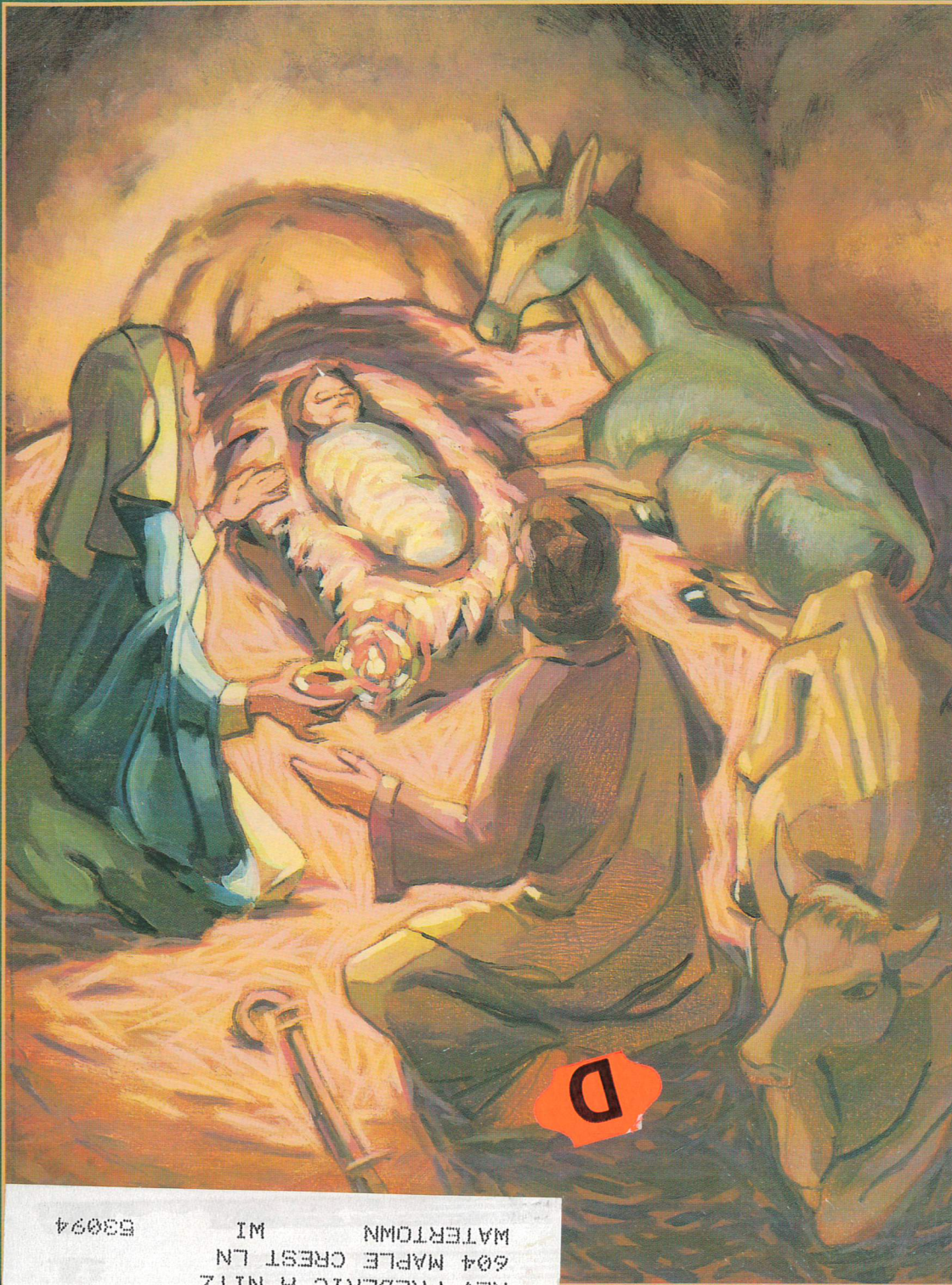


NORTHWESTERN

December 1998

# LUTHERAN

THE WORD FROM THE WELS



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giving to  
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By the  
grace of  
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Holy birth  
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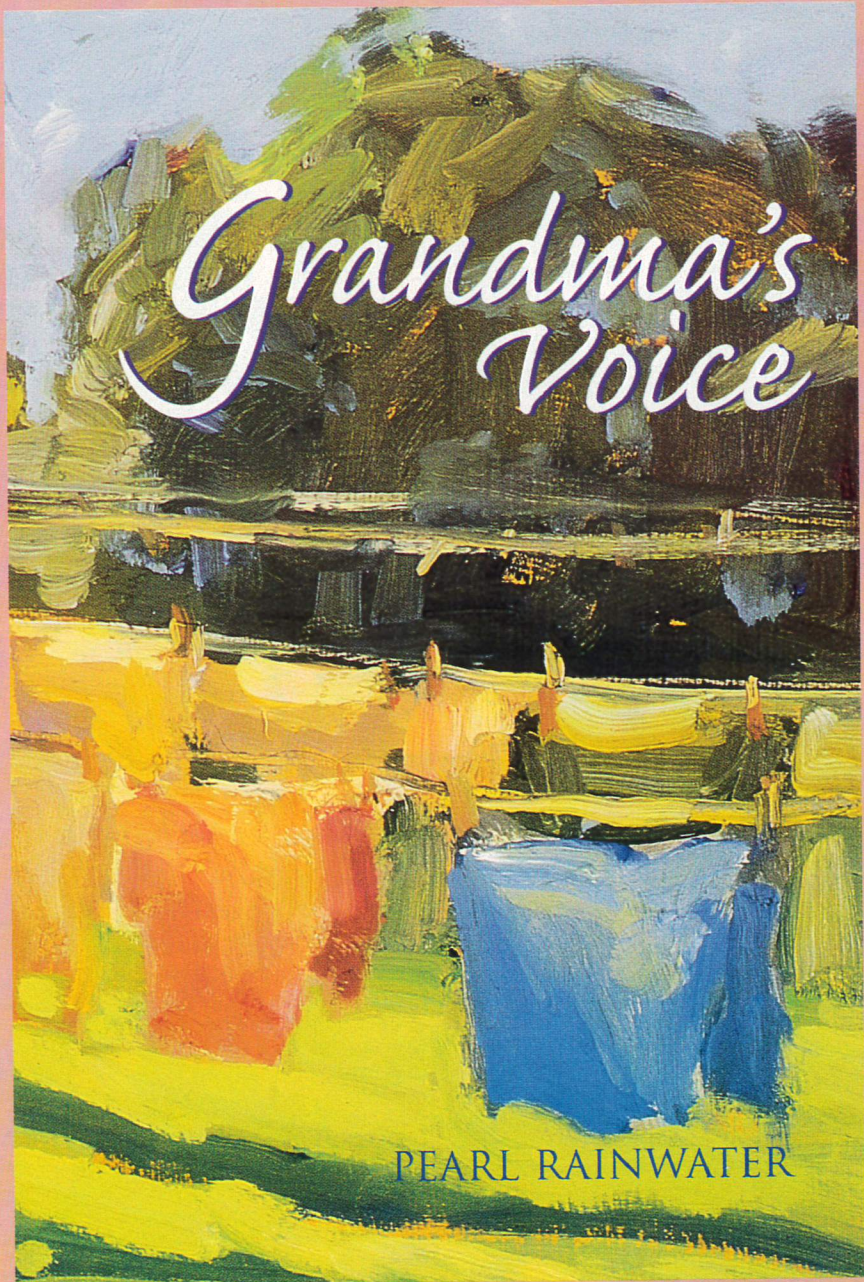
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## Sit and listen

*[Martha] had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed." Luke 10:39-42*

Eric S. Hartzell

When Jesus is around, there is a posture that comes naturally . . . standing and talking. There is also a godly posture that does not come naturally . . . sitting and listening. Sitting and listening to Jesus is better than standing and talking to him.

### Standing and talking

Standing and talking is prone to all sorts of distractions. From this position, Martha could spy her list of self-imposed chores looming in the background. She could see her sister sitting, apparently not sharing her enthusiasm in doing housework for Jesus. She could observe Jesus doing nothing to right her workload. You can hear her petulant voice: "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?" Martha didn't realize how tall she stood and spoke that day—taller even than Jesus. She could hear her own bossy command echoing down to him, "Tell her to help me!"

It isn't wrong to do things for Jesus. Love wants to. But it is wrong to do things for Jesus before we sit and listen to him, lest we forget why we are doing what we are doing. So what if housework doesn't

get done? So what if our projects sit on a back burner for a while?

Strength to stand and work for Jesus doesn't come until we sit and listen to him. In fact, the sitting and listening to Jesus is the one thing we do that really matters. It is life reduced to the simplest denominator.

### Sitting and listening

When we sit at Jesus' feet and look up at him to listen, we see only heaven in the background. No distractions there! When we strain to hear what he is saying to us, we cannot strain to know what others are not doing. When he tells us what he has done for us, we aren't distracted by what we need to be doing for him. Jesus doesn't need our activity. "He is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else"

(Acts 17:25). Mary sat and listened. It was the best thing she could do. It is still the best thing we can do.

One thing is needful. Listening to Jesus say he saves us is an ongoing activity. It isn't like Henry David Thoreau's response when asked if he got the newspaper. "I read a newspaper," he replied. Once with a newspaper was enough for him. Believers don't just hear Jesus once. They continue to sit and listen for a lifetime. Only from this posture can they ever rise to do anything good for the one who did everything good for them.

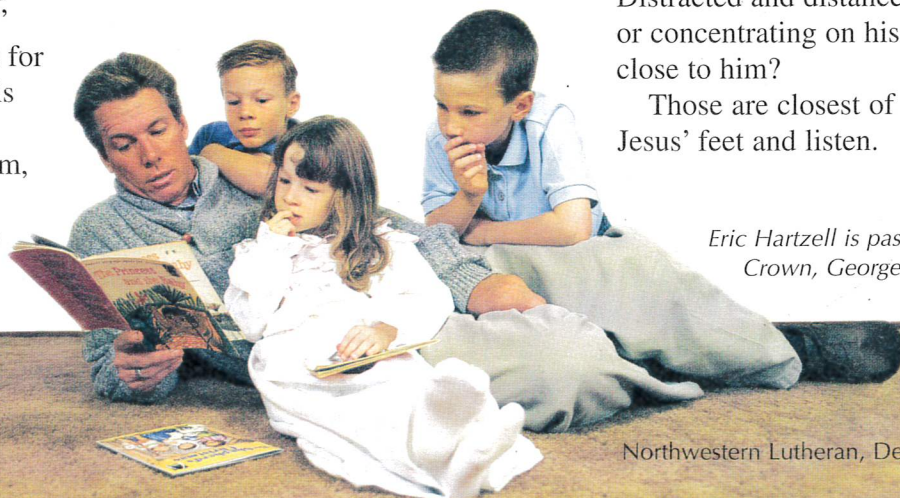
This sitting and listening is the one thing necessary. He reminds you over and over in one-on-one conversation, "I did everything for you. I saved you from your sin and death. Consider that as you do life's chores."

On our feet or at Jesus' feet? Distracted and distanced from Jesus or concentrating on his Word and close to him?

Those are closest of all who sit at Jesus' feet and listen.

NL

Eric Hartzell is pastor at Cross and Crown, Georgetown, Texas.







# NORTHWESTERN LUTHERAN

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correction: B Artin Haig took the picture on p. 18 of the November NL.

❑ As you celebrate Christmas, don't forget that millions don't know why Jesus was born. A number of articles share the true message:

- ✓ "The Christmas place" (p. 6)
- ✓ "The iconoclast" (p. 18)
- ✓ "One still night" (p. 29)
- ✓ "For our sakes he became poor" (p. 30)
- ✓ "All I want for Christmas" (p. 36)

Two offer a message from missions:

- ✓ "Gift giving to remember" (p. 11)
- ✓ "Holy birth or birth of a nation?" (p. 14)

Once you've read these, share their messages with unchurched friends and family. Tell them about this baby who lived and died—all because of love. This is the best gift you can share.

If, in sharing the message, you share your magazine, let us know and we'll replace yours . . . FREE!

- ❑ On page 8, Rebecca Levi Detro shares her journey from Mormonism to Christianity. Because it's such a powerful story we expanded the feature to three pages. Please don't miss it.
- ❑ As 1998 closes, two contributing editors end their "tour of duty." We thank Richard Balge and Mark Braun for their years of insight.
- ❑ From the entire NL staff, thanks for your comments, letters, and prayers. It is an honor to bring you NL each month. God bless your Christmas, and we'll see you in 1999.

—LRB

Cover photo by Richard Leona

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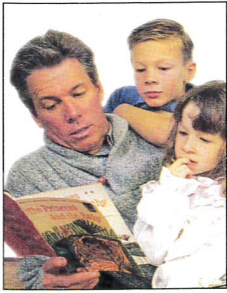
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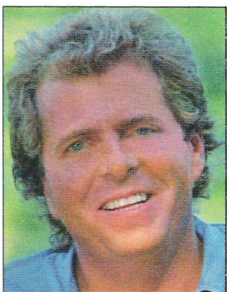




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# The Christmas place

John C. Lawrenz



**B**eaten clay strewn with straw served as the floor. Mother Earth is not God!

Upon the floor in a far corner, stood the innkeeper's ox. Mary's donkey knelt beside it. The beasts exhaled wisps of disappearing vapor into the chilly midnight air as their living bodies warmed the cave on this special night. Someday these living creatures would die. How foolish it is that some worship animals as gods!

Joseph wrapped the tiny child in strips of cloth as Mary, weary from childbirth, looked on. This man and woman would die just like the animals. But, unlike the beasts, they would stand before their Maker to give an account for their loss of God's image. Mary and Joseph were

not gods, though some would one day treat Mary that way.

God had made them all: the clay, the straw, the cave, the animals, the mother, and her man. All were in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King. The little one with them was not made. The Christian Church would confess this truth later in the Nicene Creed. God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Colossians 1:19). This baby was God, begotten of the Father from all eternity, yet true man, born of the Virgin Mary.

His parents called him Jesus. To the Hebrews who waited for him he was Immanuel, "God with us." In Bethlehem of Judea, God had entered history in a real place! God had wrapped himself in clay that breathed. This infant would live and die and live again to restore the image of God to all who believe.

## Israel's "go to" place

God said to his people, "You are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose . . . to put his Name

there for his dwelling. To that place you must go" (Deuteronomy 12:5).

