

FORWARD IN CHRIST

December 2000

NO 28 00

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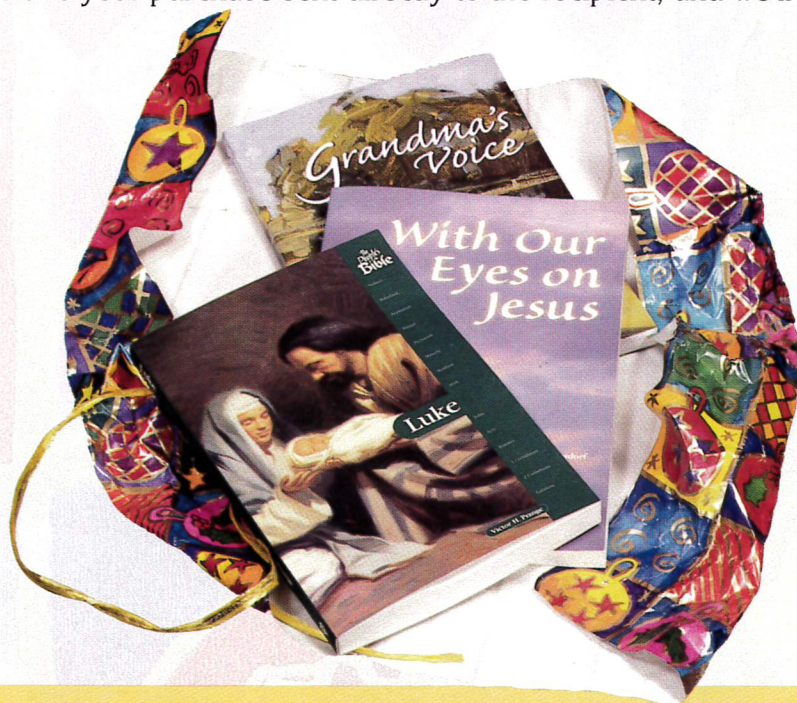
Christmas



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Jesus was born to redeem us

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Galatians 4:4,5

Paul M. Janke

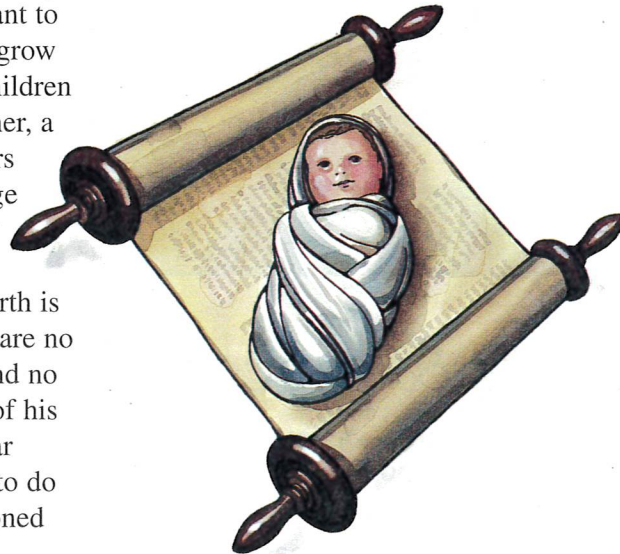
“**W**hat do you want to be when you grow up?” Some children know early: a farmer, a teacher, a pastor, or an astronaut. Others require a few years of college before they *think* they know what they want to do.

Paul’s account of Jesus’ birth is brief and to the point. There are no angels here. No shepherds and no manger. Not even the name of his mother. But the report is clear about what Jesus was going to do with his life. God commissioned his Son to be our Redeemer.

The curse of the law

The day for our Redeemer’s birth dawned at a time when the Romans had made the Mediterranean Sea their private pond. The Roman legal system was almost as formidable as their legions, but Paul didn’t have the laws of Rome in mind when he wrote that Jesus was born “under law.” He meant God’s law. Moses recorded God’s law for the Jews, but the Gentiles had God’s law, too. It was written in their hearts.

The law of Moses was exhaustive and exhausting, with rules and regulations for every aspect of life. Perfect compliance was impossible. Peter called the law “a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear.” The Gentiles fared no better. The continual scolding of their consciences was



proof that even the law written in our hearts can’t be kept perfectly.

Yet some regard the law as the sinner’s friend. They aspire to obey it so well so God will eventually have to declare them fit for heaven. They view Jesus as a law-giver, handing down more laws that are even harder to keep. They speak of the Bible as a book of directions, as if keeping the law were as simple as putting together a bicycle on Christmas. Just follow the rules, they advise, and you’ll end up in heaven.

But that’s not what the Bible says. God warns us in Galatians, “All who rely on observing the law are under a curse.” This curse is drawn out and deadly. It lands lawbreakers in perpetual torment of hell.

Our full rights as sons

To redeem us from the curse of

the law, Jesus had to take our place “under law.” He did. Born a Jew, Jesus learned and lived the law flawlessly. Those so-called minor festivals of the church year were not so minor where Jesus was concerned. The circumcision of Christ and his presentation were essential elements in a life of perfect obedience to the law. If Jesus had ignored or despised the law, even as an infant, he could not have redeemed us.

God’s justice required not only absolute obedience, but also the death of the lawbreaker. Jesus intervened. He placed himself between God’s anger and us. He shouldered our sin, our guilt, our curse. He suffered death as our stand-in. As he paid the price to set us free, he redeemed us.

Through faith in this perfect Redeemer, we are granted full rights as God’s sons. God has adopted us. He gave us his name when he gave us the righteousness of Jesus. Once we were slaves, but now we call God our Father and count ourselves as God’s heirs.

In Christ our status has changed. We were slaves; now we’re sons. We were doomed; now we’re saved. All because “when the time had fully come, God sent his Son. . . .”

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

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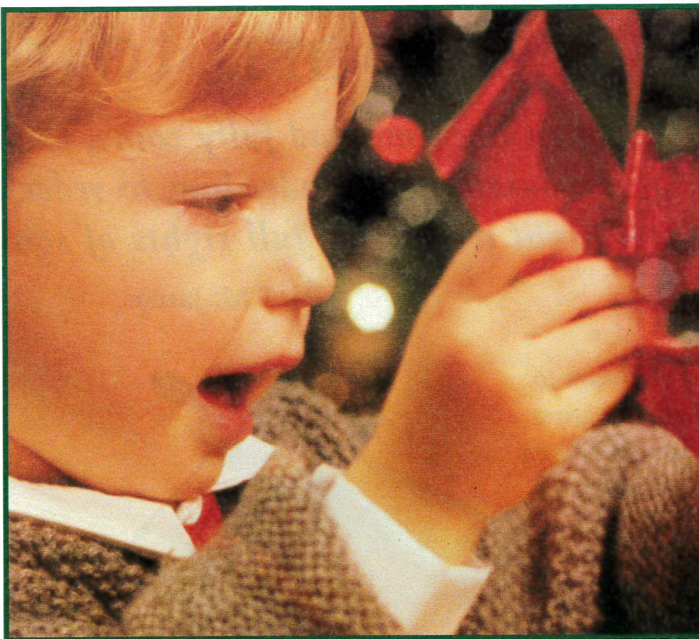
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With childlike fervor, cherish and share the joy of Christmas—Jesus.

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bits & pieces



Christmas—a time for all people to rejoice in the birth of a little child who is also our Savior from sin. Also a time to reflect . . .

- on heaven's child, and how we as heaven's children can celebrate that baby's birth (p. 8).

- on the infant in the manger, and how we at all stages of our lives are affected by what that tiny baby, the Christ child, has done for us (p. 36).



As we end the year 2000, we've included some new beginnings in the magazine. Pastor James Aderman shares lessons from Elijah, reminding us always to remember "The LORD, he is God" (p. 30). Jerry Kastens starts a new series on parenting and the spiritual growth of our children, both missions that truly are possible (p. 10).



Our coverage of the 12 districts ends this month with a trip to the North Atlantic District (p. 12). We hope this series educated you about the blessings and challenges of each district as well as how our congregations are reaching out with the Word.



What does the Bible say about sanctification? Gain some insights, as Prof. Mark Lenz concludes his study of "-ion" words in Interact (p. 19).



For eight years, he has been asking for and answering your questions. But this month Prof. John Brug ends his stint as writer of "your question, please." We thank him for his evangelical and educational answers to our readers' questions. Check out his last column (p. 32).

—JKT

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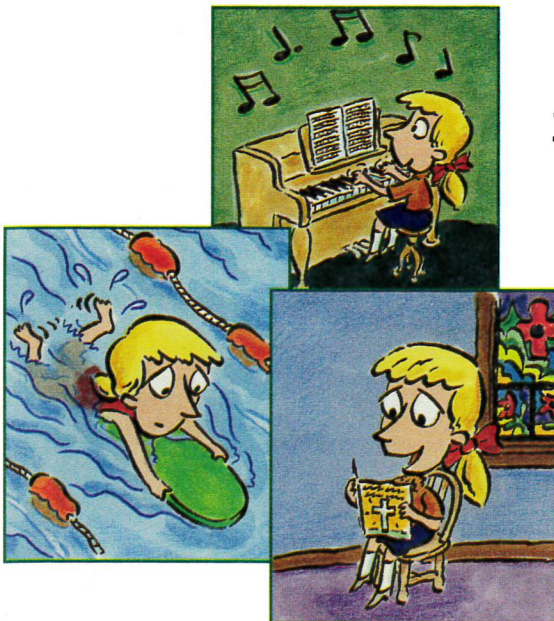
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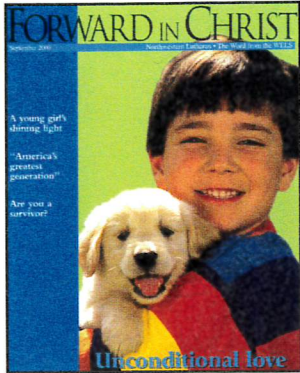
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"Do not be afraid."



I enjoyed the article "Building bridges" [Sept.].

I am a WELS Hispanic missionary at Santo Tomas, Phoenix, Ariz. Beth Thompson came last year and gave an English as


a Second Language (ESL) training seminar, which was a great help. Last month our church started its second year of offering ESL classes.

In some mission fields it might be better not to teach "religion" in the ESL classroom, but I tried using the ESL classes as an evangelism tool. I advertised that a five-minute break would be taken in each English class during which a Bible devotion would be given (in Spanish). God has granted us great success! After the first year of classes one student has taken Bible instruction classes and was confirmed. Her son will start catechism classes next year. Two other students are in instruction classes and attend church regularly.

Guadalupe Tisnado said, "I would not be here right now taking Bible classes if it weren't for those Bible devotions given in the ESL classes." After the first ESL class this year, Luis Gonzalez said to a member of our church on his way home, "I love these English classes, but I especially love the Bible talks the pastor gives. I'm going to invite friends."

Let's not keep our minds closed to alternate ways of doing things. There is nothing to lose and souls to gain. "I am not ashamed of the gospel" (Romans 1:16a).

Tim Otto

 Phoenix, Arizona

I disagree with your suggestion that "no religion should be taught in the ESL classroom" ["Building bridges," Sept.].

I have taught ESL here for nine years. None of my students had a Bible class available that

they could understand. Therefore, even the lowest level students heard some of God's Word in their own language. During the last 10-15 minutes of a 90-minute class we read orally a selection from the Bible in their language. Then I read the passage in English and they parroted it. If the students know enough English, we read only Bible materials. Vocabulary, grammar, spelling, all elements can be taught using Spirit-filled materials in my opinion.

Carolyn Loudermilk

Suger Land, Texas

The WELS ESL/EFL Steering Committee responds: Our synod's ESL/EFL Steering Committee does feel that the Bible should not be the basis for ESL instruction and that even short devotions associated with ESL classes can drive away prospective students. Most immigrants wish to learn English to help them in their daily lives, and that is what they expect from classes that are advertised as ESL classes.

At the same time, we agree that students should be offered Bible instruction in simple English, if it is not possible to offer it in their native language. However, that instruction should be given at a separate time, perhaps after the ESL class, and it should be clear that students are not being pressured to attend. Students can be taught English language skills that help them in their daily lives and still be offered God's Word in an appropriate, separate class.

Students who do not want to learn another religion may not return to a Bible-based ESL class. However, if they are attending an ESL class where they can learn English with "no strings attached," they may eventually opt to see why the nice people who teach them English think that studying the Bible is so important. In addition, no one will close immigrants' hearts to the gospel by causing them to think they were brought to the church under false pretenses.

"A child's faith" [Sept.], in which Principal Markgraf shared with us Laura Ring's last Christ-Light® assignment, touched my heart.

What a beautiful witness to a child-like faith! May we all be reminded of the great need and importance of our Christian day schools.

Brooke Carbon

Venice, Florida

In the September 2000 readers forum, Wilburn Hage writes concerning the photo on the June cover, "I think it's



Rev. Allbright who served in Fairfax, Minn., for 50 years. . . . I would like to know if that is him."

The photo is of Pastor Immanuel Albrecht, who served in Fairfax for 50 years. He is my great-grandfather. His daughter, Lorna (my grandmother), confirmed that it is he in the photo. Incidentally, he was on a team of pastors sent jointly by WELS and Missouri to look for mission opportunities in Nigeria in 1935, the same year in which Mr. Hage was confirmed.

Michael Weigand

West Bend, Wisconsin

While I support your publication and eagerly look forward to each issue, I've always had difficulty with the "news around the world" column.

I believe you faithfully quote your sources, but in so doing you import non-scriptural terminology into the magazine. For instance, there is no such thing to a Christian as a "same-sex marriage." When we use these newly invented terms, which were created to make sin sound like something else, we implicitly condone such deception to some degree.

Gary Zenda

 Racine, Wisconsin

Send your letters to Readers forum, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222-4398; FAX, 414/256-3899; <fic@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.



A kinder, gentler administration

Armin J. Panning

This article needs to go to press before the U.S. presidential election has taken place. Currently the issue is still much in doubt as to who the next elected president will be. Hence the election campaigns are going on in full force.

The candidates are going out among the voters to assure them that, if elected, the candidates will see that voters' interests are served. Expressed or implied is the promise that each one will do that better than his challenger would.

Many of you will no doubt remember the slogan of a previous election campaign promising a "kinder, gentler" administration. The very fact that such a promise was made—and that it still resonates with voters—is a telling commentary on the observable and somewhat cynical generalization that power corrupts. Power tends to make leaders less sensitive and responsive to the interests of those governed. Success tends to roughen and harden.

