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I've seen p.10

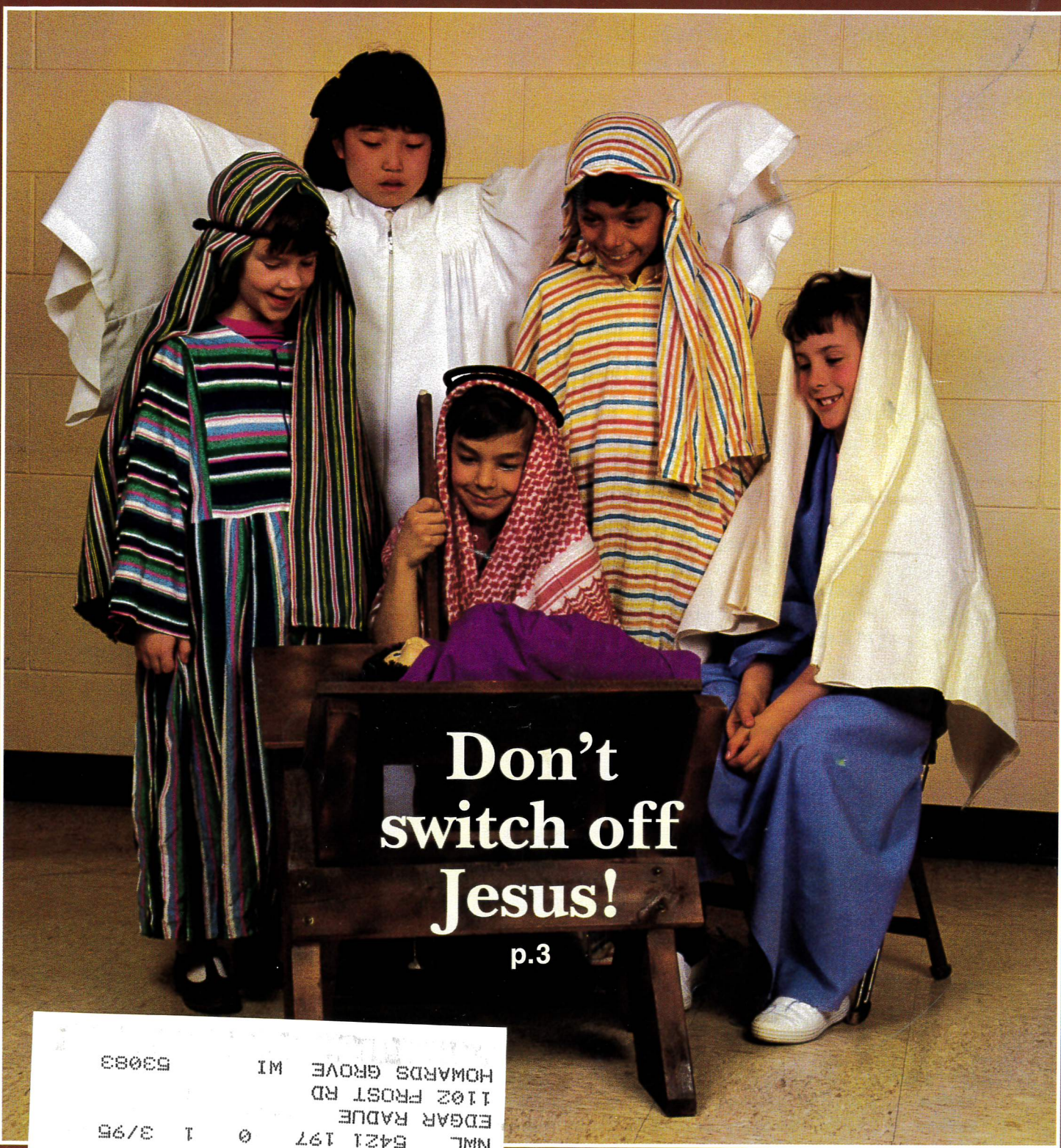
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So many
children are smiling p.6



NORTHWESTERN LUTHERAN

December 1994



**Don't
switch off
Jesus!**

p.3

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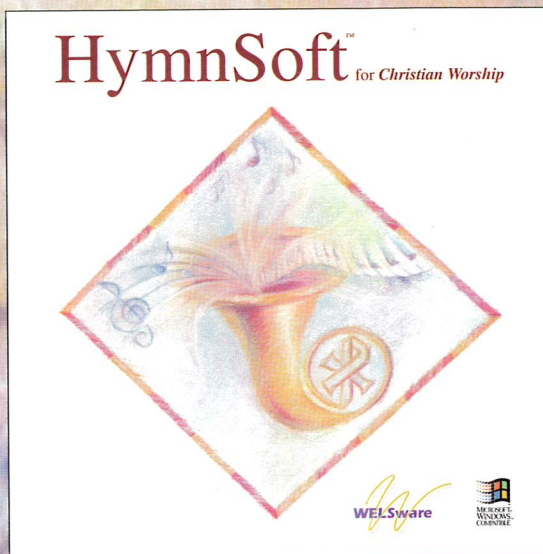
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Don't switch off Jesus!

by Richard E. Lauersdorf

It was Christmas Eve. The live nativity scene had been set up. A light bulb had been concealed in the straw-filled manger to make Baby Jesus shine when the altar lights were extinguished. But someone hit the wrong switch and turned off all the lights, including the bulb in the manger. The silence in the darkness was broken by a loud whisper from a shepherd: "Hey! You switched off Jesus!"

Switch off Jesus? Not us! We know how much we need him. Without the light of his salvation, how dark and empty our days would be.

Come and see

Those shepherds weren't much different from us. Life was tough in their day, too. They had a living to make and bills to pay. They had concerns about job security and health matters. They lived in a land where politics were often uncertain and a world where the future was unstable. And they had their sins. They had sins buried deep within their consciences and visible frequently in their daily life. They knew about the need for peace with God and how unattainable that peace seemed to be.

No wonder they trembled at the appearance of that angel. How sweet that angel's message must have sounded to their troubled hearts. "Come and see," the angel told them. "Come and see the one for whom the world has been waiting. Come and see the Savior who is Christ the Lord."

This Christmas the angel takes on a different form. He comes to us in the form of children with happy faces and pastors in pulpit gowns. But the



JIM WHITTER PHOTOGRAPHY

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has told us about. . . . When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.

Luke 2:15,17

message is the same: "Christ the Savior is born. Come and see and thrill at what you see. Look what a loving God has given us through his Son—full forgiveness, surpassing peace, and a future home in heaven."

Thank God, the message hasn't changed. How about our reaction to it? Have we heard the Christmas message so many times that it no longer seems vital? Does the light of salvation that shines forth from the Christ child's manger seem less bright?

Go and tell

What was the reaction of those shepherds once they had come and seen? They spread the good news of

Jesus' birth. They kept on talking about him even when they got back to their flocks and families. They used their days to go and tell.

What form do those shepherds take today? Do they look like you and me teaching our families and telling our friends? Do they look like those missionaries who go in our name to far-off or near-by places? Do their hands hold offerings for missions, lessons for Sunday school pupils, work tools for congregational programs? Those who see the Savior want others to see him, too. Like the shepherds, they must go and tell.

Switch off Jesus? Never! He means too much.



Richard Lauersdorf is pastor at St. John, Jefferson, Wis., and the synod's first vice-president.

May the Lord our God be with us
as he was with our fathers;
may he never leave us
nor forsake us. 1 Kings 8:57

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THE EDITOR'S PEN

He's in heaven now by *Gary P. Baumler* 34
Christmas is about more than a birth and a wonderful child.
It's about heaven connecting with earth.

- Steve Brockdorf and Cory Denekamp, two college students who went to Ukraine last summer to teach, also learned—about teaching, about mission work, and “what life is like.” And they made children smile. Read about them on p.6.
- You'll notice a brief new item, “Defining religion,” in this issue. Prof. John Brenner of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary provides definitions for religious words and phrases. If you have suggestions or requests for definitions, we'd like to hear from you.

■ It used to be called mainstreaming. Now it's called inclusion. By any name, it means that students with disabilities are part of regular classrooms—and it's a common occurrence in Lutheran schools, where special education is indeed special. Find out more in “What are these children doing in our schools?” on p.12.

- Have you made your Christmas list yet? Here's ours, for you:
 - ✓ Don't switch off Jesus! (p.3)
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 From the NL staff—Gary, Linda, Clif, and me—a blessed Christmas.

Dorothy Sonntag

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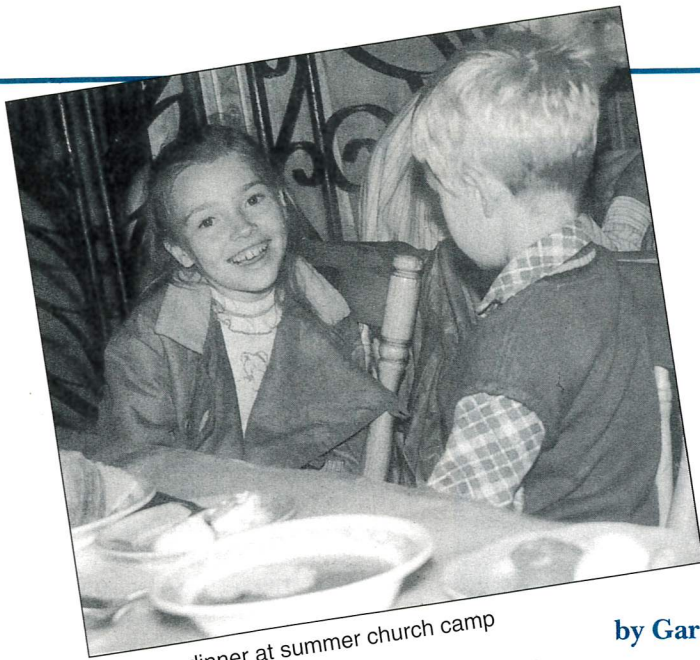
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Enjoying dinner at summer church camp



It's hard to smile with your mouth full

by Gary P. Baumler

So many

Did you know that many of us Americans don't know how to cross our legs properly? We, particularly men, like to prop up one leg parallel to the ground, with the sole of our shoe begging for the center of attention.

Ukrainians know that the leg properly crossed will leave the sole of the shoe parallel to the ground in more dignified fashion. Northwestern College seniors Steven Brockdorf and Cory Denekamp know that too, because they took the trouble to find out. They took the trouble to find out because that "trivial" piece of information might have made the difference how a Ukrainian would feel about them when they witnessed to Jesus Christ.

Steve and Cory know also that Ukrainians "are incredibly nice and generous, almost to a fault. . . . They will do just about anything for you, and they don't even know you." More important, the students know that Ukrainians hunger for the Word of God.

These young men had nearly two and one-half months this summer in Ternopil, Ukraine, to learn these things, to share the gospel, and to gain a wealth of experience.

Sharing the gospel

As the summer approached, Steve and Cory thought they were headed for Plzen, Czech Republic. However, at the same time, the Pentecostal church in Ternopil was setting up English and religion classes in the schools there and had nearly a thousand children signed up to attend. Suddenly, the Pentecostals aborted their program, and so the young men went there instead, to do in part what the Pentecostals had promised.

"That was the best thing that happened," said

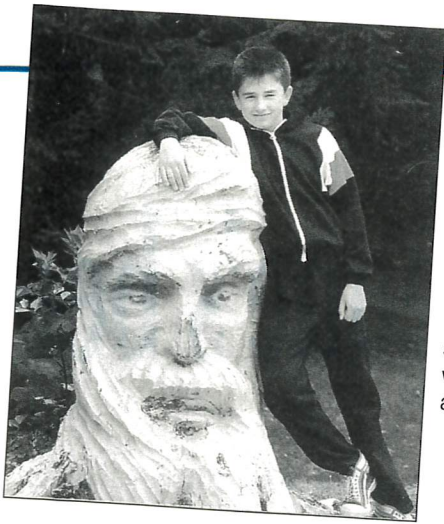
Steve. Soon each was teaching two courses a day. Part of the course was English, the other part religion, with an interpreter to help bridge the language gap. In all, they presented the gospel to nearly 250 children plus another 50 at summer church camp in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains.

They strengthened "the knowledge and understanding of a lot of people that are already in the [Lutheran] church," said Cory, and also taught the gospel to children "who are Greek Orthodox or Catholic or atheists or whatever. Many of them will never enter the Lutheran church, but they may not

PHOTOS BY GARY BAUMLER



Steve Brockdorf and Cory Denekamp spent their summer sharing the gospel in Ternopil



At summer camp, a tree stump is a work of art—and a photo op

"The children laugh with them"



children are smiling

hear the pure gospel from anyone else."

