relate to his theme and messages.**

PHOTO | iStock

## 1 *Remember who you are in Christ.*

“What changed in the past month?” I asked, after a major hurricane roared into town and ruined the community and church. The people’s laughter indicated that so much had changed! I asked a follow-up question, “Who hasn’t changed in the past month?” Together we remembered that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

What has changed this past year? Your laughter or heartache might indicate that so much has changed. The year 2020, the teenage years in general, the canceled plans for the 2020 WELS International Youth Rally all reveal so many changes. But the Bible reveals a Savior who remains the same and who abides with us through all changes. His Word reminds us all who he is and has us remembering who we are in him.

### **YOUR FUTURE IS IN GOD’S HANDS**

Amelie Doneff

I have always loved to sing. The year I started high school, there was one group in particular that I dreamed to be a part of—the choir. I was nervous to try out, but I was confident in my abilities. I prayed to God that I would do my best and hopefully get in. The day came to audition. As I stepped through the

door of the choir room, I took a deep breath. I could do this. I was instructed to sing a song I had been practicing for weeks. I also had to sight-read a piece of music. A few days later, we had a group audition. I felt anxious, but I held on to the hope that I had gotten in.

**We needn’t worry what the future holds, because that future is grounded in Christ.**

A few days later, the ominous sign with the results was posted. I pushed through the crowd, but as I neared the posting, I didn’t know what to think. What if I didn’t get in? I slowly brought my finger up to the sign, and it followed along as my eyes scanned each line, looking for my name. I didn’t see it. My heart pounded. My vision blurred.

I didn’t know what to think. I felt alone in my sorrow, seeing people pass who had gotten in. Why hadn’t I? I wanted to feel happy for them, but I was so disappointed in myself. Was I really any good at singing?

I talked to my friends and family. They encouraged me and helped me realize that it was alright. I heard stories of how other people didn’t get in, and it made me feel less alone. One of my teachers told me, “When God closes one door, he opens a window.”

Isn't this so true? We often feel like we have our whole lives planned out; we are the ones who decide what will happen; we are in charge of the outcome. And what do we do when it does not turn out the way we want it to? Is our first instinct to turn to God, to trust that he has our futures in his hands? I think that God wants us to remember who we are—children of God. He loves us and wants the best for us. “ ‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’ ” (Jeremiah 29:11). This life is full of uncertainties, but we are destined to be in heaven with him.

I do not know what I want to do with my life. But what I do know is that God will guide me where he wants me to be. He will be with me every step of the way. We needn't worry what the future holds, because that future is grounded in Christ.



*Amelie Doneff, a junior at Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, is a member at Immanuel, Manitowoc.*

## 2 Relax. The pressure is off! Wear what Christ has given you to wear.

Did you ever take swimming lessons? Learning how to float on your back can be quite unnerving. The instructions I received were to lean back fully, to remain perfectly still, and to relax completely. A few mouthfuls of water later, I floated on the wisdom of those words.

Are God's instructions for unnerving moments and worrisome times in our lives any different? He teaches us to trust him fully and lean not on our own understanding. He assures us that he fights for us and we need only to be still and to relax. He comforts us in his gracious work for us and through us.

## TRUSTING GOD THROUGH LIFE'S STORMS

Shawn Egerer

Ever since I was nine years old, I have really gotten into the sport of fishing.

I remember one specific fishing trip out on a boat that helped change my view of God. I was about 12 years old. It was a great day for fishing, slightly cloudy with a light breeze over the lake. My dad and I checked the radar. There was a little rain above our location, but that was it.

### God was watching over us, just like he always does.

My dad, my uncle, and I packed our fishing gear and headed out a couple miles in my grandpa's boat to a good fishing reef. We drifted and caught a few keeper walleyes and some rough fish while jigging. All of a sudden, the wind started to pick up. We pulled anchor and started to head back. But before we knew it, we were caught in a storm. We had life jackets, which we definitely needed, but we also had God alongside us to guide and protect us. The wind was whipping across the water, sending whitecaps over the bow of the boat. The clouds got dark, blocking the sun and sending drenching rain upon us. The waves came higher and higher. At one moment, the bow of the boat sunk in between two huge waves, and I thought we were going down.