No matter how sincerely the promise is made on the campaign trail, or how genuinely the elected candidate attempts to make good on his campaign promise, the rough and tumble task of governing makes it difficult—yes, virtually impossible—for flawed and fallible human leaders working with a selfish and demanding citizenry, to be kind and gentle in office.

That fact makes it all the more striking to see an all-powerful King coming to us in meekness and lowliness. But that is precisely the phenomenon the arrival of another Advent season brings to us. There our attention is drawn to true God and true man, in one person, coming to rule in our hearts with complete gentleness and kindness. Difficult as that concept is for us to grasp,

it really should not surprise us. For almost 500 years before this Messiah-King's birth, the prophet Zechariah wrote: "See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (9:9).

Zechariah foretold exactly what Jesus did when he humbly rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, capping a three-year ministry marked with kindness and gentleness to both friends and foes. Not only did he feed friends and heal followers, but he also declined to use force in the form of the 12 legions of angels he could easily have called out against his captors, and he forgave those who nailed him to the cross.

Why was he so meek and lowly? Not out of weakness, but that he might be our substitute and Savior and he might take on himself the punishment that should rightly have fallen on us for our shortcomings. He took our sins on himself so that through his wounds we might be healed.

Still today our gracious Advent-King makes no demands of us. Rather, by faith, as a free gift of his grace, he gives us the blessing of everything he has earned for us, namely, forgiveness of sins and the certainty of eternal life.

His is truly a kind and gentle administration, the sort we want and need. But what's more, he enables us to learn and to imitate his gentleness in our own lives. Winsomely, day after day, he invites us through Word and sacrament: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

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

[Jesus' administration] is truly a kind and gentle administration, the sort we want and need.

Heaven's children. *Heaven's Child*

At Christmas, heaven delivers its divine child to us once again, and we find ourselves wrapped up in childlike involvement.

Daron J. Lindemann

Why do more children's programs pop into production during the middle of December? Why do some of your most precious childhood memories develop from the dead of winter's darkest hour? And why does antiquated Christmas television programming aimed at viewers under age 12 still find popularity today—even among digitally trained viewers over age 20?

Because we are heaven's children. If there is a time when it's okay to be childish, this is it. Actually, this is a time when it's preferable to be childish.

Anticipation

Purple and white candles ritually dripped their wax on our Advent wreath in daily, ordered fashion. My parents performed this ceremony to keep me from clawing open the Christmas presents too early. "Okay, we're only 14 candle lights away from the big, white one," I remember thinking. How I wished that somehow the flame would magically jump from one wick to another so we could celebrate Christmas now instead of later!

My hands were tied for the moment, but the candles couldn't stop my heart from beating every day with eager anticipation. Just look at those beautiful presents under the tree! And there's no doubt that Mom will make her special recipes, and we'll see grandpas and grandmas, and . . . and . . .

Christmas for a child is not a matter of "if" but of "when." Your childhood questions about Christmas never inquired, "Is there going to be a Christmas this year?" The eager anticipation of events certain to come allows no room for edgy anxiety, wondering about possible letdowns. Can you see the childish glee on the smiling faces of Simeon and Anna when their waiting was rewarded by the baby Jesus' appearance? Can you hear the optimistic conversation of Mary and Elizabeth, both expecting miracle babies from God? These children of heaven held neither edgy anxiety nor expressionless acceptance. Their eager anticipation showed.



Don't muffle those childish feelings of excitement that tickle you at this time of the year. An event is certain to come, and the Holy Spirit is filling you with expectant faith. Just as certain as the coming of Christmas is the coming of God's other promised gifts to his children.

Instead of asking, "Will my suffering ever end?", as heaven's children we eagerly watch for something from God to help us endure and make us stronger. Instead of complaining, "I wish I could have that kind of faith," heaven's children eagerly search the Scriptures for growth and guidance. Instead of admitting, "I'll never get caught up," heaven's children eagerly awake to each new day expecting answered prayers. While you wait, don't worry about the details. Your heavenly Father orchestrated the arrival of his Son into this world, and he knows where and when you come and go.

Dependency

When I was a child I didn't understand all the work behind the scenes to "make Christmas happen" in our home. I didn't even try to understand it. I just enjoyed it. Adults too easily forget this simple pleasure when they depend on exhausting hours of baking or shopping, on keeping the candles in the bags by the driveway burning, or on white flakes from the sky to "make Christmas happen."

Joseph planned to help Mary by divorcing her. Later Joseph planned to help Mary in childbirth by making sure she had a comfortable room in the inn. Joseph's plans were turned topsy-turvy by his God, who "made Christmas happen" nevertheless.

The well-meaning question, "How was your Christmas?" implies that Christmas could happen better for some than others. We'll give such

inquiries the benefit of the doubt, figuring they refer to the amount of time during the last week of December and not to the place in Bethlehem when the time had fully come. After all, it isn't really possible for that saving event to be spoiled, is it? Can any blackened cookies change what happened in history—our Savior coming to save us from sin's guilt and dread? Any lack of funds for more expensive and enjoyable gifts? Any loss of a loved one? Any dismal performance by a favorite football team?

Childlike involvement in Christmas means the glory of God shines more brightly.

As heaven's children we don't depend on our circumstances to "make Christmas happen." It already happened, and by God's grace it happens in our hearts anew. By faith our naive participation in Christmas lets us enjoy its fullness. We might be hurting with loneliness, but our loss opens an even wider welcome to Immanuel, "God with us." We might be overwhelmed and overworked, but a helping hand is here from our own almighty Brother. We might be facing again the emptiness of some blessing God has given to others and not to us, but the Prince of Peace comes to rule right there.

We are relieved when someone else takes care of our most pressing obligation for a change. With joy we lean wholly on Jesus' name for a "good Christmas."

Joy

After ripping off enough wrapping paper to expose the identity of a meaningful Christmas gift, unbridled joy can make a child jump, shout, dance, give high fives, and

maybe even remember to say "thank you" to the giver! Break a lamp in the process and nobody growls, because this is a happy child who is making others happy, and they are all filled with delight.

Joy made the shepherds leave their sheep, perhaps unattended, and not return without first spreading the word about the Savior's birth. If it's been a while since you've been caught up in the joy of the moment:

- Joyfully change your priorities.
- Joyfully reconcile with your sister.
- Joyfully contribute to church.
- Joyfully volunteer in your community.
- Joyfully engage in spiritual conversation with your friend.
- Joyfully shovel your noisy neighbor's sidewalk.
- Joyfully visit the homebound members of your church.
- Joyfully pray for your worst enemy.
- Joyfully give these all as gifts to Jesus.

Children costumed as shepherds, angels, cattle, and Joseph and Mary gleamed with squinting smiles. Singing "Silent Night! Holy Night!" they tried looking directly at the 120-watt light bulb in the manger playing the role of Jesus, but it was too bright!

Childlike involvement in Christmas means the glory of God shines more brightly. Heaven's children notice in this humbled human the divine Savior glowing with grace. Heaven's children gaze not into the surrounding darkness but into the radiance of God's love.

The gleaming faces of heaven's children squint and smile because we cannot help it.

Heaven's child is here.



Daron Lindemann is pastor at Grace, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

PARENTING: Mission impossible?

Hey, Dad and Mom! You are God's key people.

Gerald F. Kastens

Today's parents have a challenging assignment. Their mission: provide for their children's physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual well-being for most of the first two decades of their children's lives. They will be forced to deal with peer influences, music, television, movies, the drug culture, the Internet, and each child's own developmental crises. The Bible tells us that the primary concern for Christian parents is to nurture faith that was first planted in their children's hearts when they were baptized.

Parents can't be replaced by institutions.

That sounds easy enough. Society has taught us that if we want children to learn to swim, we enroll them in swimming lessons at the YMCA. If we want children to learn to play the piano, we find a good piano teacher. If we are interested in early education, signing up for the best early childhood program in town will get the job done. When it

comes to providing Christian training, all we have to do is take our children to Sunday school and church, enroll them in a Lutheran school, involve them in youth groups, send them off to church camps, and make sure they say their prayers before meals and at bedtime.

That isn't quite the whole story. Throughout the Bible, God makes it clear that he never intended institutions and programs to replace parents. No other people were intended to have more influence on the lives of children than their parents. Parents don't have this kind of influence by accident. God designed it this way.

Mom and Dad are to be their children's first and most influential teachers. Every moment of every day, children are to be shaped and molded by the actions and words of Christian parents. God's plan is for children to learn about his love for them right in their own homes (Proverbs 22:6). It is not a question of whether parents should exert "parent power." The only question

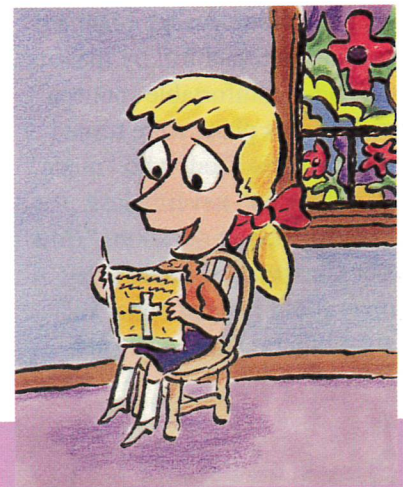
is whether parents will do it or whether they will allow someone or something else to get in the way.

Parenting teens begins long before the teenage years.

Those whom God calls he equips for service. God has also provided Christian parents with the means to accomplish the job.

Spiritual resources. Contrary to popular belief, God has not retired from active involvement with the human race. If he seems inaccessible, it's that we have not chosen to take advantage of the blessings he offers. "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear" (Isaiah 59:1).

The essential ingredient to parenting is God's Word. The Holy Spirit has not promised to come to us by any other means than through the means of grace. He does not "seep through the walls" of our homes by some kind of spiritual osmosis. According to Ephesians 6:4, fathers are the primary family teachers.



Parents must instruct. There's no way to delegate that job. Every time parents share the Word with children, the Spirit clothes the children with the spiritual armor they need for battle.

Life resources. No one observes your life "up close and personal" quite like those who live in your home. Children learn from what they see. As parents grow in their relationship to God, in maturity of faith, in overcoming their self-absorption, they are teaching the qualities their children need. Parents possess the power to seek and receive forgiveness from a merciful God and from each other, to pray and receive, to worship together, and to serve the Lord as well as one another. No influence is more powerful in the lives of children than example.

Life experiences. According to Deuteronomy 6:6-9, parental education in Israel took place every day. Parents had credibility because they were involved with their children throughout the day.

I have friends who are amazed at how God blessed their efforts to nurture their children's faith. They didn't consciously develop parenting skills, and they didn't artificially create learning experiences for their children. They just did a lot of things with their children and shared God's Word and their faith in the process.

What's a parent to do?

It's clear that Christian parents who are equipped with the living, breathing Word of God (Hebrews 4:12) have tremendous influence in nurturing the faith of their children.

- If you haven't been faithful in the use of God's Word, take your weaknesses and sins to the cross. God will give you the strength to change sinful habits.

- You can't fill someone else if your spiritual tank is on empty.

Read your Bible every day. If you have never done it before, begin with the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

- Increase the depth of your understanding by attending adult Bible classes at church.

- One of the best things you can do for your children is to have a good marriage. I have heard of people leaving the church because they thought that their parents were hypocrites, but I never heard of anyone turning away from the Lord because their parents had a wonderful relationship with the Lord and each other.

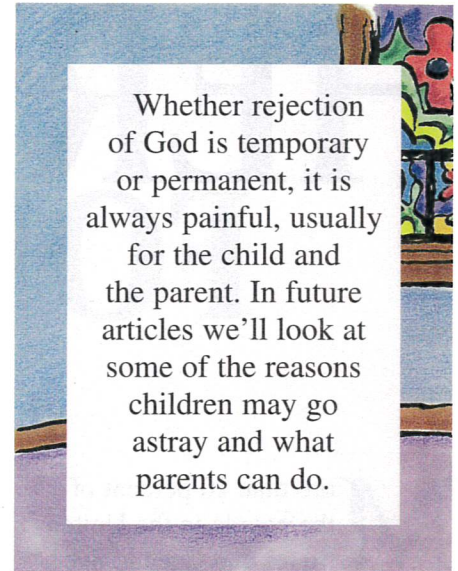
Every moment of every day, children are to be shaped and molded by the actions and words of Christian parents.

- You can have regular family devotions by teaching Bible stories to your children. The take-home lessons from the *Christ-Light* coordinated religion curriculum are perfect for families who have elementary-age children. Another good devotional resource from Northwestern Publishing House is *Wellspring*.

- Pray for and with your children.
- Model stewardship of time, treasures, and talents. Explain what motivates you to serve the Lord the way you do.

- Beginning when your children are young, practice firm, consistent, and loving discipline. Learn to know the proper use of law and gospel.

- Take time to listen to your children. Every day talk with them about their "highs" and "lows." Encourage them with God's Word



and pray together about the "lows" of each day.

A couple once lamented to me, "Our children didn't turn out the way we thought they would." This couple had sacrificed for many years so that their children would be able to attend Christian grade school, high school, and college. They visualized their teens singing in Christian music groups, leading Bible studies in the dormitory, and going on mission trips during spring break. They thought that their teens would form lifelong friendships on campus and marry equally-devoted Christian partners.

Those idyllic dreams are realized every year on campus. But it doesn't work that way for everyone. Most children will test the values taught in their homes. Some will stand firm, others will reject the ideals of the Christian faith. But regardless, the Lord promises that those who are in his Word will be blessed. We may not always understand how or in what way, but his Word always brings blessing to our lives.

Gerald Kastens is the minister of discipleship at Trinity, Watertown, Wisconsin.

HERE FOR GOOD

“We should have been here 25 years ago.”

Gary P. Baumler

More than 20 percent of the people in the United States and Canada live in this district.

Families in the district’s first parish lived over 400 miles apart from north to south.

The second parish began more than 200 miles north, with a nucleus of seven communicant members and the call to serve a field of 15 million people.

In this district, 11 starts showed early promise but eventually had to be closed, as the seed of the Word encountered some rocky soil.

This district contains the capitals of two nations and 11 of the original 13 American colonies.

When the first full-time resident pastor, Walter Beckmann, arrived in a suburb of Washington, D.C. in 1963, people told him, “We should have been here 25 years ago.”

He always told them, “In 25 years we will have been.”

Today, a full 37 years later, Beckmann, now president of the North Atlantic District, observes, “We still are here and have over 40 congregations, over 4,000 communicant members, and almost 6,000 baptized members.”

