

FORWARD IN CHRIST

February 2000

Northwestern Lutheran • The Word from the WELS

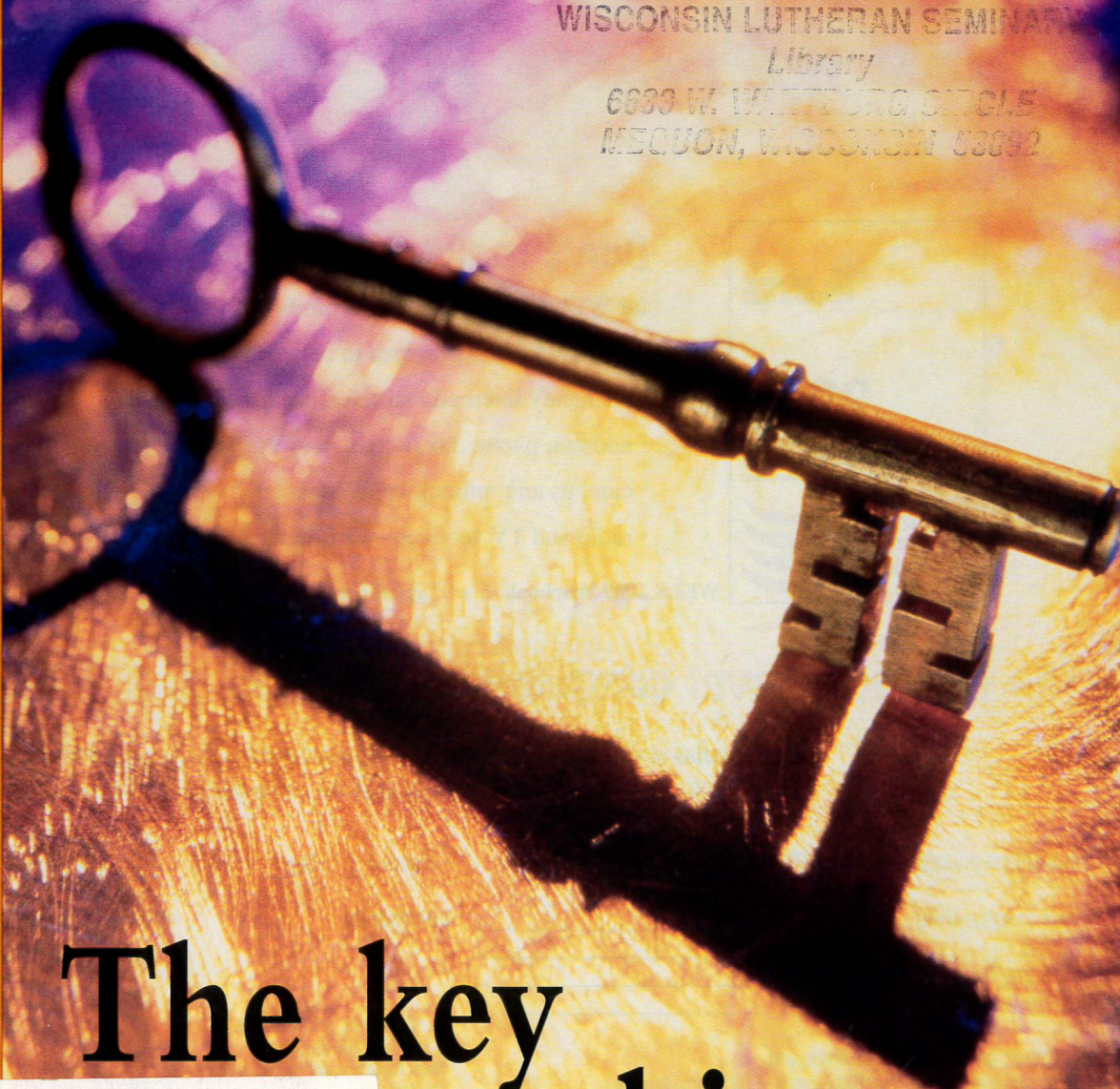
LWMS
wants you!

Fast food
frenzy

Ministering
to the
metropolis

JA 28 '00

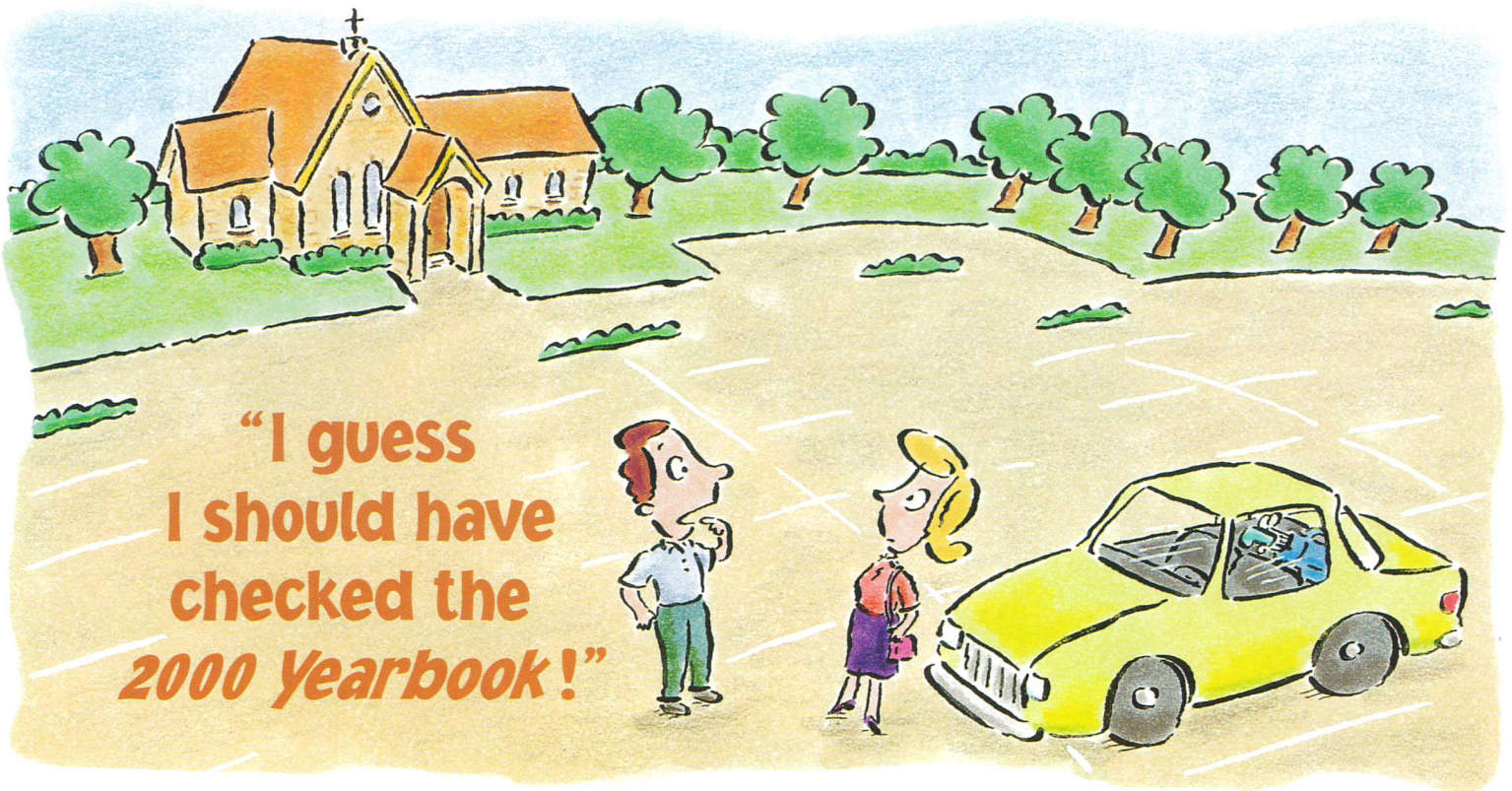
WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY
Library
6633 W. WARTBURG CIRCLE
MEQUON, WISCONSIN 53092



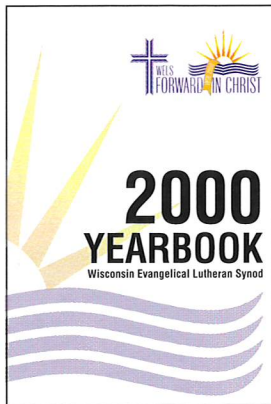
The key
everything

88/2

010120021 000000053092 INARY L
WISCONSIN LUTH SEMINARY LIBR
6633 W WARTBURG CIR
MEQUON WI 53092-1530



“I guess I should have checked the 2000 Yearbook!”



Don't make the same mistake. Worship service times for WELS congregations—from Portland, Maine, to Honolulu, Hawaii, and every state, island, and province in between—are listed in the *WELS 2000 Yearbook*.

This handy international reference guide also includes these listings:

- address, phone, fax, e-mail, and Web site information
- campus and military contact pastors
- radio and TV services—worldwide

WELS 2000 Yearbook 6"x 9" spiral-bound, 274 pages. **LU40N2000, \$13.95**

The perfect travel companion—the 2000 Yearbook—take it along!

Available **online** at www.wels.net/nph or call **1-800-662-6022** (Milwaukee area 414-475-6600) 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. weekdays. Or **mail** the convenient order form below.

Please place my order for the **WELS 2000 Yearbook**.

Name (please print) _____
 Address _____
 City/State/Zip _____
 Daytime Phone (____) _____

Check or Money Order enclosed (make payable to Northwestern Publishing House)

NPH Charge Account (net 30 days)



Bankcard No. _____

Exp. Date _____

Stock #	Qty	Book Title	Price	Total
LU40N2000	_____	WELS 2000 Yearbook	\$13.95	\$ _____
		Merchandise Total		\$ _____
		Shipping & Handling*		\$ _____
		Subtotal		\$ _____
		5% Sales Tax—Wisconsin residents		\$ _____
		6% County Tax—Milwaukee County residents		\$ _____
		Total Amount		\$ _____

***SHIPPING & HANDLING CHARGES**

Note: Bankcard and NPH charge customers will be billed actual postage plus \$2.00 handling.

If order totals	Add
up to \$ 10.00	\$ 3.70
\$ 10.01 to \$ 25.00	\$ 4.80
\$ 25.01 to \$ 50.00	\$ 6.25
\$ 50.01 to \$100.00	\$ 7.90
\$100.01 to \$150.00	\$ 9.40
\$150.01 to \$200.00	\$10.90
\$200.01 and up	\$12.50

We reserve the right to bill you for actual shipping costs when the charges exceed the schedule.



Northwestern Publishing House
 1250 North 113th Street
 Milwaukee, WI 53226-3284

You can say that again

*So I will always remind you of these things,
even though you know them and are firmly established
in the truth you now have. 2 Peter 1:12*

Paul M. Janke

A fellow was preparing to tell a joke. "Stop me if you've heard this one already," he said. Before the joke was half told, the listeners knew they'd heard it before. The joke had been making the rounds for years. They were too polite to stop the speaker in mid-joke, but laughter at the punch line was limited to a few forced chuckles. Stale jokes elicit groans, not gales of laughter.

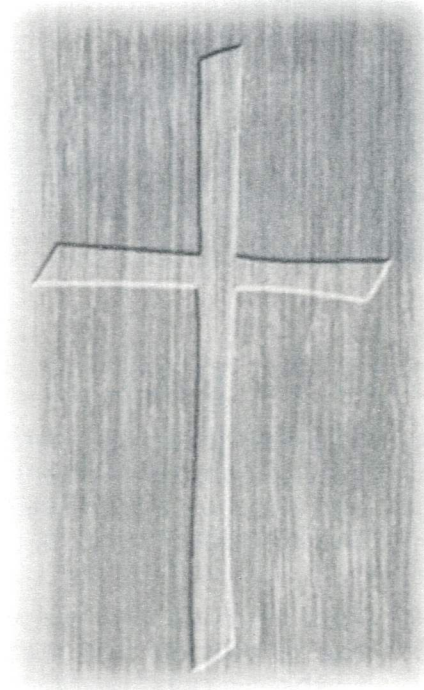
The standard of the comedian

A comedian is constantly in search of new material. He ransacks the newspapers. He becomes a keen observer of the quirks of human behavior. If he's one of the kings of comedy he may employ a whole team of writers to help him devise fresh routines. The pressure to develop new material can be intense.

Should teachers of the Bible be held to the same standard? Should we, as laypeople, enter the sanctuary breathing a silent challenge, "Tell me something new, preacher"?

Some people think so. "I know all that already," says the fifth-grader as she resists an invitation to attend Sunday school. "Week after week it's the same old stuff," says a man attempting to justify his sporadic worship attendance. And here's the clincher: "I'm not being fed." You get the feeling that sometimes means, "I'm not being fed anything new."

I don't mean to defend poorly prepared teachers or preachers who



have long since ceased to be students of the Scriptures. The gospel by cliché can become wearisome. Sermons that are little more than strings of platitudes don't do justice to the richness and variety of the Bible message. But do we really want to hold preachers to the same standard by which we judge comedians?

The standard of the apostle

The apostle Peter acknowledged that he was soon to put aside "the tent of this body." So as death drew near, what was it that he wished to share with his friends? Was it something novel, something that might

cement Peter's reputation as an original thinker? Hardly! He wanted to remind his fellow believers of the truths that they already knew.

Peter's second epistle addresses man's sin and God's grace. The apostle writes about the gloomy dungeons of hell and about heaven, the home of righteousness. He speaks of the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, through which we have salvation. He reiterates the Lord's desire to have everyone come to repentance. This is not new material. It is extremely important, however, and therefore worthy of repetition.

Anyone who presents himself as a teacher of the faith but insists that he has something original to proclaim deserves to be greeted with skepticism. False teachers invent new doctrines. Heretics revel in their originality. But faithful teachers are content to know that much of their work consists of reminding believers of the truths that they've already heard.

We may not come away from worship very often marveling at the new information we heard. But if we follow the apostle's lead, we'll be happy to hear what we already know. We'll be delighted if we are reminded of the truth about Jesus in which we've already been "firmly established."

Paul M. Janke is pastor at Saint Peter, Modesto, California.