But God was watching over us, just like he always does.

We pushed forward through the waves. As we moved ahead, the waves got smaller and the rain lightened to a drizzle. We reached the other side of the lake, and the bright sun broke through the clouds, sending golden rays across the lake and crafting a beautiful rainbow in the mist of the storm behind us. It wasn't until then that I realized God's awesome power and love. Soaked and shivering, I sat in the boat as we cruised back to the fishing spot, contemplating the abounding love and protection God provides for us each and every day of our lives.

REMEMBER RELAX

Remember Relax



My fears of the storm caused me to doubt God when I needed him the most. But the fact of the matter is, we always need God. And he is always there for us. This event reminded me of the incredible importance of putting my trust in him. It's God who gets us through our daily lives. He saves us from our sins. The Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts. He shows grace, mercy, love, and protection to us throughout our daily lives. We just need to trust that he will guide us through our lives and get us where we need to go.

So, when storms come in your life, just trust!



Shawn Egerer, a junior at Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, is a member at Grace, Manitowoc.

### 3 Rejoice! Each of us is uniquely equipped by Christ to serve Christ.

Complete the statement: I will gladly boast about my \_\_\_\_\_.

Our first reaction is probably to answer, "Strengths!" Our God is a good and gracious giver. He has given each of us unique abilities, strengths, and talents to use to his glory and in loving service to others.

### He opens our eyes to see how even weakness and hardships become opportunities to rejoice.

But the Christian also answers, "Weaknesses!" (2 Corinthians 12:9). God uses weakness and hardships too. He teaches us to rely on his sufficient grace. He opens our eyes to see how even weakness and hardships become opportunities to rejoice.

Go to p. 7 to see an example of a teenager rejoicing in the message of the gospel and spreading it to her family and neighbors.

### 4 Refuel so you remember, relax, and rejoice in Christ.

"I'm thirsty." Sweaty play in the hot sun or toilsome labor in the scorching heat can leave you thirsting for satisfying refreshment. As a child, I remember spotting cold soft drinks in the refrigerator. I can hear my mother warning, "Don't drink that. That will only leave you thirstier. Drink water instead."

### He refuels us to remember, relax, and rejoice in youth and evermore.

My mom knew what would quench my thirst. But I still slurped down the soft drink and then scurried back outside. It wasn't long until I stumbled back inside, thirstier than before. My mother was waiting with an ice-cold cup of water.

Where are you looking to quench your thirst? This world of sin and sorrow leaves us thirsting for satisfying refreshment. Sin, stress, loneliness, and loss dehydrate our souls of rejoicing, relaxing, and remembering who we are in Jesus.

God gives us what will quench our thirst. Our Savior has cups, wells, springs of refreshment and refueling promises ready to deliver in his Word. He renews us in the new life he gave us in the waters of Baptism. He strengthens us in the forgiveness he won with his body and blood that he brings to us in the bread and wine. Take in more of Jesus through his Word and sacraments! He refuels us to remember, relax, and rejoice in youth and evermore.



Joel Russow is pastor at Faith, Tallahassee, Florida.

LEARN MORE > about Russow's teen Bible study on p. 33 and at [wels.net/youth-ministry](http://wels.net/youth-ministry).

REJOICE  
Rejoice

REFUEL  
Refuel



# FORGIVE as you are *forgiven*

PHOTO | Lightstock

## **We are to forgive others the way God forgives us—freely and often.**

Andrew D. Meyer

Every Sunday, we and thousands of other believers gather for worship in various congregations. We are greeted by the pastor. An opening hymn focuses our thoughts for worship.

Then comes a crucial moment in the service: We are invited to “confess our sins to God our Father, asking him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness.” We do so, acknowledging that we have indeed sinned against God “in our thoughts, words, and actions.”

Finally, we hear a wonderful message: “As a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” And that’s it! There’s

no interrogation process to test our sincerity or list of tasks to do in order to atone for what we’ve done. In Christ, God forgives us freely and fully!