**This infant would live and die and live again to restore the image of God to all who believe.**

God's first earthly dwelling was a Tent. It was pitched in a courtyard, open to the sky and surrounded by pure white curtains. A Hebrew would bring his sacrifices into this court through a colorfully embroidered veil. There he viewed priests in white linen doing their sacred work—skinning, washing, sprinkling, and burning what was offered.

Daily these priests passed into the Tent itself through a second veil. There they would trim the lamps and burn incense. There they would set out 12 loaves of fresh bread once a week on the Sabbath.

In the deepest recesses of the holy Tent, beyond a third veil, was a room whose height and breadth and depth were perfectly equal. One priest, the High Priest, was permitted to enter this inner sanctum once a year to sprinkle blood above the ark of God's presence. This box contained God's words engraved in stone. It held the high priestly staff



---

At Christmas we  
reflect on Immanuel,  
and God's place  
among us.

of Aaron. In it was a jar of the manna that sustained Israel on its way to the Promised Land.

Moses set up this dwelling place for God in the wilderness. The Tent moved from place to place until Israel pitched it in Shiloh in the days of Joshua. The Philistines destroyed it over 400 years later.

The Tent was replaced by a magnificent building. It too had a courtyard open to the sky where sacrifices were offered. Within it was a room for the priests to bring bread, oil, and incense. It too had a most holy place for the High Priest to bring the blood of atonement once a year. David planned it. Solomon built it. Unfaithful kings desecrated it. The Babylonians destroyed it. Jews returning from exile rebuilt it. Herod the Great beautified it. Jesus worshiped in it. It was the Jerusalem Temple.

The Tent and the Temple were not God. But Tent and Temple were God's chosen places for eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and touch to sense God's presence.

• There the faithful saw God's holiness displayed in the white robes of the ministering priests and in the carved wood, colorful curtains, and golden ornaments that adorned every part.

• There sinners, aware of their sins, sensed their distance from God, marked off by the veils of separation.

• There repentant sinners smelled God's grace in the smoke of the morning and evening sacrifices.

### His was a place set apart from sin.

• There believers mingled their prayers with the aroma of incense.

• There ears caught the sound of Levites singing hallelujahs for bread and light and life.

• There Israelites, eager to celebrate a shared faith, sat down to eat fellowship meals together.

• There pilgrim feet touched a place that promised an even better place when life's long, hard journey was over.

### The perfect place

Jesus, the babe of Bethlehem, grew to manhood. He showed by his life how far short of perfection the world had fallen. His was a place set apart from sin. Yet the height and breadth and depth of his love for sinners was perfect. He became the world's Bread and its Light. Arrested, on trial, and nailed to a cross, he separated himself

even from his Father. Alone, he revealed himself both as the perfect priest and the world's once-for-all sacrifice.

The aroma of his grace-delivering gospel covers the stench of mankind's self-deceiving, works-righteous lies to this day. The message, "He is risen," once delivered by white-robed angels, is still heard wherever two or three gather together in his name. He sits at the Father's right hand in glory. Yet Jesus is truly present at every supper of bread and wine that is shared in his name. He promised to be "God with us" to the end of the age. No step on our heavenward pilgrimage is ever taken without him being there.

It is not surprising that Jesus said to those who rejected him, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19). It is not surprising that Jesus received the death penalty for these very words. Jesus' accusers did not understand what we know to be true. In Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King, the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

NL

*John C. Lawrenz is administrator of the Board for Ministerial Education.*



# Do you know a stressed-out Mormon?

One woman's amazing story of the power of God's Word.

Rebecca Levi Detro

In October 1838, David Patten was shot and killed in a skirmish between Mormons and government militia. He is considered to be the first martyr of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS). His name appears in Mormon scriptures as one of the original 12 LDS apostles. He would likely have replaced Joseph Smith as president had he not been killed prior to Smith's death. This man was also the brother of John Patten, my great-great-great-grandfather.

## Living her heritage

My father's life was similar to that of his great grandfather's, devoted to the service of his church.



The Temple in Salt Lake City, Utah. Temple Square is the largest tourist attraction in the state with over 2,000,000 visitors annually. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has 52 operating temples and another 46 under construction or in the planning stages.

My father served as a bishop or stake president for over 20 years and as stake patriarch for 25 years. (In the LDS church, the bishop is the leader of a ward or congregation, the stake president is the leader of about 10 wards, and the stake patriarch is the only man that gives prophetic blessings to individuals in the entire stake.)

Even though these positions are very time-consuming, the LDS church does not give any pay to their local leaders. My father worked his full-time job during the day and was gone almost every evening and weekend. We saw him in church on Sunday as the leader of our church, but he seldom had time to be home as the leader of our family.

He believed that the only way to live with God in heaven was through doing good works and striving to be perfect. If he was good enough, in the next life he could become a god. His church callings were evidence that he was on the right path to perfection and that he was doing what his God wanted him to do.

My mother's family was also first generation Mormons. They left everything they had to travel west with Brigham Young and endured many hardships for their church.

My mother has been as devoted to Mormonism as her mother was. During her life she dutifully had as many children as she could, and has taken every church calling she has ever been given, even during times of

great emotional and physical hardship. (LDS members are told that they must accept every calling they are given, whether or not they are particularly qualified for or interested in what they have been asked to do.) She has always had a huge garden, canned vegetables and fruits, and maintained the two-year food storage that is required of every Mormon family. She has sent two sons on missions and has seen all of her children married in the temple. (Only a minority of Mormons are worthy to be married in the temple.) At age 76 she is still the hardest working person I have ever known.

As the matriarch of a large family, she continues to work towards her goal of perfection so she will be worthy to have her husband accept her as his wife when he becomes a god.

... it never entered my mind that Mormonism could be untrue.

The sacrifices my family made over the past 165 years for their church fill volumes of journals and books. These sacrifices are badges of honor, passed from one generation to the next, and ensured my place in the culture I was raised in. Before I was married in the temple, it never entered my mind that Mormonism could be untrue. The only doubts I ever felt were ones of my own worthiness to live up to my family heritage.



## Burdened with guilt

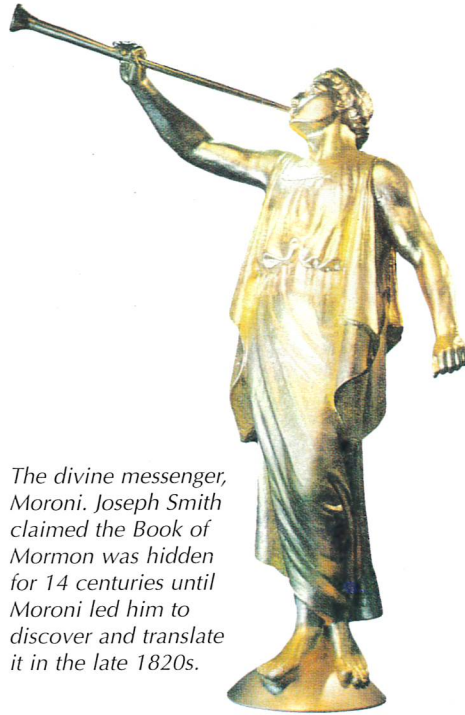
As the years went by, I realized that my family heritage was not helping me in my journey towards perfection. I felt burdened with guilt and could not understand how I could make so many mistakes, when everyone around me was so close to perfection. I became consumed with guilt, and I needed forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not easy in the LDS church. As Spencer W. Kimball, a former president of the LDS church, wrote in his book, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*: "It depends upon you whether or not you are forgiven, and when. It could be weeks, it could be years, it could be centuries before that happy day when you have the positive assurance that the Lord has forgiven you. That depends on your humility, your sincerity, your works, your attitudes."

I had been taught that the only way to be forgiven of a sin is to completely abandon that sin. I could not do this, and I felt so guilty every time I messed up. I fasted and prayed and turned to a book by my prophet for healing, but I only felt worse.

Finally, at the age of 27, burdened with years of sin and guilt, I turned to my bishop for help. I confessed all my sins and asked to be re-baptized. I had been baptized at the age of eight, but I felt I had sinned so much that if I could just be baptized again, I could have my sins washed away and start over.

Mormons are taught that bishops have been given a special gift from God to be able to read a person's heart. A week after confessing my sins, my bishop told me that the Heavenly Father had revealed to him that I was not really sincere in my search for forgiveness and that I



*The divine messenger, Moroni. Joseph Smith claimed the Book of Mormon was hidden for 14 centuries until Moroni led him to discover and translate it in the late 1820s.*

could not be re-baptized. I could not believe what I heard.

I went home, and then I realized: I could not believe what I heard! I knew I was sincere and that being forgiven was the most important thing in my life. I realized he was a fake. Everything I had been taught all my life was false. I had been living a lie. I could no longer live that lie, and I asked to be excommunicated. I was so bitter and angry towards the Mormon Church that I moved 3,000 miles to get away from Mormons and my family.

## Finding peace

I no longer believed in Mormonism, but I had nothing to replace it. I searched for the true church within Christianity, but I was too confused by my Mormon upbringing to even know what to look for. I left Christianity and tried other religions, finally questioning everything. How could I believe

anything I heard? I became agnostic, bitter, and very cynical. My husband left me. My life fell apart. I turned to alcohol. I had only a few friends, and I lived 3,000 miles from my family. I had no God to turn to, and I wouldn't listen to religious people I felt I couldn't trust.

## Everything I had been taught all my life was false.

But God is merciful and loving. He sent a six-year-old Christian neighbor into my life. She led me to God's Word by persistently inviting me to her church. I turned to the Bible for healing and read about God's true forgiveness. His miraculous power came over me, and the burdens of sin and guilt I had carried with me all my life were gone in an instant. This God was the only true God, and he wasn't in a particular denomination. I learned about him in the Bible, and he was in my heart, never to leave me and always to comfort me. I didn't do anything to earn his forgiveness or his love; it was a complete gift and one I didn't deserve.

Through Christ, God gave me in an instant the perfection that members of my family unsuccessfully work their whole lives to achieve. In the last months of my father's life, when his body was ravaged by disease and he was close to death, I heard him ask my uncle how it was possible he could become a god when he was so far from it. I believe that my father realized he had spent his entire life working for the goal of perfection and had not even come close.

*continued on page 10*





Joseph Smith talks with the American Indians. He claimed that the first inhabitants of the New World were descendants of the 10 lost tribes of Israel and the people of Babel.

## Sharing the message

During my years as a Mormon, I was approached many times by Christians trying to warn me about my church. They always focused on Joseph Smith or LDS church history, things that I believed they were lying about. Never once in my entire life as a Mormon, did anyone try to witness to me by using God's Word or by telling me the positives of Christianity. Their focus was always on the negatives of Mormonism.

## Learn how to witness actively to Mormons, and use the mighty sword of God's Word.

I found a WELS congregation that has become my church family and a pastor who has spent many hours teaching me about God in words that I could understand. He has also taught me how to witness to my family, following the apostle Paul's example of using God's Word. As the author of Hebrews claims, there is nothing more powerful than the Word of God. It is "living and active. Sharper than any

double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit" (12:5). This is what brings someone to faith, not human reasoning.

In my father's final days, he seldom spoke but allowed me to read to him from the Bible. I loved my father, and I cling to the hope that God's Word worked miraculously in his heart.

I have one brother who has left the Mormon Church and is agnostic. The rest of my family is continuing in the footsteps of their ancestors. They are sincere and devoted to their church. And they are hurting and stressed and need the healing balm of God's love.

I pray that you will enter this battle in the fight to bring Mormons the true gospel. Pray for the LDS people and for those of us in this ministry. Learn how to witness actively to Mormons and use the mighty sword of God's Word. Do you know a stressed-out Mormon? Bring him or her the gift of the true gospel. You may be the one to bring God's Word to someone in my family.

NL

Rebecca Levi Detro is a member of Messiah, Nampa, Idaho.

## Five items to help you witness

You want to witness to a Mormon, but aren't sure how? These materials were created to help you witness to Mormons.

1. *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*—a revised version of the popular book.
2. *The Prophet from Palmyra*—a video dramatized factual examination of the roots of Mormonism.
3. *Speaking the Truth in Love*—a video study guide for witnessing to Mormons.
4. Three witness tracts written specifically for Mormons, using their religious language and terms.
5. Two easy-to-read how-to witness guides.

To order, contact WELS Outreach Resources, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; 1-800-884-9312.



# Gift giving to remember

**“Look what they gave,” not “Look what I got,” should be the focus of our Christmas—and our faith.**

Carl R. Henkel

It's exciting to watch children open Christmas presents. They do so with such joy, anticipation, and reckless abandon. Tugging at pretty ribbons and tearing off colored paper, those little darlings eagerly open each precious package. With sparkling eyes, they discover what's inside. After one present is opened and they've had a moment to treasure it, the cycle repeats itself. Another present. More torn paper. More happy smiles and laughter.

Our Christmas experience in Cameroon was radically different.

## Look what they gave

We had become good friends with our neighbors across the road, and our children in the States bought presents for them. Presenting our gifts to the Cheke family—Francis (5), Julius (10), Georgina (12), Bernedette (13), Barnabas (13), Helen (18), Francesca (19)—was humbling. Rather than grabbing their gifts and ripping the paper, they held them quietly. One by one, they presented the gifts to their mother who carefully helped unwrap them. The bows and ribbons were saved, the paper carefully folded, and the gifts lovingly examined. These were likely the only Christmas presents they received.

They loved them! Months later they were still enjoying them. Later we learned that Cameroon children

are taught to show respect by allowing their parents to open their presents. These children were showing sincere obedience and genuine love by permitting their mother to open or assist in opening the gifts.

## Even the gift of faith by which you and I claim Jesus as Lord and Savior is just that—a gift.

Similarly, when we presented Christmas packages from the Sunday school children at Mt. Olive, St. Paul, Minn., to the Cameroon seminary students, each student, rather than reaching for his gift, extended both hands and allowed the gift to be placed on his open palms. Then with a slight bow and broad smile, each expressed his thanks. Those gifts, too, probably were the only presents these fine men received. They cherished them and will use them for years.

Those responses surprised us. By comparison, these dear people have much less than the average American, so we were impressed how they graciously received their gifts with the gentle spirit. In both cases, the spotlight was on the giver and not the receiver. “Look what they gave me” was the focus, not “Look what I got.”



*When they lived in Cameroon, Carl and Linda Henkel celebrated Christmas with the Cheke family (pictured.) The Chekes are a living example of receiving gifts with a gentle spirit.*

## Look what God gave

I was reminded of God's gift to the world, tenderly laid in a Bethlehem manger. That gift resides in each believer's heart. Here also the emphasis is on the giver and not the receiver. It's not “Look what I did to receive this gift” or “Look at the decision I made to invite this gift into my heart,” but “Look what an amazing gift a loving God has given me.”