FORWARD IN CHRIST

Northwestern Lutheran

Official magazine of the
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

February 2000 / Vol. 88, No. 2

www.wels.net

Editorial office

Forward in Christ/Northwestern Lutheran,
WELS, 2929 N Mayfair Rd,
Milwaukee WI 53222-4398

FAX, 414/256-3899

<nl@sab.wels.net>

Editor

Rev. Gary P. Baumler, 414/256-3230

<garyb@sab.wels.net>

Senior Communications Assistant

Julie K. Tessmer, 414/256-3231

<juliet@sab.wels.net>

Communications Assistant

Nicole R. Moline, 414/256-3232

<nicolem@sab.wels.net>

Seminary Consultant

R. D. Balge

Contributing Editors

J. A. Aderman, W. F. Beckmann, J. F. Brug,

J. D. Buchholz, K. A. Cherney, E. S. Hartzell,

R. K. Hunter, P. M. Janke, M. J. Lenz,

A. J. Panning, T. A. Westra, P.E. Zell

Art Director

Paul Burmeister

Graphic Designer

Carianne Neu

Photographs and Illustrations

Paris/SuperStock, p. 3; Masterfile, p. 8; Gerry
Koser, p. 10; courtesy of Alan Schroeder, p. 12;
Comstock Inc., p. 14; Gloria Knoll, p. 16; Photo
Disk, p. 18; Tom Nachreiner p. 36

Forward in Christ/Northwestern Lutheran

Forward in Christ/Northwestern Lutheran (ISSN 1526-
2529) is published monthly by Northwestern Publishing
House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284.
Periodical postage paid at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

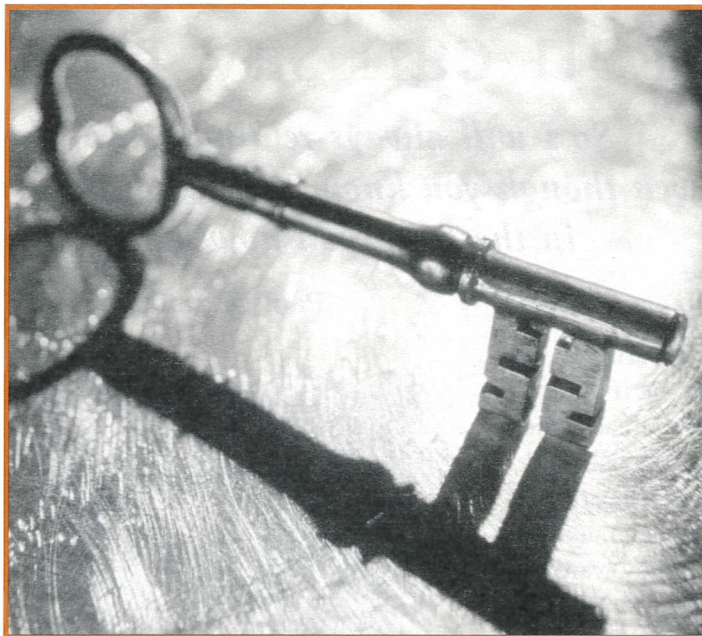
Rates: USA—\$9; single copy—\$1.50; large print—\$24.
Canada—\$9.63; single copy—\$1.61. All other countries—
air mail \$33; surface mail \$25. Postage included,
payable in advance to NPH. Write for multi-year,
blanket, and bundle rates. For single issues, Wisconsin
add 5% sales tax; Milwaukee County add 5.6% tax.
Also available on audiocassette from Mission for the
Visually Impaired, 559 Humboldt Ave, St. Paul MN 55107.

Subscription Services

1-800-662-6093. Milwaukee area 414/475-6600.
Or write NPH, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to
Forward in Christ/Northwestern Lutheran, c/o
NPH, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284.

©2000 by *Forward in Christ/Northwestern Lutheran*.
Printed in the USA.








Cover photo courtesy of Masterfile

The use of
the keys—
how to lock
and unlock
the door
of heaven

8

bits & pieces

-  In a new three-part series called "The use of the keys," Wayne Laitinen will enlighten us on what the keys are and how we are to use them. Check out "The keys of the kingdom" on p. 8.
-  How much do you know about WELS? How much about the 12 districts that make up WELS? In our series "A visit to the districts" we'll give you an insider's look at the blessings and challenges of each district. Last month you learned about the Southeastern Wisconsin District. This month find out about the Michigan spirit (p. 12).
-  The Michigan District isn't the only group with spirit. Women involved in the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society (LWMS) exude spirit for home and world missions. Read "LWMS wants you!" (p. 16), and catch the spirit.
-  The Forward in Christ Committee chose several landmark days to celebrate WELS' 150th anniversary. Reformation Day (Oct. 31, 1999) was the first. See how your fellow WELS members celebrated the Reformation and our 150th anniversary (p. 25).
-  You may have noticed the slight change on the cover. We will keep the name *Forward in Christ* throughout the anniversary celebration.

—JKT

features

THE USE OF THE KEYS

8 The keys of the kingdom

The law and the gospel keys work together to prepare a proud heart for the gospel and to raise the despairing soul to a life of faith.

Wayne A. Laitinen

ALLEGED BIBLE CONTRADICTIONS

10 Moral and ethical contradictions

How can we harmonize the wisdom of God with the presence of evil?

Forrest L. Bivens and John D. Schuetze

A VISIT TO THE DISTRICTS

12 The spirit of Michigan

A fierce loyalty, a burning zeal, and a congenial camaraderie define the spirit of Michigan congregations and members.

Julie K. Tessmer

INSIGHTS

14 Fast food or faithful fellowship?

The fast food mindset affects more than your waistline.

John L. Eich

LWMS

16 LWMS wants you!

Lutheran Women's Missionary Society is looking for a few—well, actually, innumerable—good women.

Linda R. Buxa

MISSION AND MINISTRY IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

18 Remaining faithful

Are we being faithful to the Great Commission if we forsake the urban centers of the United States and Canada?

Richard H. Schleicher

INSIGHTS

20 "For Christ's sake"

Bad expression or good motivation?

Jonathan R. Balge

PERSON TO PERSON

31 How many ways can you say, "I love you"?

Nothing that can be said today can be as important as what God has already said to us.

Karl R. Gurgel

INSIGHTS

36 Unopened letters

Many are not opening their letters from God.

Carl R. Henkel



14

departments

3 THOUGHT FOR TODAY
You can say that again

6 READERS FORUM

7 EDITORIAL COMMENT
Let's celebrate like we've never celebrated before

21 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDY

22 WELS NEWS

28 WORLD NEWS

29 BULLETIN BOARD

30 BIBLE STUDY
I know that my Redeemer lives!

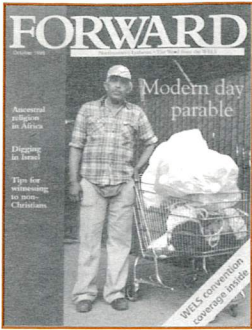
32 YOUR QUESTION, PLEASE
Matters of interpretation

33 POTLUCK

34 EDITOR'S PEN
Scrupulosity



18



**Regarding
“The Samaritan
In My House”
[October 1999].**

The article compared the homeless in our country to the man in the parable of the Good Samaritan,

who had been beaten and robbed. In telling the parable, Jesus was answering two questions. Who is our neighbor? It’s anyone we see who is in need. And, how much are we to help him? According to need, unconditionally.

Are the homeless in America “needy”? No, if food and shelter are available, but they don’t like the rules. No, if work is available, but they prefer to beg. No, if they have a source of income, but choose to spend their money on things other than food and shelter.

The article implicitly put it on our conscience to help the homeless by passing out bags of food and pockets of change, which I have done at times. In most cases I now believe that kind of help is detrimental. St. Paul writes, “If a man will not work, he shall not eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

The problem is how do we know who is truly needy (because we wouldn’t want to pass them by), and who needs to be allowed, like the Prodigal Son, to hit bottom? The only way we can answer that is by becoming personally involved with the homeless person and sharing with him God’s Word, both law and gospel.


When that’s not possible (and I’m speaking here of 21st century America and not 1st century Palestine), rather than pass out food or money, it may be better for the homeless that we drive by and generously support a well-managed shelter. Only, let’s see to it that we actually do that.

 Dale Raether
West Melbourne, Florida

I just received my October issue of Forward. As I read the letter from Alice Mehrkens about not advertising our churches and/or service times, I was reminded of my latest experience with being in a new town and attempting to attend church.

We arrived in town on a Saturday night. I called the local WELS church and got the answering machine (it is Saturday night, and that is all I really expected to get). This is what disappointed me: “You’ve reached _____ church. Please leave a message after the beep and we will get back to you.” No service times, no invitation to worship—nothing that leads you to think this church is interested in having anyone new join them for a service.

I know that other churches do the same thing. Please consider that the caller’s convenience may not be your own. We are to invite, not discourage people from worshipping with us.

 Nancy Benavides
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

I continue to enjoy *Forward/NL*. One of my favorite sections is “your question, please.” **In the December 1999 issue the discussion about different races raised additional questions for me [p. 32].**

Prof. Brug cites the Genesis post flood account, which tells us that all people are descendants of Noah’s three sons and that each son “peopled” a different geographical region. This begins to explain the origin of races. Brug also mentioned the possibility that the three patriarchs exhibited different traits.

I suggest that our patriarchs supplied greater genetic diversity.

1. Given that Noah was God-fearing, I assume that each son had the same mother, hence the sons’ inherited traits would be similar to one another. In any event they would be at least half brothers.

2. During Noah’s time God had not set apart his chosen people from the rest of society. The wives of Noah’s sons could have come from quite varied genetic stock, reflecting generational differences all the way back to Adam and Eve.


Are there any references in the Bible that support the notion that Noah’s sons had a common mother? Is there any additional information about the lineage of the sons’ wives?

 Ron Klug
South Haven, Michigan

The Bible does not speak of any wife of Noah other than the one who accompanied him on the ark. The lines of his sons’ wives are not mentioned either.—ed.

I felt I had to write about “Christmas commercialization” in the December issue by Joe King.

I was one of those people who hated to see the decorations in the stores right after Halloween, until I read his article. I never thought of that as an evangelism tool. What a wonderful insight that maybe someone will be motivated to find out more about that baby in the manger by seeing Christmas “stuff” out early.

 Debbie Wittig
La Crosse, Wisconsin

Send your letters to Readers forum, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; FAX, 414/256-3899; <nl@sab.wels.net>. Include full name, address, and daytime phone number. Letters are edited for clarity and conciseness. Writers’ views are not necessarily those of WELS or *Forward/NL*.

Let's celebrate like we've never celebrated before

Walter F. Beckmann

I'm finally remembering to date my checks with the year 2000. That makes me happy. It means I've survived Y2K.

Many lived in dread of that moment on Dec. 31 when the clock would strike midnight. They believed those doomsday prophecies and were certain that horrible things would happen. But now they're ready to tear the January page off their calendar. They're relieved to find that the world is still standing and God is still in charge.

Something about this year 2000 makes it an especially happy year for Christians. It was about 2000 years ago that Gabriel told Mary, "You will give birth to a son and are to give him the name Jesus." What a blessing it is to know that name and all that he has done for our salvation. What a privilege to live in these New Testament times of fulfillment and accomplished facts instead of those Old Testament days of shadows and prophecies.

The year 2000 has added significance for WELS. It's our sesquicentennial. For 150 years the Lord has been blessing our synod with his Word and still is today. By his grace we still proclaim that the Bible is his own divinely-inspired, inerrant Word. We still confess that we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Scripture alone, and that the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus are the world's only hope of salvation.

What blessings we and our families have personally enjoyed as WELS members! Our synod was about 30 years old when my great-grandparents arrived in the United States and became members. Ever since, the Lord has been using WELS as his instrument in blessing my family with his Word. I'm grateful for this. Your personal

history in WELS may be different, but I'm sure that your gratitude is just as great. So let's celebrate!

For almost four years, a special committee made plans and produced materials for a synodwide anniversary celebration that we're calling Forward in Christ. Your congregation received information about these plans and samples of materials. I'm sure that you've already begun to use and enjoy them. Hopefully, you've also come up with good ideas of your own.

But let me beat the drum and sound the trumpet for one anniversary event in particular—June 11. That Sunday we're asking all our congregations to celebrate together. Let's make it the greatest celebration that WELS has ever seen. Let's involve every musical talent in every one of our congregations. Let's work at having every WELS member present for worship on that Sunday. What an experience to worship in churches with standing room only and overflow crowds participating by way of closed circuit TV, and to realize that over 400,000 WELS members are at similar services.

Oh, not every member will be able to attend. But if we do friendship and neighborhood evangelism, we could set our sights on a total attendance of 500,000 or more, all praising God for the 2000th anniversary of the name Jesus and 150 years of blessings that our synod has enjoyed through his name. That would be a celebration we would not soon forget, nor would our children. They would want to be working for such a church body for the rest of their lives.

So let's celebrate like we've never celebrated before.

Walter Beckmann is the retirement pastor at Grace, Falls Church, Virginia.

For 150 years
the Lord has
been blessing
our synod
with his
Word and
still is today.

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

Wayne A. Laitinen

The law and the gospel keys work together to prepare a proud heart for the gospel and raise the despairing soul to a life of faith.

Of the six chief parts of Christian teaching, “The Use of the Keys” is perhaps the least understood. Everyone knows about the Ten Commandments, the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, and the Sacrament of Holy Communion. But what is the Use of the Keys?

Why keys?

Our Lord Jesus first introduced the picture of keys in Matthew 16:13-19. Peter, as the spokesman for the Twelve, had just confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. In reply, Jesus commended Peter and declared that

the Holy Christian Church would be built on Peter’s confession and that even the powers of hell could not overcome such a faith.

But this saving faith in the Savior was not just for the Twelve. Jesus’ disciples were to bring the message to the world. That would be a formidable task, since all people in this world are, by birth and by nature, God’s enemies. They have neither the power nor the will to accept Christ. So Jesus gave the disciples the tools to tear down the barriers of unbelief and replace them with faith: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”

Usually the same key is used to lock and unlock a door. But Jesus

speaks here of one key as the “binding” or locking key and the other as the “loosing” or unlocking key. He continues, “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Keys to what door?