### **RECEIVING FULL FORGIVENESS**

Do you ever stop to ponder how amazing this is? Think about how you are sinful from birth, imperfect, flawed, and defective. Then also think about all the ways you’ve sinned against God in the past week alone. I dare you to recount every inappropriate lust you’ve harbored in your mind, every swear word you have muttered, and every unwise word or action not motivated by love for God or love for others. The truth is painfully obvious: We sin far too many times for God to take notice of us or forgive us. Still, he forgives us without reservation or hesitation!

But what if God suddenly decided, “I’m done with half-hearted apol-

ogies and watching sinners make the same mistakes over and over again”? What if God stopped forgiving us entirely? Thankfully, we never have to worry about that. No matter the number or nature of our transgressions, God never sends us away empty-handed. Every single time, without fail, his declaration to us remains the same: “For Jesus’ sake, you are forgiven.”

This is a message we’ve heard hundreds or perhaps thousands of times. As a result, perhaps too many of us resist receiving forgiveness or simply dismiss it without hearing it. Sure, we might feel unworthy of forgiveness. Nevertheless, it’s ours in Christ, because of Christ, and we rejoice.

### **FREELY GIVING FORGIVENESS**

But what happens when we find ourselves in a position to forgive others? Are we as ready and willing to say “I forgive you” to another



person as consistently as God says it to us? We likely have no trouble receiving forgiveness, but many of us struggle mightily with giving it.

It's not hard to understand why. Consider the stories about the atrocities some have endured: vile slanders, domestic violence, and horrific sexual abuse at a young age! Crimes like these irreversibly ruin lives! What about the unkept promises made by those we count on for protection, guidance, and sustenance? When we suffer traumas like these, we don't forget about them. We especially don't forget about the villains who put us through such misery. As time passes, our unresolved bitterness can fester deep within until it consumes us completely. When that happens, nothing else is important, not even the compassion God has shown us. All that matters to us is that our adversaries pay to quench our thirst for revenge!

If you've ever found it hard to forgive like God forgives, you're not alone. Jesus' disciples also wrestled with this issue. "Then Peter came up and asked Jesus, 'Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother when he sins against me? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but I tell you as many as seventy-seven times'" (Matthew 18:21,22). Jesus then spoke the parable of the unmerciful servant.

He makes a compelling point: If God can forgive the millions upon millions of sins we've committed against him, then doesn't it make sense that, overflowing with his abundant mercy, we can forgive the few sins others have committed against us? If not, then why do we expect God to treat us any differently? Do we dare entertain the idea that our sins aren't as damning or that we're somehow more deserving of forgiveness than others?

Remember, we all have fallen and come short of God's demands, but we have all been justified in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:23,24). So then, what Jesus taught his disciples must apply to us also: "If your brother sins . . . forgive him. Even if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times returns to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him" (Luke 17:3,4). Jesus can't make it

## **Forgiving like God—unconditionally and limitlessly—does not make you weak or foolish. Forgiveness is strength!**

any clearer than that. When someone repents, even if it's for multiple infractions in a short time, our default response should not be to question their sincerity. We should not presume we know what's in their heart. We shouldn't demand they prove themselves worthy. Our proclamation to them is the same as God's declaration to us: "For Jesus' sake, you are forgiven!"

### **GLORIFYING GOD THROUGH FORGIVING**

Our sinful nature protests: "What about evildoers getting their comeuppance? What about charlatans manipulating me? What if someone is never sorry about what they have done?" These are concerns, to be sure. However, is it really worth letting our fears of injustice win out or, being tricked, override Jesus' clear command?

Let's say someone who's wronged you "apologizes." You forgive them, only to find out later they weren't being honest with you. You've done nothing wrong. If such an individual fails to understand or appreciate your compassion, that's their sin, not yours. But what if you withhold forgiveness because you didn't believe someone deserved it or didn't appear to be sincere, but it turns out they were being sincere? That's your

sin! If one must choose between looking like a naïve fool or being a stubborn jerk, it's far better to be the former than the latter!