Even the gift of faith by which you and I claim Jesus as Lord and Savior is just that—a gift. Just as those 14 seminarians simply stretched out their hands and their present was given to them, so God simply places the gift of faith into our hearts, and we, with a humble bow and appreciative smile, accept his gift with grateful hearts. Through the gift of faith, we receive the gift of Jesus Christ as our personal Savior.

The Cheke children and the seminary men truly appreciated their little gifts. I pray that I will always appreciate the greatest gift of all—God's own Son.

NL

*Carl Henkel, pastor at Mt. Olive, St. Paul, Minnesota, spent one year teaching at the seminary in Cameroon.*



# BY THE GRACE OF GOD HE LIVED

## A man with ALS built his faith and life despite challenges.

Julie K. Tessmer



*Larry and Doris Carlson on their pontoon in Cumberland, Wis., in 1990. The Carlsons had always fished there before Larry developed ALS. Larry didn't want that to stop. "He said we could take a nurse along. He wanted to teach his young son how to catch fish, how deep to fish, and mostly how to clean fish," said Doris. They continued to go fishing there during the summer until Larry's death in 1996.*

But not really. Larry lived for another 18 years. And although physically Larry was paralyzed except for his eye muscles, he still was always building—whether it was his marriage and family, his faith, or other's hopes and faith.

### Building a marriage

When Larry and his wife, Doris, said their vows in 1952, little did they know that a large part of their marriage would be spent "in sickness" rather than in health.

"This was where we were both tested in our faith," said Doris. "This was what we promised on bent knee before the altar in 1952. This was to be our future together—learning to live with ALS."

When Larry was diagnosed, he still looked healthy. But things deteriorated quickly. Larry began to fall and couldn't drive a car anymore. He started having swallowing problems. Doctors had to put a feeding tube in his stomach so he wouldn't starve to death. His breathing became shallow because his muscles were collapsing over his lungs. "I taught the two youngest children how to roll Larry and pound on his chest to keep him breathing," said Doris. In 1981, he went on a respirator. He couldn't write because he couldn't use his hands and couldn't speak because he lost control of the muscles in his throat and lungs. Doris continued to work nights to

**L**arry Carlson liked to build. He worked for construction companies, did home repair in his spare time, and helped build three WELS churches.

But in 1976 Larry started having difficulties gripping things, and his left arm went limp. In 1978 he was

diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) or Lou Gehrig's disease. In this incurable disease, the nerves that send impulses to the muscles die, and the muscles waste away. Doctors then told Larry he had three to five years left. His building days were over.



support their three children still at home. During the day she took care of Larry.

But instead of letting ALS strain their marriage, the couple used it to make their marriage stronger.

"We were closer because of it," said Doris. "We really got to know each other better."

She continues, "People would say, 'You and Larry really don't have good communication.' You're kidding. I know what he needs by reading his eyes. I can tell when he's happy, sad, scared. I can look at my spouse's face and read his emotions."

They also could "talk" through an electromyograph (EMG)—a communication system Larry operated by raising his eyebrows. The EMG produced visual records of electrical activity of a muscle through three electrodes on Larry's forehead. The EMG then activated a computer. In this way, Larry could continue to help Doris make decisions about their home, family, and life.

"She [Doris] relied on him a lot," said Marty Davis, a registered nurse who worked for the Carlsons for five years. "She asked him questions, and he would tell her what to do, how to fix things, etc."

"Other than the Lord, he was my counselor," said Doris.

Larry also stayed involved with his children's lives. He attended his daughters' weddings, saw his grandchildren, and, six months before he died in 1996, even attended his youngest son's college graduation.

"The last 20 years the Lord gave us really reminded us of our wedding vows," said Doris. "I would do it all over because it showed us what marriage really is."

## Rebuilding lives

While Larry and Doris were working on building their marriage and family, they were also working on rebuilding their changing lives. Larry didn't let being bedridden slow him down.

Every summer the Carlsons would go from their home in Delaware, Ohio, to Cumberland, Wis., so Larry could go fishing. They made trips to Florida in the winter to visit their daughter. They made home videos showing Larry's home care and his fishing. They started the first ALS support group in Columbus, and traveled around the United States, visiting and encouraging others with ALS.

## Larry was at peace with the hand God dealt him.

When they weren't traveling, Larry was busy writing. Besides responding to letters, he wrote a care plan book for ALS people, his life story, and annual Christmas letters that were sent to ALS support groups.

"We received mail from all over the world and the United States. . . . To help them to learn to live with ALS, with the help of God, or learn to accept death and be in the peace that God gives us—that was our most rewarding mission from God," said Doris.

## Built up in faith

And Larry was at peace with the hand God dealt him. The title of a manual he wrote describing his life with ALS showed this—"By the grace of God I live."

Hearing about this grace was a priority to the Carlsons. When Larry was unable to go to church, they watched videotaped services. Area pastors visited often. Their pastor, Joel Jenswold of Shepherd of Peace, Powell, Ohio, served them the Lord's Supper—Larry receiving it through his feeding tube.

And God's grace showed in Larry's actions.

"Larry's faith came right through all his letters," said Doris. "Keeping the faith was his most important message."

Larry also witnessed to the nurses who worked for him.

"I got as much out of working for Larry as he did," said Davis. "He never once said, 'Why me?'"

She continued, "He had a stubborn faith. No one or nothing could take it away. He accepted every challenge, knowing that God had a reason for everything he did."

Not everyone would have risen to the challenges God gave Larry and his entire family. But just as Larry built himself, his family, and others up, so also the Lord built Larry up, giving him faith, courage, patience, and the promise of heaven. Not for the three to five years doctors gave Larry to live, but for 18 years.

Larry Carlson liked to build.

But not just buildings.

NL

*Julie Tessmer is the communications assistant for Northwestern Lutheran and Communication Services.*

*Look for previous articles about Larry Carlson in the April 1, 1982, and the Nov. 15, 1987, issues of Northwestern Lutheran.*



# Holy birth or birth of a nation?



## Celebrating Christmas in Taiwan reminds one missionary about the importance of his work.

Peter J. Leyrer

The flower vendor crushed a twig and invited me to enjoy the fragrance. Nice, but not what I expected. It didn't smell like a Christmas tree, but it looked like one and the price was right. Our first Christmas in Taiwan, we celebrated with an artificial tree. This year, I thought, we'll have something green and growing instead of something green and plastic.

At home I transplanted the little tree in a decorative pot and set it on our apartment's balcony to wait for the holiday season. "How big will it grow by Christmas?" the kids and I wondered. "By next Christmas?"

Within a couple of weeks the lovely fragrant needles began to turn brown, and the death was complete a couple of weeks after that. I bought another and kept it alive just long enough to hang a few baubles from its rapidly wilting branches.

This year green and plastic will dominate our holiday decorations. As part of life overseas we have learned to adjust and readjust the way we think about our traditions.

What does a traditional Christmas hold for you? Snow? A pile of gifts under a tree? Since you've read this

far, I assume a "traditional" Christmas for you would center around the birth of Jesus Christ. How might things be different for people in a land where it never snows, where palms outnumber pines, and where less than five percent of the population confess Jesus as Lord and Savior?

### People go out dancing

"I'll stop by some evening and bring tea. Taiwan tea—you know what that is?" Despite my affirmative, he shows me a yellow Lipton box. "This is not Taiwan tea." He reveals the astronomical price he paid for a canister of "real" tea and invites me to savor the aroma.

If I had known Zhang Yian Ming last year maybe I'd still have that little green tree. His father, Zhang Guo Xing, developed a line of fertilizers that his company exports all over the world. Yian Ming now manages the company and a little shop in our neighborhood. He taught me how to nurse a couple of ailing orchids back to health. A pair of beautiful "butterfly" orchids testify that he speaks of what he knows. Their position on the shop's "god

shelf" told me before Yian Ming could that his family is "traditional Buddhist."

We move past the preliminaries of conversation that I have come to accept as part of this culture, questions that still make me squirm: "How much do you pay for rent? What's your salary?" I answer accurately, in hopes that my honesty will some day pave the way for my gospel witness. We settle down to the topic I'd like to discuss.

**Most churches in Taiwan . . . consider Christmas a prime outreach opportunity.**

"Taiwan has no Christmas," he states with Grinch-like certainty. "We have Constitution Day." The people of Taiwan take a day off work each year in honor of the Republic of China's Constitution, which was ratified on Dec. 25, 1946, and went into effect on Jan. 1, 1947. The people of Taiwan also realize that many other nations celebrate the day as Christmas.



How does Taiwan celebrate Constitution Day/Christmas? My language teacher warned me that no matter how many times I ask that question I will hear just one answer. She was right. On Christmas Eve the people of Taiwan go out dancing.

What does Christmas have to do with dancing? Nobody knows, except that western TV and movies depict Christmas as a festive time, and dancing is a festive activity. One woman said people danced at Christmas even when dancing broke the law. In the early days of the Republic, the government declared that all citizens must conserve their energy and resources for the day when they would need to counter an invasion from Communist China. The woman described a police raid on a Christmas dancing party she once attended as a youth. She gave the police a false name. Because I don't know the statute of limitations on Taiwan dancing party law, I'm withholding her real name.

### Christians worship and witness

The small minority of Christians here celebrate Christmas as you do. They attend worship. Many exchange greeting cards and may give gifts, but not with the extravagance we expect in the States. One mother who had lived in the United States didn't like the secrecy that surrounds gift giving. Here she takes her son to Toys-R-Us and tells him to pick out his Christmas gift. Doesn't sound like fun to me, but it seems to work for them.

Back in the United States, every pastor I know, including me, warns his congregation that we may lose the meaning of Christmas in all the glitter and tinsel. At first blush, my conversations about Christmas in Taiwan confirm those fears. The Chinese name for the holiday liter-



(Above) Contributors to the article include the Wednesday evening Bible study group, pictured here in part with Missionary Rob Siirila (back right).

(Left) Men rehearse for "Double 10," a traditional Chinese celebration. "Double 10" (Oct. 10) is Taiwan's national holiday. Taiwan has no Christmas. Instead people take the day off work to honor the Republic of China's Constitution, which was ratified on Dec. 25, 1946.

ally means "Holy Birth Festival." Still, Zhang Yian Ming didn't know if the day commemorated Jesus' birth or his resurrection. He also told me that other countries call it "All Saints' Day." A woman, who this year will celebrate her third Christmas as a Christian, said that before she became a Christian she thought the holiday took its name from a species of tree that Europeans and Americans like to bring into their homes.

For all the differences and misunderstandings, a Taiwan Christmas and a U.S. Christmas have one thing in common: packed churches.

Liu Yi Juen, a young man with political aspirations and a doctorate from the University of Chicago, was recently baptized after "many years of struggle." He and several other Christians pointed out that curiosity about Christianity runs high at Christmastime. "Christians used to keep to themselves," he said—an easy mistake to make when you're outnumbered 20 to 1. "But now we need to use Christmas to invite others to come and hear the message." Most churches in Taiwan, including

ours, consider Christmas a prime outreach opportunity.

Glitter and tinsel will never replace the message, but they may bring people in to hear the message. The shepherds in the fields that night long ago surely would have missed the manger if God had not sent history's greatest advance publicity team to seize their attention. For all of their wisdom, the Magi would have stayed at home if the Creator had not painted an advertisement across the billboard of the heavens.

This month Christians in Taiwan know that people are watching us. By God's grace everyone who stops dancing long enough to pause by the manger will hear a message older than any of the traditions at your house and as new as the Christ child born in each believer's heart: peace on earth, good will to men.

NL

*Peter Leyrer is a missionary in Taiwan.*

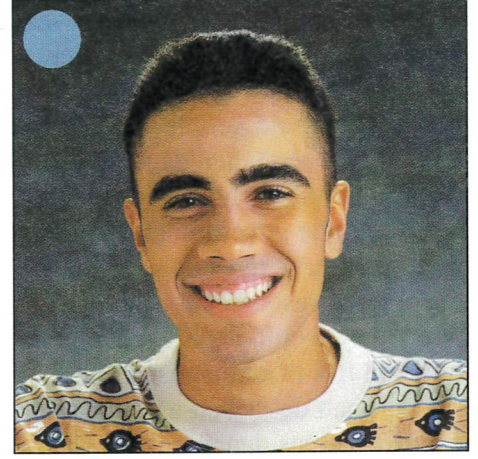
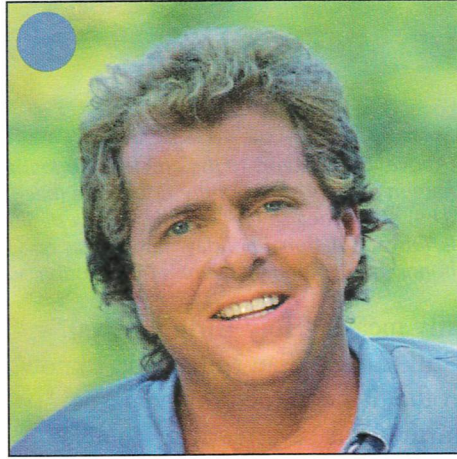
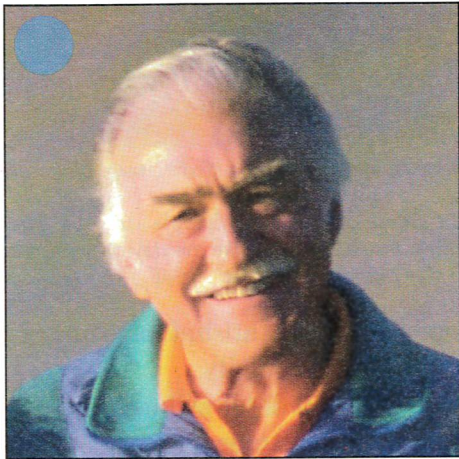
*Many thanks to Jeannie Chang for language assistance.*



# Christianity confronts postmodernism

Paul E. Kelm

A look at today's culture offers insight for today's congregations.



Is your congregation's median age rising? Does your church have difficulty getting young adults to attend voters' meetings, serve on committees, and join traditional organizations? Are there fewer young people in worship?

We are told that young people are, well, young. They're getting rebellion against authority and rejection of their parents' lifestyle out of their system. They're discovering by experience that the truths and values their church taught them are true. Besides, they're really busy. But when they get married and have children, they'll come back to church just as others in the past.

Will they?