The need to educate was obvious. When the non-Lutheran children visited a nearby monastery, all their attention turned to the pictures of saints, or they wanted to visit a sacred spa where Mary allegedly had appeared. "They wouldn't even talk about any of the true gospel pictures or the true gospel symbols," Cory said. "It was either the saints or Mary."

Similarly, the longtime Christian custom of crossing oneself has developed superstitious overtones. "The number of times you cross yourself, where you cross yourself, how you cross yourself, all of that is very important," explained Steve. "And we don't know how much thought is given to 'Christ died for our sins.'"

In the end, said Steve, "We gave the gospel to a lot of people."

Gaining experience

All of this added up to experience for young men studying to be pastors, "experiences we will carry into the ministry that we would not have learned in school," Steve believes.

Their experience stretched well beyond the formal classroom too. Wherever they went, they found people eager to speak English with Americans, people, they noted, who not long ago were taught that Americans were the enemy. Now the Ukrainians wanted to make small talk: "Why are you here?" "Why are you teaching?" "What are you teaching?" For Steve and Cory, each conversation was an opportunity to share their faith.

Understandably, Cory concluded, "We gained a lot of experience in teaching, a lot of experience on what the mission scene is like, and a lot of experience of what life is like."

People ask for Bibles

Anna Chapolska, school principal, former Communist Party Member, and devoted Christian: "The people ask for Bibles. When they get them, they kiss us and weep. They've never had one before."



Anna Chapolska, a former Communist Party member, now a Christian

To others, Steve and Cory, too, were an experience. Anna, an elementary school principal who directed the summer camp, said in Ukrainian: "Cory and Steve are very good workers. Orderly, organized, polite! They're always with the kids. They teach well. I am a teacher and they teach me about teaching. Without them, I am without my hands.

"They don't rule through fear. The children laugh with them. So many children are smiling!"

A grant from the Siebert Foundation of Milwaukee, Wis., helped make Steve and Cory's trip to Ukraine possible. The church in Ukraine is a mission of Thoughts of Faith, an independent mission organization that is part of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Gary Baumler is editor of Northwestern Lutheran and WELS Director of Communications.

Someone's been

by Carl R. Henkel

I read a story the other day. Maybe you've heard it before. It goes like this:

A traveler, between flights at an airport, went to a lounge and bought a small package of cookies. Then she sat down and began reading a newspaper. Gradually, she became aware of a rustling noise. From behind her paper, she was flabbergasted to see a neatly dressed man helping himself to her cookies. Not wanting to make a scene, she leaned over and took a cookie herself.


A minute or two passed, and then came more rustling. He was helping himself to another cookie. By this time, they had come to the end of the package, but she was so angry she didn't dare allow herself to say anything. Then to add injury to insult, the man broke the remaining cookie in two, pushed half across to her, ate the other half, and left.

Still fuming some time later, when her flight was announced, the woman opened her handbag to get her ticket. To her shock and embarrassment, there she found her pack of unopened cookies.

How wrong our assumptions can be!

Have you ever jumped to the wrong conclusion about someone? It can happen easily. All the evidence, as we see it, seems to point in a particular direction.

At times, these situations, like the cookie story, are embarrassing, but do no harm. At other times, however, they drive wedges between people, cause pain, hurt feelings, and bitterness.



*Have you ever jumped
to the wrong conclusion?*

eating my cookies

Marriage breakups, family feuds, congregational in-fighting, and synodical discord are frequently the result of faulty understanding of "evidence."

Individuals, church bodies, even nations have been ravaged because of misinformation or misunderstanding. Our sinful nature thrives on gossip, loves a juicy story, and willingly believes the worst.

You and I may not be able to clean up every mess that results from erroneous judgment, and we may not even be able to undo the damage caused by our blundered conclusions. But we can begin, right now, to take more seriously the words of Jesus, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. . . . Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? . . . You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:1-5).

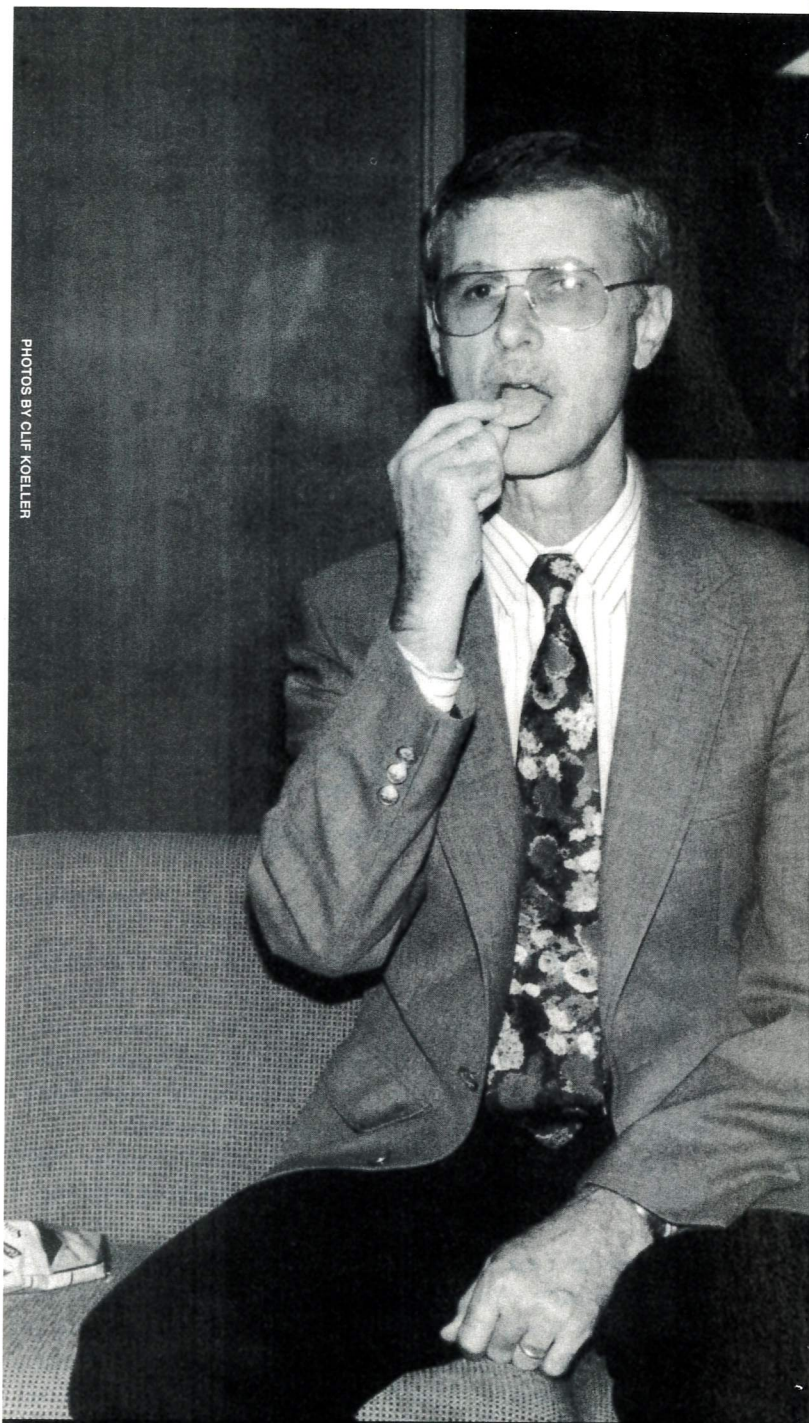
The Lord had good reason for giving us the eighth commandment: "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." He knows how prone we are to jump to faulty conclusions.

Martin Luther explained the commandment: "We should fear and love God that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him or give him a bad name, but defend him, speak well of him, and take his words and actions in the kindest possible way."

"Take his words and actions in the kindest possible way." That's good advice. The next time you get angry because you think someone is eating your cookies, remember it's possible that you are eating his.



Carl Henkel is pastor at Mt Olive, St. Paul, Minn.



PHOTOS BY CLIF KOELLER

*The result can be pain,
hurt feelings, and bitterness.*



The trouble I've seen

Five possible reasons for the trouble in your life

by Rolfe F. Westendorf

What is God trying to tell me? Christians trying to cope with misfortune often ask that question. And it's a logical question. Nothing happens without God's permission. When misfortune strikes, he must have some purpose. But what can that purpose be?

There is no simple explanation for trouble. We learn different things from different kinds of trouble.

- **Trouble can result from our own neglect and disobedience.** An example is being stranded in the middle of nowhere because we forgot to put gas in the tank. But self-imposed trouble can get a lot worse. Marital discord often results from our selfish behavior. Rebellious children do not honor and respect their parents. Bills cannot be paid because we spent our money foolishly. Alcoholism develops when we continually turn to drinking for entertainment or relief from distress.

Any time we abuse God's design in nature, including human nature, we can expect to suffer. When trouble results from our neglect and disobedience, God is saying, "Stop abusing the good things I have given you."

- **Trouble can come from Satan to destroy our trust in God.** Job was a pious man whom God had richly blessed. Satan claimed that Job would curse God if those blessings were taken away. God allowed Satan to strip Job of his health, wealth, and family.

The same kind of thing can happen to you or me. Satan thinks he can get us to turn against God by making our lives miserable.

But there are limits to Satan's power. The Bible tells us "God will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out, so that you can stand up under it."

When trouble results from Satan's attacks on our faith, God is saying, "The devil is doing this. But do not despair. I will not permit him to prevail."

- **Trouble can come to remind us that we are sinners.** To be saved, we must know that we are sinners dependent on the Savior. But when things are going well for us, we can easily take credit as if we were worthy of God's goodness toward us. We forget that we deserve to be in hell. We look at God's blessings as rewards of our merit instead of gifts of his grace.

That's when God's love sends us trouble to remind

us that we are sinners who must depend totally upon his grace. That trouble is not punishment for selfishness and pride. It's a nudge from God to help us look only to Christ.

When God sends trouble to humble us, he is saying, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought. Do not trust in yourself. I have made you helpless to remind you to trust in me and my grace alone."

• **Trouble can be a blessing in disguise.** Saul experienced a vision on the road to Damascus that terrified him and left him temporarily blind. He spent a few days in fear and misery. But his experience led him to bring the gospel to millions through his preaching and his letters. The trouble God sent led Paul to write to the Romans that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.

Maybe a failed romance left you free to marry a faithful spouse. Or a handicapped child taught you to appreciate simple treasures that you had been taking for granted. We do not always recognize the gifts that God sends us through troubles, but most of us have received such blessings.

When trouble is a blessing in disguise, God is saying, "I know this is hard for you, but it proceeds from my love for you, which I revealed when I sacrificed my Son on the cross. Trust that love. I will give you the blessing I have planned for you."

• **Trouble can be God's punishment for sin.** The king of Egypt had big trouble when the waters of the Red Sea rushed down on him. His disobedience brought the wrath of God upon him. God keeps his threats as he keeps his promises. He punishes sin with trouble—in this life and in the life to come.

But this trouble is reserved for unbelievers. God's children do not experience God's wrath, for their sins have been washed away by the blood of Christ. Trouble is never the vengeance of God upon his children. That vengeance fell upon Jesus. As long as we are children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, we are free from God's punishment.

God promises, "I may allow trouble to test you. I may send trouble to guide you. I may send trouble to humble you. No matter what the trouble may be, it is love that allows it. Take comfort and know that you are still my child and an heir of eternal life."



Rolfe Westendorf is pastor at Siloah, Milwaukee, Wis.



COURTESY OF WELLS MASS MEDIA / PHOTO BY GERALD KOSEN STUDIO

Five reasons for trouble

1. It may be the result of our own neglect and disobedience.
2. Satan may send it to destroy our trust in God.
3. God may send it to remind us that we are sinners.
4. God may send it as a blessing in disguise.
5. God sends it to unbelievers as punishment for sin.

What are these children doing in our schools?

Disabled children find a truly special education in Lutheran schools

by Laurie Biedenbender



PHOTOS BY LINDA BAACKE

Deb Boeldt, special education teacher at David's Star school, Jackson, Wis., helps Matthew Bogusz with a computer learning game.

David clutched his bag as he walked through the double doors that late August day. The nervous, high-pitched chatter of the other freshmen told him they felt the same way he did. In fact, he decided, these classmates of his would probably turn out to be just like him in many ways. Except one.

David Otto was almost completely blind.

David's years at Shoreland Lutheran High School in Somers, Wis., were not radically different from those of his classmates. With the help of a supportive family, concerned teachers, and an indispensable visual-tech machine, he experienced success.

David is not all that unusual. Lutheran schools have students with hearing impairments, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, Down's Syndrome, attention-deficit disorder, depression and other emotional disturbances, dyslexia, and learning disabilities of all kinds.

What are these children doing in our schools? Exactly what their classmates are doing: learning to read, write, compute, and create in a family atmos-

phere where Christ is the head and center of all activities.