What is it that Jesus’ followers are told to lock or unlock? Jesus gave us the answer after his resurrection: “If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven” (John 20:23). Obviously, these keys are used to forgive and not forgive sins. In simple terms, they lock and unlock the door of heaven.

If someone is still in his sins, it is impossible to live in the presence of the holy God. So we tell him that his desire to live in sin has excluded him from God's presence. As long as he persists in unbelief, heaven's door is locked. By his impenitence, he has chosen God's eternal wrath.

But when someone has been struck to the heart by his sins, and desires God's forgiveness, we unlock the door of heaven. That is, we announce to the penitent sinner that by Jesus' merits, all his sins have been removed, and the door to paradise is open.

Lutherans rightly call these two keys the law key and the gospel key. Both are good. Both are given by God for our salvation. But each key has a different function.

The key of the law prepares a proud, self-willed heart for the gospel. It offers no hope. Rather it kills, crushes, damns, destroys, and causes the proud heart to despair. The law key cannot save the sinner. However, it prepares stubborn hearts for the good news of salvation.

The gospel key, on the other hand, is the good news that Jesus' atoning work satisfied God's justice against us poor sinners. The gospel key raises the despairing soul to the life of faith. It gives nothing but forgiveness of sins and the certainty of salvation to the trembling heart.

Examples of how the keys work

Nathan the prophet used the law key and gospel key masterfully when he found that King David had been living in concealed sin for the better part of a year (2 Samuel 12). He couched the king's adultery and murder in a parable of an innocent man who was victimized by a rich, powerful neighbor. When the king declared that the aggressor deserved

to die, Nathan replied, "You are the man!" (2 Samuel 12:7). In this way the prophet turned the king's justice on himself. Death was God's sentence, too. Nathan locked the door of heaven in David's face.

When someone has been struck to the heart by his sins, and desires God's forgiveness, we unlock the door of heaven.

The binding key of Nathan produced the beneficial effect Nathan was seeking. As soon as David realized where he stood with God, he was struck with terror by his sins and confessed, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Samuel 12:13). Immediately after this confession of sins, the prophet replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die!"

You cannot help but be struck by the quickness of the prophet to use the gospel key, once David repented. Nathan did not do what we would expect the unbelieving world to do. He did not give David a set of guidelines that he must meet before he can obtain forgiveness. There is not a 12-step program here. That would be a tyranny against a soul already burdened by its sin. Nor does the prophet say, "Your sins against God and country are so heinous that we must put you on probation until we determine whether your repentance is genuine." As soon as David repented, he was given forgiveness full and free.

True, God does expect that the repentant sinner will strive against his

sin. But that is not the condition on which forgiveness is given. Our willingness to change cannot come from the law. It can only come from a heart set free by Jesus' forgiveness.

Our Savior used the keys no differently than Nathan did. Jesus used the loosing key on the woman caught in adultery. He told her, "Neither do I condemn you." In these words our Savior gave her complete forgiveness. Once the door of heaven was opened and her faith in Jesus' forgiveness was established, she had the power to say "no" to adultery. So Jesus continued, "Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:11).

Have you ever wondered why God didn't send holy angels to use the keys? Perhaps it is because "there is no better salesman than a satisfied customer." Holy angels and the lost world have one thing in common: neither of them have known what it is like to be "buried with Christ through baptism into death." Nor have they been "raised with Christ through the glory of the Father" as we have in our baptism. But you and I have experienced the joy these keys bring. What better priests and witnesses to bring Christ to a lost world?

I am reminded of the way our Lord forgave penitent Peter of his triple-denial and, at the same time, restored him to full apostleship. Rather than saying, "I forgive you," he said, "Feed my lambs . . . take care of my sheep" (John 21:15,16). Your baptism is your call to be Christ's witness. Even the holy herald, Gabriel, might well envy us.



Wayne A. Laitinen is pastor at Gethsemane, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Subject: Subject: Re: Moral and Ethical Contradictions

To: sondavid@university.edu

From: jimandjoan@home.com

Date: February 4, 2000



Send



Delete



Address



New memo

Message:

"David" wrote:

>Hi Dad,

>Did you hear about the plane crash in our area? Everyone was killed. Which

>brings up a question . . . Why does God allow these things to happen? How can

>we harmonize the wisdom of God with the presence of evil in the world? Isn't

>this a moral and ethical contradiction that we see so often around us?

>Love, David

David,

Yes, we heard about the accident on the news. It was a tragedy. And your question is a good one. It is something many people wonder about. How can a wise God allow such terrible things to occur? Besides the jetliner accident in your area, there have been many other disasters around the world: earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, murders, wars, and famines. The list goes on. Why doesn't God do something to prevent them?

Just a few weeks ago someone raised this question in Bible class. The pastor gave us a good answer. He pointed out that we will never be able to harmonize God's wisdom and the presence of evil to our liking.

But even though we can't understand why a wise God allows such things to happen, there are some points to keep in mind. Let me share with you four principles our pastor gave us. I think you will find them helpful. Here goes . . .

1. God is wise. This may seem to state the obvious, yet it is something many forget. Now that we human beings have begun to unravel the mysteries of life, we may think we are wiser than God or that God isn't as wise as we once thought. But God is wise—wiser than we can imagine. He doesn't just know how this world works. He is the one who conceived it and created it. He keeps everything in place day after day. It's no wonder Romans 11:33 states, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!"



2. Sin originated against his will. Many who wrestle with the question of evil often blame God for what happens. They feel that he is responsible because he either caused it to happen or failed to do something to prevent it. What they forget is that evil happens in this world because of sin, either a direct sin, as is the case with a murder, or the general presence of sin that causes earthquakes and other natural disasters. God isn't responsible for sin. Rather, Romans 5:12 tells us that "sin entered the world through one man." When Adam and Eve sinned, they brought countless problems into life, everything from disasters to death. So let's not blame God for something man brought into the world.

Yet some would argue, "If God is wise and powerful, why didn't he prevent it from happening?" It is true that in his wisdom and power, God could have prevented the fall. Yet he chose to allow it to happen. Why? Scripture doesn't tell us. While some may call this a contradiction, it is more accurate to say that we don't have an answer to this question. It is beyond our limited ability to comprehend.

3. The fullness of God's wisdom appears in his plan of salvation. Man fell into sin and introduced sin into the world. But instead of destroying the world and its inhabitants, God chose to save the world.

Consider what an amazing plan he devised to do this. He didn't force us to earn it, or pay for part of it. He did it all. His plan was so simple it insults the intelligence of the unbeliever. Such a person calls it "foolishness" (1 Corinthians 1:23). Yet it's so profound it inspires our humble praise. The apostle Paul called it "God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began" (1 Corinthians 2:7). It is a wisdom that led him to send his Son, Jesus, to live and die as our substitute. It is a wisdom that forgives all our sins for Jesus' sake. It is a wisdom that prepares a place for us in heaven because of what Christ did in our place.

4. Sin and evil must serve God's purpose and praise. Some clear passages teach this truth—Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:28.

But let me direct you to the life of Job. He faced some major disasters in a short period of time. He lost his health, his wealth, and his family, all within a few days. Even though he took it well at first, in time he began to wonder about the wisdom of God. Eventually he even questioned God and demanded an answer. God didn't give Job the answer Job wanted. God simply reminded Job that he is God and that "God is wise." God showed Job that even all the bad things that happened in his life work out for God's purpose and praise. Job was a man of faith before his ordeal. His faith was even stronger after his ordeal.

So even Satan and all his evil schemes ended up serving God's purpose and praise. Sometimes God does prevent evil from happening. Other times he allows it to occur. But when he does, he uses it for his glory and our good.

I hope this helps you understand this apparent moral contradiction—as much as we can understand it in this life. By the way, I'm sending you a book that speaks about some of these things in more depth. It's called *God's Providence—He Cares for You*. It's part of the People's Bible Teachings series I told you about. You may find it helpful.

We look forward to having you home over spring break. I hope we can answer some more of your questions then.

Love, Dad



The SPIRIT of Michigan

A fierce loyalty, a burning zeal, and a congenial camaraderie define the spirit of Michigan congregations and members.

Julie K. Tessmer

“We’ve got spirit, yes we do! We’ve got spirit, how ‘bout you?”

Many cheerleaders use this cheer to “fire up” the people. Spirited fans can be an encouraging force and help spur the team on to victory.

But the Michigan District doesn’t need cheerleaders. Previous Michigan District President Karl Krauss, in a history of the district, characterizes its spirit as “an almost fierce loyalty, a burning zeal, and a congenial camaraderie.”

That spirit makes the district unique, according to John Seifert, Michigan District President.

What makes that spirit powerful is its base—God’s Word.

Fierce loyalty

The strongest loyalty that members of the Michigan District feel is loyalty to the Word. Seifert sees the district’s willingness to defend and uphold Bible doctrines as one of its greatest strengths.

“When there are doctrinal issues and questions that need to be addressed, there’s just an eagerness to go back to the Word,” said Seifert. “We see what the Word says and then resolve our issues because we work with a common base.”

Since that base runs throughout WELS, a loyalty to the synod also exists. Common challenges and blessings fuel that loyalty.

“There are challenges that hit us no matter where we live,” said Seifert. “They are common to us because we

all have the same sinful nature and really need the same Savior.”

Burning zeal

The district’s fierce loyalty to the Word motivates members to share the Savior with people who don’t know him.

This burning zeal for missions permeates district history, including its beginning in 1833 with Pastor Friedrich Schmid.

Schmid traveled throughout Michigan, gathered people into congregations, and ministered to the Native Americans in the state.

The mission zeal didn’t stop, even after Michigan, and five other districts, joined the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States in 1919. Michigan District members wanted to spread the Word, but not only in their district.

Financial support from district members helped make it possible to send Carl Wacker and Edgar Hoenecke, both from the Michigan District, to explore mission possibilities in Africa in the 1940s.

Then in 1954, several Michigan pastors “leap-frogged into Florida to serve our WELS snowbirds,” said Seifert. “This would give the Florida residents an opportunity to belong to a conservative, solidly Bible-based denomination.”

They didn’t stop there. In 1963, a Michigan District pastor began outreach work on the east coast, resulting in the first WELS church in Virginia. More churches sprang up,

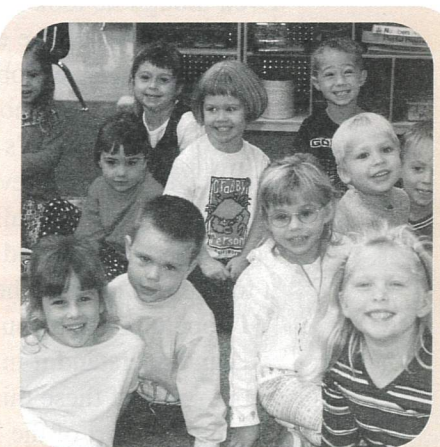
leading to the development of the North and South Atlantic Districts.

“It was a time of adventure and excitement,” said Seifert. “When pastors met for conference the most important items on the agenda were the home and world mission reports.”

The Michigan District also helped teach laypeople how to be missionaries. Wilmer Valleskey, a pastor in the Michigan District, was instrumental in developing early materials for personal evangelism.

“Now individual Christians could be better equipped to talk about Jesus to their friends, neighbors, and relatives,” said Seifert.

The district mission spirit is still strong today, even though the district



Students in one of the four preschool sessions offered by Immanuel, Findley, Ohio. Immanuel opened a preschool in 1996 to reach out to the community. Fifty students, 80 percent from the community, attend the preschool now. In 1999, Immanuel had 16 adult confirmations from contacts made through the preschool.

hasn't opened as many exploratories as other areas.

At one time the district opened so many missions that they had to focus their attention on nurturing them instead of opening new ones, according to Pastor Dennis Himm, chairman of the District Mission Board (DMB). Combine this with limited resources and manpower, and opening new missions turns into a big challenge.

"We don't have enough pastors now to fill the pulpits," said Himm. "At the same time the Lord is opening doors all around us."

That's why the Michigan DMB's goal is to open two exploratories every year.

But Himm stressed that mission work isn't only about opening missions. It's reaching out to the unchurched, no matter where you are.

"More people are excited about outreach work—not only mission congregations but self-supporting ones too. We have seen a big renewal," said Himm.

He equates that renewal to the power of the Word.

"When people are in God's Word in Bible study, you see the mission spirit burning brighter."

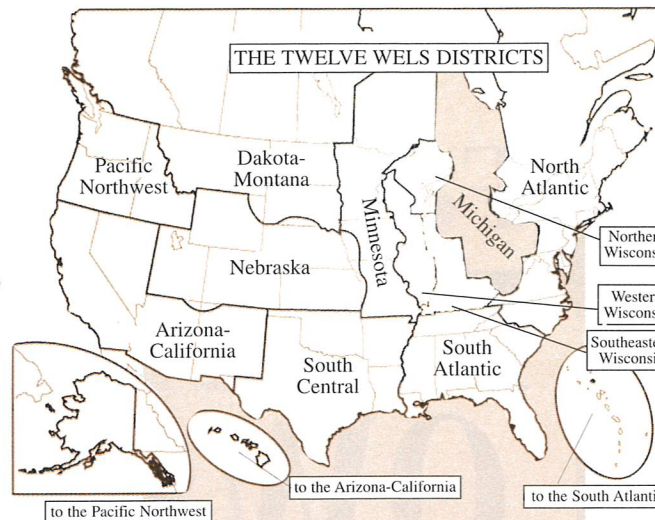
Congenial camaraderie

You also see the people growing closer to one another.

"It's a spirit that exists because of what the Lord does in his Word to draw us not only closer to him, but also closer to each other," said Seifert.

He continues, "It [the Michigan spirit] has a kind of independence attached to it, but an interdependence is also there."

This camaraderie is present



Michigan District

Stats at a glance Michigan District

Conferences: 4
Circuits: 14
Congregations: 151
Mission churches: 16
Exploratory churches: 2

Baptized members: 47,745
Communicant members: 36,539
Average attendance: 43.2%
Pastors: 154

Adult baptisms: 133
Adult confirmations: 498

Sunday school enrollment: 4,885
Bible class attendance (teens): 557
Bible class attendance (adults): 4,694

Early childhood education schools: 42
Lutheran elementary schools: 53
Area Lutheran high schools: 2

Preparatory school: 1

Statistics taken from the 1998
Statistical Report and the
Commission on Parish Schools.

even though the district is spread throughout several states and consists of everything from country congregations to metropolitan areas.