**A recent explanation for the graying of the church explores differences in generations.**

● "Builders," born before 1946, invested values in the church, values like loyalty to the traditions of the denomination, continuity and rever-

ence in worship, fiscal and managerial conservatism.

● "Baby Boomers," known for questioning authority and "finding themselves" in a spiritual "journey," have demanded more programs and variety in the church. Their lifestyle doesn't accommodate long church meetings or commitments.

● "Generation X," born after 1964, has little interest in the church as institution. Young adults want "meaningful" worship and volunteer experiences. They value time more than money, and they're searching for a sense of family in smaller groups. Perhaps young people don't relate to our "church culture."

**A deeper answer to the church's difficulty in reaching young adults is rooted in the dramatic change in western civilization.** People today have a different set of assumptions about life. Most observers say we've entered a new era: "Postmodernism."

Postmodernism is a reaction to modernism. **Modernism was characterized by**

**1. extreme rationalism,** the denial of any theological or intuitive truth in favor of objective reasoning.

**2. scientism,** the conviction that the scientific method can explain everything and solve anything.

**3. humanism,** the exaltation of humankind to the role God once held as the center of life and the arbiter of truth and values.

A corollary of these tenets is optimism—a utopian confidence in unending progress and a better world.

Modernism is dead. Pure reason led to intellectual stalemate, as philosophies negated each other, and people opted for "what works" for them. The scientific discoveries of relativism and randomness exploded simple mathematical explanations for the universe. Besides, people lost faith in the ability of science to solve their problems and lost patience with



a mechanistic view of life that robbed them of any meaning and mystery. A world war, threat of nuclear holocaust, new diseases like AIDS and Alzheimer's, and erosion of confidence in institutions like government and business destroyed the modern presumption of progress.

**Modernism was no friend of Christianity.** It favored secular society. Religion became a leap of faith because God was undemonstrable by science and unprovable by reason. The Bible was reduced to mythology. Heaven and hell became fictions of a repressive church bent on enforcing an archaic moral code. Darwinian evolution made a Creator unnecessary. Education replaced religion as the answer for social ills. And hope became a materialistic goal rather than an eternal expectation.

While some churches capitulated to modernism, "demythologizing" the Bible's miracles and offering a social gospel more "relevant" to a here-and-now culture, evangelical Christianity held its ground. But because modernism lived by objective reason, modern culture had a significant impact on the church. Some Christians retreated from the debate, leaving the impression that Christianity was anti-intellectual. Others engaged in dogmatic reasoning that made Christianity appear anti-emotional. The church ministers within its culture.

**That culture has changed. Postmodernism is no friend of Christianity either.** But we had better understand its impact on the people we serve and hope to reach. If we understand how our young members think and feel and approach life, we can better involve them in the church's ministry. And if we are sensitive to the culture around us, we will discover new ways to reach

new people with the timeless truth of the gospel.

**Postmodernism is most readily recognized in politically correct "multiculturalism."** Acknowledging that no one culture is inherently superior is a healthy attitude. But underlying today's notion of multiculturalism is the conviction that religion is simply a part of culture and, therefore, no one religion is better than another. The 500th anniversary of the discovery of America, therefore, depicted Christopher Columbus as a villain who imposed his Christian culture on pristine native Americans who had a perfectly good animistic religion.

**Philosophical pluralism argues that there is no one truth, only many truths.** In fact, there is no objective point from which to argue a case for truth. In its unique context, each culture establishes its own truths.

Truth, then, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. No wonder that Jesus' claim, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me," (John 14:6) is viewed as intolerant bigotry.

Postmodernism rejects the possibility of one all-encompassing story that explains life—what the Bible claims to present. As a result, life cannot have any ultimate meaning, any sure hope, any real purpose. The curse of postmodernism is that, at best, life has been narrowed to the experience of one's own small circle, and at worst, life has been reduced to the cynical. In character then, America's youth dismiss conflicting viewpoints with "Whatever!"

**Against this tide, Christianity offers the consistent explanation for life that is God's love.** His special creation; his prophecies and miracles, culminating in the incarna-

tion of his Son; his self-sacrificing redemption of the world; his assurance of eternal life—all these truths of Christianity extend hope to a generation estranged from hope.

Because postmodernism has rejected reason and objectivity as any explanation for life, young adults are typically not impressed with doctrinal arguments and historical claims to be "right." Postmodernism treats history as merely political or religious propaganda. What young people are looking for is a genuine experience of love.

**The church must reintroduce its claim to objective and absolute truth in God's Word, but after it has introduced people to real and lasting love in God's Son.** Objective truth is not discovered in science or arrived at by reason, as the modern world insisted. Rather, it is revealed by God through Jesus Christ and in Scripture.

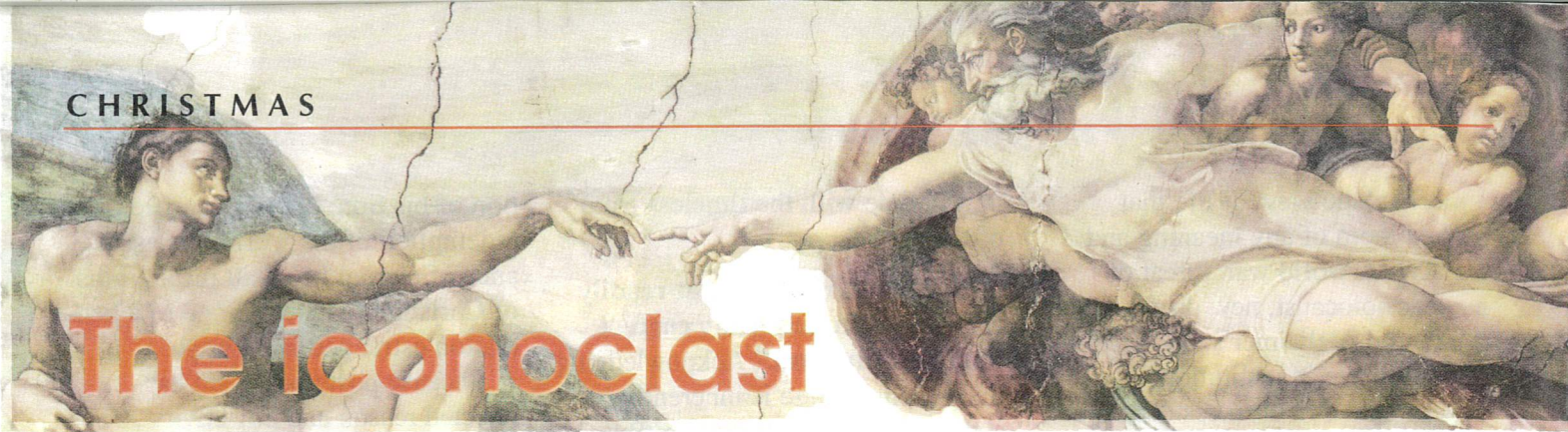
To a postmodern world the church itself is the first evidence of its truth, when it lives out the power and love of that truth. "All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another," Jesus said (John 13:35). To postmodernism the church presents its "softer side," love and hope, while to modernism the church presents hard-edged propositional truth.

Truth doesn't change to fit culture. But the way the church introduces people to the truth is affected by culture. We are naive if we fail to recognize the impact that two-plus centuries of modernism and western culture have had on the way we carry out our ministry. We will be frustrated if we fail to recognize the impact of postmodernism on the people today to whom Jesus has sent us.

NL

*Paul Kelm is a parish consultant for the Parish Assistance Office.*





## Jesus came into the world to shatter every false idea about who God is and to show us the truth.

Mark A. Paustian

**W**hat's an "iconoclast?" Literally, it's an "icon smasher."

An iconoclast sincerely believes in God, but also believes that God must never be represented in any kind of visual image.

### Destroying artistic images of God

An iconoclast goes so far as to destroy any artistic depiction of the unfathomable Lord. No fatherly figure done in stained glass. No sculpture in plaster or stone, even if it's to teach a religious lesson. Michaelangelo's rendition of the Creator's life-giving fingertips reaching to touch the fingertip of Adam? A definite no-no. You simply do not create any image of God. Period.

This idea dates to the 16th century, to the days following the Reformation. The iconoclasts of that day actually broke into Christian churches to demolish the Christian art. Imagine statues smashed to smithereens, the sanctuary floor covered with shards of stained glass, beautiful paintings-turned-jigsaw-puzzles.

The iconoclast made it his duty to destroy any representation of God, fearing the image might be a false one and, therefore, as wicked as Aaron's Golden Calf. The "iconoclast controversy" of long ago has deprived us from seeing some of the most exquisite, spirit-soaring Christian masterpieces ever created. You can tell I am no iconoclast.

### Destroying false images of God

But, if you think about it, Jesus was and is our iconoclast. (Huh?)

Jesus came into the world to shatter every false idea about who God is and to show us the truth. "The Son is the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus came into the world to reveal to you and to me exactly who God is.

Since sin began, human beings have fashioned God in their own image: from Greek and Roman mythical gods (who seem conspicuously like your least favorite in-laws) to our own culture's false god (who's biggest concern seems to be that we're all enjoying ourselves—God as tolerant grandfather). There is the do-nothing god, who may or may not exist; it hardly matters if he does. Or we imagine him as a "Force," as impersonal and unfeeling as a jolt of electricity. Maybe we make him the Cosmic Bookkeeper, who likes nothing better than to catch us in a sin (and then gets even by stalling our car . . . in the middle of State St.). Or he is the interesting but irrelevant subject of philosophers, a mere idea to be debated and then filed away. Most insidious of all, there is the god-without-a-face. Call him Allah, Christ, Vishnu . . . it's all the same. Caricatures and lies.

But thank God for God! As you think of all the false images of the One-who-made-us, see statues crashing and smashing onto a marble floor, tongues of fire licking through canvas paintings, medieval stained glass shattering . . . with beams of light breaking through.

And in the midst of all the rubble . . . stands Jesus.

God-made-known, real, alive, in flesh and blood.

The image smasher.

The iconoclast.

The radiance of God's glory.

The exact representation of God's being.

The One who came to demolish every wrong idea of who God is. "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18).

This Christmas, watch the Image Smasher being born in a stable. See his hand wrapped around Joseph's thumb . . . caressing the face of the leper . . . clawing the ground of Gethsemane . . . cruelly nailed to the wood. Watch him take his first steps . . . to the cross. Draw close to the one who would rather die than live without you. And you know who God is.

NL

*Mark Paustian is pastor at New Life, Rockford, Illinois.*



# INTER-ACT

Mark J. Lenz

"The word of God is living and active." Hebrews 4:12

## Introduction

What figures will be found in a creche in (or perhaps outside) your home this Christmas?

How would you describe the appearance of the Christ-child in your nativity scene?

How is Christ, either as a baby or as a man, depicted by your favorite artist?

Why might it be appropriate to depict the manger with a cross in the background?

## I. Text

### Read Isaiah 53:2-6

<sup>2</sup>He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. <sup>3</sup>He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. <sup>4</sup>Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup>But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup>We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

## III. Application

1. Do you think that a creche or painting of Jesus that was totally accurate would sell very well? Explain.
2. Why do you suppose the Bible does not describe Jesus' physical appearance?
3. Why is it not only appropriate but also necessary to study a portion of Scripture such as Isaiah 53 at Christmas time?
4. Discuss the practice that some people have of decorating a Christmas tree with Chrismons (white and gold homemade symbols for Christ and his truth).
5. How do your worship services and family devotions give the proper emphases at Christmas time?

## II. Questions

1. How does Isaiah picture the Messiah's humble origins? What insight does Isaiah 11:1 give into the words "tender shoot?" (Jesse was the father of King David. The Babylonian exile brought the kingdom of Judah to an end, but the Messiah would grow as a shoot from that stump of David's family.)
2. How does Isaiah 52:14 help you understand verse 2b? The word "beauty" is translated as "fine-looking" in 1 Samuel 16:18. Who is this expression describing there? In what ways is the Messiah the opposite of this man, destined to be king of Israel?
3. Cite examples of Jesus being "despised and rejected" (see Matthew 13:55; Luke 16:14; John 10:20; Luke 23:18).
4. In what ways did Jesus experience sorrows and suffering? Why did Jesus endure this (vs. 4-6)?
5. Why did God hide his face from Israel (see Isaiah 1:15; 59:2)? Why did God forsake Jesus on the cross?

## IV. Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank you for humbling yourself to be my Savior. When you came to this world you displayed nothing of rank or position, pomp or grandeur, nothing that appeals to the eyes of natural man. But when I realize that you were pierced for my transgressions, that you bore my punishment, and that God laid all my guilt on you, then I see you as a beautiful and wonderful Savior. Thank you for coming to rescue me. Help me celebrate your birth properly. Amen.

Mark Lenz is a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota.





## Year 2000 alert

The Tel/Tech Task Force alerts WELS constituents to potential Year 2000 (Y2K) problems. The problems are real and involve more than computers, although the extent of the problem throughout the country cannot be known with certainty. Such problems can be external, as well as internal. Most businesses consider it past time to have a plan in place. It is time for churches and schools to do an assessment, if they have not already done so.

Elements of such a plan should include:

- Become informed on the scope of the problem.
- Understand what's been done so far, both within and without (local

vendors, business contacts, governmental agencies).

- Make sure new purchases of hardware and software are Y2K compliant.
- Assess and inventory current hardware, software, and internal systems for Y2K compliance.
- Determine and implement solutions for non-compliant elements.
- Run a test (proof of performance) on each component brought into compliance.

The outline is based on a plan for county government developed by Evans Associates, a consultant to the task force. A revision of that plan appropriate for the church setting will be available from the Tel/Tech office.

Contact Linda at 414/256-3298 or check the WELS Web site at <[www.wels.net/sab/frm-news-w.html](http://www.wels.net/sab/frm-news-w.html)>.

Many Internet sites contain Y2K information. <[www.zdnet.com/zdy2k](http://www.zdnet.com/zdy2k)> provides a directory and breaking news. "Consumer Alert" is a good starting place on that site. <[www.year2000.com](http://www.year2000.com)> is also a rich resource.

At the synodical administration building, Data Information Services (DIS) is addressing potential problems and has scheduled a proof-of-performance test for the building in early 1999.

*Wayne Borgwardt*

## The library tender

The greeting cards are bright and beautiful. On the front are dainty, pressed flowers, artistically arranged. Above the flowers the words are simple. Inside there is room for a note or letter. These cards are the main source of funding for the library at Peace, Cottonwood, Ariz.