"The number one priority is spiritual education," said Elsa Manthey, remedial teacher at Bethany, Manitowoc, Wis. "Children's most important 'skill need' is to live as Christians, and our schools are definitely the best place for that."

They're getting help

Meeting the needs of each student creates a tension that instructors are well acquainted with. Curriculum adaptations, such as more time to do an assignment, fewer problems, or an alternate assignment altogether, are necessary for children of different abilities, noted Debbie Boeldt, remedial teacher at David's Star in Jackson, Wis. "But good teachers already do these things," she added.

More seriously challenged students may need more help. Learning coordinators like Manthey and Boeldt supervise resource rooms where students get the special help they need from teachers who are trained to work with children who learn in different ways.

Kevin Frank's family sought out David's Star when Kevin wasn't doing as well as they thought he could at public school. After working with Mrs. Boeldt for a few months, Kevin found his level of academic success.

"Now he can do his homework," said his father, Donald. "He can read. He can do his math. It's the extra help he gets. It's the smaller classroom. And the teachers here really want to help the kids."

Lutheran high schools have risen to the challenge too. Kathy Proeber, Shoreland's extended learning coordinator, uses a variety of tools to help students stay academically afloat. Some function within the school setting: peer tutors, volunteer adult tutors, less demanding courses, and a school-wide system that hourly monitors students' homework.

Jason Klumb searches for words beginning with the letter A. Assignments tailored to a student's needs are part of the special education program at David's Star.



Others function outside the school setting: college tutoring programs, county literacy councils, and government resources.

"Lutheran high schools are doing more than ever before to help kids who are challenged," said Sue Breitreutz, learning coordinator at Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis. "We accept them and meet them at their level to help them experience success."

They're hearing the gospel

Certainly, public school teachers also work hard to help their students achieve success, but the words and actions of WELS teachers reflect the deep-seated love of a caring God. "Here you can tell kids where their best help comes from," said Proeber. "When they're unmotivated or frustrated, they can go to the Lord and ask for strength. We pray in class and one on one. You can't do that anywhere else."

Only in a Christian school can a teacher wheel Lisa, a fifth grader with spina bifida, to the chalkboard and tell her, "With God all things are possible." Only in a Christian school can a teacher sign to Doug, deaf since a car accident when he was four, "I can do everything through him who strengthens me." Only in a Christian school can teachers lead every child to say, no matter what his gifts, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

And only in a Christian school can teachers daily remind students that they are redeemed children of God with an eternal future awaiting them.

They're learning

While appreciating the advantages of Christian education, occasionally parents will decide that the needs of their child would be better met elsewhere. After two years, David decided to attend a specialty school where he could learn braille, mobility, and



A little extra help from teacher Deb Boeldt and a calculator are all Brian French needs to succeed in school.

daily living skills—important steps toward independent living. Decisions like David's are often painful, made only after hours of conscientious, prayerful consideration of the child and his future.

On the other hand, more parents than ever before are choosing WELS schools for their challenged children.

"They seek us out first for the religious aspect," said David's Star principal Frederick Mahnke, "and also for our remedial teacher's expertise."

Those parents appreciate the structured setting usually found in WELS classrooms, and they learn that including disabled students in regular classrooms is what many Lutheran schools have been doing all along.

Christian Educators for Special Education (CESE) offers conferences, resource materials, and a newsletter with information for helping special needs children. For information, write CESE, Wisconsin Lutheran College, 8800 W Bluemound Rd, Milwaukee WI 53226.



Laurie Biedenbender is a member of Epiphany, Racine, Wis.

Those who think of the church as a visible organization are likely to view ministry as what the organization's leaders should be doing, but

Ministry belongs to believers

by Wayne D. Mueller

We've all heard sermons and lectures and read articles on what was wrong with the church in Luther's time. Why did the church need reforming? The list is long: the work-righteous mass, indulgences, sins of the clergy, relic worship, saint worship, mariolatry, and church meddling in government.

Roman Catholicism's concept of the church and its ministry made these problems worse. Rome held a material view of the church and a hierarchical view of ministry.

A material view and "lazy respect"

A material view of the church wrongly links outward membership in a congregation with membership in the body of Christ. Rome's official teachings stated that all those who belonged to a Roman Catholic congregation—and only those—were true believers.

The hierarchical structure of Rome's clergy jibed with the material view of the church. If Christ's church is a visible organization, then ministry must be what the visible leaders of those churches do. Rome's priestly system dominated ministry from the top down. The clergy held political and legal control of the laity. Devotion to teaching and preaching came second.

As a result, the laity in Luther's time had developed a lazy respect for the clergy. Lay people honored their priests by letting the clergy do everything for the laity: read the Bible, make sacrifices for sins, and intercede for them.

The problem is still spooking around

Vestiges of Rome's material church and hierarchical ministry are still spooking around today. People

still tend to think of "church" as brick and stone buildings rather than the invisible gathering of all true believers. At times loyalty to a church organization seems to be more important than communion with the body of Christ.

And who would deny that the laity occasionally gives "lazy respect" to their called ministers? Many people expect the clergy to do more than public ministry. Pastors are often left to tend the personal priestly duties of their members, such as Bible study, prayer, outreach to the unchurched, youth education, visitation of the sick, and private correction of sinners. Still today, those who think of Christ's church as a visible organization are likely to view ministry mostly in terms of what the organization's leaders should be doing.

Luther's solution

How did Luther deal with this problem? Against the material church notion Luther posed the Bible's teaching of Jesus' invisible, spiritual church: "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Since God alone can read hearts, church affiliation does not determine one's membership in the kingdom of God, Luther said. "The Lord knows those who are his" (2 Timothy 2:19).

Luther quoted Jesus: "The kingdom of God does not come visibly" (Luke 17:20). Then he asked, "Isn't this a horrible error, that the unity of the Christian communion, which Christ himself has removed from all physical and external cities and places and placed into the spiritual places, should be ascribed by these dreamers to the physical congregation, which must of necessity be bound to place and location?"

Luther's teaching about the ministry was consistent

*Many people expect
the clergy to do more
than public ministry.*

with his teaching about the church. Ministry is the privilege of serving as a steward of the gospel. Since the gospel was given to the church—the invisible church—the privilege to dispense it also belongs to the church. Luther insisted that the church includes every believer.

Rome misinterpreted Matthew 16:18,19 to say that the ministry of the keys was given only to the pope. Luther opposed that view: "For here Christ gives the keys to the entire communion and not to St. Peter. . . . The keys do not belong to the pope as he falsely claims, rather to the Church, that is to the people of Christ, the people of God, or the holy Christian people, all over the world, or wherever there are Christians. Just as Baptism, the Sacrament, God's Word do not belong to the pope, but to the people of Christ."

Dispelling lurking phantoms

God can dispel the lurking phantoms of a material church, hierarchical ministry, and lazy respect for called workers. He did just that during the Lutheran Reformation, and he can do it today.

The light of his Word dispels any shade of misunderstanding about who his people are and what their mission is. "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known" (Ephesians 3:10). God gave ministry to his church. His church is his people, all believers in Jesus Christ.

If Luther were alive today, he might repeat himself: "The Word of God does not belong to the preacher . . . but to the disciple who hears and believes. The Sacrament does not belong to him who administers it, but rather to him to whom it is administered."

God's grace alone has preserved us as a people who



love his Word. What great blessings God can give through the simple truth that he has given stewardship of that Word to every single member of the church!

Every member of our believing priesthood will "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). All believers will share the Word with their families, encourage and correct sinning brothers and sisters, intercede for the spread of the gospel, talk about the Savior to their neighbors, and let their light shine to attract those still in darkness.

When believers do those things, passive respect for those in the public ministry will dissolve. In its place, there will be real honor for ministers. Our prayers, gifts, and support will encourage called workers to make a bold witness to the world before Jesus returns.

Is all this too much to hope for? Can't happen, you say? It already has. It was called the Lutheran Reformation. The same gracious God calls us today with the same gospel. God has made us his people, his church. And he has given ministry to us.



Wayne Mueller is administrator
for WELS Parish Services.

During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

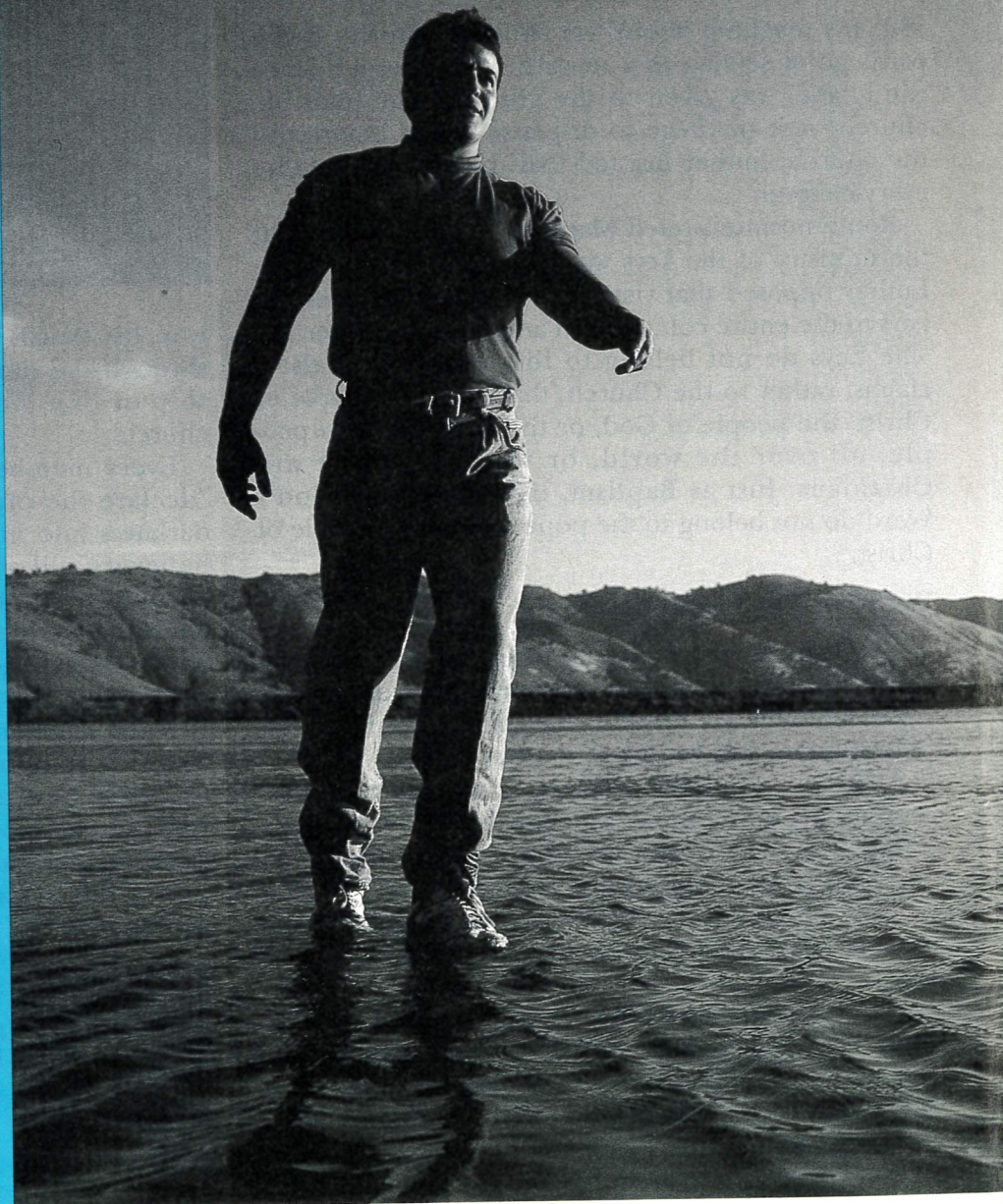
"Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat and walked on the water to Jesus.

MATTHEW 14:25-29

MRS. KEVIN SCHEIBEL PHOTOGRAPHY

Will you—with bold faith—venture over stormy waters without a boat to get to where Jesus is beckoning you?



A rock floats

by Gary P. Baumler

Can a rock float? “Of course not,” you’re probably thinking. At least I hope you’re thinking, “Of course a rock can’t float,” because it makes it so much the easier to impress upon you the significance of what happened when Peter, the Rock, walked on water.

Have you ever wondered what was the greater miracle—the one most people remember, that Jesus walked on the water—or the one that seems more incidental, that Peter walked on the water?

Can you walk on water?

Think of it another way: You can, can’t you, imagine Jesus, the Son of God, walking on water? But can you imagine yourself walking on water? You are like Peter.

“What’s the point?” you ask. The point is that faith, resting on Jesus and attentive to his bidding, will dare much and will experience miraculous results. The point is that you and I may yet have to exercise our faith in ways we never dreamed possible.