But rest assured, forgiving like God—unconditionally and limitlessly—does not make you weak or foolish. Forgiveness is strength! It's the greatest expression of his love. The apostle Paul writes, "God shows his own love for us in this:

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). As his redeemed children, we forgive.

Forgiving others like God forgives us is among the most excellent ways we can honor him. Moreover, what better way to proclaim the love of Christ than by sharing the same kind of mercy we receive from him? Could we be deceived or even exploited? It's possible. But even then, forgiveness is a bold statement of trust that God's justice will prevail, whether in the short term or all the way to judgment day.

Receiving forgiveness from God on a free and constant basis is truly a blessing like no other. May he empower us to grant it to others in the same way. Whether receiving or giving, there's no need to resist. God is glorified through both!



*Andrew Meyer is pastor at St. Paul, North Freedom, Wisconsin.*

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



## The difference

I'm looking out my study window this morning. The grass is green. The birds are flying from branch to branch. The robins are hopping on the grass to find lunch. What I see is not unusual. The neighbors can also look out their windows and see the same things.

Although we see and perceive the same things, we may evaluate and interpret them differently. Yet we are the same. Each of us is a human with eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to sustain life. We eat. We sleep. We have friends, even if they are not the same friends. In many ways we are all the same.

Of course, some things make us different. Our families are not the same. A look around the neighborhood tells me that some houses are more elaborate than others and some have multiple cars in the driveway and garage. There are differences. But there still is a core of sameness.

**There is one more difference that is not visible from the window. Like all Christians, I know that I am forgiven.**

On Sunday morning, I can notice a difference. When I back my car down the driveway to travel to church, the neighborhood is quiet. It's not that I'm up at sunrise. During the pandemic, Sunday morning church is hours after sunrise. Before we could attend services, we watched services from our couch. The car stayed in the garage. Who could notice a difference?

So as I watch a family walk down the street with a new puppy, I wonder, *What is it that makes me different?* It's often hard to see how a Christian is different. From the window of every house we all look the same. We essentially are all the same. Size, race, and age are like the clothes we wear or the house we live in. They don't change the fact that we are all humans. The differences we see are often not essential.

One big difference, however, is how we perceive ourselves. I see being human as more than eyes, ears, heart, and families. A careful look at the world around me tells me that humans are flawed and imperfect. I can see that and hear that. We excuse the faults of others and hope they will overlook ours. In spite of that, we are all human and are the same in one dark and sometimes hidden way—we are imperfect and sinners.

What's different is that some refuse to understand that and others—me included—anguish over our imperfections, weaknesses, and sins.

There is one more difference that is not visible from the window. Like all Christians, I know that I am forgiven. My sins are covered by the perfection, strength, and righteousness of Christ. I am a child of God—a flawed human who is adopted by God's love and mercy.

That then makes me different in other ways. We all suffer from viruses, pain, discomfort, disappointment, and everything else that is normal for humans. But Christians understand that they are loved by God through it all. We don't just wait for all our troubles to be over. We endure patiently, knowing that our loving God controls all things for our good—even the course of national and international history.

All humans will come to the end of their lives here. It will happen to everyone I see out my window—the bike riders, the walkers, the children, and those who are walking their dogs. But Christians are not panic-stricken by that thought. The One who loves all humanity also has promised victory over that common human event.

He is risen. That hope sustains us all as Christians in every kind of chaos, disappointment, and frustration.

John A. Braun | FIC Editor



# the book of James

## A BLUEPRINT FOR LIVING OUT OUR LIFE OF FAITH

Richard E. Lauersdorf

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**LAST TIME**, James spoke about trials; this time, he speaks about temptation. Though he uses the same Greek word for both, their meanings are far different, as the context shows. Trials are outward tests that God uses to detach us from the world and attach us to his Word. Temptations come to weaken and even wipe out our faith. They come from the world around us, the devil beside us, and appeal to the evil heart within us. When they come, James in his blueprint for Christian living reminds us how to battle them.