Spirit-born spirit

With a number of unique aspects about it, this district, which was once the Colonial Conference of the Michigan District, faces challenges similar to the other 11 districts you’ve read about in this series. It faces them with a spirit that we pray all in WELS might share.

Says Tom Zarling, first vice-president of the district, “The spirit of the district is very good, and I have enjoyed viewing its wholesome influence on everyone.” To illustrate, Zarling points to the district’s “commitment to the Word and commitment to growing in the Word.” A commitment to WELS and its mission from God follows closely.

Zarling adds that he sees a wholesome “outlook, enthusiasm, and willingness to learn” among the churches and called workers of the district that is unique in his experience.

Church-challenging diversity

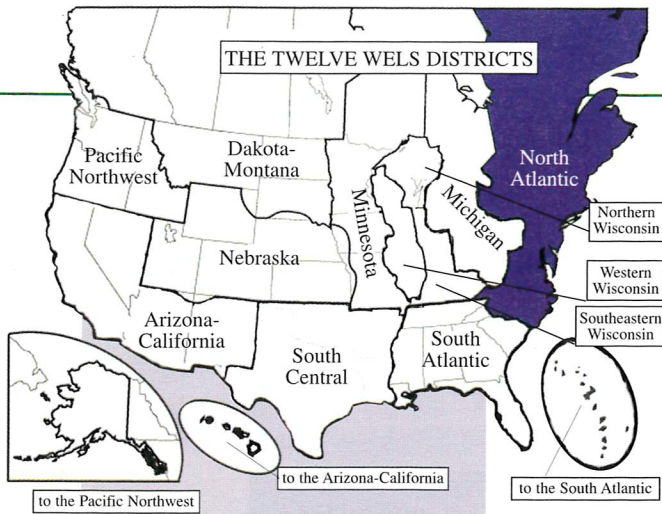
Perhaps the single word that best sums up the challenges the district faces is “diversity.” From the southern balminess of Winston-Salem, N.C., to the concrete jungles of New York City; from the industrial valley of Roanoke, Va., to the bedroom community of East Brunswick, N.J.; from sleepy Pembroke, Ontario, Canada, to bustling Toronto—and



The congregation at Grace of God, Dix Hills, N.Y. This congregation, established in 1974, first met in a hotel, then in the parsonage. They completed their chapel in 1989.



Patti Wolfe shares Jesus with the three-year-old Sunday school class at Peace, King of Prussia, Penn.



■ North Atlantic District

Stats at a glance
North Atlantic District

Conferences: 2
Circuits: 5
Congregations: 40
Mission churches: 18
Exploratory churches: 6

Baptized members: 5,703
Communicant members: 4,116
Average attendance: 55.8%
Pastors: 42

Adult baptisms: 23
Adult confirmations: 154

Sunday school enrollment: 1,041
Bible class attendance (teens): 156
Bible class attendance (adults): 1,407

Early childhood education schools: 5
Lutheran elementary schools: 6
Area Lutheran high schools: 0

Statistics taken from the 1999 Statistical Report, the Commission on Parish Schools, and the Board for Home Missions.

ministry, discipleship groups. Congregational worship has been held in members' homes, nursing homes, community centers, schools, motels. Services have been interrupted by a gun auction in the next room of a motel, a nursing-home attendant looking for a wheelchair, a dog wandering in through the open school door, locked school doors.

New York City with its five boroughs and over seven million people defies comparison. Just this summer WELS sent two new seminary graduates there as a team to establish a new base to witness to Christ.

With so many people in so many great cities, the opportunities for expansion in the district are limitless. However, getting the necessary money and manpower is a continuing struggle. A struggle, but not a deterrent. Our people there are doing what they can where they can when they can for God's kingdom.

Heaven-sent prayer

In that way, they are, again, like the other 11 districts of WELS. Their prayer, then, on looking back at the history of their district as part of WELS' 150th anniversary, is something for all of us to pray. Pray "that we are reminded that the Lord truly is Lord of the Church and that he preserves and extends his kingdom by grace from small beginnings through difficulties and challenges that human strength alone cannot overcome."

Pray "that we are encouraged as his people to look to him for resources, reserves, and strength to carry his gospel message into a new chapter in church history that God may be glorified, his people strengthened and edified, and his Church motivated to proclaim the timeless gospel of Jesus Christ with renewed eagerness and zeal!" (North Atlantic District History of Congregations, p. 3).

Gary Baumler is editor of Forward/NL and WELS Director of Communications.

beyond—the district's members are reaching out with God's Word. Each place encounters its unique culture and multi-cultures.

In response, our churches look for the best ways to reach the people with the gospel: bussing children to Sunday school, starting daughter congregations, canvassing, daycare, dynamic teen ministry, puppet



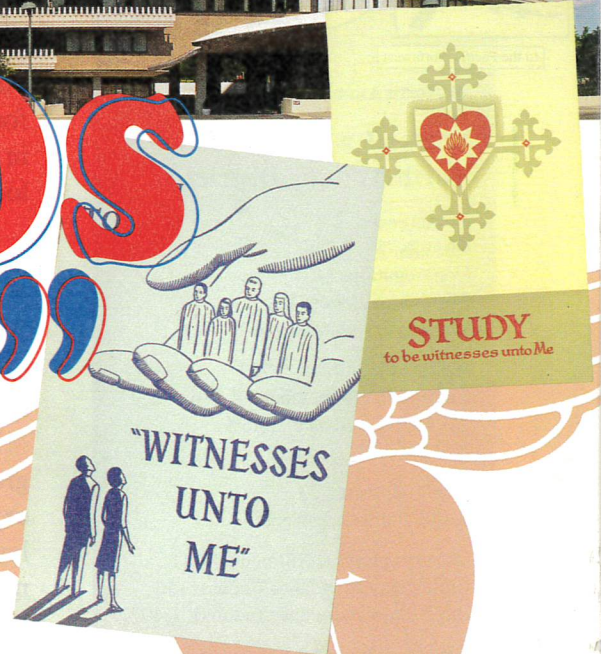
A vacation Bible school class at St. Paul, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. St. Paul offers three types of VBS classes throughout the year: a weeklong VBS in summer, a two-day spring VBS, and a one-day Christmas VBS.

The Wisconsin Synod stood firm on the Scriptures, even as the United States became more liberal in social and religious issues.

Mark E. Braun



“That 70s Show”



Nixon's involvement in Watergate and the focus on personal evangelism in WELS are just two of the important events that shaped history in the 1970s.

Watergate

TNL said surprisingly little about Watergate. When it did, its writers refrained from glib condemnation of others' failings. “We look for integrity and trustworthiness in our elected officials,” one editorial by Toppe read, “but we are inclined to excuse untrustworthiness in ourselves.” Americans who reserve a lower standard for themselves than for their government “have forfeited their right to exclaim about Watergate.” If citizens are remiss in civic righteousness, and if they discover their

“The ancient pagan desire to be rid of the burden of defective or unwanted children is finding expression in our own day,” wrote Dr. Siegbert Becker in the first issue of *The Northwestern Lutheran* (TNL) of the 1970s.

Most pending legislation sought to permit abortion “only if the physical or mental health of the mother” was endangered or if “a mentally deficient or physically deformed child” was to be born. “Christian morality is not determined by human legislation,” Becker stated, yet passage of such legislation would “force Christians to take a second look at this matter.”

Thus began the Wisconsin Synod's response to one of the most controversial and far-reaching social questions of the 20th century.

Abortion

The argument that “unwanted children” were best aborted by their mothers “sends chills up and down

one's spine,” Carleton Toppe remarked. Should such a principle gain acceptance, “the life of born children will not be safe either.” A 1972 headline noted that Billy Jean King could not have earned \$100,000 playing tennis the previous year had she not terminated an unwanted pregnancy. This prompted John Pacher to reply, “God pity children born into homes where human life takes second place to sports trophies and the whims of parental convenience.”

After the Supreme Court's 1973 decision barring states from interfering with a woman's decision to seek an abortion, Joel Gerlach commented, “There is no law which says we cannot voice our dismay and our disagreement with the Court's decision. We say this, not because we feel there is any merit in legislating morals for the ungodly, but because we think the unborn need a voice to speak for them.”

officials to be corrupt, "they are getting the government they deserve."

One change Watergate effected was a move toward conservatism. Though forces generated in the sixties were "far from spent," Toppe observed a "greater concern for morality in government" and "more sober thinking about higher education and welfare." Toppe seemed to concur with the observation of a spokesman from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, Oak Park, Ill.: "The era of the strong social gospel is sort of out," replaced by "a trend toward evangelical emphasis." As liberal churches declined, Evangelical and conservative churches were gaining ground.

Synod work

Following extraordinary congregational growth in the 1960s, the synod's 1971 convention highlighted personal evangelism. "Many twentieth century Christians harbor the idea that evangelism is a new word and new type of work in the Christian church," wrote Wilmer Valleskey. Some

falsely attributed "shady" meaning to the word, identifying it with "hoot'n, toot'n hollering hallelujahs and fire and brimstone sermons" in revival tents, observed Valleskey. Not so. Evangelism is spreading the good news—by speaking or printing, in tract or book or tape, personally or by proxy. "Evangelism may never be an elective for Christians," Valleskey concluded. "It is the heart of the Church."

Though WELS did not endorse the broadly ecumenical "Key 73" outreach effort across North America, Pastor Rolfe Westendorf insisted the time had come "to reaffirm our oft-repeated intention to preach the Gospel to every creature." Faithfulness to Romans 16:17 may explain Wisconsin's non-involvement in "Key 73," yet on the basis of Matthew 28:19 "we certainly cannot explain away any failure on our part to be out there witnessing."

The United States celebrated its 200th birthday in 1976, moving Toppe to say, "The bicentennial is

also our bicentennial." The Wisconsin Synod supported the separation of church and state, but "that does not mean that we must stand aloof and unconcerned when our country remembers its past with admiration and gratitude." Religious freedom and material prosperity were "still enabling us to expand our church's work."

During the 1960s and 1970s, much of United States Lutheranism suffered "a marked drift to the left." Yet, Edward Fredrich wrote, "Friends and foes alike agree that the Wisconsin Synod can be aptly described as 'most conservative' in doctrinal matters." A chief reason was the strong leadership provided by Oscar Naumann, who died in 1979 after serving as WELS' synod president for 26 years. Naumann "resisted the trend of the times" and stood firm with his church body "on the old scriptural and confessional basis."

Mark Braun is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The Lutheran Ethic, an extensive study of the attitudes of Lutheran clergymen in the Detroit area, revealed that the statement "The Bible is God's Word and all that it says is true" was endorsed by 10 percent of LCA clergy, 19 percent of ALC clergy, 74 percent of LCMS clergy, and 100 percent of WELS clergy. Yet Lawrence Kersten, the study's editor, also observed: "We found more Wisconsin Synod students and almost as many Missouri Synod students as Jewish students wanting to live in a religious ghetto," and "almost half of the Wisconsin Synod laymen said they wanted to live in an all-Lutheran community or subdivision."

Carleton Toppe in 1972: "Once Archie Bunker has been typed as a man with a closed mind, the producers of the show have only to depict him as being in favor of something, and the viewer will be inclined to see prejudice. Let Archie loathe

homosexuals, and there's the strong suspicion that he is narrow-minded about this practice. His belief in the creation account makes evolution seem more reasonable. If he defends the Bible, his son-in-law makes atheism appear to be the more sensible option. . . . Depicting morality as mere prejudice can serve the devil very well."

John Parcher considered the characterization of WELS as a "dozing giant" to be unwarranted. Synodical fathers built churches, schools, and colleges "in the face of withering anti-German sentiment, bore them up through wars, depressions," and tough times. "Look next Sunday with the eyes of faith at the people who file out of the church door, from the babe bawling in mother's arms to the trembling hand of the old man. They may not look like it, and at times they may not feel like it, but these believers are the precious people of God."

Technologically speaking

Julie K. Tessmer

We live in a technological age. We can hear it all around us. The ringing of countless digital phones, the bleeping of the groceries as they go over the electronic scanner, the buzzing of pagers, the “eep” when “you have mail”—all remind us how technology is used in our world.

The benefits these advances give us far outweigh the complications—and the noise. At this turn of the millennium, WELS is working at using technology to the fullest so that congregations and members, as well as those to whom they are witnessing, can hear the sweet sound of the gospel.

technology

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“Technology is to our generation what the printing press was to Luther’s. It’s difficult for us to imagine the Reformation taking place without its impact,” says Wayne Borgwardt, director of the Telecommunications/ Technology Task Force.

How true. But in order for technology to be really useful today, it needs to be coordinated and structured. That’s where the Tel/Tech Task Force comes in. This group was given a five-year mandate in 1996 to develop a technological infrastructure for WELS. Its vision included a public Internet site <www.wels.net>, which is already finished; a series of area networks (the intranet); video-conferencing for meetings and distance education; and Web-based instruction.

Although all these goals are worthwhile, the task force also realizes that individual congregations and schools need help to better use technology to advance God’s kingdom.

To help, Tel/Tech and the Commission on Parish Schools are developing a self-help assessment so schools and churches can realize where they are in the area of technology, can recognize their technology

needs and opportunities, and can work together to discover new and better uses for technology.

A synodwide technology conference—WELS Tech 2001—will also help plant new ideas. This conference will cover all areas of technology, from creating a Web site to incorporating computers and the Internet in your teaching to setting up a church computer network.

“Pastors, teachers, and laypeople will walk away from this conference with new and different ideas on how they can use technology in their churches and schools and in their outreach,” says Karl Peterson, a WELS Tech committee member.

How can we afford not to use every means possible when people’s souls are at stake?

For more information:
Tel/Tech Task Force, Dr. Wayne Borgwardt, 262/650-1592; <borgway@sab.wels.net>. WELS Tech 2001, Web site <<http://www.wels.net/welstech2001>> WELS Communication Services, <welstech2001@sab.wels.net>; 414/256-3210.