The Peace Women's Guild voted to start a church library in 1990. Audrey Taggart volunteered to furnish shelves and implement a system to check out books. There were donations, but only enough to get a few children's Bible story books and paperback Christian books. If the library was to succeed, something had to be done.

Audrey and her husband, Bob, had mastered the art of pressing flowers. Audrey began making flower note cards to display near the library. The suggested donation was a dollar a card, all for purchasing library books.

In a few months they had made several hundred dollars.

Audrey started purchasing more books. As the shelves filled with children's books, we provided small tables and chairs to accommodate the flood of little readers. The library began to grow rapidly as more books were donated. Volunteers mended and repaired books, went through catalogs and suggested books and videotapes for purchase, and submitted book reviews for the church newsletter.

Audrey had difficulty keeping up with the demand for cards. Bob made her a bigger flower press, and as her flower beds became depleted, other women brought flowers to press.

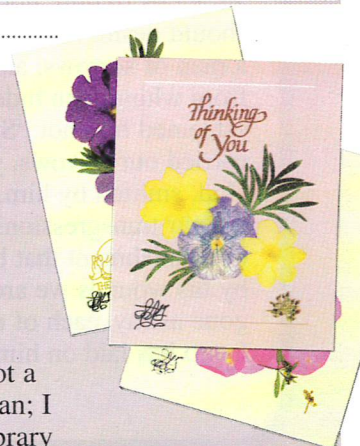
Since Peace is expanding, volunteers are now busy packing everything into boxes for temporary storage. The plans call for a special room for the library. Audrey has been consulting with the building committee about

shelf heights, lighting, children's tables. She asked for suggestions because, she says, "I am not a trained librarian; I am just the library tender."

In the new library, there will be a rack of Audrey's flower note cards. When asked how she has managed to continue making cards, while ordering books, overseeing the library, and inspiring others to donate money and books, she just smiles and says, "With the LORD's help."

Perhaps Proverbs 16:3 explains the success of the work of this library tender: "Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed."

*Ruth Kessel*





## A habit in Hungary

This Christmas, thanks to Sharon Burow's determination, more children in Hungary will know why Jesus was born.

Burow, a teacher at Peace, Hartford, Wis., and Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, has spread the gospel in Hungary the past two summers.

In 1997, she was given the opportunity to meet with educators and administrators in Hungary. Burow contacted the Board for World Missions and learned that WELS was not working there, so she decided to do her own mission work.

To get Christian materials into Hungarian, Burow had her children's book, *And I Can Go and Tell*, translated. This book uses colors to tell the message of salvation and encourages children to share the gospel. Using area congregations' donations, she also took Hungarian Bibles, tapes, books, puzzles, and 1,500 buttons with Jesus messages written in Hungarian.

When in Hungary, Burow met with the public kindergarten's superintendent, who invited Burow to read *And I Can Go and Tell* to the public school children. She visited 11 schools and gave a book to each child.

"I'm surprised there is so much openness to the gospel," she says.

Burow also met with the head of



Children in Hungary heard the story of Christmas this past June. Using the book, Christian Countdown to Christmas, kindergarten students learn more about the gospel. This book is only one of many materials that Sharon Burow has taken to Hungary to tell children about Jesus.

all the Hungarian Catholic kindergartens—a total of 20 schools that each serve 75-150 children. The nuns now use *And I Can Go and Tell* in their curriculum.

Because of her contacts, sincerity, and work, Burow was asked to speak at the Hungarian National Teachers conference in 1998.

Determined to make the most of every opportunity, she took another book she has written, *Christian Countdown to Christmas*, and worked with Hungarian high school students to make the book rhyme.

"Because this was my second trip to the country, people were even more receptive to the message," she said. "I gained their trust because I returned."

But this second trip wasn't the end. "God has more for me to do in Hungary. I know that," says Burow. "Hungary in June—a habit."

And this is one habit she hopes other people will develop. This summer, Burow will take four to seven WELS kindergarten teachers along with her to teach and do evangelism.

Contact the Commission on Youth Discipleship for a copy of the book—414/256-3274.

## WELS-ELS Forum held

On Oct. 12-13, the annual WELS-ELS Forum was held in Milwaukee. At this forum, administrators and theologians from WELS and its sister synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), met to discuss theological issues and to express the unity that exists between the two church bodies.

ELS was established in 1918 in Lime Creek, Iowa, and now has its headquarters in Mankato, Minn. They

have 136 congregations and about 21,975 baptized members in 20 states. WELS has been in fellowship with ELS since they formed.

Fellowship between these two church bodies means that members from each may take communion in congregations of either synod. It also means that calls into the ministry and membership transfers between synods are freely given.

Pastor Kenneth Strack, the chairman of the WELS Committee on Relief, has moved. Send correspondence to him at:

Pastor Kenneth Strack  
WELS Committee on Relief  
3226 Gove Dr  
Tecumseh MI 49286  
517/423-2621





## Century of caring for souls



*The Lutheran Home Association, based in Belle Plaine, Minn., celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1998. Thirteen locations across Wisconsin and Minnesota serve over 1,100 seniors, disabled, and injured people. The Lutheran Home is the oldest WELS social service agency.*

"Pastor, does God only love smart people," asked an old man with a developmental disability in a group home.

The pastor quickly responded, "No! Of course not. God loves all people."

The man replied, "That's good because I'm not so smart. I thought he only loved smart people who can read."

A middle-aged mother came to another home after suffering drug, physical, and sexual abuse inflicted by her husband. Her possessions filled two grocery bags. When, after two years of counseling and spiritual care, she returned to her community, she asked if she could take her Bible.

A man in his mid-40s suffered a stroke and was admitted to one of the skilled nursing facilities for intensive therapy. Throughout the family's ordeal, the caregivers and chaplain worked with them, sharing God's Word. After months of grueling physical, speech, and occupational therapy, the man returned home. His wife wrote, "You are all wonderful reflections of Christ's love. We have never experienced such kindness. We will never be able to thank you enough."

Stories like these happen every day at The Lutheran Home (TLH), an association operated by 200 WELS and ELS congregations nationwide. The 13 locations in Minnesota and Wisconsin care for over 1,100 people—seniors and persons with developmental disabilities, mental

retardation, severe mental illness, brain injuries, Alzheimer's, and dementia.

Studies indicate that about 500,000 people in nursing homes and about seven million people with mental retardation in the United States have little or no church connection.

Opportunities for outreach abound among those who use TLH's services. Full-time WELS chaplains serve at the larger facilities. Local WELS pastors serve the smaller homes regularly and offer devotions, Bible classes, and counseling to the residents.

The organization has been celebrating its 100th anniversary throughout 1998. The final anniversary service was held Nov. 8. TLH began when Sophie Boessling, an 83-year-old widow, donated her farmland and \$4,500 to her church, Trinity, Belle Plaine, Minn., to start a Christian home for the elderly and orphans. It was dedicated Nov. 6, 1898. Sophie, a resident, died suddenly two days later.

*To learn more, call Michael Klatt at 1-800-852-9672.*

## Hispanic mission work marks 50th anniversary

It all started 50 years ago with one man, V.H. Winter, in one state, Arizona.

In 1948, Winter moved from Flint, Mich., to the Southwest to begin mission work to the Hispanics—a first for WELS. The first Spanish services were held on Dec. 5, 1948.

More than once, Winter preached to an empty church, but he was determined not to give up. Within 10 years, Winter had begun a Spanish radio broadcast, started a Sunday school, confirmed two young men, and dedicated a church and school.

Although Winter died 10 years ago, his work is being carried on by

missionaries in Mexico, California, Florida, Wisconsin, and every other place WELS sponsors mission work in Spanish. And as the gospel is preached to Hispanics in more areas of the Americas, that list will grow.

*For a more detailed account of Winter's work, see the Winter issue of Mission Connection. MC is distributed free to all WELS congregations, courtesy of WELS Kingdom Workers.*

*Pastor V.H. Winter, pioneer of mission work to Hispanics, in 1950. In 1948, he began Spanish-speaking services at this Seventh Day Adventist church. This December, WELS is celebrating its 50th anniversary of mission work to Hispanics.*





## New schools, new opportunities

WELS has a long history of operating schools and operating them well. People in our nation long for what we have: Christ-centered, high quality education based on biblical values.

Because of this, some churches have new opportunities to spread the gospel by starting early childhood, elementary, and secondary programs. "Forward with Lutheran Schools" has been started as part of the Parish Assistance program to help these congregations.

The goal is to lead a congregation through careful analysis, determining if they should start a school. The next

step, if the church chooses to open a school, is to shape the vision to contribute to the congregation's overall ministry. Then, in the first year of operation, mentors work with the staff to get the school off to a good start. The process takes about 18 to 24 months. Currently, 12 congregations have contacted the parish assistance office to participate.

Jason Nelson accepted the call to spearhead this effort and started his work this past summer. Nelson has taught at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee; Lakeside



Jason Nelson

Lutheran High School, Lake Mills, Wis.; Shepherd of the Valley, Westminster, Colo.; and Beautiful Saviour, Carlsbad, Calif. He and his wife, Nancy, who works part-time in a floral shop, have four children: Amanda, 20; Laura, 17; Justin, 14; and Jordan, 7. They are members at Christ, Big Bend, Wis.

For more information, contact Jason Nelson, 414/662-1614; <jnelson@sab.wels.net>.

## Puppets with a purpose

Can you imagine anyone witnessing using a couple of socks, an ironing board, and a cloth?

Micki Schneider could—and did. And that's how she started the Atonement Puppeteers, a group of 14 fifth- through eighth-graders from Atonement, Milwaukee, who use Christian puppetry to share their faith.

Because telling others about Jesus isn't always easy to do.

"I taught fifth- and sixth-grade Sunday school," said Schneider. "These kids had no clue on how to witness."

But using Christian puppetry scripts allows the children to tell others about Jesus through the puppets. During their hour-long weekly practice, Schneider also teaches the puppeteers how to witness using *God's Great Exchange*, a booklet developed by the Commission on Evangelism.

Since their start in 1996, the kids have retired their socks and now use hand puppets similar to those on *Sesame Street*. The ironing board and cloth have been replaced by an actual stage. The Puppeteers now do 25-30 shows a year for other WELS schools and churches, Jesus Cares Ministries, hospitals, and battered women shelters.

"Six or seven shows are outside of our church body," said Schneider.



The Hands 2 God puppetry team. From left: Jim Hildeman, Tim Payne, Cassie Payne, Matt Payne, Christi Payne, Dave Payne.

"Then the kids can also use their actions as witnesses."

The Atonement Puppeteers aren't the only group witnessing through puppetry. Under Jim Hildeman and Dave Payne, Hands 2 God grew out of the youth ministry program at Eternal Love, Appleton, Wis., in 1995.

Six out of seven members of Hands 2 God are part of Payne's family. This past summer they toured congregations in Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Indiana.

Several churches, according to Payne, made the puppet show an evangelism event and invited people from the community.

"We have a love of presenting in places where the people haven't necessarily heard the gospel before," said

Payne. "You can just see the kid's face light up."

The trip, he said, was also beneficial to his own children.

"It was great for our kids to see people drive 50 or 60 miles to go to church," added Payne. "They showed their faith and love to us, and we were able to give something back to them too."

Because giving a Christian witness is what these groups are about.

"One soul, one time. That's all it takes. Then we're doing what we're supposed to do," said Schneider.

For more information about these groups, contact Micki Schneider at 414/442-1137; <ppt.cmp.fritz@juno.com> and David Payne at 920/731-7921; <Dpayne@fvlhs.org>





## WELS news briefs

These updates are from the offices of the synod administration building. You can contact these offices and administrators at 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; 414/256-3888.

### Commission on Youth Discipleship

Every other week the Commission on Youth Discipleship posts a **child's devotion on the WELS Web site** <[www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net)>. If you have access to the Internet, encourage your child to read these devotions.

### Commission on Evangelism

Some **20,000 telephone invitations were extended this fall by Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors** in Milwaukee and La Crosse for events in mission congregations. Call the evangelism office if you want to use this phone service.

The **1999 School of Outreach schedule is complete**. These schools are designed to help congregations improve their witnessing skills. Schools will be held in California, Tennessee, Wisconsin (3), North Carolina, Oklahoma, Michigan, and Alberta, Canada. For information about a School of Outreach in your area, contact your district evangelism coordinator or the evangelism office.

An **expanded Outreach to Mormons package is available**, including two videos about Mormonism and witnessing to Mormons.

### Commission on Parish Schools

A generous grant from AAL and a special agreement with New Horizons Computer Learning Center provide **low-cost, high-quality computer instruction for WELS teachers** throughout the synod. Contact the CPS office for more information.

The **CPS home page is located at** <[www.wels.net/sab/frm-cps.html](http://www.wels.net/sab/frm-cps.html)>. WELS teachers are available to answer questions in areas such as school administration, early childhood education, and special education. Additional links are also available to provide resources for teachers, students, and parents.

### Board for World Missions

The Multi-Language Publications Committee sponsored a **workshop on English as a Second Language (ESL)** in August. The workshop wrestled with issues related to training ESL/English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, identifying useful teaching resources, developing an ESL/EFL curriculum, and using technology in promoting courses. The committee recommended the Board for World Missions provide a consultant to offer guidance and resources those who want to teach ESL and to establish a steering committee with representatives from all areas of ministry to pursue other uses of ESL/EFL in spreading the gospel.

## Obituaries

### Walter L. Strohschein 1905-1998

Walter Strohschein was born March 2, 1905, in Albion, Minn. He died Oct. 19, 1998 in Princeton, Wis.

A 1930 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Strohschein served at Trinity, Dundee, Wis., and St. John, Princeton, Wis. He also served as District President of the Northern Wisconsin District and chairman of the synod's Board of Trustees.

He is survived by his wife, Bernice; one daughter; four grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren; and two siblings.

### Conrad I. Frey 1914-1998

Conrad Frey was born May 29, 1914, in Phoenix, Ariz. He died Oct. 13, 1998, in New Ulm, Minn.

A 1938 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Frey served as a tutor at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich. He also served St. Bartholomew, Kawkawlin, Mich., and Our Saviour, Westland, Mich. He was president of two synodical schools: Michigan Lutheran Seminary and Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

He is survived by his wife, Charlotte; one daughter; one son; eight grandchildren; four great-grandchildren; six sisters; and three brothers.