Look at Simon Peter. An experienced fisherman who doubtless had traveled over every mile of the Sea of Galilee many times, he had perhaps never experienced a worse night on its waters than this one. Caught in a sudden storm, the disciples had to strain at their oars to keep their boat from capsizing or being swamped in the wind-ravaged waters. It did not help much when they became convinced that they saw a ghost walking on the water toward their boat.

But then the “ghost” identified himself as the Lord Jesus in the flesh. And Peter, as usual quick to respond, said, “Lord, if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.”

Notice: Peter did not recklessly jump from the boat into the churning waters. He did not assume that Jesus wanted him to walk on the water with him. But Peter expressed a faith that saw in Jesus “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” He expressed a faith that said, “Just say the word, Jesus, and I will climb out of my boat in the middle of this storm, confident that

your will and power will allow me to walk on the water’s surface.”

“Come,” said Jesus. Peter did.

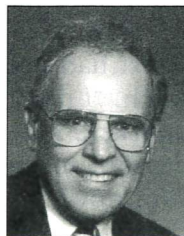
Impossibilities become possible

It sounds so easy, so obvious. Jesus says, “Come,” and even natural impossibilities become possible for those who do his bidding. Surely we must believe that—we who know Jesus in ways Peter had yet to learn.

We know the Jesus who walked the way of the cross to achieve the greatest miracle on earth, the forgiveness of our sins. We know the Jesus who walked through death, trampling death underfoot as he walked away from his own grave; the Jesus who has made it possible for us also, through faith in him, to pass through death to life. Seemingly, then, we must be ready, as Peter was, to walk confidently through other “impossible” circumstances as long as we are following Jesus’ bidding.

Are you, then, ready to “walk on the water” if the Savior bids you? Will you—with bold faith—venture over stormy waters without a boat to get where Jesus is beckoning you? Perhaps the question has immediate meaning for you. It may mean believing that the Lord Jesus wants you where you are, doing what you’re doing, and in faith perhaps going through great difficulties. It may mean that you can do far more as a servant of Christ than you ever dreamed possible. It may mean that Jesus has plans for you in his church, though it appears you would have to walk on water to fulfill them. It may mean that, when the way seems the darkest and stormiest, you need to look for Jesus, hear his voice, and follow him.

One thing is certain: The more you dare for Jesus in faith, the more outstanding the results you’ll experience.



Gary Baumler is editor of Northwestern Lutheran, and WELS Director of Communications.

Christmas in *Cordero de Dios*, a storefront mission in Miami. The banner says "Praise the Lord."



Another day of grace

by Ralph W. Martens

Everyone looked up as the door of our storefront church opened. A young man, a handsome, dark-haired stranger, entered, peering across the room where we sat around a table.

"Buenos noches. May I help you?" I asked.

"I'd like to speak to the *padre* or minister. Is he here?" he replied.

Rising to meet him, I introduced myself as the pastor and explained that we were in the middle of a Bible study.

"May I speak with you alone, right now, for about ten minutes?" he asked.

With permission of the class, we withdrew to my study. Ten minutes became twenty as the young man poured out his story. Twenty years old, troubled, confused, plagued with chronic illness and anxiety. Friends had told him that his problems were the result of someone's efforts to separate him from his girlfriend by occult means.

When the prayers and counsel of a priest had not helped, he sought relief with a *brujo*, a witch. "I don't believe in those things," he said, "but it worked. I am relieved. My anxiety is gone, but was it right to do that, to go to a witch? What should I do now? My mother is an evangelical, she says . . ."

When the evening ended, the Christmas project had not turned out well and would have to be done over.

The Bible study had not gone as planned. Worse, the young stranger got away without leaving his name or address. But we looked forward to the next day, because the Lord had given us another day of grace.

I saw no ten-minute quick fix for his problem. I looked at my watch as I heard the sound of voices rising in the Bible study area. The class had already waited patiently while I gave a group of young people directions for a Christmas art project. Now the class would wait again. But another soul needed to be fed.

When the evening ended, the Christmas project had not turned out well and would have to be done over. The Bible study had not gone as planned. Worse, the

young stranger got away without leaving his name or address. But we looked forward to the next day, because the Lord had given us another day of grace.

Sure of that grace, we ended the evening in the Lord's name. We prayed for the young man, for our missions, our country, the sick and the unemployed, for ourselves and absent brothers and sisters. We prayed for a blessed Advent to prepare us for our Savior's coming.



Ralph Martens is pastor of *Cordero de Dios*, Miami, FL.

Parish Stewardship Services

Jim Diehl, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod's stewardship counselor, answers questions about Parish Stewardship Services.

What does a stewardship counselor do?

Parish Stewardship Services offers a program that creates a deeper understanding of the biblical meaning of stewardship. I train people to conduct stewardship programs in their congregations. I want to help churches raise money, of course. But more important, I want to help people see what God says about managing money.

What does the congregation have to do?

The congregation provides the people. I provide training and materials. The more people, the less work each person has. We try to get 30 to 40 percent of the congregation actively involved, both men and women. That's important, because the program isn't just about money.

How much does it cost?

An initial meeting and a video explaining the program's purpose and benefits are free. Fees are based

"Excel in the grace of giving"

The Parish Stewardship Services program

- **Purpose:** Communicate what God says about management of his money so that God's people can grow in the grace of giving.

- **Format:** A concentrated program, running 12 to 35 days, that focuses on the biblical teachings of money management and employs an every-member visitation organized by a trained stewardship counselor.

- **Workers needed:** Telephone committee, Bible study leaders, hospitality committee, visitation committee.

- **Materials and training:** Provided by the stewardship counselor.

- **Cost:** Fees are on a sliding scale, depending on the length of the program.

For more information, contact WELS Parish Stewardship Services, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; 414/256-3278.

DOROTHY SONNTAG



Jim Diehl, parish stewardship counselor, confers with program coordinator Lenny Hanson.

on a sliding basis and paid in installments. Churches can also apply for a grant to help with cost. Cost is the biggest objection, of course. Talk about pocketbooks hits a nerve. But you have to look at long-term results. One thing I tell congregations is that they shouldn't worry about the fee. They'll raise more than enough money to cover costs. And with education about the biblical meaning of stewardship, people will continue to give.

Can't a church solve its stewardship problems just by getting all its members to come to church?

For one thing, they're not going to get all their delinquent members to come to church. That's just not going to happen. And if they do come, without education about giving they'll give their leavings, not their first fruits. Education strengthens the understanding that we're not giving to the church, we're giving to the Lord.

Can't a congregation have a stewardship program without outside help?

They can, but people are often more willing to listen to an outsider—there's the thing about the "prophet without honor." And I'm a layman. I can say things to other lay people that a pastor might be uncomfortable saying.

Do you have questions about the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod—how it functions, how decisions are made and carried out? Please send your questions to *OPEN DOORS*, Northwestern Lutheran, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398.

Catechism revision is a group effort

"Befriend" or "be a friend"? Those were among many phrases over which the committee for rewording Luther's *Small Catechism* deliberated.

The catechism version now used by WELS pastors and teachers was published in 1982.

Need for a revision became apparent with the publication of *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*, which altered the wording of creeds and prayers found both in the hymnal and the catechism. The synod's Board for Parish Services appointed a six-member committee to work on the rewording. That committee listened to suggestions from others.

According to Daniel Schmeling, chairman of the committee, the proposed rewording includes recommendations from people

throughout the synod.

"The committee began meeting in February 1993," wrote Schmeling in a report to BPS. "We reviewed 60 written responses to proposed revisions and we adopted a series of guidelines:

- ✓ If there is no compelling reason to change the current wording it should remain as it is.
- ✓ The wording should be suitable to 21st century Americans.
- ✓ Wording should be consistent with that in *Christian Worship*.
- ✓ Whenever possible, wording which is common among various translations and editions of the catechism should be used.
- ✓ The wording should be fluent

and lend itself to oral reading and memorization.

The committee submitted its proposed changes to the 1994 district conventions. Six districts and 26 individuals and groups responded in writing. "In addition," said Schmeling, "many persons spoke privately to committee members." It was clear, he said, that synod members "had invested a considerable amount of time and effort in studying the proposed changes."

The committee's recommendations, which will be reviewed by the synod's Conference of Presidents, were presented to BPS in September. The board will make the final decisions.

"Befriend" or "be a friend"? Following its guidelines, the committee suggested "be a friend."

Church librarians—showered with blessings

Appropriately, name tags were in the form of book marks for the 71 members of the WELS Church

Librarians Organization (WELS—CLO) who met in Oconomowoc, Wis., Sept. 17. The meeting was a

mix of practical advice and spiritual inspiration.

The library committee of St. Matthew, Oconomowoc, stood under an umbrella to tell the assembly how they got their church library started.

Why the umbrella? "We started praying," explained Bev Fulmer, "and God showered us with blessings. They came pouring down."

The program also gave librarians time to look at displays, talk over problems, and exchange ideas.

Newly elected officers are Joanne Weber, Muskego, Wis., president, and Charlene Schauwitzer, West Allis, Wis., treasurer.

WELS—CLO has 126 members in 26 states. It meets twice a year and provides a newsletter and resource materials for church libraries.

For more information, write WELS—CLO, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398, or call 414/256-3222.

Luther Prep adopts seal

Luther Preparatory School (LPS), Watertown, Wis., which will open next year as a merger of Martin Luther and Northwestern prep schools, now has a school seal.

"The seal's focus is on the open Bible, on which all instruction and activities at LPS are founded," reports an LPS update. "The Latin words, *fides, sapientia, ministerium*, are translated 'faith, wisdom, ministry' as a summary of the school's purpose."

Three dates appear on the seal: 1865, signifying the founding of Northwestern Prep; 1979, Martin Luther Prep's founding; and 1995, Luther Prep's.

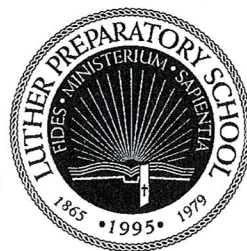
Other items in the update:

- A committee of MLPS and NPS

students is meeting to discuss issues such as student government and dormitory policies. Exchanges between NPS and MLPS classes have helped students from the two schools get acquainted.

- Construction continues on a new academic center and a student union addition. One dormitory, Augsburg Hall, will be renovated, and a building will be converted to additional dormitory space.

- The opening enrollment at LPS is expected to be over 550, a number higher than the total enrollment this year at MLPS and NPS.



No organist? Get a computer

Larry Schwanke's church doesn't have an organist. "But we do have very good organ music," he reports, "thanks to our computer organ." He is pastor of Emmanuel, Zephyrhills, Florida.

Schwanke says the system is easy to use. "I have only basic music skills, but I can enter most music into the computer. The cost also is low." Three items are necessary: a computer, keyboard, and sound system.

"Any computer will work," Schwanke says. "This is where the computer program and the music

files are stored. Through the computer you tell the keyboard what notes to play and when to play them."

The electronic keyboard can be any model, "as long as it is MIDI compatible," says Schwanke. "What this means is that the keyboard has some extra plug connections which allow it to talk with the computer via MIDI cables. A keyboard with a number of organ settings and multiple MIDI channels allows you to select different sounds for preservice and postservice music and hymns."

While a church's existing sound system might be satisfactory, Schwanke recommends a "surround sound" stereo system, using four speakers "to increase the volume and for a richer sound. The quality of sound depends greatly on your speakers."

Even congregations that have no problem finding organists could use the system. "Organists can use it as a recorder," suggests Schwanke, "and replay it for extra services. Or if someone gets sick, you have an emergency system to fall back on."

Teachers convene on tropical island

Lutheran elementary teachers of the South Atlantic District may have set a record for distance when they met for their annual conference last August. They traveled over 1800 miles to Antigua, in the Leeward Islands.

"The conferences were always in Florida, because only two schools are out of the state," explained Jane Schlenvogt, teacher at Peace, Bradenton, Fla., "until 1993, when the conference was in Georgia. That left only one school that had never hosted a conference."

That school was St. John, on a Caribbean island 400 miles north of Venezuela. Most Antiguans are descendants of Africans brought as slaves to the island, a former British colony.

The school, with classes from preschool through eighth grade, opened in 1974, soon after mission work began in the city of St. John's. Two pastors and five teachers serve the congregation.

"The conference in Antigua was a first, but hopefully not the last," said Schlenvogt. "There were blessings to all involved. The teachers who attended all feel they under-



Usual business, unusual setting—Palm trees, warm breezes, and the Caribbean didn't distract them. South Atlantic District teachers, outside St. John school in Antigua, are dressed for business and not for the beach.

stand mission work in a foreign field better."

Those teachers' former teachers made the trip possible. Mrs. Adelia Sievert paid most of the conference expenses in memory of her husband, Erich, who died last year. The Sieverts taught for many years at Dr. Martin Luther College, the ministerial school for WELS teachers.