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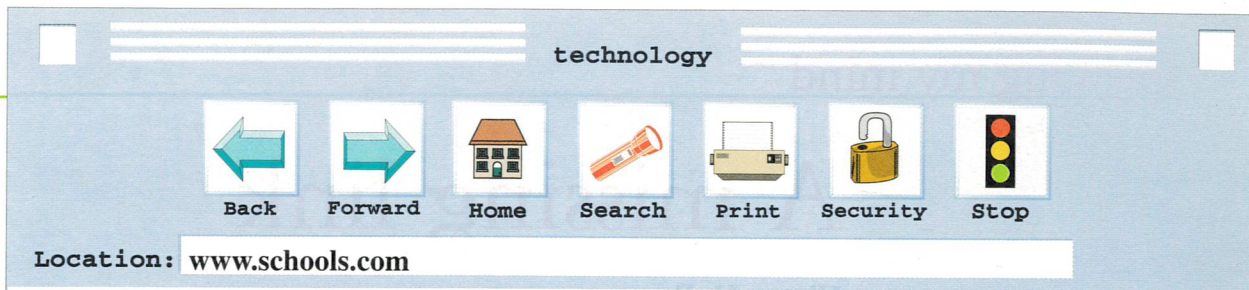
Who has time for technology when congregations and pastors are struggling to nurture current members and reach out in the neighborhood?

Technology can actually help, giving congregations new ways to present timeless truths.

- Over one-third of WELS congregations have Web sites. Most church sites share who our Savior is and what he has done for us as well as give specific information about WELS, service times and directions, and how to contact the church.

Atonement, Plano, Tex., took their site one step further by creating a password-protected area that only church members can access. Here board members post what church boards are working on. A SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Trends) analysis shows the congregation’s mission and what it needs to work on. And opportunities for volunteering are displayed.

“Our goal is to be as visible to everybody as we possibly can and to be encouraging people to go [to the Web site], use it, and stay informed,” says William Gabb, pastor at Atonement.



A new subject can be added to the “reading, ‘riting, and ‘rithmetic” taught in our schools—computers.

“We as Christians are stewards of the gifts God enables us to use. Technology is one of those gifts,” says Robert Klindworth, principal at St. Matthew, Winona, Minn.

St. Matthew is working at making its students better stewards of that gift. The school has a fully equipped computer lab (with 27 computers), as well as computers in every classroom. The point of the computers is to help support the school’s curriculum by allowing students to research on the Internet for reports and use programs to improve their skills in math, science, etc.

Students at St. Matthew aren’t the only ones learning about technology. So are the teachers. They are required to take 40 hours of training so they can be better end users,

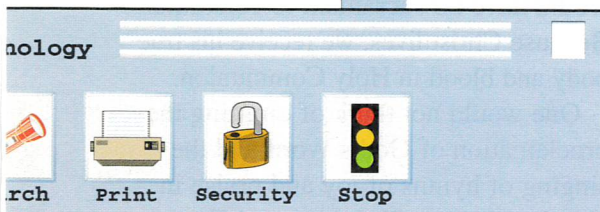
teachers, and network supporters.

Martin Luther College (MLC), WELS’ teacher/pastor-training school in New Ulm, Minn., is also making sure teachers stay up-to-date with technology. Students are taught basic computer applications and software programs as well as how to teach and use computers in the classroom.

WELS schools aren’t only teaching about using technology. They’re using technology in their teaching. On-line distance education via the Internet is becoming a thrust in WELS’ technology planning. MLC is converting continuing education and WELS certification courses for on-line use and is developing on-line courses for its new Masters Degree program.

Area Lutheran high schools are also getting involved by planning on-line courses for high school students. Two pilot courses may be offered in fall 2001. These courses would give students opportunities to take a class that they may not have at their high school or a more advanced level of a subject.

“The computer can be compared to a pencil and a slate or the marker and the whiteboard of years past,” says Klindworth. “It is a tool that will be part of [the students’] future.”



Atonement also posts the Sunday sermon—on Saturday night. Mothers of small children and a legally deaf woman read the sermon ahead of time so they know what’s coming. Three families who live over 40 miles away are encouraged to print out the sermon and have their own devotion when they can’t make the commute.

• Visually presenting the gospel is another way congregations use technology.

Pastor Michael Schultz of Mount Calvary, Flagstaff, Ariz., created an entire multi-media presentation using a data projector, PowerPoint, and Logos™ (Bible software program), to accompany his adult instruction and confirmation classes. He can use charts, graphs, maps, pictures, and an onscreen Bible as he teaches children and new members about gospel truths. “As far as students are concerned, it’s an extremely beneficial way to teach,” says Schultz. “You have more resources, and you affect more senses.”

But he warns: “The media should not replace the message.” The message always remains the most important focus.

Julie Tessmer is senior communications assistant for Forward/NL and WELS Communication Services.



A missing link

Victor H. Prange

How often should a congregation celebrate Holy Communion? Once a month? Twice a month? Every Sunday? Should Holy Communion be offered on festivals like Christmas and Easter?

WELS congregations answer such questions in various ways. That is as it should be, since our Lord Jesus Christ has not given New Testament Christians any rules telling us when and how often we ought to celebrate this sacrament. Nor has he told us how often we as individuals should commune. Whenever we celebrate Holy Communion, we do it in remembrance of Jesus and his work of salvation for us.

Since two of the most significant salvation events are the birth and resurrection of Jesus, it would seem to be important to offer the sacrament to our members who desire to commune on Christmas and Easter.

Christmas celebrates the coming into the flesh of God's one and only Son. "The Word became flesh" so that he could give his body and shed his blood on the cross in payment for our sins. The tangible reality of Christ's incarnation ("becoming flesh") is given to us in this sacrament. As certainly as the Son of God took on our human flesh and blood, so certainly he gives us his body and blood in this sacrament. Without Christmas we would not be able to receive Holy Communion on any Sunday of the year. There is good reason to celebrate the sacrament on Christmas Day.

Easter celebrates the truth that "Christ was raised from the dead" (Romans 6:9), that Christ lives also today. The Apology to the Augsburg Confession (X,4) links "the living Christ" with Holy Communion: "In the Lord's Supper the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present and are truly offered with those things that are

seen, bread and wine. We are talking about the presence of the living Christ, knowing that 'death no longer has dominion over him.' " It is the living Christ who comes to us in this sacrament. Without Easter we would have no sacrament to celebrate. Because Christ lives, we receive his true body and blood in Holy Communion.

One would not think of omitting the proclamation of God's Word and the singing of hymns of joy and praise in our churches on Christmas and Easter. Yet many Christians belong to WELS congregations that fail to celebrate Holy Communion on these most significant festival days. Rather than point out that it might be impractical to offer communion on these days, should we not recognize the spiritual benefit for believers who would have the privilege of receiving the sacrament on festivals that recall Christ's incarnation and resurrection? Should we not be a church of Word and sacrament also on Christmas and Easter?



Victor Prange is a retired pastor.

The Minnesota District Forward in Christ Anniversary Committee, with help from Martin Luther College, prepared a resource booklet for Christmas 2000 and upcoming years. It includes:

- An introductory article and Bible study encouraging the celebration of Holy Communion at Christmastime.
- A service for Christmas Eve or Christmas Day with new music, special prayers, and sermon notes.
- Music resources

The booklet was already mailed to congregations and area Lutheran high schools. Check out the Web site <http://www.mlc-wels.edu/fic_mn> or contact Steven Thiesfeldt, 507/354-8221.

Should we
not be a
church of
Word and
sacrament also
on Christmas
and Easter?



Inter-Act

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

Introduction

Ray was excited about his new job. He would be making considerably more money than he ever had before. But his friends warned him that he would have to work with some tough characters. They were often abusive. They used foul language. They told dirty jokes. They had found numerous ways to slack off without getting caught. After the first month Ray's friends asked how it was going. "Just great!" he said. "No one even suspects that I'm a Christian."

Do the people with whom you live, work, and play know that you are a Christian? What does your attitude reveal? What do your words say about you? What do your actions suggest?

I. Text

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5.

"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God."

II. Questions

1. What words state that God has absolute standards for man's behavior?
2. The basic meaning of the word "sanctified" is "made holy" or "set apart for God." Why are we holy in God's sight? (Think about the meaning of the word justification.) What does it mean to be "set apart for God?" "Set apart" suggests that this is not our own doing. Who set us apart for God that we might live for him?
3. The word sanctification suggests that the Christian's life is to be markedly different from that of the unbeliever. Why is it to be so?
4. From what Paul stresses, what was a particular problem in the first century world? How does this underscore the relevance of God's Word to our own day and age?
5. The words "each of you should learn to control his own body," could be translated "each of you should learn to acquire a wife." Why would Paul say this (1 Corinthians 7:2,9)?
6. To what sins does "passionate lust" refer (Romans 1:26,27)?
7. What characterizes "the heathen" (Ephesians 4:17)?
8. What is the condition of those "who do not know God" (Galatians 4:8)?
9. Why does Paul stress these matters for people who are already believers?

III. Applications

1. Describe what the world would be like if there were no absolute standards of behavior.
2. Being set apart for God does not suggest that a Christian is to be aloof and unsociable. It means just the opposite. Explain.
3. What does it mean for a Christian to be "in" the world but not "of" the world?
4. Give examples of how sexual immorality pervades today's society. What specific things can you as a Christian do about it?
5. What particular things can you do to honor and uphold God's institution of marriage?
6. Agree/disagree: The lives of those who do not know God are totally frustrating, useless, and meaningless.
7. Cite an example of being a slave to something that is not God.
8. Agree/disagree: Christians are permitted to do more things today than they were a couple of generations ago.
9. The past several months we have been studying "-ion" words in Scripture. Why did we study such words as redemption and justification before we studied the word sanctification?

IV. Prayer

Father, you sent your Son to be holy for me and to die for me. Help me always show that I am your dearly loved child. Cleanse my thoughts, purify my words, and sanctify my actions. It is your will that my life should be set apart for you. Make your will my will. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

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

Loving the stranger at your door

In serving our neighbor, we show how much we care for Christ.

Paul O. Wendland

The boy sat on his dormitory bed, looking out the window. His view seemed a perfect match for his mood. He was looking out on a square patch of snow. The sky was that gray, gloomy overcast you only see in the Midwest in the dead of winter. Even the light seemed to have a gray pallor to it. Off to one side, by itself, he could see one small tree, empty of leaves. The wind shook its tiny branches with a relentless and indifferent ferocity.

The stranger outside the circle

He had come to this Christian school with great anticipation. He stood in awe of everyone: the professors with their deep understanding of God's Word and the students with their easy, American ways. They had been graced with so much by their God. Most of them had gone to Lutheran elementary schools, where they had been surrounded by Christian friends. He hoped one day he could have a few drops of the understanding that they all had seemed to absorb in abundance from birth.

But then had come the pain and the terrible longing for a home he could not go back to. For the faces of loved ones he could no longer see. For those familiar sights and sounds that would reinforce the same, comforting message, "This is where you belong. Here's where you fit in."

There were no such voices in the place he now called home. Not that his classmates were cruel or his professors unkind. There just seemed to be no one he could talk to. No one seemed to understand what he was going through.



Oh, once in a while someone would sit by him in the dining hall. They would ask, "How are you doing?" And he'd say, "Fine, fine." And they'd say, "You come from Africa, don't you? Boy, I bet you saw a lotta things there, huh? What's it like living in Africa?"

The first time someone asked him that, he thought they really wanted to know. So he began to talk about what was on his heart: how he missed the way the sky looked in the rainy season, bright with brilliant sunlight and white puffy clouds and a sky so blue you could almost lose yourself in it. He tried to speak of those long cool evenings when the air would be filled with laughter and conversation. He tried to tell them how he had once gone to a school where each one seemed to speak his own brand of English—Australians, Israelis, Africans, Americans, and Afrikaners—and where no one seemed to care or think it unusual.

He had tried to tell them. But then, either because his words were too poor or because they couldn't understand or maybe because they really didn't want to know, he saw the interest fade in their eyes. They would turn away and say, "That must have been something," and go on to other things.

After a while, he didn't even try anymore. It didn't seem to make any difference. There would always be this circle, this magic circle. Inside of it, everyone fit in. Everyone belonged. He would be stuck forever on the outside looking in.

Strangers need to be loved

"When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in

Egypt. I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:33,34). The law of love was never meant to be applied only to the members of some exclusive club. It doesn't teach us to draw circles that mark some as being out of bounds, nor does it regard those who are different as being beyond the pale.

If this was a truth God wanted his Old Testament people to remember, how much more ought we to hold it in our minds. We are a people who were once not God's people. Now we live by faith in the boundless love of God for us in Christ Jesus.

Remember, and reflect on this truth, just as God wanted his Old Testament people to reflect on his ancient ways. When did Israel's God choose to break into history in the most dramatic way? Not when they were moving freely about the promised land like Jacob and Abraham did, but when they were slaves in Egypt! Why? Because then they would know that the power to redeem was God's, and God's alone. Then they would remember what it meant to live as strangers—on the margins and at the mercy of society. Then God's great compassion would teach them to love their neighbor as themselves. From God they would learn how to love the stranger at their door.

But they forgot, didn't they? At this time of year we are reminded of another time when God broke into history. He did it in a way that was outwardly much less dramatic. A man leads a donkey into a sleeping village late at night, looking for a place for himself and his pregnant wife. Her time is upon her; already the pains are coming fast. He must hurry. He runs to the hostelry, and then, in mounting frustration, he goes from house to house. But no one seems to have room. The citizens of Bethlehem are not being purposefully unkind.


They've just been rendered indifferent to the needs of a stranger by what seem to them to be the greater demands of their own busy lives.

Are you loving the stranger at your door?

"But I'd have done something to help if I'd been there!" we say. But Luther once called these foolish thoughts. "You only think that way because you know how great he is!" he countered. Then he went on, "You have Christ in your neighbor. Serve him!" In serving our neighbor, we show how much we care for Christ.

In America we are currently experiencing a period of immigration the likes of which the country has not known since World War I. Over one in 10 people living in America these days is foreign born.

What do they discover when they encounter us in WELS? A few years back, a special synodical committee was charged with answering that question. Their conclusion? "We are comfortable in our congregations and are reluctant to do the things which would make others comfortable in our midst."¹ Another way of putting it is to say: we are not too considerate of the stranger at our door. Not because we are cruel, or purposefully unkind, but simply because we are too busy with our own lives.

These may be hard words, but we need to hear them, and consider our ways. Then we find ourselves again in the great, pardoning love of that little Stranger born for us in Bethlehem. Only in him do we find the strength to love our neighbors as ourselves, and only his love can teach us to see him in the face of every stranger. 

Paul Wendland is a professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota.

¹From the "Seeking Our Neighbor" report to the 1997 Synod in Convention.

“I am . . .” campaign attracts visitors

The objective of WELS’ Outreach 2000 evangelism campaign was twofold: to provide a positive awareness for and witness from WELS and to enable congregations to extend an invitation and to receive first-time visitors.