"The need is the same all over as far as sinners in need of their Savior and in need of help in living their lives," said Seifert.

Members recognize their common needs and try to help each other on the road to heaven.

"It's a group of dedicated men and women who are eager to serve their Savior," said Seifert. "Hard questions get asked, and we work at getting answers."

Hard earthly times also hit. The ups and downs of the auto manufacturing business impact both members and congregations.

"Sometimes the Lord blesses us with less regular work and less income," said Seifert. "That affects us not only in our individual families, but also in our congregations and the amount of work that we can afford to do."

But congregations band together to accomplish the work the Lord asks them to do.

In 1999, three inner-city Detroit congregations, a congregation in the Detroit suburbs, and students from Michigan Lutheran Seminary (MLS), Saginaw, worked together to spread the gospel to the unchurched through an inner city vacation Bible school.

Doing this work helped the students see that mission work is in their own backyard.

"We have MLS kids going out all over the world to help with outreach," said Paul Prange, president of MLS. "It was fun and good for them to stay in Michigan and do the same work."

Doing work like that lifts your spirit. And an uplifted spirit works hard at being loyal to the Word, zealous in mission work, and close to its family in God. Not only in Michigan, but all over the world.



Julie Tessmer is the senior communications assistant for Forward/Northwestern Lutheran and Communication Services.



Fast food OR Faithful FELLOWSHIP?

The fast food mindset affects more than your waistline.
Take time to savor the important relationships in your life.

John L. Eich

\$376.23. Keep this dollar amount in mind. \$376.23. We'll get back to it.

First, consider this scenario: You're on the way home from the office, tired and stressed. You're hungry, but you know that the refrigerator at home is as empty as your stomach. If you are like most Americans, where are you going to stop for food for the evening meal? Not the grocery store. Where, then? A gas station. You're driving on the freeway, turn off at your exit, and stop at the Citgo station. You pump some unleaded into your tank and run in to pick up some pizza, clam chowder and salad, or a hot deli sandwich.

Fast food meals

You're part of a swelling demographic group of Americans who don't have time to cook up an elaborate home meal. You've discovered the joy of not cooking and are snap-

ping up what the food industry calls HMRS, Home-Meal Replacements, a growing \$100 billion-a-year phenomenon. Hungry Web surfers can even preview full menus and order prepared meals that will be delivered to their homes from their favorite grocery store.

In 1953, just a year before the first Golden Arches went up, Swanson created the TV dinner. This was at a time when meals took two hours on average to prepare. TV dinners hit the shelves with the promise of providing relief to mothers "burdened with baby-boom offspring." What once took two hours now has been "nuked" to 15 minutes or less.

Oh, yes. \$376.23. This is the amount Americans spend each year on fast food—per person!

In 1970, Americans spent about \$6 billion on fast food. Last year they spent more than \$100 billion on fast food. Americans now spend more money on fast food than they do on movies, books, magazines, newspapers, videos, and recorded music—combined. (Eric Schlosser, "Fast Food Nation," *Rolling Stone*, Sept. 3, 1998)



Fast food relationships

We don't want to take time for dinner, but we miss a lot because of our love affair with fast food. What do you really miss when you skip supper? You don't just miss good cooking, but a great chance to know the people with whom you are eating.

We live in a society and a culture where people, even in the Christian family, seldom share their innermost thoughts and concerns. In times of grief we're stoic. Pride prevents us from admitting our faults and failures to one another. In our hurried lifestyles we seldom have time to sit and listen.

As a pastor, I've heard couples struggling with their marriage say about each other, "I just don't know who this person is anymore." Or parents throw their hands up in the air in disgust and say, "I just don't understand my teenager."

The challenge for us is to slow down enough to make a connection with one another.

Invariably one cause, and it is just one cause, is that they take very little time to listen, talk, share, and empathize with each other. Fast food or faithful fellowship? Too often our love affair with the fast food lifestyle means fast fellowship, which always leaves us empty.

It's sad how easily we can find ourselves in the fast food mindset. It's the outcome of our society. A few years ago the average workweek was 37 hours. It has now mushroomed to almost 52 hours. That doesn't leave much time for family fellowship. Prime time is during dinnertime, so we sit around and eat, listening to what the TV says, instead of listening to each other. Our egos demand the fast food family. It's almost a badge of honor to boast to other parents, "my kid is in 25 school activities,

while I'm the president of . . . and serve on . . . and do . . ." And the list goes on.

The challenge for us is to slow down enough to make a connection with one another. We can do this by taking the time we actually need to eat a meal, not jam food in our mouths as we run by the table on our way to baseball practices, dance lessons, church meetings, and appointments. We need to take time to talk and listen to each other. That may mean unplugging the TV and turning on the answering machine. Imagine really getting to know that other person across the dinner table.

Fast food religion

This fast food approach has even spilled over into our time with God. Five-minute devotional books fill the bookshelves, instead of an hour of prayer and study. Church services are under pressure to shorten, to serve fast food: a 15-minute service, a five-minute sermon, a hymn, a prayer, and you're on your way.

Don't we tell our children not to wolf down their food but to chew slowly and taste what they're eating? When the psalmist wrote, "Your words . . . [are] sweeter than honey to my mouth" (119:103) you get the impression that he allowed the Word to "melt in his mouth." He didn't rush through it like biting a Tootsie Roll Pop. How can we learn to know our Lord if we wolf down his Word and then madly rush on to other activities?

I'm a morning person. I like to get up at 4 AM (my family thinks that I'm strange). But the house is quiet, and the phone doesn't ring. It's my chance to spend some

unhurried time with my Savior.

Maybe your time is during the day when the kids are at school, or in the evening when they're in bed, or as you ride the train or bus to and from work. Whatever works for you. Just take time with your Lord—unrushed and unhurried. "Chew" on the word. Meditate on it, and you'll find out how much more nourishing a good meal with God is, compared to fast food.

Fast food may have its place, but it also may interfere with really getting to know other people and our God.

So what'll you have? Carry out or a fine meal? Fast food or faithful fellowship?



John Eich is pastor at Grace, Alma, Michigan.

LWMS wants YOU!

Lutheran Women's Missionary Society is looking for a few—well, actually, innumerable—good women.

Linda R. Buxa

“I carry the LWMS banner because I think it's cool,” says Sheryl Hagen from Appleton, Wis.

“Carry” may be too subtle a word for this woman who proudly waves the LWMS banner and participates in almost every LWMS retreat, rally, and convention.

“My son caught on,” she says. “He told me, ‘That’s all you women do: rally, retreat, rally, retreat.’”

She answered, “Christian warfare is what it’s called.”

This Christian warfare involves you. Through Lutheran Women's Missionary Society (LWMS), women of all ages can get involved and support WELS home and world mission work.

Support mission work

“I could tell you the moment I got involved,” says Hagen, who is in her 40s. It was at the convention in Green Bay, Wis. “I went up, and it was awesome.” Meeting people from across the country, “we got mutually fired up.”

That’s because she saw over 1,400 women working to support missions.

Heidi Goelzer, who is in her 20s, felt the same way after her first convention in Dallas. “They were always talking about missions. We heard from missionaries and their wives about how God is working through them,” she says.

“I got to see and hear how my money is helping the Lord’s king



LWMS members work hard to prepare for the convention. The site is chosen three years ahead of time. A number of circuits band together to complete the work that needs to be done.

dom,” says Goelzer. “It was incredible. I was crying all the time.”

Why would Goelzer, who herself is actively involved in mission work (her husband is an exploratory pastor in San Antonio, Tex.), be so fired up to hear from missionaries?

“As you move to outer regions where there aren’t as many WELS churches, your opportunities grow. You don’t have many friends who are WELS, and you become aware of how many people need the gospel.”

That is why LWMS exists. To remind WELS members that people still need to hear the gospel, and to pray for those who are reaching these people—missionaries, their families, and those in missions.

Be involved in mission work

But LWMS doesn’t exist only for you to support mission work. They also want you to be active doing mission work.

“This is not a coffee-klatch,” says Harry Hagedorn, home missions administrator. “These are people who have a Spirit-worked zeal for souls. They come together to share their enthusiasm.”

However, that enthusiasm doesn’t end after rallies and conventions. “They go home to share that zeal in reaching out to all nations,” says Hagedorn.

Women of the WELS (WOW) retreats will be held in 14 areas of the nation. The theme is “Shine Like Stars” and women will be encouraged to use their God-given talents. You will meet women who share your faith, become more aware of missions, and find meaningful areas of service. The retreat costs only \$25, which helps those whose budgets are stretched by the cost of national conventions.

Retreats will be held in the following areas: Oregon; South Dakota; Las Vegas, Nev.; Colorado; Illinois; Va./Penn./Md. area; Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minn. area; Milwaukee, Wis.; Northern Wis.; Manitowoc, Wis.; Ohio; Atlanta, Ga. area; Houston, Tex; and Orlando, Fla.

An AAL grant helps make these retreats possible. Contact the LWMS central office, 8420 W Beloit Rd, West Allis WI 53227; 414/321-6212; <LWMS@execpc.com>.



The national board members perform a skit at the convention.

Reaching all nations means finding your place in the body of Christ and working to bring others in too.

One LWMS circuit in Appleton, Wis., is reaching all nations by reaching out to the Hmong in the neighborhood.

Hagen reminds us that witnessing is also letting your light shine by your day-to-day activities. "Take care of somebody who's older," she suggests. "Make sure their needs are covered."

Cherry Simpson, who lives in Alabama, had been the lead graphic designer for JCPenney. Yet she wasn't active in any organization and didn't feel as if she was using her abilities to the fullest.

"All of a sudden I realized: In the Bible, God didn't have the pastors doing artwork," she says.

In 1997 she volunteered to do LWMS's graphic design work. Though it is "fast becoming a full-time job," she loves every minute of it.

"Because my talent is God-given, this work is truly a fulfillment of my faith. I do not get tired of doing it," explains Simpson, who is in her 40s.

She's a good example to all women who want to serve Jesus.

"Sometimes you get stuck in a job that is not your forte and then you feel put upon. Volunteer to do

something you love. Find your talent and use it for God."

But how do you know what your gift is? LWMS wants to help women discover the answer. Regional retreats this fall and in the spring and fall of 2001 will offer worship, Bible study, missionary speakers, and information about how you can serve your God. This action-oriented, weekend-retreat format is designed for those whose jobs, families, and busy schedules make attending meetings, circuit rallies, or national conventions difficult.

Although LWMS was formed so women could support mission work more actively, women aren't the only ones who make LWMS happen.

"LWMS needs dads and husbands to pitch in," Hagen says.

"Especially when grade-school-age children are at home and it's harder to get away. Because we all can't go to far off mission fields, husbands can offer support so women can get out there and encourage our missionaries."

Cherry Simpson's husband, Larry, got financially involved. He purchased a Macintosh computer so Cherry would have the technology she needed for the design work. "My husband is my silent

LWMS connects you to women from over 900 WELS congregations in the United States, Canada, Antigua, and Bulgaria. If your congregation hasn't joined yet, why not encourage them to do so? These are some ongoing programs and activities.

Circuit rallies. These localized rallies are held each spring and fall and feature missionaries or those associated with mission work.

Conventions. Held annually, each offers worship, workshops, and the chance to meet world and home missionaries. This year's convention will be in Nashville, Tenn., from June 23-25.

Befriend a mission. LWMS members send letters and care packages to designated missionary families and pray for the family, congregation members, and those who need to hear about Jesus.

Mission-box offerings. Small boxes are available for you to save your spare change (and dollars). Each year two mission projects receive these offerings. This year home mission's project is Hmong ministries and the world mission's project is the Native American Lakota vicar.

Prayer calendar. For \$2, this calendar keeps mission work on your prayer list each month by featuring a mission. In addition, every mission family member's birthday is listed.

partner in LWMS. He pays for all of this," she says.

This is an important reminder that mission work is not an exclusive effort. It is a family effort, a body of Christ effort. It takes all people of all ages with all talents to spread the gospel. You are part of the work. You are needed.



Linda Buxa, who lives in Kodiak, Alaska, is a member of Shepherd of the Hills, Anchorage.

Remaining

Are we being faithful to the Great Commission if we forsake

Just before Holy Week, the Lord stopped his disciples on the road and threw them the challenge: “We are going up to Jerusalem!”

You can almost feel the blood chilling in their veins. They had heard the rumors. They knew that political pressures were reaching their boiling point in the capital city. Every miracle Jesus did, every sermon he preached, every crowd he gathered was causing more concern to the rulers in Jerusalem. The anger, hatred, and determination to destroy this Nazarene agitator had grown like a black thundercloud on the horizon.

Now the master was telling them they were going to walk smack-dab into the middle of this threatening danger. If they had any doubts about the outcome of it all, he clearly told them: “The Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!” (Matthew 20:18-19).

The bugle had blown the charge! “We are going up to Jerusalem!” And what was there? A city of palaces and slums. Cruelty and corruption in

high places. Cheap chiselers in the temple and tyrannical tax collectors squeezing out every penny imaginable. Sacrifices in worship that were a sham. Human life cheapened to nothingness. Racial tensions between Jew and Samaritan, between Roman and Herodian. Hatred everywhere.

Bypassing the Jerusalems of today

The Jerusalems are still there, aren't they? The story is the same, only the names have changed.

The world is full of Jerusalems, but you don't have to be foolish enough to walk right into them. Somewhere there is a safe bypass. After all, we build beltways around our major cities so you don't have to drive right into them. It's safer, more secure, less congested.

Sometimes we reduce our lives to that. We delude ourselves into thinking that the chief purpose of life is to find all the secure and comfortable bypasses. And we can probably pause here to take our bows. We have been pretty successful. But are we doing what the Lord wants us to do?

Why aren't we in the big cities?

Twenty years ago, people were moving from the cities to the suburbs.

In many ways our WELS mission program responded to that flight.

The bulk of our activity since the 1970s has been in the suburbs as new churches were established to serve our ever-expanding cities. In many instances we have been quite successful in ringing these major metropolitan areas with WELS missions. Our mission activity in the past was not intended to shirk our responsibilities. We were simply responding to the changing situation. We were being faithful to the Great Commission.