### PUT THE BLAME WHERE IT BELONGS

People have always tried shifting the blame for temptation. Some point the finger at the “old evil foe” (*Christian Worship* 200:1). Of course, Satan has much to do with sin, but he is not the only or the closest one to blame.

Others have tried shifting the blame to God. Perhaps they don’t use the exact words of James, “God is tempting me” (1:13), but that’s where their excuses finally point. Pilate reached with dripping hands for a clean towel, and Adam blamed Eve. Both said, “Don’t blame me. Blame God who made me and the world the way we are. Blame him for the people and the things around me.”

Yet James tells us, “God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt

anyone” (1:13). Because he is absolute holiness, he makes no contract with evil. Instead, he keeps us from temptation to do evil or gives us the power to repel what the devil, world, and flesh bring. The blame for temptation lies with man’s own “evil desire” (1:14). Our flesh and the devil only put the match to the charcoal already within us.

Move over, Adam and Pilate. We too would rather shift than shoulder the blame for temptation. Like the photographer, we use the touch up of excuse to try for a flattering portrait. But that doesn’t change the real me. Always it is, “I am tempted of my own evil desires.”

As Christians we should not think that we have the old Adam tightly enough in check. Like the slickest magician, he can slip out of the tightest knots and pick the securest locks. “If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall,” Paul warned (1 Corinthians 10:12).

### PUT OUR TRUST WHERE IT BELONGS

James repeats that warning and then reminds us that when temptations come, we need to put our trust where it belongs.

Though we cannot shift our blame or sins to others, God can and did. He laid our iniquity on his Son and with his wounds healed us (Isaiah

53). Now through Word and sacrament he enables us to walk the path of the prodigal back to the Father’s house.

When battling temptations, we need to remember that though we cannot by ourselves sin no more, with Christ we can try. With his power provided in Word and sacraments, we can start standing upright in our falling-down world.

### DIGGING DEEPER

1. In Luke 11:4 we pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” What answer does 1 Corinthians 10:13 give us for that prayer?
2. What do Genesis 8:21; Matthew 15:19; and 1 John 2:16 tell us about the origin of temptation?
3. What comfort does Hebrews 4:14,15 offer us when facing temptation?