## Through my Bible in 3 years

### January 1999

1. 2 Corinthians 6:11—7:16
2. 2 Corinthians 8:1-15
3. 2 Corinthians 8:16—9:15
4. 2 Corinthians 10
5. 2 Corinthians 11:1-21a
6. 2 Corinthians 11:21b—12:10
7. 2 Corinthians 12:11-21

8. 2 Corinthians 13
9. Micah 1 and 2
10. Micah 3:1—4:7
11. Micah 4:8—5:15
12. Micah 6:1—7:6
13. Micah 7:7-20
14. 1 Timothy 1
15. 1 Timothy 2
16. 1 Timothy 3:1-13
17. 1 Timothy 3:14—4:5
18. 1 Timothy 4:6-16
19. 1 Timothy 5:1—6:2

20. 1 Timothy 6:3-21
21. Titus 1
22. Titus 2
23. Titus 3
24. 2 Timothy 1
25. 2 Timothy 2
26. 2 Timothy 3
27. 2 Timothy 4
28. Leviticus 1
29. Leviticus 2 and 3
30. Leviticus 4:1—6:7
31. Leviticus 6:8—7:38



## District news

### California

**Edgar Hoenecke** was 95 on Aug. 5. His family gathered from far and near to celebrate. Hoenecke was the founding pastor of Reformation, San Diego while serving as the Executive Secretary of the WELS Board for World Missions. He lives with his wife, Meta, in Rancho Bernardo, Calif. In July they celebrated their 72nd wedding anniversary.

*Hermann John*

### Minnesota

**West Lutheran High School, Plymouth, Minn.**, is celebrating its 20th anniversary during the '98-99 school year. . . . **Emanuel, St. Paul, Minn.**, celebrated its 120th anniversary on Sept. 20. . . . **St. Paul, Alexandria, Minn.**, celebrated its 30th anniversary and Pastor **John Willitz's** 25th anniversary in the ministry on Aug. 23.

### North Atlantic

As we approach the year 2000, questions abound concerning the end times. To prepare people for these questions, **St. Paul, Ottawa, Ontario**, hosted a workshop on Oct. 24 that dealt with the subject of end-times, millennialism, Revelation 20, a biblical timeline, etc. . . . Abiding Word, Orleans, Ontario, held a "**Councilmen and Wives Banquet**" in September. Six councilmen and their wives attended the banquet, which included a meal and Bible study sessions for the men, women, couples, and the full group. The goal was to encourage and support these important leaders in God's church as they began their terms of office. . . . **Divine Word, Nepean, Ontario**, celebrated its 20th anniversary in October.

*Kevin Schultz*

### Pacific Northwest

**Messiah, Nampa, Idaho**, celebrated its 25th anniversary on June 28. Messiah was the first WELS congregation established in Idaho. . . . On July 26, **Beautiful Savior, Corvallis, Ore.**, celebrated **Pastor Duane Vanselow's** 20th anniversary in the ministry. . . . **Redeemer, Yakima, Wash.**, celebrated its 50th anniversary on Oct. 11.

*David Birsching*

### South Atlantic

**Beautiful Savior, Marietta, Ga.**, dedicated a 6,500 sq. ft. education wing on Oct. 11, while at the same time recognizing the 15th anniversary of the congregation and **John Guse's** 25th year in the ministry. Guse is the president of the South Atlantic District. . . . **Good Shepherd, Deltona, Fla.**, dedicated a new sanctuary on Nov. 1. Builders For Christ helped make this project a reality. . . . After more than two years of regular visits to Antigua by various lay leaders and missionaries in Puerto Rico, **Missionary Timothy Satorius and his family moved from Puerto Rico to Antigua**. Satorius is working for a year in a pilot project with St. John's, strengthening a group of Spanish-speaking Lutherans. Eventually the group will incorporate into the English-speaking congregation or form its own congregation. The **first regular worship service in Spanish** was held on Oct. 4 between the two English services. Forty-five people attended, and three baptisms were performed.

*Mark A. Haefner*

### Western Wisconsin

**Winnebago Lutheran Academy, Fond du Lac, Wis.**, had a groundbreaking ceremony for its new building on Oct. 3.

### Southeastern Wisconsin

**Bethlehem, Menomonee Falls, Wis.**, has a pleasant but perplexing problem—how best to serve its rapidly growing membership. Present facilities are being taxed, and expansion is not feasible at the current site. So the congregation purchased 8.5 acres in neighboring Germantown and plans to build worship and educational facilities there. These facilities will not replace their current church but will be an additional site for ministry. The staff will serve both sites. . . . **Jerusalem, Milwaukee**, celebrated its 110th anniversary on Oct. 11. . . . **Trinity, Mequon, Wis.**, rededicated its church on Oct. 18. The congregation restored the interior of the 1902 building to its original artwork. October also marks the congregation's 145th anniversary. . . . On Oct. 4, **St. John, Lomira, Wis.**, celebrated the 25th anniversary in the teaching ministry of **William J. Vilski**.

*Scott Oelhafen*

## YOUTH NEWS

**Sarah Fein** was one of eight Saginaw County teens who received honors for an essay "Why I choose abstinence." This high school student essay contest was sponsored by the Infant Mortality Coalition's Teen Pregnancy Committee. Fein, a 1998 graduate of Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, is now a student at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.





Most news reported in this section is derived from Religion News Service. Items do not necessarily reflect the views of WELS or Northwestern Lutheran.

## U.S. less Protestant than half-century ago

In the past 50 years, the percent of adults who describe themselves as Protestants has fallen from 69 percent in 1947 to 57 percent.

The Gallup poll also showed that Catholicism grew from 20 percent in 1947 to a high point of 29 percent in the late 70s and early 80s, and subsequently declined to the current 26 percent. The Jewish percent of the U.S. population declined from five percent a half century ago to two percent in 1972, and has remained at this level since.

Only six percent of U.S. adults say they have no religious preference. But among people ages 18-29, that figure rises to 12 percent for men and 13 percent for women.

[*Emerging Trends*, June 1998]

## Dutch theologian contradicts Jesus

Somehow a noted Dutch theologian has missed the portion of the Bible where Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

"One cannot pray to Jesus," says Harry Kuitert, retired professor of theology from the Free University of Amsterdam and retired minister of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. To pray to Jesus, he said, "is a gross heresy—Jesus only points back to God."

Kuitert made his comments in a new book where he writes that "Jesus supported the Jewish view of God, so he never saw himself as God-on-earth. He is not a Second God, nor the Second Person in the Holy Trinity."

He also must have missed the section where Jesus says, "I and the Father are one."

A number of clergy in the Reformed Churches are planning to publish an open letter challenging Kuitert's view and "providing a positive witness about Jesus, the Son of God."

## Life is good

When Charles Dickens described the time of the French Revolution, he said, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." American adults would probably take a more decisive stand on life these days, likely portraying this era as the best of times.

A Barna Research Group survey reveals that most Americans possess a positive view of life at the end of this century. Three out of four are either completely or mostly satisfied with their life, and 76 percent are "excited about the future." Only 35 percent feel stressed out, and just 36 percent claim to be searching for meaning in life.

One of the reasons underlying people's sense of security is their religious faith. Overall, 70 percent describe themselves as religious, and 62 percent say they are "a committed Christian."

*The survey by Barna Research Group polled 1,006 people age 18 or older. The maximum sampling error is +3 percent.*

## rē · li · giōn

### Defining religion

**Works righteousness:** The false belief that human beings can merit or contribute to their own salvation by what they do or do not do. Works righteousness is the basis of every man-made religion. According to Scripture we are saved entirely by God's grace apart from any merit or worthiness of our own (Ephesians 2:8,9; Romans 4:4-8).

## Religion influences teens' behavior

A survey of teens shows that those who attend religious services at least four times a month have substantially different attitudes toward smoking, drinking alcohol, and using illegal drugs than nonreligious teens.

The results underscore the importance of religion in "giving our children the moral values, skill, and will to say 'no' to illegal drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes," said Joseph Califano Jr., a former Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare.

"It also tells parents that by taking their children to religious services beginning at a very early age they can have a major impact on whether or not their children resist these substances."

*The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse survey was conducted from May-July 1998 and polled 1,000 teens, ages 12-17. The margin of error was ± 3.1 percent.*

**Religious teens** attend church at least four times a month

**Nonreligious teens** attend services less than once a month

8% Smoked cigarettes 22%

13% Tried marijuana 39%

19% Personally drink alcohol 32%

20% Friends drink alcohol 38%



## CHANGE IN MINISTRY

### Pastors

**Grams, Timothy H.**, to St. John, Sleepy Eye, Minn.  
**Habermann, Elwood C.**, to WLIM, Inc., Milwaukee.  
**Henning, Timothy P.**, to exploratory, Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.  
**Lenz, Kenneth F.**, to WLIM, Inc., Milwaukee  
**Schultz, Karl M.**, to Immanuel, Hadar, Neb.  
**Sievert, Louis J.**, to Our Savior, Two Rivers, Wis.  
**Stern, Steven G.**, to WLIM, Inc., Milwaukee  
**Tetzlaff, David A.**, to WLIM, Inc., Milwaukee  
**Westra, Kevin P.**, to Redeemer, Yakima, Wash.

### Staff Ministers

**Borgwardt, Donald K.**, to WLIM, Inc., Milwaukee  
**Owens, Sarah**, to deaconess, WLIM, Inc., Milwaukee

## SYNOD CONVENTION

The 55th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod will be held July 26-30, 1999, at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Details will be announced later.

Memorials to be included in the *Book of Reports and Memorials* (BoRaM) must be submitted to the president's office by Feb. 1, 1999.

## CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The Synod Nominating Committee will meet at 7 PM, Jan. 13, 1999, at the synod administration building, Milwaukee. The committee will propose three candidates for each position:

- Board for World Missions administrative committee members: Latin America (layman & pastor), Native American (layman), Central Africa (pastor & teacher), Japan Europe Asia (layman), Southeast Asia (layman & pastor)
- Board for Parish Services: board member (layman); communion chairmen for Worship & Special Ministries
- Northwestern Publishing House Board of Directors: three board members (layman, teacher, pastor)
- Board for Ministerial Education: three board members (two laymen, one teacher)
- Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Board of Control chairman (pastor)
- Board for Home Missions chairman (pastor)
- Board for World Missions chairman (pastor) and layman
- Synodical Council member (pastor)

The list of candidates nominated will be published in spring 1999. The delegates will elect one candidate for each position at the synod convention on July 26-30, 1999. Any synod voting member is invited to send names with pertinent information by Jan. 1, 1999, to Pastor Douglas Bode, 1515 S 15 St, Prairie du Chien WI 53821; phone/FAX, 608/326-4899.

## REQUEST FOR COLLOQUY

Rev. David W. Schmidt, Rochester, N.Y., formerly a pastor of the Confessional Lutheran Church, has requested a colloquy for the purpose of entering the pastoral ministry of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Correspondence related to this request should be addressed to President Walter Beckmann, North Atlantic District, 7401 Masonville Dr, Annandale VA 22003.

# Bulletin BOARD & NOTICES

To place an announcement, call 414/256-3210;  
FAX, 414/256-3899; <karenb@sab.wels.net>  
Deadline is six weeks before publication date.

### NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS

The cutoff date for Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) receipts in the synod's post office lock box is the last business day of each month. December 1998 lock box offerings will be credited as 1998 receipts through Jan. 11, 1999, as long as they are received in the lock box on or before that date and are clearly labeled "December" on the remittance coupon. Offerings must be mailed to the lock box rather than delivered to the synod offices.

Mark Meissner, Director of Finance

**The Synod Administration Building will close:** Dec. 24-25—Christmas. Callers may leave voice mail messages, 414/256-3888.

### ANNIVERSARIES

**Manitowoc, Wis.**—First German (125). Dec. 6. Services, 8 & 10:30 AM; potluck follows. 920/684-0101.

**Crete, Ill.**—Trinity (150). Jan. 31, 1999—"A Festival to the Lord." Services, 8 & 10:45 AM; potluck, noon. Feb. 28—Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Chorus, 8 & 10:45 AM. Charles Bonow, 708/672-8125.

**Colorado Springs, Colo.**—Salem, (25). Jan. 24, 1999—services, 8 & 10:30 AM; chili dinner follows. 719/599-0200.

**Racine, Wis.**—First Evangelical (150). Feb. 14, 1999—Matrimony-theme service, 9:30 AM. Any couple married here may participate in a processional. Reception follows. March 28, 1999—Confirmation-theme services, 8 & 10:45 AM. Anyone confirmed here is invited. RSVP, 414/633-8267.

**West Allis, Wis.**—Woodlawn (70), April 18, 1999. Anniversary celebration services, 8 & 10:30 AM; potluck follows. Thomas Kneser, 414/321-2126.

### COMING EVENTS

**National campus rally**—Dec. 27-30, UW-Madison. 608/257-1969; <national.rally@juno.com>.

**National WELS handbell festival**—April 10-11, 1999, at Wausau, Wis. Sunday concert, 2 PM. Cheryl Diener, 715/258-7203.

**Church Librarians' Organization**—WELS-CLO meeting, April 24, 1999, at Trinity, Waukesha, Wis. 414/256-3222. <jaweber@sab.wels.net>

**Medical ethics conference**—medical professionals, clergy, attorneys, and anyone interested in Christian decision-making in medicine invited to "Decisions in Medicine" Medical Ethics Conference. Feb. 18-19, 1999, at the Sheraton World Resort, Orlando, Fla. Cost: \$110 per person. WELS Lutherans for Life, 1-800-729-9535 ext. 107; 774-1331 (Milwaukee).

For a weekly updated bulletin board,  
see the WELS Web site <www.wels.net>.

### NEEDED

**Campbell's soup labels and General Mills box tops**—for Good Shepherd Lutheran School needing equipment, games, and teaching tools. Send by March 15, 1999, to 2900 42 St NE, Cedar Rapids IA 52402. Linda, 319/377-6360.

### AVAILABLE

**Wurlitzer electronic organ**—Series 20, No. 1964, 2 manuals, 32 note pedalboard. Free for cost of shipping. Kurt Grams, 507/354-8115.

**Wood kneeling bench with railing**—6 to 7 ft. long. Free for cost of shipping. Pastor Rahn, 715/687-3411.

### NAMES WANTED

**High school honors choir**—for the National Conference on Music, Worship, & the Arts, Kenosha, Wis. July 18-21, 1999. Open to WELS and ELS sophomores, juniors, or seniors. Contact pastor or high school/prep school director for information. Deadline: Jan. 15, 1999. Peter Sordahl, 602/936-6764; <PASordahl@aol.com>

**Corona, Calif.**—for exploratory. Rick Johnson, 909/734-1625; <pasturick@aol.com>.

**Southwest Broward County, Fla.**—of people interested in starting a Bible study and mission congregation in the Pembroke Pines/Weston/Davie area. Jack or Barbara Meyer, 954/385-1788.