DEFINING RELIGION

DOXOLOGY: An expression of praise to God. The common doxology begins with the words, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

—John M. Brenner

Youth news

Athletes play in China

When students from three Lutheran schools traveled to Beijing, China, last summer to play basketball against Chinese teams, they also used the trip as an evangelism opportunity. They invited other travelers to a worship service and passed out religious pamphlets.

From Northwestern Prep, Watertown, Wis., were Sadie Jo Fitzsimmons and Koreen Wilke. Ina Pechuli represented Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix. Sarah Bahn, Raven Thomas, Sarah Wenzel, Sarah Wolf, Courtney Edison, and Suzanna Jordahl came from California LHS, Wildomar. Chhaya Bhakta, from Corona Christian in California, rounded out the team.

Coaches were David Bartelt and Tom Wolf of CLHS and Lorenz Pechuli of ALA. CLHS and International Sports Exchange sponsored the program.

Athletes from three Lutheran high schools. Front row (left to right): Courtney Edison, Sarah Bahn, Sarah Wolf, Koreen Wilke. Back: Sarah Wenzel, Raven Thomas, Suzanne Jordahl, Ina Pechuli, Chhaya Bhakta, Sadie Fitzsimmons.



Essay winner

Katrina Johnson, 13, a student at St. John, Libertyville, Ill., was one of 20 winners in an international geography essay competition. In addition to the weekend trip, finalists and their teachers each received a \$1,000 scholarship. Delta Air Lines sponsored the contest.

Katrina Johnson and her teacher, Rick Grundman, attended a weekend winners' celebration in Orlando, Fla., where they posed with a friend.



Youth rally—Over 180 young people from five states gathered July 11-14 in Rapid City, S. Dak., for the Black Hills regional

youth rally. Topics and workshops centered around the theme "Headin' for heaven."

WELSNET to add director of program development

Northwestern Publishing House in Milwaukee, Wis., plans to add a director of development for WELSNET, a computer bulletin board service for WELS members.

The director will be responsible for increasing WELSNET member-

ship, which now stands at about 500, by providing more on-line educational and informational sources, and researching electronic communication technology.

"WELSNET is the future of communication in our synod," said

Mark C. Brunner, vice president of marketing at NPH. "This person will help shape that communication."

A grant from Lutheran Brotherhood will initially fund the director's position.

Dakota-Montana District

Churches merge—On Sept. 11, two Sioux Falls, S. Dak., congregations merged, keeping one's name and building, and the other's synod. St. Paul, a Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod church, and Bethel, from the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, formed a WELS-affiliated congregation called Bethel. The merger brings 226 St. Paul members together with 79 Bethel members. St. Paul's buildings will be sold.

Anniversaries and dedications—**Apostles, Billings, Mont.**, held a festival and rededication service Sept. 25. **Trinity, Aberdeen, S. Dak.**, recently observed its 40th anniversary and dedicated a new organ. St. Martin, Watertown, S. Dak., celebrated **Pastor Dennis Hayes'** 25 years in ministry.

—Ronald L. Kruse

Michigan District

Huron Valley Lutheran High School, Westland, has expanded its distance learning program, adding Spanish and a second year of Latin. Latin is taught from Michigan Lutheran Seminary, and Spanish from Arizona Lutheran Academy.

Christ Our Savior, Rockford, went from being an exploratory mission to self-supporting in four

years. The congregation has its own worship facility, dedicated two years ago, on the north side of Grand Rapids.

St. Paul, Saginaw, observed the 25th anniversary in ministry of Principal **Michael Hein** on Oct. 23. On Sept. 11, the congregation honored **June Miller**, who retired after teaching Sunday school for 32 years.

Two **Ann Arbor** churches observed anniversaries: **St. John** celebrated its 125th anniversary on Sept. 18, and **Redeemer** its 50th on Oct. 2.

Appointments to the Board for Parish Services: Pastor **Mark Gieschen**, evangelism commission; teacher **Philip Kuske**, parish schools; **Ray Arnold**, special ministries. To the constitution committee: Pastors **Arnold Kunde** and **James Langebartels**.

—James L. Langebartels

South Central District

Members of **Holy Word, Austin, Texas**, celebrated the congregation's 25th anniversary Feb. 20. The congregation has had an elementary school since 1974. **Gethsemane, Oklahoma City**, the first WELS



Builders for Christ helped build this new church for Prince of Peace, Houston, Texas.

church in Oklahoma, celebrated its 25th anniversary June 6. The congregation has maintained an elementary school through much of its history.

Redeemer, Edna, Texas, dedicated a new fellowship area May 1. Members of the congregation built the new facility. **Prince of Peace, Houston**, dedicated a new church June 19. Builders for Christ contributed approximately 4,200 hours to the project. Gifts and loans from members and a Church Extension Fund loan made the project possible.

Lord of Life, Friendswood, Texas, honored **Marie Hollis** June 12. She has served as organist of the congregation for its 24-year history.

Members of **Good Shepherd, Midland**, and **Our Redeemer, San Angelo, Texas**, won't soon forget the June 26 installation of their pastor, **Kevin Cortez**. The temperature that day reached 115 degrees.

—Charles L. Learman

On the bright side

Which part?

When Margo Klug, of Hartford, Mich., brought her dog to the Mission for the Hearing Impaired convention in Manitowoc, Wis., last summer, the MHI newsletter reports: "Margo's hearing dog, Jessie, even went to church at Bethany on Sunday morning. One inquisitive lad asked her what kind of dog Jessie was. When Margo answered part German shepherd and part golden retriever, he asked, 'Which part is the retriever?'"

—*Ephphatha newsletter*

Tabernacle teams: an old idea for a new church

Because they worship in a dance studio, members of Hope, Irmo, S. Car., must play musical chairs each week as they rearrange furni-

ture before the service. They have found a way to lighten up this tedious chore.

"Tabernacle Teams" are assigned a Sunday to work and have been given the Old Testament names of those responsible for similar duties when it was time to move the tabernacle through the wilderness. Setting up chairs on Sunday morning are the Shimeites, Izharites, Hebronites, Uzzielites, Mushites, and Libenites.

Our compliments to the authors of this creative idea, and also to those willing to serve as Mushites.

—*South Atlantic District newsletter*

Do you have a brief story or thought that will brighten someone's day? Please send it to *BRIGHT SIDE*, *Northwestern Lutheran*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; or Fax to 414/256-3899.

Obituary

Ruth E. Muehlenbeck 1947-1994

Ruth E. Muehlenbeck was born May 5, 1947, in Saginaw, Michigan. She died Sept. 18, 1994, in Largo, Maryland.

A graduate of Michigan Lutheran Seminary and Dr. Martin Luther College, she taught at St. Paul, Green Bay, Wis.; St. Stephen, Adrian, Mich.; and Divine Peace, Largo, Maryland, where she observed her 25th anniversary in ministry Aug. 28.

She is survived by her parents, Fred and Mollie Muehlenbeck, and sisters Carolyn (Larry) Schmidt and Judith (Wayne) Traub.

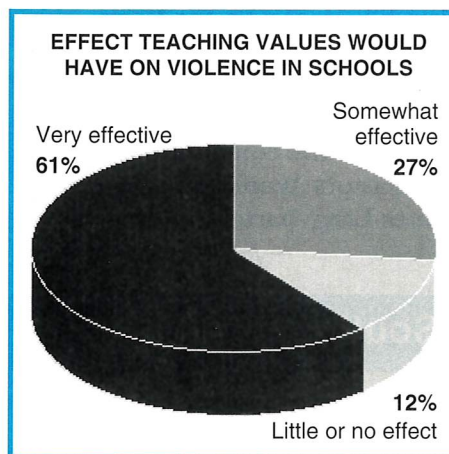
NORTHWESTERN LUTHERAN SUBSCRIPTION INCREASE

Effective January 1, subscription rates for *Northwestern Lutheran* will increase from \$8.50 to \$9.00 for an individual subscription; from \$5.50 to \$5.75 for bundle subscriptions; from \$6.00 to \$6.25 for blanket subscriptions.

Poll supports teaching values in schools

In a recent Gallup Poll, about half the nation's adults say personal values and ethical behavior should be taught in the public schools. Four in 10 say these matters should be left to parents or the churches of the community. Twelve percent say that ethics and values should be taught both in the schools and by parents and churches. Most likely to ask for help from the public schools are parents who now have children attending them.

When presented with a list of specific values that could be taught in the schools, nearly all receive ringing endorsement from the public. The values 9 adults in 10 believe stu-



dents should be taught:

- ✓ respect for others
- ✓ industry or hard work

- ✓ persistence or the ability to follow through
- ✓ fairness in dealing with others
- ✓ compassion
- ✓ civility and politeness
- ✓ self-esteem

Most people believe that teaching values and ethics would be an effective means of reducing violent behavior in school. Six adults in 10 think ethics and values instruction would be very effective, and 27 percent say it would be somewhat effective. But 12 percent of those polled feel teaching values would have little or no effect upon the level of violence in schools.

Parents urged to monitor media mores

Because parents are increasingly concerned over the barrage of sexual images influencing children, Religious News Service offers the following experts' advice:

- ◇ Don't be afraid to censor. Parents should not hesitate to ban programs, channels, videos, or printed material that they consider inappropriate for their children.
- ◇ Review all PG-13 movies before

allowing your children to watch them, or watch them with the children. Some have profanity and sex.

◇ Keep a close eye on network television, as well as rented videos and movies on premium pay channels. Afternoon talk shows have some of the most sexually explicit language on television.

◇ Urge children to question you about sexual images that confuse

them. Try not to be judgmental about questions, but don't be afraid to say that you feel uncomfortable about offensive images, and explain why.

◇ Live what you preach. The best antidote to the barrage of sexual imagery is the example of parents in respectful and loving relationships.

The failure of sex education

In a biting 25-page article in the October issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, Barbara Defoe Whitehead calls sex education as mandated in a number of states a "failure." Defoe is a vice-president of the Institute for American Values based in New York City.

"It is smart," she says, "to identify sex education with realism, honesty, and sexual freedom. (Its opponents are thereby unrealistic, hypocritical, and sexually unliberated.) Similarly, it is advantageous to link the sex-education campaign with the struggle against religious fundamentalism and, more generally, with opposition to religious

argument in public life."

She points out that studies show that sexual behavior is influenced more by parental discipline and supervision than by sex education courses. She cites a study which shows that "teenagers with moderately strict parents had the lowest level of sexual activity, whereas teens with very strict parents had higher levels, and those with very permissive parents had the highest levels. Moreover, there is a strong empirical relationship between diminished parental supervision and early sexual activity."

Nor is religion irrelevant. "Religiously observant teens are

likelier than others to refrain from sex; the highest level of premarital intercourse occurs among teens with no religious affiliation," reports the University of Michigan sociologist Arthur Thornton. At the same time, he says, cause and effect can work in the other direction. Early sexual activity can dampen religious ardor.

Whitehead's conclusion: "As it is typically taught, sex education has little effect on teenagers' decisions to engage in or postpone sex. Nor do knowledge-based sex-education programs significantly reduce the incidence of teenage pregnancy."

—James P. Schaefer

What's good for the soul is good for the body

"The fear of the LORD adds length to life." "Fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones." So says Scripture (Proverbs 10:27 and 3:7,8).

Now science is discovering what Scripture always taught.

David Larson, a psychiatrist and medical researcher, claims that religion benefits mental health. From 12 years of psychiatric literature, he concluded that more than 90 percent of the studies link religion and good mental health. Religion

proved to be protection against suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, and depression.

Scientific studies also show less heart disease risk, quicker recovery from burns and fractures, lower blood pressure, and fewer hospital stays among churchgoers.

Furthermore, the religious are more likely to stay married than their unchurched neighbors, and therefore are likely to be healthier. A 1989 American Demographics report stated, "Many studies show that broken marriages create stress,

resulting in weight change, stomach upset, fatigue, appetite loss, headaches, nervousness, nightmares, difficulty in sleeping and tensions. No wonder divorced men and women are more likely than the married to suffer from chronic conditions, acute illnesses, and injuries."

Besides making divorce less likely, religion brings to marriage shared values, ideology, purpose, and sense of commitment. It also leads to more satisfaction with sexuality.

(Adapted from *Current Thoughts & Trends*, October 1994)

ELCA sidetracks study on sexuality

Bowing to a yearlong firestorm of criticism, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is abandoning an effort to adopt a church-wide policy statement on human sexuality by 1995.

In October 1993, the ELCA released a first draft of a statement on sexuality. While church officials charged that news accounts were simplistic and sensational, thousands of irate church members nonetheless

flooded the Chicago headquarters with demands that the draft be scrapped.

A second draft of the proposed policy statement was to have been released this month and reviewed for action next year by the denomination's churchwide assembly.

But the Division for Church in Society agreed to scrap the plan upon the recommendation of the Conference of Bishops, Church

Council, and a special consulting panel.