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

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

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

# COMMUNITY

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## THINGS TO NOTE

### CHANGES IN MINISTRY

#### Pastors

**Birkholz, Neil**, to North American Asian outreach consultant

**Boushek, Kevin**, to Divine Savior-Sienna Plantation, Missouri City, Texas

**Cares, Mark**, to retirement

**Engelbrecht, Thomas**, to Christ Our Redeemer, Aurora, Colo.

**Ewald, Andrew**, to Immanuel, Mosinee, Wis.

**Frey Jr., Edward**, to WLCFS-Christian Family Solutions, Germantown, Wis.

**Hundley, Kevin**, to St. John, Waterloo, Wis.

**Kock, Mark**, to retirement

**Laitinen, Jeremy**, to Shoreland Lutheran High School, Somers, Wis.

**Loescher, Philip**, to St. John, Hemlock, Mich.

**Muske, Scott**, to St. Matthew, Freeland, Mich.

**Schmidt, Daniel**, to Faith, Excelsior, Minn.

**Schnake, Kevin**, to St. Peter, Schofield, Wis.

**Stern, Jesse**, to Bay Pines, Seminole, Fla.

#### Teachers

**Blievernicht, Lynette**, to retirement

**Bredendick, Kristi**, to Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis.

**Bruckschen, Jamie**, to Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.

**Coron, Shelly**, to Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis.

**Gerbing, Hannah**, to Kingdom Prep Lutheran High School, Wauwatosa, Wis.

**Herold, Sarah**, to Little Lambs Preschool, Chesapeake, Va.

**Ihlenfeldt, Rachel**, to Bay Pines, Seminole, Fla.

**Kiecker, Samantha**, to Beautiful Savior, Carlsbad, Calif.

**Koester, Nina**, to Kids Crossing Early Learning Center, Madison, Wis.

**Krohn, Linda**, to retirement

**Kruschel, Rebecca**, to St. John's, Two Rivers, Wis.

**Lange, Madeline**, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.

**Menges, Emily**, to Grace Christian Academy, Falls Church, Va.

**Merseeth, Karen**, to retirement

**Reese, Maria**, to Trinity, Belle Plaine, Minn.

**Riediger, Rachel**, to St. John, Bay City, Mich.

**Schemenauer, Linda**, to Michigan Lutheran High School, Saint Joseph, Mich.

**Thiesfeldt, Gregory**, to retirement

**Thiesfeldt, Steven**, to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

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

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

### ANNIVERSARIES

**Caledonia, Minn.**—St. John (125). Sept. 20. Worship, 9 A.M.; catered meal to follow. RSVP for meal at 507-725-3412.

**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).

### COMING EVENTS

**Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary 2020 symposium**—Sept. 21–22. Hosted by Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Essays on Martin Luther's 1520 treatises. Pastors and emeriti can attend online via webinar; only faculty and students can attend in-person. Register online. Website, [wisluthsem.org/2020-symposium](http://wisluthsem.org/2020-symposium).

### NAMES WANTED

**Chicago, Ill.**—Evangelical Lutheran Synod Missionary Karim Yaghleji is requesting names of Arabic-speaking prospects in the Chicago area. [kyaghleji@blc.edu](mailto:kyaghleji@blc.edu).