**Cary, Apex, Morrisville, Holly Springs, Fuquay-Varina, N.C.**—for Tree of Life exploratory, Cary, NC. Michael Geiger, 919/363-7720.

**Ports Townsend, Hadlock, Ludlow, Wash.**—for Hope (ELS), Port Hadlock, Wash. 360/379-1721 or Glenn Obenberger, 253/537-5492.

**SE Jacksonville, Fla.**—for exploratory. Phil Hoyer, 904/821-9445; <jaxannephil@juno.com>.

**Adult honors choir**—for the National Conference on Worship, Music, & the Arts, Kenosha, Wis. Must be available July 17-19, 1999, for rehearsals and concerts. Mary Prange, 414/873-9105.

### POSITIONS AVAILABLE

**Network Support Specialist**—Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee. Qualifications: service oriented; communication and interpersonal skills; enjoy working independently, problem solving, and maintaining systems. Experienced working with, configuring, and supporting Windows NT 4.0, Windows 95, TCP/IP, network security, Internet applications, databases, and Microsoft Office 97. Undergraduate degree in computing or similar discipline (or equivalent experience with an education degree) and one year experience as a network support specialist required. Paul W. Schumacher, Director of Campus Technology, Wisconsin Lutheran College, 8800 W Bluemound Rd, Milwaukee WI 53226.

**Security guard**—Wisconsin Lutheran College. Part-time weekends. Qualifications: high school diploma or equivalent, good driving record and valid Wisconsin driver's license, and self-management skills. Apply at 8725 W Wisconsin Ave, M-F 8 AM-4 PM.

**Maintenance director**—Bethany Lutheran College (ELS), Mankato, Minn. Send resume by Jan 1, 1999, to Paul B. Tweit, Administrative Vice President, Bethany Lutheran College, 700 Luther Dr, Mankato MN 56001-6163; 507/344-7312.

**Food service director**—Retreat/Conference Center, Spooner, Wis. Send resume by Jan. 1, 1999, to Paul B. Tweit, Administrative Vice President, Bethany Lutheran College (ELS), 700 Luther Dr, Mankato MN 56001-6163; 507/344-7312.



# One-on-one forgiveness

**There can be no real harmony, no lasting peace, no true unity in the church unless every member is willing to forgive every other member.**

Fredric E. Piepenbrink

In the heart of his letter to Philemon, Paul states his main reason for writing and presents a crucial ingredient for Christian fellowship—forgiving one another.

## Opportunities for forgiveness

Paul had decided to send the runaway slave, Onesimus, back to his owner, Philemon. This was difficult, first, because Paul and Onesimus had become close friends. **“I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you”** (Philemon 12). There is no closer relationship than the bond between a Christian and those he has brought to Christ.

But, second, Onesimus had become valuable to Paul’s ministry. **“I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel”** (Philemon 13). Many, including Philemon, whom Paul had also converted, were not in a position to come to Paul’s aid. But Onesimus was. It must have been heart-wrenching for Paul to send Onesimus back, not knowing if he would see him again or what Philemon would do with him.

But Paul saw a higher principle. He saw an opportunity for a Christian to forgive a new fellow Christian, even though one had sinned against the other in a serious way—*theft of property and service*. The act of forgiveness and the uniting of brothers in the Lord presented an opportunity that could not be passed by. Paul was willing to send away his friend and helper for a higher spiritual good, not only for Philemon and Onesimus, but for the whole church, which would recognize Philemon’s act of one-on-one forgiveness and follow his example.

## Forgiveness in the church

In this sinful world, conflicts among members arise even in the church. The church is made of sinners. They strive against temptation, but sometimes their sinful nature takes over. Some sins are minor and incidental and can be overlooked. After all, *“Love covers over a multitude of sins”* (1 Peter 4:8). Such sins are forgiven immediately.

For repeated and egregious sins, the offended party will attempt to restore the sinner: *“Brother, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are*

*spiritual should restore him gently”* (Galatians 6:1). Then, when a fellow Christian repents, the offended party joyfully forgives him completely. The matter is dropped. The offense is never mentioned again. The incident is deliberately forgotten.

How precious is the fellowship of believers! How increasingly precious it is when a new follower of Jesus receives not only the forgiveness of the Lord, but of fellow believers. Paul couldn’t deny Philemon that experience. So he wrote, **“He [Onesimus] is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord”** (Philemon 16).

Whom in your church family do you have the opportunity to forgive? We have all been wronged by someone in our family of believers. But there can be no real harmony, no lasting peace, no true unity in the church unless every member is willing to forgive every other member.

So do what Paul told Philemon to do—receive them back as brothers or sisters. You may not need to verbalize your forgiveness, but show it by kind words and actions. Not only will your offender appreciate it, but you will experience the joy of being Christ-like. Remember the legacy of the early Christian church that shocked the heathen world—see how they love one another!

*Fredric E. Piepenbrink is pastor at Atonement, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.*

Next time: respect

PHILEMON  
forgiveness



# One still night

It's the still of the night. I guess that's why I enjoy a late-night Christmas Eve service so much. The hurried dance of wrapping paper is over. You can see the floor again. The sparkling voices of the children, grandchildren, are silent now in happy slumber. A hush has come over the world. Involuntarily perhaps, the world has stopped its frantic pace, unmindful of the real reason for the calm. It's a perfect time, in the stillness of the night, to reverently reflect on the One who came to us from heaven above.

Did you ever wonder what God the Father was doing while his Son was being born? You can trust he was no disinterested bystander! Some might silently feel, or openly say, "Well, it's about time he seemed interested in our world! After all, it was about 4,000 years since Eden, where God first pointed the world toward Christmas."

It's hard to picture a timeless God in heaven, who is not bound to moments and months as we are on earth. And yet, for God, not an earthly moment passes without some heavenly thought behind it. Ceaselessly, God was preparing for the fullness of time, the exact moment for his Son to come to earth from heaven.

Can you even begin to imagine all the details? We know only a few of them:

- God's Son would be virgin-born.
- A girl, just like Mary, had to be prepared whose fiancé, pushing all pride and prejudice to the side, would be as thoughtfully caring about her and her delicate condition as Joseph was.
- A world ruler, the proud Roman Caesar, would need to order a census that could bring a poor couple to Bethlehem, the place long foretold for the birth.

- And, to help care for them in exile (wicked King Herod would seek the young child's life), wise men from the East had to be notified by a spectacular star so they could present their rich gifts to him.

You might have thought, with all that had gone into this event and with all that would come out of it, it would be the kind of spectacle we may have witnessed in English royal weddings. Oh, it was spectacular! An angel announced it, a chorus of angels joined in proclaiming it, praising God for it. But the night Jesus was born was no media event.

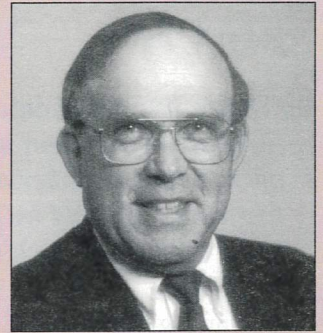
It was the greatest moment in human history: God's Son coming to earth from heaven above. But God had nothing to prove. He wasn't doing it for show. And so Jesus' birth, God's Son assuming our flesh and blood, took place in a lonely, humble manager.

What was God the Father thinking? Was this any way to treat his only Son?

His thoughts were on you and me and on our children and grandchildren, even as he remembered Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God's Son had to come to earth so humbly so we could rise with him one day to heaven's glory.

So it happened: one still night God's Son, our Savior, came to earth from heaven above.

And so, enjoy the stillness of a silent night. This quietness, we know, will not last forever. But, most of all, enjoy the calm, the eternal peace the Savior brings, coming to earth from heaven.



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

*It's a perfect  
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# When a pastor says "no"

John F. Brug

***What is our stand on conducting a funeral if the person who died was not a WELS member or a Christian? Should we do this as an opportunity to preach the gospel to the living?***

Our regular practice is that WELS pastors conduct a Christian funeral only for people whose Christian confession is known to us. A funeral will not be a comfort unless it includes a recognition of the deceased's Christian faith. Normally we will conduct a funeral only for a person who was a member of our fellowship.

**If the pastor has no evidence of Christian faith on the part of the deceased, what can he say that will be both honest and a comfort?**

However, exceptional circumstances may arise. A WELS pastor may have ministered to a non-member during illness. In response to the pastor's presentation of the gospel, that individual confessed faith in Christ but had no chance to "set his house in order" as far as church membership. On the basis of the person's confession of faith, the pastor could conduct the funeral. To avoid confusion or offense the pastor would explain the circumstances to his council and/or congregation.

If the pastor has no evidence of Christian faith on the part of the deceased, what can he say that will

be both honest and a comfort? If he warns the mourners not to follow the deceased's example of spiritual neglect, it will be honest, but not a comfort. If he provides gospel comfort where there was no evidence of faith, it will be a comfort, but not honest.

Because the death of a loved one is an emotional time, it is important that pastors and congregations regularly remind their members of funeral practices and the reasons for them, so that people do not first learn about them in the stressful situation of arranging a funeral for a loved one. Pastors should also make every effort to evangelize the unchurched relatives of their members while they are still alive. Then speaking the gospel to them can do some good. Their friends and relatives should do the same.

***Why do WELS pastors turn down invitations to lead prayers at public high school graduations but pastors of other denominations don't?***

Scripture teaches that people should not join in public worship and prayer unless they agree in doctrine. They should not participate in religious activity that gives equal status to truth and error. At public religious ceremonies, all denominations, even non-Christian religions, are given equal status.

I was once asked to conduct a high school baccalaureate service with a pastor who had driven members from his congregation by his false teaching. What impression would it have given to members of

both congregations and to the community if we would have conducted such a service together? In the minds of many it would have confirmed the common view that it really does not matter what you believe; all religions are basically the same.

Such a false impression can easily be given even when the adherents of opposing views do not participate in the same service, but take turns in successive services. Love requires us to give a clear testimony against religious indifference that treats truth and falsehood as equals.

Pastors of many denominations do not believe that agreement in doctrine is necessary for joint prayer and worship. They see no problem in worshiping with people who hold unscriptural positions. Others feel they can participate as a testimony to their own view, without giving the impression that they are granting equal recognition to error. This distinction will seldom be clear to the general public.

*John Brug is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon.*

Send questions to Your question, please, *Northwestern Lutheran*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; <nl@sab.wels.net>



# For our sakes he became poor

Armin J. Panning

**M**ore than a decade of robust economy has made many people comfortable and complacent. They assume an increase in wealth and material things can be taken for granted. Mortgage payments will always be met, there will be money for the children's college education, retirement funding is secure.

In his wisdom, the Lord has seen fit to issue a wake-up call. After months of financial instability in Southeast Asia, the contagion has spread to Europe, as well as to Central and South America. And, as of this writing, there are disturbing developments also in the United States' economy.

Painful as such a reversal of fortune may be, it can serve a good purpose if it heightens our appreciation of what God was willing to do for us at his nativity. Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor (2 Corinthians 8:9).

We need that reminder because we, too, often glamorize the nativity account. Influenced no doubt by Christmas card scenes, we tend to think only of a sweet cuddly baby sleeping comfortably under the adoring gaze of Joseph and Mary and the shepherds. We so easily overlook the discomfort. We forget that Bethlehem actually presents a scene of abject poverty. Only the barest of accommodations are in place, with no medical technology or helpful attendants.

A makeshift delivery room and a nursery set up in a stable would be grim for any child. But this was no ordinary child! This was the true God, the creator and sustainer of the universe, who held all things in his hand. Though he owned

absolutely everything, he chose for the moment not to use what was rightfully his. He literally became desperately poor.

Why did he do that? Paul gives the answer when he writes to the Corinthians, ". . . so that through his poverty we might be rich."

True God took on human flesh in order to take our place. By living the perfect life we could not live, he, the God-man, earned righteousness for us. By his innocent death he paid for what we had done amiss. Thus he won forgiveness for us and earned the perfect righteousness that avails before a just and holy God. Hence, by faith in Christ we are now members of God's family, his children, heirs of all that God owns. In Christ we have access to everything. We are fabulously rich.

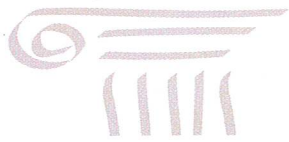
With a lagging economy there may be fewer gifts under the Christmas tree this year, but that is no barrier to true Christmas joy. In the Christ Child we have everything. Rejoicing in that wealth, we too can say with the prophet Habakkuk:

Though the fig tree does not bud  
and there are no grapes on the vines,  
though the olive crop fails  
and the fields produce no food,  
though there are no sheep in the pen  
and no cattle in the stalls,  
yet I will rejoice in the LORD,  
I will be joyful in God my Savior.  
(3:17,18)

*Armin Panning is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon.*

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**We had many responses to the articles on the called worker shortage and ministry to the cities. Because we wanted everyone to be heard, we expanded Readers forum to two pages. Bible readings are on p. 24**

**Hi, I'm 12 years old and picked up a copy of *Northwestern Lutheran*. I loved it!** After reading "We live together as a family," I understood why we should be thankful that Jesus died for us. It gave great examples, so it was easy to understand. Your magazine is awesome!

*Will Johanning  
Sussex, Wisconsin*

I am 12. I know you are busy, but I have an idea. My teacher recommends us to read NL. So I do, and many of my classmates do. It's okay, **but I think it would be neat if you could have something for kids.** In our newspaper we have a page like that every Saturday where there are things for us to read. This would be cool to have but it would be like about God and stuff. Thanks for your time!

*Kathryn Jackan  
Marshfield, Wisconsin*


**Re: End-time issues [Sept.]** My husband and I decided that we would be cremated. We believe, as your article states, that it makes no difference to God, and on Judgment Day we will enter heaven. Cost, which was not mentioned, was a large factor in our decision. We cannot see placing money into the ground. We hope that the money will be used in more productive means, such as charity, education, or bringing God's Word to other people.

*Iona Hayter  
Sparta, Wisconsin*

**I wish to second Jeske's well expressed, cross-cultural "Concern for the city."** Sometimes it takes a bit of strong talk to get people to do some hard thinking.

We of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa, too, must plan for the year 2000 and beyond with these facts in mind. Our church (in Malawi and Zambia) continues to grow, but this increase still occurs largely in rural areas. As people flock to the supposed utopia of urban areas, we must be there to meet and to minister to them. This means putting forth greater efforts toward an outreach-oriented, cross-cultural/tribal/linguistic/socio-economic evangelistic approach, as encouraged by this article.