During the three-week Easter outreach campaign, more than half a million media pieces were used, including postcards, brochures, yard signs, mini billboards, large billboards, newspaper ads, and radio and TV spots. Each venue advertised WELS’ Web site, <www.wels.net>, and the site’s hits spiked noticeably in April (hits: March—2,367,726; April—2,404,636; May—2,344,567).

Also spiking was the number of first-time visitors to many WELS congregations. Eighty-two percent of reporting parishes (dual parishes provided single reports) received first-time visitors on Easter Sunday, at an average of 12 per parish. Twenty-nine parishes reported between 25-49 first-time visitors, six reported between 50-100 first-time visitors, and two reported over 100 first-time visitors.

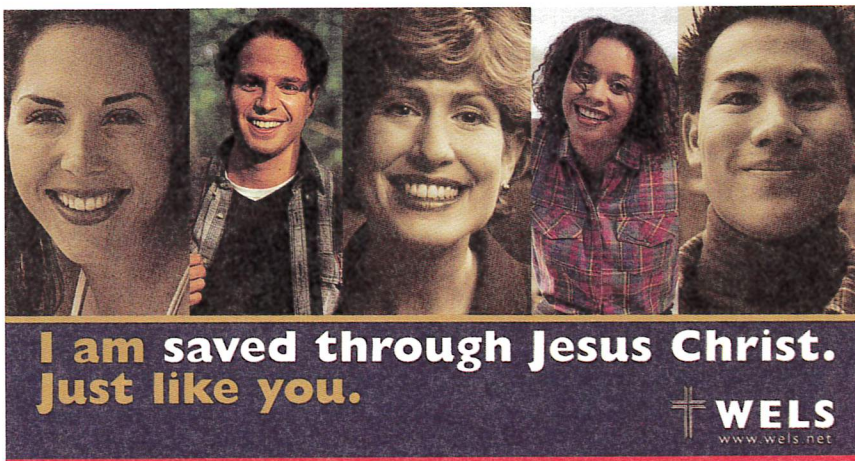
Robert Hartman, administrator for the Commission on Evangelism, notes

that first-time visitors will attend services if congregations “intentionally seek opportunities to invite visitors, appoint a task group to oversee the event, and work at expanding their prospect list.”

A congregation that followed that plan with Outreach 2000 received a letter from one of its first-time visitors. She wrote, “My husband and I received a postcard inviting us to worship with you on Easter. We liked the Christ- and Bible-centered message it conveyed, so we were here last

Sunday. The Easter service was a blessing—the message, the music, the welcome. Today I’m here alone, as Ron passed away early Monday morning. The last two things we talked about Easter evening were our wonderful long weekend and returning to this church. . . . Thank you for helping make his last day on earth—Easter—so very special. God bless you all.”

When asked whether Outreach 2000 was worth all the time and money, Hartman answers, “When you get to heaven, ask Ron!”



This brochure is one of the Outreach 2000 resources. By hosting a Friendship Sunday, your congregation can still use these brochures and other Outreach 2000 resources.

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

Christmas—through the eyes of a child

How does a little child look at Christmas? Let five-year-old Ben Bieberitz tell you (with a little help from his dad).

Lights

Every year my daddy starts the Christmas season by putting white lights outside around our house on all the bushes and wreaths and on the green trees in the backyard. He puts lights outside because Jesus is the “light of the world.” I asked my daddy

why he puts white lights out instead of colored lights, and he says it is because Jesus was white and clean without any sin. That means he didn’t do anything wrong like not sharing toys or being mean to people. . . .

Decorations

Our family likes to drive around and look at Christmas lights around our city. Some houses have a lot of decorations. This year we saw many pretty houses with many neat lights. Only some houses had manger scenes and angel decorations, and I saw one house with a lighted cross. The people who live in those houses believe in Jesus. Some houses that didn’t have

manger scenes or angel decorations don’t believe in Jesus, and that is sad.

Toys

My brother David and me got a lot of toys like a train, Legos, bikes, and cars. It is fun playing with all the toys. My dad says it is a good thing he buys batteries by the case. Those batteries make things go really fast and make flashlights really bright. Except sometimes batteries wear out, and then the toys don’t work anymore until we put new batteries in. It is a good thing God is more powerful than batteries!

Ben Bieberitz

Calvary, Thiensville, Wisconsin

Meet the editorial staff—uncut

Ever ask yourself, “Who are these people who write for *Forward/NL*?” Through this new series you can find out. Read on:

Interacting with Mark Lenz

As an author of *Forward/NL*'s “Interact” Bible study series, Mark Joel Lenz received inspiration for his current series while teaching a doctrine class at Martin Luther College. He says, “It struck me that many of the basic truths of faith are expressed in ‘-ion’ words, such as justification.”

His role as a Martin Luther College professor of religion and history has also led to Lenz guiding travel tours. In 1998 he was one of the leaders of a singing tour through Europe. This winter he is one of three leaders taking a group to Greece and Turkey to walk in the apostle Paul's footsteps.

“Hands down,” though, Lenz's favorite place is Switzerland. If he could plan the perfect day for him-

self, Lenz would take Esther, his wife of 32 years, to Switzerland. They would “walk along a mountain path in Switzerland and then stop for coffee at a sidewalk café along Lake Thun with the snow-covered Alps in the background. That would be followed by a candlelight dinner and a symphony orchestra concert.”

When not strolling through Switzerland or another exotic locale, Lenz says he and Esther “have a daily quiet time when we go for a walk or sit on the screened-in porch or in front of the fireplace and talk about the day. We listen to each other and offer support, encouragement, and advice.”

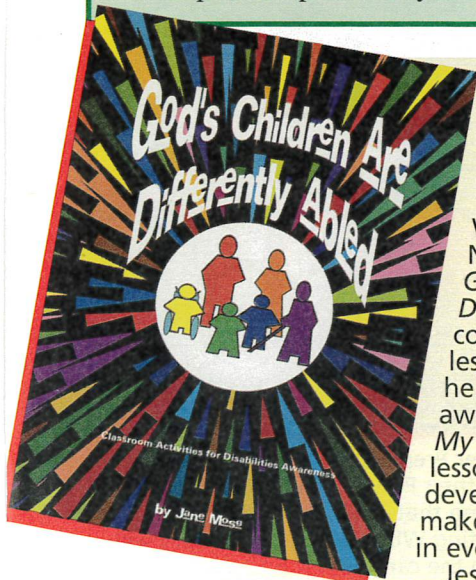
Some of their conversations focus on their three adult children, their children's spouses, and their two young grandsons. Other conversations focus on their goals. He comments, “Esther and I would



Mark and Esther Lenz pose in front of Britain's Houses of Parliament in London during a singing tour of Europe partially coordinated by Professor Lenz.

like to see more of the world. Several books I would like to write are in the embryonic stage. (I think I know what the titles will be anyway.) I'd like to transform the more than occasional squeaks and squawks of my cello into consistently beautiful music, and I'd like to compose music.”

Meanwhile, he'll continue to use his everyday experiences as a college professor to inspire his interactive Bible study writing for *Forward/NL*.



Two new publications are available from JCM Publications, a publishing division of the Jesus Cares Ministries Wisconsin Lutheran Special Needs Resource Center. *God's Children Are Differently Able* (left) contains a variety of lessons and activities to help increase disability awareness in children. *Living My Life with God* includes lessons that help adults with developmental disabilities make God-pleasing choices in everyday situations.

Jesus Cares Ministries

(JCM), a part of The Lutheran Home Association, offers support, Christian education, worship, fellowship, and evangelism programs for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

To order, contact JCM Publications, 2949 N Mayfair Rd Ste 101, Milwaukee WI 53222; 877-505-3675; <jcm@wlim-jcm.wels.net>.

Mission videos show the world

How would you like to see—with your own eyes—the work of WELS world missionaries and the people that they serve?

Now you can. A new video series, *World Missions Today*, offers that in-depth look. “Our world missions may be spread across the globe, but *World Missions Today* brings them home,” says Dan Koelpin, Board for World Missions (BWM) administrator.

Created by the BWM and the producers of *WELS Connection*, each eight-minute video will focus on a different mission. The first three missions featured are Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Apacheland.

All congregations received these first videos free due to grants from Aid Association for Lutherans and WELS Kingdom Workers. After evaluation and review, the BWM will determine if they will continue the series.

For more information, contact the Board for World Missions, 2929 N Mayfair Rd, Milwaukee WI 53222; 414/256-3233; <KoelpinD@sab.wels.net>.

Who's going to win?

While the eyes of the world were turned to the Olympics in Sydney, Australia, the eyes of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa (LCCA) were focused on Chipata, Zambia. Pastors and missionaries from Malawi were going for the gold against their brothers from Zambia in the tug of war contest. The Olympic events were the culmination of a joint pastors' conference held between the sister conferences of the LCCA.

For three days, over 50 men joined together in worshipping our Lord, discussing problems and threats to the LCCA, and strengthening each other in Christian fellowship. A tour of a cotton gin and the "LCCA Olympics" concluded the conference. Such annual conferences are crucial for a fledgling church body less than 50 years

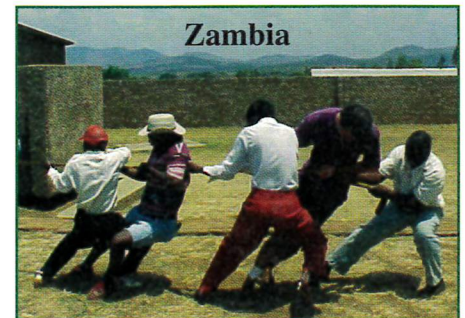
old as it works toward the goal of standing on its own two feet in Christian maturity.

So who's going to win? When everyone gets together to study God's Word and grow up together in the truth, the winners are the pastors, missionaries, and finally all the members of the LCCA. Please pray for us that we may "prepare God's people

for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach the unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12,13).

By the way: Malawi won the tug of war, but Zambia won the Olympics!

Paul L. Wegner



High schools focus on Forward in Christ

There seems to be no end to the ways that Forward in Christ (FIC) can be celebrated. These high schools put their own twists on the 150th anniversary celebration.

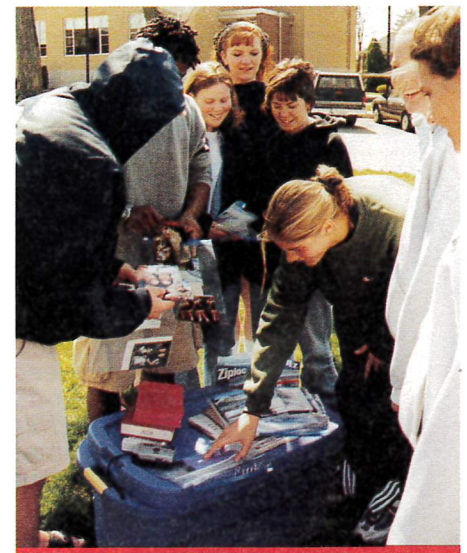
- **Luther Preparatory School (LPS), Watertown, Wis.**—A student FIC committee planned a variety of events. Chapel services utilizing special music and liturgy allowed students and faculty to praise God. Students also participated in the burial of a time capsule and an FIC art contest, won by Beth Boehringer.
- **Kettle Moraine LHS, Jackson, Wis.**—Kettle Moraine sponsored an FIC week Feb. 21-25. Speakers shared information about the various aspects of WELS' ministry.
- **Fox Valley LHS (FVL), Appleton, Wis.**—FVL used "Forward in Christ" as their theme for the 1999-2000 school year. FVL's communications director, Dave Payne, is coordinating the production of a commemorative booklet outlining the history of each area Lutheran high school.

- **Lakeside LHS, Lake Mills, Wis.**—Lakeside used the Forward in Christ logo to make signs for the school doors and the gym. School devotions for the 1999-2000 school year reflected the Forward in Christ theme. This year Lakeside's theme is Forward in Christ—Together, Forgiven.



Lakeside Lutheran High School is boldly proclaiming its intention to go forward in Christ.

- **Illinois LHS (ILHS), Crete**—ILHS's senior class built a timeline showing U.S. History, WELS history, and the histories of the two congregations that support the high school, Trinity and Zion, both located in Crete. The time-



Luther Preparatory students pack items into their Forward in Christ time capsule hoping that in 50 years LPS students celebrating WELS' 200th anniversary will open the capsule.

line serves as a visual learning tool for the high school students and for Trinity and Zion's congregations as they study "Anniversary Reflections," the Bible study prepared for the FIC celebration.

WELS news 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.

Vice-President for Mission and Ministry

414/256-3204

In existence since 1997, the **Synodical Council held a retreat in August in which it examined its role and function in depth.**

The Council emphasized that its main objective is "raising the sights and setting the direction of the synod."

Council members consider the synod's critical issue to "encourage people to a passion for all the lost and help them discover how to reach these people." Built into this is the understanding that we must reach across ethnic, social, generational, and philosophical boundaries.

Critical issue number two is "individualizing spiritual growth and evangelism." Each individual Christian needs to grow in his personal use of the Word and then in his personal sharing of that Word with others.

Communication Services Commission

414/256-3210

The biennial theme for 2001

to 2003 is "Work while it is day."

This theme begins at the synod convention in July 2001.



Board for Ministerial Education

414/256-3237

Enrollment figures are out for WELS' four ministerial education schools. They include Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis., and Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw (high schools that prepare students for full-time church work);

Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. (college that trains teachers and prepares men for the seminary); and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon (four-year seminary that trains pastors).

Enrollment

| | 98-99 | 99-00 | 00-01 | Increase |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|----------|
| WLS (on campus) | 103 | 117 | 111 | -5% |
| MLC | 863 | 912 | 1026 | +13% |
| LPS | 528 | 581 | 576 | -1% |
| MLS | 338 | 367 | 379 | +3% |
| Total | 1832 | 1977 | 2092 | +6% |

Commission on Evangelism

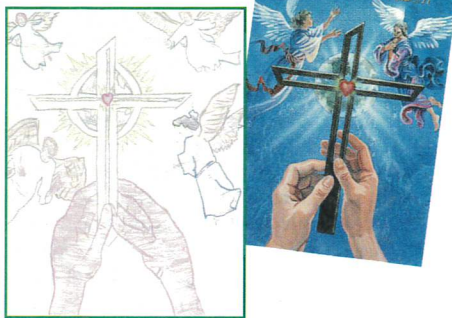
414/256-3287

Evangelism Sunday 2001

resources are available either in print form or via e-mail attachment. Feb. 4 is the suggested date for an evangelism emphasis in 2001. However, the resources can be used at any time.