**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).

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

**BRAUN, JEROME H.**

July 12, 1934–July 16, 2020

**HUTH, PAUL H.**

April 30, 1932–June 25, 2020

**KAUFFELD, EUGENE P.**

July 19, 1929–June 28, 2020

### TEACHERS & STAFF MINISTERS

**HEIDERICH, FREDERIC D.**

Nov. 11, 1934–June 29, 2020

**HEUP, HOWARD F.**

April 10, 1932–July 1, 2020

**KOEPKE, ROBERT B.**

Jan. 23, 1944–July 5, 2020

**NELSON, DAVID L.**

Aug. 3, 1946–July 1, 2020

**ZIMMERMANN, PAUL E.**

Dec. 30, 1933–June 25, 2020

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

— Matthew 5:4

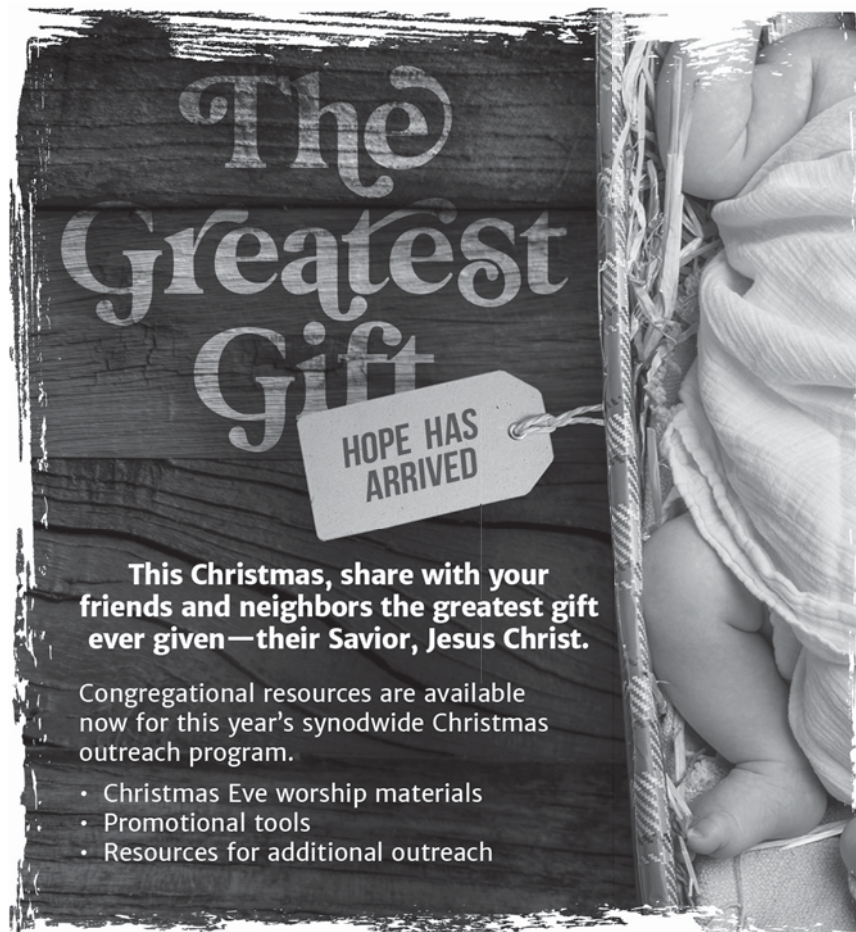


## THROUGH MY *Bible* IN 3 YEARS

- |                              |                      |                    |
|------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| 1. 2 Thessalonians 2:13–3:17 | 11. Jos. 13:1–15:12  | 22. Gal. 4:8–5:1   |
| 2. Joshua 1                  | 12. Jos. 15:13–17:18 | 23. Gal. 5:2–24    |
| 3. Jos. 2                    | 13. Jos. 18, 19      | 24. Gal. 5:25–6:18 |
| 4. Jos. 3, 4                 | 14. Jos. 20, 21      | 25. Proverbs 1     |
| 5. Jos. 5, 6                 | 15. Jos. 22          | 26. Prov. 2, 3     |
| 6. Jos. 7                    | 16. Jos. 23          | 27. Prov. 4, 5     |
| 7. Jos. 8                    | 17. Jos. 24          | 28. Prov. 6, 7     |
| 8. Jos. 9                    | 18. Galatians 1      | 29. Prov. 8        |
| 9. Jos. 10                   | 19. Gal. 2           | 30. Prov. 9        |
| 10. Jos. 11, 12              | 20. Gal. 3:1–18      |                    |
|                              | 21. Gal. 3:19–4:7    |                    |

SEPTEMBER 2020

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## COVID casualties

More than four million infected and 148,866 deaths. Those are the coronavirus statistics shared by the US Centers for Disease Control at the end of July. Meanwhile, the World Health Organization reports 16,523,815 COVID cases, with 655,112 deaths worldwide.

How many more COVID-19 casualties will there be by the time you read this? How many more before there is a vaccine? But how dependable are all these statistics? I think there may be millions more of unreported COVID-19 casualties before this is all over.

The unreported casualties? They may include higher numbers of domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, or depression and other mental health issues that arise as a tragic by-product to the “Stay Home, Stay Safe” orders that have been in place in much of the United States.

### **I’m troubled by what COVID-19 has done to a rigorous, informed, yet civil exchange of information about the pandemic.**

The unreported casualties? Government estimates for May indicated the unemployment rate caused by this pandemic might have been 16 percent, a figure not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

But those aren’t the unreported casualties I’m thinking about. I’m troubled by what COVID-19 has done to a rigorous, informed, yet civil exchange of information about the pandemic.

Instead of dialogue and debate, we dig trenches and ready ourselves for war. Over what? Mask or no mask? What about six-foot social distancing? Handshakes or hugs? Share your personal views on issues like these, and you better hunker down into your trench to avoid incoming fire!

How tragic!

This heated war of words can also spill over into our congregations. Battle lines can be drawn

over livestreaming worship versus in-person worship; singing or no singing; passing the offering plate or placing the plate on a stand in the back of church; a handshake or an elbow bump after worship. Why is it that we seem all too quick to take “words and actions in the worst possible way” rather than “the kindest possible way” (Eighth Commandment, Luther’s explanation)?

Now is not the time for us to forget the inspired proverb, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1). Nor will we want to ignore the warning shared by James, half-brother of our Lord: “Consider how a little flame can set a large forest on fire! And the tongue is a fire” (James 3:5,6). Now more than ever we Christians need to let our “speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you know how you are to answer each person” (Colossians 4:6).

Sadly, I also dredged down into my trench and fired away at others who didn’t share my “enlightened” ideas. Self-interests controlled my tongue, and I sinned in my speech. What about you?