While the second draft will be circulated for comment, it will not be brought to the 1995 Churchwide Assembly.

The church plans to distribute the document to ELCA's 17,000 clergy, 1,300 associates in ministry, and 11,000 congregations before making it available to the general public. Plans are uncertain for it beyond that.

When bread is not bread

It took all day and into the night for Korean scholars working to revise existing Bible translations to agree on the right word for the all-important biblical concept of bread.

Should it be "ddok," a traditional Korean steamed rice bun?

Or should it be "bahng," the Korean word for the Western-style bread loaves now sold in many bak-

eries in South Korea?

"We debated and discussed all day and into the night," said Hyuun Sup Um, a professor of Old Testament at Seoul's Luther Seminary. "Finally we decided to use 'ddok' because the word has been in the Korean Bible now for 100 years and catches the essence of Korea's rice-based sustenance."

Gideon Bibles under attack

A group of atheists and agnostics called the Freedom From Religion Foundation have mounted a campaign to discredit and ultimately remove the Bibles placed in motel rooms by Gideons International. One of the group's ploys is to place stickers on the Bibles either warning

against taking the Bible literally or accusing Gideon, a figure in the Old Testament, of being a mass murderer.

The Gideons have warned the group in a letter to stop placing labels on Bibles, citing possible copyright infringement.

Prisoners file suit for religious rights

Some wanted to wear special prayer beads, some wanted to perform a prayer ritual in prison recreation areas, and some wanted a special religious diet. All were refused by the state of New York and in turn filed suit under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

Authorities for the state maintain that Congress lacks the constitutional authority to place restrictions on

powers given to the state.

The New York challenge could go to the Supreme Court for a final decision on the year-old law's constitutionality.

News reported in this section is derived from Religion News Service, Ecumenical Press Service, Evangelical Press Service, and Lutheran World Information. World news items do not necessarily reflect the views of WELS or *Northwestern Lutheran*.

Pastor loses deduction

Can a pastor take a business deduction for books, vestments, and computer equipment when filing his income tax? When United Methodist clergyman Michael Weber of North Carolina deducted \$722 for such items in 1988, the IRS disallowed it. A recent tax-court ruling has upheld the IRS position.

At issue is whether clergy, who must file as self-employed for Social Security purposes, can file their income tax as self-employed independent contractors. Trial Judge John Pajak found that Weber "is an employee for federal income tax purposes."

The case turned on a legal concept known as the right-to-control test: how and by whom the pastor is supervised. Pajak found that Weber was subject to "significant control" by the church. Weber has not decided whether to appeal the decision.

DEFINING RELIGION

ATHEIST: A person who believes that there is no God. The Bible calls such a person a fool (Psalm 14:1, Psalm 53:1).

—John M. Brenner

The deadline for submitting notices is six weeks before publication date. To place a notice please call 414/256-3231.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Administrator for Communication on Financial Support

The Conference of Presidents invites synod members to nominate candidates for administrator for Communication on Financial Support. The candidate should be theologically trained, understand the scriptural principles of Christian giving, and be capable of managing a multi-person office. Because he will also administer the Division of Administration, he will spend time on that division's budgeting and strategic planning.

Send names by Jan. 9 to Pastor Robert Zink, S68 W14329 Gaulke Court, Muskego WI 53150.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

The Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary board of control, with the approval of the Board for Ministerial Education, requests the voting constituency of the synod to nominate theologically trained candidates for the position of seminary librarian to fill a vacancy effective the close of the 1994-95 school year.

The board also requests nominations for professor of education (including use of computers and media) and Old Testament to fill a vacancy effective the end of the present school year. Calling this man is subject to approval by the BME and the Coordinating Council.

Please send names with pertinent information by Dec. 21 to Pastor Paul Manthey, 8419 W Melvina St, Milwaukee WI 53222. The list of nominees will be shared with the Conference of Presidents and will be available from the seminary office, 11831 N Seminary Dr, Mequon WI 53092; 414/242-7200.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS Martin Luther College

Martin Luther College's board of control requests voting members of WELS to nominate qualified pastors and teachers for two positions.

English: Nominees should be qualified to teach composition and literature. The position will be filled pending approval of the Board for Ministerial Education and the Coordinating Council.

Music: Nominees should be qualified to teach organ, Lutheran worship, and direct a choir.

Send nominations by Jan. 15 to Philip Leyrer, 3209 Nightingale Lane, Middleton WI 53562.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS Michigan Lutheran Seminary

Voting members of the synod are invited to submit nominations for the vacant German professorship at Michigan Lutheran Seminary. With BME permission, the MLS board will call an individual to teach intermediate and advanced German and supervise one or more extracurricular activities. Faculty members must have or attain synod and state of Michigan certification. Please send nominations with pertinent information to the board's secretary by Dec. 30. Upon request a list of the nominees will be available from the secretary, Mr. Jerold Meier, 12958 Beck Rd, Plymouth MI 48170.

MISSION AND MINISTRY SEMINAR

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary invites pastors to a mission and ministry seminar, "Share the Promise," Jan. 31-Feb. 2 from 7:30 AM-12:30 PM each day. The seminar will focus on the work of WELS parish services and home and world missions. Contact Larry Schlomer, 6717 W Wartburg Cir, Mequon WI 53092; 414/567-6251.

WELS ADMINISTRATION BUILDING HOLIDAYS

The synod administration building will be closed:
December 23-26 and on these dates in 1995:
January 2—New Year's Day
April 14—Good Friday
May 29—Memorial Day
July 3-4—Independence Day
September 4—Labor Day
November 23-24—Thanksgiving
December 25-26—Christmas
 You can leave messages on voice mail, 414/ 256-3888, or FAX 414/256-3899

GIFTS TO WELS

Individual contributions for the mission and ministry of WELS, above congregational giving, are welcome. You may designate a particular program or fund. Please make checks payable to WELS. Designate the work you wish to support on the memo line of your check or on an attached note. Send to Ministry of Planned Giving, WELS, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398.

SONGS AND LOGO MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE

The students of Northwestern College and Dr. Martin Luther College who are working to develop student life at Martin Luther College request members of the WELS to submit music and/or lyrics for an MLC school song/alma mater and an athletic "fight song." Students are also seeking art that would depict the school mascot (Knights) and colors (red, white, and black) for purposes of student publicity. Send ideas before Dec. 31 to John Lawrence, MLC Vice President for Student Life, 225 Highland, New Ulm MN 56073.

NAMES WANTED

Survey work preliminary to conducting exploratory services. People interested in WELS services, contact person noted.

PEACHTREE CITY / FAYETTEVILLE / NEWMAN / SHARPSBURG, GEORGIA—Pastor Tim Wempner, 154 Cobblestone Cove, Sharpsburg GA 30277; 404/253-0593.

ROWLETT, TEXAS—Divine Peace. Pastor Dan Voigt, 2519 Larkspur Ln, Rowlett TX 75088; 214/475-6389.

CHANGE OF TIME AND PLACE OF WORSHIP

FORT WALTON BEACH, FLORIDA—Risen Savior, 104B SW Hollywood Blvd. Sunday school and Bible class, 9:15 AM. Worship, 10:30 AM. Pastor Martin Scheele, 904/862-2361.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

PASTORS:

- Adams, Brian J.**, from Christ, Keystone Heights, Fla., to St. Paul, Franklin, Wis.
- Ehlers, Timothy J.**, from St. John, Manitowoc, Wis., to exploratory, Phoenix, Ariz.
- Furno, David J.**, from Holy Cross, Standish, Mich., to St. John, Westland, Mich.
- Gibbons, Gregory D.**, from Mt. Zion, Kenosha, Wis., to Lola Park, Redford, Mich.
- Jeske, John C.**, from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., to retirement (Aug. 1995).
- Koester, Robert J.**, from Ascension, Moorhead, Minn., to Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wis.
- Malchow, Daniel W.**, from WELS Commission on Communication for Financial Support to retirement (July 1995).
- Oehlke, Christopher C.**, from St. Paul, Faith, S. D., to James Valley, Jamestown, N.D./St. Paul, Valley City, N.D.
- Pommeranz, Norman E.**, from Northdale, Tampa, Fla., to retirement.
- Schaefer, Paul E.**, from Glory, DeSoto, Tex., to St. Peter, Plymouth, Mich.
- Schupman, Arthur W.**, from St. Peter, Milwaukee, Wis., to Living Water, Hot Springs Village, Ark.
- Valleskey, Thomas A.**, from Shepherd of the Mountain, Reno, Nev., to Grace, Sitka, Alaska.
- Westerhaus, Martin O.**, from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., to retirement (Aug. 1995).
- Winkel, Timothy J.**, from Good Shepherd, Omaha, Neb., to Shepherd of the Valley, Westminster, Col.

CONGREGATION TREASURERS

The cutoff date for Synod Mission Offering receipts in the synod's post office lock box is the last business day of each month. December 1994 lock box offerings will be credited as 1994 receipts through January 10, 1995, as long as they are received in the lock box on or before that date and are clearly labeled as December offerings on Form 220. Please note that offerings must be mailed to the lock box rather than delivered to the synod offices.
 Randy Matter, controller

HANDBELL FESTIVAL

Two regional WELS handbell festivals will be held April 22-23. The eastern regional will be at Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis., and the western at St. Martin Lutheran School, Watertown, S.D. For information contact Cheryl Diener, 223 W Badger, Waupaca WI 54981; 715/258-7203.

AVAILABLE

CHRISTMAS MUSIC TAPE—30-minute cassette with selections from Martin Luther Preparatory School Christmas concerts. \$3.75 per tape, including shipping, payable to MLPS. Send to MLPS Recruitment Office, 405 E Campion Blvd, Prairie du Chien WI 53821.

MIMEOGRAPH—AB Dick 555. Free. Contact Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, 9420 W Capitol Dr, Milwaukee WI 53222; 414/463-2325.

OFFICE EQUIPMENT—electric spirit duplicators; thermofaxes; mimeographs; typewriters. Free for shipping. St. John, Watertown WI 53094; 414/261-5959.

PIPE ORGAN—4 ranks, chimes. Call after 5 PM. Don Yahne, Kendall, Wis. 608/463-7536.

NEEDED

BIBLE STORY PICTURE CHARTS by Concordia, Old and New Testament, and **BIBLE PICTURES TO COLOR**, New Testament packets, by M. Doris Lindemann, published by Gibson. For Sunday school teacher. Fran Siegler, 1435 Wayne Rd., West Bend WI 53095; 414/334-1996.

ORGANIST—for Divinity-Divine Charity, Whitefish Bay, Wis. Call Pastor Robert Dick, 414/332-7572.

AUDIO/VISUAL LIBRARY SERVICES

ELIJAH (Code 8231)
 1994 25 min. 1/2" VHS color PIJ
 Although freely embellished, this animated version retells the scriptural account of Elijah's ministry up to and including his victory over the prophets of Baal.

ONCE FOR ALL (Code 5145)
 1994 8 min. 1/2" VHS color JSCA
 Is there a "No Trespassing" sign in front of your church? There may be if your church seems uninviting to minority cultures. This video will help congregations get started in the challenging work of multi-cultural evangelism.

BIBLE HISTORY VIDEOS
 This series of Bible stories was originally offered as 16mm films with live actors. The films have been put into video format. The "new" videos include:

- Abraham, a Man Of Faith** (Code 5146)
 1994 15 min. 1/2" VHS color PIJSCA
- Jacob, Bearer of the Promise** (Code 5147)
 1994 16 min. 1/2" VHS color PIJSCA
- Joseph, the Young Man** (Code 5148)
 1994 15 min. 1/2" VHS color PIJSCA
- Moses, Called by God** (Code 5149)
 1994 17 min. 1/2" VHS color PIJSCA
- Joshua, the Conqueror** (Code 5150)
 1994 16 min. 1/2" VHS color PIJSCA
- Gideon, the Liberator** (Code 5151)
 1994 15 min. 1/2" VHS color PIJSCA
- Ruth, a Faithful Woman** (Code 5152)
 1994 14 min. 1/2" VHS color PIJSCA
- Samuel, a Dedicated Man** (Code 5153)
 1994 17 min. 1/2" VHS color PIJSCA
- David, a Young Hero** (Code 5154)
 1994 16 min. 1/2" VHS color PIJSCA
- David, King of Israel** (Code 5155)
 1994 16 min. 1/2" VHS color PIJSCA
- Solomon, a Man of Wisdom** (Code 5156)
 1994 16 min. 1/2" VHS color PIJSCA
- Elijah, a Fearless Prophet** (Code 5157)
 1994 16 min. 1/2" VHS color PIJSCA

An annual fee of \$75 allows a congregation to use 30 titles at no additional cost except for return postage. For \$100 congregations may use 50 titles during the calendar year. Individual titles may be rented for \$7.50 or \$10 depending on the format. Order from AUDIO/VISUAL LIBRARY SERVICES, Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113th St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284. Phone 1-800-662-6093, ext. 7 (Milwaukee area phone 414/475-6600, ext. 127). Call weekdays between 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.