Commission on Youth Discipleship

414/256-3224



Stacy Sanchez, an eighth-grade member at King of Kings, Garden Grove, Calif., won the 2000 children's Christmas card contest. The concepts in her drawing (left) were used to create the card (right) available for sale from the Commission on Evangelism. Call 800/884-9312 or 414/256-3281 to order "He Came For Me!" postcards.

Strengthening Sunday School for Today and Tomorrow contains resources to assist in evaluating, planning, and implementing ways

to strengthen your congregation's ministry to children. To receive your free copy, contact your district youth discipleship coordinator or the Commission on Youth Discipleship (CYD).

"Get Real" is the theme for the 2001 International Youth Rally being held July 11-14 at Iowa State University, Ames. For information, contact Kris Snyder, 414/527-6854.

Christmas for Kids vacation Bible school program is updated for this year. A new lesson was developed for this popular one-day event that can help your congregation reach out into your community. The Christmas for Kids kit includes student lessons, leader's guide, and promotional resources. To order a kit, contact CYD.

Commission on Parish Schools

414/256-3223

This fall the **Commission on Parish Schools (CPS) administered its first annual survey of teachers and principals.** CPS hopes these surveys will allow them to better serve our schools and teachers. This year's survey questions dealt with curriculum standards, achievement testing, factors that hinder continuing education, faculty Bible studies, and the Care Committee for Called Workers.

Commission on Adult Discipleship

414/256-3277

The **Senior Ministry Committee produced the Senior Ministry Handbook**, a tool congregations can use to encourage seniors in the service they can give to their Lord and his church. Every congregation received a complimentary copy and is encouraged to get the resource into the hands of an active, enthusiastic, take-charge senior member who will implement some of the handbook's ideas. To receive a copy of the handbook, contact the Commission on Adult Discipleship at 414/256-3278.

District news

South Central

About 400 people responded to **Abiding Word, Houston, Texas's**, invitation to an open house/barbecue served on Sept. 10 in connection with the dedication of its new 22,500 square foot Christian Life Center & School. The new facility houses Abiding Word's K-8 school and includes a full-sized gymnasium and space for Bible classes and youth activities.

Minnesota

On Sept. 17, **Grace, Oronoco, Minn.**, held a Sunday school teachers' honor dinner in gratitude to God for past and present teachers, including Olive Campbell for her 41 years of service.

Kimberly Warning, special education teacher, is coordinating **Jesus Cares Ministries' new inclusion program**. The purpose of the inclusion program is to assist parents, principals, and teachers in providing a Christ-centered education to children with special needs who are not currently in Lutheran elementary schools. Schools needing help in serving special needs students should contact Warning at 877/505-3675.

California



Myra Heyn, member at Hope, Penryn, Calif., and her four grandchildren recently visited with Olympic champion Stacy Dragila. Heyn, a retired schoolteacher, both taught and coached Dragila in junior high school in Auburn, Calif. Dragila is the current world-record holder and gold medal winner in women's pole vaulting.

North Atlantic

In September, members of **Christ Redeemer, Trumbull, Conn.**, offered a community car wash, along with church pamphlets and an opportunity to talk with the pastor. One young man heard about Jesus as his Savior for the first time.

Western Wisconsin

Check out **Lutheran Girl Pioneers'** Web site, <www.lgp.org>.

Northern Wisconsin

On Oct. 8-9, the **Northern Wisconsin District** hosted a **Forward in Christ** celebration for district called workers. The district's called workers enjoyed a reception at the Park Plaza Paper Valley Hotel, Appleton, Wis., and a service at Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton.

In October, **Aid Association for Lutherans (AAL)** launched their Lutherans Online site, <www.lutheransonline.com>, that offers free Web hosting for Lutheran congregations and organizations. Other services include e-mail greeting cards, message boards, free e-mail, and tutorials to assist in building Web sites.

South Atlantic

Ascension, Sarasota, Fla., and Peace, Bradenton, Fla., are working together to sponsor a daughter congregation in eastern Manatee County, Fla. They have 10 acres of land, and the Board for Home Missions recently granted them permission to call a mission explorer.

Members of **Abiding Peace, Greenville, S.C.**, dedicated their new worship facility on Aug. 27. Several Builders For Christ who volunteered on the Abiding Peace building project were in attendance.

On Oct. 15, members of **Sola Fide, Lawrenceville, Ga.**, dedicated their new church and school facility.

Southeastern Wisconsin

Twelve-year old **Alison Kuhn** designed the winning theme for the 2000/2001 Lutheran Girl Pioneers' membership button. Her theme, Forward in Faith, was deemed appropriate in light of WELS' 150th anniversary theme, Forward in Christ. Kuhn is active in the LGP group at Faith, Antioch, Ill.

Happy Anniversary!

CA—On Sept. 17, members of **Shepherd of the Mountains, Reno, Nev.**, cel-

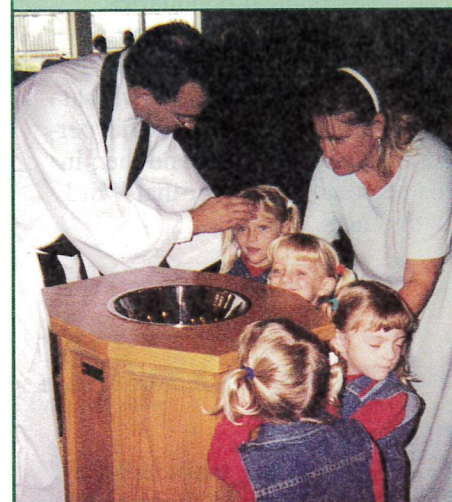
ebrated their 25th anniversary as a congregation and 20th anniversary of their Lutheran elementary school.

NA—Members of **St. Paul, Amherst, N.H.**, celebrated the church's 25th anniversary on Nov. 5. In connection with the anniversary, the congregation embarked on "Faith Comes by Hearing," a program in which members read or listen to the entire Bible by the end of the year. For each book finished, a leaf was added to a vine that was "growing" from the roots of Jesus and his Word in one corner of the fellowship hall. Several vines reached the opposite wall, and new ones are sprouting every month.

SEW—On Oct. 15, members of Fairview, Milwaukee, Wis., praised God for **Jim Aderman's** 25 years of service in the pastoral ministry.

Richard Lauersdorf celebrated his 40th anniversary in the pastoral ministry on Oct. 15 at David's Star, Jackson, Wis.

California



Dan Wagenknecht, pastor at Grace, Yorba Linda, Calif., baptized the Hasson quadruplets on Oct. 1. The four-year-old quads attended Grace's vacation Bible school in August. After follow-up visits, their parents decided to allow Wagenknecht to baptize Amy, Catherine, Rachal, and Sarah. The quads attended Sunday school, and their parents accompanied them to worship on Oct. 1.

Western Wisconsin



“Who said billboards and mailings were the only ways to spread God’s message? Garage doors work, too!” write Harold and Terri Herlich, members at Living Hope, Peoria, Ill.

These pastors are the reporters for the districts featured this month: CA—Hermann John; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NA—Kevin Schultz; NW—Joel Lillo; SA—Mark Haefner; SC—Peter Snyder; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Elton Stroh.

Symbols for your life

Symbol: The descending dove

Background and meaning: This symbol comes directly from the Bible. Matthew 3:16,17 says, “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with whom I am well pleased.’” At Jesus’ baptism all three persons of the Trinity were present: the Father’s voice, the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, and Jesus, the Son of God. This symbol is one of the most widely used in religious art.



Bible gems: “As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove” (Mark 1:10).

“Then John gave this testimony: ‘I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him’” (John 1:32).

“No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3).

A symbol for your life: Why is the Holy Spirit important to you? Through what does he do his work? What must we continue to do throughout our lives? On what festival do we especially celebrate the Holy Spirit and his work?

Unity in diversity

You might have thought you were back at Babel at the time when God confused human language or that you had walked in on a charismatic service with people speaking in tongues.

What you actually were hearing was the Lord’s Prayer spoken in nine languages. Participants spoke the prayer together in English at Sunday morning worship as a recognition of their unity of faith. Then they spoke it in nine languages as a joyful celebration of our diversity.

Over Labor Day weekend, Martin Luther College (MLC) invited its international and culturally diverse students to a two-day retreat at the Marvin Schwan Retreat Center, Trego, Wis. Twenty-eight students, from 10 countries and from different minority cultures within the United States, gathered for mutual encouragement around the Word of God.

The retreat’s purpose was to help MLC’s international and culturally diverse students adjust to life at the college, form friendships with other students, and grow spiritually.



The attendees at the two-day retreat for international and culturally diverse students at Martin Luther College.

Presenters encouraged students to look to God as the source of strength and comfort in difficult times. Counselors from Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service helped them understand the psychological aspects of culture shock. Bible study and discussion groups directed them back to God, to God’s Word, and to God’s people for help in time of need. A faculty member presented information and suggestions for better study skills. Conversation, canoeing, and campfires rounded out the activities.

Did it work? On the bus on the way home the students said, “Let’s keep getting together for regular

Bible study and fellowship.” The following week one student who was at the retreat said, “It’s great, we see each other in the cafeteria, and we sit together—no more sitting alone to eat.”

MLC has 16 international students and 15 to 20 American minority students. Just as God turned Babel’s curse to blessing at Pentecost, so God enriches life at MLC by having these different cultures on campus. We pray that the Lord would continue to send us students from diverse cultures and backgrounds to prepare for ministry in an ever-increasing multicultural society. We also recognize and give thanks for the unity that binds us together—one body and one spirit.

Mark Goeglein



Mormons continue to grow in numbers—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the Mormons) continues to grow, recently passing the 11 million membership mark.

At the church's centennial anniversary in 1947, it had one million members, most living in Utah. Now about 5.1 million Mormons live in the United States, and almost six million are overseas, according to church figures. The church's active missionary work brought in 300,000 new members last year.



Next "Weigh Down" book canceled—

In September, Thomas Nelson Publishers stopped publication of a new Christian weight-loss book by Gwen Shamblin, who was accused of rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity. Comments on the Weigh Down Web site prompted questions of her beliefs.

Gwen Shamblin's book, *The Weigh Down Diet*, sold more than 1 million copies since it was published in 1997, and thousands of churches hold "Weigh Down" workshops each week.

Abortion pill approved by FDA—

In September, the Food and Drug Administration approved the use of the abortion pill, RU-486, to terminate early pregnancies.

This method of using mifepristone along with another drug, misoprostol, is available for up to 49 days after a woman's last menstrual period. Besides killing the unborn baby, this drug also can be harmful to the mother.

Pro-life and pro-choice organizations are up in arms over this decision. But the president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America estimated that the pill would be available at her organization's centers in November.

[*LifeWire*, Sept. 29, 2000]

Book covers sport the Ten Commandments in Chicago public schools—

The Total Living Network, an independent religious television-based ministry, can give out 100,000 book covers featuring the Ten Commandments and inspirational quotes to Chicago public school students.

The school district approved this distribution as long as students aren't forced to take the book covers and the covers are distributed off school grounds. Church-state groups also agree as long as the school district remains neutral.

Religious e-books available for download—

Thomas Nelson, a Christian publishing company based in Nashville, Tenn., began releasing best-selling books through Internet retailers in November.

Consumers will be able to purchase more than a dozen best-selling religious titles through e-tailer channels and download them into their computers.

Survey: Pastors' opinions on the death penalty and physician-assisted suicide—

A recent survey shows that pastors support the death penalty 72 percent to 28 percent. About 15 percent feel strongly that the death penalty should be abolished.

An even larger majority opposes the practice of physician-assisted suicide. Eighty-three percent oppose it, while only 17 percent support laws allowing this practice.

Ellison Research conducted this survey of 518 Protestant pastors. The survey had a margin of error of plus or minus 4.3 percentage points.

Tomb of St. Peter refurbished—

The Vatican has finished restoring what Christians believe to be the tomb of St. Peter, located in the ancient mausoleums under St. Peter's Basilica.

It took two years for chemists,

physicists, and lighting experts to clear away the mold, algae, fungi, and salt, which had accumulated over the centuries.

The mausoleums were covered over by the Emperor Constantine in the fourth century. Excavation of the tombs, now 6 to 16 yards underground, began in 1939.

Catholic exorcist hired in Chicago—

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago hired the first full-time exorcist in its 160-year history.

The priest has been on staff for a year, but his appointment was recently made public. He will be responsible for purging demons from possessed people.

The Boston and New York Archdioceses also have exorcists.

Survey: Religious beliefs and spiritual practices in the 21st century—

According to a recent poll, the American public sees nothing but growth in the areas of religious beliefs and spiritual practices over the next century.

Sixty percent think that religious beliefs or spiritual practices will change the way we think over the next 100 years. Eighty percent predict that these beliefs will become more of a force in people's lives rather than less.

The poll also shows that many (70 percent) believe that the growth in quality of religious beliefs is important in order to guide advances in science and technology.

This survey, titled "Religious Beliefs, Spiritual Practices, and Science in the 21st century," was conducted for the John Templeton Foundation by The Gallup Organization.

[*Emerging Trends*, April 2000]

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

- Diener, Robert J.**, to St. Peter, Larsen/Zion, Readfield, Wis.
- Jeske, John C.**, to retirement
- Kuether, Lon P.**, to St. Mark, Bemidji, Minn.
- Martz, M. Scott**, to Lamb of God, Phoenix, Ariz.
- Mohlke, Howard O.**, to St. Paul, Norfolk, Neb.
- Pankow, Thomas K.**, to Grace, Manitowoc, Wis.
- Ruppel, James A.**, to Good Hope, Ellensburg/Good Faith, South Cle Elum, Wash.
- Schmidt, Daniel R.**, to St. John, St. Clair, Minn.
- Smith, Jeffrey S.**, to Living Word, Petaluma, Calif.

SYNOD CONVENTION

The 56th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod will be held July 30-Aug. 3, 2001, at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw. Details will be announced later. Memorials to be included in the *Book of Reports and Memorials* (BoRaM) must be submitted to the president's office by Feb. 1, 2001.