Then let’s ask forgiveness from the fellow believers we pierced with our words. Also join hands with me—virtually—and confess those inflammatory words to the One whose every word is pure, true, and selfless.

Finally, rejoice to know that the Lord reaches down into our trenches with his gracious guarantee: “Yes, as high as the heavens are above the earth, so powerful is his mercy toward those who fear him. As distant as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our rebellious acts from us” (Psalm 103:11,12).



*Contributing editor Glenn Schwanke, pastor at Peace, Houghton, Michigan, also serves as campus pastor at Michigan Technological University.*

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




# GOD WILL provide

—PSALM 145:16

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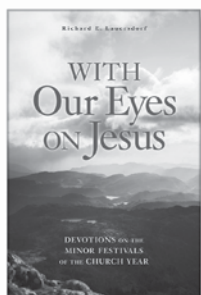
Professor Daniel Deutschlander's *Civil Government* remains a well-loved read that defines a godly relationship between church and state. Based on a study by Thomas Kock, this Bible study's nine lessons explore *Civil Government* chapter by chapter with questions for each lesson and answers in the back to encourage deep group conversations. Together, you will discover how God blesses believers through both establishments and how you can fulfill your roles as citizens on earth and in Christ's kingdom. Softcover, 63 pages. **LU2201199, \$4.99** 

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# NOW I LAY ME *down to sleep*

**One veteran Christian adds the certainty of heaven to a familiar prayer.** | Harold H. Hoepfner

**MANY OF US** have tucked our children to bed with the words of a familiar prayer:

Now I lay me down to sleep;  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.  
If I should die before I wake,  
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

Maybe you learned it from your parents and repeated it to a new generation. I remember it as a child, and I know many have used it.

Yet there is something about the prayer that troubles me.

## **"IF I SHOULD DIE BEFORE I WAKE"**

For some, what troubles them is the idea of raising the thought of dying in the minds of their children just before they go to sleep. Praying "If I should die before I wake" can be difficult for children at the scariest time of the day, just before "lights out."

When I look back at the time this prayer was written, I think I can understand the reason for including the idea of death. The prayer came from England before there was a United States. It was included in Thomas Fleet's *New England Primer*, which was first printed in 1737. Some suggest the prayer goes back even further.

Death would have been easier for parents and children to understand at that time. Infant mortality was higher. Many families experienced the death of children. In rural settings, children often got sick or had accidents that ended in death. Medical science and doctors were often far away.

But today it's different. We want to remove the idea of death from our children. So we teach our children to pray:

Now I lay me down to sleep;  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.  
Guard me, Jesus, through the night;  
And wake me in the morning light.

(There are variations, of course.)

But I don't know if it's the thought of dying that troubles me about this prayer. As a Christian, I can face death confidently with all the assurances God gives in his Word about heaven and the victory over death Jesus promises us.

## **"I PRAY THE LORD MY SOUL TO TAKE"**

I think what troubles me is the request, "If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." It seems to create doubt about the certainty of reaching heaven. As I see it, in fact, it raises an element of uncertainty in my mind about my salvation.

Of course, we have God's promise that he grants every prayer of his children if it is according to his will. But to me the certainty that a Christian can feel about being received into heaven at death becomes only a possibility in the prayer. The prayer leaves me with a "maybe"—maybe I will and maybe I won't go to heaven.

So I searched for words that might express such confidence in Jesus as I lay myself down to sleep and considered each night that I might not

awake to see the morning light. I've added this thought to the prayer for myself:

Now I lay me down to sleep;  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.  
If I should die before I wake,  
I know the Lord my soul will take.

Some may hesitate to include the idea of death at the close of day with their children. Others may choose to say a different prayer. But I still pray it and find it comforting to know that because of Jesus I will certainly enter heaven. For me, as I close my eyes, it's a reminder of the reason for our peaceful rest. It reminds me that I rest secure for Jesus' sake.



Harold Hoepfner, a retired pastor, is a member at St. Philip, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

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