Today the shift is back to the cities as urban renewal projects blossom and people rediscover that there is life in the city.

But of these cities—Toronto, Montreal, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Pittsburgh, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco—Chicago is the only one where WELS has a presence right in the heart of the city.

Looking at challenges in big cities

Should we forsake the urban centers of the United States and Canada in favor of the suburbs? Are we being faithful to the Great Commission in doing so?

We need to work in these urban areas of our cities. Yes, it is costly work. The overall cost of living in

faithful

the urban centers of the United States and Canada?

Richard H. Schleicher

cities is higher: rent, insurance, groceries. It is unlikely you will buy a piece of land and erect a worship facility on it. Instead you need to lease a storefront or other facility in which to gather for worship. And stereotypes are connected with the cities: dirty, drug-infested, crime-ridden, unsafe streets filled with the homeless and the immoral. Sounds like places that need to hear the message of God's law and gospel, doesn't it?

Urban people need a Savior as much as suburban and rural people.

But it's frightening, isn't it? If we follow Jesus to Jerusalem, we could see everything that is so precious to us—our families, our homes, our comfort, our securities, our pleasures—go down the drain. Somebody could get killed!

So how do we do it? We don't have any clearly defined models after which to pattern our work. I've also heard these objections to our doing this kind of work: "Won't it be more costly?" "Isn't it more dangerous?"

"These aren't usually 'our kind of people' [read: middle-class, white, Germanic origin], are they?" "We don't really know how to do this big city work." "Why don't we stick with what we have been successful in doing for so many years?"

Following the Great Commission

Recently the Board for Home Missions and the synod in convention have encouraged more work in urban areas. District mission boards are laying plans for entering or reentering the cities.

But why should we try?

Not simply to fulfill synod resolutions and desires. Something more important compels us—the example of the early New Testament Church and the Savior's Great Commission. When the apostle Paul undertook his missionary journeys, he usually went to the major cities of his day. The seed was planted, God gave the increase, and the church spread out from there.

Yes, we have many questions to answer and some special considerations in our planning as we seek to work in these cities. But none of these things is insurmountable. The gospel is still God's dynamite, and it produces results in the big cities just as in the suburbs. The hearts of the

unbelievers in our urban population centers are in the clutches of Satan as much as those in the suburbs. They are no more or no less resistant to the gospel. Urban people need a Savior as much as suburban and rural people. In the early New Testament church, God showed us his powerful Word at work in reaching the hearts of all people, rich and poor, urban, suburban, and rural, of every nation and tongue. We should not expect less from that Word today. It still accomplishes what he pleases.

The Jerusalems of the 1990s won't go away. They won't evaporate just because we want them to. We can't shove them off into a corner someplace and look for the most convenient road around them. They are still there and have to be faced. The Savior's Great Commission is still there too. Let's not make it the great omission in our lives—individually or as a synod.

The Savior is calling us, challenging us: We are going up to Jerusalem. Are you listening? Will you come along?



Richard Schleicher is pastor at Prince of Peace, Flower Mound, Texas.

Bad expression or good motivation?

"For Christ's sake" or "For Christ's sake"

Jonathan R. Balge

Sad to say, the expression "For Christ's sake!" seems to be used more often in a bad way than in a good one. It seems that it is most often used as a blasphemous exclamation of anger or surprise.

Correctly using "for Christ's sake"

But there is a good way to use this expression. We can use it to explain why we make certain decisions. For example, "I thought about cheating on my taxes, but for Christ's sake, I didn't." We might define "for the sake of" as "in the interest of." "In the interest of honoring Christ my Savior, I'm working on controlling my temper."

The following Scripture passage illustrates this way of using and understanding the expression "for Christ's sake": "Christ's love compels us . . . he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Corinthians 5:14,15).

Living "for Christ's sake"

By nature we do not live "for Christ's sake." By nature we live for ourselves, "for our sake." Living for self is self-destructive. Consider briefly the spiritual damage that people do to themselves when critical life decisions are made with self at the center instead of Christ.

As Paul says to the Corinthians, we are to "no longer live for ourselves" but for Christ.

When people choose to live together as if married when they are not, such a decision is made with self, not Christ, at the center. "What seems best to me" is elevated above "what God commands." People may choose to file for divorce, not because something

has happened for which God permits a divorce, but because "I'm not happy in this marriage." "My sake" becomes more important than "Christ's sake."

We might think of our worship services as a regular help that we all need to get over our self-centeredness. As Paul says to the Corinthians above, we are to "no longer live for ourselves" but for Christ. Left to ourselves, we will always slide back to living for ourselves. Each of us needs to have the cross and grace of God before our eyes. Only then will we do the right things for the right reasons.

The right reason is not for your sake. Not for your pastor's or church's sake. Not for your parent's sake. Not for your nation's sake. It is for Christ's sake. There is no higher or better reason.



Jonathan Balge is pastor at Salem, Owosso, Michigan.



Inter-Act

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

Introduction

You won. You wore down your parents' resistance. After weeks of noes, your badgering paid off. They weren't thrilled about it, but finally they said "yes." You had their permission. But you knew you didn't have their blessing.

Try to recall a time you received permission but not blessing. What's the difference?

Jesus demonstrated the difference to some men who were testing him. He took them back to a time when God, through Moses, "permitted" divorce. In the same breath, Jesus quoted verses in which God "blessed" marriage (Matthew 19; cf. Genesis 1:28). That contrast is the difference between God's permission and God's blessing.

The Israelites would see the difference between permission and blessing "on the way" to the promised land.

I. Text

Moses had ascended Mt. Sinai to meet with the Lord (Exodus 24-31) but the Israelites grew impatient while waiting for him to return (chapter 32). They turned away from the LORD to worship a golden calf. Moses called them back, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me."

Read Exodus 33:1-3.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.' ²I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. ³Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way."

II. Questions

1. For what did God give the Israelites his permission?
2. How did the Lord make it clear he was withholding his blessing?
3. The Lord would not go with them on the way because they were a "stiff-necked" people. "Stiffnecked" describes an animal resisting a heavy yoke on its shoulders. How did that picture describe the Israelites?
4. God uses other word pictures to describe sin: to rebel, cross over, miss the mark, or resist. Why is the picture of "stiff-necked" most appropriate here? See chapter 32.
5. The Israelites were on their way again. The Lord had threatened not to go with them because of their sin. How did he remind the Israelites that he would go with them on the way?
 - * "Now go, lead the people to their place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you" (32:34).
 - * "Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey" (33:3).
 - * "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (33:19).

III. Applications

1. Which would mean more to you: God's permission or God's blessing? Why?
2. When can we be sure we have God's blessing, not just his permission?
3. God permits good and evil to co-exist in our world and in our hearts. But he never approves of evil; he never blesses it. He does use evil, though. In what ways have you seen God use evil to bring about good?
4. God is with us, even when we're "stiff-necked." We call that "grace"—undeserved love. Think of a time in your life when the Lord stayed with you, even though you were "stiff-necked."
5. On the way to eternity, you might find yourself wandering off, as the hymn describes it, "to find where demons dwell." What people in your life might God use to speak his Word and call you back?

IV. Prayer

Dear Lord, more than your permission, I seek your blessing. Show me the difference between your way and my way. Your compassion is my only hope. Thank you for how you have stayed with me on the way. Now teach me how your commands are blessings, not burdens. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Randy Hunter is pastor at St. Andrew, Middleton, Wisconsin.



Turning trash into cash

Sometimes even trash can be profitable.

The students and teachers at Zion Lutheran School, Clatonia, Neb., found this out last spring when their local trash collectors, Howard and Melvin, gave them over 6,000 box tops they had collected from going through the trash.

"A lot of the box tops still had food on them because they [Howard and Melvin] were digging through the trash for them," said Kurt Herrel, teacher at Zion.

This 16-student, one-room school sent in the box tops to the General Mills Box Tops for Education program and received \$900. It also was the only school in Nebraska to receive a \$5,000 bonus toward field trips because it had the most box tops turned in per student ratio in the state.

The students invited Howard and Melvin to the school for a thank-you party in November 1999. There the



Howard (third from right in back) and Melvin (second from right in back) with the students of Zion Lutheran School, Clatonia, Neb. Zion used the money they received from the box tops for new maps and computer supplies.

students and teachers sang Thanksgiving songs and shared their faith with Howard and Melvin, who are not members of Zion or of WELS. And Howard and Melvin didn't come empty-handed. They brought another 6,000 box tops.

Zion isn't the only school Howard and Melvin give box tops to. They have collected over 30,000 box tops, all of which they have donated to

various private schools in the Clatonia area. Why? Only because they want to support private education.

Their labor of love hasn't gone unnoticed in the community. The local TV station did a piece on Melvin and Howard and Zion Lutheran School. Zion also kept in touch with their trash collectors by inviting them to Christmas services.

Where are they now?

In Forward/NL, we report the news, but aren't always able to follow-up. "Where are they now" is our way of giving you the rest of the story.

"Firm faith in Finland," a letter written by Juhanni Viitala, ran in July, 1999.

Here's a recap:

Juhanni Viitala, a pastor from Finland, received no support from his own countrymen when he spoke out for confessional Lutheranism. Therefore, at the invitation of the WELS Board for World Missions, he and his family came to the United States for one year to study at the seminary. In his letter, he spoke of what a "blessed rich year in the fellowship of WELS believers" he and

his family experienced. He also wrote of his hope of starting a confessional WELS sister church in Finland when his family returned there in June 1999.

So, where are they now?

On Sept. 22, 1999, Juhanni Viitala was installed as full-time pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church of Finland (ELCC). Viitala, along with Pastor Jukka Söderström, serve the entire membership of the ELCC in Finland. They travel throughout Finland and even serve a group of believers in Sweden.

Viitala's home church is in Porvoo, a suburb of Helsinki. Average attendance is 25-30 worshipers each week.



Pastor Juhanni Viitala and his wife, Paivikki, the day of his commissioning.

Paivikki, Viitala's wife, is studying to be a nurse. Their four children resumed their schooling in Finland.

The work Viitala is doing will continue to be supported by the WELS mission expansion/exploration fund until June 30, 2001. The ELCC is working to be self-supporting by that time.

One God, one heart, one voice

The gym at Wisconsin Lutheran College (WLC), Milwaukee, was filled to capacity, with standing room only. People were even spilling out into the hallway. They all waited anxiously for the event to begin.

No, 2,500 people weren't waiting for the basketball team to run onto the court for the championship game or for the graduates to receive their diplomas. They wanted to hear the pops concert of the WELS 1999 National Choral Festival. And they would come back in two days to hear the sacred concert too.

High school students—456 strong—from 19 WELS area Lutheran high schools and two preparatory schools performed at the pops concert on Nov. 12, 1999, and the sacred concert on Nov. 14. But for the students that was only part of the exciting weekend at WLC under the theme "One God, one heart, one voice."

Rehearsals took up a large part of the weekend. Each individual choir had time to go through their music, which ranged from jazz to rock-n-roll, for the pops concert. All students also spent five hours rehearsing as a mass choir and two hours practicing in one of the three smaller choirs of 150 students each for the sacred concert.



Over 450 students performed at the sacred concert for WELS National Choral Festival at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, in November 1999.

Free time let students get to know each other, have some fun, and relax.

Milwaukee area congregation members hosted schools, giving students and their directors places to stay. High school choirs then sang for these churches' Sunday services.

The sacred concert was the high point of the weekend. Guest directors John Nolte (Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.), James Nowack (Wisconsin Lutheran College), Mary Prange (Lutheran Chorale), and James Tiefel (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon) led the students as they joined their hearts and voices together to praise God.

"It's a faith-building experience," said Paul Adickes, director of the choir from Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis. "The kids never come back the same."

He continued: "They're focused on one purpose, so when we go back to school they come back as a choir."

Students look forward to the choral festival every year. Choir members from Evergreen Lutheran High School, Des Moines, Wash., even bought their own plane tickets.

"Out here they [students] don't get a chance to associate with fellow Lutheran high school students," said Jodi Justman, director at Evergreen. "It's neat for them to be with other teens of their own faith."

Eight schools attended the first annual choral festival, which was held at Luther High School, Onalaska, in 1967. In November of this year, students will gather again at either Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis., or Great Plains Lutheran High School, Watertown, S.D., for regional choral festivals.

"These festivals help keep the synod a little smaller," said Adickes. "They also help us break out of our own little shells."

Break out of the shells and break into song, together.

Journey to Bethlehem

What was it like to be traveling to Bethlehem for the census at the time of Jesus' birth? Roman soldiers pushing you along. Animal smells filling the air. Beggars pulling at your clothes. Crowds suffocating you.

Northland Lutheran High School (NLHS) decided to portray the night that Jesus was born so community members could begin to understand what it was like. The sophomore class of NLHS, along with principal Rick Grundman, coordinated the evening tour, "Journey to Bethlehem."



This Roman soldier badgered travelers on their way so they could get a feel for the pressures of those who made the trip at the time of Jesus' birth.

Walls and city gates were built to create the feeling that the travelers were entering Bethlehem. Once inside the city walls, visitors saw storefronts, taxpayers' booths, an inn, and finally the stable where Jesus was born.

Costumed volunteers portrayed tour guides, Roman soldiers, beggars, other travelers, peddlers, Mary, and Joseph. A live camel was even present!

Outside of class, 156 volunteers donated over 1,478 hours on the project. AAL helped with the funding.

NLHS's hard work paid off when over 1,000 people took this "journey to Bethlehem" during a four-hour time span on Dec. 11, 1999. And, if the goal of the event was achieved, these visitors to Bethlehem came away with a better understanding of the Christmas story and the events surrounding it.

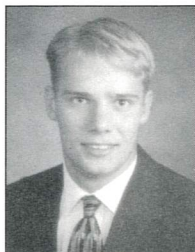


Martin Luther College Graduates

On Dec. 17, 1999, 13 students graduated from Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Those receiving Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degrees were in the teacher track. The two men who received Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degrees were in the pastor track.