REQUEST FOR COLLOQUY

John Weaver-Hudson, Birmingham, Mich., a pastor who was in the LCMS colloquy process, has now requested a colloquy for the purpose of serving in the pastoral ministry in WELS. Correspondence related to this request should be addressed to President John C. Seifert, Michigan District, 907 Mattes Dr, Midland MI 48642-3708; <MidPWELS@aol.com>.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The Synod Nominating Committee will meet Jan. 3-4, 2001, at the synod administration building. The committee will propose three candidates for each position:

- Synodical Council member (teacher)
- Northwestern Publishing House Board of Directors: three board members (layman, teacher, pastor)
- Board for Parish Services: chairman, board member (teacher), commission member for Evangelism (pastor) and Parish Schools (teacher)
- Board for Ministerial Education: chairman, two board members (one area Lutheran high school representative, one layman)
- Michigan Lutheran Seminary Board of Control chairman
- Luther Preparatory School Board of Control chairman
- Board for World Missions board member at large
- Board for World Missions administrative committee members: Latin America (pastor, teacher), Native American (pastor, layman), Africa (pastor, layman), Japan Europe Asia (pastor, teacher), Southeast Asia (pastor)
- Synod Board of Appeals: chairman, three pastors, three teachers, and three laymen

The list of candidates nominated will be published in spring 2001. The delegates will elect one candidate for each position at the synod convention on July 30-Aug. 3, 2001. Any synod voting member is invited to send names with pertinent information by Dec. 15, 2000, to Pastor Douglas Bode, PO Box 423, Aurora CO 80040; 303/364-0890; FAX, 303/364-0891; <welsec@aol.com>.

The synod administration building will be closed: Dec. 25, Christmas; Jan. 1, 2001, New Year's Day. Callers may leave voice mail messages, 414/256-3888.

NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS

The cutoff date for Congregation Mission Offering (CMO) receipts in the synod's post office lock box is the last business day of each month. December 2000 offerings sent to our lock box will be credited as 2000 receipts through Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2001, as long as they are received in the lock box on or before that date and are clearly labeled as "December" offerings on the remittance coupon. We ask that you continue to mail your offerings to the lock box. That location, our bank, will provide you with the fastest deposit process for your congregation.

Mark Meissner, director of finance

COMING EVENTS

Concerts—Lutheran Chorale, Dec. 3. 3 & 7 PM, Atonement, Milwaukee. Mary Prange, 414/873-9105.

Living nativity—St. Paul, Muskego, Wis. Dec. 8-10, 6-9 PM. Presentation every 20 minutes with fellowship. Heidi Schuh, 262/679-4284.

Concerts—Lutheran Festival Chorus, "Celebrating 25 Years of Spreading God's Word Through Song." Dec. 10. 3 PM, Jerusalem, Morton Grove, Ill.; 7:30 PM, Trinity, Crete, Ill. Marvin Koch, 847/437-8187.

Women's retreat—Jan. 12-14, 2001, Montverde, Fla. Cost: \$110. Judy Becker, 941/355-6591.

LWMS 2001 WOW retreats—Jan. 19-21, Winter Park, Fla., area. Jennifer Rosenbaum, 321/453-1000.

Mar. 2-3, Mishicot, Wis. Kathie Wendland, 920/682-5694.

Apr. 27-29, Williamsburg, Va. Lynnette Hupman, 703/361-1419.

May 4-6, Otter Crest, Ore. Char LaForest, 541/388-2405.

Sept. 21-22, Escanaba, Mich. Betty Warning, 715/484-4405.

Mid September, Larkspur, Colo. Tiphonie Figurski, 719/534-9697.

Oct. 5-6, Trego, Wis. Betty Ruffedt, 715/568-1248.

Oct. 12-13, Davenport, Iowa. Deonne Titus, 815/273-2780.

Nov. 9-10, Milwaukee, Wis. Sarah Malchow, 414/389-0010.

TBA, Toledo, Ohio. Ruth Kemerley, 419/365-5503.

TBA, Atlanta, Ga. Chery Simpson, 334/607-0296.

WELS Christian couples' retreat—Feb. 16-18, 2001. Green Lake, Wis. Pam See, 262/691-1989.

Women's retreat—Pathways to Christ Retreat, Mar. 16-18, 2001. Pioneer Inn, Oshkosh, Wis. Dorothy Laabs, 920/235-6495.

Christian Woman Today retreat—19th annual. Sponsored by Christ the Lord, Brookfield, Wis. Mar. 23-25, 2001, at Olympia Resort, Oconomowoc, Wis. Brochures available in January. Kathie Mueller, 262-521-1159.

Spiritual Renewal Weekend for Women—Mar. 30-Apr. 1, 2001. Radisson Hotel, Rochester, Minn. Bev, 507/931-3945.

Today's Christian Women's retreat—Mar. 30-Apr. 1, 2001. Radisson Hotel, Toledo, Ohio. Brochures available in Jan. Laurie, 248/391-1133.

WELS handbell festivals—

Northeast region, Apr. 21-22, 2001, Fox Valley LHS, Appleton, Wis.

Southeast region, Apr. 21-22, 2001, Shoreland LHS, Somers, Wis.

Western region, Mar. 31-Apr. 1, 2001, Great Plains LHS, Watertown, S.D.

Michigan region, Apr. 28, 2001, St. Paul Lutheran School, Livonia, Mich.

Cheryl Diener, 715/258-7203.

European choral/history study tour II—Sing the music of the Renaissance and Baroque masters in Italy, Austria, and Germany. June 17-July 6, 2001. Credit available for music or history through MLC. Cost, approximately \$2,975. Roger Hermanson or Mark Lenz, 800/686-4142.

WELS Tech 2001—technology conference for pastors, teachers, and laypeople. July 15-18, 2001, Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis. Registration forms will be mailed in February. <<http://www.wels.net/welstech2001>>. To get on a mailing list, contact Debbie, 414/256-3210; <welstech2001@sab.wels.net>.

AVAILABLE

Dishes—123 plates and cups, off-white with green edge, restaurant quality. Available for cost of shipping. Kathy Schlicht, 320/589-4662.

Paraments—traditional colors excluding black, available for cost of shipping. St. Paul, Hopkins, Mich., 616/793-7222.

SERVICE TIMES

Sheridan, Wyo.—Valley Ev. Lutheran Church. Meets at Sheridan Women's Club, 20 Tschirgi St. Sunday service, 2 PM. Sunday school and teen and adult Bible class, 3 PM. 307/672-7599.

Yuma, Ariz.—Prince of Peace, 2500 S 8 Ave. Sunday service time for Dec.-Mar., 8:15 & 10:45 AM; Apr.-Nov., 9 AM. Alan W. Gumm, 520/726-8716.

NAMES WANTED

Japan mission field—searching for returning Japanese who have been studying or staying abroad with whom you have been in contact. Kermit Habben, <kdhabben@cb3.so-net.ne.jp>.

Wausau, Wis.—Salem Lutheran Church. Roy Hoenecke, 715/845-2822.

THROUGH MY BIBLE IN 3 YEARS

If you have been following the readings of "Through my Bible in three years," you have now made it through your Bible. Last month's readings ended the third year. If you want the full listing of these readings, check out the Web site at <www.wels.net/sab/frm-3yr.html> or contact the Commission on Adult Discipleship, 414/256-3278; <carlam@sab.wels.net>. Look for a new set of readings next month.

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

The LORD, he is God

“The LORD, he is God” became Elijah’s worship cry during his public ministry.

James A. Aderman

יהוה

HE IS GOD

“**T**he LORD, he is God! The LORD, he is God!” What began with one astounded man’s half-whispered confession quickly infected a crowd of thousands as the words leaped from mouth to ear. Now a mountaintop of Israelite men bellowed the worship cry. “The LORD, he is God!” The clamor cascaded down the side of Mount Carmel, skittering across the wide Kishon Valley to the north and east.

Elijah, God’s spokesman

Leading the worship was a wildly bearded man. Dressed in a camel hair robe with a broad leather belt, he looked, in some ways, as uncouth and dangerous as a Hell’s Angel. He exulted over an eye-popping miracle that had just affirmed the omnipotence of the LORD. With fire from heaven, the God of Israel had consumed a water-drenched sacrifice while Baal’s altar continued to testify to that idol’s impotence.

His name was Elijah, *Eliahu* in Hebrew. His name was a confession of faith, meaning “the LORD (*Yahweh*) is my God.” He was the Lord’s spokesman to an idolatrous nation. He represented the holy, unapproachable God whose unfathomable love, somehow, would not allow him to reject his wayward people.

“The LORD, he is God!” is a description of Elijah’s entire public ministry. In the Lord’s name and backed by his protection, Elijah accosted Israel’s fickle and ruthless kings, demanding a return to the true religion. Dressed in the armor of God, he stood alone and unafraid against 450 priests of Baal. Shielded by Absolute Truth, he demanded fealty toward the God of truth from a people who, at best, vacillated between the LORD and false gods.

Elijah, Israel’s reminder

Israel needed to be reminded that the LORD is God. About 60 years before Elijah appeared, the kingdom of Solomon and David had split into two countries. All the kings in the northern half, called Israel, worked to sever every connection with the Lord. They even set up alternate worship sites and urged their people to follow foreign gods.

Among the worst of those kings was Jeroboam, the first to rule. But Ahab, the king during much of Elijah’s life, outdid Jeroboam in godlessness and immorality. His wife, Jezebel, goaded him on. She was a heathen princess from Sidon, Israel’s neighbor to the north. When Jezebel

moved into his palace she unpacked the powerful influence of her pagan ideals, treachery, and religion.

Elijah, the man

Elijah, however, wasn’t just a fiery preacher. He was complex. The prophet’s mountain-man exterior cloaked a much more vulnerable interior. In his private life we find a gentle and loving friend. When we peel away the iron-handed firmness that his ministry required, we discover a soft heart challenged by living out that persona.

Though often thrust into the public eye, Elijah was a man comfortable being alone. He spent solitary weeks with only his God as a companion.

And like every child of God, grateful for forgiveness and resurrection, Elijah lived in the joy that “The LORD, he is God!”

James Aderman is pastor at Fairview, Milwaukee.

For further study

1. How is the Lord’s relationship with you and his purpose for you similar to his relationship with and purpose for Elijah?
2. Read Philippians 3:7-11. the meaning of Elijah’s name, “The LORD is my God.” How does a similar lifestyle show in you?

A Christmas confession

Christmas is a mystical time of year, a season for the senses, a time for faith. Children are said to go to bed, excitedly, with “visions of sugar-plums” dancing in their heads. Many people, nostalgically, dream “of a white Christmas, just like the ones I used to know.” Armies have been known to recess hostilities on Christmas Eve, calling a 24-hour truce, almost as if war, or any other human catastrophe, can be turned on and off like a light switch.

Such hope—much of it, unfortunately—is pure fantasy. And yet, for a moment or two each Christmas, almost everything seems believable. Sadly, though, the greatest hope of all is judged by many to be unbelievable, pure fantasy. Thank God for the faith to believe it!

“I believe,” the Apostles’ Creed affirms, “in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth. . . . in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord . . . and in the Holy Spirit. . . .”

God-inspired trust in these three articles of faith makes Christmas, or Easter, or any church festival enjoyable and enduring.

“I believe in God, the Father almighty.”

“God made me,” Martin Luther confesses in his Small Catechism, “. . . and he gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my mind, and all my abilities.” And, Luther affirms, “God still preserves me by richly and daily providing . . . all that I need to keep my body and life. . . . All this God does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because I have earned or deserved it.”

“I believe in Jesus Christ.”

Luther, while never wanting us to overlook these richly undeserved temporal gifts, quickly returns to far richer and more costly eternal blessings of God, in the second article

of the creed. “He . . . purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil.” These rich gifts were secured for us by our Savior, Luther reminds us, “not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death.” And all this he did for us that we “should be his own and live under him in his kingdom.”

The reality behind it all, its lasting beauty, comes to us fully each Christmas as we, in faith, encounter again the incarnation. God’s Son takes our flesh and blood, becoming a child.

The wonder of it staggers human logic. It doesn’t seem reasonable for God to become a man. Even the best of human beings falls far short of being Godlike, completely pure and innocent. While every human birth is a wonder, none approaches the miraculous proportions of the incarnation: no human father, only an earthly mother. And so, when the God-man dies, what redeems us is his holy, precious blood, his innocent suffering and death.

“I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

From a human perspective, though, it still is not enough. It takes faith to believe it. Trust in something this incredible takes more than human reason. It requires an implant, a gift from the outside, faith—all the Spirit’s doing.

“He will give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ,” explains Luther.

None of this is seasonal fantasy, a mere illusion. All of it is real. And so, with Luther, we would conclude a Christmas confession with our own statement of faith: “This is most certainly true!”



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

God-inspired
trust in these
three articles
of faith makes
Christmas, or
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God's will be done

John F. Brug

In connection with the change of the millennium I heard a sermon in which the pastor said, "[The end] may not come for another 2000 years, but that is not what we expect. We enter 2000 with the firm expectation that there will never be a year 3000, because Jesus is coming back first. . . . We cross the threshold of what will probably be the last millennium." How does this agree with Matthew 24:36 that we can't know the time?

Because all the signs of the end are present in increasing measure as nations of "Christendom" are becoming more heathen again, we can say Christ's return could be at any time. It certainly appears that the time is ripe for Christ's return. Yet we must admit there have been other dark times for the church, for example on the eve of the Reformation. Luther was quite confident that the end was near, but God gave a time of revival of the church's fortunes. He may do so again.

The point he is stressing is that we should both be ready for and eagerly looking forward to Christ's return.

Perhaps the statement of "a firm expectation that there will never be a year 3000" is a bit strong, but the preacher seems to qualify it with "it may not come for another 2000 years" and "what will probably be the last millennium."

The point he is stressing is that we should both be ready for and eagerly looking forward to Christ's return. We should be praying for it and working for it by preaching the gospel throughout the world. Whether or not the world lasts another millennium or two, we know that for each of us, the end of this world is coming within this century.

Why do we vote to call pastors and teachers instead of drawing a name from the qualified candidates like the disciples did in picking a replacement for Judas? Is voting for the candidates something new to our democratic United States?

It seems that electing pastors from a slate of qualified candidates has always been the practice (or at least a practice) of the church except when a hierarchical clergy usurped the right of choosing pastors for itself. Our Lutheran Confessions refer to the election of pastors, especially in the section of the Smalcald Articles about the authority of bishops, which says that it is necessary for the Church to retain the authority to call, elect, and ordain ministers. There is no specific detail about the method of election. Writings of the early church also refer to a vote by the church. Sometimes the church retained only the right to approve the candidate proposed to them by the bishops. Even in Acts 1 it is not certain that the successor of Judas was chosen without a vote. Most translations refer to "casting lots," but some commentaries maintain that the Greek term refers to a vote, not to casting lots.