The ten virgins

Matthew 25:1-13

by Mark E. Braun

Ten giggly teenage girls on their way to a wedding. Toes pinched into narrow high heels, party dresses hiding skinned knees, mousse and lip gloss, the scent of Jontue. Just a hint of how their little-girl bodies were being transformed, butterfly-like, into graceful young women.

"Why are you bringing those clunky bottles of extra oil?" five asked.

"Cause otherwise we won't have enough," the other five answered.

"Yeah, you will. You'll be sorry dragging them around all night. I bet the groom shows up early."

But he didn't. So the girls went on giggling about the cute guys in their algebra class, and whose dad was the most fun, and what secret would you never tell your mother. As evening turned to night, the wedding became a slumber party, and they all sacked out on the floor.

Left out of the party

Isn't that how it always goes? The unexpected happens all the time. The bridegroom is very late, but then someone shouts, "He's here!"

The girls bound off the carpet, rub the sleep from their eyes, check their lamps—"Oh, no! They're going out!" Suddenly bringing no extra oil didn't look so smart. It wasn't so dumb after all, carrying around those clunky bottles. "Quick! Give us some of yours." (Can you hear desperation?)

"We can't," the others say. "There won't be enough for us if we give you some"—a poor display of

Christian sharing, but that's not what this story's about.

"Go get your own," they said, but while their friends were gone, the party really got rolling. In went the five who had brought their clunky bottles.

When the other five got back from the all-night convenience store, they could hear the band playing inside the great hall. And when they pressed their faces against the window pane, they could see dancing. But the bouncer didn't know them, and he locked the door.

Worse than missing a wedding

It's enough to break a young girl's heart, but Jesus was talking about

bigger things than missing the coolest wedding of the season. We've all experienced that panicky feeling that rises from the pit of our stomach.

"I had all day to go to the store, but I put it off, and now the store's closed."

"I could have finished my homework over the weekend. Now it's too late."

Some day it will be too late even to believe.

The time to believe is now.

"Keep watch," Jesus said, "because you do not know the day or the hour." This is serious business. And yet, when all is said and done, don't forget what we're waiting for. The bridegroom will appear to join the bride he loves. The Savior returns to gather his redeemed. We're looking forward to a party!

Sure, we need to watch for him. What a shame it would be to miss all the fun.

Next: The talents.

Mark Braun teaches at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee.



Correction:

The parable of the wise and wicked servants (Nov.) is not in Matthew 2, but in Matthew 21:45-51.

What really happened that night

What was it really like in the stable when Jesus was born? Few if any biblical scenes have been depicted by artists more often: Mary and Joseph and the shepherds gazing at the baby.

I have a book in my library titled *The Bible in Art: Twenty Centuries of Famous Bible Paintings*. It has twelve paintings of the stable scene. Recently my four-year-old granddaughter and I were looking at some paintings in this book. When we came to the stable scene, she asked a most intriguing question: "Why is the baby lying on the ground?" Sure enough: in six of the twelve paintings, Jesus is lying on the ground.

I did not have a good answer for her, but her question set me to thinking. Luke's Gospel says plainly: "She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger." Then why do the artists show the baby lying on the ground?

It's not only the baby who is out of place in these paintings; there is little attempt at realism. The scene is made contemporary and is glorified. The artists do not depict the stable as it really was.

To get an idea of what it was really like that night in the stable, you might visit a shelter for the homeless. On the night that Jesus was born, Mary was homeless. She found no room in the inn. She was sheltered in a cattle shed. There her baby was born.

Martin Luther describes the sorry scene: "The birth was still more pitiable. No one regarded this young wife bringing forth her first-born. No one took her condition to heart. No one noticed that in a strange place she had not the very least thing needful in childbirth. . . . no warm water, nor even cold. No fire, no light. The mother was herself the midwife and the maid. The cold manger was the bed and the bathtub. Who showed the poor girl what to do? She had never had a baby before. I am amazed that the little one did not freeze."

Luther stands in awe of the shocking contradiction unveiled that night in the stable: "Instead of soft and silken stuff/You have but hay and straw so rough/On which as King, so rich and great/To be enthroned in royal state" (CW 38:11).

What was it really like that night in the stable when Jesus was born? Luther may be more realistic than the old painters in describing the scene. But to picture that baby lying on the ground suggests a profound theological truth: Behold the Word made flesh, God interfacing with earth, come to redeem us sinners from death and hell. That's really what happened that night in the stable.

Victor H. Prange



Victor Prange is pastor at Peace, Janesville, Wis.

To get an idea of what it was really like that night in the stable, you might visit a shelter for the homeless.

Grammar vs. gender

In his letter, "Grammar's what you make it" [June], Roger Kovaciny makes a valid point in a vivid style: "The church has the most to lose by turning people off needlessly," so we should be careful not to insult people by careless use of language—in particular, by using "he" for the impersonal pronoun, which some women may find insulting.

Pastor Kovaciny's legitimate concerns can be met without violating the laws of syntax. If you want to avoid specific gender references, use second person pronouns in informal speech and writing. Those who need to be more formal can make indefinite references with the plural. Anyone who wants to find a way to avoid insulting genders can do so without confusing numbers. All who disagree may write their own letters—but not to me.

*Philip Wilde
Englewood, Florida*

Child care centers

No one can argue that child care centers [Aug.] bring opportunities for evangelism, but child care centers also give a mistaken idea that the child care trend is a fact of life.

Church food pantries provide to those in need, yet we seldom expect our church members to expect a daily meal from the food pantry. A child care center is also a service provided for those in need. Why, then, are so many church members using this service?

Child development research has demonstrated that young children need significant interaction with parents and that a mother's care is particularly important during the early years of a child's life. This is not some "traditional family ideal" that can be ignored.

I pray that we will not succumb to society dictating our parental roles, but allow the Holy Spirit to guide us in our quest to train our children.

*Glenn E. Jones
Shawnee, Kansas*

Child care

It was a pleasure to read "Shaping young lives" [Aug.]. As a preschool teacher, I've had the opportunity to witness young lives in both Lutheran and non-Lutheran settings. I was excited to read that some WELS churches are using child care settings as missionary fields. God gives us many means and tools to spread his Word. Child care centers are tools that have been overlooked for far too long. God bless these centers and their staffs.

*Julie A. Miner
Belle Plaine, Minnesota*

Using credit cards

Payment of credit card balances ["Your question, please," Sept.] is not free-loading, because the issuing bank collects a fee from the merchant.

The balance payer's use of the card is covered by that fee and therefore contributes no loss to the bank. Finance charges are for administrative expenses in handling individual accounts, the largest of which is for bad debt losses.

Most balance payers use the card for convenience. Too, many card users find that a transaction is approved more quickly than when paying by check.

*Herbert C. Huebner
Ruston, Louisiana*

Church musicians

What a pleasure it was to read "Cherish your church musicians" [Sept.]. We take music in worship for granted—until it isn't there.

Studying music can cost sizable amounts of money. The fees are not insignificant even if we look upon them as an investment.

Organists and choir directors should find a seminar each year to improve their skills. It would benefit the congregation if this could be part of the budget.

One more thought: the hymns and anthems that are played and sung on Sunday do not appear out of thin air. Each musician must have the time to practice them. Time spent preparing

a service is important. Nothing distracts a service more than sloppy playing or vocal music that is not well thought out.

*Patricia Backhaus
Waukesha, Wisconsin*

Computerized church music

"Cherish your church musicians" [Sept.] covered some problems I see in church music. When asked, "What are your plans for an organ in your new church?" I have heard a pastor say, "We have an electronic keyboard and on alternate Sundays we use a computer." I have heard people say this is the future of church music.

Another comment on payment: Our congregation pays a teenage baby sitter as much as the church musician.

*Eldora Behning
Alpharetta, Georgia*

Choosing a school

With all due respect to Tom Franzmann, I couldn't disagree more with "Choosing a school" [Oct.]. Our Lutheran high schools are capable of preparing young people for their chosen career, whatever that might be.

But beyond that, the most important reason for attending an area high school is the opportunity to live at home. At this time in a young person's life there is nothing as important as living with loving parents who will instill their values in their son or daughter. Being raised by strangers and peers miles away from home is hardly the atmosphere a 14-year-old needs. Others can't possibly take the same interest in your child. Also, a big part of high school is sharing experiences, whether that means watching your child participate in athletic events or telling you what they did that day.

A prep school may offer an education but there is much more to preparing for life than what is taught in the classroom.

*Roger A. Ferch
Grafton, Wisconsin*

"Choosing a school" [Oct.] provided commendable support for families who choose Christian education. However, I was disappointed with the implication that a prep school is a better way to prepare for the ministry than a Lutheran high school.

At our Lutheran high schools, those interested in the ministry receive the preparation and encouragement needed for enrollment at our ministerial college.

I am thankful for the fine work done at our preparatory schools. But the Lutheran high school that is near enough to allow my children to live at home is a blessing. During these critical years parents need to support, monitor, and participate in their teenager's high school experiences. Thank God for the Lutheran high schools that make this possible!

*Gregory Thiesfeldt
Fond du Lac, Wisconsin*

Thomas Franzmann replies:

I did not say the Lutheran high school was inferior; nor that the training provided in them is not equal that provided in prep schools.

Lutheran high schools are doing a fine job at what they are chartered to do—provide a Christ-centered education for young people entering a variety of occupations. I doubt the synod prep schools can match that. On the other hand, prep schools are doing a fine job of what they are chartered to do—provide the training which equips students to enter the next step in preparing for the ministry. I don't think area high schools can be as consistent in providing that as prep schools can.

There are exceptions, of course, in both kinds of schools. Sometimes a prep school turns out a fine doctor or engineer or sanitation worker. Sometimes an area high school turns out a fine pastor or teacher. And some schools do better than others. But if a student knows he or she wants to prepare for the ministry, I recommend prep school.

Volunteers needed

We visited Russia and Bulgaria last summer to find out if there was a useful task that we, as lay people, could perform on a long-term basis. We observed the results the Word of God has achieved through faithful workers. We saw the results of God's love in the faces of new Christians.

Our synod has sent as many missionaries into these fields as our monetary reserves will allow. We need volunteers who can help. WELS Kingdom Workers supports and promotes volunteer help in this and other areas.

Russia has close to 300 million people. Can there be too many of us going?

*Eberhard and Susan Loescher
Salem, Iowa*

Graduates without calls

Again this year not all Dr. Martin Luther College graduates were assigned. Shouldn't new graduates be given priority before married women coming out of retirement and before a non-synod-certified person from the local congregation?

Why can't we do something to get DMLC students state-certified? Unassigned graduates can't teach in public schools without going back to school to become certified.

*Jim and Barbara Casper
Colgate, Wisconsin*

Wayne Borgwardt, administrator for ministerial education, responds:

The WELS teacher education program prepares for ministry in the church, rather than merely providing preparation for a job. Congregations are encouraged to call graduates of our ministerial college. Former teachers are encouraged to update skills prior to re-entering the ministry. Minnesota state certification for DMLC students is hindered by the requirement of an internship in a public school.

In the interest of conciseness, letters are subject to editing. Full name, address and daytime phone number should accompany each letter. Names will be withheld only under unusual circumstances. Letters cannot be acknowledged, nor can all letters be used. Letter writers are responsible for the accuracy of their statements. *Northwestern Lutheran* cannot research letters to determine factuality. Address your letters to *READERS FORUM, Northwestern Lutheran, 2929 N Mayfair Road, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; Fax 414/256-3899.*

January '95

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

One of the marks of God's people is their love for his Word. Many have said, "I will start at Genesis and read the Bible through to the end." But the project is soon abandoned. These proposed readings—5 to 10 minutes each day—will take you through the entire Bible systematically and with variety. The next month's readings will appear in the next issue.

Are we all God's children?

by John F. Brug

Can we call non-Christians God's children, or are they only his creatures? Can we call only Christians children of God?

When the Bible calls us "children of God," it is usually emphasizing that we are God's heirs who will enjoy life on his estate in heaven. This is true only of Christians (Galatians 3:26-4:7). All people are God's children in the sense that he created them and redeemed them. Paul in that way called the heathen God's "offspring" (Acts 17:26-30). In Acts 17 he used a

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what religion
people follow.*

Greek word (*genos*) for "children" that implies only descent from God. He did not use the Greek word he used in Galatians 3 (*huiioi*), which implies rights of inheritance.

Before God brings people to repent and come to faith in Christ, they are his children only in the sense that the lost son in Luke 15 remained the father's child even after he had abandoned his father. The father still loved him and

wanted him to return, but he was not an heir until he was received back into his father's house.