Dawn M. Bock
New Ulm, Minn.
B.S. in elementary
education



Jeffrey K. Falck
Suffolk, Va.
B.S. in elementary
education



Brandi L. Fauver
Bay City, Mich.
B.S. in elementary
education



Todd D. Gorsline
New Ulm, Minn.
B.S. in elementary-
secondary education



Aimee G. Hardman
Ringle, Wis.
B.S. in elementary
education



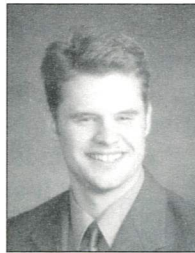
Amy L. Kneser
West Allis, Wis.
B.S. in elementary
education



Koreen B. Koehler
Lafayette, Minn.
B.S. in elementary
education



Junel A. Korth
Greenville, Wis.
B.S. in elementary
education



Michael A. Marquardt
New Ulm, Minn.
B.S. in elementary-sec-
ondary education



James R. Schmeling
Mankato, Minn.
B.A.



Scott A. Schwertfeger
Mankato, Minn.
B.A.



Katherine L. Vitale
Monroe, Mich.
B.S. in elementary
education

Not pictured:
Randall J.T.
Macdonald
Tacoma, Wash.
B.S. in elementary
education

Assignments for MLC graduates:

Falck, Jeffrey K., Good Shepherd, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
Fauver, Brandi L., Zebaoth, Milwaukee, Wis.
Hardmann, Aimee G., Memorial, Williamston, Mich.
Kneser, Amy L., St. Luke, Watertown, Wis.
Vitale, Katherine L., Trinity, El Paso, Tex.

Reflecting on our past, rejoicing in our future

Thousands of WELS members across the country gathered on Oct. 31, 1999, to celebrate Reformation. Many of these Reformation services included "Forward in Christ" celebrations to help observe WELS' 150th anniversary. Although the services were similar in their focus on the Word, on the Synod's history, and on looking forward in Christ, the districts celebrated in distinct ways. Take a look at some examples:

Arizona/California district

St. Paul's First, North Hollywood, Calif.—Following the rich worship customs of St. Paul's First, a processional including acolytes, a cross bearer, the special choirs, and the presiding ministers began the service. The executive director of "Forward in Christ," Pastor Gerald Free, preached the sermon.

Dakota/Montana district

St. Paul, Rapid City, S.D.—Record attendance. An area member wrote and composed a song for "Forward in Christ," that was sung at the service.

Michigan district

St. Paul, Saginaw, Mich.—President Karl Gurgel preached. A bell choir and a brass choir played "To God be the Glory" to begin the festival service. Following the service, a banquet was held at the Horizons Center in Saginaw.

Holy Trinity, Wyoming, Mich.—Three sermonettes were delivered, each by a different pastor, on the theme "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever."

Minnesota district

Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.—Two thousand people attended. A joint Lutheran elementary school choir, three area Lutheran high school choirs, MLC choirs, a joint congregation choir, and many instrumentalists participated.

Nebraska district

Our Savior, Harrisonville, Mo.—The service encouraged all members to get involved in mission work.

North Atlantic district

George Mason High School auditorium, Falls Church, Va.—The sermon theme "Wow! What a God!" gave rise to the comment, "Wow! What a service!" Service highlights included music from a mass choir, a brass choir, a women's choir, and a tone chime choir.

Abiding Word, Orleans, Ontario, Canada—Siloah Youth Gospel Choir from Milwaukee, Wis., contributed to the worship service.

Northern Wisconsin district

St. Matthew, Appleton, Wis.—Songs of the Reformation were highlighted throughout this service.

Pacific Northwest district

Evergreen Lutheran High School, Des Moines, Wash.—WELS and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod celebrated together with a song service that included eight different choirs.

South Atlantic district

King of Kings, Maitland, Fla.—The circuit-wide service was well-attended, as was the potluck that followed the service.



South Central district

Faith, Russellville, Ark.—Over 1/3 of worshippers drove three hours or more to attend this "Forward in Christ" Reformation service.

Southeastern Wisconsin district

Milwaukee Auditorium, Milwaukee, Wis.—Over 5,500 people attended. Many arrived in buses that were rented for the occasion. Choirs from all over the area sang. Local television stations reported on the event.

Western Wisconsin district

Mount Olive, Monroe, Wis.—Attendees enjoyed the Prep Singers from Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. Joint adult and children's choirs from both Wisconsin and Illinois also helped make this service special.

Plans for additional Forward in Christ celebrations are underway. The weekend of June 10-11 (Pentecost) will find many congregations taking part in district events designed to thank God for the 150 years of grace he has lavished on WELS. Catch the Forward in Christ spirit and join in your area's festivities.



An overhead view of the Milwaukee Auditorium on Oct. 31, 1999, shows the Forward in Christ Reformation service that took place there. Over 5,500 people from all over the Southeastern Wisconsin District took part in this service.

1999-2000 WELS school statistics

<u>High schools</u>	<u>Elementary schools*</u>	<u>Early childhood education</u>
22 schools 5,670 students 442 teachers	365 schools 29,943 students 2,022 teachers	299 schools •231 with a LES** •68 without a LES 5,282 students 320 teachers

Eight new preschools/child care centers

- St. Luke Early Childhood Center, Saginaw, Mich.
- Child of Faith Preschool, Excelsior, Minn.
- Christ Our Rock Little Lambs Preschool, Rochester, Minn.
- The Treasure Box, Tyler, Minn.
- Our Precious Lambs Preschool, Omaha, Neb.
- Cross of Christ Preschool, Universal City, Tex.
- St. John Lutheran Preschool, Mequon, Wis.
- Bethany/St. Paul Lutheran Preschool, Fort Atkinson, Wis.

Two new Lutheran elementary schools

- St. Peter, Modesto, Calif.
- Ascension, Sarasota, Fla.

Breakdown of students who attend Lutheran elementary schools



*Totals are missing one school's information. **Lutheran elementary schools (LES).

WELS new briefs

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

Commission for Communication on Financial Support

414/256-3208

The 2000 Subscription Setting video has been sent to all congregations. The first segment provides an overview of the work of the synod. Then the video shows how a congregation can support the work and what steps they should take to determine the amount of support to provide.

Commission on Evangelism

414/256-3288

Production for *Harvest of Joy*, a synod anniversary history video, is underway. This six-part production will feature dramatic vignettes depicting all aspects of our synod's work. Information on ordering will be coming soon.

Communication Services Commission

Forward/Northwestern Lutheran is working on archiving 85 years of back issues onto a searchable index of articles to be located online on the WELS Web site <www.wels.net>. If authors or families of authors do not want their articles included on this index, contact Linda Buxa by June 30, at 907/486-5486; <linda-buxa@alaska.com>.

Catalogs of 150th anniversary memorabilia are still available. The catalogs include items that showcase the anniversary theme—*Forward in Christ*. For a catalog, contact WELS Communication Services, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; 414/256-3210; <usr73@sab.wels.net> or look online at <<http://www.wels.net/sab/fic-cat.html>>.

Obituaries

John E. Henning 1940-1999

John E. Henning was born June 23, 1940, in Milwaukee, Wis. He died Nov. 20, 1999, in Seattle, Wash.

A 1965 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Henning served St. Matthew, Spokane and Holy Trinity, Des Moines, both in Wash.

He is survived by his wife, Judith; two sons; one daughter; two grandchildren, and relatives and friends.

Mark A. Ohr 1962-1999

Mark Ohr was born Oct. 12, 1962, in Hempfield Township, Penn. He died Sept. 4, 1999, in Greensburg, Penn.

A 1986 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., Ohr taught at St. Paul, St. Paul Park, Minn., and St. John, Goodhue, Minn.

He is survived by his parents, one brother, his grandmother, nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

District news

South Atlantic

Good Shepherd, Deltona, Fla., received a \$15,000 grant from AAL to begin a videography ministry for teens. Bible studies and a monthly video that can be used by youth groups throughout the synod will be produced. Also, they hope to have a weekly or monthly teen video that can be shown in WELS high schools and youth groups. To help with this project, contact Todd DeNoyer, 407/321-7510.

Northdale, Tampa, Fla., has renovated its fellowship hall because it is opening a kindergarten through grade five elementary school in the fall of 2000.

A WELS Kingdom Workers grant allowed volunteers to conduct "**Christmas for Kids**" vacation Bible school in **Grenada**. Bible information classes and a kids' club continue to meet regularly on the island.

Southeastern Wisconsin

Siloah, Milwaukee, held a friendship Sunday on Oct. 24, 1999. Seven hundred fifty people attended this special service, and 425 were visitors.

Southeastern Wisconsin



Kendall Yorkey (right), a fourth-grader at Peace, Hartford, Wis., performed with the Rockettes during a Radio City Christmas Spectacular in Chicago on Dec. 11, 1999. Kendall auditioned with about 400 other children for this opportunity.

North Atlantic

Grace, Falls Church, Va., received a grant so that called workers can receive training in Spanish. This will allow them to reach out to their Hispanic neighbors.

Abiding Word, Orleans, Ontario, entered a float in the city's Christmas

"Parade of Lights." Members walked next to the float and distributed over 7,000 flyers inviting community members to the Christmas for Kids program and Christmas worship services.

Happy Anniversary!

SA— Redeemer, Merritt Island, Fla., celebrated its 35th anniversary on Oct. 17, 1999.

SEW— Zum Kripplein Christi, Iron Ridge, Wis., held its final 150th anniversary celebration on Dec. 23, 1999, with a service entitled "Come to the Little Manger of Christ." When translated from German, the name Zum Kripplein Christi means "to the little manger of Christ."

In September 1998, the members of Nathanael, Milwaukee, honored **Henry A. Lange** for the 50 years he served in the pastoral ministry.

On Dec. 8, 1849, the initial meeting was held to organize "The First German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin." This meeting took place at **Grace, Milwaukee**. On Dec. 8, 1999, a special service of thanksgiving was held at Grace in memory of this event.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: NA—Kevin Schultz; SA—Mark Haefner; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

THROUGH MY BIBLE IN 3 YEARS

March 2000

1. Matthew 12:22-50	18. Jer. 9:23-10:25
2. Matt. 13:1-23	19. Jer. 11, 12
3. Matt. 13:24-52	20. Jer. 13
4. Matt. 13:53-14:12	21. Jer. 14, 15
5. Matt. 14:13-36	22. Jer. 16:1-17:18
6. Matt. 15:1-20	23. Jer. 17:19-18:23
7. Matt. 15:21-39	24. Jer. 19, 20
8. Matt. 16:1-20	25. Jer. 21, 22
9. Matt. 16:21-17:13	26. Jer. 23
10. Matt. 17:14-27	27. Jer. 24, 25
11. Matt. 18:1-35	28. Matthew 19:1-22
12. Jeremiah 1	29. Matt. 19:23-
13. Jer. 2:1-3:5	20:28
14. Jer. 3:6-4:31	30. Matt. 20:29-
15. Jer. 5, 6	21:22
16. Jer. 7:1-8:3	31. Matt. 21:23-46
17. Jer. 8:4-9:22	

Ways to fund your subscription

To cover costs, prices for *Forward/Northwestern Lutheran* will increase slightly as of May. All subscriptions will go up \$1, bringing an individual subscription to \$10, a bundle subscription to \$7.25, and an every home subscription to \$6.75.

Forward/NL understands how a congregation's budget must be stretched. That's why we've developed a number of suggestions to help you continue to bring our "Word from the WELS" to every member of your church.

Special offering envelopes. Plan a special collection with FREE envelopes from Northwestern Publishing House.

Group sponsorship. Consider approaching organizations (women's

groups, men's Bible study, youth group) in your church to sponsor *Forward/NL* for the congregation.

Individual sponsorship. Are there families who support *Forward/NL* who could adopt the magazine? Consider enlisting their contributions for quarterly payments.

Subscription Sundays. With two months notice, *Forward/NL* will provide free promotional magazines. Use these to develop a "Subscription Sunday" and promote individual at-home subscribers.

An elementary idea. Introduce the magazine to your elementary school and designate a portion of school fees to subscriptions.



World's six billionth baby born in October—

The birth of the world's six billionth baby on Oct. 12, 1999, caused

many religious leaders to revisit the issue of global population growth.

Leaders differ widely on their opinions about the advisability of massive family planning to stem the earth's population growth.

"For a number of the world's religions, this is probably the single most difficult issue they face," said Christine Gudorf, an ethicist and professor of religious studies at Florida International University.

The United Nations has predicted the population will reach anywhere from 7.3 billion to 10.7 billion by 2050, with 8.9 billion considered most likely.

The United Nations Population Fund offers these statistics on world population growth:

- World population growth has slowed from 2.4 to 1.3 percent in the last 30 years, but it is still rising by 78 million people per year.
- Fertility has declined from 2.8 to 1.6 children per couple in developed countries since the 1950s and from 6.2 to slightly less than three in less-developed countries. Even with these declines, the population continues to rise because of the large numbers of people reaching child-bearing years.
- Africa's population has tripled since 1960.
- Global life expectancy has risen from 46 to 66 years in the past 50 years.

Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi reopens—

The Upper Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, badly damaged in an earthquake in 1997, reopened in November with its structure repaired and many priceless frescoes at least partially restored.

According to the Italian Ministry of Culture, 80 construction specialists, 70 art restorers, and 20 volunteers labored 140,000 hours on the

project. While workmen reinforced the church's vaulted ceilings with 25,000 bricks, art experts pieced together 320,000 fragments of frescoes with the help of computers.

The 13th century basilica suffered severe damage in two strong earthquakes that hit central Italy in September 1997. The tremors killed 11 people.

Seven nations cited for religious persecution—

China topped a list of seven nations the State Department said are of "particular concern" because of their poor treatment of religious believers.

Other nations named were Afghanistan, Burma, Iran, Iraq, Serbia, and Sudan.

The list was announced in October as a follow-up to an IFRA- (International Religious Freedom Act) mandated State Department report that detailed limitations placed on religious freedom in more than 190 nations and territories.

The seven nations on the list were among the worst violators of religious freedom.

Evolution labeled as "controversial theory" in Oklahoma—

An Oklahoma committee has voted to require a disclaimer in new biology textbooks that says evolution is a "controversial theory."

The Oklahoma State Textbook Committee's decision makes Oklahoma the latest state to officially challenge how evolution is taught.