Nothing in Scripture forbids a congregation from drawing a name

from a list of qualified candidates nor from delegating its right to call to another group as congregations do when they go to the assignment committee with a request for a seminary graduate. But voting is a fine way to express the right of the congregation to choose its pastor.

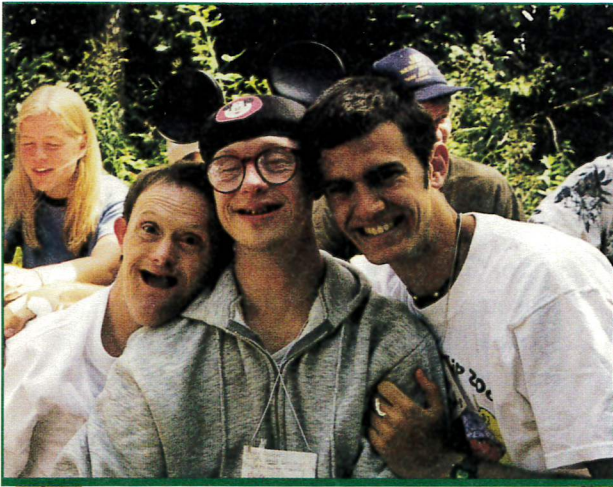
A friend asked me whether angels are male or female. I said I didn't know, but later thought that they are neither—just God's heavenly beings carrying out his will.

Your feeling was correct. Though angels sometimes appeared with a form like that of young men, angels are spirits. As such they have no physical bodies (Hebrews 1:14—"angels are ministering spirits," Luke 24:39—"a spirit does not have flesh and bones"). Angels do not reproduce sexually (Matthew 22:30).

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

DEFINING RELIGION

Soul: the divinely created, non-material part of a human being which is the seat of life, center of self-consciousness, and seat of an individual's thinking, willing, and feeling. The soul will never cease to exist. At death it returns to God to enter eternal joy or eternal torment. On the last day a person's soul will be reunited with his resurrected body to continue eternally in heaven or hell.



Campers John Wojnarowicz and Mark Perkins, and counselor Matthew Bown (l to r) enjoying the fellowship at Camp Phillip, Wautoma, Wis. Every year the Southeastern Wisconsin District Chapter of Jesus Cares Ministries sponsors a week-long camp filled with crafts, singing, devotions, Bible studies, and fellowship for about 26 developmentally-disabled people.

Submitted by Amy Towner

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.

CHRISTMAS PRAYERS

Looking for new prayers for during the Christmas season? Why not pull out your hymnal and use some of the old familiar Christmas carols we all love to sing. Not only are their melodies beautiful, but their words also strike chords within our hearts. Here are some to check out:

Remembering:

From Heaven Above to Earth I Come
(*Christian Worship* 38)

Behold, a Branch is Growing (CW 47)

Reflecting:

Of the Father's Love Begotten (CW 35)

Silent Night! Holy Night (CW 60)

Rejoicing:

Oh, Rejoice, All Christians, Loudly (CW 45)

Joy to the World (CW 62)

Retelling (sharing):

Go, Tell It on the Mountain (CW 57)

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing (CW 61)



FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE

And now these three remain:

FAITH

"Now **faith** is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."—Hebrews 11:1

"For it is by **grace** you have been saved, through **faith**—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."—Ephesians 2:8,9

HOPE

"But those who **hope** in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."—Isaiah 40:31

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living **hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."—1 Peter 1:3

AND LOVE

"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his **love** endures forever."—Psalm 118:1

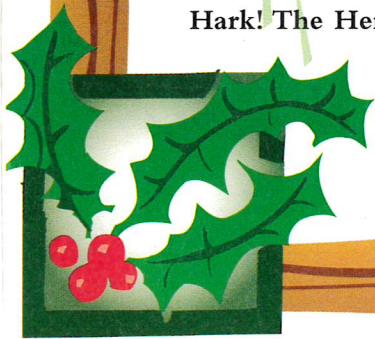
"For God so **loved** the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."—John 3:16

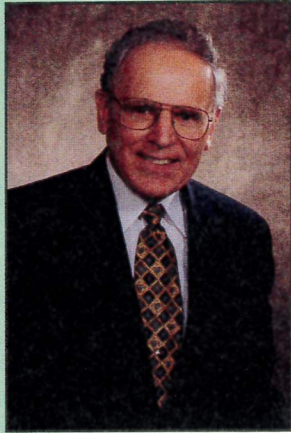
MAYBE NOAH KNOWS

One of the books we gave our two-year-old daughter, Annie, features Noah and the animals he took with him in the ark. One summer we visited the San Diego Zoo where Annie was able to see some of the creatures that accompanied Noah during the flood.

At one of the displays my husband saw a strange animal he'd never seen before. He blurted out, "What is that?" Annie looked at him and said, "I don't know. Go ask Noah!"

*Michelle Carrillo
Corona, California*





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

Are you afraid
that because
you're not
good enough
God will pass
you by?

“Do not be afraid.”

The four-year-old cried out, “Mom! Dad! I’m afraid. I hear a noise.”
“There’s nothing to be afraid of, Son. Go to sleep.”

Moments later, now crying: “Dad! Mom! Something’s in my room. I can hear it.”

This time Dad came upstairs and appeared in the doorway. He listened for a bit, then came and put his arm around his son: “Don’t be afraid. It’s just the window shade rustling in the breeze.” He adjusted the shade and left.

So the fears of a little child, calmed at last by a loving father! But the boy would graduate to other fears, not all so readily calmed. He was afraid of the neighborhood bully, of war, and then afraid that the Russians might one day drop atomic bombs on his country.

You know about fears, don’t you: some trivial, some deep and foreboding? What are some of your fears?

Are you afraid of snakes or bugs or heights or crowds?

Do you fear for your safety?

Are you afraid of things that go bump in the night?

Are you afraid that most of the good things in life will pass you by?

Are you afraid that because you’re not good enough God will pass you by?

Are you afraid that your job may not last or that you will not have enough to live on?

Do you fear that pagan ideas are proliferating through our world?

Do you fear for your health or the health of someone dear to you? Are you afraid of dying? Do you think about how you will die?

Everyone, I think, has some fears, although some of us show them less than others. Only you know all your fears—you and God.

So, God has a message for you in this season, a message from his holy angel, spoken first to terrified shepherds in Bethlehem’s fields.

“Do not be afraid.”

Do not be afraid? That’s easy for someone to say who doesn’t have your fears. The experienced mountain climber leads you to the edge of a steep cliff. “Don’t be afraid,” he says. You still tremble in your boots.

True, but this isn’t just anyone talking to you. It is God through his angel. It is God, your loving Father, standing at your side and putting his arm around you: “Don’t be afraid, it’s just the rustle of sin around you, but I’ve fixed it for you.

“Do you see that child named Jesus lying in a feeding trough in Bethlehem’s stable? He’s my Son. He’s the Savior of the world. He is Christ the Lord.

“Do not be afraid. He has come to make it so you’ll never have to cry again, never have to fear. He’ll face all the things that can make you afraid and overcome them for you. He’ll always be with you.”

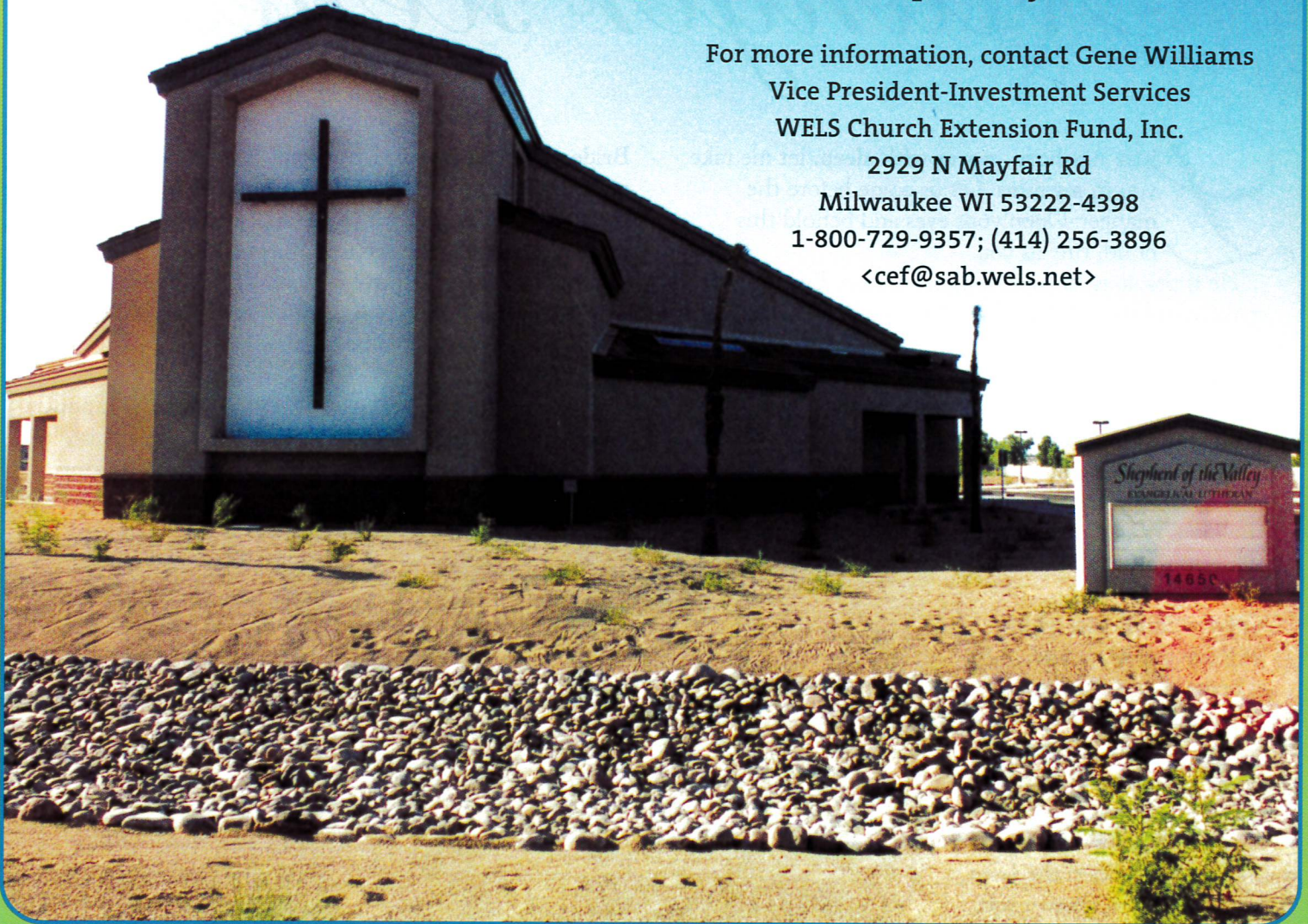
So, God seems to leave again, just as surely as Christmas will come and go, but he’s left his Spirit with you. The Spirit shows you Jesus again each day. He takes you from the stable to Calvary and to the empty grave. He convinces you that your salvation has come. He adjusts the shades of life, showing you the glories of eternal life with Jesus. He helps you block out the noises that upset you by comforting you with the sweet sound of the gospel.

“Do not be afraid.”

Gary P. Baumler

Through the Church Extension Fund, your gifts and investments can help a mission congregation like Shepherd of the Valley, Surprise, Ariz., acquire a permanent worship facility.

For more information, contact Gene Williams
Vice President-Investment Services
WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc.
2929 N Mayfair Rd
Milwaukee WI 53222-4398
1-800-729-9357; (414) 256-3896
<cef@sab.wels.net>



If you would like an offering circular or the CEF video "Building Time," please fill out the form below:

Offering circular

"Building Time" video

Name _____

Mail to: WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc.
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City _____ State _____

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This ad is neither an offer to sell nor a solicitation of an offer to buy these investments. This offer is made only in the offering circular.

Manger scenes

Evelyn Wilson

Little newborn, warm with sleep, let me take you in my arms. Let us come before the manger. Open your eyes and behold this child, tiny as you.

He is precious, beyond comprehension. Even the animals are reverent before him, their muffled lowing aiding his gentle sleep. See his mother's face filled with love. Surely she realizes the magnitude of this birth. Soon you, too, will learn of what this Christ Child has done for you. Hush, hush, my little one. No need for tears or whimpering. All is well. Sleep, sleep, sweet Jesus in the manger and you in my arms. Oh, yes, all is well.

Oh my child, you who explore the whys and wheres of everything, walk with me to the manger. This is the place to look and think. Here is the Jesus whom you have learned to know, to pray to, and sing about: the Jesus who loved and forgave you, who sends his angels to watch over you as you begin your quickening steps into our great world. This is the Savior, our substitute, who overcame death on the cross, giving us life eternal with his resurrection on Easter morning. Oh, look to the manger, to the cross. Learn and remember!

Oh confirmand, let us walk to the manger. Here is the Jesus to whom you have pledged your allegiance. No knight of old had a master more worthy, a king so great, to follow and obey. Ponder the wonders of this Babe of Bethlehem, this child about his Father's business. Here is the one to heed, this Jesus who can, will, and does help each step of the way. Here is the friend who will never let you down, the trusted companion along life's road. Remember your allegiance. This Bethlehem Child is worthy indeed!

Bride and bridegroom, let us walk hand in hand to the manger, with love between you not nearly as great as the love our God had for us in sending this Jesus, here sleeping so sweetly before us. Let your love for each other reflect this great love of God. This child surely is worthy of your honor, praise, and service in the years just beginning to unfold before you.

Oh, parents, you with your own child, now held securely in your arms. Let us also bring this baby before the little king in the manger. Surely Mary, his mother, felt as you, with her newborn. Mary had much to ponder, as you, no doubt, do. You hold this new life, precious to God, given you to love, nurture, train in his ways, and finally to release as a bird on the wing. The paths are thorny, the way narrow. Oh, teach the Jesus Way. Pass on the good news, given through this Jesus child.

Oh aged one, with faltering step, silvered hair, and dimming eyes, let me help you to the manger.

Do your eyes see our Christ Child asleep in the hay? Yes, surely it is you who have learned to know the great love and magnitude of our Jesus Child, here so sweetly asleep. Put through the refiners' fire, humbled and brought low, you have learned to thank God for all things, even the afflictions and especially for this Jesus, through whom we gain eternal life. And now, the race is nearly finished, the prize won, the crown obtained. God keep you strong in faith until you behold our Jesus face to face, not as the child born in humble means, but as the King of Kings, in glory and forever.

Oh, Jesus, we bow before you in awe.

Evelyn Wilson is a member at Mount Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