Today when people say, "We are all God's children," they usually mean that it doesn't matter what religion people follow; they can be saved without faith in Christ. This is false. We, therefore, should avoid saying, "We are all children of God," if we will leave the impression that salvation is possible without faith in Christ.

In Acts 17 as soon as Paul addressed the heathen as God's "offspring," he immediately called on them to abandon their idols and turn to the only true God. Whatever vocabulary we use, we should always make three points clear: God is the creator of all people; God has provided salvation for all people: only those who repent and turn to Christ will enjoy an eternal inheritance in God's kingdom of light.

Why don't Lutherans worship on the seventh day—Saturday—as God commanded? Didn't Sunday originate as a pagan day for worshipping the sun? Didn't a pope change the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday?

God commanded Israel to worship on the seventh day, but the command applied only during the Old Testament.

The New Testament tells us we have been freed from the Sabbath command: "He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations. . . . Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a

New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day" (Colossians 2:13-16).

We obey Christ's command, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another . . ." (Hebrews 10:25). Within 20 years of Jesus' death, Sunday had apparently become the main meeting day of the church. We, therefore, have the permission of the Lord and the example of the New Testament church in using Sunday as our primary day of worship.

The early church fathers were aware that some pagans worshipped the sun on Sunday, but they declared there could be no better day to rededicate to the true Sun of Righteousness. Constantine, the first Christian emperor, apparently made Sunday a holiday. The pope did not make Sunday the day of worship. The first Christians freely made this choice.

Two responses are appropriate to the charge of Sunday worship being pagan or Catholic. First, defend the freedom you have in Christ. Don't let anyone make you a slave to rules that God has not laid upon you. Second, use the freedom God has given you. Gladly use every opportunity you have to praise the Lord and hear his Word.

Send your questions to *QUESTIONS*, Northwestern Lutheran, 2929 N Mayfair Road, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398. Questions of general interest are preferred. Questions will be answered only through this column.



John Brug teaches theology and Old Testament at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.

MRS. KEVIN SCHEIBEL PHOTOGRAPHY



Getting Christmas right

Do your parents celebrate Christmas? What a foolish question! Of course they do. Doesn't everyone?

No, everyone doesn't. Some don't even try. And some who try, don't get it right. They fill Christmas with tinsel, treats, and treasures; the trimmed tree; the fantastic food; the glittering gifts. They have a merry time with friends and family. But they don't get it right.

Getting it right often depends on the answer to another, more telling question: Were your parents Christian?

It's a question I was asked on a recent visit to our mission in Hong Kong. In a room with all new Christians except for me, no one else could answer yes to that question. No one else had parents who taught them the true meaning of Christmas. None of their parents had been Christian.

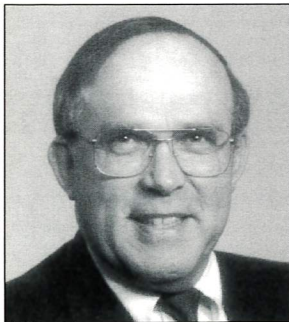
Being a Christian and celebrating Christmas go together. You can't have one without the other. To be a Christian, to believe in the Christ child, is the only way you can really enjoy the full fragrance of Christmas.

Christmas and being a Christian belong together because they both begin with Christ. They both are part of God's plan of salvation through his one and only Son.

This Christmas, as you celebrate with your family, thank God your family is Christian. If they aren't, or if you know others who aren't, why not share the greatest Christmas gift of all, God's Son, with them? They will eternally thank you.

A blessed Christmas, Christian!

Karl R. Gurgel



*Karl R. Gurgel
is president of the Wisconsin
Evangelical Lutheran Synod.*

Do you have a question for President Gurgel? Please send it to *PERSON TO PERSON*, Northwestern Lutheran, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398.

He's in heaven now

He's in heaven now. He had such tough beginnings. It wasn't enough he was born in a stable, but while he was still an infant, his parents had to flee the country to save his life.

They were people of modest means, and once he left home, he got by on even less, without his own home to rest. Many people followed him for a while, but few understood him. In the end, most abandoned him. One of his closest friends betrayed him.

He did only good things, but many hated him anyway. They plotted to frame him for crimes he didn't commit. They dragged him to a kangaroo court and sealed his early death.

If his birth was lowly, his death was rock bottom. Oh how he suffered! Alone! Tortured! Mocked! Crucified! What sweet relief when he could say, "It is finished!"

It's good to know he's in heaven now.

Knowing he's in heaven sheds heavenly light on Jesus' birth. For at his birth, heaven's angel announced him as Savior. And a host of angels gave glory to God.

However, we would have trouble sharing the angels' praise, if we didn't know the rest of his story. He came from heaven and returned to heaven. He gave up heaven's glory for us in order to restore heaven's glory to us.

Thank God he's in heaven now.

That means the once helpless child in a manger did all the things no other human being could do. He did the heavenly Father's will and overcame death and hell.

MRS. KEVIN SCHEIBEL PHOTOGRAPHY



It means he ascended to heaven and in his power as God still blesses us with his invisible presence.

It means our Savior lives, and we live in him.

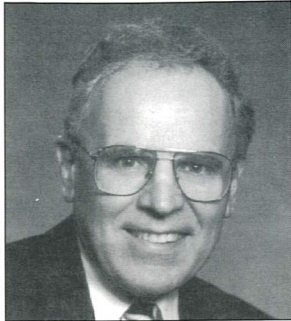
It means for his sake, God sees us the way we see Jesus, innocent and heaven-bound.

It means he's coming again to take us to heaven with him.

Christmas is about more than a birth and a wonderful child. It's about heaven connecting with earth, about God restoring us as his children. It's a birthday planned in heaven and staged on earth, but with heaven as its eternal backdrop.

It seems, therefore, that I need to do more than wish you a "merry Christmas" now. "Peace!" comes to mind, but you need to know why Christmas means peace. "Christmas blessings!" comes close because it calls for the blessings that the newborn Savior won. "God be with you at Christmas!" is my sincere wish. But maybe you'll understand best what I wish for you when I remind you, "He's in heaven now."

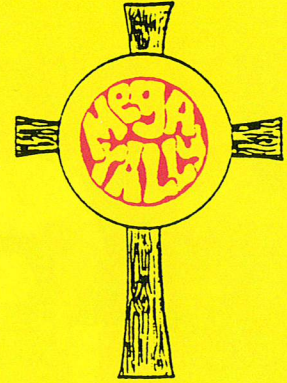
Gary J. Baumler



Gary Baumler is editor of Northwestern Lutheran.

MEGA RALLY

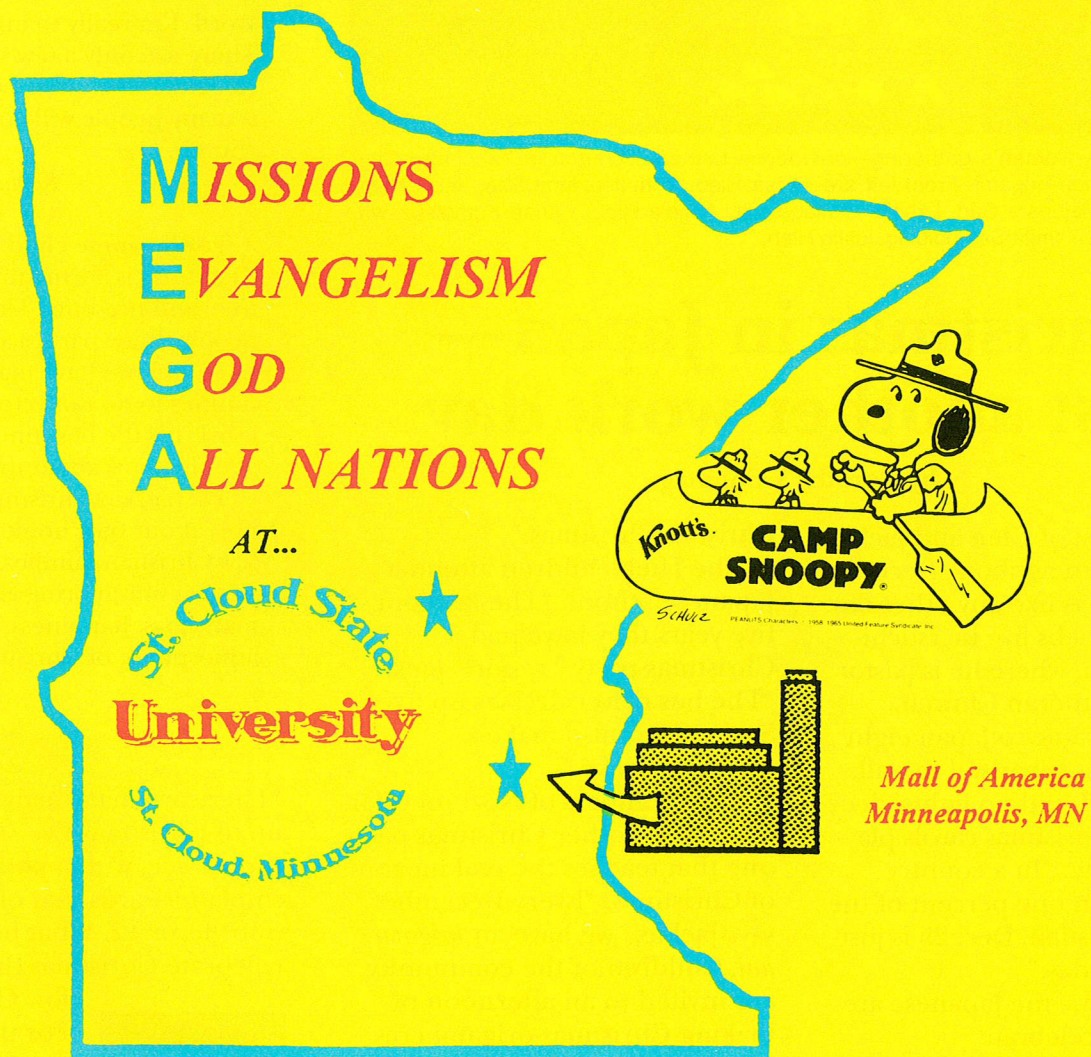
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**Commission on Youth Discipleship
WELS Parish Services**



The fungikai—women's gathering—of Nozomi Lutheran church in Tsuchiura City, Japan, with their origami. From left are Tessa Hieb, Komatsuzama San, Jacki Hieb, Kobori San, Majuhara San, Lynelle Schleusener, Angela Hieb, Nanae Komatsuzawa, Tsutsumi San, Tomita San holding Justin Hieb.

Christmas in Japan— just another work day

by Dorothy J. Sonntag

For most of Glen and Jackie Hieb's neighbors, December 25 is like any other day. The Hiebs live in Tsuchiura City, Japan, where he is pastor of Nozomi Lutheran Church.

"When we came to Japan eight years ago, I was surprised to walk downtown and find no lights, decorations, or Christmas carols playing," says Jackie. "In a country where less than one percent of the people is Christian, Dec. 25 is just another work day."

Now, she says, the Japanese are beginning to celebrate Christmas—but without Christ. "Things have changed a bit. We are finding more decorations, and Santa Claus is everywhere—but a nativity is almost never seen. The Japanese are still missing the

Christ in Christmas."

The Hieb children attend a Japanese school. "The last four or five years they have had a Christmas party," reports Jackie. "The bus driver dresses up like Santa. They also make a Christmas cake."

The members of Nozomi offer children another Christmas party, one that teaches the real meaning of Christmas. "Every December," says Jackie, "we have an *origami-kai*. Children of the community are invited to an afternoon of making Christmas origami creations. We combine this traditional Japanese art form with the story of Jesus' birth."

For the Christians in Tsuchiura City, "church is the only way to celebrate Christmas," says Jackie.

JAPANESE CHRISTIANS TALK ABOUT CHRISTMAS

When I was a child, I thought Christmas was when I was given presents. I used to pretend to be an angel and sing "Silent Night." I didn't know the true meaning of Christmas, but now I do.

Kobori San

Christmas in Japan is just a party. But in church we learn of Jesus Christ through God's Word. I'm really thankful for it. There are only a few families that celebrate in church, so my hope is many people will come to church.

Komatsuzawa San

For Japanese children, Christmas is a Christmas cake, a tree, and presents. The young people enjoy parties and dates. In church we have many opportunities to do *dendo* [evangelism]. It's the best time to let people know about their Savior.

We had no Christmas celebration at our own homes except a few Christian families. So activities in church bring each of us many joys, happiness, and the atmosphere of Christmas.

Tomita San

"There are many activities leading up to Christmas Eve. The climax is the service, with a potluck fellowship afterwards that often goes until 11 or 12. What better way to celebrate Christmas than with fel-

low Christians? For them, it is truly the celebration of Jesus' birth."



*Dorothy Sonntag
is assistant editor of
Northwestern Lutheran.*