The Kansas Board of Education passed new testing standards in summer 1999 that minimize the importance of evolution. In October, the Education Department in Kentucky deleted the word "evolution" from its standards and replaced it with the words "change over time."

The Oklahoma committee screens textbooks for the state's public school districts, which can only buy books approved by it.

John Dickmann, a member of the committee, said it was added because biology books do not give enough attention to alternate explanations of how life developed, the Associated Press reported.

Guidelines for teaching about the Bible in public schools published—

The First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., and the National Bible Association, published "The Bible and Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide," in November. This document gives guidelines on teaching about the Bible in public schools.

Guidelines in the 11-page document include the following statements about studying the Bible in public school curricula:

- It must be educational and not devotional.
- Classes should be taught in an academic and objective manner.
- Teachers should be chosen based on their academic qualifications, not beliefs or nonbeliefs about religion.
- The Bible can be a primary text but generally should not be the only text in a course.
- Divine action and supernatural occurrences in the Bible cannot be taught as historical fact.

Eighteen religious and secular organizations have endorsed the guide, including the American Jewish Congress, the Council on Islamic Education, the National Association of Evangelicals, the National Council of Churches, People for the American Way Foundation, the National Education Association, the American Association of School Administrators, and the American Federation of Teachers.

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

**CHANGES IN MINISTRY****Pastors**

- Goelzer, Christopher**, to NW San Antonio Exploratory, San Antonio, Tex.
Knepprath, Roger H., to St. John, Redwood Falls, Minn.
Mueller, Stephen T., to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic
Rossmann, Jonathan L., to Christ, West Salem, Wis.

Teachers

- Bartsch, Rita J.**, to St. John, Watertown, Wis.
Bastian, Joy, to St. Paul, Franklin, Wis.
Glowicki, Shaun E., to Immanuel, Hadar, Neb.
Huebner, Rachel, to Emanuel, New London, Wis.
Johnson, Dawn, to Timothy, St. Louis Park, Minn.
Kramer, Joel P., to Fox Valley LHS, Appleton, Wis.
Miller, Amy L., to St. Luke, Vassar, Mich.
Retzlaff, Shana, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee
Schroeder, Monica L., to Peace, Hartford, Wis.
Strackbein, Ruth E., to retirement
Uhlhorn, Daneen P., to Atonement, Baltimore, Md.

ANNIVERSARIES

- Fond du Lac, Wis.**—Winnebago Lutheran Academy (75). Feb. 6. Let's Celebrate Day, 11:30 AM-3 PM. Anniversary service, 3:30 PM. 920/921-4930.
Lancaster, Calif.—Our Shepherd (30). Feb. 13. Service, 2 PM. David Warkow, 661/943-1025.
Milwaukee, Wis.—St. Peter (140). Feb. 13. Service, 10 AM. May 21. Service, 10 AM. Reception at Wisconsin Lutheran College, noon. 414/645-7326.
West Allis, Wis.—Good Shepherd (75). Feb. 20. Services, 7:45, 9:15, & 10:45 AM. Catered dinner to follow late service. Ages 4-12, \$5; 13 & older, \$10. Send reservation & check by Feb. 1 to GSLC, 75th anniversary dinner, 1235 S 100 St, West Allis WI 53214. Feb. 21. service, 7 PM. Mar. 5. Home missions services, 7:45, 9:15, & 10:45 AM. Mar. 6. Home missions service, 7 PM.
Oak Creek, Wis.—St. John (150). Mar. 4. Service, 6 PM. Mar. 5. Services, 8 & 10:30 AM. Dinner & program to follow late service. RSVP, 414/761-0782. May 20. Homecoming service, 6 PM. May 21. Homecoming services, 8 & 10:30 AM. July 30. Picnic, 9:30 AM.

COMING EVENTS

- Mission & Ministry Seminar 2000**—Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Opening service, Jan. 31, 7 PM. Seminar, Feb. 1-3, 7:30 AM-12:30 PM. "Go Forward as Christ's Witnesses." Nathan Wagenknecht, 262/242-8247.
Martin Luther College choir tour
 Feb. 25—St. Peter, St. Peter, Minn., 7:30 PM
 Feb. 26—Eastside, Madison, Wis., 6:30 PM
 Feb. 27—Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, Madison, Wis., 8:30 & 11 AM;
 St. Mark, Green Bay, Wis., 7:30 PM
 Feb. 28—Immanuel, Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., 7 PM
 Feb. 29—Emanuel, Tawas City, Mich., 7:30 PM
 Mar. 1—Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich., 10:09 AM;
 St. Paul, Saginaw, Mich., 7:30 PM

- Mar. 2—Michigan LHS, St. Joseph, Mich., 2 PM;
 St. Paul, Stevensville, Mich., 7 PM
 Mar. 3—Lakeside LHS, Lake Mills, Wis., 2 PM;
 Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis., 7:30 PM
 Mar. 19—St. Paul, New Ulm, Minn., 7:30 PM

Regional campus rallies—

- Mar. 3-5 Philadelphia, Penn.
 Mar. 17-19 Columbia, Mo.
 Mar. 24-26 Stevens Point, Wis.
 Apr. 14-16 Tempe, Ariz.
 Karen Marshall, 414/256-3279;
 <usr20@sab.wels.net>.

Luther Preparatory School choir tour

- Mar. 16—Divine Savior, Indianapolis, Ind., 7 PM
 Mar. 17—Sola Scriptura, Decatur, Ga., 7 PM
 Mar. 18—Good Shepherd, Jacksonville, Fla., 3:30 PM
 Mar. 19—Good Shepherd, Deltona, Fla., 8:30 AM
 King of Kings, Maitland, Fla., 10:30 AM
 Mar. 21—Cutler Ridge, Miami, Fla., 6:30 PM
 Mar. 22—Ascension, Sarasota, Fla., 7 PM
 Mar. 23—Bay Pines, Seminole, Fla., 7 PM
 Mar. 24—St. Paul, Beverly Hills, Fla., 7 PM
 Mar. 25—Sola Fide, Lawrenceville, Ga., 7 PM
 Mar. 26—Beautiful Savior, Marietta, Ga., 8:30 & 11 AM; Christ Our Savior, Columbia, Tenn., 7 PM
 Mar. 27—Good Shepherd, Downers Grove, Ill., 7:30 PM
 Randy Bode, 920/261-4352.

Circle of Love retreat for women—Mar. 17-19. Oshkosh, Wis. Karen, 920/757-9401.**Christian Women Today retreat—**Mar. 24-26. Olympia Resort & Spa, Oconomowoc, Wis. Kathi, 414/521-1159.**Spiritual renewal weekend for women—**Mar. 31-Apr. 2. Rochester, Minn. Deb, 507/931-3383.**WELS handbell festivals—**

- Northeast region, Apr. 1-2
 Southeast region, Apr. 1-2
 Western region, Apr. 8-9
 Michigan region, Apr. 8-9
 Cheryl Diener, 715/258-7203.

Today's Christian Women retreat—April 7-9. Lansing Sheraton Hotel, Lansing, Mich. 248/391-1133.**S.H.A.R.E. spring seminar—**Singles Helping One Another on the Road to Eternity. April 29. Milwaukee, Wis. Doris, 262/534-7852.**WELS-CLO meeting—**WELS Church Librarians' Organization meeting. Apr. 29. Grace, Prairie du Chien, Wis. Presentation about videos suitable for church libraries and how church libraries can serve visually impaired members. Joanne Weber, 414/256-3222.**Christian writers workshop—**June 12-16. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Conducted by Northwestern Publishing House, WELS Board for Parish Services, and Martin Luther College. Enrollment limited to 10 participants. For scholarship information, contact WELS Board for Parish Services, 414/256-3224.**China study tour—**The history and geography of China. June 16-July 5. Registration deadline, March. Limited enrollment. Prof. Earl Heidtke, 507/359-9774; <heidtker@mlc-wels.edu>.**AVAILABLE****Advent wreath—**Rock of Ages, Payson, Ariz. Free for the cost of shipping. 520/474-2098.

Hammond organ—Free for the cost of shipping. Chesaning, Mich. Jerry Catterfeld, 517/845-7732.

Flags—One large, silver. One medium, stainless chrome. Free for the cost of shipping. Grace, Prairie du Chien, Wis. 608/326-4899.

NEEDED

After-school teacher—St. Paul's Lutheran Child Care Center, Franklin, Wis. Mon.-Fri., 12-6 PM. Some flexibility possible. Contact Joy, 414/421-1833. Or apply in person, 6881 S. 51st St, Franklin, Wis.

Volunteers—to teach English and religion at Martin Luther School (ELS), Plzen, Czech Republic, during 2000-01 school year. Airfare, apartment, & utilities provided. Matthew Luttmann, <meltof@sml.cz> or David Meyer, 608/243-3227.

SERVICE TIMES

Safford, Ariz.—Grace. Sunday service, 10:30 AM. Bible class, 9:45 AM. Paul Schulz, 520/428-7620.

Yuma, Ariz.—Prince of Peace. Sunday service, 8:15 & 10:45 AM. Bible class & Sunday school, 9:45 AM. Alan Gumm, 520/726-8716.

Benson, Ariz.—Bethlehem. Sunday, 8 AM. Steven Spencer, 520/458-5897.

NAMES WANTED

Madison/Huntsville/Decatur/Athens, Ala.—Lamb of God, Madison, Ala. Jim Turriff, 256/464-3900.

LaPorte/Michigan City/Chesterton/Porter, Ind.—Beautiful Savior. Don Schultz, 219/874-2465.

Commission on Special Ministries—names of WELS members who are developmentally disabled. Letters and appropriate memorabilia are sent seven times each year to the recipients of the He Cares-We Care Ministry-by-Mail program. Include mailing address, parent/guardian's name & address, home congregation, & pastor's name. 414/256-3241. <usr10@sab.wels.net>.

Former S.H.A.R.E. members—for alumni reunion. Names and addresses of former members. Doris, 262/534-7852.

Naples, Fla.—WELS/ELS members looking to join mission congregation in Naples, Fla. Steven Brockdorf, 941/348-3624.

Charlottesville, Va.—Grace. Services held occasionally. Kevin Wattles or Walter Beckmann, 703/534-1719.

CORRECTIONS

Pastor David M. Eckert did not change his ministry to Trinity, Rollingstone, Minn. (Dec., 1999). Trinity, Rollingstone, Minn., became a dual parish with First, Minnesota City, Minn. Eckert serves both parishes.

Randel Fink was incorrectly reported (Dec., 1999) as accepting a call to be a pastor at St. Paul, Muskego, Wis. Fink actually accepted a call into staff ministry as the Minister of Administration.

I know that my Redeemer lives!

Earthly success means nothing in comparison to standing at the last day in the presence of God.

Jon D. Buchholz

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me (Job 19:25-27).

Poor Job! The most successful man in the region lost it all. He went from riches to rags in a matter of minutes. His failed health left him a wretch of a man, his body oozing and festering with sores as he poked among the ashes of his former life. The comfortless counsel of his friends only compounded his misery. By any worldly standard, Job was a pitiful sight, a picture of destitution, a loser at life.

A hopeless situation? Not for a believer. Not for Job. Not by a long shot.

Job's soaring spirit

"I know that my Redeemer lives," said Job confidently, even amid the destruction and death all around him. His condition had not changed one simple truth: God lives! While Job's body was wracked with pain, his spirit soared to contemplate the truth of his living Savior.

Unlike the pagans who trusted inanimate idols, Job clung in faith to the living God. Job knew that the God who lives is not distant, unconcerned, and aloof. In faith Job perceived that the Lord's ears were

open to his cries of suffering. God's all-seeing eye witnessed his misery. He knew the living God as his Redeemer, the God of his salvation.

As long as Job could look beyond this life to the prospect of meeting his Savior face to face, he could never be a loser at life. Earthly success meant nothing in comparison to standing at the last day in the presence of God, gazing upon the beauty of his Redeemer. In the final analysis, with God on his side, he would be eternally successful.

Our eternal success

How do you measure success in life? By the size of your bank account or your retirement plan? By the model year of your car, or the number of acres you farm, or the number of people who call you boss? Success in worldly terms hinges upon material performance. Garner enough wealth, luxury, and prestige, and—congratulations!—you'll be counted by the world as a successful player at the game of life.

When things go well, it's easy to lose sight of the glorious eternity waiting for God's people. When things go poorly, it's easy to become self-absorbed and preoccupied with personal tragedy.

Both views miss the bigger picture—the eternal picture.

"I know that my Redeemer lives!" we say together with Job. Our living Savior shared our human experience. He carried our griefs. He endured our suffering and knew our pain. He died our death. He conquered death and Hades forever—all so we could look forward to something infinitely better than this life.

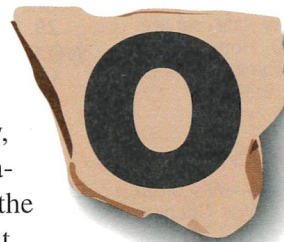
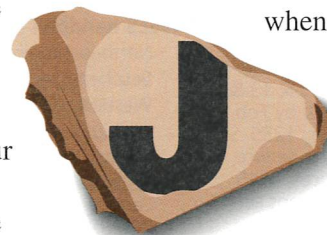
The final measure of our success as Christians will come when we meet our Lord. On the last day we will see him as he is. Face to face. Together with Job our hearts yearn for that day of our deliverance,

when, set free from bondage to decay and death, we will feast our eyes upon the glory of our living Redeemer forever.

Jon Buchholz is pastor at Holy Trinity, Des Moines, Washington, and teaches at Evergreen Lutheran High School.

*For further study:
Read Job 11-19*

*Next month:
Self-justification*



How many ways can you say, “I love you”?

“**H**ow do I love you? Let me count the ways.” It all depends on how original you are, how often you can say the same thing in different words. How many ways can you say, “I love you”?

Just using different words, however, may not be enough. Words alone might not always express our feelings. In exasperation, Eliza Dolittle, the heroine in *My Fair Lady*, exclaims to Henry Higgins, “Don’t just tell me, show me!”

God has both told and shown his love for us. It was so great that we didn’t have to show love to him to be loved by him. He loved us when we were both unlovable and unloving, traits that we all too often still display. In fact, “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

His love inspired our love for him. And we have ways to show it. Jesus said, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching” (John 14:23). Or, also using Jesus’ words, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples” (John 8:31).