In Africa, as well as America, "a church body's spiritual vigor is demonstrated in its mission commitment to share the gospel across cultures." As believers move more deeply into the Scriptures, they will just as surely move outward with the Word into their surrounding society. Thanks again for this encouraging message!

*Ernst R. Wendland  
 Lusaka, Zambia*

**"Way-to-go" in pointing out that we should not forget urban churches or the people in the inner city!**

"Concern for the city" [Sept.] may not set well with some WELS members, but I feel it was a timely wake-up message. We would all benefit from rereading and applying the six items in "Worship thoughts for cross-cultural outreach." These items can be applied to all churches, not just cross-cultural ministries. God bless your efforts, Pastor Jeske!


*Frederick P. Schleg  
Friendship, Wisconsin*

**"Concern for the city" was well written and thought-provoking. There is, however, one point on which I would disagree.** Under worship thoughts for outreach he advocates having the choir sing from the front of church. The choir is to lead the worship. They also add to the beauty of the service. All this is intended to be to the glory of God—not the glory of the choir. If a choir loft is provided up front there may be no problem. But, if the choir marches up in front of the altar to sing, there is great danger that the singing will become a performance rather than a leading in worship. Perhaps what Jeske says is true for the cross-cultural worship setting. But in many congregations, up front would be a detriment to the worship atmosphere.

*W.H. Allwardt  
Winner, South Dakota*

**Re: "Seven reasons why city churches die" [Oct.]** In the section on social class issues, it mentions our music. Some hymns are difficult to sing. Having come from a Methodist background (they do much singing), I have difficulty singing some hymns. We know people who went to other churches because of this. Part of the problem is that most, if not all, pastors are good singers and have had music as part of their studies. Others of us haven't had this training.

Another reason city churches die was left out. Many seem apathetic and will not canvass. And there is little or no follow up. The pastor must visit within a day or two. Also, if a lay person calls on the guests, they are more likely to return. This should be the main thrust of the congregation, as well as the evangelism committee.


*Ray Renner  
 N. Ft. Myers, Florida*



**Your staff article, "The wolf is at the door," [Oct.] does not mesh with Dave Danford's "Crash cart" piece in one sense.**


While we are encouraged to "pray for more workers," Danford rightly tells parishioners not to think that "it's someone else's job to take care of it."

We do have 400,000 workers. When they work, there is sufficiency. What we need is a bigger stream of full-time leaders for the workers, that is, public ministry trained people. Let us be precise in our prayers.

 *Doug Wellumson  
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin*


**Thank you for "The wolf is at the door."** The authors explored the shortage of public ministers and offered positive practical solutions.

Some thoughts of how to answer the shortage would be to encourage synod and church leaders to examine how existing ministers are used. Are some geographic areas overserved by WELS churches and schools? Are churches and schools not filled to capacity but close enough to another church or school where facilities and called workers could be combined? Are there small churches or churches with declining memberships that could combine with another church? Are administrative positions being filled by public ministers that could be served by lay members? An additional thought might be to design an educational system that would allow more second career people to complete some studies in their community prior to going to New Ulm or Mequon. Again, thank you for your fine article.


 *Dennis E. Mastin  
Burke, Virginia*

**I liked the recommendations made about the teacher/pastor shortage.**

Many of my friends are teachers or have been teachers in WELS schools. Many struggle because they find themselves in areas where there are not WELS churches on every corner. They never student taught in remote areas, and were not raised in remote areas. Maybe MLC needs to expose practice teachers to such environments. Wisconsin requires public school teachers to have urban experiences. Why not require something similar for MLC graduates?

 *Dawn Schultz  
Waukesha, Wisconsin*


**From 1994-97 we lost 83 ministers through resignation.** The percent is small, but the effect is devastating and far-reaching. We will probably never know why these men left the ministry, and I, for one, don't want to know, unless it is a weakness in WELS. Did the gap left by these men put souls at risk? Are congregations folding because of their loss? Are men coming out of the seminary aware of the pitfalls in the public ministry? The Care Committees for Called Workers sound like a good beginning at putting a stop to this hemorrhage.

 *Milton Gibbs  
Pullman, Washington*

**Re: "The wolf is at the door."** I agree wholeheartedly that this is serious, and I think it will get worse before it gets better. There is no button to push to suddenly fill all vacancies. There are a lot of little things to be done as this article suggests.

But I see a more glaring solution. WELS needs to look within itself and evaluate the many pastors and teachers that are in non-pastoral and non-teaching positions. We spend a lot of time and money preparing them to


preach and teach, and then we call them to positions that administrators or businessmen and women could fill. Let's get them on a call list, and look for lay people to perform non-pastoral and non-teaching positions. Let's get these people out in the field they were trained for and fill these vacancies.

 *Ken Eppler  
Carlsbad, California*

**Two articles in October left me both encouraged and discouraged.**

First, "The wolf is at the door" was difficult since I wrestled with becoming a pastor while attending a WELS church. The encouraging piece is that change generally doesn't occur until "status quo" is no longer effective. It is a prime opportunity for WELS to find out what is causing the shortage of pastors (and why pastoral candidates are departing the synod—I am currently attending seminary) and how to mobilize the congregation into ministry (the priesthood of all believers). Are pastors and teachers looked on as the only spiritual authority, thus causing a feeling of inadequacy in church members?

Second, the article addressing the seven reasons why city churches die did not mention a couple of major issues: music—do non-believers and believers in the city listen to an organ?; messages—are sermons relevant to the issues they are dealing with?; culture—are cultural issues blocking potential city church members from attending?; and finally do church members really care if they reach the lost in the city or is the pastor going it alone? Unless the lost really see that someone cares, what message do you have? Mercy ministries are very important in this demographic. Also, there are many healthy church models to look at for suggestions.

 *Chuck Krueger*



## Virtual reality



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

Sin is real and  
condemns us  
to eternal  
death. The  
Savior is real  
and gives us  
eternal life.

The young woman reached out into thin air as if to touch something or someone, but nothing was there. She looked like someone groping in darkness, but it was broad daylight and she was not sight impaired. She was experiencing virtual reality, seeing only what the “viewer” on her head allowed her to see.

Moments later she would remove the contraption and re-enter “real” reality. Or would she? More and more, people insist that a kind of virtual reality is all we know. And in that frame of reference, your virtual reality is as good as my virtual reality, and mine as yours. It sounds so . . . fair.

So, what’s the problem? First, there’s the semantic variable, the way we use words. If everything is only virtual reality, that says something about reality: the reality is there is only virtual reality. Maybe we understand it better in other terms. In a virtual-reality world, there are no absolutes, no exclusive truths. But to say so is an absolute statement and declares an exclusive truth. If this matter weren’t so serious, it might be fun to play with the words.

Then there’s the psychology of the matter. Living in virtual reality means never having to say you’re sorry, never having to risk making judgments of actions or teachings, never having to take a stand on your convictions. It can mean calling a sexual encounter in a public office by a public officer on the public’s time a private matter. And, if you never have to condemn others for their actions, you don’t have to be condemned for yours.

The legal implications can be frightening. How do you decide what is right or wrong? “What’s wrong for me isn’t neces-

sarily . . .” You know how it goes. Is it any wonder that abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, adultery are making inroads to “respectability” in our virtual world? Increasingly, the Ten Commandments are treated as if they were no more than the Ten Suggestions.

Morally and spiritually we suffer. We lose any sense of sin, if not also of shame. If sin disappears from my virtual world, then I never have to repent and I don’t need a Savior. My religion is to create a virtual reality where I feel the most comfortable. It doesn’t matter if other religions directly contradict it and oppose it. They, too, have their virtual space.

What we have, then, is a world of people groping as if in darkness, stumbling as if blind. And there is such a world. Speaking of the Word that became flesh, John tells us: “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it” (1:4,5). That’s reality.

In the Word made flesh, however, we see the glory of God himself, “the One and Only, who came from the Father full of grace and truth” (1:14). Yes, Pilate (and all virtual-reality advocates), there is truth—absolute truth. Jesus is “the way and the truth and the life.” No one comes to the Father except through him (John 14:6). Sin is real and condemns us to eternal death. The Savior is real and gives us eternal life.

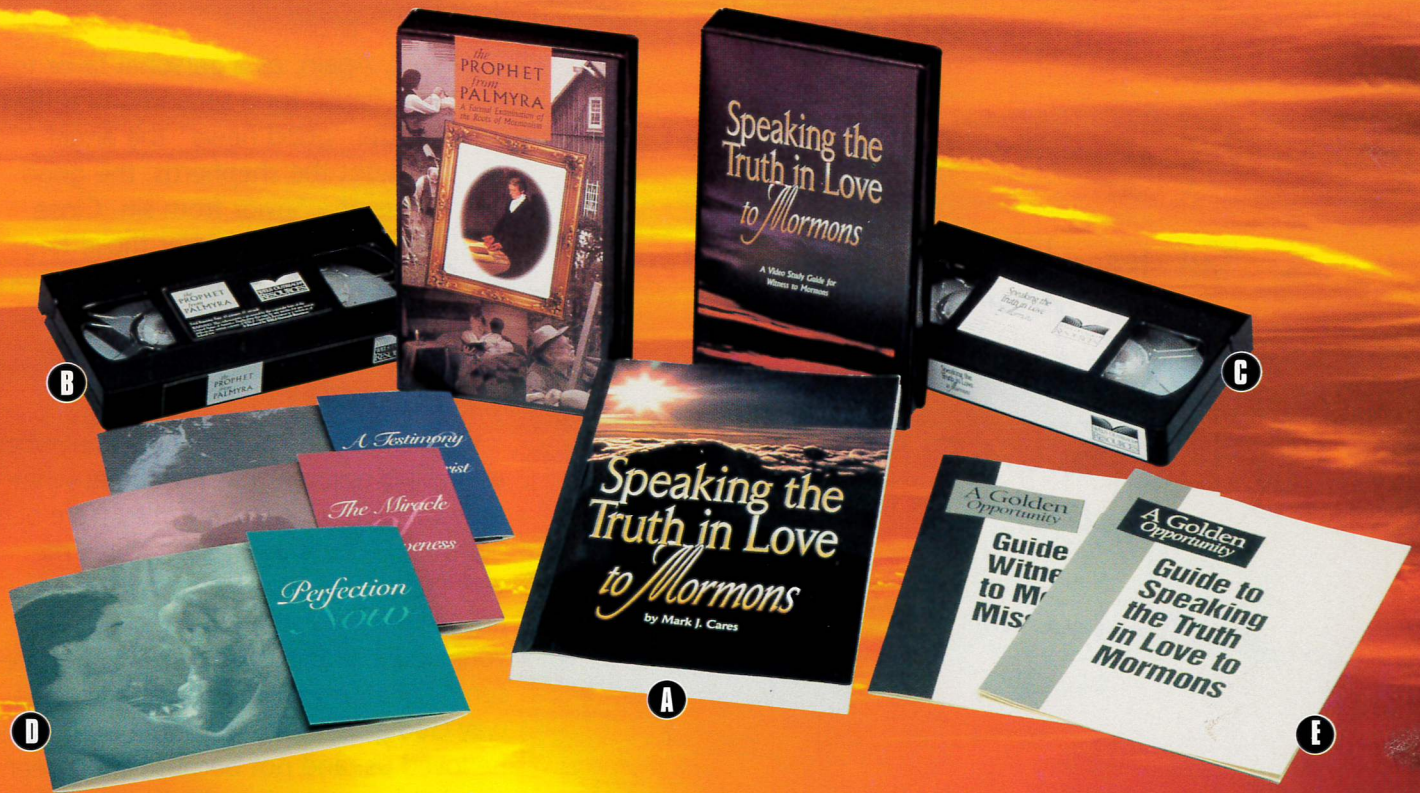
In this season, may reality move you to humble praise. “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given”—the “Mighty God,” the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

*Gary P. Baumler*



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B- VIDEO-The Prophet from Palmyra. A dramatized factual examination of the roots of Mormonism.

C- VIDEO-Speaking the Truth in Love. A video study guide for witnessing to Mormons.

D- WITNESS TRACTS (set of 3)-Written specifically for Mormons in their language.

E- WITNESS GUIDES (set of 2)- Easy read "how to" guides.

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# All I want for Christmas

Five things you can do to make the author happy this year.

**Kenneth A. Cherney**

It's me again—Pastor Ken. And here is just what you've been waiting for: my Christmas list. Below is a list of the gifts I hope to receive from each of you this year.

I'm not greedy. Your gift can be just one thing on the list (although if you want to give me more than one, that'll be fine). I'm also not impatient. Give your gift when it's convenient. After Christmas will be all right—though on or before would be even better.

Ready? Here goes.

1. Read Luke 2:1-20
2. Reflect on the "good news"
3. Tell the children they're getting presents because you love them
4. Enjoy a great Christmas with all the trimmings
5. Thank God out loud!

1. As a gift, a personal favor to me, find a quiet corner, sit down with your Bible, and read Luke 2:1-20. Read it in the King James Version. Read it in Today's English Version. Read it in Urdu for all I care. But please—just read it. That's all.

2. Again, as a personal favor to me, pause for a second and reflect on the "good news" the angel brought the shepherds: the good news of a Savior from sin. Close your eyes and whisper those two words to yourself. First, "sin." Think about it. Then, "Savior." Again—that's all. Thank you very much.

3. Even as we speak, people everywhere are telling children that they'll get what they want for Christmas if they have been "good little boys and girls." Make me very happy this year. Don't say this to anybody. If they ask, tell the children in your house that they're going to get presents because you love them. The same way God gave us a Savior from sin because he loved us, and not because we'd been good little sinners (good little sinners?).

5. To make your Christmas as joyful as possible, thank God for your Savior, that greatest present ever given. I mean, thank God out loud. Over at his house. With other Christians. Check the paper for times, or give your church a call. They'd like nothing better than to have you with them this year.

There. If you've been scratching your head over what to give me, scratch no more.

With sincere thanks and best wishes,  
Ken Cherney

*Ken Cherney is a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota.*

4. Another thing. Every year, certain well-meaning, but misguided, souls try to make you feel guilty about presents and holly and Christmas cards and turkey because all these things supposedly detract from "the true meaning of Christmas." Tell these souls to lighten up. The "true meaning of Christmas" isn't as fragile as that. The greatest present ever given—our newborn Savior—is not threatened by the presents under your tree or the food on your table. Enjoy a great Christmas with all the trimmings. Really—you'll be doing me a favor.