Holding to his teachings and obeying them go together. Faith is worked in our hearts through the hearing of the Word of God. As the Word of God is heard or read, God’s Spirit living in that Word produces the fruits of faith, one of which is doing what those words say to us.

Our Christian love starts, then, with the hearing of the Word, doesn’t it? But there are so many other words that want to be heard: TV, newspapers, books. Solomon already said it. “Of making many books there is no end” (Ecclesiastes 12:12). With all this com-

petition for hearing human words, we don’t have enough time for God’s words.

Or do we?

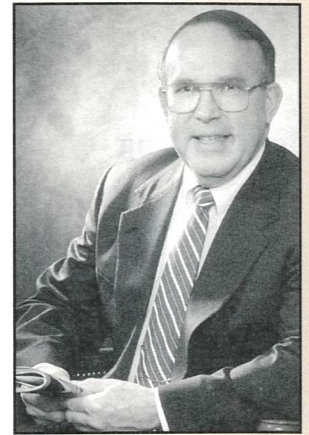
Actually, it’s even more important that we take the time for Bible study. Nothing that can be said today can be as important as what God has already said to us. Everything needs to be given a priority in keeping with God’s priorities. It starts with taking time, as one prayer puts it, “to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” the Word of God.

To highlight this challenge for us is the third objective of our synod’s Mission Statement: “To establish churches where Christians help each other grow and mature in the faith through public worship and a lifelong study of the Word of God.”

Taking this objective to heart, one of the better ways to say, “I love you” to someone may be a personal invitation to Bible class or an encouragement to attend church more often.

Perhaps we, ourselves, need such a valentine, the encouragement for more Bible study, with family or alone. For through lifelong contact with the living Word, we become mature in the faith.

Then, with God helping us, we will be inspired by the Word to follow what it says and to show our love for Jesus and for others, too. And all together we will move forward in Christ.



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

Nothing that can be said today can be as important as what God has already said to us.

Matters of interpretation

John F. Brug



My son has some jewelry with the Yin-Yang symbol on it. What does the symbol mean? Should my son be

wearing that kind of jewelry?

Yin and Yang express a basic principle of Chinese religion and philosophy, the flow and balance of opposites. Yin and Yang describe the world as a relationship between complementary opposites.

Yin and Yang express a basic principle of Chinese religion and philosophy, the flow and balance of opposites.

Yin and Yang are not two separate things. They are one thing expressed in two ways, like two ends of one stick or the two sides of a coin. The 24-hour cycle expresses itself as day and night. This is symbolized as the dark half and light half of the Yin-Yang symbol that is enclosed in a circle. Yin and Yang become each other. Day belongs to Yang but after reaching its peak at mid-day, the Yin gradually begins to unfold until it is night. In turn, when Yin reaches its peak at mid-night, the Yang gradually unfolds until it is day again. This cycle is true for all opposites. The world isn't hot or cold. It is hot on its way to becoming cold and cold on its way to becoming hot.

Thus, any phenomenon may

belong to either Yin or Yang, but it contains the seed of its opposite. This is symbolized with the small black and white dots in the Yin-Yang symbol.

The principle of Yin and Yang can be applied to any area of life: Chinese medicine and other forms of holistic healing, martial arts, the study of history, and even Chinese cooking.

Today the symbol is often associated with New Age ideas and is widely used as a marketing tool for New Age products and seminars. (It is hard to understand how this symbol can be popular in New Age since Yin is dark, negative, and feminine, and Yang is bright, positive, and male. People use it without understanding it.)

The symbol is sometimes associated with heathen or spiritist concepts, but some people think of it as simply a symbol of balance in life. It is no longer a distinctly heathen symbol, but I would not use it because of its association with Chinese religion and New Age spirituality.

What is the purpose of the book Song of Songs? It doesn't seem to have any theological ideas in it. Why did Solomon write it?

There are three principal approaches to the Song:

1. It is about the love of man and woman;
2. It is a symbolic presentation of the love between God and the church that uses the same comparison as Ephesians 5;

3. Commentaries should discuss both of these aspects just as Ephesians 5 does.

Many traditional commentators followed the second approach and did not deal with the sexual aspects of the book. This view was, however, heavily influenced by the monasticism and celibacy emphasized by the medieval church.

Many modern commentators follow the first approach and see the Song as primarily or exclusively about man and woman. It is certainly correct to emphasize that we should not expect the book to be a purely spiritual parable about God and the church, because all of the other Wisdom literature of the Bible (Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, and Job) is about God-given principles for earthly life.

The two commentaries on Song of Songs published by Northwestern Publishing House follow the third approach and discuss both the physical and spiritual applications of the Song. This follows the pattern of Proverbs 7:1-9, in which spiritual and physical adultery are discussed side by side.

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

**Send questions to your question, please,
Forward/NL,
2929 N Mayfair Rd,
Milwaukee WI 53222-4398;
<nl@sab.wels.net>**



"Just say no" works better when it starts at home.

"Teaching values to our children works best when we honor an uncomfortable and annoying rule of thumb: We need to practice what we preach." Karen Scalf Linamen

A man rocked a boat to see if it would tip. It did.

"A man reaps what he sows." Galatians 6:7

Some people throw away a bushel of truth because it contains a grain of error, while others swallow a bushel of error because it contains a grain of truth.

On spirituality in vogue

"The present vogue for spirituality is little more than that: a passing fad indulged in for easy gratification rather than a genuine religious commitment requiring hard choices and genuine faith. In the 1960s it was pot; at the [turn] of the millennium it's God. Same difference."

(Washington Post book critic Jonathan Yardley, reported in RNS)

PROVERBS TO LIVE BY

"Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips."
Proverbs 27:2.

"Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him."
Proverbs 26:12.

Thoughts on prayer



As his mother watched, a small boy curled in bed and offered his nightly prayer. When he had finished, he continued to speak softly, with eyes closed.

"What did you ask for?" his mother questioned. To which he replied: "It isn't nice to always ask for things. I just told God that I love him." (*Berean Searchlight*, October '74, adapted)

Some people are so busy they don't take time to pray. Others are so busy they have to take time to pray. Which are you?

"A Christian is always praying, whether he is sleeping or waking. For his heart is always praying, and even a little sigh is a great and mighty prayer." Luther

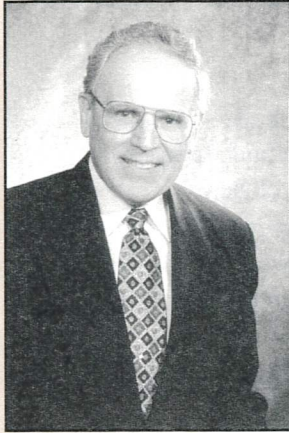
Picture this

Picture card of St. John's, Iron Creek, Dunn County, Wis., for the 75th anniversary, Sept. 18, 1938.



From the back of the card: "First Lutheran services held in Iron Creek in June 1863, by Missionary Muldaenke, Watertown. In fall of same year the Lutheran Christians united and organized a congregation. A parsonage was built in 1864. Palm Sunday, 1865, the first church was dedicated to the service of the Triune God. Present church building erected and dedicated in 1902. On June 13, 1930, a tornado badly damaged the church. It was repaired, renovated, and rededicated to the service of the Holy Trinity on Aug. 17, of the same year. In 1931 electric lights were installed. In 1937 a basement was built. Sept. 17, 1933, 70th anniversary was celebrated. The following pastors have faithfully served the congregation: Genske, Schmidt, Siegler, Jenny, Pieper, Eickmann, Stevens, Baum, Schaller, and Baumann. The present pastor is Rev. O. E. Hoffmann. He was installed Sept. 30, 1928.—Dear Lord, bless the congregation in the future as in the past. We ask it in the name of Jesus our blessed Lord and Savior." (submitted by Pat Sasse)

Send pictures to Picture this, *Forward/NL*, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398. On a separate sheet, give us information about the photo. Those whose photos are chosen will receive a small gift.



Gary P. Baumler is editor of *Forward/INL* and WELS Director of Communications.

Do you beat yourself up mentally over errors you made long ago and for which you've asked forgiveness?

Scrupulosity

I came across a new word. It describes a spiritual and a psychological problem. Psychologists coined the term—"scrupulosity." In its extreme, they see it as an obsessive-compulsive disorder.

"Scrupulosity is an extreme version of what is normally moral and devout," says Allen Weg, a psychologist who is vice president of the New Jersey affiliate of the Obsessive-Compulsive Foundation. "These people are always concerned that they are doing the wrong thing or are evil in God's eyes" (cited by Steve Chambers in a 1999 Religion News Service feature).

Since reading Chambers' article, I have thought long and hard about this thing called scrupulosity. Who suffers from it? How much of it is purely spiritual? Does it infect you and me? If I were to define it, I'd say it is always striving for perfection, always falling short, and always feeling guilty about it.

I have many questions: Can anyone who experiences the daily urges of original sin and knows the shame of sin not have symptoms of scrupulosity? Can anyone who knows the demands of our holy God escape it? How can we, when we know our own shortcomings, ever have a true sense of well-being? If you sense the shameful-ness of sin, how can you not be driven by this compulsion?

I wonder about symptoms: Have you ever found yourself repeating the Lord's Prayer over and over again, fearing that you didn't say it quite the right way or didn't embrace its every thought? Do you beat yourself up mentally over errors you made long ago and for which you've asked forgiveness? Do you fear that if Jesus came today, you're not quite ready—haven't quite cleaned up your life enough yet? Do you continually repeat your own private rituals in an effort to make things "right"

in your life? Do you tend to think that a less-than-perfect Christian may not be a Christian at all?

If you answered yes to any of the last five questions, you likely suffer from a touch (at least) of scrupulosity. Probably, no one else knows about it because you suffer it in silence. But you know.

In its extreme forms, scrupulosity drives addictive behavior for which a person should seek a psychologist's help. But, for our purposes, let's stay with spiritual concerns. You can suffer from a form of scrupulosity without needing a psychologist.

You do, however, need to scrupulously examine again what God has done for you. What we are dealing with here is not at all new. It has long been known as "works righteousness" or "perfectionism." It's safe to say that we all are infected with a measure of it because it is the tendency of our natures.

The spiritual antidote for this compulsion is so simple as to be difficult. We call it the good news, and we receive it in Jesus. In a word, it is "forgiveness."

Forgiveness overcomes scrupulosity. Start with what God sees when he looks at you, a believer in Jesus Christ. God sees the perfect life of his Son covering your imperfect life. God sees the sacrifice of his Son winning forgiveness for your every wrong. He does not count your sins. You do not need to win his approval. You have it in Jesus.

When scrupulosity intrudes on your life and upsets your comfort, sweep it away with the broom of full and free forgiveness in Christ. Say, "I am forgiven. Thank you, Lord!" And live the full life in him.

Gary P. Baumler



Sunday School

for TODAY and TOMORROW

Planning Manual for Strengthening Sunday Schools

The new millennium is a great time to re-evaluate a 200-year-old tradition and re-energize it for a new generation. Sunday school can serve as a primary strategy for growth and evangelism among children and families in your churches and communities.

Each *Sunday School for Today and Tomorrow* binder contains resources to assist in evaluating, planning, and implementing ways to strengthen your congregation's ministry to children. Contents include:

- Leadership Roles
- Sunday School Models
- Recruiting/Training
- Outreach
- Worship
- Parent Involvement
- Evaluation/Planning
- Bibliography

Watch for more information from your district's Youth Discipleship Coordinator.

~ or ~

Contact the Commission on Youth Discipleship at 414-256-3274.

Unopened letters

Many are not opening the letters from God that say “I love you” and “My Son died for you.”

Carl R. Henkel



When Elizabeth Barrett married the famous poet Robert Browning, her parents were so upset they disowned her. She and her husband moved far away.

Elizabeth loved her parents and did everything she could to be reconciled with them. Several times a month she wrote expressive, loving letters. After 10 years with no response, a package finally came from her parents. With happy anticipation Elizabeth opened it. But inside she found all her letters—unopened.

Like her husband, Elizabeth was a poet, and her letters of reconciliation were eloquent. They have been called some of the most beautiful and expressive in all English literature. But her parents never read them.

Reconciliation between parents and daughter

What did you think of when you read this story? I thought, first, of the ecstasy Elizabeth must have experienced when she finally received a package from her folks. She must

have been happy beyond words. Can't you see the sparkle in her eyes, hear the pounding of her heart as she excitedly opens her precious package? And then—the tears! How she must have cried that the package contained only her unopened letters.

Second, I thought of the anguish and pain behind the words: “But her parents never read them.” That's depressing, isn't it? Mom and Dad were so hurt or angry or stubborn that they never gave their daughter a chance to reconcile.

How could this happen? When a person gets hurt badly enough or often enough, that person determines never to get hurt again. Maybe Elizabeth's parents wanted to avoid more hurt.

Yet, I can't believe that they were happy about their decision. Part of them had to ache for reconciliation, for harmony, for peace. Mom must have longed to hug Elizabeth in her arms and hear her say, “I love you.” Dad must have wanted to peek into his daughter's letters and see what was happening in her life.

But something—was it pride, anger, hatred, loss, or just a deep, deep hurt—kept them from reconciling with their daughter. That's sad because both parents and daughter would have such great relief, such tremendous joy, if they could have made peace.

Reconciliation between God and man

The Lord longs to be reconciled with the people of his world. He, in fact, “reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them” (2 Corinthians 5:18,19). He has committed to us the message of peace between God and humanity, the message that through faith in Jesus, we are at peace with the Father in heaven.

Tragically, many have returned God's love letters unopened. They have blindly rejected his attempts to bring the peace of reconciliation into their hearts. I've been told that if all the unbelieving people of the world lined up single file in front of our church doors, the line would stretch around the world—30 times! And that line is getting 20 miles longer every day. So many people, like Elizabeth's parents, are not opening the letters from God that say, “I love you. My Son lived and died for you. You can have peace in Jesus. You can know joy. You can experience his free forgiveness.”

Are there people with whom you can talk today about their relationship with their Lord? Is there some healing that your gracious Savior can work through you? Seize the opportunity!

Carl Henkel is pastor at Mount Olive, St. Paul, Minnesota.